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Urban renewal: Limerick PVC submission Development Plan 1998 Planning / PVC - Campaigns
Posted on Wednesday, April 09 @ 17:32:50 CDT By Gabi

The Plasticisation of Limerick



Friend's submission to the Limerick City Development Plan Review:

Limerick, mock Georgian PVC window capital of Ireland

"In recognition of the special quality of the brick and timber sash windows which defines the character of the major part of the city's historic building stock..."

Mr. Maurice Moloney, City Manager, 8th.June 1998

Limerick Corporation

Civic Offices , Limerick.

RE; SUBMISSION ON 1998 LIMERICK CITY DRAFT DEVELOPMENT PLAN REVIEW.

For decades the lack of planning control on Limerick's noble streets and terraces has been a source of frustration and bewilderment to those

concerned about Ireland's cultural heritage and environment. The current

Limerick Corporation Review of the City Development Plan presents the

opportunity to address the matter.

With is impressive Shannonside setting, medieval heart of Cathedral and

Castle, great Newtown Pery layout of steets and Crescent, and new Hunt

Museum Limerick should be poised to take its place in the premier league of

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European historic cities of its size. However the Limerick Corporation

Development Plan provisions providing for the maintenance of the city's

architectural heritage have not increased in content or effectiveness over

the last three decades. Limerick's failure of planning enforcement of

Development Plan Listed Building objectives to ensure that detrimental

Material Alterations are subject to Planning Permission, is unequalled not

just in Ireland, but probably in any European historic city. The level of

unauthorised aluminium and uPVC replacement all over its listed Classical

terraces gives Limerick the dubious distinction of being open to

international ridicule as the Mock Georgian Plastic Capital.

The 1998 Limerick City Draft Development Plan shows that Limerick

Corporation is not remotely confronting its responsibilities. Despite the

high quality work that has been achieved in projects such as the Milk

Market, the Hunt Museum, the conversion of the Presbyterian Church, and by

Limerick Civic Trust in different locations, the quality of the overall

historic fabric is spiralling downhill. Uncontrolled gritblasting and

cement pointing is ravaging the city's older brickwork and uPVC windows

dominate most streets.

This situation cannot continue.

Limerick is now seeking to promote itself as a Heritage Tourism

destination, for which huge EU funding has been granted for the

overwhelmingly worthy Hunt Museum project and the very dubious Castle Lane

one. The city cannot continue to market itself in this way and draw down

EU funds, while the quality of its real architectural inheritance is

progressively diminished.

Since 1997 Ireland has ratified the CONVENTION FOR THE PROTECTION OF THE

ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE OF EUROPE, (the Granada Convention 1985). This

imposes a European Treaty obligation on Ireland to maintain its distinctive

part of Europe's architectural heritage. Limerick Corporation as Planning

Authority for what is a significant European historic city is obliged in

conjunction with central government to implement a co-ordinated series of

measures in accordance with the Treaty Articles.

The most im- Mediate priority is to ensure that the current Development Plan

review process achieves a comprehensive Listing and planning control

framework for the preservation and enhancement of the city's historic

building stock. Its most im- Mediate objective must be to halt the tide of

plastic window infestation and initiate its appropriately designed reversal. As the same

time the commercial core of the city must be strengthened against the

threat of peripheral development, while reducing the level of dependency on

the motor car as primary means of mobility.

THE PLASTICISATION OF LIMERICK

FROM

WESTERNMOST RENAISSANCE CITY IN EUROPE

TO

PLASTIC MOCK GEORGIAN CAPITAL

HERITAGE TOURISM INVESTMENT - SHAM AND REALITY

Limerick has received what is in terms of international significance,

quality of design and huge good value for the EU grant involved, the most

impressive single heritage investment in Ireland; the Hunt Museum. At the

same time it has also received what is probably the single most dubious

"heritage" development in the entire country, the £3.8 million EU and

Shannon Development Castle Lane beside King Johns Castle (above right).

This includes the "reconstruction" of a 19th. century warehouse of the very

type still being demolished in the Milk Market area. It is a Disneyesque

piece of historical conceit basically designed as a large tour bus stop

pub, while the real heritage of the city suffers progressively accelerating

mutilation.

HONKEY TONKEY LIMERICK

As the city and economy grows the dependency on motor car mobility grows

even more dis-proportionally, due to the failure to invest in public

transport and promote cycling. The approach roads around the city are

becoming more like a mid west American city (above centre) . The design

reference for places of social resort are becoming more American (below

left and centre). When the "traditional" style is adopted in pub

refurbishment the result is over blown parody, such as "The Newtown Pery".

This adopts a bogus establishment date of 1806, but in its lumpy teak

street frontage, illiterately used Classical detailing plonked onto the

first floor windows, and kitsch clock, lamp and uPVC windows represents the

total antithesis of the simple design elegance of the early 19th. century.

The appearance of the city's terraces large and small is now dominated by

uPVC or coated aluminium windows,(above right and centre right), poorly

performing and inappropriate materials for the Irish

climate as the
deteriorating new Tourist Office shows (below right).

THE NEW CIVIC ARCHITECTURE - AMBITION AND REALITY

Limerick more than any other Irish city has
commendably sought to design

new public buildings in a bold confidently contemporary
idiom. The Louvre

pyramid in Paris shows how innovative contemporary
design and materials can

compliment and add to the impact of historic buildings.
Unfortunately the

new Civic buildings in Limerick have been let down by poor
quality

materials and detailing. The Civic Offices (above) are
ageing

disappointingly. The rusting gate and girders of the Kings
John's Castle

Visitors Centre makes it look like an abandoned factory
planthouse.

THE REAL TREATMENT OF LIMERICK'S REAL HERITAGE

The real importance of Limerick is the extent and quality of
its 18th. and

19th. planned streets and buildings. All over the major
terraces original

sash windows with their delicate glazing bars and hand
made glass have been

needlessly swept away and replaced by plastic flip out
frames of various

incongruous designs. Catherine St.(below left and centre),
Villiers

Almshouses (below right). Despite the European status of
Limerick as a

major brick Classical city no concern or attention has been
directed into

enforcing proper maintenance standards. However while
hideous window

replacement can be reversed in the future, the abuse of
brickwork through

ill advised grit blasting in the name of cleaning cannot be.
This leaves

the surface pitted and its performance lifetime drastically
reduced.

Blasted and pitted brickwork in Catherine St. with absurd
new add on cement

detailing (above left). Brick facade in O'Connell St. being

attacked by an

industrial shot blasting company in the course of a Sunday morning (above

right).

THE LEGACY OF THE 1960'S AND 1970S

Limerick suffered as badly as Cork or Dublin from poor quality and out of scale buildings in the 1960s and 1970s. AIB and Royal George Hotel O'Connell St. (above) and various State and Semi State offices in the Henry St. area such as Telecom (below). Many of these facades have poor quality facing materials and window systems which will require total replacement in the immediate future. In contrast the city still abounds with 150 to 200 year old buildings with brick facades and timber doors and windows capable of performing satisfactorily for generations more.

QUALITY OF RECENT COMMERCIAL ARCHITECTURE

Of all Irish cities Limerick has been the most successful in achieving an

overall coherence of quality and scale in the the extensive development

generated by the Urban Renewal Tax incentives from the late 1980s and

throughout the 1990s. A mixture of new buildings have satisfactorily

re-established streetscapes in Henry St. (above right), and Charlotte Quay

(above centre) though the effect of the slate clad plantrooms is

unfortunate. Cruises St. though bringing about the undesirable demolition

of the old Cruises Hotel, has been designed as an open shopping precinct

satisfactorily fitting into the grain of the city (centre and bottom

right). The conversion of the former Presbyterian Church in Henry St. to

offices (below centre) is a model of sensitively designed and creative

reuse.

CRUDE DESIGN QUALITY OF uPVC WINDOWS

uPVC and aluminium coated uPVC is incapable of replicating the subtle

design quality of Limerick's traditional sashes. It cannot be moulded or

modelled satisfactorily to suit arched window openings as Sullivan Insurances,

4 Hartstonge St. graphically illustrates (above left). A major fault

common to almost all uPVC windows is that the opening section is set within

the main frame, so that the mock pane divisions of the fixed and opening

sections are of different sizes and do not line up, O'Connell St. (above

centre and right). A unique uniform terrace in Hartstonge St. Lwr, exhibits

some of the ugliest window replacement in Ireland (below left). Only No.

8 (centre house below centre) retains its original camber headed Wyatt

windows on the upper floors. The flats converted Nos 9 and 10 and the

corner building forming 29 Henry St., occupied by Colin Marsden Chartered

Accountant, are treated with grotesque flat headed uPVC parodies, even

worse when swung out in an open position. However the hinged windows of No.

7 shows that wrongly designed timber replacement is as bad as anything in

uPVC.

PILLARS OF SOCIETY SETTING THE WORST CIVIC EXAMPLE.

Apart from representing an act of Civic vandalism all of the inappropriate

uPVC windows in the Crescent area are ILLEGAL Material Alterations to

Listed Buildings, which if subject to appeal to An Bord Pleanála would not

be given planning permission. In the 1991 and previous Limerick City

Development plans the Crescent is designated for preservation under List

"A"and the surrounding streets are designated list "B" which requires that

"any proposal to alter or demolish shall be the subject of an application

for permission to the Corporation" While the Corporation's failure to

prosecute

its Statutory responsibility is indefensible, so to is the behaviour of

some of the most prominent property owners in the city.

THE LEADING OFFENDERS WHO SHOULD KNOW BETTER

Limerick Leader Ltd. Newspaper, 54 O'Connell St (above left)

The Jesuit Order, north side the Crescent (above centre)

Belltable Arts Centre/ Arch Confraternity, 69 O'Connell St (above right).

The Medical Profession,e.g. Dr. Morgan Costelloe's surgery

13 Barrington St. (below left).

St. Vincent de Paul Hartstonge St. (below left centre).

The Estate Agents eg; Frontline 28 Mallow St , and

G.V.M. 26 Cecil St (below right centre and right).

The Legal Profession. e.g. Lucy Collins Solr. 55 O'Connell St.

THE QUALITY OF LIMERICK CRAFTSMANSHIP AND DETAILING

Limerick adapted the form of the Classical terrace to create a distinctive idiom

of proportion detailing and craftsmanship. The terraces of the late 18th.

and early 19th. century are distinguished by a superb soft textured brick.

There is a hierarchy of door designs ranging from tri-partite in the

grander houses in O'Connell St (above left and right centre) and the

Crescent, where doors are flanked by three quarter columns with pilasters

framing the embellished glazing of the sidelights. Off O'Connell St the

more important terraces such as Mallow St (below left) have full columned

doorcases, while more modest examples such as in Catherine St. have half

columns (below left). The quality and survival rate of embellished

fanlights in the city is outstanding. Original windows indicate an

accomplished school of joinery in Limerick. Sashes are executed to a

carefully considered Classical proportion in the size and number of panes.

Despite rampant plastic replacement there are still hundreds of sashes of

150 to 200 years in age around the City capable with good maintenance of

being given indefinite life. These retain most of their original hand made

crinkled crown or sheet glass (above right) which give the facades an

irreplaceable patina and texture in diffusing and reflecting light, sun and

shadow. All too often old sashes are unfairly written of as jammed, shabby

or even rotten when the problem is only one of over accumulation of paint,

needing to be stripped back.

THE WESTERNMOST RENAISSANCE CITY IN EUROPE

The layout of what was first called Newtown Pery outside the Medieval Walls

in the 1760s, was distinguished by a bold Classical grid plan, recalling

that of Edinburgh but equally the cities of North America with which

Limerick had such close links. The area acquired an impressive sequence of

uniform brick terraces culminating in the uncompleted Pery Square in the

mid 19th. century (above left.) . The greatest achievement was the

combination of the double Crescent and great length of O'Connell St (left)

creating a major axis parallel with the river. Off the west end of this

were streets with well proportioned terraces of the early decades of the

19th. century, notably Mallow St (below) and Barrington St. (above

centre). Newenham St. (above right) contains more modestly scaled houses.

ORIGINAL COMMERCIAL AREAS OF NEWTON PERY

The eastern end of the great New Town layout adjoining the medieval city

was designed with uniform terraces of shopkeepers premises such as Patrick

St (above left) and Ellen St (above right). 4 Patrick St the birthplace of

Catherine Hayes "The Swan of Erin " the most internationally acclaimed

Irish singer of the 19th. century (below left) and 34 Denmark St. (below

right), both of the early 1800s are the best reminders of the former

character of the area.

EXTENSION OF COMMERCIAL AREA INTO RESIDENTIAL

Most of what is known as Georgian Limerick is the legacy of a prosperous

merchant, professional and trading class. The majority would have done

business in their own houses. In locations such as Roches St. stone

warehouse adjoin residential terraces . As the late 19th. century

progressed the area of retail and commercial activity spread westwards

along O'Connell St,(above left) and southwards along William St (below).

Business activity became more prominent in the streets off O'Connell St.

such as Cecil St (above right). However the character of the upper floors

remained largely intact though with the original sashes very often replaced

with larger pane divisions. In some cases facades were plastered and

embellished such as the Chamber of Commerce O'Connell St.

THE PLASTIC WINDOW INVASION

Removal of sashes and replacement with top hung frames begun only in the

1970s initially with tropical hardwood and later aluminium. The window

replacement problem only began to make a serious impact with uPVC coated

aluminium in the 1980s followed by solid uPVC in the 1990s. The phenomenon

is already becoming second generation with plain aluminium hinged windows

installed in the late 1970s or early 1980s being replaced by mock Georgian

uPVC, showing that modern factory window systems have a performance life of

no more than 15 to 20 years. A jarring variety of inappropriate

materials and opening designs now dominates Thomas St. (entire left and

below left), O'Connell St (above left) and the Crescent, Catherine St.,

(above right) Cecil St., Glentworth St (below left), Mallow St., and all

of the city's other main Classical terraces. The example the treatment of

Adrian Greaney's Solicitors ground floor offices in 8 Catherine Place

illustrates how even the inappropriate alteration of one floor can ruin the

character and quality of an entire building (below right).

FIRE SAFETY PROBLEMS OF ALUMINIUM AND uPVC WINDOWS.

Most prefabricated uPVC or aluminium based replacement window systems in

older buildings are double glazed and top hung. This means that the window

is impossible to climb out through in an emergency ladder rescue evacuation

situation. Because of the air cushioning effect of the double glazed seals

windows are difficult to break without heavy implements either from inside

or outside. The above photograph shows the behaviour of uPVC/Aluminium

frames in a recent fire in 32 Denmark St. Limerick. While new fire

Regulations coming into effect on July 1st.1998 require that bedroom

windows should be openable to facilitate emergency ladder assisted egress,

this is not applicable to the converted flats such as Mallow St. (above

right) and hotels such as in Glentworth St (below right). While the fire

frapped occupant of a uPVC double glazed sealed room

trapped occupant of a fire double glazed sealed room
would of course die
primarily from loss of oxygen, once sufficient temperatures
are reached
uPVC building components such as fascias, windows etc.
are subject to
meltdown emitting dioxins posing a risk to firefighters.

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