

Senior Engineer,
Infrastructure Development,
Cork City Council,
City Hall,
Cork,
T12 T997.

9th January 2025

Re: Emmett Place Enhancement Project

To whom it may concern,

Cork Chamber represents 1,200 members together employing 130,000 people throughout the city, metropolitan area and county. Our vision is to be a world-leading Chamber of Commerce, delivering on a progressive economic, social and sustainability agenda at the heart of a vibrant business community. Our direction is guided by our formal pledge to uphold the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. Cork Chamber has also been designated an SDG Champion by the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications for 2024-25.

We welcome the opportunity to contribute to the consultation process on the Emmett Place Enhancement Project, a key civic plaza at the heart of Cork city centre.

Cork has been designated an EU mission city for climate neutrality to 2030. The transition to a more sustainable and climate-resilient city and region will lay the foundations for sustainable economic development and improved quality of life.

The stated aim of the Emmett Place Enhancement Project is to create a flexible civic space, which aligns with Cork City Council's mission to promote sustainable, accessible, and people-centric urban environments.

Cork Chamber shares in this vision of creating sustainable and people-centric environments. Such projects will contribute to Cork's development as a sustainable city with vibrant communities and a strong quality of life. In doing so, Cork will be well positioned to attract and retain investment and talent.

Yours Sincerely,



Conor Healy

CEO

Observations

Introduction

Cork Chamber welcomes the opportunity to comment on Cork City Council's proposal for the enhancement of Emmett Place. Emmett Place occupies a key location in Cork city centre, serving as a central plaza and meeting point for the surrounding area, which includes a number of significant public buildings, i.e. Cork Opera House and the Crawford Art Gallery. The ongoing redevelopment of the Crawford Art Gallery will further transform and enhance the area, increasing footfall and attracting visitors. With this in mind, now is an opportune time to revitalise Emmett Place, delivering future-proof public realm spaces in the heart of Cork City.

Project Need

As noted in the Design Statement for the enhancement of Emmett Place, the current public realm was designed with through traffic in mind, yet the space has since evolved into a busy pedestrianised zone in the heart of the city. Emmett Place already plays host to a number of public events throughout the year, such as elements of the annual Corkmas festival, as well as the Cork Jazz Festival, Cork on a Fork, and others. With both the Crawford Art Gallery and the Cork Opera House facing onto Emmett Place, Emmett Place remains busy with pedestrians throughout the year. A redevelopment would serve to enhance the area's attractiveness for residents and visitors and would allow for even more public events to take place in the area during the year.

Urban evolution has been identified by Cork Chamber's members as a key priority for Cork's future development. Creating and maintaining safe, welcoming and thriving public realm spaces in our urban centre is critical to ensure that Cork remains an attractive place for those wishing to live, work, visit or invest in Ireland. Urban centres across the country have undergone significant changes in recent years, presenting challenges for businesses and residents alike, and demanding a renewed approach to sustainable urban development. Key public realm spaces like Emmett Place have a critical role to play in enhancing the fabric of city life, supporting economic growth and development in a rapidly-growing city like Cork, and guarding against threats like vacancy, dereliction and the changing nature of retailing.

Revitalising our urban centres, and central public realm spaces like Emmett Place in particular, must be a priority for all levels of government, in line with the ambitions set out in key policy documents including the National Planning Framework, Cork City Development Plan, Cork Metropolitan Area Transport Strategy, Cork City Centre Revitalisation Action Plan, City Centre Movement Strategy, and Cork City Climate Action Plan.

The National Planning Framework, in particular, sets out ambitious targets in terms of the development of more sustainable environments, including improved public spaces and more sustainable, active travel options. The enhancement of Emmett Place proposes a suite of improvements to the public realm, such as improved accessibility, an extension of the pedestrianisation measures already in place in the area, and the creation of a flexible, people-centred civic space suitable for temporary events, all of which would significantly contribute to the creation of a more sustainable Emmett Place. The proposed design seeks to retain as much of the existing fabric of Emmett Place as possible, reflecting a welcome redevelopment of the public realm in a sustainable manner.

In addition, the proposed design aligns with much of Cork City Council's sustainable development plans as set out in the Climate Action Plan, the Cork Area Metropolitan Transport Strategy, and other documents. Cork city's designation as an EU mission city for climate neutrality to 2030 is also significant in this regard. The achievement of our climate neutrality goals must be to the fore in all planning for the city centre's future development. We have a unique opportunity at present to integrate climate neutrality and sustainability into every aspect of Cork's growth and development over the coming years. The enhancement of Emmett Place will serve to increase pedestrianisation and enhance the level of greenery in the city centre, two key elements of more sustainable urban centres.

The evolution of public transport in Cork as proposed under the Cork Metropolitan Area Transport Strategy should be kept in mind as the project progresses, particularly as it is not due to be delivered until the Crawford Art Gallery reopens in 2027. Bus access to the area should be considered, as well as appropriate wayfinding signage to direct visitors to nearby public transport access points, in line with new approaches to wayfinding currently being implemented across the city.

Existing Condition

As noted in the Design Statement, Emmett Place is a mixed-use area at present. Although operating with reduced vehicle access currently, the space lacks the proper infrastructure and aesthetic that would allow it to reach its full potential as a flexible civic space.

Emmett Place currently houses 17 bike racks, supporting active and sustainable travel in the area, however there is immense potential to develop this further and encourage greater levels of active travel in the city centre, in line with the aims of the Cork Metropolitan Area Transport Strategy.

Design Approach

Cork Chamber welcomes the people-centric approach to redevelopment proposed by Cork City Council. Aligning the area's revitalisation with Cork's broader climate and sustainability goals, and supporting the facilitation of public events and gatherings, will enhance Cork's attractiveness and support economic growth and resilience.

The proposal's aim to minimise change to necessary loading bay access and the accommodation of occasional vehicle access is also welcome and will ensure that any negative impact on businesses operating in the surrounding area is negligible.

In addition, the proposal's aim to retain much of the existing public lighting is welcome, as well as the proposal to retain much of the existing natural stone paving, reflecting both the historical and more modern evolution of the plaza.

The urban greening proposals will also play an important role in enhancing the attractiveness of the space and contributing to a greener, more sustainable city centre. Permanently removing vehicle access and reducing street clutter will enhance the area further, creating a much-needed flexible civic space in the heart of the city which can play host to a greater range of everyday and seasonal events.

Material

The sustainable approach to material usage in the proposal is particularly welcome, aligning with Cork's broader sustainable development and climate neutrality objectives. The retention of

existing materials and street furniture where possible should be prioritised, in tandem with a reduction in street clutter insofar as possible.

Proposed additions, such as additional greenery, flexible seating, and interventions to make the public realm more playful, will all contribute to enhanced placemaking, transforming Emmett Place into a focal point in the city centre, where pedestrians are encouraged to pause, relax and enjoy the public realm. Such work is in line with ongoing efforts to improve placemaking around the city centre, such as the improved wayfinding signage recently installed.

Conclusion

Cork Chamber welcomes the proposal by Cork City Council to enhance the public realm around Emmett Place in a sustainable manner, enhancing the city centre's attractiveness and creating an improved civic space that can facilitate all manner of public events. As the projected start date for the redevelopment is scheduled for after the reopening of the Crawford Art Gallery in 2027, it is vital that developments in infrastructure and transport that take place in the meantime are also taken into consideration in the planning phase of the project.