

Cork City Council,  
City Hall,  
Anglesea Street,  
Cork,  
T12 T997.

21<sup>st</sup> August 2025

**Re: Mary Street, Douglas Street and White Street Public Realm Enhancement Scheme**

To whom it concerns,

Cork Chamber welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the public consultation on the proposed Mary Street, Douglas Street and White Street Public Realm Enhancement Scheme.

Cork Chamber represents 1,200 members together employing 130,000 people throughout the city, metropolitan area and county. Our vision is to lead a transforming and ambitious Cork city and county, and our purpose is to unite, represent and support our members and 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 Climate, Energy and the Environment for 2024 – 2025.

Cork Chamber's advocacy efforts are guided by the views and priorities of our partners, and are shaped by our continuous engagement with members, our board and key stakeholders in Cork city and county.

Urban evolution has been identified by Cork Chamber's members as a key priority for progress in Cork city and urban areas across the county. Urban evolution refers to the creation of safe, welcoming urban centres, ensuring that Cork city and other urban areas remain attractive to those wishing to live, work, visit or invest in Ireland. Sustainable urban development that aligns with climate goals and population growth projections must be prioritised in the coming years as regeneration and new development in Cork continues apace. Schemes such as the proposed Mary Street, Douglas Street and White Street Public Realm Enhancement Scheme have a key role to play in this regard.

It is critical that the historic nature of the South Parish area is preserved and protected as part of the proposed development, and that the public realm enhancement measures in

question are implemented in a sustainable manner, with respect for the local community and the area's heritage. Proposals to enhance the public realm around Red Abbey Tower, for example, are welcome in this regard.

Furthermore, the enhancement of the existing public realm and the development of additional open and green spaces is a particularly welcome aspect of the proposed scheme. Urban green spaces serve an important role as focal points for communities, promoting social cohesion, inclusion and integration by providing a meeting point for local residents and a potential venue for community events. Enhanced green spaces, alongside the projected reduction in through traffic that will result from the scheme, will allow for additional public events, festivals, and arts and cultural projects, similar to current Open Streets events which take place around the city each year, including on Douglas Street.

At present, much of the area is located more than a 10-minute walk from a green space, providing little scope for outdoor activities for local residents, particularly children and elderly residents who may be less able to access other areas. As noted in the consultation documents, children make up around 30% of the area's current population, however many families choose to move out of the South Parish as their children grow older. Improving safety for families by reducing through traffic will also contribute to enhancing the area's vibrancy and liveability.

With this in mind, the proposed development of a small city park at the eastern end of Douglas Street is a welcome feature of the scheme. Green spaces within urban areas provide a vital resource for those living and working in the surrounding area, contributing to an improved quality of life. This in turn improves an area's attractiveness for prospective residents, business owners and others, which supports Cork's overall economic competitiveness.

Proposals within the scheme to enhance urban landscaping, including the planting of trees, and installation of planter beds and Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems, are also welcome, and will support the overall vision of a more sustainable, welcoming and vibrant city centre. Consideration should be given to enhancing biodiversity and supporting local ecosystems where possible in planning for proposed landscaping and green spaces, by for example prioritising pollinator-friendly plants, and installing insect hotels and birdhouses.

Measures such as enhanced lighting, as proposed in the area around Red Abbey Tower, will be important in this regard too, ensuring that the new public realm spaces remain safe and welcoming for residents and visitors.

Given the scheme's proposed reduction in vehicular access to the area, as well as the reduction in on-street parking, it is critical that the scheme's implementation does not have an adverse effect on local businesses who require road access for deliveries and

other services. Ongoing consultation with the local business community will be vital in this regard, and the potential for enhanced footfall from those making use of the new public realm spaces should be supported with advertising and informational campaigns to encourage support for local businesses.

In addition, access to public transport from the area should be enhanced to ensure that local residents and visitors to the area are not negatively affected by the changes in traffic patterns. Consideration should be given to the accessibility of the scheme and surrounding area for those with disabilities or reduced mobility. Prioritising additional frequency and capacity of local bus services will be important, in line with proposals under BusConnects, as well as ensuring that access to bus stops on the periphery of the scheme is clearly signposted. Facilitating safe, active and sustainable travel should also be a core focus of the scheme, and the proposed development of bike parking throughout and the introduction of the TFI shared bike scheme on Abbey Street are welcome in this regard.

Cork Chamber welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback to the public consultation on the Mary Street, Douglas Street and White Street Public Realm Enhancement Scheme and to express support for the proposals within, which will contribute to positive, sustainable urban evolution in the city's historic core.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Conor Healy', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Conor Healy

CEO