
Urban Planning and Regeneration: A Community Perspective

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Introduction

A Changing Context for Urban Politics and Urban Planning

In the opening chapter to *The Entrepreneurial City*, Hall and Hubbard (1998) point to the manner in which commentators are depicting the post-industrial, post-modern Western city as differing dramatically from its predecessor. They speak of the emergence of a new urban politics distinguished by the reorientation of urban government away from its traditional role as a welfare and service provider to one more concerned with fostering and encouraging local growth and economic development (1998, 1-2). Such a reorientation has witnessed an increasingly close cooperation with the private sector – a process which has seen the local authority become imbued with many of those characteristics once distinctive to private business. This process has led commentators to proclaim the emergence of the ‘entrepreneurial city’ – a concept which now enjoys a wide currency among politicians, administrators and a diverse range of academic interests.

There are many interesting dimensions to the concept of urban entrepreneurialism – the manner in which entrepreneurial governance has become the dominant response to urban problems in those cities caught in a downward spiral of deindustrialisation and decline; the manner in which ‘locality-specific factors mediate more general processes of economic and social change’; the relationship between entrepreneurial urbanism and the broader dynamics of advanced capitalism; the questions which debates on entrepreneurial governance are raising in relation to ‘the central geographical themes of scale, territory, community and identity’ and the ensuing relevance of the concept for urban and regional studies; the prominence which the public-private partnership assumes at the heart of entrepreneurialism; the expansion of local political action to encompass both the local state and a wider array of private and semi-private actors and the resulting obfuscation of traditional boundaries between previously distinct sectors and classes (Hall and Hubbard, 1998, 1-9). Hall and Hubbard’s delineation of the fundamentals of the concept, and the concerns of those writers whose interest is increasingly converging on the entrepreneurial city, is also, however, of equal interest in its identification of a number of ‘crucial silences’ and weaknesses in respect of the ‘burgeoning cross-disciplinary literature on urban entrepreneurialism’. This point might be made with particular reference to the ‘paucity of studies which have hypothesised as

to the likely long-term consequences of entrepreneurialism for those living in the affected cities' (1998, 12-13).

This article is concerned with one of the key functions and responsibilities exercised by local government – planning, a department whose orientation will have a key role in determining the physical landscape, economy, society and culture of the city. In the case of Dublin, and the local authority with responsibility for inner Dublin (Dublin City Council), urban geographers have delineated the transformation through which urban planning has undergone in recent decades in response to two key triggers – the introduction of a range of central government urban renewal initiatives and an increasing ethos of entrepreneurialism within the local authority itself. McGuirk and MacLaran (2001) chart the manner in which the local authority has increasingly 'sought refuge in micro-area planning' in response to the marginalisation of their traditional urban planning functions following the introduction of central government's urban renewal programmes (2001, 437-38). This programme of centralised renewal initiatives is charted through each of its four stages¹ – the core strategies of which are judged to mirror the emerging culture and pattern of urban entrepreneurialism and regeneration across Europe. This chronology is, of course, accompanied by an acknowledgement of the continuing failure of property-led regeneration to lead to the real and sustainable regeneration of previously derelict inner city areas (KPMG, Murray O'Laoire and NIERC, 1996).

McGuirk and MacLaran have pointed thereafter to the evolution of a more holistic approach to urban planning which was to differ from 'the pro-active entrepreneurialism' being promoted in other arenas by special purpose authorities and the local authority itself – one which would assert a new role, authority and relevance for local authority planning. 'This local area approach was subsequently embodied in the Corporation's Integrated Area Plans (IAPs), a holistic and integrative approach to urban planning which mirrored the approach of the special purpose authorities...' The Integrated Area Plans, which would be distinguished by three core features – holism, localism, sectoral integration, were described in the following manner.

'...localized planning mechanisms which aim to embrace the complexity of contemporary urban systems through developing a holistic approach towards the achievement of social, economic and environmental goals while encouraging the necessary inter-sectoral co-ordination to achieve such aims' (McGuirk and MacLaran, 2001, 450).

The positive dimensions and possibilities of this new planning approach were located, among other things, in its adoption of a more holistic approach to urban planning in which the traditional focus on physical planning would expand to encompass an associated and integrated programme of social and economic renewal; the awarding of urban renewal tax incentives in a more targeted and strategic manner; the institution of a cross-sectoral framework which would provide a means of leveraging additional public

¹ (i) The Urban Renewal Act 1986 and Finance Act 1987; (ii) the creation of a special purpose authority charged with the renewal of the disused Custom House Docks – the Customs House Docks Development Authority; (iii) the Temple Bar Area Renewal and Development Act 1991 and Finance Act 1991; (iv) the creation of two designated Enterprise Zones (McGuirk and MacLaran, 2001, 441-43).

and private sector funding for the implementation of a wide range of integrated renewal strategies; the instigation of a regeneration process which would be relevant and responsive to the social, economic and environmental needs of inner-city neighbourhoods and which would, in some cases, underwrite and resource the ideas and plans which inner city communities had formulated in respect of their own neighbourhoods; the opportunity to develop a plan in close consultation with all relevant interests; a framework which would facilitate 'the structuring and management of local complexity' and the assertion of planning's potential coordinating functions and interactive role in relation to public, private and community interests (McGuirk and MacLaran, 2001, 448-53).

These were just some of the many opportunities identified in respect of the Integrated Area Plan approach. If one of the distinctive dimensions of the IAP lay in its forging of new partnerships and networks between diverse interests and sectors in pursuit of an integrated programme of environmental, social and economic renewal, it was also clear that the threat to realising such potential might also issue from the very convergence of these diverse interests on the implementation of one single plan. McGuirk and MacLaran have noted the vulnerability of local areas to 'powerful discourses of entrepreneurialism, globalisation and place competitiveness' and the manner in which 'local priorities may be marginalized by the privileging of economic efficiency over social concerns' (2001, 453). If such vulnerabilities had been realised in the previous programme of property-led regeneration and in the forerunner to the Integrated Area Plans – the Historic Area Rejuvenation Project (HARP), the extent to which the opportunities presented by the Integrated Area Plan would be realised remained to be seen. The IAP was adopted as a key element in the 1998 Urban Renewal Scheme and as a stated policy and core component of the Dublin City Development Plan, 1999.

Notwithstanding the celebrations which have attended the advent of integrated planning in many popular, political and media circles, it has been rightly pointed out that Dublin's experience of micro-area planning remains limited; that an inclusive approach to planning is no guarantee of socially inclusive outcomes and that a deepening entrepreneurial orientation at the heart of urban governance may exert a stronger, contrary and more politically expedient influence on the planning system than the demands and complexities of an integrated programme of physical, social and economic renewal (McGuirk and MacLaran, 2001, 453-54). The retention of a critical stance in relation to the manner in which the integrated planning process operates and the ends to which it works remains an imperative, thus Hall and Hubbard are in agreement in urging caution on this matter and direct attention to the manner in which entrepreneurial policies 'inevitably tend to subjugate the overall interests of the community in the interests of capital accumulation' (1998, 18). They are also in agreement in pointing to the outstanding task of 'exploring the manner in which entrepreneurial cities are experienced and understood by local populations, and the ways in which this differs from the hyperbole of the city boosters' and 'elite coalitions' espousing such policies (1998, 21).

In describing the manner in which debates about the efficacy of entrepreneurial policies have to date been 'dominated by the hollow rhetoric of politicians and policy-makers,' Hall and Hubbard are issuing a clear challenge to others who may have cause to question the orthodoxy of such rhetoric (1998, 18). In the case of Dublin, the local authority's adoption of the IAP planning mechanism has been described in a similarly

provocative vein as ‘a search for new legitimacy and relevance’ (McGuirk and MacLaran, 2001, 450). This article will consider the degree to which the implementation of the IAP in an area of the inner city designated for urban renewal has succeeded in establishing its legitimacy within the resident inner city community. It will also consider the degree to which the experience of that inner city community accords with the official rhetoric.

An Experiential Account of Recent ‘Innovations’ in Irish Urban Planning

This paper presents a community perspective on the Irish planning system informed by the engagement, which the community of the Liberties area of Dublin’s inner city has had with Irish planning – initially within the Liberties/Coombe Integrated Area Plan and thereafter within the standard statutory planning system. That perspective is drawn from the specific experiences of three individuals who have been engaged in differing capacities in asserting, monitoring and defending the community’s interests in the implementation of the Integrated Area Plan (IAP) in question: a chairperson of an inner city residents’ association and Community Representative on the Monitoring Committee of the Liberties/Coombe Integrated Area Plan for three years; a policy analyst working with a local network of inner city community organisations and a community planner who provides independent technical advice to inner city communities.

In an arena which is dominated by the policies, papers, positions, publications and imperatives of central government, local authorities, planning practitioners and private developers, the distinctive feature of this perspective lies in its issuing from a party whose views have rarely been documented and even more rarely admitted to the public discourse on the achievements and shortcomings of the Irish planning system. The perspective in question is that of one resident community of Dublin’s inner city – a previously physically, economically and socially devastated quarter of the inner city which was designated for urban renewal in the late 1990s and whose 100 tax designated sites are now attracting private developers in their droves.²

The community in question is resident in the Liberties area of Dublin’s inner city – one of the oldest and most distinctive quarters of Dublin city, and one which is now undergoing extensive development which will transform both the physical landscape and urban fabric of the area beyond recognition for future generations. The planning context within which this development is taking place is the Liberties/Coombe Integrated Area Plan – one of five IAPs prepared by the then Dublin Corporation (hereafter referred to as Dublin City Council) for the 1998 Urban Renewal Scheme.

This paper will provide a brief description of the unique living, working and cultural conditions which once characterised the Liberties prior to its descent into a socially and economically devastated community in the latter half of the twentieth century. Against such a backdrop it will consider the significance which the Liberties/Coombe IAP and

² Dublin City Council has described the continuing significance of the tax incentives in its most recent Liberties/Coombe IAP Annual Report in the following manner: ‘The private development of landmark tax incentive sites, some of which were sold by the City Council, is now well underway and, with the extension of the tax incentives until July 2006 on forty-six sites under the Urban Renewal Scheme and all of the Living over the Shop properties, will continue over the next few years. It is encouraging to see the area being described as a “fast developing growth area” by various independent commentators’ (Dublin City Council, 2004, 2; see also pp. 7-8).

its array of renewal strategies and objectives assumed for this inner city community. The paper will outline a chronology of the community's deepening involvement with the IAP, and the increasingly complex planning points into which such an involvement drew it. It will address the specific experience which this community has had of monitoring, objecting and appealing to planning applications and decisions on a number of key tax designated sites within one Urban Design Framework Plan (UDFP) in the IAP in question, i.e. the Cork Street/Coombe Urban Design Framework Plan.³ The article will close with an indication of the conclusions, which this community has now reached about Irish planning and its operation within both the specific confines of the Liberties/Coombe Integrated Area Plan and the wider parameters of the standard statutory planning system.

Following a three-year engagement with the IAP, the community of the Liberties has assembled a considerable body of documentation relating both to the manner in which Dublin City Council has managed the implementation of the Liberties/Coombe IAP and the degree to which it has met and honoured the commitments and objectives outlined in this IAP (Brudell, 1999, 2000, 2002; Brudell and SWICN Environment Group, 2003; Coveney, 2001; Hammond, Brudell and Henry, 2001a, 2001b, 2002; Hammond, 2002; SWICN Environment Group, 2002a, 2002b). As this article is concerned with the community's experience of the Irish planning system, it will select three issues for particular attention: (i) misrepresentation of the real agenda being pursued via the IAPs – and the role and standing of the community's representatives therein; (ii) the manifestly unequal position which the community occupied within the structures of the IAP – a position compounded by the local authority's failure to provide Community Representatives with the necessary information or resources; (iii) the community's experience of the planning system as the most telling manifestation of this inequality.

The Liberties: Economic and Social Change

The Liberties – A Unique, Living, Working Cultural Quarter

All accounts of the Liberties area in Dublin's south-west inner city direct attention to the area's rich historical, architectural and archaeological heritage (see, for example, Gillespie, 1977; Pearson, 2000). They describe the vigour and diversity which once characterised the south-west quarter of the inner city. As a quarter which had always welcomed refugees from religious persecution and economic adversity across Europe, the Liberties also housed one of the most culturally diverse residential communities in the State. The presence of this once distinctive community is distinguishable in many remnants from the past but is perhaps most visible in the vibrant and remarkably diverse working-class economy which evolved organically within the Liberties. The area once housed a vibrant working-class community which found employment in the following industries – brewing, distilling, weaving, linen, clothing, tanning, rope making, baking, confectionery, markets, animal husbandry, laundering, trades etc. The legacy of this very singular economy and industrial past is also evident in the area's historic street and housing patterns – a legacy which left a very particular physical landscape on one of the

³ I.e. the Urban Design Framework Plan for the Cork Street/The Coombe Relief Route as contained in (i) the appendices to the Cork Street/The Coombe Relief Route Environmental Impact Statement 1998, (ii) the appendices to the Liberties/Coombe Integrated Area Plan, and as attested to in (iii) the Cork Street/Dolphin's Barn Street/The Coombe Area Compulsory Purchase (Road Widening, Improvement and Construction, Housing and Development) Order 1998 Sworn Inquiry.

main thoroughfares in the area – Cork St., as is evidenced in the following testimony of one resident who has lived on Cork St. since the 1950s:

‘I am a lifelong resident of Cork St. in Dublin’s Liberties and old enough to remember when Cork St. was bounded by a mixture of 1-storey cottages, 2-storey houses, 3-storey tenement houses, remnants of 4-storey Georgian houses, shops and small businesses. Some of the houses had front and back gardens. Some had farmyards behind and alongside them. The larger area – the Liberties – in general would fit into this description. The mixture of factories, shops and houses, schools, hospitals, churches, a public swimming pool, a crèche, on-street playing areas, cinemas, dance halls, good shopping streets all combined to sustain the local community through good and bad times. Reasonable health, a primary education and a willingness to work in the labour intensive – often low paid – industries that characterised the area were all that was needed to get a person through life and rear a family to the standards of the time.’

The above situation no longer obtains. Following the marked industrial decline of the south-west inner city, the Liberties no longer retains a strong sense of economic identity and is today characterised by all of the compound problems which accompany long-term unemployment.

The Decimation of the Liberties

The decades since the middle of this century have been characterised by a range of national and international economic policies, market forces and technological developments, which have seen the closure and withdrawal of virtually all of the traditional industries from the Liberties. This industrial decline was overseen initially by a period of Government inaction – inaction which served to debilitate and incapacitate the community of the Liberties. The decline of the area’s industrial base led in the first instance to two generations of endemic unemployment in the area and each of those compound problems which accompany exclusion from the economic life of any society. It also led to a radically altered urban fabric and landscape.

Planning, or maybe the absence of planning, relocated the remaining sources of employment out of the area – a movement which was paralleled in the de facto housing policies of the time. The demolition of the tenements resulted in the movement of tenement dwellers out to the suburbs. Those who could afford to do so were encouraged to avail of grants to buy their own houses – generally outside the area – a policy move which accelerated the exodus of those with any means, while those without were left to face the bleak drug-ravaged decades that followed.

Unemployment, poverty and the associated problems were thus concentrated into the few square miles which comprised the Liberties – and, in particular, into the large-scale modernist flat blocks constructed by Dublin City Council in the 1950s and 1960s which saw significant numbers of very deprived people concentrated into what would become poverty enclaves in the following decades. In more recent years, Dublin City Council has acknowledged its culpability on this issue:

‘On the cleared sites within the Liberties and on extensive new sites close to the canal, Dublin Corporation built larger modernist blocks, in the 1950s and 1960s. The segregation of these flats and estates from their surrounding areas, inadequate design and poor management led to negative consequences in both human and urban terms. Past policies including surrender grants and allocations have done little for the estates’ viability. These communities suffer from complex exclusion, limiting their ability to participate in and contribute to the development of the area or the wider city’ (Dublin Corporation, 1998, 52).

The legacy of those decades is evidenced in the facts and figures which continue to characterise the community of the Liberties:

‘The south-west inner city continues to be characterised by the myriad of factors and problems which has led analysts to rank eight of the quadrant’s seventeen electoral wards as among the most disadvantaged 10% in the country. The south-west inner city houses the largest concentration of public authority housing in the State, dependency on social welfare rates of 80-90% are to be found in many of these flat complexes, the quadrant contains an above average proportion of lone parent households, the South Inner City Drugs Task Force estimate that as many as 12% of the population of the Task Force area are drug users, community personnel estimate that as many as 50% of adults have literacy problems... There are many stark summary facts, figures and estimates which can be cited to illustrate the point’ (Brudell, 1999, 31).

To this day, the area houses the largest concentration of social housing in the State – eight of the area’s seventeen electoral wards contain more than 50% social housing (Dublin Corporation, 2001, 102). Government and local authority policy and planning – or the lack of – directed the residents of this community into these flat complexes. The same Government and local authority have now agreed planning legislation and housing policy which will prohibit the provision of any future social housing in many of the area’s electoral wards – thereby ensuring that those in need of social housing in future will be removed from the family and community networks which have become vital for their survival. If there was a subtext of social engineering at work in the planning and housing policies of the 1950s and 1960s, then that same social engineering is at work once more – this time, explicitly.

Physical Blight

While the cumulative and inevitable effect of such early social engineering was not immediately evident, the impact of the Government’s physical planning was immediately visible on the streets and landscape of the Liberties. Among a number of other thoroughfares earmarked for future road widening in the south-west inner city area, Cork St. was first redlined for the infamous Cork St./Coombe Bypass almost fifty years ago – a planning decision which led to further urban blight as buildings were either allowed to lie derelict or demolished in anticipation of the planned road widening. In the case of Cork St. – and its continuation, Dolphin’s Barn St. – every house on the south side of the street was knocked down, with each vacant site forming a ‘set back’ which would be left idle to facilitate the construction of the new road at whatever point in time the Government might turn its attention to the task. While the north side of the

street did not suffer to the same degree, large tracts of derelict land between Cork St. and South John St. and Marrowbone Lane were also left vacant in the same period of time. Over the ensuing fifty years, the area was allowed to descend into a state of dangerous physical dereliction, disadvantage and blight – a situation which infected every aspect of the accompanying social and economic infrastructure of that community.

From a local perspective, the spectacle of physical neglect came to symbolise the degree to which the Irish Government had withdrawn from its duty of care to the citizens of this inner city community, whose labour had once been integral to the industrial and economic life and prosperity of this city.

The Liberties/Coombe Integrated Area Plan: A Chronology of the Community's Hopes
The Preparation of a 'Community Vision' for Cork Street

As the redlining of Cork St. reached its fiftieth anniversary, it became apparent that the Government was finally in a position to look to the construction of the Cork St./Coombe Bypass. As a community which had been 'in a geographical and planning limbo' (Murray O'Laoire, 1997, 1) for fifty years, and as the one which had the largest stake vested in the redevelopment of the street, the Cork St. and Maryland Residents Association approached neighbouring architects, Murray O'Laoire Associates, to request their assistance in constructing a community vision and plan for the redevelopment of Cork St. With the generous and pro bono assistance of the consultants in question, the residents' association thus found itself in a position to produce a framework plan outlining a community vision for the reconstruction of the street – *Cork Street/Maryland Towards a New Future*.

In that framework plan, the residents of Cork St. and Maryland argued that the reconstruction of the street and the redevelopment of its vacant and derelict sites should take place in a manner which would benefit everyone. Its vision statement asserted that the 'Cork St./Maryland axis will be a vital catalyst, in a new future for the liberties. It will be a thriving "urban space" re-stating its history, on principles of beauty, integration and sustainability' (1997, 20) and proceeded to detail a framework plan which would confront each of the barriers then presented by neglect, decline and marginalisation; find a way to innovatively attract investment and commerce in a way which preserved the street's essential scale and character while simultaneously integrating the training of the area's young people; find a formula which would give priority to pedestrians and public transportation within the thoroughfare; incorporate an innovative and human approach to crime reduction and rehabilitation from related illnesses; incorporate facilities for early childhood education; develop a specialist weekend market which would alternate between an antiques market one week and a market for racing champion pigeons the next (Murray O'Laoire Associates 1997).

It was the view of the consultants that the document would serve 'as a forum for consultation and focused community regeneration issues' which would include housing (and the related issues of capacity for residential regeneration, affordability, direct provision by the local authority, provision by the voluntary housing associations and social mix) and socio-economic regeneration with the accompanying aspiration that 'the nature of any new economic base' in the area would 'ideally reflect and facilitate local employment opportunities' (Murray O'Laoire, 1997, 7). In considering the status of this framework plan, Murray O'Laoire Associates stated that 'the City Manager and the

Chief Planning Officer have both been appraised of this initiative, and welcome it'. The framework plan in question was subsequently launched by Dublin's Lord Mayor in the Mansion House in 1997.

Dublin City Council's Liberties/Coombe Integrated Area Plan

The public launch of the community's vision document was followed very rapidly by an extensive consultation process between Dublin City Council and the community of the Liberties/Coombe and, thereafter by the preparation and publication of the *Liberties/Coombe Integrated Area Plan* in 1998 – a plan, which to the surprise and delight of the Cork St. and Maryland Residents Association, incorporated much of the content of its own community vision and framework plan. Like four others in the Dublin City Council area, the Liberties/Coombe IAP was prepared for the 1998 Urban Renewal Scheme – a scheme which the Department for the Environment and Local Government described as representing 'a radical departure from previous schemes... [involving] a more targeted approach to the award of urban renewal incentives, both in terms of their scale and the way in which they will be applied. The new scheme is based on the concept that the designation of an area should not take place in isolation but should emerge from a broadly based Integrated Area Plan (IAP)' (Department of the Environment and Local Government, 1999a). Dublin City Council stated that designations were 'based on the concept of Integrated Area Plans (IAPs), which address not only issues of physical development but also cover wider issues of local socio-economic benefit, social housing, affordable housing and community projects including training and education' (Dublin Corporation, 1999).

Dublin City Council elaborated on the detail of such an integrated development concept in the text of the *Liberties/Coombe Integrated Area Plan* which outlines a series of renewal objectives under the following chapter headings: (i) Land Use, (ii) Built Environment, Urban Form and Urban Design, (iii) Employment, Enterprise, Education and Training, (iv) Health, Community and Amenity, (v) Housing, (vi) Conservation and Archaeology, (vii) Tourism, Arts and Culture, and (viii) Transport and Movement. In addition to outlining the wide array of integrated social, economic and physical renewal objectives which it intended to pursue in the implementation of the IAP, Dublin City Council also expounded on the detail of its physical renewal objectives in an Urban Design Framework Plan contained in the appendices to the plan. In the case of Cork St. and the Coombe – the thoroughfare that would provide the site for the centrepiece of the IAP, the Cork St./Coombe Bypass – tax designations had been attached to fifteen sites. On each of those fifteen sites numbered and identified as B1–B15 within the appendices to that IAP, Dublin City Council outlined design specifications – including zoning and maximum building heights and densities allowable on each site.

The design specifications outlined within the Urban Design Framework Plan were to be reiterated in the Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO) hearing held the following year – a hearing which represented the first introduction to the world of planning for the assembled residents of Cork St. At a sworn inquiry heard before an inspector, a senior planner from Dublin City Council described in detail, and under oath, the zoning, densities and maximum heights for each tax designated site. In each case the design specifications outlined by the senior planner were exactly those that had been outlined in the UDFP in the appendices to the Liberties/Coombe IAP. Further assurance was forthcoming in the guarantees which the senior planner provided in relation to the

conditions to which developments would be obliged to comply if they wished to avail of the attached tax incentives.

'Each of the tax incentive sites in the IAP has a mini development brief in the Appendices which sets out the proposed form and use of development necessary in order to both attract tax incentives, and conform with the overall design framework for the corridor' (Transcript CPO Hearing, 1999, 136-37).

Community's Concerns and Hopes in Relation to the Liberties/Coombe IAP

While local hopes grew with each objective and commitment outlined within the *Liberties/Coombe Integrated Area Plan*, the community was also cognisant of the findings of the KPMG, Murray O'Laoire Associates and NIERC (1996) study in relation to the manner in which previous Urban Renewal Schemes had impacted on indigenous inner city communities. It was also, of course, aware that the implementation of the IAP would be economically driven and that its impetus would derive from the private sector – a sector whose interests would always differ dramatically from those of an inner city community. It accordingly again looked to the text of the *Liberties/Coombe Integrated Area Plan* to seek clarification on the precise role and standing to be accorded to the community within the implementation structures of the IAP as it sought to both pursue and protect local interests in the implementation of the plan. It understood that any words or commitments outlined on this matter would carry the imprimatur and authority of the local government authority charged with managing the implementation of the plan.

The *Liberties/Coombe Integrated Area Plan* provided abundant assurances on this very point. In the opening pages of the IAP, Dublin City Council cited the requirement which Department of the Environment and Local Government Guidelines placed on the preparation of the IAPs that 'a strong emphasis be placed on the social dimension of urban renewal, requiring that education and training, employment, local economic development and community development be integrated in future plans for physical urban renewal' (Dublin Corporation, 1998, 5). It acknowledged the hopes and expectations which the community of the south-west inner city had invested in the plan's implementation.

'Having campaigned for many years to have the widespread social and physical problems of the area addressed, there is now an expectation that the three-pronged objective of physical, social and economic renewal can be achieved within the context of the I.A.P.' (Dublin Corporation, 1998, 91).

The plan described the 'strong, energetic and varied community group structure' as one of the 'key strengths' of the Liberties/Coombe area and identified 'the extent and vigour of the community sector' as 'one of...[its] most important resources' (Dublin Corporation, 1998, 89, 91). The chapter in question concluded with the following statement: 'It is important that implementation mechanisms be developed to ensure that the expertise and focus of the community sector will continue to be given adequate expression' (Dublin Corporation, 1998, 91).

For the community of Dublin's south-west inner city, the *Liberties/Coombe Integrated Area Plan* signified above all else the return of central and local government's political

attention to an area which had been awaiting that political attention and political will for almost half a century. In a quarter of the inner city in which many areas were categorised as belonging among the most disadvantaged ten per cent in the State (Gamma, 1999, 30), the community could not afford, in any case, to refuse the range of objectives which the *Liberties/Coombe Integrated Area Plan* outlined in relation to the social, economic and physical regeneration of the area.

Notwithstanding all of the concerns outlined earlier, the community noted the significant achievements, which were now being cited in respect of both the new Urban Renewal Scheme and the IAPs prepared under that scheme. It noted the many commitments which the *Liberties/Coombe Integrated Area Plan* made to the community of the south-west inner city. For those whose concerns centred around the physical form which the redevelopment of Cork St. would assume, they had the further and irrefutable assurance of design specifications given under oath in the 1999 CPO hearing.

In essence, the community understood the *Liberties/Coombe Integrated Area Plan* to be an invitation to the community to leave the confrontational nature of past exchanges between the community and statutory sector behind. It understood it to be an invitation to enter – as an equal partner – into a clearly delineated and structured process which would bring about the sustainable urban regeneration of the south-west inner city by integrating physical, social and economic objectives.

In agreement and solidarity with the larger community of the Liberties/Coombe, Cork St. and Maryland Residents Association responded in good faith to the publication of the *Liberties/Coombe Integrated Area Plan*. Stepping out of the adversarial role which the community of the inner city had heretofore been obliged to adopt in relation to the State, it pledged to support and engage positively with the *Liberties/Coombe Integrated Area Plan*.

The Community's Experience of the Implementation of the Integrated Area Plan

The introduction to this article located the distinctive feature of this community's perspective on the Irish planning system in its issuing from a party whose views have rarely been documented and even more rarely admitted to the public discourse on the achievements and shortcomings of the Irish planning system. The entry into such a discourse has been greatly facilitated by a decision which the South West Inner City Network (SWICN), a network of community organisations in the Liberties, took to formally record and archive the community's experience of the implementation of the Liberties/Coombe IAP. While only one of those documents was formally published, all are a matter of public record and each now informs this discussion of the community's perspective on the Irish planning system (Brudell, 2000, 2002; Brudell and SWICN Environment Group, 2003; Coveney, 2001; Hammond, Brudell and Henry, 2001a, 2001b, 2002; Hammond, 2002; SWICN Environment Group, 2002a, 2002b). This inner community's introduction to the world of planning dates from its engagement with the Liberties/Coombe IAP and it is to that engagement that this article returns as it seeks to delineate the defining features of that community's experience and perspective.

Community and its Role in the Implementation of the Liberties/Coombe IAP

At the time of publication, Dublin City Council proposed the following implementation mechanism for the IAP – a cross-sectoral 'Steering Group' whose membership would

include wide representation from public, private and community sector groups recognised as having a role and associated with the plan area, and a multi-disciplinary 'Project Implementation Team' who would be responsible for implementation and who would report, in turn, to the Steering Group (Dublin Corporation, 1998, 125).

The implementation mechanism for the IAP subsequently established differed from the original 1998 proposals in one very significant respect – the substitution without explanation of a cross-sectoral Monitoring Committee for a cross-sectoral Steering Committee. The full significance of the decision to relegate the community to a monitoring role after the fact, as opposed to a steering, agenda-setting, decision-making role as envisioned in the published IAP, is beyond the brief of this particular article. Its significance within the context of the community's subsequent experience of planning must nonetheless be noted in relation to two arising questions: Who, in the absence of a structure officially designated as a Steering Committee, was steering the implementation of the Liberties/Coombe IAP? And what precise authority would the Monitoring Committee enjoy in monitoring the implementation of this plan? If there was little clarification forthcoming on the former, the Department of the Environment and Local Government did appear to be in a position to assist in the latter. On the specific issue of planning, its 1999 Urban Renewal Scheme Monitoring Guidelines were quite specific:

'It is important that monitoring should relate to the IAP as a whole and not just the designated sites. However the emphasis will necessarily be on the development of the designated sites and their role in achieving the overall objectives of the IAP.'

In the event, Dublin City Council invited three community organisations – Cork St. and Maryland Residents Association, South West Inner City Network (SWICN), South Inner City Community Development Association (SICCCA) – to nominate a representative each to the newly instituted Monitoring Committee where they would be joined by three local Councillors and a representative from each of the following interests – Chamber of Commerce or similar business interest, Trade Council or similar interest, Architectural/Historical/ Conservation interest. It was thus on foot of such representation that the community of the south-west inner city entered into the formal structures of the Liberties/Coombe IAP – structures which it understood had been instituted to monitor the stated and specific overall objective of the *Liberties/Coombe Integrated Area Plan* – 'to bring about sustainable urban regeneration by integrating physical, social and economic interventions to address the key issues in the area' (Dublin Corporation, 1998, i).

This was towards the end of a decade that had seen the convergence of many integrated, interagency and community initiatives in Dublin's inner city in response to the very many pressing social problems of the 1980s and 1990s, including Area Based Partnerships, Area Network Organisations, Local Drugs Task Forces, Integrated Services Projects, Tenants Forums, Community Policing Forums and Community Development Projects. The decision to delegate representatives to participate on a voluntary basis in one more forum imposed an additional burden and pressure on an inner city community already grappling with very serious social problems and very depleted resources. It was a decision, thus, which was not taken lightly and one which

represented an investment of very scarce community resources in a plan in which this inner city community understood itself to have a definite stake and authority.

Grappling with the Myriad of Technical Issues at Stake in the Implementation of the IAP
From the moment that the Community Representatives entered into the Monitoring Committee, they were confronted with the vast array of technical issues at stake in the implementation of the Liberties/Coombe IAP – planning, architectural, archaeological, conservation, engineering, economic development, financial and taxation policy, environmental impact, socio-economic impact, etc. While planning was only one of this myriad of issues, it became clear that it was the discipline through which the decisions determining the detail of the changing physical landscape of the Liberties would be taken. In attempting to grapple with the detail and complexity of the Irish planning system, the Community Representatives were confronted at every turn by a whole relationship of power and inequality vested in the technical language and professional jargon employed by Dublin City Council's IAP Project Management Team in its presentations to the Monitoring Committee. This difficulty was compounded by the manner in which such technical information was presented without notice or advance documentation at the meetings of the Monitoring Committee – a factor which precluded any advance opportunity to read, understand or consult with the community organisations which have mandated the Community Representatives in the first instance. It was the first of many difficulties which would signal the increasingly vulnerable position which the community's representatives would come to occupy within an implementation structure in which the power differential would become increasingly explicit.

By the end of the first year of the Liberties/Coombe IAP, the Community Representatives had experienced a number of serious difficulties and concerns in relation to their participation in the Monitoring Committee – difficulties relating both to the manner in which the IAP was being implemented and to growing uncertainty about the plan's capacity to deliver on each of its key social, economic and physical renewal objectives. Such community concerns prompted the formulation of a document called *A Mandate for the Community Representatives to the Liberties/Coombe Integrated Area* – a document which clarified one very important issue for the community, its stake in the implementation of the Liberties/Coombe IAP was diminishing before its eyes. In attending to each of the issues of concern to the community, the document also, however, provided very clear grounds for a frank and constructive engagement between the Community Representatives and Dublin City Council.

The Resource Issue

The issue of resources was one such grounds on which constructive engagement could have taken place. Under one of seven issue headings under which the community outlined the mandate for its representatives, the community sought a commitment from Dublin City Council that it would both allow it to avail of existing resources and expertise within the local authority and provide the Community Representatives with an agreed budget which would enable them to access expert advice independently where necessary. Those resources were sought both as a matter of principle and as a simple necessity in the highly sophisticated and complex technical environment into which the Community Representatives had stepped. In a community which housed neither a body of professionals nor the financial means to purchase the expert professional advice and assistance required, the Community Representatives judged those resources to be a

simple necessity if they were to enjoy any degree of equality within the Monitoring Committee.

Attempts to Engage Dublin City Council in the Resolution of Community Concerns

In seeking to engage Dublin City Council on the issue of resources and on each of the other serious issues outlined in its Mandate document, the SWICN invited the City Manager to formally receive the document at a Roundtable Conference on Community Involvement in the Integrated Area Plans. While accepting the invitation to 'receive' the report, the City Manager's comments on the day amounted to a summary dismissal of the concerns, findings and recommendations outlined in the Mandate document – a summary dismissal which the community of the Liberties could only contrast with the overwhelming consensus and endorsement with which the document had been greeted across the inner city. While the community were to be congratulated on their efforts in putting such a document together, the issues and recommendations on which it sought to engage Dublin City Council were disposed of as 'old news.' At no stage either on that day or in subsequent attempts to engage Dublin City Council and its CEO, did any official party concede the validity or legitimacy of the concerns and recommendations which the community had clearly articulated in this document.

On the very pressing issue of resources, it became clear that the Community Representatives were to be left entirely unassisted as they sought to defend the community's interests and diminishing stake in the IAP. Increasingly they were also to be left without the information material to their monitoring function in the implementation of the plan. Meanwhile, community concerns were becoming increasingly acute as planning issues on individual tax designated sites came to the fore.

Entry to the Planning Arena

With the lodging of the first applications on tax designated sites within the UDFP for Cork St./the Coombe, the community of the Liberties embarked upon a steep learning curve on the Irish planning system. Upon familiarising itself with the detail of two of the first planning applications on tax designated sites on Cork St.,⁴ it became clear that the developments for which permission was being sought, did not comply with the design specifications outlined by Dublin City Council in either the UDFP for Cork St./the Coombe or in the sworn evidence adduced by one of its senior planners in the CPO Hearing referred to above. (The planning applications in question sought, among other things, heights and densities far in excess of that provided for in the UDFP and CPO Hearing.) It was accordingly with some confidence, then, that the Community Representative for Cork St. and Maryland awaited the automatic refusal of planning permission in each case. In both cases the community's confidence was to prove ill founded as the Planning Authority proceeded to grant permission for each.

As outlined above, the members of the Monitoring Committee had been entrusted with an explicitly stated responsibility in relation to monitoring 'the development of the designated sites and their role in achieving the overall objectives of the IAP'. The members had not been apprised of any changes in circumstances since the publication of the *Liberties/Coombe Integrated Area Plan* which might have altered the status of

⁴ I.e. P.A. Reg. Ref.: 3857/00, An Bord Pleanála Ref.: PL 29S.125294 (90-97 Cork St. and 49 Marrowbone Lane, Dublin 8); P.A. Reg. Ref.: 3256/01, An Bord Pleanála Ref.: PL 29S. 130084 (Junction of Cork St. and Ardee St., Dublin 8).

that plan. Accordingly, the Community Representative for Cork St. and Maryland immediately brought the issue to the attention of the wider Monitoring Committee and Project Implementation Team and sought their assistance in dealing with this blatant contravention of the IAP. The Community Representative for Cork St. and Maryland also took the formal step of submitting an 'Observations' document which outlined the detail of the contravention – as it pertained to one of the above grants of permission – before closing with three key questions in relation to (i) the hierarchy of plans used in determining the granting or refusal of planning permission, (ii) clarification on whether or not the management of Dublin City Council had taken a policy decision to supersede the agreed IAPs, and (iii) the position of elected City Councillors on plans which were a stated policy of the Dublin City Development Plan 1999.

On the first occasion, a response from the Planning Authority within Dublin City Council was forthcoming. This response described the community's observations as 'a thesis' and then proceeded to move between specific details as they related to the planning permission at issue in the Observations document and the larger policy and planning context within which the standing of the IAPs must be considered. At the same time, the response studiously avoided the key questions posed by the community. Alarmed and a little disconcerted by both a number of inaccuracies and the apparent disingenuousness of the Planning Authority's response, the Community Representative for Cork St./Maryland submitted a second and more considered Observations document to the Monitoring Committee – one which posed questions in relation to (i) the pre-planning consultation phase, (ii) the significance of the Bacon III Report and the Residential Density Guidelines within the context of the grant of permission under scrutiny, (iii) the manner in which the IAPs had responded to 'unforeseen circumstances', (iv) the hierarchy of plans invoked in making a decision on planning applications, (v) the existence and operation of a 'feedback loop' in the implementation of the IAPs, and (vi) the existence of a Design Framework Plan for the Liberties/Coombe IAP. It also restated the three questions which had remained wholly unanswered within the Planning Authority's response. On this occasion a considerably shorter and more curt response was forthcoming from the Planning Authority to the effect that it saw 'no merit in engaging in further correspondence' on the issue.

Entry to the Broader Planning Arena

In disbelief, the community turned again to the IAP's Project Management Team and wider Monitoring Committee for an acknowledgement of this contravention of the Liberties/Coombe IAP. It looked for some direction as to how this issue could be resolved. After many heated and acrimonious discussions on the issue, a direction was finally forthcoming from the IAP's Project Management Team. If the Community Representative in question was unhappy with individual planning permissions, he should pursue the issue as a private citizen through the standard statutory planning system and appeal each planning decision of concern to him to An Bord Pleanála.

While this inner city community would be obliged to accelerate its understanding of the staples of the Irish planning and appeals system from that point on, it did not yet have the advantage of three pieces of information which Dublin City Council officials did, of course, have in their possession in urging the community to use An Bord Pleanála as an arbiter on whether or not the planning applications in question were in breach of the Liberties/Coombe IAP and the Dublin City Development Plan. It would subsequently come to a very rapid realisation of the following factors: An Bord Pleanála was not

bound by the provisions of the Dublin City Development Plan; any three members of the executive Board could overturn the recommendations of its own inspector; Dublin City Council was prepared to submit a written statement to An Bord Pleanála to the effect that the IAPs had been superseded by the Residential Density Guidelines and the Bacon report (Department of Environment and Local Government, 1999b). The last piece of information – perhaps the most telling indicator of the regard in which Dublin City Council held the Monitoring Committee which it had itself convened – had come to the community’s attention through accidental sight of an internal memo which had never been officially communicated to the Monitoring Committee.

The Resources Required to Engage in the Planning Appeals Process

This inner city community entered into the planning appeals process with the same lack of access to either finance or professional networks of expertise with which it had entered into the Monitoring Committee of the Liberties/Coombe IAP. If it had judged the task of ensuring compliance with the IAP within the confines of the Monitoring Committee to be an onerous one, it was now to come to a fuller understanding of the magnitude of this task as planning decisions moved from the arena of the Planning Authority to that of An Bord Pleanála. It was also to come to a full realisation of the injustice of such a responsibility falling to a sole member of the Monitoring Committee.

The unique and defining feature of the Irish planning system has been located in its extension of the right to appeal to third parties (Comptroller and Auditor General, 2002, 20). Such commendations do not however appear to exhibit any understanding of the distinct disadvantage at which the third appellant finds him/herself in approaching the appeals system – a disadvantage which is compounded in direct proportion to the extent of the appellant’s socio-economic deprivation. The real structural inequality at work is strikingly evident from the experiences of the Cork St. and Maryland Residents Association in its efforts to engage with the increasingly complex planning points into which the planning appeals process drew it.

‘In order to object to a planning application, the necessary fees must be paid. The application must be read and understood – very often a difficult task for the uninitiated. The language used by the professionals must be deciphered and decoded. Terms such as “footprint”, “grain”, “texture”, “densities”, “plot ratio”, “site coverage”, “cartilage” – some of which have a different meaning in everyday language – must be researched in order to find out what they mean when used in the mystical world of the Town Planner. The National Spatial Strategy, the Dublin City Development Plan, the Local Area Plan, the Strategic Planning Guidelines for the Greater Dublin Area, Environmental Impact Studies, CPO Transcripts... are just some of the plans and reports which must be read and deciphered. The Bacon Reports, the Residential Guidelines, the Kenny Report – all of these and more become compulsory and necessary reading. All are selectively quoted by the consultants engaged by the developers in an apparent attempt to bamboozle, and eventually wear out, any member of the public who dares object. The difficulty in deciphering each of the above documents is, of course, compounded by the fact that planning professionals refuse to outline the hierarchy of documents, which must be taken into account in determining a planning

application' (Chairperson, Cork Street and Maryland Residents' Association, 2003).

The Pressures Exerted by Developers, Politicians and Others

The burden, which the preparation of appeals placed on this inner city community, was not alleviated upon submission of appeal. In some cases the appeals process necessitated further observations in response to the submissions of other parties to the appeals process. As each observation and argument on increasingly intricate planning details was exchanged between the first, third and other parties, the pressure upon rapidly depleting community resources grew. Meanwhile pressure of an entirely different nature was increasingly being brought to bear.

The lodging of each successive appeal has served to focus the attention of very powerful and wealthy interests on the third party appellant and the obstruction which the appeal is perceived to pose to the proposed private development. On lodgement of each appeal, a familiar pattern has now begun to establish itself, whereby pressure to withdraw appeals is exerted from all sides. This article does not allege any attempts to bribe third party appellants in the inner city community in question because such a word has never to the authors' knowledge been explicitly used in any approaches. It is not its intention therefore to allege any overt attempts to bribe third party appellants to withdraw their appeals. It can, however, describe the nature of the approaches which have been made to the inner city organisation in question. On a number of occasions, the chairperson of the Cork St. and Maryland Residents' Association has been contacted by developers and promised 'Community Gain' if the appeal was withdrawn. In the case of one particular appeal, which had been taken (as with all the appeals) on the basis that the grant of permission constituted a contravention of the Liberties/Coombe IAP, the private developers enquired if the appellant had taken the appeal on a matter of principle and was accordingly 'not for turning' or if there were room for discussion. In the event that there were 'room for discussion' a map of the proposed development was produced and the developers proceeded to point to a building within the development site which could then be 'talked about'. The overture like all others was refused. It subsequently emerged that the building, which the private developer appeared to be using as a bargaining tool in an attempt to negotiate the withdrawal of the appeal in question, was in fact a publicly owned building, which An Bord Pleanála subsequently ordained should be the subject of a separate planning application. The meeting in question followed on a personal telephone call from a former Government Minister enquiring if the third party appellant would consider meeting with the developers in question. It is within such a nexus that the lodgement of planning appeals has threatened to mire this inner city community.

While the offer of material assets has been used to bring one type of pressure to bear on an impoverished inner city community, a considerably more subtle and invidious pressure is also being exerted through attempts to mobilise local community opinion against the third party appellant who has lodged the appeal with An Bord Pleanála. Such attempts have resulted in approaches from neighbours, community activists, Community Gardai and various others seeking to persuade the Community Representative to withdraw the appeal in the interests of the local community. In seeking to ferment community disunity on this point and in seeking to construe the third party appellant as the only obstacle to the securing of much needed community resources in a deprived area (whether such resources assume the guise of hard cash, a

community facility or a community bus), the private developer is also functioning to divert critical community attention away from the real structural causes of the continuing social and economic inequality characterising this inner city community – the political and ideological decisions which the State makes in allocating the resources at its disposal and the power of capital, relative to that of working-class communities, in influencing such decisions. As a process, it is also manipulating inner city communities into a position where they are effectively being asked to concede the securing of basic socio-economic rights to be a matter of negotiation with the private sector – a process and a responsibility from which the State appears to have largely absented itself.

The Outcome of the Planning Appeals Process

When An Bord Pleanála finally delivers its decision, this inner city community is confronted by an outcome which it can only conclude to be the final travesty. An Bord Pleanála's inspectors are, in most cases, vindicating the grounds on which this inner city community is lodging its appeals⁵ while An Bord Pleanála's executive board is upholding the grants of permission in breach of the Liberties/Coombe IAP while repeatedly failing to outline its rationale for departing from its own inspector's recommendations. This inner city community has noted the Comptroller and Auditor General's statement that 'in anticipation of the provisions of the Planning and Development Act, 2000 coming into force, it was the practice since 2000 to set out the reasons in cases where it [An Bord Pleanála] disagrees with an inspector's recommendations' (Comptroller and Auditor General, 2002, 39). While this may be the Comptroller and Auditor General's understanding of operational procedures within An Bord Pleanála, it has not been the experience of this inner city community. An Bord Pleanála's decisions speak of 'having regard to' a range of factors – the zoning objective for the area, the policies of the planning authority as set out in the current Development Plan for the area, the policies of the planning authority as set out in the Integrated Area Plan for the area, the planning history of the site, the provisions of the Residential Density Guidelines etc. – a phrase which is sufficiently vague and nebulous to allow its executive board to rule as it will without any corresponding obligation to document the rationale and reasoning informing its decisions.

It is the contention of this article that such planning appeal decisions do not meet the 'test of reasonableness'. In an age in which 'openness and transparency' have become the mantra of all public institutions, this inner city community is a little perplexed as to why planning should be one of the last remaining areas in which the citizenry of this State is being asked to have unquestioning and uncritical faith in the judgement of an executive board which appears to remain free to rule without any accompanying obligation to reason.

⁵ See e.g. PL29S. 130084, Inspector's Report: 'The planning authority appears to have abandoned its own height guidelines for the site. In its response to the grounds of appeal it states that the guidelines specifying 4 storeys along Ardee Street and Cork Street have superseded. It does not indicate what policy document has superseded the IAP. I have examined the Dublin City Development Plan 1999, which post-dates the IAP, and can find nothing in it which would suggest that the IAP has been superseded. Indeed, policy IC3 reinforces the status of the IAP by promoting its implementation.'

Conclusions

The Liberties/Coombe IAP – The Net Outcome for the Community of the Liberties

While this inner city community seeks to come to terms with its experience of the Irish planning system – both within the initial confines of the Liberties/Coombe Integrated Area Plan and, thereafter, within the wider statutory planning system – it is confronted on a daily basis with one irrefutable truth. Dublin City Council is granting permission after permission to developments on tax designated sites in breach of the design specifications outlined within its own Urban Design Framework Plan and Integrated Area Plan; An Bord Pleanála is confirming its decisions by upholding permission after permission on each of these sites.

The net effect of such a decision-making process is the development of this very old and once distinctive quarter of Dublin's inner city in a manner entirely contrary to that outlined in the *Liberties/Coombe Integrated Area Plan* and the CPO Hearing which followed on its publication. As the implementation of the Liberties/Coombe IAP enters into its fifth year, this inner city community is now obliged to compare the approaching end product of this plan with the range of integrated social, economic and physical renewal objectives outlined in an IAP prepared under an Urban Renewal Scheme which the then Government hailed as a radical departure from previous schemes.

When this inner city community surveys the landscape of the Liberties, it can now see with great clarity what the net outcome of the Liberties/Coombe Integrated Area Plan, and its centrepiece – the Cork St./Coombe Bypass – has been: a road which has dissected this community by day and which will continue to provide the blank dead space which has plagued this community by night for decades; the 'tax incentivising' of the area which has attracted the ruthless and speculative greed of private developers while simultaneously failing to yield any significant revenue for the delivery of 'community gain'; ever increasing building heights and densities in wildly inappropriate and overblown private gated developments which are destroying the residential amenity, social cohesion and distinctive architectural heritage of this once distinctive historical and cultural quarter; the displacement of the resident community which will always follow as an inevitable consequence on the influx of private capital as land and property values rise; the auction and privatisation of publicly held lands at a time when the shortage of publicly owned land is being cited as one of the major barriers to the provision of social housing; the failure to secure any social housing units from the extensive private residential development taking place in the area. In addition to the failure to deliver on the key social and economic objectives outlined in the plan, continued breaches of the UDFP for Cork St. attest to the manner in which the implementation of the Liberties/Coombe IAP is actually damaging the existing physical environment and placing increasing and unsustainable strains on the area's already overburdened infrastructure.

All of this has, of course, been done in the name of urban renewal, urban regeneration and urban revitalisation. When individual Community Representatives have sought to engage the relevant Irish authorities – statutory and governmental – with their experience in seeking to ensure that the Liberties/Coombe IAP would be implemented in accordance with the published words and sworn evidence of its own officials, it has found the State to be silent on the issue. It has found finally that the perspective of this inner city community – so celebrated in the published *Liberties/Coombe Integrated Area Plan* – has now become an unwelcome voice of critical dissent.

The Community's Experience of the Irish Planning System – Some Conclusions

As this article is concerned with the community's experience of the Irish planning system, it returns its attention in closing to the three conclusions reached on foot of its engagement with planning within both the confines of the Liberties/Coombe Integrated Area Plan and the broader parameters of the standard statutory planning system.

- (i) The article contends that the Department of the Environment and Local Government and its local authority, Dublin City Council, misrepresented both the real agenda being pursued via the IAPs and the role and standing of the Community Representatives therein. It contends that the Liberties/Coombe IAP and its governing Departmental Guidelines were presented in a manner designed to persuade the community that it had a stake and an authority in the implementation of the IAP which neither party was prepared to concede when faced with the assertion of such a stake and authority. It would appear reasonable to conclude that the manner in which the Liberties/Coombe IAP and the role and authority of its Monitoring Committee were presented was an attempt to pre-empt and co-opt any potential community opposition to the real agenda being pursued via the IAP in question.
- (ii) As one of most deprived working-class communities in the State, it would appear self evident that any individuals delegated to represent the interests of that community within the Liberties/Coombe IAP Monitoring Committee would enter such a formal structure in a profoundly unequal position, i.e. without access to financial means, technical expertise or the professional networks through which either of these resources might have been sourced in more affluent communities. That inequality was compounded by the local authority's action and inaction; by its refusal to allow the community's representatives access to either its own technical expertise or the financial resources which would have enabled them to access technical expertise independently, where they judged such independent advice to be necessary; by its failure to provide the Community Representatives with the information material to the role which they had assumed in monitoring the implementation of the Liberties/Coombe IAP. This issue would, of course, become particularly marked when individual Community Representatives were forced to adopt an adversarial role in monitoring the implementation of the IAP. This article contrasts the shameful treatment of the community's representatives with the commitment which the then Minister for Housing and Urban Renewal made in his foreword to the Urban Renewal Guidelines – 'arrangements put in place must incorporate mechanisms to ensure that disadvantaged local communities and representative organisations and groups should participate fully in the planning and realisation of urban renewal programmes.'
- (iii) This article believes that the community's experience of the Irish planning system has become the most telling manifestation of the unequal position which the community's representatives occupied within the structures of the Liberties/Coombe IAP. It contends that the community's experience of engaging with the planning system is, in fact, one of the most telling illustrations of the unequal position which working-class people in this democracy assume in approaching one more institution in Irish society which prides itself on its openness, transparency and accountability but which appears free to grant and uphold planning permissions in breach of its own statutory

planning documents without any obligation to inform the public of its rationale.

That has been and continues to be the community experience of planning in the Liberties area of Dublin inner city.

In the course of engaging in the implementation of the Liberties/Coombe IAP, it is important to acknowledge that this community has encountered individual members of the local authority and the planning profession who have sought to assist the community's representatives in the very onerous task which they assumed in entering into the Monitoring Committee of the Liberties/Coombe IAP. This article wishes to reiterate the welcome with which this inner community greeted the Liberties/Coombe IAP; the hopes which this inner city community invested in its implementation and the support which it pledged for the programme of integrated social, economic and physical renewal which that plan promised. It wishes to affirm the importance of an institution such as An Bord Pleanála and the right of the third party appeal. This article acknowledges such a right to be a valuable one for any citizenry, but it also suggests that the continuing and significantly more powerful right of the final arbiter in the Irish appeals system to make a decision without any accompanying obligation to outline its reasoning, significantly diminishes the right of the third party appeal.

This article neither shares in the commendations which are heaped on the Irish planning system with its distinctive third party appeal system nor in the celebrations of the local authority's new found modus operandi of conciliatory partnership, which this article would contend is, in fact, functioning to preclude and negate the emergence of any legitimate criticism of what is being done to working-class communities in the name of urban renewal.

Addendum

The Community Representative for Cork St. and Maryland Residents Association resigned from the Monitoring Committee of the Liberties/Coombe Integrated Area Plan in November 2002. The Community Representative for the South West Inner City Network followed suit in December 2002. The Community Representative for the South Inner City Community Development Association remains a member of the Monitoring Committee, as does a fourth Community Representative for the Rialto Network who joined an expanded Monitoring Committee in 2001.

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