

Vision for Capel Street

Ciarán Cuffe MEP, 2022



View from Grattan Bridge of Capel Street, Summer 2021

Introduction

Capel Street is a vital part of Dublin's social fabric, and economic life. For more than three centuries it has been a busy vibrant thoroughfare that attracted a mixture of uses and activities reflecting the changing nature of city life.

As the city changes and develops the street is undergoing significant changes. The provision of modern transport infrastructure has contributed to the loss of buildings in and around the Capel Street area, and the dominance of car traffic has had negative impacts on the street's character. Dereliction and under-use are a cause for concern, and comprehensive redevelopment is causing dramatic changes to this part of Dublin City.

However, as the accompanying report 'Capel Street: 'Full of Personality and Diversity'' illustrates, the street has also played a leading role in attracting and nurturing diversity, and new communities in recent years. It can continue to be at the heart of Dublin's identity in future years, but targeted interventions are required to protect and support both the built fabric and those who live, work, and spend time in the area.

If carefully managed and developed, it can continue to be an attractive part of Dublin life in the in the years ahead.

Proposals for improvements

Urban Fabric

The existing buildings on Capel Street are an integral part of its character. Only some of the older buildings are on the Record of Protected Structures. More of the older buildings should be listed for protection by Dublin City Council

Capel Street is distinguished by the height, width, and depth of the existing buildings. This should be respected in any planning proposals for new buildings on the street and in the surrounding area. This should be prioritised in Dublin City's Development Plan

Capel Street is designated as an Architectural Conservation Area. Dublin City Council should appoint a designated individual to ensure the existing buildings are better protected, and support their sensitive renovation and energy upgrading.

The Living City regeneration scheme should be continued by the Department of Finance to further support residential use of the upper floors of buildings.

Cherishing Diversity

The rich history and diversity of the street should be celebrated with information that informs the public of the street's importance and history. Dublin City Council's Commemorative Plaques Scheme could contribute to this

New art and sculpture should be commissioned to celebrate the street. Dublin City Council's Public Art Programme can assist in realising this

Gentrification can lead to new uses displacing existing activities that contribute to the area's character. Dublin City Council should ensure that any changes in the Commercial Rates scheme support existing uses rather than encourage their displacement

The City Council should consider an annual festival that would celebrate the many strands of history, culture, music, and lives that contribute to the area's character including the immigrant and LGBTQ+ community. This could be achieved in partnership with the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage; the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport, and Media; and the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth

As part of the preparation for Dublin City Council's new Integration Strategy, the Council should reach out to immigrants who live or work on or near Capel Street to hear of and incorporate their concerns and celebrate their successes

Public Realm

Dublin City Council should initiate a full public realm regeneration scheme that would replace concrete and tarmacadam surfaces with native Irish stone. Given the wide range of professional advice available to the local authority including architecture, planning, urban design and landscaping it would be prudent to put in place a multi-disciplinary team with a strong input from experts in green infrastructure, as well as those skilled in managing vehicular traffic

An urban greening programme should be part of Dublin City Council's public realm regeneration. This should include the provision of street trees planted in the earth (not planters), and provide for bushes, shrubs and planted areas that can act as soak-aways to mitigate the impact of climate change

Dublin City Council should appoint a public realm manager with responsibility for the management and improvement of the public realm in the Capel Street Area. A priority should be to tackle the dereliction and vacancy at the following locations by working with the owners to achieve sensitive development.

- 67 Capel Street (neglected temporary pocket-park) and nearby derelict sites
- 74, 75, 76, 77 Capel Street (Technical University of Dublin site)
- 109 Capel Street (empty premises)
- 163, 164, 165 Capel Street (junction with Strand Street Little)

The Environment and Traffic Section of Dublin City Council should work with residents and businesses to successfully animate the street appropriately

Play space for children should be central to public realm improvements for the street, as many families with children live on or nearby the street

Dublin City Council should work with residents to ensure that the night-time economy works in harmony with residents, businesses, and visitors, and ensure late-night noise is minimised. If necessary, the Noise control unit should support residents in

the licensing courts with evidence of noise pollution from businesses that cause disruption

Provision of quality public seating that would allow visitors to rest and socialise in comfort on both streets without being obliged to pay for the privilege

A safety audit of the street should be undertaken by the local authority in conjunction with Dublin City Council, An Garda Síochána, Dublin Town, businesses and residents. This should inform future changes and management of the Street

Transport and Mobility

Reducing the amount of through traffic from Capel Street must be a top priority. This will reduce traffic noise and air pollution, and provide safer conditions for people of all ages.

The proposals to remove vehicular traffic from much of the street are welcome. Footpaths should be widened in areas where vehicular traffic is retained. Universal Design principles should apply to any changes in footpaths or carriageways

Prior to upgrading an accessibility audit should be carried out to identify obstacles such as kerbs, uneven and sloped surfaces that impede access for people with disabilities with a review to remedying these.

Sandwich boards and surplus poles must be removed as they are significant obstacles for people with disabilities

In the short-term the Environment and Traffic Section of Dublin City Council should carry out road resurfacing to provide a smoother surface for all road users which will enhance the experience of the area for all

The Council should put in place a street management system in conjunction with all City Council Departments including Cleansing, Lighting, Parks, and other services. It would also involve coordination with An Garda Síochána and Dublin Town the Business Improvement District

The City Council should provide parking bays for people with disabilities, as well as loading bays in appropriate places by consulting directly with all businesses on the street and surroundings, and with relevant bodies.

Ciarán Cuffe, MEP for Dublin, March 2022