



Limerick Chamber

**Submission on Draft
Masterplan for St. Joseph's
Hospital (Colbert Quarter)**

December 2023

1.0 Introduction

Limerick Chamber would like to thank the Land Development Agency (LDA) for the opportunity to submit our members' views on the LDA's St. Joseph's Hospital Draft Masterplan – published in November 2023.

Limerick Chamber is the largest business representation organisation in the Mid-West, boasting a membership of over 400 businesses and over 50,000 employees. Limerick Chamber represents a wide array of businesses across the region from local retailers, indigenous exporters to multinational corporations and everything in between.

This development will have many benefits but from a business representative perspective, the 500 – 600 homes planned is of major significance not only to Limerick City but the entire Mid-West region.

Like in many other regions, housing has become a major constraint on businesses' ability to expand in the Mid-West. Therefore, housing has become a major topic that Limerick Chamber advocate, research, and lobby for on behalf of our members. Hence, worker housing is received with open arms in Limerick City. However, we cannot underestimate the urgent need for the delivery of housing.

2.0 Feedback

From a business representative perspective, the announcement of housing, the 500 – 600 housing units, are of great significance. The availability of appropriate and affordable housing is a key contributor on the ability of the Mid-West to attract and retain people, businesses, and investment. Businesses in Limerick and the wider Mid-West have continued to expand their workforces, adding to the housing demand. Therefore this announcement is much welcomed.

We welcome the focus on apartments for the site, as well as the inclusion of some car space that is not overbearing but serves some need, we also welcome the urban greenway and focus on active travel on the site, and we commend the LDA for their forward thinking and progressive approach in this regard. We welcome the inclusion of site permeability with the proposed link to Roxboro Road and Roxboro Avenue (the Jail Boreen). We also commend the inclusion of a Creche on the site. Limerick Chamber also welcomes and commends the inclusion of home ownership on the site, which we see as a critical aspect of building not only sustainable communities, but sustainable economies. However, there is some feedback that Limerick Chamber would like to be considered as part of the final masterplan.

2.1 Tenure Mix

The tenure mix of the housing on this site is welcomed and will be championed by the Chamber. The inclusion of cost rental and making homes available to home owners is of major significance to meet the worker housing demands, which leads to the betterment of the local, county, and regional economy. We ask that the LDA to protect and ensure that the 90% cost rental and purchase will remain part of the final masterplan and indeed subsequent planning permission. Affordable housing is a completely new form of tenure, for both purchase and rental, and thus developments must be frontloaded with this tenure to make up for lost time with under delivery in the past.

- 70% of the housing on this site is planned to be made available for cost rental. Cost rental is something that Limerick Chamber has been advocating for in Limerick, Clare, and Tipperary within our monthly publication of the 'Mid-West Rental Monitor' – which aims to shed light on the lack of rental availability and increasing rental costs. Cost rental can make worker housing more affordable, but it can also help people save, reducing the rental trap problem. Decreasing rental costs can help prospective buyers save for a deposit on a home and potentially have significant impact on retaining these citizens.

- 20% of the proposed housing will be made available to buyers which will help with the lack of supply in the region. This is much welcomed by Limerick Chamber considering the fact that just 43% of new home transactions in Limerick went to owner-occupiers in 2022 and that home ownership in Limerick has decreased from 76% in 2011 to 64% in 2022. Furthermore, just 7% of households in the city centre own their home and this development will help to improve this figure. Feedback from our members outlines that purchase would be an attractive option on this site, furthermore, our research suggests this also. Limerick Chamber are happy to collaborate with the LDA in this regard with helping to bring forward purchase on this site.

- The 10% social housing will help address those on social housing waiting lists. It is important to also achieve social targets without losing sight of the massive pent-up demand in the system for private and affordable housing. This helps to ensure a comprehensive and sustainable development of Limerick. We would advocate for the complementary use of social housing on this site, i.e. to be used for those that may use the HSE facilities, or that the social housing is for specialist disabled categories and or age friendly housing.

Ultimately we feel that the tenure mix is an appropriate response to the site.

2.2 Other HSE Lands

While we appreciate that the HSE might have long-term plans for other parts of the site, namely, the green field space at the east of the site adjacent to Mount St. Lawrence Cemetery. The exclusion of these lands, means potentially a further 3.2 hectares could be available for housing if included. We would ask that if the HSE does not bring plans forward within one year that parts of the site transfers to the LDA for the provision of affordable worker housing. This is a key strategic site in the city, a city where very little residential development for affordable and private housing has been undertaken for the past 20 years. We must fully utilise all strategic land banks, where possible, for the provision of housing and not rely on plans for other uses that may never come to pass, meaning the land will lay idle in the meantime.

2.3 Terraced Houses

Limerick Chamber welcomes the inclusion for terraced houses. We understand that different home typologies are required for a site such as this, especially when there is an emphasis on purchase. We also feel that houses are appropriate in the context of Limerick Chamber's City Centre Report, where we found that the city centre is home to smaller families (1 to 2 people) due to perceived lack of space for larger families. Therefore, we welcome the inclusion of larger homes which suit families and will encourage people to stay and move into the city centre while also owning their own home.

2.4 Balconies

Being mindful of affordability and viability constraints, we ask that the potential for balconies for apartments be investigated as part of the planning submission. This will allow the creation of a more vibrant and open neighbourhood.

2.5 Protected Structures

We appreciate that the masterplan is mindful of existing protected structures on the site and given the important heritage aspects of these buildings we would advocate for their continued protection as part of the development.

2.6 Connectivity

While we welcome the permeability of the site, as mentioned previously, we ask that the LDA and Irish Rail consider better connecting the site to Colbert Train Station. With the current plans it appears that residents will have to either travel via Sexton Street or Lower Careys Road to get to the train station. However, from a time efficiency perspective, access via the "back" of the train station, close to the development would be an optimal outcome.

2.7 Retail Space

We ask that the LDA be mindful when including any retail space in the development. We advocate for residents of the development having their needs met with convenience stores and other essential services, however, the LDA must be mindful not to detract from the retail offering of the core city centre.

2.8 Segregating Fence / Wall

While not immediately clear from the plan, there appears to be a fence or wall separating the LDA lands from the HSE lands. Limerick Chamber views this as inappropriate and will go against creating a permeable neighbourhood. Furthermore, we would hope that some of the people living in the LDA development would work in the HSE facilities and this would create an unnecessary barrier for those travelling to work. Furthermore, the segregating fence / wall will create a cul-de-sac in the development which can sometimes create an unsafe environment. We understand that the Colbert Quarter Spatial Framework Plan was adopted into the Development Plan for Limerick City and County Council 2022 - 2028 and it did not include a segregating wall or fence.

2.9 LDA Resources

It is realistic to think that a planning application for this development could be submitted within 12-months maximum. Therefore, we implore the LDA to provide the resources needed to bring this development to planning within the next 12-months. Failing to do so will allow to housing crisis to become deeper entrenched in Limerick.

3.0 Concluding Remarks

Again, we thank the LDA for the opportunity to submit our member's views on the plan. We welcome the publication of the draft masterplan for St. Joseph's, and we commend the LDA for their hard work in bringing the plan forward and in their forward thinking and progressive approach to the site particularly regarding tenure mix.

We would ask that once the master plan is finalised that a timeline for development is published so it can be outlined on the Limerick Chamber Strategic Development Pipeline. Furthermore, given the urgent need for housing and time lapsed so far in Colbert Quarter, that the LDA bring this development forward as efficiently and quickly as possible while also ensuring that this project is adequately resourced from a human capital perspective.

However, the LDA must also continue to work on bringing plans forward for other elements areas of Colbert Quarter and other strategic areas in Limerick City (such as the old gas site) as quickly as possible.



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