



Berkeley Road - A Living Space for All



## Re. The Mater Station

Breda Scully

As a lifelong resident of Berkeley Road Parish, my main concern is for the health and wellbeing of all who live and work in this area. We live between two very large institutions, the Mater Hospital and Mountjoy Prison. Their buildings dominate the skyline, and with further construction works going on in both places, it can seem as if our living space is being encroached upon and dwindling all the time. We can feel squeezed out of existence.

That is why Berkeley Road and The Four Masters Park are so important. There is a villagelike-feel to the place. Small shops line one side of the road, while the park is on the other side, alongside St. Joseph's Church. The row of two-story Victorian buildings harmonises well with the park and church and helps to give Berkeley Road its unique character as a neighbourhood.

Neighbourhoods are very important. As stated in a recent Irish Times article\* ( "Neighbourhoods are the building blocks of cities". Also, "places with a village feel, where residents can walk to local shops and pubs and restaurants... help create a sense of community and belonging. People feel they know people and can call upon others in times of need. They are less likely to feel isolated or lonely and more likely to have social connections".

That is why Berkeley Road is a haven in a very built-up area. The shops have an old-world feel. There is the personal touch, which means so much. Sadly, the post office in Berkeley Road has gone, and that in Phibsboro is due for closure. The bank in Phibsboro was closed a few years ago. We have lost much, but wish to see our remaining businesses and shops stay open. The closing-off of Berkeley Road and the removal of parking spaces will put shop owners under severe pressure and will likely result in the loss of even more businesses.

Across the road is the beautiful Four Masters Park, which lends an air of peace and tranquillity to the scene. It would be a huge loss if a metro station and its ancillary structures were parachuted down onto this beautiful green space. For many people it may be the only grassy area they see during the course of their day. There is something deep within us that longs for greenness and natural surroundings. A health worker told me recently, that when coming off-duty after nightwork, she loved to see the morning dew sparkling on the grass as she walked by the park. These are the small, intangible, unmeasurable encounters that are, nevertheless, so important in our lives. They feed our spirits.

It should be remembered that many people living in, and visiting the area may have physical or mental impairments which make it difficult for them to get around, even in normal circumstances. Many people attending the Mater Hospital and its associated buildings on Berkeley Road and Eccles Street, use mobility aids of various kinds. Add in a giant construction site, changes in traffic flow, removal of footpath etc., and life becomes even more difficult for those with any kind of disability.

Having spoken to wheelchair users and those with visual impairment, I have been asked to express the following concerns:-

For wheelchair users these include

Difficulty negotiating uneven ground, slopes, risk of tyre puncture, axle or front fork breakage.

For those with visual impairment they include

Difficulty hearing traffic or signals at crossings due to additional noise, difficulty walking on uneven ground.

General problems would be

Difficulty accessing local amenities (shops, doctors, dentists, churches) or public transport, where they have to cross at or near the construction site, or where the amenities have moved due to the works, or where transport is diverted away from normal routes.



The Berkeley Road area is also one of great cultural significance. In James Joyce's *Ulysses*, it is on the route of Paddy Dignam's funeral cortege. On a Saturday morning recently, I took part in a Joycean walking tour of the area. We stood at the junction of Berkeley Road and Eccles Street, as relevant passages from the book were read aloud ("Quick warm sunlight came running from Berkeley road swiftly, in slim sandals, along the brightening footpath. Runs, she runs to meet me, a girl with gold hair on the wind"). All those present admired the lovely vista before us - the Four Masters Park straight ahead, with its winter-bare trees, St. Joseph's Church rising majestically behind, then looking left, the row of Georgian buildings along Eccles Street, culminating in the exquisite spire of St. George's Church. The spell was only broken when I remarked that the beautiful park was marked out for destruction, and that a metro station entrance and ancillary structures would take its place. There was a unanimous chorus of disapproval, even disbelief that this could be allowed to happen.

However, the Four Masters Park is still there. The daffodils have been blooming for several weeks now. One can imagine them as the "girl with gold hair on the wind". The row of magnolia trees are in full, glorious blossom. But the park is no longer tended by Dublin City Council.

They looked after it for many years, and their wonderful seasonal planting was its glory. Many times I saw visitors taking photos of the colourful flower beds, and on passing buses, every head would turn as we passed the park. Still, even without tending, the daffodils and magnolias yield their yearly delights, bringing joy to all our hearts. They are faithful, even when we are not.

My wish would be for the Mater Metro Station to find another “home”, just not in The Four Masters Park! I would love to see Dublin City Council to take over the care of the park, restore the seasonal planting of flowerbeds, perhaps make it a community park, where residents could assist with planting and learn more about the flowers and plants. In this way, the Healing Hands sculpture, by Tony O’Malley, would take on a new and broader meaning, encompassing the healing which comes when we draw close to nature and, thereby, to ourselves.

\*Living in Walkable Neighbourhoods Makes Us Happier by Prof. Kevin Leyden, professor of political science and public policy in the school of political science and sociology at University of Galway. Lorraine D’Arcy, senior lecturer in the school of transport engineering, environment and planning, and the sustainability action research lead at the Technological University, Dublin.