

## Clonliffe Development Public Art Strategy Report

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This brief is to prepare a Public Art Commissioning Strategy for the proposed development at Clonliffe Road in Dublin 3 and 9. The proposed development combines private and social housing and public pathways, and will also accommodate a listed historical building and includes proposed proximate training grounds for the GAA. The context includes a set of architectural proposals of high contemporary standard. This spectrum of use requires a strategy that offers possibilities for engagement by occasional visitors, frequent local users and residents.

The Strategy takes account of the historical resonance and significance of Clonliffe by:

- (i) keeping record of historical artefacts,
- (ii) proposing a fine-grain network of works designed to enhance place-making and develop relationships with the area, and its historic plantlife, and
- (iii) commissioning a major public artwork on site. A large-scale artwork, commissioned as part of an overall scheme of works would offer a destination and focal point for the development.

Some smaller works, embedded into and enhancing the proposed infrastructure, would produce an explorable cross-site experience, providing both context for, and extension of, the larger work.

To accomplish this, the commissioning strategy takes three parts:

- Strand 1 Focusing on *memory and heritage*,
- Strand 2 *Narrative and community* and
- Strand 3 Providing an *emblematic 'custodian' of place*.

The proximity of the River Tolka to the application site presents a site with great potential for a set of public artworks that harness historic resonance, enhance experience and reflect contemporary aesthetics and interests.

The commissioning and placement of artworks throughout the proposed development take into account the historical context, the surrounding urban landscape, the combined planned usage and place making priorities and the future and existing natural amenities that the site and redevelopment opportunity offer. Given the scale and significance of the development the Public Art Strategy presents a variety of possibilities for engagement and relationship building between the site, the artworks and the visitor/viewer.

The proposed commission looks at the existing natural life and surroundings of the site and how this meets with landscaping in the development, casting trees in a primary role. Trees are the existing 'population' at Clonliffe and, with the river Tolka, which flows adjacent to the site, they add much to the natural value of the Clonliffe lands. The existing trees and proposed new

planting will be met by a series of newly commissioned artworks, which will reflect contemporary thinking in both production and delivery, as is central to the architectural tone of the development. This will be achieved by commissioning artists by invitation, to tender to a specific brief (rather than by open competition), as reflected in National Public Art Commissioning guidelines.

The Public Art Commissioning Approach for this site proposes the following 3 strands:

- An archival document/record of the historical artefacts on site as they currently exist.
- A fine-grain intensification of the public/place making value of the planting onsite by an enhanced 'tagging' of trees and plants.
- A sympathetic but dramatic moment of focus on a specific tree onsite, which will be metaphorically nominated as a 'representative' of the tree population.

Underscoring all three strands is an emphasis on artistic thinking at a macro and micro level across the site. The commissions will be embedded within the overall strategy. Health and safety, anti-vandalism and feasibility will be front-loaded as concerns with all works.

All three strands will be overseen by a visual arts curator and strands 2 and 3 may be commissioned from the same artist. It is proposed that the commissioning incorporates an artists residency on site during production of the works.

## **Strand 1**

### *An Archive Box*

Given the extraordinary collection of artefacts on site and their imminent redistribution, Strand 1 of this proposal involves the annotated recording and preservation of the artefacts currently on site, at the seminary building in particular. This will take the form of a single volume artefact, in the form of a book or folder, prepared in collaboration with the architect, curator and artist/designer, after the removal of artifacts by the church. The archive will be presented to the appropriate National Museum, under advice from Dublin City Council Heritage Office, and consideration will be given to holding a copy on site and online. Consideration will also be given to building a display unit for this archive box using materials recovered from the site during development.

## Strand 2

### *Enhanced Tree and Plant Labelling*

Existing trees on the site have already been tagged with small metal tags as is usual as a function of audit for the planting. In collaboration with NMP Landscape, this Strand will involve commissioning and producing a series of enhanced 'tags' for trees and plants across the site, providing information, context and occasional snippets of related narrative (examples below).

The artist, in collaboration with the Landscape Architects and the Wayfinding Strategy will produce a readable, engaging set of signs which will serve to enhance the experience of the flora on site for the viewer/visitor. This tagging will be extended to certain spots on the site where particular wildlife may be seen, such as a kingfisher at the river. The set of tags across the site will serve as 'fascia' or connective tissue, building an intimacy of place for users, and acting as a backdrop and context for the larger commission in Strand 3.

Sample information and narratives for inclusion on enhanced tags:

#### Example 1

General information on trees:

*'Wise old mother trees feed their saplings with liquid sugar and warn the neighbors when danger approaches. Reckless youngsters take foolhardy risks with leaf-shedding, light-chasing and excessive drinking.'*<sup>1</sup>

#### Example 2

Specific Species related information:

*Salix or Willow Tree: Willow tree blossoms are 'perfect' in that they are complete flowers, containing both male and female flower parts.*

#### Example 3

Narrative sample of tree-related folklore:

*Irish folklore tells the story of Labhraidh Loinseach, the King of Leinster who had the ears of a horse. The king's ears were a dark secret and every barber who cut his hair was sentenced to death afterwards. One such barber was the son of a widow and she begged for him to be spared. The king agreed on the condition that he never tell a living soul. The barber whispered the truth to a willow tree. Some time later this willow was made into a harp. When the harp was played at court it cried out 'The King Has Horse's Ears!'*

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<sup>1</sup> Grant, Diàna Markosian, Richard. "Do Trees Talk to Each Other?" *Smithsonian Magazine*, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/science-nature/the-whispering-trees-180968084/>



Sample tree tag with minimal information

**IDEALLY HERE SOME  
SUNSHINE WOULD TOUCH  
YOUR FACE**

Sample Text: *Ideally Some Sunshine Would Touch Your Face Here*  
Postcard 2018 © Laure Prouvost

### **Strand 3**

#### *A Talking Tower*

The site at Clonliffe contains several areas of original planting, primarily of trees, which will be added to by the landscaping plan as part of the redevelopment. This places trees as the historical 'residents' of the site. It has been shown that trees have a network of communication and this network is represented in Strand 2.

Strand 3 will highlight a single tree on the site for specific attention as part of a public artwork. This tree will act as a metaphorical 'spokesperson' or representative for the tree population across the site.

This commission will be achieved through lighting, kinetics or sculptural intervention. The materials and conceptual underpinning of the work will reflect contemporary artistic practices in both thinking and materials.

The title *A Talking Tower* is taken from the Louis MacNeice poem, *I Am That I Am*. The poem lists a series of tautologies - "man is man, woman woman, and tree tree" - but MacNeice suggests that all of these can alter or expand. In particular, he says a tree can become a 'talking tower'. The description of a tree as *A Talking Tower* places it as an agent within an urban, built setting and this change of status acts as a reminder of creative possibility and growth.