

**IN THE MATTER OF AN APPLICATION TO
AN BORD PLEANÁLA
FOR PERMISSION FOR
STRATEGIC INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT
(THE CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL OF IRELAND)
ABP Reg. No. PL29N.PA0024**

AND IN THE MATTER OF AN ORAL HEARING

**Architectural Appraisal
Statement of Evidence of Shane O'Toole**

Shane
O'Toole

Statement of Shane O'Toole to An Bord Pleanála's Oral Hearing

1.0 QUALIFICATIONS AND EXPERIENCE

- 1.1. My name is Shane O'Toole.
- 1.2. I graduated in architecture from University College Dublin in 1979. I have practised as an architect, urban designer and architectural critic, with an established international reputation in each field. In recent years I have concentrated on my role as critic and architectural historian, daily assessing the quality of architecture, both built and unbuilt.
- 1.3. I was elected a Fellow of the Royal Institute of the Architects of Ireland (RIAI) in 1999 and was twice Vice President of the Institute. I am a Past President and Honorary Life Member of the Architectural Association of Ireland (AAI). I am the only Irish person to have been elected to membership of CICA, the International Committee of Architecture Critics.
- 1.4. I have won many national and international awards as an architect and urban designer, including the Grand Prix at the Cracow International Biennale of Architecture in Poland in 1989. I was a founder director of Group 91, the urban design collective that led the regeneration of Dublin's Temple Bar in the 1990s. In 2002 I was a recipient of the International Union of Architects' (UIA) triennial Sir Patrick Abercrombie Prize for Town Planning and Territorial Development for Group 91's work in Temple Bar. As part of the Temple Bar redevelopment, I designed The Ark in Meetinghouse Square, Europe's first purpose-built cultural centre for children, in 1995. The Ark was named PLAN Irish Building of the Year and won the Downes Medal, the AAI's supreme award. The Ark was the first Irish-designed building to receive a European Architecture Award from the RIBA and was one of two buildings commended in the RIAI Gold Medal Awards for the period 1995-97.
- 1.5. As a critic, I have contributed hundreds of articles to newspapers, national and international journals, exhibition catalogues and books. I was Irish architecture critic for *The Sunday Times* for a decade and am on the editorial board of the Royal Irish Academy's forthcoming book, *Irish Art and Architecture, 1600-2000*. My most recent book, *North by Northwest: The life and work of Liam McCormick*, co-authored with Dr Paul Larmour, Reader in Architecture at Queen's University Belfast, was short-listed in the International Committee of Architecture Critics' triennial book awards, presented in Tokyo last month. In 2010 I was named International Building Press (UK) Architecture Writer of the Year for the third time in a row, becoming the first writer in the 40 years of the awards to achieve that distinction.

- 1.6. I have twice, in 2004 and 2006, been appointed Ireland's Commissioner at the world's largest architecture exhibition, the Venice Biennale. I have advised on international architectural award schemes and exhibitions in Europe, America and Japan, including (since 1992) the Mies van der Rohe Award (The European Union Prize for Contemporary Architecture), Harvard University's Veronica Rudge Green Prize in Urbanism and the *New Trends of Architecture in Europe and Asia-Pacific* exhibition, 2006-07. I have chaired award juries for both the RIAI and RIBA Regional Awards and for the RIAI Gold Medal, the ultimate accolade in Irish architecture. I have served on the jury for the Mies van der Rohe Award (The European Union Prize for Contemporary Architecture), in 2003, and, annually since 2008, at the World Festival of Architecture in Barcelona.
- 1.7. I was a co-founder of DOCOMOMO, the international working party for the documentation and conservation of modern movement buildings and sites, at Eindhoven, The Netherlands, in 1990, and am Secretary of DOCOMOMO Ireland, the heritage body. I am a board member of the Irish Architectural Archive. I was the inaugural curator/director of the Irish Architecture Foundation in 2005-06, when the annual Open House Dublin architectural festival, which provides free public access to Dublin's greatest architecture of all periods, was inaugurated.

2.0 MY POSITION

- 2.1 I have been requested by the National Paediatric Hospital Development Board to provide an independent architectural assessment of the proposed Children's Hospital of Ireland at the Mater Hospital campus on Eccles Street in Dublin 7.

3.0.0 ARCHITECTURAL ASSESSMENT OF THE CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL OF IRELAND

- 3.0.1 In preparing my assessment of the proposed development, I am aware of:
- the Government decision of July 2011 to construct the new national children's hospital on the site of the Mater hospital campus,
 - the objective to develop a world-class facility of approximately 110,000m² to facilitate excellence in the delivery of clinical services, teaching and research in an environment that is fully supportive of children, their families and staff, and
 - the particulars of the application and the submissions by prescribed bodies and third party observers.

- 3.0.2 In structuring my architectural assessment of the proposed development, I thought it might be of assistance to the Board to order my assessment along the lines of the submission, dated 13th September 2011, made by The Heritage Council. That submission highlights four issues in relation to the development proposal:
- the planning arguments for form, extent and massing,
 - justification as a significant architectural statement at the city scale,
 - the impacts on city views and the tentative World Heritage Site list, and
 - the impact on the economic functioning of the district.

These four issues, identified by the Heritage Council, neatly encompass all of the architectural assessment comments raised in the various submissions made.

- 3.0.3 My architectural assessment of the proposed Children's Hospital of Ireland will attempt to answer the two key questions posed by the Heritage Council, on page 2 of its submission: "Is this the most beautiful and acceptable object that it can be?" and "Is it worthy to become a dominant image of Dublin and its urban skyline?"

3.1.0 I: The Planning Arguments for Form, Extent and Massing

- 3.1.1 It is neither within the scope of my brief nor my expertise to challenge the requirements of the brief for the Children's Hospital of Ireland, which has been the subject of multiple expert reviews which concluded it should be located on the Mater Hospital campus, together with a future Maternity Hospital, in order to optimize the benefits of 'tri-location' of teaching adult hospital, children's hospital and maternity hospital. For the purposes of my assessment the 'extent' of the brief is a given, as is the location. Therefore, in order to respond to the Heritage Council's supplementary query, my firm understanding is that the brief cannot be disaggregated in a reasonable way and accommodated on several sites.

- 3.1.2 It is my considered opinion that the 2011 Site Masterplan is logical and optimises the use of the site for the proposed functions.
- 3.1.3 Hospital design is possibly the most difficult and problematical field of architecture today. Hospitals are extremely complex buildings in their ordering and function and most contemporary hospitals, worldwide, are a disappointment to both architects and, more importantly, patients alike. In advanced societies these buildings, which deal in life and death and the hope of healing should be among the greatest secular buildings of our times. And yet they are not. Mostly, they are banal and dispiriting places, if not downright alienating. Why exactly that should be, I cannot say. But it is a fact. Cold and machine-like in conception and operation, it is as if their creators have lost sight of the humanity of patients. If we look carefully, however, there are some signs of hope for the future. Perhaps the best known examples are the small Maggie's Cancer Caring Centres in the UK (documented in *The Architecture of Hope*, published last year), which demonstrate how much good architecture can influence the way people feel and lead to improved medical outcomes. I was surprised and greatly heartened, therefore, when examining the architectural design concept for the Children's Hospital of Ireland, to detect a similar guiding ambition and sensibility at work. I consider this an exceptional design concept and believe it can lead to the creation of a truly world-class children's hospital in Dublin.
- 3.1.4 The proposed accommodation is arranged like a layer cake. Almost one-third of the development (35,590m² of the 108,356m² gross floor area) is located underground and comprises parking and services on four levels, including provision for a future Metro station. More than two parking spaces per bed space are provided (972 car spaces and 243 bicycle spaces for 392 in-patient beds and 53 daycare beds). Above ground, the main elements of the brief are stacked one above the other, as follows, with the busier areas located closer to the street and the depth of the building reducing as it gets higher:
- the emergency department,
 - the diagnostic and treatment areas,
 - the therapy park, and
 - the sleep-over wards.
- 3.1.5 The new four-storey frontage to Eccles Street is appropriately scaled and repairs the street in a manner consistent with the urban design objectives of the LAP.
- 3.1.6 The entrance is well located in terms of both urban design and hospital planning considerations. Its scale, which is that of a small urban square such as Temple Bar Square, is appropriate to its location and function. It will provide a welcoming face to this important new institution.

- 3.1.7 The main bulk of the eight-storey podium building, containing the diagnostic and treatment areas and their supporting plant rooms, is set back from Eccles Street and concealed from immediate view.
- 3.1.8 The height of the diagnostic and treatment blocks corresponds roughly with the height of the city's rooftops, and parts of it will be visible in places against Dublin's skyline. All development higher than this will be visible from many parts of the city.
- 3.1.9 The uppermost part of the building, the in-patient ward block, is designed as a sculptural object perched above the rooftops, its form independent of that of the technical medical facilities that support it. The form of the ward block was tested by the architects through many iterations, including, for example, a tower, which would be taller but have a somewhat smaller footprint. Medical considerations require that the ward block silhouette will be large: a ward needs 24-30 beds; two wards are needed per floor to allow seasonal changeovers, when illnesses differ in their frequency; and all acute hospitals now require single bedrooms for effective infection control. Nevertheless, it is my considered opinion that the architectural design concept for the Children's Hospital of Ireland is the correct one for this brief and site. It literally elevates the position of sick children and their parents above all else and, as such, is powerfully symbolic of the ethos anybody would want for this new national institution, the Children's Hospital of Ireland.
- 3.1.10 The design of the single, en-suite, in-patient rooms, which can also accommodate family members staying overnight with patients, has been carefully considered to be as much of a 'home away from home' for children as is possible. Their chief architectural glory, however, will be in the wonderful views they will afford sick children – which will be better than from any penthouse apartment in the city – and which, even if only as an 'architectural placebo', cannot but help make them feel specially valued, lift their spirits and thereby improve their prospects of achieving a successful medical outcome.
- 3.1.11 That same sense of care, generosity and thoughtful innovation can be seen in the unique therapy park, a series of healing gardens and roof terraces laid out between the diagnostic and treatment podium and the wards above.
- 3.1.12 I would concur with the opinion expressed at pages 25 and 26 of Dublin City Council's submission (Report No. 245/2011 of the Assistant City Manager) that "The building works on both a civic scale and a human scale and provides a high standard of amenity in a dense, inner-urban site."

3.2.0 II: Justification as a Significant Architectural Statement at the City Scale

- 3.2.1 Every age creates new monuments for new times. By definition, monuments possess a scale that sets them apart from their surroundings. From medieval Dublin, we think of St Patrick's cathedral. From the Age of Enlightenment, we have the broad streets that the Wide Streets Commissioners carved through the medieval city and those wonderful Portland-stone-fronted and green-copper-domed institutions of State – the old Parliament on College Green, City Hall and Gandon's riverine masterpieces, the Four Courts and the Custom House.
- 3.2.2 It is often forgotten that some of our greatest urban symbols were not without controversy in their day. For example, the *Dublin Evening Post* of Jul 21st, 1781 reported in the following vein: "A correspondent informs us that the front of the new Custom House will be three hundred and seventy five feet, but adds that from the opinion which the public in general seem to entertain of the many injurious consequences likely to be experienced by the city from its situation, that he would venture to lay three hundred and seventy five pounds the plan is not carried into execution during the remainder of this century at least." In Paris, Guy De Maupassant famously ate every day at the restaurant in the Eiffel Tower because, as he put it, "It's the only place in Paris where I can eat and not see that hideous tower." He ridiculed it as a "high and skinny pyramid of iron ladders," while the novelist, Léon Bloy, labeled it a "truly tragic street lamp."
- 3.2.3 In Dublin, after Catholic Emancipation, we got the soaring cupola of Rathmines church. Industrial Dublin gave us the Guinness silos, the Gasometer and the Pigeon House chimneys. In the 1970s it was the world of finance that left its mark most prominently on the city, with the Central Bank, in particular, but also the Bank of Ireland headquarters on Baggot Street. Our Millennium monuments were different again: the Spire and two great stadia, Croke Park and the Aviva, which have been recently joined on the skyline by the National Convention Centre and the Criminal Courts.
- 3.2.4 There are few hotter topics in Ireland today than the state of the health service. I am of the opinion that like the examples cited above, the Children's Hospital of Ireland is a major institution worthy of making a significant architectural statement at the city scale. I believe it would capture the popular mood and symbolically reflect a desired change of values in Irish society from one of rampant individualism to more balanced social solidarity. I am of the opinion that the architecture of the design proposed is of sufficient quality to fulfill such a role.

3.3.0 III: Impacts on City Views and the Tentative World Heritage Site List

- 3.3.1 Dublin is a candidate UNESCO World Heritage Site. While the application refers the architecture since the Restoration, it continues until the 21st century and refers, for example, to the literary of Joyce and Yeats. The UNESCO List includes 936 sites from around the world, of which 725 are cultural (including buildings and districts), 183 natural and 28 mixed.
- 3.3.2 Being inscribed on the UNESCO List has not precluded several European cities from recently erecting in the vicinity of World Heritage Sites buildings that dramatically change the unique character of those cities. Examples of such UNESCO World Heritage Site cities include Graz in Austria, Bruges in Belgium and Amsterdam in The Netherlands.
- 3.3.3 In Graz, the website of the Kunsthaus declares: "The Kunsthaus Graz opened its doors in 2003, the architectural *pièce de resistance* of Graz's year as European Capital of Culture. The biomorphous building designed by Peter Cook and Colin Fournier – known locally as the Friendly Alien – has since become an attraction for art lovers and the culturally minded from all over the world. But it has also become an essential landmark in the urban identity of the city of Graz." So, it is clear that significant impacts on heritage assets and city views may sometimes be seen as a positive. UNESCO has not threatened Graz's place on the List.
- 3.3.4 In Bruges, Robbrecht and Daem's Concert Hall had an even greater impact on the character of the city, because of its colour, scale and monolithic character. The Bruges tourism website says, however, that "Bruges is not only a world heritage city but also a city that is making history today. Within the framework of European Capital of Culture of 2002 ... the architects had to take into account an existing, familiar and respected cityscape on the one hand and the ambition of the city to use this project to mark an important cultural moment in a contemporary way for the future on the other." Clearly, in Bruges the future and the past are not at loggerheads, despite significant impacts on World Heritage Site city views.
- 3.3.5 In Amsterdam, the construction of Renzo Piano's Nemo Science Centre had a rather less significant impact on important canal views, due to its distance from the canal, but an impact nonetheless, which has, however, not affected the UNESCO status of the canal ring inside the Singelgracht.
- 3.3.6 The Children's Hospital of Ireland will have impacts on many city views and significant impacts on some city views but it is not at all clear that these impacts would negatively affect the possibility of Georgian Dublin's eventual inscription on

the UNESCO List. It is clear from the examples cited that innovative contemporary buildings can contribute to the richness of historical contexts.

3.4.0 IV: Impact on the Economic Functioning of the District

- 3.4.1 In conclusion, I remarked at the outset that this planning application is about the future of Dublin itself. By that I meant the continuing ability of the city to accommodate within its limits significant national institutions, employers and economic drivers such as the Children's Hospital of Ireland.
- 3.4.2 I have noted, at 4.1.1 above, the requirements of the brief and the capacity of the site that has been decided by Government.
- 3.4.3 I am of the opinion that the Site Masterplan is logical and optimizes the use of the site for the proposed functions. I am also of the opinion that the architectural design concept for the Children's Hospital of Ireland, which calls for the bedrooms to be in the air, is the correct one for this brief and site, and that it is symbolically appropriate. I am further of the opinion that it is an exceptional design concept and believe it can lead to the creation of a truly world-class children's hospital in Dublin.
- 3.4.4 The scale of the proposed hospital is effectively irreducible. The entirety of the ward block will be visible from many parts of the city. Based on the experience, outlined above, of European cities already inscribed on UNESCO's World Heritage Site List, I am not persuaded that the impacts the Children's Hospital of Ireland will have on city views and heritage assets would negatively affect the possibility of Dublin's eventual inscription on the UNESCO List.
- 3.4.5 Finally, I would concur with the opinion expressed at page 34 of Dublin City Council's submission (Report No. 245/2011 of the Assistant City Manager) that "... while it is clear that a building of this scale will impact significantly on the character of the city, this is an inevitable part of the compromise necessary to achieve development in inner urban areas and it is the Planning Authority's view that they are outweighed by the positive contributions which this scheme will make to the city centre."

October 17, 2011