



Charlie Haughey and the Redevelopment of Temple Bar

Charles Haughey played a central role in the redevelopment of Temple Bar which began in the early 1990s. Mr. Haughey viewed the regeneration of the area as a Government flagship project for Dublin's year as European City of Culture in 1991. The objective was to build on what had been taking place in the area spontaneously, and to create a cultural quarter which people would visit and in which others would work and live.



Prior to its redevelopment much of the area was marked by a number of derelict sites, many of which were used for surface car parking and many of the buildings were poorly maintained. In the late 1980s local groups including small businesses, cultural organisations and residents living in the area established the Temple Bar Development Council to campaign for the preservation and renewal of the area.

In the mid-1970s the State transport company CIE began acquiring a considerable portfolio of buildings and sites for the creation of a new transportation centre in the Temple Bar area. Mr. Haughey's commitment to the preservation and redevelopment of the area was in evidence as early as 1987 when he stated that, given Temple Bar's status as one of the oldest, most historic and traditional parts of Dublin, he 'wouldn't let CIE near the place'.

Charles Haughey was determined to bring about the renewal of Temple Bar and this became one of his core political priorities during what proved to be his last term as Taoiseach. Mr. Haughey was keen to see the renewal of the Temple Bar area as a cultural quarter and took decisive action to ensure the proposed transportation centre, including a central bus station did not go ahead. In this regard in March 1991 the State agreed to pay just under £4 million to acquire the CIE's properties in the Temple Bar area of Dublin.

In the summer of 1991 the Taoiseach gave legislative effect to his plans for the redevelopment of Temple Bar. The passage of the Temple Bar Renewal and Development Bill through the Oireachtas created two state companies, Temple Bar Properties Ltd and Temple Bar Renewal Ltd which were established to oversee the regeneration of the entire area which stretches from Fishamble Street to Westmoreland Street and from Dame Street to the Liffey Quays. The successful passage of the Bill through the Oireachtas gave the impetus to the Taoiseach's commitment to develop the Temple Bar area as a cultural quarter.

During the process of redevelopment Mr. Haughey as well as those tasked with carrying out the regeneration were keen to ensure that existing buildings be preserved and refurbished so that the area would retain its 'left bank' character. As was outlined in the original mission statement of Temple Bar Properties the aim was to create 'bustling cultural, residential and small business precinct that will attract visitors in significant numbers'. As part of the effort to encourage the renewal of the area the Government produced a special package of conservation-based tax reliefs to encourage investors to finance the refurbishment programme. These generous tax incentives allowed for the full cost of the refurbishment of buildings to be tax deductible. This package also provided for 100 percent tax relief on the cost of acquiring a property in the area. The creation of such tax incentives by the Government was an important element which drove the redevelopment of Temple Bar. The significance of such measures to the redevelopment of the area is underlined in an article by Irish Times journalist Renagh Holohan which stated that, 'The generous tax incentives being offered for renewal projects in the Temple Bar area of Dublin represent the most significant contribution ever made by an Irish Government to architectural conservation.'

An important element of the redevelopment plan was the increase in the residential population of the Temple Bar area. This has been achieved with an increase in the number of people living in Temple Bar from 250 in 1990 to approximately 2,000 today. The increased provision of residential accommodation in the area was brought about by converting former warehouses into new residential developments, together with the construction of new residential buildings throughout Temple Bar.

Another key feature of the redevelopment process was the pedestrianisation of the area. With the help of funding from the European Union, Dublin City Council was able to re-cobble the streets of Temple Bar. The creation of new public spaces was one of the main elements of the plans to renew Temple Bar, this occurred primarily on sites which had previously been used as surface car parks. European Union funding facilitated the creation of new public spaces most notably the Meeting House Square and Temple Bar Square. One of the core objectives of the renewal process was to bring about an enhancement of Temple Bar's cultural infrastructure. The provision of new cultural centres as well the improvement of existing facilities

represents one of the most important legacies of the redevelopment of Temple Bar. There was considerable success in this respect with the creation of the highly regarded Ark Children's Cultural Centre, the Temple Bar Music Centre, the Irish Film Institute premises on Eustace Station and the Project Arts Centre on East Essex Street which was rebuilt as part of the regeneration of the area. The construction of buildings for new and existing cultural uses was a central element of the renewal of Temple Bar.

In the late 1980s much of the area was characterised by significant dereliction and decay. The transformation of such derelict and underutilised sites into public spaces, residential units and cultural centres has greatly enhanced the quality of the environment of the Temple Bar area. Today Temple Bar is also a high-profile tourism destination attracting approximately 3.5 million visits a year. The renewal of Temple Bar has brought about the creation of a mixed-use area with cultural, social, residential and commercial functions. While the credit for the redevelopment of Temple Bar can be widely shared it is doubtful that the restoration of the area would have been a success without the determined political will from the then Taoiseach for this to be achieved.