

8 Merrion Square

Dublin 2

December 15th 2016

**Dublin City Council - Demolition of An Bord Fáilte HQ Building**

Letter of Observation on planning application reg. ref. no. 4166/16

Dear \_

An application has recently [November 25th ] been made to Dublin City Council, by Irish Life plc, for the demolition of the Bord Fáilte HQ office building, designed by Robin Walker in 1961, located at Baggot Street Bridge [nos. 74-75 Baggot Street Lower]. It is intended to replace it with a perimeter block designed by Reddy A+U.

DoCoMoMo Ireland intends to lodge an observation with DCC on this application, opposing the demolition of the Robin Walker [Michael Scott & Partners] building. We are hoping to persuade you to either

a] sign this letter [digitally and return by email, or manually and return by post to the above address] adding your support to the observation – in the event of a grant of permission by Dublin City Council, DoCoMoMo Ireland will appeal to An Bord Pleanála, and will contact you again to sign and support that appeal; or

b] enter your own observation on the application [ref. 4166/16] directly to The Planning Authority, Civic Offices, Dublin 8 including a payment of €20 – this option allows you to enter your own appeal later if you so choose.

**The last day to enter an observation to Dublin City Council is Tuesday 3rd January 2017.**

The DoCoMoMo observation will include a detailed rebuttal of the various reports lodged with the application, along with supporting information, based on the following points:

* Robin Walker was a distinguished Irish architect, recognised as such during his lifetime, and the Bord Fáilte building was his first major commission as a senior partner in Michael Scott & Partners, on his return from Chicago. The building is an important introduction to that period of architecture in Ireland and, as such, an important part of Irish architectural heritage which should be conserved;
* Irish Life [formerly Irish Life and Pensions] is a semi-state company, involved in asset management, whose funds derive from profits made on investments of public finances. The site and building at 74-75 Baggot Street Lower is therefore a state asset - this development effectively involves the sale and/or letting of a state asset with no independent cost-benefit analysis having been carried out which includes the assessment of heritage or cultural values;
* there is no evidence of alternative development options for the site having been explored - and there is no evidence that this possibility was included in the tender invitation [misleadingly referred to as a "competition" in the applicant architect's design report] issued by Irish Life - in particular, the option of conserving the original building and developing the remaining half of the site;
* the argument that the economic policy of Dublin City Council trumps conservation policy when it comes to job creation or encouraging development is not borne out when one considers that large swathes of the inner city are currently derelict [such as the Thomas Street and O'Connell Street areas] - a proper economic development policy would direct investment towards these areas, with whatever incentives are necessary, and simultaneously insist on the conservation of C20th buildings of architectural merit lying within the Dublin 2 so-called "business district", instead of actively promoting their demolition;
* this point is more acutely important when it concerns semi-state agencies, such as Irish Life, engaging in purely speculative development;
* the original building design was a government commission, for a specific purpose on a low budget, and therefore the criteria for its design were, in addition to fulfilling its functional requirements, architectural, aesthetic and cultural - and not motivated by profit like the current application;
* Dublin City Council has failed to progress the application which was made by DoCoMoMo in 2010, to include the original building [among nine others] in the RPS, despite its commitments to do so - the mid-C20th period is seriously under-represented on the RPS;
* Robin Walker's Bord Fáilte building is a stand-alone object - a punctuation mark at the corner where the long sweep of the Baggot Street terrace meets the Grand Canal - an urban design strategy which has its provenance in Renaissance city planning. This is not achievable by the construction of a perimeter block - a point which will be emphasised in direct contrast to the argument put forward by the applicants that a perimeter block will improve the urban form, which all too conveniently tallies with the unstated objective to maximise floor area on the site;
* a holistic conservation approach to the site, including proper and sustainable planning and development, must have regard to issues of massing and bulk, of public open space, planting, density, visual permeability and the Grand Canal as a green corridor - not simply the eventual "building out" to 100% site coverage;
* the conservation analysis put forward by the applicants is not impartial, is prejudiced in favour of the application and fails to consider a number of conservation options, therefore it lacks credibility;
* best practice internationally calls for a revised approach to the refurbishment of architecture of this period, which is more nuanced and complex than simply the achievement of "Grade A" office standards, complete with "raised-access flooring" and "air-conditioned comfort" as described in the applicant's supporting documentation;
* while the applicant's report indulges extensively in opinion about the architectural provenance of the original building - and compares it with examples in Britain and America - no adequate assessment is given of its relative importance to Irish architectural heritage and cultural life.

The observation will be further supported by:

* a high quality photographic record of the Robin Walker building, including original and current images;
* a thorough, detailed assessment of the architecture of the original building - its plinth, basement area, cast concrete windows, concrete frame and weathering detail, use of brickwork, proportions, parapet and landscaping;
* an examination of its typological innovation within the context of local Dublin architecture of the time, and since - including an exposition of its originality, clarity, architectural provenance, language and durability;
* a critical assessment of its place within the context of postmodern theory of the city as artefact, the Georgian estates and the theoretical thread linking those to Mies van der Rohe and the work of Robin Walker;
* a critical evaluation of the work of Robin Walker, including his written theory, his extensive research and lifetime commitment to the C18th city, and his work as a city planner.

We sincerely hope that you will agree with DoCoMoMo Ireland that the Bord Fáilte building represents an important piece of our architectural heritage, which requires our protection in the face of this undesirable proposal for redevelopment. Your support is greatly needed - and much appreciated.

Yours faithfully

Simon Walker, Chair

on behalf of

DoCoMoMo Ireland Committee

I fully support and agree with the observations contained in this letter and wish to see planning application ref. 4166/16, which includes the demolition of the original Bord Fáilte HQ building, refused permission by Dublin City Council.

Signed Date

Name