

Cork City Council

Cork Docklands North and South Quays Maritime Usage Licence Application

Attachment 4.11 Other National or European Strategic or Policy Objectives

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List of Acronyms/ Glossary

Abbreviation	Description
CDSQ	Cork Docklands South Quays
MASP	Cork Metropolitan Area Strategic Plan
MUL	Maritime Usage Licence
NBAP	National Biodiversity Action Plan
NPF	National Planning Framework
OPW	Office of Public Works

1. Introduction

This report sets out the need for the proposed maritime usage associated with the Cork Docklands South Quays and North Quays projects. The proposed maritime usage comprises a programme of marine, intertidal, ecological, archaeological and structural site investigation surveys within the River Lee, required to inform the planning, engineering design, environmental assessment and delivery of the Cork Docklands South Quays public realm and flood defence project, together with structural-only surveys of existing quay walls and suspended slabs at the North Quays. The South Quays survey area extends along approximately 3.4 km of the southern bank of the River Lee between Kennedy Quay and Blackrock Village, while the North Quays structural surveys focus on Horgan's Quay, the Turning Basin and North Deep-Water Quay along the northern waterfront adjacent to the N8 corridor and Kent Station lands.

The need for the maritime usage is directly linked to the need to generate robust baseline information on existing quay wall condition at the North Quays, and on riverbed characteristics, intertidal and subtidal habitats, archaeological sensitivities, flood-related design constraints and access conditions within the South Quays project area. The North Quays element is limited to structural investigation of the quay walls and submerged elements at Horgan's Quay, the Turning Basin and North Deep-Water Quay, including above-water and underwater structural inspection, wall toe and scour assessment, sonar or echo-sounding where required, and targeted material testing such as coring or chipping where necessary. Without these surveys, the future projects could not be designed, assessed or advanced in an evidence-based and environmentally responsible manner.

2. Why the proposed maritime usage is required

The proposed surveys are required because the Cork Docklands North and South Quays projects are fundamentally a riverfront infrastructure and public realm scheme in which key project components interact directly with the marine and intertidal environment below the High-Water Mark. The future projects include quay wall repair or replacement, riverfront public realm enhancement, improved pedestrian and cyclist access, and integration of flood defence measures. To design those interventions properly, Cork City Council and its design team require detailed information on the condition and capacity of the existing quay structures, including the profile and composition of the riverbed where relevant, the extent of scour or undermining, and the physical characteristics of the waterfront corridor required to inform the proposed works.

The proposed surveys will provide the technical and environmental evidence needed to identify constraints early, target interventions appropriately, inform environmental mitigation, reduce uncertainty in design development, and support future statutory applications and construction planning. In practical terms, the surveys are integral to determining what can be delivered, where it can be delivered, and how it can be delivered safely and sustainably along both the North and South Quays corridors.

The need for the maritime usage is reinforced by the nature of the waterfront environment and the need to obtain proportionate baseline information to inform the project design and assessment process. At the South Quays, this includes riverbed, intertidal and subtidal environmental and archaeological information, together with survey data needed to understand flood-related design constraints and access conditions. At the North Quays, the need is limited to structural baseline information for the existing quay walls and submerged elements at Horgan's Quay, the Turning Basin and North Deep-Water Quay, including above-water and underwater structural inspection, wall toe and scour assessment, and targeted material testing where required. The use of targeted survey methods is the least intrusive and most proportionate means of obtaining the information needed to progress the project responsibly.

3. Why the surveys are needed imminently

The proposed maritime usage is needed at this stage because both the North and South Quays projects are at the point where design progression, environmental assessment and future consent preparation depend on site-specific evidence rather than desktop assumptions. The surveys will establish the baseline conditions necessary to inform future design options, engineering feasibility, environmental safeguards and project phasing. They will also allow the design team to identify where repair, replacement, stabilisation, flood integration, access improvement or habitat protection measures may be required.

Carrying out the surveys now will also improve project efficiency and proportionality. By resolving key uncertainties at an early stage, the maritime usage will help to avoid over-design, reduce the risk of later redesign, and ensure that subsequent environmental and engineering assessments are based on reliable field data. This is particularly important for a linear waterfront project where structural condition, access constraints and environmental sensitivities are likely to vary considerably along the river corridor.

4. Strategic need for the maritime usage

4.1. Cork City growth and docklands regeneration

The need for the proposed maritime usage is closely linked to the strategic importance of Cork Docklands within Cork City's growth and regeneration agenda. Cork City Council states that the Cork City Development Plan 2022 to 2028 sets out how the city will grow and develop over the plan period while complementing a longer 2040 vision and describes Cork as an emerging international city of scale and a national driver of economic and urban growth. The same source notes that Project Ireland 2040 designates Cork for significant additional growth supported by large-scale investment.

Within that city-wide context, Docklands is a major strategic regeneration area. Cork City Council states that the Cork Docklands Framework Plan is intended to support infrastructure delivery on a 147-hectare riverside site and that this infrastructure is key to developing sustainable and resilient communities. The Framework Plan also identifies the public realm, waterside amenity, travel, sports and community infrastructure required to unlock the development capacity of the Docklands and support the delivery of enabling infrastructure and development.

In this context, the proposed maritime usage supports National Policy Objective 5 of Project Ireland 2040, which seeks to develop cities and towns of sufficient scale and quality to compete internationally and to act as drivers of national and regional growth, investment and prosperity. The surveys are required because they provide the site-specific environmental and engineering information needed to advance strategically important elements of Docklands regeneration from concept into evidence-based design and implementation. At the South Quays, this includes information to support public realm enhancement, river access improvement, flood adaptation and quay infrastructure renewal. At the North Quays, it includes baseline structural information on the existing quay walls and submerged elements at Horgan's Quay, the Turning Basin and North Deep-Water Quay, to inform assessment of structural condition, scour, access constraints and any required material testing. The proposed maritime usage is therefore required not only to inform a discrete project, but to enable the renewal, accessibility and long-term investability of a key waterfront corridor within Cork Docklands.

4.2. Regional and metropolitan development objectives

The need for the maritime usage is also supported by regional planning policy. The Cork Metropolitan Area Strategic Plan, which forms part of the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Southern Region, provides a framework for accelerated sustainable growth in the Cork Metropolitan Area and identifies Cork as one of Ireland's key metropolitan growth areas, explicitly linking metropolitan development to regeneration, consolidation of the city centre and the creation of new urban quarters in the Docklands. Provision in the National Planning Framework for Metropolitan Area Strategic Plans through National Policy Objective 67 further reinforces the strategic role of Cork Docklands within a coordinated metropolitan growth framework, with the proposed maritime usage providing the evidence base needed to sequence and deliver riverfront regeneration, access improvements and climate-responsive infrastructure along the North and South Quays in a manner aligned with regional spatial and economic objectives.

At national level, the revised National Planning Framework is the Government's high-level strategic plan for shaping the future growth and development of the country to 2040, guiding public and private investment while protecting and enhancing the environment and placing strong emphasis on compact growth, regeneration and the effective use of existing urban land. The proposed maritime usage supports these objectives indirectly by enabling the design and delivery of a project located within an existing urban waterfront corridor rather than on greenfield land. The surveys are required to obtain detailed, site-specific information on quay wall condition, structural capacity, riverbed profile and environmental constraints, so that public realm and flood resilience infrastructure can be designed and delivered accurately within a compact brownfield waterfront corridor; in doing so, they support the strategic objective of accommodating urban growth through regeneration of existing city assets and waterfront lands.

4.3. Sustainable mobility, accessibility and waterfront use

The proposed maritime usage is also required because the future Cork Docklands North and South Quays project will contribute to improved sustainable mobility and riverfront accessibility within Cork City. The National Transport Authority states that a key principle of the Cork Metropolitan Area Transport Strategy is to reduce dependency on the private car within the Cork Metropolitan Area, increase the appeal of sustainable transport options and support future growth through an efficient transport network. The Cork Docklands Framework Plan likewise identifies public realm, waterside

amenity and transport infrastructure as necessary components of Docklands development, emphasising the role of the waterfront corridor in supporting walking, cycling and public access.

Within that context, the South Quays project, as described in the materials prepared for this MUL application, is intended to improve pedestrian and cyclist access, enhance the riverfront environment and strengthen connections with the wider city, while the North Quays project will deliver complementary structural and public realm renewal through the realignment of the N8, the creation of a high-quality waterfront amenity space and the refurbishment of quay wall infrastructure at Horgan's Quay, the Turning Basin and North Deep-Water Quay. The North and South Quays proposed development form an integrated Docklands regeneration corridor in which movement, amenity and access improvements are closely linked to structural renewal and flood-related interventions. The maritime usage is needed because these ambitions cannot be translated into deliverable infrastructure without a sound evidence base on quay condition, levels, geometry, structural capacity, river margins and environmental constraints. The site investigations are therefore essential to enabling improved access, connectivity and public use of the waterfront in a way that is technically robust and environmentally informed.

The proposed maritime usage is also consistent with the National Planning Framework objective to strengthen statutory arrangements between spatial planning and transport planning in the cities, as expressed in National Policy Objective 69. By supporting a project that reallocates a traffic-dominated quayside to a high-quality public realm with dedicated walking and cycling corridors, improved local access and reduced reliance on private car movements along the North Quays, the surveys enable sustainable mobility patterns and healthier urban movement networks in line with national transport and climate policy.

4.4. Flood resilience and climate adaptation

Flood resilience is a central element of the need for the proposed maritime usage. The Cork Docklands South Quays project is intended not only to improve public realm quality, but also to integrate flood defence measures along a vulnerable urban waterfront. The proposed surveys are needed to inform the design of those measures and to ensure that future interventions respond to actual structural, hydraulic and environmental conditions along the South Quays. At the North Quays, the surveys are required to establish baseline information on the condition of the existing quay walls and submerged elements, including scour, tidal effects, access constraints and other factors relevant to the design and delivery of the proposed quay wall and public realm works.

At national level, the Office of Public Works (OPW) states that Ireland's flood risk management policy is implemented across three strategic areas: prevention, protection and preparedness. The OPW also identifies itself as the lead agency for coordinating flood risk management policy and the implementation of flood risk management plans under the national framework and the EU Floods Directive. These national policy priorities make clear that flood-related infrastructure planning is a matter of continuing State importance.

At city level, Cork City Council's Climate Action Plan 2024–2029 states that the city's vision is to become a climate neutral and resilient city and that the Plan includes actions to improve the natural environment, protect the built and natural environment for future generations and support best-practice governance. The need for the maritime usage is therefore reinforced by the role the surveys will play in informing adaptation-led infrastructure on the River Lee waterfront. The investigations will help ensure that future flood-related interventions are technically robust, proportionate to site conditions and integrated with wider public realm and ecological considerations.

The maritime usage supports the wider public objective of making urban waterfront infrastructure more resilient to flooding and climate change impacts in a city where flood risk adaptation is already a key policy concern.

4.5. Social and economic need

The need for the proposed maritime usage also arises from the expected social and economic role of the future North and South Quays projects. Cork City Council states that the Docklands Framework Plan is intended to support sustainable and resilient communities and to unlock development capacity in the Docklands through enabling infrastructure, public realm and community facilities. It further states that this strategic infrastructure will help enable 9,000 to 10,000 new homes in a compact urban environment while providing public realm and community infrastructure.

The North and South Quays projects sit within that broader urban transformation agenda. By improving waterfront access, amenity, movement corridors, and resilience of quay infrastructure, the project has the potential to support a more attractive, accessible and investable Docklands environment. The site investigation surveys are needed because they provide the factual basis on which those improvements can be designed and delivered. In this way, the maritime usage indirectly supports wider social goals relating to public access, recreation, health, liveability and urban quality, and wider economic goals relating to regeneration, confidence in infrastructure delivery and long-term investment readiness within Cork Docklands.

5. The maritime usage as a necessary enabling step

The proposed maritime usage should therefore be understood as an enabling activity of strategic importance to the advancement of the Cork Docklands North and South Quays projects. It is necessary because they will:

- establish the existing ecological, archaeological, structural and riverbed baseline conditions within the project area at South Quays
- establish the existing structural baseline conditions for the North Docks quay infrastructure, including submerged elements and scour at the wall toe, to support the design of the proposed interventions and any required remedial works
- inform the design of quay wall interventions, waterfront public realm improvements and integrated flood defence measures
- support future environmental assessment and statutory consent processes using field-based evidence rather than assumption
- reduce technical and environmental uncertainty at an early stage
- enable more proportionate, targeted and efficient project design
- support delivery of a strategically significant component of Cork Docklands regeneration.

The maritime usage is also proportionate with the surveys being temporary, localised and investigative in nature. They are designed to obtain the information necessary to progress the wider projects while minimising unnecessary intrusion into the river environment. In that sense, the need for the maritime usage is both practical and strategic. Practical due to the information being required to design the projects, and strategic because the projects aligns with city, regional and national objectives for regeneration, resilience, compact growth, sustainable mobility and improved urban quality.

6. Conclusion

The need for the proposed maritime usage is clear and compelling. The Cork Docklands North and South Quays projects are a strategically important waterfront regeneration, access and flood resilience scheme within Cork City, and the marine, intertidal and structural site investigation surveys proposed under this MUL are essential to informing its design, environmental assessment and future delivery. Without these surveys, the project could not proceed on a robust technical or environmental basis.

By enabling an evidence-based public realm and flood defence project within Cork Docklands, the proposed maritime usage indirectly supports the objectives of the Cork City Development Plan, the Cork Docklands Framework Plan, the Cork Metropolitan Area Strategic Plan, the National Planning Framework, the Cork Metropolitan Area Transport Strategy, Cork City's Climate Action Plan, and Ireland's wider flood risk management policy framework. It is therefore necessary not only for project design and consenting purposes, but also as a foundational step in delivering broader social, economic, regeneration and climate resilience outcomes for Cork City and the wider metropolitan area.

Through its role in enabling compact waterfront regeneration, sustainable mobility, flood adaptation and improved public realm within Cork Docklands, the proposed maritime usage also aligns with National Policy Objective 74 of Project Ireland 2040, which seeks coordinated delivery of the National Planning Framework and National Development Plan via the National Strategic Outcomes. The surveys provide the site-specific technical and environmental information required to underpin investment decisions and project sequencing in a way that supports national objectives for compact growth, low carbon transition, enhanced amenity and strengthened urban economies.