

Aonach Mhacha – Design Statement



The Site

The fire station is a vacant building which has been identified as a key site for proposed development in the Armagh Master Plan. Adjacent to the Shambles Market and with key views to the two main Cathedrals, the site location is highlighted as a major city centre gateway. The Master plan identifies this location as a node which will become a focal point of activity, attracting users and becoming a destination in its own right. We aim to meet the shared vision and objectives of the Master plan with our proposals and continue to enhance this area which has recently seen the regeneration of key projects such as the Shambles Market and the North South Ministerial

Council Building. Our design proposal endeavours to reflect key themes identified in the Master plan for this location such as improving pedestrian links, improving the night time economy, provision and enhancement of flexible external spaces, provision of mixed development and enhancement of the conservation area.



The Project

Aonach Mhacha is the name of a recent collaborative social enterprise which proposes to build and manage a cultural centre in the historic heart of Armagh City. The cultural centre itself will also be known as Aonach Mhacha (Assembly of Mhacha - the pagan Celtic warrior queen who gave her name to the city of Armagh). Six cultural organisations will become anchor tenants in the building and utilise the facilities. The company is a registered charity and profits generated by the trading activities of this social enterprise will be

reinvested in cultural, social, arts, education and recreational projects in the Armagh area.

Aonach Mhacha aims to develop and deliver a series of cultural and community projects which will be additional to the activities carried out by the anchor tenants. These will include language classes, social enterprise training, cultural tourism events, art & cultural heritage exhibitions, concerts, festivals, musical and dance performances, workshops, seminars and community development initiatives. Facilities will include: community meeting rooms, office accommodation, playschool, Café, a gift shop, a multi-purpose area for performance/dance, workshop and media suite.

The estimated £1.2M development of Aonach Mhacha as an Irish Language Cultural Centre will have a significant impact upon the social and economic situation in recessionary times. Aonach Mhacha will enhance the proposed regeneration of this part of the city centre which links the Neighbourhood Renewal area to the historic conservation area.

The new cultural enterprise hub will make the area safer and more attractive to visitors and will increase footfall in the area, contributing to the evening economy. It will generate custom for local enterprises, such as restaurants and licensed venues which will be contracted to provide services for the centre during festivals, concerts and other activities. Educational, creative arts and community projects will also be attracted to the location.



Building design

We have identified two key elements of the site to be; the existing stone arches and walls to English Street and to Dawson Street. We propose to give prominence to the original stone archway by making the Upper English Street archway the main access point to the Building. The workmanship and attention to detail demonstrated in the stone work of this entrance way has guided our internal layout. The angle in which the arch directs us through the door and continues to the other side of the site. It points towards the historic clock tower which is a feature of the Shambles Market. The street frontage created addresses the retail spine on Upper English Street, with a recessed element that steps up to meet the three storey buildings on this side. The form then turns the corner to bow in homage to the Clock Tower mentioned above, thus giving it presence in the street context. Along Dawson Street the scale steps down again to meet the two storey domestic dwellings that climb the hill.

There is a strong presence of red brick within this area. At the top of Upper English street the First Trust bank sits proudly propping the street end, the proposal acts as a book end to Upper English street, whilst completing the pattern of red brick town houses that envelope around the Shambles market. The red brick is on a domestic scale that suits the function and aspirations of the user group of the building. Narrow vertical openings within the front elevation have been created to capture framed views to Lower English Street, whilst a large glazed element seeks to capture the street life of Armagh. We propose to create strong visual links to the two main Cathedrals a large glazed window situated on Dawson Street towards St. Patricks Cathedral RC. Views to St Patricks Cathedral COI can be captured among the roof tops via the roof top terrace area on the second floor.