

# Nuns' Island Masterplan

## Outline Project Brief

Buildings & Estates

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# A. Outline Project Brief

## A.1 Introduction

### A.1.1 The Project Description

Vision 2020 and the NUI Galway Strategic Plan sets out and defines the University's Mission, Vision and Values. Working under the guide of this plan we are seeking to embrace its key themes to foster a vibrant community, engagement with wider society, build on mutually-beneficial partnerships as we engage locally and internationally and importantly to serve and engage with our diverse communities.

With this in mind the University is looking at the lands in Nuns' Island with a view to working in partnership with Galway City Council to develop and create a destination space within our City that will drive sustainable development, regenerate both the built form and public realm through high quality urban design, deliver employment, and promote innovation and learning.

It is the University's goal to develop a masterplan proposal for the lands at Nuns' Island. The masterplan will explore the development potential and opportunities the lands at Nuns' Island can hold not just for the University but for the City as a whole. The masterplan will not be developed in isolation from the immediate context of the street network, the waterways and significant public places and will have consideration of the greater economic, social and environmental benefits that will be realised through the regeneration of these lands.

The masterplan has been specifically identified by Galway City Council in the City Development Plan 2017-2023 as a policy priority for the regeneration of lands and buildings at Nuns' Island.

### A.1.2 Location

Located strategically between the City centre and NUI Galway this site provides the link from the City to both NUI Galway and the University College Hospital. The Site has frontage onto the River Corrib and contains a number of canal waterways. The site has development potential to extend the public realm across the river creating further connections to the City centre and the University.

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## A.2 Galway City Development Plan

### A.2.1 Overview

The current Galway City Development plan embraces the University, its role and contribution to the City. Within the City's Development Plan the section on City Centre Area Based Plans, defines the University in the context of "key destinations such as NUIG"

The Development Plan goes on to quote "to develop good employment opportunities having close physical links .....also well placed to link in with and take advantage of the proximity of higher level institutes – GMIT and NUIG"

### A.2.2 2017 – 2023 Galway City Development Plan

The Nuns' Island area of Galway City has been identified in the adopted Galway City Development Plan 2017-2023 as a potential regeneration area within Galway City centre. Furthermore, the National University of Ireland Galway's Vision 2020 NUI Galway Strategic Plan 2015-2020' set out a bold vision for the University campus, which aims to foster a vibrant community by building on mutually-beneficial partnerships. As a significant landowner in Nuns' Island, National University of Ireland, Galway (NUI Galway) is commencing the preparation of a comprehensive masterplan for the area, with a view to working in partnership with Galway City Council to create a strategic spatial vision for a destination space within Galway City. It is proposed to develop a cohesive, integrated regeneration proposal for the Nuns' Island area, to optimise the potential of this underutilised City centre space and bring a wider scale benefit to the City.

A number of national government policy and legislative changes have recently been adopted to promote urban regeneration in the form of the Urban Regeneration and Housing Act 2015 and the Construction 2020 and Rebuilding Ireland policy documents. The proposed masterplan presents an unprecedented opportunity to develop an ambitious, cohesive vision for the subject lands which optimise the potential of this underutilised City centre space and bring a wider scale benefit to the City.

### A.2.3 Cultural Heritage

Nuns' Island is located to the west of the medieval City of Galway amid the many natural and man-made waterways that characterise this area. It has been an important location for industry, particularly in the nineteenth century and it was the site of the County and town jails, the sites of which are now occupied by the Galway Cathedral. The protection of the cultural heritage of the area is of great importance and a profile of the archaeology and architectural and industrial archaeology heritage of the immediate surroundings has been undertaken.

### A.2.4 Traffic & Transport

Galway City Council and Galway County Council, in partnership with the National Transport Authority, have developed the Galway Transport Strategy (GTS), an Integrated Transport Strategy for Galway City & Environs. The GTS sets out a series of actions and measures, covering infrastructural, operational and policy elements to be implemented in Galway over the next 20 years and sets out a framework to deliver the projects in a phased manner.

Galway City Council's strategic objectives for transport are:

- To promote and encourage sustainable development,
- To manage the traffic in a way which maximises mobility and safe movement, and
- To maintain and develop / upgrade infrastructure.

Although there is a limited amount of through traffic on Nuns' Island, the island is directly connected by one of the City centre's three River Corrib bridge crossings, the Salmon Weir Bridge. This crossing generates significant travel demand across the day including a high volume of pedestrian, cyclist, car and bus traffic. University Road is the main access point for traffic onto Nuns' Island with all other routes through the island restricted to one-way movement.

Nuns' Island benefits from some walking and cycling amenity which presents potential for enhancement as part of the proposed walking and cycling network for the City set out in the GTS.

A significant amount of parking is currently available on Nuns' Island. Off-street public parking is available at the Cathedral car park and on-street parking serves the visitor as well as local residents.

Coach parking is provided within Cathedral car park which can generate high volumes of pedestrians in peak

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season. There are limited amenities available at present for this facility.

Proposals outlined in the GTS suggest the upgrade of University Road to a bus-only route with local access for car traffic only.

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## A.3 Outline Project Brief

### A.3.1 Opportunity & Ambition

Nuns' Island lands present an opportunity to transform an underutilised parcel of lands on the very edge of the City centre. The regeneration of the lands needs careful and detailed consideration as their location directly between the City and the University easily facilitates an expansion of the University campus or an expansion of the City creating a civic space to carefully bring both City and University together.

It is proposed to develop a cohesive and achievable regeneration proposal for the area to create vibrant space through the appropriate mix of uses, public realm spaces and living community. Working in partnership with Galway City Council, and interested stakeholders from within our community to establish a framework for development that will be a catalyst to bring wide scale benefit to the City as a whole. Realising this ambition will require a collaborative approach based on detailed engagement and long term thinking.

### A.3.2 Masterplan Objectives

The main objectives of the masterplan will be to inform future regeneration and development activity of Nuns' Island and ensure that such activity contributes to the creation of a distinctive, high quality urban area within Galway City in line with the objectives set out in this outline brief.

The completed masterplan will:

- Provide a framework to guide future development activity, exploring the balance between different types of development
- Assist the University and Galway City Council to identify specific development opportunities and package lands and buildings efficiently.
- Assist the University and Galway City Council to identify and foster place-making themes and projects associated with green infrastructure, culture, arts, neighbourhood services, the balance between residential, University and commercial uses and activities.
- Assist the University and Galway City Council to address and integrate public realm, pedestrian, cycle and vehicular movements throughout the area including opportunities to create improved linkages to the City and University grounded in an understanding of the latest approaches to the design, delivery and maintenance of high quality public realm.
- Set out an approach to urban design which can be used to inform the design of new buildings / spaces and redevelopment of existing protected buildings so as to create a consistently high standard of design across the masterplan site area.
- Be used by the local planning authority as a reference document to inform the development of a single, though inherently flexible, development reference point for future planning applications.

### A.3.3 Outline Brief Considerations

The following outline considerations have been identified in relation to the brief for the masterplan of Nuns' Island. These considerations will need to be assessed and developed by the Masterplan Design Consultant to form a definitive project brief for the masterplan following appointment of the successful tenderer:

- Establish a vision for Nuns' Island to address the kind of place that the area should become including physical, social, environmental and economic needs of the area.
- Create a new sense of destination and identity for Nuns' Island including an opportunity to address the branding of this area.
- Complement and reflect the unique character and culture of Galway City including the quality built form, natural and built heritage.
- Suggest an appropriate form of urban structure with reference to the arrangement of blocks, streets, buildings, open spaces and landscape in a manner that identifies the critical elements versus those that are more flexible or open.

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- Demonstrate the possibilities that exist through re-organisation of the existing urban structure, pedestrian and traffic movements and connectivity for achieving a higher quality City centre environment.
  - Encourage a mixed-use development of the area with commercial, residential, cultural and educational uses.
  - Optimise the use both for amenity and recreation and the development of the public realm and the existing open spaces and additional open spaces required to act as a catalyst for future development.
  - Have regard to optimising vehicular and pedestrian movements and connectivity within the area and the connectivity with the City as a whole.
  - Achieve delivery of a high quality public realm and an area that will accommodate critical amenity, community and cultural facilities.
  - Enhance and expand the existing neighborhood's with access to high amenity opportunities.
  - Have regard to the character of the area, including existing development, proposed development, landscape/water features, access points, topography, views, contours, cultural heritage and local bio-diversity.
  - Have regard to the location of the River Corrib and surrounding canals which provide an opportunity for improved amenities by opening up waterways to the Public including boardwalks and new pedestrian bridge links to the City.
  - Address issues of image, culture and identity specific to this area.
  - Have regard to the existing built heritage, its history, its setting within the City and the role it (can) play as a link between the University and the City.
  - Create attractive integrated and sustainable development that sustains vitality and viability within a high urban setting through development and redevelopment.
  - Improved permeability/access to Nuns' Island with enhanced linkages to City and University.
  - Examine the Cathedral car park and explore the potential for significant enhanced public realm opportunities from simple re-design to accommodate shared surface use through potential for better urban design solutions.
  - Persse's Distillery warehouse building is located on a prominent site with significant potential for a landmark redevelopment.
  - Development opportunity for a new Transportation Hub for the City including associated amenities; shops, toilets, kiosks, tourist information centre etc.
  - Opportunity for the development of a Visitor Destination Space in Nuns' Island Opportunity to bring Nuns' Island together to form one cohesive district, currently viewed as two distinct zones.
  - Masterplan site is on edge of Lough Corrib Special Area of Conservation and requires due consideration.
  - Potential for linkages to Corrib Greenway and provision of greenway amenities.
  - Potential linkages from Nuns' Island South through Monastery site and Persse's Distillery Warehouse Building to Nuns' Island North and River Corrib.
  - Galway City Transport Strategy to be considered in relation to proposed amendments to traffic routes and strategy for car parking.
  - Take into consideration all relevant ecological and flood risk issues.
  - Be cognisant of opportunities that may exist to contribute to the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions and to incorporate climate change adaption measures.