

Clyde Docks Preservation Initiative

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Report on the Planning History of Govan Graving Docks

Summary Briefing Paper

November 2016

This document provides a concise summary of the key points identified in a 2016 report by the Clyde Docks Preservation Initiative (CDPI) - *Report on the Planning History of Govan Graving Docks*.

The full report is available in PDF format from http://cdpi.org.uk/case_studies.htm

Executive Summary (Extract)

The report will look in some detail, at the history of planning and development proposals for Govan Graving Docks, since the closure of the site as a working dock facility.

The core of our thesis is that an extensive redevelopment of Govan Graving Docks for residential and commercial use is not feasible on grounds of desirability/popularity, financial viability, technical viability, industrial/maritime heritage concerns and the A-listed status of the site. The information we have researched and collated in this report will serve unequivocally to prove that.

The site has continued to lie derelict for 28 years despite several proposals for housing redevelopment having been put forward and later shelved for various reasons. We have concluded that housing/commercial proposals for such a prominent site as Govan Graving Docks would have gone ahead already had they any real viability and prospect of success.

The report also aims to raise questions of whether a private sector property developer is the most appropriate type of organisation to be entrusted with the stewardship of one of the most unique and significant maritime heritage assets in Europe.

We aim to demonstrate that Local Government strategy in dealing with Govan Graving Docks has in the past lacked objectivity, coherence and consistency in the time that the site has been derelict. Further that this has not aligned with stated policy objectives aimed at encouraging regeneration of the River Clyde corridor. Additionally the approach of the Scottish Government (formerly the Scottish Executive) and previously the Scottish Office prior to devolution has largely been passive. This report is not intended to level criticism at public bodies or officials but simply to identify lessons that can be learned from past experiences.

Background

The report presents an outline of the history of Govan Graving Docks that establishes its significance to Glasgow's maritime and shipbuilding heritage.

Housing and Commercial Proposals

This section of the full report begins by identifying a July 2016 request for a Screening Opinion under the Environmental Impact Assessment regulations, for a mixed-use (primarily residential) redevelopment of Govan Graving Docks, and puts it in the context of previous housing development proposals for the site.

Key Points:

- ❑ Environmental consultants for the developer had asked Glasgow City Council to agree that an Environmental Statement (based on a full environmental impact assessment) would not need to accompany a planning application
- ❑ Glasgow City Council decided that an Environmental Statement would need to be submitted
- ❑ The Screening Opinion request indicated planning consent will be sought for a development of 600 homes, 195 hotel rooms and 7,520sqm of offices
- ❑ A proposal submitted in 2002 (by a former joint venture company connected to the current owners) was for 430-530 homes, 300 hotel rooms and 7,500 – 11,500sqm of offices
- ❑ The figures from the July 2016 Screening Opinion request suggest a development similar in scope and scale to the 2002 proposal is still intended long term
- ❑ SEPA expressed concerns over lack of flood mitigation proposals for aspects of the 2002 plan
- ❑ Glasgow City Council, in a proposal of partnership with the then owners, sought funding from the European Regional Development Fund for the 2002 proposal of £7m towards the estimated £24m enabling infrastructure costs for the development.
- ❑ ERDF funding did not go ahead because of a change in funding policy at Strathclyde European Partnership
- ❑ Glasgow City Council Development and Regeneration Services Committee approved the 2002 masterplan subject to conditions but the committee did not appear to take into consideration the historic significance of the site in the context of shipbuilding history at that time.
- ❑ It was unclear how the 2002 proposal would have delivered on a raft of key policy objectives for regeneration of the River Clyde.
- ❑ The 2002 proposal was revised in 2004, retaining most of the overall scheme but abandoning plans for a hotel, scaling back the amount of office space and increasing the number of residential units with an overall similar footprint for the development.
- ❑ Both 2002 and 2004 proposals intended two of the dry docks to be built over and the docks used to house basement car parking. It is not clear how the requisite amount of car parking could be achieved by any other means
- ❑ An assessment of the development costs for the 2002/2004 proposals by CDPI puts the sale of properties in the development well above the average for the area, requiring it to have been a luxury development even just to break even. Potentially with an average cost well in excess of £200,000 per dwelling at current prices

Public Policy

- ❑ Minutes of Glasgow City Council Development and Regeneration Services (DRS) Committee meetings since 2002 have shown no record of concern for the future of the docks in the context of their significance to shipbuilding and maritime history. The site has only been looked at as a redevelopment opportunity
- ❑ Options other than housing have not been identified or discussed by DRS Committee
- ❑ There are no Council or Committee minutes referencing the graving docks since 2010
- ❑ Govan graving docks is currently listed in the Glasgow City Development Plan 2 (CDP2) as a housing proposal. Housing Proposal H015

- ❑ The A-listed status and historic significance of the site was acknowledged by the Scottish Government DPEA reporter in the review of CDP2. The reporter recommended no modifications to H015 at this time but suggested it be reviewed again in the next stage of the City Development Plan
- ❑ In a wider context, opportunities to develop the river as a hub for culture, leisure and tourism have not been adequately pursued. Govan graving docks stands as a case in point for this policy oversight
- ❑ A 2002 report by the Director of DRS stated that a key policy aim of waterfront regeneration in Glasgow was the “**accommodation of national visitor attractions and capitalising on the industrial heritage of the river**”
- ❑ There appears to have been little if any progress on delivering this policy aim

Planning History

- ❑ Planning consent has twice been granted during the 1990s, both detailed planning and listed building consent, for use of Govan graving docks as a maritime heritage centre
- ❑ There has never been planning consent granted for a housing development on Govan graving docks
- ❑ An application for planning permission for a mixed use housing/commercial development of Govan Graving Docks was refused by Glasgow District Council in 1990
- ❑ In 1989 The Clyde Ship trust were seeking to acquire Govan Graving Docks via compulsory purchase to develop the site as a maritime museum
- ❑ In 1989 Glasgow District Council served a repair order on Windex Ltd, the project manager for a proposed housing/commercial development of Govan Graving Docks in partnership with former owners Clydedock Engineering Ltd and others. The physical evidence shows that this was never complied with

Owners Plans and Finances

- ❑ The site is currently owned by New City Vision subsidiary Bishop Loch Developments (Scotland) Ltd
- ❑ A mortgage is held over the graving docks which, along with a floating charge over the company, has been passed from AIB into the Irish NAMA toxic debt portfolio*
- ❑ The company's accounts appear to suggest considerable risk for any investor in backing a development of Govan graving docks
- ❑ It has been speculated that the owners primary short-medium term aim is to seek planning consent to boost the asset value on their balance sheet
- ❑ It has been concluded that any proposed housing development will involve similar enabling infrastructure costs to the 2002 proposal (£24M)

[The ultimate parent company of Bishop Loch Developments is Dublin-based Cannon Kirk Limited]*

Ownership History and Related Details

- ❑ The site passed from Clydeport to Clydedock Engineering Ltd in 1980
- ❑ Windex Ltd had been granted a pre-emption right to buy the docks in 1989 for the sum of £400,000. Windex later acquired the site in its subsidiary company City Canal Ltd in 1999 – a company later identified as being a joint venture with current owners Bishop Loch Developments (Scotland) Ltd
- ❑ Ownership of the site passed to Bishop Loch Developments when City Canal was voluntarily wound up in 2006

- ❑ City Canal accounts to March 2016 show approx. £16M revaluation surplus of its land portfolio
- ❑ These accounts also indicated land was being held for *investment potential* and not intended to be developed but this was at the same time as City Canal were apparently in discussions with Glasgow City Council DRS about their development plans for the site
- ❑ After Bishop Loch Developments acquired City Canal assets investment property appears to have been reclassified as stock with a write down in value to just over £4.5 million
- ❑ A title deed condition obliges the owners of the docks to maintain the condition of the quay walls at their own expense
- ❑ Clydeport is entitled to half of the net costs of any sale of Govan Graving Docks in excess of £400,000 for non dry docking purposes

Listed Building Issues

- ❑ Govan graving docks is category A-listed which places restrictions on any development
- ❑ The listed status places obligations on the owners to maintain the condition of buildings and structures
- ❑ There appear to be grounds for a repairs notice to be served on the owners – non compliance of which could lead to a compulsory purchase order – as well as grounds for a Direction for Minimum Compensation to be applied under Section 45 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) (Scotland) Act 1997

Heritage/Conservation Based Proposals

- ❑ Govan graving docks is the only site in Glasgow where it would be possible to create a major maritime attraction on the waterfront using a site of historic significance
- ❑ Govan would potentially attract greater numbers of visitors than sites further down the Clyde (e.g. in West Dunbartonshire or Inverclyde)
- ❑ It is doubtful that housing and a major visitor attraction could feasibly be created on a single site
- ❑ Throughout the UK placations made by developers to conservationists and other groups early in planning processes are often abandoned or phased out later on

Maritime Park Proposal

- ❑ A potential opportunity has been identified for Govan graving docks to accommodate a facility for restoring historic ships and building sustainable wind driven cargo sailing ships as an integral part of a maritime based visitor attraction
- ❑ Opportunity has been identified to develop a hub for social enterprises and micro business franchises as integral parts of a maritime park/centre at Govan graving docks
- ❑ A nature park area has been proposed for part of the site

Primary Research By CDPI

- ❑ 92% of respondents to an online survey expressed opposition to a housing development at Govan graving docks
- ❑ 93% would like to see at least one dock restored to working order
- ❑ More than 8,300 people have supported a petition in favour of a maritime centre at Govan graving docks
- ❑ Several sources have agreed the docks are potentially of 'nil' value due to the cost of necessary remediation and infrastructure work

Conclusions

- ❑ The report concludes that a housing development at Govan graving docks is not viable
- ❑ With council budgets already stretched bringing the site into council ownership is untenable
- ❑ An independent charity taking ownership would be the best way to secure the future of Govan graving docks
- ❑ The current owners have sat on the site for 15 years and appear no closer to breaking ground
- ❑ Grounds appear to have been established for Govan Graving Docks to be placed under a Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO) with a Direction for Minimum Compensation under Section 45 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) (Scotland) Act 1997