

CASE STUDY 3

TITANIC QUARTER



Titanic Quarter Docks



Titanic and Olympic Slipways

Titanic Quarter is the redevelopment of Queens Island – a flat man made island at the entrance to Belfast Lough which was constructed by the Belfast Harbour Commissioners in the mid nineteenth century from mud flats and connected to the eastern part of the city. For 100 years it was the focus of industrial Belfast in particular its shipbuilding industry. Arguably the pinnacle of the area's achievement was the construction of RMS Titanic in 1912 by Harland and Wolff Limited. This was the largest ship in the world at the time and was constructed along with a sister ship the Olympic on a specially constructed slipway. The ship has become infamous because of its tragic loss on its maiden voyage. Steel framework associated with the construction of these ships survived until the 1960's. The slipways are now scheduled monuments.

The area until recently was typified by industrial sheds of varying ages and dry docks. The dock road running across the entrance to the island was bounded on one side by a corporate brick wall beyond which were the harbour lands. A similar wall interspersed with buildings fronted each side of the main access road into the heart of the island.

With the decline of the shipbuilding industry the area has been released to new companies. To the northern end of the island traditional industrial uses continue while to the south and west a large area was leased in 1999 to Titanic Quarter Limited a specially created development company.

At the base of the island Belfast's millennium project– the Odyssey was opened in 2000 adjacent to a large rectangular dock. This is a very large building five stories tall with a shallow dome. It has an auditorium, interactive museum, shopping area and multiplex cinema.



Harland and Wolf Drawing Offices



Interior of a drawing office

Conservation Issues

The island is a large and complex industrial site. One land owner owns the site but control is under a number of different long term leaseholds. Close to central Belfast the island has potential to assist in expanding the economic activity of the city if carefully handled. Because of the Titanic connection the 'quarter' was designated as one of six signature tourism destinations in 2004. This designation is reflective of the heritage importance of the island to the city.

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Consideration of Site

NIEA investigated the island and identified a number of docks for scheduling in the late 1980's. These were confirmed in 1995. The slipways of the Titanic and Olympic were scheduled in 1999. At the eastern junction of the island with the harbour estate the large iconic cranes of Sampson and Goliath and their associated dry dock were scheduled in 2004.

NIEA's listing team visited the site in 1999 along with those who had been involved in the scheduling proposals. Structures worthy of detailed consideration were identified. Further research was carried out into these structures and final decisions made on protection. Two structures were considered to meet the test for statutory listing. These were the Harland and Wolff drawing offices at the centre of the island and a pump house at its northern end.

With the full transfer of the western and southern half of the island to the private development company a series of demolition works were carried out. Most of the structures (mainly sheds and workshops) no longer in use were removed.

Master planning

In the Northern part of the island a science park has been developed around the listed pump house and two scheduled dry docks. This follows a localised master plan developed by the leaseholder. Until recently there were concerns over long term sustainability of these structures which had not found a new use. Following the designation of signature tourism status however a proposal to develop the heritage of the site has been produced by the leaseholder. This is well supported and has a good chance of achieving funding.

The development of the whole island is considered in the draft Belfast Metropolitan Plan published in November 2005. This proposed that a dedicated master plan be developed for the island. It suggested that such a plan should set a scale of 3 to five stories for new buildings in the area. A more recent addendum suggests that this could be extended to six stories.

In parallel Titanic Quarter Limited evolved plans for its holding on the island. This envisaged a mixed use development with apartments, offices and associated services to the bottom of the island and lighter industrial units to the northern end near the science park. A new road parallel to the titanic slipway would cut across the site giving access to more of the interior than previously. This has been submitted to the BMAP team within Planning Service.

A planning application for phase one of this development at the southern end of the site adjacent to the Oddessy was submitted to Planning Service in early 2005. Consent issued in mid 2006.

Since 2006 Planning Service have organised a number of meetings which have included all of the major public and private stakeholders to discuss the more complex problems of phase 2 of the development which contains the Titanic slipway and the drawing office.

As part of this process NIEA:Built Heritage produced a report explaining clearly the heritage interest of the remaining historic structures on the site.

Conclusion

With a major 'iconic' interpretative building between slipway and drawing office now supported by the Northern Ireland Assembly and signature status given to the maritime associations of the island it is hoped that the masterplan for this key part of the site can evolve into a catalyst that ties together the interpretation of the wider industrial legacy of the whole island.