

The loss of Clarendon Street's old lights makes city less special

Mary Kerrigan, Education Officer with the Walled City Partnership, argues that the city has been damaged by the removal of the historic street lights on Clarendon Street.

Alerted by Clarendon Street property owners noticing men removing their old street lights last spring, the Walled City Partnership contacted the local planning office and discovered Roads Service can change street lights and paving in a conservation area (or anywhere else) without planning permission.

This type of work can radically change the appearance of an area - often more than any new building. Without formal planning control, the people whose views, property (and property values) are most directly affected have no idea what is about to happen until it happens. Owners, heritage organisations and the wider community can't say what they think. This apparent lack of transparency and opportunity for public scrutiny means statutory agencies are denied the opportunity to canvass informed opinion, and achieve community ownership.

Walled City Partnership research reveals Derry was one of the first, if not the first, city in Ireland to electrify its street lights in 1894. The Clarendon Street/Queen Street lights were at least 85 years old - possibly even older. Walled City Partnership is unaware of any other historic street lights of this vintage anywhere else in

Northern Ireland or the Republic of Ireland outside of Dublin. This means Derry's old street lights are nationally important. Their loss makes Derry less special.

Historic buildings, street-lights, paving, walls, and railings are all critical to the overall appearance of a historic street. The uncontrolled removal or alteration of even one of these means decision-making affecting the character of our finest historic streets lies in the hands of Roads Service personnel.

Though, undoubtedly, well intentioned, they are generally untrained in the assessment of the character of heritage environments, historic metal repair or product design. In other parts of the country, old street lights are kept, repaired and upgraded.

Walled City Partnership raised the matter at the last Heritage Crime Summit convened by DoE Minister Alex Attwood in Belfast on the April 4, 2012. We were dismayed to see the removal, during July and August, of Clarendon Street and Queen Street's entire stock of old street lights - and their replacement with inappropriate reproductions.

The recent appearance of inappropriate sample paving laid halfway down Clarendon Street raised alarm bells further.

The Department for Social Development is paying for the replacement lights and new paving - part of a drive to do up the city's public areas before UK City of Culture 2013. DSD advises that this scheme could roll out across the rest of the Clarendon



A sample of the paving at Clarendon Street.

Street Conservation Area - more cause for concern.

Following issue of its research, Walled City Partnership was invited by DSD to meet Roads Service which confirmed it hadn't carried out any specialist analysis by appropriately qualified experts before removing the old lights.

Inside a conservation area, the presumption is in favour of preservation. These old lights were removed without

prior historic research as to their importance, without scientific examination of their condition, or without exploring every avenue to see what would have to be done to keep them - before considering renewal as a last resort.

In a city branding itself as historic, this is retrograde action. Given their importance, the Walled City Partnership has asked that the old lights be taken into safe storage for



One of the new street lights on Clarendon Street.

the city's benefit, that they be fully analysed and that recommendations for their repair, upgrading and reinstatement be provided, with costs. This should be carried out by a suitably qualified and experienced specialist. The Walled City Partnership has also asked that the design layout and paving for the proposed Clarendon Street paving scheme be reconsidered and is encouraged to report that DSD has

advised that no action will be taken to replace the paving in Clarendon Street or remove any more of Derry's old street lights in the short term.

The Walled City Partnership (Foyle Civic Trust, Derry City Council and City Centre Initiative) was formed in 2002. It delivers the Townscape Heritage Initiative [THI] in Derry and became Northern Ireland's first THI to take on an educational role in 2011.

Liofa campaign celebrates first birthday

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More than 250 members of the PSNI and unionist politicians have signed up for the Liofa campaign designed to promote fluency in Irish, the Mayor of Derry has said.

Councillor Kevin Campbell made the comment at a celebration held in Cultúrlann Uí Chanáin on Wednesday to mark the first anniversary of the launch of the campaign.

The Liofa campaign was launched a year ago by culture minister Carál Ni Chuilín and to date more than 2,000 people have signed up to try to become fluent in Irish by 2015.

The Mayor was joined at An Chultúrlann by dozens of people who have been attending Irish language classes as part of the campaign to cut a cake to celebrate the first twelve months of the initiative.

"This is a very important day celebrating the first birthday of the Liofa cam-

paign," Colr. Campbell said. "Last year when Carál Ni Chuilín launched this project the intention was to get 1,000 people to sign up between 2011 and 2015 to increase their levels of fluency. To date 2,256 have signed up and registration is still ongoing," he added.

The Mayor also said people from all backgrounds are signing up to the campaign.

"This is a very important campaign. When you learn a language you are also learning about culture and identity and about where we come from.

"It is not just confined to one community; it is a cross-community and cross-cultural campaign. 250 members of the PSNI and unionist politicians have signed up to this campaign so far. They have recognised the importance of the Irish language, not just as a language, but as an integral part of Irish culture. And it is a culture that embraces everyone," he explained.

Colr. Campbell also said

that Irish language and culture will be to the fore in the City of Culture celebrations.

"It will be about celebrating our culture in a way that includes and embraces everyone. The Irish language does not belong to any one community," he said.

Ciara Nic Lochlainn, education coordinator at Coláiste an Phobail, said increasing numbers of people are signing up for the campaign.

"Large numbers of people have expressed interest in Liofa and the sign-ups have been ongoing. It has been very popular in Derry with a lot of people signing up for our classes.

"Liofa gives people area target to aim for and a focus for their learning. Our classes stay in line with the Liofa programme and offer a clear pathway to fluency," she said.

As well as the Liofa anniversary celebrations, Coláiste an Phobail held a registration day on Wednesday for people to sign up to its classes. Classes are offered at nine differ-



Irish language enthusiasts join with the Mayor of Derry Colr. Kevin Campbell to celebrate the first birthday of Liofa 2015 at

ent levels from complete beginners to fluent speakers and include a number of exam classes.

Ms Nic Lochlainn said there has been a good uptake for this year's classes. "There has been a great deal of interest

so far. We have had a range of people signing up including parents of children at local gaelscoilleanna as well as a number of people from other countries who are encountering Irish for the first time.

"We have noticed a lot of

people signing up for the complete beginners' classes which is encouraging.

"If anyone wants to sign up for any classes or would like information they can contact 71264132 to speak to one of the teachers," she said.