

Dominick Hall

Cotter & Naessens and Denis Byrne Architects



The site is situated on part of the former Dominick Street flats complex on the east side of Lower Dominick Street, Dublin 1, at the junction with Parnell Street. The mixed-use development for Dublin City Council includes apartments and townhouses, complemented by a community centre and retail space at street level. The six-storey block along Dominick Street comprises a terrace of six apartment 'houses' of five storeys, providing sixty-seven apartments above the ground floor community centre and commercial space. A short terrace of five townhouses delineates Dominick Place, a new street linking Dominick Street to Granby Place.

The masterplan strategy for this project seeks to reinstate the historically well-defined character of Dominick Street as both a destination and conduit to the city's cultural heart. We have reinstated the street face with a brick façade but layered it to provide a continuous south-facing loggia that will offer communal open space for residents and shelter from the rain. This design serves as an acoustic and visual barrier for the apartments, insulating them from the busy street below.

The corner block on Parnell Street has a complex urban task, necessitating a more sculptural form. It must negotiate the varying scales of Parnell Street and Dominick Street while maintaining a distinctive civic scale through its unique language of openings and material aesthetic. It stands as a small landmark on Parnell Street, marking the revitalised urban quarter. This corner building includes the more unique and bespoke accommodation, including three high-dependency apartments featuring adjustable kitchens and bathrooms equipped with assistive technology.

The apartment house is the fundamental building block of the project; there are six houses, each with their stairs and core arranged along the courtyard. Each apartment features a central hall sized to a turning circle, flanked by the living room facing the sunny street side and a pair of bedrooms looking onto the courtyard. The low ceiling of the entrance vestibule accentuates the generous cubic volume of the central hall.

The two main entrances are located off Dominick Street. Each entrance leads to a voluminous brick-lined hall with stairs and a lift leading to the upper courtyard, where the six apartment houses are accessed. The courtyard is defined to the rear by a single-storey raised structure that is planted with a row of trees to screen and protect from the wind. The structure below incorporates storage and plant rooms, as well as the Marian shrine from the old flats. The garden spaces are landscaped as a room, including seating areas, lawns, and play-spaces. The courtyard features an excavated area, creating a sunken garden for the community centre at street level.

The project is designed to achieve NZEB standards. We developed a clearly defined, highly insulated and airtight envelope, with careful detailing to eliminate thermal bridging. The building is equipped with air source heat pumps, rainwater harvesting, photovoltaic panels, and centralised ventilation systems with heat exchange.

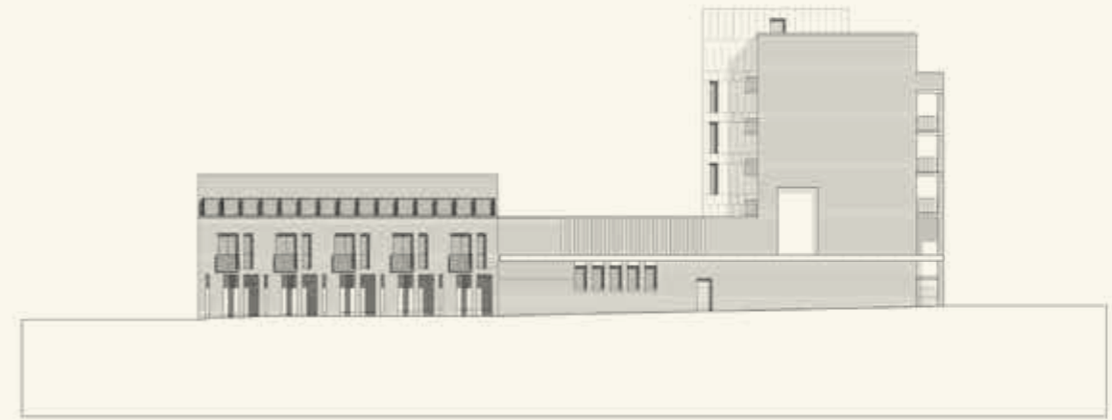
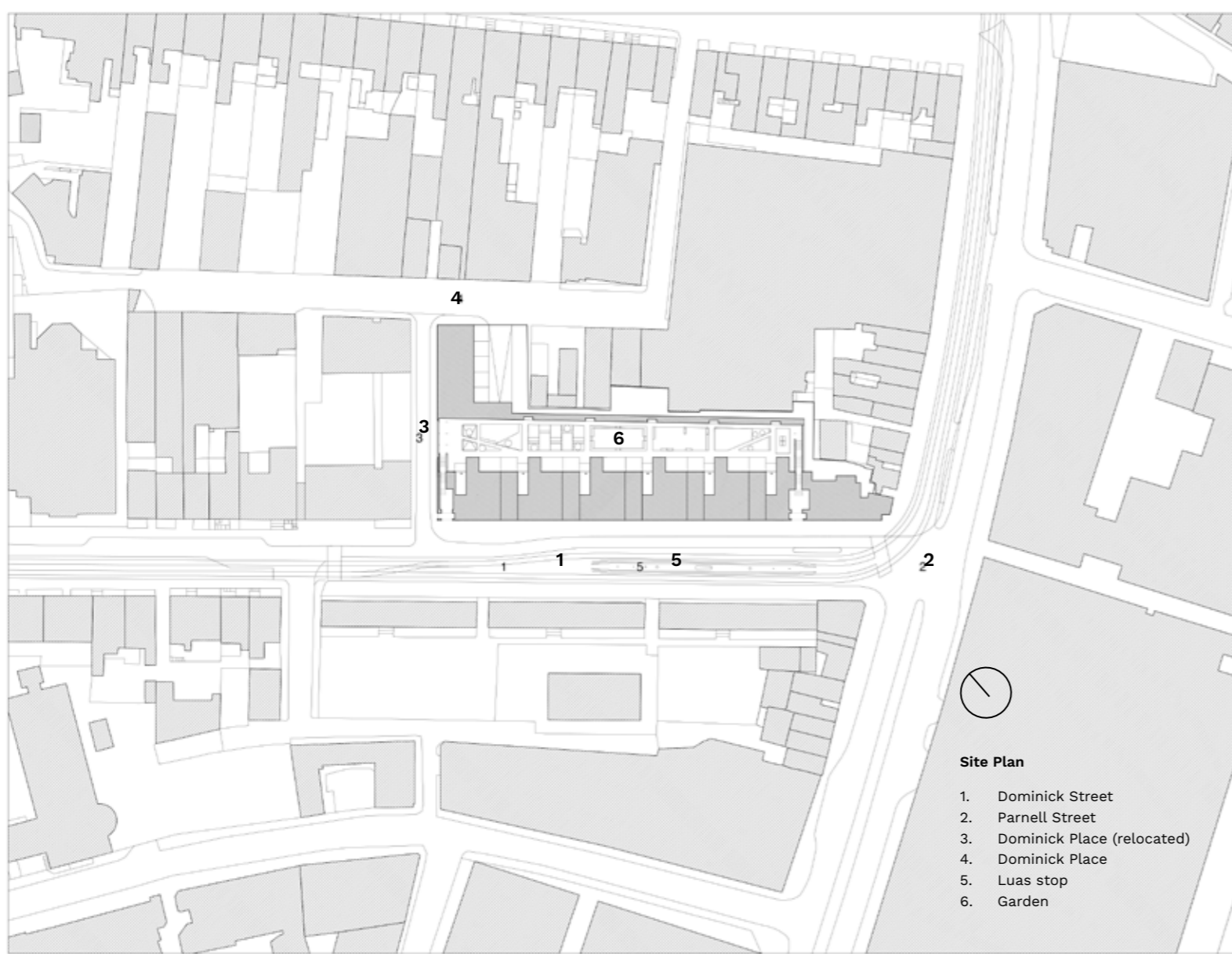


(this page) 1. A continuous south-facing loggia offers communal open space for residents and shelter from the rain 2. The corner block on Parnell Street has a complex urban task, negotiating the varying scales of Parnell Street and Dominick Street while maintaining a distinctive civic scale 3. The new building reinstates the street face and historically defined character of Dominick Street 4. The garden spaces are landscaped as a room, including seating areas, lawns, and play-spaces

- Location** Dominick Street, Dublin 1
- Site Area** 4500m²
- Floor Area** 15,808m²
- Plot Coverage** 0.9
- Plot Ratio** 3.5
- No. of units** 72
- Density** 160dph
- Contract** PWCF1
- Value** Undisclosed
- Duration** January 2019 – December 2022
- BER** A2
- Energy Demand** 34kWh/m²/hr

- Client** Housing and Community Services, Dublin City Council
- Architect** Cotter & Naessens and Denis Byrne Architects
- Project Management** Dublin City Council Architects Department
- Quantity Surveyor** John J. Casey & Co.
- Structural Engineer** Nicholas O'Dwyer
- M+E Engineer** MMA Consulting Engineers
- Landscape** Cunnane Stratton Reynolds
- Fire Consultant** Jensen Hughes
- Access Consultant** O'Herlihy Access Consultancy
- Acoustic Consultant** CLV Consulting
- Assigned Certifier** Denis Byrne Architects
- Archaeologist** Rubicon
- Brick Supplier** Kingscourt Country Manor
- Contractor** Duggan Brothers Ltd

- Photography** Paul Tierney
- Text** Louise Cotter
- Review** Jonathan Curran



Elevation (Dominick Lane)



Section



Elevation (Dominick Street)

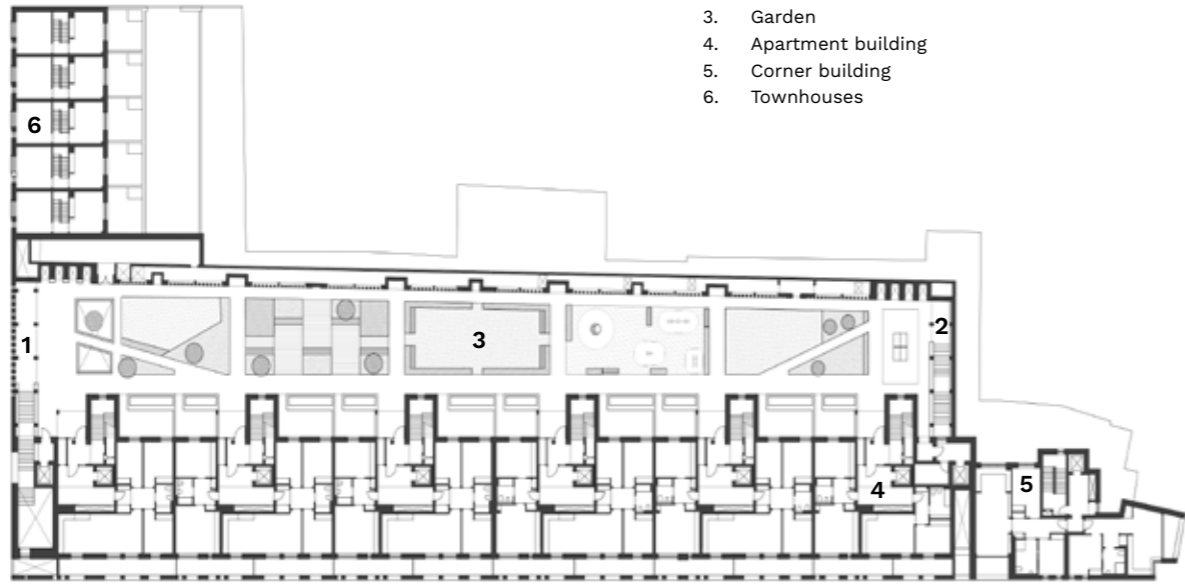


Section



First Floor

- 1. North stair
- 2. South stair
- 3. Garden
- 4. Apartment building
- 5. Corner building
- 6. Townhouses

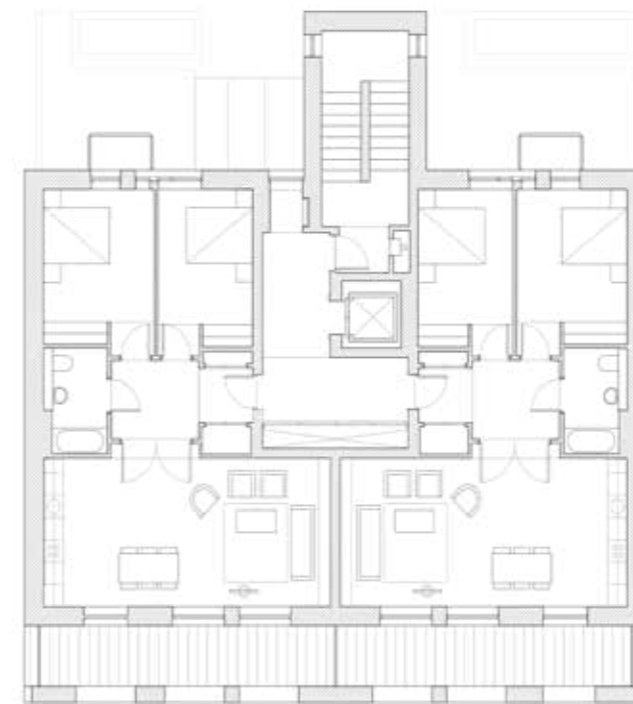


Townhouse

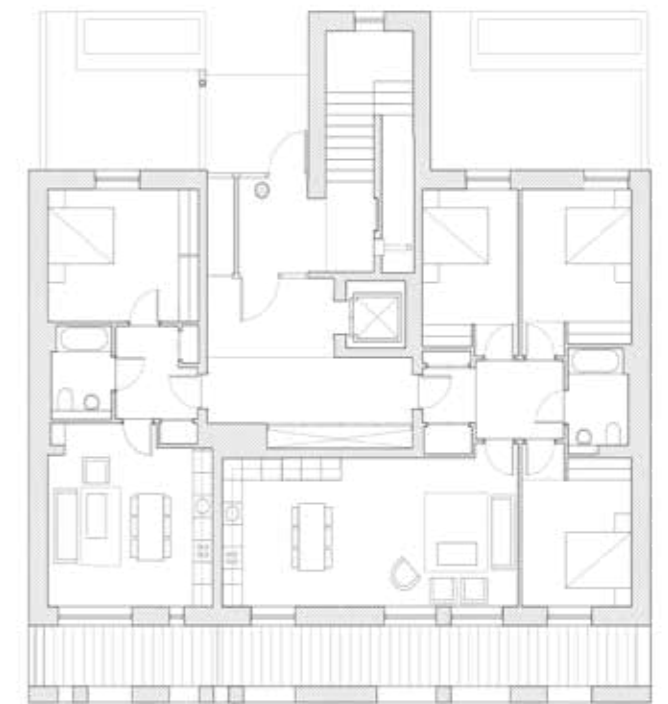


Ground Floor

- 1. Retail space
- 2. Community centre
- 3. Townhouses
- 4. Corner building
- 5. Service corridor
- 6. North stair
- 7. South stair



Apartment Type A



Apartment Type B + C



Everyday grandeur

Review by Jonathan Curran

If the city is forever in flux, then the city is forever renaming itself. During a 1947 Dáil debate on housing, the situation at Dominick Street was summarised thus: ‘You don’t change tenement houses into flats by calling them multiple dwellings’.¹ Following the same line of enquiry, what can we call this latest construction on Dominick Street? Regeneration seems to be the phrase given to recent works here, so you’d be forgiven for thinking that these manoeuvres amounted to no more than a change of pavement and some new lights – such is the absence of any precise vocabulary to announce the construction of seventy-two new homes onto the street. So what, then, is this new arrival on Dominick Street?

Well, big, certainly, and strong. The loggia, with its varied columns and deep, continuous balconies behind, is doing a lot of the heavy lifting here. You can quickly understand its intention, which is a credit to the clarity of the design. It is in rhythm with the Georgian facades on Upper Dominick Street and is effective in creating a rich backdrop to the street. It’s got the civic certainty of a classical colonnade, but with enough irregularity to hide some secrets – and bath towels. The slight indentation of the metal handrails allows the brick columns and granite beams to be read clearly, while a myriad of occupations lies just deeper. The building is a demonstration that we can aspire to greater things in our social housing stock than unit-per-hectare calculations.

The building is looking one way – duelling with neighbouring building, history, stigmas, developmental norms. But it is also trying to pull two moves at once, the second of which is the residents’ garden. Making space like this, in the pressure cooker of Dublin’s housing market, is a bold move; to be lauded. It is easy to envision it becoming a focal point of the community, with a mix of playground, lawn, and planting. Looking along the perimeter wall, with its niches, seats, and reclaimed statue of the Virgin Mary, it’s difficult not to make some reference to ‘the walled garden’.

Romantic as that may be, and not entirely untrue, it does neglect the fact there is a five-storey building looming overhead. The whole building serves the street with such vigour, you occasionally get the feeling it’s turned its back on the garden. There are small balconies from bedrooms, giving the facade some life, but it does question whether there might have been a more meaningful space, as part of the circulation, say, that could have linked the apartments with the gardens below.

The entire building has a looseness to it, something distinctly foreign to the dieted dimensions of contemporary apartment living. We watched a gaggle of kids playing in the generous foyer between apartment doors, which you could quickly see becoming an extension of the flats. The stairwells are impressively well day-lit, with large, well-proportioned windows again giving a sense of living in something grand. High ceilings, the deep, long loggia, generous entrance halls: they all create spatial experiences typically reserved for ecclesiastical structures. It’s a quality found in the work of Marie-José van Hee, where walls seem to intercept oversized windows in a manner that suggests living in the remnants of a much bigger building. Some everyday grandeur, an intention that appears throughout this scheme.

The building does also show face to Parnell Street, at the thin point of the wedge. Its windows are clustered into the centre of the facade, giving it a busy, dense, and pleasing air. The change of materiality also enhances the sense of civic weightiness. Although, the dimensions of the limestone panels seem a shade too large, and perhaps hinder some of the lovely proportions of the building from reaching full effect. The ground floor space, vacant at the time of writing, feels like a real opportunity for the street. With extra head height appearing – and availed of – during the design, the unusually grand dimensions of the space is a wonderful piece of place-making.

It was Dublin’s own Rob Doyle who recently wrote that ‘Dublin is too distracted by other worries to notice you’.² But this building feels like a sign of attention. Mention of Dublin City Council tends to incite strong emotions. (A previous sighting of a man with a huge, coloured Dublin Corporation back tattoo had a strong effect on this author.) But it’s difficult to imagine any other local authority managing to pull this off. Ensuring such high-quality design is probably not making friends with the number crunchers, but taking the long view of Dublin city is a rare stance. This town might well be the oldest friend of mine, but it’s increasingly a distant and estranged friend, one who sees little wrong with bargaining away their personality to the highest bidder. But not this street. Up the flats.

Notes

- ¹ Houses of the Oireachtas, Dáil éireann debate - Thursday, 11 Dec 1947, House of the Oireachtas. Available at: https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/dail/1947-12-11/60/?highlight%5B0%5D=dominick#pk_284. Accessed 11 August 2023.
- ² R. Doyle, ‘The Mall and the Abyss’, *Dublin Review*, 3 October 2022.