SEAN O’CASEY COMMUNITY CENTRE
O'Donnell + Tuomey Architects' Account

This community centre is for a long-established East Wall, a predominantly working-class community. The building includes childcare, senior citizens' daycare, sports and drama facilities. Built on a reclaimed site, the street entrance is defined by a wall and its street entrance is turned against the dominant grid. The new urban development. East Wall

is circumscribed by the curving lines of 17th century railway tracks and the straight line of the 18th century sea wall. This was the Georgian grid that runs parallel with the River Liffey. It is a place apart, a section of the city with its own sense of identity, contained within city-scale infrastructural boundaries. The site for the project is on the cleared ground of a former school building within the low-rise density of the neighbourhood of two-storey tenanted housing.

Analysis of Brief and Client Aspiration

It was clear from the brief that much of the accommodation should ideally be located on the ground floor, in particular the community centre, day-care centre for the elderly and the sports hall. The children required easy access to protected outside areas to allow the children to play and learn in fresh air.

Given the extent and scale of commercial development in the docklands area close to the East Wall, it was a stated aspiration of the East Wall Community Development Council that the new building would be a visible expression of the East Wall Community as part of the living city. They wanted a high building.

Building Form

The design concept is for a single-storey building piazza with courts and gardens with a single tall element: a 'leaning tower' of education and meeting rooms, marking the skyline to identify the special status of the building in the urban landscape. The creche, day-care centre, library/cafe and gym all open into and overlook landscaped courtyard gardens. Educational rooms, staff and meeting rooms are in the tower, which is located at the front of the building to ensure easy access as well as a clearly visible presence on the street. Four separately functioning blocks emerge from a single-storey plan which is cut out to form four courtyard gardens. The gardens are densely planted with semi-mature native trees and shrubs. Spaces of circular windows and roof lights perforate the exterior wall. Small balconies at eye-level, middle floor windows at desk-level and larger openings at body-scale provide points of communication between the world within and the larger world outside the containment of the courtyard complex.

The courtyards provide diagonal transparency and between the different social activities of the centre, connecting with and relating to passive and active recreational areas.

Sustainability Features

Environmental aspects include GBCS compliant and a ground-source heat pump combined with passive measures such as high thermal mass and insulation. These result in lower energy consumption, reduced CO2 emissions and low annual heating bills.

Materials

External walls are corrugated fair faced concrete, cost against a framework of corrugated iron, an industrial material indigenous to the context. Glazed screens to the garden courts are framed in untreated IPE hardwood.