

Plunkett station becomes the sticking point for North Quays project

Eoghan Dalton Reports

A visit by the Minister for Finance to Waterford shed light on the difficulties facing the redevelopment of the North Quays – despite Paschal Donohoe remaining non-committal on funding. Throughout his time in City Hall, the Fine Gael TD repeatedly referred to getting value for taxpayers in any public spending.

What has become central to the project is the relocation of Plunkett Station so that it becomes central to the new development on the Quay.



Chief Executive Michael Walsh (right) pressed home the case for funding to relocate Plunkett Station to Minister for Finance Paschal Donohoe (left) during last week's meeting

The Saudi-backed Falcon Real Estate maintain this is key to the project's success from their end as it will allow greater access to the newly created and state of the art transport hub. Estimations for the relocation range from €20m to as much €40m. When asked by the Munster Express if he had hesitations about providing the funding for the project, Minister Donohoe said: "I want to be careful obviously about ensuring that if we make money available, it's money that we can demonstrate to taxpayers here in Waterford that it's been well spent.

"Moving a train station, because of how fixed rail infrastructure is, is a really big deal.

"But I also know that to make the North Quays project happen, we do have to look at how we adjust the transport support that is in place for this part of the city." He added that "lots of options" are being looked at in relation to Plunkett Station and told media that either he, his Cabinet colleagues or local Fine Gael politicians "might be in a position soon to announce how we're going to move all that forward". The appeals for funding were led last week by Waterford Council's chief executive Michael Walsh.

During a presentation to the Minister and representatives of Project Ireland 2040, Mr Walsh said that the Council is "satisfied" that two-thirds of the money needed for the train station is guaranteed from the Government's Urban Regeneration and Development Fund (URDF), covering the sustainable transport bridge at the Clock Tower and the access routes from the Kilkenny side of the Quays.

"We have one remaining issue and it is the train station," Mr Walsh said. "We have a dysfunctional train station at the moment. It has no connectivity with cycling, with buses, has a cliff face that is preventing it from using two of its three platforms. "It floods on a regular basis and generally speaking the access is completely inappropriate and a real retard to

people using it.”

Meanwhile, Irish Rail has insisted it is fully supportive of the project and is not responsible for holding up the development. The company has also said that the project would open up the prospect of introducing an hourly service to the Waterford-to-Dublin service. While the visit was originally arranged for Minister Donohoe to deal with allegations of bullying in Waterford Fine Gael and to begin finalising candidates for the next General Election, the Council visit came about due to Waterford’s place in Project Ireland 2040.

The Minister told City Hall that he came up with the idea of the URDF due to the North Quays - viewing it as a project which would do much for the region. According to plans under Project Ireland 2040 Waterford City will expand by 50 per cent to 2040, supporting a population of over 80,000. Key to this is the North Quays project. It will create a new, sustainable 46,900 square meters mixed-use extension to the city centre on the north side of the River Suir, and will include a new link bridge to the city centre and improvements to the road network in the Ferrybank area.

Work is set to commence by Falcon Real Estate Development on this by the end of this year. An integrated transport hub is also an integral part of the plans and the public consultation for this closed last month.