

Time for action on North Wharf eyesore



The condition of the North Wharf, one of those problems which shows no sign of abating any time soon, has once more been called into question by Deputy Mayor Jason Murphy and Irish Times Editor Kevin O'Sullivan.

Just days after the final remnants of the 2011 Tall Ships poster was finally removed, Deputy Mayor Murphy said the North Wharf would be ideally suited to showcasing some of Spraoi's larger works, specifically created for Spraoi Festivals.

"Having recently visited St Herblain for a town twinning event, I was struck at how authorities in Nantes have opened up a former empty riverside area for walks and artistic displays," he said.

"Given the fantastic works which Spraoi have created in recent years for its fantastic annual parade each August, perhaps displaying them on the North Wharf might be a decent short to immediate term proposition for the site. Of course access might be an issue, but it ought to be put to some form of positive use. Where there's a will there's a way."

He added: "Some landscaping and the creation of a riverside walkway would not require a massive financial outlay, and such an addition would be welcome for locals as well as those visitors disembarking from cruise ships on the North Wharf. Right now, we've a set of disused buildings and an unkempt area which resembles a relic of Stalinist Eastern Europe. The time is long overdue to do something about this long-standing issue and perhaps we could get something one about it in advance of the next tourist season."

Addressing the same issue when addressing a Waterford Chamber Business Breakfast on Friday morning last, having officially opened the Imagine Arts Festival the previous night, Irish Times Editor and Tramore native Kevin O'Sullivan struck a similar note.

Calling for the North Quays to be "recast and accelerated", Mr O'Sullivan said the site would be ideally suited for an international architectural competition which would represent "a landmark project for Waterford and inject new confidence into the entire region".

Its redevelopment, he added, would represent "a big message in renewing the city beyond the Viking Triangle".

The call for action was also backed by Robin Mandal, the President of the Royal Institute of Architects for Ireland, who spoke at the launch of the Waterford Festival of Architecture at the Granary on Friday last.

However, Mr Mandal differed from the view expressed by several Councillors, and called for parts of the Flour Mill building, which remains a listed structure, to be retained.

"The continuous concrete construction was unique for the period in the city's development and many such flour mills have been retained elsewhere around world" said Mr Mandal.

He also backed Jason Murphy's call for landscaping the quays and opening it for pedestrian use prior to any long-term development.

"Waterford is moving forward in terms of new design and building work, particularly when it comes to the Viking Quarter along with the South Quays," he added.

We understand that there are a number of ownership issues relating to the Mill, whose owners are now headquartered outside the country now. Waterford Harbour board also retains an interest in the North Wharf.

The call for action was also backed by Metropolitan Area Mayor Lola O'Sullivan who said it was important for the City and County Council to exercise whatever positive influence it can wield with respect to the site. In March, Waterford City Council sought tenders for the demolition of all derelict buildings and structures on the 5.7-acre North Quay site, including by the listed R and H Hall Flour Mills building.

Plans to revamp the site, unveiled during Martin Cullen's time at the Department of the Environment, fell foul of the recession.