

Kilkenny's Design on TUSE Campus

Abbey Quarter also mooted as a home for National Design Centre



Kilkenny city's 10-acre Abbey Quarter site would represent an ideal fit for a School of Design within the new Technological University of the South East (TUSE), in addition to the new National Design Centre which has been mooted in the National Planning Framework.

This two-pronged pitch was made to Business, Enterprise and Innovation Minister Heather Humphreys by Kilkenny County Council Chief Executive Colette Byrne at the launch of the €17 million Abbey Quarter project on Wednesday last. And, according to Ferrybank-based Minister of State John Paul Phelan (FG), neither Waterford or Carlow Institutes of Technology should view the Kilkenny proposal as potentially serving to erode their respective student bases.

"If we're thinking in a regional sense when it comes to the Technological University, then for me we're at nothing," Minister Phelan told The Munster Express.

"What's been articulated here this morning to the Minister would represent an addition to the South East's third level educational offering, and I think the case for this particular site with respect to both the School of Design and the National Design Centre is compelling. It makes eminent sense." Making the case on both fronts for Kilkenny, Minister Phelan stated: "When it was included in the National Planning Framework originally, a fund of up to €60 million was referenced for a new National Design and Craft Hub. Since the late 1960s when Kilkenny, through the Civic Trust, got its hands on Kilkenny Castle, converted the Stable Yard across from it, that area has become the home of craft and design in the country, particularly when it comes to leading jewellers that are still working in those buildings in the Stable Yard. There are a number of potential sites around the city which I feel are suitable for the development of such a centre, including this one here; there's another 16-acre site just across the river (Nore) on the old mart site, there's the St Canice's Hospital site on the edge of the city and St Patrick's on the Kells Road which is about 50 to 60 acres so for me, Kilkenny is the obvious place for such a centre and obviously I will continue to push what Colette Byrne said this morning in terms of Kilkenny being the location for such a centre."

Addressing Minister Humphreys, Ms Byrne stridently made the case for both TU status for the South East and the primacy of the Abbey Quarter site, which was also referenced in Kilkenny County Council's 'From Charter To Framework' report, published in April.

"The South East region needs the Technological University of the South East to be delivered," she stated. "Our ask is that Kilkenny is that a (TU) campus is provided for in the Abbey Quarter and that such a campus would play to our strengths - with that in mind, a School of Design would seem fitting." Referencing the Council's campus report, Ms Byrne said that Kilkenny "can play a role in providing a share of the 57,000 additional student places needed in the country in the next 10 to 15 years. This (framework) report and its recommendations are now being considered by the Steering Group established by IT Carlow and Waterford Institute of Technology and I want to acknowledge both Presidents (Dr Patricia Mulcahy and Prof Willie Donnelly) who are here today, along with some of their staff who are tasked now with the delivery of a Technological University. We look forward to having a campus of the University in Kilkenny."

Regarding the National Design Centre, Ms Byrne said: "My ask is simple: give Kilkenny city serious consideration as the home for the National Design Centre for the country. It would be right at home here in Kilkenny...it would build on the legacy of the Kilkenny design workshops, it would like to the campus of the Technological University and it would have a very significant impact not only on Kilkenny but on the whole of the South East region and would be keeping with Government policy in supporting regional development. Not everything can fit inside The Pale. There will have to be positive discrimination towards the regions if the NPF is delivered. Select Kilkenny as a location for the National Design Centre and Kilkenny will play its part and make it happen."

Minister Phelan welcomed the regional dimension Ms Byrne extolled during her speech. "She majored on the importance of delivering the Technological University, and it's not about breaking up the pieces that are already there (in Waterford and Carlow): it's about adding something new - what can Kilkenny do that's not being done already, that can add value to the University of the South East with Waterford and Carlow ITs as part of it, in addition to a facility in Wexford. Kilkenny has a number of concrete (TU) proposals now, another being in the area of advanced agriculture, where they've been involved with

TSSG in WIT, who are operating out of St Kieran's College here in Kilkenny and developing those areas in terms of what the University of the South East should be in Kilkenny in particular."

The case for the joint delivery of the National Design Centre and TUSE Design School strengthens Kilkenny's case, in Minister Phelan's view.

"The new National Craft and Design Centre should be attached in some way to a third level institution. Now that doesn't mean it has to be right in the middle of a campus but it should be in some way connected to it. All of the sites I mentioned are all very close to Kilkenny city centre and there's intense lobbying going on at all levels to try and get a commitment on that new Craft and Design Centre and I think it's interesting that the people involved in the Craft and Design Council are also positive about the prospect of Kilkenny being the location."