

North Quay's "Compelling" Funding Case

Waterford City & County Council will leave 'no stone unturned' in pursuit of the €104.5 million it is seeking from Government to assist in the delivering of the Fawaz Alhokair North Quay development. Speaking to The Munster Express in the wake of the Council's application via the Urban Regeneration and Development Fund (URDF) dated September 28th, Michael Walsh said City Hall's commitment to a project that also promises €350m of private sector investment cannot be doubted.

"It is impossible to give absolute certainty," said Mr Walsh when asked about the delivery of a project unprecedented in both scale and investment for Waterford, "but rest assured we will leave no stone unturned to make it happen and intend to make it happen".

The Council's €104.5m application (which it hopes is delivered in four annual tranches – €20.1m, €31.6m, €35.7m and €17.1m) is well in excess of the €50m to €60m capital funding estimate which had been widely reported upon previously. When asked how confident he was that the total requested would be provided by Central Government, Mr Walsh stated: "Our view is that our case is fairly compelling – there is a lot of work gone in to date and the progression of the Planning Scheme, land purchases and design for the infrastructure, along with the partnerships aligned with the schemes including the private sector, leave us in a pretty good space to deliver – the site is a nationally designated Strategic Development Zone after all that nobody else is presenting."



A drawing by the North Quay project's design team of the proposed Marina, which was tweeted last weekend by Fawaz Alhokair's Strategy Director, Rob Cass. "Happy with progress," he stated.

Explaining the €104.5m figure, Michael Walsh said the final application had also factored in additional works both within the Kilkenny administrative area and with regard to Irish Rail's role in the delivery of the overall plan. Added to that, consideration had been made for additional bus priority measures "at the behest of the National Transport Authority" along with "provision for construction inflation and contingencies following detailed design and risk analysis". Matching funding at local level accounting for a further €34.8m of investment (2019: €5m; 2020: €1.7m; 2021: €11.6m and 2022: €5.6m) would bring the pot up to €139.3m.

The €34.8m will be broken down into the following contribution levels:

Waterford City & County Council: €16.8m.

Kilkenny County Council: €3.5m.

Developer Provided: €9.4m.

National Transport Authority: €5.1m.

The URDF application states: "Waterford City and County Council will not fail to meet the matching contribution necessary, however, given its commitment to development of the wider urban area and the significant catalyst that these developments can be for Waterford. These proposals enable contracted development in the urban environment of greater than €350 million while further ancillary developments of in excess of €100 million are certain on foot of these proposals."

Mr Walsh stressed that the application did not come with a clawback proviso with respect to the €15m investment Waterford City & County Council had made in the Waterford Greenway. "The funding will be absolutely specific to the projects proposed," he stated.

The URDF application also outlines a breakdown of "all key task elements of the proposal delivery timeline" which is as follows: 2019: Planning approval for city centre access (Q1) and the Transport Hub (Q2), along with serviced land initiatives at Ferrybank/Belview (Q2 and Q3). Construction works for access roads and bridges to commence in Q3 with work on the Belmont Link Road due to convene in Q4. 2020: Construction of the Transport Hub and Sustainable Transport Corridor is earmarked for Q2, along with serviced land initiatives at Ferrybank/Belview. 2021: City centre access works are set to be completed by Q2, with the serviced land initiatives at Ferrybank/Belview due to be signed off in either Q1 or Q2. 2022: The Transport Hub, Sustainable Transport Corridor and City Centre Access (Abbey Road) are all due for construction completion by Q1.

It has to be imminent at this stage and I would be hopeful for a decision in the next few weeks. "Early to mid-2022 is actually realistic and a very specific programme has been developed in this context," added Mr Walsh, who said that outstanding Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO) matters "had to be imminent at this stage and I would be hopeful for a decision in the next few weeks." The application notes: "The scope of the ambition in the context of this investment is no less than to achieve transformation in Waterford's positioning and growth. It will catalyse one of the single largest private sector developments in the state, will support the creation of a residential growth area of greater consequence in Ferrybank and deliver enhanced connectivity that will contribute to the city's growth well into the future. The integration of this development will further Waterford's goal to double visitor numbers between 2017 and 2023."

As part of the project's 10,000 square metre Visitor Centre, Mr Walsh confirmed a story first reported by this newspaper in May 2017: the relocation of the House of Waterford Crystal from The Mall onto the 17-acre development site. "We would envisage a full move (of Waterford Crystal) and would intend that an alternative visitor attraction would occupy the existing premises," he said.

The following private sector investments, as per the URDF application, are "envisaged immediately" on the North Quay.

- 1: 40,000 square metres of retail space
- 2: 7,500 square metres of leisure space
- 3: 15,000 square metres of office space
- 4: A 400 room conference hotel and leisure development
- 5: The aforementioned Visitor Centre
- 6: Car parking with a total of 1500 spaces
- 7: At least 200 apartments and
- 8: A renewable energy project.

Citing the ability of the project's core partners in terms of their project delivery acumen (Fawaz Alhokair and Seamus Walsh, proprietor of the Ard Rí Hotel site in addition to both local authorities), the report adds: "The private sector envisages the commencement of development in mid-2019 and it will be necessary to commence the public sector infrastructure immediately thereafter to facilitate contemporaneous commissioning of the different projects."

Said Michael Walsh: "Michael Quinn is the (Council's) Project Co-ordinator and would have a team of people working on the project with weekly project meetings. There is a Steering Group which I chair and ultimately a member of the Sanctioning Authority (from the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government) would normally sit on this following the funding decision."

The URDF application describes the project as capable of realising "the single greatest transformation in Waterford's history with the establishment of a new economic entity on the North Quays that will be complimentary to the existing City Centre for the adjoining residential areas...The combined development here represents one of the biggest single capital investments in this country which of itself will be a significant generator of activity while the job creation (1250 during construction and 2300 thereafter) will represent a significant step change in Waterford's growth ambitions."