

Quay Rebirth Edges Nearer

The publication of Waterford City & County Council's Urban Regeneration Development Fund (URDF) application is timely, a 28-page manifesto which presents a better and attainable future for both our city centre and our region.

While the €104 million funding application represents a considerable increase on figures previously discussed and published, as our interview with Council Chief Executive Michael Walsh demonstrates, there are four main reasons behind that increase.

- 1: Additional works in the Kilkenny administrative area which have been included,
- 2: The inclusion of additional works required by Irish Rail,
- 3: The provision of additional bus priority measures at the behest of the National Transport Authority and
- 4: With provision being made for construction inflation and other contingencies following detailed design and risk analysis.



A Drawing by the North Quay Project's Design Team of the Proposed Marina

The €350 million private sector investment is set to deliver 1250 construction jobs over its three-year building phase, followed by 2300 permanent jobs, 15,000 square metres of "high quality office space" and a half-million annual visitors. These figures, while long since in the public ether, remain somewhat fantastical given Waterford's recent industrial and employment history, but the commitment of Fawaz Alhokair to this project remains steadfast. In recent days, a fresh drawing of the river front emerged from the company's principal Waterford-based representative, currently on a visit to Saudi Arabia. And while one can never say that any certainties extend beyond death and taxes, this company's commitment to delivering an unprecedented city centre development at both Michael Street and the North Quay remains steadfast.

And to those pouring scorn on the idea that this proposal will be delivered on, all we can do is offer our pity. We need to believe in this project.

And we must retain our belief in the delivery of a better, brighter and more prosperous Waterford, connecting the North Quays to John Street, which remains a fascinating prospect.

High end ICT and financial services ought to be attracted to the redeveloped North Quay, which should in turn lead to the expansion of the Crystal Valley Tech group, which will host its inaugural Tech Summit at the WIT Arena on Thursday next, October 18th.

As part of our North Quay wish list, we would like to see the delivery of a faster train service to Dublin to a similarly revamped Heuston Station as part of the integrated transport hub the North Quay will be home to. The connection of the Waterford and Kilkenny Greenways, facilitated through the new bridge which will be delivered as part of the project, will also serve to attract cyclists to the new visitor centre, which is likely to feature the re-homed House of Waterford Crystal. Brexit remains the great unknown on so many fronts, including this project, but we must retain hope that this grand vision will be delivered upon. And the benefits it will bring to the wider Ferrybank community (in and around the Belmont Link Road) should not be underestimated and ought to create an enhanced and practical relationship between both Waterford and Kilkenny's local authorities. Michael Walsh believes the targeted completion date of mid-2002 is "actually realistic" and that the programme as detailed in the URDF application has been developed with that timescale in mind. The North Quay has been cleared. The design plans are in train. The application has been met. Perhaps we are closer to the end of the beginning than we may have thought just a few weeks ago.