

## Waterford's Time to Shine

The Deloitte report prepared for Waterford City & County Council outlines this area's prospects under the Government's 'Ireland 2040 plan' and localises the plan's eight major objectives.

The first of these is titled: 'A fair society within which all regions have the chance to prosper with the North Quay development identified as the key local innovation through which this ambition can be realised. The signing of detailed contracts between the local authority and Falcon Real Estate Development Ireland Ltd, coupled with an imminent and long-awaited announcement of capital funding for the North Quays/Michael Street project, made for positive news late last week. What many people, perhaps with some justification given our history of false dawns (including a previous plan for the North Quays) had feared - i.e. that nothing would come of this - can now breathe somewhat easier.



The North Quay will create a new neighbourhood in our city centre, and is likely to make the South Quay a more attractive residential proposition.

The regeneration of Michael Street and the North Quays is going to happen, creating new jobs for the city both in the immediate and long term. The city centre is to expand in an unprecedented manner, creating new retail, office and residential spaces in the heart of Waterford. The North Quays might, as one well-placed source suggested last week, also provide the ideal outlet in which the Headquarters of the Technological University of the South East (TUSE) could be located: still in Waterford city but just a stone's throw from County Kilkenny. This in turn would feed into the fifth and sixth objectives of Ireland 2040 as identified in the Deloitte Report: 'A collaborative society in which our cities and regions engage in partnerships' and building 'A creative, innovative and culturally attuned society'. That the city centre project has the capability of catalysing an economic renaissance in the city and region is difficult to dispute, given the spending boost the Deloitte report has projected via the North Quay and Michael Street projects alone.

Rising from an admittedly modest spending base, those behind the project have estimated that by as early as 2020, there will be a spend from the new development accounting for €256 million, with a further tourist spend in the region coming to €484 million. This would represent a €470 million increase in just five years, with the combined figures for the aforementioned projected to reach \$1.1 billion by 2025 and rising to almost \$1.6 billion by 2030. As the Falcon media brief puts it: "The North Quays is in a unique position to help meet Waterford's growing needs and provides an opportunity to create a sustainable mixed use city centre development...The vision for the area will be to create a sustainable modern mixed use quarter connected to, consolidating and extending the City Centre while facilitating the development of the northern city environs and respecting its historic and natural environment on the River Suir. The area will act as a model in integrating smart, innovative and sustainable solutions into all aspects of the environment including land use, building design and public realm."

The residential dimension to the North Quays is as significant as any other element of the project since it will effectively create a new neighbourhood in the greater Ferrybank area. According to Falcon: "The development will deliver in the region of 300 residential units, primarily in the form of apartments. In addition, the population of Waterford City is expected to grow by 29,000 people over the next 20 years to a population of 83,000. The North Quays SDZ lays the foundation for this propulsive growth." The briefing continues: "The opportunity to live on the North Quays offers exciting new prospects for inner city living, enjoying outstanding cityscape and water views. Planned residential development will sustain the North Quays as an enlivened and active urban quarter. The advantages of living in the city centre, including proximity to place of work, services,

amenities and public transport will be maximised in the integration of the residential element of the North Quays.”

It should also have the effect of regenerating elements and improving values of existing properties on the South Quay, as well as O’Connell Street, the facelift of which has already begun via the Cultural Quarter concept. Further to that, the works at the Applemarket will, in time, be recognised as the first large scale imprint of the re-imagined city centre, acting as an entry to the Michael Street complex. Slowly but surely, the pieces are falling into place. Waterford is making itself anew. Better times clearly and undeniably lie ahead. “The quality of the living environment, from the fabric of the apartment/residential block to integration with the urban street and the internal quality of the individual unit, will be of a high standard to attract and retain residents,” according to Falcon. “Residential developments will interact with the street by means of frequent entrances, overlooking windows and balconies.”

For almost 20 years, I’ve strolled up and down The Quay and wondered what, if anything, would ever be done with the North Quays. An Office of Public Works CD-ROM for the 2002 international design competition, has remained within arm’s reach at my desk, a ‘What Might Have Been’ greatest hits collection, a reminder of what could have been delivered when CD-ROMs were still hi-spec.

But the Waterford of Crystal Valley Tech, of a proposed Technological University, of an enhanced tourism offering and with enhanced connectivity to and from Dublin is now dancing to a new, hopeful, job creating beat. Further questions about this project will undoubtedly be raised in the months ahead, but I for one will not apologise for seeing something utterly new, vibrant and exciting for being just that. Exciting times indeed. This really is Waterford’s time to shine.