

## Board re-iterates stadium stance in Convention Report

The commitment to redevelop Walsh Park is one of the more noteworthy features included in the Waterford County Board's Convention Report, which was issued to the media ahead of Thursday's assembly at Lawlor's Hotel. In his 2018 assessment, County Board Chairman Paddy Joe Ryan states that "the city venue is the ONLY avenue they wish to pursue as regards upgrading, due to its central location and its accessibility. It is important for people to bear in mind that all major county grounds around Ireland, including Croke Park, Thurles, Limerick, Killarney, Salthill and many others are located in cities or towns in the middle of residential areas. We hope to work with the Waterford (City & County) Council and residents in the area for a satisfactory outcome for all. We appreciate the support and engagement of the GAA officials on this initiative."



County Board Chairman Paddy Joe Ryan pictured during last year's County Convention.

| Photos: Noel Browne

On the same topic, County Secretary Pat Flynn re-iterated the Board's stance. "The clubs unanimously agreed to proceed with the redevelopment of Walsh Park as it was the only financially viable option. Following consultations at various levels the revised plans were placed before the County Board in June and again the clubs unanimously agreed to proceed. Planning permission was received in August and we now await the decision of An Bord Pleanála following two appeals. Following issues raised in the media regarding an alternative location for a stadium, the clubs at a subsequent County Board meeting agreed overwhelmingly for a third time that the redevelopment of Walsh Park is the only viable option and should proceed."

Pat Flynn added: "A great deal of time and work has gone in to bring the plans to where they are today and without naming any individuals, I would like to put on record my thanks to all involved in the process to date. I would especially like to sincerely thank the clubs of the county, your members and the Management Executive for your strong and consistent support for the development despite the efforts of certain individuals and media personnel to disrupt the project. There are many challenges to overcome over the next few months but I am confident working together we will achieve our objective and have a stadium all involved in Waterford GAA will be proud of." Reflecting on a challenging year for Waterford hurling, Pat Flynn stated: "All credit must be given to the players, team management and background personnel who put in tremendous work and commitment throughout the year. A word of thanks and acknowledgement to Derek McGrath for his dedication and work to Waterford hurling and developing the team for the past five years. There were some bad days but many good days over the last number of years with the All-Ireland Final in 2017 being the standout highlight. Our appreciation also to all who served on the management and backroom teams during Derek's term. We wish the new manager Paraic Fanning and his team every success as we look forward to the year ahead."



Waterford's Tom Devine gets past Clare's Cathal Malone during last May's Munster Championship opener.

As for the Senior Footballers, who enjoyed an All-Ireland Qualifier win in Wexford Park, Pat Flynn added: "The players and team management deserve our appreciation for their tremendous dedication again this year and hopefully that wonderful day in Wexford will not only be a great memory but also an incentive for the year ahead. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Tom McGlinchey for his work and commitment to Waterford Football over the past four years. There were some good days but many heart-breaking days especially in the League during that term but Tom's enthusiasm and dedication never waned. I

would also like to thank all who worked with Tom in his background team during those years. I would ask the clubs to cooperate and support the new Team Manager Benji Whelan in his endeavours to have the best team possible representing Waterford at all times."

Regarding the eternally problematic GAA calendar, Paddy Joe Ryan believes that Croke Park must "look at the whole structure, including the club structure, on a national basis because otherwise our clubs who are the backbone of the Association will be forgotten" . He added: "There has been a lot of comment this year about the club scene in Waterford and the delay in getting matches played and then the hectic schedule towards the latter end of the year, this should not happen in an ideal world and it is not the wish of the Board or the clubs and certainly not the club players, to have a congested calendar like this. However, as I said, the GAA needs to look at it very closely. I apologise to the clubs for the delays but I can assure you that at all times, we did our best to ensure that games were played, but circumstances often dictated to us.

The restructuring of the Waterford Club Football Championship for 2018 will be discussed at the January County Board Meeting to try to find a satisfactory solution for all interested parties. The new hurling structure will bring a fresh set of challenges in that regard and I stand by my opinions on it, but having said that I accept the democratic outcome of the Congress and we move forward in positivity and unison." Paddy Joe Ryan said that the Board has "found itself at the centre of an unnecessary mediastorm at certain times this year, that has sometimes distracted from the real business that has to be done and from the great work that is going on. Three years ago we had a debt of approximately €700,000, this debt was indeed eliminated this year, thanks to you the clubs, and also to a number of other donations and fundraising initiatives that were carried out. I want to thank each and every person sincerely who contributed to putting us back on a level pegging and although it may sometimes lead to unpopular decisions having to be made, I am determined that we will not find ourselves back in such a precarious position during my tenure."

He continued: "There are lots of people who are very willing to pass comment on social media forums these days about the business of the County Board. Again, this is something that I didn't have to deal with in my first tenure as Chairman. While everyone is entitled to their opinion and free speech is very important, I think it is also necessary for commentators to be fully informed and have the full facts, before you make your opinion known on a public forum. Just to reiterate, this administration is comprised mainly of volunteers, unpaid officials, who give freely of their time to work towards a common goal, the betterment of the GAA in Waterford, and the backbone of the Boards are the clubs. Personal criticism of officials on the likes of Twitter or Facebook can be keenly felt by family members of those involved. Let us all aim to work together, support one another and drive forward positively in 2018. We are all working towards the same goal after all."

Regarding club fixtures, Pat Flynn contends that a majority of clubs have treating the League competitions "with contempt". "The total number of games played in the Championships and Leagues this year will be 357. There were 33 walkovers during the year with 23 in football and 10 in hurling competitions. The highest number in a competition was 8 in both the Minor Football Championship and Senior Football League. The number of walkovers in adult competitions was 19." In a trend reflecting recent Conventions - and rather disappointingly from this observer's perspective - only two motions will be put before delegates on Thursday evening, both of which have been tabled by the Tallow Club.

The first calls for the "Club Hurling Championships to commence after Waterford's inter-county participation has ended" while the second calls for both Senior Leagues to be changed into four groups of three, with games to be played every two weeks and for the Final to be played as a double header if there are no dual clubs involved.