

SELLING THE SOUTH EAST

By 2030, the South East will not only be the fastest growing region in Europe, but it will also be the most sustainable. That was the sunny sentiment offered at last Wednesday's South East Business Expo by Falcon Real Estate Development Director Rob Cass, who believes the benefits of living in this region continue to be made plain to the region's Diaspora, in addition to a wider audience.

Referring to the "outstanding growth" levels which he foresees, in addition to "really exciting plans that just aren't out there yet," Mr Cass said that the North Quay development, in addition to Kilkenny's Abbey Quarter and Wexford Town's Trinity Wharf projects would help to drive such growth. He also believes the potential saving of €100,000 on a South East-based mortgage when compared to Dublin prices, in addition to the region's mountain ranges and 300 kilometres of coastline were other key selling points for this region.

Speaking at the Expo, Eishtec's Head of Talent Culture Catherine Sheridan said that "super talent" was being retained in the region and welcomed the fact that "we're no longer just talking about entry level jobs being available".



On the same topic, WIT's Engineering School Head, Dr Ken Thomas, said "the number one thing was to stop people leaving the region" beyond their years in education and that stakeholders ought to pay greater attention to the "international perspective" of the South East. The development of a meaningful Technological University (TU) is also likely to play a key role in driving the region's future growth by not only retaining talent but through the projected doubling of its population, as identified in the Project Ireland 2040 plan.

Encouraging younger professionals to buy or rent apartments in the city centre must form part of this projected growth, Rob Cass added, to help inject some welcome vibrancy into Waterford beyond 6pm on weekdays. Citing a new build grant which had been available in the Ferrybank area via Kilkenny County Council, creating a similar grant in Waterford city and county should be considered.

He even suggested that a section of Barronstrand Street (directly opposite the North Quays) should be regenerated to create an urban neighbourhood which at present simply doesn't exist. Encouraging more 'living over the shops', a scheme first floated at the turn of the century primarily taking Dublin into account, along The South Quays, is surely worth a reboot.

And given the apartment spaces Waterford City & County Council have created on O'Connell Street as part of the Cultural Quarter development, it's clear that a commitment to inject new community life into the city centre is already being planned for.

As Rob Cass pointed out on Wednesday last, things are happening in both Waterford and our neighbouring counties. Progress is being made, even if at present a great deal of that is going underneath the public and media radar. The Expo, held at the WIT Arena, also welcomingly reminded delegates of this city and region's low crime rates, a key selling point among prospective Foreign Direct Investors, along with those professionals who may consider a move to the South East. This is just one of many positives about our region which we who've lived and worked here for years might underestimate. Major plans are afoot. Significant actions will soon follow. The age of lip service in the South East of Ireland is nearing its long overdue conclusion.