

Minutes of the Economic Development & Enterprise SPC 29th January 2020

In attendance:

Waterford City: Cllr Lola O'Sullivan (Chair), Cllr Declan Clune, Cllr Pat Fitzgerald, David Lane, Jen Harris, David Walsh, Garrett Wyse, Kevin Kiersey

Dungarvan: Cllr Pat Nugent, Cllr Conor D McGuinness, Gerty Murphy

Apologies: Cllr Eddie Mulligan, Cllr Ger Barron

Staff: Michael Quinn, Lisa Grant

North Quays Update

Rob Cass, Falcon Malls, attended the meeting and answered questions on the documents which were circulated in advance of the meeting.

Project Timelines

The current timeline is that Government funding is expected to be confirmed by end of March after which the tendering process will commence. Construction is due to commence Q1 2021.

Rob clarified that the January 31st deadline does not exist. The contract has deadlines which were extended from November 2019 to March 2020 and both parties have the option to extend deadlines. There are cost and social consequences of delays.

Funding

There may be some delays if there is a change in government. There has been extensive engagement with relevant Department staff and it is expected that they will recommend the proposals to the new Minister. Michael outlined that there is cross party support at local level. Discussions were held with Mary Lou McDonald and Mary Butler TD is also very supportive of the project.

There is continual engagement with DPER and the methodology is in line with their guidelines. It is also expected that there will be no change to the URDF which will finance part of the project. Rob clarified that they cannot move forward until government funding is confirmed as the commercial element is only viable in tandem with the full government funding.

Transport Hub

Regarding the relocation of the strain station, discussions are ongoing between DoHPLG and DOTTS with funding to be provided from the NTA. The final mix of funding from the NTA and URDF to be signed off on.

It was acknowledged that Irish Rail does not have the finance to relocate the train station. The current location is unsuitable for a number of reasons which would all require investment:

- There is only one operational platform
- The length of the platform limits the train length
- Infrastructural upgrades are required for signalling
- Roundabout outside station is at maximum capacity
- Flood defence measures required
- Rock surface unstable
- No bus service to the station
- Limited car parking
- Issues with pedestrian/cyclist access
- The expected increased volume of rail users would require improved public access

The new train station needs to cater for and create future demand and will address the issues relating to the current location outlined above.

The new transport hub will open up the north city where future development is more likely to occur and will be the driver of the north city. The new train will also require a fast service to Dublin to meet the needs of office workers and other commuters. There is significant support from ISIF and IDA for office accommodation.

Messaging re North Quays

The level of negative media and the perception of delays was acknowledged. Concern was expressed that the project sponsors would be affected by this negativity. The necessity of promoting a positive message for Waterford and the South East was highlighted. Michael advised that the Council are working on a joint promotional document with Waterford Chamber and Falcon Malls. Rob suggested that it might be useful to develop a North Quays FAQs to address the questions arising.

Retail Element

There is huge interest in the site from a retail perspective due to the site location, the chronic undersupply of retail in Waterford and the future growth in population which make it an attractive proposition. The focus is not on UK high street brands which are struggling due to an oversupply but rather on European brands and high growth brands. Online is considered an opportunity and retailers will have omni channels and a greater emphasis on experience. Rob highlighted that the message needs to be communicated that Waterford is open for retail.

Office Accommodation

IDA are very interested in the office element and it's envisaged that the bulk of employment will come from office jobs. The location of the train station will make commuting to Dublin an attractive option. Consideration will need to be given to attracting talent from abroad to meet the demand for skilled labour.

It was noted that the North Quays is only one of three locations in Ireland with access to black fibre which will be key to attracting tech talent and which needs to be promoted. This superfast connectivity combined with affordable housing and excellent quality of life will help attract the skilled workforce.

Michael Street Development

This is being worked on in parallel with the North Quays and the contracts provide for them to be developed concurrently.

Waterford & Kilkenny

Regarding the existing shopping centre in Kilkenny, it was highlighted that this was too far removed. There is a problem with the anchor tenant and this site will not have the critical mass of the North Quays with the transport hub to be sustainable.

It was suggested that the failure to secure the boundary extension was a strategic constraint going forward. Michael clarified that it was not within the power of the Local Authority to request a boundary extension and it cannot form part of the Development Plan. He outlined that the MASP process will look at the wider city area with a focus on how to define and grow the city in coordinated way. The Executive and Elected members will jointly work on the preparation of the MASP.

Waterford and Kilkenny have a good working relationship from North Quays and Greenway extension. The SEDO has also provided a good framework for the regional local authorities to work together and acknowledge Waterford as the regional driver. Project 2040 also identifies Waterford as the regional economic driver.

Dungarvan/ West Waterford Economic Impact

In response to a query re the potential positive or negative impact on Dungarvan/West Waterford. Rob has not analysed where the extra 6,900 jobs are coming from which creates an opportunity. There will also be a reversal of retail leakage which has the potential to benefit the economy.

Other

Rob was asked that there be a commitment to workers' rights, that conditions would be positive during the construction phase and from future employers, a guarantee of minimum wage and collective bargaining. Rob advised that he cannot dictate to tenants but that they would comply with Irish/EU employment legislation. He noted that Falcon Malls has a principal of securing talent from the region.

Michael clarified that there would be no protocol over and above existing protocols. Waterford Council will be tendering for access infrastructure and will be bound by the rules and regulation of the tendering process.

Rob was thanked for his comprehensive update and the opportunity to answer the questions raised. Cllr. O'Sullivan advised Rob that she would ask the Mayor to invite Rob to present at the March or April Plenary meeting.

Minutes & Matters Arising

Lisa updated re membership and advised that Chambers Ireland were the nominating body for the business sector. David Walsh informed the committee that places were available on the three SPCs and that the positions were divided between the two local Chambers.

Local Flavours

Details of the INTERREG Local Flavours programme were circulated in advance of the meeting. Members were advised that if more detail was required that Claire Loughnane or Vinnie O'Shea could be invited to present at a future meeting.

Shop Front Improvement Scheme

Lisa asked that following the discussion at the previous meeting, if the SPC were in agreement, that the draft SFIS be approved so that it could be progressed to the Plenary Council. The draft scheme was proposed by Cllr. D. Clune and seconded by Garrett Wyse.

AOB

Gerty raised the issue of the number of listed buildings which are vacant and which are not attractive to individuals or developers due to the number of restrictions in place and the cost implications of regenerating them. Such buildings are in danger of becoming derelict and Tidy Towns cannot tackle their presentation as they are private property.

Michael advised that as part of drafting the Development Plan there would be a review of listed structures. He also highlighted that there is openness from a conservation point towards protecting the buildings to bring them back into use.

It was agreed to write to the Planning SPC re this issue and request and feedback.

It was agreed that the June meeting should involve a site visit to Port of Waterford.

Next meeting: 25th March 2020 9.45am in the Maritana Room, Waterford City and Deise Room, Dungarvan