Issues for discussion
with the Boundary Committee on
10th March 2016

Prepared: March 2016
1. Impact of a boundary extension on identity in the Area of Interest

The public consultation process undertaken by the Committee generated a very significant response, on paper at least. A series of orchestrated petitions generated almost 18,900 submissions primarily from residents of Kilkenny and in particular from persons who are not resident in the Area of Interest. In total 2,187 people resident in Kilkenny city and its environs made submissions objecting to any boundary extension. The response by the Waterford City and County Council’s Executive to the Kilkenny County Council submission highlighted the motivation for this orchestrated campaign of outrage – they view the area as a cash cow and have little interest in the provision of services there.

One issue to emerge from the public consultations was the general indifference of the residents of Ferrybank to the consultation process. Just 366 residents or 6% of the total population of Ferrybank (both the Waterford and Kilkenny EDs) made a submission on the proposed boundary review. Compare this with more than 50% of the population of the nearby Pollrone ED which includes the village of Mooncoin who made submissions. 61% of the residents in the Rathpatrick ED, which includes Slieverue, made submissions – although it should be noted that one of these residents actually favoured the proposed boundary extension.
Kilkenny County Council’s submission states that south Kilkenny’s culture is deeply rooted in the history of county Kilkenny. This is not in doubt. However, the histories of south Kilkenny and of Waterford are also very closely entwined and the Committee’s attention is drawn in particular to the detailed submission from Mr Des Griffin which touches on this shared past.

There is a sense from the tone of many of the submissions from south Kilkenny residents that they have no need or wish to engage or interact with Waterford. This is a feigned sense in our view. We have previously advised the Committee of the research by Maynooth University which highlighted the substantial percentage of residents of south Kilkenny who travel into Waterford city to work. This research is based on Census 2011 data and we would confidently predict that the Census 2016 will reflect similar if even higher percentages. Any commuter amidst the volume of commuter traffic coming over Rice Bridge every morning will confirm this.

Another factor which has been highlighted as part of the argument about identity is the threat to sporting associations. We are providing the Committee with two maps which would suggest that the sporting links between clubs in south Kilkenny, both soccer and GAA, with Waterford are actually quite strong. We are highlighting these sporting links merely to reflect our view that sporting and cultural borders can be fluid and need not be tied to administrative boundaries. Sporting associations have been pragmatic and flexible in this respect (See Figures 2 and 3).
A number of the submissions from Kilkenny, in particular around the Area of Interest, expressed concerns about potential implications for Church and parish boundaries. Church boundaries have been regularly subject to revisions and alterations throughout history and are certainly not tethered to local government boundaries. Figure 4 shows the Catholic Church’s Diocesan boundaries across Ireland and it is clear that several local government administrative boundaries are not consistent with Diocesan boundaries, with no obvious or apparent impacts for the communities concerned. We would be confident therefore that a boundary extension will have no implications for parishes or clubs in the vicinity of the Area of Interest.
The PLUTS projected very substantial population growth north of the river Suir in the Committee’s Area of Interest and the reality is, regardless of whether a boundary extension takes place or not, the population of the area will undoubtedly increase in the coming years. These new residents’ identities are not known so we should not assume what they will belong to or aspire to be part of. What we do know is that they will reside in a significantly increased urban area.

2. Lack of services currently being provided

In 2013 Kilkenny County Council opened a Local Area Office in the Ferrybank Shopping Centre. The Area Office and the Library are being leased by the Council from the developer of the otherwise empty shopping centre and the costs of establishing the Library was largely funded by the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government. Section 5 of the Kilkenny County Council submission of 22 January 2016 to the Boundary Committee, the services delivered to Ferrybank and the wider Piltown district are listed (page 55). If the boundary were to be extended, residents of the Area of Interest would be able to access the full range of this Council’s services within a relatively short distance by whatever method of transport, as opposed to the more than 100 kilometre round trip to Kilkenny County Hall. Examples of the additional services that residents would be able to avail of in this Council’s public offices would include the full range of housing services, motor tax payments, viewing planning files and the receipt of tenders.

The following extract is from the 2009 Ferrybank/Belview Local Area Plan (LAP).

“There is a distinct lack of playground facilities in the plan area. There is no public playground and only one housing development (Blackthorn Hills, Rockshire) in the plan area has a purpose built playground. Additional play grounds are permitted in other developments as well. However, this LAP proposes to identify lands that could be used to facilitate the development of public playgrounds at locations adjacent to residential areas, and in proximity to existing and proposed neighbourhood/district centres.”

Seven years later there is still no public playground in the area and the children of 2009 are now probably in secondary school and their playground years are behind them. Those children will more than likely have been using the playgrounds and amenities provided by this Council in the City since 2009 and before then.

Kilkenny County Council’s submission indicates that they have 19 local authority houses in Ferrybank. This is simply a further indication of the unwillingness that Council has to invest locally in the Area. Between 2006 and 2011, in the Ferrybank area alone, nearly 600 new houses were built. Kilkenny Council could therefore have expected to be able to acquire at least 60 social houses under Part V. The fact that they have less than a third of that number would suggest that once again the Council opted for the revenue rather than the service provision to the residents.
As we indicated in our first meeting Waterford is the de facto provider of social housing in the Area of Interest and it has been for many decades now. We own 218 houses and provide a range of other units through other social housing schemes. More than 700 of the applicants on our housing waiting list have indicated a preference for Ferrybank. The reality is that when people contact Kilkenny County Council to enquire about social housing in Ferrybank, they have been told to contact this Council instead.

Businesses located in the Area of Interest have consistently expressed frustration publicly regarding the lack of commitment by Kilkenny County Council in relation to the presentation and maintenance of the approach roads to Waterford City. This frustration is very clearly reflected in the submission made to the Committee by Mailo Power, who is a business person in the Area of Interest, who was particularly scathing of Kilkenny County Council’s attitude to the business community in the Area.

Waterford City and County Council’s plans for the redevelopment of the North Quays are a clear demonstration of our commitment for the renewal of the North side of the river and for its integration into the heart of the City Centre. Working in partnership with the Port we will oversee this long overdue programme of urban regeneration and there is a specific commitment in the Capital Investment Plan for the funding of infrastructure in the North Quays.

There is a complete lack of arts and cultural facilities being provided by Kilkenny in the Area and the residents rely on the services and facilities provided by this Council. Similarly, any supports for the voluntary and community-based emergency services are being provided by this Council, not by Kilkenny County Council. Finally, the development of the various community projects in the Ferrybank area simply would not have happened if it had not been for this Council’s initiative. We have provided a combination of funding, buildings and sites for a range of community projects including the Abbeylands Community Centre and the Hillside Community Building which houses the childcare and afterschool centre (despite both of these being physically located in Kilkenny).

3. Public representation

It would be particularly important if a boundary extension occurs that the Area of Interest should be adequately represented on this Council immediately on the extension taking place and to ensure that there is adequate representation for future population growth in the Area.

We would consider, based on a number of factors, that the number of Councillors for the Waterford Metropolitan District should increased by 2. Consistent with the Terms of Reference for the Boundary Review, if a boundary extension occurs, it is a matter for the Committee to make recommendations for any consequential re-configuration of the three Electoral Areas of the Metropolitan District.

Subject to any specific legislative requirements, it is our understanding that any
changes to the level of representation or alteration of Electoral Areas would not take effect until the next local government elections. It is, however, reasonable to project that (based on reasonable projections of population growth) that the Area would comprise a significant proportion of any newly configured Electoral Area of the Waterford Metropolitan District.

Waterford City and County Council’s immediate priority if a boundary extension is to occur will be to ensure that the residents of the Area will have access to and assistance from our elected Members as well as having access to the full range of this Council’s services at close proximity.

4. Experience of collaboration and co-operation

The PLUTS was jointly agreed by the Waterford and Kilkenny Councils in 2003 and it set out a strategy for the future development of the City and its environs, including the Area of Interest. This Council has demonstrated its commitment to the PLUTS and this is evidenced by the substantial investment in infrastructure and facilities in the Carrickpherish area of the City. Kilkenny County Council’s approach to planning in the Area of Interest, however, was in our view completely contrary to the objectives of the PLUTS. While this can be evidenced by the attitude taken to residential development, both in the urban and the rural parts of the Area, it is best demonstrated by decisions taken by Kilkenny County Council in relation to retail development.

The history behind the development of the largely vacant Ferrybank Shopping Centre, completed in 2009, is well documented in the submission to the Boundary Committee by Stephanie Taheny. The net result of the development and the long-running legal disputes is that the residents of the area literally living their lives in the shadows of a monument of the Celtic Tiger, there is a primary school directly in front of the building and the football and GAA pitches are right behind it. The location of the Centre is so poorly conceived that if it ever were to open as a shopping centre, the road network in the area would grind to a halt. There is no obvious room for expansion of the road immediately to the front of the centre and housing and sports clubs are located to the rear. It is very telling that the original anchor tenant has been prepared to undertake a lengthy legal battle and pay compensation of more than €20 million to avoid taking occupancy of the centre. The understandable focus on the Ferrybank Centre almost results in the Ross Abbey retail centre, completed in 2008 and which has never opened, being forgotten or overlooked.

The Port of Waterford was located in the heart of the City Centre for centuries until it moved down river to its current location in 1992, primarily and quite understandably for capacity reasons. The Port remains intrinsically linked with the Waterford City and indeed it retains a very substantial land bank along the riverside in the city. It is currently working with this Council to ensure the redevelopment of the North Quays. It would be particularly important, in our view, that the Port and its surrounding area would be included in any boundary extension. We are also
concerned that the Committee might be misled by the submission of Kilkenny County Council dated 22 January 2016 which includes a number of claims that Kilkenny County Council has invested heavily in the Port. The reality is that the Council has not invested anything in the Port, the Port of Waterford Company which is a statutory body is responsible for investment in the Port and its facilities.

5. Community facilities

Kilkenny County Council has provided the Committee with pictures of 23 community facilities in the Area of Interest. The list of facilities provided is interesting because it reinforces the reality about the lack of investment by Kilkenny County Council in the Area of Interest.

Figures 6 to 9 are of schools in the Area (funded by the Department of Education). Indeed, this Council has reserved a land bank adjacent to St. Mary’s Boy’s National School (Figure 7) which is across the road from the Ferrybank Shopping Centre for a proposed extension to the school.
Figure 7: St. Mary’s Boy’s National School, Ferrybank

Figure 8: Our Lady of Good Counsel School, Ferrybank

Figure 9: Slieverue National School
Figures 10 and 11 are of the Library, largely funded by the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government, and which is being leased by the Council from the developer of the otherwise empty Ferrybank Shopping Centre.

Figure 12 (overleaf) is of Waterford Golf Club, the inclusion of this as a community facility is somewhat misleading.
Figures 13 and 14 are the pitches of Ferrybank Athletic Football Club and Ferrybank GAA Club. Both pitches are located on the Kilkenny side of the boundary. **The two pitches are actually owned by Waterford City and County Council and are being leased (on affordable long-term leases) to the two Clubs.** Figure 15 is of the Slieverue GAA Club’s pitch – the Club’s website documents the history of the development of the pitch between 1956 and 1959 and noted the work was done by club members voluntarily.
Figures 16 to 18 (overleaf) are more typical community facilities and in truth, these facilities would not exist had it not been for the initiative of this Council and Waterford-based community groups such as the Waterford Area Partnership the Waterford Regional Youth Services. It is our understanding that the majority of the participants of the U-Casadh project (Figure 17) are actually Waterford residents. The building in Figure 18 which houses the Abbeylands Community Centre and the Regional Youth Services belongs to Waterford City and County Council and is located in Abbeylands, an estate built by this Council in 2002 to meet social housing demand in the area.
Figure 16: Community Allotments, Ferrybank

Figure 17: U-Casadh Project, Ferrybank

Figure 18: Abbeylands Community Centre/ Abbeylands Regional Youth Services, Ferrybank
Figure 19 is of a Childcare and Afterschool Centre. Waterford City and County Council actually provided the site for the Centre and contributed to the cost of its construction.

Figures 20 to 22 are of Parish Halls in the Area while Figures 23 and 24 are of care homes operated by a religious order and a private health provider.
Figure 21: John O’Donovan Parish Centre, Slieverue

Figure 22: St Mary’s Parish Hall, Slieverue

Figure 23: St Joseph’s Care Home, Ferrybank
Figure 25 is the one playground in the Area – it was actually built by the property developer (and not by Kilkenny County Council) more than ten years ago and has only recently been taken in charge by the Council. Figure 26 is of the proposed site for a playground that Kilkenny County Council announced they will be developing. Kilkenny County Council stated in the Local Area Plan in 2009 that there is a distinct lack of playground facilities in the plan area.
Figure 27 is a sign for a social club which was established for the workers of the old Clover Meats Factory while Figure 28 is of a railway line which is part of the proposed Greenway route.
In summary therefore, 23 facilities or amenities were highlighted and most of these have no linkage in any way with Kilkenny County Council and those that do are reflective of the lack of priority that Council has attached to the Area.
6. Outline of WCCC Plan for the Area of Interest

Waterford City and County Council above all else will prepare a proper Urban Design Framework for the new developing area of Ferrybank and will commit all resources accruing in the area to the future development of the area.

Urban Design Framework

This Council will do a complete analysis of the developing urban area with a particular emphasis on the transportation issues likely to arise and to the creation of a number of sustainable neighbourhoods with individual populations of the order of 6,000 persons. These neighbourhoods will provide for central neighbourhood zones to service the communities incorporating retail and community facilities including education facilities and in particular primary schools. The emphasis will be on internalisation of transport and sustainable development. We will undertake a full review of the retail strategy and provide for neighbourhood centres in the area as appropriate and consistent with the policy throughout the urban area.

It would be an immediate priority of this Council to apply appropriate rural housing standards in an area which is contiguous to a designated Gateway. Of particular concern, given past experience, would be the appropriate consideration of future one-off developments which could potentially impede or restrict the achievement of the objectives of the PLUTS and the future development of an urban framework for the Area.

Resource Application

This Council will commit the necessary resources for the early provision of services and infrastructure. In particular we will prioritise the early provision of transportation infrastructure and the development of neighbourhood centres. We will seek to remediate deficiencies in existing services and community facilities and will prioritise the delivery of broadband and gas infrastructure in the first instance. Experience would indicate that the advancement of core services will demand application of the full development contributions accruing in the area and attraction of significant additional national support in order to achieve these goals.

Service Delivery

This Council within a period of 4 to 5 years will seek to achieve the same level of service in the area of interest as throughout all of our urban areas. This will see enhanced presentation, road maintenance and community development in particular and will be consistent with the methodology used in the amalgamation of Waterford City and County. As is our practice historically we will work with developers and communities to immediately take in charge residential estates and will ensure the delivery of fair and accessible services to all. Along with the enhanced service delivery of all services at our offices in the City Centre we will use the library and the community development building to provide a suite of local services to greatly enhance accessibility for the residents of the area.