



Kilkenny County Council

John Street

Kilkenny

18th July 2015

RE: DRAFT MASTERPLAN FOR ABBEY CREATIVE QUARTER (FORMER SMITHWICK'S BREWERY SITE AND BATEMAN QUAY / MARKET YARD AREA)

Dear Sir/Madam

Kilkenny Archaeological Society welcomes this opportunity to comment on the revised draft masterplan for the Abbey Quarter. As we are an historical and archaeological society we wish to confine our comments to the heritage aspects of the masterplan and in particular to the draft archaeological report (DAR).

Firstly, the report's authors and their team are to be congratulated on having produced such a comprehensive assessment of the archaeological and architectural heritage of the masterplan area. It places archaeological concerns at the heart of the design process and provides a sound basis on which decisions regarding the future development, conservation and enhancement of the masterplan area can be undertaken. As such it addresses many of our concerns regarding the treatment of the archaeological importance of the site within the masterplan process.

We note however that fundamental questions remain regarding the surviving extent and layout of the Franciscan abbey and the nature and depth of the surviving archaeological stratigraphy ('deposit model') within the site. It would appear that these basic questions and therefore the impact of the proposals on archaeology can only be addressed by further archaeological investigations, including excavations. In the absence of these additional works the proposed layout of new structures throughout the masterplan area would seem somewhat premature and could be subject to substantial alterations if substantive archaeological materials are found where new buildings are proposed.

In the same vein, whilst we warmly welcome the proposal to re-excavate the abbey church within a research framework that includes an element of community archaeology we note with concern however, that there is no commitment from Kilkenny County Council to fund this project and that central government and EU sources will be relied upon instead. Needless to say such funding will be difficult to obtain in the current economic climate.

In relation to the implementation of its recommendations the DAR states: 'In order to ensure that these proposals are carried out, mandatory procedures or specific design contracts detailing the archaeological conditions will be required in order to confirm compliance and will have to be adopted by potential developers on the site'. However, Kilkenny Archaeological Society would have concerns that because the DAR (and the masterplan) is 'non statutory' there would be no legal basis to enforce compliance with this key recommendation and indeed all of the report's recommendations. We would recommend that measures are introduced to set the report's recommendations on a statutory footing.

Kilkenny Archaeological Society in particular welcomes the commitment to 'place the Abbey precinct at the centre of the development' and the proposals to enhance the immediate environs of the abbey church are likewise to be welcomed. We would comment however that the retention of the Mayfair building will interfere with what would otherwise be a spectacular vista of the church and city walls. We would ask therefore that consideration be given to demolition of the Mayfair building.

We also welcome the proposal to prepare a 'Heritage Conservation Plan for St. Francis Abbey, Evans' Turret and St. Francis' Well in the context of the existing City Wall conservation plan' but would question why the scope of the conservation plan could not be broadened to include the entire masterplan area.

Our comments regarding the spur road or 'urban street' with the Central Access Scheme are contained in our separate submission on Variation 1.

Finally, Kilkenny Archaeological Society look forward to working with Kilkenny County Council on the successful future implementation of the masterplan.

Yours Sincerely

Barry Fitzgibbon

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Honorary Secretary