

Options Report Submission 2024



Submission - 18 Oct 2024

Key Asks & Recommendations



Redevelopment of Sarsfield House



Investment & Upgrade Public Amenities



All encompassing plan for the whole waterfront



Drastic Increase in Pace of Plans & Works



Transparent Plan for €73.4 Million Funding



Boost talent attraction by investing in public space



Less Reliance on L2030 Plan



Create a Public Plaza



Integrate area with Medieval Limerick



Event / Festival Space -Public Realm with a Purpose



Create a Nucleus for the City Centre



Child Friendly Space



Worker Homes in Cleeve's Quarter and Opera Centre



Provide a worthy vista of the Shannon



Improve relationship with the River



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What MORE AMBITION looks like























Introduction & Summary

Limerick Chamber would like to thank Limerick City and County Council for the opportunity to submit our member views on the proposed Arthur's Quay Framework Plan Options Report (AQFP). Limerick Chamber is a member-led organisation representing 400 organisations across Limerick, operating in a diverse range of sectors. We are the leading advocate for many types of organisations ranging in size from micro businesses to large multinationals, covering the breadth of the enterprise and public sectors across Limerick.

We commend Local Authority Staff in bringing the Draft AQFP forward. However, from a Chamber perspective, there are significant concerns.

Firstly, all the options are seen, by the Chamber, as unambitious and unbefitting of the name "World Class Waterfront". They do not represent the ambition many stakeholders have for the city centre. Furthermore, it is concerning that it has taken such a drastic length of time to get to such high-level plans, without providing any real detail. The World Class Waterfront (WCW) was first promoted in the 2013 Limerick 2030 Economic and Spatial Plan, funding was secured in 2021 to the tune of almost €74 million in Urban Regeneration and Development Funding (URDF). According to the Limerick Chamber Strategic Development Pipeline, a draft plan was supposed to be released in Q4 of 2023, then this was moved to Q1 2024 and it was finally released in Q4 of 2024. This time slippage is hugely concerning, and if Limerick truly wants to meet the ambition its inhabitants have then there needs to be a drastic increase in the pace of delivery.

Furthermore, Limerick Chamber must question the scope of the plans. Originally, the WCW project was supposed to travel the length of the city from the Docklands to King's Island and the North Bank of the River Shannon. What has been presented to date is a tiny fraction of the overall area.

The WCW can, if developed correctly, be the nucleus of the city centre, connecting the medieval quarter to the retail and commercial space on the newly refurbished O'Connell Street / Georgian Quarter. The space must include more functional public space with purpose or it runs the risk of being an extension of the existing defunct park. The public realm space should incorporate more entertainment amenities for families and our growing student population. We should be looking at the space as a way of connecting our universities with the city centre.

In November 2023, Limerick Chamber released the Limerick City Centre Report. This report represents the most detailed and comprehensive data study undertaken in recent years for Limerick City Centre. It provides a number of key recommendations that are not only underpinned by official data sources but also by almost 500 city centre stakeholders who responded to the survey. It covers a broad range of themes but isn't all-encompassing; like any city, Limerick is constantly evolving and will need regular updates to seize opportunities and deal with any challenges. We have listened to our membership and their concerns with the city and brought forward practical and tangible recommendations that will work to improve the city centre if implemented correctly.

While the City Centre Report made many recommendations, there was one common thread coming from responses and that was the city offers a unique vibe and ambience making it unique and attractive. This cannot be easily emulated and stems from years of hard work. However, these selling points are what give the city centre a unique value proposition that differentiates it from out of town shopping centres.

Ultimately, the report highlighted that the city centre should not try to become an out of town shopping centre, there are unique characteristics to both that make each attractive, that instead the city centre should nurture and grow what makes it great. At the end of the day, nobody lives in a shopping centre, and it is the objective of Limerick Chamber to create a thriving liveable city to both live in and do business in.

To that end, Limerick Chamber are advocating for Option 2 with the caveat that it must be MORE AMBITIOUS.

The AQFP needs to remember what the focus of the overall project is, and that is improving the waterfront and its public amenities, all along the waterfront. Arthurs Quay Park needs to become a focal point but with attractive amenities.

The three proposed waterfront development options represent a missed opportunity for Limerick's city centre, lacking the ambition necessary to realize the waterfront's potential. If developed effectively, the waterfront could become the heart of the city, linking the medieval quarter with the newly revitalised O'Connell Street and of course the Georgian Quarter. However, without a well-planned public space that includes entertainment amenities for families and students, it risks becoming underutilised.

While many entertainment amenities are privately owned, the city should create space for these offerings, as attracting families and providing non-alcoholic activities was a key request from local surveys. The redevelopment of Arthur's Quay Park and the waterfront offers a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to create a central hub, especially given the lack of a focal point in the current city layout. Large gatherings and events like Riverfest or Christmas markets require a more suitable and focused area, which is missing in the current proposals.

There is significant potential to include covered areas for year-round use, and to focus on creating a people-centric space that complements existing attractions like the Milk Market. Additionally, affordable and private housing should be integrated with key developments such as the Opera Centre and Cleeves Quarter to enhance the waterfront's appeal.

Although Limerick Chamber finds the current proposals lack vision, Option 2 provides a basic framework that could be expanded upon. The waterfront must become a unique value proposition that can't be replicated by out-of-town shopping centres or other cities. A central feature, such as an amphitheatre, could be included to attract visitors, while more should be done to cater to the student population and local workers.

Ultimately, Limerick is competing on an international scale for investment, and factors like liveability and public space play a crucial role in attracting businesses and talent. The city centre must leverage its historic charm and unique advantages, with the World-Class Waterfront acting as the connector between the city's different quarters. However, this can only be achieved through ambitious and thoughtful development.

In conclusion Limerick's waterfront development options are seen as lacking ambition and missing the opportunity to transform the city centre. The area has the potential to become a central hub, connecting different city quarters, but requires well-designed public spaces, entertainment amenities. The waterfront should focus on creating a unique value proposition that attracts people, but current plans fall short. The Chamber advocates for more vision and ambition, especially in building a public space that can serve the city's needs year-round



While there are many items that can negatively impact a city centre, the one item that has the largest impact is the failure to change with the times. It is unlikely that any city centre will ever survive being resistant to change, but the ones that do thrive are the ones that learn how they can be part of the change.

The Future Development of Limerick City Report Key Findings

Drive the 'experience economy' by promoting the city centre as a place for leisure, entertainment and non-retail experiences with the publication of a seasonal curated programme of events

Designate temporary street performance areas in the city centre. Furthermore, build on the success of the Limerick Street Art Trail by incorporating interactive art installations

Impelment pedestrian zones; green areas; on-street dining infrastructure; disability access; child-friendly amenities; Intelligent street furniture that caters for the needs of all demographics

Re-design of public outdoor spaces for cultural events / performances

Opportunity to pedestrianise parts of the city and increase outdoor seating areas

Improve liveability of the inner city which will attract a younger demographic

Differentiate from Shopping
Centre Experience

Future Limerick Report Background

In 2021, Limerick Chamber dedicated considerable resources to develop the Future Development of Limerick City Report (FLR) in collaboration with Indecon Economic Consultants. This initiative was driven by concerns from the Chamber and its members about the ongoing decline of Limerick's city centre. The report offered an independent evaluation of Limerick City's performance and provided recommendations.

Amid the Covid crisis, the report served as a benchmark assessment comparing the performance of Limerick city to other Irish cities. Drawing on international best practices, it highlights several measures to promote the city's sustainable future development.

In 2022, Limerick Chamber introduced the Strategic Development Pipeline (SDP), a major recommendation from the FLR. This initiative highlights an estimated €6 billion in capital investment for the region while also aiming to increase accountability in delivering public projects.

The research undertaken by Indecon provided, and continues to provide, an overview of Limerick's performance compared to other major Irish cities and European cities, highlighting several important findings. It draws on a new survey with responses from over 400 participants, including business owners, employees, and others, showcasing Limerick's key strengths and the main concerns of its community. The analysis incorporates models and approaches from other countries to achieve sustainable city development. Additionally, new econometric modeling was conducted to assess the impact of skill enhancement on supporting sustainable growth.

This pioneering report by Limerick Chamber provided evidence-based insights for national and regional policy. These efforts aim to position Limerick as an economic powerhouse for the region. Moreover, the report's findings will help frame key discussions about the future of Limerick City.

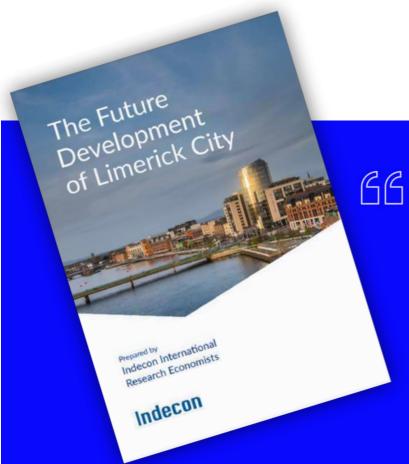
To guide Limerick's sustainable development, the report draws on international models used in other countries. These practices focus on creating vibrant, economically resilient cities, and their application to Limerick aims to ensure balanced growth and long-term sustainability.

A major aspect of the report is its focus on skill enhancement. Using econometric modelling, the research assesses the implications of improving the skills base in Limerick to support economic growth. This emphasis on education and workforce development is seen as essential for driving innovation and attracting investment. However, it continues by highlighting that creating an attractive city centre core by improving public realm as a key aspect for attracting such skilled workers and ultimately driving retention and attraction.

The Future Development of Limerick City report by Indecon and Limerick Chamber not only sets out an ambitious vision for Limerick's economic growth but also emphasises the critical importance of public spaces and the public realm in driving the city's sustainable development. A vibrant and well-designed public realm is essential for making Limerick an attractive place to live, work, and visit, as well as for fostering community engagement and improving quality of life.

The report highlights that public spaces, including parks, streets, squares, and waterfront areas, play a central role in urban life. The report highlights the need to invest in these spaces to create a more livable and vibrant city. High-quality public spaces can enhance social cohesion, support cultural activities, and improve health and well-being, making them a crucial element of the city's long-term strategy.

Limerick's public realm is seen as an underutilised asset with great potential for revitalisation. The report calls for a holistic approach to urban design, integrating green spaces, pedestrian-friendly areas, and improved infrastructure to create a more inclusive and accessible city. This approach aligns with international best practices, where cities that invest in enhancing their public spaces have experienced significant benefits in terms of economic vitality, tourism, and overall urban appeal.



These actionable items are informed by the research and analysis undertaken and by our examination of international models of sustainable development.

Limerick Chamber's City Centre Report Key Findings

Census Data

Survey Results

7% of the City Centre Own Their
Home

10% Unemployment Rate in the City Centre

25% of the Population Travel to Work, School, College or Childcare on Foot 16% of the Population Travel to Work, School, College or Childcare by Car 51% of respondents believe that plans for the city centre are not ambitious enough

76% of survey respondents believe there are not enough trees, greenspaces and biodiversity in the city centre 59% of people think the cost of parking is too high (includes private car parks)

Top reasons people would like to live in the city centre: Greater Access to Amenities and Atmosphere (91%)

Top 3 items that would encourage people to visit:

1) Garda Presence
2) Non-alcoholic Attractions
3) Improved Public Relam

37% of survey respondents shop in person less than pre pandemic

Combining both Census and survey data allowed Limerick Chamber to formulate our evidence-based strategy for the city centre, and how we see value being added to the city centre to drive sustainable and strategic growth over time.

City Centre Report Background

In March of 2023, Limerick Chamber launched the Better Regions Initiative (BRI), a series of independent reports focused on revitalising the city centre. The BRI seeks to provide real-time analysis of the city centre, offering evidence-based recommendations for improvement, primarily informed by member organisations and citizen feedback. This independent research has culminated in the Limerick City Centre Report (published November 2023), which outlines findings and recommendations that, if implemented, will significantly accelerate the city centre's regeneration. The Limerick City Centre Report is the most comprehensive economic study undertaken for the city centre. The release of Census data provided an ideal opportunity to delve deeper into economic trends shaping Limerick. Additionally, we conducted a comprehensive survey that attracted nearly 500 respondents.

City Centre Report High Level Findings

Our research revealed that while some aspects of Limerick's city centre are functioning well, others need improvement. Limerick Chamber strongly supports developing the city centre as a place not just for business but also for living, working, and education—where people can spend their entire lives. However, this vision of a vibrant city centre with medieval and Georgian quarters along the Shannon River is far from the current reality.

Based on extensive research, the City Centre Report identified key areas for improvement. These include the need for more housing, with a focus on private ownership and affordable rentals, as well as better options for families and the elderly to live in the city centre. The ideal location for housing is within the Opera Centre and Cleeves Quarter. Safety and security were also highlighted as major concerns, with many expressing a desire for a safer and more pleasant environment for residents and visitors.

As part of the AQFP, we see Sarsfield House as a key player in bringing forward residential accommodation near the waterfront. Ultimately, from our survey, the reason people chose to live in the city centre is because of convenience, access to amenities, and recreational offering. When it comes to people not living in the city centre, (75%) most often visit the city centre during commercial retail hours, 9 am to 5 pm i.e. there is a lack of an all-day footfall or all-day economy. Concerningly, for shoppers, habits have changed since the pandemic with 36% shopping in person less.

When asked about the top things that work well in the city centre, the top 4 thematic areas include hospitality (bars & restaurants), appearing in 28% of responses, followed by outdoor amenities, appearing in 16% of responses, while the Milk Market and pedestrianized streets / outdoor dining are the 3rd and 4th most observed thing people like about the city centre appearing in 11% of responses respectively.

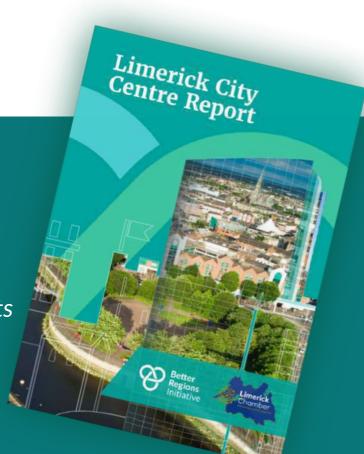
When asked about the areas that the city centre can improve to encourage respondents to visit the city centre more often, a more attractive and safer environment was the most frequent answer appearing in 27% of responses, more leisure and recreational attractions with a non-alcohol focus were the second most frequent answer – appearing in 23% of responses. The third highest option was improved public realm, i.e. cleanliness, green areas, etc.

World Class Waterfront Area Specific Recommendations

As part of the evidenced based recommendations in the Limerick Chamber City Centre Report. Limerick Chamber provided two recommendations focusing on the World Class Waterfront:

R46: Review the scope of the geographical area covered in the existing "world-class waterfront" works programme to be expanded to the docklands.

R47: Expand the existing footprint of Arthur's Quay Park to increase green spaces and bio-diversity in the city centre.



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there is significant scope to expand Arthur's Quay Park to incorporate more green space and biodiversity. This is one of the primary asks of survey respondents and would allow for a large city centre riverside park

Concerns & Challenges

Redevelopment of Sarsfield House

It is disheartening to see that both options 2 and 3, provide no strategy for the retention and development of Sarsfield House. The majority of Limerick Chamber survey respondents advocate for the retention of Sarsfield House as a mixed use development with a large emphasis on worker friendly private and affordable accommodation.

While most agree that the building is not aesthetically pleasing, remediation or re-development works should be undertaken to the outside of the building to make it more visually pleasing. Furthermore, it was also highlighted as a potential opportunity to downscale Sarsfield House providing more public space and a better vista along the Shannon while also providing high quality residential options for workers.

It is the view of Limerick Chamber that many of the objectives for Arthur's Quay outlined under the Local Development Plan (LDP) AQ 01 can be accommodated within the confines of the existing Sarsfield House structure and footprint. Those objectives being; facilitate creation of a mixed-use retail, residential, leisure and office development - this can be brought forward without any impact on the park or greenspace and losing no public amenity footprint.

The Limerick 2030 Economic and Spatial Plan also outlines the objective of "capturing this rich heritage, protecting and enhancing it" when speaking about the cities history.

Without a version of Sarsfield House, achieving the above will be extremely difficult.

Furthermore, the bottom floor, or indeed other floors, within the development can be used for commercial or retail development to compliment large emphasis on worker friendly housing provided on the upper floors.

The options plan also outlines that the Arthur's Quay Framework Plan will support the national ambition for Limerick to grow by 50% by 2040. It is impossible to see how the plan will help to achieve this without the retention and revitalisation of Sarsfield House into a mixed-use building.

If a strategic plan is not brought forward for Sarsfield House to provide residential accommodation, Limerick City will be hampered, while other developments in the city are being brought forward to provide retail and office space - there is no such drive for residential.

Limerick 2030 - An Economic and Spatial Plan for Limerick

The Limerick 2030 - An Economic and Spatial Plan for Limerick was published in June 2013. While much content is still relevant to this day, it is concerning, the much of the draft framework plan for Arthur's Quay relies on a document prepared when both Limerick and Ireland were drastically different places to both live and do business in.

As outlined in the plan's foreword "the plan is by design a flexible, dynamic framework capable of responding to changing circumstances..." - therefore, it should be clear that flexibility is built into the original plan to respond to the challenges and opportunities of the day (11 years later).

However, there are some key insights from the L2030 Plan that are relevant to the Arthur's Quay Framework Plan (AQFP) that are not obviously coming through in the AQFP. Those being:

- 1) Putting pedestrians first throughout the city centre
- 2) Remove as much extraneous car traffic from the city centre as possible
- 3) Reducing the impact of car traffic along the Quays
- 4) Create the conditions where Limerick City gains a reputation as a safe and easy place for pedestrians to use



Upon examining the Interim Review and Update of the Limerick 2030 Plan, completed by KPMG in 2022, there are core concerns where KPMG outline "requires uplift" - this is the lowest progress marker of the three progress markers outline in the report. The others being "progress clearly evident" and "some progress being made". The areas where KPMG outlined uplift being required are as follows.

- 1) Wider reinvigoration of the city centre from renovations, new development, increased activity, footfall
- 2) To create quality strategic gateways to the city centre, thereby making it a welcoming experience for visitors
- 3) To establish a unique tourism offer that takes full advantage of the city centre's special heritage and environmental characteristics

Pace of Work & Ambition

It is deeply concerning to Limerick Chamber that, despite the L2030 Spatial Plan highlighting the need for investment on the Waterfront and Arthur's Quay Park in 2013, it has taken 11 years to get to a high level plan for the area. More concerning is that in March 2021 Limerick City and County Council were successfully awarded €73.4 million under the Urban Regeneration Development Fund (URDF) for the "World Class Waterfront" plan and it has taken almost four years to publish a high level options report. If Limerick is to remain competitive, then a serious uptake is required in rolling out plans.

Also, there is huge concern regarding the scope of the AQFP. The URDF was awarded for:

- 1) Public realm works stretching along the quayside from the Docks along the central quays to Merchant's Quay, King John's Castle and George's Quay and returning along the north bank of the river Shannon 2) Proposed pedestrian bridges, one of which will cross the Shannon linking the City Centre with O'Callaghan Strand including the new development quarter at Cleeves and a smaller bridge which will span the Abbey River
- 3) Re-alignment of the public road at Arthur's Quay and Honan's Quay to facilitate a comprehensive redevelopment project at Arthur's Quay.

However, the current proposed high level plan only represents a fraction of the area covered by the funding. There needs to be a clear timeline and cohesive plan for the whole of the waterfront, and how it will all piece together.

Furthermore, the current AQFP is seen as unambitious, it is unclear where or how the €73.4 million is to be spent and invested for the betterment of the city centre.

Overreliance on Adjacent Developments

As part of the AQFP, it is the view of Limerick Chamber that too much emphasis has been put on adjacent developments, some public, some private, to increase the attractiveness of the public space and the waterfront. For example, it is public knowledge of the challenges the UL city campus is facing. Furthermore, despite the former Debenham's store receiving planning permission in October 2023 for retail and aparthotel space, no works appear to have commenced on site,

The focus of Limerick City and County Council should be on grounds they have direct control over, or can easily assume control. An over emphasis on other development could mean that the overall plan moves much slower (if at all) and is contingent on many unknown variables within other organisations.

This is a core concern of the Chamber as it will mean progress on state land will move much slower as a result and may not focus on the correct areas of development.



Concluding Remarks

Option 2 - With MORE AMIBITION

As outlined in the introduction, all three options are a serious lost opportunity for the city centre and suffer from a chronic lack of ambition in terms of what the waterfront could be.

If developed properly, the world-class waterfront has the potential to become the heart of the city centre, acting as a nucleus linking the medieval quarter with the retail and commercial areas of the newly renovated O'Connell Street/Georgian Quarter. To avoid becoming just an extension of the underutilised park, the space must include an expanded and more purposeful and functional public areas. The public realm should feature enhanced entertainment amenities, catering to families and the growing student population. Additionally, the waterfront should serve as a bridge, connecting our universities to the city centre.

As we outlined in the Limerick City Centre Report:

Unfortunately, most entertainment amenities are provided privately. However, one item Limerick stakeholders can do is provide space for these amenities. For example, Limerick has a relatively low population of under 18s. If we want to encourage more families to live in and visit the city centre then we need more entertainment amenities such as cinemas, bowling allies etc. This was also a key ask from the survey that we conducted. For now, it is important to continually raise these items when plans are being brought forward. It is also worth noting, that from our survey adults were also interested in having a greater availability of non-alcoholic related activities in the city centre.

This is a once in a life time opportunity to reimagine the city centre a create a space that is fit for the 21st century. Currently, there is no central point of focus in the city centre, the lack of a central plaza is pronounced throughout daily life, but particularly at key points of the year such as when welcoming the Limerick team home, outdoor concerts, Riverfest and Christmas villages. The World Class Waterfront and the reimagining of Arthur's Quay part is an obvious location for this. The waterfront area as depicted in the options is sprawling and not suitable for large congregations nor does it have a point of focus or indeed a unique selling point.

There is huge potential in the area to have covered sections which provides for use all year around. Limerick City has just two parks, if the use and size of the park is diminished, it signals a backwards approach to where the city plans on going. This requires an actual strategy for more usable public space - not more buildings in the area. However, to accompany the "new" world class waterfront the buildings should be a stand out also have a public utility and use.

Time and time again, the Milk Market is highlighted as an attraction to the city for people all over the Mid-West and beyond. We should be creating a space that compliments the likes of the Milk Market, not competes, but focuses on a similar approach of attracting people to the city centre with a unique value proposition and people centric approach.

Of course, Limerick Chamber is critically aware of the need for private and worker friendly affordable housing. We allocate significant resources to researching and lobbying in the area of worker focused housing. There needs to be a renewed focus on this type of residential development in both the Opera Centre and Cleeves Quarter. These public developments provide a unique opportunity to provide accommodation that is linked to the waterfront, furthermore they are the most advanced developments in the city centre and can ensure the timely delivery of homes.

Limerick Chamber believes all options as lack vision and ambition, however, the ethos and spirit is correct within option 2 and provides a very basic framework upon which to build ambition. Option 2 also closely aligns with the city centre report undertaken by Limerick Chamber. However, there needs to be far more ambition when moving option 2 forward.

The AQFP appears to have forgotten what the project is about in the first place, and this is the Waterfront and how we can boost its attractiveness through investment in public realm and expanding public space.

The AQFP also has forgotten that this space is about more than just one building or plot - it is about creating a totally unique value proposition in the city centre that can't easily be replicated in out of town shopping centres, or indeed in many other cities. However, rather than embracing this fact, the current plan has turned its back on it. We would encourage a total change of strategy going forward.

Unfortunately, this focus on public space and the river is not reflected in any of the options. Arthur's Quay Park needs a focal point, currently it is a poorly maintained amenity with little reason to visit there other than it being a park. However, with a focal point such as an amphitheatre or other public amenity with improved public space will drive footfall.

Limerick brands itself as a student city, and rightly so, but yet the plans, rather than acting as a central node between all universities and colleges, does not embrace this and doesn't offer anything to the student population - or indeed any other population.

Limerick prides itself as a place to do business, again rightly so, but the AQFP appears to have forgotten to think of employees in businesses that require amenities outside work to boost their liveability and indeed drive attraction and retention.

Limerick is not just competing with Dublin and Cork, we are competing on a international scale for investment in jobs. In Limerick Chamber, we know all too well, that global decision makers think of things like public realm and liveability when choosing a place to invest and do business in. The AQFP needs to be cognisant of this, and not slip into complacency where decision makers think liveability and public realm do not make a difference.

Throughout the year, Limerick struggles to find an appropriate location for outdoor events and gatherings, unfortunately it appears the O'Connell Street revitalisation has not provided this outlet. However, the waterfront and Arthur's Quay Park can, but only if we plan it correctly putting the right focus on what is one of the city's unique selling points.

Limerick City Centre should build upon its comparative advantages, the social and experiential elements for both the daytime and nighttime economy of Limerick City Centre. This would also involve building on the historic charm of the city, creating a unique experience. This would involve a better public realm offering. Limerick Chamber believes that the World Class Waterfront is the perfect space for this- its location can be the connector between all quarters of the city, but only if developed thoughtfully.

















