

## **Submission to Boundary Commission on proposed extension of Waterford City Boundary.**

The commission will have received many technical submissions from the affected councils in this case which will inform the general discussion and decision. I should like to take a slightly different approach.

**Background:** My paternal grandfather Thomas Griffin was born in Rathpatrick, Slieverue in Co Kilkenny in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. My paternal grandmother Ellen Jennings was born in Rathgormack in Co Waterford in the same period. As young people they both came to Waterford city to work. This would have been entirely natural as the city was the largest urban area in the south east at the time with rail and seaport links to every major city in Ireland and the UK. They married in the early 1900s and were housed in one of the new houses which had recently been built in Doyle Street, Waterford, by Waterford Corporation. They had nine children and extensive family links across Waterford city, county and south Kilkenny.

Their situation mirrored that of many hundreds of other young people at the time in that they had moved to a city in pursuit of work and to make a future. There is hardly a family in Waterford city at the present time which does not have similar links in to some of the surrounding counties. Waterford city is unique in that it has always been separate from its eponymous county and has been a county in its own right for centuries. Given the riverine nature of the south east and the use of the river system as boundaries it is interesting that one can work in Waterford city and yet easily live in any of the counties of the south east, Waterford, Wexford, Kilkenny, Tipperary and Carlow which at its nearest point near New Ross is only twenty miles removed from the city.

**History:** The Waterford city boundary in county Kilkenny has been altered before and maps to show the status quo ante are available to the commission. One of the most interesting things about the current proposal is the reaction of some of the politicians in south Kilkenny who live adjacent to Waterford city. Two names stand out, that of John Paul Phelan and Bobby Aylward, both of whom are TDs. Both have espoused the “not an inch” line and given their political milieu, any other reaction could hardly be expected. It is somewhat akin to the Nationalist and Unionist situation in Northern in that politicians on either side are sometimes afraid to lead or make any utterance which runs counter to the prevailing dispensation for fear of perceived electoral consequences.

Mr Phelan bears the name of the O’Faoláins, the Princes of the Decies. The very people who defended Waterford’s Reginald’s Tower against the Normans in 1170, and one of the most ancient names in this area, which is still to be found all across south Kilkenny and East Waterford in many forms, Phelan, Whelan, Whalen, Whelane etc. The Normans introduced the Power name (de le Poer, de Paor) to Waterford. It is now ubiquitous across the south east. One of the historic land holdings on the west side of Waterford city is at Butlerstown, where the eponymous Butler family now (synonymous with Kilkenny) had a large castle since the 13<sup>th</sup> century. The archaeological excavations which preceded the N25 Bypass and Second

River Crossing in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century clearly showed homogenous historic occupation across the whole stretch of the road from Kilmeaden to Slieverue. This would have been a time when the river system was viewed as the motorway system of the time and not as the impenetrable barrier it has come to be seen as. The coming of the Normans allowed the same rivers to be used by King John as a simple basis of administration although the presence of a Power Castle at Grannagh which remained in that families hands, who were the lords of county Waterford, until the late 14<sup>th</sup> century showed that the boundaries at the time were not really fixed. The subsequent decline of the county system meant that many county boundaries did not really exist until the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

**Political History:** Which brings me to Mr Robert (Bobby) Aylward, TD. The Aylward family were stewards and essentially customs watchers for the Plantagenet royalty and were given lands in Faithlegge, at the confluence of the Barrow and Suir, in county Waterford in 1171 to perform those functions for the king. They subsequently acquired extensive holdings at Aylwardstown in south Kilkenny, where they performed the same function, but retained their Waterford lands until dispossessed by Cromwell in 1650. Previous to that time the family had members elected as mayor of Waterford city. The family's interest in politics has existed along time.

It is unfortunate though that the current utterances by both Mr Phelan and Mr Aylward, which seem to me to reflect the nonsensical and relatively recent (in historic terms) idea that people in south Kilkenny are in some way ethnically or culturally different from the people of Waterford, gives little cognisance to their own family history. The essential point is that south Kilkenny is at present essentially rural and Waterford city is quintessentially urban. The frisson between both areas is reflected across all urban and rural development in Ireland and elsewhere. People who live on the fringes of cities, as in Ferrybank, do so because of the facilities, employment, economic and social intercourse and opportunities which are possible. At the same time there is a "fear" of urban life. This is an entirely natural phenomenon.

**GAA:** When ethnic or cultural differences are mentioned the shadow of the GAA always intervenes. No-one denies the hurling success of county Kilkenny and it is a thing to be celebrated, yet there is no evidence in Waterford city that I can see of any resistance to people maintaining allegiance to Kilkenny even if they are domiciled in Waterford. Flags and bunting celebrating Kilkenny can be seen during the summer in many parts of Waterford city and if one may continue the historical analogy, one may find many Phelans in the playing annals of county Kilkenny. Indeed the celebrated Richie Power bears a most historic Waterford name also. The spread of these family names, as well as those like Walsh and Butler, throughout Waterford and Kilkenny underline the reality of centuries of social and cultural interaction.

If the boundary commission decide that a boundary extension for Waterford is necessary, and my life's experience suggests no other course, then there is no reason why dual loyalty of hurlers cannot be easily facilitated. This has often been the case in Ferrybank where the church, which is in the city, was built by the Barron family of Belmont as a chapel of ease for themselves (Slieverue being the parish) and a growing Ferrybank population. Interestingly

the dedication to the Barron family in the Ferrybank church recites “Henry Winston Barron, of Belmont Park in the City of Waterford”.

**Planning:** I was for many years a committee member and secretary of Waterford An Taisce. During much of that nearly 40 year period, a convention emerged between Waterford City and the county councils of Waterford and Kilkenny that no retail development would take place in their operational areas on the fringes of Waterford city in order to preserve the primacy of the Waterford city centre retail product. That sadly vanished with the Celtic Tiger. The development of the Waterford Waste Water treatment plant at Gorteens facilitated all the development in the south Kilkenny area. It is common knowledge that the Glanbia plant at Belview was only developed because of easy access to water treatment at Gorteens. Investment by Kilkenny Co Co (KKCC) in the area and in its infrastructure has been minimal.

Any reading of the popular “Echoes from South Kilkenny” column in Waterford’s Munster Express newspaper will find many, many articles where councillors of KKCC are deeply unhappy with the level of support from their own council for the south Kilkenny area. Without investment by the Port of Waterford and by Waterford city council, nothing would have ever happened. It is instructive to note that KKCC never built a single house in the Ferrybank area for the simple reason that they always viewed the development of Ferrybank as adding to the growth of Waterford city. The empty Ferrybank shopping centre is testament to the predatory planning policies of KKCC. The shopping centre, which is empty at present, went ahead without being tested at Bord Pleanala. Previous applications for this shopping centre had been tested and refused by An Bord based on the fact, inter alia, that Ferrybank was part of the environs of Waterford city and a suburb of the fifth largest city in the state.

It is my understanding since then that there was a need, within the Retail Planning Guidelines, for retail facilities at district shopping level for Ferrybank and Waterford city council fully support that need. That need has not abated, but could easily have been met with a shopping centre like the Supervalu one on the Tramore Road in Waterford where convenience shopping plus small additional facilities are provided. It is also my understanding that the present Ferrybank shopping centre was essentially a “town” centre facility which depended for its future success on Ferrybank being considered as a separate town from Waterford city. It would have effectively substituted Ferrybank Town centre for Waterford city centre in retailing terms. The impact of the proposed large volume of comparison retailing which the centre would have contained, on Waterford city and indeed on New Ross and Carrick on Suir and probably Kilkenny itself, can only be imagined given its proposed huge catchment area. The example of the Crescent Shopping Centre in Limerick and its negative impact on the centre of that city give some idea of the possible consequences.

**Shipping:** The move of the Port of Waterford to Belview in 1990 is part of world-wide move where ships and shipping leave the traditional port city centres where they operated. The move to bigger ships and to non-tidal 24/7 access has driven this process. The Port of Waterford expended huge sums of money and much time and effort to drive this move. It is therefore deeply offensive to see the port facility signposted across south Kilkenny as

Belview Port. The international website and ship search engine Maritime Traffic.com does not list or recognise Belview Port. It recognises the Port of Waterford (code IE WAT). It is therefore counterproductive in terms of shipping traffic development, industrial development and international commerce to persist with the Belview name.

The huge opportunities for Waterford, Kilkenny and the wider south east in the international cruise market are compromised by this situation. How will Kilkenny promote cruise liner visits to the non-existent port of Belview? One can imagine the executives of KKCC “selling” the attractions of Belview to someone in Arizona or California who is subsequently unable to find any such port as Belview. Such an inability to even correctly signpost the location of the facility in order that it might be correctly picked up by internet search engines and by social media outlets is little short of unbelievable and destructive of the local economy. The port’s move to Belview was struck by tragedy in 1995 when two major container gantries at the port were destroyed in a storm. Failure, because of many legal challenges up to Supreme Court level, to dispose of portal land in the city of Waterford at the North Wharf, Cassin Wharf and at R&H Hall’s mills left the port in a deep financial crisis and unable to fully develop facilities at Belview for which it has full planning permission and which would have driven major progress for the port and for the region. It has begun to recover strongly but to reach its full potential it is essential that it is reunited with Waterford city if only for convenience and simplicity of planning purposes.

The CEO of the giant international pharmaceutical firm Sanofi, which owns the hugely successful Genzyme plant at Knockhouse in Waterford city where they have an investment approaching €600 million, has publicly commented on the fact that his company has easy access with good infrastructure to all the stakeholders in Waterford who are concerned with the industrial development of the area and the attraction of Foreign Direct Investment. It is counterintuitive to imagine the same Sanofi company executive arriving in Waterford Airport and being driven to Waterford Port and then to be told that planning would be dealt with by another authority some 50 km away, under a different development rationale. No future planning in and around the port can be undertaken without considering the impact on the city and its surrounds. Given the negative example set with retailing in Ferrybank one could foresee the problems that could emerge if the current situation is not rectified.

**Social Demography:** The social integration for community, health and social welfare purposes of south Kilkenny and Waterford will surely be part of technical submissions to the commission. It suffices to say that south Kilkenny is within the Waterford ambit for Health services as delivered from University Hospital Waterford (UHW), for Community Health services which are delivered for the area from HSE area HQ in Waterford, for Social and Community Welfare services from the Dept. of Social Protection from its divisional offices in Waterford. A large proportion of the population of south Kilkenny were born in UHW or in its predecessors at Waterford Regional Hospital and Waterford Maternity Hospital. Many will probably die in UHW. Many of the children of south Kilkenny receive secondary education in Waterford and very many attend third level studies at Waterford Institute of Technology.

The politically driven amalgamation of Waterford with Wexford to form the Waterford Wexford Education and Training Board (WWETB) meant that Waterford is amalgamated with a county (Wexford) to which it has no direct access except by travelling through the Carlow Kilkenny ETB area. The upshot of this nonsensical arrangement is that the Abbey Community College in Ferrybank, whose entrance gateway is in Waterford city, and from the steps of whose main building the offices of Waterford City ETB offices at The Mall in Waterford were visible, is administered from Kilkenny 30 miles away. The administrative cost and nonsense involved in such a situation can only be imagined. It need hardly be said that very many people from south Kilkenny work in Waterford. Should verification of that statement be needed then a trip to the Grannagh roundabout at the foot of the M9 and then to the Waterford railway station roundabout at the Sally park dual carriageway any morning between 7.30 am and 9.30 am will provide ample proof.

Commuting to work in the nearest city is a natural function of every city and community in the developed world. The ability of the host city to grow and attract employment and services should be among the prime interests of those in its immediate hinterland to ensure access to facilities of all kind and to employment. While many organisations, such as the Hospice movement, across south Kilkenny carry out wonderful fund raising for facilities in Waterford city, unfortunately access to Waterford through county Kilkenny was awful for many decades. The situation has changed dramatically since the M9 was opened in 2010. It is the stuff of anecdote and may be apocryphal that a decision was taken at senior management level of KKCC circa 1970 to accord zero priority to roads in county Kilkenny which led to Waterford city. The impact of such a policy, which seemed visible in real terms, was such that road access to Waterford from Dublin via the old N9 was the terrible. Stories are legion of IDA executives bringing FDI investors to Waterford city via the N9 only to have then return to Dublin somewhere around Gowran such was the negative impact of the old road.

**Regional policy:** The south east region has over 500,000 inhabitants. It is among the best situated regions in the state with good land, a good climate and good location. Yet it has always failed to achieve its full economic potential. There are many reasons why this is so but chief among them is the inability of Waterford city to act and be supported by other counties in the region, as a regional centre. Interurban rivalry in the south east is intense and spurred by local politics. The closeness of the city boundary in Ferrybank is a visible testament to the inability of local government to recognise the realities of 21<sup>st</sup> century life, where all facilities cannot be retained and developed within small units such as Irish counties. The constant difficulties with smaller hospitals in Ireland highlight this situation and many of these facilities and the administration that surrounds them are a hangover from mid 19<sup>th</sup> century decisions which are simply unworkable in the present day. University Hospital Waterford with some 110 consultants is the biggest such facility in the south east and is one of eight national cancer services. Public hospitals in Wexford, Clonmel and Kilkenny all have approx 27 consultants. It is matter of public record across the south east that services from the cancer centre at UHW have led to better services and increased survival rates in the region.

Too often, the positive outcome from sensible administration, are lost in a plethora of county council politics. The 2015 decision of the Industrial Development Authority (IDA) to

reappoint a regional manager to Waterford for the south east underlines the necessity to take a focussed regional approach to such things. Already several major new industries such as Nypro and West Pharma have located in Waterford and this will surely benefit the wider region as well as south Kilkenny. A coherent planning regime under one council for Waterford city and its environs north and south of the Suir would surely be highly advantageous in job creation terms.

**General:** The problem for Waterford city and its boundary in Ferrybank is that the issue is driven by interurban rivalry. People in the south Kilkenny area adjacent to Waterford city must vote for councillors who are presented with county development plans whose policy aim naturally suggests the primacy of Kilkenny. It is this dichotomy that is at the heart of the problems. County Development Plans tend to see the county unit as existing like an island, separate from its surroundings. The reality is that Waterford, which has been the largest urban area in the south east for 1000 years, is literally partly in county Kilkenny. People in Kilkenny naturally see their town as important and as a defensive strategy have used policy in Ferrybank and across south Kilkenny, as a proxy against the future development of Waterford. Some would say they see their town, attractive tourist destination that it is, as replacing Waterford city as the largest urban centre in the region. A boundary extension would, on that basis, reduce Kilkenny and increase Waterford and is therefore something to be resisted.

The question of rateable income is a red herring as suitable phasing of rate losses to county Kilkenny allied to suitable payments for rates lost could easily and effectively be put in place. Such a repayment system was put in place in 1980 when Waterford County ceded land on the west of Waterford city to the city council. However if rational policies and good public administration are to be developed then something must be done in Ferrybank. The boundary is simply too close and too tight. It was this very tightness that underlined the minister's decision to appoint the Boundary Commission. The option of removing Ferrybank entirely from Waterford is simply a non-runner and would rightly be seen as a politically inspired move to further reduce the impact of Ireland's fifth largest city.

**Closing statement:** A great period of regional development for Waterford and the south east took place in the 18<sup>th</sup> century when the city and port of Waterford were deeply involved with the Newfoundland fishery trade. At that time a homogenous community existed along the river network of Suir, Nore and Barrow all dedicated to economic growth and prosperity. At that time people spoke of the area north of the Walsh Mountains, which is that line of high ground running from New Ross transversely across county Kilkenny to Carrick on Suir in County Tipperary, as being Kilkenny while the banks of the river and area round the harbour were "Waterford". If the truth be told, then there are many in Wexford who regard New Ross as "Waterford" and many in Tipperary who regard Carrick on Suir as "Waterford". It is hardly stretching matters to suggest that the reality for Kilkenny is that there are many people in that county town who regard Ferrybank and the surrounds as Waterford despite what is said in public.

I cannot believe that there is any sensible councillor or executive in Kilkenny county council who privately believes that the present situation is logical or truly workable going forward or indeed that the status quo should be allowed to remain. Regardless of the smoke and heat and negative political comment the commission and its work may engender in parts of county Kilkenny where descriptions of Waterford as Nazi Germany are sadly to be heard from a vociferous minority, I believe that there is an understanding among politicians and among many ordinary people that Waterford city needs to be helped and that something must be done with the boundary to ease local tensions and provide a long term solution to the friction that surrounds the issue. The absolute truth is that without Waterford, Ferrybank would never have existed. Without Waterford the port would not have developed. Friction around the boundary issue helps no-one and is destructive to regional policy. A strong Waterford, within sensible urban boundaries, will help regenerate a strong south east region.

Given the present situation and closeness of the urban/county boundary, I do not think, after an examination of the facts, that the boundary commission will do anything other than propose an extension of Waterford city boundary into south Kilkenny. Such a move may cause a political reaction but I am sure that sense will prevail and any negative reactions will subside over time as better public administration develops across the area. The N25 Waterford City Northern By-Pass, from Slieverue to Grannagh, suggests itself as a clear physical boundary for the northern area of Waterford city with County Kilkenny. It should be set in stone by the commission. I look forward to seeing and reading its proposals.