

Quality Assurance – In Depth Check

Section A: Introduction

This introductory section details the headline information on the programme or project in question.

Programme or Project Information	
Name	Construction of Abbey Quarter Urban Street and Park, Kilkenny City
Detail	Capital Investment Project to construct Abbey Quarter Urban Street and Park, Kilkenny City
Responsible Body	Kilkenny County Council
Current Status	Expenditure being incurred
Start Date	November 2017
End Date	Expected completion date Q1 2025
Overall Cost	€16.3 million

Project Description

The Abbey Quarter Site comprises of circa 20 acres. This Strategic City Centre Site was purchased by Kilkenny County Council in 2012 following the decision by Diageo to move their operations to Dublin. Kilkenny County Council developed a Masterplan and Urban Design Framework for the Abbey Quarter that included extensive public consultation with local people and comprehensive surveys to inform the appropriate treatment of the rich heritage and archaeological assets on the site.

With St Francis Abbey at its core, this regeneration project aims to create an attractive, well-designed urban quarter with a mix of uses. These include commercial, residential, enterprise development, recreational and community.

Kilkenny County Council entered into a 50:50 partnership with the National Treasury Management Agency (NTMA) and established Kilkenny Abbey Quarter Development Limited (KAQDL) to develop the building plots. KAQDL has responsibility for the commercial development of the plots, including the buildings on the Abbey Quarter. These buildings will include a mix of offices, residential, education and retail use and will be delivered on a commercial basis. Kilkenny County Council is responsible for the delivery of the significant public realm, community and cultural infrastructure in the Abbey Quarter and the public library in the Mayfair Building. The OPW has responsibility for St Francis Abbey, a national monument which has been closed off to the public for decades.

The Government through the Urban Regeneration and Development Fund (URDF) has and is part-funding a number of the public realm projects through two URDF funding rounds. The URDF aims to deliver more compact and sustainable development, as envisaged under Project Ireland 2040.

The site will be developed in phases. Phase 1 is almost complete, comprising of the former Brewhouse Building which is circa 5,000 square meters of office space (now occupied). The Public Realm aspect completed or underway includes the following, Riverside Linear Park and Skate Park, upgrade of Horse Barrack Lane, restoration of Mayfair as the new City Library and associated public realm, restoration of Tea Houses, proposed restoration of former squash court for cultural/arts use, extension of Medieval Mile to Parliament Street, refurbishment of Vicar Street and Greensbridge Street, off street connectivity upgrade works, lighting up Medieval Mile and improvements to City Demarcation and Gateways.

In 2018 a Multi-Disciplinary team were appointed for the development of an Urban Street through the Abbey Quarter site. It was intended at the time that the street would be advanced before the Urban Park project as it was expected that the archaeological test excavations in the area of St Francis Abbey would lead to significant delays to the advancement of the park project. With the completion of the excavations in the area of the Abbey it was found that the below ground archaeology was consistent with the cartographic and other written records for the area. Accordingly, in agreement with the National Monuments Service it was determined that more detailed excavations in the area were not required and it was appropriate to progress with the development of the proposal park as provided for in the Abbey Quarter Masterplan.

The Abbey Quarter Phase 2 will deliver 4 projects. One of the projects is a new Urban Street and Park which is a critical piece of infrastructure that will improve access, help define and open the building plots for development and enhance the attractiveness and 'live-ability' of the site. The Urban Street will extend some 500 meters linking Wolfe Tone Street to Bateman Quay and will be for priority use by pedestrians and cyclists. The Urban Park and Public Plaza will open up access to and allow for the public enjoyment of the St Francis Abbey, a national monument which has been

closed off to the public for decades. The Urban Street and Park project in the Abbey Quarter will be assessed in this In Depth Check to ensure its compliance with the Public Spending Code.

One planning application was made for the combined development of the Urban Street and Park and the Part 10 planning application for the development of the Urban Street and Park was approved by An Bord Pleanála in February 2021.

At the time of this In Depth Check the project is expected to go to tender for construction within the next month.

Section B - Step 1: Logic Model Mapping

As part of this In-Depth Check, Kilkenny County Council's Internal Audit Unit have completed a Programme Logic Model (PLM) for the Abbey Quarter Urban Street and Park Project, Kilkenny City. A PLM is a standard evaluation tool and further information on their nature is available in the [Public Spending Code](#).

Objectives	Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Outcomes
Construction of an Urban Street and Park within a strategic site in the Abbey Quarter in Kilkenny City.	A budget of €16.3 million.	<p>Kilkenny County Council is acting as Project Manager for the duration of the project.</p> <p>Appointed a Multi - Disciplinary Design Team. Progress the project through the design to planning stage.</p> <p>Planning Permission for the project was received from An Bord Pleanála in February 2021.</p>	The development of an Urban Street and Park in the Abbey Quarter site.	An area that will fit in seamlessly, to compliment the Medieval City as an inclusive place for an intergenerational community to work, live, visit and play, with St. Francis Abbey at its core.
To ensure value for money is achieved.	Prepare funding applications and reports as required for Department approval.	A Preliminary Business Case, & Multi Criteria Analysis (MCA) was prepared and submitted to the Department for URDF funding	Ensure stringent financial management of the project.	The project is to provide a new Urban Street and Park within a Strategic site in Kilkenny City. This project must be executed satisfactorily,

		approval. Monitoring the project spend.		within budget to the required standard and on time.
To provide a new amenity area that will transform the City Centre Brownfield site.	Assessment of the specific need and best use of the site in the Abbey Quarter.	Kilkenny County Council developed a Masterplan and Urban Design Framework for the Abbey Quarter which included extensive consultation with all stakeholders.	The project is aligned with the current Kilkenny County Council Development Plan, the National Planning Framework and the Regional Planning Objectives (RPOs) of the Southern Region's Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES).	An attractive area where people can meet and gather. An amenity area to play and exercise in. A place where events can be organised such as exhibitions and markets.
To provide an Urban Street which will have pedestrian and cyclist priority enhancing the accessibility to the Abbey Quarter. The completion of the new Urban Street will enable delivery of further building plots for up to 150 Residential Units, Hotel, Enterprise Hub, Educational and additional Commercial Units.	As part of the business case for URDF Funding Kilkenny County Council assessed all project options before progressing Phase 2.	Kilkenny County Council completed an MCA for Phase 2 of the development. The MCA established preferences between projects by reference to an explicit set of criteria.	The preferred option is in accordance with the National Strategic Outcomes (NSOs) under the National Planning Framework and the Regional Planning Objectives (RPOs) of the Southern Region's Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES).	Lever further commercial development on the Abbey Quarter, that in turn will attract investment, jobs and people. Creation of an attractive, liveable, well designed high quality Urban Quarter. Foster enterprise and innovation and attract investment and new businesses.

Description of Programme Logic Model

Objectives:

The objective of the project is to construct a new Urban Street and Park in the Strategic Abbey Quarter site. The Abbey Quarter Phase 2 Advancement Project consists of 4 sub-projects. The four sub-projects will be fully completed by the end of October 2024. This project will create a more vibrant and inviting public space which will greatly enhance the overall quality of Kilkenny City Centre. The new Urban Street and Park will act as a catalyst to stimulate further

private sector development.

Inputs:

The primary input to the programme is the capital funding of €16.3 million of which 75% will be provided for through the Urban Regeneration and Development Fund (URDF) from the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage. The remaining 25% funding will be provided by Kilkenny County Council and this has been provided for in the latest 3-year Capital Programme approved by the Council in 2021.

Activities:

There were a number of key activities carried out to date on the project. These include purchase of lands, appointment of a project manager, setting up a steering committee to oversee the delivery of the project and funding requests which included a Preliminary Business Case. A Multi Criteria Analysis was prepared and included a high level risk assessment, strategic rationale, detailed design brief, financial and economic appraisal. A Multi-Disciplinary Design Team was procured to progress the project through design to planning stage. Kilkenny County Council liaised with the URDF Unit in the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage at the key stages during the project lifecycle. Approval has been received from the Department to proceed to tender stage.

Outputs:

Having carried out the identified activities using the inputs, the outputs of the project are for the provision of a new Urban Street and Park in the strategic Abbey Quarter site in Kilkenny City.

Outcomes:

The envisaged outcomes of the project will be the provision of a new Urban Street and Park. The project includes a redevelopment of a large brownfield site. It will provide easy access and a strong sense of place, creation of an attractive, liveable well designed high-quality Urban Quarter. The project will have significant economic benefits. It will be an area for job creation, it will foster enterprise and innovation and lever private sector investment. The project will provide pedestrian and cycle priority linkage to the heart of the City Centre and increase the number of people cycling and walking. Cultural benefits will include opening up the area around St Francis Abbey for enjoyment by locals and visitors alike. There will be an increased provision of community and cultural facilities.

Section B - Step 2: Summary Timeline of Project/Programme

The following section tracks the Urban Street and Park project in the Abbey Quarter, Kilkenny City from inception in terms of major project milestones:



2012	Kilkenny County Council purchased the strategic City Centre site from Diageo in 2012 following the decision by Diageo to move their operations to Dublin
2015	Kilkenny County Council developed a Masterplan and Urban Design Framework for the new Abbey Quarter site
2016	Funding of €6.1m was secured under URDF Call 1 for Phase 1 of the project. Additional funding was received from the Libraries Capital Programme to deliver a new Library on the site. The works in Phase 1 are either complete or well underway with the new Library due to open in September 2023
2018	Appointment of Multi-Disciplinary Design Team for the development of the Urban Street in Phase 2
2019	Archaeological Excavations on site
2019	Extension of scope for Multi-Disciplinary Design Team to include the design to planning for the Urban Park
2020	Planning Application submitted to An Bord Pleanála for the project
2020	Application for URDF Call 2 2020
2021	Preliminary Approval Letter from Department for URDF Funding of €10m
2021	An Bord Pleanála Part 10 Approval for the project with conditions
2021	Termination of Design Team contract for the development of the Urban Street through the Abbey Quarter, due to the extension of the scope of required services to include the Urban Park Project
2021	Retender for Design Team services to include the development of the Urban Park with the Urban Street Project through detailed design, tender, construction and handover
2021	Appointment of Multi-Disciplinary Design Team for the detailed Design and Construction of the Urban Street & Park in the Abbey Quarter
2022	Preliminary Business Case (PBC) & MCA submitted by Kilkenny County Council
2022	In June 2022, an updated PBC was submitted to the Department

- 2022 Letter of Approval in principle to proceed to Design, Planning & Procurement Stage and a revised Appendix 1 received in the amount of €12.2m
- 2022 Refined PBC & MCA submitted to Department as part of Final Business Case

Section B - Step 3: Analysis of Key Documents

The following section reviews the key documentation relating to appraisal, analysis and evaluation for the Urban Street and Park project in the Abbey Quarter, Kilkenny City.

Project/Programme Key Documents	
Title	Details
National Development Plan 2018-2027 (Project Ireland 2040)	The National Development Plan sets out the configuration for public capital investment over the next 10 years
Regional Spatial & Economic Strategy for the Southern Region	Framework through which the National Planning Framework's vision will be delivered in the region
Abbey Quarter Masterplan & Urban Design Framework	Masterplan for the development of the Abbey Quarter site
Kilkenny City & Environs Development Plan 2014-2020	It is the main public statement of planning policies for the development of Kilkenny City & Environs
CE Order appointing Multi-Disciplinary Design Team	Tender Assessment Report and order from CE appointing successful Design Team
CE Order extending the scope of the Multi-Disciplinary Design Team	Recommendation to extend the scope of services of the Design Team
Application Form for URDF Call 2 2020	Proposal for funding for URDF Call 2
Preliminary Approval Letter from Department	Funding approved for €10m
Planning Approval	Part 10 Approval from An Bord Pleanála
CE Order terminating Design Team Contract	Terminating the Design Team Contract

CE Order appointing Design Team	Appointment of Design Team
Preliminary Business Case & MCA	Preliminary Business Case & MCA submitted to the Department
Revised Preliminary Business Case	Additional PBC with additional details to support the application
Department Approval Letter	Approval in principle to move to the next stage in the process
Further Refined Business Case	Refined Business Case
Department Letter of Approval	Approval to prepare final tender documents and proceed to tender in the amount of €12.2m

Key Document 1: National Development Plan 2018-2027 (Project Ireland 2040)

The National Development Plan contains ten National Strategic Outcomes (NSOs) representing the overarching priorities which the National Planning Framework (NPF) is designed to achieve. The mission and purpose of the NDP is to set out the new configuration for public capital investment over the next ten years to secure the realisation of each of the NSO's.

Key Document 2: Regional Spatial & Economic Strategy for the Southern Region

The Southern Regional Assembly's Regional Spatial & Economic Strategy (RSES) provides the framework through which the NPF's vision and the related Government policies and objectives will be delivered in the region.

Key Document 3: Abbey Quarter Masterplan & Urban Design Framework

Kilkenny County Council developed a Masterplan & Urban Design Framework for the Abbey Quarter which included extensive public consultation to inform the appropriate treatment of the rich heritage and archaeological assets on the site.

Key Document 4: Kilkenny City & Environs Development Plan 2014-2020

This Development Plan emphasises sustainable economic development of the City into the future while seeking to and balance the needs for redevelopment, expansion and growth in the environs with strong policies for the conservation and protection of the natural and built environment and ensuring a good quality life for its inhabitant.

Key Document 5: CE Order appointing Multi-Disciplinary Design Team

Appointment of a Multi-Disciplinary Design Team for the development of an Urban Street and associated services through the Abbey Quarter site.

Key Document 6: CE Order extending the scope of the Multi-Disciplinary Design Team

CE Order extending the scope of services for the Multi-Disciplinary Design Team to include the design to planning stage for the Urban Park in addition to the Urban Street.

Key Document 7: Application Form for URDF Call 2 2020

An Application by Kilkenny County Council for funding through the URDF Fund Call 2 2020.

Key Document 8: Preliminary Approval Letter from Department

Preliminary approval from the Department for the Urban Street & Park Project in the amount of €10m.

Key Document 9: Planning Approval

An Bord Pleanála Part 10 Approval for the project with conditions.

Key Document 10: CE Order terminating Design Team Contract

Termination of Design Team Contract due to the extension of the scope of required services to include the Urban Park Project. The termination of the contract was required to comply with procurement requirements and a retender for Design Team to include the development of the Urban Park with the Street project through detailed design, tender, construction and handover.

Key Document 11: CE Order appointing Design Team

Appointment of Multi-Disciplinary Design Team for the detailed design and construction of the Urban Park & Street in the Abbey Quarter.

Key Document 12: Preliminary Business Case & MCA

The Preliminary Business Case & MCA was submitted to the Department, it identified the preferred option for the project, the associated risks and set out a proposed implementation strategy for the investment proposal.

Key Document 12: Revised Preliminary Business Case

Additional information was included in the revised Preliminary Business Case submitted to further progress the funding application.

Key Document 13: Department Approval Letter

Departmental approval to proceed to Design, Planning & Procurement Strategy as part of the Final Business Case Stage.

Key Document 14: Further refined Business Case

Kilkenny County Council submitted a revised Business Case for the advancement of the project. The Business Case further tests and refines the underlying assumptions for the preferred option.

Key Document 15: Department Letter of Approval

Approval from the Department to proceed to prepare final tender documents and proceed to tender in the amount of €12.2m.

Section B - Step 4: Data Audit

The following section details the data audit that was carried out for the Abbey Quarter Urban Street and Park Project in Kilkenny City. It evaluates whether appropriate data is available for the future evaluation of the project.

Data Required	Use	Availability
Funding Application to the Department	Request to the Department of Housing, Local Government & Heritage for approval in principle	Yes
Preliminary Business Case & MCA	Further support the application for funding	Yes
Refined Final Business Case	Developed and refined the assumptions of the application	Yes
Report on tenders for Design Team	Assess procurement process	Yes
Approval from An Bord Pleanála	Confirmation of approval to construct project	Yes
CE Orders	Ordering the appointment of Design Team & Contractor	Yes
Details of expenditure on project	Financial monitoring and compliance with budget	Yes

Data Availability and Proposed Next Steps

The necessary data is available on file to evaluate this project. The objective of the project is to construct a new Urban Street and Park in the Strategic Abbey Quarter site. The documents and reports that were undertaken as part of the tender process to date for this project are available. The financial information is available from Agresso (Financial Management System).

Substantial work has been undertaken to complete the Preliminary Business Case, Final Business Case and the Multi-Criteria Analysis to support the application for funding for the project. The analysis of the strategic rationale for the proposed project is clearly defined. A detailed design brief has been provided together with key financial details for the project. The Risk Register provides an analysis of the primary risks involved in delivering the project and also includes actions to mitigate the risk. The next stage of the process is the preparation of tender documents to procure a main contractor, which constitutes passing through Decision Gate 2 in the project lifecycle.

Section B - Step 5: Key Evaluation Questions

The following section looks at the key evaluation questions for the Abbey Quarter Urban Street and Park Project, Kilkenny City based on the findings from the previous sections of this report.

Does the delivery of the project/programme comply with the standards set out in the Public Spending Code? (Appraisal Stage, Implementation Stage and Post-Implementation Stage)

Kilkenny County Council are currently preparing tender documents to procure and appoint a main contractor. Work to date on the appraisal stage of the project complies with the broad principles of the Public Spending Code.

Kilkenny County Council received approval from the Approving Authority to proceed to Preliminary Business Case development at Decision Gate 0. Following the development of the Preliminary Business Case for the project including conducting appropriate financial, economic and sensitivity appraisal and submitting it to the Approving Authority they received Approval in Principle at Decision Gate 1, which granted approval to move into Final Business Case Stage.

The full requirements for Design, Planning & Procurement Strategy as part of the Final Business Case Stage are set out in Section 5 of the Public Spending Code. A refined Business Case was submitted to the Department and approval to proceed to prepare final tender documents and proceed to tender was received, which is Decision Gate 2.

Is the necessary data and information available such that the project/programme can be subjected to a full evaluation at a later date?

The necessary data is on file including but not limited to the following to allow for a full evaluation;

- Funding Applications and Department Approval Letters
- Tender file and Tender Assessment Reports
- CE orders appointing Design Team
- An Bord Pleanála Approval
- Financial Expenditure on Agresso - financial management system
- Relevant reports

What improvements are recommended such that future processes and management are enhanced?

The Department has confirmed that it is satisfied that Kilkenny County Council's Preliminary Business Case submitted in support of its Abbey Quarter Phase 2 Advancement proposal meets the appropriate obligations of the Public Spending Code and that continued support under the URDF funded capital programme is justified.

It should be noted that URDF funding is limited and that the Department as the Approving Authority must be satisfied that URDF funding is applied to projects that are well managed and represent good value for money. Therefore, it is imperative that Kilkenny County Council continue with prudent management and monitoring of the project going forward.

Section: In-Depth Check Summary

The following section presents a summary of the findings of this In-Depth Check on the Abbey Quarter Urban Street and Park Project, Kilkenny City.

Summary of In-Depth Check

Overall, I find this project complies with the broad principles of the Public Spending Code. Currently the project has passed through Decision Gate 2 in the project lifecycle and has approval to proceed to the development of a Final Business Case for submission to the Department as part of the approval process for Decision Gate 3. The required data is available in the files in an orderly manner which will allow for evaluation at a later date if required.

When the project is finished a Project Completion Report should be completed to assess if the project was delivered in line with its intended scope and budget and in compliance with the Public Spending Code. This review stage is critical for identifying lessons learned and driving the process of continuous improvement.

The Ex Post Evaluation Stage is the last stage of the project lifecycle and is critical for identifying lessons learned and driving the process of continuous improvement in how public bodies manage public investment, particularly the identification, appraisal and development of capital projects.