

Mr. Michael Noonan, T.D.,
Acting Minister for Finance,
Department of Finance,
Merrion Street,
Dublin 2.

29th March, 2016.

RE: Sale of the Royal Victoria Dockyard, Passage West, Co. Cork.

Dear Minister,

Please find enclosed a copy of a letter the elected members of the Ballincollig-Carrigaline Municipal District of Cork County Council have sent to Mr. Brendan McDonagh, Chief Executive Officer of the National Assets Management Agency (NAMA).

We ask for your urgent assistance.

The Royal Victoria Dockyard, was placed on the open market by NAMA in October 2015. This is a site that occupies an area of over 3 hectares in the centre of Passage West town centre. Passage West is a town of approximately 5,500 residents situated some six miles from the southern suburbs of Cork City. Lying between the desirable conurbations of Rochestown and Monkstown, Passage West should be a thriving hub. On the contrary, however, it exhibits ongoing dereliction and a commercial centre that could at best be described as faltering. This is, for the most part, a consequence of the dirty cargoes handled at the dockyard (scrap metal, animal feed, timber and sawdust), the high dock wall running the length of the town creating a dark and dirty corridor through the main street and the trucks bullying their way through the narrow streets on their way to the dockyard, often leaving a trail of sawdust behind them. This dockyard is a Dickensian operation which has no place anywhere in today's Ireland let alone in the centre of a town.

But it was not always so. The Royal Victoria Dockyard was built in the 1830s, preceding Harland and Wolff by almost 30 years. Some 300 people came from Cork City by train to work in the dockyard every day. The standard of craftsmanship was such that it came to be regarded as a European centre of shipbuilding excellence. Two magnificent dry docks were constructed of hewn limestone, pioneering in their day. Every possible service associated with shipping at the time was offered: ropemaking, chandlery, sailmaking, ironwork ...

Although the dockyard was considered for new town centre development on two occasions in the past 15 years, this never came to pass. The site is wharf, expensive to develop and constrained by an already congested local road network. Ironically however, we may be fortunate that this did not come to pass because the true potential of the dockyard site lies in its past.

As a centre of industrial/shipbuilding heritage, the possibilities the Royal Victoria Dockyard offers are beyond describable. This is one of Ireland's best opportunities to, for the first time, offer a flagship site to the tremendously popular European Route of Industrial Heritage. With the potential to attract visitors from all over the world, Passage West could showcase the very best of shipbuilding techniques in the 19th century. There could be no more appropriate location: on the shores of Cork Harbour, close to an existing heritage network and merely a stone's throw from the best of contemporary industrial development in Ringaskiddy.

Moreover, reclaiming the dockyard site would permit continuation of the Greenway running from Cork City through Rochestown and down as far as Passage West. This Greenway is the most used public amenity in South Cork. It currently cannot be extended through Passage West; because of the dockyard wall, the town is too narrow and congested.

Despite the simply limitless heritage prospects this site offers, its sale has been agreed for ongoing dock use. We are on the cusp of the most extraordinarily incomprehensible missed opportunity. This is probably the only occasion in our lifetime when it is possible for this site to pass from the ownership of one public body to another. Never again in our lifetime will we have such a chance to reclaim its inherent heritage such that we may display it and capitalise on it. Never again in our lifetime will we be able to consider extending the much-used Greenway with such ease. And by this missed opportunity, the incredible heritage strengths of Passage West will, for the rest of our lifetime, be cloaked under increasing dereliction, congestion and dust.

This is our most urgent request to you to support our vision for this potential. We ask you most sincerely to intervene before it is too late. Our greatest desire would be for the State to purchase the Royal Victoria Dockyard through the Office of Public Works such that it may begin to realise its unparalleled potential.

With many thanks for this, your urgent assistance.

Regards,

Cllr Joe Harris
Vice-Chair, Ballincollig-Carrigaline Municipal District
On behalf of the elected members of the Ballincollig-Carrigaline Municipal District