

THE VALENTIA TRANSATLANTIC CABLE FOUNDATION

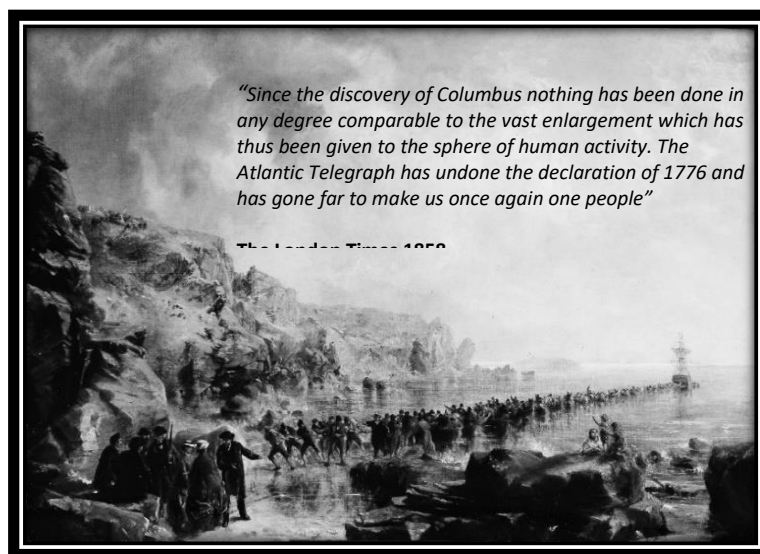
Submission To the Kenmare Municipal District Local Area Plan 2023 - 2029

A submission to the consultation to the Draft Kenmare Municipal District Local Area Plan 2023 – 2029, on behalf of the Valentia Transatlantic Cable Foundation.

Leonard Hobbs

Chairperson, Valentia Transatlantic Cable Foundation

November 3rd 2023



The Foundation is proud to support the Valentia Island Development Companies (VIDC) ambitious plans to restore and preserve the key historical sites on the island to their former glory in pursuit of UNESCO World Heritage status and to create a place which recalls the wondrous technological achievements of a time past while driving opportunities for Valentia in the future.

It is hoped that inscription will be achieved during the lifetime of this Local Area Plan and as such the Foundation would welcome the continued support of Kerry County Council and the local Community in preparing the submission dossier and in parallel driving the kind of structural changes and protections which will enable Valentia to fully exploit the opportunities which the UNESCO designation will undoubtedly deliver.

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Key Recommendations:

With a view to fully exploiting the opportunities which the UNESCO designation will undoubtedly deliver, the Foundation would call upon the Kenmare Municipal District to consider the following points when finalising the 2023-2029 Local Development Plan

1. The provision of adequate statutory protections for the ensemble of relevant sites including the Cable Station complex and Slate Yard at Knightstown with a view to preserving the natural boundaries of these sites, including their integrity, authenticity and sustainability, while at the same time not inhibiting the development of the island's infrastructure, including affordable and sustainable homes, commercial outlets and other community building needs.
2. The provision of infrastructure improvements in anticipation of increased number of residents and visitors to the island, on a round year basis, including road improvements, parking, cycling lanes, water and waste treatment, broadband infrastructure etc
3. To enable the start up and scaling up of new businesses which will emerge from the Digital Hub at the Cable Station and by providing industrial development space at Chapeltown
4. To increase the number of affordable homes to accommodate exiting needs in the community as well as the new arrivals and families who will take uptake up positions and/or establish new enterprises in the Digital Hub at the Cable Station and the Business Unit in Chapeltown.
5. To enable the revival of Knightstown as a vibrant village with multiple restaurants, bars and shops to cater for existing residents and the increased number of visitors and employees of the new business at the Cable Station and in Chapeltown.
6. To increase in the number of beds, beyond the availability air bnb and self-catering accommodation, by expanding the Royal Hotel capacity and other sources. This will greatly enhance the island's ability to attract small conference and corporate events, particularly in the off season, for groups of up to 150.

About the Foundation:

In May 2016, the Valentia Transatlantic Cable Foundation Board was established with the objective of the “*raising and application of money and other resources to advance the scientific heritage of, and community development on, Valentia Island and to promote Valentia Island as a site which should be included on UNESCO's World Heritage List*”

Context:

In 1858, Europe and North America were connected via the undersea transatlantic telegraph cable, that reduced communication times from weeks to minutes, in an achievement now considered the 19th century equivalent of putting a man on the moon.

The first message transmitted in August 16th 1858 over the 3,000 kilometre cable was a note of congratulations from Queen Victoria to US President James Buchanan, sent from Valentia Island in County Kerry to Newfoundland, Canada.

The then remote Valentia Island in County Kerry in Ireland played a major role in connecting the old and new worlds for the first time, placing Ireland at the 'cross hairs' of the emerging global communications industry as the 'Victorian internet' was born.

This was the first step and a permanent connection was established in July 1866 between Valentia in Co Kerry and Hearts Content in Newfoundland. Instant communication was now a reality – and Valentia was at the centre of the revolution: a small island off the coast of Ireland became the point at which modern globalisation began.



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“Now, almost every considerable expanse of water will be traversed by the slender cords which bind continents and islands together and practically bring the human race into one great family “– American Scientific, 1870

The UNESCO Project:

The Foundation is proud to support the Valentia Island Development Companies (VIDC) ambitious plans to restore and preserve the key historical sites on the island to their former glory in pursuit of UNESCO World Heritage status and to create a place which recalls the wondrous technological achievements of a time past while driving opportunities for Valentia in the future.

On July 21st 2022, we warmly welcomed the announcement from the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage, Darragh O’Brien, TD of the inclusion of the Transatlantic Cable Project on the Irish UNESCO World Heritage tentative list. This was only one of three projects accepted onto the Irish list which is a precursor to a formal submission to UNESCO in Paris.

We are now supporting Kerry County Councils engagement with other side of the cable at Hearts Content in Newfoundland and their plans to submit a transnational application, an aspect which we understand will be favourably looked on by the UNESCO selection process. Canadian government officials from Parks Canada and the local government in Newfoundland are currently working with the Department of Heritage in Ireland to advance the project. A preliminary assessment from UNESCO is now expected in 2025 with a final inscription decision expected in early 2028.

It is hoped that inscription will be achieved during the lifetime of this Local Area Plan and as such the Foundation would welcome the continued support of the Council and the local Community in preparing the submission and in parallel driving the kind of structural changes and protections which will enable Valentia to fully exploit the opportunities which the UNESCO designation will undoubtedly deliver.

The Work to date:

Some excellent progress has been made to date, and although we are still only in the early stages of the project, it is clearly evident that the project has the ability to engage parties from around Ireland and indeed the world in the Valentia story and has the potential to enhance the socio-economic development of the island.

To date over €1.5m of public funding has been raised. Significant private funding has also been secured from a number of multinational companies.

Also;

- In February 2018, the President of Ireland, Mr Michael D Higgins visited the Cable Station.
- July 2018, the historic Cable Station building, was handed over by the current owner, Mrs Ranka Pollmeier, and was accepted on behalf of the people of Valentia by then Mayor of Kerry and now Minister of Education, Ms Norma Foley.
- July 2019, Mr Paschal Donohoe, Minister for Finance and Public Expenditure delivers a key note at the annual Valentia Lecture
- April 2020, RTE’s Building Ireland series features a full episode on the incredible story of the Transatlantic Telegraph Cable’s arrival in Kerry and the launch of the so-called “Victorian internet”
- October 2021, The project was also endorsed in the National Development Plan

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Oct 2021, Ms. Mairead McGuinness, European Commissioner for Financial Stability, Financial Services and the Capital Markets Union addresses the Valentia Lecture

October 2021, Mary Rose Stafford from the Foundation with Michael Lyne, chairperson of the Valentia Development Company launch the “8th Wonder” exhibit at the Cable Station.

- On July 21st 2022, the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage, Darragh O’Brien, TD announced the inclusion of the Transatlantic Cable Project on the Irish UNESCO World Heritage tentative list. This was only one of three projects accepted onto the Irish list which is a pre-cursor to a formal submission to UNESCO in Paris.



- July 22nd 2022, the 6th Valentia Lecture returned with a full audience to the historic Cable Station. We were joined by both the US Ambassador to Ireland, H.E. Claire Cronin and the Canadian Ambassador to Ireland, H.E. Nancy Smyth

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- September 2022, Minister Crocker from Newfoundland visited the Cable Station at Valentia where he signed an MOU with Kerry County Council to “ create a framework for cooperation and coordination between the two governments concerning the UNESCO World Heritage nomination for the Transatlantic Cable Ensemble “
- In June 2023, the Board of National Broadband Ireland hold their board meeting at Valentia.



- In August 2023 a delegation of the key stakeholders of the Valentia end of the Transnational UNESCO project visited Hearts Content in Newfoundland, home to the landing site of the Canadian end of the Transatlantic Cable. The delegation was led by the newly appointed Mayor of Kerry, Mr Jim Finucane, along with officials from Kerry County Council and the Department of Heritage. Also in the party was a representative group from Valentia and the Cable Foundation. A return visit is being planned for the Spring of 2024





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Future plans:

A major deliverable in this project is in the restoration and refurbishment of the historic Cable Station at Knightstown in Valentia. From the establishment of the transatlantic cable business in the late 1800's to its demise in the 1960s, the Cable Station was at the centre of global communications, with cutting edge technologies being deployed, and indeed often developed there. We are encouraged by VIDCs ambitious plans to restore the building and re-establish it as a living and working space with a unique combination. The ground floor will showcase the industrial heritage of the site and in the summer of 2022 saw the creation of the first phase with an immersive visitor experience of the transatlantic cable story called the "8th Wonder". The first floor will see the establishment of the Digital " Hub at the Cable Station" when the subsequent restoration is completed.

As the refurbishment of the Cable Station will be completed under strict conservation requirements, the offices on the first floor will offer a unique experience for the users, beyond what is traditionally offered in modern digital hubs. It is thought that together with its spectacular setting on the shores of the Atlantic, the "Hub at the Cable Station" will attract the more creative entrepreneur to this unique remote setting, enabled by the "World Wide Web on the Wild Atlantic Way".

Plans are also underway to also restore the 'First Message Building' in the heart of the village at Knightstown from where the first ever transatlantic message was sent in 1858. This restoration will open up the Slate Yard to the village, providing a town square type amenity, complete with tourist office and community spaces.