

"People are fascinated by prisons or any place with military connections" he said. "Alcatraz attracts over 1.3 million visitors annually despite the fact that it operated as a prison for only 34 years. Spike Island has ten times more history than any of these. Its Island status gives it added attractiveness as the boat trip becomes another part of the experience, with the beautiful views of Cobh spreading out behind you.", he added.

Junior Chamber International Cobh was aware of Michael's interest in the Island's history and its potential as a visitor attraction. A few weeks ago they contacted him about starting a process to achieve the goal of securing Spike Island's heritage and promoting its development as a visitor attraction. The presentation to the Council was the first public step in this process.

President of JCI Cobh, Hendrick Verwey stated that achieving their objective will have enormous benefits for Cobh, Cork City and the surrounding harbour regions. However JCI Cobh is not underestimating the amount of effort and persuasion that lies ahead, especially since Michael McDowell's announcement last Thursday that a new prison is to be built on the Island. "We have only one chance to influence political will and to persuade policy and decision makers of the enormous untapped potential that lies in the centre of Cork Harbour", he said.

JCI Cobh propose to form a group whose campaign will culminate in a Keynote Conference in the Autumn. Speakers will include internationally recognised authorities on history and historical tourism. Attendees will include officials from four Government Departments, Tourism promoters, County Council personnel, politicians and local community groups. In order to stage a thoroughly professional and successful conference the group will be seeking financial assistance from local businesses, local government and ECAD.

The members of Cobh Town Council were impressed with the proposal and Councillor Michael Keating felt that the issue of the future development on the Island was so important that it should be brought directly to the Taoiseach's office which he undertook to do.

People with expertise in compiling DVD presentations or with a background in Graphic Design and printing would be of enormous benefit.

Anyone interested in this project can contact Hendrick Verwey on **087 2593850** or email **cobh@jci-ireland.org**.