Ancient Food Market building, Portugalete

Metropolitan Bilbao

The intervention focuses on the former Municipal Food Market, a distinctive building of significant architectural value within the city's urban heritage. Located in the historic centre, it forms part of the municipality's most emblematic and recognizable area. The rehabilitation and enhancement of the building is conceived as a strategic action within the **broader framework of the comprehensive regeneration of the Historic Center**. Its recovery is not only driven by heritage conservation criteria but is also envisioned as a **lever for urban transformation, capable of reactivating economic, social, and cultural dynamics**. Through its adaptive reuse, the building has the potential to become a hub of activity, generating new flows, strengthening the centrality of the area, and contributing to the sustainable revitalization of the municipality.

To this end, **innovative, sustainable, and creative solutions are sought**, considering the constraints associated with preserving the building.

The program of uses is intentionally left open to encourage disruptive approaches and hybrid models. **A single exception is made for an open-plan space on the ground floor, conceived as a place for civic gathering and as a platform for cultural and community activities.**Ultimately, this is a strategic project supported by **strong institutional commitment**: the City Council will actively participate in financing the intervention, in proportion to the share of the building allocated to public or municipal uses, demonstrating its firm commitment to sustainable, inclusive, and opportunity-generating urban regeneration.



Plot Area:
Building constructed on a 1,280 m² site, with the following usable floor areas:

- Semi-basement: 560 m² (expandable)
- Ground floor: 970 m²
- First floor: 901 m²

Ownership of the Building:
Owned by the City Council.

Type of Property transfer intended:
The **operation** will be structured through a **concession over a public domain asset**, in accordance with Royal Legislative Decree 781/1986 of 18 April (*RD 781/1986, de 18 de abril*), the Regulations on Assets of Local Authorities *(Reglamento de Bienes de las Entidades locales*), and Law 33/2003 of 3 November on the Assets of Public Administrations (*Ley 33/22003 de 3 de noviembre del Patrimonio de las Administraciones Públicas*), or through a legal instrument provided for in this framework that is compatible with the nature and classification of the asset.

Given the project's characteristics and its public interest, **the concession fee may be wholly or partially offset** by the successful bidder's commitment to carry out the rehabilitation works, and any interventions required to bring the project into operation.

The **duration** of the concession—or of the applicable legal instrument—will be defined with flexibility to ensure the **economic and financial viability and long-term sustainability** of the proposal. For guidance purposes, it is envisaged to fall within a range of **20 to 40 years**. This aspect will be further developed and specified during the second phase of the process.

The Portugalete City Council **reserves the use of an open-plan space on the ground floor** of approximately 566 m², to be financed with municipal public funds.

Deadline for the submission of the Expression of Interest: Monday, 5 October 2026, at 14:00 (Central European Time, CET).

Presentation of the site and development expectations

THE CONTEXT

Portugalete is a town located within the **metropolitan area of Bilbao**, in the province of Bizkaia (Basque Country). With an area of approximately 3.2 km²—of which nearly half a square kilometre corresponds to the Nervión Estuary—and a population exceeding 45,000 (2025), it is the most densely populated municipality in the historic territory.

Its demographic structure shows a gradual ageing trend, although in recent years a degree of stabilisation has been observed, partly due to inward migration. The local economy is predominantly service based, closely linked to retail, commerce, and its strong functional and territorial relationship with the city of Bilbao.



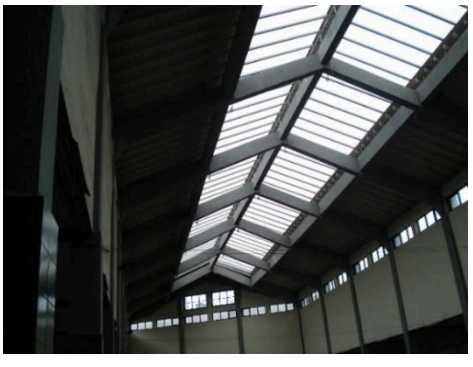
Within this dense and fully consolidated urban context, the former Municipal Food Market stands as a protected building of **considerable architectural and historical significance**. Located in the heart of the **Historic Quarter of Portugalete**, the property occupies a prime position within the town's most valuable and characterful heritage setting.

THE BUILDING

The building occupies a plot measuring 55 by 23 metres, with a total area of 1,280 m², and includes a semi-basement level of approximately 560 m², internally connected to the rest of the structure. Oriented along a north–south axis on its longer side, the building is mainly rectangular in form, with the exception of the northern façade, which is chamfered to align with the layout of María Díaz de Haro Street

The façades display a consistent and well-balanced composition, characterised by large openings and the use of brickwork in the upper window frames, emphasizing the four corners by curving them. The interior of the building also features remarkable elements, particularly the large central space, illuminated from above by a linear skylight.



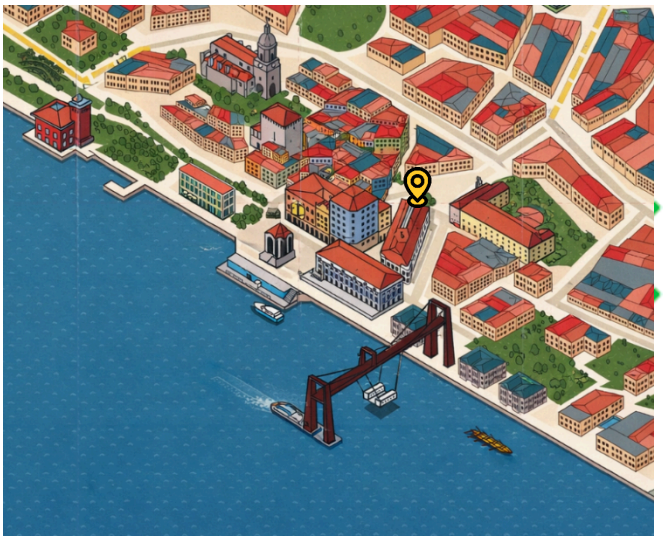


The building's structure requires full demolition and rebuilding. Keeping the original structural typology will ensure safety and long-term durability for future uses. The façade may be preserved as is, provided it must be first separated from the structure and stabilised using scaffolding during demolition and reconstruction.

Interested teams can access estimated rehabilitation budgets for the building in the *Dataroom,* prepared for different scope variations, along with the Geotechnical Study ("MERCAD ESTUD GEOTECNICO") and the 2015 test results ("Ensayo hormigón 2015" y "Ensayo carbonatación 2015").

URBAN INTEGRATION AND ITS LOCATION

The building occupies a prime location in the Historic Quarter of Portugalete, forming part of the town's main heritage area alongside the Town Hall, hotels, traditional streets, public squares, and other notable landmarks.



Its proximity to the Nervión Estuary, the Camino de Santiago, and the Vizcaya Bridge (both UNESCO World Heritage Sites) further increases its potential to connect with a broader network of historical, cultural, and recreational spaces, attracting both local residents and visitors.

A significant share of the municipality's cultural heritage is found here. Notable nearby landmarks include the Basilica of Saint Mary of Portugalete, Salazar Tower, the Portugalete Iron Pier, the Town Hall, and the former Portugalete Railway Station, among many others.



The coastal route of the Camino de Santiago (a UNESCO World Heritage Site) passes through the historic quarter, typically running by the church and along the upper part of the town. The former market's location further strengthens the building's appeal as a destination for both residents and visitors.



The Portugalete City Council presents the former Municipal Food Market as a space open to the initiative and creativity of development teams, demonstrating a clear willingness to consider and accommodate a wide range of uses and activities that enable the building to be operated on a financially viable basis while ensuring the long-term sustainability of the investment.

In terms of **accessibility,** its exceptional location makes the market easily, quickly, and sustainably accessible from any point within Bilbao's metropolitan area. Its integration into a network of pedestrian streets encourages **pedestrian access** from across the town centre, with mechanical ramps ensuring step-free access to the immediate surrounding

The site also benefits from excellent **public transport** connections—including metro, bus, and rail—with a commuter rail station located in the heart of the historic quarter, providing swift links to Bilbao, Barakaldo, Getxo, and the wider metropolitan area

Its proximity to the Nervión Estuary also enables **access by boat**, supported by a recently developed 42-meter-long tourist pier, as well as a direct connection to the right bank via the Vizcaya Bridge. During the summer months of 2025, more than 5,500 passengers disembarked at this point via regular services and organized boat excursions.

Finally, the municipality is well connected to the **main road network** via the Autovía A-8. Just a short distance away is the Zubi-Alde Car Park, a 24-hour public car park providing a convenient solution for both residents and visitors

Taken together, this multimodal connectivity makes the former market a highly accessible and well-connected location—an ideal setting for projects seeking strong visibility, ease of access, and the ability to attract a diverse audience

DEVELOPMENT OBJECTIVES

Regarding the project's objectives, the municipality maintains an open, flexible stance. It avoids imposing a predefined use or fixed model for the building. Teams are encouraged to explore **innovative solutions** from a broad, integrated perspective. The focus is on proposals that generate ongoing activity, attract diverse audiences, and create economic, social, urban, and environmental value, contributing to the revitalization of the area.

This open approach is meant to encourage **creative and practical ideas that fit well with the building's unique character and history**. It ensures the project fits into the city and lasts over time.

From the municipality's perspective, the aim is to deliver a building that advances sustainability, accessibility, and contemporary standards while supporting public, economic, and cultural activities in a single, flexible space. This will result in a tangible, mixed-use facility that meets "15-minute city" principles. The Portugalete City Council's financial participation will directly correspond to the extent of public or municipal usage, ensuring clear accountability and benefit for the community. Proposals with a **diversified business model** will be valued if they deliver sustained revenue from space use (events, cultural activities, and services) and measurably strengthen the surrounding area. The bidding team's preliminary feasibility assessment demonstrates economic and financial robustness in varied occupancy, positioning, and operational scenarios (see Dataroom documentation).

Within this framework, the key priorities are initiatives linked to **culture**, **activities and businesses associated with the energy transition**; and **activation of the riverfront as a space for leisure and social interaction**. Proposals establishing connections with the municipal pier, less than 100 meters away and currently used for berthing and disembarking visitors, will be viewed favourably. Integrating the pier could broaden the offer through low-impact water-based leisure activities—such as kayaking, paddleboarding, and similar activities—and strengthen the building's relationship with the Nervión Estuary.

Consider extending the basement to create a versatile venue for **cultural and performing arts**, such as a concert hall, event space, or community programming. This venue could sustain continuous activity and generate economic returns.

Still, the City Council is **open to new ideas** that make the project more financially stable and help the local area, as long as they respect the environment and use green practices.

Finally, while keeping this open approach, the City Council, to help guide the project in facing key urban challenges, sets out, as advice only, a set of main themes. Proposals should align with these themes, which mirror the key changes outlined in the Metropolitan Bilbao 2050 Strategic Reflection.

1. Zero carbon: Energy transition and urban decarbonization

In line with the **Local Agenda 2030,** the City Council aims to make the building a benchmark. It will promote decarbonization and support projects in renewable energy, shared self-consumption, and energy efficiency in residential and urban contexts. Within the **Metropolitan Bilbao 2050 Strategic Reflection**, reducing emissions across all sectors—industry, transport, energy, and residential—has been identified as a key priority. To achieve this, it is crucial to commit to bold actions that drive a sustainable energy model based on efficiency, electrification, and the deployment of renewables such as solar, wind, green hydrogen, and geothermal energy. This transition must be gradual, equitable, and supportive of social cohesion. Everyone involved must actively contribute to ensure the collective success of this essential transformation. The territory benefits from significant competitive advantages in this field. These include a strong industrial base, advanced technological capabilities, and a well-established business and innovation ecosystem. To fully leverage these strengths, stakeholders are encouraged to collaborate in driving forward innovative energy solutions, smart networks, and shared self-consumption models. By actively engaging, we can ensure that Bilbao's metropolitan area becomes a leading reference in the energy transition in southern Europe.

This component is mandatory and integral to the competition framework. Ensure active compliance to stay eligible.

2. Culture: music, artistic creation and scenography

In a complementary way, the project reinforces the building's cultural vocation as a driver of identity, social cohesion, and economic development. Culture—and music and artistic creation in particular—has historically played a central role in the transformation of Bilbao's Metropolitan Area, becoming a key strategic vector since the 1990s.

Within the framework of the Metropolitan Bilbao 2050 Strategic Reflection, priority lines include fostering collaboration among cultural stakeholders, enhancing the international

projection of local identity, and strengthening the cultural and creative industries as a strategic sector.

In this context, the project can play a significant role as a space for cultural production, training, rehearsal, and dissemination, helping to consolidate a dynamic creative ecosystem capable of generating economic opportunities, attracting talent, and projecting the territory's cultural identity internationally. Particular value will also be placed on proposals that encourage **the activation of public space and citizen participation, integrating culture as an accessible, everyday experience**.

3. Water: Active connection with the Nervión Estuary

The relationship with the Nervión Estuary constitutes a structural and organizing axis of metropolitan development. As a foundational element of the territory, the Estuary has historically been the driving force behind its economic, social, and urban growth, and is projected to play a central role in its future as a sustainable metropolis.

Within the **Metropolitan Bilbao 2050 Strategic Reflection,** the Estuary is conceived as a critical infrastructure for climate adaptation, a corridor for economic activity and innovation, a laboratory for sustainability and circular economy, and a space for territorial cohesion and civic interaction. In this context, the site has the potential to serve as an example of resilient, adaptable infrastructure that operates in synergy with the Estuary.

Accordingly, the project may act as an active node of connection to the Estuary, benefiting the community by integrating the building into river dynamics and promoting sustainable leisure activities and environmental education. This relationship enhances the natural surroundings, attracts visitors, and generates new water-related urban centralities.

Furthermore, by leveraging the Estuary, the project will support the testing of replicable urban and technological solutions, directly benefiting public authorities, the business sector, academia, and civil society through increased collaboration and innovation.

The municipality will use the central open space on the ground floor as a **covered public square**. This area is designed to foster connection and interaction, welcoming individuals, community groups, and organizations to collaborate and develop joint initiatives.

The goal is to expand on the current model of an **open, flexible, and multidisciplinary community meeting place** that can host fairs, markets, and various socio-cultural activities. Adaptable, modular furniture and infrastructure will support diverse events and enable local associations and community groups to organize activities effectively.

The City Council of Portugalete invites local businesses, community groups, and stakeholders to help transform this historic building. By partnering with the public sector, you can contribute to a vibrant, innovative space that promotes sustainability and urban vitality. We encourage your involvement in creating a flexible, secure, and attractive environment for investment and community benefit.

Specific planning rules and regulations

The main planning instrument for the whole municipality is the **General Urban Development Plan of Portugalete (*Plan General de Ordenación Urbana, PGOU*)**. The PGOU is a legal framework that defines land use, zoning, and development regulations for the city of Portugalete. It was published in the Official Gazette of Biscay (B.O.B. No. 41, 1 March 2011), along with its later amendments.

In addition, the former market building is located within an area designated as an Integrated Rehabilitation Area (*Area de Rehabilitación Integrada*, ARI) by Order of 9 November 1994 of the Basque Government's Regional Minister for Town Planning, Housing and the Environment (*Orden de 9 de noviembre de 1994, del Consejero de Urbanismo, Vivienda y Medio Ambiente del Gobierno Vasco*). The urban planning instrument governing and implementing rehabilitation actions within this ARI is the **Special Plan for the Internal Rehabilitation (*Plan Especial de Rehabilitación Interior, PERI*) of the historic quarter**.





The PERI allows for the reconfiguration and reorganization of interior spaces, provided that the central courtyard typology is preserved. It also permits extending the semi-basement floor area to occupy the full footprint of the building's vertical projection.

Another protective layer exists under **Decree 29/1996 of 6 February (*Decreto 29/996 de 6 de febrero*), which classifies the Historic Quarter of Portugalete as a Listed Cultural Asset and as a Monumental Ensemble**. Under this, the market building receives basic protection.

Article 15 sets out the provisions applicable to elements included within this category:

> *Article 15 – Basic Protection*
> *Elements classified under basic protection are those buildings which, while not possessing outstanding architectural, historical, or artistic value, nonetheless form an interesting part of the built heritage from a typological or environmental perspective.*
> *[...]*
> *h) Replacement of structural elements in poor condition with new ones, even where different materials are used, as well as any other interventions affecting the structure and foundations that enhance their stability and safety.*

Subsequently, by means of the Resolution of 12 April 1999, this level of protection was partially amended, specifying for the former municipal market building that protection applies to its façades, volumetric configuration, and structural typology.

> *4.– The following lists are added, corresponding to buildings subject to morphological protection and partial protection, and are set out as follows:*
> *"List 5*
> *Municipal Market (Coscojales 14)*
> *List 6*
> *Façades, external volume, and structural system (internal structure and roof), as well as the presence of a courtyard above the first floor of the Municipal Market (Coscojales 14)."*

It should be noted that the building is located within the basin of the Nervión Estuary, specifically within the 100-metre riverbank protection zone, where coastal legislation imposes restrictions on land use and the activities carried out within it.

Accordingly, this development may require the relevant administrative authorisation.

Climate priorities and urban environmental challenges

Within the framework of the **Metropolitan Bilbao 2050 Strategic Reflection** the territory has defined a set of strategic objectives to address major environmental and climate challenges, shaping a more sustainable, resilient, and balanced metropolitan area. Key lines of action include the comprehensive refurbishment of the metropolitan building stock to improve energy efficiency, accessibility, and comfort; the promotion of renewable energy generation and use in urban and residential contexts; and the renaturalization of urban space through the expansion and consolidation of green and blue infrastructures.

The metropolitan strategy also promotes integrating nature-based solutions into urban design and infrastructure, aiming to improve climate change adaptation and bolster resilience to risks such as flooding, especially in areas around the Nervión Estuary and other vulnerable regions.

Aligned with this framework, the municipality of Portugalete confronts the challenge of progressing toward a sustainable urban model that ensures quality of life, safeguards natural heritage, and increases adaptive capacity to climate change. To do this, it has identified environmental and climate priorities that direct public policies, investments, and actions toward more sustainable, resilient, and healthy development.

Combating climate change is a core priority, driving the **steady reduction of greenhouse gas emissions** and fostering a decisive energy transition. This means enhancing the **energy efficiency of especially older residential buildings**, promoting local adoption of renewable energy, transitioning to a **mobility** model less reliant on fossil fuels, and supporting **public transport**, cycling, and walking.

Improving **air quality**, reducing noise pollution, and advancing sustainable mobility are key goals for the municipality. The City Council is preparing its Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan and planning a *bidegorri* (cycle lane) as detailed in the **Sectoral Territorial Plan for Cycle Routes in Biscay (*Plan Territorial Sectorial de Vías Ciclistas de Bizkaia PTSVCB*)** 2023–2035, which will run along the lower part of Portugalete and link it to the larger Basque cycling network on the left bank, stretching as far as La Arena Beach.

At the same time, Portugalete identifies the **La Benedicta** Park as playing a key role in preparing the municipality for the impacts of climate change. In this respect, strengthening urban resilience through the **renaturalization** of this area—by increasing tree cover and green spaces—is considered a priority, enabling it to function as a climate refuge that helps mitigate the effects of **heatwaves** and provides particular protection for more vulnerable populations.

The project must take these priorities into account by proposing sustainable maintenance systems for the protected building. In particular, the intervention is expected to address the **ten climate challenges** set out by Reinventing Cities, with particular emphasis on the following:

- Green buildings and energy efficiency (mandatory)
- Clean construction and building life cycle (mandatory)
- Climate resilience and adaptation
- Circular resources and sustainable waste management
- Social inclusion and community engagement
- High-quality architecture and urban design

With this approach, Portugalete can stride confidently toward a greener future, guided by a project built to withstand climate and environmental challenges.