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## 4. Changing the face of a city

**THREE CORKMEN** are being credited with pointing Limerick in its new direction — Tom Rice, the former city manager; Jack Higgins, his successor, and Jim Barrett, who has been acting as city architect in Limerick for the past six years.

Barrett, as nearly everyone calls him, had the distinct advan-

tage of long years in the private sector before he took the job. He had also won awards for a solar housing scheme in Clonmel and for what is probably Dublin's best inner city infill, at Meath Street/The Coombe.

Hugely enthusiastic (most of the time) about his task of changing the face of Limerick, he is also a wheeler-dealer, buttonholing developers in pubs to ask them why they haven't started work on

some scheme or other when the planning permission was granted months ago.

One of the first things he wanted to do was to get rid of the local authority houses from King John's Castle, so, after convincing the powers-that-be that it was worth doing, he went around and personally persuaded the residents that he would build new houses for them if they got out.

Only one man wouldn't budge

and, hearing that there might be EC funding for the restoration of the castle, he used to call in to Barrett's office. "Do you speak French?", he would ask, "because I'm going to get Jacques Delors after you." Eventually, he agreed to go.

The city architect got into hot water a couple of years ago when he proposed moving the Treaty Stone from its precarious position beside Thomond Bridge to the

square in front of the civic offices. Intense pressure from Thomondgate meant it was moved no more than 50 yards.

In one afternoon, Barrett bought up half-a-dozen run-down buildings on Nicholas Street, one for just £6,000, and all are to be restored by the corporation as part of the "medieval precinct". No wonder the concrete spheres outside the Granary are known as "Barrett's Balls".

