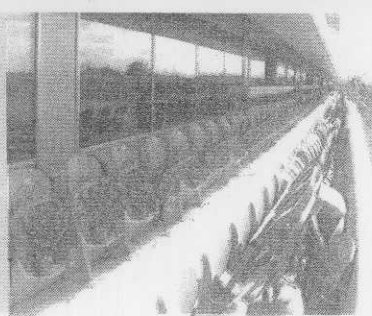


# homond Park

the world-class stadium taking shape



## 'The only way is up for house prices in Limerick'



Talking up the city: developer Ger Clohessy with RTE's Cathy Halloran at the launch of the report he commissioned by leading economist Jim Power, which paints a largely positive picture of Limerick

## Clohessy fights the city's corner

Mike Dwane

DEVELOPER Ger Clohessy is exhorting the private sector to build on a positive economic analysis of the Limerick region carried out by Jim Power of Friends First.

Mr Clohessy commissioned one of the country's best-known economists out of frustration with the "raw deal Limerick gets from every angle" when it comes to publicity.

The captain of a supposedly unfashionable Young Munster side which won the All Ireland League 15 years ago, Mr Clohessy is used to fighting back.

"We wanted to bring in somebody neutral like Jim Power to come in and do a proper analysis and look at the positives as well, of which there are an awful lot. Limerick is a progressive city; it's open for business; there's a lot of opportunity here and strategically we're located better than any city outside of Dublin," he said.

Mr Power's report shows Limerick houses remain the most affordable in any major city in the country and while prices have stagnated in

the last 12 months elsewhere, new and second hand homes in Limerick have risen in value by 9.8 per cent and 11.8 per cent respectively.

"House prices here have not reduced and our prices have always been very affordable," said Mr Clohessy, who heads up Clohessy Homes, one of the leading house builders in the Limerick area.

"If you look at the house prices in Dublin, Cork or Galway, they have been in Dublin sometimes three and four times the price of a three-bed semi in Limerick, in Cork twice the price and the same for Galway. If you look at those figures, there is no way we'll be going down. The only way is up. Demand will be coming into play in the next number of months. If I was a first-time buyer, I would be seriously looking at purchasing my house at the present time instead of spending and wasting money on rental. The rental market is very high in Limerick and the reason is people are not buying houses," he added.

Mr Power's report commends the ambitions of Limerick City Council but when it was put to

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

## Boat Club plan in balance

Anne Sheridan

THE DEVELOPER behind the plans to demolish and redevelop Limerick Boat Club said he is still hopeful that his €20 million "dream" development could receive planning permission, even though nine councillors have said they will not be supporting the plans once it goes to a vote at City Hall.

To receive the green light, a majority of the 17 city councillors have to vote in favour of a material contravention to rezone the site and also remove the Boat Club from the list of protected structures.

But the president of Limerick Boat Club, Dermot Moloney, is asking councillors and the public to look at the bigger picture and said the proposal put forward by Michael Daly of Fordmount Developments represents a "once in a lifetime" opportunity for their club. "I genuinely would be worried if this doesn't go ahead. It could be the end of the club as we know it," said Mr Moloney.

Mr Daly had previously said he would walk away from the plans if the majority of councillors were against the designs, but he now believes that councillors may not be as outrightly opposed as they have stated in public.

"I have seen some of the press and come of the comments from councillors but from the views I've received from councillors haven't concurred. Ultimately it's the councillors call as they will have to

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## Boat club plan

# President's fears for club if proposal falls

Anne Sheridan

THE President of Limerick Boat club has spoken out to defend developer Michael Daly's plans for the site off Sarsfield Bridge following mounting opposition from city councillors.

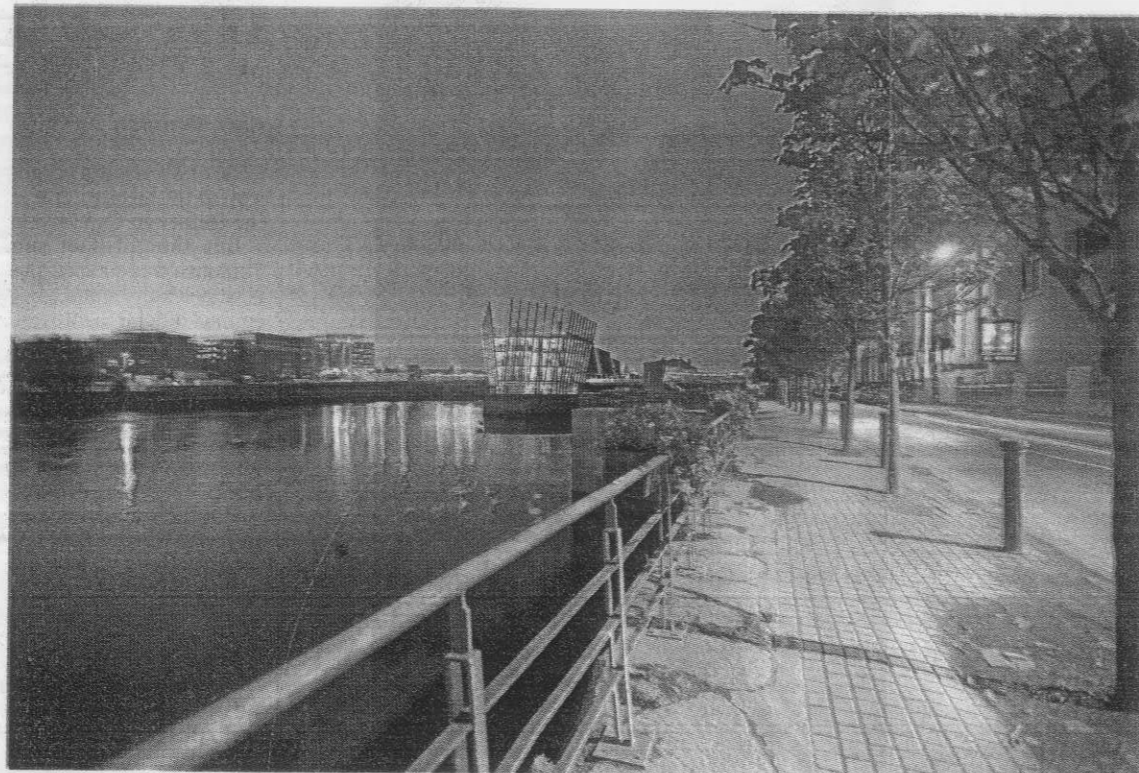
Describing the investment in the club as an opportunity that "only arises once in a lifetime", Dermot Moloney, also warned that without this investment from Fordmount Developments, the future of the boat club could be under threat.

"There really isn't another option - we have tried everything over the past 15 years. I genuinely would be worried for the club if this doesn't go ahead. This was the first rowing club in Limerick, and even from that perspective it would be a shame to see it go. It could be the end of the club as we know it," said Mr Moloney.

In the coming months, city councillors will have to vote to have the site rezoned and remove the building from the list of protected structures, but Mr Moloney is urging councillors and the wider public to recognise the benefits the proposed €20million redevelopment would have for the future of the club and the image of the city.

While he recognised that the boat club has been in existence since 1870, he said the current facilities require serious modernisation. He said a number of schools have also declined to get involved with the club based on health and safety reasons.

Mr Moloney said it was agreed two years ago, when he became president of the club, "that for the club to survive we needed to inject new vigour into



Ship shape: an architect's impression of how the proposed new boat club development would look at night



Worried: Don Moloney



Supporter: Cllr Joe Leddin

the rowing side of Limerick Boat Club," however they recognised that they wouldn't be capable of raising the amount of investment required to rebuild the facilities alone.

The boat club then sought to identify organisations willing to embrace their vision, and said they were "fortunate enough to

come across Michael Daly".

"Fordmount expressed an interest early on and engaged an ex-oarsperson [Belfast architect Sean McCann] to look at the project from an architectural and boating perspective.

"We have worked closely with Fordmount in order to deliver what we

believe to be the best outcome for the club and the city. As more and more focus is turned towards the river we believe this is a win-win for all concerned," he said.

He said the club have already received expressions of interest from other schools anxious to row at the new facility if and when it is developed.

"We are very excited by the prospects if this project gets the collective support it deserves," said Mr Moloney.

City councillors who have backed the proposed development to date include Labour Cllr Joe Leddin (a member of Limerick Boat Club), Fine Gael councillors Jim Long and Kevin Kiely.

Cllr Kiely said that the building, in its current format, "is a shambles" and "looks like an old barn

from a distance".

"It's really an eyesore and was never finished properly to begin with," said Cllr Kiely, adding that the city council should be "imaginative and progressive" and give this development "the thumbs up". Cllr Long said "if the Boat Club is to benefit we can't argue with that."

Labour's Cllr Gerry McLoughlin said he will be supporting the plans once it comes to a vote.

"It's a state of the art boat club that's being put forward and it's a fabulous commercial enterprise, which will bring Limerick into the 21st century. It will add to the whole entry into the city. I know the old is important, but the new is important too," said Cllr McLoughlin.

The planning application should be decided upon by City Hall by June 26.

Anne Sheridan

THE CLOSING date to lodge objections against the €20million redevelopment plan for Limerick Boat Club passed this Thursday, with three objections and a further three submissions being received by the planning office prior to the deadline.

The Thomond Archaeological and Historical Society, Sinn Fein and local surveyor William Peacocke have all lodged objections against the proposed development, while the heritage body An Taisce, the Green Party's James Nix and Askeaton resident Billy McGuire have made submissions regarding the development.

The Thomond Archaeological and Historical Society cite its grounds for objection as "the demolition of a protected structure, the scale of the proposed development on this sensitive site, and the impact of the proposed building on the bridge, river, Shannon Rowing Club and views from all the approaches by river and road".

The local Sinn Fein party stated: "whilst redevelopment and new development especially in the city centre is welcome we believe this project is out of scale and proportion to the area and will have a negative visual impact on the city and its river view."

Mr Peacocke is also concerned about the scale of the proposed development, and notes that the building is a listed structure.

Billy McGuire, Askeaton, has lodged a submission to the planning department, stating that the Irish Republican Brotherhood monument bordering the site needs to be protected, which again is one of Sinn

# Three objections and submissions received on boat club development

Fein's concerns. Mr McGuire, whose late father Martin rowed with the Boat Club, said he is not opposed to the plans.

"I think it's a pretty awful looking building anyway," he said of the current structure, "but the monuments have a wonderful history and shouldn't be lost."

Mr Nix states the efforts of the applicant to ensure the long-term viability of the boat club are welcome, but he is concerned that the glass structure would obscure the view of the building on the opposite side of the river - Shannon Rowing Club - from downriver. He suggests it would be better to consider the future of both rowing clubs in unison.

An Taisce said it is "broadly favourable to the general thrust of the development," but has called for the city council to recognise that this development would require the demolition of a protected structure and be a contravention of the Limerick city



Cllr Leddin: upgrade

development plan.

Independent Cllr Kathleen Leddin has been one of the most vocal opponents of the plans; she believes the current boat club should be upgraded, rather than demolished.

At a recent meeting of Limerick City Council, Independent Cllr John Gilligan described the

development as "crass", "commercial", "an appalling structure" and said it is "a cheap answer to interfere with one of the most beautiful bridges in Ireland."

Fine Gael Cllr Maria Byrne said she is supportive of some development at the site, but is "not in agreement with what is currently being proposed," with a number of other councillors also sharing her views.

"It's a very historic part of the city and we have to put in something that's going to blend in with the surroundings. I don't think the glass structure does it for me," said Cllr Byrne.

She noted that a conservation architect has reported there is very little in the building now of historic significance, and the president of Limerick Boat Club, Dermot Moloney, has also stated that 25 per cent of the original brick work was removed in 1985 when renovations were carried out.

Fianna Fail councillors Kieran O'Hanlon and John Cronin also stated they are opposed to the current plans - Cllr O'Hanlon believes they do not "blend in with the whole area".

However, both the Labour and Fine Gael parties have diverse opinions on the redevelopment of the boat club. Fine Gael Cllr Diarmuid Scully said he believed the proposal "is not in keeping with the city" and "would age very quickly" while his party colleague Cllr Michael Hourigan described the current designs by the Belfast-based McCann Moore architects as "offensive to the eye".

"I see something totally different there My main worry is what it would look like in ten years' time,"

said Cllr Hourigan. But Fine Gael's Jim Long and Kevin Kiely have endorsed the proposal.



Cllr Houlihan: one chance

In the Labour party, Cllr James Houlihan said "it's an iconic part of the city and we only have one chance to do something right with this". Cllr John Ryan described the plans as "terrible," but colleague Joe Leddin said it is a "win-win situation".

Mayor of Limerick Cllr Ger Fahy is currently undecided about the development and intends to examine the plans in detail once more comprehensive outlines are submitted to the planning department.

"I do think there needs to be greater transparency [in the plans]. The images might not tell the full story and it is important that the development would fit in with our vision of Limerick as a riverside city," said Mayor Fahy.

Independent Cllr Lilly Wallace said she would support the ward councillors in whatever they feel is the best decision.

With the majority of city councillors opposed to the current plans, it remains to be seen if the developer Michael Daly will as he stated last month "walk away from the plans" given the level of opposition.

As he asserted in early May, "it's now a question of whether the city wants this building or not."