

'SQUARE' DEFENDED

Consultants explain thinking behind new city council chamber

BY LEADER REPORTER

THE consultants who recently reported on Limerick's new City Hall this week defended their outline layout for the council chamber.

Limerick Leader reporter, Paddy Moroney, in an article last week, criticised the proposed seating plan (reproduced on the right).

He found main "flaws":

- CORPORATION officials are placed at the backs of council members, who would have to turn to communicate with them.

- COUNCIL members do not face the Press.

- NEWS reporters are seated beneath the edge of the public gallery and, therefore, exposed to falling objects.

Problems

Mr. Brian Hogan, on behalf of the consultants—Messrs. Tyndall Hogan Hurley, architects, of Dublin—said this week:—

"Mr. Moroney has accurately identified some of the problems involved in arriving at a good arrangement for the chamber.

"We take his criticisms as seriously intended, however wittily expressed.

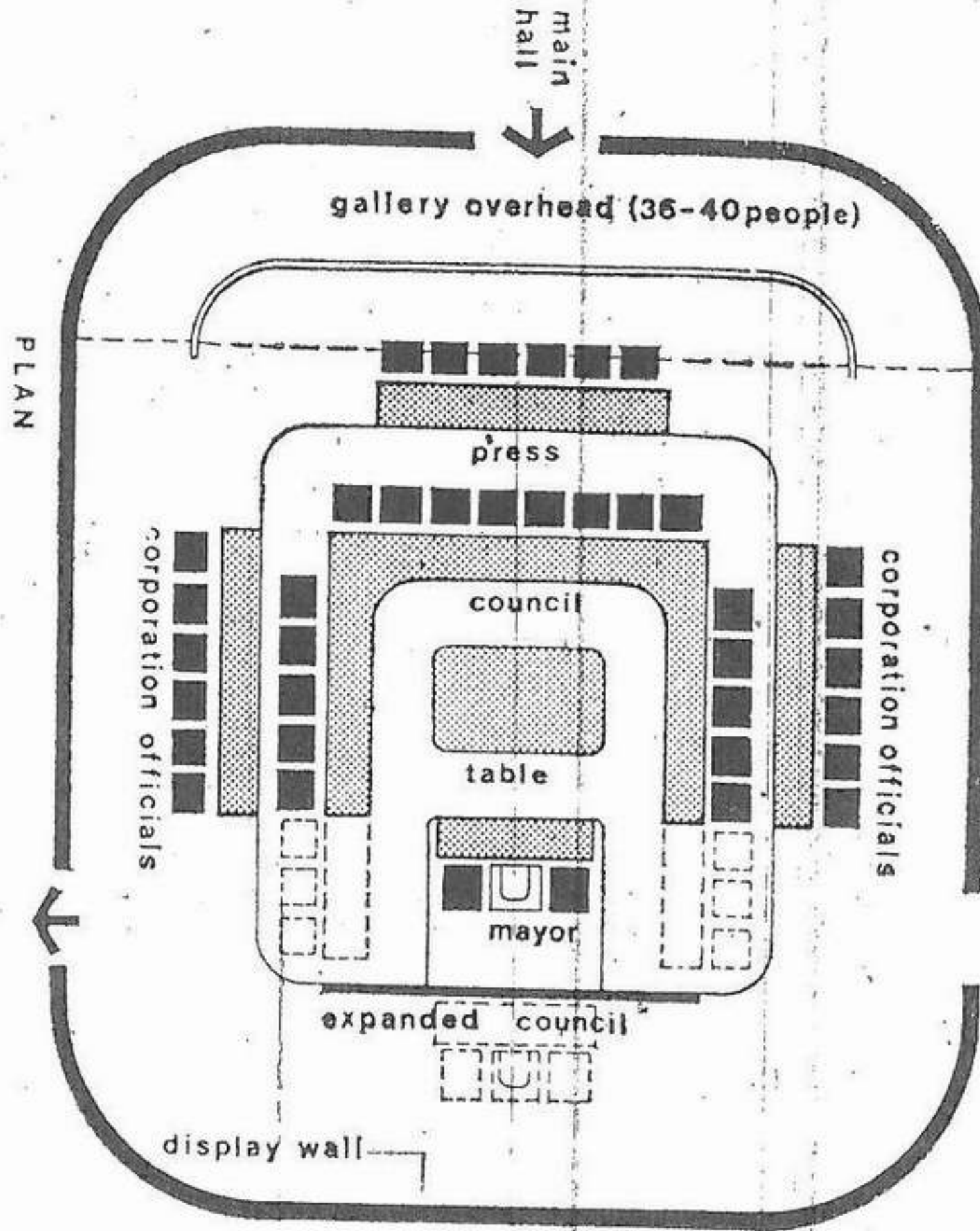
"It seemed important to us that the chamber should be a fairly intimate space, to encourage genuine discussion rather than formal polemics.

"If the room is reasonably small, microphones will not be required.

"Furthermore, the chamber is not always fully occupied, and empty seats tend to have a dampening effect.

"For these reasons the council seating is arranged in a square to reduce the distance between members, and the public seating (rarely filled) is located on a sloping gallery with good sightlines

explain thinking behind new city council chamber



The seating plan.

into the chamber below.

"The seating for Corporation officials will not always be occupied fully; however essential their presence is, they are secondary in importance (in this room) to the elected representatives.

"The Press, who are always essential, have heretofore been located in the centre of the room.

"Do they not have to crane their necks sometimes in that position?"

"In any event, the small central space is better occupied by a table on which the mace may be placed, or on which plans or models under discussion may be shown in full view.

"We think that the Press, on slightly raised seating facing the Mayor, will have a much better view of the proceedings and will have no problem in hearing everything that transpires in the position we propose.

"Being partially under the public gallery, any distracting sounds emerging from that area would, we hope, be cut off from the Press.

"Mr. Moroney advocates a circular layout to include councillors and officials.

"We tried this idea at an early stage, and it does not work well for the following reasons: firstly, you cannot expand a circle (our square plan has two 'open-ended' sides to accommodate a later enlarged Council, dotted in on our drawing); secondly, the room becomes very large as the circumference of the circle must be large enough to accommodate members and officials.

"This, in turn, means that there is an undesirably large distance between speakers, and militates against the intimate atmosphere which we felt was appropriate.

"Furthermore, a circular room creates acoustic problems, and a larger chamber is more expensive.

Outer ring

"Finally, to locate the public on an outer ring—as suggested by Mr. Moroney—would increase the size of the chamber even more, and would cause intolerable distraction to the members' deliberations. The public, we believe, might feel inhibited in coming and going freely if their seating formed part of the central discussion area.

"As the architects responsible for advising Limerick Corporation on this project, we welcome informed comment—like Mr. Moroney's—on any aspect of our proposals, which are, of course, totally subject to the approval of the Corporation.

"Having done the job we were appointed to do, any evidence of public interest in this important building is gratifying to us.

"Your city needs a new City Hall; the more it is discussed and considered, the better it is likely to be."