

# Residents concerned at level of vandalism

By **PADDY MORONEY**

A MEETING of residents in the old historic quarter of Limerick city has been told of acts of vandalism and intimidation, which are ruining the quality of life in the district.

Much of the blame has been attributed to groups of young people who appeared to have little else to do.

The meeting — held at St Mary's School Hall, Bishop Street, in the heart of "the Parish" — pressed questions on security and safety to the Garda crime prevention officer for Limerick, Sgt John Kelly, and the deputy chief fire officer, Carmel Kirby.

One member of the King's Island Heritage Area Residents' Association, which had called the meeting, said that she had had visitors from the United States who had been very unimpressed by the condition of the locality.

"A couple of Americans went up to the castle, and they said the whole area (around Nicholas Street) was closed up and torn down," said one resident.

Secretary Nancy Irwin explained: "The meeting was called to examine the situation where, if elderly and vulnerable people secure their homes against intruders, they could also be preventing their own quick escape in the event of fire.

"A room can go on fire in 15 seconds, which is pretty terrifying, and they emphasised the need for smoke alarms."

But although the discussion centred on how to reconcile this problem, it was the complaints of vandalism which drew the attention of the meeting.

"We also told the crime prevention officer about what was going on in the heritage area."

One serious problem is the existence of what appears to be a small gang of

youths who, for idleness, pelt stones at the very attractive Villiers Homes, an architectural gem in themselves and housing one of the most admired charities in the city — the accommodation of the elderly.

There are fears locally that, eventually, somebody such as the caretaker could be hit with a stone.

Local residents are angry at what appears to be the ease with which youths can strike and then be gone again.

Said one spokeswoman: "The youths are very active. There are young teenagers drinking in the car park behind the city hall, spending the whole evening there, and throwing bottles and cans over the walls into people's property."

She added: "One woman living in Newgate found that they were throwing mud at her home, and she had to get up in the middle of the night, and they told her that they would get her shop next.

"She had the house repainted, and the next time it happened was a few nights later."

The residents feel that there is a need for more security cameras, particularly for the smaller streets.

Revealed a resident: "One of the Sisters in the convent two nights ago got up at 3am and found they had unhinged the convent gate and had dragged the railings across the road."

Declared another resident: "We are very dependent on tourists here. We need cameras and garda patrols, and we need to clean up the graffiti."

On the question of reconciling the need for domestic security with the need for a rapid exit, the residents were told that they would have to arrange a route inside the house and a quick means of exit, in case of fire.

"The worst burglary in the world is better than being burned to death," said secretary Nancy Irwin.