

# City 'needs Civic Trust to balance appalling image'

By MAIRÉAD NI CHAOIMH

LIMERICK needs its Civic Trust to counter its appalling image, according to former Fine Gael leader Deputy Michael Noonan.

He was speaking at Limerick Civic Trust's 20th birthday celebrations in Mary Immaculate College this Monday. Deputy Noonan, who was also present for the launch 20 years ago said: "Twenty years ago we had acres and acres of dereliction in the city strewn with litter and weeds."

"People laughed and it was not believed we could change the appearance of Limerick. But now we have one of the finest cities in Europe. The Trust has brought new ideas to the city and never underestimate the power of a concept. The Trust has brought great ideas to fruition. I know that the next 20 years will be as fruitful as the last."

Deputy Noonan said that an entity like the Civic Trust was necessary especially at a time when "lawlessness has beset the city and it is suffering from an appalling image."

"Something must be done before employment prospects suffer. It is not a huge problem; it can be dealt with. We are not Washington DC with one of the highest murder rates in that country, or Lagos or Mexico."

He called for a "trademark building" for the city, a theatre on the banks of the river which would be "a living manifestation of the modern cultural Limerick."

He also stated how important it was to have a Minister at Cabinet from Limerick.

"This is our weakness as the third city. We are

not represented at Cabinet and that is where the power is. Areas that are represented, there have clout, and areas that are not represented have none," he said.

Meanwhile, the Trust was described as "the best example of a civic trust I have ever come across" by international expert David Fletcher.

"I am overwhelmed and astonished to see what has been achieved in Limerick in 20 years," he said.

Prof Fletcher, honorary chairman of the Pennine Heritage Trust, was the guest speaker at the launch of the trust 20 years ago and has not been in the city since.

He has helped set up many trusts in England, Ireland and in Europe. He is an authority on heritage, community and urban regeneration.

"There are two kinds of civic trusts, those that do and those that don't. And this is one that does. This is a real dirt under the fingernails trust."

"A real measure of success is when completion of these projects results in influencing the climate of opinion and gets people thinking in a different way. Another measure is when people start saying it was their idea."

"What I see here in Limerick is remarkable and absolutely amazing. And Denis Leonard has been vital, he has held the Trust together and been the continuity and driving force."

Mayor John Cronin described the Trust as "epitomising my idea of the vision I have for Limerick, especially in relation to the voluntary nature of the organisation."

Trust chairman James J O'Donnell said that he was proud of the work of the Trust over the past two decades.

"We have completed two pedestrian bridges, given employment to over

70 people, published several books on historical research, recorded 126 folklore interviews, and carried out 106 projects all around the city," he said.

"In the last 20 years Limerick has evolved from an attitude of accepting development at any cost to one where values are put on the architectural environment and heritage of the city."

"This is positive and I would urge the Mayor, City Council and city officials to keep raising the bar on developers so as to get a contribution from them for the betterment of Limerick," he said.

The main feature of the

meeting at the Ceann Cora room was Prof Fletcher's lecture Slides of the Trust's projects were also shown. Local politicians, students and lovers of Limerick's heritage were in attendance at the lecture theatre.

Peadar Cremin, president of Mary Immaculate College, said that they were "in party mode this evening to announce a great good news story."

The Civic Trust is to announce its special 20th birthday project in the coming weeks.

Mr O'Donnell promised that it will be "our best yet and a popular project among all sections of the community".



At Mary Immaculate College for the 20th anniversary celebrations of Limerick Civic Trust, Peadar Cremin, president, Mary Immaculate College; Denis Leonard, Trust director, and former Fine Gael leader Deputy Michael Noonan



Mayor John Cronin with Prof David Fletcher, guest speaker and honorary chairman Pennine Heritage Trust, and Limerick Civic Trust chairman, Jim O'Donnell

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