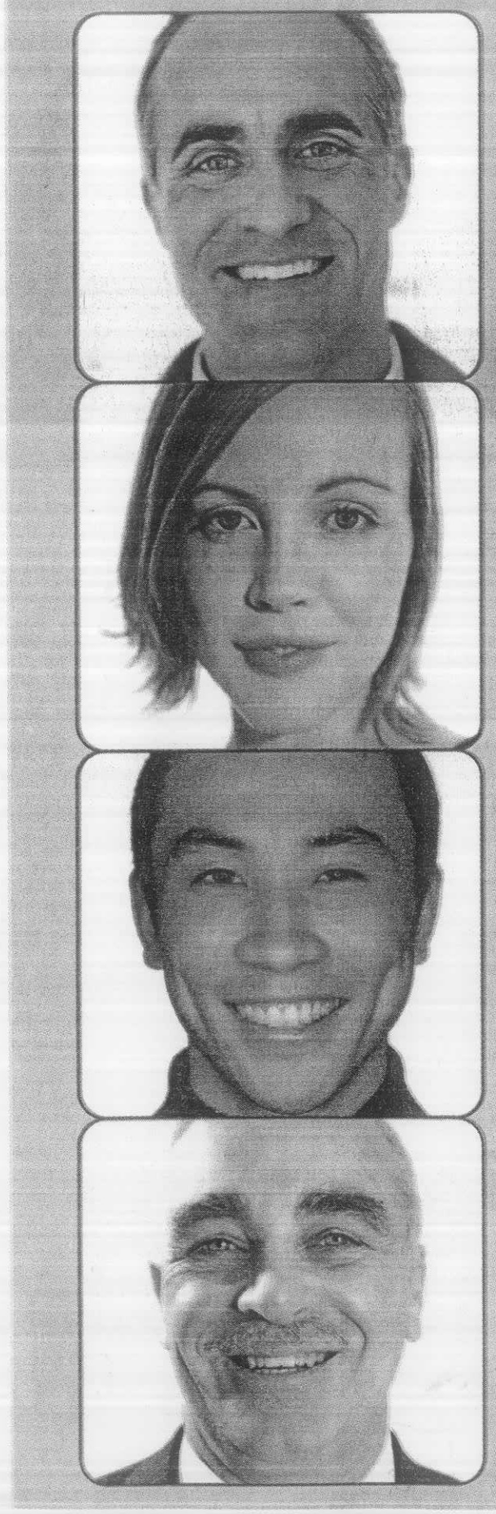


An artist's impression of the proposed development at Limerick Docklands

Shannon Foynes
PORT COMPANY

Port boss reveals dockland vision

By DONAL O'REGAN

A NEW landmark iconic building that will stand out in the existing skyline is just one of the dramatic changes Limerick will see if the sale of the docklands go through.

The redevelopment of over 40 acres of prime docklands, which is set to run to millions of euro, could generate up to 1,000 jobs for the city and create a landmark development modelled on some of the most successful dockland rejuvenation projects in

ever-increasing size of ships and the inadequate facilities and water depths, Limerick Port can simply no longer compete in a national context.

"The tidal gates at Limerick can only open at high water—consequently access to some of the bigger vessels must often be restricted to a time window as narrow as one hour a day during daylight hours.

"While the existing port can only cater for ships of 4,400 tonnes, Foynes can already cater for ships with 10 times that capacity, and even this is set to double to over 80,000 tonnes as the County Limerick port continues its programme of expansion,"

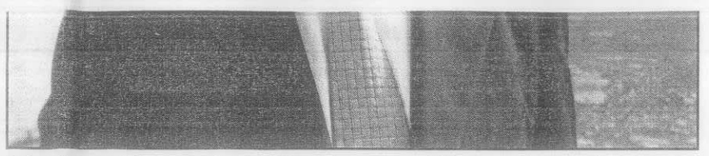
on some of the most successful dockland rejuvenation projects in the world, the current owners of the site, Shannon Foynes Port Company stated.

Brian Byrne, chief executive, revealed that the declarations of interests and proposals for the site included a variety of mixed uses and commercial ventures, including hotels, financial centres, some retail, a cultural centre for the arts, a national convention centre and a small amount of exclusive residential property.

Mr Byrne said that the company were at the final stages of deliberating over proposals from developers and the overall plans were exciting.

"This project has the potential to trigger massive investment for Limerick, and represent a landmark development for the city's economic and visual environment," he said.

The story of estuarine cities with their own ports is a universal one; intrusive port facilities move downriver as the urban growth and density levels place an insurmountable pressure on the city waterfronts, said Mr Byrne.



Brian Byrne, Shannon Foynes Port Company chief executive: project has the potential to trigger massive investment in Limerick

Dublin and Waterford have already rejuvenated their derelict dockland sites—Cork, Drogheda, Dundalk and Galway have announced that they are soon to follow.

"Should Limerick turn its back on this opportunity to show leadership, decades of neglect will follow at this site, and a massive opportunity will be lost," Mr Byrne believes.

The rejuvenated docklands development would also complete the aesthetic transformation of riverside Limerick that has been a work in progress from Arthur's Quay up to the present Steamboat Quay, spanning three decades, he said.

"The plans incorporate a sophisticated aesthetic look while retaining a strong maritime theme, with berthing for sailboats and motor-cruisers to the front of the bustling commercial centre featuring prominently among the proposals," said Mr Byrne.

On completion, the new commercial centre could employ up to 1,000 people, in addition to an estimated 750 jobs involved in the construction phase.

The overall value of the project to the city's economy in monetary terms has the potential to exceed €50m a year.

However, not everybody shares Mr Byrne's optimism about the future for Limerick if the port is sold off.

One of their arguments is that the port has been profitable.

And the port company acknowledged that Limerick Docks was "in the black".

But they said achievement of its profit level does not fully take into account the costs associated with dredging, navigational aids, commercial rates and transport costs, along with management and corporate support.

"When one considers that none of the cargo handled through the city's docks is destined for sale in the city itself—there can be little doubt that very significant savings can be achieved for the consumer if cargo is handled through a more efficient facility," Mr Byrne said.

Instead, the entire 550,000 tonnes of cargo has to be trucked through our city's over-congested streets, pointed out Mr Byrne.

Regarding the objections to the proposed sell-off, Mr Byrne empathised with the emotional debate in the context of the tradition of port activity in Limerick, but that due to the the County Limerick port continues its programme of expansion," said Mr Byrne.

The proposed sale will also release vital additional equity for the ongoing redevelopment of Foynes Port—one of the premier deepwater multimodal ports in the country—which is crucial to the overall economic development of Limerick City and the entire region.

With regard to job losses, Mr Byrne rejected claims that 200 jobs would be lost as a result of the sale of the land.

He revealed that the company now employed just seven part-time stevedoring staff, nine full-time support staff and that all their jobs had already been underwritten with a 10-year guarantee.

Mr Byrne also reaffirmed that Shannon Foynes Port Company were determined to engage with local political representatives in relation to the docklands.

The company plan to facilitate an information day early next month and the board are also expected to decide on the proposals next month.

Scrap metal waiting to be shipped through the docks

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