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Market value: Limerick Milk Market Trustees and some of the stallholders are locked in combat over plans to develop the market into a major tourist attraction, and, inset top left, an architect's drawing of the proposed revamped market with its covered roof

'Grey areas' may yet stall market redevelopment

■ Two sides at loggerheads over Milk Market plans as another challenge looms

Anne Sheridan

"A LOT of businesses which are presented with change at the moment view it as a threat. But this is not a threat," said David O'Mahony, chairman of the Market Trustees, commenting on the €2m plans for the Milk Market. Times have changed, he said, and with that, the popular Milk Market needed to move with the times and embrace them, while also respecting the old order – including loyal customers and traders at the historic market, which dates from 1852. But change is often resisted. Some traders believe it is being resisted with good reason; others are objecting to the clarity from the trustees on their future in the new plans. And yet there are strong arguments from both sides, who share one common view – to develop a better market and one that is unique, and not striving to be Cork's English Market. The multi-million euro development received planning permission from An Bord Pleanála ear-

lier this year after appeals were made against Limerick City Council's decision to grant planning.

Now, a judicial review of the latest decision is in the pipeline, and a University of Limerick sociology lecturer has confirmed her intention to begin another petition among "regulars of market who appreciate and value the uniqueness of the market as it is".

Among those who value the market as it stands is Pallaskenry native Ken Miller, who has been trading there since 1984. Before that, his mother began their family stall at the market in 1954.

Now, as he approaches the age where he is entitled to a pension, he is still ploughing away, overseeing the making of jams, chutneys and a variety of foodstuffs, which he sells each Saturday. "My view is leave well enough alone. The market just isn't ready for the type of market they're proposing. Attendance on a Saturday is fine, but beyond that it's a white elephant. When they introduced



Milk Market stallholder Ken Miller: 'The reservations are soundly based because of these grey areas, which may result in a loss of business'

a market on other days of the week, it collapsed," said Mr Miller.

He attributed the failure of the market to take off on other days to the rise and dominance of supermarkets over local shopowners and stallholders.

Regarding the price of having a stall at the market, he said: "We raised that on numerous occasions but nothing was forthcoming. We were told it wasn't their number one priority."

For Mr Miller, this is one of the many "grey areas" in the plans, which, he said, were largely drawn out before they had a chance to put their case.

"The reservations are soundly based because of these grey areas, which may result in a loss of business," he said, adding that he felt the trustees will aim to get rid of "the bread and butter line" because they "don't slot in with high street standards".

Limerick resident and trader Treasa Storey, who sells similar foodstuffs, said "one of the main problems is we're not being kept in the loop".

"People are asking questions but we're not getting any answers. We would like something in writ-

ing. They didn't even tell us when the planning permission was going in (to City Hall), or when we got it," said Ms Storey, whose family have been trading at the market for 30 years.

Yet Chris O'Connor, development co-ordinator of the project, said every trader – with many travelling from Cork, Kerry, Waterford, Clare, Galway and Tipperary – is hugely valued, and each will bring something different to the market.

Both he and Mr O'Mahony said the traders concerns were "very valid", but regretted that written correspondence had not yet been circulated as the details were still being ironed out.

They maintain they are simply moving the market on to the next level, and capitalising on what the market could offer, not just to traders and visitors, but to the city as a major tourist attraction. "This will be the premier visiting location in Limerick," said Mr O'Mahony, who believes that, on average, it may attract more visitors than Thomond Park over time.