

Milk Market prepares to welcome a new era

Anne Sheridan

IT was an historic and sad occasion for many at the Milk Market last Saturday on the final day before contractors move on site to redevelop one of the country's oldest markets.

From this Saturday, November 7, the market will move to nearby Ellen Street in the city as construction work to install a canopy over the open-air market is set to begin.

Traders from Co Limerick have expressed mixed feelings on the plans for the new market.

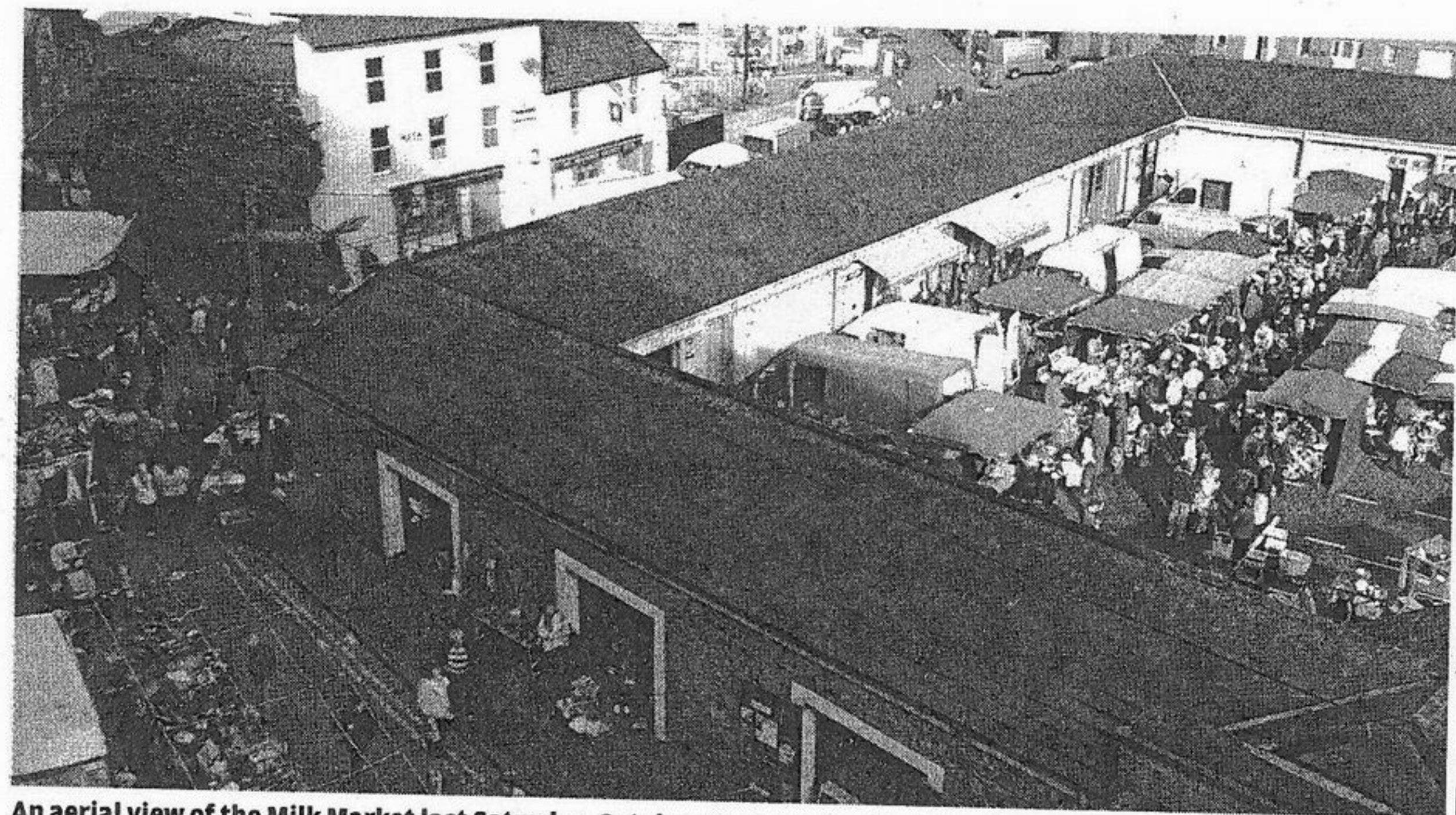
Pallaskenry trader Ken Miller, who has been doing business there since 1984, said there was great "sentimentality and loneliness" felt on Saturday.

"I have never seen so many people taking photos at the market – it was as if they were trying to preserve the old market in their minds.

"The question was also there – 'Would it be for the better?' If it does have the magnetism the developers are talking about it will draw extra business," said Mr Miller.

Sylvester Flanagan, 74, from the Ennis Road area, said he has been visiting the market for the past 35 years. Meeting his friends and "getting lovely fresh fish from West Cork, the like you wouldn't get in the supermarket" have kept him coming back over the years.

"It won't be the same. They're doing away with



An aerial view of the Milk Market last Saturday, October 31. It was the final day the market will operate in its current format before a canvas canopy is built over it and it moves to a six-day format

PICTURE: MARTY HOLLAND

all the smashing businesses and the new ones aren't doing too well. It should stay the way it is. People seem to be a bit down over it," said Mr Flanagan.

Trader Marie Hussey, who operates Green Acres cheese shop at the market, said people were "awfully sad last Saturday, and everyone was talking about their parents and grand-parents coming to the market". A vehement opponent of the €2m plans to alter the market, she added: "I'm open to coming back and saying I was wrong, if I am proved wrong, and I will apologise to the Market Trustees."

However, it has been argued that the erection of a shelter over the market will protect traders and shoppers from the elements during the winter months especially, and ultimately increase trade.

Independent John Gilligan, a former chairperson of the Market Trustees, believes the plans will give the market "an entire new lease of life" and previously said that those who have objected to the plans are "living in the past".

By next year it is intended the Milk Market will become a six-day market, rather than operating for six hours each Saturday.

It is estimated that the newly upgraded facility will have the potential to increase footfall at the Milk Market by over 50 per cent per week when it reopens in mid-2010.

It is also planned to make the venue available for other events such as Christmas markets, food fairs and classical concerts.

David O'Mahony, chairman of the Market Trustees, said their aim is to have the Milk Market recognised as the "outstanding example of best practice in market operations in Ireland and beyond".

A seasonal calendar of events and stalls for the

market is now being prepared, which will see a diversity of new and old traders attend on different days of the week, excluding Monday when the market will be closed.

A 120-seat restaurant is also planned for the Milk Market area, which the Market Trustees believe will become a "must visit location."

The opening of the market next year is expected to be "a national event", and those in the food industry, including Darina Allen and Minister for Food Trevor Sargent, have supported the ideals behind the new market, according to Mr O'Mahony.