

Mayor hopeful over decision on centre

By ANNE SHERIDAN

LOCAL authority officials and members are remaining optimistic about the future of the €250m Opera Centre despite another delay for the project.

A decision was due from An Bord Pleanála last Thursday but now the case is to be decided by November 24.

The developer, Belfast businessman Suneil Sharma, said he is "very disappointed" that they will have to wait nearly another month for approval by the planning body.

Mayor Leddin said he is very hopeful the project will be given the green light. "It's not unusual for An Bord Pleanála to take more time in deciding a case, especially when you consider the size and scale of this project. It's certainly not looking doubtful. In fact, I would be quietly confident that it will go ahead. It would be a massive addition to the city's regeneration," said Mayor Leddin.

Last Thursday Mr Sharma, director of

Regeneration Developments Ltd., said he would be "gutted" if the case were to be delayed any further. "It should be quite a simple decision. It's the biggest thing Limerick is going to see in the foreseeable future. It will be bad for us as developers if it doesn't go ahead but it will be disastrous for Limerick and the Mid West," said Mr Sharma, who is also Managing Director of the engineering group Befab.

The four appellants - Pauline Fenton, Cáit Ní Cheallacháin, Daniel Broderick and Caroline O'Brien - have all objected to Limerick's "shopping mecca" on the grounds that heritage will be lost if the development goes ahead.

Limerick architect Cáit Ní Cheallacháin, refused to accept €250,000 payoff from the developers of the Opera Centre in the hope that she would withdraw her objection.

Mr Sharma did not deny the deal but believed the timing of this leak was quite cynical.

"We've presented a very robust case to the board and have the support of every major heritage body," he said.

The project, which is the



The artists impression of the €250m Opera Centre

biggest development in the country at present, is set to bring 1,200 new jobs to the

region.

Denis Leonard of Limerick Civic Trust and

the Irish Georgian Society said "if we lose out on this development we're looking

at very serious problems for the development of the area."