

Advertising promotion

Heat is on for Opera Mall success

THE end of October will see An Bord Pleanála make its final decision on the future of the proposed Opera Mall shopping centre. Set to extend from St Michael's Place (in front of the Cahill May Roberts building), up Rutland Street and into Patrick Street, if built, the mall will be the largest city retail regeneration project outside Dublin.

For now, the sole objector to the project is Limerick architect Cait Ni Chealleacháin, who has her two-part case (reference P05/548) lodged with City Council. However, there is a new optimism on the developer's part, Regeneration Developments Ltd who are based in Belfast, that the Opera Mall will see the light of day.

According to Pat Kearney, whose firm Rooney Auctioneers



A pedestrian bridge will extend from the multi-storey mall into Denmark Street to access the carpark.

ants and then others secured in units extending from 2,500 sq ft to 10,000 sq ft".

The plans have changed little since

Trust and the Irish Georgian Society. And An Taisce did not appeal the plans."

The mall itself will approximate an enor-

another two storeys to cope with the attendant volume of traffic; a cost of 200mn euro is mooted for the construction involved and the remodelling of No 4 Patrick street into a living museum - it's the former home of opera queen Catherine Hayes.

Pat Kearney is 100 per cent confident that the many units will fill completely should the Opera Mall be built, with tenants from the UK and West Europe companies as well as Irish. The focus is on fashion and lifestyle shops. His argument is that city badly needs a popular shopping hub that will be all weather and beautifully designed: at Christmas last year, Limerick, the third largest city in Ireland, lost trade and was the only city to do as suburban shopping centres proved increasingly attractive and convenient to consumers.

Regeneration

Developments lead

Suneil Sharma is chief executive of the company Regeneration Developments which is the money and vision behind opera mall.

Re the objection launched by Ms Ni Cheallachain, who wants more buildings retained in their entirety, he says "We have taken every body's issues and concerns on board and one person is holding us up, someone not based in the area concerned. We are working in partnership with the council and traders and have met everybody".

He points to the move of furniture and hardware stores from the city to more space and the loss of footfall as traders and customers move off. "Look, we have to protect our town centres from the suburbs taking over. The retail industry has changed enormously and people

need nice big boxes for their stock - retailers need considerably bigger and better units to be successful".

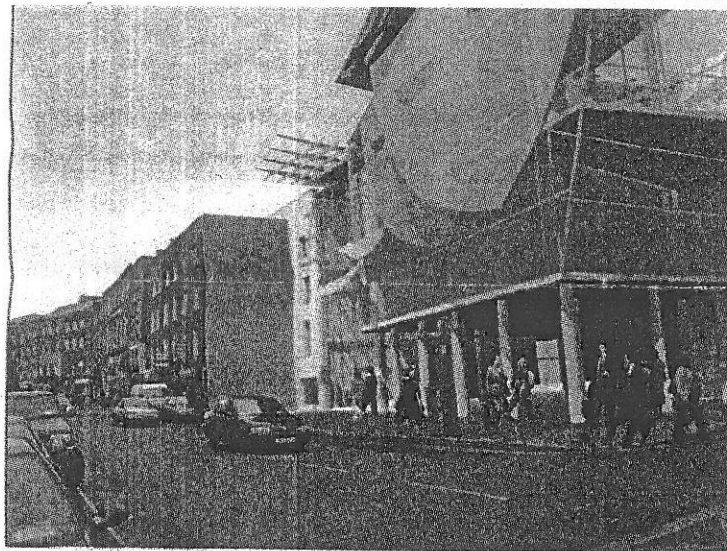
International clientele

He laments the appeals process that "has wasted four to five months. This is a once in a life time opportunity for the tenants [of Rutland Street and Patrick Street] and it will do terminal damage to the city centre if the mall does not go ahead. Operators for the Opera Mall are not

able to make a commitment until they see the planning clean and they are talking to hundreds of such schemes around Europe. Regeneration Developments feels this scheme will go ahead, it has to be a runner".

Should planning permission be granted late October, the next step will be to prove Opera Mall's viability by singing agreements with the retailers, national and international. "We are talking to all

the major players in Europe. The theme is fashion, it is key to any one of these developments, you get a niche fashion anchor and all of the other things that a spin off that - phones, computers, homewares". Suneil Sharma's own weight is on the technical and legal aspects of fostering Opera Mall and he pays a warm tribute to the "massive commitment by the developers who have remained faithful to the project".



Some of the original buildings fronts such as the Old Town Hall Centre, where Limerick Post is based, will be retained.

will be agents for the individual units should they materialise: "This should see the creation of some 1,200 new jobs. There will be two major anchor ten-

this project first began three and half years ago, he adds and "it has the support of every heritage group - Thomond Archeological Society, Limerick Civic

mous 300,000 sq ft of retail space and connect by a pedestrian foot bridge with Denmark Street and its convenient carpark. This will scale up

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