

# LIMERICK

Saturday 17 May 2008

BECAUSE LIFE IS

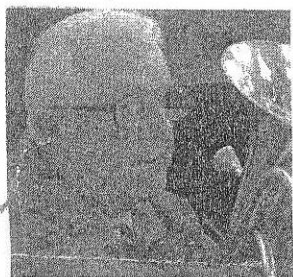
## Best for loc

- Ballynanty's James McCarthy hopes for Munster soccer gl
- Limerick athletes excel in schools finals at Plassey

### LEADER LIGHTS



**Peter Power**  
Politician on the up  
Page 9



**Pa Phelan**  
Boherbuoy mainstay  
Pages 1-2, Leader 2



**Laura O'Mahony**  
Out and about in city  
COMMUNITY LEADER

# Granary now part of €350m Opera Centre

■ New plans go to City Hall; completion date put back

**Anne Sheridan**

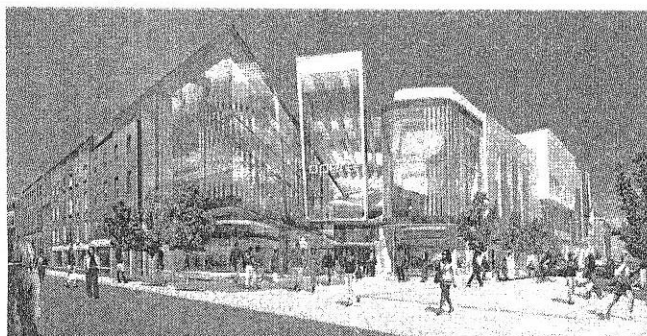
CONSTRUCTION on the €350 million Opera Centre is anticipated to start this September, as the developers have re-applied to Limerick City Council for planning permission to expand the largest retail centre in the Mid-West to incorporate four more buildings – including The Granary – into their plans.

But shoppers will have to wait at least three years to enter the doors of the centre, where Marks & Spencer are rumoured to have their first outlet in the city centre, by which time the Coonagh Cross development and ParkPoint retail centre in Castletroy will be completed.

Robert Bloomer of Hamilton Osborne King said the developers are hopeful that this new application “will be more straightforward” than the last contentious application, which was passed by An Bord Pleanála after numerous local objections.

However, the developers could potentially face another major battle with City Hall, as they are seeking to include The Granary – a listed building – and home to Trinity Rooms nightclub, as well as the city library, into the development.

Fine Gael Cllr Kevin Kiely, a member of the council's strate-



An architect's impression of the revised and expanded Opera Centre, after its developers re-applied for planning permission

gic planning committee, said this application could take up to two years to process if there are objections from the public, and has major concerns about how the development has proceeded since its inception two years ago.

“One of my major concerns is that they haven't entered into any negotiations with Trinity Rooms, where about 90 people are working. Furthermore, all of lower Patrick Street is now closed and it's not doing anything for the image of the city. I think they jumped the gun in taking those retailers out too soon and it doesn't look right to have all those shops boarded up,” said Cllr Kiely.

But Joe Clarke, manager of Trinity Rooms, said they would be delighted to be part of the

Opera Centre, which he believes will breathe more life into the city centre, and confirmed that they will not be forced to find another venue for the club. “We've had a very successful business in The Granary for the past five years and we'll be having another five years here. That won't change one iota. We've a long term lease and have bookings into 2009,” said Mr Clarke.

Originally estimated to cost in the region of €250m, Mr Bloomer has confirmed that the cost of the project has now increased to €350m. Some 275 jobs will be generated during the construction phase and approximately 800 full and part time jobs will be created once the centre is open and trading.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

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# Opera centre plans expanded

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

➔ Under the new planning application, the Dublin based company Regeneration Developments Ltd have applied to build a "new" multi storey shopping centre with a street mall, retail centre, underground car parking and food hall to provide 38,541 sq m of new mixed use retail, comprising two retail anchors and 38 retail units.

"We're effectively enlarging the site and including buildings which weren't in the original application.

"We have agreed the terms with one of the main anchors and we are in active discussions with a number of major

and international retailers for the other outlets," said Mr Bloomer, who would not confirm if Marks & Spencer have confirmed their intention to open an outlet in the city.

Mr Bloomer said as the number of car parking spaces has now increased to 1,000 spaces, he anticipates that the city planners will be closely examining the traffic implications for the Patrick Street area. The old town hall on Rutland Street - another protected structure - is also part of the new redesign.

The Limerick Leader can also exclusively reveal the six Irish businessmen who bought the multi-million euro company

from four British investors last year, and whose identity has been has been fiercely guarded by the company since the change-over.

According to documentation obtained this week from the Companies Registration Office, Belfast businessman Suneil Sharma sold on the company last year to Pat Keogh, 63, of Newtown, Clarina, along with five other businessmen.

## Tycoon

They are Kerry property tycoon Jerry O'Reilly, 62, who owns The Granary building; David Courtney, 47, of the property consultancy group Spain Courtney Doyle (and also a

director of Superquinn); Dublin businessman Terence Sweeney, 46; Kildare accountant Eamon Shields, 35; and Dublin accountant Pdraig Breen, 31.

Mr O'Reilly is a director of over 70 companies and owns a number of properties in Limerick including the Cahill May Roberts office block on Bank Place and is co-owner of the Absolute Hotel Group. This year his fortune was estimated to be in the region of €65m according to the Sunday Times Rich List.

Two years ago, three British businessmen, in addition to Mr Sharma, were registered as directors of the company Regeneration Developments.

They were Co Antrim property mogul Samuel Morrison, whose fortune was estimated to be worth €450m this year; Lata McCarthy, and Samuel Verner Morrison.

Mr Morrison and Mr Sharma donated funds totalling over €3million to the company in 2006, and under the company's financial statements in 2006 the site in Limerick was valued at €2,180,000.

Mr Sharma also donated the No 4 Patrick Street - the birthplace of the late opera singer Catherine Hayes - to Limerick Civic Trust for restoration, after An Bord Pleanála ruled that the building should be preserved.

## Man in 30s drowned in Shannon

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

➔ believed to be in his late 30s, was recovered at approximately 7.45pm. He was removed to the Mid-Western Regional Hospital in Dooradoyle, where the post-mortem will be carried out on Thursday.

Roger Sweeney of Irish Water Safety said that on average one person in Ireland dies from accidental drowning every week, and urged people looking to avail of the summer weather to be wary of the dangers of swimming in rivers and other waterways: "If people want to swim, we must stress that