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OPERA CENTRE SET TO GET GO AHEAD



EXCLUSIVE
By NICK RABBITS

CITY planners will give the multi-million euro Opera Centre the go ahead over the next week, the Limerick Chronicle has learned.

Mayor John Gilligan, Cllr Kevin Kiely and a planning official confirmed this morning that the planning application for €350m-rated project will be granted, subject to city manager Tom Mackey signing it off when he returns from holiday.

The development, originally mooted in 2005, looks to finally be approved, after redrawn plans which bring in four new buildings including The Granary, were lodged in May.

Cllr Kevin Kiely of the planning strategic policy committee, said they were informed of the intention to grant permission on Monday afternoon by city officials, who before going public, need to inform developers. Regeneration Developments, the consortium which includes Kerry businessman Jerry O'Reilly.

The owner of the adjacent Granary and seven parties

who made submissions to the plan will also be informed by the planners.

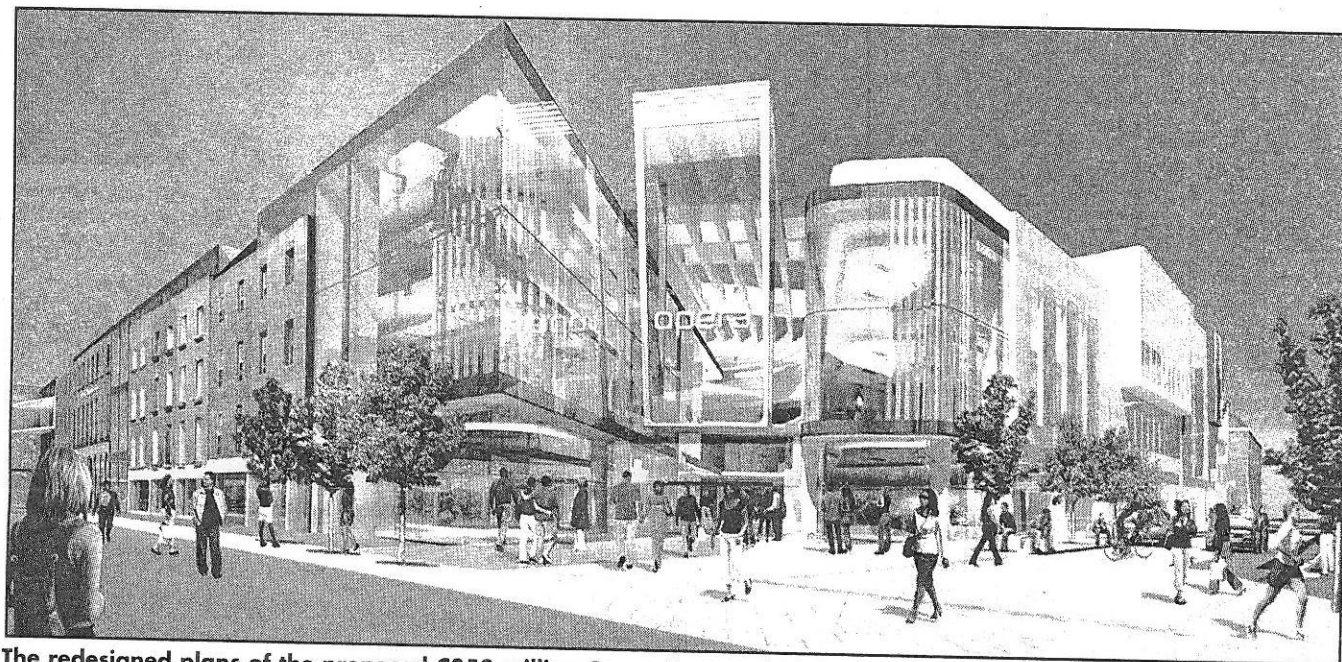
The Opera Centre, estimated to cost €350m, will be the Mid West's largest shopping centre at more than 38,000 square meters.

Although it will not be complete for at least three years from the date builders move on site, suggested tenants include Marks & Spencer, who were recently denied permission to move into the Crescent Shopping Centre. The development will also include a food court and a pub.

Last week it emerged that the owners of the Trinity Rooms may seek compensation from the council if a small piece of land at the Bank Place Plaza is taken over by the city authority through a compulsory purchase order.

The nightclub's owners Redroom Ltd say the 0.00985 hectare piece of land is a major access point for their deliveries, and queuing system, and claim that if they cede the land, it could force them out of business.

Although Cllr Kiely says he will welcome the Opera Centre, he has appealed to the developers to enter into discussions with businesses based in the Granary - "main-



The redesigned plans of the proposed €350 million Opera Centre which is about to be approved

ly the Trinity Rooms."

"They have a staff of 100 people, and the developers should enter into immediate discussions with them now they have got the decision to go ahead," he said.

Cllr Kiely also predicted The Opera Centre will have

"no problems" disposing with any of their commercial units. I feel this will be the start of the regeneration of the city centre.

"With the plans to develop the Arthur's Quay site this is the start of good things to come," he added.

Although the plan will be given permission later today, subject to an unconfirmed set of conditions, objections and appeals to An Bord Pleanála could delay the project further.

A decision on whether the council can impose the CPO

on the scrap of land is expected from An Bord Pleanála by September 22.

During the construction phase, 275 jobs will be created on site, and once the centre is operational, another 800 full and part time jobs will open up.

Clare councillors si