



Fine Gael leader, Enda Kenny speaking at the Fine Gael press conference in the Marriott Hotel  
PICTURE: ADRIAN BUTLER

## Kenny and Long disagree on 'racism' controversy

Mike Dwane

FINE Gael's Cllr Jim Long today insisted he had "nothing to say sorry for" after party leader Enda Kenny indicated the councillor was "prepared to apologise to the Polish people" offended by his controversial remarks on migrant workers.

There were calls to have Cllr Long ejected from Fine Gael after he claimed migrant workers were making little contribution to the economy and displacing Irish people from jobs. On a visit to the city yesterday, Deputy Kenny said:

"I read the remarks and I spoke to Jim Long this morning and had a long and fruitful conversation with him about this. Migrant workers did not cause the unemployment problem in Ireland. The real problem here is the Government mismanaging the economy has failed to protect and create jobs."

"Jim Long reported to me frustration he had been feeling and what was being expressed to him on the doorsteps. This is nothing

unusual. All over the country I meet people who have either lost their jobs or are in fear of losing their jobs," Deputy Kenny said.

Fine Gael would shortly publish a 10-point plan on immigration and integration which would deal comprehensively with all concerns expressed by Cllr Long.

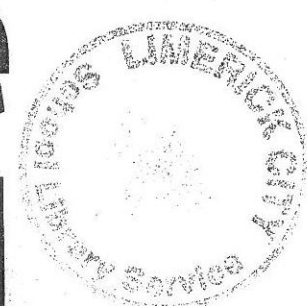
"Jim was quite open about this and having explained this to him, he is quite prepared to say publicly that he did not wish to offend any migrant worker and that if in the course of the remarks that he made in reporting frustrations of people on the doorstep, he is quite prepared to apologise to the Polish people. We will be in discussion with him about the Fine Gael document being published in the next 10 days."

Asked if he was happy for Cllr Long to remain as a Fine Gael candidate if he made an apology, Deputy Kenny said: "In those circumstances, yes."

But Cllr Long denied that any apology had been agreed with Fine Gael or Enda Kenny. All that had been agreed, he stressed, was that his remarks appeared to have caused offence and that this was not intentional. Cllr Long said today he has

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# Developers say Opera Centre will go ahead



## Minister O'Dea 'quite perturbed' at Anglo Irish involvement

Anne Sheridan

THE developers behind the €350m Opera Centre have said the fact that Anglo Irish Bank has a 50 per cent share in the project is "irrelevant" as to whether it goes ahead.

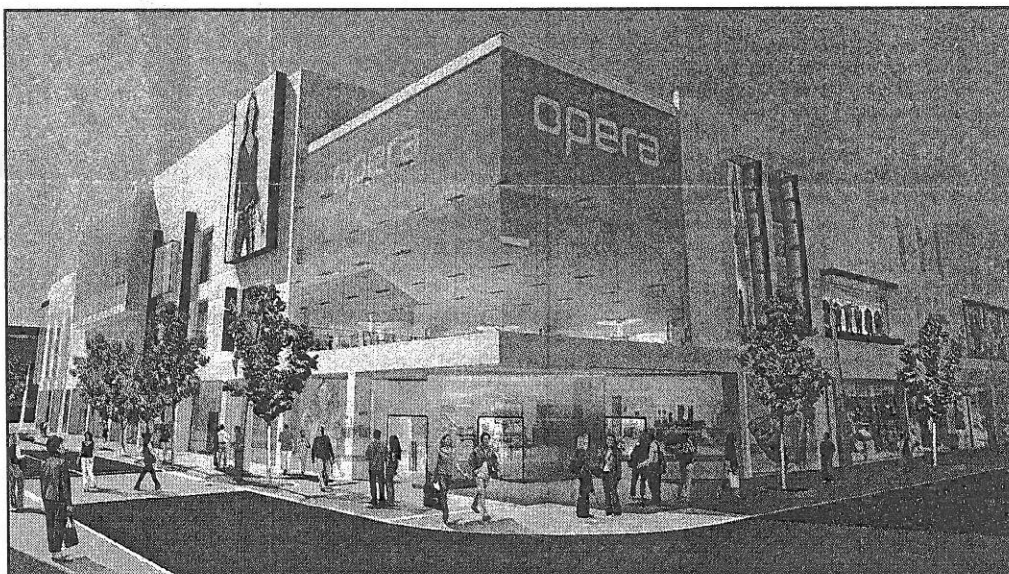
A spokesperson for the company added that claims that the project may not get off the ground due to the financial backing of the troubled, nationalised bank is a "red herring."

It has emerged that Anglo Irish Bank acquired its stake in the venture on December 2007, with a view to selling it on to private clients, but that never happened.

The planning application is currently before An Bord Pleanála for a second time, and Regeneration Developments, the company behind the project, are hopeful of a positive outcome in June.

"Regeneration Developments want the project to go ahead and are continuing to work on it."

"They purchased the project from the original developers with a view to building it. It will be built if we get planning, get anchor tenants and other major tenants, and if a bank - it doesn't have to be an Irish bank - is prepared to fund the commercial developments," said a



The redesigned Opera Centre which is before An Bord Pleanála at the moment

spokesperson for the company. Minister for Defence, Willie O'Dea, said he was "quite perturbed" to learn of the bank's stake in the retail development, which is expected to be "Limerick's shopping mecca" pending planning permission.

"It's certainly a problem. I'd prefer if they didn't own the shares. It came as a complete surprise. I never knew they

were so immersed in the property game, but I wouldn't despair completely," said Minister O'Dea.

He said the Minister for Finance Brian Lenihan is expected to set up an interim National Assets Management Agency, prior to receiving full legislation, and they may become involved with the development in Limerick. "They

will certainly try to make that workable. So there is light at the end of the tunnel," he added.

Minister O'Dea added that he hopes that project will get the go-ahead in the coming months. "It's a fabulous project and the place looks terrible at the moment. Dereliction is creeping in."

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# 'Opera Centre will go ahead'

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Former Mayor of Limerick, Jack Bourke, described the project as "a dead duck" and a "fiasco" upon learning of Anglo Irish's involvement with the ambitious retail enterprise.

The bank's bad debts have now grown larger than was projected when the bank was nationalised in January, and they are to ask the Government for a further cash injection of up to €2.5 billion. The three property developers behind the project - David Courtney, Jerry O'Reilly and Terry Sweeney - are also clients of Anglo Irish Bank.

"The more I see and hear about the Opera Centre the more it looks like a dead duck," claimed Mr Bourke, three-time former mayor and a local election candidate. "And it will be an absolute



**Willie O'Dea, quite perturbed to learn of the bank's stake**

shame if it becomes that. If it gets planning I don't believe they [Anglo] will be in a position to fund anything."

When the multi-million euro plans were first presented to the public, Mr Bourke said "everybody was elated about the idea" but he now has real concerns that "the first entrance to the third city will be a load of locked up buildings."

Laura Ryan, communications executive with Limerick Co-Ordination Office, said she also hopes it goes ahead as "it will revitalise the city centre and provide much needed employment in both the construction and retail sectors."

If the plans receive permission, the Mid-West's largest retail centre is expected to create 275 jobs during the construction phase and another 800 full and part time jobs will be created once the centre is open and trading.

A decision on the revised plans is expected next month, after Regeneration Developments submitted revised drawings for the project two weeks ago. An exact decision date has not been confirmed by An Bord Pleanála, but those involved in the project expect that it will be made in the summer months.