

RISING TENSIONS

By Frank Connolly

Plans to redevelop the north city centre from the GPO in O'Connell Street to Parnell Street and including the Moore Street fish and vegetable market have led to a fresh outbreak of hostilities on the historic site linked to the 1916 Rising.

The lands, known as the Carlton site, have been the subject of prolonged planning controversy going back to the late 1990s when architect Paul Clinton, and a number of property owners on Upper O'Connell Street, sought to develop a retail scheme and conference centre. For almost three decades, the site has remained derelict and a monument to the neglect, by several governments and Dublin City Council (DCC), of the main street of the capital city.

A row has recently erupted over a proposal to compensate 17 street traders, who hold licences issued by DCC, for any disruption to their business caused by UK developers Hammerson, which has been granted partial planning permission to build a large shopping, residential and office complex on the largely disused landbank.

Details of a scheme to give €1.5 million to the traders in compensation while construction work is underway were confirmed at a meeting of the Council in early February by DCC chief executive, Owen Keegan. *Village* has learned that this offer was raised to €1.7 million in early May 2021 following discussions between the Council and the traders and that an offer of further negotiations was made on Sunday, 20 February.

However, tensions over the compensation issue were dramatically raised when it emerged that a planning consultant acting for the traders said that they wanted €34 to €40 million, or more than €2 million each, to move their stalls during the construction of the Hammerson scheme.

A subsidiary of Hammerson, Dublin Central GP, had agreed to pay €1 million towards the compensation package, with the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage and DCC contributing £300,000 and €200,000, respectively, to the overall €1.5 million offer.

In a statement in reply to a question by SF



Hammerson scheme, viewed from O'Connell Street

Debate as to whether 30-year-derelict Carlton site should be developed though scheme demolishes much of the Moore St battle site

Councillor Micheál MacDonncha, Keegan said:

“In the spring of 2021, prior to a planning application....Dublin City Council's Housing & Community Services Department, Casual Trading Section began to engage in a commercially sensitive process to try and put a framework in place to compensate traders in the event of development.

This was a tripartite framework with DCC, Department of Housing, Local Government & Heritage and Dublin Central GP Ltd. (Hammerson) partaking to compensate traders as all three.... brought forward proposals that may have an impact on traders over the coming years: DCC on the upgrading of Moore Street, the Dept. on the restoration of the National Monument as a commemorative centre and DCGP on the delivery of the Dublin Central site and Enabling Works for Metrolink”.

The Council chief executive insisted that the process was “entirely separate from that of the Planning Authority and that the Planning Authority has no role in matters of compensation”.

Two out of three planning applications relating to the Hammerson project were granted in late 2021 after an Advisory Group set up by the Government and including politicians, street traders and relatives of those who fought in the Rising recommended support for the commercial development. Some of those who participated in the advisory group have claimed that their opposition to the development which, they argue, will destroy much of the historic battlefield site

around Moore Street was not reflected in the final recommendation.

Claims that the compensation offer was conditional on accepting the Hammerson proposals have been rejected by officials of the Council and the Department of Heritage with knowledge of the negotiations. Butcher, Stephen Troy, has claimed his business on Moore St will be severely disrupted during construction and received no offer of compensation from the developer. The representatives of the traders did not participate in the vote taken by the Advisory Group in relation to the Hammerson proposals before it published its recommendations in May 2021.

The Taoiseach, Micheál Martin, has also been dragged into the controversy after he publicly endorsed the Hammerson project as the planning application was submitted to DCC. He confirmed that he attended a private meeting with Hammerson executives in April last year after which he provided a statement to the company for a press release it issued some weeks later.

The Taoiseach was accompanied by the



Butcher, Stephen Troy speaking at a recent 'Save Moore Street' protest



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Hammerson proposal for Moore Street

secretary general of his department, Martin Fraser, at the meeting on 19 April, 2021 with Connor Owens, Ireland Director of Hammerson, its development manager Ed Dobbs and architect Friedrich Ludewig.

At the meeting, Owens set out the company’s vision of the scheme including the restoration of Upper O’Connell Street, pedestrian entrances to Moore Street through a new public square and its provision of works for a Metrolink station. He said that Hammerson would retain all pre-1916 buildings on Moore Street and construct a new archway to commemorate the Easter Rising. The development includes the construction of 94 new homes, 210 hotel rooms, retail outlets, restaurants, offices and shops.

In a press release by Hammerson in early June announcing its decision to lodge the planning application, Micheál Martin was quoted as welcoming the rejuvenation plans, which, he said, “will enhance the status of O’Connell Street by developing new transport links and delivering new homes, retail facilities and offices which will boost employment in the area. The locations around Moore St and the GPO will see an increasing number of visitors who will be drawn into the seminal role it played in our history”. He added that “it is important to continue to liaise with the street traders and those concerned with heritage conservation”.

Connor Owens joined Hammerson in early 2021 from NAMA where he was Head of Asset Management Recovery, and responsible for “driving returns from NAMA’s retail portfolio”. Owens led the team which arranged the disposal of Project Jewel, one of the largest portfolios sold by NAMA, which included the €2 billion in distressed loans of developer Joe O’Reilly. O’Reilly’s company, Chartered Land, owned the



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former Carlton site, and 50 per cent of the nearby ILAC centre where he had ambitious plans to develop a shopping mall and office scheme after Clinton failed to progress his scheme in the early 2000s, and before the financial and property crash. O’Reilly also

owned the Dundrum Shopping Centre as well as a 50 per cent stake in the Pavilions shopping centre in Swords, county Dublin. The entire loan portfolio was sold to Hammerson and German insurer Allianz for €1.85 billion in 2015.

With the centenary of the Rising approaching a year later, the Government agreed to purchase 14-17 Moore Street, from where the leaders of the Rising surrendered in 1916 and to declare them a national monument which would be protected and refurbished by the State. In May 2016, High Court judge, Max Barrett, ruled that all of the lands and houses of Moore Street comprised an important battlefield site and should be preserved in their entirety. It was a significant victory for those campaigning for the area from the GPO to Parnell Square, including its lanes and

buildings to be transformed into a cultural and historic quarter. If NAMA could be encouraged to release 14-17 Moore Street for preservation, there was no reason why the larger area surrounding the national monument could not also be secured from the state-controlled agency, they argued.

Instead, the High Court order was appealed and overturned at the Supreme Court allowing the Hammerson project to proceed with the support of the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage and Dublin City Council.

In March 2021, SF TD Aengus O’Snodaigh introduced a bill seeking to create a cultural quarter in Moore Street which was passed by the Dáil without any dissenting voice. This did not dissuade the Taoiseach from endorsing the Hammerson project following his meeting with Owens and others a month later. On 1 June, 2021, Sinn Féin leader, Mary Lou McDonald, accused Martin of supporting “a plan to turn one of the most significant sites in modern Irish history over to a private developer”.

The Taoiseach replied “that what the Government is not prepared to do is stand over continuing neglect of central Dublin more generally, of O’Connell Street and surrounding streets”.

You would not think that Micheál Martin was a cabinet minister for most of the 25 years during which the Carlton site has lain derelict, amid repeated claims of corruption and scandalous incompetence by the State in relation to the country’s main thoroughfare. **L**



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Relative’s proposal