

Are there plans to de



by Jenny Friel

A COUPLE of weeks ago, Social Democratic councillor Daniel Ennis was searching online for information about his neighbourhood in Dublin's north inner city, for a presentation he was putting together on its history and heritage.

Sticking some keywords into Google, he landed on a video on the Ballymore Group's YouTube channel. Entitled simply 'Sheriff Street, Dublin', it was posted on December 18, 2024, and had been viewed just over 600 times.

'I stumbled across it,' he says. 'After watching it, I got on to my mum straight away to see if she'd seen it, or if any of my aunts who live down there knew anything about it. I couldn't quite believe what I was seeing.'

It's a very slick 3D marketing video, the kind that showcases projects planned by development companies like Ballymore. This one, narrated by a woman with a soft Dublin accent, starts with an aerial view of the northside of Dublin's docklands before focusing in on a large Christmas tree-shaped plot of land bordered by the Royal Canal and the Irish Financial Services Centre, which contains the Sheriff Street area.

WHILE surrounding areas have benefitted from investment over the decades, under-investment in Sheriff Street has resulted in the area generally struggling and falling behind,' says the narrator as the area is outlined in red.

'This has led to it becoming somewhat isolated, as the surrounding neighbourhoods have grown and prospered.'

'This is a strong area, a proud area, an area rich in history and community. An area that deserves more.'

The video then brings the viewer through a street-level tour of a reimagined Sheriff Street area, starting at the Laurence O'Toole church on Seville Place, before turning left down Emerald Street, deep into the heart of a community that, as locals grimly admit, has long been synonymous with serious crime and chronic drug dealing.

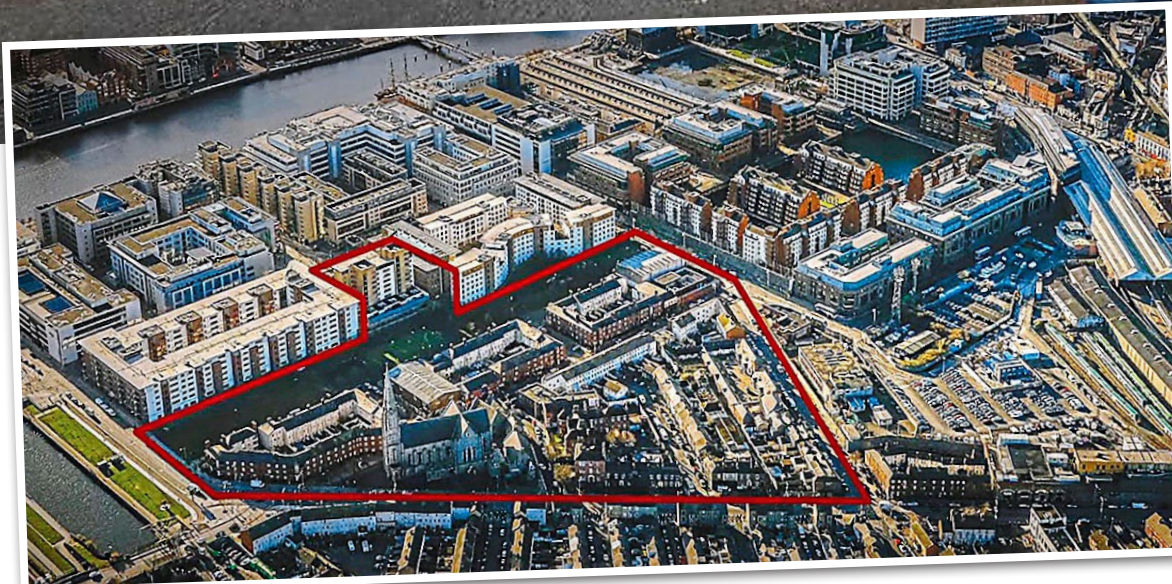
This bright new Sheriff Street shows nothing of the current realities of this neighbourhood, which is surrounded and overlooked by dozens of huge shiny office blocks and towers filled with hundreds of high-spec apartments, built during the last big docklands regeneration project.

Remaining locals have long feared being forced out of the place where they have lived for generations.

It didn't help when at the end of last month, David McRedmond, chief executive of An Post and the chair of the Dublin City Task Force, wrote an opinion piece in the Sunday Business Post newspaper, laying out its ten-



It's a question locals have been asking for years without answer, but recent newspaper reports plus a planning company's slick regeneration video makes them fear being pushed out of their homes



Marked out: The area of Sheriff Street highlighted in the Ballymore video

point strategy for revitalising the city centre.

'Dublin 1 can become one of Europe's most happening neighbourhoods,' he began, and then later added: 'If we transform the core, there are other amazing adjacent plans, such as Ballymore's, to completely rebuild the

Sheriff Street area from Amiens Street to Spencer Dock.'

'Two things jumped out when I read that,' says Mark Fay, chairperson of the North Wall Community Association and local shop owner. 'The first is, at last it's now in print, what we've always expected. The second thing is

that I don't think this guy fully understands what he's done by putting it in the paper.'

'It's like the third secret of Fatima we've been trying to extract from the senior planners and officials over the last eight years and could never get. What's going to happen to Sheriff Street?

This guy could have said that Ballymore is going to redevelop the Dublin Arch,' he says of land adjacent to Connolly Station for which Ballymore has planning permission to build a new development of apartments, offices and a hotel.

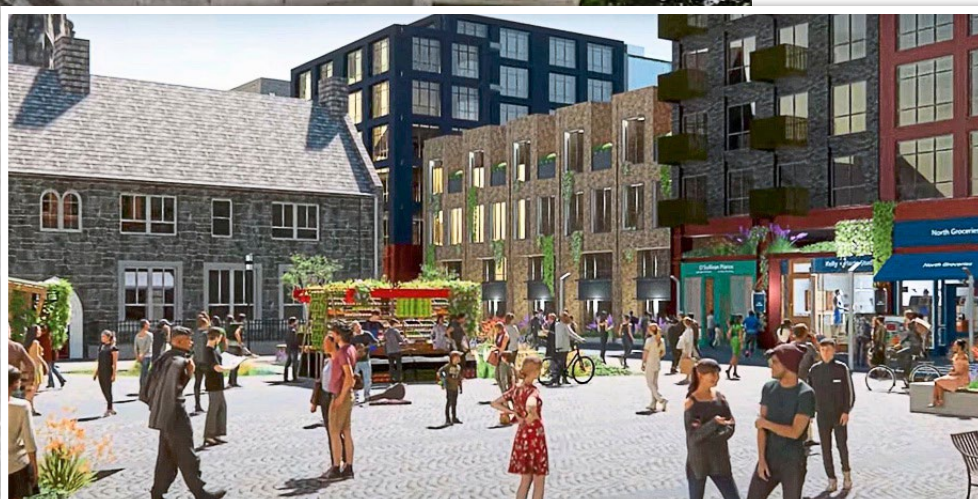
'But he didn't, he said from Amiens Street to Spencer Dock. For the last few weeks I've taken walks around there, wondering where he really meant. Now, looking at that video, as far as I can see, Sheriff Street is gone.'

Fay fully expects the video to cause consternation and fear in the community, where residents have long suspected there have been plans for their homes.

'I had a fella call into me a couple of years ago, wondering if he should take out a €10,000 loan to get new windows for his house,' he explained. 'He asked my opinion, I told him to hold off, that's the kind of limbo we've been living in.'

'It's based on our experience with the IFSC, being told we're all

molish Sheriff Street?



Inquiries: Mark Fay, chairperson of the North Wall Community Association. Inset above, stills from the slick Ballymore video



Concerned: Daniel Ennis

what's in store for the Sheriff Street area.

'If you live there, to see something like that, it means your house being knocked down, and you have no knowledge of it,' he says. 'There's been no consultation, not even a flyer in your letterbox, it's the height of disrespect.'

It's a particularly aspirational vision, with lines of colourful, independent shops, selling goods from ceramics to pianos. It claims 2,000 homes will be built, along with accommodation for 500 students, subsidised arts spaces, and places for small traders and start-ups 'to prosper'.

It will, the narrator says, create real connections with the existing community and lift the area out of the shadow of the city and docklands to become a place reborn.

'They talk about their "masterplan" and how you have this triangle of a community that's been isolated,' scoffs Ennis. 'They're downplaying the thriving community that's the heartbeat of the area, and which has always been the heartbeat of the docklands.'

He acknowledges the long-term, ongoing criminal issues in the area.

'Obviously we see the open drug-dealing, the scramblers,' he says. 'I know young kids are afraid of what they're witnessing, but it comes down to a lack of Garda presence. We've seen a bit of an uptake on the Royal Canal Greenway, two guards are constantly on bikes there now, which will help. But Sheriff Street has been largely left to its own devices.'

Fay agrees and goes so far as to claim it's a 'deliberate strategy'.

'It's a managed decline,' he says. 'A recognised tactic.'

'You allow it to run it down to a level where the place becomes synonymous with being a no-go area, it gets a reputation and people don't go in there.'

On the board of several community groups, including the Dockland Oversight and Consulting Forum (DOCF), he says he's asked at every meeting for the last three years about the plans for Sheriff Street.

'I get the same answer every time, "no plans Mark, nothing on the table, nothing in the pipeline, nothing to see here". Technically speaking, they'd be right. It's only a promotional video, Ballymore's vision of extending their Dublin Arch development.'

'We'll be told they haven't applied for planning permission yet. But you can be sure they're showing that video to companies and consultation with the community, as always, comes after the fact.'

ASPOKESPERSON for Ballymore Group told the Irish Daily Mail: 'What we set out to create builds on all that is great about Sheriff Street; its people, its talent and the rich cultural, sporting and social fabric that already exists in the neighbourhood.'

'We have shared this vision with members of Government and opposition. There is a long road to travel, involving the community, the local authority and government working together before moving to any next stages.'

'It is a concept that is fundamentally about investing in the social infrastructure of our great city and this great community. It envisages: refurbished, upgraded and new homes; A centre of excellence for boxing; A new educational anchor focused on skills, trades and design; Green spaces, play parks, crèche space all interwoven with the existing schools (upgraded), church, streets and amenities; and arts and culture amenities.'

'A guiding principle at the heart of this idea is that people from the community stay in the community. It is not about gentrification or regeneration, it's about investment and rejuvenation.'

'It is a starting point, not an end point or the finished article.'

'It is a first step in a conversation; the next step would involve the community and understanding what is important

for them in their place, their home,' the spokesperson said.

Mark Fay says Ballymore will face a battle from the community. 'We got over €8 million for our school,' he says.

'Largely thanks to Paschal Donohoe, in fairness to him. We have a community hall, a couple of five-a-side pitches, the Oasis centre that sees 7,000 people through the doors every year for all sorts of vital counselling, everything we've fought for.'

'Now, after seeing this video, you can be sure there are business-people, carpetbaggers and land-grabbers looking at the Sheriff Street area. We're staring down the barrel of big money coming back in to look at the bones of what's left of Sheriff Street. They took what they wanted before, left us to rot but we managed to survive.'

'That's the one thing I'll agree with what the woman said in that video, we've managed to survive. You know why? It's our community, it mightn't be pretty, but my family have been here since 1876 and now we're expected to bow down and pack a suitcase?'

Ennis believes moving even more long-term residents out of the area will 'tear the heart and soul out of the place'.

'We saw it with the flats,' he says. 'All those homes torn down and we got nothing, not even a full-sized football pitch where our kids can go play, nothing was given back. I can't see anything in that video, just a linear park where people can go sit and have a coffee.'

'I love seeing development down in the docklands, I love the area. But if we are going to do anything further, it has to start and finish with community involvement. These are the streets that were built on the back of all our families' work in the docks.'

Fay also resents the picture of the Sheriff Street area presented in the Ballymore video.

'It's patronising, the way it's described,' he says. 'We're referred to as an isolated community, isolated from where?'

'But that's part of the talk developers use, "sure look at this place, who'd want to live here? But if you give us planning permission, this is what we'll do."

'Yes, we have a bad name and yes, there's crime down here, but there's crime everywhere, there's not one inlet or back country lane that doesn't have drugs. We're a functioning, operating community, warts and all.'

in this together and everything's going to be great. And then bang, a demolition order.'

He's referring to 1998, when 16 complexes of Sheriff Street flats were demolished to make way for the IFSC.

'There were 455 family homes in those complexes and they'd have been happy to scatter them to the four winds,' says Fay. 'But because of the reaction of the community, Dublin City Council was forced to buy back vacant tracts of land and build housing estates, which gave people the option to stay.'

'Now it's about to happen all over again, except this time there is no vacant land, anywhere.'

DAYS after his opinion piece was published, McRedmond insisted to the Dublin Inquirer newspaper that he didn't mean that houses on Sheriff Street would be demolished, that he was writing about the plans to improve public space in the area. 'I'd hate to

think that anyone would feel in any way insecure about their homes,' he said. 'I don't see anything that would in any way threaten people's homes.'

This week he told the Irish Daily Mail: 'I had no intentions in my comments to the Business Post other than expressing enthusiasm for anyone who wishes to invest in the inner city.'

'I can't comment on the community's concerns as I haven't seen them. But I would say any plan which threatens the rights of residents to live where they live would be wrong.'

'Urban redevelopment can and should work to the benefit of local communities. I have no knowledge of the status of Ballymore's plans, other than I've seen their proposals at a high level and they look interesting, and seem to be good for the area.'

After watching the Ballymore video several times, local councillor and nearby resident Daniel Ennis believes there is good reason for serious concerns about