

## Thursday December 8 2005

### NEWTOWNARDS: CASTLEBAWN REGENERATION SCHEME TO ENHANCE TOWN CENTRE

Newtownards town centre is to receive a radical overhaul and regeneration boost as the result of a proposed £250 million investment by Castlebawn Ltd, a joint venture between Eastwood Property and R&A Group. The ambitious proposals which promise to create up to 2,000 jobs will extend the town centre and edge of centre southwards in a three-stage development known as Castlebawn. The development could be completed by 2009.

Fearghal Eastwood, speaking on behalf of Castlebawn Ltd, says the regeneration scheme will inject new vigour into Newtownards's retail offer by vastly improving the road system, expanding the town centre, developing its cultural heritage and transforming the town into a profoundly attractive visitor destination.

"Newtownards stands to gain enormously from the proposed development," says Mr Eastwood. "The current traffic congestion in the town will be dramatically reduced by a ring road running south of the town centre. The completed project will reverse Newtownards' decline and create a successful regional centre attracting visitors and shoppers from all over the North and South of Ireland plus visitors from abroad."

"The intention is to regenerate the town centre of Newtownards by expanding it southwards and driving up footfall very substantially," he says.

Stangford MP, Iris Robinson, who has campaigned for the regeneration of Newtownards town centre says she welcomes the proposals.

"This is the right concept for Newtownards," says Mrs Robinson. "It will regenerate and enhance the existing town centre by expanding it and by making it more accessible. It will create long-term employment in an area which has suffered the brunt of a recession in the manufacturing sector. It will also improve Newtownards's civic heritage by opening up so much of the town's historic fabric which has lain almost forgotten for the past generation."

The three strands of the development will start with the Tesco super store. This will be followed by the 300,000 sq ft Castlebawn Shopping Centre tucked in between Court Street and the canal. The shopping centre will provide the physical link from the town centre directly to Tesco. Within the centre will be a long-awaited Museum of the Wall, celebrating the town's historic Bawn Wall.

"Part of the wall itself will feature through sensitive development which minimises interference with the old structure but which highlights it through dramatic lighting" says Mr Eastwood

The third and final stage of the Castlebawn development, the 167,000sq ft Castlebawn Retail Park will include larger bulky goods retail outlets.

**Mr Eastwood says the investment in the town would start with the roads link designed to relieve congestion in the High Street and help through-flows around the town.**

**“The key to this ambitious project is transport communications and that is why we are willing to invest substantially in creating a new road system just south of Newtownards town centre,” says Mr Eastwood.**

**Eastwood Property and R&A Group plan to build two miles of roads and road links within the next two years.**