

John Hearne: driven on several fronts



John Hearne, pictured here in Gaza with fellow SF Councillor Pat Fitzgerald and Mahfouz Kabariti of the Gaza Fishermen's Association, is a passionate activist on several fronts.

Sinn Féin City and County Councillor John Hearne is a campaigner and activist on several fronts, both at home and abroad.

Speaking to The Munster Express, Cllr Hearne has spoken about how local politicians and local communities need to work together to curb anti-social behaviour and criminality, an issue we touched on in last week's installment.

Matters at the Templars Hall residential estate appear to have greatly improved, although the proof of that pudding will only truly be tested when the new college year gets underway of course.

"A new management company has been formed by the residents," said Cllr Hearne, "a limited company which is providing security on the estate, is ensuring that common areas are being maintained and that bins are collected promptly and that's certainly helped to alleviate some of the problems that residents had been having there."

He added: "There's also been issues with 'noisy neighbours' in both Council and rented property elsewhere in the city and I believe that noise levels need to set and strictly monitored. Tenants and landlords also have a role to play and they ought to do their bit when it comes to being respectful to others living nearby. I also believe that local authorities should be able to move on persistently noisy and disruptive residents should the matter arise."

Cllr Hearne, who will be Metropolitan Area Mayor in 2016, is hoping that a new cross-country track amenity can be developed on an 80-acre site in Ballybeg, which is currently nothing more than wasteland.

"It'd be great to develop the site; the Winter League could use it, along with our local athletic clubs. Something like this would enhance the area and could attract local, national and even international events in time - it'd be fantastic for the area." He also believes an enclosed area for sulky racing would greatly reduce the risk of on-road accidents to horse or driver, stating that this is a common practice in other countries.

"If we'd a circular track or a grassy area provided somewhere, I think that'd be to everyone's benefit, sulky driver and motorist alike."

Cllr Hearne is also involved in the Committee For The Forgotten, a Waterford-based organisation which is campaigning for the identification of all body parts recovered from our coast.

"As a fisherman, I know all too well how families feel if they've lost a loved one at sea, and sadly we've had our share of such tragedies involving Waterford fishermen in recent years, be it off our own coast or in Union Hall.

"We need to ensure that DNA tests are carried out on all recovered body parts; that's the core objective of the Committee. This will require resources of course."

In June, Justice Minister Frances Fitzgerald welcomed the passing of legislation which will establish a new DNA Database, which is primarily aimed "at assisting Gardaí in the investigation and prosecution of crime", so let's hope its remit can be expanded in due course.

Another cause of John's is the plight of the people of Gaza, which he has visited and seen for himself at first hand the consequences of the ongoing conflict between Israel and Hamas. "The death and destruction has gone on for far too long and the Palestinians have suffered more than most. Enough is enough. We just want to see this war brought to a permanent conclusion and for the people of Gaza to be allowed to live their lives in peace, so that they can rebuild their city as well as their lives."

Regarding the current Irish asylum system, Cllr Hearne said he would like to see the processing system accelerated. "People are spending far too long in direct provision; we need to look after such applicants in a more humane way than we have as a country up to now. That can change and it needs to change."

Cllr Hearne also wished newly promoted Fine Gael Minister of State Paudie Coffey well in his new role.

"I hope Minister Coffey can bring more jobs to Waterford and help provide additional resources to help further revive the city centre, especially given his housing brief."

As for his own political ambitions, Cllr Hearne confirmed he'll be backing Senator David Cullinane's bid to win a Dáil seat for Sinn Féin in Waterford come the next general election.

"I enjoy being a Councillor," he said. "National politics is very time consuming, what with all the late meetings held in Dublin and elsewhere around the country, but I'm happy where I am and looking forward to serving as Mayor in 2016."