

Sports Minister shocked at Ballybeg fire damage



Minister of State for Tourism & Sport Michael Ring surveying the damage to the St Saviour's GAA Club premises on Thursday last. | Photo: Noel Browne

Minister of State for Tourism & Sport Michael Ring visited Ballybeg on Thursday last and he expressed his horror having witnessed the extent of the damage at the facilities targeted during the recent arson attacks.

Accompanied by colleague and fellow Minister of State Paudie Coffey and Councillor John Cummins, their first port of call was to Saint Saviour's GAA Club where they were welcomed by Club Chairman Mark Corcoran and Secretary Noel Reidy.

Clearly shocked at what they saw at the club the travelling party then made their way to the Ballybeg Youth Research Centre where they met manager Lil Quinn, who took them through the gutted facility.

From there, they moved to St Saviour's Boxing and Football Clubs and again were clearly shell-shocked by sight of a once thriving building which catered for dozens of young boxers and footballers.

Larry Durand and Paul Simpson represented the Boxing Club while Bobby Kennedy, Willie Moore and 'Gunner' O'Callaghan were present for the soccer club.

Speaking to The Munster Express, Michael Ring said he was "rocked to the core" and he described the attacks as "outrageous" and "cowardly".

He added: "I came here today to see for myself what had occurred and I have to admit it is much worse than I had envisaged. I am appalled and this is an attack on the community and not just sporting clubs and a resource centre, and I was saddened today to see grown people cry..."

"They have built up these facilities to cater for young children and then they had to watch them been taken away from them by thugs. I have to condemn in the highest order what has happened here to this community and I hope we will never see anything like this in our country again."

Minister Ring said he was impressed by “the spirit of the people”. He continued: “They are not beaten and they won’t be beaten .The community is rallying around them and I know that the local council has also rallied with them.”

Minister Ring said he hoped his department can help out financially in the near future. “Paudie Coffey and John Cummins will come to me at a later stage when the insurance situation is sorted out and I have advised all of the clubs of that situation.

“Having said that, I was saddened to come here today but in another way I was heartened to see the incredible spirit of all the people I met and we will leave no stone unturned to get things back to normal and hopefully even better than they were before.”

Minister Coffey explained how funding may be available for the devastated bodies down the line.

“There is no emergency fund in place but at the end of the month a new Sports Capital Programme will be in place and I will be in contact with the clubs along with John Cummins to get the insurance business sorted and I will welcome the applications from the clubs involved in this dreadful business when that area is sorted out.

“I have seen devastation in my life but I have never seen anything like this. You have to see what has happened here first hand. I have the greatest respect for all of the St Saviour’s clubs and I often played against some of them down through the years and along with the other clubs and resource centre they won’t be found wanting.”