

Ballybeg rises Brick by Brick



Jane Hannon (Treasurer) and Willie Moore (Chairman) of the Brick by Brick fund.

Standing outside the smouldering Saint Saviours GAA Clubhouse on Saturday, January 24th, it was impossible not to feel low. It was impossible not to feel angry. It was difficult not to feel vengeful.

More woe, of course was to follow later that week, when the Saint Saviour's Boxing/Soccer Club building was attacked. The disappointment and the anger intensified.

Three sports clubs and the Youth Resource Centre, all up in smoke. Why? Why? Why?

And on the very night a public meeting was held in Ballybeg to establish what lay ahead for the community as a whole, there was a fear that the local primary school would be 'hit'. Thankfully, an adequate Garda presence on the night ensured that didn't transpire.

And of course fears remain, but so too does local vigilance. However, even on that miserable Saturday morning, when locals chatted outside St Saviour's GAA Club over cups of tea supplied by local shops, an air of resilience was also palpable.

Those responsible for these attacks cannot and will not be allowed to win: that was, essentially, the central message relayed to me in conversations not for publication. And the 'Brick by Brick' campaign was born.

"There's great progress after being made in the last few weeks," said committee member and life-long Ballybeg resident and Brick by Brick Chairman Willie Moore.

"The roof is back on the GAA Club; they're working on the inside side of it at the moment and that'll be back up and running soon enough. The Soccer and the Boxing Club are in the same position. They finished the roof on it last Tuesday and all the inside of it is done bar the flooring."

Willie added: "But the (City & County Council-owned) Youth Resource building is probably going to take that little bit longer to get back up and running. It's a seven days a week operation and they're working out of a house in Ballybeg at the moment; we're hoping to get a portakabin for the summer.

"The inside of the building is all cleaned out - the structural damage of the building was assessed last week - but we'd obviously like to see the refurbishment work starting as soon as possible; it'd be a great development for the whole community to see all three buildings open and in public use again very, very soon. It'd be lovely to see them all officially opened at the same time."

The series of attacks proved "devastating for the community", said Willie, and few have championed the Ballybeg cause more than he down through the decades.

"But the effort that's been put in by the people of Waterford city and county, and even outside of Waterford, and the way they've supported us in the past few months has been unbelievable. It's been incredible."

Such a crushing week in Ballybeg's history has, inspiringly, catalysed a remarkable level of widespread goodwill, and it's been difficult to keep track of all the fundraisers and charity nights that have been held over the past five months.

And once more, the people of Waterford, no strangers to hard times, have proven their worth. On the whole, we're a decent shower!

"About a week or so after the fires, it was a Friday morning, we'd three women in Ballybeg who did a cake sale for us up at the Community Centre and the turnout for it was unbelievable," said Willie.

"And one of the girls turned around to me and said to me 'what happened last week is after uniting the parish' and a lot of people have said the same to me since.

"And it's not just people in the parish - people from right across Waterford have weighed in behind us and they're all saying that enough is enough. Saint Paul's Parish, just to name one off the top of my head, have gone out of their way to help us in the past few months. We're all together on this."

Of course, there are other buildings in the estate which have been burned out, some recently, some longstanding (such as the pub directly opposite the Community Development Project offices). And one hopes that City Hall can, where possible,

intervene in due course and get these buildings back into practical and positive use.

“As a community, we shouldn’t have to be looking at a pub that’s been burned down and pretty much derelict for the last three to four years,” said Willie.

“No part of Waterford should be looking at something like that, for that matter. This is a great city full of good people, it’s a beautiful city and we all want it looking as well as it can.”

Willie added: “We need more Guards too. We’re crying out for them. The Community Guard, when he was in place, was invaluable. People were delighted to see a Guard in the area on a regular basis, and we need that back.

“In fact, all the clubs in the area have put their names to a letter which is going to be sent to the Minister for Justice about what we need in our area, because if there’s no action taken, then the wrong kind of people are going to take over this area, and that’s in no-one’s interest.”

Concluding on an upbeat note, Willie Moore stated: “The way all the clubs and the community have come together has been fantastic. What happened in January was so wrong: all these resources are there to help young people, and we never want that to change. We took the decision that we weren’t going to lie down. We couldn’t lie down. And we’ll never lie down.”