

Future flows on the river

Tom Crosby's Tarmon Harbour development is a triumph of one man's dream over adversity and the natural landscape.

Brenda McNally

"IT'S always sunny flying from A to B, " our pilot Paul explains as we approach Termonbarry, "then when you get to B it starts raining." And just like that, after 50 minutes flying through glorious weather from Dublin to Roscommon, our helicopter hits a wall of thick grey mist and the attending soft rain seems certain to dampen our landing and the launch of the final phase of Tarmon Harbour.

But that would be discounting the many resources of local developer Tom Crosby. For, just as the man behind one of the most innovative rural renewal developments makes his way through the crowd of onlookers towards us, out of the blue, the sunshine returns.

One gets the distinct impression there is little Crosby couldn't achieve if he set his mind to it.

Take Tarmon Harbour. Tapping into one of the country's most beautiful natural resources, the Shannon River, this inland marina scheme has been much more than a dream come true. It has been a labour of love entailing over a decade's worth of blood, sweat and tears.

Not only did the planners need convincing... the scheme was challenged at every turn and even ended up in the High Court... but there was also the enormous physical task of digging a channel from the Shannon towards two acres of adjacent land which also had to be excavated.

"I'm from Termonbarry, and had been involved for years in the pub and restaurant business. But I was always aware of the lack of infrastructure in the area and what was a major bone of contention with the cruiser traffic people on the Shannon: the lack of mooring facilities, " explains Crosby. "At times back then, you had people tying boats up to trees or even boulders. I really felt the Shannon had only reached about 20% of its true potential."

Crosby first came up with the idea for Tarmon Harbour back in 1991. As the then President of Longford Chamber of Commerce, he saw how the town was transformed by the tax Urban Renewal Incentive Scheme and he came up with a plan to extend a similar scheme to Roscommon and build a marina. So along the way, he has also been responsible for kick starting what we now know as the Rural Renewal Scheme.

A publican and local councillor, this is Crosby's first major development scheme. A man with a vision, he also had the good sense to realise expertise was needed.

Crosby engaged Dublin architect and boating enthusiast Michael MacNamara, and quantity surveyor Kieran O'Brien, a plan was hatched for a residential and marina development. Today Crosby hopes the 90-berth marina with apartments, Villas and townhouses as well as commercial buildings will help invigorate the area and make it the tourism capital of the northwest.

"Many have dreams but few have the grit to make the dream a reality," local priest, Father Eamonn O'Connor commented as he blessed the site at the launch. Grit is probably understating it, the excavation work revealed an unexpected 12ft layer of rock which had to be removed if the plan was to get off the ground.

Work was started on the actual building just over a year and a half ago. It was a monumental job at first, the digging of the Marina alone took four months. Willis Brothers, the Mayo civil contracting firm excavated two acres of the site down to about 20 feet to create the marina, and dug a channel to bring the water inland to it.

With the subsequent development of houses and apartments, Crosby explains the idea is that you can literally tie up your boat in the back garden,"True grit, wine, women and song were in abundance at the launch. Ex-Miss Ireland Vivienne Doyle cut the tape on the marina and the proceedings were accompanied by local jazz band and fine food from the Purple Onion Crosby's former premises.

Everything that has been built has already been sold and he is about to commence the second phase of the development which will bring the total residential units to over 100.

All houses and apartments have substantial private balcony and patio areas and are orientated so as to exploit views of the marina, the River Shannon and the existing village. Substantial plot size and low site coverage ensures the development will reflect and complement the existing character and density of the village. A combination of low housing density, existing public open spaces to the village, and along the river and the extensively landscaped public spaces within the development ensure Tarmon Harbour offer sits residents the spaciousness and freedom associated with a typical riverside village community

The houses have a porthole window in the main bedroom as well as to the front of the house and split-level floor and skylights give a very contemporary feel. The four-bed townhouses over three levels start at 390,000. The three-bed detached villas start at 550,000 and the three-bed town houses over four levels start at 370,000.

Half of the 90 marina berths remain and these also qualify for tax relief for those who purchase units at the development. Other special features include fully-fitted kitchens with integrated fridge/freezer, electric hob and oven with extractor fan. Timber frame double glazing, tiled floor in kitchen, bathroom and utilities and oil-fire central heating in the houses and electric Goldshield heating in the apartments. Work is due to commence on the final phase at the end of May and completion is expected in spring 2006. With plans for a helipad on the site, it seems as though Crosby has thought of everything, maybe even a way of beating the country's impossible traffic chaos. A high fliers' and jet-setters' dream, locals can look forward to many more chopper touchdowns, if not the accompanying good weather.