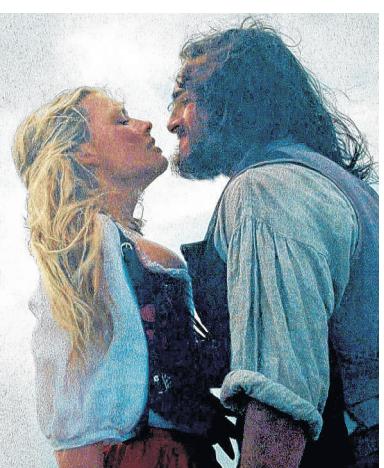


FILM REVIEW GET SET FOR 'CARRY ON HEATHCLIFF'

Donald Clarke
Arts&Ideas



Objectors to a second Dublin airport argue that the city is not big enough to warrant it, but Oslo, a capital with a smaller population, has two airports

Justine McCarthy
Opinion&Analysis



BIRD'S-EYE VIEW OF THE HOUSING CRISIS
SHERRY FITZGERALD
CHIEF EXECUTIVE
MARIAN FINNEGAN

Ciarán Hancock
Interview Business

Science museum costs 'could reduce flood relief spend'

OPW chairman warns it doesn't have €70m for children's science centre

Pac hears new museum could come at expense of urgent flood schemes

MARTIN WALL
Public Affairs Correspondent

The Office of Public Works (OPW) has warned it could have to reduce spending on flood protection measures if forced to foot the bill for a long-planned National Children's Science Centre which could cost €70 million or more.

Under an arbitrator's finding from last December, the OPW must deliver the building for the project by the end of 2029. The arbitration ruling also says the project should go to tender by the end of this year.

However, OPW chairman John Conlon told the Dáil's Public Accounts Committee (Pac) yesterday that the organisation had no funding to pay for the science centre.

The committee heard that no Government department has been willing to become a sponsor for developing the project, which has been under consideration for more than 20 years. So far about €5 million in public funding has been spent on the project.

The proposed centre is earmarked to be located at Earlsfort Terrace in Dublin.

Comptroller and Auditor General Seamus McCarthy, who last year published a scathing report on the background to the project, said yesterday it would fall on the OPW to pay for the National Children's Science Centre project if no other Government department was willing to fund it.

"It has become an OPW project and partly it is of their own doing because of commitments that they signed," McCarthy said.

Conlon said in the absence of additional funding being provided, he would "have to consider reducing expenditure on things like flood schemes, which is something I would find almost impossible particularly given the climate obligations we have and the climate change and even what is happening in recent weeks".

Conlon said he was concerned the OPW could potentially also become liable to

meet ongoing costs associated with the science centre even after the building was delivered.

McCarthy said there was an original agreement between the OPW and the promoters of the proposed centre to provide a building on a site near Heuston Station in Dublin. However, this was abandoned following the economic crash after 2008.

In 2013 the OPW and the charity behind the project – Irish Children's Museum Ltd (ICML) – reached a deal under which it would provide a 9,580 sq m building at Earlsfort Terrace.

Poor costs estimates

"Poor cost estimates of the State's liability in respect of the agreement were provided at different stages in the development. In May 2024, the construction cost to be borne by the State, stood at an estimated €70.4 million with the potential for further increases," McCarthy said.

He also said the proposed project had never been evaluated or appraised in accordance with the requirements of the public spending code.

"Furthermore, we found that because no public body has emerged to act as the sponsoring agency for the project, key controls designed to safeguard public funds were not applied in respect of the science centre project."

Under questioning from James Geoghegan of Fine Gael, ICML chief executive Barbara Galavan said under the arbitrator's finding, OPW would have to provide a building for the project by December 2029.

Conlon said the OPW was bound by this finding. However, he said he did not have a "funder for this project".

Asked how he intended to deliver the building, Conlon said: "To be very frank at this point, I can't do it without funding."

Committee chairman John Brady of Sinn Féin said Minister for Public Expenditure Jack Chambers must intervene "and put an end to the waste of public money".



Bravery saluted
Medals for soldiers

Fr Paul Murphy and Pte Ciara Shanahan at Renmore Barracks, Co Galway, after being presented with Distinguished Service Medals arising from a knife attack on the chaplain at Renmore Barracks in 2024. Pte Shanahan came to his aid despite being unarmed.

Report: Page 2
Photograph: Brian Lawless/PA

EU leaders urge unity ahead of key Rubio meeting

DEREK SCALLY
and JACK POWER

Wary European leaders are to meet senior Trump officials at the Munich Security Conference today amid growing doubt – and dissent – over the future of the transatlantic relationship.

A year after US vice-president JD Vance's broadside against Europe, EU leaders are hoping for the best with US secretary of state Marco Rubio.

But a year into US president Donald Trump's second term,

as ongoing efforts to resolve the Ukraine-Russia war are complicated by unresolved crises in Greenland and elsewhere, some EU leaders heading to Munich prepared for the worst.

Denmark's prime minister, Mette Frederiksen, urged her EU colleagues to remain united after last month's "Greenland moment", when Trump threatened a US takeover of the Danish territory.

"I would have preferred a world where allies didn't threaten each other, where Russia didn't conduct a war, but the

old world is not coming back," she said.

Despite global disquiet and disorder, there is quiet confidence among some European representatives that their united front on Washington's Greenland demands – now nudged into a closed-door committee – offers a blueprint for defusing future conflicts.

German chancellor Friedrich Merz is expected to remain pragmatic, if robustly realistic, in his keynote address.

After a bilateral meeting with Rubio, however, Merz will

also meet Trump arch-rival Gavin Newsom, California's Democratic governor. The chancellor will also meet China's foreign minister Wang Yi as well as Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelenskiy with the French and UK leaders.

Areas of co-operation

US analysts expect Rubio to remain consistent on Trump policy in Munich but less contentious than Vance a year ago, seeking instead areas of co-operation on shared global and regional concerns, including the

Middle East and Ukraine.

EU leaders will be watching closely for any US signals on a French-backed proposal to attach "buy European" strings to future EU funding and state contracts.

French president Emmanuel Macron has championed the idea to protect key sectors and ensure more money flows back into European industries.

After a leaders' retreat yesterday in Limburg, northeast Belgium, European Council president António Costa announced "broad agreement"

for a European preference scheme if used "in selected, strategic sectors, in a proportionate and targeted way".

There are concerns in Dublin, and other capitals including Berlin and Rome, that such an approach could stoke tensions if perceived by Washington as overly protectionist.

It is understood the Government believes any preference clauses should include multinational companies with significant EU operations, rather than just European-owned firms.

Another Ice deportation flight passes through Shannon

CONOR GALLAGHER
Crime and Security Correspondent

Another aircraft chartered by the Trump administration as part of its mass deportation efforts refuelled in Ireland this week.

The private business jet stopped at Shannon Airport in Co Clare on Wednesday night while travelling to Cairo, Egypt.

US sources confirmed the aircraft was chartered by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (Ice), the agency leading president Donald Trump's immigration crackdown.

It is the sixth Ice deportation operation to refuel at Shannon since Trump returned to power a year ago. Last year, three aircraft chartered by Ice stopped at Shannon while bringing deportees to African countries.

In most cases, the deportees had no connections to the coun-

tries they were deported to. In a case last May, a group of eight men was deported to Djibouti in violation of a court order.

In January and February, two more Ice deportation flights stopped at Shannon while deporting groups of Palestinians to Tel Aviv in Israel.

The aircraft used in those operations, a Gulfstream IV, is owned by Gil Dezer, a close friend of Trump, and had been hired by Ice from the aircraft rental company Journey.

The use of Shannon as a stop-over has been condemned by Opposition politicians. However, Irish authorities say the flights do not need to seek permission as they are technically private aircraft.

The latest flight departed from Mesa Gateway Airport in Phoenix, Arizona, the location of several Ice detention centres, on Wednesday morning.

The Gulfstream G550 was also chartered by Ice from Journey.

It landed at Shannon at about 6.30pm on Wednesday before taking off a short time later and flying to Cairo. It remained on the ground there for two hours before returning to Shannon. As of last night, it remained in Shannon Airport.

It is not known how many people were on board the flight or if Egypt was their final destination.

As it ramps up deportation operations, Ice has increasingly turned to small and medium sized jets to remove people from the US. These aircraft have limited range meaning they often have to stop to refuel in Europe after crossing the Atlantic.

→ Border tsar pulling federal agents out of Minnesota: page 7

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Weather

Cold with some frost and ice in places, especially in the west and north. Highs of 3-7 degrees.

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Home News

US: Kilkenny man Seamus Culleton, who is being detained by Ice in the US, was facing possession of drugs charges in Ireland when he moved to the US. Page 2

World News

UK: Monaco-based billionaire Jim Ratcliffe, the owner of Man Utd, apologised over comments suggesting immigrants were 'colonising' the UK.

Business This Week

Pharma: Icon is delaying publication of its financial results while lawyers investigate if the Irish clinical trials group overstated its revenues for 2023 and 2024

Supermarkets: As many as 82 jobs at SuperValu owner Musgrave are under threat as the company trims costs

Sports Friday

Soccer: The FAI have confirmed that the Republic of Ireland will fulfil their two fixtures against Israel in the Nations League later this year. Page 12

Soccer: Arsenal's title hopes were dented after Brentford held the league leaders to a 1-1 draw. Page 13