

New owner of Hayes Hotel to turn building into ‘cultural hub’

Conor Kane

Last Updated: Thursday, September 18, 2014, 10:07

The new owner of the famous Hayes Hotel in Thurles has said he wants to turn the landmark property into a “cultural hub” which will recognise its role in GAA history but also become a thriving business.

Yesterday it was revealed that local businessman Jack Halley, who is originally from Fethard in Co Tipperary but based in London for a number of years where he worked in the hospitality industry, was the purchaser of the historic business. The Co Tipperary hotel is where the GAA was founded in 1884 and has remained an important part of Irish sporting heritage and local business life.

However, following trading difficulties in recent years it went into receivership last year and was sold at auction by Allsops Space on Monday.

Jack Halley said yesterday that, as a long-time sports fan and businessman, he was glad of the opportunity to buy the Thurles hotel, which sold at Monday’s auction in Dublin for €650,000 following interest from a number of bidders.

“I love the GAA and Tipperary hurling and football and thought, what better way to support sport here in Ireland than to get Hayes Hotel and try and turn it around and bring something to Thurles and Tipperary,” Mr Halley said. The building’s history as the birthplace of the GAA was an important factor, he said.

“I want to emphasise that, and make it a cultural hub as well as a sports hub. People can have somewhere to bring visitors to show them what Ireland is all about and what the GAA is all about.”

He said he intends to put money into improving the hotel once the formal takeover happens next month, but this will be an incremental process and won’t happen overnight. The business will remain open and he wants to retain the current staff complement of about 25, with plans to take on more employees in the coming years.

“It will be a gradual thing and we’ll do it in stages.” There had been calls in recent months for the GAA to step in and buy the hotel, given its history, but Mr Halley did not rule out some involvement by the association in hosting a GAA-based attraction in the building.

This could involve memorabilia being placed in the hotel’s former billiard room which was where the meeting involving Michael Cusack, Maurice Davin and others set up the GAA. “They have expressed interest to us... to make Hayes the focal point as the birthplace of the GAA. But we haven’t gone into fine detail.”

Hayes Hotel has 30 bedrooms as well as a bar, restaurant and nightclub and is a popular gathering spot for GAA fans when big matches are held at nearby Semple Stadium in Thurles. Mr Halley said he wants to make the venue a popular place for visitors to watch all sports, as well an attractive place for functions and the general food and drink trade.

“I want to not only keep it open but want to bring it back to its former glory, and better if I can,” Jack Halley said yesterday. “Obviously that will take a few years.”