



Diana at 60

8-PAGE SPECIAL

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PLUS INSIDE

Prince Charles won't let Archie be made a prince

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Bombshell analysis admits this Government won't be able to build 33,000 homes a year

2025 BEFORE HOUSING TARGETS CAN BE MET

THE Government has been given a dire official warning that the housing crisis will not begin to get better until at least 2025, the Irish Mail on Sunday can reveal.

An internal analysis has told the Covid Coalition chiefs that they'll have to change tack significantly from their current housing policies to even make that deadline.

EXCLUSIVE

By John Drennan

In a bombshell document prepared for the Cabinet's Housing sub-committee, the Taoiseach, Tánaiste and Housing Minister have been told of significant

obstacles they will face in meeting their housing commitments including that:

- Demand-side policies – such as grants for prospective homeowners – will create house price inflation;
- A lack of builders, manpower and materials to build houses will limit the economy's ability to build;
- The Government needs to activate

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My daughters were thrilled when I finished with Ian Bailey

JULES THOMAS SPEAKS TO MoS

PAGES 20-21

EXCLUSIVE

by Isabel Conway

IT IS one of the most anticipated documentaries in years, but one of its key players admits she probably can't bear to watch it.

Film director Jim Sheridan's five-part look into the unsolved murder of Sophie Toscan du Plantier premieres on Sky Crime tonight but Jules Thomas, the ex-partner of former prime suspect Ian Bailey, says the pain of watching it may be too much.

She also says she broke up with Bailey earlier this year partly because her daughters refused to visit with her grandchildren while he was still living in the house.

'I don't know yet if I will watch it,' she tells the Irish Mail on Sunday in the idyllic gardens she has created at her home in Schull, only a few kilometres away from the scene of the murder which still haunts West Cork.

'I probably won't watch because I know it will upset me so much. I want to avoid that because I can't take any more upset.'

It emerged this weekend that the family of Du Plantier has written to Sky requesting that all interviews with her family be removed from the series. The family was apparently unhappy with the way the five-part series portrayed Bailey as a victim in the saga.

Ms Thomas, who confirmed to the MoS earlier this year that she had split from Bailey, also admitted she was unhappy with the film as it is expected to show an image of her face after being attacked by Bailey in 1996. The assault resulted in her being hospitalised.

'For a while he seemed to be in disbelief when I finally told him it was over'

'It's going to be showing my face bashed up by Ian. I said [to Jim], "Please make it very quick, will you? Don't let it be a lingering shot".'

She says she made this request not to spare her pain but so that viewers would not see the attack as proof of Ian Bailey's guilt over Du Plantier's murder.

'That's why I didn't want it used. Not for me, for him, because of the false conclusions that could be drawn, connecting him with Sophie's death.'

Ms Thomas says she asked Sheridan whether it was really necessary to include the photograph. He is said to have replied that by not including it, the French would claim he was biased.

'That's why it had to be used,' she says.

French television producer Sophie Toscan du Plantier, 39, was bludgeoned to death in the drive of her West Cork holiday home two days before Christmas in 1996.

The murder has become one of this country's most infamous crimes, spawning books, films, an internationally acclaimed series of podcasts and an upcoming Netflix documentary.

Ms Thomas, who is in her early 70s, was already in a relationship with former journalist Ian Bailey, 64, when he initially covered Du Plantier's murder for several newspapers. He later became the prime suspect.

He has always denied the killing and was never charged in Ireland, although he was found guilty of the mur-

der in absentia in France in 2019.

This week, Ms Thomas who is an accomplished landscape painter and gardener, elaborated on her reasons for finally ending the at-times violently abusive relationship.

'Whilst Ian was here, I couldn't see my three daughters and grandchildren. They refused to visit because they didn't want to meet him. My daughters were absolutely thrilled when I finished with Ian.'

'For a while he seemed to be still in disbelief when I finally told him, "That's it, I want to get on with my own life". I want nothing more to do with him, I just can't handle the stress, I've been praying that he will get fixed up in

his own place soon,' she says.

The Welsh-born artist has lived in West Cork for 50 years having purchased her cottage with money from her 'immensely wealthy grandfather'. She has asked Bailey to vacate the home as soon as possible.

Ms Thomas believes Bailey has spent 'the past few months looking in vain for somewhere to live'. She says he still 'comes and goes', staying in her house, but they are

not on speaking terms.

'I couldn't kick him out whilst he had nowhere else to go. But there are signs he is trying to find somewhere and he has moved carloads of stuff out,' she says, adding that she has considered helping to fund a caravan for him after his efforts to rent accommodation around West Cork came to nothing.

She has given him until July to move out, the month her daughter Virginia will marry her fiancé Killian in the grounds of her cottage.

Speaking to the MoS two months ago, she confirmed that she had ended their 30-year relationship.

In the exclusive interview she explained how she had 'put up with him for far too long'.

After 25 years, she said was sick and tired of 'all that stuff in print, the press attention, the photographers, everything'.

She said she felt compelled to stay by his side for years as 'it would have looked like he did it' if she had abandoned Bailey.

Last weekend, Bailey was reportedly staying in a B&B in the nearby vil-

lage of Ballydehob, while Virginia, Killian and their six-year-old son spent the weekend at Thomas's cottage.

She explained the family reunion was only possible 'in Bailey's absence'. With him gone, she is now looking forward to visits, too, from her eldest daughter Saffron, who has two children, and youngest daughter Fenella.

'There are signs he is trying to find a place... He has moved stuff out'

Despite their turbulent relationship, she says she 'never had any doubt' that Bailey was innocent of Du Plantier's murder.

'This Jim Sheridan documentary series is bound to throw new light on the case, I think it will be fair and not one-sided.'

'He is innocent of the murder. I have no doubt about that.'

'Neither of us were contacted for another documentary coming out

As Jules Thomas prepares her idyllic gardens for her daughter's wedding, she reveals why she asked her ex-partner Ian Bailey to leave My family refused to visit while he was here

SOLIDARITY: Ian Bailey and Jules Thomas outside the Four Courts in 2014





TROPICAL PARADISE: Jules Thomas in her garden in West Cork

on Netflix; that's a disgrace, and it will be biased and full of all that hearsay evidence from the French trial that the Irish Courts would never have allowed to be heard.' Last year, the Irish High Court rejected a request for the third time for his extradition to France where

he was sentenced to 25 years in jail. Ms Thomas told how Sheridan, a six-time Academy Award nominee who has worked on the five-part documentary series *Murder At The Cottage* for 12 years, spent months at a time in West Cork talking to herself, Bailey and others.

She says he told her he was astonished that Ian Bailey never mentioned to him that she was arrested twice by investigating gardaí, once in February 1997 and again in September 2000. 'It was horrific, their interrogation, and unbelievable how Ian



SWEET HOME: The cottage in Schull where Thomas has lived for 50 years and, right, one of her paintings which continue to sell

would not have said anything about my two arrests,' she says.

'But that's so typical of him, he has to be the central character with no thought at all of what I was suffering.

'I remember when the guards arrested me, I said to them, "I have a family to look after at home, you can't just take me away".'

Ms Thomas shows me around her renovated studio which commands dramatic views of Hungry Hill Mountain on the Beara Peninsula with a glimpse of Dunmanus Bay nestling to the left below.

A new floor has been put down and the studio walls display her evocative paintings of beautiful sunsets, regional landmarks and foaming West Cork coastal scenes as well as abstract works, all of which sell well.

Over the years, she has also specialised in large-scale murals



'He is innocent of the murder. I have no doubt about that'

for visitors and heritage centres, including those at Mizen Head, Killaloe, Co. Clare, and Lough Neagh in Northern Ireland.

'I'm a private person and I'd rather stay that way,' she admits.

With her model-like slenderness, and deeply tanned skin from spending up to six hours a day working in her garden, Thomas blossoms with energy and enthusiasm, showing off a stunning tropical paradise she's created around the two-storey home.

Around the luxuriant foliage, are her beloved hens – Cream Legbar, which lay blue eggs, French Marans and Black Rock, not easily stressed and renowned for hardiness, wander among a few colourful roosters searching for titbits.

More reminiscent of the tropics than windswept West Cork, Yuccas, palm trees, banana plants and Canariensis are among the exotic species she has nurtured, framing a pond of water lilies.

An open-fronted summer house sits before the greenery. Here, Ian Bailey spent hours composing poems which he would often perform in the pubs of Schull, sometimes finishing off by playing the bodhrán.

'I look forward to having a martini here,' Jules says, pointing at the carved sign on the porch, 'Tropical

Garden'. Ms Thomas tells of how her mother Beryl, still alive at the age of 103, also found inspiration and peace in West Cork in her small studio home about 250 metres away.

Ms Thomas's psychiatrist father was a good friend of Welsh literary genius Dylan Thomas and her parents also got to know Brendan Behan through their circle of Bohemian friends while the famous Dublin novelist, poet and playwright was in London.

The arrival of her six-year-old grandson from the nearby beach with his parents brings a broad smile to her face.

The couple who live in Cork city are at the house to make final plans for their July wedding. They plan to light up the tropical garden and much of the catering will be done by Ms Thomas, who shyly admits she's a good cook.

A shed, once used as a writing den by Ian Bailey, has been cleared out to house a fridge for drinks for the wedding.

Ms Thomas says her garden will make a fine wedding-day setting.

'We have fire pits worked out and the place for the marquee and lights. Bob, the youngest of my three grandchildren, announced the engagement of his parents. He said, "My mummy and daddy are going to get married", he's quite the speechmaker already. I'm not sure if any family of mine will come from the UK yet, it's difficult to plan travel because of the pandemic.

'There's nothing like a wedding to bring light and cheerfulness to a home. I want the day to go off perfectly.'

More than anything, she says she wants to stay stress-free.

'I paint more, I garden more, I've got some nice supportive friends, I'm mentally strong and I have learnt how to get on with my own life.'

FREE INSIDE



Spring Garden



with Gerry Daly

BRILLIANT EIGHT-PAGE PULLOUT STARTS PAGE 39



TEARS OF A QUEEN

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A ROADMAP TO FREEDOM

■ All retail to resume by second week of May

■ Inter-county travel ban ends in early June

■ Poll: Majority back vaccine rollout by age

EXCLUSIVE

By **John Lee**

GROUP POLITICAL EDITOR

CABINET ministers have revealed a draft timeline for how the country will open up again over the coming weeks and months.

The welcome news comes as Covid-19 indicators continue to fall and a more encouraging picture of the vaccine rollout programme emerges.

One minister told the Irish Mail on Sunday that outdoor retail and click and collect services will reopen at the beginning of next month. Cabinet sources also indicated that the ban on inter-county travel will be lifted by the beginning of June.

News of the impending end of lockdown comes as a new Ireland Thinks-Irish Mail on Sunday poll published today reveals six in 10 people back the Government's policy of rolling out the vaccine based on age instead of prioritising teachers and gardai.

Our poll also reveals that the vast majority of people (87%) intend to take the

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BREAKUP: Ms Thomas said 'I've had enough'

EXCLUSIVE

Jules: Why I've split from Ian Bailey after 30 years

PAGES 12-13



'HEARTBROKEN': Mr Bailey feels 'raw'

By Isabel Conway

JULES Thomas has had enough of Ian Bailey. The landscape artist told the Irish Mail on Sunday: 'After 25 years I am sick and tired of banging on with this; it's been just awful – all that stuff in print, the press attention, the photographers, everything.'

For his part, Mr Bailey is 'heartbroken'. The self-confessed former prime suspect in the murder of French TV producer Sophie Toscan du Plantier, is looking for a new home in west Cork after his partner ended their 30-year relationship.

Ms Thomas told the English former journalist – who will be the subject of two new documentary series to be released on Netflix and Sky this year – that 'we're done' and that she wants him out of her home and life as soon as possible.

But Ms Thomas also told the MoS she felt compelled to stay by his side for years as if she had abandoned Mr Bailey, 'it would have looked like he did it'.

Mr Bailey, 64, confirmed his 'journey with Jules is over' when speaking to the MoS at the Skibbereen farmers' market in west Cork.

'I am feeling very raw at present, so I don't want to speak about this right now, but it is over,' he revealed with a deep sigh, raising a hand to his heart. At the moment I'm searching for some-

'If I left him it would have looked like he did it'

where to live and that's very difficult down here with so little property available and such high demand for it.'

It is now almost 25 years since Ms Toscan du Plantier was brutally beaten to death in a frenzied attack outside her holiday home near Schull just before Christmas in 1996. However, nobody has yet been charged with her murder.

Mr Bailey's life has been tumultuous for the last quarter of a century. There have been two arrests, a highly public criminal investigation that ultimately delivered insufficient evidence to prosecute him in Ireland, and libel cases against eight newspapers. There was also a failed case against the State for wrongful arrest and a successful attempt by the State to extradite him to France, which was subsequently overturned by the Supreme Court.

Throughout all this his partner Ms Thomas remained loyally by his side despite hating all the media and public attention focused on the couple. She continuously declined to comment to journalists or to say how she was coping or feeling as each court drama unfolded.

Instead, she retreated in silence back to her studio and to her world of gardening, rarely leaving her rural homestead.

But speaking to the MoS, Ms Thomas said she has had enough and her relationship with Bailey is now over. 'Why did I stick with it, what else could I do?' she said when asked how she coped with the intense media circus that surrounded the couple. 'If I had left him in the middle of all that it would have looked like he did it, so I just gritted my teeth.'

Despite the break-up, Ms Thomas said she is convinced Mr Bailey did not murder the French TV producer. 'I am convinced of his innocence, always have been and that it was a stitch-up by the guards from the beginning.'

Ms Thomas has given Mr Bailey notice to leave the house she owns, and which they have shared for decades, the remotely situated Prairie Cottage at Lissacaha outside Schull in the heart of west Cork.

The couple met a few months after Mr Bailey first came to the area in early 1991. At the time he was working in a fish factory after arriving from the UK intent on pursuing a career writing poetry.

He initially rented a studio apartment on his future partner's property. But as romance blossomed he moved up into the main cottage where Welsh-born Ms Thomas, who came to west Cork in the Seventies, was raising her three daughters from two previous marriages.

The respected landscape artist and long standing member of the local community was charmed by the younger, handsome Heathcliff-like poet who took her into a gre-

garius new world of pubs, music and poetry sessions.

Since then the couple have had a stormy, and occasionally violent romance, details of which were aired in public during Bailey's libel trial. However, Ms Thomas insists there was no single reason that influenced her decision to end the relationship now, only saying: 'I've had enough... that's all.'

She said: 'He is very hard going. I put up with him for far too long and I realise now that it was a waste of time... it was always a one-way flow;

VICTIM: French TV producer Sophie Toscan du Plantier



men like him don't ever bend or accommodate... it's to do with their egos. Yes, he was physically abusive to me a couple of times; we split up for a while and then we got back together again.'

The severity of these beatings were laid bare during Mr Bailey's libel trial in December 2003 when passages from his diaries referring to three violent incidents were read out to a shocked courtroom.

The first incident occurred in 1993, when he attacked her so severely she sought hospital treatment, judges were told. In another incident in May 1996 one of Ms Thomas's daughters knocked on a neighbour's door for help.

The court heard the neighbour

found Ms Thomas in the bedroom, half on and half off the bed with bite marks on her hands, great clumps of hair pulled out of her head, a swollen eye and her bottom lip torn away from her mouth.

Mr Bailey said of the assaults at the libel trial: 'It is to my eternal regret that in our 13 years together we had three fights.'

Confirmed his 'journey with Jules is over'

During the trial in Paris on May 17, 2019, a written statement was read into the record from Ms Thomas's daughter Ginny, who told gardaí in Schull on January 2, 1997, that Mr Bailey had made a sexual advance on her when she was 18 while giving her a lift. The design and communication student also outlined details of two assaults that Mr Bailey had committed on her

mother at their home in Schull.

He was later convicted in his absence by a French court of the murder of Ms Toscan du Plantier, 39, but has denied any involvement in her killing and denied ever making any admissions that he killed her.

Rumours that the couple's long relationship was finally at an end had been circulating around the farmers' markets of west Cork.

On Easter Sunday earlier this month, Ms Thomas and Mr Bailey arrived at opening day of the 2021 Schull farmers' market in separate vehicles.

They set up separate stalls – Mr Bailey selling pizzas and chutneys, Ms Thomas with her artwork – well distanced from each other. The former couple had shared a stall together for many years at the popular seasonal market that celebrates its 21st anniversary this year.

Mr Bailey appeared to enjoy the attention as he was often photographed and approached by curious

EXCLUSIVE: Jules Thomas on the end of her 30-year relationship with former murder suspect Ian Bailey, and why she stood by him for so long

I put up with him for too long. Men like him don't ever bend; it's to do with their egos



UPS AND DOWNS: Ian Bailey with his former partner Jules Thomas in 2015



'HEARTBROKEN': Ian Bailey sitting at his van at Skibbereen market with journalist Isabel Conway last Saturday, and, left, in his workshop at the home he shares with Jules Thomas which he will soon vacate

Two series on Sophie set for TV

By Valerie Hanley

THE massive success of a podcast about the murder of French TV producer Sophie Toscan du Plantier has prompted two rival documentary makers to make television series about the unsolved case.

Both series are expected to be released later this year, with insiders predicting the five-part documentary made by six-time Oscar nominee Jim Sheridan could be screened as on Sky as soon as June.

A second documentary has also been made by US streaming giant Netflix.

The release of both documentaries is sure to renew interest in the intriguing unsolved murder, not only in Ireland but also internationally. The 13-episode West Cork podcast, made by Amazon-owned Audible, was one of the most successful true crime podcasts ever aired.

The makers of the podcast spent three years compiling the 13-episode series and they travelled to west Cork several times to speak with prime suspect Ian Bailey, locals, as well as investigating gardai.

Programme makers Sam Bungey and Jennifer Forde also spoke with the French family of the 39-year-old slain mother-of-one and the first episode was released in February 2018.

West Cork was formerly exclusive on subscription service Audible but is now available as a free podcast.

Meanwhile, Sheridan's five-part documentary series, called *Murder At The Cottage: The Search For Justice For Sophie*, for Sky Studios, was scheduled to be released in the autumn but insiders predict it might be broadcast in two months.

Mr Bailey has co-operated with this film, saying he respects the director as a person 'of fairness and integrity'.

Despite being approached by the makers of the three-part Netflix series, the English-born journalist decided not to co-operate with the American streaming service.

Its documentary series is due to be aired later this year and will feature scenes re-enacted by an actor playing Mr Bailey.

non-locals and foreign tourists wanting to meet the man whose battle to clear his name had been headline news for decades.

Ms Thomas was the complete opposite: staying in the background, quietly selling her delicately painted prints of impressive landscapes and views of the west Cork countryside. As usual, she kept a low profile on Easter Sunday as Mr Bailey toured the stands to greet fellow traders.

He told some market regulars why himself and Ms Thomas had separate stalls, explaining that after 30 years their journey together was over and that she wanted him out of her life, adding he was 'heartbroken' and 'very sad'.

He also told acquaintances at the market that his former partner had

served him a month's notice to leave the house they had shared for 30 years and he could end up sleeping in his car.

Mr Bailey said he had his eye on a house 'one up, one down, maybe a bit cold in winter', but there was a bidding war and he could not compete. He said he was getting the paperwork together to apply for a local authority house. But, as a single man he would be at the bottom of any social housing list, he added.

At the Skibbereen market last Saturday, Mr Bailey, the son of an English market butcher, sat in the back of an open van chatting and watching the world go by, cheerfully saluting locals, including a politician and her mother.

One of the best farmers' markets in the country, Skibbereen had a

busy day, the best so far in a year of lockdowns, with food and plant stalls attracting plenty of business.

Mr Bailey confirmed to the MoS that his 'journey with Jules is over'. Wearing a wide brimmed hat and flowing scarf, the 6ft 4in English-

'He's looking. He'll find something'

man towered above most visitors, greeting some briefly, stopping to chat with others.

He explained he does not have a stall of his own due to Level 5 restrictions that deemed books of poetry and his homemade chutney

and pizzas as non-essentials.

His former partner, who does not have a stall at the Skibbereen Market, said afterwards: 'I don't go out and talk to many people at the moment. I've had my first jab and I want to stay clean until the next one.'

In May 2015, Mr Bailey was ordered to pay all of the legal costs - estimated at between €2m and €5m - of his failed civil action over the conduct of the Garda investigation into the Toscan du Plantier murder.

While he searches for a new home, Mr Bailey remains living under the same roof as his former partner. When asked about their living situation Ms Thomas, who works out of a studio attached to her home while Mr Bailey does his writing in a con-

verted shed at the back of the house, said there 'isn't any small talk between us if that's what you mean', confirming they were still sharing the same kettle to boil water for tea.

When told her ex-partner is experiencing difficulty finding somewhere new to live she said: 'He's looking; he'll find something.'

When asked if Mr Bailey could be heartbroken, she laughed 'oh yes', emphasising she is getting on with her own life.

Down through the years, the artist said she used to spend all her Saturdays baking bread and cakes for their shared market stall the following day in Schull. 'It was taking up my whole day. Now I don't feel like baking any more food. I do quite well anyhow with my art.'

Santa is sold out travellers avoid

Parents eager to reward kids but coalition's messaging hits summer plans

By Isabel Conway

THE cash mountain accumulated by Irish families who saved on childcare costs and other expenses as well as the commute while working remotely is set to create a big holiday bonanza for children.

Now it appears parents want to reward children who missed out on important life events over the past year and a half - including Communion and birthdays - by giving them a trip of a lifetime to Lapland before Christmas or to the ever popular Florida theme parks in 2022.

Travel agents are reporting a rush on that magical visit to Santa with two- and three-night stays to visit the great man in his toy workshop and enjoy the wonders of snowy Lapland above the Arctic Circle proving unbeatable.

John Barrett of Magic Vacations in Kinsale, Co. Cork, told the Irish Mail on Sunday: 'There are 24 direct

'Nobody is blinking at the price'

flights from Ireland to Lapland and all the two and three-day holidays have sold out.

'The cost for two adults and two children would only be a few hundred under €6,000 but nobody is blinking at the price. Parents are splurging out to reward the kids who had it tough and missed out a lot during pandemic lockdowns.'

Mr Barrett also reported a surge of bookings and enquiries for school holiday visits to Disneyland Paris and for trips of a lifetime to Walt Disney World and Universal Studios in Orlando, Florida.

He added: 'Customers have been saying their children missed out on big life events like birthdays, Communion and Confirmations and they want to make it up to them.'

'They are booking family packages to Orlando for the theme parks over the Easter holidays and summer of 2022.'

The emphasis on splashing the cash on more distant trips abroad was echoed by Sunway Holidays chief executive Mary Denton.

Ms Denton told the MoS: 'Irish holidaymakers are itching to get a holiday abroad this summer and Portugal and the Canary Islands continue to be in high demand.'



SUMMER SUN: Tourists arrive at Malaga airport this week

Testing rules add significant costs

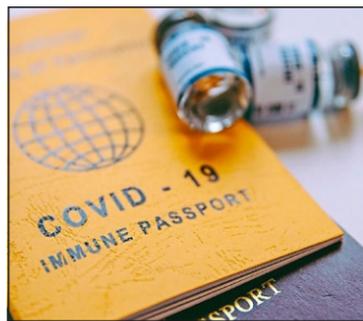
By Claire Scott

IRELAND is set for a phased return to non-essential travel on July 19 with overseas trips possible for people without quarantine - but several rules still apply.

Passengers will have to show they have been vaccinated against Covid-19, have a negative PCR test result or have recently recovered from the virus.

A negative PCR test will not be necessary for children under seven.

Testing requirements will add significant costs to your holiday. At Dublin Airport you could fork out between €69 to €199 for a test,



DIGITAL CERT: Freedom to travel

depending on the type and time it takes to get a result.

You will need to show a negative PCR test result from the previous 72 hours to avoid quarantine on your return to Ireland.

Prospective holidaymakers are urged to take out travel insurance to avoid further costs if you contract Covid-19 overseas.

This could add around €70 to an insurance policy but will ensure accommodation is covered while you are overseas.

Ireland, along with all other EU countries, has agreed to the EU Digital Covid cert. The cert can be added to your phone or printed out and will display, when scanned, if you've been vaccinated, received a negative PCR test or recently recovered from a Covid-19 diagnosis.

These rules will apply for travel within EU/EEA countries, the US and the UK.

The Government has the ability

to apply an 'emergency break' to travel to and from a country where a variant of concern or variant of interest develops.

Those returning home from a country where an 'emergency break' has been applied will be required to quarantine in a hotel if they do not have valid proof of vaccination.

It will be important for hopeful travellers to monitor the requirements of the EU country they intend to enter as each member will be able to decide the status a visitor will require.

For example, some countries may only accept fully vaccinated visitors and a negative PCR test alone may not be considered sufficient.

'Customers are prepared to spend a lot more for their well-deserved holiday this summer.'

'We are seeing a big increase in multi-generational holidays, as families want to catch up on some quality time with each other and what better way than with a nice holiday in the sun.'

Travelnet.ie manager Tom Randles said enquiries had picked up since the Government announcement on the resumption of travel on July 19 when the EU Digital Covid Certificate comes into effect. But

he said most bookings have been for the autumn and winter.

However, Irish Travel Agents Association (ITAA) chief executive

'Flights for mid-term sun breaks are almost full'

Pat Dawson said 'a shortage' of airline seats would be the main stumbling block for people looking to jet off to sunnier climes in the autumn.

Mr Dawson said almost all flights to the popular Irish hotspots in the Canary Islands, Portugal and mainland Spain are already full for the midterm October break, with only the most expensive seats still on sale.

The ITAA chief said connectivity would also be a problem in resuming travel to the US when the ban on travel is lifted, with limited availability until the end of the year.

Mr Dawson said that the cost of PCR tests in Ireland was also prohibitive and the ITAA wants the

Government to apply for some of the €100m set aside by the EU to reduce the cost of Covid testing.

Some European countries such as France are currently offering PCR tests for free. They are also available at a far lower cost in some other nations than in Ireland, where the cheapest tests will set consumers back around €100.

Travel agents are also reporting there is a lot of confusion among the public over what is required of them in relation to travel vaccinations and restrictions.

t, but confused sun favourites



HOT TICKET: Santa is nearly booked out

By **Debbie McCann**

AER LINGUS regional flights were cancelled without warning and with immediate effect yesterday after Stobart Air, which operates the services, announced it had ceased operations.

But Aer Lingus yesterday confirmed it had developed plans to replace some of its regional schedule.

It said it would operate five of the 12 routes and BA City Flyer would operate two more for at least the next week.

'Alternative operations for the outstanding routes are still being determined,' the statement said.

'All impacted customers are being contacted directly and

'Pandemic resulted in almost no flying'

offered details of an alternative flight where feasible. All impacted customers also have the option of a full refund.'

Aer Lingus will operate the Dublin/Edinburgh, Dublin/Manchester, Belfast City/Manchester, Belfast City/Birmingham and Belfast City/Edinburgh routes.

BA City Flyer will operate the Belfast City/Exeter route and the Belfast City/Leeds Bradford route.

Plans for the Dublin/Kerry and Dublin/Donegal public service obligation routes are still being worked out.

Customers due to travel on the Belfast City/East Midlands, Dublin/Glasgow and Dublin/



GROUNDING: Stobart Air has cancelled services

Regional flights hit as Stobart Air calls in liquidator

Newquay routes are being offered alternative flights.

Aer Lingus said: 'Teams across Aer Lingus have been working through the night progressing alternative flying operations from tomorrow to provide a service for Aer Lingus regional customers.'

Stobart announced on Friday night it was terminating its franchise agreement and was in the process of appointing a liquidator.

The airline could not say how

many customers were affected by the cancellations.

In a statement, the airline said: 'Late on the evening of 11th June, Stobart Air notified Aer Lingus that it was terminating its Franchise Agreement with Aer Lingus with immediate effect.'

'As a result, all Aer Lingus regional flights operated by Stobart Air are cancelled. Stobart Air referred to the continuing impact of the pandemic which has resulted in almost no flying since March 2020. Stobart Air has

ceased trading and is now in the process of appointing a liquidator.

'Aer Lingus apologises to customers for the inconvenience caused by the cancellation at such short notice of all flights operated by Stobart Air.'

Transport Minister Eamon Ryan said the announcement was 'concerning news for the affected workers and for regional connectivity'. He added: 'We will be engaging with all stakeholders to restore connectivity to the regional airports affected.'

Maura Fahy, managing director of Fahy Travel Worldchoice in Galway, told the MoS: 'Current interest is low for the summer months, especially for families, there is some interest for later in the year.'

Meanwhile Michael Bowe, managing director of Bowe Travel in Thurles, Co. Tipperary, said there was 'definitely pent-up demand'.

But he added: 'Presently most customers are waiting to see the adaptation of the Digital Green Certificate before confirming. The Irish Government's mixed messages with regard to the start-up of

'Mixed messaging is making people nervous'

travel is making customers nervous.'

Ann Davis, general manager at Abbey Travel, agreed most people were too cautious to fly in the short term.

She told the MoS: 'There is still too much confusion in relation to vaccinations and government direction, which changes almost daily.'

Winter sports specialist Topflight says bookings for ski holidays at the start of 2022 are performing extremely well.

Topflight chief executive Anthony Collins told the MoS: 'Customers can't wait to get safely back to the slopes with family and friends or to see their children experience a ski holiday for the first time.'

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I'll miss flying home to Donegal

IT WAS my birthday this week: I went to the James Vincent McMorro concert on Thursday, then flew out to Donegal yesterday to see my 88-year-old mother.

I thought to myself, 'Wow, isn't life wonderful?' and then wallow.

I woke yesterday morning to a Facebook link telling me all Aer Lingus regional flights operated by Stobart Air had been cancelled.

I was looking at it thinking, 'Ah, no this obviously doesn't apply to me.' And then I read the article and it very much did apply to me – and to a hell of a lot more than me.

The entire network of Stobart flights in Ireland is gone as well as



By **DANNY MCELHINNEY**

its operations across Britain.

It's not so bad for me really – I'll be on the bus from Letterkenny today instead. But there are people around Ireland who really rely on these services. It's the sudden nature of this that hits you.

I started using the service in July last year. To be honest, I'm the bad son who comes up to visit his 88-year-old mother two or three times a year. I flew up and down again at Christmas. I started flying because

there was no capacity on the bus and I investigated the possibility of travelling by train, but it would have been a train from Dublin to Belfast, Belfast to Derry and from Derry to Lifford where I live – which would have taken six and a half hours.

Flying really suited me once Covid hit because I didn't want to have to wear a mask for three and a half hours on a bus.

The flight goes to Carrickfinn, which is in the middle of nowhere, right up the northwest of Donegal, and it is the most scenic approach in the world. It is a really, really beautiful approach.

It was a great service. Out of force of habit I would arrive an

hour and 15 minutes before my flight, but people would arrive walking on as if they were getting on a bus. It was a service for people from Donegal to get to Dublin, and a lot of people like me would travel down to meet parents.

The impact of this on that part of Donegal is going to be terrible.

I flew down yesterday on time. I got to Donegal Airport with everyone smiling as usual.

There was no indication of what was to come at that point.

Then this morning I saw the Facebook post – I wasn't even out of the bed because I always have a lie on in my mother's.

I really fear for Donegal Airport now, I really do.