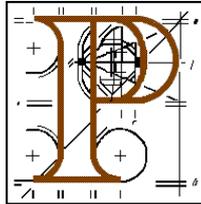


An Bord Pleanála



Inspector's Report

Development: Installation of an external ATM to existing Bank of Ireland premises, which is a protected structure, R.P.S. no. 1001202 and N.I.A.H. Register no. 20827277, and alterations to front façade at 18 Westbourne Place, Ballyvoloon, Cobh, Co. Cork.

Planning Application

Planning Authority: Cork County Council
Planning Authority Reg. Ref.: 14/05561
Applicant: The Governor of the Bank Of Ireland
Type of Application: Permission
Planning Authority Decision: Grant Permission

Planning Appeal

Appellant(s): An Taisce
Type of Appeal: Third Party V Grant
Observers: None
Date of Site Inspection: 8th January 2015

Inspector: Kenneth Moloney

1.0 SITE DESCRIPTION

The Bank of Ireland building is a 4-storey mid-terrace property situated in a prominent location in the centre of Cobh adjacent to the promenade and waterfront.

The Bank of Ireland façade maintains much of its original character particularly at upper floor levels. The ground floor external façade is a later addition and has some low key signage.

The internal layout of the Bank generally consists of a banking hall with large public counter however there is a small partitioned office to the front of the building where it is proposed to insert the ATM. There is an existing ATM within the banking hall of the building.

2.0 PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

The proposed development is for the installation of an external ATM to existing Bank of Ireland building which is a protected structure. The proposal includes alterations to the existing front façade.

The alteration to the façade will involve removing two existing external ground floor windows and replacing them with one single stainless steel surround and signage and installing an ATM. The proposal will also involve enlarging the original window opening.

3.0 PLANNING AUTHORITY'S DECISION

The Planning Authority decided to grant planning permission subject to four conditions. The conditions are generally standard.

Internal Reports: There are two internal reports on the file:

Heritage Unit: There are no objections subject to conditions.

Architects Report: There are is objection subject to condition.

Objections: There is a submission from An Taisce objecting to the proposed development on conservation grounds.

4.0 PLANNING HISTORY

- L.A. Ref. 07/520580 – Permission granted to Bank of Ireland to remove an existing window and upvc frame to rear of existing Bank of Ireland and construct new glazing frame /window in its place with all associated site works.

5.0 DEVELOPMENT PLAN

The operational development plan is the Cobh Town Development Plan, 2013 – 2019. The appeal site is zoned ‘town centre and mixed uses’.

The subject building is a protected structure and the following policies are relevant;

- Policy Objective HE – 20 ‘Protect all protected structures’
- Policy Objective HE – 22 ‘No loss or damage to the elements which contribute to the character of the structure.’

The appeal site is located within the ‘Town Centre Architectural Conservation Area’. The following policy is relevant;

- Policy Objective H – 28 ‘New development respects established historical and architectural character of the that area’.

6.0 GROUNDS OF APPEAL

An Taisce submitted an appeal and the following is a summary of same;

- It is contended that the proposed development negatively affects the character of the protected structure.
- In particular the proposal will adversely affect the cut sandstone shopfront which has corinthian pilasters supporting cornice with foliate brackets.
- The proposed development would impact on the left elliptical-headed window openings with chamfered architraves and paired round-headed window openings with blind oculi, flanking timber corinthian-style engaged colonettes and cast-iron spear-headed sill guards. These features are referred to in the record on the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage.
- The proposal would adversely impact on the character of the protected structure with is located within a prominent location within an Architectural Conservation Area.
- The proposal would be contrary to the policy objective HE-01 of the Cobh Town Development Plan, 2013 – 2019.
- Policy Objective H0-22 requires that there is no loss of elements which contribute to the special character of the structure.
- It is contended that the removal of the window which is heavily referred to in the record in the NIAH would be an entire loss of an element which contributes to the special character of the structure.
- In addition the proposed ATM would detract from the preservation of the character of, and would adversely affect the Architectural Conservation Area in which the protected structure is sited.
- The proposed development would materially contravene the policies and objectives of the Cobh Town Development Plan, 2013 – 2019, and

would be contrary to the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.

7.0 RESPONSES

None

8.0 ASSESSMENT

The main issues to be considered in this case are: -

- Architectural Heritage

Architectural Heritage

The Bank of Ireland building the subject of this appeal is a protected structure in accordance with the provisions of the Cobh Town Development Plan, 2013 – 2019. I note from the Appendix B of the Town Development Plan that it is stated that the protected structure (reg. no. 10012020) is '*a terraced 3-bay 4-storey house with curved façade built in 1855*'. The Bank of Ireland building is also located within the Town Centre Architectural Conservation Area in accordance with the provisions of the Cobh Town Development Plan, 2013 – 2019.

Accordingly the building the subject of this appeal is of conservation significance. I would also note that Chapter 4 of the town plan sets out guidance and objectives for the town centre and of relevance is objective TCW – 03 which states it is an objective to '*continue to enhance the streetscape and heritage assets of the town centre and continue with environmental improvements*'. Furthermore in the town plan Section 3.7.8 outlines the importance of heritage tourism. Therefore I would consider that the Cobh Town Development Plan, 2013 – 2019, recognises the importance of the built character in Cobh and its contribution to the area.

In addition to the protected structure status the Bank of Ireland building is recorded on the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage website (www.niah.ie) as having a regional status. I note from the record on the NIAH website that it is stated that the street level elevation dates from approximately 1895. The NIAH record is of particular importance to this appeal as there is a reference to the ground floor elevation. The NIAH record states '*terraced curved three-bay four-storey former house, built c. 1855, now in use as bank with later cut sandstone bank front inserted, c. 1890, to front (south) elevation*'. In relation to the shop front it is stated that;

'cut sandstone shopfront having Corinthian pilasters supporting cornice with foliate brackets. Elliptical-headed window openings with chamfered architraves and paired round-headed window openings with blind oculi, flanking timber Corinthian-style engaged colonettes and cast-iron spear-headed sill guards'.

The NIAH appraisal states that *'the later Venetian Gothic style bank front is finely executed and well designed addition, and is indicative of the architectural quality employed by banking institutes in the late nineteenth century'.*

Therefore I would consider based on the NIAH record that the shop front strongly contributes to the character of the structure.

I would note from the local authority Architects report, dated 5th August 2014, that there were a number of discussions with the applicant and that the current proposal represents the most sensitive solution leaving the façade of the building intact. The local authority Architect concludes that the proposal is acceptable subject to condition which includes the storing of the materials should the building ever need to be returned to its original condition. The local authority planners report states that the primary concern of the proposal relates to the overall appropriateness of the works proposed given the protected status of the structure. The report concludes that the proposal will not contravene objective HE-20 of the Cobh Development Plan.

I noted from a visual observation of the area that the Bank of Ireland building is located within a prominent site in the centre of Cobh adjacent to the waterfront. I noted from a visual observation of the area that the Bank of Ireland façade maintains much of its original character particularly at upper floor levels. The existing ground floor external façade has some low key signage. The neighbouring properties at the upper floor levels, apart some signage, maintain much of their original character. At ground floor level the neighbouring property, i.e. Kelly's Public House, has altered significantly from its original character. The ground floor façade includes corporate canopy and signage however apart from this property much of the neighbouring properties, including Bank of Ireland, retain much of their original character at ground floor level.

In terms of considering the impact of the proposal on the Town Centre Architectural Conservation Area I also noted that the AIB building which is located on West Beach further west of the appeal site has an ATM located externally to its building. Although this building is a protected structure (reg. ref. 10017015) it is located in a less sensitive part of town. Although I would be of the opinion that the entire waterfront façade adds to the architectural character of Cobh I would consider that the Bank of Ireland façade and the neighbouring facades on Westbourne Place is of added significance given their location, architectural quality and their four-storey height which is taller than all other terraces facing onto the waterfront.

In conclusion therefore I would consider that a key principle of any protected structure, in accordance with the Planning and Development Act, 2000 (as amended) and Architectural Heritage Protection Guidelines, 2004, is retaining the features of a protected structure that contribute to the special interest of that structure. The guidelines advise that a planning authority, or indeed in this case the Board, will have to balance the continuing economic viability of a protected structure with the effect on the character and special interest of its fabric of any consequent works. In this particular case I would conclude that there is no doubt that the insertion of the ATM, as proposed, would result in the loss of original character of the shop front which dates from 1895. I note that the bank currently operates with an internal ATM situated within the main banking hall however it is understandable that the bank would desire an external ATM for their customers.

It is my view, based on the balance of information, that the existing shop front contributes to the character of the protected structure and this is evident from the record on the NIAH website. I would acknowledge that the neighbouring property has a corporate type shop front however I would consider that the shop front of the appeal building has historical significance as it relates to the late nineteenth century and also has a high level architectural quality as described in the NIAH record. The ATM as proposed would result in the loss of this historical and architectural quality and therefore, in my view, would adversely impact on the features which contribute to the special interest of this protected structure and would therefore be contrary to the policy objective HE-22 of the Cobh Town Development Plan, 2013 – 2019 and the Town Centre Architectural Conservation Area.

I have inspected the internal layout of the bank building and I would not consider the intervention of the ATM would adversely impact on the internal character of any special features within the protected structure.

9.0 RECOMMENDATION

I have read the submissions on the file, visited the site, had due regard to the development plan and all other matters arising. I recommend that planning permission be refused for the reason set out below.

REASONS AND CONSIDERATIONS

The appeal property which dates from the mid-nineteenth century is a Protected Structure, listed as 1001202 in the Record of Protected Structures, contributes positively to the architectural character of the town centre and the setting of the waterfront. The proposed development, given intervention to the shopfront would have a serious and detrimental impact on the special character of the protected structure and would seriously injure the visual amenities and the architectural and historical interest of the area and would therefore be contrary to Policy HE-22 of the Cobh Town Development Plan, 2013 – 2019, the Town Centre Architectural

Conservation Area and the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.

Kenneth Moloney
Planning Inspector
13th January 2015