



An
Bord
Pleanála

Inspector's Report ABP-306701-20

Development	Retain and complete alterations and extensions to school, including access levels and layout, and construct a single-storey rear classroom extension
Location	Ballinphuill & Termon Beg townlands, Castlerea, County Roscommon
Planning Authority	Roscommon County Council
Planning Authority Reg. Ref.	PD/19/608
Applicant(s)	Fr. John McManus, on behalf of the Board of Management of Tarmon National School
Type of Application	Retention permission & permission
Planning Authority Decision	Grant
Type of Appeal	Third-Party
Appellant(s)	John Larkin
Observer(s)	None
Date of Site Inspection	18 th May 2020
Inspector	Colm McLoughlin

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1.0 Site Location and Description

- 1.1.** The appeal site is located in the rural townlands of Ballinphuill and Termon Beg in north County Roscommon, approximately 2.5km northeast of Castlerea. The site features 90m frontage onto a local road (L-1616), which connects with the R377 regional road approximately 150m to the southeast. This local road primarily serves a mix of agricultural lands, farmyards and one-off houses, as well as the subject school.
- 1.2.** The appeal site is stated to cover 1.05ha and accommodates a primary school that has recently been extended and features an unsurfaced vehicular access, a turning circle and parking area along the northwest side and an enclosed astro-turf playing pitch to the rear. The older school building is located on the southeast side of the site and the new extension elements are primarily located to the northwest side with an internal connection between the older and newer elements to the front of the school. The school features various classrooms and a range of ancillary facilities for staff and pupils, including a general purpose (GP) hall, while the extensions that appear to be nearing completion would provide three additional standard classrooms, three Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) classrooms, a sensory garden space, reception, offices, stores and changing facilities. The appeal site is bordered to the northwest side and the rear by two grass playing fields, while a house and agricultural holding is situated along the southeast side. The surrounding area is characterised by gently rolling agricultural fields bordered by a mix of ditches, stonewalls, hedgerows and trees. There is approximately a 3m drop in levels from the northeast corner of the site to the southwest corner, which is largely reflective of levels in the immediate area to the site.

2.0 Proposed Development

- 2.1.** The proposed development to be retained and completed comprises the following:

 - amendments to permission granted under Roscommon County Council (RCC) planning register reference (reg. ref.) PD/15/402, comprising revisions to the layout and levels of the previously permitted vehicular access road, parking, turning circles and footpaths, as well as alterations to the elevation treatments of the school extension;

- amendments to the changing and storage rooms previously permitted under RCC planning ref. PD/14/256, comprising a revised use as two classrooms with toilet facilities and alterations to the elevation treatments.

2.2. The proposed development comprises the following:

- construction of a single-storey rear extension measuring a stated gross floor area of 138sq.m, comprising an extended circulation space and an additional ASD classroom served by ancillary rooms for pupils, including toilet and changing facilities.

3.0 Planning Authority Decision

3.1. Decision

3.1.1. The planning authority decided to grant permission, subject to eight conditions of a standard nature, including the following:

C.2 provide revised locations and details for two mobility-impaired car parking spaces and a pedestrian crossing along the new access road;

C.3 provide a landscaping and boundary treatment plan.

3.2. Planning Authority Reports

3.2.1. Planning Report

The report of the planning authority (January 2020) can be summarised as follows:

- while sightlines are not delineated on the drawings submitted, sufficient visibility would be available at the access;
- two mobility-impaired car parking spaces proposed to be located to the rear of the site, should be relocated to their previously permitted location;
- a total of 35 car parking spaces would be provided for the primary school;
- the applicant should outline whether or not the wastewater treatment system installed has adequate capacity to account for the additional classrooms;

- the extension building designs are in keeping with the main school, while the revised layouts and levels allow for improved and safer access to the school;
- there would be sufficient screening from neighbouring properties and additional tree planting is proposed within the school grounds.

3.2.2. An addendum report is added to the planning authority's report outlining that the development description did not specifically refer to the revised layout to the rear of the school, encompassing the hard and soft play areas, as well as the wastewater treatment plant and percolation area. The addendum concludes that a condition should be attached to the permission to advise that these elements do not form part of the subject development.

3.2.3. Other Technical Reports

- Environment Section – no objection, subject to conditions;
- Roads Section – no objection, subject to conditions.

3.3. Prescribed Bodies

3.3.1. None consulted.

3.4. Third-Party Submission

3.4.1. One submission was received by the planning authority during consideration of the application from a resident of Ardass House, a neighbouring property located approximately 150m to the northwest of the appeal site. The issues raised in this submission are similar to those raised in the grounds of appeal and are collectively summarised under the heading 'grounds of appeal' below.

4.0 Planning History

4.1. Appeal Site

4.1.1. The planning authority reports outline the planning history for the site with the following two planning applications the most recent applications relating to the appeal site:

- reg. ref. PD/14/256 – permission granted in October 2014 for a two-storey extension to the rear of the GP hall, comprising of two changing rooms and toilets at ground-floor level and a storage area at first-floor level;
- reg. ref. PD/15/402 – permission granted in March 2016 for a single-storey four-classroom extension to the west side of the school, a single-storey entrance porch to the GP hall, a vehicular entrance road with additional car parking and set down areas, hard and soft play areas, including a sensory garden and an astro-turf pitch, installation of a new sewerage treatment unit and percolation area.

4.2. Surrounding Sites

- 4.2.1. Planning applications in the surrounding area primarily comprise proposals for one-off houses, domestic extensions and agricultural buildings.

5.0 Policy & Context

5.1. Roscommon County Development Plan 2014-2020

- 5.1.1. Chapter 8 of the Development Plan addresses ‘Social, Community and Cultural Development’ and refers to education playing a vital role in developing sustainable and balanced communities in the County. Policies for education development are included in section 8.3 of the Development Plan, including policy 8.18, which aims to, inter alia, facilitate the improvement of existing education and training facilities in the County to ensure a suitably skilled local workforce and to eliminate educational disadvantage. Chapter 9 of the Development Plan provides Development Management Guidelines & Standards, including Section 9.25.1 addressing ‘schools development’, which requires adequate provision of car parking, play areas and access for schools.

5.2. National Guidelines and Legislation

- 5.2.1. An array of technical design guidance for primary schools is provided by the Department of Education & Skills. The following planning guidance document is relevant:

- The Provision of Schools and the Planning System - A Code of Practice for Planning Authorities, the Department of Education and Science, and the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government.

5.3. Natural Heritage Designations

- 5.3.1. The nearest designated sites to the appeal site, including Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and Special Protection Areas (SPAs), are listed in table 1 below.

Table 1. Natural Heritage Designations

Site Code	Site Name	Distance	Direction
000592	Bellanagare Bog SAC	3.1km	north
004105	Bellanagare Bog SPA	3.1km	north
002110	Corliskea/Trien/Cloonfelliv Bog SAC	6.4km	southwest
000600	Cloonchambers Bog SAC	6.4km	west
002338	Drumalough Bog SAC	7.7km	west
000612	Mullgollan Turlough SAC	8.3km	east

5.4. Environmental Impact Assessment - Preliminary Examination

- 5.4.1. Having regard to the nature and scale of the existing and proposed development, including the development to be retained, and the absence of a pathway to any sensitive location in the vicinity, there is no real likelihood of significant effects on the environment arising from the proposed development. The need for environmental impact assessment can, therefore, be excluded at preliminary examination and a screening determination is not required.

6.0 The Appeal

6.1. Grounds of Appeal

- 6.1.1. A third-party appeal accompanied by photographs and extracts of planning application drawings was submitted by a resident of the neighbouring Ardass House, who is also stated to be the owner of neighbouring lands to the north and west of the

playing pitches adjacent to the appeal site. The grounds of appeal can be collectively summarised with the third-party submission, as follows:

- the appellant does not object to the principle of the development, but does require amendments to the scheme, in order to address impacts on neighbouring residential amenities and agricultural operations in the area;
- the finished-floor levels of the permitted and constructed school vary by approximately 1.5m, resulting in an external raised terrace pathway overlooking the appellant's house and this matter was not properly addressed by the planning authority;
- the building extensions do not comfortably sit into the local topography and as a consequence, the visual prominence of the extensions is heightened, particularly as the appeal site is situated approximately 4m above the floor level of the appellant's house;
- proposals result in light pollution that impact on the residential amenity of the area and a condition should be attached to restrict illumination levels and the hours of operation for the facility;
- mitigation measures via landscaping along the site boundary to address the visual impacts of the proposal development on the wider area should have formed part of the application proposals and should be provided prior to a decision on the appeal;
- proposals result in the loss of previously permitted trees that were proposed to front the main school entrance area.
- the cumulative impact of the school development alongside the adjoining associated playing pitches should be considered, including the intention to install floodlighting and the potential implications for the safety of the additional pupils attending the school, who may cross into the appellant's agricultural lands. A 2m-high boundary fence should be installed adjoining the appellant's lands;
- the installed roads and parking layout is inadequate with poorly functioning drop-off area and poor visibility viewing westwards along the local road.

6.2. Applicant's Response

6.2.1. The response of the applicant to the grounds of appeal can be summarised as follows:

- minimal additional impacts on local amenities would arise as a result of the development proposed in this application;
- the appellant is requesting the Board revisit and amend development previously permitted under separate planning permissions, while many of the issues raised have been addressed in conditions set out by the planning authority, which the applicant does not contest, including those relating to the request for landscaping details and the relocation of the two mobility-impaired car parking spaces;
- the finished-floor level in the extensions to the school, match those in the main school to allow for ease of access and compliance with Building Regulations;
- the area where the school extensions are visible is very much limited to the immediate area and the overall scale, bulk and design of the extensions have been designed to fit in with the environmental context and the main building;
- the future use of other lands off site and any potential adverse impacts arising are not relevant planning issues in consideration of this application and appeal;
- the school is occasionally used by the local community for other purposes outside of school hours and restrictions on the use of the facility should not be imposed.

6.3. Planning Authority Response

6.3.1. The planning authority did not respond to the grounds of appeal.

6.4. Observations

6.4.1. None received.

7.0 Assessment

7.1. Introduction

7.1.1. The proposed development, including those elements to be retained and completed, would involve works to enhance and extend an established primary school, providing for a total of 12 classrooms, including four ASD classrooms. The proposed development is broadly supported by education policies contained within the Roscommon County Development Plan 2014-2020, including those that encourage the development of school facilities, subject to being in the appropriate location and adherence to development standards. Accordingly, I consider the substantive planning issues arising from the grounds of appeal and in assessing the development are as follows:

- Impact on Local Amenities;
- Roads and Services Layout.

7.2. Impact on Local Amenities

7.2.1. The grounds of appeal assert that the proposed development to be retained is prominently located and as a result requires several measures to be incorporated into the design and operation of the facility, in order to address their concerns. When considering planning applications for schools development, including extensions, the Development Plan requires the design to be appropriate. The appeal site is within the 'Tulsk & Rathcroghan Plateau' landscape character area, based on the Landscape Character Assessment of County Roscommon and falls within the 'dry farmland' landscape character type. While this is an area of 'Exceptional Value' from a landscape perspective due to important cultural heritage features, I am satisfied that the development does not interfere with the setting of any such features, which are a substantial distance from the appeal site.

7.2.2. Permissions have previously been granted under reg. refs. PD/14/256 and PD/15/402 for extensions doubling the floor area of the school on the appeal site and these extensions are nearing completion. As a consequence, assessment of the impact of the proposed development on the visual amenities of the area is primarily limited to the consideration of the revisions to the floor levels and elevational

treatments of these extensions, as well as the additional extension yet to be constructed to the rear of the school and measuring 138sq.m in gross floor area. The school buildings are visible from the appellant's property and they are not highly visible from the majority of the neighbouring area, primarily due to the screening offered by mature trees along the local roads and field boundaries in the area. The finished-floor level of the permitted extension under reg. ref. PD/15/402 was stated to be 84.25m in order to match the existing school (based on drawing no.19.187-123) and this would drop marginally by 0.07m to a finished-floor level of 84.185m based on the subject application drawings (Drawing No.19.187-101 Revision PL0). The applicant states that in order to maintain level access throughout the school, additional raised footpaths and ramps with safety railings from the adjoining lower grounds levels in the car park area to the northwest were required to be installed. Therefore, the floor level or indeed the visual prominence of the school would not increase by virtue of the subject proposals.

7.2.3. The other primary alterations to the building elevations, when compared with those that had been previously permitted, relate to the revised fenestration design and proportions, although the window locations have largely remained as permitted. The visual impact of these alterations are not substantial and the revised extensions are in keeping with the scale, design and character of the host building on the southeast side. Furthermore, the proposed additional building element would not be highly visible from the public realm, given its position to the rear of the school, and the scale, design and proportions of this extension would integrate with the existing buildings on site. Accordingly, the proposed development, including extension elements to be retained and completed, would be appropriate and would not be incongruous or out-of-character with the existing host buildings on site.

7.2.4. The appellant asserts that additional and replacement landscaping should be incorporated into the layout of the development, to reduce the visual impact of the development, primarily when viewed from their property to the west. Based on my assessment above, recognising the 150m separation distance to the appellant's property and the limited views of the site from the neighbouring area, and my site visit, where I noted that trees have recently been planted adjacent to the west of the school entrance within the playing pitch grounds, I am satisfied that there would not be a necessity to specify additional landscaping features within the site.

Notwithstanding this, the applicant is agreeable to the submission of a landscape and boundary treatment plan and this can be provided as a condition of the permission to require these proposals to be formally submitted. I note that the appellant has also raised concerns regarding light pollution and the future hours of operation and users of the subject facility. The extent of lighting that would arise as a result of the proposed development would be akin to that already permitted for the appeal site, therefore, I am satisfied that no additional perceptible impacts would arise in this regard. The Development Plan states that 'school buildings should be multi-functional and available for community use outside school hours', therefore, I am satisfied that a restriction on hours and end-users of the facility would be contrary to the provisions of the Development Plan and a condition to affect same would be unreasonable to attach in the event of permission being granted.

7.2.5. The appellant asserts that the proposed development would impact on the residential amenities enjoyed at their property, including via undue overlooking and a resultant loss of privacy. The proposed development would not bring the building any closer to the appellant's property, or other neighbouring residential properties, than had been previously permitted and the separation distance involved is such that persons on the appeal site could not view into the appellant's property to an extent that could reasonably be considered to be excessive. Consequently, I am satisfied that undue overlooking or loss of privacy for neighbouring properties would not arise as a result of the proposed development.

7.2.6. In conclusion, the development would not have an unreasonable impact on the visual amenities of the area or the residential amenities of property in the vicinity. Accordingly, retention permission and permission for the development should not be refused for reasons relating to the impact on local amenities, including residential amenities.

7.3. Roads and Services Layout

7.3.1. The planning authority note that the layout of the play areas and wastewater treatment system to the rear of the site, including the astro-turf playing pitch, do not strictly align with their previous layout, as permitted under Ref. PD/15/402. As these revisions were not specifically included in the advertised development description for the application, the planning authority decided to include a condition clarifying the

extent of the permission, excluding reference to the revised layout of school facilities to the rear of the site. I am satisfied that such a condition would be reasonable to attach in the event of permission being granted.

7.3.2. The appellant asserts that the new roads access and parking serving the school are not adequate and do not function appropriately. I note that the roads have not been fully completed at this stage and would therefore have limited scope to comprehensively accommodate and facilitate school traffic at present. With the completion and operation of the new access arrangements, including parking, set down areas and pedestrian crossings, this situation would improve. The alterations to the roads layout are relatively minor and would not substantially impact on traffic safety along the local road, as per the response from the Roads Section of the planning authority during consideration of the application. The planning authority has requested the installation of a pedestrian crossing towards the front of the access road and the relocation of two mobility-impaired car parking spaces closer to the front of the site. Such measures would appear necessary and reasonable, alongside the formal completion of the roads layout, and I am satisfied that the development would not endanger public safety by reason of traffic hazard and would facilitate appropriate access arrangements for the school.

7.3.3. The proposed development would revise the use of previously permitted changing room facilities adjoining the GP hall into two classrooms, while also providing an additional ASD classroom in the new extension, which accommodate much lower pupil numbers than standard classrooms and may also serve pupils from other classrooms in the school. Arising from these alterations and the extension to the school building, I am satisfied that any potential additional loading on the wastewater treatment system would be limited. As noted above, specific concerns regarding the layout of the wastewater treatment system do not form part of this planning application.

7.3.4. The appellant asserts that additional measures should be undertaken to prevent pupils crossing into the neighbouring farmland from the adjoining playing pitches. These playing pitches are not identified in the application as lands in control of the applicant, therefore, there is no scope in this application to require the installation of additional security measures along the pitch boundaries via planning conditions. Furthermore, floodlighting has not been proposed for these playing pitches under

this planning application and, therefore, it is not a material consideration in the assessment of the subject proposals.

8.0 Appropriate Assessment

- 8.1.1. Having regard to the minor nature of the proposed development, including the development to be retained and the existing installed wastewater treatment system, the location of the site and the separation distance to the nearest European site, no Appropriate Assessment issues arise and it is not considered that the proposed development would be likely to have a significant effect individually or in combination with other plans or projects on a European site.

9.0 Recommendation

- 9.1.1. It is recommended that retention permission and permission should be granted, subject to conditions, for the reasons and considerations set out below.

10.0 Reasons and Considerations

- 10.1. Having regard to the nature, scale and appearance of the proposed development to be retained and the proposed development, the established primary school on site and the provisions of the Roscommon County Development Plan 2014-2020, subject to compliance with the conditions set out below, it is considered that the proposed development would not seriously injure the amenities of the area or of property in the vicinity, would be acceptable in terms of traffic safety and convenience and would not be prejudicial to public health. The proposed development to be retained and the proposed development would, therefore, be in accordance with the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.

11.0 Conditions

1. The development shall be retained and completed in accordance with the plans and particulars lodged with the application, as amended by the further plans and particulars submitted to the planning authority on the 21st day of November 2019, except as may otherwise be required in order to comply with

the following conditions. Where such conditions require details to be agreed with the planning authority, the developer shall agree such details in writing with the planning authority prior to commencement of development and the development shall be carried out and completed in accordance with the agreed particulars.

For the avoidance of doubt, this permission only authorises the retention completion of (i) amendments to development previously permitted under ref. PD/15/402, including revised access arrangements and elevation treatments, (ii) amendments to an extension previously permitted under ref. PD/14/256, including use as two classrooms and revised elevation treatments; and (iii) a single-storey ASD-classroom rear extension, and shall not be taken to constitute any authorisation of any other deviations from the development previously permitted on the subject site under planning refs. PD/15/402 and PD/14/256.

Reason: In the interest of clarity.

2. The proposed development to be retained and completed shall be amended as follows:
 - (a) the two proposed mobility impaired car parking spaces shall be relocated closer to the front entrance of the school, to the area previously identified on the proposed site layout plan (Drawing No. TNS-PL-01A) approved under planning ref PD/15/402;
 - (b) a pedestrian crossing shall be provided traversing the car park on the northwest side of the school.

Revised drawings showing compliance with these requirements shall be submitted to, and agreed in writing with, the planning authority within two months of the date of this order.

Reason: In the interest of road safety and to ensure a satisfactory parking provision for the proposed development that is accessible to all users.

3. A comprehensive boundary treatment and landscaping scheme shall be submitted to and agreed in writing with the planning authority, within two months of the date of this order. This scheme shall include the following:-

- (a) proposed locations of trees and other landscape planting in the development, including details of proposed species and settings;
- (b) details of proposed boundary treatments at the perimeter of the site, including any entrance gates, heights, materials and finishes;
- (c) details of all proposed hard surface finishes, including proposed materials for footpaths, kerbing and road surfaces within the development.

The boundary treatment and landscaping shall be carried out in accordance with the agreed scheme.

Reason: In the interest of visual amenity.

4. Drainage arrangements, including the disposal of surface water, shall comply with the requirements of the Planning Authority for such works and services.

Reason: In the interest of public health.

Colm McLoughlin
Planning Inspector

13th July 2020