

Planning and Development Acts 2000 to 2022

Planning Authority: Laois County Council

Planning Register Reference Number: 2360442

APPEAL by Abbeyleix Tidy Towns care of Mary White of Main Street, Abbeyleix, County Laois against the decision made on the 13th day of June, 2024 by Laois County Council to grant subject to conditions a permission to Laois Bible Church care of SM Architects Limited of 35 The Willows, Pollerton, County Carlow in accordance with plans and particulars lodged with the said Council.

Proposed Development: Demolish existing temporary toilet/storage block (and associated timber fencing/gate) to side of Epworth Hall, demolition of existing modern extensions and shed to rear of same; construction of proposed single storey flat roof extension to the rear comprising of new meeting room/parent room/stores, internal alterations to same (comprising of the provision of toilets and associated services), stairs and first floor mezzanine (gallery) and all associated works, all at Epworth Hall, Main Street, Knocknamoe, Abbeyleix, County Laois (a Protected Structure RPS 072/NIAH Register Number 12900724).

Decision

REFUSE permission for the above proposed development in accordance with the reasons and considerations set out below.

Reasons and Considerations

Having regard to the Policy Objectives PS 2 and PS 3 of the Laois County Development Plan 2021-2027, which seek to protect and conserve Protected Structures in accordance with "Architectural Heritage Protection Guidelines for Planning Authorities 2004", to ensure the protection of Laois's built heritage including Architectural Conservation Areas (ACAs) and Protected Structures, and to ensure best practice conservation standards, it is considered that the scale and design of the proposed extension, including a monopitch roof, would not be subordinate to the Protected Structure, would significantly detract from the rear elevation, would be evident and visible from the Main Street negatively impacting the principal elevation, and would, therefore, be contrary to the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.

It is also considered, having regard to the Protected Structures Development Management Standard DM PS 1 of the Laois County Development Plan 2021-2027, that the level and configuration of proposed alterations to the Protected Structure including stairs, a mezzanine, stud partitions and additional openings to the rear elevation, would not be justified, would not relate to and complement the special character of Epworth Hall, would be in conflict with its surrounding environment and would be inappropriate in the context of the positioning of Epworth Hall within Abbeyleix ACA. The proposed development would, therefore, be contrary to the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.

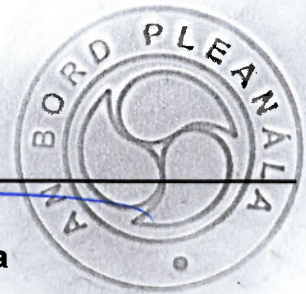
In deciding not to accept the Inspector's recommendation to grant permission, the Board noted that Epworth Hall is a designated Protected Structure located within Abbeyleix ACA, and it is also listed on the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage, with a regional rating (architectural and social). The Board noted the comment of the planning authority that Abbeyleix ACA is characterised by architecture of a high quality, and it noted that Epworth Hall is one of the most prominent buildings on the Main Street in Abbeyleix.

The Board disagreed with the Inspector that the proposed works would not significantly impact the special character of the Protected Structure, and it disagreed that the proposed design would complement its character. The Board was of the opinion that the development proposed within Epworth Hall and its attendant grounds, would not respect its significant heritage, would negatively impact its features, would not protect the outward and inward views, and would be detrimental to the character of the structure and its setting.



MaryRose McGovern

**Member of An Bord Pleanála
duly authorised to authenticate
the seal of the Board.**



Dated this 23rd day of April 2025.