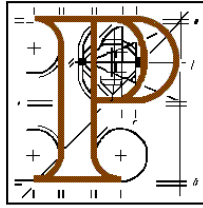


An Bord Pleanála



Inspector's Report

Appeal Reference No: PL29N.245646

Development: Protected Structure: Changing of the lettering in the existing sign which is fixed to the front elevation of the building at No. 55 Lower Gardiner Street, Dublin 1.

Planning Application

Planning Authority: Dublin City Council
Planning Authority Reg. Ref.: 2396/15
Applicant: Cathal O'Connell
Planning Authority Decision: Refuse permission

Planning Appeal

Appellant(s): Cathal O'Connell
Type of Appeal: First party
Observers: None
Date of Site Inspection: 8th January 2016

Inspector: Donal Donnelly

1.0 SITE LOCATION AND DESCRIPTION

- 1.1 The appeal site (No. 55) is located at the southern end of Gardiner Street in Dublin City Centre. No. 55 (protected structure) is a terraced two-bay four storey Georgian style building built c. 1825. It is the end building on the eastern side of the street. The adjoining building to the south appears to be a later infill corner building at the end of Beresford Terrace.
- 1.2 No. 55 and the adjoining corner building to the south are occupied by “Paddywagon”, a tour operator and tourist accommodation provider. The appeal site was formerly occupied by “The Irish Catholic” newspaper for approximately 50 years up to 2007 and is now in use as a tourist hostel. A tourist office occupies the ground level the adjoining building.
- 1.3 There is a signage structure reading “The Irish Catholic” between the first and second floor windows of No. 55. The structure continues across most of the width of the building and comprises lettering on a sheet of Perspex inserted into a box with length of 6m and height of 400mm. The box protrudes by approximately 200mm. It is stated within application documentation that the sign may have been relocated from the original premises of The Irish Catholic on Middle Abbey Street.

2.0 PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

- 2.1 The proposed development at No. 55 Gardiner Street comprises the following main elements:
 - Changing of lettering in the existing sign fixed to the front elevation of the building in the panel of brickwork between 1st and 2nd floor windows;
 - Removal of the lettering “The Irish Catholic” and erect alternative lettering “Paddywagon”.

3.0 PLANNING HISTORY

- 3.1 No planning history on the appeal site.

4.0 PLANNING AUTHORITY DECISION

4.1 Planning and technical reports

- 4.1.1 Under the assessment of the application within the initial Planner's Report, reference is made to the report of the Conservation Officer, which states that the earliest date that could be given to the signage is c. 1930's and coincidentally Perspex acrylic was first introduced in the early 1930's as a cast sheet material. This material was used for box signage and it is stated that *"...in this instance the particular font used has a certain look associated with both the newly born state, religious landscape and artistic trends of the time."*
- 4.1.2 It is concluded by the Conservation Officer that the sign contributes to and is integral to the artistic, social and cultural significance of the building and should not be removed or replaced. It is also noted that the fact that the sign exists on the façade of this building should not infer the ability to locate any sign on this façade.
- 4.1.3 The Case Planner acknowledges that The Irish Catholic has relocated from this building in recent years; however, there are concerns regarding the proposal to replace lettering on an historic sign. It is stated that the location of the revised signage would be contrary to Section 17.25.3 of the Development Plan and would detract from the integrity of the protected structure and add to visual clutter in this conservation area. It is also noted that the existing hostel also occupies the adjoining building which is extensively advertised.
- 4.1.4 A further information request from the Planning Authority sought a revised signage proposal at ground level that would be more sympathetic and would not materially affect the character of the protected structure. The revised proposal comprises alteration to the initial design of the sign to provide brass lettering rather than signage at ground level; however, it is recommended by the Case Planner that planning permission should be refused.

4.2 Planning Authority Decision

- 4.2.1 Dublin City Council issued notification of decision to refuse permission for the following reason:

"The proposed provision of revised advertising signage, including 0.5m high lettering, at the upper levels of this prominent four-storey protected structure, would adversely

affect the character and special interest of the Protected Structure, would be contrary to section 17.25.3 of the Dublin City Development Plan 2011-2017 which deals with signage on commercial premises and would set an undesirable precedent for developments of this type above ground floor level, which would result in visual clutter and be detrimental to the visual amenities of this dedicated conservation area. The proposal would therefore be contrary to the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.”

5.0 GROUNDS OF APPEAL

5.1 A first party appeal against the Council’s decision has been lodged on behalf of the applicant. The grounds of appeal and main points raised in this submission can be summarised as follows:

- Existing sign is a classic American style plastic fascia sign typical of late 50’s and early 60’s and manufactured and erected in 1958 upon The Irish Catholic’s move to Gardiner Street.
- Perspex was almost certainly not available in Ireland after its invention and there would not have been any sign manufacturers yet familiar with the material or capable to manufacture in this skill.
- Existing sign is clearly an established element of “pre-‘63” origin and as a “permitted” development, it is within the Planning Authority’s gift to approve a change of text or letters within the sign.
- Council’s position in this case qualifies as being equivalent to Populuxe or Pop Art in so far as it is both ironic and placing exceptional value on something mundane and ugly.
- Protected structure status and conservation area designation did not visualise extreme protection of this ugly 20th century sign – house is worthy of preservation but sign is not and therefore modification by changing of lettering is academic.
- It is an accepted policy that brass and stone are more sympathetic to a Georgian house and that individual lettering is less intrusive.

- It was not uncommon in the 18th and 19th centuries for businesses to paint signs or erect fascia and signage on upper levels – filling a commercial need in this instance is not alien to this style.
- It is questionable whether the prominent sign ought to be allowed to continue given that the publisher has long left the building and more importantly, whether in fact it retains any social and cultural relevance.
- Local Authority planning policy ought to support a domestic export enterprise such as Paddywagon. Company's activities are labour intensive, it contributes significant taxes and fosters visitors to the country.
- It would appear out of kilter to preserve such an obscure and irrelevant icon over a young go-ahead brand.

6.0 RESPONSES/OBSERVATIONS TO GROUNDS OF APPEAL

6.1 Planning Authority response

- 6.1.1 In response to the first party appeal, the Planning Authority refers to the comprehensive planning report which deals fully with all the issues and justifies its decision.

7.0 POLICY CONTEXT

- 7.1 Within the Dublin City Council Development Plan, 2011-2017, the appeal site is zoned Z8, Georgian Conservation Areas, where the objective is *“to protect the existing architectural and civic design character, to allow only for limited expansion consistent with the conservation objective.”*
- 7.2 No. 55 is a protected structure (Ref: 3058). Adjoining buildings on Lower Gardiner Street and Beresford Terrace are also protected structures.
- 7.3 Development standards for works to a protected structure and development in Conservation Areas and Architectural Conservation Areas is set out in Sections 17.10.1 and 17.10.8. respectively. Sections 17.25.3 covers signs on shopfronts and other business premises.

- 7.4 The Council's Outdoor Advertising Strategy is set out in Appendix 27 of the Development Plan.

8.0 NATIONAL GUIDELINES

Architectural Heritage Protection – Guidelines for Planning Authorities

- 8.1 These Guidelines set out development objectives for protecting structures, or parts of structures, which are of special architectural, historical, archaeological, artistic, cultural, scientific, social, or technical interest, and for preserving the character of architectural conservation areas.
- 8.2 It is stated in Section 8.5, that fixtures and fittings are part of the history of a building, even where they are later additions, and should be retained in situ. In addition, it is noted that *“old lettering and shop signs may be more difficult to retain when premises change ownership, but efforts should be made to identify and retain examples that are of particular interest or quality.”*

9.0 ASSESSMENT

- 9.1 In my opinion, the main issues for assessment under this appeal are the appearance of the proposed signage itself, together with its impact on the character and special interest of the protected structure, and on the visual amenities of the conservation area.

Appearance of proposed signage

- 9.2 Under the Council's reason for refusal, it is considered that the proposed amendment to the sign is contrary to policy regarding signage on commercial premises. It is stated under Section 17.25.3 of the Development Plan regarding signage of shopfronts and other business premises that *“advertisements and signs relating to uses above ground floor level should generally be provided at the entrance to the upper floors...”*. The applicant was offered the opportunity by way of further information to submit a revised signage proposal at ground level that would be more sympathetic and would not materially affect the character of the protected structure. However, the applicant's revised proposal included the replacement of entire signage box with individual brass lettering at a similar position on the façade.

- 9.3 In my opinion, the replacement of the existing signage box with any type of new signage represents a retrograde step. If the Board is minded to grant permission, I consider that the most appropriate approach would be to insert a new signage board over the existing one, without damaging the original lettering. However, it is also advised within Section 17.25.3 that the size of lettering used (for shopfront fascia boards), should be in proportion to the depth of the fascia board. The existing signage box was made for “The Irish Catholic” to fit across its dimensions. The word “Paddywagon” is not proportionate to the width of the signage box.
- 9.4 I would also have concerns regarding the proposed font of the lettering. The existing lettering is an older serif style that complements the Roman numerals on the clock above, as well as the building itself. The proposed sans serif lettering has a more modern appearance. It is recommended under Section 17.25.3 that *“corporate signs will only be permitted where they are compatible with the character of the building...”*. I consider that the proposed lettering of modern appearance is not compatible with the historic character of the building, and overall, I would be in agreement that the proposal is contrary to the Council’s policy regarding signage on commercial premises.

Impact on the character of the protected structure and ACA

- 9.5 The building is currently in use as a hostel associated with the adjoining “Paddywagon” tourist office and headquarters. Previously it was occupied by “The Irish Catholic” newspaper from 1958 until 2007. It is stated in the Council’s Conservation Report that the sign was probably relocated from the original premises of The Irish Catholic on Middle Abbey Street. The Conservation Officer considers that *“the survival of the signage associated with the Irish Catholic is an important remnant of this part of the history of the building and has a social and cultural relevance in terms of the significance of this building.”*
- 9.6 The appellant submits that the protected structure status and conservation area designation did not visualise extreme protection of this 20th century sign. It is considered that the house is worthy of preservation but the sign is not, and therefore modification by changing of lettering is academic. The appellant also questions whether the prominent sign ought to be allowed to continue given that the publisher has long left the building, and more importantly, whether in fact it retains any social and cultural relevance.
- 9.7 It is noted in the Architectural Heritage Protection Guidelines that fixtures and fittings are part of the history of a building, even where

they are later additions, and should be retained in situ. It is also recognised that *“old lettering and shop signs may be more difficult to retain when premises change ownership, but efforts should be made to identify and retain examples that are of particular interest or quality.”* The Guidelines go on to state that *“where good lettering or signage exists but a premises has changed hands, it may be possible to add new signage while leaving the original lettering in place. For example, a new signboard can be mounted over the existing one without damaging the original lettering below or new signage can be placed elsewhere on the shopfront, leaving the old name in place.”*

- 9.8 As noted above, I do not consider that the proposed signage, in terms of its font type and proportions, is appropriate as a replacement for existing signage on this protected structure and at a prominent location within the conservation area. With respect to the existing sign, I agree that it contributes to the artistic, social and cultural significance of the building. The proposal would see the removal of signage of certain historical merit to be replaced with inappropriate modern signage and wording for a protected structure. It is also noteworthy that the positioning and scale of the proposed lettering would not be acceptable if there was no existing signage in place.
- 9.9 Having regard to the above, I would be in agreement that the proposed amendment to the sign would have an adverse visual impact and would seriously detract from the character of the protected structure and conservation area by reason of its modern appearance, excessive scale, proportions and prominent positioning. I consider that the existing sign, which has been in place for over 50 years, should be left in situ in view of its contribution to the history of the building. It may also be the case that the historical significance of this sign will increase over time.

Appropriate Assessment

- 9.10 Having regard to the nature and scale of the development proposed and to the nature of the receiving environment, namely an urban and fully serviced location, no appropriate assessment issues arise

10.0 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

- 10.1 It is considered that the proposed development should be refused for the reasons and considerations hereunder.

REASONS AND CONSIDERATIONS

The proposed development would result in the removal of an existing sign of certain historical significance to be replaced by a modern sign that would be of excessive scale and prominent positioning in the context of current Development Plan standards. Having regard to the Council's policy regarding signage on commercial premises and to the status of the building as a protected structure located within a dedicated conservation area, it is considered that the proposed sign would be visually obtrusive, would seriously detract from the character and special interest of the protected structure and would set an undesirable precedent for development of this type above ground level within the conservation area. The proposed development would, therefore, be contrary to the provisions of the Z8 zoning objective and to the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.

Donal Donnelly
Inspector

19th January 2016