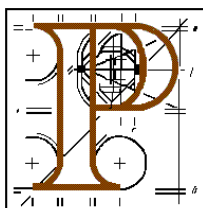


An Bord Pleanála



Inspector's Report

Development: Demolition of disused former school building and construction of new staff car park, St. Joseph's Primary School, Sleeven East, Co. Cork.

Planning Application

Planning Authority: Cork County Council

Planning Authority Reg. Ref.: 15/5903

Applicant: Board of Management St. Joseph's Primary School.

Type of Application: Permission

Planning Authority Decision: Grant Permission

Planning Appeal

Appellant(s): An Taisce

Type of Appeal: Third Party V Grant

Observers: Parents Association of St. Joseph's Primary School

Date of Site Inspection: 26th January 2016

Inspector: Kenneth Moloney

1.0 SITE DESCRIPTION

The appeal site is a town centre location situated off Chapel Street which is located approximately 150 metres south of the Main Street, Macroom. Chapel Street rises upwards from Main Street.

The site in question is an existing primary school campus and there is currently a pedestrian and vehicular entrance to the school off Chapel Street, however there is no car park on the site. There are two school buildings on the site. The larger school building is situated on the western half of the site and the smaller school building is located on the southern side of the site.

The site for the proposed car park was formerly the location of a pre-fabricated building and there is also a two-storey dis-used former school building on the site.

2.0 PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

Planning permission is sought for the demolition of a disused former technical school building and the construction of a car park on the site of the former technical school and also on the site of the former pre-fab classrooms.

The proposed development provides for 25 car parking spaces on-site. The technical school proposed for demolition is a two-storey building and is currently unused.

3.0 PLANNING AUTHORITY'S DECISION

The Planning Authority decided to grant planning permission subject to 7 conditions. The following conditions are relevant;

- Condition no. 6 states that the site shall be used for car parking / traffic management.
- Condition no. 7 states that prior to demolition of the former technical school, an archival standard photographic survey of the interior and exterior of the building shall be carried out.

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

- Environment Report: No objections
- Area Engineer: No objections
- Conservation Office: Recommends refusal.
- Cork National Roads Office: No objections

Objections: An Taisce submitted a submission stating that the extended surface car park is undesirable and Smarter Travel measures should be adopted.

Submissions: Irish Water has no objections. Transport Infrastructure Ireland submits that the Planning Authority is required to abide by official policy.

4.0 PLANNING HISTORY

- L.A. Ref. 13/54011 – Permission **granted** for 3 class rooms, toilets, ancillary resource room and associated site development.
- L.A. Ref. 07/54051 – Permission **granted** for a prefabricated class room.

5.0 TOWN PLAN

The operational Town Plan is the Macroom Town Plan, 2009 – 2015.

The appeal site is zoned CF 'Community Facilities'. The zoning objective allows for local civic, community, educational and religious facilities and associated ancillary amenity facilities, open spaces / recreational areas to serve the immediate surroundings and hinterland'.

In accordance with the provisions of this Plan the appeal site is not on the list of the RPS. The appeal site is also located outside the designated Architectural Conservation Area.

6.0 DEVELOPMENT PLAN

The operational Development Plan is the Cork County Development Plan, 2014 – 2020.

Relevant policies include;

Policy HE 4 – 2 Protection of Structures on NIAH.

Policy TM 1 – 1 Encourage non-car based transport.

Policy TM 2 – 1 Encourage Safe Walking Environment

7.0 GROUNDS OF APPEAL

An Taisce lodged an appeal and the grounds of appeal are summarised as follows:

Site Location

- The appeal site is associated with St. Mary's Convent (1865) which is situated to the south.
- Although separate ownership there is an underground tunnel connection between the two sites.

- The former technical school is not on the RPS however it is recorded on the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage (reg. 20852057).

Architectural Merit

- The structure proposed for demolition is listed on the NIAH and is assigned a regional status.
- The structures categories of special interest include Architectural and Social.
- The subject structure was part of the religious institutions that were responsible for education in the early 20th century.
- The structure also has cultural, historical and social significance.
- The structure retains much of its original form and fabric, such as slate roof, ridge vent and sash windows.
- The Heritage Unit recognises the importance of the building in relation to surrounding structures.
- The Heritage Unit argues that the building should not be seen in isolation but as part of a wider complex.
- The Heritage Unit also argues that the buildings simplicity should not be seen as part buildings lack of architectural merit.
- It is contended that the demolition of the structure would be contrary to Objective HE 4-2 of the Cork County Development Plan.
- It is contended that the proposal for a car park to replace the structure on the NIAH is inappropriate.
- The proposed car park is contrary to Objective TM 4-1 (d) of the Cork County Development Plan.
- It is contended that the proposal would set an undesirable precedent to the architectural heritage of Macroom.

Smarter Travel

- The proposed development is contrary to Smarter Travel: A New Transport Policy for Ireland, 2009 – 2020.
- A principle objective of this document is that alternatives to the car are more widely available such as walking and cycling.
- Chapter 3 sets out a number of overriding policy objectives.
- It is an objective to reduce commuting by car by reducing the modal shift from 65% to 45%.
- Action 4 requires Local Authority's to create sustainable neighbourhoods.
- Action 16 sets out an objective to reprioritising traffic signals to favour pedestrians instead of vehicles.
- The replacement of a structure on the NIAH is undesirable. The proposal would encourage the reliance on the car use for work travel.
- The proposal is not consistent with TGD-027 and TGD-020.
- It is considered that the proposed development would be contrary to Policy Objectives TM1-1 (g) and TM 3-3 (b) of the Cork County Development Plan, 2014 – 2020.
- It is noted that concerns in relation to the demolition of the subject building were raised at the pre-planning meeting.

- It is submitted that the Heritage Unit report and the Planner's report both indicate that there is established traffic in the area and that the proposed development may lead to an increase in car-based trips.
- It is concluded that the proposed development may exacerbate the existing traffic situation in the area.

Reuse of Structures

- Cork County Development Plan encourages the re-use of centrally located vacant buildings for social, cultural and artistic uses.
- There are contradictions between the Conservation Report prepared by John Cronin & Associates and Heritage Unit encouraging the re-use of the building.
- There is a contradiction in terms of the future use of the subject building.
- The planner's report states that the existing building would have no real future use whereas in an earlier it report states that it would have a future use.

8.0 OBSERVERS

The following is a summary of an observation submitted by the Parents Association of St. Joseph's Primary School.

- The Parents Association are in full support of the proposed development.
- The main focus of the submission is to alleviate the traffic congestion by providing additional car parking spaces. This is also in the interest of safety for school children.
- There are currently insufficient car parking spaces to allow parents drop children to school.
- Parents are more likely to drop children to the school gate.
- Parents have to drive their children to the school gate in the following circumstances;
 - they have other children in the car
 - the pupils have heavy school bags
 - no available public transport
 - none existence of cycle lanes
 - during wet weather it is not possible for children to walk to school.

9.0 RESPONSES

First Party Response

The following is the summary of a response submitted J. & N. Murphy on behalf of the applicant;

Architectural Merit

- There is a significant difference between a structure on the RPS and a structure on the NIAH.

- It is contended that the objective HE 4-2 of the Cork County Development Plan in relation to NIAH is less stringent requirement than corresponding objectives in relation to RPS (ENV 4-1 (a), (b), (c)).
- Consideration of a structure on the RPS is only possible after due process where selection for a structure on the NIAH is achieved by un-overseen decision.
- The NIAH does not have a status equivalent to the RPS.
- A restriction of the building is the existence of a very large surface water retention tank immediately north of the building.
- The subject building is beyond economic repair / adaptation.
- It is considered that given the separation of the subject building (former technical school) from the existing school that no school-related use is appropriate for the building.
- The maintenance of the building is an economic burden on the voluntary school.
- It is considered that the retention of the said structure would result in an incongruous feature in a relatively elevated location.
- The subject building is devoid of any architectural features.
- It is submitted that An Taisce stated in their original objection to the Local Authority that the building was not of particular architectural merit.

Smarter Travel

- The school supports Smarter Travel and promotes Walk on Wednesdays.
- It is an oversimplification to state that all car parking is bad.
- It is submitted that it is not practically possible for all children to walk to school having regard to distances from the school and given that the car is the only realistic option.
- It is 10 years since the last pupil cycled to school having regard to the apparent dangers.
- It is submitted that a lot of the objectives in the Smarter Travel, 2009 – 2020, have not been achieved.
- It is not practical to provide cycle lanes in the town centre having regard to the current restricted width of the existing footpath and width.
- The proposed car park will achieve two of the 'Smarter Travel' objectives. The proposal will provide a proper wheel chair bound space for staff, pupil or visitor.
- The proposed development will relieve traffic congestion on the school road with the main street and this will therefore reduce perceived danger for parents and children walking to school. The car parking proposal would therefore facilitate walking to school by improving safety.
- There are no buses currently serving the school.
- The adjoining St. Mary's secondary also significantly adds to congestion in the area.
- The school has been pro-active in addressing congestion (see appendix 6).
- Car pooling is also an option.

Reuse of Structure

- The building is unsuitable for reuse having regard to Fire Safety, Disabled Access, Stairs Dimensions, Sanitary Accommodation.
- There is significant dry-rot particularly on the stairs and some roof repairs are required. Also all the windows and doors need to be replaced.
- The building would have to be significantly altered to meet modern standards.
- It is submitted that a viable use has not been found for the building in over 40 years and it is unlikely that a viable use will be found in the future.

Contractions

- It is submitted that there is no contradiction in John Cronin & Associates report as it has been consistently stated that there is no viable use for the building.
- It is submitted that there is no contraction in the planner's report. It is acknowledged that the Heritage Unit report and the Area Planner's report differs from the Senior Planner report.

Area Engineers

- The applicant's concur with the Area Engineer's report.
- The Area Engineer acknowledges that the proposed car park is a solution to the traffic congestion.

Building Heritage Report

- It is acknowledged that there was an indication by the Heritage Officer at the pre-planning meeting that the building was of lesser importance than that which was attached to it.
- Equating the RPS structures with the NIAH structures is incorrect.
- The Heritage Officer notes the poor traffic situation.
- The Heritage Officer notes that the building is typical building of that type and age. However it is not possible to protect all buildings of this age.
- There is no feature within the building that's unique to its use.
- The building has no current connection to the main convent campus. This building stands alone and affects nothing else.
- The building is incorrectly described on the NIAH listing as a 'Convent / Nunnery'.
- The building is relatively modest.
- The building was not, as previously described, the cradle of vocational education at this campus.
- It is contended that the building does not have the 'first of a kind' historical status or importance considered relevant by the Heritage Officer.
- It is not possible to adapt the building for modern uses due to requirements with Building Regulations and Disability Access Requirements.

Senior Executive Planners Report

- It is acknowledged that the proposal addresses the Smarter Travel requirements for Disabled Access, and will, by improving safety in the vicinity of the school, encourage parents to allow children to walk to school.
- It is clear from Section 1.81 and 2.4.2 of the Heritage Guidelines that the NIAH does not have the same status as the RPS.
- The report refers to a number of similar buildings that are re-used or proposed for reuse. None of the other buildings are similar to the building in the current appeal.

Senior Planners Report

- This report notes that the subject building is modest compared with the many fine stone buildings in its vicinity.

10.0 ASSESSMENT

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

- Principle of Development
- Architectural Heritage
- Traffic and Access

Principle of Development

In accordance with the Macroom Town Development Plan, 2009 – 2015, the appeal site is zoned for 'Community Facilities'. The proposed development before the Board is to provide car parking on an existing school site and is therefore ancillary educational development.

The proposed development is consistent with the zoning objective and therefore the principle of the proposed development, in my view, is acceptable.

Architectural Heritage

An Taisce, in their appeal submission, argue that the demolition of the existing school building, which facilitates the proposed car parking provision, is contrary to the built heritage objectives of Cork County Development Plan, 2014 – 2020.

In considering the architectural value of the subject building I would have regard to the architectural merit of the building itself and also relevant policy objectives in relation to architectural heritage.

I carried out a visual inspection of the subject two-storey building on the appeal site and I would conclude that the subject building has some conservation merit. I would conclude this on the basis that the building is in its original condition, both internally and externally, and has many of its original internal features including timber-sash windows, doors, stairs and fireplace. In

terms of the external character of the building I would consider that the roof profile, chimney and opes would also make a contribution to the built heritage of the local area as they are all original features and this in my view helps to make an historical contribution to the local street scape. Overall I would accept that the building is modest in terms architectural features or character but nonetheless it is very close to its original condition and therefore, in my view, would make a contribution to the character of the area.

There are two built conservation reports on the file worth considering in the evaluation of the former school buildings built heritage. Firstly the Built Heritage Assessment submitted by John Cronin & Associates, as part of the planning application. This report outlines that the subject building, known as the Technical School, was built in 1909. The Technical School was part of the convent complex, on the adjoining site, which was built in 1865. It is outlined that the Technical School was linked to the convent by underground tunnel and its original purpose was to provide education for girls who did not attend secondary school. The Technical School taught cookery, dressmaking, arts and crafts and also religion. The building was therefore formerly used as an Industrial School. The report concludes that the Technical School is of limited architectural or aesthetic appeal.

The report on the file from the Heritage Unit states that the simplicity of the structure in terms of plan, form, layout and materials is what is characteristic of the building. In this report it is stated that it strongly disagrees that the building is of limited architectural merit or aesthetic appeal. The report also notes that the local area is defined and characterised by the presence of religious institutions and their ancillary structures and the subject building is important in terms of the historical, social and cultural associations. It is claimed that the social significance of the structure is not considered in the submitted 'Built Heritage Assessment'. The Heritage Unit concludes that the building itself is a good authentic example of its building type. The report states that demolition of the Technical School will result in the irreversible loss to our architectural heritage and compromise the integrity of the existing built environment and would also contravene Policy ENV 4-2 of the Cork County Development Plan. This conclusion and recommendation is supported by the Area Planner and the Senior Executive Planner of the Local Authority. I would note that the Senior Planner has overruled the Area Planners recommendation of refusal on the basis of the current traffic congestion and it is considered that the car park offers a solution to alleviate these problems.

In terms of policy provision the Technical School is not listed on the RPS. However the building is listed on the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage. The record on the NIAH (ref. 20852057) states that the building is of regional status. The architectural appraisal states as follows '*this former school retains much of its original form and fabric, such as a slate roof, ridge vent and sash windows. Built as an industrial school to train young women in household duties, it played an important role in the local social fabric in the past.*

Policy objective ENV 4-2 of the Cork County Development Plan, 2014 – 2020, is relevant as it is an objective to have regard and consideration of all structures which are included in the NIAH for County Cork, which are not currently included on the RPS.

It is my view, based on the information on the file and a visual observation of the building, that the former Technical School contributes to the built heritage in terms of its social, historical and architectural interest and that its demolition would result in a loss in the architectural heritage of the local area and would be contrary to Policy Objective ENV 4-2 of the Cork County Development Plan, 2014 – 2020. I recommend a condition to the Board, should they favour granting permission, to retain the former technical school and revise the car parking layout accordingly.

Traffic and Access

The proposed development provides for 25 car parking spaces and currently there is no on-site car parking provision. There is on-street parking provision adjacent to the school gate, however these spaces are mainly occupied by staff belonging to the school. It is intended that the staff will use the proposed car park and that the on-street car park will become available to parents for drop-offs. I note that parent's dropping children off for school use the limited on-street car parking provision and also use the turning circle on the opposite of the public road from the school gate which facilitates parents dropping off children to school. During my site inspection I observed the school and its environs at the morning drop-off and based on my visual observation there was considerable traffic congestion with a knock-on effect on the Main Street. This traffic congestion is concentrated for a short-period but nonetheless has wider implications beyond the school.

I note in the Area Engineer's report, dated 5th October 2015, that it is acknowledged that there is a long-standing traffic problem in the area adjacent to the school. The report states that the roads in the area are narrow and it is in close proximity to the local church and St. Mary's Secondary School. The report concludes that the removal of staff parking from the street would be very welcome and a great help as it will free up on-street spaces for drop-offs. The report also states that the school should promote alternatives as outlined in the National Transport Authority. I would also note that the Area Planner's report considers that the car parking provision, as proposed, is a short term solution to a wider traffic management problem. The report also refers to wider infrastructure projects within the town which will alleviate traffic congestion and this includes a ring road which would link Chapel Street in an eastern direction to the Main Street. This would effectively mean that there would be a second access to the school from the Main Street and would alleviate traffic congestion at the Main Street / Chapel Street junction.

I would note that there is an existing vehicular access serving the school and this access will be used to facilitate the new proposed car park.

I would consider that the proposed car park would certainly improve the safety of pupils and parents as it will increase provision and partially prevent parents from dropping children on the side of the public road. However in terms of congestion Chapel Street will still experience the same car numbers during peak periods and there maybe queuing to the proposed car park with subsequent tail-backs on Chapel Street. Overall I would consider that the proposed car park would be an improvement on the existing congestion.

In considering the proposed development I would have regard to the Section 10.2 of the Cork County Development Plan 'Walking, Cycling and Public Transport' and I would acknowledge that a common theme of this section of the Development Plan is to encourage a modal shift from car based journeys to more sustainable journeys. I would also have regard to National Policy Guidance, i.e. Smarter Travel: A New Transport Policy for Ireland, 2009 – 2020, which largely mirrors the guidance set out in Section 10.2 of the Cork County Development Plan.

Overall I would consider that a stand-alone car park is part and parcel of most schools and is indeed important and necessary infrastructure for schools. Although it would be desirable to generate less car based trips to the school however this, in my view, is not a realistic option, at this time, given the level of available alternative infrastructure such as public transport and cycle lanes in the town itself. Having regards to the current traffic situation on Chapel Street and on the basis of the information on the file, I would consider that on-site car parking is acceptable in the interest of traffic safety.

11.0 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 granted for the reasons set out below.

REASONS AND CONSIDERATIONS

Having regard to the 'Community Facilities' zoning objective of the subject site as set out in the Macroom Town Plan, 2009 – 2015, and the established use on the site for educational purposes it is considered that, subject to compliance with conditions set out below, 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, therefore be in accordance with the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.

CONDITIONS

1. The development shall be carried out in accordance with the plans and particulars lodged with the application, except as may otherwise be required in order to comply with the following conditions. Where such conditions require points of detail to be agreed with the planning

authority, these matters shall be the subject of written agreement and shall be implemented in accordance with the agreed particulars.

Reason: In the interest of clarity.

2. The proposed development shall be modified as follows:
 - a. The former Technical School, circa. 1909, shall be retained on the site.
 - b. The proposed car park layout shall be revised to provide for 2 (a) above.

Revised drawings showing compliance with the above requirements shall be submitted to the planning authority for written agreement prior to the commencement of development.

Reason: In the interest of protecting structures included in the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage which is a policy objective (Policy Objective ENV 4-2) of the Cork County Development Plan, 2014 – 2020, and having regard to the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage regional rating the former Technical School.

3. Covered and secure bicycle parking spaces shall be provided within the site. Prior to the commencement of development, the layout shall be submitted to the planning authority.

Reason: To ensure an adequate bicycle parking provision is available to serve the development.

4. Water supply and 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 and to ensure a proper standard of development.

5. The construction of the development shall be managed in accordance with a Construction Management Plan which shall be submitted to, and agreed in writing with the planning authority prior to the commencement of development. This plan shall provide details of intended construction practice for the development, including hours of working, noise management measures and off-site disposal of construction/demolition waste.

Reason: In the interest of amenities and public safety.

6. The developer shall ensure that prior to commencement of development, details of a Traffic Management Plan during the construction phase, shall be submitted to the Planning Authority for their written agreement.

Reason: In the interest of development control and traffic safety.

7. Lighting shall be in accordance with a scheme, which shall be designed to minimize glare and light pollution, and which shall be submitted for the written agreement of the planning authority prior to commencement of development.

Reason: In the interest of residential amenity and public safety.

8. Prior to the commencement of development, the developer shall submit a detailed landscaping plan prepared by a suitably qualified landscape architect for the agreement of the planning authority. Such a plan shall include proposals for the retention of trees and hedgerows on the site where appropriate and measures for their protection during the construction phase. The landscaping plan shall include details of all boundary treatment.

Reason: In the interests of visual amenity and of the amenities of adjoining residences and to ensure a proper standard of development.

Kenneth Moloney
Planning Inspector
26th February 2016