



An Bord Pleanála

Inspector's Report

PL27.246081

DEVELOPMENT:- Change of use, demolition works and extension including new two storey bedroom pavilion and loft conversion of former school (protected structure) to dwellinghouse and other works including new vehicular entrance at The Old School House, Main Street, Roundwood, Co. Wicklow.

PLANNING APPLICATION

Planning Authority:	Wicklow County Council
Planning Authority Reg. No.:	15/688
Applicant:	Nigel Harper and Joanne Neville
Application Type:	Permission
Planning Authority Decision:	Refuse Permission

APPEAL

Appellant:	Nigel Harper and Joanne Neville
Type of Appeal:	First v Refusal
Observers:	None
DATE OF SITE INSPECTION:	7th April 2016

INSPECTOR:	Mairead Kenny
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1.0 SITE LOCATION AND DESCRIPTION

The site is located in the centre of Roundwood at the northern end of the Main Street. The site is between the commercial core of the town, to the south and two substantial commercial premises to the north, both public houses with restaurants and one of which also offers over-night accommodation. Both public houses have reasonably large surface car parks, one of which is positioned opposite the rear of the subject site. To the south-west of the site is a relatively large school.

The appeal relates to the former Roundwood School. The former school is at the junction of the Main Street (R755) and the L1059 to Lough Dan. Access to the existing school to the south-west is from the local road. There is a drop off arrangement at the front of the school and at the opposite side of the road just beyond the school an area beside the public road was in use for parking at the time of my inspection.

The site is elevated above the surrounding buildings (including the public houses and the commercial terrace to the south) and above street level. The building on site is fairly centrally positioned on the site but the front building line is set back from the Main Street. There is a stone wall and railing around the northern and eastern site boundaries.

The former school is a single storey building dating to 1923, which has been extended to the rear in the mid/late twentieth century. The building has been largely vacant for decades, with some occasional use for holding of local meetings and possibly other intermittent uses. The interior of the building has not been significantly altered since last used as an educational establishment. While there was some minor evidence of damp in places in the interior, it appeared to me that the condition of the building is good.

Photographs of the site and surrounding area, which were taken by me at the time of my inspection are attached to the rear of this report.

2.0 PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

Permission is sought for a change of use of a former school and for related demolition and extension works. This involves:

- change of use to a five bedroom dwellinghouse
- demolition of toilet blocks and linking corridor
- construction of new two-storey bedroom pavilion, entrance porch and corridor to north
- construction of utility room to the west
- loft conversion over existing two classroom block

- replacement windows to old school house
- new dormer window and French windows to south (rear) elevation
- internal alterations and associated site works to include new vehicular entrance and partial realignment of boundary wall
- garden store
- removal of existing concrete steps and provision of new ramped access from Main Street
- landscaping.

The stated floor area of the existing building is 290.68 square metres of which it is proposed to demolish 84.98 square metres. The area to be retained is thus 205.7 square metres and an additional 215.15 square metres is to be constructed.

The application submissions include a number of consultants' reports, which are summarised below.

Report of **GVA Grimley Ltd** submitted by way of unsolicited additional information refers to the recommendation in the planner's report dated 14th August 2105 that permission be refused for reason of material contravention of the zoning objective and traffic. This report responds to the planning policy issues and states:

- development deemed to comply with best conservation practice and with objective RPSI of the Town Plan
- consideration of the CDP and the Roundwood Town Plan – a material contravention does not occur for reasons discussed
- there are many precedents including in Roundwood area
- in terms of protected structures there is a precedent – PL234187.

Report of **NRB Consulting Engineers** submitted by way of unsolicited additional information reiterates points made in the earlier report of July 2015, which refer to the limited traffic generated, ambient low traffic speeds, access details including tracking and sightlines. The development is deemed to comply with DMURS and to provide for safe access.

David Slattery Conservation Architects Ltd report dated 30th June 201J (*sic*) provides observations on the significance of the building and on the impact of the proposed change of use and works.

The **Planning Engineering Report** prepared by Pinnacle Consulting Engineers dated 25th June 2015 outlines the existing and proposed drainage,

pollution control and water main infrastructure to support the proposed development. It concludes that there is sufficient capacity to serve the proposed development.

3.0 PLANNING HISTORY

Under pre-planning consultations 15/64 the applicant was advised that the extension proposed was acceptable.

4.0 PLANNING AUTHORITY DECISION

4.1 Planning and technical reports

The report dated 2nd December 2015 of the **Executive Planner**, countersigned by the Senior Engineer and the Director of Services recommends refusal, taking into account the additional information relating to the zoning objective and the entrance, which was presented by the applicant on 29th October 2015. The main points include:

- while permissions have previously been granted for change of use from schools to residential the site in this case adjoins lands in educational use and the Planning Authority is not convinced that the proposed change of use is acceptable
- the submission relating to the sale of the property is noted
- issues raised by the applicant were already considered and it was already concluded that the proposed development constitutes a material contravention of the zoning
- not convinced that site access as proposed is safe and appropriate.

A hand written note states that an entrance can be accommodated if changes are made to the proposal.

The earlier report of the **Executive Planner** dated 14th April 2015 recommended further information be requested relating to the structural condition of the protected structure and the entrance. A note written by the **Senior Engineer** stated that there is no concern relating to the structural condition but that there are issues with the entrance in terms of the proximity to the junction and the turning area and states that the scale and location of the extension uses up spaces which could be better utilised. The main concern however is in relation to the principle of the proposed change of use which contravenes the CE zoning. Whether it materially contravenes the zoning is not straightforward. The report discusses the latter point in detail. The recommendation was to refuse permission based on a material contravention and traffic.

Report of **Senior Executive Engineer** dated 9th November 2015 indicates concerns regarding proximity of the vehicular entrance to junction of regional / local road in

absence of a revised site layout. Previous report dated 7th August noted that the proposed entrance is too close to the junction which could result in accidents involving vehicles turning left off the regional road onto the local road. Junction is very busy at school pick up / drop off times. Revised layout showing a safer vehicle access needed.

The report of **Irish Water** dated 29th July 2015 recommends a condition.

4.2 Planning Authority Decision

The Planning Authority decided to refuse permission for the reasons summarised below:

- materially contravene a zoning objective of Roundwood Town Plan 2010-2106
- would endanger public safety by reason of traffic hazard.

5.0 GROUNDS OF APPEAL / OBSERVATIONS

5.1 Grounds of Appeal

The main points of the first party appeal include:

- building largely vacant for 30 years and no requirement for uses specified in CE zone, which are generously provided in the village
- under the draft plan the use indicated is Town Centre, which would allow for residential use
- would improve the built environment and protect the building
- supported by local community
- given the broad nature of the zoning objective a material contravention could not be deemed to apply
- all three criteria are met in relation to section 37(2)(b)
- access complies with DMURS.

5.2 Observations

None.

6.0 RESPONSES

6.1 Planning Authority response

The Planning Authority has not responded.

7.0 POLICY CONTEXT

National Inventory of Architectural Heritage

The school is

- rated as of 'Regional' interest
- listed under 'Architectural' and 'Social' categories of special interest.

Architectural Heritage Protection Guidelines

These set out policies relating to:

- submission required to accompany an application
- considerations relating to extensions and changes of use.

Wicklow County Development Plan

Under the development plan Roundwood

- is designated as a Level 6 settlement (lowest tier)
- has a requirement between 2010 and 2022 for an additional 191 houses
- is a Neighbourhood Centre / Local centre in retail strategy.

Other relevant policies refer to protected structures – RPS1 is to positively consider proposals to improve, alter or extend or change the use of protected structures so as to render them viable for modern use, subject to suitable design, materials and construction methods. RPS2 refers to works being carried out using best heritage practice. RPS5 refers to considering the change of use of protected structures subject to not adversely affecting the structure, character, appearance and setting.

Section 5.4.3 refers to the uses allowable in any zone. In core town centre areas active uses will normally be required at ground floor level, i.e. retail, commercial, community or leisure uses.

Section 15.3 refers to the provision of social infrastructure and describes the wide variety of facilities required including educational and development, physical and mental care, leisure and recreational and cultural facilities.

Roundwood Town Plan

Relevant policies / objectives include:

- site zoned CE Community and Educational
- improve the road and provide a footpath between village centre and St Laurence O'Toole National School
- provide additional parking and set down area for school on R1 lands.

8.0 ASSESSMENT

I propose to consider this appeal under the following headings:

- architectural heritage

- zoning
- traffic
- Appropriate Assessment.

Architectural Heritage

I refer the Board to the NIAH which ascribes a Regional rating to this buildings and states that it has both Architectural and Social significance. The NIAH appraisal of the protected structure is

Prominently sited well preserved school house of 1923 whose (largely) traditional 20th century appearances makes a positive contribution to the streetscape.

In considering the foregoing I have had regard particularly to the submissions contained in the report of David Slattery Conservation Architects Ltd. This describes the building in three parts namely original, extended and ancillary. The building is stated to be of standard design, not particularly significant, unique or rare and of local architectural importance. Designed in the early years of Free State the building has some historical significance.

Adequacy of documentation

The Architectural Heritage Protection Guidelines sets out policies relating to the submissions required to accompany an application. The legal requirements under the Regulations are to ensure that sufficient details are presented to demonstrate how the development would affect the character of the structure.

The application is accompanied by a Conservation Report, which details the removal of internal features and rates the impacts of such works. However, there is a limited amount of information relating to external finishes including windows, render, rainwater goods, doors and so on. Works to the interior are not addressed in detail including in relation to insulation upgrades, damp proofing, joinery and other details. These could be addressed if necessary by condition and the submissions do indicate that best conservation practice would apply.

The more significant changes which require assessment and the impact of which are not addressed in detail include the impact of the demolition, the extensions and the change of use, which I refer to below.

Demolition and Extensions

The works involve demolition of 84 square metres of the existing 290 square metre building. The Conservation Report states that the impact of removal of extensions is moderate, positive and long-term. Under 6.8.13 of the Guidelines there is an onus on the applicant to make a case that a part of a protected structure which is to be demolished does not contribute to the

special interest of the whole. I do not consider that this case has been made in the submissions and I note that the extent of demolition is significant.

Regarding the extension I note that new work proposed stated to be 215 square metres in area, which is very significant. In fact the area of new build would exceed the area to be retained. The Conservation Report states that none of the works could be considered as compromising the character of the original schoolhouse or irreversibly impacting on the original fabric or detail and that much of the present structure does not date to 1923.

The requirement under Guidelines includes (6.8.2) that extensions should involve the smallest possible loss of historic fabric and ensure that important features are not obscured and that the principal elevations are not adversely affected. I accept that this is achieved in terms of the view along Main Street from the south. It is not demonstrated that the development would not adversely impact on the setting of the protected structure and the principal facades when considered from the local road.

I do not agree with the first party submissions which refer to the works being not unduly intrusive and to have minimal impact on the protected structure. I have particular concerns about the bedroom pavilion but also refer the Board to the intervention at roof level to form a loft. I am of the opinion that the two storey element to the rear of the building (bedroom pavilion) is excessive and that it detracts from the character of the protected structure. The two storey element is of greater scale and bulk than the protected structure as seen in External View 2 dated 19th March 2015 and in my opinion seriously detracts from the character of the protected structure. When viewed from the west the two storey flat roofed structure would almost obscure views to the original building.

There are elements of the design which attempt to mitigate the impact on the original building notably the separation of the two-storey bedroom block from the original two classroom building. However, I consider that due to the building line, height, bulk and detailed design, the proposed development does not constitute 'suitable design' as required under Objective RPS1 of the plan and does not comply with the requirements in the Guidelines relating to the loss of historic fabric or the impact on the principal facades.

Change of Use

The NIAH refers to the social interest of the building. I consider that subject to a suitable approach to demolition and extensions the building would read as a former school and that the change of use would be acceptable in principle. The Guidelines refer to the need to consider any implications of changes of use and how they would impact on the character of the protected structure. In this case the following are of concern:

- updating of insulation and how this would impact on character
- the exposed nature of the open space, which fails to afford any privacy for future residents and which might result in requirements for screening.

These matters would need to be addressed in the event of a grant of permission.

The Conservation Report refers to adaptation to residential use being appropriate as it will secure the future life of the original protected structure and allow it a continued presence within the village and on that basis the proposal merits favourable consideration. I agree that the residential use would constitute a viable re-use of the building and ensure that it is well maintain. However, based on the submissions before the Board this would be at the expense of very substantial works and changes to the building and to ground levels in the vicinity. I am unconvinced that the house design proposed protects the architectural integrity of the protected structure and in this respect I have concerns regarding the residential scheme proposed.

Conclusion

I consider that the development proposed involving large-scale demolition and extension works and the changes to the ground level would be contrary to policy RPS1 of the current development plan, which requires suitable design, materials and construction methods.

I advise the Board that this reason could reasonably be considered to constitute a new issue in this case.

Zoning

The main reason for refusal stated in the decision of the Planning Authority is that the development would materially contravene a development zoning objective of the Roundwood Town Plan. The Planning Authority considered that the proposed use contravenes the zoning. I note that the Planning Authority did not lightly come to the conclusion that the zoning is *materially* contravened. The basis for so concluding related to the fact that the use was identified in the town plan as being required and the fact that it adjoins similarly zoned lands. The Planning Authority gave consideration to factors which might favour a recommendation to the elected representatives but noted that such arguments had not been presented and would not appear to be sustainable.

The development plan clearly states that the site zoning is not prescriptive. The Town Plan is not rigid in its application of the zoning objective and even uses which are neutral to the zone objective are acceptable, subject to their contribution to the achievement of the zoning objective and vision.

The use proposed is considered by the applicant to enhance the zoning vision. The zoning vision as indicated in the plan is 'to provide and enhance the existing social infrastructure for the town'. The County Development Plan outlines a wide range of types of social infrastructure none of which include residential development.

I am of the opinion that the change of use of a former school to a private residential dwellinghouse neither 'provides' nor 'enhances' the social

infrastructure in this town. I do not consider that such an argument can be reasonably sustained. Having regard to the central location of the site in the middle of the town centre zoning I consider that the residential use would constitute a use which lacks activity / vibrancy and which would weaken the social and commercial core of the town.

I do not consider that the use would complement the vision of the zoning objective. I note the comments of GVA regarding the purpose of social infrastructure to provide a service and to promote community cohesion and community identity but I do not agree that a private dwellinghouse can fulfil this role. It is not providing a service and is not open to the community.

There is an argument that the development might reasonably be argued to be 'neutral' in the context of Roundwood where there are many existing residential units within the town centre.

In assessing the matter I have taken into account the statements made by the first party in relation to the amount of community lands available and the limited contribution of this single site in the totality of the town. The applicant has also presented a case that there is no need for additional community or related uses. However, the applied zoning objective is site specific and should be interpreted as such. I reiterate my view that considerable weight should be put on the location of the site on the main street and the Town Centre zoning to the north and south and educational use to the west. In that context I consider that the development of a single residential unit in a building, which would appear to be suitable for a range of other uses constitutes haphazard development and is not in accordance with the proper planning and sustainable development of the area. I note section 3.1 of the GVA submission of October 2015 refers to the policy to develop the town in a compact form and provide an efficient basis for investment in infrastructure and facilities. I am of the opinion that a more intensive use of this site is warranted in the context of that policy.

The Board may wish to consider whether the long standing vacancy of the building is indicative of lack of potential alternative uses. I noted at the time of my inspection that Roundwood appears to be a vibrant place and there is little evidence of under-utilisation, vacancy or dereliction. While the population is low the town is stated to support a wide hinterland. The site has a high profile due to its elevated nature and location at the junction of two roads. I consider that it is not demonstrated that there are no suitable uses other than residential use to sustain the protected structure.

In conclusion my opinion is that the Planning Authority was correct in deciding that the development materially contravenes the zoning objective. The Board is advised of the legal restrictions applying in the event that it is decided to grant permission.

Traffic

Reason 2 of the decision of the Planning Authority refers to traffic safety issues. The view is also expressed in the reports on file that the matter is capable of resolution. I note and agree with the submissions by NRB to the effect that use as a private residential house will have very significantly lower traffic generation characteristics than the long established use as a national school or more recently as a Montessori school. I agree that the predicted trip generation of about 10 cars per day is a reasonable estimate and that this would not be noticeable in the existing environment. I also have faith in the results of traffic surveys undertaken, which concluded that the 85%ile passing traffic speed is 29kph. Having regard to the quiet nature of the roads in the vicinity of the site, as well as the history of use of the site, I agree with the comments of officials of the Planning Authority that a safe access to the site can be designed.

In terms of the detail of the development before the Board the access is based on DMURS. I consider that the limited sightlines available and the turning within the site are acceptable in the context of the location and could be further addressed by condition in the event of a grant of permission. The appeal submission refers.

Alternatively it would be open to the Board to grant permission for the development omitting the access and parking. In my opinion that would be appropriate as the works involved in opening up the access are significant. There is ample on street parking in the general area as well as two private car parks and in that respect I do not consider that it is necessary that on-site parking be provided to serve the proposed house. I also note that the access would be across a footpath to a school and that there are objectives in the town plan to improve the road and path. In my opinion the ideal scenario would be that the vehicular access and parking be omitted.

In conclusion I do not consider that reason 2 is sustainable.

Appropriate Assessment

Having regard to the nature and scale of the development proposed and to the nature of the receiving environment, namely a town centre and fully serviced location, no appropriate assessment issues arise.

9.0 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

I recommend that the Board uphold the decision of the Planning Authority to refuse permission for the reasons and considerations hereunder.

REASONS AND CONSIDERATIONS

1. Having regard to the protected structure status of this building, it is considered that the proposed works would, by virtue of the level of intervention and the dominant nature of the two-storey bedroom block, have a detrimental and irreversible impact on the essential qualities of this structure, thereby materially affecting its character.

The proposed development would, therefore, be contrary to the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.

2. The site is located in an area zoned objective Community and Educational in the current development plan for the area. The Board considers that the proposed development would materially contravene the zoning objective, as set out in this plan.

Mairead Kenny
Senior Planning Inspector
29th April 2016