

An Bord Pleanála



Inspector's Report

Appeal Reference No: PL05E.246242

Development: Construction of extension to dwelling at Summy, Portnoo, Co Donegal.

Planning Application

Planning Authority: Donegal County Council

Planning Authority Reg. Ref.: 15/51657

Applicant: Henry Carey Good

Planning Authority Decision: Refuse permission

Planning Appeal

Appellant(s): Henry Carey Good

Type of Appeal: First party

Observers: None

Date of Site Inspection: 10th May 2016

Inspector: Dolores McCague

1 SITE LOCATION AND DESCRIPTION

- 1.1 The appeal site is located at Summy, Portnoo, Co Donegal. Summy is situated west of the Ardara / Mass road R261 on a peninsula where undulating land characterised by lakes and wetlands with outcropping rock, and rough grazing, is an unspoilt and in parts, very scenic setting.
- 1.2 The site is elevated with reference to the public road, accessed by a narrow private lane. The site is occupied by a single storey traditional style masonry cottage extended to the south east and with a rear extension which runs at right angles to the main house. The dwelling has double pitched gable ended roofing. The setting of the site, which is relatively flat at the location of the dwelling, has rising ground to the north, and ground levels falling away to the south and west; with a small grove of trees to the south. There is a gap in the trees through which the existing house is visible from the road.
- 1.3 The site immediately adjoins the West of Ardara / Mass Road SAC.
- 1.4 The site is given as 0.432ha within a larger landholding.

2 PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

- 2.1 The proposed development comprises of the following main elements:
- Conversion of part of the existing rear extension from residential accommodation to studio area and construction of a two storey extension, 6m x 6m, to the front; and a small single storey porch extension 4m x 1.8m also to the front (north-east).
 - The proposal will accommodate a livingroom at ground floor and a bedroom with en-suite at first floor.

- The extension has a hipped, pitched slate roof. Being a square the roof culminates in a point.
- The extension has two large windows one at ground floor and one at first floor on the south eastern elevation, two tall narrow windows one at ground floor and one at first floor on the south western elevation, no windows on the north eastern elevation, and three small high level windows at first floor level on the north western elevation.
- The dwelling is served by a mains water supply and a septic tank.

2.2 The stated floor area is 64.4 sq.

3 PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

3.1 There is no planning history associated with the site.

4 PLANNING AUTHORITY DECISION

4.1

4.2 Planning and technical reports

4.3 HSE, Environmental Health Officer – 12/1/2016: conditions re. effluent treatment system

4.4 Appropriate Assessment Screening Report 9/2/2016:

The subject site is located within approximately 40m of the West of Ardara/Maas Road SAC Site code 000197.

Assessment of likely effects – on the basis of the following principle reasons:

- The fact that the development will not result in any direct loss, or fragmentation of habitat from the Natura site,
- The nature and small scale of the proposed development,
- The fact that the development only proposes 1 additional bedroom and the associated likelihood that the development will not place any significant additional loading on the existing septic tank and percolation area serving the dwelling,
- The scale and extend of existing development in the area,

the planning authority is of the opinion that the proposed development will not adversely affect the integrity of nearby Natura Site.

4.5 The planning report refers to the effluent treatment via existing connection to existing septic tank. On the basis that the development will only provide 1 additional bedroom, it is not considered that the development will place any significant additional loading on the septic tank. While it is noted that an EHO report recommending conditions for a percolation area have been submitted, as no percolation area has been proposed and it is otherwise considered that the development will not place a significant additional loading on the existing effluent treatment system, it is not considered appropriate to impose conditions on any grant of permission.

4.6 The Council issued notification of decision (11/2/2016) to refuse permission for the proposed development for the following reason:

On the basis of: the overall height (7.7m), 2 no. storey hipped roof, horizontal emphasis to fenestration to the eastern elevation, and overall tower like design, of the proposed extension vis-à-vis the modest vernacular single storey gable ended pitched roof nature of the parent dwelling, the Planning Authority considers that the proposed extension would be overscaled, out of character and therefore visually incongruous vis a vis the parent dwelling. Accordingly to permit the development would be detrimental to the visual amenities of the area and would thereby be contrary to the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.

A note accompanying the decision advised the applicant that notwithstanding the decision to refuse permission the planning authority would be amenable to a domestic extension which is sensitive to the overall scale, height and design of the parent dwelling.

4.7 The decision was in accordance with the planning recommendation.

5 GROUNDS OF APPEAL

5.1 A first party appeal has been lodged by GA Slowey Architectural Design Services, on behalf of the applicant, against the Council's decision to refuse permission.

5.2 The grounds of appeal and main points raised in this submission can be summarised as follows:

- The existing topography of the lands surrounding the existing dwelling does not lend itself to easily providing an extension of the size required and hence the idea of providing a two storied tower effect which is not over-scaled or out of character or visually incongruous.
- The visual amenity of the area would be in no way damaged as a result of this development as the proposed extension would not be seen from any of the surrounding roads.
- The proposed development is in full compliance with the siting and design guide of the Donegal County Development Plan, 2012-2018.

5.3 Attached is a letter from the first party.

- Referring to his long standing connection with the area and the dwelling which was acquired by his parents in the late 60's. The inspiration for the proposed extension was the Irish Tower House, with a contemporary twist. These were medieval towers with later domestic buildings attached: cottages or farmhouses with a great difference in the proportions between one build and the other.

- It is difficult to extend a low lying cottage. The design gives first floor accommodation and prevents excessive horizontal building. It also tucks the building into the site between rhododendron bushes and mature trees. It is virtually not visible until arrival at the end of the long private lane. On arrival the existing cottage is in front and the proposed tower to the left. The tower is very simple in appearance. The east façade was deliberately kept with no windows. The north with 3 small square windows is a direct reference to the small windows found in medieval towers.
- Precedent is indicated on photographs attached to the appeal.

6 RESPONSES/OBSERVATIONS TO GROUNDS OF APPEAL

- 6.1 In response to the first party appeal, the Planning Authority considers that the proposed extension would be overscaled, out of character and therefore visually incongruous vis a vis the parent dwelling and would therefore be detrimental to the visual amenities of the area. Reliance is placed on the planners report on the application.

7 POLICY CONTEXT

- 7.1 The Donegal County Development Plan, 2012-2018, is the operative plan.
- 7.2 Appendix B Building a House in Rural Donegal - A Location Siting and Design Guide, includes:

The linear plan form is of particular and historic rural reference, considering a narrow plan, modest in scale with a vertical emphasis to the gables. Notwithstanding the above, a deep plan footprint may equally be considered appropriate depending on the opportunities afforded by the site. Details of the site analysis

will in part determine the plan form of a dwelling in the countryside.

Consider the scale and proportion of traditional buildings in the countryside to inform a contemporary design resolution. Form, scale, proportion and massing are intrinsically linked and should all be considered carefully, to provide for a sensitive building intervention which sits harmoniously within its environs.

The expression of the building layout, in plan and elevation, is informed by the component parts; the roof, windows and doors, materials and details. Simplicity of elevation is a familiar characteristic of rural dwellings and should be carefully considered when dressing the building, considering particularly the specifics of local reference that vary from area to area within the county.

Windows and Doors/Porches. The traditional ratio of solid to void should inform the treatment of the elevation. Windows should be given a vertical emphasis and complement the window to wall ratio accordingly.

The treatment of the roof edges should be carefully considered and relate directly to the rural detailing of the area.

8 ASSESSMENT

8.1 In my opinion, the main issue to be addressed in this appeal is the visual impact of the proposed extension within the landscape in terms of its design and scale. Appropriate assessment is also addressed.

8.2 Visual Impact

8.3 The grounds of appeal states that the proposed development is in full compliance with the siting and design guide of the Donegal County Development Plan, 2012-2018.

8.4 The design guide a linear plan form as being of particular and historic rural reference, considering a narrow plan, modest in scale with a vertical emphasis to the gables, however it also considers that a deep plan footprint may be appropriate depending on the opportunities afforded by the site. It advises that the scale and proportion of traditional buildings in the countryside should inform a contemporary design resolution.

Form, scale, proportion and massing are intrinsically linked and should all be considered carefully, to provide for a sensitive building intervention which sits harmoniously within its environs.

8.5 The proposed design is stated to take its inspiration from the tower house. I accept the argument made in relation to difference in the scale of buildings within a group: that tower houses often have later domestic buildings attached with great difference in proportions between one build and the other. In this case there is not the great contrast between a five storey tower house and single storey or two storey attached dwelling. The contrast is between a two storey extension and single storey house.

8.6 Some important details should be noted in relation to the 'tower house' form, which are in contrast with the design of the proposed extension.

In tower houses the roof is largely concealed behind a parapet wall, in the proposed extension the roof is prominent culminating in a point and is therefore, in my opinion, a discordant feature.

In tower houses because of their historic origins and defensive function, the scale of openings is limited, in contrast to the large windows proposed in the proposed extension, e.g. the 2no. 2.4m x 1.7m windows in the south eastern elevation.

8.7 The proposed design would be of less importance if, as stated in the grounds of appeal, the proposed extension would not be seen from any of the surrounding roads. The proposed extension will be visible from the public road.

8.8 I am in agreement with the concerns expressed by the planning authority in relation to the design of the proposed extension, although in my opinion this does not necessarily preclude the provision of a two storey extension in a manner which *is sensitive to the overall scale, height and design of the parent dwelling*.

8.9 I agree with the planning authority's assessment that the design as proposed does not achieve this. Accordingly I recommend that planning permission should be refused.

8.10 Appropriate Assessment Screening

8.11 In accordance with obligations under the Habitats Directives and implementing legislation, to take into consideration the possible effects a project may have, either on its own or in combination with other plans and projects, on a Natura 2000 site; there is a requirement on the Board, as the competent authority, to consider the possible nature conservation implications of the proposed development on the Natura 2000 network, before making a decision on the proposed development. The process is known as appropriate assessment. In this regard a guidance document 'Appropriate Assessment of Plans and Projects in Ireland' was published by the DoEH&LG on the 10 December 2009.

8.12 The proposed development involves the construction of an extension to an existing dwelling which will increase the potential occupancy by one additional bedroom.

8.13 The West of Ardara/Mass Road SAC (site code 000197) is close to the subject site and extends over an area of 6739.04ha. There are 31 qualifying interests most of which occur in coastal areas:

Estuaries

Mudflats and sandflats not covered by seawater at low tide

Large shallow inlets and bays

Atlantic salt meadows
Mediterranean salt meadows
Shifting dunes along the shoreline with *Ammophila arenaria*
(white dunes)
Fixed coastal dunes with herbaceous vegetation (grey dunes)
Decalcified fixed dunes with *Empetrum nigrum*
Atlantic decalcified fixed dunes (Calluno-Ulicetea)
Dunes with *Salix repens* ssp. *argentea* (*Salicion arenariae*)
Humid dune slacks
Machairs (* in Ireland)
Oligotrophic waters containing very few minerals of sandy plains
(*Littorelletalia uniflorae*)
Northern Atlantic wet heaths with *Erica tetralix*
European dry heaths
Alpine and Boreal heaths
Juniperus communis formations on heaths or calcareous
grasslands
Semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland facies on calcareous
substrates (*Festuco-Brometalia*) (* important orchid sites)
Molinia meadows on calcareous, peaty or clayey-silt-laden soils
(*Molinion caeruleae*)
Lowland hay meadows (*Alopecurus pratensis*, *Sanguisorba*
officinalis)
Blanket bogs (* if active bog)
Depressions on peat substrates of the *Rhynchosporion*
Alkaline fens
Vertigo geyeri (Geyer's Whorl Snail)
Margaritifera margaritifera (Freshwater Pearl Mussel)
Euphydrias aurinia (Marsh Fritillary)
Salmo salar (Salmon)
Lutra lutra (Otter)
Phoca vitulina (Common Seal)
Petalophyllum ralfsii (Petalwort)
Najas flexilis (Slender Naiad)

- 8.14 Having regard to the nature and scale of the proposed development and nature of the receiving environment and proximity 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 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

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

REASONS AND CONSIDERATIONS

Having regard to the visibility of the proposed development from the public road, from which the treatment of the difference in scale between the proposed two storey extension and existing single storey dwelling, the contrasting roof treatment, and the contrasting scale of fenestration, would be viewed as discordant features, the proposed development would be detrimental to the visual amenities of the area and would thereby be contrary to the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.

Dolores McCague
Inspectorate
Date: 23rd May 2016

- Appendix 1 Map and Photographs
Appendix 2 Extracts from the Development Plan 2014 -2020