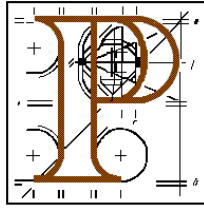


# An Bord Pleanála



## Inspector's Report

**PL18. 246452**

**DEVELOPMENT:** Enlargement of sanctuary and relocation of altar within church, and addition of strong room and WC to the rear of building

**ADDRESS:** St. Mary's Church, Dublin Road, Castleblayney, Co. Monaghan

### PLANNING APPLICATION

**Planning Authority:** Monaghan County Council

**Planning Authority Reg. No.:** 16/19

**Applicant:** Muckno Parish Finance and Property Committee

**Application Type:** Permission

**Planning Authority Decision:** Grant permission subject to condition

**APPEAL**

**Appellants:** Joe Duffy

**Type of Appeal:** 3<sup>rd</sup> party vs. grant

**Observers:** Kevin Blackwood

**DATE OF SITE INSPECTION:** 13<sup>th</sup> July 2016

**INSPECTOR:** Stephen J. O'Sullivan

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 This report deals with a first party appeal against a decision of Monaghan County Council to grant permission for alterations to a church.

## **2.0 SITE**

- 2.1 The site consists of the crossing, chancel and part of the transepts of St. Mary's Church, which stands just south of the commercial and historic centre of Castleblayney, Co. Monaghan. It is on the Dublin Road, a main approach to the town. The church is dated to 1851 and is stated to be in the early English Gothic style. A graveyard lies to its south. A parish office is housed in a small building to its rear along Church Street. The Anglican church stands on the other side of that street. The sacristy of St Mary's is in a flat roofed addition to the main church building that stands between the chancel and the southern transept. The sanctuary is defined by a marble altar rail that runs in a line just east of the side entrances to the church, with perpendicular arms to the north and south of the altars to the Sacred Heart and Blessed Virgin respectively, thereby including those altars in the sanctuary. The rail has brass gates in three places. The sanctuary was re-ordered after the in the 1970s. An older altar and reredos stand in the chancel c1.5m from the rear wall, in front of which stands the current altar. It is of marble, with a plain form. An ambo and sedilia that were made from elements of a previous pulpit stand to the north and front of the altar. A wooden font stands to the south of the altar.

## **3.0 HISTORY**

- 3.1 Reg. Ref. CB 13/4 – the planning authority granted permission on 2<sup>nd</sup> September 2013 for works to the church that would include a new access ramp and entrance plaza; the relocation of the sacristy to the side of the front entrance; new porches at the side entrances; and the relocation of the bell. Works that were proposed to the chancel and sanctuary were excluded from the permission by condition no. 1, which referred to a requirement for a separate application on the matter. Works on foot of this permission have not commenced.

## **4.0 PROPOSAL**

- 4.1 It is proposed to extend the sanctuary so that the altar would be at the crossing of the church. The altar rail would be moved and altered so that it stood in four pieces, two at the head of the nave and one in either transept. The altar, ambo and sedilia would stand on a hexagonal platform two steps in height. The altar

would be a new structure that used columns from the old pulpit. The ambo would be modified from the existing, with some columns used for the new altar. A new stone font would be installed in front of the altar of the Sacred Heart. The old altar and reredos would be moved forward so that the latter was in line with the eastern side of the transept. The rear of the reredos would be altered to match its front. The area behind it would become a mortuary chapel and adoration area enclosed by a glass wall and ceiling. Stone tiles would be installed, either by reusing or matching the existing tiles and patterns. The rear addition that houses the sacristy would be replaced with a smaller structure that would accommodate a toilet and a strong room.

## **5.0 POLICY**

5.1 The church is a protected structure. Section 57(6) of the Planning and Development Act 2000 states that the board shall respect liturgical requirements when considering an application for permission that relates to a protected structure that is regularly used for public worship. Chapter 5 of the *Guidelines for Planning Authorities on Architectural Heritage Protection* issued by the minister in 2004 addresses places of public worship. It states that the heritage significance of church buildings lies in their central role in the community as places of public worship over many generations. Section 5.2.1 refers to the enlargement of an existing sanctuary or chancel to allow the relocation of altars and lecterns as an example of works required to respect liturgical requirements. Section 5.3 states that the appropriate authority in the Roman Catholic Church for consultations is the diocese, which in the current case would be the bishop of Clogher. Section 7.7 states the principle of promoting minimal intervention in protected structures and that dramatic interventions are rarely appropriate.

## **6.0 DECISION**

6.1 The planning authority decided to grant permission subject to 5 conditions. Condition 1 omitted the proposed glass wall and ceiling behind the altar.

## **7.0 REPORTS TO THE PLANNING AUTHORITY**

7.1 Submissions – The appellant objected to the proposed development on grounds similar to those raised in the subsequent appeal.

7.2 Planner's report – The report refers to the assessment of proposals to alter the church which the planning authority commissioned from Kevin Blackwood, a

conservation architect, in December 2013. The applicant's desire to improve liturgical practice is reasonably stated. Apart from the glass room the proposed adjustments have been sensitively and appropriately designed. The reuse of the existing elements of the altar rail and pulpit provide an interesting link with the past. A grant of permission was recommended.

## **8.0 GROUNDS OF APPEAL**

8.1 The grounds of appeal can be summarised as follows-

- The is the same proposal that the planning authority previously refused. Paragraph 36 of the guide to planning appeals from the board states that a second application for the same development may not be made. The proposed development again involves dismantling the altar rails of Italian marble that were crafted in 1931 by Vanucci and Favilla and which would be considered irreplaceable.
- The appellant has no objection to the proposed strong room and WC.
- The applicant's claim to have kept the altar rails in the proposed development is disingenuous. It would be vandalism to move the pulpit and marble kneeling rails.
- Moving the brass gates would create a fire hazard and would interfere with the free flow of people in an emergency. The would have to be altered and butchered in order to provide a wide enough access.
- A petition supporting the appeal was submitted signed by 1,500 parishioners and heritage friends.
- There is a risk of damage to the altar rails and other features whose movement is proposed.
- The planning authority's assessment failed to respect the principles of the Unesco's Convention Concerning the Protection of World Cultural and Natural Heritage of 1991 and the Granada Convention of 1997. Dramatic interventions in protected structures are rarely appropriate, as stated at section 7.7 of the guidelines. An independent conservation architect

should be retained by the board to advise on the protection of this valuable church heritage.

## **9.0 RESPONSES**

9.1 The planning authority did not respond to the appeal.

9.2 The applicant's response can be summarised as follows-

- The applicant engaged Grade 1 conservation architects to assist them in developing their proposals. The re-ordering of the sanctuary was excluded by condition from the permission granted under 13/40004. There is no inconsistency in allowing further consideration to this part of the church in the current application.
- The fire authority has assessed the proposed layout.
- The church has changed and evolved throughout its history. There is a need to balance the celebration of the liturgy with good conservation practice. The bishop and parish priest have endorsed the current proposal as being in accordance with liturgical requirements.
- It is disputed that the submitted petition accurately reflects the views of the larger number of parishioners.

## **10.0 OBSERVATION**

10.1 The observation from Mr Blackwood was submitted on an independent basis. It expresses concern with the proposal to move and alter the altar rails which were installed in the 1930s by Italian marble masons. They are of high quality and unusual within Ireland. They were paid for by parishioners at a time of great economic difficulty. The submission of a petition signed by 1,500 persons indicates their social significance. The proposed works will do permanent damage to the rails preventing their reinstatement to the original design intent in the future.

## **11.0 ASSESSMENT**

- 11.1 It is noted that the appeal raised no objection to the proposed construction of a toilet and strong room in place of the current sacristy and that the applicant did not appeal the condition on the planning authority's decision to omit the proposed glass wall and ceiling over the adoration area to the rear of the re-ordered sanctuary. The latter omission was supported by the observer. It should be repeated if the board decides to grant permission in this case, as such a screen would reflect sound and light that disrupted the unity of the space within the church in an undesirable manner.
- 11.2 Section 57(6) of the planning act places a particularly strong onus on the board to respect liturgical requirements in cases such as the present one. The applicant has submitted a reasonable argument that the proposed development is required to meet current liturgical practice by having the celebrant located more centrally among the congregation, and closer to them, when the mass is celebrated. The proposed changes have been endorsed by the Bishop of Clogher, who is the appropriate authority on such liturgical requirements under section 5.3 of the guidelines on architectural heritage protection. Similar works to move the sanctuary and altar from the east end to the crossing has been carried out in many Roman Catholic churches in the years since the second Vatican Council. They are cited in section 5.2.1 of the guidelines as an example of works that reflect liturgical requirements. In these circumstances a strongly compelling reason would be required for permission to be refused.
- 11.3 It is not considered that such a reason arises in this case. While the proposed development would interfere with the form and function of the altar rail, which is a feature of architectural and historical interest, the applicant has made reasonable efforts to incorporate elements from it and other existing features in the furniture of the re-ordered church. The relocation of the ceremonial focus of the church from its east end to the crossing is a significant departure from the historic form of the building. However it emerges from changes to liturgical practice that reflect the continuity of the use of the church as a place of public worship. The proposed development therefore represents an acceptable form of change to a protected structure that is consistent with the historic and current purpose of that structure. As such it would be in keeping with the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.
- 11.4 It is not considered that the proposed development raises issues of fire safety. In any event, such matters would be subject to control by the council under fire safety legislation rather than under planning law. There is no prohibition on

making successive applications for permission for the same development. What section 37(5)(a) of the planning act prohibits is the making of a second application while the first is before the board on appeal. This would not apply in this case as the previous application was determined and a final grant of permission was made before the current application was lodged.

## **12.0 RECOMMENDATION**

12.1 I recommend that permission be granted subject to the conditions set out below.



## REASONS AND CONSIDERATIONS

The proposed works to the protected structure of St. Mary's Church are considered to be a proportionate response to changing liturgical practice which accord with the current and historic role of the protected structure as a place of public worship for the community. Therefore, having regard to the duty to respect liturgical requirements set out at section 57(6) of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, and the advice given in Chapter 5 of the *Guidelines for Planning Authorities on Architectural Heritage Protection* issued by the minister in 2004, it is considered that the proposed development would represent an acceptable intervention into the fabric of the protected structure and would, subject to compliance with the conditions set out below, be in keeping with the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.

## CONDITIONS

1. The development shall be carried out and completed 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 details to be agreed with the planning authority, the developer shall agree such details in writing with the planning authority prior to commencement of development and the development shall be carried out and completed in accordance with the agreed particulars.

**Reason:** In the interest of clarity

2. The proposed structural glass wall and ceiling to the rear of the altar shall be omitted from the proposed development.

**Reason:** To maintain the integrity of the protected structure

3. A conservation expert shall be employed to manage, monitor and implement the works on the site and to ensure adequate protection of the retained and historic fabric of the protected structure during the works. In this regard, all permitted works shall be designed to cause minimum interference to the fabric of the church.

All works to the protected structure shall be carried out in accordance with best conservation practice as detailed in the application and the Architectural Heritage Protection Guidelines for Planning Authorities issued by the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government in 2004

All existing original features, including interior and exterior fittings/features, joinery and plasterwork, shall be protected during the course of the works.

**Reason:** To ensure that the integrity of the retained structures is maintained and that the structures are protected from unnecessary damage or loss of fabric.

4. The external finishes of the proposed extension shall harmonise with the existing church in terms of colour, texture and detail.

**Reason:** In the interests of visual amenity and to maintain the integrity of the protected structure

5. Water supply and drainage arrangements shall comply with the requirements of the planning authority for such works and services.

**Reason:** In the interest of public health

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Stephen J. O'Sullivan  
29<sup>th</sup> July 2016