

Inspector's Report ABP301657-18

Development	The realignment and recessing of existing agricultural entrance, construction of general purpose agricultural machinery shed, outdoor slurry tank, concrete yard and all associated works. Oberstown, Tara, County Meath.
Planning Authority	Meath County Council.
Planning Authority Reg. Ref.	AA/180208.
Applicant	Leonard Dillon.
Type of Application	Permission.
Planning Authority Decision	Grant.
Type of Appeal	Third Party -v- Grant.
Appellant	Pat Purcell.
Observers	None.
Date of Site Inspection	4 th September, 2018. Paul Caprani.

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1.0 Introduction

ABP301657-18 relates to a third-party appeal against the decision of Meath County Council to issue notification to grant planning permission for the realignment and redesign of an existing agricultural entrance and the construction of a general purpose agricultural machinery shed, outdoor slatted slurry tank, concrete yard and all associated works at Oberstown, Tara, County Meath. The third party appeal contend that unauthorised development has taken place on site and the proposal could give rise to ground and surface water contamination.

2.0 Site Location and Description

- 2.1. The subject site is located in the rural area of Oberstown in east County Meath approximately 7 kilometres north of the town of Dunshaughlin and 4 kilometres south of the village of Kentstown. The subject site is located on the northern side of a local road which runs between the N2 National Primary Route and the N3 motorway and is approximately 3 kilometres west of the small village of Rathfeigh. The subject site is located on the northern side of the local road which incorporates a straight alignment in the vicinity of the site. The subject site is governed by the 80 kmph speed limit.
- 2.2. There is extensive ribbon development along the roadway serving the subject site particularly, along a stretch of the road approximately 300 metres to the east of the site.
- 2.3. The site in question has a modest road frontage and the road frontage is confined to the south-east corner of the site where the existing entrance is located. The road frontage is confined to a width of approximately 14 metres. The southern boundary of the site runs in a westerly direction from the entrance and forms the rear boundary of four dwellinghouses located to the south-east of the subject site which front directly onto the road. There is also a dwellinghouse located to the immediate east of the subject site, (the appellants dweling) and there are a number of dwellinghouses in the wider area fronting onto the public road.

2.4. The site itself is roughly rectangular in shape and has a stated area of 0.333 hectares. The total landholding of the applicant which is located to the west and north of the subject site amounts to some 26.37 hectares. There is a large rectangular hayshed located near the entrance of the subject site (see photo's attached).

3.0 Proposed Development

- 3.1. Planning permission is sought for the realignment and redesign of the proposed entrance. The drawings indicate that 160 metre sightlines are achievable in both directions from a point 3 metres back from the roadway at the redesigned entrance.
- 3.2. Planning permission is also sought for the construction of a new general purpose agricultural machinery shed which is to be located 20 metres west of the existing haybarn and 20 metres to the north of the southern boundary of the site. The shed in question has a gross floor area of 451 square metres. It is approximately 13 metres long and 15 metres wide. It rises to an overall height of 7.887 metres and comprises of a 2.3 metre high concrete wall at base level and metal side and roof sheeting above. A series of rooflights are to be incorporated along the roof of the structure. The building is to incorporate a shallow pitch roof and is to be constructed in accordance with the Department of Agriculture specifications.
- 3.3. It is also proposed to construct an outdoor slatted tank. The tank is to be located to the rear of the existing hayshed 20.3 metres from the eastern boundary of the site and 6.5 metres from the northern boundary of the site. The slatted tank is rectangular in shape 12.4 metres in length, 4 metres in width and 3 metres in depth. The tank has a capacity of 123,900 litres.

4.0 Planning Authority Decision

Decision

Meath County Council in its decision dated 26th April, 2018 issued notification to grant planning permission subject to 14 conditions.

4.1. Documentation Submitted with the Planning Application

- 4.2. A covering letter was submitted with the planning application dated 28th February, 2018 by Johns Brook Surveys. The covering letter notes that planning permission was refused for a similar type application (see Planning History below) for two reasons relating to traffic and the fact that the applicant has not demonstrated a justification or need for the shed of the scale proposed. It is stated that on foot of this decision the current application has resulted in the repositioning of the existing entrance to address safety concerns. It states that the proposal complies with the NRA DMRB for an 80 kilometre design with no relaxations.
- 4.3. Furthermore, the slurry tank on the site has been relocated 21 metres from the nearest point of the house to the east and this is three times the required distance (7 metres) set out for any septic tank from a dwellinghouse and twice the required distance of any percolation area from the house. The slurry tank will be constructed in accordance with the Department of Agriculture specifications hence no leakage will occur. The tank therefore will not cause any threat to the environment from runoff entering the groundwater or surface water.
- 4.4. Also enclosed are a number of maps as is additional information in the form of appendices which it is argued addresses the Planning Authority's request for additional information under the previous application AA170581.

5.0 **Observations**

5.1. An observation was submitted by the current appellant objecting to the proposed development. A separate observation was submitted by Mr. Darragh Brangan which expressed concerns in relation to the impact of the proposed development due to noise pollution, odours and increased volumes of traffic. The contents of both have been read and noted.

5.2. Internal Reports

5.2.1. A report from the Transportation Department notes that sightlines to the north-east are impeded by a bush growing at the front gate pillar. There is no objection subject to the bush in the of the gate pillar being remove to facilitate sightlines.

- 5.2.2. The planner's report sets out details of the proposed development and local development plan policies as it relates to the site. It notes that the applicant has submitted landscaping proposals which will help soften any visual impact arising from the shed. It is noted that the applicant has submitted further details under the current application in relation to the need for the proposed shed. It is stated that the applicant has a total landholding of 26 hectares and has also purchased lands in Flemingstown which have no sheds or farm facilities on same. The applicant owns a number of agricultural vehicles and machinery and needs a safe place to store them. It is noted that a supporting letter has been submitted from Teagasc in relation to the applicant's farming activities and the proposed new shed. It is also noted that documentation was submitted under AA170581 which demonstrates that the existing buildings were built in the 1980s and therefore are statute barred from enforcement proceedings. In relation to wastewater, reference was made a report received from the Environment Department under the previous application (AA170581) which was satisfied with the details submitted from an environmental perspective. The slurry tank will be constructed as per Department of Agriculture requirements.
- 5.2.3. With regard to traffic and access, it is stated that the revised entrance proposal is considered to be acceptable and represents an improvement on the current access arrangements on site. It is considered that the applicant has overcome the reason for refusal relating to traffic under the previous application.
- 5.2.4. Based on the above assessment it is considered that the proposed development is in accordance with the proper planning and sustainable development of the area and it is therefore recommended that planning permission be granted for the proposed development.

6.0 **Planning History**

6.1. Details of one planning application is attached to the rear of the file.

Under Reg. Ref. AA170581 planning permission was sought in 2017 for the construction of a general purpose agricultural machinery shed, outdoor slatted slurry tank and concrete yard and all associated site works.

6.2. The planner's report requested additional information under eight separate headings relating to:

- Further details with regard to the use of the shed and justification for the size and scale of the shed.
- Further details in relation to separation distances between the proposed slatted unit and boundaries.
- Further details in relation to the planning status of the existing barn/hayshed located on site.
- Further details in relation to access arrangements.
- Further details in relation to vehicle turning movements within the site.
- Further details in relation to landscape.
- The applicant was also requested to address issues raised in observations on file.
- 6.3. A response from the applicant was submitted on 31st October, 2017. Details of this further information do not appear to be contained on the history file. However, the subsequent planner's report and various internal reports are contained in the pouch to the rear of the file. Based on the additional information submitted, the final planner's report considered that the proposal would endanger public safety by reason of a traffic hazard and the applicant has not justified the size and scale of the shed based on the size of the landholding and it was considered that the proposal would represent an undesirable precedent for developments of this kind. Planning permission was therefore refused on this basis.

7.0 Grounds of Appeal

- 7.1. The decision of Meath County Council to issue notification to grant planning permission was the subject of a third party appeal on behalf of Pat and Madonna Purcell.
- 7.2. It is argued that the proposal represents unauthorised development in that the combined area of the existing joined buildings on site exceed the area provided for in the conditions and limitations associated with the exempted development provisions for a store, barn or shed not intended for animals. The buildings in question were not intended for animals and this is evidenced by the lack of effluent facilities. It is also

stated that the building has not been used for animals. As such, the proposal constitutes unauthorised development.

- 7.3. The proposed slatted tank is to be situated less than 10 metres from the surface water drainage channel and approximately 12 metres from the site boundary. The tank would be a mere 19 metres from the appellant's house. There is clear planning concern in respect of the potential for surface and groundwater contamination. The hydrogeological assessment which was submitted with the previous application (prepared by Tobin Engineers and submitted as an appendix in the current application) does not give any comfort in respect of surface water. The existence of low permeability subsoils increases the likelihood that unplanned effluent would percolate through topsoil or along the surface of the site.
- 7.4. Department of Agriculture specification S123 strongly recommends that all outdoor tanks be a solid cover and not slatted. There is a clear concern for ingress of water from slabs and roof etc. which would increase the risk of overflow.
- 7.5. The vehicle movements could potentially provide headlight nuisance given the intensity of the activity proposed close to the boundary. Noise nuisance should also be considered particularly at night.
- 7.6. It is stated that Condition No. 6 of Meath County Council's notification to grant planning permission is invalid as it is not within the competence of the developer to construct and operate so that no pollution of any watercourse will take place. The subject site is sufficiently large that effluent facilities could be located within further separation distance from any neighbour.
- 7.7. Concerns are expressed that the revised access arrangements do not adequately demonstrate that all access issues have been resolved.
- 7.8. Finally, the Board are asked to refer to the planning history as it is deemed to be relevant in the case of the current application before the Board.

8.0 Appeal Responses

8.1. Planning Authority's Response to the Grounds of Appeal

8.1.1. Meath County Council is satisfied that all matters raised in the appeal were considered during the course of the assessment of the planning application. Reports

received from both the Roads Department and the Environment Department who are satisfied that the proposed development was acceptable from a traffic and environmental perspective subject to conditions. The proposal will be required to comply with Department of Agriculture Regulations with regard to the design of the storage tank as well as the separation distances to water bodies and dwellings. Effluent will be stored in a sealed tank with no leakage occurring.

8.1.2. The applicant has stated that the existing sheds were built in 1980 under the guidance of Department of Agriculture and these buildings have existed as farm buildings since this time. Documentation was submitted supporting this. A landscaping plan is also submitted to strengthen the existing site boundaries. The proposal is therefore considered to be consistent with the policies and objectives in the Meath County Development Plan and the Planning Authority respectfully request that An Bord Pleanála uphold the decision to grant planning permission for the said development.

8.2. Response on behalf of the Applicant

8.2.1. Frank Burke and Associates on behalf of the applicant submitted the following response:

It is argued that the development is not unauthorised as claimed by the applicant. At the time of construction c.1980 it is stated that the existing shed was exempted development and complied with all regulations as set out in the Department of Agriculture. The building has been consistently used as a farm building. There is a submission on file from Johns Brooks Surveys supporting the claim that the land and the existing building has been in farming use since the 1980s. Various receipts for farming activity have also been submitted. It is also stated that even where the building was unauthorised any action by the Planning Authority at this time would be statute barred. It is stated that the applicant does not offer any evidence to support the claim of unauthorised development and, even if the development was unauthorised, precedents exist for both Meath County Council and An Bord Pleanála where planning permission was granted for development which was previously refused.

The Board are also asked to note that the existing farm building predated the erection of the appellant's dwelling and the appellant therefore should accept that fact that agricultural activity will be the predominant activity in the locality. The applicant has elected to live in an environment where farming activity predominates which will result in impacts in respect of noise, odour and traffic etc.

- 8.2.2. With regard to the slatted tank, it is stated that construction and operation of the tank will be done in accordance with Departmental standards. Further information has been submitted in respect of the previous application which suggests that the proposal fully complies with all requirements under S.I. 31 of 2014. The proposed tank was also relocated as far west as feasible away from the Purcell house. The landowner's obligation under S.I. 31 of 2014 is enshrined in Condition No. 6 of the Planning Authority's decision. The applicant would have no objection to such a condition being attached if the Board are minded to grant planning permission. Furthermore, a number of other conditions were incorporated in Meath County Council's grant of planning permission in order to safeguard the environment.
- 8.2.3. With regard to noise and nuisance at night, it is stated that the farmyard in the main, will be used during the day and night-time activity will only occur in exceptional circumstances. The proposed landscape would also mitigate against any temporary noise and light nuisance.
- 8.2.4. With regard to traffic issues, it is stated that sightlines fully comply with NRA Guidelines and the wider recessed entrance will allow standard farm machinery greater ease of access.
- 8.2.5. Finally, it is stated that the previous refusal under AA/170581 have been adequately addressed to the satisfaction of the Planning Authority. It is also stated that the proposal fully complies with the policies and objectives set out in the Meath County Development Plan. For the above reasons, it is respectfully requested that the Board take the above points in assessing the application.

9.0 **Development Plan Provision**

9.1. The site is governed by the policies and provisions contained in the Meath County Council Development Plan 2013 – 2019.

- 9.2. In relation to agricultural development the development plan seeks to maintain the vibrant and healthy agricultural sector based on the principles of sustainable development. Section 10.9.1 relates to agricultural buildings. It outlines that the provision of well-located structures and facilities necessary for good and environmentally sound agricultural practice will be supported by Meath County Council. It notes that development proposals will be assessed having regard to:
 - The Design of the Building
 - Waste Management Facilities
 - Impact on Residential Amenities
- 9.3. Section 11.13.1 of the Plan also refers to agricultural buildings and structures. It states that the design, scale, siting and layout of agricultural buildings should respect and where possible enhance the rural environment. Buildings should be grouped together in visually appropriate areas. The use of dark coloured cladding are deemed to be the most suitable for farm buildings. It also requires that developments would comply with the Good Agricultural Practice Regulations.

9.4. S.I. No. 31 of 2014

Part 2 sets out details in relation to farmyard management.

- Section 5 sets out the provision for the minimisation of soiled water. It requires that an occupier of a holding shall take all such reasonable steps that are necessary for the purposes of minimising the amount of soiled water produced on the holding.
- Section 6 requires that livestock manure and other organic fertilisers, soiled water and effluents from dungsteads, farmyard manure pits or silage pits arising, that are produced in a building or yard on a holding shall, prior to its application to land or other treatment, be collected and held in a manner that prevents the run-off or seepage, directly or indirectly into groundwaters or surface waters of such substances.
- The occupier of a holding shall not cause or permit the entry to waters of any these substances. The Regulations require that such soiled waters be held in pits that shall be maintained free of structural defect and be maintained and

managed in such a manner as necessary to prevent run-off or seepage, directly or indirectly into groundwater or surface water of such substances.

10.0 Planning Assessment

10.1. I have read the entire contents of the file, visited the site in question and have had particular regard to the issues raised in the grounds of appeal. I consider the Board can restrict its deliberations to the issues specifically raised in the grounds of appeal which are assessed below.

10.2. Unauthorised Development

- 10.3. The grounds of appeal argue that the existing hayshed on site constitutes an unauthorised structure on the grounds that planning permission was never obtained in the first instance for the construction of the shed. In relation to this matter I note that the appellant has not submitted any evidence that the structure in question is unauthorised. Having inspected the site and the building on site it is readily conceivable that the structure in question may have been in existence in excess of 7 years as contended by the applicant. Under such a scenario, the structure in question would be statute barred from enforcement proceedings. This in itself however does not confer any authorised status on the structure.
- 10.4. The applicant has also submitted various documentation which it is argued proves that the structure in question has been in existence since the 1980s. I have consulted the documentation submitted, and there are receipts/quotes contained on file which suggest that the haybarn in question was constructed around 1980. It cannot be definitively determined in my opinion that the receipts/quotes contained on file specifically relate to the haybarn in question. However, the receipts/quotes submitted do relate to a haybarn/shed on the applicant's lands and therefore it would be reasonable to assume that they relate to the structure in question.
- 10.5. It is also apparent that the haybarn in question would have been classed exempted development under the provisions of Class 8 of the Planning and Development Regulations 1977. The 1977 Regulations (SI 65 of 1977) exempted agricultural buildings for the making or storage of silage which had an aggregate floor area not

exceeding 400 square metres. The structure in question according to the drawings submitted amounts to just over 300 square metres.

10.6. Based on the evidence submitted therefore, I would conclude that the structure in question has been in existence for over 30 years and the said structure would have been classed as exempted development in accordance with the provisions of the 1977 Planning and Development Regulations and as such cannot be classed as an unauthorised structure as suggested in the grounds of appeal.

10.7. Residential Amenity Issues

- 10.8. Concerns are also expressed in the grounds of appeal that the proposed slatted tank could give rise to amenity issues or could give rise to groundwater or surface water contamination issues. The main amenity issues raised in the grounds of appeal relate to excessive noise, odour and light pollution. The lands in question are in agricultural use and the appellant's dwelling is located in a rural area where agriculture predominates. Where agricultural activity is practiced, this is undoubtedly going to give rise to some levels of noise and traffic generation as can be expected with any commercial enterprise. The applicant points out that the agricultural activity currently practiced on the lands in question are mainly confined to normal business hours (daylight hours). The traffic generated associated with housing machinery in the new shed would not be so intense in my opinion to give rise to significant or material amenity issues for surrounding residents. I would suggest that the traffic/noise/light pollution generated would be typical of that associated with any agricultural activity in a rural area where agricultural activity predominates.
- 10.9. Similarly, in relation to odour while I acknowledge that the slatted tank will give rise to some level of odour generation. Again such odour generation would be typical of any agricultural activity which involves the rearing and housing of livestock on a farm or farmyard area. It is not unreasonable that in a rural area where agricultural activity predominates that some level of odour would arise from commercial agricultural enterprises.
- 10.10. The slatted tank is located 20 metres from the nearest point of the appellant's dwelling. It is reasonable that the tank in question be located in close proximity to the shed. However, I do not see any reason why the slatted tank could not be relocated

to the west side of the hay/cattle shed in the proposed area of hardstanding between the existing and proposed building. This would increase the separation distance from c.20 metres to c.50 metres away from the appellant's dwelling. This should significantly reduce any potential impacts in terms of odour.

- 10.11. The suggestion that the slatted tank should incorporate a solid concrete slab as a cover as suggested in the grounds of appeal could in my view give rise to health and safety issues with regard to the lack of ventilation and trapped gases within the tank.
- 10.12. The applicant in the response to the grounds of appeal suggests that the separation distance between the slatted tank and the appellant's dwelling at 20 metres is acceptable and is three times the separation distance required between a dwellinghouse and a domestic septic tank. I do not consider that this comparison is appropriate having regard to the size, scale, capacity and the slatted nature of the animal effluent holding tank compared to that associated with a domestic septic tank.
- 10.13. With regard to the possibility of the slatted tank giving rise to groundwater or surface water pollution, it is a requirement under both the Department of Agriculture Guidelines and under S.I. 31 of 2014 that any tanks constructed for the collection and storage of effluent must be structurally sound and incorporate no structural defects. Section 6 of the said Regulations also require that livestock manure and other organic fertilisers, soiled water and effluents from dungsteads, farmyard manure pits or silage pits arising or produced in a building yard on a holding prior to its application to land or other treatment be collected and held in a manner that **prevents run-off or seepage directly or indirectly into groundwaters or surface waters of such substances** (my emphasis). Thus, the applicant is required by law to comply with any such stipulations set out in the Regulations. As the applicant is legally obliged to comply with the requirements set out in the Regulations, the tank should not pose a threat to either groundwaters or surface waters.
- 10.14. I also note that there are no surface water bodies in the immediate vicinity of the site that could realistically be at risk of contamination from the slatted tank. The tank in question has a capacity of almost 124 cubic metres and this in my view is sufficient to accommodate any excess surface water run-off from the hardstanding associated with the new farmyard area. The applicant indicates that the tank has a storage

capacity of greater than 18 weeks which is required for the Meath area under Schedule 3 of S.I. 31 of 2014.

10.15. Sightlines

10.16. Finally, with regard to the issue of sightline I would refer the Board to the photos attached in my report. The photos in my opinion clearly indicate that there are more than sufficient sightlines in both directions at the entrance to the farmyard. The realignment of the entrance as proposed does not in my view constitute a traffic hazard.

11.0 Appropriate Assessment

Having regard to the nature and scale of the proposed development and nature of the receiving environment together with the 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.

12.0 EIAR Screening Determination

The development in question does not fall within a class for which an EIA is required.

13.0 Conclusions and Recommendation

Arising from my assessment above I consider the proposed development would not impact on residential amenity, would not be prejudicial to public health and would not constitute a traffic hazard. The proposed development would, therefore, be in accordance with the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.

14.0 Reasons and Considerations

Having regard to the rural location of the subject site and the predominant established agricultural use in the wider area it is considered that the realignment and recessing of the existing agricultural entrance, together with the construction of a general purpose agricultural machinery shed and outdoor slatted slurry tank and concrete yard would, subject to conditions set out below, not seriously injure the amenities of the area or of property in the vicinity, would not be prejudicial to public health and would generally be acceptable in terms of traffic safety and convenience. The proposed development would, therefore, be in accordance with the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.

15.0 Conditions

 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.

- Water supply and drainage arrangements for the site, including the disposal of surface and soiled water, shall comply with the requirements of the planning authority for such works and services. In this regard –
 - (a) uncontaminated surface water run-off shall be disposed of directly in a sealed system, and
 - (b) all soiled waters shall be directed to a storage tank. Drainage details shall be submitted to and agreed in writing with the planning authority, prior to commencement of development.

Reason: In the interest of environmental protection and public health.

3. The slatted tank shall be used only in strict accordance with a management schedule which shall be submitted to and agreed in writing with the planning authority, prior to commencement of development. The management schedule shall be in accordance with the European Communities (Good Agricultural Practice for Protection of Waters) Regulations, 2014, as amended, and shall provide at least for the following:

- (1) Details of the number and types of animals to be housed.
- (2) The arrangements for the collection, storage and disposal of slurry.
- (3) Arrangements for the cleansing of the buildings and structures (including the public road, where relevant).

Reason: In order to avoid pollution and to protect residential amenity.

4. All uncontaminated roof water from buildings and clean yard water shall be separately collected and discharged in a sealed system to existing drains, streams or adequate soakpits and shall not discharge or be allowed to discharge to the foul effluent drains, foul effluent and slurry storage tanks or to the public road.

Reason: In order to ensure that the capacity of effluent and storage tanks is reserved for their specific purposes.

5. Details of all external finishes for the new agricultural building shall be agreed in writing with the planning authority prior to commencement of development.

Reason: In the interest of visual amenity.

6. Prior to the commencement of development, the applicant shall remove the existing bush at the eastern gate pillar at the entrance into the development in order to achieve adequate sightlines in an easterly direction.

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

7. A minimum of 18-weeks storage shall be provided in the underground storage tank. Prior to commencement of development details showing how it is intended to comply with this requirement shall be submitted to and agreed in writing with the planning authority.

Reason: In the interest of environmental protection and public health.

 The use of the proposed structure shall be for agricultural purposes only as defined in the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, and shall not be used for any commercial purposes.

Reason: In the interest of clarity and orderly development.

9. The developer shall pay to the planning authority a financial contribution of €1,360 (one thousand three hundred and sixty euro) in respect of public infrastructure and facilities benefiting development in the area of the planning authority that is provided or intended to be provided by or on behalf of the authority in accordance with the terms of the Development Contribution Scheme made under section 48 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended. The contribution shall be paid prior to commencement of development or in such phased payments as the planning authority may facilitate and shall be subject to any applicable indexation provisions of the Scheme at the time of payment. The application of any indexation required by this condition shall be agreed between the planning authority and the developer or, in default of such agreement, the matter shall be referred to An Bord Pleanála to determine.

Reason: It is a requirement of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, that a condition requiring a contribution in accordance with the Development Contribution Scheme made under section 48 of the Act be applied to the permission.

Paul Caprani, Senior Planning Inspector.

1st October, 2018.