



An
Bord
Pleanála

Inspector's Report 302735-18.

Development	Extension and alterations to tourist retail building to include alterations to existing elevations to facilitate the additional floorspace.
Location	Blarney Castle Estate, Monacnapa, Blarney, County Cork.
Planning Authority	Cork County Council.
Planning Authority Reg. Ref.	185992.
Applicant	Sir Charles Colthurst.
Type of Application	Permission.
Planning Authority Decision	Permission with conditions.
Type of Appeal	Third Party.
Appellant	Padraig O'Buachalla.
Observer	None.
Date of Site Inspection	22 nd November 2018.
Inspector	Derek Daly.

1.0 Site Location and Description

- 1.1. The appeal site is in the village of Blarney in County Cork. The site is within the demesne of Blarney Castle a major tourist attraction and immediately to the south of the village square/ green in the village centre. Immediately inside of the demesne entrance are tourism related buildings and associated car/coach parking used to accommodate visitors wishing to enter the grounds of Blaney Castle.
- 1.2. The proposed development relates to one of the buildings which is a building used for retail purposes and for entry to the grounds. The building is single storied and L-shaped in footprint and serves as an entrance and exit point for visitors to the Castle and Demesne. There is a tree located to the front of the building within an enclosed circular walled bed.
- 1.3. The site has a stated area of 0.0828 hectares.

2.0 Proposed Development

- 2.1. The proposed development as submitted to the planning authority on the 27th of July 2018 was for the extension and alterations to a tourist retail building to include alterations to existing elevations to facilitate the additional retail floorspace.
- 2.2. The extension is on the northern side of the existing building and will if constructed reconfigure the footprint of the building from a L-shape to a rectangular shape. The elevations of the proposed extension will be similar to the external finishes of the existing building. The proposed extension will have a flat roof and will also provide for internal alterations to the existing building. The tree in front of the building will be removed.
- 2.3. The existing building has a stated gross floor area of 208m² and the gross floor area of the proposed extension is stated as 127m².
- 2.4. Unsolicited further information was submitted on the 3rd of September 2018 clarifying land ownership. The clarification related to an area of the landholding and is not specific to the defined site and area which is the subject of the planning application.

3.0 Planning Authority Decision

3.1. Decision

The decision of the planning authority was to grant planning permission subject to five conditions.

3.2. Planning Authority Reports

3.2.1. Planning Reports

The planning report dated the 18th of September 2018 refers to

- The planning history.
- Submissions received.
- An assessment of the issues including principle of the development, policy, residential and visual amenity, conservation and flooding.

Permission was recommended.

3.2.2. Other Technical Reports:

Area Engineer Report dated 21st of August 2018 indicates no objections.

4.0 Planning History

There is history of applications relating to the demesne and in relation to the cluster of buildings at the entrance to demesne including;

P.A. Ref. No.13/4247

Permission granted for an extension to existing tourism building.

5.0 Policy Context

5.1. Development Plan

5.1.1. Cork County Development Plan 2014.

The importance of Blarney Castle and Demesne is recognised in relation to its built heritage as stated in a general objective TO2-1 to protect and conserve important built heritage. The plan also recognises the importance of Blarney Castle as a key tourism attraction (section 8.3).

The demesne has a number of recorded monuments, archaeological sites and protected structures. The grounds of Blarney Castle are located within Blarney Architectural Conservation Area.

The site is located within the Metropolitan Cork Greenbelt and outside of the development boundary of the village. Within the greenbelt area objective RCI 5-6 makes provision for consideration of the extension and intensification of existing uses of an appropriate scale and in special circumstances.

5.1.2. Blarney Macroom Local Area Plan 2017.

The importance of Blarney as a tourism destination is referred to and Objective GO-07 promotes the future development of Blarney as a tourism destination.

The site as stated is not within the settlement boundary of the village of Blarney but adjoins the boundary and the lands within the development boundary are zoned Town Centre.

6.0 The Appeal

6.1. Grounds of Appeal

The appellant in a submission dated the 30th of September 2018 refers to;

- The route of the majority of tourism/visitor traffic between the Blarney Woolen Mills complex seeking to visit the Blarney Castle Estate do so at a very dangerous crossing point without the benefit of a pedestrian crossing or a proper footpath on either side of the road.
- The circulation of traffic into the car park is a major hazard putting pedestrians at risk and the development as proposed development adds to pedestrian risk. There are also issues in relation to the existing car park.
- Coach traffic using the site in particular have a severe problem at the junction with the public road.

- The capacity of the car park is a concern which must be addressed and any permission which increases footfall will by definition increase the car parking requirement which is not factored into the current application.
- Reference is made to the removal of a signature tree which the development will necessitate its removal, and this is not referred to in the application.
- The movement of traffic should be amended from the current clockwise flow to an anti-clockwise flow and this would address the concerns stated in the appeal.

6.2. Applicant Response

The applicant c/o Mc Cutcheon Halley in a submission dated the 9th of November 2018 refers to;

- The crossing point referred to is outside of the remit of the applicant's control, but the applicant shares the concern referred to about this unauthorised crossing facilitated by Blarney Woolen Mills and have indicated this to Cork County Council who have indicated that although unauthorised it is outside of the possible enforcement time period.
- There is ample car and coach parking provided within the Castle grounds and tourists to the Castle are encouraged to use the parking.
- In relation to traffic movement and safety concerns these were considered by the area engineer who raised no concern.
- It is not anticipated that there will be an increase in car parking requirement arising from the proposed development. The proposal will provide for increasing the retail offering to existing visitor numbers.
- The applicant has responded to increased numbers in recent years by providing addition parking facilities which are considered adequate to meet current and projected tourist numbers.
- In relation to the removal of the tree the drawings clearly indicate its removal, but this removal should be seen in the context of the extensive programme of native woodland planting undertaken in the demesne.

- The layout as proposed was one of many options considered and was considered to provide for minimal interference and the optimum design response.
- The submission also includes a response by MHL Consulting Engineers to matters raised and indicates that the main entrance is constrained by existing buildings outside of the control of the applicant.
- The clockwise circulation allows coach passengers to be discharged on the appropriate side of the road and has worked without the need for barriers. Any separation of pedestrians and vehicles would likely lead to an increase in speed of vehicles.
- Exiting coaches are required to yield to inbound traffic and the junction operates within a legacy issue and constraints of land ownership.
- Adopting an anti-clockwise flow as suggested would endanger pedestrians and result potentially in higher traffic speeds and would need to be countered by the provision of ramps which would be less desirable than the current natural calming provided by restricted sightlines and shared surfaces.

7.0 Assessment

7.1. The proposed development is for an extension to and alterations to tourist retail building to include alterations to existing elevations to facilitate the additional floorspace. The existing building has a stated gross floor area of 208m² and the gross floor area of the proposed extension is stated as 127m².

7.2. Principle of development.

In section 5 of the report I have outlined the main policy provisions as they relate to the site and area.

Although the site is located within the Metropolitan Cork Greenbelt and outside of the development boundary of the village of Blarney, objective RCI 5-6 makes provision for consideration of the extension and intensification of existing uses of an appropriate scale and in special circumstances. The development is for a modest increase in floor area as part of a cluster of tourist related buildings in the demesne of Blarney Castle an important and long established tourist attraction. It is also in

very close proximity to the village and the development boundary of the village. I would have no objection in principle to the development. The development will not adversely impact on other policy and objectives of the county development plan or the local area plan in relation to architectural heritage.

7.3. Siting and design.

The extension is of a modest scale and will largely complement in height and finishes the existing building. In relation to the removal of the tree referred to in the grounds of appeal the extension will necessitate its removal but the tree does not have any major significance in the context of the area.

7.4. Other matters raised in the appeal.

The issues raised in relation to the proposed development largely relate to traffic with reference to the current flows of traffic, parking and conflict between pedestrian and vehicular movements. As part of the response to the grounds of appeal the applicant's consulting engineer has responded to the issues raised.

It is noted that many of the issues raised are outside of the site and the applicant's control. The current traffic flow to the site are largely dictated by current traffic arrangements in situ as for example one side of the village green is one way and therefore traffic into the site can only enter from one direction.

I would accept that manoeuvrability of vehicles is tight but this a historic legacy of the layout of the village and outside of the control of the applicant. Equally pedestrians crossing the public road from the Woolen Mills site into the Blarney Castle site although not desirable in the uncontrolled manner in which it presently occurs is not a matter that the applicant can address though it is noted that within the site the applicant has put in place to separate pedestrian and vehicular movement.

The current flow within the site does address, I consider, safety for pedestrians alighting from coaches. I would also note no objections to the current arrangements were indicated in the roads report of the local authority.

Given the scale and nature of the development I do not consider that a demand for an additional parking provision arises given the current provision on the site.

7.5. 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.

7.6. EIAR Screening Determination

Based on a preliminary examination of the nature, size or location of the development there is no real likelihood of significant effects on the environment and EIAR is not required.

8.0 Recommendation

- 8.1. Arising from my assessment above I recommend that the Board uphold the decision of the planning authority and grant planning permission for the proposed development based on the reasons and consideration set out below.

9.0 Reasons and Considerations

Having regard to the existing pattern of development and the nature and scale of the development as proposed, it is considered that the proposed development would not seriously injure the amenities of the area or property in the vicinity 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.

10.0 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 external finishes of the proposed development shall be the same as those of the existing building in respect of colour and texture.

Reason: In the interest of visual amenity.

3. The developer shall pay to the planning authority a financial contribution 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. Details of the application of the terms of the Scheme 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 the proper application of the terms of the Scheme.

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.

Derek Daly
Planning Inspector

3rd November 2018