



An
Bord
Pleanála

Inspector's Report ABP-308416-20

Development

Retention permission sought for: (i) 2.5m high fencing on the western boundary, (ii) 2.5m high fencing and pedestrian gate on part of the southern boundary, (iii) Fence poles on the eastern boundary and part of the southern boundary, and (iv) 2.5m high fencing enclosing two sides of an oil storage tank, located at the rear of the existing school premises.

Permission south for: (i) Install 1.8m high fencing on the eastern boundary and part of the southern boundary, and (ii) Associated site works.

Location

Renaniree National School,
Reananerree, Macroom, Co. Cork

Planning Authority

Cork County Council

Planning Authority Reg. Ref.

20/5588

Applicant(s)

Board of Scoil Naisiunta Reidh na
nDoiri

Type of Application

Retention permission and permission

Planning Authority Decision

Grant, subject to 2 conditions

Type of Appeal

Third Parties -v- Decision

Appellant(s)

Sean & Mary Lynch

Jerry & Helen Lynch

Paudie & Siobhan McSweeney

Observer(s)

None

Date of Site Inspection

18th December 2020

Inspector

Hugh D. Morrison

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1.0 Site Location and Description

- 1.1. The site is located in Reananerree, a hamlet c. 14km due west of Macroom “as the crow flies”. This site lies on the northern side of the L3402, which runs from the N22 to the east to the R584 at Ballingeary to the south-west. It accommodates the local National School. The remainder of this hamlet comprises several dwelling houses, a parish church and hall, and a post office. The surrounding elevated area comprises fields and woodlands.
- 1.2. The site is of elongated form and it extends over an area of 0.0957 hectares. It maintains a frontage of c. 51m with the adjoining local road to the south. The school building (230 sqm) is sited in the eastern portion of the site and the accompanying playground is laid out in the western portion. The playground is continuous with hard surfaced areas to the front and to the rear of the school building, too. This building is essentially of rectangular form under a double pitched roof with a lean-to annex to the rear. It is of traditional design with a row of tall sliding sash windows in its front and rear elevations and it is finished in pebble dash under a slated roof.
- 1.3. The school grounds are enclosed by means of a low-rise wall, which is punctuated by pillars. A gated pedestrian entrance within this wall corresponds with the front door to the school building. A “V” shaped stile in this wall in the south-eastern corner allows pedestrian access, too, and at the western end of the grounds there is a gated entrance for service vehicles and a gated pedestrian entrance off an informal parking area. The eastern end of the grounds abuts a residential property, which lies on the northern side of a more minor local road that forms a junction with the L3402. Exposed rock bounds the rear of these grounds, to the north.

2.0 Proposed Development

- 2.1. The proposal seeks retention permission for the following items:
 - (i) 2.5m high fencing on the western boundary,
 - (ii) 2.5m high fencing and pedestrian gate on part of the southern boundary,
 - (iii) Fence poles on the eastern boundary and part of the southern boundary, and

(iv) 2.5m high fencing enclosing two sides of an oil storage tank, sited to the rear of the school building.

2.2. The proposal also seeks permission for the following items:

(i) Install 1.8m high fencing on the eastern boundary and part of the southern boundary, and

(ii) Associated site works.

3.0 Planning Authority Decision

3.1. Decision

Permission granted subject to 2 conditions.

3.2. Planning Authority Reports

3.2.1. Planning Reports

View expressed that safety requirements outweigh any visual amenity concerns.

3.2.2. Other Technical Reports

- Cork County Council:
 - Area Engineer: No objection.

4.0 Planning History

None

5.0 Policy and Context

5.1. Development Plan

Under the Blarney Macroom Municipal District Local Area Plan 2017 (LAP), Reananerree is identified as a Village Nucleus and the site is shown as lying within the development boundary around this settlement.

5.2. Natural Heritage Designations

None

6.0 The Appeal

6.1. Grounds of Appeal

(a) Sean & Mary Lynch of Derryfinneen, Reananerree

- Concern is expressed over the proposed retention of the 2.5m high pedestrian gate and the proposed erection of a 1.8m high fence along the southern and eastern boundaries of the site. While not a protected structure, the school is an old traditional building that should be respected. Views of it should therefore not be interrupted by these items.

(b) Jerry & Helen Lynch of Reananerree

- The proposed 1.8m high fence along the south-eastern corner of the site would obstruct further the already limited sightlines of the L3402 available from in front of the appellants' dwelling house.
- The closure of the "V" pedestrian access in the eastern boundary of the site would cause school goers to have to use the centrally sited gate in the southern boundary and so negotiate parked/manoeuvring cars on the L3402. The ensuing hazard would be heightened during wintry conditions. The view is expressed that a wall-height gate would be adequate to accompany the "V".
- Concern is expressed that the retention of the 2.5m high pedestrian gate would be unnecessary, as an existing gate would be adequate, and it would be visually forbidding.
- The retention of the 2.5m high fence around the ball playing area and the oil tank is welcomed. This is a needed replacement fence.

(c) Paudie & Siobhan McSweeney of Gort an Eadain, Cill na Martra

- The retention of the replacement 2.5m high fence around the western portion of the site, where ball games are played, is welcomed. By contrast, the

eastern portion in front of the school building is not used in this way, and its existing enclosure by means of a wall is adequate.

- Concern is expressed that the proposed 1.8m high fence would be unsightly and it would obstruct views of the school building, which dates from 1898. An alternative approach would be to return the 2.5m fence to the western gabled elevation of this building, thereby securing the playground, but leaving the principal elevation unobscured.
- Concern is expressed that the closure of the “V” pedestrian entrance in the eastern boundary to the site would force school goers to enter by means of a more hazardous pedestrian entrance off the L3402. Instead this stile should be accompanied by a small gate.
- Concern is expressed that work was undertaken without planning permission and that such work, which is proposed for retention, should not now benefit from being *in-situ*. Attention is drawn to the fact that the Board of Management responsible has now been dissolved.
- The enclosing of the oil tank is welcomed.

6.2. Applicant Response

- The proposal is prompted entirely by the need to ensure the safety of school goers aged 4 – 12 years old. Deficiencies in this respect were flagged by the school’s insurer and the applicant’s health and safety obligations.
- The case planner was supportive of the proposal, remarking that the works concerned were typical of those undertaken at schools elsewhere in the County.
- Attention is drawn to how much busier the L3402 has become overtime and how the proposed fencing would secure the school’s grounds without altering its appearance.

6.3. Planning Authority Response

None

6.4. **Observations**

None

6.5. **Further Responses**

None

7.0 **Assessment**

7.1. I have reviewed the proposal in the light of the Blarney Macroom Municipal District Local Area Plan 2017, the submissions of the parties, and my own site visit. Accordingly, I consider that this application/appeal should be assessed under the following headings:

- (i) School safety,
- (ii) Road safety,
- (iii) Visual amenity, and
- (iv) Appropriate Assessment.

(i) Public safety

7.2. The applicant has submitted a letter from its insurer, which outlines safety concerns that were identified during a site visit in 25th February 2020. I note from this letter that there was a wire mesh fence supported on poles that enclosed the exposed sides of the school playground to the L3402 and the adjoining informal car park to the west. This fence was deemed to be in a poor state of repair and in need of replacement. I note, too, the concern expressed over the low wall to the remainder of the boundary with the L3402 in front of the school building.

7.3. The applicant in response to the appellants' grounds of appeal has reiterated that the impetus for the proposal is the need to ensure the safety of school goers, who are aged between 4 and 12. In this respect, it draws attention to the case planner's report, which acknowledges that the L3402 has become more heavily trafficked in recent years. This report also acknowledges that the type of fencing proposed is typical of the type of fencing that is commonly used to secure school grounds elsewhere in the County.

- 7.4. I note that all the parties to this appeal accept the need to enclose the main school playground to the west of the school building and so, insofar as the current proposal relates to the retention of new fencing around this portion of the school grounds, no objections have been raised. Likewise, the proposed retention of fencing around the oil tank to the rear of the school building, insofar as it is commented upon, is welcomed. What is at issue is the proposed fencing in front of the school building, to its south-eastern corner, and along its eastern boundary.
- 7.5. I note, too, that the proposed fencing along the southern boundary and around the south-eastern corner of the school grounds would achieve the applicant's objective of ensuring the safety of its site. However, this factor is not the only factor that needs to be considered in coming to a decision on the proposal.
- 7.6. I conclude that the proposal would *prima facie* meet the applicant's safety objectives for the school site.

(ii) Road safety

- 7.7. The appellants (b) and (c) express concern that the proposal would be detrimental to road safety. In this respect, they draw attention to the closure of the "V" shaped stile in the south-eastern corner of the site, which would have the effect of forcing school goers approaching from the east to navigate a route, perhaps through parked/manoeuvring cars on the northern side of the L3402, to the pedestrian gate that corresponds with the front door to the school building. Such school goers would encounter additional hazard in the process.
- 7.8. My site visit coincided with the close of the school day and so I observed that school goers exited the school building via the front door and proceeded to cross the playground to the pedestrian gate in the western boundary to the school grounds where parents/guardians collected them. These parents/guardians were waiting in cars that were parked in the informal car park beyond this gate. A minority collected their children by simply parking on the roadside.
- 7.9. If the pattern of movement that I observed is typical, then I anticipate that the scenario of school goers navigating the northern side of the L3402 from the east would be a less frequent occurrence. While I recognise that for any who do approach from the east the "V" shaped stile would be convenient, I am also conscious that to facilitate its continuing use by specifying a gate on its inside would risk encouraging

parents/guardians to drop/collect children in its vicinity, which would overlap with the junction between the L3402 and a more minor local road. On balance, I consider that, notwithstanding the historic use of this stile, its closure would be in the interest of road safety.

- 7.10. Appellant (b) also expresses concern over the siting of the proposed fence in the south-eastern corner of the school grounds, insofar as they consider it would obscure visibility to road users manoeuvring to and from the residential property to the east of the site.
- 7.11. During my site visit, I observed the visibility available from in front of the residential property with respect to the L3402. I noted that such visibility is limited mainly by an evergreen tree in the appellants' front garden. I noted, too, the presence of a telegraph pole in the corner of the school grounds. The proposed fence would be composed of a fine wire mesh, which is intended to be "see through". I consider that its erection in the south-eastern corner of the school grounds would have a negligible effect upon the visibility in question. I also observed the sightlines that are available to road users exiting from the more minor local road onto the L3402. Due to the sweeping alignment of the L3402, these sightlines would be unaffected by the proposed fence.
- 7.12. I conclude that the proposal would be consistent with road safety.

(iii) Visual amenity

- 7.13. The fence proposed for retention on the western and southern boundaries of the site, the pedestrian gate proposed for retention on the southern boundary, and the poles proposed for retention on the southern and eastern boundaries are all 2.5m high. The fence proposed for the southern and eastern boundaries would be 1.8m. The Planning Authority attached Condition No. 2 to its permission to address the anomaly of the proposed 1.8m high fence being hung from 2.5m high poles. Thus, these poles would be reduced in height to coincide with that of the fence.
- 7.14. The appellants express concern that the proposed fence would be unsightly and that it would obscure views of the school building, which dates from 1898. Appellant (b) also expresses concern that the 2.5m high pedestrian gate proposed for retention appears forbidding. Appellant (c) suggests that if the 2.5m high fence was to be returned to the start of the western elevation of the school building, the playground

would be secured and the need for the pedestrian gate and new fence would be obviated.

- 7.15. The applicant has responded by stating that their proposal would not alter the appearance of the school building.
- 7.16. During my site visit, I observed that the existing fence proposed for retention is composed of fine wire mesh which allows views through it. In this respect, it is a visually “light” structure. I, therefore, consider that the proposed fence, which would be of the same type only lower, would facilitate the continuation of views of the school building, albeit through the fence rather than uninterrupted as at present.
- 7.17. During my site visit, I observed that pupils exited the school from the front door. I also observed that there is another door through which they could exit in the annex to the rear and adjacent to the north-eastern corner of the site. I consider that, given the siting of these two doors in positions where they do not open into the playground to the west, the continuous areas of hard surfacing around the school building that connect with this playground are needed to facilitate movement to and from this playground and so the applicant understandably wants to secure these areas, too, by means of the proposed fence. In these circumstances, appellant (c)’s alternative would fail to reckon with this pattern of movement and the corresponding need to secure boundaries in the interests of school safety.
- 7.18. I conclude that the proposal would, provided the provisions of Condition No. 2 are adhered to, be compatible with the visual amenities of the area.

(iv) Appropriate Assessment

- 7.19. The proposal is for the retention and completion of fencing to the majority of the boundaries to Renanirree National School and for the retention of fencing around the school’s oil tank. During its construction and operational phases, this proposal would not have any effect upon any European sites in the wider area.
- 7.20. Having regard to the nature, scale, and location of the proposed development and the nature of the receiving environment, it is concluded that no Appropriate Assessment issues arise as the proposed development would not be likely to have a significant effect individually or in combination with other plans or projects on a European site.

8.0 Recommendation

- 8.1. That retention permission and permission be granted.

9.0 Reasons and Considerations

Having regard to the Blarney Macroom Municipal District Local Area Plan 2017, the Board considers that, subject to conditions, the retention of the proposed poles, fence, and gate, and the erection of the proposed fence on the site would promote the safety of the school, be consistent with road safety, and be compatible with the visual amenities of the area. No Appropriate Assessment issues would arise. The proposal would accord with the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.

10.0 Conditions

1.	<p>The development shall be retained 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.</p> <p>Reason: In the interest of clarity.</p>
2.	<p>The poles proposed for retention in connection with the erection of the proposed fence shall be reduced in height to 1.8 metres.</p> <p>Reason: To ensure that the height of the poles coincides with the height of the fence, in the interest of visual amenity.</p>

Hugh D. Morrison
Planning Inspector

5th January 2021