

Inspector's Report

ABP 318248-23

Development	Retention of reconstructed derelict cottage as a house with associated waste water treatment system and percolation area. Retention of agricultural storage shed and stable boxes with landscaping and ancillary site works. Cloghan, Ardcath, Garristown, Co.
Location	Meath.
Planning Authority	Meath County Council.
Planning Authority Reg. Ref.	23/760
Applicant(s)	Geoffrey Lyons.
Type of Application	Retention Permission.
Planning Authority Decision	Refuse.
Type of Appeal	First Party.
Appellant(s)	Geoffrey Lyons.
Observer(s)	None.

Inspector's Report

Date of Site Inspection

27 February 2024

Inspector

Aisling Dineen

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Appendix 1 – Form 1: EIA Pre-Screening

1.0 Site Location and Description

- 1.1. The site is located in the townland of Cloghan, which is c.4.5 km southeast of Duleek in Co. Meath.
- 1.2. The site is situated at the end of a short narrow laneway, which is accessed off the public road, L- 10041. There are two established residential dwellings on either side of the lane access point. The site contains a dwelling house and large agricultural shed (both subject of this retention application) and a large concrete drive/paved area. There are two also two non-permanent storage containers located on the site.

2.0 Proposed Development

2.1. It is proposed to retain the dwelling house, of stated area 195 sq. m. and the agricultural shed, of stated area 480 sq. m. on the subject site. It is also proposed to retain the waste water treatment system and percolation area.

3.0 Planning Authority Decision

3.1. Decision

The planning authority made a decision to refuse planning permission on the 18th September 2023, for the following reasons:

 The proposed development is located within a rural area 'Under Strong Urban Influence', where it is a requirement for applicants to (i) comply with the Local Needs Qualifying Criteria as outlined in Section 9.4 of the Meath County Development Plan 2021 -2027 and to (ii) demonstrate a rural housing need.

Having regard to the planning history and in the absence of any documentation in relating to the existence of a dwelling on this site, it is not considered that the applicant has demonstrated a justification or need for the dwelling at this location in accordance with the provisions of the Meath County Development Plan 2021-2027. The development to be retained would, therefore establish an undesirable future precedent for developments of this kind and be contrary to the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.

- 2. Based on the information submitted, in particular the absence of any documentation in relating to the need for the agricultural structures to be retained, it is not considered that the applicant has demonstrated a justification or need for the structures of this scale at this location. The development to be retained would, therefore establish an undesirable future precedent for developments of this kind and be contrary to the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.
- It is policy (RD POL 43) of the Meath County Development Plan 2021 2027, 'To ensure that the required standards for sight distances and stopping sight distances are in compliance with current road geometry standards as outlined in the NRA document Design Manual for Roads and Bridges (DMRB), specifically Section TD 41 – 42/09 when assessing individual planning applications for individual houses in the countryside'.

Having regard to the failure of the particulars submitted with the application to demonstrate visibility splays in accordance with the requirements, the Local Planning Authority is not satisfied on the basis of the information submitted that safe visibility splays can be provided in each direction to the required standards. Accordingly, to permit the proposed development would endanger public safety by reason of a traffic hazard, be contrary to the aforementioned provisions of the Meath County Development Plan 2021 -2027 and thereby be contrary to the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.

The Chief Executive's decision reflects the planner's report.

3.2. Planning Authority Reports

3.2.1. Planning Reports

- Planning History & National and Local Policy is stated.
- No reports received in relation to environment, transportation or surface water.
- The area is an 'Area Under Strong Urban Influence', where local housing need polices are applicable under Section 9.4 of the plan. Having regard to previous refusals on the site, no details have been submitted as to whether

the existing dwelling to be retained has always been in situ, therefore the principle of the development cannot be substantiated.

- Regarding the agricultural shed (480 metres), there is no evidence to demonstrate that this shed is being used for agricultural purposes and the applicant has not provided any detail or justification with regard to same.
- It is considered that retention of the dwelling would not have any harmful impacts on the residential amenity of adjacent property.
- Proposed is to be serviced by a new treatment system. Details submitted indicate favourable conditions at the site.
- 3.2.2. Other Technical Reports

None.

3.3. Prescribed Bodies

None.

3.4. Third Party Observations

None.

4.0 **Planning History**

Planning Ref: SA60468 (Year 2006) Incomplete application.

Planning Ref: 70300 (Year 2007) Planning Permission refused, in summary, on the basis of the area being under Strong Urban Influence and lack of demonstrated rural generated housing need.

Planning Ref: SA/110016 (Year 2011):

Planning Permission refused for two reasons; in summary,

 Owing to derelict nature of the building to be restored the residential use considered to be abandoned and does not comply with Section 6.7.8 of the Meath Plan 2007-2013 and the Planning Act 2000. The proposal would set undesirable precedent for similar types of development. 2. On the basis of the area being under Strong Urban Influence and lack of demonstrated rural generated housing need.

5.0 Policy Context

5.1. **Development Plan**

The Meath County Development Plan, 2021-2027, is applicable.

The site is located on un-zoned land and outside of any settlement boundaries. It is within an the '*Bellewstown Hills and Uplands Landscape Character Area*'.

Chapter 9 of the Development Plan sets out the rural settlement strategy. This outlines that the planning authority recognises the long tradition of people living in rural areas and promotes sustainable rural settlement as a key component of delivering more balanced regional development. It sets out that rural development should be consolidated within existing villages and settlements that can build sustainable rural communities as set out in the National Planning Framework (NPF) and the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Eastern and Midlands Region (RSES).

The Development Plan seeks to accommodate rural generated housing needs where they arise, subject to local housing need criteria and development management standards. The following strategic policies are of relevance:

• RUR DEV SP 1: "To adopt a tailored approach to rural housing within County Meath as a whole, distinguishing between rural generated housing and urban generated housing in rural areas recognising the characteristics of the individual rural area types".

• RUR DEV SP 2: To ensure that individual house developments in rural areas satisfy the housing requirements of persons who are an intrinsic part of the rural community in which they are proposed, subject to compliance with normal planning criteria. Natural Heritage Designations.

The site is located within an area identified within a Rural Area Under Strong Urban Influence as indicated on Map 9.1 of the Development Plan. The Development Plan sets out the following guidance in respect of the area: Area 1 - Rural Areas under Strong Urban Influence "Key Challenge: To facilitate the housing requirements of the rural community while directing urban generated housing development to areas zoned for new housing in towns and villages in the area of the development plan. This area exhibits the characteristics of proximity to the immediate environs or close commuting catchment of Dublin, with a rapidly rising population and evidence of considerable pressure for development of housing due to proximity to such urban areas. This area includes the commuter- belt and peri-urban areas of the county and are the areas that are experiencing the most development pressure for one-off rural housing. These areas act as attractive residential locations for the inflow of migrants into the county".

The following policies are of relevance:

- RD POL1: Seeks to ensure that individual house developments in rural areas satisfy the housing requirements of persons who are an intrinsic part of the rural community in which they are proposed, subject to compliance with normal planning criteria.
- RD POL2: Seeks to facilitate the housing requirements of the rural community as identified while directing urban generated housing to areas zoned for new housing development in towns and villages in the area of the development plan.

Section 9.4 of the County Development Plan relates to: "persons who are an Intrinsic Part of the Rural Community". It outlines that the Planning Authority recognises the interest of persons local to or linked to a rural area, who are not engaged in significant agricultural or rural resource related occupation, to live in rural areas. Of relevance to this appeal, persons local to an area are considered to include:

 Persons who have spent substantial periods of their lives, living in rural areas as members of the established rural community for a period in excess of five years and who do not possess a dwelling or who have not possessed a dwelling in the past in which they have resided or who possess a dwelling in which they do not currently reside. Section 9.5.1 – Development Assessment Criteria – outlines criteria that the planning authority shall also consider in assessing individual proposals for one-off rural housing. These criteria include the following:

- The housing background of the applicant in terms of employment, social links to rural area and immediate family.
- Local circumstances and the degree to which the area surrounding area has been developed.
- The degree of existing development on the original landholding from which the site is taken.
- The suitability of the site in terms of access, wastewater disposal and house location relative to other policies and objectives of this Plan.
- The degree to which the proposal might be considered as infill development.

9.8.1 Agricultural Buildings

The provision of well-located structures and facilities necessary for good and environmentally sound agricultural practice shall be supported by the Planning Authority. The suitability of a given proposal will be determined by the following factors:

- The provision of buildings to a design, materials specification and appearance and at locations which would be compatible with the protection of rural amenities. Particular attention should be paid to developments therefore in sensitive landscapes as identified in the Landscape Character Assessment (Refer to Appendix 5);
- The availability of an effective means of farm waste management to ensure nutrient balancing between application of farm wastes to land and its balanced uptake by agricultural use of land;
- Whilst the Planning Authority recognises the primacy in land use terms of agriculture in rural areas and that the presence of individual housing should not impinge unduly on legitimate and necessary rural activity, regard should also be had to the unnecessary location of major new farm complexes proximate to existing residential development.

5.2. National Planning Framework

Policy Objective 19 is of relevance to the proposed development. It requires the following:

'Ensure, in providing for the development of rural housing, that a distinction is made between areas under urban influence, i.e. within the commuter catchment of cities and large towns and centres of employment, and elsewhere:

• In rural areas under urban influence, facilitate the provision of single housing in the countryside based on the core consideration of demonstrable economic or social need to live in a rural area and siting and design criteria for rural housing in statutory guidelines and plans, having regard to the viability of smaller towns and rural settlements;

• In rural areas elsewhere, facilitate the provision of single housing in the countryside based on siting and design criteria for rural housing in statutory guidelines and plans, having regard to the viability of smaller towns and rural settlements'.

5.3. Natural Heritage Designations

The subject site is not located within or contiguous to a Natura 2000 site. The nearest Natura 2000 sites are Boyne Coast and Estuary SAC (Site Code: 001957) and Boyne Estuary SPA (Site Code: 004080) located c. 10.5 km northeast of the site and the River Nanny Estuary and Shore SPA (Site Code 004158) situated c.12 km east.

5.4. EIA Screening

Having regard to the nature and scale of the proposed development, the site location outside of any protected site, the nature of the receiving environment, the limited ecological value of the lands in question, and the separation distance from the nearest sensitive location, there is no real likelihood of significant effects on the environment arising from the proposed development. The need for environmental impact assessment can, therefore, be excluded at preliminary examination and a screening determination is not required.

6.0 The Appeal

6.1. Grounds of Appeal

- There has been rural habitation on this site for over 200 years. The demolished property was in use until early 1990's after which it fell into dereliction.
- The applicant has regenerated the farm yard with the construction of a dwelling house and agriculture building which includes a storage barn and ancillary stable boxes.
- The dwelling has been constructed to modern standards with a compliant waste water treatment system.
- The property remains a viable agricultural holding and the applicant has provided a substantial agricultural building to facilitate this.
- The dwelling and agricultural buildings have a use, which is rural and is not of urban influence.
- Meath County Council in refusing planning permission over the past 20 years has allowed the previously existing house to fall into dereliction. The 2006 and 2007 proposals proposed the replacement of the existing house – by differing applicants, who had not met the housing needs criteria and the application was not refused on the condition of the house but on policy relating to rural settlement.
- Current national policy is moving towards the rehabilitation and restoration of all vacant and derelict property. While it is acknowledged that these works have been completed outside the planning and development control system, there is a lack of rural accommodation.
- The rebuilt house is not dedicated to specific personal housing need but can be fully utilised by people who are content to reside in an agricultural environment and can sustain their existence from same.
- It is submitted that the applicant has involvement in 'extensive farming interests' and has a number of parcels of land, all in Co. Meath, across which

he has a string of horses. The farm buildings are used as fodder storage and secure machinery and supplement storage. Policy 9.8.1 does not place any linkage between the scale of farm enterprise and the scale of buildings and the keeping of horses is not as dependent on quantity of land as other livestock.

- The existing laneway has been in existence for over 200 years and is therefore an established entrance. The existing hedgerow bounding the roadway is c.4 metres from the edge of the roadway and these hedgerows form the boundaries to more recent residential developments. The sight distances are set out on attached drawings showing 90 metres in either direction set back 2.4 metres.
- It is noted that there is no objection from the transportation department with an engineering objection to the proposal.

6.2. Applicant Response

The applicant is the appellant.

6.3. Planning Authority Response

- Correspondence and content of the first party appeal is noted. All matters
 raised therein have been previously addressed by the Executive Planners
 report dated 18th September 2023 and the planning authority wishes to rely on
 the content of same.
- The Board is requested to uphold the decision of the Planning Authority to refuse permission in this case.

6.4. **Observations**

None.

6.5. Further Responses

None.

7.0 Assessment

- 7.1. Having examined all the application and appeal documentation on file and having regard to the relevant local and national policy and guidance, I consider that the main issues in this appeal are those raised in the grounds of appeal and the planning authorities' reasons for refusal and I am satisfied that no other substantive issues arise. AA also needs to be considered. The main issues, therefore, are as follows:
 - Rural Housing Policy
 - Agricultural Building
 - Residential Amenity
 - Traffic Safety
 - Waste Water Treatment
 - Other Issue
 - Appropriate Assessment

7.2. Rural Housing Policy

- 7.3. It is apparent that the subject dwelling was reconstructed from, what was a derelict dwelling some time ago. The exact date of reconstruction is not stated anywhere in the documents lodged, although the appellant has submitted that the house was habitable until the 1990s and after this it became derelict. The development description has advertised; '*the retention of the reconstruction of derelict cottage*', therefore there is no argument regarding the fact that the cottage in question was in fact derelict.
- 7.4. The planner's report comments regarding the lack of evidence of the existence of house at this location is not directly appropriate in the assessment of the subject application.
- 7.5. Under a previous application on the site; planning register reference number SA 110016, the planner comments that '*There is an old derelict cottage on the application site. All walls, roof, windows and doors are not intact…the structure can only be described as being in ruins*'.

- 7.6. Therefore, given these comments, which were made following a site inspection on the 2nd March 2011, the conclusion under this application was that the residential use was no longer extant and the residential use had been abandoned. Therefore, this report concluded that '*The structure does not constitute a habitable dwelling and the proposed development would constitute a new dwelling therefore the applicants are required to demonstrate a rural housing need at this location*'. This application (SA 110016) and the decision is not presently under review however I note that the decision made by the planning authority is relevant to the subject appeal and it is considered that it was a fair and reasonable decision, regarding the facts relating to the appeal site.
- 7.7. It is noted that the policy under the relevant previous plan; Section 6.7.8 Vernacular Rural Buildings and Replacement Dwellings and RD POL 46 of the Meath County Development Plan 2007-2013, is broadly similar to Section 9.14.1 *Development Assessment Criteria for refurbishment and/or replacement of existing housing stock in rural areas,* of the current plan; Meath County Development Plan 2021 -2027 and policy relating to the definition of 'a habitable dwelling' is the same in both plans.

The above plans refer, that a habitable house' means

- (a) A house used as a dwelling
- (b) Is not in use but when last used was used, disregarding any unauthorised use, as a dwelling and is not derelict, or,
- (c) Was provided for use as a dwelling but has not been occupied'
- 7.8. Accordingly, it is considered that as the previous residential use was abandoned that the house, the subject of the current retention application, falls within an area under Strong Urban Influence, that a housing need assessment of the applicant, within the interpretation of rural housing policy as per para 5.1 above, must be carried out.
- 7.9. There are no documents on the file indicating any housing need relating to the applicant. The applicant is stated to have an address at a location c.10 km from the appeal site. The submission to the appeal on behalf of the applicant/appellant suggests that housing need does not apply to the applicant:

'The rebuilt house is not dedicated to specific personal housing need but can be fully utilised by people who are content to reside in an agricultural environment and can sustain their existence from same'

- 7.10. This assertion appears to admit that there is no claim to housing need on behalf of the applicant, however it is suggested that housing need could be established by a certain class of people at a future time. I am of the viewpoint that at the time of this assessment, that no details have been submitted to fulfil the housing need criteria of the applicant and I do not consider it appropriate/fair or consistent with the application of planning policy and practice, to make a favourable recommendation on this application based on a potential future occupancy of the subject house.
- 7.11. Therefore, it is considered that the applicant has not demonstrated a housing need, and/or a social or economic need to live at this location, with an address some 10 km away.
- 7.12. It is considered that a person who would fall within a class of rural housing need, specific to this area, may, without prejudice, meet rural housing criteria, however in this instance such criteria are not demonstrated. Therefore, I concur with the planning authority in its first reason for refusal.

7.13. Agricultural Building

- 7.14. There are two issues relating to the agricultural building/shed, which is constructed to the north of the house on site which merit discussion; The justification for the agricultural building, and the overall mass and scale of the structure.
- 7.15. With regard to the justification for the structure the planning application contained little substantive detail as to what the structure is actually being used for. The plans refer to '*Agricultural Storage Shed' and 'Stable Boxes'* but little if no detail was submitted to indicate the type/nature of agriculture, which the shed supports, although stable boxes, indicates the keeping of horses.
- 7.16. I noted that at the time of inspection, that the large green shuttered door on the agricultural shed was locked and therefore the contents within were not inspected. The stable boxes attached to the outside of the large shed structure were not enclosed with stable doors etc. Except for one compartment, the stables were open with various items such as disused furniture and random items left within. These

stable areas were certainly not under horse related usage. I observed no horses in the yard or in the shed area at the time of inspection.

- 7.17. The application site location map does indicate by blue marker, that there are two fields situated to the north of the shed, which are in the ownership of the applicant. This is not supported by any land registry documents or REPS documents or any other evidential detail to validate ownership of this parcel of land. No other details in support of farming practice are submitted apart from the statements submitted under the appeal, which state that the applicant has '*Extensive farming interests*' and '*has a number of parcels of land, all in Co. Meath, across which he has a string of horses*'. It is noted that there is no evidence/documentation submitted to validate ownership of '*A number of parcels of land*' in Co. Meath or validate ownership of such horses or of horse related agricultural activities, except for the statements under the appeal submission.
- 7.18. The appeal document submits that the shed is used for storage of fodder, supplements and machinery. While this may be true, although not validated by any supporting documents submitted under the application or the appeal, there is no justification for the scale of the agricultural building.
- 7.19. With regard to scale of the agricultural shed, which measures 480 sq. m. in floor area and is a stated 10 metres in height, it is unquestionably on the large side, when compared with the average agricultural shed structure. The size in the absence of a valid justification for its use is problematic as there appears to be a void in validated information under the application and appeal documentation as to the actual purpose and use of the shed.
- 7.20. The appeal document argues that there is no requirement or policy under Section9.8.1 to link the scale of a farm enterprise with the scale of buildings. It is also argued that the keeping of horses is not as dependent on quantity of land as other livestock.
- 7.21. I am of the viewpoint that policy 9.8.1 clearly states that agriculture structures, which are 'necessary' for good and sound agricultural practice shall be supported by the Council. In this instance as the actual use of buildings and the agricultural practice itself has not been validated, therefore, it has not been validated that the subject structure is 'necessary' for agricultural practice.

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- 7.22. In relation to the scale of the agricultural structure, the policy clearly requires that 'the provision of buildings to a design, materials specification and appearance and at locations, which would be compatible with the protection of rural amenities'
- 7.23. I concur with the point that the keeping of horses is not as dependent as quantity of land as other livestock and I would also consider that the scale of the agricultural structure, the subject of retention, is not specifically relevant or applicable to the keeping of horses either. In this regard, I concur with the planning authority in that there is no justification for the subject agricultural structure, or for the scale of the subject agricultural structure.

7.24. Residential Amenity

7.25. There are two houses positioned to the north and south of the access lane, which serves the subject site. Both houses are at a satisfactory distance such that there will be no impacts on the residential amenity of both properties with regard to overlooking or overshadowing, of the said properties.

7.26. Traffic Safety

7.27. I note that the planning authority recommended a refusal as the documents submitted with the application did not have clear visibility splays submitted with the plans and documents attached, which is a requirement. This is considered reasonable. However, the appeal submission includes the required plan with visibility triangle clearly demonstrated. I noted at the time of inspection, that the front boundary of both premises either side of the access lane, are appropriately set back and maintained. Accordingly, I find no issue with this proposal from the perspective of traffic safety.

7.28. <u>Waste Water Treatment</u>

7.29. It is proposed to retain the waste water treatment system and percolation area. A site characterisation assessment report is submitted. All required minimum distances are adhered to. There are no vegetative indicators or odours, which would appear to suggest that the system is not functioning correctly. I am satisfied with the details submitted regarding waste water treatment.

7.30. Other Issue

7.31. Under the opening paragraph of the appeal document, the term 'appeal against the decision of Dublin City Council to refuse the above planning application' is stated. I consider this to be a typographical error and I note that all of the appeal documentation including planning register reference number, relates to the subject application in the functional area of Meath County Council.

7.32. Appropriate Assessment

Having regard to the limited nature of the proposed development and the nature of the receiving environment and 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 either individually or in combination with other plans or projects on a European site.

8.0 **Recommendation**

8.1. I recommend that retention permission be refused.

8.2. Reasons and Considerations

 Having regard to the derelict nature of the pre-existing house and having regard to the location of the site within an Area Under Strong Urban Influence in accordance with the Sustainable Rural Housing Guidelines for Planning Authorities published by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government 2005, National Policy Objective 19 of the National Planning Framework (February 2018) which, for rural areas under urban influence, seeks to facilitate the provision of single housing in the countryside based on the core consideration of demonstrable economic or social need to live in a rural area, having regard to the viability of smaller towns and rural settlements, the Board could not be satisfied on the basis of the information on the file that the applicant comes within the scope of either economic or social housing need criteria as set out in the overarching National Guidelines. The proposed development, in absence of any identified local based need for the house at this location, would result in a haphazard and unsustainable form of development in an unserviced area, would contribute to the encroachment of random rural development in the area and would militate against the preservation of the rural environment and the efficient provision of public services and infrastructure and undermine the settlement strategy set out in the development plan. The proposed development would, therefore, be contrary to the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.

2. Based on the information submitted and in the absence of any documentation in relation to the 'necessity' for the agricultural structure to be retained, it is considered that the applicant has not demonstrated a justification for the necessity for the agricultural structure, of this scale, at this location. Accordingly, the development to be retained would conflict with the provisions of Section 9.8.1 of the County Development Plan 2021 – 2027, and would establish an undesirable future precedent for developments of this kind and would be contrary to the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.

I confirm that this report represents my professional planning assessment, judgement and opinion on the matter assigned to me and that no person has influenced or sought to influence, directly or indirectly, the exercise of my professional judgement in an improper or inappropriate way.

Aisling Dineen Planning Inspector 8th March 2024

Appendix 1 - Form 1

EIA Pre-Screening

[EIAR not submitted]

An Bord Pleanála Case Reference								
Proposed Development Summary		velopment	RETENTION OF RECONSTRUCTED DERELICT HOUSE AND TREATMENT SYSTEM AND PA. RETENTION OF AGRICULTURAL SHED.					
Development Address			CLOGHAN, ARDCATH, GARRISTOWN, CO. MEATH.					
			velopment come within the definition of a		<mark>Yes</mark>			
 'project' for the purposes of EIA? (that is involving construction works, demolition, or interventions in the natural surroundings) No furthe action required								
2. Is the proposed development of a class specified in Part 1 or Part 2, Schedule 5, Planning and Development Regulations 2001 (as amended) and does it equal or exceed any relevant quantity, area or limit where specified for that class?								
Yes		Class	. EIA Mandatory EIAR required					
No			Proceed to Q.3					
3. Is the proposed development of a class specified in Part 2, Schedule 5, Planning and Development Regulations 2001 (as amended) but does not equal or exceed a relevant quantity, area or other limit specified [sub-threshold development]?								
			Threshold	Comment	C	conclusion		
				(if relevant)				
No			N/A		Prelir	IAR or minary nination red		
Yes		Class/Thre	shold		Proce	eed to Q.4		

4. Has Schedule 7A information been submitted?				
No		Preliminary Examination required		
Yes		Screening Determination required		

Inspector: Aisling Dineen Date: 08th March 2024