

Inspector's Report ABP-319929-24

Development Retention/completion of conversion

and extension of permitted structure

granted under ref. no. 07/574,

together with all associated site works.

Location 'Taobh Coille', Coolfore,

Monasterboice, Co. Louth, A92 C6F8

Planning Authority Louth County Council.

Planning Authority Reg. Ref. 24/60197.

Applicant(s) Noel & Mariosa Brodigan.

Type of Application Retention Permissions & Permission.

Planning Authority Decision Refusal of Retention Permission &

Permission.

Type of Appeal First Party.

Appellant(s) Noel & Mariosa Brodigan.

Observer(s) None.

Date of Site Inspection 3rd September 2024.

Inspector Heidi Thorsdalen

1.0 Site Location and Description

- 1.1. The site is located in the townland of Coolfore, Monasterboice, approximately 6.4 km northwest of Drogheda and approximately 4 km northwest of M1, Junction 10. The site is accessed via the N51 or the R168 Drogheda Road and the Hill of Rath Road (L6322) from the southeast or via the R168 Drogheda Road and local rural roads from the northwest. The surrounding area is rural and agricultural. The appeal site is located at the western end of a string of residential development from the Hill of Rath crossroad.
- 1.2. The appeal site has a stated area of 0.3 ha and gently slopes towards the west. The site comprises of a large four bedroom two-storey detached dwelling with a stated gross floor area 275 m2. A detached single storey structure with permitted use as a double garage and incidental storage is located adjacent to the dwelling, and the retention for its conversion to habitable accommodation forms part of this appeal. The dwelling fronts the local road and is orientated southwest to northeast, and the detached structure is orientated perpendicular to the dwelling. Both buildings are setback from the road by c. 26 m, situated towards the rear of a large plot and the main gardens extending to the sides and the front.
- 1.3. The dwelling and the detached structure have a render with brick detailing finish and a stone finish on selected elevations. The roof tiles are black/blue. Access to the appeal site is via a splayed vehicular entrance with a stone wall finish. The remainder of the front boundary is defined by hedging and trees. The west and northern (rear) boundaries abut field boundaries and are defined by trees and hedgerows. The eastern boundary grassed and open towards the adjacent residential property.

2.0 Proposed Development

- 2.1. The proposed development would comprise of the following:
 - Retention of conversion, and completion of same, of previously permitted structure granted under Ref. no. 07/574 for incorporation into existing dwelling house for residential use.

- Construction of a new corridor link extension, measuring 11.4 m in length, c.
 2.7 m in depth and c. 2.95 m in height.
- Relocation of existing certified wastewater treatment system and install new eco flo coco filter and polishing filter.
- All associated site development and infrastructure works

3.0 Planning Authority Decision

3.1. Decision

- 3.2. Decision to refuse permission for 2 no. reasons listed below:
 - 1. The garage structure permitted on the site under File ref. 07/574 has not been built in accordance with the parent permission and as such is unauthorised. The proposal to retain and convert its use for residential purposes with an associated link from the main dwelling house gives rise to over-development of the site and the floor area and layout of the extension would give rise to an independent unit on site. The proposal for retention is contrary to the provisions of section 13.8.36 of the Louth County Development Plan 2021-2027 as varied. The proposal is, therefore, considered contrary to the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.
 - 2. This site is located in Rural Policy Zone 2 as designated by the Louth County Development Plan 2021 2027 (as varied). Permission was granted under ref no: 07/574 for a dwelling house and domestic garage on this site. The proposed development description is considered misleading and is essentially to accommodate another dwelling house on a restricted site in a rural area. The principle of subdividing the site to accommodate two separate dwellings and/or use of a permitted garage structure as an alternative use for habitation notwithstanding that it has not been built in accordance with the plans and particular of the parent permission is contrary to the conditions attached to Planning Ref. No. 07/574. The proposal if permitted would set an undesirable future precedent for rural based developments of excessive scale on restricted sites and as such would be contrary to the proper planning and sustainable of the area.

3.3. Planning Authority Reports

3.3.1. Planning Reports

- 3.3.2. Planning Report (signed 30th May 2024) is summarised as follows:
 - The site is within Rural Policy Zone 2, defined as an 'Area under strong urban influence'.
 - In terms of the principle of the development, it is considered that the
 proposals give rise to an independent unit due to floor area and layout, and
 that the floor area at 126.205m² is considered excessive in terms of scale and
 contrary to Section 13.9.21 of the Development Plan.
 - The rationale for the unit relating to personal circumstances is noted.
 - Permitting the proposed development would set an undesirable precedent of other similar inappropriate development in the rural area.
 - The proposed development is noted to have satisfied assessment criteria relating to open space, neighbouring residential amenity, vehicular access, wastewater, and surface water.
 - The garage structure permitted on the site under PA ref. 07/574 has not been built in accordance with the parent permission and as such is unauthorised.
 - The principal of subdividing the site to accommodate two separate dwellings is contrary to the provisions of the parent permission ref. no. 07/574.
 - The proposal to retain and convert its use for residential purposes with an associated link from the main dwelling house development gives rise to overdevelopment of the site.

3.3.3. Other Technical Reports

- Waste Management & Environment Section (2nd May 2024): No objection, subject to conditions.
- Place Making & Physical Development Section (30th April 2024): Request for further information demonstrating minimum sightline requirements in line with Condition 15, PA ref. 07/574.

3.4. Prescribed Bodies

None.

3.5. Third Party Observations

None.

4.0 **Planning History**

- 4.1. The following relevant planning history is noted for the appeal site:
 - PA Ref. 07/574: Permission granted for the applicant for a dwelling with detached garage, and associated site development works and subject to 15 conditions.
 - PA Ref. 22/339: Retention permission refused for the applicant for change of use and alterations, from existing detached double garage/storage area to existing use as a gym/yoga room, home office/study, toilet/wash facilities and food preparation area, all incidental to the enjoyment of existing dwelling. 3 no. reasons for refusal relating to: provision of self-contained dwelling unit and contrary to Section 13.8.7; capacity of wastewater treatment system and percolation area; and existing surface water arrangements and policy objective IU19.
 - PA Ref. 22/803: Retention permission and permission refused for the applicant for the conversion of existing detached garage to independent living unit to extend the living accommodation of existing dwelling and alterations. 2 no. reasons for refusal relating to: contrary to Section 13.8.36 on scale and not ancillary to the main dwelling, and materially contravenes Condition 14 (PA ref. 0/7574) use of garage; and capacity of existing wastewater Treatment Systems and contrary to Policy IU16, 17 & 18.
- 4.2. The following planning enforcement history is noted for the appeal site:
 - Ref. 22 U005: Warning letter issued 16th February 2022, alleged noncompliance with Condition No. 14 of Planning Reference: 07/574 (Garage to be used solely for purposes incidental to the enjoyment of the dwelling house

and not for any residential, industrial, business commercial or anti-social purpose) cited.

5.0 Policy Context

- 5.1. The Louth Council Development Plan 2021-2027, as varied.
- 5.1.1. The Louth County Council Development Plan 2021-2027, as varied, and which came into effect on 11th November 2021.
- 5.1.2. The site is located within an area designated as Rural Policy Zone 2 "Area under strong urban Influence", Map 3.2.
- 5.1.3. Chapter 13 Development Management Guidelines, Section 13.9 Housing in the Open Countryside:
 - Section 13.9.21 Family Flat/ Independent Living Unit:

"A family flat or independent living unit is a separate unit of living accommodation on the site of an existing dwelling unit used to accommodate an immediate family member of the main household on the site. The construction of an extension or conversion of part of an existing house or garage/outbuilding to a family flat or independent living unit, shall comply with the following requirements:

Rationale – The need for the development must be clearly set out.

Scale – The family flat shall be ancillary to the main dwelling and shall be modest in size and scale with a floor space that shall generally not exceed 50m².

Integration – If attached to the main dwelling an internal link shall be provided.

Ownership – It shall not be sold or let as an independent unit and shall remain in the same ownership as the main dwelling on the site.

Access – It shall not have a separate vehicular access.

Services – If the property is served by an individual onsite wastewater treatment system this system must have the capacity to accommodate any additional loading in accordance with the requirements of the EPA Code of

Practice: Domestic Waste Water Treatment Systems (p.e. ≤10) (2021). This may result in the requirement for existing on-site systems to be upgraded to the current standards."

- Section 13.9.20 Residential Extensions
- Section 13.9.17 Wastewater Treatment and Water Supply
- Section 13.9.18 Surface Water; compliance with the requirements of the EPA guidelines or other subsequent standards in addition to the policy objectives and criteria set out in Chapter 10 of this Plan.
- 5.1.4. The following policies are noted:
 - Section 3.16.2 Extensions to Dwellings, Policy Objective 34
 - Section 10.2.3 On-Site Wastewater Treatment System, Policy Objectives
 IU16, IU17 and IU 18
 - Section 10.2.3 Sustainable Drainage Systems, Policy Objective IU19
- 5.1.5. Louth County Council Development Contribution Scheme 2023, Section 8:

 Development Contribution Charges, "Note 1: the provision of an extension to an existing house or the conversion for use as part of the house of any garage, store, shed, or other structure used for ancillary domestic purposes is considered exempt from development contribution charges."

5.2. National Policy and Guidance

5.2.1. Code of Practice, Domestic Waste Water Treatment Systems (Population Equivalent ≤10), March 2021, The Environmental Protection Agency.

5.3. Natural Heritage Designations

5.3.1. The site is located c. 2.3km north of River Boyne and River Blackwater SAC and c.3.5km north of the River Boyne and River Blackwater SPA.

5.4. EIA Screening

5.4.1. Having regard to the nature and small scale of the proposed development, and the nature of the receiving environment, and its proximity to 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**

- 6.1.1. A 1st Party appeal has been lodged by GF Planning on behalf of the applicants Noel and Mariosa Brodigan. The grounds of the appeal are summarised as follows:
 - It is submitted that the garage as permitted under PA ref. 07/574 was built, and the retention permission sought for the conversion into living accommodation should not prejudice the determination of same.
 - It is submitted that it is unreasonable to suggest the scale is now excessive or overdevelopment given the principle of the structure, the floor space and height were deemed acceptable under PA ref. 07/574.
 - It is submitted that the use of the site a residential dwelling is already
 permitted, and that the Planning Authority has confirmed that alterations to the
 structure are visually acceptable, have no impact on neighbouring residential
 amenity and that ample space for recreational and domestic purposes have
 been.
 - It is submitted that a reduction in floor area to 50 m² could be conditioned if considered necessary.
 - It is submitted that this is not an independent living unit, but an extension to the main dwelling.
 - Applicants' circumstances are noted.
 - It is submitted that the question of precedent would not arise given each application should be treated on its own merits and the merit of this application is justified.

• Reference made to the Constitution of Ireland (Articles 41.1, 41.2, 42.1 and 42A.1), Guardianship of Infants Act 1964 (Section 3) and case law regarding the interests of the Family unit, and the welfare and rights of children.

6.2. Planning Authority Response

6.2.1. The response from the Planning Authority (4th July 2024) refers to assessment contained with the planning report (30th May 2024) and makes no further comments.

6.3. **Observations**

6.3.1. None.

7.0 Assessment

- 7.1. Having examined the application details and all other documentation on file, and having inspected the site, and having regard to the relevant policies and guidance, I consider that the main issues in this appeal to be considered are as follows:
 - Development Plan Provisions
 - Wastewater Treatment
 - Appropriate Assessment

7.2. Development Plan Provisions

- 7.2.1. I note from the site history that the overall dimensions of the existing detached structure including the two floor levels conform with what was permitted under PA ref. 07/574. I further note that prior to its conversion to habitable accommodation for which retention permission is sought, the structure was in use as a garage/incidental storage for the main house in accordance with PA ref. 07/574 Condition 14.
- 7.2.2. The proposed accommodation layout of the conversion provides for self-contained living accommodation, and I agree with the Planning Authority that the guidelines contained within Section 13.9.21 Family Flat / Independent Living Unit of the Development Plan are applicable to the proposed development. I note the Planning Authority's reference to Section 13.8.36 in Refusal Reason 1, however, I have taken

- this to be a typo as the referenced guidelines relate to similar developments but in an urban setting.
- 7.2.3. Section 13.9.21, subject to satisfying assessment criteria, provides for the conversion of a detached garage/outbuilding in a rural location to provide for separate living accommodation on the site of the main dwelling and to be occupied by an immediate family member. I note that the Planning Authority is satisfied that the proposed conversion will not unduly affect the visual or residential amenities, that the access, surface water management and the wastewater treatment system proposals are acceptable, and that no concerns regarding the ownership or the rationale for the proposed development. I would concur with the assessment of the Planning Authority with the exception of the wastewater treatment which I will consider in further detail in Section 7.4 below.
- 7.2.4. The scale of the detached structure is as permitted, and I consider it subordinate to the main dwelling taking account of footprint, height, and the perpendicular positioning in relation to the main dwelling. I note from the rationale that the proposed use will be ancillary to the main dwelling and is currently occupied by the applicants as observed during my site visit.
- 7.2.5. I note the permitted upstairs would not be suitable for habitable accommodation due to floor to ceiling height restrictions, and as such, its function should be reverted to incidental storage and could be conditioned in the event of a grant of permission. The gross ground floor space at c.97m² would substantially exceed the 50m² standards. I note the standards closely align with the dimensions of a one bedroom flat, and in this regard, I would consider it more relevant where a new structure is proposed or where a part of the existing dwelling is to be converted. It would be reasonable to apply a degree of flexibility when dealing with an existing permitted detached structure. In this regard, I do not see any benefits in restricting the conversion of the ground floor space given the proposed development satisfies all other Section 13.9.21 criteria.
- 7.2.6. I note the applicants have outlined that part of the of the structure could be converted back to garage/storage to address the matter of floor space if necessary, however, as stated, I do not see any merits in doing this at ground floor level, but I consider it applicable to first floor. It is also deemed that the proposed accommodation can

- revert back to being a garage and incidental storage when no longer occupied by a family member.
- 7.2.7. The proposed development includes a glazed link extension to integrate the converted garage to the main dwelling. I note this was not proposed in previous applications. Given there are no requirements for the detached structure to be linked to the main dwelling under Section 13.9.21, and taking account of the scale, the positioning of the link and the planning history, I consider it surplus to the proposed development and unnecessarily restrictive to the external use of the property. I am satisfied that the proposed link extension can be omitted by condition in the event of a grant of permission. This would also address the Planning Authority's reason relating to overdevelopment.
- 7.2.8. The Planning Authority's reason for refusal references the location of the conversion within the Rural Policy Zone 2 and the principle of subdividing the site to accommodate another dwelling. As noted above, I considered that the rationale for the proposed conversion and ownership criteria under Section 13.9.21 of the Development Plan have been satisfied.
- 7.2.9. Having regard to the above, I am satisfied that the proposed development accords with relevant Section 13.9.21 of the Development Plan subject to conditions restricting occupancy and use. I do not consider the exceedance of the floor space standards to be a material contravention of the Development Plan given Section 13.9.21 are only guidelines.

7.3. Wastewater treatment

7.3.1. The existing onsite wastewater treatment system (wwts) is located within the eastern part of the site, adjacent to the detached structure. I note from the submitted report by Traynor Environmental (dated 11th April 2024) and the Inspection of the Sewage Treatment System and Percolation Area Report (Paul Martin, dated 10/10/2022), submitted under PA ref. 22/803, that the existing onsite wwts consists of an 8PE O'Reilly Oakstown Treatment System and that treated effluent is pumped to a raised c. 200 m2 soil polishing filter/percolation area. Furthermore, submitted performance results for the existing 8PE system corresponds to EN 12566-3 and S.R. 66. Both reports confirm that with an existing system capacity of 8 PE (1200 l/d), the

- additional loading of a bedroom within the converted structure can be catered for. There is no indication within the submitted reports that the current system does not accord with current standards. Conditions 11, 12 and 13 under PA ref. 07/574 in relation to the existing onsite wwts are noted.
- 7.3.2. The Inspection Report (dated 10/10/2022) noted that based on visual inspection the existing system appeared well drained and no nuisance problems such as odours or ponding were noted. It concluded that the system appeared to be in good working order and that the percolation area did not pose an environmental hazard. The report by Traynor Environmental does not outline any concerns with the existing system, but states that a relocation is required to ensure minimum distance as per Table 6.2 of the EPA Guidelines from the converted habitable accommodation to the tank and polishing filter. Of note, I did not observe any issues with the existing system during my site visit, the ground was firm, no odours, and the vegetation did not suggest any problems or recent remedial works.
- 7.3.3. Having regard to minimum separation distance in Table 6.2 of the EPA Guidelines and having reviewed submitted Drawing No. TE24.220.100, I am satisfied that the location of the existing system meets or exceeds distances to specified features with exception of the distance to dwelling given the conversion of the garage. The existing tank is located c. 3.7 m from the gable of the converted structure, and it is proposed to relocate the tank further east to achieve a buffer of 8,267 mm which exceeds the minimum 7 m separation distance. The existing soil filter / percolation area is located c. 7.5 m from the converted structure, although I note only a small portion of the area is located within the required 10 m minimum separation distance. It is proposed to dismantle the existing treatment area and create a new one further east, the proposed separation distance to the converted structure is stated as 10,962 mm. I note that the relocation of the system and the proposed new location for the raised polishing filter area complies with Table 6.2 except for distances to trees.
- 7.3.4. The EPA Guidelines requires a site characteristics form and a percolation test to be provided for any new wwts and these have not been provided. From review of GSI mapping¹, I note that the appeal site is located on poor aquifers with high

¹ Geological Survey Ireland, website visited 22nd October 2024: www.gsi.ie/en-ie/data-and-maps/Pages/default.aspx

groundwater vulnerability and falls within the R1 response category where an onsite system is acceptable subject to normal practices. Further site details are noted including onsite BRE 365 soakaway trail pits as referred to in the Traynor Environmental Soakaway Design report (dated 11th April 2024) and detailed in the Soakaway Design Report (Paul Martin, dated 10/10/2022, PA ref. 22803); and Traynor Environmental report, Figure 2 providing a cross section of the proposed raised 200m² polishing filter area and which indicates a design based on a groundwater level set at 800 mm BGL. In addition, the existing system appears to operate satisfactorily within the site and PA ref. 07/574, Conditions 11d and 12 in terms of maintenance and certification are noted. I do not however, consider that this provides sufficient detail to satisfy the requirements of the EPA Guidelines and as such, I do not agree with the Planning Authority that adequate information has been submitted for the proposed new system to demonstrate that there will be no threat of environmental pollution.

7.3.5. Having regard to the above, I consider that the applicant has demonstrated that the existing system has the capacity to accommodate the proposed development, that it is in good working order and appears to comply with the EPA Guidelines except for distances to dwelling. Furthermore, retaining the existing polishing filter area which is noted to operate satisfactorily is likely to pose less risk to the groundwater environment than implementing a new system. Given the variations in separation distance are minor and relate to a dwelling rather than a potential pathway feature to groundwater, I consider that retaining the existing polishing filter area to accommodate the proposed development would be acceptable. The relocation of the tank would, however, be acceptable given this would not pose a risk to the groundwater environment. I am satisfied that this can be conditioned in the event of a grant of permission and I have recommended as such.

8.0 AA Screening

8.1. Having regard to the nature and scale of the proposed development and the nature of the receiving environment, and the distance from the nearest European site, no Appropriate Assessment issues arise. Therefore, 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.

9.0 Recommendation

9.1. Having regard to the foregoing I recommend a grant of permission for the reasons and considerations and subject to the conditions set out below.

10.0 Reasons and Considerations

10.1. Having regard to the information submitted with the application and the nature and scale of the proposed development, it is considered that, subject to compliance with the conditions set out below, the proposed development would comply with Section 13.9.21 with respect to the provision of ancillary living accommodation as set out in the Louth County Development Plan 2021 – 2027, as varied, would not be injurious to the visual or residential amenities of the area and would, therefore, be in accordance with the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.

11.0 Conditions

ot R	coarticulars submitted with the planning application except as may be otherwise required by the following conditions. Reason: To clarify the plans and particulars for which permission is granted.
(a) (b) the R si of common R	The proposed development shall be amended as follows: (a) The proposed glazed link extension shall be omitted. (b) The attic space shall be converted back to incidental storage space to the main dwelling. Revised drawings showing compliance with these requirements shall be submitted to the planning authority for written agreement within 3 months of the date of this grant of permission, and works to complete the conversion as per agreed revised drawings shall be carried out with 18 months of the date of this permission. Reason: In the interests of visual amenity and to restrict the use of the extension in the interest of residential amenity.

3	The independent family unit for a family member(s) shall not be sold, let or otherwise conveyed as an independent living unit and shall revert to use as part of the main dwelling on the cessation of such use. The existing garden and curtilage of the overall residential property on this site shall not be subdivided. Reason: In order to comply with the policy objectives of the development plan HOU 41 and HOU 42 for the area.
4	 (a) The percolation/polishing filter area shall not be decommissioned and shall be retained in its current position as implemented under PA ref. 07/574. (b) The 8PE septic tank/ wastewater treatment system shall be relocated and no part of it shall be closer than 7 m to the converted garage, and installed in accordance with the standards set out in the document entitled "Code of Practice - Domestic Waste Water Treatment Systems (Population Equivalent ≤ 10) " – Environmental Protection Agency, 2021. Within 12 months of the date of this grant of permission, the applicant shall submit a report to the planning authority from a suitably qualified person (with professional indemnity insurance) certifying that the septic tank/ wastewater treatment system and associated works is constructed and operating in accordance with the standards set out in the Environmental Protection Agency document referred to above. Reason: In the interest of public health and to prevent water pollution.
5	Site development and building works shall be carried out only between the hours of 0700 to 1800] Mondays to Friday inclusive, between 0800 to 1400 hours on Saturdays and not at all on Sundays and public holidays. Deviation from these times will only be allowed in exceptional circumstances where prior written approval has been received from the planning authority. Reason: In order to safeguard the [residential] amenities of property in the vicinity.
6	Surface water drainage arrangements shall comply with the requirements of the planning authority for such works and services. Reason: In the interest of public health and surface water management.
7	All public service cables for the development, including electrical and telecommunications cables, shall be located underground. Reason: In the interest of visual amenity.

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.

Heidi Thorsdalen Senior Planning Inspector

25th October 2024

Appendix 1 - Form 1

EIA Pre-Screening

[EIAR not submitted]

An Boro			319929			
Proposed Development Summary		elopment	Retention/completion of conversion and extension of permitted structure granted under ref. no. 07/574, together with all associated site works.			
Development Address			'Taobh Coille', Coolfore, Monasterboice, Co. Louth, A92 C6F8			
1. Does the proposed dev			velopment come within the definition of a		Yes	✓
			n works, demolition, or interventions in the		No	
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			EIA Mandatory EIAR required			
No	√		Proceed to Q.3			eed 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 (if relevant)	С	onclusion
No	✓		N/A	(II relevant)	Prelir	IAR or minary nination red
Yes					Proce	eed to Q.4

4. Has Schedule 7A information been submitted? N/A as not a Class, see Question 3 above.		
No		Preliminary Examination required
Yes		Screening Determination required

Inspector:	Date: _25/10/2024
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