



An
Bord
Pleanála

Inspector's Report

ABP-320125-24

Development

Protected Structure: Demolish existing temporary toilet/storage block and existing modern extensions and shed, construction of flat roof extension, internal alterations to same and all associated works (RPS 072/NIAH Reg. No. 12900724)

Location

Epworth Hall, Main Street,
Knocknamoe, Abbeyleix, Co. Laois

Planning Authority

Laois County Council

Planning Authority Reg. Ref.

23/60442

Applicant(s)

Laois Bible Church

Type of Application

Permission

Planning Authority Decision

Grant Permission

Type of Appeal

Third Party.

Appellant(s)

Abbeyleix Tidy Towns.

Observer(s)

None.

Date of Site Inspection

7th March, 2025

Inspector

Aiden O'Neill

Contents

1.0 Site Location and Description.....	4
2.0 Proposed Development.....	4
3.0 Planning Authority Decision	5
3.1. Decision	5
3.2. Planning Authority Reports.....	6
3.3. Prescribed Bodies	9
3.4. Third Party Observations.....	9
4.0 Planning History	9
5.0 Policy Context	10
Development Plan.....	10
5.2. Natural Heritage Designations	12
6.0 EIA Screening	12
7.0 The Appeal.....	13
7.1. Grounds of Appeal	13
7.2. Applicant Response	15
7.3. Planning Authority Response	17
7.4. Observations	17
7.5. Further Responses.....	17
8.0 Assessment	18
9.0 AA Screening	21
10.0 Recommendation.....	22
11.0 Reasons and Considerations	22
12.0 Conditions.....	22

1.0 Site Location and Description

- 1.1. The proposed development site is located to the south-west of the town centre of Abbeylisk, Co. Laois. The site comprises Epworth Hall (c. 192m²), described in the NIAH listing as a detached former Methodist chapel, c. 1826, with four-bay side elevation which was extended, c. 1915, comprising a gable-fronted range with projecting porch added. It is in use as a Church by the applicant.
- 1.2. The site is irregular in shape and extends to c. 0.177ha.
- 1.3. The Hall is set back from Main Street, the boundary with which is characterised by black railings and gate, and is accessed by footpath between 2no. front lawns. There is an existing stone boundary wall to the north-east and west of the Hall, and an existing hedgerow to the north-west, south and west. the area of the site that extends beyond the stone wall along the western boundary is described as a garden.
- 1.4. A timber fence is located between the Hall and the adjacent 2-storey property, Preston Hall (Protected Structure, RPS 071, NIAH reg. ref. 12900723), to the south. There is a detached single-storey shed with a galvanised roof to the rear (north-west) of the Hall. To the north of Epworth Hall is the two-storey detached Old Manse (Protected Structure, RPS 760, NIAH reg. ref. 12900725).
- 1.5. The prayer room of the Laois Bible Church is located to the right of the porch entrance, with the kitchen space, meeting room, toilets, and storage accessed to the left. The rear open space is used as a playground.
- 1.6. The application materials state that Sunday services occur from 10.30-11.00am, with an occasional evening service on Sunday for special occasions, and occasional use on Wednesday and Thursday evening at 8.30pm for Bible study. There is a congregation of c.50 persons on a Sunday, with 4-6 people during week.

2.0 Proposed Development

- 2.1 Planning permission is sought for demolition of existing temporary toilet/storage block (and associated timber fencing/gate) to side of Epworth Hall (being a protected structure RPS

072/NIAH Reg.No.12900724),demolition of existing modern extensions and shed (proposed to be retained in response to the RFI) to the rear of same, construction of proposed single storey flat roof extension (a height of 3.78m with a plaster finish) to the rear comprising of new meeting room/parent room/stores, internal alterations to same (comprising of the provision of toilets and associated services), stairs and first floor mezzanine (gallery) and all associated works at Epworth Hall, Main Street, Knocknamoe, Abbeyleix, Co. Laois on behalf of Laois Bible Church.

- 2.2 The gross floorspace of the proposed works is stated to be 208m², and the area of demolition is stated to be 72m² (as originally proposed – the shed to the rear of the Hall is to be retained in response to the RFI on the application).
- 2.3 The proposed development, as clarified in response to the RFI, includes the reinstatement of the previously demolished front boundary wall (1.715m), with access gate. Otherwise, the existing front boundary to the street, the footpath and the open space area are to be retained. The existing stone boundary wall to the north-east of the Hall is to be retained (the section of same to the immediate west of the Hall, bounding the garden to the west, is to be demolished, as confirmed in the response to the RFI), as is the existing hedgerow to the north-west, south and west. In response to the RFI, the detached shed to the north-west of the Hall is to be retained and used for storage.
- 2.3 The site is connected to public services.

3.0 Planning Authority Decision

3.1. Decision

The Planning Authority decided to grant conditional planning permission on 13th June, 2024.

3.1.1. Conditions

Permission was subject to 9no. conditions, including:

2. (a) The works shall be carried out under the direction of an experienced conservation architect with RIAI accreditation at Grade 2 or Grade 1. Prior to the commencement of the development, the Developer shall submit for the written agreement of the Planning Authority the name and professional qualifications of the Conservation Architect.

b) The works shall be carried out in accordance with the approach set out in the submitted Architectural Heritage Impact Assessment report received by the

Planning Authority on 20/10/2023 and the further information received on 16/04/2024 and the details submitted with the planning application. The project conservation architect shall immediately inform the Planning Authority in the event that any concealed feature of interest is uncovered during the works and work shall cease in this area pending agreement with the Planning Authority on how to proceed.

c) The project Conservation Architect shall make a photographic record of the works as they proceed, to include photographs of the protected structure at intervals of no greater than one month from commencement of the works until completion of the development. These photographs shall be annotated and dated. This photographic record shall be made available to the Planning Authority, if requested while the works are progressing and shall be collated into a single record of the works, copies of which shall be submitted to the Planning Authority and the Irish Architectural Archive on completion of the development.

d) The Conservation Architect shall submit to the Local Authority a Conservation Compliance report upon completion of the development. Photographs of the areas of change and a record of the main stages of the works shall be included, cross referenced to a suitably scaled drawing showing the existing structure and fabric elements.

Reason: To ensure that the integrity of the Protected Structures is maintained and that the proposed works are carried out in accordance with best conservation practice with no unnecessary damage or loss of surviving historic building fabric.

3. The finish of new work shall be consistent with details received on 20/10/2023 and the further information received on 16/04/2024, unless otherwise agreed in writing with the Planning Authority.

Reason: In the interests of proper planning, residential amenity and visual amenity.

3.2. Planning Authority Reports

3.2.1. Planning Reports

- The report of the Executive Planner dated 4th December, 2023 notes that the site contains Epworth Hall which is one of the most prominent buildings on the Main Street in Abbeylax.

- The footprint of the extension is large is in scale and most importantly larger than the footprint of the original building. The proposed extension is not subservient or of an appropriate scale in the context of the original building.
- Notwithstanding the set-back of the proposal from the front elevation, the Planner is also concerned with the height of the extension which sits above the eaves level of the front gabled side extension of the Protected Structure to which it is to adjoin. The height of the extension should be reduced to no higher than the eaves to allow it to read more appropriately and sit more comfortably with the original building.
- The detailing of the extension is unacceptable. There is no information on how the roof of the extension is to be finished as well as the window detailing including alignment and finishes to same.
- There would appear to be a rear garden diving wall attached to the outbuilding which frames the rear garden area and it would appear that the proposed extension would encroach on same requiring its demolition. This has not been addressed in the AHIA.
- There is a stained glass feature window to the rear elevation that is noted within the submitted AHIA as being an important feature of the building. The proposal would see the complete enclosure of this feature window which is concerning.
- Planning reference 20/161 included condition 7 (b) which required the reconstruction of demolished wall to match the wall that originally existed on site. This condition has not been complied with and there are no proposals for same.
- Given the nature and extent of the proposal, the Planner was satisfied that the proposal would not have a detrimental impact on neighbouring development in terms of overshadowing, overdominance or overlooking.
- Uisce Éireann required further information in relation to the existing sewer within/near the development site.
- A Request for Further Information issued on 6th December, 2023 to address these issues.
- The applicant responded on 17th May, 2024 with the following details:
 - the footprint of the extension has been significantly reduced in scale so that it is subservient to the main structure. The extension reads as a lean-to type structure of between 3.05m and 4.349m in height.

- the materials are modern in contrast to the original structures but not so modern so as to detract from them in scale and not larger than the footprint of the original building. It is of an appropriate scale in the context of the original building.
- the height of the revised extension at the front sits below the eaves level of the front gabled side element of the original structure so that it reads more appropriately.
- the roof of the extension is to be finished in an aluminium standing seam deck and the window frames to have a timber finish.
- the rear garden dividing wall is made of a mix of concrete posts and planks and modern blockwork and is to be demolished. This is now addressed in the AHIA.
- the stained glass feature window is no longer being enclosed.
- proposals for the reconstruction of the previously demolished wall are included.
- the majority of the existing 225mm sewer is outside the site, and is not near the location of the proposed extension, therefore no building over the sewer will occur.
- The report of the Executive Planner dated 6th June, 2024 notes the response from the applicant is generally acceptable, noting the proposed timber finish to the extension which may be acceptable subject to the use of appropriate materials. As the proposal now includes a the reconstruction of a boundary wall (this was not included in the original proposal), it was considered to be significant further information, and the applicant was requested to re-advertise on 9th May, 2024 and responded with revised notices on 14th May, 2024.
- There has been no report received from Uisce Eireann in relation to the further information submitted. A condition in relation to the setback of the proposal from the sewer is recommended.
- The Executive Planner's report is the basis for the Planning Authority's decision to grant planning permission.

3.2.2. Other Technical Reports

- The report of the Executive Engineer, Roads Design Office dated 1st December, 2023 states that it has no objection subject to conditions.

- The report of the Executive Technician, Roads Office dated 7th November, 2023, states that the Portlaoise Municipal District Office has no objection.

3.3. Prescribed Bodies

- Uisce Éireann made a submission on 10th November, 2023 requesting further information that the applicant shall conduct a survey of the site and provide drawings identifying the route that an existing sewer takes through the proposed site and its proximity to the proposal. The applicant will be required to engage with Uisce Éireann's diversions team and provide evidence of the outcome of this engagement as a response to the further information request.
- TII made a submission on 3rd November, 2023 stating that it has no observations to make. TII also responded to the Significant RFI on 04th June, 2024 to advise that the Authority's position remains as set out in our letter of 3rd November, 2023.

3.4. Third Party Observations

- There was 1no. submission received from the Third Party in response to Significant Further Information on 29th May, 2024, stating that the description of the development in the newspaper notice and site notice is not the same, and also enquiring why it has taken 4 years to resolve the matter of the unauthorised removal of the front stone (bow shaped) boundary wall – which has been replaced with an inferior timber fence with a 3m opening gate, and brought forward to allow access from the Church side door - and erection of a toilet block to the front side of Epworth Hall. It is considered that the streetscape has been compromised. Every effort should have been made to retain and maintain the wall. Having regard to the ACA designation, the removal of the wall would require planning permission.

4.0 Planning History

- 20/161: temporary permission (18months from the date of grant) granted on 16th June, 2021 to retain (a) the demolition of a wall (b) a toilet block. Thereafter Planning permission is sought to complete the construction of the toilet block together with all ancillary site services and associated site works. Please note that the proposed works are within the curtilage of a protected structure RPS O7Z (NIAH reg no 12900124).
 - condition 7 of this permission states as follows:

- (a) the subject development shall be permitted for a period of 18no. months only from the date of grant of this permission. Prior to the expiry of the permission, the use shall cease and the structures shall be permanently removed from the site.
- (b) prior to the expiry of the period referred to in (a) above, an application for permission to replace the timber fence with a wall similar to the original and to replace the toilet block with suitably designed and located welfare facilities shall be made to the Planning Authority.
- There is an open Enforcement file - 22/113 - regarding non-compliance with condition 7 of planning file reference 20/161.

5.0 Policy Context

Development Plan

- The applicable Plan is the Laois County Development Plan 2021-2027.
- By reference to Map 4.2-A of the Plan, the proposed development site is located in the zoned town centre of Abbeyleix.
- By reference to Map 4.2-B of the Plan, it is also located in the Abbeyleix Architectural Conservation Area (ACA), and is also a designated Protected Structure, RPS 072 (Appendix 1 of the Plan). Epworth Hall is also listed on the NIAH (ref. 12900724) and has a regional rating (architectural and social).
- In relation to the character of Abbeyleix ACA, Appendix 2 of the Plan notes that the high quality of architecture is particularly evident in the buildings lining the main square and along the main street. The designed layout is comprised of two storey structures grouped together in small terraces with intermittent laneways, integral carriage arches and long narrow burgage plots to the rear of the buildings' courses create a linked appearance and a sense of harmony in the town centre. It also states that repeated features such as the use of stone finishes for window sills, steps, eaves and string courses create a linked appearance. There are numerous detached civic buildings of architectural significance dispersed throughout the town.
- Policy PS 2 of the Laois County Development Plan 2021-2027 seeks to Protect and conserve buildings, structures and sites contained in the Record of Protected Structures.

- Policy PS 3 of the Laois County Development Plan 2021-2027 states that ‘any development, modification, alteration, or extension affecting a Protected Structure must be prepared by suitably qualified persons and Accompanied by appropriate documentation as outlined in the Architectural Heritage Protection Guidelines for Planning Authorities [DAHG, 2011] to enable a proper assessment of the proposed works and their impact on the structure or area and be carried out to best practice conservation standards. Its setting will be considered against the following criteria, and whether it is:
 - a) Sensitively sited and designed;
 - b) Compatible with the special character;
 - c) Views of principal elevations of the protected structures are not obscured or negatively impacted;
 - d) Of a premium quality of design and appropriate in terms of the proposed scale, mass, height, density, layout, and material so that the integrity of the structure and its curtilage is preserved and enhanced. Where appropriate, the Protected Structure status is used as a stimulus to the imaginative and considered design of new elements.
- Policy Objective DM PS 1 in relation to development within the curtilage of a Protected Structure states that in considering applications for development within the curtilage and/or attendant grounds of a protected structure, the Council shall have regard to the following:
 - The various elements of the structure which give the protected structure its special character and how these would be impacted on by the proposed development.
 - The proximity of any new development to the main protected structure and any other buildings of heritage value.
 - The design of the new development that should relate to and complement the special character of the protected structure.
 - Outward and inward views from the protected structure are to be protected. High quality design will be a foremost consideration when assessing proposals for development within the curtilage of a protected structure, with particular emphasis on siting, building lines, proportions, scale, massing, height, roof treatment and materials. This does not preclude innovative contemporary buildings. High quality

contemporary interventions will be encouraged over historic pastiche. Development proposals should include appraisal of the wider context of the site and structure including its demesne landscape, where applicable.

- Policy Objective DM PS 3 requires the submission of an Architectural Assessment Report as per the Architectural Heritage Protection: Guidelines for Planning Authorities” (2011) with respect to applications for permission for restoration, refurbishment, demolition development or change of use of protected structures.
- Policy Objective ACA 1 seeks to ensure that any development, modifications, alterations, or extensions within an ACA are sited and designed appropriately, and are not detrimental to the character of the structure or to its setting or the general character of the ACA and are in keeping with any Architectural Conservation Area Statement of Character Guidance Documents prepared for the relevant ACA.

5.1. Relevant National or Regional Policy / Ministerial Guidelines (where relevant)

5.1.1 Architectural Heritage Protection – Guidelines for Planning Authorities 2011

- 5.1.1.1 These guidelines are issued under Section 28 and Section 52 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 and concern development objectives: a) for protecting structures, or parts of structures, which are of special architectural, historical, archaeological, artistic, cultural, scientific, social, or technical interest, and b) for preserving the character of architectural conservation areas.

5.2. Natural Heritage Designations

- 5.2.1 The proposed development site is c. 2.3km to the east of the River Barrow and River Nore SAC (002162) and c. 2.43km to the east of the River Nore SPA (004233).

6.0 EIA Screening

Having regard to the limited nature and scale of development and the absence of any significant environmental sensitivity in the vicinity of the site, 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. Please refer to Form 1 and Form 2 as per Appendix 1 below.

7.0 The Appeal

7.1. Grounds of Appeal

- The Third Party appeal makes the following points
 - The appellant has significant concerns in relation to the proposed development.
 - The main concerns relate to the AHIA. The lack of a critical assessment of the potential impacts within the context of the location within Abbeyleix Architectural Conservation Area and the streetscape of the town of Abbeyleix.
 - The application provided inadequate drawn information as required given the sensitive conservation location and as required under the Regulations.
 - The failure to provide any visual impact assessment of the proposed development within the historic and intact streetscape context renders the AHIA as inadequate and flawed.
 - Epworth Hall is a Protected Structure (RPS 071) as listed in the current Laois Development Plan, located between Old Manse House (RPS 760) to the north and Preston House (RPS 071), adjacent to the south. The single-storey flat roofed extension to the rear will be visible from Main Street beyond a replacement rendered wall and gates.
 - The following are the grounds of appeal:
 - Insufficient drawn information – failure to provide adequate contiguous elevational drawings prevented the opportunity to consider and provide a critical assessment of the conservation and visual impacts of the proposed development on the site. The failure to provide a contiguous elevation drawing showing the potential impact of the proposed development on the protected structures undermines the entire AHIA.
 - AHIA – the failure to provide a critical assessment of the potential architectural conservation impacts of the proposed development on Epworth Hall and the adjacent Preston House undermines the Council's assessment of the proposed development.
 - The appellant has no issues with the use but is focused solely on the failure to consider and assess the potential impacts on the protected structures, the Abbeyleix ACA and the streetscape as part of the overall setting. The failure to give regard to the potential detrimental impacts on the contiguous protected structures is of grave

concern. Without considering these potential impacts in detail nor providing a critical assessment of the degree of potential conservation impacts the report is flawed in failing to the proposed development. The lack of a coherent assessment is particularly flawed.

- Poor quality design information in respect of material finishes – the proposed extension will be clearly visible from Main Street. The drawing is contrary to validation requirements in failing to give any levels above datum as required. The notional vertical dimensions shown are tied back to any levels so are providing an unverifiable relationship to the existing protected structure and to its locational context. There are also no details of the proposed materials. The timber cladding should be defined as a particular profile, joint type, member size(s), selection and finish. It cannot be assessed what, if any, overhang, fascia type, throating and flashing is proposed. The detailed design may not accord with the design shown on the drawings.
- The hardwood doors are not dimensioned so it is impossible to know what they look like. The complete lack of design information will preclude an assessment of the visual impact of the proposal. By extension, this precludes an assessment of the potential visual and architectural conservation impacts. Given the sensitive context, it is essential to visualise the appearance of the proposed development if it were erected as required.
- Lack of detail on reinstatement of the demolished wall and introduction of gates: there is no clarity as to the actual proposed reinstated wall. There is no clear detail on material, banding, dimension and profile. No sectional profile is provided. While plastered blockwork is stated, there is no detail on the type of block, finish, thickness or composition. The 1715mm dimension cannot be verified as being the actual dimension of the unauthorised demolished wall it is intended to replace. There is also no detail on the width and horizontal location of the side hung double gates.
- An Bord Pleanála is requested to overturn the grant of permission.
- The crude design and failure to provide a comprehensive impact assessment would be detrimental to the character and guidance provided in Abbeylax ACA if it were allowed to proceed.

7.2. Applicant Response

- The applicant's response dated 5th August, 2024 states as follows:
 - Description of development is different between notices – detail is the same
 - Why has it taken four years to resolve – appears to reference the demolition of a bow shaped wall to allow access to the side of the site, and the erection of temporary toilets. Retention was sought and granted for the temporary toilets and it was agreed to reinstate the wall once the toilets were no longer required, subject to planning permission.
 - This was part of an overall plan to construct an extension to the church building including the installation of permanent toilets.
 - The reinstatement of the bow shaped wall is dealt with in the current application, and also the removal of the timber fence and the temporary toilets referred to in the objection – by objecting, the appellant is delaying the reinstatement of the wall and possibly jeopardizing it as funding will not be available in the future.
 - Epworth Hall is a Protected Structure, built in 1826 it was formerly a Methodist Church, named after the town of Epworth in Lincolnshire, birthplace of John Wesley, founder of the Methodist Church. It is currently in the ownership of Laois Bible Church and is used as a place of worship and a meeting hall, similar to its original use. The proposed development will ensure that the building continues to meet the needs of the owners.
 - The AHIA prepared by Sean Mahon Architect (a Conservation Architect) and SM Architects Ltd details the proposed development, its impact on existing structures, the necessity of these works, and the overall justification and reasoning as to why these are in accordance with the Development Plan.
 - The main appeal points are addressed as follows:
 - Insufficient drawn information: a full and comprehensive set of drawings was submitted.
 - Poor quality assessment: and full and comprehensive architectural assessment was carried out including full photographic survey and contiguous elevations.
 - Poor quality design information: a full and comprehensive set of drawings

was submitted.

- Poor quality information on materials proposed: all material finishes were proposed on the drawings, with samples of materials to be submitted attached as a condition in the normal way.
- Lack of detail of the reinstatement of the unauthorised demolished wall and the introduction of gates to same: the blockwork wall was demolished to allow access to the side of the building. It is now proposed to reinstate that wall as originally constructed. The proposed gates will be solid so that the impact will be minimal. The wall is not historic and was in poor condition and its reinstatement is not being disputed.
- AHIA: a full and comprehensive description was provided of Epworth Hall, and a full impact assessment was carried out.
- County Council: the original design was revised in consultation with the Council and further revised at Further Information stage, including:
- Design and Impact on the Heritage Asset: the footprint of the extension has been significantly reduced in scale so that it is subservient to the main structure. The materials used in the design have also been altered so that they are modern in contrast to the original structures but not so modern that it detracts from them in scale and most importantly larger than the footprint of the original building.
- The height of the revised extension at the front sits below the eaves level of the front gabled side element of the original structure to which it is to adjoin and allows it to read more appropriately and sit more comfortably with the original building.
- The roof of the extension is to be finished in an aluminium standing seam deck and the window frames are to have a timber finish.
- There is a rear garden dividing wall attached to the outbuilding which is made of a mixture of concrete posts and planks and modern blockwork and it is to be demolished. This has now been addressed in the AHIA.
- The stained glass feature window to the rear elevation that is noted within the submitted AHIA as being an important feature of the building is no longer being enclosed.
- Proposals for the reconstruction of the wall as required were also enclosed.

- Granted planning: in addition to the Council being satisfied that the development was appropriate, it also granted permission which demonstrates that sufficient information was submitted for a valid application. To ensure there is no ambiguity, the Council attached a number of conditions including that the wall be reconstructed in full consultation with the Council and that samples be provided of all materials for the extension.
- The proposed works will not have any significant impact on the built character of the building.
- The works are necessary to ensure the building's future and that the works will not impact significantly on the character of the building.
- The extension is needed to ensure that the current occupants have sufficient spaces for their activities. This will ensure that the building continues to be occupied and by doing so will ensure that the building continues to survive in to the future.
- Urges the Board to overturn the objection as it is designed to further frustrate the further development of this wonderful building. By keeping the building occupied the building's future is ensured and an important part of the heritage of Abbeyleix is maintained.

7.3. Planning Authority Response

- None on file.

7.4. Observations

- None on file.

7.5. Further Responses

- None on file.

8.0 Assessment

- 8.1 Having examined all the application and appeal documentation on file, and having regard to relevant policy, I consider that the main issues which require consideration in this appeal are those raised in the grounds of appeal, and I am satisfied that no other substantive issues arise.
- 8.2 I note the matters raised in relation to the validity of the planning application, but I note that the Planning Authority has accepted same, and, therefore, do not propose to address this issue in this Report.
- 8.3 Equally, the Uisce Éireann submission has been addressed in the course of the planning application.
- 8.4 The main issue is as follows:
- Nature and extent of the proposed development and impact on the Protected Structure and ACA
- 8.5 Nature and extent of the proposed development and impact on the Protected Structure and ACA
- 8.5.1 The proposed development seeks permission for internal and external alterations to Epworth Hall, a Protected Structure, located in an ACA, on the Main Street of Abbeyleix. These works have been subject to an Architectural Heritage Impact Assessment in accordance with policy objective DM PS 3 of the Plan.
- 8.5.2 The Hall is currently in use as a Bible Church and meeting space, with external playground.
- 8.5.3 The single-storey flat roofed extension to the rear, as modified in response to the RFI, and the internal mezzanine floor and toilet accommodation will provide improved facilities for the Church's congregation.
- 8.5.4 The rear extension, as modified in response to the RFI, is not large in scale and is smaller than the footprint of the Protected Structure. Its height, as revised in response to the RFI, is below the eaves level of the front gabled side element of the Protected Structure, to enable it to be read more appropriately and sit more comfortably with the Protected Structure. It is also noted that the stained glass feature window to the rear elevation is no longer to be enclosed as a consequence of the reduced rear extension.

- 8.5.5 The external extension has been sensitively designed by the applicant's Conservation Architect to be subservient to the Protected Structure, and to be appropriate in an ACA.
- 8.5.6 The proposed development will ensure the continued use of the Protected Structure into the future.
- 8.5.7 The reinstatement of the boundary wall as proposed in the response to the RFI will address the Third Party's concerns about the previous demolition of same, and the previous permission to reinstate this wall, which has now expired. It is noted that these works appear to have not been carried out for funding reasons. In the event that the Board is minded to grant permission, it is recommended that a condition is attached requiring the existing timber fence to be removed and the wall to be reinstated.
- 8.5.8 It is further noted that the rear garden dividing wall is to be demolished to facilitate the new rear extension, and that the clarification of this demolition resulted in the requirement to readvertise. It is noted that this wall comprises a mixture of concrete posts and planks and modern blockwork, and its demolition is acceptable to the Planning Authority.
- 8.5.9 The proposed internal modifications, including the demolition works, are not significant.
- 8.5.10 Having regard to policy objective PS 3 of the Plan, it is my submission that the proposed development:
- 8.5.10.1 is accompanied by a detailed the Architectural Heritage Impact Assessment prepared by the applicant's Conservation Architect of the proposed works and their impact on Epworth Hall and the Abbeyleix ACA and be carried out to best practice conservation standards. In addition, the proposed development, as modified at RFI stage, is:
- a) Sensitively sited and designed;
 - b) Compatible with the special character of the Protected Structure;
 - c) Views of principal elevations of the Protected Structure is not obscured or negatively impacted;
 - d) Of a premium quality of design and appropriate in terms of the proposed scale, mass, height, density, layout, and material so that the integrity of the structure and its curtilage is preserved and enhanced.
- 8.5.11 Having regard to policy objective DM PS 1 of the Plan, it is my submission that:
- 8.5.11.1 The various elements of the structure which give the protected structure its special character are not significantly impacted by the proposed development.

- 8.5.11.2 The rear extension is subordinate to the Protected Structure.
- 8.5.11.3 The design complements the character of the Protected Structure.
- 8.5.11.4 The principal views of the Protected Structure are not significantly affected by the proposed development. A high quality contemporary design approach has been taken by the applicant's Conservation Architect.
- 8.5.12 It is considered that the proposed development, as revised in response to the RFI, is of an appropriate design and scale in the context of Epworth Hall, Protected Structure, sited within the Abbeyleix Architectural Conservation Area.
- 8.5.13 It is noted that the Planning Authority was satisfied that the revised proposal was acceptable subject to the attachment of a condition requiring that the works are to be carried out in accordance with the approach set out in the submitted Architectural Heritage Impact Assessment and under the direction of a Conservation Architect, with a photographic record to be taken during the course of the construction, and a Conservation Compliance report to be submitted on completion of the works. I recommend that the Board attach the same condition in the event of a grant of permission.
- 8.5.14 The architectural detailing of the proposed extension, including the use of timber cladding, timber finish to the window frames and aluminium standing seam deck roof, is acceptable in principle to the Planning Authority, subject to condition 3. In the event that the Board is minded to grant permission, it is recommended that the same condition is attached.
- 8.5.15 On this basis, it is my submission that the proposed works are not significant, with the rear extension being subordinate to the Protected Structure. I would tend to agree with the applicant, as expressed in the AHIA, that the proposed works will not have any significant impact on the built character of Epworth Hall.
- 8.5.16 I concur that the works are necessary to ensure the building's future and that the works will not impact significantly on either the character of the building or the ACA, and are, therefore, in compliance with policy objective ACA 1 of the Plan, and the proposed works are not detrimental to the character of Epworth Hall or to its setting or the general character of the Abbeyleix ACA and are in keeping with the Statement of Character Guidance Documents prepared for the ACA.
- 8.5.17 I am also satisfied that the nature and extent of the works will not result in any significant visual impact on the character of the area.

9.0 AA Screening

- 9.1 See Appendix 2 attached to this appeal. I have considered the permission for the demolition of existing temporary toilet/storage block (and associated timber fencing/gate) to side of Epworth Hall (being a protected structure RPS 072/NIAH Reg.No.12900724),demolition of existing modern extensions and shed to the rear of same, construction of proposed single storey flat roof extension to the rear comprising of new meeting room/parent room/stores, internal alterations to same (comprising of the provision of toilets and associated services), stairs and first floor mezzanine (gallery) and all associated works on a site at Epworth Hall, Knocknamoe, Abbeyleix, Co. Laois in light of the requirements S177U of the Planning and Development Act 2000 as amended.
- 9.2 The proposed development site is c. 2.3km to the east of the River Barrow and River Nore SAC (002162) and c. 2.43km to the east of the River Nore SPA (004233).
- 9.3 The proposed development consists of the demolition of existing temporary toilet/storage block (and associated timber fencing/gate) to side of Epworth Hall (being a protected structure RPS 072/NIAH Reg.No.12900724),demolition of existing modern extensions and shed to the rear of same, construction of proposed single storey flat roof extension to the rear comprising of new meeting room/parent room/stores, internal alterations to same (comprising of the provision of toilets and associated services), stairs and first floor mezzanine (gallery) and all associated works on a site at Epworth Hall, Knocknamoe, Abbeyleix, Co. Laois.
- 9.4 No nature conservation concerns were raised in the planning appeal.
- 9.5 Having considered the nature, scale and location of the project, I am satisfied that it can be eliminated from further assessment because there is no conceivable risk to any European Site. The reason for this conclusion is as follows:
- Nature of works, including the small scale and nature of the development
 - Location and distance from nearest European site and lack of connections
- 9.6 I conclude that on the basis of objective information, that the proposed development would not have a likely significant effect on any European Site either alone or in combination with other plans or projects.

- 9.7 Likely significant effects are excluded and therefore Appropriate Assessment (stage 2) (under Section 177V of the Planning and Development Act 2000) is not required.

10.0 Recommendation

- 10.1 I recommend that permission for the development be granted for the following reasons and considerations.

11.0 Reasons and Considerations

Having regard to the provisions of the Architectural Heritage Protection Guidelines for Planning Authorities [DAHG, 2011] and the policies of the Laois County Development Plan 2021-2017, including policy objectives PS 3, DM PS 1 and ACA 1, it is considered that subject to compliance with the conditions set out below, the proposed development to be retained would not seriously injure the amenities of the area, and would 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.

12.0 Conditions

1.	<p>The development shall be carried out and completed in accordance with the plans and particulars lodged with the application, as amended on 17th May, 2024 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>(a) The works shall be carried out under the direction of an experienced conservation architect with RIAI accreditation at Grade 2 or Grade 1. Prior to the commencement of the development, the Developer shall submit for the written agreement of the Planning Authority the name and professional qualifications of the Conservation Architect.</p>

	<p>b) The works shall be carried out in accordance with the approach set out in the submitted Architectural Heritage Impact Assessment report received by the Planning Authority on 20/10/2023 and the further information received on 16/04/2024 and the details submitted with the planning application. The project conservation architect shall immediately inform the Planning Authority in the event that any concealed feature of interest is uncovered during the works and work shall cease in this area pending agreement with the Planning Authority on how to proceed.</p> <p>c) The project Conservation Architect shall make a photographic record of the works as they proceed, to include photographs of the protected structure at intervals of no greater than one month from commencement of the works until completion of the development. These photographs shall be annotated and dated. This photographic record shall be made available to the Planning Authority, if requested while the works are progressing and shall be collated into a single record of the works, copies of which shall be submitted to the Planning Authority and the Irish Architectural Archive on completion of the development.</p> <p>d) The Conservation Architect shall submit to the Local Authority a Conservation Compliance report upon completion of the development. Photographs of the areas of change and a record of the main stages of the works shall be included, cross referenced to a suitably scaled drawing showing the existing structure and fabric elements.</p> <p>Reason: To ensure that the integrity of the Protected Structure is maintained and that the proposed works are carried out in accordance with best conservation practice.</p>
3.	<p>The finish of new work shall be consistent with the details lodged with the application, as amended on 17th May, 2024, unless otherwise agreed in writing with the Planning Authority.</p> <p>Reason: In the interests of proper planning and visual amenity.</p>
4.	<p>Prior to the commencement of development, the developer shall submit details of the removal of the existing timber fence and reinstatement of the wall for the written agreement of the planning authority.</p> <p>Reason: In the interest of orderly development and to ensure that the integrity of the Protected Structures is maintained and that the proposed works are carried out in</p>

	accordance with best conservation practice.
5.	<p>Prior to the commencement of development the developer shall enter into a Connection Agreement with Uisce Éireann (Irish Water) to provide for a service connection to the public water supply and/or wastewater collection network.</p> <p>Reason: In the interest of public health and to ensure adequate water/wastewater facilities.</p>
6.	<p>The disposal of surface water shall comply with the requirements of the planning authority for such works and services. Prior to the commencement of development, details for the disposal of surface water from the site for the written agreement of the planning authority.</p> <p>Reason: To prevent flooding and in the interests of sustainable drainage.</p>
7.	<p>No advertisement or advertisement structure, the exhibition or erection of which would otherwise constitute exempted development under the Planning and Development Regulations 2001 (as amended), shall be displayed or erected within the curtilage of the site without a prior grant of planning permission.</p> <p>Reason: In the interest of visual amenity.</p>
8.	<p>A Construction and Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) shall be submitted to and agreed in writing with the planning authority prior to the commencement of development. The CEMP shall include but not be limited to construction phase controls for dust, noise and vibration, waste management, protection of soils, groundwaters, and surface waters, site housekeeping, emergency response planning, site environmental policy, and project roles and responsibilities.</p> <p>Reason: In the interest of environmental protection.</p>
9.	<p>Prior to commencement of development, a Resource Waste Management Plan (RWMP) as set out in the EPA's Best Practice Guidelines for the Preparation of Resource and Waste Management Plans for Construction and Demolition Projects (2021) shall be prepared and submitted to the planning authority for written agreement. The RWMP shall include specific proposals as to how the RWMP will be measured and monitored for effectiveness. All records (including for waste and all</p>

	resources) pursuant to the agreed RWMP shall be made available for inspection at the site office at all times.
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	Reason: In the interest of reducing waste and encouraging recycling.
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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.

23rd March, 2025

Ad onull

Inspector: _____ **Date:** _____

Appendix 1 - Form 1
EIA Pre-Screening
[EIAR not submitted]

An Bord Pleanála Case Reference	ABP-320125-24		
Proposed Development Summary	Protected Structure: Demolish existing temporary toilet/storage block and existing modern extensions and shed, construction of flat roof extension, internal alterations to same and all associated works (RPS 072/NIAH Reg. No. 12900724)		
Development Address	Epworth Hall, Main Street, Knocknamoe, Abbeyleix, Co. Laois		
1. Does the proposed development come within the definition of a 'project' for the purposes of EIA? (that is involving construction works, demolition, or interventions in the natural surroundings)		Yes √	Tick if relevant and proceed to Q2.
		No	Tick if relevant. No further 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)?			
Yes √	Tick/or leave blank	Class 10(b)(iv) Urban development which would involve an area greater than 2 hectares in the case of a business district, 10 hectares in the case of other parts of a built-up area and 20 hectares elsewhere. (In this paragraph, "business district" means a district within a city or town in which the predominant land use is retail or commercial uses.)	Proceed to Q3.
No	Tick or leave blank		Tick if relevant. No further action required
3. Does the proposed development equal or exceed any relevant THRESHOLD set out in the relevant Class?			

Yes	Tick/or leave blank	State the relevant threshold here for the Class of development.	EIA Mandatory EIAR required
No √	Tick/or leave blank	Class 10(b)(iv): The site is 0.177ha, therefore well below the threshold of 2ha	Proceed to Q4

4. Is the proposed development below the relevant threshold for the Class of development [sub-threshold development]?

Yes √	Tick/or leave blank	State the relevant threshold here for the Class of development and indicate the size of the development relative to the threshold. Class 10(b)(iv): The site is 0.177ha, therefore well below the threshold of 2ha	Preliminary examination required (Form 2)
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5. Has Schedule 7A information been submitted?

No √	Tick/or leave blank	Screening determination remains as above (Q1 to Q4)
Yes	Tick/or leave blank	Screening Determination required

Inspector: *Ad. Orull*

23rd March, 2025

_____ Date: _____

Appendix 1 - Form 2

EIA Preliminary Examination

An Bord Pleanála Case Reference Number	ABP-320125-24
Proposed Development Summary	Protected Structure: Demolish existing temporary toilet/storage block and existing modern extensions and shed, construction of flat roof extension, internal alterations to same and all associated works (RPS 072/NIAH Reg. No. 12900724)
Development Address	Epworth Hall, Main Street, Knocknamoe, Abbeyleix, Co. Laois
<p>The Board carried out a preliminary examination [ref. Art. 109(2)(a), Planning and Development Regulations 2001 [as amended] of at least the nature, size or location of the proposed development, having regard to the criteria set out in Schedule 7 of the Regulations.</p> <p>This preliminary examination should be read with, and in the light of, the rest of the Inspector's Report attached herewith.</p>	
<p>Characteristics of proposed development</p> <p>(In particular, the size, design, cumulation with existing/proposed development, nature of demolition works, use of natural resources, production of waste, pollution and nuisance, risk of accidents/disasters and to human health).</p>	<p>The proposed development seeks to demolish existing temporary toilet/storage block and existing modern extensions and shed, construction of flat roof extension, internal alterations to same and all associated works (RPS 072/NIAH Reg. No. 12900724).</p> <p>The nature and extent of the proposed development is modest in footprint and is not exceptional in the context of the existing environment.</p> <p>The proposed development does not require the use of substantial natural resources, or give rise to significant risk of pollution or nuisance. The development by virtue of its type,</p>

	<p>does not pose a risk of major accident and/or disaster, or is vulnerable to climate change. It presents no risks to human health. Surface water will be discharged to public sewer or public drain. Wastewater to be discharged to public sewer.</p> <p>It presents no risks to human health.</p>
<p>Location of development</p> <p>(The environmental sensitivity of geographical areas likely to be affected by the development in particular existing and approved land use, abundance/capacity of natural resources, absorption capacity of natural environment e.g. wetland, coastal zones, nature reserves, European sites, densely populated areas, landscapes, sites of historic, cultural or archaeological significance).</p>	<p>The development is situated in the town centre of Abbeyleigh.</p> <p>The proposed development site is c. 2.3km to the east of the River Barrow and River Nore SAC (002162) and c. 2.43km to the east of the River Nore SPA (004233).</p> <p>Having regard to the nature and scale of the proposed development, it does not have the potential to significantly affect other significant environmental sensitivities in the area.</p>
<p>Types and characteristics of potential impacts</p> <p>(Likely significant effects on environmental parameters, magnitude and spatial extent, nature of impact, transboundary, intensity and complexity, duration, cumulative effects and opportunities for mitigation).</p>	<p>Having regard to the modest nature of the proposed development, its location removed from sensitive habitats/features, likely limited magnitude and spatial extent of effects, there is no potential for significant effects on the environmental factors listed in section 171A of the Act.</p>

	There are no significant cumulative considerations having regard to other existing and/or permitted projects.
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Conclusion		
Likelihood of Significant Effects	Conclusion in respect of EIA	Yes or No
There is no real likelihood of significant effects on the environment.	EIA is not required.	No
There is significant and realistic doubt regarding the likelihood of significant effects on the environment.	Schedule 7A Information required to enable a Screening Determination to be carried out.	No
There is a real likelihood of significant effects on the environment.	EIAR required.	No

Inspector: Aden O'Sullivan Date: 23rd March, 2025

DP/ADP: _____ Date: _____ (only where
Schedule 7A information or EIAR required)

Appendix 2 - AA Screening Determination Test for likely significant effects

AA Screening where no screening report was submitted, and no significant AA issues arise.

Screening for Appropriate Assessment Test for likely significant effects				
Step 1: Description of the project and local site characteristics Case file: ABP-319551-24				
Brief description of project	Normal Planning appeal			
Brief description of development site characteristics and potential impact mechanisms	The proposed development site is located on Main Street, Knocknamoe, Abbeyleix, Co, Laois. There are no watercourses or other ecological features of note on the site that would connect it directly to European Sites in the wider area.			
Screening report	No Laois County Council screened out the need for AA.			
Natura Impact Statement	No			
Relevant submissions	None			
Step 2. Identification of relevant European sites using the Source-pathway-receptor model				
European Site (code)	Qualifying interests ¹ Link to conservation objectives (NPWS, date)	Distance from proposed development	Ecological connections	Consider further in screening Y/N
River Barrow and River Nore SAC (Site Code: 002162)	12no. habitats, including 2no. priority habitats; 10no. species https://www.npws.ie/sites/default/files/protected-sites/conservation_objectives/CO002162.pdf	2.3km	No direct connection	Y
River Nore SPA (Site	1no. species https://www.npws.ie/sites/default/files/protected-sites/conservation_objectives/CO002162.pdf	2.43km		

Code: 004233)	sites/conservation_objectives/CO004233.pdf			
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The proposed development site is c. 2.3km to the east of the River Barrow and River Nore SAC (002162) and c. 2.43km to the east of the River Nore SPA (004233).

Further Commentary / discussion

Due to the location of the development site and the distance between the site and the nearest designated site, I consider that the proposed development would not be expected to generate impacts that could affect anything but the immediate area of the development site, thus having a very limited potential zone of influence on any ecological receptors.

Step 3. Describe the likely effects of the project (if any, alone or in combination) on European Sites

AA Screening matrix

Site name	Possibility of significant effects (alone) in view of the conservation objectives of the site*	
	Impacts	Effects
Site River Barrow and River Nore SAC (Site Code: 002162) Estuaries [1130] Mudflats and sandflats not covered by seawater at low tide [1140] Reefs [1170] Salicornia and other annuals colonising mud and sand [1310] Atlantic salt meadows (Glauco-Puccinellietalia maritimae) [1330] Mediterranean salt meadows (Juncetalia maritimi) [1410] Water courses of plain to montane levels with the Ranunculon fluitantis and Callitricho-Batrachion vegetation [3260] European dry heaths [4030] Hydrophilous tall herb fringe communities of plains and of the montane to alpine levels	Direct: none Indirect: localized, temporary, low magnitude impacts from noise, dust and construction related emissions to surface water during operation	The contained nature of the site (defined site boundaries, no direct ecological connections or pathways) and distance from receiving features connected to the SAC make it highly unlikely that the proposed development could generate impacts of a magnitude that could affect habitat quality within the SPA for the SCI listed. Conservation objectives would not be undermined.

<p>[6430]</p> <p>Petrifying springs with tufa formation (Cratoneurion) [7220]</p> <p>Old sessile oak woods with Ilex and Blechnum in the British Isles [91A0]</p> <p>Alluvial forests with Alnus glutinosa and Fraxinus excelsior (Alno-Padion, Alnion incanae, Salicion albae) [91E0]</p> <p>Vertigo moulinsiana (Desmoulin's Whorl Snail) [1016]</p> <p>Margaritifera margaritifera (Freshwater Pearl Mussel) [1029]</p> <p>Austropotamobius pallipes (White-clawed Crayfish) [1092]</p> <p>Petromyzon marinus (Sea Lamprey) [1095]</p> <p>Lampetra planeri (Brook Lamprey) [1096]</p> <p>Lampetra fluviatilis (River Lamprey) [1099]</p> <p>Alosa fallax fallax (Twaite Shad) [1103]</p> <p>Salmo salar (Salmon) [1106]</p> <p>Lutra lutra (Otter) [1355]</p> <p>Trichomanes speciosum (Killarney Fern) [1421]</p> <p>River Nore SPA (Site Code: 004233)</p> <p>Kingfisher (Alcedo atthis) [A229]</p>		
	Likelihood of significant effects from proposed development (alone): No	
	If No, is there likelihood of significant effects occurring in combination with other plans or projects? No	

	Likelihood of significant effects from proposed development (alone): No
	If No, is there likelihood of significant effects occurring in combination with other plans or projects? No
<p>Step 4 Conclude if the proposed development could result in likely significant effects on a European site</p> <p>I conclude that the proposed development (alone or in combination with other plans and projects) would not result in likely significant effects on a European Site. No mitigation measures are required to come to these conclusions.</p>	
<p>Screening Determination</p> <p>Finding of no likely significant effects</p> <p>In accordance with Section 177U of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) and on the basis of the information considered in this AA screening, I conclude that the proposed development individually or in combination with other plans or projects would not be likely to give rise to significant effects on the Bray Head SAC or any other European site, in view of the sites Conservation Objectives, and Appropriate Assessment (and submission of a NIS) is not therefore required.</p> <p>This determination is based on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The relatively minor scale of the development and lack of impact mechanisms that could significantly affect a European Site • Distance from the nearest European site 	

Ad. O'Neill

23rd March, 2025

Inspector: _____ **Date:** _____