



An  
Coimisiún  
Pleanála

## Inspector's Report ACP-323362-25

<b>Development</b>	Alterations to Planning Application Ref. No. 2162. Demolition of a house and the construction of a new house which will adjoin the courtyard buildings. Alterations to the courtyard buildings and all associated site works.
<b>Location</b>	Freffans House, Freffans Great, Trim, County Meath, C15 KR9X.
<b>Planning Authority</b>	Meath County Council
<b>Planning Authority Reg. Ref.</b>	2560127
<b>Applicant(s)</b>	Conor Moran
<b>Type of Application</b>	Planning Permission
<b>Planning Authority Decision</b>	Refuse permission
<b>Type of Appeal</b>	First Party v Decision
<b>Appellant(s)</b>	Conor Moran
<b>Observer(s)</b>	None.
<b>Date of Site Inspection</b>	16 <sup>th</sup> November 2025
<b>Inspector</b>	Dan Aspell

## **1.0 Site Location and Description**

- 1.1.1. The site location is Freffans House, Freffans Great, Trim, County Meath. The site is located within what is known as Freffans Farm which is accessed off the L62021.
- 1.1.2. The application red line area is stated as measuring 2.0ha. It is located within the farm and accessed by two long drives. The red line includes Freffans House and related courtyard outbuildings surrounding open lands and lightly wooded areas.
- 1.1.3. Outside the red line area, to the north-west, are a number of agricultural and storage buildings related to the wider farm, and partly constructed stables and related yards.
- 1.1.4. Freffans House is not on the Meath County Development Plan 2021-2027 Record of Protected Structures or on the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage. The site is not within or near an Architectural Conservation Area (ACA).

## **2.0 Proposed Development**

- 2.1.1. The proposed development comprises alterations to previously permitted planning application Reg. Ref. No. 21/62, generally as follows:
  - Demolition of Freffans House;
  - Alteration, renovation and extension of the courtyard buildings to include dwelling space, private office space, and living accommodation;
  - Construction of a dwelling house generally in the same location which will adjoin the extended courtyard buildings;
  - New wastewater treatment plant and associated landscaping and site works.
- 2.1.2. The application included architectural drawings prepared by the applicant's architect, site suitability assessment reports, and related information. The appeal included a Defects Survey report for Freffans House prepared by the appellant's engineer.

### 3.0 Planning Authority Decision

#### 3.1. Decision

3.1.1. Meath County Council issued a notification to refuse permission for 1 no. reason, as follows:

- Reason 1: *“It is considered that the proposed development, which proposes to demolish Freffans House, would contravene policies HER POL 21 – 23 of the Meath County Development Plan 2021-2027. The Planning Authority considers the existing dwelling, while not a protected structure, to be of architectural merit being a late Georgian Farmhouse from c.1800 and every effort should be made to protect same. If permitted, the proposed development would contribute to the deterioration of the architectural heritage of the county and would set a wholly undesirable precedent for future developments similar in nature. The proposed development would therefore be contrary to the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.”*

#### 3.2. Planning Authority Reports

3.2.1. Planning reports: The Planner Report on the application stated the following:

- Existing structure: No documentary evidence in the form of a structural engineer’s report, condition survey, or architectural impact assessment have been provided to confirm the dwelling is in a ‘derelict state beyond repair’. Report considered the building to be of architectural merit and contributing to the architectural heritage of the County. Proposal contravenes Policy HER POL 21 amongst others. Further Information required;
- Siting, Design & Layout: Proposed replacement dwelling would occupy the general footprint of the existing house. No details for the use of the office and guest rooms are provided. Further Information required;
- Access, Traffic & Parking: No amendment to access arrangements are proposed. Works permitted under Reg. Ref. 21/62 have been completed. Access arrangements remain acceptable;

- Archaeology & Heritage: Report notes Conservation Officer comments. Further Information required;
- Site Services: Report noted water supply and surface water management proposals. Regarding wastewater, proposed wastewater demand is unclear and the submitted Site Characterisation Form is out of date. Further information required;

The Planner Report in response to Further Information stated the following:

- Further Information Item 1: A letter from the applicant's agent is submitted. The proposal to demolish the dwelling was not altered. Planner Report stated that whilst Freffans House is not a protected structure, it has architectural merit and in the Planning Authority opinion is worth protecting. Applicant cites building costs and ruinous state of the structure as prohibiting restoration however no evidence is submitted to verify claims of dilapidation and ruination. Report concurred with the Conservation Officer Report that permission should be refused;
- Item 2: Response comprised a letter from Applicant's agent. Report noted that the applicant intends to use the dwelling and all associated lands as a private residence, and that additional bedrooms on the landholding shall be for use of family and friends, with farm staff living off-site. Report states the response was considered acceptable;
- Item 3: Response comprise an agent's cover letter and a Site Characterisation report. Report considered the response acceptable;
- Item 4: Applicant was requested to arrange a site visit. No contact was made;
- Appropriate Assessment screening: Proposal would not be likely to have significant effects on European Sites.
- Recommendation: Refusal.

#### Other Technical Reports

- 3.2.2. Architectural Conservation Officer: The first Conservation Officer Report stated that although the house currently is not a Recorded Protected Structure, it is a surviving late Georgian farmhouse from circa 1800 and should be retained. The report stated

that it did not agree with demolition of this building due to its significant historical value and indicated that it should be repaired and restored and not demolished. Report recommended further information and redesign, as follows:

- Provide a comprehensive historical analysis of the house by a Conservation Architect;
- Rework the proposal to retain the existing house, with the option of adding an extension to meet modern family needs.

3.2.3. The Conservation Officer Report in response to further information stated the applicant did not contact the Conservation Officer as advised; did not provide a comprehensive historical analysis as requested; did not submit a structural report confirming the alleged ruinous state of the house; and did not provide the referenced drone photographs. The report stated that rising building costs as stated are not enough to condone demolition. The report set out related commentary and stated that it did not agree with the proposed demolition.

3.2.4. The reports referred to County Development Plan Policies HER POL 21, HER OBJ 23 and HER POL 26.

3.2.5. Environment Section: None

3.2.6. Roads: None

3.2.7. Water Services: None

### 3.3. **Prescribed Bodies**

3.3.1. None.

### 3.4. **Third Party Observations**

3.4.1. None.

## 4.0 **Planning History**

### 4.1. **Subject site**

Overlapping applications related to Freffans House

- 4.1.1. Reg. Ref. 24/60302: Planning permission granted by the Planning Authority in 2024 for: erection of no. 1 polytunnel built using standard galvanized aluminium rails on concrete pads and covered with polythene sheets.
- 4.1.2. Reg. Ref. 21/62: Planning permission granted by the Planning Authority in 2021 for: alterations to Freffans house; extension to Freffans house to adjoin existing courtyard buildings; alterations and renovations to existing courtyard buildings to include living accommodation and private office use; extension to existing courtyard buildings, including car port; new waste water treatment plant for Freffans house; construction of a replacement dwelling, in lieu of Freffans lodge, which is to be demolished as per Planning application TA/200830; new waste water treatment plant for replacement dwelling; associated landscaping and site works. (*Invalid appeal recorded Ref. ACP-310232-25*).
- 4.1.3. Reg. Ref. TA/200830: Planning permission granted by the Planning Authority in 2020 for new field entrance onto public road; new farm yard consisting of livestock housing shed with underground slurry holding tank; general agricultural storage and machinery shed; above-ground manure pit; underground water holding tanks; new stable yard consisting of 1 no. building incorporating 8 no. stables, 1 no. building incorporating 2 no. stables; 1 no. building incorporating 4 no. stables; enclosed motorised horse walker; open equestrian exercise arena; enclosing walls and hard surfaces associated with farm yard and stable yard; general site works; demolition of existing dwelling house.

4.2. **Nearby sites:**

- 4.2.1. None.

## 5.0 **Policy Context**

### 5.1. **National guidelines and strategies**

Climate Action Plan 2025

National Biodiversity Action Plan 2023, including its Objectives and Targets

Caring for our Vernacular Heritage 2022

A Living Tradition A Strategy to Enhance the Understanding, Minding and Handing on of Our Built Vernacular Heritage 2021

Climate Action and Low Carbon Act 2015 & Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021.

Architectural Heritage Protection Guidelines for Planning Authorities 2011

Quality Housing for Sustainable Communities Best Practice Guidelines for Delivery Homes Sustaining Communities 2007

Sustainable Rural Housing Guidelines for Planning Authorities 2005

## 5.2. Development Plan

- 5.2.1. The site is within a the 'RA – Rural Area' land use zoning objective area. I note the following provisions of the Development Plan;
- 5.2.2. Section 8.7.3 'Historic Building Stock and Vernacular Architecture':
- 5.2.3. Policy HER POL 21: *To encourage the retention, sympathetic maintenance and sustainable re-use of historic buildings, including vernacular dwellings or farm buildings and the retention of historic streetscape character, fabric, detail and features.*
- 5.2.4. Policy HER POL 22: *Seek the retention of surviving historic plot sizes and street patterns in the villages and towns of Meath and incorporate ancient boundaries or layouts, such as burgage plots and townland boundaries, into re-developments.*
- 5.2.5. Policy HER POL 23: *To actively promote the retention and restoration of thatched dwellings as a key component of the built heritage of the County.*
- 5.2.6. Objective HER OBJ 23: *To ensure that conversions or extensions of traditional buildings or the provision of new adjoining buildings, are sensitively designed and do not detract from the character of the historic building.*
- 5.2.7. Section 8.7.5 Designed Landscapes, Gardens and Demesnes:
- 5.2.8. Policy HER POL 26: *To encourage the protection and enhancement of heritage gardens and demesne landscapes, and to support, in consultation with the owners, the provision of public access to these sites as appropriate.*
- 5.2.9. Section 9.6 'Rural Residential Development: Design and Siting Considerations':

- 5.2.10. Policy RD POL 9: *To require all applications for rural houses to comply with the 'Meath Rural House Design Guide'*
- 5.2.11. Section 9.14 'Vernacular Rural Buildings and Replacement Dwellings':
- 5.2.12. Policy RD POL 30: *To promote the viable re-use of vernacular dwellings without losing their character and to support applications for the sensitive restoration of disused vernacular or traditional dwellings.*
- 5.2.13. Policy RD POL 31: *To encourage and facilitate the appropriate refurbishment of existing housing stock in rural areas and in certain limited cases the replacement of existing dwellings subject to development assessment criteria outlined below.*
- 5.2.14. Policy RD POL 32: *To oppose the demolition and replacement of traditional or vernacular rural houses in order to protect the varied types of housing stock in rural areas of the County and to preserve the rural built heritage.*
- 5.2.15. Policy RD POL 33: *To consider the limited conversion of outhouses and other structures attached to large country houses or other heritage structures where acceptable conservation practice is observed in line with the other policies and objectives of this plan and where acceptable site suitability has been established in terms of access, car parking, open space, wastewater disposal and maintaining the setting and amenities of the main structure.*
- 5.2.16. Policy RD POL 34: *To respect the sensitive restoration and conversion to residential use of disused vernacular or traditional dwellings or traditional farm buildings, including those which are Protected Structures, such proposals shall not be subject to the Rural Housing Policy (i.e. local need) that applies to new dwellings.*
- 5.2.17. Section 9.14.1 'Development Assessment Criteria'.
- 5.2.18. Section 11.2.1 'Pre-Application Discussions'.
- 5.2.19. Section 11.4 'General Standards applicable to all Development Types', including DM POL 2: *Appropriate energy conservation strategies should be employed in location, design, mass, orientation and the choice of materials of all new and renovated developments.*
- 5.2.20. Meath Rural Design Guide



### **5.3. Natural Heritage Designations**

- 5.3.1. River Boyne and River Blackwater SAC and River Boyne and River Blackwater SPA are approx. 2.64km to the north.

## **6.0 Environmental Impact Assessment screening**

- 6.1.1. The proposed development has been subject to preliminary examination for environment impact assessment (See Forms 1 & 2 Appendix 1 of this report). Having regard to the characteristics and location of the development and the types and characteristics of potential impacts, I consider that there is no real likelihood of significant effects on the environment. The development, therefore, does not trigger requirement for EIA screening and an EIAR is not required.

## **7.0 The Appeal**

### **7.1. Grounds of First-Party Appeal**

- 7.1.1. A first-party appeal was received, from the appellant's planning consultant, the main points of which are summarised as follows:

- Appeal sets out details of the decisions, Planner Report and Development Plan, incl. HER POL 21-23 and RD POL 32;
- Appeal states the Development Plan recognises limited circumstances where replacement of a dwelling may be acceptable (RD POL 31). Appeal states that Section 9.14.1 clarifies that a replacement dwelling may be permitted if the original structure was last used as a dwelling and its roof, internal and external walls are generally intact. Appeal states that the intent in this regard is to ensure truly ruinous structures are carefully evaluated;
- Appeal states the subject case sits at the outside of the margins of these policies. It states that prior to its dereliction Freffans House may have exhibited architectural character but its physical conditions has severely deteriorated despite the applicant's best efforts at stabilisation;

- Appeal acknowledges the proposal does not strictly encourage retention (HER POL 21) however the spirit of the heritage policies can be upheld through sensitive replacement in this exceptional circumstance;
- Freffans House is not a Protected Structure or in an ACA. It is of local architectural interest but was not deemed to warrant listing on Record of Protected Structures (RPS). Planner Report acknowledges the House's character and also derelict and dangerous state;
- Appellant fully respects principles of reuse and embodied energy; appellant initially pursued restoration (Ref. 21/62), but after exhaustive investigation including a drone survey and building defects report it became clear that very little of the original house could be saved. The structural fabric is compromised to a dangerous degree. Appeal refers to bulging walls, water ingress through failing roof timbers, and the internal structure largely gutted. Appeal states that the collapse of sections since 2021 means restoration would amount to facadism or wholesale reconstruction behind retained fragments. The extensive damage occurred prior to appellant purchasing the property in 2019. Appeal states the intent of Policies HER POL 21 and RD POL 32 cannot be meaningfully achieved because the building's integrity has been lost;
- Once purchased in 2019 the appellant sought to ensure the building was safe and secure from the elements. The unauthorised extension was removed. Permission for alterations and extension (Ref. 21/62) was granted. Despite protect works the house further deteriorated. Appeal refers to attached drone photography which shows the ruinous state of the House. Report sets out details of current condition incl. in relation to chimneys, roof, windows, walls, and internal floors, plaster, joinery, fireplaces, stairs and walls. Appeal states the original plan was to restore the House however this has proven impossible, unviable, and prohibitively costly in view of the degradation, and further made prohibitive by the surge in building costs since the property was acquired;
- Appeal states the proposal was acceptable on all other planning grounds, and that the decision to refuse on this one ground is unsupported by the facts;

- Appeal states the decision to refuse was made without the Planning Officer and Conservation Officer visiting the site, and without viewing the provided drone photography. Appeal requests the Commission to review same;
- Decision to refuse is contradicted by the drone photography and building defects survey which show the structure is effectively beyond repair. Refusal fails to appropriately weigh the exceptional condition of the building against the heritage policies. Enforcing a 'no demolition' stance undermines the broader aim of preserving Meath's vernacular heritage;
- Appel states the Defects Survey concludes the house is structural unsound and effectively beyond repair and rehabilitation. The submitted drone footage corroborates this showing collapsed sections of the roof and floor, destabilised walls, and extensive weather damage. No significant historic interior features survive. There is a total lack of internal vernacular structural elements. Appeal sets out a summary of defects, incl. lack of ceilings, decorative plasterwork, wall finish, joinery, floor finishes, fireplaces, and the majority of historic windows. Appeal also states that floor structures have been greatly compromised, and internal walls have been removal such that the original layout is lost;
- Appeal states the structure is 'a perilous shell', and that insisting on its retention is not practical or in the interests of heritage which would result in continued decay and collapse meaning the structure and its history would be lost. Appeal states that by contrast a carefully executed 'reconstruction' offers a way to honour the legacy of the House in a safe, sustainable manner;
- Regarding precedent, the Council previously granted (Ref. 21/62) proposals for substantial work to Freffans House and demolition of Freffans Lodge which was a smaller dwelling on the site. As such the Council recognised that demolition and new build was warranted to achieve overall improvement. Proposal is consistent with the planning history and does not set an adverse precedent;
- RD POL 34 supports conversion / reuse of vernacular structures; proposal will bring back into use the courtyard buildings. Reviving the farmyard gives effect to the heritage policies even if the original House fabric cannot be retained;
- Regarding the proposed design, appeal states the replacement is designed by RIAI accredited Conservation Practice Grade I Architect. The proposed

replacement is on same footprint and of same scale and form as existing structure and complies with HER OBJ 23. Proposal is architecturally respectful and sensitive to its context, and will harmonise with the existing 18<sup>th</sup> Century courtyard complex. It is not generic, but is a purpose-designed reconstruction informed by conservation best practice. Massing, proportions and façade detailing echo late-Georgian character. Where feasible, sound materials from the House will be salvaged and reused. The Council found the design, layout, footprint, height and aesthetics to be acceptable;

- Proposal is essentially a brownfield site as per National Planning Framework National Policy Objective 17, and will ensure continued use of this historic homestead. The Development Plan encourages refurbishment of disused houses to help meet rural housing needs which echoes Government's 'Town and Village Renewal' and 'Housing for All' objectives;
- Mitigation: Appellant will accept conditions for a measure survey, photographic record and architectural salvage plan to document the House. Landscaping will reinforce the setting of the House. The historic courtyard will be repaired and reused. The overall demesne character will be maintained and enhanced;
- Services: Site services will be upgraded. Proposed wastewater treatment plant and percolation area (WWTS) will outperform existing septic tank;
- Access: The approved entrance (Ref. 21/62) will be utilised. No issues arise;
- The Architectural Heritage Protection Guidelines acknowledge where preservation of a historic structure is not feasible, a well-designed new building may be acceptable;
- Summary: The proposal represents exceptional circumstances to justify demolition and departure from the policy of retaining vernacular structures. Freffans House is derelict, uninhabitable and dangerous. Regarding the principle of development, the proposal was deemed acceptable on all raised parameters. House is beyond economic or practical repair. Whilst it is a regrettable last report, the replacement will secure the long-term future of the historic farmstead which aligns with Development Plan heritage policies. Proposal has no adverse impact but instead offers planning gains by removing a dangerous ruin and rejuvenating a piece of Meath's rural built environment. The proposal is justified

on both policy and practical grounds. It balances heritage concerns with the need to address dereliction and safety issues.

7.1.2. The appeal includes a Defects Survey report relating to Freffans House prepared by the appellant's engineer. The survey includes photographs and related commentary, and makes the following points:

- The building dates from the 1820s. It has been in a state of dereliction for approx. 15 years. All fixtures have been stripped out (fireplaces, stairs, coving, plaster ceilings, doors, most windows etc);
- Building has effectively been left open to the elements, with most windows and doors missing and significant damage to the roof, allowing for water ingress and vegetative growth;
- Significant insect infestation and wet rot to structural timbers;
- Stonework to external and internal structural walls has been damaged in a number of areas, with some poor-quality repairs attempted;
- Approx. 20% of the windows remain but are significantly damaged and beyond repair.

## **7.2. Planning Authority Response**

7.2.1. The appeal response received from the Planning Authority summarises the appeal, states the application was appropriately considered, and requests the Commission uphold the decision to refuse.

## **7.3. Observations**

7.3.1. None. Submissions were sought from Failte Ireland, The Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage Development Applications Unit, the Arts Council, the Heritage Council, and An Taisce in relation to Freffans House, however no responses were received within the defined timeframe.

## **7.4. Further Responses**

7.4.1. None.

## 8.0 Assessment

8.1.1. Having regard to the foregoing; having examined the application, appeal, Planning Authority reports, and all other documentation on file including all of the submissions received in relation to the appeal; and having inspected the area within and around the site; and having regard to relevant local, regional and national policies, objectives and guidance, I consider the main issues in this appeal are those set out in the refusal reason and related matters raised in the course of the appeal.

### 8.2. Principle of development

8.2.1. The site is within a 'RA – Rural Area' land use zoning objective area. The zoning objective for the area is "*To protect and promote in a balanced way, the development of agriculture, forestry and sustainable rural-related enterprise, community facilities, biodiversity, the rural landscape, and the built and cultural heritage*". Residential is a permitted use subject to compliance with the Rural Settlement Strategy. I am satisfied residential development is acceptable in principle in the area, subject to the considerations below.

### 8.3. Refusal reason

#### Demolition of Freffans House

- 8.3.1. I have reviewed the relevant provisions of the Development Plan including Meath Rural Design Guide, and of the Architectural Heritage Protection Guidelines. I note in particular that Freffans House and related lands are not on the Meath Record of Protected Structures or within an Architectural Conservation Area. I also note Freffans House is not recorded on the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage.
- 8.3.2. Regarding the heritage of Freffans House, information submitted by the applicant as part of the parent application (Ref. 21/62) stated the main House dated from 1852. That application included details of the historic House and wider estate, as well as details of the changes to the House including modern additions and alterations. In the subject application, the Planning Authority Architectural Conservation Officer stated the House is a late Georgian farmhouse, although I note the date of construction referenced in the report differs ('circa 1800').

- 8.3.3. Regarding the condition of the House, I observed that the dwelling has not been in use for some years and is in a very poor condition. Whilst the roof, floors and internal & external structural elements are largely in place, the external envelope is open to the elements and the majority of internal fixtures, fittings and features have been removed. However, despite the obvious deterioration of the building, I consider that much of the external and internal building fabric, form and layout remains intact and that a significant degree of the original external character of the building remains.

*Development Plan*

- 8.3.4. Regarding the refusal reason, it stated that the proposal to demolish Freffans House would contravene Development Plan policies HER POL 21–23. I am not satisfied Policies HER POL 22 and 23 are directly relevant to the subject proposal. HER POL 22 relates to plot sizes and street patterns in villages and towns, and to ancient boundaries or layouts such as burgage plots and townland boundaries. I see no evidence that ancient boundaries or layouts, burgage plots or townland boundaries relate to the site. HER POL 23 relates to thatch dwellings and as such is not relevant in this case. In this regard, I note that the Architectural Conservation Officer report refers to somewhat different provisions of the Development Plan (HER POL 21, HER OBJ 23 and HER POL 26). I address each in turn below.

*Policy HER POL 21*

- 8.3.5. Policy HER POL 21 seeks to encourage the retention, sympathetic maintenance and sustainable re-use of historic buildings, including vernacular dwellings or farm buildings and the retention of historic streetscape character, fabric, detail and features. In 2021 the applicant sought to re-use the building as a dwelling, and the Council granted permission in this regard (Reg. 21/62).
- 8.3.6. The subject application and appeal set out the appellant's reasons for why reuse is no longer being pursued. The appellant's planning consultant report gives reasons in this regard. It refers to the building condition; that little of the original house could be saved; that the structural fabric is compromised to a dangerous degree; and notably that the restoration is impossible, unviable and prohibitively costly, and further made prohibitive by the surge in building costs since the property was acquired. I note these points are made in the planning consultant report and not in the submitted Defects Survey report.

- 8.3.7. The Defects Survey report identifies defects and sets out related observations and comments. The report states the building has been in a state of dereliction for some time, however I consider that no clear conclusion or recommendation are provided as to whether the building could be reused or not.
- 8.3.8. The subject application is for alterations to permission Ref. 21/62. As part of that application the appellant intended to reuse the building. An 'Historical Background, Design Statement and Visual Impact Assessment' report prepared by the same architect was submitted with that application. The report set out details of the then current condition and identified that many elements required to be repaired or replaced. The report stated the main external walls were stable and generally structurally sound. The report stated the main house was in urgent need of restoration and repair. Details of the then proposed restoration were set out. Whilst I am conscious the report was drafted in late 2020 and has not been updated as part of the subject application, having reviewed the parent application, and based on the information currently available, I do not consider that it has been clearly demonstrated that the building, despite it being stated as being derelict for c.15 years, has deteriorated so significantly in the last c.4 years as to preclude the permitted reuse. I note that within the referenced Historical Background report, works to the house are shown as having commenced.
- 8.3.9. The Development Plan does not set out significant supporting details for the application of Policy HER POL 21, and to what extent re-use of historic buildings is to be encouraged. Development Plan Section 11.2.1 states that an Architectural Assessment may be deemed necessary to accompany planning applications on a case-by-case basis. The Planning Authority sought for the submission of a comprehensive historical analysis of the house by a Conservation Architect. This has not been provided as part of the application or appeal. I note the applicant's architect is a RIAI Accredited Conservation Practice Grade I architect. Whilst I acknowledge the appellant's points regarding the current condition of the building, and whilst I do not wish to ascribe to the building the status of a Protected Structure or a structure within an ACA, given the forgoing I am not satisfied the appellant has clearly demonstrated that the current proposal has had appropriate regard to HER POL 21. I note in particular the absence of an updated historical analysis of the house by a



Conservation Architect and the lack of clear conclusion or recommendation within the submitted Defects Survey report.

*Policy RD POL 31*

8.3.10. The appellant states that Policy RD POL 31 is also relevant, and that it recognises limited circumstances where replacement of a dwelling may be acceptable. RD POL 31 seeks to encourage and facilitate the appropriate refurbishment of existing housing stock in rural areas and in certain limited cases the replacement of existing dwellings subject to development assessment criteria outlined in Section 9.14.1 'Development Assessment Criteria'. Section 9.14.1 sets out 6 no. criteria, of which the following 5 no. I consider to be relevant to the proposed demolition:

- *That in the case of replacement dwellings, to require that the original structure was last used as a dwelling and that its roof, internal and external walls are generally intact.* Both the Planner Reports and applicant documents refer to the existing building as a dwelling. Given the nature of the building, I am satisfied the structure was most likely last used as a dwelling. In this regard, I note RD POL 31 relates to refurbishment of existing housing stock. Given the existing condition of the building, it is debatable whether the building can be considered to form part of the housing stock, however I am satisfied the building comes within the parameters of Section 9.14.1. Further regarding the condition of the building, and noting the submitted Defects Survey, in the context of this criterion I am satisfied the roof, internal and external walls are generally intact;
- *That replacement dwellings are provided at locations where safe access and acceptable wastewater disposal arrangements can be put in place and where specific development objectives or other policies of the Planning Authority are not compromised, and;* Having regard to the assessment set out in the Planning Authority reports, and to my assessment below in relation to access and services, I am generally satisfied safe access and acceptable wastewater disposal arrangements can be put in place and that specific development objectives or other policies of the Planning Authority are not compromised;
- *That the replacement dwelling shall be designed to be of a size and scale appropriate to the site, and;* Given the height, size and scale of the existing building, and the nature and layout of the site and adjacent areas, I am generally

satisfied the proposed dwelling size and scale is appropriate to the site for the purposes of this criterion;

- The design of replacement dwellings in rural areas shall comply with the 'Meath Rural Design Guide'. Having regard to the proposed dwelling, and noting its similar height, scale and form to the existing building, I am generally satisfied the proposal meets the requirements of this criterion;
- In the assessment of whether a house which it is proposed to replaced is habitable or not, the Planning Authority will rely on the definition contained in Section 2 (Interpretation) of the Planning & Development Act 2000 as amended. A "Habitable House" means a house which: a. is 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. The Development Plan does not set out guidance for how this criterion is to be applied. I note the building is clearly not currently habitable.

8.3.11. Having reviewed the provisions of Policy RD POL 31 and Section 9.14.1, I am generally satisfied the proposed development complies with these provisions.

#### Other Development Plan Policies and Objectives

8.3.12. I have also reviewed the proposed development in the context of other related provisions of the Development Plan.

#### *Policy RD POL 30 and Policy RD POL 32*

8.3.13. RD POL 30 relates to vernacular and traditional dwellings and RD POL 32 relates to vernacular and traditional rural houses. No clear definitions of these terms are provided in the Development Plan, Architectural Heritage Protection Guidelines, or other national guidelines. However, I note the Development Plan refers to the vernacular tradition as the homes and workplaces built by local people using local materials.

8.3.14. Regarding RD POL 30, I am satisfied Freffans House does not represent vernacular architecture and as such this policy is not directly relevant to this case.

8.3.15. Regarding Policy RD POL 32, it seeks to oppose the demolition and replacement of traditional or vernacular rural houses in order to protect the varied types of housing stock in rural areas of the County and to preserve the rural built heritage. Minimal

supporting text as to the application of this policy is set out in the Development Plan. I note the Conservation Officer report referred to HER OBJ 23 which relates to traditional buildings; this raises the question as to why neither the refusal reason nor Conservation Officer report referred RD POL 32 which relates to traditional houses. Nevertheless, given the wording of Policy RD POL 32 I am satisfied that, whilst the term 'traditional' is not clearly defined in the Development Plan, it is relevant to the subject building. I am generally satisfied the existing building should be considered to form part of the housing stock, in line with Section 9.14.1 and Policy HER POL 31 above, and I am satisfied the building forms part of the rural built heritage of the County. Accordingly, having regard to the information set out above, in particular the nature and heritage of the building and the information submitted with the application and appeal, I do not consider the applicant has satisfactorily addressed the provisions of Development Plan Policy RD POL 32 which seeks to oppose the demolition and replacement of traditional rural houses in order to preserve the rural built heritage.

*Policy HER POL 26*

- 8.3.16. The Conservation Officer reports refer to HER POL 26, which seeks to encourage the protection and enhancement of heritage gardens and demesne landscapes. The garden and landscape layout proposed as part of this application is broadly as permitted under the parent application (Ref. 21/62). I am satisfied the proposed works in this regard are generally acceptable.

*Objective HER OBJ 23*

- 8.3.17. The Conservation Officer reports also refer to HER OBJ 23, which seeks to ensure that conversions or extensions of traditional buildings or the provision of new adjoining buildings are sensitively designed and do not detract from the character of the historic building. No commentary is provided within the Conservation Officer reports in relation to the proposed buildings and related works. I note the applicant architect is a Conservation Practice Grade I architect, and I have reviewed the points made within the application and appeal in relation to the proposed works. As noted above, I am satisfied the positioning, height, size and scale of the proposed dwelling are generally acceptable. I note the proposed building is considerably larger, and I would characterise the overall design and style as being a contemporary version of

the existing building. Whilst I consider the overall design approach is acceptable, I have some reservation regarding the style, detailing and lack of detailed assessment of the suitability of the proposed design within its heritage context, however on balance I do not consider refusal in this regard is warranted.

#### Courtyard refurbishment and extension

- 8.3.18. I note the provisions of Objective HER OBJ 23, Section 9.14.1 and Policy RD POL 33. Development Plan Section 9.14.1 sets out 6 no. criteria relating to refurbishment in rural areas. The sixth criterion is that in the case of refurbishment and extension proposals, that the scale and architectural treatment of proposed works are sympathetic to the character of the original structure and the surrounding area including adjoining or nearby development.
- 8.3.19. I have reviewed the development proposed to the courtyard buildings, which are to be largely retained. The works proposed relate to conversion of the buildings to ancillary office, storage, residential and guest space adjoining the proposed dwelling, including the replacement of existing fenestration and doors. An extension to the courtyard buildings is proposed, which is broadly comparable to the existing courtyard in terms of design, height, and form. In terms of materials, I note the existing courtyard structure is built of stone, whereas brick is proposed for the extension. In terms of the nature of the proposed works, I am generally satisfied with this element of the proposal, subject to a standard condition in relation to materials.
- 8.3.20. Regarding the proposed use of the courtyard buildings, I note the submitted drawings (Drw.No. PL-NMR 203) refer to a staff apartment. The response to further information stated there are currently no household staff employed; the dwelling will only be used as a private house and will have no commercial use; temporary farm staff are employed at times; the development includes for a home office; and that the applicant is not seeking permission for a rural enterprise or business start-up. I consider that a condition in this regard would be required to restrict the nature and operation of any permitted dwelling to that of a single dwelling unit.

- 8.3.21. I address access, car parking, and wastewater disposal separately below.

#### Summary

- 8.3.22. Having regard to on the foregoing, and having regard to the provisions of the Development Plan in particular Policy HER POL 21, which seeks to encourage the

retention and sustainable re-use of historic buildings, and Policy RD POL 32, which seeks to oppose the demolition and replacement of traditional rural houses in order to preserve the rural built heritage, I am not satisfied the appellant has satisfactorily demonstrated that the revised proposal accords with these provisions of the Development Plan, in particular in relation to the demolition of Freffans House. As such, whilst I am satisfied that the proposal broadly complies with the provisions of Policy RD POL 31, which applies to the demolition of and replacement of dwellings, I am not satisfied that the proposal complies with the provisions of the Development Plan in relation to historic buildings and the preservation of rural built heritage.

8.3.23. Further in this regard, the land use zoning objective for the area is “*To protect and promote in a balanced way, the development of agriculture, forestry and sustainable rural-related enterprise, community facilities, biodiversity, the rural landscape, and the built and cultural heritage*”. I am not satisfied the revised proposal protects and promotes in a balanced way the built and cultural heritage of the area.

8.3.24. In this regard I acknowledge the extent of dereliction of the building, however conversely, I consider that it retains a significant degree of its character, heritage value and physical form. I note in particular the appellant did not provide the historical analysis requested by the Planning Authority Conservation Officer. I do not consider the proposal satisfactorily responds to the Conservation Officer assessment that the building should be reused rather than demolished. I note too the absence of clear conclusions and recommendations in the submitted Defects Survey.

8.3.25. In summary, whilst I consider the intended use of the wider estate is to be welcomed and aligns with the Development Plan, and whilst I acknowledge the appellant points as set out above, on balance, and based on the available information, I do not consider the demolition as proposed should be permitted.

#### **8.4. Related matters raised in the course of the appeal**

##### Wastewater

8.4.1. A new wastewater treatment plant is proposed to replace an existing septic tank. The second Planner Report considered the proposals acceptable. No report from the Environment or Water Services sections are recorded. A Site Suitability Assessment was submitted in response to further information. I have reviewed the details

provided. Secondary and Tertiary Treatments Systems were considered suitable, with a tertiary treatment system proposed. I am generally satisfied with the proposal in this regard, subject to standard conditions.

#### Access

- 8.4.2. The site is accessible from the L62021 by two separate accesses. The existing access gates are set back from the road and splayed. The application states that the existing and previously permitted access arrangements are to be utilised. Sufficient parking would be available. I am satisfied the proposed arrangements are acceptable subject to the attachment of conditions linking the proposed development to that previously permitted.

#### Rural housing

- 8.4.3. The applicant proposes demolition of the existing building and construction of a dwelling in its place which is to be used as a private residence for the applicant and their family. Permission was granted to the applicant (Ref. 21/62) for the demolition of Freffans Lodge, a previous dwelling on the farm, and the construction of a replacement dwelling. I am not satisfied the application and Planner Report fully addressed this matter, however I do not consider that refusal in this regard is warranted.

#### Use of existing building

- 8.4.4. I address above the terminology used in the Development Plan in relation to 'housing stock', 'dwelling' and similar. Freffans House appears to have been derelict for some years; is open to the weather; and the majority of its internal features have been removed. Given the wording of the Development Plan, I am satisfied as to the applicability of the above policies and objectives to subject case, however, in the interests of clarity I do not ascribe any particular active use to the building.

#### Submitted information

- 8.4.5. I note the appellant points regarding a lack of site visits by the Planning Authority, and lack of consideration of a referenced drone survey. I have set out above the general findings of my site visit. The Conservation Officer report stated the referenced drone photographs were not provided. Although I note a hyperlink to the drone survey was provided within the application text, I see no drone footage

submitted with the application or appeal documentation, either on the Planning Authority public file or Commission case file. Whilst the Commission may be inclined to seek submission of the referenced information, I am satisfied this is not necessary to progress to a decision in this case.

## **9.0 Appropriate Assessment screening**

- 9.1.1. 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 any European Sites including the River Boyne and River Blackwater SAC and River Boyne and River Blackwater SPA in view of the conservation objectives of these sites and is therefore excluded from further consideration. Appropriate Assessment is not required. This determination is based on the nature of the proposed works and the location and distance from nearest European site and lack of connections.

## **10.0 Water Framework Directive**

- 10.1.1. The subject site is located in a rural area and is located approx. 241m from the Boycetown river. The proposed development comprises demolition of a building, construction of a house, alterations to courtyard buildings and associated site works. No water deterioration concerns were raised in the planning appeal. I have assessed the project and have considered the objectives as set out in Article 4 of the Water Framework Directive which seek to protect and, where necessary, restore surface & ground water waterbodies in order to reach good status, and prevent deterioration. Having considered the nature, scale and location of the project, I am satisfied it can be eliminated from further assessment because there is no conceivable risk to any surface and/or groundwater water bodies either qualitatively or quantitatively, or otherwise jeopardise any water body in reaching its WFD objectives. The reason for this conclusion is as follows: the small scale and nature of the development, the location-distance from nearest Water bodies, and/or lack of hydrological connections. I conclude that on the basis of objective information, the proposed development will not result in a risk of deterioration on any water body either

qualitatively or quantitatively or on a temporary or permanent basis or otherwise jeopardise any water body in reaching its WFD objectives and consequently can be excluded from further assessment.

## 11.0 Recommendation

11.1.1. I recommend permission be **Refused**, for the reasons and consideration below.

## 12.0 Reasons and Considerations

Having regard to the heritage of Freffans House, and to the information submitted with the application and appeal, it is considered that the applicant has not clearly demonstrated that the demolition of Freffans House as proposed would comply with the provisions of the Meath County Development Plan 2021-2027, including Policy HER POL 21, which seeks to encourage the retention and sustainable re-use of historic buildings; Policy RD POL 32, which seeks to oppose the demolition and replacement of traditional rural houses in order to preserve the rural built heritage; and the 'RA – Rural Area' land use zoning objective for the area which seeks "*To protect and promote in a balanced way, the development of agriculture, forestry and sustainable rural-related enterprise, community facilities, biodiversity, the rural landscape, and the built and cultural heritage*". It is considered that the applicant has not satisfactorily demonstrated that the proposed development accords with these provisions of the Development Plan, in particular in relation to the demolition of Freffans House, and accordingly should be refused.

*-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.-*

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Dan Aspell  
Inspector  
24<sup>th</sup> November 2025



## APPENDIX 1

### Form 1: EIA Pre-Screening

<b>Case Reference</b>	ACP-323362-25
<b>Proposed Development Summary</b>	Alterations to Planning Application Ref. No. 2162. Demolition of a building and construction of a house. Alterations to the courtyard buildings and site works.
<b>Development Address</b>	Freffans House, Freffans Great, Trim, Co. Meath
<b>1. Does the proposed development come within the definition of a 'project' for the purposes of EIA?</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes, it is a 'Project'. Proceed to Q2.
	<input type="checkbox"/> No, No further action required.
<b>2. Is the proposed development of a CLASS specified in Part 1, Schedule 5 of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001 (as amended)?</b>	
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes, it is a Class specified in Part 1. <b>EIA is mandatory. No Screening required. EIAR to be requested. Discuss with ADP.</b>	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No, it is not a Class specified in Part 1. <b>Proceed to Q3</b>	
<b>3. Is the proposed development of a CLASS specified in Part 2, Schedule 5, Planning and Development Regulations 2001 (as amended) OR a prescribed type of proposed road development under Article 8 of Roads Regulations 1994, AND does it meet/exceed the thresholds?</b>	
<input type="checkbox"/> No, the development is not of a Class Specified in Part 2, Schedule 5 or a prescribed type of proposed road development under Article 8 of the Roads Regulations, 1994. <b>No Screening required.</b>	
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes, the proposed development is of a Class and meets/exceeds the threshold. <b>EIA is Mandatory. No Screening Required.</b>	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes, the proposed development is of a Class but is sub-threshold. <b>Preliminary examination required. (Form 2) OR If Schedule 7A information submitted proceed to Q4. (Form 3 Required)</b>	Class 10(b)(i) Construction of more than 500 dwelling units.
<b>4. Has Schedule 7A information been submitted AND is the development a Class of Development for the purposes of the EIA Directive (as identified in Q3)?</b>	
<b>Yes</b> <input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Screening Determination required (Complete Form 3)</b>
<b>No</b> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<b>Pre-screening determination conclusion remains as above (Q1 to Q3)</b>

**Inspector:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_ 14<sup>th</sup> November 2025\_\_

## Form 2: EIA Preliminary Examination

<b>Case Reference</b>	ACP-323362-25
<b>Proposed Development Summary</b>	Alterations to Planning Application Ref. No. 2162. Demolition of a building and construction of a house. Alterations to the courtyard buildings and site works.
<b>Development Address</b>	Freffans House, Freffans Great, Trim, Co. Meath
<b>This preliminary examination should be read with, and in the light of, the rest of the Inspector's Report attached herewith.</b>	
<b>Characteristics of proposed development</b>	Proposed development comprises demolition of a building and construction of a houses in a rural area. The proposed development has a modest footprint, comes forward as a standalone project, requires modest demolition works, does not require the use of substantial natural resources, or give rise to production of significant waste, significant risk of pollution or nuisance. The development, by virtue of its type, does not pose a risk of major accident and/or disaster, human health or is vulnerable to climate change.
<b>Location of development</b>	The development is located in a rural area. The receiving location is not particularly environmentally sensitive and is removed from sensitive natural habitats, designated sites and identified landscapes of significance in the County Development Plan. The site is of historic and cultural significance being a period dwelling, but is removed from designated sites of archaeological interest, Protected Structures or Architectural Conservation Areas. Given the scale and nature of development and mitigation proposed there will be no significant environmental effects arising.
<b>Types and characteristics of potential impacts</b>	Having regard to the characteristics and modest nature of the proposed development, the location removed from sensitive habitats/features, likely limited magnitude and spatial extent of effects, and absence of in combination effects, there is no potential for significant effects on the environmental factors listed in section 171A of the Act.
<b>Conclusion</b>	
<b>Likelihood of Significant Effects</b>	<b>Conclusion in respect of EIA</b>
There is no real likelihood of significant effects on the environment.	EIA is not required.

**Inspector:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_14<sup>th</sup> November 2025\_\_\_\_\_  
**DP/ADP:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_