



An  
Coimisiún  
Pleanála

## Inspector's Report

PL-500869-MH-26

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<b>Development</b>	Permission to convert existing attic space to an office/store space, modification of roof structure, raising of the existing gable c/w window, new internal access stairs, two rooflights within front roofslope and flat roof dormer in rear roofslope.
<b>Location</b>	No. 4, The Drive, Highlands, Rathmullan, Drogheda, Co. Meath
<b>Planning Authority</b>	Meath County Council
<b>Planning Authority Reg. Ref.</b>	2561305
<b>Applicant(s)</b>	Austin & Vanessa MacNamara
<b>Type of Application</b>	Permission
<b>Planning Authority Decision</b>	Refuse Permission
<b>Type of Appeal</b>	First Party v Decision
<b>Observer(s)</b>	None
<b>Date of Site Inspection</b>	20 <sup>th</sup> day of May 2026
<b>Inspector</b>	Fergal Ó Bric

## 1.0 Site Location and Description

1.1 The subject site is located within the southern environs of Drogheda, within the administrative boundary of Meath and approximately 2.25 kilometres south-west of Drogheda town centre. The appeal site comprises a stated area of 0.026 hectares. There is an existing semi-detached two storey dwelling on site within a row of identical type two storey semi-detached dwellings within 'The Drive' residential development, a cul-de-sac within the wider Highlands residential development which comprises a large residential development of two storey detached, semi-detached and terraced dwellings. To the front of the dwelling, the site has its own off-street private car parking area which is enclosed by low perimeter walls along the front (roadside) boundary and there are low walled boundaries along the western and eastern (side) site boundaries forward of the front building line.

1.2 To the east and west (each side) of the appeal site are identical two storey semi-detached dwellings on generous plot sizes fronting onto the internal access road and to the rear (north) of the appeal site are two storey dwellings within 'The Close' part of the Highlands development residential development. Within the rear garden space there are two-metre-tall boundary walls along its perimeter, also some laurel planting along the eastern rear boundary. The rear garden area also includes a garden shed, a patio area, some grassed area and a single storey sunroom extension.

## 2.0 Proposed Development

2.1 Planning permission is sought for the following:

- Permission for the conversion of attic space to an office/store comprising the modification of the roof structure,
- Raising of the existing gable c/w window,
- New access stairs,
- 2 no. rooflights in the front roofslope,
- Flat roof dormer window in the rear roofslope,
- All associated site works.

### 3.0 **Planning Authority Decision**

#### 3.1 Decision

The Planning Authority (PA) issued a decision to refuse planning permission on the 30th day of January 2026 for the following reason:

1- It is an objective (DM OBJ 50) of the Meath County Development Plan 2021 – 2027 that, “All applications for residential extensions in urban areas shall be of high-quality design which respects, harmonises and integrates with the existing dwelling in terms of height, scale, materials used, finishes and window proportions”. It is considered the proposed development in particular the dormer, by reason of its inappropriate flat roof design and insufficient floor to ceiling height, would be out of keeping and would fail to integrate with the character and form of the parent dwelling and neighbouring properties; resulting in an unbalanced ad-hoc relationship with the neighbouring property and would constitute a visual discordant and substandard form of development which would by itself, and by the precedent it would create, be contrary to best practice. Accordingly, permitting the proposed development would be contrary to the aforementioned provisions of the Meath County Development Plan, would impact the visual amenities and character of the area and depreciate the value of property in the vicinity and, thereby, be contrary to the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.

#### 3.2 **Planning Authority Reports**

##### Planning Reports

- The appeal site has the benefit of an A1-existing residential land use zoning objective. Principle of development acceptable subject to development management criteria being adhered to.
- DM OBJ 50 sets out criteria in relation to domestic extensions in urban/rural areas and requires high quality design which respects, harmonise and integrates with the existing dwelling in terms of height, scale, materials, finishes, window proportions, respecting established building line, breach ridge line or eaves of roof,

- The PA set out that the proposed dormer feature would be unacceptable by reason of its inappropriate design, would be inconsistent with the character of the area and fail to integrate satisfactorily with the dwelling on site and neighbouring residential properties,
- The dormer feature would represent a discordant feature, a substandard form of development and would establish an undesirable precedent,
- A refusal of planning permission was recommended on this basis.

### 3.3 **Third Party Observations**

None received.

### 4.0 **Planning History**

No relevant planning history.

### 5.0 **Policy Context**

#### 5.1 **Development Plan**

Meath County Development Plan 2021 -2027

Zoning Objective A1-Existing residential where the objective is “to protect and enhance the amenity and character of existing residential communities’.”

Chapter 11- Development Management Standards

Section 11.5.25 of the Development Plan relates to extensions in urban and *rural areas*. *The following objectives are relevant:*

DM OBJ 50: All applications for residential extensions in urban and rural areas shall comply with the following criteria:

- High quality design which respects, harmonises and integrates with the existing dwelling in terms of height, scale, materials used, finishes, window proportions etc.
- The quantity and quality of private open space that would remain to serve the house.

- Flat roof extensions, in a contemporary design context, will be considered on their individual merits;
- Impact on amenities of adjacent residents, in terms of light and privacy. Care should be taken to ensure that the extension does not overshadow windows, yards or gardens or have windows in the flank walls which would reduce a neighbour's privacy;
- Extensions which break the existing front building line will not normally be acceptable. A porch extension which does not significantly break the front building line will normally be permitted;
- Dormer extensions shall not obscure the main features of the existing roof, i.e. should not break the ridge or eaves lines of the roof;
- Proposed side extensions shall retain side access to the rear of the property, where required for utility access, refuse collection, etc.
- Ability to provide adequate car parking within the curtilage of the dwelling house,
- In all cases where diversion or construction over existing sewerage and/or water mains is required, the consent of Irish Water will be required as part of the application.

## 5.2 Ministerial Guidelines

5.2.1 Having regard to the nature of the proposed development and to the location of the appeal site, I consider the following Guidelines to be pertinent to the assessment of the proposal.

- Sustainable Residential Development and Compact Settlements, Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2024),
- Appropriate Assessment of Plans and Projects in Ireland, Guidelines for Planning Authorities, 2010.

## 5.3 Natural Heritage Designations

The River Boyne and Blackwater Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and the River Boyne and Blackwater Special Protection Area are both located approximately 580 metres north of the subject site.

#### 5.4 **Environmental Impact Assessment-Screening**

(See Appendix 1 at end of this report). The proposed development is not within a class of development outlined within Schedule 5, Part 1 or 2 of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001, as amended. The need for environmental impact assessment can, therefore, be excluded at pre-screening stage and a screening determination is not required in this instance

#### 5.5 **Water Framework Directive- Screening**

The appeal site is located approximately 580 metres south of the River Boyne watercourse.

The proposed development relates to alterations to an existing two-storey semi-detached dwelling within an established residential development. The detailed development description is set out within Section 2.0 of my report above.

Potential for impact upon water quality was not raised by the Planning Authority nor by the applicants. The appeal site is an urban brownfield one which is fully serviced in that there is access to the public watermains and foul sewer network.

I have assessed the planning documentation and have considered the objectives as set out in Article 4 of the Water Framework Directive which seeks to protect and, where necessary, restore surface and ground water bodies in order to reach good status (meaning both good chemical and good ecological status), and to prevent deterioration. Having considered the nature, scale and location of the project, in relation to surface water management, I am satisfied that it can be eliminated from further assessment, as the applicant has demonstrated that there is no conceivable risk to The River Boyne watercourse in terms of its water quality.

The reasons for this conclusion are as follows:

- The location of the subject site, removed from the nearest boundary of the River Boyne watercourse

- The absence of hydrological connections to the River Boyne.

## **Conclusion**

I conclude that on the basis of objective information, that the proposed development will not result in a risk of deterioration on any water body (rivers, lakes, groundwaters, transitional and coastal) 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.

## **6.0 The Appeal**

### **6.1 Grounds of Appeal**

This is a first-party appeal against the decision of Meath County Council to refuse planning permission for the attic conversion development and associated site works. The grounds of appeal can be summarised as follows:

#### Principle of development

- There are many examples of attic conversions throughout Meath and other counties.
- New residential developments are using the attic floor space as additional bedroom space.
- The proposed attic conversion does not meet the criteria for habitable space, but the space would be very beneficial as an office/study space and for additional storage, which are important in terms of modern living.
- Only one other application for the conversion of an attic space has been made in the Highlands residential development, being in 2013 and that proposal was refused planning permission.
- The purpose of the planning system is to allow people to modify their homes as their family needs change.
- However, since the 2013 refusal, a lot has changed in terms of how people use the space within their homes.

- Within the Highlands development, a number of single and two storey domestic extensions have been permitted, which alters the character of the properties within the development substantially.
- The property at No 4, the Drive has previously been extended to the rear with a 17 sq. m. family and sunroom single storey extension.
- The attic conversion would not be used for habitable purposes as alluded to in the Meath County Council Planners Report

#### Design and Layout:

- The design has been carefully considered; hence the use of the half hip roof profile as opposed to a full gable raise.
- While the proposed design is not commonplace within the Highlands development, the design is commonly used throughout many other Council areas.
- The separation distance to the property to the rear at no 22 'The Close' is approximately 26 metres.
- The proposed dormer window within the rear roof slope would be a further one metre back from the rear building line, thus further removed from the neighbouring property to the rear.
- The changes proposed to the front roofslope, with the insertion of two rooflights would have no greater a visual impact than a single or two storey extension.
- The location of the property within the Highlands development would not make the rear dormer window particularly prominent within the neighbourhood.

#### Other Issues:

- No observations were received from neighbouring residents within the Highlands development.

## 6.4 **Planning Authority Response**

Response received. The PA reiterated its decision to refuse planning permission for the attic conversion development and requested that the Coimisiún uphold the decision of the PA.

## 7.0 **Assessment**

Having examined the application details and all other documentation on file, including the reports of the Local Authority, having inspected the site, and having regard to the relevant local and national policies and guidance, I consider that the substantive issues in this appeal to be considered are as follows:

- Principle of Development
- Design and layout
- Residential Amenity
- Other Matters
- Appropriate Assessment

### 7.1 **Principle of Development**

7.1.1 The subject site is located within a residential area on the perimeter of Drogheda town. The appeal site has the benefit of an A1-Existing residential land use zoning objective within the current Meath County Development Plan 2021 – 2027. The zoning objective seeks ‘To protect and enhance the amenity and character of existing residential communities’. The current proposals as per the public notices submitted seek permission to convert the attic space for office use and storage space, raising of the existing gable c/w window, to provide a new internal access stairs, to insert 2 no. rooflights in the front roofslope and a flat roof dormer window in the rear roofslope and all associated site works. It is, therefore, considered that the alterations proposed to the permitted dwelling are acceptable in principle.

### 7.2 **Design and Layout**

7.2.1 The appeal site comprises a two-storey semi-detached dwelling with a stated floor area of 128.75 square metres (sq. m). The proposed attic conversion would have a floor area of 31.62 sq. m, and it is stated by the applicants within their planning documentation that the converted attic space would comprise an office space and storage area. It is stated within the planning documentation that the attic conversion would provide for an office area and storage area.

7.2.2 A number of window alterations are proposed as part of the development. A new window opening would be inserted within the existing gable and it is proposed to install two rooflights in the front roofslope and a flat roofed box dormer window in the rear roofslope. The additional first floor window openings would serve the converted attic space and provide for illumination within the attic conversion. Neither the eaves nor the ridgeline would be breached by the proposed rooflights or dormer feature. From the planning documentation submitted, the dormer window would be set back from the rear building line by a distance of c. one metre. It is proposed to install a fixed staircase from the existing first floor landing area in order to provide for access to the converted attic space. The new window openings on the side (east and west) elevations and within the front and rear roof slopes would provide illumination into the ground floor bedroom areas and are considered acceptable.

7.2.3 In terms of design and layout, I consider that the modifications required to the roofslope of the dwelling would materially alter the roof profile from a hipped roof to a half-hipped roof. All of the existing dwellings within 'The Drive' and within the wider Highlands development have hipped roofs. Given the subject site comprises a semi-detached dwelling, the altering of the roof profile within one dwelling of the pair of semi-detached dwelling upsets the balance and consistency of the roof profiles within the area and would, therefore, be out of character with the existing established and permitted design within the residential development. The subject site at No 4 'The Drive' is located within a row of identical semi-detached dwellings. I note that no other dwelling has altered their roof profile to date within 'The Drive' and I consider that the permit the proposal to materially alter the roof profile from a hipped gable roof which is consistent with the neighbouring established and permitted dwellings to a half-hip roof profile would be out of character with the design and roof profile of the other half of the semi-detached dwelling at No 5, The Drive and with the other neighbouring residential properties within 'The Drive' and would, therefore, establish

an undesirable precedent. The issues in relation to respecting the amenities of neighbouring dwellings will be addressed in Section 7.3 below.

7.2.4 I note that policy objective DM OBJ 50 relates to domestic extensions which are required to provide for 'High quality design which respects, harmonises and integrates with the existing dwelling in terms of height, scale, materials used, finishes, window proportions etc'. I consider that the material altering of the roof profile would not respect, harmonise or integrate with the existing dwelling on site nor with the adjoining semi-detached dwelling nor the other neighbouring residential properties within 'The Drive'. The introduction of the half-hipped roof profile feature would, therefore, fail to adhere to the provisions of the DMOBJ 50 policy objective within the current Meath CDP 2021-27 in relation to requirements for domestic extensions or having due regard to the character of the area. I do not consider that the half-hipped roof profile respects or integrates within the character of the area in this instance, would represent a visually discordant feature in this locality and would establish an undesirable future precedent.

### **7.3 Residential Amenity**

7.3.1 I note that no submissions were received from neighbouring residents in relation to the attic conversion proposals. I also note that the Planning Authority did not raise any particular issue in relation to adverse impact upon neighbouring residential amenities. In terms of overlooking from the two front roofslope rooflights, these features would face directly onto the internal service road serving 'The Drive' residential development and face towards the front garden spaces of other residential properties within 'The Drive'. Therefore, no potential for adverse impacts on neighbouring properties would arise from the rooflight features.

7.3.2 In terms of the rear roofslope flat roofed dormer window feature, the PA were not satisfied that by virtue of its design that it would comply with the provisions of the DM OBJ 50 policy objective. This dormer feature by virtue of its location within the rear roofslope would not be visible from the public domain. I also note that there is a separation distance of c. 13.5 metres from the existing two storey rear building line to the rear (northern) boundary wall and 9.6 metres from the nearest part of the single storey rear extension to the rear boundary wall. I also note that the dormer feature would not breach either the ridgeline nor eaves of the existing roof.

7.3.3 The proposals would accord with the provisions of SPPR1 within the Sustainable Residential Development and Compact Settlement Guidelines (SRDCSG's) 2024. In relation to separation distances, the Guidelines set out a minimum separation distance of 16 metres is required between opposing first floor windows. Therefore, on balance, having regard to the generous separation distance from the residential properties backing onto the subject site, within 'The Close' and by virtue of the dormer feature location within the rear roofslope and out of view from the public domain, I do not consider that this window feature would be unacceptable in this instance, nor would it be contrary to the provisions of policy objective DM OBJ 50. Given the relatively modest scale of the conversion proposals, and notwithstanding the unacceptability of the material alteration of the roof profile, I am satisfied that the proposed attic conversion would not adversely impact the residential amenities of neighbouring residential properties by reason of overlooking, overshadowing and/or overbearance

7.3.4 The separation distance between the side gables of the dwellings would not alter under the current proposals. The attic conversion and alteration to the roof profile would be no closer to the side boundaries than the existing dwelling on site.

7.3.5 Having regard to the separation distances demonstrated, in addition to the existing walled boundary treatment and the mature landscaping that exists within the rear garden boundary areas, I am satisfied that the proposed development would not result in undue overlooking of the neighbouring residential properties in this instance. Having regard to the suburban context of the appeal site, I consider that the proposed development accords with the requirements of Section 11.5.25 of the Meath County Development Plan 2021-2027 in respect of overlooking, daylight and separation distances between dwellings.

#### **7.4 Other Matters**

7.4.1 In relation to car parking, I do not consider that the proposed attic conversion would generate any additional car parking requirement. In any event, I note that there is adequate space within the front curtilage of the subject site for two cars to park side-by-side without one or other being required to move in order for the other car to manoeuvre within the site curtilage. The car parking standards set out within the CSG.s for urban neighbourhoods, including Drogheda provides for a maximum

standard of one space per dwelling. Therefore, I am satisfied that there is adequate car parking provision within the subject site curtilage.

7.4.2 The appellants have set out within their appeal submission that the PA referenced the use of the converted attic space for habitable purposes. No proposals for the use of the converted attic space as habitable space have been submitted as per the public notices or the planning documentation submitted. Within their appeal submission, the applicants state that they propose to use the attic space for domestic storage purposes and office space only. Therefore, this matter does not form part of this assessment.

## 8.0 **Appropriate Assessment**

8.1.1 I have considered the development in light of the requirements S177U of the Planning and Development Act 2000 as amended. The subject site is located approximately six hundred metres south of the River Boyne and Blackwater SPA (site code: 004232) and the River Boyne and Blackwater SAC (site code: 0002299). The development description was set out within Section 2 of the report above. The proposals relate to alterations to an urban serviced dwelling previously permitted by the Planning Authority. The PA conducted an AA screening exercise and concluded that 'the proposed development (entire project), by itself or in combination with other plans and developments in the vicinity, would not be likely to have a significant effect on European Site(s). In light of this, it is considered that a Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment (Natura Impact Statement) is not required in this instance'.

8.1.2 The applicants did not submit an AA screening report as part of their planning documentation. The appeal site is located on a brownfield site on zoned and fully serviced lands. I consider that the appeal site is not hydrologically/ecologically connected to any of the European sites, located to the south of the appeal site. There were no drainage ditches evident within the confines of the appeal site nor along its boundaries. Therefore, I am satisfied that there is no apparent surface water hydrological link between the appeal site and any European site.

8.1.3 Having considered the relatively minor nature and scale of the alterations proposed, with no additional footprint and the location of the project, I am satisfied that it can be eliminated from further assessment because there is no conceivable

risk to these two or any other European Site. The reason for this conclusion is as follows:

- The modest scale of the development, which relates to extensions and alterations to a permitted residential dwelling unit, on zoned serviced lands, within a brownfield site and within a designated settlement,
- The separation distance from the nearest European site and the absence of hydrological or ecological connectivity to any Natura 2000 site.
- The AA screening exercise conducted by the Planning Authority which concluded that 'No appropriate assessment issue arise as the development would not be likely to have a significant effect individually or in combination with other plans or project on any European site.

8.1.4 I conclude that on the basis of objective information, that the development would not have a significant effect on any European site either alone or in combination with other plans or projects. Likely significant effects are excluded and, therefore, Appropriate Assessment (Stage 2) under Section 177V of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) is not required.

## 9.0 Recommendation

I recommend that planning permission for the attic conversion within the dwelling and associated site works be refused planning permission for the following reason(s):

1-Having regard to the pattern and character of development in the area, it is considered that the proposed attic conversion and material roof profile alteration, by reason of its inappropriate design, would represent a visually discordant feature, would fail to integrate with the dwelling design on site, would be out of character with the dwelling on site, the adjoining semi-detached dwelling and neighbouring dwellings within 'The Drive' residential development and would seriously injure the residential amenities and depreciate the value of adjoining properties by reason of visual obtrusion. The proposed development would also be contrary to the provision of policy objective DM OBJ 50 within the current Meath County Development Plan 2021-27 in relation to the creation of high-quality domestic extensions, would

establish an undesirable future precedent and would, therefore, be contrary to the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.

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

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Fergal Ó Bric

Planning Inspectorate

2<sup>nd</sup> day of June 2026

## Appendix 1 - Form 1

### EIA Pre-Screening

<b>An Bord Pleanála</b>	PL-500869-MH-26		
<b>Case Reference</b>			
<b>Proposed Development Summary</b>	Permission to convert existing attic space to an office/store space, modification of roof structure, raising of the existing gable window, new access stairs, two rooflights within front roofslope and flat roof dormer in rear roofslope.		
<b>Development Address</b>	No. 4, The Drive, Highlands, Rathmullan, Drogheda, Co. Meath.		
<b>1. Does the proposed development come within the definition of a 'project' for the purposes of EIA?</b>  (that is involving construction works, demolition, or interventions in the natural surroundings)		<b>Yes</b>	x
		<b>No</b>	
<b>2. Is the proposed development of a CLASS specified in Part 1 or Part 2, Schedule 5, Planning and Development Regulations 2001 (as amended)?</b>			
<b>Yes</b>	Tick/or leave blank		
<b>No</b>	Tick or leave blank	Alterations to a permitted dwelling does not fall within a class of development as per the Planning & Development Regulations.	x
<b>3. Does the proposed development equal or exceed any relevant THRESHOLD set out in the relevant Class?</b>			

<b>Yes</b>	Tick/or leave blank		
<b>No</b>	Tick/or leave blank		X
<b>4. Is the proposed development below the relevant threshold for the Class of development [sub-threshold development]?</b>			
<b>Yes</b>	Tick/or leave blank	Proposals relate to conversion of attic space to an office/store space, modification of roof structure, raising of the existing gable window, new access stairs, two rooflights within front roofslope and flat roof dormer in rear roofslope.	X

<b>5. Has Schedule 7A information been submitted?</b>		
<b>No</b>	Tick/or leave blank	X
<b>Yes</b>		

**Inspector:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_