

REPORT TO AN BORD PLEANÁLA

ON

APPEAL AGAINST CONDITION ON A REVISED FIRE SAFETY CERTIFICATE

(Register Ref No: FA/15/1498/REV, FSC 1297/16/REV)

ISSUED BY DUBLIN CITY COUNCIL

FOR

MATERIAL ALTERATIONS TO LOWER GROUND AND GROUND FLOOR LEVELS

AT

GENERAL POST OFFICE, O'CONNELL STREET LOWER, DUBLIN 1

Client: An Bord Pleanála
An Bord Pleanála Ref: Fv 0010
Our Ref: CTA1624
Date: June 2016

1.0 BACKGROUND

This Report sets out my findings and recommendations on the appeal submitted by Jeremy Gardner Associates (JGA) against a condition attached to a granted fire safety certificate (Register Ref. No: FA/15/1498/REV, FSC 1297/16/REV) issued by Dublin City Council (DCC) in respect of an application for material alterations at the General Post Office (GPO), Lower O'Connell Street, Dublin 1.

The material alterations relate to revisions to previously approved layouts for an exhibition centre at lower ground and ground floors of the GPO. The particular alterations that are the subject of this appeal relate to a change in the type of use of part of the space at ground floor, adjoining the Reception area.

Having considered the drawings, details and submissions on the file I am satisfied that the determination by the Board of this application as if it had been made to it in the first instance would not be warranted, as no significant matters have been noted other than the subject matter of the appeal. Accordingly, I consider that it would be appropriate to use the provisions of article 40(2) of the Building Control Regulations, 1997 in this case.

1.1 SUBJECT MATTER OF THE APPEAL

- An application for a Fire Safety Certificate (FA/15/1498/REV) was lodged by JGA and received by DCC on 23rd October 2015 (a revised application form and additional fee was submitted on 17th November 2015).
- The Fire Safety Certificate (FSC 1297/16/REV) was granted by DCC, dated 22nd February, 2016, with five conditions.
- An appeal against condition No. 3 was submitted by JGA on 21 March 2016.

The condition states: *'The A hall orientation hall space which opens on to the reception space shall be constructed of solid 60 minutes fire resisting construction with FD60S fire doors so as to protect the means of escape from the remainder of the premises.'*

Reason: *To comply with Part B1 of the Second Schedule to the Building Regulations, 1997 to 2014.*

1.2 DOCUMENTS REVIEWED

- Application for Fire Safety Certificate lodged by JGA, received by DCC on 23rd October 2015 (documents reviewed included Compliance Report XI/2905/R3, Issue 4 and revised ground floor plan XI/2905/3/4 Revision C dated 16/02/16)
- Appeal submission by JGA to An Bord Pleanala, dated 21st March 2016
- Submission by DCC to Bord Pleanala received 8th April 2016
- Appeal submission by JGA to An Bord Pleanala, dated 25th May 2016
- Documents and drawings from previous Fire Safety Certificate applications with Reg. Refs. 14/1103 and 14/1307/REV.

1.3 SITE VISIT

Due to uncertainty about the layout of the accommodation at the Reception area at ground floor (it was unclear whether certain lines on the ground floor plan represented overhead structural elements or structures/fittings at ground floor level) I briefly visited the ground floor area on 15th June to review the layout around the Reception area. I established that the lines on the plan represented overhead structures but that a Reception counter (not shown on the plan) was installed to the rear of the Reception area.

It was also noted that the glass screen between the orientation space and the Reception area (referenced in the JGA submissions) does not extend up to ceiling level (with a gap of around 500mm above).

2.0 FINDINGS

The case made by the Appellant is summarised as follows:

- The risk of fire from the orientation space affecting the front escape route is very low, based on the intended usage and fire load (as shown in the Figure 1 photograph included in the appeal document).
- In the previously granted Fire Safety Certificate for this space (Ref. No. FSC 1470/14) the fire load would likely be greater than what is proposed now, based on the retail space and cloak area/ticket/Reception indicated previously. The orientation space will contain mainly 'hard' chairs for viewing the orientation of the exhibition.

- The space is separated from the reception area by glass construction and a sliding door (for noise reduction purposes).
- In the event of fire (in the orientation space) blocking the front escape route (leading on to O'Connell Street), occupants of the centre have an alternative means of escape through the exhibition area leading to other external escape routes (either at lower ground or ground level), onto Henry Street.
- Occupants using these escape routes will pass through a compartment that is fire separated (in 60 minutes fire resisting construction) from the orientation space, which will protect occupants.
- An adequate number of trained staff will be available to assist with evacuation, including evacuation of disabled persons.
- Disabled persons will be able to pass through a separate fire compartment in any area of the exhibition space without the need of staff assistance.
- The building will have a Category L1 fire detection and alarm system, with voice (evacuation) facility.

The case made by the building control authority is summarised as follows:

- The loss of an exit from this space, the increase in the occupancy and the mode and manner of escape from the remainder of the building for all persons necessitated this condition.

3.0 CONSIDERATIONS:

The orientation space in this case is located just inside the O'Connell Street entrance to the GPO. As noted above, DCC has (in their submission) given three reasons for applying the condition.

The alterations in this case include the locking of a side exit door from the orientation space, for security reasons. JGA have noted that removal of this alternative exit results in single direction travel that is within the permissible limits as per Table 1.2 of Technical Guidance Document B (TGDB) (in this case, 15m travel distance to a point from which alternative directions of travel become available).

It is unclear how a condition requiring the provision of a 60 minute fire rated enclosure to the orientation space would be considered relevant with respect to the loss of this exit door,

within the parameters noted above. In any case, the reason stated on the Fire Safety Certificate for the condition relates to protection of escape routes from other parts of the building.

The increase in occupancy is also given as a rationale for the 60 minute fire resisting enclosure of the orientation space. JGA note that occupancy has increased (from the previous application) from 24 to 48 persons, but that this does not make a material difference to the overall exit capacity from that part of the building. In terms of single direction means of escape, 1.2.2.5 of TGDB permits an area or room to have occupancy of up to 50 persons, provided the relevant travel distances are met (which is the case here).

Again it is unclear how a condition requiring the provision of a 60 minute fire rated enclosure to the orientation space would be considered relevant with respect to a relatively small increase in occupancy numbers (the reason stated on the granted Fire Safety Certificate for the condition relates to protection of escape routes from other parts of the building).

The third reason given by DCC for the condition is 'the mode and manner of escape from the remainder of the building for all persons'. It is assumed from this statement that this is a reference to the fact that one of the three designated escape routes from the ground floor exhibition space passes through the foyer between the orientation space and the reception area (one undesignated route from the lower ground floor also passes through that space).

The question arises as to whether the location of the orientation space (without fire resisting enclosure) unduly jeopardises escape from those other areas.

In previous Fire Safety Certificate FSC 1470/14 the lower ground floor had two designated exits at that level; a further stairway also provided a route up to ground floor (although not designated on the plans or in the compliance report as an exit/escape route from that level). Subsequent Fire Safety Certificate FSC1870/14/REV showed a slightly altered stairway arrangement up from the lower ground floor, but still not designated as an exit/escape route to ground floor level. The ground floor exhibition space has an escape route via the Reception area but also two alternative exits to the rear.

Although the latter Fire Safety Certificate plans do not show the Orientation Space (that area is hatched as not being relevant to that application but presumably remained as per the

previous Fire Safety Certificate), the former granted Fire Safety Certificate showed that area as containing a ticket desk, cloaks facility and retail unit. Presumably DCC, in granting the Fire Safety Certificate, considered those uses as being compatible with the requirement to suitably protect escape routes, for the layout as presented with that application.

The potential fire load in the orientation space would appear to be low, comprised mainly of 'hard' chairs.

In the event of a fire within that space, patrons at lower ground floor level have two exits at that level, and will not need to exit upwards via the ground floor Reception area (the stairway up from that level does is not designated as an escape route). Patrons of the ground floor exhibition area have two other designated exits to the rear at that level.

The exhibition spaces at both levels (and the alternative exits from them to the rear) are fire separated from the Reception area (and from the orientation space) by 60 minute fire resisting construction and FD60S doors.

JGA have noted that occupants using those escape routes can pass within a compartment that is fire separated from the orientation space and an adequate number of trained staff will be available to assist with evacuation, including evacuation of disabled persons. Disabled persons within the exhibition spaces will be within a separate compartment from that containing the orientation space and will be able to use exits and escape routes to the outside from both levels without the need of staff assistance (although it will be available).

Under the previously granted Fire Safety Certificates, the building will have a Category L1 fire detection and alarm system, including a voice alarm (evacuation) facility in the exhibition spaces. It is considered, along with the presence of staff, that this will provide early warning and reduced response times in the event of a fire.

Given the relatively low proposed fire load in the orientation space, the availability of alternative escape routes, the staffing and fire alarm system specification and the fact that the same general layout was previously approved by DCC, albeit with a higher potential fire load (ticket office, cloaks and retail unit), it is considered that Condition 3 should be removed and replaced by a revised Condition 3 as set out below.

4.0 CONCLUSIONS:

Condition 3 should be removed and replaced with a revised Condition 3, as set out below under Reasons and Considerations.

5.0 REASONS and CONSIDERATIONS:

Having regard to the submissions made in connection with the Fire Safety Certificate application and the appeal, the previously approved fire safety designs (FSC1870/14/REV and FSC1470/14), and considering the functional requirements under Part B1 (Means of Escape in Case of Fire) of the Second Schedule of the Building Regulations 1997 to 2014, it is considered that the proposed alteration of the relevant area from the previously approved retail/ticket office/cloaks usage to use as an orientation space would not give rise to any new or greater contravention of Part B1, and in particular, would not give rise to a diminution of the (previously approved) protection of escape routes from the ground floor and lower ground floor exhibition spaces, and, therefore, Condition No. 3 should be removed and replaced with an amended Condition No. 3 as follows:

Condition 3: The glazed screen enclosing the orientation space should extend (in toughened glass) up to ceiling level across its full width.

Reason: To improve the containment of any smoke within the orientation space in the early stages of a fire that might occur within that space.

Signed by:

COLM TRAYNOR BE FIEI Chartered Engineer

Date: 20th June 2016