

**Mount Auburn
Residents Association**

The Secretary
An Bord Pleanála
64 Marlborough Street
Dublin 1
D01 V902

19th July 2024

RE: ABP Ref: RL15.320031

Dear Sir/Madam,

We wish to submit an observation with respect to the appeal lodged by Knockmount Properties Limited against the decision of LCC Planning Ref: S52024/24.

We feel that there is no justification in the appeal submission by Knockmount Properties Limited to have the decision of LCC overturned with regards to sought exemption.

We believe LCC has made the correct decision based on the criteria required for review of exemption application.

Knockmount House & Grounds:

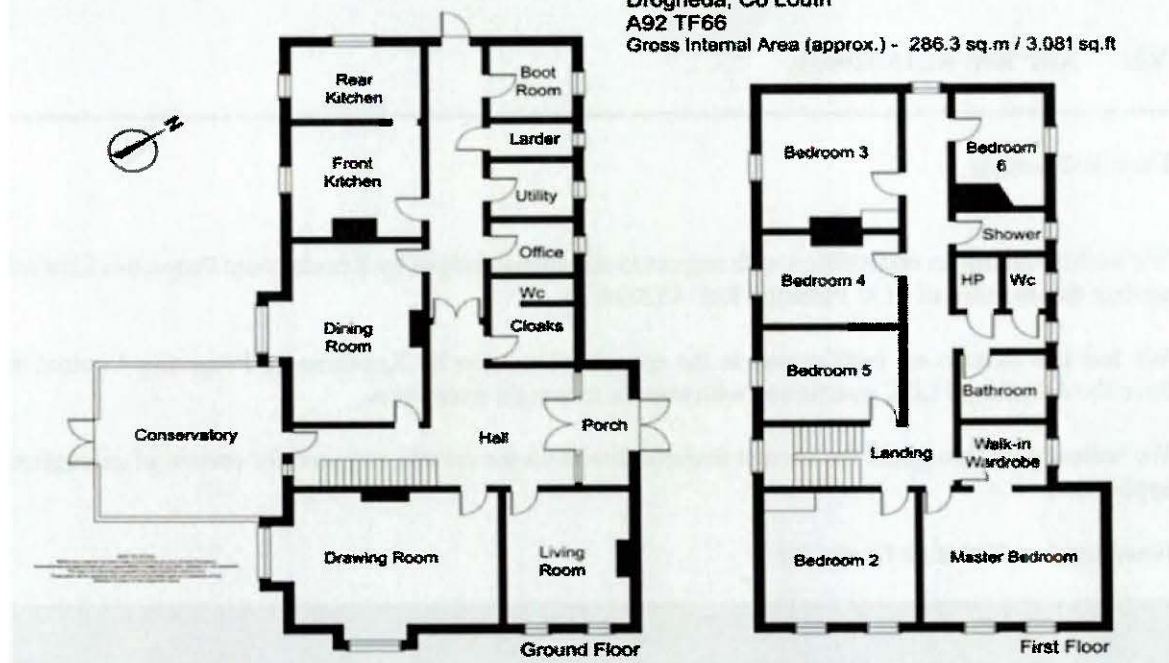




FLOOR PLANS

For Identification purposes only. Not to scale.

Knockmount, Dublin Road,
Drogheda, Co Louth
A92 TF66
Gross Internal Area (approx.) - 286.3 sq.m / 3,081 sq.ft



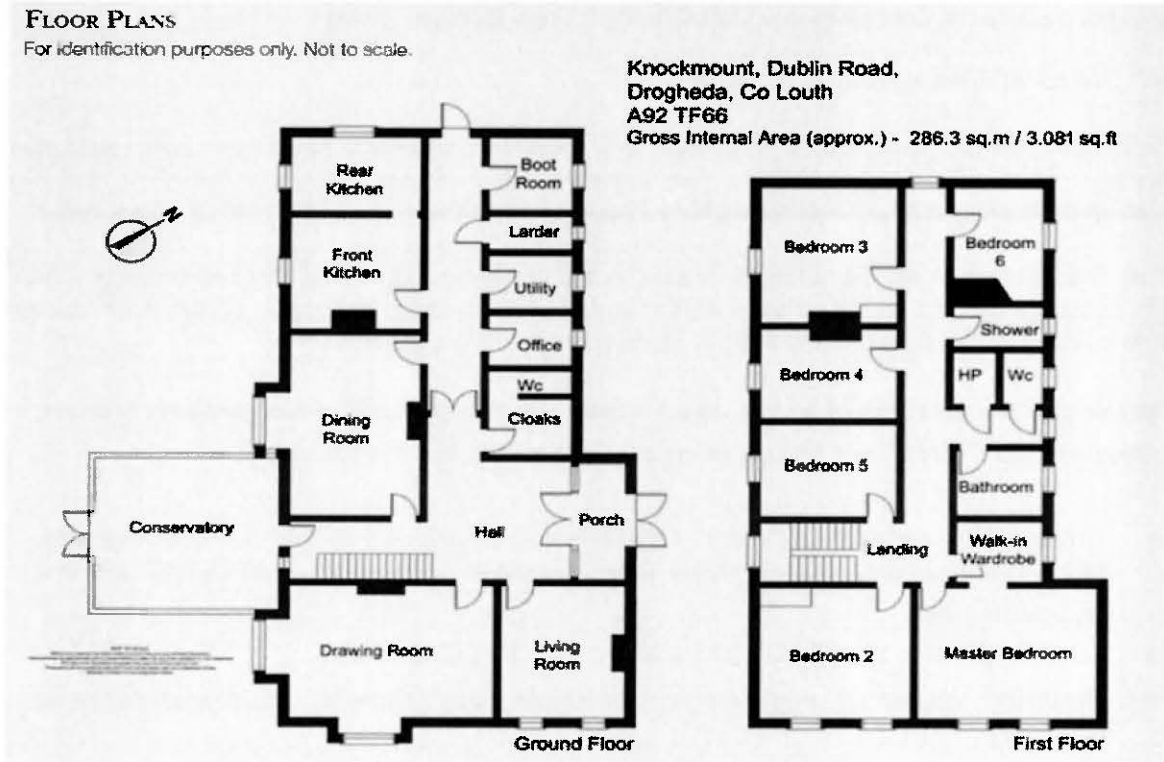
Summary of Observation Points:

1. Change of Use
2. Material Change of Use
 - Provision of Care
 - Parking
 - Traffic
 - Water Services
 - Waste Collection
 - Noise
 - Light
 - Security
3. Safety

1. Change of Use

We strongly assert that the proposal for Knockmount House constitutes a fundamental change in use development.

Knockmount House prior to any development had floor plans as detailed below:



- 6 x Bedrooms with Handbasins
- 2 x Toilets
- 1 x Bathroom
- 1 x Shower
- 2 x Kitchen
- 1 x Dining Room
- 1 x Living Room
- 1 x Drawing Room

Original floor plans for Knockmount shown above detail a 6 bedroom house.

As per Appeal document submitted by Knockmount Properties Limited, this now seems to have been changed into a development consisting 14 Ensuite Bedrooms with shared kitchen space without any legitimate planning permission being sought or approved.

This has effectively changed Knockmount from being a Private Residential House into a Hostel which constitutes a fundamental Change of Use contrary to KPLs assertion that:

“the only alteration to have occurred being an increase in the number of residents accommodated upon the site”

2. Maerial Change of Use

Provision of Care

It is intended that 56 people occupy this development which averages 4 persons per room in hostel style bunk beds in order to maximise occupancy and therefore revenue. 14 Families would also be sharing the kitchen facilities and the dining room at meal times in a very small space due the aforementioned changes made to the floor plans to accomodate the 14 new dwelling spaces.

It is also stated in the appeal document that:

“it is submitted that the use of Knockmount as a long-term residential building to house protected persons, which does not provide care, does not constitute a change of use and therefore, does not constitute developnet in accordance with the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended).”

This is inaccurate as per a Briefing Note sent by the Goverment of Ireland dated 15th January 2024 which clearly lists out all the care that will be provided to persons proposing to occupy Knockmount House. Excerpts are shown below and full briefing attached as an appendix.

What are the conditions at the site – what are the sleeping arrangements, toilets, showers, etc.? What are the catering arrangements for the building?

- *The property consists of a two-story building situated in the centre of Drogheda. The property is secure and private with electronic gates, high walls, and a wooded area with trees.*
- *Accommodation consists of 13 en suite rooms varying in size.*
- *There are sufficient numbers of bathrooms and showers for the number of residents.*
- *There will be a full board catering provided on this site. Residents will be provided with three meals per day with a varying menu. Residents will have tea, coffee, cutlery and crockery replenished daily. Fruit and nuts will be provided as a healthy snack.*
- *The property is within walking distance to schools, shops, doctors, bus and train services.*
- *Each resident will have toiletries replenished weekly and other essentials such as toilet paper replenished as needed.*
- *The washing of clothes and bed linen will be done by a local laundrette company.*
- *The facility will have high speed fibre Wi-Fi.*
- *Fire alarms, fire-fighting equipment and security cameras fitted throughout the common walking areas.*

How many staff are on site? Is there a presence there 24/7? What are the security arrangements for the building?

- *The facility will be staffed 24/7. There will be staff on site to include a duty manager who is Garda vetted and certified with Tusla; two support staff to help with social welfare applications, schools, and enrolment of adults for general courses; two security guards on rotating 12 hour shifts; two cleaners; a chef and a kitchen porter; and a gardener / maintenance staff.*
- *Security staff will be present 24/7. There is also CCTV in place.*

This clearly shows that it is intended to provide care for the persons occupying Knockmount House.

Parking

- 14+ Family Units
- Care Staff

The 'What If' scenario needs to be considered which could arise if all families and care staff have vehicles that require to be parked onsite. This has the potential to increase significantly the number of vehicles which would require parking space.

Traffic

There will be significant intensification to traffic volume (motor vehicles & bicycles) on the Dublin Road. This road experiences extremely high levels of traffic as the main artery for traffic into Drogheda town. There is also no cycle lane on this section of road which already makes it dangerous for cyclists and the existing built form and presence of a railway bridge would suggest widening of the road in this area is not likely.

Traffic leaving Drogheda would be severely impeded should a car have to pull into this development as there is no room for a filter lane and all traffic would be held up until the vehicle was allowed to cross the road and enter the development. An already struggling traffic artery would be made much worse.

Furthermore, it is widely regarded as one of the most dangerous roads in town for pedestrians due to the already narrow footpaths and excessive traffic.

Waste Collection

14+ Family units and care staff have the potential to produce a significant amount of household waste per week. This would be business or industrial scale waste in terms of volume compared to a typical private residence such as Knockmount House would have been used for prior to the proposal to turn into a hostel. Waste collection frequency would also have to increase to accommodate such an increase.

Waste Bin volume and storage would also be an issue with regards to the current layout of the house. The smells and rodent attraction associated with this volume of waste storage would be a significant intensification to the existing waste regime on site.

Water Services

It is noted in the appeal submission that:

“upgrade works to the house’s sewage system have been carried out in recent years.”

Unfortunately, we are not familiar with the scale of these upgrade works, however, it would need to have been very significant to accommodate the intensification of residency onsite and the associated water usage:

Daily Showers

Toilets Flushing

Cooking & Food Washing

Eating & Cooking Utensil Cleaning

Additional Onsite Clothes Washing

Utility Services

The works already carried out converting the house from a 6 bedroom residential property into a 14 bedroom hostel type development will also lead to a significant intensification of utility services required for electricity and heating provision within the site. Again, this would be on a business or industrial scale and far from its previous private residential usage.

Noise

It is noted in the appeal submission:

“the proposed use will not affect noise levels in the area that may be detrimental to the amenity of adjoining dwellings. As noted, the house will be used to provide accommodation to families. It is anticipated that any increase in noise would be in keeping with any residential development, with the noise of children playing in the garden likely to be the greatest source of noise.”

We would not totally agree with this, as there would be additional noise due to the additional vehicles using the site as well as the noise from care activities and intensified waste collection. We do however agree with the comment referring comparison to “any residential development” and in particular the acceptance that the noise intensification would be in keeping with a residential development, of which go through the normal planning process, and not an exemption which may allow for deficiencies and shortcuts.

Light

There is also be an intensification of light coming from the house and grounds due to the significant increase in persons being accommodated in Knockmount House. Both from domestic lighting in the rooms at night and also from the proposed 24 hour security presence. This would also be in keeping with development scale material change of use.

Security

The very fact that Security Services are required on site would highlight an intensification of use of the house as the earlier use of the house as a Private Residence did not require 24hr Security Services or Duty Managers.

3. Safety

Safety needs to be a key consideration for any development at Knockmount House. Previous Planning applications provided for the Dublin Road to be recessed and a pedestrian crossing to be installed and alterations made to the front entrance. Road Safety and the protection of any proposed residents from harm while walking, cycling and driving should be a key consideration in any future development.

Conclusion

We hope we have outlined our observations well enough to clearly put across our concerns about this proposed development and its planning status.

Accordingly, we request that An Bord Pleanála uphold the decision of Louth County Council to refuse a declaration of exemption for the development at Knockmount House.



Update on Temporary Emergency Accommodation for International Protection Applicants

Briefing Note: 15th January 2024

**Knockmount House,
Dublin Road,
Drogheda,
Co Louth,
A92 TF66**

This briefing note is being provided to you by the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth to ensure you are informed of developments in your area in relation to emergency accommodation for international applicants.

Update in relation to Knockmount House, Dublin Road, Drogheda, Co Louth:

From 17th January 2024 onwards 56 beds will be provided for people seeking refuge in Ireland who are International Protection Applicants in Knockmount House, Dublin Road, Drogheda.

- All statutory requirements relating to the establishment and management of emergency accommodation are being met by the service provider, including health and safety, fire, building regulations and other requirements.
- The Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth will manage the arrival of people into this centre.
- The contract with this centre has been signed for a period of one year.
- See the Q&A section at the end of this note for answers to a wide range of questions.

A - Context and Overview of Current Accommodation Pressures

Legislation:

Under the *Recast Reception Conditions Directive (SI 230 of 2018)*, the Government, through the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY), is legally

required to provide accommodation to international protection applicants who seek it, while their claim for international protection is being determined by the Department of Justice.

When people seeking International Protection arrive in Ireland, they make themselves known to relevant authorities to formally seek this status. They are then transferred to a number of designated accommodation centres as their application is processed.

Context:

- In the last few years there has been an increase in people seeking asylum in Ireland from other countries. In addition, since the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Ireland has seen an unprecedented number of people arrive here fleeing the Russian aggression.
- We are currently providing **26,279** people seeking International Protection with state-sourced accommodation and support services.
- In addition to that, since February 2022, we are also providing accommodation to **75,026** people who have fled the war in Ukraine, resulting in over **101,300** people in state-provided or pledged accommodation in Ireland, and that number continues to increase.
- In the last six months there has been an average of 560 people seeking accommodation every week.
- Our communities and neighbourhoods have responded with a generosity of spirit, in keeping with both our international reputation and our obligations, that recognises the human plight and trauma that people are experiencing, and their right to seek protection and help from the international community.
- The provision of accommodation, health, education, income and other supports as appropriate, to both International Protection applicants and those fleeing the war in Ukraine, is a whole-of-government emergency response.
- A range of departments, agencies, service providers, and local authorities are involved in the accommodation, resettlement, and integration process.
- Given the scale and urgency of the operation to source accommodation for new arrivals, manage and process them appropriately, and transfer and settle them into their new homes and communities, there has been a requirement to act at pace, with developments often happening at very short notice.
- We are working to improve how new accommodation is sourced, and how these developments are communicated to local communities. Our aim is to enhance communications and engagement and give communities more access to information and updates on what is happening in their community.

Accommodation Shortage:

- The accommodation of international protection applicants is a demand-led process with new applicants arriving in the country and seeking accommodation every day.
- The pressure to accommodate over **101,300** new people in such a short period of time has led to significant shortages. The Department has been forced to avail of all offers of accommodation made, right across the country, in order to address the accommodation shortfall.
- The Department is working urgently across Government and with agencies, NGOs and local authorities to bring new accommodation on board to meet the State's humanitarian responsibilities.
- In light of the acute and growing pressures, Government has stepped up action to maximise the pace and scale of delivery on this accommodation strategy. The Cross-Government Accommodation Working Group, chaired by the Department of the Taoiseach, consists of the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth; the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage; and the OPW.
- An expanded programme of work has been agreed by Government that will allow consideration of commercial properties and sites for development, refurbishment or purchase and the use of alternative modular buildings.
- This work is being progressed by all of the State bodies working together, as part of the Accommodation Working Group, and a National Coordination Unit, established in the Local Government Management Agency to ensure delivery on the expanded workstream at local level.

B – Overall Figures – as of 9th January 2024

Those seeking International Protection	
26,279*	The number of International Protection applicants (IPAs) who are currently being accommodated by the State.
12,802	The number of IP applicants who have arrived in Ireland seeking refuge in 2023 to date.
15,014	The total number of IP applicants who arrived in Ireland in 2022.
57	The most recent 7-day average number of IP arrivals into the State.

Those fleeing the war in Ukraine

75,026

The number of people fleeing the war in Ukraine in Ireland, known as Beneficiaries of Temporary Protection (BOTPs) who are being provided with accommodation by the State or through pledges (*not all seek state-provided accommodation*).

**figure as at 31/12/2023*

C – Questions and Responses

1. How many people are intended to be accommodated in Knockmount House, Dublin Road, Drogheda? What will the resident breakdown be at the building?

- *The capacity is for 56 people in 13 rooms.*
- *The accommodation will be for families and adult female international protection applicants*

2. How long can people expect to stay there?

- *It is not possible to say with certainty what the length of stay will be having regard to the number of IP applicants arriving in Ireland and the scarcity of alternative accommodation. A one-year contract has been signed with the provider.*

3. What are the conditions at the site – what are the sleeping arrangements, toilets, showers, etc.? What are the catering arrangements for the building?

- *The property consists of a two-story building situated in the centre of Drogheda. The property is secure and private with electronic gates, high walls, and a wooded area with trees.*
- *Accommodation consists of 13 en suite rooms varying in size.*
- *There are sufficient numbers of bathrooms and showers for the number of residents.*
- *There will be a full board catering provided on this site. Residents will be provided with three meals per day with a varying menu. Residents will have tea, coffee, cutlery and crockery replenished daily. Fruit and nuts will be provided as a healthy snack.*
- *The property is within walking distance to schools, shops, doctors, bus and train services.*
- *Each resident will have toiletries replenished weekly and other essentials such as toilet paper replenished as needed.*
- *The washing of clothes and bed linen will be done by a local laundrette company.*
- *The facility will have high speed fibre Wi-Fi.*
- *Fire alarms, fire-fighting equipment and security cameras fitted throughout the common walking areas.*

4. Who are the owners and who are operating on site? What experience do they have?

- *The property operated by Secure Accommodation Management Limited, who have a lease agreement for three years on this property. There will be staff on-site 24 hours a day. The management company has extensive experience in the provision of accommodation centres for IPAS.*
- *In addition, the Centre Management team in IPAS have developed and rolled out (as a pilot initially) a training programme for all centre managers to take part in and this will be offered to the provider.*

5. How many staff are on site? Is there a presence there 24/7? What are the security arrangements for the building?

- *The facility will be staffed 24/7. There will be staff on site to include a duty manager who is Garda vetted and certified with Tusla; two support staff to help with social welfare applications, schools, and enrolment of adults for general courses; two security guards on rotating 12 hour shifts; two cleaners; a chef and a kitchen porter; and a gardener / maintenance staff.*
- *Security staff will be present 24/7. There is also CCTV in place.*

6. Is the building fire cert in place?

- *A valid fire cert is in place and has been provided to the Department.*

7. How will people be accommodated on site and retain a degree of privacy?

- *Each resident will have their own lockable bedroom and 24-hour access.*
- *Each shower and toilet is appropriately partitioned for privacy.*

8. How will IP applicants be provided with PPS numbers? Are some of them eligible to work?

PPSNs are provided through the Department of Social Protection (DSP). Applicants are eligible to work from 6 months after their arrival in Ireland. Most of the residents will be new arrivals. Many who have found work are making a positive contribution to the local and national economies, particularly in areas where there are skills shortages.

9. What health supports are available to IP Applicants?

The Department's International Protection Accommodation Service (IPAS) works closely with the HSE. IP applicants access health services through mainstream services: primary care, GP and emergency services. Any IP applicant residing in IPAS accommodation is entitled to a medical card. IPAS will advise their HSE liaison in advance of residents being accommodated.

10. What integration supports are available to provide linkages with the local community?

IPAS carry out resident clinics at all new and existing accommodation locations. IPAS also work with a number of NGOs who provide support to residents in the form of clinics, and in addition there is a DCEDIY funded confidential NGO run helpline to assist with any queries a resident may have.

11. What supports are available to provide day-to-day activities to the IP Applicants?

- IP applicants may avail of English language classes through their local Education and Training Board (ETB)
- An adult resident receives an allowance of €38.80 per week.
- Other assistance from the Department of Social Protection, such as bus fares to attend appointments, is available at the discretion of the local Community Welfare Officer.
- Adults are entitled to work in Ireland after six months.
- IPAS carries out resident clinics at all new and existing accommodation locations to communicate with residents.
- IPAS works closely with the HSE. International protection applicants are entitled to access mainstream health services.
- IPAS works with a number of Non-Governmental Organisations who provide support to residents in the form of clinics, and there is a Department of Children, Education, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) funded confidential NGO-run helpline to assist with any queries that residents may have as well as an IPAS Helpdesk manned by Department officials.
- International protection applicant (IPAs) are not entitled to apply for or avail of social housing or the Housing Assistance Payment while their claim for asylum is being determined by the International Protection Office (IPO).
- If an international protection applicant (IPA) has somewhere else to live in Ireland such as with a friend, spouse or family member they may do so. If an IPA does not have somewhere to live and needs to be accommodated by the Irish State, for the duration of their application for asylum with the International Protection Office (IPO), they will be accommodated in an International Protection Accommodation Service (IPAS) centre.
- Intreo (the Public Employment Service) supports and services will be specifically geared towards encouraging a greater diversity of employment options for applicants. They will be entitled to access supports from Intreo to assist them in accessing employment. Once labour market access has been granted, it is already the case that applicants can attend further education and training courses to help in upskilling.
- Post Leaving Certificate (PLC) courses are also often focused on directly developing skills for employment and applicants are provided access will also be provided to employer networks to make applicants aware of available opportunities and to raise employer awareness of applicants' skills and qualifications.

12. Is any assessment provided to IP Applicants to ascertain their needs or vulnerabilities?

Yes. IPAS have a team working to provide vulnerability assessments. (It should be noted that this team remains under considerable pressure in the context of high numbers of arrivals and opening of a high number of new emergency locations).

13. Is Drogheda the only area considered for this type of accommodation, or have other areas in the city/country been examined? How many other centres like this are in operation?

Emergency centres have been opened in all parts of the country. There have been over 190 accommodation locations utilised since January 2022 across 26 counties. These options must be considered to prevent homelessness for the unprecedented numbers of people arriving seeking international protection.

14. Who should public representatives contact with follow-on queries or concerns?

The Community Engagement Team is working across Government to ensure a more co-ordinated approach. Queries on this specific location can be directed to community@equality.gov.ie