Architectural Heritage Impact Assessment

Property:	Bert House, Bert Demesne, Athy, Co. Kildare
Status:	Kildare Protected Structure No. 34-03
NIAH:	No. 11903403 of Regional significance
Project:	Conversion of basement to bedrooms
Location:	Townland: Bert Demesne
Coordinates: Owner:	665631, 697626

Report Date: Friday 8 August 2025



1.0 Introduction

Bert House is a large Palladian mansion dating from the 18th century which is and has been used for the housing of people seeking International Protection (refugees) in the Republic of Ireland. It is proposed to convert the basement into further accommodation residential accommodation and this report accompanies an application for a Section 5 Declaration.

The structure is designated as of being 'Regionally Important' on the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage. It is also a protected structure as listed by Kildare County Council in the current Kildare County Development Plan 2023 – 2029.

2.0 Short Description of the Structure

Bert House is a detached eleven-bay three-storey Classical-style house, c.1780, on a H-shaped plan possibly over basement comprising seven-bay three-storey recessed central block with seven-bay single-storey flat-roofed open loggia to ground floor, three-bay three-storey projecting flanking end bays, three-bay three-storey side elevation to east and seven-bay three-storey Garden Front to south having single-

bay single-storey projecting glazed porch to centre and three-bay projecting flanking end bays. Hipped roofs on a H-shaped plan with slate behind parapet wall. Clay ridge tiles. Rendered chimney stacks. Cast-iron rainwater goods. Flat-roof to open loggia behind parapet with iron railings over. Materials not discerned. Nap rendered walls. Ruled and lined. Painted. Rendered dressings including channeled piers to ground floor to end bays, motifs to loggia and decorative panels to upper floors to end bays. Moulded cornice with blocking course parapet wall over. Square-headed window openings (tripartite in round-headed recessed niches to ground floor end bays). Stone sills (balustraded panels to first floor end bays). Moulded architraves (with keystones to first floor; moulded consoles and entablatures to first floor end bays). 2/2 and 6/6 timber sash windows. Square-headed door openings. Moulded keystone with coat of arms over. Replacement timber panelled double doors, c.1995. Square-headed loggia along front (north) elevation with cut-stone columns. Projecting glazed porch to center Garden Front (south) with ogee-headed domed roof. Fixed-pane windows. Glazed double doors with overlight. (https://www.buildingsofireland.ie/buildings-search/building/11903403/bert-house-bert-demesne-co-kildare)

The building was converted into a hotel which was granted retention permission on the 26/1/2007 (05/2226). The basement rooms were converted to a bar, sauna, snooker room, dance studio and storage rooms for use of hotel guests.

The structure is set back from the adjoining Regional Road, R 417 in own landscaped grounds. There is a stone surfaced forecourt to its front. Between the front of the building and the public road the tarmacadam access road surface was upgraded and resurfaced in 2024. The rear lawn area was significantly altered under planning register 05/2226 with the upgrading of the onsite wastewater system and percolation area in 2007 or 2008.

3.0 History of the Structure

The house, consisting of the central seven bays was built between 1720 and 1730 for Captain William Burgh b.1667 who was the Comptroller and Accountant General for Ireland. The house was designed by his brother Thomas Burgh (1670-1730) who also designed Trinity College Old Library and numerous other significant buildings around Ireland. They were the sons of Ulysses Burgh, Bishop of Ardragh. The Burgh family lived in the house until 1863 when another Ulysses Burgh, who by then had become Lord Downes, died and the house passed to his daughter Charlotte Colbome. She lived there until 1909 when the house was sold to the 'Misses Geoghegan', one of whom finally sold it to a Major Quirke, her cousin, atler the death of her sister. Lady Geoghegan herself moved to Bert Lodge, a new smaller house that she had built close by.

From late 1968, early 1969 Bert House was owned by Mr. Joe Kelly who was a relative successful racing driver. He lived there with his family for ten years and 'restored the property to a high standard' according to his son Kieron Kelly (https://athyeyeonthepast.blogspot.com/2008/02/bert-house.html)

After passing through a number of other owners including Spindara Ltd who converted it into a hotel, the building was subsequently purchased by the present owners and has since been used as accommodation for Beneficiaries of Temporary Protection (BOTPs) from

Ukraine and now persons seeking international protection. This is a building of considerable significance which the current owner has been attempting to maintain and retain as a 'working' building of architectural significance. Prior to the current owners purchase and use of the building it was vacant for nearly 10 years.

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4.0 Maps

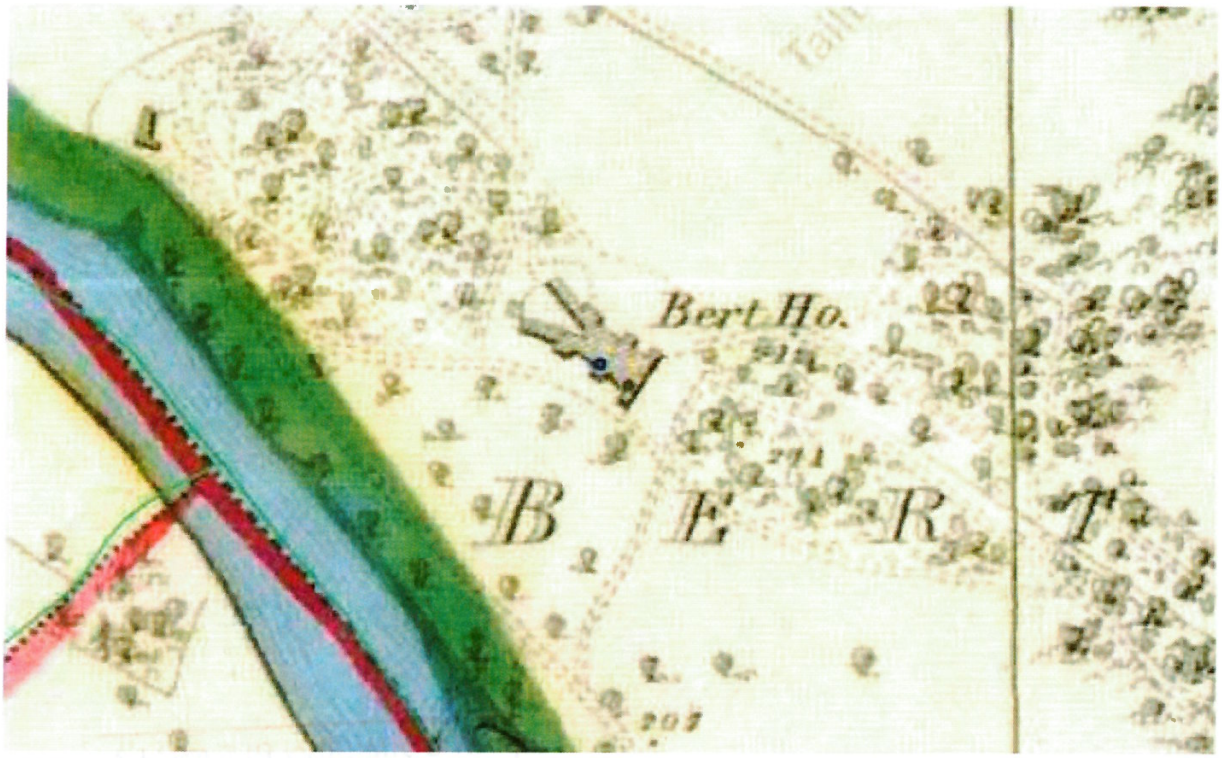


Fig 2 Detail from the first OS map c.1837-8. CYAL50481036 © Tailte Eireann -Surveying.

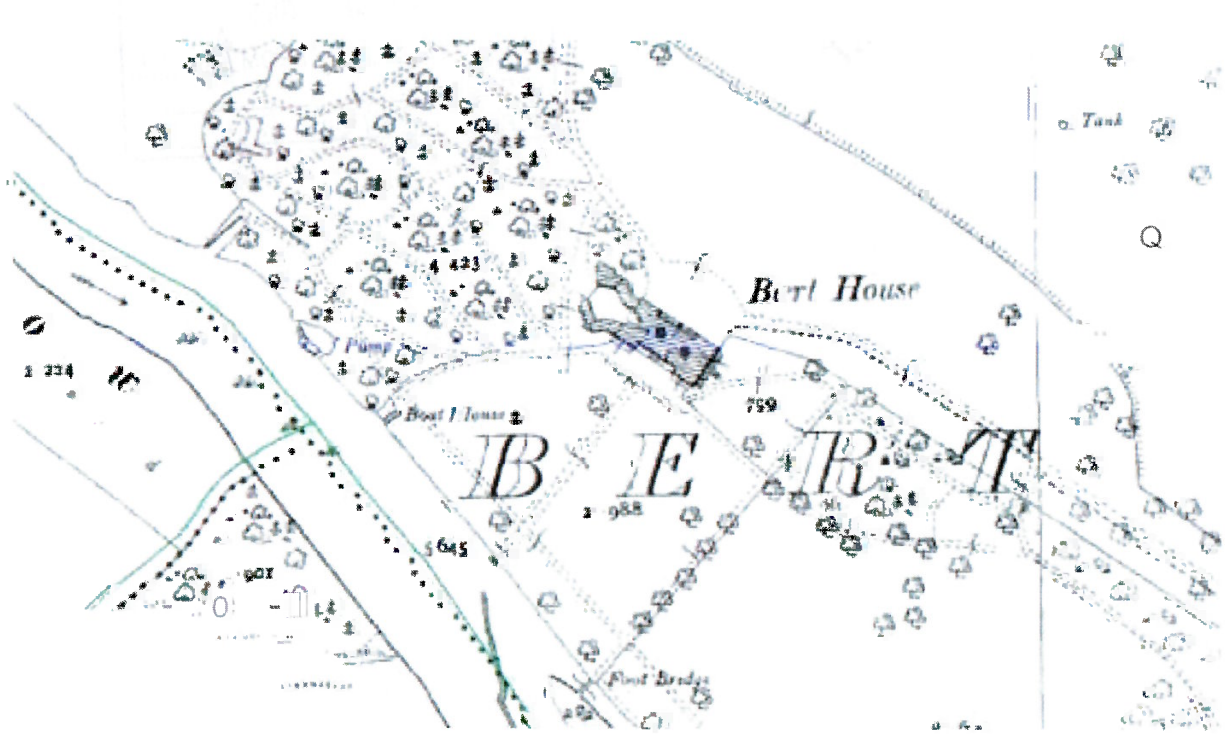


Fig 3 Detail from the second OS map c.1870-2. CYAL50481036 © Tailte Eireann - Surveying.

5.0 Impact Assessment

Receivine Environment

The application site is in rural County Kildare near Athy.

The Kildare County Development Plan 2023-2029 states:

The placing of a structure on the RPS seeks to ensure that the character of the structure is maintained and any changes or alterations to it are carried out in such a way as to retain and enhance this character. The usual provisions for exempted development do not apply to protected structures and proposed protected structures. Works to a protected structure, that would materially affect the character of the structure will always require planning permission.

and...

Promote best practice and the use of skilled specialist practitioners in the conservation of and any works to protected structures. Architectural Heritage Impact Assessment reports should make reference to the DHLGH Advice Series on how best to repair and maintain historic buildings. The AHIA report should summarise the principal impacts on the character and special interest of the structure or site and describe how it is proposed to minimise these impacts. It may also describe how the works have been designed or specified to have regard to the character of the architectural heritage.

"Under Section 58 of the Planning and Development Act, 2000, as amended, each owner and occupier must ensure that a Protected Structure or any element of a Protected Structure is not endangered through harm, decay or damage, whetller over a short or long period, through neglect or through direct or indirect means."

The Architectural Heritage Protection Guidelines for Planning Authorities [2004] is a source of information for owners of Protected Structures. At paragraph 11.1.3, the Guidelines pose the following questions for development:

a) Does the structure retain its original plan-form?

b) If not, are there any alterations or additions of interest?

c) Have the proportions of the rooms or spaces been altered? Have they been damaged by alteration, improved or merely changed?

d) Are there any interesting, planned relationships between rooms or spaces, such as enfilades, processional routes, industrial processes and the like? Have these been ahered or interrupted by changes or created out of previously existing spaces?

e) Is there a hierarchy to the various spaces? How do the principal spaces relate to the subsidiary ones, for example, dining rooms to kitchens or banking halls to offices?

f) Is the relationship of the spaces or the layout of rooms of interest because of the insight it gives into the workings of a bygone time; for example, the relationship of cells to a courtroom or a milling room to a store?

g) Are there elements of interest in the interior such as early iron and concrete floors,

timber stud partitions, lath-and-plaster ceilings, exposed roof trusses?

h) Is there any joinery of quality such as internal doors, window shutters, skirting boards, dado rails, architraves, wall panelling?

i) Arc there finishes of interest to flooring, walls **or** ceilings?

j) Are there any surviving original or good quality decorative schemes? These might include lime wash, paint, wallpaper, wall-paintings, painted ceilings, tiling, gilding, and other finishes.

k) Are there any fixtures or features which are original to the building or of architectural or historical interest for example fireplaces, counters or benching?

l) Is there surviving machinery connecled with a building's present or former use, such as milling machinery, early lifts or dumb waiters?

Methodology

A desktop study was carried out of the Kildare County Development Plan 2023-2029 and of the Record of Protected Structures. In addition the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage is used to identify structures and places of architectural heritage value in the vicinity of the proposed development and policies relating to the protection of County Kildare's significant historic environment.

Research was undertaken of relevant literature, historic documents and historic mapping as part of this assessment.

In addition, a site visit was carried out on 30th July 2025 to determine the likely impact of the proposed development on the architectural heritage of the building.

This assessment of the effects on Architectural Heritage had regard to the Guidelines on the Information to be Contained in Environmental Impact Assessment Reports prepared by the Environmental Protection Agency (2022), and to Directive 2011/92/EU (as amended by Directive 2014/52/EU) on the assessment of the likely effects of certain public and private projects on the environment which can be used as a way of quantifying impacts on the Built Heritage.

The list of definitions given below is taken from Table 3.4: Descriptions of Effects contained in the Guidelines on the information to be Contained in Environmental Impact Assessment Reports prepared by the Environmental Protection Agency. Some content is also given below on what these definitions might imply in the case of architectural heritage. The definitions from the EPA document are in *italics.*

- *Imperceptible: An effect capable of measurement but without significant consequences.*
- *Not Significant: An effect which causes noticeable changes in the character of the environment but without significant consequences.* Changes that would not be significant in terms of Planning Consent
- *Slight: An effect which causes noticeable changes in the character of the environment without affecting its sensitivities.* This suggests the overall Heritage Significance of the property would not be impacted by the proposed changes even though they would be noticeable

- *Moderate: An effect that alters the character of the environment in a manner that is consistent with existing and emerging baseline trends.* Some impact on the Heritage Significance. but within acceptable limits.

- *Significant: An effect which. by itscharacter, magnitude, duratio11 or intensity altersa sensitive aspect of the environment.* Some impact on Heritage Significance, moving outside of acceptable limit.

- *Very Significant: An effect which. by its character, magnitude, durational or intensity significantly alters most of a sensitive aspect of the environment.* Where the Heritage Significance is severe]y impacted or lost altogether even though some of the structure may remain.
- *Profound: An effect which obliterates sensitive characteristics.* Loss of the entire structure or all of its Heritage Significance.

The Proposed Development

Change of use of basement rooms to habitable residential accommodation.

In relation to The Architectural Heritage Protection Guidelines for Planning Authorities [2004] as a source of information for owners of Protected Structures I shall now assess the proposal in relation to the items listed below:

a) *Does the structure retain its original plan-form?* **In terms of what is proposed no interference with the building is proposed. No openings or closing of walls is proposed. Some painting of existing plastered walls has and will continue to take place. No works associated with electrical conduits or plumbing is proposed.**

b) *If not, are there any alterations or additions of interest?* **No works proposed. Just a change from gym, etc as set out above and in the attached drawings is what is being proposed.**

c) *Are there any interesting, planned relationships between rooms or spaces, such as enfilades, processional routes, industrial processes and the like?* **Have these been adhered or interrupted by changes or created out of previously existing spaces? No works proposed. Just a change from gym, etc as set out above and in the attached drawings is proposed.**

d) *Is there a hierarchy to the various spaces? How do the principal spaces relate to the subsidiary ones; for example, dining rooms to kitchens or banking halls to offices?* **No. All such changes were granted previously by Kildare County Council when permission was granted for a change of use from a stately home/ dwelling to a Hotel.**

e) *Is the relationship of the spaces or the layout of rooms of interest because of the insight it gives into the workings of a bygone time; for example, the relationship of cells to a courtroom or a milling room to a store?* **No.**

f) *Are there elements of interest in the interior such as early iron and concrete floors, timber stud partitions, lath-and-plaster ceilings, exposed roof trusses?* **No. All such changes were granted previously by Kildare County Council when permission was granted for a change of use from a stately home/ dwelling to a Hotel.**

g) Is there any joinery of quality such as internal doors, window shutters, skirting boards, dado rails, architraves, wall paneling? **No.**

h) *Are there finishes of interest to flooring, walls or ceilings?* **No. All features including the vault type ceilings observed in room are to be maintained and not altered or amended.**

i) *Are there any surviving original or good quality decorative schemes? These might include lime wash, paint, wallpaper, wall-paintings, painted ceilings, tiling, gilding, and other finishes.* **No. This was always a 'basement' area and no such paint, tiles, etc would historically not have existed. All changes to the interior fabric of the building was changed after a grant of permission by Kildare County Council.**

j) *Are there any fixtures or features which are original to the building or of architectural or historical interest, for example fireplaces, counters or benching?* **No. This was always a 'basement' area and no such features would historically not have existed. All changes to the interior fabric of the building was changed after a grant of permission by Kildare County Council.**

l) *Is there surviving machinery connected with a building's present or former use, such as milling machinery, early lifts or dumb waiters?* **No. This was always a 'basement' area and no such features would historically not have existed. All changes to the interior fabric of the building was changed after a grant of permission by Kildare County Council.**

Impacts

The anticipated impacts on the protected structure are listed and described as follows:

The basement of Bert House has already been converted for use as a leisure centre for the former hotel meaning all the rooms have been plastered or dry lined and had replacement fire doors fitted. Most rooms have had concrete floors installed. The only exception being the proposed living room which still has stone flags. All the interior finishes appear to date from the conversion to a hotel.

For the proposed development, there are no alterations to room sizes or new opes proposed. There are no remaining visible historic features that could be impacted by the proposed change of use.

6.0 Discussion

Although Bert House is a significant building, reputedly designed originally by a famous architect, the proposed development in the basement will not impact any further on its significance beyond any existing impacts due to the alterations carried previously out to make it into a leisure centre for the hotel.

Thomas Burgh, famous Military Engineer and Architect is not attributed with having designed Bert House in the Dictionary of Irish Architects. It seems likely however that he would have had some input to the new house being built by his brother, but it is not clear where this information originally comes from.

The use of the house to accommodate many needy families ensures it is maintained and appreciated for the future. The existing occupants appear very

contented and it is nice to see happy children playing in the garden.

7.0 Conclusion

The change of use of the spaces set out in this document (no works proposed), including any painting of existing plastered and painted area will have no impact on the historical and architectural value of this building other than ensure that this building can be maintained and protected into the future.

James Powell CEng MIEI
Conservation Consultant
087 6686090



Fig 4 Central corridor of the basement looking north west

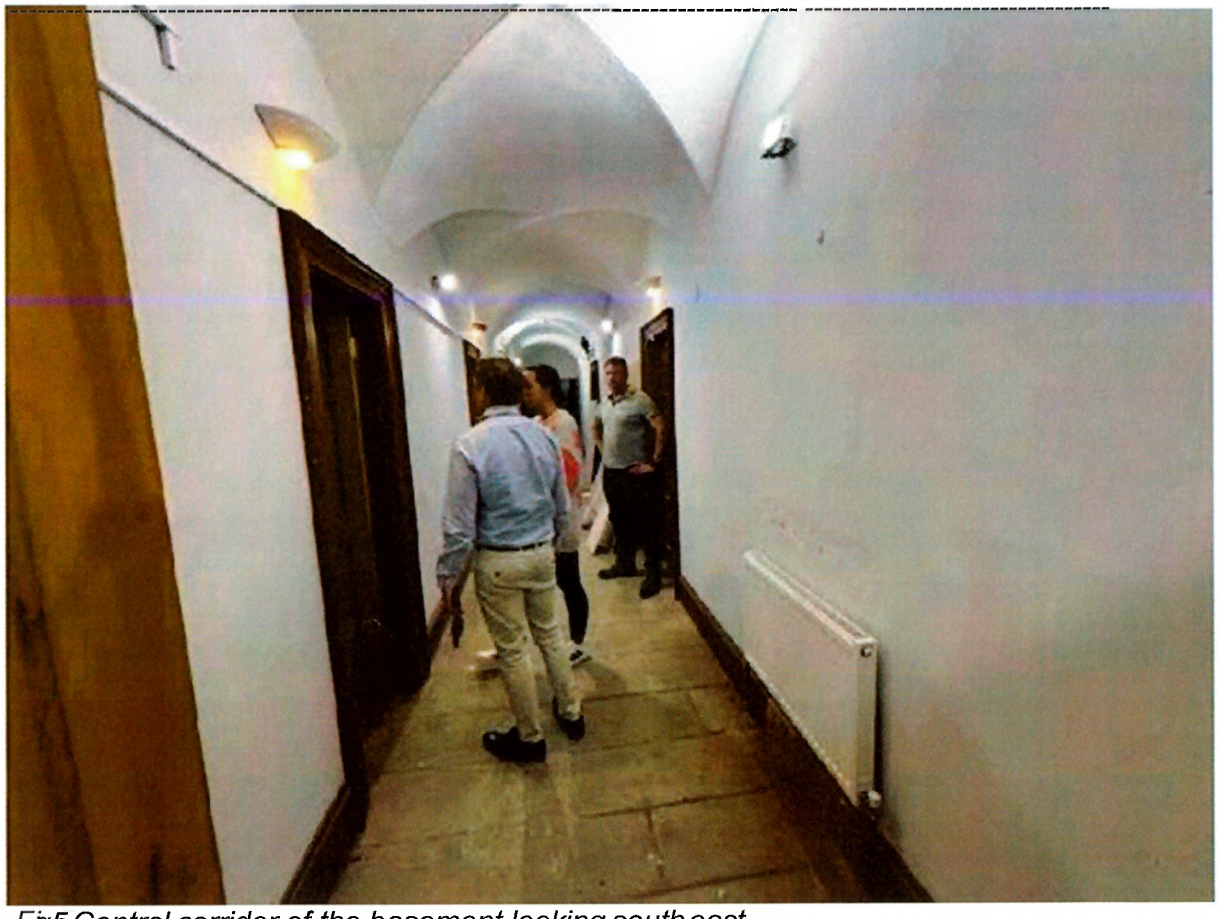


Fig5 Central corridor of the basement looking south east

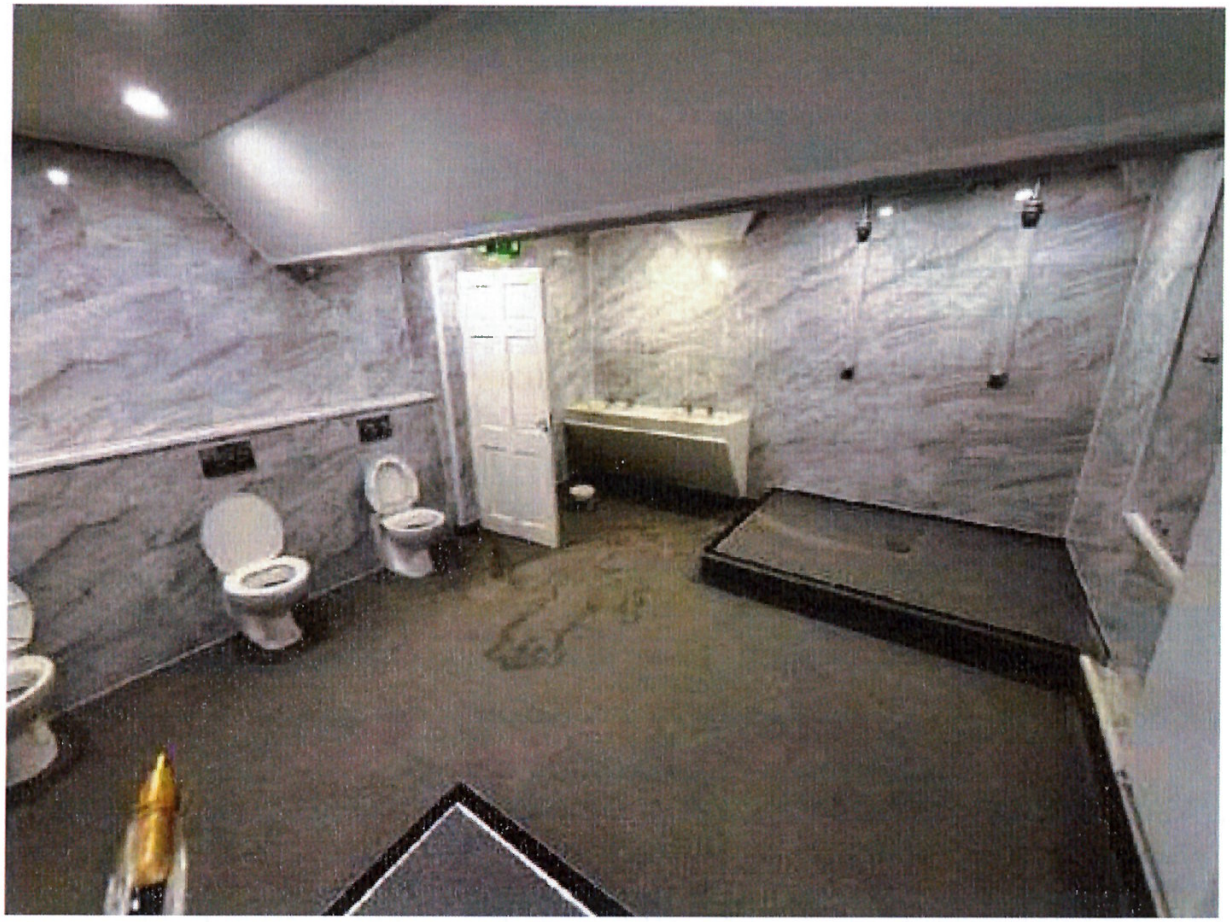


Fig 6 Proposed shower room



Fig 7 Proposed Bedroom 8, previously sauna or jacussi



Fig 8 Proposed Bedroom 7



Fig9 Proposed Bedroom 6



Fig 10 Proposed Living room (note the valuted roof feature)



Fig 11 Proposed Bedroom 1 with shower ensuite beyond



Fig 12 Proposed Bedroom 2 with ensuite through door at rear.



Fig 13 Proposed kitchen



Fig 14 Proposed bedrooms 3 and 4, to be subdivided (and insulated etc) Modem construction under patio.



Fig 15 Exterior of the building, patio mentioned in Fig 14 is on right.

CCH
Architects, Interior Designers,
Conservation Architects, Master Planners

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December 08, 2025

Our Ref 22029 ah/ACP x2

Bert House, Bert Demesne, Athy, Co. Kildare
Damien Malone Spindara Limited.

A Cara,

I am a qualified practicing Architect (B.Arch, FRIAI, RIBA), am Managing Director of CCH Architects and am accredited by the RIAI as a Grade 2 Conservation Architect. I regularly prepare AHIAs for various projects such as this.

I have read the submission to Kildare County Council seeking a Section 5(1) Declaration for the Change of Use (no material alterations) of lower ground floor of Bert House Hotel to bedrooms to accommodate people seeking international protection (IPS), in particular the AHIA prepared by James Powell, C Eng, MIEI, Conservation Consultant, as well as the Planners report, dated November 12 last. I have also been furnished by the applicant with a short walk-through video of the lower ground floor at Bert House.

The Planning Officer's report is very thorough and goes through in great detail Protected Structures and Exempted Development and the difference in the opinions seem to revolve around whether the ancillary internal works with the Change of Use in this case is Exempted Development.

History of the Structure
The house, consisting of the central seven bays was built between 1720 and 1730 for Captain William Burgh b.1667 who was the Comptroller and Accountant General for Ireland. The house was designed by his brother Thomas Burgh (1670-1730) who also designed Trinity College Old Library and numerous other significant buildings around Ireland. They were the sons of Ulysses Burgh, Bishop of Ardragh. The Burgh family lived in the house until 1863 when another Ulysses Burgh, who by then had become Lord Downes,

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died and the house passed to his daughter Charlotte Colbome. She lived there until 1909 when the house was sold to the 'Misses Geoghegan', one of whom finally sold it to a Major Quirke, her cousin, alter the death of her sister. Lady Geoghegan herself moved to Bert Lodge, a new smaller house that she had built close by.

From late 1968, early 1969 Bert House was owned by Mr. Joe Kelly who was a relative successful racing driver. He lived there with his family for ten years and 'restored the property to a high standard' according to his son Kieron Kelly).

After passing through a number of other owners Spindara Ltd was granted retention permission for the change of use to a hotel under planning permission Ref. 052226 that included the construction of a new gymnasium at lower ground floor level. Most recently, the upper floors of the hotel building have been used as accommodation for Beneficiaries of Temporary Protection (BOTPs) from Ukraine and now persons seeking international protection. This is a building of considerable significance which the current owner has been attempting to maintain and retain as a 'working' building of architectural significance. Prior to the current owners purchase and use of the building it was vacant for nearly 10 years.

The building is very fine example of an 18th century Palladian mansion and the current use as accommodation is clearly established. The only issue being the lower floor that was fitted out as a gymnasium and leisure facility per Ref. 052226, has not been used and is now proposed for the same purpose as the two upper floors of the building.

Section 57 (1) Planning and Development Act

Works affecting character of protected structures or proposed protected structures.
Notwithstanding section 4 (1) (a), (h), (i), (j), (k), or (l) and any regulations made under Section 4(2), the carrying out of works to a protected structure, or a proposed protected structure, shall be exempted development only if those works would not materially affect the character of—
(a) the structure, or
(b) any element of the structure which contributes to its special

From the documentation presented by the applicant and a review of all documentation associated with the section 5 Declaration and Council's decision, the proposed works are internal only consisting of an inconsequential change to the Gym and the provision of 2 no. en-suite facilities. In my professional opinion, the proposed works do not materially affect the character of the existing structure or any element of the structure which contributes to its special architectural, historical, archaeological, artistic, cultural, scientific, social or technical interest.

I am fully satisfied that this Change of Use and ancillary internal works would in no way detrimentally affect, this very fine historic structure. Therefore, the proposal is exempted development in accordance with Class 20(f) and section 4(1)(h).

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If there are further queries in this matter please revert.

Yours faithfully.



ARTHUR HICKEY