



Proposal for Howth Old Courthouse, Harbour Road, Howth, Dublin 13

Outline Description of Development

Introduction:

Economic, Enterprise and Tourism Development Department, Fingal County Council proposes to refurbishment and upgrade the Old Courthouse, Harbour Road, Howth, Dublin 13 - a protected structure (RPS No 567) for continued community use and new use as a public tourist office.

Existing Configuration and Use:

The building has a prominent location on the Harbour Road and visible from the main entry route into Howth from Dublin Road. The total site area is 193 sqm. The site includes a small landscaped green area to the west of existing building. The southern boundary is formed by the public footpath on Church Street, which rises sharply from Harbour Road. The southern and eastern walls of the building function act as retaining walls.

The existing main entrance opens off the footpath onto Harbour Road and has steps which act as a barrier to universal public access. The large room (original courtroom) is currently used as a flexible space for community type uses. A small raised stage area to the western side of the room was probably the original raised platform for court and church use. From the entrance hall a stairs leads to a small mezzanine area which is used as office space – a community employment scheme operates from there. Another small room at ground level is used as a small store.

The other principal room contains a teastation is a few steps higher than the main room used by staff.

A small extension of the main volume on the western side contains an entrance porch and wc. This existing secondary entrance is currently accessed from the street through a single gate and a number of steps leading to a small yard area.

The existing stone wall to the street at either side of the building on Harbour Road and Church Street acts as a retaining wall for planted areas and forms the site boundary to the public street.

Recent History:

The building was renovated under a FÁS training and volunteer scheme in the 1980's. The building is a protected structure reflecting its historic use, however the substantial reconstruction in the 1980s mean there are relatively few original internal features survive.

As part of the reconstruction works walls were partially dry lined internally - the main room has a painted hardboard wall lining which acts as a pinboard backing for display purposes.

An Taisce have been a tenant / leaseholder at the building since it was restored in the mid-1980s and have generally used it for weekend book sales and public meetings. They intend to retain a presence at the building.

Proposal.

The proposal involves forming a new entrance courtyard to the western side to accommodate ramped access and allow for universal access to the building. The new landscaped courtyard of approx. 60 sqm will provide an elevated amenity space with seating overlooking the harbour area. It is proposed that the main public access into the building will be from the western side via the entry court.

The existing floor area of the building remains unchanged at 104 sqm split over ground and mezzanine level. The use of the smaller principal room will change from staff tea station use to a publicly accessible Tourist Office. The main principal room will be retained as a flexible space for Community use accessed from the Tourist office via a new ramp. Minor alterations are proposed internally and two blocked up windows will be reopened to provide more natural light and ventilation. A single unisex existing toilet will be increased in area to meet current standards and a small tea station is proposed in the lower level of the building.

The proposal involves retaining existing painted signage on the western elevation and external plaques. The provision of new high quality metal feature signage at the western boundary will allow clear and easy identification of the tourist office use and panel on new railings will allow for changing local information to be accommodated. The exterior of the building will be repainted in an appropriate colour scheme on completion.

Main modifications proposed to allow for development and proposed use as a Tourist office:

The external area to the western side of the building will be landscaped to provide an attractive public realm area. An existing tree will be retained if possible or replaced with similar on the site and a new flagpole erected replacing existing.

The floor level of the building is a number of steps above the street level which presents universal access difficulties to a public building. A new accessible entrance is proposed from the western side. The existing solid timber door will be changed and automated to open out in the direction of escape. A small WC will be enlarged to provide a compliant accessible toilet.

The current teastation / kitchen area will be modified to provide a small tourist office with a public reception desk and information area. This will allow the relocation of the Howth Tourist office from a temporary cabin located across the road on Lands under Harbour master control.

Two blocked up circular openings on the southern elevation to Church Street will be opened up to provide natural ventilation and additional daylighting.

The existing small fixed stage area will be removed and the main hall will have internal ramped access within the hall which will facilitate broader community and public exhibition type use. The existing store at the lower level will be converted to a refreshment area (tea station) and a smaller equipment store will also be retained.

Internal lining of the main room with wood particle board will be removed and wall finish repaired and redecorated

It is intended that the current main entrance will become a secondary entrance and emergency exit.

The mezzanine level will continue its function as an office area with workstations for An Táisce who will retain a presence within the building.

A complete services upgrade of the building including a full electrical rewire is required. Existing service routes will be reused where possible. A new drainage run to service the proposed relocated teastation will run under footpath to minimise impact on the protected fabric of the building.

Signage has been considered so as not to detract from the character of the building and avoid ad hoc signage distribution. The proposal involves retaining existing painted signage on the western elevation and external plaques. New high quality signage at western boundary, will allow clear and easy identification of the tourist office use and allow for changing information to be accommodated on railings near entrance gate.

Existing Infrastructure

The building will be serviced by existing drainage infrastructure. Existing poor condition and maintenance issues require renewal of some drainage runs along footpath and in landscaped area. No parking is provided on site but paid public parking is available on Harbour Road and in public carparks nearby. The proposal involves a complete refurbishment of all services to the building but minimising disruption and impact to historic fabric.

Materials

Forming the entrance courtyard will require some level changes which will require underpinning and some rebuilding of sections of the existing boundary walls to the landscaped area using salvaged or local stone. Etched or painted galvanised metal railings with a simple clean design will sit above low level boundary walls. Visibility of the building will be maintained.

A natural stone surface is proposed to the landscaped area and the new wall supporting the new ramp and planter feature will be fairfaced reinforced concrete. The new seat will be formed in hardwood slats.

Drawings and Planning Information:

- Planning Notice
- Architects dwg No 1606.P.01 Existing site, Ground and First Floor Plans Elevations and Sections
- Architects dwg No 1606.P.02 Proposed site, Ground and First Floor Plans Elevations and Sections
- Architects dwg No 1606.P.03 Location maps and proposed external view showing courtyard layout
- Outline Description of Development
- Conservation Planning Statement (Part 8 procedure)
- Fingal County Council Planning Report