

FINGAL COUNTY COUNCIL PLANNING REPORT

Initiation of procedure pursuant to Part XI of the Planning and Development Acts 2000 (as amended) and Part 8 of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001 (as amended)

INTRODUCTION:

The Economic, Enterprise and Tourism Development Department is the proposing Department for a development by Fingal County Council of the refurbishment and upgrade of the Old Courthouse, Howth for continued use as a community facility and a proposed use as a tourist office.

PLANNING HISTORY

Subject site

None on file.

In the vicinity

None relevant.

NATURE OF DEVELOPMENT:

Internal and external works to the old Courthouse and curtilage in order to provide for a tourism office in addition to refurbishment for continued use as a community facility. The works are stated as:-

External -

- Provision of hard landscaped area to the west of the existing courthouse, to comprise a new access point, ramped and stepped access, retained external stone walls, raised land levels to match internal floor level of proposed tourism office, hardwood seating area, signage pole, advertising area and galvanised railings.
- Remove blockwork to southern windows and restore glazing.
- Repair and redecorate external walls and windows.
- Provide new outward opening automatic door to porch.

Internal-

- Provide tourism office (15sqm) within western room.
- Provide accessible toilet within existing porch.
- All internal walls to be repaired, rewired and redecorated.
- Provide new tea station and storage beneath existing mezzanine.
- Remove existing dias.
- Provide accessible ramp from the tourism office into the larger community space.

ZONING:

Fingal County Development Plan 2017 - 2023

The subject site is located within land-use zoning objective TC in the Fingal Development Plan 2017-2023 which aims to *“Protect and enhance the special physical and social character of town and district centres and provide and/or improve urban facilities”*.

The subject site is located in the Howth Historic Core ACA.

The Old Courthouse is a Protected Structure RPS:467 – Late 19th Century four-bay single storey former courthouse.

The existing use of the building is as a community facility. This use is not proposed to change. The proposed tourism office use in part of the building is not specifically mentioned as a use in the Fingal; Development Plan, however the use is considered to be closest in nature to a cultural facility which is defined in the Technical Guidance Notes – Appendix 4 of the Development Plan as:-

Use of a building, or part thereof, or land, for cultural purposes to which the public may be admitted with, or without, the payment of a fee. This does not include a dancehall or a nightclub.

A cultural facility is permitted in principle within the TC zoning.

Section 1.5 Main Aims of the Fingal Development Plan 2017 – 2023.

2. Provide for the future wellbeing of the residents of the County by: Ensuring the provision of adequate housing, necessary infrastructure and community facilities.

8. Facilitate the potential for growth in tourism by implementing the *Fingal Tourism Strategy 2015-2018*, as appropriate.

Relevant Objectives.

Objective PM66: Ensure provision of accessible, adequate and diverse community facilities and services in new and established areas to provide for the well-being of residents.

Objective PM67: Ensure community facilities are flexible in their design and promote optimum usage.

Objective PM71: Support the provision of new community centres and facilitate the refurbishment and extension of facilities where there is a need for such works. Such facilities shall be accessible by a range of travel modes with an emphasis on walking, cycling and public transport use, while providing limited car parking facilities to meet anticipated demand of non-local visitors to the centre.

Objective PM72: Resist the loss of existing social and community facilities such as community centres and youth clubs or any sports facilities including playing fields, unless satisfactory alternatives are available.

Objective PM73: Encourage the development of multi-functional buildings which are not used exclusively by any one group.

Objective Howth 1: Ensure that development respects the special historic and architectural character of the area.

Objective Howth 6: Encourage and facilitate the development of a Community Centre in Howth Village.

Objective ED61: Direct the provision of tourist related facilities, such as information offices and cultural centres, into town and village locations to support and strengthen the existing economic infrastructure of such centres.

Objective CH20: Ensure that any development, modification, alteration, or extension affecting a Protected Structure and/or its setting is sensitively sited and designed, is compatible with the special character, and is appropriate in terms of the proposed scale, mass, height, density, layout, materials, impact on architectural or historic features, and junction with the existing Protected Structure.

CH32: Avoid the removal of structures and distinctive elements (such as boundary treatments, street furniture, paving and landscaping) that positively contribute to the character of an Architectural Conservation Area.

Fingal Tourism Strategy 2015 – 2018

Action CRT8 – Develop Howth Courthouse as a Tourist Information Office.

SITE LOCATION & DESCRIPTION:

The wedge shaped site (c. 193sqm in area) contains a single storey former courthouse structure, rectangular in plan, with a projecting entrance porch located in Howth Village at the junction of Church Street and Harbour Road. The structure has a pitched roof and is rendered, with decorative external pilasters along with roundels to the windows and doors. The former courthouse building contains two pedestrian entrances, one from Harbour Road directly into the main room of the building, while a second is provided from the porch in the eastern façade. Internally the structure is comprised of three rooms, 1) a rectangular space, containing a small raised dias at the eastern end and an internal staircase to a mezzanine floor, 2) a smaller room, formerly the judges chamber is currently used as a kitchen, and 3) a porch feature which provides secondary access to the building.

To the west of the courthouse building is a small narrow planted area with a number of small trees. A stepped path cuts through this space. The stone wall is forms the boundary of the space from the courthouse building to the stepped path. On-street parking is provided on Harbour Road.

DEPARTMENTAL REPORTS:

- Heritage Officer by report dated 23rd February 2018 welcomes the proposed development. Comments are noted.
- Conservation Officer has no objections to the proposed development subject to conditions.
- The Transportation Section – no report at the time of writing.
- The Parks and Green Infrastructure Division by report dated 25th January 2018 has no objections to the proposed development subject to conditions.
- Water Services – Forward Planning Section by report dated 14th February 2018 has no objections to the proposed development subject to conditions.
- Community, Culture and sports Division by report dated 20th February 2018 has no objections to the proposed development.

APPRAISAL:

The existing courthouse building is an attractive part of the heritage of Howth Village. Continued appropriate use is of importance for maintaining the integrity of Protected Structures and it is beneficial to have additional public access to this vernacular structure. The proposed use of a small area within the building as a tourism office is considered to provide for a high quality facility in terms of accommodation within an attractive heritage building with an associated newly constructed seating area which will provide space for tourists to congregate. In addition designated spaces for discrete advertising are proposed in order to avoid proliferation of signage on the heritage structure. Overall, it is considered to that the location of a tourism office in the Old Courthouse is contemporaneous with the promotion of Howth as a higher quality tourism destination and is more visually appropriate than the existing temporary facility.

Internal and external works to the structure would generally have substantial benefits in terms of providing for appropriate refurbishment of the building for future community uses. No designated user has been indicated within the submitted documentation. This is supported by Objective PM73 which encourages the development of multi-functional buildings which are not used exclusively by any one group. It is noted that the Community, Culture and Sports Division note no objections to the proposed works. The Conservation Officer and Heritage Officer both note support for the project. The Conservation Officer wishes to see restriction on non-official advertising along the railings to the front paved area. It is also considered appropriate to provide colour to the railings, rather than galvanising.

The Parks and Green Infrastructure Section have noted that the existing tree will not survive works and amendment to ground levels and suggest replanting with an appropriate pine species. This is considered acceptable.

Screening for Appropriate Assessment.

The proposed development would involve modest refurbishment works to an existing structure and provision of an additional 15sqm tourism office use.

The proposal has been assessed by the Heritage Officer and it is noted that given the nature and location of the proposed development it will not affect Natura 2000 sites and therefore a full Appropriate Assessment is not required in this case.

Environmental Impact Assessment.

As was noted above, the proposal is for the refurbishment works to an existing structure and provision of an additional 15sqm tourism office use. For the purposes of development by a Local Authority requiring an Environmental Impact Assessment under Section 176 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) it is noted that the proposed development is not of a class specified within Part 1 or Part 2 of Schedule 5 of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001 (as amended) and would not have such significant effects on the environment as to require the undertaking of Environmental Impact Assessment.

Conclusion

The proposed works to comprise refurbishment of the Old Courthouse, retain community use and provision of a tourism office within part of the building is considered to be an appropriate response to the need for continued upkeep and use of a vernacular Protected Structure on a prominent corner site within the Howth Village Architectural Conservation Area. The proposal would safeguard and ensure the continued use of the building and provide for a modern and visually appropriate intervention in the form of the seating space to the front (west) of the building. The proposed development is therefore considered to be in accordance with the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.

RECOMMENDATION:

The Planning Department have no objection to the proposed refurbishment works to the Old Courthouse (A Protected Structure) and provision of an additional 15sqm tourism office use and new access and seating area subject to conditions requiring:-

1. Use of materials and colour scheme shall be agreed with the Conservation Officer prior to the commencement of development.
2. Railings shall not be galvanised and shall be painted or powder coated a colour to be agreed with the Conservation Officer.
3. A pine tree (*Pinus nigra* 150 – 175cm rootball specimen or similar) shall be provided in place of the tree proposed for retention, which is unlikely to survive the proposed works.
4. Discharge of surface water from the seating area to the proposed tree pit, of which details are to be agreed with water services.
5. No discharge of surface water shall be permitted to the foul sewer.



Pat Boyle

Senior Architect



Hazel Craigie

a/Senior Planner.

Recommendation endorsed



Ed Hearne.

Director of Services

Economic Enterprise and Tourism Department

26th February 2018