

SOUTH DUBLIN COUNTY COUNCILS

ARCHITECTURAL CONSERVATION OFFICERS REPORT

RE: SD22A/0153 – LORETO ABBEY, GRANGE ROAD, RATHFARNHAM, DUBLIN 14.

Protected Structure

Loreto Abbey is referred to in the Council's Record of Protected Structures - Schedule 2 of the South Dublin County Development Plan 2016-2022 under Map Ref. No. 253. Under Section 2 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, the term 'structure' means "*any building, structure, excavation, or other thing constructed or made on, in, or under any land, or any part of a structure so defined, (a) where the context so admits, includes the land on, in or under which the structure is situated, and (b) in relation to a protected structure or proposed protected structure, includes (i) the interior of the structure, (ii) the land lying within the curtilage of the structure, (iii) any other structures lying within that curtilage and their interiors, and (iv) all fixtures and features which form part of the interior or exterior of any structure or structures*". Therefore, the entire site is a protected structure, including all existing buildings on site including their exteriors, interiors, fixtures and fittings. The Protection also extends to the lands of the site and as such come under the provisions of the Planning and Development Act 2000.

Appraisal

The proposed development consists of the following; Development on site for Phase 1 (of a 2-phase future masterplan) partial demolitions, refurbishment and a new circulation link extension to the existing Loreto Abbey Complex, protected structures (RPS no.s 252 and 253) at the Grange Road Loreto Rathfarnham for use as Gaelcholaiste an Phiarsaigh; The proposed Phase 1 works shall consist of partial demolitions of two storey link and toilet extensions; construction of a new 787sq.m replacement four storey glazed circulation extension linking the existing 1725 Georgian House and 1890's St. Anne's buildings; refurbishment works to the existing 1725 Georgian House and 1890's St. Anne's buildings, with works to the ground floor of the 1903 Gymnasium Building (all forming part of the protected structure RPS no. 253) totalling 3,854sq.m; demolition of 20th Century extension to, and holding works for future re-use, to Northern Gate Lodge (RPS No. 252); construction of temporary school prefabricated toilet accommodation for school use during the phasing of the main construction works; on-site drop-off, set-down and vehicular parking provisions, and associated off-site works adjoining the shared access road/ right of way with the Loreto Abbey Apartment Development; all associated hard- and soft- surface play areas, bicycle parking area and landscaping, boundary treatments; associated surface water attenuation, foul and surface water drainage connections, site works and ancillary services.

The project consists of the adaptive re-use of a number of Protected Structures on the site and the construction of a new 4-storey glazed link building that will function as a circulation hub between the existing buildings allowing connectivity throughout resulting in a wider use of the existing buildings which are currently not in use. The proposed development will result in a suitable use and the future protection of the existing buildings as part of a contemporary secondary school.

It should be noted that the Design Report makes reference to the two phases as part of the overall Master Plan for the subject site. It states that it is “proposed redevelopment college campus will have new synthetic-surface play area integrated within the grassed ‘chalice’ landscape, hard surface play areas to north of block D and new link and to east of Block B/Pugin Chapel together with associated landscaping, boundary treatments...”. As with previous developments or works within the site, the importance of the setting and front landscape design of the convent has been highlighted by the undersigned along with the retention of the central statue feature. It is considered the front grassed ‘chalice’ landscape area should be maintained in its existing form and therefore any proposals to change the use or design would not be deemed acceptable. It is recommended that an overall landscape design should be provided in order to identify the areas within the complex for use as recreational space and play as part of the school’s use and those requirements need to address any visual impacts and the protection of the setting and principal views of Loreto Abbey.

The proposed Phase 1 works shall consist of:

- Partial demolitions of 2-storey link and toilet extensions;
- Construction of a new 787m² replacement four storey glazed circulation extension linking the existing 1725 Georgian House and 1890s St. Anne’s buildings;
- Refurbishment works to the existing 1725 Georgian House and 1890s St. Anne’s buildings, with works to the ground floor of the 1903 Gymnasium Building (all forming part of the protected structure RPS no. 253) totalling 3,854m²;
- Demolition of 20th Century extension to, and holding works for future re-use, to Northern Gate Lodge (RPS No. 252);
- Construction of temporary school prefabricated toilet accommodation for school use during the phasing of the main construction works;
- On-site drop-off, set-down and vehicular parking provisions, and associated off-site works adjoining the shared access road / right of way with the Loreto Abbey Apartment Development.

As part of the accompanying planning application documentation a ‘Conservation Impact Assessment’ has been submitted by Fitzgearld Kavanagh and Partners Conservation Architects which addresses the design intention and conservation works proposals in relation to works to Block A, B and ground floor of Block E. This document is very comprehensive, and it includes a conservation strategy and methodology for the conservation works. The approach and methods proposed adhere to best practice and conservation principles. An impact assessment for the proposed works is provided along with a very detailed description and methodology for Thermal Upgrading Works. There are a number of alterations to the existing internal layouts Building A and B. The impacts and mitigation for works are detailed as part of the Conservation Impact Assessment.

A Pre-Planning meeting took place on the 14th May 2022 (Reg. PP041/21) with the Planning Authority, Architectural Conservation Officer, Dept. Education reps & Architects to discuss the initial concept and reuse of the existing buildings along with the overall design concept for the extended use as a Second Level school and connection of buildings within the complex to allow for a more sustainable use of the Protected Structures on the site. The undersigned welcomed the commencement of design stage for Phase one and the adaptive reuse of the existing structures within the complex. The refurbishment works and level of intervention was very well considered.

The new proposed glazed circulation extension linking the Georgian House and St. Annes was considered to be appropriate and justified in that it is required to allow the connection of these buildings in supporting a sustained long-term use and functionality as part of the needs for the existing school. The overall form and design of the circulation extension was shown to be acceptable at pre-planning stage and its justification and functional need was fully considered. There were two options presented with design references.

The undersigned had indicated that Option B (Complete Accoya[®] timber glazing system with fixed glazing and timber panels incorporating opening sash units and doors) would be softer in its finish and would support the overall design and sensitive integration of the proposed link at this location (east and north elevation). This modern intervention as proposed will read clearly as a new contemporary addition in contrast to the historic buildings and site context.

It is clearly identified that in order to facilitate the new link extension that the removal of an existing 2-storey link corridor and existing 6-storey modern toilet block to the north of Building B would be required. In particular the removal of historic block (link corridor) which is in a poor state of disrepair. However, notwithstanding the condition of this historic element, justification and mitigation is required for its removal. In assessing this part of the proposed development, it is felt that the adaptive reuse and long-term viability of Loreto Abbey has to be weighed against the removal of the former link structure. Another such intervention and new build element is proposed at the junction of Blocks B and D facing west (front elevation) in order to provide a clearly visible and identifiable accessible pedestrian entrance into the new circulation link behind.

This intervention involves the removal at lower ground floor of part of the wall to make an accessible entrance and the addition of a fully glazed 2-storey screen which is designed to align with the Georgian House string course, while being set back and secondary to its corner similar to the reference image provided from the Hugh Lane Gallery, which helps to illustrate the design intent. It is considered that the need for this intervention is warranted in order to provide accessibility, however the execution and how this intervention will sit at this location is particularly important. It felt that specific details on the installation and fixtures etc are required to ensure minimal intervention and high-quality finish.

At the pre-planning meeting the level of energy upgrading works were discussed and the undersigned requested the specifications and methodology for all fire and energy upgrading works should be provided in order to assess the scope of works and the suitability of these works and materials. Comprehensive detail has been provided as part of the planning application in this regard.

It is considered that the details provided in the conservation strategy should be adhered to as part of an overall methodology for the proposed works to all existing buildings and all works should adhere to best conservation principles and practice.

The impact of the required thermal upgrading works has been analysed and where appropriate mitigating measures have been outlined within the report. The conservation report provides an architectural impact assessment of the proposed works which details the works and assesses the overall impact. It is noted that a condensation risk analysis has been carried out for Building A and a study has been carried out on options for the insulation to the walls of Building B (Georgian House). A summary description of the existing fabric is provided allowing the proposed thermal upgrading works to be fully assessed. It is considered that the overall approach has been well developed and adheres to best practice and methodologies.

It is proposed to demolish the modern extension to the North Gate Lodge (RPS Ref. 252) and carry out holding and repair works for future use. Details of the proposed works and methodology for same have been provided in the Conservation Impact Assessment. It is considered that the demolition of the modern extension is acceptable and that holding, and repair works are welcomed given the current condition. The scope of works proposed for the North Gate Lodge under Phase one will ensure its future protection and reuse.

Conclusion

On assessing the level of conservation works, refurbishment, interventions, thermal upgrading and fire safety works, it is considered that the proposed works and mitigating measures have been well considered to ensure minimal intervention to the original built fabric. The proposal allows for the adaptive reuse of existing buildings within the complex and allows the extended use as part of the existing school. The proposed works also allow the necessary conservation repairs and upgrading to be carried out, therefore ensuring the continued use and protection of Loreto Abbey, which is of National Architectural importance.

Recommendation

Based on the above it is considered that the proposed development is acceptable with the following conditions attached. It is recommended that the following conditions be attached to a grant of permission:

- The proposed development shall be carried out in accordance with the details provided in the Methodology as part of the Conservation Impact Assessment and Conservation Strategy. Works shall be carried out adhering to best conservation practice and principles.
Reason: Ensuring works are carried out in accordance with the details provided adhering to best practice and conservation principles.

- A suitably qualified Conservation Architect should continue to be engaged to supervise and oversee the proposed works to the existing Protected Structures (Loreto Abbey RPS Ref. 253 and Gate Lodges RPS Ref.252), ensuring that all conditions relating to the architectural conservation and status of the existing buildings are addressed and submitted for agreement with the Councils Architectural Conservation Officer as set out below.

South Dublin County Councils Architectural Conservation Officer should be informed when works commenced and should be provided with a final Work Programme in order to facilitate site inspections.

Reason: To ensure the engagement of a suitably qualified conservation architect to advise and oversee the works in accordance with best practice.
- It is considered that the proposed interventions and works within the existing buildings should be carried out in accordance with the details specified in the detailed Methodology provided as part of the Conservation Strategy and approach. All works should be carried out in accordance with good conservation practice and principles ensuring minimal intervention and no damage or risk to the original built fabric. Those areas being affected by new opens or widening of new opens/interventions or new additions should be made good using the appropriate materials and methods.

Reason: To ensure works to structures within the curtilage of Loreto Abbey, Protected Structure (RPS Ref. 253 and 252) are carried out according to good conservation practice and principles.
- Safety measures should be put in place during the proposed works on site. A Safety Statement should be provided detailing how the existing structures will be protected during demolition works and site clearance/excavation and construction. This should include all Protected Structures including the North Gate Lodge and architectural features within the curtilage. Details should also be included as to how the site will be accessed during the works and location of site set up etc.

A safety statement should be submitted for written agreement with the Councils Architectural Conservation Officer prior to the commencement of development. Once works commence on site the Councils Architectural Conservation Officer should be contacted with regard to inspecting the safety measures put in place to safeguard and protect ALL Protected Structures on site.

Reason: To ensure the Protected Structure and all associated features are being safeguarded during the proposed development and appropriate safety measures are put in place to prevent any possible damage.
- A schedule of materials and finishes should be provided for the proposed new link extensions, prior to commencing development. Materials and finishes have not been indicated. Options were provided as part of the pre-planning with Option B considered to be more appropriate in materials and overall design in this location. This should include full details on materials and finishes for all elements of the proposed development.

Reason: To ensure full and proper execution of these designed elements.

- A window schedule for all historic and original windows should be submitted in order to justify the proposed upgrading works to include the use of new high performance slim glazing units. Details of the reinstatement of new timber sliding sash windows should be submitted to confirm the overall design, profile and material.
Reason: To ensure the correct materials and methods in accordance with conservation principles.
- The new build element proposed at the junction of Blocks B and D facing west (front elevation) in order to provide a clearly visible and identifiable accessible pedestrian entrance into the new circulation link behind requires further detail. This intervention involves the removal at lower ground floor of part of the wall to make an accessible entrance and the addition of a fully glazed 2-storey screen which is designed to align with the Georgian House string course, while being set back and secondary to its corner.
It is considered that the need for this intervention is warranted in order to provide accessibility, however the execution and how this intervention will sit at this location is particularly important. It felt that specific details on the installation and fixtures etc are required to ensure minimal intervention and high-quality finish. Further images and detailed drawings should be provided ensuring the overall design elements and materials are acceptable.
Reason: To ensure new interventions are of high visual quality and the insertion will not cause direct damage or impact on the original built fabric of the Protected Structures.
- It should be requested that copies of the condensation risk analysis and the study for options for thermal upgrading works should be submitted and that a record should be kept, and photographs of all thermal upgrading works in order to present a case study of good thermal upgrading and works to historic structures as part of climate change policy.
Reason: In the interest of sharing information and providing case studies of good practice and use of materials for energy upgrading works for Protected Structures in addressing climate change policy.

The above conditions should be submitted to the Councils Architectural Conservation Officer (Ms. Irenie McLoughlin) for agreement and written approval prior to the commencement of development.

Irenie McLoughlin
Architectural Conservation Officer

Date: 1st July 2022

