

HERITAGE IMPACT ASSESSMENT

PROPOSED STRATEGIC HOUSING DEVELOPMENT

AT

“DE LA SALLE” SCHOOL AND MONASTERY,
BALLYFERMOT, DUBLIN 10.

(PARTLY A PROTECTED STRUCTURE)



FOR

DWYER NOLAN DEVELOPMENTS LTD.

DERMOT NOLAN
CONSERVATION ARCHITECT

14 LOWER BAGGOT STREET, DUBLIN 2
TEL: 01-676 4025 E-MAIL: info@swn.ie

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1. INTRODUCTION.

1.1 This report has been prepared as an accompaniment to a planning application for a Strategic Housing Development on a (roughly rectangular) 8.3 Ha. site located at Ballyfermot Road, Ballyfermot, Dublin 10.

I am engaged as Conservation Architect by the designers of the subject proposal, Delphi Design, to consider the impact of the proposed development in terms of Heritage.

1.2 The subject proposal is for inter-alia; 927 no. residential units in 8 no. blocks (Blocks A-H) ranging in height from 2 to 13 storeys, arranged around a roughly rectangular plan, with access from the public roads to the south (Ballyfermot Road) and west (Lynch's Lane).



PIC. 1; PROPOSED SITE LAYOUT.

The residential blocks are laid out towards the perimeter of the site, with Public Open Space located in the centre, as one enters from Ballyfermot Road, and in the north-west in the form of playing pitches.

1.3 To accommodate the development, it is proposed to demolish part of the existing school buildings and the monastery building on the site. The site is not within or adjacent to an Architectural Conservation Area; however, part of the complex of former school buildings is a Protected Structure.

The central block (of 3 no. linked buildings) has recently been placed on the Record of Protected Structures.

An initial Architectural Heritage Impact Assessment (AHIA) for the subject development was prepared in March 2020 as part of the pre-application discussions. At that time, there was some ambiguity as to what features of the site formed part of the Protected Structure.



PIC. 2; MAP SHOWING ELEMENTS FOR INCLUSION ON THE RPS.

It has now been clarified that the Protected Structure on the site (RPS Ref. 8784) includes: (a) the central classroom block, including return, which contains toilets of the former school (b) the “open air” loggia structures and (c) the entrance piers & gates at the footpath.

- 1.4 This was confirmed in Dublin City Council’s letter of 19th February 2020 which is reproduced as an appendix to this report.
- 1.5 The current Architectural Heritage Impact Assessment is put forward based upon the final design, which has taken on board the comments of Mary McDonald (Dublin City Council Conservation Officer) as well as the undersigned, and, in section 6, addresses outstanding points from the initial AHIA submitted as part of pre-application discussions with Dublin City Council and An Bord Pleanála.

2. BACKGROUND.

- 2.1 The monastery on the site features in the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage survey (Reg. No. 50080372) but the school does not. The record rates the monastery as being of Local standing and dates it as 1950-1960. The building is regarded as being of Architectural, Historical & Social interest.
- 2.2 The coordinates of the property are given as 310558, 233720.
- 2.3 The monastery is described thus in the NIAH survey:

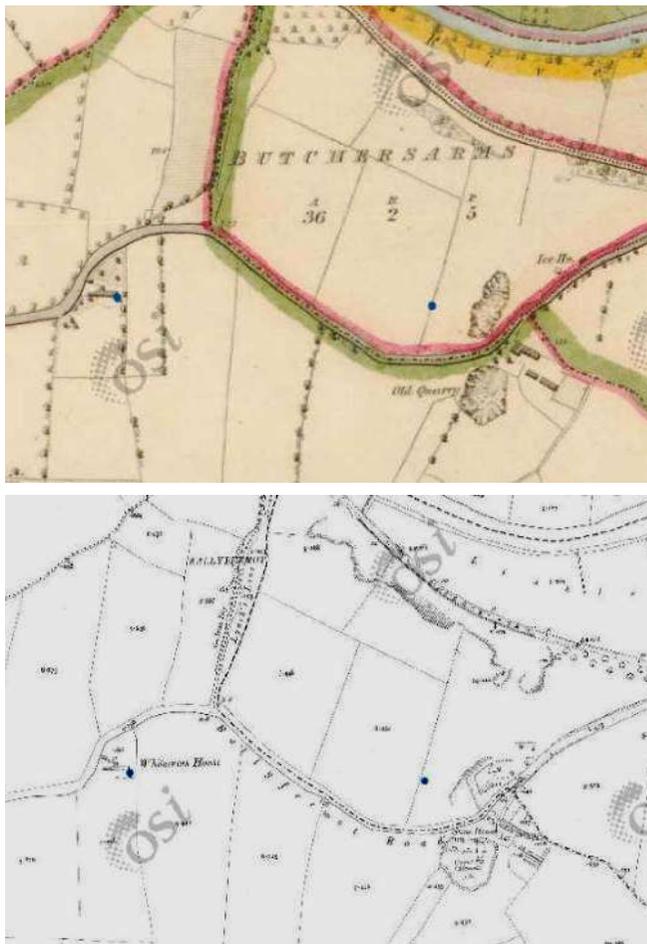
“Detached U-plan eleven-bay two- storey monastery, built 1950, having pedimented portico to front (south) elevation, three-bay pedimented breakfronts to either end of front elevation, forming east and west wings to rear. Four-bay chapel to ground floor west wing with apse to north elevation. East wing now in use as health offices and clinic. Pitched copper-clad roofs with red brick chimney stacks and cast-iron rainwater goods. Rendered eaves course, rendered cornice and carved limestone roundels to pediments. Roughcast rendered walls with rendered quoins and plinth course. Square-headed window openings with rendered reveals, cut granite sills and one-over-one pane timber sash windows. Round-headed stained glass windows to chapel. Main entrance having pedimented Doric portico with paired columns, carved urns and cast-iron decorative plaque to pediment. Square-headed door opening having double-leaf timber panelled door with sidelights and overlight. Square-headed door opening to north elevation, having timber panelled glazed door and opaque overlights. Set in own grounds having painted steel railings on chamfered cement rendered plinth to site boundary. Entrance to south having rendered gate piers and steel gates.”

Under the heading “Appraisal” the following is written:

“This building was designed by Simon Aloysius Leonard, responsible for many of the Roman Catholic Church's commissions. A well-proportioned and attractive building, its

design and materials relate directly to the large educational complex of Mount La Salle to the west, also designed by Leonard, to serve the rapidly-growing population of Ballyfermot”.

- 2.4 The 1840s and 2010 O.S. maps were inspected to compare how the area appeared in those times and today. It is shown that the school and monastery were built on lands which were quite rural, being comprised of a number of fields to the east of Ballyfermot, quite near the much more important settlement of Chapelizod to the north/north-west.



PICS. 3 AND 4; 1840s AND 1910 O.S. MAPS.

These maps are reproduced on left where it can be seen that the school and monastery (which are located on two fields at the centre of the maps) were built on virgin lands to a generic plan.

- 2.5 The school buildings were inspected externally and internally on 12th February 2020 in order to record their qualities and characteristics and to evaluate their importance.
- 2.6 Photographs are used throughout this assessment in order to illustrate certain points, and to give sense of the character of the complex.
- 2.7 The monastery was also inspected, albeit only externally. It can confidently be said that the school and monastery, which were designed by the same architect and built at the same time, were identical, at least in terms of their external treatment.
- 2.8 The group of buildings to the north of the complex, probably related to the adjacent sports playing fields, were not inspected and were inaccessible.
- 2.9 The development proposal seeks the demolition of the monastery, despite its appearing in the NIAH survey, while the central classroom block of the school is to be retained, refurbished, and incorporated into the development, along with the entrance gate piers.
- 2.10 It is recognised that there is a degree of affection for the presence of the De La Salle Brothers on the site for almost 70 years and is felt it is reasonable that this should be commemorated.

3 DESCRIPTION, HISTORY

- 3.1 The site largely comprises playing fields with hedgerow growth to its perimeter and some mature trees along its west & north boundaries (to Chapelized bypass).
- 3.2 To the south of the site are located the school buildings, now empty but intact, with the monastery, now derelict, vandalised and abandoned, located to the extreme south-west of the site.



PIC. 5; GENERAL VIEW OF FRONT OF SCHOOL.

- 3.3 The classroom blocks are elongated, running east/west, towards the south of the site, almost 200 metres long. They formed a quadrangle with the buildings (which were sports-related), and return blocks at ends. An open, but covered, colonnade connects all of these buildings
- 3.4 The complex of buildings is of masonry construction (thought to be mainly blockwork, probably with concrete ring- beams), with aluminium windows on concrete sills.

The windows were probably originally of steel.



PIC. 6; GENERAL VIEW SOUTH (QUADRANGLE).

- 3.5 It is possible that the monastery building, which is of a cellular nature, is of more conventional construction – timber joists, etc., with boarded finish, as the spans are generally shorter and rooms smaller. No access was available to the interior to confirm this.

- 3.6 Roofs are generally of copper; these had been replaced, and patched, with profiled metal in places. Corridors have a lower ceiling level, to allow for north-facing high-level natural lighting to classrooms.

In the monastery, there were large, multi-flued brick-finished chimneys.

- 3.7 Upper floors of the school are generally of concrete, finished with a combination of woodblock (classrooms) and terrazzo (corridors).

Ground floors were suspended to school, with boarded finish; these had external vents. The monastery had an unvented (perhaps concrete) ground floor.



PICS. 7 & 8; EXTENSIVE USE OF TERRAZZO IN STAIRCASES (FLOORING, TREADS AND UPSTANDS).

3.8 There is, as was common at the time, much use of terrazzo as a flooring material (incl.to staircases, & upstands).

Otherwise, walling & ceiling materials are of Gypsum plaster.



PIC. 9; TYPICAL CLASSROOM

3.9 Internal joinery (doorcases, skirtings, etc.) are plain, with painted finish, of typical fashion for the time.

3.10 As no access was available, we cannot comment on the interior of either the rear, sports-related, building or the monastery.



PIC. 10; FRONT OF MONASTERY BUILDING.

3.11 While the single-storey toilet block, located at the east end of the central school block, is included in the structures which are included in the Record of Protected Structures, and thus to be afforded protected status, the subject development includes for the demolition of this element.



PIC. 11; TOILET BLOCK (NOTE PATCHING TO ROOF).



PIC. 12; AERIAL VIEW OF SCHOOL.



PIC. 13; SPORTS-RELATED BUILDING & COLLONADE.

4 CHARACTER.

- 4.1 In evaluating character, both the quality of the school and monastery themselves, also their setting and relationship to their surroundings, will be considered.
- 4.2 While the central classroom block of the school has been afforded protected status in the RPS, the general undistinguished aesthetic of the buildings and the lack of character which might have contributed to any architectural interest are thought to be the reasons (a) they have not been fully included in the RPS and (b) in the case of the monastery, is rated only as of Local importance in the NIAH survey.

Having inspected the buildings and their setting, I agree with this evaluation.

- 4.3 There is a limited charm in the simplicity of form of both the school & monastery, which have not, as far as can be seen, been altered or extended in any significant way.
- 4.4 The school and monastery are typical of those built between 1930 and 1960 by the Religious Orders in Ireland. Like many other such institutions, they are undistinguished.
- 4.5 Essentially, the original fabric of the school is intact whereas that of the monastery is compromised by vandalism.
- 4.6 Apart from Architectural, Historical & Social the writer is not aware of any other category of interest (archaeological, artistic, cultural, scientific, or technical) which might apply to either the school or the monastery.
- 4.7 Apart from broadcaster Joe Duffy, the only notable alumni were a few minor footballers, none of whom had international careers.

4.8 The character of the school and monastery and their setting can also be gained from the photographs which accompany this assessment.

4.9 It is understood that the school, which was one time the largest school in Ireland, if not Europe, is well built, and has a place in the hearts of the people of Ballyfermot. It is also true that there is a desire to leave a trace of its existence here, where it has stood for nigh on 70 years.

To that end, the monastery was first recommended for protection in the RPS, but instead it is the school building, or at least part of it, which has now been afforded protected in the RPS.



PIC. 14; THE SCHOOL (END BLOCK).

4.10 Accordingly, the central classroom block of the school building, including for 2 no. staircase towers, 2 no. flanking single storey loggia and principal paired entrance gate piers, is now listed as a Protected Structure in the 2016-2022 Dublin City Development Plan (RPS Ref No. 8784). The monastery building is not thus listed.



PIC. 15; SCHOOL (CENTRAL BLOCK – FRONT).

4.11 As the central classroom block has the additional feature of the “twin towers”, it is more worthy of protection than the two plainer blocks to each side.

4.12 It is thought that the inclusion of the toilet block in the RPS is not warranted.



PIC 16; INTERIOR OF TOILET BLOCK.

In fact, it is thought that the retention of the toilet block is harmful to the character of the main building, as is demonstrated at PICS 11 and 12.

5 CONDITION.

The two buildings are in quite different condition. The school is in excellent condition, with all elements of its interior and exterior having been minded and in the same condition as when it was last used in 2019. It has not been subjected to vandalism.

The monastery however has been vandalised, and is regarded as in generally poor condition, with the following matters noted in the sub-sections below.



PIC. 17; GENERAL VIEW OF MONASTERY BUILDING.

5.1 Roofs

5.1.1 The pitched roof covering & fitting were examined from ground level only. Copper has been removed from the roof of the monastery building, allowing water ingress for some time.

Elsewhere, copper roofing is showing sign of its age. As copper can be expected to last between 50 and 100 years and the school is c. 70 years old, the material is thought to be nearing the end of its useful life.

5.1.2 It seemed that the monastery has been subject to arson attack. It is not fully known to what extent damage has been caused by fire damage.

5.1.3 Chimneys, flashings, ridges, (replacement) gutters, downpipes and facias seemed in good condition, but with some spalling of brick to chimneys, growth in gutters, and possible decay to facias.

5.1.4 Outbuildings & shelters were not examined. Attic spaces were not examined.

5.2 Walls

5.2.1 Walls appeared sound, generally with good vertical line and little or no cracking.

5.2.2 Windows and external doors are fair, with some original, or early, elements subject to timber decay. More recent aluminium and uPVC windows are sound.



PIC. 18; MONASTERY. NOTE VANDALISM TO ROOF.



PICS. 19 & 20; INTERIOR OF TYPICAL CLASSROOM (TOP) AND END OF CORRIDOR.

5.3 Floors

5.3.1 These, where examined, seemed generally structurally sound.

5.3.2 Although not evident, timber floors can be expected to be subject, to some extent, to infestation or decay. Ground floors can suffer from dampness.

There are instances of some such decay throughout the school building.

5.3.3 It can be expected that fire(s) will have damaged floors in the monastery.



PIC 21; CLASSROOM, WITH WORK ONGOING.

5.4 Services

5.4.1 Electrical, gas, plumbing, water & drainage installations appear to be functional. These were not examined in detail.

5.4.2 Generally, sanitary facilities are contained within the 3 no. bathroom blocks, while heating is spread throughout the building.

5.4.3 Central heating boilers were contained at basement level, in the central block.

5.5 Outbuildings

5.5.1 There are remnants of former outbuildings which seemed to have been used for recreational purposes by the Brothers who lived in the Monastery.

These also apparently have suffered from vandalism; they have thus been demolished, with their debris remaining on site.



PIC 22; TOTAL DERELICTION OF OUTBUILDINGS (REMAINS INDICATED).

5.5.2 These are thought to have been of inferior construction, based on observation of their remnants.

None of these is considered to have contributed to the character of the building or its setting, as they were most likely of a later time, perhaps built by the Brothers.

6 RESPONSE TO COMMENTS RAISED BY PLANNING AUTHORITY AND CONSERVATION OFFICER.

Thus far, this report has generally dealt with matters previously submitted to An Bord Pleanála at the earlier stages of the SHD application process. At the outcome of the pre-application meetings, the Planning Authority and the Conservation Officer of Dublin City Council raised a number of points to be further addressed as part of a final application.

Following the initial design put forward at the pre-application consultation in October 2020, to which this author had no input, the Designers have now taken on board the comments of Mary McDonald, DCC Conservation Officer, as well as the comments of the undersigned.

This section of the report takes the points raised by both in turn.

6.1 What exactly is noted on the RPS, with particular reference to Toilet block, loggias and gates.

6.1.1 It is now clear that these are the elements which are protected: (a) the central classroom block of the former school, including the return which contains the toilets, (b) the “open air” loggia structures and (c) the entrance piers & gates at the footpath.

Confusion may have arisen as there were two separate letters issued by Dublin City Council; these differed in content. The second (corrected) issue of that letter, dated 19th February 2020 is reproduced as an appendix to this report.

PIC. 2 of this report has clarified the Protected Structure on the site.

6.2 Toilet Block

6.2.1 This report has made a strong case for the demolition of the toilet block to the rear, and I suggest that perhaps, in the haste to enter the central classroom block of the school in the RPS, this lesser appendage was unfortunately included.

In summary, the reasons for demolition of the toilet block are:

- It is fundamentally unremarkable
- It detracts from the simple and robust appearance of the central block
- It is not readily adaptable for other uses.

6.2.2 In support of this view, I quote the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht publication 'Architectural Heritage Protection; Guidelines for Planning Authorities' (2011) as follows:

"There may be cases where an existing addition is of little architectural quality, or is even damaging, to the original architectural design. This may arise, for example, where a ... poor-quality extension has unbalanced a good symmetrical façade. Partial demolition may be permitted in such cases, providing it can be achieved without any adverse structural or architectural impact on the protected structure."

It is indicated as removed in the development proposal and should be removed. I regard the removal of this element (both physically and its removal from the RPS) as having a positive impact.

6.3 Loggias

6.3.1 The DCC Conservation Officer had given her views on the salient issues in writing in her email of 26th May 2020. In the tri-partite Pre-Application Consultation Meeting held with An Bord

Pleanála via Microsoft Teams on 5th October 2020, her views in relation to the existing loggias to each side of the (retained) central classroom block were further discussed.

Her point was that these were an important feature of the school design as (inter alia) it was through these very structures that the school children entered the school yard, and thence the corridors & classrooms.

6.3.2 My response was strongly stated – that the loggias make no sense once the east and west blocks are removed. I now further emphasise that the loggias were originally provided principally to allow teachers, and students, to move laterally from one block to the next, with some degree of protection from the weather.

6.3.3 It is accepted that, with their interesting, almost Egyptianite, form & ornamentation, they have a certain "presence", but their somewhat tortured shape (so as to accommodate the staggered plan-form of the blocks) is at odds with the scheme layout. They make too strong a statement, almost urging people to enter the proposed scheme via these "portals", which is contrary to the intention of the designers.

6.3.4 An unfortunate fact is that such covered areas tend to encourage loitering and other "anti-social" behaviour, which could give the scheme a reputation for harbouring such activities.

6.3.5 A further difficulty was mooted that the loggias appear to have been built into the structure of the classroom blocks and damage might be caused in their removal. To overcome the above obstacles, it had been suggested that only their front (south) wall should remain.

To do this is to engage in the practice of “facadism” which, it is felt, should not be encouraged. As is stated in ‘Architectural Heritage Protection; Guidelines for Planning Authorities’ (2011): *“The protection of a façade alone should generally only be considered where there is no surviving interior of any interest.”* I believe (for the reasons given above, and as follows), it is appropriate to adhere that principle in this instance.

6.3.6 Whatever the original purpose and function of the loggias, they most certainly are of equal value, i.e. they admitted children to the school in equal measures, or facilitated lateral movement of personnel in equal measures. Accordingly, to continue to apply that logic, they should have equal value in their new altered environment. As can be seen in the layout of the proposed scheme, this cannot be the case.

Therefore, their retention, and re-use and integration into the proposed scheme makes no rational or aesthetic sense.

Accordingly, I regard the loss of the two loggias as being of slightly negative impact, (mitigated by the absence of logic in their retention), resulting in an overall neutral impact.

6.3.7 In the earlier scheme proposal put forward to the pre-planning meetings, only the front (south) walls of the loggias were proposed to be retained, as these served to obscure the asymmetry of Block A in relation to the Protected Structure.

As this is no longer the case in the final design, there appears to me to be no other justification for their retention. This is clearly illustrated in the illustration (PIC. 27) from the Architect’s design.



PIC. 23; TOILET BLOCK.



PIC. 24; LOGGIA (FROM WITHIN SCHOOL YARD).

6.4 Width / Alignment of Block A.

6.4.1 In the Conservation Officer's note of 26th May 2020 concern is expressed about the fact that the proposed building of Block A is not symmetrically positioned behind the retained central classroom block. I felt that this concern was generated not by what was apparent on the ground (what is "experienced" by the viewer), but by inspection of the Plans, and thus was unwarranted.

Nevertheless, this block has been modified in the final design so that now, it sits symmetrically behind the retained school block. I trust this matter is now resolved.

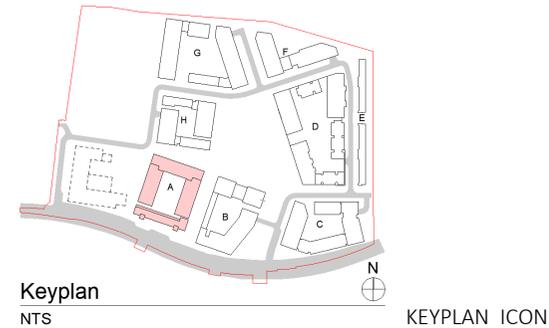


PIC. 25; SECTION THROUGH SCHOOL & BLOCK A.

While having been modified as mentioned, the stepped profile of Block A towards Ballyfermot Road is retained, as seen above, so it appears less visually dominant in relation to the school block.

I regard the siting and profile of this block as having negligible impact upon the Protected Structure.

6.4.2 Incidentally, it should be noted that earlier iterations of the proposed scheme referred to this element as "Block G". The nomenclature has been altered from then, as is reflected the image below (a reproduction of the legend icon which feature at top right of all drawings prepared for the application by the architect).



PIC. 26; VIEW OF BLOCK A, LOOKING SOUTH.



PIC. 27; PLAN OF BLOCK A, WITH RETAINED SCHOOL BLOCK TO THE SOUTH.

6.5 Siting of Block B

6.5.1 The Conservation Officer's concerns about the siting of Block B (to the Protected Structure's east) are noted.

She posits that the siting of this block, which is located forward of the "notional" building line, is inappropriate (presumably as it obscures the retained central school block as seen from the east).

6.5.2 There is inevitably some sympathy with this viewpoint, but I believe it lacks a sense of proportion and fails to recognise the altered setting of the retained block.

Whether one, from a static viewpoint on the south side of Ballyfermot Road or on approach from the east or west, observes the school building, it IS prominent. To the eye of this observer the robustness of its form, palette of materials and strength of detail ensure that it commands attention.

It is an interesting building that deserves to be seen, and it will be seen. Analysis of the views presented by Google Earth (PIC 28), taken from the south side of the road) suggest that visibility of the central block remains zero when one is opposite the vehicular entrance to the existing retreat house. As one is less than 40 metres further west it will, in the proposed scheme, become visible, and will continue to be seen for some time as one passes.

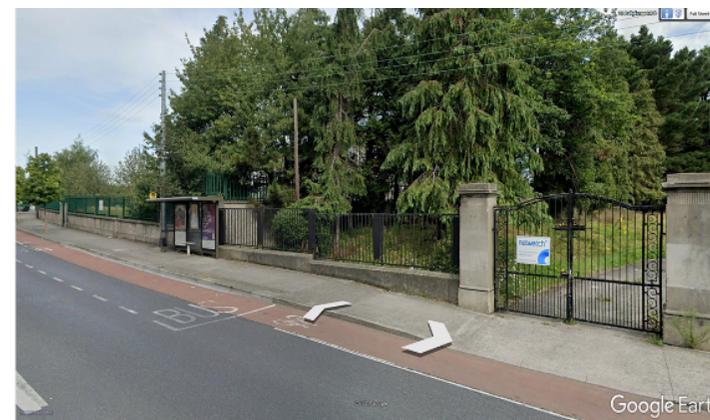
6.5.3 The central school block, with a footprint of c. 500 sq. metres, and a road frontage of 60 metres, has been retained, and integrated into the scheme. In its original inception, it was the dominant part of a set-piece of three distinct buildings.

6.5.4 While not featuring in the NIAH survey of the area, it is thus described in Dublin City Council's document recommending the addition of the structure to the RPS: *"The remaining structures, including the eastern and western classroom blocks and the assembly hall building reflect a more reserved and sparing deployment of detail. Although these structures contribute to the group setting of the complex as a whole, these are considered to be of LOCAL significance and do not merit being placed on the RPS."*

This suggests the central block needs nothing more than to be placed in the RPS. It retains, at 60 metres long, with its striking twin stair towers, a strong presence on this stretch of road. This presence is not diluted by the placement of Block B of the proposed development 6.5 metres forward of the Protected Structure.

Accordingly, I regard the placement of Block B as being of neutral impact.

6.5.5 In the following section 6.6, which deals with the existing entrance gates, there are further observations on this matter.



PIC. 28; VIEW FROM OPPOSITE RETREAT HOUSE GATES.



PICS. 29 & 30; TOP IMAGE SHOWS VIEWS FROM 'X' (WHERE ENTIRE FAÇADE OF SCHOOL WILL BECOME VISIBLE) AND 'Y' (WHERE RETAINED GATES/PIERS BECOME VISIBLE). LOWER IMAGE (EXISTING) SHOWS VIEW FROM 'Z' (WHERE FAÇADE BECOMES VISIBLE AT PRESENT, BECAUSE OF TREES).

6.6 Entrance Gates

6.6.1 Following the confusion as to what elements were actually added to the RPS, it is confirmed that the piers and gates to (approximately) the middle of the central block ARE now Protected Structures.

6.6.2 While the initial scheme included the removal of the piers and gates, these are now retained as, in the writer's opinion, they fulfil a useful role in the design of the scheme, making the school more legible. In this regard, it is noted that the fluting detail in the piers is echoed in the top of the stairs towers of the central block (see PICS 31 & 32 below).

6.6.3 It is worth recalling the Conservation Officer's concerns in relation to the lack of prominence of the prime Protected Structure (i.e. the central block), because of the location of Block B in relation to it.

6.6.4 Accordingly, and in compliance with the writer's recommendation, the piers/gates are retained, and relocated in a central position in relation to the central block.

They will be re-located slightly, to accommodate the proposed future BusConnects route on Ballyfermot Road, but still retain their physical relationship to the retained central school block.

6.6.5 A significant benefit of this is the observer becomes aware of the school as one approaches, especially from the east. The piers / gates are being relocated inwards (northwards) to the site into the plaza area in front of the protected structure and will be clearly visible from a distance as a visual "thumbprint" before the school itself comes into view.

6.6.6 In spite of its rating (inter alia) as being of architectural importance, it is not the opinion of the writer that the school block is an intrinsic part of an integrated set-piece along Ballyfermot Road.

This is why the two side blocks, and remainder of the school buildings, are not listed in the RPS. As the City Council's own assessment says: *"The central classroom block displays architectural ambition, making its mark on the street scene*

through the picturesque composition of the two stair towers” and adds “The remaining structures display an overall sparing deployment of detail, compared to the central classroom block, leaving these somewhat lacking in interest.”

6.6.7 So, if one accepts that the central block is a “stand alone” iconic building, it should not, especially at 2 storeys high, be seen as having some important spatial relationship with its new neighbours, i.e. Blocks A and B of the proposed scheme.

6.6.8 There is, I would suggest a strong case to be made in favour of the retained block being located in its “set back” location, with the resulting “plaza” replacing the present grassed/tarmac-covered forecourt.

6.6.9 This “plaza” is, I would suggest, given extra status by the prominence of the gates/piers and associated highlighted paved area.



PIC. 31; GATES & PIERS (SCHOOL IN BACKGROUND).



PIC. 32; TREATMENT TO TOP OF STAIRS TOWERS.



PIC. 33; PATHWAY TO SCHOOL/CRECHE (CGI).

6.9 Very little information on the conversion of the Protected Structure submitted, in particular the extent of any modifications required to enable change of use (comment in an Bord Pleanála Inspector’s report on recommended opinion (p.13), dated 12.10.2020).

6.9.1. In the time since pre-application meetings were held, further detail has been given in relation to the proposed use of the retained building and the interventions which are deemed necessary to give effect to these uses.

6.9.2. The building will accommodate a creche and a (1-room) civic centre. This is a change from the original proposed use at pre-application stage as a creche only.

6.9.3. It is important that the character of the Protected Structure is recognised principally as applying to the iconic aspect of the building (i.e. its physical presence). For residents of Ballyfermot, the school represents a “visual trigger” to a time when institutional buildings such as this seemed to be a symbol of the existence of a permanent, and perhaps comforting, religious presence in this country in the early days of the state.

6.9.4. Notwithstanding this, this is a handsome structure; its retention and adaptation to accommodate its proposed new uses is to be welcomed.

6.9.5. Its character was described in section 4 of this report. The City Council’s document recommending the addition of the structure to the RPS also alludes to its special character.

6.9.6. Obviously, the context of the Protected Structure is fundamentally altered by (a) the removal of its east and west wings and (b) the proposed apartment development; this has been dealt with earlier in this document.

As there are likely to be only minor changes to its exterior (apart from the accepted removal of the toilet block and loggias), and these relate largely to restoration of finishes, I believe these can largely be ignored.

6.9.7. An exception is the proposed replacement of the windows with “Alu-clad” elements, which will be double-glazed.

The original windows are presumed to have been of steel manufacture, which would have had a narrow profile and a painted finish. These were replaced in the 1990s with

aluminium units, which are of a bulkier profile, with an anodized finish.

I regard this alteration as having a neutral impact. I believe it would be appropriate to include a condition, on any grant of permission, requiring samples of these to be submitted for approval by the Planning Department.



PIC. 34; CENTRAL BLOCK.



PIC. 35; STAIRWELL (NORTHERN END).



PIC. 36; TYPICAL CLASSROOM.

6.9.8. Drawings have been prepared by the designers which fully illustrate the scope of their proposed alterations. Changes to the interior can be summarised thus:

- Alterations to the plan form by removal, addition or alteration of walls/partitions, and formation of new openings.
- Impact of above on ceiling, floor & wall finishes.
- Replacement of existing services and Introduction of new additional services.
- Altered live loading on existing structure.

These drawings, numbered D1808-32 to D1808-45, are specifically related to works to the Protected Structure; these are included with the application.

6.9.9. The historic plan form is simple, and can be clearly read and appreciated. It comprises an axial corridor to the northern side of the building, which gives access to south-facing rooms, with their high-level north-lighting. While these cross-walls are located on a grid, and abut piers on the southern elevation, this grid is not rigid.

It is noted that these cross-walls are not uniformly located over one another. Nor are they centred on piers of masonry.

In adapting the building for its new use, this pattern is maintained. The proposed interventions do not upset this rhythm and the circulation through the building is fundamentally unaltered.

6.9.10. Most of this re-arrangement of walls, openings and fittings are made in order to provide toilets in small clusters, so these can cater for immediately adjacent rooms.

It is apparent that large, centralised toilet facilities (such as were provided in the existing school building and are proposed to be demolished) are not suitable to a creche, so their inclusion in a more piecemeal manner is appropriate in this instance.

6.9.11. While this will result in a slight, barely perceptible alteration of character, it is considered to be necessary for the adaptation of the building to its new use.

As stated above, the planform is very strong and straightforward, with a series of rooms opening off the full-length corridor on its northern side. It is so robust that the slight changes do not cause a significant material alteration to the character of the building.

Accordingly, I regard the overall impact of these physical alterations of the planform as negligible or neutral.

6.9.12. Ceilings and walls are of smooth plaster, with no cornices, centrepieces, or other embellishments. They can thus be made good, using gypsum plaster, without loss of character, following the above alterations.

New partition walls abut only piers, i.e., not windows, on the south wall, ensuring the external elevations are unaffected.



PIC. 37; CLASSROOM – CARPET FLOOR COVERING.



PIC. 38; CLASSROOM – NORTH-FACING WALL.



PIC. 39; CORRIDOR (EAST END). ENTRANCE TO CLASSROOM ON RIGHT.

6.9.13. Floor finishes within rooms are largely of hardwood, “woodblock” diagonal pattern, mostly covered by carpet. They can thus be made good by craftsmen with appropriate skills, following alterations to plan.

As the likely creche operators have a strong preference for sheet material as floor covering, for sanitary reasons, this will be laid throughout in rooms, over whatever finish is extent, but not in corridors, where the existing terrazzo will be retained

Impact upon flooring finishes is thus neutral.

6.9.14. Routing of services (particularly heating, plumbing, and drainage, which tend to be bulkier) can have unfortunate effects on the character of Protected Structures. This is more common in older buildings, which tend to have more precious surfaces.

These impacts can be reduced by (a) the careful and comprehensive planning of all service runs and (b) following and re-using existing runs where possible.

A mechanical & electrical consultant with experience of working on historic structures should be engaged at an early date, as this will reduce any impact to the minimum.

Electrical & I.T. cabling is easier to conceal and, apart from principal runs, can be chased into walls and run behind ceilings, which can then be made good. Consideration should be given to confining major vertical runs to the 2 stairwells, from which future access will not be disruptive.

6.9.15. It is proposed to (a) remove a suspended ceiling and (b) restore the glazing to the “bullseye” windows in each of the staircase towers, so as to improve the natural light to these spaces.

This, which is also regarded as comprising a restoration of character, is considered as having a positive Impact.

6.9.16. As the structure was designed and built with classroom loading (1950s class size!) in mind, and is of apparently robust construction and in good condition, it is to be expected that it is over-designed for its proposed use.

Accordingly, there is no negative impact as a result of its new use.

6.9.17. At 6.4.17 of the publication 'Architectural Heritage Protection; Guidelines for Planning Authorities' (2011), the question of a Fire Risk Analysis is raised.

A formal analysis has not, as far as the writer is aware, been carried out.

I would suggest that, as the floor plan at each level is clear and unambiguous, with obvious (and alternative) means of escape plainly visible, the building will not have to undergo significant alterations in order to bring it in line with modern standards.

6.9.18. The re-use of the building as a creche and/or civic centre, is therefore regarded as having a neutral or positive impact, and is felt to be a fundamentally sound idea, and one which accords with the policy of the Development Plan, which encourages the re-use of existing buildings.

This is also a fundamental principle of good Conservation practice.

Just as the building is sufficiently robust to withstand the new setting of the apartment scheme, I feel it can also withstand being incorporated into the proposed residential scheme and adapted for use as a creche and/or civic centre.



PIC. 40; CORRIDOR, LOOKING EAST (LEFT).

PIC. 41; THRESHOLD BETWEEN CORRIDOR AND CLASSROOM.

6.10. Children's play space area: to the front of the Protected Structure, concern raised with railings / safety issues and impact on the sense of place and open nature of the proposed scheme.

6.10.1. It seems to me the concern here is that play- areas to creches tend to be enclosed sooner or later. This is often done without permission and, typically, comprises hastily erected "8 by 4" chipboard sheets which would obscure the Protected Structure.

Locating it to the north is not ideal orientation for the operation of the creche, but it makes sense in conservation terms.

6.10.2. Accordingly, the play area is now relocated to the rear (north) so that it (or its future modification/extension) will have minimal impact on the public realm, or from important common areas within the scheme.

Pic. 42 (on the following page) shows its proposed treatment.

6.11. Additional CGIs to be presented.

6.11.1. The Conservation Officer suggested that further computer-generated-images be prepared, to assist in demonstrating the potential impact of the proposal on views from other, more distant, important Protected Structures. This has been done.

6.11.2. Although this is dealt with elsewhere in this application, the writer has examined these CGIs and Verified Views and has the following comments.

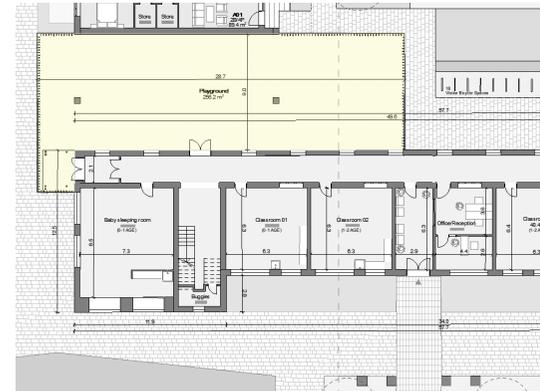
6.11.3. It is evident from a number of locations that this is a large group of buildings which are prominent from a considerable distance. The designers have not attempted to conceal the structures; they will be seen, including from the vicinity of Protected Structures like the Magazine Fort, Áras an Uachtaráin, and some of the Liffey bridges in central Dublin.

They will also be seen from closer, probably considered less important, and much closer, viewpoints.

6.11.4. I believe the designers have avoided the pitfall of considering the appearance of the scheme from one viewpoint only (usually from the principal adjacent road). This can lead to “slab-sided” minor elevations.

In this case, I am satisfied that the proposal, while substantial in scale, avoids that undesirable result and is clearly to be seen “in the round”, from all directions.

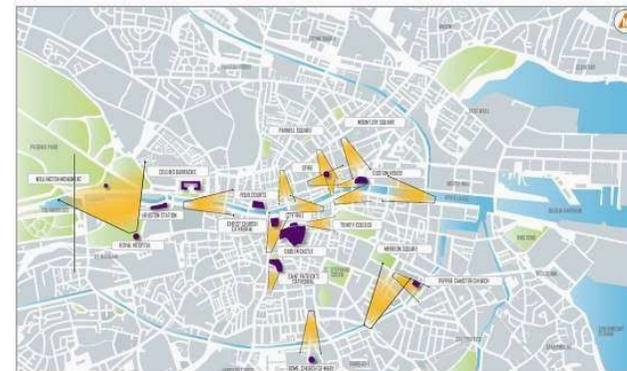
6.11.5. It is also apparent that the scheme will not interfere with and of the “Key Views & Prospects” shown on the Development Plan, while making a clear statement as to the relevance of Ballyfermot.



PIC. 42; CRECHE PLAYGROUND (PLAN).



PIC. 43; IMAGE OF CRECHE PLAYGROUND (LOOKING SOUTH, TOWARDS REAR OF PROTECTED STRUCTURE).



PIC. 44; PROTECTED VIEWS OF DUBLIN.

6.12 Bottom out all issues prior to making any application.

I agree with the principle of providing as much information as possible, especially in the area of conservation, for assessment at application stage. However, in large, complex schemes such as this, it can be impracticable to do so comprehensively.

6.12.1 It is to be welcomed that, in spite of the extent of the scheme, its Protected Structure is a well-defined, stand-alone building. Proposed interventions to it can readily be dealt with by condition.

It is also noted that its detachment from the other (proposed) blocks on site allows it to be easily hoarded for continued protection from physical damage. Again, this can be reinforced by condition.

6.12.2 As works to the Protected Structure will be fully documented, it is felt this is not necessary. However, if it is felt the school blocks, or retreat house which it is proposed to demolish need to have their photos so presented, this could be conditioned and can be done from the collection. The retreat house was photographed externally only, and has been fire damaged, making this task more onerous.

6.12.3 With regard to the principle of the change of use of the school, the 'Architectural Heritage Protection; Guidelines for Planning Authorities' (2011) state that, inter alia, if:

"a planning authority considers that the alterations required to achieve a proposed change of use will not have an undue adverse effect on the special interest of the structure, the proposals may be granted subject to conditions as appropriate."

I believe it is appropriate that this principle should apply in the subject case.

6.12.4 I trust it is not necessary to re-state the case for the change of use from school to creche. As the guidelines say: *"On the whole, the best way to prolong the life of a protected structure is to keep it in active use, ideally in its original use."*

While a creche is not the original use, it is sufficiently similar in nature that the adaptation of the building involves little intervention.

6.12.5 There is an obvious difficulty, from an applicant's viewpoint, in submitting a wealth of detailed information on proposals for works to Protected Structures. This is because of the possibility of the imposition of conditions by the Planning Authority, or An Bord Pleanála, requesting a change of design, thus rendering the detailed information worthless.

It is generally preferable to request such information by way of condition, after the overall design is finalised.

7. CONCLUSIONS.

- 7.1 If the building(s), which are only listed in part, were rated as being of Regional importance or higher, they would be worthy of a degree of protection afforded by 2.4.3 and 2.4.4 of the 'Architectural Heritage Protection; Guidelines for Planning Authorities' (2011) which states: "A *planning authority must have regard to any recommendation made to it by the Minister*".

As the monastery is rated only as of Local importance, I would suggest it does not deserve protection.

- 7.2 The buildings exhibit some basic 20th-century architectural and civil engineering heritage.
- 7.3 On account of the connections the buildings have with the Clergy and their involvement with the education system during the twentieth century, the retention of the central block is considered appropriate.

Otherwise, the buildings are not considered of any significance.



PIC. 45; FAÇADE OF THE CENTRAL BLOCK (SCHOOL BUILDING).

- 7.4 Though only partly a Protected Structure (for reasons mentioned earlier) it is recognised that there is a limited architectural interest in the form of the original school and monastery on the site.

- 7.5 The analysis of the fabric suggests that all of this is original, perhaps with the possible exception of the now-demolished outbuildings.

- 7.6 I endorse the decision of the Dublin City Council to afford Protected Structure status to the central block of the school, but that it should not be extended to the return room containing toilets.

In the circumstances, I believe it is quite acceptable to permit the demolition of (a) those parts of the school which are not listed in the RPS, and (b) the monastery. For reasons mentioned earlier, it is also felt that the removal of the loggias will result in an overall neutral impact.

- 7.7 I also believe that the proposed new setting of the remaining part of the school, i.e. the central block, will not be compromised by its being incorporated into the proposed housing scheme nor its adaptation as part of that scheme.

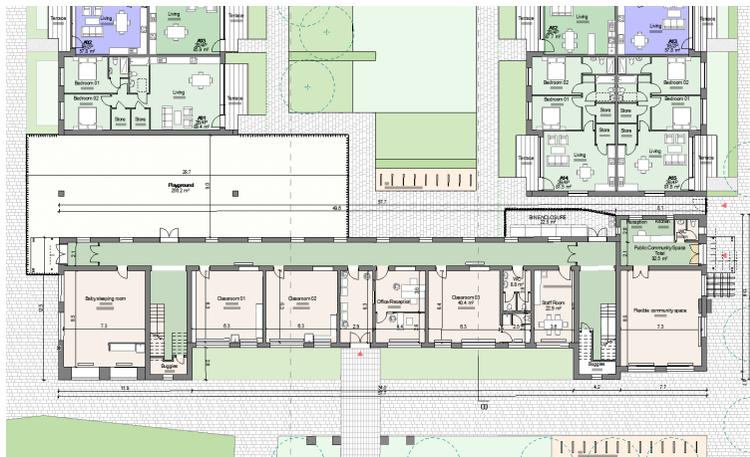


PIC. 46; FAÇADE (MONASTERY BUILDING).

7.8 It is felt that the building is sufficiently robust in its design and execution (most especially the central front block, with its heroic “twin towers”) to withstand the proposed alteration to its setting.

7.9 It is also felt that the use as, and adaptation of, the central block of the school for use as a creche / civic centre in the scheme is a fundamentally sound idea, and one which accords with the policy of the Development Plan and good Conservation principles, both of which encourage the re-use of existing buildings.

Just as the building is sufficiently robust to withstand the new setting of the apartment scheme, I feel it can also withstand the intervention necessary for its incorporation into the proposed residential scheme and adaptation for use as a creche and civic centre.



PIC. 47; GROUND FLOOR PLAN OF RETAINED BUILDING (BOTTOM OF PICTURE).

In retaining the basic layout of rooms, with working access corridor to rear, the altered building is suitably redolent of the original layout.

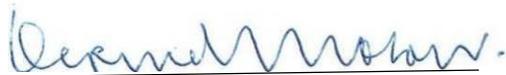
7.10 The external treatment of the proposed new blocks nearest the Protected Structure (i.e. Blocks A and B), with their brick finish, contrasts sufficiently with the existing roughcast external (and pitched copper-covered roof), of the school; this further allows the Protected Structure to stand out appropriately from its new neighbours.

7.11 Finally, and fundamentally, I believe the addition of the central school block on the Record of Protected Structure is to be welcomed; the omission of the side blocks heightens one’s awareness of this central block which, as a result, presents a greater presence to the public realm.

7.12 I believe the designers, particularly in the manner in which they responded to the input of the Planning Authority and Conservation Officer, have minimized the potential negative impact of the proposed development on the Protected Structure.

8. RESEARCH, & REFERENCES.

- 8.1 Apart from the photographs included in this Heritage Impact Assessment, many others were taken (by both the designers and the undersigned). At 6.4.12 of the 'Architectural Heritage Protection; Guidelines for Planning Authorities' (2011), it states that photographs: *"if necessary, should be cross-referenced to floor plans. The location and direction of the camera when the image was taken should be indicated on the survey drawings."*
- 8.2 In considering the impact of the proposed works) the following specific publications (inter alia) have been consulted:
- "The Advice Series" by DoEHLG
 - "Architectural Heritage Protection; Guidelines for Planning Authorities" by DoEHLG,
 - "Dublin City Council Development Plan 2016-2022".
 - "Irish Period Houses: a Conservation Guidance Manual" by Frank Keohane



Dermot Nolan, Dip. Arch., FRIAI; Conservation Architect Grade 2.

The author is a practicing Architect, qualified since 1975, and principal of Dixon McGaver Nolan. In 2003, He completed the RIAI course leading to accreditation (Grade 3) in conservation. In 2010, he was assessed by an RIAI Board, leading to Grade 2 accreditation.

Dermot Nolan has extensive experience in conservation and has been the principal architect in such projects on historic structures as:

- Refurbishment and renovation of 33 Parnell Square, Dublin (18th Century) for Comhar Linn Credit Union
- Retention and restoration of façade of Strand Cinema, Dublin (1920s), and its integration into apartment scheme
- Renovation and refurbishment of 19 Kildare St., Dublin (18th Century) for Mitchell & Son
- Alterations, refurbishment and Conservation of The Temperance Hall, Longford (1905) for the Parish of St. Michael
- Works to boundary wall and railings St. Mary's church (1815), Main Street, Mohill, Co. Leitrim (part of works to public realm of the town)
- Conservation and repair of metal railings and stone plinths to front of nos. 34 to 39 Parnell Square for the I.N.T.O.
- Refurbishment of roof and provision for disabled access at Church of the Holy Name, Beechwood Ave., Ranelagh, Dublin. (1914)
- Conservation & restoration of estate walls, "Gandon Gate" and lodges, also temporary works (yards & manor) at Carriglas Manor, Co. Longford.

He has given Conservation advice to Castlebar Urban District Council on planning applications for protected structures and has prepared a number of Section 57 Declarations for that Authority.

He has made many successful applications for grants for Conservation works from various sources including the 2015, 2016, 2017 & 2018 Structures at Risk Fund and the 2019 & 2020 Historic Structures Fund.

He has also prepared dozens of evaluations of historic buildings and sites and prepared a number of Architectural Heritage Impact Assessments for both his own clients and those of third parties.

September 2021.

9. APPENDIX.

Letter from Dublin City Council (dated 19th February 2020) confirming extent of the Protected Structure on the site.

