



Comhairle Contae Chorcaí

Cork County Council

6th November 2023

Planning Report

Part 8 Development of a Community and Enterprise Hub, Cobh Library, Casement Square, Cobh, Co. Cork

To whom it concerns,

The Economic Development, Enterprise & Tourism Directorate of Cork County Council has prepared a proposal for development of a Community and Enterprise Hub in part of the ground floor area of the Cobh Library at Casement Square, Cobh; and have submitted details of the scheme to the Planning Department for comment. This report outlines the key planning considerations with respect to the subject proposal.

Nature of Proposal

Development of a Community and Enterprise Hub in part of the ground floor area of the Cobh Library at Casement Square, Cobh to an E-Centre. This hub space will cater for remote workers, start-ups and working tourists.

Site Description

This site is located at Casement Square, Cobh and comprises a detached thirteen-bay two-storey building built c. 1855. The building is listed on the RPS (ID:1896) and is located within the Architectural Conservation Area.

Planning History

There is no planning history on the site.

Planning Policy

Cork County Development Plan 2022

The site is located within Cobh Town Centre on lands zoned Town Centre / Neighbourhood Centre. The site is located within the Architectural Conservation Area and comprises a Protected Structure (ID: 1896).

County Development Plan Objective

ZU 18-17: Town Centres/ Neighbourhood Centres

- a) Promote the development of town centres and neighbourhood centres as the primary locations for retail and other uses that provide goods or services principally to visiting members of the public. The primary retail areas will form the main focus and preferred location for new retail development, appropriate to the scale and function of each centre and in accordance with the Retail Strategy. Residential development will also be encouraged particularly in mixed use developments while the use of upper floors of retail and commercial premises in town centres for residential use will in particular be encouraged.
- b) Recognise that where it is not possible to provide the form and scale of development that is required on a site within the core area, consideration can be given to sites on the edge of the core area based on sequential approach.

Appropriate Uses in Town Centre/Neighbourhood Centres

Retail, cultural uses, recreation uses, hotel, bed and breakfast, public houses, financial services, professional services, medical and healthcare services, leisure facilities, places of worship, residential, mixed residential, childcare facilities, education facilities, community facilities, civic uses, offices, public transport facilities, car parks, funeral homes.

The following local policies are considered relevant:

S.8.7.24 – In addition to the provisions of the Cork County Development Plan, Cork County Council has established an Economic Development, Enterprise and Tourism Directorate. The Directorate seeks to support and engage businesses and communities at a local level throughout County Cork in a number of ways including:

Support the development of industrial and commercial infrastructure including the provision of E-Centres / Digital Hubs and Incubator Units.

EC 8-4: Place-making

EC 8-5: Connectivity

EC 8-6: Economic Resilience

EC 8-7: Smart Working / remote Working

HE 16-14: Record of Protected Structures

HE 16-18: Architectural Conservation Areas

Assessment

The site is located within Cobh Town Centre and is zoned Town Centre/ Neighbourhood Centre where it is policy to promote the development of town centres and neighbourhood centres as the primary locations for retail and other uses that provide goods or services principally to visiting members of the public. Appropriate uses in Town Centre/ Neighbourhood Centres include community facilities, civic uses, offices.

E-centre hubs provide dedicated facilities such as hot desks, own door offices and training and meeting rooms, providing flexible and affordable workspaces with high-speed broadband for individuals and businesses. This hub space will cater for remote workers, start-ups and working tourists and the town centre location will bring an added economic boost to this Harbour town location.

Hubs provide the environment for job creation. The proposed hub is a 115sq.m. development, with the capacity to support an estimated 12 jobs plus training facilities. A hub of this nature will enable local residents to work remotely from a base closer to home, thus reducing transport related emissions.

The proposed development is considered to be consistent with the zoning objective of the site as well as other policy objectives of the 2022 CPD such as EC: 8-7 Smart Working/ Remote Working which encourages the location of new working hubs/ co-working spaces within the

settlement network, preferably on Town/ Village Centre sites and encourages the sustainable reuse of existing vacant buildings within town/ village centres for such purposes.

The proposal also aligns with the Programme for Governments commitment to the development of a Town Centre First policy – a strategic approach to town centre regeneration by utilising existing buildings and unused lands for new development and promoting residential occupancy in the rural towns and villages.

Built Heritage

The site comprises a Protected Structure within the Architectural Conservation Area. Minimal works are proposed to the building and the reuse of a Protected Structure in this town centre location is welcomed. An Architectural Impact Assessment (by Design Forum Conservation) has been submitted and has been assessed by the Conservation Officer, who reports as follows: *“The Impact Assessment report makes a series of suggestions which should also be integrated into the proposal for the E-hub. The proposal has little impact on the building, other than providing for works to the rear modern flat roofed block which will further integrate this area into the main block and will see improved toilet facilities here.”* The Conservation Officer has also attached recommendations that should be adhered to in order to protect the special character of the building.

EIA

EIA Screening attached. The proposal is considered not subject to EIA Directive.

AA

AA Screening to be completed by Ecology Unit.

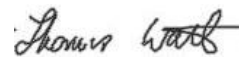
Conclusion

The proposed development should result in positive impacts and add to the vitality and viability of the town centre and align with existing local and public services and facilities.

The proposed development accords with the policies and objectives of the Cork County Development Plan 2022 and accords with the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.



LOUISE AHERN
Executive Planner



THOMAS WATT
Senior Planner



Comhairle Contae Chorcaí

Cork County Council

06/11/23

RE: EIA Pre-Screening Assessment Community and Enterprise Hub, Cobh Library, Casement Square, Cobh, Co. Cork

To whom it concerns,

The subject building has the following Statutory designations:

The building is located within the **Cobh Architectural Conservation Area (ACA)**. The building is listed on the **Record of Protected Structures, RPS ref no 1896**, a Detached thirteen-bay two-storey town hall, built c. 1855 now a library.

Non-Statutory

The building is listed as of regional significance on the **National Inventory of Architectural Heritage (NIAH) 20827287: Cobh Town Hall and Courthouse**

The development of a Community and Enterprise Hub in part of the ground floor area of the Cobh Library at Casement Square, Cobh to an E-Centre, involves the internal refurbishment works to the ground floor and its conversion to a 'working hub' (offices), new toilets, cellular closed office and open plan desk space.

Having regard to the description (and nature, size and location) of the proposed development, I am satisfied that the proposed development does not fall within a class set out in Annex I or Annex II of the Directive; or (Schedule 5 Parts 1 and 2 of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001, as amended); and as such the proposed development is not subject to the EIA directive, and no screening is required.

Determination

The requirement for EIA can be excluded at this pre-screening stage as the proposed development does not fall within Schedule 5 of the Planning and Development Regulations.

Thomas Watt
Senior Planner

Conservation Officer Recommendations

The rear flat roofs need to be repaired. Rainwater outlets are blocked, and the roof has some vegetation ingress.

Issues with walls to interior (some dry lined) need to be addressed; it will be necessary to improve ventilation of walls and restore the natural balance of the traditionally built walls. The dry lining should be removed and walls recovered in insulated lime render, cork or Calcium Silicate Board to improve the thermal performance and allow breathability of the fabric.

Walls to interior that are not lined need to be assessed and proposals made to address damp issues. This may be a reflexion of inappropriate cement based renders to the exterior of the walls. If so the render should be removed and replaced with lime based renders. Stone plinth cement pointing should be removed, joints raked out, and repointed in appropriate lime and sand mortars. The AHIA report suggests that this would potentially improve any 'rising damp' concerns.

Painting (where necessary)– breathable paint to be used to interior and exterior.

Proposed layouts

I note that there are two proposals for the site, presented as Figure 85 and 86 in the AHIA. The proposal under figure 85 is appropriate from a conservation standpoint. The addition of wheelchair access to the façade is inappropriate and unnecessary given the extant access available in the door under the arch.

The proposal entails the creation of several smaller private office areas. Additional specification should be provided regarding how this will be achieved- will these be partitioned off with half walls or will walls reach ceiling? will they be pod-style rooms with space over? The integration of such small rooms into a space with considerable ceiling heights will be design challenge that needs additional consideration and clarification. In terms of room numbers, the layout proposed under figure 86 in the AHIA is preferable as it has a cleaner less cluttered effect on the overall space.

Specifications for all the above should be provided for approval of the heritage unit.

Dr. Elena Turk, Conservation Officer