



Planning Ref: 2560043

20th March 2025

Planning Section
Laois County Council

Dear Sir/Madam

Re: 2560043 – remove an existing vent stack which is a protected structure, reference 922 in the planning authority's Record of Protected Structures • Permission for installation of a replacement vent stack and associated pipework and ancillary site works AT Grattan Street, Portlaoise, Co. Laois.

Comment

The Heritage Council have significant concerns regarding this application and believe that the demonstration of policy compliance with the Laois County Development Plan 2021-2027 is inadequate.

The preamble to Policy Objectives PS1 to PS10, states that *"total or substantial demolition of a Protected Structure or any significant element of the Protected Structure will not be acceptable in principle, save in exceptional circumstances where demolition and redevelopment would produce substantial strategic benefits for the community which would decisively outweigh the loss resulting from demolition"*.

We have considered the planning report that was submitted with the application. There is a section in this report that refers to archaeological heritage, with reference made to both the national monuments and the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage (NIAH). There is no discussion on the record of protected structures within the context of the relevant county development plan policies, which is the primary framework for determining planning applications.

Several of the policy objectives noted here need to be considered within the context of this planning application. Of particular relevance is Policy Objective PS5 which intends to *"Refuse planning permission for the demolition of any protected structure unless the Council is satisfied that exceptional circumstances exist. The demolition of a protected structure with the retention of its façade will likewise not generally be permitted"* by this policy. Furthermore, there is no indication that PS1 to PS3 have been complied with in relation to due regard to the *Architectural Heritage Protection Guidelines for Planning Authorities 2004*.

We also consider this application, as presented, as being particularly egregious in terms of compliance with Policy Objective PS9, which seeks to *"Promote the repair and reuse of existing building stock, including heritage buildings, as a means of avoiding unnecessary carbon outlays with newbuild"*.

Baill na Comhairle | Council Members

Martina Moloney (Cathaoirleach | Chairperson),
Michael Farrell, Dr. John Patrick Greene, Fionnuala May,
Deirdre McDermott, Dr. Patricia O Hare, John G.
Pierce, Sheila Pratschke, Prof. Mark Scott,
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There does not appear to be any evidence in the planning application of efforts to make safe the existing vent stack, and the Heritage Council would question how the protected structure was allowed to fall into such a condition that it is now “deemed beyond repair given the corroded conditions” resulting in a neglect which now “presents a public safety risk with potential for collapse onto the public road”. Furthermore, there appears to be no evidence of any conservation input engaged at any stage, and there is no assessment of the heritage impacts associated with the application.

Such symbols of the country’s historic county towns are a particular symbol of their time. An aspect of industrial heritage such as vent stacks and water pumps are now rare to see in a country town, even though they contribute significantly to their character in the form of historic street furniture. Their loss should be resisted, and at the very least an adequate heritage assessment, as informed by conservation specialist input, culminating in a satisfactory demonstration of compliance with the relevant county development plan policies, should be the minimum standard for such applications.

In addition, *The Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government Advice Series on Wrought and Cast Ironwork 2009* notes that nothing will remain in perfect condition, if it is not maintained regularly. A simple regime of repainting once every five years and touching up smaller areas of paint loss in the intervening period, would have done much to prolong the life of historic ironwork. There are many cleaning and repair techniques that can be used to repair corroded or damaged cast and wrought ironwork. Even when ironwork may appear at first glance to be irredeemably corroded or damaged, it is often perfectly possible to repair.

In conclusion, the Heritage Council object to this proposal due to the inadequate information submitted with the planning application, the lack of conservation specialist input to inform the scheme, and the unsatisfactory demonstration of compliance with policy objectives PS1 to PS10 of the Laois County Development Plan 2021-2027. The Heritage Council would recommend that further information is requested in this regard. If indeed, there is adequate conservation opinion, and a sufficient demonstration of why a replacement vent shaft is needed, every effort should be made to keep the historic vent shaft in situ.

I trust these views will inform Laois County Council’s determination on this application.

Yours sincerely,

Virginia Teehan

Chief Executive Officer

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