

**The Chairman and Members of
North West Area Committee.**

Meeting: 20th April 2021

Item No: 4

Re: Change of use and development of a public library at the Former Postal Sorting Office, Seamus Ennis Road, Finglas – Status of Part 8 Planning Application 2064/21

Attached, is a copy of the Planner's Report for the Part 8 Application for the change of use and development of a public library at the former Postal Sorting Office on Seamus Ennis Road. The Report recommends that planning permission be granted subject to two conditions.

We hereby notify the Elected Members of the North West Area Committee of the intention to present this proposal to the City Council at the meeting of 10th May 2021. The Planning and Property Development Department will forward the Chief Executive's Report to the Chief Executive's Office for inclusion on the Agenda of the May City Council Meeting. The process for approval or non-approval of a Part 8 is a reserved function of the City Council.

Mairead Owens
City Librarian

In compliance with the provisions of Section 179 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) and Part 8 of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001 (as amended) and in compliance with the provisions of the Local Government Act 2001 and pursuant to the requirements of the above, notice is hereby given of Dublin City Council's intention to carry out the following works:

Application No: 2064/21

Proposal: LAW: Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended)
Planning and Development Regulations 2001 (as amended) - Part VIII

Applicant: Culture, Recreation & Economic Services

Location: Dublin City Libraries

Proposal: Change of use and development of a public library at the Former Postal Sorting Office, Seamus Ennis Road, Finglas

Pursuant to the requirements of the above, notice is hereby given of a change of use and upgrade to the existing building in compliance with current building regulations in terms of universal access, fire escape and accessible WC provision. The former postal sorting office will be converted into a public library with works to include full mechanical and electrical refit, enlargement of existing window on south elevation, internal refurbishment providing spaces for reading, studying, exhibitions, library/community events and sanitary accommodation to meet the requirements of high quality contemporary library service provision. Ramped access to existing front entrance and consequent landscaping are also included. No addition or reduction to the existing floor area is proposed under this application.

An Environment Impact Assessment Screening Report has been prepared and it has been determined that an Environmental Impact Assessment is not required.

Location of the Site:

The existing building is located on the northern side of Seamus Ennis Road to the east of Finglas Village. The site is occupied by a vacant An Post sorting office which is set back from the road and sits on a slightly elevated position. The site is irregular in shape and is bound by a telephone exchange to the west (EIR), a recycling centre to the east and residential development (fronting onto Clune Road) to the north.

The existing building has a long, blank frontage to Seamus Ennis Road, with an access to a rear yard at the eastern end of the building.

Nature and Extent of the Proposed Development:

The development comprises of the change of use of the existing building from An Post Sorting Office to library use.

Content of the Submission:

The following documentation was lodged:

- Part 8 Submission – Architects Appraisal prepared by Crean Salley Architects; and
- Floor plans and elevations prepared by Crean Salley Architects.

Planning Context:

Zoning & Policy

The site is located in an area zoned objective 'Z4' within the Dublin City Development Plan 2016-2022 (CDP), with the accompanying land-use objective *to 'provide for and improve mixed services facilities'*. Library uses (community facility) are permissible under the Z4 zoning.

Dublin City Development Plan 2016 - 2020 Context:
Section 14.8.4 - District Centres

Finglas is identified as Key District Centre (KDC 4)

As the top tier of the urban centres outside the city centre, key district centres have been identified which will provide a comprehensive range of commercial and community services. In relation to community and Social Services, it is noted that Key District Centres will be encouraged to become the focal point for the integrated delivery of community and social services.

Chapter 12 of Dublin City Development Plan 2016-2022 sets out the following policies in relation to the development of community uses.

SN15: To ensure all community facilities and high-quality facilities are accessible to all.

SN16: provision of strategic new community infrastructure complements the range of existing neighbourhood facilities is located at the interface between communities

SN18: provision of a range of community facilities in the city

SN24: To support the implementation of the Dublin City Library Development Plan,

SN29 To promote built environments and outdoor shared spaces which are accessible to all.

CHC33: To support the national cultural institutions and facilitate the provision of fit-for purpose, sustainable cultural infrastructure

CHC38: expansion and improvement of Dublin city's library network.

Section 16.10.17 Dublin City Development Plan 2016-2022 relates to the retention and re-use of Older Buildings of Significance which are not Protected. The policy states that the re-use of older buildings of significance is a central element in the conservation of the built heritage of the city and important to the achievement of sustainability.

Appendix 15: Access for all

The proposal is deemed to be consistent with the policies and objectives outlined in the Dublin City Development Plan 2016-2022.

Technical Departments:

Transportation Planning Division: Report dated 24/2/21. No objection, subject to conditions.

Parks, Biodiversity and Landscape Services: No response received.

Drainage Division: Report dated 1/2/21: No objection subject to conditions.

City Architects: No response received.

City Archaeologist: No response received.

Waste Management Services: No response received.

Consultees:

Irish Water: No response received.

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht affairs: No response received.

Persons / bodies who made submissions:

There have been 4 no submissions received. The issues raised in the submissions include: -

- The existing building is ugly and not designed with aesthetics in mind, clearly belongs in an industrial estate;
- No attempt to improve the outward appearance, proposed railings make it worse.
- Windows required;
- Outdoor seating and bike racks required to the front of the building;
- Separation between the library and recycling facility required;
- Support for this significant development which will enhance the cultural and educational lives of all who live in Dublin 11 and wider afield;
- Plans look fantastic and a much needed public service enhanced;
- Picnic benches are required to the front of the building, these would bring vibrancy to the village and would provide a meeting area in the village for people. These would also allow for people to read outside.

These submissions have been considered and form part of the assessment of the proposal.

Planning Assessment:

The subject site comprises an existing disused sorting office formerly occupied by An Post. The proposed development comprises of the change of use of this existing building to allow for the proposed library use. It is noted that no extension to the floor space of the existing building is proposed as part of the development.

It is noted that external alterations are proposed to be minimal, with works confined to repair and upgrading of the existing fabric on a like-for-like basis to bring the building up to contemporary performance standards.

Principle of development:

As has been set out, library use is permissible under the Z4 zoning which applies to the site.

Scale and Design:

The proposed development is the change of use of an existing disused An Post sorting office to use as a library. It is considered that the upgrade of an existing vacant building, on a prominent site in proximity to Finglas Village would make a positive contribution to the streetscape and the surrounding area. Support has been expressed for the development in submissions received.

The existing building has an east-west orientation with a return to the north. The east-west axis comprises of the main body of the building and has a length of c.30m and a maximum width of c.10.2m. The return to the north (rear) of the building has a length of c. 18m and a width of c.9.3m.

The main body of the building is to the front and was previously used as the sorting area, offices and bike store, with the return to the rear used as staff amenities and an ESB sub-station. It is now proposed to alter the layout in the following ways:

- The east-west axis to the front of the building is proposed to house the main reading room, book shelves, study area, reception and children's play area;
- The return to the north (rear) of the building is proposed to house the bathrooms, staff facilities including a break room and meeting room.
- The ESB sub-station is to remain in place.

The building has a maximum height of c.5m with a projecting flat roof and has a floor area of c.395m². It is not proposed to alter the height or floor area of this building.

There are a number of alterations proposed to the detail of the existing façade. These include:

- A new access ramp to the building;
- A new timber sliding gate to act as a security shutter to the front door when the library is closed;
- An enlarged window to the front of the building (addressing Seamus Ennis Road);
- A new timber sliding louvered shutter to cover the enlarged window when the library is closed.
- A new timber louvered Brise Soleil to the projecting flat roof;
- New stencilled signage above the front door indicating the building is a Library; and
- Some remedial works to the roof is proposed including upgrading the upper storey clear glazing which has been damaged, and the upgrade of elements of the flat roof which have been leaking.

The building at present has a functional look with very little articulation to Seamus Ennis Road and the public realm in general, this is commensurate with its previous use as An Post sorting office. The large picture window with a new sliding timber louvered shutter will provide an attractive architectural feature whilst maintaining the somewhat austere sorting office frontage. It is considered that this approach including limiting new window opes is acceptable given the applicants strategy for development is to 'upcycle' the existing building, to foreground its

inherent virtues and to focus particularly on energy saving measures, pairing retrofitted insulation with modern mechanical & electrical provision.

It is noted that there is a large area of lawn area to the front/south of the building onto Seamus Ennis Road. The plans provided do not show any landscaping or street furniture within this area. It is considered that there is an opportunity to provide additional landscaping including picnic tables to front of the property that would enhance the public realm including enhanced separation between the library and the adjacent recycling containers.

It is noted that the proposal would not include any car parking for the public and the number of staff car parking spaces is not outlined. A report from the Transportation Planning Division dated 24/2/21 states: *No additional car parking is proposed and the existing rear yard shall be for staff parking and service access only.* This is acceptable having regard to the location of the building within walking distance to Finglas Village and the fact that there is a bus stop to the front of the building. It is further noted that there is some public car parking on the opposite side of Seamus Ennis Road (in proximity to the primary school).

It is noted that the proposal does not include any cycle parking. A report from the Transportation Planning Division dated 24/2/21 states: *It is noted that no cycle parking is proposed. The application site is located within Area 3 of the Development Plans Strategic Transport and Parking Areas map (Map J), which stipulates that cycle parking for public buildings, including Libraries should provide cycle parking at a rate of 5% of the expected number of visitors per day. In that regard, the applicant is requested to provide cycle parking to development plan standard. This shall be located adjacent to the public entrance of the library and be secure, sheltered, well lit and of the Sheffield style cycle parking design so as to allow both wheel and frame to be locked.*

The Transportation Planning Division have recommended that revised plans should show secure, sheltered, well lit cycle parking (to Development Plan standards) to be provided adjacent to the public entrance to the library.

Impact on neighbouring properties:

As the proposed development is a change of use and there are no floor area or building height alterations proposed, it is considered that the development would not give rise to any unacceptable overlooking or overlooking of neighbouring properties. Further to this, it is considered that the proposed development would not constitute overbearing development. It is considered that the relationship of the development to neighbouring properties is acceptable in this respect.

Conclusion

It is considered that the re-use and upgrade of the existing vacant sorting office building to provide a new library facility is acceptable as it is consistent with the provisions of the Dublin City Development Plan 2016-2022 and will provide a community benefit for Finglas and surrounding areas.

Recommendation:

I recommend that the City Council be informed that the planning authority has no objection to the proposed development and that the proposal is in accordance with the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.

Accordingly, the City Council should be advised to approve the proposed development subject to the following requirements:

1. Prior to the commencement of development, a landscaping scheme for the Seamus Ennis Road frontage of the site shall be submitted to, and agreed in writing with, the planning authority. This scheme shall include the following:

Proposed locations of new trees and other landscape planting along the Seamus Ennis Road frontage including details of proposed species and settings. The landscaping scheme should provide outdoor seating (if feasible) and greater separation between the library and the adjacent recycling facility.

2. The applicant shall comply with the following requirements of the Transportation Planning Division of Dublin City Council:

Prior to commencement of development, the applicant shall submit revised plans providing cycle parking to Development Plan standards (i.e. at a rate of 5% of the expected number of visitors per day). This shall be located adjacent to the public entrance of the library and be secure, sheltered, well lit and of the Sheffield style cycle parking design so as to allow both wheel and frame to be locked.