

# CONSERVATION REPORT

## PART 8 AMENDMENT APPLICATION DROGHEDA CIVIC OFFICES, FAIR STREET, DROGHEDA

### LOUTH COUNTY COUNCIL

SEPTEMBER 2020

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

This report has been prepared by Alastair Coey Architects, RIAI Grade 1 Conservation Architects, for inclusion in the Part 8 Amendment Application in support of the introduction of an ESB Substation and LV Switch Room as part of the proposed refurbishment and redevelopment of the Fair Street Council Offices complex, for use as Drogheda Civic Offices by Louth County Council.

For the purposes of this report, the following convention has been adopted to identify the buildings within the complex by Block, as follows:

|         |   |
|---------|---|
| Block A | Drogheda Council Offices, Francis Johnson Building (former Cornmarket)            |
| Block B | Drogheda Housing and Planning office<br>(former school and later Council Chamber) |
| Block C | Drogheda Community Services Building (former school)                              |
| Block D | Valhalla Hall   |
| Block E | Annex Building  |
| Block N | New Link Building   |

## 2.0 THE SITE

### 2.1 Statutory Designations

The Drogheda Civic Offices complex is located within the designated Fair Street Architectural Conservation Area and adjacent to Bolton Square Architectural Conservation Area and Zone of Special Archaeological Interest. All five existing buildings are located within Drogheda's medieval walled area as outlined in the Drogheda Walled Town Conservation Plan, 2006.

Within the site, four of the structures are listed in the Record of Protected Structures; Drogheda Council Offices (former Cornmarket), 52 Fair Street, NIAH reference number 13618043 (DB 069a) is considered as of National importance, Drogheda Housing and Planning Office (former school and later Council Chamber), 54 Fair Street, NIAH reference number 13618044 (DB 069b) and Drogheda Community Services building (former school), 55-56 Fair Street, NIAH reference number 13618045 (DB 082), both of regional importance. What is being called the annex building (Block E), which is now included within the proposed works, is also protected due to its connection to the Convent of the Sisters of Charity (former Convent now in use as apartments), Fair Street, NIAH reference number 13618046 (DB 086), also of regional importance.

It is the Drogheda Community Services building, hereafter referred to as Block C, which will be the main focus of this report due to its proximity to the proposed ESB Substation and LV Switch Room.

## 3.0 BLOCK C

### 3.1 History of the building

Block B, C and D appear for the first time on the third edition OS map (1907-9) with Block C captioned as 'Industrial School'.

Block C, the former industrial school is suggested to have been built in 1894 (Drogheda Street Guide, p36). It has an H plan with nine-bay façade, advanced gable ends, segmental-headed windows with inset piers to the jambs, courses of blue brick, brackets under the sills and decorated limestone keystones. The description notes: "Although this description makes the

building sound impressive, this is not the case.” Physical evidence within the building itself suggests that the building was constructed in phases, the most easterly wing being constructed first, and originally having another narrower structure attached to the west, with front wall perhaps on the line of the existing central bay. It appears that the remainder of the building was added some time later, although detailing is very similar, indicating that this may have been within 10-20 years of the original structure, perhaps to meet the growing needs of the convent. The arrangement of the building internally indicates that access was originally from the convent via the building we call the annex, Block E. At a later date, the building was reconfigured to provide separate access via the west entrance, at which time, presumably the stone staircase was inserted to the building as the arrangement jars with the archways somewhat at ground floor.

In the late twentieth century, the Fair Street schools were closed and placed on the market. The Committee of Drogheda Community Services, under the Chairmanship of Dermot Kierans, purchased and renovated the former Industrial School (Block C), installing new kitchens and a training computer suite. Under its new use, the buildings formed a valued community hub, offering support and a variety of services within the community.

### **3.2 Building Description**

No. 56 Fair Street, a detached nine-bay two-storey former school, built c. 1900, comprising recessed central three-bay section flanked by two gable-fronted three-bay blocks with breakfront central bays to east and west.

The roof is pitched natural slate with clay-ridge tiles and gable fronted ventilators with trefoil motif to roof ridge. Walling is red brick laid in Flemish bond, polychromatic brick courses to sill and lintel levels, chamfered plinth, stepped brick eaves. Windows are generally camber headed 2/2 painted timber sliding sashes, with the exception of a small number of metal casements with timber sub-frames, within corbelled brick reveals with brick voussoirs and keystone detail.

The principal elevation faces south and is nine-bays wide with an entrance to the east. The entrance comprises a segmental-headed door opening inset with a single timber panelled door.

The east elevation is abutted by an adjoining building to the east (single-bay rendered annex building).

The north elevation is abutted by the one-storey brick building to the north.

The west elevation is three-bays wide with an entrance to the centre. The entrance comprises a segmental-headed door opening with vitrified brick enrichments to window heads, trefoil motif to limestone keystone and inset with a large plain-glazed over light and painted and glazed set of double doors.

## **4.0 PROPOSALS**

### **4.1 ESB Substation & LV Switch Room**

The ESB Substation and LV Switch Room are proposed to be accommodated within the new link building, Block N and enclosed within the service yard which forms parts of the new extension and which is situated to the north of Block C.

The internal measurements of this flat-roofed single-storey structure are to be 3.5 x 6.2m with two doorsets opening outwards to the north elevation. The external finish of the ESB Substation and LV Switch Room will be a continuation of the external render which is provided along the entire northern elevation of Block N.

The roof is proposed to be finished in asphalt or similar falling towards the north to align with rainwater goods along the remainder of the northern elevation to Block N.

## 5.0 IMPACT ASSESSMENT

The wider scheme centres around the four Protected Structures on the site, which are connected by a predominantly two storey extension to the rear which serves as new entrance foyer, public facilities and circulation space. The proposal impacts positively upon the Protected Structures and the new single-storey ESB Substation and LV Switch Room which forms part of the wider proposal will have a net neutral impact upon Block C.

### Massing

In terms of massing, the proposal has a small footprint and low height, particularly when considered in context with the full extent of the new link building and as such is not intrusive on the visual character of Block C being subservient in both scale and massing.

Furthermore, the proposal is located within the screened external service yard area permitted in the original Part 8 application. As such and when considering the north elevation, there was already a full height fence proposed here; the introduction of the ESB Substation and LV Switch Room replaces the fence by continuing the external rendered wall to the north elevation with additional door openings.

### Materiality

The external walls of the proposal are to have a rendered finish continuing along the full extent of the north elevation to Block N. The colour of render will be sympathetic to the tone and colour of the adjacent buildings / protected structures while also being in keeping with the modern link building.

### Views

Views outwards from Block C towards the ESB Substation and LV Switch Room are limited to four windows located on the ground and first floor on the northern elevation of the east wing. Views of the proposal from the two ground floor windows will be largely obscured by new landscaping and fencing which form part of the enclosure of the new service yard. At first floor level, the ESB Substation and LV Switch Room structure is overlooked by two windows however given the single-storey nature of the proposal it presents no issues for limiting views beyond or for daylighting. The proposal will also be roofed in a suitable roof covering which is sympathetic to Block C.

In terms of the proposals visual presence looking towards the north elevation of Block C, this again is minimal. The north elevation of Block C is not the principal elevation and as such is not impacted significantly by the introduction of the ESB Substation.

## 6.0 CONCLUSION

In summary, the amendment of the original Part 8 application to include the ESB Substation and LV Switch Room outlined in this report will make minimal impact on the Protected Structures in the immediate vicinity.