Chief Planning Officer

Kerry County Council

Rathass

Tralee

Co. Kerry

23rd December 2020

**Re. Proposed conversion of agricultural building to a two-storey dwelling at Dromhumper, Killarney, Co. Kerry**

**Ref. 201140**

Dear Sir/Madam,

The Irish Georgian Society, a non-governmental charity, was established in 1958 and works to promote and protect Ireland’s built heritage. The Society has inspected this planning application and is of the considered opinion that the plans would have a considerable detrimental impact on the character and setting of Flesk Castle, a protected structure, within whose attendant grounds the proposed development site lies.

The National Inventory of Architectural Heritage identifies Flesk Castle as being of regional importance for its architectural, artistic, historical and social interest (NIAH reg. no. 21306604). It was built in a Gothic Revival style c. 1820 for John Coltsmann, a merchant from London who settled in the area some years previously. The design of the Castle has previously been attributed to Coltsman himself though the architectural historian Kevin V. Mulligan has recently suggested that this may have been achieved with professional input from the Pain brothers, noted architects of the Gothic Revival in Ireland (*Rich Specimens of Architectural Beauty,* 2020).

The Castle is situated on an elevated site looking out over Lough Leane with Tommies Mountain, Purple Mountain and Shehy Mounatin lying in the distance. These landscape features form part of a picturesque composition around the Lakes of Killarney that have long drawn visitors to the southwest of Ireland and which was recorded by artists such as Jonathan Fisher and James Arthur O’Connor in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Writing of the view from Flesk Castle in 1824, John Preston Neale observed:

The west front presents an extensive view of the northern, or Lower Killarney Lakes, studded with numerous Islands, and overshadowed by a lofty chain of mountains, which rising abruptly from the water, display in their majestic groupings, sublime outlines of Alpine scenery.

Abandoned and partially dismantled in the 1930s, the house stood as a ruin for the remainder of the twentieth century but is now being given a new lease of life through the vision and dedication of its current owners. This commitment to the architectural heritage of Kerry and indeed of the country should be celebrated and given every support and encouragement and in doing so hopefully inspire others to follow suit. It is noted that Architectural Heritage & Conservation objective H-34 of the Kerry County Development Plan is supportive of the restoration of such buildings through aiming to…

Protect the architectural heritage and promote conservation-led regeneration and re-use of buildings, where appropriate.

It is also noted that objective H-38 seeks to …

Ensure that any development, modification, alteration, or extension affecting a protected structure and/or its setting… Demonstrates an understanding of the historical importance of the building and its setting and does not detract from the special character / interest of the protected structure.

The proposed development site is positioned in a sensitive location where, if granted, it would intrude upon the principal view from Flesk Castle west towards the Lakes of Killarney and the mountains beyond. This view forms an essential part of the building’s interest and would have determined its siting at the time it was built some two hundred years ago.

The Irish Georgian Society recognises that permission was previously granted for the construction of a house close-by and is strongly of the opinion that this should provide further reason not to approve this application as it would see an intensification of such use in a rural location. It should be noted that in considering rural housing, objective RS-4 of the Kerry County Development Plan aims to:

Ensure that the provision of rural housing will protect the landscape, the natural and built heritage, the economic assets and the environment of the County.

The Plan also zones the site in question as G3 (Conservation, amenity or buffer space, corridor/belt, landscape) which a new residential unit would evidently not be consistent with.

In summary, the Irish Georgian Society is of the view that this planning application for the construction of a two-storey house close to Flesk Castle would compromise important views from the house that are integral to its architectural and historic interest. In this regard it would be contrary to the heritage provisions of the County Development and would also be contrary to the zoning of the site. For this reason, the Irish Georgian Society respectfully urges that planning permission be refused.

Text, letter

Description automatically generatedYours sincerely,

Donough Cahill  
Executive Director IGS