

**FORMER ESB PREMISES
LEIXLIP**

**ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE
IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

19th October 2023

**Historic Building Consultants
Old Bawn
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1291/01

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Background

This report has been prepared for Clúid Housing as part of the documentation to be submitted with a planning application for a development at Leixlip, Co. Kildare.

The site was inspected for the purposes of preparing this report on 8th and 15th September 2023 and had previously been visited on 9th June and 25th July 2014. The photographs incorporated in the report were taken on these site visits and the site was examined to prepare the descriptions contained in the report.

Historical research was carried out on the background history of the property and the results are set down below.

While this report contains comment on aspects of the condition of the buildings it is not a condition report or a structural report and must not be read as such.

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Historical background



Plate 1: Ivy House with the ESB building at right

The front part of the ESB site at Leixlip was previously part of the grounds of Ivy House, which stands next to the site, on its western side. The entrance to the grounds of Ivy House still runs between the house and the ESB building. The western corner of the former ESB showroom building is built around the stone gate pier on the right-hand side of the access. The map below is an extract from the Valuation Office map of Leixlip, dating from about the 1850s, and showing the grounds of Ivy House outlined in red and a building on the site of the ESB showroom, which is indicated by a blue arrow.

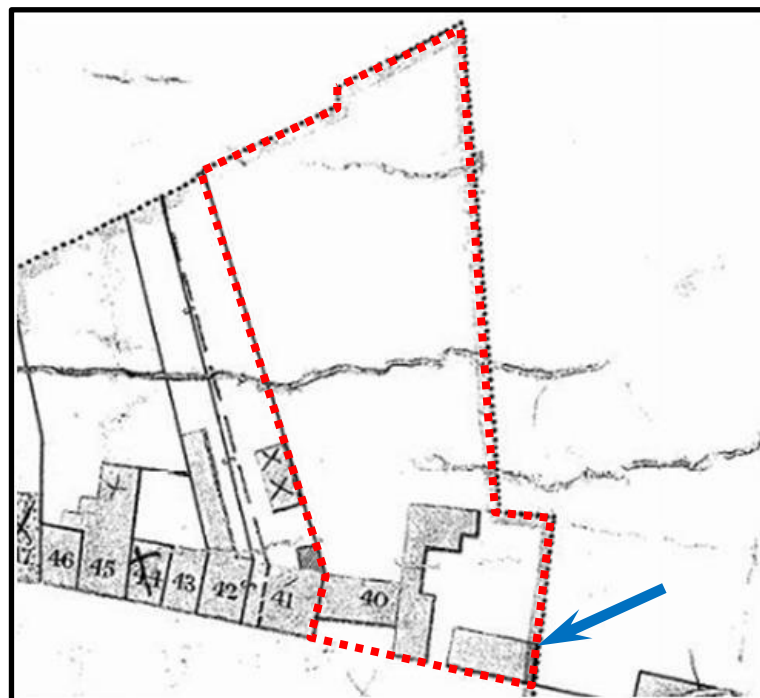


Figure 1: Valuation map showing grounds of Ivy House

The land enclosed by the red line remained unchanged for a period of well over a century, extending to approximately 0.28 hectares.

The building marked by the arrow in the map extract is on the same site as the ESB showroom and offices. This building is shown on the first edition Ordnance Survey six-inch map of 1837 and is seen again on later Ordnance Survey maps, including the larger scale map at 1:2500 scale that was published in 1907. Although it is difficult to be certain from maps of this small scale, the old building and the present ESB building appear to be the same size and in the same location. The building on the present site is ringed in red on the map extract below.

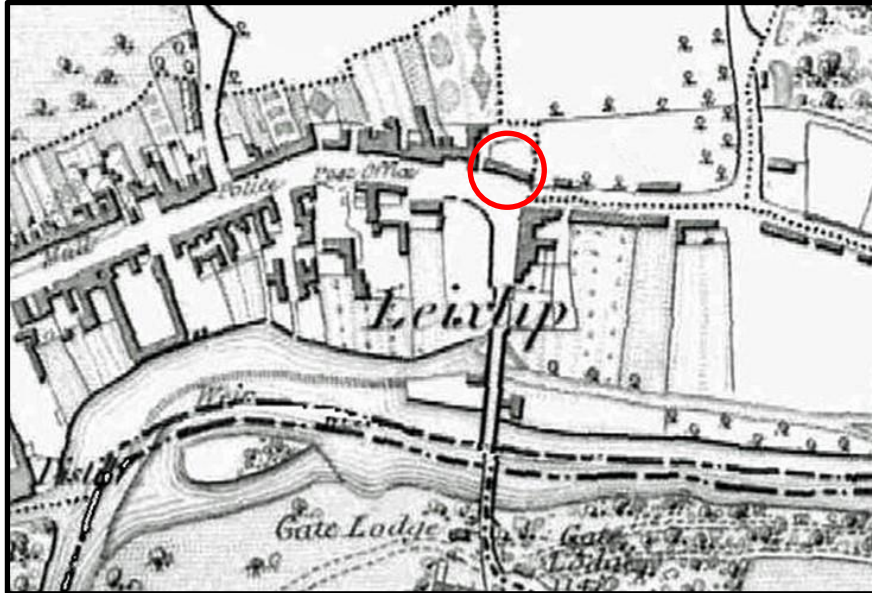


Figure 2: Detail of 1837 Ordnance Survey map

John Colgan, in his book *Leixlip, County Kildare*, published in 2005, gives very little information about the background history of Ivy House other than to list some of the occupiers. Significantly, however, the book says that “the adjoining ESB premises (dating from 1966) was formerly a shed, with a solid wall to the street”.

The records of the Valuation Office can sometimes show whether a building was demolished before a new building is erected. Unfortunately, however, in this instance the records are not helpful. No changes to buildings on this site are recorded in the manuscript records, which run up to the year 1967. In subsequent records, which are computer printouts, the presence of the ESB is noted, but there are no details to show the transition of the site or building from Ivy House to the ESB.

Conservation context

Record of Protected Structures

The former ESB showroom is not included in the record of protected structures as set down in the Kildare County Development Plan 2023-2029. Ivy House, which is on the site to the west of the former ESB building is a protected structure, listed under reference B11-51.

Conservation areas

The application site lies within the Leixlip Architectural Conservation Area (ACA). The map below is an extract from chapter 11 of the Kildare County Development Plan 2023-2029 and shows the extent of the ACA outlined and hatched in blue, while the former ESB showroom is ringed in red.

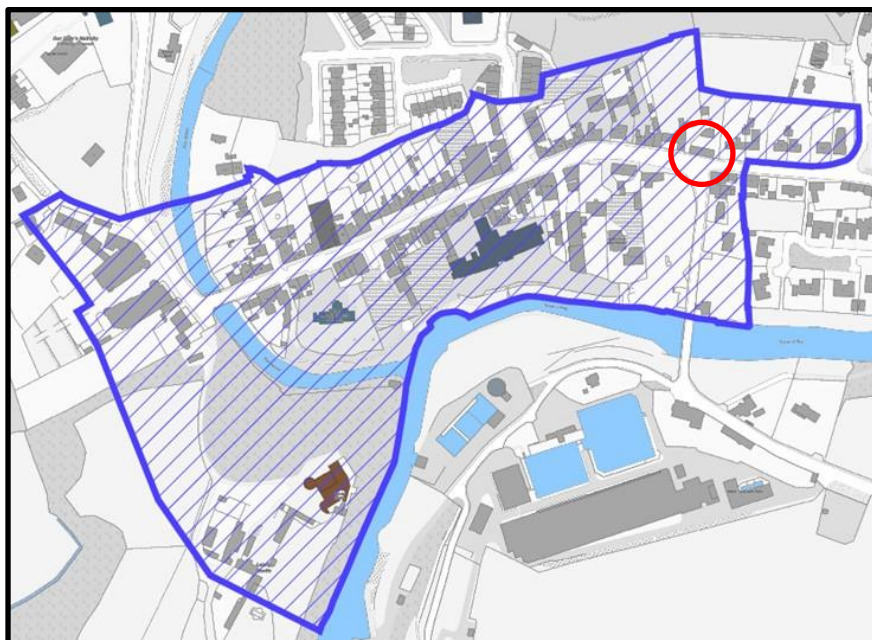


Figure 3: Leixlip Architectural Conservation Area

National Inventory of Architectural Heritage

The National Inventory of Architectural Heritage carried out its survey of the Leixlip area in 2003. No buildings on the present application site were included in that survey. Ivy House, which lies on the adjacent site to the west, is included in the survey under reference 11804023 and is assigned a Regional rating for its architectural, historical and social interest.

Former showroom



Plate 2: Former ESB showroom

In the light of the proposal to demolish the former ESB showroom on the site frontage it is important to assess the building for its potential architectural heritage significance.

The site was first visited to assess the building on 9th June 2014. It was possible to get inside the building on the upper floor, though on that occasion there was no access to the lower floor. There is no staircase in the building and at that time the only access to the ground floor appeared to be via the shopfront. A key was available that fitted the lock on the shutters, but they would not open. This may have been due to a lack of power supply to run the motors that lift the shutters.

Examination of the outside of the building showed that it is entirely faced in materials dating from the 1960s, except for the gate pier embedded in the corner. The facade is a mix of roughcast render and smooth render, which is cement-based and is typical of a form of architecture that was common in the 1960s.

Internally, the upper floor is dry lined and is divided by partitions that would be typical of the late twentieth century. There was no visible evidence of older masonry on that visit. Hence, the result of that visit to the site was inconclusive, as it was not possible to rule out the existence of an earlier stone wall beneath the internal dry lining and the external render.

The site was visited again on 25th July 2014 with a view to removing some of the later wall coverings to establish what was beneath them. The results are given below.

Further visits were paid to the site on 8th and 15th September 2023. By that time vegetation had been removed from the rear of the building, revealing doors that had not been apparent on the previous visits. Entry was gained to the ground-floor level, and this proved that the fit-out at that level also dated from the 1960s, with stud partitions and modern dry lining and plaster.

Building description

The descriptions that follow provide an overview of the former ESB showroom. As the building is not a protected structure a full room-by-room survey is not required. However, following the brief introduction to the nature of the building a more detailed analysis of the building fabric is provided below.



Plate 3: Street frontage of former ESB showroom

The former showroom is two storeys in height, with a covering of fibre-cement tiles. The front façade has a shopfront window on the ground floor, to the west of which is a series of four casement windows protected by metal grilles. The shopfront is concealed behind steel roller shutters. The façade is roughcast rendered, with smooth-rendered pilasters rising to full height flanking the windows. There are two windows in the western elevation on the upper floor, this elevation being roughcast rendered as per the frontage.



Plate 4: View of showroom from the west



Plate 5: View of showroom from the east

The eastern elevation of the building is concealed beneath a heavy growth of ivy. There are no windows in this elevation. The access to the site at the rear is to the east of the building and is closed by a pair of gates.



Plate 6: Rear view of former showroom

The rear of the building has a number of timber casement windows on each of the two floors. Two external steel stairways give access to doors on the upper floor, one at each end of the building, while there are two doors on the lower floor, both close to the western end. The rear elevation is roughcast rendered.

Ground floor



Plate 7: Internal view of shopfront

On the ground floor level, the eastern end of the building was the former showroom and public counter, and this area is lit by the shopfront, with some light penetrating the perforated steel roller shutters. The ceiling in this area is drooped and surfaced with acoustic tiles.



Plate 8: Public office in former showroom



Plate 9: Office at ground-floor level

The western part of the ground floor is divided by means of timber stud partitions with plasterboard facings to provide offices, stores, a WC and a corridor. The doors are hollow with plywood facings and are set in simple timber architraves. The ceilings are of plasterboard.



Plate 10: Store at ground-floor level

First floor

Plate 11: First floor of former showroom

As noted above, the first floor is approached via two external steel stairways. The interior is divided into a number of rooms and spaces by timber stud walls faced with plasterboard. The ceiling is of plasterboard and slopes at the northern and southern sides. The floor is boarded. There is a kitchen at the western end of the building, lit by two timber casement windows facing west. The other windows on this level are on the northern elevation.



Plate 12: Kitchen at first floor level

Opening up of fabric

The diagrams below show the locations of the fabric that was opened up in July 2014 to investigate the building on each of the floors. As before, access was not gained to the lower floor at that time, though the findings on the upper floor were such that viewing the interior of the ground floor was not necessary.

The upper diagram shows the first floor, with the layout of partitions, shown for guidance only and not to scale. The door and window openings in the external walls are not shown. Only the external faces of the walls are shown at ground floor level, as no access was gained to the interior at that time. The red rings indicate where the surfaces of the walls were removed to investigate the nature of the masonry beneath. The numbers indicate the descriptions of the findings as set out below.

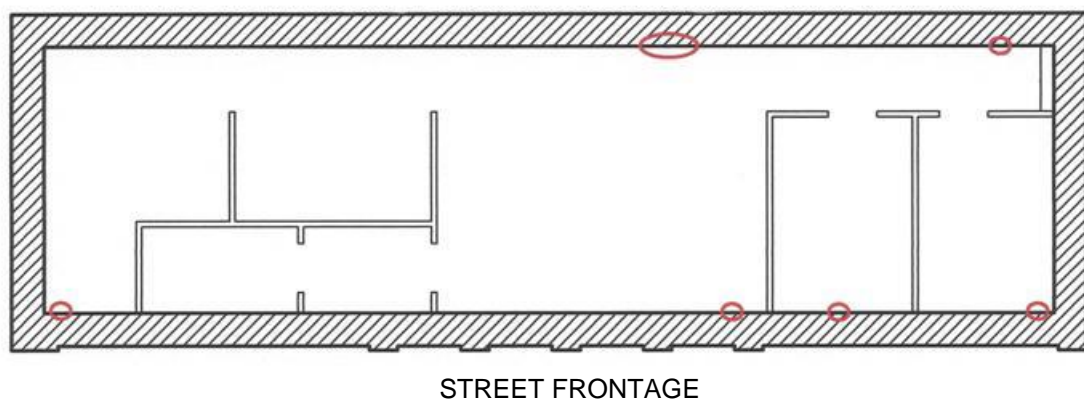


Figure 4: Sketch plan at first floor showing locations of opening up



Figure 5: Sketch plan of external face at ground level showing opening up

Before describing the findings arising from the opening up of the wall surfaces a description is given below of an examination within the roof space.

Roof space



Plate 13: Timber structure of roof

The roof has a comparatively steep pitch and is constructed with coupled rafters and collars, which are set high. Hangers are suspended from the collars to support the ceiling joists at mid-point. The ceiling joists are set well above the eaves and would function as a second line of collars to cross-brace the rafters. All of these timbers are of mid-twentieth century date, suggesting that the roof was entirely rebuilt during the conversion to ESB showroom in the mid-1960s. The ceiling attached to the joists is entirely of plasterboard.



Plate 14: Inner face of eastern gable

At either end of the roof the inner face of the gable is visible and is constructed for the most part from rubble limestone set in lime-based mortar. The outer portion of the gable rises higher than the inner portion, leaving a recessed section of masonry which originally held the end rafters. On the northern slope of the eastern gable one of the rafters is still in place, though serving no purpose. This is visible in plate 4 above, to the left of the photograph. The overall height of the gable has been raised with the addition of two courses of concrete, raising the gable by 360mm from the top of the stone gable to the underside of the present roof.



Plate 15: Detail of inner face of western gable

In the photograph above the inner face of the western gable is seen, with the two different levels in the stonework. Part of the concrete which raised the gable is seen on either side of the gable, while below this on the left-hand side it may be seen that the slates are still in place, indicating the nature of the roof covering prior to the reconstruction of the building in the 1960s.

First floor interior

As indicated in the diagram above, dry lining was broken open in six places around the perimeter of the building at first floor level during the visit in 2014. The findings may be summarised in the photograph below, which is of the area opened near the mid-point of the rear wall.



Plate 16: Opened area of rear wall at first floor level

The investigation shows that the wall had been raised by the addition of two courses of concrete blocks, thereby raising the eaves by about 450mm. Below this the inner face of the walls had been rendered with sand and cement. Beneath this render the walls are of limestone rubble, with a poor quality of stonework comprised of a mix of stone sizes, including a significant number of relatively small stones, all set in a lime-based mortar that is relatively soft and friable. The coursing did not appear to be particularly regular, though the areas opened up were too limited to be sure of the exact nature of the coursing.

Rubble stone masonry appeared in all six areas where the wall was opened up at first floor level.



Plate 17: Detail of stonework on front wall

Ground floor exterior

Given that stone masonry had been found on both gables within the roof space and in all six areas opened at first floor level it may be reasonably assumed that the greater part of the ground floor will also be of limestone rubble masonry. Opening up on the external face of the ground floor walls was thus confined to investigation of the area around the shopfront and two accessible areas at the side and rear. For the most part the rear of the building was not accessible due to very dense growth of vegetation, including brambles.

Surprisingly, the one area at the rear of the building that was investigated proved to have concrete blockwork beneath the roughcast render. It is concluded that there is a blocked doorway at this location and the blockwork is merely the infill of the ope.

A small area on the eastern gable end was opened up and revealed limestone rubble beneath.



Plate 18: Detail of pier at front of building

There were several breaks in the south-eastern corner of the building where it appears that vehicles entering the gates had impacted on the wall. Examination of the revealed masonry showed that this corner of the building consists of a mass concrete pier with a facing of sand and cement render. One of the piers to the west of the shopfront was opened up, as seen in the photograph above, and this also revealed a concrete core with a sand and cement render.

Interpretation

It is clear from these investigations that the greater part of the original shed was retained when the ESB showroom was provided in the mid-1960s. The presence of limestone masonry in the gables, as seen in the roof space and in all six areas opened up in the internal faces of the first floor confirm that the whole building was retained, though it was modified by the raising of the roof.

The investigations at ground floor level were intended to establish whether the front elevation was the original building, though pierced with new openings. What the investigation has shown is that two-thirds of the elevation to the street has been replaced with concrete and opens. The full length of the facade is 19.86 metres, while the shopfront and the area of concrete piers and windows to the west of the shopfront occupy a total of 13.25 metres of the street frontage. The smooth rendered area above the shopfront and windows would represent the substantial beam that supports the masonry above. The opening up at first floor level included three locations above this beam, the purpose of which was to establish whether the facade was demolished and rebuilt at first floor level as well as on the ground floor, as this would seem to have been the simplest way to have carried out the construction, particularly as the roof was removed and a new roof structure provided. However, the finding was that the limestone rubble wall extends over the top of the shopfront and the ground floor windows.



Plate 19: Front facade showing area where original walling has been removed

The photograph above shows with red hatching the area that was opened up during the construction in the 1960s, and which has been replaced with concrete and openings. As has been noted above, the roof was reconstructed in its entirety, with the total height of the roof raised by about 450mm.

Implications of earlier structure

As the investigations have confirmed the information in John Colgan's *Leixlip, County Kildare* (2005) that the present building incorporates an earlier shed, converted for use as a showroom and offices, what are the implications for a possible proposal to demolish it and redevelop the site? Before answering that question, the issue of curtilage should be considered.

Curtilage and protection

The Planning and Development Act, 2000, which is the basic legislation under which buildings are protected, states that in the case of a protected structure the term "structure" includes "any other structures lying within that curtilage and their interiors".

Unfortunately, the planning acts do not define "curtilage" and neither do the *Architectural Heritage Guidelines for Planning Authorities*. However, the guidelines offer the helpful statement that "for the purposes of these guidelines it can be taken to be the parcel of land immediately associated with that structure and which is (or was) in use for the purposes of the structure". It is the function of the planning authority to define the curtilage if this should be necessary and in the case of the ESB showroom this could go either way. Clearly the showroom building is not immediately associated with Ivy House, but equally clearly it was associated until the mid-1960s.

In this context the ruling in by Mr Justice Humphreys in the High Court in the cases of North Great George's Street Preservation Society and An Bord Pleanála in May 2023 would seem to be relevant, where the judge ruled that:

Whether property B falls within the curtilage of property A should be determined by reference to the legally relevant time for the purposes of the determination of the issue. This may vary from legal context to legal context. For determining the legal effect of an entry in the RPS, the "legally relevant time" is the date on which the structure on property A was first listed prior to the establishment of the RPS system or first included in the RPS, whichever was earlier, unless the wording of the RPS has changed in a relevant way in the meantime or has made express relevant provision to determine the curtilage.

In the present case it appears that the ESB building was alienated from the property at Ivy House prior to Ivy House being added to the record of protected structures and hence it would not be considered to lie within the curtilage of the protected structure.

It is my opinion that the ESB site and the former showroom building should not be considered to be part of the curtilage of Ivy House as there is no functional connection between the two properties and as the showroom building was not part of the curtilage at the time that Ivy House was listed or added to the record of protected structures. Furthermore, that part of the shell of the original shed that still survives beneath the later facade of the showroom has been altered to such an extent that none of its original character survives. .

Historical significance of building

As noted above, while the shell of the original stone shed or barn still survives within the showroom building its original character has been entirely lost through the works to turn it into an office and showroom. About two thirds of the ground floor of the street frontage is either an opening or a concrete pier between opes. The roof level has been raised significantly. At least part of the rear elevation has been altered to put window and door openings in and to block up other opes. Whatever features may have existed in the interior are likely to have gone, as the conversion to showroom has not been done in such a way as to preserve features such as cobbled floors, stable stalls and so forth.

In essence, it is my belief that this building has little or no surviving significance.

Conclusions

Arising from the above, it is concluded that while the former ESB showroom and offices is based on an earlier stone-built shed, the building has been altered to such an extent that it retains none of its original character. It would appear that the original building, prior to the conversion works in the 1960s, was not of any great significance in itself, being merely a simple shed, while those elements of the original masonry that have been inspected show that the standard of the masonry was of poor quality, suggesting that this building was not of any significance.

Site survey

Yard to rear of former showroom



Plate 20: View to west across rear yard

The site frontage has the width of the former showroom plus the width of the laneway leading to the side of the building, as has been noted above. To the rear of the building there is a yard which extends to this full width, while running back more than twenty metres to the north. Beyond this yard the site narrows, continuing northward at the eastern end, before widening significantly to the east. The yard at the rear is bounded on the west by a stone wall that has been raised with timber fencing, beyond which is the protected structure at Ivy House. To the east the boundary wall is of rubble stone at the southern end, while of concrete along most of its length within the yard. At the rear, or north, of the yard are concrete sheds.



Plate 21: View to west from stairway on upper floor toward Ivy House



Plate 22: View to north-west from upper level

The photograph above shows the concrete sheds at the rear of the yard, with the outbuilding to the rear of Ivy House at left, with part of a later rear addition behind Ivy House. The photograph below shows the narrower part of the site, at right, gated at the entrance to the yard, and running back toward the field, or open part of the site, to the north. The concrete sheds are seen at left in the foreground. Beyond the sheds is a small area, enclosed by fencing, within which is a telecommunications mast. The building, the yard and the narrow section of the site, including the telecommunications mast, lie within the architectural conservation area (ACA), while the open land at the northern end of the site lies beyond the ACA boundaries.



Plate 23: View toward rear of site from upper level



Plate 24: View into yard from rear of site

The photograph above shows the view southward through the gateway into the yard at the rear of the former showroom. This area is separated from the land at the rear, with the telecommunications mast, by a gateway with concrete piers supporting steel gates.



Plate 25: Eastern boundary wall

The eastern boundary wall alongside the yard is of concrete, while to the north of the gateway, in the narrow part of the site, the boundary wall is of rubble stone.

Site at rear



Plate 26: Link route between yard and rear site

The narrower part of the site is seen in the photograph above, with the concrete sheds visible to the rear of the vans and the fenced area with the telecommunications mast at right.



Plate 27: View to north across the rear site

Beyond the narrow area, to the north, the site widens out into a substantial field. The field margins are overgrown, with a densely wooded area to the north, beyond the boundary, as seen in the photograph above.



Plate 28: View to east across rear site

To the east of this field is a group of houses in Silkechain Lane, backing onto the site. The rear boundaries of those properties are marked by concrete walls.



Plate 29: Southern boundary of rear site

The southern boundary of the field is marked by a chain-link fence supported on concrete posts.

Assessment

The assessment of the former showroom has been given above, concluding that the building is based on a shed built with rubble stone, but extensively altered in the 1960s, leaving no traces of the earlier building except for the shell. The roof has been replaced in its entirety, the windows, doors internal partitions, ceilings, floors and other fittings all result from the 1960s alterations. Externally and internally the walls have been covered with roughcast render and hardwall plaster respectively, leaving nothing of the original building visible.

The assessment also explains that the former showroom is not within the curtilage of the adjacent protected structure.

The former showroom and the land to the rear, including the yard and the narrow neck of land on which the telecommunications mast stands, lie within the Leixlip Architectural Conservation Area. The survey has shown that on the western boundary and part of the eastern boundary the site is bounded by rubble stone walls. Nothing else within the yard or the narrow section of the site is of architectural heritage significance.

The land to the north, where it widens into a field, is outside the boundaries of the ACA and there is nothing within that part of the site that is of architectural heritage significance.

Proposed development

It is proposed to develop the site for housing and community purposes. The large area to the rear, in the northern section of the site, is to be developed to provide residential accommodation with two three-storey blocks orientated east-west, facing each other, while a third, single-storey building will be located at the eastern end.

At the front of the site the existing former ESB showroom is to be demolished and a new building erected on the site and used for community facilities. The new building would reflect the scale of the original, though it would not be as long, allowing for a widened access road at the eastern end of the frontage to serve the development at the rear. The new building would be of similar height to the former showroom, though would be a single-storey, double-height space. To the rear of this frontage building, the western part of the present yard is to have a single-storey structure, providing the entrance to the community centre and ancillary office, WC and plant room. Adjoining this to the north is to be a single-storey one-bed apartment.

Assessment

The existing former showroom has been assessed above, indicating that it is not of sufficient architectural heritage merit to warrant its retention. Any attempt to retain this building would hamper the development of the site, as the present access, while adequate for the current and recent past use of the property, is inadequate to provide access to a more intensive development.

The proposed replacement building, by maintaining the height and presence on the street frontage of the existing building, would ensure that the proposed development would have minimal impact on the character of the street frontage within the architectural conservation area. The choice of materials and the design of the building also reflect the character of the existing building and the ACA.

The single-storey element immediately to the rear of the frontage building will ensure that there is little or no impact on the adjacent protected structure, nor on the character of the ACA. As was noted in the survey section above, the boundary with the protected structure is a stone wall topped with a high timber fence and the proposed single-storey building will not rise higher than this existing boundary. The stone boundary wall will not be affected by the proposed building and care will be taken at construction stage to ensure that the stability of the wall is not affected.

The construction of the roadway leading to the rear will not in itself affect the character of the ACA. However, it will be laid out in close proximity to the stone wall that forms part of the eastern boundary, and which is within the ACA. The significance of the wall is recognised, and the wall will be protected during construction works and all excavation works in its vicinity will be undertaken with due care to ensure that the wall is not undermined or subjected to impact damage.

The large expanse of land in the northern part of the application site is not within the architectural conservation area and does not adjoin any protected structures. However, it is noted that the western boundary of the application site is the boundary of the ACA and hence the field adjoins the ACA. The land to the west of this part of the site is the rear garden of Ivy House, and hence is part of the curtilage of the protected structure. The proposal keeps the buildings at the rear of the site at a distance from this boundary and hence there will be little or no impact on the character or setting of the protected structure or the ACA. The area adjacent to this boundary is to be laid out for car parking and all works in this area will take full account of the need to protect the boundary of the protected structure.

Conclusion

From an architectural heritage perspective, the present proposal may be considered in two parts – the demolition and reconstruction of the building on the street frontage and the erection of new buildings on the land at the rear.

It has been shown that the shell of the existing building is the remnant of an older shed, though the character of this shed has been significantly altered in the past and no part of the original fabric is visible beneath the later facings. The building is not of architectural heritage significance and the proposed design of the replacement building will ensure that there will be little or no adverse impact on the character of the architectural conservation area.

The assessment has shown that the proposed buildings on the site will have no adverse impact on the adjacent protected structure or the architectural conservation area. The presence of historic stone walls has been noted and these will be protected from damage through impact or undermining during the construction stage.