



IRISH GEORGIAN SOCIETY

Ireland's Architectural Heritage Society

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Planning Authority Cobh Town Council

Carrig House Cobh Co. Cork

12th August '05



**Re. Proposed alterations to St.
Column's Cathedral, Cobh, Co. Cork
Ref. 05/52040**

This planning application proposes the extension of the sanctuary in to the nave area of the cathedral requiring the removal and partial relocation of the altar rails, the creation of a permanent altar on the extended sanctuary, the provision of a new cathedra facing the congregation and other works to the chancel, nave and transepts of St. Colman's Cathedral.

The Irish Georgian Society has not had an opportunity to appraise all of the documentation associated with this planning application but we have reviewed the architectural drawings that illustrate the proposed works.

The Society has significant concerns about the impact of these proposed works on the character of the sanctuary area in particular as well as its impact on the character of the church as a whole. For these reasons, we are of the opinion that there are two primary issues that must be addressed:

1. The actual liturgical necessity for the works taking into account international precedent
2. The conservation approach adopted and its means of addressing the reversibility of the works

Liturgical Requirements

The Irish Georgian Society does not purport to be expert on liturgical requirements or, therefore, the justifications put forward to substantiate the proposed works to the interior of St. Colman's Cathedral. However, we are aware that there is considerable debate about

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The Society aims to encourage an interest in and the conservation of distinguished examples of the visual arts and allied arts of all periods in Ireland.

whether the proposed alterations are necessary under the provisions of the Second Vatican Council. As the re-ordering of the sanctuary would have considerable impact on the character and fabric of this important cathedral as a whole, we are of the opinion that it is essential that a compelling need to meet liturgical requirements be established. We suggest that an independent view on this matter be given that assesses international standards and precedence. The Society notes in particular the approach adopted in Italy which has not necessitated the scale of interventions proposed for St. Colman's Cathedral.

Conservation Approach

The proposed extension of the sanctuary area into the nave would not only alter the form and layout of the nave and chancel area but would also necessitate substantial invasive works that would be particularly damaging to the mosaics running across the nave and transepts. The works also necessitate the removal and partial reinstatement of the altar railings. The Society assumes that the altar rails that are not reused will be retained on site to comply with best conservation practice. It is also apparent that certain elements of the mosaics are to be reused. However, we have very considerable concerns about the tiling illustrating foliate motifs that run parallel to the altar rails. The seemingly irreversibility of these works would be contrary to proper conservation practice as outlined in the ICOMOS Burra Charter for the Conservation of Places of Cultural Interest. Article 15.2 states:

Changes which reduce cultural significance should be reversible, and be reversed when circumstances permit. Reversible changes should be considered temporary. Non-reversible change should only be used as a last resort and should not prevent future conservation action.

The Society contends that the removal of this decorative tiling should not be considered a solution of "last resort" and that any works should make every effort to retain them. In essence, any proposed extension to the sanctuary area should be reversible.

Conclusion

The Society is cognisant of the provisions pertaining to Places of Public Worship in the *Architectural Heritage Protection Guidelines for Planning Authorities*. These guidelines state the following:

Respecting liturgical requirements includes recognising that churches may wish to adapt places of public worship in the light of contemporary revisions of their worship and mission. Thus church authorities may, in their places of public worship, require flexibility in... the enlargement of an existing sanctuary... Section 5.2.1

Where the planning authority determines that proposed works to the interior of a protected structure that is regularly used as a place of public worship require planning permission, it shall respect liturgical requirements in reaching a decision on the application for permission. Section 5.2.5

In this regard, the key issue is in determining whether there is a compelling case for these works in order to comply with liturgical requirements. If this can be clearly and independently established, the Society considers that the planning authority address the proposed works in accordance with best conservation practice. In doing so, we would urge that a request for additional information be made requiring the retention *in situ* of the decorative tiling adjoining the sanctuary area and that all works within the church be readily reversible.

The Irish Georgian Society urges that every consideration be given to



Planning Officer IGS

this submission. Yours sincerely

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