

## **Objection lodged by Louise Harrington, Conservation Officer with Cork County Council**

*Re.: PD 05/52040*

### **Policy:**

This proposal affects the interior of a building which is a protected, structure that is used as a place of public worship.

### **Regulations:**

The applicant has included a statement on the impact of the proposed development on the protected structure. The advertisement of the application is also in accordance with the regulations. As this affects a building which is a place of public worship the applicant has also provided detailed information on the liturgical requirements that are the basis for the reordering.

Chapter 5 of the Department of the Environment, Heritage & Local Government's Architectural Heritage Protection Guidelines for Planning Authorities sets out the Minister's guidance on this matter as specified in the 2000 Planning & Development Act.

### **Pre-planning:**

I have had a pre-planning meeting with Brian McCutcheon in relation to this application to advise on the making of a valid application from the point of view of protected structures and regulations. Cathal O'Neill also telephoned me in relation to the submission of adequate drawings. Subsequently, a sample drawing was also sent to me.

I am in regular contact with the Historic Churches Advisory Committee of the Diocese of Cloyne in relation to the carrying out of works to churches that are protected structures and am, therefore, aware of the procedures that have been followed by the Trustees.

### **Observations On the File:**

This application has attracted huge attention and the number of observations/objections bear this out. I have been referred 4 observations from The Pugin Society, The Irish Georgian Society, the Department of the Environment, Heritage & Local Government and An Taisce. I understand that another larger group objection was also submitted, however, I did not receive a copy of this.

### **Liturgical Requirements:**

I have studied carefully the *'Liturgical Requirements: St Colman's Cathedral, Cobh, Co. Cork, Context and Text'* and Chapter 5 of the Department's guidance on this matter.

### **Significance of the Cathedral**

St Colman's Cathedral is a treasure of Cork architecture and Irish architecture. It is also an internationally important example of Gothic Revival art and architecture. As the Department of the Environment, Heritage & Local Government chapter 5 guidelines suggest, church buildings are repositories for the great artistic endeavours and achievements of a community in any given time. The level of detail and finish in this building is unparalleled in Co. Cork. The association of the building with Edward Welby Pugin and George Coppinger Ashlin is another factor in assessing its importance.

## **Assessment of the Proposals on the character of the protected structure:**

The proposals contained in this application would be detrimental to the character of the protected building for the following reasons:

### **1. Design:**

The design of the proposed sanctuary extension is out of character with a Gothic Revival Church; the emphatic semicircles are typical of a Classical or Baroque church where ovals, domes and semi-circles abound. The elongated vertically and pointed, arch of the Gothic do not tally with this proposal. Had an art historical assessment been included with this proposal that might have been clear.

### **2. Removal of Items:**

The justification for the removal of items is unsatisfactory in architectural conservation terms. The DoEHLG has said that the design approach has taken account of the Venice Charter. I would argue that this is not so Article 11 states that 'The valid contributions of all periods to the building of a monument must be respected'. This is not the case here. The cutting away of the predella on the side altar, the removal of original mosaics and their storage is not in line with the spirit of the Charter nor is in line with the aforementioned guidance issued by the Department of the Environment, Heritage & Local Government on protected structures. There would appear to be an implication that this proposal somehow relates to Pugin's original design (3<sup>rd</sup> page of architect's report) - I would argue that this is completely unsubstantiated academically. There is also an implication that G C Ashlin somehow oversaw 'the uneven standard of design and workmanship of the interior finishes and the omission and addition of some significant features'. In light of the acknowledged significance of this building this contention does not hold nor does it hold when one takes into account that after Pugin's death Ashlin & Coleman had the biggest church practice in Ireland. For this reason, I would argue that the location, design and finish of all of the items affected by this proposal, bar the altar, are important original features and should remain in situ. Finally, I note that the complete visibility of the sanctuary will never be achievable in this type of arcuated construction i.e., where the columns of the nave and piers of the crossing will always block views of the altar from everyone of the pews in the aisles. I noted that in the current transept arrangement approximately 16 seat-spaces on both sides of the transept have no view of the altar, however, the other 48 do.

### **3. Proposal to design features later:**

In my opinion this is unsatisfactory.

### **Conclusion:**

I appreciate the arguments for liturgical requirements and understand the case for re-ordering which is presented very clearly and backed by the appropriate sources. However, I am of the opinion that the impact on the architectural heritage would be significant and overrides any benefit that would accrue from the re-ordering of the building. For this reason I recommend refusal of this application