

Oral Hearing - St. Coleman's Cathedral
OPENING STATEMENT OF EVIDENCE
Des Heffernan, Senior Architect.

1. *Introduction*

- 1.1 My name is Des Heffernan. I am a Senior Architect with Cork County Council.
- 1.2 There have been claims that Cobh Town Council acted in a substandard manner by relying on the report of '*A temporary Architect – on holiday relief*'. In view of this I set out my qualifications and experience in a bit more detail than I would normally.
- 1.3 My views and conclusions are set out in my report dated 29th August. In this prepared statement I confine myself to the background to my conclusions on the major principles involved
- 1.4 I consider St. Colman's Cathedral to be a magnificent building, both inside and out. This proposal, to change the interior, deserves the most careful and detailed consideration. Before writing my report I visited the cathedral three times, and spent considerable time considering the Act, Guidelines, submissions, and visualising how the proposed changes would look.

2. *Qualifications and experience:*

- 2.1 I qualified as an architect in 1966 with a Diploma in Architecture from Oxford Polytechnic. (now Oxford Brooks University)
- 2.2 I have practiced as an architect for 40 years. I worked for a number of private practices until 1985 when I joined Cork County Council. Since I joined the council I have had overall responsibility for architectural services for South Cork. This is one of the three electoral division of the county, and extends from Ballyvourney to Youghal, and from North of Macroom to the sea.
- 2.3 South Cork contains five Town Councils (Youghal, Middleton, Cobh, Kinsale and Macroom) and these fall within my area of responsibility. These are separate Planning Authorities. The Town Architects act as Planning Officers for these councils.

3. *Reasons I wrote the Planning Report on this application:*

- 3.1 Denis Deasy is Town Architect / Planning Officer for Cobh, and has been for many years. In the hierarchy of Cork County, Denis reports to me, but effectively he would be virtually independent in Professional matters. He handled pre-planning discussions for this application and would normally have done the report

- 3.2 Planning decisions have to be made to timescales, which are strictly defined in the Planning Acts and Regulations. Sometimes these clash with holidays, sick leave etc. Since 1985 I have done urgent planning reports for Denis when he is not available, as he does for me.
- 3.3 Denis had booked to go on Annual Leave for the month of August (as he does virtually every year). In July last year, it became obvious that Denis would be on leave in the period from the last date for the receipt of third party objections, to the date when a decision had to be made on this application. He would not be able to write the report.
- 3.4 Before Denis went on holidays we had three separate meetings to discuss this application. We reviewed the drawings and the preplanning discussions. I understood that he considered that the procedures to allow the Planning Authority to ascertain the liturgical requirements (par. 5.3.1.), as set out in the *Architectural Heritage Protection Guidelines*, had been followed, and that he considered that '**Liturgical Requirements**' had been established correctly.

4. *To change a heritage structure or not?*

- 4.1 There are two basic philosophies on the approach to alterations to Heritage structures:
- (a) *This building is of such importance that it should be preserved as it is, and no change should be permitted.*
 - (b) *This is a very important building, but if it is to survive for future generations, it has to be adapted sensitively, so that it will continue to be used and ongoing maintenance funded.*
- 4.2 Both of these philosophies are legitimate. Respected people can hold either view, on the same proposal, even though they are directly contradictory. In relation to this application, the County Conservation Officer (Louise Harrington) concluded that permission should be refused, while I concluded that permission should be granted.
- 4.3 With virtually every application to change a protected structure (e.g. to change a heritage house to a hotel), a judgement has to be made by the planning authority, on which of these philosophies is appropriate.

5. *To change a 'Place of Public Worship'*

- 5.1 There is one type of heritage building where strong guidance on these questions is set down in the Planning Act and Guidelines. This is for Places of Public Worship. For these the Planning Authority is obliged by the Act to "**respect liturgical requirements**".

- 5.2 Many views on 'liturgical requirements' have been submitted as observations and in appeal documents. The Planning Authority's obligation is to ascertain that '**Liturgical Requirements**' have been established by the applicants, in the manner set down in the guidelines.
- 5.3 Section 5.3.2 of the Guidelines sets out in detail, what procedures should be followed to establish '**Liturgical Requirements**' for a Catholic Church. They require that each diocese set up an '*Historic Churches Advisory Committee*' to '*advise on the necessary documentation, including liturgical requirements -*'. In my opinion a Planning Authority has a responsibility to ascertain that these procedures have been followed.
- 5.4 I concluded that for this application '**Liturgical requirements**' have been established by the applicants following the procedures set down in The Guidelines.

6. ***Conclusion:***

- 6.1 I concluded that the Act and Guidelines require a Planning Authority, in principle, to permit changes to Places of Public Worship where '**Liturgical requirements**' have been correctly established by the applicants. I concluded that this had been done for this application.
- 6.2 Once I became satisfied that '**Liturgical requirements**' had been established, the details of the application became the subject of an assessment of the quality of the detailed design, conservation principles etc. I considered that those proposed were of high quality.
- 6.3 I recommended permission, subject to conditions.

Des Heffernan
Senior Architect.