

Implementation Date: 01 September 2023

Template for Requesting Speaking Rights at the Planning Committee

The Protocol for the Operation of the Planning Committee provides for interested person(s) to register to speak on a planning application that is scheduled to be determined at the next meeting of the Planning Committee. This request must be received by the Planning Department no later than 10am on the Monday before the Planning Committee meeting via email account planning@causewaycoastandglens.gov.uk.

Planning Reference	LA01/2023/0418/F. Refurbishment and conversion of former blacksmith's forge to dwelling. Refurbishment and conversion of shed to dwelling. Demolition of former showroom and weighbridge building. Associated landscaping and access works 70m SE of 23 Ballymacrea Road, Portrush
Name	David Dalzell and Colin Mayrs (Speakers)
Contact Details	Tel: Email:
Support or Objection – please tick relevant box	Support ☒ Objection ☐
There have been no objections to this application. Consultees (DfI Roads, Rivers, Geological Survey, NI Water, Natural and Historic Environment Divisions and NIEA) have no objections. Planning Policy Statement 21 Policy CTY4 The Conversion and Reuse of Existing Buildings: The building is permanent construction; the design respects and conserves the original form, character and architectural features; the proposed extensions have been sensitively designed to be sympathetic to the existing building and original design and architectural style; the proposal will have no adverse impact on nearby residents or continued agricultural operations on adjoining land, the nature and scale of the development is appropriate to the setting which is well back from the public road in a well-defined mature site. The site will be enhanced with new planting. The buildings have been out of use for some time and are in a state which has attracted anti-social behaviour – they need a positive new use. All necessary services are on site or can be provided without significant adverse impact on the locality; and the access arrangements have satisfied DfI Roads.	

The planner has asserted that the building is in an “*advanced ruinous state*” and unsuitable for conversion. We disagree - many such buildings have been brought back to use. The forge had a roof until it had become damaged and was taken down for safety reasons. The old garage is largely intact, though recent storms have been hard on the old tin roof. This can all be repaired.

The proposal is entirely in line with the spirit and intention of CTY 4.

Strategic Planning Policy Statement (SPPS)

SPPS 6.70 states, “*All development in the countryside must integrate into its setting, respect rural character, and be appropriately designed.*” The planners concede that the proposal will be well sited, using existing terrain and vegetation so that it is integrated (and not prominent) in the landscape. As such, it complies with **Policy CTY 13 Integration and Design of Buildings in the Countryside, and CTY 14 Rural Character**. Therefore, as it integrates and is appropriately designed it follows that the proposal is also compliant with SPPS 6.70.

Furthermore, we have shown how the site will be significantly greened-up by the replacement of large areas of existing roads and hardstanding, and the demolition of the weighbridge and showroom buildings, which really do have little historical interest.

The planners have failed to give proper weight to the SPPS, which states that sustainable development should be permitted. This reuse of existing buildings is an inherently sustainable form of development, supported by planning policy and the Council's wider drive towards making better use of resources and combatting climate change.

SPPS 6.73 Local Importance of existing buildings: The SPPS gives examples of the buildings that could be considered “locally important”, “...(*such as former school houses, churches and older traditional barns and outbuildings*)...” Evidently these are only examples, not a definitive list. Since other types of buildings with industrial heritage value must be considered locally important (railway buildings and mills for example), why not historic quarry buildings?

The planners are wrong to dismiss these buildings as not locally important, indeed the old forge and shed are physical evidence of Craigahulliar's mining and quarrying period in the early 20th century. Together and as a group, these buildings stand testimony to the men and women who worked in the quarry which was such an important part of the North Coast landscape and social economy for over one hundred years.

These buildings are heritage assets and conversion and re-use will secure their upkeep and retention, which in turn helps to conserve, and “tell the story” of Craigahulliar. The geological and industrial heritage assets in the area have great potential to draw visitors to the area but many features of this heritage have already been lost – should we lose more by failing to grasp the planning policies specifically drafted to permit this sort of imaginative repurposing?

Ireland's leading industrial archaeologist, Dr Fred Hamond, has assessed the buildings and has concluded that they are of historic heritage interest for their age and wall fabric, and as physical evidence of the quarry's development. It is indisputable that these buildings are of local historic interest. It follows that they are locally important. By recommending refusal of the reuse and refurbishment of these buildings, the planners are sending out a message that vernacular buildings and buildings with industrial archaeological interest but otherwise without statutory protection, are not worth retaining. The countryside will be a poorer place without these buildings.

The planner asserts that the buildings to be converted are “*not locally important*”. We disagree. It is these buildings, singly and in groups, that provide the physical, tangible remains of the history of this part of the Borough. If they are lost (as they will be if no practical new use can be found) then the integrity of the Craigahulliar heritage asset will be irreversibly diminished.

Now that the landfill site has been closed, we expect the Council to be looking to future uses for Craigahulliar that may include public access and hopefully interpretation of the geological features on the site, and its mining and quarrying legacy and the story of the people who worked and lived there. We want these industrial heritage buildings to remain as a key part of that historic story and to demonstrate how old buildings in the countryside can be sympathetically conserved and repurposed for the future.

May I respectfully remind the members (through the Chair) that this committee overturned a similar

refusal recommendation (in January this year) and approved the refurbishment of the old workshop and canteen at Craigahulliar? In that case, the committee recognised the sustainability of retaining and reusing rural buildings like this. Members, you rightly acknowledged the local importance of these buildings and put considerable weight on the comments made by the expert Dr Hamond. Planning reference LA01/2023/0417/F.

In contrast, the single example of an appeal decision provided by the planners is not comparable to this proposal. There, the application was for a farm dwelling which fundamentally engages different planning policies. Much of that building's wall were not intact with one gable missing entirely – with no “*enclosed, interior space*”. That site hadn't the historical context of this proposal.

The Applicant, Colin Mayrs will speak on Policy CTY6 Personal and Domestic Circumstances:

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The planners have assessed the proposed accommodation for Ellen as if it were a new dwelling in the countryside. They have failed to take account that Ellen's proposed home fits CTY 6 perfectly, where a “*suitable alternative*” to a new dwelling in the countryside is the “*conversion and reuse of another building within the curtilage of the property*”. The host building (the old shed/garage) is clearly within the curtilage of the Forge.