



Planning Ref: 2660126

25th March 2026

Planning Section
Mayo County Council

Dear Sir/Madam

Re: 2660126 The application concerns a range of works to Ballina Convent, a protected structure, and associated buildings.

The proposal includes:

- **Change of use of the convent ground floor to community facilities (c.1,036 sqm) and a two-bedroom apartment (c.103 sqm) for residents linked to the facility. Community uses include the continued use of the chapel and kitchen areas, as well as counselling, meeting, training, arts and music spaces, sanitary facilities and a community courtyard. Works include new services, photovoltaic panels and conservation-led interventions to the historic fabric.**
- **A new single-storey workshop and storage shed (c.203 sqm).**
- **Change of use of St. Mary's (c.462 sqm) and St. Anne's (c.795 sqm) former school buildings to community facilities, with external insulation and photovoltaic panels.**
- **Refurbishment and reinstatement of the gatehouse as a residential unit, including a two-bedroom extension, photovoltaic panels, new parking, storage and revised access.**
- **New site fencing, updated parking layouts, a new fuel tank, associated site works and on-site directional signage.**

Comment

The Heritage Council was established in 1995 as a statutory body under the Heritage Act 1995 with a Council (the Board of the body) appointed by the Minister. The Heritage Council is a prescribed body under the provisions of the Planning and Development Acts 2000-2010 and S.I. No. 600/2001 of the Planning and Development Regulations, section 28 inter alia, in accordance with its functions under Section 6 of the Heritage Act, 1995. We seek to provide submissions on forward planning, development management and strategic infrastructure developments as they relate to Ireland's heritage, namely built, cultural and natural heritage.

We have reviewed the submitted documentation, whilst simultaneously noting the building's inclusion on the Record of Protected Structures (RPS No. 10) in the Mayo County Development Plan 2022–2028, as well as its listing in the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage (Ref. 31204001). The convent's architectural, historical, social and technical significance—dating from

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Martina Moloney (Cathaoirleach | Chairperson), John Burgess, Damian Downes, Deirdre McDermott, Muirís Ó Céidigh, Dr. Patricia O Hare, John G. Pierce, Sheila Pratschke, Prof. Mark Scott, Dr. Mary Tubridy

Aras na hOidhreachta, Lana an Teampaill,
Cill Chainnigh, Eire, R95 X264

Aras na hOidhreachta, Church Lane,
Kilkenny, Ireland, R95 X264

T 056 777 0777 | **E** mail@heritagecouncil.ie

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1860—is well established, and the proposed community-focused use aligns with its long-standing role in Ballina.

The Heritage Council supports the principle of re-use and refurbishment of vacant and derelict buildings within town centres, consistent with national and local policy on regeneration, compact growth and reducing vacancy. In this regard, the proposal aligns with the Mayo County Development Plan 2022–2028 and the Ballina Local Area Plan 2024–2030, including Policy **HSCO 15**, which promotes the development of the former Sisters of Mercy Convent for community, cultural, educational, amenity and residential purposes.

We also note that the project is broadly consistent with policies **BEP 4**, **BEP 6**, **BEP 8**, **BEP 11** and **BEP 12** of the Mayo County Development Plan, which collectively support the protection, sympathetic maintenance, conservation and adaptive reuse of protected and vernacular structures, as well as the retention of historic character, fabric and features. At the same time Policies **BEO 2** and **BEO 3** of the Ballina Local Area Plan reinforce the importance of conserving protected structures and ensuring that any alterations respect their established form and character.

Therefore, the key issue for the Heritage Council in reviewing this application is to ensure that the positive re-use of the building is not undermined by unjustified/excessive interventions to the historic fabric of the building. We believe that broadly this has been achieved.

The building's historical and cultural significance dates back to 1860 with various uses throughout its time, most notably, its function as a historical, social and technical landmark within Ballina. Therefore, the proposed community use of the building will enable this continuation in a manner that befits a building of such prominence in Ballina.

The inclusion of a comprehensive Architectural Heritage Impact Assessment is welcomed. The analysis, including the conservation strategy and assessment of the building's features, demonstrates a clear commitment to protecting and enhancing the historic fabric. The works proposed appear to be developed with due regard to best practice in conservation and the long-term care of the buildings.

The Heritage Council has two specific points for further consideration:

- The proposed use of PIR board for dry-lining the kitchen walls (A6.e, p.57 in the AHIA) is generally unsuitable for solid wall construction due to moisture-management concerns. While the intent to accommodate services is noted, conservation-appropriate alternatives should be considered, utilising breathable or moisture-open materials that protect the performance of the historic fabric. We believe this can be achieved by condition of any permission.
- The proposal to concrete over the existing south entrance steps (B2, p.60) presents a risk to the original stonework, despite being theoretically reversible. Less invasive options—such as a temporary ramp structure or reuse of the existing ramp shown on drawing PL950-P14—should be examined to avoid unnecessary impact on the protected elements. The Local Authority may wish to seek further information on this point or put a condition on

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the grant of permission to revisit this aspect of the scheme.

To support the successful delivery of the project, we would recommend that a Grade I or Grade II conservation architect be retained to guide and oversee works to the protected structure, ensuring alignment with best conservation practice and the planning authority's requirements.

Conclusion

Overall, the Heritage Council is supportive of the proposed development and the intention to bring this important historic complex back into sustainable, community-focused use. We believe it complies with the relevant policies in the Mayo County Development Plan 2022-2028, and the Ballina Local Area Plan 2024-2030.

We trust these observations will assist Mayo County Council in determining this application.

Yours sincerely

Virginia Teehan

Chief Executive Officer

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