



OPW

The Office of Public Works
Oifig na nOibreacha Poiblí

Ms. Niamh Maguire,
Committee Secretariat,
Committee of Public Accounts,
Leinster House,
Dublin 2.



Ceann Oifig
Sráid Jonathan Swift
Baile Átha Troim
Co. na Mí

Head Office
Jonathan Swift Street
Trim
Co Meath

Teil/Phone: (046) 942 6000
Facs/Fax: (046) 948 1793
Íosghlao/LoCall 1890 213414
Suíomh gréasáin/website: www.opw.ie

Dear Ms. Maguire,

I refer to your letter dated 4th June 2013 requesting further information to be provided to the Committee members following my appearance before the Committee on 23rd May for the examination of:

**2011 Annual Report of the Comptroller and Auditor General
Vote 10: Office of Public Works (OPW)
Chapter 14: Measuring Procurement Procedures**

The responses to the Committee's queries are as follows:

1. Confirmation on whether the office space that was utilised for the new office for the Minister of State in 2007 was previously occupied prior to the commencement of renovation work by the OPW in 2007.

The rooms were previously used as follows:

- 118a Single office occupied. Occupant moved to room 213c in Kildare St.
- 119 Meeting room.
- 119a Single office occupied. Occupant moved to another room in Kildare St.
- 119b Single office occupied. Occupant moved to room 416 in Kildare St.
- 119c Storage
- 119d Storage

The OPW had no role in the relocation of any of the relevant staff, which was managed by the client Department.

2. A note on the likely proportion of the cost of renovation of the Minister of State's office in 2007 that could be attributed to the buildings status as a protected building

OPW estimate that that a charge of between 20 to 40% of the building cost is typical for work of this nature on a protected structure. Typically in a protected structure there is a prohibition on certain building practices leading to additional labour costs as well as increasing the actual quantity of material used.

In the case of the building in question, the architect's brief allowed for only a very restricted range of options with regards to both choice of materials and modifications on plan.

3. A note on the OPW's involvement with the local authority during the acquisition of a site for development in Drogheda in 2006 as part of the decentralisation programme

The preferred location for the decentralisation project for Drogheda, not only as a location for the decentralised Department but also to maximise its beneficial commercial impact on the town, was a package of three County Council owned town centre sites.

At the time of acquisition negotiations in 2004/05, the property market was buoyant. In common with many regional towns, Drogheda was experiencing a boom period, notably with the opening of the high profile town centre development - Scotch Hall - located at the eastern end of the town centre, within half a mile of the subject decentralisation sites. In Drogheda, negotiations were complicated by the fact that the Local Authority made it clear that, to facilitate a disposal to OPW, they would require the acquisition of replacement town centre car parking for which the subject sites intended for purchase by OPW, were being used at that time.

In February 2005, negotiations commenced with the local authorities nominated valuers who proposed an asking price of €10.42m for the 3 subject sites. The replacement car park facilities remained as a condition of the sale.

In December 2006, a 0.66 acre replacement site (Reilly's) on Narrow West Street was brought to the market for sale by auction. This was identified by the local authority as being a suitable site to provide replacement car parking. The Local Authority proposed to OPW (and it was agreed) that the OPW would reimburse the costs associated with buying this property at auction in exchange for the three council sites.

The Reilly's site was purchased at auction in Sept 2007 for a nett bid price of €7.75m. The gross figure for the Reilly site of €9.493m encompassed purchase price, VAT, Stamp duty and legal costs. This in effect was the price paid by OPW for the three sites totalling 1.64 acres. In terms of site area it represented a land exchange whereby OPW acquired 3 sites totalling 1.64 acres, in exchange for the cost of OPW funding the purchase of a site of 0.66 acre.

4. A list of the recently closed Garda stations identified for disposal by the OPW

For the information of the members I will restate the OPW policy with regard to the potential disposal of recently closed Garda stations:

- Identify, in the first instance, if other State Bodies, including Government Departments and the wider public sector has a use for the property.
- If there is no other State use for a property the OPW will consider disposing of the property on the open market, if and when conditions prevail, in order to generate much needed revenue for the Exchequer.
- If no State requirement is identified or if a decision is taken not to dispose of a particular property the OPW would consider community involvement subject to the receipt of an appropriate business case which would indicate that the community/voluntary group has the means to insure, maintain and manage the property and that there are no ongoing costs for the Exchequer.

The OPW are presently examining expressions of interest from State bodies and Community Groups for the use of vacant properties including former Garda stations. Following this examination the OPW will finalise a list of properties which will be offered for sale.

It is not possible at this time to provide information on specific properties which will be placed on the market, however given that no specific requests have so far been received from the wider public service or from local or community interests for 59 of these properties, this may be indicative of the quantum of properties that may be offered for sale.

Other issues such as shared services, rights of way, encroachments and communications infrastructure on site may impact on when it is possible to put specific properties on the market.

5. The names of the public bodies that have shown an interest in acquiring the Stepside GS

The Road Safety Authority has expressed an interest in acquiring the closed Garda station at Stepside.

6. A note on the dispute between the State and the trust in relation to Mount Congreve House and gardens and the steps being taken to resolve this dispute

The house and gardens at Mount Congreve are currently under the care of the Mount Congreve Trust. The Mount Congreve Trust consists of three Trustees including the Commissioners of Public Works. The remaining two Trustees represent the Congreve Foundation and were appointed by Mr. Congreve.

The Trust period for the gardens commenced upon the death of Mr Congreve in May 2011 and will expire in May 2032. The Mansion House will remain in the hands of the Trust until 2059. Only upon the expiration of these Trust periods will the properties revert to the ownership of the State.

The Commissioners of Public Works, in their role as Trustee, are in ongoing discussions with the other Trustees as to the future management of the Trust properties.

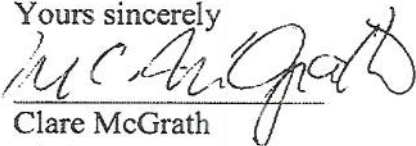
7. A note on status of audit into artworks housed in Leinster House

An art survey / audit is on-going in co-operation with the staff in Leinster House. A number of artworks have yet to be located. OPW has issued guidelines on the management of artworks in Leinster House and these procedures are now in place in relation to any movement of artworks.

8. A copy of audit report on project funded by OPW and delivered by local authorities

The Audit Report referred to at the meeting is in the course of preparation and is expected to be completed by the end of 2013 as stated to the committee. A copy will be forwarded to the Committee on completion.

Yours sincerely



Clare McGrath
Chairman

19th June 2013