

**PROPOSED DEMOLITION
OF ANCILLARY STRUCTURES
AT
POOLBEG GENERATING STATION
PIGEON HOUSE ROAD, DUBLIN 4**

ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE ASSESSMENT

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Summary

This report has been produced as an assessment of the potential effects of the proposed demolition of ancillary buildings at the ESB Poolbeg Generation Station on built heritage.

The report investigates the historical background to the land in the vicinity of the site for the proposed development, showing that the great South Wall was constructed between Ringsend and Poolbeg in the eighteenth century and that the present site was in the open sea at that time. In the late eighteenth century, a harbour was constructed at Pigeon House part way along the South Wall and in the late nineteenth century this harbour was acquired by Dublin Corporation, the precursor of the present Dublin City Council. In 1903 the corporation erected a power station on its lands at Pigeon House and in 1927 this came into the ownership of the Electricity Supply Board (ESB).

Until the 1960s Pigeon House was a small island with the sea to the south and the estuary of the Liffey to the north. With the intention of erecting a new power station to the east of Pigeon House a substantial area was reclaimed from the sea and construction commenced. The new power station opened in 1971 and became known as the Poolbeg Generating Station. It has been extended significantly since that date.

It is proposed to demolish three buildings, all of which are disused. These include the Safety Building, which was formerly a recreational building and some stores and workshops. There are no protected structures on the site and the site is not within an architectural conservation area.

It is concluded that the three buildings that would be demolished are not of architectural heritage significance, and that they should be recorded through photographs and written descriptions prior to their demolition.

Background

This report has been prepared for ESB Engineering and Major Projects as part of the input to a planning application for the demolition of three disused ancillary buildings at the Poolbeg Generating Station site, Dublin 4.

While this report contains comment on aspects of the condition of the buildings it is not a condition report or a structural report and must not be read as such.

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Methodology

The built heritage assessment examines buildings and other structures that are proposed for demolition and assesses the architectural significance of those structures. The emphasis is on structures still standing. Where a building or other structure has been destroyed it no longer has architectural significance on the landscape, though it may leave traces that fall within the ambit of the archaeological assessment. It may also have had an importance that remains through the historical record, though this is not of concern to the present task. For a structure to have architectural significance it need not survive intact and ruins, or even fragments of buildings may be of importance.

The identification of buildings and structures to be assessed for impact was based in the first instance on an analysis of current Ordnance Survey maps. The potential for any building or other structure on the site to have special architectural significance was also gauged through examination of the following sources:

- The Dublin City Development Plan 2016-2022
- Ordnance Survey six-inch maps of 1843, 1871, 1912 and 1936
- Ordnance Survey 1:2500 maps of 1864

Any buildings on or close to the proposed site that were identified on the earlier Ordnance Survey maps were then checked against the current Ordnance Survey maps to ascertain which were still extant.

The entries in the Records of Protected Structures for Dublin city were also checked.

The structures identified on the site were examined to assess their architectural heritage significance, if any, and to consider potential for mitigation where necessary. In each case the structures identified are rated in accordance with the system adopted the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage (NIAH) wherein a structure is rated as being of International, National, Regional or Local interest, or, if a structure is of no special interest, the NIAH includes a category of "Record only"¹.

The definitions for each of these categories is as follows:

International:

Structures or sites of sufficient architectural heritage importance to be considered in an international context. Examples include St Fin Barre's Cathedral, Cork. These are exceptional structures that can be compared to and contrasted with the finest architectural heritage in other countries.

¹ National Inventory of Architectural Heritage *NIAH Handbook* edition 2017, p. 20

National

Structures or sites that make a significant contribution to the architectural heritage of Ireland. These are structures and sites that are considered to be of great architectural heritage significance in an Irish context. Examples include Ardnacrusha Power Station, Co. Clare; the Ford Factory, Cork; Carroll's Factory, Dundalk; Lismore Castle, Co. Waterford; Sligo Courthouse, Sligo; and Emo Court, Co. Laois.

Regional

Structures or sites that make a significant contribution to the architectural heritage within their region or area. They also stand in comparison with similar structures or sites in other regions or areas within Ireland. Examples would include many Georgian terraces; Nenagh Courthouse, Co. Tipperary; or the Bailey Lighthouse, Howth. Increasingly, structures that need to be protected include structures or sites that make a significant contribution to the architectural heritage within their own locality. Examples of these would include modest terraces and timber shopfronts.

Local

These are structures or sites of some vintage that make a contribution to the architectural heritage but may not merit being placed in the RPS separately. Such structures may have lost much of their original fabric.

Record only

These are structures or sites that are not deemed to have sufficient presence or inherent architectural or other importance at the time of recording to warrant a higher rating. It is acknowledged, however, that they might be considered further at a future time

The legislation relating to the protection of architectural heritage is set down in the Planning and Development Act 2000 and this defines architectural heritage as including structures which are of special interest under the headings of architectural, historical, archaeological, artistic, cultural, scientific, social or technical interest. Wherever the phrase "special architectural interest" is used in this report it should be taken as including special interest in any one or more of these eight categories.

In this assessment each building or structure that is considered is assigned a rating in accordance with the NIAH system or is stated to be not of special architectural interest. Where the rating is deemed to be higher than "Record only" the category of special interest is noted.

It should be noted that the term "special architectural interest" applies only in the context of this assessment of architectural heritage and does not imply that those buildings and other structures that are not considered to be of special architectural interest are in any way inferior or are of lower value.

Historical background

A substantial proportion of the eastern part of Dublin city is on land reclaimed from the sea over the past three hundred years or so. At that time, the present site lay almost four kilometres to the east of the shoreline at Sandwith Street, with only the tip of a narrow sand spit at Ringsend dry at high tide to interrupt the expanse of water.

In 1715 the city authorities agreed to construct a breakwater in the bay to protect the navigation channel from drifting sands and to provide an anchorage. This breakwater was to be constructed with timber piles and was to be out in the open water rather than attached to dry land. This project, known as The Piles, ran over a distance of approximately 2.7 kilometres, with its eastern end at Poolbeg, while the western end was at the point that was later to be the site for Pigeon House Harbour.

It was not until 1748 that the decision was taken to connect the piles to dry land by building a wall eastward from Ringsend. This was in the form of a double wall – or two walls with the space between filled with material such as sand. The wall was completed in 1760 and work commenced to continue it along the line of The Piles as far as Poolbeg. The Poolbeg lighthouse was commenced shortly afterward and was completed in 1767.

As the original piles had been constructed in the bay with no connection to land they were not aligned on Ringsend and so the new wall met the line of the piles at an angle. In the closing years of the eighteenth century Pigeon House Harbour was constructed at the angle between the two sections of the wall and the Pigeon House Hotel was built to serve passengers arriving and departing via this harbour. With the political turmoil of the late 1790s and the opening years of the nineteenth century, particularly with the ongoing war with France, the harbour was fortified. The significance of Pigeon House as a harbour for the mails and passengers waned following the opening of Howth Harbour in 1818. For the next eighty years Pigeon House continued in use as a military outpost for the defence of Dublin port.

In 1897 the military presence at Pigeon House discontinued and the harbour and barracks were acquired by Dublin Corporation. The corporation was about to construct a main drainage system for the city, somewhat belatedly, as the health of Dublin was significantly worse than other cities in these islands, with lack of adequate sewerage being a significant cause of the problem. The townships of Rathmines and Pembroke had already constructed a sewage system discharging into the Liffey at Poolbeg, though this was further to the east than the treatment plant proposed by the city in the 1890s. The sewage pumping station built by the corporation at this time was at Irishtown, with the settling tanks and the outfall located within Pigeon House Harbour. From there the sludge was loaded onto a ship and brought out to sea, where it was dumped.

In 1902 there was an outbreak of smallpox in Dublin and the corporation, as the local health authority, established an isolation hospital in a group of former military buildings that lined the road on the approach to Pigeon House Harbour. Following the abatement of the smallpox epidemic the hospital was given over to use as an sanatorium for those suffering from tuberculosis, which was endemic in the city in the first half of the twentieth century.

In that same year, Dublin Corporation laid the foundations to a new power station at Poolbeg. The city streets had been lit by gas since about 1820 and in 1892 the corporation built a generating station at Fleet Street to turn the street lighting over to this newer and more efficient power source. As the demand for electricity grew it became necessary to build a second station and the land recently acquired at Pigeon House was seen as a suitable location. Pigeon House power station came on stream in 1903 with a generating capacity of 5MW. This power station was transferred into the ownership of the ESB in 1927.

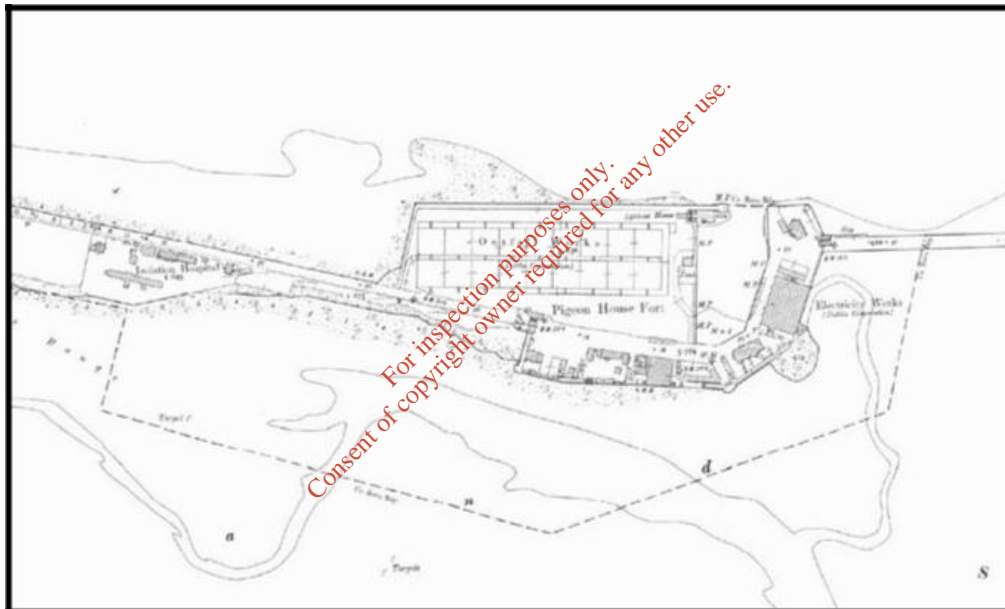


Figure 1: Detail of 1907 Ordnance Survey map showing Pigeon House

At the time of these significant changes Pigeon House was still effectively an island in Dublin Bay, connected by a causeway that led westward to Irishtown and eastward to the Poolbeg lighthouse. The map extract above, dating from 1907, shows the harbour, sewage settling tanks, isolation hospital and Pigeon House Power Station, with the sea and river estuary running up to the boundary walls to the north and south. This remained the situation until the 1960s with little change, though the output of the power station increased.

In the 1960s the decision was taken to build a new, larger power station to the east of Pigeon House and significant land reclamation was undertaken to create the site. The new Poolbeg Power Station opened in 1971. Since that time, the power station has continued to be updated, with new buildings and facilities provided.

Baseline environmental study

Conservation status

Record of Protected Structures

No structures within the application site or within the Poolbeg Generating Station site as a whole are included in the record of protected structures. There are protected structures to the west of the site, notably the former Pigeon House generating station, the former Pigeon House Hotel and the remaining portions of the former isolation hospital and the fort. The great South Wall is also a protected structure.

Conservation Areas

No part of the proposed development within an architectural conservation area. Within the immediate landscape of the Poolbeg Site, there are two conservation areas: Pigeon House Conservation area, incorporating the Pigeon House Power Station and the remaining open section of Pigeon House Harbour; and Great South Wall Conservation area, incorporating the section of the Great South Wall stretching from the end of the reclaimed land to Poolbeg Lighthouse.

National Inventory of Architectural Heritage

The National Inventory of Architectural Heritage has not yet published its survey of the Dublin 4 area.

ESB Heritage Inventory

The ESB heritage inventory has included the power station at Poolbeg and has assigned it a National architectural heritage evaluation for its special artistic, historical, scientific, social and technical interest.² The inventory elaborates on these special interests as follows:

Artistic: This relates to a sculpture unveiled on Sandymount Strand in November 2004 to mark a century of electricity generation on the Poolbeg peninsula.

Historical – the historical interest relates to the continuous use of the Pigeon House/Poolbeg site for electricity generation since 1903.

Technical – the Poolbeg Station remains the only generating station on the ESB system which is operated on two fuel sources, oil and gas.

Scientific/Environmental – The Poolbeg Environmental Management Framework consists of an integral pollution control licence and ISO 14001 environmental management system.

Social – the ESB has created an amenity for the people of Dublin at Shelly Banks. It is noted that while “architectural heritage” is one of the eight categories of special interest addressed in that inventory, the study did not deem this to be one of the categories that would apply to the Poolbeg site.

² Brendan Delany, Peter Carroll and Judith Doherty, 2005, *A Heritage Inventory of ESB Buildings in Ireland*, ESB, pp. 152-156.

Building survey

In the section below each of the structures within the application site is examined to assess whether it is of special interest as built heritage. This would include special interest for its architectural, historic, artistic, cultural, scientific, social or technical interest. This list of potential interests is derived from section 10(2)(f) of the Planning and Development Act, 2000, which sets down the obligation of a planning authority to include objectives for the protection of structures in its development plan. The list also includes special archaeological interest, but this is not included in this report as it is considered in its own section.

Each structure is given a number prefixed with “BH” for Built Heritage. Where the assessment finds that a structure is not of special interest and is rated as “Record only” no mitigation measures would be warranted other than to record the structure if it is to be demolished or removed.

In each case the survey includes a brief description of the structure and an approximate date of construction.

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BH.1 – Safety Centre

Plate 1: Safety Centre seen from above (1999)

Description

The Safety Centre or Recreational Building is a single-storey, metal-framed, flat-roofed structure. It is clad in grey concrete brick on three sides, while the fourth has a continuous glazed elevation. The roof overhangs to the front of the glazed wall, with the overhang supported on timber posts, providing a covered walkway. The fascia and timber posts are deteriorating and show signs of rot.

Date of construction:	post-1970s
Protected structure:	No
Special interest:	None
Special interest rating:	Record only
Proposal:	Demolition
Impacts on built heritage:	None
Effects on setting:	None
Mitigation required:	Record through photographs and written description.



Plate 2: Safety Centre – southern elevation



Plate 3: Safety Centre - eastern elevation

BH.2 – Store

Plate 4: Store/workshop – eastern elevation

Description

A single-storey, flat-roofed building faced with grey concrete brickwork, above which is a continuous glazed panel. A wing projects to the east at the southern end of the building and this section lacks the clerestory glazing on its northern side. The building is disused.

Date of construction:	post-1970s
Protected structure:	No
Special interest:	None
Special interest rating:	Record only
Proposal:	Demolition
Impacts on built heritage:	None
Effects on setting:	None
Mitigation required:	Record through photographs and written description.



Plate 5: Store/workshop – northern elevation of wing



Plate 6: Store/workshop – southern elevation

BH.3 – Main store/workshop

Plate 7: Main store/workshop with generating hall at rear

Description

The main stores consist of five interconnected stores, each of which is square in plan with raised clerestory lighting. The base of the building is of grey concrete blockwork, above which are two continuous bands of windows. Projecting to the west at the southern end is a two-storey element of grey concrete brick with windows in vertical bands. Projecting to the west at the northern end is a single-storey structure faced with profiled steel cladding.

Date of construction:	1971
Protected structure:	No
Special interest:	None
Special interest rating:	Record only
Proposal:	Demolition
Impacts on built heritage:	None
Effects on setting:	None
Mitigation required:	Record through photographs and written description.



Plate 8: Main stores/workshop – two-storey section



Plate 9: Main workshop/stores – single-storey wing at northern end

BH.4 – Administration building

Plate 10: Administration building – southern elevation

Description

A five-storey office building faced in concrete brick, with a projecting south-facing section, the frame of which is faced with metal cladding, and which has curtain-wall glazing. The rear section has vertical strip windows. Both sections are flat-roofed and stand on cylindrical concrete columns, behind which is a solid wall of concrete brick. The entrance is to the north.

Date of construction:	1971
Protected structure:	No
Special interest:	None
Special interest rating:	Record only
Proposal:	Retain and repair façade of building following demolition of adjacent stores and workshops to which it is attached.
Impacts on built heritage:	None
Effects on setting:	None
Mitigation required:	None.

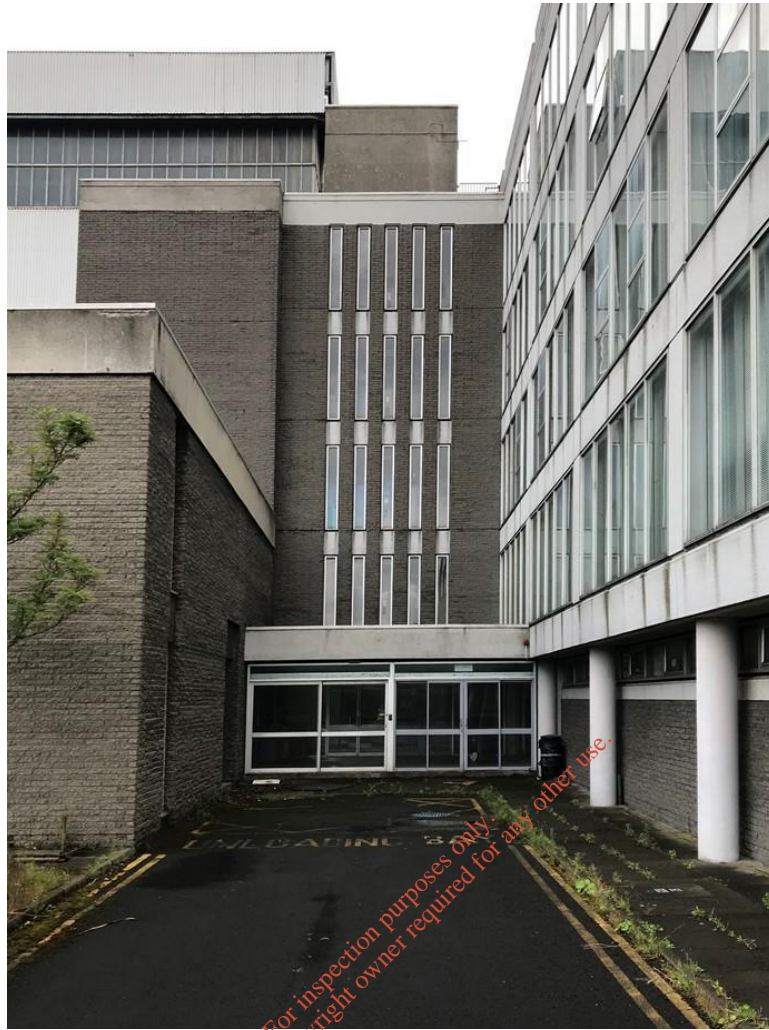


Plate 11: Northern side of administration building

Assessment

Protected structures

It was noted above in the Conservation Status section that there are no buildings or other structures on the present site that are included in the record of protected structures. The great South Wall passes through the ESB Poolbeg campus, adjacent to the river, to the north of the present site but at such a distance from the proposed demolition and with other buildings in the intervening space, that there would be no potential impact on the character or setting of the wall.

To the west of the application site is the disused Pigeon House power station, which is also a protected structure. The presence of the buildings on the present site is not an essential part of the character or setting of that power station and hence the demolition of three of the buildings would have no impact on the character or setting.

No other protected structures are in close proximity to the application site.

Buildings proposed for demolition

It was noted in the Conservation Status section above that the Poolbeg ESB site was given an architectural heritage evaluation as being of national significance in the ESB *Heritage Inventory*. However, it is clear in the text of that inventory that it was not intended that all of the structures on the Poolbeg campus would be accorded this significance.

The *Heritage Inventory* states that the Poolbeg site falls under five categories of special interest, namely artistic, cultural, historical, scientific, social and technical. It is noted that the inventory does not consider architectural interest to one of the categories that apply to Poolbeg. Furthermore, the inventory explains very clearly, on page 156, the basis on which these five categories were assigned and nowhere in these explanations is there any reference to the four buildings on the present site, three of which it is proposed to demolish.

It is also notable that the recent study of mid-twentieth century architecture in Dublin includes the Poolbeg Generating Station in its survey, but only to single out the two chimneys that were built in the 1970s.³ The rest of the ESB site is dismissed as “this sprawling industrial campus”.

These two documents support the conclusions cited in the building survey above, that none of the three buildings proposed for demolition is of architectural heritage significance.

³Rowley, 2019, p. 458.

Mitigation

Three structures have been identified above as being proposed for demolition, while a fourth would need repairs as it is attached to one of the structures proposed for demolition. In each case the building has been assessed as not being of architectural heritage significance and has been rated as "Record only". In response to that assessment it is recommended that each of the buildings should be recorded by means of photographs and written description prior to demolition and that the resulting reports be lodged in the Dublin City Library and Archive and in the Irish Architectural Archive.

Residual impacts

As no structures or architectural heritage significance would be affected by the proposal there would be no residual impacts on architectural heritage.

Do-Nothing Scenario

In the event of a Do-Nothing Scenario there would be no adverse effect on architectural heritage. All protected structures considered in this study are outside the site of the proposed development and their future existence would not be affected by a decision to do nothing with the site. Such features as have been identified within the site would remain in place were no development to go ahead.

Difficulties encountered in compiling

The outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic occurred during the compilation of this report, limiting access to sites and to libraries and archives. However, an inspection of the site was carried out and the resources available were sufficient to allow the completion of the assessment and there were no significant consequences for the completion of the text.

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