

# This ole house is getting old so time for a change of plan

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SENATOR Paul Coghlan has asked that an important yet largely neglected Killarney building be restored and used as an arts venue for the area. Referring to Killarney House, the local senator has argued that the building be transferred to a public private partnership (PPP) if work on the government owned facility is delayed further and a performing theatre and audio visual centre for the National Park should be developed. Dating back to the Earls of Kenmare, the house stands silent almost 10 years after it was acquired by the state, in accordance with the will of former owners, American businessman John McShain and his wife. McShain sold the building to the environment department at well below market value on the assurance that the house and 52 acre estate would be incorporated into Killarney N

The house is currently the responsibility of the National Parks and Wildlife Service, part of the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government, which manages Killarney National Park.

In a renewed call to restore the local attraction, Senator Paul Coghlan has asked that it be transformed into an arts venue before it deteriorates further.

Environment Minister Dick Roche, though, has claimed that the necessary infrastructure work will cost up to ?5m. Minister Roche had previously met with Killarney Town Council in July 2005 and assured that he intended to retain and preserve the 'integrity and character' of Killarney House, both internally and externally.

"Something really beneficial and useful, not just for Killarney National Park, but for Kerry and the entire South West should be done with the house - even if it were to involve a public private partnership," Senator Coghlan told the Seanad last week.

Detailed specialist surveys commissioned by the Office of Public Works have made it clear that significant infrastructural works are required.

"If the Department is not prepared to advance matters then it should immediately consult with the local authorities in Kerry and other interests who could ensure, through a PPP, the provision of a proper arts venue that would

incorporate an audio visual facility for the National Park and a performing Arts Theatre. This could also facilitate large scale civic and other receptions,” the senator added.

“I find it incomprehensible that the Minister has refused to commit himself to any future works and no capital funding is presently provided. The longer the house is left to rot the more expensive it will be to restore it. The security risk increases and already some minor damage has been done.

“It has the potential to be a magnificent contribution to our tourism infrastructure and particularly cultural tourism. When the house was given to the state it was clearly envisaged that it would be restored as a visitor and information centre,” he added.

Most of the contents of the house have been acquired by the state, including furniture and art that dates back to the Earls of Kenmare.

The golden gates and railings of the house have been restored, a security system has been installed and heating pipes and radiators have already been upgraded while dampness prevention work has been carried out along with the provision of dehumidifiers following consultation with the OPW but work is currently at a standstill.

The lawns and garden, though, are regularly maintained and small maintenance jobs are carried out on the house.

“The cost of restoring Killarney House to its former glory continues to increase the longer the necessary work on its restoration and refurbishment is postponed and the annual cost of storing its valuable furniture is also increasing.

“It is a fine historic house for which elaborate plans were already outlined. The house continues to deteriorate and the structure is seriously weakened,” he added.



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