



## An Roinn Gnóthaí Eachtracha agus Trádála Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

Our Ref: FOI/Req 2020/77

7 May 2020

Dear Mr. Foxe,

I refer to the request which you have made under the Freedom of Information Act 2014 for access to records held by this Department, as follows:

*Under the FOI Act 2014, I am seeking the following:*

- a spreadsheet/table of all costs associated with the restoration of the roof at at the embassy in London.*
- copy of any inspection/condition report relating to the roof of the embassy in London.*
- if possible, an information note on the roof restoration project, including details on whether there have been cost overruns on the project.*

I refer also to the acknowledgement of your request, which was sent to you on 15<sup>th</sup> April 2020 and your subsequent reply on 15<sup>th</sup> April 2020.

There are two records, which fall within the scope of your request and subsequent agreement to limit the search to electronic record only. Record 1, the table of all costs associated with the restoration of the roof at the Embassy in London is attached. Record 2, an information note on the roof restoration project has been incorporated below.

The Embassy and Consulate network facilitates the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade to pursue its goals and policies on behalf of the State. The diplomatic network consists of offices and official accommodation in more than 90 locations worldwide, which provide platforms for our Missions to promote Ireland's political, economic and cultural interests and values, provide various services to our citizens including consular assistance, develop strategic stakeholder relationships and represent Ireland's interests in international organizations and with external stakeholders in a global arena.

The Department has a responsibility and duty of care to staff and visitors to all our buildings, and must ensure that there are adequate security provisions and that health and safety standards are met, as well as providing universal access facilities. The Department maintains an appropriate level of health, safety and security in all the buildings within our mission network, depending on each locations' unique circumstances and requirements.

## **Background on the Roof Restoration Project, at Embassy of Ireland London**

The Embassy in London is well located in London facilitating straightforward access by members of the Irish community, business and other groups. It is also located close to the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office and other British Government ministries. The building is used extensively for events to promote Ireland and engage with the business community and Irish diaspora. Over 90 official events, attended by a total of more than 9,500 guests, were held at the Embassy in 2019, ranging from large receptions, to business lunches, and meetings with external contacts and stakeholders.

The London roof restoration was a major, complex repair project necessitated by our lease obligations with the landlord. The Embassy has leased this premises for over 70 years, and is responsible for maintaining and repairing the building as required from time to time. The property is a grade 2 listed 19th century building, located in a central location in Belgravia. It provides office accommodation for around 50 staff; space for the hosting of official functions & meetings including those with members of the Irish community, political and business interlocutors; and includes frequent interaction and collaboration with Irish state agencies and business networks.

The roof of the Embassy building, being around 150 years old, although repaired periodically during our tenancy, required complete renovation, to make it fit for purpose, ensuring it remained watertight, and by extension to protect the inner fabric of the building, and was effectively replaced in full.

The works required detailed surveying, design by a team of professional and technical advisors, including architects, engineers, lead and stone work specialists, and safety consultants and approval from the landlords, followed by planning and listed building consent from Westminster City Council.

There were a number of challenges in terms of health and safety, maintenance, structural issues and the business requirement that the premises remain fully occupied, and operated “as normal” during the roof replacement, continuing to work in line with the business goals of the Department and to provide necessary services to members of the public.

In order for the roof repairs to be carried out in a safe manner in line with health & safety regulations, extensive scaffolding surrounded the building for more than 12 months. This also allowed a temporary roof to be erected, to protect the building and allow staff remain in situ for the full period of the repairs with no interruption to the normal work of the Embassy. The plans for the scaffolding and temporary roof required the input of experienced structural engineers. This approach reduced the overall cost of the project, as there was no necessity to acquire temporary office accommodation for the duration.

The roof comprises eleven different building conditions and complex heritage detailing. The permissions received from Westminster City Council included a number of strict conditions to be adhered to, and required that the work be carried out under the supervision of a heritage architect, and by a contractor with experience of complex works on listed buildings. In addition, it was required that all materials used were approved by Westminster City Council, including historical decorative lead-work, metalwork, stone condition, slates, etc. It was essential to ensure that the

building remain water-tight and that the project was conducted in line with all safety regulations for both contractors, and that the embassy could remain open and functional. As part of the renovation work, a number of other structural defects were remedied. This included repair and rebuilding works to a number of chimneys, which were found to be in danger of collapsing and had to be reconstructed, and removal of asbestos in the roof space.

The project to complete the necessary renovation works, was carried out over 24 months, including the complex design, consultation, and planning stage, and a period of approximately 12 months while the works were actually underway. The project was carefully managed from start to finish, by a team of professional project managers, architects and engineers. It met the health and safety criteria and local heritage specifications as set out by the local authority and building owners.

All expenditure, including that related to property maintenance, repair and/or refurbishment across the Department's property portfolio is conducted in line with our obligations under Government procurement regulations and guidelines. This includes adherence to public tendering and contracting rules, taking account of both national and EU Public Procurement thresholds.

**Right of Appeal**

Should you wish to appeal this decision, you may do so in writing to the Freedom of Information Unit, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 76-78 Harcourt Street, Dublin 2 or by email to [foi@dfa.ie](mailto:foi@dfa.ie). A fee applies for an appeal for access to non-personal information; the level of this fee has been set at €30. For methods of payment, please contact FOI Unit at [foi@dfa.ie](mailto:foi@dfa.ie), or 01-4082857. You should make your appeal within 4 weeks (20 working days) from the date of this notification. However, the making of a late appeal may be permitted in appropriate circumstances. The appeal will involve a complete reconsideration of the matter by a more senior member of the staff of this Department.

Yours sincerely

Kevin Carr