

“That Cork County Council would use the powers granted to it under Section 71 of the Local Government (Planning and Development) Act 2000 to take Vernon Mount (No. 00480 in the Record of Protected Structures) into public ownership.

That in thus acting in accordance within its statutory powers to respond to its commitment in HE 4-1 of the County Development Plan, Cork County Council would be mindful that:

- 1. Since 1997, the owners of Vernon Mount have failed on an ongoing basis to uphold their responsibility under Section 58 of the Local Government (Planning and Development) Act 2000**
- 2. The cost of the works to the roof of Vernon Mount carried out by Cork County Council in 2010 and in 2012 was to be reimbursed by the owners to Cork County Council in the event of damage befalling the house.”**

Vernon Mount was described by the Irish Georgian Society as arguably the finest example of a Neoclassical suburban villa to survive in the country. Its interiors were decorated with paintings by the late 18th century, Nathaniel Grogan. Its social heritage was intertwined with that of Cork. Had this motion been heard when it was scheduled, on 24th July, it would have been one year to the day when Vernon Mount was gutted by fire.

The battle to save Vernon Mount was a race against time and those concerned about the house had seen something like this fire coming for a long time. Purchased as a development opportunity in 1997, the house had been boarded up and abandoned since a failed planning application. Ongoing lack of maintenance saw the house deteriorate until in 2008, it was identified on the World Monuments Watch List of Most Endangered Buildings. There were holes in its roof, its gutters and downpipes were broken and the windows throughout the house were smashed. Requests from the Crawford Art Gallery and the Irish Georgian Society to the owner to permit the Grogan paintings to be removed and restored fell on deaf ears. Cork County Council received assistance from the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht to replace the roof in both 2012 and 2014. There was no input from the owners. Locals knew security measures at the house were ineffective. In June of last year, they knew timber was being stockpiled inside. Despite local photographic evidence to the contrary, the owners claimed security was adequate. The house burned.

The frustration is that there are provisions within the Planning & Development Act 2000 to protect irreplaceable buildings like Vernon Mount. An owner of a building on the Record of Protected Structures is legally obliged to prevent that building’s deterioration. In September 2016, I asked that Cork County Council would, using one of those legal provisions, pursue the owners of Vernon Mount for 19 years of failure to uphold their responsibilities to this massive piece of Cork heritage. My motion received broad support but in the full year that has followed, there hasn’t been one word of feedback on the legal advice the Chief Executive indicated would first be necessary.

I am now asking that Cork County Council would do something the Irish Georgian Society, An Taisce and the Grange-Frankfield Partnership have asked long since: to use its powers of CPO and take Vernon Mount into public ownership. Despite the loss of the paintings and the extensive fire damage to the house, it has been confirmed as still being architecturally and socially valuable. It is in a landmark location, visible for miles. It could form a key component of the Tramore Valley amenity space planned between City and County. A condition of the County Council’s repairing the roof was that should damage befall the building, the cost of repair would be reimbursed.

This could assist in offsetting the cost of CPO. Successful prosecution of the owners could further reduce that cost.

For the past 12 months, the burned shell of Vernon Mount on the slopes of the South Cork hills has cruelly epitomised decades of societal, heritage and legal neglect. I am asking for your support for Cork County Council to finally put that right by taking the relic of this magnificent building into public ownership.

Hayes contrived to live in considerable luxury overlooking Sydney harbour where he built Vaucluse House, later to become the home of the distinguished Irish-Australian politician W.C. Wentworth, who remodeled the house. Vaucluse would later become the first property of the Australian Historic Houses Trust. This Australian connection makes Vernon Mount of particular Irish-Australian interest

“That Cork County Council would identify

- **the details of notices served under Section 59 of the Planning & Development Act 2000 on the owners of Vernon Mount since 1997,**
- **the dates on which such notices were served,**
- **any works undertaken by the owners in response to those notices**

and that Cork County Council would pursue the owners of Vernon Mount (No. 00480 in the Record of Protected Structures) for prosecution under Section 58 of the Local Government (Planning & Development) Act 2000.”