

Property Plus

The Sunday Business Post

June 4, 2017
businesspost.ie

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Dublin Airport Central takes off page 10

PROPERTY EDITOR TINA-MARIE O'NEILL



GIVE YOUR HOME A 'PLACELIFT'



Gardens, halls and kitchens are just some of the areas Placelift has transformed, with projects generally lasting up to three weeks



Clodagh Doyle, founder of Placelift, says a balanced approach is key to all projects

What's the best way to revive your vacant property for the housing market? Read on...



Tina-Marie O'Neill
Property Editor

The number of vacant homes in Ireland varies between about 180,000 and almost 200,000, depending on whether or not holiday homes are included. Either way, about 10 per cent of the total housing stock lies empty for myriad reasons and in various states of deterioration.

It's no surprise, then, that with supply under such pressure, the government is expected to propose new initiatives aimed at bringing vacant housing back into stock and encouraging owners to refurbish vacant properties for sale or rent.

Still, transforming a property for sale or letting can be challenging. Clodagh Doyle established her specialist property renovation firm, Placelift, in 2013. Based in Wicklow, she offers her services in that county, in the greater Dublin area and Co Kildare.

"Understandably, potential buyers or tenants are often put off by a property that has not been lived in for some time, especially if it feels damp and in need of basic repairs," she said. "There are a number of steps that owners can take, however, to help revive an empty property in preparation for sale or rent."

According to Doyle, properties can lie idle for a whole variety of reasons, from legal or financial ones to emotional ones. In some cases, such as an executor property, it can be difficult for families to know where to start.

"In our experience, executor sales are the main reason for homes being left

vacant. Other reasons why properties become vacant include parents or relations moving into nursing homes, people living and working abroad, and landlords who are time-poor and have not got around to upgrading their property after a long tenancy. In each case, given the current market, people are losing out on potential income."

Doyle set up Placelift with her husband, Ivan, who had his own building company before the recession hit. The aptly-named company has a core team of three, including the couple and a full-time plasterer/painter. Every job differs, and Doyle has an ad hoc team of plumbers, electricians, carpenters and suppliers which she has built up over the past four years. What started off as renovating for selling or letting has evolved into four key services, which also includes a personalised bespoke service for people moving into or renovating a property.

"Apart from gardens getting out of hand, one of the biggest issues we see in vacant buildings is a build-up of condensation and mould, which creates a musty

smell that is off-putting, hard to get rid of, and often confused with dampness," said Doyle.

"Vacant buildings are also more expensive to insure, are open to vandalism, and can lower the value of the homes in the immediate area."

"Transforming a property is not always about a big spend; it's about spending wisely and knowing where to put the available funds. That's where we come in."

"In one project, we exchanged dark slate floor tiles in the open-plan kitchen/living/dining area for white porcelain tiles and painted the brick fireplace white, which completely transformed the look of the place. In another property, an executor sale in which there was a very small budget, we painted and retiled the kitchen area, painted the hall, the bedrooms and installed carpet in the bedrooms - all relatively small improvements which had an overall transformative effect."

The average duration of a project is between two and a half weeks and three weeks, which can include filling skips for clearance to handling shoe bags to the agent for viewings.

"Every project and budget requires a balanced approach," said Doyle. "There is no point in creating a lovely kitchen and living-room while leaving bathrooms and bedrooms in poor condition upstairs."

"Usually, the cost of a renovation will be between five and 10 per cent of the market value to bring it up to a great standard. Not everyone has that, and some are reluctant to spend it; but for those selling, the results are a faster sale and a higher price than you would get if you did nothing. People often ask if they will get their money back if they spend it. For us, the answer is obvious, but people sometimes need to be convinced."

Doyle's website, Placelift.ie, has an impressive portfolio of "before and after" examples of the company's previous commissions, details about each project, as well as the type and duration of each.

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“Transforming a property is about spending wisely and knowing where to put the available funds”



With new tiles, this room was transformed into a bright and airy living space and kitchen



33
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Apple Tree House gardens have lawns trailing down to the shore

HOUSE OF THE WEEK



The living room offers stunning views across Lough Swilly

A retreat on the shores of Lough Swilly

BY CATHERINE HEALY

Lough Swilly in Donegal is a sea inlet with a long and storied history. It's from here, 410 years ago, that the Earls of Tyrone and Tyrconnell – two of the most powerful Gaelic leaders of the time – fled to exile in mainland Europe as the British tightened their grip on the Irish Catholic aristocracy. And it's on these waters, in 1798, during the United Irishmen rebellion, that the revolutionary Wolfe Tone was captured aboard a French fleet.

On the western shores of the lough is Apple Tree House, a waterside retreat set on two acres of gardens in the Gortlugh townland of Rathmullan. Built in the 1980s, the split-level house has panoramic sea views and direct access to a sandy beach. It was fully renovated and extended by its current owners in 2006, and today spans 374 square metres.

The property, which is on the market for €1.25 million through



Floor-to-ceiling windows in the dining room

Savills, opens into an entrance hall on the upper floor. A focal point on this level is the large living room and kitchen, which has a vaulted ceiling, a centre island and oil-fired Aga, with double doors leading to a sheltered terrace. There are floor-to-ceiling windows here and in

both the drawing room and dining room, which connects to a wrap-around balcony.

A utility room off the hallway is plumbed for a washing machine and dryer, and has a sink and built-in storage cupboards. The master bedroom – with two

walk-in wardrobes and an en suite, which has two sinks and a double shower – is also found on this floor, along with a main bathroom and two more bedrooms, one with en suite. Downstairs, there's a sun-room, games room and library with built-in shelving. Another en-suite

bedroom on the ground level has French doors out to the patio. A raised, glass gazebo is a highlight outside, offering 360-degree views. The gardens have lawns trailing down to the shore, as well as a variety of specimen trees, flower beds, vegetable patches and

stone pathways, and a large pond with its own island and bridge. Beside the house is a solid oak, two-storey workshop designed by the British-based Roderick James Architects.

The 138-square-metre building has wiring and plumbing, and

could be converted into guest accommodation with the appropriate planning permission.

The house, which has a BER rating of B3, lies two kilometres from the seaside village of Rathmullan on the Fanad peninsula. The area is home to a good selection of pubs and restaurants, most notably the four-star Rathmullan Country House.

A popular spot for wildlife-watching, Lough Swilly is home to dolphins, porpoise, swans and migratory geese. The inlet also holds a number of shipwrecks, including the SS Laurentic, which went down after hitting a German mine in 1917, claiming more than 350 lives. The ship was carrying over 3,000 bars of gold when it sunk, and 22 still lie on the bed of the lough.

Amenities in the wider vicinity include Glenveagh National Park and Rosapenna Links Golf Club, both of which can be reached in about 40 minutes by car. Ramelton and Milford are a 20-minute drive away. Viewing is by appointment. For further information, contact the agent at 01-6634350.



The Chauffeur's Lodge has its own front garden and two car-park spaces

Chauffeur's Lodge at Mount Juliet drives €500k asking price

BY TINA-MARIE O'NEILL

Joint agents Hooke & MacDonald and Goffs Property are handling the sale of The Chauffeur's Lodge in Mount Juliet, Co Kilkenny, with an asking price of €500,000.

The whitewashed double-fronted lodge is located beside the Manor House Hotel at the centre of this serene and pristinely kept estate and renowned golf club in Thomastown. Its location means the lodge is within a short walk of the clubhouse, the leisure centre, the hotel and the resort's restaurants.

Despite its old world charm, the two-storey lodge has been extensively refurbished and modernised and comes to the

market in turnkey condition. The house comprises an entrance hall; a living room with timber floors, timber panelled ceilings and a stove fireplace with a modern fire surround; a fitted kitchen with modern Shaker-style cream units, integrated appliances and a dining room, an adjoining utility room with additional fitted units and a sink, a cloakroom with a washhand basin and WC, two double bedrooms, each en suite and each with fitted wardrobes. Outside, the house proper has its own front garden and two car-park spaces.

Impressive Georgian mansion that houses a Michelin Star restaurant.

Set along the banks of the River Nore, the estate also has an 18-hole Jack Nicklaus-designed championship golf course and clubhouse. The resort is located about 1.5 kilometres northwest of the N9 Dublin-Waterford Road, about 2 kilometres from Thomastown mainline train station, some 3 kilometres west of Thomastown, 16 kilometres south east of Kilkenny city, 48 kilometres north of Waterford city and 120 kilometres south west of Dublin.

The Chauffeur's Lodge is on view by appointment with Hooke & MacDonald at 01-6318402 or Goffs Property at 045-961048.



The master bedroom at the Chauffeur's Lodge



The living room with timber floors and timber panelled ceilings

Adding value to your property with a 'placelift'

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Clodagh Doyle's top tips to maximise the value of a vacant property

Budget
Regardless of the condition of an empty property, the aim is to present it in such a way that

buyers can clearly visualise its full potential. While some properties require a complete renovation, others can benefit from some simple repairs and TLC.

Start with a concise to-do list and set yourself a budget for the project, including a contingency fund. A good guideline is 15 per cent of the estimated cost. It is also worth checking if your vacant property could qualify for a government loan to help with

repairs.

First impressions

There is no better place to start than standing on the street and taking an objective look at your vacant property. Most prospective buyers or tenants will form their first impression within seconds. Make sure it is a positive one by painting the exterior, including the front door. Polish and shine the door accessories, clear and clean the gutters and make your property look loved!

Gardens

Tidy the gardens, front and rear, trimming hedges and shrubs. Introduce some seasonal colourful plants and garden furniture, if feasible. Power-wash all paths, patios and driveways. Decking, fencing and side gates can be revived by staining.

Clearance

Less is more when it comes to furniture. Remove as much as



Wardrobes - before Placelift

you can from the entire property, ensuring that it is clutter-free. If you are planning to leave a certain amount of furniture in situ, go the extra mile to dress these areas. It will greatly enhance the marketing photographs and the overall viewing experience.

Deep-clean

Vacant properties can tend to smell damp and musty, due to moisture and lack of air circulation. Air out the entire prop-



Wardrobes - after Placelift

erty, and immediately tackle any damp or mould issues. Expect potential viewers to look everywhere!

Clean inside wardrobes, kitchen cabinets, oven and fridge, along with all flooring. Windows should sparkle inside and out.

Bathrooms and kitchens should be as pristine and inviting as possible. A professional cleaning company is the best option, budget permitting.

difference to the overall aesthetics, without breaking the bank.

Choose inviting, warm neutral tones for the walls, and plump for crisp fresh whites for the ceilings and woodwork.

Focus

If you are trying to balance the budget, concentrating on some key areas can help to focus both your to-do list and your bank balance. A new kitchen, bathroom, central heating, carpets and re-decoration can quickly transform a dark and decrepit no-show house into a stunning turnkey home.

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