



U2 star to raze €1m house, all for a sea view

■ Colin Coyle

LARRY MULLEN wants to tear down a €1m house he owns in Howth, Co Dublin, because it is obstructing the view from his coastal home.

The U2 drummer has applied for planning permission to demolish Ros Mor, a two-storey, six-bedroom house adjacent to his main home, Claremont Lodge. Once the 1,900sq ft property has been razed it will open the way for him to add a large conservatory with unobstructed views of the coast.

Mullen bought Ros Mor at the same time as Claremont Lodge and the house now sits within the main house's boundary, protected by an imposing wall and CCTV security. An application to demolish the two-storey house was lodged with Fingal county council on Christmas Eve in the name of Mullen's long-term girlfriend, Ann Acheson. Architects Douglas Wallace have been hired to oversee the project.

Mullen has lived in the sprawling property on Claremont Road in Howth for almost 20 years with Acheson and their three children. If his application is approved, he will add a series of extensions, including a 750sq ft conservatory, and a first-floor office and bedroom, to take advantage of panoramic sea views. The house is one of the few in Howth with direct access to the strand. It also has a gym, playroom, office and several en suite bedrooms.

The council's development plan discourages the demolition

of habitable houses, but Mullen says in his planning application that Ros Mor is of little architectural merit. It would be worth in the region of €1m if it came on the market.

Money is not really an object for Mullen. His band are worth an estimated €738m, according to the latest Sunday Times Rich List. The members moved some of their operations to Holland, which does not tax music royalties, after the Department of Finance put a cap on the artists' exemption scheme.

Nor is he the first Irish celebrity to decide that a house is worth more in rubble than in one piece. In 2004 Norma Smurfit, the former wife of millionaire businessman Michael Smurfit, bought a €2.27m house in Mount Merrion and was allowed to flatten it and replace it with a more modern home.

Denis O'Brien, the telecoms billionaire, recently requested permission to bulldoze Belmont, a 100-year-old, 7,850sq ft house on Shrewsbury Road that he had bought months earlier for €35m. He wants to replace it with a 22,000sq ft "eco-friendly" mansion. An Bord Pleanála is adjudicating on his proposals.

The most expensive house ever bought in Ireland, Walford on Shrewsbury Road at €55m, also faced the wrecking ball last year, but won a reprieve when planners ruled the house "contributed to the character and identity" of Ireland's most coveted avenue.

Mullen has bought up neighbouring properties in Howth. His motive appears to be to ensure his main residence is not

overlooked. In 2000 he paid €1m — €320,000 more than the asking price — for Strand Lodge, another adjoining house.

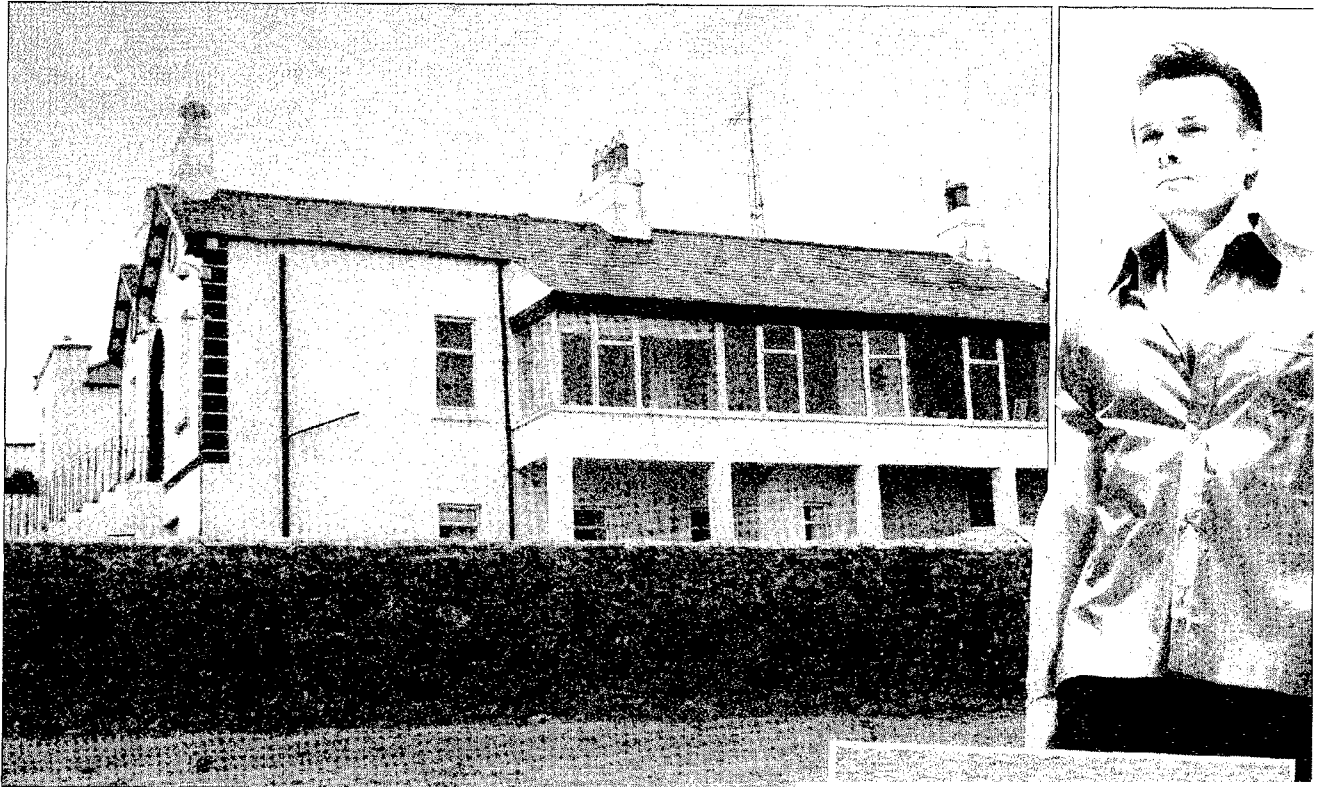
The Artane-born musician also objected to the transformation of the nearby Howth Lodge hotel into an apartment development in the mid-1990s. It was eventually given the go-ahead by the planning appeals board.

The drummer is the only member of U2 still to live on the north-side of Dublin, where the band originated. His neighbours on Claremont Road include Emily O'Reilly, the ombudsman.

Other residents of Howth, a fishing village that has become a magnet for reclusive stars, include Dolores O'Riordan, the singer, and Moya Doherty and John McColgan, the creators of Riverdance. Gay Byrne, its most enduring celebrity, said recently that he was considering swapping his home of 38 years for a city-centre apartment.

Mullen's bandmates in U2 have also had problems with Dublin planning officials. Bono was criticised by An Taisce for seeking to cut down 20-year-old trees at his Dalkey home to make room for two sheds, one for use as a studio. A decision on his application should be made in the coming weeks.

¶ **The property is one of a few in Howth with direct access to the strand** ¶



Mullen, above right, says in his application that Ros Mor in Howth is of little architectural merit



The musician and his family want to enjoy the coastal views