



Planning Ref: FP2024-006

(Please quote in all related correspondence)

30 January 2024

Westmeath County Council
County Buildings,
Mount Street,
Mullingar
County Westmeath

Via email:

Re: Notification under Article 28 (Part 4) or Article 82 (Part 8) of the Planning and Development Regulations, 2001, as amended.

Proposed Development: Athlone Joint Urban Area Plan 2024-2030 Notification of Strategic Issues Paper.

A chara

I refer to correspondence received in connection with the above. Outlined below are heritage-related observations/recommendations co-ordinated by the Development Applications Unit under the stated headings.

Built Heritage

The Department refer to the correspondence in relation to the '*Athlone Joint Urban Area Plan (JUAP) 2024-2030 - Strategic Issues Paper*'. This Department welcomes the opportunity to contribute in the early stages of the plan making process.

In preparation of a response, this Department has reviewed and had regard to the following plans:

1. Westmeath County Development Plan 2021-2027.
2. Roscommon County Development Plan 2022-2028.
3. Athlone Town Development Plan 2014-2020.

Athlone has a rich built and archaeological environment. This is reflected in the presence of 233 Protected Structures and 9 Architectural Conservation Areas within the administrative boundary. The built heritage is safeguarded, managed and enhanced,



through a robust and integrated policy and development management framework as evidenced in the above plans.

For what pertains specifically to the '*Athlone Joint Urban Area Plan (JUAP) 2024-2030 - Strategic Issues Paper*' this Department has the following high level observations and remains available for further and more detailed consultation as the statutory process continues:

Statutory Guidelines & National Advice Series

'*Architectural Heritage Protection: Guidelines for Planning Authorities*' have been issued under Section 28 and 52 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended), and are available here¹ for consultation. These guidelines are a practical guide for planning authorities and for all others who must comply with Part IV of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) on the protection of the architectural heritage.

The Department has also produced a user-friendly Advice Series. These publications address a variety of technical topics relating to the built heritage. Topics of particular relevance to planning authorities may include energy efficiency, universal access and the conservation of historic ground surfaces. A full schedule of the publication titles and a link are available in Appendix 1 of this document.

Appropriate Title/Headings/Use of Phrases:

In general, it is important to ensure a consistent set of terms and phrases are adopted, explained and applied throughout statutory plan/s. The interchangeable use of terms and phrases such as architectural heritage, built heritage, cultural heritage and built historic environment can cause confusion for the end user. The Athlone JUAP should adopt a preferred term and ensure it is applied consistently throughout the plan as whole.

Built Heritage Order within Plan:

It is noted that in the case of 'Athlone Town Development Plan 2014-2020' and *Athlone Joint Urban Area Plan (JUAP) 2024-2030 - Strategic Issues Paper*, built heritage is dealt with in a standalone 'Heritage Chapter'. This is considered appropriate, it would however be beneficial to consider grouping areas such built heritage, place-making, town regeneration, urban regeneration or similar in progressive order within the plan.

As these areas will have overlapping elements in terms of policies and objectives as well as development management standards, grouping them together will enable users and specifically non- technical users to fully understand the comprehensive requirements in

¹ <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/0937a-architectural-heritage-protection-guidelines-for-planning-authorities/>



respect of town centres, architectural conservation areas, protected structures and design standards for public spaces, streets, etc and how they relate to each other.

Policy and Objective Cohesion:

It is vital to ensure that policies and objectives relating to the architectural/built heritage align with and support overlapping land use policies and objectives. This is of particular importance in regeneration areas/individual regeneration sites/opportunity sites/action plans or similar. Conflicting or unclear policies and objectives introduces varying levels of uncertainty which may disrupt the successful delivery of necessary and well-intended projects.

It is therefore recommended that an assessment is undertaken to ensure cohesion between overlapping policies and objectives relating to architectural/built heritage and specified land uses. It is recommended zoning and land use descriptions/action plan objectives/town first policies/place-making objectives or similar make reference to the presence of protected structures and/or architectural conservation area designations as well as corresponding objectives and development management standards where relevant to a site.

Both the *Westmeath County Development Plan 2021-2027* and the *Athlone Town Development Plan 2014-2020*, have effectively integrated built heritage into other relevant policy areas such as place-making, urban regeneration, tourism and rural housing to highlight a representative example. It is considered that this is a very proactive approach and such integration guarantees a cohesive and holistic approach to delivering innovative and optimal solutions to current national environmental, economic and societal challenges. The JUAP will hugely benefit in applying and further developing this process.

Policies, Objectives and Development Standards Consistency:

Westmeath County Development Plan 2021-2027 has detailed policies, objectives and development standards relating to built heritage, most notably; CPO 14.26 – 14.57, outlined in Chapter 14, Cultural Heritage and development standards CPO 16.5-16.9, CPO 16.28, and CPO 16.59 in Chapter 16 Development Management Standards.

It is recommended that these policies, objectives and development management standards are brought forward into and appropriately referenced in the JUAP. This will ensure an alignment with the County Development Plan as well as a consistency in the nature and application of built heritage policies, objectives and development management standards in area based plans.

Architectural Conservation Area Character Statements and Supporting Maps:



It is noted that Section 14.8, (pg. 422) of Westmeath County Development Plan states that

'Statements of Character will be prepared for the ACAs in Athlone and Mullingar and will inform the respective Urban Area Plan for Athlone and the Local Area Plan for Mullingar. The Statements of Character identify the special character of each individual ACA'.

This Department supports the action to carry out Statements of Character for the 9 Architectural Conservation Areas within the JUAP boundary.

Statements of Character are an effective tool in assessing the historic environment, understanding its unique and authentic character and the significance and value of the same. This in turn helps to inform and direct frameworks, policies and strategies for the delivery of other essential services such as public realm schemes, strategic infrastructure, addressing dereliction and vacancy, urban and rural regeneration and integrated land use solutions.

It is recommended that suitably qualified persons are involved in the preparation of the Statements of Character. For local authorities with Architectural Conservation Officers or similar such staff, they will be ideally placed to provide the necessary technical advice, policy analysis and development and operate in a collaborative manner to the benefit of the organisation. Where a Local Authority does not have in house expertise and/or capacity, they may need to seek the appointment of suitably qualified and experienced conservation consultants.

Resources:

There are a number of architectural heritage resources and grants available to local authorities which are in Appendix 1 of this correspondence.

You are requested to send any further communications to this Department's Development Applications Unit (DAU) at manager.dau@npws.gov.ie where used, or to the following address:

The Manager, Development Applications Unit (DAU), Government Offices,
Newtown Road, Wexford, Y35 AP90

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Simon Dolan
Development Applications Unit
Administration



Appendix One: Useful Resources

Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage Publications.

1. Architectural Heritage Protection Guidelines for Planning Authorities- [Resources - Buildings of Ireland](#)
2. A Living Tradition: A Strategy to Enhance the Understanding, Minding, and Handing on of Our Built Vernacular Heritage - [Search Vernacular & Thatch Building Surveys - Buildings of Ireland](#)
3. Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage **Advice Series - Resources - Buildings of Ireland**
 - Maintenance: A Guide to the Care of Older Buildings.
 - Windows: A Guide to the Repair of Historic Windows.
 - Roofs: A Guide to the Repair of Historic Roofs.
 - Thatch: A Guide to the Repair of Thatched Roofs.
 - Energy Efficiency in Traditional Buildings.
 - Bricks: A Guide to the Repair of Historic Brickwork.
 - Ironwork: The Repair of Wrought and Cast Iron Works.
 - Paving: The Conservation of Historic Ground Surfaces.
 - Access: Improving the Accessibility of Historic Building and Places.
 - Ruins: The Conservation and Repair of Masonry Ruins.
 - Disaster: A Guide to Prevention and Preparedness in the Historic Built Environment.
 - Places of Worship: The Conservation of Places of Worship.
4. Caring for our Vernacular Heritage- [Search Vernacular & Thatch Building Surveys - Buildings of Ireland](#)
5. Fire Safety in Thatched Properties - [Search Vernacular & Thatch Building Surveys - Buildings of Ireland](#)
6. **National Inventory of the Architectural Heritage (NIAH)-** www.buildingsofireland.ie. The National Inventory of Architectural Heritage (NIAH) is a state initiative under the administration of the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.

The purpose of the NIAH is to identify, record, and evaluate the post-1700 architectural heritage of Ireland, uniformly and consistently as an aid in the protection and conservation of the built heritage. The published surveys are a source of information on the selected structures for relevant local authorities. They are also an educational and research



resource. It is hoped that the work of the NIAH will increase public awareness and appreciation of Ireland's architectural heritage.

7. **Built Heritage and Climate Action** Information Page and Resources: [gov.ie](http://www.gov.ie) - [Built and Archaeological Heritage Climate Action \(www.gov.ie\)](http://www.gov.ie)



Grant Information

1. **Built Heritage Investment Scheme (BHIS):** Provides grants of up to €15,000 to individual owners for small-scale works to repair and preserve their historic properties. This is administrated through each local authority. ([gov.ie - Minister Noonan launches €9 million in funding for 2024 built heritage schemes](#) ([www.gov.ie](#)))
2. **Historic Structure Fund (HSF):** The Historic Structures Fund will offer up to €200,000 for projects that deliver a major community benefit. It also offers funding for vernacular structures and for historic shopfronts. The Historic Shopfront Stream provides funding for the refurbishment and conservation historic shop facades to safeguard these distinctive features of our towns, villages, and cities. The Vernacular Stream provides funding for conservation repairs and small capital works to vernacular structures that are not listed in the local authority Record of Protected Structures. ([gov.ie - Minister Noonan launches €9 million in funding for 2024 built heritage schemes](#) ([www.gov.ie](#)))
3. **Community Monuments Fund (CMF) -** The Community Monuments Fund invests in archaeological heritage and helps owners and custodians of archaeological monuments to safeguard them into the future for the benefit of communities and the public. This is administrated through each local authority - [gov.ie - Community Monuments Fund 2024 - Call for Projects](#) ([www.gov.ie](#))
4. **The Heritage Council Historic Towns Initiative -** An initiative to promote heritage-led regeneration and to improve the quality of our historic towns and villages for residents and tourist- [Historic Towns Initiative | The Heritage Council](#)
5. **Urban Regeneration and Development Fund (URDF):** The Urban Regeneration and Development Fund (URDF) aims to deliver more compact and sustainable development, as envisaged under Project Ireland 2040. It does this by part-funding regeneration and rejuvenation projects in Ireland's five cities and other large towns - [gov.ie - Urban Regeneration and Development Fund \(URDF\)](#) ([www.gov.ie](#))
6. **Rural Regeneration and Development Fund:** The Fund seeks to provide investment to support rural renewal, strengthen and build resilience in rural communities and assist in the regeneration of towns and villages with a population



of less than 10,000, and outlying areas - [gov.ie - Rural Regeneration and Development Fund \(www.gov.ie\)](#)

7. **Vacant Property Refurbishment Grants** – There are a number of grant schemes available that relate to the refurbishment of vacant or derelict properties. The particulars of the relevant schemes are available at the following link - [gov.ie - Refurbishing Vacant Property - All Supports \(www.gov.ie\)](#)

8. **Town and Village Renewal Scheme:** own and Village Renewal Scheme (TVRS) supports the revitalisation of rural Ireland through a renewed focus on town centre economic and social vibrancy and regeneration, including tackling vacancy and dereliction in towns and villages. The scheme is administered through the local authorities, who are required to work closely with local communities and local businesses to develop and implement proposals that can make a lasting impact in revitalising rural towns and villages across the country -[gov.ie - Minister Humphreys announces investment of over €4.5 Million to tackle Dereliction and Vacancy in Rural Towns and Villages \(www.gov.ie\)](#)