

Chapter 12 Built Heritage

12.0 Aim

To conserve, protect and enhance the built heritage of Birr where possible. To strike a reasonable balance between conservation and development objectives in the interests of the proper planning and sustainable development and continue to protect, conserve and enhance buildings, areas, structures, sites and features of special architectural, historical, archaeological, artistic, cultural, scientific, social or technical interest.

12.1 Context

“Built heritage” is the term used to describe buildings, places and sites which have acquired through time special interest and values and as such, warrant protection and preservation, where feasible. It is our duty within society to try and pass on this heritage to future generations, whilst encouraging reuse as one of the best possible ways to ensure the survival of our heritage.

Birr town is an early monastic site and was designated a “Georgian Heritage Town” by Bord Fáilte (now Fáilte Ireland), in 1994. The history of Birr town and its environs (including Crinkle), is still represented today in its buildings and structures that have been preserved and protected under previous development plans. The protection of this proud history, through the protection of the character of these buildings, is important to the culture of the people of Birr and their related tourism industry.

12.1.1 National Monuments Acts

The National Monuments Acts 1930 – 2004 provide for the protection of archaeological heritage. The Record of Monuments and Places (RMP) was established under Section 12 of the National Monuments (Amendment) Act 1994 and structures, features, objects or sites listed in this Record are known as Recorded Monuments. As well as extending protection to all known sites, the National Monuments Acts 1930 – 2004 extends protection to all previously unknown archaeological items and sites that are uncovered through ground disturbance or the accidental discovery of sites located underwater. Where necessary, the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government will issue preservation orders to ensure protection is afforded to sites believed to be under threat (refer to www.archaeology.ie).

12.1.2 Framework and Principles for the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage 1999

This document sets out the broad principles for the protection of the archaeological heritage of Ireland. Under section 12.3 of the National Monuments (Amendment) Act 1994, a person proposing to carry out works at or close to a Recorded Monument is obliged to give notice of such intention to the Minister. The Councils must ensure that development, either above or below ground within the vicinity of a site of archaeological interest, will not be detrimental to the character of the archaeological site of its setting.

12.1.3 Architectural Heritage Protection Guidelines 2004

Architectural Heritage Protection Guidelines, published by the DoEHLG in 2004 give guidance to Planning Authorities on the application of Part IV of the Planning and Development Act 2000, and deal with Protected Structures and Architectural Conservation Areas in considerable detail.

12.1.4 National Heritage Plan 2002

A key objective of the National Heritage Plan (2002) seeks to “place heritage at the heart of public life”. The plan recognises that heritage is communal and we all share a responsibility to protect it. Protection of heritage must begin at local level enabling everybody to become actively involved in preserving and enhancing the heritage of Birr.

12.1.5 Offaly Heritage Plan 2007-2011

The Offaly Heritage Plan is the second Heritage Plan to be prepared and published for the County and it outlines a five-year, specific action plan of work to be carried out in County Offaly. Offaly Heritage Forum will oversee the plan with programme delivery being co-ordinated by the Offaly Heritage Office. Actions for Birr include awareness programmes on

the built heritage and survey work on vernacular buildings of interest. The Councils will continue to work with the Heritage Forum in relation to achieving its targets over this Development Plan period.

12.2 Strategy

12.2.1 Architectural Conservation

Birr is a designated “Georgian Heritage Town” because of its unique and largely intact architectural character and setting. Birr town’s built environment is characterised by a compact historic core, but also by wide streets, defined squares and tree lined walks. It contains many fine buildings and terraces dating from the 18th and 19th Centuries. It is essential that any renewal or new development should respect and compliment this character. The overall policy of the Councils will be based on maintaining the character and attractiveness of Birr by carefully controlling development, in particular, in the town centre and within Crinkle village.

12.2.1.1 New Development

The Councils will encourage contemporary development, higher density and/or mixed-use development, where the applicant can successfully demonstrate that any proposal will not negatively detract from the character of the existing built environment.

12.2.1.2 Protected Structures

Section 51 (1) of the Planning and Development Acts 2000-2009 states the Planning Authority’s obligation in relation to structures that are worthy of protection:

“For the purpose of protecting structures, or parts of structures, which form part of the architectural heritage and which are of special architectural, historical, archaeological, artistic, cultural, scientific, social or technical interest, every development plan shall include a record of protected structures, and shall include in that record every structure which is, in the opinion of the planning authority, of such interest within its functional area”.

An inventory of structures of architectural heritage was produced for Offaly in 2006 as part of the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage (NIAH) by the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government (DoEHLG). The survey included Birr town and environs. The Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government has made recommendations for 298 structures in the Town Council boundary¹ to be listed as Protected Structures. The Town Development Plan 2004-2010 contained 242 Protected Structures listed within the town boundary. There is a strong overlap of Protected Structures on the 2004-2010 list with structures proposed by the Minister. Therefore, there is not a substantial increase to the list of Protected Structures under this plan.

It is an objective of this plan to protect all structures within the Birr Town Record of Protected Structures (RPS) which are of special architectural, historical, archaeological, artistic, cultural, scientific, social or technical interest. The Birr Town RPS accompanies this plan.

12.2.1.3 Alterations/Extension of Protected Structures

The Councils will ensure that the alterations or extensions to protected buildings and structures will only be permitted if the proposals are in keeping with the character of the building and preserve the architectural and historic features of the building or structure. The Planning and Development Act, 2000 removes exempted development rights where works to a Protected Structure will materially affect the character of the structure. Planning Permission will be required where such works are proposed.

Section 2(1) of the Act states that a Protected Structure can include the interior, its curtilage and any fixtures or fittings which form part of the interior or exterior. Where a structure is protected by its inclusion within the Record of Protected Structures, planning permission is required for any alteration internally or externally, which affects its character. Works which particularly affect the character of Protected Structures include the removal of original render and replacement of

¹ A copy of the Protected Structures for Birr environs, which is under the remit of the County Development Plan 2009-2015 and therefore adopted under the County Record of Protected Structures, are included for identification purposes in the Birr Town Record of Protected Structures.

original windows. The insertion of windows constructed of non-sustainable materials, such as PVC, has a detrimental effect on the visual appearance and historic integrity of Protected Structures and will not be permitted.

Protected Structure status automatically includes the curtilage of the structure listed. As stated in the Architectural Heritage Protection Guidelines 2004: "Protected Structure includes the land lying within the curtilage of the Protected Structure and any other structures within that curtilage and their interiors".

Owners or occupiers may seek a declaration from the Councils as to the type of work, which the Councils consider would not materially affect the character of the structure. Owners or occupiers are encouraged to consult with the Councils in good time as to the appropriateness of proposed works and, as necessary, to seek competent advice on the best practice for carrying out such works.

12.2.1.4 Change of Use of Protected Structures

The Councils will favourably consider the change of use of any building listed for protection provided such a change of use does not seriously impact on its intrinsic character.

12.2.1.5 Demolition of Protected Structures

There is a presumption against the demolition of Protected Structures. Planning permission is necessary to demolish a Protected Structure and this presumption exists within the context of any application for planning permission for any Protected Structure and is governed by Section 57 (10)(b) of the 2000 Act. The Councils will strongly resist the demolition of any buildings or structures listed for protection, unless the Councils is satisfied that exceptional circumstances exist.

12.2.1.6 Architectural Conservation Areas

Architectural Conservation Areas (ACA's) comprise a place, an area, streetscape, or group of structures or part of a townscape, which is of special architectural, historical, archaeological, artistic, cultural, scientific, social or technical interest or contributes to the appreciation of Protected Structures. It may or may not include Protected Structures. Such areas can be identified as ACA's within the Development Plan and objectives included to protect their character. The Councils will examine the need to designate areas as ACA's during the period of this plan with particular attention given to historic core area of Birr.

12.2.1.7 Vernacular Structures

There are some structures within this plan area that are of moderate scale and are important for a number of local reasons e.g. local history or building techniques etc. Individually, or as part of a group of buildings or street, such structures may contribute positively to the character of the area or townscape, which can be diminished by their loss.

It is an objective of the Councils to encourage the protection, appreciation and appropriate revitalisation of the vernacular heritage of Birr including the setting and features.

It is an action of the Offaly Heritage Plan 2007-2011 to survey aspects of buildings such as estate cottages, gate lodges, vernacular house types, barns/farm buildings and promote awareness and care of traditional features such as sash windows and lime render.

12.2.1.8 Birr Workhouse

A study was commissioned by Offaly County Council supported by the Heritage Council to investigate the current condition and use of workhouses in Ireland generally and Birr Workhouse specifically. The aim of the study is to provide an assessment of how workhouses may be adapted for future uses. The study is to be available to the public and will help inform any future planning decisions regarding the redevelopment of Birr workhouse.

12.2.1.9 Birr Public Realm Study

The Birr Public Realm Plan 2009 contains information, including polices and objectives, in relation to improving the built environment of Birr which is relevant to this chapter (refer to Chapter 4 Town Centre, Retail and Renewal for further information).

12.2.2 Archaeological Conservation

It is the Councils' policy to protect archaeological heritage from damage. It is an objective of the Councils to secure the preservation of all archaeological monuments included in the Record of Monuments and Places, together with any other sites and their settings discovered since the publication of the Record.

12.2.2.1 Zones of Archaeological Potential in Birr

There are currently 8 Zones of Archaeological Potential identified within Birr town and environs (refer to Map 12.1), including an Urban Archaeology Zone. However, it is accepted that many other sites may remain beneath the surface and possibly may become uncovered following development/excavation work (refer to www.archaeology.ie).

12.2.2.2 Urban Archaeology

In 1986, an Urban Archaeology Study of Birr town was undertaken by the Department of the Environment which has led to an Urban Archaeology Zone being delineated (refer to Map 12.2). Elsewhere, however, deposits are likely to survive and there is a strong likelihood of recovering house foundations, refuse pits, industrial area, and workshops of 16th and 17th century date.

12.2.2.3 Consultation with Relevant Bodies

The Councils will ensure that all planning applications for development, refurbishment, restoration works etc. shall be referred on receipt to National Monuments and Architectural Protection Division (Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government). Wherever practicable, the Councils will encourage the provision of public access to sites identified in the Record of Monuments and Places.

The Councils will take cognisance of the advice and recommendations of the Department of the Environment, Heritage & Local Government, both in respect of whether or not to grant planning permission, and in respect of the conditions to which permission, if granted, should be subject.

The Councils will facilitate pre-planning consultations in relation to the archaeological heritage with the Planning Authority in its capacity of being charged with the implementation of the National Monuments Acts.

A full record of the Record of Monuments and Places is available at Offaly County Council offices and should be consulted in cases of all developments on or adjacent to within the setting of sites of archaeological interest or within Zones of Archaeological Potential. In relation to all Recorded Monuments, the Councils recommend that potential developers consult as early as possible with the relevant agencies (such as the National Monuments Service of the DoEHLG) and the Councils in order to ensure that archaeological concerns can be specified and if appropriate, integrated into the development proposals at as early a stage as possible.

12.2.2.4 Development Assessment Criteria

In considering developments which impact on Archaeology, the Councils will:

- Seek archaeological impact assessments as part of the planning application when a proposed development could affect a Recorded Monument, a Zone of Archaeological Potential, or previously unidentified element of archaeological heritage, or their setting, and;
- Ensure that a suitably qualified archaeologist carries out all archaeological works required when permission is granted for such development.

12.2.3 Relevant Documentation to be provided with Planning Applications

It is the Councils' policy, where appropriate and necessary, to request the applicant to submit all relevant documentation such as survey drawings, photographs, recordings, visual models and other particulars necessary to show how the proposed development will impact on the character of a Recorded Monument, Protected Structure, ACA or structure of vernacular interest.

12.2.4 Where to find Information on Built Heritage

Copies of Record of Monuments and Places and Record of Protected Structures for Birr, including detailed location maps, are available for public viewing within the Planning Departments of Birr Town Council, Offaly County Council and throughout the network of libraries in County Offaly. Useful websites in relation to the built heritage relevant to Birr include www.buildingsofireland.ie and www.archaeology.ie. A number of publications relating to County Offaly and including Birr's vernacular heritage are available including:

- *"An Atlas of Birr", John Feehan and Alison Rosse*
- *"The Medieval Churches of County Offaly", Fitzpatrick and O'Brien*
- *"Living Under Thatch", Barry O'Reilly*
- *"Offaly Bridges", Fred Hammond*

12.3 Policy

Architectural Heritage

BTEP 12-01 It is the Councils' policy to ensure that the alteration or extensions to Protected Structures will only be permitted if the proposals are in keeping with the character of the building and safeguard the special architectural, historical, archaeological, artistic, cultural, scientific, social or technical interest of the building or structure.

BTEP 12-02 It is the Councils' policy to encourage the rehabilitation, renovation and re-use of existing old structures, where appropriate, over the demolition of same and new-build on-site. Such rehabilitation, renovation and re-use works to existing vernacular structures must positively contribute to the streetscape of the area.

BTEP 12-03 It is the Councils' policy, where appropriate to exercise the powers conferred by sections 59-80 of the Planning and Development Acts 2000-2009 to ensure the conservation of Protected Structures. In all but exceptional cases, the Councils will seek the refurbishment and reuse of buildings, rather than the demolition and new build.

BTEP 12-04 It is the Councils' policy to protect and enhance the urban form of Birr including the character of streetscapes, vistas and squares.

BTEP 12-05 It is the Councils' policy to encourage contemporary development within Birr where the applicant can successfully demonstrate that any proposal will not negatively detract from the character of the existing built environment.

BTEP 12-06 It is the Councils' policy to encourage mixed-use and/or higher density development within Birr where the applicant can successfully demonstrate that any proposal will not negatively detract from the character of the existing built environment.

BTEP 12-07 It is the Councils' policy to exercise its statutory powers to preserve and enhance the amenity and unique character of the town. A major consideration in Development Management will be the effect of any proposed development upon the environmental character of the town's historical and architectural features.

BTEP 12-08 It is the Councils' policy, where appropriate and necessary, to request applicants to provide an appropriate level of investigation and recording (including survey drawings and photographic records) of protected buildings, structures and sites which are subject of development proposals.

BTEP 12-09 It is the Councils' policy to openly facilitate, on an on-going basis, appropriate guidance to owners and occupiers of protected structures in relation to works that are exempted from planning permission through Section 57 Declarations of the Planning and Development Acts 2000-2008.

Archaeological Heritage

BTEP 12-10 It is the Councils' policy to apply the following principles to the archaeological heritage of Birr:

- To facilitate appropriate guidance in relation to the protection of Birr town and environs archaeological heritage.
- To promote public awareness of the rich archaeological heritage in this area.
- To protect and enhance archaeological monuments and their settings and Birr's Zone of Archaeological Potential.

BTEP 12-11 It is the Councils' policy to ensure that full consideration is given to the protection of archaeological heritage when undertaking, approving or authorising development in order to avoid unnecessary conflict between development and the protection of the archaeological heritage.

BTEP 12-12 It is the Councils' policy to have regard to the shaded area on Map 12.1 and Map 12.2, as Zones of Archaeological Potential and to ensure that planning applications are referred to the appropriate prescribed bodies.

BTEP 12-13 It is the Councils' policy to ensure that when an unrecorded archaeological object or site is discovered, any works that threaten the object or site are immediately suspended and that the appropriate Government agency is informed.

BTEP 12-14 It is the Councils' policy to protect historical burial grounds within Birr town and environs and encourage their maintenance in accordance with conservation principles.

12.4 Objectives²

BTEO 12-01 To protect all structures listed in the Birr Town Record of Protected Structures, that are of special architectural, historical, archaeological, artistic, cultural, scientific, social or technical interest in Birr.

BTEO 12-02 To examine the feasibility of designating Architectural Conservation Areas in Birr over the plan period.

BTEO 12-03 To ensure that all new proposed shop fronts are designed to a high standard of contemporary and traditional design.

BTEO 12-04 To protect the character of the streetscapes and squares of Market Square, Emmet Street and Square, Oxmantown Mall, Townsend Street, The Green, John's place, Compton Row, Newbridge Street, Connaught Street, O'Connell Street, Main Street, Castle Street, St. Brendan Street and Crinkle village core.

BTEO 12-05 To secure, where feasible and appropriate, the protection of the character of the existing original carriage archways/access-ways to the rear of existing properties.

BTEO 12-06 To secure, where feasible, the protection of the character of structures of interest, which are part of the towns milling and distilling heritage.

² The order of listing of objectives is not intended to indicate priorities. Subject to the availability of resources, it is the Councils' aim to monitor and accomplish the objectives listed in this section within the period of the plan.

BTEO 12-07 To secure the protection (i.e. preservation in situ or at a minimum protection by record) of all archaeological monuments included in the Record of Monuments and Places, for Birr town and environs, as established under Section 12 of the National Monuments (Amendment) Act 1994, and their setting.

BTEO 12-08 To protect and preserve archaeological sites and their settings discovered since the publication of the record of Monuments and Places and the publication of the Urban Archaeology Survey.

