
Detailed Design Statement

St. Josephs Convent

Main Street, Ferbane, Co. Offaly

Offaly County Council



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PREFACE

Applicant:	Offaly County Council
Application Type:	Planning Application
Location:	St. Joseph’s Convent, Main Street, Ferbane, Co.Offaly
ITM Centre Point Co-Ordinates:	611621, 724560
Ordnance Survey Reference No.:	50357885_1

THE PROJECT

This Detailed Design Statement supports the Part 8 planning application for the development of development of St. Joseph’s Convent, Main Street, Ferbane, Co. Offaly.

The development will consist of the refurbishment of St. Joseph’s Convent (NIAH Reg. No. 14806004), demolition of an existing extension and modular buildings and construction of a new extension to the southwest of the convent. All renovation work will be carried out in accordance with conservation best practice, current building regulations, and with input from qualified structural engineers where required.

The project also includes the restoration of the existing assembly hall building as a multipurpose space as well as the creation of an urban garden and riverbank walk along the River Brosna, a new site entrance along the Ballycumber Road (R436), and associated site development works including groundworks.



THE TOWN OF FERBANE

The town of Ferbane is located in northwest Offaly at the crossroads of the N62 and R436 roads. It is situated approximately 27km from Tullamore and 22km from both Athlone and Birr/ Fermoy. Ferbane is sited on a bridging point of the River Brosna, a tributary of the River Shannon. Ferbane is classified as a 'Smaller Town' in the Settlement Strategy of the Offaly County Development Plan 2021-27 and performs important retail, residential, employment, service, and amenity functions for local rural hinterlands. The town centre is predominantly linear in form along the Main Street. The Offaly County Development Plan 2021-2027 identifies the site of St. Joseph's Convent as 'Opportunity Site No. 1' within Ferbane Town Centre, noting its potential for various uses due to its size, riverside setting, and potential pedestrian links to the town centre.



Google Maps – Ariel Image

THE SITE

The site is located on Main Street, Ferbane. The Convent building is a detached L-plan five-bay three-storey building that was originally built as a convent/nunnery around 1880. The convent fronts directly onto the Main Street. Through this project we will restore the convent and assembly hall and create facilities that will benefit the town of Ferbane for generations to come, which we will help to drive footfall into the town centre, increase tourism and, above all, restore this vital piece of Ferbane's built heritage.

The town centre site is approximately 3.25 ha and is rectangular in plan, running east to west from the Main Street N62 along the Northern banks of the Brosna River.

The River Brosna runs along the southern site boundary. The gardens have a steep drop in levels and some existing vegetation creating shade.



KLA – Existing Site Layout Plan

THE CULTURAL CONTEXT

The original house on the site was built in the 1700s and was acquired under a 99-year lease by Canon Sheridan, Parish Priest, in 1888. The property was then leased to the Sisters of St. Joseph of Cluny, a French Missionary order, who established St. Joseph’s Convent, Ferbane, in 1896. The primary mission of the sisters was to provide education for young people and engage in parish work. St. Joseph’s Convent Girls’ Secondary School operated on site from 1896 until 1972, and the sisters concluded their formal roles in education in 2007. Throughout its history, the convent served not only as a school but also as a community hub, at times housing a bakery and a men’s social club, and hosting plays and concerts. The aspiration is to transform this historic building into a vibrant community and educational hub, honouring the legacy of the Sisters of St. Joseph.

THE POLICY CONTEXT

This proposal aligns with the strategic aim of the Ferbane Town Plan to reinforce Ferbane town centre by targeting the redevelopment of underutilised sites like ‘Opportunity Site No. 1’, which includes St. Joseph’s Convent. The proposed development considers the Green Infrastructure Strategy for Ferbane, Co. Offaly, 2021 and aims to enhance links to existing Green Infrastructure assets, including the River Brosna. The renovation works for the convent will be carried out in accordance with conservation best practice. The design will also consider the need for ecological sensitivity due to the proximity of the River Brosna, which is within the Shannon River Basin. The development aims to deliver an accessible, multi-functional external public realm.

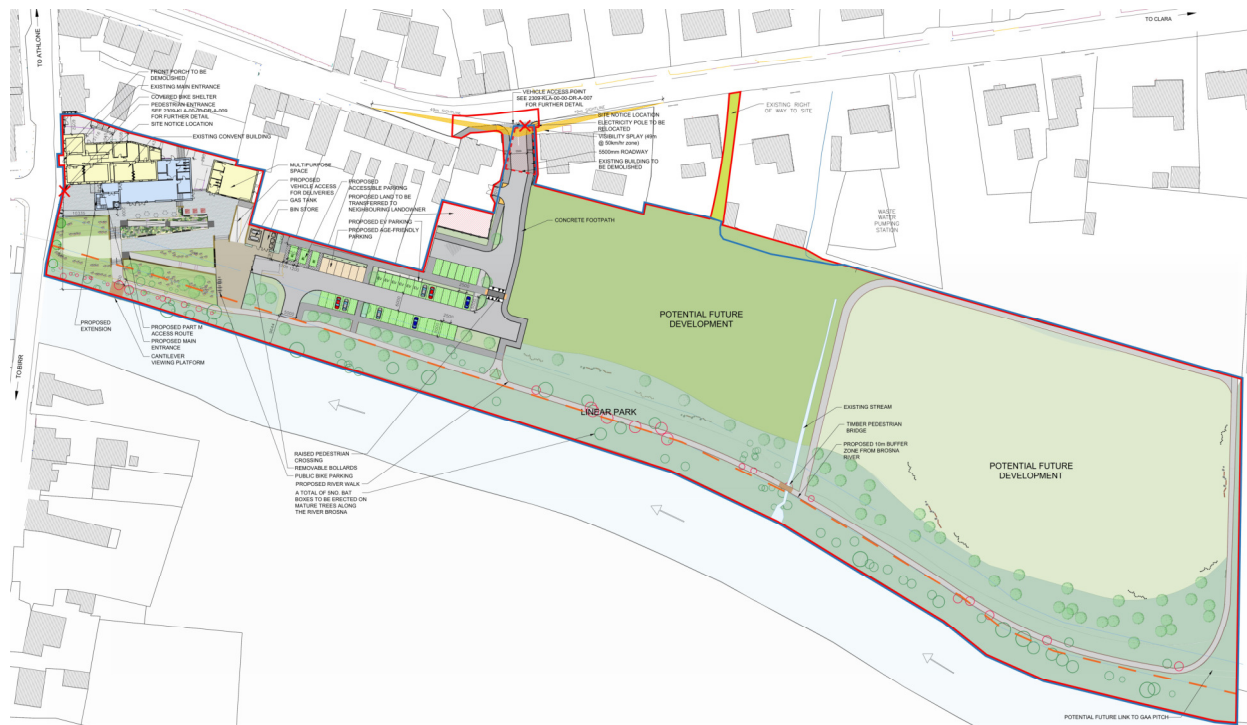


Figure 1: A view of the Front Elevation St. Joseph's Convent from Ferbane Bridge

SITE ORGANISATION/LAYOUT

The proposed works include the refurbishment of the existing convent structure and the demolition of some existing extensions and outbuildings to the south and north. A new three-storey flat roof extension will be constructed to the southwest of the convent to improve internal layout and provide essential facilities like a lift, stairwell, and toilets. The existing Assembly Hall Building will be retained and repurposed as a multipurpose space. The site will feature a new site entrance along the Ballycumber Road (R436) leading to a new car park with 42 spaces, including accessible and EV charging spaces.

The project includes the creation of an urban garden, and a riverbank walk along the River Brosna. Internal works will involve repurposing rooms and installing internal ramps to improve accessibility.



KLA –Proposed Site Layout Plan

WIDER SITE MASTERPLAN

This proposal aims to deliver an accessible, multi-functional external public realm. Key elements of the wider site masterplan include linked community green spaces, enhanced accessibility and connectivity, a community garden, a proposed terraced area, a linear park/walk along the River Brosna, and a green car park with integrated Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SuDS).

The design incorporates SuDS engineering within the car park, using infiltration trenches and rain gardens. The landscape design includes a soft landscape palette with native and ornamental planting to enhance biodiversity and provide seasonal interest.

The project includes the addition of dedicated vehicle access from the R436 Ballycumber Road. Features of the site enhancement will include enriched greening, priority to pedestrians and cyclists and high-quality material choices, improved car parking and set down facilities will also be located on the Convent grounds. It is envisaged that this improved site will create a sense of place within Ferbane for community services and create a defined space for them within the town.

BUILDING DESIGN

The refurbishment of the existing convent will include replacement of external windows and doors, with triple glazed aluminium windows to improve thermal performance. Internal works include dry lining rooms for thermal performance improvement and minor demolition of internal walls to repurpose spaces. The front porch, which is not original, will be demolished to reinstate the original doorway and façade.

The new three-storey flat roof extension to the southwest will feature modern architecture with clean lines, large windows, and a combination of concrete, fibre cement panels, and painted render. The architectural style and materials of the extension will clearly distinguish it as a later intervention, in line with conservation principles.

The extension will house a new lift and stairwell, toilet blocks, stores, and ancillary spaces, and will be accessible from all three levels of the existing building as the existing central staircase will be demolished, and a series of internal ramps will be installed to ensure Part M compliance and accessibility.

The Existing Assembly Hall will be reclad with new external wall insulation, and the slate roof will be replaced with new Fibre Cement slates. All external windows and doors will be replaced, and asbestos ceilings and floors will be removed and replaced.



KLA –Proposed Extension to St. Joseph’s Convent

SUSTAINABILITY

The project incorporates several sustainability measures. The refurbishment includes dry lining and potentially external wall insulation to improve the thermal performance of the existing building. Replacement windows will be triple glazed, further enhancing energy efficiency. The new extension will utilise durable and low-maintenance materials.

Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SuDS) will be integrated into the landscape design, particularly within the car park area, using rain gardens and attenuation tree pits to manage surface water run-off. The creation of an urban garden and riverbank walk will enhance biodiversity. The car park will include electric vehicle charging spaces to promote sustainable transportation. The soft landscape framework prioritizes native species where appropriate. The reuse of the existing convent building itself is a sustainable approach to development.



KLA – Existing Ariel Image of St. Joseph’s Convent

ARCHITECTURAL CONSERVATION

The renovations will be carried out in accordance with conservation best practice. The project aims to preserve the integral parts of the original structure of St. Joseph’s Convent.

The existing statue of St. Joseph on the western façade will be retained, cleaned, and restored if necessary. The demolition of later, poor-quality extensions will positively impact the original convent building. The new extension is designed with a clear distinction from the original building, utilising modern architectural styles and materials to indicate it as a later addition, adhering to principles of conservation.

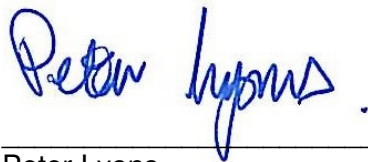
CONCLUSION:

In conclusion, the detailed design presented in this statement provides a comprehensive and considered approach to the redevelopment of St. Joseph’s Convent. It aims to create a sustainable, accessible, and vibrant community asset that respects its historical and cultural significance while meeting the needs of the contemporary Town of Fermagh and its residents. The proposals outlined herein represent a positive intervention that will secure the future of this important building for generations to come.



KLA –Proposed Extension to St. Joseph’s Convent

Detailed Design Statement prepared on the 25/04/2025 by:



Peter Lyons
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BIBLIOGRAPHY & ICONOGRAPHY:

- 1) Offaly County Council Development Plan 2021-2027.
- 2) Ferbane Town Plan 2021-2027
- 3) Photographs by Kenny Lyons & Associates.
- 4) Photographs from National Inventory of Architectural Heritage - ([NIAH](#))
- 5) Aerial Image from Google Maps.