

Architectural Heritage Impact Assessment



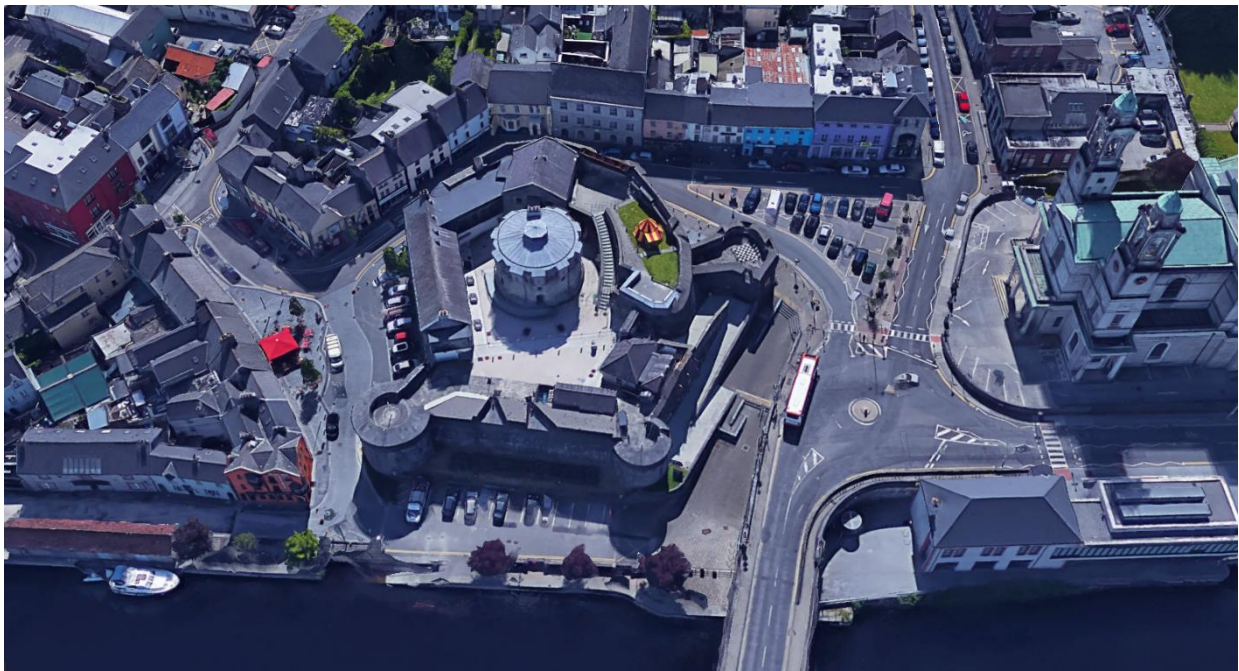
Patrick Dunne Architects Ltd.,
90 Knocknashee,
Goatstown,
Dublin 14.

RE: Athlone Public Realm Enhancement

Date: March 2023

Ref: 21022

Rev: C



Athlone castle and surrounding public realm.
Image copyright: Google



Patrick Dunne Architects Ltd.
90 Knocknashee, Goatstown, Dublin 14.
Tel: 0877436805 E-mail: patrickdunnearchitect@gmail.com
www.patrickdunnearchitect.com
Company registration no. 650277 Vat registration no. 3613806SH



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90 Knocknashee,
Goatstown,
Dublin 14.

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Patrick Dunne Architects Ltd.
90 Knocknashee, Goatstown, Dublin 14.
Tel: 0877436805 E-mail: patrickdunnearchitect@gmail.com
www.patrickdunnearchitect.com
Company registration no. 650277 Vat registration no. 3613806SH



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90 Knocknashee,
Goatstown,
Dublin 14.

Introduction

This report on the public realm area surrounding Athlone castle has been prepared to assess the building and its grounds for its special architectural, historical, archaeological, artistic, cultural, scientific, social or technical interest, taking cognisance of all features that merit mention or specific conservation.

The primary focus of the report is the assessment of the above in relation to proposed public realm improvement works by assessing the existing historic fabric, their impact on the proposed works, and in turn the impact of the proposed works on the historic fabric. This report has been prepared by Patrick Dunne Architects. It is to be read in conjunction with the drawings and documents prepared by Urban Agency architects, ORS consulting engineers, BMJ and Associates cost consultants, McElroy Associates M&E consultants, Minogue + Associates Environmental Co-ordinators,

Our assessment of the impact of the current proposals is based on the following information showing the existing streetscape and proposed changes:

Purpose of this assessment

This Architectural Heritage Impact Assessment forms part of a Part 8 process for the design and procurement of public realm improvement works surrounding Athlone castle.

Architectural drawings/reports:

- Urban Agency Public Realm Inception Report - Urban Agency.
- Topographical + Building Survey - Murphy Surveys.
- Outline Traffic Management Plan - ORS.
- Mechanical + Electrical drawings - McElroy and Associates
- Environmental Impact Assessment Screening Report - Minogue and Associates.
- Archaeology Report - IAC.

The report is submitted in the form recommended in “Architectural Heritage Protection - Guidelines for Planning Authorities” and is intended to provide sufficient documentation to assist the Planning Authority in making an informed decision on the potential impact on the protected structure and its setting by providing background information, analysis and supplementary photographic information. This report also contains recommendations based on a review of the proposals taking into account any mitigating measures that have been incorporated into the design during the course of the consultation process, the design as now proposed, the planning history and earlier alterations.



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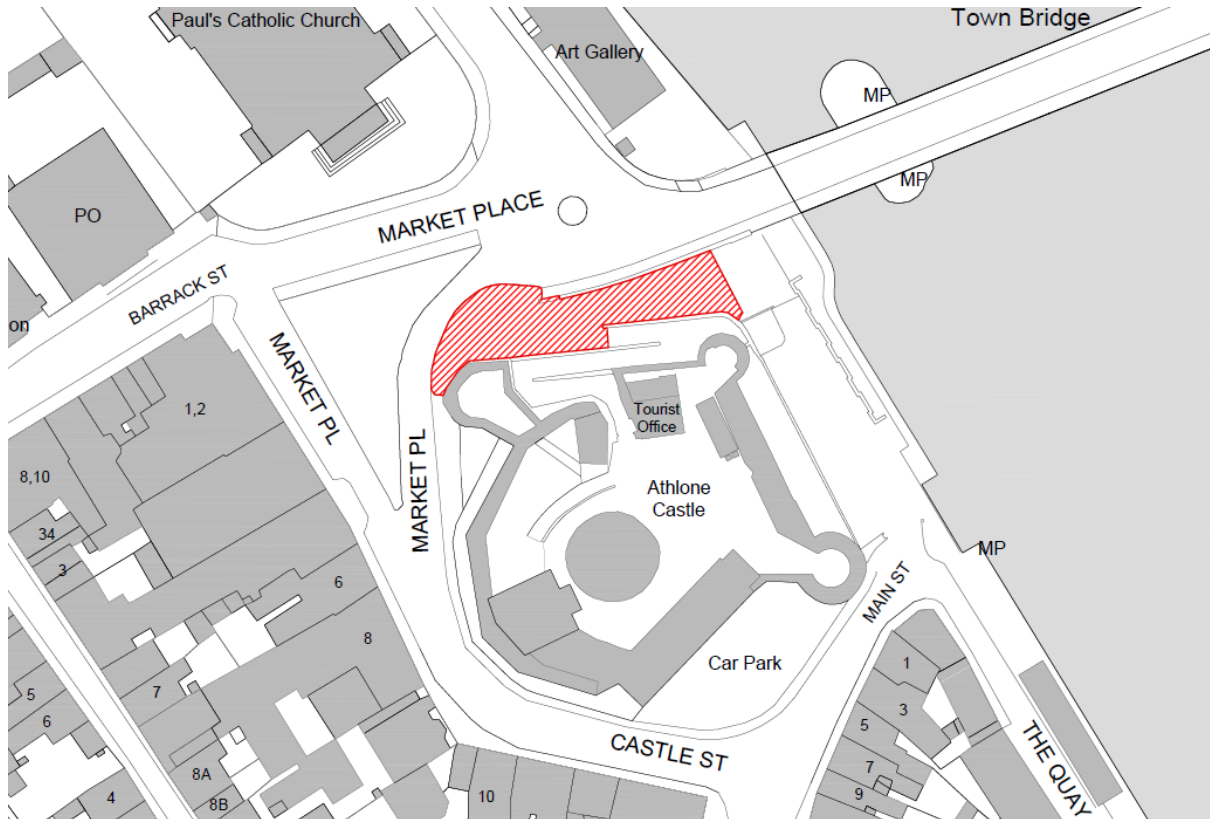
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Core Data:

The maps below indicate the boundary of the proposed works.



Map of boundary of proposed works.
Image copyright: Urban Agency.

In the above map, The hatched area is the focus of this report. The surrounding context will also be included insofar as they impact or influence the works or are affected by the works.

The site is the land immediately to the north of Athlone Castle, bounded by the castle, the Shannon quays, Athlone Town bridge and Market Place.

Google maps link to the site: <https://goo.gl/maps/1nPyVSQHBuh7Wa149>

OSI coordinates (Irish Transverse Mercator): 603822, 741488

Land Owners: State Ownership

Local Authority: Westmeath County Council

Form of protection: The site is in an Architectural Conservation Area (Athlone Town ACA)

The site is in a zone of archaeological potential.



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Westmeath County Council Record of Protected Structures, lists several of the surrounding structures. As such the site is in the curtilage of each.

Athlone Castle is a National Monument. The site includes facades of the castle and is within the curtilage of the National Monument.

Athlone Town Bridge: RPS No: 15000010
Date: 1840 - 1845
Original Use: bridge
In Use as: bridge
Rating: Regional

NIAH Description

Four-arch Italianate-style road bridge over River Shannon, built between 1841-4. Constructed of ashlar limestone with ashlar detailing. Three broad segmental-headed arches to the east end having channelled voussoirs and projecting keystones, set on advanced piers with pilasters on square-plan and bullnose cutwaters. High ashlar limestone parapet with incised Greek key decoration, with projecting string course below at road level. Western most arch was originally a swivel bridge serving Shannon Navigation, now replaced by a fixed flat-headed arch constructed of reinforced concrete with an cast-iron balustrade in 1963. channelled ashlar limestone walls with solid parapets to either end of bridge and a wide round-headed pedestrian underpass with projecting voussoirs to western side. A plaque to centre of bridge records date of construction and contractors/engineers responsible.

NIAH Appraisal

A broad and elegantly-composed bridge, which forms an attractive and imposing landmark in the centre of Athlone. The construction in ashlar limestone attests to high quality stone masonry. This bridge was built by the Shannon Navigation Company between 1841-4 to replace the bridge built by Sir Henry Sidney in 1566. The engineer and contractor responsible for the new bridge were John Rhodes and John McMahon respectively. The original swivel section to the west end of the bridge was constructed to allow the passage of steam boats and was intended to help Athlone develop into a major inland port. This never happened due to a number of factors, most notably the development of the railway network in the early 1850s. Nevertheless, this bridge is an interesting monument to commercial ambition and to technological development in Athlone during the mid nineteenth-century.

Athlone Castle: RPS No: 15000352
Date: 1210 - 1830
Original Use: fortification
In Use as: museum/gallery
Rating: National

NIAH Description

Freestanding Norman castle, built c.1210, consisting of a polygonal keep with early-nineteenth century machicolations surrounded by a thick rubble limestone curtain wall (on pentagonal plan with pronounced base batter) having three polygonal bastions to north and east side facing over bridge



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and River Shannon. Largely rebuilt by British Army between c.1800-1827. In military ownership until 1970, now in use as a museum. Tower to Market Place elevation crowned by early-nineteenth century cast-iron water tank by Mallet of Dublin. Garderobe to northern part of curtain wall. Detached five-bay two-storey barrack building to interior, built c.1810. Constructed of coursed rubble limestone with pitched slate roof, square-headed window openings with six-over-six pane timber sliding sash windows and a round-headed doorcase with timber door and spoke fanlight above. The ramp up to the castle has a line of pistol loops. Castle located on east bank of River Shannon overlooking Shannon road bridge (to north east) and site of earlier bridges (to east).

NIAH Appraisal

An imposing structure that dominates the left bank of the River Shannon and originally defended the strategically important Shannon River crossing. It has played a central role in the history of Athlone and in the development of the street plan on the Connaught side of the town. The castle was originally founded by John De Gray in 1210 but the extant curtain wall and the bastion towers were originally built at the end of the thirteenth century. The castle was heavily damaged in the 1691 siege and by an accidental explosion in 1697. The castle was described as 'ruinous' in a number of eighteenth century accounts but was repaired and adapted by the British Army during the first decades of the nineteenth century as part of a series of defences along the Shannon to defend against possible French invasion. The machicolations on the keep and the bastion towers date from this period and they are similar in appearance to those found on Martello Towers, which date to the same time and were built for the same purpose. The castle remains an important historical monument and a focal point in the centre of Athlone.



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Map showing the context and location of surrounding protected structures (blue) and National Monuments (red).

Image copyright: Archaeology.ie



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History

History of Development:

The Castle

Athlone Castle, known as Adamson Castle was built c.1210, on the site of an original structure thought to have been built c.1129. Fortified in the late 13th Century and held by various families until 1547 when it was taken by the British. Damaged and neglected for many years, it was remodelled by British Army between c.1800-1827.

In 1682 the description by Sir Henry Piers was that the castle was built *'on a high raised round hill, resembling one of our Danish raths or fort, the walls wherof do almost shut up the whole ground; in the centre whereof is an high-raised tower, which overlooketh the walls and country round about; on the side that faceth the river are the rooms and apartments which served always for the habitation of the lord president of Connaught, and governor of the castle; the middle tower being the repository or store-house for ammunition and warlike provisions of all sorts'*

The British left in 1922 when the Free State troops took over the Barracks. Adamson Castle was named after Brigadier George Adamson who was shot dead in 1922. It was in military ownership until 1967 when the Old Athlone Society established a museum in the castle. In 1969 the castle was designated a National Monument.

The Bridge

A bridge was built in 1129, at the time of the original fortification. '1129: The castle of Athlone and the bridge were erected by Toirrdelbach Ua Conchobair in the summer of this year i.e. the summer of the drought' - Annals of the Four Masters.

1567, a stone bridge named 'Sidney's Bridge' was built south of the location of the current bridge. In 1682 Sir Henry Piers wrote that 'one tower on the castle wall is so advantageously seated that it commandeth the whole bridge, which nevertheless hath a great drawbridge on that end'.

1844, the new stone bridge was built - Shannon Road Bridge. This bridge designed by Thomas Rhodes had a swivel opening-span which was decommissioned in the early 20th Century.

Siege of Athlone

The castle was an important Jacobite stronghold and the bridge an important river crossing. The siege began in July 1690 where the Williamites caused the fall of Athlone castle. Sergeant Custume was a hero of the great siege of Athlone in 1691, sacrificing his life in the defence of the bridge.

The Site

Prior to the construction of the new bridge in 1844, a significant number of buildings and laneway were situated to the east of the castle, along the river bank. Goubet's plan of the castle (NLI Ms. 2742; Murtagh 1994, Map 5) dating from 1691 depicts a range of buildings inside the curtain wall. The curtain wall on the eastern side is thought to have been mostly destroyed in 1691 and is absent in Tarrant's Survey of 1793.

Following the construction and new location of the bridge the Grand Canal Store building can be seen on the quays. No further buildings have been in this location since.



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A prospect of Athlone Castle and Sidney's Bridge by Thomas Philips 1685.
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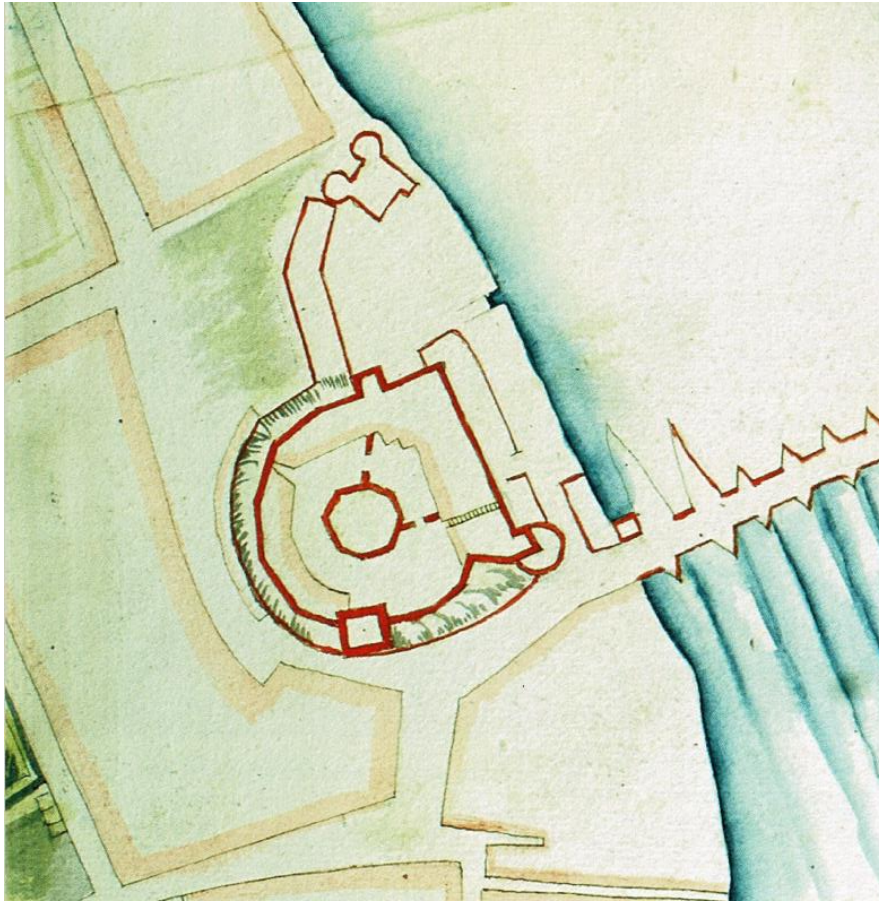
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90 Knocknashee,
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Detail from Phillips' plan of Athlone 1685 showing the location of Sidney's bridge, buildings outside the walls and the square turret to the south-east, which is later enclosed by a round turret.
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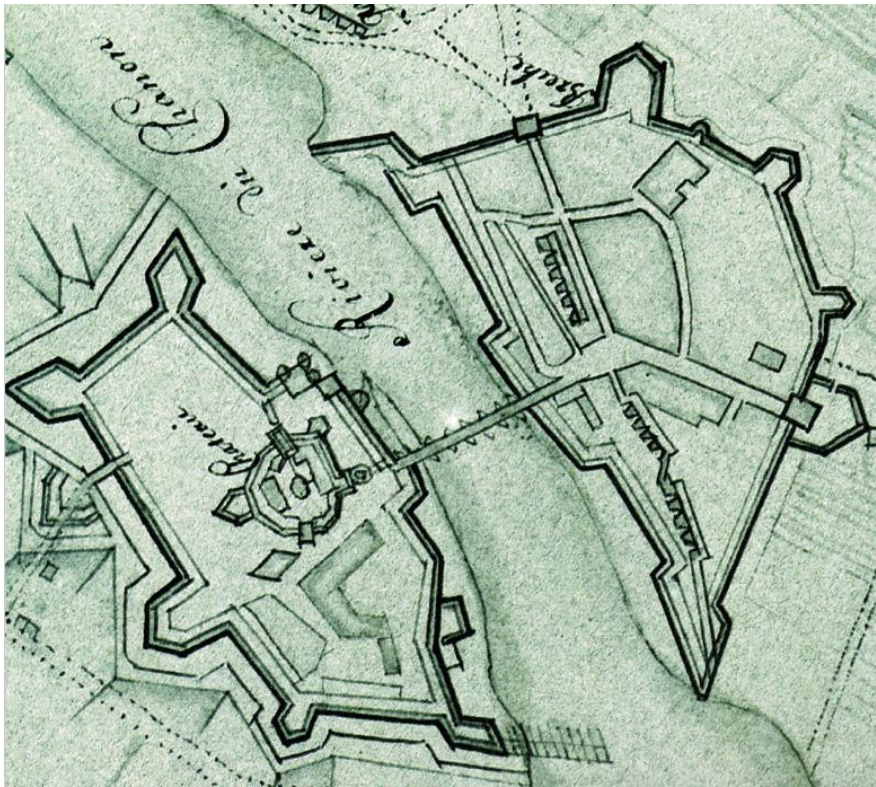
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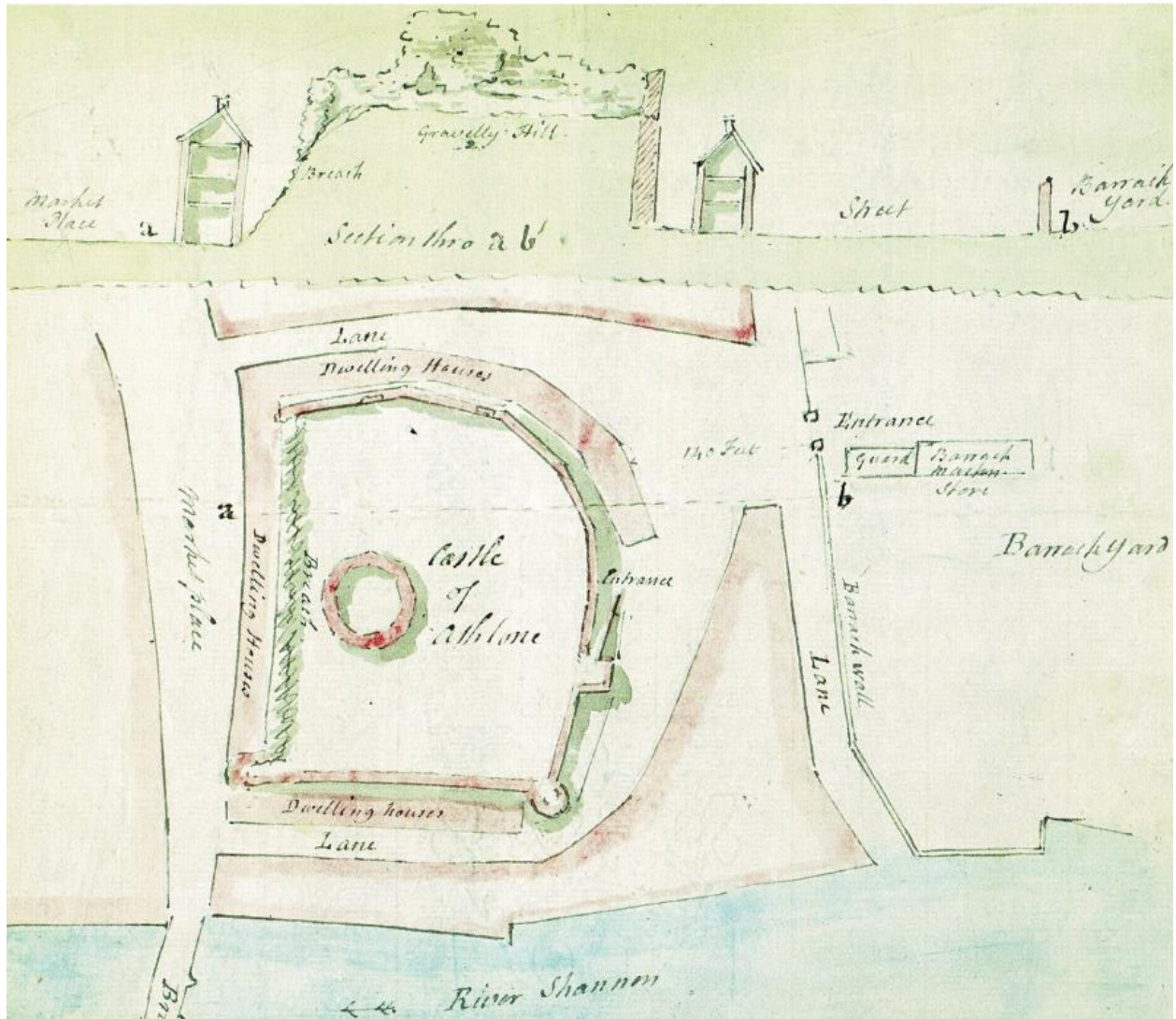
Detail from Goubet's plan of Athlone 1691 showing the curtain wall
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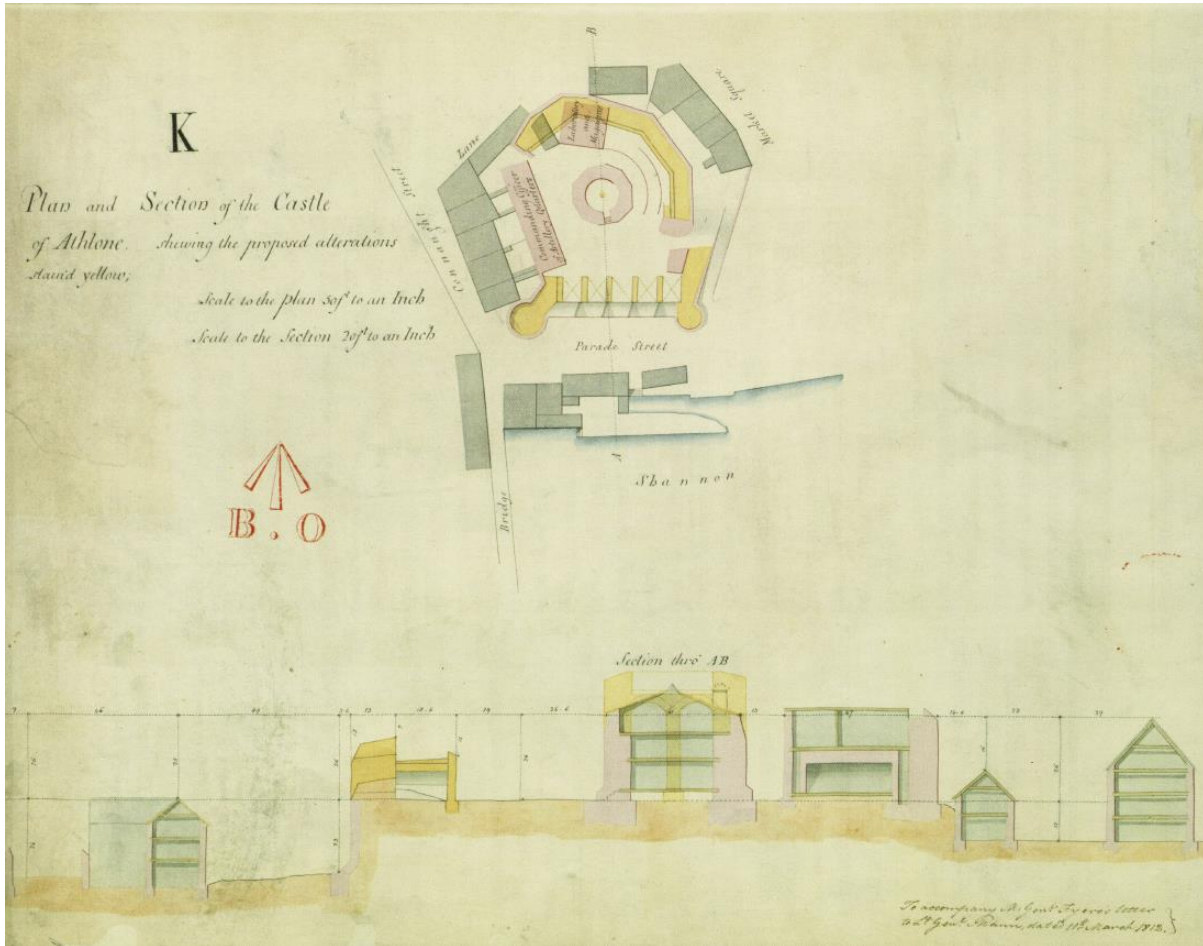


Tarrant's Survey 1793 showing the location of Sidney's bridge, the laneway and houses to the riverside of the castle and the poor condition of the keep and the absent curtain wall.
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Plan and section of the castle from 1812. The pink coloured structures existed at the time, proposed are coloured yellow.
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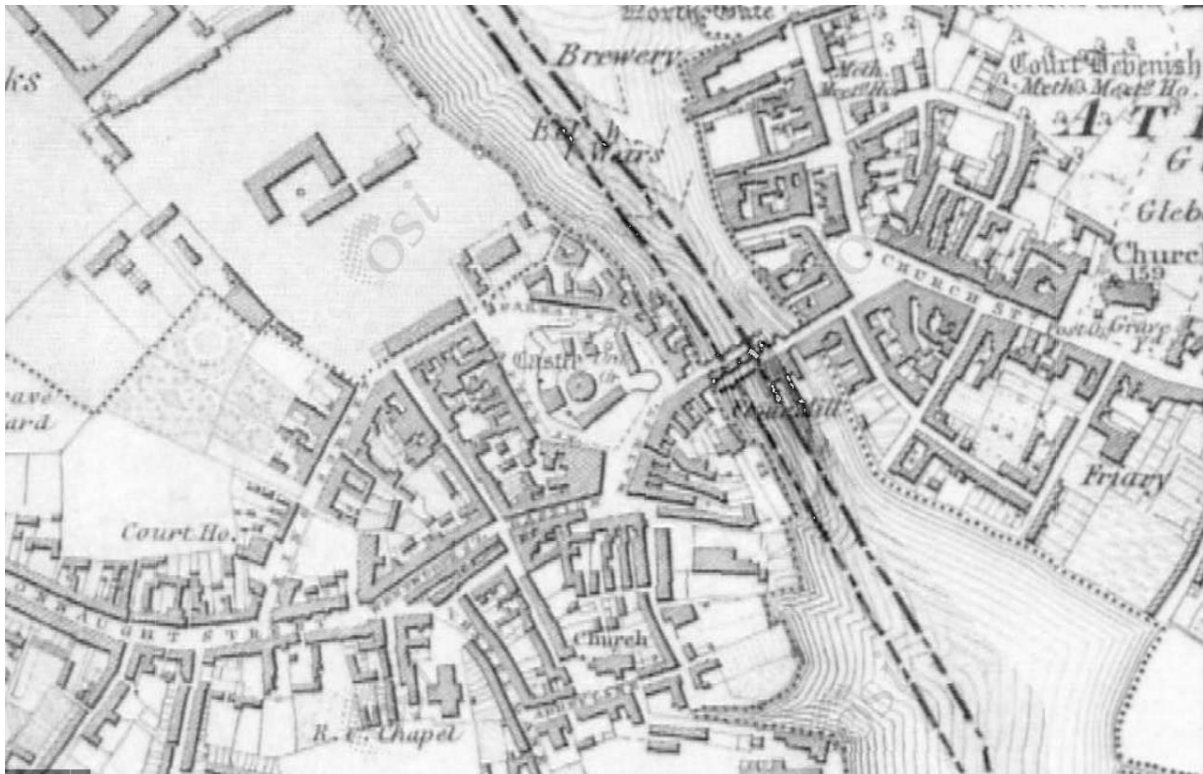
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Goatstown,
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Six inch map extract 1829-1841.

The six inch map (1830s to 1840s) shows the medieval bridge extant and a significant number of buildings to the east of the castle which have been demolished. Also of note is the area of land which extended into the current position of the river at that time.



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Tel: 0877436805 E-mail: patrickdunnearchitect@gmail.com

www.patrickdunnearchitect.com

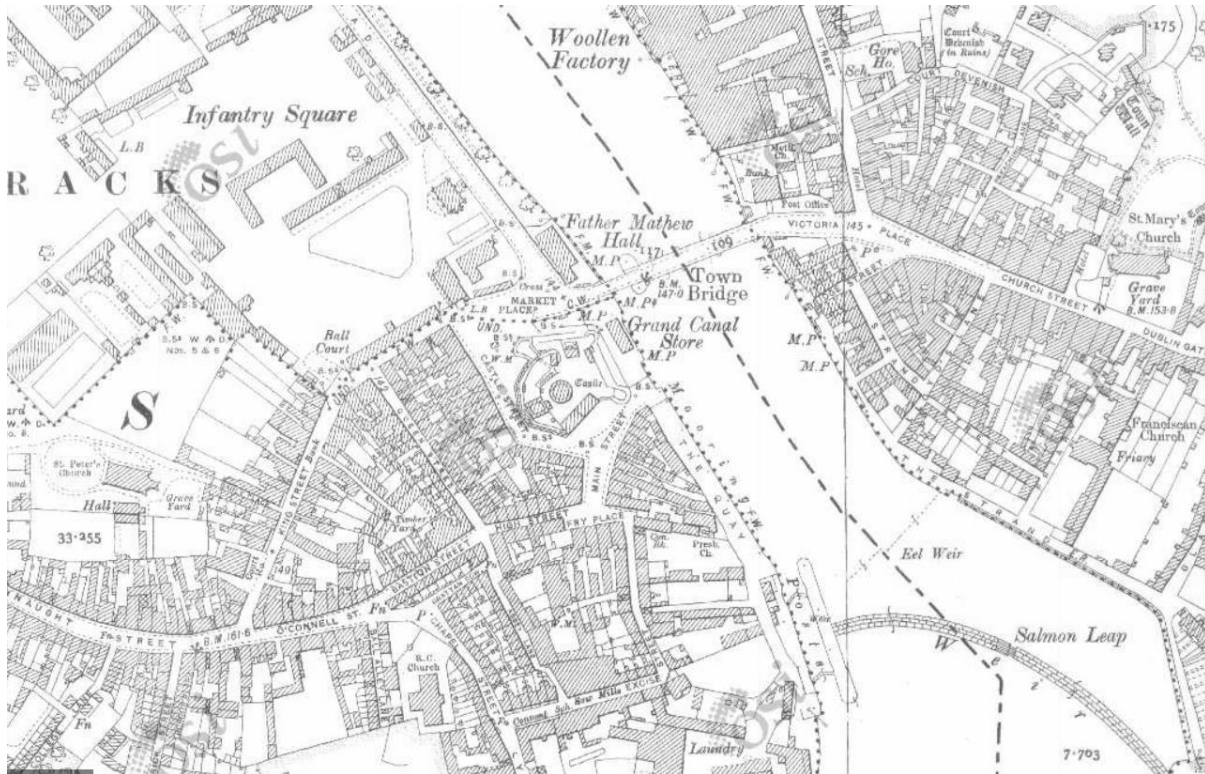
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25 inch map extract 1888-1913.

The 25 inch map (1880s to 1910s) shows the widening of the river adjacent to the castle, the construction of the current bridge, quays and Grand Canal Store building on the quays. The remodelling of the west bank by this time gives us the current layout of the castle, quays and bridge.

The church of Saints Peter and Paul, north of the castle has not yet been constructed.



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Recent Aerial Photograph

The recent aerial photograph shows the current layout. The public realm spaces are clear and well defined at this scale.



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Lawrence collection photographs



This Lawrence collection photograph shows the Grand Canal Store building at the waterfront. The presence of a motorcar on the bridge dates the photograph to after 1900 and probably after 1910.



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This photograph from the Lawrence collection, probably from the same date as the one above, shows the position of the castle in the streetscape and context prior to the construction of saints Peter and Paul church.



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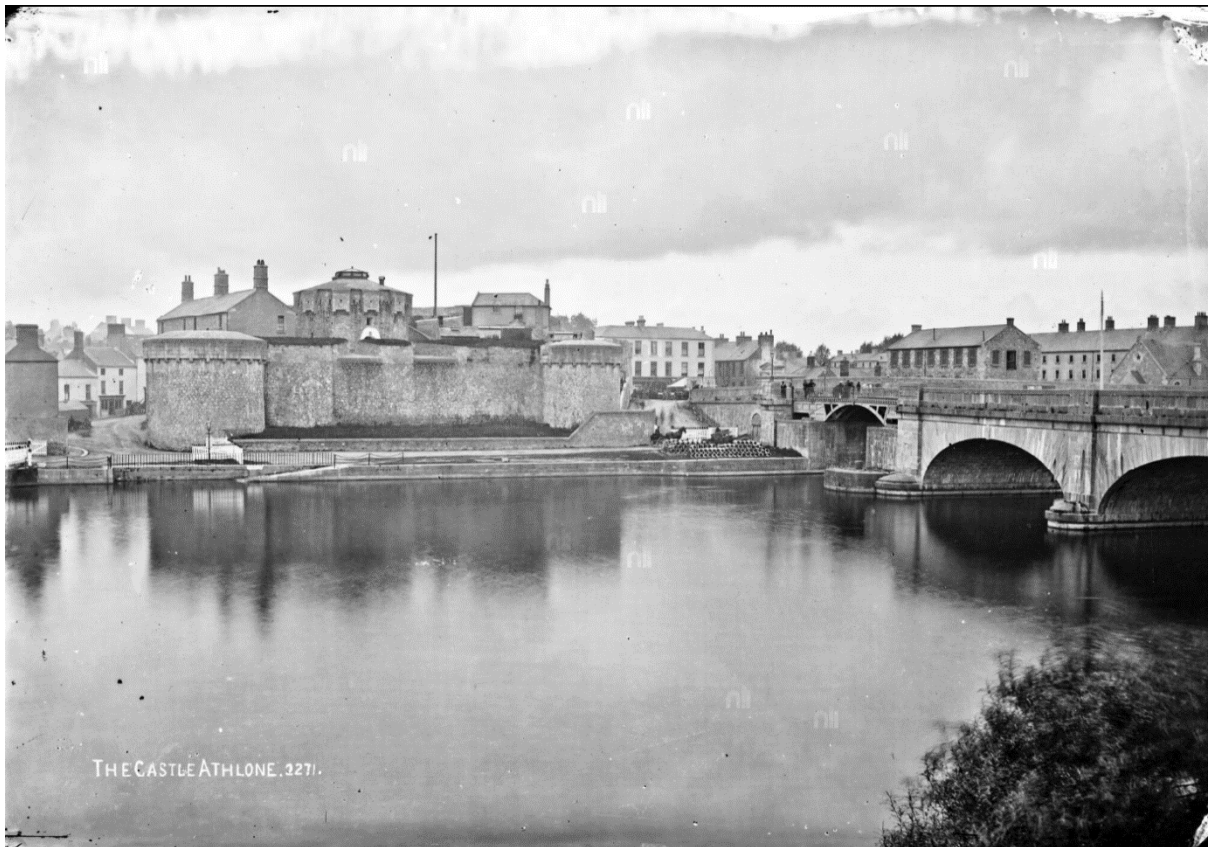
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90 Knocknashee,
Goatstown,
Dublin 14.



These photos show the composition of the waterfront after the demolition of the grand canal store building and prior to the construction of Saint's Peter and Paul's church. The general arrangement of the urban fabric is as found today, but with an appealing lack of visual clutter and a uniformity of building materials and finishes visible.



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90 Knocknashee,
Goatstown,
Dublin 14.



Image of the market place between the castle and the Barracks from the late 1800s or early 1900s.
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www.patrickdunnearchitect.com

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90 Knocknashee,
Goatstown,
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Other photographs



1922 W.D. Hogan. Hogan-Wilson Collection. The day of the takeover of Custume Barracks Athlone by the I.R.A. from the British Army. Note the iron railings and structure, replaced with concrete when the opening section which was decommissioned in the early 20th Century. Copyright the National Library of Ireland.



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90 Knocknashee,
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Dublin 14.

Current Context

Description

The site is the area of land between Athlone Castle to the south, Athlone Town Bridge to the north, The Shannon quays to the east and Market place to the west. The site contains the main entrance to Athlone castle at its northwestern corner.

The site slopes upwards by approximately 5 meters from the Shannon quays to the higher level at market square.

The site is publicly accessible. It is partly pedestrianized and partly used for surface car parking at its southern and western parts. It accesses lands to the north of the town bridge via an open archway underneath the western end of the Town Bridge.

The surrounding historic buildings enclosing the space (Castle, Bridge, Quays) are all constructed of limestone and provide a visual coherence.

Surface finish materials on the public space between the castle and the Shannon include:

- Soft landscaping (grass and decorative planting) behind iron railings on the east façade and batter of the castle.
- Tarmacadam finish to vehicular accessible and parking spaces between the iron railings and a modern stone wall at the quays.
- The area between the modern stone wall is a mix of concrete paving slabs and gravel.
- The tops of the quay walls, which finish flush at ground level, form a limestone surface at the water's edge.

Surface finish materials on the public space rising at the bridge from the Shannon quays, to the castle entrance and market square are:

- Brick paving dating from recent decades. This finish extends from the kerbs at market square through to the quay walls.



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Current Context and Condition:

The site contains primarily paving and surface parking from the late 20th century. These surfaces are ageing and are not in themselves of historic or architectural value. The late 20th century interventions are largely piecemeal and are currently detracting from the visual impact of the historic structures.

It should be noted that there are layers of development on the site including now removed historic structures at the quay sides, alterations to the bridge and likely continuous undocumented remnants of past development around the castle. While the past development is not now extant at ground level it may still be of archaeological value or an influence to design proposals.

The key historic structures defining the sites edges contain uniformity of materials in the use of limestone. They have texture and rich complexity in the differing size of stone used and differing material treatments at various periods of development.

Surrounding streetscapes at main street and castle street have had successful public realm improvement hard landscaping works carried out in recent years. These have drawn influence from the materiality of the surrounding historic structures and contribute successfully towards improving the quality of the public environment in the environs of the castle.



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Photographs



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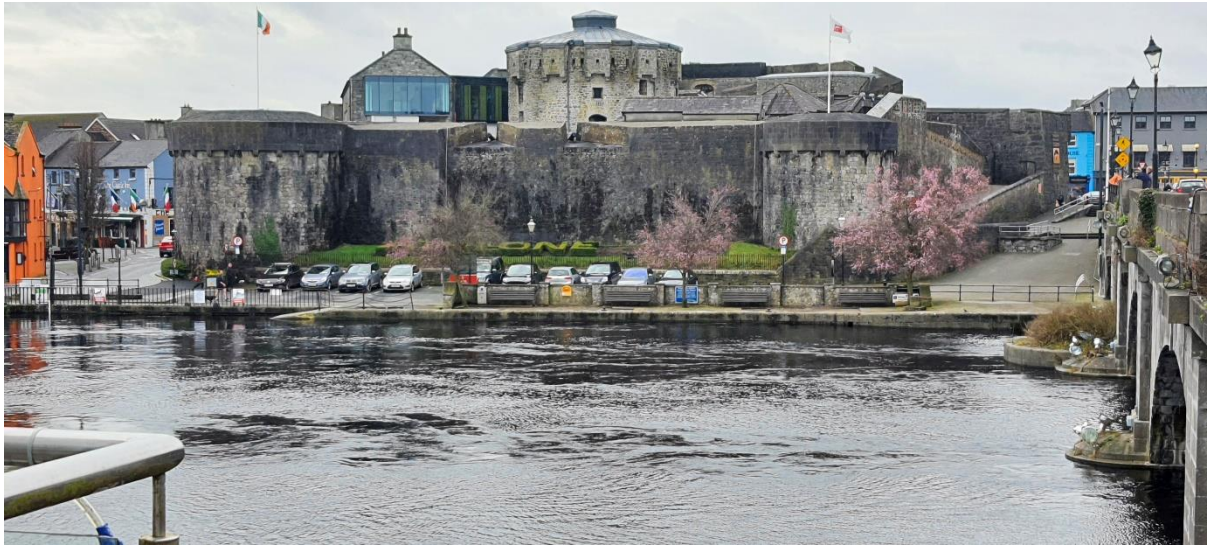
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Streetscape Features



Castle ramp entrance, form and walls date to the 1820s Napoleonic renovation. Cobble surface dates to late 20th/early 21st century.
Adjacent surface is concrete cobble with limestone and steel ramps and railings, late 20th/early 21st century.



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Note late 20th/Early 21st Century railings.



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Overview of castle entrance and site area.



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90 Knocknashee, Goatstown, Dublin 14.
Tel: 0877436805 E-mail: patrickdunnearchitect@gmail.com
www.patrickdunnearchitect.com

Company registration no. 650277 Vat registration no. 3613806SH



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90 Knocknashee,
Goatstown,
Dublin 14.



The entrance ramp and pistol loops date from the Napoleonic stage of development 1800-1827.



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Note the area of railing and concrete base below where the opening section was previously.



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Applicable policies and objectives:

Note on Ministerial Consent:

Planning and Development Regulations: Section 83 (3)
Notice of proposed development to certain bodies.

“to the Minister, the Heritage Council, and An Taisce – the National Trust for Ireland,
and in the case of development of a type referred to in sub-paragraph (i) or (ii), An Chomhairle
Ealaíon and Fáilte Ireland,”

Mechanisms of Protection:

Part IV of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) requires planning authorities to include in their development plans, policies and objectives for the protection, enhancement and preservation of the built heritage in their functional area. The two principal mechanisms within this legislation for the protection of built heritage assets are by maintaining a Record of Protected Structures (RPS) and designating Architectural Conservation Areas (ACAs).

The Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht’s publication Architectural Heritage Protection: Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2011) and Government Policy on Architecture 2009-2015, contain policy and advice for the protection of Architectural Heritage, including Protected Structures and Architectural Conservation Areas. The Department has also issued a range of publications under its Advice Series to provide more detailed guidance and advice on historic building materials and issues e.g. maintenance, access, windows, iron, and brickwork.

Westmeath County Development Plan 2021-2027

1.8 Strategic Aims:

Urban Centres & Placemaking: To protect and enhance the unique identity and character of Westmeath’s towns and villages and improve quality of life and well-being through the application of Healthy Placemaking, underpinned by good urban design, with the creation of attractive public spaces that are vibrant, distinctive, safe and accessible and which promote and facilitate positive social interaction.

Cultural Heritage: Westmeath County Council recognises the importance of identifying, valuing and safeguarding our archaeological, architectural and cultural heritage for future generations and aims to do so by means of proper management, sensitive enhancement and/or appropriate development of this resource.

Chapter 14 Cultural Heritage:

14.1 Aim:

Westmeath County Council recognises the importance of identifying, valuing and safeguarding our archaeological, architectural and cultural heritage for future generations and aims to do so by means of proper management, sensitive enhancement and/or appropriate development of this resource.



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Architectural Heritage Policy Objectives	
It is a policy of Westmeath County Council to:	
CPO 14.26	Support initiatives to identify architectural heritage that may be under threat due to climate change or neglect and progress measures and, where possible, support the protection of at risk architectural heritage.

Architectural Heritage & Protected Structures Policy Objectives	
It is a policy objective of Westmeath County Council to:	
CPO 14.27	Protect and conserve buildings, structures and sites contained in the Record of Protected Structures and to encourage the sympathetic re-use and long-term viability of such structures without detracting from their special interest and character.
CPO 14.28	Protect the architectural heritage of Westmeath through the identification of Protected Structures, the designation of Architectural Conservation Areas (ACAs), the safeguarding of designed landscapes and historic gardens, and the recognition of structures and elements that contribute positively to the vernacular and industrial heritage of the County.
CPO 14.29	Require that applications for modifications, alterations, or extensions to a Protected Structure will be assessed in accordance with the Architectural Heritage Protection Guidelines 2011 and should be sensitively sited and designed, compatible with its special character, and appropriate in terms of the proposed scale, mass, height, density, layout, and materials so that the integrity of the structure and its curtilage is preserved.
CPO 14.30	Seek that the form and structural integrity of Protected Structures is retained as part of any redevelopment proposal and that the relationship between the Protected Structure and any complex of adjoining buildings, designed landscape features, or designed views or vistas from or to the structure is considered.
CPO 14.31	Encourage rehabilitation, renovation and re-use of existing Protected Structures for their own economic benefit and that of the area in which they are located.
CPO 14.32	Carry out an audit and assess the condition of Protected Structures within the Council's ownership and devise a Conservation Management Plan/maintenance regime for these structures.



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90 Knocknashee,
Goatstown,
Dublin 14.

Architectural Conservation Areas Policy Objectives	
It is a policy of Westmeath County Council to:	
CPO 14.39	Promote development that positively contributes to the character and appearance of the Architectural Conservation Area. New development or alterations to existing building(s) in an ACA shall respect the special character of the ACA and reflect the historic architecture in terms of scale, design and materials used. Regard shall be had to any guidance contained in the Statement of Characters prepared for ACAs.
CPO 14.40	Consider development proposals within ACAs in accordance with the Statements of Character prepared for ACAs in Castlepollard, Kilbeggan, Moate, Tyrrellspass, Mullingar and Athlone.
CPO 14.41	Prepare Statements of Character and guidance in relation to development within each of the identified Architectural Conservations Areas (ACAs) in the County.

CPO 14.42	Ensure that Architectural Conservation Areas (ACAs), including any associated public realm area, are protected and ensure that any new development or alteration of a building within or adjoining an ACA positively enhances the character of the area and is appropriate in terms of the plot size, proposed design, including: scale, mass, height, proportions, density, layout, materials, plot ratio, and building lines.
CPO 14.43	Avoid the removal of structures and distinctive elements (such as boundary treatments, street furniture, paving and landscaping) that positively contribute to the character of Architectural Conservation Areas.



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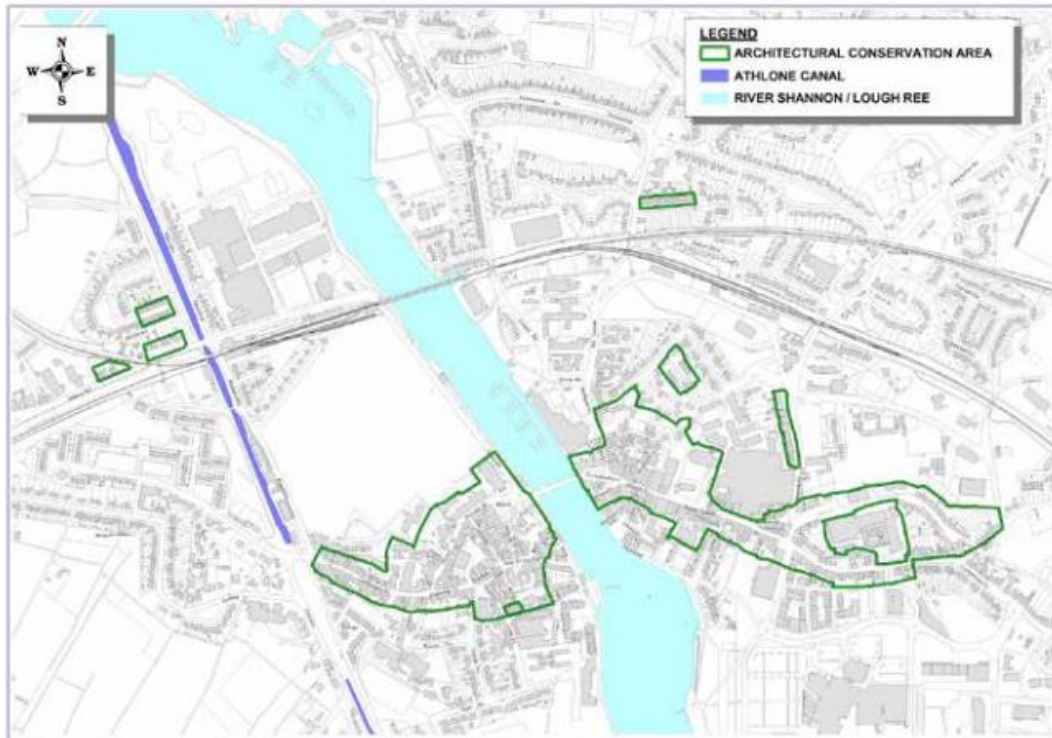
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Goatstown,
Dublin 14.

Athlone Town Development Plan 2014-2020

Chapter 11 Natural Heritage, Built Heritage & Archaeology:



Map. 11.1 Map of Architectural Conservation Areas, Athlone

11.18 Architectural conservation Areas (ACAs):

1. The Town Centre: This area extends from Connaught Street and includes most of the streets in the west bank area such as Fry Place and O'Connell Street, across the river including the road bridge to the eastern end of the town to Sean Costello Street. This conservation area retains the medieval form of the town and has a variety of styles and types of buildings ranging from the castle, domestic houses, civic buildings and churches, commercial premises and shop units.

11.19 Built Heritage Policies & Objectives:

It is a policy of the Councils:

P-BH1: To have regard to the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government publication 'Architectural Heritage Protection Guidelines for Planning Authorities' 2004 in the implementation of development objectives and the assessment of planning applications relating to protected structures, proposed protected structures or buildings within Architectural Conservation Areas.

P-BH2: To protect and conserve buildings, structures and sites contained in the Record of Protected Structures and to resist the demolition of such structures, except in exceptional circumstances where a need has been established.



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P-BH3: To ensure that any development, modification, alteration, or extension affecting a Protected Structure and/or its setting is sensitively sited and designed, is compatible with its special character, and is appropriate in terms of the proposed scale, mass, height, density, layout, and materials so that the integrity of the structure and its curtilage is preserved.

P-BH4: To conserve and protect the town's built environment and heritage in terms of streetscapes, individual buildings and features of historical, architectural, artistic, cultural, scientific, social and technical interest.

P-BH5 To consider designation of those areas that have particular environmental qualities that derive from their overall layout, design and unity of character as Architectural Conservation Areas (ACAs) and that the character of such areas is preserved.

P-BH6: To ensure that any new development or alteration of a building within or adjoining an ACA positively enhances the character of the area and is appropriate in terms of the plot size, proposed design, including: scale, mass, height, proportions, density, layout, materials, plot ratio and building lines.

P-BH7: To resist the demolition of a structure that positively contributes to the character of an ACA, except in very exceptional circumstances. Where demolition is granted an assessment of the impact of the replacement building on the character of the ACA will be required.



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Goatstown,
Dublin 14.

Impact Assessment

Description of the proposed works:

PART XI OF THE PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT ACT, 2000 (as amended)

PART 8 OF THE PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT REGULATIONS, 2001 (as amended)

Pursuant to the requirements of the above, notice is hereby given that Westmeath County Council proposes to undertake the following works:

Public Realm Enhancement and Associated Works within an area encompassing c.0.0425ha immediately to the north of Athlone Castle (a National Monument and protected structure – reference Number RPS 070) and within an Architectural Conservation Area (Athlone Town), Athlone, Co. Westmeath.

The proposed development will consist of works at the northwest and proximate to the main entrance to Athlone Castle and include the following:

1. Removal of existing ramps, steps, railings, and relocation of public lighting
2. Public Realm enhancement to include hard and soft landscaping, footpaths, ramps, steps and public lighting;
3. Signage
4. Accommodation works (including utility provision, drainage and services);
5. Other associated works

The site is bounded by Athlone Castle to the South, Athlone Town bridge, also known as Shannon Road Bridge (a regional Monument and protected structure - Reference Number RPS 004) to the North, The Shannon quays to the East and Market Place to the West.

The Proposed scheme has undergone **Appropriate Assessment Screening** under the Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC) and screening for **Environmental Impact Assessment** under the EIA Directive 2014/52/EU.



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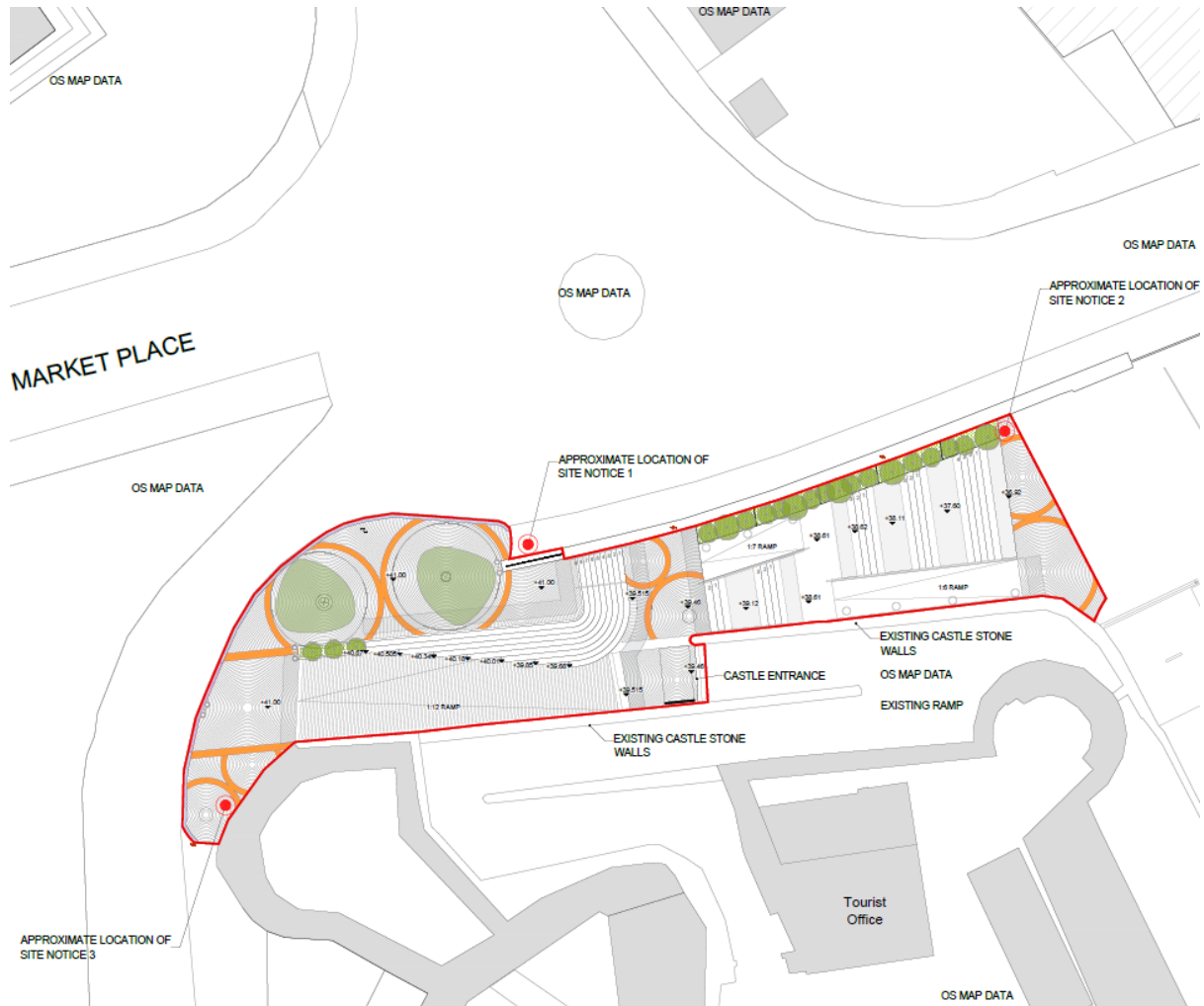


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Dublin 14.

Proposed Site Layout Plan



Site Layout Plan and development description courtesy of Urban Agency.



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Detailed Analysis:

Existing hard landscaped surfaces to be removed are:

- Tarmacadam, assumed to be in a standard sub base build up, less than 600mm deep.
- Brick pavers, assumed to be in a standard sub base build up, less than 600mm deep.
- Modern stone faced wall at quays, probably with a blockwork core and a concrete footing depth of less than 600mm.
- Modern brick planter at south end of parking area on west side of the site, assumed to have a concrete footing depth of less than 600mm.
- Modern additions in the area of the castle entrance to improve pedestrian access including steps and access ramps. Likely construction date 1990s or 2000s. These are finished in liscannor stone, limestone, and in situ concrete capping, assumed to have a concrete footing depth of less than 600mm. Tubular steel railings with galvanized or black painted finish.

Existing hard landscaped surfaces to be retained are:

- Low stone wall and iron railing to the east of the castle, adjacent to the car parking. Coursed ashlar limestone approx. 1 meter high. Partially repointed with protruding cement based mortar. Half round limestone capping and iron railing approx. 800mm high. Likely to be late Georgian or early Victorian in date.

Existing historic structures to be retained on the site are:

- Historic material of the façade of Athlone Castle. The castle walls are constructed of limestone showing varying treatments and levels of stone dressing representing various stages of development throughout the castle's history. Generally the rougher, less worked stone is the oldest while the smoother finished is later and the cut stone elements are more recent again.
- Historic Access ramp at the castle entrance. Slightly inclined random rubble retaining walls with cut stone capping at lower ramp levels. Brick dressings to pistol loops at higher levels. Material largely dates to the Napoleonic development of the castle in the early 19th century.
- Structure of the Town Bridge. Built mid 19th century of cut limestone. 20th century alterations in concrete in westernmost bay when opening section was removed. Built fabric is generally in good condition though aesthetically impacted by surface mounted services and signage.

Proposed lighting:

- Lighting is proposed to highlight the tunnel under the Shannon Bridge and to highlight the proposed trees.

Potential concealed features underground:

- Due to the layered historical development of the site including a historical curtain wall, enclosing several buildings within a castle bailey there is a potential for concealed, historical features underground not uncovered in recent landscaping works. The proposed works are not likely to dig to a depth lower than that already disturbed in recent decades. In addition to the historical evidence, several unidentified anomalies as buried artefacts or change of material have been observed and mapped in the GPR survey carried out by Murphy Geospatial.



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Impact Conclusion

Given the position of the site within an Architectural Conservation Area, work will require planning permission, either through the regular process or by Part 8 Approval.

Given the position of the site within a zone of Archaeological Potential, design and construction work must involve the close collaboration with an archaeological consultant.

Proposals are respectful of the national monument - Athlone Castle, and protected structures defining the site. The works proposed will improve the prominence of the historic structures in the streetscape and as viewed from the river. As such the works are, subject to careful attention to detail, monitoring and workmanship, to be welcomed from a heritage impact standpoint.

The junctions of the new hard landscape surfaces with the castle, bridge or quay wall structures will maintain the existing relationship between old and new. The well defined meeting of new and historic fabric is welcomed.

The lighting of the new work needs careful consideration. Lighting should not compete with the castle walls for prominence but should be subservient to the castle floodlights. Location of fittings are appropriate to the proposed works. Cable runs are located in new work as opposed to on historic structures but need ongoing consideration as the design develops; they should be designed to be as unobtrusive as possible to potential archaeology on the site.

In the area at the junction of the bridge and the castle entrance, the removal of the steel railing (late 20th century and not part of the original fabric of the area) and (subject to the detailed design of the proposal) the moving or lowering of the plinth below these railings, will increase the visual prominence of the castle entrance and ease the movement of pedestrians to the newly landscaped entrance area. This strategy can be welcomed from a heritage impact perspective as it will help to reassert the presence of the castle entrance. However, careful consideration of the treatment of the stone plinth will be required, with input from a conservation professional during the detailed design and construction of this element of work. I recommend that any material removed from the plinth be retained on site and be identifiable.

The quay wall is being incorporated as an important heritage feature. The removal of the visual clutter formed by late 20th century interventions is to be welcomed. The proposed bicycle parking and planters deal with health and safety issues in a more favourable way than options such as guard railings on the quay walls, which would have a detrimental effect.

Likewise, the iron bollards on the quay wall are proposed to be retained and integrated into the scheme. The proposed reduced visual clutter will highlight the presence of these features. They are being treated as important historic elements given their relationship to the quay walls and to the large iron bollards to the south which are included in the record of protected structures.

New hard landscaping surfaces are replacing work from recent decades with a higher standard of design than the existing and with appropriate, high-quality materials. The fact that the new work replaces work carried out recently and does not include significant excavation means that there is unlikely to be and disturbance to historic material below ground level. However, contractors must be informed, aware and cognisant at all times of the complex history of development on the site and the potential to expose valuable historic fabric during site works.



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Project Specific Principles of Conservation:

Strict conservation principles should be applied throughout the works and in all aspects of workmanship.

The general contractor and all site operatives should be clearly advised of the importance of the fabric of the historic structures surrounding the site. I recommend that all site operatives are briefed on the history of the site to foster a culture of stewardship for the site's heritage.

Historic material is being retained on the site. Work is almost exclusively restricted to the replacement of modern interventions to reassert the prominence of the historic structures in the streetscape and the community.

The works should generally be carried out in accordance with good building conservation principles enshrined in the *ICOMOS 1964 International Charter on the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites (the Venice Charter)*.

Where specific repair work is to be carried out (such as locally to stonework or mortars in the historic structures the specification of such work should, at all times, be the faithful replacement of what exists, or did exist, as is appropriate to good conservation practice, i.e; repair with like materials or replace with what was - and in like manner - where at all possible.

Observation notes and a photographic record should be maintained throughout the project which should be certified on completion.

All works should be carried out in accordance with current best practice and, in particular, in accordance with the following publications:

- Department of Arts, Heritage and Gaeltacht, Architectural Heritage Protection - Guidelines for planning Authorities, 2011.
- Department of Arts, Heritage and Gaeltacht, Advice Series.

The following conservation principles apply to the works:

- Care should be taken to avoid unnecessary replacement or damage of historic fabric.
- Works to the original fabric to be reversible where possible.
- All historic material should be retained and repaired where possible. If historic materials are to be removed or relocated on site, very careful consideration should be given to the final placement of such material.
- Honesty of repairs and alternations to be promoted.
- Repairs to be carried out without any attempt at disguise or artificial ageing.
- Appropriate material and methods to be used.
- Any replacement material required should match original in colour, size, texture, thickness and durability. Use of architectural salvage discouraged.



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Recommendations & Conclusions

The site contains several protected structures (bridge, bollards) and national monuments (castle), each of which is a large, visually inert form with well defined spaces between them. There are other historic structures which warrant the same respect as the protected structures and national monuments (quay walls, smaller iron bollards).

The overall historic streetscape of the town retains a medieval influence which is rare in Irish towns. The spaces to the west and south of the castle contribute to this streetscape and work well. The outdoor spaces to the north and west of the castle (the subject site for this assessment) were largely created by mid 19th century works associated with the construction of the Shannon bridge. They allow a visual pause in the busier surrounding urban fabric and are ideally suited to the proposed recreational use.

In recent decades the clarity of form of the streetscape has been compromised by small scale ad-hoc interventions, signage, planting and landscaping works.

I recommend that proposed works aim to re-establish the clarity visible in the Lawrence collection photographs and enhance the visual dominance of the castle in the surrounding streetscape.

In this instance, to highlight the presence and visual impact of the castle and the other historic structures I recommend the junction of historic structures and new landscape interventions are carefully considered. They should, as proposed make clear and well defined additions to the streetscape.

New interventions must sit harmoniously within the wider streetscape. The castle and bridge sit in a delicate balance and we hope to heighten the visual prominence of the castle. To this end the new works must not compete with the historic structures. Specification of suitable materials must blend with the historic limestone of the castle, bridge and quay walls, as well as the successful limestone landscaping to the west and south of the castle.

It is the opinion of the undersigned that none of the proposed works will adversely affect the character of the historic site or any element of the structures which contribute to its special interest, subject to careful ongoing detailed design, supervision and construction. Further the proposed works will enhance their prominence in the townscape.

It is to be noted that strict conservation principles must apply throughout all works which will conserve the structures and contribute to their sustainable use in a heritage context. Whilst any changes associated with the proposed development may otherwise be small, they must be considered at a level of detail to ensure that damage is not caused inadvertently to existing fabric including that which may be exposed during construction work.

I consider that the proposed works will not adversely affect the special character of this historic site and will ensure the continued protection of the streetscape and associated historic structures by improving its recreational amenity value. Therefore, we consider that the proposed works will be consistent with the objectives of Westmeath County Council County Development Plan 2021-2027, Athlone Town Development 2014 - 2020 and the provisions of Part IV of the Planning and Development Act (Architectural Heritage).

Patrick Dunne Architect B.Arch MRIAI



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