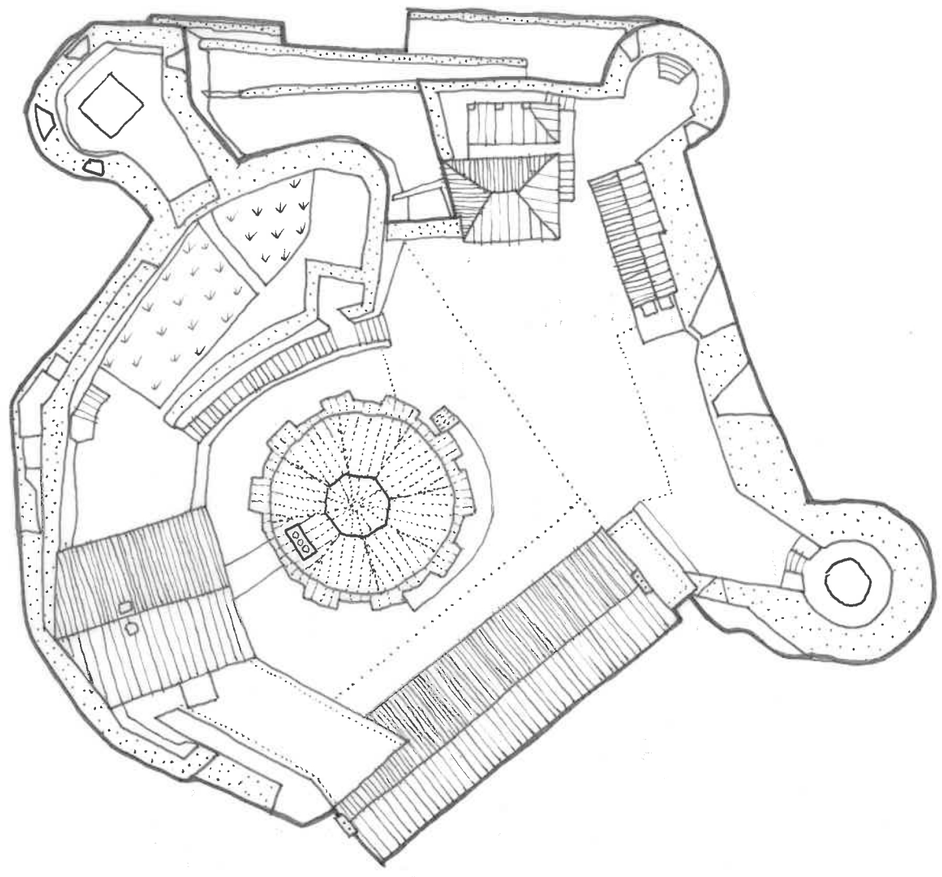

ATHLONE CASTLE – INTERPRETATION, FACILITIES & VISITOR JOURNEY ENGAGEMENT PROJECT, ATHLONE

Architectural Heritage Impact Assessment 23 . 07 . 2025

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Fig.1: Contemporary aerial view of the site from the west

Fig.2: Photo from courtyard, Ros Kavanagh

Fig.3: Contemporary aerial view of the site from the east

Fig.4: View approaching the entrance

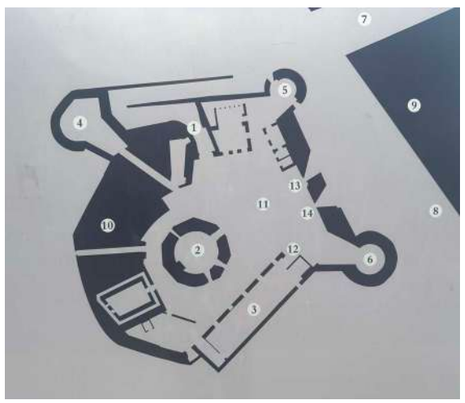

Fig.5: View of visitors' map

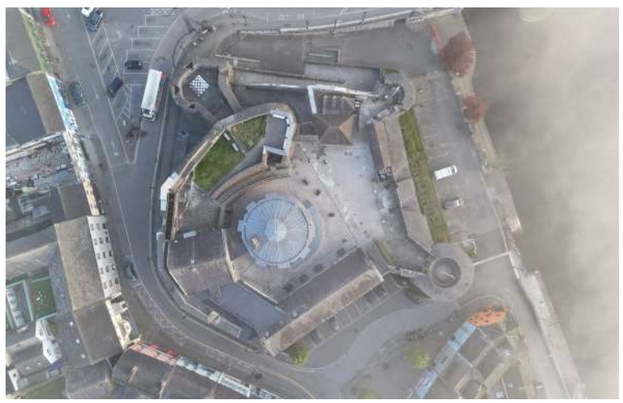

Fig.6: *Contemporary aerial view*

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1.0: INTRODUCTION

This is an Architectural Heritage Impact Assessment of the proposed interpretation, facilities & visitor journey engagement project, at Athlone Castle by Galmstrup Architects. This assessment forms part of the Part 8 application for the proposed works comprising enhancement works aimed at improving interpretation, visitor facilities, and the overall visitor journey, to enhance public engagement with the historic site.

The assessment is to be read in conjunction with the following drawings prepared by Galmstrup Architects.

Drawing List

GA-038-10001	Existing Ground Floor GA
GA-038-10002	Existing First Floor GA
GA-038-11001	Demolition Ground Floor GA
GA-038-11002	Demolition First Floor GA
GA-038-12001	Proposed Ground Floor GA
GA-038-12002	Proposed First Floor GA
GA-038-10501	Existing GA Sect. AA through Keep
GA-038-11501	Demolition GA Sect. AA through Keep
GA-038-12501	Proposed GA Sect. AA through Keep
GA-038-14000	Keep Stair - Plans
GA-038-14001	Keep Stair - Sections
GA-038-14002	Airlocks - Plans
GA-038-14003	Airlocks - Elevations
GA-038-14007	Ticketing Window - Plans Elevations Sections
GA-038-14050	Gable Stair & Kiosk - Plans
GA-038-14051	Gable Stair & Kiosk - Elevations

1.1: CONSERVATION ARCHITECT

Max O'Flaherty, Aughey O'Flaherty Architects, Grade 1 Accredited Conservation Architect has prepared this report to accompany the Part 8 application for the proposed works being submitted to Westmeath County Council. The assessment is based on site inspections of the castle and surrounds carried out across April, May, June & July 2025. The proposed scope of work is based on meetings and dialogue with the National Monuments Service across June & July 2025.

Fig.7: Lawrence collection 1870 and 1910

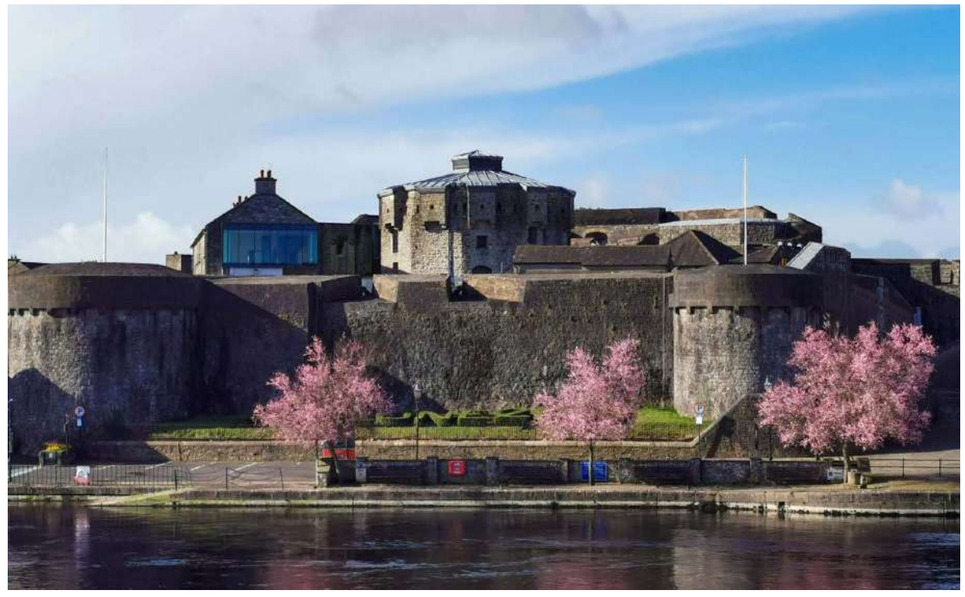

Fig.8: Contemporary view from east bank

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1.2: DEVELOPMENT DESCRIPTION

The part 8 description of the development is as follows:

Proposed development at Athlone Castle, Saint Peter's Terrace and Bigmeadow, Athlone, Co. Westmeath, N37 A6D7 (a Protected Structure, RPS No. 70, and a National Monument Heritage Site Reg.No. 15000352), comprising enhancement works aimed at improving interpretation, visitor facilities, and the overall visitor journey, to enhance public engagement with the historic site.
The proposed development will include the following:

1. Localised external restoration and adaptation to existing fabric to facilitate ticketing, coffee kiosk and new staircases
2. Provision of new internal exhibition spaces
3. Installation of new entrance airlocks for environmental control of collection
4. Internal refurbishment works including upgrades to electrical and mechanical systems
5. New external interpretation, lighting, wayfinding and signage works
6. Small scale demolition works to widen openings, removal of non-original elements to reveal original features
7. Ancillary Works

This assessment reviews the impact of the various interventions on the built fabric of the castle within the above development description. The assessment is broken down into a series of interventions, each of which is assessed on an individual basis. The interventions are arranged according to whether they are internal and external.
There has been significant liaison and dialogue in relation to these interventions with the National Monuments Service across June & July 2025.

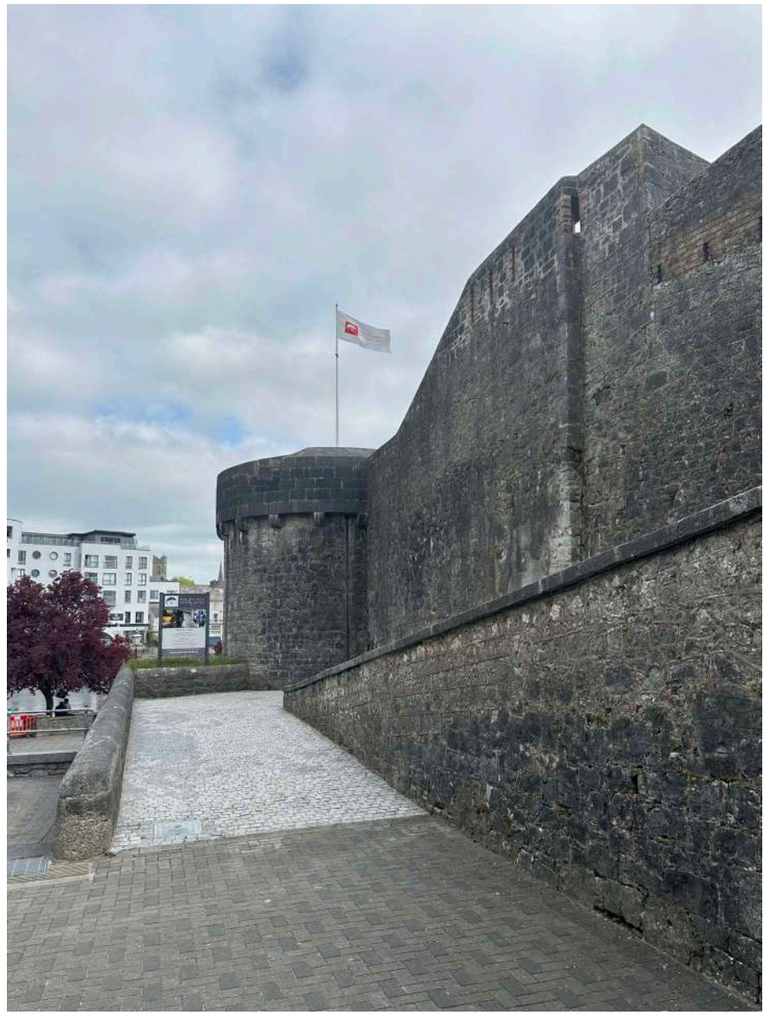

Fig.9: View approaching the entrance

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2.0: STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The castle buildings are National Monuments in State Care and are included in the Record of Protected Structures in the Athlone Town Development Plan.

Athlone Castle dates from in or about 1210 and was a significant defensive and administration centre by the 16th century. The 17th century saw a decline in its fortunes and the 1691 siege of Athlone, coupled with an explosion in the powder magazine in 1697, saw the buildings almost reduced to the level of the yard. Little seems to have been done to the buildings during the 18th century until about 1793 when a programme of repair and rebuilding was embarked that lasted into the 19th century. The majority of the buildings on the site today date from this period including the Barracks Block, the Armaments Block and the Keep above the undulating plinth. The remainder of the 19th and most of the 20th century saw very little change to the buildings until the military occupation ceased and the castle was declared a National Monument. Significant alterations and upgrading was undertaken in the 1990's to create the extant Visitor's Centre within the castle walls.

2.1: STATUTORY PROTECTIONS

The castle buildings are protected structures under the provisions of the Local Government (Planning and Development) Act 1999. (RPS No. 70, Volume 8, Records of Protected Structures, Westmeath County Development Plan 2021 – 2027 listed as '12thC Norman fortress - King John's Castle') The castle buildings are also a National Monument in State Care. The Official notice is affixed to the Curtain Wall mid-distance up the entrance ramp adjacent to the Bridge. The castle buildings are listed on the National Monuments Service"s Record of Monuments and Places under SMR No. WM029- 042002- with the description "Castle – Anglo-Norman Masonry Castle." The proposed works to the castle are subject to the submissions, notifications and approvals required by the various Planning Acts (1963 – 2006), the various National Monuments Acts (1930 – 2004) and the various regulations arising from those Acts.

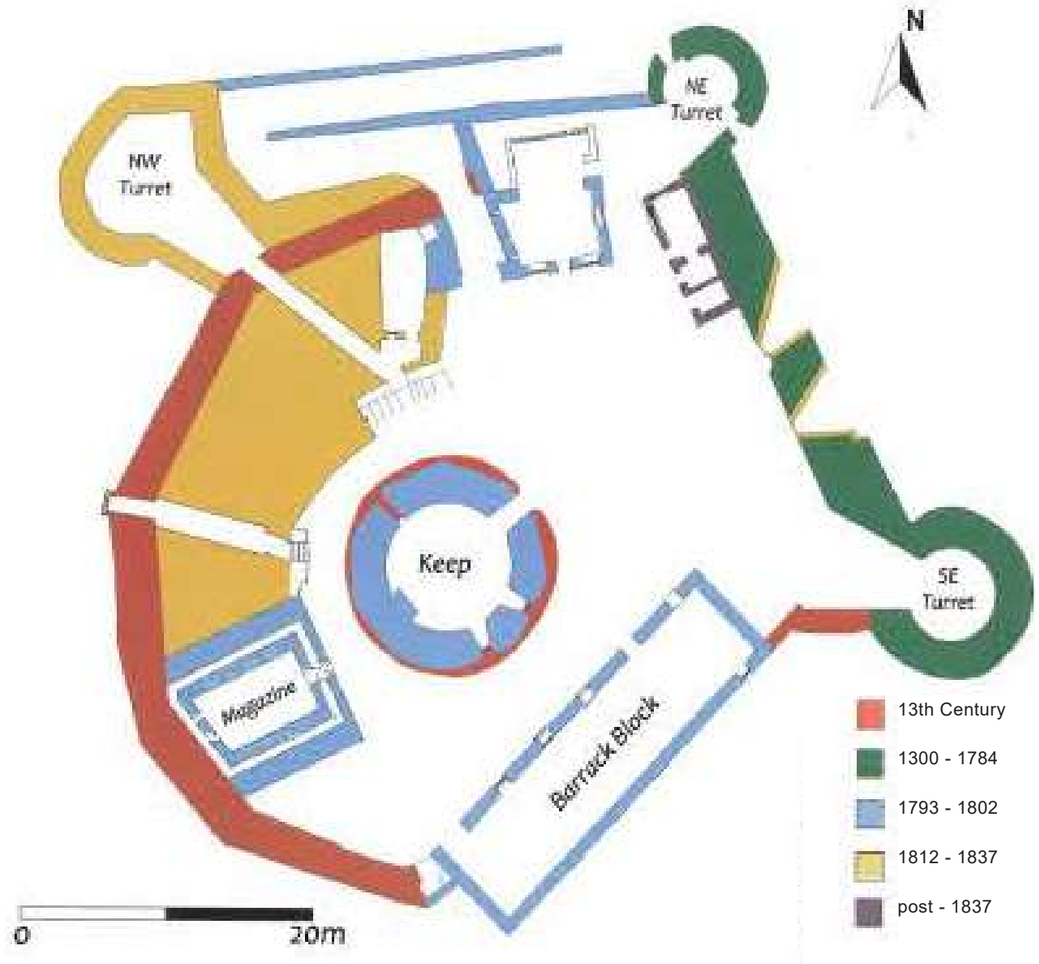

Fig.10: Castle Phasing Plan, Page 45, Athlone Castle, Westmeath County Council

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2.2: RECORD OF PROTECTED STRUCTURES DESCRIPTION

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

2.3: 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 pentangular plan with pronounced base batter) having three polygonal bastions to north and east side facing over bridge 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[1]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).

Fig.11: Lawrence Collection_exterior photo

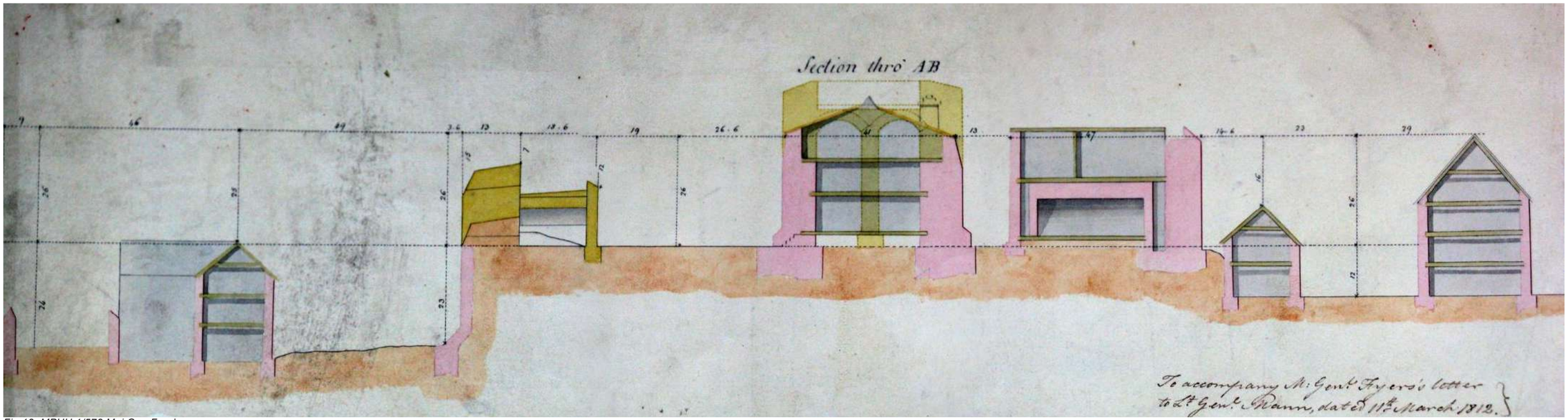

Fig.12: MPHH 1/578 Maj Gen Fyer's

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2.4: 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. 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[1]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.

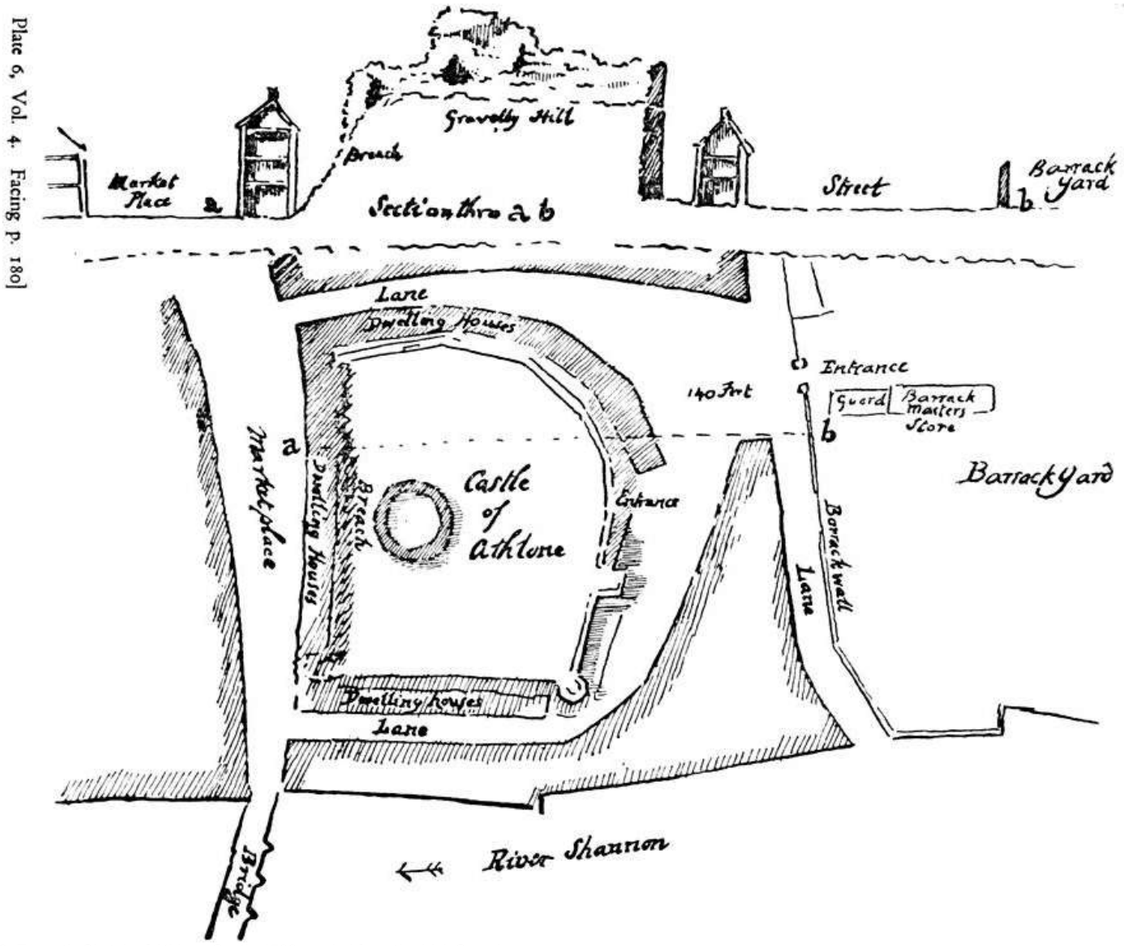

Fig.13: Tarrant’s Sketch of Athlone Castle 1793, copied from the Irish Sword

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2.5: HISTORY

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. Significant alterations and upgrading was undertaken in the 1990's to create the extant Visitor's Centre within the castle walls.

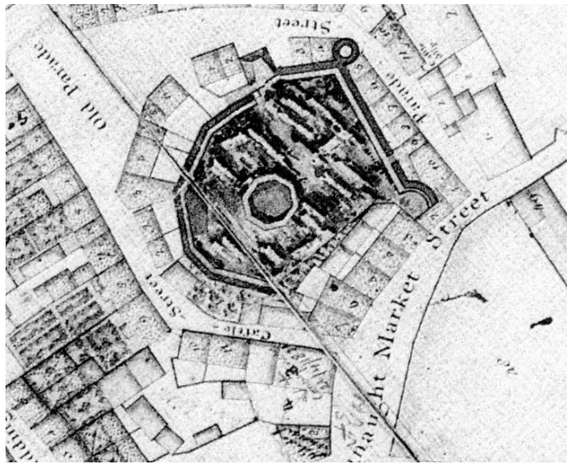

Fig.14: Extract From Thomas Sherrard's Map - 1784

Fig.16: Extract From Ordnance Survey Map Sheet 52 - Surveyed 1837

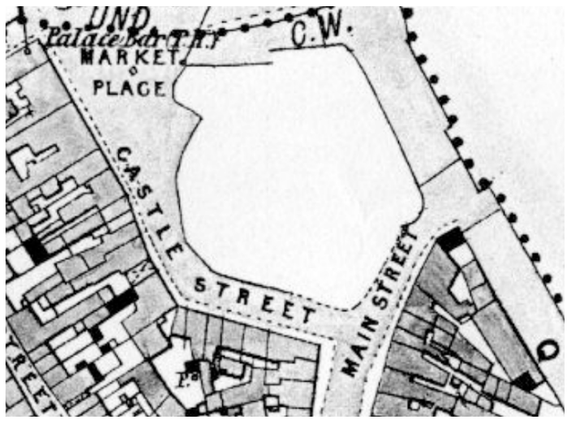

Fig.15: Extract From Ordnance Survey Map Sheet 52-3, Surveyed 1889.

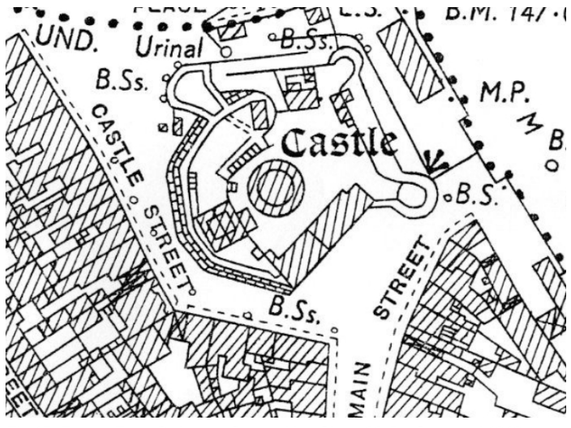

Fig.17: Extract From Ordnance Survey Map Sheet 29-5 – Surveyed 1912.

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2.6: BACKGROUND TO THE DEVELOPMENT

Westmeath County Council Project Design Brief sets out that a Visitor Experience Survey was undertaken in 2019 which found that the castle was under-performing under key headings as follows:

- only 43% of visitors that enter the Castle walls, pay into the visitor centre which houses the interpretive galleries.
- there is a low level of conversion of visitors from the ‘free’ external space into the ‘paid’ internal space.
- there is very little visitor interpretation at street level right up to admissions
- the admissions area is not immediately obvious
- the average visitor dwell time is just 23 minutes (across both paid and free visitors)
- the value proposition and mission statement is not clear.
- the value proposition centres around the story of the Siege of Athlone in 1690, but this central story is lost in a lot of other historical detail
- the current brand is currently ‘Athlone Castle’ which could benefit from further refinement
- while the interpretation is of a high quality, it covers too much

The attraction received a poor score for visitor experience, below national average across most areas.
Lowest scores were in the area of signposting, quality of coffee shop, interior layout, availability of staff, quality of some of the presentations and exhibits.
In short, the survey found that there is an opportunity to look at how the story is being

Fig.18: View from entrance

Fig.19: View of North East turret

Fig.20: View of entrance

Fig.21: View of Congested entry

Fig.22: View of Ablution house

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2.7: PURPOSE

The purpose of the project is to ensure that Athlone Castle:

- is a flagship cultural attraction within the Hidden Heartland's region and a key component of the Athlone destination experience,
- maximises its potential as a visitor attraction through the development of its commercial capacity to grow and deliver financial stability,
- has a detailed Capacity Planning; Revenue Generation; and Sales Activation plan categorising key actions and objectives,
- delivers on its key KPIs including growth of visitor numbers to 70,000 per year.

2.8: EXISTING CONDITION

In summary, the existing condition suffers from:

-excessive visual clutter,
-a confused visitor experience,
-extensive and inappropriate recent installations,
-and neglected upkeep of building fabric.

Fig.23: View of plant & Bin enclosure

Fig.24: View of plant & Bin enclosure

Fig.25: Contemporary aerial view towards Cathedral

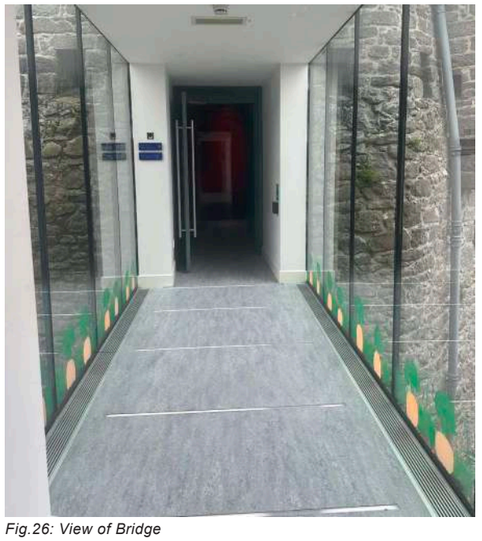

Fig.26: View of Bridge

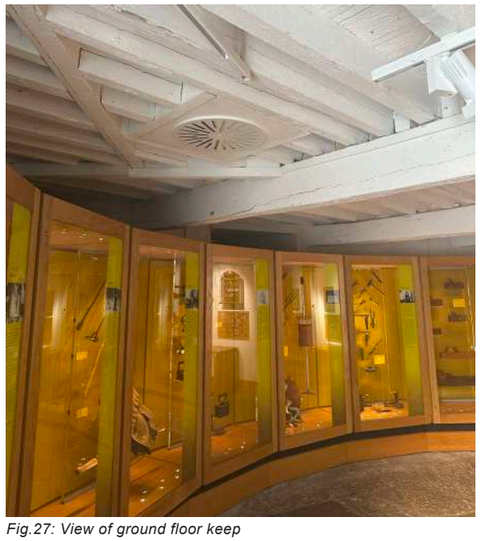

Fig.27: View of ground floor keep

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3.0: THE PROPOSED WORKS & CONSERVATION IMPACT

On the adjacent plans, each intervention is numbered, and its location is highlighted on the plan layout for clarity.
The interventions are grouped according to whether they are internal or external.
Each intervention is described, and its conservation impact is assessed and classified as positive, negative or neutral. Where mitigation measures are recommended, they are described.

3.1: EXTERNAL INTERVENTIONS

EX-1 New welcome flags / signage to create attractive entrance.
The current signage at the castle entrance is adhoc and haphazard and a co-ordinated signage strategy will reduce visual clutter and improve the visitor experience.
The provision of new flags and signage is necessary and is to be encouraged.
No loss of historic building fabric is envisaged. The area affected is confined and limited.
The interventions are reversible.
Conservation Impact: Neutral

Mitigation Measures: It is important to ensure that the excavations required for the base of the poles or the grounds for the fixing of signage is minimised and does not affect historic building fabric. A detailed survey of the relevant areas will need to be carried out. The signage and flag bases would need to be carefully detailed and installed with sensitivity. Removal or cutting into historic fabric should be avoided.

EX-2 Removal of modern sash window to Gate Building to create ticketing window.
The proposed ticketing window has been the subject of much investigation, study and discussion with the National Monuments Service.
The proposal inside the gate is an interim solution to enable time for investigations and funding for a long term permanent solution outside the castle entrance. The proposed replacement of a modern sash window in the tourism office with a ticketing window will enable visitors to purchase tickets at the gate. The sash window to be removed and replaced dates from the twentieth century. The wall finishes also date from the twentieth century. The works are a minor local intervention and relate to modern building fabric only.
The intervention does not affect historic building fabric.
Conservation Impact: Neutral

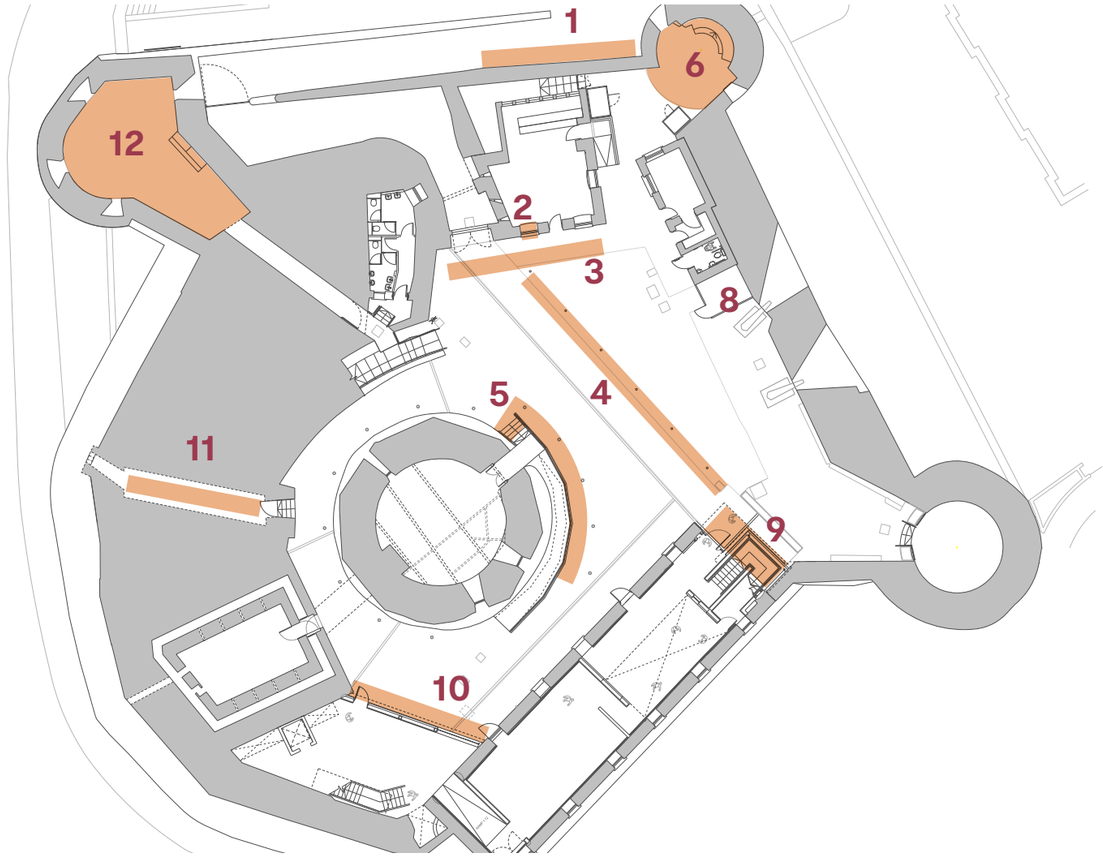

Fig.28: Galmstrup Architects - Ground Floor - Existing plan

Fig.29: View of North eastern turret

Fig.30: View of gate building

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3.1: CONT.D

EX-3 Installation of temporary and reversible visitor barriers.
The existing bollards and screening are loose haphazard fittings. The replacement of these with more co-ordinated barriers will reduce visual clutter. This work relates primarily to modern building fabric and is reversible. No loss of historic building fabric is envisaged. The area affected is confined and limited.
Conservation Impact: Neutral

EX-4 Removal of lighting bollards, replacement with alternative lighting strategies.
The lighting bollards are recent interventions, dating from 2012. The removal and replacement relates to modern building fabric only. The intervention will result in more appropriate and sensitive lighting which will positively affect the character.
Conservation Impact: Positive

Mitigation Measures: It is important to ensure that the removal of any existing service runs does not affect historic building fabric. A detailed survey of the relevant area will need to be carried out. The proposed new electrical runs would need to be carefully detailed and carried out with sensitivity. Chasing or cutting into historic fabric should be avoided.

EX-5 Adaptations to 2012 ramp and stair to provide bench and more welcoming approach to keep.
This ramp and stair are recent interventions, dating from 2012. The adaptation works relate to modern building fabric only. The area affected is confined and limited. The interventions are reversible. The intervention does not affect historic building fabric or character.
Conservation Impact: Neutral

EX-6 Removal of storage clutter from NE turret to allow visitor access and improve legibility of defensive castle architecture
This north eastern turret is currently inaccessible to the visitor and the addition of this area to the visitor experience is positive in a general sense.
No loss of historic building fabric is envisaged.
The intervention will bring this key part of the castle back into the visitor experience, will contribute to improving the legibility of the castle and is to be encouraged.
Conservation Impact: Positive

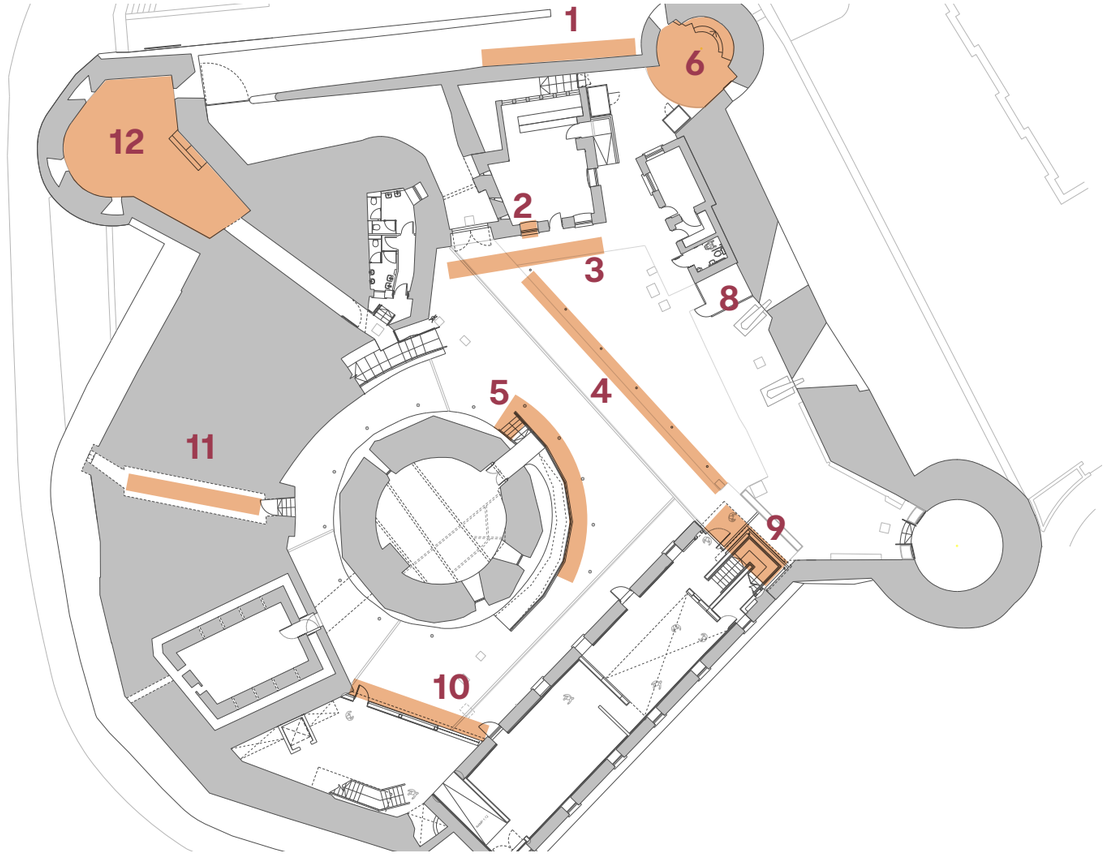

Fig.31: Galmstrup Architects - Ground Floor - Existing plan

Fig.32: View of keep and ramp

Fig.33: View of North eastern turret

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3.1: CONT.D

EX-8 Removal of the Plant & Bin Enclosure
To the south of Ablution House, there is a small plant enclosure which contains air handling units and bins. This enclosure is a recent intervention dating from 2012 and is unsightly in in a prominent central position in the courtyard. This screen is to be replaced with new timber cladding. The intervention relates to modern building fabric only. No loss of historic building fabric is envisaged.
Conservation Impact: Neutral

EX-9 Reconfiguration of stairway and ground floor enclosure to 2012 barracks gable building
This stair and ground floor enclosure are recent interventions, dating from 2012. The reconfiguration works relate to modern building fabric only. The intervention does not affect historic building fabric or character.
Conservation Impact: Neutral

EX-9 Reconfiguration of stairway and ground floor enclosure to 2012 barracks gable building
This stair and ground floor enclosure are recent interventions, dating from 2012. The reconfiguration works relate to modern building fabric only. The new timber cladding will soften the elevation and relate to cladding elsewhere. The intervention does not affect historic building fabric or character.
Conservation Impact: Neutral

EX-10 Timber cladding to ground floor 2012 link building to better integrate with historic setting
The link building is a recent intervention, dating from 2012. The alteration works relate to modern building fabric only and do not affect historic building fabric or character.
Conservation Impact: Neutral

EX-10 Adaptations to existing door and window openings to improve disabled and service access and improve daylighting to internal space.
This door and window openings are recent interventions, dating from 2012. The alteration works relate to modern building fabric only and do not affect historic building fabric or character.
Conservation Impact: Neutral

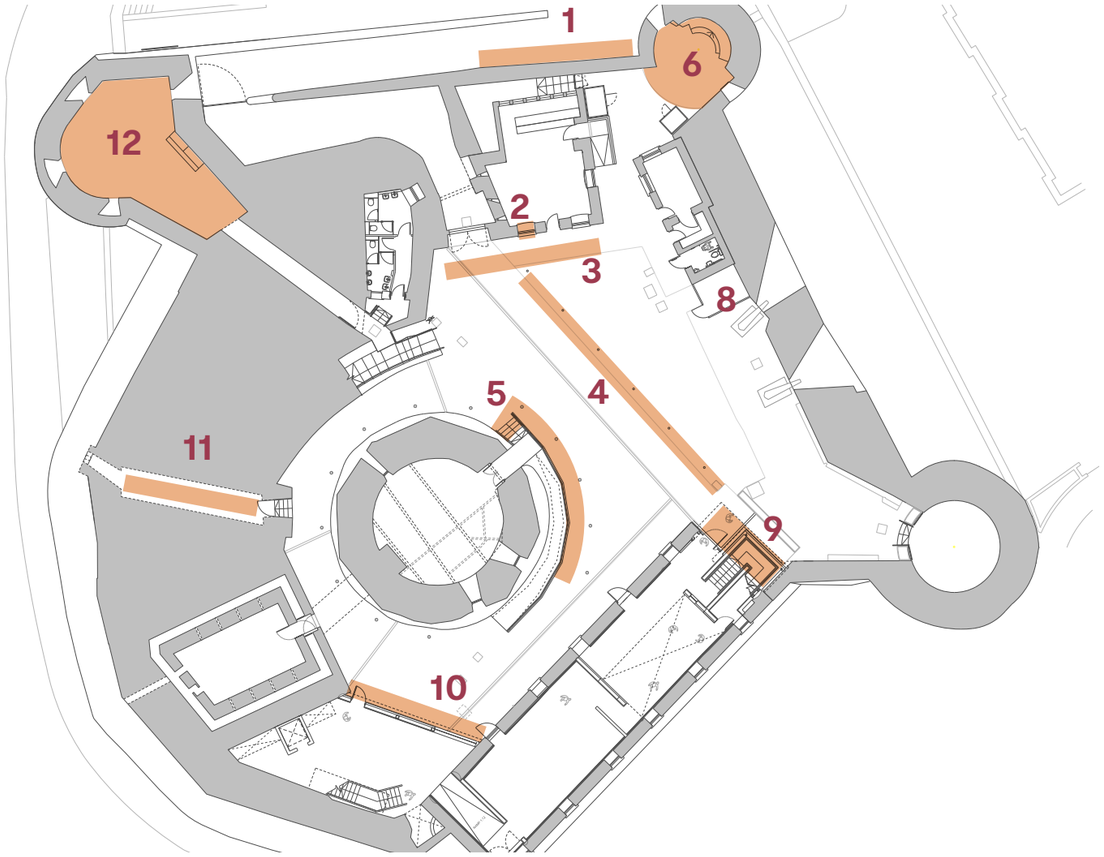

Fig.34: Galmstrup Architects - Ground Floor - Existing plan

Fig.35: View of plant & Bin enclosure

Fig.36: View of plant & Bin enclosure

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3.1: CONT.D

EX-10 Creation of ‘airlock’ portal to improve internal environmental control
The finishes proposed for removal are not original and date from the 2012 works. The proposed ‘airlock’ relates to modern building fabric only and will enable museum standard environmental stability. No loss of historic building fabric is envisaged.
Conservation Impact: Neutral

EX-11 Removal of storage clutter from W slot to allow access into and improve legibility of defensive architecture
This western slot is currently inaccessible to the visitor and the addition of this area to the visitor experience is positive in a general sense.
This removal work is necessary to enable access. No loss of historic building fabric is envisaged.
The intervention will contribute to improving the legibility of the castle and is to be encouraged.
Conservation Impact: Positive

EX-11 Provision of small power / lighting to W slot to aid interpretation
As above, this western slot is currently inaccessible to the visitor and the addition of this area to the visitor experience is positive in a general sense.
The provision of small power and lighting is necessary to enable this in a safe manner. No loss of historic building fabric is envisaged. The area affected is confined and limited. The intervention is reversible.
The intervention will contribute to improving the legibility of the castle and is to be encouraged.
Conservation Impact: Positive

Mitigation Measures: It is important to ensure that the removal of any existing service runs do not affect historic building fabric. A detailed survey of the relevant area will need to be carried out. The proposed new electrical runs would need to be surface mounted, carefully detailed and carried out with sensitivity. Chasing or cutting into historic fabric should be avoided.

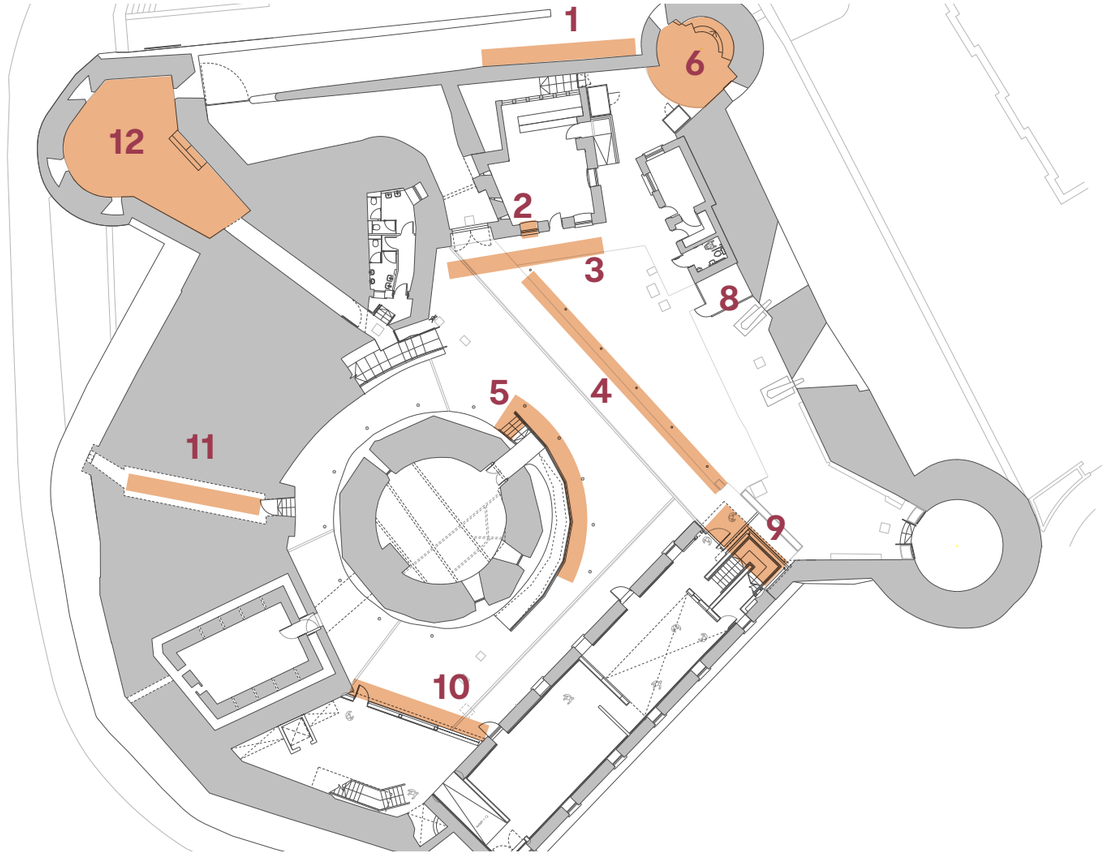

Fig.37: Galmstrup Architects - Ground Floor - Existing plan

Fig.38: View of end of Western slot

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3.1: CONT.D

EX-12 Provision of small power / lighting to NW turret to facilitate interpretation and small events.

The north western turret is currently accessible in daylight hours only and the expansion of this visitor experience is positive in a general sense.

The provision of small power and lighting is necessary to enable this in a safe manner.

No loss of historic building fabric is envisaged. The area affected is confined and limited.

The intervention is reversible.

The intervention will contribute to improving the legibility of the castle and is to be encouraged.

Conservation Impact: Positive

Mitigation Measures: A detailed survey of the relevant area will need to be carried out. The proposed new electrical runs would need to be surface mounted, carefully detailed and carried out with sensitivity. To minimise the effect on historic building fabric. Chasing or cutting into historic fabric should be avoided.

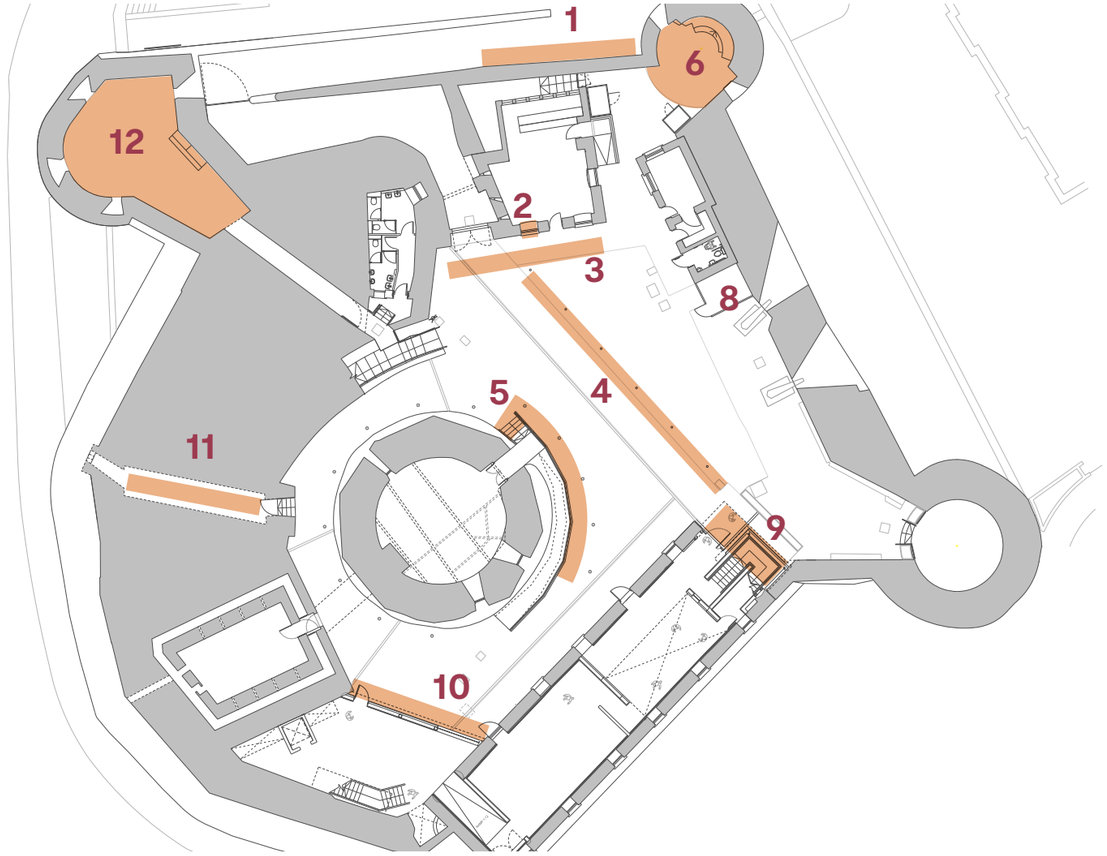

Fig.39: Galmstrup Architects - Ground Floor - Existing plan

Fig.40: View of North Western slot

Fig.41: View of North Western turret

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3.1: CONT.D

EX-13 Removal of lawn and provision of increased hard-standing to allow for greater visitor use (with revised planting areas)
The removal of the lawn and the replacement with hardstanding does not affect historic building fabric or character. The reduced area of lawn will be retained.
Conservation Impact: Neutral

Mitigation Measures: Ensure that the removal of lawn and associated earth does not affect historic building fabric. The relevant area is subject to the outcomes of archaeological testing. Cutting into historic fabric to be avoided.

EX-14 Adaptation to existing modern terrace finishes to create permanent step free access to the terrace between interior and exterior
The current terrace finishes are recent dating from 1990's. Their replacement with step free access does not affect historic building fabric or character.
Conservation Impact: Neutral

Mitigation Measures: It is important to ensure that the replacement works do not affect historic building fabric. A detailed survey of the relevant area will need to be carried out. The works would need to be carefully detailed and carried out with sensitivity. Chasing or cutting into historic fabric should be avoided.

EX-14 Creation of 'airlock' portal to improve internal environmental control
This current door is a recent intervention dating from 2012. The replacement with an 'airlock' portal will sit within the historic arched opening and will not affect historic building fabric or character.
Conservation Impact: Neutral

Mitigation Measures: It is important to ensure that the replacement works do not affect adjacent historic building fabric. A detailed survey of the relevant area will need to be carried out. The associated service runs would need to be carefully detailed and carried out with sensitivity. Chasing or cutting into historic fabric should be avoided.

EX-15 Internal reconfiguration of stair - no change to 2012 gable building 1F externally
This stair is a recent intervention dating from 2012. The reconfiguration works are internal. The intervention does not affect historic building fabric or character.
Conservation Impact: Neutral

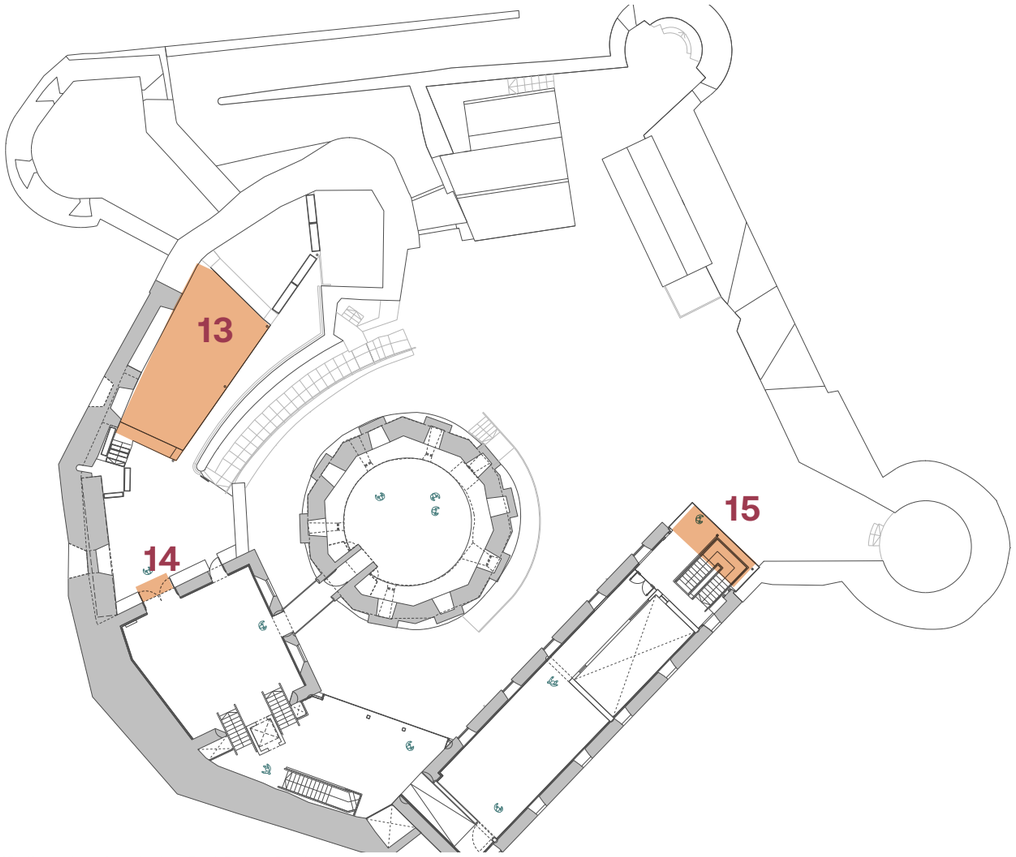

Fig.42: Galmstrup Architects - First Floor - Existing plan

Fig.43: View of lawn area

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3.2: INTERNAL INTERVENTIONS

IN-1 Gateway buidling - Internal fit out to suit office, ticketing and retail needs - location of new ticket office and shop

The existing internal fitout dates from the twentieth century. The works are a minor local intervention and relate to modern building fabric only. The area affected is confined and limited. No loss of historic building fabric is envisaged.

Conservation Impact: Neutral

IN-2 Internal fit out to mid 19C ablution block to create staff break room and kitchenette / storage

The existing interior of the ablution building is not original and dates from the twentieth century. The proposed works are a minor local intervention and relate to modern building fabric only. No loss of historic building fabric is envisaged. The area affected is confined and limited.

Conservation Impact: Neutral

IN-3 Internal fit out to mid 19C ablution block for storage

The existing interior of the ablution building is not original and dates from the twentieth century. The proposed works are a minor local intervention and relate to modern building fabric only. No loss of historic building fabric is envisaged. The area affected is confined and limited.

Conservation Impact: Neutral

IN-4 Keep GF - Remove existing displays and display cases to reveal 18C wall openings

The existing displays and display cases are not original and date from the 2012 works. The proposed removal relates to modern building fabric only and will reveal historic fabric. No loss of historic building fabric is envisaged. The area affected is confined and limited.

Conservation Impact: Positive

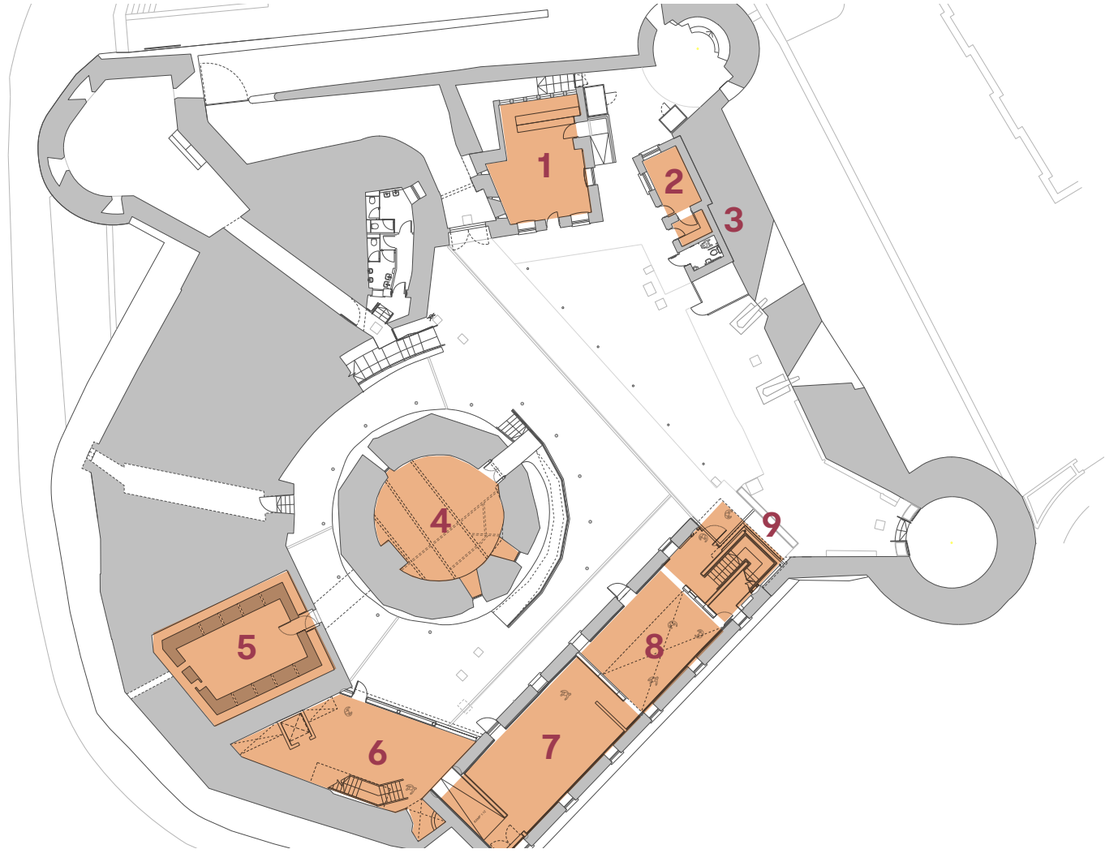

Fig.44: Galmstrup Architects - Ground Floor - Existing plan

Fig.45: View of ablution house

Fig.46: View of gate building interior

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3.2: CONT.D

IN-4 Keep GF - New stair in historic location to re-instate previous connectivity, improve legibility of the keep architecture and improve visitor flow

The proposed creation of a new staircase within the keep would relink the lower and upper levels which are currently separate unconnected levels. The proposal would involve minor loss of some historic building fabric. A detailed survey of the relevant area has been carried out to minimise the loss of historic fabric. There is logic for the proposal in that there previously was a staircase linking the levels internally, indeed the arrangement prior to the 2012 works would have been to move between levels within the keep rather than across the current glazed bridge arrangement at first floor. The current arrangement results in two separate dead end experiences of this key element of the castle.The reinstatement of the stair would enable a loop of movement and an easier flow and for visitors through the museum. The proposal would result in a more authentic experience of the keep building. While there would be some minor negative impact, the positive impact of this intervention is justified.

Conservation Impact: Minor Negative/ Positive

Mitigation Measures: The proposed stair is to be carefully detailed and should be legible as a contemporary intervention. The area affected should be confined and limited. Excavations at the base should be minimised

IN-5 Armoury - Remove glass screen, allow access to space and improved legibility of materiality, form and original use. New interpretation / exhibition

The screen proposed for removal is not original and dates from the 2012 works. The proposed removal relates to modern building fabric only and will enable access to the full and original vaulted space. No loss of historic building fabric is envisaged. The visitor experience will be enhanced.

Conservation Impact: Positive

IN-6 Link GF - Creation of entry / transition space with reduced visual clutter for improved legibility of enclosing medieval curtain wall to south west

The link space dates from the 2012 and the creation of an entry / transition space here will reveal historic fabric. No loss of historic building fabric is envisaged.

Conservation Impact: Positive

Fig.47: Galmstrup Architects - Ground Floor - Existing plan

Fig.48: View of ground floor keep

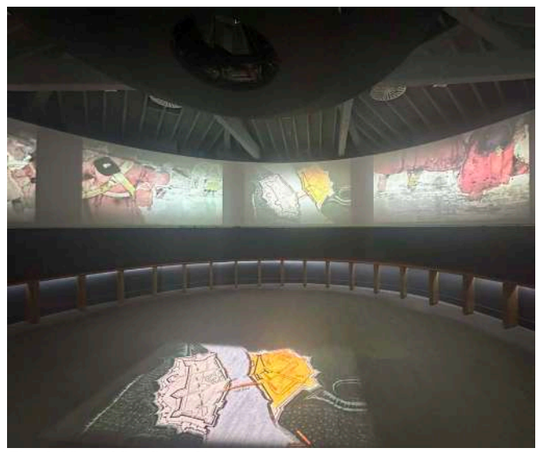

Fig.49: View of first floor of keep

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3.2: CONT.D

IN-7 Barracks GF west - Opening up of blocked 18-19C windows and removal/ lowering of 2012 wall enclosing ramp. New exhibition.
The finishes proposed for removal are not original and date from the 2012 works. The proposed removal relates to modern building fabric only and will reveal historic fabric. No loss of historic building fabric is envisaged.
Conservation Impact: Positive

IN-8 Barracks GF east - Adaptations to 2012 wall to create central opening to GF west. New exhibition
The relevant wall is a recent intervention dating from 2012. The reconfiguration works are localised and replace modern building fabric only. The intervention does not affect historic building fabric or character.
Conservation Impact: Neutral

IN-9 2012 Gable building GF - Reconfiguration of stair to create space for new coffee kiosk and enclosure to match footprint of 1F above
This stair is a recent intervention dating from 2012. The reconfiguration works are localised and replace modern building fabric only. The intervention does not affect historic building fabric or character.
Conservation Impact: Neutral

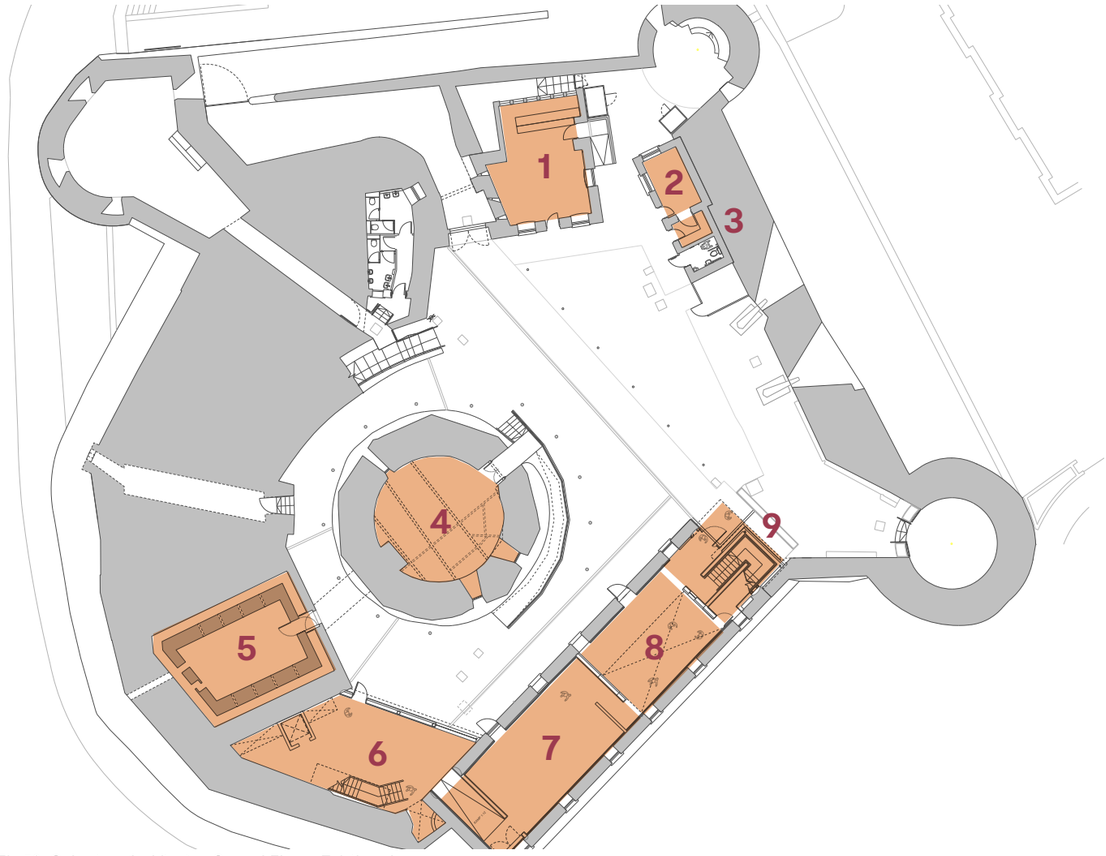

Fig.50: Galmstrup Architects - Ground Floor - Existing plan

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3.2: CONT.D

IN-10 2012 Gable building 1F - Reconfiguration of stair to create improved access to views east over the River Shannon

This stair is a recent intervention dating from 2012. The reconfiguration works are internal and localised. The intervention does not affect historic building fabric or character.

Conservation Impact: Neutral

IN-11 Barracks 1F east - New exhibition

The new exhibition proposed is to replace the current exhibition dating from 2012. The new exhibition replaces modern building fabric only. No loss of historic building fabric is envisaged.

Conservation Impact: Neutral

IN-12 Barracks 1F west - Removal/lowering of 2012 wall enclosing ramp. New exhibition.

The relevant wall is not original and dates from the 2012 works. The works relate to modern building fabric only. No loss of historic building fabric is envisaged.

Conservation Impact: Neutral

IN-13 Link 1F - Creation of transition / multi-purpose event space with reduced visual clutter for improved legibility of enclosing medieval curtain wall to south west

The link space dates from 2012 and the creation of a transition multipurpose space here will reduce visual clutter. The proposed removal relates to modern building fabric only and will reveal historic fabric. No loss of historic building fabric is envisaged.

Conservation Impact: Positive

IN-14 Armoury building 1F - Removal of plasterboard to west wall to reveal lime rendered stonework wall for improved legibility of castle form

The existing plasterboard finish proposed for removal is not original and dates from the 2012 works. The proposed removal relates to modern building fabric only and will reveal historic fabric. No loss of historic building fabric is envisaged.

Conservation Impact: Positive

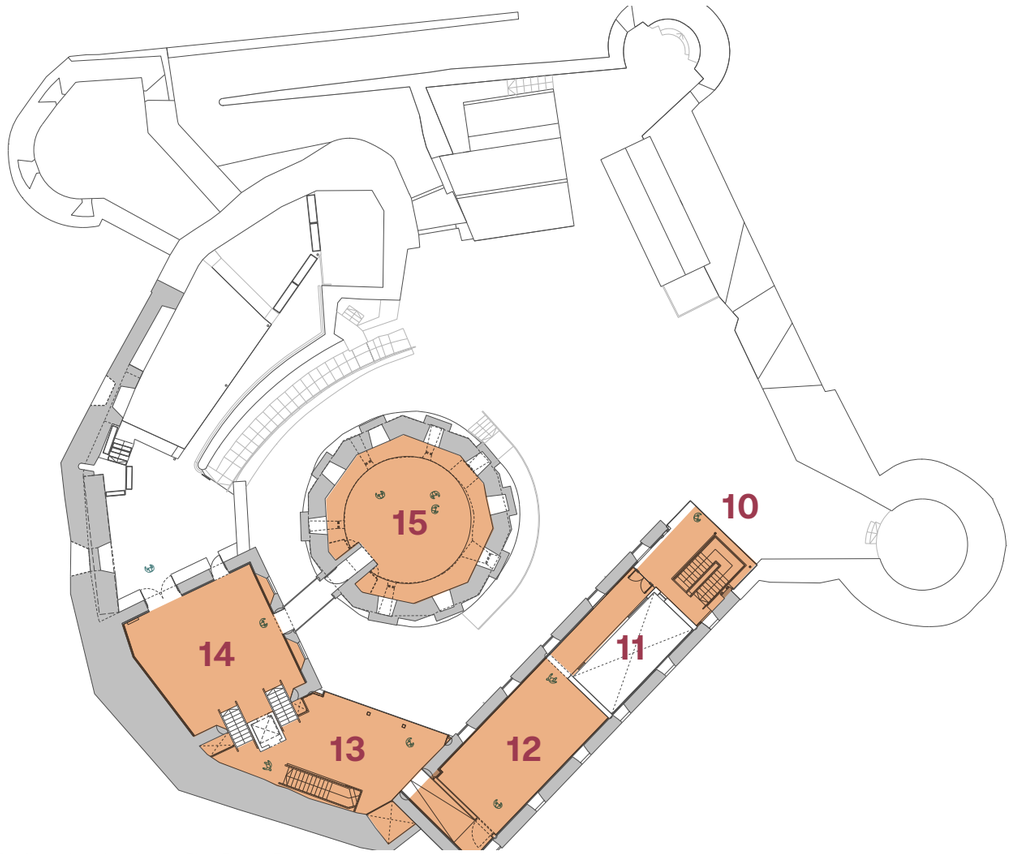

Fig.51: Galmstrup Architects - First Floor - Existing plan

Fig.52: View of barracks gable

Fig.53: View of barracks link

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3.2: CONT.D

IN-14 Armoury building 1F - Opening up of 18-19C windows towards keep for improved daylighting and legibility of historic building

The finishes proposed for removal are not original and date from the 2012 works. The proposed removal relates to modern building fabric only and will reveal historic fabric. No loss of historic building fabric is envisaged.

Conservation Impact: Positive

IN-14 Armoury building 1F - Internal fit out to create airlock facilitating museum standard environmental stability to space

The finishes proposed for removal are not original and date from the 2012 works. The proposed fitout relates to modern building fabric only and will enable museum standard environmental stability. No loss of historic building fabric is envisaged.

Conservation Impact: Neutral

IN-14 Armoury building 1F - New exhibition

The new exhibition proposed is to replace the current exhibition dating from 2012. The new exhibition replaces to modern building fabric only. No loss of historic building fabric is envisaged.

Conservation Impact: Neutral

IN-15 Keep 1F - Remove projection screen boarding at upper (previous 2F) level, boarding to machicolations, and AV ceiling infrastructure to reveal building form See IN-4

The existing screen boarding, infrastructure, etc proposed for removal are not original and dates from the 2012 works. The proposed removal relates to modern building fabric only and will reveal historic fabric. No loss of historic building fabric is envisaged.

Conservation Impact: Positive

IN-15 Keep 1F - Create floor opening to accept new stair rising from GF as item In-4

The relevant floor is not original and dates from the 2012 works. The proposed removal relates to modern building fabric only, see further assessment in IN-4.

Conservation Impact: Positive

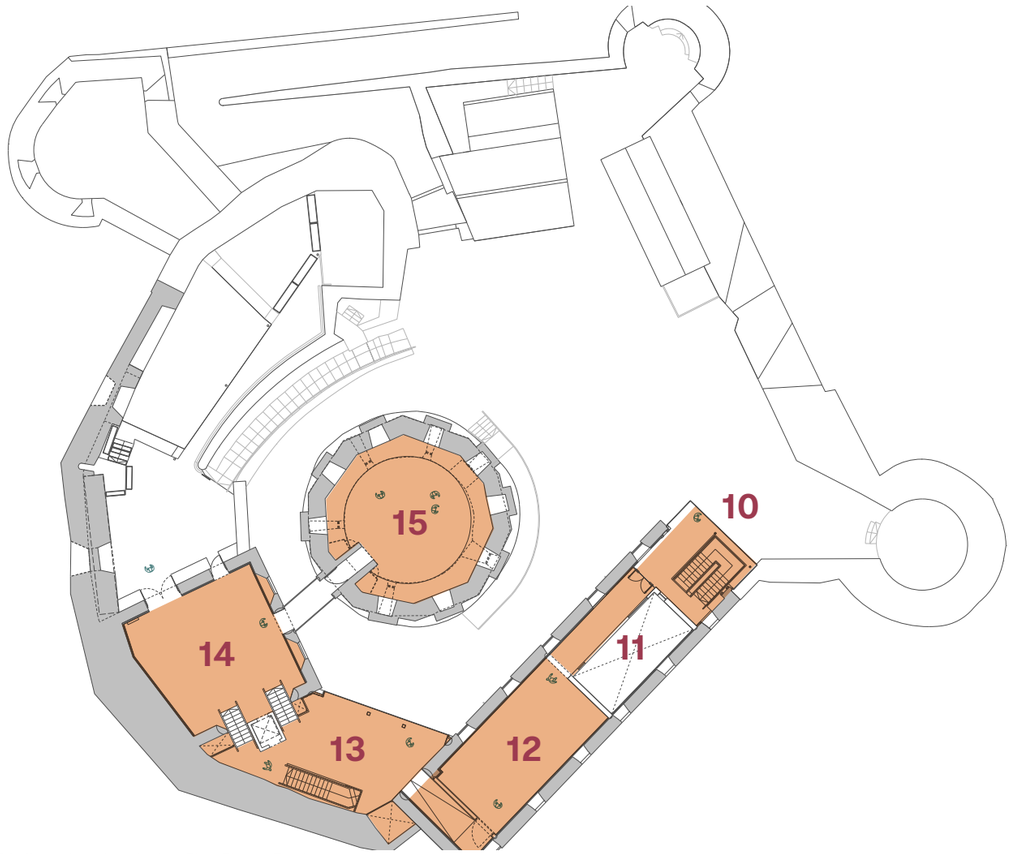

Fig.54: Galmstrup Architects - First Floor - Existing plan

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3.3: 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. All site operatives are to be 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 mostly restricted to the replacement of modern interventions to reassert the prominence of the historic structures.

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 alterations 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 is discouraged.

Fig.55: Photo from courtyard, Ros Kavanagh

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4.0: RECOMMENDATIONS & CONCLUSION

In conservation terms, the castle is a collection of interventions, additions, and subtractions across time. These interventions responded to the needs of the castle as it evolved from anglo-norman fortress, to military barracks, to museum and national monument. In recent decades, the historic architectural clarity of the castle has been compromised by small scale ad-hoc interventions, signage, screening, lighting, tourism & exhibition installations, etc.
The proposed works aim to declutter, simplify, and re-establish that architectural clarity and as outlined above are generally of positive or neutral conservation impact.

The proposed works are supported as they:
- help to control entry to the castle, resulting in additional paying visitors and enhanced security of the site
- enable the castle to be more financially sustainable helping to maintain its built heritage into the future
- remove previous inappropriate interventions, declutter the castle, its courtyard and structures
- bring the north east turret and western slot back into the visitor experience
- re-instate the staircase and movement through the keep
- result in an enhanced and more logical visitor experience.

The proposed works have been studied in detail and include for mitigation measures to minimise the impact of the various interventions.
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 in many cases, the proposed works result in a conservation gain and will expose or enhance architectural quality of the castle.

Fig.56: Contemporary aerial view of the site from the east

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4.0: CONT.D

The proposed works will:
- be carried out according to best conservation practice using specialist repair techniques,
- be carried out by contractors who have extensive experience in the repair of historic buildings
- be overseen by a conservation repair specialist with extensive experience in the repair of historic buildings
- be overseen by a RIAI Grade 1 Conservation Architect.

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 this heritage context. While many interventions associated with the proposed development are 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.

The proposed works will not adversely affect the special character of this historic site. They will ensure the continued protection of its historic structures. The proposed works are consistent with the objectives of Westmeath County Council County Development Plan 2021- 2027 and the provisions of the Planning and Development Acts.

Fig.57: Contemporary aerial view

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