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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.

14.2 Background

Westmeath has a rich and unique heritage of which we can be proud. Our cultural heritage is the legacy of past generations; it is part of our identity, and the distinctive character of where we come from. Tangible aspects of this cultural heritage include archaeological sites and monuments, vernacular structures, and historic buildings – the landscape indicators of our past. Intangible aspects of our cultural heritage include mythology associated with the County such as the story of the Children of Lír, An Táin Bó Cúailgne (the Cattle Raid of Cooley), links to historic figures and events, as well as language, folklore and place names. The vast array of archaeological, built, cultural and natural assets in the County are the cornerstone of our tourism product. In this regard, Cultural Heritage plays a significant role in attracting visitors to the County.

Cultural Heritage Policy Objectives		
It is a policy	objective of Westmeath County Council to:	
CPO 14.1	Improve accessibility to our cultural heritage and maximise its potential as a learning resource.	
CPO 14.2	Promote the understanding of cultural heritage in terms of its inherent and unique character and to recognise what elements should be preserved, conserved or enhanced.	
CPO 14.3	Support the implementation of objectives and actions of the Westmeath County Heritage Plan 2018-2023 and update during the lifetime of the Plan.	
CPO 14.4	Support the growth of cultural tourism in the County, including the potential for niche heritage based tourism products by facilitating the development of heritage events, festivals and infrastructure in a sustainable manner.	

14.3 Archaeological Heritage

Our Archaeological heritage is characterised by the material remains of the past. Archaeological monuments include upstanding structures such as churches, graveyards, castles, ringforts and holy wells as well as sites that have little or no visible surface expression for example: -settlements, burials, fulachta fiadh, ditches and pits. County Westmeath boasts a wealth of archaeological monuments including the royal site of Uisneach, prehistoric barrow burials, wooden trackways, such as the Bronze Age road way at Mayne, earthworks, crannógs and ringforts. There are many fine examples of mottes (and baileys), tower houses, and several deserted medieval settlements. Our rich ecclesiastical heritage includes church and abbey ruins, graveyards, high crosses and holy wells, notable sites include those in Fore. Our archaeological heritage includes artefacts, the earliest of which are stone

tools dating from the Mesolithic period (c.9,000 - 5,000 years ago). Some of the more famous artefacts found in Westmeath include gold ear-spools (from the Mullingar area), the Lough Lene Bell, the Balinderry Gaming Board and several Viking hoards.

The Urban Archaeological Survey for County Westmeath conducted in 1985 covers the areas of Ardnurcher, Athlone, Ballymore, Fore, Kilbeggan, Kilbixy, Mullingar and Athlone old town and identifies 'Zones of Archaeological Potential' within these settlements.

The National Monuments Acts 1930-2014 provide for the protection of archaeological sites, monuments, artefacts and shipwrecks that are listed in the Record of Monuments and Places (RMP). This list is updated as and when previously unrecorded archaeological sites are discovered. Currently there are over 4,000 archaeological monuments recorded in Westmeath, 13 of which are National Monuments in state care, as indicated in the table below.

Table 14.1 National Monuments in State Care

RECORD OF	NATIONAL	LOCATION	DESCRIPTION	STATE
MONUMENTS	MONUMENT			OWNERSHIP /
AND PLACES	NO.			GUARDIANSHIP
(RMP) REF.				
WM-029-042	520	Athlone	Castle	ownership
WM-014-002	481	Delvin	Castle	Ownership
WM-023-01301	560	Dunnamona	Motte	Ownership
WM-004-035010	215	Fore	Abbey; Church and	Ownership
WM-004-035004			Hermitage	
WM-004-035003				
WM004-035002	220	Fore	Gateways	Ownership
WM004-097004				
WM012-076	265	Taughmon	Church	Guardianship
WM-015-001	213	Inchbofin,	Early Christian	Ownership
		Lough Ree	Monastic	
			Complex	
WM-024-061	155	Kellybrook	The Catstone,	Ownership
WM024-069			Ringfort and Barrow	
WM-021	572	Raharney	Ringfort	Ownership
WM-029-008	223	Twyford	Bealin Cross	On privately
				owned land
WM-07-045	610	Faughalstown	Mortimer's Castle	Ownership
WM-011-130	606	Wattstown	Two Barrows	Ownership
WM-011-131				
WM-022-015	624	Portlick	Norman Motte	Ownership

Archaeological remains provide valuable information about our past and the people who lived here before us. The archaeological resource is non-renewable – excavation of an archaeological site or feature results in its destruction and removal from its landscape setting. Where new development is being considered, the archaeological potential of the site should be considered in the very earliest stages of planning by checking the National Monuments Service's Archaeological Survey Database on https://www.archaeology.ie/.

Archaeology Policy Objectives		
It is a policy of Westmeath County Council to:		
CPO 14.5	Seek to ensure the protection and sympathetic enhancement of archaeological heritage, and in this regard applications will be referred to the National Monuments Service, Department of Culture, Heritage & the Gaeltacht for comment.	
CPO 14.6	Seek to ensure the protection of archaeological sites and monuments and their settings and archaeological objects that are listed in the Record of Monuments and Places, in the ownership/guardianship of the State, or that are the subject of Preservation Orders or have been registered in the Register of Historic Monuments. Seek to ensure the protection and preservation of archaeological sites, which have been identified subsequent to the publication of the Record of Monuments and Places.	
CPO 14.7	Ensure that any development adjacent to an archaeological monument or site shall not be detrimental to the character of the archaeological site, or its setting and shall be sited in a manner which minimises the impact on the monument and its setting. Development which is likely to detract from the setting of such a monument or site will not be permitted.	
CPO 14.8	Seek to ensure the protection and preservation of underwater archaeological sites in riverine or lacustrine locations.	
CPO 14.9	Encourage and promote the appropriate management and maintenance of the County's archaeological heritage, including historical burial grounds, in accordance with conservation principles and best practice guidelines.	
CPO 14.10	Consult with the National Monuments Service in relation to proposed developments adjoining archaeological sites.	
CPO 14.11	Ensure that archaeological excavation is carried out according to best practice as outlined by the National Monuments Service, Department of Culture, Heritage, and the Gaeltacht, The National Museum of Ireland and the Institute of Archaeologists of Ireland.	
CPO 14.12	Prepare conservation plans for the management of archaeological sites and monuments in Council ownership.	
CPO 14.13	Encourage increased awareness of and public access to monuments within Council ownership.	

14.4 Fore Special Heritage Area

In recognition of its exceptional archaeological and historical importance and the significant contribution which it can make to the tourist offering in North Westmeath, a Special Heritage Management Study has been prepared for Fore. The wealth of the archaeological and historical remains in Fore Village, together with the attractive landscape in which they are set mark this area out as one of national importance. Fore is one of the main tourist attractions promoted in Westmeath under the Ireland's Ancient East brand.



Figure 14.1 Fore Abbey

The Fore Special Heritage Management Study sets out objectives for the sustainable development of the village which are based upon the principles of protecting the intrinsic value of the historic, archaeological and natural heritage setting. In recent years, a number of looped walks have been developed at Fore, which are indicated in Volume 2. It is Council policy to protect the views from these looped walks.

Fore Special Heritage Area Policy Objectives

It is a policy of Westmeath County Council to:

CPO 14.14

Continue to protect and enhance the Fore Special Heritage Area in accordance with the Fore Special Heritage Management Study adopted in 2010, and any update made thereto.

CPO 14.15	Support the development of sustainable tourist initiatives in Fore subject to appropriate archaeological and ecological assessment.
CPO 14.16	Ensure that new development proposals which have the potential to impact on Archaeological Heritage must be accompanied by an Archaeological Assessment in accordance with requirements of the National Monuments Service of the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.
CPO 14.17	Ensure that development proposals that would detrimentally impact upon the setting and interpretation of archaeological monuments, historic landscape or buildings of architectural value at Fore will not be permitted.
CPO 14.18	Protect and sustain the established appearance and character of views over the surrounding countryside at Fore, while facilitating the continued development of uses that sustain the activities that give rise to the appearance and character of the landscape.
CPO 14.19	Ensure that development and activities that are immediately adjacent to the scenic off-road walking routes of Fore, sustain the established appearance and character of views, that contribute to the distinctive quality of the landscape.

14.5 The Hill of Uisneach

The Hill of Uisneach is one of the most sacred and historic sites in Ireland renowned as an ancient meeting place in the centre of the country. Over 35 archaeological monuments are recorded on the Hill. These date from the Neolithic (c. 6,000-4,000 years ago) through to the medieval period, representing ceremonial, burial and settlement activity spanning several millennia. The Hill of Uisneach is on the tentative list (2010) for future nomination to the UNESCO World Heritage List as one of the five Royal Sites of Ireland. See also Section 13.3.9 of the plan in relation to Uisneach Landscape Character Assessment and High Amenity Area.

Hill of Uisneach Policy Objectives			
It is a policy of	It is a policy of Westmeath County Council to:		
CPO 14.20	Continue to support the promotion of Uisneach as one of the Royal Sites of Ireland		
	under the proposal for its designation as a UNESCO World Heritage Site and/or		
	other appropriate initiatives.		
CPO 14.21	Support the development of a greenway from the Old Rail Trail to the Hill of		
	Uisneach, subject to the protection of the archaeological significance of the site.		
CPO 14.22	Endeavour to improve public access to the Hill of Uisneach, with the involvement		
	of landowners and relevant stakeholders, in consultation with the National		
	Monument Service.		
CPO 14.23	Seek funding to prepare and implement a Conservation Management Plan for		
	Uisneach in consultation with landowners, the National Monument Service and the		
	Department of Culture, Heritage & the Gaeltacht.		

14.6 Architectural Heritage

Westmeath has many significant built heritage sites and historic landscapes, including such well known examples as Tullynally Castle, Moydrum Castle and Belvedere House & Gardens. Along with fine historic houses, their associated demesne lands and follies, our architectural heritage includes vernacular buildings that reflect our rural traditions. In urban settings there are many areas of architectural significance, several of which have been designated Architectural Conservation Areas (ACAs), our historic towns, include the walled town of Athlone and planned towns, such as Castlepollard and Tyrrellspass. The army barracks in Athlone and Mullingar are noteworthy sites of built heritage significance, as are the variety of industrial heritage sites within the County, which include our canals, bridges, railways, mills and distilleries.

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.

14.7 Protected Structures

Each Local Authority has a legal responsibility to compile a Record of Protected Structures (RPS). Structures, or parts of structures, can be added to the Record if they are deemed of special architectural, historical, archaeological, artistic, cultural, scientific, social or technical interest.

A Protected Structure, unless otherwise specified, includes the exterior and interior of the structure, the land lying within its curtilage, any other structures and their exterior and interiors lying within that curtilage, plus all fixtures and features which form part of the interior or exterior of any of these structures. Curtilage refers to the parcel of land immediately associated with the Protected Structure and generally forms the boundary of the property ownership.

Large properties like country estates, institutional complexes, and industrial sites can have extensive grounds that contain a number of additional structures within their curtilage or attendant grounds which have a functional connection or historical relationship with the principal building. The location of these structures and the laying out of the lands were often deliberately designed to complement the appearance of the principal structure or to assist in its function. Therefore, the setting of a Protected Structure may contribute significantly to its special character. Any works that would

materially affect or impact the character and setting of a Protected Structure require planning permission.

Prior to undertaking works to a Protected Structure, it is essential to make an assessment of the special character of the structure and to identify all elements, both internal and external, which contribute to same. An assessment of the special character of the structure is required as part of a Protected Structure Impact Assessment which should accompany the planning application. The detail of the assessment should be proportionate to the overall special character of the structure and its curtilage and the scale and complexity of the proposed works.

The Council encourages the sensitive upgrading of protected structures to improve environmental performance, energy efficiency and to adapt to the impacts of climate change. Applications involving a change of use, conversion, extension or other refurbishment of a Protected Structure will be required to demonstrate how environmental performance can be improved together with how the proposal seeks to adapt to climate change, reduce carbon emissions, improve resource use efficiency and minimise pollution and waste. For historic structures, simple measures such as draught proofing, energy and water efficient appliances, roof insulation and repair and maintenance work can bring substantial improvements and have minimal other impacts, both visually and on historic fabric and traditional construction.

Protected Structures Policy Objectives		
It is a policy objective of Westmeath County Council to:		
CPO 14.24	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 14.25	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 14.26	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 14.27	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 14.28	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 14.29	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.
CPO 14.30	Carry out an audit of Protected Structures within the Council's ownership to
	identify any Protected Structures that are under threat directly or indirectly due to
	climate change.
CPO 14.31	Integrate climate change adaptation measures into future heritage management
	plans.
CPO 14.32	Provide guidance for owners of protected structures or historic buildings on
	upgrading for energy efficiency and climate resilient measures and promote the
	principles of sustainable building design in conservation.
CPO 14.33	Ensure a sustainable future for Protected Structures and buildings sited within
	ACAs by encouraging and supporting works to upgrade the environmental
	performance of such structures together with the implementation of measures to
	address the impacts of climate change. Such works should not adversely affect the
	special character of the structure including impact on historic fabric, traditional
	construction, visibility, siting and design. The installation of renewable energy
	measures and equipment will be acceptable where sited and designed to minimise
	the visual impact, where it does not result in any significant loss of historic fabric
	or otherwise affect the significance of the structure.
CPO 14.34	Incentivise the restoration of Protected Structures in towns and villages.
CPO 14.35	Facilitate contemporary and innovative designs providing that they are of a
	sufficient high quality and do not detract from the character of the historic fabric
	of the Protected Structure.

14.8 Architectural Conservation Areas

An Architectural Conservation Area (ACA) is a place, area, group of structures or townscape that is of special architectural, historical, archaeological, artistic, cultural, scientific, social or technical interest or value, or contributes to the appreciation of Protected Structures, which may be included in a Development Plan where it is considered necessary to preserve its character. ACAs are chosen very often because they contain a group of historic buildings, have a distinctive street pattern or plot size which gives the area a distinct character and contributes to the town or village wherein it is located. Most structures in an ACA are critical in how they positively contribute to the streetscape or character of an area. Within an ACA protection extends to the external appearance of such structures and streetscapes. Any such works that would have a material effect on the special character of an ACA require planning permission, even works that are usually considered Exempted Development under Section 4 of the Planning & Development Act 2000 (as amended). The Council shall seek to ensure that new development works within an ACA respect and enhance the special character of the area including the setting of protected structures, and comply with development management standards. The identification of new ACAs and/or the modification of existing ACAs may be proposed during the lifetime of the County Development Plan.

The ACAs within Westmeath are identified on the relevant settlement maps in the following settlements:

Settlement	Location
Athlone	Town centre
	Church Street and Connaught Street,
	St. Mary's Place,
	St. Brigid's Terrace,
	Garden Vale,
	Goldsmith Terrace,
	St. Columba's Terrace,
	Riverside Place,
	Coosan Point Road
Mullingar	Town centre,
	Ginnell Terrace,
	Millmount Road,
	Fairview Terrace, part of Auburn Road,
	St. Brigid's Terrace,
	Harbour Street.
Tyrrellspass	Village centre including the Village Green
	Belvedere Orphanage
Ballynacarrigy	Main Street
Castlepollard	The Square and surrounding streetscape
	extending along the Dublin Road and Church
	Street
Clonmellon	Main Street and St John's Church
Kilbeggan	The Distillery and Main Street, including the
	Market Square
Multyfarnham	Village core to the west of the River Gaine
Rochfortbridge	Derrygreenagh Park
Moate	Main Street and The Newtown
Glasson	Main Street

A Statement of Character has been prepared for a number of ACAs in the County, namely Castlepollard, Kilbeggan, Moate, and Tyrrellspass. Statements of Character will be prepared for the ACAs in Athlone and Mullingar and will inform the respective Urban Area Plan for Athlone and the Local Area Plan for Mullingar. The Statements of Character identify the special character of each individual ACA.

Architectural Conservation Areas Policy Objectives			
It is a policy of	It is a policy objective of Westmeath County Council to:		
CPO 14.36	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 14.37	Consider development proposals within ACAs in accordance with the Statements		
	of Character prepared for ACAs in Castlepollard, Kilbeggan, Moate, Tyrrellspass,		
	Mullingar and Athlone.		
CPO 14.38	Prepare Statements of Character and guidance in relation to development within		
	each of the identified Architectural Conservations Areas (ACAs) in the County.		
CPO 14.39	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 14.40	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.		

14.9 Vernacular Buildings and Structures

Vernacular buildings were built to perform a specific function and were constructed using local materials and designed to reflect local traditions. Vernacular buildings are distinctive to the character of the county and contribute in a particular way to the distinctive character of local areas e.g. farm buildings, forges, gate piers, public houses and cottages.

While these older buildings may not meet the criteria of sufficient special interest to be designated Protected Structures, their form, scale, materials and orientation contribute positively to the rural landscape as well as to the historic villages and towns.

Vernacular Building and Structures Policy Objectives		
It is a policy of	bjective of Westmeath County Council to:	
CPO 14.41	Encourage the retention and appropriate re-use of vernacular buildings, including vacant traditional farm buildings, where appropriate and encourage the retention of the original fabric such as windows, doors and other significant features of historic buildings.	
CPO 14.42	Require that the size, scale, design, form, layout and materials of extensions to vernacular dwellings or conversions of historic outbuildings are in keeping and sympathetic with the existing structure.	

CPO 14.43	Ensure that works to existing buildings and structures of architectural merit
	maintain and enhance their character and distinctiveness.
CPO 14.44	Ensure wherever possible that proposed infrastructural and public utility works
	within the County do not remove historic street furniture such as limestone kerbs,
	cobblestones, cast-iron post boxes, street lamps etc
CPO 14.45	Promote, where feasible the retention of surviving historic plot sizes and street
	patterns in the villages and towns of Westmeath and have regard to ancient
	boundaries or layouts, such as burgage plots and townland boundaries in new
	development proposals.
CPO 14.46	Ensure that works to existing buildings and structures of architectural merit
	maintain and enhance their character and distinctiveness.

14.10 Historic Parks, Gardens and Demesnes

There are many Historic Parks, Gardens and Demesnes in Westmeath. These planned landscapes are characteristic of 18th and 19th century settlement and are often the setting of a Protected Structure; e.g. the manor house, estate houses, gate lodges, walled gardens, outbuildings and enclosed yards and gardens. The National Inventory of Architectural Heritage (NIAH), includes a survey of Historic Gardens and Designed Landscapes. There are 225 demesnes or designed landscapes recorded in County Westmeath.

Belvedere House, Gardens and Park built c.1740 is one of the finest historic small houses in Ireland and is set in a planned 18th century landscape extending over 65 hectares. Given the architectural and cultural significance of Belvedere House, Gardens and Park and having regard to its status as the premier tourist attraction in the County, the Council is committed to ensuring that its future development is informed by a Conservation Management Plan. The preparation of masterplans for complex sites such as historic buildings and demesnes, in particular where there is a mix of cultural and natural features across a large area, is supported by the Council.

Historic Parks. Gardens and Demesnes Policy Objectives		
It is a policy objective of Westmeath County Council to:		
CPO 14.47	Support the economic viability of parks, gardens and demesnes by encouraging	
	high quality development that does not lead to the loss of, or cause harm to the	
	character, the principal components of, or the setting of parks, gardens and	
	demesnes of special historic interest.	
CPO 14.48	Support the preparation and implementation of a Conservation Management Plan	
	for Belvedere House, Gardens & Park.	
CPO 14.49	Require a masterplan to be prepared for development proposals within historic	
	designed and demesne landscapes. Such a plan should include an appraisal of the	
	designed landscape together with an architectural appraisal, in order to inform	
	design proposals, which must be sensitive to and respect the built heritage	
	elements and green space values of the site.	

14.11 Industrial Heritage

Industrial heritage refers to the physical structures which remain today from the industrial era of the late 18th century and following years. It includes railways, turnpike and coach roads, canals and their locks, distilleries, mills, hydraulic rams, the peat and quarry industries. An inventory of Industrial Heritage Sites in Westmeath was compiled in 2019 and this included an outline history of the development of industry in the County. Based on cartographic and historical information, the inventory identified 4,855 industrial heritage sites in the county and this information will inform future surveys and planning decisions.

Industrial Heritage Policy Objectives		
It is a policy objective of Westmeath County Council to:		
CPO 14.50	Protect, where appropriate, industrial heritage structures or elements of	
	significance identified in the Inventory of Industrial Heritage and any subsequent	
	surveys by adding them to the Record of Protected Structures.	
CPO 14.51	Utilise the information provided within the Inventory of Industrial Heritage Sites in	
	Westmeath, and any subsequent surveys when assessing development proposals	
	for industrial heritage sites.	
CPO 14.52	Support the retention and appropriate repair/maintenance of historic bridges and	
	other significant industrial heritage features in the County.	

14.12 Language Heritage

The use of the Irish language as part of everyday life is encouraged and the Council has an important role to play in the promotion of the language in the County. The Development Plan can support and provide land-use and spatial dimensions to promote and protect the linguistic and cultural heritage of the area. The Council will continue to support initiatives at County level to strengthen bilingualism in the County.

Language Heritage Policy Objectives		
It is a policy objective of Westmeath County Council to:		
CPO 14.53	Promote the naming of new residential developments in bi-lingual format. The	
	naming of new estates should reflect local place names, townlands, history,	
	folklore and/or cultural features in the area.	
CPO 14.54	Preserve historic place and street names and ensure that new street names should	
	reflect appropriate local historical or cultural associations.	
CPO 14.55	Support the use of the Irish language on shopfronts.	
CPO 14.56	Support the establishment of a naming committee within one year of adoption of	
	the Plan, to evaluate naming proposals for new residential and/or mixed-use	
	developments.	



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