

Headfort Demesne Architectural Conservation Area

Historical Development

In 1660, 7,443 acres of land at Kells was purchased by Thomas Taylor of Ringmere in Sussex, who had come to Ireland in 1653, as chief surveyor to Sir William Petty, the author and originator of the Down Survey, the earliest accurate map of the country.

The earliest plans for Headfort House were prepared by Richard Castle in 1750. The final design was a combination of Castle's originals and revisions thought to be by George Semple.

Summary of Character:

The historic demesne of Headfort House is a highly complex landscape site of enormous cultural significance.

The site encompasses a major country house of international architectural and artistic value containing hugely important Robert Adam interiors, the only work of this influential 18th century architect to survive in this country. The house is set within an expertly conceived and well-preserved designed landscape of harmoniously overlaid layers, and is a one of the most notable examples of the picturesque English Landscape Garden in Ireland. The designed landscape is punctuated with ornamental and functional structures of artistic and social significance, including the strikingly elegant 18th century bridge by Thomas Cooley, the atmospheric and intricately detailed Gothic-Revival Mausoleum, the Gothic viewing grotto, outbuildings of fine architectural quality and a rare example of an underground ice house. The planting is of great botanical significance and includes features of great interest and rarity, such as the Yew Avenue, the American Garden and the early 20th century Pinetum. A special feature of the demesne is the sense that the outside world is not cut-off. The demesne enjoys a direct visual relationship to the historic town of Kells, with which it is historically and culturally linked. The steeple of the medieval church tower, built by the 1st Earl of Bective in 1783, reinforces the link between town and demesne, as does the spectacular view of the Lloyd Tower beyond. The house and town lie set in an unspoilt rural landscape of great beauty and together form a historic cultural landscape of great richness.

Objectives:

1. To preserve the character of the demesne, its designed landscape and built features, by limiting the extent of new development permitted within the demesne and requiring that any such development, both within the demesne and in the surrounding area, should not have an adverse affect on the special qualities of the demesne.

2. To require that all works, whether of maintenance and repair, additions or alterations to existing buildings or built features within the demesne shall protect the character of those buildings and features by the use of appropriate materials and workmanship.

A detailed statement of character and planning guidance is available to download from the website.