

Athboy Architectural Conservation Area

Historical Development

The town of Athboy was one of the four centres (with Navan, Ratoath and Trim) set up by the Anglo-Normans to function as important towns in County Meath. In 1694, the town's 'lands and commons' and several other denominations of land were erected into a manor and granted to Thomas Bligh, MP for Athboy, who had earlier purchased almost 12 km² (3000 acres) in the area of Athboy. His son, John, was created "Earl of Darnley" in 1725 and the Blighs (Earls of Darnley) were landlords of all but six of the 27 townlands in the parish of Athboy throughout the 18th and 19th centuries.

Layout

The layout of the historic core of Athboy has evolved over centuries, the principle influencing factors being the medieval town walls and associated burgage plot arrangement. This has dictated the tight urban grain visible to this day in the town. The river and the associated former corn and flour, now timber mills dictated the eastern boundary of the town walls.

The approaches and exits to and from the town are key elements to the special character of Athboy and the peripheries are largely defined by rubble stone walls a classic feature of many eighteenth-century Irish villages, and one which penetrates the urban fabric of Athboy in its public and private laneways.

Built form

The built fabric of Athboy's streets is typical of the austere architectural style of smaller Irish towns and is well defined by a hierarchy of building typologies, forming an eclectic mix of uniform terraces, houses with varied plot widths and detached landmark buildings in residential, commercial and ecclesiastical use. One of the most significant landmarks in the town is the ecclesiastical site of St James's Church of Ireland and its attendant grounds which retain a medieval church tower. The remnants of vernacular buildings on the approach roads and streets into Athboy, and the quality of public buildings demonstrate the layering of architectural styles and add to the special character of the town. The retention of rubble-stone boundary walls and outbuildings to the rear of the streetscape, often hidden from the public realm, heightens the special interest and architectural character of the ACA

Materials

A palette of materials particular to the area, namely local limestone, some red and yellow brick, purple slate, painted timber and ironwork provides unity of character. Although the buildings are relatively unadorned, fortunately some retain original features such as fanlights, timber sash windows, slate roofs, railings and other boundary treatments which

make up the attractive streetscapes. It is the combination of all of these elements that contribute to the special character of the ACA of Athboy.

Summary of Special character

The special character of Athboy derives from its extraordinarily rich settlement history and the resulting archaeological and architectural set-pieces, from its homogenous streetscape permutated with buildings from many periods and the use of traditional building materials in its architecture. Furthermore its historical and social associations with the Darnley family, adds to its special interest

Objectives:

1. To preserve the character of the town and its setting by requiring that the height, scale, design and materials of any proposed development within and adjoining the historic core of the town should complement its character and not diminish its distinctiveness of place.
2. To encourage the removal of visually intrusive elements such as overhead cables or inappropriate signage.
3. To require the preservation and re-instatement of traditional details and materials on existing buildings and the streetscape where improvements or maintenance works are being carried out.

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