



Conservation Impact Assessment of Proposed works Kenlis Place, Public Realm Improvements, Kells, Co Meath.



Extract first edition OS map

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1 Introduction & Executive Summary.

David Cullivan, Conservation Architect, of Gaffney & Cullivan Architects Ltd, has been retained by Meath County Council in connection with the preparation of a Part 8 Planning Application for works known as Kenlis Place Public Realm Improvements, Kells, Co. Meath. The proposed works are located close to and within the curtilage of Kells Credit Union, which is a Recorded Protected Structure, in the Meath County Development Plan. This conveys statutory protection on both the building and its curtilage. The proposed development will consist of the upgrading of pedestrian crossings, reorganization of some on street car parking and the provision of ramped access to the Credit Union, together with all associated site works. The Recorded Protected Structure is reference no. 90529 and is known as St Columba's (Colmcille's) Credit Union, or the former Masonic Hall, Headfort Place, Kells, Co. Meath.



Extract second edition OS map

These works have been designed with conservation principles in mind and this report will demonstrate the rationale behind the design decisions taken. The overarching philosophy is that the original building fabric will be retained and respected by the new works. The second principle that applies in this case is that the new works shall be of their own time and in no way be a pastiche or facsimile of the configuration of the protected building. These are consistent with ICOMOS guidelines and accepted Conservation practice as set out in international charters* and BS7913; *The Principles of Conservation of Historic Buildings*.

The following document is a Conservation Impact Assessment of works proposed to be undertaken. This report includes a brief inventory of the building fabric proportionate to the nature and extent of the works proposed. This comprises a set of record photographs. Finally, there are drawings illustrating the proposals to develop the public realm works. This report will assess these proposals.

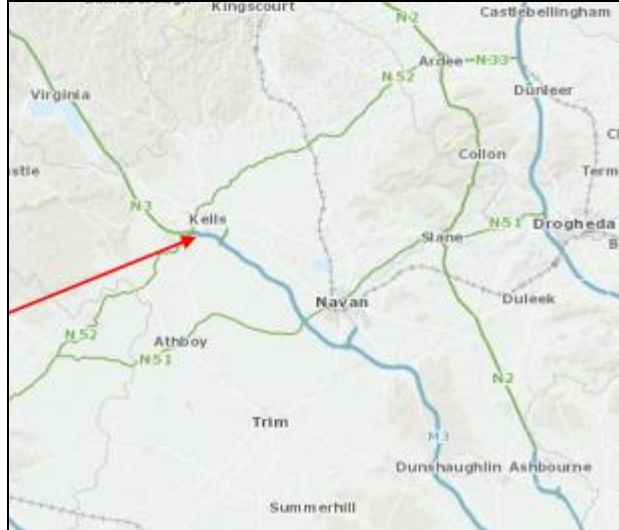
This report has been prepared to satisfy the requirements of the Architectural Heritage Assessment as set out in Architectural Protection, Guidelines for Planning Authorities”.

* *The Venice Charter 1964; The Burra Charter 1979-2013; The Washington Charter 1987; Narra Document on Authenticity 1994*



2 Site Location Map

The property is located in the eastern half of the country at the northern end of County Meath.



Source OSI maps. OSI licence no. AR 0041921





3 Core Data and Building Status

(in accordance with NIAH guidelines)

This refers to the Recorded Protected Structure within the curtilage of which works are proposed.

(1) **Client**

Meath County Council.

(2) **Date record was compiled**

November 2021.

(3) **Ordnance Survey Location of building**

*OS Map location.
674190, 775817.*

(4) **Address of Proposed Development**

Kenlis and Headfort Places, Kells, Co Meath.

(5) **Building works type**

Public realm improvements.

(6) **Brief Description of Building**

Refer to Architectural Inventory in section 4.

(7) **Construction Dates**

The building was constructed c 1800.

(8) **Appraisal of Cultural Significance**

A masonic lodge, number 607, was granted a warrant and founded in the town of Kells on the 1st of January 1789. It was the fifth lodge to be established in County Meath. The present Credit Union now occupies the former Masonic Hall which was constructed circa 1800. The building has been much altered, however it retains a neo classical style five bay front with a central entrance at ground floor level. This is articulated with a projecting open porch supported on a pair of unadorned columns surmounted with a flat roof. There is a wider, tripartite window directly above at first floor level, with all other windows at ground and first floor being of matching proportions. Above this centerpiece at roof level is a raised masonry gable breaking through the parapet that otherwise surrounds the slate roof. This sits uncomfortably and is unlikely to be an original feature. There are raised paster quoins forming bands at first floor level and more conventional stepped quoins below. There is an attractive limestone plinth which provides an elegant and imposing base for the building to sit on and a corresponding string course between ground and first floor level. Brick quoins have been added to the ground floor windows which themselves have been replaced with uPVC. These non original works, together with signage, flag poles and numerous window stickers detract from what was otherwise a fine composition in one of the most imposing and important sites in the streetscape in Kells. The area immediately in front of the building has evolved into a small parking area for cars. It is not geometrically suited to this purpose and the presence of cars to the front detracts further from the visual appearance of this once fine edifice. Finally, there is a religious statue on a limestone plinth located in front of the parking area.





Image taken by author, September 2021

- (9) **Architectural Heritage Value Rating**
*The building is not included on the Record of Monuments and Places and therefore has no heritage rating.
(source NIAH).*
- (10) **Local Authority Administrative Area**
Meath County Council
- (11) **Purpose of Assessment**
*Set out context of buildings and history.
Comment on and assess proposed interventions.
Comment on and assess conservation proposals.*
- (12) **Protected Structure Status**
The building is a Recorded Protected Structure as recorded in the Meath County Development Plan 2021-2027. Reference number 90529.
- (12) **NIAH reference number**
The building is not included on the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage.
- (13) **XY Coordinates**
674190, 775817.
- (14) **Current Use**
The building is in use as a Credit Union.
- (15) **Date of Site inspection**
Multiple occasions, 2020-2021
- (16) **Author of Report**
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RPS_Register.xlsx 39 / 113 79%

Record of Protected Structures

Address	Registered Address	Structure	Type	Level	Architectural Features	Historical Period	Structure Name	Listing Date	Description	Map Key Number
8527	John Street	Headfort Place	Public	Headfort Place	Public	Headfort Place	Headfort Place	1988	Headfort Place two storey former house, built c.1820 and an extension to the north former house, built c.1850, with original carriage arch, and the bay has stone former house to the west, built c.1850	18-0004
8528	John Street	Headfort Place	Public	Headfort Place	Public	Headfort Place	Headfort Place	1988	Headfort Place two storey former house, built c.1820, with an early twentieth century attached loggia to the east, built c.1900	18-0004
8529	John Street	Headfort Place	Public	Headfort Place	Public	Headfort Place	Headfort Place	1988	Two bay two storey former house with front projecting one storey porch, Headfort Place	18-0004
8530	John Street	Headfort Place	Public	Headfort Place	Public	Headfort Place	Headfort Place	1988	Headfort Place two storey former house, built c.1820, listed by single storey porch, Headfort Place	18-0004
8531	John Street	Headfort Place	Public	Headfort Place	Public	Headfort Place	Headfort Place	1988	One detached three bay two storey town-tenement house, built c.1790, second and third storeys with flanking bays, pedimented and topped with a pediment, approached by a carriage arch, through one wing of an enclosure, built c.1850	18-0004
8532	John Street	Headfort Place	Public	Headfort Place	Public	Headfort Place	Headfort Place	1988	One detached three bay two storey town-tenement house, built c.1790, second and third storeys with flanking bays, pedimented and topped with a pediment, approached by a carriage arch, through one wing of an enclosure, built c.1850	18-0004
8533	John Street	Headfort Place	Public	Headfort Place	Public	Headfort Place	Headfort Place	1988	Extensive site of archaeological remains, former house, built c.1790, approached by a carriage arch, through one wing of an enclosure, built c.1850	18-0007
8534	John Street	Headfort Place	Public	Headfort Place	Public	Headfort Place	Headfort Place	1988	One detached three bay two storey town-tenement house, built c.1790, with underpinning ground floor, pedimented and topped with a pediment, approached by a carriage arch, through one wing of an enclosure, built c.1850	18-0004

Meath County Development Plan, Record of Protected Structures



National Inventory of Architectural Heritage, Map register. Note no reference to Kells Credit Union





4 Architectural Inventory.

The works proposed at present are confined to the public space to the front and sides of the building. No works are proposed to the Credit Union building itself which is the Recorded Protected Structure. The works are described below.

Removal of the car parking spaces and realignment of the junction of John St /Kenlis Place and Headfort Place.

Provision of pedestrian crossings on each street.

Improvement of public access to the Credit Union by the introduction of a ramped access compliant with building regulations.

Repositioning of the religious statue to cater for all of the above.

Ancillary works associated with the above.

In the context of the works proposed therefore, the inventory is not required to contain any information over and above that contained in the Core Data section.



Image taken by author, September 2021

The building has a five bay front with a central entrance at ground floor level. This is articulated with a projecting open porch supported on a pair of unadorned columns surmounted with a flat roof. There is a wider, tripartite window directly above at first floor level, with all other windows at ground and first floor being of matching proportions. Above this centerpiece at roof level is a raised masonry gable breaking through the parapet that otherwise surrounds the slate roof. This site uncomfortably and is unlikely to be an original feature. There are raised paster quoins forming bands at first floor level and more conventional stepped quoins below. There is an attractive



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limestone plinth which provides an elegant and imposing base for the building to sit on and a corresponding string course between ground and first floor level. Brick quoins have been added to the ground floor windows which themselves have been replaced with uPVC. These non original works, together with signage, flag poles and numerous window stickers detract from what was otherwise a fine composition in one of the most imposing and important sites in the streetscape in Kells. The area immediately in front of the building has evolved into a small parking area for cars. It is not geometrically suited to this purpose and the presence of cars to the front detracts further from the visual appearance of this once fine edifice. Finally, there is a religious statue on a limestone plinth located in front of the parking area.



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5 Photographic Record.

As stated previously, because the works proposed are confined to the area to the front of the building only, we have confined the photographic record to the affected parts only.



Ground floor at junction with paved forecourt. The brick reveals are not original and detract from the appearance of the building. The stone plinth is an important element of the composition and needs to be retained as a feature of the elevation. A purely functional design response to the need for a ramp could negatively impact on the plinth and take away from the setting and proportions of the front elevation.

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The extensive use of cobble lock would at the time been considered a high quality material, given the availability of funds to carry out the work. However, as a material it has not aged well and detracts from the appearance of the former Masonic Hall.



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The diminishing depth of the plinth on the southern side of the building illustrates the issue with falls in and around the building.



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The lack of universal access and the challenges for people with prams are clear to be seen at the front entrance. As part of the public realm works, this will be resolved.



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Close up of the cobble lock which is not attractive nor is it weathering well.



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The comments from the preceding images apply here also.



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6 Appraisal of Significance of works proposed.

The former Masonic Hall, now Credit Union is a significant building both because of its past history and current public function for the community. It is a fine neo-classical structure although it has been poorly modified in recent times. The works that are now proposed will not directly impact on the fabric of the structure although the context and curtilage will be impacted. While we would normally begin this analysis by breaking down elements of the proposal and commenting on each, in this case, a more holistic appraisal is more appropriate.

Existing setting compared with the setting proposed.

At present, the building sits on its original stone plinth and in turn on a paved area of cobblelock. The immediate frontage is filled with parked cars in a poorly laid out parking area. This can be clearly seen in the image below.



The setting of the Protected Structure is not enhanced by the car parking immediately in front of the main elevation.

The proposal being considered at present is designed to enhance pedestrian safety in the centre of Kells and to make the town centre more appealing to the public. The road junction between Kenlis Place and John Street/Headfort Place will be made safer and aligned with more conventional road safety standards. A raised table with defined pedestrian crossings will passively slow traffic and make the area more pedestrian friendly. The removal of the poorly laid out car parking area will free up the frontage and will enhance the setting of the building. It will now more closely resemble the arrangement that was present at the time of the second edition OS mapping at the turn of the last century (1900). (refer to map on P3).

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In addition to the above, the current proposal will allow the issue of level access to the Credit Union to be resolved. Universal access to public buildings that are on the Record of Protected Structures poses challenges and the Credit Union is typical of many in this regard. At present there are four steps leading to the entrance which restricts access to many users. A resolution is not straightforward as the natural topography falls away from the front of the building. However, this proposal takes advantage of the removal of the car parking and replaces it with a "pocket park" at the heart of the town. This park features a ramp that along with a raised flower bed and seating, becomes a feature in its own right in the town centre, enhancing the quality of the urban space for the public. By laying the ramp out in this position, the plinth of the old Masonic Hall is preserved and critically the original setting and proportions are maintained. The relocation of the religious statue to this location consolidates this as an interesting space for people to gather and wander, safe from traffic.

The materials proposed in the new park are sympathetic to those chosen for the public realm enhancements which have recently been completed successfully in Kells. The use of limestone paving, and cobble sets will be more suitable and appropriate to the original building than the concrete cobblelock being replaced.

In conclusion, these works will improve and enhance the setting of the Recorded Protected Structure known as Kells Credit Union. These works, if completed, will more closely resemble the original setting of the former Masonic Hall and remove the unsightly car parking from the front elevation. In keeping with best conservation practice however, these works will be very clearly of their own time and will be clearly legible as a new phase of works in this area. The materials will be more sympathetic and appropriate to the setting and therefore the overall composition will be improved. These legible works will however be reversible if ever required in future; another core philosophy of good conservation practice. The bonus that will be achieved with all these works however, is improved safety for pedestrians and therefore enhanced comfort for users of the town centre. The Credit Union members will gain significant dividends of enhanced access for all users and an improved setting for their premises.



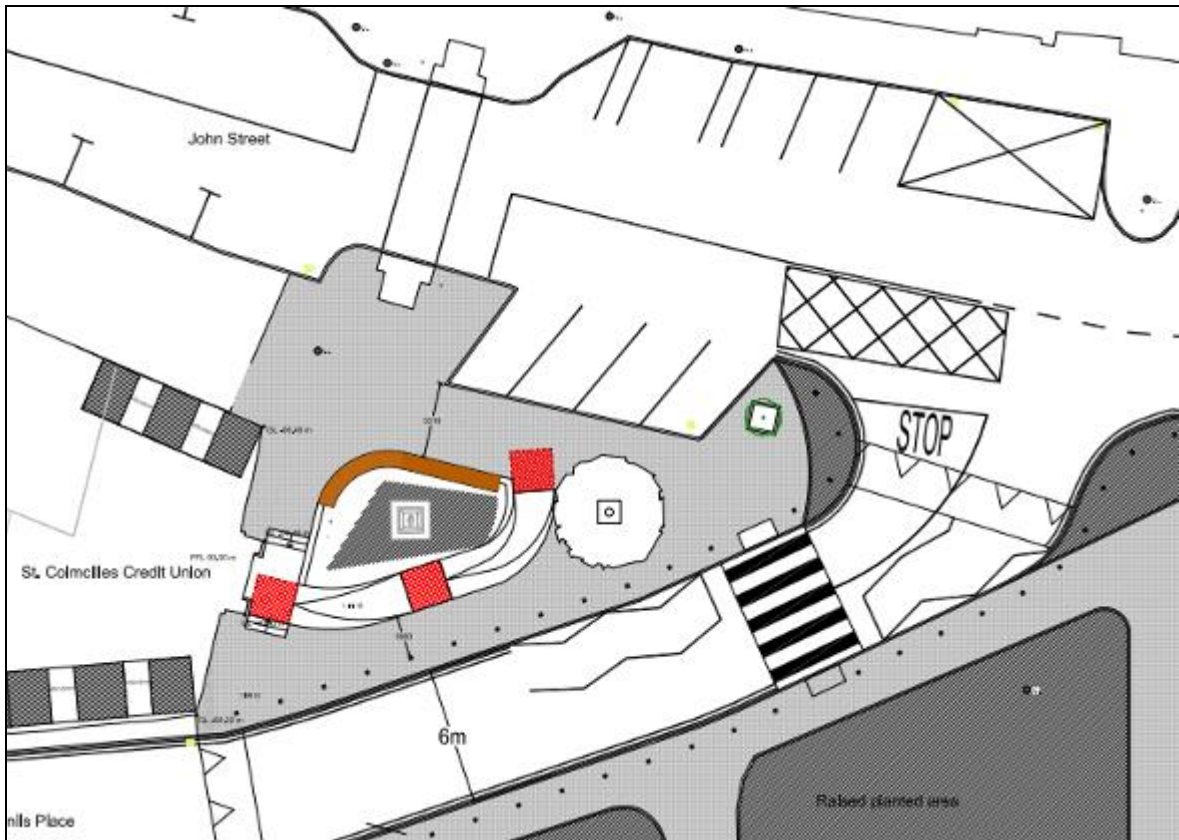
The existing access is unsuitable for people with mobility issues and those with prams etc.



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The layout design that is proposed for Part 8. This reclaims the frontage from car parking and establishes an area for pedestrians that incorporates universal access for the Credit Union.



Sample of the more suitable limestone paving employed in recently completed works in Kells.



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This paving is more sympathetic to the setting and the materials are more consistent with the Protected Structure than the cobble lock and tarmacadam that are present currently.



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7 Conservation Recommendations and Assessment of Impacts.

The proposed development consists of what can be classified as public realm improvements to traffic flow; pedestrian movement and universal access. They are taking place within the curtilage of a Record Protected Structure. The core philosophy of conservation is to retain integrity of the original building fabric and setting in so far as is reasonably possible. The works proposed will have no impact on the fabric of the Protected Structure. These proposals respect the integrity of the curtilage and can be considered as being acceptable. The new works must be detail designed to a high standard to ensure that the principles adopted at this stage at a high level, are delivered in the execution of the works. The images below illustrate how this can be achieved with careful and sensitive use of materials.



The impacts are summarised in detail the Table the appended to this document.



8 Conclusions

The proposed works comprise no interventions to the fabric of the Protected Structure itself; but they will impact on the setting. The proposals conform to accepted Conservation principles, will facilitate and indeed improve the continuing use of the structure and enhance the setting. The detail design of the seating, ramps, steps, handrails and associated street furniture should be carried out under the direction of a suitably qualified conservation architect to ensure that the appropriate mitigations are maintained at the implementation stage and that the detailed design delivers the quality of materials that this setting requires.

Signed



22nd November 2021

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