
Architectural Conservation Assessment

Convent of Mercy

Main Street, Ballymahon, Co. Longford

Longford County Council



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PREFACE

This Architectural Conservation Assessment has been prepared to support the application for permission for development at Main Street, Ballymahon, Co. Longford. The development will consist of

- the demolition of existing rear extension, construction of new rear extension, and refurbishment of the Dean Egan Library
- the construction of rear extension and refurbishment of Scoil Náisiúnta Naomh Colmcille and segregation of dedicated access adjacent to Scoil Náisiúnta Naomh Colmcille to the lands to the South
- the construction of a new community workshop facility, yard space and parking to the rear of Scoil Náisiúnta Naomh Colmcille
- **the refurbishment of the Convent of Mercy NIAH Reg. No. 13316005, demolition of existing side extension, construction of new extensions to the South West and North East of the Convent of Mercy.**
- **the construction of a new community hall, parking and set down area on the grounds of the Convent of Mercy**
- the construction of public realm improvement works including shared surfaces, landscaping, widening of existing lane adjacent to the Dean Egan Library and associated realignment of existing boundary wall.
- The provision of all groundworks, service connections, site drainage, internal paths, paving, parking, public lighting, public open space; and all associated site development works to complete the development.
- The proposed development is within the curtilage of protected structures LCC RPS No. 103 NIAH Reg. No. 13316028 and LCC RPS No. 255 NIAH Reg. No. 13316003.

This development is part of “Ballymahon – Pobal le Cheile Regeneration Project”, which includes works to Scoil Náisiúnta Naomh Colmcille, the Dean Egan Library and the Convent of Mercy. The complete works that relate to the Convent of Mercy include a) the refurbishment of the Convent of Mercy NIAH Reg. No. 13316005, demolition of existing side extension, construction of new extensions to the South West and North East of the Convent of Mercy, and b) the construction of a new community hall, parking and set down area on the grounds of the Convent of Mercy. All other works listed in the development description above are to be disregarded as they do not affect the Convent of Mercy, and as such are irrelevant to the conservation assessment of this building.

Applicant: Longford County Council

Application Type: Planning Application

Location: Main Street, Ballymahon, Co. Longford

ITM Centre Point Co-Ordinates: 615277,757349

Ordnance Survey Reference No.: 2694-B / 2694-D

Structure:
Detached Seven-Bay Two-Storey Over Basement Building: Former Convent
NIAH Reference Number: 13316005
RPS Reference Number: NA

Date of Assessment: March 2024



NIAH: *Front Elevation of the Convent of Mercy*

INTRODUCTION

Historical Description: From National Inventory of Architectural Heritage

“Detached seven-bay two-storey over basement former convent with attic storey, built c. 1882 and extended in 1895, having central three-bay gable-fronted breakfront and advanced single-bay gable-fronted breakfronts to either end of the main façade (southeast). Now in use as a day care centre. Multiple-bay two-storey over basement return with additional three-storey flat-roofed extension to the northeast and various flat-roofed single-storey extensions to the southeast. Pitched slate roofs with ridge tiles, overhanging eaves, brick chimneystacks, wrought-iron finial to central breakfront gable and cast-iron rainwater goods. Cut stone kneeler stones to gables to front elevation and corbelled eaves courses. Lined-and-ruled rendered walls over projecting plinth with moulded cut stone detailing. Round-headed niche to first floor central bay having trefoil-headed canopy with spired roof and containing statue on cut limestone plinth, the latter a continuation of the adjoining limestone sills and supported by a marble column and console bracket. Pointed arch openings to attic storey of gable-fronts, containing sheet metal vents. Pointed arch window openings to first floor having tooled limestone sills and replacement windows. Segmental-headed windows to ground floor with tooled cut limestone sills and replacement windows. Pointed arch door opening to central breakfront having square-headed doorway with timber panelled door, cut stone surround, plain overlight and flanking pointed arch sidelights with cut stone surrounds. Doorway approached by flight of cut limestone steps. Set back from road in extensive grounds to the northwest end of Ballymahon with garden to south and southeast of site, with cast-iron railings and pedestrian gate leading to St. Matthew’s Roman Catholic church (13316007). Modern school buildings to site. Convent graveyard to the northeast.”

Appraisal:

This substantial and well-proportioned late nineteenth-century convent retains its original imposing form and character despite recent conversion to a new use. The Institutional Gothic form of this building is characteristic of the convent architecture in Ireland during the second half of the nineteenth century, a period when a great many buildings of this type were constructed. The plain front façade is enlivened by the advanced gable-fronted breakfronts, the variety and treatment of the window openings and by the Gothic detailing to the canopied statue niche. It forms part of a group of related structures along with the Roman Catholic church (13316007) to the south and the convent school buildings (13316006) to the southwest. This building is of social importance to the local community as a school and is an historical reminder of the role of the Sisters of Mercy in Ballymahon. The simple railings, gates and the convent graveyard complete the setting and add to this composition.

CORE DATA

Purpose of the assessment:

This Architectural Conservation Assessment has been prepared to support the application for the development of “Ballymahon – Pobal le Cheile Regeneration Project”, which applies to Scoil Náisiúnta Naomh Colmcille (RPS 255), the Dean Egan Library (RPS 103) and the Convent of Mercy. This Architectural Conservation Assessment has been prepared to support the refurbishment of the Convent of Mercy and the proposed works surrounding the structure, as such, the development works which apply to this site are:

- the refurbishment of the Convent of Mercy NIAH Reg. No. 13316005, demolition of existing side extension, construction of new extensions to the South West and North East of the Convent of Mercy
- the construction of a new Community Hall, parking and set down area on the grounds of the Convent of Mercy

Name & address of structure: The Convent of Mercy, Main Street, Ballymahon, Co. Longford

Form of Statutory Protection: NA

Record of Protected Structures: NA

NIAH Reference: 13316005



Convent of Mercy, Main Street, BALLYMAHON, Ballymahon, Co. LONGFORD

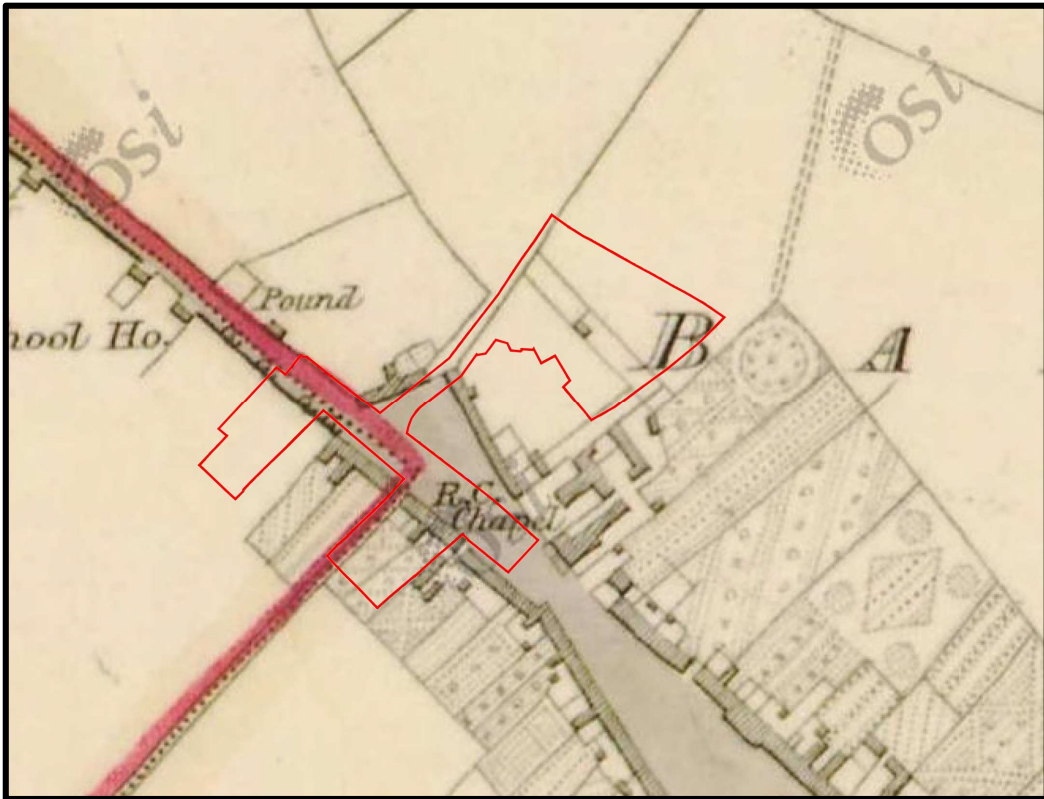
Reg No: 13316005

Detached seven-bay two-storey over basement former convent with attic storey, built c. 1882 and extended in 1895, having central three-bay gable-fronted breakfront and advanced single-bay gable-fronte...

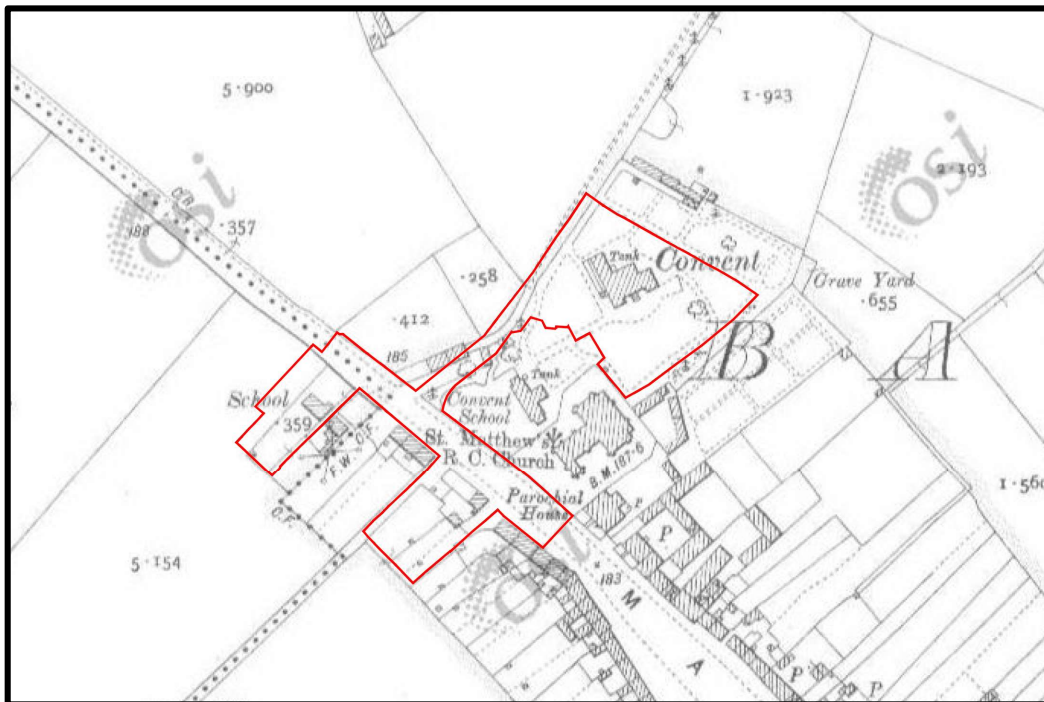
[View Record](#)

NIAH: Extract from National Inventory of Architectural Heritage

MAPS



GeoHive Map Viewer - Historical map 6 inch Colour 1837-42



GeoHive Map Viewer - Historical Map: 25 inch 1888-1913

PROPOSED WORKS

The proposed works are as a result of the applicants wish to suggest the following works:

- The refurbishment of the existing structure, the Convent of Mercy. This renovation would include the repair and replacement of all existing external windows and doors, including the feature window in the South West gable and the timber dormer in the North West-facing plane of the main roof. It would also include the repair and replacement of the existing roof and damp proofing the basement. It is important to note that such renovations will be carried out in accordance with conservation best practice, current building regulations and incorporating the input of qualified structural engineers where required.
- Demolition works which consist of the demolition of the poor quality flat roofed hexagonal extension to southwest and the demolition of extension to northwest at ground floor level. It is important to note that such renovations will be carried out in accordance with building regulations and with the guidance of qualified structural engineers.
- The construction of a single storey flat roof extension to the southwest of the convent will provide much improved internal layout configuration for community services. The extension will be accessed through a new circulation area which will also be used to access the existing building.
- The construction of a three-storey tower on the northeastern side of building accessing all three levels of existing building by providing a new stairwell. Toilet blocks, stores and ancillary rooms will also be located in this extension block.
- Internal works which include the dry lining of rooms insofar as possible to improve the thermal performance of the building. Minor demolition works internally include various internal walls to be demolished to repurpose rooms and provide the rooms required for a day care centre. The replacement of the existing lift serving all three levels to make the building accessible to all users, and the addition of another stair core to the northwestern side of the building to facilitate ease of circulation within the building and safe egress in the event of fire. New openings will be added to the existing extension that is being retained on site. The repurposing of internal rooms can be seen in detail in the drawings in the following pages.
- Additional minor demolition works including exterior stairs and ramps.
- The construction of a new carpark to the southeast of the building providing 24 new parking spaces, including one accessible space. 8 new staff parking spaces will also be provided along the northern boundary of the site. New carpark will be accessed through existing way leave area and existing entrance gates to site. A set down area and turning area will also be provided to south of site.

- The construction of a new single storey pitched roof community hall along the North Eastern boundary of the site to contain toilets, coffee dock, entrance hall, community hall and store.
- The design concept for the extension focuses on modern architecture with clean lines, large windows for natural light, and a harmonious combination of aluminium, concrete, and painted render. The materials were chosen for their durability, low maintenance, and ability to create a sleek and stylish appearance. Dark grey powder coated aluminium will be used for exterior elements such as window frames and doors. Painted render finishes to contrast the existing building will be applied to exterior walls, providing a clean and minimalistic appearance. The architectural style and choice of materials for this extension will make clear that it is a later intervention in line with the principles of conservation.

Please see images overleaf of the existing building, and drawings of proposed works.

PHOTOGRAPHIC SURVEY



KLA – Image of the southern façade of the Convent of Mercy



KLA – Image of the southern façade of the extension to the Convent of Mercy



KLA – Image of flat roofed extension to be retained with Convent of Mercy in background



KLA – Image of hexagonal extension to be demolished viewed from northwest boundary



KLA – Image of external stairs to be demolished on east side of building



KLA – Image of access to basement level on north side of Convent of Mercy



KLA – Image of protruding northern gable of Convent of Mercy



KLA – Image of flat roof extension to southwest of Convent, with hexagonal extension in background



KLA – Image of original timber rooflights which are in severe disrepair & first floor feature window in the Convent of Mercy



KLA – Image of the original timber sash windows of the Convent of Mercy



KLA– Image of the extensive water damage and damp on the upper floors



NIAH – Image of front elevation of the Convent of Mercy c.2005



NIAH – Image of northeastern corner of the Convent of Mercy c.2005



NIAH – Image of northwestern corner of the Convent of Mercy c.2005



***NIAH** – Image of north side of the Convent of Mercy c.2005*



***NIAH** – Image of north side of the Convent of Mercy c.2005*



NIAH – Image of north side of the Convent of Mercy c.2005



NIAH – Image of the Convent of Mercy viewed from existing entrance gates on west boundary

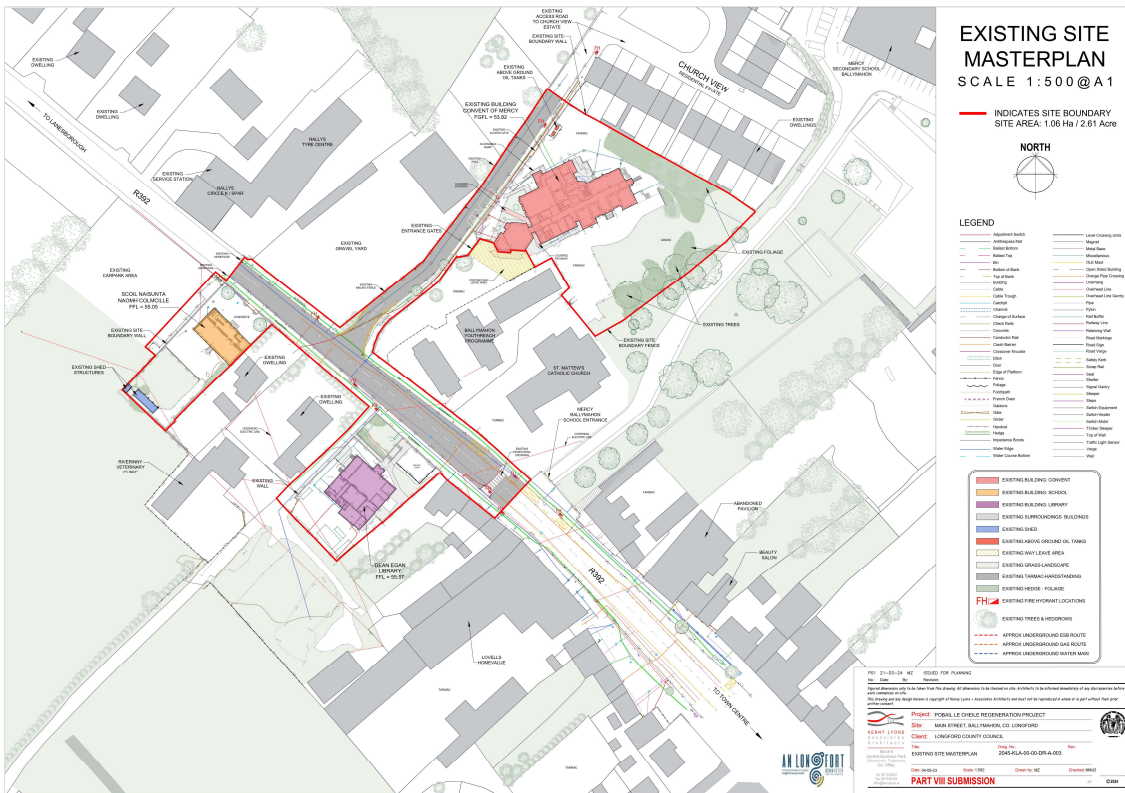


NIAH – Image of south side of the Convent of Mercy c.2005

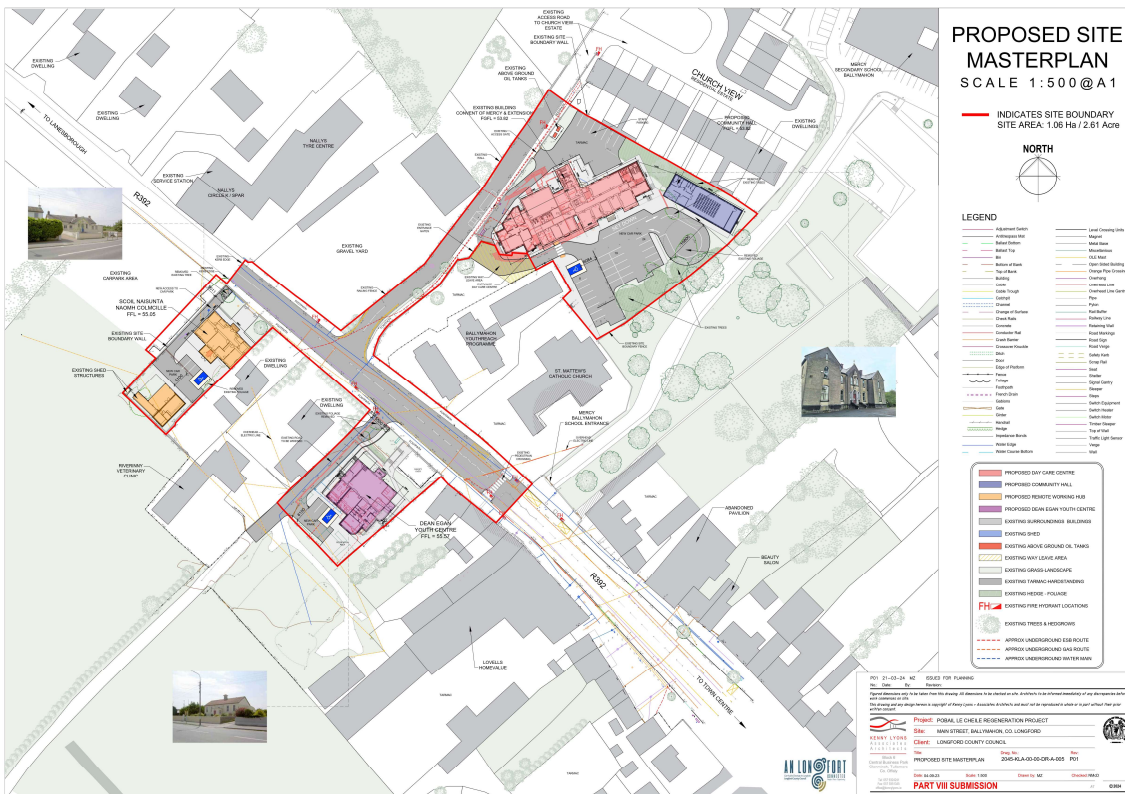


NIAH – Image of the Convent of Mercy viewed from back of St. Mathew's Catholic Church

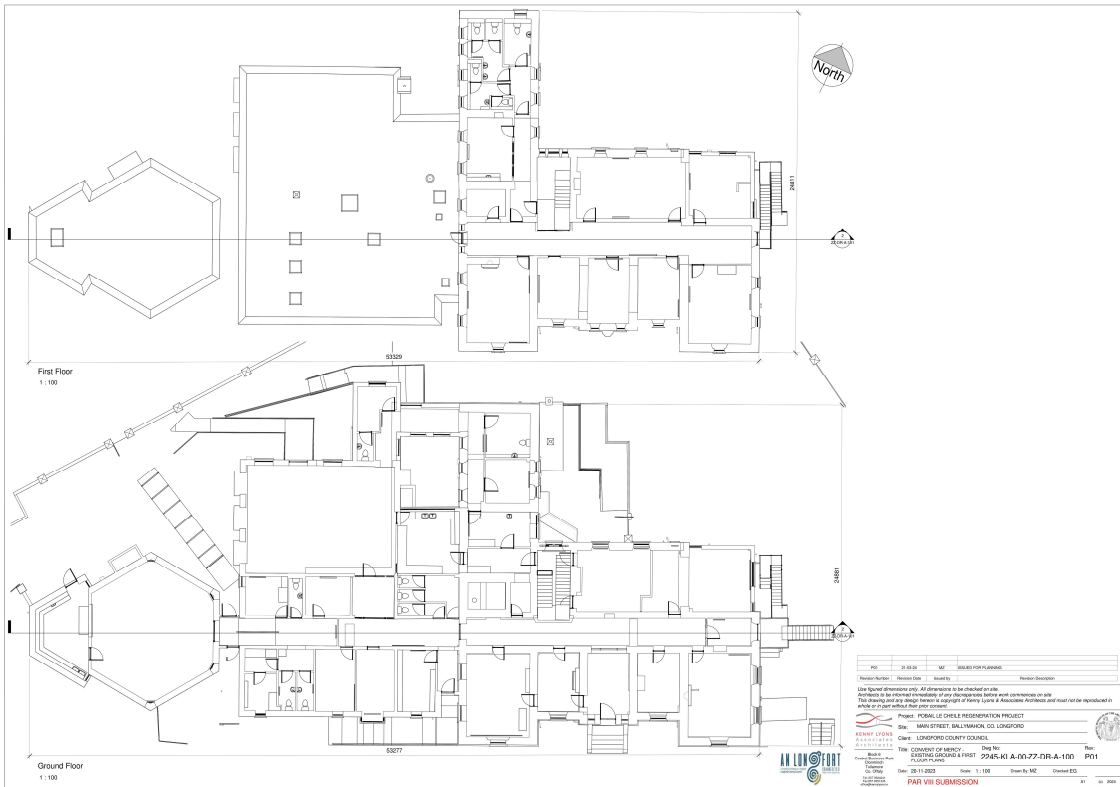
DRAWINGS



KLA – Existing Site Layout Plan



KLA – Proposed Site Layout Plan for “Ballymahon – Pobal le Cheile Regeneration Project”



KLA – Existing Ground & First Floor Plan of the Convent of Mercy



KLA – Existing Elevations of the Convent of Mercy



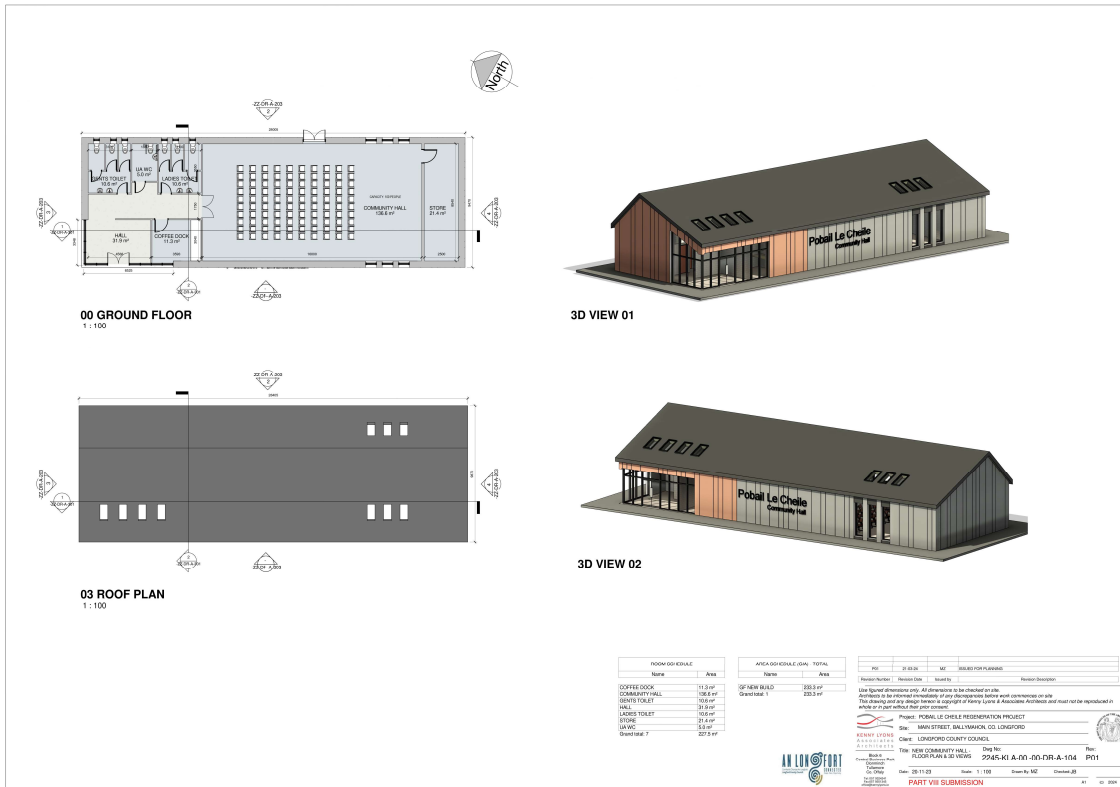
KLA – Proposed Front & Rear Elevations of Convent of Mercy



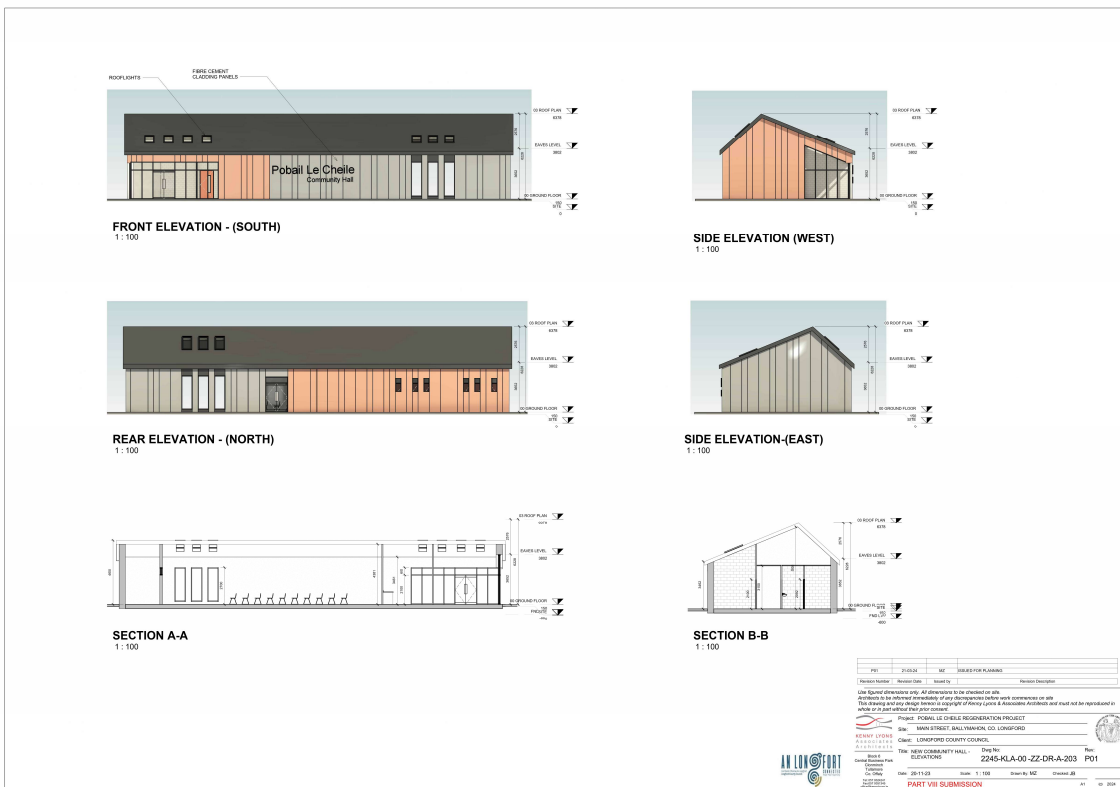
KLA – Proposed Side Elevations of Convent of Mercy



KLA – Proposed Sections of Convent of Mercy



KLA – Proposed Floor Plan & 3D of Community Hall



KLA – Proposed Elevations & Sections of Community Hall

IMPACT ASSESSMENT OF PROPOSAL:

The impact of the proposed intervention will be positive as it will refurbish the existing structure and complement its architecture with modern design sensitive to the existing form.

Schedule of Interventions:

Feature Ref	Description	Proposed Alteration	Impact Of Proposed Alteration	Evaluation of proposed works/ mitigating measures/ justification
Windows	Pointed arch window openings to first floor having tooled limestone sills and replacement windows. Segmental-headed windows to ground floor, feature First Floor window to South West gable with tooled cut limestone sills and replacement windows.	Repair existing windows and where necessary, replace windows.	Positive impact restoring the original character and fabric visuals of the building.	Best conservation practice will be implemented. Specialist window supplier.
Timber Panelled Door	Pointed arch door opening to central breakfront having square-headed doorway with timber panelled door, cut stone surround, plain overlight and flanking pointed arch sidelights with cut stone surrounds.	Repair existing door, sidelights and overlight, and if necessary, replace.	Positive impact, the repaired panelled timber door will improve function and visual aesthetic.	Best conservation practice will be implemented. Specialist timber supplier.
Pitched Slate Roof	Pitched slate roofs with ridge tiles, overhanging eaves, timber dormer feature, brick chimneystacks, wrought-iron finial to central breakfront gable and cast-iron rainwater goods	Repair and replacement of existing roof, chimneystacks, timber dormer and all other roofing elements.	This will have a positive impact on the building as it preserves the original roof structure and the buildings character.	This is a justified step to retain the original roof of the protected structure.

Feature Ref	Description	Proposed Alteration	Impact Of Proposed Alteration	Evaluation of proposed works/ mitigating measures/ justification
External Walls	Lined-and-ruled rendered walls over projecting plinth with moulded cut stone detailing	Repainting of external walls, repair where necessary, and dry lining to be installed internally where possible.	This will have a positive impact as repainting the external facades will restore the original visual aesthetic and through dry lining, the thermal performance of the building will be improved.	This is a justified step to ensure the original façade is not altered and the thermal performance of the building will be improved.
External Niche on Front Façade	Round-headed niche to first floor central bay having trefoil-headed canopy with spired roof and containing statue on cut limestone plinth, the latter a continuation of the adjoining limestone sills and supported by a marble column and console bracket.	Existing statue, canopy, niche and all other related details to be retained and repaired where necessary. Repainting might be necessary.	This will have a positive impact as repainting the niche and canopy will restore the front façade to the original colour and vibrance it had before.	This proposed work is required in order to preserve the buildings character.
Arched Vents on Gable-Fronts	Pointed arch openings to attic storey of gable-fronts, containing sheet metal vents	Arched openings to be retained as part of original structure, vents might need to be replaced.	This will have a positive impact as the vents can continue to aerate the building and original façade is retained.	This proposed work is justified in order to allow the vents to fulfil their function while retaining the architecture of the pointed arch openings.
Limestone steps	Flight of cut limestone steps on approach to front door.	Limestone steps to be retained and appear to be in good condition, no works presumed necessary.	This will have a positive impact as the original steps are retained, conserving the previous form of the approach to the building.	This is a justified step as the limestone steps are a feature of the original architecture and as such must be preserved.

Feature Ref	Description	Proposed Alteration	Impact Of Proposed Alteration	Evaluation of proposed works/ mitigating measures/ justification
Existing Extension	Existing 20 th Century hexagonal single-storey flat-roofed extension (former chapel) to the west of Convent & existing flat-roofed extension to the north of the Convent.	Existing 20 th Century extensions to be demolished as indicated as they are in poor condition and not part of the original Convent of Mercy	This will be positive as the existing extensions take away from the original Convent of Mercy and are in poor condition.	This step is necessary as the extensions do not compliment the architecture of the existing Convent and occupy a crucial area on this site where a new extension, sensitive to existing form, could be built.
Internal Works	Dry lining of rooms, minor internal demolition works, addition of new lift and addition of a new stair core to north of building.	The dry lining of internal rooms, where possible. The demolition of internal walls to repurpose rooms. The addition of a lift serving all three levels in the centre of the building. The addition of a new stair core to the north of the building to access all three levels.	Positive as dry lining of rooms will improve thermal performance of the building. The demolition of some internal walls will create the space needed to meet the room requirements for a day care centre. The addition of an internal lift will make the building accessible to all users. The addition of a new stair core will improve circulation within the building.	These works are justified as the Convent is an old building with poor thermal performance, therefore dry lining is needed. The day care centre has specific room requirements, many of which cant be met with existing size/ types of rooms. The new lift is an essential addition to make the entire building accessible. The stair core is a positive addition, vital to the fire safety and good circulation of the building.
Other Demolition Works	Additional minor demolition works such as external ramps and stairs.	Poor condition ramps and stairs currently surrounding the Convent and accessing the extensions, to be demolished.	Positive as the external facades of the Convent will be uninterrupted by poor condition ramps and stairs and will be allowed to be appreciated fully by the public.	These works are justified as the current external ramps and stairs interrupt the architectural beauty of the Convents facades and are currently falling into disrepair.

Feature Ref	Description	Proposed Alteration	Impact Of Proposed Alteration	Evaluation of proposed works/ mitigating measures/ justification
New Extension	Proposed single-storey flat-roofed extension to west of Convent & three-storey extension block to east of Convent.	Construction of the single-storey extension to the west of Convent and three-storey extension to the east of the Convent, using modern design and thoughtful materials which will be discreetly flashed to historic fabric.	Positive as the single-storey extension will provide much needed space for the Day Care Centre and a new circulation area to access the existing building, while the three-storey block provides a new stair core to access all three levels, and essential stores, toilets, counselling rooms etc.	This is a justified step as circulation within the building must be maximised and the day care centre has room requirements that need to be met and are satisfied through the areas provided in this extension.
New Community Hall	Single storey pitched roof building along eastern corner of site.	Pitched roof single-storey community hall will be built along eastern corner of site using low maintenance, durable materials which complement the existing built fabric of the site.	This will have a positive impact as it will provide a new community hall for the town of Ballymahon, including toilets, coffee dock, store, and entrance hall.	This is a justified step as the town needs a community space to hold meetings, functions etc. and this building will supply a facility the whole community can avail of.

Significance of Structure:

The regeneration and extension of this structure is a necessary and important step to allow present generations to enjoy the physical expression of past generations. These works would also prevent the building from falling into disrepair and allow it to provide the vital space and resources needed for the rapidly growing community of Ballymahon town. The crucial restoration of this building will reinstate its architectural significance in the heart of the community of Ballymahon and allow it to continue to be an integral element of the built heritage of the town.

Effectiveness of the Works:

The proposed works will preserve the integral parts of the original structure of the Convent of Mercy. We believe that the proposed refurbishment and extension of the Convent of Mercy will allow it to achieve its full potential and functionality and will be beneficial to the enhancement of Ballymahon town and allow the building to be preserved and celebrated for generations to come.

Architectural Impact Statement prepared on the 21/03/2024 by:



Joseph Breslin BArch BSc (Architectural Studies) MRIAI
Accredited in Conservation Grade III
For Kenny Lyons & Associates Architects

BIBLIOGRAPHY & ICONOGRAPHY:

- 1) Longford County Council Development Plan 2021-2027.
- 2) Historic Maps, Site Location Map – By OSI - (www.osi.ie).
- 3) Photographs by Kenny Lyons & Associates.
- 4) Photographs from National Inventory of Architectural Heritage - (NIAH)
- 5) Aerial Image from Google Maps.