

Planning Statement

Inis Cealtra Visitor Experience
on behalf of Clare County Council

December 2024



McCutcheon Halley
CHARTERED PLANNING CONSULTANTS

Document Control Sheet

Client	Clare County Council	
Project Title	Inis Cealtra Visitor Experience	
Document Title	Planning Statement	
Document Comprises	Volumes	1
	Pages (Including Cover)	100
	Appendices	0
Prepared by	Martina Keenan Rivero	
Checked by	Paula Galvin	
Office of Issue	Dublin	
Document Information	Revision	B
	Status	Final
	Issue Date	December 2024

CORK

6 Joyce House
Barrack Square
Ballincollig
Cork
P31 YX97

T. +353 (0)21 420 8710

DUBLIN

Kreston House
Arran Court
Arran Quay
Dublin 7
D07 K271

T. +353 (0)1 804 4477

www.mhplanning.ie

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1. Introduction

This Planning Statement has been prepared by McCutcheon Halley Chartered Planning (MHP) Consultants to accompany an application to An Bord Pleanála under Section 177AE of the Planning and Development Act (PDA) 2000 (as amended) on behalf of Clare County Council (CCC) for a proposed tourism development, the Inis Cealtra Visitor Experience.



Figure 1 Aerial View of Inis Cealtra

In summary, the proposed development aims to upgrade and enhance visitor facilities across two key areas in East Clare: Inis Cealtra Island (Holy Island) in Lough Derg and Mountshannon Village.

The works at Inis Cealtra will involve constructing a new floating jetty and walkway, enhancing pedestrian paths and installing welfare and storage facilities.

In Mountshannon village, there are two proposed development sites: a greenfield site to the north of Main Street, which will accommodate a new public car park. To the south of Main Street within the 'Old Rectory Site' it is proposed to develop a Visitor Centre together with public realm enhancements.

An Environmental Impact Assessment Report (EIAR) and Natura Impact Statement (NIS) have been prepared and are included with this application for approval.

1.1 Inis Cealtra Visitor Management and Sustainable Tourism Development Plan

This proposed development has its origins in the 2017 *Inis Cealtra Visitor Management and Sustainable Tourism Development Plan*, which has the following stated objective:

"This Plan seeks to ensure the long-term conservation, preservation and presentation of this unique cultural site to international standards, while expanding its attractiveness and ability to cope with significantly increased numbers of visitors."

The Inis Cealtra Action Plan 2017-2022 outlines a framework for achieving the objectives outlined in the plan. This long-term, evolving development strategy for Inis Cealtra and Mountshannon aims to preserve the island's heritage, raise visitor awareness, and generate economic benefits for the local community. The plan includes numerous recommendations which are summarised below.

- *Visitor numbers can, and should, be increased to bring more tourism, and socioeconomic benefits, to the local region. There is capacity to increase the numbers of visitors significantly, while ensuring protection of the built and natural heritage of the island within the context of a number of management strategies and new facilities.*
- *The rich heritage and history of the site is of such importance that it justifies broadening access to it for more visitors. It is important that such a significant example of our cultural heritage will be shared beyond those currently familiar with it.*
- *In order to increase visitor numbers, specific amenities must be provided to allow effective management of such growth in numbers.*
- *A visitor facility is required as a gateway to receive, inform and filter access to the island. This should comprise high quality facilities for visitors. Without significant investment in such a facility, the island cannot withstand the impact of increased visitor numbers, nor could the whole experience be considered to be of the quality expected of comparable historical site destinations nationally and internationally.*
- *Some new facilities to enhance the visitor experience, provide ease of access, safety and information on the island's heritage, will be needed on the island. These will be the minimum facilities necessary to allow the growth of visitor numbers that a site of such cultural value deserves and could absorb. However, to preserve the authenticity and ambience of the island, more elaborate facilities will have to be provided off site. Having considered a number of alternatives, it is regarded that Mountshannon is the most fitting location to receive and manage a new visitor centre; it is the lakeshore village closest to the island, has a deep cultural connection to it and has enough infrastructure potential to accommodate an increase in visitors. The local area would also benefit greatly from increased tourism economy at this location.*

The 28 specific objectives to achieve the recommendations outlined above and they are reproduced .

6.2 Specific objectives

The objectives set out under the Plan to realise the above recommendations are:

Objective 1

To commence the nomination of Inis Cealtra, in combination with the other significant early medieval monastic sites, as a serial World Heritage Site, in the near term.

Objective 2

To restrict access to the island to a maximum number at any one time of 100 persons (excluding guides and staff), no more than 400 in any day and a maximum of 45,000 over the course of the year. These numbers should be taken as the maximum number of persons arriving on the island for all subsequent studies, projections, models and projects.

Objective 3

To have primary visitor access to the island via a ferry from a new visitor centre on the mainland with a small access charge, and to allow the local community continue accessing the island free of charge with established local tourism businesses using a discounted permit system.

Objective 4

To procure a new visitor centre on the mainland to serve the needs of visitors seeking to learn more about the island.

Objective 5

To develop the new visitor centre for Inis Cealtra at the south end of the community park in Mountshannon (site 2) with views to the island and access from the main street via the Aistear park. Alternative options assessed for the development of a visitor centre, including the Old Rectory and the Aistear Centre, can be explored further should the new-build option prove unfeasible.

Objective 6

To engage a professional interpretation design company to design and develop an interpretative experience for the visitor centre, taking account of the wealth of academic, social and anecdotal information assembled in this Plan (including Appendix 2).

Objective 7

To provide a new visitor centre which may include a range of services and facilities for visitors, including audio visual auditorium, exhibition, visitor information and ticketing, café, retail, toilets, meeting rooms, spiritual space, pilgrim traveller facilities, connection to ferry point and drop off points with limited parking facilities.

Objective 8

To have access across the lake to Inis Cealtra from Mountshannon.

Objective 9

To construct a new landing facility at a location that allows both a safe passage to and safe landing and embarkation on/from the island. This will become the main landing point for visitors to the island.

Objective 10

To introduce new visitor facilities on Inis Cealtra comprising pathways around monuments and the island, suitable orientation signage, new pods to provide for emergency, toileting and staff facilities, wastewater management, benches and improved landing points for kayaks.

Objective 11

To remove, or if necessary relocate, the OPW shed and wooden fencing and let the shed's functions be served by one of the new 'pods' which will provide spaces necessary to meet a minimum level of accommodation required of a public facility with employees.

Objective 12

To develop an Accessibility Plan that facilitates accessing the monuments, protecting their condition and preserving the character and ambience of the setting.

Objective 13

To install a sustainable natural toilet system on the island.

Objective 14

To limit impacts on archaeology, ecology and the character of Inis Cealtra, the island will be closed to visitors during winter and at any other time the maximum numbers of visitors will not be exceeded.

Objective 15

To develop an interpretative approach that focuses on the heritage of Inis Cealtra and endeavours to broaden visitor interest to also encompass other important heritage sites in the region, and to have this holistic focus reflected in all interpretative activities of the Plan.

Objective 16

To develop a comprehensive presentation and communication strategy grounded in the human interaction of guides rather than signage (on the island) and relying on both traditional and modern means and technologies (at the visitor centre).

<p>Objective 17 To provide a warden during the open season with specific responsibility for caretaking of the island from first to last boat and to provide guides and ushers to fulfil other specific functions necessary for the smooth and safe running of visitor operations on the island.</p>	<p>Objective 27 To create a dedicated website for Inis Cealtra as well as a social media presence to provide information about the island and the visitor centre and to promote the use of Inis Cealtra as the island's name.</p>
<p>Objective 18 To manage entry into the area known as the Saints' Graveyard so it is supervised and controlled, and so that walking on the medieval grave-slabs is deterred in order to prevent further wear and damage to them.</p>	<p>Objective 28 To carry out urgent stabilisation, maintenance or conservation work, as set out in this Plan, to monuments on Inis Cealtra, as soon as possible and prior to any increase in visitor numbers or other development work being initiated.</p>
<p>Objective 19 To seek the assistance of the OPW in the management of Inis Cealtra.</p>	
<p>Objective 20 To develop a landscape management plan in consultation with an archaeologist, an ecologist and an agricultural consultant or farmer, and to include active management of vegetation by sheep.</p>	
<p>Objective 21 To create a community forum representing the interest of the local communities in the development and managing of the island's future, including a local access provision.</p>	
<p>Objective 22 To discourage and, if persistent, prohibit camping, unaccompanied tours and fishing on the island and to prohibit dogs except companion dogs and sheep dogs being used for management purposes.</p>	
<p>Objective 23 To commission a conservation management plan focusing on Inis Cealtra's archaeology and monuments prior to any works being initiated on or for the island.</p>	
<p>Objective 24 To target the market segments previously identified for the lake in the new marketing strategy, i.e. Culturally Curious, Great Escapers and Nature Lovers.</p>	
<p>Objective 25 To provide the ferry service to the island using a fleet of two 50-seater ferries.</p>	
<p>Objective 26 To develop a branding strategy, to include naming, titles, logos, digital and print media initiatives, through a single party services contract with the content (of the appropriate sections of) the Plan forming the brief to tenderers.</p>	

The Clare County Development Plan (CCDP) 2023-2029 includes an objective **CDP9.23** to implement this Plan.

"It is an objective of Clare County Council:

b) To work with relevant stakeholders to implement the Inis Cealtra (Holy Island) Visitor Management and Sustainable Tourism Development Plan including the development of an associated visitor centre in Mountshannon;"

The implementation progress of the Inis Cealtra (Holy Island) Visitor Management and Sustainable Tourism Development Plan is one of the two

main key performance indicators (KPIs) for tourism in East Clare, and submitting this application represents a significant milestone in that process.

1.2 Project Team

The project has been developed by a highly experienced professional team, including McCullough Mulvin Architects, McCutcheon Halley Planning, Mitchell and Associates, Malachy Walsh and Partners, Tobin Consulting Engineers, Archaeological Projects Ltd., Susan Heffernan (Project Management & Marketing Consultant), Mizen Underwater Archaeology, Digital Dimensions, and Evolve Access.

The application is accompanied by a comprehensive set of supporting documentation which should be read in conjunction with this Planning Statement.

1.3 Statutory Notice Development Description

The proposed development provides for upgrade and enhanced visitor facilities on lands measuring approximately 20.3 hectares located at Inis Cealtra (Holy Island) in Lough Derg, and at two locations in Mountshannon Village, in the Townland of Mountshannon.

The two sites in Mountshannon Village include: (1) lands within the curtilage of the 'Old Rectory' (a Protected Structure, RPS No. 464) and extending south to encompass a section of Harbour Road (L-4034) and Mountshannon Harbour car park, and (2) lands to the north of Aistear Park on the north side of Main Street (R352).

The proposed upgrade and enhanced visitor facilities development will consist of:

(a) Demolition of an existing concrete shelter (16sq.m) at Inis Cealtra adjacent to the existing pier at the north-west of the island;

(b) Installation of a new L-shaped floating access jetty and walkway at the north-west of Inis Cealtra Island at the location of the existing pier, consisting of a floating breakwater jetty, a stone and concrete causeway connected by a steel access ramp and a canoe launch jetty with access ramp;

(c) A series of new-mown grass pedestrian paths on Inis Cealtra facilitating enhanced access to the island's main monuments and natural landscape;

(d) Provision of three staff and public welfare facility 'pods' including a weather shelter (20sq.m), WCs (15sq.m) and a staff rest room (25sq.m), principally made up of prefabricated timber components;

(e) Removal of foul waste from a holding container forming part of a proposed dry toilet system on Inis Cealtra Island, and its transportation by tanker to an off-site licenced wastewater treatment facility;

(f) Construction of a public car park on the north side of Main Street, incorporating 169 total car parking spaces including 105 standard car parking spaces, 11 accessible car parking spaces and 53 overflow car parking spaces on reinforced grass in the northern part of the site, together with 6 coach parking spaces and 40 secure bicycle parking spaces;

(g) To facilitate the new car park in Main Street, it is proposed to remove two sections of an existing mound/wall (approx. 155m combined length) extending south to north through the site, together with the access gate and a 7.8m section of the existing masonry wall at the site's frontage to Main Street on the southern boundary;

(h) Construction of a new part one-storey, part two-storey Visitor Centre with a gross floor area of 1,594sq.m to the south of the existing 'Old Rectory' building (RPS No. 464), incorporating a series of interpretation, exhibition and education spaces, together with a café and ancillary supporting spaces;

(i) Removal of two sections of the existing stone wall (approx. length 45m combined total) at the south and south-west boundary of the 'Old Rectory' site at its frontage to Harbour Road, to enhance access from Harbour Road and provide a visual connection between the new Visitor Centre and Lough Derg;

(j) Reconfiguration of the existing Mountshannon Harbour car park, providing for 49 total car parking spaces, including 46 standard spaces and 3 accessible spaces, together with public realm enhancements;

(k) All ancillary infrastructure and site development works above and below ground level including undergrounding of an existing ESB overhead line at the site of the new car park in Mountshannon Village, public lighting, drainage, connections to public services, site access, traffic calming, hard and soft landscaping, public realm works and boundary treatments.

A detailed description is provided in Section 4.

1.4 Consultation

The application documents for this proposed development, including the EIAR and other supporting information, are available at *Have Your Say* on the Clare County Council website.

During the preparation of the application, Clare County Council and its representatives consulted with a number of statutory authorities and stakeholders having an interest in this project, including:

- The **Office of Public Works** (OPW) with responsibility for the conservation and presentation of National Monuments on the island.
- The **National Monuments Service** (NMS) in relation to the protection of the island's archaeological heritage.
- **Waterways Ireland** (WWI) as the navigation authority for Lough Derg and the Shannon, provided technical expertise as required.
- **National Parks and Wildlife Service** (NPWS) with a key role in the protection of Ireland's biodiversity, working to secure the conservation of ecosystems, flora and fauna in Ireland.
- **Uisce Éireann**, Ireland's national regulated water utility is responsible for the delivery of water and wastewater services in Ireland.

- **Fáilte Ireland** as the National Tourism Development Authority seeks to support the long-term sustainable growth in the economic, social, cultural and environmental contribution of tourism to Ireland.

In addition, a public meeting was held in Mountshannon in July 2023 to inform members of the local community about the project, including the emerging development design and anticipated timeframe for preparing and submitting the application to An Bord Pleanála.

The required information has been issued for the Department of Housing, Planning, and Local Government's EIA Portal. This tool informs the public in a timely manner of applications accompanied by an EIAR.

2. Proposed Development Site

The proposed development site comprises lands measuring approximately 20.3 hectares located at Inis Cealtra (Holy Island) in Lough Derg, and at two locations in Mountshannon Village.

The vast majority, approximately 18.1ha, of the site area relates to Inis Celatra, with the balance distributed across two parcels in Mountshannon.

The two sites in Mountshannon Village include: (1) lands within the curtilage of the 'Old Rectory' (a Protected Structure, RPS No. 464) and extending south to encompass a section of Harbour Road (L-4034) and Mountshannon Harbour car park, and (2) lands to the north of Aistear Park on the north side of Main Street (R352).



Figure 2 Aerial View - General Site Location Plan

A breakdown of the site areas associated with the different project elements is as follows:

Project Component	Location	Area
New floating access jetty, 3 staff and welfare facility pods, mown grass pedestrian paths.	Inis Cealtra (Holy Island)	c. 18.1 hectares
Village Car Park	Mountshannon	8,685 sq.m
Visitor Centre, reconfiguration of the harbour car park and public realm enhancements.	Mountshannon	13,163 sq.m

Table 1 Site Areas

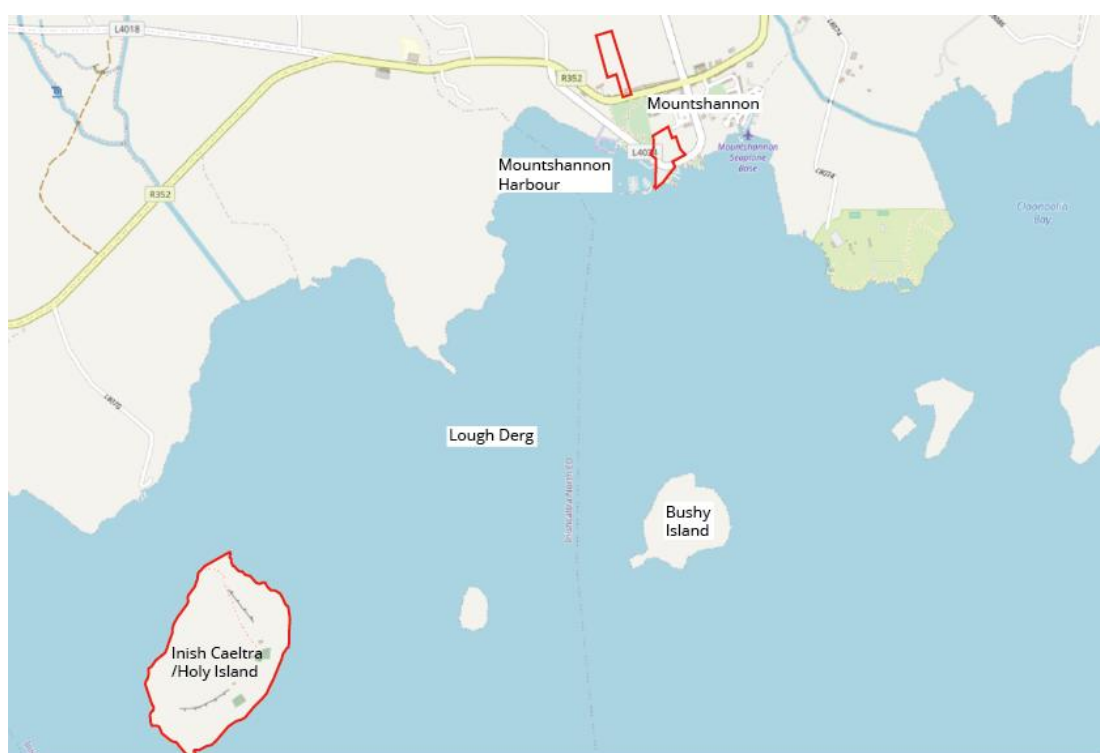


Figure 3 Proposed Development Site (Mountshannon 2 no. sites & Inis Cealtra)

2.1 Inis Cealtra (Holy Island)

Lough Derg is the third-largest lake on the island of Ireland. It is set between the Slieve Bernagh Mountains to the west in Co. Clare and the Arra Mountains to the east in Co. Tipperary. Inis Cealtra (Holy Island) is located within this scenic context.



Plate 1 Round Tower, St. Caimin's and Burial Ground

The island is uninhabited and was once a monastic settlement. On its eastern shore is an important group of ecclesiastic monuments comprising the following buildings: St Caimin's, St Michael's, St Brigid's, St Mary's, Tempall na bhFear nGonta, a shrine (known as the Confessional) and substantial remains of a round tower. A stone monument known as the Bargaining Stone, a Penitential Station, lies near the Lady Well. There are numerous bullaun stones, mounds of stones and earth associated with pilgrim patterns, earthworks and a children's burial ground or 'cillin'. There are 189 individual sites or stone features identified on the island and entered on the Record of Monuments and Places.



Plate 2 St. Caimin's Church



Plate 3 Round Tower, St. Caimin Church & Bullaun Stone

The island is approximately 2km southwest of Mountshannon village and is accessible by boat. Clare County Council owns it, and the Office of Public Works (OPW) owns and manages its monuments.

Access to Inis Cealtra is provided via an existing pier located on the northwest side of the island that is owned and operated by Waterways Ireland (WVI). The travel distance between Inis Cealtra Pier and Mountshannon Harbour Pier is approximately 2 kms.



Plate 4 View of the Island Jetty

Paths were an integral part of the pilgrimage route. All of the paths and the 'paved street' uncovered and recorded in de Paor's excavations are now covered over. None of the early medieval or post-medieval path surfaces,

either of gravel, paved stone, or metalling, are now visible. Where they were investigated during the excavation, paving tended to occur on the inside of the post-medieval pilgrimage enclosures around the churches. The main path/ earthwork apparent on the island is that which extends from St Michael's Church past St Brigid's Church and down to St Mary's Church would appear to be of primary monastic date. There is additionally a 100m section of a double banked walkway from St Michael's enclosure towards St Caimin's Church.

The path from the pier on the north-west of the island to the monastic enclosure was apparently partly reinstated in 2001 (information from Ger Madden, cited in O' Leary et al (2017, 87). Due to overgrowth, the original 50m of this path from the pier does not follow the original line taken. Fragments of geotextile are presently exposed, and the lower section of the path is eroded. Either side of the path is marked with occasional large flanking boulders.



Plate 5 Existing mown grass pathways

The embankments and/or paths are clearly defined on the overall LIDAR survey.



Plate 6 LIDAR Survey

2.2 Mountshannon

A boat slipway is provided at the existing harbour wall at Mountshannon Harbour. Mooring facilities for boats are provided at its existing harbour piers and pontoons. Private access to Lough Derg and Mountshannon Harbour is also provided at Inis Cealtra Sailing Club, and from Lakeside Jetty Holiday Homes and Lakeside Holiday Park.



Plate 7 Mountshannon Harbour



Figure 4 Mountshannon: Points of access for boats to Inis Cealtra

Mountshannon Harbour provides a range of tourist and recreational activities, including harbour flights over Lough Derg, tours of Holy Island from the pier, opportunities to see White Tailed Eagles from the Bird Hide and a blue flag beach for swimming. It is occupied by an existing car park with 46 parking spaces and the adjoining marina area and related facilities.

The 'Old Rectory' Site, also in Mountshannon Village, encompasses the Old Rectory building, a protected structure (RPS No. 464), outbuildings to the

north-east of the building, as well as surrounding open space and a landscaped garden. The site is relatively flat with a slight slope towards the north. Works are ongoing on the site associated with a Part VIII approval for an interpretive/education facility and café (see Section 3).



Plate 8 The Old Rectory – Protected Structure

Within Mountshannon, the Carpark Site is located to the north of Aistear Park, on the northern side of Main Street (the Regional Road R352) which connects Ennis to Portumna and runs to the west of Lough Derg. It is a greenfield site, lined by trees and hedgerows along much of its boundaries, with an old field bank composed of stone and earth extending north through the central part of the site.

3. Planning History

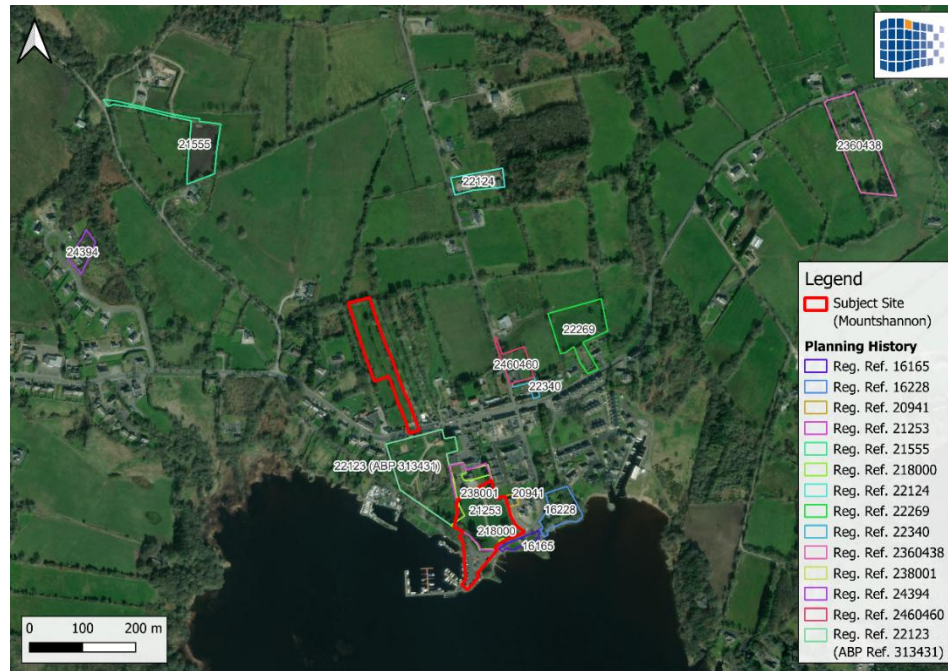


Figure 5 Planning History – Mounshannon Village

3.1 Proposed Development Site

Details of approved development within the proposed development site are included in the following Table. There is no planning history attached to the proposed greenfield village car park site or Inish Cealtra. The Part 8 approval for the Old Rectory granted in 2023 is substantially complete.

Subject Site	
The Old Rectory Mounshannon, Co. Clare, V94 P66V	
Permission was granted to retain all demolition and alterations to existing out-buildings and the as-constructed works, incorporating garages and storage sheds.	CCC Reg. Ref. 21253 Granted 23 rd Jun 2021
<p>Alterations, modifications and partial change of use of the existing Old Rectory (a Protected Structure, RPS No. 464) on a site measuring 1.17ha, consisting of:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Construction of a 57sq.m single-storey ground floor extension to the north-west of the building (double height space) with a maximum height of 6.4m (and lift height 7.8m) above ground level to facilitate Education/ Enterprise space of 30sq.m and new internal stair access; At ground floor level change of use from existing residential to; 	CCC Reg. Ref. 218000 Granted 10 th May 2021

Subject Site	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education / Enterprise Facilities (2 no. rooms with a cumulative GFA of 79sq.m) • Reception Area (26 sq.m) • Welfare Facilities (5sq.m) • Store Room (2sq.m) • Plant (3sq.m) 	
<p>iii. At first floor level, partial change of use from existing residential to incorporate;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Facility / Co-working Space (16sq.m) • Welfare Facilities (7sq.m) 	
<p>iv. A 1-bedroom apartment (87sq.m) at first floor level with associated private amenity space (garden area) of 50sq.m at ground level to the north-west of the Protected Structure;</p>	
<p>v. A new lift within the footprint of the existing building to provide for universal access to the Community Facility/Co-working Space and apartment;</p>	
<p>vi. At ground floor level, a new opening in the northern and western wall of the existing building to provide access to the proposed extension, new and enlarged openings to internal walls between the existing kitchen and utility room and between the existing hallway and lounge;</p>	
<p>vii. At first floor level, new openings and removal of internal partitions, together with an opening in the roof to provide access to the lift and a new opening in northern wall at first floor level to provide access to new apartment;</p>	
<p>viii. Cleaning and repointing works to the existing brickwork, repair and replacement of any damaged roof slates with natural slate, replacement of PVC windows with double-glazed timber sash windows and the removal of modern internal additions (flooring and cornices) to reveal the existing historic fabric;</p>	
<p>ix. Resurfacing of the existing vehicular access and construction of a new vehicle passing bay;</p>	
<p>x. Construction of a 1.8m wide pedestrian footpath to the west of the existing vehicular access;</p>	

Subject Site	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> xi. Demolition of new build section of existing splayed entrance to provide for dedicated pedestrian and vehicular access points and reinstatement of splayed entrance; xii. Regrading existing levels to the front (south side) of the building to achieve universal access consistent with Part M of the Building Regulations; xiii. Provision of 7 no. total car parking spaces and inclusion of a set down area to the east of the building, to provide for 1 no. dedicated residential space and 6 no. dedicated spaces for non-residential uses; xiv. Provision of 2 no. secure resident bicycle parking spaces to the rear (north-west) of the building and 10 no. secure bicycle parking spaces for visitors at the front (south-east) of the building; and xv. All ancillary site works including public lighting, landscaping, drainage, connections to public services and undergrounding of existing ESB overhead line. 	
<p>Alterations, modifications and change of use of the existing Old Rectory, Mountshannon (a Protected Structure, RPS No. 464) from Residential to Tourism Interpretive Centre and Café uses, on a site measuring 1.35ha.</p> <p>Note: This development is at an advanced stage of construction, with anticipated completion in Q1 2025. Thus, no overlap in construction activity will occur.</p>	<p>CCC Reg. Ref. 238001 Granted 10th July 2023</p>

Table 2 - Planning History on Subject Site.

3.2 Mountshannon Village

Details of approved development within Mountshannon Village are provided in the following Table. Of relevance is the s.38 traffic calming measures at Main Street which are scheduled to commence in 2025 and will provide safe crossing for inter alia the proposed village car park.



Plate 9 Main Street's Approved Traffic Calming Measures

Notably, the development identified below was known to Uisce Eireann at the time of issuing a Confirmation of Feasibility for this proposed development.

Mountshannon Village	
Mountshannon Harbour, Harbour Road Cottages, Mountshannon, Co Clare	
Permission was granted for upgrade and enhancement of the existing canoe trail at Lough Derg in Counties Tipperary, Clare and Galway and thirteen concurrent applications are being made to the requisite Authorities. The development at Mountshannon Harbour will consist of new trail signage, canoe storage cage, refurbishment of existing service block providing part M compliant shower and toilet and upgraded infrastructure in order to facilitate the enhanced Canoe trail.	CCC Reg. Ref. 16165 Granted 29th May 2016
Mountshannon Lodge, Mountshannon, Co. Clare	
Permission was granted for development of an existing single storey dwelling which will consist of a) Demolition of two existing sub-standard extensions; b) Renovation of remaining single storey house; c) Construction of new single storey extension to rear and side	CCC Reg. Ref. 16228 Granted 13th June 2016
4 Harbour View, Harbour Road, Mountshannon, Co Clare	
Permission was granted to retain minor elevational changes to the existing dwelling house.	CCC Reg. Ref. 20941 Granted

Mountshannon Village	
	8th March 2021
Millpool Road, Mountshannon, Co Clare	
Permission was granted to erect a dwelling house, garage, driveway, install an effluent treatment system and polishing filter and all associated site works.	CCC Reg. Ref. 21555 Granted 15th November 2021
Mountshannon, Co Clare, V94 7W96	
Permission was granted for retention of a porch as constructed to the front of the house and retain two sheds erected to the rear of the house	CCC Reg. Ref. 22124 Granted 11th May 2022
The Old School House & Church, Mountshannon, Co Clare V94 AT2W	
Retention permission was granted for the change of use of the building which is a protected structure from church / school to a single private residential unit; and permission to replace the existing roof covering with natural slate, re-render the exterior of the building with lime render, provide three no. new conservation roof windows to the rear of the roof	CCC Reg. Ref. 22340 Granted 13th July 2022
Mountshannon, Co Clare	
Permission was granted for the construction of 11 no. dwelling houses of varying size and design, 1 no. building containing 2 no. apartments, new site entrance, development access roads paths, landscaping, service connections and associated site works & services.	CCC Reg. Ref. 22269 Granted 3 May 2023
Aistear Park, Mountshannon, Co Clare	
Erect a Pavilion (a roofed open structure) for communal, cultural, education and events and gatherings and all associated site works.	CCC Reg. Ref. 22123 Granted 6th April 2022 Appeal ABP Ref. 313431 Granted 24th July 2023
Cloonamirran Tld, Mountshannon, Co. Clare, V94D2VF	
Construction of a stable building and associated site works	CCC Reg. Ref. 2360438

Mountshannon Village	
	Granted 8th Dec 2023
Cloonoolia South, Mountshannon, Co. Clare	
Erection of a dwelling house and garage, entrance and driveway and install an effluent treatment system and soil polishing filter and all associated site works	CCC Reg. Ref. 2460454 Decision to Grant - 14 Nov. 2024
Mountshannon Community Hall, Mountshannon, Co. Clare, V94 F5A0	
Alterations and demolition work to the existing Community Hall, the construction of a sports hall and Arts centre and ancillary buildings along with all associated site works	CCC Reg. Ref. 2460460 Live Application RFI - 19 Nov. 2024
Public Realm Works Mainstreet Mountshannon, Co Clare	
Traffic Calming Measures at Main Street Mountshannon Note: The construction works for this development are scheduled to commence in mid-January 2025. As such, no overlap in construction activity is foreseen.	Section 38 Development
4 An Garran, Mounshannon, Co Clare V94 X00N	
The development will consist of an extension to a bedroom on the first floor, to the rear of the property, above the existing utility room	CCC Reg. Ref. 24394 Live Application Decision Due – 25 Jan. 2025

Table 3 - Planning History in Mountshannon Village.

3.3 Wider Area

Details of approved development within the surrounding locality are provided in the following Table.

Surrounding Locality – County Clare	
Williamstown, Whitegate, Co Clare	
Two no boats/houseboats for use as short term tourism rentals	CCC Reg. Ref. 2360128 Granted 14th June 2023
CCC Development- AA Application Ballycuggaran, Killaloe, Co. Clare	
Proposed Fáilte Ireland Platforms for Growth - shared WC, Shower, and Changing Room facilities. A Natura Impact Statement has been prepared.	ABP Ref. 313140 Granted

Surrounding Locality – County Clare	
	3rd July 2023
Kilana Lodge, Rahena More Ogonnelloe, Killaloe Co Clare., V94 W83C	
Change of Use from residential to recreational camping site and the construction of six no. cabins for the purpose of short stay accommodation and associated works. A Natura Impact statement will be submitted to the planning authority with the application	CCC Reg. Ref. 2360286 Decision to Grant - 02 Feb 2024 Live Appeal ABP -319124
Drumman East, Williamstown Harbour, Whitegate, Co. Clare, V94 PY57	
The regeneration and redevelopment of existing buildings and land, for tourism and recreational purposes, including development of 4 no. residential lodges, café and retail units, 2 no. apartments, decking area and outdoor seating, floating jetty and all associated site development works. The proposed development is located within the curtilage of Williamstown Harbour a protected structure RPS 350. A Natura Impact Statement has been prepared.	CCC Reg. Ref. 2460336 Live Application, 12/09/24 – RFI
Sellernaun West, Mountshannon, Co Clare	
Living accommodation in converted attic area and associated site works to dwelling.	CCC Reg. Ref. 24302 Decision to Grant - 12 Oct. 2024
Middleline South, Mountshannon, Co Clare	
For a Tertiary Treatment System and Infiltration/treatment area with polishing filter at the existing dwelling	CCC Reg. Ref. 2460553 Live Application Decision Due – 10 Jan. 2025
Surrounding Locality – County Tipperary	
Lough Derg Yacht Club, Dromineer, Nenagh, Co. Tipperary	
improvements to the boat mooring facilities, new c. 2 m wide walkway/pier, proprietary "Versa-Dock" part floating docking system for mooring an RNLI rescue rigid inflatable boat (RIB) and associated site works	TCC Reg. Ref. 20251 Granted 17th June 2020
Dromineer Quay, Dromineer, Co Tipperary	
the seasonal installation of a timber canoe and SUP storage platform and jetty from 1st May to 14th September which will be installed in conjunction with the inflatable water park and mobile service unit granted permission under Planning Ref. No. 17600541,	TCC Reg. Ref. 2260155 Granted 25th May 2022

Surrounding Locality – County Tipperary	
including all associated site works. A Natura Impact Statement (NIS) has been prepared.	
TCC Development- AA Application - Dromineer, Co. Tipperary	
Construction of a facility centre for water sports activities and all associated works. A Natura Impact Statement has been prepared.	ABP Reg. Ref. 313916 Granted 06th Oct 2022
Surrounding Locality – County Galway	
Portumna Demense, Portumna, Fairyhill, Co. Galway	
Construction of a new multi-use shared leisure route between Portumna Bridge and Lough Derg Water Recreation Park and a new 8 berth marina, and associated works. The proposal will involve works to or within the curtilage of the following protected structures; Portumna Harbour, Fairyhill (RPS 477) and Portumna Castle, Portumna Demesne (PRS 3785). A Natura Impact Statement has been prepared.	GCC Reg. Ref. 191287 Granted 15th June 2020
Portumna Demense, Co. Galway	
Installation of an inflatable Aqua Park that will operation seasonally from May 1st to September 30th inclusive and associated site works. A Natura Impact Statement (NIS) has been prepared.	GCC Reg. Ref. 2260326 Granted 16th Nov 2022

Table 4 - Planning History in Surrounding Locality.

4. Proposed Development

The Inis Cealtra Visitor Experience is to be developed on an island, Inis Cealtra (Holy Island), and on the mainland, in two principal locations within Mountshannon village. A summary of the proposed island development and village development follows.

Inis Cealtra Island

- Demolition of an existing shelter adjacent to the existing pier at the northwest of the island.
- Installation of a new floating access jetty and walkway at the northwest of the island, consisting of a floating breakwater jetty, a stone and concrete causeway connected by a steel access ramp and a canoe launch jetty with an access ramp.
- A series of new mown grass pedestrian paths to allow for enhanced access to the main monuments and natural landscape on the island.
- Provision of three staff and public welfare facility 'pods' including a weather shelter, welfare facilities and a rest room for island staff.

Mainland – Mountshannon

- Construction of a new public car park in Mountshannon Village, on the north side of Main Street, incorporating 169 car parking spaces, together with coach parking and bicycle parking facilities.
- A Visitor Centre in the southern part of the 'Old Rectory Site'. It is a part-one-storey, part-two-storey semi-circular building incorporating a series of spaces for interpretation, exhibition and education associated with the Inis Cealtra Visitor Experience, together with a café and ancillary supporting spaces. The public realm works in front of the main façade, which is paved in natural stone, will continue the curved geometry of the building, creating a space for visitors to meet, relax, and take in views of Lough Derg and Inis Cealtra.
- Reconfigured the existing Mountshannon Harbour car park, providing 49 total car parking spaces and public realm enhancements.

A comprehensive description of the architectural design approach is presented in McCullough Mulvin **Architectural Design Statement**.

4.1 Inis Cealtra Island

4.1.2 Demolition Works

To facilitate the development, it is proposed that the existing concrete shelter adjacent to the existing pier at the north-west side of the island be demolished.

The structure is simple in construction, consisting of mass concrete walls and floors, a flat roof, and a single window and door. Its principal dimensions are 4.830m width, 3.244m length, and 2.57m height. Its gross floor area (GFA) is 16 sq.m.

The existing shelter will be dismantled from the top down using hand tools to break the existing concrete and timber into sections that can be manually handled. Dismantling will start with removing the roof, followed by removing the window and door, removing the walls, breaking out of the floor slab and removing foundations (if any). The material will be sorted into waste for disposal/ recycling and then removed off the island by boat where it will be disposed of by a licensed waste contractor.



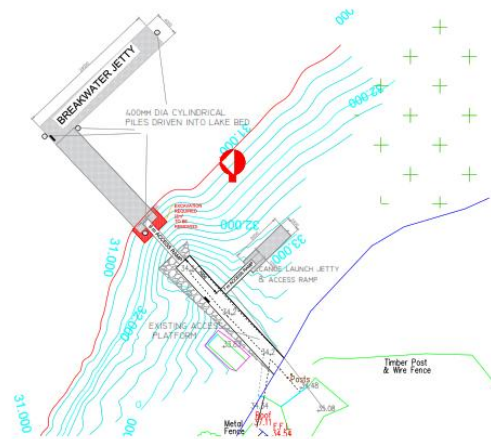
Figure 6 Existing Visitor Shelter to be Demolished

4.1.3 Mooring Point

It is proposed that a new floating access jetty be constructed at the location of the existing concrete landing point to the northwest of the island. The existing jetty extends only a short distance into the lake, meaning the depth of water around it is relatively shallow, limiting the size of boats which can land there to very small vessels. Works to the existing jetty and provision of a new floating jetty, which extends into deeper water, will allow for safer and more convenient passage between the mainland and the island, and this will become the principal point of arrival for visitors to the island.

The new L-shaped jetty extends out into the lake approximately 53m and is designed as a breakwater jetty that breaks most of a wave's crest and provides a safer mooring on the inner jetty area. The structure is made up of four principal parts: a floating breakwater jetty, a stone and concrete

The causeway, which is constructed over the existing concrete jetty (which will remain in place) on the island's shore, comprises a concrete anchor platform held in place by 4 no. 203mm H—piles. Around it, stone gabions are placed, built up to provide a 3m wide level surface that will be paved with stone.



Proposed new floating access jetty - Plan

Figure 7 Proposed Jetty at Inis Cealtra

This map shows the proposed navigation channel and new wharf area. The channel is indicated by a dashed line, and the new wharf is shown as a solid line. The map also includes labels for 'NEW NAVIGATION CHANNEL' and 'EXISTING NAVIGATION CHANNEL'. The area is divided into several sections, with some sections labeled 'NEW WHARF' and 'EXISTING WHARF'. The map also shows the 'NEW WHARF' and 'EXISTING WHARF' areas. The map is oriented with North at the top.

Figure 8 Existing Navigation Channels

4.1.4 New Pedestrian Paths

A series of 2m wide mown grass pathways is proposed to allow visitors to explore the island, its archaeological features and natural beauty. The path of least intervention is proposed as mown paths to existing ground levels for minimum visual impact and to avoid impact on the archaeology underground.



Plate 10 Existing & Proposed Path

The paths' design follows the principles of minimal intervention. It balances accessibility, wayfinding, landscape readability, and protection of archaeology and nature.

The layout and location of the paths is defined by the following:

- Existing path locations and access to main monuments (Path 1, Path 8).
- Accessibility and location of monuments - paths 11 and 12 are proposed to take visitors to Lady Well and the Bargaining Stone in a less direct but gentler sloping route.
- A series of additional paths are proposed to make a looped walk around the island with the option of a smaller loop (Path 3) or a bigger loop walk around the whole island to enjoy the natural beauty of the island as well as its cultural heritage, leading through grasslands and woodlands and back to the mooring point (Path 2). Providing a short connection between the two options (Path 4) allows for a wider variety of loop options.
- Another path (Path 6) is proposed alongside the ecclesiastical enclosure as a way to experience the site's now hidden history (the enclosure is not visible above the ground).

In order to avoid erosion, several measures are proposed:

- Several path options are proposed to spread the footfall. These may be phased in different seasons as the intensity of use is observed.
- The existing stone base to path 1 is proposed to be repaired where necessary. Path 1 is expected to be the most heavily used as it leads from the mooring point directly to the Round Tower.

4.1.5 Island Pods

Three new 'pods' are proposed on the island to meet the needs of staff and visitors by providing a weather shelter, welfare facility and a rest room for island staff.

Photovoltaic (PV) panels will be installed on all roofs to power essential equipment, including lighting and a small pump in the welfare facility.

The pods are lightweight, freestanding, sitting on metal piles in timber pavilions, and raised on timber legs so that their contact with the ground will be minimal, reducing the risk of disturbing sensitive archaeology. While each pod serves a distinct function, they share a similar architecture and construction method.

The pods will have new timber walkways to provide level access into them, and these, too, will be of timber construction resting on mini-pile foundations. All pod and walkway components will be assembled on the island to minimise the impact of their construction and are designed to be dismantled and removed if required, leaving 'no-trace'.

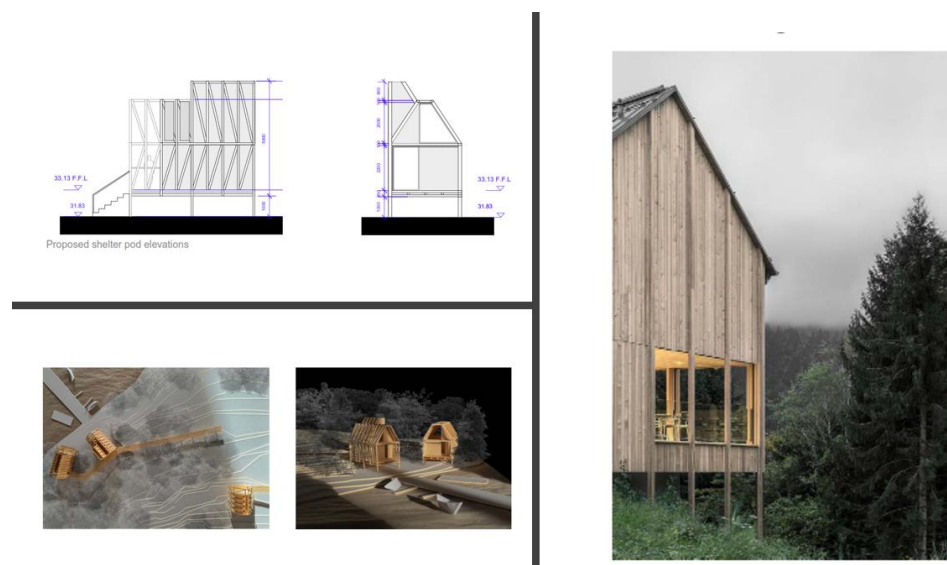


Figure 10 Proposed Pods: reference elevations, images and materials.

The pod locations have been carefully considered to minimise their visual impact on the island and provide geographically convenient facilities for visitors and staff, near to the jetty. In all cases, they are to be built in the shelter of existing woodland or scrub. The predominant use of timber in their construction means that they will sit comfortably within the woodland and scrub landscapes where they are to be placed and remain visually unobtrusive.

The following sets out the specific detail of each of the three pods.

1. The **Weather Shelter** (20 sq.m GFA) will be located close to the new jetty in an area previously occupied by a small built refuge. The pod

height will range from 5.4m to 6.3m and will contain space for visitors to shelter during adverse weather conditions or while waiting for the boat, with an approx. capacity for 30 persons seated. A new timber walkway (approx. 42m in length), which connects the shelter and staff pods, will be provided to give level access. The walkway will be at the finished floor level of the pods and will run level to the east, connecting back in with the existing higher ground level at its starting point.

2. The **Staff Pod** (25 sq.m GFA) will range from 5.4m to 6.3m in height. It will provide shelter and rest for the island guides and ushers who will be on Inis Cealtra daily. The accommodation comprises a single space containing a tea station, a break area with seating, lockers, and first aid equipment.
3. The **Welfare Pod** (15 sq.m GFA) will range from 5.25m to 6.25m in height. It will contain two no. dry WCs and requires no foul drainage or water supply. Sanitation gels will be used for hand hygiene. Like the shelter and staff pod, the WC pod will have a new timber walkway (approx. 27m in length) to give level access to it. The walkway will be at the finished floor level of the pod and will run level to the southeast, connecting back in with the existing higher ground level at its starting point.

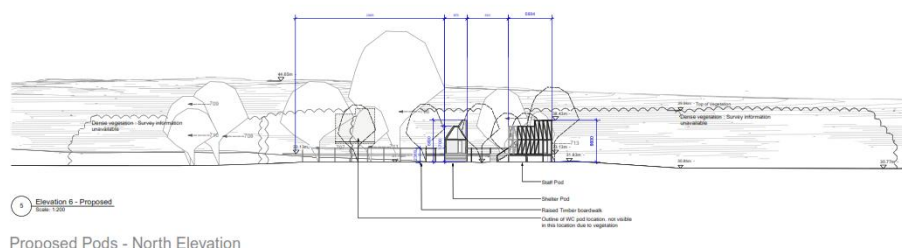


Figure 11 Proposed Pods Contextual Elevation

4.1.6 Landscape Management

A **Landscape and Conservation Management Plan** for Inis Cealtra has been prepared on behalf of Clare County Council and is appended to the Landscape Design Report. Its purpose is to ensure the vegetated island landscape is appropriately maintained and diversified in a manner that respects the setting for the monuments and protects habitats. It is a living document that will require an annual review with stakeholders.

The island is grazed by sheep from early summer to winter. This management maintains a landscape of meadows down to the marshy foreshore and, to a lesser extent, the encroaching scrub. Pockets of woodland offer shelter to the sheep and add to the diversity of habitats on the island. Areas around the five churches and round towers are enclosed and currently managed as regularly mown grass.

The landscape strategy for the island is to maintain a grazing regime and to limit the requirement for mowing to any areas that need to be protected from sheep. Grazing the landscape with sheep, limited generally from May to October, will limit any risk of damage to the monuments whilst generating a species-rich meadow. Scrub and woodland development will be monitored and managed through the grazing regime, with some possible interventions required to encourage or restrict growth as required.

4.1.7 Water & Drainage

The Civil Utilities Planning Report, which accompanies this application under separate cover, contains a full description and should be read in conjunction with this section.

Storm Water

Stormwater generated on the island will be managed at its source by dispersing the runoff through the natural vegetation of Inis Cealtra and using permeable materials to maximise the use of SUDS measures where reasonably practicable. There are no plans to implement an underground sewer system.

Wastewater

A dry toilet system will be installed to overcome the logistical challenges of removing solids and liquids. Deposited waste will be separated into liquid and solid form, and it will then be stored in a holding container as part of the dry toilet set-up.

A contractor will be appointed to manage the maintenance of the foul system and waste removal from the island. The designated maintenance contractor will ensure that the waste is delivered to the appropriate Uisce Éireann (UÉ) treatment facility, where it will be processed in accordance with UÉ standards. Uisce Éireann has advised that the effluent collected will likely be taken by an authorised and licenced tankard wastewater haulier to Bunlicky Wastewater Treatment Plant (WWTP) in Limerick City. According to the latest Annual Environment Report (AER) The annual mean hydraulic loading is less than the peak treatment capacity. The annual maximum hydraulic loading is greater than the peak treatment capacity. The discharge from the wastewater treatment plant does not have an observable negative impact on the Water Framework Directive status.



Plate 11 Indicative Image of Proposed Dry Toilet System

4.1.8 Water Supply

Being an island, it is not feasible to establish a direct water supply connection to the existing Uisce Éireann network. In this instance, it is proposed to serve the island with a bottled potable water supply that will meet the needs of the staff on the island and the medical needs of visitors if the need arises. Regular boat trips will be scheduled to transport sufficient potable water to meet the needs of staff and visitors. This method of water delivery will be carefully managed to maintain consistent availability and uphold health and safety standards.

4.2 Mountshannon

4.2.1 Village Car Park

Demolition

To facilitate the construction of the Village Car Park, it is proposed to remove two sections of an existing mound/wall with a total combined length of approx. 155m. This includes one section measuring c. 151.4m in length extending north through the central part of the site. A shorter section of 3.6m in length in the south of the site adjacent to the western boundary is also proposed to be removed. The wall is an old field bank composed of stone and earth. However, much of the soil is now eroded off the bank (refer to the following Figure).



Plate 12 Extract from Demolition Plan showing extent of central wall/mound to be removed hatched in yellow (Left) and Photo showing composition of part of the wall/mound (Right)

The existing gate and a 7.8m section of the existing masonry wall along the site's frontage at the southern boundary will also be removed, as shown in the following Figure.

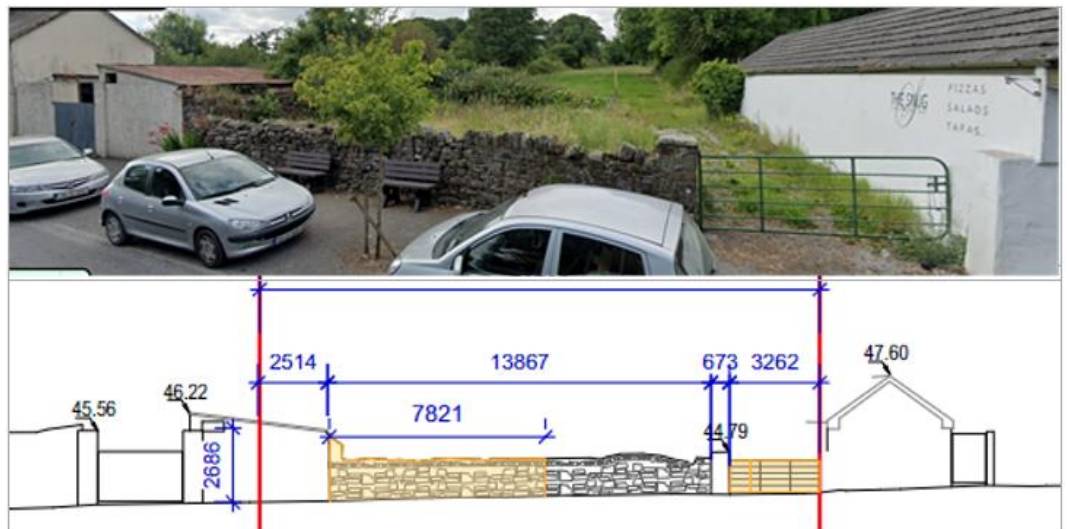


Plate 13 Photo of existing wall and gate at front of Village Car Park Site (Top) and Extract from Demolition Plan showing extent of existing wall and gate to be removed (Bottom)

Access, Parking & Circulation

A new public car park is proposed for the north side of Main Street in Mountshannon Village. The car park has been designed to accommodate sufficient parking for the projected visitor numbers. Considering that the full capacity will not be required year-round, it is split between permanent and overflow parking.

The car park will host 169 car parking spaces, together with coach and bicycle parking facilities, as follows:

- 6 coach parking spaces,
- 11 accessible car parking spaces (2 no. EV),
- 105 car parking spaces,
- 53 overflow car parking spaces on reinforced grass to the northern part of the site, and,
- 40 secure bicycle parking spaces.

There will be 34 EV charging points, which is 20% of the car parking spaces. Ducting will also be provided to allow for 18 additional EV parking spaces (to include accessible spaces).

A two-way system is proposed at the southern portion of the site. Buses will be able to circulate the site without the need for reversing. An area has been designed to allow buses to traverse through the car park if all the available spaces are occupied. The layout has been developed to minimise the extent of hard paving required on the site. The temporary car parking is proposed to cater for overflow parking at the height of the tourist season which is envisaged to be during the summer months.

Traffic calming measures such as speedbumps will be installed at appropriate intervals to reduce the speed of motor traffic using the Village car park. This will assist with reducing speeds and increase driver awareness within the car park due to the vulnerable road users utilising it. A path is provided in the south of the site to allow pedestrians to traverse from the car park entrance around the site.

The sightlines at the entrance of the car park with the main street have been developed taking cognisance of the traffic calming measures, speed cushions, pedestrian crossings, carriageway narrowing, etc., that have been installed on the Main Road in Mountshannon. These measures are understood to reduce the design speed to 30km/hr.

The car park has been designed to create a densely planted place with a variety of surface materials so that it feels like a soft-edged, rural space suited to its surroundings. The site is surrounded by an existing natural boundary of mature trees and hedgerows, the majority of which will be retained. Additional trees and planting will be introduced to the site and placed between the parking areas.

Surface finishes will be varied throughout the area, ranging from tarmac on the carriageway to compacted gravel in the parking bays and pedestrian paths to reinforced grass in the overflow parking area.

Sheffield cycle stands will be positioned within the car park, close to the site entrance on either side of the accessway, ensuring convenient access to the village, the visitor centre and the harbour area.

Drainage

The Civil Utilities Planning Report, which accompanies this application under separate cover and should be read in conjunction with this section, contains full details of the proposed drainage strategy.

The **stormwater management** system has been designed using the following criteria:

- Pipes are designed to reach self-cleansing velocity in the one in 2-year event
- Sewers not surcharging in the 2-year event
- Sewers not flooding in the 100-year event with 20% Climate Change
- Class 1 Bypass Petrol Interceptors
- Sub-surface attenuation systems designed for storage of a 1 in 100-year storm plus 20% Climate Change factor
- The sites/elements are designed to attenuate the greenfield runoff rate for the 1-year, 30-year and 100-year return periods respectively. This is in compliance with Appendix E of the Greater Dublin Strategic Drainage Strategy. The aim of this is to mimic the existing hydrological regime existing on the site so to minimize the impact of the development. An emergency overflow will also be provided in the event of a blockage occurring at the hydrobrake.

The proposed storm drainage management regime will be served by both hard and soft engineering solutions. It is proposed to integrate a traditional stormwater sewer system with a combination of SuDS measures to manage the stormwater runoff generated by the proposed site. The site has been split into multiple sub-catchments within the main catchment of the overall car park development. Surface water runoff from these sub-catchments will be captured via a combination of stormwater gullies and filter drains. The SuDS features, such as filter drains, have been designed and integrated within the car park development while taking cognisance of the four main pillars of SuDs, which are water quantity, water quality, amenity and biodiversity.

The stormwater management system will tie into a combined public sewer located on the R352, which runs east-west at the entrance to the Village Car Park. Discharge from the site will be limited to Greenfield runoff rates.

It is proposed that reinforced Grasscrete paving will be utilised in the overflow parking section of the car park. This system allows rainfall in this area to infiltrate the ground. Any overflow that would occur would be catered for by the proposed access road to the car park area, which has been sloped towards the east of the site, where a dry swale has been positioned to allow surface runoff to infiltrate into the ground naturally.

There is no proposal to install a **water supply connection** to the Village car park.

There is no **foul sewer system** required within the Village car park. Visitors will have access to toilet facilities within the Inis Cealtra Visitor Centre and the island of Inis Cealtra.

Public Lighting

LED Lanterns mounted on 6m columns shall be installed in the car park to facilitate safe movement. Each lantern shall be controlled via an individual photocell, with the overall lighting scheme controlled via an astronomical time clock, allowing the lights to be switched off when the car park is not in use. Cognisant of the rural location, the proposed light fittings provide downward light output only to ensure no adverse light pollution in the surrounding environs. The lanterns specified are designed to operate at 3000K to minimise any unfavourable effects on the local wildlife and natural environment. The car park lighting shall be designed in accordance with CIBSE guidelines and IS EN 12464-2 for parking areas to a minimum lux level of 10 lux for medium-traffic areas.

Services

The existing overhead ESB lines traversing the village car park site will be undergrounded. The applicant will liaise with ESB Networks at the detailed design stage to agree on the underground cable route and the location of any mini pillars that may be required to facilitate the undergrounding of the overhead cable.

Power and data ducting and cabling shall also be provided to entry and exit access control barriers and a ticket machine in the village carpark.

4.2.2 Visitor Centre

Demolition

An existing stone wall fronts the 'Old Rectory' site at Harbour Road. Two sections of the wall are proposed to be removed to facilitate access from the new Visitor Centre building's ground level to the harbour and provide a strong visual connection between the Visitor Centre and Lough Derg.

The section to be removed measures approximately 23m in length and has a height of approximately 0.87 m in the southwest. The other section, to the south of the site, is approximately 22m in length and approximately 1.0m high. The following Figure provides an image of the existing wall and shows the location of the two sections to be removed.

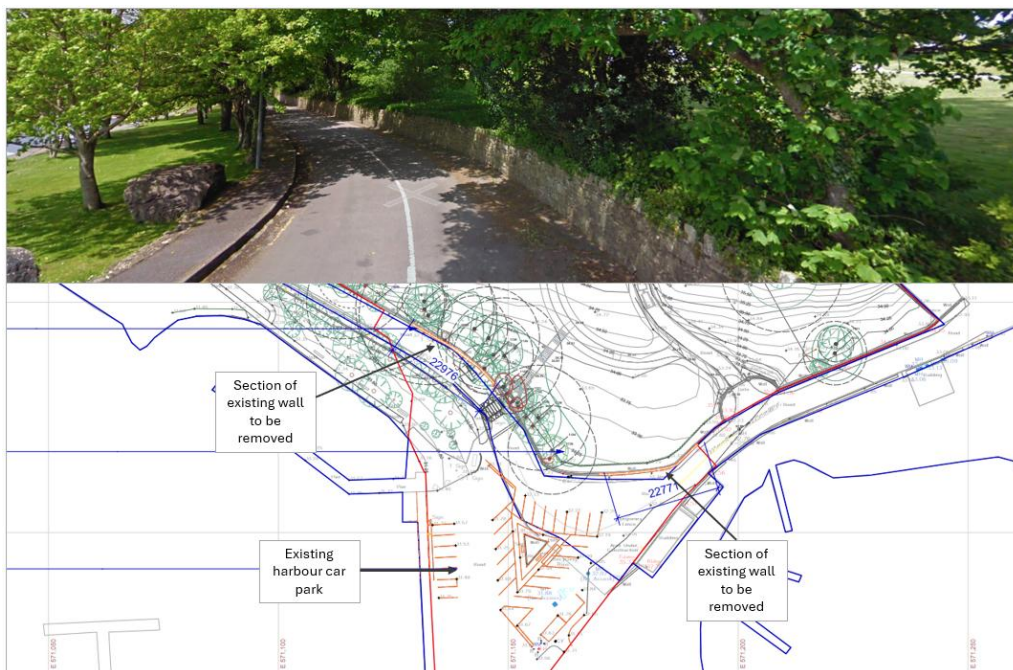


Plate 14 Google street view of existing wall along the south-west boundary of the Old Rectory site at its frontage to Harbour Road (Top) and Extract of Demolition Plan showing the location in the south part of the Old Rectory site where sections of the wall are proposed to be removed (Bottom)

Siting and Design of Building

A part-one-storey, part-two-storey Visitor Centre with a gross floor area (GFA) of 1,594 sq.m and a maximum height of 7.8m above ground level is proposed to be constructed in the southern part of the Old Rectory site, fronting Harbour Road. The site coverage is 10.8% occupying 1,426 sq.m of the total Rectory Site area of 13,163 sq.m. The Plot Ratio i.e., Gross Floor Area / Site area is 12.1%

The building has been oriented to face Mount Shannon Harbour and Lough Derg and establish a strong visual link with Inis Cealtra. The design draws inspiration from early monastic circular fortified settlements in composition, form, and materiality.

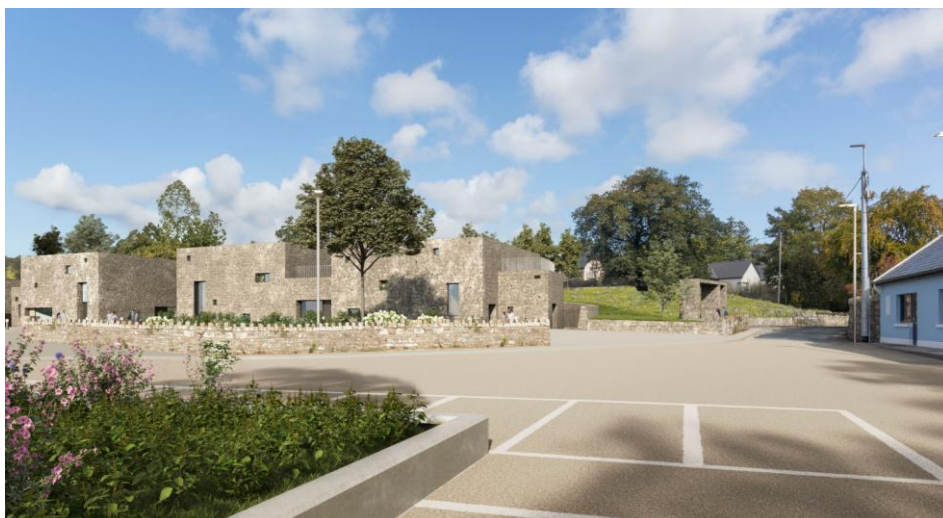


Plate 15 Proposed Visitor Centre

The Visitor Centre (building and public realm) occupies a circular area partially set back into the sloped landscape of the Old Rectory site, mediating the significant change of level in the site and minimising its visual impact.

The ground floor level of the Visitor Centre is at +32.83m OD, which is above the 1:100 year flood level and will tie in with the existing harbour and harbour car park level (approx. +32.00m OD). This will allow an easy connection for visitors between the visitor centre, the new public realm space to the front of it and the harbour.

The existing Rectory site slopes up relatively steeply from south to north, rising from approximately +32.00m OD at its southern boundary to +40.00m OD at the rectory building itself. This level change has been exploited by setting the Visitor Centre's ground floor, which houses most of its accommodation, back into the site so that the external ground level rises around the building as it moves from south to north. This means that the external ground level is level with the internal ground floor of the visitor centre along its front elevation to the south, while the external ground level is level with the roof terrace level along its northern boundary. This allows the building to read as a single-storey building with 'pop-ups' at first floor from the harbour side, while from the elevated level of the rectory, only the first-floor pop-ups will be visible. This strategy helps to reduce the massing of the building when seen from the elevated position of the rectory helping to retain the strong visual connection between the rectory and the lake below.

This siting strategy also means that a direct pedestrian connection can be made from the northern side of the rectory site, where the majority of visitors will approach the building via a route through Aistear Park from the new car park to the north of Mountshannon main street. This connection is made via a new path which leads from the entrance point to the rectory site from Aistear Park at the northern boundary, down to the roof terrace level of the building, over this terrace and down to the lower harbour level via (a) the new

grand external staircase, (b) a new externally- accessible lift inside the building and (c) a new gently sloped route.



Plate 16 Proposed Visitor Centre from Rectory south toward the roof terrace and Lough Derg beyond.



Figure 12 Extract from Proposed Site Plan for Visitor Centre

Building Form

The circular form of the plan of the building draws inspiration from pre-Christian passage tombs such as Newgrange, Knowth and Dowth and early Christian monastic settlements such as Kells and the monastic settlement on Inis Cealtra itself. A retaining wall surrounds the building for the entirety of its curved, north-eastern edge, holding back the ground as it rises behind. The building occupies the north-eastern semi-circle, while the south-western semicircle is an open public realm space that links to the harbour from where visitors can go to the island.

The plan of the building is largely split into two sections- the Inis Cealtra Visitor Experience (Visitor Centre) and associated spaces to the east of the external grand stair and the café and back of house (BOH) support spaces to the west of the stairs, though both sides are connected via the external circulation route that circumnavigates the northern boundary of the building.

At ground floor (1,426sq.m GFA), the section of the visitor centre to the east of the stairs has six principal spaces comprising the Entrance Foyer/ Ticketing, Informal Interpretation, Inis Cealtra Experience Zones and AV Experience/Embarkation/ Island Briefing/ Pilgrim Change. These spaces have been arranged so that visitors can move through each of them in a clear, sequential route that follows the interpretation narrative. Support and BOH spaces are arranged between these principal spaces, some accessible to the public and others to staff only.

The ground-floor café and BOH spaces to the west of the stairs contain the main café dining room and servery space, café support spaces such as kitchens and WCs, and general building support spaces such as staff areas and plant and maintenance areas.

At the first-floor level, the internal accommodation (168sq.m GFA) is housed in two of the five pop-ups that form a series of independent volumes rising above the lower roof level. The one over the café provides a mezzanine space that can be used by the café or separately for functions, and the other houses research spaces. The mezzanine level of the café has external direct access to the roof terrace.

The lower roof of the building will be a publicly accessible terrace that will be level with the external ground level to the north of the building and can be accessed at this point. Visitors can move around this terrace between the two-storey volumes which pop up from the floor below and out to its south-western edge, where they will have elevated views back out over the water towards Inis Cealtra.

Building Uses and Facilities

The proposed Visitor Centre will include a series of spaces and facilities to serve visitors, staff and community members, as detailed below.

- Entrance foyer and ticketing area.
- Interpretation, exhibition, and education spaces, including audiovisual and exhibition rooms. These spaces are intended to cater

to tourists (domestic and international), school groups, special interest groups, and corporate groups.

- Flexible café/event space located on the building's western side. It accommodates a ground-floor dining room and server space with additional seating at an upper mezzanine level, which can be used with the café or independently for functions.
- Visitor facilities including retail area, waiting spaces, island briefing and preparation areas and management facility.
- Research Centre and facilities for the support of the white-tailed sea eagle project.
- Office and Administration area.
- Back-of-house facilities include plant rooms, a kitchen, a delivery bay, bins, facilities management, a comms room, and storage.
- Circulation area, including two stair/lift cores.

Materials & Elevational Treatment

The facades of the building will be faced in local stone which will help to give it a sense of weight and to bed the building down in its site. Though clad in traditional material, it will be used in a contemporary way through its precise cutting & laying and use of large openings to mark it out as something new and to avoid pastiche. The principal southwest façade contains a small number of large, carefully chosen openings that frame selected views from within and give a view of the internal life of the building from without. These larger openings will be interspersed with smaller openings for windows and recesses which will be planted to animate the façade.

This material treatment will continue at first floor level to the upper volumes which will share the same stone facing. The accessible roof terrace of the building will be an intensive green roof meaning that it can be planted with substantial vegetation that will give the sense of moving through a lush landscape held between stone volumes. Similarly, the upper roofs over the first floor pop-ups will be planted with sedum so that the view from the upper level of the Rectory will be down to the vegetation of the visitor centre roofs and stone of its walls, embedding it in the landscape. The pedestrian routes on the roof terrace will be stone and they will bring visitors out to its south-western extremity where they can take in views of the lake and Inis Cealtra.

This use of stone will continue inside the building, with the principal, double-height vaulted spaces finished in the same material internally to give a sense of moving through and between hefty volumes. These vaulted spaces will contain rooflights that will bring light in from above that will change with the passing of the day and the year.

Landscape

The area to the front of the new building, in front of its main façade, has been designed as a semi-circular plaza. The generous space will provide a comfortable place for people to wait to board a boat, to gather after they have returned from the island, or to sit out and enjoy something from the

café. The area will be paved in natural stone, with its geometry continuing the curved form of the building to complete the circle.

Care has been taken to retain many of the existing mature trees that form part of the southern boundary of the rectory site, and these will remain in place in new concrete retaining structures.

Two mounded large, planted areas are proposed to the plaza to maintain part of the existing trees on the sides, while trees right in front of the centre of building are removed to allow for a generous access as well as open the view towards the island.

The roof terrace of the visitor centre is accessible both from the centre itself as well as from the rectory by a winding gently sloping compacted gravel path. A visual access is proposed between the Rectory building and the new visitor centre with a wide mown reinforced grass strip for pedestrian use and a step connecting the rectory formal garden with the gently sloping grass mown terrace and grass steps connecting the grass terrace to the little compacted gravel arrival plaza to the visitor centre roof terrace. This axis is further framed by both existing and proposed tree planting.

Where the public realm intersects with the existing road, it will be a shared space with cars, with its slightly raised level helping to control their speed and make it safe for pedestrians.

Access

The **Architectural Design Statement** and **Civil Utilities Planning Report**, which accompanies this application under separate cover, contain a full description of the proposed access arrangements and should be read in conjunction with this section.

Pedestrian access arrangements between the proposed new car park and the Visitor Centre site have been carefully considered. Under the permitted Part 8 development (Reg. Ref. 238001), a pedestrian route has been facilitated through Aistear Park to the west of the Old Rectory site, ensuring visitors can access the Visitor Centre through an opening in the boundary. The new Visitor Centre will allow pedestrian access directly to the shared space being created in the Harbour Car Park.

Cyclist and vehicular access will be through the existing vehicular entrance on Harbour Road, which will be maintained. The existing access track serving the site will be realigned as part of the proposed development to accommodate the Visitor Centre. This revised internal road layout of the Visitor Centre site has been subjected to a swept path analysis of a bin lorry and a fire engine.

Sheffield stands providing 32 secure bicycle parking spaces will be installed in front of the Visitor Centre to serve staff and visitors. This bicycle parking is in addition to the 40 bicycle parking spaces within the new Village car park at Main Street, which forms part of this project.

Public Lighting

Given the visitor centre's rural location, the design philosophy is to provide sufficient lighting to guide people at the entrance and along either the driveway or the pathway to the property and to allow safe access and egress from the building. The light fittings proposed all provide downward light output only to ensure that there is no adverse light pollution in the surrounding environs. All the lanterns specified are designed to operate at 3000K to minimise any unfavourable effects on the local wildlife and natural environment.

Lighting shall be in compliance with Clare County Council's Public Lighting Policy.

Drainage

The **stormwater management** system has been designed using the following criteria:

- Pipes are designed to reach self-cleansing velocity in the one in 2-year event
- Sewers not surcharging in the 2-year event
- Sewers not flooding in the 100-year event with 20% Climate Change
- Class 1 Bypass Petrol Interceptors
- Sub-surface attenuation systems designed for storage of a 1 in 100-year storm plus 20% Climate Change factor
- The sites/elements are designed to attenuate the greenfield runoff rate for the 1-year, 30-year and 100-year return periods respectively. This is in compliance with Appendix E of the Greater Dublin
- Strategic Drainage Strategy. The aim of this is to mimic the existing hydrological regime existing on the site so to minimize the impact of the development. An emergency overflow will be provided also in the event of blockage occurring at the hydrobrake.

There is an existing stormwater system on the site that attenuates the discharge from the Old Rectory. The proposed system is to attenuate flows generated from the impermeable surfaces within the Visitor Centre development. This will utilise a separate attenuation system from the Old Rectory with a hydro brake downstream, restricting flows to the greenfield runoff rate.

The proposed drainage network will incorporate sumps within manholes for silt removal and a bypass petrol interceptor prior to discharge.

The site is currently served by a **wastewater/foul system** installed as part of the redevelopment of the Old Rectory building. This system includes a treatment unit, which reduces the biological load from the effluent prior to discharging it into the public sewer on Harbour Road.

It is proposed that the foul water generated within the Visitor Centre will be treated by the existing on-site treatment unit prior to discharge by an existing

connection to the foul sewer in Harbour Road. Uisce Éireann have confirmed that this connection is feasible. The Confirmation of Feasibility is included in Appendix A of the Civil Utilities Planning Report.

An existing 150mm diameter **water main** is located on Harbour Road, south of the proposed Visitor Centre. A 100mm diameter pipe will connect to this main via a T-junction that is installed at the site entrance. The T-junction is split into two branches: the western branch will be reserved for connecting to the Visitor Centre, pending planning approval, and the eastern branch will serve the permitted Old Rectory development. The existing network is shown in the Confirmation of Feasibility in Appendix A of the Civil Utilities Planning Report, where Uisce Éireann confirmed the feasibility of this new connection.

Sustainability

It is proposed that a sustainable heating system using air source heat pumps (ASHPs) be utilised to deliver the building's heating and hot water requirements. The utilisation of ASHPs shall reduce the building's carbon emission rates with a heating control system in place to allow for zonal heating control and timeclock settings. LED lighting with PIR controls shall also be utilised as a further energy reduction measure.

Services

There is an existing ESB substation located on the Rectory site. As part of the works associated with the new Interpretive Centre in the Old Rectory building, a new ESB mini pillar has been installed inside the main entrance gate, and a three-phase **electrical supply** to the proposed Visitor Centre will be fed from this mini pillar.

The existing **Eir network** enters the Rectory site from Mountshannon Court to the north. As part of the works to the Old Rectory building to facilitate a new Interpretive Centre, a spare communications duct was installed from the Eir chamber in Mountshannon Court to the main entrance gate. A new duct will tee off from this existing duct to provide a broadband connection to the Visitor Centre.

4.2.3 Mountshannon Harbour Car Park & Public Realm

The existing car park at Mountshannon Harbour provides 46 parking spaces, inclusive of 2 no. accessible spaces. The parking area will be reconfigured to accommodate 49 car parking spaces, including 46 standard spaces and 3 accessible spaces. Additional amenities will also be provided, including a seating area, bin store, and new tree planting. New paving and finishes will be provided throughout. The area of the car park will remain the same as the existing car park at 2,647 sq.m, following the works.

Reconfiguring this area will improve circulation around the harbour and create a shared space. This shared space has been designed to allow vulnerable road users to traverse between the Visitor Centre and Mountshannon Harbour. Traffic calming features will be implemented to reduce the risk to vulnerable road users. The speed limit in this area will be reduced to accommodate the development.



Plate 17 Exiting & Proposed Harbour Parking Area

The reconfigured harbour car park has been subjected to a swept path analysis of a jeep and boat trailer. This is to verify that the proposed reconfiguration has not negatively impacted the difficulty of vehicles accessing the slipway to launch boats.

The intent for the harbour car park stormwater disposal is not to change the hydraulic regime that currently exists on site. The existing outfalls will be maintained. The addition of green areas will assist with reducing the rate of runoff from this area.

There is no requirement for either a water connection to serve the area or wastewater/foul system to be installed at this location.

The harbour lighting shall be designed to IS EN 12464-2.

4.2.4 Operating Hours

Visitor Centre

The Visitor Centre will operate seasonally, from March to September. On opening, operating hours will be seven days a week as follows:

- March to June - 9:00am until 5:00pm
- July to September - 9:00am until 6:00pm

Outside of these times, the Visitor Centre may open for groups, school tours or private bookings, according to demand. The season may expand to meet future demand.

Village Car Park

To maximise this asset, the car park will always be operational, and a barrier system will be implemented to control traffic, maintain security, and enhance operational efficiency.

Inis Cealtra Walking Trails & Tours

The island tours will operate seasonally, from March to September. Operating hours will be seven days a week as follows:

- March to June - 9:00am until 5:00pm
- July to September - 9:00am until 6:00pm

If the Visitor Centre operates outside these designated hours to accommodate additional demand, no additional boat tours will be offered.

4.2.5 Phasing

The current indicative phasing strategy suggests that the project will be split into 2 phases. These phases are based on the information available at this time. To avoid doubt, it is not proposed or intended that the applicant/contractor(s) is bound by these proposals which may change depending on the timing and circumstances at the time of construction.

Table 5 Proposed Phasing

Phase	Project Element / Proposed Works	Duration of Works	Anticipated Completion
1	(a) Works at Inis Cealtra Island, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mooring point • Demolition of existing visitor shelter • Network of pedestrian pathways • Welfare Pods (b) New Car Park in Mountshannon Village	12 months	Q1 of 2028
2	(a) Visitor Centre, Mountshannon (b) Reconfiguration of Mountshannon Harbour car park	18 months 6 months	Q3 of 2042

4.2.6 Staffing

The **Visitor Management Plan** that accompanies this application under separate cover provide details regarding the anticipated staffing model and should be referred to in conjunction with this section.

The Inis Cealtra Visitor Experience will employ core operational staff and flexible, seasonal staff, including seasonal tour guides who will work on the island. The Visitor Centre café will be operated by lease. The anticipated staffing resources required to meet the seasonal needs of the Inis Cealtra Visitor Experience are set out in the following Table.

Table 6 Inis Cealtra Visitor Experience Staff Modelling

No. Days	Closed	Low	Shoulder	Peak
	120	92	91	62
Visitor Centre				
Visitor Centre Manager	1	1	1	1
Duty Manager	1	1	1	1
Bookings/Admin	1.5	1.5	1.5	1.5
Shop/Tickets	0	1.5	2	3
Galleries		0	1.5	2
Break Cover	0	0.5	1	1
Café (leased)	1	1.5	2.3	3.7
Total staff on site daily	4.5	8.5	10.8	14.2
Twilight Tours				
Twilight Tour	0	0	3	3
Break Cover	0	0	0	0
Total Staff on Twilight Tours	0	0	.	3
Island Tours				
Staff per tour	0	1	2	2
Break Cover	0	0.3	0.3	0.3
Total Staff on Island Daily	0	1.3	2.3	2.3

4.2.7 Visitor Numbers

The **Visitor Management Plan**, which accompanies this application under separate cover, provides details regarding the anticipated staffing model and should be referred to in conjunction with this section.

The projected visitor numbers provided below include a breakdown for Phase 1 and Phase 2 of the project. Anticipated visitor numbers to the Interpretive Centre at the Old Rectory, due to become operational in 2025, are included in the modelling, given that the proposed visitor management strategy provides for a combined ticketing system.

Visitor number growth is modelled to Year 5 of Phase 1 operations when visitor numbers are projected to plateau until the project enters Phase 2.

The maximum daily capacity on Inis Cealtra Island is 400 people, and no more than 100 people are permitted on the island at any one time. This is consistent with *Inis Cealtra Visitor Management and Sustainable Tourism Development Plan* (2017) which identified these maximum visitor thresholds to ensure the sustainable tourism development of the island. The numbers are consistent with the Limits of Acceptable Change research undertaken to inform the Plan.

Phase 1 Visitor Numbers

Phase 1 visitor modelling comprises visitors to the Interpretive Centre at the Old Rectory and visitors opting for the boat and guided island tour at Inis Cealtra. Visitor number growth is modelled to Year 5 of Phase 1 operations, when visitor numbers are projected to plateau until the project enters Phase 2.

	% of weighting	Year 1-2		Year 3		Year 4-5		Year 15	
		All visitors	Boat Tour	All visitors	Boat Tour	All visitors	Boat Tour	All visitors	Boat Tour
Jan	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Feb	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Mar	7	1,400	840	2,100	1,260	2,800	1,680	3,763	2,258
Apr	7	1,400	840	2,100	1,260	2,800	1,680	3,763	2,258
May	10	2,000	1,200	3,000	1,800	4,000	2,400	5,376	3,225
Jun	15	3,000	1,800	4,500	2,700	6,000	3,600	8,064	4,838
Jul	20	4,000	2,400	6,000	3,600	8,000	4,800	10,751	6,451
Aug	20	4,000	2,400	6,000	3,600	8,000	4,800	10,751	6,451
Sep	13	2,600	1,560	3,900	2,340	5,200	3,120	6,988	4,193
Oct	8	1,600	960	2,400	1,440	3,200	1,920	4,301	2,580
Nov	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Dec	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Annual		20,000	12,000	30,000	18,000	40,000	24,000	53,757	32,254

Table 7 Phase 1 Visitor Number Modelling

Phase 2 Visitor Numbers

Visitor modelling for the second phase of this project incorporates the new Visitor Centre that will augment the visitor offering at the Old Rectory, building on the Phase 1 projection. The new Visitor Centre will increase the capacity and scale of appeal to accommodate greater visitor numbers.

	% of weighting	Year 1		Year 2-3		Year 4-5	
		All visitors	Boat Tour	All visitors	Boat Tour	All visitors	Boat Tour
Jan	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Feb	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Mar	7	3,850	2,310	4,550	2,730	5,250	3,150
Apr	7	3,850	2,310	4,550	2,730	5,250	3,150
May	10	5,500	3,300	6,500	3,900	7,500	4,500
Jun	15	8,250	4,950	9,750	5,850	11,250	6,750
Jul	20	11,000	6,600	13,000	7,800	15,000	9,000
Aug	20	11,000	6,600	13,000	7,800	15,000	9,000
Sep	13	7,150	4,290	8,450	5,070	9,750	5,850
Oct	8	4,400	2,640	5,200	3,120	6,000	3,600
Nov	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Dec	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Annual		55,000	33,000	65,000	39,000	75,000	45,000

Table 8 Phase 2 Visitor Number Modelling

4.2.8 Island Tours & Boat Service

An estimated 60% of visitors will take a boat trip to the island for a guided tour. Clare County Council will tender the boat service, and the successful tender will operate 25-seater boats.

The island guided tour will last approximately 45 minutes, allowing visitors to explore the island independently. Visitors are likely to remain on the island for one hour but are requested to stay no longer than two hours.

The boat service will scale over time to reflect visitor demands, Phase 1 comprises the Old Rectory Interpretive Centre combined with an optional boat and guided island tour at Inis Cealtra. It is expected that Phase 2 will generate sufficient demand for a number of boat tour operators to operate the service.

The proposed Phase 1 visitors' boat between Mountshannon Harbour and Inis Cealtra Island will be seasonal, ranging from two round-trip daily boat services during low season to eight round-trip daily boat services during high season. The expected high season eight daily round trip sailings is of the same order as the existing summer tourist season.

The proposed Phase 2 visitors' boat service to/from Inis Cealtra Island from/to Mountshannon Harbour will be seasonal, ranging from six round trip daily boat services during the low season to 14 round trip daily boat services during the high season. The expected high season 14 daily round trip boat sailings would be six additional to the existing summer tourist season - there are typically eight existing round boat trips daily between Mountshannon Harbour and Inis Cealtra.

4.2.9 Management Structures

Clare County Council, via Clare Tourism DAC, will manage and operate the Inis Cealtra Visitor Experience, inclusive of the Visitor Centre, new car park facilities off Main Street, and the welfare facilities on Inis Cealtra. The café in the Visitor Centre will be operated by lease.

Visitors will walk from the Village car parking facilities to the visitor centre through Aistear Park, which Mountshannon Community Council owns and manages.

Currently, the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage is responsible for the protection of the archaeological remains on Inis Cealtra. The local authority also has responsibility for municipal burial grounds located on the island. The Office of Public Works (OPW) is responsible for managing the national monuments on Inis Cealtra. The National Monuments Service (NMS) is responsible for the conservation and recording of the site. National Parks & Wildlife Service (NPWS) has a role in the management and environmental conservation of Inis Cealtra, given the area's SAC and SPA designations. Waterways Ireland has responsibility for the management, development and promotion of Lough Derg and the Shannon Navigation, including Mountshannon Harbour and the jetty on Inis Cealtra. There will be no change to the role of the statutory bodies responsible for the national monuments and conservation measures on Inis Cealtra, nor the role of Waterways Ireland.

Primary access to Inis Cealtra will be via guided boat tours operated by licenced boat operators. Licences will be awarded by tender by Clare County Council on a 3-year basis. Subject to demand, licences will be awarded to a single or multiple operators. A concessionary rate will be available to existing boat hire companies such as the 5 boats from Lakeside Holiday Park in Mountshannon.

Members of the local community and members of Lough Derg Anglers will be able to land for free with a permit-style approach.

Guided tours on the island will be operated by Clare Tourism DAC, staffed by Inis Cealtra Visitor Experience. Their role will also include monitoring and surveying of visitor impacts.

Key stakeholders involved in the management of Inis Cealtra will form a representative group, the Inis Cealtra Management Group, to have oversight both in terms of the strategic management of the island and the operational management of the island. This group, led by Clare County Council, will include OPW, NMS, Waterways Ireland and Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.

Inis Cealtra Community Forum will be established to represent the voice of the local community in the management of Inis Cealtra and the delivery of the new visitor experience. Its role will be to facilitate local community input and linkages as the project develops, ensuring the socio-economic benefits of this project are reflected across East Clare. It will also serve as a liaison with Clare County Council in managing local access to Inis Cealtra.

4.3 Demolition and Construction Phase

This application is accompanied by a **Construction & Environmental Management Plan** (CEMP) and should be read in conjunction with this chapter. The CEMP provides a comprehensive description of the construction phase and outlines the commitments and mitigation measures to be implemented during the construction phase of the proposed development.

All of the mitigation measures proposed within the EIAR, and other supporting documents are deemed adopted for the purpose of the CEMP.

The appointed contractor will be provided with the CEMP and will be required to comply with the provisions contained in it.

4.3.1 Programme

The principal stages associated with the construction works are set out below.

PHASE 1

Inis Cealtra Island

- Pre-commencement activities, including site investigation work and pre-construction surveys
- Pre-construction activities including demolition of the existing shelter on the island
- Site Clearance Works
- Construction of temporary site construction compound
- Construction of new floating access jetty and walkway located at Northwest of the island where the existing mooring point is located
- Construction of 3 no. new staff and public welfare facility 'pods' on the island
- Construction of new pedestrian paths on the island
- Complete site works, tidy up site, landscaping, restoration
- Demobilise site compound facilities

Village Car Park

- Pre-commencement activities including site investigation work and pre-construction surveys
- Pre-Construction Activities
- Site Clearance Works
- Construction of temporary site construction compound
- Construction of a new public car park on a site to the north of Mountshannon main street with all associated ancillary site works
- Complete site works, tidy up site, landscaping, restoration
- Demobilise site compound facilities

PHASE 2

Harbour Car Park Reconfiguration

- Pre-commencement activities including site investigation work and pre-construction surveys
- Pre-Construction Activities
- Site Clearance Works
- Construction of temporary site construction compound
- Reconfiguration of the existing Mountshannon harbour car park, located to the south of the proposed visitor centre with all associated ancillary site works
- Complete site works, tidy up site, landscaping, restoration
- Demobilise site compound facilities

Visitor Centre

- Pre-commencement activities including site investigation work and pre-construction surveys
- Site preparation and pre-construction activities
- Environmental measures
- Construction of temporary site construction compound
- Construction traffic routes
- Site construction drainage system
- Construction of proposed visitor centre to the southern part of the Old Rectory site
- Complete site works, tidy up site, landscaping, restoration
- Demobilise site compound facilities

4.3.2 Construction Hours

Construction is proposed to take place within the following hours:

- 08:00 to 19:00, Monday to Friday inclusive, and
- 08:00 to 13:00 Saturdays.

There will be no work on Sundays and bank holidays.

Deviation from these times will only be in exceptional circumstances where prior written approval has been received from the planning authority.

4.3.3 Construction Personnel

Inis Cealtra Island

It is expected that the construction of the island elements (construction of jetty/ demolition of existing shelter/ construction of pods and paths) will require approximately 25 personnel, including during the peak construction phase, including site contractors, engineers, materials delivery personnel, environmental personnel, and health and safety personnel.

Village Car Park

It is expected that the construction works on the Village Car Park will require approximately 20 personnel, including during the peak construction phase, including site contractors, engineers, materials delivery personnel, environmental personnel, and health and safety personnel.

Harbour Car Park Reconfiguration & Visitor Centre

It is expected that the construction works on the Harbour Car Park and Visitor Centre elements of the works require approximately 50 personnel including during the peak construction phase, to include site contractors, engineers, materials delivery personnel, environmental personnel, health and safety personnel.

4.3.4 Construction Traffic

A preliminary **Construction Traffic Management Plan (CTMP)** has been prepared and is included in Chapter 6 Traffic Transport of the EIAR.

A more detailed **Traffic Management Plan** will be completed prior to the works commencing and this will be agreed between the Contractor and Clare County Council to ensure that traffic is managed during the works safely and with least impact.

Inis Cealtra Island

Access to the island will be by boat. The first phase of the works on the island will be to modify the existing concrete slipway to the northwest of the island and to construct the new floating jetty. Upon completion of these works, the new floating jetty will provide personnel/ materials via boat/ barge access to the island to facilitate works associated with the paths and welfare pods.

The proposed Phase 1 construction works at Inis Cealtra Island would generate up to eight round boat trips daily between Mountshannon Harbour and Inis Cealtra Island.

Village Car Park

The Proposed Development is located within the town of Mountshannon. Access to the site is by means of the existing entrance onto the R352.

Construction traffic will include:

- HGVs importing construction materials, including concrete, road build-up materials, building materials, drainage/ducting materials, structural steel, cabling, site boundary fencing, etc.
- HGVs exporting waste/spoil/demolition materials
- HGVs delivering plant/cranes and fuel
- Traffic associated with on-site construction personnel

Construction access for the new Village Car Park works at Mountshannon will be via a single site access on Main Street, at the approximate location of the existing site gated access.

A temporary construction compound will be provided within the new Village Car Park site for the Village Car Park works.

Phase 1 Construction Traffic Volumes

The removal of materials off-site would generate up to 25 daily truck movements, both inbound and outbound, during the initial period of the proposed Phase 1 construction. Earthworks volumes will be removed during off-peak traffic periods and outside local schools' start and finish times.

Peak construction delivery and heavy vehicle volumes would generate a peak total of up to 35 daily vehicles, both to and from site, for the Phase 1 construction works, including up to 25 daily delivery vehicles generated by the Village Car Park works and up to 10 daily delivery vehicles generated by the Island works.

Peak construction deliveries will not coincide with the phased removal of earthworks and demolition volumes to a licensed recycling facility.

During Phase 1 construction, peak construction staff vehicles would generate 30 daily inbound vehicles and 30 daily outbound vehicles. All construction parking will be located within the temporary construction compound. This will prevent construction staff parking in public on-street locations and at the public Harbour Car Park.

Visitor Centre and Mountshannon Harbour Car Park Reconfiguration

The proposed Visitor Centre and harbour car park are located within the town of Mountshannon and will comprise Phase 2 works. The site is located in close proximity to the R352 which joins the townlands of Ennis and Portumna.

Construction traffic will include:

- HGVs importing construction materials, including concrete, road build-up materials, building materials, drainage/ducting materials, structural steel, cabling, site boundary fencing, etc.
- HGVs exporting waste/spoil/demolition materials
- HGVs delivering plant/cranes and fuel
- Traffic associated with on-site construction personnel

Construction access for the reconfiguration of Mountshannon Harbour Car Park and the new Visitor Centre will be via the L4034 Harbour Road and the R352.

A temporary construction compound will be provided at the new Visitor Centre site for the Visitor Centre construction works. A temporary construction compound will be provided at the Harbour Car Park site for the Harbour Car Park works.

All construction parking will be located within the temporary construction compounds for the Phase 2 construction works. During low season, temporary construction staff car parking will also be provided at the Phase 1 construction Village Car Park.

Phase 2 Construction Traffic Volumes

There will be no significant demolition volumes generated by the Phase 2 construction works for removal off site to a licensed recycling facility.

The removal off-site of excavated earthworks materials would generate up to 20 trucks, both inbound and outbound, during the initial phase of the proposed Phase 2 construction. The removal of earthworks volumes will be during off-peak traffic periods and outside local schools' start and finish times.

Peak construction delivery and heavy vehicle volumes would generate a peak total of up to 30 daily vehicles, both to and from site, for the Phase 2 construction works, including up to 20 daily delivery vehicles generated by the Visitor Centre works and up to 10 daily delivery vehicles generated by the Harbour Car Park works.

Peak construction deliveries will not coincide with the phased removal of earthworks and demolition volumes to a licensed recycling facility.

4.3.5 Construction Waste

All excavated material will be brought to a licenced waste facility for final disposal. All potential waste shall be appropriately sampled and tested for waste assessment using the HazWaste Online™ Tool and Waste Acceptance Criteria (WAC) criteria. The assessment of potential soil waste would occur insitu, in advance of excavation during the initial site investigation and take account of the waste acceptance criteria for soil recovery facilities and/or waste landfills. All soil sampling, waste classification and reporting will be conducted by a suitably qualified person.

This waste classification assessment will form part of a Site-specific Soils Management Plan. Soil proposed to be re-used for landscape and fill purposes should be assessed in advance to determine the suitability for re-use with reference to the proposed site end-use.

The main contractor working on site during the works will be responsible for the collection, control and disposal of all waste generated by the works. Construction phase waste may consist of hardcore, stone, concrete, steel reinforcement, ducting, shuttering timber, food waste from the canteen and unused oil, diesel and building materials. This waste will be collected at the end of the construction phase and taken off site to be reused, recycled, and disposed of in accordance with best practice procedures at an approved facility. Municipal waste from the on-site facilities will be collected on a regular basis by approved contractors and disposed of in an authorised facility in accordance with best practices. Plastic waste will be taken for recycling by an approved contractor(s) and disposed of or recycled at an approved facility.

4.3.6 Earthworks

Inis Cealtra Island

No excavation works are proposed for Inis Cealtra island in connection with the new paths and construction of the welfare pods.

To facilitate the new floating access jetty at Inis Cealtra Island, the lakebed (2m³) will need to be excavated on the south end of the main breakwater jetty. The excavator will be positioned on a pontoon raft, and the material will be removed and placed on a skip on the pontoon raft to be removed off-site. A silt curtain will be placed around the excavation area when removing material.

Village Car Park

Approximately 3,200m³ of topsoil will be excavated, carefully segregated, and transported to an agreed temporary deposition point. This material will then be removed from the site, with a minor amount kept on site in a temporary storage area for later use in landscaping.

Bulk excavation of a volume of 4,200m³ approximately will then occur to the required sub-formation levels using excavators and dumpers. This material may be temporarily stockpiled on the site prior to being removed from the site.

All excavated material will be brought to a licenced waste facility for final disposal. All potential waste shall be appropriately sampled and tested for waste assessment using the HazWasteOnline™ Tool and Waste Acceptance Criteria (WAC) criteria. The assessment of potential soil waste would occur insitu, in advance of excavation during the initial site investigation and take account of the waste acceptance criteria for soil recovery facilities and/or waste landfills. All soil sampling, waste classification and reporting will be conducted by a suitably qualified person.

Mountshannon Harbour Reconfiguration and Visitor Centre

Approximately 1,600m³ of topsoil will be excavated, carefully segregated and transported to an agreed temporary deposition point. This material would then be removed from the site with a minor amount may be kept on site in a temporary storage area for later use in landscaping.

Bulk excavation of approximately 6,200m³ under the proposed building and front courtyard and 1000m³ for the realigned access track and other external areas will then occur to the required sub formation levels using excavators and dumpers. This material may be temporarily stockpiled on the site prior to being removed from the site.

All excavated material will be brought to a licence waste facility for final disposal. All potential waste shall be appropriately sampled and tested for waste assessment using the HazWasteOnline™ Tool and Waste Acceptance Criteria (WAC) criteria. The assessment of potential soil waste would occur insitu, in advance of excavation during the initial site investigation and take account of the waste acceptance criteria for soil recovery facilities and/or

waste landfills. All soil sampling, waste classification and reporting will be conducted by a suitably qualified person.

4.4 Health and Safety

4.4.1 Construction Phase

The appointed contractor and Project Supervisor Construction Stage (PSCS) will be responsible for managing all aspects of health and safety pertaining to the construction works in line with the requirements of the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (Construction) Regulations 2013, and other relevant Irish and EU safety legislation at all times.

4.5 Monitoring

4.5.1 Community Liaison

The appointed Main Contractor will be required to follow best practice as outlined in 'The Code of Considerate Practice'. This is an initiative set up by the construction industry in 1997. It is designed to encourage best practice, beyond statutory requirements, focusing on the community, the environment and the workforce. The Considerate Constructors Scheme experience in Ireland has been that early positive and proactive engagement with businesses and residents impacted by construction is the best approach.

4.5.2 Environmental

The monitoring proposed in Chapters 4 to 14 of the EIAR will be carried out during the demolition and construction phases. This monitoring is integrated to ensure that there will be no likely significant impact during the site's development.

A bespoke site Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) will be prepared by the appointed contractor prior to work commencing on site. The main purpose of a CEMP is to provide a mechanism for implementation of the various mitigation and monitoring measures which are described in the EIAR. The CEMP demonstrates the applicant's commitment to implementing the proposed development in such a way as to avoid or minimise the potential environmental effects arising from construction activities. All personnel will be required to understand and implement the requirements of the plan.

Aspects that will be addressed within the CEMP will include but not limited to, waste and materials management; noise and vibration; dust and air quality; traffic and vehicle management; pollution incident control; and protection of vegetation and fauna. A summary of the mitigation measures to be incorporated into the CEMP is provided in Chapter 16 of the EIAR.

4.6 Commissioning

The testing and commissioning of services (drainage, watermain, gas, electricity) will be completed in accordance with relevant codes of practice as set out in Chapter 7 of the EIAR.

5. Legislative Context

5.1 Part X of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended)

Part X of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) outlines the requirements for the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) of developments carried out by or on behalf of a Local Authority that necessitate the preparation of an Environmental Impact Assessment Report (EIAR) as is the case for this proposed development.

In summary, Section 175 establishes the process for assessing the environmental impact of developments, including the requirement for an EIAR, the approval process by the Board, and considerations regarding environmental protection and relevant policies.

- **Section 175(1)** mandates that local authorities prepare or commission an EIAR for proposed developments that require it.

This obligation is discharged, an EIAR accompanies this application that satisfies the prescribed information requirements as per **Section 177**. It is confirmed that a notification has been issued to the EIA Portal, discharging the applicant's duties set out under **Section 172 (B)**.

- **Section 175(2)** states that a development requiring an EIAR cannot proceed unless the Board has approved it, with or without modifications.
- **Section 175(3)** requires the local authority to apply to the Board for approval of the development once the EIAR is prepared.

This obligation is discharged, the application for approval is being submitted to An Bord Pleanála.

- **Section 175(4)** requires the local authority, before it makes an application for approval under subsection (3), to publish a notice in a local newspaper setting out specific details about the proposed development and where it can be viewed (not being less than 6 weeks) during which, a copy of the EIAR may be inspected free of charge or purchased. The notice must also identify details regarding the public's right to submit an observation. A copy of the EIAR must be sent to prescribed authorities and must also identify that submission can be made.

This obligation has been discharged. The notice was published in the Clare Champion and Clare Echo and the following prescribed bodies have been notified.

Prescribed Body
An Taisce - The National Trust for Ireland
An Chomhairle Ealaíon - The Arts Council
Faite Ireland
Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage
National Monuments Service, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage
National Parks & Wildlife Service, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage
Department of Environment, Climate and Communications
Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media
Department of Rural and Community Development,
Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine
Office of Public Works
Inland Fisheries Ireland
The Heritage Council
Waterways Ireland
Environmental Protection Agency
Department of Transport, Development Applications Unit
National Transport Authority
Transport Infrastructure Ireland
Uisce Éireann
Birdwatch Ireland
Tipperary County Council
Limerick City and County Council
Galway County Council
Southern Regional Assembly

- **Section 175(5)**

- **Subsection (a):** The Board may, if necessary, ask the local authority to provide further information about the environmental effects of the proposed development.
- **Subsection (b):** If the Board determines that the additional information significantly affects the likely environmental impacts of the development and/or the consequences for proper planning and sustainable development in the area. The Board will require the local authority to:
 - Publish a notice in a local newspaper, informing the public about the further information provided. The notice must include details on where and when the information can be inspected or purchased and the period (at least 3 weeks) during which submissions or observations can be made to the Board.
 - Send a copy of the further information to any prescribed authorities and inform them that submissions can be made to the Board within at least 3 weeks of receiving the notice.

- **Section 175(6)** requires the Board to consider the EIAR and any relevant information, including potential environmental effects, impacts on sustainable development, and any feedback from other EU Member States or states under the Transboundary Convention.
- **Section 175(7)** allows the person conducting an oral hearing for the compulsory purchase of land related to a proposed development to hear evidence on specific matter.

It is noted that this proposed development does not require a compulsory purchase order.

- **Section 175(8) (a-b)** outlines the conditions under which the Board may grant an exemption from the requirement to prepare an EIAR for the proposed development.

It is noted that this provision is not applicable to this proposed development. The application includes an EIAR.

- **Section 175(9)(a-c)** outlines the Board's options when deciding on the application, including approving the development (with or without modifications), partially approving it, or refusing approval. The Board can also impose conditions on approval.
- **Section 175(10)** deals with the Board's handling of applications for developments that involve activities requiring an Integrated Pollution Control (IPC) or Waste Licence.

It is noted that this provision is not applicable to this proposed development. The application includes an EIAR.

- **Section 175(11)** gives the Minister the authority to make regulations concerning the procedure and administration of approval

applications, including requesting written opinions from the Board on EIARs, establishing procedures for EPA observations, managing notifications, consultations, and submissions from EU Member States or Transboundary Convention parties and requiring the Board to provide information on its decisions regarding the proposed development.

- **Section 175(12)** requires the Board to consider relevant policies, including special amenity orders, European sites, and government policies, when making its decision.

5.2 Part XAB of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended)

Part XAB of the Planning and Development Act 2000 sets out the requirements for the appropriate assessment of developments which could have an effect on a European site or its conservation objectives.

- **Section 177(AE)** sets out the requirements for the appropriate assessment of developments carried out by or on behalf of local authorities.
- **Section 177(AE) (1)** requires a local authority to prepare, or cause to be prepared, a Natura impact statement in respect of the proposed development.

This obligation is discharged, a Natura Impact Statement accompanies this application.

- **Section 177(AE) (2)** states that a proposed development in respect of which an appropriate assessment is required shall not be carried out unless the Board has approved it with or without modifications.
- **Section 177(AE) (3)** states that where a Natura Impact Statement has been prepared pursuant to subsection (1), the local authority shall apply to the Board for approval and the provisions of Part XAB shall apply to the carrying out of the appropriate assessment.

This obligation is discharged through the submission of this application directly to An Bord Pleanála.

- **Section 177(AE) (4)** requires a local authority before making an application for approval to Publish a public notice detailing the proposed development, including the Natura impact statement, and invite submissions on its environmental and planning implications, as well as its impact on a European site. Provide information on where and for how long the Natura impact statement can be inspected. Send the application to prescribed bodies, inviting their submissions during the inspection period.

This obligation has been discharged. The notice was published in the Clare Champion and Clare Echo and the prescribed bodies identified in the preceding section been notified.

5.3 Environmental Impact Assessment Directive

Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) requirements derive from EU Directives. Council Directive 2014/52/EU amended Directive 2011/92/EU and is transposed into Irish Law by the European Union (Planning and Development) (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2018.

The Planning and Development Regulations (PDRs) 2001, as amended identify:

- the development classes which should be subject to mandatory EIA (Part 1 of Schedule 5);
- the classes of development which should be subject to EIA where they exceed a certain threshold of scale (Part 2 of Schedule 5);
- the classes of development which should be subject to EIA (Part 2 of Schedule 5) where the planning authority or the Board determines that they would be likely to have significant effects on the environment due to the characteristics of the proposed development, the location of the site, or the characteristics of the potential impacts (Part 2, Schedule 7).

The proposed development does not fall within the development classes set out in Part 1 of Schedule 5 of the Regulations.

The proposed development falls within the category of 'Theme parks' as set out in Class 12 (e) within Part 2 of Schedule 5 of the PDRs, being a 'Tourism and Leisure' project, which provides that a mandatory EIA must be carried out for projects including,

"12. Tourism and Leisure

*(e) **Theme parks** occupying an area greater than 5 hectares."*

The development class 'theme parks' has been transposed from Annex II (12(e) of the EIA Directive without defining or describing this development type. However, recognising the broad scope and purpose of the EIA Directive, EC Guidance regarding the interpretation of this project type states:

*(i) The theme or objective of the park is not defined by the EIA Directive. **Parks falling within this project category could be developed, for example, for recreational, educational or informative purposes.** However, it should be noted that the project category 'theme park' is listed in Annex II (12) under the heading 'Tourism and leisure'. For instance, a park that has a specific theme or attraction or several attractions, like an amusement park, should be considered a theme park. Areas planned for a leisure attraction based on or related to a particular subject should also be covered by this project category. For example, water parks and zoos should be considered to fall under this project category.*

The Inis Cealtra Visitor Experience is a tourism project that is being developed for recreational, educational, and informative purposes. Therefore, having

considered the characteristics of the proposed development, the broad purpose of the EIA Directive and its overall objective, which is to ensure the protection of the environment and quality of life, together with the relevant guidance, it was determined that the threshold relating to theme parks should be applied.

The proposed development site measures approximately 20.3 hectares, which is in excess of the 5 hectares set aside for theme parks and, therefore, triggers the threshold for a mandatory EIA.

Notwithstanding that 'Tourism and Leisure' was determined to be the applicable project category for the Inis Cealtra Visitor Experience, the project category 'Infrastructure projects' in Part 2 of Schedule 5 is also of relevance.

10. Infrastructure projects – [Part b]

- (i) *Construction of more than 500 dwellings*
- (ii) *Construction of a car-park providing more than 400 spaces, other than a car-park provided as part of, and incidental to the primary purpose of, a development.*
- (iii) *Construction of a shopping centre with a gross floor space exceeding 10,000 square metres.*
- (iv) **Urban development which would involve an area greater than 2 hectares in the case of a business district, 10 hectares in the case of other parts of a built-up area and 20 hectares elsewhere.** (emp. added)

(In this paragraph, "business district" means a district within a city or town in which the predominant land use is retail or commercial use.)

The project does not involve development for residential purposes, a car park with more than 400 spaces, or a shopping centre. However, it could potentially be classed as 'Urban development' given the individual project elements, which include, *inter alia*, a visitor centre, village car park, harbour car park and public realm works. Furthermore, despite its wider rural setting, Mountshannon is a built-up area designated as a Tier 1 Large Village in the Clare County Development Plan.

In contrast, the balance of the application lands on Inis Cealtra are unzoned and effectively undeveloped. Development on the island (albeit limited) is proposed as part of a wider project with supporting infrastructure in Mountshannon that may be described as 'Urban development'. For this reason, and again having regard to the broad scope and purpose of the EIA Directive, the category 'Urban development' may be considered relevant to this project even though the island lands are not 'urban' in character.

In considering the thresholds that would apply, it is noted that Inis Cealtra makes up most of the lands within the application site boundary. The island is not a 'business district', nor could the lands be considered a 'built-up area', so the 20-hectare threshold that applies to lands 'elsewhere' may be deemed applicable. Alternatively, a more conservative threshold of 10 hectares could

be applied, having regard to the extent of works associated with the project that are proposed within the 'built-up area' of Mount Shannon.

Irrespective of which threshold is applied, if it is accepted that the proposed development falls within the scope of 'Urban development', the application area measures 20.3 hectares in area, requiring mandatory EIA.

In conclusion, the project triggers the requirement for mandatory EIA based on the area thresholds because,

It is a '*Tourism and Leisure project*' and the proposed development falls within the development type 'theme park', subject to a threshold of 5 hectares;

or,

It is an '*Infrastructure project*' classed as 'Urban development', subject to a threshold of 10 hectares or 20 hectares depending on the site characteristics.

The project requires an EIAR to accompany the planning application for permission in all cases and accordingly one is submitted with this application.

5.4 Habitats Directive

European sites designated for nature conservation include Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) and Special Protection Areas (SPA) under the Habitats and Birds Directives.

According to Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive, any project likely to significantly affect a European site must undergo an Appropriate Assessment. The project can proceed if the assessment indicates no adverse impact on the site's integrity. The AA screening test is required to assess if the project, individually or with others, may significantly affect a European site, based on best scientific knowledge. If the potential for significant effects cannot be ruled out, a Stage II AA is necessary, and project proponents must submit a Natura Impact Statement (NIS) with their planning application.

This planning application includes Information to Inform AA Screening and a NIS under separate cover.

6. National & Regional Planning Policy Context

The key provisions of national and regional planning policy related to the proposed development are set out in the following subsections. The key policy and guidance documents of relevance to the proposed development are as follows:

- National Planning Framework 2040;
- The Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) for the Southern Region 2020

6.1 National Planning Framework – Project Ireland 2040

Project Ireland 2040 is the Government's overarching policy initiative to make Ireland a better country for all, a country that reflects the best of who we are and what we aspire to be. Project Ireland 2040 comprises the National Planning Framework (NPF) and the National Development Plan (NDP).

As a strategic development framework, Project Ireland 2040 sets the long-term context for our country's physical development and associated progress in social, economic and environmental terms, in a national and European context.

The NPF sets the context for the Regional Spatial Economic Strategies (RSES) through 10 National Strategic Outcomes (NSO's) and the following are of relevance to this subject proposal;

- **Strengthened Rural Economies and Communities (NSO 3)** are a strong part of the identity of the Southern Region. Rural areas play a key role in the Region's economy, environment and quality of life, which is reflected by the objectives of the Action Plan for Rural Development.
- **Enhanced Amenities and Heritage (NSO 7)** enriches and nurtures our community life. By acting as custodians of our wealth of culture, heritage and the arts, we are safeguarding it for future generations. Increased emphasis on attractive place-making will require ease of access to amenities and services supported by integrated transport systems and green modes of movement such as pedestrian and cycling facilities.

The NPF highlights the importance of protecting Ireland's built heritage assets as a non-renewable resource in a manner appropriate to their significance as an aid to understanding the past, contributing to community well-being and quality of life as well as regional economic development.

The NPF highlights under a section titled 'Ireland's Rural Fabric' that promoting new economic opportunities arising from inter alia tourism is a priority.

6.1.1 Updated Draft Revised National Planning Framework (November 2024)

The Updated Draft highlights that rural areas in Ireland play a key role in both work and recreation, particularly through the agri-food and tourism sectors, which employ over 430,000 people (18% of the national workforce). However, it is acknowledged that rural Ireland has faced challenges such as the decline of traditional industries, emigration, and poor connectivity.

The policy update focuses on:

- Strengthening rural communities and supporting their future growth.
- Addressing rural decline and revitalising smaller towns and villages.
- Encouraging job creation in the rural economy while tackling connectivity gaps.

The update highlights that since the NPF's launch in 2018, complementary policies like *Our Rural Future* 2021-2025 have been introduced.

- **Our Rural Future** aims to create a thriving rural Ireland by supporting vibrant communities, developing rural towns and villages, and promoting sustainable environmental practices. It recognises that outdoor activity tourism is a key growth sector worldwide and states Ireland is well-placed to capitalise on this trend. It highlights that the development and promotion of this sector provides opportunities for employment growth in rural areas in particular, through local businesses and entrepreneurs using the tourism assets in their area in a sustainable way to support recreational activities such as walking and canoeing.

As regards heritage, *Our Rural Future* identifies that Ireland's rich heritage is a significant asset for the country's tourism industry, particularly in rural areas. Heritage plays a central role in sustaining and regenerating rural communities, with Ireland's relatively unspoilt environment offering some of the most spectacular landscapes and biodiversity in the world. The new *Heritage Ireland 2030* plan will highlight the importance of heritage to Ireland's communities, economy, and society, setting out strategic priorities for the heritage sector over the next decade.

There are 107 National Policy Objectives, and the following are particularly relevant to the proposed development.

National Policy Objective 12

Ensure the creation of attractive, liveable, well designed, high quality urban places that are home to diverse and integrated communities that enjoy a high quality of life and well-being.

National Policy Objective 14

Regenerate and rejuvenate cities, towns and villages of all types and scale as environmental assets that can accommodate changing roles and functions, increased residential population and employment activity, enhanced levels of amenity and design and placemaking quality, in order to sustainably influence and support their surrounding area to ensure progress toward national achievement of the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

National Policy Objective 20

In meeting urban development requirements, there will be a presumption in favour of development that can encourage more people and generate more jobs and activity within existing cities, towns and villages, subject to development meeting appropriate planning standards and achieving targeted growth.

The proposed development responds to these NPOs. The provision of a new car park to the north of Main Street safeguards the quality of the public realm along Main Street and around the harbour area, effectively accommodating vehicles, buses, and other forms of transport. This improves accessibility and contributes to a more attractive and functional public space.

Improvements to the harbour area, including reconfiguring car parking and plaza to the foreground of the Visitor Centre, will significantly elevate the attractiveness and design quality of this location in Mountshannon. These upgrades will create a more vibrant and well-planned environment for residents and visitors alike.

The proposed development addresses several key areas outlined in NPO 14, contributing to the planning objective of regenerating and rejuvenating the village of Mountshannon.

- The project will raise the overall amenity levels in the area by introducing public spaces, pedestrian-friendly infrastructure, and high-quality architectural design. Enhancing the aesthetic appeal of Mountshannon through thoughtful placemaking including an attractive waterfront and cultural landmark will improve the quality of life for residents and enhance the visitor experience
- The Visitor Centre can adapt to the evolving needs of the area, offering flexible spaces that can serve multiple purposes over time. This ensures that the development can evolve with the community's changing requirements.
- By attracting tourists, the proposed development will stimulate local employment, both directly and indirectly. Job creation will help foster a sustainable local economy and is consistent with NPO 20.
- The project directly contributes to several of the UN SDGs, such as **Goal 8** (Decent Work and Economic Growth) by generating employment, **Goal 11** (Sustainable Cities and Communities) by promoting inclusive, safe, and resilient urban development, and **Goal 12** (Responsible Consumption and Production) through sustainable tourism practices. By embedding sustainability into the project's core principles, the initiative aligns with the global agenda to create more sustainable urban areas and improve the quality of life for both residents and visitors.

National Policy Objective 23

Protect and promote the sense of place and culture and the quality, character and distinctiveness of the Irish rural landscape including island communities that make Ireland's rural areas authentic and attractive as places to live, work and visit. Any successor policy documents relating to national policy for rural areas and the islands will ensure continued alignment and consistency with the National Policy Objectives of this Framework.

National Policy Objective 26

Continue to support the proportionate growth of and appropriately designed development in rural towns that will contribute to their regeneration and renewal, including interventions in the public realm, the provision of amenities, the acquisition of sites and the provision of services.

National Policy Objective 34

Continue to facilitate tourism development and in particular a the Strategy for the Future Development of National and Regional Greenways, and a Blueways and Peatways Strategy, which prioritises projects on the basis of their environmental sustainability, achieving maximum impact and connectivity at national and regional level while ensuring their development is compliant with the National Biodiversity Action Plan, the national climate change objective and requirements for environmental assessments.

The proposed development effectively responds to NPO 23 by focusing on the following key actions:

- The project celebrates local culture and heritage by developing a visitor experience around the unique story of the area, the island's rich history and spiritual significance, from its monastic ruins to its unique cultural heritage so that visitors can deeply connect with the place and its people.
- The proposed development incorporates low-impact, sustainable construction and environmentally sensitive designs that blend seamlessly with the rural landscape.
- The **Landscape & Conservation Management Plan** included with the application promotes environmental conservation that protects key landscape features, biodiversity, and natural habitats. For example, the proposed 'light-touch' walking trails on the island, will ensure that tourism does not compromise the integrity of the natural environment.
- It promotes the unique identity of Inis Cealtra and Mountshannon, focusing on their distinct history. In doing so, it ensures that tourism development does not overpower the authenticity of the island but instead highlights its unique cultural and natural offerings.
- The design of the infrastructure (visitor centre and pods, etc.) aligns with the area's traditional rural character, using locally sourced materials, colours, and architectural styles that are in keeping with the local context.

Consistent with NPO 26, Clare County Council acquired the 'Rectory Site' in Mountshannon and has the option to acquire the 'Village Carpark Site', subject to planning permission.

This proposed development will contribute to the regeneration and renewal of Mountshannon:

1. By creating jobs in hospitality, retail, and services, and attracting investment.
2. The proposed development will revitalise infrastructure through the provision of a public carpark for the village, a plaza to the foreground of the Visitor Centre and enhancing the public space at the harbour area.

3. The proposed development promotes the protection of local cultural landmarks, fostering a sense of community pride and identity.
4. The visibility brought by a project of this nature can attract further investment in infrastructure, services, and businesses, making the village more resilient and economically diversified.

In these ways, tourism can act as a catalyst for long-term regeneration, creating a vibrant, sustainable future for the village while preserving its rural character and unique identity.

National Policy Objective 37

Ensure the integration of safe and convenient alternatives to the car into the design of our communities, by prioritising walking and cycling accessibility to both existing and proposed developments, and integrating physical activity facilities for all ages.

National Policy Objective 63

Support the coordination and promotion of all-island tourism initiatives through continued co-operation between the relevant tourism agencies and Tourism Ireland, pursue the further development of sport, and invest in the diverse heritage, arts and cultural and linguistic traditions of the island.

National Policy Objective 66

The planning system will be responsive to our national environmental challenges and ensure that development occurs within environmental limits, having regard to the medium and longer-term requirements of all relevant environmental and climate legislation and the sustainable management of our natural capital.

Mountshannon is in a rural area with a 'basic' level of public transport. Therefore, it is important to acknowledge that there are limits to the degree of modal shift that can be achieved. Notwithstanding, this project optimises the opportunities available by embedding the following strategies into the design to reduce reliance on cars, consistent with NPO 37.

1. The design integrates well-connected, pedestrian-friendly pathways between key tourist attractions and the village centre. This will encourage walking as a primary mode of transport for both visitors and locals once they arrive in Mountshannon.
2. The design facilitates safe and convenient cycle parking within the Village Carpark and the Visitors Centre.
3. The Village Carpark includes spaces for bus parking, promoting connections between key tourist destinations and reducing car dependency.
4. The Village Carpark includes electric vehicle (EV) charging making it easier for tourists and residents to travel sustainably.

This application includes an Environmental Impact Assessment Report (EIAR) and a Natura Impact Statement (NIS). These reports assess the project's potential impacts on the environment, biodiversity, and surrounding natural capital and outline mitigation measures to address any adverse effects. The findings of the assessment have informed the design of the project, i.e. it was an iterative process, and by incorporating the measures, the proposed development adheres to environmental limits while promoting sustainable development aligned with climate and biodiversity goals, consistent with NPO 66.

National Policy Objective 88

Conserve and enhance the rich qualities of natural, cultural and built heritage of Ireland in a manner appropriate to their cultural and environmental significance.

National Policy Objective 89

Enhance, integrate and protect the special physical, environmental, economic and cultural value of built heritage assets, including streetscapes, vernacular dwellings and other historic buildings and monuments, through appropriate and sensitive investment and conservation.

The proposed development will conserve and enhance Ireland's natural, cultural, and built heritage by integrating a comprehensive Landscape and Conservation Management Plan, which is appended to the EIAR, see Volume III. This approach focuses on maintaining the island's dynamic landscape, which consists of meadows, foreshore, scrub, and woodland, ensuring that the development of the tourism project complements the area's cultural and environmental significance.

Key elements of the policy response include:

1. The landscape will be managed to support pollinators, ensuring that areas of the island are maintained with native plants that attract and sustain pollinator populations, thus enhancing biodiversity.
2. The Plan includes extensive and intensive management strategies for the island's landscape:
 - Extensive Management: Grazing practices will be used to manage meadows and cultivate scrub and woodland areas with minimal intervention, preserving the natural state of the landscape.
 - Intensive Management: Areas around the monuments will be more intensively managed with mowing and vegetation control to preserve the monuments' access and prevent vegetation encroachment.
3. The management plan is based on indigenous species, specifically oak, ash, elm, and hazel. Due to the challenges posed by Dutch Elm Disease and a moratorium on ash propagation, the plan prioritises oak woodland with a hazel understorey, supplemented by other native species such as birch, holly, cherry, and apple. Local provenance seedbanks will be sourced for regenerating the woodland.
4. The management plan follows a temporal cycle—seasonal, annual, and over decades—ensuring long-term sustainability and proper maintenance of the landscape.

5. Bird and Bat Box Schemes will be incorporated as part of the biodiversity enhancement efforts to support local wildlife and contribute to the area's ecological health.

By incorporating these elements into the project, the proposed development will enhance Mountshannon's and Inis Celatra's natural and cultural heritage, promoting sustainability while respecting the area's environmental significance.

6.2 The Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) for the Southern Region

The RSES for the Southern Region emphasises the need to further promote and develop tourism attractions while enhancing the capacity to harness the untapped potential of tourism and local enterprises. This strategy is recognised as crucial for the region's sustainable growth.

The Strategy outlines a plan to create a robust, resilient, and sustainable region, with the protection and enhancement of culture and heritage identified as a key objective. Section 7.3.3 underscores the importance of safeguarding built heritage.

The key Regional Policy Objectives (RPOs) that are relevant to the proposed development include:

- **RPO 26** strongly supports strengthening the viability of villages, securing investment, and the sustainable delivery of holistic infrastructure in villages.
- **RPO 50:** Supports developing a diverse range of economic specialisms in rural areas, including tourism, to take advantage of opportunities presented by the Wild Atlantic Way and other regional brands.
- **RPO 53:** Aims to (a) improve tourism and leisure amenities to meet the needs of an increasing population, (b) promote activity-based tourism, and (c) develop sustainable facilities and connectivity networks to enhance visitor access and encourage longer stays.
- **RPO 54:** Emphasises that developing new tourism facilities must include relevant environmental assessments and reporting.
- **RPO 203:** This objective encourages the revitalisation of historic areas in cities, towns, and villages through the efforts of local authorities, the Heritage Council, communities, heritage property owners, and other stakeholders. Local authorities are tasked with ensuring that increased tourism does not negatively affect local services (e.g., water, wastewater) or facilities like parking. Heritage-led initiatives should consider the historical setting and potential visitor impact, ensuring that environmental assessments, including impacts on

protected species and other environmental receptors, inform decision-making for heritage-related projects.

- **RPO 204:** Better Public Access: aims to enhance public access for both abled and disabled visitors to historic, built, and natural environments. Local authorities are encouraged to ensure that decisions on projects or developments to improve access and facilities are based on a suitable level of environmental assessment.
- **RPO 207:** Archaeological Investigation emphasises that for developments potentially impacting archaeological sites or zones, local authorities must ensure decisions are informed by appropriate archaeological investigations conducted by qualified professionals.

The project proponent is the Local Authority. The design of the proposed Visitor Centre within the 'Rectory Site' respects the setting of the existing Protected Structure, the Old Rectory. Refer to the Architectural Design Statement and Chapters 5 (LVIA) and 13 (Built Heritage) of the EIAR together with the photomontages. The design of the infrastructure elements within Mountshannon are all of the highest quality and will enhance the public realm and lake-side areas of the village.

A Confirmation of Feasibility (COF) from Uisce Éireann is included with the application. It confirms that, based on the anticipated visitor numbers, a water connection is feasible without an infrastructure upgrade. A wastewater connection is also confirmed as feasible without an upgrade. The COF confirms that Uisce Éireann has completed optimisation works at the Mountshannon wastewater treatment plant.

The application is accompanied by an EIAR (which includes inter alia, landscape and visual, biodiversity and archaeological assessments) and NIS prepared by qualified and competent experts who conclude that subject to mitigation, there will likely be no significant residual environmental effects from the proposed development's construction or operational stages.

The Visitor Centre is Part M compliant, i.e., it complies with the requirements of the Building Regulations regarding accessibility. An **Accessibility Audit** for Inis Cealtra is included with the application. The accessibility assessment of the island identifies challenges posed by its natural terrain, particularly for visitors with mobility impairments. While the island's historic and natural beauty are key attractions, steep gradients and uneven surfaces can hinder accessibility. Plans to improve access include mown grass paths, seating areas, and the provision of well-edged paths to enhance wheelchair access. However, some areas will still require assistance for wheelchair users. The introduction of guided tours will help visitors navigate the island more easily. Proposed facilities like a jetty, toilets, rest areas, and shelters will be designed with accessibility in mind, following universal design principles. However, the audit acknowledges that due to the site's sensitive nature and historical significance, certain accessibility issues are unavoidable. The goal is to improve access while respecting the island's cultural, natural, and archaeological integrity.

7. Planning Assessment

The subject site is wholly located within the administrative boundary of Clare County Council and is therefore subject to the policies and objectives of the Clare County Development Plan 2023-2029 which came into effect on 20th April 2023.

7.1 Principle of Development

7.1.1 Land Use Zoning

The Clare County Development Plan (CCDP) 2023-2029 designates Inis Cealtra for tourism development, identifying the island as a major opportunity to grow the tourism industry and encourage visitors to East Clare. The plan promotes Inis Cealtra as a tourism destination and supports the sustainable expansion of tourist facilities on the island, as set out in policy objective **CDP9.27**:

It is an objective of Clare County Council:

a) To identify the tourism function of the county's islands and address the functional, planning and environmental impacts of additional visitors in order to facilitate increased access to the islands in a sensitive and appropriate manner;

..., and

e) To promote the sustainable tourism development and management of Inis Cealtra (Holy Island) as part of the overall Visitor Management and Sustainable Tourism Development Plan.

In addition, the settlement plan for Mountshannon in Volume 3c of the CCDP 2023-2029 contains objectives which promote tourism development on Inis Cealtra as follows:

To encourage a sustainable tourism industry based on the amenities of Lough Derg and Inis Cealtra (Holy Island) and the White Tailed Eagle (General Objective)

...

To work with relevant stakeholders to support the implementation of the Visitor Management and Sustainable Tourism Development Plan for Inis Cealtra (Holy Island), including the development of a visitor centre in the village (and associated facilities) (Tourism Objective)

Inis Cealtra is located outside the settlement boundary and is not zoned in the CCDP 2023-2029. Notwithstanding, the island is designated for the development of tourist facilities, reflected in the explicit policy support for sustainable tourism development, indicating that the principle of tourism development is acceptable on the subject lands, subject to the range of normal planning and environmental considerations.

Two land use zoning designations apply to the proposed Village Car Park site. The southern portion of the site is zoned Mixed Use. This zoning designation is described in the CCDP 2023-2029 as follows:

The use of land for 'mixed use' developments shall include the use of land for a range of uses, making provision, where appropriate, for primary and secondary uses e.g. commercial/retail development as the primary use with residential development as a secondary use. Secondary uses will be considered by the local authority having regard to the particular character of the given area.

On lands that have been zoned 'mixed-use' in or near town or village centres, a diverse range of day and evening uses is encouraged and an over-concentration of any one use will not normally be permitted.

The northern part of the lands is zoned Utilities (UT1) in the CCDP 2023-2029, with the following zoning objective:

UT1 is land zoned as utilities and would facilitate the provision of a car park/bus park to serve the Inis Cealtra Visitor Experience. Access should be provided for in a location which minimises the flow of traffic through/along the Main Street of the village. Any such development and areas of car parking must ensure pedestrian permeability and connectivity with the village core and the Inis Cealtra Visitor Centre.

The zoning matrix in the development plan confirms that a car park is acceptable in principle on lands zoned Mixed Use, and the UT1 zoning designation aims to facilitate a car park to serve the Inis Cealtra Visitor Experience. The development of a car park at this site is therefore permitted in principle.

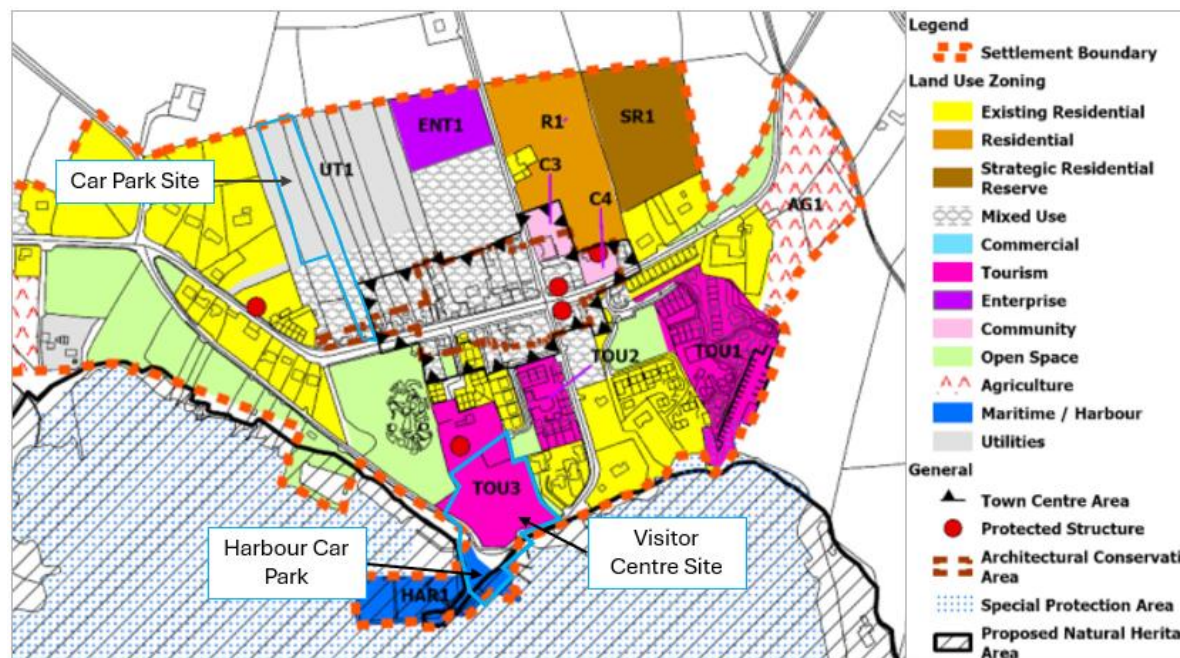


Figure 13 Extract of Mountshannon Zoning Plan (Source: CCDP 2023-2029, Vol. 3C)

The new Visitor Centre is proposed to be situated within the 'Old Rectory' site which is zoned for Tourism in accordance with the CCDP 2023-2029. The Tourism zoning objective is stated as:

Land zoned for tourism development shall be used for a range of structures and activities which are primarily designed to facilitate tourism development and where uses are mainly directed at servicing tourists/holiday makers and visiting members of the public.

It is considered the Visitor Centre incorporating a series of areas for interpretation, exhibition, and education, together with supporting spaces and ancillary café, falls within the use class of Tourism Complex which is shown as acceptable in principle in the CCDP zoning matrix.

Mountshannon Harbour including the car park area is zoned Maritime/Harbour (HAR1) in the CCDP 2023-2029, with the following zoning objective:

HAR1 incorporates the existing marina area and associated facilities and adjoining carpark area. Development compatible with the existing use of the lands and associated lakeshore for marina/harbour/recreational uses will be favourably considered in this area subject to appropriate design and environmental criteria.

The land use zoning matrix identifies a car park as an Open for Consideration use in this zone. The proposed reconfiguration of the car parking spaces and circulation area, together with public realm enhancements, is therefore acceptable in principle, being directly compatible with the existing use of the lands and adjoining maritime uses.

This proposed tourism-led development is consistent with the specific land use zoning objectives for the subject lands and tourism-related objectives in the development plan which encourage sustainable tourism development and management of Inis Cealtra. The principle of the proposed development is therefore considered acceptable, both at Inis Cealtra (Holy Island) and on the mainland in Mountshannon.

7.1.2 Tourism Development

The stated vision for County Clare in the CCDP is,

"That County Clare would develop as a place to be part of and proud of, where urban and rural communities enjoy a high quality of life, work practice choice, inclusivity and service access and so that the county is a dynamic, resilient, connected and internationally competitive location for innovation and investment and is a national leader in climate action, creativity, culture, heritage, tourism and environmental management."

Each chapter identifies a key goal supported by strategic aims and objectives to achieve this vision. Chapter 9, Tourism includes **Goal IX:**

"A county in which tourism growth continues to play a major role in its future development. A county which is the gateway to the west, delivering tourism

experiences which reflect our strong commitment to sustainability, connectivity, innovation and new approaches to doing business. A place that is globally recognised as a sustainable destination and where the benefits of tourism are spread across the county throughout the seasons."

Section 9.2.3 of the CCDP contains policy objective **CDP9.4** relates to the provision of tourism developments and tourist facilities. The policy strikes a balanced approach between promoting tourism development and protecting environmental and community interests.

It is an objective of Clare County Council:

- a) To permit tourism-related developments and facilities inside existing settlements where the scale and size of the proposed development is appropriate and in keeping with the character of the settlement, subject to normal site suitability considerations;*

Response: Within Mountshannon, the existing Rectory Site slopes steeply from south to north, rising from approximately +32.00m OD at its southern boundary to +40.00m OD at the rectory building. This change in elevation has been thoughtfully utilised in the design of the visitor centre, with its ground floor (which contains the majority of the building's accommodation, 1426 m²) set into the slope. As a result, the external ground level rises around the building from south to north. At the southern elevation, the external ground level aligns with the visitor centre's internal ground floor, while at the northern boundary, the ground level aligns with the roof terrace.

This approach allows the building to appear as a single-storey structure with "pop-ups" at the first floor visible from the harbour side. From the elevated position of the rectory, however, only the first-floor pop-ups are visible. This design strategy effectively reduces the perceived mass of the building when viewed from the rectory, helping to preserve the strong visual connection between the rectory and the lake below.



Plate 18 Proposed Visitor Centre view from Rectory south towards Lough Derg

- b) To permit tourism-related developments outside of settlements where there is a clear need for the specific location and the benefits to the local community are balanced with any potential environmental impact;*

Response: In the case of the proposed development for tourism access to Inis Cealtra, access to the island is one of the most significant challenges that must be addressed in this proposed development.

Currently, the primary access points are from Mountshannon and Knockaphort. However, Knockaphort is deemed unsuitable for future expansion due to several key issues: concerns regarding embarkation safety, a lack of essential infrastructure (such as parking, lighting, communications, water, and waste facilities), and limitations related to road access to the quay. These challenges highlight the importance of careful planning to ensure that access to the island is safe, sustainable, and minimally disruptive to the environment and the island's historical and archaeological significance.

In response to these challenges, the proposed development provides only the minimum facilities necessary to ensure the health and safety of both visitors and staff, as well as the management and protection of the island. The infrastructure improvements are specifically designed to minimise any negative impact on Inis Cealtra's archaeological, natural, and cultural heritage.

Once operational there will be a cap on the maximum visitor numbers, in line with limits of acceptable change in the research for the Visitor Management and Sustainable Development Plan which informed the Clare County Development Plan.

To align with best international practice, only the minimal physical interventions are envisaged, particularly in the monument area of the island, with the focus remaining on safety and the protection of the island's cultural and natural assets.

- c) To ensure that development of new or enhanced tourism infrastructure and facilities include an assessment of the environmental sensitivities of the area including an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA); Appropriate Assessment (AA) and Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA) if required in order to avoid adverse impacts on the receiving environment;*

Response: The application includes an EIAR, Information to Inform AA Screening, a Natura Impact Statement and Site-Specific Flood Risk Assessments. These environmental assessments confirm that the site and its environs have capacity to absorb the proposed development without significant environmental adverse effects.

- d) To work with the relevant authorities to develop specific monitoring protocols for visitor pressure on the county's natural, archaeological and built heritage asset and to ensure that tourism activities are maintained within sustainable limits for the European sites in the county.*

Response:

The proposed development acknowledges the importance of managing tourism activities within sustainable limits, particularly for European sites.

The **EIAR** for the proposed development includes monitoring proposals where required, and these protocols will be rigorously adhered to. These monitoring measures are designed to assess and mitigate any potential impacts on the environment, heritage assets, and surrounding areas, in line with best practice standards.

Additionally, the bespoke **Landscape & Conservation Management Plan** and the **Visitor Management Plan** integrates a comprehensive monitoring and management system. This system is designed to track visitor numbers and impacts and ensure that the development operates in alignment with Leave No Trace principles, promoting responsible tourism. These systems will be continually reviewed and adjusted as needed to ensure that tourism activities remain sustainable and do not compromise the integrity of the site's natural, archaeological, and built heritage.

Implementing these measures will ensure that the development is in harmony with the surrounding environment and heritage, providing a sustainable and enriching experience for future generations.

7.2 Tourism Objectives for East Clare

Section 9.2.7 refers to Ireland's Hidden Heartlands. It is stated that Work is progressing on unlocking the potential of this extended region through two transformational projects which are designed to capitalise on the growth in 'slow tourism'. These include the development of the River Shannon and the lakes as a long-distance corridor for water-based activity.

In this context, it is important to highlight that the proposed development at Inis Cealtra includes a canoe launch jetty with an access ramp. This facility is specifically designed to support the growing interest in water-based activities, providing a safe and accessible launch point for kayaks and canoes. This complements the broader vision for the River Shannon corridor by enhancing the visitor experience and facilitating eco-friendly, slow tourism activities on the water. Therefore, this proposed development will not only support sustainable tourism but also encourage greater appreciation of the natural and cultural heritage of the area, contributing to the overall growth and diversification of tourism in Ireland's Hidden Heartlands.

Section 9.3.3 of the CCDP identifies that East Clare boasts diverse tourism resources, particularly along Lough Derg, with significant growth potential through initiatives like the Ireland's Hidden Heartlands and the Shannon Tourism Masterplan (2020–2030).

It is stated that The County Clare Tourism Strategy 2030 highlights fragmentation in the tourism sector, particularly between East Clare and the western/northern parts of the county. To address this, the Council plans to develop a gateway visitor facility in Mountshannon as part of the Inis Cealtra

Visitor Management and Sustainable Tourism Development Plan. Additionally, opportunities exist to expand niche tourism offerings in the region, including bird watching, water sports, wellness, spa facilities, and agri-tourism.

The specific objective for this geographical area is **CDP9.23**.

Development Plan Objective: Tourism in East Clare	
CDP9.23	<p>It is an objective of Clare County Council:</p> <p>a) To support East Clare as a tourism destination and promote the tourism assets of the area including Ireland's Lakelands, greenways, blueways, the Munster Vales, Brú na Bóinne and the Ireland's Hidden Heartlands tourism experience;</p> <p>b) To work with relevant stakeholders to implement the <i>Inis Cealtra (Holy Island) Visitor Management and Sustainable Tourism Development Plan</i> including the development of an associated visitor centre in Mountshannon;</p> <p>c) To promote the Lough Derg (on the Shannon) Heritage and Nature Trail, the work of the Lough Derg Marketing Strategy Group and other future initiatives that enhance established attractions and work to promote Lough Derg and the surrounding area as a tourism destination;</p> <p>d) To facilitate sustainable marina developments and associated amenities at appropriate locations inside and outside of settlements along Lough Derg and other lake areas;</p> <p>e) To develop and enhance tourism products, in particular sustainable and eco-tourism;</p> <p>f) To facilitate and encourage the development of new and expanded outdoor activities in East Clare such as canoeing, water sports, bird watching, mountain-biking and walking trails and to develop links to complementary facilities;</p> <p>g) To promote Lough Derg and the Slieve Aughty region as a tourism location and to develop a series of viewing points in the area;</p> <p>h) To promote wellness and self-development facilities; spa and health complexes and agri-tourism enterprises;</p> <p>i) To support the upgrade of the amenity facilities in the Ballycuggaran area;</p> <p>j) To facilitate the investigation of historical sites in East Clare containing the remains of a complex of blast furnaces and iron foundries;</p> <p>k) To support the development of a footpath/walking route around Lough Derg, linking Killaloe to Tuamgraney and Mountshannon;</p> <p>l) To promote the implementation of the <i>Tourism Masterplan for the Shannon 2020–2030</i>.</p> <p>m) To encourage the development of additional visitor accommodation and food and beverage offering in East Clare.</p> <p>n) To support the identification of potential upgrades or new public transport routes and greenways to encourage sustainable tourism options for visitors to East Clare.</p>

This proposed development forms part of the implementation of this Development Plan objective. It will enhance the tourism offering in East Clare and delivers the following specific objectives of the Inis Cealtra Visitor Management and Sustainable Tourism Development Plan which were developed to achieve the Recommendations that flowed from the Plan which are:

- *Visitor numbers can, and should, be increased to bring more tourism, and socioeconomic benefits, to the local region. There is capacity to increase the numbers of visitors significantly, while ensuring protection of the built and natural heritage of the island within the context of a number of management strategies and new facilities.*
- *The rich heritage and history of the site is of such importance that it justifies broadening access to it for more visitors. It is important that such a significant example of our cultural heritage will be shared beyond those currently familiar with it.*
- *In order to increase visitor numbers, specific amenities must be provided to allow effective management of such growth in numbers.*
- *A visitor facility is required as a gateway to receive, inform and filter access to the island. This should comprise high quality facilities for visitors. Without significant investment in such a facility, the island cannot withstand the impact of increased visitor numbers, nor could the whole experience be considered to be of the quality expected of comparable historical site destinations nationally and internationally.*
- *Some new facilities to enhance the visitor experience, provide ease of access, safety and information on the island's heritage, will be needed on the island. These will be the minimum facilities necessary to allow the growth of visitor numbers*

that a site of such cultural value deserves and could absorb. However, to preserve the authenticity and ambience of the island, more elaborate facilities will have to be provided off site. Having considered a number of alternatives, it is regarded that Mountshannon is the most fitting location to receive and manage a new visitor centre; it is the lakeshore village closest to the island, has a deep cultural connection to it and has enough infrastructure potential to accommodate an increase in visitors. The local area would also benefit greatly from increased tourism economy at this location

Of the 28 Objectives set out in the Plan, the proposed development would deliver on 13 of them. It is noted that the site for the visitor centre outlined in Objective 5 was not available for development and so the location is within the Old Rectory site which the Council was able to acquire.

Developing two interpretive centres on the same site in the village will not lead to conflicts, as there is a wide range of exhibitions and themes associated with Mountshannon that are showcase worthy. The existing Part VIII approval for the Old Rectory (Ref. 238001), which is well advanced with an expected completion in Q1 2025, involves modifying and extending a Protected Structure to provide a modest amount of exhibition and education space (127 sq.m), along with a café (55 sq.m) and a office (11sq.m). According to the **Visitor Management** Plan included under separate cover, the Old Rectory Interpretive Centre's capacity is 31 visitors at any one time with a predicted max 45-minute dwell time, resulting in approx. 372 visitors in the high season, an annual total of 54,436 visitors.

In the opening year, 2028, of the full Phase 1 infrastructure, the Old Rectory is predicted to attract 20,000 visitors per year, and this is predicted to rise to approximately 40,000 visitors in 2033 and over 50,000 in 2038. The latter will trigger a funding event for the Visitor Centre which is expected to have a 3–5-year lead time. In the opening year the total number of visitors per annum is predicted to be 55,000 rising to 75,000 after 5-years.

As set out above, the Old Rectory Interpretative Centre does not have the capacity for the visitor numbers that are anticipated to occur after 15-years in operation. The proposed new Visitor Centre will complement, rather than conflict with, the Old Rectory's use. The area has a rich array of history, folklore, natural heritage (such as the White-tailed Sea Eagle project), and literary significance (e.g. Edna O'Brien) that can be highlighted through both centres. The distinct themes and exhibitions at each centre will ensure they work together to enhance the visitor experience.

Objective 3

To have primary visitor access to the island via a ferry from a new visitor centre on the mainland with a small access charge, and to allow the local community continue accessing the island free of charge with established local tourism businesses using a discounted permit system.

Objective 4

To procure a new visitor centre on the mainland to serve the needs of visitors seeking to learn more about the island.

Objective 5

To develop the new visitor centre for Inis Cealtra at the south end of the community park in Mountshannon (site 2) with views to the island and access from the main street via the Aistear park. Alternative options assessed for the development of a visitor centre, including the Old Rectory and the Aistear Centre, can be explored further should the new-build option prove unfeasible.

Objective 6

To engage a professional interpretation design company to design and develop an interpretative experience for the visitor centre, taking account of the wealth of academic, social and anecdotal information assembled in this Plan (including Appendix 2).

Objective 7

To provide a new visitor centre which may include a range of services and facilities for visitors, including audio visual auditorium, exhibition, visitor information and ticketing, café, retail, toilets, meeting rooms, spiritual space, pilgrim traveller facilities, connection to ferry point and drop off points with limited parking facilities.

Objective 8

To have access across the lake to Inis Cealtra from Mountshannon.

Objective 9

To construct a new landing facility at a location that allows both a safe passage to and safe landing and embarkation on/from the island. This will become the main landing point for visitors to the island.

Objective 10

To introduce new visitor facilities on Inis Cealtra comprising pathways around monuments and the island, suitable orientation signage, new pods to provide for emergency, toileting and staff facilities, wastewater management, benches and improved landing points for kayaks.

Objective 11

To remove, or if necessary relocate, the OPW shed and wooden fencing and let the shed's functions be served by one of the new 'pods' which will provide spaces necessary to meet a minimum level of accommodation required of a public facility with employees.

Objective 12

To develop an Accessibility Plan that facilitates accessing the monuments, protecting their condition and preserving the character and ambience of the setting.

Objective 13

To install a sustainable natural toilet system on the island.

Objective 14

To limit impacts on archaeology, ecology and the character of Inis Cealtra, the island will be closed to visitors during winter and at any other time the maximum numbers of visitors will not be exceeded.

Objective 20

To develop a landscape management plan in consultation with an archaeologist, an ecologist and an agricultural consultant or farmer, and to include active management of vegetation by sheep.

7.3 Mountshannon Objectives

Volume 3C (Interim Version, April 2023) of the CCDP establishes specific objectives for Mountshannon settlement.

7.3.3 General Objectives

The General Objectives for the village that are relevant to the proposed development.

- To promote the consolidation of the existing villages through brownfield reuse/redevelopment and compact growth within the identified land use zoning to support existing services, whilst retaining its existing character;
- To ensure that existing permanent population levels and services are maintained and expanded;
- To ensure that future growth is balanced and sustainable and is relative and appropriate to the function, scale, size and character of the existing village;

- To encourage a sustainable tourism industry based on the amenities of Lough Derg and Inis Cealtra (Holy Island);
- To encourage further retail, tourism and commercial development;
- To encourage developments that will provide services for both visitors to the area and the local population in order to generate year-round activity and employment in the area.

The proposed development in Mountshannon will significantly contribute to the local economy and support the village's tourism infrastructure. This development will create a variety of new jobs, helping to enhance the area's employment opportunities. Specific roles will include:

- Interpretive Centre Staff: Personnel to manage and run the interpretive centre, providing visitors with insights into the local heritage, culture, and natural environment.
- Bookings and Administration: Staff to handle bookings for tours, boat trips, and other activities, as well as general administrative support for the tourism centre.
- Shop and Café Staff: Employees to operate the proposed shop and café, providing visitors with a welcoming space for refreshments, local goods, and souvenirs.
- Tour Guides: Local tour guides to offer informative and engaging experiences for visitors, showcasing the unique heritage and natural beauty of the area.
- Boat Operators: Skilled boat operators will be needed to facilitate water-based activities, enhancing access to Inis Cealtra and the surrounding waterways.
- Managerial and Financial Roles: Management and financial staff will ensure the smooth operation of the centre, handling the day-to-day operations, budgeting, and financial oversight.

Overall, the proposed development will create a range of jobs, enhance the village's tourism capacity, and provide the necessary infrastructure to support sustainable growth in the area.

7.3.4 Tourism Objectives

Volume 3C also includes Tourism Objectives, for Mountshannon, and the following are relevant to this proposed development.

- To consolidate the existing village, support the tourism industry in the area and encourage the development and enhancement of a range of amenities and services for both permanent residents in the village and surrounding hinterland as well as visitors to the area.

The proposed new car park off the main street in Mountshannon will have significant benefits for both the village's public realm and its overall safety. By providing dedicated parking outside the main thoroughfare, the development will help reduce traffic congestion in the village centre, creating a more pedestrian-friendly environment. This will allow for a

safer space for residents and visitors to walk, explore, and enjoy the area without the constant presence of vehicles.

The decision to site the visitor centre clustered with the old rectory next to the public park, aligns with the principles of consolidating the village. This strategic location enhances the village's character and identity by focusing development around existing historical and communal landmarks, rather than expanding into surrounding areas.

By positioning the visitor centre near the harbour and adjacent to the Old Rectory, the development fosters a cohesive sense of place, integrating key heritage sites with new tourism infrastructure. This approach supports the village core by attracting visitors to a accessible location, where they can explore both the natural environment and the rich history of the area in a compact, well-connected space.

Moreover, clustering the visitor centre with the Old Rectory and the public park helps to strengthen the community fabric by reinforcing the connection between the village's historical sites and modern amenities. It also ensures that tourism development complements the existing village structure rather than sprawling outward, preserving the charm and integrity of the village while offering modern facilities for residents and visitors alike.

The area in front of the new Visitor Centre, directly in front of its main façade, has been designed as a new public realm space. The generous size of this area will create a comfortable and welcoming environment for both locals and tourists. It will serve multiple purposes, providing a place for people to wait while boarding a boat, to gather after returning from the island, or simply to relax and enjoy refreshments from the café. This thoughtfully designed area will foster a sense of community and contribute to the village's vibrant atmosphere, offering a flexible space that can be enjoyed by all.

This location supports the sustainable growth of the village by making efficient use of existing infrastructure and enhancing the local economy without compromising the village's character or natural surroundings. It encourages both tourism and local engagement, helping to create a vibrant, consolidated community hub.

7.3.5 Transport, Active Travel and Connectivity Objectives

Maximising travel by public transport to tourism destinations offers significant advantages in terms of sustainability, climate change mitigation, and improving air quality. The Development Plan clearly reflects an intention to prioritise and support public transport options as part of a broader strategy for sustainable tourism development. This focus on public transport aligns with best practices in responsible tourism, contributing to a reduction

in the environmental impact of visitor travel while promoting a more sustainable and eco-friendly tourism model.

Specifically in relation to Mountshannon the CCDP identifies that,

Bus Eireann provides a Saturday Service from Limerick to Mountshannon and the expansion of the bus service would greatly support the tourism product in the area and would provide a valuable alternative to the private car for local residents, encouraging a modal shift to a more sustainable transport option. TFI Local Link Limerick Clare provide two bus services from Mountshannon, the C1 Scarriff-Whitegate on Saturdays and the C2 Scarriff-Whitegate (Monday to Fridays)..."

Similar to all major tourist attractions it is reasonable to expect that a high proportion will arrive by coach and or will look to travel by public transport. The **Traffic & Transport Assessment** submitted with this application concludes as follows,

"the operational effect of the proposed development on traffic and transportation will be not significant negative to slight negative, and long term to permanent."

It is however noted that maximising travel by public transport is

The Plan states that:

"Any proposed development on zoned lands identified in the plan will be required to demonstrate how they contribute to enhanced permeability and connectivity within the village, to the village core, local services, amenities and the national school as appropriate."

The proposed village car park located to the north of Mountshannon's main street is strategically positioned to draw visitors through the village's main street, encouraging foot traffic and helping to connect the car park with the village's central areas. A direct pedestrian connection is created from the northern side of the rectory site, where the majority of visitors will approach the building. Visitors will follow a path that runs through Aistear Park, linking the car park to the visitor centre.

This path leads from the entrance point at the northern boundary of the rectory site, descending to the roof terrace of the building, continuing over the terrace, and then descending further to the lower harbour level. This can be accessed via the new grand external staircase, a new externally accessible lift inside the building, or a gently sloped route in the landscape, ensuring easy access for all visitors.

In this way, the building will serve as a gateway for visitors, connecting their main point of arrival in the car park with Lough Derg and Inis Cealtra, and offering a seamless experience that integrates the village, the harbour, and the surrounding natural and cultural attractions. The design not only enhances visitor access but also encourages exploration of the village, promoting a vibrant connection between the car park, the main street, and the wider area.

7.3.6 View Objectives

It is stated that:

“The lakefront area affords views from land to water which need to be protected from unnecessary obstructions, structures or clutter. Where structures or objects are required they must be carefully screened to ensure that there will be no negative visual impact or depreciation of the lakeside views.”

The building’s height, form and massing, particularly the middle break in the façade, and punctuation of windows, allows it to address the harbour without being overly assertive.

The roof terrace of the building will be a publicly- accessible terrace that will be level with the external ground level to the north of the building and can be accessed at this point. Visitors can move around this terrace, between the two- storey volumes which pop up from the floor below and out to its south-western edge, where they will have elevated views back out over the water towards Inis Cealtra.

This application is accompanied by a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment and a comprehensive suite of photomontages and together they demonstrate that there will be no negative visual impact to this setting.

7.3.7 Mountshannon Harbour Area Objectives

The Plan states:

“Development compatible with the existing use of the lands and associated lakeshore for marina/harbour/recreational uses will be favourably considered in this area subject to appropriate design and environmental criteria. Any development within the Harbour will require a habitat and species survey and an ecological assessment which will inform the screening for appropriate assessment. Any development must take full account of the integrity, scale and character of the rural landscape, rural settlement, and visual amenity (both to and from the harbour area). Any development must adhere to the requirements of the Water Framework Directive and the Shannon International River Basin Management Plan.”

The reconfiguration of the existing carpark at the harbour will significantly enhance the amenity and aesthetic value of this area. The Biodiversity and Water chapters of the EIAR, the AA Screening Report and NIS include an assessment of this this area and should be referenced.

7.3.8 Flood Risk Objective

It is noted that a Strategic Flood Risk Assessment was carried out as part of the preparation of the CCDP plan. The SFRA in Volume 10(c) states development must be in accordance with Section 5.28 of ‘The Planning System and Flood Risk Management Guidelines for Planning Authorities’ (2009).

In addition, Objective 2.6 of the CCDP requires proposals for development in areas where there is a risk of flooding to have regard to ‘The Planning System and Flood Risk Management – Guidelines for Planning Authorities 2009’.

A **Flood Risk Assessment** prepared by MWP accompanies for development at Mountshannon and Inis Celatra accompanies this application. It concludes that:

"The flood risk assessment identified that elements of the project is within Flood Zone A & B as defined in the Flood Risk Management Guidelines. The proposed uses are justified based on existing zoning, existing use and the SFRA conducted for the County Development Plan. The primary flood source to the project will be from fluvial sources due to its proximity to Lough Derg."

A separate **Flood Risk Assessment for the Jetty** at Inis Cealtra prepared by Tobin Consulting Engineers is included with the application. It concludes that

"With reference to the PSFRM guidelines, the proposed development is comprised of "water compatible" (jetty) elements.

The subject site is not expected to be at risk of coastal flooding due to its large distance inland from coastal waters.

Jetties are considered water compatible and therefore allowed in any flood zone.

Given the relatively small size of the jetty compared to the vast area of Lough Derg, as well as the lakes relatively calm nature with minimal wave action, it is estimated that the proposed breakwater jetty will not significantly impact flood risk elsewhere. Therefore, the risk of fluvial flooding to the subject site is very low.

Pluvial mapping was published as part of PFRA mapping and indicated that the subject site is not liable to pluvial flooding.

The jetty will be designed to ensure that pluvial water flows off efficiently, preventing water ponding and minimizing residual risks associated with extreme pluvial flood events. Therefore, the risk of pluvial flooding to the subject site is very low.

The surface water flood risk to the proposed jetty will be removed due to its ability to rise and fall with the water levels within the lake

Based on the results of this flood risk assessment, it is estimated that the risk of flooding to the proposed development will be minimal, and that the development will not increase the risk of flooding elsewhere."

Landscape & Visual Amenity

The sites of the proposed Visitor Centre and car park sit within the Mountshannon settlement boundary and the designated Heritage Landscape of the Clare CDP 2023-2029 as seen in the extract of the mapping of Areas of Special Control in the following Figure.

Inis Cealtra and other islands are included in this designation, which is reinforced by the identification of scenic routes along the R352 from Mountshannon heading towards Scarriff and Tuamgraney. The scenic route designation continues in a loop to the south of Lough Derg, along the R463 to Ogonnelloe.

The shorelines around Lough Derg are therefore environmentally, culturally, and visually sensitive. The designation is described as follows in the CDP 2023-2029:

iii. Heritage Landscapes – areas where natural and cultural heritage are given priority and where development is not precluded but happens more slowly and carefully.

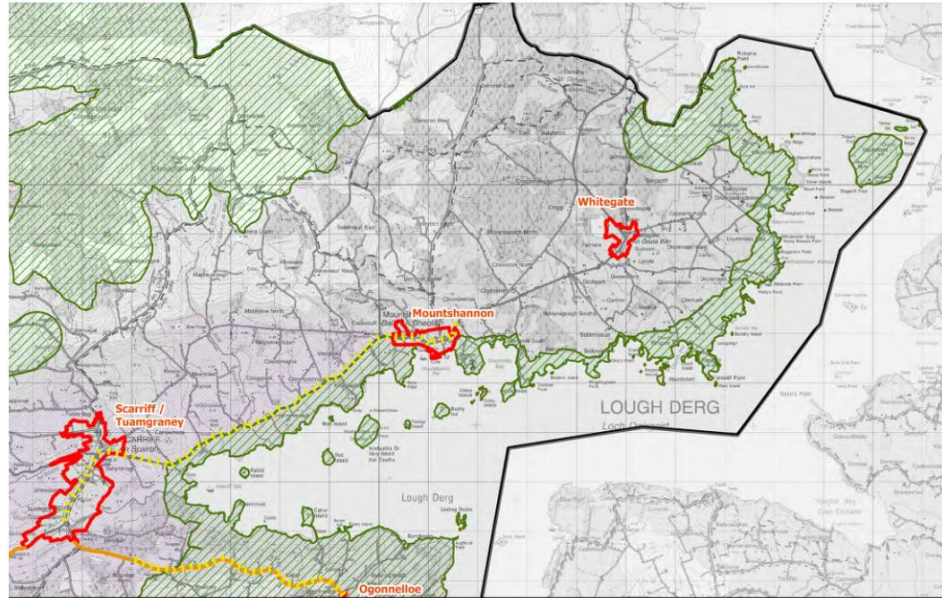


Figure 14 Areas of Special Control Map from the Clare CDP 2023-2029

The mapping of Landscape Designations across the county shows the context of this heritage designation in combination with scenic views being typical of shoreline areas.

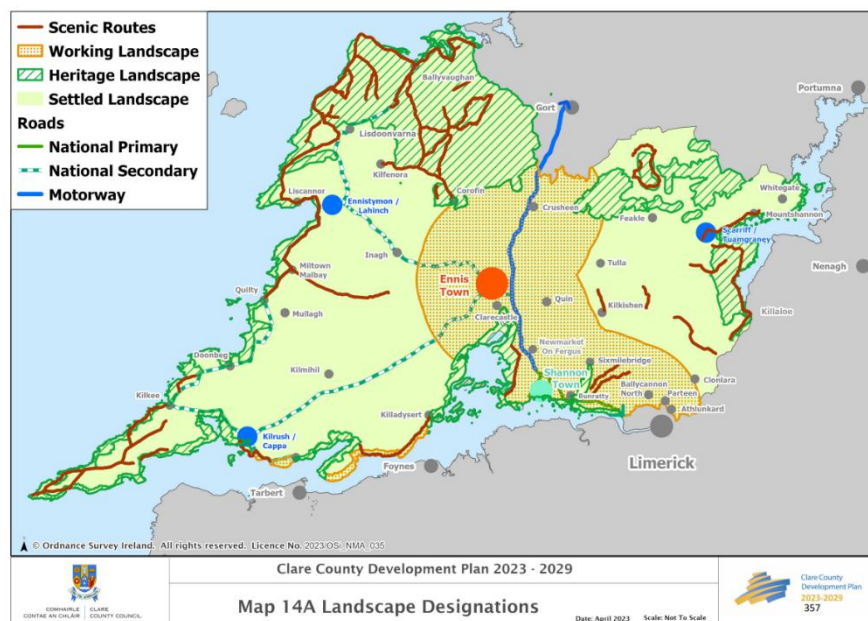


Figure 15 Landscape Designations

Protected scenic routes continue into County Tipperary, along the R494 as and along smaller shoreline roads. Across these distances, it can be difficult to identify Inis Cealtra among the other islands and indentations of the shoreline. However, the round tower is a distinct landmark that helps distinguish the island.

It is an Objective **(14.7)** of the CCDP to:

- To protect sensitive areas from inappropriate development while providing for development and change that will benefit the rural community;
- To ensure that proposed developments take into consideration their effects on views from the public road towards scenic features or areas and
- To ensure that appropriate standards of location, siting, design, finishing and landscaping are achieved.

The **Landscape & Visual Assessment** presented in the EIAR assesses the impact of the proposed development on the landscape and the visual amenity. It includes an assessment of 29 viewpoints with both near and far ranges, these are presented as verified views in the application.

In summary, the assessment of the impact of the proposed development on the landscape and views post mitigation for the operational phase is as follows. Note, this information is extracted from the LVIA.

The following Table summarises the identified likely residual significant effects during the operational phase of the proposed development post mitigation. Notably, the quality of the effect on the landscape is for all three areas assessed as positive.

Likely Significant Effect	Quality	Significance	Extent	Probability	Duration	Type
Inis Cealtra						
Landscape	positive	profound/high	local	likely	long term	Residual
Visual	neutral to positive	high/moderate	local	likely	long term	Residual
Car Park						
Landscape	positive	slight/moderate	local	likely	long term	Residual
Visual	neutral	moderate	local	likely	long term	Residual
Visitor Centre						
Landscape	positive	High/moderate	local	likely	long term	Residual
Visual	neutral to positive	moderate	local	likely	long term	Residual

Table 9 Summary of Landscape & Visual Operational Phase Effects Post Mitigation

The following Table summarises the identified visual effects during the operational phases from each of the 29 no. viewpoints. Importantly, there is no likely significant negative effect identified from any of the locations.

Table 10 Summary of Effects on 29 no. viewpoints

View	Location	Sensitivity	Magnitude of Change	Operational Stage Significance & Quality
1	Mountshannon	low	medium	moderate and neutral
2	Mountshannon	very high	negligible	slight
3	Mountshannon	low	high	moderate and positive
4	Mountshannon	high	low	moderate and neutral
5	Mountshannon	medium	low	moderate and neutral
6	Mountshannon	medium/high	high	high and positive
7	Mountshannon	medium	low	moderate/slight & neutral
8	Mountshannon	medium	negligible	slight & neutral (not visible)
9	Lough Derg	high	negligible	slight/not significant (imperceptible)
10	Lough Derg	high	negligible	slight/not significant (imperceptible)
11	Lough Derg	medium	negligible	slight/not significant (imperceptible)
12	Lough Derg	medium	negligible	slight and neutral
13	Lough Derg	medium	negligible	slight and neutral
14	Lough Derg	medium/high	negligible	moderate/slight (imperceptible) & neutral
15	Lough Derg	very high	negligible	moderate/slight (imperceptible) & neutral
16	Lough Derg	very high	negligible	moderate/slight (imperceptible) & neutral
17	Lough Derg	very high	negligible	moderate/slight (imperceptible) & neutral
18	Inis Cealtra	very high	negligible	moderate/slight (not visible)

View	Location	Sensitivity	Magnitude of Change	Operational Stage Significance & Quality
19	Inis Cealtra	medium	negligible	slight (imperceptible) and neutral
20	Inis Cealtra	very high	negligible	moderate/slight (not visible)
21	Inis Cealtra	very high	negligible	moderate/slight (not visible)
22	Inis Cealtra	medium/high	low	moderate & positive
23	Inis Cealtra	high	low	moderate to slight & neutral
24	Inis Cealtra	very high	low	moderate and neutral
25	Inis Cealtra	high	low	moderate/slight and neutral
26	Inis Cealtra	high	negligible	moderate/slight (not visible)
27	Inis Cealtra	very high	negligible	moderate/slight & positive
28 ¹	Mountshannon	high	low	moderate & neutral
29	Mountshannon	high	low	moderate & neutral

7.4 Cultural Heritage (Built & Archaeology)

The design of the infrastructure has been carefully guided by the existing built heritage, and archaeological considerations. The proposed development strikes a balance between protecting these valuable assets and fulfilling the objectives outlined in the Inis Cealtra Visitor Management and Sustainable Tourism Development Plan. Every aspect of the design has been developed with the aim of minimising heritage impacts while enhancing the visitor experience, ensuring that the cultural integrity of the proposed development site is preserved for future generations.

The location of the visitor centre within the site is cognisant of the Old Rectory, a Protected Structure. The parcel of the proposed development site slopes up relatively steeply from south to north. This level change has been exploited by setting the ground floor of the visitor centre back into the site so that the external ground level rises around the building as it moves

¹ It is noted that the pedestrian crossing shown on the proposed photomontage relates to development that will be undertaken as part of a Section 38 Development approval identified in Section 3.

from south to north. This means that the external ground level is level with the internal ground floor of the visitor centre along its front elevation to the south, while the external ground level is level with the roof terrace level along its northern boundary. This allows the building to read as a single storey building with 'pop- us' at first floor from the harbour side, while from the elevated level of the Old Rectory, only the first-floor pop- ups will be visible. This strategy helps to reduce the massing of the building when seen from the elevated position of the Protected Structure helping to retain the strong visual connection between the rectory and the lake below.

As the Alternatives Chapter of the EIAR sets out, the location and design of the jetty on Inis Cealtra was guided by the baseline archaeological environment.

Similarly, the locations of the three pods near the jetty is away from the most sensitive archaeological areas identified in the surveys and within an area that has already been disturbed by development.

The formalised approach proposed to managing visitors will have a positive impact on cultural heritage. It will reverse the current arrangement where visitors can traverse the island freely and this will mitigate the existing risk to cultural heritage and ecology on the island.

The Built Heritage Chapter (13) contained within the EIAR concludes as follows,

"The assessment concludes that the most direct impact to the cultural heritage - Built Heritage lies in the construction of the new jetty at the north-west side of the island. The impact is considered however to be low, as the construction of the stone and concrete jetty here in the 19th century or earlier will have resulted in the removal of any earlier material if such was present.

The assessment concludes that the impact to the Built Heritage from increased visitor numbers will be positive. An assessment of remediation of more recent and inappropriate intervention to the Built Heritage of Inis Cealtra lies outside the remit of this assessment, but several examples are noted in the extensive documentation prepared by O' Leary et al (2017). These include the use of cementitious flashing and mortar on several of the churches, and rusting wire used to hold the apex of a plaque in place, chipped and damaged stone with poor repairs.

Increased visitor numbers will result in the presence of staff on the island, to inform and guide the visitors, to maintain the landscape and in part improve it with additional planting of native species and removal of the encroaching scrub. Proposals for the maintenance and improvement of the landscape are outlined in the Landscape and Conservation Management Plan.

Establishment of improved visitor facilities, both in Mountshannon and on Inis Cealtra, will bring increased awareness of this important island monastic site, which ranks in significance with sites such as Clonmacnoise and Glendalough. Renewed focus on Inis Cealtra will result in an increase of research and study of this important resource."

The Archaeology Chapter (14) contained within the EIAR concludes as follows,

"The assessment concludes that the most direct impact to the cultural heritage and archaeological heritage lies in the construction of the new jetty at the north-west side of the island. The impact is considered however to be low, as the construction of the stone and concrete jetty here in the 19th century or earlier will have resulted in the removal of any earlier material if such was present.

The assessment concludes that the pods are to be located in an area of very low archaeological significance, with only either naturally deposited sands or hillwash present, and other soils with modern material throughout present. The foundations for the pods are a series of screw piles, which will have minimal impact on underlying deposits."

7.5 Ecology

The application includes an AA Screening Report, an NIS and the Biodiversity Chapter (10) of the EIAR.

The conclusion of the biodiversity chapter states,

"Provided that the Proposed Development is constructed and operated in accordance with the design, best practice and mitigation measures stipulated, significant residual effects on biodiversity are not anticipated on any Important Ecological Feature (IEF) at any scale.

The application of mitigation and protection measures throughout the construction and operational phases will ensure that no significant residual impacts will arise from the project, either alone or in combination with other plans or projects."

Managing access to the island as proposed will have a positive impact on biodiversity by regulating visitor access and preventing the current unhindered access that can harm the delicate ecosystem. By implementing controlled access, the development will reduce potential disturbances to wildlife, protect sensitive habitats, and prevent environmental degradation. This approach will allow for more sustainable visitation, ensuring that both the natural environment and biodiversity are preserved while still offering a high-quality experience for visitors. Such measures are essential for maintaining the ecological balance of the island for future generations.

7.6 Parking

The parking standards in the CCDP outline the number of parking spaces required for new developments. It is stated that,

"The principal objective of defining parking standards is to ensure that in assessing development proposals appropriate consideration is given to the accommodation of vehicles attracted to the site within the context of the promotion of modal shift to more sustainable forms of transport. The Council's car parking standards have also been informed by the NPF which requires a strong focus on consolidating growth within existing built-up areas, strengthening our urban centres and improving public transport, permeability and accessibility. The standards have also been informed by the 'Sustainable Urban Housing: Design Standards for New Apartments – Guidelines for Planning Authorities' (December 2020) including SPPR 8."

Table A3 sets out the requirements but there is no specific category for tourism developments. In these cases, the CCDP states,

"In the case of any development type not listed in Table A3, the Planning Authority will determine the parking requirement having regard to the traffic and movement generation associated with the development and other objectives contained in the Plan;"

Response: The proposed village car park incorporates 169 car parking spaces, six coach/bus parking spaces and 40 no. bicycle parking spaces. The 169 car parking spaces include 11 accessible spaces, 105 standard spaces and 53 overflow spaces. EV charging points will be provided for 20% of the car parking spaces.

The car park has been designed to accommodate sufficient parking for the projected staff and visitor numbers (see **Visitor Management Plan**), considering that full capacity will not be required year-round, with a split between permanent and overflow parking.

Access to the car park will be restricted by barrier out of hours, prohibiting overnight parking.

"Large areas of car parking should be accompanied by a landscaping plan to mitigate the visual impact of same;"

Response: A Landscape Masterplan prepared by Mitchell & Associates accompanies this application.

"All bicycle parking spaces must be secure."

Response: The proposed bicycle parking is Sheffield Stands. This typology was chosen as it provides optimal security. Unlike traditional stands that only allow a user to lock the wheels to the frame, this stand allows the user to secure the entire bike, preventing thieves from detaching the wheels and stealing the frame. Made from hot-dip galvanised steel, it is highly durable and resistant to rust, ensuring long-lasting protection even in outdoor conditions.

"In non-residential developments, 5% of car parking spaces provided should be set aside for disabled car parking."

Response: 11 of the proposed 169 spaces are designed for disabled access, being 6.5% of the total.

"Where the nature of a particular development is likely to generate a demand for higher levels of disabled car parking, the Planning Authority may require a higher proportion of parking for this purpose. Disabled car parking spaces should be located as close as possible to the building entrance points and allocated and suitably signposted for convenient access;"

In non-residential developments, 10% of car parking spaces should be set aside for parent and child car parking. Parent and child parking spaces should be provided as close as reasonably possible to the building entrance points and should be allocated and suitably signposted for convenient access;"

Age Friendly car parking spaces should generally be provided, where possible, in all developments. These parking spaces should be located as close as possible to the building entrance points and allocated and suitably signposted for convenient access”

Response: The reorganisation of the existing parking at the harbour provides additional spaces that facilitating convenient access to the proposed visitor centre.

“In town centre locations, in mixed use development proposals, consideration will be given to dual parking usage, where peak times do not coincide;”

Response: It is proposed that the village car park will be used by tourist and the general public i.e. it will not be exclusive to the Inis Cealtra experience. In this way the use of this infrastructure will be maximised.

8. Conclusion

In conclusion, Clare County Council (the applicant) aims to deliver a high-quality, immersive visitor experience, including a Visitor Centre and supporting services in Mountshannon, alongside essential infrastructure and facilities on Inis Cealtra. The project will preserve the island’s monuments, improve accessibility while respecting its sensitivities, and stimulate the local economy.

As part of the Inis Cealtra Visitor Management and Sustainable Tourism Development Plan, the development of a new visitor facility in Mountshannon will enhance the tourism offering in East Clare and contribute to the wider Ireland’s Hidden Heartlands area.

This well-designed tourism project will promote and protect the sense of place in Mountshannon and Inis Cealtra by celebrating local heritage, respecting the environment, and creating economic opportunities for residents. By focusing on sustainability, cultural preservation, and community involvement, tourism can become a driver of positive change, enhancing the authenticity and attractiveness of the area for both locals and visitors. This will ensure the long-term viability of the region while aligning with key national policy objectives.

This Planning Statement demonstrates that the proposed development aligns with relevant national, regional, and local planning policies. Given the zoning objectives, as well as the design, layout, and scale of the development, it is considered that the proposed project will enhance placemaking and local amenities in Mountshannon and support the growth of the tourism sector in the East Clare region. Therefore, the proposed development is consistent with the proper planning and sustainable development of the region.

