

ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE IMPACT ASSESSMENT
PROPOSED COMMUNITY HUB EXTENSION
to
THE FORMER METHODIST CHAPEL / ICA HALL,
PATRICK STREET, DURROW, CO. LAOIS.



Street elevation

On the instructions of
LAOIS COUNTY COUNCIL
in partnership with
DURROW DEVELOPMENT FORUM CLG

BLUETT & O'DONOGHUE

PROJECT MANAGEMENT ARCHITECTURE ENGINEERING BUILT HERITAGE PLANNING FORENSICS

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**THE FORMER METHODIST CHAPEL / ICA HALL,
PATRICK STREET, DURROW, CO. LAOIS.**

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1. Introduction

The purpose of this Report is to describe the heritage significance of the former Methodist Chapel, a protected structure, and to assess the impact of the proposed development of a Community Hub extension on the features which contribute to its historic character and special interest.

Durrow Development Forum (DDF) acquired the former Methodist Chapel / ICA Hall in 2015 and have undertaken two programmes of repairs to the protected structure since then with grant assistance from the Heritage Council.

DDF acquired the adjacent vacant Civil Defense base (CDB) in 2017 and the Durrow Community Development Plan identifies the DDF property as a suitable site to locate a new community building to provide flexible multi-purpose spaces for all the active groups and organisations in the town.

In 2019, DDF was granted Planning Permission to demolish the vacant CDB structures and to construct a new 'Community Use Facility, attached and internally connected to the former Methodist Chapel / ICA Hall'.

The site was subsequently cleared and Phase 1 of the permitted Community Use Facility, a toilet block extension, was constructed as well as the new plant room / storage structure at the rear of the site.

The development which is the subject of the current Part 8 public consultation is a modification of the previously approved scheme in the light of revised accommodation requirements and a desire to be able to facilitate more outdoor activities in the light of the experience of the Covid-19 pandemic.

This report has been prepared by Cormac O'Sullivan, RIAI Conservation Architect Grade 2 of BLUETT & O'DONOGHUE.

The methodology of the report follows the guidance set out in the Dept. of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government "*Guidelines for Planning Authorities on Architectural Heritage Protection, Appendix B; Architectural Heritage Assessment Reports*".

The Report should be read in conjunction with the accompanying drawings;

Sheet 1 – Site Location Map.

Sheet 2 – Site Layout Plan.

Sheet 3 – Measured Drawings of Existing Buildings.

Sheet 4 – Ground Floor Plan.

Sheet 5 – First Floor Plan.

Sheet 6 – Roof Plan.

Sheet 7 – Elevations & Sections.

Sheet 8 – 3D images.

2. Historical Background

In the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage, (NIAH), the Methodist Chapel is recorded as having been constructed between 1820 to 1825.

The early Ordnance Survey map dating from 1829 to 1841 (Figure 1) indicates a building set back from Patrick Street although it is T-shaped in Plan.

The Ordnance Survey map dating from 1897 to 1913 (Figure 2), clearly depicts and labels the Methodist Church and the front entrance porch is also evident. The porch is off-centre which suggests there was an extension on the north side of the chapel by that time.

The Methodist Church archives record that the building was sold to the Irish Country Women's Association in 1963 /1964 for £145.

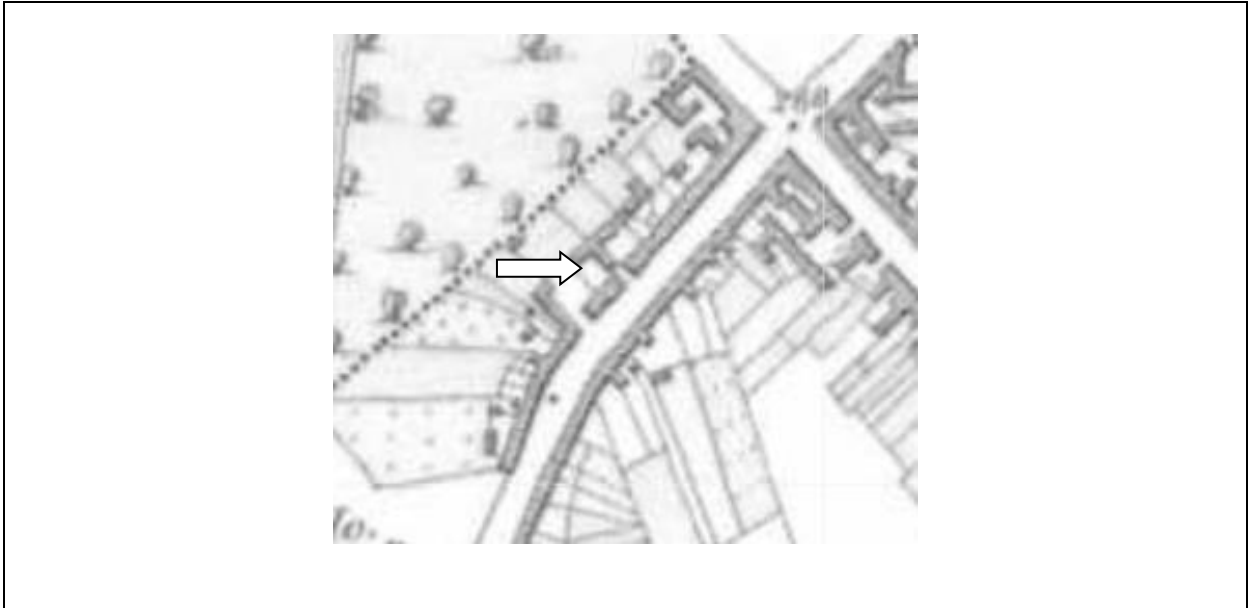


Figure 1. Extract from the OS map series 1829-1841

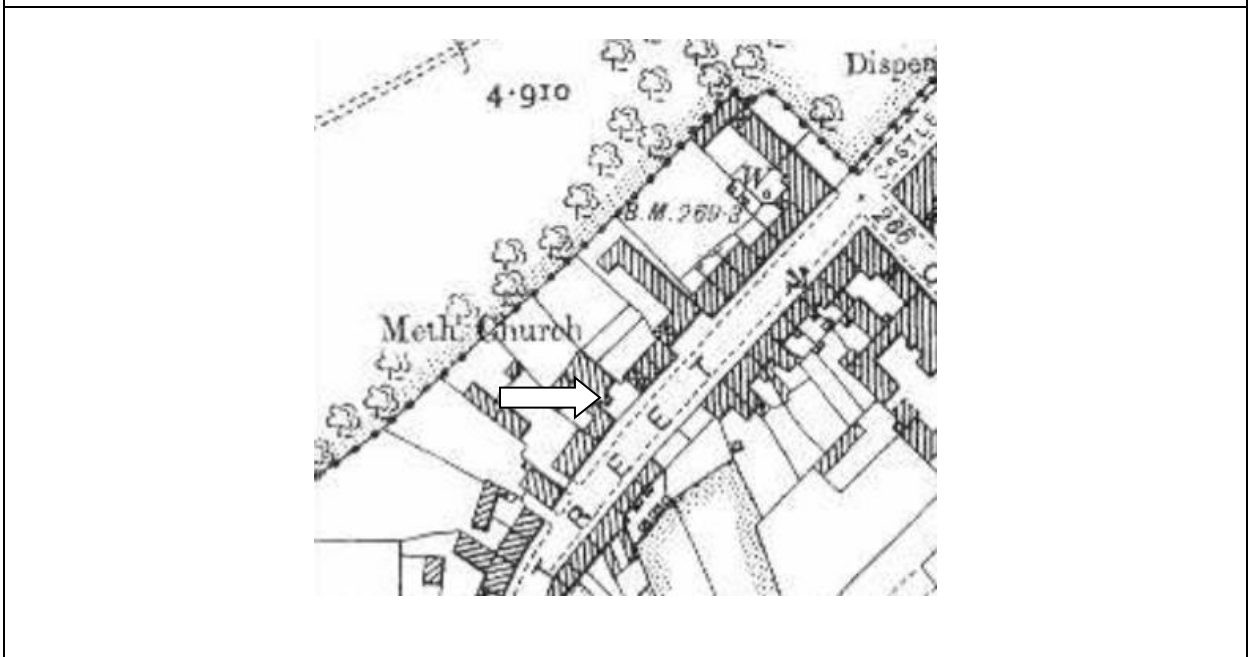


Figure 2. Extract from the OS map series 1897-1913



Figure 3

This photograph from the early 1970's shows the old Town Hall, right, and the old Fire Station, centre, both now demolished. The former Methodist Chapel, by then the ICA Hall is to the left of the image.



Figure 4

Aerial view of the DDF property prior to acquisition of the Civil Defence Base and removal of its structures



Figure 5

Current view from Patrick Street following removal of the Civil Defence Base and addition of toilet block extension to the former chapel.

3. Description

The former Methodist Chapel comprises a single-storey traditional masonry structure which is gable fronted to Patrick Street and set back behind a small forecourt edged by cast and wrought-iron railings and gate to the public footpath.



The double pitched roofs of the chapel and the entrance porch are finished in natural slate, having been restored by DDF in 2016. Other conservation and repair works undertaken by DDF since taking possession of the protected structure include:

- Renewal of the roof valley gutters,
- Reconstruction of the brick chimney on the south side wall,
- Repair of the multi-pane lancet windows,
- Construction of French drains to the front and rear of the building and removal of impervious paving to address damp ingress.

Although very small, the role of the structure as a public building is emphasised by the treatment of the front elevation which has a smooth plaster finish, accentuated barge details to the gables and elegant lancet windows. The entrance porch has raised plaster quoins, corbel stones at the springing of the gable and a plaque (now overpainted).

In contrast, the rear gable is plain with exposed random rubble masonry, vestiges of lime render and a simple verge detail to the roof.

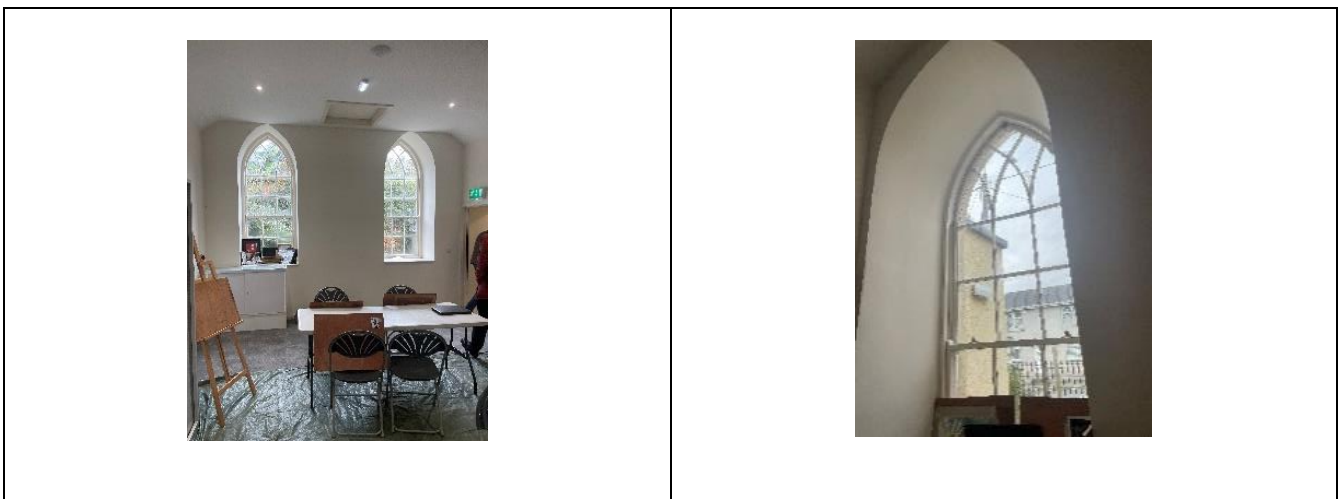
There are 12 over 6 timber lancet sash windows to the front and rear facades while the north and south side walls, being party walls to the neighbouring properties historically, do not have windows.

There is a long narrow single-storey, flat-roofed toilet block extension along the north side of the protected structure. This was recently constructed and has steel cladding as a temporary wall finish pending the construction of Phase 2 of the Community Hub Project.



The interior of the protected structure survives as a single space, albeit with modern floor, wall and ceiling finishes. Besides the access from the entrance porch, there are two recently formed openings at each end of the side (north) wall to access the toilet block extension.

At present, the structure is mainly used for storage, particularly for items associated with annual Durrow scarecrow festival.



4. Statement of Heritage Significance

The former Methodist Chapel is listed in the County Laois Record of Protected Structures (RPS ref. 164) It is also rated as being of regional importance in the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage and is described as being of special architectural and artistic interest (NIAH ref. 12900912).

Features of architectural and artistic interest are evident in the façade and frontage to Patrick Street in the detailing of the plasterwork, the multi-pane lancet windows and the iron gate and railings with decorative finials.

Of equal heritage significance is that the interior of the protected structure retains its original form as a single undivided space which remains accessible to the community as it has always been.

5. Proposed Development & Architectural Heritage Impact Assessment

The Proposed Development

The proposed development comprises:

- Alterations to the toilet block extension and construction of a part single-storey, mainly two-storey extension to provide a series of rooms with good interconnectivity, providing flexible accommodation for community groups, along with ancillary management, kitchen and sanitary facilities and improved internal access to the protected structure,
- enhancement of the forecourts to Patrick Street, both that of the protected structure and that of the new extension which have a level difference of c.700mm between them.

Architectural Heritage Impact Assessment

Any works to a protected structure or development proposed within its curtilage should be informed by a sound understanding of the heritage significance of the site.

In this instance, the heritage attributes of the site which could be vulnerable to adverse impact by development are identified as;



- the undivided nature of the interior which retains the proportions and fabric of the historic Methodist Chapel,
- the architectural composition and detailing of the façade to Patrick Street and the contribution it makes to the streetscape.

The proposed development is therefore assessed in terms of its impact on these aspects of the heritage significance of the former Methodist Chapel, namely:

- the impact on the fabric of the protected structure,
- the impact on the setting of the protected structure.

Impact on the fabric of the protected structure

The interior of the protected structure will be maintained as a single space but it is proposed to widen one of the existing internal connections between the protected structure and the toilet block by 800mm from 1000mm to 1800mm.

	
<p>The doorway from the entrance porch into the Hall is narrow, c. 1m wide.</p>	<p>Both doorways from the Hall into the toilet block extension are narrow, c. 1m wide.</p> <p>It is proposed to widen this access to 1.8m</p>

Comment:


It is noted that all 3 doorways into the Hall are narrow and inhibit access for wheelchair users.

It is acknowledged that a widened opening, in combination with a platform lift in the new extension, can provide universal access to the Hall and achieve compliance with Part M of the Building Regulations (Access and Use). A wider entrance can also provide a better means of escape in the event of an emergency in the Hall and allow the protected structure to be used for events or activities involving a greater number of people, subject to the terms of a Fire Safety Certificate.

This opening is on the plain north side wall of the protected structure and widening the opening will not affect any features of architectural interest or adversely affect the historic character of the space.

It is considered that universal access and satisfactory means of escape can broaden the appeal of the protected structure and more frequent use will ensure its care and maintenance in perpetuity. This is a likely positive outcome of the proposed development.

It is considered that this minor intervention on the fabric of the protected structure is justified and acceptable.

	<p>Recommendation</p> <p>The ceiling of the hall has the appearance of a suspended ceiling hung from collar ties at a higher level because it is set only marginally above the top of the lancet windows.</p> <p>It is recommended that the attic space be inspected to ascertain if the ceiling was at a higher level historically and if architectural features, formerly exposed, remain in-situ. Such features might comprise plaster cornicing, carved roof timbers/trusses or decorative panels. In the event that such features are found, appropriate conservation works should be undertaken to restore and present the features within the space.</p>
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Impact on the setting of the Protected Structure

It is proposed to construct a mainly two-storey building adjacent to and connected with the protected structure.

Comment:



It is considered that the design of the new building has regard to the character of the protected structure and can enhance its role in the streetscape.

This is because:

- The new structure incorporates a single-storey link element where it joins the protected structure with a flat roof set at a level below the eaves of the former chapel.
- The building line of the single-storey link element is slightly recessed behind the building line of the protected structure and the building line of the two-storey element aligns with that of the protected structure. This will increase the prominence of the protected structure when approaching up Patrick Street from the town centre and the views of it.
- The level difference between internal floor levels in the protected structure and in the new building (c. 700mm) is reflected in each of the forecourts to Patrick Street whereby the setting of the former Methodist Chapel can be restored at the upper level.

It is considered that these design measures demonstrate an understanding of the heritage significance of the site and will have a positive impact.

Besides restoring the character of the historic setting, the design facilitates independent access and use of the protected structure via the entrance porch rather than via the new building, if preferred, and this can broaden the appeal of the protected structure to some groups or organisations.

	
<p>It is proposed to reconstruct the forecourt outside the new extension for drop-off/deliveries to the Community Hub and to facilitate a variety of associated outdoor activities.</p>	<p>The forecourt to the protected structure is c.700mm above that of the new extension. This allows restoration of the historic setting of the Methodist Chapel as a separate space.</p>

6. Conclusion

This Report describes the former Methodist Chapel in Durrow and explains its heritage significance.

It details the conservation works carried out by Durrow Development Forum to safeguard the protected structure since it was acquired in 2015 and outlines the nature and scale of the project to create a Community Hub.

The impact of the proposed development on the fabric and on the setting of the protected structure is assessed. It is concluded that the design of the scheme is based on a sound understanding of the heritage significance of the site and that the change will be overwhelmingly positive.

The direct impact on the fabric of the protected structure is modest while its setting will be much enhanced. Most of all, a suitable new use is set to maintain the interior of the former chapel as a single undivided space, and one that is universally accessible to everybody.

This is a good outcome for the community and will also be of benefit to the architectural heritage of County Laois.

SIGNED

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'C O'Sullivan', written in a cursive style.

CORMAC O'SULLIVAN,

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