

Re-imagining the Scouts Den Site



Re-imagining the Scouts Den Site Feasibility Study

Claremorris Swinford Municipal District in conjunction with Ballyhaunis Abbey Trust are undertaking a Feasibility Study to assess the redevelopment potential of the Scouts Den site. The Scouts Den building has a long and complex history on the Friarsground Site since 1946.

The current building has been found unfit for purpose and unsafe for re-use due to structural and other safety issues and has been recommended for demolition. The feasibility Study seeks to address the site complexities and Heritage protections that exist on Friarsground and work with the Community on developing potential options for the future. As part of the report, further site surveys and investigations will be undertaken- both environmental and Archaeological to determine its suitability for redevelopment.

Report Aims

To Provide options for potential future development of the Scouts Den Site.

Carry out investigations at the site location in relation to Archaeology, Environment and biodiversity

Provide information to the public as to the sites history and future potential.

Work with the Community to develop a solution within the confines of the protections given to the site.



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History of Ballyhaunis Scouts Den

The Ballyhaunis Scout Troop was founded by Very Rev. Canon P. Moane, P.P., Began in March 1931 as was known as the 4th Mayo Troop Catholic Boy Scouts of Ireland. Canon Moane was then the C.C. at Ballyhaunis and he became their first Troop Chaplain.

There were 17 members of the group invested that year and one of the first activities of the troop was a weekend spent on Croagh Patrick in July 1931, and a weekend under canvas at Churchfield, Knock. By 1932 there were 30 in the group and it began to expand its activities to first aid training and attending at the Eucharistic Congress.

In 1934 the colours of the 4th Mayo Troop were blessed at the Convent grounds, Ballyhaunis and the ceremony was attended by over 300 boy Scouts from Robeen, Ballinrobe, Castlebar, Ballina, Swinford, Tuam and Westport as well as Ballyhaunis. The ceremony included a parade with music provided by local and Boy Scout Bands.

The Original Scouts Den was built on the grounds of the Friary Complex on the site of the current Scouts Den in 1946. It was little more than a cottage but served their needs well. The troops popularity led to a reconstruction of the Den in 1957, and it was reopened to great fanfare. Although numbers dropped briefly in the 1960's recruitment drives were held and its popularity revived. Successive expansion of the Troops premises happened during the period 1970-1990's creating the large complex structure we see today.

By the year 2000 the Scouts Den was so large a structure that it served as a community Hall where Christmas and School Concerts were held. By the time the Friars left Friarsground, the Scouts Den Building was already starting to fall out of favour, its Community function now superseded by a replacement Community Town Hall on Upper Main street. The Scouts continued to have a presence in Ballyhaunis until relatively recently, but since then the oversized building has fallen into disrepair and is no longer used.

Due to its unsuitability for re-purposing and structural issues throughout, the Scouts Den has been recommended for demolition. It is with this recommendation in mind that the Scouts Den 're-imagining' project has begun.

Historical Information taken from 'Catholic Boy Scouts of Ireland Mayo 1930-1961 compiled by Colm Dunne of the 1st Mayo Troop in Castlebar in September 2016. The history is drawn from reports of Scouting in Mayo' via Annagh Magazine 2017



Original Scouts Den 1946



1980s Scouts Den



Present Day Scouts Den Building

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Existing Heritage Protections on St Marys Abbey and Friarsground Site

St. Marys Abbey and the Friarsground Site are Heritage sites of importance. The St. Mary's Abbey Chapel is listed as a protected structure (RPS No. 0182) in Volume 4 of the Mayo County Development Plan 2022/2028. St. Mary's Church is also listed and has been deemed to be of regional importance, and of Archaeological, Architectural, Artistic, Historical, and Social Interest by the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage (NIAH Ref. No. 31213018). The Chapel itself is also a recorded monument (MA Ref. MA093-063002, ITM 149779, 279481 FRIARSGROUND:Abbey).

During a recent visit to the Chapel by a member of the National Monuments service, it was noted that some of the remaining medieval windows in the Chapel would have national and potentially international interest.

St Mary's Chapel features bespoke Harry Clarke Studio windows to the new side Chapel, Known as the 'Our lady of Good Counsel' altar. The tripartite windows were commissioned as part of the construction of the new South wing and reconfiguration of the chapel layout, completed in 1937. The windows were not installed until after the death of Harry Clarke sometime prior to 1940.

The windows were therefore most likely designed by Clarkes protégé and Mayo native, Richard Jennings during the period of him as principal artist in the Harry Clarke Studio.

There are a number of other recorded monuments also on the Site including the Burial ground, Crosses, Tombs, House, Ecclesiastical remains giving the site tremendous collective significance.

What do the Heritage Protections mean for St Marys Abbey and Friarsground Site? What impact do they have on the Scouts Den?

St. Marys Abbey and the Friarsground Site have dual protections-They are both monument and a protected Structure. Monument protection entails protection of the Archaeological features above and below the ground and the surrounding area called an RMP zone. An RMP zone, (Record of Monuments and Places zone) in Ireland marks an area around a protected archaeological site and is managed by the National Monuments Service, not the Local Authority. It highlights land where historic remains are expected and any ground work in this zone needs official notice, care and is usually subject to archaeological licence.

St Mary's Chapel is registered as a protected structure. This means it is a building or feature considered by a local authority to be of special architectural, historical, archaeological, artistic, cultural, scientific, social, or technical interest. Inclusion on the local Record of Protected Structures (RPS) places strict legal controls on changes, maintenance, and development to preserve its unique character. Protected Structure Status extends to the 'curtilage' of the site.

On the Friarsground site curtilage extends to and includes the boundaries of the site in all directions. 'Curtilage' means the parcel of land and outbuildings immediately surrounding a main building that are, or were, historically used for its purposes and functioning. Legal protection extends automatically to everything inside this boundary—including gardens, yards, and secondary structures—meaning alterations require planning permission for alterations that might ordinarily be exempt from planning.

The Scouts Den is located within both the RMP zone of the Monument protection and the curtilage of the Protected Structure, therefore the Site and building is afforded the protections and restrictions that come with these designations. In practical terms, this requires that any redevelopment of the Scouts Den Site requires Archaeological investigations and screening under licence as well as assessing any future impact on the monuments and Protected Structure. The site designations take precedence over the redevelopment of the site and therefore any proposals for the site must come with a well researched and considered proposal which has been deemed acceptable within the restrictions of the Scouts Den Site .

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Development Options



All options would involve initial site clean-up and demolition, including potential hidden risks associated with the existing building. Depending on the level of development proposed, archaeological and environmental screening, National Monuments consultation and planning permission may also be required.

Each option would also require funding, which may present challenges given recent investment in other grant-funded projects in Ballyhaunis. The scale and impact of each proposal will also need to be considered by the relevant heritage, conservation and regulatory bodies.



1. Sensory Garden

Benefits and considerations of creating a sensory garden

- Improves green space and biodiversity while providing therapeutic and accessible spaces for the community.
- Likely to have a low impact on the landscape and attract heritage/conservation support.



2. Pavillion

Benefits and considerations of proposing a Pavillion

- Creates a sheltered community gathering space for seating, chess and other activities
- Second most expensive option and likely to raise regulatory and conservation concerns.
- A similar proposed project nearby may raise concerns about overdevelopment of the area.



3. Childcare Facility

Benefits and considerations of developing a childcare centre

- Expands existing childcare provision with a modern, purpose-built facility.
- Could incorporate shared facilities such as a community café or kitchen.
- Most expensive option and likely to have the greatest regulatory and conservation concerns.



4. Return to Grassland

Benefits and considerations of returning to Grassland

- Restores the site naturally and increases green space and biodiversity.
- Likely to have the least impact on the landscape and attract strong heritage/conservation support.
- Least costly option.

Online Survey



<https://forms.cloud.microsoft/e/kJSDp1AxPe>