

A Proposed Development at  
**The Breffni Centre**  
**Main Street, Dromahair, Co Leitrim**

Archaeological Screening Report

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## **Executive Summary**

This report has been prepared at the request of Sweeney Architects who are currently developing a design proposal for the development of a public library on the site of the Breffni Centre, Main Street, Dromahair, Co Leitrim, on behalf of Leitrim County Council. This study aims to assess the archaeological, architectural and cultural heritage environment which currently exists on and around the proposed development site, evaluate the likely impacts that the proposed development will have on this environment, and recommend suitable mitigatory measures. The study area upon which this report is based extends 500m from the site boundary in all directions and incorporates parts of the townlands of Drumahaire, Carrickacroghery, Mullagh, Fawn, Drumlease, Ardakup Beg, Mullanaskageagh, and Creevelea.

No known archaeological sites are found on the site of the proposed development. The nearest site listed by the Archaeological Survey of Ireland is a possible standing stone located 154m to the southeast. Several archaeological investigations have been undertaken in Dromahair in recent decades, but none suggest that the proposed development site has archaeological potential.

No buildings or other features listed by the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage are found on the site of the proposed development. The nearest such building is Dromahair Garda Station, located 96m to the southeast. None of the buildings on the site are included in the local authority's Record of Protected Structures. The nearest Protected Structure to the site is the Abbey Hotel located 133m to the northwest.

The buildings on the site include a core two-storey structure which probably dates to the late nineteenth century, a northern one-bay two-storey extension which was added after 1908, a southern two-bay, two-storey addition with a false Mansard roof which was added in the later 1900s and single-storey dancehall to the rear, which also dates to the later 1900s. The proposed development will be facilitated by the demolition of the buildings on the site. There is no reason, on archaeological grounds, why the development should not proceed and no further archaeological mitigation is recommended.

## 1 Introduction

### 1.1 General

1.1.1 This report has been prepared for Sweeney Architects, Longford, to contribute to their work to develop a site at Main Street, Dromahair, Co Leitrim, on behalf of Leitrim County Council. The project will see the development of a library on the site of the Breffni Centre, a near-derelict hotel complex in the centre of Dromahair.

1.1.2 This report was prepared in August 2020 by Dr Rory Sherlock, Consultant Archaeologist, following a site visit, consultation with the site architect, and a short programme of documentary research.

### 1.2 Site Location

1.2.1 The development site lies in the townland of Drumahaire and the village of Dromahair, Co. Leitrim, at ITM 580313, 831279. The site is located on the eastern side of Main Street, the Eircode for the property is F91 YF6E and the Folio No. is LM20109F.



**Figure 1:** Site Location: Dromahair is situated in a drumlin landscape to the southeast of Lough Gill (Ordnance Survey Ireland Licence No. EN 0093620 – ©Ordnance Survey Ireland / Government of Ireland)



**Figure 2:** Location Map (extract from OS 6" map - 1st ed. From 1837) with site indicated (Ordnance Survey Ireland Licence No. EN 0093620 – ©Ordnance Survey Ireland / Government of Ireland)



**Figure 3:** Location Map (extract from OS 25" map from c. 1908) with development site outlined in red (Ordnance Survey Ireland Licence No. EN 0093620 – ©Ordnance Survey Ireland / Government of Ireland)



**Plate 1:** Aerial view of Dromahair within the site indicated in red  
(Ordnance Survey Ireland Licence No. EN 0093620 – ©Ordnance Survey Ireland / Government of Ireland)

### **1.3 Study Area**

- 1.3.1 The study area upon which this report is based extends 500m from the site boundary in all directions and incorporates parts of the townlands of Drumahaire, Carrickacroghery, Mullagh, Fawn, Drumlease, Ardakup Beg, Mullanasky, and Creevelea.

### **1.4 Objectives and Methodology**

#### **1.4.1 Objectives**

This study aims to assess the archaeological, architectural and cultural heritage environment which currently exists on and around the proposed development site.

#### **1.4.2 Desktop Research Methodology**

The desktop research element of this study utilised a several documentary and cartographic sources, and the main sources consulted may be summarised as follows:

- National Monuments Service's online Historic Environment Viewer
- Sites and Monuments Record (SMR) & Record of Monuments and Places (RMP)
- National Inventory of Architectural Heritage
- Excavations Bulletin
- Aerial Photographs
- Cartographic Sources

#### **1.4.3 Fieldwork Methodology**

A site inspection by a professional archaeologist is a key component of any Archaeological Screening Report. During the site inspection the archaeologist records any known monuments and also seeks to identify and record any hitherto unrecorded features of archaeological or cultural heritage significance. The archaeologist walks the site, records the current land use, notes any inaccessible areas, and takes a series of photographs to illustrate the report. The site under consideration in this study was visited by the author on 14/08/2020.

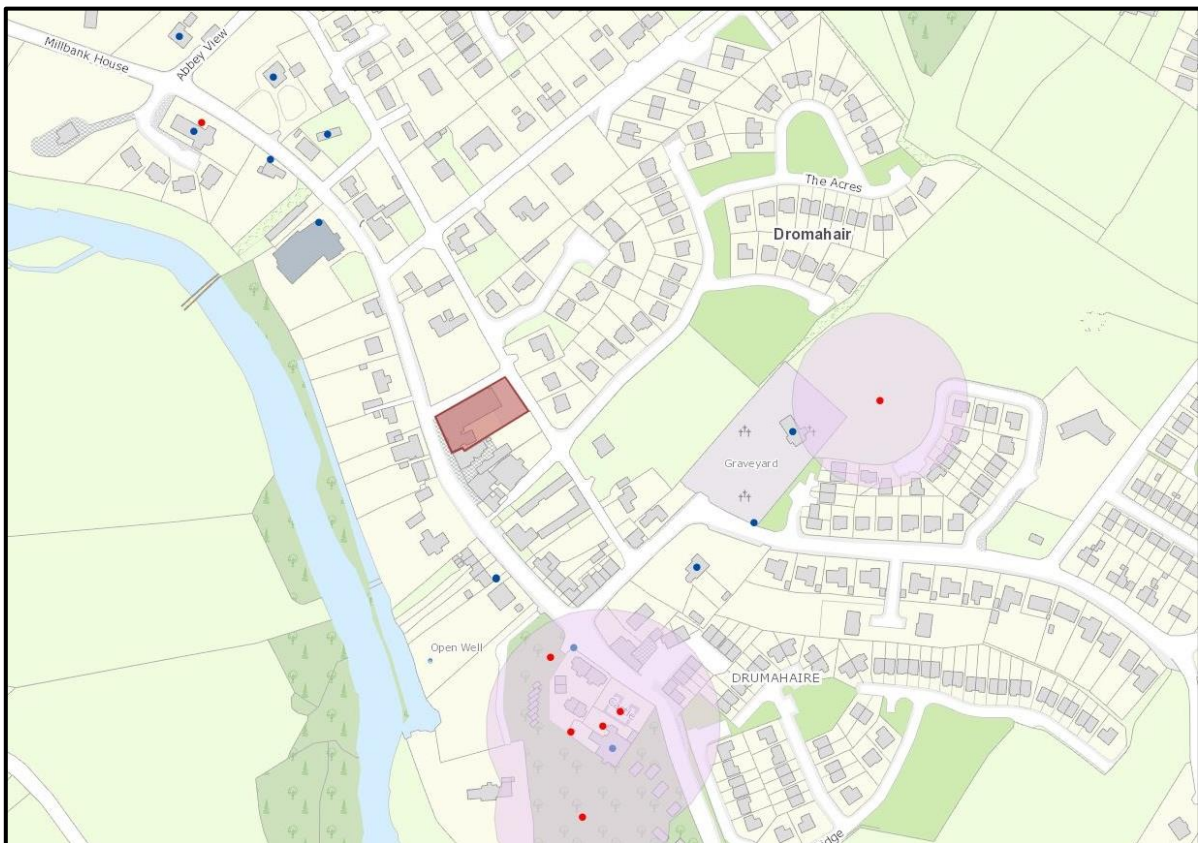


## 2 The Receiving Environment

The village of Dromahair developed in the seventeenth century after George Villiers, duke of Buckingham, was granted 11,000 acres in the area. His brother probably built the fortified house that stands near the site of an earlier castle of the O'Rourkes (Moore 2003, 213).

### 2.1 Legislative Status

- 2.1.1 The site of the proposed development does not lie within the Zone of Notification for any known archaeological monuments (Figure 3).
- 2.1.2 None of the buildings on the site of the proposed development are listed in the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage.
- 2.1.3 None of the buildings on the site of the proposed development are listed in the Record of Protected Structures.



**Figure 4:** Site Location Map (OSI Street Map from Historic Environment Viewer) – the site outline (red) shows that the site lies some distance from known archaeological monuments (pink circles / red dots) and from structures listed on the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage (blue dots) (Ordnance Survey Ireland Licence No. EN 0093620 – ©Ordnance Survey Ireland / Government of Ireland)

## **2.2 Known Archaeological Sites in the Area**

- 2.2.1 No known archaeological sites are found on the site of the proposed development.
- 2.2.2 The archaeological sites and monuments located within 500m of the proposed development site are listed in the Record of Monuments and Places (RMP) for County Leitrim as follows:
- A fortified house, a bawn, a gateway, and a possible standing stone (LE014-008----) are located 154m to 220m southeast of the proposed development site in Drumahaire townland.
  - A ringfort (LE014-007----) lies *circa* 220m east of the proposed development site in Drumahaire townland.
  - A castle (LE014-009----) lies *circa* 265m east of the proposed development site in Drumahaire townland.
  - The Franciscan friary of Creevelea (LE014-004----), together with an associated graveyard and tomb, are located *circa* 500m west of the proposed development site in Creevelea townland.

## **2.3 Recent Archaeological Excavations**

- 2.3.1 Evidence gleaned from archaeological investigations undertaken in the vicinity of a proposed development site can contribute significantly to the assessment of the proposed development's archaeological impact. In the current case, ten archaeological investigations were recorded in the vicinity of Dromahair and these included a pre-development monitoring programme near the Church of Ireland church (Timoney 2006a), pre-development test-trenching on the site of the Castle Court housing development (Timoney 2006b), monitoring of topsoil stripping associated with the extension of the graveyard beside Creevelea Friary (Read 2006), pre-development monitoring of an unnamed housing development at the eastern end of Dromahair (Halpin 2008), several phases of works in the vicinity of the castle and fortified house (Halpin 1995; 1997; 1998), and works associated with the North Leitrim Regional Water Supply (Halpin 2003).
- 2.3.2 None of the aforementioned archaeological investigations appear to have been undertaken within 100m of the proposed development site and, of those investigations which did uncover archaeological finds or features, none appear to have any relevance to the proposed development site.

## 2.4 National Inventory of Architectural Heritage

The buildings and other structures located within 500m of the proposed development site which are listed in National Inventory of Architectural Heritage are as follows:

- Dromahair Garda Station (30806012) located *circa* 100m south of the proposed development site in Drumahaire townland.
- The Abbey Hotel, a mid-nineteenth century hotel (30806008) located *circa* 133m northwest of the proposed development site in Drumahaire townland.
- Church View, a late-nineteenth century house (30806015) located *circa* 155m southeast of the proposed development site in Drumahaire townland.
- An early twentieth-century postbox (30806016) located *circa* 156m southeast of the proposed development site in Drumahaire townland.
- Drumlease Church of Ireland church (30806013) located *circa* 172m east of the proposed development site in Drumahaire townland.
- A mid-nineteenth century milestone (30806014) located *circa* 175m southeast of the proposed development site in Drumahaire townland.
- A mid-nineteenth century milestone (30806006) located *circa* 198m northwest of the proposed development site in Drumahaire townland.
- A terrace of three nineteenth-century houses (30806007) located *circa* 205m northwest of the proposed development site in Drumahaire townland.
- The Lodge, a late-eighteenth or early nineteenth-century house (30806017) located *circa* 230m southeast of the proposed development site in Drumahaire townland.
- St Patrick's Roman Catholic church, dating to 1885-1890 (30806005) located *circa* 240m northwest of the proposed development site in Drumahaire townland.
- Abbey View House, a late nineteenth-century house (30806004) located *circa* 256m northwest of the proposed development site in Drumahaire townland.
- Millbank House, an early nineteenth-century house (30806002) located *circa* 305m northwest of the proposed development site in Carrickacrogghery townland.
- A late nineteenth-century water pump (30806003) located *circa* 305m northwest of the proposed development site in Drumahaire townland.
- An early nineteenth-century bridge (30806018) located on the Bonet River *circa* 360m southeast of the proposed development site in Drumahaire and Ardakip Beg townlands.
- A watermill, dating to between 1780 and 1820 (30806001), located *circa* 467m northwest of the proposed development site in Drumahaire townland.

## **2.5 Cartographic Evidence**

The Ordnance Survey 6" map from the 1837 (Figure 2) and the Ordnance Survey 25" map from 1908 (Figure 3) show no features of archaeological significance on the site under study. The 6" map shows a simple rectangular structure on the site. This building faces Main Street and it is unclear if it was subsequently replaced by the buildings shown on the 25" map, or if it is a component of them. The buildings shown on the more detailed 25" map can be identified within the complex of buildings still existing on the site (see Section 3 below).

## **2.6 Planning History**

- 2.6.1 The complex of buildings on the site, known as the Breffni Centre, were run as a hotel, bar and dancehall for many years. The business closed over ten years ago and has since passed through the hands of several owners. In terms of the site's planning history, three recent planning applications are worthy of note.
- 2.6.2 Permission was granted in 2006 to demolish the hotel and dancehall and construct a 40-room hotel on the site (Planning Ref.: 041956). This development did not proceed.
- 2.6.3 In 2008 Leitrim County Council refused planning permission to demolish the hotel and dancehall and construct a three-storey complex to include a supermarket, a creche, a gym and a community room (Planning Ref.: 071233). The local authority's decision to refuse planning permission was then appealed to An Bord Pleanála, who granted permission for the development (Ref.: PL12.235230), but this development did not proceed.
- 2.6.4 In 2018 Leitrim County Council granted planning permission to the current owners to convert part of the complex into a sit-down / take-away restaurant with living accommodation overhead (Planning Ref.: 17132). This development has not proceeded.

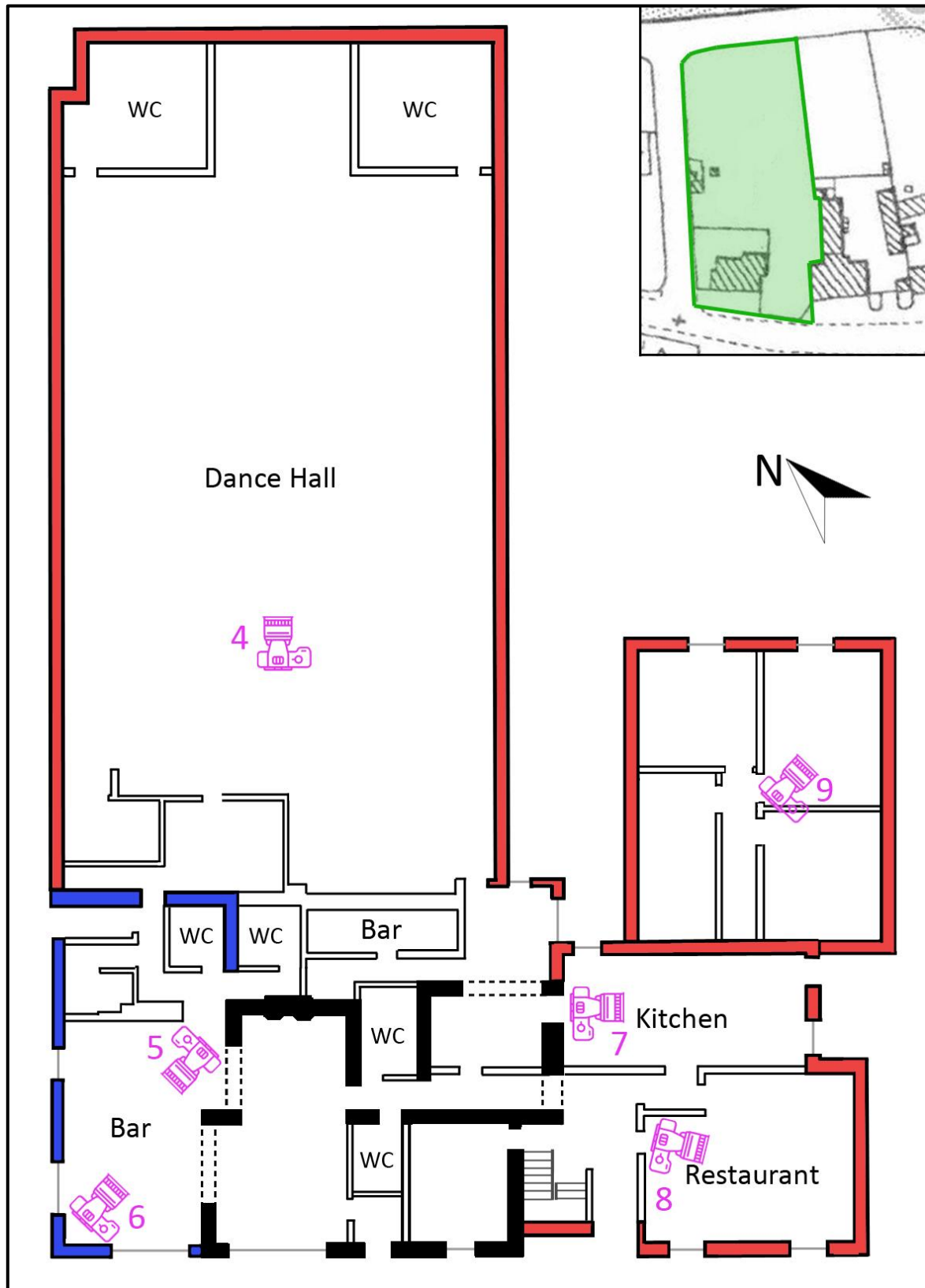
### 3 Site Description

- 3.1 The site of the proposed development is occupied by a near-derelict two-storey hotel complex on the eastern side of Main Street, Dromahair. The site is bounded by public roadways on three sides and by an adjoining property to the south. The complex is composed of three principal connected buildings and several minor additions, the oldest part being a four-bay, two-storey building fronting onto the main street, which incorporates several two-storey returns to the rear and is likely to have been built in at least two phases. To the south of this, a recessed one-bay linking structure connects the original building to a two-bay, two-storey building with a false Mansard roof which also has frontage onto Main Street (Plate 2). A large single-storey dancehall (measuring *circa* 29m x 14m) was added to the rear of the original structure in the mid/late twentieth century.

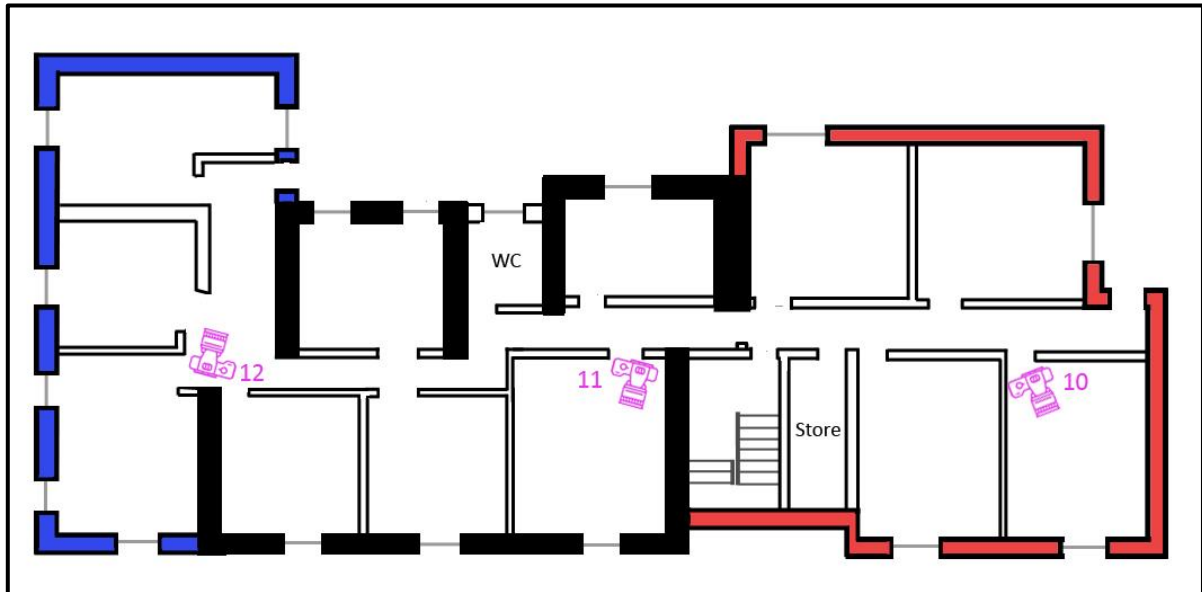


**Plate 2:** View of the site looking eastwards from the opposite side of Main Street

- 3.2 The 4-bay building on the site is likely to have been built in at least two phases. It has few features of note, other than several brick chimneys, and it does not match the structure shown on the site in the Ordnance Survey 25" map from 1908 (Figure 3), since the structure on the map does not extend northwards to the site boundary whereas the northern gable of the existing building is aligned on the edge of the street. It is probable, given the irregular fenestration (Plate 2), that the southern three bays date to the nineteenth century and the fourth bay, with the two-storey return behind it, was added post-1908 (Figure 5). The pre-1908 buildings, including the three-bay two-storey building facing Main Street and the two offset two-storey projections to the rear (all shown in black in Figure 5), match the outline of the buildings on the site on the 1908 Ordnance survey map quite closely.



**Figure 5:** Schematic plan of the ground-floor level of the hotel with the pre-1908 phases in solid black, the post-1908 phase in blue and the various later twentieth-century phases in red (some details omitted for clarity). The insert (top right) shows the site on the 25" map from 1908 (rotated for comparison) and the pink symbols/numbers in the main image indicate camera locations and refer to Plate numbers in this report.



**Figure 6:** Schematic plan of the first-floor level of the hotel with the pre-1908 phases in solid black, the post-1908 phase in blue and the late twentieth century phase in red (en-suites and other details omitted for clarity). The pink symbols/numbers indicate camera locations and refer to Plate numbers in this report.



**Plate 3:** The rear of the hotel complex with an open yard in the foreground, the roof of the dancehall which is below street level at the rear of the property (centre) and the rear of the main hotel block which faces Main Street (background)



**Plate 4:** The interior of the dancehall



**Plate 5:** The ground floor of the northern post-1908 extension





**Plate 6:** The ground floor of the northern post-1908 extension looking through the archway which carries the old gable of the pre-1908 building



**Plate 7:** The hotel kitchen looking south



**Plate 8:** The restaurant in the ground-floor area of the two-bay southern extension



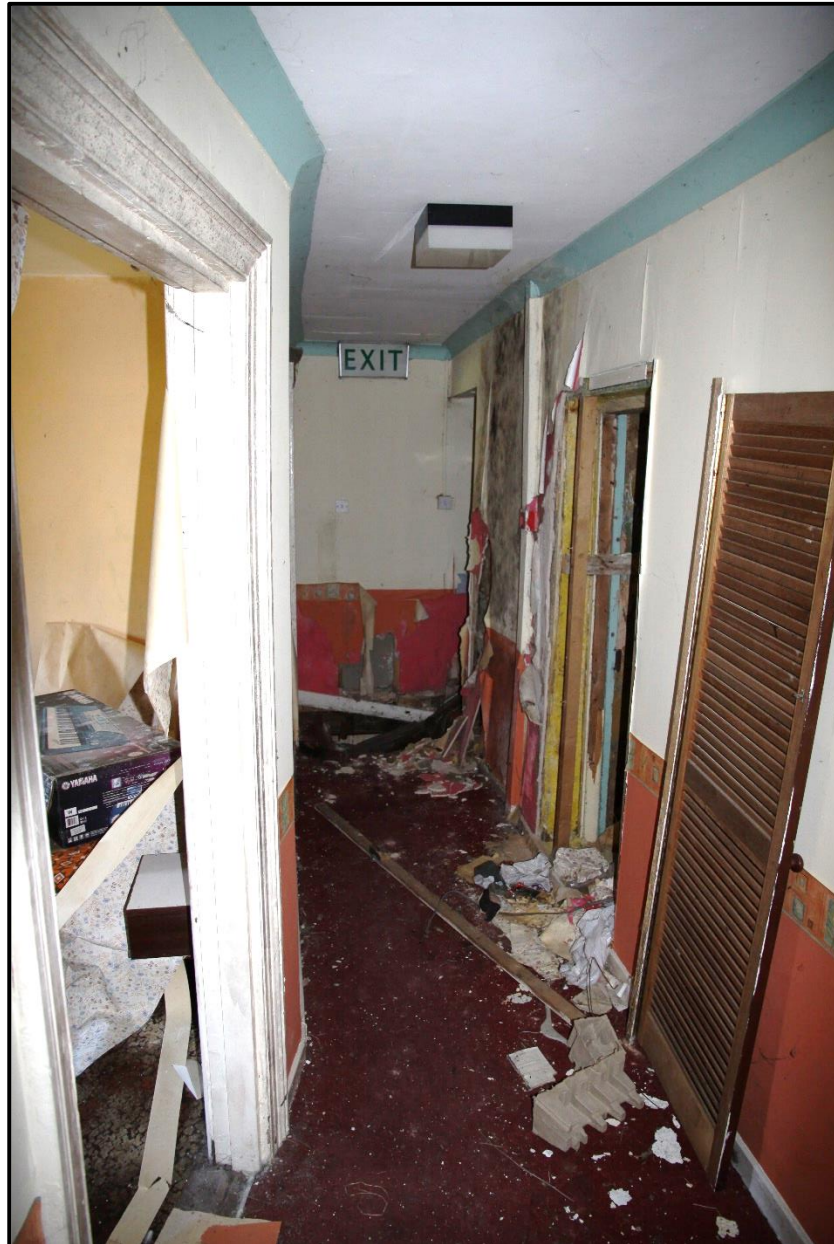
**Plate 9:** One of four ground-floor rooms in a modern extension to the rear of the hotel's kitchen



**Plate 10:** One of the bedrooms in the first-floor area of the two-bay southern extension



**Plate 11:** One of the bedrooms in the first-floor area of the older pre-1908 section of the hotel



**Plate 12:** The first-floor corridor in the post-1908 extension at the northern end of the building

## 4 The Proposed Development

4.1 The proposed development involves the construction of a two-storey public library on the site of the Breffni Centre on Main Street, Dromahair (Figure 7). The development will be facilitated by the demolition of all the buildings on the site.

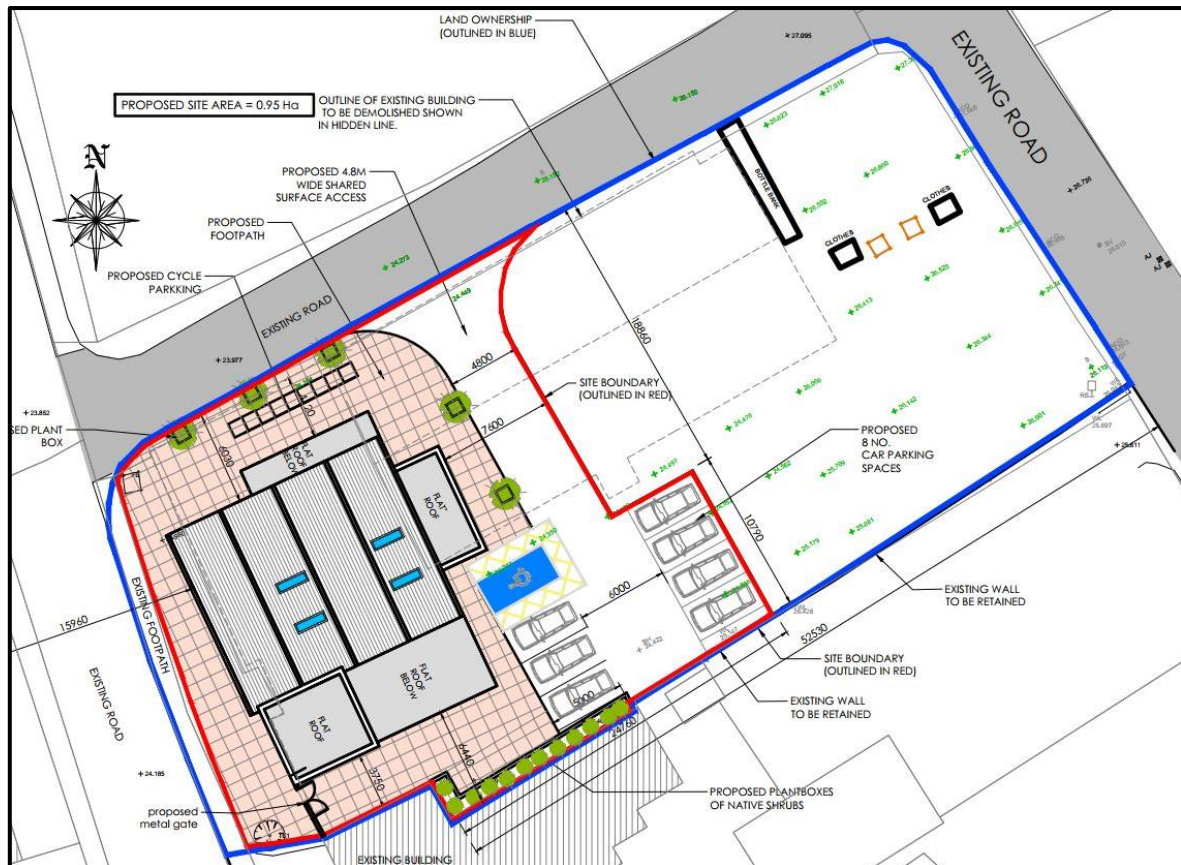


Figure 7: Proposed Site Layout with public library facing Main Street (Sweeney Architects)

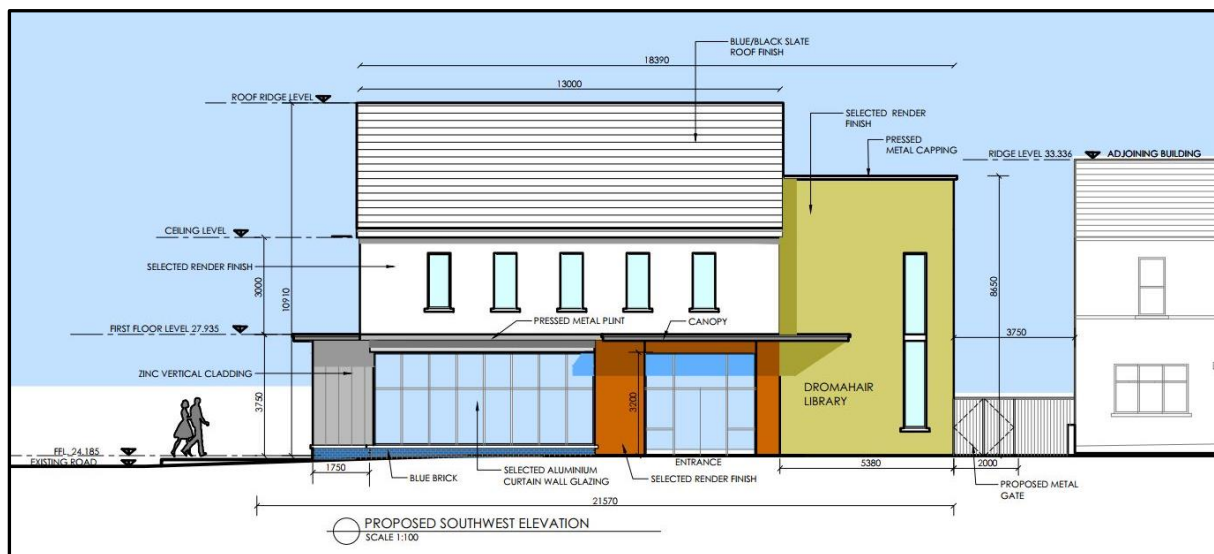


Figure 8: The front elevation of the proposed new library (Sweeney Architects)

## 5 Archaeological Impact Assessment

### 5.1 *The impact on nearby upstanding monuments*

5.1.1 The proposed development will not impact upon any known archaeological monument. The nearest monument listed by the Archaeological Survey of Ireland is over 150m away and the field inspection associated with the preparation of the current report revealed no previously unrecorded features of archaeological interest on the site.

5.1.2 **MITIGATION:** No mitigation is required to protect known archaeological monuments, as these are all located over 150m from the proposed development site.

### 5.2 *The impact on underlying archaeological strata*

5.2.1 The impact of a proposed development on hitherto unknown underlying archaeological strata cannot be fully assessed by a desk-based report, but a number of factors are worthy of note:

- The nearest archaeological site is over 150m away and recent excavations in Dromahair have not produced any evidence for archaeological strata close to the development site, so there is no evidence to suggest that archaeological strata survive *in situ* on the site.
- The area on which the dancehall stands was clearly excavated to a significant depth prior to its construction, as the floor level of much of the structure is below street level (which rises significantly towards the rear of the property), and any archaeological strata which may have existed in this area of the site are highly unlikely to survive *in situ*.

5.2.2 **MITIGATION:** No mitigation is required to protect the archaeological potential of the site, which appears to be very low. There is no evidence to suggest that archaeological strata once existed on the site and the development of the site over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is likely to have had a significant negative impact on any such strata which could potentially have once existed there.

### 5.3 *The impact on standing buildings*

5.3.1 If the proposed development goes ahead, the hotel complex will be demolished to make way for the new building. All the buildings on the site appear to date to the 1800s and 1900s and

none are listed on the Record of Protected Structures or the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage.

- 5.3.2 The complex is of limited architectural interest, but the two-storey buildings do form part of the streetscape of Dromahair. The buildings have suffered from vacancy and neglect for over a decade and significant roof issues have led to water ingress, collapsing floors and damaged internal walls. An analysis of a 'Do Nothing Impact' on these buildings suggests that, without substantial investment, they will begin to collapse in the coming decade and so the proposal to redevelop them can be seen as a positive intervention in the wider context of the village.
- 5.3.3 The demolition of the entire complex would clearly have a profound effect on the site, but the dancehall and other single-storey extensions to the rear have no obvious architectural merit. The two-storey buildings could potentially be retained if they underwent substantial renovation, and their retention was considered by a conservation architect during the design process for the site. After due consideration, the design team chose to propose the demolition of the existing buildings and the construction of a new library on the site.
- 5.3.4 **MITIGATION:** As the buildings on the site are not of archaeological interest, and as the older two-storey buildings were examined by a conservation architect prior to the design team's decision to opt for their demolition, no archaeological mitigation is required to protect the standing buildings on the site.

## **6 Conclusions and Recommendations**

### **6.1 Conclusions**

6.1.1 This report has described the archaeological context of, and the standing buildings on, a proposed development site on Main Street, Dromahair, Co Leitrim.

6.1.2 The Archaeological Impact Assessment within this report has concluded that the archaeological potential of the site is very low and so further mitigatory measures are not required to protect the archaeological heritage.

6.1.3 The Archaeological Impact Assessment within this report has concluded that buildings on the site are of limited architectural merit and, since the buildings have been examined by a conservation architect, no archaeological mitigation is required to protect them.

### **6.2 Recommendations**

6.2.1 It is recommended that the development should proceed without further archaeological mitigation.



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