

Urban Design Study for Knocktopher

Overview

Knocktopher is a historic settlement, containing the remains of ancient and medieval building forms, including ringforts, the sites of at least three castles (the most notable of which is the Garrison Castle), the remains of a Carmelite Convent (founded and endowed by James, 2nd Earl of Ormond, in 1356), including the distinctive Church tower in ruins, and the magnificent Knocktopher Abbey.

Areas of Notable Character

The structure and form of Knocktopher village, as it appears today, consists of a somewhat fragmented or dispersed form, with a number of distinctive townscape elements. These could be best described as 'character areas' - of which there are four notable ones - each separated by an intervening area of undeveloped agricultural lands. These can be loosely described as follows:

1. Village Centre and Vicinity

The first of these would be in the vicinity of the Church of Ireland Church and the intersection of the N9 and the Callan Road (R699)/Graigenamanagh Road. This is the commercial heart of the village, which includes the service station, Carroll's Hotel, a pub and local retail store. It is typified by a tight urban form and near continuous building lines, though is adjoined on the perimeter by freestanding buildings and bungalows.

2. Knocktopher Abbey and Vicinity

The second area is focused at Knocktopher Abbey and its immediate vicinity, including the old graveyard with the medieval Church Tower, the Catholic Church and the former site of the Garrison Castle. With the exception of the short terrace both opposite and immediately north of the Church, the area is characterised by high stone walls, significant tree groups and important sites such as the Abbey, graveyard, and Church grounds. It is bound to the north by the distinctive parkland setting formerly associated with the Abbey.

3. School and Vicinity

The third character area, is in the vicinity of the Vocational School and the vicinity of the small road that leads to the Carrigshock Memorial. By comparison to the other areas, it appears underdeveloped with some ribbon development along the national primary road.

4. Mill and Vicinity

The fourth, and last 'character area' is on the southern edge of the settlement, consisting of the agricultural silos and mill buildings (now Glanbia) and a mix of dwelling types, including two semi-detached traditional stone cottages, an old farmstead and bungalow, all knitted together by a relatively narrow road, overgrown hedgerows and significant tree groups.

As one moves through the village the street pattern twists and



Photo 1: View of Church of Ireland on entering the village on the Callan Road—note landscaped verge on right.



Photo 2: Village Centre.



Photo 3: Knocktopher Abbey.

Photo 4: View of Church southern approach into Village.



turns sharply at regular intervals, with views frequently 'stopped' by a significant building or group of buildings. These 'stops' provide important focal points, but the overall pattern results in 'serial vision' - a sequence of views unfolding as one moves through the townscape.

Character of the Landscape Setting

On approaching from the south, it would appear that the topography gradually rises, with the village of Knocktopher sitting on a plateau like form, which is dissected by a dip that forms the course of a stream running from west to east. This is particularly evident on viewing the village from Knocktopher Abbey. On the northern approach, the topography appears rather flat and level.

A second stream traverses the study area to the south, running in a north-easterly direction. Some marshy, wetland areas adjoin the stream and there is a significant amount of trees in its vicinity, of conifer and deciduous varieties. In general, the fields around the village comprise both arable and grazing lands, some of which are enclosed by strong hedgerows and well developed hedgerow trees, such as ash. In addition, in the vicinity of the southern stream course, there are a number of other areas which contain trees of townscape significance. Particularly noteworthy in this regard is the area around Knocktopher Abbey and the parkland setting of lands between the Abbey and the Callan Road. Other notable areas are indicated on the Urban Design Map.

Pattern and Shape of the Settlement

The pattern of village development as it occurs today is in the form of a loose linear development, intersected by the Callan-Graigenamanagh Roads. Although linear, the principal street pattern which now forms the route of the National Primary Route (N9), is not straight, but twists, turns and meanders, creating interest and variety along its route. An examination of the earlier 1839 Ordnance Survey Map indicates a number of notable changes to the townscape over the intervening years. Perhaps the most notable, is the alignment of the N9, between the old graveyard and the Graigenamanagh Road, which is now approximately 30 metres west of the original alignment (the original route is still just about evident on the ground). The other notable feature on the 1839 map, is the pattern of buildings along the road network. A significant terrace development existed south of the Catholic Church on the same side of the road, probably consisting of residential cottages. It is currently the site of the soccer pitch and sports grounds in the village. There was some further development along the Graigenamanagh Road and also a cluster of buildings along the northern stream (east side of road).

Virtually all development in the village occurs as road frontage development with little or no backland or in-depth development (the one exception are four semi-detached dwellings



Photo 5: View of Village from Knocktopher Abbey presents a parkland setting.



1839 Ordnance Survey Map

Photo 6: View northwards towards Post Office from in front of the Catholic Church - note the sharply deflected building line which gives great interest to the streetscape.



off the Callan Road and farm outbuildings.

Buildings and Spaces in the Village

Landmark buildings in the village include the following:

- o Church of Ireland
- o Knocktopher Abbey
- o Medieval Church Tower (in Graveyard)
- o Catholic Church.

The streetscape in Knocktopher is not continuous, with significant gaps between each of the 'character areas' described above. A strong sense of enclosure, spatial containment and individual identity is created in the vicinity of the N9 and the Callan Road junction, where the traditional building line is established along the inner side of footpaths. A similar sense of enclosure is created in the vicinity of the graveyard and the Catholic Church ground, created in part by the position of buildings, tall stone walls and mature tree groupings. Elsewhere, the contribution of buildings and other elements to the streetscape is not as strong, in part created by the former clearance of older and obsolete buildings and/or the position of building facades further from the busy National Primary road (i.e., modern bungalow development). This is understandable and highlights the strong conflict that exists between heavy traffic and the need to protect individual amenity and the goals of village townscape improvement. Improvements to the streetscape must therefore be considered in the context of traffic calming or a village by-pass.

The Nature of Open Spaces

There are just two areas of public open space in the village. The principal area is the 'active' space in the form of the playing fields, immediately south and east of the Catholic Church. The second area comprises 'passive' open space, in the form of a landscaped wedge of land that adjoins the stream. While it is accessible to the pedestrian, there is only one car parking space serving this small park. Picnic benches/seating is also provided.

Though not in public ownership, the grounds of Knocktopher Abbey, with its wooded entrance, landscaped gardens and parkland setting, and back entrance onto the Callan Road, comprises a significant area of amenity within the village.

Roads and Traffic

The principal traffic flow in the village is along the National Primary Route - the north south route between Kilkenny and Waterford. Traffic volumes are extremely heavy and create a significant dis-amenity, detracting from the character and the quality of life of the place.

Narrower road widths, restricted by either tight building lines or tight hedgerows, add to the setting and rural character of the area, creating a strong sense of enclosure, but nonetheless cre-



Photo 7: View of Church of Ireland.

Photo 8: The old graveyard and Church Tower, formerly associated with the Carmelites.

Photo 9: Streetscape view along the Callan Road.

Photo 10: Riverside park.

ate a conflict with traffic speeds and the safety of both pedestrians and cyclists. This is particularly evident on the southern approach (near the Glanbia buildings and nearby bridge) and also in the vicinity of the terraced buildings adjoining the north side of the Catholic Church.

Consideration should be given to traffic calming measures on either side of the National Primary road and within speed limit areas. This would reduce carriageway width but would force traffic to move at slower speeds. A sign on the east side of the southern approach to the school, relating to school safety, is poorly maintained and overgrown with hedgerow vegetation.

While road surfaces are generally good throughout the village, the road edges (adjoining footpaths and verges) are in poor condition at a number of locations, notably, between service station and Callan Road on the west side; and opposite the Post Office, between the graveyard and the short terrace further south.

Other Considerations

The village displays at least three different types of planters, some of which are poorly maintained. Uniformity in the design of these planters would add to the streetscape.

The old water pump near the Graigenamanagh Road/N9 junction should be maintained, as this traditional feature adds character to the area.

There is only one street bench (seating) in the village (near the junction between Thomastown Road and the N9 - though functional and south facing, it does not provide much character.

Design Principles based on distinctive local character.

The following principles will apply and should be read in conjunction with the Urban Design Map:

- Protect the general character of the parkland setting north of Knocktopher Abbey.



Photo 11: Deflected street adds interest to the streetscape, but with heavy traffic on the busy N9, safety is a concern. The lack of a footpath on the left side reduces pedestrian comfort level



Photo 12: Quality of footpath in centre of village is in poor condition.



Photo 13: Street furniture—planters and seat—are in relatively poor condition.



Photo 14: One of a variety of planters to be found in the village.

Photo 15: Traditional Water pump is an attractive historic feature in the village and should be maintained.



- Incorporate the northernmost stream as a linear park.
- Ensure the continuation of building lines and specifically encourage good quality architectural designs on all focal sites identified on the Urban Design Map.
- Introduce traffic calming at critical points within the village.
- Delineate parking spaces and improve road markings in front of the Vocational School.
- Protect the important tree groups identified on the Urban Design Map.
- Protect, reinstate and/or repair the old stone wall in areas identified allowing for necessary access where appropriate.
- Ensure the uniformity of planters and replace where appropriate.
- Maintain the landscaped area immediately before the speed limits on the Callan Road (south side).
- Improve the footpath on the west side of the road between the former Carmelite Convent/graveyard at Cnoc an Tóchair and the terraced group of buildings further south (see Urban Design Map).
- Provide and/or reinstate a footpath on the east side of the road in front of the Post Office and the adjoining terrace.
- Ensure that any new infill development respects traditional building lines in the vicinity. New infill developments will be expected to have regard for the Design Guidelines on Future Development (Appendix A).



Photo 16: Stone wall on the Callan Road requiring repair.



Photos 17, 18 & 19: Examples of strategic sites at road junctions, which act as important focal points when passing through the village - important yet sensitive architectural treatment required. Their current state does little to enhance the image of the village.

