



**PRESENTATION BUILDING REGENERATION  
LIBRARY, CULTURAL, CIVIC, AND  
LEARNING SPACE  
TULLOW STREET CARLOW**

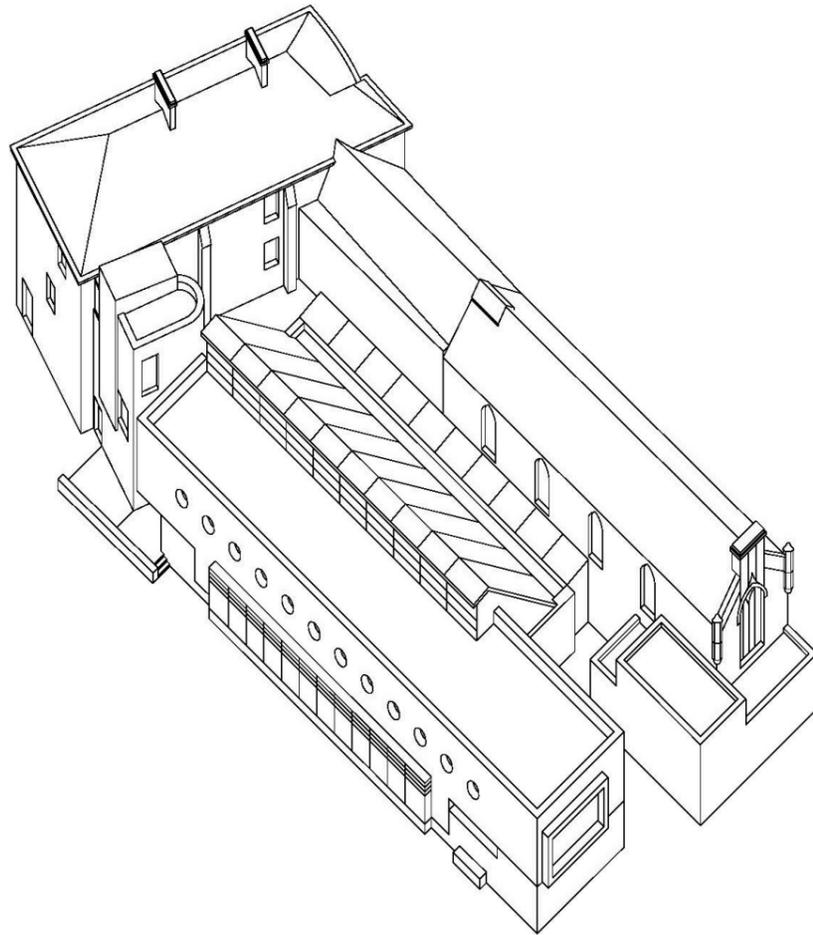
**STAGE 2A REPORT  
December 2020**

**CARR COTTER & NAESSENS ARCHITECTS**



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REPORT



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Revision	Date
Rev_00	17.12.2020
Rev_01	12.01.2021
Rev_02	16.02.2021

## INTRODUCTION

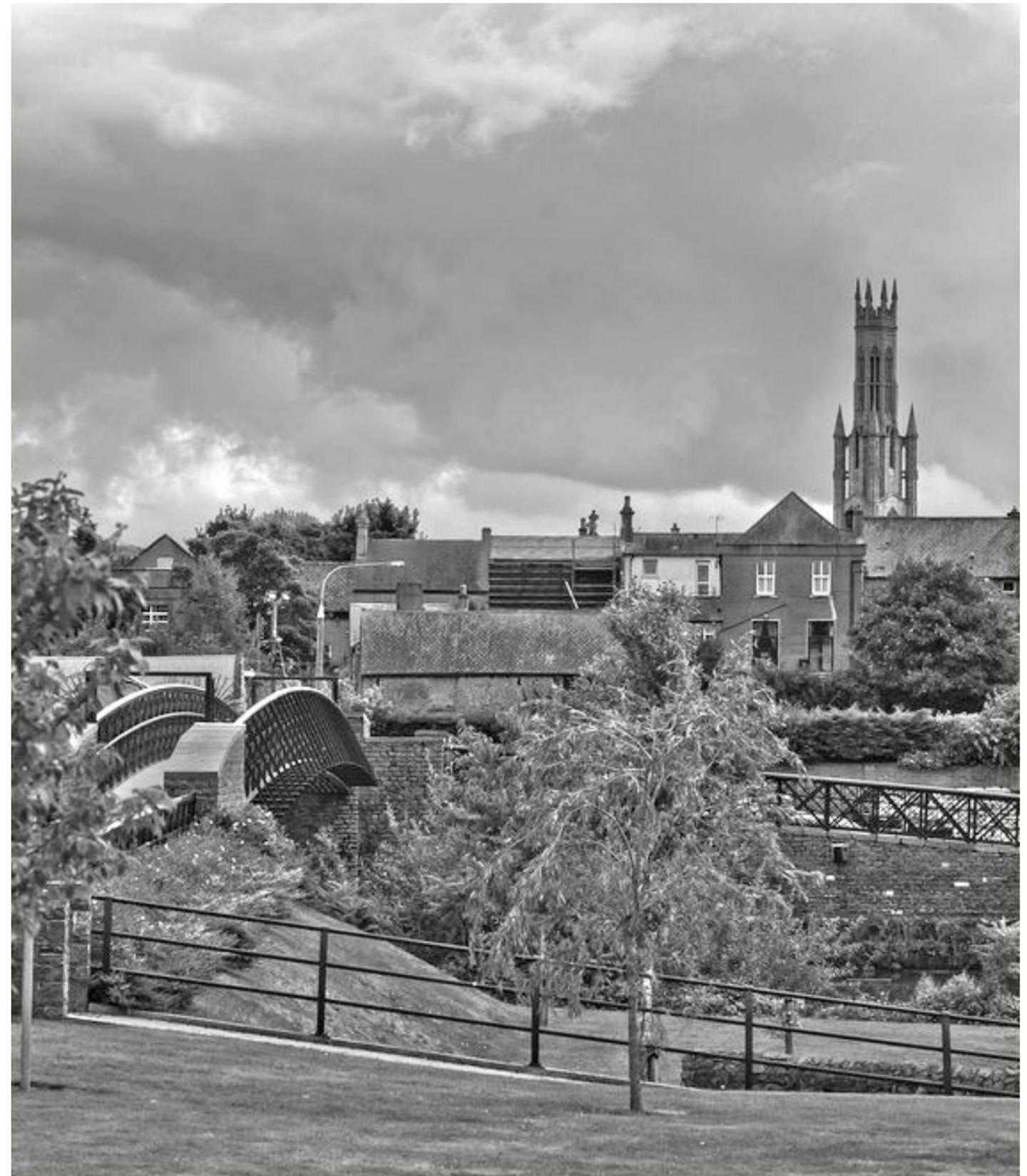
Carlow is a town rich in civic institutions and fortunate in its riverside setting. The Normans recognised the strategic location of this place, at the confluence of the Barrow and the Burren, defending the edge of the Pale and built Carlow Castle at the beginning of the 13th century. The town continued to expand and grow beyond its medieval walls and retains a strong sense of place through its urban structure and historic landmarks. Carlow Cathedral, the Courthouse, Carlow Museum and Visual Carlow are key components of a town which is well endowed in the signifiers of civic status. The future of small and medium sized Irish towns is under pressure from the gravitational pull of major urban centres and the decline of local shops and services. Carlow County Council understand the value of investment in the fabric of the town as demonstrated by its ambitious proposals for a rejuvenated public realm submitted to the Urban Regeneration and Development Fund. Coherent and high quality urban interventions and placemaking support ongoing investment in education and support for businesses. Key to this strategy is an understanding of and nurturing of the towns heritage and historic artefacts which are not only cultural assets but economic ones. The World Bank, in its publication the Economics of Uniqueness, underlines the economic case for investing in cultural heritage which supports liveability and the distinctive character of a town. Nobel Prize laureate Robert Melton Solow stated “ Over the long term, places with strong, distinctive identities are more likely to prosper than places without them. Every place must identify its strongest, most distinctive features and develop them or run the risk of being all things to all persons and nothing special to any...Liveability is not a middle class luxury. It is an economic imperative.”

In the course of this pandemic, there is a paradigm shift in the operation of workplaces, how we live and congregate. Now is the time for a review of regional settlement. Simon Jenkins wrote in the Guardian (13.08.20) “the age of the office is over-the future lies in Britain’s commuter towns. The rise in home working has thrown city centres into crisis. If I were in the property game, I’d buy anywhere with a cathedral.” The increased links between home and work, in neighbourhoods supported by a strong sense of place, will favour historic towns such as Carlow.

Local resources such as libraries, cafes, community centres all provide the essential social infrastructure for towns to thrive. Sociologist Eric Klinenberg describes social infrastructure as “building places where all kinds of people can gather is the best way to repair the fractured society we live in today”. Investment in the development and upkeep of social infrastructure is essential for the foundations of civic life. Carnegie libraries were the foundation of public libraries in the 19th century. Carnegie’s philanthropy, as is well-known, most significantly took the form of financial bestowments to towns wishing to build public libraries: the earliest of these often featured a lamp standard to denote enlightenment. The word public is important. They were freely accessible to all, the first libraries with public access to shelves – an invitation to stay and browse – and the first to provide spaces specifically for children.

Library design has evolved; contemporary libraries are seen as interactive knowledge hubs, a place for public assembly and exchange. Learning in the broadest sense of the word underpins the concept of this civic institution. The public library service is the largest information and cultural infrastructure in Ireland, with over 12 million visits annually. Library usage in all parts of the country has increased exponentially since the last recession; libraries are an essential public facility, as information centre, communication hub and meeting place. Indeed the creation of a generous and beautiful space, at once a home from home and civic place, will provide the facility for community uses as yet unimagined for future generations.

The long term nature of this project and its juxtaposition with historic monuments that themselves have endured and survived for centuries does inform material choices and the character and quality to be achieved in this significant development for Carlow town. Generous and inspiring spaces crafted in robust and enduring materials will stand the test of time and reward astute investment for future generations.



The project brief required the design team to establish the best strategy to redevelop the existing central library, library headquarters and county archives of the Presentation Building into a library, civic and learning hub for the town. The brief reflects the need to accommodate the range of services required under Our Public Libraries strategy 2022, which embodies the concept of the public library as an interactive knowledge hub. The Presentation Building Regeneration project is envisaged as a public and community space, integral to the plans for the renewal of Carlow Town Centre public realm.

The role and typology of the public library has evolved since the establishment of the first free public libraries in the 19th century; contemporary libraries are now seen as a place for public assembly and exchange, a multifunctional assembly of spaces that offer a myriad of community uses for learning, leisure and culture.

The use of book handling systems and information technology has facilitated a new design paradigm; space is more fluid encouraging an interactive and less hierarchical use of the interior space by librarians and readers. Despite the ubiquity of on-line networks, there is still a demand for a physical space, a good public room where people can meet and congregate, or read alone at ease.

Many contemporary libraries may be considered as catalysts for urban regeneration as well as signifiers of public identity. The brief states the desire to reflect the importance of the Presentation Building in the town as a landmark and as a generator of public space, setting up a sequence of civic spaces (Library and Community Hub Museum-Cathedral-Visual-Carlow College) knitted in to the fabric of the cultural quarter. The setting of this historic and significant assembly of buildings, located at the interface between the commercial part of the town and the cultural quarter reinforces the cultural hub and library as a unifying and strategic link between these domains.

#### PROJECT INCEPTION/PRELIMINARY DESIGN OPTIONS

The library complex currently comprises the original Presentation Convent Building renovated in 1997 and extended with the branch library/lending area and bookstore. The Tourist Office, Shaw Room and Gallery renovation was completed in 2000 and the Carlow County Museum was refurbished in 2012.

The accommodation as it stands presents the following issues

- Reading room with its multiple columns is inflexible with no space for public events such as readings, seminars or exhibitions
- No meeting rooms or workshops are provided
- Dispersed arrangement of offices, book processing and administration
- Limited public facilities particularly toilets, changing area or lockers
- None of the limited toilet facilities are suitable for universal access
- Circulation and interface between public areas and local history is difficult to navigate
- Lack of storage for books and archival material
- Thermal performance of the building limits the ability to meet the 2030 and 2050 targets for Public Buildings of 50% energy efficiency and 30% total carbon reduction, a minimum B rating and NZEB performance.

A range of options were considered starting with a minimal approach of reconfiguring the existing forms, extending to complete replacement and rebuilding of the modern blocks of the library, in parallel testing against the desired list of facilities and uses. The sequence and scope of development will be driven by budgetary constraints. The building spaces should have a clear and legible volumetric organisation that facilitates reconfiguration of uses over time as needs change. The accommodation schedule will require rigorous analysis and testing to ensure that the budget is optimised and funding application is based on cost benefit analysis



## CONTEXT

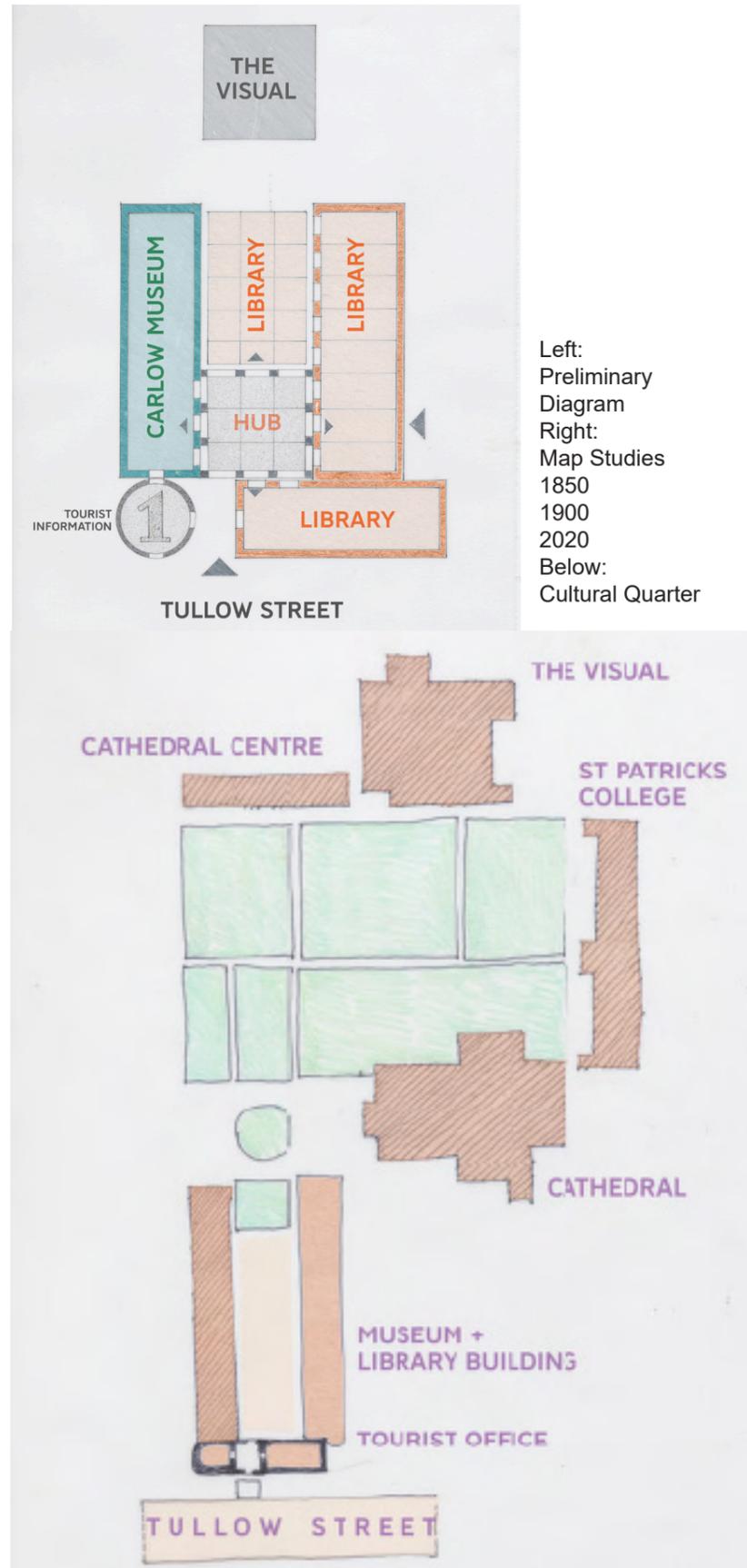
The proposal to develop a library, community and learning hub creates an opportunity for a vibrant and interactive place. The particular and unique character of the site which, is an Architectural Conservation Area, will inform the building design. The building should have a clear and strong form that expresses the civic character of the institution and engages proactively with the public realm. A public building in the city may sustain many cycles of change and function over its lifespan. Its place in the hierarchy of the city must stand the test of time.

The first task is to understand the context and development of the site and how it has evolved, and then to appreciate the assets and opportunities of what there is now. The Presentation Convent is very much a street building with a clear and direct relationship to College Street and Tullow Street. The urban realm improvements planned for Tullow Street and the Carlow College link will regenerate and revitalise the public realm facilitating social interaction and community activity. The Presentation Building Library, community and learning hub creates the potential to build on this and to create new links and connections between the town centre and cultural quarter. Connections are not only related to pedestrian movement through and across the site but also to visual connections, optimising views of the cathedral, townscape and college grounds.

The public realm is considered in 3 ways:

- The building threshold at Tullow Street
- The re-definition of Presentation Place as a coherent street framing views to the Cathedral
- Building on the rear of the site, the creation of a hub around which all of the spaces address and connect.

Historically the building plots on Tullow Street were long and narrow extending back to the walls of the College. These plots have gradually been developed against the grain, changing the reading of the town buildings and their private gardens. The Presentation Convent was an important institution in the town. As was common for convents of the time, there were fine landscaped gardens for contemplation and a greenhouse for fruit and vegetables. Where the garden stood there is now a car park overlooked by a terrace of apartments, Presentation Place. There is an opportunity to properly define this space as a street with a long building that might enclose a new garden, courtyard or rooflit space. Although not used presently there is a gate leading into the Cathedral grounds, providing another pedestrian route to the Visual and St Patrick's College.



**BRIEF**

The development of the brief is underpinned by consideration of the Presentation Buildings as an integrated community, cultural and learning complex accommodating the Carlow County Museum, Carlow Tourism and Carlow Central Library. The current facilities offer limited scope for the expansion considered essential due to projected population growth, which was already increased by 37% in County Carlow and 67% in Carlow Town between 1996 and 2016. The development of the new libraries strategy Our Public Libraries 2022, ICT developments, increased usage and population growth inform the development of facilities to support

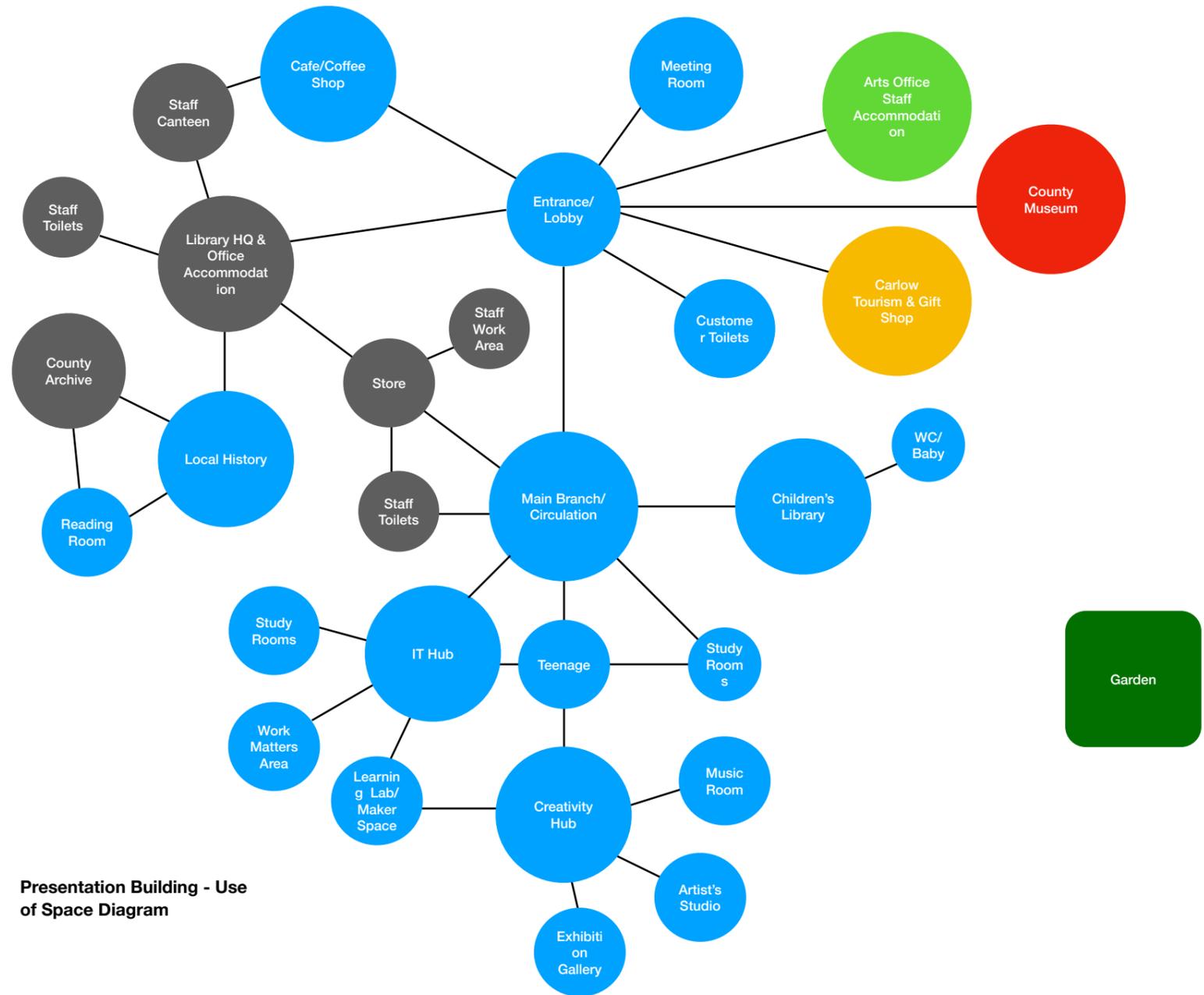
- Reading and Literacy
- Learning and Information
- Community and Culture

The core accommodation requirements are for

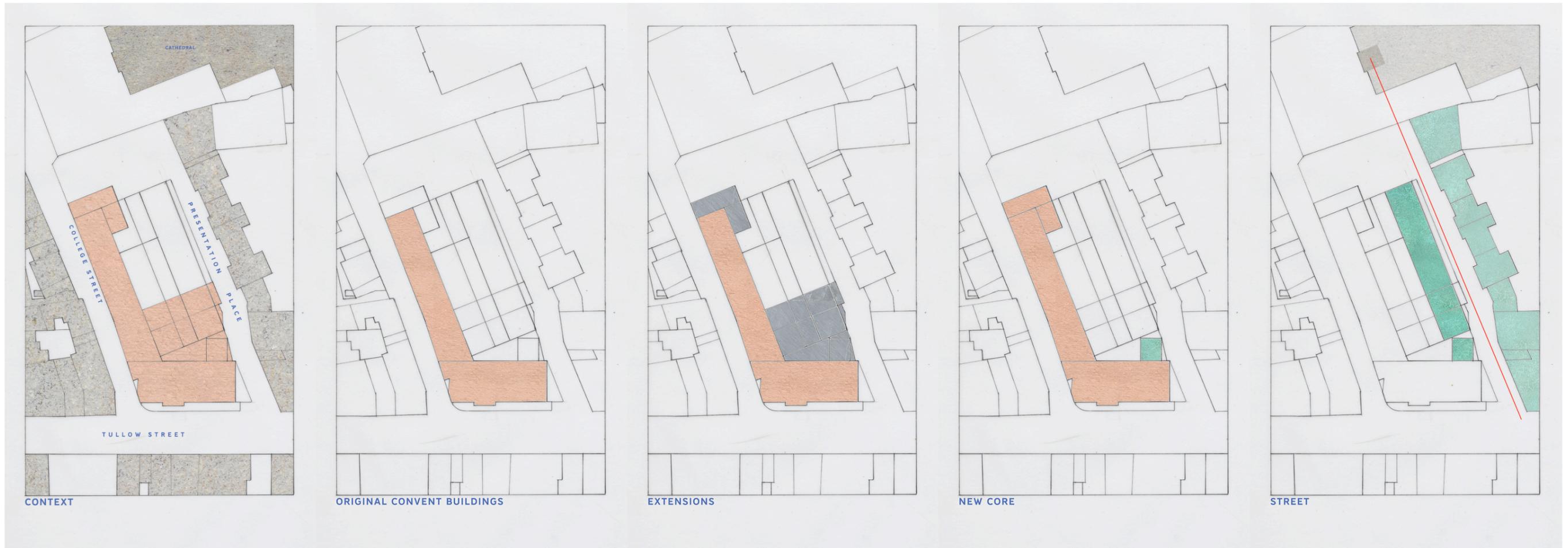
- Entrance to the Presentation Building from Tullow Street and Cathedral Square
- Main Lending Library
- Children and Families Library
- Young Adult Library
- Reference and Study Rooms
- ICT and eLearning Hub
- Local Studies -collections and public reading room
- County Archive-storage and public reading room
- Staff Accommodation-offices and welfare facilities
- Gallery and exhibition space
- Meeting and Collaboration Rooms
- Staff and Public Toilets

Consideration was given to artists' studios and a café but not progressed due to physical constraints. The town centre location would allow independent cafes in the town to service this need. Accommodation schedules are included for each Off-site storage for reserve stock collection and council records is an option but there is space allocated for this function. A garden is included in Option 1.

Accommodation schedules are included in Appendix 1



**Presentation Building - Use of Space Diagram**



**DESIGN STRATEGY: SITE**

The design strategy is derived from an understanding of the context, constraints and opportunities of the site.

The original convent buildings were street buildings, providing strong definition to Tullow Street and College Street.

The original gardens were dismantled and buildings added in 1997 (the library) and the County Museum extension in 2012.

A rationally planned lift and stairs core may be placed at the hinge point between old and new.

A new building defines Presentation Place and encloses a multi-functional hub space for library, events and exhibitions.



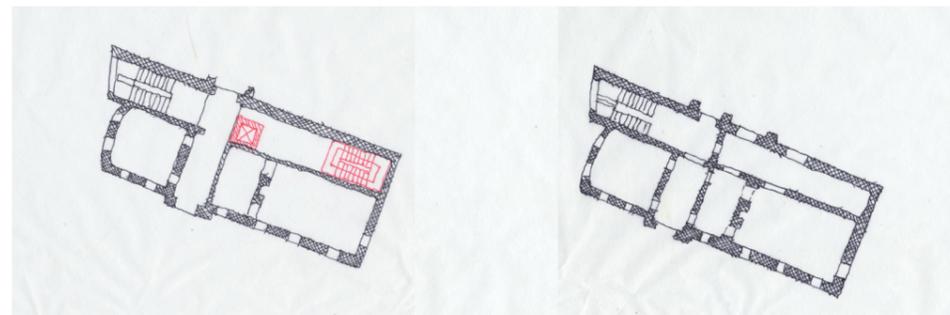
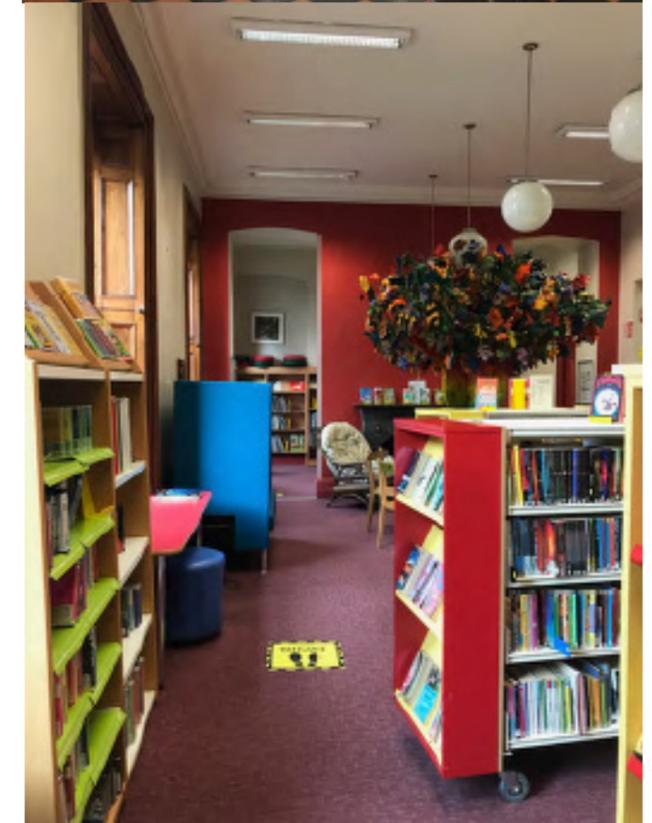
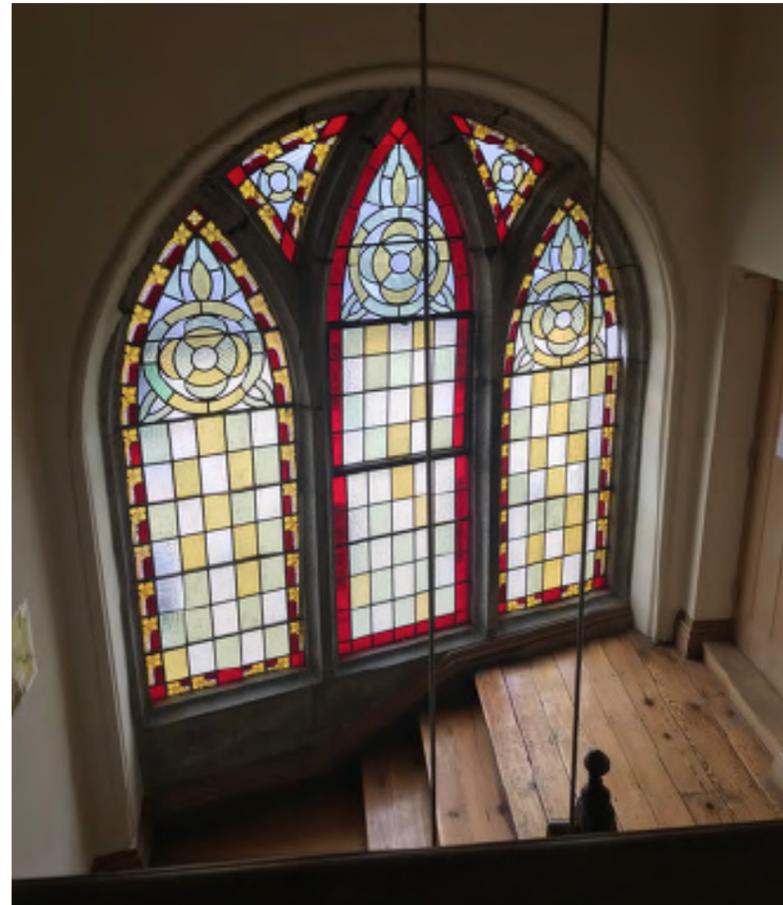
## DESIGN STRATEGY: PRESENTATION BUILDING

The Presentation building is soundly built with well-proportioned rooms. The clarity of these rooms is obscured by current use and configuration. The connection to the street is important; as the tourist office is to be displaced (allowing for consolidation of the County Museum along College Street) a suitable location would be on the ground floor of the Tullow Street building. Its co-location with the library and cultural hub, as a place for information, is appropriate. The ground floor of the Presentation Building, currently accommodating the children's library might be repurposed as a local history centre, with direct access off the entrance hall. For townspeople and visitors alike, this suite of rooms could be considered as the vestibule to the town.

A lift was inserted into the building plan to provide universal access. It is proposed, in all plan options except the most minimal, to remove the lift and escape stairs and relocate to a more central position in the plan. This would restore the building rooms to their original configuration, retaining the sense of the building as a grand residence.

Unsatisfactory accretions will be cleared away and the original geometry of the rooms restored. The scale and simplicity of the rooms lends flexibility to their intended use which might evolve over time. The upper floors of the building will be used for more specialised and semi-public use, including administration offices and archives.

Historic research is essential to the understanding of what is significant in the building complex. It is essential to identify what is intrinsic to the building's historic character and therefore ensure interventions are managed in a way that preserves the building's character. A more detailed account of the building's history and conservation strategy is outlined in the Carrig Conservation report in Appendix 2.



The key task therefore is first to realize a **clear circulation strategy, facilitated by the relocation of the lift and escape stairs**, to ensure smooth working of the building. Secondly a **services strategy** that is feasible and pragmatic must be devised. A significant portion of the budget could be used to provide new services and associated builder's work; a robust strategy will need to be developed to adapt the building and provide new services suitable for current expectations in terms of performance and comfort. The design strategy for the building will be driven by an integrated approach to the design of spaces and services, and a necessarily spare approach to finishes and materials.

Finally an appropriate strategy is devised to **improve the thermal performance** of the building in a manner that respects the inherent character of the building enclosure. An integrated approach includes removal of the sand cement render and application of a lime render, renewal of the roof incorporating breathable membranes and insulation, and repair of windows. A more detailed outline of the energy strategy is outlined in the Varming Report Appendix 2.

The design team will work together to ensure that the vision for the building is met whilst also ensuring the protection of the building's surviving heritage assets and its significance. All interventions to the building will be carefully designed to ensure the least impact on the building and also respect the principle of reversibility.

## DESIGN STRATEGY

The Presentation Building is reconfigured and clarified as previously described. The Tourist Office is located in the Shaw Room at ground floor level and accessed off the original vestibule. A local history reading room and collections area may also be located off this vestibule.

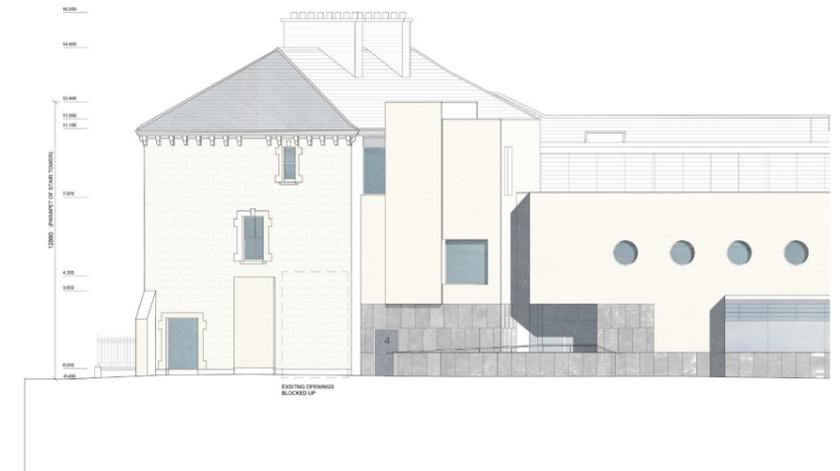
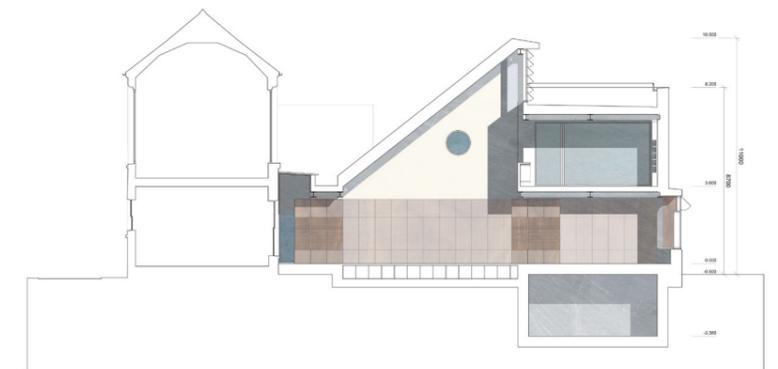
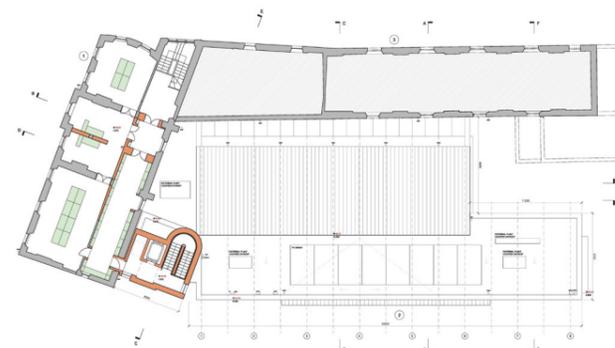
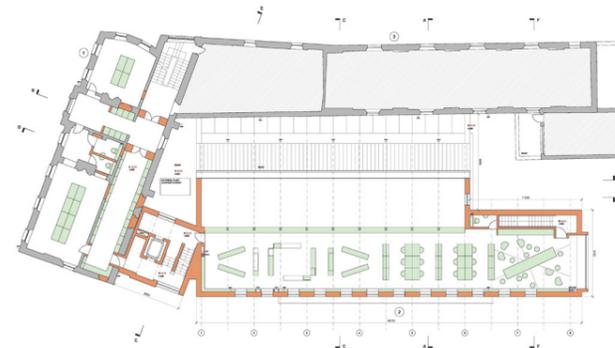
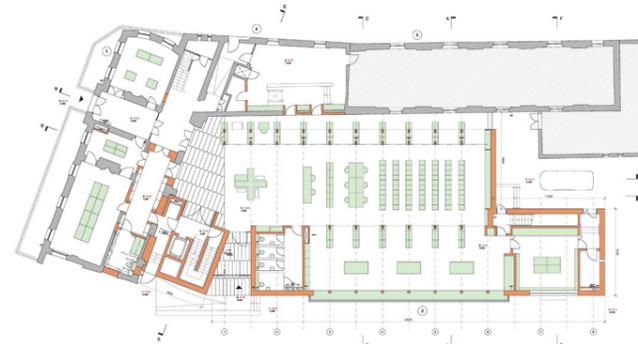
A new lift and stair core is placed at the hinge of the plan, connecting new and old buildings.

The new building is placed parallel to the County Museum and defines Presentation Place. The new structure fills the existing footprint of the library, extending to the Museum. The cross section is configured to lighten the impact of this adjacency. A two-storey building defines the street face and provides a first floor roof lit reading room overlooking a double height volume with the multi-functional library space. The roof profile drops down to meet the level of the museum façade string course.

The entrance off Presentation Place is retained and a more compact stone paved entrance lobby allows access to public toilets. There is space for temporary exhibitions in the library hall, which is a tall volume overlooked by a mezzanine reading room. A long window provides views to the street at ground level. Picture windows are strategically located on north elevations framing views of the Cathedral. Windows along Presentation Place are avoided to maintain overlooking of the neighbours; the rooms are mainly rooflit. Book deliveries and a workshop space are located to the rear. There is provision for a basement floor with reserve collections, archives and services. There will be direct connection between the new library "living room" and museum via the existing tourist office. The provision of a shared entrance off Tullow Street to the Library, Cultural, Civic and Learning Space will encourage synergies between the museum and library to be developed, particularly in the development of temporary exhibitions and access to local history collections.

**Pro:** The building footprint provides adequate accommodation for the brief requested; the dimensions and volume offer flexible multipurpose space that may be configured for temporary events and exhibitions as well as the public "living room". The space may be read as a hub linking museum, convent reading rooms and building on Presentation Place.

**Con:** Building up to the existing structures will entail careful detailing at the interface with existing historic structure of the Museum.



**MATERIALS**

The external materials palette will be driven an understanding of the context, in conjunction with clear implementation of the building design strategy. The existing Library/Museum complex is characterised by the use of local granite enclosures to openings particularly at the College Road staircase, which is finely detailed and the use of a granite base to the street railings. The façade to the street is finished in render-the restoration of the County Museum indicates how the building may have originally looked with the soft texture and colour of the lime render, which is proposed for the Tullow Street and College Road elevations of the Library. The rear of the County Museum is an interesting collage of cut limestone, granite inserts (probably salvaged) and some brick reveals. The combination of granite to the important facades and limestone to the sides is evident also in the Cathedral.

There is already a precedent set for contemporary interventions on the site with the Museum extension, which is clad in a flamed, weathered limestone.

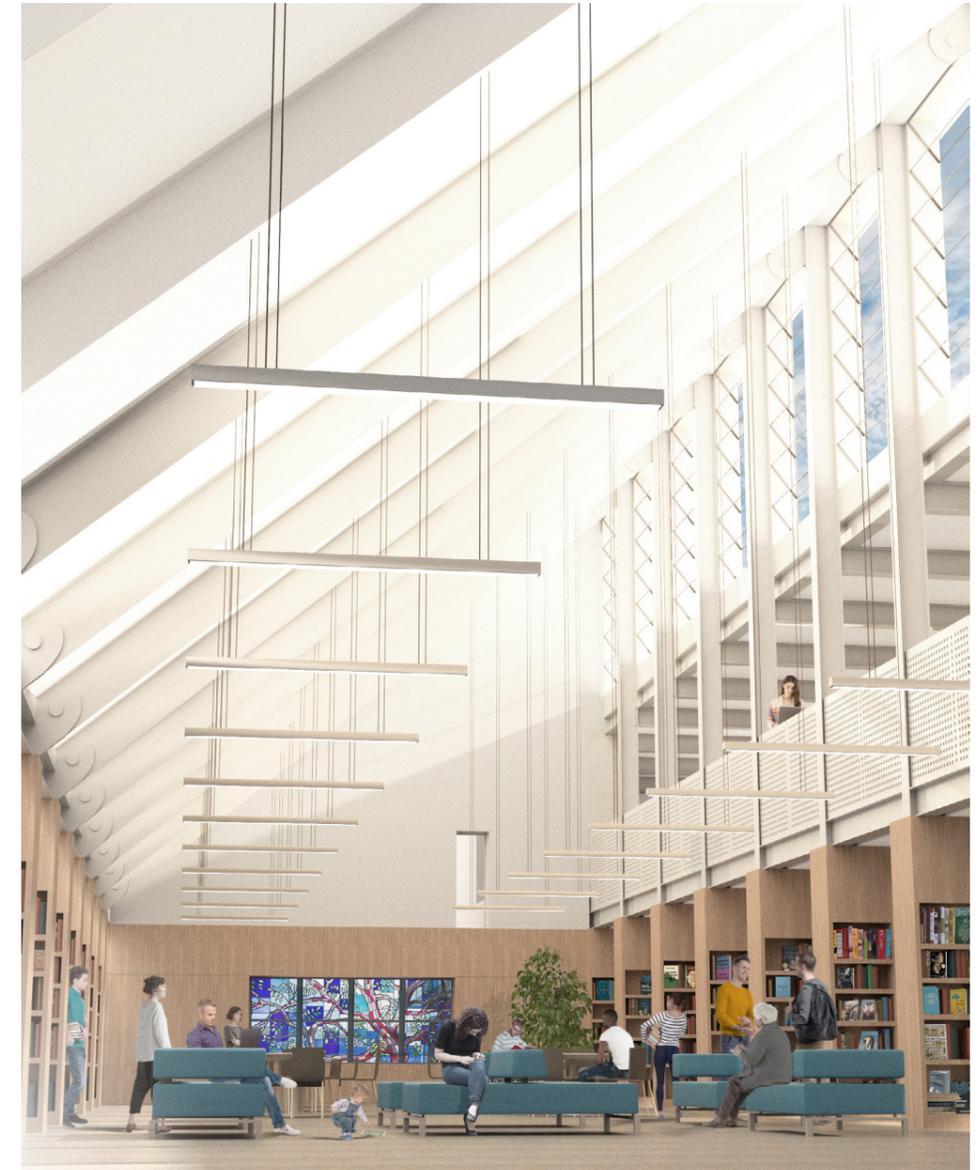
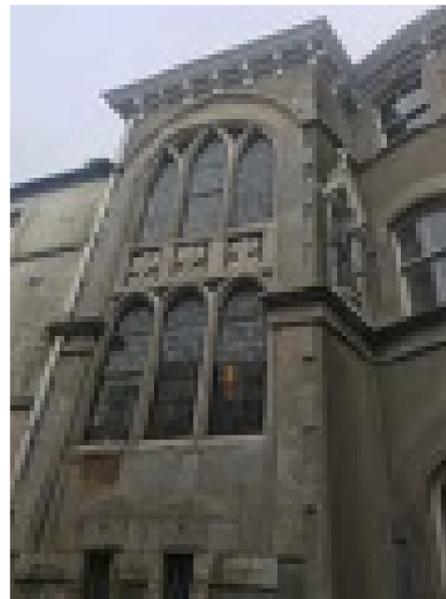
We propose to create a limestone plinth which rises to make an entrance porch and falls to define windows, which are carefully placed to offer views and light to readers. This dark base will contrast with the wall above which will be finished in a grey lime render.

Limestone will also be used at the building threshold, making a robust and easily maintained flooring finish.



Above  
Tullow Street Elevation with view to Cathedral

Top Right  
Rear Elevation of County Museum  
Middle Right  
Collage of Limestone, granite, brick detailing  
Bottom Right  
Granite details at stair window on College Street



Above  
View of Library Hub

Inside the new building the materials will be simple and monotone. White walls will be lined in hardwood shelves and acoustic panels at ground level. Floor finishes will include terrazzo at ground floor which is suitable for underfloor heating, and hardwood on the second floor.

The Presentation Convent will be finished to optimise daylight. White walls and joinery will clarify the forms of the rooms. Hardwood flooring will be used on the ground floor and carpet in the quieter work spaces of the upper floors. A steel structural frame is under review and would provide an elegant lightweight solution to the mezzanine floor, its balcony and the pitched roof profile. The roof will be clad in a zinc standing seam as this will weather to a grey finish similar to the limestone walls of the County Museum.

## SUSTAINABILITY

A sustainable building design strategy goes hand in hand with the promotion of wellbeing for the building users. Access to views, natural light, outdoor spaces and planting as well as use of low pollutant materials such as zero formaldehyde, low VOC. The best high-performing spaces deliver psychological comfort which is experienced as a sense of belonging, and control over the immediate work environment.

It is instructive to note the adaptability and robust nature of the protected structures on the site. Design lifespan and low maintenance requirements will inform design choices and favour high quality natural materials, finishes and furniture that will wear and weather well with minimal maintenance. The selection of materials that do not require applied finishes to be periodically maintained and components with long lifespan (and guarantees for such) for example, door ironmongery, light fittings, will reduce running costs and the negative environmental impact associated with frequent repair, upgrades and waste disposal. Liaison with the building and facilities managers during the briefing process will be essential part of the process.

The material and systems selection regime will be complemented by robust detailing that underpins the weathering, energy efficiency and longevity of finishes and components. The structure of the building in both the configuration and material has particular relevance to the sustainable building and initial design considerations for the services systems in the building which will have a major influence on the building's efficiency and overall performance. We look at optimising the façade to ensure adequate daylight, the use of natural ventilation and achieving comfortable conditions within the building. Dynamic Thermal Modelling allows for the performance of the building to be assessed in conjunction with the external environment, building usage, façade design and ventilation method to show the effect on the internal environment and building energy consumption.

Our approach will be one of maximising passive design and the conditioning of the building using the building envelope, form and fabric. This means that the reliance on active M&E systems is reduced, along with the maintenance and running costs. Use of double height volume for the main space allows use of the stack effect to optimise natural ventilation, air quality and energy use. A more detailed energy report is included in Appendix 4.

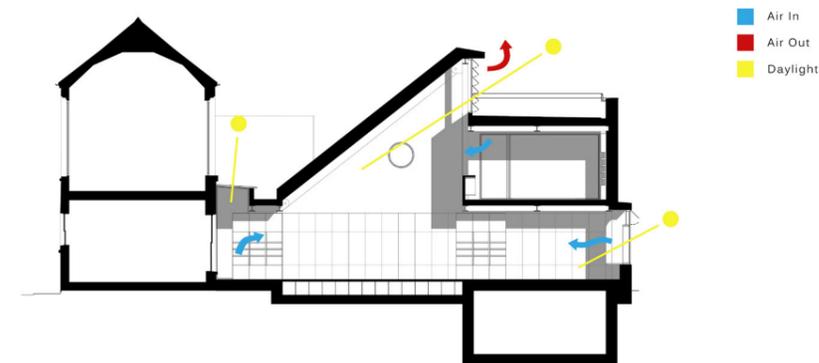
Good access to both daylight and controlled sunlight – allowing shafts of sunlight into the building can provide delight and really lift spaces. Natural ventilation coupled with appropriate thermal mass will provide much of the conditioning with back-ground cooling when necessary to deal with peak summer-time temperatures. Maximising daylight and natural ventilation will tend to lead to larger open plan spaces. Absorption local to noise sources and to transmission routes will limit the spread of noise and reverberation. The arrangement of spaces and use can enable different acoustic environments throughout the building appropriate to each location.

## ACCESSIBILITY

Inclusive design, which seeks to remove barriers and impediments to free and independent movement and use, benefits all sectors of the population. We believe that the principle of universal access underpins our design strategies from the earliest stages of design inception; the motivation is to realise a design where easy access is not a remedial intervention but a natural part of the design solution encompassing spatial planning, services, dimensions of things and the look and feel of finishes and fittings. We will comply with BS 8300 as well as published research on space planning, behaviour analysis and ergonomics. Carlow County Council aim to lead the way in providing accessible spaces and exceed TGD M where feasible. A Changing Places facility will be provided in the building.



Above  
View of childrens reading room  
Below  
Diagram of environmental effects



## AREA SCHEDULE

15.12.2020

### GROSS INTERNAL AREAS

The gross internal areas are measured to the inner face of the outer walls. This is a standard method of measurement, but may vary from area measurements by the quantity surveyor.

	EXISTING CONVENT BUILDING				EXISTING EXTENSION		NEW BUILDING				TOTAL GIA M <sup>2</sup>	NEWBUILD GIA M <sup>2</sup>
FLOOR	BASEMENT	GROUND	FIRST	SECOND	GROUND	FIRST	BASEMENT	GROUND	FIRST	SECOND		
	69	304.6	208.5	208.5	337.5	92.5	124	658.5	293.2	29.2	<b>1895.5</b>	1104.9

**Site Area: 1854m<sup>2</sup> | 0.185ha**