



# **PUBLIC REALM PROPOSALS** AT VISUAL, CARLOW

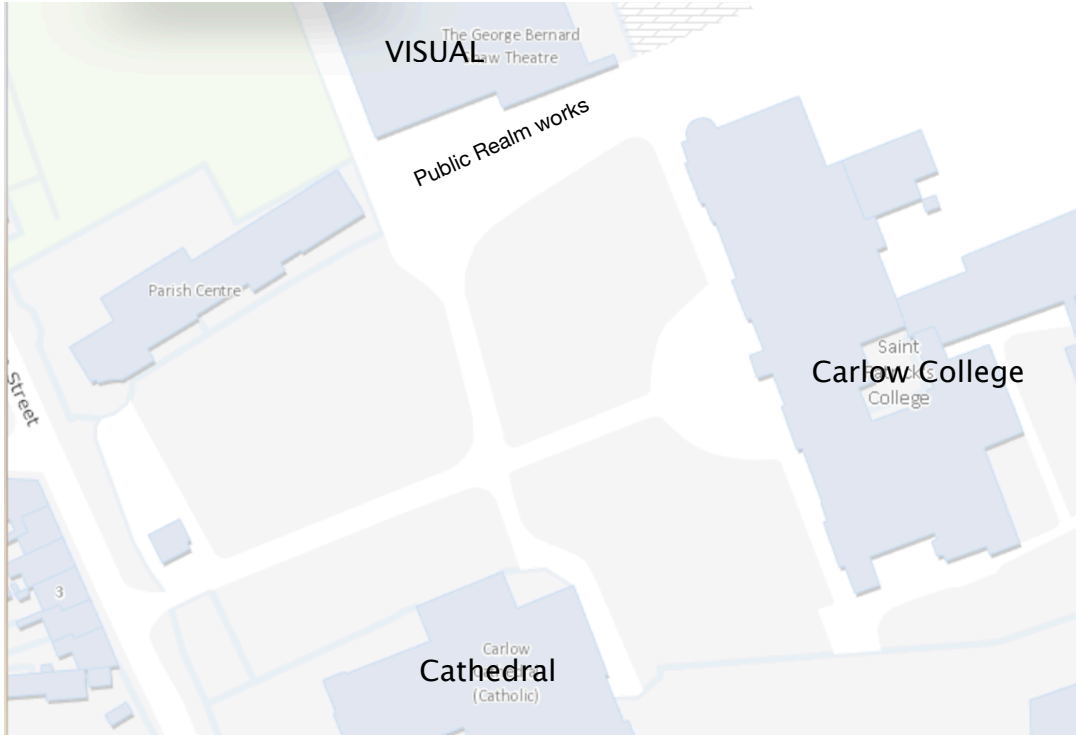
ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE IMPACT ASSESSMENT

## 1 Introduction

- 1.1 Carlow County Council are proposing to make improvements to the public realm space in the vicinity of Visual, Carlow. This process is subject to a Part 8 application under the Planning Acts.
- 1.2 As Visual is sited on the grounds of Carlow College and within the curtilage of the college and the cathedral, both listed on the Record of Protected Structures (RPS) in the Carlow Development Plan, an Architectural Heritage Impact Assessment is required to consider the impact, if any, on the protected structures on site.
- 1.3 This assessment has been prepared by Margaret Quinlan, FRIAI, Grade 1 accredited in Conservation.
- 1.4 This assessment is to be read in conjunction with the Part 8 documentation prepared by Carlow County Council

## 2 VISUAL Arts Centre

- 2.1 VISUAL is the Carlow Arts Centre and is a project of the Carlow Local Authorities. The site for Visual was donated by Carlow College.
- 2.2 An international architectural competition was held by the RIAI and the design contract was awarded to Terry Pawson, a British architect with a background in designing buildings for the arts and cultural sectors.
- 2.3 Visual opened in 2009 and houses a 335-seat theatre and the largest cube gallery space in the country –12 metres high – where it hosts a programme of both commissioned and existing high-quality national and international contemporary art, performances and multi-media events.
- 2.4 Visual, an award-winning architectural design, is not listed at present on the Record of Protected Structures.



OS map of open space at Carlow College



View of VISUAL and college from entrance at College St



1st Ed OS map c 1840



2nd Ed OS map c 1900



### 3 Protected Structures on the Carlow College site

#### 3.1 Summary Description of the buildings (as listed on the RPS)

RPS No.	NIAH No.	Description	Date range	Rating Importance
CT73	10000437	<b>St. Patricks College College Street</b>  Originally freestanding four storey late 18 <sup>th</sup> century building advancing forward at centre and sides. Late Georgian extensions to flanks with larger windows.(excludes rear extension)	1785- 1793	<b>National</b>  Architectural, Historical, Interior, Personality, Group. Uniqueness/ Rarity
CT74	10000438	<b>Rear Extension. St. Patrick's College</b>  Victorian 'Romanesque' building extending to rear of seminary and linked to it by modern narthex, part of full and radical reconstruction of older work	1887- 1888	<b>Regional</b>  A,H,Int,P,G
CT75	10000435	<b>Entrance Gates St. Patrick's College</b>  Entrance gates to St Patrick's College in rusticated granite ashlar, limestone and curved rendered walls with granite coping. Central carriageway topped with iron arch over iron gates	1789- 1793	<b>Regional</b>  Architectural, Historical, Group
CT76	10000436	<b>Gate Lodge, St Patrick's College,</b>  Well detailed single storey late Neoclassical Doric gate lodge. Two pedimented fronts, that to gate with in antis baseless columns between square piers 1820- 1839	1820- 1839	<b>Regional</b>  Architectural, Historical, Group
CT77	10000188	<b>Carlow Cathedral</b>  Cruciform cathedral in late English gothic style, with tower at the southern end of the transept surmounted by a lantern, 151 feet high	1820- 1833	<b>National</b>  Architectural, Historical, Interior, Personality, Uniqueness/ Rarity
CT78	10000439	<b>Railings &amp; Gates, Carlow Cathedral</b>  Railings and gates fronting the Cathedral of spiked tops surmounting a low granite wall. Oil lamps sit on top of the piers which are in turn decorated with shields of the Diocese	1832- 1839	<b>Regional</b>  Architectural, Group

## **3.2 Historical Background**

Carlow College has an illustrious history. It is Ireland's oldest third level Catholic college founded in 1782 and opened in 1793 after relaxation of the Penal Laws. From 1793 until 1892 Carlow College was both a lay college of the humanities and a seminary.

From 1840, the University of London accredited degrees at Carlow College in the Arts and Law. With the University Education (Ireland) Act 1879, the Royal University of Ireland was established, and the following year, degrees offered at Carlow College were accredited by this educational body. From 1892, lay students were based at Knockbeg College and Carlow College operated exclusively as a seminary for the education of priests until 1989.

In 1990, Carlow College once again welcomed lay students to study third-level courses in the Humanities and Social Sciences. Since 1997, Carlow College has embarked on a building and renovation campaign which has seen the development of new lecture halls and the completion of a Students Centre, Library and Archive (2006). As part of its on-going support for the arts, the College donated land to the Carlow Local Authority for the development of the Centre for Contemporary Art and The George Bernard Shaw Theatre (VISUAL), an €18 million development project located in the heart of Carlow Town. In 2011 Carlow College refurbished Lennon House to provide on-campus accommodation.

The earliest part of the building is the large central block, almost 37 metres long. In 1817, Carlow-based Thomas Alfred Cobden (1794-1842) was engaged as the architect for an extension. Thomas Cobden, a young English-born architect also designed the Roman Catholic Cathedral of the Assumption and other Carlow buildings of the time, including Duckett's Grove.

The south wing was added in 1819 and was connected to the existing college by a two-storey link building. The main north wing was built between 1821 and 1835 on a much grander scale. It contains a very fine cantilevered granite staircase leading up from a granite paved entrance hall. A large hall with semi-circular apse, once the college chapel, is now named the Cobden Hall and is used for college and public events.

A new wing at the south end, connected to the old building by a closed cloister intended to serve as play hall, was designed by William Hague. The foundation stone was laid in summer of 1879.

The chapel of the Sacred Heart, built in the Hiberno-Romanesque style, was built to mark the centenary of the college and now functions as the College Library. An exhibition on the history of the college is on display in the corridor leading into the Library.

To mark the bicentenary of the opening of Carlow College, a replica of the high cross from nearby Sleaty was erected in the grounds. Immediately opposite is a modern work entitled Sun Stone by the German artist Paul Scheidner and it is aligned with the sun at the summer solstice.

The college entrance gate and gate lodge, built in 1832, were almost certainly designed by Cobden too. The lodge is a small two-roomed building with a doorway under a classical pediment and flanked by two Greek Doric columns.



## Carlow Cathedral

The cathedral is cruciform in late English gothic style, with a tower at the southern end of the transept surmounted by a lantern, 46 metres high.

A chapel from the penal period existed between Carlow College and the Dublin Road. In 1787, a sizeable Church was built on the later Cathedral site. The Cathedral was completed in 1833 and the old church was demolished. Part of its transept walls were retained and incorporated into the new structure. Gothic in design. Thomas Cobden was the main architect. The tower and lantern, is said to have been inspired by the Cloth Hall at Burges in Belgium. The successful completion of the building work in 1833 represented a magnificent achievement for the people of Carlow and the diocese who contributed the most of the final cost of the building – £9,000.

Many changes came over the years to how the Cathedral looked, the main campaigns being in 1899 and in 1997 when the architect Richard H. Pierce designed alterations and reordering.

### 3.3 Summary Assessment of the Complex

The contemporary Visual building, with the low-key Parish Centre, encloses to the north the fine semi-public space created by the long frontage of Carlow College, with the Cathedral forming the east side. The mature trees are prominent as are the existing wide asphalt paths. The space contains three sculptures – the high cross replica, the Sun Stone and the imposing steel Medusa Tree, by Eileen McDonagh, close to the entrance to VISUAL.

The complex contains two structures rated of National Importance, both architecturally and of great historic importance as forerunners at a time of major change in Irish history. In recent years, the site has gained a modern Arts Centre, itself setting a new national standard for others to follow.





## 4 The Proposal

The proposal is a simple one. In essence, it aims to upgrade the approach to VISUAL and to install signage and directional clues to guide visitors from the parking area to the entrance.

PROPOSAL	JUSTIFICATION	IMPACT
<p>Directional signs at NE corner of VISUAL building.</p> <p>Signage totem c. 8m high, at SE corner high quality concrete base plinth and a glass upper section with cut-out lettering in profile against the sky and illuminated at night</p>	<p>To act as an eye-catcher to the visitor arriving from the vehicular entrance and to point to the route, which aligns with the frontage of Carlow College</p>	<p>The sign is a slender column contemporary in style and appropriate for its setting.</p> <p>No visual impact on the protected structures.</p> <p>Positive impact for the VISUAL site</p>
<p>New curved in-situ concrete wall, tapering in height and incorporating seats</p>	<p>To define the space by making an edge to the college lawn, to introduce visual interest by the curved surface, to encourage social use of the space with seating</p>	<p>No adverse impact on the protected structures.</p> <p>A positive impact in defining the college space while maintaining the same visual connectivity</p>
<p><b>Entrance area</b></p> <p>New granite paving</p> <p>Information points in Corten steel</p>	<p>To upgrade the existing concrete surface and provide information</p>	<p>Positive for the site as a whole</p> <p>No adverse impact on the protected structures.</p>
<p><b>Medusa Tree area</b></p> <p>New in-situ concrete wall incorporating seats, adjustments to grass bank</p>	<p>To define the end of the approach space and to create a social area around the sculpture</p>	<p>Positive for the site as a whole</p> <p>No adverse impact on the protected structures.</p>

### Summary Assessment of Proposal

The Public Realm proposal will not have any adverse impact on the principal protected structures of Carlow College, the Cathedral and the associated buildings and features within their curtilage.

The scheme will be of considerable benefit to VISUAL and will offer a more interesting and visually-contained external space at the general entrance area.

  
 Margaret Quinlan FRIAI