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Commercial Shopfront Structures
Shamrock Square
Carlow Town
County Carlow

Heritage Assessment Report

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1.0 Background to this report:

Located on the east side of Carlow Town's Shamrock Square, at the junction of Barrack Street, Tullow Street, Staplestown Road, Pollerton Road and Green Lane, the subject properties occupy a highly visible site. As Carlow Town continues to grow and regenerate its historic town centre, it is important that properties such as these are either maintained to a high standard, or redeveloped to provide much needed housing.

The two adjacent properties that are the subject of this preliminary Conservation and Heritage Impact assessment have been allowed to deteriorate following a devastating fire in 2008, and are now in extremely poor condition. This report has been written to discuss their architectural interest, their current conditions, and proposals for redevelopment of the site. Of particular interest is the Protected Structure status that the structures were given at the beginning of the 21st century, when they were in much better condition, (RPS Nos. CT 93 and CT 94).

The pair of former shopfront structures facing onto Shamrock Square are now obviously in ruinous condition, and their retention and redevelopment would entail substantial expenditure to safely carry out such works, far in excess of their economic value.

The new owner of these structures has is interested in redeveloping a site that includes these two properties, and would like to explore the possibility of replacing the two shop front properties with new construction, a development which will require the removal of both structures from the Record of Protected Structures.

2.0 Description of the Subject Properties:

Shamrock Square Buildings. This pair of mixed use commercial shops with two floors of living accommodation above (RPS Nos. CT 93 and CT 94) appear on the first edition of the OS, surveyed in 1837, and their general design and internal details suggest that they were probably built around 1830-1840. The well detailed Victorian shopfronts were likely added during the second half of the 19th century.

The reasons for including these buildings on the RPS is assumed to be because of their attractive period shopfronts. As seen in old photographs taken when the shops were still in business, the shopfronts consisted of robust timber posts supporting ornamental sign boards and moulded timber cornices. There were timber framed shop windows with a panelled timber apron under each window. The shop doors were glazed timber panelled doors. This type of shop front was common throughout the towns and villages of Ireland up until the last decades of the twentieth century. The vast majority of such historic shopfronts have been replaced with more contemporary shopfronts, or with pastiche reproduction joinery.



Photo No. 1. General photo looking east, showing the west front elevations of the two shop front buildings around 1990. The late 19th century shopfronts remain intact in this view, and show that the buildings are otherwise quite ordinary and modest examples of commercial buildings with living accommodation above, dating from the first half of the 19th century.

The Shamrock Square Buildings were heavily damaged in a fire in 2008, with the roofs burned away. Since that time, the interior of both buildings remained exposed to rainwater ingress for over a decade. By the time the current owners purchased the properties, they were in a very dangerous and unstable condition.

Unfortunately, it appears that while the shopfronts partially survived the 2008 fire, the subsequent damage from rain penetration into the top of the cornices has led to loss of both cornices and the richly ornamented shop piers. As the attached photos illustrate, the external walls are all that remain of the two shop front buildings. The roof and internal floors have perished since the fire, and the internal walls have become unstable and have largely collapsed. Of particular concern is the condition of the large timber lintels that support the front walls over the original shopfronts. Those timber beams have been exposed to the weather for well over a decade and their structural integrity is now highly compromised by rot and decay.

A condition assessment of these buildings has been carried out by Martin Peters, Structural and Civil Engineer, to provide an expert opinion as to their current physical condition, and whether there is any merit in attempting to reinstate the remaining structures.

3.0 Assessment of Potential Heritage Impacts from Proposed Developments

Due to the extensive degradation of the roof and internal structure of the two shop front buildings, the clients' preferred option is to seek permission to demolish the remaining external walls from those buildings, and to erect a new development of multi-storey flats. To allow for this scenario, the subject of those buildings being included on the Record of Protected Structures must be addressed. It is clear from the attached photos, and the structural engineer's condition report, that these structures have lost a significant amount of their architectural fabric, and that what remains is severely compromised. It is highly unlikely that any new use could be found that would be able to pay for the excessive cost of reinstating those buildings, and the remaining buildings would have relatively little original historic fabric left in place. Given their ruinous condition, and relatively low level of significance upon which those buildings were listed for protection, it would seem reasonable to remove them from the RPS.

Conclusions:

- The overall property faces onto one of Carlow Town's most prominent road junctions.
- The two Protected Structures that stand facing onto Shamrock Square were heavily damaged by fire in 2008 and have subsequently become reduced to the four external walls. All of the timber roof and floor structures have perished, and internal masonry walls have fallen or are in danger of falling.
- It is doubtful that the damaged buildings could be economically reinstated within the remaining walls. If that was to be considered, it would have to be recognised that the only surviving features from the original structure would be the heavily repaired external walls.

Photo Survey of Existing Conditions:



Photo No. 3. General view looking south showing the former brewery on the left, and the pair of commercial buildings looking out onto Shamrock Square on the right.

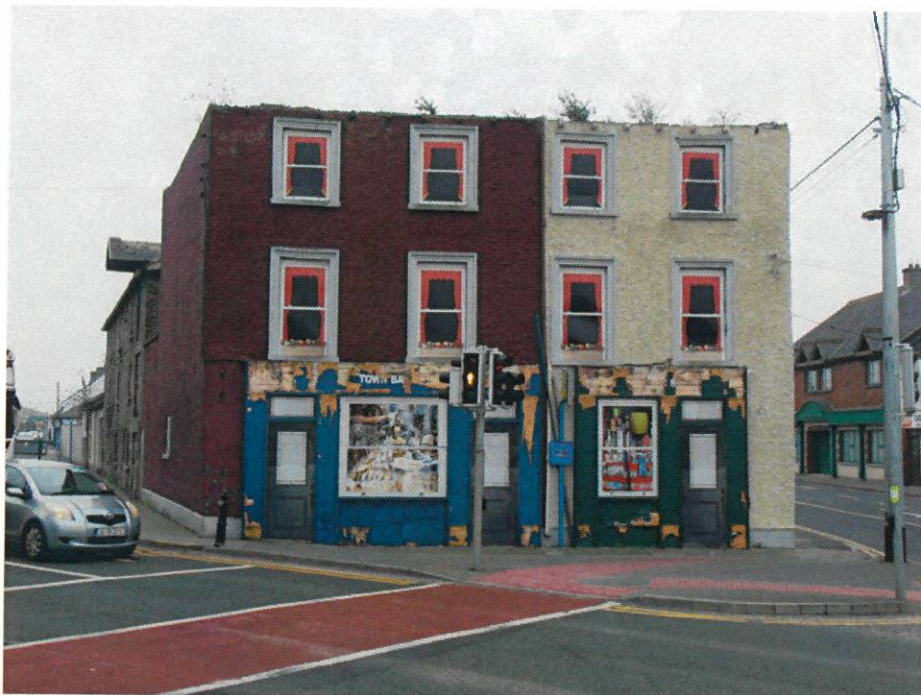


Photo No. 4. General view looking east, showing the west facing front elevations of the shop buildings. The fire damaged roof has totally collapsed into the building. The windows and shopfronts were covered with plywood.



Photo No. 5. General view looking north-east, showing the current condition of the two commercial buildings. Note the vegetation growing on the wall heads.



Photo No. 6. View looking north-west showing the south elevation of the commercial buildings that face onto Shamrock Square.



Photo No. 7. Detail view looking south inside the Shamrock Square buildings. Note the advanced decay to the internal structure, and the loose materials at the top of the wall heads. These buildings would require substantial resources to reinstate, and very little of the original decorative fabric would be retained.



Photo No. 8. Detail view looking west inside the Shamrock Square buildings. The shopfront to the northern building is shown here, including its badly rotted timber lintel. That large timber beam has rotted due to being exposed to the weather over the last decade, and will shortly be unable to support the two floors of masonry above it.