Chapter 6  Natural Environment, Conservation & Heritage

6.0  Introduction

The Council recognises the importance of the natural and built environment in terms of the economic, social and cultural well-being of the County. It is the aim of the Council to ensure a balance between development and protection of the natural and built environment. This will be achieved through appropriate policies and objectives that respect the natural and built environment, the economy and the social and cultural needs of the community.

6.1  Natural Heritage

Portlaw is situated along the River Clodiagh, a tributary of the River Suir which is designated as a Special Area of Conservation. The SAC was designated for the presence of 8 species and 7 habitats listed in Annex 1 and II of the EU Habitats Directive. The protection of the favourable conservation status of SAC sites is a policy of the Waterford County Development Plan.

One of the qualifying interests of the River Suir SAC is the Freshwater Pearl Mussel which occurs in the River Clodiagh. A Catchment Management Plan for Freshwater Pearl Mussel in the River Clodiagh was published by the DoEHLG in 2009. This plan sets out a number of detailed measures for the future conservation of the species. This plan also forms part of the Programme of Measures under the SE River Basin District Management Plan.

Outside Portlaw Town, a number of areas are protected in recognition of their national importance as wildlife habitats. Portlaw Woods (cSAC & pNHA) and Coolfinn Marshes (cSAC & pNHA) require protection for the following reasons:

- They contain valuable habitats where organisms (some rare) live in a relatively natural state;
They often contain aquifers of regional importance that are vulnerable to groundwater pollution;

Coolfinn Marshes are a significant wetland in County Waterford attracting large populations of wintering waterfowl. The area supports nationally important numbers of overwintering Greylag Geese (av. max. 400). Other species recorded in significant numbers include Whooper Swan, Teal, Tufted Duck, Golden Plover, Lapwing and Curlew; and

Portlaw Woods which covers a large area of Curraghmore Estate to the west of the Town, are a fine example of mature oak woodland, representing one of the larger remaining tracts of woods in the Country.

The protection of natural resources is a fundamental principle of sustainability. However, areas of nature conservation value cannot survive in isolation and it is important to maintain connectivity or ecological corridors linking these sites and this includes the network of open spaces, gardens, stone walls and urban tree lines within Portlaw Town.

**Policy NH 1**

**Policy NH 2**
To comply with Article 6 of the Habitats Directive to ensure that there is no significant adverse impact on the integrity of the River Suir SAC and that the requirements of Articles 6(3) and 6(4) of the Habitats Directive are fully satisfied by screening all projects and plans for Appropriate Assessment.

**Policy NH 3**
To encourage the retention and creation of sites of local biodiversity value, ecological corridors and networks that connect areas of high conservation value such as woodlands, hedgerows, stonewalls, earth banks and wetlands.

**Policy NH 4**
It is a policy of the Council to comply with the objectives, policies and Programme of Measures of the Water Framework Directive and the South Eastern River Basin District Management Plans.
6.2 Preservation of Trees and Hedgerows

Woodland areas, treelines and hedgerows are important for their nature conservation value and the contribution they make to the amenity of an area. They provide habitat for wildlife and help create an attractive landscape. It is the aim of the Council to protect trees and hedgerows that contribute to the amenity of an area.

New developments will be required to carefully consider the potential impact the development will have upon trees and hedgerows. They will be required to retain existing trees where practicable and wherever possible to retain existing hedgerows. Where development involves the loss of trees, a replanting scheme with trees of appropriate numbers species and sizes will be required.

The Council may request that a tree survey is completed as part of a development proposal, to ensure development will not result in the damage or loss of mature amenity trees.

**Policy NH 5**

To protect trees and hedgerows in all new developments, particularly species rich roadside and townland boundary hedgerows and seek their replacement with new trees and hedgerows with native species of local provenance where their removal is necessary during the course of road works or other works. There will be a presumption against the removal of trees and hedgerows where there is a realistic alternative.

6.3 Invasive Species

Many species of flora and fauna have been introduced to Ireland and pose a serious threat to native vegetation, wildlife and their ecosystems. Problematic species in Waterford include Grey Squirrel and invasive plants such as Japanese Knotweed and Himalayan Balsam.

**Policy NH 6**

Where development is approved for sites containing known invasive species the Planning Authority will consider where appropriate the use of conditions for control and eradication of invasive species.

6.4 Bats

All bat species in Ireland are protected under the Wildlife Act 1976, as amended in 2000, and the EU Habitats Directive. Bats often use old stone buildings including bridges for hibernation roosts. Waterford County Council commissioned a survey of bridges in 2008 with the aim of assessing bridges in terms of potential for bat usage and to facilitate
safeguarding of bat habitat during future repair and maintenance work on bridges. The bridge over the river Clodiagh was deemed suitable for bats. As usage of a bridge by bats may be sporadic and related to seasonal factors any bridge with significant bat potential needs to be assessed prior to commencement of works.

Artificial lighting may impact on bats and best practice requires use of low pressure sodium lamps that emit little UV and avoid unnecessary light spill along with appropriate siting that avoids lighting up hedgerows or waterways.

**Policy NH 7**
To require a survey of old stone buildings and bridges for breeding or roosting bats prior to redevelopment works being carried out.

### 6.5 Built Heritage

The built heritage of Portlaw, within the model town area, is a physical manifestation of past social, economic and cultural events. In its heyday, in terms of scale and sophistication, Portlaw would have matched other world renowned model towns such as Saltaire and New Lanark. It is considered to have been an inspiration for Bessbrook, the only other planned industrial town in Ireland and it was also thought to have been a model for Bourneville, which is considered the pinnacle of this form of social and urban planning. The layout of the model village inspired by the Baroque tradition of urban planning make it exceptional both in the context of Irish urban development as well as that of model village design.

The Town of Portlaw as we now know it, initially owes its existence to the establishment of a cotton mill by David Malcolmson in 1825. The scale and technological achievement at the mill represented a remarkable success for its time but it was the creation of the model village that is one of the most enduring and important aspects of the Town and a testimony to the Quaker ideals of the Malcolmson’s. The village of Portlaw still retains many of the features of the planned 19th Century industrial settlement. Four streets radiate from the Square and the gateway of the Old Mill, which would have been the centre of all activity. Around the Town there are a variety of structures which range from the industrial buildings of the former cotton mill (known as the Tannery complex) with its associated mill features, to civic structures such as the Courthouse and the Dispensary. Dwellings include the large houses such as Mayfield House and Woodlock House which were designed by John Skipton Mulvaney and the distinctive original single and two-storey workers houses with curved roofs known as Portlaw roofs. Overlooking the village is the Catholic Church built to plans prepared by J.J. McCarthy which is of National importance. Just outside the Town lies Curraghmore House which is of national importance and has one of the most intact Historic Demesnes in the Country.
6.6 Protecting the Built Heritage of Portlaw

The built heritage of Portlaw is protected by either inclusion on the Record of Protected Structures (RPS) or under the policies and objectives of the Local Area Plan. The aim of these is to protect and enhance this heritage for the benefit of all, residents and visitors alike and to ensure that it is passed on to future generations.

A Protected Structure or proposed protected structure is one that the Planning Authority considers to be of special interest under one of more of the following categories - architectural, historical, archaeological, artistic, cultural, scientific, social or technical grounds. Details of Protected Structures are entered by the Council in its Record of Protected Structures (RPS).

In the area covered by the Portlaw Plan there are currently 21 structures on its RPS. The RPS is included in appendices of the Portlaw Local Area Plan. Structures can be added to, or deleted from the RPS at anytime by a formal process. The Council maintains a continually updated copy of the RPS, a list of which is available on the Council website.

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<tr>
<th>Policy BH 1</th>
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<tr>
<td>It is the policy of the Council to maintain a Record of Protected Structures to protect all the structures or parts of structures which are of historical, architectural, artistic, archaeological, social, scientific, technical and cultural interest.</td>
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<th>Policy BH 2</th>
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<td>Demolition of a Protected Structure can only be considered in exceptional circumstances and the onus will be on the developer to provide the strongest justification for such an action.</td>
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<th>Policy BH 3</th>
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<td>It is a policy of Waterford County Council to protect the built heritage and to encourage sensitive development or reuse of buildings to promote economic growth and regeneration.</td>
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<th>Objective BH 1</th>
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<td>Within the historic core of Portlaw, it is an objective the Council to:</td>
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- Identify, protect and enhance the unique character of a streetscape by providing guidance on appropriate development;
- Protect, where appropriate, elements of the streetscape such as rubblestone boundary walls and street furniture which make a positive contribution to the built heritage; |
To retain, where appropriate, original building features of vernacular structures such as barrel-shape roofs of the workers houses, timber sash windows, decorative barge boards and shop fronts. Where appropriate, the Council shall encourage the reinstatement of historically correct traditional features such as sliding sash windows and shop fronts etc;

- Promote sensitive reuse and/or alterations of buildings of historic character; and
- Ensure that the design of new buildings respect the streetscape.

6.7 Heritage Conservation Plan

The Heritage Conservation Plan for Portlaw was produced in 2003 by the Heritage Council and addressed the various issues and threats posed to the built heritage of Portlaw. It should be acknowledged that some of the built heritage of Portlaw may never be renovated or reused. However, Waterford County Council endeavours to work in partnership with the community on projects which will enhance the built heritage. The Council shall also endeavour to implement the policies and objectives of the Portlaw Heritage Conservation Plan subject to resources and the availability of funding.

6.8 The Tannery site

The Tannery Site is of national importance and offers a prime site for redevelopment within the Town. The present layout of the factory buildings began as far back as 1826 and the factory was used for tanning between 1932 – 1985. The redevelopment of the site has been delayed for a number of years due to contamination of the site as a result of its various uses over the years. The millpond was used as a landfill for tanning waste when the site was in use as a tannery and the contamination in the site is one of the main impediments to redevelopment. The development of the Tannery Site will require a Master Plan approach. Prospective developers will be required to liaise with the Planning Section of Waterford County Council prior to the submission of a planning application.

Due to the economic downturn, it is noted that the redevelopment of the site may not happen for a number of years. In the meantime, landscaping of the Tannery area at its interface with the public realm would be of benefit to the community from a visual amenity perspective.

Objective BH 2

It is an objective of the Council to facilitate the assessment, remediation and redevelopment of the Tannery. This site can accommodate a high quality mixed use development and shall be subject to the approval of a Masterplan and Environmental Management Plan for the site.
**Objective BH 3**
It is an objective of the Council to facilitate the resolution of the contamination and dereliction issues regarding the Tannery site and to consider proposals to landscape the site to improve the visual amenity value for the community.

### 6.9 Improving the Public Realm

The term 'Public Realm’ refers to all areas to which the public has open access including streets, public parks, civic buildings and facilities. Whilst this area extends beyond the historic core it is the same historic elements such as walls, canal quays, areas such as the Square and green areas which can contribute to the special interest and distinct character of an area.

**Policy BH4**
To promote a high standard of civic amenity and design and to respect existing open spaces, urban spaces, vistas and streetscape.

**Policy BH 5**
To encourage the sensitive redevelopment of vacant or derelict sites in the streetscape.

### 6.10 Vistas and Settings

The location of a structure of special interest is often enhanced by its setting. In Portlaw, the main vista and setting begins with the area around the Square but areas such as the approaches into the Town along, the entrances to the key buildings such as Woodlock House, Curraghmore House etc, should also be considered.

**Policy BH 6**
To promote a high standard of civic amenity and design and to respect existing open spaces, urban spaces, vistas and streetscape.

**Objective BH 4**
To protect the vistas and settings of protected structures and the streetscape by the retention, where feasible, of vernacular houses such as those on Brown Street, William Street, Georges Street and Carrick Road.

**Objective BH 5**
It is an objective of the Council to retain, where appropriate, the existing stone walls, canal banks, hedgerows and mature trees on the approach to and within the Town.
6.11 Archaeology

The archaeological heritage composed of structures, constructions, groups of buildings, developed sites, all recorded monuments as well as their contexts, and moveable objects, situated both on land and under water.\(^1\) This includes:

- Recorded sites and features of historical and archaeological importance included in the Record of Monuments and Places;
- Major sites of archaeological importance in state ownership and guardianship;
- National Monuments which are the subject of preservation orders in County Waterford; and
- All previously unknown archaeology that becomes known (e.g. through ground disturbance, fieldwork or the discovery of sites underwater).

The National Monuments Acts 1930-2004 provides for the protection of the archaeological heritage. Due to Portlaw’s location along the River Clodiagh, there is potential for underwater archaeology. In considering development proposals the Council will take account of rivers, inter-tidal and sub-tidal environments, and the potential to impact on previously unrecorded sites and will have regard to the advice and recommendations of the Underwater Archaeology Unit of the DAHG.

6.12 Record of Monuments and Places

The Record of Monuments and Places (RMP) of County Waterford identifies archaeological sites within the Portlaw area. There are currently 3 archaeological sites in the Record of Monuments and Places in the jurisdiction of the Portlaw Local Area. These recorded monuments are protected under the National Monuments Act 1994 as amended. The Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht have relevant publications relating to archaeological heritage on their website www.ahg.gov.ie.

**Policy AH 1**
To ensure the preservation of all archaeological monuments included in the Record of Monuments and Places (RMP) and to protect and preserve the archaeological value of underwater archaeology.

**Policy AH 2**
To ensure that development in the vicinity of a site or archaeological interest including sites above or below water shall not be detrimental to the character of the archaeological site or its setting.

\(^1\) The European Convention for the Protection of Archaeological Heritage, Valetta, 1992
Policy AH 3
To secure the preservation ‘in situ’ of archaeological remains and settings in accordance with government of all archaeological monuments included in the Record of Monuments (Amendment) Act, 1994 and sites, features and objects of archaeological interest generally.

Policy AH 4
Promote public awareness of the rich archaeological and architectural heritage of Portlaw by providing information, where feasible, by way of smart phone applications, information via the internet, leaflets or tour guides.

6.13 Historic Graveyards

Historic graveyards include all graveyards and burial grounds used prior to the 20th century. A distinction is made between the terms “burial grounds” and “graveyards” where burial grounds are areas of land used for burials while graveyards are burial grounds associated with churches. There are over one hundred historic graveyards located in the County. Graveyards dating from pre1700 A.D. are given statutory protection under the National Monuments Act 1930-2004.

Policy AH 5
It is the policy of the Council to apply best practice in the care and management of historic graveyards as detailed in the guidance document on the “Care, Conservation and Recording of Historic Graveyards in County Waterford” published by Waterford County Council in 2009 and the Department of Arts, Heritage and Gaeltacht. (www.ahg.gov.ie)

6.14 Heritage and Recreation

Portlaw is an area rich in built and natural heritage and this asset is actively promoted by the local heritage group and Portlaw Heritage Centre through conservation works and heritage interpretive signage. There is potential for developing walkways to enjoy Portlaw’s heritage sites and the local landscape providing opportunities for enhancement of quality of life and development of tourism.

Objective HR 1
To facilitate as the opportunity arises, the development and enhancement of walking routes in the Portlaw area in consultation with relevant landowners and stakeholders.