

Proposal for Bus Connects threatens fabric and character of Dublin's historic streetscapes

Donough Cahill

In its submission for the public consultation process for Bus Connects, the National Transport Authority's (NTA) proposals to reconfigure Dublin's bus networks, the Irish Georgian Society criticised apparent proposals to remove original fabric from the historic built environment and remove street trees in architecturally sensitive areas.

The Society's submission called for a comprehensive architectural, archaeological and cultural heritage assessment and a further public consultation process before a decision is reached on a Preferred Route Option.

Bus Connects was launched in 2017 by the NTA with the aim of improving Dublin's bus system and reducing journey times by an ambitious 20–30 minutes. The scheme proposes a series of dedicated corridors where buses would have priority and be developed in tandem with cycle lanes.

While recognising the potential positive gains to be achieved through enabling more sustainable forms of transport, the IGS has faulted the NTA for not providing sufficient information to allow for an assessment of the impact of proposed new routes on the historic built environment. Though the NTA's maps illustrate cases where the curtilage of protected structures and historic streetscapes are impinged upon, there is no accompanying discussion or assessment of how this will affect boundary walls and railings, gardens, and historic street furniture and paving. In particular, the Society queried why the removal of original fabric from within the curtilage of protected structures or the removal of existing street trees would even be countenanced at locations where there is sufficient space to provide on-street car parking bays.

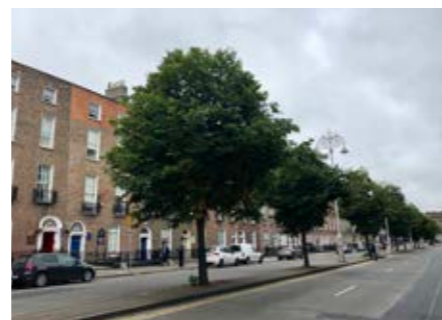
The Architectural Heritage Protection Guidelines for Planning Authorities identifies the importance to the character of historic buildings of boundary features such as railings and gates. It also cautions against moving these noting that "it would not only make them liable to damage... but may also adversely alter the relationship between the structure and the features of its curtilage" (p. 194)

The IGS also took issue with the methodology used in selecting preferred route options. Of concern was an evident lack of field work undertaken in assessing the historic built environment. It would appear that desktop resources were used in place of on-site investigation and that this was limited to the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage, the Record of Monuments and Places, and the Record of Protected Structures. While undoubtedly valuable in their own right, these resources do not provide an exhaustive list of heritage structures and sites, and so potentially exclude sites of importance. The absence of a field survey of prospective routes possibly indicates why there has been no assessment of historic fabric to be removed, the significance of that fabric, and whether it will be re-instated.

The city-wide scale of the project would indicate the need for the NTA to produce an Environmental Impact Assessment as part of the planning process. Such an exercise would normally require an exploration of alternative options which in this case should entail an assessment of different routes to those that have been chosen. However, the Society argued that a desktop review of heritage designations within the study area is not sufficient to inform a meaningful consideration of alternative options.

The Society also expressed considerable misgivings about the impact of Bus Connects on trees in gardens and lining the streets along its routes. Whilst the information brochures indicated the number of trees to be retained, only a general indication is given to the number to be removed rather than to their location. On the UCD to City Centre Location alone, approximately 160 trees are proposed for removal which is of particular concern as this route runs along sensitive historic streets. Loss of trees has the potential to result in significant adverse impacts on historic streets.

The Irish Georgian Society called for the NTA to fully assess the impact on Dublin's heritage before reaching a decision on any Preferred Route Options and that these findings are put out for further public consultation. In certain cases it has already amended its initial proposals which indicates a willingness to take on board observations received. It is hoped that this capacity for change will also apply to sensitive heritage buildings and streetscapes.



Baggot St Lower, Dublin

Conservation Grants Scheme

Ashleigh Murray



St. Catherine's Church, Thomas Street, Dublin

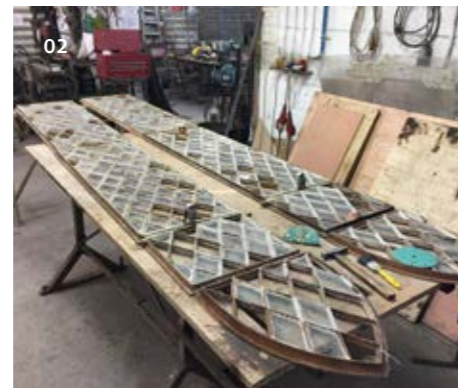
The IGS is delighted to announce that we have completed the sixth year of the Conservation Grants Scheme, which has been funded by IGS London since 2014. Although the original intention was to run the scheme for four years, its great importance is very much recognised and London continues to strive to extend it, subject to available funds. Up to €50,000 is available each year and this year's funding was distributed among nine successful projects, which ranged from small landmark structures to country houses.

We are pleased to support a folly that forms part of the landscaped demesne of Ballycumber House, Co. Offaly. The house was originally built as a castle in 1627 but was subsequently remodelled in the 18th and 19th centuries. It has

been suggested that John Warneford Armstrong (1770–1858), who famously betrayed the Sheares brothers in 1798, erected the folly in c. 1830; however, no documentary evidence survives and it may be earlier. The folly is built on high ground within a designed, naturalised landscape. It is a curious structure since it is circular in plan with soaring buttress, which are perhaps reminiscent of great cathedrals seen on distant shores. As the folly is deteriorating, it requires the consolidation of the wall heads and the crowns of the buttresses.

This year, a number of churches are being assisted. St. Kevin's Church in Harrington Street, Dublin, was completed in 1872 to the designs of Edward Welby Pugin (1834–1875) – son of the famous Augustus Pugin,

responsible for the interiors of the Palace of Westminster – and his partner the Irish architect George C. Ashlin (1837–1921). The ceilings and walls were originally decorated with a stencilled scheme by Ashlin but this was covered in the 20th century with non-breathable paint. Works have already begun to restore this beautiful decorative feature and funding will aid the next phase of these works. The London Young Irish Georgians (YIGs) also raised additional funds for the building.



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01 St Paul's 'French Church', Portarlington, Co. Laois **02** The restoration of St Paul's windows **03** Ballyarthur, Co. Wicklow with recently restored side elevation, grant aided in 2018 by the Society **04** Ballycumber folly, Co. Offaly (image courtesy of Offaly Historical & Archaeological Society) **05** Jamesbrook Hall, Midleton, Co. Cork **06** Interior of Ballyarthur, Co. Wicklow, the restoration of which is being supported by the Society in 2019 **07** Panel prior to restoration from Our Lady's Chapel at St. Kevin's Church, Harrington Street, Dublin

St Paul's 'French Church' in Portarlington, Co. Laois, was founded by French Huguenots in 1698. In the mid-19th century the original simple hall was enlarged with a cruciform plan and a tower; repair works are required to several associated cast-iron windows. St Catherine's Church in Thomas Street, Dublin, was designed in the 1760s by the Irish architect John Smyth (d.1775). At the centre of this granite building are four Doric columns supporting a pediment, while a clock decorates the adjacent bell tower. The clock, which has not worked for many years, is being restored and we are supporting the restoration of the clock face.

At the Royal and Prior School in Raphoe, Co. Donegal, we are aiding the production of a Conservation Report for a vacant house that was built in c.1850. Undertaking initial investigations and assessments of historic buildings is vital before any works take place, and this report which will establish the significance of the building and inform the conservation approach.

We are supporting vital window repairs at two houses, thereby providing necessary protection

from water ingress which can be detrimental to historic buildings. Jamesbrook Hall, Midleton, Co. Cork, is a complex site as the main house was built in c.1780 but it was attached to an existing c.1675 house, while in 1820-1830 a collection of cottages, a coach house and stables were erected to the rear. Two bow windows serving the c.1780 house are being repaired. Temple House, Ballymote, Co. Sligo, is a mansion that was built in c.1820 but it was substantially extended and embellished in c.1864. The sash windows to the rear of the house, overlooking the central courtyard, are in very poor condition and are in urgent need of repair.

Following successful grant aiding last year, we are pleased to provide additional support to two early houses. Myrtle Grove, Youghal, Co. Cork, is a rare example of an unfortified 16th-century Irish house. Last year involved the repair of an oriel window that faces the medieval St Mary's Collegiate Church and is where Sir Edmund Spenser is said to have written *The Faerie Queen*. Works continue with the repair of the first-floor windows of the main elevation.

The c. 1680 former hunting lodge of Ballyarthur, Ballanagh, Co. Wicklow, required extensive repair works to a gable wall, which have been successfully undertaken. However, the gable wall had experienced extensive water ingress over the years, which caused damage to interior decorative plasterwork. The next phase of works is the repair and reinstatement, where required, of this important decorative feature.

As demonstrated above, there are a variety of issues that face owners of historic buildings, often resulting in financial pressures, and this important scheme helps owners to fund essential works for the continued protection of these historic assets. There is a range of structures that will benefit from our support, including a folly, residential buildings, and churches. We would therefore, like to thank all our IGS London members for making this year's scheme possible and we will aim to extend it beyond 2019, subject to available funding, to continue this particularly worthy cause.