

Athlone Town Council

ATHLONE TOWN COUNCIL

**ATHLONE TOWN WALLS AND
DEFENCES
CONSERVATION PLAN**



OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGY

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Athlone Town Council

FOREWORD

Athlone, Co. Westmeath is one of the primary locations in the history of Ireland and possesses standing remains of the defences that enabled it to survive to the present day. It straddles the River Shannon and was an important crossing point and gateway on the waterways of the centre of the country. For this reason, it was a critical strategic location and played a role in every important invasion of Ireland. A bridge was built and a castle to guard the bridge, in medieval times. Subsequently, stone walls were constructed round the east side of the town, sealing it to the bank of the river. In the 17th century earthen ramparts were constructed around the west side of the town, and bastions were added to the walls of the east town. Further defences in the form of batteries were added to the west town in the early 19th century.

However during the 19th and 20th centuries, the walls and defences have gradually been pulled down and removed, through the growth of the town. Only small sections remain, together with indicators of the positions of the walls. It is imperative to preserve these to ensure the survival of the physical elements of the history of Athlone. A conservation plan has been prepared to create policies for the conservation of the walls and defences and to put forward strategies to raise the image and public awareness of these important monuments.

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Oxford Archaeology

November 2005

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The prominence of Athlone as an historic town and visitor destination demands the appropriate treatment of its public monuments. Efforts to sustain both the standing and buried heritage of the medieval and later town are imperative for the preservation of the history of Athlone.

The history and associations of the Town Walls are of great interest to Athlone as part of the new town centre re-development and are of particular significance, together with the role they can play now and in the future as facilities of public recreation and learning.

A Conservation Plan is now required to form the basis of an integrated and agreed strategy for the future management and repair of the walls and defences and of the sites of their previous locations. The conservation plan has created policies for the conservation of the walls and defences and puts forward strategies to raise the image and public awareness of these important monuments.

ATHLONE TOWN WALLS AND DEFENCES CONSERVATION PLAN

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ATHLONE TOWN WALLS AND DEFENCES CONSERVATION PLAN

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and Purpose

Background

Oxford Archaeology (OA) was commissioned by Westmeath County Council on behalf of Athlone Council, to produce a conservation plan for the Town Walls of Athlone (figure 1). The walls are of great importance both locally and nationally, but the deteriorating condition of the walls and recent threats to the surviving lengths has been a cause of concern.

Objectives

It is anticipated that the conservation plan will be of use for:

- Improving access to the walls
- Improving local understanding of the walls and their significance
- Highlighting the path of the walls
- Promotion of the recognition and protection of the walls
- Protection of the setting from adjacent developments
- Guidance for repairs and conservation
- Encouragement of management schemes for effective maintenance.

In addition, the conservation plan will consolidate the documentation relating to the site found in local records, historical mapping and national documents. The data can then be disseminated in a manageable form, from where the policies for protection and preservation can be developed.

Basis and Structure

The underlying principles of the plan are derived from The Conservation Plan (James Semple Kerr, 1996). It also takes into account the series of international charters summarised in the Guide to International Conservation Charters (Historic Scotland, 1997), the principal ones being the Charter of Venice (1964); the UNESCO Recommendations, (1976); the Congress on European Architectural Heritage (Council of Europe, 1975), the Valetta Charter (Malta) and the Charter for the Conservation of Places of Cultural Significance (Australia ICOMOS, 1988; referred to as the Burra Charter). Guidance has been sought from sources such as Commissioning a Conservation Plan (English Heritage, 1998) and in Conservation Plans for Historic Places (Heritage Lottery Fund, 1998) and Informed Conservation (Kate Clark, English Heritage, 2001). Recent Conservation Plans produced for the Heritage Council of Ireland have also been consulted.

Current Recognition and Protection of the Monument

Though these charters are not legislation, the principle of understanding historic sites as a necessary basis for decision making, and the requirement to protect their significance through processes of change or conservation is enshrined in national legislation. The National Monuments Acts and Amendment Acts 1930, 1954, 1987, 1994 and 2004 provide for the protection of archaeological sites and monuments.

The term '**monument**' as used in the Acts is defined so as to include 'any artificial or partly artificial building, structure, or erection whether above or below the surface of the ground and whether affixed or not affixed to the ground and any cave, stone, or other natural product whether forming part of or attached to or not attached to the ground which has been artificially carved, sculptured or worked upon or which (where it does not form part of the ground) appears to have been purposely put or arranged in position and any prehistoric or ancient tomb, grave or burial deposit, but does not include any building which is for the time being habitually used for ecclesiastical purposes;

'the expression "**national monument**" means a monument or the remains of a monument the preservation of which is a matter of national importance by reason of the historical, architectural, traditional, artistic, or archaeological interest attaching thereto and also includes (but not so as to limit, extend or otherwise influence the construction of the foregoing general definition) every monument in Saorstát Eireann to which the Ancient Monuments Protection Act, 1882, applied immediately before the passing of this Act, and the said expression shall be construed as including, in addition to the monument itself, the site of the monument and the means of access thereto and also such portion of land adjoining such site as may be required to fence, cover in, or otherwise preserve from injury the monument or to preserve the amenities thereof;

'the word "**maintain**" when used in relation to a national monument includes the cleaning, repairing, railing off, fencing, and covering in of such monument and the doing of all such other acts and things as may be necessary or expedient for the preservation or protection thereof, and cognate words shall be construed accordingly;

'the expression "**archaeological object**" means any chattel whether in a manufactured or partly manufactured or an unmanufactured state which by reason of the archaeological interest attaching thereto or of its association with any Irish historical event or person has a value substantially greater than its intrinsic (including artistic) value, and the said expression includes ancient human and animal remains and does not include treasure trove in which the rights of the State have not been waived.

In brief, the Minister for Environment, Heritage and Local Government has the power to issue preservation orders on national monuments that are in danger of being destroyed and to acquire, either compulsorily or by agreement, any national monument. As stipulated by the Acts, the Minister is required to establish and maintain the *Register of Historic Monuments* and a *Record of Monuments and Places*.

The Town Walls of Athlone are currently protected as Recorded Monument Protection (RMP) WM029042---. The No. 1 Battery is protected as WM029010--- and the site of Nos 2 - 6 Batteries is WM029011---.

Athlone Town Council

The *Heritage Act, 1995* provides for the establishment of a statutory Heritage Council to be appointed by the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Gaeltacht and the Islands. The Heritage Council is an independent body with a remit to provide advice on heritage matters including aspects of law and the proposal of policies to protect, preserve and enhance the national heritage.

Other legislation that affects heritage includes the *Planning and Development Act, 2000 – 2002* which ensure that the protection and consideration of heritage is a statutory responsibility. The Act requires development plans to ‘include objectives for...the conservation and protection of the environment including, in particular, the archaeological and natural heritage’ and ‘the protection of structures, or parts of structures, which are of special architectural, historical, archaeological, artistic, cultural, scientific, social or technical interest’ (Pt. II S10). In addition, development plans were to ‘include a record of protected structures’ (Pt. IV S51). At the same time the *Architectural Heritage (National Inventory and Historic Monuments (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, 1999* established a National Inventory of Architectural Heritage.

Local Plans and Policy

Athlone Town Council is the relevant authority for planning control within the town. The walls of Athlone are currently protected inside the boundary of the RMP border given to the town, but are not protected in their own right. It is an objective in the Athlone Town Plan 2002 to protect and preserve or realise the historical/archaeological heritage of the town. It is also an objective to promote an awareness of the historical/archaeological heritage of Athlone by signage and interpretation.

2 UNDERSTANDING THE MONUMENT

2.1 Scope of the Study

The subject of the study comprises both the extant walls and those lengths that have been demolished. An initial study was made of the available documentary evidence prior to an investigation of the standing fabric.

The investigation of the standing walls has included photography to identify the main types and phases of work in each section and to establish the varied condition of the masonry.

2.2 Review of Sources

There is a quantity of primary evidence and secondary source material relating to the history and development of Athlone Town Walls. The main resources used for information on the walls were the published works of Dr. Harman Murtagh. Additional material on Irish historic towns and defences was gained from sources listed in the bibliography (Appendix 1). Further material was collected locally from the Athlone Town Visitors' Centre and the Local Studies Centre of the Aidan Heavey Library, Athlone, and nationally additional information was obtained from the DoEHLG SMR Archive at the Archive Unit, St. Stephens Green, Dublin.

2.3 Previous Research

Irish town walls have been subject to a comprehensive study (Thomas 1992), while the walls of Athlone have been the subject of detailed research, notably by Murtagh in a series of key publications (1971, 1973, 1980, 1985, 1986), and more recently in the *Athlone* fascicule of the *Historic Towns Atlas* (Murtagh, 1994). John Bradley has produced the *Archaeological Potential of Athlone*, for the *Urban Archaeological Survey* (OPW 1993), which is an important work in highlighting the areas of the town, which could reveal more information, through archaeological investigation.

3 HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

3.1 Topography and Setting

Athlone is the principal crossing point of the river Shannon, situated on the border between the two Irish kingdoms of Mide (Meath) on the east and Connacht on the west, the later boundary between Leinster and Connaught, and often in a significant frontier zone. Athlone is located almost in the centre of Ireland and is a two-part town set on either side of the River Shannon. It is located at a point where the River Shannon shallows and cuts a gravel ridge, which created an ideal crossing point or ford. The name Athlone derives from the two Irish words meaning Luan's ford (*Ath Luain*).¹

The surrounding landscape is generally flat, formed of Carboniferous limestone and glacial deposits. However, a significant amount of the original position of the walls has been preserved by the arrangement of the streets (see figure 2). It is possible that foundations for the walls and bastions might be preserved below ground in a number of these locations, and might in some cases warrant an archaeological excavation, during future redevelopment.² The surviving features and lengths of wall are of particular interest and significance to the modern town. However, the traces of former lengths below ground would add a further dimension to the picture of Athlone as a fortified town.

3.2 The Development of the Monument

Early settlers of Athlone

The fording point has been regarded as important from prehistoric times, indicated by the large numbers of finds from the river bed. The first indications of a settlement in historic times are in the form of five grave slabs found on the east river bank, dating from the mid-eighth century, which may have indicated the presence of a church. Ornaments, found in the Shannon at Athlone, have been related to a major Viking gold hoard, found at Hare island in 1802, dating to the ninth and tenth centuries.³

The First Defences

A causeway was built by the kings of Connacht and Mide in 1001, as noted in the Annals of Ulster. The first bridge and castle at the location of Athlone were built by Toirdealbach, King of Connacht, in 1120 and 1129 respectively and were important for his territorial ambitions. In 1133 Cormac King of Munster struck back and destroyed the bridge and dun of Athlone.⁴ It is thought that the Cluniac priory of Saints Peter and Paul was founded in West Athlone, during the mid-twelfth century, indicating the growing importance of the settlement on both sides of the river.⁵

¹ Murtagh, 2000, 2ff
² Bradley 1993, 15ff
³ Bradley, 1993, 8ff
⁴ Flanagan 2005,919.
⁵ Bradley, 1993 8-9

Anglo-Norman Athlone

The reference to the burning of a bodhún (bawn) by Ua Conchobair in 1199 may refer to the presence of an Anglo-Norman motte or ring-work.⁶ Athlone was already noted by the English as having a strong strategic location which was developed by King John, at the same time as he confirmed the position of Cathal Crobderg as King of Connacht.⁷ In 1210 Athlone joined Dublin in being used as a centre of the English administration of Ireland when a stone bridge and castle were built by Bishop John de Grey, the Irish justiciar.⁸ The castle was located on the West bank of the river, protecting the bridge which connected it to the East Town on the opposite bank; the castle was surrounded with strong walls and ten-sided donjon.⁹ After Cathal's death in 1224 the town was burnt by his son Aed during the troubles in Connacht, after which the province was granted to Richard de Burgh.¹⁰ The town was clearly a significant enough place in the 13th century for the Franciscans (Greyfriars) to establish a house there. A murage grant dates to 1251, when the justiciar John Fitz Geoffrey was provided with 80 marks to enclose Athlone and Rindown (a nearby town on the west of the Lough Ree), and to repair the castles. Although there is little evidence of later murage grants, it seems that these walls were built, as a reference was made to them in a document from 1578, which was concerned with the building of further walls.¹¹

Connacht continued to be heavily disputed territory in the 1260 until the death of King Aed in 1274, and he burnt Athlone on at least one occasion in 1272 and destroyed the bridge. The bridge was rebuilt in stone in 1274 (and a royal galley), and works carried out in the castle, and then again in 1278 after an attack in 1277.¹² Of the three royal castles at Athlone, Roscommon, and Rindown, Athlone was least exposed, but it cannot be certain how much urban life continued behind the town walls (if they still existed), and the castles themselves were in a poor state in 1313 on the eve of the Bruce invasion.¹³

Medieval walls were an important protection against outright attack by the Irish, but also functioned for the maintenance of law and order, and control of trade (figure 9). Athlone was for many years effectively frontier town for English settlement, and this made its defences of special significance. Nevertheless it remains an interesting question as to whether Athlone continued to function as a town in the period of English contraction between the 14th and 16th centuries. The town was burnt in 1315, and the bridge was apparently abandoned for a ferry until the 16th century, and the castle reverted to a local Anglo-Irish family.¹⁴ The massacre of merchants taking eels from Athlone to Trim in 1452 under escort could be taken as evidence either way, but the castle of Athlone was in English hands in 1495, if only for a while.¹⁵

The Elizabethan Town

Under Henry VIII the castle was recovered for the crown, and the town revived, though no town walls were mentioned.¹⁶ Sir Henry Sidney was commissioned between 1566-7, to build a new stone bridge over the river (figure 8). The bridge contained three water mills and carved stone plaques bearing the Royal coat of arms, a bust of Queen Elizabeth I, and representations of Sidney, Lewis, his supervisor of works, and Robert Davenport, overseer of the works.¹⁷ The plaques are now stored in the National Museum of Ireland in Dublin. The economy of the town rapidly developed, and it is clear that the defences were once more developed.

New gatehouses were built in 'East Town', including North Gate and Dublin Gate. The North Gate is referred to in 1578, when it was occupied by Robert Davenport, the provost-marshall of Connacht (shown on front cover). The East Gate was built by Edmund O' Fallon and was leased to him in 1578.¹⁸

The 17th Century Defences

In 1606 the corporation was fully established, consolidating an era of renewed growth.¹⁹ The defences were completed when stone walls were constructed linking the East and North gates, by the local townspeople as part of the fee-farm grant schemes of Sir Charles Wilmot between 1619-36.⁴ Stretches of the walls survive as standing remains in East Town, and may include remnants of the medieval walls or of this phase of rebuilding. The defences were never fully put to the test, since during Cromwell's wars the royalist forces in the town surrendered in 1651 rather than withstanding a long siege. It was the Parliamentary forces, having now secured the valuable Shannon crossing point, that put the town in a proper state of defence.

Medieval stone walls with towers had become outmoded in the age of gunpowder, but it was only in the 17th century that the new style of angled bastions became common. For the defence of this important frontier town, stone-built bastions were added to the walls of the East Town by Cromwell's engineers in the early 1650s, of which evidence for four bastions remains, including the principal Dublin Gate which made the street take a dog-leg turn to exit the town, and which still remains today (figures 4 & 5). Even more impressive was the construction of a completely new bastioned circuit on the landward side of the West Town which was fortified with earthen rampart walls and bastions at the same time, of which the street alignment of one bastion remains.²¹ A military plan of the town drawn in 1685 by Thomas Philips shows the results of these works (fig.5).

In the Williamite wars Athlone again was of military significance, and from 1690 the Jacobite-employed French engineers devised ways of adding to the fortifications of Athlone. This involved the construction of earthen ramparts inside the stone walls and bastions of the East Town; in the West Town a new earthen rampart was added to the riverside, and another bastion built outside the west walls. The defences are shown on two plans of 1691 (fig.6). This time the defences were fully tried and tested in the assaults on the Jacobite garrison in 1690 and 1691. On the first occasion the attackers were held off, but during the 1691 Siege of Athlone, one of the bastions (Site 13) was blown open at the 'nose' by the Williamite forces and the East Town was largely destroyed by fire. The West Town and the Castle were pulverised by the bombardment, although partly protected by the river.²² The West Town ramparts may have been destroyed or dismantled after the siege, and do not appear on the 1748 plan of the town, which indicates the survival of most of the East Town walls, and marks the extensive Garrison barracks built north of the castle in 1700 (fig.7).²³

The Batteries

Towards the end of the 18th century and during the beginning of the 19th century, further defences were added to the West Town, against the impending threat from Napoleon (figures 7 and 8)⁵. On the assumption that French forces planned to infiltrate Ireland from bays along the west coast and try and march on Cork and Dublin, Athlone was seen as a strategic point on the upper Shannon. It was thus of paramount importance for the defence of Dublin, that the French would be prevented from crossing the river, and it was therefore decided to increase the defences at Athlone and at Shannonbridge to the south.

A star-shaped fort, to be located to the north of the west side of the town had been proposed by Thomas Phillips on his map, previously in 1685 (figure 5), but it was calculated as being

⁴ Murtagh, 1980, 94

⁵ Kerrigan, 1995, 264ff

costly and was never built.⁶ The earthen ramparts constructed during the Cromwellian period were in bad repair by 1766.⁷ Athlone needed something more substantial to stand up to the threat of possible invasion. New defences were commissioned and in 1798, temporary works were begun on Gallows Hill, in the West Town, by Lieutenant-Colonel Buchanan. The works were transformed into more permanent structures between 1803 - 1806.⁸ Eight batteries were constructed in all, of which only No. 1 Battery, to the north of the West Town survives. These make an instructive comparison with the nearly contemporary Lines of Torres Vedras thrown up by Wellington to defend Lisbon in the Pensinsular War.

Documentary Evidence

Documentary evidence for the walls is mainly to be found in murage grants and orders written throughout the history of Athlone, the first being the murage grant of 1251. It may be the case that not all of the orders were carried out, however, it seems that medieval walls were constructed, the remains of which were evident during the building of the *Fee Farm* walls between 1619-36. Further documents exist in the form of pipe rolls, extents, journals et cetera, that have been examined by Murtagh and others in the production of published works dealing with the history of Athlone.

Cartographic Evidence

The following maps discussed are from the *Historic Towns Atlas* (Murtagh, 1994). The main evidence to suggest the route of the wall is Thomas Phillips' map of Athlone, published in 1685 (figure 5). This shows the walls around the town on both sides of the river, complete with the bridge in between and the angled bastions. There is the outline of a pentagonal star-shaped fort to the west of the town, a proposed fort design which was never built, due to its cost.

Goubet's map of 1691 (figure 6) shows the castle in the west side of the town at the top of the map and the east side to the bottom. Further walls are shown to the north of the town, along what might be the south shores of Lough Roe, complete with angled demi bastions. Additional batteries are shown to the north of the east side of the town, with crenellations.

A plan of east Athlone dating to c.1750 has labels detailing the North gate and Dublin gate, together with some of the street names and buildings⁹. Houses are shown along the streets, but might not indicate the actual number of tenement plots present at this time.

Thomas Sherrard's map of 1784 (figure 7) is orientated showing the West Town at the top and the East Town at the bottom of the sheet. Street names are given, together with house numbers. The barracks are shown to the north of the castle and a canal is shown to the west of the town, at the top of the map. The earthen walls of the West Town are not shown on this plan and therefore may not have survived in evidence at this time.

The Ordnance Survey draft manuscript town plan of 1837-8¹⁰ specifically indicates the surviving lengths of standing wall, but does not show the path of the demolished lengths of wall.

⁶ Murtagh, 1980, 99

⁷ Murtagh, 1980, 106

⁸ Kerrigan, 1995, 229ff

⁹ Murtagh, 1994, Map 6

¹⁰ Murtagh, 1994, Map 2

From comparison of the sources mentioned above, it seems that the West Town was the first part of Athlone to lose its defences. No walls or earthen ramparts in this area are shown on Sherrard's map of 1784. Their absence may have been a result of the construction of the new battery fortifications that were constructed, pre-empting the threat of the French.

By 1837, the Ordnance Survey map was drafted and only the East Town is shown as walled. At the present time, the only surviving stretches of wall are located at Gazetteer Sites 4 - 10.

3.3 Summary of Key Phases

The phases relevant to the construction, use and destruction of the walls are as follows:

- I** Medieval settlement in Athlone, possibly undefended
- II** Medieval walled town from 1251
- III** The Elizabethan Phase, c. 1570s
- IV** The Construction of the East Town walls between 1619-36
- V** The Cromwellian Phase, 1652-4
- VI** The Jacobite Phase, c.1691
- VII** The Batteries of the Late 18th and Early 19th Centuries

4 ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

4.1 Introduction

Basis of the Assessment

The assessment of significance reflects the cultural and ecological aspects of the monument as a whole, particularly in relation to urban defences of Ireland and Britain, whilst also assessing the sections of the wall individually. Significance in other terms are taken into consideration, such as in an academic context and also in the light of other values that visitors or users of the land may assign to the monument and its historical perspective.

The components of the walls are assessed individually so as to provide a detailed framework, before being considered in a wider setting. This will be used to identify key elements and to highlight specific areas of consideration.

Levels of Significance

Initially an assessment is made on the significance of the monument at three levels:

- National importance
- Regional importance
- Local importance.

The monument is then further considered on four major aspects:

- *Architectural interest*: taking into account design, decoration, craftsmanship, building types and techniques and significant plan forms.
- *Historical interest*: with regard to important aspects of the area's social, economic, cultural and military history.
- *Historical association*: with nationally important people or events.
- *Group value*: how the monument as a whole is perceived.

Other factors that are taken into consideration include:

- Ability to characterise a period
- Rarity of survival
- Extent of documentation
- Association with other monuments
- Survival of archaeological potential above and below ground
- Fragility/vulnerability
- Diversity - the combination of high quality features.

Less tangible, but still vital to the significance of the monument, are the social and spiritual qualities represented by the monument. These can be formulated into seven fields:

- *Representative value*: the ability to demonstrate social or cultural developments
- *Historical continuity*
- *Literary and artistic values*
- *Formal, visual and aesthetic qualities*

- *Evidence of social historical themes*
- *Contemporary communal values*
- *Power to communicate values and significance.*

Values to be Used and Degrees of Significance

In assessing degrees of significance, these criteria have helped to inform assessments of overall significance, the relative importance of key elements or phases, and the judgements on individual elements of the Town Walls, at Gazetteer level. The degrees adopted are:

Exceptional Significance: elements of the monument which are of key national or international significance, as among the best (or the only surviving example) of an important class of monument, or outstanding representatives of important social or cultural phenomena, or are of very major regional or local significance.

In terms of Athlone, the most important factor is that the walls are the only surviving example of 17th century walls around a town in the Republic of Ireland.

Considerable Significance: elements which constitute good and representative examples of an important class of monument (or the only example locally), or have a particular significance through association, although surviving examples may be relatively common on a national scale, or are major contributors to the overall significance of the monument.

The walls of Athlone include bastions, built by Cromwell's engineers, and may be unique to Ireland in their state of preservation. In addition, there is evidence of damage sustained on the bastions during the Siege of Athlone, by King William of Orange in 1692. The Batteries in the West Town, built between the 1790s and 1800s are in addition, surviving monuments of the Napoleonic era in the history of Ireland.

Moderate Significance: elements which contribute to the character and understanding of the monument, or which provide an historical or cultural context for features of individually greater significance.

These elements include the alignment and names of certain streets in Athlone, which allude to the locations of the Town Walls and gates that have since been demolished. The location of the original bridge is also in evidence in suggestion only, by the existence of Bridge Street, which leads to the riverside, directly opposite the castle.

Low Significance: elements which are individually low value in general terms, or have little or no significance in promoting understanding or appreciation of the monument, without being actually intrusive.

These include the up-standing remains of the walls that may have been built in 19th or 20th centuries, but still mark the path of the original walls.

Intrusive: items which are visually intrusive or which obscure understanding of significant elements or values of the monument. Recommendations may be made on removal or other methods of mitigation.

These items include plant growth that has been allowed to obscure the walls and also cause damage to the monument. Other elements include objects built up in front of the walls, for

example a concrete wall and tank by the Prince of Wales Hotel (Site 7), or the 1960s and later houses to the east side of the walls (Sites 8-10).

Assessments of significance

Assessments of significance are set out from three perspectives:

Overall Significance: a statement of what is special about the Town Walls of Athlone as a whole.

Chronological assessments and key elements of significance: an assessment of the monument through time, identifying what is important about each principle stage, and why, including an evaluation of the social and community values of the monument.

The Gazetteer: the identification of the components, which make up the monument and their individual significance (built structures, landscape features, buried or lost elements) setting out for each entry:

- Summary
- Description
- Status
- Significance
- Condition - Issues and Vulnerability
- Policies - Recommendations.

4.2 Overall Significance

As one of the major medieval towns in Ireland and situated on the River Shannon, Athlone occupied a site of immense strategic importance. It is one of a relatively small number of towns that was defended by a wall, and was one of the few where the defences were put to the test.

The town walls and defences were a potent symbol of urban authority and acted as a practical barrier against warfare and crime. The walls also survive as a monument of the dominance inflicted on the town by a series of successive forces. These included the Anglo-Norman castle, the medieval town walls, the 17th-century town walls built under English administration, the bastions of the Cromwellian period, the earthen ramparts built during the Siege by the Williamite forces and the Batteries built as a prevention against the Napoleonic threat, during the late 18th and early 19th centuries.

The walls of Athlone are of significance when considered as an essential part of the town plan. Their course was determined by the plot layout of the Anglo-Norman town, and in turn they have had their **effect** on subsequent development and land-use. The orientations and names of some of the streets preserve the positions of where the walls once stood.

The surviving elements of the defences are themselves significant, and have added value on account of the amount of documentation for the lost parts of the walls and gates, and also the potential for further discovery and interpretation. There is a high level of archaeological

potential throughout the town, which on investigation, may reveal a greater understanding of the phases and construction and purpose of the walls.

4.3 Chronological Assessment of Significance

Phase I Medieval settlement in Athlone, possibly undefended, c.12th - 13th centuries

There is potential for discovering more about the earliest phases of settlement and the castle and the nature of any defences prior to the building of the medieval walls. This significance is primarily with regard to buried archaeological remains.

The potential of the early settlement archaeology of Athlone is of considerable significance.

Phase II Medieval Athlone, the walled town, 13th - 16th centuries

As indicated by historical sources the town was walled from at least the mid-13th century, but relatively little is known about these defences. There is potential for discovering more about the course and character of the medieval walls, and discovering their relationship to later additions and changes. This significance is primarily with regard to buried archaeological remains.

The potential of the medieval defences of Athlone is of considerable significance.

Phase III The Elizabethan Phase, c. 1570s

There is potential for investigating further into the building of Sir Henry Sidney's bridge, the Dublin and North gates and the walls adjoining them.

Archaeological investigation may reveal remains of the structures surviving.

Phase IV The Construction of the East Town walls between 1619-36

There is the potential for the survival of the walls built for the *Fee Farm Grants*, organised by Wilmot, which largely enclosed the East Town. Parts of the walls remain standing and have been incorporated into the standing walls of the town. They may include elements of the medieval walls referred to as surviving at the time of the fee farm walls.

Remains of this phase would be of some significance.

Phase V The Cromwellian Phase, 1650s

There are significant standing remains and traces of the paths of the bastions erected between 1652 -54, by General Ireton, as part of the strengthening of the East Town. Further bastions were added to the West Town at this time.

These bastions remain as illustrations of the importance of Athlone to the Cromwellian forces and as examples of bastion fortifications.

Phase VI The Jacobite Phase, c.1691

There is the potential for the below-ground survival of the earthen ramparts erected in the West Town in 1691 by the French engineers. Evidence remains for the Siege of Athlone in 1691, as the destruction of the ‘nose’ of Bastion 4 at Site 10.

*There is significant potential for archaeological remains of the earthen ramparts to be found during future development works in the West Town. The remains of Bastion 4 in the **East** Town are a significant link to the Siege of Athlone.*

Phase VI The Batteries of the Late 18th and Early 19th Centuries

From the invasion-scare defences of the Napoleonic era, No. 1 Battery remains and the site of Nos 2-6 Batteries is preserved under the modern housing development. It is possible that the remains of Nos. 7 and 8 batteries may also be preserved below ground.

Archaeological remains of the batteries may be found during future development works in the West Town. The standing remains are significant as remains of a major period of national defence.

5 ISSUES AND POLICIES

5.1 Conservation Plan policy aims

This section of the Conservation Plan proposes policies to protect and where possible, enhance the significance of the walls. The proposed policies act on two levels, some are for long term development while others aim to meet more immediate needs. The underlying objective is to ensure that what is significant and valuable in the monument survives for the future as well as for the use and enjoyment of the present. In implementing the policies it is important that a balance is maintained between conservation, interpretation and public expectation from the monument.

The proposed policies are intended to provide a framework for decision making and a benchmark against which to assess proposals. Specifically they aim to:

- Preserve and protect the significance of Athlone Town Walls for the benefit of present and future generations.
- Establish an effective conservation philosophy for the monument.
- Guide the process of monument development by establishing criteria against which the appropriateness of proposals can be assessed.
- Consider how public access can be assured and appreciation of the monument enhanced through schemes of interpretation.
- Define policies to help guide the care and maintenance of the monument.
- Provide guidance on the treatment of features which are intrusive or detrimental to an understanding of the monument.
- Identify elements of significance which have suffered erosion, and which may be restored to understanding.

5.2 Policy Framework

The statutory basis for the policy framework has been outlined above in §1.2.2.

6 MANAGEMENT ISSUES

6.1 Recognition and Protection

Although the Town Walls are part of the overall Recorded Monument ‘Town of Athlone’, and sections of the walls are subject to Preservation Orders, there is a clear need for the defences to be recognised as a distinct component of the monument comprising the Town of Athlone, and afforded effective legal protection against works which affect their character. The Recorded Monument Protection number for Athlone is WM0029-42. The No. 1 Battery is WM0029-10 and the site of Nos 2 - 6 Batteries is WM0029-11.

6.2 Survival and Physical Condition

The walls have been diminished through centuries of neglect and processes of rebuilding, gradual alteration and demolition. The majority of the walls now surviving, are located in the north-east of the town. The need for effective protection backed up by the application of legal sanctions where necessary is clearly apparent. The surviving parts of the wall are in various stages of repair, ranging from reasonable maintenance to benign neglect. A few parts are in need of structural repair or at least monitoring of their condition. The lack of control of vegetation is, in places leading to further deterioration of the wall and needs to be monitored carefully. This is a particular problem for the stretches of the walls that form borders to private gardens. The physical remains of the walls comprise both the walls and their setting, and there is a need to protect the setting of the monument from inappropriate development nearby (while recognising that they are an urban monument in a changing built environment).

6.3 Buried Archaeology

There is much potential for buried archaeological remains of the monument itself, its ancillary features (e.g. ditches and ramparts), and remains of earlier defensive systems, though the full character and location of these is not fully understood. Ground-disturbing activities (including works to infrastructure and services as much as new building activity) can have deleterious effects on significant deposits, or on occasion may reveal but not damage features of importance. Both visible and hidden elements of the standing walls and towers can be regarded as archaeological deposits in the same way as buried remains, and are equally subject to damage or destruction from repair and maintenance activities. Archaeological investigation is often destructive, though this is mitigated by the benefit arising from ordered collection and dissemination of information, and the resulting gain to knowledge.

6.4 Gaps in Understanding

There is some uncertainty over the line of the defences (especially in the West Town), and the position and extent of the gates. The age of the remaining parts is not always entirely clear, together with the extent of post-medieval rebuilding. There are some

areas of documentary history that have yet to be explored fully and will further clarify the date of any rebuilding and removal of the walls (however the archive unit records have been examined).

6.5 Interpretation - Presentation of the Town Walls

There is a lack of perception of Athlone as a walled Town, although the existence of individual parts of the walls is well known. Whilst the Castle is rightly promoted as a tourist attraction, the walls themselves do not figure on current literature or mapping and are not related to in the exhibition of the Castle. This lack of awareness is also reflected in the recent loss of view of parts of the walls, and the lost opportunities to make the defensive line a feature of new development, (for example behind the Prince of Wales Hotel).

6.6 Ownership and Access

The ownership of the walls is not always clear, especially where they form boundaries between different properties. Corporate ownership by the Town has gradually been relinquished over the last centuries, but there is a clear need for an assumption of some responsibility for the maintenance of surviving sections. Conversely, there are lengths of wall on private land where some degree of permanent or occasional public access may be desirable, and at least one place where the lack of a path obstructs a continuous circuit of the defences.

6.7 Monument Management Requirements

Above all, the Town walls need to be seen as an entity, requiring protection, a degree of 'ownership', and an agreed management plan that can be followed over an appropriate timescale. Athlone Town Council and Westmeath County Council will obviously have a part in this, but partnership with national bodies (e.g. The Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government), private owners and local interest groups will be important. The dissemination of information about the protected status of the walls, and the sanctions that will be taken against infringement must be well publicised. It is recognised that there are financial implications in this, but much of the work is low-cost ongoing maintenance once the major problems have been addressed.

6.8 Public and Visitor Expectations

A key part of the management must be the promotion of the walls as a key feature of the historic Town. This will partly be achieved by information available in printed material and Town mapping, but could also be expressed by signage and marking out of lost features. Access to the walls would need to be improved, and this may require the provision of sign-posts and plaques. In addition, occasional access to private premises for the maintenance and assessment of the condition of the walls will be required.

7 POLICIES FOR THE CONSERVATION OF ATHLONE TOWN WALLS & DEFENCES

7.1 Introduction

This section of the Plan establishes policies for the protection of the significance of Athlone Town Walls and realising the full potential for public enjoyment, access and understanding

Following a statement of overall purpose, five principal policies are set out which cover broad areas of application:

- 1 - Protection.
- 2 - Conservation, Repair and Maintenance.
- 3 - Enhancement and Improvement.
- 4 - Access and Interpretation.
- 5 - Tourism, Education and Research.
- 6 - Management and Finance.

These policies are developed into more detailed proposals for action in the succeeding sets of policies, each with subsidiary recommendations.

Individual policies and recommendations are also developed for elements of the monument at Gazetteer level in Part Three of the Conservation Plan. Where relevant, these are cross-referenced to the main policies as set out here.

Definitions of terms used in the following policies are listed below.

7.2 Definitions

The Plan has adopted definitions as set out in Irish legislation to define important archaeological concepts:

Monument represents all artificial structures of whatever date, regardless of whether or not they are of archaeological, architectural (or any other heritage) interest, though excluding buildings in use for ecclesiastical purposes.

National Monument is a monument or the remains of a monument the preservation of which is a matter of national importance by reason of the historical, architectural, traditional, artistic, or archaeological interest attaching thereto.

Historic Monument is a prehistoric monument and any monument associated with the commercial, cultural, economic, industrial, military, religious or social history of the place where it is situated and or of the

country and also includes all monuments in existence before 1700 AD or such later date as the Minister may appoint by regulations.

Archaeological Area is an area considered to be of archaeological importance but does not include the area of a historic monument entered in the Register of Historic Monuments.

Archaeological Object is any chattel whether in a manufactured or partly manufactured or unmanufactured state which by reason of the archaeological interest attaching thereto or of its association with any Irish historical event or person has a value substantially greater than its intrinsic (including artistic) value, and the said expression includes ancient human, animal or plant remains.

Words used in the plan to describe processes have meanings as defined by the Burra Charter (1988):

Conservation means all the processes of looking after a place so as to retain its significance. It includes maintenance, preservation, restoration, reconstruction, and adaptation, and will often be a combination of processes.

Maintenance means the continuous protective care of the fabric, contents and setting of a place.

Preservation means maintaining the fabric of a place in its existing state, and retarding deterioration.

Restoration means returning existing fabric to a known earlier state by removing accretions or re-assembling existing components, without introducing new material.

Reconstruction means returning a feature as nearly as possible to a known earlier state, with the introduction of additional materials, new or old, into the fabric.

Adaptation means modifying a place to proposed appropriate uses.

Policy Aims

To protect and enhance the visual amenity, historic character, setting and landscape of Athlone defences, and promote public understanding and enjoyment of the monument.

7.3 Principal Policies

Policy 1: Protection

To place the conservation of Athlone Town Walls and the protection of their significance at the heart of future planning and management of the monument.

Policy 2: Conservation, Repair & Maintenance

To implement effective regimes for maintenance and repair, protecting significance and historic integrity and observing exemplary standards of conservation practice.

Policy 3: Enhancement & Improvement

To enhance the historic character and visual qualities of the monument, where appropriate by consolidating eroded elements and removing intrusive elements.

Policy 4: Access and Interpretation

To encourage public understanding and enjoyment of the monument, promoting a high degree of physical and intellectual access and meeting the needs of a broad variety of users.

Policy 5: Tourism, Education & Research

To develop the understanding of Athlone through informed archaeological investigation and research, and ensure their preservation in an accessible form within a comprehensive monument archive. To promote the Walls and Defences of Athlone as sites of interest and historical resources for learning about our past and their role in the local and national history.

Policy 6: Management and Finances

To suggest / devise schemes for the practical application of the conservation plan, and the raising of funds in order to do so.

7.4 Policies for Protection

Policy 1.1

To protect the historic fabric and character of the Town Walls and their setting within Athlone, and the surviving evidence for former use and functions.

- Ensure the recognition of the Town Walls, whether standing or buried, as a separate component of the overall monument that is Athlone Town.
- Organise co-operation between private owners and Athlone Town Council.
- Establish a local interest group in liaison with the Old Athlone Society.

Policy 1.2

To minimise risk to the historic fabric of the monuments from normal public use and administrative operations.

- Provide physical protection where appropriate, e.g. Bastion 4, Lucas Lane.
- Ensure that public services and infrastructure works without planning control do not cause damage to the monument.

Policy 1.3

To observe effective regimes for physical security of the monument.

- Establish a code of conduct for the repair and management of the wall
- Prioritise urgent investigations and works on those areas of the wall at current risk.
- Monitor the condition of the walls, and the performance of the maintenance regime.

Policy 1.4

To protect the ecological value of the monument and its immediate environs, and to resolve any conflict on a basis of knowledge, advice and agreement.

- Discourage the growth of wall plants in the direct vicinity of the walls and monitor the growth of plants close to those areas of the wall currently acting as garden boundaries.
- Make owners of the gardens aware of suitable species for immediate proximity to the walls.
- Agree the removal of damaging woody species, and the appropriate treatment of ivy growth, with supervision and advice if necessary.

Policy 1.5

To meet all statutory and legal requirements for the protection of the monument, the health and safety of individuals and the requirements of disabilities legislation.

- Enforce the laws for the protection of monuments.
- Investigate the need for repairs on unsafe parts of the walls.
- Ensure equal opportunities for access in the creation of new visitor facilities and viewing points at locations of interest around the walls.

- Investigate the need for safe locations for display panels where visitors can read the panels away from the danger of traffic.

7.5 Policies for Conservation, Repair and Maintenance

Policy 2.1

To ensure regular and effective programmes of structural maintenance, with planned monitoring, inspection, conservation and repair, where necessary reviewing and revising existing arrangements.

- Monitor and investigate cracks and failures.
- Ensure the standing remains are consolidated to protect them from the elements and stabilise them from further collapse.
- Investigate the need for localised stone repair / fixing where necessary.
- Remove any concrete render and pointing of the walls and replace with a sympathetic lime-based mortar.
- Remove tree and shrub growth, and discourage regrowth, and ivy.

Policy 2.2

To ensure that all works, whether new works, conservation or repair, are informed by a clear and detailed understanding of the monument, are preceded by appropriate investigations of the historic fabric, and are fully recorded.

- Establish a cycle of monitoring and maintenance.
- Investigate, survey, and record parts of monument prior to and during works.
- Ensure repairs are recorded and logged for the walls as a single maintenance archive for the monument to inform future management decisions.

Policy 2.3

To carry out all works in accordance with the highest standards of conservation, retaining significance, avoiding loss of fabric, and adhering to historical accuracy in design, materials and workmanship.

- Employ experienced firms to design and carry out works.
- Ensure that clearance and maintenance is carried out under supervision.
- Where possible allow a reasonable level of non-destructive plant growth.

7.6 Policies for Enhancement & Improvement

Policy 3.1

To improve public access so as to minimise impact on the monument

- Maintain good and equal means of access for visitors of all abilities, by providing ramps where appropriate and leaflets of public transport and parking in the vicinity of the monuments.
- Provide sign-posts to indicate the locations of the monuments.
- Maintain margins around the walls preserving the field of view of the monuments, (e.g. Site 9).
- Hold open days, in association with private owners and the Friary, to open up more of the Walls to visitors.

Policy 3.2

To enhance public appreciation of the Town Walls and their setting wherever possible by removing or ameliorating visually intrusive elements, or those which conceal or confuse understanding.

- Encourage owners of gardens backing onto the walls to keep vegetation under control.
- Place a margin around exposed stretches of the walls, limiting the proximity of any new developments to avoid obscuring them further.

Policy 3.3

To enhance understanding of the historic monument, where appropriate by repairing past damage, and seeking to locate key elements which have been lost.

- Locate lost features, for example gates and buried lengths of walls.
- Undertake vegetation removal to expose more of the standing remains.
- Place display panels to indicate the arrangement of the site and its plot boundaries that might otherwise be missed by the visitor.

7.7 Policies for Access and Communication

Policy 4.1

To ensure that enjoyment and understanding of the monument are open and accessible to all.

- Ensure that public access to the walls is not diminished further by future developments.
- Enhance access as previously described [Policy 3.1]
- Ensure opportunities for equal access for mobility impaired, and provision of other means of understanding where this is not possible [Policy 3.1].
- Hold open days to gain access to those areas of the walls that are in private grounds.

Policy 4.2

To extend public access and enjoyment to the whole monument and its significant features.

- Link the surviving wall features of the walls in a walk/linear park, possibly with head-sets explaining the points of interest along the walk.
- Highlight lost stretches of wall and gates in e.g. paving, or with wall-mounted plaques and display panels.
- Adopt a logo on signs to highlight the sites as part of a walls walk around the town
- Erect display panels at sites of the standing remains, to explain their function and their role in the defences of the town and where appropriate, their role in Irish History.
- Produce a pamphlet and map, explaining the link between the sites of the defences, to illustrate how they relate to each other and to the town.
- Create a display at the Athlone Tourism Visitors Centre, about the walls and defences, and how they relate to the Castle and the town as a whole.

Policy 4.3

To develop interpretation to encourage understanding of the principal features of the monument, and facilitate access to information.

- Mark the line of the defences on town maps and tourist literature.
- Provide modest signage to identify sites.
- Provide display panels at sites of the standing remains, to explain their function and their role in the defences of the town and where appropriate, their role in Irish History.

Policy 4.4

To develop the range of educational provision for schools and other groups, as an important element in interpretation and the promotion of access.

- Develop the walls walk as part of an educational/tourist trail of Athlone.

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- Hold open days to enable the viewing of elements of the walls normally hidden in private grounds.
- Produce an information pack for schools, detailing the history of Athlone, its walls and defences and its role in Irish history.

7.8 Policies for Tourism, Education and Research

Policy 5.1

To create a formal archive or information base relating to the Town Walls of Athlone, distinct from working files and records of current transactions, to include a record of all interventions in the monument.

- Survey the most significant exposed remains, using photogrammetry or rectified photography, and commission a condition survey to provide a record of the current condition of the walls.
- Refer to results of previous excavations; address the curation needs for archaeological finds and archives.
- Carry out further investigation in the corporation and other archives; including architectural records.

Policy 5.2

To promote future research, with a planned agenda for investigations and an ability to respond to opportunities.

- Seek opportunities for archaeological investigation of the line of the wall, and defences, during future development works.
- Record future repair and maintenance works.

Policy 5.3

To promote the site as a tourist attraction for the improved awareness of the local community and visitors to the area and as an encouragement for visitors to remain longer in the area.

- Provide signposts to highlight the locations of the more substantial elements of the walls.
- Provide tourist literature in shops and public places of Athlone and at the Tourism Visitor Centre.
- Provide literature detailing Athlone's Town walls and other attractions of the area, in the Dublin Tourist Offices.
- Hold talks and tours with willing members of the Local Authority and visiting Academic staff, to provide insight into the walls and defences.
- Highlight the bridge and site of the old bridges over the River Shannon, during a river awareness week, in the form of a talk, possibly on a boat.

Policy 5.4

To promote the site in the local schools and community to further improve the awareness of the role of the town walls and defences of Athlone in the local and national history.

- Organise school tours around the town, detailing the varying sites of the town walls and defences.
- Hold open days for local interest groups to come and have guided tours.

- Run workshops in association with the Craft Council of Ireland and Athlone Institute of Technology, to come and see either conservation work in action or the results of effective work carried out to the standing remains (e.g. Site 6), the engineering involved in the construction of the defences, e.g. the Batteries at Site 16 and the modern engineering involved in the construction of the wall display at Site 6.
- Hold re-enactment days to illustrate the defensive points of the town and associated activities, for example a Williamite siege, or the building of ramparts and batteries.

7.9 Policies for Management and Finance

Policy 6.1

To raise funds for the initial requirements of the conservation plan.

- Delegate / appoint a member of the Local Authority to produce a Business Plan listing the possible expenditures and income that could be generated by the sites as attractions to the town.
- Member to make a case for funding of the site, to Westmeath County Council and the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, and other interested bodies.
- Investigate the possibility of a joint fund-raising venture with the Castle, for the promotion of the historic core of Athlone.

Policy 6.2

To create a scheme for the maintenance of the site and the funds in order to do so.

- Examine the possibility of raising funds through postcards and literature, to be sold in the Athlone Tourism Visitor Centre shop, the new Civic Centre, in galleries and in the Dublin Tourist Office.
- Raise funds through organising specialist open days and workshops with interested bodies.
- Make a case to the local council, to try and provide more facilities in Athlone to cater for visitors to the sites - thereby improving the reputation of the area as a tourist destination and maintaining a steady flow of visitors.

8 IMPLEMENTATION

8.1 Introduction

The implementation of the Plan will require the assumption of responsibility for the monument, its formal protection, the adoption of policies and the planning and implementation of programmes of repair and enhancement. Implementation may need to follow differing time-scales and decision-making processes, with some proposals capable of introduction in the short term, and others, if adopted, coming into play over a longer period.

The following section is a suggested approach rather than a specific and prescriptive plan of action. It is to be noted that under the requirements of national legislation and local planning guidance many of the proposed works will require consents and permissions of the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government and/or the Westmeath County Council.

8.2 Assumption of Responsibility

The first stage is the assumption of ‘ownership’ of the monuments, which can best be achieved by formal Guardianship under the Local Authority. In the cases where the walls form boundaries for private gardens, the Local Authority should liaise with the owners on a regular basis to ensure co-operation in the upkeep of the walls, between the separate owners and the Local Authority.

<i>Action</i>	<i>Means</i>
Encourage liaison with Athlone Town Council Heritage Officer and private owners [1.1]	i) Heritage Council and Local Authority support for post of Heritage Officer
Establish a Local Interest liaison group [1.1]	Hold regular meetings encouraging interaction between private owners and the Local Authority.

8.3 Formal Protection

At present, the Walls and Defences are included in the protection of Athlone Town, under RMP Nos. 10, 11 and 42, of Sheet 29, Co. Westmeath.

Action	Means
Ensure the recognition of the Town Walls as a separate component of the Athlone Town monument, whether standing or buried. [1.1]	Clear mapping of the defences as a linear component on existing or proposed designation mapping. Defining the boundary around the Batteries, RMP No. 11.
Enforce the laws for the protection of monuments. [1.5]	Explicit publicity and statement in Development plan; liaison between the Heritage Officer and Garda.
Ensure that public services and infrastructure works without planning control do not cause damage to the monument. [1.2]	Ensure that liaison with services explicitly includes heritage considerations.

8.4 Adoption of the Policies

The early adoption of policies as a code of practice for the protection of the walls will enable public and private owners to be equally aware of the limits of permissible activities.

Action	Means
Establish a code of conduct for the repair and management of the walls. [1.3]	Promulgate a written Code to circulate to owners, responsible parties and conservation specialists.
<i>Code to include:-</i>	
Protection of the ecological value of the monument and its immediate environs, and resolution of any conflict on a basis of knowledge, advice and agreement. [1.4]	
Monitoring of the growth of plants in the proximity of the walls. [1.4]	
Ensure that all works are informed by a clear and detailed understanding of the monument. [2.2]	
Investigate and record parts of monument prior to works. [2.2]	
Ensure repairs are recorded and logged for the walls as a single maintenance archive for the monument to inform future management decisions. [2.2]	
Ensure that all works are carried out in accordance with the highest standards of conservation, retaining significance, avoiding loss of fabric, and adhering to historical accuracy in design, materials and workmanship [2.3]	
Employ experienced firms to design and carry out works.[2.3]	
Ensure that clearance and maintenance is carried out under supervision.[2.3]	
Ensure that public access to the walls is not diminished. [5.1]	
Ensure equal opportunities for access in the creation of new visitor facilities. [1.5]	

8.5 Planning Repair and Enhancement

Works on the walls will need to be preceded by a phase of investigation and planning to establish the scope of work required, and prioritise what is to be done.

Action	Means
Establish a cycle of monitoring and maintenance of the standing remains to ensure longevity. [2.2]	Produce a Management Plan and have annual / more frequent inspections of the walls, liaising with any private owners.
Survey the standing remains, while they are uncovered with vegetation or strip off vegetation, to enable a survey to make a record of the current state of the walls. [3.1]	Commission an archaeological study and photogrammetric or rectified photographic survey and produce drawings to be stored as part of the monument archive and to be used as a basis for the location of past and future conservation works.
Investigate the need for repairs on unsafe parts of the walls. [1.5]	Commission study / specification
Monitor and investigate cracks and failures. [2.1]	Commission study / specification
Investigate the need for localised stone repair/fixing. [2.1]	Commission study / specification
Prioritise urgent investigations and works. [1.3]	(Management plan)

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Promote future research, with a planned agenda for investigations and an ability to respond to opportunities. [3.2, 3.3, 5.1-5.4]	(Management plan)
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8.6 Implementation of Repair and Enhancement

These can be divided into the Short, Medium and Long-Term. Short term recommendations, capable of immediate introduction are :

<i>Action</i>	<i>Means</i>
Ensure regular and effective programmes of structural maintenance, with planned monitoring, inspection, conservation and repair, where necessary reviewing and revising existing arrangements. [2.1]	Management Plan The current stone repair on the bastion, in front of the Civic Centre, following the Conservation Report prepared by John Redmill (2004). Monitor condition of all other exposed stretches of the walls. Commission removal of any concrete-based render and pointing to replace with a sympathetic lime-based mortar.
Agree the removal of damaging woody species, and the appropriate treatment of ivy growth. [1.4]	Check vegetation in private gardens and its possible threat to the walls, especially those of Sites 7 - 10.
Minimise the degradation of the walls by trapped moisture.	Commission the removal of concrete-based render and pointing from the walls and repair with lime-based sympathetic materials.
Provide physical protection where appropriate, e.g. Sites 6 and 10.	The wall and bastion of Site 6 is being protected by a glass panel, as part of the Conservation Report prepared by John Redmill (2004). The 'nose' of the bastion at Site 13 is protected by double-yellow lines on the road surface but is still at risk from traffic flow.
Link the surviving features of the walls in a walk/linear park. [5.2] Develop the walls walk as part of an educational/tourist trail of the historic town. [4.1-4.3]	Publish leaflet / maps; mark the line of the walls and defences on town maps and tourist literature. [5.3] Adopt a logo to put onto plaques marking the points of interest around the town, creating a walls walk. [5.2] Provide modest signage in the form of plaques to identify sites. [5.3] Provide display panels at appropriate points to explain the walls, with maps showing their position in relation to the other points along the walk and any reconstructive illustrations to put the standing remains in context The removal of any current signposts that are vague and do not indicate precise locations of the walls and defences.
Ensure opportunities for equal access for mobility impaired, and provision of other means of understanding where this is not possible. [1.5, 3.1]	Provide information on wheelchair access available at points along the walls walk, disabled parking and / or the nearest public transport access. Where appropriate, provide ramps to aid access (e.g. at Site 6) Provide headsets from the Athlone Tourism Visitor Centre, to provide information on Sites 1-22, as part of an informative walking tour round the town centre. A separate headset or Braille display panel could be provided at No. 1 Battery, being further away from the visitor centre.

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Medium term policies are:

<i>Action</i>	<i>Means</i>
Publish the results of previous excavations. [5.1]	Consider a possible joint publication of minor archaeological sites investigated throughout the town, especially those having found remains of the walls and defences.
Carry out further investigation in other archives, not yet researched. [5.2]	Promotion of research in connection with archaeological investigations, or as separate project
Seek opportunities for archaeological investigation of the line of the wall, and earlier defences, during future development works [5.2]	Refine mapping of archaeological features to show areas of potential interest
Highlight lost stretches of wall and gates in e.g. paving and with display panels and plaques. [5.3]	Provide enhanced sign-posting and display panels to help inform the public of the extent of the walls, remaining and removed.
Improve the setting of the walls and limit impingement on the settings.	Seek removal of vegetation covering the wall at Sites 7 and the exterior of 8. Seek the removal of the breeze block wall and tank obscuring the town wall at Site 8. Create a mapped boundary area on the exterior of Site 9, limiting the proximity of new development. Provide informative display panels at appropriate sites in safe locations, where they can be read safely and they provide explanations of what can be seen at those points.
Improve access to the walls and increase public awareness.	Hold open days in liaison with the private owners, and hold tours around the wall walk. Hold talks, with visiting academics and interested parties, to local interest groups.

Policies for longer term improvements are:

<i>Action</i>	<i>Means</i>
Maintain the walls and the plaques and other visitor facilities along the path of the walls.	Carry out annual or more regular checks on the condition of the walls, the plaques, display panels and settings, and employ a gardener to keep vegetation under control.
Raise funds for the upkeep of the walls and associated facilities	Hold open days with visiting schools and other interest groups. Make contacts with any bodies that have interests in aspects associated with the walls, that might give sponsorship or might get involved in joint ventures of either publications, documentaries or tours. Promote publications relating to Athlone and its defences in bookshops throughout Ireland and further afield. Gain sponsorship from local businesses for talks and functions.

8.7 Adoption and review

The Conservation Plan will be formally adopted by the Athlone Town Council, The Heritage Council and the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government in a process involving consultation with private owners and any other stakeholders.

Following formal adoption, the plan will be reviewed every five to ten years to reflect changing knowledge and circumstances, especially changes in legislation and guidance.