

Meath County Council

Planning Report

To:	Lisa Carroll, A/Senior Executive Planner
From:	Ryan Keleghan, Assistant Planner
File Number:	2660742
Applicant:	Bank of Ireland Group PLC
Development Address:	Bank of Ireland, Headfort Place, Townparks, Kells, A82 W894.
Application Type:	Permission
Date of Site Inspection:	21/07/2026
Date of Report:	04/08/2026
Date Decision Due:	10/08/2026
Development Description:	The development will consist of the installation of 1no. digital screen at ground floor level along the front façade (south elevation). The screen will be located internally within the existing window display.

1. Site Location & Description

The site measures 0.059ha and is located within the townlands of Townspark, and within the settlement boundary of Kells. The site is currently commercial with a financial institution operating on the premises. The site is located off the regional road R-147-39. The site is immediately surrounded by residential dwellings and commercial and retail properties.

The site is zoned B1 – Commercial Town or Village. The site is located within the Kells Historic Core Architectural Conservation Area (ACA). The subject site is a Protected Structure, LA RPS ID: 90530. There are a number of Protected Structures located adjacent to the site also. There are no Recorded Monuments or Protected Views within the application site. The site is located within the 'South West Kells Lowlands', lowland landscape character area, which has a moderate landscape character value and has a moderate landscape sensitivity.

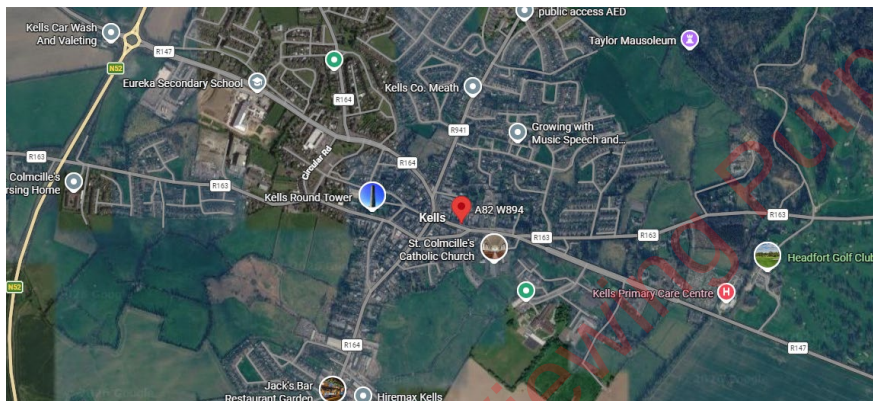


Figure 1: Site Location. (Source: Google Maps, 2026)

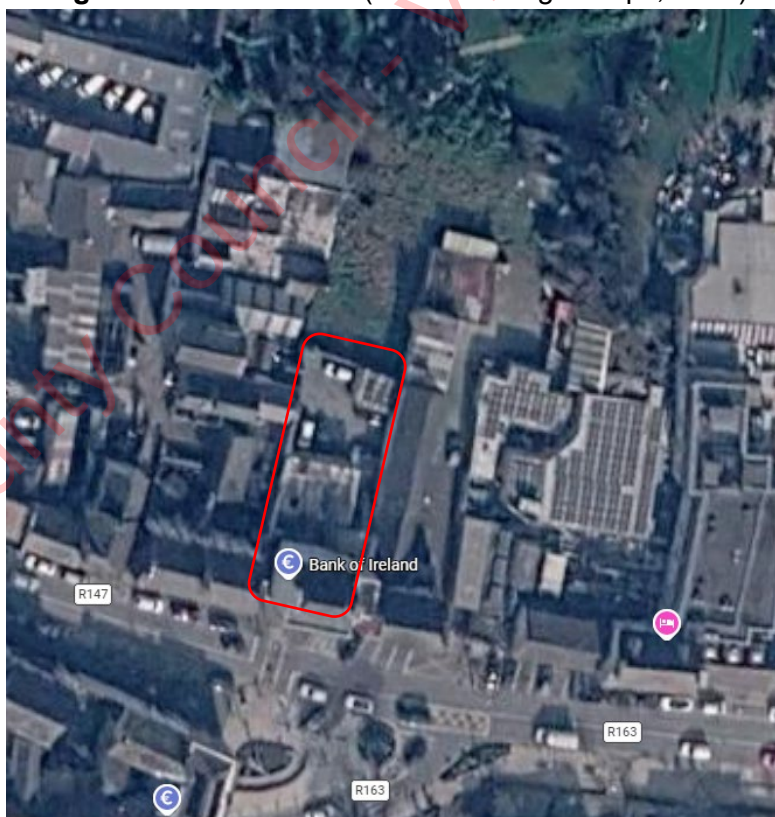


Figure 2: Aerial Photograph of Site (Approximate Redline Boundary). (Source: Google Maps, 2026)

Site Inspection Photography



Figures 3-7: Images taken during the site inspection on the 21/07/2026.

2. Proposed Development

The Applicant is seeking planning permission for the development which “*will consist of the installation of 1no. digital screen at ground floor level along the front façade (south elevation). The screen will be located internally within the existing window display.*” Reference to the Protected Structure is mentioned on the public notices but not included within the project description.

3. Planning History

A review of the Meath County Council Planning Register indicates that there is recent and relevant planning history on or near the subject site.

- **Plan Ref No. KT60029:** Planning permission was refused for the “*construction of a disabled access ramp and handrail to the existing front entrance. This development is a protected structure*”. The development was refused for the following reason:

Having regard to the protected status and considerable character of the building it is considered that in light of other less obtrusive alternatives available, that the proposed development onto the front façade would be unnecessary, compromise the character and visual amenity of the building and as such would be contrary to the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.

4. Policy Context

4.1 National Policy

Project Ireland 2040, National Planning Framework (NPF) was formally adopted on 29th May 2018 and is the long-term, 20-year strategy for strategic planning and sustainable development of our urban and rural areas to 2040. The core objectives of the NPF are to secure balanced regional development and a sustainable ‘compact growth’ approach to the form and pattern of future development.

The Architectural Heritage Protection Guidelines 2011 (as amended)

These Guidelines are issued under Section 28 and Section 52 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended. Under Section 52(1), the Minister is obliged to issue guidelines to planning authorities concerning development objectives, a) for protecting structures, or parts of structures, which are of special architectural, historical, archaeological, artistic, cultural, scientific, social or technical interest, and b) for preserving the character of architectural conservation areas. Guidelines issued under Section 28 of the Act require planning authorities to have regard to them in the performance of their functions.

4.2 Regional Policy

The Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) for the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly (EMRA) came into force in June 2019. The document is a strategic plan and investment framework to shape future development in the region towards 2031 and beyond.

4.3 Local Policy

The Meath County Development Plan 2021-2027 (CDP) is the statutory development plan for the area. The CDP sets the local planning policy context including provision for urban and rural development.

The following chapters are relevant to this application;

- Chapter 4 of the CDP sets out the ‘Economy and Employment Strategy’.
- Chapter 8 of the CDP sets out the ‘Cultural and Natural Heritage Strategy’.
- Chapter 11 of the CDP sets out the ‘Development Management Standards and Land Use Zoning Objectives’.

Section 11.10.1 of the Meath County Development Plan outlines the policies and objectives in relation to Advertising.

Advertising structures are an accepted and necessary part of commercial activity and are essential for way finding.

DM POL 30: To permit only advertisements which enhance the appearance and vitality of an area and make a positive contribution to the streetscape.

DM OBJ 103: The following signage types will be discouraged

- Signs which advertise general products or services
- Animated, moving, flashing, rotating or sound-emitting signs
- Billboards
- Roof mounted signs or signs which project above the ridge height of the building
- Internally illuminated awnings
- Changeable message signs
- Pole mounted signs
- Wall signs
- Free standing signs

DM OBJ 104: In assessing advertising signage, the Council will consider the following criteria:

- The size and scale of signs which should not conflict with existing structures in the vicinity.
- The potential impacts on the streetscape of the proposal
- Large scale commercial advertisement structures are not acceptable on or near Protected Structures, Architectural Conservation Areas (please refer to Map 8.3), in public parks and in areas of high amenity.
- Signs should not interfere with windows or other façade features or project above the skyline.

DM OBJ 105: Advertisement structures will not be permitted where they give rise to a potential traffic hazard. In accordance with the Spatial Planning and National Roads and the Guidelines on the provision of Tourism and Leisure Signage on National Roads (2011), advertisement structures will not be permitted at roundabouts, at traffic signalised junctions, at locations where they obstruct sight lines, compete with other traffic signs, give rise to confusion for road users or endanger traffic safety.

DM OBJ 106: Applications for advertisement structures along national routes and along approach roads to towns and villages will generally not be permitted except for tourist attractions of national or regional importance which utilise the approved designated signage.

DM OBJ 107: The number of advertisement structures for any one premises shall be kept to a minimum and will generally be restricted to a maximum of two in the local area. In exceptional cases this maximum may be exceeded at the discretion of the Council.

DM OBJ 108: The use of electronic variable messaging signs commonly known as “VMS signs”, shall be reserved strictly for use in roadwork activities, hazard information and or as part of an approved event traffic management plan. Advanced written consent of the Council will be required prior to installation and usage of such signage.

DM OBJ 109: In urban centres, where public realm strategies have been prepared the Council reserve the right to de-exempt any signage in the interests of visual amenity in these Areas.

Section 8.7 of the Meath County Development Plan 2021-2027 outlines the policies and objectives in relation to Architectural Heritage and Protected Structures.

A Protected Structure, unless otherwise stated in the RPS, includes:

- the interior of the structure;
- the land lying within its curtilage;
- any other structures within the curtilage, and their interiors, and:
- all fixtures and features which form part of the interior or exterior of any of these structures.

The term 'curtilage' is generally taken to mean those lands immediately associated with the structure, and in the case of smaller properties usually means all land within the boundaries. In the case of larger properties, the curtilage must be determined on a case by case basis.

HER POL 14: To protect and conserve the architectural heritage of the County and seek to prevent the demolition or inappropriate alteration of Protected Structures.

HER POL 15: To encourage the conservation of Protected Structures, and where appropriate, the adaptive reuse of existing buildings and sites in a manner compatible with their character and significance. In certain cases, land use zoning restrictions may be relaxed in order to secure the conservation of the protected structure.

HER POL 16: To protect the setting of Protected Structures and to refuse permission for development within the curtilage or adjacent to a protected structure which would adversely impact on the character and special interest of the structure, where appropriate.

HER POL 17: To require that all planning applications relating to Protected Structures contain the appropriate accompanying documentation in accordance with the Architectural Heritage Protection Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2011) or any variation thereof, to enable the proper assessment of the proposed works.

HER POL 18: To require that in the event of permission being granted for development within the curtilage of a protected structure, any works necessary for the survival of the structure and its re-use should be prioritised in the first phase of development.

HER OBJ 15: To review and update the Record of Protected Structures on an on-going basis and to make additions and deletions as appropriate.

HER OBJ 16: To identify and retain good examples of historic street furniture, e.g. cast-iron post boxes, water pumps, light fixtures and signage, as appropriate.

HER OBJ 17: To promote best conservation practice and encourage the use of appropriately qualified professional advisors, tradesmen and craftsmen, with recognised conservation expertise, for works to protected structures or historic buildings in an Architectural Conservation Area.

HER OBJ 18: To provide detailed guidance notes and continue to develop the Council's advisory/educational role with regard to heritage matters and to promote awareness, understanding and appreciation of the architectural heritage of the County.

Section 8.7.2 of the Meath County Development Plan 2021-2027 outlines the policies and objectives in relation to Architectural Conservation Areas.

An Architectural Conservation Area is a place, area, group of structures or townscape, which is of special architectural, historical, archaeological, artistic, cultural, scientific, social or technical interest. 4 They may also include areas which contribute to the appreciation of Protected Structures.

Piecemeal alterations on individual non protected structures can have a significant cumulative effect on a streetscape. Any works which would have a material effect on the special character of an ACA require planning permission.

It is the Policy of the Council:

HER POL 19: To protect the character of Architectural Conservation Areas in Meath.

HER POL 20: To require that all development proposals within or contiguous to an ACA be sympathetic to the character of the area, that the design is appropriate in terms of height, scale, plot density, layout, materials and finishes and are appropriately sited and designed with regard to the advice given in the Statements of Character for each area, where available.

It is the objective of the Council:

HER OBJ 20: To identify places of special character, with a view to their designation as Architectural Conservation Areas and to modify existing ACAs, where necessary.

HER OBJ 21: To prepare and review, where necessary, detailed character statements and planning guidance for each ACA.

HER OBJ 22: To avoid the demolition of structures and the removal of features and street furniture which contribute to the character of an ACA. The Council will require that any planning application for demolition or alteration within an ACA be accompanied by a measured and photographic survey, condition report and architectural heritage assessment.

Kells Historic Core Architectural Conservation Area Character Statement

The objectives of the Kells Historic Core ACA are as follows:

1. to preserve the historic street pattern within the core of the town,
2. to require that all new developments shall observe the existing scale of the town.
3. to protect the character of the existing streetscape by giving consideration to the suitability of style, construction materials, colour and decoration to be used in any proposals for development taking place within this area.
4. To encourage appropriate new uses for empty and under-utilised buildings.
5. To avoid the destruction of minor historic elements whose cumulative loss would severely erode the cumulative cultural significance of the town

Meath County Council Shopfront and Signage Guidelines

All other relevant Section 28 Planning Guidelines have been considered in this assessment of this application.

5. Submissions

There have been no submissions received on behalf of this application.

6. Representations

No councillor representation has been received on behalf of this application.

7. Prescribed Bodies

The application was referred to the following Prescribed Bodies:

- **Department - Archaeology:** No response received to date.
- **An Taisce:** No response received to date.

- **The Heritage Council:** No response received to date.

8. Internal Referrals

The application was referred to the following Internal Department:

- **Conservation:** Refusal Recommended.

9. Pre-Application Consultation

A review of Section 19 of the submitted Application Form indicates that there was no pre-planning consultation held in respect of the proposed development.

10. Planning Assessment

The main planning considerations in the determination of this application are:

- Principle of Development
- Design & Layout
- Flood Risk
- Archaeology/Built Heritage
- Transportation
- Site Services

10.1 Principle of Development

The application site land zoning is stated as B1 – Commercial/Town or Village Centre, according to the Meath County Development Plan 2021-2027. This zoning objective is as follows; “*To protect, provide for and/or improve town and village centre facilities and uses*”.

The application site is zoned ‘B1 – Commercial/Town or Village Centre’ in the Meath County Development Plan 2021-2027 where a ‘Bank / Financial Institution’ is a permitted use. The proposed development would be ancillary to the existing Bank / Financial Institution. The existing dwelling on the site has satisfied the principle of development.

The proposed development is considered to be acceptable in principle subject to a detailed planning assessment and compliance with the design standards and assessment criteria provided within the Meath County Development Plan 2021-2027.

10.2 Design & Layout

The Applicant is proposing an internal LCD sign which is located behind the existing window. There are no proposed external changes to the subject site. At present there are two paper signs located in place of the proposed signage.

The proposed development is 1.2m in height and 0.685m in width and will locate centrally in the window. The subject development is described as “*new lcd displays to be located internally behind existing window glazing*”. This would not be in accordance with the particulars of **DM OBJ 103**, given the proposed signage would “advertise general products or services”, would be “animated and moving” and also be a “changeable message sign”. While these are generally discouraged, given the subject site is a Protected Structure, these limitations should be strictly enforced.

The proposed design is likely to detract from the character of the Protected Structure and impact the character of the ACA. The proposed design would appear to not align with the Meath County Council Shopfront and Signage Guidelines in terms of the proposed signage.

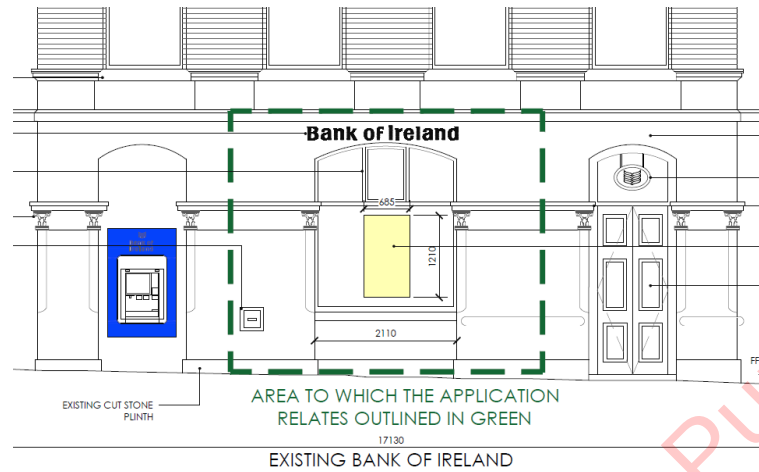


Figure 8: Proposed Front Elevation, as submitted.

10.3 Flood Risk

The Meath County Development Plan 2021-2027 refers to Flood Risk Management as a key area of assessment. A review of the area indicates that the application site is partially located in an identified flood risk zone in the OPW PFRA Mapping/Strategic Flood Risk Assessment for County Meath carried out for the Meath County Development Plan 2021-2027. The subject site is not located within a flood zone. The closest flood zone is located 110m east of the subject site. This is a Flood Zone A; therefore, the zone is defined as an area of high probability of flooding. However, the application site is in a Flood Zone C (fluvial) where the risk of flooding is low.

10.4 Archaeology/Built Heritage

There are no known Recorded Monuments. The subject site is within the curtilage of a Protected Structure (LA RPS ID: 90530). The proposed development is located within the Kells Historic Core ACA. The Protected Structure/subject site building is described as being a *“Detached four-bay three-storey bank, built c.1890, flanked by single-storey screen walls. Hipped roof hidden behind parapet with rendered chimneystacks. Red brick façade to upper floors, with timber sash windows and stone sills, set in segmental-arched openings. Rendered façade to ground floor with string course and cornice. Engaged colonnettes having foliated capitals flanking ground floor openings”*. The subject structure retains its original use.

The subject site is located adjacent to a number of Protected Structures, which are as follows:

- Shop (LA RPS ID: 90528)
- House (LA RPS ID: 90531)
- House (LA RPS ID: 90532)
- House (Terraced) (LA RPS ID: 90554)

These are unlikely to be impacted by the proposed development.

The Meath County Council Conservation Officer has reviewed the same and recommended refusal based on the following comments *"The proposed digital signage is incompatible with the principles of the Kells Conservation Area and is deemed inappropriate within the context of Meath County Council's Shopfront Design Guide. Additionally, it is unsuitable for a Recorded Protected Structure. Accordingly, this planning application should be refused"*.

10.5 Transportation

The site will be accessed through an existing entrance pedestrian pathway and regional road. There are no proposed changes to the subject entrance.

Given the size and scale of the proposed development and it's the subject site location adjacent to a traffic light junction, the proposed development would not be in accordance with **DM OBJ 105**.

10.6 Site Services

As outlined in the Application Form submitted by the Applicant the site services have been stated to be 'Not Applicable'.

11. Appropriate Assessment

Article 6(3) of Council Directive 92/43/EEC (the Habitats Directive) compels competent authorities to undertake an appropriate assessment of any plan or project not directly connected with or necessary to the management of a Natura 2000 site but likely to have a significant effect thereon, either individually or in combination with other plans or projects.

'Appropriate Assessment of Plans and Projects, Guidance for Planning Authorities' (2009) provide advice to planning authorities on their obligations under the Habitats Directive. The document, "Appropriate Assessment of Plans and Projects in Ireland: Guidance for Planning Authorities", states that where, from the nature, size and location of the development, it is unclear if the proposal will have a significant effect on a Natura 2000 site(s), a Natura Impact Statement will be required.

The following Natura 2000 sites are located within 15km of the subject site:

- River Boyne and River Blackwater SAC (002299)
- Girley (Drewstown) Bog SAC (002203)
- Killyconny Bog (Cloghbally) SAC (000006)
- River Boyne and River Blackwater SPA (004232).

The Planning Authority considered the nature, scale and location of the proposed development and other plans and projects (where there could be potential for cumulative or in-combination effects), the conservation objectives/ qualifying interests of European Sites within the vicinity of the site and the distance to European Sites, any protected habitats or species, the WFD catchment location, the underlying aquifer type and vulnerability and the excavation works, emissions, transportation requirements and duration of construction and operation and cumulative impacts associated with the proposal.

The Planning Authority's Screening for Appropriate Assessment has considered the potential effects including direct, indirect and in-combination effects of the proposed development, individually or in combination with the permitted developments and cumulatively with other plans or projects on European Sites. The Planning Authority concludes that the proposed development (entire project), by itself or in combination with other plans and developments in

the vicinity, would not be likely to have a significant effect on European Site(s). In light of this, it is considered that a Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment (Natura Impact Statement) is not required in this instance.

12. Environmental Impact Assessment

The Planning Authority is required to determine if the proposed development requires an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA). This determination is based on the requirements set out in Schedule 5 of the Planning and Development Regulations, 2001 to 2026, Schedule 5 requirements.

The Planning Authority is required to determine if the proposed development requires an EIA. The proposed development does not equal or exceed a threshold or represent a category of project listed in Schedule 5 of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001 to 2026. Having regard to the small scale and nature of the development and the site location, the proposal would not require sub-threshold EIA.

13. Development Contributions

Not Applicable in this instance.

14. Conclusion

Having regard to the location of the development site within the Kells Historic Core Architectural Conservation Area in conjunction with the policies and objectives (DM POL 30, HER POL 14 and DM OBJ 33) as set out in the Meath County Development Plan 2021-2027, it is considered that the proposed development would adversely impact upon the architectural heritage of the building, surrounding areas, and historic quality of the town streetscape, thereby contravening DM OBJ 33 and DM OBJ 103. The proposed development would not therefore be in accordance with the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.

15. Recommendation

In light of the foregoing, whilst having regard to the details submitted as part of the application, it is considered that the policies and objectives of the Meath County Development Plan 2021-2027 have not been satisfied, and it is therefore recommended that permission for the proposed advertising signage screen is **REFUSED** for the following reasons:

1. It is the objective of the Meath County Development Plan 2021-2027 “To protect and conserve the architectural heritage of the County and seek to prevent the demolition or inappropriate alteration of Protected Structures”. (HER POL 14). By virtue of the prominent location and design of the proposed development, the Planning Authority considers that if permitted, the development would adversely impact upon the setting and character of the protected structure and neighbouring protected structures. Further, the Planning Authority considers that the development would not have the capacity to assimilate into its surroundings and would injure the amenities of the surrounding area. It is therefore considered that the proposed development would contravene the aforementioned objective of the County Development Plan, be contrary to the aforementioned Ministerial Guidelines, establish an undesirable future precedent and would be contrary to the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.

2. The proposed digital signage is incompatible with the principles of the Kells Conservation Area and is deemed inappropriate within the context of Meath County Council's Shopfront Design Guide. The signage would not be in accordance with the particulars of DM OBJ 103, given that the proposed signage would “advertise general products or services”, would be “animated and moving” and would also be a “changeable message sign”.

REFUSAL



Ryan Keleghan

Assistant Planner

Date: 04/08/2026

RECOMMENDATION

ACCEPTED

10 August 2026

SIGNED:



Lisa Carroll

A/Senior Executive Planner