

CO. OFFALY DRAFT DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2021-2027 (SUBMISSION)
Amendment to Record of Protected Structures Former Kilroy Premises Item 23-257 (Regional) High Street Tullamore This architecturally important building faces an uncertain future and steps should be taken to ensure its survival. It should be the subject of a detailed survey following which its description and appraisal in the Record of Protected Structures should be updated. In the meantime, the present entry should be modified. The original structure which dates from c. 1730, was built by Nicholas Crawford, the Master of the local military barracks and was later used as the office of the Charleville Estate before becoming Kilroys electrical shop and store in the late 1950s. Recent research has uncovered the similarity in architectural proportions, details and design of the building with those of the south front of Belvedere House outside Mullingar which was erected around the same time. Belvedere House was designed by Richard Castle (1690-1751), one of the most important architects of the period and designer of Carton House, Russborough House and Leinster House, now the home of Dail Eireann. Both Tullamore and Belvedere are five bay stone structures with projecting end bays, a half basement and a piano nobile approached by stone staircase. The main difference is that the Tullamore building has a visible hipped roof supported on a fine carved stone cornice whereas Belvedere is finished with a simpler running cornice. Arguably, Tullamore is the finer design. Both buildings utilise the same unusual feature of matching Venetian windows surmounted by a demi-lunette or Diocletian window. Original photographs show the building set back from the street to match the building line of its neighbours and with a sweeping staircase rising to a well-designed Gibbesian door case. This is topped by a pediment over a pulvinated frieze which is more elaborate than that at Belvedere. It is presumed that these original architectural features remain behind the masking shop front. The similarity to Belvedere has been commented on by the eminent architectural historian Dr. John O'Connell and its attribution to Castle has been endorsed by Andrew Tierney in his comprehensive overview of the architecture of Leinster. Along with the Market House in O'Connor Square, this building is in architectural terms, the most sophisticated 18c.structure in Tullamore.It would however appear to be unoccupied and given its age, its future must now be in doubt. It should be the subject of a more intensive appraisal based on a full architectural survey which would establish the extent of the original structure and its condition with a view to arresting any further deterioration. Any steps necessary to ensure its preservation and conservation should then be taken and if necessary, the powers of inspection and protection available to the Council under Part 4 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 used. The integrity of this important building was regrettably degraded by the



erection in 1959 of a single storey shop front which obscured the lower part of the facade and its entry steps and which advanced to the back of the footpath thereby interrupting the building line on the eastern side of High Street which had been established on either side by buildings of the same period. The shopfront is executed in an illiterate mock Georgian style of four squashed arch openings with a flat fascia over and bears no architectural or functional relationship in design, scale or materials to the 1730 building behind. This structure is of no intrinsic architectural merit and its degradation of the historic building and transgression of the building line of the street, would be unthinkable today. With its heavy and permanently locked security gates it is not a shop entry, but is used for displays and effectively presents a dead frontage to the street. It is an inappropriate anomaly whose removal would reveal the original frontage of the important building behind and restore the civic character of High Street. By virtue of its age and design the shop front cannot be considered to be worthy of inclusion in the protection accorded to the 1730 building and the RPS should clarify that lest it prove an impediment to any future proposal to restore the original building. I would ask therefore that pending an architectural survey leading to a more thorough description and appraisal, the present entry in the RPS should stand but that the following sentence be deleted: 'The 1959 shop front is appealing with its arcaded timber pilasters and recessed round headed doorway with double wrought iron security gates'. and that the following sentence be added: 'For the avoidance of doubt, the 1959 shop front does not form part of the Protected Structure'.

