



Submission to Kildare County Council as part of the Draft Development Plan Process

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 The Punchestown Area Community Group are a group of residents who are passionate about the Punchestown area. The purpose of our group is to work for the benefit of the public and residents in the Punchestown area.
- 1.2 Our group formed to come together to address concerns of the local community and our aspirations for how our area can improve in the future in a balanced and inclusive manner. The key goal of the Punchestown Area Community Group is to help ensure that the Punchestown area becomes more inclusive, vibrant, economically robust and climate resilient.
- 1.3 Our group is passionate about preserving and respecting our biodiversity. We are passionate about sustainable mobility and moving towards active travel where necessary.
- 1.4 The Punchestown area is rich with local amenities and heritage assets and we are highly motivated to ensure their protection and amelioration.
- 1.5 Generally, the area referred to as Punchestown includes the townland of Punchestown itself, but on a more general scale the 'Punchestown area' centres around Watch House Cross and includes the surrounding townlands of Punchestown Little, Punchestown Great and Swordlestown which immediately borders it. The townland of Swordlestown is not as commonly known as Punchestown and therefore residents in this area would tend to more generally refer to their area as Punchestown.
- 1.6 The purpose of this submission is to seek recognition in the Development Plan for Gowran Grange Demesne and its curtilage. We wish to seek the necessary protection it deserves and to ensure its legacy and contribution to society into the future. We propose that Grange Gowran House and its curtilage be immediately added to Kildare's Record of Protected Structures.
- 1.7 Gowran Grange Demesne is of historical, social and architectural and landscape significance. The reason why it is not included as a protected structure would appear to arise from omission rather than absence of significance or historical importance.
- 1.8 While Gowran Grange is not currently a protected structure it warrants such designation on architectural, historical, cultural grounds and is of significant importance as a heritage demesne.
- 1.9 Gowran Grange Demesne is in the townland of Swordlestown North. It is next to Watch House Cross. It neighbours with Punchestown Racecourse and many stud farms. It is

accessed via the historic Woolpack Road (its main entrance) and the Ballymore Eustace Road (its secondary entrance).

Fig. 1 – Gowran Grange main country house, circled in yellow, within its established parkland setting



Fig. 2 – Aerial photograph showing Gowran Grange edged in red and the main country house circled in yellow

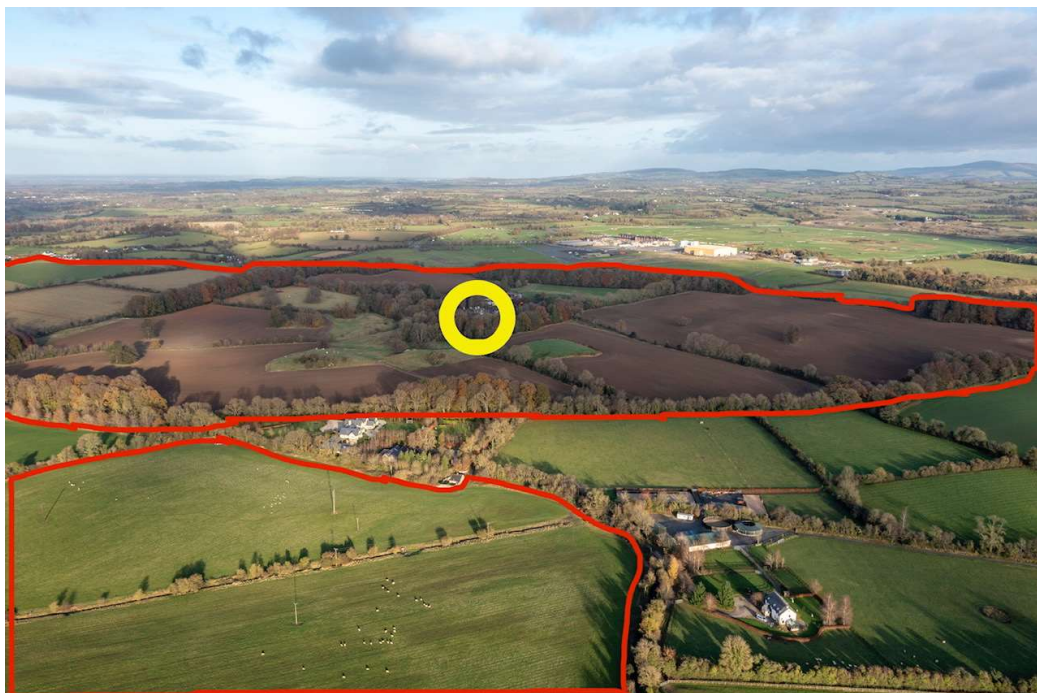


Fig. 3 – Map showing location of Gowran Grange Demesne marked in orange



2.0 About Gowran Grange

- 2.1 Gowran Grange Demesne consists of a historic country house and parkland estate on approximately 370 acres in total. The landscape of Gowran Grange is a distillation of history, land use and the underlying natural conditions of the area.
- 2.2 The area is primarily covered in a loamy drift soil-type over carboniferous limestone bedrock geology.
- 2.3 The Gowran Grange Demesne is situated in a major landscape type as defined by the County Kildare Landscape characterisation study, Eastern Transition Lands of County Kildare.
- 2.4 The slope and topography is gentle; and concentrations of surrounding tillage lands and pasturage in this area tend to be characterised by extensive views across large fields with maintained field boundaries, treelines and hedgerows.
- 2.5 The Gowran Grange Demesne stands out in this area as characterised by the well wooded undulated landscape of corn fields and pasturage with small wetland features.
- 2.6 The Gowran Grange Demesne is a designed parkland landscape, of early- mid- 19th century design, and inspired and influenced by design in England, the political power base of the Anglo Irish ascendancy.

2.7 The house at Gowran Grange is surrounded by woodland on the Woolpack Road and the Ballymore Eustace Road. This woodland has remained unchanged over the years and is a key feature of the estate. On the Woolpack Road, low stone walls along with the woodlands form the borders of Gowran Grange.

3.0 Historic importance of Gowran Grange Demesne and its Curtilage

3.1 Gowran Grange House is a well-maintained country house dating back to the 19th century. The original family still resides at the house.

3.2 Gowran Grange Demesne is fundamental to the history of the area. The house and its curtilage are of great historic importance both architecturally and socially.

3.3 JHE Fock (4th Baron de Robeck) commissioned the building of Gowran Grange at Swordlestown Demesne, Naas, Co. Kildare between the years 1857-59.

Fig. 4 – Gowran Grange as viewed from the west



3.4 The House was designed by the architect John McCurdy who was known mainly as a designer of hotels. He designed the Shelbourne Hotel (1865) and the Royal Marine Hotel in Dun Laoghaire, to name but a few.

3.5 A substantial Gothic revival manor house, Gowran Grange was designed in collaboration with W.H. Lynn, who was called in to improve the Gothic detailing of the interior. This style of architecture was popular right up to the end of the nineteenth century.

3.6 Gowran Grange House was built during a time of prosperity. There was further building work completed in 1872 and the 4th Baron spared no expense in both the materials used and its design.

Fig. 5 – Gowran Grange as viewed from the south



3.7 The de Robeck family were active members of the Kildare Hunt. It is evident from the book, *A History of the Kildare Hunt (1913)*, the huge contribution the family made to the development and wellbeing of the hunt.

3.8 The 'Great Southern & Western Railway' line runs to the extreme southwest corner of the estate. The original railway is thought to have been used by the 4th baron de Robeck to travel to the RDS where he was president. It has also been noted that many visitors to Gowran Grange arrived by train. Racegoers from Tullow alighted the train near Gowran Grange at Harristown Station and using rights of way walked through the lands of Gowran Grange Demesne to make their way to Punchestown Racecourse.

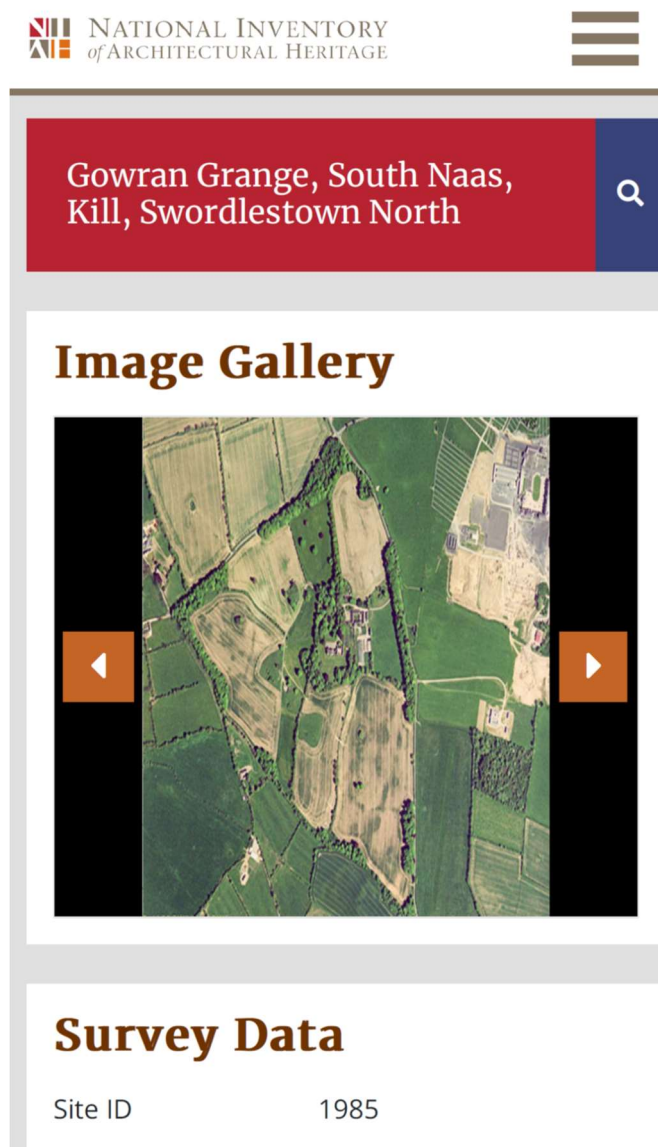
3.9 The de Robeck family have been pivotal to the success of events such as the Punchestown races, the Kildare Hunt and the Dublin Horse Show.

3.10 According to *Into Kildare (intokildare.ie)*, Big Houses and Hard Times, today just three of Kildare's 'Big Houses' remain in the hands of the families that lived there a hundred years ago, namely Killadoon, Burtown House, and Gowran Grange.

3.11 The house and demesne continue to be maintained to a high standard with the known archaeological monuments and woodlands strenuously safeguarded.

3.12 We note that Gowran Grange is included on the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage (NIAH) (Fig. 6). As a building listed in NIAH, we are asking that Gowran Grange and its curtilage be promoted to Kildare County Council’s Record of Protected Structures (RPS).


Fig. 6 Gowran Grange - Extract from National Inventory of Architectural Heritage (buildingsofireland.ie)



NATIONAL INVENTORY
of ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE

Gowran Grange, South Naas,
Kill, Swordlestown North

Image Gallery



Survey Data

Site ID	1985
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**Fig. 6 Gowran Grange - Extract from National Inventory of Architectural Heritage
(buildingsofireland.ie)**

Barony / Municipal Borough	South Naas
Parish	Kill
County	9
Former County	Kildare
Townland	Swordlestown North
Present on Ordnance Survey	First Edition: no Second Edition: yes, sheet 120 Revised Edition: yes
Present on Ordnance Survey First Edition 6" Series	[1836 to 1846] No
Location on Ordnance Survey 1:50,000	Sheet No: 55 Grid Letter: N Grid Reference: 907154

4.0 Landscape significance of Gowran Grange Demesne

- 4.1 The Gowran Grange Demesne, while privately owned, supports features of Historic Parkland Landscape as defined by Cookson and Tickner (2013) as set out in the table below. This includes formal gardens, a collection of interesting trees and the less formal natural habitats, water channels, artificial ponds and Mixed Broadleaf woodland.
- 4.2 Water features in the Gowran Grange area are concentrated in the core/central area of Gowran Grange Demesne, where artificial ponds support beautiful fringing aquatic and emergent vegetation.
- 4.3 Artificial waterbodies within the Gowran Grange Demesne include a littoral shelf or shallow shelf around the fringes of the artificial ponds. These shallows of the pond facilitate the development of fringing reed beds, swamps and emergent vegetation.

HISTORIC PARKLAND

Feature category	Parkland features
Open Parkland	Parkland trees, tree clump, avenue, sward
Woodland	Designed woodland, woodland perimeter belt
Access & view	Approaches, wider circulation, designed views & vistas
Waterbodies	Canals, lakes, streams, fish ponds, duck decoys, water management structures
Boundaries	Stone Wall, iron railing, hedge
Park-related archaeology	Former park boundaries & features, false antiquities, land use archaeology, pre-park funerary & settlement features (i.e. ring fort feature??), 20th century archaeology
Parkland architecture	Lodges & entrance lodges, ornamental parkland buildings, farm buildings, walled kitchen gardens

Table 1. Key parkland features organised into seven feature categories as per Cookson and Tickner

4.4 Images are provided at figs. 7 and 8 below showing some of the key parkland features within the Gowran Grange Demesne.

Fig. 7 – Image of main entrance to estate with curved stone walls, main entrance gates and established parkland trees



Fig. 8 – Image of established specimen trees throughout the estate, with established woodland throughout



Fig. 9 – Image of established specimen trees throughout the estate, with established woodland throughout



4.5 The extent of the established woodland at the Gowran Grange Demesne is shown in the map at fig.

Fig. 10 – Map showing extent of parkland trees and specimen trees in central part of landholding



Fig. 11 – Map showing extent of full landholding (edged in red) including woodlands, specimen trees, hedgerows etc. The main country house is at the centre of the triangular parcel marked central



- 4.6 It is clear from the images presented in this report that Gowran Grange comprises not only a building of architectural merit and value but also the entire landholding comprises valuable stands of woodlands and specimen trees. The overall value of this cannot be underestimated and it is clear that protection for the entire Demesne is warranted.
- 4.7 Chapter 11.16 of the Draft Development Plan deals with Country Houses and Demesnes. It acknowledges that Kildare has a large number of country houses and demesnes where the grounds and settings constitute an intrinsic element of their character. This is also true of the Gowran Grange Demesne. Chapter 11 acknowledges *“there are many other country houses, with important designed landscapes and substantially intact demesnes that contribute to the architectural and landscape heritage of County Kildare.”* Gowran Grange is one of these other country houses that merits being listed and we would request that the Council familiarise themselves with the estate in order to fully understand its significance from an architectural, cultural and landscape perspective.
- 4.8 Policy LA 4 of the current development plan seeks to ensure that local landscape features, including historic features and buildings, hedgerows, shelter belts and stone walls, are retained, protected and enhanced where appropriate, so as to preserve the local landscape and character of an area, whilst providing for future development. The Gowran Grange estate not only comprises the country house and designed parkland, but



it also provides a number of other important local landscape features such as stone walls throughout the perimeter of the estate. These contribute greatly to the local landscape and character of the area. We would therefore propose that in line with this policy that the entirety of the Gowran Grange Demesne be recognised as an important historic entity and that the building and that the entirety of the landholding (including the wider curtilage) be immediately protected.

- 4.9 The extent of the landholding of the Gowran Grange Demesne is shown at fig. 11. The main triangular parcel at the centre of the estate houses the main country dwelling with parkland designed gardens. The triangular section of the estate benefits from stone walls around large parts of its perimeter. The parcel of land immediately to the north of the triangular section also benefits from original stone walls both at the corner of the site (at Watch House cross) and along the Woolpack Road frontage. Historic features, such as these stone walls, extend throughout the entirety of the landholding as edged red in Fig. 11 and the entire 370 acre estate merits protection. Specimen trees are scattered throughout the landholding and merit protection. The heritage of the Gowran Grange Demesne is significant and it provides the county with a strong sense of place, character and distinctiveness. We would urge the Council to protect the Gowran Grange estate by virtue of its inclusion on the Record of Protected Structures and to cherish it as a true heritage asset both now and into the future.