



Fingal County Council

Comhairle Contae Fhine Gall



Howth Castle

Architectural Conservation Area

Statement of Character



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Permission has been granted by the Map Library, Trinity College Library, Dublin for the reproduction of Figures 2 and 3 which are extracts from early historic maps

A copy of the late 19th/early 20th century postcard of Howth Castle (Figure 5) was obtained from the Fingal County Archives of Fingal County Council.

Introduction

Many of the towns and villages of Fingal contain areas of architectural, historical, and/or cultural interest, which have a particular distinctive character considered worthy of retention and enhancement. Planning legislation allows a planning authority to include objectives in the County Development Plan to preserve the character of a place, area, group of structures or townscapes, taking account of building lines and heights, that:

- is of special architectural, historical, archaeological, artistic, cultural, scientific, social or technical interest or value or
- contributes to the appreciation of protected structures.

The title given to these areas or places is *Architectural Conservation Areas*, or ACAs for short. Currently, there are 28 ACAs designated in Fingal.

An ACA could encompass, for example, a terrace of houses, a whole streetscape, town centre, or a small cluster of structures associated with a specific building such as a mill or country house. Most structures in an ACA are important in how they positively contribute to the streetscape or character of an area. Therefore, in ACAs the protection relates to the external appearance of such areas or structures. **Any works that would have a *material effect* (i.e. impact) on the character of an ACA require planning permission**, even works that are outlined in the Planning Regulations as not normally needing planning permission, and known as Exempted Development. This does not prevent alterations, extensions or new build within ACA's but the designation seeks to ensure that any new development respects or enhances the special character of the area and is carried out in consultation with the Planning Department and Conservation Officer, usually through a planning application.

This document is one in a series that set out to identify the special character of each individual ACA and give guidance to homeowners, developers and planning professionals on the type of works that would require planning permission in that specific area.

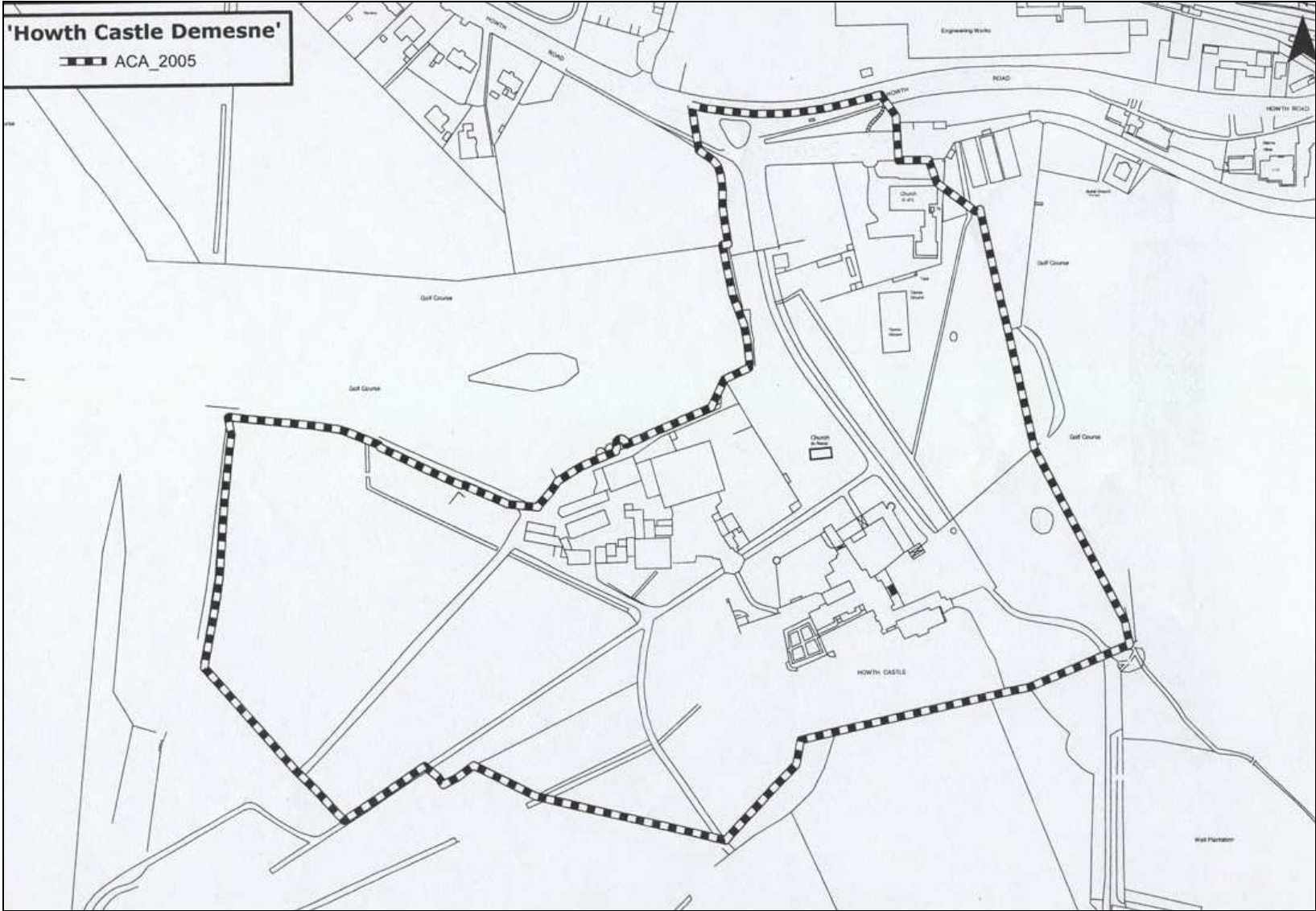
Location and Boundary of the Conservation Area

Howth Castle is located within a large landscaped demesne, situated on the western part of the Howth peninsula, which extends out from the north-eastern shore of Dublin Bay. The peninsula itself is dominated by the Hill of Howth, which rises to 560 ft at its highest point, and is one of the most prominent features of North County Dublin. Howth is about nine miles from Dublin City Centre, and is considered today to be a coastal suburb of Dublin City. Within Fingal it forms part of the southern boundary with Dublin City Council's area.

Howth Castle is accessed off the Howth Road, just prior to entering Howth village, through large impressive Neo-Gothic gates. These entrance gates share access to Howth Castle and to the Deerpark Hotel and Golf Course. The golf course now encompasses most of the former demesne lands. To the east of the entrance gates, just outside Howth Castle demesne is St. Mary's Church, a 19th century Church of Ireland church. Howth Castle itself is situated at the end of the initial long tree-lined avenue, which opens up into a forecourt fronting the castle on one side of the avenue and a sloping lawn with views opening out eastwards onto the Deerpark Golf Course.

The boundary of the Howth Castle ACA extends from the Howth Road to just south of Howth Castle and includes St. Mary's Church, the formal gardens and old orchard to the castle, the ruins of an ancient church, the Howth Transport Museum complex, a large copse of trees to the west of the castle, as well as Howth Castle itself and adjoining outbuildings. As much of the demesne lands would have been altered to accommodate the golf course and hotel complex, the boundary of the ACA was reviewed and limited to a core area surrounding Howth Castle and the entrance avenue.

Fig. 1 Boundary of Howth Castle ACA



Historical Development of the Area

While Howth itself has a long history of settlement with the earliest records dating to the 2nd century, the history of Howth Castle is traced back to the 12th century, to Sir Almeric, the first Lord of Howth, who came to Ireland with Henry II, as part of what is known as the Anglo-Norman Invasion. Sir Almeric is said to have arrived in Howth in 1177 and was granted possession of the lands of Howth by the Crown after the Battle of Howth. Sir Almeric took the family name of St. Lawrence and his descendants held the title Lord of Howth from this time until 1909. In 1767 the titles Viscount St. Lawrence and Earl of Howth were created by the Irish Peerage. In 1909 the 4th Earl of Howth died without any direct descendants and so the title lapsed but his nephew, Julian Gaisford, inherited the estate and had the name St. Lawrence added to his surname by royal licence that same year. Therefore, the Howth estate has remained in the ownership of the St. Lawrence family for over 800 years.

The first Howth Castle was supposed located on top of a cairn on the site now occupied by the Martello Tower within the village of Howth, overlooking Howth Harbour. It was probably a motte and bailey structure and sited there due to the strategic location of the site. A deed dated to 1235 refers to it as the Old Castle, which would infer that a new castle had been constructed, possibly on the existing site. The oldest structure within the current Howth Castle complex is the gatehouse tower,



Fig.2 Extract from Bernard Scale's Map of the City and Suburbs of Dublin 1773

which dates to the 15th century. It is possibly associated with Christopher, the 14th Lord of Howth, who acquired a hereditary barony with the right to sit in the House of Lords in 1461, and has been credited with building a castle keep and tower. Another Christopher, 20th Lord of Howth, undertook a prolific building campaign, in the mid-16th century with the addition of a hall to the keep and the erection of an enclosure wall and turrets. The floor above the hall was added later by Nicholas, 23rd lord and the east wing was built in the mid-17th century.

The castle was enlarged and modernised in 1738 by William, the 27th Lord of Howth, with the addition of the north tower, the north and west wings, the entrance door and

terraced steps, and many of the farm buildings. Originally there was a wall enclosing the courtyard and entry to the castle was by way of a gate tower. In the early 1800's, the round tower and turret at the corner of the stable yard were built. The elaborate Neo-gothic entrance gates were built circa 1835, along with an adjoining gate-lodge, which is now a derelict ruin. When Julian Gaisford-St. Lawrence inherited the estate in 1909 he employed the renowned architect Sir Edwin Lutyens to renovate the castle. Among the alterations designed by Lutyens are: an additional tower to the rear of the castle containing the library, the chapel in the east wing, a loggia and corridor in the drawing room wing, and a sunken Dutch garden.

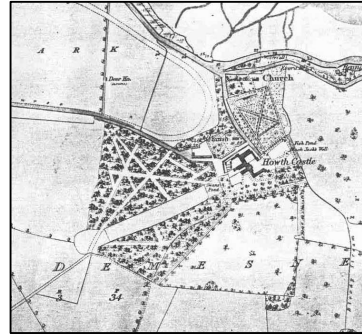


Fig. 3 Extract from 1st edition of Ordnance Survey Map c.1837-43

The early historic maps see (Figs. 2 and 3) show how the grounds of Howth Castle were laid out with formal gardens, ponds, tree-lined entrance avenue, and views framed by dense copses of trees which were intersected by pathways. The aerial photograph below (Fig. 4) shows that many of these designed features have survived from at least the 18th century to the present day, although not in their full glory. The walled garden remains, which once housed a Beech Hedge Garden set out in the 17th century. The moat in front of Black Jack's Well is an artificial pool formed in the early 18th century, while the approach to the castle was planted with Irish yews in the late 19th century. Further south are the Rhododendron Gardens, and close to these a portal tomb.



Fig. 4 Aerial photograph of Howth Castle and St. Mary's Church

In the early 1970's most of the lands of the demesne were converted into a public golf course and the Deerpark Hotel constructed. The general public is allowed access to much of the grounds of Howth Castle either through use of the golf course or hotel facilities or by walks through the Rhododendron Gardens onto the Hill of Howth.

Just north of the castle complex are the ruins of an old church, which is now overgrown and half-hidden. Also north-west of the castle is a complex of outbuildings and sheds that is used by the National Transport Museum in the summer months. St. Mary's Church is also included within the Howth Castle ACA even though it is accessed from outside the entrance gates to the demesne, as it contributes to the character of the area. This church was designed by James Edward Rogers and was completed in 1866. It was built on the site of the old church and the tower of this older structure was incorporated into the new design. It is still in use as a place of worship today, with a modern parish centre constructed in the late 1990's to the south of the church.

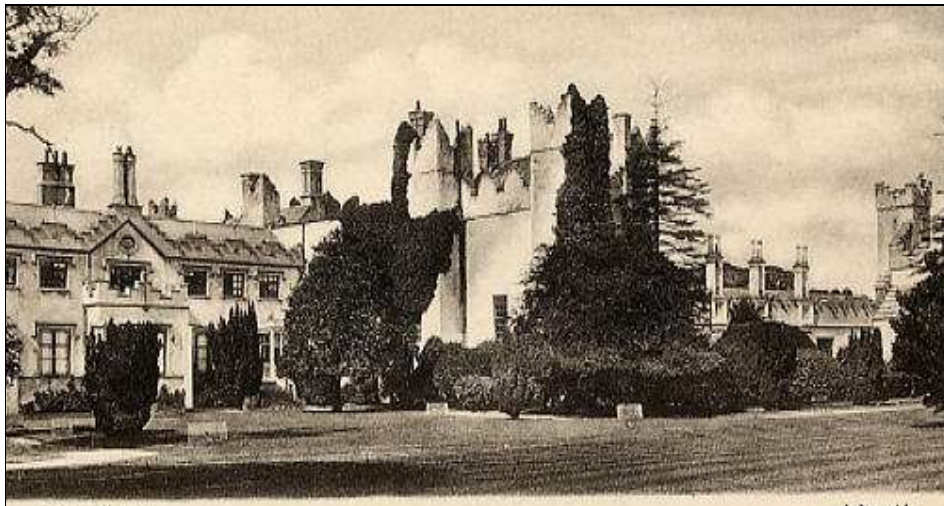


Fig. 5 Postcard of Howth Castle from late 19th or early 20th century

Schedule of Protected Structures & Recorded Monuments

There are three Protected Structures within the boundaries of the Architectural Conservation Area, which are protected under the Planning & Development Act 2000.

- RPS No. 556 Howth Castle, Howth Demesne (incl. Castle, Wings, Tower, Stables and Chapel)
- RPS No. 557 Church (ruin), Grounds of Howth Castle, Howth Demesne
- RPS No. 594 St. Mary's Church (Church of Ireland), Howth Road, Howth Demesne

The following archaeological sites, features, artefacts, etc., listed as Recorded Monuments on the Record of Monuments and Places, are within the boundaries of the ACA and are protected by National Monument legislation.

- DU015-026 Church, Howth Demesne
- DU015-02701 Castle, Howth Demesne
- DU015-02702 Gatehouse, Howth Demesne
- DU015-042 Burial Ground, Howth Demesne

Development Plan Zoning & Objectives

In the Fingal Development Plan 2005 –2011 the land is zoned Objective HA - *To protect and improve high amenity areas*. The lands also have a specific map based objective on the Fingal Development Plan Maps to protect and preserve trees, woodland and hedgerows.

The lands fall within the Buffer Zone of the Howth Special Amenity Area and are therefore subject to certain policies and objectives of the management plan of the Howth Special Amenity Area Order (SAAO). The following policy from the SAAO relates to planning issues within the Buffer Zone.

Policy 1.3.1 The Council will designate a Buffer Zone for the special amenity area in the County Development Plan. In considering planning applications within the buffer it will be Council policy:

- *in respect of natural beauty, to preserve prospects of the Special Amenity Area and to preserve open views from the Special Amenity Area,*
- *in respect of special recreational value, a) to preserve existing rights of way leading to the special amenity area, and, where appropriate, to create additional rights of way, b)to allow development which utilises the recreational, tourism and educational potential of the special amenity area, provided that such development does not have a significant negative visual impact and that it conforms with the zoning objectives and other development standards of the development plan,*
- *in respect of nature conservation, to protect existing natural and semi-natural habitats and, where appropriate, to encourage the creation of new semi-natural habitats in order to enhance the habitat diversity of the peninsula.*

Description of Existing Built Environment

- **Entrance Gates, Avenues, Access Paths & Roads within the Demesne**

Howth Castle is accessed off the Howth Road, opposite Techrete Ireland Ltd., prior to entering the village of Howth itself. A Y-shaped junction connects the avenue leading to the castle with the main road. Before passing through the elaborate Neo-Gothic gate pillars, which mark the entrance to the estate, there is a small cul-de-sac to the east that provides access to St. Mary's Church and parish centre.



Fig. 6 Entrance Gates and Pillars to Howth Castle

The entrance gateway was built circa 1835 and is a large ashlar limestone structure with cast-iron entrance and pedestrian gates. The gateway consists of a pair of pointed segmental arches flanked by banded columns with reeded shafts and topped by decorative capping stones. The central columns act as gate piers to the main entrance gates, while the pedestrian gates are housed within the arches. The stone arches require repair works where the stone has split. The ruins of the early-19th century gate lodge are located just inside these gates. A tree-lined avenue, with Irish yews planted on either side, slopes gently uphill leading to the Castle, with the walled garden running along the eastern side. The avenue curves slightly eastwards to skirt around the ruins of the medieval



Fig. 7 Main Avenue, view from entrance gates



Fig. 8 First view of castle

church so that there is no long vista to the castle from the main gates. The first glimpse of the castle is of the square corner tower of the medieval section before the avenue widens up to reveal the front courtyard and main elevation of Howth Castle. The main avenue then proceeds more steeply uphill towards the Deerpark Hotel and Golf course. A long linear route branches off to the south-west just prior to the medieval wing allowing access to the stables and outbuilding complexes as well as the wooded area to the rear of the castle.

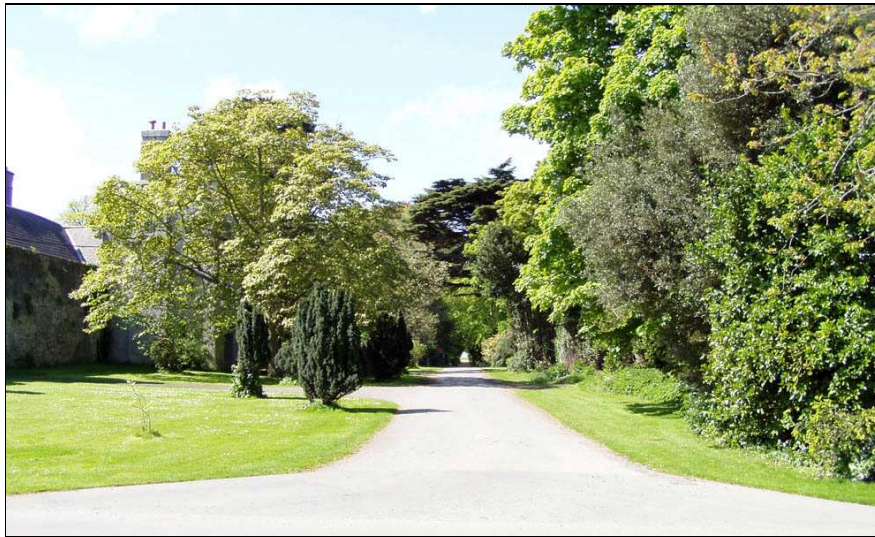


Fig. 9 Avenue leading to outbuildings and large wooded area to rear of castle

- **Designed Landscape Features**

The demesne relates to the grounds or parkland belonging to a large country house and derives from the term given to manorial lands retained for private use by a feudal lord. The demesne landscape was very much a managed landscape that was planned to meet the tastes of the owner. Prior to the 18th century, the predominant designed landscape style favoured formal geometric gardens such as those at Versailles in France. However, throughout the 18th and 19th century the fashion changed to a more naturalistic backdrop, which generally consisted of the main house overlooking fields filled with livestock, strategically placed trees, along with additional features such as artificial lakes or ponds, ha-has, gardens and ornamental buildings. Most surviving

Irish demesnes followed this latter style, where the lands functioned as a working farm. Howth Castle Demesne has a number of these parkland features as well as some formal garden layouts.

A painting exists from 1745 entitled "Prospect of the House of Howth" which gives an artists impression of the improvements to the castle and the grounds by William St. Lawrence, 27th lord of Howth. A large rectangular pool is depicted in the foreground with swans swimming up and down its length. Above this are lawns surrounding a small circular pool, known as Black Jack's Well, with a central and two flanking walkways leading to an oval-shaped courtyard to the front of the castle. On either side of the lawns are walled gardens; the one to the left is a formal garden while the one to the right appears to be an orchard with a small folly or house in the centre. To the rear of the castle a long formal avenue is visible flanked by copses of trees, which gives a framed view of Sutton Creek and Dublin Bay. Surrounding the more formal landscaped features are pastoral fields enclosed by hedges. While some landscaped elements depicted in this painting survive to the present day, others appear to have never been implemented, and so the painting should not be viewed as an exact representation of the demesne in the mid 18th century.

Most of the demesne lands of Howth Castle have been converted for use as a golf course since the early 1970's and so the field system and pastoral setting no longer exists but some of the designed landscape features have survived. A yew lined main avenue still leads to the forecourt of the castle as discussed in the previous section. On the east of the main



Fig. 10 Yew trees & walled garden, with stone pier and gate visible



Fig. 11 Pedestrian gate to walled garden

avenue is a walled garden. The early historic maps indicate that it once had a more elaborate layout with an orchard, beech hedge, garden house and sundial garden. However, the centre of the walled garden appears to have been cleared and most of these elements no longer exist with just some trees remaining along the



Fig. 12 Detail of plaque at Pedestrian gate

edges of the interior. Stone gate piers with iron gates provide access into the garden from the main avenue. There is also a pedestrian gate opposite the front courtyard, which has a small plaque set into the wall.



Fig. 13 Interior of Walled Garden

The lawn to the front of the castle appears to have retained many of the historic landscape features, with a water-filled moat still separating this area from the lands to the east. A circular hollow marks the site of Black Jack's Well and there are walks enclosed by trees on either side of this grassed area leading to the moat.



Figs. 14, 15, & 16 Moat, site of Black Jack's Well and Tree-lined Walk

A large copse of trees, that is evident on all of the early maps, remains to the rear of Howth Castle. This is intersected by a number of pedestrian routes. Lutyen's Sunken Garden, the Sidney Garden, and Swan Pond all appear to still serve the owners as features of the private gardens immediately adjoining Howth Castle.

The landscaped elements of Howth Castle demesne, like the built fabric, have changed and evolved over the centuries and it is the current surviving features that contribute to the character of the Architectural Conservation Area, rather than any features that existed in the past.

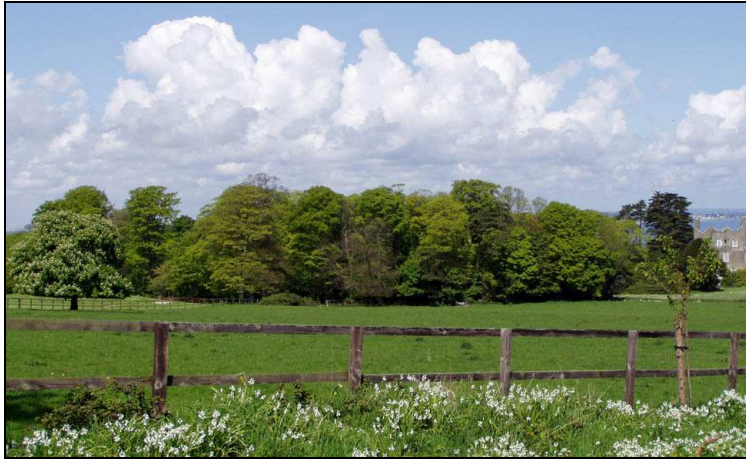


Fig. 17 Copse of Trees, south of Howth Castle

- **Built Fabric**

- St. Mary's Church

St. Mary's Church was designed by James Edward Rogers and completed in 1866. Rogers also designed the Church of Ireland churches of Kenure in Rush and Holmpatrick in Skerries. Both of these churches are Protected Structures. St. Mary's is built on the site of the old church and the old tower was incorporated into the new design, with the addition of a spire. It is a detached Gothic-style structure with an elaborate principal entrance on the west end. The arch over the doorway has alternative sandstone and granite voussoirs, while the capitals, bases and recessed arch have decorative foliage carvings. Internally, there are a number of

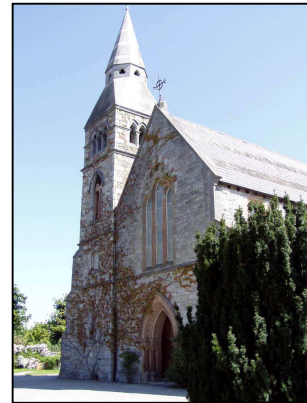


Fig. 18 St. Mary's Church

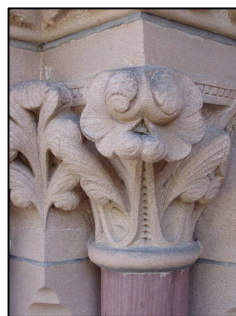
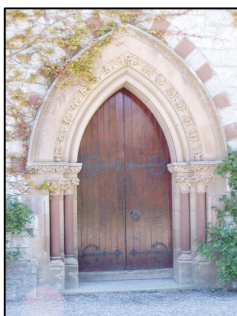


Fig. 19 & 20 Details of entrance door of church

features of note, including the carved capitals, the gothic brick arches and the stained glass windows. The East Window, entitled "Christ the Healer of mankind" dates to 1910 and is by James Powell & Sons of London. The other windows include works by the stained glass artists Evie Hone, A.E. Child, Ethil Rhind and Catherine O'Brien.

The iron entrance gates to the church site are set into square stone piers with triangular capping stones. There is a small parking area just outside the boundary wall. Within the grounds of the church is a small garden of remembrance and a new parish centre, which was granted planning permission in the early 1990's.



Fig. 21 Parish Centre

➤ Ruins of Late Medieval Church

The church ruins are overgrown and hidden within a wooded area to the north of the medieval wing of the castle. It was a stone structure with gothic pointed arch opes and has an east-west orientation, which point to it being medieval in date. In Vincent McBrierty's book "*The Howth Peninsula – its History, Lore and Legend*", it is stated that a chapel was built on the grounds of the castle in 1700 by Thomas, 26th lord of Howth. The church or chapel structure is visible in the 1745 painting of a prospect of the castle, while Bernard Scale's Map of 1773, is one of the earliest cartographic documents to show this structure clearly, to the north of the main castle buildings and surrounded by trees (see Figure 2).



Figs. 22, 23, & 24 Ruins of Church, Howth Demesne

➤ Howth Castle

Howth Castle itself, as outlined in the section that dealt with the historical development of the area, is an amalgamation of different structures, additions and alterations from the medieval period to the present day. This combines to give the castle its unique character, with its mix of medieval towers and keep, classical 18th century features, 19th century ranges, and early 20th century



Fig. 25 Towers and stable block

alterations. The first views of Howth Castle from the main avenue are of the 19th century stable range with its crenellated towers and turrets. The stable block adjoins the 15th century gate tower, which is in a derelict condition. The front elevation of Howth Castle is framed by this medieval gate tower to the north and a 19th century wing to the south with crenellated towers. The central entrance block consists of a 16th century hall range which was modified in the early 18th century to incorporate a number of classical features such as the entrance steps and balustraded terrace, Georgian sash windows and Doric doorcase. The range is itself an addition to the original castle structure which is a 15th century keep or tower house. The battlement decoration on the original and additional structures unifies the various phases of development to give an overall homogeneous appearance to the castle complex.



Fig. 26 Stable Range



Fig. 27 Front elevation of Howth Castle

➤ National Transport Museum Complex

The outbuildings and shed complex to the north-west of the castle is used to house the National Transport Museum. The sheds are a mix of concrete and galvanised metal structures. The former farm buildings are two-storey rubble stone structures with slate roofs.



Fig. 28 Farm Building



Fig. 29 Sheds and Outbuildings

- **Views**

The principal views of note within the boundaries of the ACA are of Howth Castle itself. There are some views out of the ACA, namely from the entrance gates and from the castle over the golfcourse. These views contribute to the character of the area and it is important that potential new development within the ACA does not negatively impact on or obscure these views.



Figs. 30, 31, & 32 Views from gates, of Howth Castle, and out over the golfcourse

Summary of Special Character

The special character of this ACA reflects its original function as a demesne landscape as there is a secluded, quiet charm to the place despite its proximity to a busy road and Howth Village, as well as the internal traffic generated by the golf course and hotel. It is not just the structures that contribute to the character of the ACA but the designed landscape features are integral to the appeal and attraction of this area.

The majority of structures within this ACA are Protected Structures or are within the curtilage of a Protected Structure and therefore already have restrictions on the type of works that can be carried out without planning permission. However, ACA status was felt to be an appropriate additional designation so as to provide protection to the designed landscape features within the demesne which are associated with the castle and to any other estate buildings of interest.

Fig. 29 Annotated Map



Implications for Planning and Development

The objective of Architectural Conservation Area designation is to protect the special character of an area through the careful control and positive management of change of the built environment. Therefore, the assigning of ACA status on a streetscape, cluster of buildings, or a town/village core results in **restrictions on certain works to the exteriors of structures** within the boundary of the ACA. Owners, occupiers, or developers proposing to carry out works within an ACA should be aware that in general, planning permission will be required for any new build to the front of the structure and changes of original materials, such as windows, wall finishes, boundary walls, roof coverings etc. While new development and alterations to existing structures can still occur subject to planning, proposal should respect or enhance the area's special character.

The majority of structures within the boundaries of this ACA are already Protected Structures and so planning permission is required for works that are deemed to materially affect the character of these structures. Therefore the specific objectives for the Howth Castle ACA will relate mainly to the designed landscape and views.

WORKS NOT AFFECTING THE CHARACTER OF THE ACA (DO NOT REQUIRE PLANNING PERMISSION)

- **MAINTENANCE & REPAIRS**

Planning permission is not required for regular maintenance works and genuine repairs to the Protected Structures within this ACA (such as roof, rainwater goods or window repairs) as long as original materials are retained where they exist, or where replacement is necessary that it is on a like-for-like basis and the works have been agreed with the Conservation Officer.

- **RESTORATION OF CHARACTER**

Where original materials have been removed and replaced with modern or inappropriate alternatives, the restoration or reinstatement of these features will not require planning permission where the method, materials and details for the works have been agreed with the Conservation Officer.

WORKS IMPACTING ON THE CHARACTER OF THE AREA (WORKS REQUIRING PLANNING PERMISSION)

- **NEW BUILD**

Development within this ACA should be such that it does not negatively impact upon the designed and natural landscape, the setting of structures within the demesne, or mature trees and wildlife, which contribute positively to the character of the ACA. Neither should any development have a cumulative negative effect on the Protected Structures. The original landscape design intentions are to be respected.

- **RETENTION OF DESIGNED LANDSCAPE FEATURES**

Irrespective of whether there are proposals to develop within the boundaries of the ACA, features such as the walled garden, formal gardens, moat, pond, etc. should be retained.

- **RETENTION OF MATURE TREES**

Within the ACA there are a number of tree-lined walks, specific planting of trees and mature trees that add to the character of the ACA. It is an objective of the ACA designation that these elements are retained, as any major changes would impact on the character of the area. A tree felling license is required, rather than planning permission, for the cutting down of any trees. The Howth Estate Company states that it has a management plan for the wooded areas of the estate. It is recommended that consultation take place between the Howth Estate Company and the Parks Department and Planning Department of Fingal County Council with regard to this plan.

- **PRESERVATION OF VIEWS**

The vistas along the main avenue between the entrance gates and Howth Castle and the long avenue on the northern side of the stables block should be preserved and the mature trees framing these drives retained. The views that open up to the front and rear elevations of Howth Castle should also be preserved.

- **INSTALLATION OF SIGNAGE**

As the hotel and golf course are commercial ventures there are signs advertising them at the entrance off the Howth Road. While outdoor advertising is essential to

commercial activity, care should be taken that it does not detract from the overall character and visual amenity of the area. New or replacement signage within the ACA should be of an appropriate design to complement or enhance the area, and should not be overly dominant.

- **EXTERNAL LIGHTING**

The illumination at night of the avenue or certain buildings and features within the ACA would need to be agreed with Fingal County Council. The method of lighting i.e. type of fitting, fixing method and type of light would need to be specified by the applicant in seeking permission and should be designed so that it does not contribute to general lighting, result in light pollution, or negatively impact on other structures in the ACA.

- **CARPARKING WITHIN THE AREA**

Additional carparking facilities within this demesne ACA should be concealed where possible with appropriate planting and landscaping.