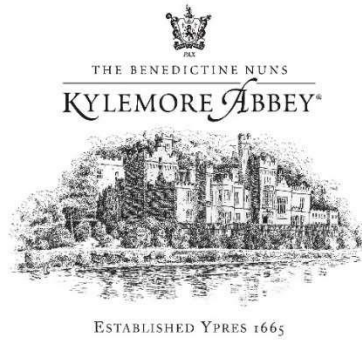




Kylemore Abbey Submission to Galway Co. Council Development Plan 2021-2027

29 July 2021

Introduction

Kylemore Abbey is a Benedictine monastery and iconic visitor destination in the heart of Connemara. Owned by The Kylemore Trust, a registered charity and non-profit organisation led by Benedictine nuns, the Trust is committed to “preserving the natural beauty and heritage of Kylemore for the Irish nation“. Kylemore is a values-led organisation committed to ethical and sustainable development, in line with the UN Sustainable Development Goals, and informed by the principles of *Laudato Si: On Care for our Common Home* (2015).

Summary and Basis of the Submission

As an organisation Kylemore Abbey/The Kylemore Trust has a diverse mission in areas of culture, heritage, ecology, tourism, education, and faith. Galway’s Draft County Development Plan 2022 –2028 (CDP) aims “to promote the creation of an attractive county to live, work, visit and enable businesses to flourish in an environment that offers a range of housing options, robust and diverse range of employment opportunities, access to quality infrastructure and community facilities with a high-quality sustainable environment for all”. It is in this widest context of the social, cultural and economic development of Co. Galway that Kylemore Abbey makes submissions to the draft County Development Plan and seeks inclusion of the following specific objectives:

- Support for Kylemore Abbey as it develops new, sustainable tourism products in cultural tourism, gastronomy, educational/spiritual tourism. As a major economic driver of tourism (CDP pp. 167, 170), Kylemore Abbey generates vital employment in Connemara and the county. Local authority actions needed to lead new tourism initiatives – include delivery and implementation of a new Tourism Strategy; and priority actions for transport infrastructure, services and EV charge points for rural-based tourism.
- Support for Kylemore Abbey initiatives to protect and conserve its cultural assets through its ongoing Heritage & Conservation Programme 2021-2024 and opportunities for heritage skills training. The significance of Kylemore Abbey as a tourism/economic driver is built on its cultural assets: natural and built heritage of Kylemore Abbey & Victorian Walled Gardens and the intangible assets of its history and archives. Local authority support for these actions is vital.
- Actions to stimulate enterprise and economic development in Connemara for agri-food and artisanal food enterprises. Based on the rich food culture of Connemara, Kylemore Abbey will develop its food enterprises. It applauds the GCC actions in support of agri-food enterprise clusters and will engage in future programmes.
- Actions to target invasive species and support biodiversity in Connemara region, particularly control of *Rhododendron ponticum*. With its deep commitment to biodiversity and stewardship, Kylemore Abbey requests action to control *Rhododendron ponticum*, acknowledging that a joint land management approach with key stakeholders and landowners is the most effective solution
- Support for Kylemore Abbey as it seeks to become a flagship destination for culture and arts events and for educational and heritage initiatives. As a vital part of the social fabric of Co. Galway and a major factor in the quality of life in the Connemara area, Kylemore is committed to making available its natural amenities; culture & heritage infrastructure; and its resources as a place of education and faith, in support of wider community.

Kylemore Abbey is home to three principal activities:

- Tourism: major national visitor attraction and cultural destination, welcoming 500,000 visitors (2019) with a focus on heritage, cultural tourism, artisanal foods, and crafts
- Education: activities include music education and schools' education programmes in heritage and ecology; strategic partnership with the University of Notre Dame, the Notre Dame Kylemore Abbey Global Centre; and a partnership with NUI Galway – the Kylemore Biodiversity Stewardship Programme.
- Faith/Religion: Benedictine monastery at the heart of Kylemore offers religious services, retreats and spiritual education programmes.

Kylemore Abbey Estate

Kylemore Abbey is a 1,000 acre estate and internationally-recognised Irish landmark set in The Twelve Bens / Garraun Complex Special Area of Conservation. Kylemore is home to ten (10) heritage sites listed on the Irish National Inventory of Architectural Heritage (NIAH) with ratings of national and regional architectural significance. Surrounded by one of the most impressive historic designed landscapes in Ireland, it represents a balance between natural topography and man-made interventions including planting and hydrological engineering.

Since 1920 Kylemore Abbey has been home to a religious community of Benedictine women, with strong European ties, reaching back to the 1600s in Belgium. The Benedictine community is developing increasingly global links with India, Europe and the US. A new Monastery, Retreat & Education Centre is under construction on site.

Kylemore Abbey is a strategic destination point on the Wild Atlantic Way. Tourism activity employs 120 people, attracts 500,000 visitors (2019) and generates over €60M for the regional economy (See Appendix 1).

Kylemore's appeal as a tourist destination draws from its rich architectural and cultural heritage, which has been restored and conserved over the past century.

In recent years a growing focus on sustainability, biodiversity and the natural heritage has resulted in innovative programmes of invasive species clearance; native woodland planting; the introduction of Connemara ponies, heritage breed pigs and native Irish bees to the estate; and the opening up of new walkways and tree trails.

Cognisant of the social, economic, and cultural importance of Kylemore Abbey to national heritage and the economy of the West of Ireland, the following observations on the Draft Galway County Development Plan under the relevant CDP chapter headings.

Chapter 4: Rural Living & Development

“Support the role of rural areas in maintaining a stable population base through a strong network of villages and small towns and strengthening rural communities by supporting a resilient rural economy and the sustainable management of land and resources”.

Observation

Kylemore Abbey is located in North-West Connemara, in an area under-served by public infrastructure, and with limited provision of amenities and cultural facilities for the local community. Acknowledging Government and local authority policy to create opportunities for rural economies and communities, Kylemore Abbey plays an important role in enhancing the attractiveness and quality of life in rural Connemara in terms of natural and cultural amenity, education, religious practice, etc.

By providing cultural, heritage and amenity facilities (walking trails; places of worship, heritage experiences, event and education venues) Kylemore acts as a community resource and cultural hub - enhancing local life, providing amenity space; offering education programmes, and adding to the attractiveness of the area for remote workers and

acting as a driver of enterprise development. As part of its current strategic plan, Kylemore intends to further develop these activities, in line with its values-led ethos.

Chapter 5 : Economic Development, Enterprise and Retail Development

“To develop and build on the economic strengths and assets of the county as a thriving, competitive and attractive place for a range of sectors to locate, based on the principles of a well-established economic base that is highly appealing to both investors and employees”.

Observation:

In the CDP Section 5.8 Sectors, Clusters and Employment identifies the top emerging economic sectors and clusters in Co. Galway as Tourism, Agri-food/Agri-tech and Retail. Kylemore’s role as a major strategic driver of tourism in the region is detailed under Ch. 8 below. It is worth noting that Kylemore is a key part of the local supply chain, with long established commitment to local suppliers of goods and services. In 2018 Kylemore Abbey spent 53.4%/ €2.2M of total expenditure on goods and services in the Galway-Mayo region, 2018, Kylemore Abbey Economic Impact Study, Fitzpatrick & Associates 2019, see Appendix 1).

In addition to its strategic importance in local supply chains and the regional economy, Kylemore is also expanding its food enterprise and retail activities. Building on the rich food culture of Connemara, and Kylemore’s traditional hospitality activities, in recent years Kylemore Abbey has developed a range of artisanal food products, including jams, honey, chutney, chocolate, and bakery/cakes. This represents a new and important opportunity for employment, retail and agri-food enterprise clustering in Connemara.

Kylemore welcomes the stated CDP Policy Objectives in relation to agri-food development , specifically SCO 3 (Agri-food Industry and Rural Diversification) and SCO 5 (Gastronomy) Sector and SCO 6 (Bia Innovator Campus). Kylemore Abbey and its emerging food and craft brands will pursue all relevant GCC initiatives to support enterprise development for agri-food , gastronomy or artisanal brands in the region, leveraging its distinctive international brand to build a new economic cluster, generate employment and spin-off enterprises.

Chapter 8: Tourism & Landscape

“To encourage the development of the tourism sector as an economic driver for the County whilst ensuring the landscapes which are one of the county’s most important assets are protected”.

The CDP states (8.2 Strategic Aims) that “Galway County Council shall work with the appropriate agencies and state bodies to ensure that the tourism industry is promoted and supported and that our landscapes are suitably protected and will accord with the following strategic aims:

- To safeguard and augment Co Galway’s extensive tourism sector
- To maximise the potential of sustainable tourism contributing to balanced economic development
- To work in partnership with Fáilte Ireland, and other agencies to develop tourism in Co Galway
- To support the preparation and implementation of a Tourism Strategy for Co Galway
- To develop and enhance new and existing tourism products, attractions and tourism infrastructure
- To capitalise on the distinct tourist attractions that Co Galway has to offer including Destination Towns, natural, built and cultural heritage, scenic landscapes and natural amenities
- To work to improve the visitor experience and to support Visitor Experience Development Plans across the county to ensure that all visitors enjoy the unique experience of Co Galway
- To capitalise on the county’s identified nodes along the Wild Atlantic Way and Irelands Hidden Heartlands
- To protect the landscape categories within the county and avoid negative impacts on natural environment.”

Observation – CDP 8.5 Tourism in Co. Galway

Kylemore Abbey welcomes and endorses the above aims and respectfully requests GCC consider the following specific tourism actions:

- additional tourism support at local authority level; in welcoming the planned Tourism Strategy and Visitor Experience Development Plans, Kylemore would favour increased staffing/number of Tourism officers to deliver and sustain this strategy. Despite the fact that Galway is one of the top 3 most-visited counties in Ireland, it does not have similar levels of tourism-related resources employed at local authority level, compared to similar-sized and even smaller counties.
- prioritise transport infrastructure, services and EV charge points for rural-based tourism areas, attractions, and centres, particularly in Connemara to support sustainable tourism
- seeks to encourage partnership with arts organisations, Creative Ireland and GCC Arts Office so that Kylemore can host cultural events, performance, and exhibitions, thereby providing a platform for cultural tourism, particularly in North West Connemara and providing incentive for increased visitor footfall during the off-peak and shoulder seasons
- encourages local authority to take a co-ordinating role in developing regional, multi-partner partnerships for new cultural and spiritual tourism products, in particular a spiritual way/walking trail/Camino from Connemara to Mayo, linking Kylemore Abbey, Mámean, Croagh Patrick, Ballintubber Abbey, Knock.

Chapter 10: Natural Heritage, Biodiversity and Green/Blue Infrastructure

“To contribute towards the protection, conservation and management of biodiversity and natural heritage including sites designated at national and EU Level and protected species and habitats outside of designated sites and to develop a green/blue infrastructure network in the interests of the proper planning and sustainable development of the county”

Observation

With a tradition of committed stewardship and land management rooted in its Victorian origins, Kylemore is committed to addressing invasive species, specifically *Rhododendron ponticum*. Adopting an integrated, collaborative approach and working with major landowners and stakeholders (NPWS, Coillte, Forum Connemara) Kylemore is committed to a developing a collaborative programme for the control of *Rhododendron ponticum* with following benefits:

- Improvement of the biodiversity profile of the area, enabling the regeneration of indigenous species
- Generate significant, ongoing employment opportunities for initial rhododendron control and removal and enduring land management and preservation
- This approach would be a national exemplar – offering a model for community/regional land management and collaboration
- Opportunities for research, innovation, and usage of the ‘off-cuts’ of the wood and foliage □ Cleared areas will be prioritised for afforestation and reforestation with indigenous native tree.

Chapter 11: Community Development and Social Infrastructure

“To promote and develop healthy and sustainable communities, with access to a wide range of good quality social, community, healthcare, educational and cultural facilities that meet both current and future needs and where, through a commitment to equality, participation, accessibility and social inclusion, the County develops as a unique location that improve people’s quality of life”.

Observation

Kylemore Abbey is located in North-West Connemara, poorly served by infrastructure, and with limited provision of amenities and cultural facilities for the local community. Kylemore Abbey plays an important role in enhancing the attractiveness and quality of life in rural Connemara in terms of community, natural and cultural amenity, faith/religious practice, and education.

By providing cultural, heritage and amenity facilities (walking trails; heritage experiences, event and education venues) Kylemore acts as a community resource and cultural hub - enhancing local life, sharing amenities with

local community, providing space for cultural and charitable events; adding to the attractiveness of the area for remote workers.

Kylemore is a centre for education, with a range of programmes for primary schools (music teaching, culture and ecology) and secondary schools (music teaching). The presence of the University of Notre Dame Kylemore Abbey Global Centre ensures significant numbers of students and faculty are on site each year. As a place of worship, it offers the community a valuable service, and is an important part of the social fabric of the area.

As part of its current strategic plan, Kylemore intends to further develop these activities, in line with its values-led ethos, specifically through:

- provision of new walking trails and a new cultural venue in the Castle building serving the Connemara area addressing - SRA 1 Sport, Amenity and Recreation.
- the development of its new Monastery and Education/Retreat Centre, Kylemore will develop as a centre for faith based programmes for in line with CDP policy objective EDU 1 Educational Facilities
- Kylemore's new Monastery will enhance Kylemore as a place of worship, and act as a multi-faith facility for the area in line with CDP objective PWB 1 Places of Worship.

Chapter 12: Architectural, Archaeological and Cultural Heritage

"Conserve, enhance, manage and protect the architectural, archaeological and cultural heritage as key social, economic and cultural assets which are an integral part of the county and safeguard these valuable resources through proper management, sensitive enhancement and appropriate development. Recognise the important role that the arts and cultural can play in making a place as attractive area to live, work and enjoy".

The CDP identifies a range of strategic aims and associated actions (Chapter 12.2) in architectural, archaeological and cultural heritage in which Kylemore Abbey has a shared interest.

Observation: CDP 12.5 Architectural Heritage

The relevant CDP strategic aims are extracted below, as follows:

- The Council recognises the importance of identifying, valuing and safeguarding the archaeological and architectural heritage of Galway for future generations which can be achieved through the proper management, sensitive enhancement and/or appropriate development of this resource
- The Council will conserve, enhance and protect the special character of the architectural heritage of Galway through the identification of Protected Structures, the designation of Architectural Conservation Areas (ACAs), the safeguarding of designed landscapes and historic gardens, and the recognition of structures and elements that contribute positively to the vernacular, industrial and coastal heritage of the County
- Support the implementation of County Galway Heritage and Biodiversity Plan 2017-2022 (and subsequent plans) in relation to the promotion and protection of its Cultural Heritage
- Promote and support arts and cultural activities, facilities and services that meets the cultural and artistic needs of communities, supports creative activity and enhances the cultural, economic and social life of communities in County Galway
- Engage with all relevant stakeholders (and in particular local communities) in matters relating to the protection of the architectural, archaeological, and cultural heritage and The Arts
- Encourage understanding of the architectural, archaeological and cultural heritage of the County. Shall have regard to the advice series for owners issued by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.

The Kylemore Trust Heritage & Conservation Programme 2021-2024

Kylemore Abbey has a reputation for responsible stewardship and management of heritage assets, delivering award-winning conservation projects of scale since the 1990s. These underpin its development as a centre of cultural tourism and regional economic driver.

Over the next 10 years, The Kylemore Trust will undertake a programme of heritage and conservation initiatives. Phase 1, The Kylemore Trust Heritage & Conservation Programme 2021-2024 will deliver a conservation programme focussed on:

- Victorian Walled Gardens: Conserve Glasshouses, Pathways, Gardener's Bothy & Tool Shed
- Neo-Gothic Church Restoration: Address deterioration to this important national monument -
- Kylemore Castle: Create new cultural and education space in the iconic Castle building
- Heritage Walks: Provide new walking paths and improve, secure and develop existing routes.

The Kylemore Trust Heritage & Conservation Programme 2021-2024 will have demonstrable public benefits and specifically meet a number of stated policy objectives in relation to Architectural Heritage identified within Galway County Development Plan, notably AH1 - Ensure the protection of the architectural heritage of County Galway and AH2 – Protected Structures and meets a number of the objectives of the GCDP with regard to the conservation of Protected Structures, specifically

“(a) .. protection and sympathetic enhancement of structures including their curtilage and attendant grounds included ... in the Record of Protected Structures (RPS) ...”

(d) ensure high quality architectural design of all new developments relating to or which may impact on structures (and their settings) included in the Record of Protected Structures.

(e) Promote and ensure best conservation practice through the use of specialist conservation professionals and craft persons.”

AH 10 - Designed Landscapes

Kylemore Conservation & Heritage Programme 2021-2024 identifies the protection of Kylemore's surviving historic designed landscapes as a conservation objective. As one of the foremost designed landscapes in Ireland, Kylemore welcomes the inclusion of this objective and future GCC initiatives associated with this objective.

AH 13 - Traditional Building Skills

Kylemore Conservation & Heritage Programme 2021-2024 represents a major investment in the conservation of one of Galway's flagship heritage sites. It offers a significant educational opportunity for traditional building skills.

Kylemore Abbey has begun exploratory discussions with stakeholders, including the local authority, on creating taught programmes for heritage and conservation skills aimed at apprentices in the construction sector, with the Kylemore site acting as a 'living laboratory' for conservation and traditional building skills. This meets the GCDP Objective AH13, which commits to

“Support and promote traditional building skills, training and awareness of the use of appropriate materials and skills within the Local Authority, community groups, owners and occupiers of traditionally built structures.” Kylemore welcomes opportunity for collaboration with Galway Co. Co. and other stakeholders to address this objective.

CDP 12.7 Cultural Heritage

Observation

Kylemore Abbey is a centre of cultural heritage, with renowned architecture, landscape and garden design, food culture, and a rich history over two centuries. It's a place of living culture – as part of the European Benedictine tradition extending to the 9th century.

Within the CDP Kylemore Abbey seeks recognition for the intrinsic cultural heritage and intangible assets of Kylemore Abbey as a national and international heritage locale addressing CUH1 Cultural Heritage and CUH2 Special Places of Historic Interest, noting also that Kylemore Abbey has a rich and well-maintained archive, which should form part of any future library and archives network in the county, as per CUH 5 Library and Archives

12.8 Creativity and the Arts Observation

Kylemore Abbey has always been a place of creativity and art, welcome and outreach. Kylemore acts as a hub for culture in Connemara. Recently Kylemore has increasingly partnered with arts organisations, providing the site as

venue for a range of arts events and collaborations. This highlights an important regional need for arts venues and locations in Connemara. Current plans to create a space for cultural events in Kylemore Castle will address this and meet CDP objectives CA 1 Development of Arts and Cultural Infrastructure and CA 2 Development of facilities

Appendices

Appendix 1: Kylemore Abbey Economic Impact Study (Fitzpatrick & Associates, 2019)

Accessible at [this link](#) or at Kylemore Abbey [website](#)

Appendix 3: Conservation Plans & Reports Accessible

at the links below:

[Conservation Appraisal of Walled Garden & Historic Landscape of Kylemore Abbey \(Crimmins, 2020\)](#)

[Conservation Plan on The Neo Gothic Memorial Church Kylemore \(Crimmins, 2020\)](#)

For further information:

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