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SUBMISSION TO

Clare County Council To Request

Zoning of Lands for the new County Development Plan 2023-2029

On Behalf of The Poor Clares

March 2022



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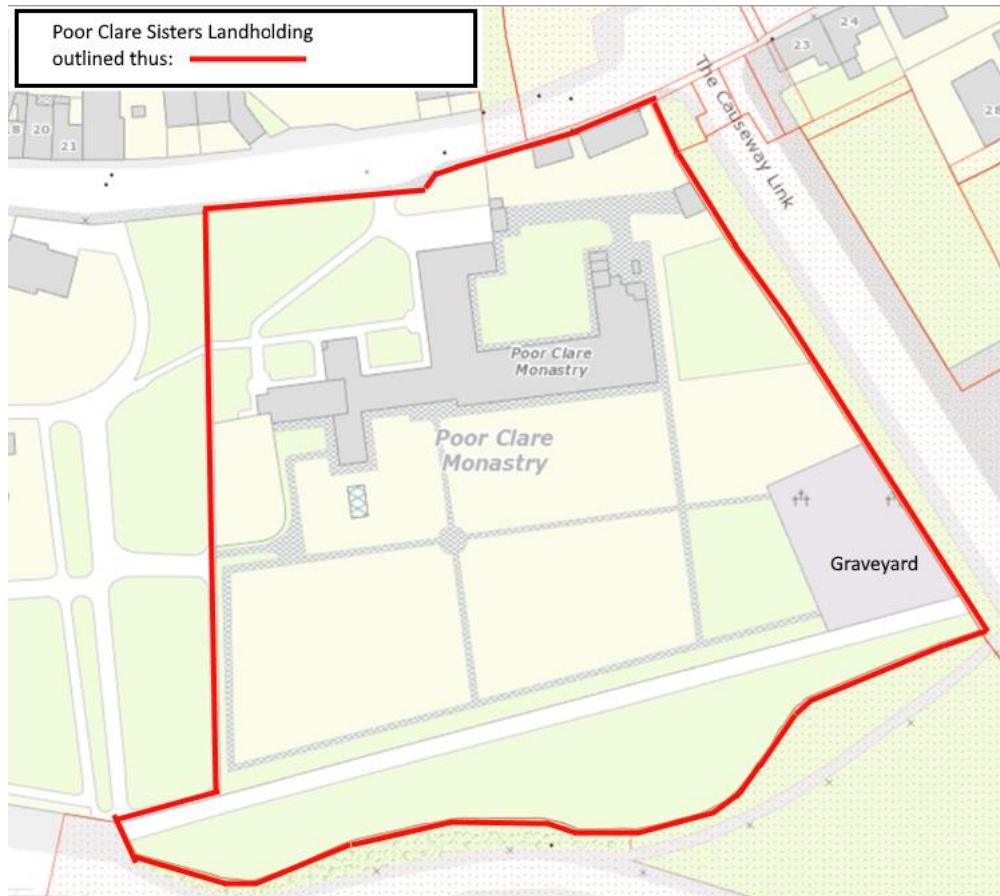
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1. Introduction

This submission to Clare County Council has been prepared by Hassett Leyden & Associates on behalf of The Poor Clares.

It relates to a site in the Francis Street area of Ennis and is submitted on foot of the preparation of the new County Development Plan of 2023-2029. The site in question consists of those lands zoned as “Community” in the current Clare County Development Plan of 2017-2023.



Subject Lands of this submission outlined in red.

This submission seeks to have the land which is already zoned as “community” under the current Clare County Development Plan of 2017-2023 and to have them continue to be zoned as community in the new Clare County Development Plan of 2023-2029 and excluded from the zoning titled “The Friar’s Way Transformational Project”. The land which is the subject of this rezoning submission are in the ownership of the Poor Clares and encompass an area of just over 2.02 hectares.

2. Opportunity Presented by the Clare County Development Plan of 2023-2029

Clare County Council will in the near future be updating the Clare County Development Plan for 2023-2029.

The preparation of this Development Plan for the County of Clare provides a suitable opportunity for the presentation of submissions to Clare County Council in support of the case for the subject site currently zoned as "community" within the current County Development Plan, for their zoning to continue to be zoned as "community" under the new Clare County Development Plan for 2023-2029 and to be excluded under the zoning titled "The Friar's Way Transformational Project".

This submission seeks to establish the context of the site with regard to:

- (a) The location, character and extent of the land.
- (b) The site's relationship with the Poor Clare Monastery and their monastic way of life.
- (c) The site and its enclosure is a vital part of the "contemplative" element of the Order and is integral to the Order's way of life.
- (d) The site in the context of what it means to the Poor Clares as their only outdoor space in which they can regenerate and be connected to nature.

The submission establishes within this context the manner in which the site if zoned as part of the "The Friar's Way Transformational Project" under the new Clare County Development Plan of 2023-2029 will in fact destroy the entire functioning of the monastery and will ultimately force the Poor Clares to leave Ennis, to which they have been an integral part of the community since 1958.



Extract CCC Draft Development Plan 2023-2029, Poor Clare Monastery outlined in GREEN.

3. Site Description

The subject site of just over 2.02 ha is located in the Francis Street area of Ennis and backs on to the Temple Gate Hotel, and the Dunnes Stores Multi-Storey parking area. It is part of the Poor Clares monastery for the last 64 years. The Poor Clares monastery is composed of the monastery building facing Francis Street and the monastery garden is orientated to the rear of the property.

The Order of Saint Clare is working within the community and thus the central location in Ennis and is also an enclosed order meaning that the private garden to the rear is the only amenity the sisters have and is vitally important to the Order and to their quiet, contemplative monastic life.

4. Zoning Issue

- The community zoning is acknowledged and should remain as such in the County Development Plan. It conforms with the actual use as a monastery by the Order of St. Clare.
- The description in the draft County Development plan of the “The Friar’s Way Transformational Project” is clearly unwarranted or to state that the lands are under utilised and might be “up for grabs” for a wider project. In relation to the Poor Clares Sisters site, the land is in full use for the purpose of a monastery and there is absolutely no surplus land that could be included in a different project.
- The Poor Clares sisters have engaged with Clare County Council on this matter and made their points clear in their correspondence dated the 10th of August 2020 and the 11th February 2021 addressed to Mr. Conneally and clearly pointed out their position. A copy is attached. We request that the content of these letters be acknowledged.
- The Poor Clares sisters have no intention of selling part or any of their property in Ennis and thus without their consent it is clearly unjustified to include the portion of their property in a manner that would result in effectively carving up and destroying the monastery. The order at their own expense purchased lands to the south in 1995 to ensure a buffer or protection zone for the closed order and its amenity.
- We realise the endeavours of Clare County Council to address wider public realm issues in the County Development Plan but we would stress that one cannot made wider plans with lands that are not available for development for such a purpose.

- We believe that this area of the town centre can be transformed with the same outcomes and excluding the Poor Clares Sisters site. A public realm project needs to be designed with realistically available land for the project. Sorting out the public realm issues will take a lot of imagination and outside the box thinking and will need to acknowledge the presence of a monastery in the centre of Ennis. Appropriate and imaginative planning can integrate and enhance the existing urban fabric of the Poor Clares monastery.

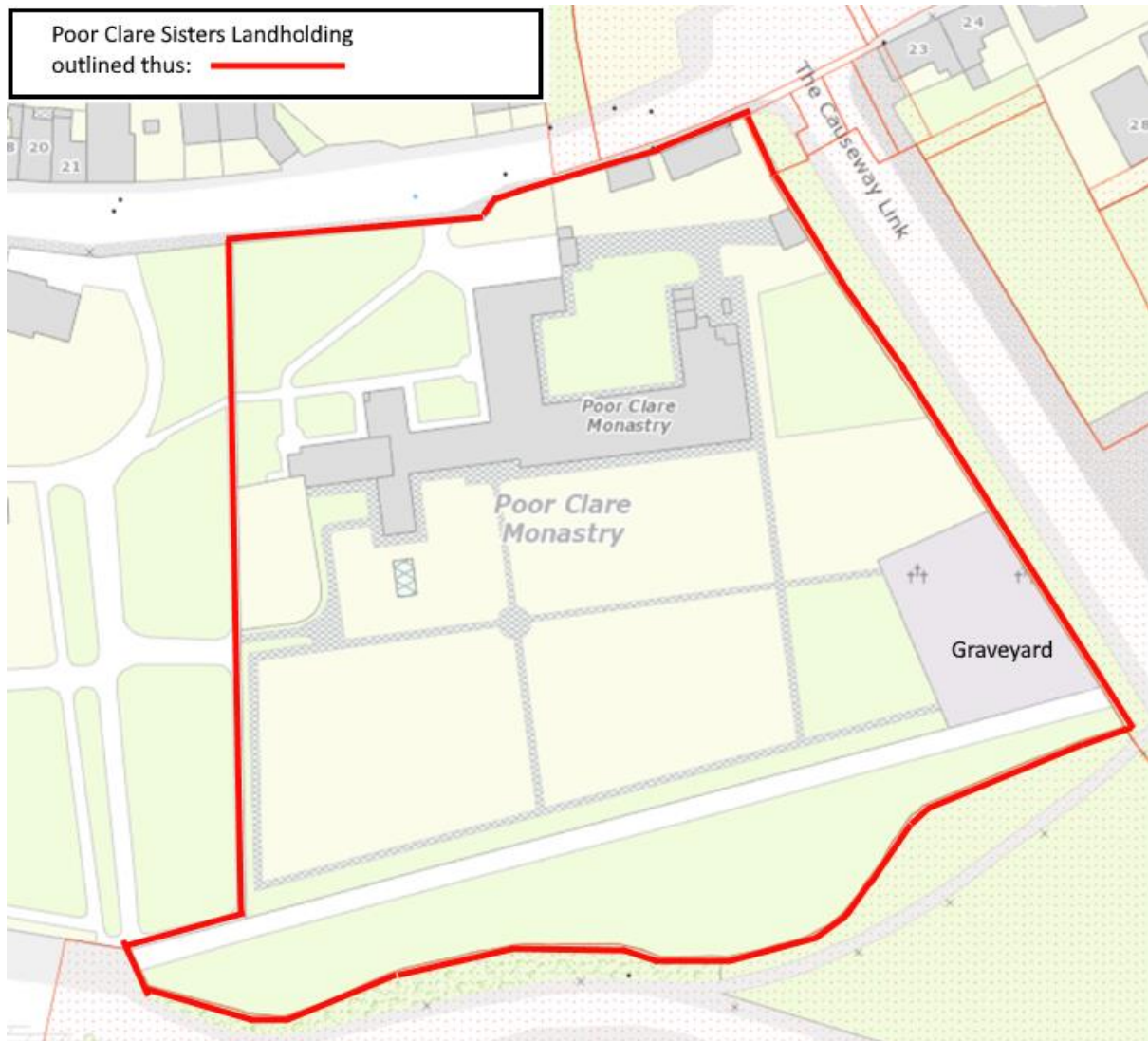
5. Conclusions

It is clear that the arbitrary outline of the “The Friar’s Way Transformational Project” goes beyond the realistically available property for such a project. It is also clear that the Poor Clares monastery cannot be arbitrarily carved up and lands designated as under utilised without fully understanding the workings of a monastery and monastic life.

We therefore request that the Poor Clares monastic way of living be totally respected and that the entire property be removed from the “The Friar’s Way Transformational Project” outline.

Including part of the Poor Clares property on the “The Friar’s Way Transformational Project” would clearly be an attack on the established Poor Clares Order and seriously jeopardise their future existence here in Ennis. We are confident that this is not the intention of Clare County Council and that everyone recognises the tremendous work that has been done over the last 70 years by the Poor Clares monastery. Their ongoing presence in Ennis is welcome and provides vital ecclesiastical support to the community.

ANNEXE - 1 -PROPERTY MAP OF LANDS



ANNEXE - 2 -COPY OF CORRESPONDENCE

Letter sent by the Poor Clares to the Council in 2020 about the garden and the Ennis 2040 plan.

Liam Conneally, Director of Services,
Áras Contae an Chláir,
New Road,
Ennis,
CO. Clare V95DXP2.

10/08/2020

RE: DRAFT ENNIS 2040

Dear Mr. Conneally,

We have been spending time, thought and prayer around your approach to us with regard to the proposed zoning of a section of our property. We have also taken advice.

Before I tell you our conclusions, I thought it would be a good idea to share with you some aspects of our life, and hope that it will help you to understand the reasoning behind what we have decided.

To be a Poor Clare today means to live the Gospel of Jesus Christ in poverty, chastity, obedience and enclosure, in sisterly communion and in association with St. Francis and his brother friars.

Our Order was founded in Assisi on March 18th 1212 when St. Clare left her noble home, and exchanged her finery and her jewels for the rough tunic that Francis gave her. So there are eight centuries of history behind our way of life. The Friars are known as the first order of St. Francis. The Poor Clares are the second order of St. Francis. Such is the close connection between the friars and Poor Clare sisters. The Gospel is 'The book of life' for us, and on it is founded our Rule and way of life. All points of our rule are to be understood and applied according to the mind of St. Francis and St. Clare and in the light of the understanding and interpretation given by the Church. Our Contemplative way of life was endorsed by the Second Vatican Council and reaffirmed by the Holy Father, Pope Francis.

Our community here in Ennis was founded from the Poor Clare Monastery in Cork in 1958. The sisters came at the invitation of the then Bishop, Joseph Rodgers, who was anxious to have a group of Contemplative sisters here in his diocese of Killaloe. The site on which the Monastery is built was gifted to us by the friars when the foundation was made. Subsequently, in 1994, the community had to purchase a piece of land, adjoining the property, because it was being sold by the local sisters of Mercy. Our fear was that the land could have been bought by someone who would build structures that would overlook our garden, consequently invading the space so necessary for the life of silent prayer and recollection lived by the sisters.

Our contribution is that of a community of prayer. We partake in regular liturgy : divine office seven times a day: daily personal adoration of the Blessed Sacrament: daily spiritual Reading and study of Sacred Scripture: daily meditation and Rosary and of course daily Mass. In all our praying we remember the intentions of those who have asked us to pray for them. Our Monastery is a place of peace and prayerful contemplation where those who visit us bring their hopes and despairs, their dreams and fears, their loves & loneliness, their sorrows and joys .They share them with us and we are always willing to listen with compassion & empathy, to pray with them and to pray for them. People unburden themselves of their troubles and those of their loved ones. They solicit our understanding, our encouragement and our prayers. They know they are never judged and always loved unconditionally no matter what. We are hugely supported by the people of Ennis, of Co. Clare and beyond.

To facilitate our search for intimacy with God we have a vital need for a silence embracing the whole being. St Clare encouraged us to "drive every noise away from the dwelling place of the mind so as to enable us to cling to the depths of God alone". The contemplative life is an exceptional charism and in the light of this we must assiduously cultivate the spirit of quiet recollection which is only fitting in those dedicated to prayer in and for the Church. In order to nourish the spirit of prayer and to maintain a continually fresh turning to God, it is incumbent on the sisters to protect and to preserve a truly contemplative ambience with all solicitude, engaging in a special way to create and live in an area of external and interior silence in prayer, in asceticism, and fervent spiritual progress, in the careful celebration of the liturgy, in fraternal life in common, in regular observance and in the discipline of separation from the world.

When you and Helen met us on July 3rd, you explained to us that an economic and spatial plan for Ennis 2040 was being prepared. Furthermore, you advised that a section of our property was to fall in under a project titled "The Friars Way Transformational Project".

We understand that the project is to incorporate the rear gardens of our property at Francis Street, together with part of the adjoining Friary Lands and the car park of the Temple Gate Hotel. The total area involved is 5 acres. Approximately 3 acres of our property falls in under this proposal.

From the document provided, we understand that the project envisages a development to feature residential blocks of two to four storeys high (approximately 70 units) together with some retail and community uses, laid out in a courtyard setting. It is also planned to develop a multi-storey car park and a new bus shelter.

We understand that this document is aspirational, but could form some basis of zoning on the site going forward.

The document does not outline what proposed zoning will be on our site.

We understand that approximately 3 acres of our property falls in under this project. This portion of property forms our formal gardens, together with a small cemetery where our former colleagues are interred (8 graves).

As outlined previously, the solitude and tranquillity that our gardens provide is an essential part of who we are and how our Order operates.

Our site is fully enclosed by a high stone wall of over 3 meters ensuring our privacy.

We are aware of the uniqueness of our property, in so far as that it fronts three streets namely Francis Street, The Causeway and Friars Walk.

We are also aware of its central location to O'Connell Square, and its significance to the town centre of Ennis.

Unfortunately, we must register our outright objection to any part of our property being zoned for any form of development except for its current use. Our objection is based on the following grounds:

1. As outlined above, our existence and way of life requires the entirety of our property. Therefore, it is not possible to segregate same.
2. Part of the site that you propose for development is the resting place of 8 of our deceased sisters. Any suggestion of relocating the graveyard is deeply upsetting to us, as an Order and individually.
3. We are not aware of what the future will bring for our Order, but would respectively suggest that any inclusion of our property under this 2040 Plan is premature.

Bearing in mind what we have outlined above, we respectively suggest that this project be reviewed in its entirety, due to the very valid reasons we have outlined above.

Trusting that you will take on board our reservations & decisions.

God bless you,

Sr. Bernardine Meskell (Abbess)

Liam Conneally's reply to the Poor Clares in 2020



COMHAIRLE | CLARE
CONTAE AN CHLÁIR | COUNTY COUNCIL

21st December 2020.

Sr. Bernardine Meskell,
Abbess,
Poor Clare Sisters,
Poor Clare Monastery,
Francis St.,
Ennis,
Co Clare.

Dear Sr. Bernardine,

Apologies for the delay in my reply to your letter dated August 2020.

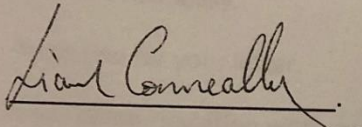
I acknowledge the contents of your letter which was a comprehensive history and description of the Poor Clares Monastery in Ennis. I appreciate the spiritual contribution that the Poor Clares make to the Ennis and wider Clare and national communities and I hope that your Monastery will continue its existence in Ennis long into the future.

In January 2021 pending the Covid pandemic conditions An Taoiseach Micheál Martin has agreed to officially launch the Ennis 2040 Economic and Spatial strategy. As I explained at our meeting the Ennis 2040 strategy is a high level non-statutory plan and while it will inform the review of the next Clare County Development Plan it will not in its own right place zoning objectives on the Poor Clare lands. While I fully appreciate your concerns regarding the proposed Friars Walk transformational site in the draft Ennis 2040 document I am also conscious of your acknowledgement that the Poor Clares property by reason of its Ennis Town Centre location and significant street frontage makes it a strategic site of significant development potential. I acknowledge your opinion that the Friars Walk site is premature however the Ennis 2040 Strategy is a 20 year strategy which will inform at least three development plan periods (3 x 6yrs) and it is for this reason that I consider the Friars Walk site to be strategic in nature and an important component of the development of a future town centre for Ennis.

It is with this long term town centre growth objective in mind that the Council intends to proceed to release the Ennis 2040 strategy similar to that presented to you at our meeting. In this regard the Council is committed to engaging with you at all stages of the future planning of the town of Ennis as it impacts on your site. I wish you and the Poor Clare sisters well during the Christmas period and I look forward to further engagement with you during 2021.

Thank you for your thoughts and prayers,

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Liam Conneally". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above a horizontal line.

Liam Conneally,
Director of Service.

Poor Clares reply to Liam Conneally in 2021.



11th February, 2021

Poor Clare Monastery
St. Francis Street
Ennis
Co. Clare

Liam Conneally,

Áras Chontae an Chláir,

New Road,

Ennis,

Co. Clare, V95 DXP2.

Dear Mr. Conneally,

Thank you for your letter.

In our communication with you, we endeavoured to set out to you why we could not concede to the Council's request.

It is our belief that what you are proposing sets out the Council's objective in relation to portion of our property. In doing so, it interferes with our title.

As fee simple owners of the entire Monastery property, your proposal could seriously devalue the property and undermine the remaining property.

Accordingly, we request that there should be no reference at all to The Poor Clare Sister's property in the proposed document.

The Poor Clare Sisters are prepared to alert the Council should we decide to dispose of the property.

God bless you.

Sincerely,

Sr. Bernardine Meskell (Abbess)