



Cahiracon House Feasibility Study

2019



Commissioned by

The Planning Department, Clare County Council

Co-Funded by

The Heritage Council and Clare County Council

Produced by

Alan Hill Tourism Development Ltd.

AH

Alan Hill
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In association with

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An Chomhairle Oidhreachta
The Heritage Council



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Executive Summary

This Study was commissioned by the Planning Department, Clare County Council and was co-funded by the Heritage Council and Clare County Council. The aim of the research project was to provide consultancy services and undertake the feasibility study on Cahiracon House to examine the heritage resource, value and potential of Cahiracon House and surrounding grounds, having regard to the surrounding maritime landscape. The project was completed during May to October 2019, and is an action under the Clare County Heritage Plan 2017-2023. This work has to be seen through a number of different lenses:

- ✚ The House and grounds are in private ownership;
- ✚ The architectural importance and heritage of this nationally significant building;
- ✚ The genuine affection the local community have for Cahiracon largely grounded in its days as a much admired secondary school;
- ✚ The potential multiple commercial uses for the broad campus into the future and;
- ✚ Cahiracon in the context of the Shannon Estuary and wider development strategies for the region;
- ✚ The Heritage value of the site, the buildings on the site and the Cultural Heritage surrounding its previous uses.

Considerable attention was placed on 'listening' to the reminiscences and hopes that the community of the greater Kildysart area have for the site. The engagement was considerable culminating in a special Cahiracon focused Heritage Week Event on 22nd August 2019. An accompanying Online Survey employed to secure feedback from the wider community received well, with 248 respondents demonstrating a considerable groundswell of local support for sustainable development solutions. The community, the Council and all the main stakeholders are totally aligned in their vision to see activity once again with people coming and going at Cahiracon House.

Clare County Council established a Steering Group to input into and oversee the development of this Feasibility Study. This ensured the Study was constantly updated with the necessary developments as they were evolving. The Study can be broken down simply into conservation and commercial findings. In relation to *conservation* the following were standouts:

- ✚ The House is in urgent need of roof repair to avoid further deterioration from lack of use;
- ✚ There are a considerable sweep of important interior features largely remaining intact within the House;
- ✚ The grounds and gardens have a 'story' to tell and;
- ✚ The House needs to be restored to a certain degree of finish in order to enable the overall campus to be taken seriously' as a destination.

The commercial and operational findings were more extensive and complex. They included:

- ✚ The House, and supporting grounds, should be viewed as necessary supports for the headline cruise training college concepts currently being examined;
- ✚ The overall sustainability of the campus will involve developing and managing multiple partnerships from the public, academic, commercial and community sectors;
- ✚ The future investment in Cahiracon should aim to enrich the quality of life for locals while offering a world class learning experience for those coming from overseas.

Flowing from the findings above, are a set of tangible recommendations below designed to help deliver a sustainable enterprise over the coming decade. In summary they include:

- ✚ Ensure a 'balanced' development approach going forward where commercial considerations are fully aligned with conservation and the environment, ensuring the community remain at the heart of every consideration;
- ✚ Examine the delivery of the overall project on a 'phased' basis into the long run;
- ✚ Be mindful of the potential of creating a small number of income generating initiatives that can help subsidise worthy but non-income generating aspects of the enterprise;
- ✚ Remain open to be *inspired* by the impressive history of the House and grounds.

The emerging confluence of factors and partners provides a platform to fundamentally refurbish and refresh the whole site to the benefit of all parties. History will likely treat poorly the failure to grasp this opportunity to re-imagine Cahiracon House.

Table of Contents

1	Introduction	5
2	Cahiracon House.....	9
3	Consultations.....	21
4	SWOT Analysis.....	30
5	Risk Analysis.....	35
6	Cahiracon House Future Development.....	42
7	General Findings and Recommendations.....	58
8	Conclusion.....	62
9	Appendices	63

1 Introduction

Cahiracon is a substantial mid-18th century Georgian house altered with wings added in the mid-19th century, situated on the bank of the Shannon Estuary. It became a former boarding school with relatively modern classrooms and accommodation for up to 80 students. It also has several outbuildings, including a full-sized indoor basketball court and foundations and utilities for a number of prefabricated buildings. The main house is a beautiful building, very prominent on the landscape, with some exceptional architectural and decorative features internally. The house itself is in a state of disrepair but largely structurally sound while the other buildings are much newer and would require minimal investment to renovate.

In order to explore options for putting the House back into use once more, Clare County Council now wish to reimagine Cahiracon House through a Feasibility Study. The aim of this study was to improve, re-use, re-imagine and increase the role of Cahiracon House and its grounds in the Heritage, Social and Business Activity in the area, adding diversity and vitality to the local communities. Alan Hill Tourism Development Ltd, John Ruddle Consulting and Healy Partners Architects (hereafter referred to as *'the Team'*) were commissioned in June 2019 by Clare County Council to provide consultancy services and undertake the feasibility study on Cahiracon House to examine the heritage resource, value and potential of Cahiracon House and surrounding grounds, having regard to the surrounding maritime landscape.



Cahiracon served as a former boarding school up until the early 2000's, with a number of modern buildings providing the accommodation, classroom and recreational blocks. Clare County Council in 2017 was successful in securing Enterprise Ireland funding to undertake a feasibility study on a site recently zoned for maritime related industry development as identified under the Strategic Integrated Framework Plan for the Shannon Estuary. Flagship Maritime Consultants were commissioned to provide consultancy services to undertake this study on behalf of Clare County Council. Flagship, through their extensive knowledge of the maritime industry identified 3 unique pieces of infrastructure in, and adjacent, to the zone those being, Cahiracon Pier, Cahiracon House and a partly finished drydock. Arising from this study the concept of a National Cruise Training College was established which would see the hospitality staff and other non-marine staff for the international cruise industry provided with their mandatory basic safety training. Subsequently, through the Regional Enterprise Development Fund from Enterprise Ireland, Clare County Council was awarded €1.78m in funding to support their investment in developing an International Cruise Hospitality Training Facility.

1.1 Scope and Methodology of this Study

The initial tender (April 2019) was commissioned by The Planning Department of Clare County Council and was co-funded through the Heritage Council and Clare County Council. The Feasibility Study aimed to identify future options for the House and grounds in line with best international practice. The important role of the community in the future development of Cahiracon was identified from the beginning.

The consultancy team comprised:

- ✚ Alan Hill, Project Lead;
- ✚ John Ruddle, Senior Consultant;
- ✚ Dr Julien Carlier, Consultant and;
- ✚ Richard Rice, Conservation Architect

Based on the assessment of previous research, baseline assessments, site visits, consultations with key stakeholder, and a well-attended public meeting (August 22nd) the team developed a methodology that addressed the following:

- ✚ An assessment of the heritage significance of Cahiracon House and site placing both in context;
- ✚ A significant options appraisal for the development and reuse of existing House and grounds;
- ✚ Proposed improvements to the House (including preliminary drawings, visualisations and site mapping);
- ✚ Concrete, actionable recommendations based on the findings from the above and;

This process began in May 2019 and finished in October. Key milestones along the way included:

- ✚ Steering Group Engagement (X 3 sessions) Note: The Group was made up of four Council Officers from the Planning Department.
- ✚ Formal Engagement with Representatives of the Kildysart Community (July).
- ✚ Online Survey (June-August).
- ✚ Agency and Stakeholder Engagement (May - August)
- ✚ Public Meeting, Kildysart - Heritage Week Event focused on Cahiracon (August).

Specific challenges to be addressed included:

- ✚ Deteriorating nature of the House and grounds;
- ✚ Lack of tourism infrastructure in the immediate area;
- ✚ Dovetailing this Study into all relevant plans and strategies;
- ✚ Appreciation for the enthusiasm and ambitions of the local community and;
- ✚ Generating a future vision for the House and grounds that was commercially sustainable.

1.2 Literature Review and Context

Key Document	Relevance
National Planning Framework	The vision set out under this Framework is based on a set of values that will ensure Ireland's long term economic, environmental and social progress for all parts of our country. In framing a new way forward, the National Planning Framework draws upon lessons learned from the National Spatial Strategy and highlights a vision of success based on better choices compared to a 'business as usual' approach.
Draft Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Southern Region 2019 - 2039	The draft RSES provides a long-term regional level strategic planning and economic framework, to support the implementation of the National Planning Framework, for the future physical, economic and social developments for the Southern Region.
Clare County Development Plan 2017 - 2023	<p>The County Development Plan complements and supports the implementation of planning and spatial policy expressed at local level and contains objectives that aid the economic, social and cultural development of the county:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✚ It is an objective of Clare County Council to facilitate and promote the sustainable development of the lands at Strategic Development Location A – Innismurry / Cahiracon for marine-related industry. All proposed developments should be in accordance with the Birds and Habitats Directive, Water Framework Directive and all other relevant EU Directives; ✚ Record of Protected Structures: Cahiracon House is recognised as a protected structure (RPS No.: 446 NIAH No.: 20406901). ✚ The existing infrastructure, strategic location, economic base, deep-water location characteristics etc. identifies the area of Cahiracon as a broad focal point for the concentration of marine related industrial development. ✚ The County Vision relates to maximising its unique characteristics, strengths, location and connectivity to become Ireland's centre of culture, tourism, heritage and the preferred international destination for sustainable investment and innovation. ✚ Goal 8 highlights how tourism growth can continue to play a major role in the future development of the County, adapting to the challenges of competing markets by maximising the development of a high quality, diverse tourist product. ✚ Goal 13 promotes the protection and enhancement of the County's unique natural heritage and biodiversity and recognises the potential for sustainable green infrastructure development, while promoting and developing its cultural, educational and eco-tourism potential in a sustainable manner. ✚ The core strategy of the Plan includes sustaining the success of established tourism areas along the West Coast of Clare ..., while enhancing the physical access and developing the potential of tourism in particular along the Shannon Estuary; ✚ The Strategic Integrated Framework Plan (SIFP) for the Shannon Estuary promotes the potential of the estuary for tourism and recreation activities.
Clare County Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP) 2016 – 2021	The purpose of the plan is to promote economic development and local and community development in the functional area of Clare County Council.
Clare Rural Development Strategy 2026	<p>This Strategy sets out how rural Clare will develop in the coming years by all stakeholders working in a spirit of cooperation. It acknowledges that rural Clare, with its rich physical environment, its built and cultural heritage, its magnificent landscapes and seascapes, can be proud of its history, heritage, environment and natural produce. Some of the Strategy's strategic focus is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✚ Providing special supports for combined towns and partnering parishes so that they can achieve sufficient scale of population and resources to attract public investment and justify private investment; ✚ Developing innovative and community-based social enterprise centres where multiple agencies can deliver their services; ✚ Increasing the quality of the physical, built, social and cultural environment of rural areas so that they are more attractive places in which to live both now and in the future.

Key Document	Relevance
LEADER Local Development Strategy (LDS)	<p>This was developed by Clare Local Development Company (CLDC) to achieve a number of objectives in the areas of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✚ Enterprise Development and Tourism; ✚ Rural Towns, Community Facilities and Broadband; ✚ Hard-to-Reach Communities and Young People; ✚ Water Protection, Biodiversity and Renewable Energy.
The Shannon Masterplan	<p>The Shannon Masterplan is a key step in the evolution of the new Fáilte Ireland strategy for 'Ireland's Hidden Heartlands' (IHH) which is one of the four key regional tourism experience brands. Covering the 'heart' of the country through to the Shannon Estuary, the Shannon Region of the masterplan includes Cahiracon.</p>
The Pilgrim Way	<p>The ultimate aim is to develop a route that will inspire both domestic and overseas visitors to journey along the Shannon and Erne inland waterway corridor, immersing themselves in Ireland's spiritual history. It is envisaged that the Pilgrim Way will drive economic opportunities in provision of visitor services in food, accommodation, activities, guiding, recreation and interpretation for the multiple local villages and enterprises along the route.</p>
Limerick Clare Climate Change Strategy	<p>The aim of this strategy is to identify the solutions to the challenge of reducing energy related emissions and to outline the actions to be taken to meet the requirements under the Kyoto Protocol.</p>
The Shannon Town and Environs Local Area Plan 2012-2018	<p>This LAP aimed to proactively pursue the continued growth of Shannon as a centre of industrial and business excellence and to ensure that Shannon, as a linked Gateway with Limerick, is a driver of County and regional prosperity through its strategic location and access on the Atlantic corridor, in addition to its employment base, international airport and other competitive advantages.</p>
Feasibility Study on Potential Development of a Maritime Centre of Excellence in Cahiracon, Co. Clare	<p>This study aimed to assess the potential of the Cahiracon Development Zone for maritime industry related development and to identify a potential project that can be pursued in the short term and that can be supported by an upcoming Enterprise Ireland development fund application. Specific recommendations emanating from this study were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✚ To maximise the development potential, a coordinated approach marketing the potential of the zone needs to be undertaken by Clare County Council or allocated to another body or organisation with the experience of attracting inward investment; ✚ The purchase of Cahiracon House to be developed primarily as a National Cruise College along with marketing the location for other educational purposes described in this report; ✚ Support for the private developers of a Combined Heat and Power Plant project provided they meet the planning requirements and they demonstrate their interest in supporting environmental conservation and Cahiracon Walk. ✚ The development of Cahiracon Walk along the estuary and through mature woodland. ✚ The appointment of site developers to promote and market the zone for appropriate development and to follow up on the opportunities highlighted in the study.
Developing Nature-based Tourism Opportunities on The Shannon Estuary Way	<p>The project aimed to compile information on natural heritage and local sites in the context of developing nature-based tourism opportunities within the Shannon Estuary area of County Clare. The report proposes two phases of approach:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✚ Phase 1 focus on establishing reputation and targeted promotion to the birdwatching community along with the development of 9 sites with modest infrastructure needs. These sites include the Kildysart area. ✚ Phase 2 looks at long-term planning for more significant developments and activity, including the development of a major visitor and viewing centre around a nature reserve-style area as yet undefined.

2 Cahiracon House

2.1 Introduction

Cahiracon House is situated on the north bank of the Shannon Estuary. In reference to the NIAH, it is described as a five-bay, three-story (including a basement/ Cellar) Georgian House built c. 1790, with a cut limestone projecting iconic porch to its centre. The House boasts three bay over basement flanking wings, with full height canted bay windows. A lean-to conservatory exists to the left of the building, and a two-bay single story bay to the right side, added in 1873. A five-bay single story return was added in 1990 to accommodate later uses as a convent and school. The house incorporates hipped and pitched roofs, rendered chimneystacks, moulded eaves courses, rendered and cut limestone stone walls with string courses, and timber sash sliding windows. A flight of limestone steps lead up to the main entrance. A detached, five-bay single story cut limestone gate lodge also exists, with a pediment central breakfront and cut limestone piers with cast iron gates and railings.

The house is positioned to occupy a prominent role, orientated east with views out over the Shannon Estuary. The foreground between the river embankment and the house would have been modified to maximise this view. The house itself, while of the late Georgian period, is not classically organised or symmetrical in nature as would have been typical of the period. There is influence of other architectural styles and a sense that the building design was modified as the House was being built. The conservatory was added after the 1850's by Lord Annaly, also known locally as Colonel White, who built the billiard-room in expectation of a visit from his crown prince, later King Edward VIII. There is an element of eclectic styles incorporated into the design and these elements of curiosity give the house and its outbuilding a unique architectural expression. The detail of finishes within the house such as the plaster detailing to cornices and ceilings, the cantilevered stone stairs and the execution of the classical orders around and within the house are to an excellent level of detail and craftsmanship. Many of the original details such as fireplaces and timber panelling survive and are in good condition. This house has a story to tell!

About 1780, when an East India fleet took refuge in the Shannon, an encampment was formed in the deer-park of Cahiracon. In 1837 it was the seat of Bindon Scott. The Scotts were popular landlords. James Kelly was the owner of Cahiracon House in 1865. He sold it to Lord Annaly in 1876. Lord Annaly is better known locally as Colonel White, the man who "brought water over a hill" from Effernan Lake by siphon to supply the domestic needs of Cahiracon. He is also the man who built the billiard-room in expectation of a visit from his crown prince, later King Edward VIII. Colonel White sold the estate in 1889. The Vandeleur family moved to Cahiracon in the late 1890's after their house at Kilrush had burned down. The Society of St. Columban, also known as the Maynooth Mission to China, bought the property in 1920. They in time sold it to the Salesian Sisters of St. John Bosco. Cahiracon House was up to more recent time, a school and convent belonging to the Salesian Sisters of St. John Bosco. The house has been vacant since its last former use as a secondary school in 2002.

The House enjoys its own pier on the Estuary, accessible from the front lawn. The grounds consist of 10 acres, historically designated as a landscaped and pleasure grounds. Within these grounds are rights of way to the Cahiracon Pier. The House is located adjacent to the R473 which runs nearby to the Estuary, however, there are few views of the house or the maritime landscape due to dense hedgerows and walls. The R573 also forms part of the Shannon Estuary Way, and is a short distance away from the Wild Atlantic Way. Both these designated routes attract visitors to the area.



2.2 Site location



2.3 Appraisal

The quality of construction throughout the building is to a notably high standard. The entrance porch and main entrance stairs are of particular note but other elements such as columns and vaulting on the basement are constructed to a high standard. Plasterwork throughout the house is impressive and the architectural detail of these features are clear and visible. Original fireplaces and timber panelling are also of note. Original joinery of the house including windows and doors remain but many are in poor condition and permit water ingress. The primary concern with Cahiracon House is the condition of the external fabric and in particular the water ingress through the roof. The quantum of water entering the building is causing damage and the longer such water ingress is permitted the more challenging and expensive it will be for the building to be repaired and conserved. The priority work for the house would be to undertake such works that arrest any further damage to the house by undertaking appropriate measures to seal the building.

The glazed conservatory to the South of the main house is a late addition to the house, first appearing on the historic maps in 1870 and obviously influenced by the Crystal Palace exhibition building (1851). While most conservatory's of this period were executed in cast iron, the conservatory at Cahiracon has structural elements such as roof truss in cast metal but the dominant material is in timber. The base of the conservatory is raised in order to align with the main entry floor of the house and the detail of such a podium is notable. The conservatory building is in particularly poor condition and unsafe to enter. It would be desirable that the area is fenced off in order to ensure no health and safety issues arise.

In consideration of the development of Cahiracon House and its demesne, consideration should be given to integration of built site features to the house, some which are not within the intended grounds of the house. These relates to the notable Entrance gates and the gate lodge. There are outbuildings to the north of the main house which have attractive architectural details and features.



2.4 A House under Threat

Cahiracon House is a protected structure of national significance. The building contains many architectural details executed to a very high standard of craftsmanship and generally, subject to opening up investigation works, are in a very good condition. However, the condition of the house is deteriorating, primarily due to openings in the roof which are permitting rainwater ingress. This water is causing direct damage to building fabric and indirect damage in terms of creating a very damp environment which will lead to fungal growth, dry & wet rot etc. It is our strong direction that emergency works are carried out on the roof in order to address this water ingress. In addition, existing guttering, glazing etc. should all be routinely serviced in order to protect the building.

Given the significance of the house architecturally, there is scope in terms of construction skills training to accommodate a skills-based conservation module for apprentice crafts people. Such a programme would require exploration with the relevant educational agencies and construction industry.



2.5 A House with Opportunities

When working with a protected structure, the primary approach should be assessing what uses can be accommodated within the existing building. Importantly, it is best practice to work with the existing building and the series of spaces and rooms it offers rather than seeking to undertake alterations that create unnecessary impacts. Within Cahiracon House, there is a notable variation of spaces. There is a large former Ball Room and Dining Room. There are many rooms of a size appropriate to accommodating education and work space uses and indeed, the consideration of providing accommodation within the upper floors also presents opportunities. Depending on what future uses are envisaged for the building, the incorporation of Part M accessibility (elevator, ramps etc.) is workable with the correct initial considerations.

While it is accepted that there is limited overlap between the activities of the Cruise Ship training education offer and that of the existing protected structure buildings, an overview is required to achieve both joined up thinking and a sense of future proofing the overall building accommodation on the site. Refurbishment of the more modern school buildings should be guided by how these elements can be integrated, either at the outset or into the future, with the main body of the house. In addition, such consideration should extend to the existing outbuildings from the original house and the former PE hall building as well as the former outdoor sports facilities of the school.

The consideration of a mix of uses within the existing building is a matter that will require careful consideration. If such activities include accommodation overlapping with non-accommodation uses. This has implications in terms of fire design and the degree of compartmentation required in separation of uses.



2.6 Cahiracon House Gardens

There remains little evidence of the presence of any substantial gardens around Cahiracon House, other than landscaped grassy lawns and woods. However, most grand houses of this era had distinct leisurely and decorative gardens, some including kitchen gardens. Unfortunately, many of these labour intensive gardens fell into disuse in the twentieth century, and it is possible Cahiracon House gardens were no exception to this fate.

A new and inventive landscape and planting plan is now proposed, incorporating several aspects of current and relevant issues regarding climate change resilience, pollinator-friendly and public sensitisation to the natural environment. The design includes monastic inspiration that is appropriate to garden history of such a property, with an aim to enhance Cahiracon as a destination and a place that people will travel to visit. The new landscaping will have the potential to be drawn upon as topics for programmes, talks, events, tours, workshops and even conferences. More importantly, it will serve to stimulate the view from the house to the estuary, and with strategic design and planting the observing eye will be drawn away from the industrious horizon.

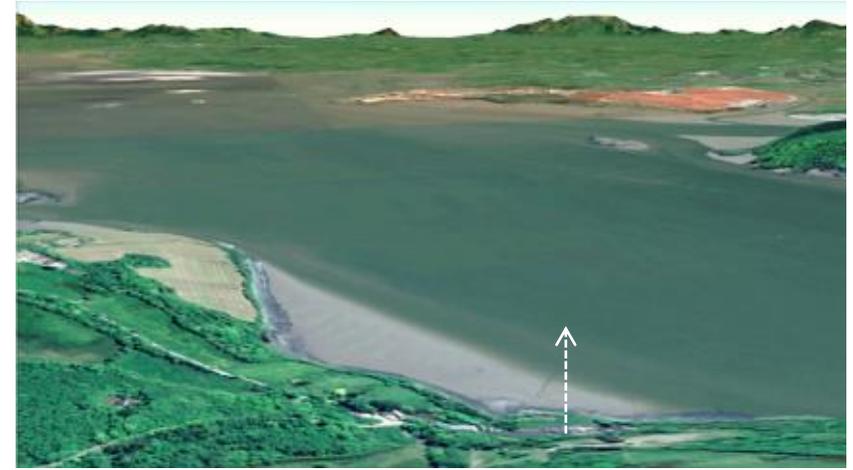
The current property grounds appear to contain no historic artefacts or traces of previous layouts, beyond the presence of the original walls. Expanses of curved lawns fill the space immediately in front of the house, rolling gently down to the estuary shore. Throughout the grounds, the existing trees (mostly broadleaf, conifers and scrub) are either mature or over-mature.

Some preliminary considerations relating to the current grounds include

- ✚ The current front garden area of the house is largely uninterfered with and could be viewed as a *carte blanche* for the new landscape plan;
- ✚ There exists opportunity to maintain a main axis or vista through the front garden space to line up with the House;
- ✚ The existing dense boundary of trees, particularly west and north-facing provide welcome shelterbelts but also present shaded conditions in these areas for much of the time;
- ✚ The main entrance is set apart (tangent) to the main orientation of the only existing front garden space.



2.7 Site Appraisal and Key Considerations



Some key considerations

- ✚ Retain existing spatial zones in front of the House.
- ✚ The grounds and gardens will likely be free to enter for visitors.
- ✚ Maximise the horticultural opportunities in the warmest, sunniest and most sheltered aspects of the main gardens.
- ✚ Establish a point of orientation at the gardens entrance. Create a 'wow factor' on arrival to the House. Clearly indicate the entrance into the main garden. Provide clean views to new gardens and potential café/ dining area.
- ✚ Consider the integration of the proposed looped walking route from the gardens into the wider grounds.

Landscape view appraisal from Cahiracon House: main view is unobstructed over the estuary and onto an industrial horizon of Aughinish Alumina (above right). Left aerial image illustrates the current landscape layout of the immediate House grounds, with football pitch at the rear of the property. Three zones immediately in front of the house are defined, **zone 1** (access to the House and hard ground, parking), **zone 2** (current grassy lawn, following existing contours) **zone 3** (ground depression with scrubland bounded by grassy area and estuary).

Significant mature woodland shelters the site from north, west and southern aspects. Some small trees and shrubs appear to be planted on the estuary shoreline immediately below the front of the house. On closer inspection, there appears to be no remains of a more formal division of the grounds, and although limited in space, there is considerable opportunity to redesign, landscape and enhance the immediate front grounds of the property.

2.8 Landscape Concept Development

Two main strands in garden design first appeared in Monastic Gardens, and have been present ever since, making a strong reappearance in the Victorian Era. These strands have influenced how plants have been used in gardens and cultivated spaces, and represent two differing views of nature: the 'Formal' and the 'Romantic'. In monastic gardens, the walled garden represented a sheltered enclosure and protection from wild, untamed nature. Formal garden rooms and enclosures contained sacred and productive uses such as vegetable, fruit and herb cultivation, medicinal plants, flowers with religious associations, fish ponds, and bees. At the same time, gardeners mixed cultivated plants with wildflowers in the very first examples of meadow gardening.

These themes remained in Victorian times, with sheltered kitchen gardens and cultivation of exotic crops through to formal carpet bedding and the cultivation of plants from all over the world. Similarly, the informal use of plants expanded with the development of wild gardening, herbaceous borders and an ongoing fascination with cottage gardens. This ongoing interweaving of the formal and the romantic is proposed to form the organising principle for the new landscaping at Cahiracon. Formal Monastic Gardens consisted of geometric layouts comprising a series of sheltered smaller square or rectangular spaces, linked with vistas, sight lines, focal points and formal avenues. The individual formal spaces would be filled with regular planting beds (raised or at ground level), often in groups or multiples of four on a cruciform pattern. The beds contained herbs, vegetables, medicinal plants and sacred flowers, either in monocultures or simple mixes. Other areas contained plantings of orchards and other fruiting trees and shrubs.

Emerging concept ideas

- ✚ Using existing gradients from the house, terrace out into more formal areas and gardens, gradually moving out into more informal and romantic areas at the furthest extent and into the surrounding woodlands. A retaining wall may be required to extend the formal gardens.
- ✚ Create new divisions across the open grass area to create new alignments between landscaping features, aspects, and vistas.
- ✚ It is highly recommended to relocate the roadway to the rear of the property, making the front of Cahiracon House an unspoilt, complete garden experience with no motorised traffic or hard-bound surface.





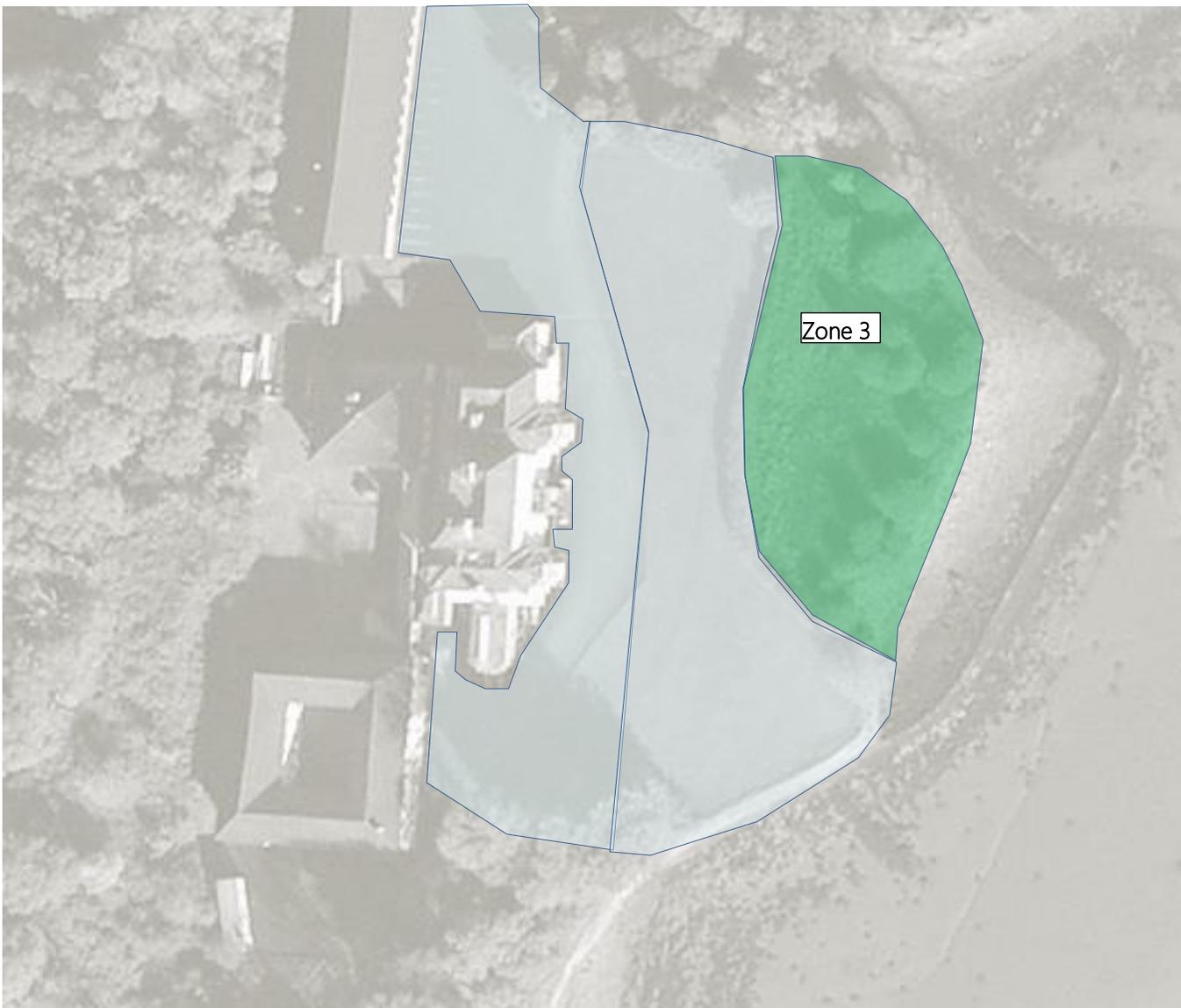
Zone 1: Formal Lawns and House Borders

- ✚ Reduction or removal of access/service roadway to accommodate more green space, bringing the gardens more intimately to the house, and to allow for plenty of outdoor seating and spill-out space for café etc. in good weather.
- ✚ These green spaces delineated by straight, edged, low hedge borders give enclosures and formality. Steps and changes in levels (working with contours) provide a more dynamic feel and encourage visitors to explore further.
- ✚ Additional use of green space may include teaching space for workshops or as meeting spaces where groups can assemble.
- ✚ House borders should include welcoming planting, with strong evergreen presence but including seasonal flowering and scented highlights.



Formal Gardens

- ✚ This should be the heart of the Cahiracon gardens; geometric arrangements of beds and parterre's that contain a wide variety of demonstration and educational plantings of herbs, edible and symbolic plants. This zone can be bounded by formal low hedge borders, as an extension of the formal lawns. A retaining wall could enable this zone to be extended forward and maintain a single level.
- ✚ Consideration should be given to a formal terraced orchard sitting within a colourful wildflower meadow in the lower regions of the zone, making full use of the full sun aspect. The orchard could be a potential site for beehives, producing a limited batch of Cahiracon branded honey (unique keepsakes and marketing potential).



Romantic Gardens

- ✚ This is in complete contrast to the previous formal garden and lawns. Winding and rich experiences that create a sense of surprise to visitors entering, celebrating an informal cottage garden planting and making statements of existing established species of reed, grasses, scrub and trees.
- ✚ Intrusions of formality are brought in by shaping high hedges, providing immediate further contrasts to areas of managed wilderness.
- ✚ Boardwalks provide new experiences from unbound gravel paths in damp areas, perhaps reaching the upper estuary brackish zone with typical salt tolerant plants beneath- an ideal opportunity for interpretation of the dynamic estuarine ecosystem for the discerning visitor.

2.9 Cahiracon House native monastic gardens suggested species lists

A non-exhaustive list of appropriate suggested native species is recommended to respond and provide resilience to a range of climatic and environmental factors. These species lists also respond to a seasonal range of pollinator requirements. Any application of the following dedicated species planting provides opportunity to elaborate on the importance of these species in terms of appropriateness, traditional uses, benefits to various ecosystems and food webs.

- ✚ Lawn: Native lawns are created with long and slow growing native grass species that require less irrigation and are more likely to be resistant to weeds, pests, and fungal diseases. Species include meadow grass (*Poa pratensis*); Red Fescue (*Festuca rubra*) and Annual Meadowgrass (*Poa Annua*) etc.
- ✚ Hedges: Native hedges make for the most durable of hedging as they are best adapted to our climate over millennia and are most sustaining to native birds and insects. Common, suitable species include Hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*); Blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa*); Holly (*Ilex aquifolium*); Wild Privet (*Ligustrum vulgare*) with flowering creepers such as Honeysuckle (*Lonicera periclymenum*) and Wild Roses (*Rosa spp*) etc. A combination of Holly and Wild Privet is ideal for low, box-profiled hedges.
- ✚ Borders: Given the relatively mature and often shaded aspects of the Cahiracon grounds considered, a native blend of shade tolerant wildflowers found growing in and near the edges of woodlands in Ireland is proposed. These species can include: Ramsons/ Wild Garlic (*Allium ursinum*); Wood Anemone (*Anemone nemorosa*); Lords-and-Ladies (*Arum maculatum*); Foxglove (*Digitalis purpurea*); Wild Strawberry (*Fragaria vesca*); Bluebell (*Hyacinthoides non-scripta*); Primrose (*Primula vulgaris*); Common Snowdrop (*Galanthus nivalis*) etc. Additional extensive lists of pollinator friendly wildflowering species and recommendations are included in the All-Ireland Pollinator Plan.
- ✚ Additional species of interest can be used to make statements and natural complementary features (alongside wall borders, urns, hanging baskets etc.)- including smaller ferns Polypody Fern (*Polypodium spp.*) Hart's Tongue Fern (*Phyllitis scolopendrium*), larger hardy ferns Broad Buckler Fern (*Dryopteris dilatata*) and Hard Fern (*Blechnum spicant*). A rare and interesting Water Fern (*Azolla filiculoides*) may be incorporated into rocky water features.



3 Consultations

To fully inform the Study on the considered input of all key stakeholders was necessary. A different approach for each was designed to secure the information required.

Stakeholders included

- ✚ Clare County Council: Promoter
- ✚ Local Community: Kildysart and Surrounds
- ✚ Development Agencies: Failte Ireland
- ✚ Academia & Professional: LIT and Flagship Consulting
- ✚ Heritage Week Public Event: Focus on Cahiracon House, Capturing the Stories (>100 in attendance)
- ✚ Visitors and Users: Respondents to the Online Survey (>300)

3.1 Context and Methodology

Aims & Objectives

The aim of this information gathering and benchmarking exercise was to secure accurate feedback on experiences, perspectives and suggestions on how best to move forward. A key output would be to provide valuable data on practical benchmarking to evaluate how the aspirations of key partners were being met.

The underlying objectives for this strand of the Study were:

- ✚ Provide the consultants with contemporary data upon which to build and justify findings and recommendations;
- ✚ Building on previous research conducted by the likes of Clare County Council and Flagship Consulting adding to the sum of professional research;
- ✚ Provide some benchmarking data upon which to evaluate and monitor performance into the short to medium term at Cahiracon;
- ✚ Demonstrate to all stakeholders a partnership- focused approach to strategic planning namely the PR benefits flowing from good communications planning and execution;
- ✚ Ensure the exercise is easily understood, manageable and has professional integrity.

3.2 The Consultation Approach:

Meeting the Partners

This included a combination of the following:-

- ✚ Face-to-Face Meetings
- ✚ Focus Group Sessions including with the dedicated Steering Group within the Council
- ✚ Phone Interviews

In many cases there was a need to revisit many of these sessions as the project progressed from its start in May 2019 to conclusion in October 2019.

The Online Survey

- ✚ Online Survey distributed through Google Forms platform;
- ✚ Ten distinct questions;
- ✚ 12 – 15mins to complete;
- ✚ Opened June-August, 2019
- ✚ Promoted through social media and partner websites who carried the link. The success of the Survey with 248 responses demonstrates the keen interest, strategic importance and goodwill towards Cahiracon especially from the local community.

Heritage Week Event

- ✚ Over 100 people in attendance;
- ✚ Lasted 1:50mins finishing just before 9:30pm with time for Q&A;
- ✚ Both Dick Cronin (the House) and John Tracy (the Estuary) presented;
- ✚ Both Clare Champion and Clare People sent reporters. Clare FM provided coverage earlier in the day;
- ✚ Most impressive response by the community to all aspects of the evening.



3.3 Consultation Outcomes

The following is a summary of outcomes from consultations with the main stakeholders:

Local Community

- ✚ The community is very proud of efforts to fundraise and manage the creation of the Community centre, Crèche and playground. Community centre opened 2006 costing €1.5m with no debt. Community works well together and supports positive projects;
- ✚ Job Creation is vital for the local community continuity;
- ✚ Water treatment is an issue, sewer treatment plant required for Kildysart. This is hampering future growth of housing and business;
- ✚ Cahiracon House has a vital link to the community which is important to retain - statement – “nearly every family in the parish had a son or a daughter who went to the Cahiracon school. The community is willing to get behind the project”. School alumni keep in contact via a Facebook page;
- ✚ Cahiracon is the only remaining big house between Ennis and Kilrush on the Estuary;
- ✚ Open access is important -Community appreciated that Cahiracon was always open to the public under the Columbans and Salesians;
- ✚ Future Use ideas:
 - Cultural, Recreational, Education combined, Multi use;
 - Shannon Estuary Way stopping point;
 - Cookery School;
 - Education Base;
 - Walled Gardens – Restaurant/café;
 - Nursing Home;
 - Accommodation;
 - Interpretive centre telling stories and heritage of Education at Cahiracon etc.;
 - Centre for Island promotion/Boat trips;
 - Marine/Woodlands;
- ✚ Estuary Islands – Seen as a major advantage of the area – Horse Island, Cannon Island;
- ✚ Community supporting the Development of Cahiracon – Community can build micro business around the Cruise College – Such as:
 - Boat trips to Islands;
 - Mini Bus transport to and from Airport;
 - Food Production;
 - Lake Fishing – Learning the skills – Fly Tying, casting etc. (mainly Trout);
 - Culture learning and GAA – Music, dance etc.;
 - Estuary Walkways Guided Tours;
 - Accommodation (currently 5/6 Airbnb offers available in Kildysart);
- ✚ Community strongly support the creation of recreational space around the House, Walkways, parking, gate remaining open, picnic areas.

Ex - students/Recreational users

- + Positive memories of school and Columbans and Salesians;
- + Everyone is really keen to see it developed;
- + Open access was there originally and would be very welcome again.

Agencies

- + House must form part of initial development. Cruise training centre may not be taken seriously with a dilapidated building in central position;
- + By its configuration, Cahiracon House would not easily lend itself to a traditional visitor attraction of scale layout;
- + Cahiracon is a good simulation of cruise staff being away from the normal lifestyle and away on sea – Cahiracon is remote, better than city location;
- + Curiosity factor of the House – people will be interested in the social story – told in the house;
- + Architecture of the House is another interesting story - house should not be over - conserved but brought back to its normal look and feel to give an authentic and create curiosity;
- + Some suggested uses:
 - o Base for rowing groups to have weekend's away, dormitory accommodation with evening restaurant etc.;
 - o Special interest groups for Marine or wildlife tourism;
 - o Audience is not local but worldwide;
 - o Partnerships are crucial to developing Cahiracon.
- + Cruise Ship trainees are ambassadors for The House/site;
- + Jobs - Any economic activity will create jobs – regardless how few – anything is better than it lying empty;
- + Cruise ship links - Consider other staff in Cruise ships as potential audience for refresher and advanced courses;
- + Support - Agencies will support positive Development.

Academic College

- + It is remote far from population bases so difficult for full time or even part time courses but providing practical courses, training, sabbatical courses offer better potential;
- + What courses and training is complimentary to the Cruise Training operation;
- + What other maritime training potential is possible – culinary training, Spa and beauty training.

Landowner

- ✚ Priority to get activity back to the site including the House;
- ✚ Economic development and Jobs are the priority;
- ✚ Local community support and participation are vital;
- ✚ Urgency to conserve the House immediately;
- ✚ The House should be a significant magnet to draw international students into the training college;
- ✚ The grounds are historically important as is the access to the grounds from the estuary with its related infrastructure.
- ✚ Heritage potential of the House and Grounds should be maximized.

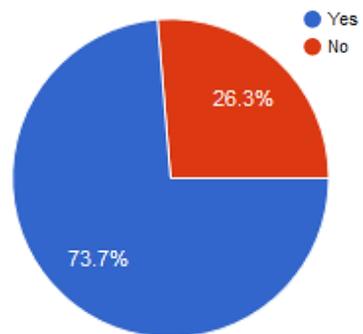
Cruise Ship Training

- ✚ In the Flagship Consulting (2018) report, it is relatively clear what goes into the modern accommodation/classrooms and recreational infrastructure (according to the report development zones). This will unlikely change as evidence suggests this is what the international cruise training market require;
- ✚ The House could provide additional more upmarket accommodation / lecture suites / attractive communal spaces / interpretation and event spaces (eg talks, music and exhibitions). The House 'telling a story' about the site and its multi-layered past;
- ✚ New alliances focused on the House will be welcomed e.g. community and the Whale and Dolphin Group;
- ✚ The House and grounds has to be restored to a minimum level of presentation before the first students come on site. Roof needs fixed (Westport House example). Standout walks along estuary potential;
- ✚ Stressed Fire Training space close to the Gym area at the moment. This is needed for the Cert students – Health and safety issues;
- ✚ The restored House is a critical 'image' (a USP) to help sell the whole proposition globally;
- ✚ Ground floor signature rooms are the best place to start.

3.4 Survey Results

Section 1: Participant Profile:

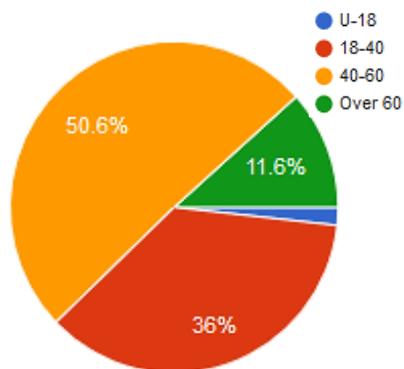
1.1: Have you personal or family connections with Cahiracon House?



Objectives: To identify the degree (or otherwise) of individual or family connections to the House. It is assumed there is a strong 'local 'loyalty' to the House. Through this widely distributed Survey we will learn something on the degree of this 'connection'.

Commentary: Three out of four respondents stated they have a 'connection' to the House. The Survey received 248 completed online or written responses, with nearly 75% of those being from within Clare and with 55% being local. This is out of a recorded population in Kildysart of 386 (Census, 2016). This is a significant proportion of the entire population of the village who provided written feedback to the Survey.

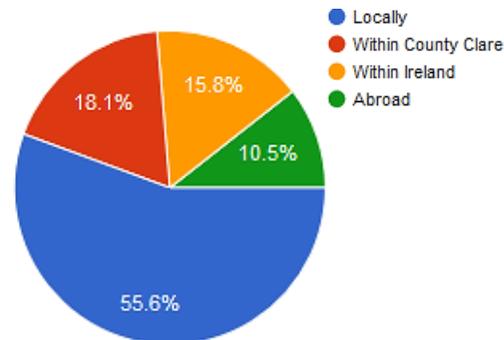
1.2 Which age group do you fall into?



Objectives: Examine the generational participation in the Survey. As the school closed its doors in 2002, it is interesting to see the age profile of participants.

Commentary: There is a healthy breakdown between the 40+ age group who account for nearly two out of three respondents and the one third who are under 40yrs representing the coming generations. Perhaps slightly surprising that the over 60yrs account for only one in eight replies

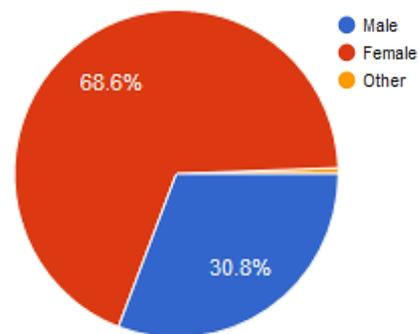
1.3 Do you live...?



Objectives: This question is another way of assessing the profile of participants. In particular the local versus non-local segments. Getting a clear picture of the local sense of pride of place and ownership of the history of Cahiracon House is an important outcome from the whole survey process.

Commentary: The balance between local and non-local is positive with just over one in two describing themselves as local. On the other end of the spectrum it is interesting to note that over one in ten described themselves as being from out of state - perhaps former students living abroad immediately comes to mind. That leaves nine out of ten replies being from within Ireland.

1.4 How do you identify?



Objectives: Securing a solid read on the gender breakdown of participants was important. It is recognised that women tend to participate more fully in such surveys.

Commentary: There is a less than a one in three participation rate from men. The survey was distributed widely by the leading community development players in Kildysart that tend to be gender equal.

Section 2: Cahiracon House Going Forward

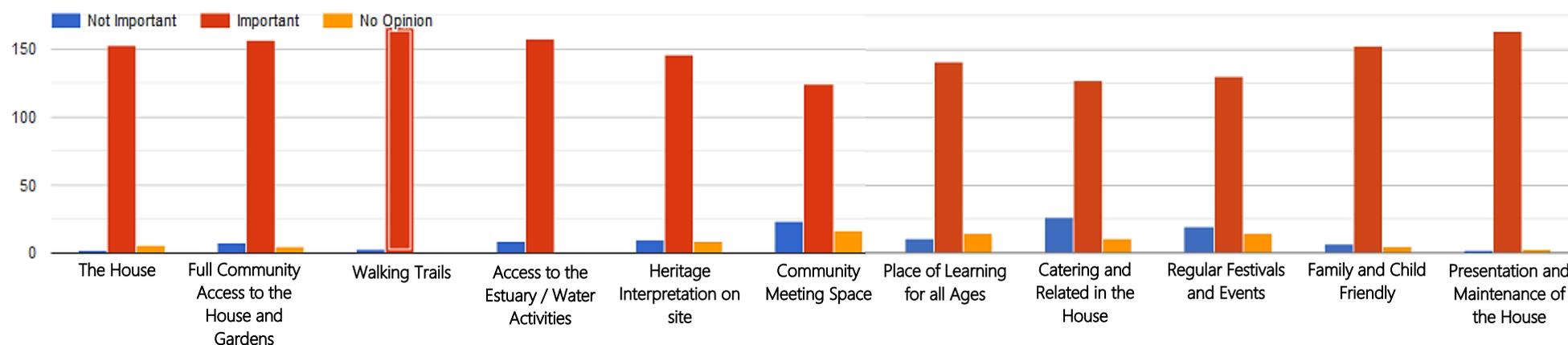
2.1 How important would you rate the need to renovate the House?



Objectives: Assess the degree of support to conserve and refresh the House as part of the whole development programme. In particular, do the community wish to see a significant investment going into the House?

Commentary: An unambiguous response with nearly all respondents stating they wish to see the House renovated.

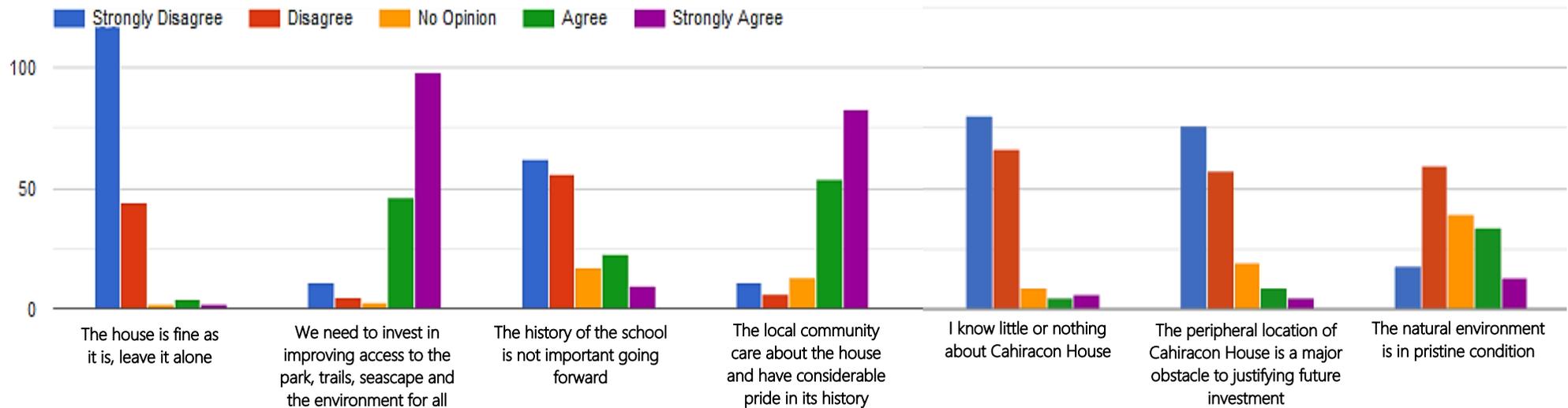
2.2 Please rate the following facilities / infrastructure and services within the House & Grounds in relation to their importance to you going forward?



Objectives: This question aims to mine down into the importance and the priority rating of key facilities, infrastructure and services through the eyes of the respondents. It is encouraging them to make a 'call' in relation to likely future investments in the House and Grounds.

Commentary: There were eleven options presented from the House to having the facility family friendly. Without exception it was considered 'Important' that the promoters make the investment with a few options such as 'Catering', 'Festivals & Events' and 'Meeting Space' showing a modest degree of push back through being classed as 'Not Important'. However, the degree of push back was marginal.

2.3 Please rate the following statements...

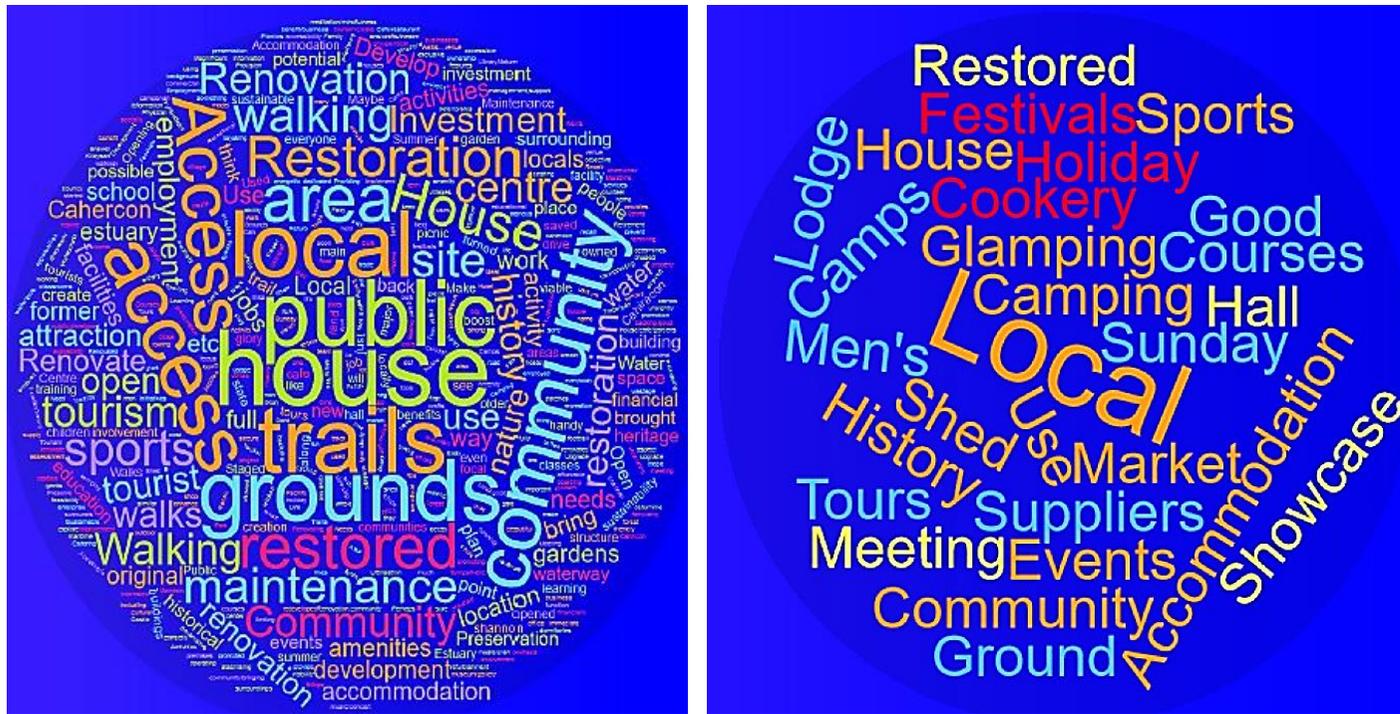


Objectives: This question is the most complex yet revealing in the Survey. Through a series of seven 'provocative or assertive' type statements it is attempting to learn the strength of motivations behind participants answers from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree'. Individually and collectively, they help build up a coherent picture on respondents attitudes to Cahiracon House.

Commentary: It is more helpful to take each question in sequence:-

- *The House is fine as it is, leave it alone.* Significant commitment to restore the House. There is no dispute in relation to the justification of the investment required.
- *We need to invest in improving access to the park, trails, seascape and the environment for all.* Investment in improving access to the grounds is considered a high priority. However, the statement was not as strong as the commitment to see the House restored.
- *The history of the school is not important going forward.* A majority saw the schools legacy as being important however; it was not a universal statement with nearly 25 respondents agreeing with the statement.
- *The local community care about the house and have considerable pride in its history.* Considerable support for the contention that the community care about the house however, a small minority question this statement. The reason for this may be two fold namely a) there are other more important projects to deliver upon locally and b) if the community was that interested would they not have done something concrete to conserve it since the school closed its doors.
- *I know little or nothing about Cahiracon House.* The level of self-assessment on knowledge of the house is significant. However, there is an obvious cohort who feel they could learn more about Cahiracon House.
- *The peripheral location of Cahiracon House is a major obstacle to justifying future investment.* A clear and unambiguous statement that location is not a perceived obstacle. The question is complex on a number of fronts; however, it does demonstrate that largely local respondents do not see road access or current tourism infrastructural provision as being a negative force holding back investment.
- *The natural environment is in pristine condition.* Just over one in four of respondents felt the natural environment was in a healthy condition. That leaves three out of four feeling uncomfortable making a positive statement about the immediate environment. The definition of environment is important in this regard and we have to assume respondents saw it as being a collective describing all aspects of the natural world / biodiversity from the estuary, forest, build environment to water treatment.

2.4 Please identify what you consider to be the Top 3 essential things that are needed and you would like to see over the coming decade in Cahiracon House?



Objectives: The purpose behind this question was to secure what respondents felt were the 'essential' things that need to happen on site. Each was asked to provide '3 things'.

Commentary: As respondents tended to supply many more than '3 things' this question became an extensive menu of what is required on site from over 248 people. Consequently, the responses have been broken down into the two Word Clouds (a graphical means to present in some order many different informational inputs to present a coherent picture). The first Word Cloud gives a 'weighting' to the most referenced 'things' (larger in the foreground) while the second is a random list of the more innovative and relevant keywords that come up in analysing the feedback. The two together help provide a snapshot of the opinions of respondents.

2.5 Please rate your degree of confidence in Cahiracon House becoming an internationally significant education and tourism related destination over the coming decade?



Objectives: Do respondents feel the future offering at Cahiracon House is achievable and more importantly sustainable. Do they have confidence that those tasked with achieving on the promise will realise it? Do they as a community feel this project will have a considerable and positive impact on their lives and those of future generations?

Commentary: When presented with 'No Confidence' versus 'Extremely Confident' only one in roughly six expressed the former. The vast majority were either 'Moderately Confident' or 'Very Confident'. At this stage of the project, this is encouraging feedback to get from important stakeholders in the venture.

4 SWOT Analysis

The purpose of this section is to present a concise strategic 'picture' of what the team has learned about the house and grounds going forward through a) researching the site b) examination of best practice at home and abroad c) feedback from multiple consultations including the popular and enlightening Online Survey and d) regular discussion with the project Steering Group.

To help clarify things all learnings have been segmented into one of three distinct categories namely:

1. Landscape, House and Environment;
2. Building a Sustainable Visitor Experience and;
3. Management, Finance and Partnerships.

The traditional strategic management 'tool' of examining all under the four pillars of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats is being employed. Most of the observations outlined below are deliberately at the higher strategic end of the management and planning spectrum.



Strengths

Landscape, House and Environment

- ✦ Nationally important house (National Inventory of Architectural Heritage);
- ✦ Relative state of repair of the House;
- ✦ Powerfully 'positive' backstory of the House and grounds (school & related community *ownership*);
- ✦ Likely regeneration of the modern school outbuildings as a sustainable enterprise;
- ✦ Access to the Shannon estuary with Cahiracon House being a microcosm of a multi-century story around trading, industrialisation, fishing and political intrigue;
- ✦ Mature landscape / tree-scape with a significant recreational potential.

Building a Sustainable Visitor Experience

- ✦ The interior potential of the House to be reimaged (aligned with the outbuildings);
- ✦ Capitalising on the potential of the Shannon Estuary and the new Shannon Estuary Way brand through delivering on an early stage visitor attraction of scale and innovation;
- ✦ The goodwill and latent capacity of Kildysart and surrounding villages to support a sustainable broad tourism 'offering';
- ✦ Good estuary access infrastructure;
- ✦ Potential tourism related partnerships from Flying Boat Museum to Loop Head;
- ✦ Claiming correctly to be the 'Window to the Shannon Estuary';
- ✦ Much 'good practice' elsewhere to learn from and adopt.

Management, Finance and Partnerships

- ✦ Enterprise Ireland funding secured ('College' only);
- ✦ Potential for Clare County Council to embed the community at the heart of the roll-out of the development of the site;

Weaknesses

Landscape, House and Environment

- ✚ House and site currently in private ownership;
- ✚ Consequently, urgent remedial work on the House cannot be guaranteed (holes in roof / water damage);
- ✚ The site has largely turned its back on the water now firmly road/vehicular focused;
- ✚ The outdoor gardens, wood and estuary-front environment has been largely reclaimed by nature;
- ✚ Mismatch of architectural styles (and material employed) on site;
- ✚ Currently only one road access route into the site off the R473.

Building a Sustainable Visitor Experience

- ✚ Overcoming / minimising the visual impact of Aughinish Alumina directly across the estuary;
- ✚ Challenge of identifying a sustainable supporting 'enterprise(s)' for the House that 'fits' successfully with the 'College'. The challenge of engineering and maintaining 'harmony' between both;
- ✚ Regional / national lack of visibility of the Shannon estuary as a mature tourism destination;
- ✚ Difficulty of securing significant private sector investment into the House venture(s);
- ✚ Marrying a Cahiracon House offering with the other tourism offerings on the estuary;
- ✚ Poor local all-year-round market to draw upon;
- ✚ Lack of basic tourism infrastructure in the immediate area e.g. accommodation;
- ✚ Poor road connectivity.

Management, Finance and Partnerships

- ✚ Understandably the current lack of clarity surrounding the management and operational relationship of the House to the College. How to best manage a complex site;
- ✚ Natural community concerns on detailed future development plans;
- ✚ Need for the public sector to lead out initially on developing the site.

Opportunities

Landscape, House and Environment

- ✦ Harness and package the potential of the trees / estuary creating a stand-out natural visitor attraction;
- ✦ Restore the House to its former glory providing attractive new uses to distinct aspects of the House and gardens;
- ✦ Make a significant PR and programming feature of the whole restoration of the House e.g. traditional skills training, workshops and seminars, internships and open days with guided tours. See: Guédelon Castle a castle currently under construction near Treigny, France as a 'model';
- ✦ Create a mutually-supporting commercial ecosystem between the College and the House;
- ✦ Promote and facilitate local usage.

Building a Sustainable Visitor Experience

- ✦ Provide an exceptional recreational offering for locals and visitors alike in the forest/estuary bank;
- ✦ Facilitate local micro-business start-ups to capitalise on the commercial opportunities that will flow from Cahiracon over the coming decade;
- ✦ Develop a quality/imaginative all-year-round festivals and events programme 'opening up' the site to thousands more new visitors;
- ✦ Appreciate the potential of the redevelopment of the gardens/farm to attract considerable visitor numbers. Being 'inspired' by the previous offerings on site would be wise.

Management, Finance and Partnerships

- ✦ View the delivery of the whole project on a phased basis. Begin the process with a series of 'quick wins';
- ✦ Bring on board specific new partners as needs/opportunities present themselves e.g. training, private sector investors, operational partners, major event organisers, diaspora engagement and the media;
- ✦ Remain open to attracting significant corporate sponsorship;
- ✦ Likely all-year-round commercial use of site;
- ✦ Apparent long term commitment by all essential partners;
- ✦ Identifying and exploiting a recognised 'public face' for the overall project.

Threats

Landscape, House and Environment

- ✦ The unanticipated costs associated with restoring the House and grounds;
- ✦ Overcoming numerous and unforeseen challenges that will present themselves in restoring a significant listed building on this scale with its ensuing time delays (and knock-on impacts) e.g. environmental, utilities, availability of specialist skills and materials;
- ✦ Failure to address immediately the urgent remedial work required will add a 'fifteen fold' increase to costs;
- ✦ Any possible concerns from third parties;
- ✦ Policy change within Clare County Council.

Building a Sustainable Visitor Experience

- ✦ The design and operational integration and co-development of the two distinct elements on site namely the House and the College. The potential early on for confusion and conflicts upstream are real and need to be addressed;
- ✦ The need for the House to be restored in a presentable / safe manner BEFORE the College can be sold to the world. This sequencing will be challenging;
- ✦ Managing the relationship and flow on site between students and the visiting public (including locals);
- ✦ The eventual tourism offering identified is not commercially sustainable e.g. poor delivery, regional competition or failure of the Shannon Estuary to gain commercial traction as a new destination on Ireland's Wild Atlantic Way;
- ✦ Failure to build and manage the new brand delivering the necessary 'momentum'.

Management, Finance and Partnerships

- ✦ The need for exceptional project management and leadership managing both the internal and external world to the highest of standards;
- ✦ Core partner fallout;
- ✦ Identifying the correct choices surrounding the commercialisation of the site;
- ✦ The challenge of managing the relationship between the site and the community to their mutual benefit;
- ✦ How best to operationally manage the site on a day-to-day basis and the minimum level of resources required (especially capacity to help establish and maintain world class standards);
- ✦ Securing the necessary funding to be delivered for when it is required.

5 Risk Analysis

After considerable consultations (April – October, 2019), detailed engagement with the Planning Department of Clare County Council, learnings from the recent Flagship Report and the experiences secured from other similar scaled ventures across rural Ireland we are presenting below a set of the immediate *risks* to sustainability. Some possible solutions are then considered as we run through the seven 'categories' of risk for Cahiracon House into the short to medium term.



5.1 Agreeing & Reinforcing a Shared Vision

Possible Problems	Likely Solutions	Comment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The commercial and managerial 'dovetailing' of the refurbishment of the House with the Cruise Training College on the one campus. Multiple partners with possibly multiple visions for Cahiracon. Likely conflict of priorities e.g. community dividend .V. commercial gain .V. restoration of House. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regular and honest engagement between all stakeholders on growing a strategic vision for Cahiracon that satisfies all parties. Currently there appears 'goodwill' towards delivering an innovative project of scale. This needs to be built upon. 	<p>The need to consult widely (and be seen to consult widely) on Cahiracon has been an important step forward. This Study has hopefully begun this process through fact-to-face session, On-line Survey and Public Meeting. This work needs to continue. The process of publicly going about arriving at an agreed vision has been every bit as important as the letter of that vision i.e. sense of place (especially the school), inclusiveness, innovation, delivering a memorable experience and professionalism in all aspects of Cahiracon.</p>

5.2 Leadership

Possible Problems	Likely Solutions	Comment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Securing a respected, experienced, informed and committed 'project leader' (e.g. Chair) to motivate, inspire and drive the complex change programme ahead. Identification and recruitment of such a person. Composition, capacity and representation on future 'boards/management committees' driving a complex change agenda. Balance will be essential. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create a detailed Job Description / Brief for all senior levels of responsibility within the new Cahiracon structure. Conduct tailored induction, training / mentoring for key individual(s). Consider developing a small informal high powered 'advisory group' meeting twice yearly to advise the key stakeholders especially the Council 	<p>Of all the early stage tasks that lie ahead, the identification, recruitment and briefing of a suitably qualified 'project lead' will be key to success. The process of recruitment needs to be suitably discreet and driven by the most senior figures from within the stakeholders, compromises should not be entertained.</p>

5.3 Operations and Administration

Possible Problems	Likely Solutions	Comment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✦ Understanding clearly what has to be 'managed' possibly on a phased basis. Does it begin with a construction oriented phase followed then by a selling and delivering a visitor experience? ✦ Early adoption of new technology in light of best practice. ✦ Lack of necessary specialist skills e.g. in-house marketing. ✦ Availability of a suitable Project Manager role in the short term to drive construction change on the ground. ✦ Day-to-day inertia in decision making because of multiple partners ('too many chiefs'). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✦ Adopt Key Performance Indicators to enable better monitoring of performance through the change ahead. Regular reviews of admin / operations over the initial two years. ✦ Conduct an internal skills analysis to help identify 'gaps' at all levels of those involved / likely to be involved. Construct a practical response to these 'gaps' by delivering a training programme available to all. ✦ Develop and professionally manage a significant Friends of Cahiracon House Volunteer Corps to support the executive e.g. events planning and delivery; ground maintenance; guiding. ✦ Annual Report widely distributed, presented & discussed (especially in relation to the community/Kildysart). 	<p>Cahiracon is only as good as the people who help deliver it. The location is exceptional on the estuary but it will be the staff that largely facilitate the future visitor experiences. Fail to appreciate their needs to grow within their roles (appropriate management, adequate resources and workplace respect) and the job ahead will be considerably more difficult to deliver particularly in a remote destination with little tourism tradition.</p>



5.4 Prioritising the Work Programme

Possible Problems	Likely Solutions	Comment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="235 220 792 675">✚ The day to day challenge of converting the 'vision' for Cahiracon House + Cruise Training College (Flagship, 2018) into a realistic work programme should not be underestimated. This work will now follow. This Study was tasked with focusing only on the House and has offered up some concrete yet imaginative solutions. However the phase of work for the overall project will involve the dovetailing of the recommendations from both documents. This will provide the roadmap for the partners to follow over the coming years. <li data-bbox="235 719 792 959">✚ Securing on-going agreement on the three principal cornerstones of the next phase of work namely a) agreeing initiatives to be undertaken and their priority b) the timeline for delivery and c) the resources, both human and financial, required for successful delivery. <li data-bbox="235 1003 792 1139">✚ Continue to ensure the work programme is fully aligned with all necessary local, county, regional and national strategies from EI to Clare County Development Plan. <li data-bbox="235 1184 792 1281">✚ How to minimise the disruption on the ground for locals and recreational users of the grounds. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="864 220 1413 389">✚ Realism coupled with professional management and adequate resources. The project management role is a vital enabler. However preceding this is agreement on the optimum 'management system'. <li data-bbox="864 434 1111 459">✚ Secure resources. <li data-bbox="864 504 1406 601">✚ A detailed 'action plan' with clear targets will follow ... rigorous monitoring and evaluation of the delivery. <li data-bbox="864 646 1395 782">✚ Identify and deliver 'quick wins' to build momentum, enhance group cohesion and external goodwill, again especially from the community perspective. <li data-bbox="864 826 1413 1066">✚ Try where possible to avoid over 'political correctness and compromises' at the expense of appropriate commercialisation. Income will need to be generated in order to bring on subsequent phases and underwrite worthy elements of the site that may not be money making. <li data-bbox="864 1110 1386 1208">✚ Schedule the construction work where possible for the less disruptive times of the year. 	<p data-bbox="1444 220 2042 746">There will likely be some dark hours ahead in reaching an agreement on structures, work programmes and securing necessary resources. Good leadership, full participation and genuine commitment from the key stakeholders to deliver on the bigger picture will overcome such obstacles. A crunch question at this early stage in the process is the 'culture' of the new entity overseeing this change ... how will it 'weight' commercial activity, environment and community for example? As this innovative venture has never been tried in Ireland before there will be much interest across the island, particularly among local authorities and development agencies on how Cahiracon fares over the coming months and years.</p>

5.5 Finance and Resources

Possible Problems	Likely Solutions	Comment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✦ Disagreement over what financially is required from each stakeholder, in other words who pays what given the magnitude and scheduling of the investment going forward. What does the funding 'cocktail' look like? ✦ Cash flow and good financial planning. ✦ The relationship between Cahiracon going forward and corporate sponsors i.e. sponsorship opportunities. ✦ Programming balance between income generating events .V. non-income generating events as part of an annual festival and events programme on site and in partnership with Kildysart. ✦ Lack of entrepreneurship / spirit of commercial 'risk taking' within the organisational culture. Possibly new joint ventures will likely present themselves and Cahiracon needs to be open to embrace the most suitable. ✦ Maintaining free access to the site / assets by the local community while possibly having distinct fee paying visitor experiences e.g. Shannon Canopy Walk. ✦ The need for adequate and consistent re-investment into maintaining the entire site 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✦ Examine the creation of a sinking fund (secured as a percentage of turnover into a dedicated account) that is set aside annually to refresh the site assets/visitor experience into the medium/longer term. ✦ Full engagement in relationship building with public funders across multiple aspects of the work programme from scientific research to the arts. ✦ Development of clear protocols in relation to sponsorship. 	<p>It is inconceivable that the recommended change being suggested does not come without some hardship and tensions at a management level. As previously stated this fresh and brave approach is required as to how Cahiracon 'sees its future, does its business and manages its affairs'. This will translate into new structures, staff, relationships and management / financial control systems. The degree of financial and commercial activity will likely dramatically accelerate and consequently the methods of controlling, orchestrating and monitoring these will need to be of the highest professional standard. Fresh commercial approaches are required and need to be institutionally encouraged.</p>

5.6 Communications, Marketing and Selling

Possible Problems	Likely Solutions	Comment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✚ Within any change environment if you fail to bring all your partners along with you from the outset hostility festers and possibly even old divisions will soon arise, local politics in Ireland being a case in point. The very viability of the whole project will be quickly questioned by those least enthusiastic or politically challenged by the change. Fail from the outset, through poor communication/on-going consultation, to bring all vital partners along with you and the very fabric of the project will be undermined, reputations will be damaged. Good communications planning, awareness / political sensitivity and the capacity of those implementing are key to success. In essence a capable team, inclusive in spirit with a plan. ✚ The development and management of a distinctive Cahiracon brand identity. ✚ Ensuring an on-going engagement with the local community – how best to listen to the people of the greater Kildysart area through the likes of obviously creating employment (directly and indirectly), fostering new festivals and events with the community; formally reporting progress to communities; enhancing community participation and imaginative usage of Cahiracon to support local charities. ✚ The absence of specialist skills in the management 'mix', for example marketing and selling skills could become an eventual drawback e.g. consistently managed PR, educational / course marketing, joint and cross marketing and social media marketing. ✚ Professional engagement with possible sponsors / fund-raising function / diaspora engagement. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✚ Develop an internal and public/external communications plan that matches skills, budgets and need. Monitor regularly, track the delivery of all targets agreed. Provision for buying in external skills if required. Nominate one executive to take responsibility for this task. ✚ Dispute Resolution. Agree in advance at senior management level a mediation process to solve deeper rooted problems that will invariably arise in time. Remove these (if they arise) from the managing committee in order to avoid stalling progress. ✚ In time examine how best to incentivise external agents 'selling' Cahiracon and internally those tasked with delivering complex aspects of the strategy who may come up with innovative solutions for intractable problems. ✚ Keep a close eye on the 'competition' – formally document what and how they are doing things better than Cahiracon. Learn from best international practice. Formally benchmark Cahiracon against the best in class competition. ✚ Examine delivering a significant national / international annual showcase conference. Local accommodation will be required for this to materialise. This should be the kind of indicative happening on site that helps build awareness and reputation. It should not be viewed as a once-off. ✚ Begin with a commitment to gather, manage and analyse visitor/customer research. ✚ The managing committee should adopt 'communications and consultations' as a Key Performance Indicator. 	<p>Communications, both internal and external, need to be delivered to the highest professional levels to justify (and commercially sustain) the investment proposed. Therefore in order to justify this investment Cahiracon will need to demonstrate a year-on-year increase in key performance indicators like visitor numbers, visitor expenditure, jobs created, enhancing the environment, referral of business to and from partners, positive visitor feedback, greater community usage, synergy with Kildysart and surrounding villages, additional public grants secured, sponsors / donors secured, volunteers trained, festivals delivered, and quality media exposure secured. Good communication is one of the three pillars that will likely lead to success with the other two being delivery of operational excellence and best in class leadership / management of the whole project over the coming decade.</p>

✚ The potential for 'mixed messages' emerging from Cahiracon causing confusion in the 'marketplace'.

✚ Cahiracon should strive to support the Wild Atlantic Way and the new Shannon Estuary Way (and vice versa).

5.7 Partnership Building

Possible Problems	Likely Solutions	Comment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✚ Failure to 'sell' this ambitious vision to the likes of the students / visitors / community / elected representatives and key agencies. ✚ Community push-back i.e. over prioritising refurbishments, disruption and site access issues and pricing/admission charges. ✚ Meaningful engagement with large scale sponsors, benefactors and donors both at home and abroad e.g. Aughinish Alumina or Shannon Foynes Port Company. ✚ Mixed 'bed fellows' ... building and maintaining harmony. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✚ Continued practical support from Clare County Council linking the expanding work programme at Cahiracon with their own initiatives e.g. arts programming, environment, tourism and community development. ✚ Enhanced effort into engaging with and building a 'life-long relationship' with each primary school child in the greater Kildysart and surrounding villages area through site visits, special events, classroom base project work, and annual awards. Get the kids interested and the grown-ups will follow. Play on the concept of 'going back to school at Cahiracon'. ✚ There is significant potential in creating a nationally important 'cultural event' at Cahiracon e.g. film festival, concert series, recreational event or children's festival (explored also in the Concepts section of this Study). The aim would be to sustain these over the coming years. ✚ Record, where possible, on database information on all aspects of partnership building including contact information and descriptions of engagement. A senior manager should formally be reporting progress regularly to the managing committee. ✚ There are opportunities to develop effectiveness in professional networking between Cahiracon and external partners be they public, private, community or special interest groups, at home or abroad. This 	<p>Building and maintaining good working relationships with a multitude of relevant partners is a sign of a healthy and effective organisation. In these early research days much is done on a piecemeal basis, a reaction to something. Building relations is often a prelude to asking for something whether it be funding, sponsorship, a joint venture, specialist advice or to purchase a table at a fund-raising do Cahiracon is organising. With journalists, for example, the more opportunity they have to experience the different aspects of Cahiracon the more likely you will benefit from unforeseen media exposure. There is probably less than ten external people who will play an important role in determining the success or failure of the project over the coming decade. Be they secretaries of government departments, CEO's of agencies, media and business figures, senior educationalists or politicians should be engaged with in an appropriate manner whether it is formal presentations, social engagements or site visits. This is a key and on-going role of any new managing committee / Chair with support from senior manager.</p>

appears especially true in relation to developing commercial opportunities across the whole site. These opportunities seldom happen by accident.

6 Cahiracon House Future Development

6.1 Future Development

Vision

Cahiracon: a facility unequalled in its character, heritage, facilities, friendliness, menu of offerings, professionalism and overall visitor experience. A campus nestled in its mature woodland and estuarine environment welcoming students, locals and visitors alike. Through a dynamic multi-partner approach, create at Cahiracon a world-class Cruise Training College.

Aims

Through delivering exceptional cruise training for the global market Cahiracon will reimagine the whole site enabling the restoration of the House and grounds. Cahiracon will reconnect with the local community while playing a role in the rejuvenation of the Shannon Estuary. A unique venture commercially sustainable, environmentally responsible and community embracing.



Key Objectives

- ✚ Restoration of Cahiracon House, grounds and site;
- ✚ Build and manage a 'partnership' of complementary and experienced *champions* to drive the project forward;
- ✚ Genuine community engagement and stakeholding;
- ✚ Outstanding project leadership;

- + Exceptional delivery of all aspects of management and operations (visitor-focused ethos);
- + Respect and inspiration being drawn from the rich history and heritage on site;
- + Add value to the development of the Shannon Estuary Way and the Wild Atlantic Way;
- + Design and deliver a *unique* cruise training offering working in synergy with all other refreshed elements of the campus and;
- + Deliver a commercially sustainable enterprise nurturing local employment creation.

Overall approach

The main thrust of this feasibility study is to generate ideas for the future that make sense for the future that are sustainable and fit into the overall strategic context of the House, school and Estate. Given the separate work underway and discussions ongoing on the Cruise training college, any consideration of the house opens up the issue of whether future uses are complimentary or entirely separate from the House. The team have considered both and have come up with a range of interventions that are potential future uses of the House.

Strategic Context

In considering future uses of the House there are many issues to bear in mind including the following:

- + Physical and location:
 - o The current combination of physical buildings and estate and the relative layout of each of the parts;
 - o The condition, size and facilities available in each of the spaces;
 - o Environmental and conservation considerations particularly for the main House and estate;
 - o The marine macro environment of the estuary and current developments with its main stakeholders;
 - o The house and what it has been in the past, its heritage and history;
 - o The site has been empty for 17 years and is in need of extensive renovation and renewal for any of the potential uses.
- + Other non - physical considerations
 - o Local authority priority to bring a key unused asset back to life, creating economic activity and employment;
 - o Community in need of this important location re-invigorated;
 - o Fáilte Ireland having created the estuary way concept fitting into the overall Wild Atlantic Way proposition;
 - o The importance of the marine environment around the estuary and surrounding natural rural environment.

Themes emerging from the study

The main principles emerging from consideration of the various concepts are:

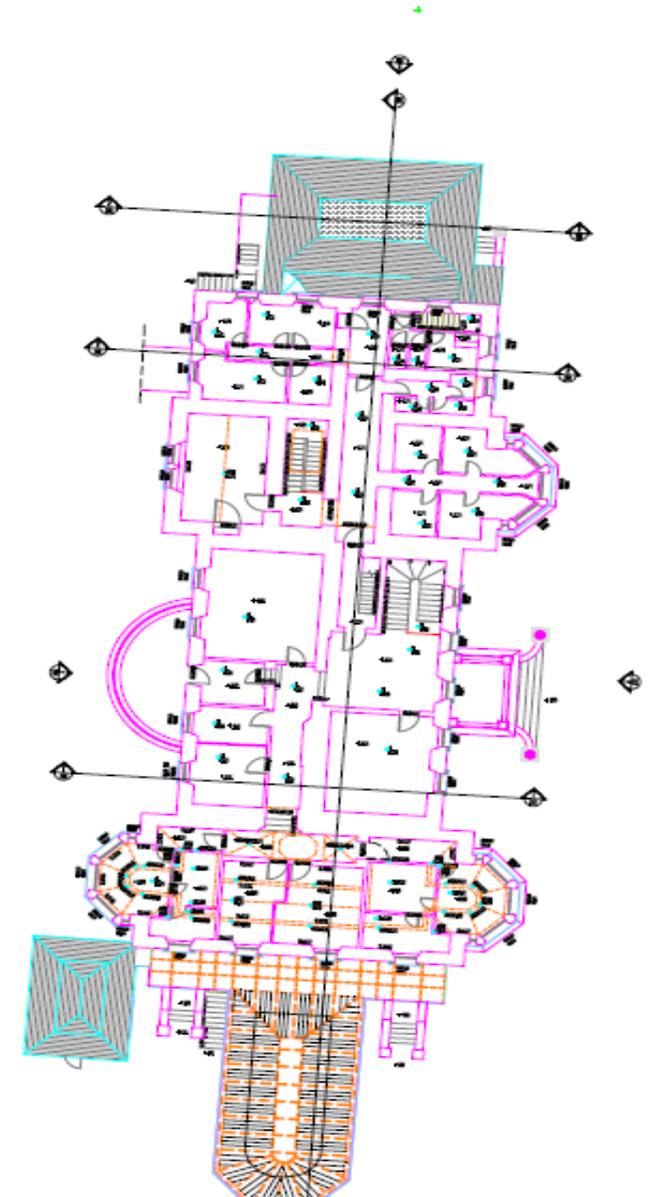
- ✚ There is a strong logic in concentrating on complementary uses to the training college theme. The hospitality training theme links very well and the hospitality hub similarly. Research centre and language lab also work and could be combined with some of the other ideas;
- ✚ The market for any future use should be international rather than local and regional. The location is off the beaten track and as such needs to provide an attraction that appeals worldwide and attracts enough people to create economic sustainability.

6.2 Development of Concept Ideas

The purpose behind this Feasibility Study was to help identify a raft of new concepts that could breathe commercial life back into the House and grounds. What follows should not be read in any order of priority or importance. Many vary in theme, location within the campus, promoters/drivers, likely market/audience and above all scale and complexity. What unites all is the belief that Cahiracon moving forward has to be viewed as an integrated 'destination' supplying a superior set of facilities and experiences to those coming to study and stay on site, those within the community and general visitors.

The following concept ideas were developed with regard to the various themes, considerations, strategic context, vision, objectives and aims for the development of Cahiracon House:

- ✚ Cahiracon Advanced Language Lab;
- ✚ Cahiracon Research Centre;
- ✚ Cahiracon Micro Distillery;
- ✚ Themed Annual Summer School- Ireland and the Sea;
- ✚ Visitor Welcome Hub;
- ✚ Hospitality Training for Cruise Ships;
- ✚ The Wild Atlantic Fishing Story;
- ✚ Cahiracon International Mindfulness Centre;
- ✚ Cahiracon Canopy Walk;
- ✚ Cahiracon Farm Allotments & Co Op Shop;
- ✚ Interpretive Etched Glass Panels.



CONCEPT
Cahiracon
Advanced
Language Lab

Timeframe:

Start date: Q2/ 2020
 Implementation: Q2/ 2021



Language labs are valued in professional development, offering students a structured eLearning environment, embedding new technologies and accelerating the learning outcomes (and enjoyment levels). Cahiracon House can offer a state of the art suite proving courses / teachers across multiple languages tailored for the cruise industry students of today and tomorrow. A distinct selling point of the programme will be the design of accredited courses that 'connect' via exceptional teachers with the local community from attending a GAA match, visiting the studio of a local artist, baking Irish soda bread or going out on the Estuary with a maritime guide on a fast rib.

Description

Thematic Area

Education, Training.

Income Generation

Projected student numbers up to 2000 Students PA.

Risk Assessment

Duplication, other partners are providing something similar. No demand from the visiting students during their intense 2/3wk stay. Accessing suitably experienced/ motivated teachers.

Embedding Best Practice

Engage with the likely 'users' of an add-on professional language service to understand fully their needs.

Operational Implications

This will require assessment of the layout of the ground floor space in the House to identify when and how a suitable facility could be created. Scope out the build and likely running costs of the enterprise.

Partnerships

Engage with all related academic partners e.g. UL / ETB / Hotel Mgmt. College, Shannon.

Environmental Considerations

Negligible impact as the Centre will be based inside the House, potential for environmental research and sustainability depending on Centre's thematic research area.

Community Engagement

Not applicable.



CONCEPT
Cahiracon
Research Centre

Timeframe:
 Start date: Q1/ 2020
 Implementation: Q2/ 2021



Description

Creation of a marine biology, ecology or marine energy centre dedicated to furthering research and developments in those areas. This centre will house laboratories and group meeting rooms and study rooms and would be associated directly to a leading college such as University of Limerick or Limerick Institute of Technology, Galway, Mayo Institute of Technology

Thematic Area

Education, Research, Innovation, Sustainability.

Income Generation

Forms part of curriculum and course work of College. Visiting educational groups and research provide income. Overall, it would likely operate as a deficit and require operational funding.

Risk Assessment

Risks include distance from population centres, other sites exist providing similar services. Risk that extent of facilities on site are not sufficient to keep pace with expansion of this area of research and education

Embedding Best Practice

Best practice in Research and innovation as set by the promoting college and standards set consistent to other leading education campuses

Operational Implications

The Centre would be operated as a satellite to main college used as a field centre for practical work, demonstrations, research and teaching.

Partnerships

Limerick Institute of Technology, University of Limerick, Energy Companies and marine technology companies.

Environmental Considerations

Negligible impact as the Centre will be based inside the House, potential for environmental research and sustainability depending on Centre's thematic research area.

Community Engagement

Potential for showcasing and dissemination of research and innovation as part of ongoing public engagement with the House.



CONCEPT
Cahiracon Micro Distillery



CAHIRACON DISTILLERY

Timeframe:

Research start date: Q1/ 2020
 Implementation: Q4/ 2020

Description
 A 500-gallon distillery system with fermenters and small bottling plant producing a Cahiracon Pine Cone Gin to begin using local ingredients for the gin for authenticity and variety. Into the future, produce a Cahiracon Whiskey which will require suitable barrel storage (possibly in basement). From a sales perspective the attraction of this boutique enterprise would be the 'ready market' for immediate sales and an expanding network of 'graduates' and satisfied clients that could smooth access of the Cahiracon produce into the great cruise ships of the world. The 'process' in its own right becomes a visitor attraction with its own 'tasting room'.

Description

Thematic Area

Artisan, export, internships, recreation, education.

Income Generation

Year 1: aim for 9,000 bottles, additional income from tours / limited runs and merchandising.

Risk Assessment

The 'suitability to Cahiracon House' issue; Distillery saturation in Ireland today- however, this is chiefly for 'export', Space is required / reengineering the space to suit the purpose proposed.

Embedding Best Practice

See loughgilldistillery.com for example of conversion of Hazelwood Demesne into a distillery.

Operational Implications

Engagement with management partners to examine the appropriateness of the venture to the House; Feasibility Study required.

Partnerships

Private sector operator experienced in industry already on West Coast/Munster

Environmental Considerations

Negligible impact as the Centre will be based inside the House.

Community Engagement

Potential for tours as part of ongoing public engagement with the House.



CONCEPT

Themed Annual Summer School - Ireland & the Sea

Timeframe:

Research start date: Q1/ 2020
Implementation: Q2/ 2021

Summer Schools (and supporting smaller Winter Schools) are a regular feature of the Irish cultural, heritage and political events landscape. The list is endless from Willie Clancy Week to the Patrick McGill Summer School. Given the importance to Cahiracon down the centuries of the 'sea' and access to the outside world the House is a fitting location for the development of a significant / high profile School with a rolling focus on all aspects of the 'sea' locally, nationally and beyond. This sponsored School will adopt a different yearly maritime theme and provide platforms for speakers to engage with the visiting public. The ensuing publicity and broad appeal will provide a significant boost to Cahiracon.

Description

Thematic Area

Education

Income Generation

Event ticketing [e.g. 120 x €120 for 3 days]; Sponsorship; Concessions.

Risk Assessment

Absence of accommodation; Adequate Event Management and Programming Skills; Absence of quality partners; Disconnection with the local community.

Embedding Best Practice

McGill Summer School, Glenties; Borris Festival of Literature and Ideas.

Operational Implications

Suitable space; Volunteer staff management; Event Steering Group (12 month lead in time required); Sponsorship raising; Programme Director brief; Scheduling considerations (locally and wider afield).

Partnerships

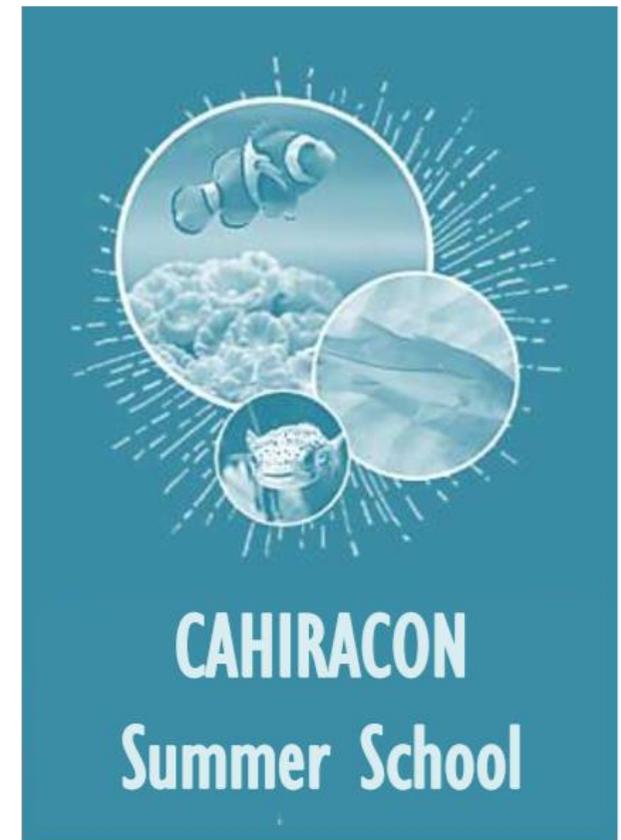
Academia, Local Community, Council, National Maritime College, Marine Institute, BIM, FI/WAW and the private sector. A Festival Steering group would be established with a one year lead in time (first Summer School, 2021).

Environmental Considerations

Negligible impact as the Centre will be based inside the House.

Community Engagement

Not applicable



CONCEPT Campus Welcome and Recreation Hub



Timeframe:

Start date: Q4/ 2020
Implementation: Q3/ 2021

Description
This involves the creation of a student/visitor hub that houses all the hospitality and recreation needs of the thousands of visitors that will pass through the college and additional visitors from the area. There is a ready-made audience and if this facility or similar is not created there would be little to do in evenings and weekends. It can double as a hospitality base for other captains and cruise ship personnel or company executives, e.g. supplementary accommodation upstairs for cruise ship company captains etc.

Description

Thematic Area

Recreation, commercial, potential community and culture.

Income Generation

Café bar, mini cinema, pool room and recreation room all generate income, staffing would be part paid and part volunteer.

Risk Assessment

Not enough commercial activity to generate return for sustainability, health and safety risks need to be fully assessed.

Embedding Best Practice

Base it on similar recreation area supporting a campus activity

Operational Implications

Need a private sector operator of the combined recreational offer – local entrepreneur type

Partnerships

Local business, recreational service companies

Environmental Considerations

Recreation can extend to outdoor site – mixed use between local community and training campus.

Community Engagement

Will support this facility if opportunities for local involvement and micro enterprises building up around it



CONCEPT Hospitality Training for Cruise Ships



Timeframe:
Start date: Q1/ 2020
Implementation: Q2/ 2021

Creation of a Quality base for hospitality training for Cruise Ships to build phase 2 of the original safety training plan. The accommodation base could be supplemented by additional rooms on second and third floors and the main rooms both on Ground floor and basement could be used for practical training centres. These could be set up to create an authentic practice area for a wide range of hospitality training for staff planning to take on Chef/waiter/bar/service areas on the cruise ship.

Description

Thematic Area

Income Generation

Risk Assessment

Embedding Best Practice

Operational Implications

Partnerships

Environmental Considerations

Community Engagement

Education and Training.

Income from Course Provision- 3 week courses with 30 students, 20 courses could result in up to 600 students.

Heavy competition from other cruise ship catering course providers, would need competitive edge of price/standards.

Centre would embed best catering standards, Health and safety and environmental sustainability standards, becoming a world-renowned training centre for hospitality.

Training Centre in House operated as a unit with safety training in partnership with Shannon Hotel College or similar hospitality training college.

Hospitality Training college e.g. Shannon Hospitality etc.

Negligible impact as the base will be based inside the House and surrounding property.

Not applicable.



CONCEPT
The Wild Atlantic Fishing Story

Timeframe:

Feasibility study: Q2/ 2020
 Implementation: Q2/ 2021

Description

The Wild Atlantic Way is awaiting a dedicated visitor centre focusing on the sea, fishing and the story of coastal communities. Cahiracon has the emerging infrastructure to create a significant attraction servicing this purpose. The 'experience' would be two fold namely an immersive experience telling the story of the sea over the last two millennia plus two significant decommissioned fishing vessels at the pier offering guided tours and a special Virtual Reality experience including a storm in the North Atlantic. A final element of the total experience would be showcase of Irish traditional & historic boat building. This inter-active experience could also offer a trip on a traditional craft in the estuary.

Thematic Area

Leisure, education, history & culture, Tourism attraction.

Income Generation

Average expenditure per visitor will likely make the core concept financially sustainable. Note: These numbers are external visitors coming on to the site and does not include the on-site student visitors.

Risk Assessment

Delivering an exceptional experience; achieving visitor targets; interpretation delivery; operational management efficiency, opening times/seasonality; admission pricing and overall cost control.

Embedding Best Practice

www.clarelibrary.ie/eolas/coclare/heritage/
www.wildatlanticway.com/highlights/traditional-boats-guide
www.tradboats.ie

Operational Implications

Recruiting and training suitable local staff and guides; ensuring the attraction 'space' is as flexible as possible; employment of new technology (e.g. AR & VR); sourcing, refitting and locating the two decommissioned trawlers.

Partnerships

Coastal communities, Council, Academia, Marine Institute, BIM, Heritage Council, Failte Ireland and sponsors.

Environmental Considerations

Potential for marine and shore disturbances due to increased water activity with boat tours, although this is likely to be negligible.

Community Engagement

Potential to employ local retired fishermen / skippers to act as tour guides & vessel operators.



CONCEPT
Cahiracon
International
Mindfulness Centre

Timeframe:
 Start date: March 2020
 Implementation: Q2 2021

Description

Creation of an international mindfulness centre dedicated to teaching people mindfulness therapies and reflective practices. The building would be a retreat centre for groups to come together and learn about mindfulness and would research best practice techniques. There is potential to link the centre with a series of floating saunas as an add-on therapeutic experience.

Thematic Area

Health, Spiritual, Leisure and Education.

Income Generation

Health and Wellness courses and 1 or 2 week sabbaticals offered.

Risk Assessment

Competition from other Centres in Better populated areas. Historic Building maintenance proves difficult to sustain as a Business.

Embedding Best Practice

Best practice in Health and safety, Equipment and training standards. See nordicmarinesauna.com for example detail on floating saunas.

Operational Implications

Operated by a Private sector partner experienced in this area. Employment support or assistance may be needed in early stages to get to sustainability point.

Partnerships

Existing wellness centre in Munster/Clare area.

Environmental Considerations

Negligible impact as the Centre will be based inside the House, potential for environmental sensitisation through open-air sessions, embedding deep respect for the natural environment.

Community Engagement

Not Applicable.



CONCEPT Cahiracon Canopy Walk

Timeframe:
Start date: Q4/ 2020
Implementation: Q2/ 2021

Description

Create a unique mature tree and Estuary walkway along the 2-3km shorefront. The walkway would be a carefully designed boardwalk ascending in places to a canopy walk. The sensitive design would take the visitor up to 12-15m, to seldom seen vistas of the Estuary, forest and estate. There must be at least one standout viewing platform / vista that captures the spirit of the 'walk', an image that will sell globally. Critically, there would be considerable interpretation built into the design embracing natural history, geology, economic history, maritime history, educational legacy of the site and, application of modern renewable technologies. The facility would be 'open to all' following the philosophy of previous landowners.

Thematic Area

Recreation, Leisure, Education, Environmental Sensitisation, Health.

Income Generation

Income from admission charge per adult / kids under 12 free to the canopy walk. [Note: The justification for admission would be the high ongoing maintenance and running costs].

Risk Assessment

Environmental Considerations, Health and Safety Considerations, Operations and Maintenance.

Embedding Best Practice

Alignment with the new Estuary Way.

Operational Implications

A full Feasibility Study (with designs and costings) is required.

Partnerships

Corporate Sponsorship (including Naming Rights to Canopy Walk) e.g. Aughinish Alumina or Shannon Airport. A new set of etched panels (see below) could be included in the canopy walk and sponsored.

Environmental Considerations

Negligible impact as the base will be based inside the House and surrounding property.

Community Engagement

Potential to create a new Kildysert Rovers (Recreational Club) who can use/run programmes out of the facility + house.



CONCEPT
Cahiracon Farm
Allotments & Co-
Op Shop

Timeframe:

Research: Q1 & Q2/ 2020
 Implementation: Q1/ 2021

Cahiracon in the eyes of the public is first and foremost a school with its own farm and craft related enterprise. An opportunity exists to designate 2 - 3 acres of suitable ground to be sub-divided into 20 allotments for the growing of fruit and veg, at a nominal rent to the local community. An overseeing 'co-operative' will maintain standards and also sell surplus produce to the visiting public along with providing farm fresh produce to the kitchen in the House. Inspiration should be sought from the School Farm (e.g. mean of cultivation, naming of plots and celebrating local people/families who worked on the farm). The allotments also become a walk in visitor space in the whole Cahiracon offering.

Description

Thematic Area

Community engagement and ownership, education, commercial sustainability; retail and related.

Income Generation

Allotment income; Training programmes; Farm Shop sales; Sales to House Cafe; Income from sales of other food related produce including within season a Cahiracon Farmers Market (to be researched further).

Risk Assessment

Generating sufficient interest, conflict with grounds landscaping/ finding a suitable area, constraints due to soil and aspect suitability.

Embedding Best Practice

Many good examples exist nationally and internationally, e.g. the Organic Centre in Rossinver, Leitrim. Also guidance could be sought from Allotments Ireland.

Operational Implications

Recruitment of a suitable Supervisor; Engagement with external partners and coordination of training programmes; Working with the local allotment holders and servicing their needs; financial controls.

Partnerships

Local community, Clare County Council, CLDC Leader and Allotments Ireland (guidance). Potential to partner up with local beekeeper.

Environmental Considerations

Negligible impact, potential for environmental sensitisation by including soil, local wildlife and estuarine information and interpretation. Potential for Organic Certification.

Community Engagement

A concrete means for the local community to have a 'physical stake' in the rebirth of Cahiracon House



CONCEPT Interpretive Etched Glass Panels

Timeframe:

Start date: Q1/ 2020
Implementation: Q2/ 2020



Glass interpretation panels with perspectives looking outwards towards the Estuary illustrating images from key epochs (including a visualisation of a walled garden / arboretum). Placement may include from the water / proposed tree canopy walk viewing the house in all its finery. These panels could bring back to life the spectacular 'history' associated with the House and site on the water all year without complicated, costly and hard to maintain interpretation panels.

Description

Thematic Area

Historical interpretation and visualisation, Education, Recreation and Leisure.

Income Generation

Could be a paid attraction with minimal charge per head, access to gardens, estate, walkways etc.

Risk Assessment

Minimal; these interpretive panels can provide excellent interpretation while minimising adverse legacy issues.

Embedding Best Practice

These panels can also function as a focal point for heritage activities. The structure is simultaneously eye catching and sympathetic to its surroundings.

Operational Implications

Could be operated by business start up with an artistic flair. Employment supported community Group.

Partnerships

Partner with Cruise Training college and CCC.

Environmental Considerations

Negligible impact, potential for environmental sensitisation by including local wildlife and estuarine information.

Community Engagement

Potential to interpret local stories / history associated with the House.



6.3 Financial Issues

Overview

The past decades at Cahiracon are very typical of many stately homes around the country. The House was originally built for prosperous landowning families and as time went on, social changes led to alternative uses needing to be found. Cahiracon was built for the Scott family, subsequently occupied by other landed families and has since transitioned into alternative uses as a base for overseas missions and then a boarding school from around 1960 onwards until its closure in 2002. Since then it has laid empty having gone through various ownership changes but no obvious solution.

The estate has extensive woodlands and the remainders of features such as the stableblock, walled gardens, gatelodge, original estuary walks and boarding school buildings.

Return on Investment

For any private sector commercial operator the cost of purchase of the buildings needs a healthy return from the operation unless it is purchased as a private dwelling. The development of a hotel has also been assessed but the major obstacles to that development are the small number of rooms available upstairs, the adjacent old school buildings taking away from the setting and the direct view of Aughinish Alumina factory on the far side of the estuary.

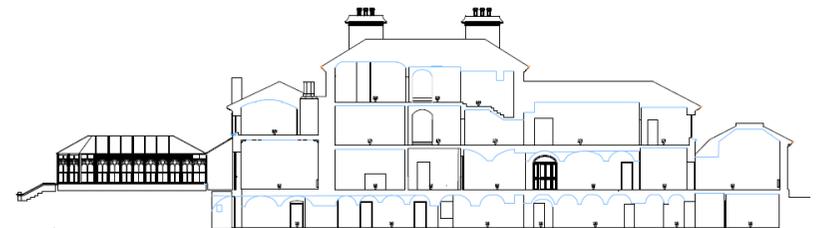
Whilst it is unlikely to find a use that will provide a commercial return significant enough to repay the initial investment over time, what must happen is that any future use for the house must at least cover the operating costs including maintenance of the property. Many uses will be put forward, and have been particularly at public consultations which may have some benefits but ultimately they won't pay for themselves. What is needed is a self - sustaining activity that avoids anyone funding a deficit.

The plan for the Cruise training college is financially robust and will create a surplus but the House equally needs to sustain itself. It may be that the use for the house is fully complimentary to the cruise college but it must also generate enough income. Each of the alternative ideas has had a very broad financial assessment done using order of magnitude figures. The ideas with the most chance of financial success to the site overall are:

1. The advanced Language lab centre;
2. The hospitality training complimentary to the cruise training;
3. The Mindfulness centre.

The research centre does also have a positive financial contribution as does the distillery.

Further work would need done to focus on one particular use. One option is to operate the distillery in the Underground floor which lends itself totally to this type of enterprise. That would also cover a small craft beer micro- brewery which also needs similar infrastructure. This small craft industry would also have an interpretive and visitor experience element to it. The ideal scenario is to identify an individual interested in starting this type of business, possibly linking with an existing franchise or operator and give them support to get started and employ others. There would be other spin offs from this for the local area. The Brand Cahiracon or the Shannon Estuary or similar could be used and promoted. The advantage with this model is that you get self - starter energy into the space which would be entrepreneurial.



The remainder of the house could then be refurbished for one of the other ideas above. Overall the idea of complimentary uses to the Cruise training appear most likely to succeed financially. There would be an element of cost and service sharing rather than each space trying to split all the common facilities. Catering, for example could be a base for both the training college and main House.

Area needed for each of the development concepts

The floor layouts for the Basement, Ground floor and upper floors and associated areas are included in appendix 9.4. We have also included a schedule outlining the proposed rooms needed for each concept and the associated total area required to give an idea of the scale of each potential development. These are indicative to give a general sense of areas needed and are not prescriptive.

Governance

Whatever is decided as the optimum future use, the issue of governance comes into the planning. Any operation or business, however small needs a proper governance structure. A method of decision making, control, oversight and management sufficient to succeed in the tough climate of regulations and responsibilities.

Cahiracon will be no different. Any future use for the house will need to be funded, developed and managed in a professional way. This is the only way to create the economic spin off necessary.

Operational management

The area of operational management is not explored in this feasibility study as that will depend on future ownership of the house and any potential future use under consideration. Obviously, the Council itself will not operate a facility like this and public and private sector partners will be needed to make it work.

Financial feasibility for preferred option

When the options are considered and a particular idea is being focused on the following will be important considerations in terms of its sustainability and financial feasibility:

- ✚ Challenging the market analysis and ensuring that there is demand for this facility;
- ✚ Set the visitor numbers or customers at a prudent level and costs at a realistic level, if not higher than expected. With this approach it is more likely that things will turn out better than expected;
- ✚ Do sensitivity analysis, what would a 10% or 20% reduction in business do to the turnover and results. What would an unexpected rise in cost, on insurance, for instance do to the feasibility;
- ✚ Do projections out to at least 10 years making sure that decisions are made with the longer term in mind;
- ✚ Set Rigid budgets for capital costs and operating costs and stick to them;
- ✚ Ensure that there is at least one financially qualified person on whatever board or committee oversees the implementation of the project;
- ✚ Set out the financial risks and address each risk with some plan of action. You can never plan for the unexpected but at least think through the things that can and do go wrong. Key staff can leave the project, financial backers can pull out etc.

7 General Findings and Recommendations

7.1 Findings

1. No Vision for House or Grounds

The recent development 'history' of the site has influenced the refining of a clear holistic vision for a sustainable future built on the cruise training college concept. This is about to change aided by the Flagship Consulting Report (2018) and this Feasibility Study which has helped identify opportunities, priorities, resources and processes.

2. Multi Partner Goodwill

As the Online Survey results tell us there is considerable community support for reimagining Cahiracon. In addition there is tangible and unreserved agency goodwill towards the evolving project from the likes of Enterprise Ireland, the Heritage Council and Failte Ireland.

3. Capable and Ambitious Project Drivers

Significant problems are associated with this project, from restoration, commercial sustainability to multi-party project scoping and management. Without the practical commitment, sharing of skills and experiences of all those involved to date the ambition of this project at Cahiracon would have been out of reach of Clare County Council. A constant challenge will be keeping this alliance of partners together.

4. Community Engagement & Anticipation

The unique history of the House, grounds and school adjacent to Kildysart has resulted in considerable community engagement on the sites future. This is a valuable social asset to build upon. The strong sense of 'place' bode well for this to continue. The programming and offerings on site much continue to attract local visitation. Likewise the campus should help create and support many new jobs in the immediate area. This healthy symbiosis should become one of the defining characteristics of the whole enterprise.

5. Challenge of House Restoration

As has been repeated throughout this Study the House needs immediate attention to damaging holes in its roof. Once remedied the structure is in a relatively good state of repair. A nationally important building, Cahiracon offers the project a majestic 'centrepiece' unmatched in virtually any other such facility in the world. The House will help define and sell the whole 'offering' into the medium long term.

6. Potential of Grounds & Estuary Access

The story of the Shannon Estuary and the original Cahiracon Gardens / Forest are an important differentiator helping to 'sell' the destination into the future. Both the gardens and estuary are dormant assets, unseen for decades. Their role in helping sustain the whole enterprise should not be underestimated. The public or tourist engagement with Cahiracon could depend largely on what refurbishment work is done with both.

7. Cruise College Commercial Potential Supporting House

This overall project will work best when there is an operational synergy and mutual respect between all distinct aspects of the campus. Failure to engineer this synergy (and maintain it) will seriously undermine the whole venture.

8. Early Phase Funding (EI) for Cruise Training College

Unlike many development scenarios in rural Ireland Cahiracon has the offer of significant funding to see aspects of the early phase work delivered. This support is however only the start. The campus will need immediate follow-on funding to see the House restored, grounds refreshed and additional new facilities built. The on-going challenge will be to establish structures and staff capacity to deliver to the highest possible standards.

9. Poor Access

The main road from Ennis to Kildysart (R473 / 25km) is an unflattering access route. Vistas are disappointing. Road surfaces and camber are uneven. The road is less well travelled than the N68 (Ennis to Kilrush) taking vehicular and bike traffic into West Clare.

10. Underperformance of the Shannon Estuary - Destination Building Required

The maritime stories (commerce, fishing, political and migration) surrounding the Shannon Estuary are awaiting a suitable new destination. Cahiracon could be such an anchor destination. Given its location and considerable natural assets Cahiracon should again turn itself towards the sea. From a recreational, tourism and economic perspective there are considerable opportunities to be harnessed. Opportunities that will sit very comfortably with the roll out of the whole Cahiracon campus.



7.2 Recommendations

1. Generate *Synergy* Between House, Grounds and College

Given the extensive work done to date on the potential cruise training college, the issue of Synergies between the House, estate and training college should be strongly adopted in the plans. There is a real opportunity to utilise the House and grounds in either a leader or support role to the Training College. These ideas and concepts are explored more thoroughly in the future development section.

2. Multidisciplinary & Integrated Options

The concept of multi - use options for the site should also be strongly considered given the Cruise College potential, the estate recreational potential, house main rooms, upstairs and basement. These spaces and facilities could create a combined site usage with greater community and stakeholder potential.

3. Enhanced Council Involvement

Clare County Council have been instrumental in developing the plans for Cahiracon to date and there is an opportunity for them to have an enhanced multi - disciplinary and integrated involvement going forward. There will remain a need for the foreseeable future for the local authority to continue the leadership of the project until a more formal operating structure can takeover professionally.

4. A Partnership Approach

The future of the site depends on a partnership approach and private sector involvement will be essential for future sustainability.

5. Adoption of Key Concepts (Following Scoring Exercise)

The future development section outlines a number of future use ideas. The project steering group discussed and assessed these ideas leading to a better sense of what the optimum outcome will be. The potential of more than one usage combined is a real possibility and should be carefully explored.

6. View the Development as a Multi-Phase Project over the Next Decade

The development should be viewed as a multi - phase development over time with funding needed for each piece of the overall plan.

7. Appreciate this Project is About 'Destination Development'

It is important to emphasise the project being more than the re-development of a house but a destination development that will become a beacon on the Shannon Estuary way.

8. Need for Excellence in Project Leadership

There will be a need for Excellence in Project Leadership when the combined usage is worked out and the project needs momentum to demonstrate positive outcomes to generate confidence amongst stakeholders.

9. Making Cahiracon Financially Sustainable

Financial Sustainability is the overall key to success and no agency can carry a loss maker. Capital costs will have to be carefully budgeted and funding identified, the overall operating income must exceed operating costs.

10. Concrete Linkage with Kildysart and Surrounds

The community are vital to the success of this project. The opportunity of micro enterprise generation is a real one and will create the right tangible support into the future. The more community accessible the project the better from this point of view.

11. Being Mindful of Environmental & Built Heritage Impacts

The built heritage and site conservation are important so as not to lose its authenticity. These should be the backdrop to any plans and developments.

12. A Multi- Agency Approach

Multi agency support is also crucial for the foreseeable future until the operations get enough traction and momentum.



8 Conclusion

Cahiracon House is a unique proposition albeit a proposition that comes with risks and distinct development pathways. There is no conventional 'rule book' to follow, this is a bespoke development scenario. It embraces a rich back story, impressive mature land and seascape, a nationally important house and a set of capable partners now wishing to think big and reimagine a sustainable future. A primary purpose of this Study was to generate new ideas around sustainable future uses for the house given the potential commercial use of the adjacent old school buildings.

The site overall is being quickly reclaimed by nature with the House in particular needing urgent and specialist care. Relatively speaking, a close examination reveals that considerable elements of the House remain in impressively good order.

The response to the Online Survey in particular demonstrates that Cahiracon has few rivals in the county for the affection the community of Kildysart holds for the House. There is an active generation currently who wish to see the site restored to a productive function that facilitates easy access and community engagement. The reality of a refurbished Cahiracon will open up significant opportunities for local employment and business development. This should be actively supported by all key partners.

This Study outlines a number of 'concepts' for the House and grounds. They range in degrees of complexity, resources required and themes, but there is one common denominator namely their combined ability to create a new 'destination' of scale for West Clare and the Shannon Estuary. The Study should be viewed as a menu where everything available satisfies both needs and desires.

The Study identifies three distinct and interconnected aspects required to create a sustainable enterprise at Cahiracon namely:

- ✚ Nothing short of excellence in the design and delivery of the total visitor/student experience;
- ✚ Genuine partnership with all stakeholders and;
- ✚ A total respect of the site, its environment and its history.

Deliver on all of the above to the highest of standards and Cahiracon House is destined to surpass even its own previous high watermarks.

9 Appendices

9.1 Heritage Weekend Event August 22

Program of the day:

Heritage Event	Week	Outline for the Evening
Heritage Week Event – 22 nd August 2019 7.30pm	Kildysart Community Hall	<p>Title: <i>Cahiracon House - Stepping Back to its Future.</i></p> <p>Date and Time: Thursday 22nd of August, 7.30 pm</p> <p>Venue: Community Centre, Kildysart</p> <p>Details: Interactive presentation and community engagement on the future use of Cahiracon House and Grounds.</p> <p>Cost: Free</p> <p>Organisers: Alan Hill Tourism Development Ltd with Clare County Council</p> <p>Contact person: Colm Murphy cmurphy@clarecoco.ie</p> <p>Booking required: No</p> <p>Suitable for Children: Yes</p> <p>Wheelchair access: Yes</p>
		<p>Running Order:</p> <p>Registration: 7:15pm - 7:30pm</p> <p>Welcome and Introduction: John Ruddle & Alan Hill [10mins]</p> <p>Speaker: Dick Cronin - 'The History and Importance of Cahiracon House & Gardens'. [15mins]</p> <p>Speaker: John Tracy (CCC) - 'Cahiracon and its Linkage to the Shannon Estuary' [10mins]</p> <p>Online Survey - Summary Findings - Alan [10mins]</p> <p>Exercise 1 - Gathering The Stories [30mins]. <i>Themes</i> - House; School; Landscape & Environment; Personalities; Drama in Cahiracon; House & Community. John and Alan. [30mins]</p> <p>Exercise 2 - Building a Sustainable Cahiracon House. Identifying and reconfirming the priority actions that lie ahead. John and Alan. [30mins]</p> <p>Plenary Session & Close Out. John & Alan. [15mins]</p> <p>Total Running Time: 2hrs</p>
		<p>Study Objectives from the Event:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✚ Fact Finding: Generate original information / stories / contacts from the community / 'friends' of Cahiracon; ✚ Community Relations: Ensure the community feels they have a significant 'stake' and input into the development of the Study; ✚ Community Relations: Demonstrate through concrete actions the proactive approach being taken by Clare County Council in developing Cahiracon House & the great community of Kildysart; ✚ Enterprise Development: Remaining mindful of creating local micro businesses and employment flowing from a future investment in Cahiracon; ✚ Heritage Considerations: Through building a consensus approach speed up the conservation and restoration of the House and Grounds; ✚ Heritage Council: Create and deliver a timely/engaging event for Heritage Week for the primary funders of the Feasibility Study and; ✚ Professional Presentation: Design and present the event in a manner befitting of Clare County Council.
		<p>Housekeeping:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✚ Photo record of the event with a supporting Press Release with images sent post-event to local media however CCC may like to engage with the local papers/photographer to help generate <u>additional</u> local publicity. ✚ CCC have offered logistical support for the evening including IT assistance. ✚ The Hall will not require a sound system for the evening (Alan & John have been on a site visit to scope the venue). ✚ The community feel there should be attendance between 30-50 on the evening. The event is receiving considerable local publicity

9.2 Results from Heritage Week Event

Note: 95 attendees were signed-in on the night; however attendance was much higher with several people opting not to sign in.

Section 1: The Boards:

House, Buildings & Farm	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✚ Sunday Club (Salesians) – afternoons; included walks to Calvary Hill; 1960's & 1970's; 12 in Club. ✚ Basketball big for two generations; ✚ Orchards near farm; ✚ St Joseph's Dormitory – All Girls; ✚ Book on Cahiracon being produced; ✚ Pitch Pine floors in dining room; ✚ There were annual school class photos taken (where are they now?); ✚ House has to be weatherproofed immediately; ✚ The two most significant memories were the green house and Calvary Hill; ✚ Knitting Factory – employed 8-10 local people; mostly school jumpers; ✚ Knitting machines ... paid low wages; ✚ Co-ed from 1975 (ish) onwards; ✚ Similar to Kylemore Abbey – stone steps; polished floors; wonderful stonework; ✚ Don't forget the Sweet Shop. Note: Called Tuck Shop by another; ✚ Colombans 1920's/Salesians 1962 ... day and boarding together; ✚ Sunny days making hay with the nuns & farm workers; ✚ "I'm rediscovering the House now as an adult and I'm in awe" ✚ Parents Council did the fundraising to pay for the PE Hall; ✚ As a child the whole place looked so big ... today it looks so small; ✚ Boarders slept on top floor; ✚ Regular masses; visiting priests; picking spuds in season; sounds of the tractor; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✚ Education on animals and local wildlife; ✚ Mass was often followed by a tour of the conservatory; ✚ What is the Chain of Ownership of the House from the 18 century / have a timeline panel; ✚ Locals employed on the farm; ✚ Country House with Afternoon Tea (idea); ✚ Sister Esteurina used to wear the full habit even during the summer; ✚ Sister Alice did the gardening and 'ruled' the conservatory; ✚ Taking cuttings with Sister Alice; ✚ Raiding the orchard; ✚ Even as a girl I appreciated the beautiful architecture; ✚ An Oasis of Happiness – green environment leading down to the sea; ✚ Record the stories from family members of those who worked there; ✚ Restore the Glass House; ✚ What I'd give to be able to have lunch with my fellow boarders again in the basement; ✚ The history of the Scotts and the history of the pier; ✚ Boarding School for foreign students; ✚ Restore the gardens and upgrade the walkways; ✚ Smoking in the woods; ✚ Corporal punishment was banned in the school therefore there was a culture of respect leading to a beautiful atmosphere, so unusual as seen through the eyes of a 12yr old girl in 1960's Ireland.

Interaction with the Village

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✚ Kildysart has to interact with all surrounding villages in order to survive; ✚ We all have such affinity with Cahiracon – public access has to be maintained; ✚ All the village kids went to Sunday Club; ✚ Trails (walking / cycling) from village to house/grounds; ✚ Develop the adjacent quarry area for watersports all year round; ✚ What about a dedicated hotel for boutique weddings and upmarket events; ✚ Shannon Estuary Way – develop a link with Labasheeda and Estuary; ✚ Workers cycling to and from work in the house/farm/factory in the morning and evenings; ✚ Do up access to the House by water (the way it used to be); ✚ Have a 'nuns pub' celebrating all the nuns that went through Cahiracon; | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✚ A very 'positive' space held in great respect by the whole community; ✚ Cahiracon could become a place of 'memories' for the schooldays of all pupils that went through school in the Ireland of the 50/60 and 70's; ✚ Sunday Outings to different and interesting places; ✚ Go down to the shore for a picnic, many locals did up to recently; ✚ Treasure hunts in the woods; ✚ Many generations learned to drive going down the drive of the House; ✚ I can remember supplies coming in by boat from Foynes and Limerick; ✚ Importance of the Kildysart GAA Club and the Show Society as partners to work with; ✚ The pub by the pier that could stay open until the last person went home (only one generation back). |
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The School, School days, Classmates and Religious ethos

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✚ Woodland Woods ✚ Choir in the Halls ✚ Retreats ✚ Typing and Shorthand ✚ Big Hall for Talks ✚ Nuns and Prayers in Chapel ✚ Charity Events ✚ Sports Day - comogie ✚ Concerts ✚ Education ✚ Friends and memories ✚ Friendships, Fun, Orchard ✚ Nuns painting the Silver gates ✚ Everything in Pristine Order ✚ Pony Rides and Horse Trails, animals ✚ Boating Sports ✚ Outbuildings, Glass House, Gardens, Gates, Driveway ✚ Corpus Christi Procession – Religion Very important ✚ Cavalry and processions on Holy days ✚ Nuns views and long driveway ✚ School in such a magnificent building ✚ Classrooms overlooking the estuary eased the pain of exams ✚ Salesians brilliant | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✚ Lunchtimes ✚ Memories of looking out classroom window at porpoises ✚ Cahiracon – a great school ✚ Mass and beautiful choirs in church at School in Cahiracon House ✚ School summer camps and Sunday club ✚ Resilience ✚ Morning of my art leaving cert exam – sister Fionula walking students around house pointing out architecture, cornices and history of House ✚ A place to commemorate the history of Cahiracon ✚ Columbans and Salesians ✚ Walking down avenue to School ✚ Evening study ✚ Craic ✚ Graduations and goodbyes ✚ Orchards ✚ Sister Bernadette ✚ Christmas chatting in the Kitchen ✚ Big House ✚ Glorious novitiate ✚ Art and Sister Fionula ✚ Music ✚ Boarders and day pupils |
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The Environment, Forest and Estuary

- ✚ Gardens, Trees, Nature, Walks, Beauty and Tranquillity
- ✚ Family
- ✚ Water Sports
- ✚ Water, Swimming, Boating trips, water activities
- ✚ Walking the Shores
- ✚ Proposed Ferry Route lost out to Killimer
- ✚ Historic books written – Paddy O'Connor
- ✚ Huts made of stone down by shore where we studied for exams
- ✚ Watching the Boats to Aughinish watching out the school window
- ✚ Walk to cliff, picnic areas
- ✚ Mrs Pole's house
- ✚ Mitching in the woods, Fun times
- ✚ Cliff - family days out
- ✚ Proposal to designate Pier a protected structure in 2005 – in Council offices
- ✚ No such place as Inishmurray Quay – it is Cahiracon pier – please correct on signage
- ✚ Preserve the lovely oak trees
- ✚ Orchards
- ✚ The walkway and entry to House
- ✚ Throwing stones in water – getting rid of sins at retreats – hide outs for lovers
- ✚ Graveyard and grotto
- ✚ Retreats
- ✚ Fishing in Estuary, Shell picking
- ✚ Treasure Hunts
- ✚ Preserve the walkways and large old trees
- ✚ Preserve Heritage centre
- ✚ Maritime education training centre
- ✚ Rugby on the Lawn, Soccer on the Tennis Courts
- ✚ Environment
- ✚ Shannon – width walks, trees, sounds. Water, birds, choirs, strike to save a big tree when school was built
- ✚ Wild Flowers
- ✚ Smell of Garden
- ✚ Dog walking
- ✚ Trips up the Estuary
- ✚ Walking trails and information
- ✚ Environmental impact is very important
- ✚ History of the Island
- ✚ Cavalry
- ✚ Waterfall and trails

Section 2: Responses to Concluding Plenary Session:

- + Daniel O'Connell stayed in the house;
- + Reinvent the Sports Hall for local kids;
- + If there is going to be an admission charge make sure local people get in free or at reduced rates;
- + The link between the house, river and the village has to be improved;
- + Leisure facilities would be great but are they sustainable;
- + Are there grants from the EU;
- + Lough Key would be a good commercial model e.g. Zip Wire through trees;
- + Kylemore Abbey could also be a good model;
- + Bring in Outreach 3rd Level education e.g. NIHE in Limerick;
- + Sort house ownership out ASAP;
- + The restoration of the house can become a training ground for 'traditional skills and crafts' to be passed on to the next generation;
- + Heritage Centre and showcase for local artists and craft workers;
- + The special architecture of the house needs to be profiles to help sell the destination;
- + Tell the story of the trees, many 100's of years old;
- + What experience do the consultants have with turning around and making sustainable old heritage houses;
- + Tell the story of the islands and the island way of life (including a visit);
- + The community will be behind any realistic venture in Cahiracon but they need to be kept involved (can't fall into private hands with the community shut out).



Building Cahercon's future

The historical building in Kildysart is still in private ownership but plans are being made for 'nationally significant' work

Owen Ryan

CAHERCON House is still in private ownership, a public meeting on its future heard last Thursday night, but it is expected that will change in the near future.

More than 100 people were at the meeting in Kildysart Community Centre, at which presentations were given by figures working on a feasibility study for future options at the site.

The study is being prepared for Clare County Council and while the council still does not own Cahercon, the meeting was told that negotiations are ongoing and are at a delicate stage.

The attendance at last week's meeting showed the level of interest in the site. Those attending heard that while Kildysart had 386 residents at the most recent census, more than 200 people had made online submissions

on the future of the site, again showing the degree of attachment to Cahercon.

Alan Hill is one of the consultants working on the project. After the meeting, he said he was delighted with the degree of interest in what they are doing and he expressed confidence about the site's future.

"We had a tremendous two-hour discussion with the community with a huge amount of feedback from people that obviously have an emotional stake in the house and the school and in the history. Hopefully, we can turn the promise of Cahercon into something that is not just countywide, but is actually nationally significant over the next few years."

He said he is confident that Cahercon will soon come back under public ownership.

"Yes, I mean, we would have to be, there are people working

behind the scenes, people who want to make it happen. There are people on both sides of the fence, people who actually currently own the grounds and the house and also people in the public sphere who are interested in actually purchasing it, so they're going through the due process now. I would just say, for the community and indeed for the county, to just be patient. Let this happen. We are going through a process."

He said that the fact that more than 200 people replied to an online survey on the future of the site says a lot.

"At the start of the presentation, I gave the preliminary findings from the online survey. It is worth just recording to show the degree of interest in this, the last census in 2016 showed that there were 386 people living in Kildysart and we have had over 200 replies to the online survey. That

says a huge amount to me; whatever the opposite to cynicism is, they've got it here in buckets."

He said he expects the feasibility study to be completed by early October.

Local businessman Michael Michaels said there is huge Kildysart interest in Cahercon.

"It was a very big turnout. Everybody in the parish and surrounding parishes had some memories of Cahercon. They had children going to Cahercon and the history of Cahercon goes back generations up to the time that it closed. It was a sad day when it closed."

Michael said he is very hopeful for the future of Cahercon, even though he feels it could take a long time for progress to be made.

"I'm very optimistic about Cahercon because of the feedback that we get as a community, it is

very, very encouraging. I hope that it will be successful, it's going to be a long process, no doubt about it, it could be more than a couple years. But I'm hoping eventually the community will benefit and tourism will benefit out of it. There's a lot to see in Cahercon, that outside people have never seen and the estuary is an asset also."

He said the grounds can be developed and that the house is "a fine, fine building and it should be restored. It's going to take time to restore it but, in time to come, it should be restored. Hopefully, please God, it will be done."

The community will be very supportive of steps to improve the site, he added.

Former county councillor Oliver Garry was also in attendance and he agreed that there is great local hope that improvements are on the way.

“There's a huge connection here... A lot of people worked in the convent, went to school there and did all their shopping here in Kildysart and that was a huge boost to the area.”

"There is fierce interest, the house has been closed long enough, for the last 20 years. The gates have been locked and people want to get in and view the house again."

The meeting heard that the building is actually in quite good condition, despite being closed for years and he said he hopes improvements aren't far off.

"It needs a lot of repair but I think it is very important that we started, and I think tonight was a start."

Mr Garry added, "There's a huge connection here, because the nuns were always an integral part of the village; they did an awful lot of our work here in the village."

"A lot of people worked in the convent and went to school there, and they did all their shopping here in Kildysart and that was a huge boost to the area. There was also, of course, the

fact that they had their own farm there as well and I think there was about 20 people working there at one stage."

At the meeting, some ideas were floated about the future of the site, from it being a hub for arts and crafts, to a centre for adult learning. Mr Garry feels it can offer a welcome economic tonic not just to Kildysart, but to much of West Clare.

"Any job is important to the area, especially in an area like Kildysart and the surrounding areas like Craney, Coolmeen, Ballynacally, Drumquin, back as far as Kilrush, Labasheeda, Kilmurry McMahon, all those areas. The marine school is bound to bring something but we were talking about the house tonight. The house can bring jobs, tourism jobs, as well as jobs in the renovation of it and there were a lot of ideas put forward there tonight," he concluded.

Back to Cahercon House's future

AN interactive presentation and community engagement on the future use of Cahercon House in Kildysart, looking at now and into the future, will be held as part of Heritage Week.

The presentation will be held in Kildysart Community Centre on Thursday, August 22 between 7.30pm and 9pm.

A heritage report on the development possibilities of Cahercon House, estate and adjoining maritime landscape is expected to be finalised by November.

Alan Hill, Tourism Development Ltd, has been engaged in carrying out a feasibility study for the project, which has been part-funded by The Heritage Council. This funding will assist the preparation of a study to fully understand the heritage context of Cahercon House and its environs to inform of development possibilities, to add value to the

public amenity, enjoyment and viable heritage-based attractions at the site.

Built circa 1770, Cahercon House is one of the most distinctive houses in the county. It was built by the Scott family and has a long history of use as a home and for education. The land surrounding the house is a designed landscape, with spectacular views of the River Fergus and the Shannon Estuary.

The Strategic Integrated Framework Plan (SIFP) for the Shannon Estuary and the Clare County Development Plan 2017-2023 designates the area and lands around Cahercon Pier for marine-related development, due in part to the existing infrastructure of the pier and the deep waters surrounding the area.

According to Brian McCarthy, senior planner, through part-funding from Enterprise

Ireland, Clare County Council is seeking the development of a maritime centre of excellence at Cahercon House.

The first phase of the project is proposed to provide a specialist commercial training facility for maritime courses and value-added training for non-seafaring personnel taking up positions at sea.

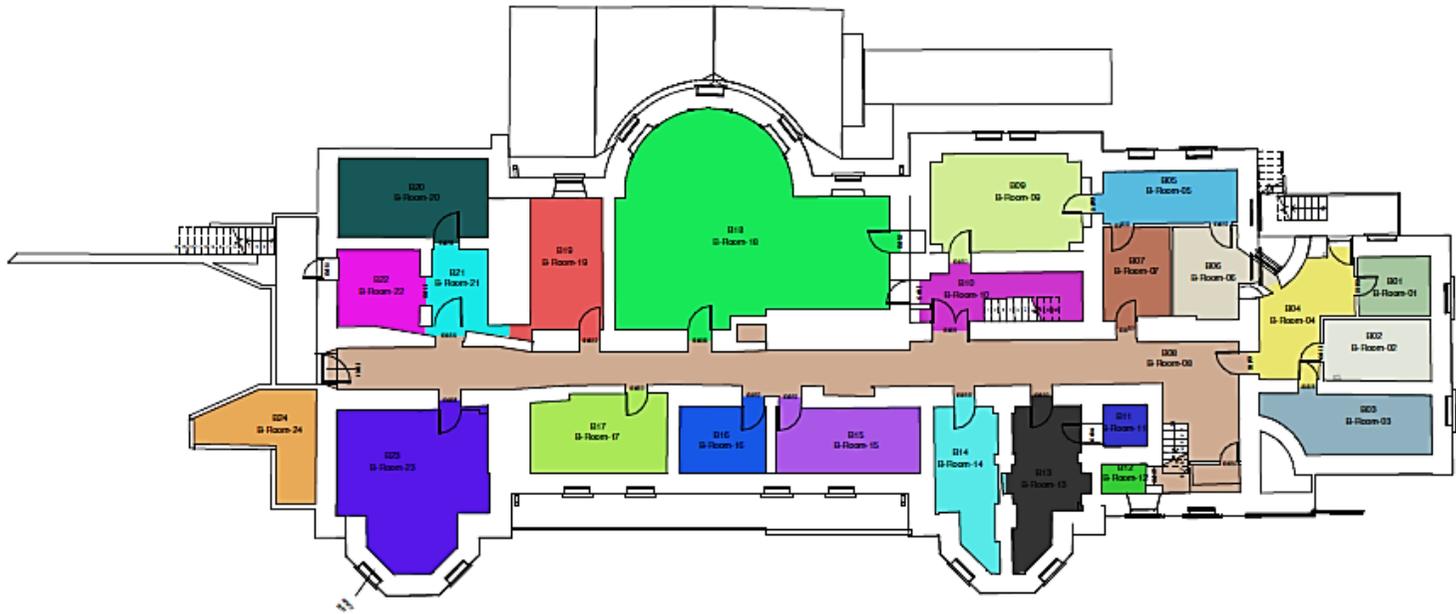
“The linkages and complementarity between the potential maritime opportunities at Cahercon House and the existing pier infrastructure are obvious. Should the requirement for the further development of a slipway at Cahercon Pier be identified, then subject to funding and environmental requirements, such a slipway development would be favourably considered, complementing the vision to create a maritime centre of excellence,” he said.

9.4 Schedule on Concepts, Floor Area Plans and Room Schedule

Concept	Rooms Occupied	Room References	Area (m ²)
Advanced Language Lab.	Ground Floor – main reception rooms and support tutorial rooms	G01 – G15	468
Research Centre	Ground Floor = main reception rooms and support rooms	G01, G02, G03, G04, G05, G08, G10, G11, G12, G14, G13, G15	441
Micro Distillery	Basement all Rooms and common areas	B01 – B24	427
Summer School	Ground Floor main meeting rooms	G01, G02, G13, G15, G10, G11, G12, G14	381
Campus Recreation Hub & Accommodation	Ground Floor and First Floor (for accommodation)	G01 – G21; F01 – F42	977
Hospitality Training	Ground Floor – main reception rooms and some support rooms	G01 – G15	468
Wild Atlantic Fishing story	Ground Floor main reception rooms	G01, G02, G08, G12, G13, G14, G15	384
Mindfulness Centre	Ground Floor	G01 – G15	468

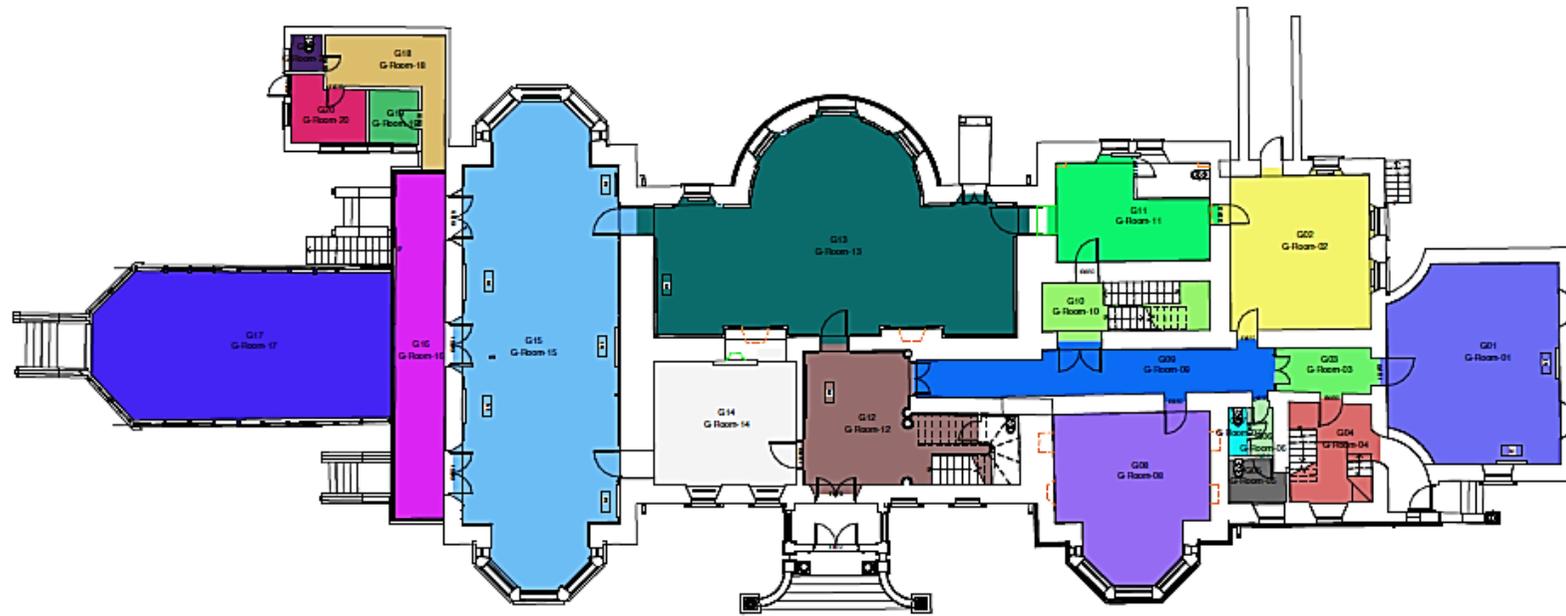
Room Legend

- B-Room-01 7 m²
- B-Room-02 11 m²
- B-Room-03 15 m²
- B-Room-04 13 m²
- B-Room-05 11 m²
- B-Room-06 11 m²
- B-Room-07 10 m²
- B-Room-08 72 m²
- B-Room-09 23 m²
- B-Room-10 12 m²
- B-Room-11 3 m²
- B-Room-12 2 m²
- B-Room-13 14 m²
- B-Room-14 13 m²
- B-Room-15 15 m²
- B-Room-16 9 m²
- B-Room-17 17 m²
- B-Room-18 72 m²
- B-Room-19 15 m²
- B-Room-20 19 m²
- B-Room-21 7 m²
- B-Room-22 10 m²
- B-Room-23 33 m²
- B-Room-24 13 m²



1 01 BASEMENT_KEYPLAN
1 : 100

SKETCH DESIGN			
<small>HEALY PARTNERS ARCHITECTS 1000 UNIVERSITY AVENUE, SUITE 1000 VANCOUVER, BC V6L 2G6 TEL: 604.681.1111 FAX: 604.681.1112 WWW.HEALYPARTNERS.COM</small>			
			
CAHIRACON HOUSE			
Project Name name			
BASEMENT PLAN			
Author	Checker	Approver	
Issue Date	1 : 100		
19-128	SK-B01		



Room Legend

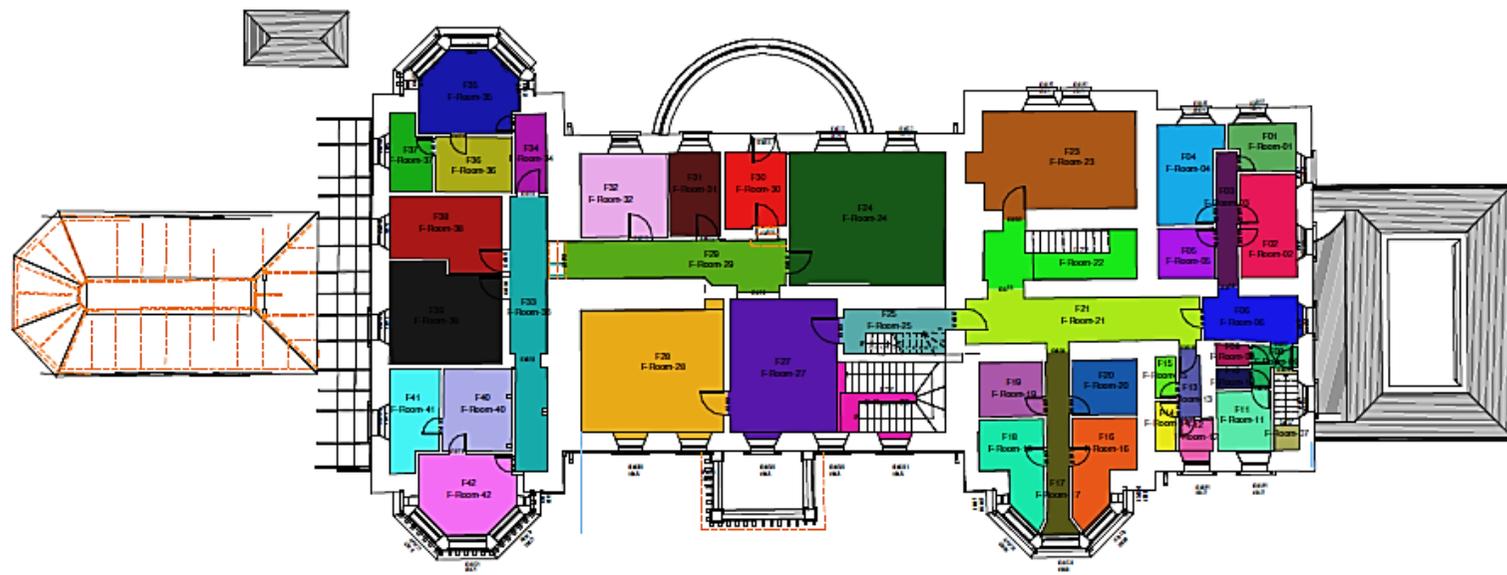
- G-Room-01 52 m²
- G-Room-02 34 m²
- G-Room-03 7 m²
- G-Room-04 13 m²
- G-Room-05 4 m²
- G-Room-06 2 m²
- G-Room-07 1 m²
- G-Room-08 36 m²
- G-Room-09 24 m²
- G-Room-10 13 m²
- G-Room-11 20 m²
- G-Room-12 31 m²
- G-Room-13 95 m²
- G-Room-14 28 m²
- G-Room-15 108 m²
- G-Room-16 27 m²
- G-Room-17 68 m²
- G-Room-18 13 m²
- G-Room-19 4 m²
- G-Room-20 7 m²
- G-Room-21 2 m²

1 GROUND FLOOR PLAN
1 : 100

SKETCH DESIGN			
			
CAHRACON HOUSE			
Project Name name			
GROUND FLOOR PLAN			
Author	Checker	Approver	
Issue Date	1 : 100		
19-128	SK-G01		

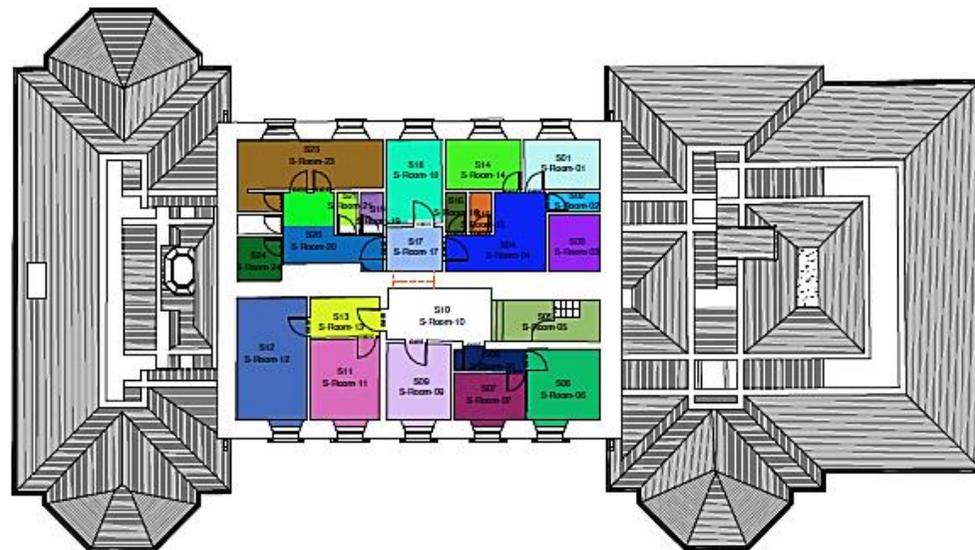
Room Legend

- F-Room-01 5 m²
- F-Room-02 9 m²
- F-Room-03 4 m²
- F-Room-04 9 m²
- F-Room-05 4 m²
- F-Room-06 7 m²
- F-Room-07 3 m²
- F-Room-08 2 m²
- F-Room-09 1 m²
- F-Room-10 1 m²
- F-Room-11 5 m²
- F-Room-12 2 m²
- F-Room-13 2 m²
- F-Room-14 2 m²
- F-Room-15 1 m²
- F-Room-16 8 m²
- F-Room-17 7 m²
- F-Room-18 8 m²
- F-Room-19 6 m²
- F-Room-20 6 m²
- F-Room-21 17 m²
- F-Room-22 12 m²
- F-Room-23 25 m²
- F-Room-24 32 m²
- F-Room-25 7 m²
- F-Room-26 12 m²
- F-Room-27 23 m²
- F-Room-28 28 m²
- F-Room-29 13 m²
- F-Room-30 7 m²
- F-Room-31 7 m²
- F-Room-32 12 m²
- F-Room-33 15 m²
- F-Room-34 4 m²
- F-Room-35 12 m²
- F-Room-36 7 m²
- F-Room-37 5 m²
- F-Room-38 13 m²
- F-Room-39 17 m²
- F-Room-40 9 m²
- F-Room-41 8 m²
- F-Room-42 11 m²



1 FIRST FLOOR PLAN
1:100

SKETCH DESIGN				
 HEALY PARTNERS ARCHITECTS				
CAHIRACON HOUSE				
Project Name name				
FIRST FLOOR				
Author	Checker	Approver		
Issue Date				
1-100				
19-128 SK-F01				



Room Legend

- S-Room-01 6 m²
- S-Room-02 2 m²
- S-Room-03 4 m²
- S-Room-04 7 m²
- S-Room-05 9 m²
- S-Room-06 9 m²
- S-Room-07 8 m²
- S-Room-08 5 m²
- S-Room-09 3 m²
- S-Room-10 8 m²
- S-Room-11 9 m²
- S-Room-12 14 m²
- S-Room-13 5 m²
- S-Room-14 6 m²
- S-Room-15 1 m²
- S-Room-16 1 m²
- S-Room-17 4 m²
- S-Room-18 7 m²
- S-Room-19 1 m²
- S-Room-20 5 m²
- S-Room-21 1 m²
- S-Room-22 2 m²
- S-Room-23 13 m²
- S-Room-24 3 m²

1 SECOND FLOOR PLAN
1 : 100

SKETCH DESIGN			
PROJECT: CAHRACON HOUSE DRAWING NO: SK-S01 DATE: 19-128			
HEALY PARTNERS ARCHITECTS			
CAHRACON HOUSE Project Name name			
SECOND FLOOR PLAN			
Author	Checker	Approver	Date
			1 : 100
Drawing No	Sheet No		
19-128	SK-S01		

Room Schedule

Basement	Number	Area	Ground Floor	Number	Area	First Floor	Number	Area	Second Floor	Number	Area
B-Room-01	B01	7 m ²	G-Room-01	G01	52 m ²	F-Room-01	F01	5 m ²	S-Room-01	S01	6 m ²
B-Room-02	B02	11 m ²	G-Room-02	G02	34 m ²	F-Room-02	F02	9 m ²	S-Room-02	S02	2 m ²
B-Room-03	B03	15 m ²	G-Room-03	G03	7 m ²	F-Room-03	F03	4 m ²	S-Room-03	S03	4 m ²
B-Room-04	B04	13 m ²	G-Room-04	G04	13 m ²	F-Room-04	F04	9 m ²	S-Room-05	S05	7 m ²
B-Room-05	B05	11 m ²	G-Room-05	G05	4 m ²	F-Room-05	F05	4 m ²	S-Room-04	S04	9 m ²
B-Room-06	B06	11 m ²	G-Room-06	G06	2 m ²	F-Room-06	F06	7 m ²	S-Room-10	S10	9 m ²
B-Room-07	B07	10 m ²	G-Room-07	G07	1 m ²	F-Room-07	F07	3 m ²	S-Room-06	S06	8 m ²
B-Room-08	B08	72 m ²	G-Room-08	G08	36 m ²	F-Room-08	F08	2 m ²	S-Room-07	S07	5 m ²
B-Room-09	B09	23 m ²	G-Room-09	G09	24 m ²	F-Room-09	F09	1 m ²	S-Room-08	S08	3 m ²
B-Room-10	B10	12 m ²	G-Room-10	G10	13 m ²	F-Room-10	F10	1 m ²	S-Room-09	S09	8 m ²
B-Room-11	B11	3 m ²	G-Room-11	G11	20 m ²	F-Room-11	F11	5 m ²	S-Room-11	S11	9 m ²
B-Room-12	B12	2 m ²	G-Room-12	G12	31 m ²	F-Room-12	F12	2 m ²	S-Room-12	S12	14 m ²
B-Room-13	B13	14 m ²	G-Room-13	G13	95 m ²	F-Room-13	F13	2 m ²	S-Room-13	S13	5 m ²
B-Room-14	B14	13 m ²	G-Room-14	G14	28 m ²	F-Room-14	F14	2 m ²	S-Room-14	S14	6 m ²
B-Room-15	B15	15 m ²	G-Room-15	G15	108 m ²	F-Room-15	F15	1 m ²	S-Room-15	S15	1 m ²
B-Room-16	B16	9 m ²	G-Room-16	G16	27 m ²	F-Room-16	F16	8 m ²	S-Room-16	S16	1 m ²
B-Room-17	B17	17 m ²	G-Room-17	G17	68 m ²	F-Room-17	F17	7 m ²	S-Room-17	S17	4 m ²
B-Room-18	B18	72 m ²	G-Room-18	G18	13 m ²	F-Room-18	F18	8 m ²	S-Room-18	S18	7 m ²
B-Room-19	B19	15 m ²	G-Room-19	G19	4 m ²	F-Room-19	F19	6 m ²	S-Room-19	S19	1 m ²
B-Room-20	B20	19 m ²	G-Room-20	G20	7 m ²	F-Room-20	F20	6 m ²	S-Room-20	S20	5 m ²
B-Room-21	B21	7 m ²	G-Room-21	G21	2 m ²	F-Room-21	F21	17 m ²	S-Room-21	S21	1 m ²
B-Room-22	B22	10 m ²				F-Room-22	F22	12 m ²	S-Room-22	S22	2 m ²
B-Room-23	B23	33 m ²				F-Room-23	F23	25 m ²	S-Room-23	S23	13 m ²
B-Room-24	B24	13 m ²				F-Room-24	F24	32 m ²	S-Room-24	S24	3 m ²
						F-Room-25	F25	7 m ²			
						F-Room-26	F26	12 m ²			
						F-Room-27	F27	23 m ²			
						F-Room-28	F28	28 m ²			
						F-Room-29	F29	13 m ²			
						F-Room-30	F30	7 m ²			
						F-Room-31	F31	7 m ²			
						F-Room-32	F32	12 m ²			
						F-Room-33	F33	15 m ²			
						F-Room-34	F34	4 m ²			
						F-Room-35	F35	12 m ²			
						F-Room-36	F36	7 m ²			
						F-Room-37	F37	5 m ²			
						F-Room-38	F38	13 m ²			
						F-Room-39	F39	17 m ²			
						F-Room-40	F40	9 m ²			
						F-Room-41	F41	8 m ²			
						F-Room-42	F42	11 m ²			

Grand Total of Rooms: 111

