

ROSSMORE MEMORIAL FOUNTAIN THE DIAMOND - MONAGHAN

Project Background



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1 INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE OF THIS DOCUMENT

Monaghan County Council ("the Contracting Authority") intends to procure a works contractor for remedial conservation works to the Rossmore Memorial Fountain, a protected structure and high-status Victorian Gothic Revival monument (1875–76, Robinson & Son of Belfast) located in The Diamond, Monaghan. The scope of works derives from the Condition Survey (Carrig Conservation International, January 2026), informed by the Historic Research Report (Carrig Conservation International, August 2026).

This document provides background information on the monument and the proposed works, including the Outline Conservation Method Statement (Section 5) and the Schedule of Works by Priority (Section 6). It is issued for information purposes only and does not form part of the Contract.

2 2. DESCRIPTION OF THE MONUMENT AND THE WORKS

2.1 THE MONUMENT

The Rossmore Memorial Fountain is a freestanding, openwork memorial fountain in the High Victorian Gothic Revival style, erected 1875–76 to commemorate Henry Robert Westenra, 4th Baron Rossmore, who died at Windsor in 1874 aged 23. It was funded by public subscription (c. £1,000), managed by a committee of the Monaghan Town Commissioners, and formally unveiled on 5 October 1877 by Prince Arthur, Duke of Connaught. It is the architectural centrepiece of The Diamond, Monaghan's central public square, occupying the site of the town's 17th-century market cross (relocated to Old Cross Square).

The monument was designed and built by Robinson & Son of Belfast, marble and stone cutters and monumental masons, selected from 36 submitted designs. Recent archival research by Carrig (2026), drawing on contemporary newspaper accounts and the Robinson & Son records held at PRONI, has established that the attribution of the design to the English architect E.J. Tarver — repeated in modern secondary sources following Mulligan's *The Buildings of Ireland: South Ulster* (2013) — is erroneous; Tarver designed only the related Rossmore Mausoleum. Tenderers should rely on the description in these documents.

The structure rises from a stepped octagonal plinth (originally of three steps, now two) through a radial colonnade of eight polished columns with individually carved foliate capitals — contemporary accounts record strawberry, cowslip, narcissus, rose, lily, fern, geranium, columbine, currant and passionflower — an arcade and vaulted interior containing the fountain assembly with its polished red granite column and former lions'-head spouts, an inscribed shield course spelling R-O-S-S-M-O-R-E, an upper arcade bearing the Rossmore arms, crest, motto and dedication inscriptions (now largely illegible), to a domed superstructure, upper colonnade and terminal spire. A sea-horse weathervane, ornamental railings and four lamp standards recorded in early photographs have been lost or removed.

2.2 MATERIALS AND STONE PROVENANCE

The archival research clarifies the stone types, which tenderers should note (final identification to be confirmed by petrographic analysis where required under the works):

- Steps, polished columns and fountain basin: Newry granodiorite from Robinson & Son's quarry at Goraghtwood, near Newry (described in contemporary sources as 'granite'; an extremely hard, durable stone) — consistent with the good condition of these elements today.
- Central fountain column: Peterhead red granite (Aberdeenshire, Scotland), polished.
- General superstructure masonry: 'white Glasgow stone' — a Scottish freestone (sandstone), forming the arches, vault, courses and carved work.
- Shields, sculptured panels and small upper columns: 'blue Cumberland stone' — contemporary accounts identify this softer stone in precisely the elements that have deteriorated most, notably the heraldic plaques.
- Copper: pinnacle elements and former spout details. A later stainless steel structural tie secures the spire.

The correlation between the documented stone types and the observed decay pattern is directly relevant to the works: the severely decayed heraldic plaques and vault elements are cut from the softer freestones, while the granodiorite and granite elements remain sound.

2.3 RELEVANT HISTORIC INTERVENTIONS

Documented interventions that bear on the design and execution of the works include:

- 1904–05: repairs and washing by contractor Henry McGough, including probable application of a proprietary 'stone preserving solution' recommended by W.F. Barry's 1905 condition report. This documented treatment is the likely origin of the suspected surface coating observed on the heraldic plaques in the 2026 Condition Survey, and its investigation forms part of the works.
- 1905: removal of carved shields from the second tier for public safety — an early precedent for the present overhead-risk concerns at the vault soffit.
- 1904: reconnection of the fountain to the town water supply; the fountain is now redundant and concealed pipework remains within the fabric.
- 1950: removal of the perimeter railings; 20th-century losses include the weathervane, gas/electric lamp standards and one plinth step.
- 1985, 2006 and 2008: grant-aided repair and public-realm works, records of which are incomplete.

2.4 CONDITION SUMMARY

A comprehensive condition survey (Carrig Conservation International, January 2026, to I.S. EN 16096:2012 methodology) found the monument to be coherent and largely stable overall, but with localised areas of severe, active deterioration driven by moisture retention and restricted drying. The principal findings, in order of urgency, are:

- Internal stone vault soffit – very poor condition; severe spalling, delamination, open cracking and risk of falling stone over an accessible public interior. High priority: immediate investigation and stabilisation, including inspection by a conservation-accredited structural engineer.
- Heraldic plaques (upper arcade) – near-total loss of carved detail (est. 90%), active delamination and void formation. High priority: specialist recording, consolidation and stabilisation.
- Lower internal pillar capitals – significant erosion of sheltered internal faces of the carved foliate capitals; persistent saturation. Medium–high priority: recording, controlled cleaning, environmental/moisture management, specialist consolidation trials.
- Pillar bases and plinth interface – saturation, joint failure and incompatible cementitious repairs. Medium priority: drainage improvement, removal of defective repairs, lime-based repointing.
- Outer arches, upper body, lettered shields, pinnacle, fountain assembly – generally good to very good condition. Low–medium priority: conservative cleaning, hand removal of vegetation, localised lime repointing, re-fixing of displaced bosses, water-shedding improvements, making safe of redundant pipework, and planned maintenance.

2.5 NATURE OF THE WORKS AND CONSERVATION APPROACH

The works are specialist conservation works to a protected structure in a live town-centre public space. No wholesale reconstruction is proposed. All works are to be executed in accordance with established conservation principles: minimal intervention; retention and stabilisation of historic fabric rather than replacement or conjectural restoration; use of compatible, vapour-permeable, lime-based materials; reversibility where achievable; no impermeable coatings, sealants or resin systems; trial areas prior to cleaning or consolidation; and full photographic and drawn recording before, during and after intervention. Works will be executed under the direction of the Council's conservation consultant, in accordance with the Outline Conservation Method Statement at Section 5 and the Schedule of Works by Priority at Section 6.

3 OUTLINE CONSERVATION METHOD STATEMENT

3.1 STATUS AND PURPOSE

This Outline Conservation Method Statement has been prepared by Carrig Conservation International on behalf of the Contracting Authority. It defines the conservation approach, sequence and standards of workmanship to which the works must be executed. It forms part of the works requirements issued with the tender documents, and the appointed Contractor will be required to develop detailed, task-specific method statements against it for approval by the conservation consultant before commencing each element of the works. It is issued for information and defines the standard of workmanship required.

3.2 CONSERVATION PRINCIPLES AND STANDARDS

- All works to comply with the conservation principles of minimal intervention, honesty of repair, reversibility where achievable, and maximum retention of historic fabric, consistent with ICOMOS charters and the Department's Architectural Heritage Protection Guidelines for Planning Authorities.
- No conjectural restoration or re-carving of lost detail (capitals, heraldic plaques). Intervention is limited to stabilisation and protection of surviving fabric.
- No impermeable coatings, sealants, water repellents or resin-based systems anywhere on the monument.
- All mortars to be lime-based and compatible in permeability, strength, colour and texture with the adjacent historic material, confirmed by mortar analysis where directed.
- All new fixings to be stainless steel or non-ferrous, set in lime-based grout, concealed and reversible, subject to structural engineer approval.
- All cleaning, consolidation and repair techniques to be proven by approved trial areas in inconspicuous locations before general application.
- Statutory consents relating to the protected structure status of the monument to be in place prior to commencement; works to comply with all conditions attaching. The monument is a protected structure only and is not a Recorded Monument; no consent from the National Monuments Service is required.

3.3 SITE ESTABLISHMENT, PROTECTION AND PUBLIC SAFETY

- The monument stands in a live public square. The Contractor (as PSCS) shall provide a fully boarded, netted and weather-protected scaffold with controlled access, hoarding/pedestrian barriers, signage and lighting, maintaining safe public circulation around the works at all times.
- Overhead protection to the vaulted interior shall be established as the first site activity, before any other works, given the identified risk of falling stone.
- Protection of the polished granodiorite and granite elements (plinth, columns, basin) from scaffold impact, staining and mortar splash throughout the works.
- No fixings into historic fabric for temporary works without the prior approval of the conservation consultant.

3.4 RECORDING AND INVESTIGATION

- Full photographic (and where directed, photogrammetric/drawn) recording of the monument before, during and after the works, with particular attention to each individually carved capital and the heraldic plaques.
- Investigation of moisture ingress pathways from the superstructure to the vault soffit; inspection of joints, dome and concealed interfaces; minimal and fully justified opening-up only.
- Inspection of the vault soffit slabs by a conservation-accredited structural engineer to assess residual capacity and direct stabilisation measures.

- Analysis of the suspected historic surface treatment on the heraldic plaques (documented 'stone preserving solution', 1905) to establish its composition and its role in moisture entrapment, informing any trial reduction or removal under specialist direction.
- Petrographic confirmation of stone types where required for repair matching (Newry granodiorite, Peterhead granite, Glasgow freestone, 'Cumberland' stone), and mortar analysis of historic bedding and pointing.

3.5 SEQUENCE OF WORKS

The works shall generally proceed in the following sequence, corresponding to the priorities in Section 6: (1) site establishment, public protection and interim overhead protection; (2) recording, investigation and trials; (3) Priority 1 stabilisation works to the vault soffit and heraldic plaques, including moisture-ingress repairs above; (4) Priority 2 works to the capitals, column bases, drainage and joint repairs; (5) Priority 3 planned conservation works, cleaning and water-shedding improvements; (6) demobilisation, final recording and handover with a maintenance plan.

3.6 WORKMANSHIP

- Cleaning: soft-bristle brushing and low-pressure water misting or approved equivalent only; no abrasive or aggressive chemical methods; trials first; cleaning to reduce moisture retention and biological growth, not to achieve uniform appearance; historic patina to be retained.
- Repointing: careful raking-out by hand of defective and cementitious joints without damage to arrises; repointing in approved lime mortar; joints to function sacrificially and facilitate evaporation.
- Consolidation: breathable mineral-based consolidants (e.g. silicate-based) applied only after successful trials, by or under the direct supervision of an accredited stone conservator.
- Plastic repair: minimal, discreet, lime/mineral-based repairs strictly limited to stabilising vulnerable edges, voids and water-traps; profiled to support existing forms without recreating lost ornament; toned to read quietly against adjacent stone.
- Structural repairs: pinning/dowelling of cracked vault slabs only where structurally justified and approved; removal of loose fragments by hand under controlled conditions, retaining fragments for record or reinstatement; replacement of stone only as a last resort, matched in geology, bedding and profile.
- Drainage and moisture management: subtle, reversible improvements to falls, joints and water-shedding details (including consideration of discreet lead or stone details at the arch-gable junctions), without visual alteration of the historic profiles; redundant fountain pipework to be capped, drained and made safe without disturbance of fabric.

3.7 SUPERVISION, QUALITY CONTROL AND HANDOVER

- All works to proceed under the direction of the conservation consultant, with hold points at: completion of trials; before consolidation or plastic repair of carved work; before any pinning or stone replacement; and before removal of any historic material from site.
- A site diary, progress photography, and records of all mortars, consolidants and repairs (locations, mixes, products, batch data) to be maintained and handed over at completion.
- On completion: final condition record, as-executed drawings/schedules, and a 10-year cyclical inspection and maintenance plan for adoption by the Council.

4 SCHEDULE OF WORKS BY PRIORITY

The schedule below summarises the works by priority, derived from the Condition Survey (January 2026). It is indicative; the priced schedule of works and specification are issued with the tender documents. Priorities 1–3 are expected to be executed under a single contract and scaffold mobilisation, sequenced as Section 5.5.

4.1 PRIORITY 1 – IMMEDIATE / HIGH (SAFETY-CRITICAL STABILISATION)

Element	Works
Whole monument (interim)	Site establishment; public protection; interim overhead protection to the vaulted interior as first activity; access restriction pending stabilisation.
Vault soffit (internal stone ceiling)	Structural engineer inspection; slab-by-slab recording; controlled removal of loose fragments by hand (fragments retained); consolidation trials and localised consolidation; pinning/dowelling of cracked slabs where approved; identification and repair of moisture-ingress pathways above (raking-out and lime repointing of joints over the vault); stone replacement only as last resort, matched in geology, bedding and Y-profile.
Heraldic plaques (upper arcade)	High-resolution recording; specialist assessment (distinct stone type – ‘blue Cumberland stone’; suspected 1905 surface treatment); analysis of historic coating; removal of imminently unstable fragments; consolidation trials and localised consolidation; discreet infill of voids/water-traps only; water-shedding improvements above plaque level. No re-carving.

4.2 PRIORITY 2 – MEDIUM-HIGH / MEDIUM (SHORT- TO MEDIUM-TERM)

Element	Works
Lower internal capitals	Recording of each individually carved capital; controlled low-impact cleaning (soft brush, low-pressure misting); measures to improve drying potential at internal faces; specialist assessment of friable areas; consolidation trials and localised consolidation; minimal edge-protection plastic repairs only. No re-carving or replication of lost foliate detail.
Column bases, plinth interface and drainage	Investigation of ground levels, falls and water pathways; subtle reversible drainage improvements; hand removal of failed cementitious patch repairs; lime repointing of open/defective joints; monitoring of base cracking; discreet lime/mineral repairs to localised losses only; retention of sound sympathetic earlier repairs.

4.3 PRIORITY 3 – LOW-MEDIUM / LOW (PLANNED CONSERVATION AND MAINTENANCE)

Element	Works
Outer arches and gables	Conservative cleaning; hand removal of vegetation with full root extraction; localised lime repointing; re-fixing of displaced hemispherical bosses in lime bedding; limited plastic repair of boss detail only where evidence exists; investigation and discreet improvement of water-shedding at gable junctions.
Upper body, lettered shields and string course	Gentle cleaning to reduce algae/lichen; localised lime repointing of open joints; retain sound applied facing repairs to shields (subject to future material analysis); record

	mechanically keyed historic repair locations; no coatings or sealants.
Central fountain assembly	Protect granite column (no intervention); record and discreetly make good the missing spout location; trial cleaning of basin staining (retain use-patina; no aggressive removal of pink staining); record, cap and make safe redundant pipework in a reversible manner, retaining the potential for future reinstatement of a working water supply to the fountain.
Pinnacle and upper colonnade	Light conservative cleaning where visually intrusive; inspection of earlier repairs and of the stainless steel tie (no alteration); include in cyclical inspection regime.
Plinth and paving	Routine cleaning avoiding damage to joints; minor maintenance; monitoring.
Whole monument (completion)	Final recording; as-executed records; 10-year cyclical inspection and maintenance plan for adoption by the Council.

5 APPENDIX A – CONDITION SURVEY SUMMARY (CARRIG, JANUARY 2026)

Element	Key issues	Urgency
Internal stone ceiling / vault soffit	Severe spalling, delamination, open cracking, brittle stone, active moisture ingress, risk of falling material	High – immediate intervention
Heraldic plaques (upper arcade)	Near-total loss of carved detail, advanced delamination, void formation, active decay; softer 'Cumberland' stone with suspected 1905 surface treatment	High – immediate intervention
Lower internal capitals	Extensive loss of detail to sheltered faces, saturation, biological growth, restricted drying	Medium-High
Plinth and lower column bases	Saturation at interfaces, grout loss, minor cracking, incompatible past repairs	Medium
Outer stone arches	Biological growth, staining, displaced/degraded bosses, runoff staining	Low-Medium
Upper body (courses & lettered shields)	Algae/lichen, staining, localised joint loss, historic repairs of uncertain composition	Low-Medium
Upper arcade piers, hood mouldings, finials, crockets	Surface soiling, minor cracking, biological growth	Low-Medium
Central fountain assembly	Loss of decorative spout, historic staining, redundant pipework	Low
Pinnacle & upper colonnade	Moderate staining, evidence of historic repairs	Low

6 APPENDIX B – HISTORICAL TIMELINE (CARRIG HISTORIC RESEARCH REPORT, AUGUST 2026)

Date	Event
1874	Death of Henry Robert Westenra, 4th Baron Rossmore, at Windsor, aged 23. Memorial committee formed by the Town Commissioners; public subscription raises c. £857 by November. Robinson & Son (Belfast) selected from 36 submitted designs; design approved by Lady Rossmore.
1875	Deed of agreement with Robinson & Son (May). Stone shortage in Glasgow delays commencement to August. Stone from Robinson's Goraghwood quarry (Newry granodiorite) and Peterhead granite polished and carved at their York Street, Belfast works.
1876	Construction completed (April); handover to the committee (May) with 12-month contractor maintenance. Additional public fundraising provides two further lamps and a gilded sea-horse weathervane.
1877	Official unveiling on 5 October by Prince Arthur, Duke of Connaught; ownership transferred to the Town Commissioners. Guard chains/ornamental railing added by Lord Rossmore. Early reports of damage and broken lamps.
1880–1885	Frost damage to fountain supply pipe (1880); vandalism of small ornaments (1885).
1904–05	Town waterworks reconnect fountain supply. Repairs by contractor Henry McGough; W.F. Barry's condition report notes 'rotten' stone and obliterated inscriptions, recommends a 'stone preserving solution' (probable origin of the surface treatment suspected on the heraldic plaques) and removal of second-tier carvings for public safety, which is carried out.
1938–1954	Weathervane in danger of falling (1938); reported 'long down' by 1954.
1950	Perimeter railings removed to accommodate traffic; monument itself retained following public opposition to relocation proposals (1949).
1985–2008	Grant-aided repairs (1985: £10,000; 2006: £12,000 conservation grant shared with Dawson Monument; 2008: £80,000 Diamond refurbishment enlarging the space around the monument).
2026	Carrig Conservation International: Condition Survey (January) and Historic Research Report (August), correcting the design attribution to Robinson & Son and establishing stone provenance.

