

St Brigid's Well, Rathcoole

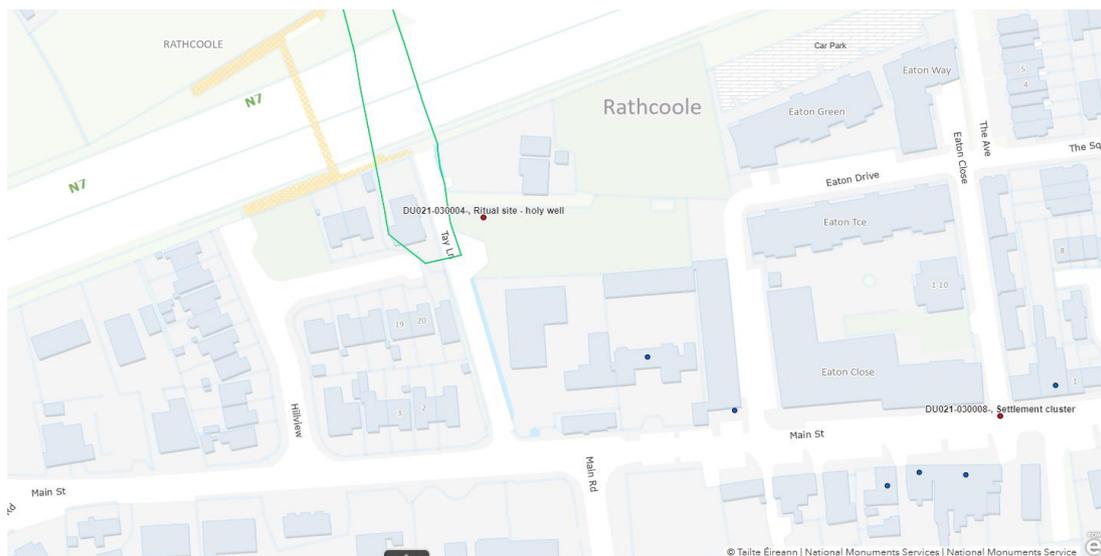
Report to Clondalkin, Newcastle, Rathcoole, Saggart and Brittas Area Committee Meeting

18th March 2026

Context

St Brigid's Well, Rathcoole, is a recorded monument (DU021-030004 Ritual Site - Holy Well) and is protected under the National Monuments Act 1994 as amended. Any works proposed to the Holy Well or its vicinity would be subject to license.

The National Monuments Service (NMS) data mapping site presents the location of the well as being within private property along Tay Lane, Rathcoole.



The NMS record provides the following description of the monument:

“Described by Ó Danachair (1958, 82) as following; “The water is piped from the well into a little basin on the roadside, below road level; a flight of steps leads down to the basin”.

A niche holds a small statue of the saint and a board has the painted inscription, "St. Brigid pray for us." Still visited. Prayers said and water drunk. Small religious objects left as offerings'.

Holy well visited and photographed by Henry Wheeler in 1978 and described as following; 'Now in a cul-de-sac between N side of Rathcoole and Naas Road. Piped into a basin (nearly dry and rather neglected). Flight of stone steps leads down to the basin. Basin looks like a stone mortar. Notice board (St. Brigid pray for us) mentioned by Ó Danachair in 1958 has gone. Niche with statue of saint is obscured by plants. No sign of offerings now' (OPW field report 28/08/1978). According to a local information St. Brigid drank from the well on her

way to Kildare. The holy well has been since filled in by the Local Authority and today there are no visible surface remains but the house opposite the well is named after St Brigid.”

Photographs, labelled St. Bridgid’s Well, Rathcoole, as sourced from the Photographic Collection of the National Folklore Collection, UCD, place the publicly accessible site of veneration at the edge of the private property, along the roadside edge. This appears to support the NMS description which indicates that water was piped from the well to the roadside veneration site. There is currently no visible presentation of the roadside veneration site at this location.





Planning process summary

As part of the development management process for the property on Tay Lane as previously reported to this ACM, planning Condition (no. 3) was applied to the granted development in relation to the holy well site (Planning Ref: SD22A/O342). This condition required the preparation of a Conservation Management Plan for the well, to be agreed by the Planning Authority and the National Monuments Service.

Over several stages in the planning compliance process, the Planning Authority liaised with National Monuments Service and engaged with the applicant in relation to the delivery of an agreed Conservation Management Plan as required under Condition no 3.

Archaeological trench investigations were undertaken, but no indications of the well's location were found. It is possible that the original well site was demolished at some point in the latter half of the 20th century. It is also possible that it survives underground at a location outside of the test trench locations.

Archaeological monitoring was recommended to oversee all future ground clearance works on the site. Should evidence of the well be found during the monitoring process the well is to be cordoned off and stabilised for preservation in-situ, with a revised Conservation Plan to be resubmitted.

Further Investigation Required

To assist in the safeguarding of the cultural heritage importance of St. Brigid's holy well into the future, it is suggested that the following issues need to be investigated further:

Establishing the precise location of the well within the property (as mapped by National Monuments Service) is important to understanding how this original source of water related to the veneration site at the roadside on Tay Lane. It is suggested from the NMS site description that water was piped from this well source to the roadside veneration site.

Evidence for the well's original location may emerge during the archaeological monitoring process, at which time options for its appropriate presentation within the agreed granted development can be developed and submitted for agreement to the Planning Authority and the National Monuments Service in a revised Conservation Management Plan.

Ideally, a sensitively designed surface presentation of the well would be proposed and agreed with National Monuments Service, located within an open space location that would be designed in a manner appropriate to the well's cultural heritage value. The redefined well site would be accessible in the open space for peaceful contemplation. This option would be subject to its positioning within the granted design for the overall development.

Next Steps

The Planning Authority through the Heritage and Biodiversity office will continue to liaise with the applicant and the National Monuments Service in relation to progressing options for the future presentation of St. Brigid's Well, Rathcoole.

As the process of complying with required planning conditions proceeds, and when full archaeological monitoring is underway, a better understanding of the issues as listed above is likely to emerge.

Until such stage, it would not be possible to put an estimate on the costs. It should be further noted that the 2026 Heritage Budget has already been finalised for the year with a number of projects already identified and agreed.

Notwithstanding this, as the safeguarding of the well is a requirement under the granted planning approval Planning Ref: SD22A/0342, costs would be borne by the applicant/developer of the lands.

St Brigid's Well is an important cultural heritage feature in Rathcoole and its surrounding areas. Local knowledge and community recollections can offer important insights to this feature, and contributions from the local community who value this site would be welcomed in the decision-making process for the safeguarding of this historical heritage feature.