

Amber Domestic Abuse CLG



Public Interest Report in Support of a Bat Derogation Licence Application

**Proposed 10-Unit Domestic Violence Refuge and Support Service,
Carlow**

August 2026

Amber Domestic Abuse CLG (trading as Amber) provides compassionate and non-judgmental support to all women, with or without children, living in Kilkenny and Carlow who are or have in the past experienced any form of domestic violence and abuse. We are a specialist domestic abuse organisation, delivering support services to women both at the refuge and in the community.

Our Mission

Amber is a specialist Domestic Violence and Abuse (DVA) organisation whose mission is

- ♀ To empower all women and their children to live abuse-free lives
- ♀ To provide safe, supportive, client-centred inclusive services to address the impacts of DVA through refuge and community responses

Our Vision

Amber's vision is of a society where domestic abuse is recognised as a serious crime and which recognises the consequences of domestic abuse for those affected; a society where the root causes of domestic abuse i.e. the unequal power relations between men and women, are addressed and which holds the perpetrators responsible for the crime, while supporting men who want to change; a society where families are nurtured, where women and children are living in an inclusive and safe society, and where unequal power relations between men and women are eliminated.

Our Values

Amber will continue to grow and develop the organisation and provide services based on need and are guided by the following values:

Empowerment is about self-determination and choice. It involves encouraging people's confidence and strength.

Respect is about upholding the dignity of each person and understanding where they are coming from. It involves acknowledging people's strengths and needs, without judgement.

Diversity and Inclusion is about responding to difference in a manner that ensures accessibility across people's diverse identities, situations and experiences.

Social Justice is about achieving equality and the right to live a life free from abuse and violence.

Our Strategic Goals 2025-2029:

- Provision of Specialist Services
- Raising Awareness of Amber and the Issue of DVA
- Expansion of Amber's Services to Carlow
- Strengthening the Capacity of Amber as a Specialist DVA Organisation

Amber provides the following services:

- 24/7 confidential Helpline offering non-judgmental support and information
- 24/7 short term emergency refuge accommodation and support
- Community-based outreach supports
 - Information, advocacy and support
 - Pre and post court support and accompaniment service
 - Group support programmes for women who are or have experienced domestic abuse
 - Specialist training for professional service personnel and community groups
- Child and Parenting support
 - Support for Mothers
 - One to one and group support for children
 - Start Safe programme for secondary schools and youth groups
- Crisis Counselling
- Amber's One Million Stars Ireland project
- Awareness raising and community engagement programmes
 - Specialist training for businesses and organisations
 - Fundraising

Purpose of the Development

Amber is developing a purpose-built 10-unit refuge with integrated support services in County Carlow to address a critical shortage of emergency accommodation and specialist domestic abuse services in the South-East.

The development has been approved under the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage's Capital Assistance Scheme (CAS), Stage 2, following extensive assessment by Government and statutory agencies. The project is recognised as meeting a significant national and regional need.

The Need for the Project

Domestic abuse remains one of Ireland's most significant public safety, public health and human rights issues.

Victim-survivors of domestic abuse frequently require immediate access to safe accommodation to escape life-threatening situations. Without refuge accommodation many women and children remain trapped in abusive homes or must relocate significant distances away from family, schools, employment and support networks.

Carlow currently has no dedicated refuge accommodation despite an identified need for specialist emergency accommodation.

The proposed refuge will:

- Provide safe emergency accommodation for women and children fleeing domestic abuse.
- Deliver specialist trauma-informed support services.
- Reduce homelessness arising from domestic abuse.
- Improve child safety and wellbeing.
- Support recovery and long-term independence.
- Reduce pressure on An Garda Síochána, hospitals, emergency departments, Tusla and local authority homeless services.

Carlow's Needs

A national needs assessment conducted by Tusla in 2018 indicated that based on Carlow's population, 6 refuge units per 10,000 population were needed. Based on the county's population, this suggests a total need for 36 refuge spaces.

However, the needs in Carlow are wider than just refuge spaces. Some highlights from the Census are as follows:

- Total population of 61,968, representing growth of 9%, higher than national average of 8%.
- 31,146 are female and 12,312 are children aged 15 years or younger. Approximately 1 in 4 women in Ireland experience domestic or sexual abuse from a partner or non-partner and 1 in 3 experience psychological violence from a partner at some point. Applied to Carlow, this means that potentially c.5,900-7,800 women aged 18 years and over need support of some kind or other over their life time (e.g. helpline, information and advice, advocacy, safety planning, court accompaniment, etc.).
- Average age of the Carlow population is 38.8 years, up from 36.9 in 2016 and in line with national trends towards an older population.
- People with dual Irish citizenship rose by over 50% to 1,491, representing 11% of Carlow's population, below the national average of 12%.
- Around 4,337 are separated/divorced, 7% of the population, which is higher than the national average of 6%.
- 573 people identify as Travellers, up by 12%.

Currently, Carlow has no refuge, and the 2018 needs analysis also highlighted a number of other needs in Carlow, including:

- Counselling for victims of sexual violence (waiting lists and unsustainable use of volunteer counsellors in existing services).
- Domestic violence services limited to court accompaniment.

- Limited access to aftercare/follow-up for victims /survivors of domestic violence.
- Transport issues that limit access to services provided in urban areas.
- No support groups.
- No dedicated children's service for children experiencing domestic violence.
- Lack of community supports.
- No schools' programme.
- Awareness and supports for specific target groups such as Traveller women, people with mental health, people with disabilities, people with addiction.
- Information on domestic violence and sexual violence.

Public Benefit

The project delivers substantial public benefit by:

- Protecting women and children from violence and coercive control.
- Preventing serious injury and, potentially, homicide.
- Supporting vulnerable families at times of extreme crisis.
- Reducing demand on emergency and statutory services.
- Supporting implementation of national Government policy on domestic, sexual and gender-based violence.
- Improving community safety.
- Delivering long-term social and economic benefits through early intervention.

National Policy Alignment

The project directly supports the implementation of:

- Zero Tolerance – Ireland's Third National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence.
- The Istanbul Convention.
- The EU Directive on Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence.
- Housing for All.
- The National Housing Strategy.
- Government commitments to increase refuge accommodation in line with European recommendations.

Strategic Importance

The development forms part of Ireland's national programme to increase refuge capacity and has received Government approval through the Capital Assistance Scheme.

The project has progressed through extensive planning, governance and statutory oversight including:

- Department of Housing approval.
- Capital Assistance Scheme Stage 2 approval.
- Design Team appointment.
- Project Management appointment.
- Ongoing engagement with Carlow County Council.
- Collaboration with Cuan, the Housing Agency and other statutory stakeholders.

Community Benefit

The refuge will serve women and children from Carlow and surrounding counties while working collaboratively with:

- An Garda Síochána
- Tusla
- HSE
- Cuan
- Carlow County Council
- Housing Agency
- Local community organisations
- Health and social care providers

The facility will provide long-term social infrastructure that strengthens community safety and public wellbeing.

Balancing Ecological and Public Interest Considerations

Amber fully recognises the importance of protecting bats and complying with wildlife legislation.

The organisation is committed to implementing all mitigation measures recommended by qualified ecological specialists and to ensuring that any disturbance is minimised and appropriately managed.

However, given the exceptional public interest served by this development, the significant unmet need for refuge accommodation in Carlow, and the Government's commitment to increasing refuge provision nationally, the organisation believes that the granting of a derogation licence represents a proportionate and appropriate balance between ecological protection and

the urgent need to safeguard women and children experiencing domestic abuse.

Conclusion

The proposed refuge represents critical public infrastructure that will save lives, improve safety, and provide essential protection and recovery services to women and children affected by domestic abuse.

The development has already undergone rigorous Government assessment and funding approval, confirming its strategic importance and public benefit. Amber respectfully submits that the significant social, humanitarian and public safety benefits of the project provide compelling grounds for the granting of a Bat Derogation Licence, subject to the implementation of all appropriate ecological mitigation measures.