

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT
OF THE
MONKSLAND COMMUNITY PARK PROJECT,
ATHLONE,
COUNTY ROSCOMMON**

ON BEHALF OF: ROSCOMMON COUNTY COUNCIL

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ABSTRACT

This assessment has been prepared on behalf of Roscommon County Council, to study the impact, if any, on the archaeological and historical resource of the proposed Monksland Community Park Project, Athlone, County Roscommon (ITM 600648, 741349). It was carried out by Matt Brooks of IAC Archaeology.

The area of proposed development is located in the townland of Monksland and comprises open scrubland bordered to the east and south by a business park, and to the north by residential development; c. 120m north of the R362. There are no recorded archaeological monuments within the site, or indeed within the study area and previous archaeological investigations c. 170m to the east noted the presence of charred material and in situ burning which may be archaeological.

The area is characterised by a disturbed landscape with ground clearance and storage of construction spoil within the proposed development area evident in the last two decades. Field inspection confirmed that the site had been previously stripped of topsoil and covered with gravel. Significant mounds of soil and construction waste were recorded on the site.

This assessment has not identified any features of archaeological potential within the proposed development area, and given the current condition of the site it is unlikely that any subsurface remains are present. As such there is no predicted impact on the archaeological resource by the proposed development going ahead.

No archaeological mitigation is required.

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 GENERAL

The following report details an archaeological assessment undertaken in advance of the proposed Monksland Community Park Project, Athlone, County Roscommon (Figure 1; ITM 600648, 741349). This assessment has been carried out to ascertain the potential impact of the proposed development on the archaeological and historical resource that may exist within the area. It was undertaken by Matt Brooks of IAC Archaeology (IAC), on behalf of Roscommon County Council.

The archaeological assessment involved a detailed study of the archaeological and historical background of the proposed development site and the surrounding area. This included information from the Record of Monuments and Places of County Roscommon, the topographical files within the National Museum and all available cartographic and documentary sources for the area. A field inspection has also been carried out with the aim to identify any previously unrecorded features of archaeological or historical interest.

1.2 THE DEVELOPMENT

The proposed development involves the development of a new “heart/centre” for Monksland, Co. Roscommon for Roscommon County Council which includes the provision of a new public park within the initial phase, as well as the creation of a new pedestrian outdoor space for year-round events in the area (Figure 2).

To facilitate the re-generation of the area, a cutting-edge, multi-purpose Community Hub for creative, education and recreational purposes will be designed and delivered as part of a later phase. In addition, the design and development of a new linear park connecting the Community Hub will create linkages with existing retail and hospitality areas and provide a green corridor in a community with very little existing green space facilitating a new shared space / “district centre approach” more attractive to residents, visitors and recreational users. The proposed development will also include the design of an “Eye Catcher” landmark on the Monksland Esker Ridge.

2 METHODOLOGY

A study area, defined as 250m from the boundary of the proposed development area, was assessed to inform this report. Research was undertaken in two phases. The first phase comprised a paper survey of all available archaeological, historical and cartographic sources. The second phase involved a field inspection of the site.

2.1 PAPER SURVEY

- Record of Monuments and Places for County Roscommon;
- Sites and Monuments Record for County Roscommon;
- National Monuments in State Care Database;
- Preservation Orders List;
- Topographical files of the National Museum of Ireland;
- Cartographic and written sources relating to the study area;
- Roscommon County Development Plan 2022–2028;
- Monksland/Bellanamullia Local Area Plan 2016–2022 (as extended);
- Aerial photographs;
- Excavations Bulletin (1970–2023).

Record of Monuments and Places (RMP) is a list of archaeological sites known to the National Monuments Section, which are afforded legal protection under Section 12 of the 1994 National Monuments Act and are published as a record.

Sites and Monuments Record (SMR) holds documentary evidence and field inspections of all known archaeological sites and monuments. Some information is also held about archaeological sites and monuments whose precise location is not known e.g. only a site type and townland are recorded. These are known to the National Monuments Section as ‘un-located sites’ and cannot be afforded legal protection due to lack of locational information. As a result, these are omitted from the Record of Monuments and Places. SMR sites are also listed on a website maintained by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (DoHLGH) – www.archaeology.ie. *Please note that the historic environment viewer was offline at the time of writing therefore our assessment was based on data dated to June 2023.*

National Monuments in State Care Database is a list of all the National Monuments in State guardianship or ownership. Each is assigned a National Monument number whether in guardianship or ownership and has a brief description of the remains of each Monument.

The Minister for the DoHLGH may acquire national monuments by agreement or by compulsory order. The state or local authority may assume guardianship of any national monument (other than dwellings). The owners of national monuments (other than dwellings) may also appoint the Minister or the local authority as guardian of that monument if the state or local authority agrees. Once the site is in ownership or guardianship of the state, it may not be interfered with without the written consent of the Minister.

Preservation Orders List contains information on Preservation Orders and/or Temporary Preservation Orders, which have been assigned to a site or sites. Sites deemed to be in danger of injury or destruction can be allocated Preservation Orders under the 1930 Act. Preservation Orders make any interference with the site illegal. Temporary Preservation Orders can be attached under the 1954 Act. These perform the same function as a Preservation Order but have a time limit of six months, after which the situation must be reviewed. Work may only be undertaken on or in the vicinity of sites under Preservation Orders with the written consent, and at the discretion, of the Minister.

The topographical files of the National Museum of Ireland are the national archive of all known finds recorded by the National Museum. This archive relates primarily to artefacts but also includes references to monuments and unique records of previous excavations. The find spots of artefacts are important sources of information on the discovery of sites of archaeological significance.

Cartographic sources are important in tracing land use development within the development area as well as providing important topographical information on areas of archaeological potential and the development of buildings. Cartographic analysis of all relevant maps has been made to identify any topographical anomalies or structures that no longer remain within the landscape.

Documentary sources were consulted to gain background information on the archaeological, architectural and cultural heritage landscape of the proposed development area.

Development Plans contain a catalogue of all the Protected Structures and archaeological sites within the county. The Roscommon County Development Plan 2022–2028 and Monksland/Bellanamullia Local Area Plan 2016–2022 were consulted to obtain information on cultural heritage sites in and within the immediate vicinity of the proposed development area.

Aerial photographic coverage is an important source of information regarding the precise location of sites and their extent. It also provides initial information on the terrain and its likely potential for archaeology. A number of sources were consulted including aerial photographs held by the Ordnance Survey and Google Earth.

Excavations Bulletin is a summary publication that has been produced every year since 1970. This summarises every archaeological excavation that has taken place in Ireland during that year up until 2010 and since 1987 has been edited by Isabel Bennett. This information is vital when examining the archaeological content of any area, which may not have been recorded under the SMR and RMP files. This information is also available online (www.excavations.ie) from 1970–2023.

2.2 FIELD INSPECTION

Field inspection is necessary to determine the extent and nature of archaeological and historical remains, and can also lead to the identification of previously unrecorded or suspected sites and portable finds through topographical observation and local information.

The archaeological field inspection entailed -

- Walking the proposed development and its immediate environs.
- Noting and recording the terrain type and land usage.
- Noting and recording the presence of features of archaeological or historical significance.
- Verifying the extent and condition of any recorded sites.
- Visually investigating any suspect landscape anomalies to determine the possibility of their being anthropogenic in origin.

3 RESULTS OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT

3.1 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The proposed development area is located within the townland of Monksland, parish of St Peter's, and the barony of Athlone in County Roscommon. The site is bordered to the north by residential development to the south and east by Monksland Business Park and by undeveloped land to the west. The Cross River is located c. 810m to the southwest.

There are no archaeological sites located within the development area or within 250m (Figure 1). The nearest recorded monument consists of a ringfort (RO052-002), located c. 1.4km to the southwest. The historic core of Athlone Town (WM029-042) lies c. 2.9km to the east

3.1.1 Prehistoric Period

Mesolithic Period (c. 8000–4000 BC)

Recent discoveries may suggest the possibility of a human presence in the southwest of Ireland as early as the Upper Palaeolithic (Dowd and Carden 2016), however; the Mesolithic period is the earliest time for which there is clear evidence for prehistoric human colonisation of the island of Ireland. During this period people hunted, foraged and gathered food and appear to have led a primarily mobile lifestyle. The presence of Mesolithic communities is most commonly evidenced by scatters of worked flint material, a by-product of the production of flint implements.

There is no archaeological evidence of Mesolithic activity within the immediate environs of the proposed development area. The wider receiving environment is likely to have been visited by Mesolithic communities who used the River Shannon (flowing c. 3km to the east) as a routeway and as a food and materials resource.

Neolithic Period (c. 4000–2500 BC)

During this period communities became less mobile and their economy became based on the rearing of stock and cereal cultivation. The transition to the Neolithic was marked by major social change. Communities had expanded and moved further inland to more permanent settlements. This afforded the development of agriculture which demanded an altering of the physical landscape. Forests were rapidly cleared and field boundaries were constructed. Pottery was also being produced, possibly for the first time. The advent of the Neolithic period also provided the megalithic tomb. There are four types of tomb in Ireland, namely the Court Cairn, Portal, Passage and Wedge; of which the latter style straddles the Neolithic to Bronze Age transition.

The earliest extant evidence of human activity in the vicinity of the proposed development dates from the Neolithic period. This phase of prehistory in the Athlone area is indicated by the discovery of four stone axes in Athlone town (NMI 1940:118; 1943:185; 1942:230; 1989:31) and three polished stone axeheads (NMI 1A/40/67) in the wider vicinity. All of these artefact types are generally assigned a date in the

Neolithic period. A megalithic tomb (RO051-043001) and headstone (RO051-043002) are known at Mihanboy c. 2km to the southwest. Although the headstone was inscribed in 1748 it was reputedly made from the missing portal stone of the tomb. Archaeological testing at this site in 2007 (Bennett 2007:1502, Licence No. 07E1042) failed to produce any related material.

Archaeological excavations (Bennett 2007:1474, Licence No. 07E3270) carried out at Ardagawna in advance of the M6 Athlone to Ballinasloe Road Scheme, c. 1.6km to the southwest revealed a prehistoric landscape. Archaeological activity from four distinct phases, the Neolithic, the Bronze Age, the early medieval and the early modern period was identified at this time and these have been added to the Sites and Monuments Record (RO052-031001–005 and RO052-032001–002). The earliest activity consisted of scattered pits representing a structure, one of which was dated to the Late Neolithic period. This pit, dated to 2860–2576 cal. BC yielded two fragments of chert as well as the seeds and fragments of wild plant species (SMR file).

Bronze Age (c. 2500–800 BC)

This period is marked by the use of metal for the first time. As with the transition from Mesolithic to Neolithic, the transition into the early Bronze Age was accompanied by changes in society. Megaliths were replaced in favour of individual, subterranean cist or pit burials that were either in isolation or in small cemeteries. These burials contained inhumed or cremated remains and were often, but not always, accompanied by a pottery vessel.

Over 7,000 burnt mounds or *fulacht fia* sites have been recorded in the country and c. 1,500 examples excavated, making them the most common prehistoric monument in Ireland (Waddell 2022, 164). Although burnt mounds of shattered stone occur as a result of various activities that have been practiced from the Mesolithic to the present day, the Bronze Age has long been believed to have seen the peak of this activity. Dating evidence from a growing number of burnt mounds, suggests activities resulting in burnt mounds were being carried over a span of 3,500 years in Ireland (Hawkes 2018). They are typically located in areas where there is a readily available water source, often in proximity to a river or stream or in places with a high-water table. In the field burnt mounds may be identified as charcoal-rich mounds or spreads of heat shattered stones, however, in many cases, the sites have been disturbed by later agricultural activity and are no longer visible on the field surface. Nevertheless, even disturbed spreads of burnt mound material often preserve the underlying associated features, such as troughs, pits and gullies, intact.

Activity during the Bronze Age period is represented by a similar number of stray finds in the Athlone area c. 2.5km to the northeast. During this period, knowledge of metalworking was acquired resulting in changes in material culture such as the introduction of metal tools and artefacts. These changes are reflected in the type of finds recovered in or near the town of Athlone, which include an Early Bronze Age copper alloy spearhead (NMI W.191), a bronze flat axehead (NMI 1991:82), two bronze palstaves (NMI 1985:45; 1968:319), two bronze looped spearheads (NMI 1988:3; 1988:4), a bronze flanged arrowhead (NMI 1968:313), a bronze socketed

arrowhead (NMI 1968:353) and a bronze rapier blade (NMI 1988:5). An unusually large number of high-status gold objects dated to the Bronze Age have also been found near Athlone including a lunula (NMI W.5), bar torcs, penannular bracelets, a 'dress-fastener', a 'tress-ring', and a 'sleeve fastener' (Bradley 1987, 20).

Archaeological excavation at Ardagawna as part of the Athlone to Ballinasloe M6 road development (Bennett 2007:1474, Licence No. 07E3270) revealed half of a small ring-ditch (RO052-031001) c. 1.8km southwest. The fosse contained fragments of cremated human bone and a perforated stone (SMR file). The fill of the fosse produced a C14 date of 1498-1466 cal. BC and a C14 date from a tree-bole provided a C14 date of 1493-1429 cal. BC, suggesting that tree-clearance was linked to the barrow in the Bronze Age. Further to the north two sherds of prehistoric pottery were recovered from the topsoil. These remains demonstrated the changing landscape within the vicinity during the prehistoric period, from the clearance of trees to meadowland and agriculture (ibid.). A *fulacht fia* (RO052-032001) and roasting pit (RO052-032002) were also discovered in Ardagawna townland, further to the west (1.7km southwest), during excavations (Bennett 2007:1475, Licence No. 07E3269).

Iron Age (c. 800 BC–AD 500)

There is increasing evidence for Iron Age settlement and activity in recent years as a result of development-led excavations as well as projects such as Late Iron Age and Roman Ireland (Cahill Wilson 2014). Yet this period is distinguishable from the rather rich remains of the preceding Bronze Age and subsequent early medieval period, by a relative paucity within the current archaeological record. The Iron Age in Ireland is problematic for archaeologists as few artefacts dating exclusively to this period have been found and without extensive excavation it cannot be determined whether several monument types, such as ring-barrows or standing stones, date to the late Bronze Age or Iron Age. It is likely that there was significant continuity in the Iron Age, with earlier monuments re-used in many cases.

There are a small number of finds in the Athlone area, that date to the Iron Age, a Hallstatt type iron sword, a bronze ring-headed pin, a bronze bowl, and two bronze mounts (Bradley 1987, 20). Monitoring of a pipe trench at Bellanamullia c. 1.7km northwest exposed a layer of ash, charcoal and burnt soil which was completely excavated (Bennett 1999:773, Licence No. 99E0014) and produced a C14 date of 335-290 cal. BC.

3.1.2 Early Medieval Period (AD 500–1100)

The early medieval period is depicted in the surviving sources as an almost entirely rural based society. Territorial divisions were based on the *túath*, or petty kingdom, with Byrne (1973) estimating that there may have been at least 150 kings in Ireland at any given time. This period, with a new religious culture and evolving technologies, saw significant woodland clearance and the expansion of grassland. A new type of plough and the horizontal mill were two innovations that improved agriculture and allowed for the population to increase. Consequently, from c. AD 500 onwards, the landscape became well settled, as evidenced by the profuse distribution of ringforts, a dispersed distribution of enclosed settlements, normally associated with various

grades of well-to-do farming and aristocratic classes in early medieval Ireland (Stout and Stout 1997, 20).

The ringfort or rath is considered to be the most common indicator of settlement during the early medieval period (Stout 1997). One of the most recent studies of early medieval settlement enclosures has suggested that there is potential for at least 60,000 such sites to have existed on the island (O’Sullivan et al. 2014, 49). Ringforts were often constructed to protect rural farmsteads and are usually defined as a broadly circular enclosure delineated by a bank and ditch. Ringforts can be divided into three broad categories – univallate sites, with one bank or ditch; multivallate sites with as many as four levels of enclosing features and platform or raised ringforts, where the interior of the ringfort has been built up. These enclosed sites were intimately connected to the division of land and the status of the occupant. One such feature was revealed through archaeological testing (Bennett 2007:1473, Licence No. 07E1119) at Ardagawna, c. 1.5km to the southwest (RO052-002).

The name Athlone is derived from *Ath Luain, the Ford of Luan*. The Annals of Clonmacnoise record that in the year AD 994, Maelsechlainn (King of Mide) and Cathal O Connor (King of Connaught) ‘made a bridge at Athlone over the Synan’ (Ann.Clon. 165). It has been suggested that this bridge may have been a ford instead (Murtagh 1994, 2). In the year 1001, the Annals of Ulster recorded that the ‘causeway of *Ath-Luain* [was made] by Maelsechlainn (high king of Ireland), and by Cathal son of the son of Conchobar’ (AU, 509). At least six bridges were built over the River Shannon at Athlone between the years 1120 and 1159.

The first known Viking raids on Ireland were carried out along the east and southeast coast in the late 8th century. During the 9th century, Viking ships began to move inland along navigable rivers, raiding secular, and ecclesiastical settlements. The annals record that by AD 836 Meath had been overrun and Connacht devastated and in AD 838 Viking fleets were moving up the River Shannon to Lough Erne (Edwards 1996, 172). There is a high incidence of Viking objects from near Athlone. In 1802, the largest Viking period gold hoard known from Europe was found in the vicinity of Athlone. The hoard was dated to the late 9th/early 10th century, as was a second hoard, of silver ingots and arm-rings, also found near Athlone (Bradley 1987, 21). Other Viking and Hiberno-Norse finds have been recovered from the River Shannon (*ibid.*). There is no record of Viking settlement at Athlone but Viking activity in the area is unsurprising given the proximity of the river, the known ford at this point and the presence of an important early ecclesiastical site there.

3.1.3 Medieval Period (AD 1100–1600)

The piecemeal conquest by the Anglo-Normans of Ireland, which commenced in AD 1169, had a fundamental impact on the Irish landscape. Their presence was strongest in the East of the Country, and it was mainly in this region that land was carved up and granted to the newly arrived lords who participated. The main success of the Anglo-Norman occupation was the welding of scattered territories into a cohesive unit through the introduction of the English form of shire government. The rural landscape became a network of manorial centres; these units would generally contain

a castle (motte and bailey), a manorial house and a number of dwellings, with extensive surrounding acreage. During the 14th to 16th centuries, tower houses were the typical residence of the Irish gentry and were a common feature in the Irish landscape.

The Anglo-Normans did not settle west of the Shannon until 1234. Their lateness in crossing the Shannon is illustrated by the lack of motte-and-bailey castles in County Roscommon, which had fallen out of fashion by that stage in the earlier colonised areas in southern and eastern Ireland

Monksland, or *Fearann na Manach* in Irish, derives its name from its association with the medieval priory of Saints Peter and Paul in Athlone. Notably, this religious establishment was the sole Cluniac monastery in Ireland, established during a period of significant reform in the Irish church led by St. Malachy of Armagh. Traditionally, the priory of Saints Peter and Paul was established around 1150 by King Turlough O Conor of Connacht. Under the influence of St. Malachy, the king supported the church reform's expansion to the western part of Ireland. At some point, the Cluniac monks were granted the lands we know as Monksland. The Cluniacs, a reformed Benedictine order from France, expanded to England in the 12th century, with their initial foundation in Lewes. Fr. Patrick Conlan, a historian of the Cluniacs in Athlone, proposed that Turlough O Conor invited the Cluniacs to Athlone to reform the ancient Irish monastery at Clonown.

The arrival of the Welsh Norman Knights headed by Robert de Clare, Earl of Pembroke (more commonly referred to as Strongbow) on the coast of Wexford in 1169, marked the beginning of the Norman invasion of Ireland. Strongbow and his small but well-armed and disciplined force had swift successes after some initial problems. He then aligned himself to succeed Dermot MacMurrough as King of Leinster by marrying his daughter Aoife. As a result, Henry II became concerned about his growth of power and set out for Ireland to establish his authority arriving in Waterford with a large force in 1171. In 1210 the annals recorded the arrival of the Bishop of Norwich, who came to Athlone where a bridge (WM029-042004) was constructed by him across *Ath-Luain*, and a castle (WM029-042002).

Athlone was granted to Geoffrey de Constantine by Hugh de Lacey in the late 12th century, following the arrival of the Anglo-Normans. It was an important medieval town both strategically and commercially. In 1210 it became the joint seat with Dublin of English administration in Ireland. It achieved borough status by at least the early 13th century and received a grant to hold an annual eight-day fair at the castle in 1221.

A castle at Bealamully had been lost by Myles Cavanagh to Irish rebels by 1596 (Cronin 1980, 117), which may have been close to Bealanamullia c. 2km to the northwest. Traditionally Cartron castle (RO052-001) is associated with St. Ruth, who commanded the Jacobite forces in 1691 and who was rallying there while the Williamites captured Athlone (Egan 2007, 149-50). In 1641, 110 acres at Cloonakille,

were leased by George Devonish from Lord Wilmott (Simington 1949, 92), and it is possible that he might have built this house.

Archaeological excavation at Ardagawna 1 (c. 1.6km southwest) as part of the Athlone to Ballinasloe M6 road development revealed a corn drying kiln (RO052-031002) and pits containing slag material (RO052-031005). In the centre of the site was the grave of a woman (RO052-031003), aged 32-42 years of age, radiocarbon dated cal. AD 1514–1648 (SMR file). No other human burials were discovered and it appears to have been an isolated burial.

3.1.4 Post-Medieval Period (AD 1600–1800)

The Monksland/Bealnamullia area is linked to the famous Siege of Athlone in 1691. In 1690 the town was attacked by a Williamite force estimated at 10,000 men but Athlone was staunchly defended by the Governor of Athlone, Col Richard Grace who refused to surrender. However, the Williamites returned in June 1691 under the command of a Dutch general, Godard van Reede, baron de Ginkel, with a full-strength Williamite army of some 25,000 men. In preparation for this second siege, the French general the Marquis de St. Ruth had mustered 20,000 men at Ballinasloe. By June 20th two Jacobite regiments had been sent to reinforce the garrison at Athlone while the remaining eight regiments were camped on the high ground in Monksland in view, but out of range, of the Williamite army. St. Ruth is said to have enjoyed a night of revelry in a house, later known as “St. Ruth’s Castle” nearby (O’Brien 2011). Once Athlone was captured the next theatre of war was at Aughim near Ballinasloe, one of the bloodiest battles in Irish history.

Dr Harman Murtagh's research extensively documents horseracing history in Georgian Athlone (O'Brien 2011). An early event occurred in Monksland in August 1731, featuring a four-day racing festival with two races daily on flat terrain. Races ranged from two to four miles, observed by spectators from elevated areas. The week included boat trips, evening balls, and a ten-mile race for "running footmen," won by Loughlin Prassagh, a servant of Lord Netterville, earning a silver watch prize. Racing at Monksland in 1732 included a £20 plate courtesy of Athlone's Corporation by Councillor William Harwood. By 1733, local racing moved to Athlone's Leinster side, but races might have continued at Monksland. In 1776, Faulkner's Dublin Journal mentioned Monksland races with "good ordinances," breakfasts, and night balls (O'Brien 2011). Races persisted for two more years, drawing ten competitors for a £100 purse in 1777. However, Monksland's racing activity diminished thereafter.

The 18th and 19th centuries witnessed a more pacified Ireland and the political climate settled; this saw a dramatic rise in the establishment of large residential houses around the country. Often these occupied areas are on the outskirts of towns. This was largely due to the fact that after the turbulence of the preceding centuries, the success of the Protestant cause and the effective removal of any political opposition, the country was at peace. The large country house was only a small part of the overall estate of a large landowner and provided a base to manage large areas of land that could be dispersed nationally. During the latter part of the 18th century, the establishment of a parkland context (or demesnes) for large houses was the

fashion. Although the creation of a parkland landscape involved working with nature, rather than against it, considerable construction effort went into its creation. Major topographical features like rivers and mountains were desirable features for inclusion in, and as a setting, for the large house and parkland. The demesne of Larkfield House is situated c. 190m to the northwest of the proposed development area. Built c. 1780, this house was the home of Joseph Sproule at the beginning of the 19th century.

3.2 SUMMARY OF PREVIOUS ARCHAEOLOGICAL FIELDWORK

A review of the Excavations Bulletin (1970–2023) has revealed that no investigations have been carried out within the proposed development area. One investigation has taken place with 250m and is summarised below.

Monitoring in advance of the Monksland Sewerage Extension Scheme (Bennett 1999:773, Licence No. 99E0014) commenced in 1999 with sections of the scheme located in the vicinity of Old Tuam Road, c. 170m to the east of the proposed development area. The only feature of interest was an area of burning consisting of a layer of intermixed ash and charred wood. No further features of archaeological significance were noted in that area of the scheme.

3.3 CARTOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS

William Petty, Down Survey Map of the Barony of Athlone, County Roscommon, c. 1655 (Figure 3)

The Down Survey depicts the proposed development area within the townland of Monksland, west of the walled town of Athlone. The site is shown within an open marshland surrounded by trees at this time. Two large bogs are located to the north and south of the proposed development area; ‘Monksland Bog and ‘Athlone Bog’.

First Edition Ordnance Survey Map, 1838, scale 1:10,560 (Figure 4)

This is the first accurate historic mapping coverage of the area containing the proposed development area. The site is shown within open land in the townland of Monksland. To the north lies the Old Tuam Road with a subsidiary road (Ceathru Na Gloch) is found to the immediate north. To the northwest lies Larkfield House and demesne landscape. No structures or features of potential archaeological origin are indicated.

Ordnance Survey Map, 1890, scale 1:2,500 (Figure 4)

By the time of this map, the proposed development area is placed within a single field of bracken with the northern extent of the site defined by a pathway that connects to the Ceathru Na Gloch road. In the wider area the only notable change from the previous mapping is the development of Mount William to the northeast.

Ordnance Survey Map, 1915, scale 1:10,560

There is very little change to the area of the proposed development by the time of this map.

3.4 DEVELOPMENT PLAN

The Roscommon County Development Plan 2022–2028 and Monksland/Bellanamullia Local Area Plan 2016–2022 recognise the statutory protection afforded to all Record of Monuments and Places (RMP) sites under the National Monuments Legislation (1930–2014). The development plan lists a number of aims and objectives in relation to archaeological heritage (Appendix 1).

There are no recorded monuments within the proposed development site nor within the study area (c. 250m). The nearest recorded monument consists of a ringfort (RO052-002), located c. 1.4km to the southwest. The historic core of Athlone Town (WM029-042) lies c. 2.9km to the east

3.5 TOPOGRAPHICAL FILES OF THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF IRELAND

Information on artefact finds from the study area in County Roscommon has been recorded by the National Museum of Ireland since the late 18th century. Location information relating to these finds is important in establishing prehistoric and historic activity in the study area.

No stray finds are recorded within the proposed development area or its immediate environs. A large quantity of artefacts have been recorded in the vicinity of Athlone town c. 2.5km to the east and these are discussed above where relevant.

3.6 AERIAL PHOTOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS

Inspection of the aerial photographic coverage of the proposed scheme held by the Ordnance Survey (1995–2013), Google Earth (2008–2023), Bing Maps, and Apple Maps revealed that the proposed development area has remained largely unchanged since 1995. Imaginary from 2007 shows the site within a disturbed landscape with the area having been stripped of topsoil at the time of adjacent construction activity to the immediate west (Figure 4). No previously unrecorded sites of archaeological potential were noted within the proposed development area.

3.7 FIELD INSPECTION

The field inspection sought to assess the site, its previous and current land use, the topography and any additional information relevant to the report. During the course of the field investigation the proposed development site and its surrounding environs were inspected (Figure 1).

The proposed development area comprises a heavily disturbed plot of scrubland located adjacent to the Monksland Business Park (Plate 1). The site is currently surrounded by chain-link fences with two open access points at the south and east (Plates 2 and 3). A steep hillside bounds the northern border of the site, between the development area and residential neighbourhood (Plate 4). A car park and retail buildings associated with the business park border the site to the east. A roadway for the business park forms the southern boundary, and a disused open lot borders the site to the west. Significant previous disturbance across the site is evident, particularly within the eastern extent where a large spoil heap, at least 5m in height, is present

(Plate 5). The remainder of the site has been stripped of topsoil in the past with a thin layer of gravel covering the surface area, and small shrubs and trees growing (Plate 6). There is additionally, substantial evidence of dumping of construction and personal waste across the site (Plates 7 and 8).

4 CONCLUSIONS

This archaeological assessment was commissioned by Roscommon County Council to assess the potential for the survival of archaeological features in advance of the proposed Monksland Community Park Project at Monksland, Athlone, County Roscommon.

The area of proposed development is located in the townland of Monksland and comprises open scrubland bordered to the east and south by a business park, and to the north by residential development; c. 120m north of the R362. There are no recorded archaeological monuments within the site, or indeed within the study area.

A review of the Excavations Bulletin (1970-2023) has revealed that no archaeological investigations have been carried out within the proposed development. Monitoring in advance of the Monksland Sewerage Extension Scheme in the vicinity of Old Tuam Road revealed an area of burning consisting of a layer of intermixed ash and charred wood. No further features of archaeological significance were noted in that area of the scheme.

Analysis of cartographic sources has revealed that the proposed development area itself has remained relatively unchanged from the post-medieval to modern periods. Historically the site is located within marshland surrounded by two large bogs; 'Monksland Bog' and 'Athlone Bog'. Ordnance survey maps depict the proposed development area within a single field of bracken to the south of Old Tuam Road with a subsidiary road (Ceathru Na Gloch) found to the immediate north. Larkfield House and demesne landscape were also noted to the northwest, while Mount William is found to the northeast beyond Old Tuam Road.

The area is characterised by a disturbed landscape with ground clearance and storage of construction spoil within the proposed development area evident in the last two decades. Field inspection confirmed that the site had been previously stripped of topsoil and covered with gravel. Significant mounds of soil and construction waste were recorded on the site.

Analysis of aerial photographic record available for the area failed to identify any previously unknown archaeological features in the area which has remained within a disturbed landscape. The majority of the site has experienced topsoil stripping associated with a construction site to the immediate west.

This assessment has not identified any features of archaeological potential within the proposed development area, and given the current condition of the site it is unlikely that any subsurface remains are present.

5 IMPACT ASSESSMENT AND MITIGATION STRATEGY

Impacts can be identified from detailed information about a project, the nature of the area affected and the range of archaeological resources potentially affected. Archaeological sites can be affected adversely in a number of ways: disturbance by excavation, topsoil stripping; disturbance by vehicles working in unsuitable conditions; and burial of sites, limiting access for future archaeological investigation. Upstanding archaeology can be affected adversely by direct damage or destruction arising from development, from inadvertent damage arising from vibration, undermining etc. and also by indirect impacts to a building's visual setting, view or curtilage.

5.1 IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- This assessment has not identified any features of archaeological potential within the proposed development area, and given the current condition of the site it is unlikely that any subsurface remains are present. As such there is no predicted impact on the archaeological resource by the proposed development going ahead.

5.2 MITIGATION

- No archaeological mitigation is required .

It is the developer's responsibility to ensure full provision is made available for the resolution of any archaeological remains, both on site and during the post excavation process, should that be deemed the appropriate manner in which to proceed.

Please note that all recommendations are subject to approval by the National Monuments Service of the Heritage and Planning Division, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.

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- www.archaeology.ie – DoHLGH website listing all SMR/RMP sites.
- www.heritagemaps.ie – The Heritage Council web-based spatial data viewer which focuses on the built, cultural and natural heritage.
- www.geohive.ie – Ordnance Survey Ireland National Townland and Historical Map Viewer (including Aerial imagery 1995, 2000, 2005 and 2013)
- www.googleearth.com – Satellite imagery (2005–2022).
- www.apple.com/maps/ – Satellite imagery (2023).

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1 LEGISLATION PROTECTING THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESOURCE

PROTECTION OF CULTURAL HERITAGE

The cultural heritage in Ireland is safeguarded through national and international policy designed to secure the protection of the cultural heritage resource to the fullest possible extent (Department of Arts, Heritage, Gaeltacht and the Islands 1999, 35). This is undertaken in accordance with the provisions of the *European Convention on the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage* (Valletta Convention), ratified by Ireland in 1997.

THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESOURCE

The *National Monuments Act 1930 to 2014* and relevant provisions of the *National Cultural Institutions Act 1997* are the primary means of ensuring the satisfactory protection of archaeological remains, which includes all man-made structures of whatever form or date except buildings habitually used for ecclesiastical purposes. A National Monument is described as 'a monument or the remains of a monument the preservation of which is a matter of national importance by reason of the historical, architectural, traditional, artistic or archaeological interest attaching thereto' (National Monuments Act 1930 Section 2). A number of mechanisms under the National Monuments Act are applied to secure the protection of archaeological monuments. These include the Register of Historic Monuments, the Record of Monuments and Places, and the placing of Preservation Orders and Temporary Preservation Orders on endangered sites.

OWNERSHIP AND GUARDIANSHIP OF NATIONAL MONUMENTS

The Minister may acquire national monuments by agreement or by compulsory order. The state or local authority may assume guardianship of any national monument (other than dwellings). The owners of national monuments (other than dwellings) may also appoint the Minister or the local authority as guardian of that monument if the state or local authority agrees. Once the site is in ownership or guardianship of the state, it may not be interfered with without the written consent of the Minister.

REGISTER OF HISTORIC MONUMENTS

Section 5 of the 1987 Act requires the Minister to establish and maintain a Register of Historic Monuments. Historic monuments and archaeological areas present on the register are afforded statutory protection under the 1987 Act. Any interference with sites recorded on the register is illegal without the permission of the Minister. Two months' notice in writing is required prior to any work being undertaken on or in the vicinity of a registered monument. The register also includes sites under Preservation Orders and Temporary Preservation Orders. All registered monuments are included in the Record of Monuments and Places.

PRESERVATION ORDERS AND TEMPORARY PRESERVATION ORDERS

Sites deemed to be in danger of injury or destruction can be allocated Preservation Orders under the 1930 Act. Preservation Orders make any interference with the site illegal. Temporary Preservation Orders can be attached under the 1954 Act. These perform the same function as a Preservation Order but have a time limit of six months, after which the situation must be reviewed. Work may only be undertaken on or in the vicinity of sites under Preservation Orders with the written consent, and at the discretion, of the Minister.

RECORD OF MONUMENTS AND PLACES

Section 12(1) of the 1994 Act requires the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Gaeltacht and the Islands (now the Minister for the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage) to establish and maintain a record of monuments and places where the Minister believes that such monuments exist. The record comprises a list of monuments and relevant places and a map/s showing each monument and relevant place in respect of each county in the state. All sites recorded on the Record of Monuments and Places receive statutory protection under the National Monuments Act 1994. All recorded monuments on the proposed development site are represented on the accompanying maps.

Section 12(3) of the 1994 Act provides that ‘where the owner or occupier (other than the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Gaeltacht and the Islands) of a monument or place included in the Record, or any other person, proposes to carry out, or to cause or permit the carrying out of, any work at or in relation to such a monument or place, he or she shall give notice in writing to the Minister of Arts, Heritage, Gaeltacht and the Islands to carry out work and shall not, except in case of urgent necessity and with the consent of the Minister, commence the work until two months after giving of notice’.

Under the National Monuments (Amendment) Act 2004, anyone who demolishes or in any way interferes with a recorded site is liable to a fine not exceeding €3,000 or imprisonment for up to 6 months. On summary conviction and on conviction of indictment, a fine not exceeding €10,000 or imprisonment for up to 5 years is the penalty. In addition, they are liable for costs for the repair of the damage caused.

In addition to this, under the *European Communities (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 1989*, Environmental Impact Statements (EIS) are required for various classes and sizes of development project to assess the impact the proposed development will have on the existing environment, which includes the cultural, archaeological and built heritage resources. These document’s recommendations are typically incorporated into the conditions under which the proposed development must proceed, and thus offer an additional layer of protection for monuments which have not been listed on the RMP.

THE PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT ACT 2000

Under planning legislation, each local authority is obliged to draw up a Development Plan setting out their aims and policies with regard to the growth of the area over a five-year period. They cover a range of issues including archaeology and built heritage, setting out their policies and objectives with regard to the protection and

enhancement of both. These policies can vary from county to county. The Planning and Development Act 2000 recognises that proper planning and sustainable development includes the protection of the archaeological heritage. Conditions relating to archaeology may be attached to individual planning permissions.

Roscommon County Development Plan 2022-2028

Government guidance states that proposed developments that may (due to their location, size, or nature) have implications for the archaeological heritage should be subject to archaeological assessment. Archaeological assessment is an essential first step in the development process to identify the archaeology, if any, present on a site, so as to allow the development to be designed from the start in such a way as to minimize the impacts of that development on the archaeology. This can avoid or reduce costs and delays to the development.

Objectives for Archaeological Heritage:

Objective 9.13

Secure the preservation (i.e. preservation in situ or, as a minimum, preservation by record) of all archaeological monuments included in the Record of Monuments and Places as established under Section 12 of the National Monuments (Amendment) Act, 1994, and of sites, features and objects of archaeological interest generally. In securing such preservation Roscommon County Council will have regard to the advice and recommendations of the National Monuments Section of the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.

Monksland/Bellanamullia Local Area Plan 2016-2022

Objective 57

Contribute, as appropriate, towards the protection of archaeological sites and monuments and their settings, archaeological objects and underwater archaeological sites that are listed in the Record of Monuments and Places, in the ownership/guardianship of the State, or that are subject of Preservation Orders or have been registered in the Register of Historic Monuments. Contribute, as appropriate, towards the protection and preservation of archaeological sites, which have been identified subsequent to the publication of the Record of Monuments and Places.

Policy 60

Protect the integrity, quality and context of significant sites and recorded monuments.

Policy 61

Seek archaeological assessment and, where appropriate, excavation and testing, preservation by record or preservation in situ, in relation to all development proposals on which the archaeological heritage may be affected.

Objective 63

Ensure that any development, either above or below ground, within the vicinity of a site of archaeological interest shall not be detrimental to the character of the archaeological site or its setting.

APPENDIX 2 IMPACT ASSESSMENT AND THE CULTURAL HERITAGE RESOURCE

POTENTIAL IMPACTS ON ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL REMAINS

Impacts are defined as ‘the degree of change in an environment resulting from a development’ (Environmental Protection Agency 2022). They are described as profound, significant or slight impacts on archaeological remains. They may be negative, positive or neutral, direct, indirect or cumulative, temporary or permanent.

Impacts can be identified from detailed information about a project, the nature of the area affected and the range of archaeological and historical resources potentially affected. Development can affect the archaeological and historical resource of a given landscape in a number of ways.

- Permanent and temporary land-take, associated structures, landscape mounding, and their construction may result in damage to or loss of archaeological remains and deposits, or physical loss to the setting of historic monuments and to the physical coherence of the landscape.
- Archaeological sites can be affected adversely in a number of ways: disturbance by excavation, topsoil stripping and the passage of heavy machinery; disturbance by vehicles working in unsuitable conditions; or burial of sites, limiting accessibility for future archaeological investigation.
- Hydrological changes in groundwater or surface water levels can result from construction activities such as de-watering and spoil disposal, or longer-term changes in drainage patterns. These may desiccate archaeological remains and associated deposits.
- Visual impacts on the historic landscape sometimes arise from construction traffic and facilities, built earthworks and structures, landscape mounding and planting, noise, fences and associated works. These features can impinge directly on historic monuments and historic landscape elements as well as their visual amenity value.
- Landscape measures such as tree planting can damage sub-surface archaeological features, due to topsoil stripping and through the root action of trees and shrubs as they grow.
- Ground consolidation by construction activities or the weight of permanent embankments can cause damage to buried archaeological remains, especially in colluviums or peat deposits.
- Disruption due to construction also offers in general the potential for adversely affecting archaeological remains. This can include machinery, site offices, and service trenches.

Although not widely appreciated, positive impacts can accrue from developments. These can include positive resource management policies, improved maintenance and access to archaeological monuments, and the increased level of knowledge of a site or historic landscape as a result of archaeological assessment and fieldwork.

PREDICTED IMPACTS

The severity of a given level of land-take or visual intrusion varies with the type of monument, site or landscape features and its existing environment. Severity of impact can be judged taking the following into account:

- The proportion of the feature affected and how far physical characteristics fundamental to the understanding of the feature would be lost;
- Consideration of the type, date, survival/condition, fragility/vulnerability, rarity, potential and amenity value of the feature affected;
- Assessment of the levels of noise, visual and hydrological impacts, either in general or site-specific terms, as may be provided by other specialists.

APPENDIX 3 MITIGATION MEASURES AND THE CULTURAL HERITAGE RESOURCE

POTENTIAL MITIGATION STRATEGIES FOR CULTURAL HERITAGE REMAINS

Mitigation is defined as features of the design or other measures of the proposed development that can be adopted to avoid, prevent, reduce or offset negative effects.

The best opportunities for avoiding damage to archaeological remains or intrusion on their setting and amenity arise when the site options for the development are being considered. Damage to the archaeological resource immediately adjacent to developments may be prevented by the selection of appropriate construction methods. Reducing adverse effects can be achieved by good design, for example by screening historic buildings or upstanding archaeological monuments or by burying archaeological sites undisturbed rather than destroying them. Offsetting adverse effects is probably best illustrated by the full investigation and recording of archaeological sites that cannot be preserved *in situ*.

DEFINITION OF MITIGATION STRATEGIES

ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESOURCE

The ideal mitigation for all archaeological sites is preservation *in situ*. This is not always a practical solution, however. Therefore, a series of recommendations are offered to provide ameliorative measures where avoidance and preservation *in situ* are not possible.

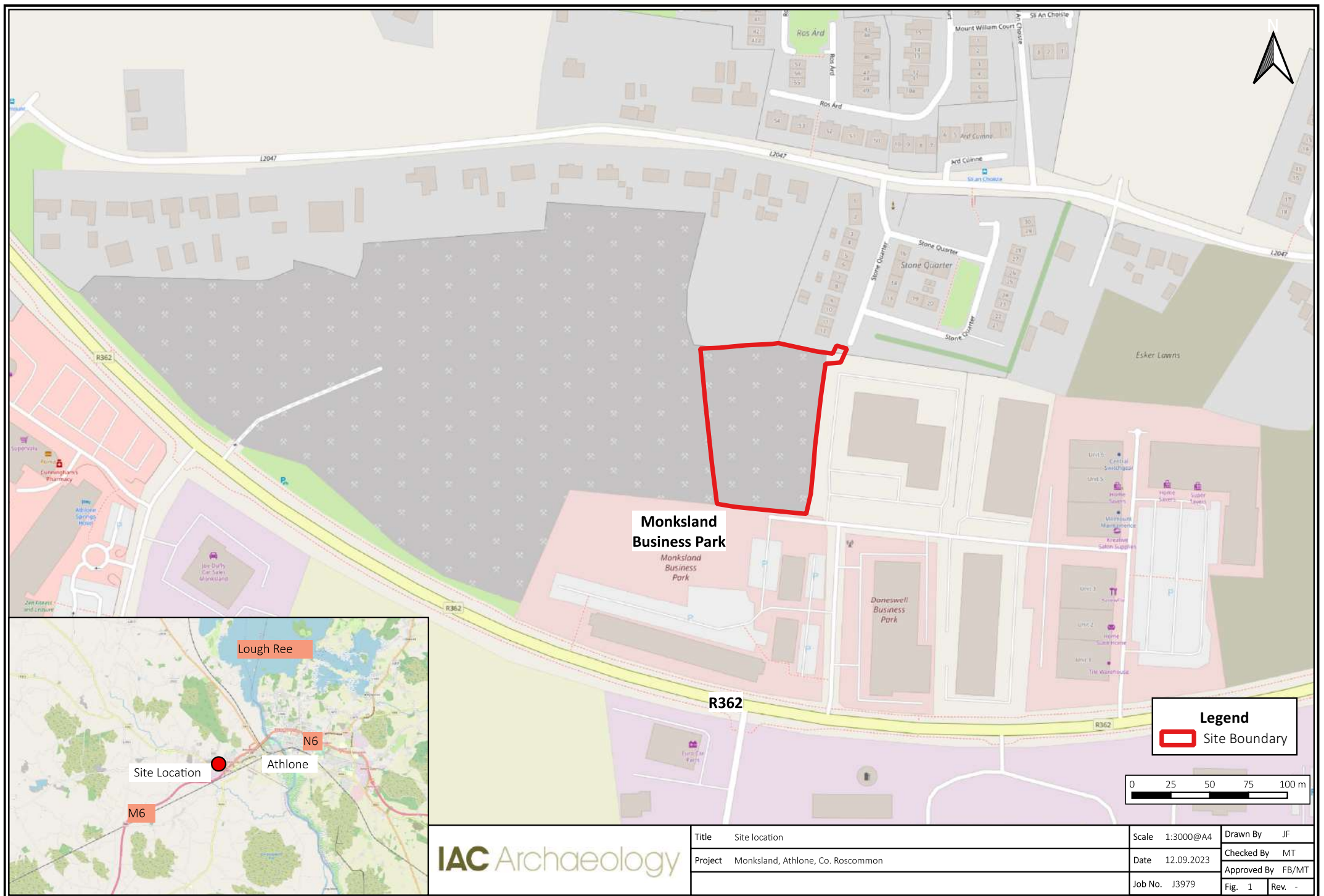
Archaeological Test Trenching can be defined as ‘a limited programme of intrusive fieldwork which determines the presence or absence of archaeological features, structures, deposits, artefacts or ecofacts within a specified area or site on land, inter-tidal zone or underwater. If such archaeological remains are present field evaluation defines their character, extent, quality and preservation, and enables an assessment of their worth in a local, regional, national or international context as appropriate’ (ClfA 2020a).

Full Archaeological Excavation can be defined as ‘a programme of controlled, intrusive fieldwork with defined research objectives which examines, records and interprets archaeological deposits, features and structures and, as appropriate, retrieves artefacts, ecofacts and other remains within a specified area or site on land, inter-tidal zone or underwater. The records made and objects gathered during fieldwork are studied and the results of that study published in detail appropriate to the project design’ (ClfA 2020b).

Archaeological Monitoring can be defined as ‘a formal programme of observation and investigation conducted during any operation carried out for non-archaeological reasons. This will be within a specified area or site on land, inter-tidal zone or underwater, where there is a possibility that archaeological deposits may be

disturbed or destroyed. The programme will result in the preparation of a report and ordered archive (ClfA 2020c).

Underwater Archaeological Assessment consists of a programme of works carried out by a specialist underwater archaeologist, which can involve wade surveys, metal detection surveys and the excavation of test pits within the sea or riverbed. These assessments are able to access and assess the potential of an underwater environment to a much higher degree than terrestrial based assessments.





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ANY CHANGES OR ADDITIONS TO THE DRAWING SHOULD BE PRESENTED TO THE ATTENTION OF THE DESIGN PARTNER AT THE ADDRESS SHOWN BELOW.

NOTES

RED LINE SITE BOUNDARY

HARD LANDSCAPE

- AS1** ASPHALT SURFACE: Paved on subsoil
- AS2** ASPHALT SURFACE: Paved on subsoil
- CS** CONCRETE SURFACE: Paved on subsoil
- PI** ASPHALT PATH: Paved on subsoil
- PE** ASPHALT PATH: Paved on subsoil

SOFT LANDSCAPE

- GR** GRASS: GRASS AREA
- US** GRASS: GRASS AREA
- SP** GRASS: GRASS AREA
- HS** GRASS: GRASS AREA
- PROCESSED TREE**

LEVELS

- +28.00m: Existing Levels
- +28.00m: Proposed Levels

PLANTING

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ROS MON Community Garden Box Caravan Roscommon County Council

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Monksland Project

P3002669

LANDSCAPE MASTERPLAN PART 8

2669-BDP-00-XX-DR-L-0002

Scale: NTS

Date: 12.09.2023

Job No.: J3979

Drawn By: JF

Checked By: MT

Approved By: FB/MT

Fig. 2

Rev. -

Title	Plan of proposed development	Scale	NTS	Drawn By	JF
Project	Monksland, Athlone, County Roscommon	Date	12.09.2023	Checked By	MT
		Job No.	J3979	Approved By	FB/MT
				Fig. 2	Rev. -



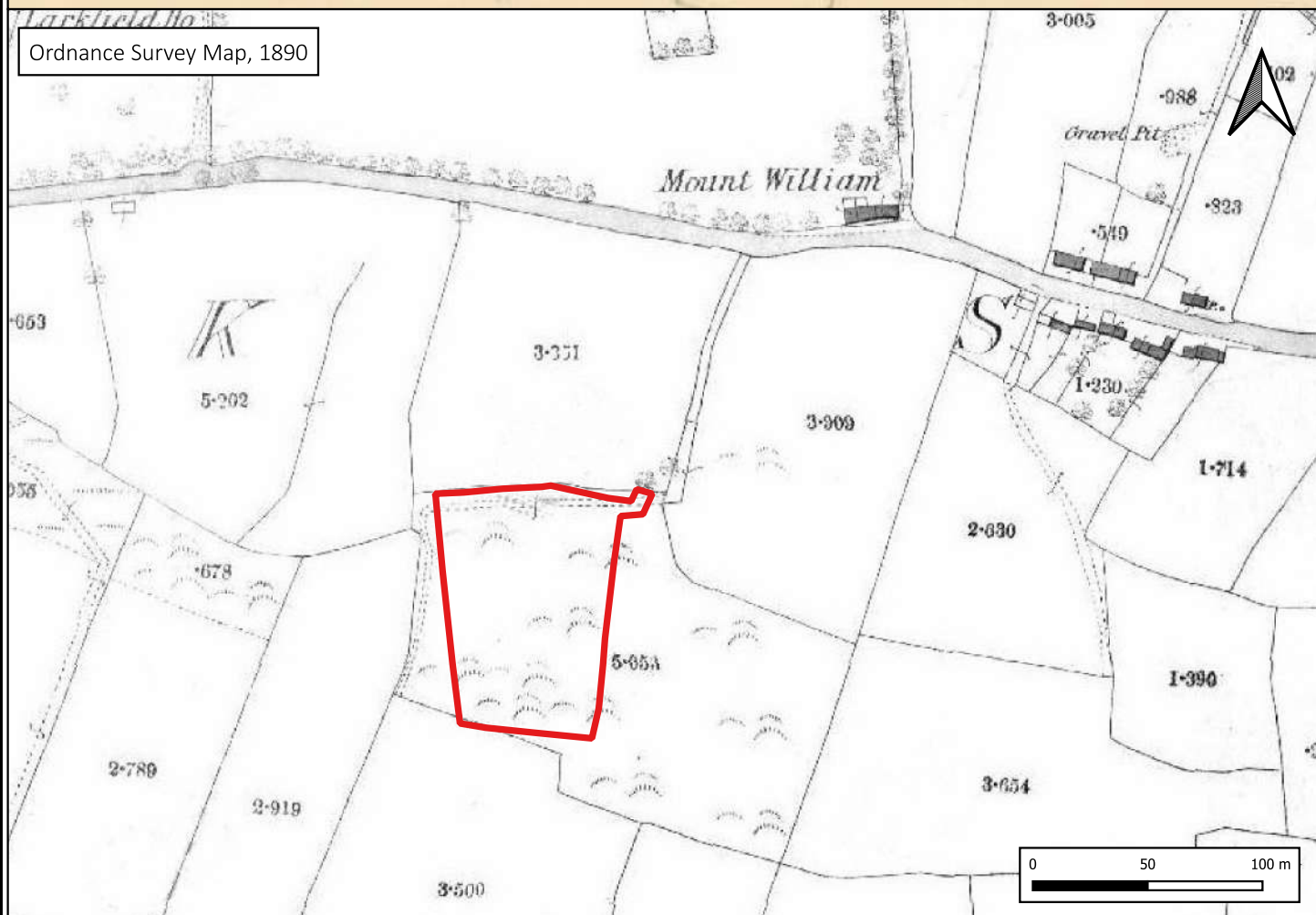
IAC Archaeology

Title	Extract from the Down Survey Map of Co. Roscommon (c. 1655) showing the approximate location of the proposed development	Scale	NTS	Drawn By	JF
Project	Monksland, Athlone, Co. Roscommon	Date	12.09.2023	Checked By	MT
		Job No.	J3979	Approved By	FB/MT
		Fig.	3	Rev.	-

Ordnance Survey Map, 1838



Ordnance Survey Map, 1890



Google Earth, 09.2007



Google Earth, 03.2022





Plate 1: Monksland Business Park, site on right, facing south



Plate 2: Site access at south, facing north



Plate 3: Site access at east, facing west



Plate 4: Northern border of site, facing northeast



Plate 5: Spoil heap at east of site, facing east



Plate 6: Western stripped area of site, facing west



Plate 7: Dumped materials on site, facing southwest



Plate 8: Dumped materials at east of site, facing west