

A Proposed Development Site at

Monksland

Athlone, Co Roscommon

Archaeological Screening Report

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Table of Contents

List of Figures and Plates	ii
Executive Summary.....	3
1 Introduction.....	4
1.1 General	4
1.2 Site Location	4
1.3 Study Area	6
1.4 Objectives and Methodology	6
2 The Receiving Environment	8
2.1 Legislative Status and Planning Context.....	8
2.2 Known Archaeological Sites in the Area.....	9
2.3 Recent Archaeological Excavations	9
2.4 National Inventory of Architectural Heritage.....	9
2.5 NIAH Survey of Historic Gardens and Designed Landscapes	10
2.6 Record of Protected Structures.....	10
2.7 Cartographic Evidence.....	10
2.8 Aerial Photographs	10
3 Site Description.....	11
4 Conclusions and Recommendations.....	15
4.1 Conclusions.....	15
4.2 Recommendations	15

List of Figures and Plates

Figure 1: Site Location: Monksland lies on the western edge of Athlone in Co Roscommon	4
Figure 2: Location Map (extract from OS 6" map - 1st ed. From 1836) with site indicated	5
Figure 3: Location Map (extract from OS 25" map from 1888) with development site outlined	5
Figure 4: Site Location Map (OSI Street Map from Historic Environment Viewer)	8
Plate 1: Aerial view of the proposed development site (outlined in blue)	6
Plate 2: View looking north from the gateway at the south-western corner	7
Plate 3: View looking south across the eastern part of the proposed development site	12
Plate 4: View from the north-eastern corner of the site looking southwest along the esker	12
Plate 5: View from the north-western corner of the site looking uphill towards the southeast	13
Plate 6: The brick- and stone-built structure close to the north-eastern corner	13
Plate 7: The brick- and stone-built structure close to the northeast corner	14
Plate 8: The vaulted area of the brick- and stone-built structure close to the north-eastern corner..	14

Executive Summary

This archaeological screening report has been prepared, at the request of Sweeney Architects, on a proposed development site at Monksland, Athlone, Co Roscommon. This study aims to assess the archaeological, architectural and cultural heritage environment which currently exists on and around the proposed development site and evaluate the likely impacts that any proposed development will have on this environment. The study area upon which this report is based extends 500m from the site boundary in all directions and incorporates parts of the townland of Monksland.

No known archaeological sites are found on the proposed development site, or within 1km of the site's boundary. No Protected Structures are found on the proposed development site, or within 1km of the site's boundary. Cartographic sources do not suggest that any features of interest formerly existed on the site. No features of archaeological significance were noted on the site during the site inspection.

In the adjoining property, just outside the north-eastern corner of the proposed development site, the remains of an early modern structure were noted. This brick- and stone-built vaulted structure, which may represent the basement of an 18th- or early 19th-century building, appears to be quite close the boundary of the proposed development site and is worthy of preservation. Sensitive design in the north-eastern corner of the proposed development site, whereby only open spaces, private gardens or pathways are planned for this area, should help to ensure the survival of the ruin in the adjoining property. Archaeological monitoring in this area may be required during the construction phase of the project.

The report recommends that the site should be considered suitable, in archaeological terms, for development and further recommends that sensitive design and archaeological monitoring in the north-eastern corner of the site as suitable measures to mitigate the impact of the proposed development on the architectural and archaeological heritage of the area.

1 Introduction

1.1 General

1.1.1 This report has been prepared, at the request of Sweeney Architects, on a proposed development site on Monksland, Athlone, Co Roscommon. Sweeney Architects have been commissioned by Roscommon County Council to design a 40-unit residential scheme for the site and this report forms part of the Preliminary Stage works for that project.

1.1.2 This report was prepared in October 2022 by Dr Rory Sherlock, Consultant Archaeologist, following a site visit and a short programme of documentary research.

1.2 Site Location

1.2.1 The site, which extends to *circa* 2 hectares, is located in the townland of Monksland, Athlone, Co Roscommon. The property is located at ITM Co-ordinate 600686, 741940 and is bounded by the *Slí an Coiste* housing estate to the east, south and southwest.



Figure 1: Site Location: Monksland lies on the western edge of Athlone in Co Roscommon (Ordnance Survey Ireland Licence No. CYAL50292372 – ©Ordnance Survey Ireland / Government of Ireland)

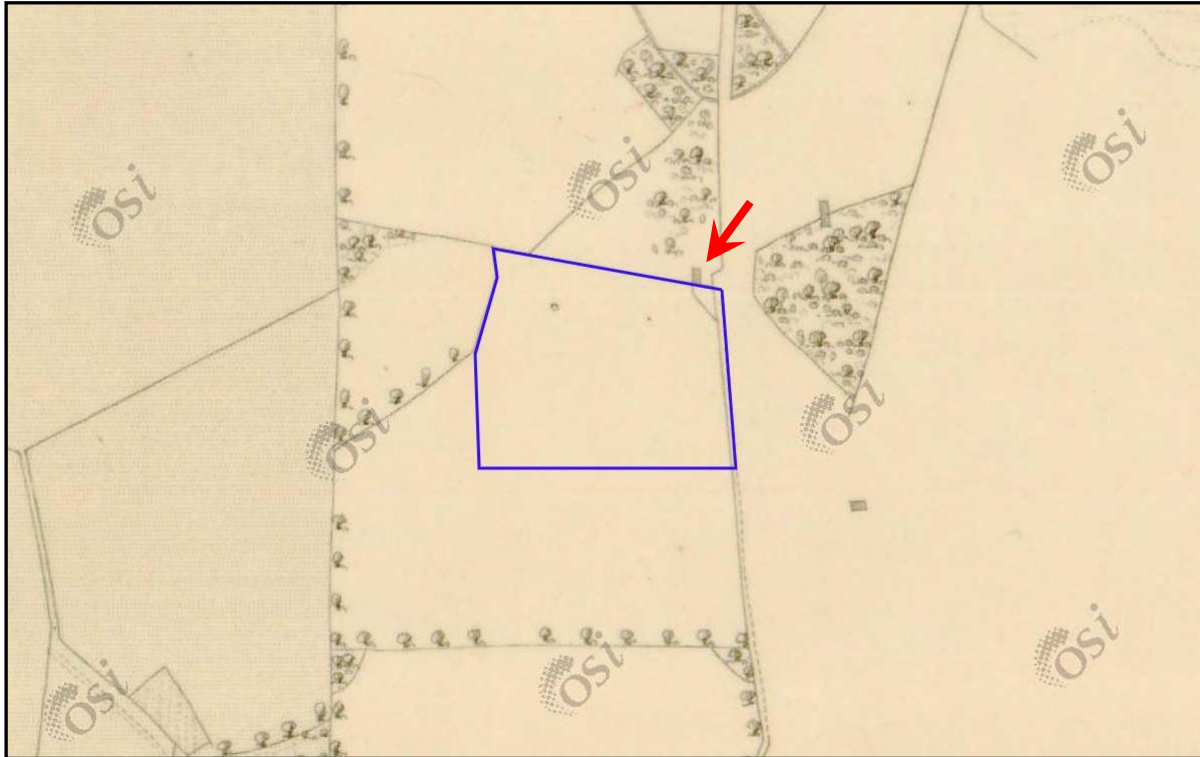


Figure 2: Location Map (extract from OS 6" map - 1st ed. From 1836) with site indicated by blue outline – the red arrow indicates the location of a ruined structure discussed in Sections 3.3 and 3.4 (below)
(Ordnance Survey Ireland Licence No. CYAL50292372 – ©Ordnance Survey Ireland / Government of Ireland)

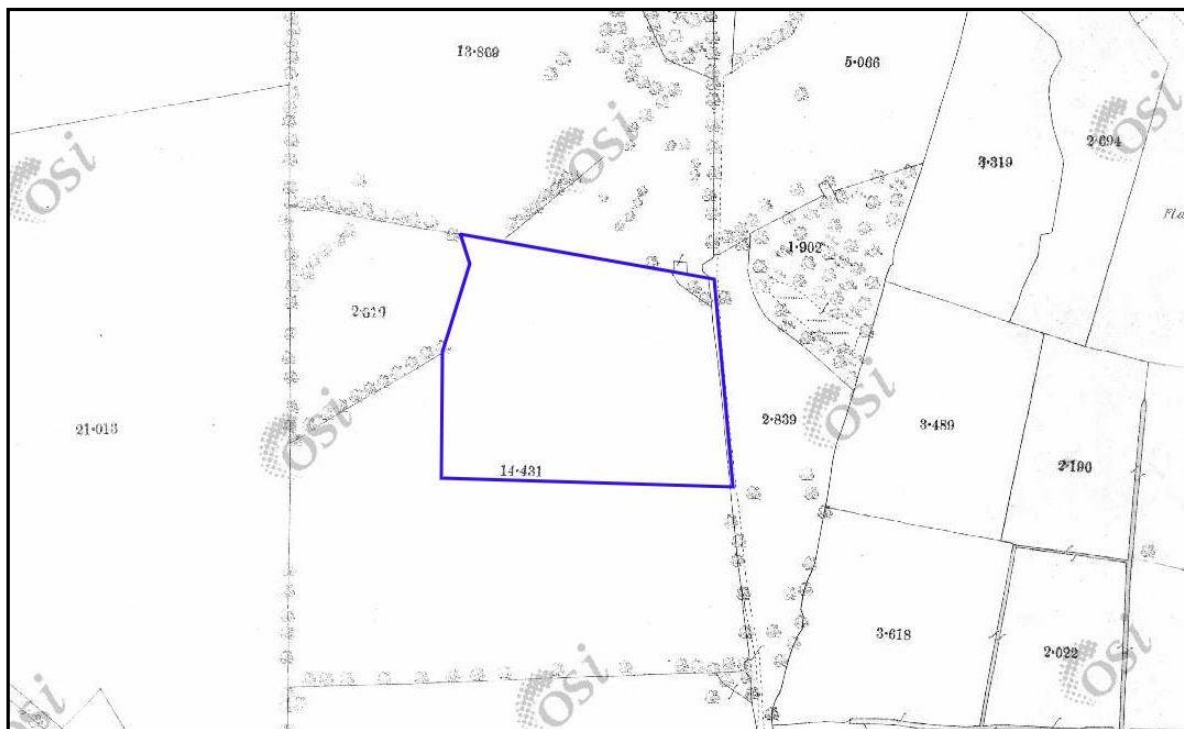


Figure 3: Location Map (extract from OS 25" map from 1888) with development site outlined in blue
(Ordnance Survey Ireland Licence No. CYAL50292372 – ©Ordnance Survey Ireland / Government of Ireland)

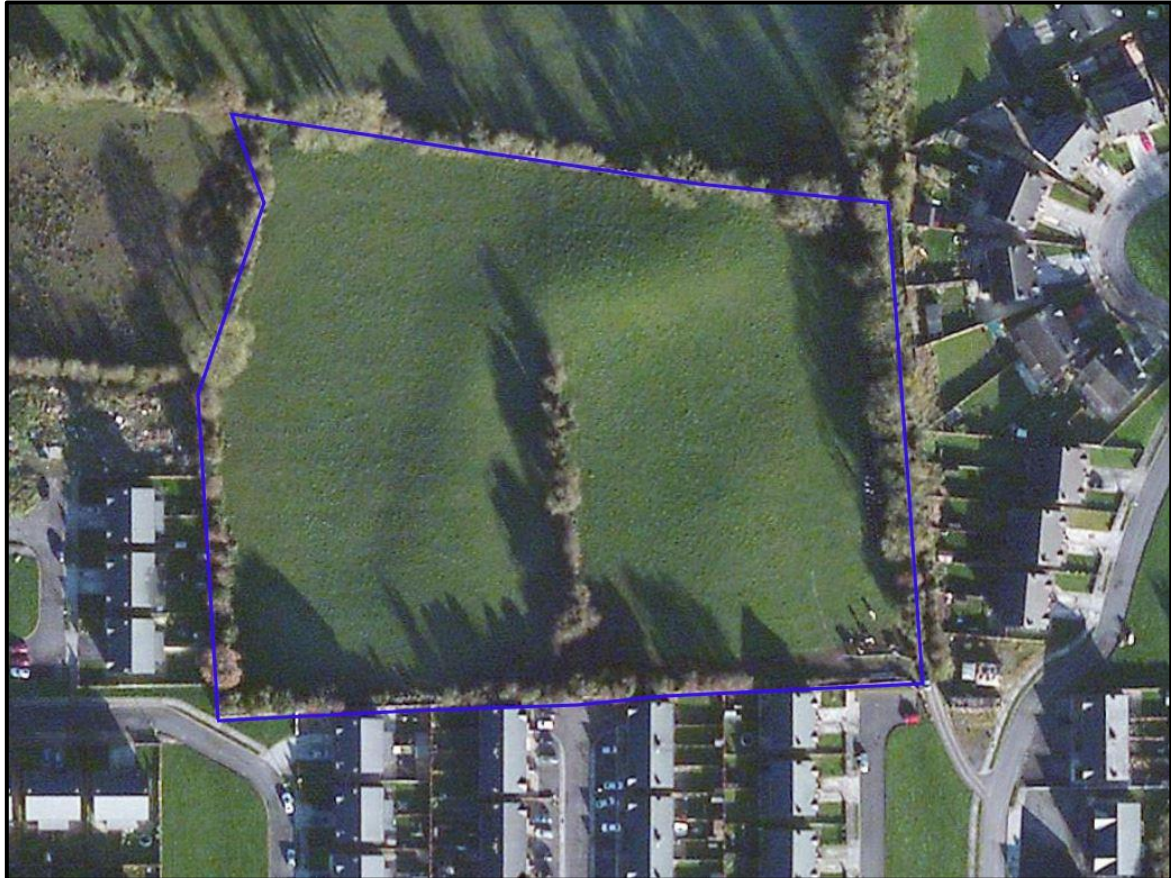


Plate 1: Aerial view of the proposed development site (outlined in blue)
(Ordnance Survey Ireland Licence No. CYAL50292372 – ©Ordnance Survey Ireland / Government of Ireland)

1.3 Study Area

- 1.3.1 The study area upon which this report is based extends 500m from the site boundary in all directions and incorporates parts of the townland of Monksland only.

1.4 Objectives and Methodology

1.4.1 Objectives

This study aims to assess the archaeological, architectural and cultural heritage environment which currently exists on and around the proposed development site.

1.4.2 Desktop Research Methodology

The desktop research element of this study utilised a several documentary and cartographic sources, and the main sources consulted may be summarised as follows:

- National Monuments Service's online Historic Environment Viewer
- Sites and Monuments Record (SMR) & Record of Monuments and Places (RMP)

- National Inventory of Architectural Heritage
- NIAH Survey of Historic Gardens and Designed Landscapes
- Records of Protected Structures for County Roscommon and County Westmeath
- Excavations Bulletin
- Aerial Photographs
- Cartographic Sources

1.4.3 *Fieldwork Methodology*

A site inspection by a professional archaeologist is a key component of any Archaeological Screening Report. During the site inspection the archaeologist records any known monuments and also seeks to identify and record any hitherto unrecorded features of archaeological or cultural heritage significance. The archaeologist walks the site, records the current land use, notes any inaccessible areas, and takes a series of photographs to illustrate the report. The site under consideration in this study was visited by the author on 7/10/2022.



Plate 2: View looking north from the gateway at the south-western corner of the proposed development site

2 The Receiving Environment

The proposed development site is occupied by a field of undulating pasture which is partly divided into two sections by a central hedgerow. The field is bounded to the east by a laneway which runs on a north-south orientation between two overgrown hedgerows. To the east of the laneway, and to the south and southwest of the field, are parts of the modern *Slí an Coiste* housing estate. The field is bounded to the north and northwest by agricultural lands.

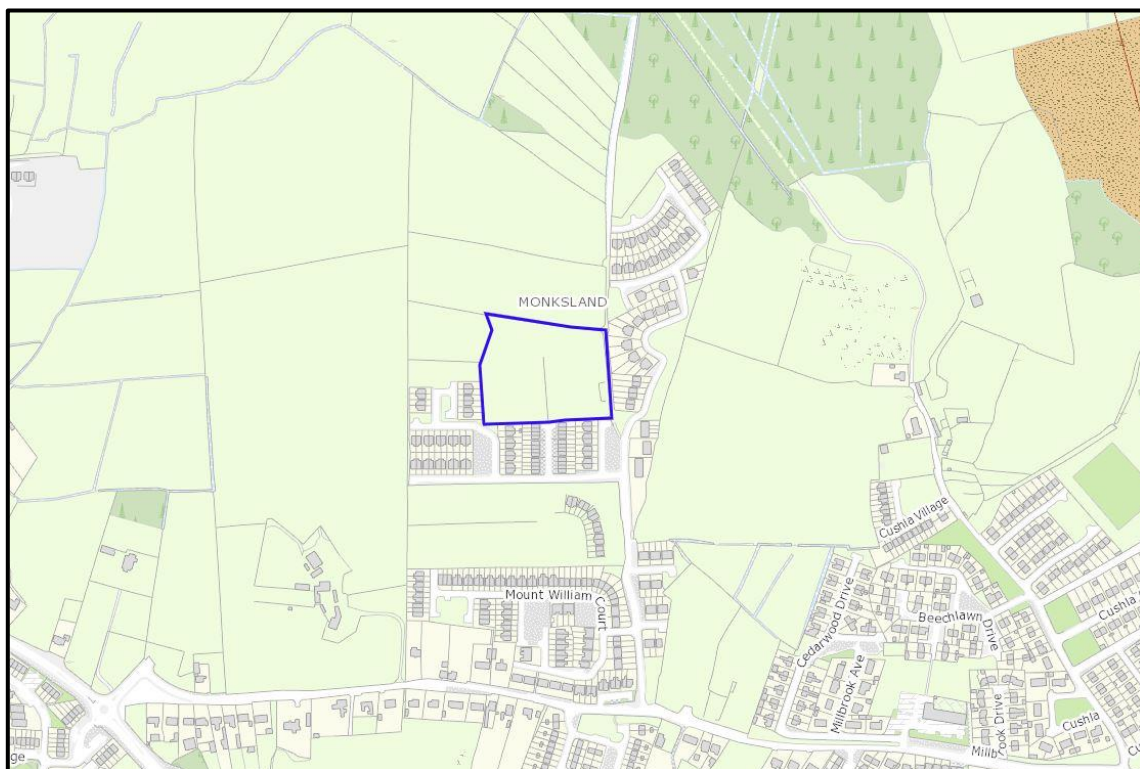


Figure 4: Site Location Map (OSI Street Map from Historic Environment Viewer) – the proposed development site is outlined in blue. Also shown are known archaeological sites (red dots – see Section 2.2) and their Zones of Notification (pink overlay), and NIAH sites (blue dots) [none are present in this area] (Ordnance Survey Ireland Licence No. CYAL50292372 – ©Ordnance Survey Ireland / Government of Ireland)

2.1 Legislative Status and Planning Context

- 2.1.1 No structures listed on the Record of Monuments and Places, which are protected under the National Monuments Act 1930 (as amended), exist upon the site. Furthermore, the site does not lie within the Zone of Notification for any nearby archaeological sites (Figure 4).
- 2.1.2 No structures on the site of the proposed development are listed by the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage.

- 2.1.3 No structures on the site of the proposed development are listed in the Record of Protected Structures for Co Roscommon.

2.2 Known Archaeological Sites in the Area

- 2.2.1 No known archaeological sites are found on the site of the proposed development.
- 2.2.2 No known archaeological sites are found within the study area for this report, which extends 500m outwards in all directions from the site boundary. The closest archaeological site or monument to the boundary of the proposed development site is a standing stone (SMR No.: RO052-025----), which is located over 1,135m to the west in Cloongowna townland.

2.3 Recent Archaeological Excavations

- 2.3.1 A search through the online database of archaeological excavations (www.excavations.ie) uncovered three records from Monksland townland, one of which reported the discovery of a burnt spread 1,260m west of the proposed development site, while the other two reported that nothing of archaeological interest was found. None of the three reports recorded anything of interest within the study area for this report, which extends 500m outwards in all directions from the site boundary.

2.4 National Inventory of Architectural Heritage

- 2.4.1 No structures listed by the National Inventory of Archaeological Heritage are found on the site of the proposed development.
- 2.4.2 No structures listed by the National Inventory of Archaeological Heritage are found within the study area for this report, which extends 500m outwards in all directions from the site boundary. The closest NIAH-listed feature to the boundary of the proposed development site is an early 19th-century ward boundary marker (NIAH Reg. No.: 15001038), which is located over 1,800m to the east.

2.5 NIAH Survey of Historic Gardens and Designed Landscapes

- 2.5.1 No gardens located within 500m of the proposed development site are listed in the NIAH's Survey of Historic Gardens and Designed Landscapes.

2.6 Record of Protected Structures

- 2.6.1 No Protected Structures listed by Roscommon County Council are found on the site of the proposed development.
- 2.6.2 No Protected Structures listed by Roscommon County Council are found within the study area for this report, which extends 500m outwards in all directions from the site boundary. The closest Protected Structure to the boundary of the proposed development site is a brew house chimney (RPS No.: 05200764), which dates to *circa* 1800 and which is located over 1,260m to the west.

2.7 Cartographic Evidence

- 2.7.1 The Ordnance Survey 6" map from 1836 (Figure 2) and the Ordnance Survey 25" map from 1888 (Figure 3) show no features of archaeological significance on the proposed development site. The 6" map shows a small building close to the north-eastern corner of the proposed development site, but it lies in an adjoining property. This structure is also indicated on the 25" map, but it is not hatched and so appears to have been roofless in 1888.

2.8 Aerial Photographs

- 2.8.1 A review of widely available online sources of modern aerial imagery (Google maps, Bing etc) uncovered no features of interest on the site of the proposed development. The archive of the Cambridge University Committee for Aerial Photography (CUCAP) was also consulted, but no oblique aerial images from the area were found.

3 Site Description

- 3.1 The proposed development site is occupied by a field of undulating pasture which is partly divided into two sections by a central hedgerow. The field is bounded to the east by a laneway which runs on a north-south orientation between two overgrown hedgerows. To the east of the laneway, and to the south and southwest of the field, are parts of the modern Slí an Coiste housing estate. The field is bounded to the north and northwest by agricultural lands.
- 3.2 Aerial imagery (Plate 1) suggests that the topographic undulations in the site represent an esker, a linear deposit of gravel and sand formed through glacial activity. The site boundaries are generally defined by overgrown hedgerows and post-and-wire fencing, though collapsed drystone walls were noted in places. No features of archaeological interest were noted on the site during the site inspection.
- 3.3 To the northeast of the proposed development, the overgrown ruins of a brick- and stone-built structure were noted during the site inspection. This structure appears to represent the remains of the building shown on the Ordnance Survey maps (see Figure 2 and Section 2.7 above). It survives as a single-storey, semi-subterranean basement-like structure which is covered with grass (Plate 6) and is largely inaccessible. It seems to represent the basement (Plate 8) of an 18th- or early 19th-century building of uncertain function. The building appears to have been accessed via the laneway which runs along the eastern boundary of the proposed development site – a gateway off the laneway gives direct access to the area around the structure. Though the building is located in the corner of the adjacent field and does not appear to have extended into the proposed development site at any time, it may extend right up to the boundary of the proposed development site.
- 3.4 Further research using Griffith's Valuations indicates that the proposed development site was part of a larger property, which extended to 92 acres, 2 roods and 30 perches, in the mid-nineteenth century. The property was held by Edward Sproules in fee and included a house, farmland and bog. Three structures are visible on the farm on the Ordnance Survey 6" map from the time – one, identified as *Mount William* on later maps, was probably Sproules' residence and so the others, including that adjoining our proposed development site, may have been agricultural buildings or uninhabited houses, though no outbuildings are mentioned in Griffith's Valuation.



Plate 3: View looking south across the eastern part of the proposed development site



Plate 4: View from the north-eastern corner of the site looking southwest along the esker ridge towards the western part of the site



Plate 5: View from the north-western corner of the site looking uphill towards the southeast



Plate 6: The brick- and stone-built structure close to the north-eastern corner of the proposed development site – the proposed development site lies beyond the hedgerow to the left



Plate 7: The brick- and stone-built structure close to the northeast corner of the proposed development site



Plate 8: The vaulted area of the brick- and stone-built structure close to the north-eastern corner of the proposed development site

4 Conclusions and Recommendations

4.1 Conclusions

- 4.1.1 This report has described the archaeological context of a proposed development site at Monksland, Athlone, Co Roscommon.
- 4.1.2 No known archaeological sites or monuments exist on, or within 1km of, the proposed development site.
- 4.1.3 No NIAH structures or Protected Structures exist on, or within 1km of, the proposed development site. The vaulted basement of an early modern building in an adjoining field is worthy of preservation, but it lies just outside the boundary of the proposed development site. Consideration should be given to this structure during the design process – ideally a buffer zone should be established around it in the north-eastern corner of the proposed development site and, if groundworks are required in the area, they should be monitored by a suitably qualified archaeologist.
- 4.1.4 Notwithstanding the presence of an early modern structure in an adjoining property, the archaeological potential of the proposed development site as a whole appears to be relatively low and this report concludes that a residential development on the proposed development site is unlikely to have a negative impact upon hitherto unknown archaeological features.
- 4.1.5 This report therefore concludes that the proposed development site should be considered suitable, in archaeological terms, for development.

4.2 Recommendations

- 4.2.1 If Roscommon County Council decide to commission a residential development on the proposed development site, it is recommended that:
- i) The design process should minimise development in the north-eastern corner, and
 - ii) Works in the north-eastern corner during the construction phase should be monitored by a suitably qualified archaeologist