

Archaeological Assessment

**Strategic Housing Development (SHD) at
Kilnafaddoge, Cartrontro, Lissywollen and
Ardnaglug, Athlone, County Westmeath**

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1. Introduction

John Cronin & Associates have been commissioned by HW Planning on behalf of Avenir Homes Limited to undertake a desktop archaeological assessment of a proposed Strategic Housing Development (SHD) at the townlands of Kilnafaddoge, Cartrontro, Lissywollen and Ardnaglug on the outskirts of Athlone, County Westmeath (**Figure 1**).



Figure 1: General location of subject site in red (Source: Government of Ireland, Historic Environment Viewer)

The overall SHD application is for the development of at 122 residential units and 46 no. student apartments consisting of 283 bed spaces and associated site works.

2. Methodology

This report is based on a programme of desktop research and assessment.

Desktop study

A desktop study assessment has been carried out in order to identify all known archaeological sites, designated architectural heritage structures and other undesignated cultural heritage assets within the study area. The principal sources reviewed for this assessment of the known archaeological resource are the Sites and Monuments Record (SMR) and the Record of Monuments and Places (RMP). Between 1984 and 1992, the Archaeological Survey of Ireland (ASI) issued a series of county SMRs which lists known archaeological sites and places and this record formed the basis for the statutory RMP established under Section 12 of the National Monuments (Amendment) Act 1994. Similar in format to the SMRs (comprising a list and set of maps), the RMPs were issued for each county in the State between 1995 and 1998. Archaeological monuments included in the statutory RMP are legally protected and are generally referred to as 'Recorded Monuments'.

The ASI has continued to record and add entries to the SMR and has developed an online database and web viewer known as 'Historic Environment Viewer'. This has been developed to enhance the user's experience by facilitating access to the database of the National Monuments Service's Sites and Monuments Record (SMR) and the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage (NIAH) in a seamless one stop point of access for both data resources (Source: www.archaeology.ie).

In addition, the following sources were consulted as part of the desktop study:

- *Cartographic Sources* - The detail on cartographic sources can indicate past settlement and land use patterns in recent centuries and can also highlight the impact of modern developments and agricultural practices. This information can aid in the identification of the location and extent of unrecorded, or partially levelled, features of archaeological or architectural heritage interest. The cartographic sources examined for the study areas include the 1st edition of the 6-inch Ordnance Survey (OS) maps (surveyed and published in the 1830s-40s) and the 25-inch OS maps (surveyed and published 1887-1913).
- *Aerial photography* - In parallel with the cartographic study, a review of publicly-accessible aerial photographic sources from the Ordnance Survey Ireland (OSI) and Google Earth was undertaken.
- *Development Plans* - The local authority development plans relevant to the study area was consulted as part of this assessment. These plans outline the local authorities' policies for the conservation of the archaeological and architectural heritage resource and include the Record of Protected Structures (RPS) and any designated Architectural Conservation Areas (ACAs). The relevant development plan for the area is the *Westmeath County Development Plan 2021-2027*.
- *Database of Irish Excavation Reports* - The Database of Irish Excavation Reports contains summary accounts of all archaeological excavations carried out in Ireland from 1969 to present.

- *Irish Heritage Council: Heritage Map Viewer* - This online mapping source collates various cultural heritage datasets and includes extracts from the National Museum of Ireland's records of artefact discovery locations as well as datasets provided by, among others, the National Monuments Service, local authorities, the Royal Academy of Ireland and the Office of Public Works. Current data was accessed via www.heritagemaps.ie
- *UNESCO World Heritage Sites and Tentative List* - UNESCO seeks to encourage the identification, protection and preservation of cultural and natural heritage around the world considered to be of outstanding value to humanity. There are two world heritage sites in Ireland and a number of other significant sites are included in a Tentative List (2010) that has been put forward by Ireland for inclusion.

3. Context

Location

The proposed development site is located at townlands of Kilnafaddoge, Cartronroy, Lissywollen and Ardnaglug, Athlone, County Westmeath (**Figure 2**). The soil profiles of the area consist mainly of limestone sands and gravels while the underlying solid geology is composed of Carboniferous limestones (www.heritagemaps.ie).



Figure 2: Location of proposed works in red (Source: provided by client)

Legal & Policy Framework

The management and protection of cultural heritage in Ireland is achieved through a framework of national laws and policies which are in accordance with the provisions of the Valetta Treaty (1995) (formally the *European Convention on the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage, 1992*) ratified by Ireland in 1997; the *European Convention on the Protection of Architectural Heritage* (Granada Convention, 1985), ratified by Ireland in 1997; and the *UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, 2003*, ratified by Ireland in 2015. The locations of World Heritage Sites (Ireland) and the Tentative List of World Heritage Sites submitted by the Irish State to UNESCO were reviewed. The nearest World Heritage Site, *Brú na Bóinne* is located 98km to the northeast, while the nearest site on the Tentative List of World heritage Sites, *Clonmacnoise* is located 12.5km to the southwest of the subject site.

The national legal statutes and guidelines relevant to this assessment include:

- National Monuments Act (1930) (and amendments in 1954, 1987, 1994 and 2004);
- Heritage Act (1995);
- National Cultural Institutions Act (1997);
- Architectural Heritage (National Inventory) and Historic Monuments (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act (1999);
- Planning and Development Act (2000);
- *Architectural Heritage Protection: Guidelines for Planning Authorities*, Department of Arts, Heritage, and the Gaeltacht (2011); and
- *Framework and Principles for the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage*, Department of Arts, Heritage, Gaeltacht and the Islands, 1999.

Archaeological Heritage

The administration of national policy in relation to archaeological heritage management is the responsibility of the National Monuments Service (NMS) which is currently based in the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht. The National Monuments Act of 1930, and its Amendments, are the primary means of ensuring the satisfactory protection of the archaeological resource. They include a number of provisions that are applied to secure the protection of archaeological monuments. These include the designations of nationally significant sites as National Monuments, the Register of Historic Monuments (RHM), the Record of Monuments and Places (RMP), the Sites and Monuments Record (SMR), and the placing of Preservation Orders and Temporary Preservation Orders on endangered sites.

Section 2 of the National Monuments Act, 1930 defines a National Monument as ‘*a monument or the remains of a monument, the preservation of which is a matter of national importance*’. The State may acquire or assume guardianship of examples through agreement with landowners or under compulsory orders. Archaeological sites within the ownership of local authorities are also deemed to be National Monuments. There are **no** National Monuments located within the study area. The nearest National Monument to the subject site is Athlone Castle (Nat. Mon. No. 520), which is *circa* 2.5km to the southwest (National Monuments Service, 2009).

The National Monuments (Amendment) Act, 1994 made provision for the establishment of the RMP, which comprises the known archaeological sites within the State. The RMP, which is based on the earlier Register of Historic Monuments (RHM) and Sites and Monuments Record (SMR), provides county-based lists of all recorded archaeological sites with accompanying maps. All RMP sites receive statutory protection under the National Monuments Act 1994 and the NMS must be given two months’ notice in advance of any work proposed at their locations. There are **no recorded archaeological sites** (as recorded by the *Archaeological Survey of Ireland*) on the footprint of the proposed development. **There is one recorded archaeological site within 500m of the site boundary.**

The *Westmeath County Development Plan 2021-2027* is the valid development plan for the area and includes the following objectives in relation to the protection of the archaeological resource:

CPO 14.5 Seek to ensure the protection and sympathetic enhancement of archaeological heritage, and in this regard applications will be referred to the National Monuments Service, Department of Culture, Heritage & the Gaeltacht for comment.

CPO 14.6 Seek to ensure the protection of archaeological sites and monuments and their settings and archaeological objects that are listed in the Record of

Monuments and Places, in the ownership/guardianship of the State, or that are the subject of Preservation Orders or have been registered in the Register of Historic Monuments. Seek to ensure the protection and preservation of archaeological sites, which have been identified subsequent to the publication of the Record of Monuments and Places.

CPO 14.7 Ensure that any development adjacent to an archaeological monument or site shall not be detrimental to the character of the archaeological site, or its setting and shall be sited in a manner which minimises the impact on the monument and its setting. Development which is likely to detract from the setting of such a monument or site will not be permitted.

CPO 14.8 Seek to ensure the protection and preservation of underwater archaeological sites in riverine or lacustrine locations.

CPO 14.9 Encourage and promote the appropriate management and maintenance of the County's archaeological heritage, including historical burial grounds, in accordance with conservation principles and best practice guidelines.

CPO 14.10 Ensure that extensions to archaeologically significant burial grounds will only be permitted, in the event the extension would not constitute a proven risk to archaeological heritage, by means of a direct impact on archaeological features.

CPO 14.11 Consult with the National Monuments Service in relation to proposed developments adjoining archaeological sites.

CPO 14.12 Ensure that archaeological excavation is carried out according to best practice as outlined by the National Monuments Service, Department of Culture, Heritage, and the Gaeltacht, The National Museum of Ireland and the Institute of Archaeologists of Ireland.

CPO 14.13 Prepare conservation plans for the management of archaeological sites and monuments in Council ownership.

CPO 14.14 Encourage increased awareness of and public access to monuments within Council ownership.

CPO 14.15 Ensure that all proposed development affecting disturbance to peatlands is subject to archaeological monitoring, in consultation with the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, unless otherwise agreed with the Planning Authority.

Archaeological context

There are **no recorded archaeological sites** (as recorded by the *Archaeological Survey of Ireland*) on or adjacent to the proposed development site. There is **one recorded archaeological monument** within a 500m radius of the subject site which are listed in **Table 1** and mapped in **Figure 4** below.

Table 1: Recorded archaeological sites (as recorded by the ASI) within 500m of proposed development areas

<i>SMR No.</i>	<i>Class</i>	<i>Townland</i>	<i>ITM (E, N)</i>	<i>Distance</i>
WM029-023----	Children's burial ground	Collegeland	605948, 741538	circa 310m to SW



Figure 3: Recorded archaeological sites (as recorded by the ASI) within 500m of the proposed development area (yellow outline) (Source: Government of Ireland, Historic Environment Viewer)

The National Museum of Ireland Topographical Files record a findspot for a “socketed axehead/ 5 coins” (Reference no. 2004:1800b) within the townland of Retreat (<https://www.heritagemaps.ie>).

The following section presents summary details of the main periods within the Irish archaeological record with references to the recorded archaeological sites located within the study area. The dating framework used for each period is based on *Guidelines for Authors of Reports on Archaeological Excavations* published by the National Monuments Service (NMS).

Early prehistoric period

Until the recent identification of human butchery marks on animal bone fragments dating to the Palaeolithic period, the earliest recorded evidence for human settlement in Ireland had dated to the Mesolithic period (7000–4000 BC) when Stone Age hunter-gatherers travelling by boats landed on the heavily forested island. The recent Palaeolithic evidence includes butchery marks identified on a bear patella found in a cave in County Clare in 2016, which was dated to 12,500 BC (Dowd and Carden, 2016). However, in 2021, re-examination of a reindeer bone fragment discovered in Castlepook Cave near Doneraile, County Cork in 1905 revealed human butchery marks on the bone which was radiocarbon dated to 31,000 BC, proving human settlement in Ireland at a much earlier stage than previously thought.

While the Mesolithic settlers did not construct settlements or monuments that have left any above ground traces, their presence can often be identified by scatters of worked flint in ploughed fields or on raised beaches. The Neolithic period (4000-2400 BC) began with the arrival and establishment of agriculture as the principal form of economic subsistence, which resulted in more permanent settlement patterns, such as the Céide Fields, County Mayo. As a consequence of the more settled nature of agrarian life, new site-types, such as more substantial rectangular timber houses and various types of megalithic tombs, begin to appear in the archaeological record during this period. There are no sites from the early prehistoric period within the study area.

Later prehistoric period

The Irish Bronze Age (2400–500 BC) commenced with the arrival of metal-working techniques to the island and this technological advance resulted in the introduction of a new artefactual assemblage into the Irish archaeological record. This period was also associated with the construction of new monument types such as standing stones, stone rows, stone circles, barrows and *fulachta fia*. The arrival of iron-working technology in Ireland saw the advent of the Iron Age (600 BC – 400 AD). This period has been traditionally associated with a Celtic ‘invasion’ but this view is no longer widely accepted as recent archaeological evidence points instead to a gradual acculturation of the Irish Bronze Age communities following centuries of contacts with Celtic-type cultures in Europe. Relatively little has been traditionally known about Iron Age settlement and ritual practices until recent decades when the corpus of evidence has been greatly increased by the discovery of Iron Age sites during schemes such as bog-cutting and road construction projects. There are no sites from the later prehistoric periods within the study area.

Medieval and Post-Medieval periods

The early medieval period began with the introduction of Christianity and continued up to the arrival of the Anglo-Normans in the late twelfth century (*circa* 400–1169 AD). While the medieval period saw the emergence of the first phases of urbanisation around the larger monasteries and the Hiberno-Norse ports, the dominant settlement pattern was still rural-based and centred around enclosed farmsteads known as ringforts (earth/timber built) and cashels (stone built). These sites comprise broadly circular enclosures delimited by one or more concentric banks and ditches in the case of ringforts and drystone walls in the case of cashels. Ringforts are one of the most numerous monuments in the Irish landscape, with some 45,000 recorded examples (Stout 1997, 53). They were formerly known by the names *ráth/lios/cathair/dún*, which still form some of the most common placename elements within the Irish landscape. The majority of excavated examples have produced evidence for the remains of timber houses, outbuildings and stockades as well as a variety of agricultural and craft activities such as grain processing and metalworking. Though there are several ringforts in the surrounding area, there are no examples within the study area.

Athlone was captured by Tairrdelbach Mór Ua Conchobair (AD 1088–1156) and his son Ruaidrí mac Tairrdelbach Ua Conchobair (AD 1116–1198), kings of Connacht. This was an important staging post for Ruaidrí’s subsequent invasion of Leinster and his repulsion of the Norman invasion. A fortification (WM029-042098-) was erected in 1129, located at an important fording point (WM029-042054-) over the River Shannon. The Annals of Ulster stated that the structure, variously called *caislen*, *caistel*, *dun*, *daingin* and *longphort*, was destroyed and rebuilt a number of times during the tumultuous years prior to the Norman invasion.

The Priory of St. Peter and Paul (WM029-042003-), the only Cluniac foundation in Ireland, was reputedly founded in 1150 by Tairrdelbach Mór Ua Conchobair (Gwynn and Hadcock 1970, 197).

It is believed to have been suppressed by Sir William Brabazon, vice-treasurer of Ireland and constable of Athlone Castle after 1547 (Bradley *et al* 1985, 47).

The discovery of early Christian cross-inscribed slabs (WM029-042043-/-44-/045-/047-) on the site of a thirteenth-century Franciscan Abbey (WM029-042001-) in the town suggests the existence of an early Christian monastery (WM029-042050-) there. These slabs were dated to the mid-8th to 11th centuries (Fanning and Ó hÉailidhe 1980). The monastery was consecrated by the Friars Minor of Athlone in 1241 and apparently destroyed during the Dissolution of Monasteries in 1567-8 (*ibid*, 243).

The arrival and conquest of large parts of Ireland by the Anglo-Normans in the late twelfth century broadly marks the advent of the Irish late medieval period, which continued up until the beginning of the post-medieval period in *circa* 1550. Within the late medieval period, towns, markets, and fairs were established and change and reform was attempted in the Irish church. By the fifteenth century the native Irish chieftains and lords began to establish tower houses and smaller castles as centres of territorial control. During the later medieval period, Gaelic rulers of the area had lost control of the territory to Anglo-Norman lords.

The kingdom of Mide was granted to Hugh de Lacy in 1172, but it was not until Geoffrey de Costentin who was granted a cantred in Connacht adjoining Athlone in 1200 that the process of settlement truly began there. In 1210, John de Grey, Bishop of Norwich, was appointed justiciar of Ireland, and it appears that he recognised Athlone's importance in subduing Connacht, which was still largely under Gaelic control (Claffey 1970-1, 56). In order to establish Athlone as a joint seat of administration with Dublin, a stone castle (WM029-042002-) and bridge (WM029-042004-) were begun in 1210. Improvements were made to the castle's fortification in 1273 and 1279 (Claffey *op. cit.*, 57). In 1305, Athlone was burned by Ruaidrí Ó Conchobhair, the nascent king of Connacht and the town subsequently fell into decline as a site for English administration. The post-medieval period (AD 1550+) saw the development of high and low status stone houses throughout the Irish country. During this period any given settlement cluster is likely to have consisted primarily of single-storey thatched cottages with associated farm buildings while two-storey farmhouses became more common in the nineteenth century.

In 1569, the castle and estate were assigned to the newly established Presidency of Connacht which was to be based at Athlone (Murtagh 1980, 91). A revival in the town's fortunes was undermined when in 1572, James Fitzmaurice Fitzgerald and his Gallowglass allies burned the town as part of the First Desmond Rebellion. It received a charter of incorporation to the town by Elizabeth I in 1599, confirmed by James I in 1606-8. The conditions of this charter included the construction of a defensive wall (WM029-042020-). In 1620, a licence was issued to hold a weekly market. The town's fortifications were further strengthened between 1651 and 1654 (Murtagh *op. cit.*, 96-8) but were breached the 1691 siege by Williamite forces.

Excavations Database

The Excavation Database (Excavations.ie) contains summary accounts of all licenced archaeological investigations carried out in Ireland (North and South) from 1969 onwards. It has been compiled from the published Excavations Bulletins from 1969 to 2010 and online material only from 2011 onwards, it now provides access to over 27,000 reports that can be browsed or searched using multiple fields, including year, county, site type, grid reference, license number, RMP number and author.

No previous works of archaeological excavation have been carried out within the subject site. The Excavation Database records that one archaeological investigation was carried out within the 500m study area. In 2013, monitoring (Licence no. 09E0440 ext.) was undertaken of soil stripping at the north side of the proposed Garrycastle bridge re-alignment scheme. Nothing of archaeological merit was noted. The results of this excavation are provided in **Appendix 2** to this report.

Two further licences excavations are recorded in the adjacent townlands of Retreat (Licence no. 98E0308) and Lissywollen (Licence no. 06E0713) but nothing of archaeological significance was identified on either site. Archaeological testing (not registered on the Excavation Database) was undertaken on a site to the west of the subject site in the townlands of Lissywollen and Retreat (Licence no. 19E0330). These archaeological works did not identify anything archaeological.

Cartographic review

The detail on historic cartographic sources demonstrates the nature of past settlements and land use patterns in recent centuries and can also highlight the impacts of modern developments and agricultural practices. This information can aid in the identification of the location and extent of unrecorded or partially levelled features of archaeological or architectural heritage interest. The cartographic sources examined for the study areas include the 1st edition of the 6-inch OS map (surveyed and published in the 1830s-40s) (**Figure 4**) and the 25-inch OS maps (surveyed and published 1887-1913) (**Figure 5**). Both maps show that the study area comprised undeveloped, enclosed agricultural land. Neither historic OS mapping editions depict any potential unrecorded archaeological features within the subject site.



Figure 4: Extract from the 1st edition 6-inch OS map depicting the area surrounding the subject lands, approximate site boundary defined in red (Source: Ordnance Survey of Ireland)

The 1st edition 6-inch map shows internal field divisions in the northern half of the site which are not apparent in the 25-inch map. There is also a farm building in the west of the subject site which is not present in the later map. The townland boundaries with Lissywollen at the north and Cartrontrouy across the southern portion of the subject site are clearly shown on the historic maps. These boundaries are extant on modern aerial images.

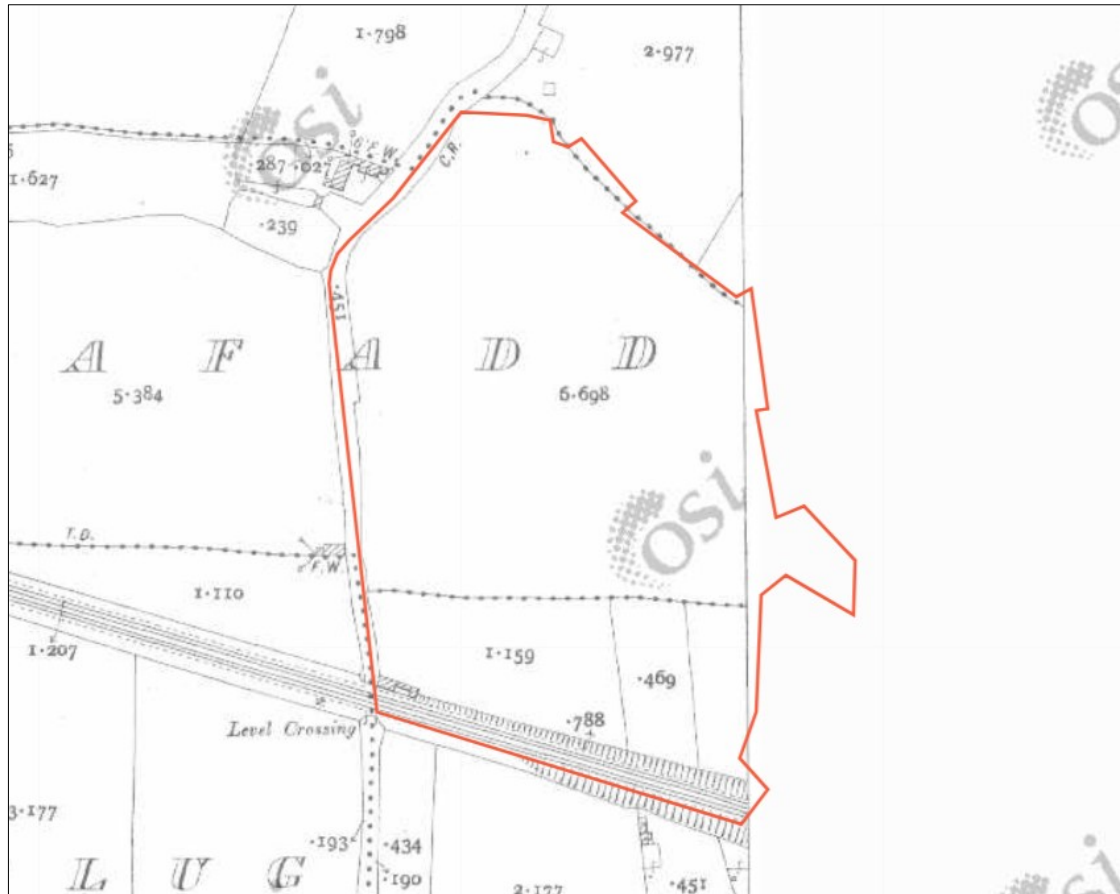


Figure 5: Extract from the 25-inch OS map depicting the area surrounding the subject lands, approximate site boundary defined in red (Source: Ordnance Survey of Ireland)

Aerial photography

An examination of Ordnance Survey of Ireland (OSI) orthorectified aerial images from 2018, 2005, 2000 and 1995 (**Figures 6-9**) was undertaken. These images show no indication of unrecorded archaeological features within the subject site and indicate that it has been largely undisturbed pastureland.



Figure 6: Segment of 2018 OSI aerial survey image of the subject site (Source: Ordnance Survey of Ireland)



Figure 7: Segment of 2005 OSI aerial survey image of the subject site (Source: Ordnance Survey of Ireland)



Figure 8: Segment of 2000 OSI aerial survey image of the subject site (Source: Ordnance Survey of Ireland)



Figure 9: Segment of 1995 OSI aerial survey image of the subject site (Source: Ordnance Survey of Ireland)

4. Description of the site

The proposed development site is located in the townlands of Kilnafaddoge, Cartronroy, Lissywollen and Ardnaglug, in a mostly agricultural landscape between the N6 Road to the north and the Midland and Great Western Railway line to the south, approximately 2km west of Athlone town centre, County Westmeath. The site comprises a single large, pentagonal-shaped field of pasture bounded by mature hedges, situated immediately west of Junction 9 on the N6 Road. The shape of this field is visible on the historic cartographic sources and the northeast and northwest boundaries are the townland boundary with the townland of Lissywollen to the north. The shape of the townland boundary appears to have been influenced by the shape an esker (recorded in *Dataset of Eskers in County Westmeath 2009* – www.heritagemaps.ie) located immediately north of the subject site.

No archaeological monuments are recorded within the subject site. No potential archaeological features were identified within the site during a review of historic cartographic sources and orthorectified aerial photographic images. This site has remained undeveloped agricultural land since at least the mid-nineteenth century. The assessment has also concluded the subject site possesses moderate archaeological potential.

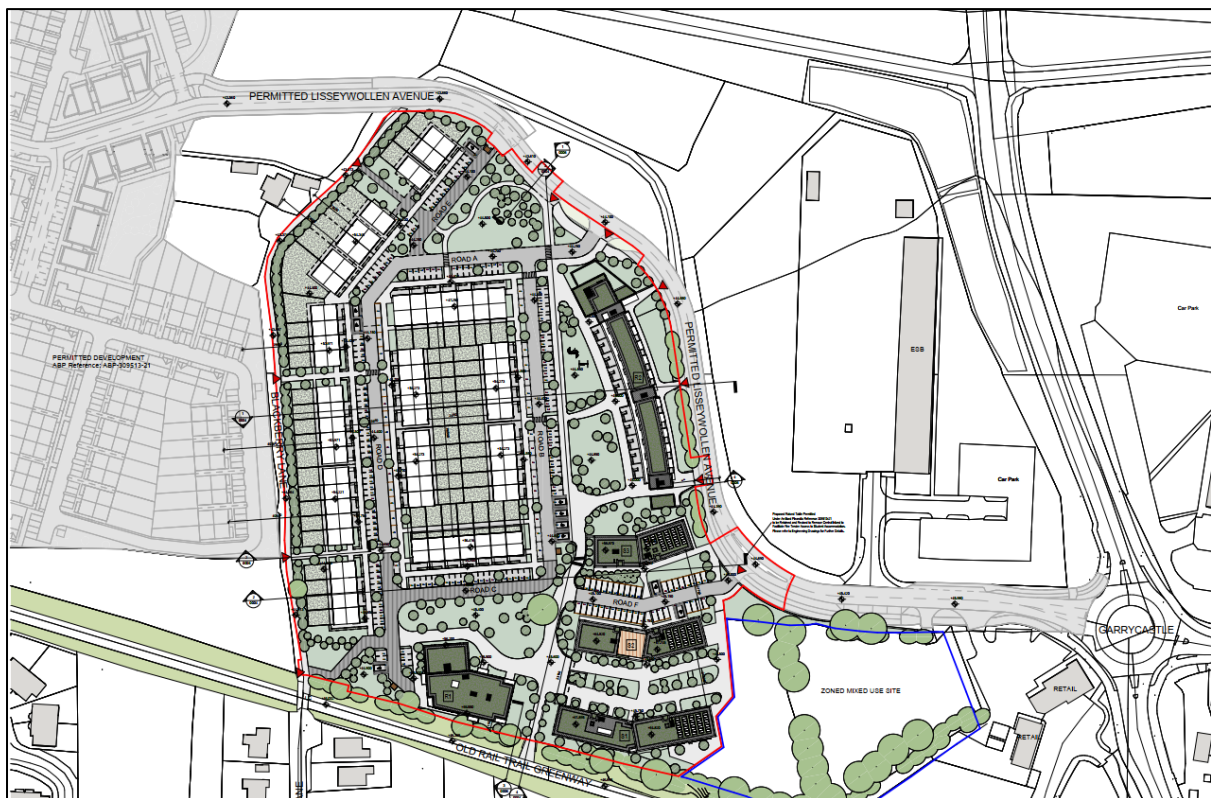


Figure 10: Schematic diagram of proposed development (Source: provided by client)

5. Conclusions and recommendations

Conclusions

This assessment has been compiled in order to examine the archaeological potential of a proposed development site. There are **no recorded archaeological sites** (as recorded by the *Archaeological Survey of Ireland*) on the footprint of the proposed development. **There is, however, one recorded archaeological site within 500m of the subject site boundary.**

Following consultation of the available and relevant datasets and historic documentary and cartographic sources, this assessment has concluded that the proposed scheme will have **no impact** on the recorded archaeological heritage resource.

The proposed development area is located within an undeveloped parcel of good quality agricultural land and the site does not appear to have been subject to significant past ground disturbance. The assessment has also concluded the subject site possesses moderate archaeological potential.

Recommendations

it is recommended that ***a programme of archaeological monitoring during topsoil stripping*** is conducted across the entire development site. The topsoil/ overburden should be stripped down to the level of the natural subsoil or uppermost archaeological horizon, whichever becomes apparent first, using 360-degree mechanical excavators fitted with toothless ditching buckets. If archaeological remains are revealed, future mitigation measures may include preservation *in situ* if viable or more likely preservation by record (archaeological excavation). Any additional mitigation measures will be subject to further consultations between the relevant stakeholders.

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Appendix 1: Archaeological Inventory entries

WM029-023----

Class: Children's burial ground

Townland: Collegeland

Scheduled for inclusion in the next revision of the RMP: Yes

Description: Situated on flat, well drained pasture, on the E side of Athlone town. Lissahearín Grave Yard consisted of a roughly circular-shaped area (diam. 19m) enclosed by a low bank of earth and stone with is no trace of an external fosse. The perimeter of the earthwork is planted with mature beech and elm trees. The interior is relatively level with stones scattered on the surface and a low stony outcrop in the E quadrant. The monument resembles a small ringfort. According to Rev. J. Pinkman (1945, 47) 'Lissaherín' refers to Ahern's Fort which lies close to the S side of the Athlone to Mullingar railway line, about half a mile from Athlone town. It was previously used as a burial place for unbaptized children. The Ordnance Survey suggested that this monument may have been a small ringfort that was reused as a children's burial ground. Monument is visible today as a roughly circular-shaped tree-planted earthwork on Digital Globe aerial photography which is within a trapezoidal-shaped, undeveloped green area, within a modern housing estate.

Appendix 2: Relevant Excavations.ie entries

<i>Site name</i>	<i>Licence and author</i>	<i>Summary</i>
Garrycastle, Athlone	09E0440 ext Avril Hayes	Monitoring was undertaken during the topsoil stripping of land at the north side of the proposed Garrycastle bridge re-alignment scheme, in those areas between chainages 480-590 and chainages 410-440. The majority of re-alignment route was test trenched by Tempus Archaeology in 2009 (licence no. 09E0440). Monitored areas were inaccessible at the time of testing. The area to the north of the railway line was stripped revealing a 0.5m depth of sod and topsoil overlying the sandy natural subsoil. Areas stripped to the south of the railway line were located in the rear gardens of adjacent dwellings. Nothing of an archaeological nature was noted.