

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT
AT
TYRRELS LAND, STRADBALLY ROAD,
PORTLAOISE, CO. LAOIS**

ON BEHALF OF: LAOIS COUNTY COUNCIL

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ABSTRACT

This assessment has been prepared on behalf of Laois County Council, to study the impact, if any, on the archaeological and historical resource of the proposed residential development at Tyrrells Land, Stradbally Road, Portlaoise, Co. Laois (Figure 1, ITM 647720, 698360). It was carried out by Maeve Tobin of IAC Archaeology.

The proposed development area is located within former parkland associated with Portran House (now Portrane Veterinary Clinic) in the townlands of Borris Little and Beladd. The site comprises undeveloped fields of pasture, bordered by mature trees and a watercourse to the east. A townland boundary crosses the southern portion of the site. No recorded monuments are known within the proposed development area; however, the zone of notification surrounding the historic town (LA013-041) of Portlaoise (formerly Maryborough) extends c. 250m to the west. Five further recorded monuments are known within the wider study area, of which the nearest are a church and graveyard (LA013-102, -102001) situated c. 360m to the northwest.

A review of the historic mapping did not reveal any features of previously unrecorded archaeological potential within the proposed development area. A large sunken rectangular feature (c. 18m x 37m) was observed as a crop mark in numerous aerial photos (1995-2022) in the centre west of the site. The function and date of this feature is uncertain, and while it may relate to modern land use (such as equestrian training) it may also have earlier origins. A field inspection confirmed a rectangular sunken area was evident at this location; however, given the overgrown vegetation no definition of form was observed. The proposed development area comprises slightly undulating terrain, falling gently from the north and west towards the watercourse and body of water bordered by a copse of trees and scrub.

The site is an undeveloped greenfield situated on the margins of a historic town bordered by a water course, and as such there is potential for previously unrecorded sub-surface archaeological remains to survive here. Water-side locations are considered to have archaeological potential as they were ideal settings for activities associated with exploitation of this resource throughout prehistoric and historic periods. If present ground works associated with the proposed development may have a direct negative impact on any surviving archaeological remains.

As such it is recommended that a programme of geophysical survey and targeted test trenching is carried out as a condition of planning to further investigate the archaeological potential of this site. If any features of archaeological potential are discovered during the course of the works further archaeological mitigation may be required, such as preservation in-situ or by record. Any further mitigation will require approval from the National Monuments Service of the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 GENERAL

The following report details an archaeological assessment undertaken in advance of a proposed residential development at Tyrrells Land, Stradbally Road, Portlaoise, Co. Laois (Figure 1; ITM 647720, 698360). 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 Maeve Tobin of IAC Archaeology (IAC), on behalf of Laois County Council, to inform the planning process.

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 Laois, 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 consists of 67 no. Social Housing units at Tyrrells Land, Stradbally Road, Portlaoise, Co. Laois (Figure 2). Access to the c. 2.8ha site will be from the Stradbally Road. There are major level changes throughout the site topography with rolling hills and mature trees. The ground falls southwards from the main access road.

2 METHODOLOGY

A study area, defined as 500m 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 Laois;
- Sites and Monuments Record for County Laois;
- 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;
- Laois County Development Plan 2021–2027;
- Portlaoise Local Area Plan 2024-2030;
- Aerial photographs;
- Excavations Bulletin (1970–2025).

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.

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 Laois County Development Plan (2021–2027) and Portlaoise Local Area Plan (2024–2030) 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 1970–2025.

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 in the townlands of Borris Little and Beladd, within the parish of Borris and barony of Maryborough East. The site comprises part of two fields of pasture bordered by tree-lined ditch and a watercourse to the east. The immediate setting is characterised by open parkland formerly associated with Portran House (now Portrane Veterinary Clinic); however, the surrounding landscape is characterised by residential estates to the east and west, high-density residential complex to the north and Institutional St Fintans complex to the northeast.

There are six recorded archaeological sites within the study area, none of which are located within the proposed development area. The nearest recorded monument comprises the area of archaeological potential surrounding the historic town (LA013-041) which lies 250m to the west.

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.

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.

Stone axe heads can date to the Mesolithic Period but are more prevalent in the Neolithic Period. They would have been instrumental in aiding Neolithic communities to manage and control the landscape in order to commence the first clearances of the densely forested land. The majority of axe heads are considered to be a 'multi-purpose' tool and would originally have been mounted on a perforated shaft of wood

(Mitchell & Ryan 1998, 183). Some axe heads are deemed less practical owing to their size and seemingly exotic geology types, and as such, have been mooted as more ritual in nature. Within the wider study area, stone axe heads have been recovered from Acragar (NMI 1943:111), Maryborough (NMI 1937:2600-2603) and The Ridge, Portlaoise (NMI: Record Only). The National Museum of Ireland also notes the discovery of a saddle quern (NMI IA/30/85 – Not acquired) from the townland of Killen/Kileenlynagh, which would have been used to grind the grains of the cereals grown by the farmers to make flour, which may also date to later periods. Other objects which may be attributed to the Neolithic Period include a perforated stone object from Gurteen (NMI 1979:87); a stone object from Derrycloney (NMI -Record Only) and a stone rubber from Derrydavv (NMI 1943:113).

Excavations in 1993 as part of the N7 Portlaoise Bypass (Bennett 1993:140; Licence No. 93E0023) at The Heath, c. 5km to the northeast of the proposed development area, revealed evidence for late Neolithic activity in the form of charcoal spreads, pits and in excess of 400 stake holes forming a series of parallel lines. The diagnostic material, which supports late Neolithic-early Bronze Age dating, included waste and worked flints; sherds of pottery (including Irish Grooved Ware and Cordoned Urns) and paleoenvironmental remains in the form of carbonised cereal grains.

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. Barrows are often found in groups, (such as those on The Heath to the northeast of Portlaoise town), or cemeteries where a number of sub-types can be found together. Occasionally they are found juxtaposed with megalithic cemeteries as at Carrowmore in County Sligo, or associated with ceremonial enclosures. A large cluster of barrows are recorded c. 3-5km northeast of the proposed development area, the nearest of which are in Rathbrennan townland (LA013-107 and LA013-108). The remains of a crouched burial were disturbed during construction of a new wall around Portlaoise Prison in 1988 430m to the north of site which may also date to this period (SMR LA013-124; Cahill and Sikora 2011, 488).

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. The remains of burnt mounds were recorded by archaeological investigations at Borris Little c. 1.6km north (Bennett 2006:1187, Licence No. 05E0547) and c. 2.2km southeast in Derry townland (LA013113001-2). No recorded examples of these sites are known within the study area.

Hoards of metal objects are a prevalent archaeological discovery from this period, which can be divided into two categories: a ritual hoard and a merchant's hoard. The latter consists of scrap metal and broken implements which may have been collected to be re-smelted but were deposited (most likely for safekeeping or economic reasons) and were never returned for. A famous example of this kind of hoard, known as the Ballytegan Hoard (NMI 1967:1-60), was made in the Dowris Phase of the later Bronze Age. It was discovered in 1967 in a gravel ridge within a shallow pit (LA013-020), c. 2.4km north of the proposed development area. The hoard consisted of 60 bronze objects which included a wide variety of items ranging from tools (portion of a staple (NMI 1967:24) to personal decorative items (sunflower pins, some with gold plated heads (NMI 1967:02; 1967:03). The artefacts were discovered on The Ridge in a shallow pit (c. 18 inches deep) in an area known locally as "Knockshee". It is a highly significant archaeological find as it shows that there was direct contact between Ireland and Denmark during the latter Bronze Age (Raftery 1971-2).

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 no known monuments in the vicinity of the proposed development area that would suggest an active presence of Iron Age communities in this area.

No archaeological remains dating to this period have been identified within the study area; however, archaeological monitoring conducted on the N7 Portlaoise Bypass identified an extensive Iron Age complex and associated features in the townland of Ballydavis, c. 3.5km to the northeast. This comprised four ring-ditches, seven furnaces and a series of postholes and pits; now recorded in the SMR as LA013-112001-004.

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. Portlaoise is the principal town of County Laois and derives its name from the ancient territory of Leix and from the first century AD when Laois was part of the Kingdom of Ossory. The sept or seven-fold system seems to have been a peculiarity of Gaelic civil life interwoven with ecclesiastical divisions and custom, where the kingdom was divided into seven parts, which were ruled by the seven 'Septs of Laois'.

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. The closest example of such a site to the proposed development area is recorded at Beladd, c. 465m east to the east (LA013-045).

Enclosure sites belong to a classification of a monument whose precise nature is unclear. Often, they may in fact represent ringforts, which have either been damaged to a point where they cannot be positively recognised or which are smaller or more irregular in plan than the accepted range for a ringfort. An early medieval date is generally likely, although not a certainty. An enclosure (LA013-042) is recorded at Borris Little, c. 900m to the north and marked on the 1841 edition of the Ordnance Survey map as a 'fort'.

3.1.3 Medieval Period (AD 1100–1600)

County Laois was located outside of the Pale, which were the lands under the possession of the English Crown that centred on the city of Dublin. During the years 1175-1325, Norman Lords had control of the best land in the county, founding boroughs at Castletown, Dunamase, Durrow and Timahoe. The arrival of the Anglo-Normans saw a change in the social structure with the introduction of the Feudal System; economic and agricultural change, military improvements and to the Gaelic Irish, a new language. They also constructed early earth and timber castles; called mottes and baileys. The remnants of these Anglo-Norman fortifications, manor farms and later stone built castles such as Lea Castle and Dunamase attest to the presence

of the Anglo-Normans in County Laois from the late 12th century onwards. The fortress at Dunamase (LA013-052), situated c. 5km to the east of the proposed development area, was part of the dowry of Aoife McMurrough, daughter to the King of Leinster Diarmuid McMurrough; wife of Richard de Clare ('Strongbow').

Gaelic communities in the county were marginalised, surviving in the bogs and forests of Laois and the foothills of the Slieve Bloom Mountains. In the 14th century, there was a Gaelic revival - a surge in the fortunes of the Irish, which resulted in an Anglo-Norman decline in fortuity. The rebel's rise to prominence was short-lived, their lands were confiscated and a 'campa' or fortress was then built at Portlaoise in 1548 (LA013-041001), c. 600m west of the proposed development area. This was constructed under the supervision of Lord Deputy Sir Edward Bellingham, who was anxious to fortify Leix following his repression of the natives and the exiling of their chieftains earlier in the year. The fort was built primarily for military and political purposes. Its situation on rising ground southeast of the River Triogue and with the Esker ridge forming a natural defensive barricade to the east made it of strategic military importance. Originally designed as a military outpost for the defence of settlers, it was placed to the southwest of the River Triogue and is first referred to in the Annals of the Four Masters in 1548 when it was known as the '*Campa of Leix*'.

In 1566, the plantation of Laois and Offaly took place under Queen Mary I during her reign (1553-1558). In the same year, the 'campa' known to the English as the *Fort of Leix*, or *Fort Protector*, was renamed Maryborough in honour of Queen Mary. A settlement grew in and around the fort, and in 1570 the town received a charter of incorporation from Elizabeth I (Bradley et al. 1986). The proposed development area lies outside of the medieval settlement.

The later medieval town was defended by a wall (LA013-041006), which enclosed a large settlement; with a plantation castle (LA013-041001) in the centre and a circular tower or castle (LA013-041003) of 16th century date. There are no surviving remains of the defences and it is difficult to gauge their exact route (Bradley 1986, 52-3). The east boundary of the town is likely preserved by the line of the Triogue River; the south wall may be reflected by the current townland boundary, while the west wall may be preserved in the line of Railway Street and Lyster Lane. This would place the proposed development area outside of the town walls. Many settlers moved into the town and the Elizabethan fiant recorded a particularly high number of property grants between 1569 and 1571 (Bradley 1986).

In the 1556 Plantation of Laois it was ordered that a church be built in every town within three years (O'Hanlon and O'Leary 1907-14). The earliest historical reference to the existence of a church at Maryborough is a reference to David Good who is listed as vicar of Maryborough in 1598 (LA013-041002). The church and graveyard (LA013-041004), c. 700m west of the development area, was located outside the walls of the plantation fort but within the town walls, as shown on the c. 1560 map of Maryborough (O'Hanlon and O'Leary 1907).

3.1.4 Post-Medieval Period (AD 1600–1800)

The ending of the Williamite Wars saw the beginning of a comparatively politically calm era, which allowed the country's landowners the security to experiment with the latest styles of architecture without the need to refer to defensive matters. Initially, constraints on available resources resulted in mansions of a relatively modest scale and relatively plain appearance. However, as the Irish aristocracy's sense of security grew over the following decades, their greater access to wealth helped foster a shift towards more ostentatious buildings. Buildings of architectural heritage value in the vicinity of the proposed development area include

In 1635 the town obtained a grant of two fairs from Charles I and in 1646 it was captured by Owen Roe O'Neill but was subsequently retaken by Lord Castlehaven (Bradley et al. 1986). The fort was destroyed in 1650 by the Cromwellian Generals Hewson and Reynolds (Feehan 1983). The destruction of the Fort signalled a major change and from then onwards the town functioned primarily as the administrative centre of the county, and as a garrison and market centre. Anecdotal evidence indicates that an external ditch partly filled with water was situated outside at least some of the town walls. This ditch was backfilled when its defensive function became obsolete in the 18th century (Bradley et al. 1986). Substantial parts of the Fort's defences are intact including the north, east and south walls, a section of the north end of the west wall and the circular tower at the northeast corner (ibid).

Notwithstanding the Penal Laws, following the tumultuous and violent events of the 17th century in Ireland, the relative stability of the early 18th century allowed for a period of growth in Portlaoise and an increase in economic activity. Portlaoise remained a focal point of trade and commerce for the county, with agricultural produce and cotton forming the drivers of this economic growth. The Cromwellian policy of seizing land from Confederate supporters and the subsequent redistribution of land at the Court of Claims in the early 1700s saw the arrival of new landed families in Laois. The diminishing risk of rebellion encouraged both public and private investment and improvement projects. The new landed families invested in industry and cotton and corn mills were established in Portlaoise.

The area of proposed development lies within the former parkland associated with Portran House. This estate was purchased by Sir Eyre Coote (1726-83) in the late 18th century with money that he had brought back from military expeditions in India (Dictionary of Irish Biography). The current Portran House was built in c. 1800 and was extended in the late 19th century. Sir Coote was briefly an MP for Maryborough in 1761 and he was recorded as a major Irish landowner at this time. His estate was inherited by his nephew, also Sir Eyre Coote, who resided for a time at Portran and was also elected as MP for Maryborough between 1797 and 1800. In 1802 he was elected MP for Queen's County (1802–6) and was appointed governor of the fort of Maryborough. He gave the site and a large sum of money towards the building of the old county hospital in Maryborough. In 1837 it is recorded that 'Portrane' House was the residence of W. Woodroffe Esquire (Lewis 1837).

During the 18th and 19th centuries, the civil administration invested in civic buildings and road and rail construction throughout Ireland, thus encouraging trade and commerce. The 'District Lunatic Asylum' (St. Fintan's Hospital, Dublin Road) was built in 1800 to the north of the proposed development area. This facility catered for the population of Laois, Offaly, Westmeath and Longford. During the early 18th century, the building at the location of Presentation Convent was used as a jail. In 1756 Dr Michael Jacob (1724-1798) opened an infirmary at this location. This infirmary was replaced by a much larger institution when the county infirmary was built in Portlaoise (Dublin Road) in 1808; to the immediate north of the proposed development area.

Throughout the post medieval period the proposed development area was located to the east of the historic core of Portlaoise (Figure 3) and it was not until the first half of the 20th century that the surrounding landscape was subject to residential development.

3.2 SUMMARY OF PREVIOUS ARCHAEOLOGICAL FIELDWORK

A review of the Excavations Bulletin (1970–2025) has revealed that no previous archaeological investigations have been undertaken within the proposed development area. Only two programmes of archaeological testing or monitoring have been carried out within the study area, for which summaries have been included below.

Archaeological testing carried out in 2006 investigated the footprint of the mortuary building annotated on the 1909 Ordnance Survey map, c. 300m to the east (Bennett 2006:1188, Licence No. 06E0271). No archaeological remains were uncovered, although the foundations of the mortuary building were noted.

No archaeological remains were identified by a programme of testing undertaken c. 400m west (Bennett 2009:517, Licence No. 09E0227).

3.3 CARTOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS

Sir William Petty, Down Survey: Map of the Barony of Maryborough c. 1656-58

This map depicts the proposed development area in the barony of 'Mariborough' to the east of 'Mariburrough towne' (Figure 3). The site is shown in open land in the parish of 'Pyurres' with the River Triogue running north to south to the east and a smaller watercourse forming the eastern boundary of site. A number of structures are present in the town including the 'Castle Fort' (LA013-041001).

David Aber, Map of the Bogs of District No. 12 in the Queens County, Drawn by order of the Commissioners for the Improvement of Bogs in Ireland, 1812

This map, while not accurate to scale, shows further topographical detail than previously presented. The site lies to the east of a north-south running ridge of ground falling to the east. The River Triogue and unnamed stream bordering the east

of site are shown and the proposed development area appears to be clear of buildings at this time.

First Edition Ordnance Survey Map, 1841, scale 1:10,560

This is the first accurate historic mapping coverage of the area containing the proposed development (Figure 4). The area proposed development comprises part of two large irregularly-shaped fields, the largest and most northerly of which is shaded as parkland associated with Portran House. A meandering watercourse runs along the eastern boundary of the site, which forms the townland boundary between Borris Little and Beladd. A narrow-canalised watercourse runs southeast from the watercourse outside of the current site, annotated as an aqueduct. The fields are bordered by trees and scrubland. Portran House is shown as a cruciform building to the immediate west of the proposed development area. A pathway leads across the northern perimeter of the site to access the house. To the site is bordered to the north by the Stradbally Road, beyond which is an Infirmary and Lunatic Asylum. The lands to the east, west and south of the proposed development area comprise undeveloped agricultural fields. Annbrook House is located to the west on the margin of the town. No buildings or features of archaeological potential are illustrated within the proposed development area.

E.F. Sanders, Manuscript Map of the Estate of Eyre Coote Esquire in the townland of Borris Little, 1895

The proposed development is partially illustrated on the margins of this estate map, at a relatively detailed scale. The footprint of Portrane House and rear outbuildings is shown to the immediate west of the site. The meandering watercourse forming the eastern boundary of site is the boundary of the mapped landscape. No features of archaeological potential or former structures are illustrated within the proposed development area. The land is annotated as the property of Eyre Coote Esq.

Ordnance Survey Map, 1909, scale 1:1,056

There are no changes of note within the proposed development area (Figure 4). The 'Downs Road' bordering the western perimeter of Portran House is also labelled as 'The Ridge of Maryborough'. To the north a fever hospital is now annotated adjacent to the County Infirmary. A Roman Catholic chapel has been constructed in the grounds of the asylum and a mortuary and graveyard are now located c. 300m to the east.

3.4 DEVELOPMENT PLANS

The Laois Development Plan (2021–2027) and Portlaoise Local Area Plan (2024–2030) 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 2).

There are no recorded monuments located within the proposed development area; however, there are six known within the wider study area. The Zone of Archaeological Potential for the historic core of Portlaoise, a recorded monument in its own right

(LA013-041), is situated c. 250m to the west. There are a further five individual recorded archaeological sites located within 500m (Table 2; Figure 1; Appendix 1). All of these sites are scheduled for inclusion in the next revision of the RMP. The town defences of Portlaoise (LA013-041006), recorded c. 450m to the west, are considered to possess National Monument State under the National Policy on Town Defences (2008).

TABLE 1: Recorded archaeological sites in proximity to the study area

RMP NO.	LOCATION	CLASSIFICATION	DISTANCE *
LA013-041	Portlaoise	Historic Town ZoN	250m west
LA013-102, -102001	Maryborough	Church and graveyard	360m northwest
LA013-124	Beladd	Burial	430m north
LA013-041006	Maryborough	Town Defences	450m west
LA013-045	Beladd	Ringfort - rath	465m east

*Note: distance is to the nearest boundary of the proposed development area

3.5 TOPOGRAPHICAL FILES OF THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF IRELAND

Information on artefact finds from the study area in County Laois 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 from the townlands of Borris Little or Beladd, which contain the proposed development footprint. Within the wider area, stone axe heads have been recovered from Maryborough (NMI 1937:2600-2603) and The Ridge, Portlaoise (NMI: Record Only), and a saddle quern was recorded in the townland of Killen/Kileenlynagh (NMI IA/30/85) further to the north. These items testify to prehistoric settlement in the wider area.

3.6 AERIAL PHOTOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS

Inspection of the aerial photographic coverage of the proposed development area held by the Ordnance Survey (1995–2013), Google Earth (2008–2023), Bing Maps, and Apple Maps was undertaken to inform this assessment. Several of the images captured by Google Earth show a rectangular crop mark, measuring c. 37m north-south by c. 18m east-west. This is situated off centre in the main field (northern field). It is most clear in the imagery of March 2022 (Plate 1). The feature was confirmed as a sunken area during the field inspection and possesses the dimensions of a ‘dressage arena’ and as such may relate to the riding and training of horses. It is also possibly related to the construction of Portran House and associated parkland landscape during the 18th century, although the feature is not marked within the historic mapping.

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 area of proposed development was visited on Tuesday 13th June 2023 in dry, bright conditions. The site is bordered to the north by a modern high stone wall along the Stradbally Road (Plate 2), with access at the northeast corner. It comprises all or part of two open fields of rough pasture which is currently occupied by horses. The perimeter of the northern field is bordered by mature trees and a dense copse of trees and scrub hinder observation of the watercourse and body of water to the east of the site (Plate 3). The historic maps indicated that a canalised section of the watercourse ran north-south along the eastern perimeter of site although no water was observed; however, this may be due to the dry conditions of the weeks preceding inspection. The terrain within the northern field was uneven, gently falling from the west and north (Plate 4). Portran House is situated to the immediate west, partially hidden from view by mature trees. The large rectangular feature observed in the aerial photographs was evident as a sunken area, although the high overgrown grasses obscured any definition of form that may have been evident (Plate 5). A large tree, visible on aerial photos, has been removed in the centre of site leaving a hollow filled with vegetation debris.

The high ridge of ground running north-south, is visible to the west of the proposed development (Plate 6). The southern field boundary of the north field also comprises the townland boundary between Borris Little and Beladd (Plate 7). This is shown as carrying water on the OS mapping; however, no water was observed in the ditch on the day of inspection. The boundary comprises a shallow ditch bordered by earthen banks and mature hedgerow. The southern field comprises relatively flat pasture overlooked by the high ground to the west (Plate 8).

No previously unrecorded features of archaeological potential were noted during the field inspection, although the presence of watercourses in the landscape lend a general archaeological potential to the site.

4 CONCLUSIONS

This assessment has been prepared on behalf of Laois County Council, to study the impact, if any, on the archaeological and historical resource of the proposed residential development at Tyrrells Land, Stradbally Road, Portlaoise, Co. Laois.

The proposed development area is located with former parkland associated with Portran House (now Portrane Veterinary Clinic) in the townlands of Borris Little and Beladd. The site comprises undeveloped fields of pasture, bordered by mature trees and a watercourse to the east. A townland boundary crosses the southern portion of the site. No recorded monuments are known within the proposed development area; however, the Zone of Archaeological Potential surrounding the historic town (LA013-041) of Portlaoise (formerly Maryborough) is located c. 250m to the west. Five further recorded monuments are known within the wider study area, of which the nearest are a church and graveyard (LA013-102, -102001) situated c. 360m to the northwest.

No previous archaeological investigations have been carried out within the proposed development area. A review of the historic mapping did not reveal any features of previously unrecorded archaeological potential within the proposed development area. A large sunken rectangular feature (c. 18m x 37m) was observed as a crop mark in numerous aerial photos (1995-2022) in the centre west of the site. The function and date of this feature is uncertain, and while it may relate to modern land use (such as equestrian training) it may also have earlier origins. A field inspection confirmed a rectangular sunken area was evident at this location, although given the overgrown vegetation no definition of form was observed. The proposed development area comprises slightly undulating terrain, falling gently from the north and west towards the watercourse and body of water bordered by a copse of trees and scrub.

The site is an undeveloped greenfield situated on the margins of a historic town bordered by a water course, and as such there is potential for previously unrecorded sub-surface archaeological remains to survive here. Water-side locations are considered to have archaeological potential as they were ideal settings for activities associated with exploitation of this resource throughout the prehistoric and historic periods.

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

- There are no recorded archaeological monuments within the proposed development area; however, the site comprises undeveloped greenfield on the margins of a historic town, bordered by a watercourse, and as such there is potential for previously unrecorded sub-surface archaeological remains to survive here. If present ground works associated with the proposed development may have a direct negative impact on any surviving archaeological remains.

5.2 MITIGATION

- It is recommended that a programme of geophysical survey and targeted test trenching is carried out as a condition of planning to further investigate the archaeological potential of this site. If any features of archaeological potential are discovered during the course of the works further archaeological mitigation may be required, such as preservation *in situ* or by record. Any further mitigation will require approval from the National Monuments Service of the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (DoHLGH).

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, DoHLGH.

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ELECTRONIC SOURCES

- www.excavations.ie – Summary of archaeological excavation from 1970–2023.
- 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).
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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1 SMR/RMP SITES WITHIN THE STUDY AREA

SMR NO.	LA013-041
RMP STATUS	Yes
TOWNLAND	Maryborough
PARISH	Borris
BARONY	Portlaoise East/ Maryborough East
I.T.M.	647070, 698519
CLASSIFICATION	Historic Town ZoN for Portlaoise
DIST. FROM DEVELOPMENT	250m west
DESCRIPTION	<p>In 1556 the Laois 'campa', known to the English as 'Fort Protector' (LA013-041001-) or the Fort of Leix', was renamed Maryborough in honour of Queen Mary. The fort attracted settlers and a map of about 1560 shows a small walled town around the fort at that date. Maryborough was granted a market in 1567, borough in 1569 and was incorporated by charter of Elizabeth I in 1570 (Bradley et al. 1986, 49). The medieval town consists of a walled town (LA013-041006-) enclosing a large settlement with a plantation castle (LA013-041001-) in the centre and a circular tower or castle (LA013-041003-) of sixteenth century date, a church (LA013-041002-) and graveyard (LA013-041004-) and a mill (LA013-041005-). Many settlers moved into the town and the Elizabethan fiants record a particularly high number of property grants between 1569 and 1571. In 1635 the town obtained a grant of two fairs from Charles I and in 1646 the town was captured by Owen Roe O'Neill but was subsequently retaken by Lord Castlehaven (Bradley et al. 1986, 49). The original market place was probably in Main Street in the area between the south side of the street and the fort (LA013-041001-) if one is to judge from the map of 1721. The late medieval church and graveyard was located outside the plantation fort (LA013-041001-) to the west. The map of c. 1560 shows 14 houses and are depicted as gabled single floor structures with a loft on the first floor; all have a central heart. Nothing remains of these houses today although some of the narrow lanes opening southwards from Main Street have tall narrow houses built over them, parts of which may be seventeenth century in date (Bradley et al. 1986, 51). The map shows only one definite street, that entering from the west immediately south of the fort's rectangular tower and exiting through the east wall. This can be tentatively identified with Bridge Street and the eastern section of Main Street (Bradley et al. 1986, 50). The map also shows a break in the west wall immediately north of the fort. This also appears to signify a street which curved southwards around the fort's circular tower. Today, this can be identified with the southern portion of Church Avenue and Church Street, and perhaps with the southern part of Church Avenue. It is clear from the location of the seventeenth century church outside the fort that the town began to expand westwards in the seventeenth century. Railway Street and the western parts of Main and Church Streets probably belong</p>

	to that time (Bradley et al. 1986, 50-1).
REFERENCE	www.archaeology.ie/ SMR file

SMR NO.	LA013-102, -102001
RMP STATUS	Yes
TOWNLAND	Maryborough
PARISH	Borris
BARONY	Portlaoise East/ Maryborough East
I.T.M.	647312, 698605
CLASSIFICATION	Church and graveyard
DIST. FROM DEVELOPMENT	360m northwest
DESCRIPTION	<p>Church: Unlocated church within the town of Portlaoise described in 1907 as 'an ancient graveyard occupied the site of the 'ridge' near the town, but no trace of a former church now remains on the spot (O'Hanlon and O'Leary 1907, vol. 1, 192). According to local tradition there was a church in the immediate vicinity, viz. At the back of Mr Brown's shop on the Ridge Road (O'Dooley n.d. ,5-6). This church was located in graveyard known as the Ridge Graveyard. The Urban Survey recorded that 'the date of the cemetery (LA013-102001) is unknown. It is possible that it represents a pre-plantation church site, perhaps even the church of the Newtown of Leys' (Bradley et. al. 1986, 54).</p> <p>Graveyard: Esker ridge which has been used as a graveyard for the town of Portlaoise, known locally as the 'Ridge Grave Yard'. Described in 1907 as 'an ancient graveyard occupied the site of the 'ridge' near the town, but no trace of a former church now remains on the spot (O'Hanlon and O'Leary 1907, 192). According to local tradition there was a church in the immediate vicinity, viz. At the back of Mr Brown's shop on the Ridge Road (O'Dooley n.d., 5-6) This is the graveyard on the outskirts of Portlaoise town marked on the OS 6-inch maps as the 'Ridge Grave yd.'. The Urban Survey recorded that 'the date of the cemetery is unknown. It is possible that it represents a pre-plantation church site (LA013-102), perhaps even the church of the Newtown of Leys' (Bradley et. al. 1986, 54). Present remains consist of a narrow long rectangular shaped graveyard (int. dims. 34m N-S; 145m E-W) enclosed by a stone wall of post-medieval date as indicated on current ed. OS 6-inch map. Graveyard contains 18th and 19th century memorials. According to a plaque on the wall of the graveyard this burial ground ceased to be used for burials in 1897 when a new cemetery dedicated to Ss. Peter and Paul in the town of Portlaoise.</p>
REFERENCE	www.archaeology.ie/ SMR file

SMR NO.	LA013-124
RMP STATUS	yes
TOWNLAND	Beladd
PARISH	Borris
BARONY	Portlaoise East/ Maryborough East
I.T.M.	647822, 698894

CLASSIFICATION	Burial
DIST. FROM DEVELOPMENT	430m north
DESCRIPTION	The files of the National Museum of Ireland records that in March 1988 human remains were discovered in the grounds of Portlaoise prison, Co. Laois (Cahill & Sikora 2011, Vol. 2, 488). A crouched burial was discovered at a depth of c. 0.6m during the construction of a new security fence. The site was investigated by Nessa O'Connor. By the time of the site investigation, the burial had been removed from its context. According to the finders, the burial lay with the head to the north. No artefacts had been found in the vicinity of the burial, and there does not appear to have been any stone protection around the remains. A lime deposit was noted in the soil surrounding where the skeleton was found, and was thought by O'Connor to perhaps be of significance. However, the bones did not appear to have been damaged as would be expected if this was quick lime. The only indication of date was that the burial pre-dates the prison wall built in 1830. The remains were retained in the Museum.
REFERENCE	www.archaeology.ie/ SMR file

SMR NO.	LA013-041006
RMP STATUS	Yes
TOWNLAND	Maryborough
PARISH	Borris
BARONY	Portlaoise East/ Maryborough East
I.T.M.	647240, 698511
CLASSIFICATION	Town Defences
DIST. FROM DEVELOPMENT	450m west
DESCRIPTION	The plan of the town from around 1560 shows that the small settlement clustered around the Fort (LA013-014001-) was enclosed by a wall delimiting a rectangular area. No mural towers or gatehouse are indicated but two openings in the W wall, immediately N and S of the fort and a probable opening in the E wall are indicated. A lease of 1569-71 mentions the 'east gate' of Maryborough. The towns charter of 1570 empowered the corporation to 'fortify the borough with ditches and stone walls' which may indicated that the defences shown in the map of c. 1560 were considered inadequate by then. There is no definitive evidence, however, for the fortification of Maryborough after 1570. There are no surviving remains of the defences and it is difficult to gauge their exact route (Bradley 1986, 52-3). The E boundary of the town is probably preserved by the line of the Triogue River, the S wall was probably close to the townland boundary, while the W wall may be preserved in the line of Railway St. and Lyster Lane. The 16th century map shows two openings in the W wall, which may represent gatehouses. These lay immediately N and S of the fort controlling entry to Main St. and Church St. There is a similar opening in the E wall in Bridge St. An unusual feature depicted on the 1560 map is the presence of an intra-mural walled enclosure in the SE angle. Its function is unknown (Bradley 1986, 53).

REFERENCE	www.archaeology.ie/ SMR file
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SMR NO.	LA013-045
RMP STATUS	Yes
TOWNLAND	Beladd
PARISH	Borris
BARONY	Portlaoise East/ Maryborough East
I.T.M.	648266, 698337
CLASSIFICATION	Ringfort - rath
DIST. FROM DEVELOPMENT	465m east
DESCRIPTION	Marked on the 1841 and 1909 editions of the OS 6-inch maps; a subcircular area (max. dims. c. 70m NE-SW; 50m NW-SE). Only slight traces of the bank survive at NE. No other visible surface remains.
REFERENCE	www.archaeology.ie/ SMR file

APPENDIX 2 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.

Laois County Development Plan 2021-2027

Aim: To protect, conserve and manage the archaeological and architectural heritage of County Laois and to encourage sensitive sustainable development so as to ensure its survival and maintenance for future generations.

Selected Relevant Objectives

AH 1: Manage development in a manner that protects and conserves the integrity and character of archaeological heritage of the county which avoids adverse impacts on sites, monuments, settings, features or objects of significant historical or archaeological interest and secure the preservation in-situ or by record of all sites and features of historical and archaeological interest.

AH 3: Protect the intrinsic value, character, integrity and settings of monuments and places in the Record of Monuments and Places (RMPs) and any forthcoming statutory register and protect Zones of Archaeological Potential against inappropriate development.

AH 4: In areas of archaeological potential, where groundworks are proposed, ensure that all works are undertaken to the highest standard and the resultant information made publicly available. Developers will be required to have regard to Archaeology and Development: Guidelines for Good Practice for Developers (ICOMOS, 2000) in planning and executing development in sensitive areas. The Council favours the preservation in-situ of archaeological remains, where areas of archaeological potential are located in town centres or villages, preservation of archaeological remains by record will be considered.

Portlaoise Local Area Plan 2024-2030

Aim: To protect, conserve and manage the built heritage of the town and to encourage sensitive and sustainable development to ensure its preservation for future generations. To protect, conserve and manage the built heritage of the town and to encourage sensitive and sustainable development so as to ensure its preservation for current and future generations.

Selected Relevant Policies

BH P1: Ensure heritage assets that are the focus for tourism development are appropriately managed and their special interest conserved from potential adverse effects from visitors or development in general and that best practice standards in relation for the environmental management of tourism enterprises are adhered to.

BH P2: Support and promote, with the co-operation of landowners, public access to heritage sites and features at appropriate locations whilst ensuring heritage related development does not result in negative impacts on the fabric or setting of Laois's heritage assets.

BH P3 Support and promote, with the co-operation of key stakeholders, the development of the Fort of Maryborough in Portlaoise and ensure that any development will not result in negative impacts on the fabric or setting of the site.

BH P4 Support the implementation of Ireland's Ancient East by facilitating the provision of visitor information in line with the policies and objectives with respect to heritage sites, and integrating the objectives of Ireland's Ancient East with transport programmes in the County.

BH P15 Encourage and support the provision of foreign language interpretation interventions in order to ensure the appropriate interpretation and appreciation of the county's heritage asset.

It is the objective of the Council to:

BH 01 Protect, conserve and enhance the built environment, through promoting awareness, utilising relevant heritage legislation and promoting good quality urban design.

BH 02 Conserve, protect and enhance the built heritage of Portlaoise, including the Architectural Conservation Area, all Protected Structures and attendant grounds, Recorded Monuments and Places and the Zone of Archaeological Significance in accordance with best conservation practice.

BH 03 Positively consider proposals to improve, alter, extend or change the use of protected structures so as to render them viable for modern use, subject to consultation with suitably qualified Conservation Architects and / or other relevant experts, suitable design, materials and construction methods.

BH 04 Ensure all development works on or at the sites of protected structures, including any site works necessary, shall be carried out using best heritage practice for the protection and preservation of those aspects or features of the structures / site that render it worthy of protection. BH 05 Support the re-introduction of traditional features on protected structures where there is evidence that such features (e.g. window styles, finishes etc.) previously existed. BH 06 Strongly resist the demolition of protected structures, unless it can be demonstrated that exceptional circumstances exist.

BH 07 Consider the change of use of protected structures, provided that it can be shown that the structure, character, appearance and setting will not be adversely affected or where it can be shown it is necessary to have an economic use to enable its upkeep.

BH 08 Ensure the protection within Architectural Conservation Areas, of all those buildings, spaces, archaeological sites, trees, street furniture, views and other aspects of the environment which form an essential part of their character, as set out in their character appraisals.

BH 09 Ensure the design of any development in Architectural Conservation Areas, including any changes of use of an existing building, should preserve and / or enhance the character and appearance of the Architectural Conservation Area as a whole.

BH 010 Promote schemes for the conservation and enhancement of the character and appearance of Architectural Conservation Areas.

BH 011 No development in the vicinity of a feature included in the Record of Monuments & Places (RMP) will be permitted which seriously detracts from the setting of the feature or which is seriously injurious to its cultural or educational value.

BH 012 Ensure archaeological assessment is carried out as required and promote 'preservation in situ' of archaeological remains and settings in developments that would impact upon archaeological sites and/or features.

BH 013 Protect previously unknown archaeological sites and features, including underwater sites, where they are discovered during development works.

BH 014 Facilitate public access to National Monuments in State or Local Authority care.

APPENDIX 4 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 5 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).

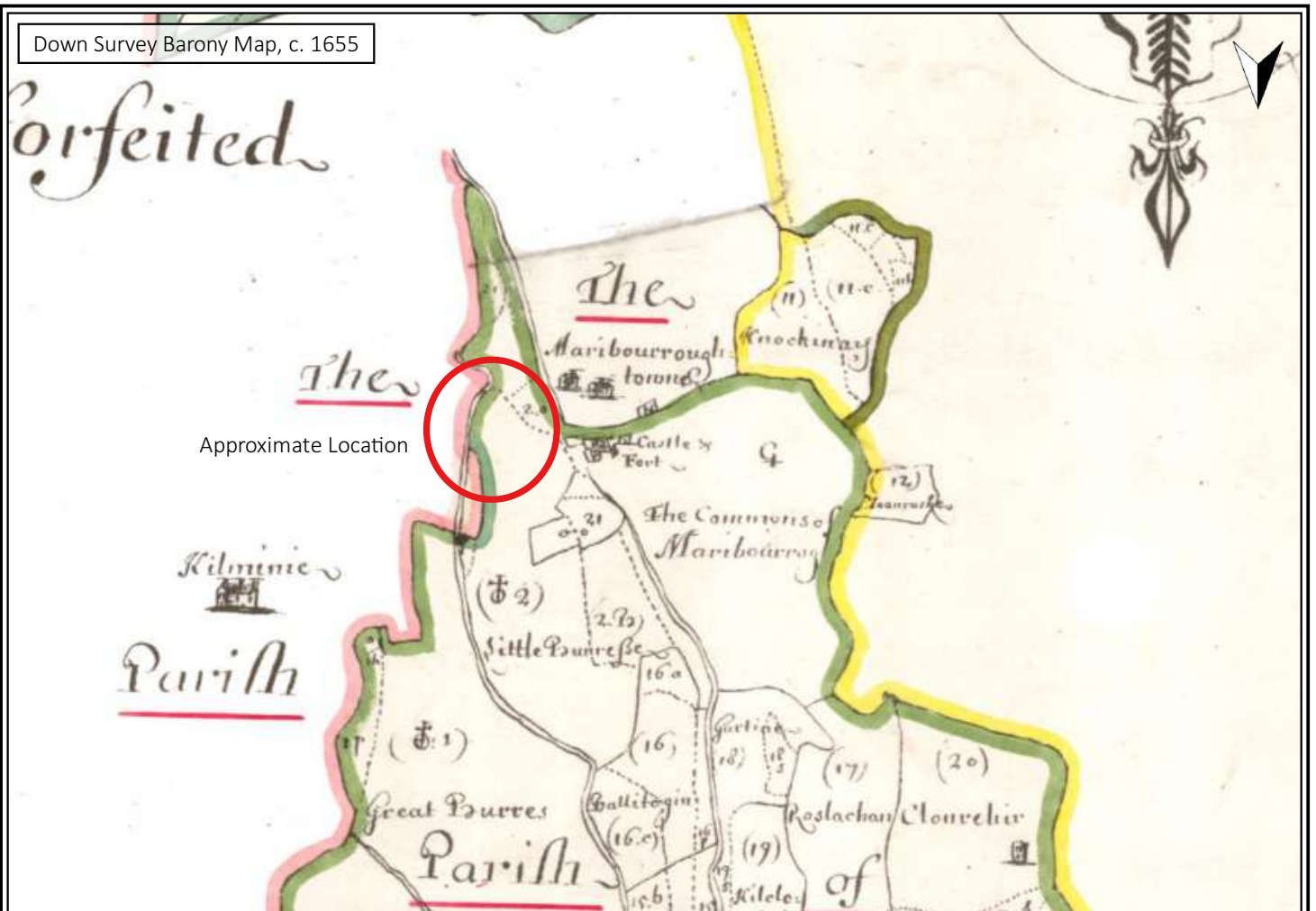
Archaeological Monitoring can be defined as ‘a formal programme of observation and investigation conducted during any operation carried out for non-archaeological reasons. This will be within a specified area or site on land, inter-tidal zone or underwater, where there is a possibility that archaeological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



Down Survey Barony Map, c. 1655

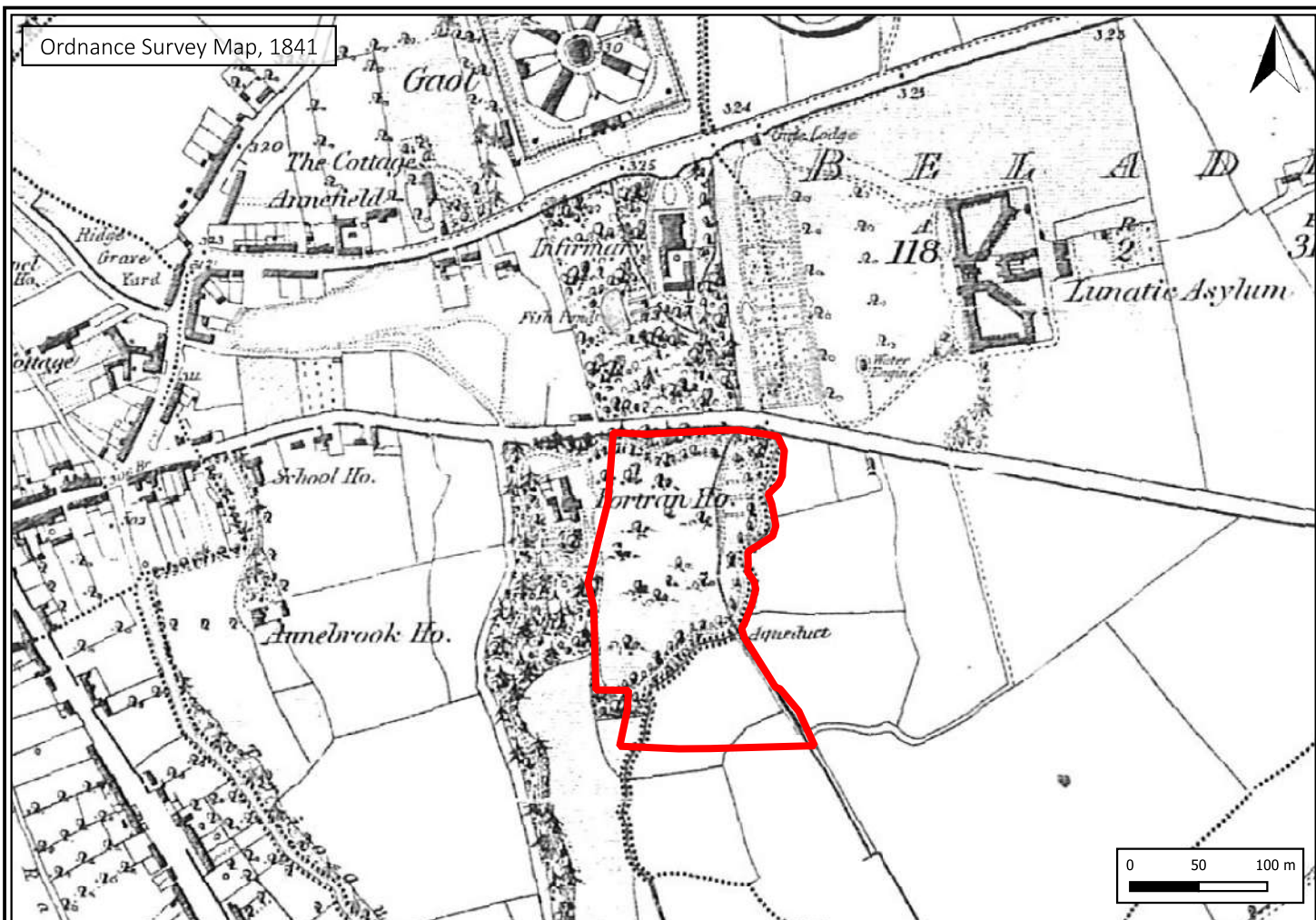


Map of the Bogs of Portlaoise, 1812



Approximate Location

Ordnance Survey Map, 1841



Ordnance Survey Map, 1909

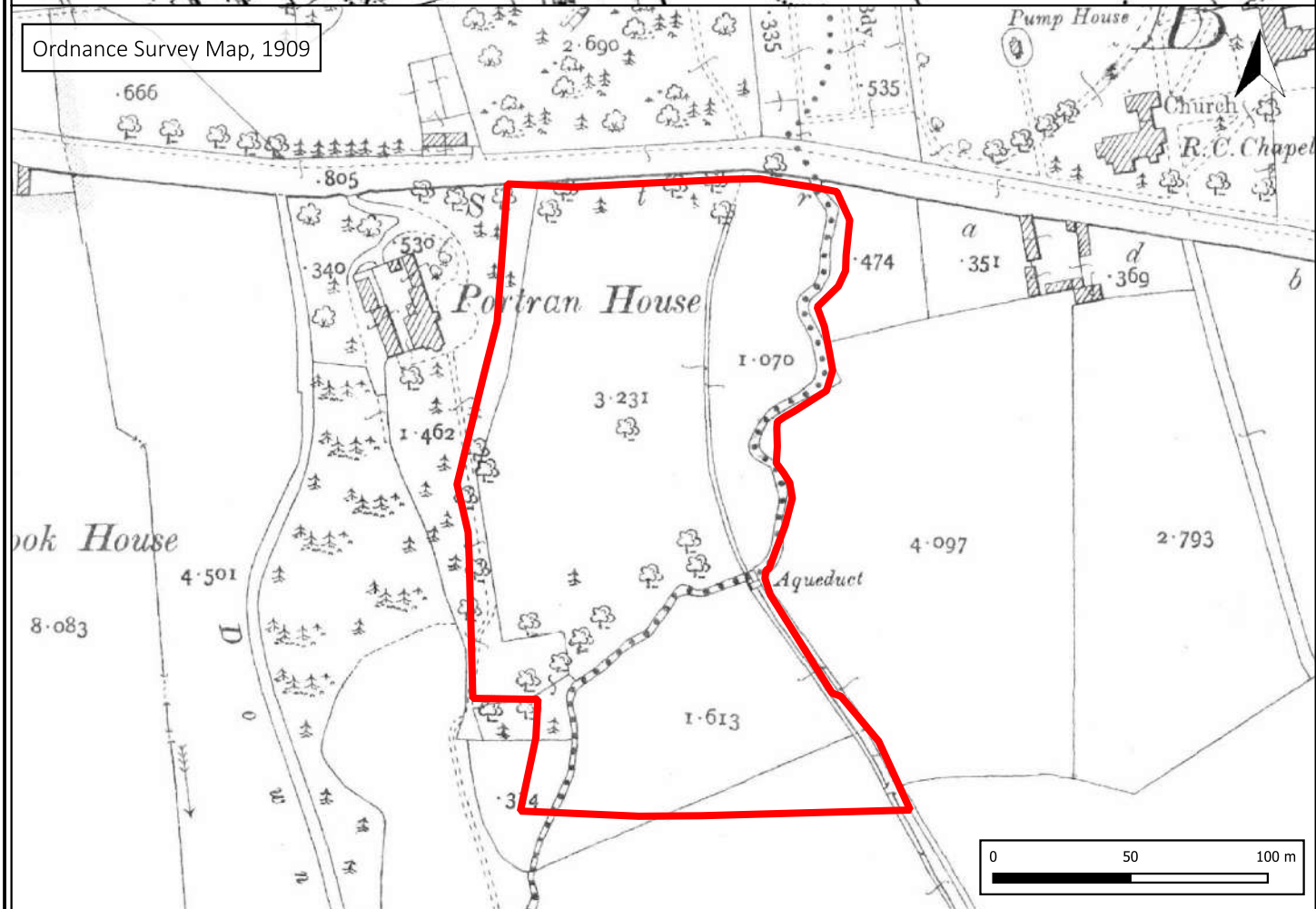




Plate 1: Google Earth (March 2022) showing rectangular cropmark



Plate 2: Northern boundary of site, facing west



Plate 3: Northern field bordered by watercourse, facing south



Plate 4: Uneven ground bordering Portran House, facing west



Plate 5: Rectangular sunken feature in foreground, facing north



Plate 6: Southern field overlooked by high ridge, facing southwest



Plate 7: Tree-lined townland boundary, facing south



Plate 8: Southern field, facing south