

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL DESKTOP REPORT AND IMPACT
ASSESSMENT FOR A DEVELOPMENT AT LISSYWOLLEN,
CORNAMADDY, ATHLONE, CO. WESTMEATH**

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ABSTRACT

This report evaluates the archaeological impacts associated with a proposed development at Lissywollen, Cornamaddy, Athlone, Co. Westmeath. Mitigation measures are provided to avoid, reduce, or offset potential adverse impacts.

CONTENTS

1.0 Introduction	1
2.0 Location	3
3.0 The Development.....	3
4.0 Archaeological & Historical Background	5
5.0 Archaeological Impact Assessment.....	16
6.0 Conclusions and Recommendations	17

List of Figures

Figure 1 Showing the location of the proposed development area on aerial images.

Figure 2 Showing plan of proposed development.

Figure 3 Showing the archaeological sites from the RMP and SMR within the study area (after the Historic Environment Viewer).

Figure 4 Extract from 17th century Down Survey map of Westmeath showing Athlone.

Figure 5 Extract from 1st edition 6" to a mile scale Ordnance Survey map of the development area.

Figure 6 Extract from 1st ed OS 25" to a mile scale map showing development area.

Figure 7 Extract from 1st Edition 25" Ordnance Survey Map.

Figure 8 Figure 8 Cavalry Barracks site map from 1863 (Source: www.militaryarchives.ie).

Figure 9 Showing the NIAH and RPS listed structures within the study area.

List of Plates

Plate 1 Showing proposed development site, facing south towards N55 Road.

Plate 2 Showing waterlogged north end of field.

Plate 3 Showing field boundary at northeast edge of development.

Plate 4 Showing raised area at southern end of the proposed development.

Plate 5

List of Tables

Table 1 List of recorded archaeological sites within the study area.

Table 2 List of NIAH and RPS structures within the study area.

1.0 Introduction

This archaeological heritage impact assessment report has been prepared by Horizon Archaeology Ltd on behalf of Westmeath County Council to assess and define the impact, if any, on the known archaeological heritage resources, of a proposed housing development within the townland of Lissywollen, Co. Westmeath. The subject site, is a number of pasture fields, situated north of the N55 Ballymahon Road, and to the east of Cornamagh Cemetery, 2km to the northeast of Athlone Town centre. The report includes mitigation measures designed to avoid, reduce or offset any potential adverse impacts.

The key objectives of this report are to assess, as far as is reasonably possible from existing records, any impacts the proposed development may have on the known archaeological heritage assets. The following key issues are addressed:

- Direct and indirect construction impacts on recorded and unrecorded archaeological or architectural heritage features.
- Direct and indirect operational impacts on recorded and unrecorded archaeological or architectural heritage features.
- Residual and cumulative impacts on recorded and unrecorded archaeological or architectural heritage features.

Archaeological mitigation in the form of an archaeological geophysical survey, followed by test trenching, is recommended to ameliorate the risk of impacting on any subterranean archaeological heritage assets. This archaeological geophysical survey and subsequent test trenching should take place following consultation with and approval by the National Monuments Service of the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, and Westmeath County Council.

Methodology

The research for this report consisted of a paper and digital survey of archaeological, historical and cartographic sources.

A study area with a 500m radius for known archaeological sites has been imposed around the proposed development area. An impact assessment and mitigation strategy has been prepared. The impact assessment is undertaken to outline potential adverse impacts that the proposed development may have on the known resources, while the mitigation strategy is designed to avoid, reduce or offset such adverse impacts.

Data sources

The following sources were examined, and a list of sites and areas of archaeological heritage value or potential was compiled:

- Record of Monuments and Places (RMP) for Co. Westmeath;
- Topographical Files (Topo) of the National Museum of Ireland;
- Record of Protected Structures (RPS) for Co. Westmeath.
- Cartographic and documentary sources relating to the study area;
- Westmeath County Development Plan 2021-2027.
- National Inventory of Architectural Heritage (NIAH).

Record of Monuments and Places (RMP) is a list of archaeological sites known to National Monuments Service. Back-up files of the Sites and Monuments Record (SMR) provide details of documentary sources and field inspections where these have taken place. There are no sites recorded on the RMP and SMR within 500m radius of the proposed development site (see Figure. 1).

Topographical Files of the National Museum of Ireland is the 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 in the discovery of sites of archaeological significance. A review of the Topographical Files for Lissywollen and Cornamaddy took place in Oct 2025.

The Record of Protected Structures (RPS) includes all known structures within the county of Westmeath that are of architectural, historical, archaeological, artistic, cultural, social, scientific or technical importance. By inclusion in the RPS these structures are afforded legal protection under the Planning and Development Act 2000. There are no buildings listed on the RPS within the 500m radius study area. The RPS for Co. Westmeath is maintained by Westmeath County Council and is available at the following address:

<https://consult.westmeathcoco.ie/ga/system/files/materials/5/Record%20of%20Protected%20Structures.pdf>

Cartographic sources are important in tracing land use development within an area of land take, as well as providing topographical information on sites and areas of archaeological potential. Cartographic analysis of relevant maps has been made to identify any topographical anomalies that may no longer remain within the landscape. Documentary sources were consulted to gain background information on the historical and archaeological landscape of the proposed development area.

Westmeath County Development Plan 2021-2027 and Athlone Joint Urban Area Plan 2024-2030 contain objectives on the preservation and management of archaeological heritage. These documents were consulted to obtain information on the proposed development area and the 200m radius study area.

National Inventory of Architectural Heritage (NIAH) is a section within the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht. The work of NIAH involves identifying and recording on a non-statutory basis the architectural heritage of Ireland from 1700 to the present day. There are no structures contained within the NIAH within 500m of the proposed development site.

2.0 Location

The proposed development is located in the townland of Lissywollen, approximately 2km north of Athlone Town centre (at NGR 605933E, 742802N). The site is situated to the north of the N55, Ballymahon Road. Lissywollen is one of the rural townlands in the hinterland of Athlone, a major town straddling the River Shannon, in both County Westmeath and County Roscommon. Lissywollen is situated in the civil parish of St. Mary's, and the barony of Brawny.



Figure 1 Showing the location of the proposed development area on aerial images.

3.0 The Development

The development at Lissywollen, County Westmeath, will comprise of a series of 8no. Apartment Blocks and 86 houses on a mostly level, sheltered site, enclosed by existing boundaries of trees hedges and a stone wall. The proposal retains a large percentage of the

existing trees and hedgerows, specific attention will be given to retaining/ protecting and enhancing the existing approximately 2m high stone wall boundary shared with the Cornamagh Cemetery. Additionally, there are 3 no. isolated very large fully mature trees randomly located within the site which have now been incorporated into the design, 2no. have become focal points within apartment courtyards and the third in the green open space retained to enhance views from the housing development.

The development will consist of a residential development and public open space of the following:

Construction of 94no. residential units comprising of the following:

- 55no. 2 bed (4 person) terraced houses (c.86m² each),
- 14no. 3 bed terraced houses (c. 100 m² each),
- 2 no. 4 bed 2 story semidetached houses (c. 120m² each),
- 15 no. 4 bed 3 story semidetached houses (c. 148m² each),
- All of the above will have associated private gardens.
- 4no. 1 Bed Ground floor Apartments,
- 2 Person UD / Age Friendly (c. 51.5m²),
- 4no. 1 Bed first floor apartments, 2 Person (c. 51.5m²) with private amenity spaces on ground floor terraces or first floor balconies.

The development will result in ground disturbance works for new buildings, structures, and infrastructure, as well as utilities, landscaping, carparking, roads and paths.

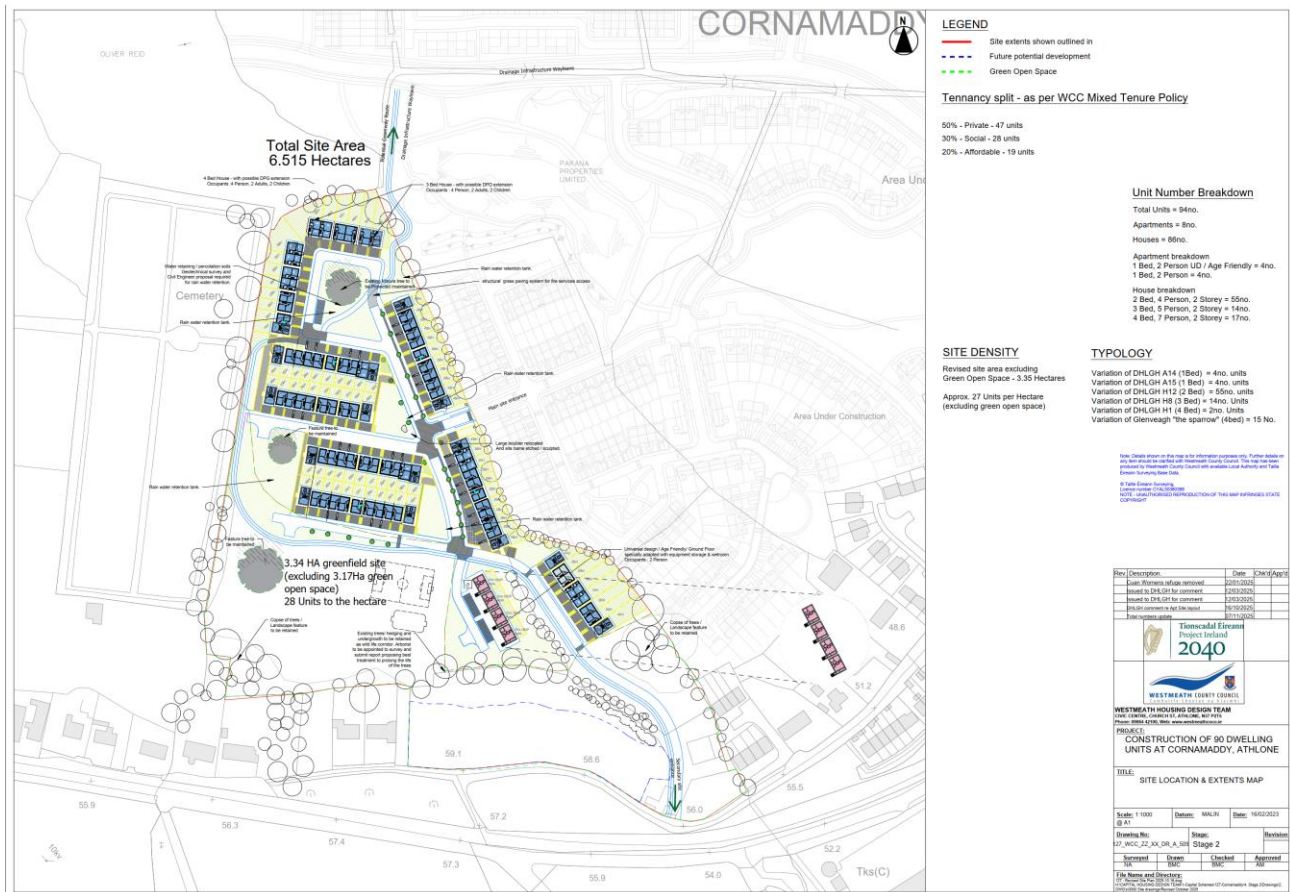


Figure 2 Showing plan of the proposed development.

4.0 Archaeological and Historical Background

General

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

There are no archaeological sites located within the proposed development site. There are no sites contained in the County Westmeath Record of Monuments and Places (1995) within the 500m study area.



Figure 3 Showing the archaeological sites from the RMP and SMR within the study area (after the Historic Environment Viewer).

Prehistoric

Archaeological evidence points to human activity in the Athlone area from the Neolithic period (c. 4000–2500 BC). Megalithic tombs, including dolmens and passage graves, are scattered across the county, indicating a well-established agrarian society. Artefacts such as stone axes and pottery sherds further attest to Neolithic habitation. The Bronze Age (c. 2500–800 BC) is synonymous with the arrival of metal working to Ireland. A Bronze Age looped and socketed axehead (National Museum of Ireland Topographical File No 2004:180) was recovered from Lissywollen townland, indicating the presence of some Bronze Age archaeology within the area.

The Bronze Age also saw the use of promontory forts as settlements, and left behind burial sites, including cist graves, barrows and fulachta fiadh. A promontory fort (RMP WM029-047) is situated in Cornamagh, 0.8km northwest of the development site. This promontory was constructed on top of a natural hillock, with commanding views of the countryside. A barrow (RMP WM029-041) is known at Garrynafela, 1km to the north of the development site. Although this site has not been subject to scientific excavation and analysis, it likely dates to the Bronze Age. Another known archaeological site, identified as a Standing Stone pair (RMP WM029-002) is situated in Clonbrusk, 1km west of the development site. This Standing Stone likely dates to the late Bronze Age. The Iron Age (c. 800 BC – 400 AD), saw the emergence of iron metal working, and was likely the period when the Gaelic language was first spoken in Westmeath, reflecting the growing social complexity of period. However, there are no known Iron Age sites in the vicinity of the development area.

Early Medieval

The early medieval period (5th–12th centuries) saw Athlone develop as a key crossing point on the River Shannon. The chain of eskers which runs through Ireland from east to west created a natural ford when it reached the Shannon at this point. Athlone takes its name from that ford: 'Athluain' translated as the ford of Luan. Luan is a personal name of unknown origin. One suggested explanation is that Luan was the name of the person who secured passage for travellers across the Shannon at Athlone.

The discovery of a number of Early Christian grave-slabs in Athlone suggests that Athlone was the site of an unrecorded Early Christian monastery. King Turlough O Connor (Toirdelbach Ua Conchobair) of Connacht was responsible for the building of a succession of temporary bridges across the Shannon at Athlone to facilitate his forays into Meath; he also built the earliest recorded castle in Athlone 1129.

Later Medieval

The later medieval period (13th-16th centuries) is synonymous with the arrival of the Anglo-Normans to Ireland, commencing in the 1170s. The Normans reached the Shannon before 1200 and recognized the strategic importance of the ford. In 1210 Bishop John de Gray, of Norwich, King John's Irish justiciar, constructed a new bridge and commenced the building of Athlone Castle on the western side of the river. This medieval bridge seems to have been destroyed by the early 14th century. The castle was built on land belonging to the Cluniac Priory of SS Peter & Paul, which had been founded in the 12th century. This priory had considerable wealth when it was dissolved during the reign of Henry VIII and its property was added to the estate of Athlone Castle. The Franciscans established a friary in Athlone

c1240. The earliest mention of town walls in Athlone is contained in a murage grant of 1251, but the surviving portions of the town-walls reflect rebuilding in the 17th century.

During the 14th and 15th centuries, the Anglo-Norman colony in Athlone declined in power, and the town fell into decay. Consequently, the Gaelic Irish exerted control over the town and its castle, alternating between the O Kellys of Hy-many and the Dillons of Kilkenny-West.

Post-medieval and early modern period

The post-medieval and early modern period marked a transformative era for Athlone. The town began to recover once the English crown forces took control of the castle again in 1537. Henry VIII implemented the Dissolution of the Monasteries, commencing in the 1540s, which saw religious lands being forfeited to the crown. The crown then used the seized lands to pay debts and shore up support amongst wealthy and influential Tudor benefactors.

The building of the great nine-arched Elizabethan bridge of Athlone in 1566, was a prelude to the establishment of the presidency of Connacht in 1569. The headquarters of the presidency was located in Athlone Castle. Athlone was granted a charter in 1599 and a second one in 1606. Under the terms of the charter a Corporation was established to govern the town and to oversee the return the town's M.P.s to parliament.

In the late 17th century during the Williamite and Jacobite Wars, the town of Athlone was besieged twice. Three 17th century coins have been found in Lissywollen. These coins are contained in the Museum's Topographical Files, and indicate that archaeological activity took place in Lissywollen during the 17th century. The mid-17th century Down Survey map of Westmeath depicts Athlone as a walled settlement beside a bridge over the Shannon. However, this map contains little information regarding the development area. The townland of Lissywollen is recorded in the Down Survey map as 'Lissobellom' and is identified as belonging to Gerrett Bryon, who is listed as 'Ir, pap' signifying that he was Catholic (Irish Papist). The townland of Cornamaddy is recorded as 'Cornemadda' and is identified as belonging to Daniell Bryan (Irish Papist).

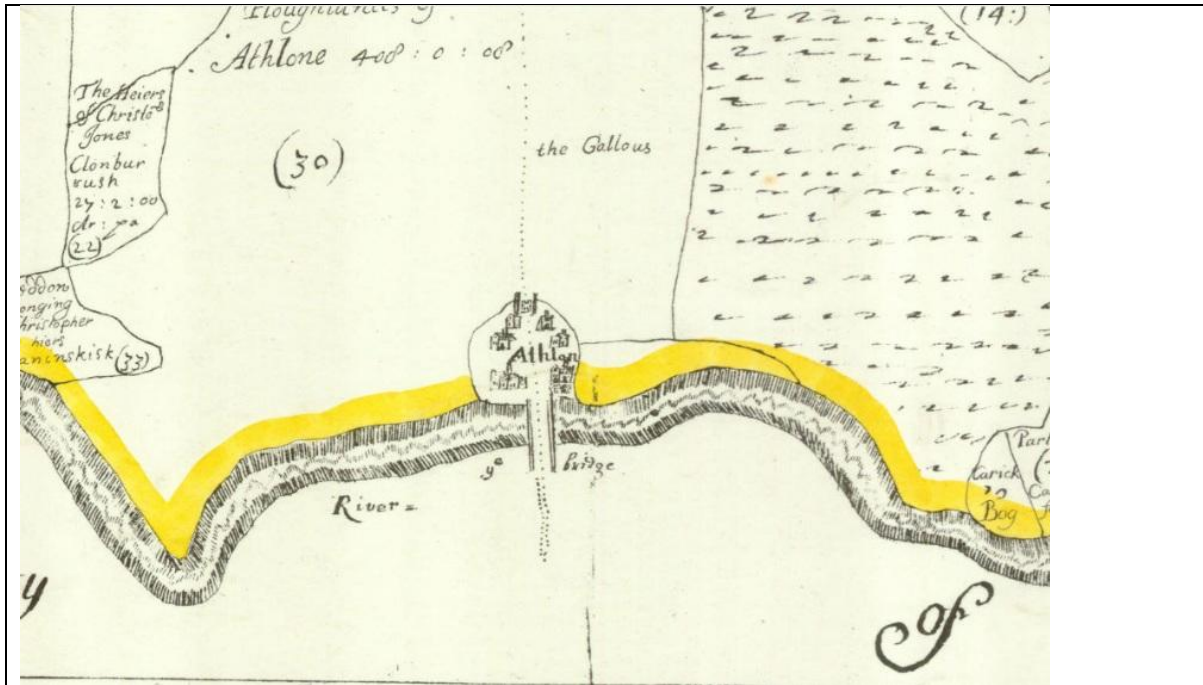


Figure 4 Extract from 17th century Down Survey map of Westmeath showing Athlone.

During the 18th and 19th centuries, the town of Athlone developed significantly, with the construction of the Athlone Canal in the 1750s, the Shannon Navigation works of the 1840s, the construction of the railway during the 1840s, and the establishment of the Athlone Woolen Mills, which was a source of local employment.

The mid-19th century first edition 6" to a mile scale Ordnance Survey maps of the area of Lissywollen and Cornamaddy, Athlone, are the first detailed scaled maps of the area to have been compiled. A limekiln is depicted on this map in the southeast corner of the development site, just north of the modern day N55 Ballymahon Road. This limekiln is situated in a pasture field beside the townland boundary with Cornamaddy. This limekiln is of unknown antiquity, but the associated process of extracting lime from limestone, is known to have been practiced since the medieval period. Several dwellings of unknown age are depicted bounding the north edge of the road, and some of these are within the development area. The northern half of the development area is depicted as being scrub land, or forested, in this map. The central part of the development area is depicted as being pasture fields.

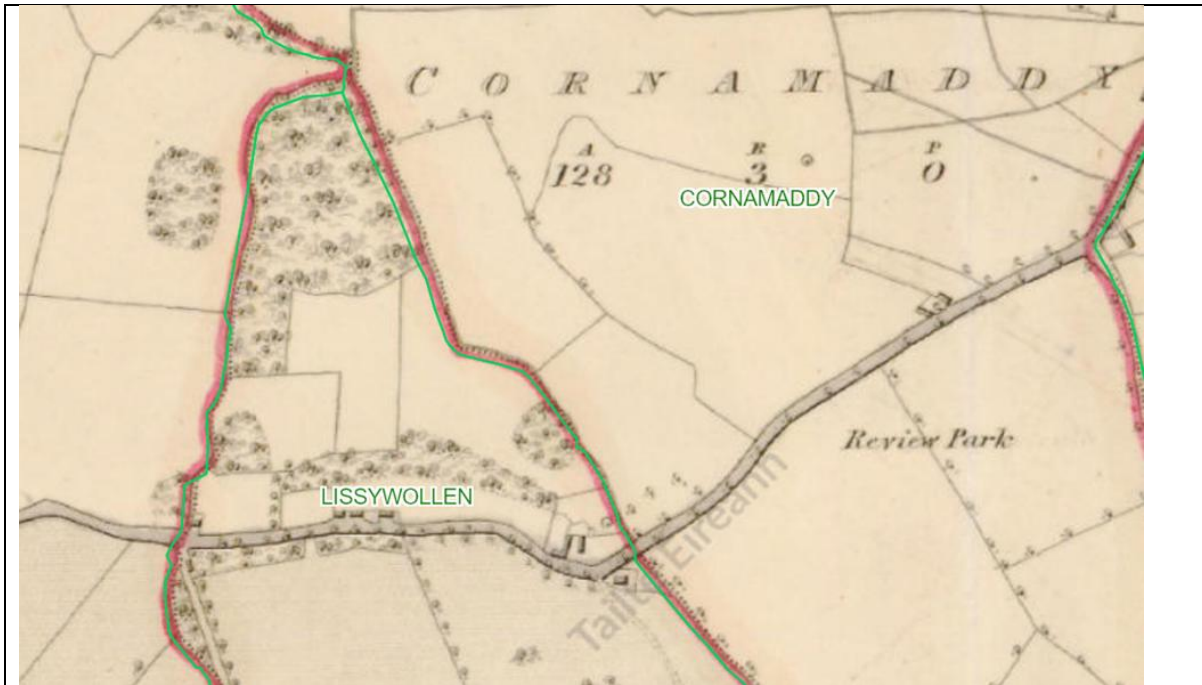


Figure 5 Extract from 1st edition 6" to a mile scale Ordnance Survey map of the development area.

Lissywollen appears in Griffith's Valuation (1847–1864) and the 1901 & 1911 censuses, offering household-level information on occupants and land use and later on detailed Ordnance Survey maps from 1912, labelled "Retreat, Lissywollen, Woodville and the disused Lisshearin Grave Yard," (https://www.alangodfrey.com/maps/co.uk/westmeath2906.htm?utm_source=chatgpt.com).

Lissywollen lies to the east/southeast of Cornamagh Cemetery which one was the main cemetery for the town of Athlone from 1871 until St. Kieran's Cemetery in Coosan was opened in 1968. This cemetery is 2 miles North of the town of Athlone. There are 27 Commonwealth burials from WWI and 6 from WW2 interred in Cornamagh Cemetery.

The late 19th century first edition 25" to a mile scale Ordnance Survey maps depict the area of Lissywollen and Cornamaddy, Athlone, in greater detail than previous maps. In this map the scrub land and forest has been cleared, and the land is put to agriculture, comprising a number of distinct fields. The limekiln that was depicted on the earlier OS map is not shown. Also, several of the buildings that are depicted on the earlier OS map within the development area, are not depicted on this map. It should be noted that the road that is shown on the historic OS maps is not the extant N55 Ballymahon road, which dates to the mid-20th century. Rather the road shown on the historic maps now survives as cul de sac, providing residential access.

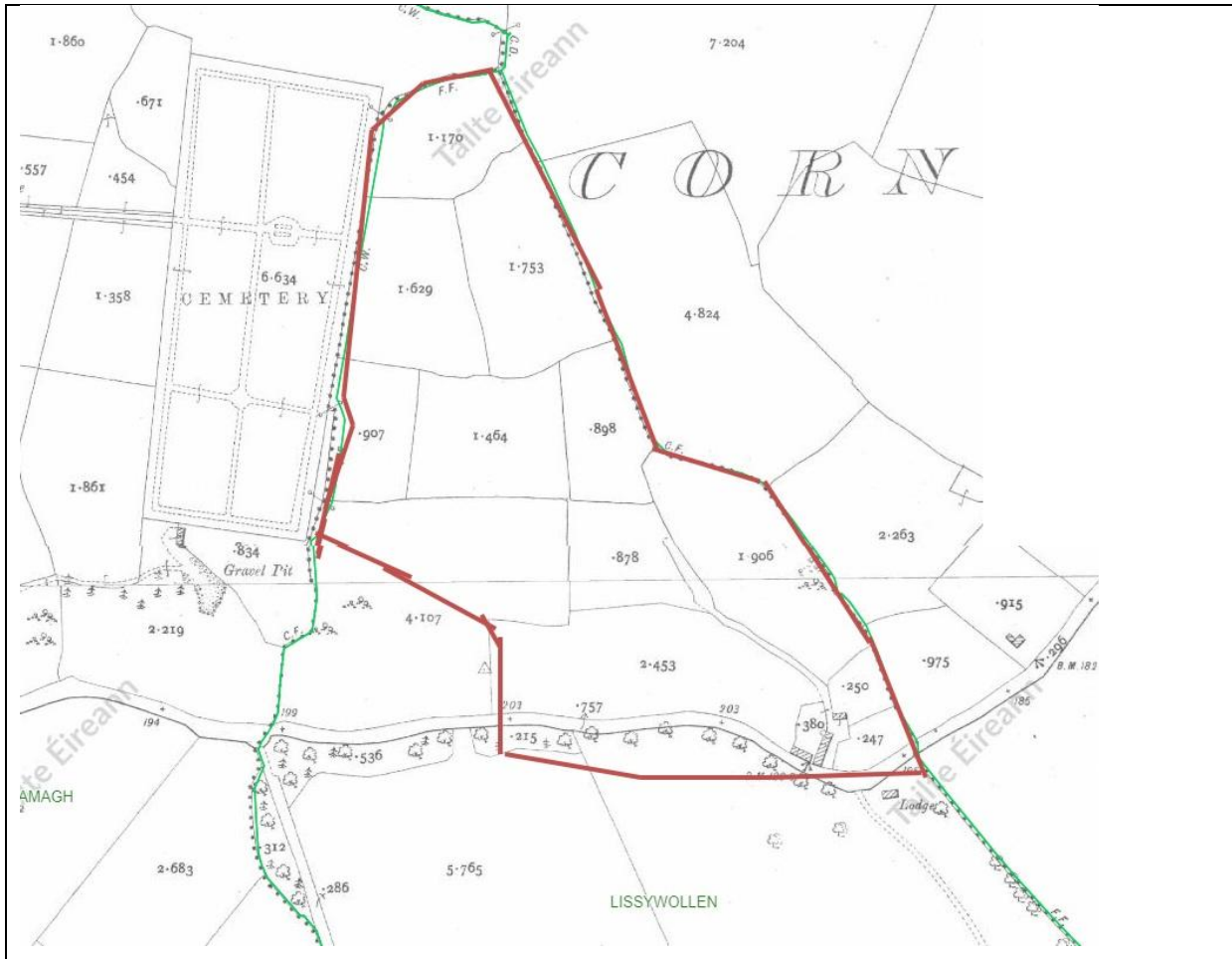


Figure 6 Extract from 1st ed OS 25" to a mile scale map showing development area.

Place names

Townland names are an important source in understanding the archaeology, geology, land-use, ownership and cultural heritage of an area. The following translations were taken from www.logainm.ie.

The Irish name for Lissywollen is Lios Uí Mhulláin, meaning „The ringfort of the O'Mullans"

1. Lios - meaning: is an ancient ringfort or enclosure, common in early medieval Ireland (roughly 500–1000 AD). In place names, "Lios" usually indicates a former fort or settlement site.

2. Uí Mhulláin – meaning: "Uí" is the genitive plural of "Ó", which means descendants of or the family of. Mullán can derive from: Mullán (a diminutive of "mullach" – meaning a summit or hilltop) or from a surname like Ó Maoláin, which comes from maol (meaning bald or tonsured, often referring to a religious person or monk).

Summary of Previous Fieldwork in the Study Area

Reference to Summary Accounts of Archaeological Excavations in Ireland (www.excavations.ie) revealed that relevant archaeological investigations took place within the townlands containing and surrounding the proposed development site.

Townland: Lissywollen, Athlone, County Westmeath

License no: 06E0713,

Author: Tim Coughlan, Irish Archaeological Consultancy Ltd.

Results: No archaeology found

These archaeological works did not identify anything archaeological.

Topographical Files

The National Museum of Ireland maintains a register of stray artefacts from throughout Ireland. This artefacts are included in a list called the Topographical Files. The Topographical Files were consulted for this report, and the following entries were identified from the study area.

NMI Register No	Simple Name	Full Name	Component	Townland	Find Place	County
2004:180	Axehead	Looped and socketed bronze axehead fragment	Bronze	LISSYWOLLEN	N/A	WESTMEATH
2004:181	Coin	Copper alloy halfpenny, James II. Irish mint	Copper alloy	LISSYWOLLEN	N/A	WESTMEATH
2004:182	Coin	Copper alloy gun money shilling, James II. January 1689	Copper alloy	LISSYWOLLEN	N/A	WESTMEATH
2004:183	Coin	Silver half crown, James II July 1690	Silver	LISSYWOLLEN	N/A	WESTMEATH
2004:184	Coin	Copper alloy halfpenny, George III. Irish mint 1781	Copper alloy	LISSYWOLLEN	N/A	WESTMEATH
2004:185	Coin	Copper alloy halfpenny, George III 1805. Irish mint	Copper alloy	LISSYWOLLEN	N/A	WESTMEATH

County and Town Development Plans

Westmeath County Development Plan 2021-2027

The *Westmeath County Development Plan 2021-2027* was consulted for the following information:

'Archaeology Policy Objectives

It is a policy of Westmeath County Council to:

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.' (p435).

Athlone Joint Urban Plan 2024-2030

The Athlone Joint Urban Plan 2024-2030 is being compiled by Westmeath County Council and Roscommon County Council. The final document has not been published. The draft policies are outlined in the website <https://athlonejointplan.ie/> which was consulted for this report.

Site Inspection

A site inspection was carried out by Fiona Maguire, for Horizon Archaeology on Friday 27th June 2025. The proposed development site at Lissywollen is situated on the north side of the N55 Ballymahon Road. The development area is comprised of pasture fields that are used for agricultural activities. The development site slopes upwards, to the south.



Plate 1 Showing proposed development site, facing south towards N55 Road.

The north end of the development area comprises poorly drained scrub pasture with reeds and bushes. The site inspection confirmed that the ground was prone to water pooling in bad weather.



Plate 2 Showing waterlogged north end of field.

The Cornamagh Graveyard is situated to the west of the development site. The site is bounded by field boundaries to the east and north. The field boundaries situated to the east of the site form the townland boundary with the neighbouring townland of Cornamaddy. Townland boundaries can date to the early medieval period and can reflect ancient tribal or familial land-holdings. The field boundaries include earthen bank, mature trees and hedgerows, and mortar bonded limestone rubble walls.

The old Ballymahon road is situated within the development site. This road was shown on the historic mapping of the area. It now functions as an access road to private dwellings which are situated outside of the development area.



Plate 3 Showing field boundary at northeast edge of development.

It is possible that this former road originated as a later medieval or post medieval road.

Local folklore indicates that a raised area in the south of the site may have had an archaeological origin or function. No cartographic or historical evidence was found to support this contention. However, the raised area was identified and examined during the site inspection. Nothing of archaeological significance was identified during the examination of the raised area of ground.



Plate 4 Showing raised area at southern end of the proposed development.

The historic mapping of the area depicts the development site as comprising a number of agricultural fields. It is not known if those field boundaries were formed by fences, walls, or hedgerows. However, these have largely been removed, during land improvements in the 20th century. Aerial images of the site demonstrate that the former field boundaries survive subterranean. The site inspection identified evidence of former field boundaries, which survive as linear depressions in the fields. The site inspection did not identify evidence of the limekiln that was depicted on historic mapping.

5.0 Archaeological Impact Assessment

The proposed development of a new 94 residential unit housing project comprising 86 houses and 8 apartments, at Lissywollen, will see construction works take place in existing pasture fields that have been used for agricultural activities. The construction works will necessitate the excavation of topsoil and underlying soils to the required formation depth. Works for landscaping, roads, drainage, utilities and services will also impact on the existing ground.

The records of the National Museum of Ireland indicate that several artefacts, both prehistoric and post medieval, were found in Lissywollen townland, but the precise findspots are not known, and these may not have been found from within the development site. Historical sources indicate that no known archaeological sites are located within the environs of the proposed development. Cartographic sources indicates that the development site previously had buildings of unknown age, and also a limekiln.

No known archaeological sites will be directly impacted by the proposed development. No invasive archaeological works have been carried out as part of this assessment. Therefore, the presence of subterranean archaeological features within the development area is possible. The proposed development presents a low degree of risk of impacting on archaeological heritage assets.

6.0 Conclusions and recommendations

The proposed development will not impact on any known archaeological sites. Archaeological mitigation measures will ameliorate the risk of impacting on any subterranean (unknown) archaeological features within the development area.

- A geophysical survey of the development area should be completed. This geophysical survey should take place under a licence issued by the National Monuments Service of the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.
- A program of archaeological test trenching is recommended to investigate the proposed development area. This archaeological test trenching should take place following consultation with and approval by the National Monuments Service of the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, and Westmeath County Council.

The completion of the mitigation measures outlined above will allow for the identification of any archaeological features within the development area. The National Monuments Service has stated that preservation *in situ* (avoidance) of identified archaeology should be the primary strategy. If preservation *in situ* (avoidance) is not possible, preservation by record (archaeological excavation) is recommended.

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www.archaeology.ie National Monuments Service

www.buildingsofireland.ie National Built Heritage Service

<https://downsurvey.tchpc.tcd.ie/> Down Survey of Ireland

www.excavations.ie Database of Irish Excavation Reports

www.logainm.ie Placenames Database of Ireland

www.map.geohive.ie Ordnance Survey Ireland aerial photographs

<https://athlonehistory.ie/history-of-athlone/>