Limekilnhill Townland, Navan, County Meath

Outline Archaeological Excavation Method Statement for NMS Review

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Planning Ref.: SHD - ABP-304494-19
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Summary

This outline method statement has been prepared by John Cronin & Associates (JCA) for review by the National Monuments Service (NMS) as part of the planning application process for a proposed Strategic Housing Development at Limekilnhill, Navan, Co. Meath. It has been compiled in response to a letter submitted by the Development Applications Unit (DAU) of the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (dated 18/11/19) in relation to this proposed development.

The DAU letter notes that the NMS have examined the Final Archaeological Impact Assessment of the proposed development prepared by John Cronin and Associates (Excavation Licence No. 18E0499, Detection Device Consent No. 18R0171, October 2019) and states the following:

> *The archaeological method statements for the mitigation will be agreed with the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht in advance of the grant of planning permission.*

It should be, therefore, noted that this document is not intended to form part of a formal excavation licence application but instead has been prepared to present an outline of the proposed archaeological methodologies which will be implemented in the event that the Board issue planning permission for the proposed development. It has been compiled following consultations with Mr Michael McDonagh and Mr Tom Condit (NMS).

Reports on the programmes of geophysical survey and targeted test trenching within the proposed development site (PDS) have been submitted to the NMS and, while the results contained therein are briefly summarised below, this document is intended to be read in conjunction with these reports.

Summary of Context

The PDS comprises a parcel of tillage farmland on the southern outskirts of the modern suburbs of Navan town, Co. Meath (Figure 1). The SMR/RMP do not list any archaeological sites within the development boundary and the nearest example comprises the recorded location of a souterrain (ME025-035----), which is now occupied by a modern housing estate, at a distance of 260m to the south (Figure 2).

A geophysical survey of the PDS and a subsequent programme of targeted archaeological testing were carried out as part of the archaeological assessment undertaken during the compilation of the EIAR for the proposed development. The geophysical survey was carried out by J.M. Leigh Surveys Ltd (Licence 18R0084) in May 2018. In summary, the survey revealed the sub-surface remains of two sub-rectilinear enclosures, located *c.*50m apart, within the tillage fields (Figures 4 and 5). Both enclosures appear to contain internal features and potential external annex features were also identified. Various external linear trends identified within the environs of the enclosures were interpreted as possible remains of associated field systems.

The test trench investigations at the locations of potential enclosure ditches and external features were carried out by Tony Cummins (JCA) under excavation licence (18E0499) in August 2018 and a licence for the use of a metal-detector (18R0171) was also obtained in order to assist in artefact retrieval from the ploughsoil upcast. The aim of the test trenching was to undertake a targeted investigation of the surfaces of the enclosing elements of the two enclosures, and their associated potential annex features, as well as examining the various external linear trends. No excavation of identified deposits and fills was undertaken as part of this work. One area of the PDS, a field within the eastern end, was not available for works during the programme of test trenching. The geophysical survey of this field identified one anomaly interpreted as a possible pit within an area of ploughing activity (identified as 'Area H' in the geophysical survey report).

The program of test trenching demonstrated that the soil profiles within the tillage fields have been extensively impacted by ploughing activity down to the surface of the underlying natural subsoil. This activity has created a mixed layer of disturbed subsoil at the base of the plough zone and the potential that this layer may seal underlying archaeological deposits within areas of the site was noted. The test excavations successfully identified the buried remains of the ephemeral upper surfaces of both enclosure ditches as well as traces of two conjoined, sub-circular annexes to the south of the northern enclosure. The upper surfaces of the ditch fills were not clearly defined and this appeared to be due to a combination of plough disturbance, potential recut activity and the presence of re-deposited subsoil originating from levelled enclosure banks. While a number of linear cut features were noted within the areas outside the enclosures, including a number to the north of the southern enclosure, no clear pattern was evident within the plough damaged subsoil and the potential exists that some examples may originate from later agricultural activity. Given the amount of plough disturbance it is probable that open areas of excavation will be required to establish the full extent of the remains of any external field systems in the vicinity of the enclosures. A small number of possible archaeological features, including pits and/or postholes, were also noted within areas outside the enclosures and the possibility that these were associated with external industrial/structural features was noted.

As noted in the Archaeological Impact Assessment submitted to the NMS in November 2019, the results of these pre-development site investigations are suggestive of the presence of two enclosures which have a morphological similarity to a number of early medieval sites excavated within recent decades[1]. While the lands within 1km of the PDS contain a number of souterrains there are no recorded ringforts present and the potential exists that the investigations undertaken within the PDS to date has added to our understanding of the early medieval landscape within environs of Navan and close to the River Boyne. Given that the full extent of these two neighbouring enclosures appears to be contained within the PDS, the proposed excavation project has the potential to facilitate a thorough examination of both sites, combined with the potential for uncovering evidence relating to their temporal and functional relationships. It will also facilitate investigation of their associated external agricultural and industrial activity area, which appears to include the remains of adjoining annexes and field enclosures. As well as the potential for examining the physical remains of these sites, the implementation of a systematic environmental and dating sampling strategy will allow for a detailed examination of the economy and organisation of this settlement area. It is intended that a detailed research design relating to the above will be presented in the method statement submitted as part of a licence application.

[1] Corlett, C. & Potterton, M. (2011) *Settlement in Early Medieval Ireland in the Light of Recent Archaeological Excavations*. Wordwell. Dublin.

Proposed schedule of archaeological mitigation works

In summary, the proposed archaeological mitigation works will comprise the following:

- **(A)** Archaeological test trenching within an area in the east end of the site [Area H] which was inaccessible during the pre-development phase,
- **(B)** Preservation by record through the archaeological excavation of two previously unrecorded enclosures and associated features identified during archaeological test investigations undertaken as part of the pre-development impact assessment, and
- **(C)** archaeological monitoring of ground works during the construction phase in remaining areas of the PDS.

Each of these mitigation measures will be enacted in the event that planning permission is granted for the proposed development and the following presents an outline of their proposed scheduling:

A. Archaeological test trenching

The geophysical survey of the PDS indicated the presence of a potential single pit feature within a ploughed field in the east end of the site (identified as 'Area H' in the geophysical survey report). The method statement submitted to the NMS for the 2018 test trenching works included proposals to investigate this feature (and its environs) but the area was subsequently not accessible during this phase of works. It is intended to carry out an advance programme of archaeological test trenching within this area prior to construction works. The extent of the proposed investigations will be clearly defined within a revised method statement that will be submitted to the NMS for approval and will also detail the procedures to be enacted in the event that archaeological features are identified in this area. This will include cordoning off any such features until the NMS have been consulted and agreed mitigation measures have been formulated and enacted. Construction works will only commence in this area once the NMS have provided written confirmation that all required archaeological mitigation measures have been successfully completed. The proposed test trenching works will comply with the IAI *Code of Conduct for Archaeological Assessment Excavations* (2006).

B. Archaeological enclosures and associated features

The proposed excavations will comply with the *Policy and Guidelines on Archaeological Excavation* (Government of Ireland 1999) and the IAI *Code of Conduct for Archaeological Excavations* (2006). Details on the nature and extent of the two enclosures and associated features are presented in the submitted Archaeological Impact Assessment (and in Chapter 13 of the EIAR for the proposed development) which includes the results of the geophysical survey and subsequent archaeological test trenching. An archaeological method statement providing full details on the timescale, methodology and extent of the excavation of these sites will be submitted to the NMS for their approval as part of the statutory excavation licence process. All archaeological features and deposits will be manually excavated and will be recorded using pro-forma context sheets and drawn at appropriate scales. A detailed photographic record will also be maintained which will show the work in progress and will include the use of drone imagery which will assist in the production of scaled 3-D imaging of the enclosures. The extent of the use of a mechanical excavator for the purposes of the excavation of the overlying plough soil during the initial phase of the excavation will be agreed in consultation with the licensing authority and will be clearly defined in the method statement. The method statement will also present available details on proposed post-excavation analyses of retrieved artefacts and environmental samples and will also outline proposals for the publication of the results of the project. No construction works will commence onsite until the full extent of the enclosures and their associated features has been

determined and they have been securely cordoned off and clearly indicated as 'No Entry' areas for the duration of the archaeological excavations. No construction works will be allowed to commence at the location of these enclosure sites and associated external features until all archaeological excavations have been completed and the NMS have been notified in writing.

C. Archaeological monitoring

A programme of licensed archaeological monitoring of ground works within all other areas of the PDS will be carried out during the construction phase of the proposed development will comply with the IAI *Code of Conduct for Archaeological Monitoring* (2006). This will entail the constant supervision of all soil removal works to the level of the undisturbed natural subsoil. The method statement submitted to the NMS as part of the licence application will clearly outline the procedures to be enacted in the event that any archaeological features are identified during the course of this work. This will include halting of ground works within the environs of the feature(s) which will then be securely cordoned off while the NMS are consulted to agree further appropriate mitigation measures. Construction works will only commence at such locations once the NMS have provided written confirmation that any required archaeological mitigation measures have been successfully completed.

Description of Excavation Team

The project team will be led by a suitably qualified, licence-eligible archaeologist who will compile and submit the licence application for the proposed programme of archaeological works to the NMS. The team will also include site supervisory staff with prior experience in the excavation of similar archaeological sites. While the size of the excavation team remains to be determined, it will be appropriate for the extent of the archaeological sites and features identified within the PDS and will be quantified in the method statement submitted to the NMS as part of the licence application. If required, additional staff from John Cronin and Associates will be available to attend site during the course of the project.

Timescale

While the exact timescale for the project currently remains to be determined (and will be dependent on the nature and extent of onsite archaeological features), it is intended that an appropriate time period for the project will be outlined in the method statement submitted as part of the licence application. In the event that the project will extend beyond that timescale, an application for the extension of the licence period will be submitted to the NMS.

Finds retrieval strategy

The artefact retrieval strategy will follow the guidelines presented in the National Museum of Ireland's *Advice Notes for Excavators* (2010 revision) and the IAI *Code of Conduct for the Treatment of Archaeological Objects* (2006). The location of all retrieved artefacts will be recorded by context. They will be each assigned unique identification numbers and will be suitably packaged, labelled and stored (following NMI guidelines). A licence application for the use of a metal-detector will be submitted to the NMS in order to assist in the retrieval of any metallic artefacts that may exist within the site. This will include a systematic pre-excavation survey of the entire extent of the enclosures, and their environs, and continuous surveys will also be undertaken during the excavation phase. It is also intended to incorporate the use of an onsite

swinging sieve to manually inspect soils from excavated deposits and feature fills as the excavation progresses.

Environmental Sampling

The proposed excavation will be undertaken to comply with the *IAI Environmental Sampling Guidelines* (2007). John Cronin and Associates have previously engaged the services of Lorna O'Donnell to assist with our excavation projects and it is envisioned that she will be engaged at the commencement of this project to advise on the site specific sampling strategies to be employed onsite and to then undertake post-excavation analyses of retrieved samples and other environmental material.

Storage and Conservation

On-site and post-excavation conservation and storage facilities will conform to the guidelines issued by the National Museum of Ireland (NMI), the Institute of Archaeologists of Ireland (IAI) and the Institute of Conservator-Restorers in Ireland (ICRI). John Cronin and Associates have previously retained the services of Susannah Kelly and she will be engaged to advise on the conservation of artefacts retrieved during the course of this project. Storage for any retrieved finds will comprise a secure lockup at the offices of John Cronin and Associates, Unit 3A Westpoint Trade Centre, Ballincollig, County Cork until such time that the archive is deposited at the National Museum of Ireland facility in Swords, Co. Dublin.

Reporting

A preliminary report will be submitted to the NMS and NMI within four works of the completion of onsite works. This will clearly present the results of the site investigations in written, drawn and photographic formats and will also identify proposed post-excavation analyses to be undertaken. A final report on the project will be submitted within 12 months of the completion of onsite works and will present a stratigraphic analysis and detailed discussion of the excavation results. It will also include reports on all post-excavation analyses including, but not limited to, specialist reports on dating of samples, environmental studies and artefact analysis. The preliminary and final reports will provide digitised scaled drawings (with geo-referencing), of all excavated archaeological features as well as extracts from the photographic record (including drone imagery) compiled during the project, which will also facilitate the development of 3-D imagery of excavated features and artefacts. The potential for the publication of a paper on the project in a journal, or other suitable format, will be actively pursued to ensure the dissemination of results.

Constraints on archaeological methods

It is envisioned that, in the event of planning permission being granted for the proposed SHD scheme, all archaeological works will be undertaken to comply with the Board's planning conditions and the requirements of the NMS. All areas within the PDS will be accessible during the course of the proposed archaeological project and written statements from the developer in relation to funding of the project will be submitted to the NMS as part of the licence application. There are, therefore, no constraints predicted that will affect the methodology outlined in this document.

Figures

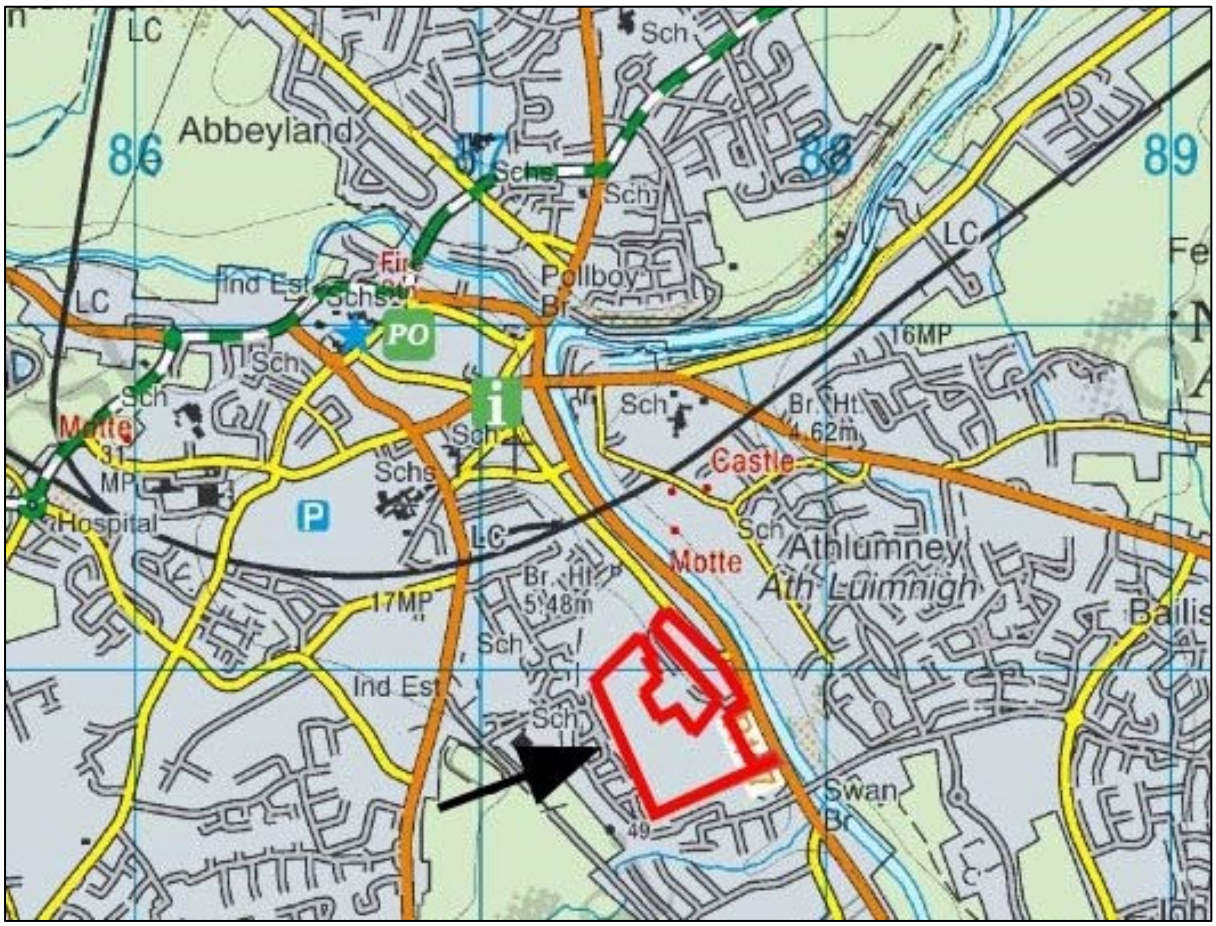

Figure 1: *Discovery series map showing site location [OSI Licence ref. 0003319]*

Figure 2: *Location of recorded monuments within environs of subject site (www.archaeology.ie)*

Figure 3: *Aerial view of PDS with locations of enclosures indicated (www.google.com/maps)*

Figure 4: *Greyscale image of geophysical survey results*

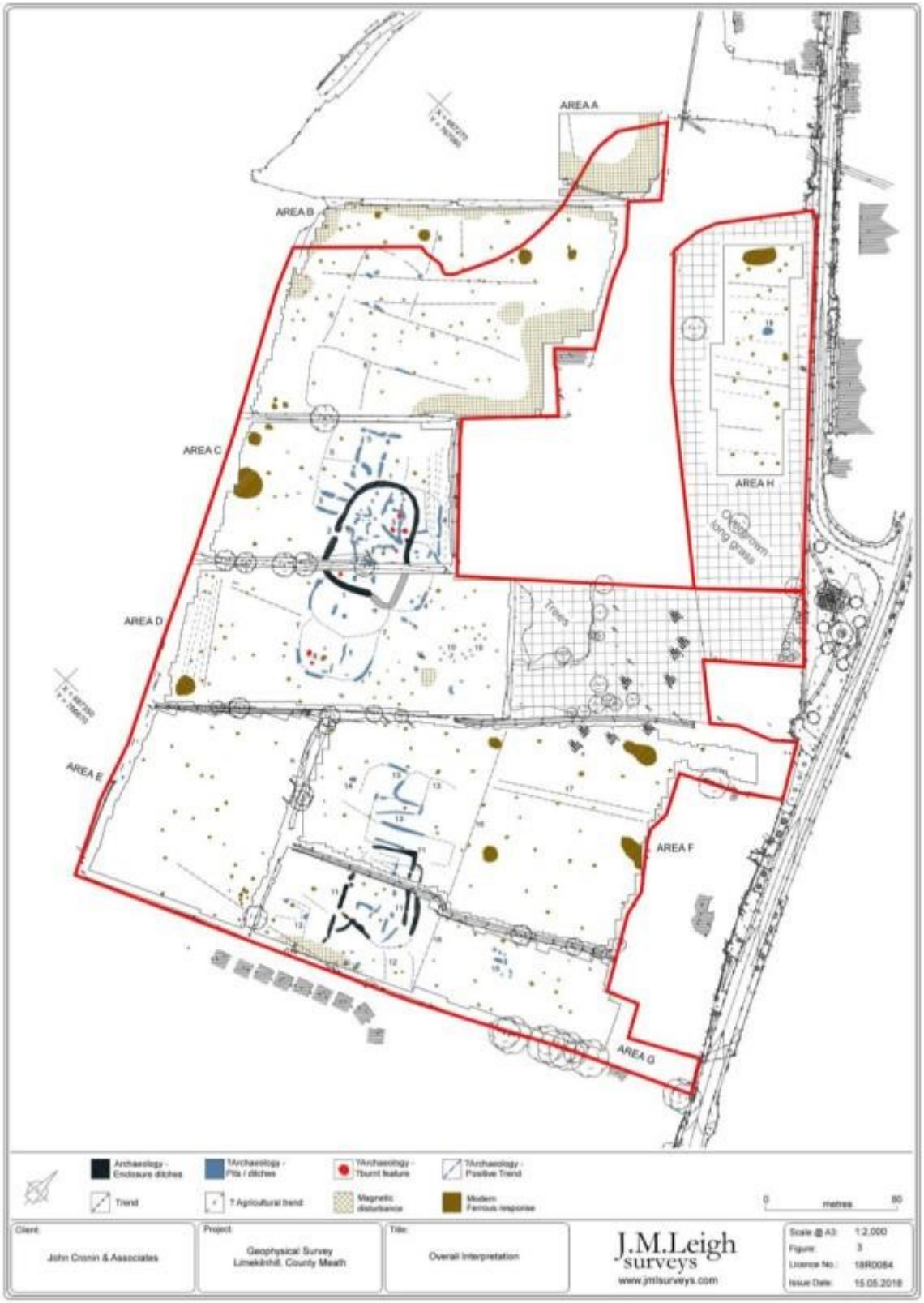

Figure 5: *Interpretation of geophysical survey results*

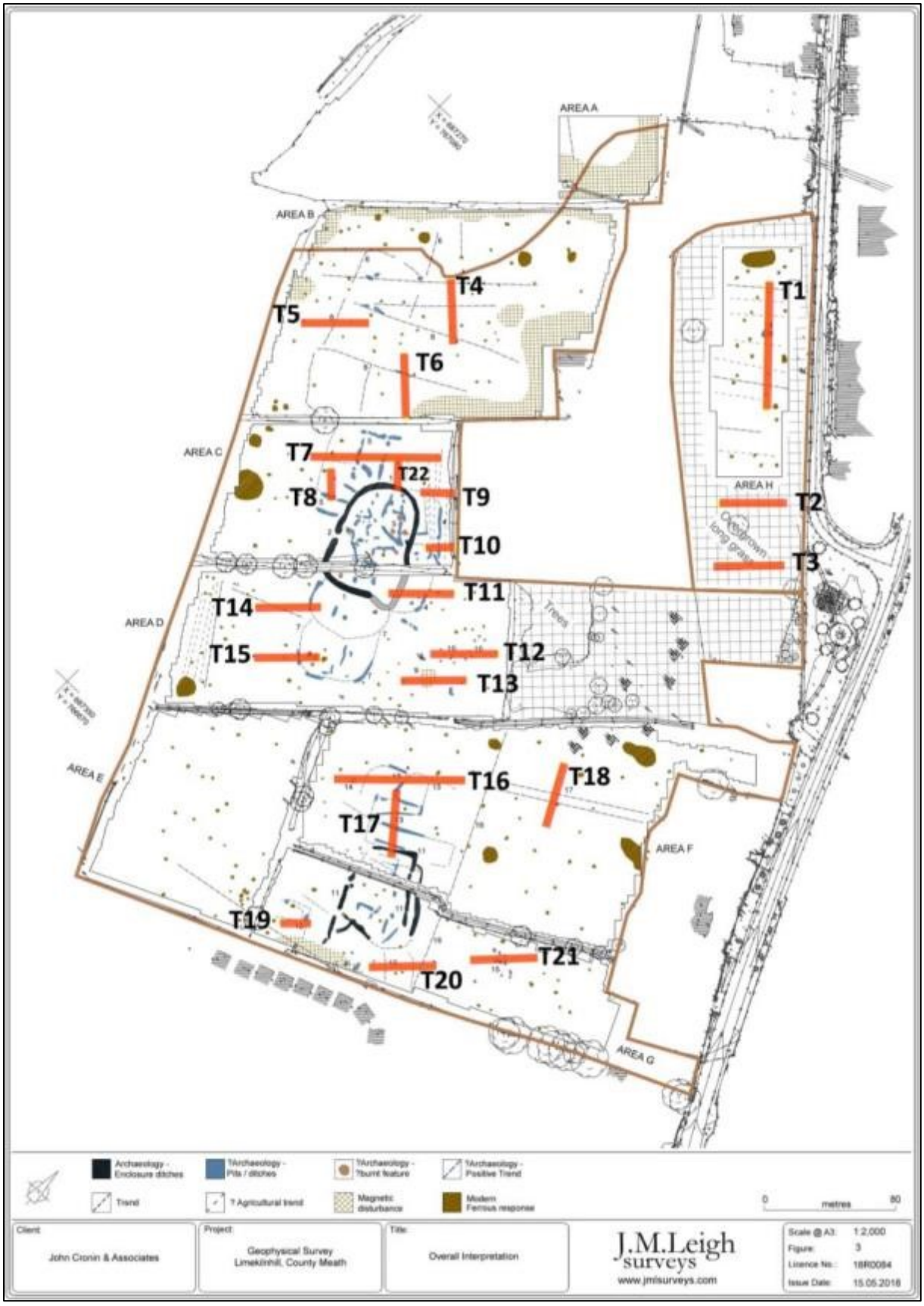

Figure 6: *Location of test trenches (red) superimposed on geophysics interpretation*