

ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT REPORT  
RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT SITE  
AT  
NEWCASTLE NORTH  
NEWCASTLE  
COUNTY DUBLIN



On Behalf Of

Deane & Deane Ltd

Licence No. 23E0058 & 23R0033

Request for Further Information SD22A/0286

February 2023

### Abstract

This report contains the results of an archaeological assessment, including test excavation, carried out on behalf of Deane & Deane Ltd for a residential development located on Main Street, Newcastle, County Dublin. The proposed development will consist of 30 residential units on a greenfield site. The development site is located within the *zone of archaeological potential* of the site of a towerhouse (RMP Ref: DU021-017002), of which no visible trace survives, and of the wider historic village of Newcastle (RMP Ref: DU020-003008). The program of archaeological testing was based on the results of a desk-based assessment and geo-physical survey. The investigation found the remains of disused field systems, boundary ditches and 19<sup>th</sup> century waste pits.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

This report contains the results of an archaeological assessment, including test excavation, carried out on behalf of Deane & Deane Ltd for a residential development located on Main Street, Newcastle, County Dublin. The proposed development will consist of 30 residential units on a c.1ha greenfield site (NGR 699750, 728844).

The development site is located within the *zone of archaeological potential* of the site of a towerhouse (RMP Ref: DU021-017002), of which no visible trace survives, and of the wider historic village of Newcastle (RMP Ref: DU020-003008). The settlement dates to the early 13<sup>th</sup> century when Newcastle was first mentioned as a royal manor in 1215. The settlement was a linear one based on a single street, running east-west with a marketplace located in the roughly sub-triangular space in front of the church at the western end.

South Dublin County Council issued a Request for Further Information (Planning Ref: SD22A/0286) in relation to the development application. Condition 16 of the RFI, required the applicant to engage the services of a qualified archaeologist to undertake an archaeological assessment, geo-physical survey and test excavation of the site to ascertain the nature and extent of any potential archaeological remains.

The desk-based assessment was completed in January 2022. The geo-physical survey was carried out in October 2022 by J.M. Leigh Surveys (Licence No. 22R0329). The survey identified the possible remains of disused field systems with linear broad tends indicative of ridge and furrow cultivation activity. The test excavation confirmed the presence of disused field systems and cultivation furrows in the northern half of the site. In addition, the investigation found the remains of in-situ burning (probably 19<sup>th</sup> century or later) at the north end of the site, a small pit, also at the north end and three N/S aligned boundary ditches, which are likely the remains of burgage plots.

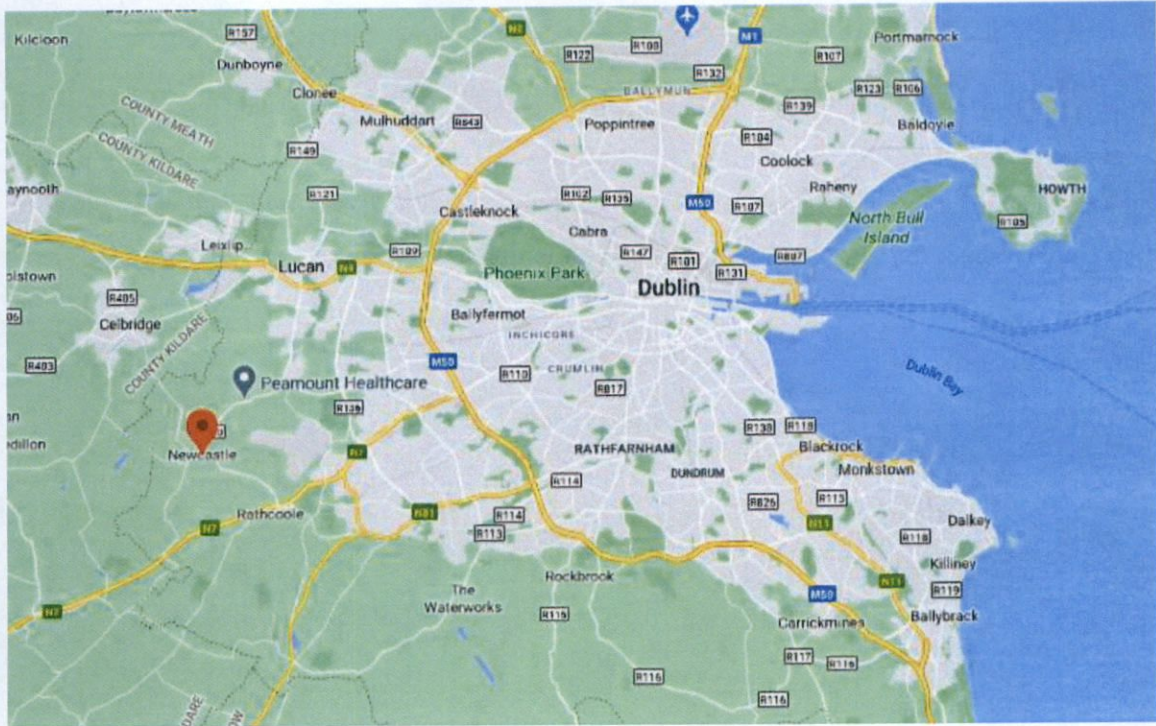


Figure 1 Area Location Map, Newcastle North, Newcastle, County Dublin



Figure 2 Site Location Map, Newcastle North, Newcastle, County Dublin



### 3. RECEIVING ENVIRONMENT

A site inspection was carried out in April 2021 to complete a walk over of the site and check for anomalies indicative of surface or sub-surface archaeological remains. The site is located behind two existing buildings (Plate 1) and is accessed via a laneway off Main Street. There is an adjacent development on the site of the towerhouse investigated in 2017 (Plate 2).



Plate 1 Existing Buildings at Front of Site



Plate 2 Adjacent Development Located on or close to Suspected Site of Towerhouse

The development site is bounded by existing buildings to the south and east, and by a small farmyard complex to the west (Plate 3). The northern boundary is not defined (Plate 4). The field is relatively flat with a clearly defined roughly rectangular raised area at the south end to the rear of buildings fronting onto Main Street. The test excavation revealed that the raised area was due to the presence of underlying limestone bedrock which protruded through the glacial till.



Plate 3 View of Site Looking West



Plate 4 View of North End of Site



## 4. ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

### 4.1 Historical Evidence

Before the Anglo-Norman invasion of 1169, the area of Newcastle belonged to Mac Giolla Mo-Cholmóc. After the invasion, a fortification (motte) was erected, and Mac Giolla Mo-Cholmóc was granted some land back under conditions of feudal tenure. Later his nephew and heir lost much of the property as the English king allocated the lands around Newcastle to one of the royal manors of the Vale of Dublin.

The motte (RMP DU020-003001) at Newcastle, west of the proposed development area, was built in the first phase of major castle building for the outer defences of medieval Dublin. This is supported by the absence of a bailey, which indicates that it was constructed within the initial stages of Norman settlement in the area, when less emphasis was placed on security. A series of motte's were constructed by the Anglo-Normans, forming a large circle around the city curving north from Howth to Swords then south to Castleknock and finishing at Dun Laoghaire. Strategically placed some four miles apart, these primary castles date from the 1170's. The motte at Newcastle guarded the most important inland route to Naas and the south. This phase of building was followed in the 13th century by the construction of moated or ditched castles and in the 15th and 16th centuries by tower houses.

Newcastle was one of four royal manors, together with Saggart, Esker and Crumlin, which meant it was a demesne manor in the hands of the English king. The manor came to constitute the parish of Newcastle which contained seven townlands covering c. 2000 acres (Civil Survey). The western end of present-day Newcastle reflects its history as a medieval manorial village. Visible at this end of the town are a motte (RMP DU020-003001), a medieval church (RMP DU020-003002) with a residential tower, and four tower houses (RMP DU020-003004/6/7, RMP DU021-017002) all near to each other.

A substantially built wall, on the southwest side of the settlement, may represent the remains of the town walls. The basic plan of the medieval village must have been determined by the alignment of the motte, the church, and the tower houses with thatched houses of the peasants lining the single road, which runs in a roughly east-west direction (Simms, 1983, 133-135). The dwelling houses of the medieval town would have fronted the road and burgage plots would have stretched back perpendicularly from the road (Manning, 1998, 136).

The location of some of these burgage plots has been supported by an excavation c. 178m to the west (Licence 13E348, Bennett 2014:143). The eastern end of the village, on the other hand, has been transformed by the construction of modern building estates.

The fact that Newcastle was a border town and under constant threat of attack from Irish invaders may have been part of the reason why Newcastle, together with other manorial villages in Ireland, was given the legal status of borough, as an incentive for people to settle and stay. The first reference to the burgesses of Newcastle is in the Statute Rolls for the late 14th century. Shortly after this we see that Newcastle is granted a special subvention, 'to well and securely make their ditches', fortifications were clearly an issue at this time. This would suggest that the village defences were relatively limited and confined to field ditches rather than walls (Simms, 1983, 138).

The medieval church (RMP DU020-00302), to the west of the proposed development area, was the church which the Anglo-Norman invaders found upon the lands of Newcastle and following their conquest, it became the central church of the parish, having a chapel in Colmanstown subservient to it. It is dedicated to St. Finian and is an interesting medieval structure; there is a battlemented tower at its west end and a turret with a spiral staircase at its northwest corner. A carved head, locally identified as St Finian, is inserted high up near the east end of the south wall of the nave and may have been part of a Romanesque church which previously stood on the site. In the graveyard (RMP DU020-003010) to the south of the church is a medieval granite cross (RMP DU020-003003) with a ringed cross on one side and a simple cross on the other. St Finian's holy well (RMP DU020-003005) is located c. 100m west of the church (Harbison, 1970, 134).

#### 4.2 Record of Monuments and Places

The Record of Monuments & Places (RMP) is a list of all archaeological sites known to the National Monuments Service. The Record of Monuments & Places includes RMP maps based on OS 6" Sheets, which indicate the location of each recorded site. The RMP list is based on The Sites and Monument Record (SMR) files housed in the National Monuments Services offices. Buildings belonging to the 17th century and later are considered as archaeological sites today, though not all sites are represented in the SMR archive. There are eight recorded monuments located 70 to 160m from the proposed development site.

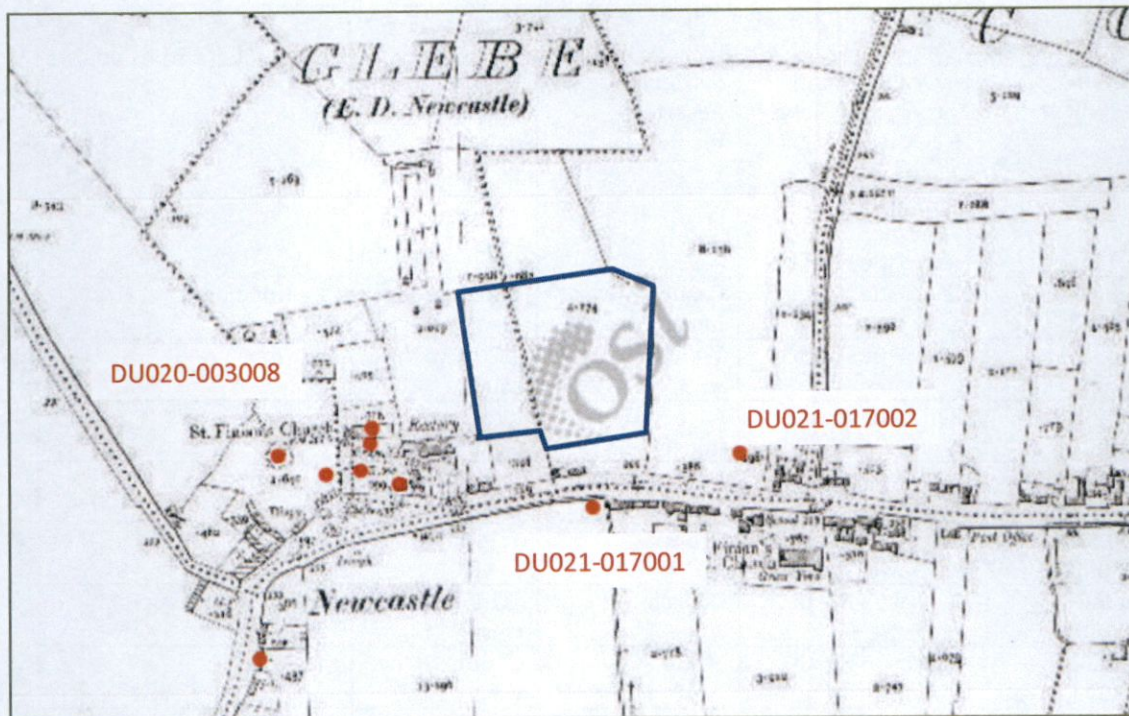


Figure 4 Record of Monuments and Places Map, Newcastle, County Dublin

#### ***DU020-003008 – Deserted settlement - medieval***

**Description:** Newcastle was first mentioned as a royal manor in 1215 and had borough status by the late fifteenth century. The settlement was a linear one based on a single street, running east-west. The marketplace was located in the roughly sub-triangular space in front of the church.

#### ***DU021-017001 – Well***

**Description:** Situated in the NW corner of a long narrow holding opposite the medieval parish church at Newcastle Lyons. It is bounded on the E by a patch of spade cultivation. Traces of mortared wall protruding from beneath the sod were interpreted as a possible site of a tower house (O'Keefe 1986, 55, No. 5). Recent clearance has revealed that the mortared wall was actually a covering for a well.

#### ***DU021-017002 – Towerhouse***

**Description:** The site is located in a field under tillage W of the road that leads N to Lucan and opposite the present RC church. According to O'Keefe (1986, 55, No. 6) a tower house was indicated in manuscript form on an old copy of the Ordnance Survey 6-inch sheet of the area held by Mr Paddy Healy, Dublin. There are no visible remains at ground level.

RMP Ref	Townland	Monument Type	Distance	Potential Development Impact
DU020-003008	Newcastle South, Cornerpark, Glebe (Newcastle By., Lucan Ed), Newcastle Demesne, Newcastle Farm	Settlement deserted - medieval	Within the zone of archaeological potential	Low
DU021-017002	Newcastle North	Castle - tower house (site of)	c.80m to the east	None
DU021-017001	Newcastle South	Well	c.70m to the south	None
DU020-003004	Glebe (Newcastle By., Newcastle Ed)	Castle - tower house	c.155m to the west	None
DU020-003010	Grange (Newcastle By.)	Graveyard	c.145m to the west	None
DU020-003003	Glebe (Newcastle By., Newcastle Ed)	Cross	c.145m to the west	None
DU020-003002	Newcastle North	Church	c.145m to the west	None
DU020-003001	Newcastle North	Motte	c.160m to the west	None

### 4.3 Topographical Files of the National Museum of Ireland

The National Museum of Ireland Topographical Files is the national archive of all known antiquities recorded by the National Museum. These files relate primarily to artefacts but also include references to monuments and also contain a unique archive of records of previous archaeological excavations. The find spots of artefacts can also be an important indication of the archaeological potential in the surrounding area.

1. Museum No M.1948:71

Townland Newcastle South

Find Brass shoe buckle

Find Place Vicinity of tower house (RMP DU020-003007)

Description 18th century brass shoe buckle, originally had an iron centre bar

2. Museum No None given

Townland Newcastle South

Find Flint axehead

Find Place Unknown

Description Flint axehead

#### 4.4 Previous Excavations

Two previous archaeological investigations are particularly relevant to this development project:

- The first is the on the site of the adjacent towerhouse DU021-017002 which was subject to archaeological testing in 2017 (Licence 17E0197, Planning ref: SD17A / 0010). Test excavation has shown that deep ploughing of recent years has taken place. The level of bedrock on this site is very high, and no remains of a medieval plough soil were uncovered. No remains of either the tower house or foundations of the later 18th and 19th century cottages on the street front remained.
- The second was a site immediately to the northeast of the subject site was tested in 2002 (02E0859) following geophysics over the entire area. Shallow burgage plot ditches extending north-south were uncovered. However, no further work appears to have been carried out, and the area was developed extensively in a housing development called 'The Glebe'.
- Medieval activity in the study area was uncovered in the form of three 13th century burgage plots fronting onto Newcastle Main Street (Licence 13E0348). Two of the plots contained kilns to the rear. Three medieval burgage plots had been tested c. 147m to the north identifying three ditches and two rubble drains of post-medieval date (Licence 07E0817).
- A double-ditched early medieval enclosure was excavated to the east of the proposed development site (Licence 06E0176). The enclosing ditches were almost square with rounded corners, with a possible gate feature identified at the terminals. Habitation features included pits, gullies, and kilns. Five iron knives of early medieval date were recovered from the site. There was a single inhumation identified between the inner and outer enclosures while a dog burial placed within a pit was also identified. The kiln excavated under Licence 06E1137 is thought to be associated with the enclosure due to their proximity.

#### 4.5 Cartographic Sources

The Down Survey maps were compiled at a scale of 40 perches to one inch (the modern equivalent of 1:50,000) and represent the first systematic mapping of a large area on such a scale attempted anywhere. On Petty's map, the village is depicted with the annotation '7 old castles. The accompanying notes record 'Seaven old castles on New Castle Towne Land and the Ruines of a Church on the parcel of Glebe'. Four of these tower houses are recorded within the RMP, as is St Finian's Church.

The 1<sup>st</sup> and subsequent editions of the Ordnance Survey show the site as an open field with several small buildings fronting onto Main Street. Traces of old burgage plots can be seen and the townland boundary runs close to the western edge of the site. The adjacent towerhouse site is not recorded on any OS map.

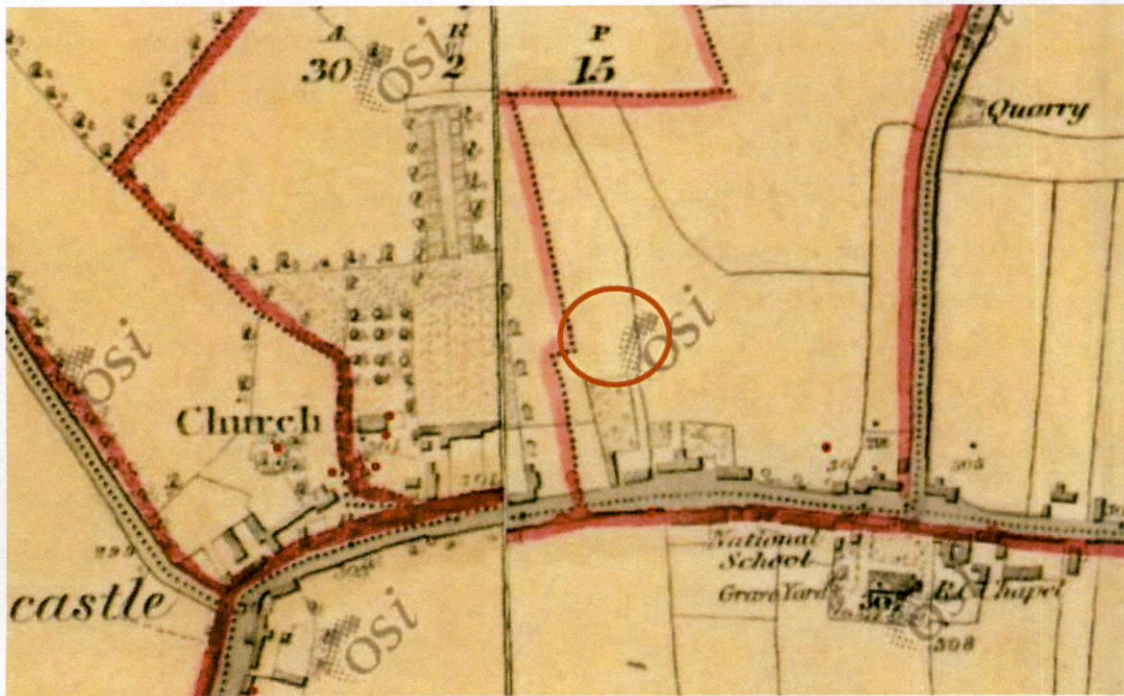


Figure 5 1st Edition OS Map, Newcastle, County Dublin

#### 4.6 Aerial Photography

Aerial photography and satellite imagery show no subsurface features or anomalies. No other features of potential archaeological significance were noted.

## 5. GEO-PHYSICAL SURVEY RESULTS

### 5.1 Summary Findings

A geo-physical survey was carried out in October 2022 and a summary of the key results is presented here. The modern magnetic disturbance from the existing agricultural sheds and adjacent buildings has complicated the interpretation of the results. Nevertheless, responses in both the north and south of the data are indicative of ditched features. The shape and form of the responses suggest a possible former field system, with linear broad tends indicative of ridge and furrow cultivation activity.

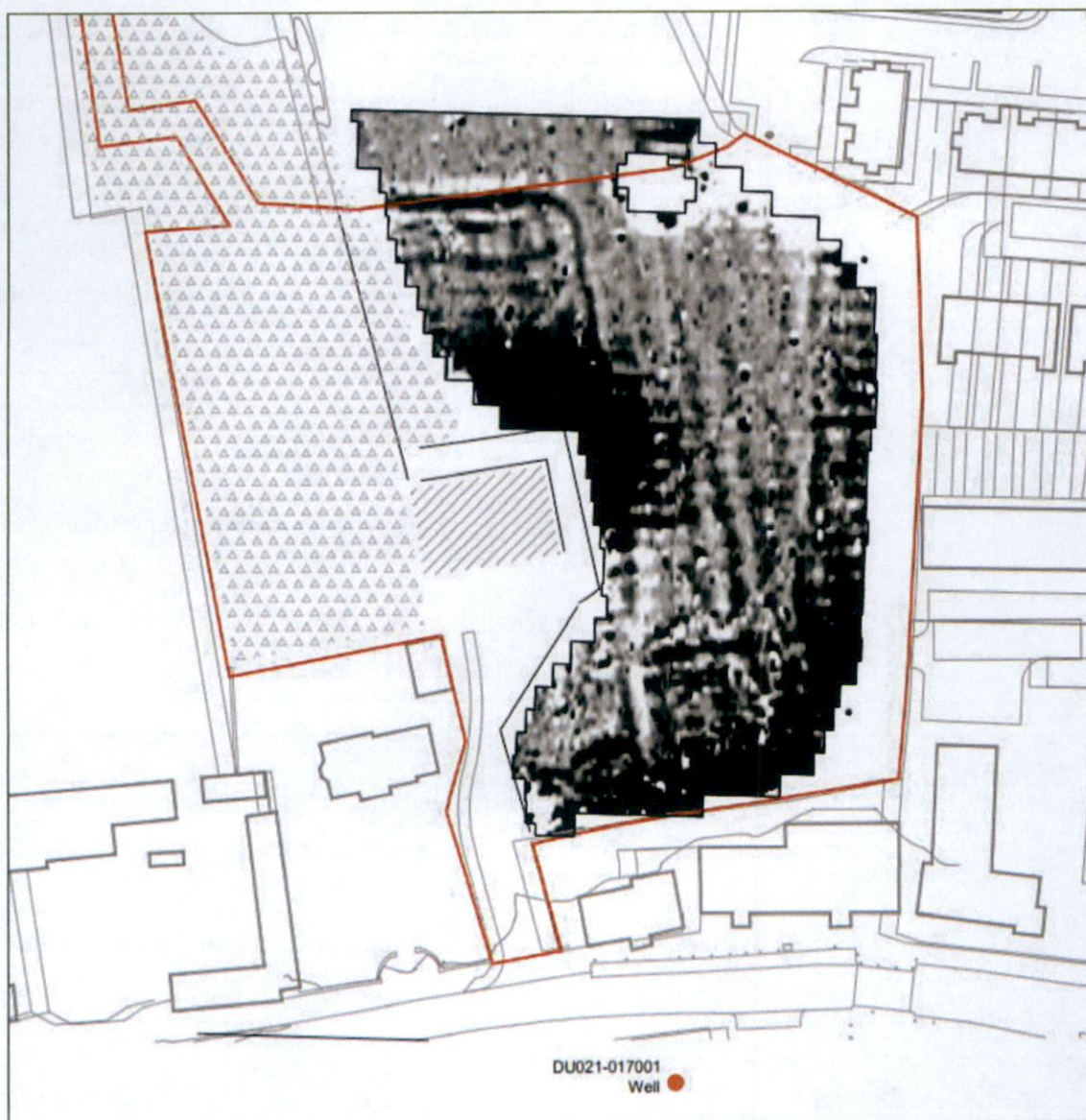


Figure 6 Geo-physical Survey Results

## 6. TEST EXCAVATION RESULTS

An excavator fitted with a 1.5m flat grading bucket was used to excavate a series of 10 test trenches across the proposed development site. The primary objective was to establish the nature and extent of features identified during the geo-physical survey and secondly, to test those areas that could not be surveyed due to magnetic interference. Each trench was excavated down to archaeological and/or natural undisturbed deposits. Archaeological features were cleaned, photographed, and planned following standard archaeological field procedures. Once completed, the trenches were backfilled for safety reasons and to protect any archaeological deposits.

Trench 1	Description
L: 40m, W:1.5m	<p>Aligned E/W. This trench was excavated to a depth of 400mm to expose compact yellow/brown glacial till and protruding fractured limestone bedrock.</p> <p>Feature 1: Located at eastern end of trench. Linear aligned N/S, 2.5m wide with upper fill of mottled brown silty clay with very occasional animal bone fragments. Full width not determined as extended outside limit of test trench to the east.</p>
Trench 2	Description
L: 40m, W:1.5m	<p>Aligned E/W. This trench was excavated to a depth of 400mm to expose compact yellow/brown glacial till and protruding fractured limestone bedrock.</p> <p>Feature 2: Located in eastern half of trench. Oval area of in-situ burning 1.4m wide and extending into southern baulk.</p>
Trench 3	Description
L: 35m, W:1.5m	<p>Aligned E/W. This trench was excavated to a depth of 300mm to expose compact yellow/brown glacial till and protruding fractured limestone bedrock.</p> <p>Feature 3: Large 7m wide depression in centre of trench filled with fractured limestone fragments and very occasional animal bone fragments.</p>
Trench 4	Description
L: 35m, W:1.5m	<p>Aligned E/W. This trench was excavated to a depth of 300mm to expose compact yellow/brown glacial till.</p>



Trench 5	Description
L: 40m, W:1.5m	<p>Aligned E/W. This trench was excavated to a depth of 400mm to expose compact yellow/brown glacial till.</p> <p>Feature 4: Linear plough furrow aligned N/S (W; 0.4m) and filled with mid brown silty clay.</p> <p>Feature 5: Linear plough furrow aligned N/S (W; 0.4m) and filled with mid brown silty clay.</p> <p>Feature 6: Linear aligned N/S (W; 2.2m) and filled with mid brown silty clay.</p>

Trench 6	Description
L: 40m, W:1.5m	<p>Aligned E/W. This trench was excavated to a depth of 400mm to expose compact grey/brown soft glacial till.</p> <p>Feature 7: Linear plough furrow aligned N/S (W; 0.4m) and filled with mid brown silty clay.</p> <p>Feature 8: Linear plough furrow aligned N/S (W; 0.4m) and filled with mid brown silty clay.</p> <p>Feature 9: Linear plough furrow aligned N/S (W; 0.4m) and filled with mid brown silty clay.</p>

Trench 7	Description
L: 40m, W:1.5m	Aligned E/W. This trench was excavated to a depth of 400mm to expose compact grey/brown soft glacial till.

Trench 8	Description
L: 40m, W:1.5m	Aligned N/S. This trench was excavated to a depth of 400mm to expose compact grey/brown soft glacial till.

	Feature 10: Linear aligned N/S extending full length of test trench. Upper fill of burnt waste including animal bone fragments, oyster shells and 19 <sup>th</sup> century pottery sherds (blackware/creamware). West cut visible, east cut outside trench.
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Trench 9	Description
L: 30m, W:1.5m	<p>Aligned N/S. This trench was excavated to a depth of 400mm to expose compact grey/brown soft glacial till.</p> <p>Feature 11: Oval shaped pit (D; 0.6m) located at north end of trench and filled with burnt/partially burnt stone fragments.</p>

Trench 10	Description
L: 40m, W:1.5m	Aligned N/S. This trench was excavated to a depth of 400mm to expose compact grey/brown soft glacial till.

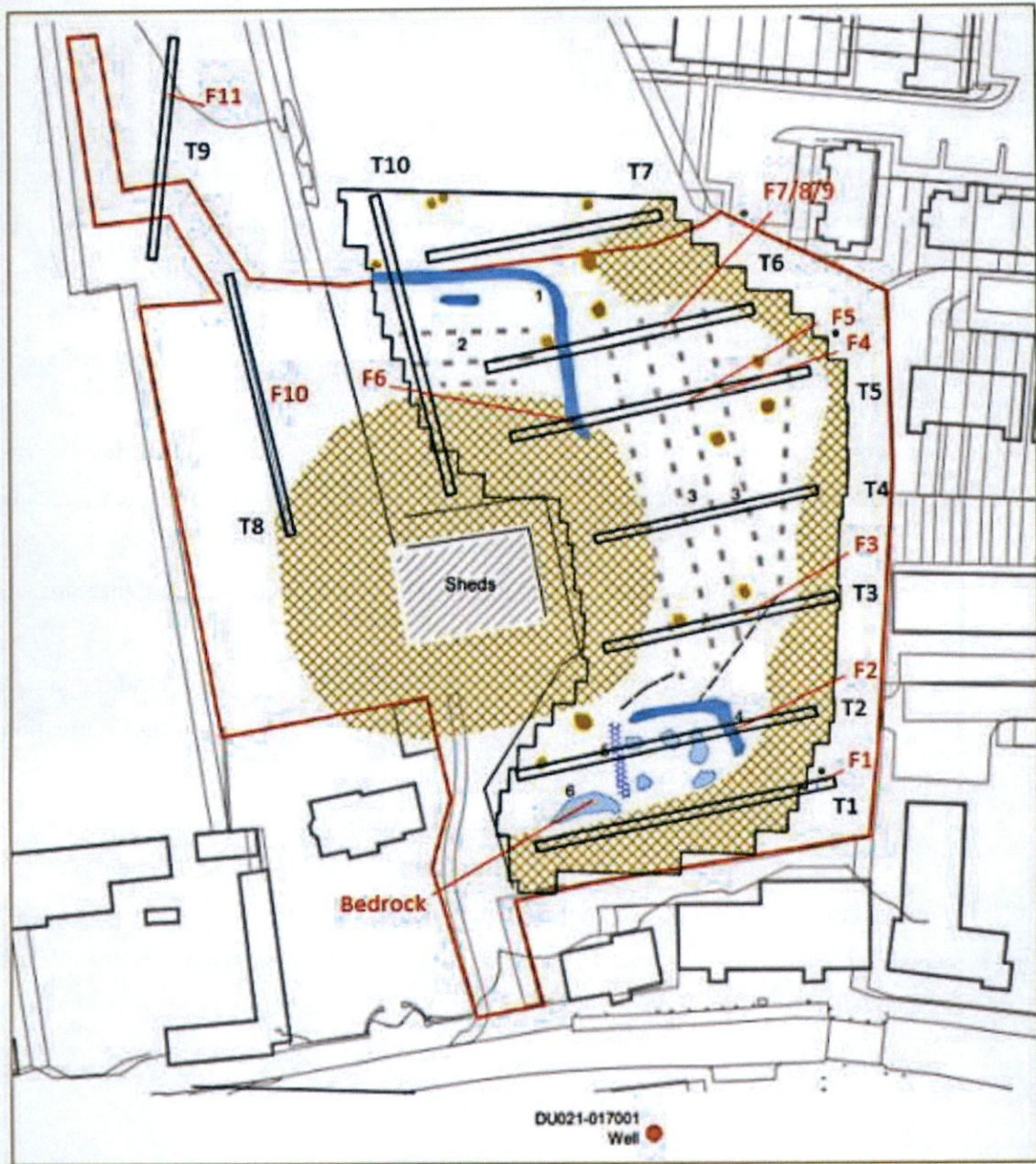


Figure 7 Key Results from Geo-physical Survey & Test Trenches

## 7. RESULTS & RECOMMENDATIONS

### 7.1 Summary Findings

The archaeological assessment was carried out to ascertain the nature and extent of archaeological remains within and close to the proposed development site. The assessment was requested due to the location of the development in the historic village of Newcastle, County Dublin, and the proximity of a suspected towerhouse site c.70m to the east.

The results of the assessment were as follows:

- There are no known archaeological sites within the footprint of the proposed development.
- The towerhouse DU021-017002 originally recorded in the adjacent site to the east was not found during a test excavation in 2017. There is no evidence to suggest that any remains associated with this site extend into this development area.
- The field survey identified no surface anomalies indicative of sub-surface archaeological remains.
- Aerial photography and satellite imagery revealed no potential archaeological remains.
- The geo-physical survey identified the remains of disused field systems and cultivation furrows but no other features of archaeological interest.
- The test excavation confirmed the presence of disused field systems and cultivation furrows in the northern half of the site. In addition, the investigation found the remains of in-situ burning (probably 19<sup>th</sup> century or later) at the north end of the site (Trench 2), a small pit, also at the north end (Trench 9) and three N/S aligned boundary ditches (Trench 1, 5 & 8) which are likely the remains of burgage plots, which are noted elsewhere in Newcastle village.

### 7.2 Development Impact

The proposed development will not directly or indirectly impact any upstanding archaeological remains. The archaeological remains identified during the test excavation will be directly impacted by the proposed development.

### 7.3 Mitigation Measures

The following mitigation measures are therefore recommended.

- All topsoil removal associated with the development should be monitored by a suitably qualified archaeologist under licence from National Monuments Service.
- A report detailing the results of archaeological monitoring should be submitted to the relevant authorities on completion. A mitigation strategy should be prepared and agreed with the National Monuments Service and Local Authority to resolve archaeological remains identified during the assessment phase.
- Should significant archaeological material be found during topsoil monitoring, further mitigation measures may be required subject to consultation with National Monuments Service and Local Authority.

*The recommendations contained within this report are subject to the approval of the National Monuments Service and Local Authority who may issue additional or alternative recommendations.*



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John Kavanagh MA MSc

Project Archaeologist

## 8. BIBLIOGRAPHY

Environmental Impact Assessment, Newcastle South, IAC

Previous Excavations, Newcastle, County Dublin

1st, 2nd and 3rd Editions of Ordnance Survey, County Dublin

Record of Monuments and Places, County Dublin

SMR files for Newcastle, County Dublin

Topographical Files, National Museum of Ireland



Plate 5 Test Trench 1 Looking East



Plate 6 Feature 1 (Boundary Ditch) Trench 1 Looking East



Plate 7 Trench 2 Looking East



Plate 8 Feature 2 (Area of Burning) Trench 2 Looking South





Plate 9 Trench 3 Looking East



Plate 10 Feature 3 (Stone Filled Depression/Pit) Trench 3 Looking North



Plate 11 Trench 5 Looking East



Plate 12 Feature 6 (Boundary Ditch) Trench 5 Looking East



Plate 13 Trench 8 Looking South



Plate 14 Feature 10 (Upper Post-Medieval Fill of Boundary Ditch) Trench 8 Looking West



Plate 15 View of Trench 9 Looking South



Plate 16 Feature 11 (Pit with Burnt Stone) Trench 9 looking South