Introduction

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The National Roads Authority (NRA) and Meath County Council propose to construct a road from Clonee to North of Kells, County Meath, with link roads to the towns of Dunboyne, Dunshaughlin, Navan and Kells. The total scheme length will be around 60km and the project will cover approximately 700 hectares of land.[1]

This information series has been devised to inform the archaeological profession (and public groups with an interest in archaeology) of the M3 project background and current status with specific regard to archaeology. The topics discussed include the following:

- Planning Background (Part 2)
- Archaeological Investigations (Part 3)
- M3 Testing Results (Part 4)
- Significance of Testing Results (Part 5)
- Future Archaeological Strategy (Part 6)
- Team Details (Part 7)
- Select Bibliography (Part 8)

The need for a new road is well established and provided for in the National Development Plan, 2000-2006 (NDP) and Meath County Development Plan. A four-year planning process was undertaken where a number of route options were examined (see Part 2). The Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the scheme was published and the subsequent An Bord Pleanála Oral Hearing was held in 2002. Archaeological work carried out as part of the EIS included desk-top assessment, field walking and geophysical survey. Following approval of the road scheme proposal and the EIS by An Bord Pleanála, full test excavation of the whole route was carried out in 2004.

For the purposes of archaeological investigation, the entire length of the M3 was divided into five separate "sections".

- Section 1, Clonee to Dunshaughlin
- Section 2, Dunshaughlin to Navan
- Section 3, Navan Bypass
- Section 4, Navan to Kells and Kells Bypass
- Section 5, Kells to North of Kells

[1] *Scheme includes 60km of mainline and 50km of ancillary and access roads.*

The test excavations of the approved route are now complete. In general terms archaeological sites are fairly evenly distributed along the length of the route with a total of approximately 160 sites revealed (see Part 4).

The sites range in date from the Neolithic period to modern times. They range in function from settlements to cemeteries and from burnt mounds to brick kilns.

This document is intended to give interested parties, in particular the archaeological community, an overview of the background, test excavation results and general potential for study of the archaeological works associated with the M3 Clonee-North of Kells scheme.

The document also presents preliminary archaeological results, however, at this stage, many details remain unclear. The advance testing, aimed to determine the location, date (where possible), nature and extent of sites only. Further detailed works are planned for all archaeological sites discovered subject to the directions issued by the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government under National Monuments legislation.

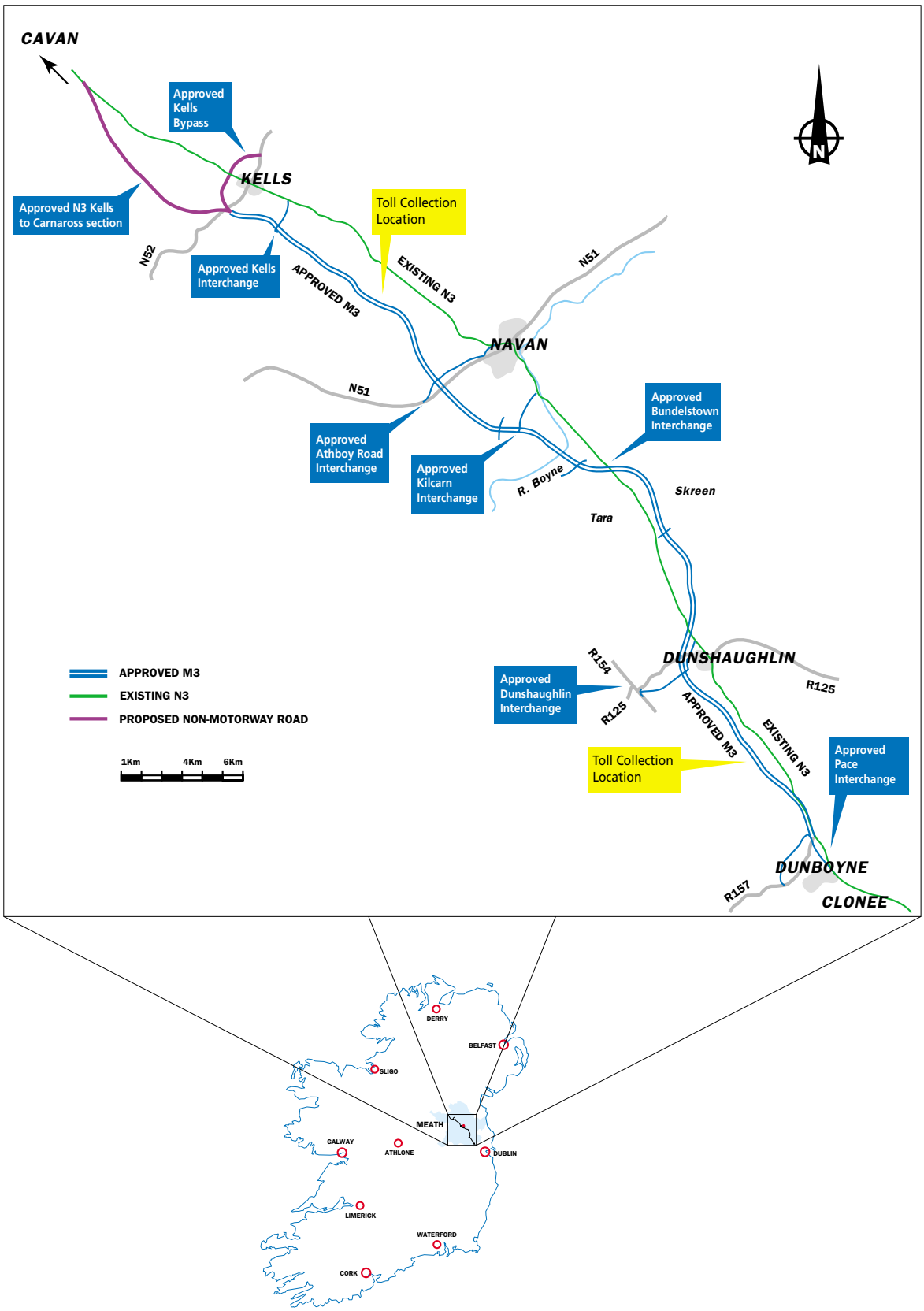
Overall, the series will provide archaeologists with a quick-reference resource from which to view the project work on the M3 and gain a better understanding of the NRA's archaeological methods.

The M3 road project has been dominated by the issue of the relationship the road will have with the monuments on top of the Hill of Tara and those within 5-10km of Tara itself. This is a recurring theme in the present document and this will also be the case in subsequent additions to the series.

Key Points (Part 1)

- M3 Motorway routed from Clonee to North of Kells
- 60km of mainline road
- 50km of ancillary roads
- Requirement for new road stressed in National Development Plan and Meath County Development Plan
- Archaeological work undertaken includes desk-top assessment, field walking, geophysical surveying and extensive test excavation
- Route divided into 5 sections
- Approximately 160 archaeological sites identified.

Fig 1.1: Approved M3 Route



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