

Future Archaeological Strategy

6

Meath County Council and the National Roads Authority (NRA) propose to commence construction of the approved M3 Clonee-North of Kells road scheme in 2006. The route commences at Clonee on the border between Dublin and Meath with link roads to Dunboyne, Dunshaughlin, Navan and Kells. It joins the existing N3 north of Kells near the border between Meath and Cavan. It is approximately 60km long but with a significant quantity of additional link roads, covering a total of approximately 700ha.

To date, extensive archaeological work has taken place on the route including desk-top survey, field survey and geophysical survey as part of the Environmental Impact Statement. Subsequently, further geophysical survey and extensive test excavation has been carried out along the whole route. The archaeological investigations carried out to date have revealed approximately 160 new sites along the whole route. The next phase of work will involve further investigations and full excavation of these sites.

These investigations will generate a significant corpus of new data. Meath County Council and the NRA are committed to the dissemination of all excavation results for the public benefit. The Authority recognises that the publication of archaeological results is not only a form of mitigation of the impacts of road construction but also a contribution by a State agency to the cultural life of the Irish people as a whole.¹ However, it is recognised throughout the archaeological profession and highlighted in the recent 2020 Archaeology Foresight consultative forum, that the lack of knowledge creation from the growing body of such data is one of the major challenges facing the archaeological profession in Ireland today.² In order to meet this challenge on the M3 project the next phase of investigations will be carried out under an overarching research framework.

The ultimate aim of the M3 Archaeological Research Framework will be to transform the data generated on the M3 archaeological investigations from ‘information’ to ‘knowledge’. Further detail on how it is proposed to achieve this aim is outlined in a forthcoming M3 Archaeological Research Framework document, but the broad outline is as follows:

- The newly uncovered archaeological data will be placed into its archaeological, palaeoenvironmental and historical context
- The integrated results will be widely disseminated

¹ *O’Sullivan 2003.*

² *Cooney et al. 2005; Doyle et al. 2002.*

Research Potential

Significant research has already taken place in many of the areas through which the road traverses, in particular the archaeological and historical research on Tara carried out by the Discovery Programme.¹ The M3 Clonee-North of Kells road scheme is not an archaeological research project. However, the work which will be carried out to mitigate the impact of the scheme on archaeology has enormous potential to contribute to future archaeological research. The approach proposed to provide a framework for this work will ensure that that potential is realised.

The full significance of many of the approximately 160 sites will only be revealed through excavation and post-excavation. However, already the results to date have indicated sites that have the potential to significantly contribute to major areas of research. One example is in the study of early medieval settlement (see Part 5).

Dissemination

In order to maximise the knowledge creation from the information generated, the results will be communicated to the archaeological community and the public at regular intervals throughout the project. Illustrated booklets and a dedicated website will provide updates throughout the project for the public (www.m3motorway.ie). The full technical reports of the work to date will also remain available for download on the website.

This information pack represents the first installment of a series of publications aimed at the archaeological and related professions. Updates will be provided on a regular basis in the form of inserts especially designed to build this information pack into a preliminary publication.

As soon as possible after the completion of excavation and post-excavation works, the final results will be published. In these publications the results of the excavations will be integrated with the results of archaeological, historical and palaeoenvironmental studies to ensure that they are placed in a broader context. Where appropriate, the results will be synthesised on a thematic basis. This will be complemented by a non-technical publication specifically aimed at the public. If you have any queries or requests regarding the pack please e-mail infopackM3@nra.ie.

¹ *Newman 1997; Bbreathnach 1995; Roche 2002.*

M3 Clonee-North of Kells – Future Archaeological Activity and Strategy

Dateline	Activity	Detail
2005-2006	<i>Geophysical Survey</i>	Additional targeted geophysical survey will be carried out at a number of sites to further illustrate their nature and extent in advance of full excavation. Blanket geophysical surveys will also be carried out in a selection of areas as a control on the previous geophysical surveys and testing.
	<i>Topsoil Assessment</i>	Ploughed field walking and metal detection surveys will be carried out in order to assess the potential for artefacts in the topsoil overlying a number of sites identified.
	<i>Palaeoenvironmental Research</i>	Palaeoenvironmental research will be carried out both within the scheme landtake and in appropriate areas adjacent to the route in order to provide a palaeoenvironmental background to the sites identified.
	<i>Historical Research</i>	Historical research will be carried out in order to provide a historical background to the sites identified.
	<i>Excavation</i>	All of the approximately 160 archaeological sites identified along the route will be fully excavated and recorded subject to directions from the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government. It is currently estimated that this work will take a little over one year to complete.
2006-2007	<i>Monitoring</i>	The removal of all remaining topsoil on the scheme as part of the construction will be monitored.
	<i>Post-Excavation</i>	Processing the results of the excavation will begin during the excavations and will be completed as early as possible after the excavations.
2005-2008	<i>Publication</i>	Interim results of the further investigations and excavations will be made publicly available during the work in a variety of formats, including printed supplements to this M3 Information Pack and updates on the NRA website and dedicated M3 website. The results of all the research will be fully published as soon as possible after completion of the work in a variety of formats - technical, academic and public-orientated.

Key Points (Part 6)

- Implement M3 Archaeological Research Framework
- Road construction to commence in 2006
- Excavation results to be made public
- Results will create a significant new archaeological resource
- Dedicated archaeological section on website (www.m3motorways.ie)
- Full technical reports will be available for download
- Defined timeline (2005-2008) for various archaeological activity/publication on M3.

