

Section II

Draft Tara Skryne Landscape Conservation Area

2.0 Introduction

This section sets out the policy and legislative framework for the designation. A brief socio-economic profile of the proposed area and a description of the physical, cultural, visual characteristics of the landscape and building traditions of the area are contained in this section. This information was used to establish the boundary of the proposed Tara Skryne Landscape Conservation Area which is illustrated on Map 1.

2.1 Policy and Legislative Framework

The statutory and policy context for the preparation of the Landscape Conservation Area is set out in this section.

2.1.1 Heritage and Landscape Policy

European Landscape Convention

In 2002 Ireland ratified the European Landscape Convention (ELC), which came into force in Ireland on March 1st 2004. The ELC aims to promote the protection, management and planning of all landscapes in Europe, and recognises the cultural role and significance of 'landscape'. The Convention is the first international treaty to be exclusively concerned with all aspects of European landscape. It applies to the entire territory of the states and covers natural, rural, urban and periurban areas. It concerns landscapes that might be considered outstanding as well as everyday or degraded landscapes.

The convention states that landscape:

- *has an important public interest role in the cultural, ecological, environmental and social fields, and constitutes a resource favourable to economic activity and whose protection, management and planning can contribute to job creation;*
- *contributes to the formation of local cultures and that it is a basic component of the European natural and cultural heritage, contributing to human well-being and consolidation of the European identity;*
- *is an important part of the quality of life for people everywhere: in urban areas and in the countryside, in degraded areas as well as in areas of high quality, in areas recognised as being of outstanding beauty as well as everyday areas and*

- *is a key element of individual and social well-being and that its protection, management and planning entail rights and responsibilities for everyone.*

Key definitions used in the European Landscape Convention:

<p>"Landscape" means an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors.</p> <p>"Landscape protection" means actions to conserve and maintain the significant or characteristic features of a landscape, justified by its heritage value derived from its natural configuration and/or from human activity.</p> <p>"Landscape management" means action, from a perspective of sustainable development, to ensure the regular upkeep of a landscape, so as to guide and harmonise changes which are brought about by social, economic and environmental processes.</p> <p>"Landscape planning" means strong forward-looking action to enhance, restore or create landscapes.</p>

The aims of the Convention are to promote landscape protection, management and planning, and to organise European co-operation on landscape issues.

<p>Article 5</p> <p>General measures</p>	<p>Each party undertakes to:</p> <p>(a) recognise landscapes in law as an essential component of people's surroundings, an expression of the diversity of their shared cultural and natural heritage, and a foundation of their identity;</p> <p>(b) establish and implement landscape policies aimed at landscape protection, management and planning through the adoption of the specific measures set out in Article 6;</p> <p>(c) establish procedures for the participation of the general public, local and regional authorities, and other parties with an interest in the definition and implementation of the landscape policies mentioned in paragraph b above;</p> <p>(d) integrate landscape into its regional and town planning policies and in its cultural, environmental, agricultural, social and economic policies, as well as in any other policies with possible direct or indirect impact on landscape.</p>
<p>Article 6</p>	<p>A Awareness-raising Each Party undertakes to increase awareness among the civil society, private organisations, and public authorities of the value of landscapes, their role and changes to them.</p>

<p>B Training and education</p> <p>Each Party undertakes to promote:</p> <p>(a) training for specialists in landscape appraisal and operations;</p> <p>(b) multidisciplinary training programmes in landscape policy, protection, management and planning, for professionals in the private and public sectors and for associations concerned;</p> <p>(c) school and university courses which, in the relevant subject areas, address the values attaching to landscapes and the issues raised by their protection, management and planning.</p>
<p>C Identification and assessment</p> <p>1 With the active participation of the interested parties, as stipulated in Article 5.c, and with a view to improving knowledge of its landscapes, each Party undertakes:</p> <p>a (i) to identify its own landscapes throughout its territory;</p> <p>(ii) to analyse their characteristics and the forces and pressures transforming them;</p> <p>(iii) to take note of changes;</p> <p>b to assess the landscapes thus identified, taking into account the particular values assigned to them by the interested parties and the population concerned.</p> <p>2 These identification and assessment procedures shall be guided by the exchanges of experience and methodology, organised between the Parties at European level pursuant to Article 8.</p>
<p>D Landscape quality objectives Each Party undertakes to define landscape quality objectives for the landscapes identified and assessed, after public consultation in accordance with Article 5.c.</p>
<p>E Implementation To put landscape policies into effect, each Party undertakes to introduce instruments aimed at protecting, managing and/or planning the landscape.</p>

Table 2: Measures that each party undertakes under Article 5 and 6 of the European Landscape Convention.

The principles and definitions of the European Landscape Convention, international best practices in the management of cultural landscapes and international conventions such as the Valletta Convention (Council of Europe, 1992) and the Burra Charter (Australian International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) for places of cultural significance (1999), among others, have guided the development of this pilot Landscape Conservation Area and have been reflected in the approach and methodologies adopted.

European Convention on the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage (Valletta Convention, Council of Europe, 1992)

The aim of the Valletta Convention of which Ireland is a signatory is to 'protect the archaeological heritage as a source of the European collective memory and as an instrument for historical and scientific study' (Article 1). It lays out a legal and ethical framework in which all archaeology is to be carried out throughout Europe and provides the basis framework for national and local policy on the protection of the archaeological heritage in Ireland. In 1999 the government published *Framework and Principles of the Archaeological Heritage* and *Policy and Guidelines on Archaeological Excavations* to meet its obligations under the Valletta Convention.

National Monuments Acts 1930-2004

The Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government has responsibility for the protection of archaeological heritage. This responsibility is fulfilled primarily through the exercise of powers under the National Monuments Acts and the work of the National Monuments Service. The legal protection of all archaeological sites and monuments is given under the terms of the National Monument Act (1930) and Amendment Acts (1954, 1987, 1994 and 2004). Within the proposed Landscape Conservation Area there are a number of national monuments in state care and monuments listed in the Record of Monuments and Places for County Meath, as established under Section 12 of the National Monuments (Amendment) Act 1994.

Convention for the Protection of the Architectural Heritage of Europe (Granada Convention, Council of Europe, 1985)

The aim of the Granada Convention, of which Ireland is a signatory, is to provide for the protection of the architectural heritage of Europe. The Convention has been enacted in Ireland through the Architectural Heritage (National Inventory) and Historic Monuments (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1999 and the Planning and Development Acts 2000-2009. The Council of Europe, in Article 2 of the 1985 Convention for the Protection of the Architectural Heritage of Europe (Granada Convention), states that '*for the purpose of precise identification of the monuments, groups of structures and sites to be protected, each member State will undertake to maintain inventories of that architectural heritage.*' The Granada Convention emphasises the importance of inventories in underpinning

conservation policies. The National Inventory of Architectural Heritage (NIAH) was established in 1990 to fulfill Ireland's obligations under the Granada Convention, through the establishment and maintenance of a central record, documenting and evaluating the architectural heritage of Ireland.

The Heritage Act, 1995

The Heritage Act, 1995 established the Heritage Council as a statutory independent body and identified national heritage as including monuments, landscapes, archaeological objects, flora, fauna, wildlife habitats, geology, heritage parks and gardens, inland waterways, wrecks, heritage objects, seascapes and architectural heritage. Under the Act landscape is defined as including *'areas, sites, vista and features of significant scenic, archaeological, geological, historical, ecological or other scientific interest'*. The Heritage Council in undertaking its responsibilities is actively engaged in delivering policy and initiatives for the identification, protection, preservation and enhancement of landscape as part of our national heritage.

County Meath Heritage Plan 2007-2011

In February 2006 Meath County Council established the County Meath Heritage Forum, a non-statutory advisory group to assist in the formulation and implementation of a County Heritage Plan. The Heritage Forum represents a partnership between all relevant stakeholders and includes representatives from local government, government departments and state agencies, local heritage and community groups, NGOs, local businesses, local development, the farming sector, educational institutions and the heritage professions. It is an objective of the County Meath Heritage Plan 2007-2011 to *'promote an appreciation of landscape and heritage as a resource for the cultural and economic development of communities in Meath'* and an action of the plan to *'pursuant to section 204 of the Planning and Development Act, 2000 seek to pilot the development and adoption of a Landscape Conservation Area..'*

'Le Chéile' – An integrated strategy for Meath to 2012

'Le Chéile' is the 10 year social, economic and cultural strategy for County Meath prepared by the County Development Board. The purpose of the strategy is to articulate a vision for the development of the county and to "provide the focus for co-operation and

co-ordination which in turn will enhance the capacity for maximizing the effectiveness of spending programmes.” There are six principal objectives in the strategy including “*to maintain and enhance the quality and diversity of the natural and cultural heritage.*” A review of ‘Le Chéile’ was published in 2005 and 2009 which included an updated socio-economic profile of the county.

2.1.2 Planning Policy Context

Planning and Development Acts 2000-2009

The Planning and Development Act 2000 consolidated all previous Planning Acts and much of the EIA regulations. Sections 9, 10, 202 and 204 are the main sections of the Act which are relevant to ‘landscape’.

Section 9 requires every planning authority to make a development plan for their functional areas and renew them every six years at the latest. The development plan sets out the strategic direction of how the county will be developed and contains policies and objectives against which individual planning applications shall be assessed. The County Development Plan must have regard to national plans policies, strategies and departmental; guidelines relating to planning and sustainable development.

Section 10 describes the content that development plans, must and may contain, in section 10 of and Schedule 1 to the Planning and Development Act 2000. Section 10 sets out mandatory objectives that must be contained in all development plans indicating that they should contain objectives for, *inter alia*:

“(2) (e) the preservation of the character of the landscape where, and to the extent that, in the opinion of the planning authority, the proper planning and sustainable development of the area requires it, including the preservation of views and prospects and the amenities of places and features of natural beauty or interest”.

Schedule 1 indicates the purposes for which objectives may be indicated in a development plan, including:

“Part I(1) Preserving the quality and character of urban or rural areas”

“Part IV(7) Preserving the character of the landscape, including views and prospects, and the amenities of places and features of natural beauty or interest.”

Section 204 of the 2000 Act enables a Planning Authority to designate a Landscape Conservation Areas within its functional area for the purposes of the preservation of a landscape.

Meath County Development Plan 2007-2013

The Meath County Development Plan 2007-2013 was adopted by the elected members of Meath County Council on March 2nd 2007. The overall vision of the County plan is:

To plan for and support the sustainable development of County Meath as a excellent place to invest in, to visit and to live in, renowned for the quality of its natural and built environment, culture and the strength and viability of its communities.

The County Development Plan will continue to set out the land use polices and objectives to guide future development management within the Tara Skryne Landscape Conservation Area. The policies and objectives, most relevant to the Tara Skryne Landscape, contained in the County Development Plan 2007-2013 are detailed in Appendix IV.

Landscape and Landscape Assessment Guidelines (Draft) 2000

The Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government (DoEHLG) published *Landscape and Landscape Assessment Guidelines Draft Guidelines for Planning Authorities* in 2000. The Guidelines were intended to help planning authorities understand their obligations in respect of landscape. The aims of the guidelines were to:

- heighten awareness of the importance of landscape issues in all aspects of physical planning;
- provide guidance to planners and others to show how landscape considerations should be dealt with;
- indicate specific requirements for development plans and for development control.

The guidelines advocate an approach to assessment which focuses on landscape character, landscape values and landscape sensitivities. The guidelines remain in draft format.

2.2 Profile of proposed Tara Skryne Landscape Conservation Area

This section provides a brief socio-economic profile of the area, informed by a 'Socio Economic Profile of County Meath' published in March 2010 by Meath County Development Board.

2.2.1 Population

Statistics on population are compiled and managed by the Central Statistics Office at District Electoral Division (DED) level. The 2006 census is the most detailed census to date and records the population of the Tara and Skryne Electoral Divisions as 1,145 and 1,403 persons, respectively. Using data from An Post Geo-Directory and applying an average household size of 2.9 would indicate the population within the proposed Draft Tara Skryne Landscape Conservation Area is 2,378 persons as of the 1st quarter of 2010.

2.2.2 Employment

The 2006 census data recorded 535 persons in the Tara ED aged 15 years + at work from a total of population of 921, a figure of 58%. The remainder were principally retired, working in the home or students. The same datasets from Skryne ED classified 58% of persons aged 15+ as at work (646 from a total of 1,102 persons) while students or persons working in the home were recorded as 12% and 15%, respectively. Between 10-14% of the workforce is engaged in agriculture while 30-35% of the workforce was classified as out of county commuters.

2.2.3 Agriculture

The visual character of this landscape is mainly undulating pasture and tillage fields interwoven with mature tree lined hedgerows. Land use is primarily agricultural, with the majority of lands set to pasture for dairy, beef or bloodstock and a smaller proportion used for tillage, owing to generally heavier soils associated with the crag and tail hills. Small areas of broad leaf forestry are interspersed with areas of scrub.

2.2.4 Tourism

The Office of Public Works (OPW) manage 40.5ha (100 acres) of state owned lands at the Hill of Tara and operate St. Patrick Church, a former Church of Ireland (built circa 1822) as a visitor centre. The church provides the main visitor facilities at the Hill of

Tara including a 53 seat auditorium for viewing of the audio visual show. A guide service operates at the site from May to September. Approximately 18,000-20,000 used the visitor centre and guide service in 2009 which is estimated as a small percentage of the total annual visitors to the site. The Hill of Tara is used as an amenity space by locals and people from neighbouring towns and villages like Navan, Trim and Dunshaughlin.



St. Patrick's Church, Hill of Tara.



The east window, *Pentecost* by Evie Hone (1936)

The Maguire family own and operate a vibrant local cafe and gift shop at the Hill of Tara specialising in home cooked local produce. Michael Slavin, a local writer and broadcaster, runs an antiquarian bookshop at Tara.



Maguire's Hill of Tara





The church and graveyard at the Hill of Skryne

2.2.5 Social and Community Context

Education

There are two primary schools in the proposed Tara Skryne Landscape Conservation Area, namely Scoil Naisiunta Colmcille, Skryne and Scoil Naisiunta Trionoide Naofa, Lismullen. Enrolment numbers for the schools from 2008/2009 are listed below.

SCHOOL	ADDRESS	GIRLS	BOYS	TOTAL
Scoil Naisiunta Colmcille	Skryne, Tara	92	98	190
Scoil Naisiunta Trionoide Naofa	Lios Mullinn	124	121	245

Table 3 Enrolment figures 2008-2009



Scoil Naisiunta Colmcille



Scoil Naisiunta Trionoide Naofa

There are no post primary schools in the immediate vicinity of the subject lands. Pupils from the locality attend post primary schools in Navan, Dunshaughlin and Ashbourne.

Recreation, Leisure and Open Space

The area is very well provided for in terms of outdoor sporting and leisure facilities. Amenities include pitch and putt, golf course, modern GAA facilities, soccer pitches, fishing groups, equestrian activities and athletics facilities.



Skryne GAA Club



Skryne Pitch and Putt Club

This area is also well served in terms of public open space which is a very valuable amenity for local residents and visitors alike. The Hill of Tara provides an important amenity function, of high value to the area and wider region as an area for walking.

There is a designated 4.5Km looped walking route on the roads in the vicinity of the Hill of Tara, developed by the Irish Hearth Foundation's Slí na Sláinte initiative in partnership with the local community and Meath County Council.



Hill of Tara Slí na Sláinte route

Dalgan Park, owned and managed by the Columbans, is set on c. 500 acres of farmland and parkland and comprises scenic woodland, a wildlife sanctuary and riverside walks along the banks of the rivers Skane and the Boyne. The Columbans allow the public access to Dalgan Park.



Dalgan Park

2.2.6 Utilities and Infrastructure

Roads Infrastructure

The N3 national primary route and M3 motorway traverses the subject lands. The M3 motorway which lies east of the existing N3 and the Hill of Skryne is the most significant piece of infrastructure development within the proposed Tara Skryne Landscape Conservation Area. A Grade Separated Junction at Blundelstown just south of Garlow Cross will provide a link between the existing N3 and the M3 motorway. The M3 Motorway is a key part of the Transport 21 plan to upgrade the overall national roads network. It will significantly improve road transport connections between the North West and the East of the country. Several strategic county roads also serve this area including the L1002/1005 which links the N3 to the N2, the L1003 which links Oberstown to Ratoath and the L2207 which links the N3 to Dunsany. The L6200 provide a direct connection from the N3 to the Hill of Tara while the L5000 provides a direct link from the N3 to the Hill of Skryne.



M3 Motorway at Collierstown
looking north



M3 Motorway at Collierstown
looking south

Public Transport

The Bus Eireann 109 commuter bus service, which runs along the N3, is the main public transport service in the area. It travels between Cavan and Dublin with stops at Kells, Navan, Dunshaughlin and Blanchardstown. Bus stops are also provided throughout the subject lands at Garlow Cross, Ross Cross and Dalgan. The 109A bus service which connects Navan with Dublin City University and Dublin Airport as well as Ratoath also runs along the N3 in part. In addition to these main services Bus Eireann operates a wide range of services with the following routes serving the area; 107 Dublin –

Kingscourt, 109N Dublin – Navan Nightrider, 134 Navan – Dunsany and 136 Navan – Ross Cross.



Bus Stop at Ross Cross

Transport 21 includes a provision of a new rail service which will serve Navan by 2015. Phase 1 will comprise a spur off the Maynooth line to Dunboyne (2010). The second phase will involve an extension of this line to Navan via Dunshaughlin and Kilmessan, both of which are outside the draft boundary. Castletown/Tara Waste Water Treatment Works is located within the Draft boundary. The Treatment Plan became operational in 2008. This facility has a population equivalent (p.e.) of 12,000 with a reserve capacity of 4,000 p.e. Meath County Council has secured the right to abstract up to 44,000m³/day from the river Boyne at Dowdstown.



Castletown/Tara Waste Water Treatment Works

2.3 Description of Landscape

This section provides a description of the physical, cultural, visual and built character of the landscape of the area.

2.3.1 Physical landscape

Our ancestors read the landscape and chose important sites very carefully and deliberately. Proximity to water, to workable soils and shelter, were all critically important to survival. For our ancestors an important consideration in site selection for ritual sites was the height and magnificence of the vista. Geology, geomorphology and archaeology are therefore inextricably intertwined.

Topography

The Tara Skryne landscape is dominated by high, bedrock-cored ridges which stand proud of all around them, being flanked:

- to the north by the rolling lowlands and river terraces of the Dalgan locality;
- to the west by the flat to gently undulating Kilmessan to Trim plain;
- to the south by the gently undulating landscape of Killeen-Dunshaughlin;
- and to the east by the flat terraces of the Hurley River and its' tributaries

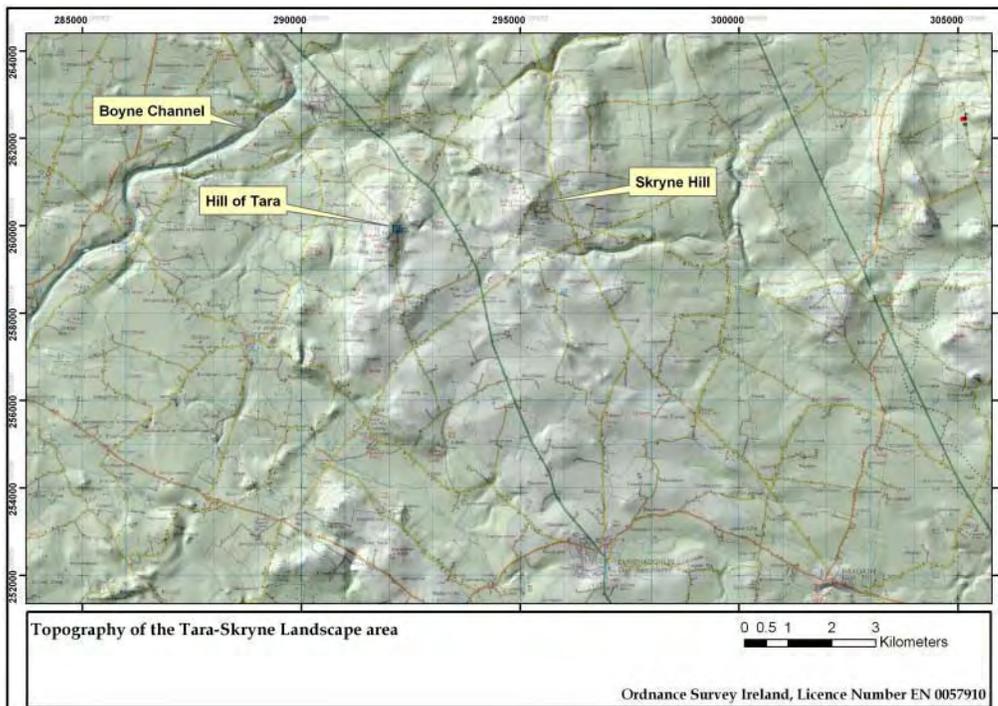


Figure 7 Topography of the area around the Tara-Skryne Valley, with the Ordnance Survey 1:50,000 Map overlaid on a Digital Elevation Model of the area.

The ridges themselves form crag-and-tails, which are glacial features composed of a rock core (the 'crag') and a 'tail' of glacial sediment. The crag and tails generally occur in clusters in Ireland and are aligned along former ice flow direction. This is clearly the case at Tara-Skryne, where the high ridges at Walterstown, Lismullin, Collierstown, Dunsany, Ringlestown and Riverstown, as well as the Hill of Tara, Skryne Hill, Belpere Hill, Tullykane Hill and Candle Hill, are all individual crag and tails oriented northwest to southeast. This is the same orientation as the ice flow direction during the last glaciation in the area.

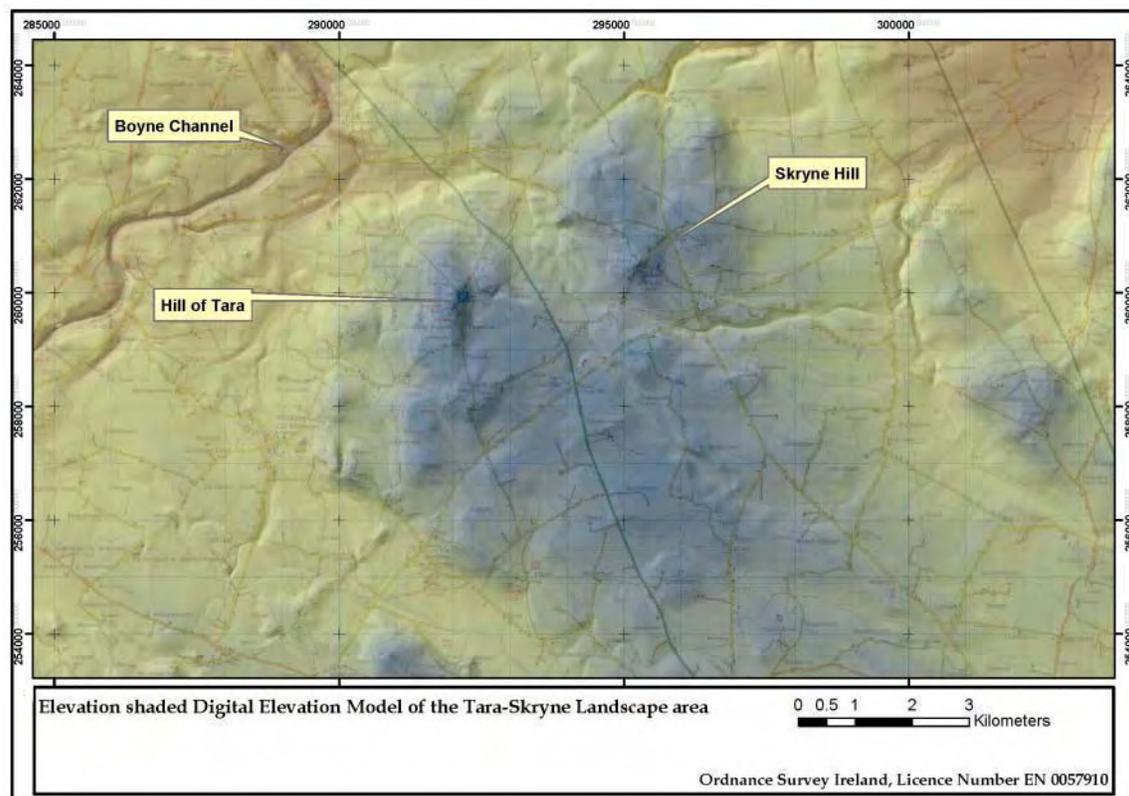


Figure 8 Colour-coded Digital Elevation Model of the area, with blue showing topographic 'highs'.

The Tara Skryne Landscape can be characterised by a number of high crag and tails incised in places by deglacial meltwater channels and hosting deglacial moraine and hummock features which demarcate raised landscapes from the surrounding flatter topography.

The only other major topographical feature within the Tara-Skryne landscape is a low ridge, or bank, which trends southwest to northeast across the flank of the Hill of Tara. This feature is a moraine ridge which can be traced southwestwards to join up with similar ridges around Trim.



The crag and tail feature that forms the Hill of Tara, viewed from the west at Bective.

Bedrock Geology

The area is underlain principally by Lower Carboniferous limestones. These rocks are dark limestones, dark micrites and calcarenites, and shales. The Lucan and Loughshinny Formation rocks (the Dinantian Upper Impure limestones) outcrop rarely in the Tara-Skryne area and occurs generally deep under the topsoils and subsoils, but they dominate the area west of Tara, the majority of the Hill itself, the area south of Ross Crossroads and that comprising Skryne Hill, as well as much of the low ground around Oberstown.

A broad, 2.5 km wide strip of Upper Carboniferous (Namurian) shales and sandstones extends from Belpere Hill northeastwards through Lismullin and as far as Walterstown

Church. These rocks, of the Balrickard and Donore Formations, are of black shales and yellow sandstones.

Subsoils

The subsoils around the Tara-Skryne area comprise a mixture of coarse- and fine-grained materials. Limestone tills (boulder clays) are the dominant subsoils in the area, with more restricted areas of sands and gravels, alluvium, bedrock outcrop, lacustrine clay, peat and tills derived from Namurian shales and sandstones also occurring. In general, subsoils are relatively shallow on the high crag and tail features, but are considerably deeper in the Gabhra Valley, particularly in its' northern portion. As is the case across much of mid-Meath, the area around the Tara Skryne is dominated by till derived from limestone. Till or 'Boulder clay' is an unsorted mixture of coarse and fine materials laid down by glacier ice during the last Ice Age. It comprises a mixture of gravels, sands, silts and clays, and much of the till around the Tara-Skryne landscape has a relatively high proportion of clay, often resulting in subsoil material of low permeability. This means that, where the till deposit is thick, there may be little infiltration of rainwater and consequently poorly drained topsoil. Where more shallow subsoils occur, the topsoils may be heavy, but relatively well drained.

Till derived from Namurian shales and sandstones occurs in a broad strip extending from Ross Crossroads through and around Skryne Hill, and as far as Walterstown Church. This material generally has a high proportion of clay within, which was derived from the black, fine grained Namurian shale bedrock. Sands and gravels are the most common subsoil in the Gabhra Valley west and northwest of Skryne, and extending through Lismullin towards Garlow Cross.

A northwest to southeast-oriented, discontinuous and beaded esker ridge, extends from Lismullin to the base of Skryne Hill. A small, poorly drained hollow with a base of lake clay and peat occurs along the boundary of Commons and Clowanstown Townlands, 1 km southeast of Ross Crossroads. This lies in what was a lake bed following deglaciation. On the summits and shoulders of the majority of the crag and tails ridges in the area, bedrock protrudes through the deeper glacial and postglacial subsoils. The

most extensive areas of bedrock outcrop occur around the summits of Skryne Hill and Tullykane Hill.

Depth to bedrock

The depth of till subsoil is generally less than 3 m on the crag summits throughout the area, increasing in depth towards the centre of the valleys. In general, the sands and gravels in the area are interpreted to be >5 m thick as seen in gravel pit exposures, but are expected to be over 10m thick across much of the area based on the topography of the materials.

Soils

The soils on the summits of the Hill of Tara and Skryne Hill are generally shallow to deep, well drained brown earths and grey brown podzolics of the Glane Complex. In historical times, pre-mechanisation, the brown earth soils in this area were the easiest soils to work in the overall Tara-Skryne landscape and would have promoted early agriculture. Moving onto the lower slopes around these, and into the wider landscape, across the Gabhra Valley and as far as Tullykane Hill to the southwest and the Five Cross Roads to the northeast, grey brown podzolics of the Dunboyne Shaley Phase occur. Grey brown podzolics are deep, well drained mineral soils, with a heavy 'B' horizon. The grey brown podzolics of the Dunboyne Shaley Phase are particularly heavy, having a high proportion of shale as their parent material.

In the areas south of Ross Crossroads and north of the Hill of Tara summit, grey brown podzolics of the Dunboyne Series occur. These have a slightly lighter texture than their 'Shaley Phase' counterparts, but still possess heavy 'B' horizons. The only other notable soil type found within the landscape area is the Ashbourne Gley Series. These soils occur in a narrow southwest-northeast band through Ross Crossroads, east of Skryne, at the base of the Gabhra Valley at Lismullin, and in the lower portions of the landscape at Walterstown-Cusackstown. These are heavy, saturated soils, with a very high percentage of clay. They generally require drainage and would not have been suited to agriculture in historical times. To the northwest and west of the Tara-Skryne landscape the soils on the sand and gravel areas are dominated by very 'dry' soil types: typically

well drained shallow brown earth soils (Finch *et al.*, 1983). To the east, poorly drained gleys of the Ashbourne Series are completely dominant.

Surface hydrology and land use

The natural and artificial drainage density in the Tara-Skryne landscape is influenced strongly by the underlying bedrock, subsoils and soils geology and a wide variation in drainage density is seen. In terms of the pattern of drainage, given that the area comprises high crag and tail ridges surrounded on all sides by lowland terrain, many stream rise in the area. The majority of the hills have streams rising at springs and seeps on their upper or mid-slopes, and flowing out across the surrounding lowland landscape. When viewed in terms of drainage pattern, therefore, the pattern in the Tara-Skryne landscape is a radial one, whereas in the surrounding landscape it is parallel to rectangular.

The Tara-Skryne landscape is characterised by a number of high crag and tail ridges, with generally relatively shallow depths to bedrock compared to the surrounding area.

- This means less proportion of deeper subsoils (those greater than 10m) than in the surrounding areas.
- The bedrock under these subsoils is similar to much of the surrounding area and that which characterises central Meath.
- The subsoils themselves are dominated by glacial tills, with less sands and gravels than the area to the northwest, west and southwest, and much more bedrock outcrop and subcrop than anywhere surrounding.
- The landscape is dominated by grey brown podzolic soils, which are well drained by have very heavy 'B' horizons. The area to the northwest and west has a much higher proportion of shallow brown earth soils than at Tara-Skryne, and the area to the east and south is dominated by poorly drained soils. From this, the Tara-Skryne landscape also has an element of uniqueness in terms of its' internal soils geology.
- The juxtaposition of the topography, bedrock, subsoils and soils results in a radial drainage pattern, completely distinct from surrounding patterns, and a relatively small drainage density, owing to the shallow depths to bedrock and dominance of well drained soils,

- This promotes a well drained landscape capable of supporting good quality pasture, but owing to the heavy 'B' horizons is often not used for tillage as much as, for example, the brown earth soils to the west and northwest.

2.3.2 Cultural landscape

The history of human activity on Tara can be traced back over five thousand years, and its name is synonymous with the high-kingship of Ireland, pagan deities and characters from the world of Irish legend. The physical landscape setting of the Hill of Tara was a key influence in its emergence as a location for ritual and ceremonial activities, located along a 2km ridge and rising to 159m, it allows for spectacular views over the central plain of Ireland (Newman and Bhreathnach, 1995).

Although the borders of the area under the direct influence of Tara ebbed and flowed over time, the aspiration of Tara to be at the very centre of Ireland is reflected by the five major prehistoric roads, the Slige Asail, Slige Chualann, Slige Dála, Slige Mór and Sligh Muhlúachra that radiated out from the hill to the four corners of the island. Tara's position above the river Boyne was a vital link between the hill and the outside world, as the river, which was navigable as far as Trim, was a conduit of the many layers of external influences imprinted on the hill and in its surrounding landscape. A long history of scholarly research has revealed that Tara was used as a religious sanctuary, a cemetery and as an arena for various rituals and ceremonies by people who lived in the fertile lowland valleys and plains around the hill of Tara rather than on the hill itself (Newman, 1997).



Commanding view westwards from the Lia Fáil on the Hill of Tara

Research

O'Donovan's Ordnance Survey letters in the 1830s reconciled the existing monuments of Tara with an eleventh century account called *Dindgnai Temrach 'The Remarkable Places of Tara'*, which identified monuments such as *Tech Chormaic 'Cormac's House'* and *Ráith na Senad 'The Rath of the Synods; Ráith na Ríg, Ráith Gráinne, Ráith Lóegaire, the Clóenfhera and the Tech Midchúarta or Banqueting Hall.* Petrie (1839) and Macalister, R.A.S. (1931) provided early descriptions of the landscape and monuments at Tara. The Rath of the Synods was excavated from 1953 to 1954 by Ó Ríordáin and he began excavating the Mound of the Hostages in 1955, which was completed in 1959 by Ruaidhrí de Valera. Grogan (2009) and O'Sullivan (2005) co-ordinated the publication of both these excavations, respectively.

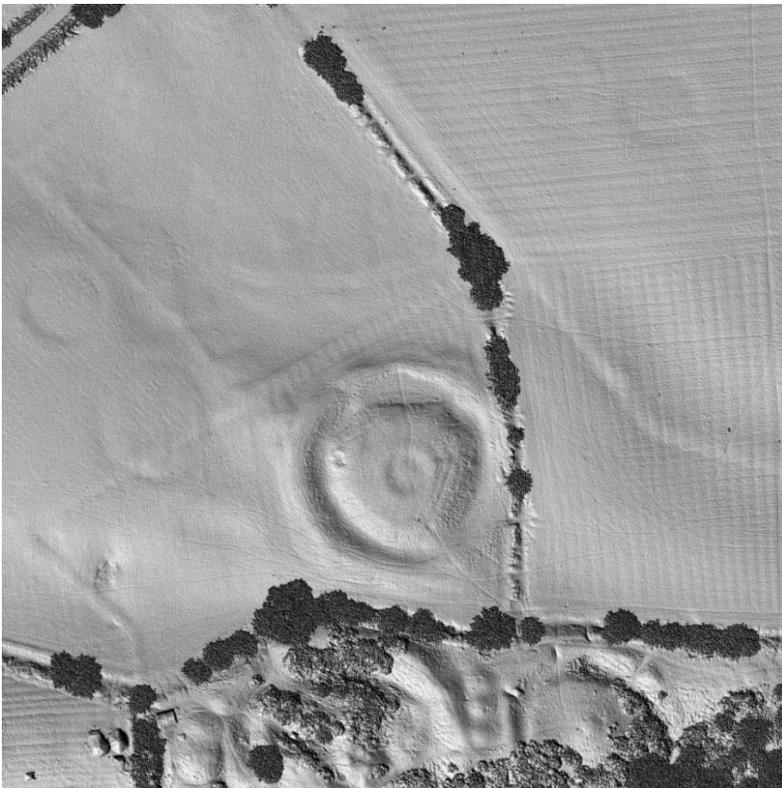
The Discovery Programme, a public institution for advanced research in Irish archaeology, initiated their research on Tara in 1992, an association which continues to this day. They sought to introduce a range of modern non-invasive survey techniques and to bring together historians, anthropologists, archaeologists, linguists and literary critics in an inter-disciplinary approach. Conor Newman directed a major topographical, geophysical and archaeological survey (Newman, 1997) while Roche (2002) published an account of a research excavation of Ráith na Ríg. Carew (2003) described the British-Israelites search for the Ark of the Covenant on the Hill of Tara from 1899-1902 and placed it within its cultural and political context. The inter-disciplinary work resulted in the publication of a bibliography of Tara (Bhreathnach, 1995), which details over 200 academic publications, and a major volume, edited by Bhreathnach, on the kingship and landscape of Tara (Bhreathnach, 2005) shows how early sources illustrate the significance of Tara as a sacred focal point of kingship in an extended landscape embracing the Hill of Skryne and the intervening Gabhra Valley.

The recent excavations along the route of the M3 motorway has added to our knowledge of this landscape, in particular with the discovery of a large post-built Iron Age ceremonial enclosure at Lismullin and early medieval enclosure complexes at Roestown, Baronstown and Dowdstown which point to thriving development in a settled landscape and represent the habitations of people of substance in the area. In December 2009 *Places Along the Way* which presents accounts of eight of the most significant sites

excavated on the M3 (incorporating the broader landscape around the Hill of Tara) was published.

From its earliest beginnings to the modern day successive generations have contributed to the story of Tara, adding their own monuments, myths and place-names to the physical and literary landscape like new chapters in a book from the Neolithic through successive phases of the Bronze Age into the Iron Age and Early Medieval period to the present. The monuments on the Hill and surrounding area reveal the true significance of this landscape.

The remains of up to twenty-five monuments are visible on the hill, and almost twice as many again have been revealed through ongoing geophysical survey, aerial photography and Lidar.



Lidar – generated topographic model of Ráith Gráinne and the Clóenfhera, Hill of Tara with several circular prehistoric barrows or ring ditches visible in the surrounding fields. These are late prehistoric burial sites (Courtesy of the Discovery Programme)

The construction of a large, possibly palisaded, hilltop enclosure followed by a passage tomb *Dumha na nGiall* (Mound of the Hostages) dating to the Neolithic period represent the earliest known evidence for human activity on the Hill of Tara.



Mound of the Hostage (Dumha na nGiall)

The ritual importance of the Hill of Tara continued into the Bronze Age and to date at least twenty-five funerary or burial monuments, which archaeologists call barrows and ring-ditches, are identified on Tara. Indeed, centuries of building these funerary monuments transformed the entire hill of Tara into a veritable necropolis, or ‘city of the dead’ (Newman, 1997). Additional ritual monuments including embanked enclosures were constructed at this time in the surrounding landscape such as Rathmiles, Rathlugh and Ringlestown Rath.

A ceremonial earthen avenue or *cursus*, aligned with the Mound of the Hostage, known as *Tech Midchúarta* or the Banqueting Hall runs along the north east side of the site and terminates close to the Rath of the Synods. Recent geophysical survey has revealed a massive ditched pit enclosure in this area.

Three more henges have so far been identified in the surrounding landscape just off the hill of Tara, and they may all originally date to the later Neolithic-early Bronze Age. A huge earthen henge known as Rath Meave, named after the female deity of Tara, is located 1.5 kilometres to the south of Tara. Rath Meave is one of the largest henge monuments in Ireland, measuring 270m in maximum diameter with a bank that even today stands up to 5.5m in height above the surrounding ground level.

About one third of the earthen bank of another henge survives in Riverstown, which is about one kilometre to the west of the hill of Tara. Archaeological investigations carried out ahead of the construction of the M3 motorway uncovered a previously unknown Iron Age ceremonial post enclosure at Lismullin. This enclosure was built within a natural hollow or amphitheatre instead of on the summit of a hill. A smaller enclosure of post-holes 16m in diameter was found to be centrally positioned within the larger circle.

Experts believe that the four largest ring-barrows on Tara, called the northern and southern *Clóenfherta* 'The Sloping trenches', *Ráith Ghráinne* 'Gráinne's Fort' and the *Forradh* 'The Inauguration Mound', are likely to date from the Iron Age period in Ireland (c. 600 BC- c. 500 AD).

Around the 1st century BC a new phase of monumental building at Tara produced the massive hengiform (henge-shaped) enclosure known as *Ráith na Rí* that is visible today encircling the crown of Tara. It has been suggested that the original Irish name for Tara, *temair* 'a place set apart, a sanctuary' was given to the area encircled by this enclosure.



Ráith na Ríg

Some years after the construction of *Ráith na Ríg*, work appears to have begun on an imposing new structure at the heart of Tara which has also survived to this day - *Ráith na Senad*. Archaeologists describe this monument as a quadrivallate earthwork, meaning a site consisting of four earthen banks. Romano-British artefacts and other votive objects uncovered by excavations carried out in the 1950s indicate that *Ráith na Senad* was used between the 1st and the 4th centuries AD.

In the centuries around the birth of Christ, around the time when the Roman Empire reached its apex, the monumental architecture erected on and around Tara appears to become markedly defensive in nature. Scholars have linked the conversion of *Ráith na Ríg* into a fortified enclosure with the appearance of defensive earthworks around Tara, such as *Ráith Lóegaire* immediately to the south of *Ráith na Ríg*, and *Rath Lugh* (named after the Celtic god Lug) to the north-east of the hill. Furthermore, the remains of a defensive linear earthwork can be found to the west of Tara. Together, all of these sites could be interpreted as an attempt to establish a defensive ring around Tara, perhaps in response to a wider pattern of social upheaval evident in Ireland in between 200 BC and 200 AD and may help define a boundary around the area.

It was at Tara, according to the seventh-century account by Muirchú, that Saint Patrick won his battle with the pagan druids and converted the king to the new religion of

Christianity. Described by Muirchú as *caput Scotorum* ('capital of the Irish') the royal political authority of Tara grew as older pagan traditions were woven into the new religious beliefs and new powerful dynasties such as the Uí Néill organised Irish kingship on a more national scale.

The bivallate ringfort called *Tech Chormaic* 'Cormac's House', the only known ringfort on the hill of Tara, is derived from Cormac Mac Airt, who is described as the king of Tara in the 3rd century AD. This earthwork was built to incorporate the adjacent *Forradh*, which was used as an inauguration mound well into the later 1st millennium AD, and both earthworks command the very centre of *Ráith na Rí* and hence possibly the heart of royal prehistoric and early medieval ceremonies and assemblies.



The Forrad and Tech Cormaic

Early medieval texts depict the hill of Skryne, situated just across the River Gabhra to the east, as a kind of mirror image of Tara. According to legend Cormac mac Airt lost his kingship and was banished to Skryne after being blinded by the sting of a bee, thus rendering him unfit to be king. Historical texts provide evidence for a more direct connection between Tara and Skryne. A charter associated with the Anglo-Norman family of de Feypo, who established a manor at Skryne, and dating to 1285 AD makes reference to a 'a royal roadway that goes from the manor of Skryne to Tara' (*regalem viam qua itur de villa de Scryn versus Taueragh*). The hill of Skryne was originally known as Achall, after the daughter of a mythical king of Tara who, according to legend, was buried in a mound on the hill. Towards the end of the 1st millennium AD attempts were made to set up Skryne as a rival to Tara as the primary centre of power. It is believed that the poem commissioned by the Norse king of Dublin, Amlaíb Cúarán,

reflected a wider attempt to challenge the territorial ownership of the kings of Tara. However, the king of Dublin and his allies were decisively beaten at a battle that probably took place in the valley between Tara and Skryne in 980 AD, thwarting the expansion of Hiberno-Norse settlement northwards into Meath, and paving the way for the eventual destruction of Hiberno-Norse power at the battle of Clontarf in 1014. Yet in spite of these victories the political role of Tara as the royal capital of Ireland was almost at an end. As late as 1170 Roderick O'Connor was inaugurated as high king of Ireland on the *Forradh*, but the Anglo-Norman conquest the following year shifted the centre of power away from Tara for good.

Following the arrival of the Anglo-Normans in Ireland, Hugh de Lacy assumed lordship over the whole kingdom of Mide including Tara. De Lacy granted '*Scrin*' (Skryne) to Adam de Feypo and the Hill of Tara was granted to Ralph de Repenteni, whose family continued to hold lands there until the middle of the seventeenth century. The ruins of a tower house castle with large mullioned windows in Castletown Tara townland may have been a residence of this family in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The Dillon family were prominent landowners in the area from the late sixteenth-century, when they acquired the Lismullin estate from the Cusack family. The Dillon family later established a new residence to the west of Tara at Riverstown, and the ruins of the eighteenth-century stone house they built onto an earlier four-storey tower house can be seen today. Samuel Lewis, in his 1837 *Topographical Dictionary of Ireland*, noted that Riverstown castle was in ruins, and listed Taragh Hall as the most prominent residence in the locality.

A charter dating from about 1191-2 provides the earliest documentary evidence of a church at Tara, which was among the possessions confirmed to the Knights Hospitallers of Saint John of Kilmainham by Pope Innocent III in 1212. The manor of Tara was sufficiently important to be made into a parish in the fourteenth century. A 1791 illustration shows the old parish church building on Tara internally divided into a nave and chancel, with a bell-tower over the western end. A stump of wall marks the location of the old church today. Architectural fragments plucked from this church and dating to the fifteenth century were re-used in the present St. Patrick's church building (now the visitor's centre), which was built in 1822-3.



St. Patrick's Church, Hill of Tara

Tara continued to hold a special significance for people into the post-medieval period. Seventeenth-century texts, such as *The Annals of the Four Masters*, claimed that Tara was the seat of the high-kings of Ireland from earliest times, and throughout recent history Tara was used as a symbol to reinforce various political campaigns in Ireland. A meeting of several prominent Anglo-Irish Catholic families of the Pale, held on the Hill of Tara on Christmas Eve 1641, led to the creation of the Irish Confederation of Kilkenny in 1642. Over one hundred and fifty years later Tara was again chosen as a rallying point, this time for a force of United Irishmen, who were subsequently defeated in a battle at the hill by Crown forces on 26 May 1798. The anniversary of the 1798 rebellion was marked at Tara twenty-five years later with a ceremony which involved moving the supposed *Lia Fáil* from the *Dumha na nGiall* to the *Forradh*, where it still stands today. As part of his campaign to repeal the Act of Union in 1843, Daniel 'The Liberator' O'Connell once more evoked the highly symbol qualities of Tara by holding a monster meeting at the hill, attended by an estimated crowd of 750,000.

The ability of Tara to divide opinion was brought sharply into focus in 1899, when a group called the British-Israelites began a destructive four year campaign of un-scientific digging on the *Ráth na Senad* in a misguided attempt to locate the Ark of the Covenant. It was a deep conviction of Tara as a sacred fount of Irish identity which led Nobel laureate, W.B. Yeats, Maud Gonne, George Moore and Douglas Hyde in 1902 to intervene and criticise this work in the national and international press.

Ongoing research and discovery is continually unveiling new information and adding to our knowledge of this landscape. An important objective of this project is to focus on communicating that knowledge to a wide audience.

2.3.3 Visual Character

Landscapes are considerably more than just the visual perception of a combination of landform, vegetation cover and buildings – they embody the history, land use, human culture, wildlife and seasonal changes of an area. These elements combine to produce distinctive local character and continue to affect the way in which the landscape is experienced and valued. However, the landscape is also dynamic, continually evolving in response to natural or man-induced processes. Within the area there are a number of visual landscape components that make up its overall visual character.

Hills

The Hills (Tara 159m/Skryne 172m) provide a spectacular and unmissable landmark within the hinterland as you approach. Skryne Church and tower is a prominent landmark to the east. The panoramic views of the surrounding countryside when viewed from these vantage points show a landscape that appears more densely wooded and one can, on a clear day, enjoy views over a number of counties.

Field boundaries

The field boundaries comprising hedgerows, hedgerow trees and stone walls, while individually or on close inspection are not particularly remarkable or unusual within the Irish landscape, in the case of the study area these features have a significant visual impact. Having regard to the area's topography, these boundary hedgerows and trees can read as woodlands and contribute significantly to the sense that there is a woodland character to the surrounding hinterland and provide important screening of development within the area as viewed from the



key view points at Tara and Skryne
In addition these well developed network of hedgerows and tree lines are an ecological corridor for wildlife. Ground conditions suit native trees that thrive in free draining soil such as oak, ash and scots pine. Copses of woodland, and some significant trees, survive within the estates of Dalgan Park, Lismullin and Bellinter House. Commercial forestry is not present within the area.



Rivers

The River Gabhra runs through the area, and is viewed within the low lying lands between the two hills. It contributes positively to the visual amenity of the valley. The existence of the rivers Boyne and Skane contribute to the landscape character of the area, adding to the diversity of landscapes experienced.



The river is enclosed by native trees, with some substantial mature beech and oak on Rath Lugh.



River Gabhra merging with the River Skane (on the right of the photo)



Dipper on the River Skane

Archaeological monuments

The monuments comprise a mix of visual characteristics, from unusual circular mound formations, copse, stoneworks and in some instances are merely fields which have played a part in the ceremonial practices of the past. It is perhaps when one experiences the panoramic views that one understands and appreciates the choices made by our ancestors as to why this location was ‘the seat of the High Kings of Ireland’, as the views are undeniably majestic.

Agricultural landscapes

Lands in pasture

These lands and the visual character associated with such uses are considered benign and positively contribute to the character of the area, being most similar in nature to what one would perceived to have been the character of this area, historically. It is acknowledged that field patterns, field boundaries and extent of mature trees and hedgerow will have changed over time, however for the most part this rural landscape is the most consistent to the original historical setting.

Within the study area there are examples of this typically Irish landscape which has remained relatively well preserved over time, with the visual character of the trees, hedgerows, embankments and stone walls being the dominant character.



A mosaic of vernacular farm buildings, gates and piers can be found throughout the area and add a positive contribution to its visual quality.

Residential Development Areas

The visual impact of the ribbon development is greater on the approaches to Tara and Skryne than that when viewed from the key vantage points of the hills. It will, if the rural visual character is to be preserved, be essential that the long-distant views of the one-off rural housing be minimised. As such retention and enhancement of existing field boundaries (with their mature trees and hedgerows) is critical. In addition, any new residential development (including replacement dwellings or significant extensions) should include for additional screen planting. Any new tree planting should have regard to the geology/soil type for the area, and therefore we would propose tree planting such as oak, etc. be the most applicable. On the key approach roads to Tara and Skryne additional landscaping, in the form of indigenous trees and hedgerow should be encouraged.

Transportation infrastructure

The M3 motorway is the singular most important transport infrastructure in Meath in recent years and will significantly improve road transport connections between the North West, Cavan, North Meath and Dublin. The landscape is not static and the M3 will have an impact on the wider landscape surrounding the Hill of Tara just as the existing roads network and houses do. The design of the route has sought to minimise its visual impact by placing the route low in the valley below Tara where the natural topography, the existing hedging and newly planted landscaping will screen it from viewers on the Hill.