2. 3. 4 Building Tradition

Introduction

Settlement patterns in the area have been greatly influenced by the River Boyne, the artery along which flowed trade, commerce and new ideas. The river moves slowly through highly productive agricultural land and a gently rolling pastoral landscape of farms, both large and small, country houses, farmhouses, outbuildings, stables and gardens, rural churches and presbyteries scattered throughout the landscape, with the village inn located at the intersections of historic routes. The building styles, materials and finishes favoured are typical of their period for County Meath and show no strong local variation.

Medieval Buildings – Tower Houses and Churches

The examples of medieval building in the area consist of tower houses and churches, most surviving only as a ruin. The tower house was the preferred dwelling of significant Irish landowners in the later middle ages, and its siting and design was influenced by the need for a secure defensive position. The sites and monuments record lists churches – at Castleboy, Dowdstown, Lismullin, and Skryne, and tower houses – Castletown Tara, Riverstown, Odder, Skryne and Walterstown.

12th Century Cistercian church at Dowdstown.

St Columba's Church, Skryne late 15th century

Skryne Castle

Odder Castle

Illustrated by the photograph on the left above, Skryne Castle which was built on the site of an earlier motte, is a late medieval tower house, much altered by the addition of a mid Georgian House. Illustrated by the photograph on the right above, Odder Castle is a fortified house of the early 17th century, much altered c. 1880. Odder originally belonged to the Barnewall family who established an Augustinian convent here.

Estate Houses and Demesnes– 18th – 19th Century

The eighteenth century created a system of estates, with a rural landscape of demesnes, and farms, and agriculture as the primary source of income. The demesne or home-farm was improved with tree-lined avenues, planted woodland, kitchen gardens and gate lodges. Four large demesnes are within the area – Bellinter, Dowdstown, Lismullin and Corbalton Hall.

Bellinter House. A classic Palladian style house now in use as a hotel. It was designed by Richard Castle and built c. 1750 for the M. P. John Preston, whose son became Lord Tara.

Corbalton Hall – an elegant extension of 1801 by Francis Johnson to the front of an earlier 18th century house, which was demolished in 1970.

Lismullen, built mid 18thC, on the site of a 13th C Augustinian Abbey it suffered fire damage in 1923, and was rebuilt without the top storey.

Dowdstown House c. 1870 .

In 1640 Dowdstown consisted of 184 acres, the church and farmhouse. After 1690 it was granted to Robert Rochford and subsequently bought by Thomas Taylor in the late 18th century and passed down through the Taylor family, increasing in size to 590 acres including 240 in woodland plantations, and although rented out to local farmers from about 1870, it remained in the ownership of the Taylor family until around 1916. In 1927 it was sold to the Columban Fathers.

19th Century - Strong Farmers Houses (Townland Houses)

These houses are detached properties built in a classical style on planted grounds. They typically had substantial farms of between 100 – 200 acres. Outbuildings reflect the design of the house, and there is a consideration of aesthetics unlike the simply functional nature of vernacular structures.

Baronstown House

Belper House

Ringlestown House

Oberstown House c. 1870

Other farmer's houses are single or two-storey houses which owe more to the vernacular tradition but have incorporated some architectural features from the more formal architectural styles.

Farmhouse at Odder

Lismullin farmhouse

Ecclesiastical Architecture

The early 19th century marked an emergence of an economic and political middle class leading to an upsurge of church building, particularly after Catholic emancipation.

Tara Heritage Centre – a former church of
Ireland tower and hall church c. 1822

Skryne Rectory c. 1800

Skryne Catholic Church, 1827

Skryne Parochial House 1880

Dalgan Park, Columban Monastery

Village Houses

After the famine landholdings were consolidated and this encouraged the development
of a small farmer economy in rural areas and the growth of trade in the towns. Graigs
within the Tara Skryne area are Lismullin, Skryne and Oberstown. These graigs, or rural

settlement clusters, take the form of a small group of houses around a crossroads, with the church and school located at some distance.

O'Connells, c.1870

Foxes pub

Pair of estate cottages at Skryne c. 1880

Industrial / Agricultural

Although the Boyne runs along the western boundary of the site, and the Skane traverses the area, there was little industrial development historically within the area, and agriculture has remained the primary industry.

Post Box at Skryne c. 1880

Water pump, Garlow Cross

Ambrose Bridge - a single arch masonry bridge
crossing the Skane near Bellinter Cross Roads.

Examples of Farm Buildings

Examples of Farm Buildings

Small farms / Vernacular Cottages

The houses of the small farmers were vernacular in style and usually one room deep with a lobby entrance. There are usually outbuildings and a yard. Of the few that survive in the area, none have retained a thatched roof.

Lismullin

Land Commission / County Council Cottages

From 1893 to 1919, a major public housing scheme provided dwellings on half acre allotments for landless labourers who were inadequately housed. These cottages were often known as " Parnell cottages " because Parnell lobbied for improved housing conditions. Land commission cottages were built in the 1930's and 40's - typically single storey with a tiled roof.

Cottage at Garlow Cross   Mid 20th Century cottage at Jordanstown

Modern Housing from 1960 onward

The majority of the housing stock in the area dates from the mid 20th Century and particularly the last 15 years, and is typically single story, dormer bungalow or two-storey using diverse materials and styles. The size and complexity of design reflects a gradual growth in prosperity. The photographs below are a selection of the current housing stock in the area and are for illustrative purposes only.

Contemporary Housing in the Area

Examples of recently completed contemporary style houses in the area

2.4 **Boundary of Tara Skryne Landscape Conservation Area (Draft)**

The European Landscape Convention states that landscape means '*an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors*'. Particular combinations of geology, landform, soils, vegetation, land use, field patterns and human settlements create landscape character which makes one place different from another.
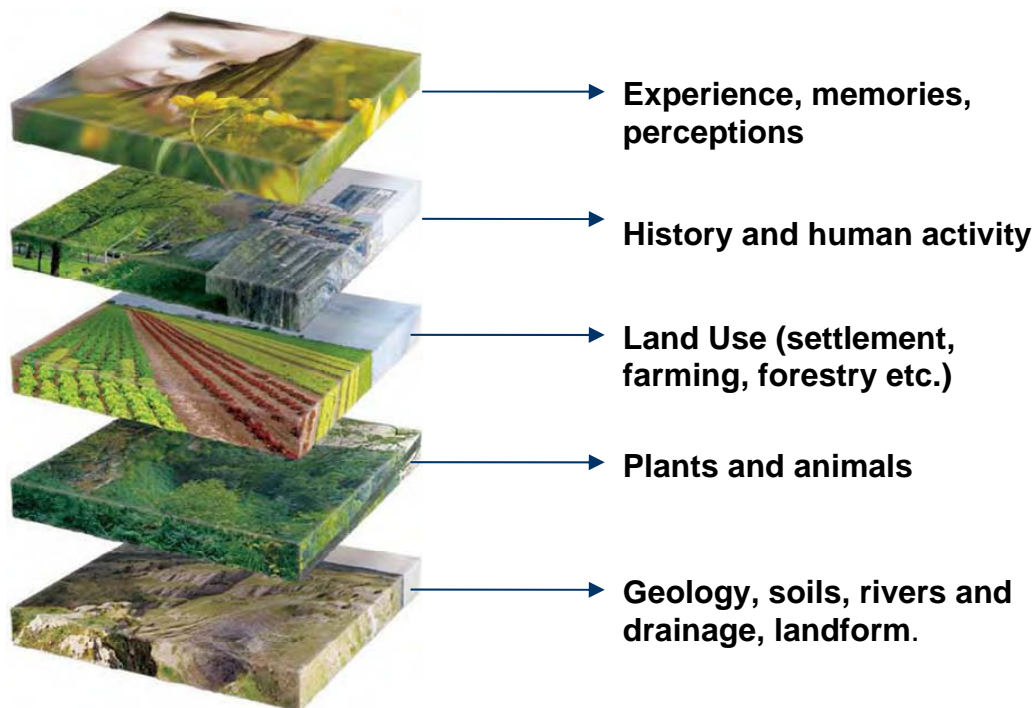

Experience, memories, perceptions

History and human activity

Land Use (settlement, farming, forestry etc.)

Plants and animals

Geology, soils, rivers and drainage, landform.

Figure 5   Components of a landscape

Process to define the boundary of the Landscape Conservation Area (Draft)

The draft boundary of the Tara Skryne Landscape Conservation Area has been informed by:

1. Desk-study to review existing research and published material on the Tara Skryne Landscape (see Section 1.4)
2. Creating a Project GIS and preparing map overlays as the basis for defining an area of common character (see Section 1.4)

3. Stakeholder meetings, pre draft public consultation events (Tara, Skryne and Navan) and a participatory boundary workshop (all reports available on project website www.taralandscape.ie)

4. Physical Landscape Study (topography, geology, surface hydrology, soils and land use)
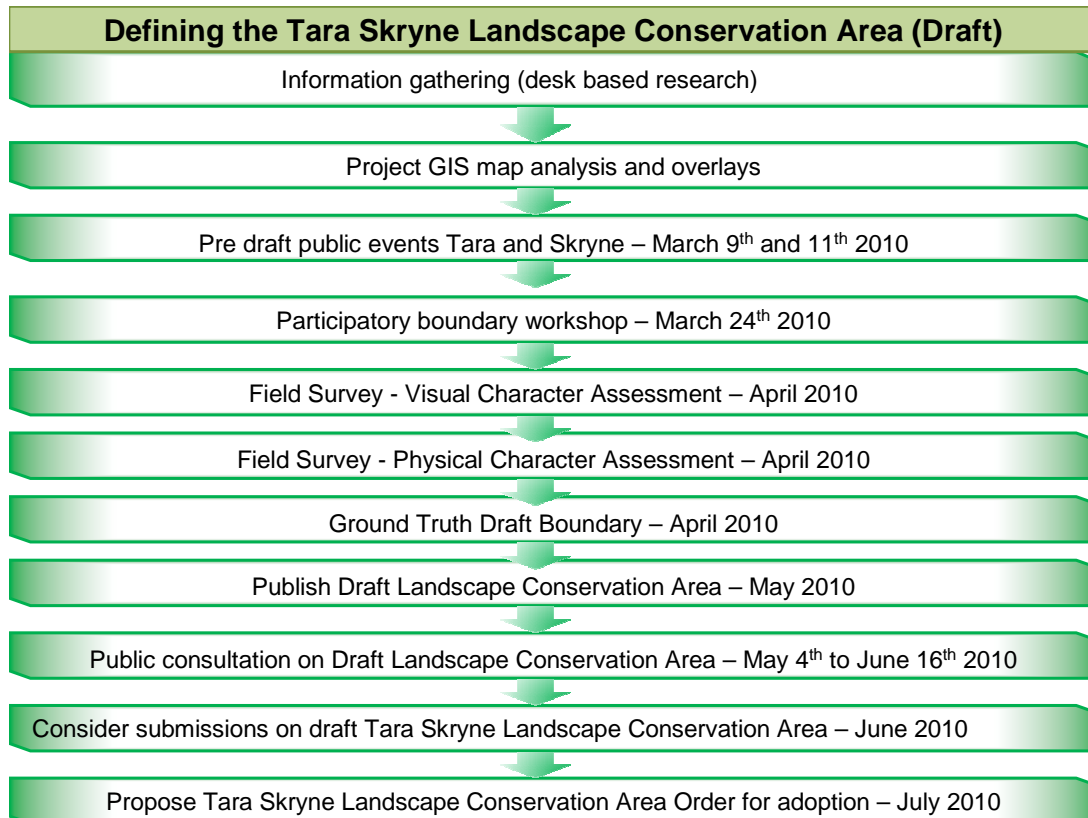
5. Visual Assessment of the Landscape

Defining the Tara Skryne Landscape Conservation Area (Draft)
Information gathering (desk based research)
Project GIS map analysis and overlays
Pre draft public events Tara and Skryne – March 9th and 11th 2010
Participatory boundary workshop – March 24th 2010
Field Survey - Visual Character Assessment – April 2010
Field Survey - Physical Character Assessment – April 2010
Ground Truth Draft Boundary – April 2010
Publish Draft Landscape Conservation Area – May 2010
Public consultation on Draft Landscape Conservation Area – May 4th to June 16th 2010
Consider submissions on draft Tara Skryne Landscape Conservation Area – June 2010
Propose Tara Skryne Landscape Conservation Area Order for adoption – July 2010

Figure 6   Flowchart of process to establish the Tara Skryne Landscape Conservation Area boundary (Draft)

Draft boundary

The Draft Landscape Conservation area is illustrated on Map 1 titled 'Draft Tara Skryne Landscape Conservation Area Map 1'.

Relationship with County Meath Landscape Character Assessment 2007

The County Meath Development Plan contains the **County Meath Landscape Character Assessment** which has been prepared as a supplementary guidance to provide an understanding of landscapes in County Meath during the period of the Development Plan 2007-2013. The County is divided into 4 **Landscape Character Types** (LCT's) representing generic areas of distinctive character such as uplands or river corridors. These LCT's are sub-divided into 20 **Landscape Character Areas** (LCA's) which are geographically specific.   The boundaries of the LCA's were determined by desktop research and then refined by site survey. Generally, no single landscape element is overriding in its importance and individual elements, for example topography, may be similar across adjoining LCA's whilst the overall character varies.

The **Tara Skreen Hills** have been classified as Landscape Character Area 12 as part of the county survey. The Draft Tara Skryne Landscape Conservation Area is a subset of Landscape Character Area 12. The County Landscape Character Assessment included all areas underlain by Namurian Shale bedrock as part of the 'Tara Skreen Hills', and stretched as far as Dunshaughlin, while also including the ridges at Culmullin, Summerhill and Garadice in the southern extreme of County Meath. The Tara Skryne Landscape Conservation (Draft) was based on a detailed analysis of the area and included a visual landscape assessment and community input.

2.5 **Planning Implications of the Landscape Conservation Area Designation**

1. The principal function of Section 204 of the Planning and Development Act is to allow a Planning Authority to identify and designate a landscape within its area for the purposes of its preservation.

2. Meath County Council in exercising this power is giving effect to an objective in the County Development Plan 2007-2013 to '*designate the historic Tara Skryne Landscape as a Landscape Conservation Area* (HER POL 65 and HER POL 113 Section 8.4.4 Heritage Landscapes refers) and to the policies and objectives contained within the Plan which relate to the Tara Skryne Landscape (Appendix IV).

3. The Meath County Development Plan 2007-2013 sets out appropriate planning and sustainable development objectives for the county and will continue to provide the framework against which individual planning applications are assessed in the Tara Skryne Landscape. The Rural Housing Policy for the area as set out in the current Meath County Development Plan will remain unchanged by the Landscape Conservation Area designation.

4. Section 4 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 lists categories of development that constitute exempted development for the purposes of the Act. The Planning and Development Regulations, 2001 in Schedule 2 list certain developments that currently constitute exempted development subject to conditions and limitations. Section 204 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 allows a Planning Authority, when designating a Landscape Conservation Area, to specify categories of exempted development which now require planning permission in the LCA area. In this regard, development that was previously exempt from planning permission under the Planning and Development Regulations 2001 which will now require planning permission is set out in Schedule I.

5. To protect the views and character of this landscape, design and siting will be important factors in accommodating new development. It is an objective of the

Meath County Development Plan 2007-2013 to prepare a rural design guide for one off housing in County Meath. The guide was completed in December 2009 and is available on www.meath.ie. The guide acknowledges that County Meath possesses high quality landscapes and a rich built fabric. In the past the emphasis in Irish vernacular rural dwelling design was on good siting making use of available shelter, a simple design and use of local materials. The guide was commissioned in order to positively encourage the application of good siting and design principals to new single house development in the countryside. Single house developments constructed in the LCA should be of an excellent standard, complimenting the landscape of which they will form a part and should contribute in a positive manner to the built heritage of the County. The guide recognises that rural dwelling design needs to respond to the requirements of the modern rural dweller. The guide therefore encourages the application of building forms that are from the traditional Irish vernacular as a reference in developing a design for a contemporary rural dwelling.

6.   The County Development Plan protects two key view points within the Tara Skryne Landscape Conservation Area (Draft)

View	Reference	Townland in which view is located
VP1	Hill of Tara	Jordanstown, Castletown Tara, Castleboy, Belpere and Cabragh
VP 27		Skryne

2.5.1   Views and Prospects

A summary visual assessment of the above key views is given below. It is an objective of Meath County Development Plan 2007-2013 to protect these view and prospects from inappropriate development (HER POL 113).

Skryne Hill (VP27)

Context : View westwards from Skryne Hill. A panorama view westwards towards Tara (3.0km) across the Gabhra valley at an elevation of +172mOD approx. Skryne Hill is the highest point within the surrounding landscape including Tara (+159mOD) and as such affords panorama views to the west (Tara), north and east. Views directly south are

restricted by existing trees and buildings. The views westwards are contained within the valley by the topography of the Hill of Tara.

This view has been identified in the Meath County Development Plan 2007-2013 as being a protected view (VP27), in that it is '*a very important view towards Tara across valley/historical/tourism etc'.*

Main Visual Elements:

From this viewpoint the Hill of Tara (3.0km) is well defined as the land rises gently to the main visual reference of the Hill of Tara, identifiable by the woodland copse which breaks the skyline on the horizon.

Pasture fields with field hedgerows and hedgerow trees dominate the view in the foreground and middle distance. The landscape character within the valley appears open as a number of hedgerows within the valley, whilst containing a number of mature trees, are not substantial in scale and depth and as such do not provide significant vegetative cover or screening.

The River Gabhra runs through the valley and feeds into the River Skane at Dowdstown bridge, but is not visible from this viewpoint.

Views of residential dwellings and agricultural buildings are restricted to the lower slopes of the Hill of Tara, primarily located along the N3. The cluster of buildings at the Hill of Tara car park are also visible. Glimpse views of the recently constructed M3 road cuttings (not yet vegetated) and a bridge on the M3 through the valley south of Tara are also possible from this viewpoint.

Lowland lands to the north of Tara provide long range views north-westwards for several kilometres on a clear day. However a significant numbers of residential dwellings/agricultural buildings are present in the view.

The main visual elements within the landscape in this location are:

- open landscape character within the Gabhra valley consisting of pasture fields and hedgerows/hedgerow trees
- Hill of Tara and woodland copse on the Hill of Tara skyline
- views of residential/agricultural buildings restricted to N3
- glimpse views of cuttings and bridge on recently constructed M3
- lowlands north of Tara provide long range views north-westwards

View west from Hill of Skryne (VP27)

Hill of Tara (VP1)

Context: This is a Key View westwards from Hill of Tara, identified within the Meath County Development Plan, VP1; it is acknowledged and already designated '*a very important view/historical/tourism etc'*. The view is a panorama view westwards across the Skane and Boyne valleys at an elevation of +159mOD.

Main Visual Elements

The woodland trees located on the upper western slopes of Tara in combination with the network of field hedgerows and hedgerow trees are prominent and provide significant depth and screening to the view. This network of vegetation gives the appearance of a wooded landscape and as such significantly restricts views of a number of dwellings and

farm buildings located within the lowlands. However, a small number of dwellings and farm buildings are visible, which while not being fully visible somewhat detract from this important panorama view.

Distant views are possible beyond Boyne valley on clear days.

The main visual elements within the landscape in this location are:

- woodland trees located on the upper western slopes of Tara
- pasture and arable fields and network of hedgerows and hedgerow trees within the lowland drumlin landscape
- distant glimpse views of gently rolling topography/hills in the lowlands

View west from Hill of Tara (VP1)