Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

Tara Conservation Management Plan

September 2022

Prepared by Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage
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Acknowledgements

The preparation of this Conservation Management Plan was directed by a Steering Group comprising representatives from the National Monuments Service, National Parks and Wildlife Service, the Office of Public Works, the Discovery Programme, the Heritage Council and Meath County Council.

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September 2022

Vision Statement for Tara Conservation Management Plan

The Hill of Tara is a unique cultural landscape of international significance where visitors experience both tangible and intangible links to those who occupied the site for over 5,500 years. Recognising this, the objective is to protect, conserve and promote an appreciation of the Hill of Tara by having in place a robust management framework that will ensure that its significance is maintained for present and future generations.

Executive Summary

The Hill of Tara is one of Ireland's most important archaeological and cultural landscapes, and it is of international significance. The archaeological complex within the State-owned land encompasses dozens of monuments recorded by the Archaeological Survey of Ireland, dating from the Neolithic through to the medieval period. During its long history it was used as a burial place, a religious complex, a venue for ceremonies associated with an exalted kingship, and was an arena for battles. The archaeology of the Hill of Tara has remained relatively undisturbed and research points to the existence of significant archaeology yet to be fully understood and interpreted.

Historical sources indicate that Tara was at the centre of the most important kingship in Ireland from at least the sixth century AD. The title 'King of Tara' was claimed by rulers from all parts of the island though, from the eleventh century onwards, the 'King of Ireland' title gradually replaced 'King of Tara'.

Tara is a special place, arising from its continued use over time for gathering and ceremonial occasions, and holds great value for many, including the local community. Its primary attraction relates to its archaeological and historical significance, which draws visitors from around the world. The hill's wide panoramic views, its ecology and accessible grasslands are additional attractions.

This Conservation Management Plan provides the framework for the long-term conservation management of the State-owned lands at Tara (Figs 1–3), which form part of a larger archaeological landscape known as the Hill of Tara.

The principles behind the Conservation Management Plan and the existing statutory frameworks are explained in the Introduction and the objectives of the plan are detailed.

Part 1 sets out the methodology behind the development of this management plan including the research, public consultation and stakeholder engagement. The preparation of this plan was directed by a Steering Group comprising representatives from the National Monuments Service, National Parks and Wildlife Service, the Office of Public Works, the Discovery Programme, the Heritage Council and Meath County Council. Initial drafting of the plan was coordinated jointly by the Discovery Programme and the Heritage Council.

Part 2 of the plan concentrates on understanding Tara through exploring the site through the lenses of history, mythology, archaeology, natural heritage, land use and the role of the large, open site as a public amenity.

The values that define the cultural significance of Tara derive from its archaeology and built heritage, history, literature, mythology, folklore, its contemporary social and spiritual value, ecology and landscape setting. These values and what it means to the many visitors are detailed in Part 3 alongside a Statement of Significance.

One of the key objectives of the Tara Conservation Management Plan is to identify any threats or issues that might negatively impact on the significance of the place. These range from sudden natural or human events that might cause damage to monuments, visitor footfall or inappropriate agricultural practices, to long-term attrition through weathering and extreme weather events brought about by climate change. Part 4 details historical impacts that took place between the eighteenth and mid-twentieth centuries and which relate to agricultural activity, land division, quarrying and treasure hunting. It also addresses modern threats and impacts arising from weathering and erosion, increased visitor footfall as well as specific issues arising from activity on site, including anti-social behaviour.

While the cultural significance of Tara is robustly based on its spectacular archaeological remains and the extensive historical and literary sources associated with the site, it is a difficult landscape to interpret for its many visitors. It is recognised that more needs to be done to improve interpretation and to manage visitor access.

The Tara Conservation Management Plan recognises these issues around interpretation, access and visitor movement, as well as specific issues arising from anti-social behaviour. The public consultation involved in the preparation of this plan has strengthened community involvement in articulating threats to Tara and how they might be addressed, and it is intended to continue this community engagement through the lifetime of the plan.

Having established the significance of the site and identified issues and vulnerabilities, Part 5 of this plan outlines policies and objectives with an Action Programme detailing actions to be implemented to meet those objectives.

Introduction

The Hill of Tara is one of the richest archaeological landscapes in Ireland. The State-owned land contains 61 individual archaeological sites and features recorded by the Archaeological Survey of Ireland, with many more across the wider Tara landscape[1]. These monuments span over 5,500 years from the Neolithic to modern times. Tara was the focus of prehistoric burials and rituals and the ceremonial landscape of medieval kings. It attracted the attention of Irish leaders throughout the ages and became a symbolic capital of Ireland. The Hill of Tara is an amenity enjoyed by the local community and by visitors and is a place of national and international cultural importance.

The State-owned lands at Tara (Figs 1–3) form part of a larger archaeological landscape known as the Hill of Tara. The State-owned lands are vested in the ownership of the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage and conservation works and day-to-day maintenance of the site are carried out by the Office of Public Works (OPW). Archaeological advice is provided by the National Monuments Service (NMS). The Hill of Tara Visitor Centre is staffed seasonally by the Visitor Services section of the OPW. Planning policy as it relates to Tara is the remit of Meath County Council as set out in the Meath County Development Plan.

The Hill of Tara is included on Ireland's 2022 World Heritage Tentative List as one component of the Royal Sites of Ireland, a serial transboundary site which also includes Dún Ailinne, County Kildare; the Hill of Uisneach, County Westmeath; the Rock of Cashel, County Tipperary; Rathcroghan, County Roscommon and Emain Macha, County Armagh. The Tentative List is an inventory of natural and cultural heritage sites that may have potential to demonstrate Outstanding Universal Value and therefore be considered suitable for nomination to the World Heritage List. As part of this nomination process, the development of a separate conservation and management plan to address UNESCO requirements will take place, drawing on this existing plan in relation to the State-owned lands at Tara.

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[1]   Any additional features identified through research and determined to be archaeological will be added to the Archaeological Survey of Ireland's records as they are identified.
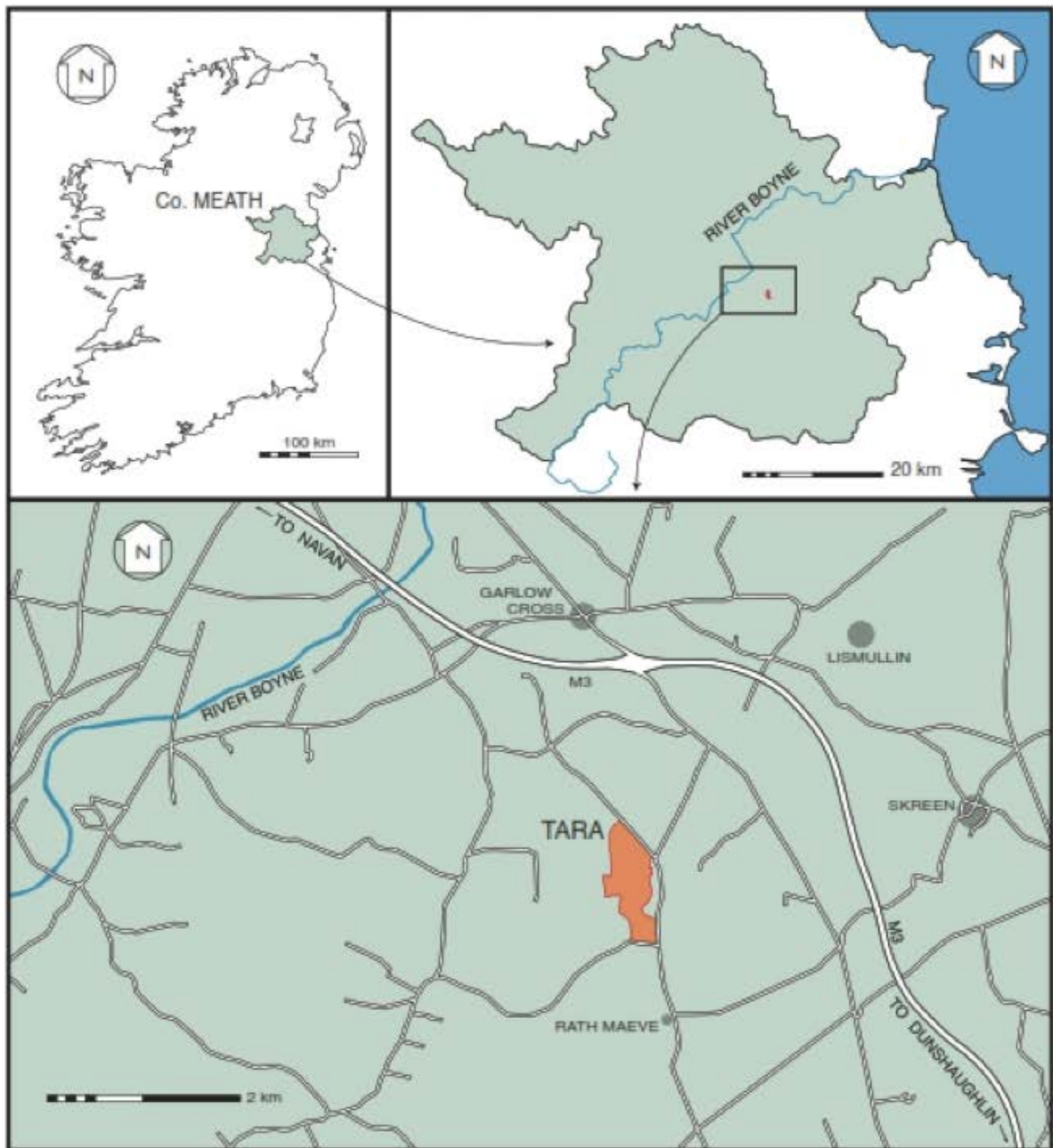
Fig. 1 Location of State-owned lands at Tara

STATE-OWNED
LAND

200M
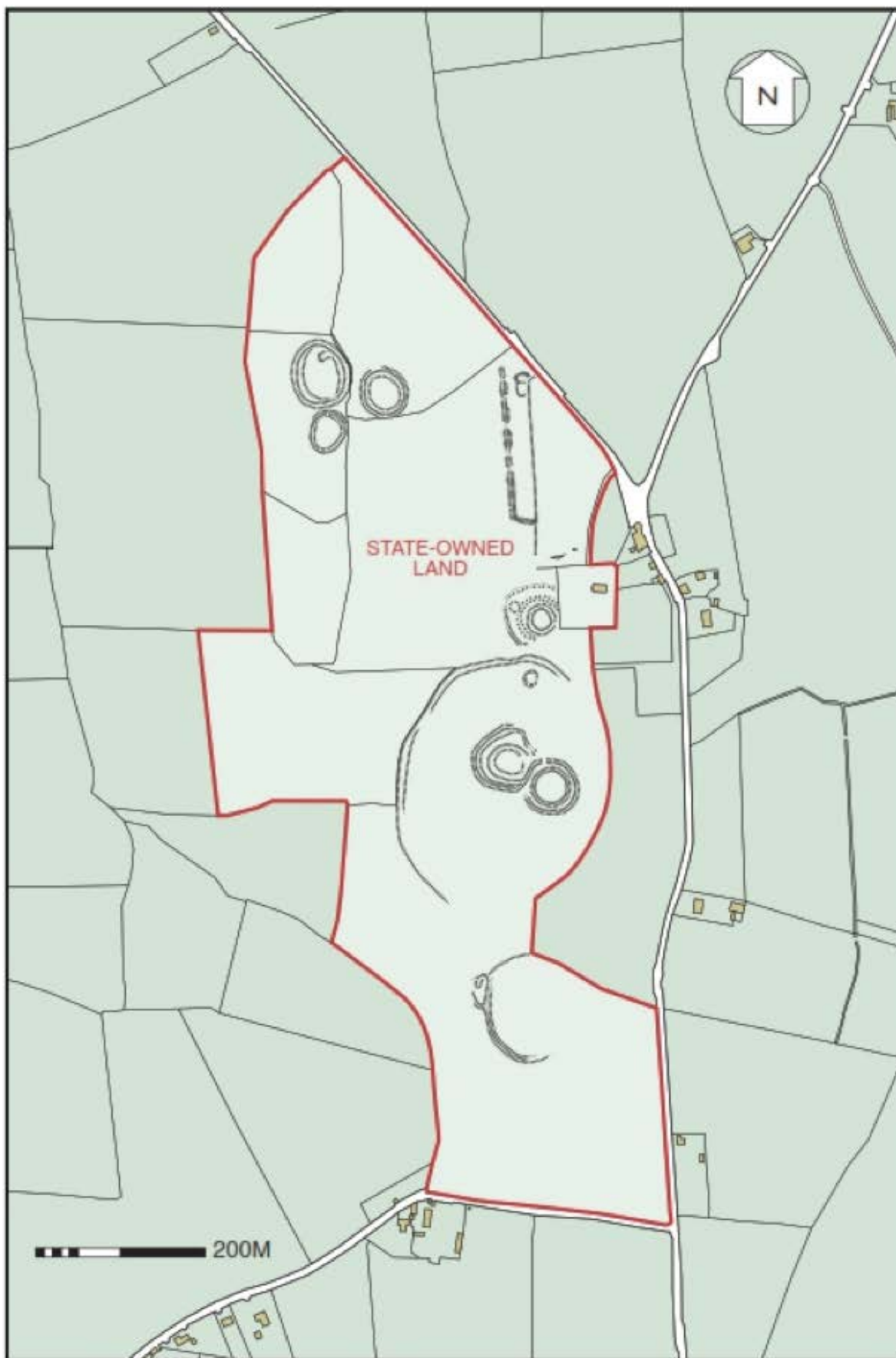
Fig. 2 Map outlining the State-owned lands

Fig. 3 The Hill of Tara (State-owned lands marked by the red boundary)

What is a Conservation Management Plan?

A Conservation Management Plan states why a place is significant and defines policies to ensure that significance is protected. It provides a framework for managing the place to ensure cultural significance is not lost in the future.

Methodologies and Guiding Principles of a Conservation Management Plan

Conservation Management Plans are drawn up in accordance with the guidelines outlined in the Australia ICOMOS Burra Charter, 2013.

This Charter provides an international model for the conservation and management of places of cultural significance. It sets out standards of practice for those with responsibility for the guardianship of such places; these might include owners, managers and custodians, consultants, statutory advisers, opinion formers, decision makers and contractors.

A fundamental principle of the Burra Charter is that places of cultural significance should be conserved for the benefit of both present and future generations.

Conservation involves all of the processes of looking after a place so as to retain its cultural significance and follows the key steps:
1. understand the place
2. assess cultural significance
3. identify all factors and issues
4. develop policy
5. prepare a management plan
6. implement the management plan
7. monitor the results and review the plan.

The popularity of the Hill of Tara for visitors (Table 1) is further reason to have in place a robust management framework to safeguard the important archaeological complex into the future.

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Quarter 1	29,934	27,901	22,445	30,713	n/a	37,109
Quarter 2	53,633	72,292	50,960	40,248	n/a	64,303
Quarter 3	60,283	71,072	63,875	n/a	n/a	53,489
Quarter 4	32,311	29,548	29,191	n/a	35,868	27,881

Table 1 Visitor numbers[2]. [Figures are approximate and based on In and Out gate counter readings. Cells marked n/a are periods during which the counter was not functioning.]

The Tara Conservation Management Plan aims to:
- provide an up-to-date description and condition assessment of the archaeological monuments within the State-owned lands at Tara
- set the context of the Hill of Tara in relation to relevant international, national, regional and local policy and guidance documents
- inform a management structure for the site and recommend priority management actions.

Existing Statutory, Policy and Guidance Framework

The plan is informed by existing national and international legislation, policy plans, conventions, treaties, charters and guidelines (Table 2).

[2] Visitor numbers counted through the Visitor Centre for the period 2009–2019 were around 10,000 annually, indicating that most visitors to the site do not go through the Visitor Centre in the former church.

National legislation and policy: cultural heritage
National Monuments Acts 1930 to 2014
Framework and Principles for the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage (1999)
Climate Change Sectoral Adaptation Plan for Built and Archaeological Heritage (2019)
Planning and Development Act 2000 to 2021

National legislation: natural heritage
The Wildlife Act 1976 to 2021

Council of Europe Conventions/Directives
Convention for the Protection of the Architectural Heritage of Europe (Granada, 1985)
Habitats Directive – Council Directive 92/43/EEC on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora
Convention for the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage of Europe (revised) (Valletta, 1992)
The European Landscape Convention (Florence, 2000)

UNESCO treaties and guidelines
UNESCO Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, 1972
UNESCO World Heritage Convention: Operational Guidelines (2021)

ICOMOS charters
The Burra Charter: The Australia ICOMOS Charter for Places of Cultural Significance, 2013
ICOMOS Charter for the Protection and Management of the Archaeological Heritage, 1990

Table 2 National and international legislation, policy plans, conventions, treaties, charters and guidelines

Management-Policy Context

The State-owned lands at Tara are owned by the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage and managed by the Office of Public Works on behalf of the Irish people. The protection and conservation of Tara is controlled by a range of national legislation, local mechanisms and international statutory and non-statutory guidance. These legislative provisions include, amongst others, the National Monuments Acts 1930 to 2014, Planning and Development Acts, various EU directives and various international treaties, conventions, charters and guidelines.

National Monuments Acts 1930 to 2014

Legislative protection for Tara extends back to the nineteenth century when Tara was included in the Schedule to the Ancient Monuments Protection Act, 1882. Today, Tara is a national monument (National Monument Nos. 148 and 676) within the meaning of the National Monuments Acts 1930 to 2014.

The National Monuments Acts 1930 to 2014 provide for the protection and preservation of national monuments and a range of other monuments and for the preservation of archaeological objects in the State. As such, they provide statutory protection for archaeological elements of the State's heritage. As a national monument in the ownership of the Minister, Tara is afforded extensive legal protection under the National Monuments Acts. Ministerial Consent is required for a range of specified activities including any ground disturbance at or in proximity to the State-owned lands.

The Minister is required to consult with the Director of the National Museum of Ireland before granting any application for Ministerial Consent.

Monuments on the Hill of Tara are also protected as Recorded Monuments in accordance with the National Monuments (Amendment) Act 1994.

Natural Heritage Legislation

In managing the State-owned lands at Tara, full regard will be had to all aspects of natural heritage legislation including the Wildlife Acts 1976 to 2021.

Meath County Development Plan 2021-2027

Meath County Council has included a series of robust policies and objectives for landscape protection in its County Development Plan 2021–2027 and these will be the primary means by which the setting and amenity of Tara is to be protected. The County Development Plan states that it is the policy of the Council to 'protect the archaeological heritage, rural character, setting and amenity of the Tara landscape and Loughcrew and Slieve na Calliagh Hills' (Meath County Council, 2021).

Strategic Objectives

This Conservation Management Plan, its objectives and actions, will evolve as issues and vulnerabilities are addressed and reviewed.

Objective 1:	to protect and conserve the heritage of the State-owned lands on the Hill of Tara and maintain its cultural significance, integrity and authenticity, including its amenity and setting
Objective 2:	to promote awareness and understanding of the Hill of Tara and its significance
Objective 3:	to manage and enhance the visitor experience on the Hill of Tara
Objective 4:	to implement the Actions of the Tara Conservation Management Plan

Table 3 Strategic Objectives

TARA CONSERVATION MANAGEMENT PLAN

1.1   Gathering Information

An essential element of preparing the plan was to gather all available information which might inform understanding of the significance of the site, including through an extensive public consultation process.

Our understanding of the archaeological, cultural and historical significance of the Tara landscape has been informed by many years of multidisciplinary research and investigation. For this Conservation Management Plan a catalogue of archaeological monuments on the State-owned lands has been compiled (see Appendix A, supporting document). This catalogue includes monument descriptions, an assessment of the physical condition of each specific place, and a record of ongoing management issues. A detailed survey of habitats and species has been undertaken by the National Parks and Wildlife Service (see Appendix B, supporting document).

1.2   The Consultation Process

Public stakeholders – local communities, visitors and interested experts – play a central role in defining the significance of a particular place, in creating a shared vision for that place, and in contributing to a sustainable long-term plan for its management. Therefore, it was essential to engage with these stakeholders in a meaningful way in preparing this Conservation Management Plan.

A consultation process was developed as an open and effective way for members of the public to engage in a constructive dialogue on Tara. The feedback received was assessed and its findings have been integrated into the plan. The decision to prepare a Conservation Management Plan was welcomed, as was the commitment to have the management of the State-owned lands on the Hill of Tara supported by sustainable long-term policies.

1.2.1   Public and Stakeholder Consultation

Various methods were employed to understand the views of the public and of local and national stakeholders. This was necessary as Tara has a significant national and international profile, and the site increasingly attracts visitors from all over the world. An online survey hosted on the Heritage Council website produced 400 responses and an on-site visitor survey was also conducted. The Discovery Programme facilitated local meetings and consulted with stakeholders, details of which are contained in Appendix C (supporting document).

1.2.2   Online Survey

To gain an insight into the views of the public in general, an online survey was hosted on the Heritage Council's website between March and May 2018.

The following questions were asked:
* What is important to you about the Hill of Tara?
* What issues concern you in relation to the hill?
* How can we best protect and preserve the Hill of Tara?
* How often do you visit the Hill of Tara?
* Any other comments?

Responses on the perceived importance of the Hill of Tara described it as a place of significance (archaeologically, historically, religiously, spiritually, or otherwise culturally) and highlighted its ability to function as a social amenity and a green space within the local environs for play, exercise, and leisure.

Concerns expressed:
- Vulnerability of monuments due to visitor numbers
- Lack of visitor infrastructure, including toilet facilities
- Car parking and traffic management
- Off-lead dog walking and fouling
- Litter
- Recreational sporting activities by sports teams, personal training/fitness boot-camps, and mountain bikers
- Lack of signage and interpretation
- Need for formal designated walkways/trails/paths to help preserve monuments and to spread footfall
- Limit to visitor numbers.

Almost half of respondents to the online survey (49.9%) reported that they visited Tara frequently, at least monthly if not weekly or even daily. An analysis of the online consultation is provided in Appendix D (supporting document).

1.2.3   On-site Visitor Survey

An on-site survey was carried out in July 2018. The objective was to develop a visitor profile for the site. Reason for visit, transport used, expectations and opinions of the site's interpretation were some of questions asked of 148 visitors surveyed on the day. Detailed results of the on-site survey are included in Appendix E (supporting document), which also incorporates results of a survey carried out in 2003.

1.3   Environmental Screening

A pre-screening check was carried out, utilising the decision tree as set out in the Environmental Protection Agency's Development of Strategic Environment Assessment (SEA) Methodologies for Plans and Programmes in Ireland – Synthesis Report. Specifically Stage 1 (Screen of Plans and Programmes) was carried out to determine if the plan should be considered to be a plan/programme under the administrative provisions criteria stipulated in Article 9(1) of S.I. 435 of 2004, European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) Regulations.

The outcome of the pre-screening stage concluded that the Hill of Tara Conservation Management Plan did not require an SEA as it will not have a significant environmental impact and it also does not provide a framework for development consent for projects.

While the pre-screening process indicated that an SEA was not required for the Hill of Tara Conservation Management Plan, further assessment was carried out using the environmental criteria contained in Schedule 1 of the SEA Regulations. The outcome of this screening concluded that the Hill of Tara Conservation Management Plan does not require a full SEA.

An Appropriate Assessment Screening Report was carried out in line with Article 6(3) of the EU Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC).

2.1   Archaeology

2.1.1   Introduction

Some 61 individual sites and monuments have been recorded on the State-owned lands at the Hill of Tara by the Archaeological Survey of Ireland (Fig. 4, Table 3), as well as many other features of cultural, historical and natural significance. The greatest concentration of monuments is spread across the gently rounded summit plateau which offers extensive panoramic views of the surrounding lowlands and the hills beyond, particularly to the west. The remains of about 30 monuments are easily identifiable as upstanding or substantial features on the hill today, while the rest survive as low-profile or buried features which have been identified through aerial photography, topographical and LiDAR survey, geophysical prospection and archaeological excavation.

List of monuments on State-owned lands		
Record No.	**Townland**	**Class**
ME031-033001-	CASTLEBOY (Skreen By., Tara Par.)	Hillfort
ME031-033002-	CASTLEBOY (Skreen By., Tara Par.)	Ring-ditch
ME031-033003-	CASTLEBOY (Skreen By., Tara Par.)	Ring-ditch
ME031-033004-	CASTLEBOY (Skreen By., Tara Par.)	Ring-ditch
ME031-033005-	CASTLEBOY (Skreen By., Tara Par.)	Ceremonial enclosure
ME031-033006-	CASTLEBOY (Skreen By., Tara Par.)	Mound
ME031-033007-	CASTLEBOY (Skreen By., Tara Par.)	Megalithic tomb – passage tomb
ME031-033008-	CASTLEBOY (Skreen By., Tara Par.)	Enclosure – large enclosure
ME031-033009-	CASTLEBOY (Skreen By., Tara Par.)	Ringfort – rath
ME031-033010-	CASTLEBOY (Skreen By., Tara Par.)	Barrow – unclassified
ME031-033011-	CASTLEBOY (Skreen By., Tara Par.)	Barrow – mound barrow
ME031-033012-	CASTLEBOY (Skreen By., Tara Par.)	Barrow – mound barrow
ME031-033013-	CASTLEBOY (Skreen By., Tara Par.)	Barrow – mound barrow
ME031-033014-	CASTLEBOY (Skreen By., Tara Par.)	Standing stone (present location)
ME031-033015-	CASTLEBOY (Skreen By., Tara Par.)	Ring-ditch
ME031-033016-	CASTLETOWN TARA	Enclosure

Fig. 4 Map of monuments on State-owned lands
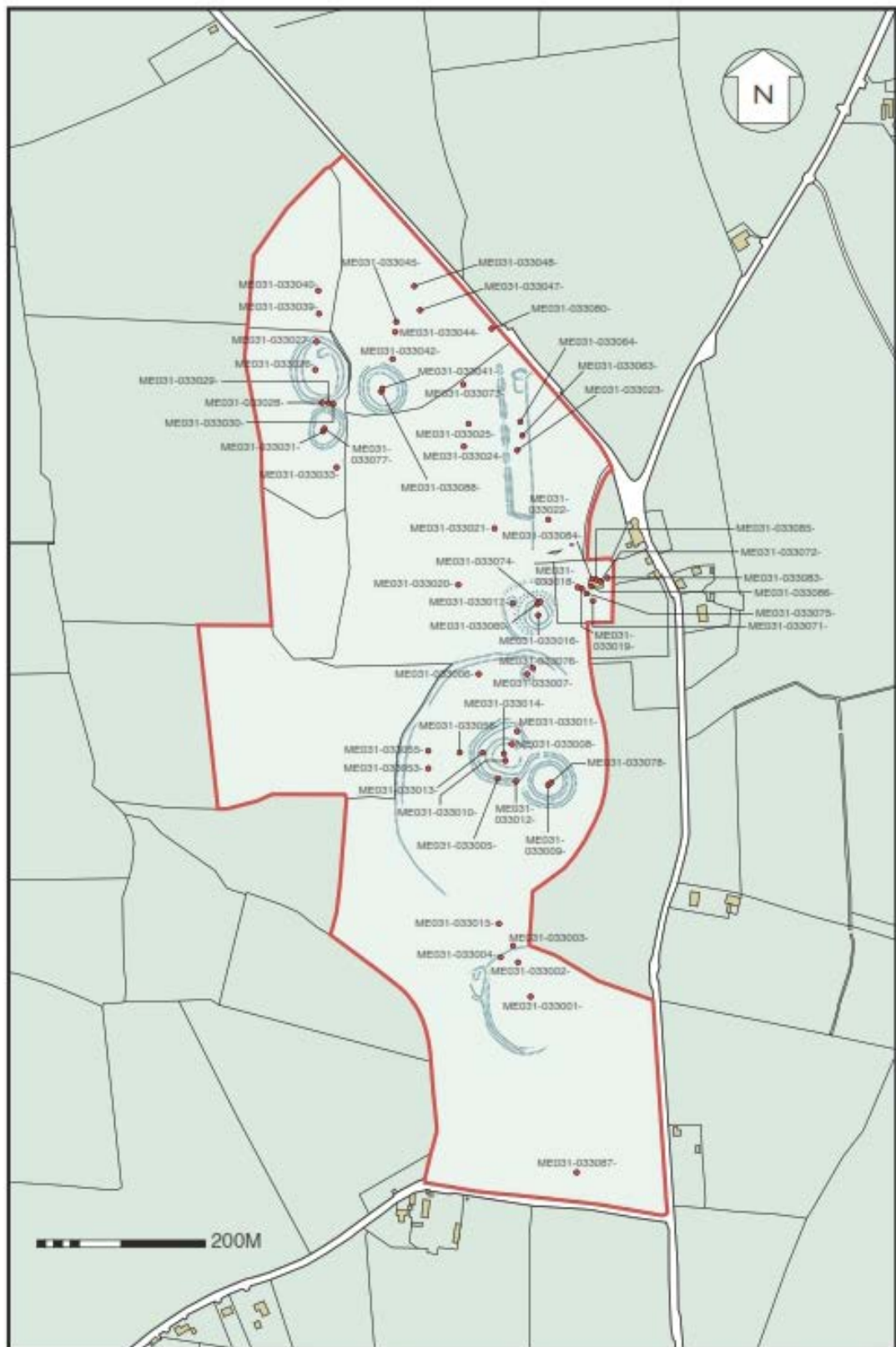
List of monuments on State-owned lands		
Record No.	Townland	Class
ME031-033017-	CASTLETOWN TARA	Barrow – mound barrow
ME031-033018-	CASTLEBOY (Skreen By., Tara Par.)	Sheela-na-gig
ME031-033019-	CASTLEBOY (Skreen By., Tara Par.)	Standing stone
ME031-033020-	CASTLETOWN TARA	Barrow – ring-barrow
ME031-033021-	CASTLETOWN TARA	Barrow – mound barrow
ME031-033022-	CASTLETOWN TARA	Barrow – bowl-barrow
ME031-033023-	CASTLETOWN TARA	Linear earthwork
ME031-033024-	CASTLETOWN TARA	Barrow – ring-barrow
ME031-033025-	CASTLETOWN TARA	Barrow – unclassified
ME031-033026-	CASTLETOWN TARA	Barrow – unclassified
ME031-033027-	CASTLETOWN TARA	Barrow – mound barrow
ME031-033028-	CASTLETOWN TARA	Mound
ME031-033029-	CASTLETOWN TARA	Mound
ME031-033030-	CASTLETOWN TARA	Mound
ME031-033031-	CASTLETOWN TARA	Barrow – unclassified
ME031-033033-	CASTLETOWN TARA	Barrow – mound barrow
ME031-033039-	CASTLETOWN TARA	Mound
ME031-033040-	CASTLETOWN TARA	Barrow – mound barrow
ME031-033041-	CASTLETOWN TARA	Barrow – unclassified
ME031-033042-	CASTLETOWN TARA	Barrow – unclassified
ME031-033044-	CASTLETOWN TARA	Barrow – ring-barrow
ME031-033045-	CASTLETOWN TARA	Ring-ditch
ME031-033047-	CASTLETOWN TARA	Barrow – ring-barrow
ME031-033048-	CASTLETOWN TARA	Barrow – ring-barrow
ME031-033053-	CASTLEBOY (Skreen By., Tara Par.)	Ring-ditch
ME031-033055-	CASTLEBOY (Skreen By., Tara Par.)	Ring-ditch
ME031-033056-	CASTLEBOY (Skreen By., Tara Par.)	Ring-ditch
ME031-033060-	CASTLETOWN TARA	Barrow – ditch barrow
ME031-033063-	CASTLETOWN TARA	Mound
ME031-033064-	CASTLETOWN TARA	Mound
ME031-033071-	CASTLEBOY (Skreen By., Tara Par.)	Church
ME031-033072-	CASTLEBOY (Skreen By., Tara Par.)	Font
ME031-033073-	CASTLETOWN TARA	Road – road/trackway
ME031-033074-	CASTLEBOY (Skreen By., Tara Par.)	Ceremonial enclosure
ME031-033075-	CASTLEBOY (Skreen By., Tara Par.)	Graveyard
ME031-033076-	CASTLEBOY (Skreen By., Tara Par.)	Pit-burial
ME031-033077-	CASTLETOWN TARA	Mound

List of monuments on State-owned lands		
Record No.	**Townland**	**Class**
ME031-033078-	CASTLEBOY (Skreen By., Tara Par.)	Mound
ME031-033080-	CASTLETOWN TARA	Road – road/trackway
ME031-033083-	CASTLEBOY (Skreen By., Tara Par.)	Battlefield
ME031-033084-	CASTLEBOY (Skreen By., Tara Par.)	Stone sculpture (present location)
ME031-033085-	CASTLEBOY (Skreen By., Tara Par.)	Wall monument
ME031-033086-	CASTLEBOY (Skreen By., Tara Par.)	Cross
ME031-033087-	CASTLEBOY (Skreen By., Tara Par.)	Well
ME031-033088-	CASTLETOWN TARA	Barrow – ring-barrow

Table 4 Monuments on State-owned lands

2.1.2   Modern Excavation

The first archaeological excavations in the modern era were undertaken in the 1950s by University College Dublin. The focus of these investigations was the three monuments on the summit of Tara: the Neolithic passage tomb known as the Mound of the Hostages, the great ceremonial enclosure of Ráith na Ríg ('Rath of the Kings') and the multi-ramparted enclosure of the Rath of the Synods. Further excavations were carried out at Ráith na Ríg in 1997 as part of the Discovery Programme's Tara Research Project (Pl. 1). The multidisciplinary research and surveys undertaken over the past 25 years, as well as publication of the excavations undertaken since the 1950s, have greatly advanced our understanding of the archaeology, history, and cultural significance of Tara.

Pl. 1 Archaeological excavations of Ráith na Ríg in 1997

2.1.3   Description of the Monuments

Most of the upstanding monuments are located on the State-owned lands, which encompass approximately 100 acres (just over 40 hectares) of the summit ridge. The monuments are primarily of earthen or earth-and-stone construction and consist variously of mounds, banks or ditches. There are a few stone monuments, among them the Lia Fáil ('Stone of Destiny') and two pillar stones in the graveyard. Excavations and surveys have shown there were once a significant number of wooden structures, including several large prehistoric enclosures.

Most of the monuments are believed to be burial monuments and enclosures. There is considerable variation in terms of form (shape and size) and date of these monuments. They include a high proportion of exceptionally large and elaborate monuments which emphasise the elevated status of Tara as a burial ground and place of religious, ceremonial and political power. Archaeological excavation and survey have revealed complex sequences of monument construction and re-use and shown that the hill has been the focus of sustained activity over more than 5,500 years, from the Neolithic period, around 3500 BC, to the present day. The principal high-profile monuments at Tara are discussed below with a more extensive catalogue of Tara monuments given in Appendix A (supporting document).

The names of a number of prominent monuments at Tara interchange between Irish and anglicised forms, with the Irish name being predominant in archaeological literature.
* Ráith na Ríg / Rath of the Kings
* Duma na nGiall / The Mound of the Hostages
* Forradh / Royal Seat
* Tech Cormaic / Cormac's House
* Ráith na Senad / Rath of the Synods
* Tech Midhchúarta / The Banqueting Hall
* Clóenfherta / Sloping Trenches
* Ráith Gráinne / Gráinne's Rath
* Ráith Lóegaire / Lóegaire's Rath
* Lia Fáil / Stone of Destiny
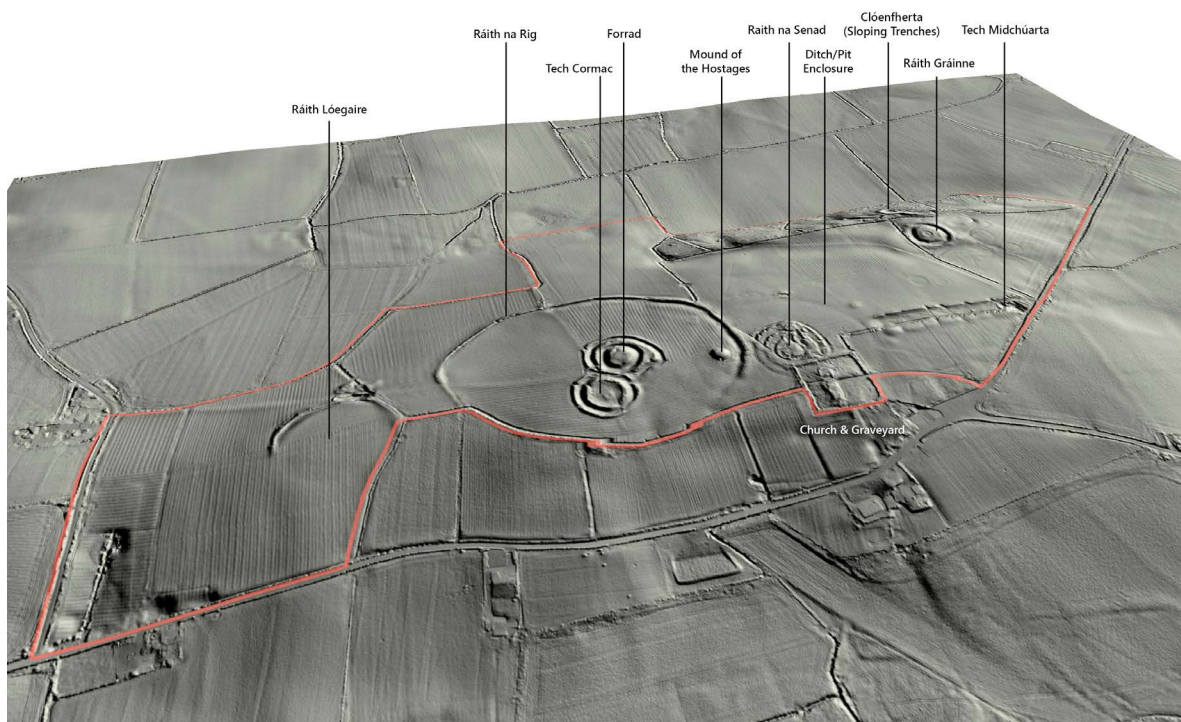
2.1.4   Principal Visible Monuments

Fig. 5 A 3D digital terrain model of Tara, as viewed from the east, with the names of some of the principal visible monuments indicated (© The Discovery Programme)

Ráith na Ríg (Rath of the Kings)

The oval enclosure measures almost one kilometre in circumference and encompasses three major monuments: the Mound of the Hostages, the Forrad and Tech Cormaic. It consists of a substantial earthen bank with an internal ditch, which are best preserved at the north-west. Two small sections of the enclosure excavated in 1952–5 revealed that the ditch, which has almost completely filled with soil, was cut 3m deep into the underlying shale bedrock. The foundation trench of a wooden palisade that ran along the inner perimeter of the enclosure was also identified. Further excavation in 1997 (Pl. 1) confirmed that the enclosure was constructed during the Iron Age, around 100 BC, and that the enclosure bank covered the remains of a bronze and iron-smithing workshop. The excavations also unearthed an assemblage of deposits in the ditch including fragments of human skulls, an infant burial accompanied by dog remains, and scatters of animal bone.

Duma na nGiall (The Mound of the Hostages)

Pl. 2 The Mound of the Hostages

The Mound of the Hostages is believed to be the earliest upstanding structure on the Hill of Tara; the covering mound of earth and stone was reconstructed following its excavation in the 1950s (Pl. 2). The Mound of the Hostages is a small passage tomb consisting of a stone-lined passage covered by a stone cairn and a mantle of soil. One of the upright stones (orthostats) on the left-hand side of the passage is decorated with characteristic carved Neolithic designs. Excavation revealed traces of pre-tomb activity and features beneath the mound and showed that the passage tomb was built in several phases, completed around 3100 BC. The remains of hundreds of individuals – most of them cremated and comprising men, women and children – were buried at the site between about 3300 BC and 1600 BC. At just over 20m in diameter, the Mound of the Hostages is small in comparison to the great passage tombs in the nearby Boyne Valley (Brú na Bóinne), which were built around the same time. However, the large number of burials, rich collection of grave-goods and its re-use during the Bronze

Pl. 3 Early Bronze Age battle-axe from the 1950s excavation of the Mound of the Hostages, on display in the National Museum of Ireland (image reproduced with permission of the National Museum of Ireland)

Age makes this tomb exceptional (Pl. 3). One burial was that of a male aged about 15 years, whose body was placed in the mound sometime around 1600 BC. He had a small bronze knife near his feet and wore a valuable necklace of jet, amber, bronze and faience, some of the materials for which came from distant parts of continental Europe and the Baltic. Another mound known as Duma na mBó (Mound of the Cow), possibly a passage tomb, once stood to the west of the Mound of the Hostages. Each of these monuments is accommodated by a slight outward curve in the boundary of Ráith na Ríg, emphasising their enduring significance during the Iron Age.

Pl. 4 The Forrad and Tech Cormaic

Near the centre of Ráith na Ríg are the conjoined earthworks of the Forrad and Tech Cormaic (Pl. 4). The Forrad is a large, flat-topped mound surrounded by two ditches and outer banks and measures 87m in diameter. It may be a prehistoric (possibly Bronze Age) burial monument that later served as the inauguration mound of the kings of Tara. A number of small mounds, possibly burial monuments, were incorporated into the bank surrounding the central mound. On the summit of the Forrad is a pillar-stone reputed to be the oracular stone known as the Lia Fáil (Stone of Destiny) which was moved from the Mound of the Hostages in 1824 in commemoration of the 1798 Battle of Tara. In early mythology the Lia Fáil was reputed to have cried out in recognition when the rightful king of Tara arrived on the hill. Tech Cormaic, which is attached to the eastern side of the Forrad, is a circular enclosure defined by two banks with outer ditches. It has an overall diameter of about 80m and is likely to be an early medieval 'royal' ringfort. A low, grassy platform near the centre of the interior is probably the remains of a building.
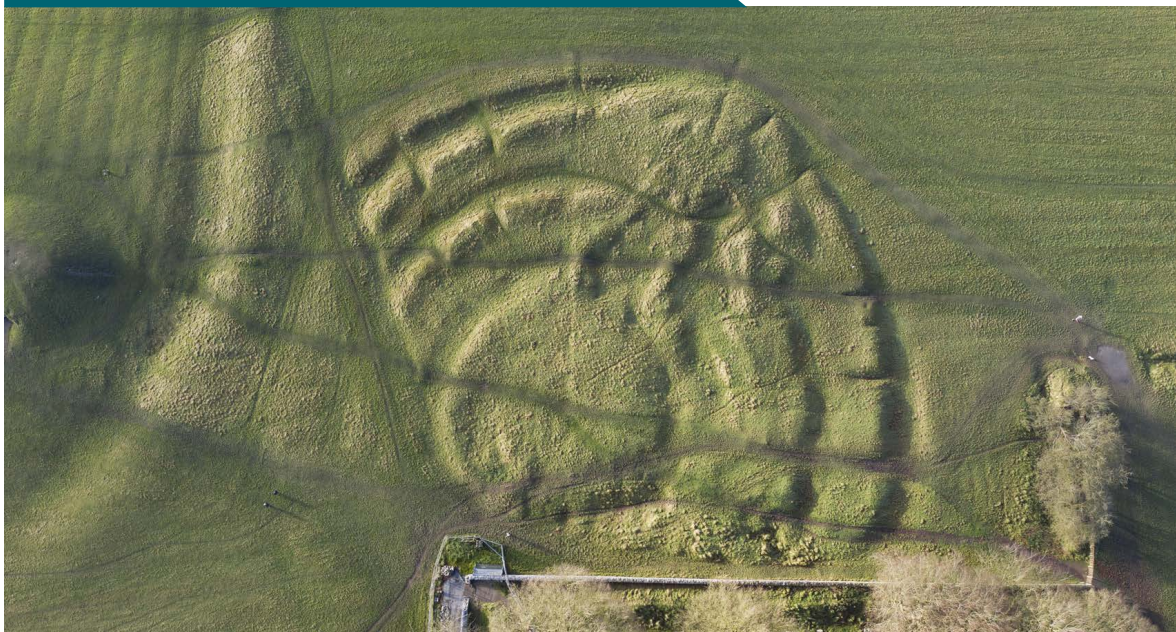
Pl. 5 The Rath of the Synods

The Rath of the Synods is a complex, multi-phase monument (Pl. 5). The graveyard encroaches on the eastern part of the monument, which was extensively damaged through digging by the British-Israelites at the turn of the twentieth century. Despite these impacts, excavations in 1952–3 did identify several earlier phases of activity at the site. The earliest structure recorded was a ditched enclosure which appears to date from the last few centuries BC or the first century AD. This was followed by a series of timber structures with potential parallels to the figure-of-eight-shaped Iron Age enclosures discovered at Navan Fort (Emain Macha), County Armagh and Dún Ailinne, County Kildare. In its final phase, dated to the second to fourth centuries AD, it consisted of a circular enclosure defined by four banks and ditches. The builders of this multivallate enclosure incorporated an earlier burial mound within its boundary and some of the ramparts were augmented by timber palisades. Within this enclosure, the remains of at least two small, post-built, rectangular structures together with industrial waste from metalworking and possible glassworking were recorded. Some of the finds associated with this phase of activity were of Roman and Romano-British origin and include an impressive collection of glass beads, a lead seal, a barrel padlock and a large assortment of glass and pottery, mainly from high-status drinking vessels. Collectively, they represent the largest assemblage of Roman finds from an excavated site in Ireland.

Substantial quantities of animal bone, including the remains of pig and ox were also recovered from the enclosing ditches. Burials from the site included cremations, possibly dating to the Iron Age, and later inhumations – one of which is as late as the thirteenth century – were buried at irregular intervals. The enclosure is named after the synods reputedly held at the site by saints Patrick, Rúadan and Adomnán during the fifth to seventh centuries AD. Geophysical survey in the late 1990s showed that the Rath of the Synods stands at the centre of a very large oval enclosure, the 'Ditch/Pit Enclosure', few traces of which survive above ground.

Tech Midchúarta (The Banqueting Hall)

Pl. 6 The Banqueting Hall

The Banqueting Hall consists of two parallel earthen banks which run north–south for a distance of 203m. The banks are spaced about 27m apart and were likely built up from material dug out from the space between the two banks, the interior being lower than the level of the surrounding ground surface (Pl. 6). The western bank is higher and better preserved than the eastern bank, which has been much reduced by ploughing. Narrow gaps occur at irregular intervals along the banks, some of which appear to be original. The prevailing sense as one travels along the interior of the monument is that of detachment from the outside world. The Tara panoramic landscape is not visible from within the Banqueting Hall, save through the gaps, and as one moves south up the slope the skyline is dominated by the Mound of the Hostages. External views focus on tombs.

While medieval texts depict this monument as a great royal hall presided over by the king of Tara – hence the name Tech Midchúarta, 'house of the middle or mead court' – it is far more likely to have been a processional avenue that formed part of the choreography of royal and religious ceremonies on the hill. Its date is unknown and could range from the third millennium BC to the first millennium AD. It shares similarities with Neolithic ceremonial cursus monuments and with later linear earthworks, such as at the royal sites of Rathcroghan, Co. Roscommon and Teltown, Co. Meath. Regardless of the date of its construction, the Banqueting Hall undoubtedly functioned as a major public monument in the enactment of royal ceremonies at Tara during the early medieval period.

Clóenfherta (The Sloping Trenches) and Ráith Gráinne (Gráinne's Rath)

Pl. 7 Clóenfherta (foreground) and Ráith Gráinne (background)

A group of barrows and mounds is located along the north-western crest of the Tara ridge. The three largest monuments are ring-barrows, each comprising a flat-topped, central mound surrounded by a ditch and outer bank (Pl. 7). Two of the barrows that overlook the steep, western slope of Tara are known as the Northern and Southern Clóenfherta or 'Sloping Trenches', and historical sources tell us that they mark the site of a royal palace that collapsed when the mythical king of Tara, Lugaid Mac Con, gave a wrong legal judgement and lost his kingship to his rival Cormac mac Airt. These are believed to be burial monuments dating to the Bronze or Iron Age. The larger Northern Clóenfherta is 80m in diameter. A large hole was dug into its central mound sometime before the 1830s, either by treasure hunters or for the quarrying of stone or gravel.

A third large ring-barrow, Ráith Gráinne, is located to the east of the Clóenfherta (Pl. 8). It is about 70m in diameter and is better preserved and more upstanding than its neighbours. On the top of its central mound, a raised circular area surrounded by a ditch is probably the remains of a later barrow. The name recalls the tale of Gráinne, Finn mac Cumaill's young wife, who left Tara with her lover Diarmait Ua Duibne and travelled the whole of Ireland with him until Finn caught up with them and Diarmait was killed by a magical boar at Benbulben, Co. Sligo.

The incorporation of earlier monuments into the fabric of later ones at the Clóenfherta and Ráith Gráinne is repeated elsewhere at Tara. This re-use or incorporation has been interpreted as evidence that those constructing 'new' monuments in the past attached importance and significance to the features that were already there, and deliberately included or re-used those features.

Pl. 8 Ráith Gráinne

Ráith Lóegaire (Lóegaire's Rath)

Pl. 9 Ráith Lóegaire

To the south of Ráith na Ríg are the remains of a large circular enclosure defined by two banks with an intervening ditch. The enclosure, known as Ráith Lóegaire, was partly levelled sometime prior to 1836 and only the western half is still visible (Pl. 9). However, its original extent has been mapped by geophysical survey which also revealed an entrance at the east and several features in the interior, including a possible roundhouse. Lóegaire mac Néill, king of Tara, was reputedly cursed by St Patrick when he refused to accept Christianity and is said to have been buried at Tara facing his enemies, the Leinstermen.

Ongoing research and survey of the State-owned lands at Tara have revealed other monuments which, while less visually imposing than the monuments noted above, are key elements of Tara's long development and use in the past. Among the most significant of these newly discovered sites is a very large oval enclosure, measuring 210m north–south by 175m east–west, that encircles and seems to share a centre-point with the Rath of the Synods. This enclosure survives in part as an upstanding feature on the ground (including the arc of a ditch and slight bank) with substantial below-ground remains for the rest of its circuit identified through geophysical survey. The monument seems to have been a ditch flanked inside and out by a ring of regularly spaced pits that probably contained a series of wooden posts. The Mound of the Hostages also lies inside this enclosure, while the enclosure seems to have been cut by, or has an intersection with, the circuit of the enclosing bank of Ráith na Ríg. The medieval graveyard straddles the Ditch/Pit Enclosure's eastern circuit. The exact date of this monument is not known, but it clearly has significant relationships to other monuments on the hilltop.

2.1.5   Description of the Subsurface Archaeology

In 1992, the Discovery Programme's Tara Research Project set out to investigate the archaeology, history and literature of Tara. At that time, about 30 monuments were recorded on the hill. Most of these were the clearly visible, high-profile monuments while others had been discovered through aerial survey in the 1970s. The 1997 publication of 'Tara: an archaeological survey' by Conor Newman doubled the number of known monuments with many new features discovered through geophysical and topographical surveys.

Since 1997, continued research and survey by the Discovery Programme/NUI Galway has resulted in further discoveries and a substantial increase in the number of recorded monuments at Tara.

Geophysical surveys undertaken between 2002 and 2014 resulted in the discovery of further enclosures, burial monuments and other traces of activity, mainly in the form of ditches, trenches and pits. The footprint of a series of timber enclosures was revealed inside Ráith na Ríg, while the remains of what are likely to be structures associated with the medieval manor of Tara were identified on the eastern slope of the hill.

Research undertaken in 2014 in collaboration with the Roman-Germanic Commission (German Archaeological Institute) surveyed some previously examined areas in greater detail, providing additional information on some of the known monuments as well as revealing new features. As new approaches to survey develop, or through the re-examination of old data and interpretations, we can expect our collective understanding of Tara's archaeology to continue to develop and grow.

2.1.6   Artefacts

Pl. 10 A selection of funerary vessels from the Mound of the Hostages (O'Sullivan 2005, pl. 1; photo Jonathan Hession)

Artefacts have been discovered as stray finds and from archaeological excavations at Ráith na Ríg, the Mound of the Hostages and the Rath of the Synods. The excavations at the Mound of the Hostages produced one of the finest collections of artefacts associated with Neolithic and Bronze Age burials in Ireland. The range and condition of the pottery was notable (Pl. 10), and included large decorative Collared and Encrusted Urns, on display in the National Museum of Ireland. One unusual find was that of an adolescent crouched burial with a necklace made of faience (finely glazed ceramic), amber, jet and bronze beads. The excavation at the Rath of the Synods produced the single largest collection of Romano-British finds so far discovered by excavation in Ireland. Among other finds were a collection of glass beads, a lead seal, a barrel padlock and a large assortment of glass and pottery, mainly from high-status imported drinking vessels and tableware. These finds suggest considerable activity at the monument between the second and fourth centuries AD.

2.2   Mythology

Tara played an extremely important symbolic role in medieval Irish history and literature. Early Irish sagas, written down during the medieval period, but possibly representing at least some aspects of late prehistoric religious beliefs and rituals, portray Tara as the domain of gods and goddesses, and heroic and semi-divine kings. Ireland is unique in that so many early texts survive, and Tara is the focus of numerous texts.

The archaeological monuments at Tara form a ceremonial complex which, from the Neolithic to early medieval period, was created in response to variously held beliefs about the nature of authority and the divine, the order of society and social relationships, the prosperity of the land, and the importance of ancestors buried on the hill and in the surrounding landscape. At the centre of the 'royal' complex was the Mound of the Hostages, the oldest recorded monument on Tara, where Lug and the goddess of sovereignty proclaimed prophecies on future kings of Tara, and where stood the Lia Fáil, the stone of prophecies that cried out in recognising a rightful king (Pl. 11).
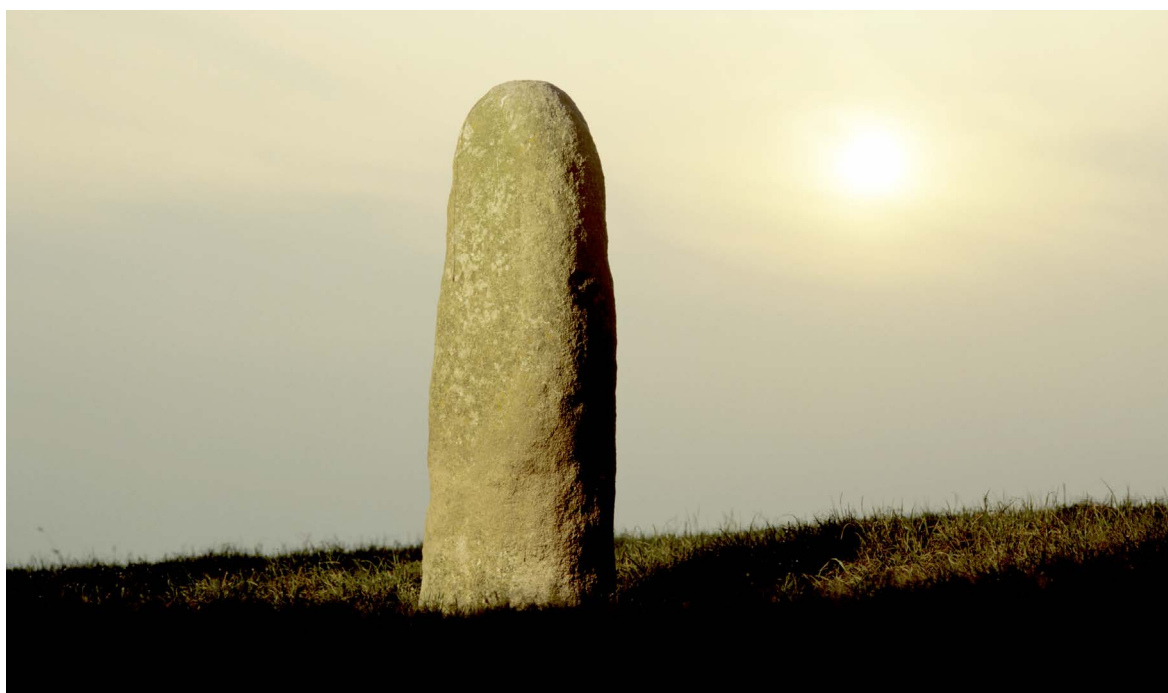
Pl. 11 The Lia Fáil

Tara was regarded as the centre of the world (axis mundi) and the king of Tara was perceived as a 'king of the world'. This universal idea reflected societies' beliefs about places where human and divine worlds met, where prophecies were proclaimed, and where rulers and their priests convened sacred ceremonies. Sites with similar attributes include 'The Centre of Heaven and Earth' in Dengfeng, China; Delphi in Greece; Jelling in Denmark; and Gamla Uppsala in Sweden.

The view of such places as cosmic centres may be reflected in the personal names of certain kings of Tara such as Domhnall and Túathal, both of which express the notion of 'kings of the world'.

2.3   History

2.3.1   Introduction

'Tara' is an anglicised version of the Irish name 'Teamhair'. The name occurs throughout Ireland and seems to be associated with hilltop sites. Tara in County Meath is pre-eminent and often designated as 'Teamhair na Rí' or 'Tara of the Kings'. The name 'Teamhair' originates from the idea of 'cutting off' or 'separating' a piece of land as an important sacred space. In this context the name seems to be related to the Latin word 'templum' and the Greek word 'temenos', both words for a temple or a sacred space. In medieval times, it was believed that the place name 'Teamhair' meant 'a place with a view' on account of the extensive panoramic views from the hill (Pl. 12).

Pl.12 The Hill of Tara

2.3.2   Tara in Late Antiquity

It is not known how old the kingship of Tara and its associated ceremonies are, though medieval texts suggest pre-Christian practices. During late antiquity (c. AD 300–600) concepts of authority were introduced from the Roman world and through the spread of Christianity which expressed this dominant position in imperial and biblical terms.

2.3.3   The Importance of Tara in Medieval Ireland

Tara was located within the medieval kingdom of Brega, which encompassed the area of counties Louth, Dublin, Meath and parts of Westmeath. Competition for the kingship of Tara was the cause of much rivalry among historic dynasties and kings in early Ireland. In the earliest texts the contention is recorded as being between the Laigin (people of Leinster) and the Ulaid (people of Ulster). From the seventh century onwards most contenders belonged to the northern and midland dynasties of the Uí Néill ('descendants of Niall'). From the eighth century, the ceremony of inaugurating the king of Tara shifted away from Tara to other places, most notably to the archaeological complex of Tailtiu (Teltown, Co. Meath).

The kingship of Tara was an exceptional kingship in Ireland which placed the king of Tara above all other kings until the eleventh century. Tara played an extremely important symbolic role in medieval Irish history and literature. Early Irish sagas, written down during the medieval period, and possibly inheriting some aspects of late prehistoric religious beliefs and rituals, portray Tara as the domain of gods and goddesses, and heroic and semi-divine kings.

It is a long-held tradition that Tara was the hub of five ancient roadways of Ireland. It is recorded in the Annals of the Four Masters that:

'The age of Christ, 123. The first year of Conn of the Hundred Battles as king over Ireland. The night of Conn's birth were discovered five principal roads [leading] to Teamhair [Tara], which were never observed till then'.

In the twelfth-century 'Metrical Dindshenchas', the lore of places (which Petrie drew on for his 1839 map of Tara (see Fig. 7)), Tara is the focal point of Ireland's road network (Gwynn 1991). Charles Edwards' paper 'Some thoughts on Early Irish roads and travel', also highlights Tara as a hub for the five 'Slige' (roads) which led to the five provinces of Ireland (Mac Amhlaigh and Ó Curnáin 2012, 71–95) (Fig. 6). The Early Irish Law tract on roads composed around AD 700, states (in Fergus Kelly's translation) that the highway 'was constructed for the meeting of two chariots, i.e. the chariot of a king and the chariot of a bishop so that each of them can go past the other' (Kelly 1997, 538). As a two-horse chariot is about 1.8m wide, the road would have been nearly 4m wide.
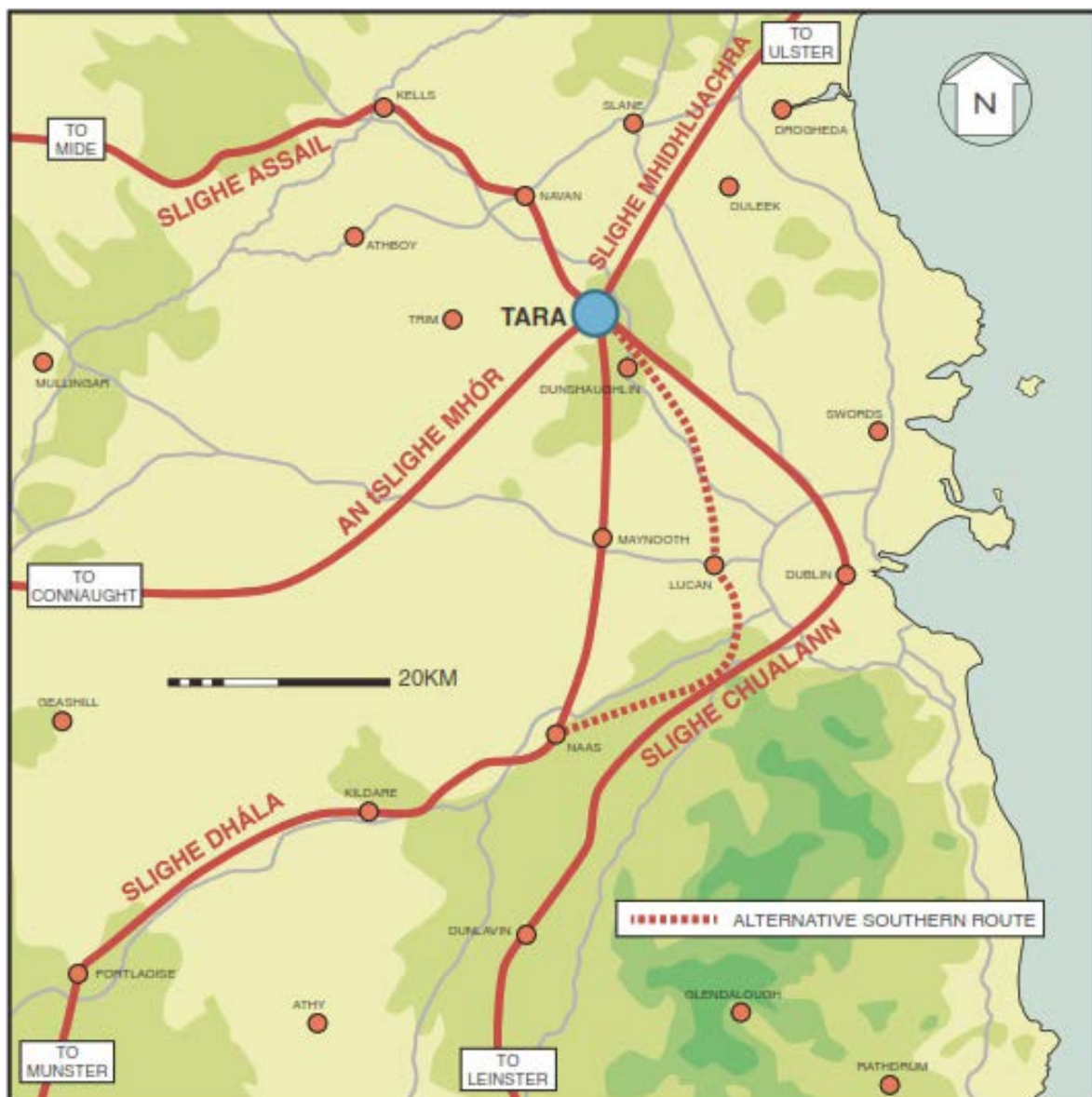
Fig. 6 Five ancient roadways of Ireland met at Tara (image courtesy Dr Matthew Stout)

The 'town' of Tara is first mentioned in the charter of Ralph de Repenteni, dating from c. AD 1191–2, which refers to a miller and two chaplains. The settlement developed as a linear arrangement of buildings set close to the western side of the road with an associated field system. A laneway ran directly from the village to the graveyard which can be traced today as a linear depression (Pl. 13). The main Dublin to Navan road passed through Tara until 1730.

Pl. 13 Linear settlement on Tara and the old laneway to the graveyard

2.3.4   Evolving Symbolism of Tara from the Early Modern Period

Despite waning in political significance, Tara continued to feature prominently in history and literature well beyond the medieval period. While Dublin became the administrative capital of Ireland from AD 1000, Tara continued to be regarded as the 'spiritual' capital of Ireland.

This view of Tara was later advanced by historians of Gaelic Ireland, especially the influential seventeenth-century Mícheál Ó Cléirigh and his Franciscan brethren who compiled the Annals of the Four Masters, and their contemporary, Geoffrey Keating, whose chronological history of Ireland 'Foras Feasa ar Éirinn' was used until the twentieth century as the record of the official history of Ireland.

In the nineteenth century, Tara's significance was greatly enhanced by the work of John O'Donovan, who recorded it for the Ordnance Survey, and George Petrie who published his seminal paper 'On the History and Antiquities of Tara Hill' in the 'Transactions of the Royal Irish Academy' in 1839 (Fig. 7)

The historic significance of Tara meant that the hill often attracted the attention of those rebelling and agitating against Dublin. The inaugural meeting that led to the establishment of the Catholic
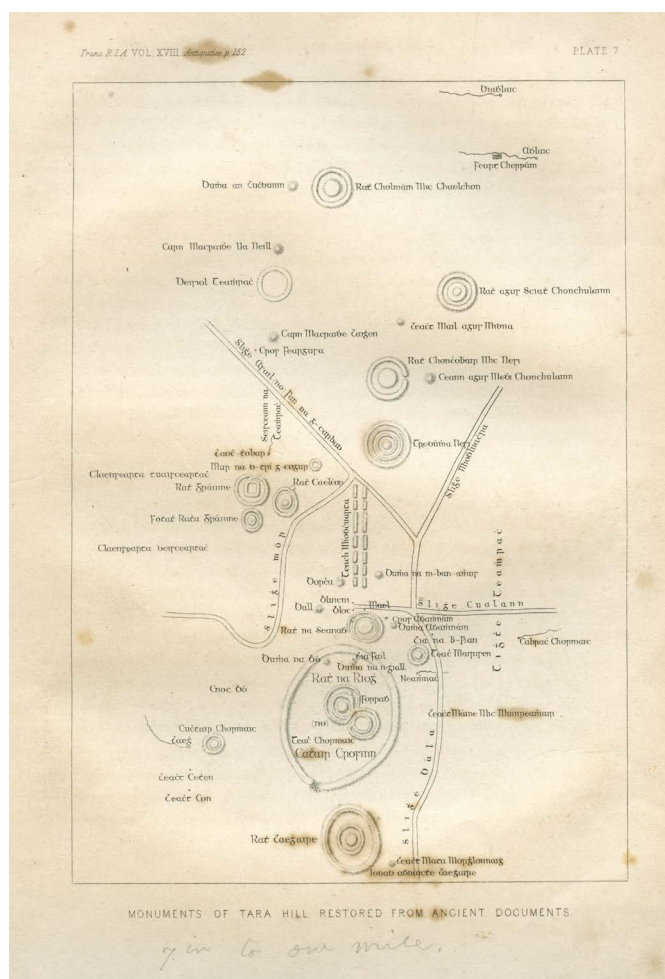
Fig. 7 George Petrie's 1839 map of Tara
(by permission of the Royal Irish Academy © RIA)

Confederation of Kilkenny, which governed much of Ireland throughout the 1640s in opposition to the Dublin administration, took place at Tara. In 1798, during the United Irishmen Rebellion, a battle at Tara between insurgents and the British army resulted in the defeat of United Irishmen with heavy losses. Daniel O'Connell held a 'Monster Meeting' at Tara on 15 August 1843 as part of his campaign to repeal the Act of Union between Ireland and Britain. It was reported that some 800,000 people attended the meeting (Fig. 8).


Fig. 8   Drawing of O'Connell's meeting on the Hill of Tara in 1843 (© Illustrated London News Ltd/Mary Evans)

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries Tara became drawn into the cultural and political movements of the period. Pádraig Pearse had planned to have the Proclamation of the Republic read out at Tara on Easter Sunday 1916 but circumstances around the countermanding of the Rising meant that the Dundalk Volunteers, who had been assigned that task, were unable to carry out his wish.

2.4   Architecture

2.4.1 The Church and Graveyard

While early legend suggests that St Patrick came to Tara, there is no mention of the place in his own writings and there is no archaeological or historical evidence for an early church on the hill. The earliest historical references to a church here date to the twelfth century. It is possible that Tara had such strong pre-Christian associations that the Church sought to move ceremonies away from the hill to other sites such as Tailtiu (Teltown). There is evidence for early Christian missionaries being active in this region, perhaps travelling the course of the River Boyne, a major communication route since prehistory. The place name Dunshaughlin – 'Domhnach Sechnaill' ('the church of Secundinus') – commemorates Secundinus, a missionary who was reputedly one of St Patrick's companions. As with other supposed companions, Secundinus is likely to have pursued a mission from Britain or Gaul independent of St Patrick.

The existing St Patrick's Church (Pl. 14) replaced a late medieval fortified church, the foundations of which lie to the south (Pl. 15). The remains of a tower are visible as a rectangular, grass-covered area defined by an earthen bank with a scarp at the east where a large block of fallen masonry lies. A church is mentioned in a twelfth-century charter of Ralph de Repenteni, and confirmed to the Knights Hospitallers in 1212, and was listed in the ecclesiastical taxation (1302–06) of Pope Nicholas IV. It is depicted in a print of 1792 by Daniel Grose (Fig. 9), showing a tower with a chancel and nave to the east and grave markers. A decorated three-light window, probably the east window of the medieval church, is incorporated in the west wall of the existing church tower. The south-western quadrant of the historic graveyard incorporates part of the Rath of the Synods. Also in the graveyard are two standing stones with a Sheela-na-gig represented on the taller stone of the pair.

Pl. 14 St Patrick's Church Tara

Pl. 15 St Patrick's Church with grassed-over foundation remains of the medieval church in the foreground

Fig. 9 Drawing of the medieval church at Tara by Daniel Grose, 1792 (image courtesy of the National Library of Ireland)

The church building was constructed in 1822 with a grant from the Board of First Fruits and consists of a simple barn-style nave with a square tower. The interior is modest, naturally lit from arched headed windows to the south elevation and a decorative light to the east end. Externally, arch headed openings are expressed as 'blind windows' to the north elevation but are not articulated internally. A number of earlier carved stones and memorials have been placed on display within the church and a decorative stone window has been embedded in the square tower of the present church. The interior features exposed trusses, simple pine furniture and a tiled dais forming the chancel, which is dominated by a fine stained-glass window by the Irish artist Evie Hone (1894–1955) (Pl. 16). An elaborate memorial in the church commemorates Sir Robert Dillon, Chief Justice of the Kingdom of Ireland under Elizabeth I, and his wife Janet Barnewall, both of whose families were important landowners in north Dublin and County Meath.

The church now operates as a seasonal Visitor Centre.

Pl. 16 The Evie Hone window in St Patrick's Church.

2.5   Natural Heritage

The Hill of Tara is located in an intensively farmed wider landscape and there is evidence of cultivation on the hill from at least the eighteenth century, and potentially from the medieval period. The underlying bedrock is limestone and the soils on the summit of the hill are generally shallow to deep, well-drained, brown earth soils and grey-brown podzolic with grey-brown podzolics on the lower slopes.

The site is grazed by sheep through a lease agreement. While the grasslands are relatively species poor, the areas of woodland, hedgerow and springs within the site are important biodiversity areas, especially in the context of the surrounding landscape. Overall, the biodiversity on the Hill of Tara is determined to be of moderate value. Opportunities exist to improve the overall biodiversity value of the site alongside the ongoing conservation of its archaeology.

2.5.1   Habitats

The main habitats present at Tara are grassland, woodland, hedgerows and springs, as well as some buildings which provide habitat for birds, bats and other organisms.

Grassland is the most dominant habitat in terms of area, and it is currently of low to moderate biodiversity value. Being grazed and regularly fertilised in accordance with approved grassland management practices, it can be classified as neutral grassland (GS1) with perennial rye grass (commonly planted into re-seeded agricultural fields) being the most common component. Other grass species, such as Timothy grass and sweet vernal grass, are found in the less intensively managed areas at the north. In terms of future management, a change in the grazing and nutrient management regimes to enhance plant, floral and invertebrate diversity will be considered.

The woodlands and hedgerows at Tara provide important habitats for wildlife (Pl. 17). A small area of mixed broadleaved woodland (approximately 500m x 50m) at the north-west of the site is dominated by the non-native horse chestnut. Pedunculate oak, elm, holly, beech and ash are also present. There is little regeneration in the understorey. The woodland herb layer is fairly typical for woodland sites and includes wood sorrel, wood rush and herb robert. In terms of future management, removal of the non-native species, coupled with under planting with native trees and shrub species of local provenance to improve woodland habitat will be considered.

Pl. 17 Woodland at Tara

The Tara hedgerows act as wildlife corridors, in addition to providing food, shelter and breeding sites for birds and other species. Bats use the woodland and hedgerows for foraging and as commuting routes as they move to and from roost sites, and this has been clearly demonstrated at this site in bat surveys. The species found in the hedgerows include hawthorn, ash and elder. Some of the hedgerows are likely to be several centuries old, and while there is limited diversity of woody species, future management will explore improving biodiversity by supplementary planting and modified management of the adjacent grassland areas.

There are five freshwater springs on the Hill of Tara. These, along with the associated areas of wet grassland, add significantly to the biodiversity at the site. At the Nemnach's Well spring, there is a very small area carpeted with the moss Cratoneuron filicinum. The sediments at the spring outflow are encrusted with a mineral called tufa, which is made up of calcium carbonate. This is carried in solution in the groundwater and the mineral precipitates out to encrust onto the sediment. Although small in area, ecologically this is a habitat of note and one which future management will aim to protect.

The built habitats include St Patrick's church and historic graveyard. Brown long-eared bats have been recorded from the graveyard, as well as the treecreeper bird. The graveyard contains a number of mature beech trees and yew trees, whose bright red fleshy arils, which surround the hard toxic seed, feed birds such as mistle thrush in midwinter (Pl. 18).

Pl. 18 Trees around the historic graveyard

2.5.2   Species

Over 100 species of flowering plants and 30 species of bryophytes (mosses and relatives) have been recorded at Tara. Most are relatively common, but together they comprise a valuable collective flora. No protected plant species have been recorded.

Irish hare, stoat, hedgehog and badger, all protected species, have been recorded. In addition, fox, rabbit and field mice have been noted. Bat survey work undertaken in August 2018 confirmed six species: common pipistrelle, soprano pipistrelle, Nathusius' pipistrelle, Leisler's bat, whiskered bat and brown long-eared bat (Appendix F, supporting document). These recordings illustrate the importance of the site as a foraging and roosting area for bats. A further survey during the period December 2018–January 2019 (Appendix G, supporting document) indicated that the woodland habitat is almost certainly utilised as a hibernation roost by Leisler's bats, the largest bat species found in Ireland. While relatively common here, it is an uncommon species in Europe, and the Irish population is considered important in a European context. All bats in Ireland are protected under national and EU legislation.

Over 40 bird species have been observed during the breeding season or using the habitats for foraging. These include four birds of prey: common buzzard, peregrine falcon, kestrel and sparrowhawk. Summer migrants such as spotted flycatcher, house martin, chiffchaff and blackcap use the site for breeding or foraging. Winter migrants – redwing and fieldfare – are regularly recorded. Swallows' nests have been recorded in the Mound of the Hostages. A record of interest is the yellowhammer, a species undergoing a decline in Ireland in its breeding range.

Invertebrates recorded include 13 species of butterfly, 12 species of moth, three species of bumblebee and eight species of spider. The number of pollinators, bumblebees in particular, was low at the time of survey, and habitat management practices will aim to improve the habitats for pollinators.

2.6 Land Use

The Hill of Tara is located within an agricultural landscape. The wide-open pasture that dominates the hill today was preceded by at least three phases of field systems. The earliest fields were small, delineated by earthen banks and ditches, and accessed by a network of lanes or droveways used for pasture. These were succeeded by larger fields created by removing some of the earlier boundaries; cultivation ridges indicate tillage was dominant. Cessation of tillage and return to pasture was a deliberate conservation measure taken by the State in modern times.

The creation of field systems over the centuries has impacted on the Tara monuments; some were incorporated into the structure of field boundaries such as the rampart of Ráith na Ríg. Ridge and furrow cultivation resulted in the levelling of a number of smaller monuments and impacted on the interiors of larger features. The State-owned land is currently leased for sheep grazing. While current grazing lease agreements include for no-drive zones on the State-owned lands at Tara, in the past, agricultural machinery traffic has caused damage.

2.7 A Public Amenity

Conserving and managing Tara requires a partnership between the community, visitors and those bodies responsible for its care. The Hill of Tara is much valued by the local community and visitors for its important archaeological heritage, its rich historical associations, its natural beauty and panoramic views. The State-owned lands are also much valued as a public amenity and are widely used by walkers, runners and dog-walkers (Pl. 19). There is a designated 4.5km looped walking route on the roads in the vicinity of the Hill of Tara, developed by the Irish Heart Foundation's 'Slí na Sláinte' initiative in partnership with the local community and Meath County Council.

Pl. 19 Visitors at Tara

3.1   Tara's Values

A central component of a Conservation Management Plan is an Assessment of Significance. This assessment examines the importance of a place in an international, national and local context with reference to the past and the present.

The cultural significance of Tara is multi-layered and encompasses many of the values set out in the Australia ICOMOS Burra Charter, 2013:

> 'Cultural significance means aesthetic, historic, scientific, social or spiritual value for past, present or future generations. Cultural significance is embodied in the place itself, its fabric, setting, use, associations, meanings, records, related places and related objects'.[3]

Criteria used in assessing degrees of significance include rarity, quality, integrity, cultural/historical associations, and ability to demonstrate important international social or cultural phenomena. The values that define the cultural significance of Tara derive from its archaeology and built heritage, history, literature, mythology, folklore, its contemporary social and spiritual value, ecology and landscape setting. In addition, it has a key association with other royal sites and there are social, spiritual and economic values associated with the place.

3.1.1   Archaeological Value

Tara is a ceremonial complex of international significance known to encompass large-scale earthen monuments dating to the Neolithic, Bronze Age, Iron Age and the medieval period. The number and layout of the monuments, both upstanding and below ground, represent a ceremonial landscape in which earlier monuments were respected and embraced by the builders of later monuments. The scale of the principal visible monuments (Pl. 20), including Ráith na Ríg, Tech Cormaic, the Forrad and the Banqueting Hall, testify to the important public function of Tara for communities through the millennia. During its long history, it was used as a burial place, a religious complex, a venue for ceremonies associated with an exalted kingship and was also a battle site. The artefacts discovered at Tara, among them Neolithic and Bronze Age funerary vessels, bronze weapons and personal ornaments, iron tools, craftworking evidence and the largest assemblage of excavated Roman finds from Ireland, support the assessment of Tara as a highly significant archaeological site.

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[3]   The Burra Charter: The Australia ICOMOS Charter for Places of Cultural Significance, 2013, section 1.2.

Pl. 20 State-owned lands at Tara from east-south-east

3.1.2 Built Heritage Value

The Hill of Tara is a layered cultural landscape which has evolved over time from the continuous use of the site for religious gathering and ceremony. The juxtaposition of St Patrick's Church and historic graveyard within this archaeological complex reflects the special regard the community had for the site and the prominence of the setting. The church is a Protected Structure – RPS-MH031-118. The National Inventory of Architectural Heritage considers St Patrick's Church of Regional Importance (Reg. No. 14403101). It retains its furnishing and many interesting features and materials including the important Evie Hone stained glass in the east window and polychromatic tiles, adding artistic interest to the building. The window was commissioned in 1932 for the 1500th anniversary of the arrival of St Patrick in Ireland.

3.1.3 Historical Value

Historical sources, many of which survive, indicate that Tara was at the centre of the most important kingship in Ireland from at least the sixth century AD. The sources suggest that until the seventh century AD the title 'King of Tara' was claimed by regional rulers from across the entire island – the Laigin (dynasties inhabiting from the east coast to the Shannon), Ulaid (dynasties along the north-eastern coast), and the emerging dynasties of the Uí Néill (dynasties from the midlands and north-west) all claimed the title. The Uí Néill dynasties maintained it until the reign of Brian Ború of Munster (d. 1014). From the eleventh century on, the title 'King of Ireland' gradually replaced 'King of Tara', but the older title remained in use particularly in antiquarian historical and literary sources that maintained the traditions relating to Tara as the most prestigious site of kingship in Ireland. Echoes of this tradition continued to influence later events in Irish history, among them Daniel O'Connell's 'Monster' Repeal meeting in 1843 and Pádraig Pearse's wish to have the Proclamation of the Republic declared at Tara on Easter Sunday 1916.

3.1.4 Literary Value

The interpretation of the rich archaeological evidence and literary material places Tara among numerous sites of cultural significance across the globe that reveal an understanding of universal beliefs relating to the cosmos, kingship and religious practices. As a place regarded as an 'axis mundi' ('centre of the world'), its kings were viewed as 'kings of the world' and the ceremonies linked to this kingship included many characteristics known elsewhere. Amongst these are a marriage to the earth-mother goddess, the use of dedicated processional ceremonial routeways, and the memorialization of the landscape through ancestral burials. The Irish name 'Teamhair' itself signifies that the hill was regarded as a sacred place, set apart from the ordinary and dedicated to exceptional ceremonies.

3.1.5 Mythological Value

The enduring popularity of Tara derives in part from its prominence in Irish mythology. Tara is the focus of many Early Irish sagas which portray it as the domain of gods and goddesses, and heroic and semi-divine kings. In myth, Tara is a stage where some of the major dramas of the Irish Heroic Age were played out. Lug, the most powerful Celtic god, is the ancestor deity of Tara. Its association with the goddess Medb symbolised fertility of its land and people.

3.1.6 Folklore Value

There is a huge body of folklore relating to Tara including stories of colourful characters and strange animals that guarded the hill. There are stories of buried treasure and of curses and tales of St Patrick and his association with the first shamrock in Ireland, which it is claimed grew on the hill.

3.1.7 Contemporary, Social and Spiritual Value

As a cultural landscape of local, national, and international importance Tara speaks to our sense of place and national identity. Over millennia it has been a ritual, communal, contested and final resting place for our ancestors. With a rich tapestry of history that continues to attract significant visitor numbers from around Ireland and the world, it is a major tourism attraction in the region.

With its panoramic and pastoral setting, Tara is widely used today as a public amenity by walkers, runners and dog-walkers. Tara is a significant education and academic research resource. For other visitors it is a place of spiritual value, of solace, of escape, and a source of artistic inspiration.

3.1.8 Ecological Value

The Hill of Tara contains no designated area for natural heritage (e.g. a Natural Heritage Area or a Special Area of Conservation). The area surrounding the hill is intensively farmed and is relatively poor in biodiversity. The less intensive farming practices on the hill itself afford the site an ecological value at a local level. While the grasslands are relatively species poor, the woodlands, hedgerows and springs contain interesting and locally important suites of species. Protected mammal species have been noted at the site.

3.1.9 Landscape Value

Situated on a broad ridge of limestone bedrock, running on a north–south axis, Tara commands extensive views to the west. The summit of the hill is the highest point in the area and a focal point in the landscape. The view encompasses the entire Boyne Valley and the east midlands. The sense of elevation at Tara is increased by the surrounding panorama more so than its actual height of 155m above sea level. Undoubtedly this was a key factor in the choice of this place for ceremonial activity and its setting and amenity are significant and remain an important draw today for its many visitors. It is a key vantage point from which one can view an extensive panorama and experience an understanding of place in the wider physical landscape.

3.2 Statement of Significance

The Hill of Tara is a renowned cultural landscape of national and international significance. With a history of use spanning over 5,500 years, Tara was a place of prehistoric funerary and ritual practices as well as a ceremonial focal point for medieval kings. It was regarded as the pre-eminent royal site in Ireland and this is reflected in its exceptional status in medieval Irish literature. This unique status has endured throughout Ireland's history. Tradition records that Tara is where five ancient roadways of Ireland met. In the modern period, Tara was a focus for political assemblies and today, the combination of historical and cultural heritage significance, landscape and archaeology attracts visitors to the Hill of Tara from Ireland and across the globe.

4.1 The Purpose of Identifying Issues and Vulnerabilities

One of the key objectives of the Tara Conservation Management Plan is to ensure the place and its significance is understood and to identify any threats or issues that might undermine this significance. Such issues can range from sudden natural or human events that cause damage to monuments to long-term attrition through weathering, visitor traffic or farming. Issues can also arise from gaps in understanding a place, potential conflicts between different values, such as conservation and tourism, or a divergence between different approaches to conserving and managing the site.

4.2 Identifying Issues and Vulnerabilities

The process of identifying issues and vulnerabilities at Tara has been informed by:
- examination of records of the National Monuments Service, the Office of Public Works and Meath County Council and the Discovery Programme's Tara Research Project and other researchers
- assessment of the condition of the monuments on the hill
- information gathered from the public consultation process.

4.2.1 The Condition of the Archaeological Monuments

As part of the Tara Conservation Management Plan process, an initial assessment of the condition of archaeological monuments was undertaken by the Discovery Programme and the Office of Public Works, with input from the National Monuments Service. This report is detailed at Appendix A (supporting document).

Despite their great antiquity, the upstanding monuments at Tara are, on the whole, generally well preserved. Being primarily of earthen construction, however, they are particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, weathering and erosion. The low-profile and subsurface monuments may be at increased risk of accidental damage due to their lack of visibility. Earthen monuments are generally prone to natural degradation and subsidence over time due to a combination of their physical properties (fabric, method of construction, angle of slope, etc.) and the effects of water, wind and other environmental processes. Aside from natural weathering and deterioration, the key agents of attrition and damage to the monuments at Tara are human activities, rooting vegetation, grazing and burrowing animals. The areas that are most at risk are those where the earthen banks are steep and the visitor footfall is high. This risk increases when the ground is soft and wet.

In terms of human impacts on the monuments, the most significant interventions took place between the eighteenth and mid-twentieth centuries and relate to agricultural activity, land division, quarrying and treasure hunting. Ploughing and cultivation of the lands during this period resulted in significant attrition and, in some cases, structural damage to the monuments, as well as disturbance to subsurface archaeological deposits. Ráith Lóegaire was partially levelled and many other monuments have been significantly reduced or completely erased (Pl. 21).

The construction of field boundaries associated with agricultural activity also impacted on many of the monuments, among them Ráith na Ríg, Ráith Lóegaire, Rath of the Synods and the Banqueting Hall. The historic graveyard encroaches on the eastern side of Rath of the Synods and this monument suffered further damage through digging by the British-Israelites at the turn of the twentieth century. Quarrying at the northern end of the Banqueting Hall and western side of Ráith Lóegaire also impacted negatively on the monuments. A large pit dug into the central mound of the Northern Clóenfherta is likely the work of treasure hunters.

Pl. 21 Ráith Lóegaire

Changes in land use and weather patterns, and an increase in visitor numbers since the lands were taken into State ownership have resulted in greater incidence of physical impact and erosion (Pl. 22). The principal sources of erosion currently affecting the complex are pedestrian traffic and sports training. The impacts of these agents are increased when the gradient is steep. The long-term impact of footfall is most evident in the network of pathways that traverse the hilltop and many of the monuments. In areas where such activity is concentrated, erosion, compaction and poaching of the ground surface is apparent.

Pl. 22 A network of pedestrian tracks traverses the Hill of Tara

Rooting vegetation and burrowing animals (rabbits) are also significant issues, though mainly limited to the Clóenfherta (Pl. 23).

Pl. 23 Rooting vegetation and rabbit burrowing are damaging the Clóenfherta

The vulnerability of the upstanding remains and buried archaeology to damage from footfall, including sports training, is exacerbated when rapid changes from wet to dry conditions occur, which can result in erosion. The high footfall at the Forrad, the Banqueting Hall, the Clóenfherta and Ráith na Ríg is creating deepening tracks, exposing underlying soils and causing further deterioration around existing gaps in their banks (Pl. 24).

Pl. 24 Tracks across the monument

Some damage is being caused through intensive use of the site as a training ground – this includes individual runners and those engaged in team training – with stud marks evident across the site and on a number of monuments (Pl. 25).

Pl. 25 Damage to the sod cover on the Hill of Tara

The Lia Fáil on the summit of the Forrad has been subjected to vandalism in recent years (Pl. 26).

Pl. 26 Vandalism to the Lia Fáil

The nineteenth-century St Patrick's Church (Protected Structure – RPS-MH031-118) stands in the centre of a rectangular, walled historic graveyard defined by an inner earthen bank and an external masonry wall. It now operates as a Visitor Centre and is the starting point of the visitor experience to the Hill of Tara. The approach from the church enclosure is somewhat unsatisfactory in terms of the sequencing of the various sites and impacts on the adjoining sites and the graveyard setting in terms of the traversing of levels and graves.

The south-west quadrant of the historic graveyard incorporates part of the Rath of the Synods (Pl. 27). The foundations of the medieval parish church and tower lie south of the present church. The historic setting of the church within the earlier enclosure is significant; however, it is somewhat detracted from by the treatment of its perimeter and its overall presentation with a cement render.

Pl. 27 The historic graveyard incorporates part of the earlier monument, the Rath of the Synods

A modern path traverses the low-lying, grass-covered remains of the medieval church and tower and leads out to the hill over the denuded remains of the Rath of the Synods. The historic graveyard's setting and character is dominated by eighteenth- and nineteenth-century mausolea and gravestones. Guidelines are in place regarding use of the historic graveyard and existing graves.

St Patrick's Church was restored in the early 1990s. Whilst the church has been maintained in overall good repair and use, its use as a Visitor Centre requires greater consideration in the context of the overall site and its future educational role. A fabric assessment will be carried out to inform what conservation works are necessary. Consideration will also be given to the approach to the church. Routine maintenance will continue.

A dedicated conservation strategy to preserve and minimize the risks of deterioration of the monuments will be enacted under this plan.

4.2.2   Interpreting Tara

The cultural significance of Tara is based on its important archaeology and the extensive historical and literary sources associated with the site. While these are known and obvious to many visitors, it is a difficult landscape to interpret. Responses to the public consultation (Appendix D, supporting document) call for improved interpretation. Specifically, there were calls for interpretation panels to be located closer to each of the monuments rather than at the main entrance to the site (Pl. 28).

Pl. 28 Interpretation panels at the main site entrance

Office of Public Works guides operate from the church between mid-May and mid-September and some unregulated private guiding services also operate. A video is shown to visitors at the church which effectively acts as a seasonal Visitor Centre. Directions to the church are not clear and the entrance to the church is somewhat unwelcoming. Changes to the main entrance gates were primarily undertaken to improve universal access and large information boards tell the story of the site at this the main access point. The interpretation boards were placed at this point to protect the uncluttered character of the hill; however, the amount of information is considerable and it is observed that visitors tend not to read it all before moving on to the site. On the hill itself, the only markers are the 1960s signs marking some of the principal monuments with their Irish and English names and there is no individual interpretation afforded (Pl. 29).

Pl.29 Marker sign to "Ráth na Ríogh"

An Interpretation Plan for the Hill of Tara will be enacted under this plan to address issues identified and explore opportunities to preserve and enhance cultural heritage with advanced digital technologies.

4.2.3   Accessing Tara

There is unrestricted year-round access to the State-owned lands at the Hill of Tara and there are multiple access points to the 100 acre site from the surrounding road network.

Office of Public Works figures indicate there were over 100,000 visitors in the first half of 2021. Approximately half of those who visit do so on a regular basis; the primary aim of such visits is not to see the monuments but to enjoy a walk in a beautiful location. Therefore, for many the hill functions much like an urban park. The infrastructure is not sufficiently robust to cope with the growth in the number of visitors to Tara. The hill is accessed primarily by cars or coaches which must negotiate narrow country roads, many of which do not have the capacity to cope with heavy vehicular usage. The number of vehicles on these roads causes safety issues for pedestrians and cyclists. At the village of Tara there are two car parks – one small public carpark at the main entrance to the site in the ownership of Meath County Council and one larger privately owned car park (Pl. 30). Many cars and coaches park along roadsides causing inconvenience to those who live on approaches to the hill and putting the road network under considerable pressure.

Pl. 30 Carpark infrastructure on the Hill of Tara

4.2.4   Difficulties Encountered by Visitors

Issues for visitors relate to both capacity and specific concerns arising from existing infrastructure. There is a lack of capacity at Tara, a problem that is becoming more acute due to the increasing number of visitors. Upon arrival at the site, visitors often find the main access point crowded. In addition, around the time of the summer solstice, the presence and behaviour of some unauthorised campers near the entrance has been intimidating to visitors and staff on site (Pl. 31). There is limited access for people with restricted mobility and other disabilities. The absence of any directional signage to navigate the site is disconcerting for some visitors, and the current pathways and grassland management can cause difficulties for some. A number of dog owners let their dogs off the leash, which causes fouling and is a concern for other visitors, especially those with small children.

Pl. 31 NO CAMPING sign at the entrance to the Hill of Tara

4.2.5   On-site Management

There is uncontrolled access to the site from a number of locations. This creates problems relating to monitoring damage to the monuments, anti-social behaviour and inappropriate use of the site including for sports team training, illegal camping and the lighting of campfires.

5.1   Introduction

This plan allows us to better understand the Hill of Tara, assess its significance, share expertise, build capacity, raise awareness of Tara and help identify issues that threaten its significance. The plan is a roadmap towards a sequence of strategic actions that will aim to create an integrated and inclusive implementation process. In line with processes embedded within the Burra Charter, it will underpin the development of policies and future actions and provide direction and consensus of approach to the long-term management of this cultural landscape. These objectives, policies and actions are based on meeting key goals relating to conservation and interpretation, infrastructure and management, access and enjoyment.

5.2   Conservation Management Plan Principles and Policies

The conservation and management of Tara is informed by an international set of principles expressed in the Burra Charter and three overarching principles specific to Tara. Five policies regarding the management of Tara have also been identified.

Principle 1	The heritage of the Hill of Tara is a valuable, non-renewable, shared resource.
Principle 2	Management of the State-owned lands at Tara should be informed by all the knowledge, skills and disciplines that can contribute to its care and preservation in accordance with current best practice.
Principle 3	Greater understanding of Tara's significance will be advanced by further investigations and research.

Table 5 Conservation Management Plan Principles

Policy 1	To implement a planned system of conservation and maintenance in accordance with international best practice to protect the site's heritage and significance and ensure that the protection of the setting and amenity of the site is central to all planning for and management of the State-owned lands at Tara
Policy 2	To disseminate information and research about the site to the public
Policy 3	To facilitate the continued use of the site as an educational and research resource
Policy 4	To continue to facilitate sustainable public access and provide a visitor experience of the highest quality befitting the significance of the site, balancing that with the imperative to protect the heritage of the site
Policy 5	To embed a permanent management structure to oversee implementation of the Tara Conservation Management Plan

Table 6 Conservation Management Plan Policies

5.3   Objectives and Actions

The objectives and actions proposed in this plan for the State-owned lands at Tara reflect the vision and priorities of the Steering Group, informed by comments and views expressed through the consultation process. An Action Programme for the implementation of actions and delivery of objectives is set out in tabular form as Appendix I.

Objective 1: to protect and conserve the heritage of the State-owned lands on the Hill of Tara and maintain its cultural significance, integrity and authenticity, including its amenity and setting

Actions:

O1.A1   Develop a grassland management strategy for the State-owned lands on the Hill of Tara.

O1.A2   Manage the site to enhance and improve its biodiversity value.

O1.A3   Manage the historic graveyard and works to existing plots and their impact on the setting of the graveyard.

O1.A4   Carry out conservation works on St Patrick's Church (Visitor Centre).

O1.A5   Develop a framework for monitoring the impacts of climate change on the site.

O1.A6   Undertake a structured survey and assessment programme to monitor impact on the site of visitors and visitor behaviour, animals and weather events and carry out approved mitigation as required, including repair works to support the ongoing conservation of the site.

O1.A7   Ensure recognition of this management plan in Meath County Development Plans.

Objective 2: to promote awareness and understanding of the Hill of Tara and its significance

Actions:

O2.A1 Establish a Tara Research Framework to encourage involvement from Research Performing Organisations and other interested parties.

O2.A2 Liaise with Fáilte Ireland and other relevant parties to ensure high-quality information and off-site interpretation for visitors is provided where appropriate.

O2.A3 Disseminate information on the heritage of the site through an educational outreach programme.

O2.A4 Further develop an educational outreach programme linking to local community and schools and other educational institutions, to raise awareness of the significance of the heritage – built and natural – of the site.

O2.A5 Support continued community involvement and support and incentivise local and creative initiatives to engage with the site, including Citizen Science projects.

Objective 3: to manage and enhance the visitor experience on the Hill of Tara

Actions:

O3.A1 Implement measures to facilitate sustainable access for arrival to site respecting its setting, significance and environs, having regard to traffic and parking issues, public transport, cycling and pedestrians etc.

O3.A2 Develop an on-site Site Interpretation Plan.

O3.A3 Develop a Visitor Navigation Plan and measures to promote sustainable movement of visitors within the site that reduce impact on the heritage of the site.

O3.A4 Promote positive behaviour of visitors to the site including by raising awareness of the significance and vulnerability of the heritage.

O3.A5 Continue to engage with relevant stakeholders around visitor infrastructure at the site.

Objective 4: to implement the Actions of the Tara Conservation Management Plan

Actions:

O4.A1 Continue oversight of implementation of the Conservation Management Plan by the Tara Implementation Group.

O4.A2 Strengthen engagement with the local community.

O4.A3 Disseminate appropriate management information to wider public.

O4.A4 Establish a site management archive with full records of conservation and operational interventions.

O4.A5 Secure resources to implement the Tara Conservation Management Plan.

O4.A6 Mid-term review and update of the Tara Conservation Management Plan.

5.4　Implementation

To oversee and coordinate delivery of actions, an Implementation Group will be established. Comprising representatives from those bodies who sat on the Steering Group, the Implementation Group will meet twice yearly to assess the continued relevance of policies and to chart progress on implementing actions and achieving objectives. The plan is intended to span 10 years and will be reviewed after five years.

The management plan is a dynamic document that will change as the management priorities shift, as conditions on site change and as other factors come into play. Regular monitoring of delivery of the Actions by the Implementation Group, together with the objectives and actions identified in the plan and annual reporting, will ensure the sustainability of Tara for present and future generations.

It is recognised that, with varying management priorities and other factors stemming from the complexity of the property, the relevance of the management plan may change over time. As such, the effectiveness of the implementation of the plan will need to be reviewed by:

- extensive reassessment of the plan after five years;
- monitoring the progress of actions in the Action Programme;
- assessment of the effectiveness of each action in achieving its objectives.

As these steps are taken, relevant sections of the plan may need to be updated accordingly and reissued.

Through continued monitoring by the Implementation Group and participation by other stakeholders, the protection of the cultural and natural heritage of Tara can be enhanced and a sense of pride can be encouraged, thus ensuring the preservation of the unique qualities of this important site.

Objective 1: to protect and conserve the heritage of the State-owned lands on the Hill of Tara and maintain its cultural significance, integrity and authenticity, including its amenity and setting

	Action	Policy	Lead	Stakeholders	Indicators	Target Date
O1.A1	Develop a grassland management strategy for the State-owned lands on the Hill of Tara.	P1	Office of Public Works (OPW), Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (DHLGH)	Discovery Programme (DP), Teagasc (T)	1. Grassland management strategy developed	1. Q3 2023
O1.A2	Manage the site to enhance and improve its biodiversity value.	P1	DHLGH, OPW	National Biodiversity Data Centre	1. Biodiversity Management Plan developed 2. Biodiversity Management Plan implemented 3. Relevant All Ireland Pollinator Plan actions implemented 4. Interdisciplinary study on hedgerows and boundaries developed	1. Within 1 year of plan's publication 2. Ongoing 3. Within 1 year of plan's publication 4. Within 2 years of plan's publication
O1.A3	Manage the historic graveyard and works to existing plots and their impact on the setting of the graveyard.	P1	Meath County Council (MCC), DHLGH, OPW		1. Burials conducted in accordance with guidelines 2. Works to existing graves carried out in accordance with guidelines	1. Ongoing 2. Ongoing

Objective 1: to protect and conserve the heritage of the State-owned lands on the Hill of Tara and maintain its cultural significance, integrity and authenticity, including its amenity and setting *cont'd*

	Action	Policy	Lead	Stakeholders	Indicators	Target Date
O1.A4	Carry out conservation works on St Patrick's Church (Visitor Centre).	P1, P3	OPW	DHLGH, Church of Ireland through the Representative Church Body, MCC	1. Fabric assessment prepared 2. Planning Authority approval in place 3. Conservation works carried out	1. Within 1 year of plan's publication 2. As required 3. Within 3 years of plan's publication
O1.A5	Develop a framework for monitoring the impacts of climate change on the site.	P1	OPW, DHLGH	DP	1. Framework developed and published online	1. Within 2 years of plan's publication
O1.A6	Undertake a structured survey and assessment programme to monitor impact on the site of visitors and visitor behaviour, animals and weather events and carry out approved mitigation as required, including repair works to support the ongoing conservation of the site.	P1	OPW, DHLGH	DP	1. Report of assessment survey and seasonal monitoring produced, including damage reports 2. NMS drone surveys / 3D modelling carried out 3. Repair/conservation preventative measures carried out under Ministerial Consent, underpinned by relevant scientific data and analyses	1. Annually 2. As required 3. As required
O1.A7	Ensure recognition of this management plan in Meath's County Development Plans.	P1	MCC	DHLGH, OPW	1. Objectives within the CMP reflected within the Meath CDP	Ongoing

Objective 2: to promote awareness and understanding of the Hill of Tara and its significance

	Action	Policy	Lead	Stakeholders	Indicators	Target Date
O2.A1	Establish a Tara Research Framework to encourage involvement from Research Performing Organisations and other interested parties.	P2, P3, P4	DHLGH, OPW	Heritage Council (HC), DP, Higher Education Institutes (HEI)	1. Establish an Expert Advisory Committee to guide research and publication 2. Tara Research Framework developed, including dissemination programme 3. Research supported and results disseminated	1. Within 1 year of plan's publication 2. Within 2 years of plan's publication 3. Ongoing
O2.A2	Liaise with Fáilte Ireland and other relevant parties to ensure high-quality information and off-site interpretation for visitors is provided where appropriate.	P2, P3, P4	OPW, DHLGH	DP, Boyne Valley Tourism, Fáilte Ireland (FI)	1. Appropriate information provided and developed 2. Options for improvements to information/ interpretation delivery, including online, multi-language, etc., assessed periodically	All ongoing
O2.A3	Disseminate information on the heritage of the site through an educational outreach programme.	P2, P3, P4	OPW, MCC	DHLGH, DP	1. Develop and deliver an annual programme of public educational events	1. Annually
O2.A4	Further develop an educational outreach programme linking to local community and schools and other educational institutions, to raise awareness of the significance of the heritage – built and natural – of the site.	P2, P3, P4	OPW, DHLGH, MCC, HC	DP, Public	1. Education outreach programme developed 2. School visit schemes developed	1. Within 2 years of plan's publication 2. Within 2 years of plan's publication
O2.A5	Support continued community involvement and support and incentivise local and creative initiatives to engage with the site, including Citizen Science projects.	P2, P3, P4	DHLGH, HC, OPW, MCC	DP, Public	1. Relevant projects developed 2. Relevant external stakeholders consulted on how best to achieve aims	1. Within 2 years of plan's publication 2. Ongoing

Objective 3: to manage and enhance the visitor experience on the Hill of Tara

	Action	Policy	Lead	Stakeholders	Indicators	Target Date
O3.A1	Implement measures to facilitate sustainable access for arrival to site respecting its setting, significance and environs, having regard to traffic and parking issues, public transport, cycling and pedestrians etc.	P3, P4	MCC	OPW, DHLGH	1. Sustainable Access Plan, including a traffic management review, developed to assess and manage visitor access to (not within) the site 2. Measures implemented	1. Within 2 years of plan's publication 2. Ongoing
O3.A2	Develop an on-site Site Interpretation Plan.	P1, P2, P3, P4	OPW, DHLGH	DP	1. Site Interpretation Plan developed and made available publicly	1. Within 2 years of plan's publication
O3.A3	Develop a Visitor Navigation Plan and measures to promote sustainable movement of visitors within the site that reduce impact on the heritage of the site.	P1, P3, P4	OPW, DHLGH	DP	1. Visitor Navigation Plan developed	1. Within 2 years of plan's publication
O3.A4	Promote positive behaviour of visitors to the site including by raising awareness of the significance and vulnerability of the heritage.	P1, P2, P3, P4	OPW, DHLGH, MCC	MCC, Public	1. Signage measures further developed to promote care of monuments 2. Specific measures implemented to address matter of inappropriate use for sports and physical training causing damage to the site 3. Bye-laws put in place 4. Appoint a suitably qualified company to undertake a review of the site from a protection/security perspective to provide the basis for a long-term strategy to address visitor behaviours 5. Specific measures implemented to discourage unauthorised gathering and camping at site entrance and on State-owned Lands at any time of year	1. Q3 2023 2. Ongoing 3. From Q2 2023 4. Within 2 years of plan's publication 5. Ongoing

Objective 3: to manage and enhance the visitor experience on the Hill of Tara *cont'd*

	Action	Policy	Lead	Stakeholders	Indicators	Target Date
O3. A5	Continue to engage with relevant stakeholders around visitor infrastructure at the site.	P1, P3, P4	OPW, MCC, DHLGH	Relevant landowners	1. Regular engagement with local stakeholders	1. Ongoing

Objective 4: to implement the Actions of the Tara Conservation Management Plan

	Action	Policy	Lead	Stakeholders	Indicators	Target Date
O4.A1	Continue oversight of implementation of the Conservation Management Plan by the Tara Implementation Group.	P1, P5	DHLGH, OPW, MCC	HC, DP	1. Implementation Group meetings held twice a year 2. Elected member representation on Implementation Group 3. Annual Action Delivery Plan prepared and made available	1. Twice a year 2. Ongoing 3. Annually
O4.A2	Strengthen engagement with the local community.	P1, P2, P4, P5	DHLGH, OPW, MCC, HC, DP	Public	1. Community Seminar held annually	1. Annually
O4.A3	Disseminate appropriate management information to wider public.	P1, P2, P4, P5	DHLGH, OPW	MCC, DP, HC, Public	1. Appropriate information relevant to management and significance of the site shared publicly	1. Ongoing
O4.A4	Establish a site management archive with full records of conservation and operational interventions.	P1, P5	OPW	DHLGH	1. Archive established and updated regularly	1. Ongoing
O4.A5	Secure resources to implement the Tara Conservation Management Plan.	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5	OPW, DHLGH	MCC	1. Resources secured 2. Plan actions implemented	1. As required 2. Annually and as required
O4.A6	Mid-term review and update of the Tara Conservation Management Plan.	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5	DHLGH, OPW	MCC, HC, DP	1. Conservation Management Plan reviewed every five years	1. Five years from Plan's publication

Appendix II:
Contacts

Comments or queries about this management plan should be addressed to:

National Monuments Service,
Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage,
Custom House, Dublin 1, D01 W6X0
Ireland
Tel: + 353 (0)1 888 2000

Useful Websites

Heritage Ireland (OPW)
https://heritageireland.ie

Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage
https://www.gov.ie/en/organisation/department-of-housing-local-government-and-heritage/

Office of Public Works cid:7A703A5B-6694-4E22-B718-CB0C8798D2AC
www.opw.ie

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