

**N6 Kinnegad to Kilbeggan Dual Carriageway:  
Archaeological Excavation**

**FINAL REPORT**  
**Ministerial Direction: A001/020**  
**Registration No.: E2707**

**Site: Ardan 3, Ardan Townland  
Co. Westmeath**

**Site Director:** G Fegan  
**Job No.:** 1112-04  
**Client:** Westmeath County Council  
**Date:** July 2009

**Valerie J. Keeley Ltd**

**transport21**  
progress in motion





## SUMMARY

This report describes the results of a programme of archaeological excavation carried out by Grace Fegan on behalf of Valerie J. Keeley Ltd at Ardan 3, Co. Westmeath. For recording purposes, this excavation was allocated the number A001/020 and the work number E2707, as part of the proposed N6 Kinnegad to Kilbeggan Dual Carriageway. The site was located at NGR 237021 234423. The purpose of the excavation contract was to resolve all archaeological sites identified as a result of archaeological test trenching carried out by Conor McDermot of Irish Archaeological Wetland Unit under licence (ref.: 04E0879) on behalf of C.R.D.S Ltd. (O'Connor *et al* 2004).

This archaeological excavation was conducted by Valerie J. Keeley Ltd., on behalf of Westmeath County Council, in accordance with the ministerial direction A001 by the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and local Government and in consultation with the National Museum of Ireland, and was funded through the National Roads Authority, in advance of the new N6 Kinnegad to Kilbeggan. This project is funded by the Irish Government under the National Development Plan (NDP) 2007-2013 and part financed by the European Union.

## **CONTENTS**

<b>SUMMARY</b>	<b>i</b>
<b>LIST OF PLATES</b>	<b>ii</b>
<b>LIST OF FIGURES</b>	<b>ii</b>
<b>1.0 INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2.0 DESCRIPTION OF DEVELOPMENT</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>3.0 LOCATION</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>4.0 RECEIVING ENVIRONMENT</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>5.0 METHODOLOGY</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>6.0 STRATIGRAPHIC REPORT</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>7.0 ARCHAEOLOGICAL DISCUSSION</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>8.0 BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>APPENDIX A: CONTEXT REGISTER</b>	
<b>PROPOSAL FOR POST EXCAVATION AND ARCHIVING</b>	
<b>PLATES</b>	
<b>FIGURES</b>	

## LIST OF PLATES

- Plate 1:** Overview of Site, pre-excavation. Looking south.  
**Plate 2:** West-facing baulk section showing buried stratigraphy. Looking East  
**Plate 3:** Overview of site, post-excavation. Looking North.

## LIST OF FIGURES

- Figure 1:** Discovery series map and route location  
**Figure 2:** OS Base map showing site and route location

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

The contract excavation of this archaeological site was conducted by Valerie J. Keeley Ltd, Brehon House, Kilkenny Rd, Castlecomer Co. Kilkenny following the completion of archaeological assessment by C.R.D.S. Ltd., excavation licence No.s 04E0879, 04E1090-1105, 04R106-108. (O'Connor *et al* 2004) for Contract 2 (Tyrrellspass to Kilbeggan) of the N6 Kinnegad to Athlone Dual Carriageway. The excavation was carried out from February 14<sup>th</sup> to February 18<sup>th</sup> 2005. The work was intended to preserve, by record archaeological deposits or structures, which could not be preserved *in situ* during the construction of this new road.

## 2.0 DESCRIPTION OF DEVELOPMENT

### *Kinnegad to Kilbeggan Dual Carriageway*

The scheme is part of the Dublin to Galway National Primary Route and covers the section of the improved N6 between the existing Athlone Relief Road to the proposed M4 at Kinnegad. The route in total is 57.5km long and will be to standard dual carriageway construction. The location of the route is predominantly to the south of the existing N6 and there will be access to the local road network through the seven grade separated junctions located at Athlone, Farnagh, Moate, Kilbeggan, Tyrrellspass, Rochfortbridge and Kinnegad. In addition to the mainline dual carriageway there is a further 0.3km of standard dual carriageway to the South of the Athlone Interchange to connect the existing N6 and 1.2km to the south of Kilbeggan Interchange to connect to the existing N52. There will be 34 of the existing public roads to be crossed by the proposed development. Two are to be severed, three diverted and the remainder bridged. The route is off line largely crossing the low-lying plains south of the existing N6.

Contract 2, under which this excavation falls covered the section of the proposed N6 Kinnegad to Kilbeggan Dual Carriageway together with associated country roads between the county road to Garranes to the east of Tyrrellspass and the N52 south of Kilbeggan. The N52 improvements to the east of Tyrrellspass and to the south of Kilbeggan are also included (Fig. 1).

### 3.0 LOCATION

The site is situated in the townland of Ardan approximately 4km southeast of Kilbeggan. Ardan is located in the parish of Rahugh in the barony of Moycashel. The name Ardan is translated as “height” which is an indicator to the surrounding environs. The townland is comprised mostly of raised areas with its highest point reaching 115m. The route of the proposed dual carriageway passes through the north-western corner of the townland. The cutting was within a quite sheltered area as a result of surrounding glacial drumlins to the east and northeast. A substantial esker ridge is situated to the west with a stream dividing this ridge from the cutting. The surrounding area consisted mostly of rough arable/pasture land with also an extensive low-lying area of peat directly under the topsoil. The cutting was located northeast of Sites E2709 (A001/018) and E3320 (A001/019). The site was located at Chainage 32955 and within the field No. 252 (Fig. 2).

### 4.0 RECEIVING ENVIRONMENT

Ardan is located in the parish of Rahugh in the barony of Moycashel. The barony of Moycashel roughly corresponds to the lands formerly controlled by the powerful Gaelic family of the Mageoghegans. It was known originally as Kinaleagh or Cineal Fhiachach meaning “race of Fiacha”. The name Ardan is translated as “height” which is an indicator to the surrounding environs. The townland is comprised mostly of raised areas with its highest point reaching 115m. On this highest point is located a barrow (WM369:030). A second recorded monument, a ringfort (WM38:030) is also located on the southern boundary between Ardan and Grange. The parish of Rahugh is known in Irish as *Rath Aodh* named after bishop Aodh mac Bric who founded a monastery at Rahugh in the sixth century. It is referred to as *Raith Aodha mic Bric* in the annals of the Four Masters and also as *Rath Hugh mc Brick* in the annals of Clonmacnoise. Later seventeenth century records makes mention of it as “Rathey”, “Rathee” and “Rathue”. A royal assembly was held at Rahugh in 859AD however there are no extant remains of the monastery at Rahugh only the site at once it stood (WM38:041). Other monuments within the parish include a holy well, a cross slab, a cemetery site, a standing stone, six ringforts, a motte at Atticonner and a castle at Kiltober. There are also three earthworks and four barrows recorded in the parish.

## 5.0 METHODOLOGY

Initially, an area of excavation was opened measuring 20m in length, east-west, and 8m in width, north-south. Topsoil over the site was removed by mechanical excavator with a flat edged bucket over an area of up to 10m either side of the identified extent of the archaeological features as outlined in the testing report and identified by the Project Archaeologist. Upon location all archaeological materials were cleaned and excavated by hand using methods appropriate to their composition, nature and date. All potential archaeological contexts were photographed and planned (in relation to the site grid) prior to excavation where appropriate. Excavation of contexts was carried out by sectioning, using methods appropriate to their composition and nature. Well-defined pits and postholes were to be half sectioned and recorded and then fully excavated. Sections were excavated through any linear features to obtain profiles and to expose the stratigraphic sequence.

The composition, stratigraphic position and interpretation of all contexts were recorded on a context sheet prior to its excavation. Contexts were sampled for palaeobotanical material, radiocarbon dating, micromorphology, petrology and wood identification where appropriate. All sections and cut features were photographed and drawn. The position of all finds and samples were recorded in three dimensions (if practicable) in relation to the site grid.

The excavation team consisted of one director, one supervisor and three assistants.

## 6.0 STRATIGRAPHIC REPORT

The site was initially recorded during centreline testing (04E0879 IAWU) and Site specific Testing (04E1101 CRDS) as a substantial burnt mound (CRDS: F16). Once the cutting had been opened and cleaned by hand the features uncovered ranged significantly in shape and extent (from .25m in diameter to 1.25m in diameter) but none were of any considerable depth (maximum depth of .25m). Throughout all of these features the same phasing of fills could be seen. The basal fill of the features comprised of a spongy, dark brown peaty material with inclusions of small pieces of waterlogged wood (c004/c006) and an average depth of 0.10m. Above this was a deposit of dark greyish black clayey silt with frequent small fragments of fire cracked stone and charcoal (c003/c008/c009) and an average depth of 0.05m. The uppermost



deposit was comprised of a soft brown clayish silt of uneven thickness, with inclusions of sand and gravel (c002) and an average depth of 0.10m.

It is most likely that these deposits were the result of natural peat filled hollows and the landowner's activity of land clearance and hedgerow burning. The western and southern areas of the cutting were susceptible to the presence of a significant amount of ground water.

Some of the features have been recorded as having cuts, all of which are extremely uneven in size and shape. This site is most likely to represent field clearance from an adjacent boggy area. The 'cuts' could well be tree or root boles which were all created at the same time, and which were filled over three identical episodes. The first episode represents the natural filling of the base of these voids by ground water and vegetation, resulting in the peaty deposit. Next a deposit of burnt material was spread over the site, perhaps from a burnt mound located outside the limit of excavation. This movement of the burnt material may well have happened in relatively recent times. The final deposit over the site seems to be buried topsoil.

## **7.0 ARCHAEOLOGICAL DISCUSSION**

No features of archaeological significance were recorded within the cutting of Ardan 3. No environmental or dating samples were obtained, as this was deemed unnecessary as the features that were recorded indicated natural filled hollows of peat with occasional burning. As mentioned in the testing report the landowner stated that burning of vegetation had taken place in the centre of the field and along the hedgerows in recent times. The features recorded can be identified as the eradication of these hedgerows and the occurrence of natural peat filled hollows.

The site of Ardan 3 is regarded as having been archaeologically resolved. This report constitutes both the preliminary and final report for the site.

## 8.0 REFERENCES

Bradley, J., 1987, *Urban Archaeological Survey, Co. Westmeath*. Archaeological Survey of Ireland.

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Walsh, P. (1915) *The Placenames of Westmeath Part 1*. Dollard Ltd. Dublin.

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## APPENDIX A: CONTEXT REGISTER

<b>Context No.</b>	<b>Cut/Fill/Deposit</b>	<b>Description</b>
1	Topsoil	Topsoil
2	Deposit	soft brown clayish silt of uneven thickness, with inclusions of sand and gravel
3	Fill	the secondary fill of pit cut c005
4	Fill	spongy but firm dark reddish brown peaty clayey silt with frequent small pieces of waterlogged wood, this deposit lies within the base of the majority of the features on the site
5	Cut	natural hollow or tree bole
6	Fill	spongy but firm dark brownish grey peaty clayey silt with frequent small pieces of waterlogged wood
7	Cut	natural hollow or tree bole
8	Deposit	loose, dark brown clayey silt with some small stones and charcoal layer of burnt spread on top of brown organic soil
9	Deposit	burnt spread layer on top of brown organic soil
10	Deposit	Loose mid greyish black clayey silt with frequent degraded/burnt sandstone and moderate amounts of charcoal, removed in the topsoil stripping this deposit was recorded in the southern baulk.
11	Deposit	buried topsoil
12	Fill	firm mid greyish brown clayey silt with a moderate amount of small stones or grit
13	Cut	natural hollow or tree bole

## **PROPOSAL FOR POST EXCAVATION AND ARCHIVING**

No further archaeological analysis is recommended or required for this site.

## PLATES





**Plate 1:** Overview of Site, pre-excavation. Looking south.



**Plate 2:** West-facing baulk section showing buried stratigraphy. Looking East

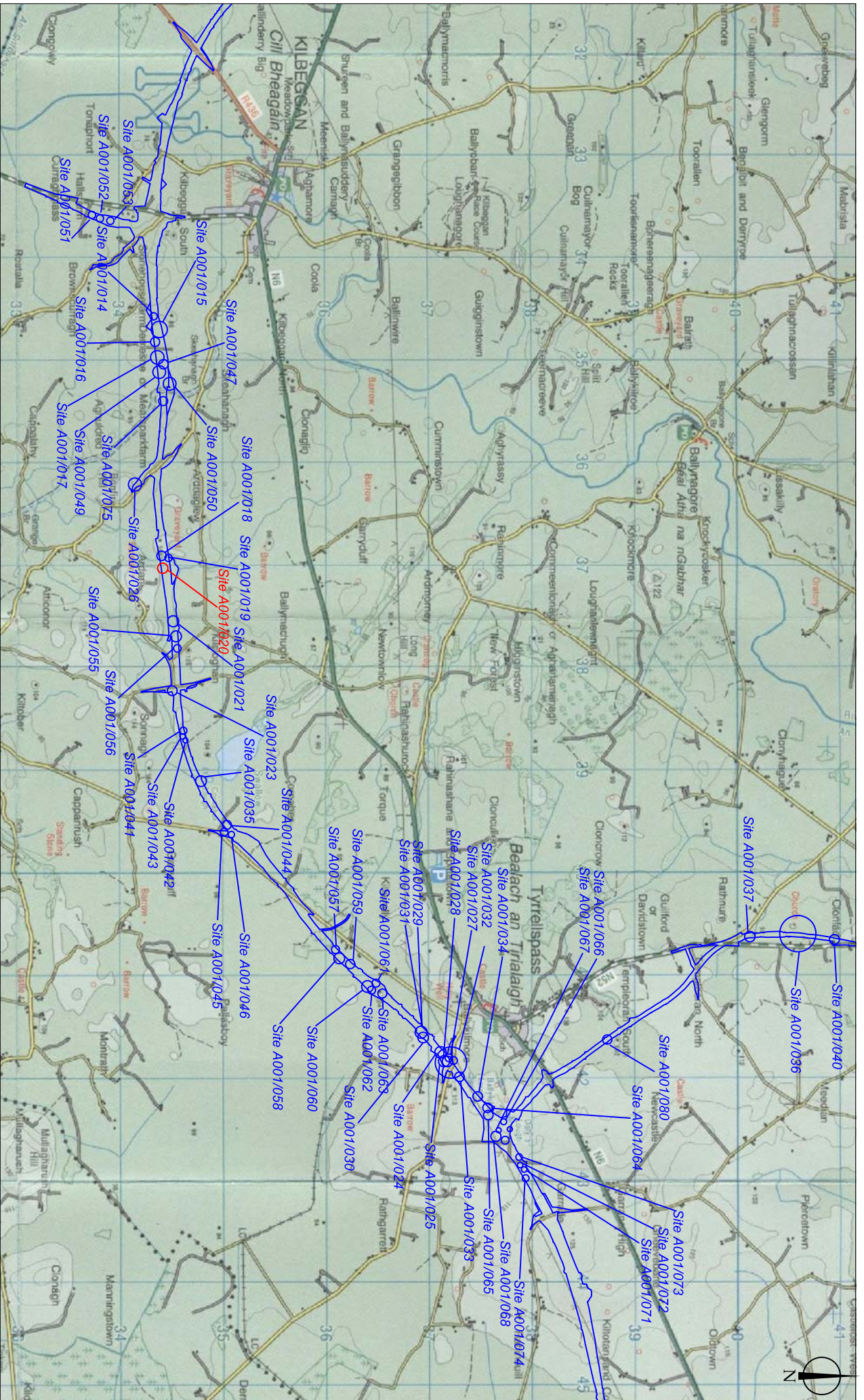


**Plate 3:** Overview of site, post-excavation. Looking North.



## FIGURES





Title  
E2707 A001/020 Location map

Notes

Job/Exc No.  
1112-04-400

Completed by  
A.Burke

CAD reference  
A001/020 Figure 1

Client  
Westmeath County Council

Date  
23 July 07

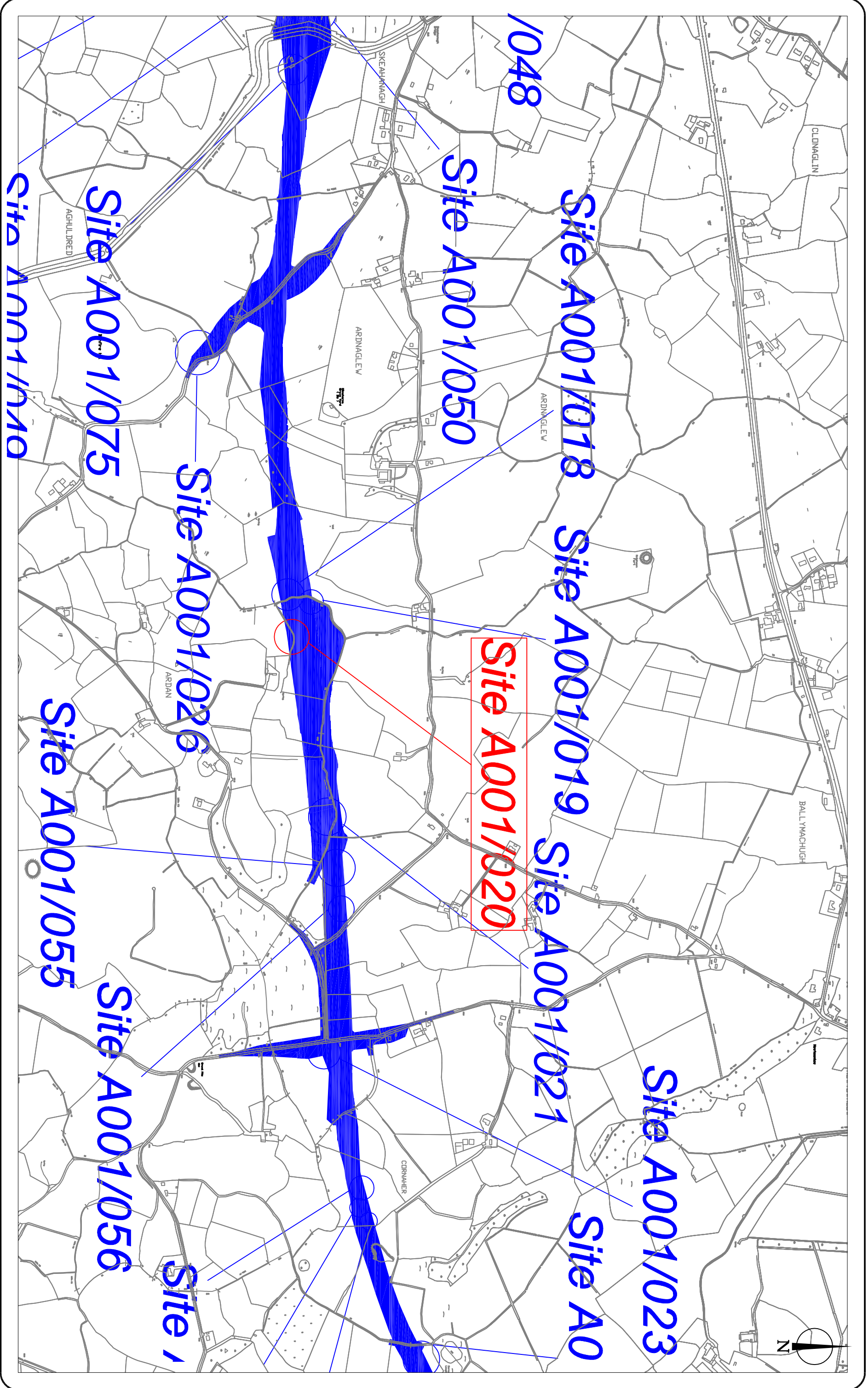
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Drawing No.  
Figure 1

Project  
N6 Kinnegad-Kilbeggan



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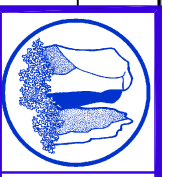
**Title**  
 E2707 A001/020 OS base map showing site and route location

**Notes**

<b>Job/Exc. No.</b> 1112-04-400	<b>Compiled by</b> A. Burke	<b>CAD reference</b> A001/020 Figure 2
<b>Date</b> 25 July 07	<b>Scale</b> 1:10000	<b>Drawing No.</b> Figure 2

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