

**ST. JOSEPH'S PLACE, GARBALLY DEMESNE, BALLINASLOE, CO. GALWAY**

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT**



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## CONTENTS

### Tables, Figures and Plates

1. Introduction
2. Archaeological and Historical Background
  - 2.1 *Recorded Monuments*
  - 2.2 *Cartographic Sources*
    - 2.2.1 *Down Survey Map of Galway 1656-58*
    - 2.2.2 *Taylor & Skinner Road Map 1777*
    - 2.2.3 *Ordnance survey map 1838-9*
    - 2.2.4 *Ordnance survey map c.1900*
  - 2.3 *Aerial Images*
  - 2.4 *Previous Archaeological Investigations*
  - 2.5 *Topographical Files*
3. Discussion
4. Impact Assessment
5. Conclusion

## **Tables, Figures and Plates**

### **Tables**

Table 1	Recorded Monuments GA087-083 & GA087-083001
Table 2	Topographical Files – Garbally Demesne

### **Figures**

Figure 1	Ordnance survey map showing location of recorded monuments GA087-083 and GA087-083001 in the north of St. Joseph’s Place
Figure 2	Down Survey map of Galway 1656-58
Figure 3	Taylor and Skinner Road map 1777
Figure 4	Ordnance survey map 1838-39 showing site location
Figure 5	Ordnance survey map 1838-39 showing site location
Figure 6	Aerial Image 2013-2018 showing proposed development site
Figure 7	Site location map 1
Figure 8	Site location map 2
Figure 9	Aerial image showing site location
Figure 10	Oblique aerial view, facing east
Figure 11	Topographic survey site map
Figure 12	Watermain services plan 2018 showing area of archaeological excavation

### **Plates**

Plate 1	Proposed development site, facing NE
Plate 2	Proposed development site, facing SW
Plate 3	Proposed development site, facing N
Plate 4	Proposed development site, facing S

## 1. Introduction

This report is an archaeological assessment of a proposed development site at St. Joseph's Place, Ballinasloe, Co. Galway. The assessment is based on a site visit and desktop study. The report is prepared at the request of O'Brien Finucane Architects on behalf of Galway County Council.

## 2. Archaeological and Historical Background

Ballinasloe takes its name from the Irish *Béal Átha na Sluaighe* meaning 'ford-mouth of the gathering'. The nature of the gathering that took place here is unclear, but it was possibly a precursor to the annual October livestock fair which in 1804 was described as one of the largest fairs of its kind in Europe. The ford was a strategically important crossing point on the River Suck and it appears to have been defended from an early period. According to the annals the first castle at Ballinasloe was built in 1124 and subsequently 'burned by casual fire' in 1131 (Leask, 1986, 6). It is said that this castle, which was almost certainly a wooden fortification, was built by Turlough Mór O'Connor, King of Connacht 1106-1156 and High King of Ireland 1120-1156. It is one of only seven 'castles' recorded in the Irish annals before the coming of the Anglo-Normans in 1169. The Anglo-Normans built the 'castle of Suicin' at Ballinasloe in 1245 (Egan 1960, 32-3) and Tadhg O'Kelly, Chief of Ui Máine, is also credited with building a castle here in the fourteenth century (Egan 1967, 118). The existing ruins comprise a rectangular bawn, which is likely to date from the 16<sup>th</sup> century. This bawn probably stands on or close to the site of the Anglo-Norman castle, and possibly the earlier Irish 'castle'. A small settlement grew up around the castle and bridge at Ballinasloe but it did not develop substantially until the sixteenth century. The Down Survey Map of 1656-58 shows what appears to be a sizeable settlement at Ballinasloe in the mid seventeenth century (figure 1) but the modern town is largely an 18<sup>th</sup> century foundation of the local landowners the Trench Family who arrived here in the 1650's and became Earls of Clancarty in the early nineteenth century.

Garbally takes its name from the Irish *garbh* meaning 'rough' or 'rough one' and *baile* meaning 'townland', 'town' or 'homestead'. The castle and lands of Garbally were purchased by Frederick Trench in the 1650's. It is said that the Trenches lived for a time in Garbally Castle, a 16<sup>th</sup> century tower house built by the Tully's, before building a more commodious residence nearby. They made further purchases of land in the area and by the early 1700's they had become owners of practically all of the land on which the town of Ballinasloe was to be built. Successive generations of the Trench family represented County Galway in parliament and William Power Keating Trench was created Earl of Clancarty in 1803. At the time of Griffith's Valuation, the estate owned property in the baronies of Clonmacnowen, Dunkellin, Kilconnell and Loughrea. In the 1870s the Earl of Clancarty owned almost 24,000 acres in county Galway as well as over 1600 acres in county Roscommon.

## 2.1 Recorded Monuments

There are two recorded monuments in the immediate vicinity of the development site, GA087-083 (Church) and GA087-083001 (Graveyard). The digital database of the Archaeology Survey of Ireland ([www.archaeology.ie](http://www.archaeology.ie)) record the monuments as follows:

Table 1 Recorded Monuments GA087-083 & GA087-083001

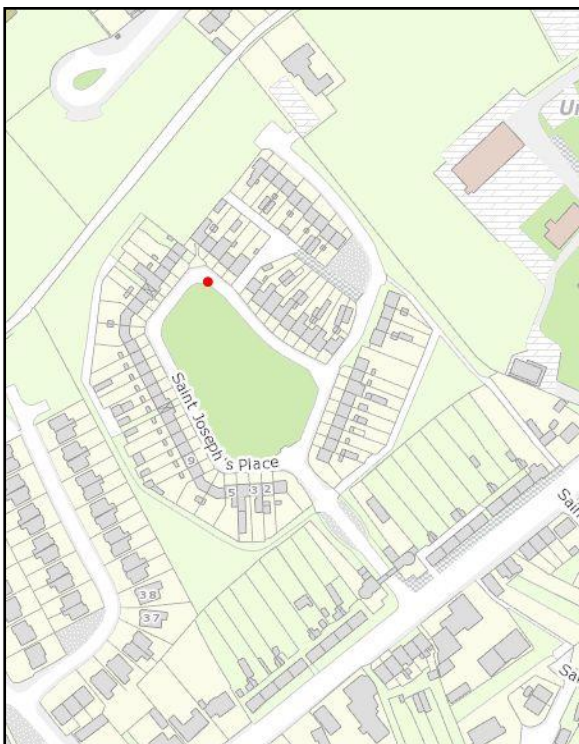
RMP No.	ITM Ref.	Townland	Classification
GA087-083	584075, 730690	Garbally Demesne	Church
GA087-083001	584075, 730690	Garbally Demesne	Graveyard

### GA087-083 (Church)

Within St. Joseph's Terrace, a housing estate to W of Portiuncla Hospital, in Ballinasloe town. According to Egan (1960, 15), 'there is some evidence of a church in Dunlo in Kilcloony parish in the tenth century, the high church yard, or infants' burial ground was the seventeenth century name. Its position is shown on 'Petty's Atlas'. In 1955, during the construction of the housing estate, 'large quantities of adult human remains were unearthed' along with 'associated finds', a bronze harp-peg and pin and a bone spindle whorl' (*ibid.*; Topogr, Files, NMI). No visible surface trace survives.

### GA087-083001 (Graveyard)

No details given. See GA087-083 (Church)



**Figure 1** Ordnance survey map showing location of recorded monuments GA087-083 (Church) and GA087-083001 (Graveyard) in the north of St. Joseph's Place (Ordnance Survey Ireland Licence No. EN 0076823)

## 2.2 Cartographic Sources

### 2.2.1 Down Survey map 1656-58

The Down Survey map of Galway shows a bridge over the River Suck at Ballinasloe, and settlements on both banks of the river. A church is shown on the east bank, most likely the medieval parish church of Creagh. 'Garbally' is named but no buildings are shown in the area.



Figure 2 Down Survey map of Galway 1656-58

### 2.2.2 Taylor & Skinner Road map 1777

The Taylor and Skinner Road map shows a country house and the name 'W.P.K. Trench Es.' at Garbally. This house was burnt down in 1798 and replaced by the existing Garbally House built 1819. The initials 'W.P.K.' refer to William Power Keating Trench, who was created Earl of Clancarty in 1803. The estate is well-established by this time and there is extensive planting in the vicinity of the house.

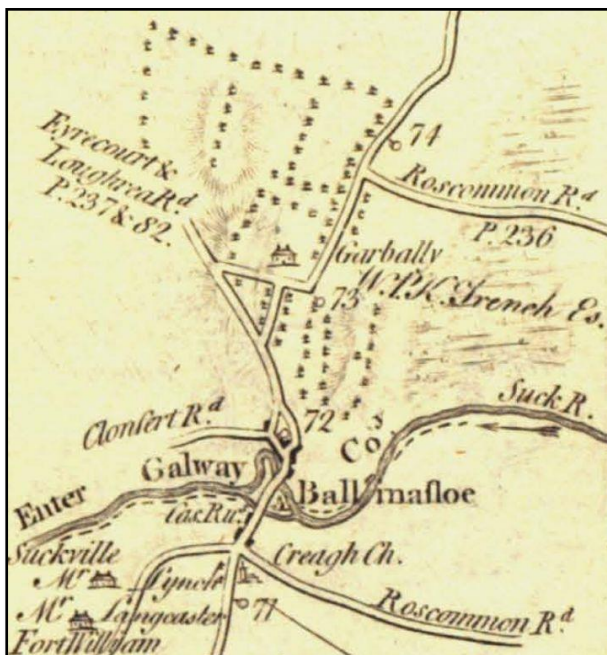


Figure 3 Taylor and Skinner Road Map 1777

### 2.2.3 Ordnance Survey map 1838-39

The first edition Ordnance Survey 6-inch map 1838-9 shows the proposed development site between two avenues in the east part of the extensive Garbally Demesne. The landscape here is one of open demesne land planted with trees and bands of woodland. The roadside plantation to the south of the development site is named 'Brackernagh Plantation'. There are no buildings, structures or earthworks shown in the vicinity of the development site.

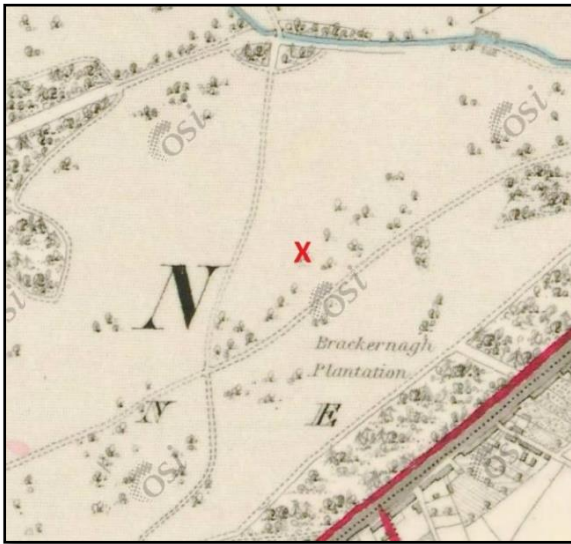


Figure 4 Ordnance survey map 1838-9 showing site location (Ordnance Survey Ireland Licence No. EN 0076823)

### 2.2.4 Ordnance survey map 1890-1900

The Ordnance Survey 25-inch map 1890-1900 shows the development adjacent to an entrance avenue, which has replaced the two avenues marked on the earlier map. The demesne landscape is shown much as before.

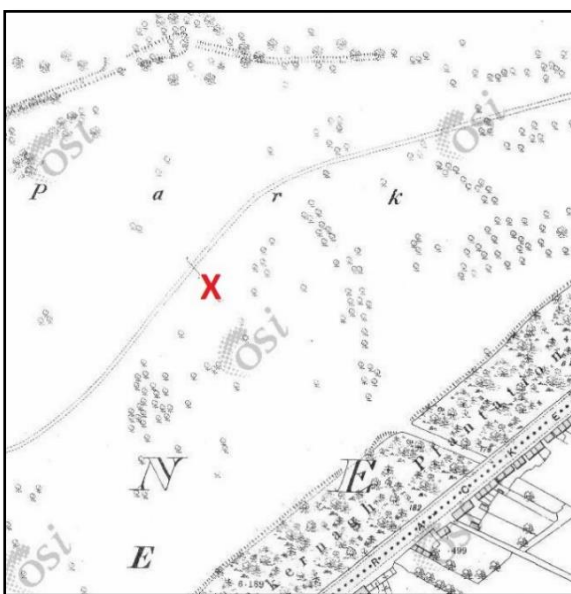


Figure 5 Ordnance survey map c. 1900 showing site location (Ordnance Survey Ireland Licence No. EN 0076823)

### 2.3 Aerial Images

A series of aerial images (1995-2018) of the area were examined on the Ordnance Survey Ireland website [www.osi.ie](http://www.osi.ie). The proposed development site is unchanged throughout this period, apart from the development of a footway along the northeast edge of the site post-2004. No cropmark features are visible on the images.



**Figure 6** Aerial image 2013-2018 showing site location (*Ordnance Survey Ireland Licence No. EN 0076823*)

### 2.4 Previous Archaeological Investigations

The Excavations Bulletin is an annual account of all archaeological investigations carried out under licence on the island of Ireland. The database is available online at [www.excavations.ie](http://www.excavations.ie) and includes summary reports of investigations from 1985 to the present. This database was consulted to establish if any investigations had been carried out in the vicinity of the development site. There are three entries relating to the discovery of human remains on the site of the existing St. Joseph's Place. The entries are recorded as follows:

#### *Garbally Demesne, Ballinasloe, Galway (NMI Burial Excavation Records)*

The Burial Excavation Records of the National Museum of Ireland record the discovery of human remains and associated artefacts at Garbally Demesne in 1955. The site is recorded as 'early medieval graves' and described as follows:

'In March 1955 human remains were discovered during the digging of foundations for a housing development at Garbally Demesne, near Ballinasloe, Co. Galway. The discovery was reported to the museum by P.J. Hartnett and investigated by Joseph Raftery. A number of burials were still visible in situ at the time of Raftery's visit, and lay at a depth of 0.09-0.3m below ground level in a layer of dark earth. Some of the grave-cuts were visible in the section and there did not appear to be any stone lining in any of the cuts, although the layer contained a number of large stone inclusions. According



to reports, all of the burials were apparently extended and supine, aligned west/east. A bronze pin from a ringed pin (1955:29) of the type usually associated with spiral ring heads was found beside one of the skulls, while a worked bronze bar which may be an unfinished pin shaft (1955:30) was discovered beside another. An iron spike (1955:31) was found near one of the burials. Spiral-headed ringed pins are early in the typology of ringed pins and can be dated to the sixth/seventh centuries.'

[www.excavations.ie](http://www.excavations.ie)

*2012:260 Garbally Demesne, Ballinasloe, Galway (Angela Wallace, Connacht Archaeological Services)*

Human remains were uncovered during monitoring of site investigations at St. Joseph's Place in 2012. The remains of a juvenile were identified within one of the slit trenches excavated within the road to the northeast of the central green area. A programme of archaeological testing was carried out in the area to determine if there were further human remains or archaeological deposits in the vicinity. Fourteen test trenches were opened in roads/lanes along the routes of the proposed sewer and watermains within the estate. A significant quantity of *in situ* and disarticulated human remains were identified beneath the road surface in the area to the northeast of the central green. The proposed pipeline was re-designed to the areas where human remains were found.

*2018:883 Garbally Demesne, Ballinasloe, Galway (Angela Wallace, Atlantic Archaeology)*

Archaeological excavation took place along the route of the proposed pipeline within a narrow NW-SE laneway in the northeast of St. Joseph's Place. Archaeological deposits and a small quantity of disarticulated human remains were uncovered over a length of c. 46m in the northwest of the lane. A small fragment of human bone was radiocarbon dated to the 6<sup>th</sup>/7<sup>th</sup> century indicating this is the site of an early medieval cemetery. A possible ditch cut, which may be part of an enclosing element associated the cemetery, was recorded in the northwest extent of the trench.

## **2.5 Topographical Files**

The topographical files in the National Museum of Ireland were consulted to see if any stray finds had been recorded in the vicinity of the proposed development. Any finds would be an indication of human activity in the area and may highlight the importance of the area in the archaeological record. The files for the townlands of Garbally Demesne, Townparks and Dunlo were searched in the database. Seven artefacts are recorded for Garbally Demesne and it is known from the National Museum of Ireland's Burial Excavation Records that at least three of these artefacts were found during construction works on the St. Joseph's Place housing development in 1955. The three finds comprise a bronze pin (1955:29), copper alloy harp peg (1955:30) and iron spike (1955:31) (See table 2). A stone axehead and two spindle whorls are also recorded as having been found in Garbally Demesne in 1955 but it is

not known if these were found at the St. Joseph's Place site. The fact that they are not mentioned in the Burial Excavation Record report suggests they were not found at this site.

Table 2 National Museum of Ireland Topographical files: Garbally Demesne

NMI Reg. No.	Name	Component	Townland
1955:29	Ringed pin	Bronze	Garbally Demesne
1955:30	Harp peg	Copper alloy	Garbally Demesne
1955:31	Spike	Iron	Garbally Demesne
1955:131	Axehead	Stone	Garbally Demesne
1955:132	Spindle whorl	Bone	Garbally Demesne
1955:133	Spindle whorl	Stone	Garbally Demesne
1955:134	pebble	Stone	Garbally Demesne

### 3. Discussion

This assessment has shown that the north part of St. Joseph's Place is built on the site of an early medieval cemetery. Human remains were first discovered here during construction works on the site in 1955. The National Museum of Ireland were informed of the discovery and carried out a site inspection at the time. The museum recorded the presence of a number of burials and recovered several artefacts including a bronze pin, which is considered likely to be part of a spiral-headed ringed pin of 6<sup>th</sup>/7<sup>th</sup> century date. Human remains were again uncovered during archaeological investigations within the road on the northeast side of the green in 2012, and during the course of an archaeological excavation carried out along the route of a proposed waterpipe within the lane in the northeast of St. Joseph's Place in 2018. A human bone sample from the 2018 excavation was radiocarbon dated to the 6<sup>th</sup>/7<sup>th</sup> century, which is consistent with the date suggested for the bronze pin found in 1955.

It has been suggested that the cemetery is associated with an early church foundation. Egan (1960, 15) states 'there is some evidence of a church in Dunlo in Kilcloony parish in the tenth century, the high church yard, or infants' burial ground was the seventeenth century name.' If there was a church here it must have been early Christian foundation given the 6<sup>th</sup>/7<sup>th</sup> century date assigned to both the radiocarbon dated bone sample and the bronze pin found in 1955. In this context, the possible ditch uncovered in the northwest end of the trench excavated in 2018 may be part of an enclosing element associated with an early Christian site. The discovery of artefacts and animal bone at the site suggests other activities taking place here and might be interpreted as evidence that this is more than just a cemetery.

However, there is no firm evidence that there was a church site here and this may well be a secular cemetery. The early medieval period saw frequent small familial cemeteries and larger communal cemeteries, often recorded as cemetery settlements. These were typically non-ecclesiastical although there were of course ecclesiastical burial grounds also. Whether secular or ecclesiastical the discovery of a bronze ringed pin and other finds suggests at least some of the individuals buried here were persons of some means and status.

Egan's reference to the *'the high church yard, or infants' burial ground was the seventeenth century name'*, is particularly interesting. No source is given for the statement and we can only assume that the information survived in the oral tradition. The *'high church yard'* presumably refers to the site's slightly elevated location while the 17<sup>th</sup> century name *'infant's burial ground'* suggests the site was re-used as burial ground for unbaptised children sometime after it fell out of use as a formal cemetery. It is interesting to note that Egan's reference to a children's burial ground is specific to the 17<sup>th</sup> century, perhaps indicating that the site went out of use altogether after this time. A dramatic change in land ownership such as that precipitated by the Cromwellian Confiscations of the 1650's is the most likely event to trigger a change in land use. Bearing this in mind it is considered possible that the site was no longer used as a burial ground following the purchase of these lands by the Trench Family in the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century and the subsequent development of an extensive demesne here. It is possible that any surface traces of the early medieval site such as enclosing banks and/or ditches were levelled sometime after the Trench Family acquired the lands here in the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century. The discovery of a coin of King James II gun money (1689) during archaeological excavations at the site in 2018 indicates some activity in this area in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century. Any surface traces of the site that may have survived beyond the life of the demesne were certainly removed when the land was developed with housing in the 1950's.

#### **4. Impact Assessment**

The proposed development site is located in the immediate vicinity of recorded monuments GA087-083 (Church) and GA087-083001 (Graveyard). There is no definitive evidence that there was ever a church here but it is clear that there is an early medieval cemetery here. The extent of the cemetery is unknown but recent archaeological investigations suggest it is centred in the north of St. Joseph's Place, immediately south of the proposed development site. Consequently, the proposed development site must be considered as a site of high archaeological potential. The higher ground in the south extent of the proposed development site is considered particularly sensitive as this may indicate the northern extent of the early medieval site.

## **5. Conclusion**

The proposed development site is considered to be a site of high archaeological potential. The client recognises the archaeological potential of the site and has commissioned a desktop assessment, geophysical survey and archaeological testing as part of the process of archaeological mitigation. The geophysical survey is scheduled to take place in late March or early April 2023 and the results of that survey will inform the proposed archaeological testing.

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[www.osi.ie](http://www.osi.ie)



Figure 7 Site location map 1

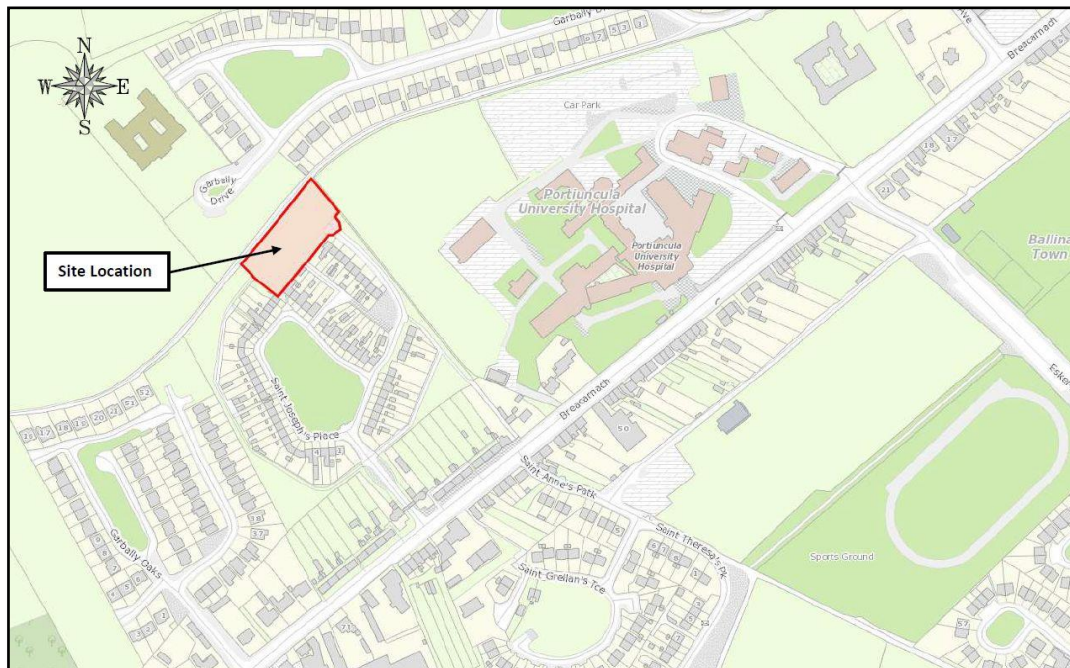


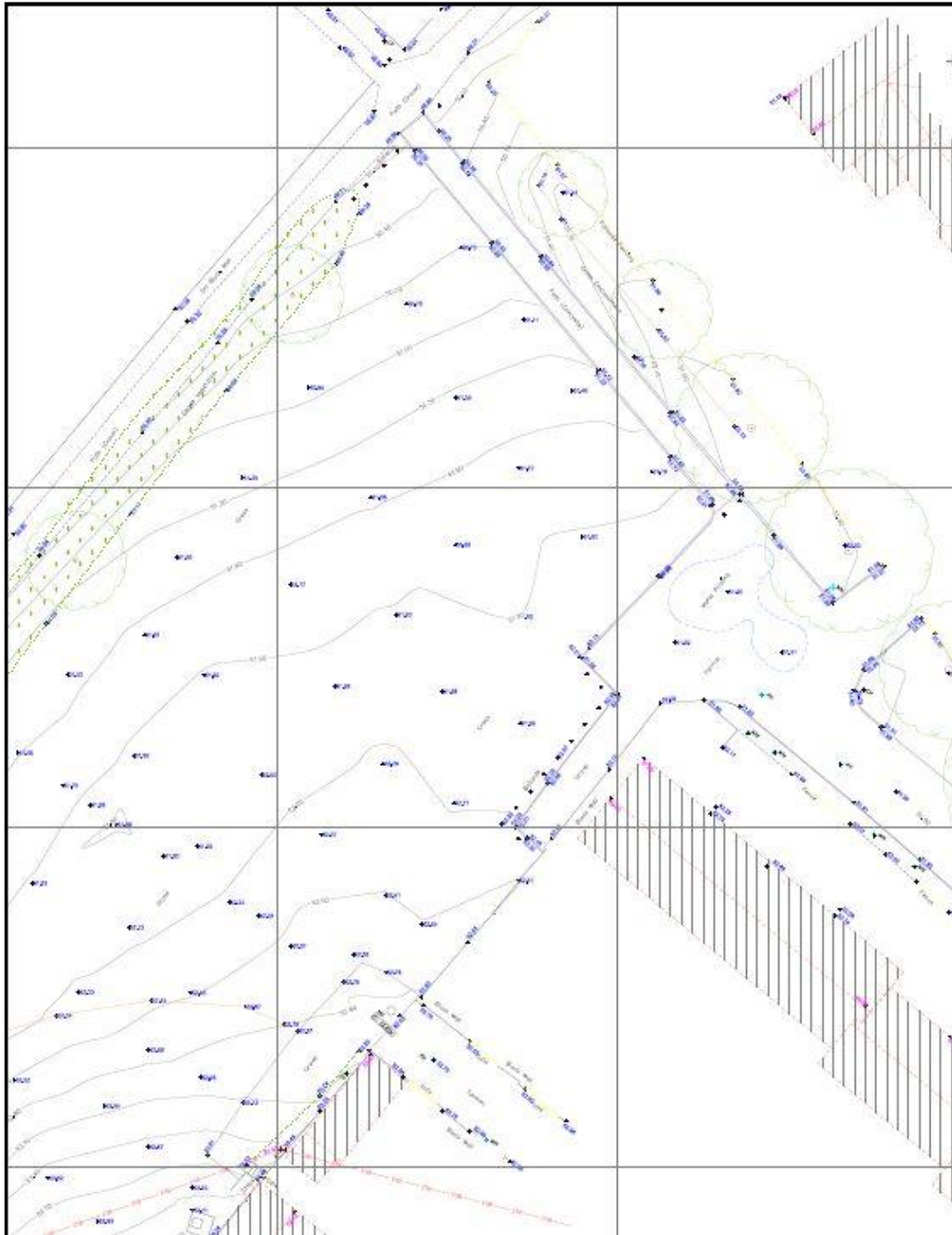
Figure 8 Site location map 2



**Figure 9** Aerial image showing site location



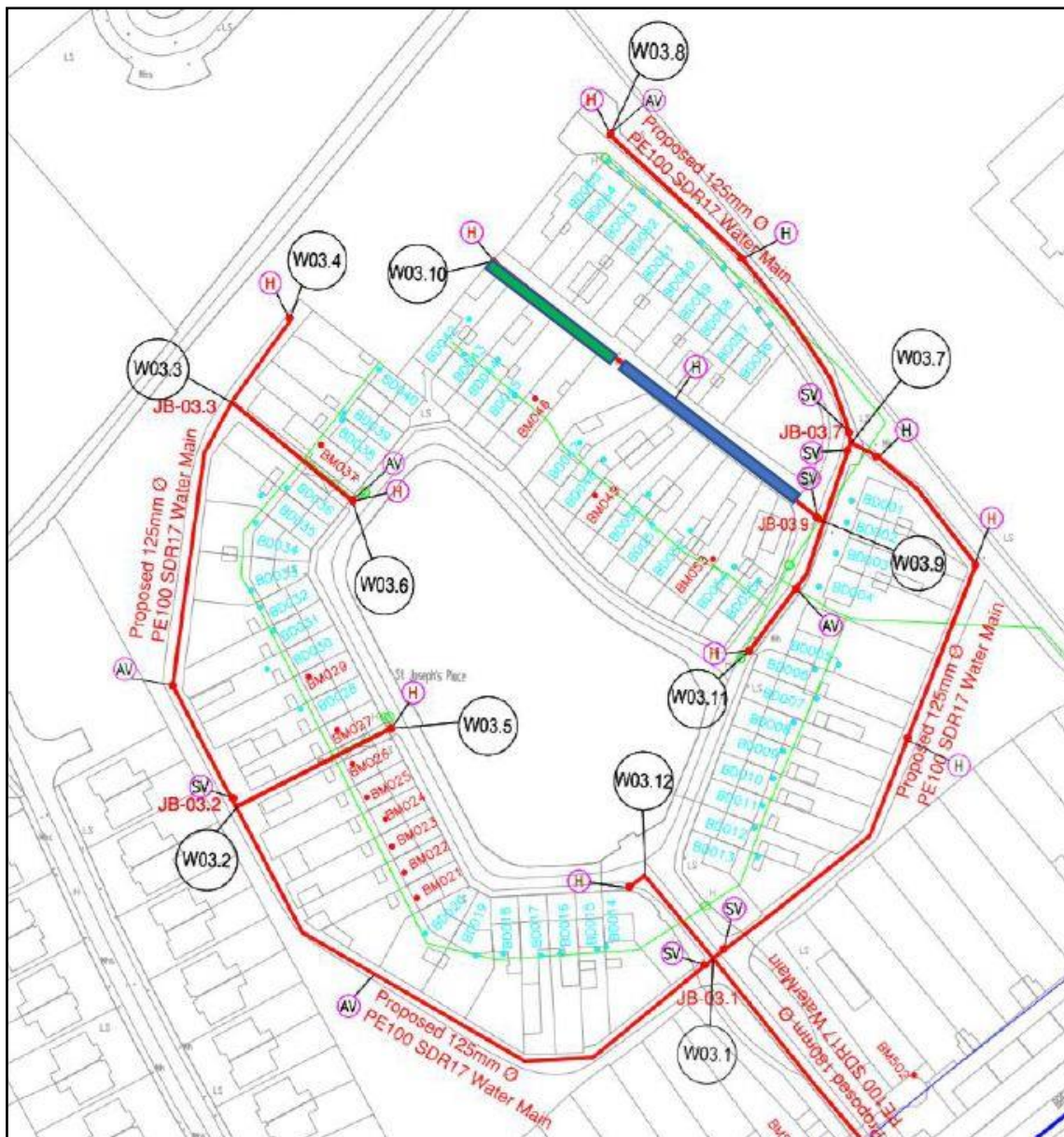
**Figure 10** Oblique aerial view, facing east



**Figure 11** Topographic survey site map

Note high point in south of site (bottom left) and gradual decline to the north and northeast





**Figure 12** Watermain plan 2018 showing area of excavation within lane in NE of St. Joseph's Place  
Note archaeological area highlighted in green (After Atlantic Archaeology, March 2021)



**Plate 1** Proposed Development Site, Facing NE



**Plate 2** Proposed Development Site, Facing SW



**Plate 3** Proposed Development Site, Facing N



**Plate 4** Proposed Development Site, Facing S