

## **An Archaeological Appraisal of the Proposed Exchange at Potato Market, Carlow Town.**

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**Site Type:** Urban  
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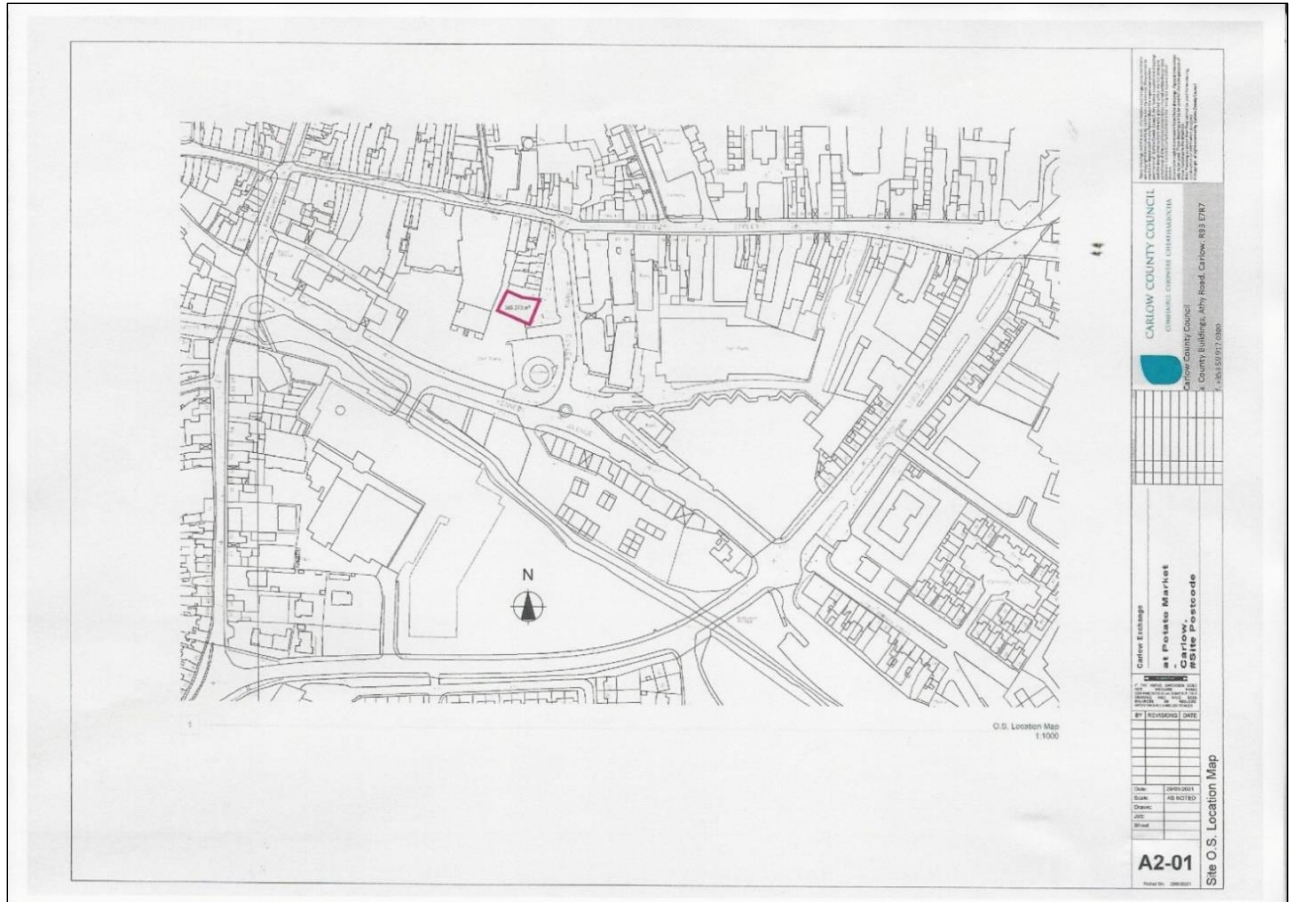
## **1. Introduction**

An Archaeological Appraisal was commissioned by Carlow County Council who are designing a new covered open space in the centre of Carlow town. Located at the Potato Market in Old Tully's Yard, Carlow County Council will seek permission, under the Part 8 of the planning process, to create this community space with multi-functional use. This new development will be known as Carlow Exchange.

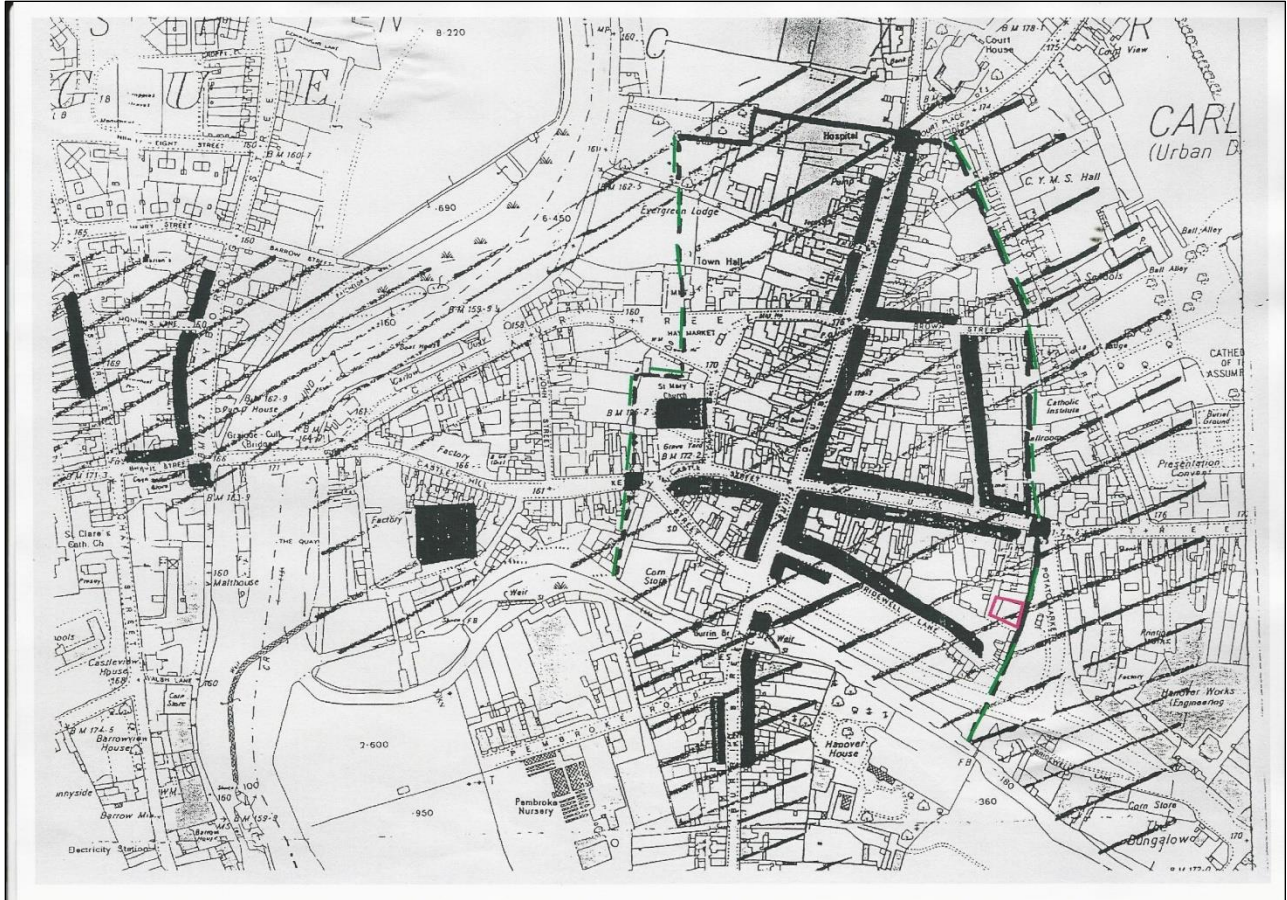
## **2. Siting**

Located to the east of Carlow's town centre, the proposed development site (PDS) is located on the west side of Potato Market. A short street, Potato Market is situated between Tullow St., which is one of the main streets in the town centre, and Kennedy Avenue (*Fig.1*). This part of Carlow town is within the townland of Carlow, the parish of Carlow and the barony of Carlow.

The site is located in the southeast part of the Zone of Archaeological Potential for the historic town of Carlow (CW007-018 [*Fig.2*]), which is a recorded and protected archaeological monument in the Record of Monuments and Places (RMP) for County Carlow.



**Figure 1. Site Location Highlighted in Red.**



**Figure 2. Zone of Archaeological Potential for Carlow Town. Site Location Highlighted in Red. Projected Outline of Town Walls Highlighted in Green Dashed Lines.**

### **3. Scope of Development Works**

Carlow County Council propose to convert a vacant plot fronting the west side of Potato Market into a covered open space. This will be a community/civic space and potentially be used on Saturdays by the Carlow Farmers Market, the main anchor tenant, whilst during the week by other interested groups in the town/county. It is envisaged it will be multi-purpose including cultural, recreational, playground, restaurant/cafe, leisure, educational, etc. The purpose of the project is to regenerate a strategic location within Carlow town centre, i.e. the Potato Market, which has been a vacant plot for several years. Situated in a central area, it offers numerous possibilities for use and support through rejuvenation of this area of the town.

The proposed development will be contained within the main fabric of the vacant plot site, incorporating the existing boundary walls and entrance. A new, independently supported roof will overhang the well-preserved masonry walls to minimise impact on their integrity; however, a new ope may be created at the west end of the southern wall to facilitate a 3m wide vehicular/pedestrian exit from the site.

#### 4. Method

This appraisal comprised predominantly a desk-based study. The site had been inspected some years previous as part of a programme of licensed archaeological testing<sup>1</sup>.

The desk study entailed an examination of documentary, cartographic and aerial photographic sources. Sources examined included the following:

- Sites and Monuments Record (SMR) for County Carlow.
- Record of Monuments and Places (RMP) for County Carlow.
- Urban Archaeological Survey for County Carlow, OPW (1990).
- Examination of the Archival Database on relevant monuments held by the National Monuments Service, Department of Culture, Heritage & the Gaeltacht.
- Ordnance Survey series of published maps.
- Review of Aerial Photographs.
- Documentary Sources, both Primary and Secondary.
- Carlow County Development Plan, 2015-2021.
- National Inventory of Architectural Heritage.
- Excavations Bulletin Database.

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<sup>1</sup> M. Henry. Archaeological Pre-construction Testing at Potato Market, Carlow. Unpub. 2003.



## 5. Historical and Archaeological Background of Carlow Town

### 5.1 Historical Background of Carlow Town

According to O'Donovan<sup>2</sup> and later Gwynn and Hadcock<sup>3</sup> Carlow was a monastic site known as *Catherlough* or *Catherlagh* in the ninth century, signifying in the Irish language “*the city on the lake*” gained from its closeness to a large sheet of water which formerly existed here<sup>4</sup>. However, it is from the Anglo-Norman period there is the best evidence for settlement. The town owes its origin to a castle erected in the reign of King John, which was to become one of the principal castles of William Marshall, Earl of Pembroke. Built at the junction of the rivers Burrin and Barrow, the town appears to have been founded by William Marshall, who issued its first charter in *circa* 1209<sup>5</sup>. In one of the earliest charters, dated *circa* 1223, it is mentioned that the burgess rent was fixed at this time by Geoffrey FitzRobert, William Marshal's seneschal<sup>6</sup>.

In 1247 the town was valued at £24 and comprised 160 burgages when it fell under the aegis of the Earls of Norfolk. In 1306 the control of Carlow was returned to the Crown: however, it was controlled by absentee lords, which enabled the native Irish to make incursions into the surrounding countryside. Indeed the administration of the country was transferred from Dublin to Carlow because it was the most suitable area for retaining the native Irish, including the MacMurroughs<sup>7</sup>. About the year 1361, Lionel, Duke of Clarence expended £500 in fortifying the town with walls in order to combat the native Irish who continued to attack and burn the town in the latter half of the fourteenth century. The control of the country reverted back to Dublin before the end of the century.

By the fifteenth century, much of Anglo-Norman control of Carlow was falling into the hands of the native Irish, although after subsequent skirmishes and battles, it finally came back under the

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<sup>2</sup> Rev. M. O'Flanagan (Compiler in 1927). Letters Containing Information Relative to the Antiquities of County Carlow, collected during the progress of the Ordnance Survey in 1839.

<sup>3</sup> A. Gwynn and R. Hadcock. The Medieval Religious Houses Ireland. 1970.

<sup>4</sup> S. Lewis. Topographical Dictionary of Ireland, 2 Vols. 1837.

<sup>5</sup> S. Murphy. Carlow and its History. (No Date).

<sup>6</sup> J. Bradley, N. Dunne & H. King. Urban Archaeological Survey for County Carlow. 1990.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*



aegis of the crown. During the Confederate Wars Cromwellian forces burnt and captured the town with relative ease in 1641; but although severely damaged, the castle held out.

It was not until *circa* 1700 that the town started to expand. In 1659 the Census of Ireland gave Carlow (with Graigue) a population of 666 placing it twelfth in the ranking of all Irish towns<sup>8</sup>. Growth took place along the existing roads leading into the town. Georgian buildings overlaid the previous medieval street pattern with further expansion in the nineteenth century with the area to the east of Tullow Gate (Tullow St./Potato Market junction) for example being the site of tenements and gardens.

By the early decades of the nineteenth century Carlow underwent a dramatic expansion. Navigation along the Barrow was a catalyst for the growth of the town and commerce commenced leading to the expansion to the quays. In a report compiled in the early 1830s, Thomas R. Mould described the town population amounting to 11,000 in 1831. He noted these people were employed in constructing municipal buildings such as the Lunatic Asylum and the Courthouse. Carlow was to experience a period of building boom in the early decades of the 1800s, which was to leave a permanent legacy on the town's streetscape.

## 5.2 Archaeological Background of Carlow Town

Although the castle was first mentioned in a charter dating to *circa* 1223, there are suggestions of a motte and bailey dating to *circa* 1180 prior to the building of the stone castle. Little of the original stone castle survives, now consisting one wall of a rectangular towered keep<sup>9</sup>. Surviving to the northeast of the castle is the medieval churchyard of St. Mary. There are references to another fortification – White Castle – which may have stood on the west bank of the river in Graigue-Cullen and it is here where there may have been extra-mural medieval suburbs<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> J. Bradley, N. Dunne & H. King. Urban Archaeological Survey for County Carlow. 1990.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

There is documentary evidence to support the view that Carlow town was fortified in the mid fourteenth century. The medieval town was triangular in plan, occupying an area of 13 hectares with a perimeter of 1350 metres. It remained unchanged in size until the eighteenth century. Leases, granted in the early eighteenth century in conjunction with Molands map of 1703 and Colombines map of 1735, are useful, in helping to establish the topography of the medieval town. Comprising five streets: Dublin St., Tullow St., Castle St., Chapel Lane and Bridewell Lane, its street plan was a cross-linear pattern. Surviving traces of the town walls are ephemeral, although Thomas makes reference to the uncovering of a stretch of this wall on the south side in the Potato Market, near the jail<sup>11</sup>. There are references to parts of the town wall at the north end of Dublin St. and on the south side of Tullow St.; as well as references to Dublin Gate, Tullow Gate and Castle Gate<sup>12</sup>. It is suspected there was no fortified wall along the west side, where the river Barrow would have acted as a natural defence line. All traces of such walls and gates had disappeared by the early eighteenth century at the latest and are not denoted on contemporary maps.

The medieval market was within the centre of the medieval town, at the junction of Dublin St. and Tullow St. The Coal Market, Hay Market and Potato Market are later developments<sup>13</sup>. The medieval parish church was, according to Thomas, on the edge of the higher ground to the northeast of the castle<sup>14</sup>. It is suggested the medieval churchyard may have extended across John St., since there is a disused burial ground to the rear of the houses on the west side of this street<sup>15</sup>; and recorded as having two graveyards in seventeenth century. The present church on this site was built *circa* 1731<sup>16</sup>. Bridges over both the rivers Burren and Barrow were built by the mid sixteenth century: a stone bridge over the Barrow; and a timber structure over the Burren in locations similar to those occupied by the present bridges<sup>17</sup>. There were two suburbs: to the west over the Barrow, known as Graigue; and to the south over the Burren<sup>18</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> A. Thomas. *The Walled Towns of Ireland*. Vols. 1 & II. 1993.

<sup>12</sup> J. Bradley, N. Dunne & H. King. *Urban Archaeological Survey for County Carlow*. 1990.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> A. Thomas. *The Walled Towns of Ireland*. Vols. 1 & II. 1993.

<sup>15</sup> J. Bradley, N. Dunne & H. King. *Urban Archaeological Survey for County Carlow*. 1990.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> A. Thomas. *The Walled Towns of Ireland*. Vols. 1 & II. 1993.

### 5.3 Archaeological and Historical Background of the Potato Market

The site of the proposed development is located in the southeast area of the archaeological zone of potential for Carlow town (CW007-018), fronting the west side of Potato Market, a short street, extending at right angles between medieval Tullow St. and the Burren river (*Fig.2*). Reference has been made to portions of the medieval town wall having been found on the south side in the Potato Market, near the jail<sup>19</sup>. The jail was located to the southeast of the Potato Market, on the site of Thompson's Building & Engineering Works, now Carlow Shopping Centre. Both Thomas and Feeley & Sheehan<sup>20</sup> suggest that the medieval defences on the east side extended from the bank of the River Burren through the former County Jail site to meet Tullow Gate at the junction of Tullow and College streets, then proceeding along much of College St. towards Dublin Gate at the northern end of the town.

The Urban Archaeological Survey for Carlow Town denotes the town wall as extending along the west side of Potato Market from Tullow Gate at the Potato Market/Tullow St. junction to the north and to the River Burren to the south (*Fig.2*). Although documentary evidence indicates the town was fortified in the mid-fourteenth century, there is no visible trace of the town walls and as stated by Bradley, one of the authors of the Urban Archaeological Survey, the "precise location and extent is unknown<sup>21</sup>."

In the early 2000s planning permission was sought to construct a hostel, two retail units and associated site works at the site. As part of this building project it was proposed to construct a basement. Further to the planning process an archaeological impact assessment, including a programme of licensed archaeological testing, was undertaken in 2003<sup>22</sup>. Four test trenches were opened on the site ranging in length from 5m to 11.8m, an average width of 1.2m and between 600mm and 1m in depth.

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<sup>19</sup> A. Thomas. *The Walled Towns of Ireland*. Vols. 1 & II. 1993.

<sup>20</sup> J.M. Feeley & J. Sheehan. *The Medieval Walls of Carlow*. 2004.

<sup>21</sup> *Archaeological Survey of County Carlow*. 1993.

<sup>22</sup> M. Henry. *Archaeological Pre-construction Testing at Potato Market, Carlow*. Unpub. 2003.

No archaeological remains were found on the site. The most noticeable feature within the trenches was the absence of any build up of infill, rubble and associated building materials that would be typically found in a town. There was minimal topsoil cover suggesting that the level of the site had been reduced. This was further supported by the absence of any foundations for the east/west and north/south internal walls visible on the relevant boundaries. The only sub-surface features of any note was a fire pit in test trench No. 2 and a posthole, of modern provenance, in trench No.1. Lean-to buildings were supported off the west and south boundary walls and this resultant posthole may be evidence of this. The fire pit in trench No. 2 comprised a shallow cut containing a fill of burnt clay and stone. Again, considering the fact that there appears to have been ground clearance on the site, the fire pit was probably the result of localised burning. No evidence associated with medieval Carlow was found. A probable reason for this is that the level of the site has been reduced, which is evident in the closeness of the natural deposits to the current ground surface; whilst a second alternative explanation is that this plot of ground was vacant during the medieval period<sup>23</sup>.

Until the 1930s the Potato Market was used as a place where farmers brought their potatoes to be weighed and later sold in the Council House, which stood at the centre of the Market. In later years it was one of the locations for a frequently held open-air livestock market<sup>24</sup>. Other commercial activities sited at the Market including a cobblers business, a garage and factory. It was also the site for civic activities such as election rallies. De Valera attended one such rally<sup>25</sup>. During the 1940s it consisted eleven houses to one side, including a forge at the rear of No. 7, as well as one house on the other side of the street<sup>26</sup>.

The site fell into disuse in the latter part of the twentieth century. In the early 2000s proposals were put forward for its commercial development but were put on indefinite hold. An examination of the 1<sup>st</sup> Edition Ordnance Survey (OS) 6-inch map (1839), Griffiths Primary Valuation of Tenements of Co. Carlow and its associated map, and the 25-inch OS map (1908)

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<sup>23</sup> M. Henry. Archaeological Pre-construction Testing at Potato Market, Carlow. Unpub. 2003.

<sup>24</sup> Potato Market, Friends and Neighbours. 1986.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

confirmed there were buildings on the site. On the 1<sup>st</sup> Edition OS map (1839) there were buildings bounding the street to the east (Potato Market) and Cockpit Lane to the south with the interior of the site vacant or used as a yard. On Griffiths Primary Valuation of 1852 the site was occupied by buildings and a yard. The site was occupied by two structures/buildings on the 25-inch OS map (1908); one on the west side (bounding Cockpit Lane) and the other, smaller one, in the southeast corner (*Pl.1*).



**Pl. 1 Potato Market Denoted on 25-inch Ordnance Survey Map (1908).**

## 6. Site Description

This PDS is located on slightly elevated ground set back from the river Burren. The site opens onto a pedestrian walkway associated within modern developments and urban regeneration within the town centre including the Potato Market (*Pl.2*). A lane extends behind the site, on its western side. L-shaped on the 1908 OS map, it was then known as Cockpit Lane and now serves access to the rear of the Dinn Rí hotel.

Covering an area of 365.273m<sup>2</sup>, the site measures 22.3m long along its south side, 21.6m on its north side and 17.6m wide fronting Potato Market and 13.8m at its west side where the grounds of the Dinn Rí Hotel are set back. The northern boundary comprises a block wall, with a step on the east/west axis, associated with a modern development (*Pls.3&4*). A 3m high stone wall defines the south boundary (*Pl.5*), with evidence of an internal wall on a north/south alignment visible in the elevation 2.5m from the southwest corner. The site's west boundary is represented by a 3.5m high stone wall which flanks a lane (Cockpit Lane) separating the PDS from the Dinn Rí hotel (*Pls.6-7*). An internal wall is visible on an east/west alignment as a slight projection. The east boundary of the site (*Pls.8-10*) comprises a 3m high wall with evidence of a blocked window visible in the southeast elevation. A 3m wide metal gate is located at the mid-point along this boundary. The interior of the site is level, surfaced with hardcore and patches of weeds/rough grass growing throughout.





**Pl. 2 External View of Site Fronting Potato Market.**



**Pl. 3 Modern Northern Boundary: West End.**





**Pl. 4 Modern Northern Boundary: East End.**



**Pl. 5 South Boundary Wall.**



**Pl. 6 Looking West at West Boundary and Dinn Rí Hotel.**



**Pl. 7 Close-up View of West Boundary.**





**Pl. 8 East Boundary Wall with Gated Entrance.**



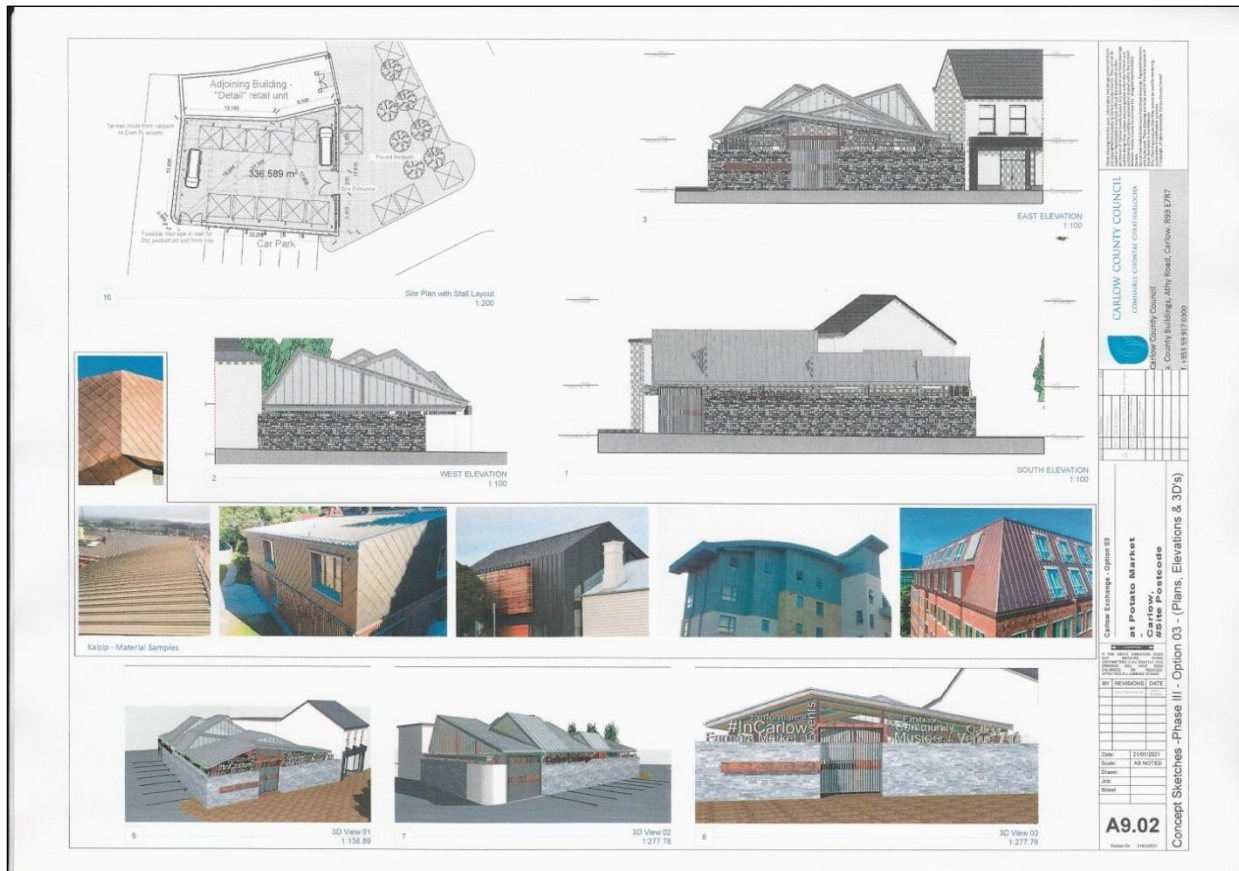
**Pl. 9 Looking Southeast at Intersection of East and South Boundaries.**



**Pl. 10 External View of East Boundary and Gated Entrance.**

## 7. Archaeological Impact Assessment

It is proposed to incorporate the existing vacant site at the Potato Market into a multi-purpose, covered, open space serving the commercial, recreational and cultural needs of the local community (*Fig.3*). The main fabric of the site, i.e. the boundary walls, will be retained. This new structure will incorporate the existing walls and the erection of a new roof, supported by a series of internal galvanised and painted steel columns and steel rafters, which will overhang the walls. Internally the roof will be clad with timber. Its existing entrance will be retained, whilst consideration is being given to creating a new pedestrian opening in the southern boundary, close to the southwest corner. Positioned along either side there will be trading stalls.



**Figure 3 Proposals for Carlow Exchange at Potato Market.**

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Sub-surface works will be limited. There will be localised excavations to support the steel columns. A number of pads will be excavated; with the majority measuring 1m x 1m x 450mm whilst two smaller ones – 600mm x 600mm x 300mm – will be positioned at the gated entrance. These pads will be spaced 3.725m apart, with the exception of the row fronting the Potato Market (east side) set closer to the neighbouring row (*Fig.4*). It will also be necessary to underpin two short sections of walling – 1m and 2m sections respectively - at the southwest corner of the site.

A programme of licensed archaeological testing was undertaken as part of the planning process for a commercial development proposal for the site in 2003<sup>27</sup>. Four test trenches were opened, all of which were set back at least 2m from the boundary walls to ensure their foundations were not undermined (*Fig.5*). Stratigraphy was dominated by hardcore 800-100mm thick, overlying a dark brown silty loam topsoil varying in thickness between 100mm and 175mm. Beneath the topsoil was a compact mid orange brown naturally deposited clay. Other than a modern posthole in trench No. 1 and a shallow cut containing burnt clay and stone in test trench No. 2, the site was devoid of archaeological remains.

Overall the most noticeable fact gleaned from the testing was the absence of any build up of infill, rubble and associated building materials that would be typically found in a town. There was minimal topsoil cover, suggesting the site had previously been reduced. This was further supported by the absence of any foundations for the east/west and north/south aligned internal walls visible on the relevant boundaries.

It is considered given the shallowness of the excavations for the pads to support the steel columns, which will not exceed 450mm, and their locations, close to the boundary walls and within areas previously disturbed for their foundations, the archaeological impact will be negligible/non-existent. A similar consideration applies to the underpinning of the two short sections of walling in the southwest corner of the site.

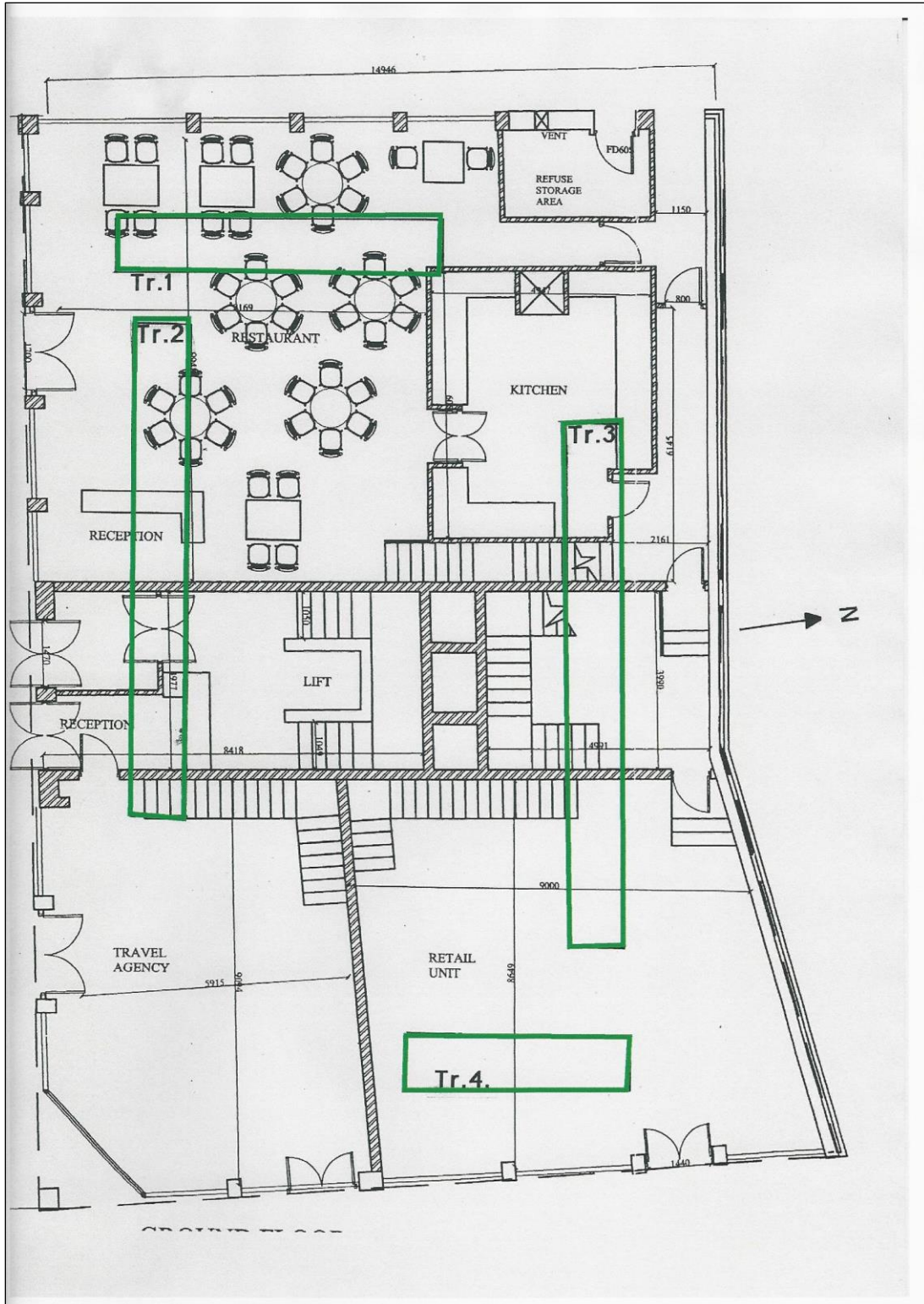
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<sup>27</sup> M. Henry. Archaeological Pre-construction Testing at Potato Market, Carlow. Unpub. 2003.









**Figure 5. Trenching Layout from Archaeological Pre-Construction Testing at Potato Market, 2003.**

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## **8. Mitigation Measures**

The results from archaeological testing works in 2003 and the very limited extent of sub-surface works proposed for the new development leads to the view that the renewal works at the Potato Market will have no adverse archaeological impact.

It is considered this proposal for the Potato Market requires no further archaeological measures.

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**Mary Henry.**

**Mary Henry Archaeological Services Ltd.**

**25<sup>th</sup> February 2021.**