22. What is Archaeological Excavation?

Archaeological excavation is the systematic recording and removal of layers of soil, deposits, or artefacts by a qualified archaeologist. As excavation is destructive by its nature it must be carried out with meticulous care so that all information, whether its relevance is immediately obvious or not, will remain available after the site has completely disappeared. This is why it is termed "systematic" to reflect this. All finds are recorded in sketches, notes, and drawings, and are often protected by laws. The proper storage of archaeological finds and objects is a necessary part of the process. The law governing the planning system is set out in the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) and in the associated Planning and Development Regulations.

23. Who carries out Archaeological Excavation?

Excavations for archaeological purposes are carried out by suitably qualified archaeologists acting under a licence, or in accordance with directions, issued by the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government. Modern archaeological excavation is a highly skilled activity requiring much expertise in the recovery of the evidence and in its interpretation and publication. The intention is to get the maximum information about the past from the ground. Objects found in an excavation are important principally because of their record associated with other objects, strata, and features. It is important that unqualified persons should not undertake archaeological excavation and if by accident a discovery is made, a planning application should be made to the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, to establish the area, whether or not the object or feature or any part of the area is a monument, and whether the area is a scheduled area. Where a discovery is made, you should leave the object or site where it was found and report it to the Director of the National Museum of Ireland.

24. Where can I find an Archaeologist?

Many archaeologists and archaeological consultancies advertise in the Golden Pages and in other media outlets. The National Monuments Section compiles a list of archaeologists eligible to apply for excavation licences. This is available from the National Monuments Service, Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, Custom House, Dublin 1 (01-8820000 or re-call 1980 20 20 21).

25. Who pays for the cost of meeting planning conditions relating to archaeology?

In line with national policy, the developer bears the cost in fulfilling any planning conditions relating to the assessment and mitigation of the impact of development works on archaeology.

26. Do I own artefacts uncovered during excavations on my site?

No. Any archaeological object found in the State and which has no known owner is, by law, the property of the State. This means that artefacts and other archaeological excavations are State property. The National Museum of Ireland receives artefacts recovered from authorised excavations, after the necessary preservation analysis and conservation works have been carried out.

27. If I discover a potential archaeological object or site on my property what do I do?

If you discover a potentially unknown archaeological object or monument on your property report it to the Director of the National Museum of Ireland on the National Monuments Section Helpline give your name, address, and a brief description of the object or site and its location. You should leave the object or site where it was found attached to a planning permission. If, however, the proposed application impacts on significant archaeological the planning authority may refuse planning permission.

17. What if the works I intend to carry out at or in the vicinity of a monument are exempted development?

Under the planning system many minor works do not require planning permission. These works are known as exempted development. However, if the type of works proposed affect a monument, which is a National Monument in the ownership or guardianship of the Minister or a local authority, or subject to a preservation order, or included in the Record of Monuments and Places then the owner or occupier undertaking the works must comply with the notification requirements under the National Monuments Act (see pt. 6).

18. Is there a standard buffer zone around monuments in the countryside within which development should not occur?

No. There are many factors which can affect the carrying out of an archaeological material around a monument, including the type and condition of the monument, the landscape and the previous land use. The establishment of a buffer or fallow area around a monument, sufficient to protect the amenity and setting of the monument requires individual assessment. Each planning application is therefore examined on an individual basis.

19. What sort of additional information relating to archaeology does a planning authority request?

Usually detailed information assessing the likely impact of the proposed development on archaeology is requested. This is referred to as an archaeological impact assessment or simply an 'archaeological assessment'. It is carried out on behalf of a prospective developer by an archaeologist and is funded by the developer.

20. What is an Archaeological Assessment?

An archaeological assessment is the investigation of known, suspected or previously unidentified monuments, sites or areas of archaeological potential in order to assess the impact which the proposed development may have on them. Each assessment should contain a description of the archaeology known to survive in the development area and the known or suspected archaeological features, not yet identified, which could possibly exist in that location. These should be assessed in terms of the impact of the proposed works on known or predicted archaeological features. Assessments may indicate that archaeological test excavation or sampling is required. The assessment procedure also provides a basis for designing the works to fit around the site. In such cases, the 'archaeological assessment' report may also provide information on the details of the work or plan.

21. What is Archaeological Test Excavation?

Archaeological test excavation is excavation of confined strips or areas of a site in order to establish the presence or absence of archaeological and to determine its nature and extent.
The purpose of archaeology is to understand how humans in the past interacted with the environment, to formulate an explanation for the development of cultures and to preserve this history for present and future generations. The practice of archaeology has developed in response to the need to understand the development of past societies. Archaeology attempts to achieve the best possible level of knowledge and understanding of past societies by assembling all available evidence and analysing it.

1. What is Archaeology?
Archaeology is the scientific study of past societies, their culture and their relationship with the environment through an examination of the material remains of their predecessors. The purpose of archaeology is to understand how humans in the past interacted with the environment, to formulate an explanation for the development of cultures and to preserve this history for present and future generations.

2. What are Archaeological Monuments?
Archaeologists use the word ‘monument’ to refer to man-made structures or to natural features altered by man. Monuments range in scale and complexity from small prehistoric tombs to large medieval towns. In Ireland, the term ‘monument’ is restricted to tangible evidence of medieval times remain. Buried deposits are also significant for understanding the way life was organised in the past.

3. Are all Monuments visible?
For many monuments there is no visible evidence. They may be below ground, in which case their existence is determined by examination of features, such as the surface of artefact scatters in ploughed field, but, in other cases may remain invisible unless uncovered through ground disturbance. Wetland environments (e.g. peatlands) have a particularly wide range of features, sites and structures which are either difficult or impossible to detect as crop-marks visible from the air or have their presence only known from the ground disturbance. Wetland environments (e.g. peatlands) have a particularly wide range of features, sites and structures which are either difficult or impossible to detect as crop-marks visible from the air or have their presence only known from the ground disturbance.

4. What is the date range of Archaeology in Ireland?
Archaeology is the study of prehistory and history in the Republic of Ireland and the six counties of Northern Ireland. The earliest archaeological sites in Ireland are slight traces of the Neolithic period, about 4000 BC. These ancient rubbish tips and buried occupation sites often reveal as much information about our predecessors as the extensive upstanding buildings.

5. Why protect and preserve archaeological material?
Archaeological sites and monuments may have no visible surface features at all; the surface features may have decayed completely or been deliberately removed but archaeological deposits and features may remain. Most of these sites can be detected as crop-marks visible from the air or have their presence only known from the ground disturbance. Wetland environments (e.g. peatlands) have a particularly wide range of features, sites and structures which are either difficult or impossible to detect as crop-marks visible from the air or have their presence only known from the ground disturbance.

6. Are Sites and Monuments protected under the law?
All archaeological monuments are protected under the National Monuments Acts 1930–1992 in the Republic of Ireland and the County Monuments Acts of the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government in Northern Ireland. The Record of the Monument and Places (RMP) is a statutory list of all known archaeological monuments provided for in the National Monuments Acts and the County Monuments Acts in the Republic of Ireland. The RMP consists of a published county-by-county set of Ordnance Survey plans and/or photographs which are marked by a circle and an accompanying book which specifies the type of monuments. It should be borne in mind that the circle does not necessarily define the extent of the site or mound of earth.

7. What is the Record of Monument and Places?
The Record of Monument and Places (RMP) is a statutory list of all known archaeological monuments provided for in the National Monuments Acts of the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government in the Republic of Ireland. The RMP consists of a published county-by-county set of Ordnance Survey plans and/or photographs which are marked by a circle and an accompanying book which specifies the type of monuments. It should be borne in mind that the circle does not necessarily define the extent of the site or mound of earth.

8. How do I know if my proposed development site lies within or close to a Recorded Monument?
You must determine whether your development site lies within or close to a Recorded Monument. You can do this by checking the site on the RMP which can be viewed online. The RMP maps are organised on a county basis and you should be able to identify your development site within the relevant townland containing your site and then as near as possible to the development site.

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10. If my proposed development site lies within or close to a site on the RMP where can I access more detailed information about it?
The Department’s Archive Unit RMP file contains all available information, including details of location, map designations for the various editions of the Ordnance Survey maps, and photographs. In some cases, an available, the field notes of State survey archaeologists and aerial photographs are included. As mentioned earlier it is intended that it will be possible to access the record online on National Monuments Service’s new website www.archaeology.ie.

11. I am planning development in proximity to a recorded monument. Do I have to notify the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government directly?
If your development site lies within or close to a site on the RMP you may be required to seek the advice of the National Monuments Service to ensure that your development project will have no adverse effects on the monument. If your proposal might affect a National Monument, you should contact the National Monuments Service to discuss the project.

12. What planning applications should I notify the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government about?
You must notify the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government in the following circumstances,

13. If I am planning a development in proximity to a Recorded Monument do I have to notify the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government directly?
Under the National Monuments Acts the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government is required to be notified of planning applications which might affect a National Monument. This means that, in practice, it is the normal practice for planning authorities to refer planning applications to the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government.

14. What happens to my planning application if referred by a planning authority to DEHLG?
Under the National Monuments Acts, if a planning application is referred to DEHLG by a planning authority, DEHLG will consider the impact of the proposed development on the monument and will make appropriate recommendations to the planning authority.

15. What are the implications of planning applications on archaeological heritage?
Planning applications are often made for developments in the vicinity of known archaeological monuments. The planning authority must refer such applications to DEHLG in order to satisfy the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) requirements for the protection of the archaeological heritage. Development plans may include such objectives, and conditions relating to archaeology may be attached to individual planning permissions.

16. Could my planning application be refused on the basis that the development would have a significant adverse impact on an archaeological monument?
If a planning application is refused on the grounds that the development will have a significant adverse impact on a National Monument, the applicant may appeal to An Bord Pleanála. Alternatively, the applicant may make a formal referral to DEHLG that the development will have a significant adverse impact on a National Monument and the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government may be required to be notified of the application.

17. If I am planning a development in proximity to a National Monument do I have to notify the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government directly?
If you are planning a development in proximity to a National Monument, you will need to notify the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government directly.

18. What are the potential consequences of refusing development of a National Monument?
If a planning application is refused on the grounds that the development will have a significant adverse impact on a National Monument, the applicant may appeal to An Bord Pleanála. Alternatively, the applicant may make a formal referral to DEHLG that the development will have a significant adverse impact on a National Monument. DEHLG may then be required to refer the application to the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government for determination.

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