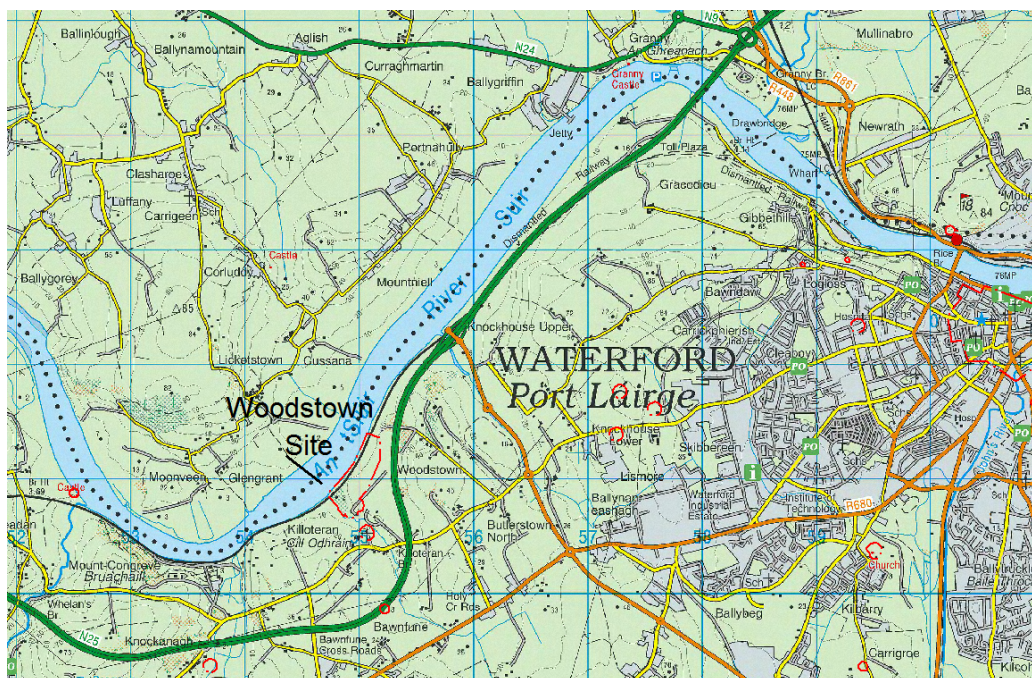


# Presentation on Conservation Management Plan for the Woodstown Viking Site

## Briefing Notes



Waterford Metropolitan District Meeting  
Monday 17<sup>th</sup> February 2020

An Chomhairle Oidhreachta  
The Heritage Council



Comhairle Cathrach & Contae Phort Láirge  
Waterford City & County Council

## 1.0 Introduction

The discovery of a previously unknown Viking settlement on the southern bank of the River Suir in 2003 is one of the most significant archaeological discoveries ever made in Ireland. Though only approximately 5% of the site has been excavated, Woodstown has produced a tremendous amount of information and artefacts that have given us new insights into the earliest phases of Viking settlement in Ireland. The Draft Conservation Management plan is informed by consultation and best practice and the previous work, reports and guidance of the Woodstown Steering Committee. The plan details the significance of Woodstown, it offers a research strategy that will form a pathway to a better understanding of the site and its context. The plan offers interpretative and communications strategies that will ensure that the story is engaging and accessible to a variety of audiences, and it will identify potential funding sources that could help to achieve the ambitions outlined in the plan. The plan also considers biodiversity and natural heritage, and also assesses practical considerations such as land ownership, boundaries, protection of the archaeological remains and public access.

Woodstown Viking Site, now listed as a National Monument, has the potential to have a transformative effect on our understanding of the Vikings. As such, it could help to establish not only the next generation of Viking-Age scholars, but offers the potential to create new experts in conservation, artefact analysis, experimental archaeology, living history , biodiversity, land management and sustainable tourism.

The location of the site, adjacent to the popular Waterford Greenway, offers a wonderful opportunity to engage and excite the general public with the story of the Vikings in Ireland and has the potential to become a world-class educational heritage tourism asset. The ideas outlined in the Draft Conservation Management Plan perfectly complement the excellent cultural offerings in Waterford City. This plan will also lead Viking Woodstown to become an iconic landmark for the Waterford Greenway and create a pathway to vibrant festivals and events.

Importantly ,Woodstown is a site that not only reflects Ireland's past, but that of Norway and Scandinavia. The Viking settlement at Woodstown is vital part of a compelling shared story and it can become a tangible connection between Ireland and Norway, leading to shared learnings, expertise and partnership in the development of archaeological knowledge and sustainable educational tourism experiences.

## 1.1 Project Background

The townland of Woodstown is located on the southern banks of the River Suir in County Waterford, approximately 9km from the city centre. During a programme of archaeological test-trenching works in advance of the construction of the N25 Waterford City Bypass in 2003, archaeologists identified previously unknown but clearly significant archaeological remains at Woodstown that appear to date to the ninth century and relate to Scandinavian activity. Following the initial investigations it became clear that the site was of potential international importance. From the nature of the archaeology and the volume of artefacts, it was decided that full-excavation of the archaeological site would have a significant impact on the delivery and budget of the planned road. In May 2005, the Minister of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government declared the site to be a National Monument and ordered the preservation in situ of the site and the route of the proposed N25 Waterford City Bypass was amended to protect the archaeological remains<sup>1</sup>.

In 2006 and 2007, further geophysical surveys led to investigations, titled '*Woodstown 6 Supplementary Research Project*'. The excavations were carried out in 2007 by ACS Ltd. in order to establish the extents of the archaeological remains and to investigate potential archaeological features revealed during geophysical survey. This was complemented by an intertidal and dive survey by the Underwater Archaeology Unit (UAU) of the National Monuments Service. The UAU survey concluded that although no evidence of exposed archaeological remains was encountered at Woodstown there remained a high potential for the retention of buried archaeology in the foreshore silts along the river course there. However, in the view of the UAU the river dynamics, strong tidal flows and river currents suggested it was highly unlikely that the shoreline at Woodstown served as a harbour. These investigations, along with the initial discoveries made in 2003, suggested that the major and central part of the site appears to be within two contiguous D-shaped enclosures both of which are defined by two concentric ditches. With the exception of some potential areas of small-scale industrial activity, most of which were identified during the 2007 excavations, archaeological material appears to be focused within the area enclosed by the ditches.

The Woodstown Working Group (WWG) was established as a steering committee to consider the future of the archaeological site. In 2006 WWG issued an interim report, followed by a final report in 2008 that contained recommendations on the future preservation and archaeological investigation of the national monument site at Woodstown

The results of the archaeological excavations, surveys and subsequent historical research and artefactual analysis, formed the basis of the TII publication *Woodstown: A Viking-Age Settlement in Co. Waterford* (Russell and Hurley eds. 2014). This was supported by further dissemination with the production of an audiobook by Abarta Heritage that tells the story of Viking Woodstown.

The Conservation Management Plan was commissioned by Waterford City and County Council in August 2019 as an Action of the Waterford Heritage Plan 2017-2022. Abarta Heritage were appointed to carry out the work following a public tender process. Neil Jackman carried out the work and is the principle author, with additional support of Dr. Conor Ryan, Róisín Burke and Geni Murphy of Abarta Heritage. The framework for this plan was developed under the guidance of a Steering Committee that featured the following members:

- Bernadette Guest, Heritage Officer, Waterford City & County Council.
- Ian Doyle, Head of Conservation, The Heritage Council.
- Ambassador Else Berit Eikeland, Norwegian Embassy, Ireland.
- James Eogan, Archaeologist, Transport Infrastructure Ireland.
- Eamon McEaney, Director, Waterford Museum of Treasures.
- Maeve O'Callagan, Archaeologist, National Monuments Service.
- Maeve Sikora, Keeper of Irish Antiquities, National Museum of Ireland.
- Dr. Liam Lysaght, Director, National Biodiversity Data Centre.
- John Sheehan, Department of Archaeology, University College Cork.
- Terje Gansum, Vestfoeld Fylkeskommune, Norway.
- Orla Scully, Archaeologist

The Conservation Management Plan is a continuation of the work of the Woodstown Working Group and Woodstown Steering Committee, and forms the next step in the ongoing care, conservation and presentation of one of the most important archaeological monuments ever discovered in the state.

## 1.2 Scope of this Conservation Management Plan

The key roles of this Conservation Management Plan are to:

- Prepare a Statement of Significance as informed by the current understanding of the site.
- Collate a Research Strategy
- Collate an Animation and Heritage Interpretation Strategy
- Develop a Pragmatic Management Plan for the site.
- Identify potential sources of funding for research and interpretation.

Actions in the Plan include;

To continue the collaborative process and achieve consensus between all stakeholders on the future research, management and conservation of the site.

To acquire the entire landholding of the National Monument should a suitable opportunity arise in the future and subject to agreement of the landowners.

To encourage inter-Museum collaboration on loans and exhibitions related to the Woodstown Viking Site between Viking Sites in Europe, the UK and Ireland.

To ensure sympathetic management of the site and incorporate biodiversity enhancement measures such as an appropriate low impact grazing regime and a species rich grassland.

To ensure security of the site and maintain robust boundaries to the site.

To put structures in place to enable further research and excavations on the site.

Any future intervention of the site to be defined/underpinned by well researched goals & international conventions.

To provide for managed access to the National Monument.

To raise the profile of Viking Studies in Ireland. Fostering Viking Research and using Woodstown as a site example.

Commission further research on existing assemblages & data from the site.

Identify funding streams for ongoing research of the site.

Support the establishment of an Archaeology Field School on the Woodstown Viking Site in collaboration with a third level academic institution.

Ensure compliance with all legal requirements and best practice standards in on-site conservation of any finds, after care and post excavation reporting relating to the site.

To complete transfer of all known artefacts in care of other bodies to the National Museum

### 1.3 Request to Waterford Metropolitan District Council

That the members of Waterford Metropolitan District Council approve the Draft Conservation Management Plan for issue to public consultation stage.