

Options Identified in Stage 1 by the Expert Group to
provide Technical Assistance to Government
in relation to the location of juvenile human remains
interred on the site of the former Mother and Baby
Home in Tuam, Co. Galway.

Delivered to Minister Katherine Zappone, Department of Children and Youth Affairs.

30th June 2017

On the 3rd of March 2017, the Mother and Baby Home Commission of Investigation released a statement confirming the presence of human remains at the site of the Former Mother and Baby Home, Dublin Road Housing Estate, Tuam, Co. Galway. On the 1st of June, Minister Katherine Zappone established a group to provide expert technical advice on how the government should proceed in dealing with the complexities of the site and with the human remains therein. This report contains the list of options as identified by the Expert Technical Group appointed by Minister Zappone.

This first-stage document sets out the options that have been identified by the group, specifically in relation to dealing with the site from a technical perspective. The second-stage document will explore each of these options in substantial detail. Each option, or scenario, will be examined in relation to the necessary requirements, what the expected outcome would be, and what the feasibility, timeline and possible cost is for the implementation of each option.

The exploration of each of these options will allow the provision of practical and factual advices to assist a decision on the future of what is a particularly complex site. There is no precedence for a situation such as this in Ireland, or indeed further afield, and the cooperation of all relevant government agencies is required in moving forward. This is to ensure that the dignity and integrity of the human remains at this location may be acknowledged and respected with their future to be secured as swiftly as possible.

Preliminary Considerations

The Site

The site under consideration is located within the boundaries of a housing estate on the outskirts of Tuam town. Currently, the space which had been occupied by the footprint of the former Mother and Baby Home is occupied by houses, associated gardens and sheds, a playground, parking area, and gravelled access-way. To the southeast is a separate garden that is known locally as the 'memorial garden' and is separately enclosed by a wall. It is within this memorial garden that the Mother and Baby Home Commission of Investigation conducted their test excavations in 2016 and 2017.

The Minister has asked the Expert Technical Group to provide advice that considers both the site of the memorial garden and the wider extent of the location in which the Mother and Baby Home would have been. These will be referred to below as the 'memorial garden' and the 'extended site' respectively.

The Environment of the Site

This site has unique and specific aspects that mean, when considered collectively, there are currently no known comparative sites, nationally or internationally.

Such complexities include the commingled/intermixed juvenile human remains, which were found in significant quantities in a subsurface chambered structure with limited accessibility. The probability that the commingling/intermixing of human remains has occurred is a significant complication to individual identification. This is more acute in the case of juvenile human remains due to their fragile nature, compounded by the potentially significant quantities involved.

The forensic excavation of a subsurface structure within an enclosed space leads to very specific health and safety considerations that must be negated if any proposed intrusive recovery works are undertaken at this site. The stability of the masonry chambered structure is unknown. The constrained size of the memorial garden also raises issues of accessibility and disturbance to the ground surrounding this walled area. The depth at which manual excavation would need to be carried out can be estimated at up to 2m below ground level: this would be classified as a deep excavation and potentially a confined space. Therefore, due to the scale and location of the site, together with the nature of the human remains discovered thus far, and the accepted standard to which these remains must be treated, there is no clear national or international precedent to follow.

The Role of the Coroner

The Coroner for North Galway has a file open regarding the human remains found at this location, however, at this time is not conducting an active investigation. The coroner has agreed to facilitate the efforts of the Expert Technical Group in fulfilling their Terms of Reference. In this regard, and in line with international best practice, any work undertaken on site must be of a forensic standard, in order that potential future investigative work, should it be required, is not compromised.

The Methods of Forensic Archaeology

The principles of forensic investigation that would apply, from the least intrusive method to most intrusive method, allow for the protection and preservation of evidence at each stage. Hence, Option 1 is the least intrusive, while Option 4 represents the most intrusive. A full methodological statement, addressing the forensic standard to be applied, will be provided in the second-stage document. At this point, the least intrusive method refers to negligible disturbance to the soils and structures at the site, while the more intrusive options necessitate various degrees of excavation and associated health and safety works.

The current position in relation to this site is that further scientific analysis is needed, both at the site and on the human remains that have previously been discovered. A geophysical survey of the available grounds of the former Mother and Baby Home will be taking place in the coming weeks. There is also a proposal to undertake sample DNA analysis to establish if it is possible to acquire such data from a selection of the remains previously recovered. The results of this surveying and testing will be utilised to inform and support the various future options that are available at this site.

Option 1: Baseline Scenario

This option involves no further investigative work at the site, once the preliminary survey and DNA testing results have been considered. The site would then be returned to being managed as a site of memorial. The requirements and outcomes of this situation will be examined more completely in the coming weeks.

Option 2: Excavate and Recover Human Remains from the Memorial Garden

This option would involve the complete forensic archaeological excavation of the structure identified as containing juvenile human remains by the Mother and Baby Home Commission of Investigation (3rd March 2017). The structure is one of two identified within the area of the memorial garden. It has been reported that this is an elongated structure, comprising 20 chambers, in which human remains have been discovered in 17 of those chambers. Information relating to the chambers state that all are deep and narrow, and are broadly consistent in size. The human remains within appear to be those of infants with no formal burial evident. From the evidence thus far, it seems that this structure is the only part of the memorial garden that contains human remains. However, in any forensic archaeological recovery of these remains, there would be a high potential risk of disturbance to the wider area of the memorial garden. It is therefore likely that the entire walled area (255 sq. m) would need to be archaeologically excavated, in order that all evidential and contextual information can be protected and examined. A consideration of the feasibility of this scenario will be determined through the consultation process that is currently on-going.

Option 3: Excavate All Areas of Interest

This option requires full consideration of results from the current programme of non-intrusive investigative work. A comprehensive appraisal of the resulting evidence from geophysical survey would therefore be necessary. In addition, this option would require the further collection and assessment of witness statements and historical records. From this evidence, it may become possible to identify further areas of potential interest, which subsequently could lead to archaeological excavation. The aim of this option is the recovery of human remains from the site in a targeted manner based on information acquired. This would logically include the area of the memorial garden and the complete forensic excavation and recovery of human remains at other targeted areas that are identified. Any potentially relevant areas of interest cannot be speculated upon at this stage but the assessment of further excavations would be based upon a multi-disciplinary consideration of those areas.

Option 4: Excavate Total Available Area

This would represent the most intrusive methodology that might be applied. This option would require the full forensic investigation and archaeological excavation of all available ground formerly occupied by the Mother and Baby Home at Tuam, in order to physically and practically exhaust all potential for further relevant and preserved human remains. The fact that the site had been a Union Workhouse, and later a military barracks, prior to functioning

as a Mother and Baby Home is a foreseeable complication to this option. As a result, there could be significant disturbance to historical burials and other archaeological features that do not relate to the operation of the Mother and Baby Home. Furthermore, while extensive, the excavation of all available areas could not be considered conclusive. Just over 0.4 hectares of the property which was once within the boundary of the Mother and Baby Home is now open ground (i.e. playground, memorial garden, private roadways). The remaining 2.3 hectares has since that time had houses, private gardens, sheds and public roadways built upon it (approximately 85% of the original site).

Option 5: Programme of DNA analysis

Once the potential preservation of DNA evidence has been established, this option may be applied to any of the above options that include further exhumation/recovery of human remains, that is, Options 2-4. Therefore, this is currently a floating option. Once the feasibility of DNA identification is investigated this option can be considered more fully. At this stage, a number of observations have been made by experts in this area. These are factors such as the potential degradation of the quality of DNA that can be recovered. The commingled/intermixed nature of the remains, alongside the understanding that these are infant/juvenile skeletal remains, potentially poses challenges that need further consideration.

The second-stage document will develop these options with regard to feasibility, requirements, expected outcomes, timelines and estimated costs. The final *Technical Report on the Tuam Site* shall be delivered to the Minister by the end of September 2017.