

Ireland on Sunday

2005-10-09 John Lee, political correspondent,

Major developers who are also financial backers of Fianna Fáil stand to make millions from the controversial M3 motorway which conservationists say will destroy the historic Hill of Tara.

A company controlled by multi-millionaire builder Joseph Murphy Jr – whose main business, JMSE, was exposed as corrupt the Flood tribunal – owns valuable lands along the route.

So too does multi-millionaire Fianna Fáil backer Cathal McCarthy, formerly a business partner of Frank Dunlop, the corrupt former government press secretary, and of Des Richardson, a close friend of the Taoiseach.

Both Mr Murphy and Mr McCarthy stand to make millions from the sale of land needed for the motorway – which campaigners say will destroy some of our most important archaeological sites – and for the construction of intersections.

But Mr Murphy, in particular, stands to make even more substantial profits from the hundreds of acres of land which he owns within a few miles of the motorway route and which may well be opened up for development once construction is completed.

Support for the M3 route formed a major part of the Fianna Fáil campaign in Friday's by-election – even though archaeologists and ecological activists have compared it to Egypt's Valley of the Kings and insist that it should be preserved.

Mr Murphy faces an investigation by the Criminal Assets Bureau after playing a central role in the Flood/Mahon Tribunal into planning corruption.

Mr Murphy and Frank Reynolds, the former managing director of JMSE who was also condemned by Mr Justice Fergus Flood, are beneficial directors of Newland Properties Ltd with an address at Ashley House, Batterstown, Co Meath.

Newland Properties owns 26 acres in Roestown, Ratoath, Co Meath, of which five-and-a-half acres are subject to compulsory purchase by Meath County Council for construction of the M3.

But in recent years, Newland Properties has bought up more than 130 acres in nearby Ratoath, Dunshaughlin, Dunboyne and their parts of south Meath near the proposed route.

Though the CPO on the five-and-a-half acres is expected to net the company about €5m, the real potential for profit is in its other properties beside and near the M3 route. Inevitably, there will be pressure to rezone this land for housing and industrial development – a move that would bring in millions more for the two building magnates, according to property experts.

Frank Reynolds said the company owned more than 100 acres “if you take in Dublin and other places”. “I think if you ask anybody whose land will be affected by the M3 or N2, they would say they'd rather have the land. I wouldn't say I'd make a killing on it. You can't do much with land that has a road running through it”, said Mr Reynolds. “I don't know if you can do much with it building-wise as people don't want to live by a motorway”.

Land Registry documents show that Newland Properties also has a massive land portfolio in Dublin. JMSE has made huge financial contributions to Fianna Fáil and the Progressive Democrats.

Tribunal star James Gogarty, when accompanying Joseph Murphy and another corrupt building tycoon, Mick Bailey, to a 1989 meeting with now jailed ex-minister Ray Burke to make a corrupt €30,000 contribution, innocently asked: “Will we get a receipt?”

“Will we f***,” was the reply.

Cathal McCarthy, meanwhile, has made millions from the development of Navan town centre in partnership with another rich developer, Gerry Duignan. IoS has seen files that show Mr McCarthy owns 12 acres at the most controversial interchange on the motorway – right beside the Hill of Tara, ancient seat of the High Kings of Ireland.

An additional 200-acre landback beside the interchange site was transferred to the name of Mr McCarthy since April 2004. The land is highly valuable given its proximity to the interchange and the M3. Opponents of the current route of the new motorway argue that the 29-acre, floodlit interchange will damage the Hill of Tara.

It has also been learned that in 1999, Mr McCarthy and Mr Duignan – registered with the Public Offices Commission as Duignan & McCarthy, PO Box 44, Navan, Co Meath – contributed £30,500 to Fianna Fáil.

The contributions are listed as ‘£2,500 for attendance at a fundraiser, £3,000 for attendance at a fundraiser and £25,000 for attendance at a fundraiser’.

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