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**TOWARDS AN ASSESSMENT OF THE
EFFECT OF THE PROPOSED KIDDERMINSTER,
BLAKEDOWN AND HAGLEY BYPASS ON THE SETTING
OF WYCHBURY CAMP**

Malcolm Cooper MPhil, DMS, MIFA, MIMgt
Archaeology Officer

Simon Woodiwiss BA, AIFA
Archaeological Field Officer

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County Archaeological Service,
Hereford and Worcester County Council,
Tetbury Drive, Warndon,
Worcester WR4 9LS

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Towards an assessment of the effect of the proposed Kidderminster, Blakedown and Hagley Bypass the setting of Wychbury Camp

Malcolm Cooper and Simon Woodiwiss

1 Introduction

A scheme to provide a trunk road to bypass Kidderminster, Blakedown and Hagley was initially proposed by the Department of Transport in April 1987. Following recommendations made by the County Archaeological Service, a desk-based assessment of sites of archaeological interest recorded on the County Sites and Monuments Record (SMR) for the route was prepared in April 1990 (Brown and Woodiwiss 1990). Following revisions in the road alignment and the introduction of the A449 Link as part of the scheme, an updated assessment of archaeological sites was made in February 1990 (Brown and Woodiwiss 1990).

The desk-top assessments were designed to provide information for the Department of Transport's Environmental Statement on the preferred route for the Kidderminster, Blakedown and Hagley Bypass and the associated A449 Link. A series of known archaeological sites which were likely to be affected were identified, and the possible effects of the road scheme on these archaeological remains was considered and described.

Following on from the desk-top assessments, recommendations for a programme of archaeological field evaluation for the route were drawn up by the County Archaeological Service in consultation with English Heritage and the Department of Transport (HWCC, September 1991). The recommended programme of fieldwork was subsequently commissioned by the Department of Transport and was undertaken by the Service in the autumn of 1992 (Brown 1992).

monument of national importance designated as a scheduled ancient monument. The 1992 report concluded that a technical appraisal of the effect of the proposed Bypass route on the setting of Wychbury Camp should be undertaken once detailed plans, elevations and sections of the proposals and associated works had been completed. In relation to this the 1992 report presented a short archaeological framework upon which consideration could be given to the effects of the proposals on setting of the scheduled ancient monument of Wychbury Camp.

The purpose of this report is to provide further information relevant to consideration of the setting of the hillfort, to define the aspects of setting which are seen as of archaeological relevance, and to indicate the type of information appropriate to the determination of the impact of the proposals on the setting of Wychbury Camp.

The proposed Bypass route passes close to Wychbury Camp an Iron Age hillfort, a

3 The archaeological site

Wychbury Camp is a defended hilltop enclosure commonly termed a 'hillfort'. Situated at the top of Wychbury Hill, it comprises an area of approximately 7.25 acres, enclosed by a series of substantial ramparts and ditches. Entrances through the defences can be readily identified to the east and west. Such monuments appear to have acted in many cases as defended settlements and there is often evidence for the storage of large quantities of agricultural produce, probably for redistribution. Given the scale of work needed for their construction, hillforts are also seen as having a large symbolic importance indicating the power and wealth of the society and individuals who brought them into being.

Hillforts are the most commonly recognised monument type surviving from the Iron Age period of prehistory (c 600 BC to AD 43). Wychbury Camp has not been the subject of any comprehensive modern archaeological fieldwork aside from surveys of the visible earthworks. What little excavation has been carried out remains largely unpublished and therefore while we can be certain the fort was in existence in the Iron Age, further information on the construction and function of the hillfort and its internal layout is limited, being based mainly on analogy with better studied sites.

An assessment of the importance of Wychbury Camp hillfort has been undertaken by the County Archaeological Service as part of English Heritage's Monument Protection Programme (the assessment following guidelines given by Raymond 1989, 16). This indicates that Wychbury Camp ranks highly as a small multivallate hillfort and confirms the status of the site as of national importance.

Wychbury Camp is one of a small group of Iron Age hillforts in Worcestershire lying to the east of the Severn. It is situated on a historic parish boundary which now forms part of the county boundary between Hereford and Worcester and the West Midlands (Dudley Metropolitan Borough).

The etymology of its name, perhaps refers to the Anglo-Saxon kingdom of the Hwicce (Cantrill 1929, 144). Its location on a medieval boundary might suggest the recognition of the importance of the site in the medieval period. No recent archaeological work has been undertaken at Wychbury, although Marten (1887) carried out some trial trenching in the area, the results of which are largely unknown.

Although now shrouded by trees which were planted largely in the 18th century as part of Hagley Park, Wychbury Hill forms a major landmark in the vicinity, being visible from the ring of surrounding hills, including the Clent Hills, the Malverns and Kinver Edge. It forms a major element in the landscape of Hagley and Pedmore parishes (in the counties of Hereford and Worcester and Dudley Metropolitan Borough respectively). It is a recreational venue, and has been considered as having potential for enhanced educational presentation (Darlington 1991, 8).

Wychbury Camp is scheduled as an ancient monument (County Monument number West Midlands 7) and as such is protected under the provisions of the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979. This indicates that the site is considered as being of national importance in the view of the Secretary of State for National Heritage. The scheduled area is indicated in Figure 1.

5 Methodology

Identifying a study area

Following the definition of setting given in the previous section, any assessment of the impact of the current proposals on the setting of Wychbury Camp will need to be based on an initial identification of a study area defined as relevant to the consideration of setting.

Views from the monument

The study area will need to take consideration of the area of the proposed road corridor readily visible from Wychbury Camp and will include significant views over and beyond the corridor. Views from the monument will include any within which the road and/or associated works will feature.

Special attention may be drawn to views to areas of particular sensitivity such as, for example, other high points in the surrounding areas, especially where these contain significantly associated archaeological or historic monuments. Similarly, views from the monument which help the viewer to gain an understanding of the monument and its hinterland should be identified.

Recommended information requirements

Mapping with accompanying written description showing directions and distances of main views from within or from directly adjacent to the hillfort into the surrounding area.

The mapping should also include the proposed route and identify significant landscape features where present.

The mapping should also include location of public footpaths and other paths within or adjacent to the monument from which views from the monument of the surrounding area can be obtained.

A colour photographic record using standard lenses illustrating the main views as identified above. An accompanying map should be provided indicating the location and direction

of photographs. Where possible, overlays of diagrams should be provided showing proposed road and associated works in relation to the main views.

Appropriate cross-sections should be provided where relevant, demonstrating any significant alteration in landscape form along main lines of view resulting from the proposals.

Views to the monument

Views to the monument are more difficult to define as the hill on which Wychbury Camp stands may be viewed from great distances, especially from the west. It will be necessary therefore to select and define an appropriate cut off point outside which views of the monument are not considered to be significant.

The south side of the hillfort is wooded as an integral part of the historic landscape of Hagley Park. The trees obscure the southern ramparts of the hillfort and at present restrict views to and from the monument. Mitigation of visual impact for the road should not therefore presuppose that existing tree cover will be retained in precisely the present form.

An important conservation issue for future generations will be the need to balance the potentially damaging effects of tree planting and regeneration on the hillfort in the context of competing objectives that the parkland landscape should be sustained.

Given the above, it is recommended that the definition of the study area for views to the monument should use views where the tree-covered eminence is visible. From the south-east the monument is visible from the Clent Hills, and from the east more distant views may be made - possibly as far as the line of the M5 motorway.

Of particular significance will be views of the monument from locations nearby, for example, the roads, houses and gardens, from which the monument will form a significant feature (the rear views of the houses to the north of the Birmingham Road (A456) and to the east of the Stourbridge

6 Material Considerations

The information given below may be usefully drawn upon when considering the impact of the current proposals on the setting of Wychbury Camp.

Views from the monument

Wychbury Camp lies at the top of a low hill at a height of 223m above sea level. From Camp's ramparts there is a variable downward slope on the northern, western and southern sides. There are a number of variations in the general form of the contours, for instance those associated with Round Hill to the south-west and the 'valley' through which the Birmingham Road passes. The eastern side is less well defined as the ground continues at a relatively high level towards Roundhill Wood.

The monument is currently covered with deciduous trees though a smaller proportion of evergreens (notably yews) are present. The tree coverage is sufficiently dense to make views from the inner rampart obscure even in winter when deciduous trees are bare. The tree density is however variable and clearer views may be obtained at certain locations.

There is permitted public access to parts of the monument but it should be noted that the status of access to the monument and its surroundings has not been established. There are at least six pedestrian approaches to the monument, largely from the south and east. Public vehicular access to the monument is not available within c 275m. Carparking at this close proximity is not extensive, nor well established or signed. Within the Camp footpaths tend to follow the tops of the two ramparts. There is no presentation or other signed indication that the monument exists.

The surrounding landscape is of the urban fringe with both typically urban and rural landscapes apparent. The urban elements are more prevalent to the east in general, and to the west in a band occupying the middle distance (Hagley, Pedmore and Stourbridge), the rural elements are more prevalent to the south (the Clent Hills) and at a greater

distance to the west. The area immediately surrounding the monument to the south is open and wooded parkland. With elements of rural and urban landscapes the visual setting of the Camp is difficult to characterise. The contemporary landscape of this type of monument would have been dominantly rural, however its present setting must also consider the current use of the monument of which recreation forms a significant part. The perceptions of visitors may vary from those from rural areas emphasising urban characteristics to those from urban areas emphasising the rural characteristics as significant elements of the landscape. While it is clear that views from the monument in some direction are clearly urban in character leading to some difficulty in visualising the original landscape which the Iron Age residents would have experienced it is still possible to appreciate the elevated location of the site and its defensive qualities in relation to the lower surrounding areas.

Descriptions should be produced of main vistas from interior of the monument and should be taken from the footpath following the top of the southern inner rampart. Trees obscure these views but description should assume that each view is clear. Photography will not be particularly informative due to tree cover though the nearest unobstructive views (on the southern edge of the wooded area) would be relevant even though it would be in a sufficiently different elevation, relation to other topographical features (especially Round Hill and the obelisk spur) and proximity to the road to make comparison difficult. Alternatively view points may be expressed in terms of profiles radiating out from the Camp to indicate sight lines and the areas of the road obscured or visible. Profiles should also indicate screening and bunding together with street furniture (lamps, signs etc).

Views to the monument

This section is divided into comments from five general view points.

Views from the west

Due to the wide area from which the hill may

7 Conclusions

It is recommended that consideration of the impact of the proposals on the setting of the monument should be based upon views to and from the monument, with associated consideration of the archaeological setting of the monument and its amenity value.

A study area should be defined based on an assessment of views to and from the monument. Main viewpoints and publicly accessible areas from the monument should be identified together with significant landscape features. Similarly main viewpoints to the monument should be indicated.

Details of the proposed scheme, including the road and associated works such as bunding and street furniture should be overlain against these in photographic and drawn form. Assessment should also include consideration of the impact of noise and street lighting on the hillfort.

Finally the impact of the proposals in terms of the visual setting of the monument should be assessed. This is likely to involve consideration of the appreciation of the monument in its current form, understanding of its past function, and its relation both to its surrounding current and former landscape and to other significant archaeological and historical monuments. The consideration should be based on current and future appreciation.

From an archaeological viewpoint it can be concluded that it should be demonstrated that mitigation of the schemes impact adequately safeguards the setting of the monument within its immediate rural environs.

Appendix 1 Extracts from the *Hereford and Worcester County Structure Plan*

(a) Approved Written Statement 1985

Policy BE1 - In considering the mass, height and siting of new development, the policy is to have regard to the effect new development will have on the landscape by ensuring that:-

ii Prominent views to and from hillsides and across open countryside or towns are protected from the intrusion of large scale development. The setting of historic and attractive man-made features such as cathedrals, churches and notable buildings should therefore be protected.

iii New development will not adversely affect sites of historic, archaeological value;

Policy BE19 - The County Council will where considered appropriate make full use of existing powers, including the provisions of the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979, to protect ancient monuments.

Policy BE21 - The County Council will request the appropriate planning authorities in carrying out their function of development control to ensure that important archaeological remains are not destroyed. However, where this is unavoidable arrangements should be made by the appropriate planning authority (whether by imposition of conditions or otherwise) to:

i Either allow access and sufficient time for qualified archaeologists to record (and if necessary excavate) the remains in advance of and where necessary during development, or

ii Retain and make accessible the archaeological features within an appropriate setting.

(b) Proposed Second Alterations to the Written Statement (HWCC September 1991)

All policies mentioned in Appendix 7a are proposed for deletion, to be replaced by:

Policy CTC5 - Development, operations or activities which would adversely affect scheduled ancient monuments or other sites of archaeological interest and their settings will not normally be allowed.

Attention is also drawn to the justification for Policy CTC5 on page 6 of this document.

The Secretary of State for the Environment has proposed modification to this policy as follows:-

Policy CTC5 - delete the words "operations or activities".

The County Council has agreed with this modification.

FIGURE 3

