RPS Planning, Transport and Environment

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M66 Development, Ashton Moss

An Archaeological Watching Brief

University of Manchester Archaeological Unit
University of Manchester,
Oxford Road,
Manchester M13 9PL

0161 275 2314

THE UNIVERSITY of MANCHESTER

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1. Introduction

1.1 The University of Manchester Archaeological Unit (UMAU) was commissioned by LG Mouchel & Partners Ltd on behalf of the Highways Agency to undertake a watching brief along the road corridor of the M66 development at Ashton Moss, during the excavation of topsoil and peat from the site, in order to observe and record any features of archaeological significance revealed during development, and to compile a report summarising the results. UMAU completed the watching brief as specified in the brief set out by Mr Norman Redhead Greater Manchester SMR Officer. The work undertaken by UMAU consisted of fifteen visits to the site between June and July 1996. No archaeological deposits were observed.

1.2 The site of the M66 Aston Moss Development (SJ 92 99) lies on the north-western side of the Borough of Tameside, Greater Manchester, between 95m and 105m OD. The road corridor bisects the moss.

Acknowledgements
The University of Manchester Archaeological Unit would like to thank the Highways Agency and LG Mouchel and Partners for commissioning the work. The watching brief was undertaken by Philip Wilson, Jon Wilson and Gavin Plaskett.

2. Setting

2.1 Geology

2.1.1 Solid

The vast majority of the development area's solid geology is composed of Collyhurst Sandstone, the lowest bed in the Permo-Triassic series. The sandstone is predominantly red in colour. Upper and Middle Coal Measures are present in the area of Manchester Road.

2.1.2 Drift

Most of the area is overlain by deep deposits of peat, represented by Ashton Moss. This peatland deposit is part of a group of ten to twelve raised bogs, developed in basins, overlying the boulder clay deposits between the Rivers Irwell, Irk and Medlock (Shimwell 1985, 304-5). In the central basin of the moss, in the vicinity of the Ashton Moss garden centre, these deposits are over 5m deep, but elsewhere the deposits vary in depth between 1.5m and 4m. The peat overlies a deposit of heavy clay, which is the main subsoil in the Littlemoss area. Apart from the sands and gravels of the Medlock valley to the north, the only other deposit of sands and gravels within the development area lies east of a line drawn between Well Style and Gravel Hill and includes the Taunton Brook area.

2.2 Topography

From south to north the land slopes upwards from 97m on Manchester Road to a peak of 102m in the centre of Ashton Moss, along Rayner Lane. North of the peat deposit, in Littlemoss, the land undulates around the 100m contour line before dropping away sharply on the edge of the Medlock Valley.

3. Aims

3.1 The recommendation for a watching brief during the development of M66 across Ashton Moss was based on the number of archaeological artifacts previously located on the Moss, and the growing body of evidence displaying that the fringes of mossland environments provide favourable conditions for settlement sites from the Mesolithic period onwards. Many lowland sites of prehistoric date located within the county have been discovered from a mossland context.

3.2 The aim of the watching brief was to allow, within the resources available, the preservation by record of archaeological deposits, the presence and nature of which could not be established in advance of the development.

4. Methodology

4.1 The archaeological watching brief consisted of the on-site presence of two field archaeologists who observed the contractors during topsoil and peat stripping of the M66 road corridor across Ashton Moss. This work was undertaken over a period of fifteen days between June and July 1996 .

5. Results

5.1 Although occasional archaeological artifacts have been discovered on Ashton Moss in the past, no prehistoric or other archaeological remains or artifacts were discovered during the watching brief. Taking into account the results of other archaeological evaluation work carried out at Ashton Moss, in conjunction with both M66 and the adjacent development, it was decided no further archaeological work would be required on the moss.

6. Recommendations

6.1 It is recommended that no further archaeological work is required on this development. All the conditions specified by the Greater Manchester SMR Officer have been complied with.

7. Terms and Conditions

7.1 The University of Manchester Archaeological Unit acts in accordance with the Institute of Field Archaeologists' Code of Conduct and observes the British Archaeologists and Developers Group Code of Practice.

7.2 UMAU is comprehensively insured for all field survey, investigations and excavations under the Royal Insurance (UK) Ltd Public and Employers Liability Insurance – Victoria University of Manchester and its Subsidiaries.

7.3 Professional Indemnity Insurance of two million pounds is provided for UMAU through the University of Manchester by Denham Direct Underwriters Ltd.

7.4 UMAU follows the University of Manchester's policy statement on Health and Safety and the SCAUM guidelines on Health and Safety in Field Archaeology.

Appendix

A.1 University of Manchester Archaeological Unit

UMAU is an archaeological Unit specialising in commercial sector work in Northern and Central Britain. It is a division of Vunan, a wholly owned University of Manchester company established in 1981, whose objective is to exploit opportunities for technology transfer.

UMAU undertakes archaeological consultancies, assessments, evaluations, excavations, watching briefs, archaeological surveys and analysis, building surveys and analysis, environmental sampling and analysis and tourism development. It has an excellent working relationship with archaeologists, historians and conservationists in the public and private sectors at local, regional and national levels. Its accumulated knowledge of primary source material in the North-West is of a very high order.

A.2 Previous Clients

Allot and Lomax Consulting Engineers, AMEC, Bolton MBC, British Opencast Executive, Bury MBC, Central Manchester Development Corporation, Cheshire County Council, the Collingwood Housing Association, EAG Ltd, English Heritage, Greater Manchester Passenger Transport Executive, Husband & Co, Manchester City Council, Derek Lovejoy Partnership, G Maunsell and Partners, McLean Homes, L G Mouchel and Partners, the Museum of Science and Industry in Manchester, the National Trust, North West Water plc, Parkman Consulting Engineers, Peel Estates, Rochdale and Oldham Groundwork Trust, Salford City Council, Stockport MBC, Tameside MBC, Trafford Park Development Corporation, Trafford MBC, Travers Morgan, Vector Investments Ltd and Wigan MBC.

UMAU has acted as consultants on over 90% of the incoming Department of Transport road schemes in Greater Manchester and immediately adjacent areas and is increasingly used by environmental consultants in need of archaeological comment and lacking in-house provision.

UMAU's reports and fieldwork accurately reflect the above and below ground implications of proposed developments, conclusions and recommendations.