

**A WATCHING BRIEF AT THE  
LILLESHALL NATIONAL SPORTS & CONFERENCING CENTRE,  
NEWPORT, SHROPSHIRE 2015**

by  
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A Report for  
**SERCO LEISURE OPERATING LTD**

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

**1.1** In August and September 2015 the Archaeology Service carried out a watching brief on groundworks associated with the construction of a two storey office building and a single storey storage/office building, the formation of internal roadways and car parking areas and associated landscaping at the Lilleshall National Sports and Conferencing Centre, Newport, Shropshire (NGR SJ 7505 1460).

**1.2** The development site was located within the Grade II Registered Park of Lilleshall Hall (National List Entry [NLE] No. 1001126) and to the east of the main buildings complex, which includes the Grade II\* listed Lilleshall Hall (NLE 1053678). The parkland around Lilleshall Hall was developed in the 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Part of the development was located close to former carriageways and in line with a possible water supply to the buildings complex from a reservoir to the east. It was considered possible that there might be some archaeological potential within the development boundary relating to the parkland and its progressive development.

**1.3** Because of the potential significance of the archaeological resource it was made a condition of the planning consent (Planning Ref: 14/04828/FUL; Condition No. 7) that groundworks associated with the proposed development should be accompanied by a programme of archaeological work to comprise an archaeological watching brief.

**1.4** The Archaeology Service, Shropshire Council, was commissioned by the Serco Leisure Operating Ltd. to carry out this programme of archaeological work.

## **2 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

**2.1** Lilleshall House (later Hall) in Sheriffhales parish was rebuilt by Sir Jeffry Wyattville in 1829 in the Tudor gothic style for Lord Gower (later 1st Duke of Sutherland). Its features include an Italianate terrace west and south of the house and an orangery projecting west at the north end of the terrace (both by Wyattville c.1829).

**2.2** Already by 1851 the gardens were highly regarded and the flower garden's extent was said to be surpassed by few in the kingdom. 'The manner of planting the flowers of one particular colour so as to form the greatest contrast with the beds contiguous to it has the most brilliant and dazzling effect'. Japonicas, roses, clematis and fruit trees were trained up a 300-yard long pergola along the north side of the western axis of the garden (Bagshaw, 1851, p397). A circular bedding scheme by the pergola, and a 'Dutch garden', 150m south of the Hall, may also date to the early 19<sup>th</sup> century.

**2.3** Beyond the flower gardens lay other elements, linked with the Hall by walks, drives and avenues. In 1891 an orchard of fruit trees (separated from the house by a yew avenue) was noted (Leach, 1891, p318). Avenues or ornamental walks led south-west to the ruins of Lilleshall Abbey; 2km northwards (planted 18 96 with Wheatley elms, partly replaced c.1980); and south via a 150m- long avenue of Lebanon cedar and Atlas

cedar leading to Belvedere, a neo-classical eye-catcher of c.1900. Also of c.1900 is a screen and loggia c.300m west of the Hall, and a formal water garden ('the Italian Garden') with balustrade, octagonal pool with fountain and four square surrounding pools.

**2.4** The Hall and grounds were used in the later 20th century by the Sports Council as the National Sports Centre. The western area of the estate became a golf course and the outlying parts of the estate reverted to agricultural use.

### **3 THE WATCHING BRIEF**

**3.1** Over the area of the new tarmac roadways, the topsoil was removed to a depth of up to 0.55m onto the top of the natural subsoil. The subsoil consisted of deposits of deep reddish brown sandy silty clay with some patches of gravel in a sandy silt matrix. In a couple of places, red sandstone bedrock outcropped into the surface of the subsoil. The subsoil had been cut across by numerous stone filled and occasional ceramic field drains. The topsoil comprised a deep reddish brown sandy clay loam, with very little humic content.

**3.2** On the area of the new grass parking areas, only the turf and part of the topsoil were removed, to a depth of about 0.3m. The subsoil was not exposed here.

**3.3** No significant archaeological features or deposits were recorded during the watching brief.

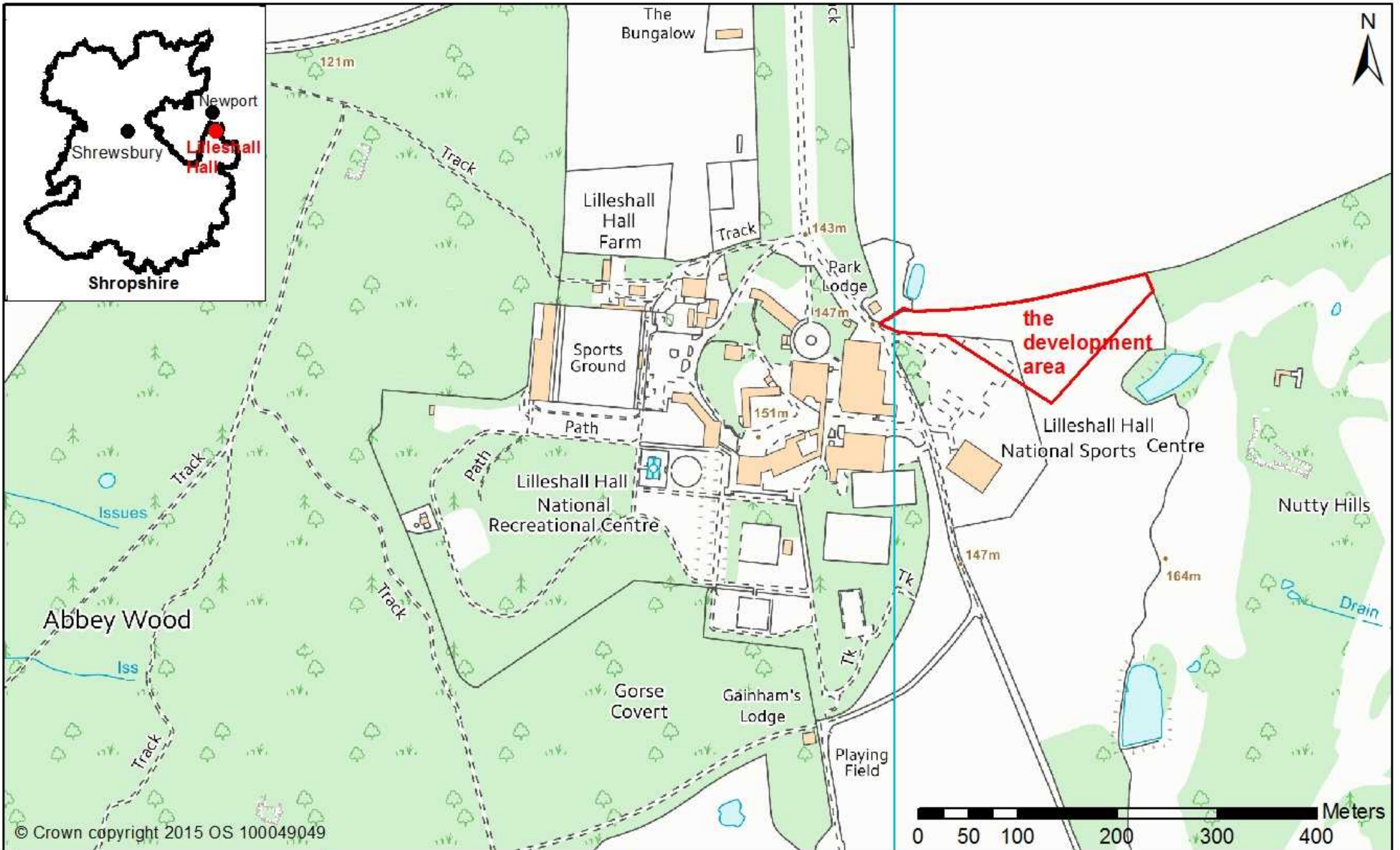
### **4 REFERENCES:**

**Bagshaw, S**, 1851: *Directory of Shropshire*, p397

**Leach, F**, 1891: *The County Seats of Shropshire*, p318

**Newman, J, & Pevsner, N**, 2006: *The Buildings of England: Shropshire*, pp326-7

**Stamper, P**, 1996: *Historic Parks and Gardens of Shropshire*, Shropshire Books, Shrewsbury



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### LILleshall NATIONAL SPORTS & CONFERENCE CENTRE 2015

Figure 1: The location of the development site

Archaeology Service, Shropshire Council,  
 Historic Environment Team, Business Growth & Prosperity,  
 Shirehall, Abbey Foregate, Shrewsbury, Shropshire, SY2 6ND

Scale: 1:5,000



Photo 1: The topsoil strip for the new access, looking W



Photo 2: The topsoil strip for the new car park, looking E



Photo 3: The topsoil strip for the new overflow car park, looking SE