

Land at Summerleys Road Princes Risborough Buckinghamshire

ARCHAEOLOGICAL DESK-BASED ASSESSMENT



understanding heritage matters

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SUMMARY

This report presents the findings of a desk-based assessment of the proposed construction of industrial units at Summerleys Road, Princes Risborough, Buckinghamshire. There are no known archaeological sites or findspots within the site. There is moderate potential for later prehistoric and Romano-British remains, although any such remains will have been disturbed by medieval and later agriculture. There is a Scheduled Anglo-Saxon cemetery near to the site. There is no evidence to indicate the location of its associated settlement, but it will be somewhere in the vicinity and locating it would provide important new evidence. The setting of the nearby Grade II Listed railway signal box will not suffer significant impact. The setting of Listed Buildings and the Conservation Areas at Horsenden and Princes Risborough will not be affected.

It is suggested that a field evaluation be undertaken to provide the planning authority with further information as to the presence, character, state of preservation and significance of any remains that are present.

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This document is presented in support of an application for construction of light industrial units at Summerleys Road, Princes Risborough, Buckinghamshire (the Potential Development Area or PDA).
- 1.2 Archaeology Warwickshire were commissioned by Blakelands LLP to undertake a desk-based assessment of the proposal site in order to determine the potential for the development to impact on archaeological remains. The assessment has been carried out according to the Standard and Guidance for archaeological desk-based assessment published by the Institute for Archaeologists (subsequently the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists).
- 1.3 Sources consulted for this assessment included the Historic Environment Record (HER), modern aerial photography, cartographic and other sources in the Buckinghamshire County Record Office and other secondary sources. HER data is shown on Fig 1, although some general records, and a few relating to modern features of no relevance to the assessment (e.g. the railway station, 19th- and 20th-century buildings in Princes Risborough, etc.), have been omitted.

Site location, topography and geology

- 1.4 The site is on the south western edge of Princes Risborough, immediately to the west of the railway station. It is situated to the rear of the modern factory unit of Ercol Furniture, Summerleys Road, from which it is separated by a wire mesh fence. It is mostly level, with a fairly steep slope down to the western end, and is c.140m max. N-S c.180m E-W.
- 1.5 The underlying geology is the West Melbury Marly Chalk Formation overlain by Head Deposits of clay, silt, sand and gravel (BGS 2016).

2 POLICY AND GUIDANCE

- 2.1 This assessment has been undertaken with reference to relevant legislation, National Planning Policy and Guidance, and Regional and Local Planning Policy relating to Cultural Heritage.

Legislation

- 2.2 Scheduled Monuments and Listed Buildings are protected by statute. Legislation regarding Scheduled Monuments is contained within 'The Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979'. Legislation regarding Listed Buildings is contained in 'The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990'. Under this legislation it is an offence to carry out works which affect the fabric of a Scheduled Monument or Listed Building without the prior written consent of the Secretary of State.

National Planning Policy Framework

- 2.3 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF or the Framework) was published in March 2012 and replaced PPS5 (Planning Policy Statement 5: Planning for the Historic Environment). The Framework has the core principal that there should be presumption in favour of sustainable development.
- 2.4 Section 12 of the Framework provides guidance on the conservation and enhancement of the historic environment. Paragraph 128 states that applicants should 'describe the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution made by their setting' in order that the planning authority can determine the application. It further states that 'the level of detail should be proportionate to the assets' importance and no more than is sufficient to understand the potential impact of the proposal on their significance'.
- 2.5 Historic England has issued detailed guidance on 'The Setting of Heritage Assets' (2015; supersedes previous English Heritage guidance), which is relevant to developments where change in setting is the principle means by which heritage assets are affected. This guidance is based on the policies set out in the NPPF and other principles and guidance issued by Historic England in the 'The Historic Environment in Local Plans' (2015) and 'Managing Significance in Decision-Taking in the Historic Environment' (2015).

Local Planning Policy

WYCOMBE LOCAL PLAN

- 2.6 The District Local Plan sets out Wycombe District Council's policies and proposals for the development and use of land. The current Local Plan was adopted in 2004, and saved and extended in 2007. It was replaced by the Adopted Core Strategy in 2008 and the Delivery and Site Allocations Plan in 2013, with some policies retained. The current consolidated version of the Local Plan identifies the policies that have been saved and are still extent as part of the Development Plan. The following are those policies which relate to the Historic Environment and are relevant to the Proposed Development Area; those relating only to direct impact on Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas are not listed as there are none on the site:

Development Affecting the Settings of Listed Buildings

2.7 *POLICY HE3*

Planning permission will not normally be granted for development which would adversely affect the setting of any Listed Building.

Local List Buildings

2.8 *POLICY HE5*

The District Council will prepare and maintain a list of buildings of local architectural or historic interest through the preparation of supplementary planning guidance. The contribution made to the local scene or local historical associations will be a material consideration in the determination of planning applications.

Development Adjoining Conservation Areas

2.9 *POLICY HE11*

Development will not normally be permitted which, although not wholly or partly located within a Conservation Area, might nevertheless have a visibly adverse effect upon the Area's special character or appearance, including intrusiveness with respect to any recognised or recorded familiar views affecting the designated area.

Scheduled Ancient Monuments

2.10 *POLICY HE18*

Planning permission will not normally be granted for development which has an adverse effect upon the site or setting of a Scheduled Ancient Monument.

Archaeology – Unscheduled Sites and Monuments

2.11 *POLICY HE19*

(1) Planning permission will not normally be granted for any proposed development which would harm unscheduled archaeological remains or their setting which are considered to be of county, regional or national importance and worthy of preservation.

(2) On some sites it may be possible to accommodate the proposed development and keep important remains *in situ*. Planning permission may be granted where the applicant can demonstrate, to the satisfaction of the council, that the important remains will be physically preserved *in situ* without harm to them. Details to ensure this should be submitted to the council as part of the planning application.

(3) In cases where the preservation of archaeological remains is not merited, planning permission may be granted subject to provision being made for archaeological excavation and recording to the satisfaction of the council.

Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest

2.12 *POLICY HE20*

Development likely to have an adverse effect upon the special historic interest or setting of existing parks and gardens will not be permitted.

3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

General background

- 3.1 The earliest material found in the study area dates from the Neolithic period, although no occupation sites are known. An axe fragment was found c.700m south west of the PDA (MBC1009). Neolithic to Bronze Age finds include a flint flake recovered in foundation trenches for the British Legion Hall in the 1950s (MBC1431; MBC1427 is a general number covering finds of all periods from this site), a residual flake in a later pit from an evaluation at Picts Lane in 2006 c.300 to the south (EBC16878; MBC 25099), and four hammerstones, a core and flint flakes at Manor Farm c.700m to the north east (MBC1630/31).
- 3.2 Amongst the material from the British Legion Hall were two Bronze Age socketed axe heads (MBC1322/3). Part of a spearhead of this date was found c.700m south of the PDA (MBC2153), and another spearhead came from a garden c.600m to the north east (MBC 3027). The Picts Lane evaluation recorded a ditch dated as Bronze Age on the basis of two hard-hammered flakes, and an undated ditch thought to be possibly of the same period (EBC 16878; MBC 25098).
- 3.3 A geophysical survey and evaluation in 2003/4 c.650m to the north recorded an Iron Age occupation site, including a ditch, storage pits and post/stake holes (EBC16849/16678; MBC24744). Evaluation and excavation c.800m to the north east at Princes Risborough swimming pool in 1993 recorded Iron Age features with pottery and other artefacts, including a ditch containing fragmentary human remains (EBC11594; MBC21947-502).
- 3.4 Several Iron Age coins have been found by metal-detector within the study area, all given a general location c.150m to the east on the other side of the railway (MBC2683/4, 27821, 27834, 27775, 27780, 27816). A ring of the same date (MBC27691) and an Iron Age to Roman brooch (MBC28796) were found in separate locations to the north west. The Icknield Way is reputed to follow the route of a prehistoric trackway, but this is now thought not to be the case and it is not shown on Fig 1 (MBC2585; Bucks CC 2016b).
- 3.5 The site of Church Farm Roman villa, c.1km south of the PDA, is a Scheduled Monument (National Mon. No. 1016788; Bucks CC 2016b; MAGIC 2016). The

- Scheduled site is just outside the study area from which HER data was obtained, but finds of Roman pottery and tile, coins and other metalwork at the southern edge are associated with it (MBC1185-8). An enclosure visible on aerial photographs just to the north east of the Scheduled Area is also suggested to be of Roman date (MBC1207).
- 3.6 Apart from these features, Romano-British activity throughout the study area is represented by several chance finds of pottery and tile, and metal-detector finds of coins and other metalwork (MBC1189/90; 1427/8; 2122; 3026; 7183; 8008; 15196; 22264; 26772/3; 27188; 27486; 27983-5).
- 3.7 The HER has two records of Anglo-Saxon metal-detector finds in the north of the study area: a brooch c.900m to the north west of the PDA (MBC27186) and a strap fitting c.1km to the north (MBC27210). Most significantly, a cemetery of this period c.750m to the south of the PDA is a Scheduled Monument (MBC7181; Nat. Mon. ref. 1020290), associated with inhumations (MBC7182), brooches and a coin of Cenwulf (MBC 22264). The site was investigated by geophysical survey in 1977, which revealed a pattern of grave-like features (EBC13200).
- 3.8 There are three concentrations of medieval and earlier post-medieval occupation within the study area. Approximately 400m to the west of the PDA is the medieval and post-medieval settlement of Horsenden (MBC 24157). The present Horsenden House dates from 1810, but is on the site of a (probably) medieval and later manor house, and is set in contemporary ornamental gardens which incorporate a curvilinear, probably post-medieval fishpond thought to have formed part of defences during the Civil War (MBC1057-9; 21754; 21755; Bucks CC 2016c). Immediately north-west of Horsenden House is the Grade II* Listed Church of St Michael and its churchyard. Although rebuilt in the 18th century it retains 14th-century tiles in the chancel and tower (MBC 12183-5). A 13th-century jug handle was recovered as a chance find nearby (MBC2130), and medieval coins were found by metal detector (MBC 27986-8). Gate Cottage, with its dovecote and barn are Listed Grade II (MBC12134-6), as is Glebe Cottage, a former farmhouse (MBC19733). The manor had a medieval and post-medieval mill; its location is not certain but may be a field called 'Home Close and Millbank' (MBC6726).
- 3.9 South of Horsenden, c.600m south west of the PDA, is the Scheduled moated site of Roundabout Wood, which includes medieval fishponds, building platforms and ridge

- and furrow (Nat. Mon. No. 1015211; MBC1004-8). The HER historic ridge and furrow map shows a small area between Horsenden and the PDA (not reproduced), on the Horsenden side of the stream which separates the two; modern air photography suggests this no longer exists (www.google.maps.uk; www.bing.maps.uk).
- 3.10 Most of the historic core of Princes Risborough is just beyond the 1km radius HER data area, to the north west of the PDA, but the medieval church (rebuilt in the 19th century) and its churchyard with Listed tombs and war memorial is just within it (MBC3048-52; MBC33346 EBC16930; EBC 17335; EBC17540). Immediately adjacent is the 15th-century Grade II Listed Monks Staithe, the former vicarage (MBC6112), and a medieval moated enclosure known as The Mount, a Scheduled Monument in which archaeological excavations were carried out in 1955 (MBC1305/6; Nat. Mon. No. 1006951; EBC12355).
- 3.11 A medieval deer park was attached to the manor of Princes Risborough (MBC3036). The medieval / post-medieval Culverton Mill was c.300m south east of the PDA (MBC7727), and there are other post-medieval mill sites c.500m to the north (MBC7729) and c.750 to the south (MBC7716). Two medieval pits and a posthole, and a post-medieval pit or ditch containing smithing waste were recorded in the evaluation at Picts Lane c.300m to the south (EBC16878; MBC25099). Other than these, all medieval and earlier post-medieval HER records refer to chance finds of pottery etc, or metal-detector finds (MBC1430; 3047; 27370; 27817; 27992-4; 28591).
- 3.12 A watching brief c.600m to the south of the PDA in 2004 revealed undated pit and ditch (EBC16461; MBC 23602). An evaluation at the former Whiteleaf Furniture factory in 2011, c.250m to the south east found no archaeological remains; it was thought that there had been significant truncation when the factory was built (EBC17426). A watching brief was carried out in Horsenden in 2010; the HER does not record any finds (EBC17385).
- 3.13 The railway signal box has no relevance to the archaeological potential, but is Listed Grade II and consideration of its setting is relevant. The List description notes that it is 'the largest and only unaltered example of a "Churchward" era [G.J. Churchward - Great Western Railway Chief Mechanical Engineer, 1902-21] GWR design box' (List ref 1276408; MBC19832). Other late features of no relevance to the assessment,

including the railway station, other 19/20th-century buildings, street furniture etc. are not discussed or shown on Fig 1.

Archaeological background in the application area

- 3.14 There are no records of archaeological sites, findspots or events within the Proposed Development Area (PDA) itself.
- 3.15 There is no tithe map covering the site, as these were commuted on inclosure. An anonymous map catalogued as c.1821 in the Buckinghamshire Record Office (but possibly earlier?), described as displaying old enclosures and field names, shows the PDA to be in a large unnamed open field, although there appear to be sub-divisions marked by dashed lines, possibly representing separate land holdings (BRO D42/G2T; Fig 2). The map appears to show a former track or lane on an alignment approximately similar to the stream/ditch along the south west boundary of the PDA, but as the map is not accurate it is impossible to be certain of the precise location or relationship. Collison's 'Plan of the Lower part of the Parish of Princes Risborough...made on the Inclosure' dated 1823, shows it within a large field with no internal divisions apparent (BRO IR/87Q; Fig 3). The track or lane on the earlier map is no longer apparent.
- 3.16 The 1st Edition OS 1:2500 map of 1887 shows the PDA to be an undeveloped field with a small wooded area at the south east. The 1898 and 1921 editions (Fig 4) show no change. No later maps were available in the Record Office, but the Bucks CC historic ridge and furrow map is based on a later OS 1:10560 map, possibly that of 1960 (which was consulted online). They show the extensive buildings of the Buildings Research Establishment (BRE) to the north of the PDA, opened as the Forest Products Research Laboratory in 1927. The PDA is essentially unaltered, except for a fence between the south east corner and the nearest BRE building. The BRE closed in 1988, when the operation was moved to BRE Watford (Fig. 5; BRE 2016). The site was subsequently redeveloped for the new Ercol furniture factory and showroom, which adjoins the PDA, and the Regent Park industrial/commercial estate. The Buckinghamshire Historic Land Characterisation survey records the PDA as a modern (20th-century) enclosure (HBC5982).
- 3.17 When Ercol acquired their site, the PDA was retained and periodically visited for a time by BRE staff as it was being used for long-term experiments on different timbers

and preservatives (Mick Platt, Ercol Facilities Manager, *pers comm*). Some remains of timbers from these experiments are still *in situ* (see Site Visit and Walkover below).

4 POTENTIAL SURVIVAL OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL REMAINS

Potential remains present

- 4.1 No early prehistoric remains have been identified in or close to the study area. A Palaeolithic handaxe was found c.6km to the south at Grange Farm, and possible Mesolithic flints were found during fieldwalking at The Warren, Bledlow, c.3km to the west (Bucks CC 2016b). The recorded superficial geology at Grange Farm is Head Deposits of silt, clay, sand and gravel. The geology of PDA is similar, and Palaeolithic material is usually found associated with redeposited gravels. However, the paucity of other finds suggests little or no potential for either Palaeolithic or for Mesolithic material.
- 4.2 In the later prehistoric periods, a few chance finds suggest some Neolithic activity in the study area, although no settlement is known. Bronze Age and, particularly, Iron Age occupation has been found, and there is a spread of chance finds across the area. The potential for remains of these periods must be considered at least moderate. (In all cases, the extreme south and south west of the PDA has less potential for occupation, as it slopes down quite sharply to the stream which runs along the south west boundary of the PDA – see Site Visit and Walkover below – and such evidence is more likely to be present on the level ground at the north of the site.)
- 4.3 Romano-British evidence is widespread, and the site is not far from a Scheduled villa. Chance finds of pottery and tile indicate structures elsewhere. The potential for Roman evidence is at least moderate.
- 4.4 Apart from two chance finds, Anglo-Saxon evidence is limited to the Scheduled cemetery which, however, is of considerable importance. It does not extend as far north as the PDA, but the settlement with which it was associated is unknown. Settlements in this period, particularly earlier, tended to shift, and it will not necessarily be immediately adjacent to the cemetery. It has also been argued that occupation and cemeteries are found in close relation to the later parish boundaries, as is the case here, although the evidence is not conclusive. It is not possible to be specific about an individual site, but there is clearly high potential within the wider area, and locating the settlement(s) would be extremely valuable. Such a settlement, if present on and around the site, would not necessarily have been noticed during

railway works in the 19th century, or on the BRE development in the 20th century, as remains of this type tend to be ephemeral and possibly aceramic. The HER does not record any archaeological work during the building of the present industrial / commercial development on the former BRE site.

- 4.5 Medieval and early post-medieval occupation will have been concentrated on the known settlements at Horsenden, Princes Risborough and Roundabout Wood. The PDA was probably used only for agriculture, and there is only low potential for significant evidence of these dates. It is possible that traces of the track or lane shown on the c.1821 map may be present along the south western edge, but its location cannot be predicted with certainty.

State of preservation

- 4.6 It is probable that surviving archaeological remains within the area of the proposed new dwelling would have been disturbed by medieval and later agriculture, and to a degree use of the site by the Building Research Establishment in the 20th century. Preservation is therefore likely to be moderate to poor.

Site visit and walkover

- 4.7 A walkover of the application area was conducted on 13th October 2016 by Ian Greig. Digital photographs were taken to provide a record of the site and several are included. The inspection was hampered slightly by rain. The PDA is separated from the Ercol premises by a high wire mesh fence, with the entrance at the north east (Fig 5). There is a metal security fence to the railway to the east. The south western boundary follows a stream/ditch, marked by trees and undergrowth, with a football pitch and running track on the opposite side.
- 4.8 The site has been disused for some time, and was badly overgrown with long grass, saplings / trees and, in places, brambles. The northern part of the site is higher and more level. Whilst the long grass prevented close visual examination of the ground surface, it was subjected to a reasonably thorough walkover. No archaeological features were noted and it is unlikely that any significant features were unobserved (Figs 7-9).
- 4.9 The southern eastern corner is wooded and very heavily overgrown, and detailed inspection was impossible (Fig 9). The rest of the south western edge, particularly

towards the west, is also heavily overgrown. A certain amount of access was possible, but detailed inspection could not be carried out (Fig 10). The site slopes down towards both these areas, which are adjacent to the stream along the western boundary. It is not thought any significant evidence is likely to have been missed.

- 4.10 Remains of the BRE experiments can be seen in several places the southern part of the site, consisting of various square- and round-section posts driven into the ground, with lead plates attached giving identification number (Figs 12, 13).

5 IMPACT OF DEVELOPMENT

- 5.1 The indicative proposed development layout is shown on Fig 14. Construction drawings and details are not currently available. Such units commonly have pad foundations, possibly with trench foundations for the perimeter walls. In this case, the ground levels and conditions along the south western edge of the site may require piling, at least in this area. The foundations will remove any archaeological remains directly impacted by them, as will service trenches throughout the development, although they would cover only a small proportion of the development area.
- 5.2 It may be possible to minimise the overall impact, and achieve preservation *in situ* of remains below the floors and the majority of the parking / circulation areas, by appropriate design so that these are built up on a suitable membrane above archaeological levels. Construction methods that avoid damage from vehicular traffic would also be necessary. However, the change in ground levels towards the south of the site may require more extensive groundwork, which would have a greater unavoidable impact.
- 5.3 The wooded south east corner would appear to be largely unaffected by the development.
- 5.4 The development would be visible from the Grade II Listed railway signal box. The List description only refers to its design and status as the only surviving unaltered example of its type. Any significance of its setting derives from its location within the railway infrastructure, which will not be affected. It is therefore considered that the setting of the Listed structure will be subject to any significant adverse impact.
- 5.5 The PDA is c.300m from the Horsenden Conservation Area. It is screened by trees, the floodlit sports facilities are between the two, and no impact on the Conservation Area is anticipated. There will be no impact on the setting of the Princes Risborough Conservation Area or the Scheduled Monuments, all of which are too far away to be affected.

6 CONCLUSIONS

- 6.1 There is a moderate chance that archaeological deposits associated with later prehistoric and Roman occupation will be disturbed by the proposed new build. In view of the proximity to the Scheduled Anglo-Saxon cemetery, there is a high possibility of Anglo-Saxon settlement remains in the area, although it is not possible to be specific about individual sites. Such evidence would, however, be very important as the nature of early settlement in this period is, even now, still not fully understood. Any medieval or early post-medieval evidence will relate to agricultural use, and be of little significance.
- 6.2 Preservation of any archaeological features is likely to be moderate to poor.

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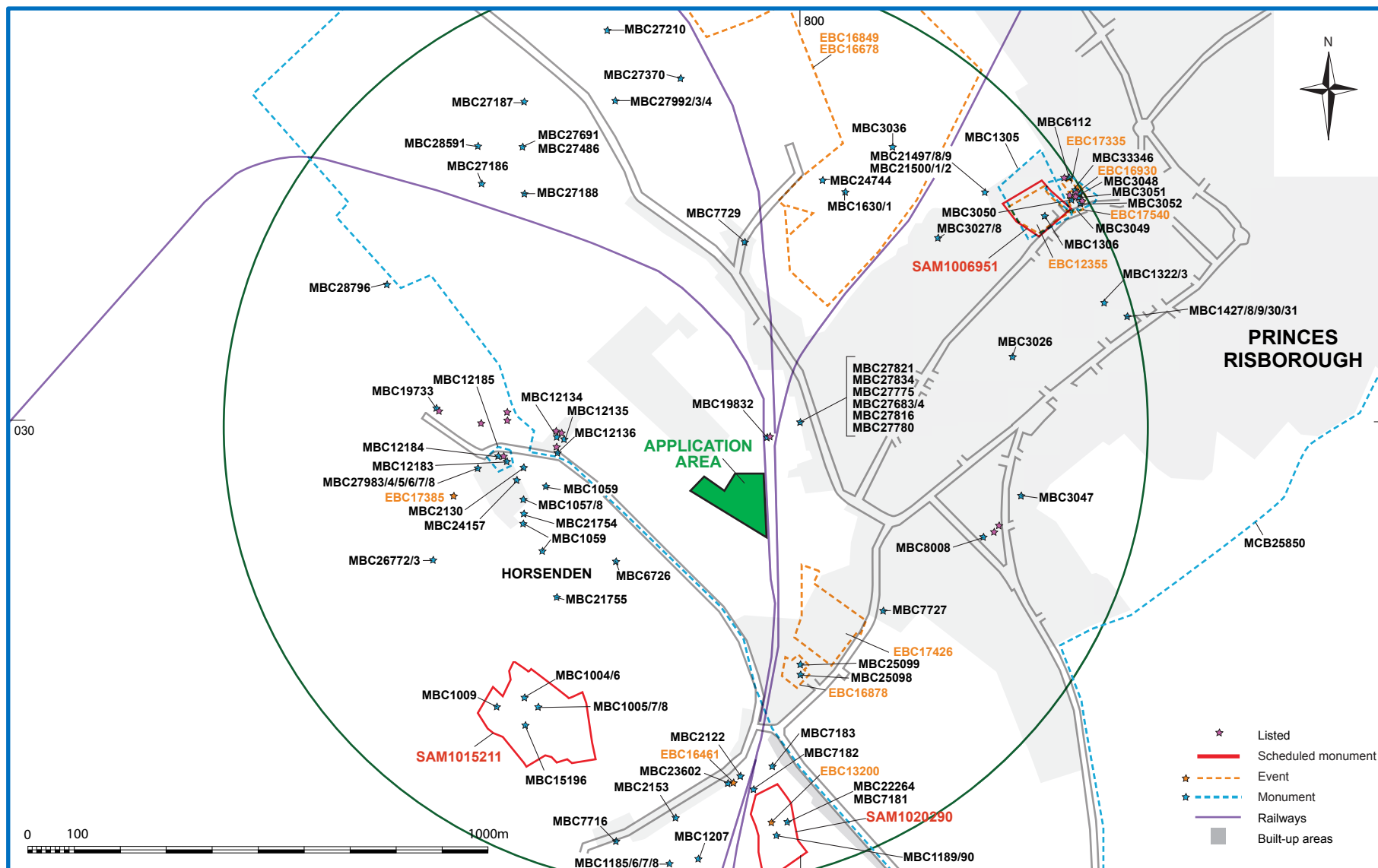


Fig 1: Location of application area and Historic Environment information



Fig 2. Anonymous undated map of c.1821 (BRO D42/G2T)
north to bottom of original - inverted for ease of comparison with later maps



Fig 3. Inclosure map of 1823 (BRO IR87/Q)

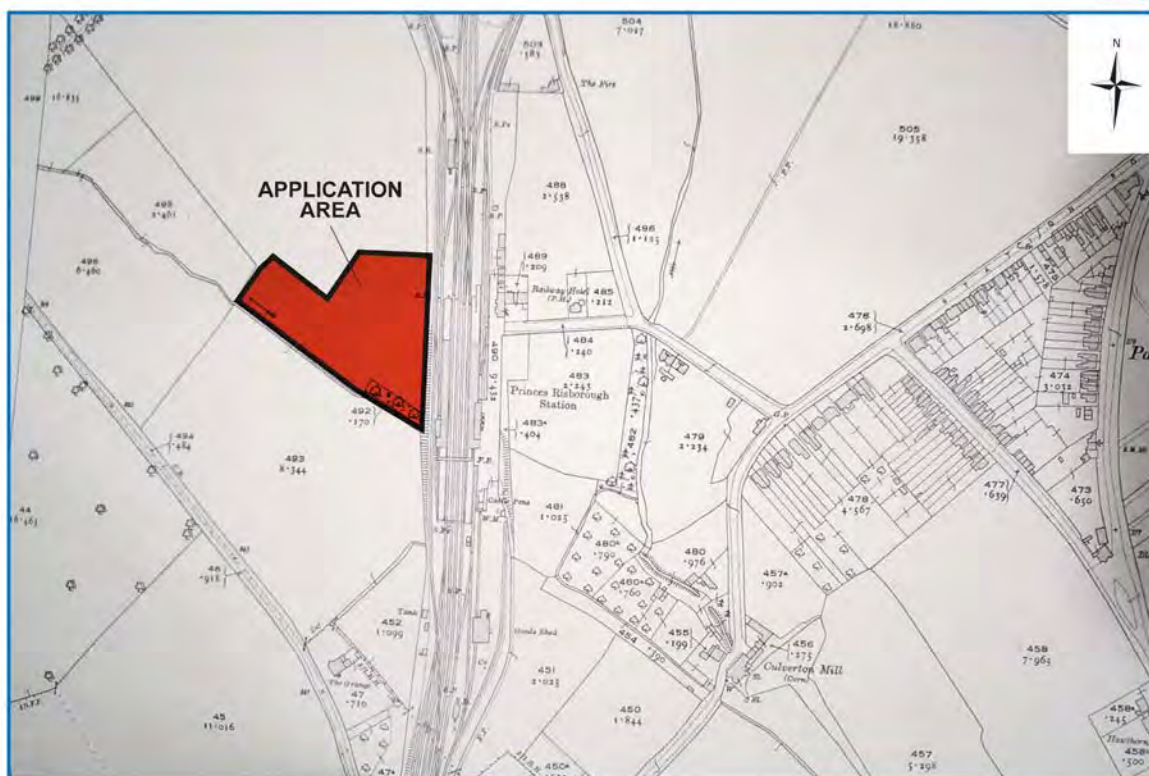


Fig 4. OS 1:2500 map of 1921, Buckinghamshire Sheet XXXVII.11



Fig 5. Site entrance, looking south



Fig 6. Northern part of the site, looking south from near the entrance



Fig 7. Northern part of site, looking north east



Fig 8. Westernmost end of site, looking north west; slope down to south west starts at left



Fig 9. Eastern boundary, looking to wooded south east corner



Fig 10. South western boundary, looking north west



Fig 11. BRE experimental timber posts



Fig 12. BRE experimental timber posts



Fig 13. Proposed development layout