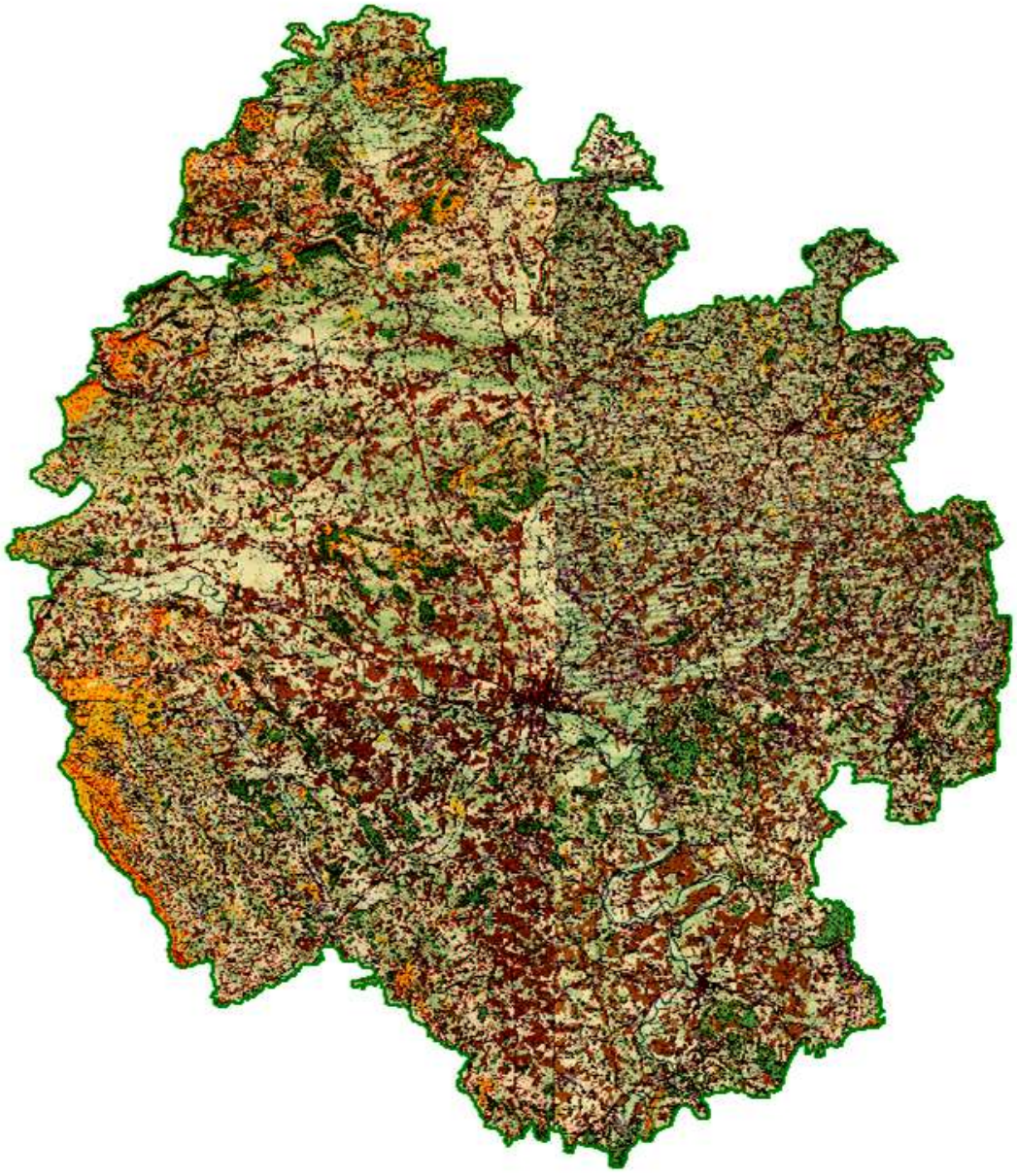
Herefordshire Council

Forestry Commission

HEREFORDSHIRE ARCHAEOLOGY

HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT RECORD REPORT



FORESTRY COMMISSION - PROJECT K

END OF YEAR REPORT: HEREFORDSHIRE

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1. Summary:

Herefordshire HER / Archaeology Service were commissioned by the Forestry Commission to deliver Project K as defined below across two financial years: 2023-24 and 2024-25. This report defines the work that has taken place to date and the methodologies applied in achieving the results. It highlights the successes and barrier to completion and suggests areas where additional support and focus are needed.

2. Introduction

2.1 Purpose of Project K

- To review all existing SHINE Polygons within Low Sensitivity Areas as defined by Forestry Commission
- To create, amend, remove or enhance existing SHINE records within Low Sensitivity Areas in Herefordshire using the new (2023) SHINE polygon standards
- To actively prospect Low Sensitivity Areas for unrecorded archaeological monuments and landscapes to ensure the archaeological resource and heritage value is clearly understood.

Note: In Herefordshire the Forestry Commission defined Low Sensitivity Areas has been buffered to encourage the combination of 'islands' thereby creating additional areas for nature recovery corridors and site / landscape specific connectivity.

2.2 Baseline SHINE data before the start of the project

- Herefordshire HER covers the entire unitary authority and county of Herefordshire. This represents 2180 square kilometres (c. 218,000 hectares)
- The Forestry Commissions Low Sensitivity Area covers 34,900 hectares, this represents c 16% of Herefordshire's land mass.
- Within (either wholly or partially) the Low Sensitivity Area there are:
  - 475 existing SHINE polygons
  - 4,577 HER Monument Records,
  - 292 Archaeological Events,
  - 410 Listed Buildings,
  - 18 Registered Parks and Gardens,
  - 41 Conservation Areas

3. Methodology

3.1 The methodology used in Herefordshire was outlined in our tender documentation. In brief we undertake a combination of the following:

- Responsive Resource Review: A review of each monument record, event record or existing SHINE polygon to understand its setting and role within the landscape
- Proactive Prospection: A review of all resources that include but not limited to:
  - Aerial Photos (current and historic).
  - EA LiDAR,
  - Historic and Current Mapping (including tithes),
  - Historic Landscape Characterisation (HLC),
  - Current Landscape Characterisation,

  - National Mapping Programme Surveys (held external to the HER),
  - Academic and landscape based resources within council control.
- After the review and prospection we then apply the SHINE standards using the workflow guidance and revised polygon standards (v.2.0 from December 2023) as appropriate.
- For new sites that do not meet the standard – we record their presence as new monuments within the HER.

3.1 The decision making process for creating/amending/removing SHINE records

- As there are two members of the team we have found that the active collaboration and co-production of this survey has led to important revisions in our working practice at both the local and county scale. This method of working has significant value to both the project but also the dataset as a whole unifying rigorous interpretation and detailed understanding of the landscape resource.
- The current workflow guidance has been rigorously applied in relation to assigning significance to current and also existing SHINE data within the Low Sensitivity Areas. However, we note that this judgement based significance criteria would benefit from greater clarity and additional guidance. For our work we have graded (high, medium and low) the resource on county importance (which is how our current standards have been applied). The reason behind this is that we are curating the archaeological resource at a landscape level and it allows us to apply a more nuanced and bespoke level of advice – highlighting elements that are rare within that landscape and therefore of most need for management. However, we are aware that we are one of many partners working on a national dataset and that there is considerable debate around the application of significance values to historic environment features. We are happy to support this piece of work at a national level with provision of examples, working practice and professional opinion.

3.2 The recording procedure for SHINE records

Prior to this project there has never been the opportunity for a wholesale review or audit of our SHINE dataset. The nature of the dataset is that it has been created piecemeal over time by multiple staff with different levels of experience and knowledge. This project is therefore allowing a systematic approach to be implemented ensuring that the data we provide the Forestry Commission is of the highest standard and at that outlined in the new SHINE polygon standard (v2.0 Dec2023) and the revised SHINE workflow guidance (forthcoming 2024). It will create a baseline for part of the dataset and allow us to make representations with Natural England (and other stakeholders) for a project to review the rest of the data.

3.3 The monitoring procedures for calculating project progress/day rates

The project outlined the following methods for monitoring:

- Number of days to each task
- Area covered

4 Results

4.1 Area covered by work (HER area and Low Sensitivity Areas)

Our study area covers the entire county – in this period we have prioritised the NW region of the county to begin our work. The reasons for this are:

- This area currently is where there is a high density of existing woodland
- It is also an area that historically was much more heavily wooded / forested. The historic built landscape here is predominately timber framed buildings underlying the historic land-use. Therefore, the landscape recovery / connectivity of creating interlinking woodlands and wooded corridors is high.
- That the HER data for this part of the county is less complete and there are fewer SHINE polygons. This is due to current land management regimes and the predominance of large farming estates who do not traditionally engage with Countryside Stewardship managed schemes.
- That there are fewer HER monuments in this region due to historical bias in population and also a lack of proactive research.

These factors all mean that this area has considerable potential but also that it will take longer to undertake the work as there is a need for considerable prospection and research.

As such it allows us an opportunity to test our working practices and ensure that all learning happens at scale and pace at the beginning of the project.

To balance this approach and to test our targets to ensure they remain achievable we have undertaken prospection in a less rural landscape dominated by lowland farms who are often managed within CS schemes. This has shown that the overall project targets are achievable within the desired timeframe.

Statistics for SHINE records reviewed/amended/created/removed – including those flagged for work

	January – March		**Project Total**
No of SHINE records reviewed	159	%	475
No of SHINE records altered	25	15% of total SHINE within area searched	5% of total altered
No of SHINE records created	60	Addition of 38% to known SHINE coverage	13% addition
No of SHINE records removed	57	35% reduction of SHINE within area searched	12% reduction

4.3 Statistics for Monument records reviewed/amended/created/removed

No of HER Monument records reviewed	2827
No of HER Monument records altered/days spent	Task to be undertaken later in project
No of HER Monument records created/days spent	Task to be undertaken later in project
No of HER Monument records removed/days spent	Task to be undertaken later in project

4.4 Day rate of work (by task or in total)

Task	**Days**
Proactive Prospection	12 (84 hours)
Responsive Resource Review	5 (35 hours)
Admin (meetings / reports)	5 (35 hours)

- Based on the projected day rates in original bid - the project is currently two weeks behind schedule. This is due to a combination of internal staffing matters and to a relatively slow start to the project as methodologies for undertaking work have bedded in. It is anticipated that this time will be 'made up' in April and May 2024.

- In February 2024 the HER completed its National Record of the Historic Environment to Historic Environment Records data transfer with Historic England – this was a 36 month project to transfer and integrate information from the national monument records into Herefordshire's HER. As such we incorporated over 6800 records and we have found that additional information helpful in addressing this Forestry Commission project.

5 Analysis

5.1 Evaluation of success vs objectives

- The project has had several areas where considerable amounts of learning have been needed. We have been surprised by the loss of earthworks across the surveyed area.
- The prospection element of the project has absorbed considerable time but what we have gained through this process is very valuable.
- The application of the SHINE standards to the dataset has been slower than anticipated. However, as the project has developed 'on the job learning' means that we are able to continue at pace making up for our slow start.

5.2 Challenges and learning lessons – improvements and opportunities

- As staff are becoming more experienced with process we are hoping for greater efficiencies.
- Now that the National Record of the Historic Environment to Historic Environment Records data transfer (a large scale specialist data migration project from Historic England to Herefordshire's HER) is complete the HER Officer will be able to spend a greater amount of time to focus on the project
- We would welcome support and more detailed national guidance on grading value judgements (specifically the significance of historic environment features assigned in SHINE records) at a national agreed level.
- We have struggled addressing several large areas of SHINE which have been applied at a landscape scale because of previous polygon standards. The sub-division of these areas (some of which are many hectares in size) will allow for fine grained future management options to be considered based on preservation and resource importance. This process of 'splitting' has taken longer than anticipated and for sake of speed have in several cases been placed to one side so that they can be addressed at a later stage of the project.

5.3 Areas of added value

- We have already noted that this work is highlighting for us significant loss of earthworks at the local and landscape scale. This is especially noticeable when comparing the most recent LiDAR results against Historic England / English Heritage's National Mapping Projects from the 1980's and 90's that used aerial photos from the period pre 1985. This wholesale loss is not just limited to the traditionally farmed lowlands where erosion from mechanised industrialised farming practices was well known. This project shows that level of loss has extended into the upland zone where grazing pasture has been 'improved' resulting in the

removal of significant areas of extant earthworks. Such is the potential loss we are recording we have asked historic England for meetings to explore re-survey to ensure that we have a good picture of the archaeological resource within the county. This highlights the importance of the SHINE dataset as a method for working with the farming community to prevent future loss.

- We have also noted that there are significant areas of unrecorded historic water meadows and areas of inland Carr / Mere and Moss like riverine wetland landscapes in the areas surveyed. These archaeological monuments and landscape types have the potential to be reinstated through Countryside Stewardship and Landscape Recovery grants as a method for capturing flood water and slowing and regularising the flow of rivers in a way that was traditionally managed in the past. These sites are in lowland areas and are particularly at risk from arable cultivation – even though they are within the flood zone.

5.4 Consideration of new polygon standards

- We welcome the standard as it is a much better way of assigning SHINE data – although we have noted that it is difficult retrofitting existing SHINE data to it and has at times caused significant delay due to the way we had created SHINE data in the past. This is specifically for large landscape areas – previously discussed above.
- It has also allowed us to refine our working practices and be more effective in decision making as well as apply SHINE in a more focussed way.

6 Conclusions and future work

6.1 Positive benefits of SHINE enhancement

- We have highlighted above benefits of the project and revised SHINE standards

6.2 Recommendations and considerations

- The periodic meetings with core Forestry Commission and other HERs has been extremely useful especially in the initial phases of the project.
- Most useful for us has been the discussions with other HERs undertaking the work – these have allowed us to problem solve live issues and also reflect on best practice.
- We wondered if some element of community support through a discord community or similar online forum might be useful to all within the project – that way live / real time matters can be discussed and problems resolved.

7 Curating and enhancing SHINE data in the future

- We will continue to consider this process in the monthly progress reports submitted to the Forestry Commission's Project Manager.