
LAND AT SOWERBY GATEWAY, (THERMOPATCH),
THIRSK, NORTH YORKSHIRE.

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL SUMMARY
OSA REPORT No: OSA20DT06.

March 2020.

OSA

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Report Summary.

REPORT NO: OSA20DT06

SITE NAME: Land at Sowerby Gateway, Thirsk

COUNTY: North Yorkshire

NATIONAL GRID REFERENCE: SE 42175 80610

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1.0 Abstract.

This Archaeological Summary has been prepared at the request of Mr. Martin Foster of Castlevale Ltd to provide information regarding the archaeological potential of a site at Sowerby Gateway Business Park, Thirsk, North Yorkshire.

The site forms part of a wider development site for which outline planning permission has been granted (Hambleton District Council Planning Reference 10/02373/OUT).

This archaeological summary draws upon information presented for the original Outline application, supplemented by the results of a series of archaeological investigations already carried out across parts of the site for which Outline consent was granted.

The various phases of archaeological investigation that have been carried out across the site have encountered archaeological features dating from the prehistoric, Romano-British and medieval periods. The most intensive area of archaeological features is located in the northwestern part of the wider development site. This area has been subject to geophysical survey and evaluation trenching and has identified the presence of settlement features dated to the Romano-British period. Across much of the site the features clearly represent agricultural field systems, predominantly in the form of ditches. Whilst many of the ditches are likely to date to the medieval and post-medieval periods at least some are earlier, probably of Iron Age and Romano-British date. At least one boundary took the form of a pit alignment; similar boundaries have been dated throughout the Neolithic to Romano-British periods, and in the example at Sowerby, it was replaced by a continuous ditch. In addition to the field systems the site has been shown to contain occasional scattered funerary monuments, in the form of barrows. One of these, excavated as part of the Sports Village development to the east, contained several cremations together with near complete and fragments of Early Bronze Age pottery vessels. Another barrow, excavated in the Phase 1 development land to the northwest of Topcliffe Road, was of a square form, most commonly dated to the Iron Age. Another small circular barrow, associated with scattered cremated remains was found within the Phase 1 land. To the southeast of Topcliffe Road a further possible barrow was identified in evaluation trenching. This example was very heavily truncated by later ploughing, so the ditch only survived to a depth of 0.12m. Elsewhere across the site small areas of pits and postholes have been recorded, although dating is very rare and no clear coherent patterns have been evident. These may indicate evidence for settlement, which has been heavily truncated by ploughing.

Geophysical survey undertaken as the initial stage of evaluation of the Phase 1 partially extended onto the site considered by this assessment. Two trial trenches were excavated on the line of the road immediately to the south of the site. These revealed deposits suggestive of low-lying marshland. Occasional ditches were cut through these deposits, probably of post-medieval date. The results of the evaluation trenching led to a watching brief being undertaken during the construction of the road. This revealed only medieval furrows beneath a former agricultural soil horizon, with no prehistoric or Roman period features being detected.

The requirement for, timing, and scale of, any archaeological fieldwork associated with development of this site will need to be agreed with North Yorkshire County Council Heritage Services in their role as advisors to the Local Planning Authority. Across the majority of the Sowerby Gateway site geophysical survey has consistently been used as the first stage of evaluation prior to development. However, with regards to the present development site, geophysical survey has already partially been carried out, without recording extensive archaeological anomalies. The site has also been utilised during the construction of the adjacent road, hotel and housing developments as a contractor's compound. As a result the current surface has become rutted and uneven and includes evidence for partial stripping and deposition of soil. This means that further geophysical survey is unlikely to produce reliable results. In view of the relatively limited results of trenching along the road immediately adjacent to the site it may be appropriate to mitigate the impact of the development by undertaking a watching brief during groundworks.

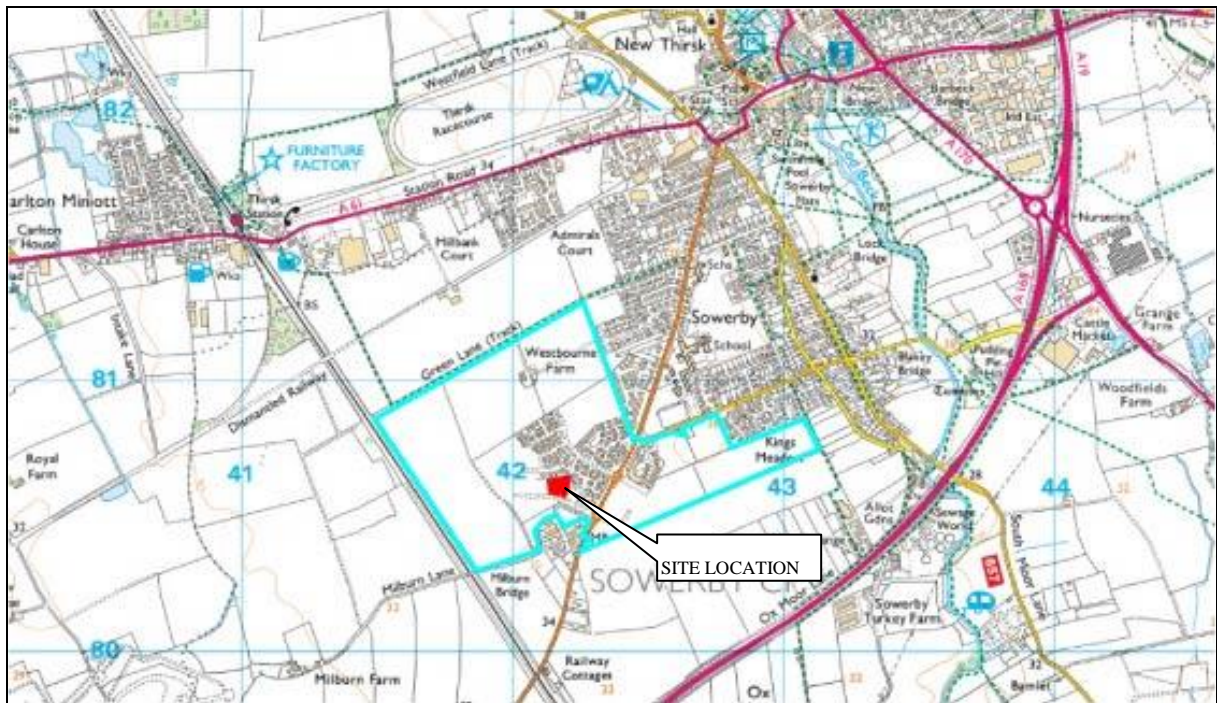


Figure 1. Site location (NGR SE 42175 80610). Limits of Outline application 10/02373/OUT, shown in blue. Reproduced from the 2000 Ordnance Survey 1:25 000 maps with the permission of The Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office. © Crown copyright. OSA Licence No: AL 52132A0001

2.0 Introduction.

This Archaeological Summary has been prepared at the request of Castlevale Ltd to provide information regarding the archaeological potential of a site at Sowerby Gateway, Thirsk, North Yorkshire.

The site forms part of a wider development site for which outline planning permission has been granted (Hambleton District Council Planning Reference 10/02373/OUT).

This archaeological summary draws upon information presented for the original Outline application, supplemented by the results of a series of archaeological investigations already carried out across parts of the site for which Outline consent was granted.

3.0 Site Location.

The site considered by this archaeological summary forms a small part of the much larger Sowerby Gateway site, for which Outline planning consent has been obtained (Figure 1, shows the boundary of the Outline site in blue). The full Sowerby Gateway site lies to the northwest and southeast of Topcliffe Road, the B1448, approximately 1.5km to the southwest of the centre of the town of Thirsk.

The site considered by this report is located in the central part of the Sowerby gateway development site, bounded to the by a new hotel and its associated car park (Premier Inn), by residential properties to the north, by a new road (Cedar Road) to the south and by further undeveloped land to the west. The location of the site is shown shaded red on Figure 1.

4.0 Archaeological and Historical Background.

The archaeological and Historical Background of the site and surrounding area was assessed as part of the original Outline Planning Application and the period by period summary of archaeological potential presented below was prepared (OSA, 2008).

The Prehistoric Period (to the 1st Century AD)

Evidence for the Prehistoric period in the study area takes two forms; stray finds and cropmarks recorded by aerial photography. The search has found no evidence for the earliest periods of human activity, the Palaeolithic and Mesolithic, but several stone and flint axe heads of the Neolithic period have been found. The locations of these have generally been recovered from the western and southern parts of the study area. A single fragmentary saddle quern of probable Neolithic date was also found to the north of Thirsk.

Two axes of Bronze Age date have also been found, both to the west of the study area. The Bronze Age is represented much more comprehensively by cropmark evidence, specifically in the form of ring ditches and round barrows. Only one of the barrows recorded has been subject of excavation, that undertaken in the mid 19th century at Pudding Pie Hill, located to the southeast of Sowerby village.

The presence of Iron Age activity in the study area is difficult to confirm with any real certainty. This is in part due to the lack of obviously Iron Age monuments that show up as cropmarks. Many of the enclosures, ditches and trackways recorded through aerial photography may date to this period, but equally they may be of Romano-British or later date. The only stray finds of potentially Iron Age date, the two fragmentary beehive querns, also suffer from this same problem; they may in fact be Romano-British in date. The other major difficulty in assigning an Iron Age date to sites found in the study area is the tendency for pre-Roman conquest sites to continue into the post-conquest period. Without detailed excavation rural sites of these periods are almost indistinguishable from each other. It should be noted, therefore, that many of the sites assigned to the Roman period may have Iron Age origins that are not apparent due to the limitations of the current evidence. Two possible settlement sites, with hut circles, have been recorded, which may be of Iron Age date.

The Roman Period (1st to the 5th centuries AD)

As has been described above the separation of the later Prehistoric and Roman periods is difficult without excavation. However, some of the evidence is in a form that clearly points to a Roman date. Three Roman (or potentially Roman) roads are included within the study area. The most convincing of these is the road from Thirsk to the River Tees. A second possibly Roman road, Saxty Way, crosses the northern corner of the Sowerby Gateway site. Saxty Way has been assumed to be of Roman date for at least 150 years when it was recorded as such on the First Edition of the Ordnance Survey. Although a section was excavated through Saxty Way in the 1960's this does not appear to have confirmed a Roman date. This may, in part be due to the continued use of this route until the fields were enclosed at the end of the 18th century. The third possibly Roman road lies some distance to the southeast of the site.

The Roman period is also represented in the study area by occasional chance finds. As described above the two beehive querns may be of either Roman or Iron Age date. Roman coins have also been, although the exact locations and the provenance of the discoveries are not known. A Roman coffin, discovered to the south of the site, is likely to indicate the presence of a settlement in the vicinity.

The majority of evidence obtained for the Roman period is provided by aerial photographs of cropmarks, and is therefore not securely dated. Although several of the cropmarks are likely to represent field systems of early modern date the study area also contains substantial evidence for earlier field boundaries, trackways and enclosures. These are of a character that are likely to be of Roman date. In addition the cropmarks recorded within the limits of the site itself are also of probably Roman date.

Early Medieval periods (5th to 11th centuries AD)

This period is, as is often the case, poorly represented in the area. Evidence for the early Saxon period is limited to burials, found within Thirsk town centre and during the excavations carried out over 150 years ago at Pudding Pie Hill. Both Thirsk and Sowerby are likely to have had early medieval origins; this has been confirmed at the former through excavation, with the discovery of a pre-Conquest rampart.

The Medieval Period (11th to the mid 16th centuries AD)

Although almost certainly of pre-Conquest origins the town of Thirsk grew in importance from the later 11th and 12th centuries following the establishment of the castle as a base of the de Mowbray family (from whom the Vale of Mowbray is still named). Although the castle itself was destroyed by the king in the 1170's the family re-established a presence in the town within a manor house.

The area to the southwest of the town, within which the site lies, is likely to have been fields or open moor during the medieval period. These areas were enclosed in 1798, when they were described as the open Sowerby Field, a pasture called the Ox Moor, the South Moor, and other “waste” grounds. The 1843 Tithe Apportionment describes all of the fields that lie within the site considered by this report as belonging to Sowerby Field. Due to the likely arable use of the site during the medieval period one might expect traces of ridge and furrow to be present. However, as the fields have been in almost constant arable cultivation during the modern period all above ground traces of ridge and furrow have been removed.

The Post-Medieval to Modern Periods (mid 16th to 21st centuries)

The agricultural character of the site suggested for the medieval period, as part of an open field system, appears to have continued broadly unchanged through the post-medieval period, until the Enclosure of 1798. This established the regular pattern of fields that, with a few minor changes, is recognisable to this day.

During the 20th century the western edge of the village of Sowerby has been extended over earlier fields to form the eastern boundary of the site. One other potentially significant development during the 20th century is the establishment of Topcliffe Airfield during WWII. Although the airfield itself lies over 1km to the southwest of the site the immediate area includes two WWII crash sites. Although there is no evidence to suggest that the site contains a crash site there is the possibility that spent ordnance or other fragments of material relating to WWII may be present.

5.0 Summary of Archaeological Investigations on the Sowerby Gateway site.

Since the original outline planning application was submitted a number of archaeological investigations have been carried out within the boundaries of the site granted outline consent. The results of these are summarised below. The investigations have been broadly divided into the different phases of development that have taken place. Each phase has been numbered (1-5) and the approximate boundaries are shown shaded on Figure 2.

1 Phase 1, Northwest of Topcliffe Road. (Shaded green on Figure 2).

This was the first area of the Sowerby Gateway site to be subject to archaeological investigation, and included two small areas to the southeast of Topcliffe Road, where roundabouts were to be constructed, together with a narrow service corridor which followed the southern boundary of the site. Initially this took the form of a geophysical survey, carried out in July-August 2011. The geophysics revealed several linear features, probably representing ditched field boundaries, together with evidence for modern ploughing (OSA, 2011). Part of this initial geophysical survey extended onto the current site (Figure 3). This survey only recorded occasional stretches of linear anomaly suggestive of truncated ditches.

The geophysics was followed by a programme of archaeological trial trenching between February and April 2012. The evaluation trenching identified several areas of archaeological interest, including an Iron Age square barrow, a pit alignment, boundary ditches and several scatters of postholes, that may indicate settlement (OSA, 2012). The scheme of evaluation included two trenches located along the line of a new access road, immediately to the south of the current site (Trenches 5 and 6). These revealed deposits suggestive of low-lying marshland. Occasional ditches were cut through these deposits, probably of post-medieval date.

Following a review of the results of the evaluation, and in collaboration with North Yorkshire County Council Heritage services a scheme of archaeological mitigation was agreed for the Phase 1 land. This was to comprise strip and record excavation in parts of the site, together with watching brief elsewhere. (OSA, 2012a). This programme of archaeological mitigation has been partially enacted during the construction of internal development roads and areas of housing. Some areas designated for commercial development are still to be carried out. Preliminary analysis of the results have indicated further funerary monuments, in the form of a small round barrow, with associated cremated remains, a continuation of the pit alignment recorded in the evaluation, enclosure ditches, pits and postholes. One of the areas of postholes appeared to form a sub-circular feature, approximately 15m in diameter, with a central large posthole. Throughout the area medieval to post-medieval furrows were evident.

The watching brief undertaken along the road immediately to the south of the site considered by this assessment revealed yellow brown sandy clay natural at a depth of approximately 0.45m below the former ground surface. This was sealed by 0.20m thickness of subsoil and 0.25m of modern topsoil. The only features identified within this road strip were a series of plough furrows, of probably medieval date. No features dating to the Romano-British or

prehistoric periods were present. (Information derived from On-Site Archaeology site archive, OSA12EX02, Zone F, Road Strip East).

2 *Land southeast of Topcliffe Road. (Shaded yellow on Figure 2).*

Archaeological investigation of this area commenced with a geophysical survey carried out in January 2014. This revealed a number of potentially archaeological features, including probable enclosure ditches, and sub-circular features, possibly indicating ring ditches. Once again extensive evidence for recent agricultural activity was recorded. The geophysics was followed by a programme of trial trenching, in January to February 2014. Some areas of archaeological interest were recorded in the evaluation trenches. These were predominantly concentrated toward the southern end of the site, and included a heavily truncated ring ditch, probably representing a small round barrow, a number of scattered pits and linear ditches. Further to the north few archaeological features were revealed (OSA, 2014). Following the evaluation two separate stages of archaeological investigation were carried out prior to and during development. A watching brief undertaken between February and July 2015 during the construction of an Extra Care facility in the northern part of the site confirmed the results of the evaluation, with no archaeological features being revealed. The southern part of the site was subject to a strip and record excavation, in September 2016, prior to the construction of an Aldi store. This revealed a series of ditches, forming field boundaries, which were dated, by pottery recovered to the medieval period. The investigation also revealed a small group of pits and postholes, which appeared to represent the plough truncated remains of a small sub-rectangular structure. Unfortunately no dating evidence was present to determine if this was also medieval, or if it was earlier (ASWYAS, 2016).

3 *Land West of Phase 1. (Shaded blue on Figure 2).*

Prior to further residential development within the central part of the Sowerby Gateway site a series of archaeological evaluations were carried out. Geophysical survey was conducted in November 2015. No obviously archaeological features were revealed. The survey area included extensive areas of magnetic disturbance, which may have obscured archaeological features, together with recent former field boundaries and anomalies suggestive of geological variation (ASWYAS, 2015). Within the northeastern portion of this area a small trial trench evaluation was carried out in February 2016. This comprised the excavation of six trenches. These all revealed a similar sequence of topsoil over 0.10m-0.30m thickness of subsoil sealing natural sand and gravel. No archaeological features were revealed (ASDU, 2016). The remaining part of this area of the site was not evaluated by trial trenching. A programme of topsoil stripping was monitored but no archaeological features were identified (MAP, 2015).

4 *Land around Westbourne Farm. (Shaded pink on Figure 2).*

Prior to further residential development within the northern part of the Sowerby Gateway site a series of archaeological evaluations were carried out. Geophysical survey was undertaken in August 2017. The survey revealed evidence for significant archaeological activity in the north and west of the site. These were generally represented by interrupted linear and

curvilinear anomalies assumed to be of archaeological origin. (Phase, 2017). A programme of archaeological trial trenching was then carried out between October and November 2017. The results of the evaluation corresponded closely with the geophysics. The southwest corner of the site was generally devoid of pre-modern archaeological features. Elsewhere a system of north-south and east-west ditches appear to represent a field system pre-dating the post-medieval enclosure period layout of the site. A discrete sub-rounded enclosure was identified in the northeast corner of the site. The evaluation also tested the origin of the postulated Roman Road, known as Saxty Way, which crosses the northern corner of the site. This shallow earthwork ridge was seen to be formed by a 0.30m thick sandy deposit. It was noted that plough furrows in this area of the site respected this linear feature, suggesting that it was actually a post-Roman agricultural landscape feature, not a road. The evaluation report concluded that the site contained sufficient, significant concentrations of archaeology to warrant further investigation. (ASWYAS, 2018).

5 *Sowerby Sports Village. (Shaded brown on Figure 2).*

The proposed sports village complex occupies the southeastern part of the Sowerby Gateway site. Geophysical survey was carried out in June 2016. This revealed occasional linear features indicative of field boundaries across the majority of the site. Within the northwest corner of the site a single sub-circular anomaly was recorded. (OSA, 2016). Due to the results of the geophysics a programme of trial trenching was undertaken in March 2018. This confirmed the presence of the sub-circular feature, suggesting that it represented a plough truncated round barrow. Elsewhere on the site the linear features were confirmed to be ditches forming rectilinear fields (OSA, 2018). No dating was present but the alignments of these ditches suggested that they pre-dated the post-medieval enclosure of the area. As the majority of the ditches were located in an area where development was to be limited to the laying of sports fields no further archaeological investigation of the ditches was required. The round barrow was subject of an archaeological excavation in December 2018. The excavation did not recover any dating evidence from the barrow ditch, but near complete and fragments of Early Bronze Age pottery vessels, and associated cremated remains were recovered. These are currently undergoing specialist assessment.

6 *Sowerby Gateway, Northwest field. (Shaded orange on Figure 2).*

Residential development is proposed for the northwestern part of the Sowerby Gateway site. Prior to development a scheme of archaeological evaluation has been carried out. This initially comprised a geophysical survey (OSA, 2019). The geophysics identified a dense concentration of archaeological features within the northern part of the field. Boundary ditches, enclosures, circular features, pits and a double ditch trackway are all suggested from the results of the survey. These features indicate a complex area of archaeological features representing not only a possible Iron Age or Romano-British settlement site but also the possibility of earlier prehistoric funerary monuments. No archaeological features were recorded in the southern part of the site. Due to the results of the geophysics a programme of archaeological trial trenching was carried out in February 2020. The trenching confirmed the suggestion from the geophysics that the southern part of the field did not contain significant

archaeology. All the large linear features identified through the geophysical survey were found to be archaeological. Additional archaeological features that had not been identified by the geophysics were also found to be present within the main area of archaeology. Boundary ditches were identified, as well a possible industrial feature. Some evidence that the site represents a settlement was found; a ring gully recorded in Trench 4 is likely to indicate the presence of a roundhouse. The pottery recovered during the evaluation indicates that the site is primarily Roman in date. (OSA, 2020). A scheme of archaeological mitigation excavation is to be undertaken prior to development of the site. This is likely to take place during Spring to Summer 2020.

7 *Marrtree Developments.*

An archaeological watching brief is being undertaken during the construction of commercial units on behalf of Marrtree Investments Ltd to the southwest of the site considered by this assessment. To date this watching brief has not recorded any significant archaeological results.



Figure 2. Location of Archaeological Investigation Areas 1-7, relative to the current site (Shaded red).

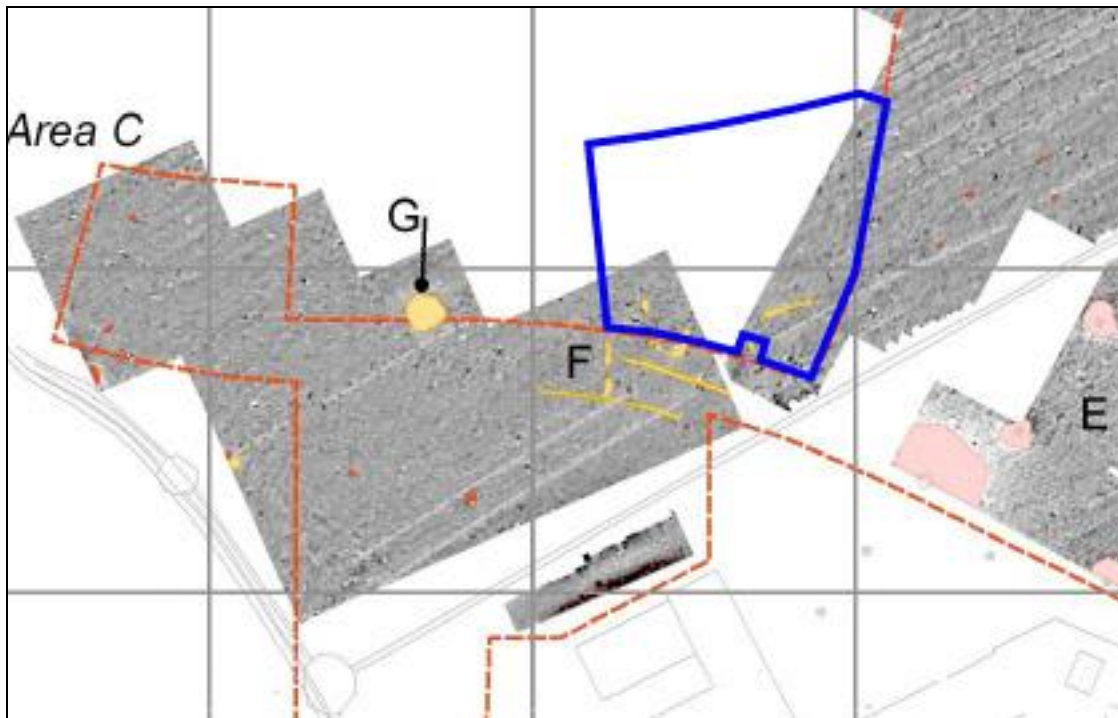


Figure 3. Extent and interpretation of the 2011 geophysics relative to the current site boundary (in blue).

6.0 Archaeological Implications.

The original Desk-Based Assessment suggested that the site was located within an area with the potential to contain archaeological remains of prehistoric, Romano-British and medieval date. Those from the medieval period were likely to represent evidence for agricultural landuse, and, as such, would be of relatively low significance. Prehistoric and Romano-British remains could include field systems, but also potentially funerary monuments, and possibly a Roman road.

The various phases of archaeological investigation that have been carried out across the site have encountered archaeological features dating from the prehistoric, Romano-British and medieval periods. Across much of the site the features clearly represent agricultural field systems, predominantly in the form of ditches. Whilst many of the ditches are likely to date to the medieval and post-medieval periods at least some are earlier, probably of Iron Age and Romano-British date. At least one boundary took the form of a pit alignment; similar boundaries have been dated throughout the Neolithic to Romano-British periods, and in the example at Sowerby, it was replaced by a continuous ditch. In addition to the field systems the site has been shown to contain occasional scattered funerary monuments, in the form of barrows. One of these, excavated as part of the Sports Village development to the east, contained several cremations together with near complete and fragments of Early Bronze Age pottery vessels. Another barrow, excavated in the Phase 1 development land to the northwest of Topcliffe Road, was of a square form, most commonly dated to the Iron Age. A further small circular barrow, associated with scattered cremated remains was found within the Phase 1 land. To the southeast of Topcliffe Road a further possible barrow was identified in evaluation trenching. This example was very heavily truncated by later ploughing, so the ditch only survived to a depth of 0.12m. Elsewhere across the site small areas of pits and postholes have been recorded, although dating is very rare and no clear coherent patterns have been evident. These may indicate evidence for settlement, which has been heavily truncated by ploughing. Investigation of the possible Roman road now suggests that this feature is more likely an element of the medieval, or later agricultural landscape. The most recent phase of archaeological investigation, located in the most northwestern part of the site, has revealed the presence of a dense concentration of archaeological features, suggestive of a settlement dated to the Roman period.

On the basis of the Desk-Based assessment, and the extensive archaeological investigations that have been undertaken, there is a moderate potential that the current development site contains archaeological features. The requirement for, and scale of, any archaeological fieldwork associated with development of this site will need to be agreed with North Yorkshire County Council Heritage Services in their role as advisors to the Local Planning Authority.

Across the majority of the Sowerby Gateway site geophysical survey has consistently been as the first stage of evaluation prior to development. However, with regards to the present development site, geophysical survey has already partially been carried out, without recording

extensive archaeological anomalies (see figure 3 above). The site has also been utilised during the construction of the adjacent road, hotel and housing developments as a contractors compound. As a result the current surface has become rutted and uneven and includes evidence for partial stripping and deposition of soil. This means that further geophysical survey is unlikely to produce reliable results. In view of the relatively limited results of trenching and then the watching brief along the road immediately adjacent to the site it may be appropriate to mitigate the impact of the development by undertaking a watching brief during groundworks.

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ASDU - Archaeological Services, Durham University.

ASWYAS - Archaeological Services, West Yorkshire Archaeology Service.

MAP - MAP Archaeological Practice Ltd.

OSA. - On-Site Archaeology Ltd.

Phase. - Phase Site Investigations Ltd.