

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT:  
LAND OFF GIB LANE, BIERTON, BUCKINGHAMSHIRE**

Planning Reference: 15/02533/APP  
NGR: SP 8718 1505  
AAL Site Code: BIGL15  
Museum Accession Number: AYBCM: 2016.108  
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Report prepared for Haymaker Energy

By  
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*Cover image: General view of the site, looking northwest along the line of backfilled Trench 6*

## Executive Summary

- Allen Archaeology Limited was commissioned by Haymaker Energy to undertake an archaeological watching brief on land off Gib Lane, Bierton, Buckinghamshire, as a condition of planning permission for an extension to a ground based photovoltaic solar farm.
- An earlier geophysical survey of the solar farm immediately to the northwest of the site highlighted a series of anomalies with archaeological potential. A programme of trial trenching which targeted these anomalies uncovered a complex of Roman linear features and enclosures. A further geophysical survey on the site itself detected a further series of faint linear and curvilinear anomalies towards the east side of the site and suggested that there might be further archaeological activity not detected in the survey.
- Nine trenches and two transformer bases were excavated, but AAL were not informed until all but one trench at the north end of the site were excavated. As such the vast majority of the groundworks for this scheme were not monitored
- No deposits or features of archaeological significance were recorded during the small area of works that were monitored. However, given the limited nature of the observations it is not possible to determine the impact of the groundworks upon the archaeological resource across the remainder of the site.

## 1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 Allen Archaeology Limited was commissioned by Haymaker Energy to undertake an archaeological watching brief during groundworks for a new solar farm on land off Gib Lane, Bierton, Buckinghamshire. The work was commissioned as part of a planning condition implemented by the Senior Archaeology Planning Officer at Buckingham County Council.
- 1.2 The fieldwork, recording and reporting conform to current national guidelines, as set out in the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists 'Standard and guidance for archaeological watching briefs' (CIfA 2014), the Historic England document 'Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment: The MoRPHE Project Managers' Guide' (Historic England 2015) and a specification prepared by this company (AAL 2015). All relevant Historic England guidelines on archaeological practice were also followed ([www.historicengland.org.uk/advice/](http://www.historicengland.org.uk/advice/)).
- 1.3 The documentation and records generated by the watching brief will be assembled in accordance with the guidelines set out in the 'Procedures for Notifying and Transferring Archaeological Archives' (BCM 2013). The documentary archive will be submitted to Buckinghamshire County Museum within six months of the completion of this report, where it will be stored under the museum accession code AYBCM 2016.108.

## 2.0 Site Location and Description

- 2.1 The site is located off the end of Gib Lane, approximately 2.6km east-southeast of the centre of Bierton, which lies in the administrative district of Aylesbury Vale in the county of Buckinghamshire, 5.1km east-northeast of Aylesbury and 11.2km southwest of Leighton Buzzard. The site comprises a c.46ha area over seven fields, centred on NGR SP 8718 1505.
- 2.2 The bedrock geology comprises Gault formation and Upper Greensand formation (undifferentiated) mudstone, siltstone and sandstone, with no superficial geology recorded (<http://mapapps.bgs.ac.uk/geologyofbritain/home.html?>).

## 3.0 Planning Background

- 3.1 A planning application has been submitted for 'Extension to ground based photovoltaic solar farm including associated works and grid connection. Land to east of Gib Lane, Bierton, Buckinghamshire' (Reference 15/02533/APP).
- 3.2 Prior to determination of the planning application, the Senior Archaeology Planning Officer at Buckinghamshire County Council requested a programme of archaeological investigation in order to provide further information concerning the archaeological potential of the proposed development area, to allow the planning authority to make a reasoned decision as to the nature and extent of further archaeological works that may be required in order to mitigate the effects of the proposed development upon the archaeological resource.
- 3.3 A geophysical survey of the site was undertaken in April 2015 (AAL 2015) and, following consultation with the Buckinghamshire County Archaeological Service, it was advised that a programme of monitoring and recording should take place during the groundworks for the scheme.
- 3.4 The approach adopted is consistent with the recommendations of the current National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), with the particular chapter of relevance being 'Chapter 12: Conserving

and enhancing the historic environment’ (Department for Communities and Local Government 2012).

#### **4.0 Archaeological and Historical Background**

- 4.1 The site lies in an area of significant archaeological potential. Geophysical survey of the proposed 46ha solar farm immediately to the northwest of the site exposed occasional dispersed anomalies of potential archaeological interest across the western and central parts of the site (AAL 2014a). A complex of linear ditches and enclosure features were recorded in the eastern part of the site, and were interpreted as a series of agricultural and settlement enclosures of probable later prehistoric to Roman date.
- 4.2 Following completion of the geophysical survey, a programme of trial trenching was undertaken, comprising 25 trenches each 50m in length, targeted on the results of the geophysical survey (AAL 2014b). The trenching confirmed the results of the geophysical survey, identifying a focus of activity in the eastern part of the site, where a complex of Roman linear features and enclosures were identified, with the relatively low density of finds recovered suggesting it represented a series of agricultural enclosures, away from the focus of settlement activity.
- 4.3 In the western part of the site, a number of undated, linear features were recorded, several of which were not apparent on the geophysical survey, in part due to their shallow and truncated nature with little evidence for the deposition of refuse in the fills. A small number of the features in this part of the site produced pottery of Iron Age and possibly Bronze Age date (AAL 2014b).
- 4.4 In 2015 a geophysical survey was undertaken on the site as part of the pre-application process for this development. The survey identified a series of very faint anomalies with archaeological potential consisting of linear and curvilinear features in the eastern half of the site, interpreted as a likely continuation of the activity recorded to the north (AAL 2015).

#### **5.0 Methodology**

- 5.1 Across the site, there were a number of access roads, cable trenches and transformer bases that were anticipated to be the subject of archaeological monitoring. Upon arrival on site, it was apparent that the majority of groundworks, comprising all trenches and transformer bases, except Trench 9 had been undertaken and the trenches backfilled (Figure 2)
- 5.2 The remaining monitoring was undertaken by one experienced archaeologist on 10<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> February and 18<sup>th</sup> February, with areas monitored located using a Leica GS08 GPS. All deposits were recorded on standard AAL context recording sheets and digital photography also formed an integral part of the recording strategy (at a minimum resolution of 10 megapixels).

#### **6.0 Results**

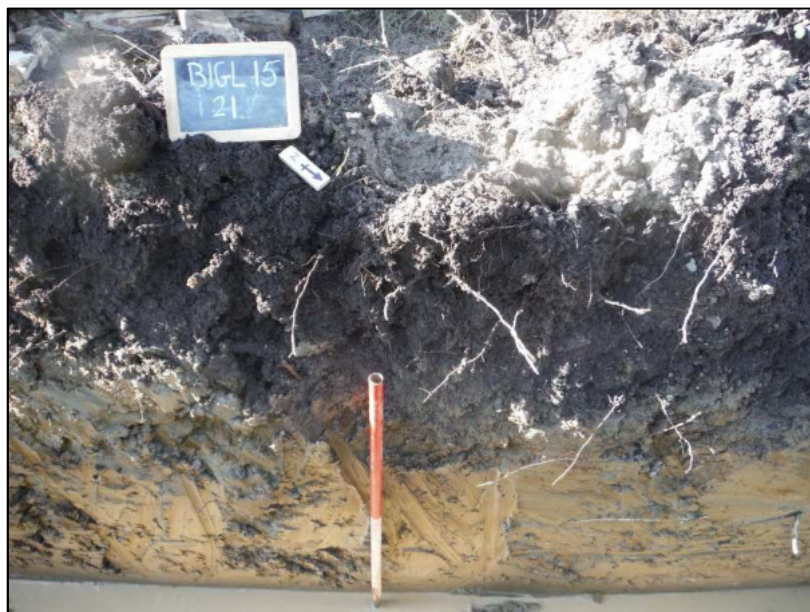
- 6.1 Trenches 1-8, and Transformer Bases 1 and 2 were excavated and backfilled prior to AAL’s arrival on site (see Plate 1 for an example). Each backfilled trench has been recorded photographically and located by GPS.



*Plate 1: Backfilled Trench 7, looking northwest*

### **Trench 9**

- 6.2 Trench 9 was orientated north-northwest to south-southeast at the north corner of the site, and was excavated to house cabling linking the Power Converter in the adjoining field to the solar farm. The trench was approximately 21m long, 0.5m wide and was excavated to a depth of 1.5m.
- 6.3 The earliest deposited recorded, 101, was the underlying geology of a light-grey clay with orange flecks, containing moderate to small sub-angular chalk inclusions. This was sealed by topsoil, 100, of soft-friable mid to dark brown clayey silt which contained occasional small sub-angular stones and was approximately 0.6m thick (Plate 2). No archaeological remains were recorded (see Figure 3 for representative section).



*Plate 2: Representative section of Trench 9, looking southwest*

## 7.0 Discussion and Conclusions

- 7.1 Nine cable trenches and two transformer bases were excavated as part of the groundworks for a solar farm, but all but one small trench at the northern corner of the site was completed without archaeological monitoring. This trench was devoid of archaeological features or artefacts.

## 8.0 Effectiveness of Methodology

- 8.1 The methodology set out in the specification was suited to the scale and nature of the project in determining the nature of the archaeology present and to mitigate the impact of the proposed development. However as AAL were not informed until the majority of works were completed, it was not possible to fully apply the methodology and as such, the impact of the development upon the archaeological resource cannot be fully assessed.

## 9.0 Acknowledgements

- 9.1 Allen Archaeology Limited would like to thank Haymaker Energy for this commission.

## 10.0 References

- AAL, 2014a, *Archaeological Evaluation Report: Geophysical Survey by Magnetometry on Land off Gib Lane, Bierton, Buckinghamshire*, Allen Archaeology Limited report number 2014107
- AAL, 2014b, *Archaeological Evaluation Report: Trial Trenching on Land off Gib Lane, Bierton, Buckinghamshire*, Allen Archaeology Limited report number 2014146
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- CifA, 2014, *Standard and guidance for archaeological watching briefs*, Institute for Archaeologists, Reading
- Department for Communities and Local Government, 2012, *National Planning Policy Framework*. London, Department for Communities and Local Government
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## Appendix 1: Context Summary List

<b>Context</b>	<b>Type</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Interpretation</b>
100	Layer	Soft-friable mid-dark brown clay-silt with occasional small sub-angular stones. Seals 101	Topsoil
101	Layer	Light-grey clay with orange flecks, moderate to small sub-angular chalk inclusions, sealed by 100. Extends beyond limit of excavation	Natural geology