An archaeological evaluation of Land west of Sheriffhales, Shropshire







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Date: 20 August 2015 Author: Andrew Walsh, awalsh@worcestershire.gov.uk Contributors: Elizabeth Pearson Illustrator: Carolyn Hunt Project reference: P4478 Report reference: 2253

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An archaeological evaluation at Land west of Sheriffhales, Shropshire

By Andrew Walsh

With a contribution by Elizabeth Pearson

Summary

An archaeological evaluation was undertaken at Land west of Sheriffhales, Shropshire (NGR SJ 748 127). It was commissioned by CgMs Consulting on behalf of their client Lightsource Renewable Energy Ltd who intends to construct a solar farm for which a planning application will be submitted.

Four trenches were excavated targeting a series of anomalies identified during a geophysical survey. Two features where identified, a small linear and a pit. No finds were recovered from the features, although a sample from the pit revealed a quantity of oak and non-oak charcoal. The geophysical anomalies were identified during the evaluation as a network of French drains. No evidence of any other archaeological activity was identified during the works.

Report

1 Background

1.1 Reasons for the project

An archaeological evaluation was undertaken at Land west of Sheriffhales, Shropshire (NGR SJ 748 127). It was commissioned by CgMs Consulting on behalf of their client Lightsource Renewable Energy Ltd who intends to construct a solar farm for which a planning application will be submitted to Shropshire Council.

The proposed development site is considered to include potential heritage assets the significance of which may be affected by the application.

The project conforms to a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) prepared by WA (WA 2015)).The project also conforms to the *Standard and guidance: Archaeological field evaluation* (CIfA 2014). The HER event reference for this project has not yet been provided. The site code reference is P4478.

2 Aims

The aims and scope of the project were to locate archaeological deposits and determine, if present, their extent, state of preservation, date, type, vulnerability and documentation.

3 Methods

The project was led by Andrew Walsh (BSc; MSc; ACIfA; FSA Scot); who joined Worcestershire Archaeology in 2013 and has been practicing archaeology since 2004, assisted by James Spry (BA; MA). The project manager responsible for the quality of the project was Tom Rogers (BA; MSc). Illustrations were prepared by Carolyn Hunt (BSc; PG Cert; MCIfA. Elizabeth Pearson (MSc; ACIfA) contributed the environmental report.

3.1 Documentary research

The proposed development site was subject to an archaeological desk-based assessment undertaken by CgMs in 2014 (CgMs 2014b).

3.2 Fieldwork strategy

A detailed specification has been prepared by Worcestershire Archaeology (WA 2015). Four trenches, amounting to an area of approximately 360m² were excavated over the site area of 18ha. The location of the trenches is shown on Figure 2. Fieldwork was undertaken between 10th and 11th August 2015. The site side code is P4478.

Deposits considered not to be significant were removed using a 360° tracked mechanical excavator, employing a toothless bucket and under archaeological supervision. Subsequent excavation was undertaken by hand. Clean surfaces were inspected and selected deposits were excavated to retrieve artefactual material and environmental samples, as well as to determine their nature. Deposits were recorded according to standard Worcestershire Archaeology practice (WA 2012). On completion of excavation, trenches were reinstated by replacing the excavated material.

3.3 Structural analysis

All fieldwork records were checked and cross-referenced. Analysis was effected through a combination of structural, artefactual and ecofactual evidence, allied to the information derived from other sources.

3.4 Artefact methodology

3.4.1 Artefact recovery policy

The artefact recovery policy conformed to standard WA practice (2012; appendix 2). In the event, no finds were recovered.

3.5 Environmental archaeology methodology, by Elizabeth Pearson

The environmental project conforms to relevant sections of the *Standard and guidance for* archaeological field evaluation (CIfA 2014), *Environmental Archaeology: a guide to the theory and practice of methods, from sampling and recovery to post-excavation* (English Heritage 2010), and *Environmental archaeology and archaeological evaluations* (AEA 1995).

3.5.1 Sampling policy

Samples were taken according to standard Worcestershire Archaeology practice (2012). A single sample of 5 litres was taken from a small undated pit (303).

3.5.2 Processing and analysis

The sample was processed by flotation using a Siraf tank. The flot was collected on a 300mm sieve and the residue retained on a 1mm mesh. This allows for the recovery of items such as small animal bones, molluscs and seeds.

The residue was scanned by eye and the abundance of each category of environmental remains estimated. A magnet was also used to test for the presence of hammerscale. The flot was scanned using a low power MEIJI stereo light microscope but no plant remains were identifiable to species level.

The cell structure of all the charcoal material was examined in under a low-power microscope to screen for oak or non-oak species.

3.5.3 Discard policy

The scanned residue will be discarded after 6 months following submission of this report unless a special request is made to retain it.

3.6 Statement of confidence in the methods and results

The methods adopted allow a high degree of confidence that the aims of the project have been achieved.

4 The application site

4.1 Topography, geology and archaeological context

The proposed development site occupies the western half of an irregular shaped field. It is bounded by a field boundary to the north, scrubby woodland to the south-west and a lane to the west. The site slopes from a height of approximately 140m above Ordnance Datum (OD) in the west to120m OD in the south. The underlying geology is mapped as Enville Member sandstone with subordinate conglomerate, siltstone and mudstone (BGS 2015). Superficial deposits are not mapped.

The desk-based assessment identified a low potential for features of archaeological interest for all periods within the proposed development site. A moderate potential for Roman activity was identified to the north of the site. Subsequently a geophysical survey was undertaken on the site, which identified a number of linear anomalies. These were interpreted as field drains (Bartlett 2014, 5).

4.2 Current land-use

The site is currently in use as arable farmland.

5 Structural analysis

The trenches and features recorded are shown in Figures 2 and 3. The results of the structural analysis are presented in Appendix 1.

5.1.1 Phase 1: Natural deposits

The underlying natural deposit in all trenches was a brownish red weathered mudstone with irregular patches of natural sandstone, at a depth of c. 0.3m to 0.4m (Plate 1).

5.1.2 Phase 2: Undated deposits

In Trench 3 the natural substrate was cut by a pit (304) and linear feature (306). Pit 306 measured 0.55m in diameter and 0.08m in depth (Figure 3, S.1; Plate 1) and was filled by a dark grey clayey silt (303) which yielded no finds but a sample from this feature yielded oak and non-oak charcoal fragments.

Linear feature 306 measured 0.65m in width and 0.18m in depth (Figure 3, S.2; Plate 2) and was orientated approximately north to south across the trench. It was filled by a sterile dark grey clayey sand (305) which yielded no finds.

5.1.3 Phase 3: Modern deposits

The trenches were also cut by an extensive array of field drains. Some had been laid as gravel filled 'French' drains and these were identified as the anomalies detected by the geophysical survey, confirming the interpretation presented by Bartlett (Bartlett 2015, 5). Other styles of field drain were also exposed during the evaluation including drain trenches backfilled with natural clay as well as clay mixed with stone, although these had not been identified by the geophysical survey.

No subsoil was identified in any of the trenches except for a possible subsoil or colluvial layer visible at the eastern end of Trench 1, which lay at the bottom of a slope. It was a light reddish grey silty sand (101) measuring up to 0.1m in depth. All the trenches were sealed by a greyish brown loamy sand topsoil, typically measuring 0.3m in depth.

5.2 Environmental analysis, by Elizabeth Pearson

The sample was rich in charcoal fragments of which some could be identified as oak and non-oak using a low-power microscope. A small number of fragments are potentially identifiable to species using a high power microscope but given that the feature was a small isolated and undated pit, no further work was carried out as limited interpretation of the tree species used in fires and the fuel economy would be limited. However, should radiocarbon dating of this material be required as part of any other project in the vicinity or further work on this site, suitable non-oak charcoal could potentially be extracted. No other identifiable charred plant remains were recorded, and the uncharred herbaceous root fragments noted in the flot are likely to be intrusive

6 Synthesis and significance

The evaluation identified two undated features in Trench 3. Two features were identified, a small linear (306) and a pit (304). No finds were recovered from the features, although a sample from the pit revealed a quantity of oak and non-oak charcoal. The series of anomalies identified during the geophysical survey were identified as French drains. No evidence of any other archaeological activity was identified during the evaluation and no other finds were recovered during the works.

The identified features are of low significance. The environmental remains are also of low significance as only fragmented charcoal was recovered of which a small proportion is potentially identifiable.

7 Publication summary

Worcestershire Archaeology has a professional obligation to publish the results of archaeological projects within a reasonable period of time. To this end, Worcestershire Archaeology intends to use this summary as the basis for publication through local or regional journals. The client is requested to consider the content of this section as being acceptable for such publication.

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8 Acknowledgements

Worcestershire Archaeology would like to thank the following for their kind assistance in the successful conclusion of this project, William Bedford of CgMs for commissioning the project on behalf of Lightsource Renewable Energy Ltd, Charlotte Orchard of Shropshire Council for monitoring the work and the land owner Andrew Gough for providing access to the land.

9 Bibliography

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WA 2015 *Written Scheme for an archaeological type of project at land west of Sheriffhales,* Worcestershire Archaeology, Worcestershire County Council, unpublished document dated 30 July 2015, **P4478**

Figures



Location of the site



Trench location plan



Plan of Trench 3 and sections 1 and 3

Figure 3

Plates



Plate 1: Pit 304 (scale 0.3m). Photo facing south



Plate 2: Linear feature 306 (scale 0.3m). Photo facing south

Appendix 1 Trench descriptions

Trench 1

Maximum dimensions: Length: 50m Width: 1.8m

Orientation:

Depth: 0.40m

E-W Main deposit description

Context	Classification	Description	Depth below ground surface (b.g.s) – top and bottom of deposits
100	Topsoil	Mid greyish brown loamy sand	0-0.30m
101	Subsoil/ colluvium	Light reddish grey silty sand, with moderate charcoal flecking and rounded and angular pebbles. Only present at east (downslope) end of the trench	0.30-0.40m
102	Natural	Mid reddish brown and yellowish orange clay with frequent patches/bands of sandstone	0.30-0.40m+

Trench 2

Maximum dimensions: Length: 50m Width: 1.8m Depth: 0.43m

NW-SE Orientation:

Main deposit description

Context	Classification	Description	Depth below ground surface (b.g.s) – top and bottom of deposits
200	Topsoil	Mid greyish brown loamy sand	0-0.30m
201	Natural	Mid reddish brown and yellowish orange clay	0.30-0.43m+

Trench 3

Maximum dimensions: Length: 50m Width: 1.8m

E-W

Bm Depth: 0.44m

Orientation:

Main deposit description

Context	Classification	Description	Depth below ground surface (b.g.s) – top and bottom of deposits
300	Topsoil	Mid greyish brown loamy sand	0-0.35m
301	Natural	Mid reddish brown and yellowish orange clay with occasional patches/bands of sandstone	0.35-0.45m+
303	Pit fill	Dark grey clayey silt with moderate quantities of charcoal	c.0.35-0.43m
304	Pit cut	Pit measuring 0.55m in diameter and 0.08m in depth	c.0.35-0.43m
305	Linear fill	Sterile dark grey clayey sand	0.35-0.53m
306	Linear cut	Linear feature measuring 0.65m in width and 0.18m in depth and orientated approximately north to south	0.35-0.53m

Trench 4

Maximum dimensions: Length: 50m Width: 1.8m Depth: 0.45m Orientation: N-S

Main deposit description

Context	Classification	Description	Depth below ground surface (b.g.s) – top and bottom of deposits
400	Topsoil	Mid greyish brown loamy sand	0-0.35m
401	Natural	Mid reddish brown and yellowish orange clay with occasional patches/bands of sandstone	0.35-0.45m+

Appendix 2 Technical information The archive (site code: P4478)

The archive consists of:

- 4 Context records AS1
- 1 Photographic records AS3
- 1 Black and white photographic films
- 55 Digital photographs
- 1 Drawing number catalogues AS4
- 1 Permatrace scale drawings AS34
- 1 Sample records AS17
- 1 Sample number catalogues AS18
- 4 Trench record sheets AS41
- 1 CD-Rom/DVDs
- 1 Copy of this report (bound hard copy)

The project archive is intended to be placed at:

Shrewsbury Museum & Art Gallery

Barker Street Shrewsbury Shropshire SY1 1QH

Tel: (01743) 258891