

JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL DESK-BASED ASSESSMENT
OF LAND TO THE NORTH OF
LADYGROVE ESTATE
DIDCOT, OXFORDSHIRE
NGR SU 5340 9145**

*On behalf of
Croudace Strategic Ltd*

AUGUST 2008

REPORT FOR Croudace Strategic Ltd
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REPORT ISSUED 18th August 2008

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Origins of the Report

This archaeological desk-based assessment is an updated version of a desk-based assessment originally carried out in 2004, in response to a proposal to develop agricultural land for residential purposes to the north of Ladygrove Estate, Didcot. This updated desk-based assessment, commissioned by Croudace Strategic Ltd, includes sites not recognised at the time of the earlier assessment, and will provide an updated assessment to inform on any works carried out in the vicinity.

1.2 Aims and Objectives

Archaeology and Planning (PPG16, 1990) provides guidance related to archaeology within the planning process. It points out that where a desk-based assessment has shown that there is a strong possibility of significant archaeological deposits in a development area it is reasonable to provide more detailed information from a field evaluation so that an appropriate strategy to mitigate the effects of development on archaeology can be devised:

Paragraph 21 states:

‘Where early discussions with local planning authorities or the developers own research indicate that important archaeological remains may exist, it is reasonable for the planning authority to request the prospective developer to arrange for an archaeological field evaluation to be carried out...’

Should the presence of archaeological deposits be confirmed, further guidance is provided. Archaeology and planning stresses preservation in situ of archaeological deposits as a first consideration as in paragraphs 8 and 18.

Paragraph 8 states:

‘Where nationally important archaeological remains, whether scheduled or not, and their settings, are affected by proposed development there should be a presumption in favour of their physical preservation...’

Paragraph 18 states:

‘The desirability of preserving an ancient monument and its setting is a material consideration in determining planning applications whether that monument is scheduled or unscheduled...’

However, for archaeological deposits that are not of such significance it is appropriate for them to be preserved ‘preserved by record’ (i.e., fully excavated and recorded by a competent archaeological contractor) prior to their destruction or damage.

Paragraph 25 states:

‘Where planning authorities decide that the physical preservation in situ of archaeological remains is not justified in the circumstances of the development and that development resulting in the destruction of the archaeological remains should proceed, it would be entirely reasonable for the planning authority to satisfy itself...that the developer has made appropriate and satisfactory provision for the excavation and recording of remains.’

Government Planning Policy Guidance, PPG 16, emphasises that early consultation regarding the results of an archaeological assessment, and a consideration of the implications of a development proposal, are the key to informed and reasonable planning decisions.

An aim of this report is therefore to facilitate that process, and enable informed discussion to take place in order, if appropriate, to develop a strategy by which the impact of the development on the archaeological resource of the site can be mitigated.

In accordance with the Institute for Field Archaeologists (IFA) *Standard* definition of a Desk-based Assessment (IFA, 1994), this report seeks to identify and assess the known and potential archaeological source within a specified area (‘the site’), collating existing written and graphic information and taking full account of the likely character, extent, quantity and worth of that resource in a regional and national context as appropriate.

A further objective is to define and comment on the likely impact of works (e.g. site clearance/reduction, construction, infrastructure etc.) resulting from the proposed redevelopment scheme on the surviving archaeological resource.

The IFA *Standard* states that the purpose of a desk-based assessment is so that appropriate responses can be made, which may consist of one or more of the following:

- The formulation of a strategy for further investigation, whether or not intrusive, where the character and value of the resource is not sufficiently defined to permit a mitigation strategy or other response to be devised.
- The formulation of a strategy to ensure the recording, preservation or management of the resource
- The formulation of a project design for further archaeological investigation within a programme of research

In accordance with PPG 16, the desk-based assessment forms the first stage in the planning process as regards archaeology as a material consideration and, if the archaeological potential warrants, may lead to evaluation by fieldwork within the defined development area.

1.3 Local Policy

The South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2011 – Section 10: Didcot (2006) provides local guidance in planning matters and development. The Local Plan survey of Didcot highlights the need for comprehensive planning and development briefs.

It states:

“...a Strategy for the Protection of the Historic Environment indicating the Planning and Development Brief’s proposals for the protection of buildings and places of architectural or historic interest and proposals for the preservation of archaeological remains that may exist on or under the land.”

1.4 Methodology

The format of the report is adapted from an Institute of Field Archaeologist *Standard Guidance* paper (IFA, 1994).

In summary, the work has involved:

- Identifying the client’s objectives
- Identifying the cartographic and documentary sources available for consultation
- Assembling, consulting and examining those sources

The principal sources consulted in assessing this site were the National Monuments Record at Swindon, the Sites and Monuments Record (2004) Historic Environment Record (2008) for Oxfordshire, the Centre for Oxfordshire Studies, and Berkshire Record Office. The first holds details of the known archaeological sites, which have been cross-referenced and supplemented by the information held at the Oxfordshire Sites and Monuments Record/Historic Environment Record. The Centre for Oxfordshire Studies and Berkshire Record Offices contains copies of relevant early editions of Ordnance Survey maps, other cartographic sources and documentary sources. Richard Oram, Planning Archaeologist for South Oxfordshire was consulted. Archaeological sites within 1.5 km of the proposal site have been noted.

The extent to which archaeological remains are likely to survive on the site will depend on the previous land-use. The destructive effect of the previous and existing buildings/infrastructure/activity on the site has therefore been assessed from a study of available map information.

In order that the appropriate archaeological response/s can be identified, consideration has been given to the need for further assessment and evaluation by fieldwork, in order to identify and locate surviving archaeological deposits on the site.

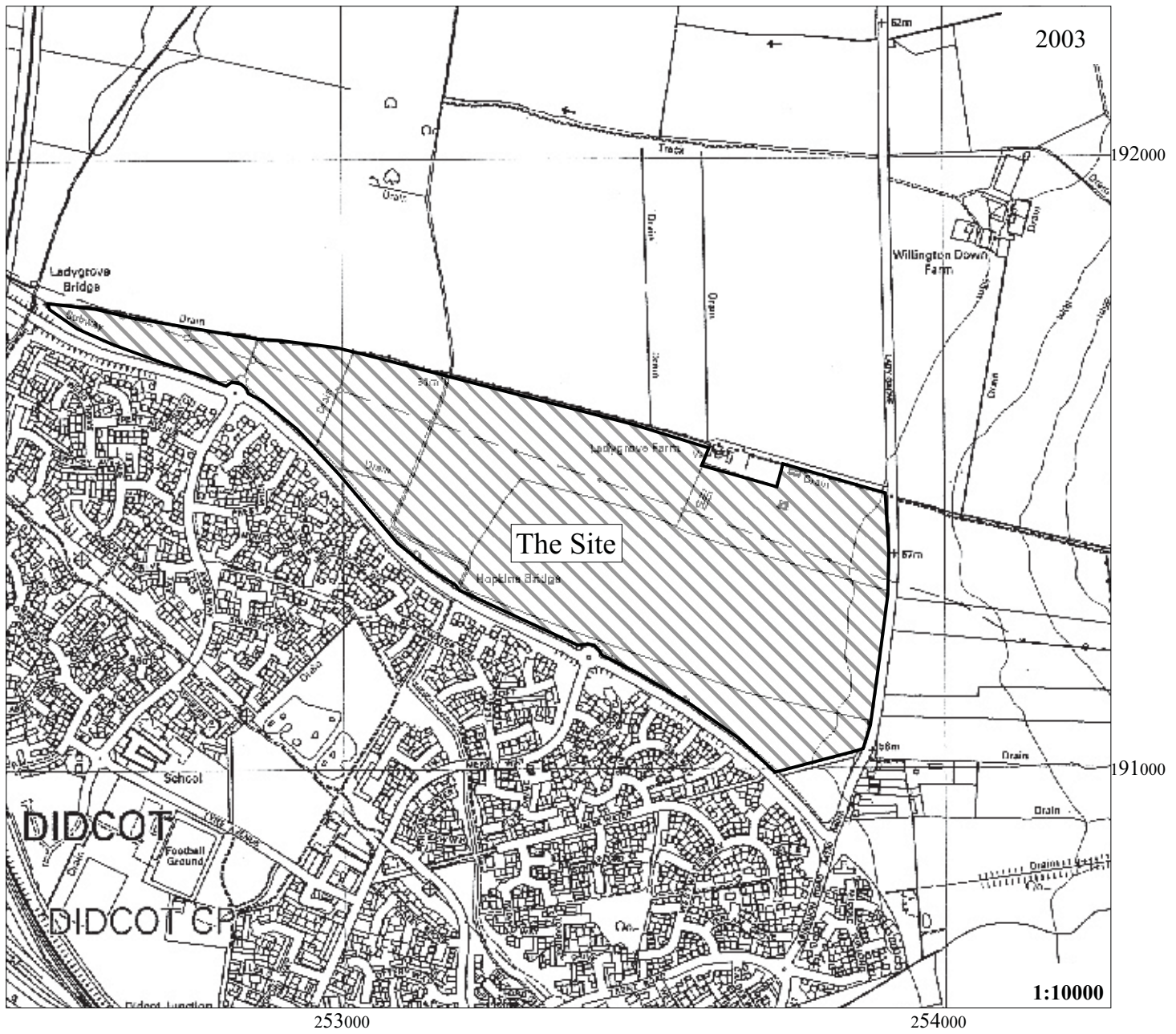


Figure 1. Location of Proposal Site

2 THE SITE (Figure 1)

2.1 Location and Description

The site is situated north of Ladygrove Estate, centred on SU 5340 9145, and is divided into two areas: the eastern area is 30.74ha and is bounded to the east by the B4016; Ladygrove Farm is located outside of the proposal area, set into the northern perimeter. The western area, 7.56ha, is situated west of a drain orientated roughly north/south separating the two areas.

The southern boundary for the western area is formed by the A4130. The site lies at between 51m and 56m OD, sloping upwards from west to east, towards Down Hill and is situated in an area of Gault Clay (British Geological Survey Sheets 253 and 254 Drift).

The proposal area is currently under pasture and there are some tracts of trees within the eastern area, probably remains of field boundaries visible on Ordnance Survey maps up to the 1975 edition.

A small spread of unfrosted brick rubble was identified near the eastern boundary of the site during a site visit. This rubble may represent the demolition of a small agricultural building.

3 PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

The site is under consideration for redevelopment for residential use.

4 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

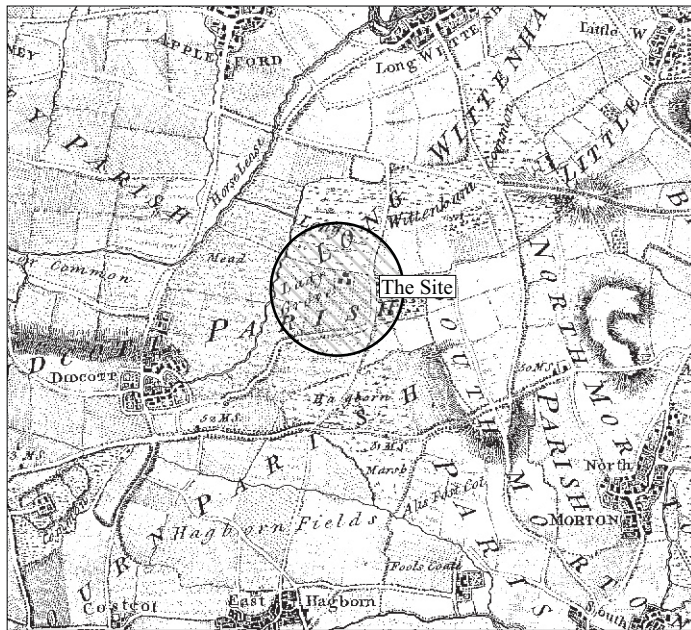
4.1 Historical Background

The proposed development site was situated within the county of Berkshire prior to 1974 when the boundaries were redefined which resulted in the proposal area being incorporated within South Oxfordshire District, Oxfordshire.

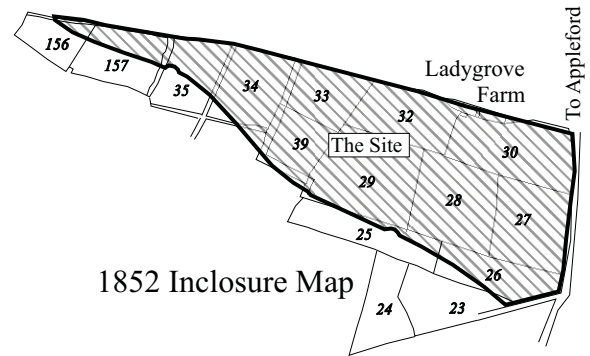
4.2 Cartographic Evidence (Figure 2)

The earliest map showing the site is John Rocque's Survey of Berkshire of 1761. Lady Grove Farm (*sic*) is shown as a cluster of buildings surrounded by roughly regular fields to the south and more marshy open ground to the north.

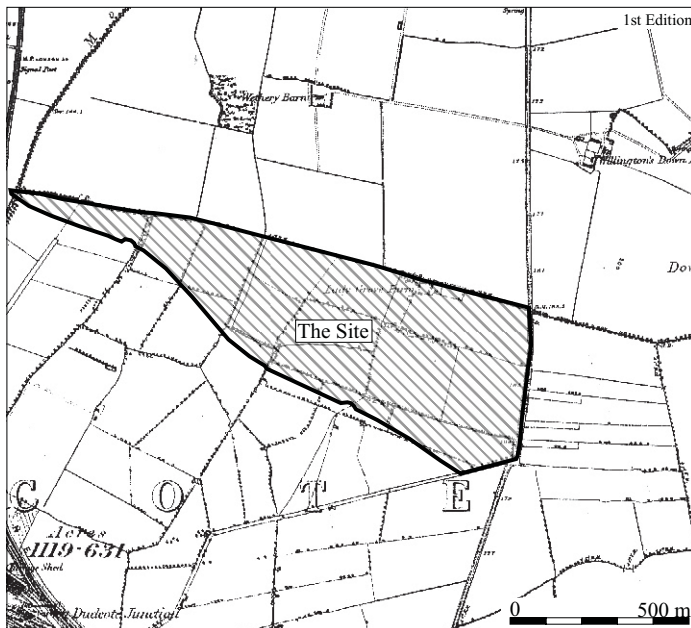
The earliest available detailed map covering the extent of the site is the 1852 Inclosure Map showing the proposed development as comprising a number of roughly rectangular fields predominantly under pasture and under the ownership of Robert Hopkins.



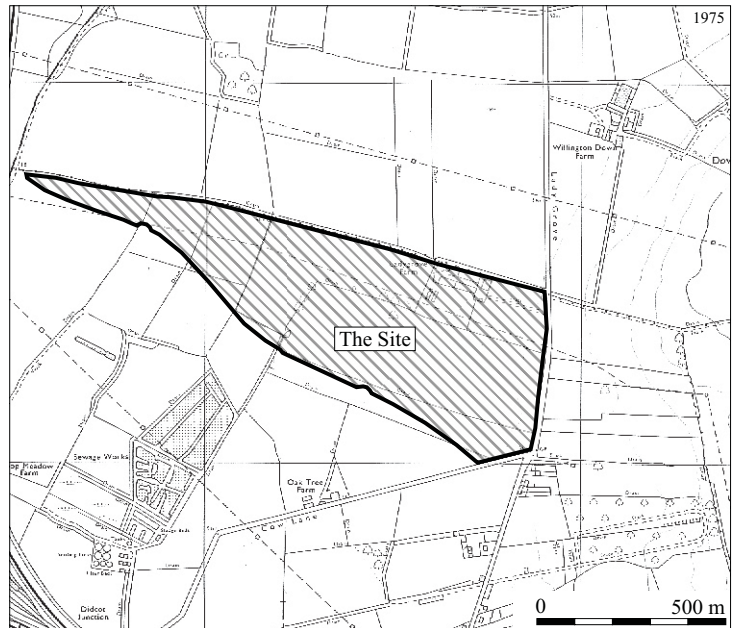
Rocques Map



1852 Inclosure Map



1881 1:10,560 First Edition Ordnance Survey Map



1975 Edition Ordnance Survey Map

Figure 2. Cartographic Evidence

The Ordnance Survey maps of 1913 and 1932 show the site has including several areas of marshy ground, particularly those fields situated immediately south of Ladygrove Farm.

The layout of the land remained largely unchanged for over a century. The field boundaries shown on the 1852 Inclosure map remain in place until the 1975 edition of the Ordnance Survey map. By this date, the three rectangular fields situated to the south of Ladygrove Farm in the eastern proposal area have had their boundaries removed to create one large open field. Some of the trees that had been part of the boundaries were left *in situ*. The boundaries in the northern part of the eastern area had also been removed, again creating a single field out of three previously separate ones. The two fields in the western area remained as depicted on the earlier maps. No further changes to the field boundaries are noted between the 1975 and 2003 edition Ordnance Survey maps. Some of the trees are not shown on the recent map, but were found to be still *in situ* at the time of a site visit (November 2003).

Within the search area, increased development is visible to the south of the proposed development site. The sewage works on the 1900 Ordnance Survey map is enlarged and reaches its maximum size by 1975. Residential development between the railway and the southern site boundary began in 1987, prior to that the area is shown as comprising fields, little changing since the creation of the 1st Edition Ordnance Survey (OS) 1:10,560 map in 1881. Six editions of the OS 1:10,000 were published between 1988 and 1994 showing the ongoing residential development north of the railway and west of Abingdon Road. Development of the area north of Cow Lane and south of A4130 commenced in 1992.

The area north of the proposed development site, exhibits little increase in development or indeed subtle shifts in field boundaries between the 1st Edition OS map and the present day.

4.3 Known Archaeological Sites

Information on known archaeological sites has been collected for an area of 1.5 km from the centre of the development site; this search area takes into consideration a 1 km wide strip from the site boundary. Numbers in **bold** refer to the identification numbers on Figure 3. The national grid reference and primary record number, relating to the County Sites and Monuments Record/ National Monuments Record (SMR/NMR), for each entry, can be found in the Gazetteer of Known Archaeological Sites (Appendix 1). No listed building survey was undertaken within the search area due to the distance of the actual proposal site from the medieval core of Didcot. However, Lady Grove Farmhouse, immediately adjacent to the site, is a listed building (Grade II) of early 17th century date with early 20th century extensions and alterations.

4.3.1 PREHISTORIC

A number of sites providing evidence of prehistoric activity have been identified.

A number of stone artefacts were recovered from the search area: two axe heads, including one of flint were recovered in 1901 at Willington's Down Farm (1) and site (8) marks the location of two Neolithic celts and two axes, one of each in stone and the others in flint.

Sites (2) – (6) comprise cropmark indications of remains including a probable pond (2), a small oval enclosure (3), enclosures, boundaries and a possible trackway (4), an asymmetrical enclosure with internal pits (5) and cropmarks of a rectilinear enclosure (6). The cropmark evidence is derived from air photographs.

Site (7) marks the location of an evaluation carried out in 2000 by Cotswold Archaeological Trust. A series of linear ditches of possible prehistoric date were located.

Further prehistoric activity in the search area includes:

A single findspot providing evidence of Late Neolithic or Bronze Age activity located at site (9): the artefact recovered was a round scraper found beside the footpath to Down Hill. Further Bronze Age activity is attested to by the recovery of a palstave from Wittenham Field, Long Wittenham (10). In addition to this, an Early to Late Bronze Age urnfield (11) was found in a gravel pit east of Pearith's Farm c. 1928. Two burials of Roman date were also recovered from this locality.

Iron Age activity is also represented in the search area: site (12), located adjacent to Wigbald's Farm, marks the location of features identified from aerial photographic survey carried out by Major G. W. G. Allen in 1934: the results of the survey were interpreted as an 'elongated enclosure', the northern limits of which had been destroyed by road construction. Site (13) marks the event of excavations carried out in 1934 by E. T. Leeds for Oxford University Archaeology Society: remains encountered have been interpreted as a settlement of Iron Age date. Site (26), the Rectory, marks the location of excavations carried out in 1980-81 by A. Briggs and B. North for Didcot Archaeological and Historical Society. An Iron Age cremation and enclosure were found.

Further general prehistoric activity was recorded during an evaluation (14) by Oxford Archaeology at Ladygrove Estate in 1994: thirty-three trenches were investigated and evidence for prehistoric tree clearance in addition to Roman field ditches was obtained under a masking deposit of alluvium 0.80 m deep. A prehistoric cremation pit and a Roman site were located during an evaluation (15) undertaken in 1997 at Appleford Sidings by C. Bell of Oxford Archaeology, and an artefact scatter comprising undiagnostic flint and Romano-British pottery was discovered in the vicinity of site (16). Site (32) was an evaluation which revealed settlement remains and cremations together with Bronze Age pottery and flint artefacts.

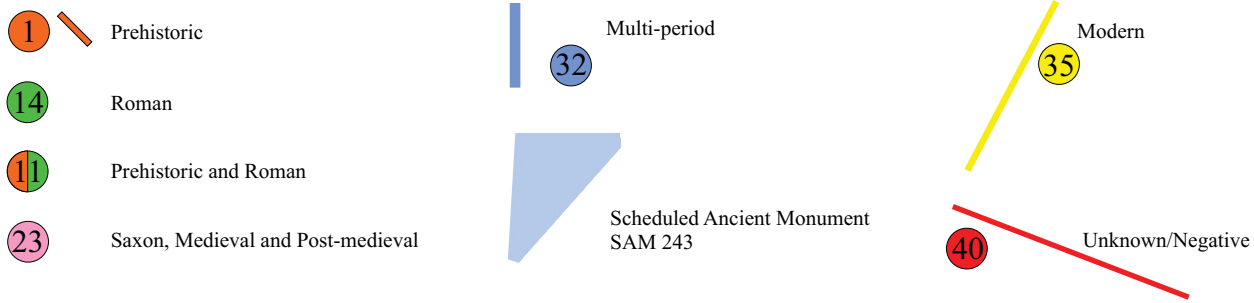
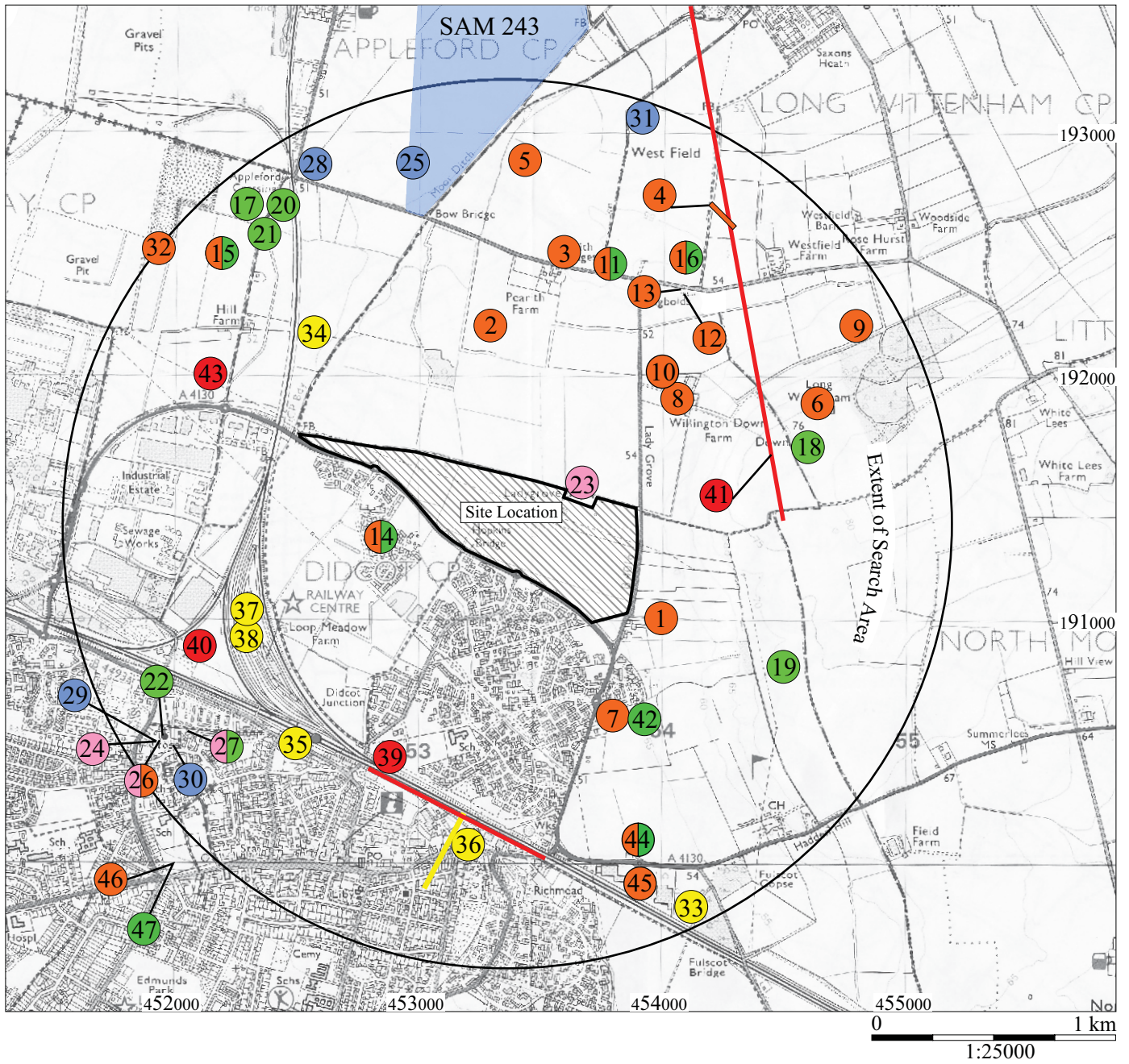


Figure 3. Gazetteer of Known Sites

On land north of the A4130 an evaluation (44) revealed many undated features; some remains, however, were dated to the Bronze and Iron Ages. Nearby, further evidence of an intensively occupied prehistoric landscape was excavated (45), which comprised activity from the Mesolithic to Late Bronze Age. The Middle Bronze Age activity was characterised by the laying out of a rectilinear field system.

Site (46) is an Iron Age coin of Cunobelinus from the early part of the 1st century AD.

4.3.2 ROMAN

A number of the sites mentioned above bearing evidence from the prehistoric period also include remains of Roman date: site (14) revealed traces of Roman field ditches, a Roman site was located at site (15) and the artefact scatter at site (16) included Romano – British pottery.

Other Roman activity includes the results obtained from an evaluation (17) carried out at Appleford Sidings in 1993. A programme of field walking, geophysical survey and trial trenching was implemented. Evidence of Roman activity was located in the form of a rectilinear enclosure and field system. There are two further sites (42) and (44) to the south of the proposal site, as well as one to the east (19) which have yielded evidence of settlement activity dating from the Roman period.

Elsewhere, Roman activity is attested by the discovery of two Roman burials in the vicinity of Pearith's Farm at site (11) (see above). Further evidence of Roman activity was revealed when sherds of Roman pottery were recovered east of Willington Down Farm (18).

The site (19) was a watching brief carried out in 1991 by Oxford Archaeology as part of the Didcot to Oxford water main; it revealed Roman settlement evidence in the form of an enclosure and ditch. A series of watching briefs (1998-9), also undertaken by Oxford Archaeology at Appleford Sidings in advance of mineral extraction, revealed remains of Roman field systems and a trackway (20).

An excavation (21) was undertaken in 2000: a Roman ditched enclosure and field system were identified. An evaluation (44) on land north of the A4130 yielded remains of Roman 'ladder' enclosures as well as other enclosure ditches.

Roman funerary remains are represented at site (22): a Roman lead coffin and Romano-British pottery were found just outside the southwestern limit of the search area. Site (47) is a late 2nd century AD coin of Pluatilla Augusta, wife of Caracalle; its precise location is not known.

A Romano-British settlement (42) comprising earthworks, pits and gullies is

known from Didcot. Site (27), marks the location of a watching brief carried out by J. Hall and R. Chambers in 1977-79 for Didcot Archaeological and Historical Society. Remains of Roman date, including a pottery vessel were recovered.

4.3.3 SAXON, MEDIEVAL AND POST MEDIEVAL

Few sites within the search area are of medieval date. Saxon pottery was discovered in the vicinity of site (23), and a late 14th century medieval cross base and shaft are known from site (24). Further evidence was recovered from site (26) where two buildings were uncovered: one medieval and the other post-medieval. Site (27) contained a medieval pottery vessel found in addition to a post-medieval site and a well of uncertain date.

4.3.4 MULTI-PERIOD

Multi-period sites comprise evidence of different types of activities over extended periods of time; continuity of landscape use or of activity is possible although it should not be understood that multi-period sites exclusively evidence continuity.

Cropmark remains identified north of Bow Bridge, on the western side of Moor Ditch comprise a multi-phase complex of rectilinear enclosures, ditches, trackways and possible hut circles. The remains are believed to be associated with a Roman villa situated within an incomplete compound (25) and are situated within the area scheduled as SAM 243.

The symbol marking site (28) is situated at the south-western corner of an area studied as part of a programme of air photographic interpretation carried out in 1987-8. The area is located southeast of the village of Appleford, and extends west of the Moor Ditch and northwards from Bow Bridge, the results cover an area of c. 20 ha. over many archaeological periods: the Iron Age and Romano-British periods are particularly well represented. Notable features include a hoard of currency bars and another of Roman pewter. Excavation in the 1970's revealed Late Bronze Age pits, Mid Iron Age enclosures and Romano-British ditched enclosures. This extensive multi-period complex also includes the Roman villa site at (25) with associated features including two trackways, enclosures, boundaries, ditches and pits. In addition to this there was a series of five Bronze Age round barrows visible as ring-ditches and further miscellaneous features.

Closely situated to, although just beyond the south-western limit of the search area, are a number of sites with multi-period activity.

Excavations carried out west of All Saints Church, Didcot (29), by R. Chambers for Oxfordshire Archaeological Unit revealed an Iron Age settlement, Roman cremation as well as the post-medieval rectory which had been demolished in 1851. Further excavations (1982) also carried out by Chambers in the rectory garden of All Saints church (30), found evidence of a

settlement dating from Bronze Age through Roman to Early Medieval and Medieval times.

Site (31) marks the location of a watching brief which revealed ditches and an artefact scatter containing Romano-British pottery, medieval tile and a post-medieval buckle.

Site (44) was an evaluation comprising 119 trenches carried out by Birmingham Archaeology. This recovered many undated features, a Bronze Age or Iron Age ditch and pits as well as Iron Age ditches and pits. Some Roman activity was evidenced as dated ditches and 'ladder' enclosures. These were sealed by alluvium, c. 0.2-1.4m thick. Post-medieval and modern features were cut into the alluvium. To the south of this, the site (45) revealed activity from the Mesolithic through to Late Bronze Age.

4.3.5 MODERN

Sites marked as (33) to (38) are modern. Location (33) is the Great Western Railway between London and Bristol. The route was built in nine sections and completed in June 1841. The symbols for (33) and (34) are not shown on the gazetteer as the railways extend over several map sheets. Site (34) is the Oxford and Didcot Branch Railway, proposed by the Great Western Railway in 1833 to improve links with the Midlands. The line was opened as a Broad Gauge line in 1844.

Site (35) marks the location of Didcot Station. The station was opened in 1844, and was rebuilt in 1885 after the original burned down.

Site (36) represents the Didcot, Newbury and Southampton Junction Railway. The Didcot to Winchester section was opened in 1885 and a connection with the London-Southampton trunk line was made in 1891. Passenger services were withdrawn in 1960 and the line closed by 1966.

Sites (37) was the Didcot Railway engine shed, and (38) the Didcot Railway coaling stage and water tank, were built in 1931 for the Great Western Railway. The structures were constructed to provide employment in the Depression and have been little altered since. The buildings are now the only surviving examples of their kind in England still in use for their original purpose. The shed (37) was closed by British rail in 1965 but continues in use as the Great Western Heritage Centre. The coaling stage (38) is Grade II listed.

4.3.6 UNCERTAIN OR NEGATIVE

Archaeological events were undertaken at three sites (39) to (41). The evidence obtained from the works revealed no significant findings/features. Site (39) was the Didcot to Milton Heights link road, a 900m road scheme investigated for archaeological remains by Thames Valley Archaeological Services in 2002. No significant remains were recorded.

Event (40) was an excavation carried out in 1984 by B. North for Didcot Archaeological and Historical Society. No traces of medieval buildings were recovered from the site.

At site (41), G. Keevil on behalf of Thames Water, carried out a watching brief (1991-2) on the South Moreton to Littlemore section of the Didcot to Oxford water main. No significant remains were recorded.

A pipeline passed through the undated cropmark complex (43) but no features were identified during the topsoil stripping.

5 DISCUSSION

5.1 ASSESSMENT OF THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL POTENTIAL OF THE SITE

In assessing the archaeological potential of the site, a number of factors must be taken into account: the geology, the survival of archaeological monuments within the development area and its environs (in this case a 1.5 km radius of the site centre), previously recorded archaeological sites, previous land use and disturbance and future land use, including the impact of the proposed development.

The site is located on Gault Clay, masked by alluvium. This combination of clay solid and clay drift geology does not permit the use of air photographs as a predictive tool for the identification of archaeological features, in the way that such features excavated into the gravel terraces of the Thames, for example, will be revealed. Consequently, we rely on previous invasive work in the immediate area to inform the assessment. Nonetheless, the presence of extensive occupation activity, comprising settlement, burial and monument building in the general area indicates that we should anticipate some archaeological remains on the site.

Within the proposed development site itself, only in the north-eastern corner, adjacent to Ladygrove Farm, is there the single findspot of Saxon pottery (23).

Site (14), 250 m south of the south-western corner of the development site yielded evidence of prehistoric and Roman activity. The evaluation revealed 0.8m of alluvium overlying a prehistoric ground surface. Remains of prehistoric tree clearance and Roman field boundaries were recorded. To the southeast of the proposal site several interventions (7), (19) (42), (44) and (45) reveal a significant spread of archaeological sites, which can be associated as part of a later prehistoric and Roman landscape with the activity (14) to the west of the proposal site.

There are several foci of multi-period activity on the edge of the 1.5 km radius search area. The most significant of these multi-period sites is SAM 243. The remains recorded in this scheduled area were mapped at 1:10000 as part of the

RCHME Thames Valley NMP project. The results of the study have identified a multi-phase complex of rectilinear enclosures, ditches, trackways and possible hut circles in association with the site of a Roman villa and its compound.

North of SAM 243, two further scheduled areas are located: SAM 147 west of the railway and on the north side of the River Thames or Isis; SAM 146 is adjacent to this, on the eastern side of the railway, and also north of the river.

The remains scheduled as part of SAM 146, directly north of SAM 243 include a long barrow cemetery comprising 13 ring ditches, one double concentric and one disk barrow. Also included are the remains of a buried ground surface with features of Bronze Age date cut into it, a Roman metalled trackway, an Iron Age boundary and prehistoric pits. SAM 147 includes many rectangular enclosures and a number of pits.

These complex sites, representing extensive continuous activity through many periods, both settlement and funerary are located over 1km from the centre of the proposed development site. The remains are adjacent to the River Thames and occupy an area of light, alluvial soils conducive to settlement activity.

The occurrence, complexity and significance of the prehistoric and Roman activity south of the A4130 is less intensive in that smaller groups of cropmarks are evident over a wider area, and the longevity of these settlements is shorter lived or more period specific. Settlement activity recorded through air photographic survey and in some cases tested by evaluation – such as sites (7), (42), (44) and (45) – has been identified and located between 0.5km and 1km (sites 2, 7, 14, 18 and 19) from the limit of the proposed development site. Single enclosures in a variety of shapes from oval to asymmetrical have also been identified, the closest being site (2), at 0.5km from the northern limit of the site.

Funerary activity tends to be confined to areas already identified as having settlement activity, such as site (26) at the south-western limit of the search area.

Artefacts are known from a number of sites, generally in association with known sites or features, however, isolated finds do occur: the Saxon pottery from site (23) at the corner of the development adjacent to Ladygrove Farm, and a number of prehistoric findspots such as sites (1) and (8).

The medieval period produced two single findspots at (23) and (24), although other artefacts have been recovered as part of the multi-period sites: a medieval building and one dating to the post-medieval period were located at site (26) just outside the south-western search limit, south of Didcot Junction.

To summarise, of the forty-seven sites located within the 1.5km search area centred on the development site, twenty are recorded as prehistoric in origin, thirteen sites have remains of Roman activity, including sites (11, 14-16, 32 and 44) which had both prehistoric and Roman remains.

In addition to the twenty-five sites of prehistoric and Roman origin, sites (25, 28-31 and 44) are known to be multi-period comprising features associated with the prehistoric and Roman periods representing several phases of activity as part of continual occupation and development of the sites: this can be most clearly seen at sites (25) and (28).

The medieval period is relatively poorly represented within the search area with only three artefact findspots (23, 24 and 27) and the remains of a medieval building at site (26). The post-medieval period has several sites associated with the development of the railway (sites 33-38) in addition to the remains of a building at site (26). Three further sites represent archaeological fieldwork carried out with no significant archaeological results (sites 39 to 41).

5.2 POTENTIAL FOR PREHISTORIC AND ROMAN REMAINS

From the above evidence it is clear that the search area and its immediate environs encompass a number of sites broadly dated to within the prehistoric and Roman periods. Although there is significant activity north of the search area at a minimum distance of 1km from the development site's northern limit, in an area of alluvium associated with the River Thames, settlement activity north of the development site, within an area of 1km from site limit to search limit provides evidence of more localised settlement activity, probably closer to small farmsteads in nature with a number of single enclosures identified. The main focus of intensive multi-period settlement activity occurs in the immediate vicinity of the proposal site. The majority of artefact findspots occur to the northeast and east of the development site.

The activity south of the development seems to form a continuum from west to east: site (14) is situated within the confines of the search area, 250m from the development site, and includes evidence of prehistoric tree clearance and agricultural boundaries probably dating to the Roman period. Southeast of the proposal site are four sites (7), (42), (44) and (45) – as well as the findspot (1) of two stone axeheads – which have been subject to archaeological investigation.

A further settlement occurs 750m from the south-eastern corner of the proposal area at site (19): this site comprises a Roman settlement with enclosure ditches. An additional cluster of activity occurs on the south-western limit of the search area and extends outwards. Multi-period activity is again evidenced here comprising settlement, funerary remains and artefacts.

That the proposed development site lies within an area of open marshy fields under pasture and is shown as such from the 18th century Rocque map evidence up to and including the present day Ordnance Survey mapping, means that there may be potential for the survival of sub-surface remains lying undisturbed below the level of ploughing. The alluvium evidenced on the evaluations (7), (14), (42), (44) and (45) indicate that the water table has fluctuated here since the prehistoric and Roman periods.

The potential for prehistoric remains within the proposed development area is high. The presence of significant remains to the west and east of the proposal site indicates that there is a focus for settlement activity in the area of the proposal site.

Sites of a similar complexity to those situated adjacent to the River Thames are likely to occur within the search area itself. The sites to the north are located on gravel and have not been subject to the same masking by alluvium as those in the vicinity of the proposal site; moreover the site is located on Gault Clay, masked with alluvium, which is not conducive to good results from aerial photography.

The remains of tree clearance and other traces of agriculture occurring in the prehistoric period and into the Roman period, situated just outside the proposal area such as at sites (14) (7), (42), (44) and (45) under a masking deposit of alluvium between 0.4m and 1.2m deep, indicate further features of a similar nature may well extend into the confines of the proposal site itself.

The implication of this is that any remains within the proposal area may be similar to the isolated enclosures and small-scale settlement remains that are scattered throughout the search area, with examples to the northeast (sites 12 and 13), and southeast (19). The potential for Roman agricultural enclosures is high, and the potential for settlement activity is medium to high.

5.3 POTENTIAL FOR SAXON REMAINS

The potential for remains dating from the Saxon period is less easily assessed. There is not currently evidence for any activity apart from the findspot of Saxon pottery (23); previously this was accorded a low potential. As it is clear that previously a low potential was accorded both prehistoric and Roman remains, it is perhaps prudent to accord the Saxon period low to medium potential.

Such a potential may well reflect the site being open agricultural land well away from the medieval core of Didcot. The fluctuation of the water table, which has caused alluviation masking the prehistoric and Roman remains, probably dates from the Saxon period. It is possible that there may well be remains associated with the management or use of the rising water table.

5.4 POTENTIAL FOR MEDIEVAL REMAINS

The potential for remains dating from the medieval period and later is low. This may be due to the open agricultural nature of the area within which the development site is situated, well away from the medieval core of Didcot.

6 CONCLUSIONS

There is a high potential for archaeological remains dating from the Prehistoric and/or Roman periods within the proposed development area.

The potential for encountering remains of post-Roman date is low to medium. The Saxon pottery located on the north side of the development site (23) may be an isolated find, possibly the result of manuring activity; equally it may be associated with Saxon activity overlooking or within the proposal area. The potential for encountering remains of medieval date is negligible.

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7.2 MAPS

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