

1. Summary

Development Stage 2A2: Compound 2A2 and Access at Land East of Station Road, Oxfordshire

Site Details

Development Stage	2A2
Site Name	Compound A2 and Access
Type of Works	Compound and Access
Proposed Archaeological Works	Strip, Map and Sample
National Grid Reference	SP 61940 23370 (centred)
Site Area	6.0 ha (59,500)
Chainage	106900 to 107300
Land Use	Pasture, mature trees and hedgerows
Local Planning Authority	Cherwell District Council
Curator	Oxfordshire County Council; Richard Oram, Planning Archaeologist (archaeologydc@oxfordshire.gov.uk or 07917 001026)

Proposed Archaeological Investigation

Archaeological works will comprise a Strip, Map and Sample (SMS) undertaken in three phases which will involve the observation, investigation and recording of the removal of topsoil. It is important to stress the specified area of SMS will be machine stripped under archaeological control to the first archaeological horizon, or to the natural geology where no archaeological remains are encountered. All work will be carried out by the Contractor in accordance with national, regional and local policy and guidelines, and in conjunction with the Heritage Delivery Strategy¹.

Previous Archaeological Works

Type of Work Undertaken	Findings
LiDAR	LiDAR data of the Site has been previously analysed. Faint traces of ridge and furrow are visible within the surrounding area, however no archaeological features are visible within the Site itself.

¹ EWR Alliance, 2019a. Network Rail (East West Rail Bicester to Bedford Improvements) Order Heritage Delivery Strategy. Unpublished Report. Section 6.6



Archaeological Potential

Potential	Period	Type of remains likely to be encountered
High	Post Medieval	Agricultural remains
	Medieval	Remains of an agricultural nature e.g. ridge & furrow; field system; finds associated with manuring
Medium	Iron Age	Settlement; field systems
	Romano-British	Settlement; field systems
Low	Palaeolithic	Flint scatters
	Mesolithic	Flint scatters
	Neolithic	Lithic scatters; settlement
	Bronze Age	Settlement; ceremonial
	Early Medieval	Field systems; settlement
	Modern	Agricultural remains



Introduction

This Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) sets out a methodology for an archaeological SMS in three phases during construction work for the installation of a construction compound and access at Compound A2, Land East of Station Road ('the Site'). The Site is highlighted within the 'Specific Sites requiring Written Schemes of Investigation' section of the Heritage Delivery Strategy as requiring a WSI for these archaeological works².

The Site is located within Development Stage 2A2 of the EWR2 scheme (centred on NGR Ref: SP 61940 23370). The Site comprises an irregular, sub-rectangular parcel of land of approximately 6 hectares (ha) located approximately 2km north-east of Launton, Oxfordshire. The Site, which consists of three agricultural fields, is currently open pasture with associated hedgerows and trees. The Site lies within the local authority administrative area of Cherwell District Council.

Topographically, the Site occupies gently undulating land, at approximately 70m AOD. The Site has an underlying bedrock geology composed of the Peterborough Member - mudstone which formed between 166.1 and 163.5 million years ago in the Jurassic Period. No superficial deposits are present within the Site³.

The Site is to be used for a construction compound and access including a small provision for office, welfare space and materials storage. The area of the SMS will be stripped of topsoil in three phases (Figure 1) and may require deeper excavation in some areas. The extent of the intrusive works thus means that archaeological mitigation within the Site is required.

3. Key Potential

Prehistoric (500,000BC - AD43)

There is an absence of evidence for Palaeolithic within the vicinity of the Site. There is minimal evidence for Palaeolithic activity within the gravel terraces of the River Cherwell to the east of Bicester, possibly due to the natural geology of the area where alluvial deposits may mask the presence of early prehistoric remains⁴. Evidence of Palaeolithic activity within the Site, if present, is likely to comprise artefactual or palaeoenvironmental remains within deeper deposits. There are also no records of assets dating to the Mesolithic period within the immediate vicinity of the Site. There have, however, been several lithic scatters found in archaeological investigations near Bicester, c.2km north-west of Site.

No evidence for Neolithic activity is recorded close to the Site. Neolithic remains are primarily based within the Thame valley close to the river's confluence with the River Thames approximately 17km south-west of the Site⁵. The absence of known Neolithic sites may be a result of limited archaeological investigation rather than limited activity during this period. There is considered to be a low potential for remains of this date to survive in the Site.

Despite a wealth of Bronze Age settlement and burial evidence to the west and south of Bicester, there is no evidence of Bronze Age activity within proximity of the Site. Evidence for Bronze Age activity has primarily been recorded as a result of modern development in those areas and it may be that Bronze Age remains have not been recorded in the vicinity of the Site due to a lack of investigation rather than a lack of activity. The available evidence does, however, indicate a low potential for remains of this period

²EWR Alliance, 2019. *Network Rail (East West Rail Bicester to Bedford Improvements) Order Heritage Delivery Strategy.* Unpublished Report Section 8, Table 8.1 Page 8-8

³ British Geological Survey Website, 2019.

⁴ Hardaker, T. (2014) The Lower and Middle Palaeolithic of Oxfordshire. In Hey, G and J, Hinds (eds) *Solent-Thames Research Framework*; Hey, G. 2014. Late Upper Palaeolithic and Mesolithic: Resource Assessment. In G. Hey, and J. Hind, (eds) *Solent-Thames Research Framework*

⁵ EWR Alliance, 2018. Network Rail Order Environmental Statement. Volume 2ii - Route Section 2



Oxfordshire had been subject to extensive woodland clearance carried out in the Middle/Late Iron Age, with environmental data corroborating the rise in open grassland environments⁶. Iron Age enclosed settlement and land management is observable in the wider landscape, with Late Iron Age remains encountered 1.5km west of the Site during trial trenching at Compound A1⁷ associated with an Iron Age/Romano-British settlement (MOX12267) previously excavated in 2002. There is deemed to be medium potential for Iron Age remains within the Site based on current evidence.

Romano-British (AD43 – AD410)

The Romano-British period saw widespread activity across the EWR route and the wider landscape⁸. Dispersed rural settlement has been encountered beyond the limits of the major Romano-British centres such as Alchester in the region of Oxfordshire and along the EWR route. Remains to the west of the Site were found in 2002 during an excavation at Bicester Perimeter Road, c.1.5km from the Site (MOX12667; SMR Ref: 16540). A ditch and posthole were recorded which contained bone and Iron Age and Romano-British pottery. Further Late Iron Age to Romano-British evidence was then encountered in 2004, c. 2km south-west of the Site (MOX23494; SMR Ref: 26122). A farmstead and field system dated to the 2nd and 3rd centuries AD was excavated with trackways and field ditches as well as two wells. During trial trenching at Compound A1 in 2019, c. 1.4km west of the Site, the remains of Late Iron Age and Romano-British settlement and land management were encountered which appears to be the northern periphery of the settlement. A medium potential for remains from this period is expected within the Site.

Early Medieval (AD410 – AD1066)

There is no current archaeological evidence recorded within the Site or wider environs which dates to the Early Medieval period; much of the activity at that time centred around Marsh Gibbon, c. 2.4km south-east of the Site, and Bicester, c. 3km to the south-west⁹. There is considered to be a low potential for remains of this date to survive in the Site.

Late Medieval (AD1066 – AD1540)

The manorial estates of Marsh [Gibbon] and Launton are recorded in the Domesday Book (1086) within the Hundred of Mow and based on the Site's current position, c. 1km north-east of Launton and c. 2km north-west of Marsh Gibbon, it is likely that it lay beyond the limits of settlement within the associated ploughlands. This is further evidenced by the presence of ridge and furrow, visible on LiDAR imagery and ridge and furrow visible on aerial photographs in the surrounding area; there is high potential for such agricultural remains to be present although these are not visible within the Site itself.

Post-Medieval (AD1540 – c.1750) and Industrial Period (c.1750 – 1901)

Early mapping depicts the settlements of 'Mershe Gibbon', 'Bicester' and 'Launton' in the vicinity of the Site although minimal detail of the settlements or surrounding land is given¹⁰. In the late 18th century, more detailed mapping of the Site shows Station Road to the west of the Site, aligned south-west to north-east between Launton and Poundon; no structures are depicted within the Site¹¹. Ordnance Survey mapping from the 19th century illustrates the Site within a landscape of enclosed fields with the Site shown as either pasture or arable land¹².

⁶ Lambrick, G. (2014) The Later Bronze Age and Iron Age: Resource assessment. In G. Hey, and J. Hind, (eds) *Solent-Thames Research Framework*

⁷ EWR Alliance, 2019b. Compound A1: Land East of Bicester Road, Bicester, Oxfordshire: An Archaeological Evaluation Report. Unpublished report.

⁸ Network Rail, 2018. Order Environmental Statement. Volume 2ii - Route Section 2A

⁹ ibid

¹⁰ Saxton, 1574. Oxonii, buckinghamiae et berceriae Comitatuum.

¹¹ Cary, J., 1794. Cary's England, Wales and Scotland (Sheets 23-24).

¹² Ordnance Survey, 1815. Bicester; OS, 1881. Oxfordshire XXIII.3. 25 inch to the mile; OS, 1885. Oxfordshire XXIII. Six inch to the mile; OS,



The line of the existing railway, established in the mid-19th century, runs to the immediate north of the Site. The site of Launton Station (MOX5012; SMR Ref: 5870) is recorded located 100m to the northwest of the Site on the railway line.

Modern Period (Post-1901)

There has been minimal change to the Site throughout the 20th and 21st centuries, as exemplified by cartographic evidence¹³ and aerial imagery. The Site has continued to occupy multiple fields throughout the modern period.

Historic Landscape Character

The present character of the Site can be defined as 18th to 19th century parliamentary type enclosures with a late nineteenth century railway to the north.

4. Previous Works

LiDAR data of the Site has been previously analysed. Faint traces of ridge and furrow are visible within the surrounding area, however no archaeological features are visible within the Site itself.

Proposal for Archaeological Investigations

The proposed programme of works at Compound A2 and Access will initially involve a programme of archaeological SMS in three phases. All works will follow the specific methodologies set out in Section 6 of the Heritage Delivery Strategy¹⁴:

- 6.4 Strip, Map, Sample (SMS)
- 6.5 Archaeological Monitoring
- 6.6 Construction Integrated Recording
- 6.7 Chance Finds Procedure
- 6.9 Environmental Sampling
- 6.10 Human Remains
- 6.11 Finds
- 6.12 Recording & Reporting
- 6.13 Archiving

Where archaeological remains are encountered, further mitigation may be required. This will be discussed and agreed between the Contractor, the Employer and the Curator.

Archaeological Strip, Map and Sample Methodology

The SMS will be carried out in three phases: Phase 1 and 2being the northern half of the SMS area and Phase 3 being the northern half (Figure 1).

No known services are present within the Site. The area will be CAT scanned prior to any excavation.

¹³ OS, 1900. Buckinghamshire XXI.NE. Six inch; 25 inch. OS, 1922. Oxfordshire XXIII.3. 25 inch to the mile. OS, 1923. Buckinghamshire XXI.NE. Six inch; OS, 1952. Buckinghamshire XXI.NE. Six inch; OS, 1968. OS Plan, 1: 2,500.

¹⁴ EWR Alliance, 2019. Network Rail (East West Rail Bicester to Bedford Improvements) Order Heritage Delivery Strategy. Unpublished Report



All topsoil stripping will be monitored and directed by the supervising archaeologist. Archaeological supervision of topsoil stripping will be at a ratio of one archaeologist per mechanical excavator. Topsoil and overburden will be removed in successive level spits down to the first archaeological horizon, or the natural sub-stratum, whichever is encountered first. At this point, ground works will cease while archaeological recording is carried out.

The removal of topsoil and overburden will be carried out with mechanical excavators utilising a flat bladed bucket (toothless), and in horizontal spits. Plant will work away from, and not track across, the machined surface until the monitoring archaeologist has given permission to do so. Movement of plant over the remainder of the Site will be minimised to prevent rutting or damage to sub-surface archaeological features as far as is practicable. Topsoil and subsoil will be stored separately and will be visually scanned.

All investigation of archaeological horizons will be by hand, with cleaning, inspection, and recording both in plan and section. Any works regarding soil management will adhere to the site requirements contained within the Development Stage 2A2 Soil Management Plan¹⁵.

The final excavation sample will be agreed following the site visit, however the minimum requirements for sample excavation in line with Historic England guidelines¹⁶ are stated below, unless otherwise agreed with the Planning Archaeologist for Oxfordshire County Council:

Table 6-1 Minimum requirements for sample excavation

Type of Remains	Requirement for sample excavation
Complex/ very significant features/ deposits/ artefact assemblages/ artefacts	Sampling to be subject of further discussion with the Richard Oram Planning Archaeologist for Oxfordshire County Council. If of exceptional nature, the advice of Historic England may be sought.
Hearths, ovens, kilns	50-100% of domestic/industrial working features (hearths, ovens). Also to be sampled for arch/mag as standard if appropriate (this applies to any in-situ burnt features unless agreed otherwise on site following discussion). Palaeoenvironmental sampling to be agreed with the Planning Archaeologist.
Possible prehistoric roundhouses or other post-built structures	Total excavation of all post-holes, spreads/ occupation layers and cut features (e.g. ring-gullies) directly associated with structures. Metal detector to be used at all stages of excavation/ removal, for better artefact recovery (e.g. for droplets of bronze).
Possible cremation burials	Total excavation; lifting of intact/ semi-intact pottery vessels with following micro-excavation in laboratory.
Linear features	Excavation by hand of sections across all termini, all junctions or intersections of cut features and, in the body of the features (if datable, ancient and manifestly rich in ancient palaeoenvironmental remains, the following scope of works:
	10% of each linear feature's exposed area
	Partial excavations within a linear at junctions of cut features will not be a substitute for sections across the body of the linear, away from such junctions, because of possible

¹⁵ East West Rail Alliance (2020) East West Rail Phase 2. Sub-Section 2A1 Soil Management Plan

¹⁶ Campbell, Moffett and Straker (2011) Environmental Archaeology: A guide to the theory and practice of methods, from sampling and recovery to post-excavation



contamination between intercutting contexts. With prior agreement with the Planning Archaeologist, the remainder of the fills may be excavated mechanically under close archaeological supervision and control and thorough metal detecting
Total excavation by hand of all discrete datable and ancient cut features of less than 2 sq. metres plan area, and such features manifestly rich in ancient palaeoenvironmental remains; except where deeper than 1 metre, when half-sections will be acceptable. Metal detector to be used at all stages of excavation/ removal, for better artefact recovery.
Post-holes probably associated with structures - complete excavation by hand. Otherwise a 50% sample will be undertaken of isolated post holes.
Default - half-section. Further sampling to be decided on basis of Health & Safety considerations/ vulnerability of fill/ contents.
All structural features will be fully revealed in plan and recorded. All individual elements including walls, floors, doorways, and any negative features will have context boundaries distinguished facilitating a full written, drawn and photographic record.
Negative structural features (beamslots etc) will be 50% sampled.
If not evidently part of a structure, e.g. a structure of industrial archaeological interest, or if without good artefact assemblage, record and sample only that sufficient to confirm late date. If artefact-rich/ part of a structure, treat as with pits and post-holes above.
Developer and Planning Archaeologist to be notified immediately on discovery/recognition. Strategy for excavation/scientific investigation/conservation etc to be agreed before work resumes.

A sampling strategy appropriate to the archaeological features and deposits will be adopted. This will include bulk samples for most archaeological contexts as well as provision for column and other necessary sampling. Bulk samples will be taken using ten litre plastic, lidded tubs (with handles) or securely fastened strong polythene bags (double bagged). All sample tubs/bags will be appropriately and clearly labelled with site codes, context details and sample information using permanent ink.

Bulk samples of dry contexts will be taken in the range of 40-60 litres as appropriate. Samples of wet (i.e. waterlogged) deposits should total 20L. Where the context is of a lower volume, 100% of the context will be sampled.

Monolith and kubiena box samples should be taken where necessary to allow for specialist analysis of deposits. The location and depth should be accurately recorded, and all samples should be taken with a 50mm overlap where more than one monolith is required. Column samples should also be taken down the length of a section where appropriate. These samples should be neatly packed and secured with



plastic and rubber bands. All samples will be appropriately and clearly labelled with site codes, context details and sample information using permanent ink.

In waterlogged conditions, it is possible that timbers will survive below ground. Where there is potential for timbers to be dated, they should be sampled following Historic England guidelines¹⁷.

All samples will be recorded in a sample register forming part of the site record.

The Contractor will be responsible for the safekeeping of all samples on-site and during transportation to the processing facility.

EWR Alliance will be informed as soon as possible of the discovery of any unexpected archaeological remains or changes in the programme of ground works on Site.

Linear features and occasional discrete features will be located using a Trimble R8 GNSS GPS and tied into the National Grid. Where complex features or groups of features are encountered, these will be recorded at a scale of 1:20 on planning sheets based on a 5m grid system. The grid will be used for planning features and all other horizontal control on site. Vertical control will be established from the nearest Ordnance Survey bench mark (OSBM), with the traverse completed as part of a closed loop. Temporary benchmarks will be established across the site, as required.

Archaeological recording, where not precluded by Health & Safety considerations, will consist of:

Planning of all exposed archaeological features and horizons (including boundaries of natural) at an appropriate scale. 1:50 will be utilised to initially map the entire exposure and linked to detail plans at 1:20 of excavated features.

Limited hand cleaning of archaeological sections and surfaces sufficient to establish the stratigraphic sequence exposed.

Excavated material will be examined in order to retrieve artefacts to assist in the analysis of their spatial distribution.

A scaled photographic record of representative exposed sections and surfaces, along with sufficient photographs to establish the setting and scale of the groundworks.

A record of the datum levels of archaeological deposits.

The SMS area and all features will be excavated only to a safe working depth, although they potentially will be stepped if required. The excavated area will be secured with road pins and barrier mesh, if required.

Records will be produced using either pro-forma context sheets compatible with those published by the Museum of London¹⁸, and features will be planned according to the single context method.

A full photographic record will be maintained using a digital SLR camera to produce RAW and JPEG images.

A record of the full sequence of all archaeological deposits as revealed in the SMS will be made. Plans and sections of features will be drawn at an appropriate scale of 1:20 or 1:50, with sections drawn at 1:10.

¹⁷ Historic England, 2010. Waterlogged Wood: Guidelines to the Recording, Sampling, Conservation and Curation of Waterlogged Wood.

¹⁸ MoL,1994. Archaeological Site Manual (Third Edition)



A metal detector will be made available on site to aid in the recovery of artefacts if required. The detector will not be set to discriminate against iron.

Any finds of human remains will be left *in situ*, covered and protected and the coroner will be informed immediately. If removal is essential a Licence will be sought from the Home Office. The Oxfordshire County Council Archaeological Officer will be informed.

Any finds covered by the provisions of the Treasure Act (1996, amended 2003, 2008) and Treasure (Designation) Order 2002¹⁹, including gold and silver, will be secured and preserved in situ until a view can be obtained from the Portable Antiquity Scheme officer.

All identified finds and artefacts will be collected and retained. Certain classes of material, i.e. post-medieval pottery and building material may be discarded after recording if a representative sample is kept. No finds will be discarded without the prior approval of the Oxfordshire County Council's Archaeological Adviser.

Finds will be studied to provide a date range of the assemblage with particular reference to pottery. In addition, the artefacts will be used to characterise the Site, and to establish the potential for all categories of finds should further archaeological work be necessary.

All finds and samples will be treated in a proper manner and to standards agreed in advance with the Oxfordshire Museums Service. Finds will be exposed, lifted, cleaned, conserved, marked, bagged and boxed in accordance with the guidelines set out in United Kingdom Institute for Conservation's Conservation Guidelines No. 2²⁰.

Provision for onsite conservation and finds treatment, in addition to any scientific dating of materials uncovered, will be undertaken where appropriate.

Oxfordshire County Council Archaeological Services (OCCAS) will monitor progress and standards throughout the project. The County Archaeological Officer shall be notified of the start date at least two weeks prior to commencement of work in order to arrange a date for the monitoring visit(s).

The SMS area should not be backfilled until after they have been monitored by OCCAS.

Upon completion of the project the landowner and the Oxfordshire Museums Service will be contacted.

7. Site in the Context of the Research Agenda

The Heritage Delivery Strategy outline the Specific Research Objectives (SROs) that the work on EWR2 may address²¹.

Given the location of the Site within an area of known medieval to post-medieval ridge and furrow, there is considered a high potential for medieval and post-medieval remains, particularly agricultural remains, to survive within the Site. If medieval or post-medieval features or medieval and later ridge and furrow are encountered within the Site, they may have the potential to contribute to:

- SRO29: Understand the chronology of development and character of later medieval field systems and their relationship to settlement across the region
- **SRO30:** Better understand the character and organisation of later medieval ridge and furrow and field systems

¹⁹ MSO (1996, revised 2002, 2008) *Treasure Act 1996*.

²⁰ United Kingdom Institute for Conservation, 1983, Conservation Guidelines No. 2.

²¹ EWR Alliance, 2019a. Network Rail (East West Rail Bicester to Bedford Improvements) Order Heritage Delivery Strategy. Unpublished Report Section 4.4



- SRO39: How did post-medieval rural industries impact on the landscape, and what was their contribution to society over the period of the urban-centred industrial revolution?
- SRO40: What was the impact of the agricultural revolution on the post-medieval landscape?

The potential for encountering hitherto unknown remains of other periods is low but cannot be ruled out.

The ability of any other remains which might be encountered to contribute to the established regional and sub-regional research framework²² and the SRO's would be dependent upon the nature, condition, extent and significance of the remains. Any such remains, however, could have the potential to contribute to and/or further the understanding of the patterns of land use, settlement and/or economy of the period to which they belong. Should hitherto unknown remains be encountered during archaeological monitoring, they should be considered in the context of Section 4 of Heritage Delivery Strategy and Solent-Thames Framework, or any successor document.

8. Report Preparation

Upon completion of the SMS, the stratigraphic record and all excavated material from the Site will be reported on. Within one year of completion of the work on site, these results will be presented as a post-excavation assessment report.

The report will include, as a minimum:

- A non-technical summary containing the essential elements of the results preceding the main body
 of the report.
- A table of contents.
- An introduction including a list of all staff members involved in the project.
- Summary geological, archaeological and historical background details for the Site.
- A statement of the aims of the project.
- A statement of the methodology of the excavation and an assessment of the same.
- A preliminary archaeological site narrative and account of the phasing based on the stratigraphic record and spot dating.
- Plans and sections at an appropriate scale cross-referenced with the written description.
- · Appropriate maps, photographs and artefact drawings.
- A discussion of the location, extent, date, nature, condition, quality and significance of any archaeological deposits identified during the work.
- All finds and environmental specialist reports.
- An interpretation of the results of the excavation in relation to archaeology in the vicinity and an
 identification of any significance and research implications arising i.e. consideration of the
 archaeological evidence from within the site set in its broader landscape setting.
- A bibliography of sources consulted.
- Site matrix.
- Context register.

²² Hey, G. and Hind, J., 2014. Solent-Thames Research Framework for the Historic Environment Resource Assessments and Research Agendas. Oxford Wessex Monograph Series



Richard Oram, Planning Archaeologist for Oxfordshire County Council, will be sent a copy of the draft report before a final version is produced or submitted to the local Planning Authority. Once finalised, copies of the report (paper & electronic) will also be submitted to be deposited in the relevant HER.

Any significant variation in the project design, including timetables, proposed after the agreement of the proposals must be acceptable to the Planning Archaeologist for Oxfordshire County Council.

Archiving

On completion of the project, an electronic copy of the post-excavation assessment report will be deposited with the Archaeological Data Service (ADS) as per Section 6.13 of the Heritage Delivery Strategy²³.

On completion of the EWR project the archive will be deposited with Oxfordshire County Museum. An accession number will be applied for from Oxfordshire County Museum. The archive will be prepared in the format agreed with the Museum and following national guidance²⁴²⁵.

10. Bibliography

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²³ EWR Alliance, 2019a. Network Rail (East West Rail Bicester to Bedford Improvements) Order: Heritage Delivery Strategy. Unpublished Report

²⁴ Archaeology Data Service/ Digital Antiquity (2011). *Guides to Good Practice*. Archaeology Data Service, University of York

²⁵ Brown D H, 2011. Archaeological Archives: A Guide to Best Practice in Creation, Compilation, Transfer and Curation. Second Edition.



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