



**Symmetry Park
Bicester, Phase 3**

**Archaeological and
Heritage Assessment**

Prepared by:
**The Environmental Dimension
Partnership Ltd**

On behalf of:
Tritax Big Box Developments

November 2024

Report Reference
edp7480_r003c

Document Control

DOCUMENT INFORMATION

| | |
|---------------------------|--|
| Client | Tritax Big Box Developments |
| Report Title | Archaeological and Heritage Assessment |
| Document Reference | edp7480_r003c |

VERSION INFORMATION

| | Author | Formatted | Peer Review | Proofed by/Date |
|------------|---------------|------------------|--------------------|------------------------|
| 003_DRAFT | MBa | GLe | ESt | - |
| 003a_DRAFT | MBa | SCh | - | - |
| 003b | MBa | - | - | FJe 021024 |
| 003c | MBa | - | - | SCh 281124 |

DISCLAIMER TEXT

No part of this report may be copied or reproduced by any means without prior written permission from The Environmental Dimension Partnership Ltd. If you have received this report in error, please destroy all copies in your possession or control and notify The Environmental Dimension Partnership Ltd.

This report (including any enclosures and attachments) has been prepared for the exclusive use and benefit of the commissioning party and solely for the purpose for which it is provided. No other party may use, make use of or rely on the contents of the report.

We do not accept any liability if this report is used for an alternative purpose from which it is intended, nor to any third party in respect of this report.

Opinions and information provided in the report are those of The Environmental Dimension Partnership Ltd using due skill, care and diligence in the preparation of the same and no explicit warranty is provided to their accuracy. It should be noted, and it is expressly stated that no independent verification of any of the documents or information supplied to The Environmental Dimension Partnership Ltd has been made.

Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| Executive Summary | 4 |
| Section 1 Introduction | 6 |
| Section 2 Legislation and Planning Guidance | 8 |
| Section 3 Methodology..... | 14 |
| Section 4 Baseline Information | 18 |
| Section 5 Impact Assessment | 32 |
| Section 6 Conclusions | 33 |
| Section 7 References | 35 |

APPENDICES

- Appendix EDP 1 Written Scheme of Investigation
- Appendix EDP 2 Images
- Appendix EDP 3 SUMO GeoSurveys 2024 Geophysical Survey Report
- Appendix EDP 4 Oxfordshire County Archaeological Service Consultation

PLANS

- Plan EDP 1: Designated Heritage Assets
(edp7480_d004b 27 November 2024 DJo/MBa)
- Plan EDP 2: HER Records
(edp7480_d005b 027 November 2024 DJo/MBa)
- Plan EDP 3: Previous Archaeological Events
(edp7480_d006b 27 November 2024 DJo/MBa)
- Plan EDP 4: Multi-hillshade LiDAR Imagery
(edp7480_d007b 27 November 2024 DJo/MBa)
- Plan EDP 5: Historic Maps
(edp7480_d008b 27 November 2024 DJo/MBa)

Executive Summary

- S1 This Archaeological and Heritage Assessment for Tritax Big Box Developments has been prepared by The Environmental Dimension Partnership Ltd (EDP) to provide an assessment of historic environment impacts to inform a detailed planning application for a commercial development at Symmetry Park, Bicester, Phase 3.
- S2 The Site does not contain any designated heritage assets. Therefore, none will be physically affected by the proposed development within the Site.
- S3 In line with Historic England's *Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning, Note 3, The Setting of Heritage Assets* (HE, 2017), the assessment has considered the potential for impacts on the settings of designated heritage assets beyond the Site.
- S4 The archaeological potential of the Site has been deduced from repositories of information outlined in **Section 3** as well as a geophysical survey of the Site undertaken in July 2024 by SUMO GeoSurveys.
- S5 The Site has been identified to have no potential to change any aspect of the settings of surrounding heritage assets, resulting in an impact on their heritage significance. Designated heritage assets located beyond the Site boundary are therefore not considered to be sensitive to change from development within the Site.
- S6 The Site has been identified to have a low potential for prehistoric remains from the Palaeolithic through to the Bronze Age period. This is due to the absence of previously recorded prehistoric remains within the Site and within its vicinity, indicating no potential for the presence of significant prehistoric remains within the Site.
- S7 The Site is considered to have a high potential for archaeological remains dating to the transitional period between the Late Iron Age/Early Roman periods. Such remains are anticipated to comprise of small-scale settlement evidence in the form rectangular enclosures and discrete pit-like features as well as agricultural features (e.g. drainage ditches, furrows, field boundaries) within the Site's central field. A review of previously recorded contemporary small-scale settlements and agricultural remains across the study area, indicates that such remains would be no more than low or local heritage significance.
- S8 The Site has a low potential for early medieval remains. This is due to a lack of previously recorded remains within the study area and the absence of any indication for the presence of significant remains of such date to be present within the Site.
- S9 The Site is also considered to have a high potential for medieval and post-medieval remains in the form of undated ridge and furrow agricultural features. Ridge and furrow is present across all three fields within the Site, orientated roughly east-west. Such agricultural features reflect local agricultural practices of the medieval to post-medieval periods and are of negligible historic interest.

- S10 The Site has no potential to contain modern archaeological remains of significance. This includes the presence of any remains reflecting peripheral storage uses of the Site to the former WWII Prison of War (P.O.W). camp adjacent to the east of the Site.
- S11 Overall, none of the archaeological remains within the Site, whether known or unknown, are anticipated to be of such significance that they would merit preservation *in situ*. Instead, potential archaeological remains within the Site are likely to comprise remains of no greater than low or local heritage significance.
- S12 The proposed development would most likely result in the total loss or heavy disturbance of any archaeological remains within its footprint, most likely remains of low significance. In accordance with Paragraph 211 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and, as stated in a consultation response from Oxfordshire County Archaeological Service (OCAS), any planning permission would be subject to a condition requiring a staged programme of archaeological investigation. Such work would record archaeological remains within the Site before their loss with the impact upon their significance considered with reference to Paragraph 209 of the NPPF.

Section 1 Introduction

- 1.1 This report has been prepared by The Environmental Dimension Partnership Ltd (EDP), on behalf of Tritax Big Box Developments and presents the results of an Archaeological and Heritage Assessment (AHA) of Symmetry Park, Bicester, Phase 3 (hereafter referred to as 'the Site'). This document has been produced to assess the impact of development on the historic environment to inform a detailed planning application for a commercial development.
- 1.2 The first aim of this assessment is to identify and assess the potential for development within the Site to cause change to designated heritage assets, either directly or through changes within their setting, and to determine whether, and to what extent, those changes might affect their heritage significance.
- 1.3 The second aim of this assessment is to consider the available historical and archaeological information for the Site and its immediate environs and to establish its likely archaeological potential in accordance with the requirements of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and local planning policy.
- 1.4 A Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) for this Archaeological and Heritage Assessment (edp7480_r002) was submitted to the archaeological advisor to Cherwell District Council (CDC) on 16 August 2024 (EDP, 2024). Confirmation of the approval of the WSI from the archaeological advisor was received on 21 August 2024 (see **Appendix EDP 1** for the WSI).
- 1.5 In accordance with best practice guidance, desktop sources have been augmented through a site walkover undertaken in July 2024 (**Appendix EDP 2**), as well as a geophysical survey undertaken by SUMO GeoSurveys in June 2024 (SUMO GeoSurveys, 2024) (**Appendix EDP 3**).

SITE DESCRIPTION

- 1.6 The Site is located to the east of Graven Hill, Bicester, adjacent to the north side of the A41, centred on National Grid Reference (NGR) 460693, 220620. It is approximately 7.34 hectares (ha) in extent. The Site comprises an area of undeveloped agricultural land and associated hedgerow boundaries, divided internally by east-west wired fence lines into three fields. The exception to this is a small compound comprised of a group of modern c.1990s farm buildings, constructed from timber, concrete, steel framed and corrugated sheet roofs. The compound is in the far north-east corner of the Site. In addition, the Site boundary includes an access road to the A41 on its western side, through the existing phases of the adjacent Symmetry Park commercial development.
- 1.7 The Site's agricultural land (i.e. three fields) is bound on all four sides by hedgerows, with fields located beyond to the north, Bicester Caravan & Leisure site, L.C. Hughes Metal Recycling site and fields to the east, A41 and fields to the south and existing phases of Symmetry Park, Bicester to the west. The western access road within the Site is bound by the modern commercial development of Symmetry Park and the A41 at its southern end.

- 1.8 Topographically, the Site is relatively uniform and sits at c.66m Ordnance Datum (aOD). The British Geological Survey (BGS) records the Site's underlying solid geology as mudstone, associated with the Peterborough Member. No superficial geological deposits are recorded within the Site (BGS, 2024). Additionally, the BGS records no geotechnical borehole data within the Site (ibid).

CONSULTATION

Oxfordshire County Archaeological Service Archaeological Fieldwork Requirements

- 1.9 Consultation regarding the approach for determining the Site's archaeological potential through fieldwork took place with OCAS between May and July 2024.
- 1.10 During this process a request was made to carry out a geophysical survey (as referenced above with the report at **Appendix EDP 2**) and a WSI for this work was agreed.
- 1.11 Following this work, in an email dated 28 June 2024 (**Appendix EDP 4**), OCAS stated that, based on the results of the geophysical survey and due to previous archaeological work having been carried out across land to the immediate north-west of the Site, that there is no requirement for the application to be supported by the results of a trial trench evaluation.
- 1.12 Subsequent consultation on 11 July 2024 identified the need for the Client to establish the nature and scope of any mitigation that may be required following on from the Site's evaluation, ahead of determination (**Appendix EDP 4**). This is to enable the timescales for any required mitigation to be fitted into the wider construction programme for the delivery of the proposed development, once permitted. As such, it was agreed the timing of the Site's evaluation was flexible and that a potential planning condition would be implemented for any remaining works required to mitigate the Site post-determination of the proposals.

Section 2 Legislation and Planning Guidance

INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 The following section summarises the key legislation and national/local planning policies which are of relevance to this assessment.

LEGISLATION

Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990

- 2.2 Sections 66(1) and 72(1) of the *Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990* set out the duties of Local Planning Authorities (LPA) in respect of the treatment of listed buildings and conservation areas through the planning process.

- 2.3 Section 66(1) of the 1990 Act sets out the statutory duty of the decision-maker where proposed development would affect a listed building or its setting. It sets out the statutory duty as follows:

“In considering whether to grant planning permission [or permission in principle] for development which affects a listed building or its setting, the local planning authority or, as the case may be, the Secretary of State shall have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses.”

- 2.4 This ‘*special regard*’ duty has been tested in the Court of Appeal and confirmed to require that ‘*considerable importance and weight*’ should be afforded by the decision maker to the desirability of preserving a listed building along with its setting. The relevant Court judgement is referenced as *Barnwell Manor Wind Energy Ltd v East Northants DC, English Heritage and National Trust [2014] EWCA Civ 137*.

- 2.5 However, it must be recognised that Section 66(1) of the 1990 Act does not identify that the local authority or the Secretary of State *must* preserve a listed building or its setting. Neither is it the case that a proposed development that does not “*preserve*” is unacceptable and should be refused. It is for the decision maker to evaluate and determine.

- 2.6 Section 66(1) of the Act sets out the statutory duty of the decision-maker, where proposed development would affect a listed building or its setting. It states that:

“...in considering whether to grant planning permission for development which affects a listed building or its setting, the local planning authority or, as the case may be, the Secretary of State shall have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses.”

- 2.7 Paragraph 206 of the NPPF transposes these sections of the 1990 Act into national planning policy as they come under the category of designated heritage assets. The

balancing exercise to be performed, between any harm arising from a development proposal and the benefits which would accrue from its implementation, is then subsequently presented in paragraphs 207 and 208 of the NPPF.

PLANNING POLICY

National Planning Policy

- 2.8 The revised NPPF was published in 2023. Section 16 sets out the government's approach to the conservation and management of the historic environment through the planning process.
- 2.9 On 30 July 2024, the government opened a consultation on proposed revisions to the NPPF. Whilst a number of reforms are proposed, none of these relates to the historic environment.
- 2.10 The opening paragraph (195) recognises that heritage assets are an irreplaceable resource and should be conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance, so that they can be enjoyed for their contribution to the quality of life of existing and future generations.
- 2.11 Paragraph 200 concerns planning applications, stating that:

"In determining applications, local planning authorities should require an applicant to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution made by their setting. The level of detail should be proportionate to the assets' importance and no more than is sufficient to understand the potential impact of the proposal on their significance. As a minimum the relevant historic environment record should have been consulted and the heritage assets assessed using appropriate expertise where necessary. Where a site on which development is proposed includes, or has the potential to include, heritage assets with archaeological interest, local planning authorities should require developers to submit an appropriate desk-based assessment and, where necessary, a field evaluation."

- 2.12 NPPF paragraph 203 is relevant when it states that:

"In determining applications, local planning authorities should take account of:

- a. the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation;*
- b. the positive contribution that conservation of heritage assets can make to sustainable communities including their economic vitality; and*
- c. the desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness."*

2.13 Paragraph 205 considers the weighting given within the planning decision with regard to impacts on designated heritage assets, stating that:

“When considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset’s conservation (and the more important the asset, the greater the weight should be). This is irrespective of whether any potential harm amounts to substantial harm, total loss or less than substantial harm to its significance.”

2.14 Paragraph 206 considers the level of harmful effects on designated heritage assets and states that:

“Any harm to, or loss of, the significance of a designated heritage asset (from its alteration or destruction, or from development within its setting), should require clear and convincing justification. Substantial harm to or loss of:

- a. Grade II listed buildings, or grade II registered parks or gardens, should be exceptional; and*
- b. Assets of the highest significance, notably scheduled monuments, protected wreck sites, registered battlefields, grade I and II* listed buildings, grade I and II* registered parks and gardens, and World Heritage Sites, should be wholly exceptional.”*

2.15 With regard to the decision making process, paragraphs 207 and 208 are of relevance. Paragraph 207 states that:

“Where a proposed development will lead to substantial harm to (or total loss of significance of) a designated heritage asset, local planning authorities should refuse consent, unless it can be demonstrated that the substantial harm or total loss is necessary to achieve substantial public benefits that outweigh that harm or loss, or all of the following apply:

- a. The nature of the heritage asset prevents all reasonable uses of the site;*
- b. No viable use of the heritage asset itself can be found in the medium term through appropriate marketing that will enable its conservation;*
- c. Conservation by grant-funding or some form of not for profit, charitable or public ownership is demonstrably not possible; and*
- d. The harm or loss is outweighed by the benefit of bringing the site back into use.”*

2.16 Paragraph 208 states that:

“Where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal including, where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use.”

2.17 The threshold between substantial and less than substantial harm has been clarified in the Courts. Paragraphs 24 and 25 of *Bedford BC v Secretary of State for Communities and*

Local Government [2013] EWHC 2847 are of relevance here in the way they outline the assessment of 'harm' for heritage assets:

"What the inspector was saying was that for harm to be substantial, the impact on significance was required to be serious such that very much, if not all, of the significance was drained away.

Plainly in the context of physical harm, this would apply in the case of demolition or destruction, being a case of total loss. It would also apply to a case of serious damage to the structure of the building. In the context of non-physical or indirect harm, the yardstick was effectively the same. One was looking for an impact which would have such a serious impact on the significance of the asset that its significance was either vitiated altogether [i.e. destroyed] or very much reduced."

2.18 In other words, for the 'harm' to be 'substantial', and therefore require consideration against the more stringent requirements of paragraph 207 of the NPPF compared with paragraph 208, the proposal would need to result in the asset's significance either being "vitiating altogether or very much reduced."

2.19 Paragraph 209 refers to non-designated heritage assets identifying that:

"The effect of an application on the significance of a non-designated heritage asset should be taken into account in determining the application. In weighing applications that directly or indirectly affect non-designated heritage assets, a balanced judgement will be required having regard to the scale of any harm or loss and the significance of the heritage asset."

2.20 In relation to non-designated heritage assets, Footnote 69 explains the exemption to the 'balanced judgement' exercise outlined in paragraph 209 in cases where:

"Non-designated heritage assets of archaeological interest, which are demonstrably of equivalent significance to scheduled monuments, should be considered subject to the policies for designated heritage assets."

Local Planning Policy

Cherwell Local Plan 2011-2031 Part 1 (adopted July 2015)

2.21 This provides the strategic planning policy framework and sets out strategic site allocations for the District to 2031. The Site does not fall within the 'Bicester 12' allocation.

2.22 The adopted Local Plan contains 'Policy ESD 15 - The Character of the Built and Historic Environment', which states:

"Successful design is founded upon an understanding and respect for an area's unique built, natural and cultural context. New development will be expected to complement and enhance the character of its context through sensitive siting, layout and high quality design. All new development will be required to meet high design standards. Where development is in the vicinity of any of the district's distinctive natural or historic assets, delivering high quality design that complements the asset will be essential."

2.23 Of relevance to the Site and historic environment, the policy states that:

“New development proposals should:

- Conserve, sustain and enhance designated and non-designated ‘heritage assets’ (as defined in the NPPF) including buildings, features, archaeology, conservation areas and their settings, and ensure new development is sensitively sited and integrated in accordance with advice in the NPPF. Proposals for development that affect non-designated heritage assets will be considered taking account of the scale of any harm or loss and the significance of the heritage asset as set out in the NPPF. Regeneration proposals that make sensitive use of heritage assets, particularly where these bring redundant or under used buildings or areas, especially any on English Heritage’s At Risk Register, into appropriate use will be encouraged; and*
- Include information on heritage assets sufficient to assess the potential impact of the proposal on their significance. Where archaeological potential is identified this should include an appropriate desk-based assessment and, where necessary, a field evaluation.”*

2.24 Part 2 of the Local Plan is under preparation, this will contain detailed development management policies, including more detailed design and historic environment policies, and non-strategic site allocations. While this is under preparation the saved policies of the Cherwell Local Plan 1996 remain part of the Development Plan.

Cherwell Local Plan 1996

2.25 Archaeological sites are considered under saved *Policy C25: Development affecting the site or setting of a scheduled ancient monument*, which is worded as follows:

“In considering proposals for development which could affect the site or setting of a scheduled ancient monument’, other nationally important archaeological sites and monuments of special local importance, the council will have regard to the desirability of maintaining its overall historic character, including its protection, enhancement and preservation where appropriate.”

Non-statutory Local Plan

2.26 Policy EN47 of the non-statutory Cherwell Local Plan 2011 is also of relevance, which is worded as follows:

“The Council will promote sustainability of the historic environment through conservation, protection and enhancement of the archaeological heritage and its interpretation and presentation to the public. In particular it will:

- seek to ensure that scheduled ancient monuments and other unscheduled sites of national and regional importance and their settings are permanently preserved;*
- Ensure that development which could adversely affect sites, structures, landscapes or buildings of archaeological interest and their settings will require an assessment of*

the archaeological resource through a desk-top study, and where appropriate a field evaluation;

- iii. Not permit development that would adversely affect archaeological remains and their settings unless the applicant can demonstrate that the archaeological resource will be physically preserved in-situ, or a suitable strategy has been put forward to mitigate the impact of development proposals; and*
- iv. Ensure that where physical preservation in-situ is neither practical nor desirable and sites are not scheduled or of national importance, the developer will be responsible for making appropriate provision for a programme of archaeological investigation, recording, analysis and publication that will ensure the site is preserved by record prior to destruction. Such measures will be secured either by a planning agreement or by a suitable planning condition.”*

2.27 In addition, the settings of listed buildings are protected under Policy EN44, as follows:
“Special care will be taken to ensure that development that is situated within the setting of a listed building respects the architectural and historic character of the building and its setting.”

2.28 The plans and policies listed above have all been considered in the preparation of this assessment.

Section 3 Methodology

- 3.1 This report has been produced in accordance with the *Standard and Guidance for Historic Environment Desk-Based Assessment* issued by the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CIfA, 2020) as well as the *Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment: Guidance Document - April 2024* produced by Oxfordshire County Council's (OCC) county archaeological services (OCC, 2024). The CIfA guidelines provide a national standard for the completion of desk-based assessments, while the OCC guidelines provide a county wide standard for the completion of desk-based assessments within the Local Planning Authority boundary of OCC.
- 3.2 This report has also given due regard to the potential for effects on designated heritage assets, in terms of their setting, in line with the five-step process outlined in national guidance (HE, 2017) and other relevant documents related to the historic environment (HE, 2015b).

ARCHAEOLOGY ASSESSMENT

- 3.3 The assessment principally involved consultation of readily available archaeological and historical information from documentary and cartographic sources. The major repositories of relevant information comprised:
- The National Heritage List for England (NHLE) curated by Historic England – for recorded designated heritage assets within the Site and surrounding area;
 - Information held by the Oxfordshire Historic Environment Record (HER) on known archaeological sites, monuments and findspots, within the vicinity of the Site. Also information from the Oxfordshire Historic Landscape Character study, National Mapping Programme and Portable Antiquity Scheme (if available);
 - Fieldwork reports from investigations within the Site;
 - Information on the British Geological Society online maps;
 - Maps and documents held by the Oxfordshire History Centre and online sources, including all editions of the Ordnance Survey;
 - Available LiDAR coverage of the Site and its environs;
 - The National Heritage List for England curated by English Heritage; and
 - Aerial photographs held by the Historic England Archive.
- 3.4 The assessment provides a synthesis of relevant archaeological information for the Site derived from a search area, hereafter known as the 'study area', to allow for additional contextual information regarding its archaeological interest and/or potential to be gathered.

A study area of 1km diameter from the Site boundary was considered proportionate and appropriate.

- 3.5 The information gathered from the repositories and sources identified above was checked and augmented through the completion of a site walkover undertaken in July 2024. This walkover considered the nature and significance of known and/or potential archaeological assets within the Site, identified visible historic features and assessed possible factors that may affect the survival or condition of known or potential archaeological assets.
- 3.6 Following consultation with the Local Planning Authority's archaeological advisor, OCAS, a geophysical survey was undertaken within the Site to characterise the potential archaeological resource. The report is included within **Appendix EDP 2**.
- 3.7 The report thereafter concludes with an assessment of the Site's likely archaeological potential, made with regard to current best practice guidelines.
- 3.8 Throughout the report, where referenced and relevant, designated heritage assets are referenced by their NHLE List Entry number, non-designated heritage assets are referenced by their Monument Unique Identification number and previous archaeological events are referenced by their Event Unique Identification number. The location of designated heritage assets is shown on **Plan EDP 1**. The location of non-designated heritage assets is shown on **Plan EDP 2**. The location of previous archaeological events is presented on **Plan EDP 3**.

SETTING ASSESSMENT

- 3.9 In addition, the report also considers the nature and significance of any effects arising through potential changes to the settings of designated heritage assets, as defined in Annex 2 of the NPPF (see below).
- 3.10 As set out above, the assessment process has given due consideration to Historic England guidance on setting as set out in *Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning, Note 3, The Setting of Heritage Assets* (HE, 2017).
- 3.11 On a practical level, the Historic England guidance (2017) identifies an approach to assessing setting in relation to development management which is based on a five-step procedure, i.e.:

Step 1: Identify which heritage assets and their settings are affected;

Step 2: Assess the degree to which these settings make a contribution to the significance of the heritage asset(s) or allow significance to be appreciated;

Step 3: Assess the effects of the proposed development, whether beneficial or harmful, on that significance or the ability to appreciate it;

Step 4: Explore ways of maximising enhancement and avoid or minimise harm; and

Step 5: Make and document the decision and monitor outcomes.

Scoping Methodology

- 3.12 A staged approach has been utilised to appropriately determine which designated heritage assets within the surrounding landscape have the potential for their settings to be affected by the proposed development, to fulfil **Step 1** of the setting assessment guidance.
- 3.13 A Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) analysis, verified through a map analysis was initially applied to the Site. This was undertaken to provide an indication of the potential intervisibility between the built form of the proposed development and surrounding landscape. The ZTV projection utilised the following parameters:
- Basemap: 1m Digital Surface Model (DSM);
 - Range: 5km;
 - Development height: 12.5m above ground level uniform building height for the two warehouses included in the proposed development; and
 - Target/observer height: 1.6m.
- 3.14 The ZTV is based on a Digital Surface Model (DSM), which captures not only the topography of the landscape, but the natural and built features on the earth's surface. However, the accuracy of the DSM to which obstructions to lines of sight between two points are recorded, is dependent on the resolution of the DSM utilised in the ZTV model. To ensure a confident scoping approach, the most accurate available DSM at 1m resolution was obtained.
- 3.15 Limitations to the utilisation of a ZTV alone derive from its creation from a fixed point (or points) in time and space, which is relative to the resolution of the LiDAR data used alongside it. Therefore, a ZTV will not account for the dynamic nature of a given landscape in its entirety, nor does it account for all landscape features or atmospheric factors that affect visibility. Hence, it should be considered that an absolute worst-case scenario for intervisibility between heritage assets and the proposed development is represented by the ZTV and considered for this assessment.
- 3.16 The ZTV provides a preliminary succinct yes/no overview of which parts in the surrounding landscape could share intervisibility with the proposed development. The ZTV was overlain with the location of designated heritage assets within a 5km radius from the Site, supplied by the NHLE curated by Historic England. Those designated heritage assets shown to fall within the extent of the ZTV have theoretical visibility of the Site in its developed form.
- 3.17 The initially applied ZTV was verified through map analysis. The initial scoping approach confirmed that no designated heritage assets beyond a 2km radius of the Site boundary have the potential to be experienced from or in combination with the Site. This is due to the built form of Bicester to the north-west, the built form of Launton and the screened Aynho and Ashendon Railway line to the north, hedgerow and treeline field boundaries across agricultural fields to the north and east, the built forms of Blackthorn to the south-east, the built form of Ambrosden to the south and the raised topography of Graven Hill to the west.

- 3.18 Following the application of the scoping methodology outlined above, a 2km radius study area was deemed appropriate for assessing whether the proposed development within the Site would have the potential to affect the settings of surrounding designated heritage assets.

LIDAR DATA

- 3.19 Airborne LiDAR data (light detection and ranging) was utilised as a source of primary data for the current assessment. LiDAR scanning records height data and has applications in the recording of archaeological earthworks.
- 3.20 A Digital Terrain Model (DTM) for the Site was acquired from the Environment Agency Data available on-line. Resolution of the data is at one data point for each 1m², a low resolution which, for archaeological prospection, has fairly limited application, aside from in the identification of larger earthworks.
- 3.21 The DTM was processed using the Relief Visualisation Toolbox (ver. 1.3 ZRC SAZU, 2019). This software allows for a range of visualisation techniques to be applied to the data. Different techniques have varying degrees of successful application, depending on the nature of the environment where the data was collected. As such, the whole suite of visualisations was produced and then, the individual images appraised as to their usefulness in the current context. This appraisal identified that of the visualisation techniques ‘multiple direction hill-shades’ produced the best quality and most useful imagery for the archaeology assessment.

Multiple Direction Hill-shades

- 3.22 Relief shading or hill-shading is the most commonly used LiDAR visualisation technique. It illuminates the DTM from a specific angle, imitating the sun and as such produces the most ‘natural’ and intuitively readable imagery. However, it is limited in that areas facing directly towards or away from the illumination source are saturated (homogeneously bright or dark respectively) and little detail can be perceived plus, features that lie parallel to the light source can be imperceptible.
- 3.23 This effect can be overcome by combining hill-shades from different directions in three different colour bands into a single image. This technique was used to produce useful images for the assessment providing an additional source of data on the Site’s archaeological potential (see **Plan EDP 4**), and which was used for guiding the site walkover.

Section 4 Baseline Information

INTRODUCTION

- 4.1 The Site does not contain any designated heritage assets such as world heritage sites, scheduled monuments, listed buildings, conservation areas, registered parks and gardens or registered battlefields. The designated heritage assets in the wider area have been assessed to identify those that have the potential to experience change to their setting, such that could result in harm to their significance. The locations of designated heritage assets considered below are shown on **Plan EDP 1**.
- 4.2 With regard to non-designated heritage assets there are 27 HER records, comprising archaeological and historical sites, artefact findspots and buildings of local interest as recorded on the OCC HER within a 1km radius of the Site (**Plan EDP 2**). In addition, there are records of 15 events in the form of archaeological desk-based assessments or fieldwork investigations and observations within a 1km radius (**Plan EDP 3**). Those records and events considered relevant to this assessment are discussed below, therefore not all the returned records are included with the text or on the accompanying plans.

DESIGNATED HERITAGE ASSETS

Setting Assessment Step 1 – Identify which heritage assets and their settings are affected

- 4.3 The following addresses **Step 1** of the five-step approach to setting assessments described in the Historic England guidance (HE, 2017). For the purposes of the report at this stage, this will identify those assets to be assessed.
- 4.4 There are no designated heritage assets located within the Site, however, there is one scheduled monument and three Grade II listed buildings located within a 1km radius of the Site boundary. These comprise the following:
- Scheduled monument of Wretchwick Deserted Medieval Settlement (**1015549**), located c.900m north-west of the Site;
 - Grade II listed 18th century Blackthorn Hill Windmill (**1300884**), located c.400m east of the Site;
 - Grade II listed early 18th century Wretchwick Farmhouse (**1046521**), located c.460m west of the Site; and
 - Grade II listed early 18th century barn approximately 50m south of Wretchwick Farmhouse (**1046522**), located c.460m west of the Site.

- 4.5 Due to the scale of the proposed development and proximity of the scheduled monument and three listed buildings located within a 1km radius of the Site boundary, all four designated heritage assets are taken forward to **Step 2** below.
- 4.6 A number of designated heritage assets are located within a 1-2km radius of the Site boundary. Such assets are predominantly clustered within the villages of Launton, Blackthorn and Ambrosden, as well as located to the west of the Site, adjacent to the A41 and A421.
- 4.7 The linear village of Launton, located between c.1.3-2.2km north of the Site, features 23 listed buildings. These listed buildings comprise a Grade I listed church (**1369735**) and Grade II* listed barn (**1232879**) located at the west end of the village, as well as 21 Grade II listed buildings located along the west side of Station Road and West End. The Grade II listed buildings comprise farmhouses and farm buildings (**1276858, 1232880, 1276859, 1232878, 1232886, 1232887, 1232888, 1276871, 1232919**), houses (**1232885, 1046510, 1232914, 1232917, 1232920**), cottages (**1276872, 1232915**), public houses (**1200434, 1232916**), a rectory (**1300750**), a churchyard cross (**1276857**) and memorial monument (**1232877**).
- 4.8 Observations made during the site walkover identified that the assets located in Launton from or in combination with the Site are unable to be experienced. This is due to intervening hedgerows and trees of agricultural fields between the Site and Launton as well as the screened alignment of the Aynho and Ashendon Railway, adjacent to the south side of Launton. Furthermore, consulted sources outlined in **Section 3** indicate that the land within the Site has no functional or historical connection to assets located within the extent of Launton.
- 4.9 As such, the Site does not form part of the setting of designated heritage assets located within the village of Launton. Development within the Site would have no potential to adversely affect any aspect of the assets' setting nor have the potential to impact the assets' heritage significance. The assets located within Launton are therefore not considered to be sensitive to change and therefore are not considered any further in this report.
- 4.10 The linear village of Blackthorn, located between c.1.4-2km south-east of the Site, features 11 Grade II listed buildings. These listed buildings comprise farmhouses and agricultural buildings (**1046530, 1046531, 1200160, 1200158, 1369744, 1200163, 1046532, 1300890**), a house (**1200166**) and cottages (**1369743, 1369745**).
- 4.11 Observations made during the site walkover identified that the assets located in Blackthorn from or in combination with the Site are unable to be experienced. This is due to the Site's southern hedgerow boundary, as well as intervening tall mature trees lining the north and south sides of the A41 and intervening hedgerow and treelined field boundaries of agricultural fields situated between the A41, B4011 and the linear settlement of Blackthorn. Furthermore, consulted sources outlined in **Section 3** indicate that the land within the Site has no functional or historical connection to assets located within the extent of Blackthorn.

- 4.12 As such, the Site does not form part of the setting of designated heritage assets located within the village of Blackthorn. Development within the Site would have no potential to adversely affect any aspect of the assets' setting nor have the potential to impact the assets' heritage significance. The assets located within Blackthorn are therefore not considered to be sensitive to change and therefore are not considered any further in this report.
- 4.13 The nucleated village of Ambrosden is located c.400m-1.5km south of the Site. The village features a historic core around Ambrosden Hall located at its south-west end, while modern mid-late 20th century residential estates are located across the settlement's northern half, adjacent to Ploughley Road and Blackthorn Road. Ambrosden features a scheduled monument and 11 listed buildings, all located within the village's historic core and situated between c.1.1-1.3km south of the Site. The scheduled monument comprises a churchyard cross (**1015166**), located within the churchyard of the Grade II* listed Church of St. Mary the Virgin (**1046525**). Meanwhile the 10 Grade II listed buildings, include memorial monuments (**1200126**, **1046526**), gate piers, gates and boundary wall to the listed Church of St. Mary the Virgin (**1046524**), a farmhouse (**1200138**), houses (**1200129**, **1200142**, **1046528**, **1046527**) and a cottage (**1369741**).
- 4.14 Observations made during the site walkover identified that the assets located in Ambrosden from or in combination with the Site are unable to be experienced. This is due to the Site's southern hedgerow boundary, as well as intervening tall mature trees lining the north and south sides of the A41, intervening hedgerow and treelined field boundaries of agricultural fields situated between the A41 and Ploughley Road and the built form of the modern residential estates across the northern half of Ambrosden. Furthermore, consulted sources outlined in **Section 3** indicate that the land within the Site has no functional or historical connection to assets located within the historic core of Ambrosden.
- 4.15 As such, the Site does not form part of the setting of designated heritage assets located within the village of Ambrosden. Development within the Site would have no potential to adversely affect any aspect of the assets' setting nor have the potential to impact the assets' heritage significance. The assets located within Ambrosden are therefore not considered to be sensitive to change and therefore are not considered any further in this report.
- 4.16 The Grade II listed building of the late 18th to early 19th century Wretchwick Lodge (**1046523**) is located c.1.16km west of the Site. However, observations made during the site walkover identified that the asset from or in combination with the Site is unable to be experienced. This is due to the built form of the existing phases of Symmetry Park, adjacent to the west of the Site. Additionally, hedgerows representing field boundaries to intervening agricultural fields, as well as tall mature trees lining the north and south sides of the A41 and a small parcel of woodland enclosing the dwelling itself, prevent any experience of the Site, asset or either in combination with the surrounding landscape.
- 4.17 As such, the Site does not form part of the setting of the designated heritage asset. Development within the Site would have no potential to adversely affect any aspect of the asset's setting nor have the potential to impact the asset's heritage significance. The asset is therefore not considered to be sensitive to change and therefore is not considered any further in this report.

Setting Assessment Step 2 – Assess the degree to which these settings make a contribution to the significance of the heritage asset(s) or allow significance to be appreciated

Wretchwick Deserted Medieval settlement (1015549)

- 4.18 The scheduled monument of Wretchwick deserted medieval settlement (**1015549**) is located c.900m north-west of the Site. The significance of the scheduled monument derives from its archaeological interest, with the potential for evidence of past medieval settlement activity within the scheduled area of Middle Wretchwick farm's grounds.
- 4.19 The setting of the scheduled monument formerly comprised agricultural fields in all directions at the end of the 19th century, however, suburban residential expansion from Bicester's core has replaced its setting to the north with modern residential development and the modern A4421. Meanwhile, agricultural fields remain present to the south of the scheduled monument. The asset's modern residential setting to the north provides no contribution to the asset's heritage significance, meanwhile adjacent fields to the south are considered to contextualise the historic agricultural setting of the former settlement and therefore provide a negligible positive contribution to the asset's heritage significance.
- 4.20 Observations made during the site walkover identified that the asset from or in combination with the Site is unable to be experienced. This is due to the built form of the existing phases of Symmetry Park, adjacent to the west of the Site. Additionally, hedgerows representing field boundaries to intervening agricultural fields prevent any experience of the Site, asset or in combination with the surrounding landscape.
- 4.21 As such, the Site does not form part of the setting of the designated heritage asset. Development within the Site would have no potential to adversely affect any aspect of the asset's setting nor have the potential to impact the asset's heritage significance. The asset is therefore not considered to be sensitive to change and therefore is not considered any further in this report.

Blackthorn Hill Windmill (1300884)

- 4.22 The Grade II listed building Blackthorn Hill Windmill (**1300884**) is located c.400m to the east of the Site. According to its NHLE list entry record, the mill likely dates to the 18th century, though it has been extensively renovated during the late 20th and early 21st century and is now used as private guest accommodation. The heritage significance of the structure is primarily derived from its architectural and historic interest as providing an example of a post-medieval local industrial windmill. The asset also features a degree of archaeological interest contained within its historic fabric. The windmill features no artistic interest. The windmill was not inspected up close during the site walkover, due to being located on gated private land.
- 4.23 With regards to the windmill's setting, the site walkover and consultation of cartographic sources indicate that it is set back from the A41 road and historically it was located within a field which contained buildings, likely related to the windmill's use. It was also located close to a quarry and a second windmill. The windmill's setting has been subject to change during the modern period through the change of use of the windmill and layout of its immediate surrounding land.

- 4.24 The present-day windmill is located on an original mound of earth, which has now been landscaped to form a circular garden. This is in turn located within a larger garden which extends to the east. The windmill is set back from the A41 road, however, due to its height it is partially visible from the road. It is the shared view between the A41 and windmill which affords the most readily available experience of the asset. Importantly, the Site does not feature within such shared views and experience of the windmill from within its setting, due to being located on lower elevated ground to the west and effectively screened by roadside vegetation along the north side of the A41.
- 4.25 The site walkover identified that the windmill from or in combination with the Site is unable to be experienced. This is due to the rising topography between the Site and asset, as well as intervening hedgerows and trees along the Site's eastern field boundary, intervening field boundaries and a woodland parcel around Mill Cottage and the caravan park/recycling site (**Image EDP A1.1-1.4**). As such, these landscape features prevent the heritage significance of the windmill from being understood and appreciated from within the Site. Furthermore, consulted sources outlined in **Section 3** indicate that the land within the Site has no functional or historical connection to the asset.
- 4.26 In conclusion, as per the definition of 'setting' as set out in Annex 2: Glossary of the NPPF, the Site does not form part of the listed windmill's setting. Development within the Site would have no potential to adversely affect any aspect of the asset's setting nor have the potential to impact the asset's heritage significance. The asset is therefore not considered to be sensitive to change and therefore is not considered any further in this report.

Wretchwick Farmhouse (1046521) and Barn approximately 50m south of Wretchwick Farmhouse (1046522)

- 4.27 The Grade II listed buildings of Wretchwick Farmhouse (**1046521**) and Barn approximately 50m south of Wretchwick Farmhouse (**1046522**) are located c.460m to the west of the Site boundary. According to the NHLE list entry for both assets, the farmhouse and barn are early 18th century in date, with the farmhouse featuring later 19th-20th century alterations and extensions. The heritage significance of the farmhouse and barn is primarily derived from their architectural and historic interest, providing an example of a post-medieval vernacular farm within the environs of Bicester. The assets also feature a degree of archaeological interest contained within their historic fabric. Neither listed building features artistic interest. Wretchwick Farm was not inspected up close during the site walkover, due to being located on private land.
- 4.28 With regards to the setting of the listed buildings at Wretchwick Farm, consultation of cartographic sources indicates that this is centralised on the farm's building complex, private driveway and adjacent fields, bound by mature treelines to the west and north and hedgerows to the east and south. The layout of the farm comprises the barn and associated farm buildings forming a formal courtyard to the south of the farmhouse. The farm complex is set back from the road and accessed via a private trackway to the east, off Ploughley Road. The boundaries of the farm are marked by a tall mature tree line to the north along the A41, tree lined to the west along the former M.O.D. central ordnance depot, a hedgerow to fields to the south and a hedgerow to Ploughley Road to the east.

- 4.29 The two listed buildings derive a degree of their heritage significance from positively contributing elements of their setting, this being historic buildings contained within the farm complex and the adjacent fields and driveway in which these buildings can be best experienced and their heritage significance understood and appreciated.
- 4.30 The Site is located to the north-east of the farmhouse and barn, beyond the farm's mature tall tree lined boundary along the A41 and beyond the intervening built form of the existing phases of the Symmetry Park commercial development. The site walkover identified that the immediately adjacent existing Symmetry Park development prevents any experience of either asset from or in combination with the Site (**Image EDP A1.5-1.6**). Furthermore, consulted sources outlined in **Section 3** indicate that the land within the Site has no functional or historical connection to the asset.
- 4.31 Hence, as per the definition of 'setting' as set out in Annex 2: Glossary of the NPPF, the Site does not form part of the setting of either the listed barn or farmhouse. Development within the Site would have no potential to adversely affect any aspect of either asset's setting nor have the potential to impact the heritage significance of either asset. Both assets are therefore not considered to be sensitive to change and therefore are not considered any further in this report.

NON-DESIGNATED HERITAGE ASSETS

HER Chronological Overview

- 4.32 A chronological overview of HER records within the Site and study area is provided below. The locations of HER records are shown on **Plan EDP 2** for reference. Recorded previous archaeological investigation and/or mitigation events on the HER, which are of relevance to the Site's archaeological potential are discussed below, where relevant. The locations of previous events are shown on **Plan EDP 3**.

Prehistoric (500,000BC – AD 43)

- 4.33 There are no HER records attributed to the prehistoric period located in the Site. However, there are HER records for prehistoric remains recorded during previous known archaeological events within the study area.
- 4.34 A number of late prehistoric (i.e. Neolithic - Iron Age) flint tools have been recovered from previous archaeological evaluation and excavations within the study area. These comprise residual, unstratified scrapers, flakes, blades and cores recovered from the fills of later Roman to post-medieval agricultural furrows and field boundary features, as well as modern plough soils (**MOX27368**, **MOX27785**, **MOX28352**, **EOX7376**). They represent a general presence of late prehistoric activity within the area.
- 4.35 Bronze Age remains recorded within the study area are limited to the presence of a dated Bronze Age linear ditch (**MOX27368**) located c.750m west of the Site, and a possible Bronze Age ring ditch (**MOX5027**) located c.720m east of the Site. The linear ditch was recorded within the Oxford Archaeology 2017 evaluation (OA, 2017; **EOX6407**). Meanwhile, according to the HER, the possible ring ditch has been recorded via aerial photographs and a geophysical survey by Magnitude Surveys in 2021 (MS, 2021; **EOX7053**). Such remains

represent a general presence of Bronze Age agricultural activity within the wider area to the west of the Site and settlement activity within the wider area to the east of the Site, and provide little insight into the Site's archaeological potential.

4.36 HER records within the study area attributed to previously recorded Iron Age remains date to the transition period of the Late Iron Age/Early Roman periods. Recorded remains represent previous findings of dispersed small-scale farmstead settlements as well as surrounding agricultural field systems (i.e. organised drainage ditches/furrows and field boundaries). Previously recorded Late Iron Age/Early Roman remains within the study area, comprise the following:

- An Iron Age enclosure was recorded during the CFA 2017 evaluation (CFA, 2017; **EOX6176**), located c.100m west of the Site within the footprint of the existing Bicester Symmetry Park development. The enclosure was interpreted by CFA to comprise a c-shaped Iron Age enclosure used for livestock;
- Late Iron Age/Roman rectangular enclosure and associated agricultural features (**MOX27785**) (i.e. ditches and field boundaries) recorded during the CFA 2022 evaluation (CFA, 2022; **EOX6736**) and subsequent CFA 2022 excavation (CFA, 2022) located c.140m west of the Site;
- A pair of Late Iron Age/Early Roman enclosures (**MOX27368**) recorded during the Oxford Archaeology 2017 evaluation (OA, 2017; **EOX6407**) located c.220m west of the Site. According to Oxford Archaeology, these enclosures represent settlement activity and may originate to the Middle Iron Age period, which continued to be occupied into the Early Roman period;
- Late Iron Age/Roman ditches, pits and limestone quarry extraction pits (**MOX28352**) recorded during the Oxford Archaeology 2022 evaluation (OA, 2022; **EOX7289**), located c.450m south of the Site;
- A possible Late Iron Age/Early Roman settlement, recorded during a geophysical survey by Magnitude Surveys in 2021 (**MOX27994**) (MS, 2021; **EOX7053**), located c.450m east of the Site. The geophysical survey detected several detected enclosures, a trackway and pit-like features, as well as an associated surrounding field system;
- An area of Late Iron Age/Early Roman agricultural drainage ditches and field boundaries and later Roman vineyard (i.e. vine cultivation furrows and ditched enclosures) (**MOX27013**) recorded during the CFA 2017 evaluation (CFA, 2017; **EOX6176**) and subsequent CFA 2018 excavation (CFA, 2018; **EOX6408**) located c.400-620m west of the Site;
- A 1st century AD Roman settlement and associated field system (i.e. pits, ditches and enclosures) (**MOX5188**) recorded during the CFA 2015 evaluation (CFA, 2015; **EOX6234**) located c.830m south-east of the Site;
- A 1st-2nd century AD Roman settlement and associated field system (i.e. pits, ditches and enclosures) (**MOX27368**) recorded during the Oxford Archaeology 2017 evaluation (OA, 2017; **EOX6407**) located c.970m west of the Site;

- Several Roman dated agricultural ditches, interpreted as field boundaries, recorded during an evaluation by Oxford Archaeology in 2013 (OA, 2013; **EOX3436**), located c.910m south-east of the Site;
- A possible area of Roman agricultural ditches and/or cultivation furrows (**MOX27081**) recorded during the Rubicon Heritage 2016 evaluation (RH, 2016; **EOX6235**), located c.410m south-east of the Site; and
- A possible Roman agricultural ditch recorded during a 2008 community event within Ambrosden (South Midland Archaeology, 2008; **EOX2357**), located c.850m south of the Site.

4.37 The majority of recorded remains listed in paragraph 4.34 represent a general presence of dispersed small-scale settlements and contemporary agricultural practices during the transitional period of the Late Iron Age/Early Roman periods. Most of these remains are located at a distance from the Site and provide little insight into its archaeological potential. However, enclosures and associated agricultural field systems recorded close to the west of the Site (i.e. during events **EOX6176**, **EOX6407**, **EOX6736**) indicate the potential for Late Iron Age/Early Roman settlement remains (i.e. domestic or livestock enclosures) and/or agricultural remains (i.e. furrows, drainage ditches, field boundaries) within the Site.

Roman (AD 43 – 410)

- 4.38 There are no HER records attributed to the Roman period located in the Site. However, there are HER records for Late Iron Age/Early Roman remains recorded during previous known archaeological events as well as from archaeological findspots within the study area.
- 4.39 HER records within the study area attributed to the transitional period of the Late Iron Age/Roman periods, have been discussed in paragraph 4.34-4.35.
- 4.40 The alignment of the Roman road of Akeman Street (East Section) (**MOX5014**) is located immediately beyond the Site's southern boundary. The Roman road follows the alignment of the modern A41. The June 2024 geophysical survey of the Site by Sumo GeoSurveys (**Appendix EDP 2**) detected no anomalies of archaeological origin within the southern end of the Site, that would have the potential to be associated with the Roman road or any other roadside activity. As such, no remains associated with Akeman Street are anticipated to be present within the Site.
- 4.41 The study area also contains one archaeological findspot for a find of Late Iron Age/Roman coins around 1898 (**MOX5005**). The findspot occurred during post-medieval quarrying within an area c.870m south-east of the Site boundary and provides no insight to the archaeological potential of the Site.
- 4.42 As discussed in paragraph 4.35, based on available HER records, the study area comprises previously recorded remains comprising dispersed small-scale settlements with surrounding contemporary agricultural field systems. Due to the proximity of recorded Late Iron Age/Early Roman settlement remains and associated surrounding agricultural remains to the west of the Site, the Site has the potential to contain contemporary evidence for small-scale farmstead settlement and/or agricultural practices.