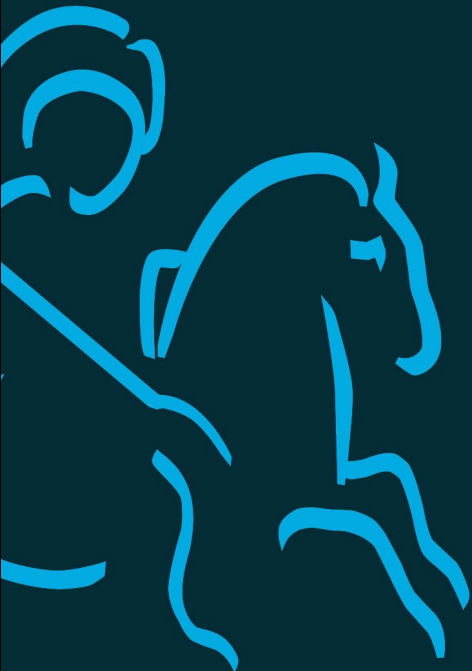


**APPEAL UNDER SECTION 78 OF THE TOWN AND COUNTRY
PLANNING ACT IN RELATION TO
LAND TO THE SOUTH OF WARREN LANE, NORTH OF WESTON
ROAD, LONG ASHTON**

**PLANNING APPLICATION NUMBER: 21/P/3076/OUT
PINS REF: APP/D0121/W/23/3315584**

**Robert Sutton Proof of Evidence (Heritage)
Summary - May 2023**



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Cirencester Building 11 Kemble Enterprise Park Cirencester Gloucestershire GL7 6BQ t. 01285 771022 f. 01285 771033	Milton Keynes Unit 8 – The IO Centre Fingle Drive Stonebridge Milton Keynes Buckinghamshire MK13 0AT t. 01908 564660	Andover Stanley House Walworth Road Andover Hampshire SP10 5LH t. 01264 347630	Suffolk Unit 5, Plot 11 Maitland Road Lion Barn Industrial Estate Needham Market Suffolk IP6 8NZ t. 01449 900120
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e. enquiries@cotswoldarchaeology.co.uk

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1. INTRODUCTION

Qualifications and experience

- 1.1. My name is Robert Sutton. I am the Director of Heritage Consultancy at Cotswold Archaeology. I am a Member of the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (MCIfA), and Cotswold Archaeology is a Registered Organisation with the Institute.
- 1.2. I am an archaeologist by qualification and have been practicing as a heritage consultant for over 20 years. A graduate of Bournemouth University, I worked as field archaeologist in London before spending nearly 10 years as a heritage consultant at Atkins. I have led the consultancy team of Cotswold Archaeology since 2011, growing the team from four to 25 professional consultants.
- 1.3. My full qualifications and experience are set out at chapter 1 of my main proof of evidence.

Scope of this evidence

- 1.4. The evidence presented within this summary proof is solely concerned with matters associated with the assessment of the potential impact of the Appeal Scheme on heritage assets.
- 1.5. This evidence has been drafted as a response to the Reason for Refusal (hereafter referred to as the 'RfR No.2' which is as follows:

The proposed development would result in the complete removal of all archaeological remains from the development site and would cause unacceptable harm to the Scheduled Monument. These remains form part of the significance of the designation of this heritage asset. In addition, the development of part of the historic field pattern associated with the Scheduled Monument would cause unacceptable harm to the historic landscape. The proposed development is therefore contrary to Policy CS5 of the Core Strategy, Policy DM6 of the North Somerset Sites and Development Plan, and paragraphs 195, 199, 200, 201, 202 and 205 of the National Planning Policy Framework.

- 1.6. The evidence that I have prepared and provided for this inquiry is true and has been prepared and is given in accordance with the guidance of my professional Institute. I confirm the opinions expressed are my true and professional opinions, irrespective of by whom I am instructed.

Summary of key matters

1.7. My evidence focuses on the following key matters:

- The specific and relative significance of the known buried archaeological remains within the Appeal Site (in reference to archaeological and historic interest);
- The impact of the appeal scheme on the buried archaeological remains within the appeal site;
- The impact of the appeal scheme on the heritage significance of the Walled Roman Settlement at Gatcombe;
- The heritage significance of the historic landscape of character of the appeal site and its surrounds;
- The impact of the appeal scheme on the experience of the buried archaeological remains and their setting;
- The heritage benefits that can be delivered by the appeal scheme (community archaeological excavations and enhanced historic interest that would improve access to the heritage significance); and
- Balancing the heritage benefits against the adverse impacts of the appeal scheme.

1.8. In summary, the main issues within the Reason for Refusal (2) can be subdivided as: i) the physical impact of the Appeal Scheme on buried archaeological remains; and ii) the change that the Appeal Scheme would bring to the historic landscape character.

1.9. Regarding the first issue, it is my position that any reasoned assessment of the available evidence would conclude that only very sparse buried archaeological remains survive within the Appeal Site (within this part of the Scheduled Monument). Furthermore, what does survive has relatively limited archaeological interest and no historic interest. Thus, the loss of these buried archaeological remains, which can be adequately mitigated, would not result in material harm to the designated heritage asset as a whole. Further to this, and also allowing for the removal of a field to west of Appeal Site from potential ploughing, the application of the 'heritage balance' results in any harm being compensated by the heritage benefits.

1.10. Regarding the second matter, the historic landscape character of the Appeal Site is of no heritage significance and is in no way associated with the archaeological interest of the important Roman period remains to the west (or the buried remains within the Appeal Site itself). The negligible effect of the Appeal Scheme on the wider experience

of the historic interest of the Roman period settlement site is accepted. However, this effect is very slight, and this can be easily offset by the benefits that can be delivered through the introduction of publicly accessible interpretation material (information boards). Again, the conclusion can be reached that the Appeal Scheme will result no harm to the designated heritage asset.

2. THE APPEAL SITE AND THE APPEAL SCHEME

The Appeal Site

- 2.1. The Appeal Site measures c2.2 hectares, located immediately adjacent to the western settlement edge of Long Ashton, North Somerset. The Appeal Site is in agricultural use (a relevant point to which I will return later), most recently planted to barley, wheat and beans.
- 2.2. The Appeal Site lies almost entirely within the Scheduled Monument known colloquially as Gatcombe Roman Settlement (see Figure 1, above). The full (official) name of the Scheduled Monument is “Roman settlement, part of an associated field system and earlier Iron Age settlement remains at Gatcombe Farm”.

The Appeal Scheme

- 2.3. The Appeal Scheme is for up to 35 affordable homes, plus the provision for areas of open space and allotments, with access from Weston Road.
- 2.4. In plan form and outline design, and in as far as it is relevant to matters associated with historic landscape character, the Appeal Scheme shares similar characteristics to the existing residential development to the east.
- 2.5. As detailed within the draft section 106 agreement, the land parcel to the west of Appeal Scheme (also lying within the Scheduled Monument) will be taken out of more intensive agricultural use. This will commit to a cessation of ploughing, which last occurred in c.2015, in this land parcel (this matter is further explored in Chapter 6, below).

3. HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE AND IMPACT ASSESSMENT

3.1. My main (full) proof of evidence sets out the appropriate context for the methodological approach that has been adopted for the assessment and the detailed descriptions of the heritage assets, their settings and the potential impacts of the Appeal Scheme.

3.2. Thus, the following paragraphs present a summary of my evidence.

Significance of the buried archaeological remains within the Appeal Site

3.3. The known buried archaeological remains within the Appeal Site, the infilled former field boundaries and pits of late medieval or more recent date and one in filled ditch of a potential Roman date have no or very limited archaeological interest. In their own right, they fall well-short of fulfilling any criteria that would allow them to be described as worthy of scheduling or of national importance. Their archaeological interest is so limited, in fact, in the most part, they should not be described as heritage assets at all (i.e., they do not have a level of “significance meriting consideration in planning decisions” – as derived from the NPPF definition of heritage assets).

3.4. In sole regard to the single, infilled ditch of possible Roman date, it is reasonable to assume that this feature may have been part of the managed agricultural hinterland of the settlement site that lies c400m to the west (in and around the existing Gatcombe Farm buildings). It is only through this association that any meaningful archaeological interest can be attributed to the remains; without this connection, without this ‘associated interest’ (or group value), they have little to no heritage significance.

3.5. The remains of the walled settlement and surviving fragments of buildings (lying nearly 400m to the west of the Appeal Site) are demonstrably of great archaeological and some latent (potential) historic interest.

The impact of the Appeal Scheme on the archaeological interest of the buried remains

3.6. Should this Appeal be allowed, it would be proportionate and an industry standard approach to carryout archaeological excavations of the areas that would be affected by groundworks, in advance of construction. This work would be enforced by a condition on the consent, to a scope agreed by Historic England and the Council. (Specifically, Scheduled Monument Consent would also need to be applied for and consented).

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- 3.7. To reinforce the point made above regarding the relatively limited archaeological interest of the remains, 100s of similar types of archaeological site (potential Roman field systems) are archaeologically excavated, in advance of construction, as a condition on planning consent every year in England and Wales.
- 3.8. In the specific instance of this Appeal Scheme, the work would be carried out by professional and accredited archaeologists. Research questions would be developed from existing and emerging research agendas associated with Roman period settlement remains; and the work would be targeted to answer them. Interested community groups and local individuals would be invited to participate in the archaeological work. The findings of the excavations and post-excavation analysis would be shared with the local stakeholders and with wider groups of archaeological professionals engaging with research on the subject, as is now standard good practice.
- 3.9. It is normal and correct to describe archaeological excavations as would be carried out as part of the consented Appeal Scheme as mitigation, because the work releases the archaeological interest and better reveals its significance (it mitigates the loss of the physical remains). These activities are capable of being a public benefit (see paragraph 205 NPPF). And in specific regard to: 'better reveal their significance', this is noted in paragraph 206 of the NPPF as something to allow proposals to be 'treated favourably'.
- 3.10. In summary, the physical loss of this single infilled, potential Roman-period field boundary would result in an adverse impact. It is accepted practice that while all attempts are made to release the archaeological interest of discovered remains, the work of professional archaeologists is not an exact science, and some information will be lost. This loss is easily compensated by the potential gains from advancing our knowledge and the opportunity to involve and engage the local community in the project.
- 3.11. It is very important at this point to note the physical loss of this single element of the wider agricultural hinterland of the settlement site would not adversely affect the archaeological interest of what would be retained and survive to the west. In fact, the very opposite is true. The potential knowledge that would be gained from these archaeological investigations as part of the Appeal Scheme would enhance and better reveal the significance of not just the limited remains within the Appeal Site but they would tell us more about the settlement site too (just as the limited work completed to date has, albeit it to a much lesser extent).

3.12. Whilst it is acknowledged that the Appeal Scheme will result in ‘the loss of c2ha of the scheduled monument / scheduled area’, as described above, this in no way correlates to the loss of ‘hectares of buried archaeological remains’ or even the loss of any important remains. Thus, the ‘loss’ of a certain quantum or area within any given scheduled monument, but specifically Gatcombe Roman Settlement, is not the relevant measure of an impact or harm.

3.13. In conclusion, following an ‘internal heritage balancing exercise’ the result would be ‘no harm’ and no conflict with national or local planning policy regarding the protection of important buried archaeological remains. However, if one’s preference is to express this differently, while (as it happens) still coming to the same conclusion, one could say that the less than substantial harm (very much at the lower end of the scale) would be compensated by the heritage benefits alone.

Heritage significance of the historic landscape character

3.14. The Avon Historic Landscape Characterisation project (Chapman 1997) classifies the Appeal Site as belonging to and lying within ‘Group A Category 1’. This encapsulates a landscape type derived from medieval (or earlier), common (or shared) field systems generally associated with nucleated settlements. The report (Chapman 1997) stipulates that this landscape form is abundant in the county, and it is considered to be of heritage significance due to its evidential and historic values and degree of preservation.

3.15. However, there are no diagnostic or landscape elements / features within the Appeal Site that give this character enough significance to justify describing it as a non-designated heritage asset. It is my understanding that this is not an argument being pursued by the Council in its Statement of Case. It is my understanding that the Council’s position on this point is that the character of the Appeal Site is of direct relevance to the significance of the buried archaeological remains of Gatcombe Roman Settlement, thus is a contributory factor in the heritage significance of the Scheduled Monument.

3.16. The element of the character of the Appeal Site as a surviving remnant of the Roman-period landscape is limited to the sole factor that the land is in agricultural use. Again, for the avoidance of doubt this ‘land use’ is not sufficient to elevate the Appeal Site to the status of a heritage asset because of its historic landscape character.

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- 3.17. To develop this point further and to bring the important assessment of ‘setting’ into the narrative, one needs to consider the specific heritage significance of the buried archaeological remains of the Gatcombe Roman Settlement and how they are experienced. The *archaeological interest* of the buried remains is not dependent on one’s experience of the remains. It is the *historic interest* that seeks to convey the story and thus the experience is relevant in this aspect alone.
- 3.18. However, this historic interest is almost completely hidden; it has a latent historic interest. While it is understood that some shallow earthworks relating to the Gatcombe Roman Settlement survive amongst the existing farm buildings these are unintelligible and physically inaccessible to the public. There are no signs or information boards that tell the story of the buried archaeological remains and the rich history of the place is lost. There is nothing that demarcates the extent of the scheduled area either.
- 3.19. With a basically ‘invisible’ heritage asset, the true potential of the historic interest of the place is not realised. For the well-informed observer, who has a detailed knowledge of the previous archaeological work and what this has taught us about the layout and function of the Roman Settlement, the historic interest could be realised, and this is likely to be best experienced when one is located in and around the existing farm buildings.
- 3.20. From locations within and on the edge of the walled compound of the Roman Settlement, the current edge of the settlement at Long Ashton can be seen to the east. The presence of these built features within one’s view does, to a very limited degree, inhibit an attempt to experience what would have been, during the Roman period, an open, undeveloped, agricultural hinterland of small, enclosed paddocks, woodland and waste (unimproved land).

The role of the Appeal Site in this experience and the impact of the Scheme

- 3.21. The Appeal Scheme, when viewed from the eastern edge of the walled compound (near to the existing Gatcombe Farm buildings), would reinforce the negative component of the built form within the setting / experience of the important buried archaeological remains. Thus, the Appeal Scheme would result in an adverse effect or a less than substantial harm (very much at lower end of the scale). This harm would only materialise prior to the consideration of potential positive heritage outcomes or benefits of the Appeal Scheme.

3.22. However, the benefits need to be considered and the section 106 agreement includes for the provision of interpretation panels / information boards to tell the story of this currently hidden history. These will better reveal the significance of this designated heritage asset, they will release and enhance the historic interest of the place. These benefits will easily offset and outweigh the very limited impact of the change of character and the presence of further modern residential development within an area that would once have been the Roman period agricultural hinterland of the settlement.

Other Points of Note re the objection from Historic England

3.23. The reference by Historic England to ‘substantial’ (using a term derived from the NPPF to denote a high level of effect on designated heritage asset) in their letter of 5th April 2023, is at best meaningless or at worst misleading; it conveys no useful scale by which a measure of the harm can be articulated. This understanding can only be achieved by careful consideration of the specific elements of a heritage asset that might be affected, the relative significance (importance) of these remains and the means by which any loss or harm could be avoided mitigated (see above).

3.24. Their letter goes on to identify a position on harm (albeit a muddled one, see above re references to substantial and less than substantial harm), and this concludes (on page 4) that this harm is ‘at the higher end of less than substantial’. In the first instance, they present no evidence to qualify this remark / scale. This ‘higher end’ suggest that the impacts wouldn’t quite result in the total loss of significance of the entire monument but would come close. This is frankly an absurd conclusion, one that should be seen as undermining the validity of any opinion expressed and a fundamental misunderstanding of the scale of the Appeal Scheme and nature of the known buried archaeological remains present (within and out with the Appeal Site).

3.25. Neither the Council nor Historic England have taken any account of how the adverse impacts of construction from the Appeal Scheme could be mitigated by expert investigation, responding to key regional research objectives, by the dissemination of the results of the work and the involvement of the local communities. This has resulted in a wholly inaccurate and incorrect presentation of the material issue; only the harm has been described, no benefits are being realised to counter, compensate, or mitigate the adverse effects.

The removal of the land to the west of the Appeal Site from active ploughing

- 3.26. As referred to above, the removal of the land to the west of the Appeal Site, is described in the section 106 agreement. This area is depicted within the blue line of the 'Location Plan' drawing number 100, dated 1st November 2021.
- 3.27. The material benefits of including an agreement to secure this area from ploughing needs to be given weight. The cessation of ploughing within the scheduled area will protect any surviving buried remains from further degradation.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Local policy

- 4.1. As has been described above, my assessment is that Appeal Scheme, when allowing for the implementation of agreed programme of mitigation work, will result in no adverse impacts, this will 'conserve' (as described in Core Strategy Policy CS5) the Scheduled Monument.
- 4.2. While Policy DM6 of the North Somerset Sites and Policies Plan identifies the preference for 'preservation in situ' but also recognises that excavation and recording could be a suitable approach. This Appeal Scheme is an example of where the need for preservation in situ is not required.
- 4.3. Thus, the Appeal Scheme accords with the local policy tests.

National policy

- 4.4. My assessment has found no harm to the heritage significance of the designated heritage assets (the scheduled monument). This is the result of the limited impacts being appropriately mitigated and offset by positive heritage effects (within an 'internal heritage balancing exercise'). Therefore, the provisions within the NPPF that would otherwise be relevant (potentially paragraph 202) are not triggered.
- 4.5. However, should an alternative approach be taken to assessing and articulating the harm and public benefits, I find the harm to be limited (very much at lower end of less than substantial harm) and in accordance with paragraph 202, outweighed by the specific public (heritage) benefits of the Appeal Scheme.
- 4.6. The key conclusions of my evidence can be summarised as:
- 1) The known important buried archaeological remains of Gatcombe Roman Settlement lie nearly 400m to west of the Appeal Site.
 - 2) While a robust understanding is had of the archaeological potential of the Appeal Site, the only known remains within it are a single infilled ditch of a possible Roman period field boundary. This feature is of limited archaeological interest.
 - 3) The physical loss of the buried archaeological remains within the Appeal Site can be adequately mitigated / offset by industry standard archaeological work in advance of construction. The advancement in our understanding of the buried archaeological remains and the ability to involve the local community and other

interested stakeholders in this archaeological work, all form part of the potential public (heritage) benefits.

- 4) The Appeal Scheme would reinforce a negative component of the current experience of the important buried archaeological remains. However, this adverse impact would only occur to a very peripheral component of the designated heritage assets significance.
- 5) This impact to the experience of the Scheduled Monument would be easily outweighed by the heritage benefits that could be delivered by interpretation / information boards.

4.7. The material benefits of including an agreement to remove the land parcel to the west of the Appeal Site from ploughing needs to be given weight. The cessation of ploughing within the scheduled area will protect any surviving buried remains from further degradation.

4.8. In conclusion, while the evidence on the planning balance is given by Mr Clinton in his proof of evidence, for the reasons presented above, I am of the opinion that the very minimal adverse impacts can be adequately mitigated and thus there is no heritage reason to refuse the Appeal Scheme.

Andover Office

Stanley House
Walworth Road
Andover
Hampshire
SP10 5LH

t: 01264 347630

Cirencester Office

Building 11
Kemble Enterprise Park
Cirencester
Gloucestershire
GL7 6BQ

t: 01285 771022

Exeter Office

Unit 1, Clyst Units
Cofton Road
Marsh Barton
Exeter
EX2 8QW

t: 01392 573970

Milton Keynes Office

Unit 8 - The IO Centre
Fingle Drive, Stonebridge
Milton Keynes
Buckinghamshire
MK13 0AT

t: 01908 564660

Suffolk Office

Unit 5, Plot 11, Maitland Road
Lion Barn Industrial Estate
Needham Market
Suffolk
IP6 8NZ

t: 01449 900120

e: enquiries@cotswoldarchaeology.co.uk

