

The archaeological and historical importance of the Leckhampton area identified for possible large-scale housing development

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Leckhampton has fertile and well-drained soil which has favoured human activity and settlement from the Iron Age through Roman and mediaeval to modern times. Recent archaeological finds in the area between the Shurdington Road (A46) and Leckhampton Lane-Church Road, together with the many buildings of historical and architectural merit in the area, emphasise the importance of protection of Leckhampton from large-scale housing developments.

The land threatened by proposed major housing developments is called here the “proposed housing development site” or the PHDS, and is subdivided into three sections:

- SD2. Fields west of the Leckhampton Lane-Crippetts Lane junction, bounded by Farm Lane, Leckhampton Lane and the Brizen housing estate.
- Brizen Farm. Bounded by the Shurdington Road and the Brizen housing estate, extending to the A46 Morrison’s roundabout.
- Leckhampton white land. The area between Shurdington Road, Kidnappers Lane-Farm Lane, Church Road and the Burrows sports field.

Evidence for Iron Age occupation

The occupation of the Leckhampton area started in prehistory with the bronze/Iron Age fort on top of Leckhampton Hill, overlooking the PHDS. This site has been investigated in great detail over many years and is one of the best known hill fort sites in Britain. Detailed excavations have revealed wooden palisades, houses and stone walls. Artefacts, including many arrow heads, provide evidence of battles. Recent excavations in Brizen Farm indicate that Iron Age activity extended westwards into the PHDS. Iron Age tracks or drove ways would have passed through the area along the base of the Cotswold escarpment.

Roman occupation

The Dryhill Roman villa site overlooks the PHDS on the hill above Shurdington. Archaeological evidence of significant levels of Roman and Romano-British activity has been discovered within and adjacent to the area. Trenching on Brizen Farm (reported by Meara in 2008) together with earlier excavations at the nearby Brizen recreation field (*Glevensis* volume 29 (1996), pages 49-50) have recovered many Roman artefacts including pottery, 3rd and 4th century coins, a finger ring and a brooch. Trackways or secondary roads crossing and bounding the PHDS linked Roman farms and houses (*The Old Roads and Tracks of Leckhampton* T. Moore-Scott, Leckhampton Local History Society Research Bulletin, number 2, 2001). The old Collum Street ran along the line of Leckhampton Lane-Church Road-Charlton Lane. The A46 from Brockworth through Shurdington and on into Cheltenham follows a route along the base of the Cotswold Escarpment which probably follows the lines of a Roman Road crossing what was to become the major Roman highway (Ermin Street) between Cirencester and Gloucester.

Excavations on Brizen Farm

The archaeological potential of the Brizen-Shurdington area resulted in extensive excavations on and around Brizen Farm (Meara, September 2008, Archaeological Evaluation Report by Oxford Archaeology for Newbridge Construction Ltd., Job Number 4118, Document 53115). The investigations involved the digging of more than 90 trenches and a thorough archaeological investigation of the whole site. Abundant pottery and other artefacts of pre-Iron Age, Iron Age, Roman, mediaeval and post-mediaeval age were discovered.

The Roman remains include artefacts, pits and field boundaries. The pottery included imported material and fragments of Samian ware (luxury pottery), mortaria (kitchen vessels) and amphora (storage vessels). The artefacts indicate the presence of a small-scale Romano-British farmstead.

Mediaeval and post-mediaeval ditches and structural remains and mediaeval and post-mediaeval pottery suggest more or less continuous occupation of the Brizen Farm area from around the time of the Norman Conquest until the second half of the 16th Century.

The excavations identified no major structures and concluded that there was no real justification for further detailed work on the site although there was a high potential for further Roman archaeological finds.

Leckhampton Moat

Opposite the church of St Peter's, within the white land area of the PHDS, is the remains of a small-scale moated manor house with a wooden bridge and fish ponds, known as the Leckhampton Moat. This scheduled ancient monument was occupied between the 12th and 16th Centuries (reports by J.G.N. Clift. 1933 in the Transactions of the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society. Volume 55 and Terry Moore-Scott, Leckhampton Local History Society, Research Bulletin Number 3).

Desk-based assessment of the white land

In September 2004 a desk-based archaeological assessment of the white land northeast of Kidnappers Lane was undertaken by Gloucestershire County Council Archaeological Services for Bovis Homes Limited (Document SW8567). No archaeological constraints on development were identified but the conclusion of the report stated that the work should be considered as a starting point for further investigations to determine the amount and quality of archaeological remains within the area.

A Historic Environment Desk Based Assessment of part of the white land at Leckhampton published in April 2010 (Document SW10110) was produced for RPS Planning and Development of Oxford. The report identified nothing of national importance but went on to say that the whole site should be regarded as having the potential for remains of late prehistoric and Roman settlements. A programme of archaeological investigation was likely to be required prior to the determination of any application for development of the site.

Magnetic Surveys

Magnetic surveys are an efficient and cheap way of identifying buried structures. Reports on two surveys in the area of the PHDS have been published.

In August 2006 Archaeological Services of the University of Durham undertook a magnetic anomaly survey of the SD2 site on behalf of CgMs Consulting (Report 1522). The anomalies revealed enclosures, ditches, ring ditches, pits and post holes. These provide

evidence of possible prehistoric settlements and reflect the significant archaeological resources of the area. The conclusions to the report were that a full archaeological survey is needed.

In February 2011 a magnetic survey was undertaken on two blocks of the white land northeast of the Kidnappers Lane/Shurdington Road junction by Archaeological Surveys Ltd. for RPS Planning and Development (Document SW10451, report 346). Although many parts of the site were inaccessible or unsuitable for surveying, no archaeologically significant features were identified.

Buildings of historical interest.

There are numerous buildings of historical and architectural interest scattered within the PHDS. These buildings include: Moat Cottage (Grade II listed), Brizen Farm (Grade II listed), Leckhampton Farm, Field Cottage, Church Farm (Grade II listed), Leckhampton Farm Court, the remains of a brick Pump House, The Berries, The Bungalow, St Peter's Rectory, Elm Farm, Sheepshead Row, Robinswood Cottage, Brizen Cottage, Cummins Row and Brook Cottage.

Immediately adjacent to the PHDS is Leckhampton Court (Grade I listed, now the Sue Ryder Care Hospice) a magnificent mediaeval manor house dating from about 1320. Across the Church Road from the site is the beautiful mediaeval parish Church of St Peter's dating back to the 14th Century. The PHDS adjoins the mediaeval Leckhampton Village with its many ancient buildings.

Conclusions

Land in the Leckhampton area should be preserved from large-scale housing development because of its archaeological and historical importance. Further detailed archaeological investigations need to be undertaken before any development is considered. The existing buildings on the proposed housing development sites and the nearby Leckhampton Village would be completely swamped by the proposed close-packed housing of a modern estate.