



Design & Access Statement

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APPENDIX A

Archaeological Assessment

Ranikhet Academy School, Reading
Archaeology Feasibility Report for Redevelopment of the School Site

David Hopkins BA MIFA

Please note that this is a desk based assessment and no site visit has been carried out. The HER data was supplied by Berkshire Archaeology on 27th April 2020.

Summary

Ranikhet School is located in Tilehurst Reading. It was built in the mid 1970s. This report sets out the archaeological aspects of a feasibility study into the redevelopment of the school at the school site.



Fig 1 School Location



Fig 2 School layout

Archaeological Background

This archaeological background study has been compiled using HER data provided by Berkshire Archaeology.

There are no archaeological sites currently recorded within the Ranikhet School site.

There are no designated archaeological sites recorded within the vicinity of Ranikhet School site which might be physically or visually impacted by redevelopment of the school site nor inform the understanding of the archaeological potential of the locality of the school site.

There are archaeological sites recorded in the wider vicinity of Ranikhet School that inform our understanding of the archaeological potential of the area and so any archaeological potential that might be applied to the school site.

Palaeolithic

Finds of stone tools dated to the lower Palaeolithic are recorded within the study area around the school. Whilst these comprise individual finds of hand axes, tools and flint flakes they speak to the potential of the underlying geology to contain archaeological information relating to this period. There is a record of sixteen hand axes discovered about 750m south west of the site. Slightly further away, about 1km south east, a considerable quantity of hand axes, flakes, scrapers, cores and cleavers (HER: 3676) were discovered at McIlroys pit. HER 10541 and HER 10569 record other Palaeolithic axes found about a kilometre to the north west. The gravel

deposit of the Tilehurst area are well known for the recovery of Palaeolithic stone tools during gravel extraction in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Mesolithic

No archaeological evidence of Mesolithic date has been found although given the general landscape character and proximity to the river Thames it is likely that people roamed through this area and may have set up camps in this period.

Neolithic

The Neolithic period is represented by stray finds of stone tools, such as polished and unpolished axes. For example a polished flint axe (HER: 10518) found about 400m to the north and a flint axe (HER: 10508) discovered about 375m to the south east. HERs 110521, 22,23 are for Neolithic axes and an adze within a km of the site. Given the landscape character and it's proximity to the Thames it is likely that the area was occupied and farmed in the Neolithic but no specific settlement location has been identified.

Bronze Age

Six pottery urns were found during quarry working about 1Km to the south east, presumably a cremation cemetery. It is likely that the area was occupied and farmed in the Bronze Age but no specific settlement location has been identified.

Iron Age

There is a large linear earthwork about 750m to the north east, likely to be a boundary bank of the period, denoting a territory rather than a settlement. It is likely that the areas was farmed and settled in the Iron Age but no specific locations for such settlement have been found to date.

Roman

There are two occupation sites of Iron Age/Roman date (HER's: 3662, 3669/70), both found during quarrying, consisting of pottery, hearths, and other cut features. These were found about about 1Km to the south and south east of the school site. Roman coins have been found in the area (HER 15480, 183117, 10466, 10464, 15463) as well as some Roman pottery. It is likely that the areas was farmed and settled in the Roman period and evidence of this has been found in the wider landscape.

Medieval

To the north east is Norcot Farm first recorded in 1327 and shown on Rocque's map of 1767. 500 n HER 16122. The area was farmed in the medieval period but allowing that an absence of mapped farm, or place name or documentary evidence of a deserted settlement from this period, the associated settlement is not at the school site.

Post Medieval

HER 16123 is a record of a brick kiln 400 m to the north west, and HER 16124 a brick kiln 750 m to the south. The area is known for both brick making and gravel extraction in the post medieval period. The kilns and brick yards are mapped and Norcot Kilns is shown on the historic OS maps as close by to the school site. North east and south of the school site were extensively extracted for clay reflecting the clay deposits that cap the base geology in many places in Tilehurst.

HER 15468 records a Second World War anti-aircraft battery some distance away, and has no implication for the wider archaeological potential of the landscape around the school site.

Archaeological Summary

Although the archaeological data for the surrounding area is limited the landscape flanking the Thames along its valley has probably been exploited by hunter gatherers in the Mesolithic and farmed and settled since the Neolithic. Such glimpses as we have come mainly from brick and gravel quarrying in the 19th and early 20th century, and had the extensive residential developments of the area been archaeologically monitored when first built no doubt a wider range and density of archaeological sites would have been observed.

The wider area has a high archaeological potential and the school site itself has its portion of that, although given the limited scale of the school site within the landscape this must be regarded as modest.

The School Site

The school site is highly developed. The school buildings cover nearly half the site and their development will have severely compromised any archaeological survival archaeological potential in that part of the school site. Likewise, the playing field and MUGA will have had to be levelled to be installed and the plan shows significant break in slope around the playing field suggesting a significant cut and fill groundwork stage. The site survey indicates a 3m drop between top and bottom of that slope, and between the playing field and the MUGA. Test pitting that took place on the old school paying field to the north, at the Dee Park development, also indicates severe truncation by landscaping on the old school playing field now developed, to the extent that no further archaeological potential survived.

Phase 1b Dee Park Tilehurst Road Reading Oxford Archaeology, *“Five of the test pits were within the grounds of Ranikhet School and one was within an area of open grassland adjacent to Deveron Drive. The evaluation identified modern landscaping deposits probably associated with the construction of the current school grounds and housing estate.”*

Furthermore within that area was previously sited a school swimming pool, the construction of which will also have localised destructive impact on archaeological survival.

The draft Terra Firma report states; *“The topography of the site is typically flat. The site has been cut and filled across several different levels to create flat plateaus for the current development. The playing fields to the south are elevated approximately*

3-5m higher than the school buildings and carpark to the north". "Due to the nature and history of the site the presence of significant Made Ground is expected due to the cut and fill across the site".

It is very unlikely that any archaeological remains will have survived construction, earthmoving and landscaping at the school grounds. The archaeological potential of the site is entirely compromised.

Palaeolithic Potential of the underlying gravels

Superficial deposits in the form of Head deposits and Winter Hill Gravel are shown to overlie the bedrock geology in places in the wider area however none are mapped by the BGS at the school site. Although the gravels of the area are well known for their archaeological potential for Palaeolithic material it would appear at this stage that gravel is not present on site. However it is possible that superficial deposits of gravel have not been mapped. If future Geotechnical Investigation indicates that natural gravel deposits overlie the base geology at the school site further advice on the Palaeolithic archaeology will be taken.

Conclusion

In view of the extensive earthmoving and developments at the site it is very unlikely that undisturbed archaeological deposit survive at the site. Any archaeological deposits surviving at the site are at best likely to be fragmentary and severely compromised. In my opinion the archaeological potential of the site would not merit the burden of further archaeological mitigation.