

BERKSHIRE ARCHAEOLOGY

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**Planning CONSULTATION RESPONSE – Application PL/24/1155
JOHN LEWIS CUSTOMER COLLECTION POINT, CROSSLAND ROAD, READING, RG1 2HT**

FAO Anthony Scholes

Thank you for consulting Berkshire Archaeology regarding the above application. Berkshire Archaeology is part of Reading Borough Council's Museum and Town Hall Services and provides historic environment advice to the five unitary authorities of Bracknell Forest Council, Reading Borough Council, Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead, Slough Borough Council and Wokingham Borough Council. This response relates solely to buried archaeological heritage, the Council's Conservation Officer should be consulted for any matters relating to the historic built environment.

There are potential archaeological implications with this proposed development as demonstrated by Berkshire Archaeology's Historic Environment Record. The site lies to the south of the Oracle development where archaeological works demonstrated the survival of waterfront remains related to the Medieval and later periods. It is on the periphery of the Medieval town and in an area that was a key point of expansion for Reading during the Later Medieval and Early Modern period. The Kennet, which flows eastwards c. 110 m north of the site, has long been a key focus for human activity. Prehistoric struck flints were found at Bridge Street c. 170 m west of the site; Roman pottery has been dredged from the river c. 150 m due north of the site; a Saxon axe and spear were found in it c. 120 m north west of the site, and excavations in advance of the construction of the Oracle Shopping Centre and car park uncovered an array of remains from different periods, including the mill which gives this road its name (known as St Giles' Mill), in use between c. 1300 and 1600, which was found c. 50 m to the north of the John Lewis warehouse. Medieval engineering of the river banks was plain from the discovery of numerous timber revetments and piles dating back in some cases to the 11th century, along with the remains of a tannery in use from the 13th - 15th centuries c. 200 m north of the site. Reading Abbey, founded in 1121 and making Reading one of the most important religious and economic centres in the region, lies around 500 m to the north east, with wharves and other productive enterprises lining the river all the way downstream from Mill Lane to Abbey Wharf. In addition, numerous archaeological remains have been uncovered in excavations to the south around London Street and Southampton Street, which were main routes to the south out of Reading from the medieval period. This was an area of the town occupied from at least the 12th century when the parish church of St Giles (c. 150 m south west) was founded to serve the borough's growing population on this side of the Kennet, with a distinct industrial character found to some of the remains, including a medieval tilery discovered at Silver Street.

The site itself was subject to an archaeological watching brief during the construction of the John Lewis warehouse (planning ref. 96/0692) in late 1997/early 1998. This watching brief monitored the removal of the existing ground slab on site, and excavation for pile caps and soakaways. Some 40

trenches were monitored, typically measuring c. 1 m by 2.5 m. Across much of the site there was considerable disturbance found, with 1-2 m of made ground consisting of bricks and rubble, overlying the natural Upper Chalk which was typically overcut by about 0.2 m. Two post medieval capped wells were discovered at 1.9 m and 0.8 m below the surface, and a small quantity of post medieval pottery was found. A small number of trenches did show alluvium or gravels overlying the chalk (typically on the western side of the site), suggesting the presence of some intact, untruncated deposits, although no archaeological features were identified in these trenches. The conclusion of the work was that no archaeological remains were disturbed, and that any remains, if they had been present, had already been truncated by earlier activity on site.

Whilst these earlier results suggest low archaeological potential on the site, only the central part of the site was assessed, and the small trench sizes did not give a particularly good sample or view of the depositional sequence (with some trenches inaccessible due to unstable baulks). The occasional identification of intact stratigraphy indicates that in parts of the site archaeological potential may well remain. Thus, on account of the high archaeological potential of the wider area, particularly for medieval remains, I do think some degree of archaeological evaluation or mitigation may be required.

As shown, the application site falls within an area of archaeological significance and archaeological remains may be damaged by ground disturbance for the proposed development. It is therefore recommended that the following condition is applied, should permission be granted, in order to mitigate the impacts of development. This is in accordance with Paragraph 218 of the NPPF(2025) which states that local planning authorities should *'require developers to record and advance understanding of the significance of any heritage assets to be lost (wholly or in part) in a manner proportionate to their importance and the impact, and to make this evidence (and any archive generated) publicly accessible'*.

Condition:

A) No development shall take place/commence until a programme of archaeological work, informed by a Desk Based Assessment, including a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) has been submitted to, and approved by, the local planning authority in writing.

The WSI shall include an assessment of significance and research questions; and:

1. The programme and methodology of site investigation and recording
2. The programme for post investigation assessment
3. Provision to be made for analysis of the site investigation and recording
4. Provision to be made for publication and dissemination of the analysis and records of the site investigation
5. Provision to be made for archive deposition of the analysis and records of the site investigation
6. Nomination of a competent person or persons/organisation to undertake the works set out within the WSI.

B) The Development shall take place in accordance with the WSI approved under condition (A).

The development shall not be occupied until the site investigation and post investigation assessment has been completed in accordance with the programme set out in the WSI approved under condition (A) and the provision made for analysis, publication and dissemination of results and archive deposition has been secured.

Reason:

The site lies in an area of archaeological potential, particularly for, but not limited to, Medieval remains. The potential impacts of the development can be mitigated through a programme of archaeological work. This is in accordance with national and local plan policy.

The proposed development is significant in scale amounting to the creation of a large towerblock which will require significant foundations, resulting in widespread disturbance across the site.

Therefore, it is advised that, in the first instance, an assessment of the potential impacts on archaeology should be made, by means of a Desk Based Assessment, which although having a wider

area summary, should focus on the site, previous impacts, proposed impacts and overall potential. This assessment will then inform on the level of mitigation necessary for the site,

In view of the nature and scale of the development and the low likelihood of the potential archaeology, should it exist, meriting preservation in situ, an archaeological Scheme of Works would represent an appropriate initial phase of investigation in order to determine the archaeological potential, levels of previous truncation, and the need for any further phases of work.

Berkshire Archaeology would be pleased to discuss the approach with the applicant, or their archaeological consultant, should permission be granted.

Dr Edwin Wood
Archaeology Officer