

LAND AT OLDPORT FARM

OSWESTRY

ARCHAEOLOGY STATEMENT

Castlering Archaeology

APRIL 2014

SYNOPSIS

This short report outlines the archaeological work undertaken since 2006 on land at Oldport Farm, Oswestry.

The report also re-affirms the commitment that the development team have in respect of archaeological mitigation prior to and during future development.

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Castlering Archaeology cannot be held responsible for any errors and inaccuracies contained therein.

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1. DESK-BASED ASSESSMENT & SITE WALK-OVER

CASTLERING ARCHAEOLOGY REPORT NO. 243

1.1 In August / September 2006 an archaeological desk-based assessment and site walk-over, commissioned by G.F. Kempster and Son, was undertaken on five parcels of agricultural land belonging to Oldport Farm for which development proposals were then under consideration (Fig. 1 *following*).

1.2 The report concluded that, although there were no previously recorded sites of archaeological interest within the study area itself, the site's borderland setting and the proximity to two prominent scheduled monuments highlighted its archaeological potential. Oldport Farm is overlooked by the earthwork remains of Old Oswestry Hillfort, a Scheduled Monument of Iron Age date. The hillfort is currently leased for grazing by the owners of the farm. Old Oswestry was incorporated into Wat's Dyke, the linear earthwork that extends in the north-south direction to either side of the hillfort. Although the function and date of the earthwork is uncertain, the monument is generally held to be a boundary dating to the reign of Aethelbald (AD 716-757). However, recent archaeological work along the course of the Dyke has suggested an earlier construction date. The Scheduled area of the hillfort includes the adjacent sections of Wat's Dyke (HER No. 01001).

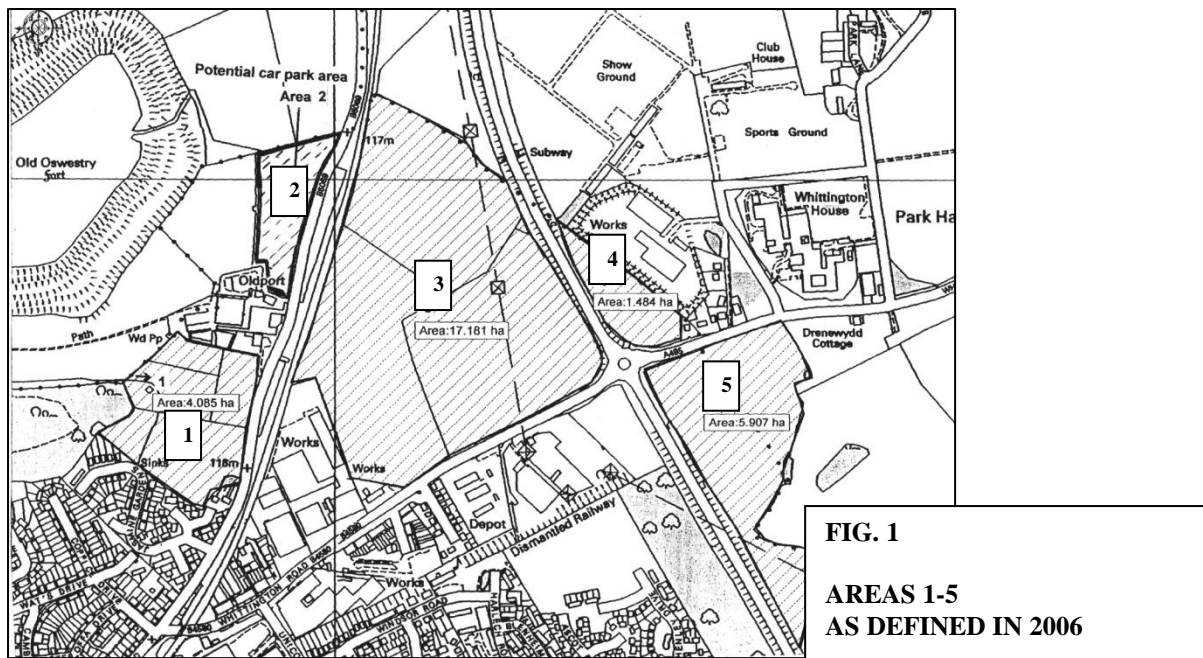
1.3 The 2006 report drew attention to the finds of Roman pottery and tile recovered during excavations on the hillfort in the late 1930s; the Roman Marching Camp at Rhyn Park c.6 km north of the study area (HER No. 00645); and the struggle for the borderland that led to the construction of the nearby Wat's Dyke in attempts to define a boundary. The Norman advance towards Wales after 1066 culminated in the construction of a proliferation of castles all along the borderland. Castles were built at Oswestry, c.0.9km southwest of the study area boundary and at Whittington, c.1.7km northeast of the study area boundary. Both Oswestry (HER No. 00351) and Whittington Castles (HER No. 01003) and the study area now lie in Shropshire, but this has not always been the case. In the early medieval period the area was part of the March of Wales managed rather than controlled by Marcher Lords, a system which continued until the Act of Union in 1536, which placed the area in Shropshire. The town of Oswestry, the Manor of Whittington and the lands in between were successively under attack by Llewelyn in 1263, Owain Glydwr in the 1400s, and during the skirmishes of the Civil War in 1644.

1.4 In the period following the Civil War, the study area appears to have developed into the agricultural landscape that partly survives today. A mortgage deed dated 1667 records the messuage known as Old Port, but, in the absence of any accompanying map, it can only be conjectured that it refers to the existing farm.

1.5 The report drew attention to modern interests in the study area, for example the construction of the Shrewsbury, Oswestry & Chester Junction Railway (HER No. 05779), the disused section of which runs parallel to the B 5069 (forms part of the western boundary of the current masterplan Site 4). The line of the Oswestry, Ellesmere & Whitchurch Railway, authorized in 1861, once crossed current masterplan Site 7 (Area 5 on the 2006 plan, Fig. 1). The line closed in 1965 and all evidence has been removed. In 1888 when the reservoir was built at Lake Vyrnwy to supply water to the rapidly growing city of Liverpool, the laying of cast iron pipes buried underground to carry the water to the city was a major feat of engineering. The pipeline (HER No. 21491) crosses Oldport land between the farm buildings and masterplan Site 1 (SAMDev004), underlies the Gobowen Road and the disused railway line before continuing along the south side of masterplan Site 4, north of Whittington Road. The pipeline then continues into masterplan Site 7 (Area 5 on the 2006 plan Fig. 1), where it runs between Whittington Road and the former Railway Line. The report drew attention to masterplan Site 6's boundary (Area 4 on the 2006 plan Fig. 1) with the former military camp at Park Hall, where troops were stationed from 1915 (HER No. 21713).

1.6 The site walk-over undertaken in 2006 identified no new above ground areas of archaeological interest. Despite extensive coverage of the area by aerial reconnaissance since the 1930s, no archaeological sites have been recorded within the study area. No archaeological finds have been recorded from the study area itself, but the owners of Oldport Farm confirm that their land is often combed by metal detectors who informally report finds of musket balls, presumed to date to the Civil War period.

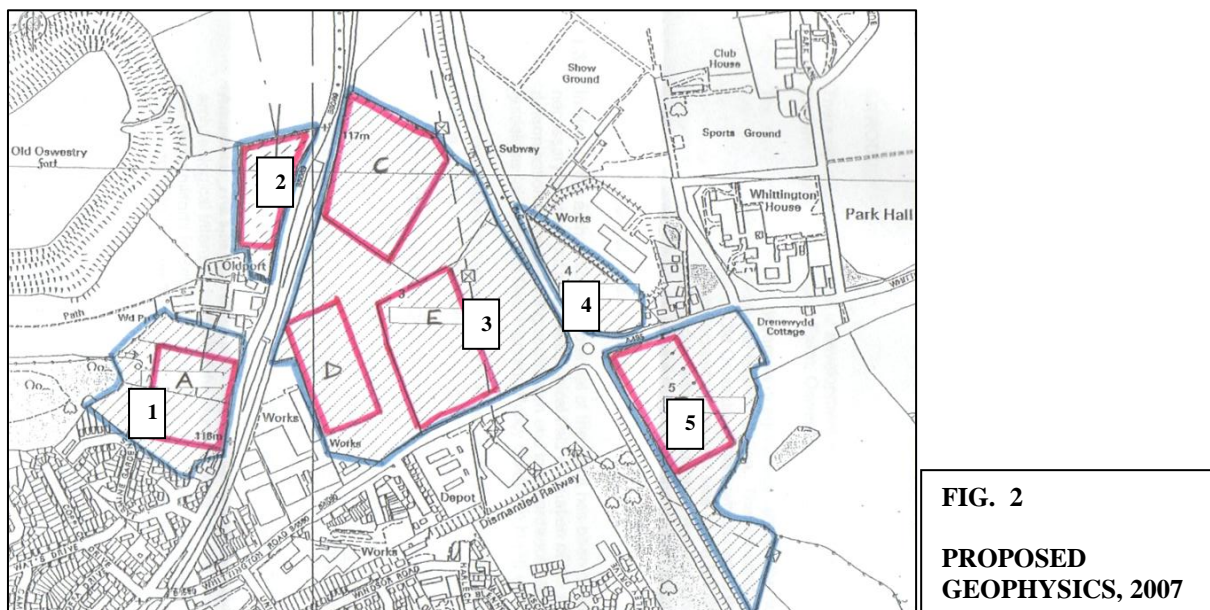
1.7 The desk-based assessment concluded that apart from the construction of the railways and the Vyrnwy Aqueduct, the study area appears to have remained intact as arable and pasture land for several centuries. However, despite any direct indication of the presence of buried archaeological remains within the study area itself, the location of Oldport and the close proximity of Old Oswestry and Wat's Dyke make the proposed development site an area of high archaeological sensitivity.



2. ARCHAEOLOGICAL ADVICE, 2007

2.1 Castlering Archaeology Report No. 243, together with the 2006 outline proposals, was submitted for consultation to Mike Watson, then the Historic Environment Officer for Shropshire County Council in December 2006.

2.2 In January 2007, a Brief for further archaeological investigation of masterplan Sites 1-4 & 7 (2006 Areas 1-3 & 5) was prepared by Mike Watson, when masterplan Site 6 (2006 Area 4) was no longer being considered as part of the development proposal. The Brief called for Geophysical Survey in the form of Magnetometry, followed by sample excavation based on the results of the Geophysics. Six sample areas (A-F) were defined by the Brief as indicated *below*.



3. GEOPHYSICAL SURVEY

GSB PROSPECTION LTD., BRADFORD (GSB Survey 07/12)

3.1 In March 2007, GSB surveyed five of the six blocks of land recommended by Mike Watson, as indicated in Fig. 3 *below*. By 2007, the former Area 5 (Now part of masterplan Site 7) was also no longer being considered as part of the development proposals.

3.2 GSB recorded a clearly defined trench system, believed to be indicative of front line and communication trenches in Area 3, Block E (current masterplan Site 5), probably dating date to World War I or 2, when the adjacent Park Hall was a military training camp. A potential access track and other pit-type features possibly associated with the trench system, although their form was not clear, were also recorded. Area B contained anomalies potentially associated with the entrance to Old Oswestry Fort but they were not well defined and were considered more likely to reflect natural variations in the subsoil. This was also true of other trends and archaeological type anomalies in the data, although given the proximity of the Iron Age hillfort an archaeological interpretation was a possibility. In addition, the route of the Vyrnwy Aqueduct was clearly defined in Areas A and E and former field boundaries were identified in Areas C and E (Fig. 3 *below*).



FIG. 3 GEOPHYSICS UNDERTAKEN IN 2007

after GSB 2007

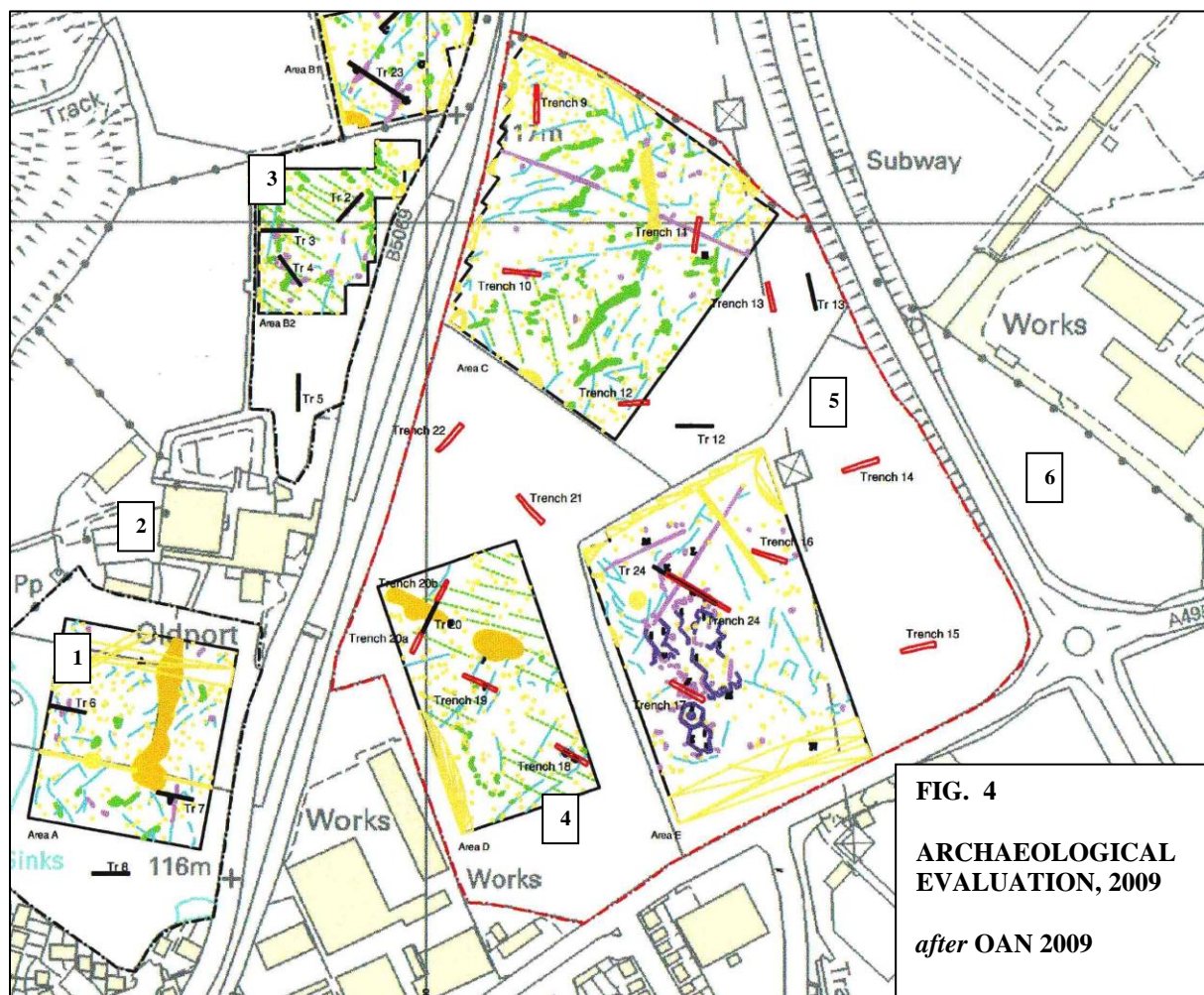
4. ARCHAEOLOGICAL ADVICE, 2007

4.1 The GSB report was subsequently submitted to Mike Watson, Shropshire Historic Environment Officer, who in turn called for the excavation of two 50m x 1.5m and twenty-two 25m x 1.5m evaluation trenches within the study area, based on the results of the Geophysics, as indicated on Fig. 4 *following*.

5. ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGY NORTH (OAN) AUGUST 2009

5.1 In 2009, OAN were commissioned to undertake trial trenching based on the advice of Mike Watson. By 2009, the current masterplan Sites 1 and 3 (Trenches 1-8 and 23 indicated in black), to the west of the Gobowen Road, were omitted from this phase of work as the planning proposals had been temporarily suspended for these two areas. The remaining 15 trial trenches in the current Sites 4 and 5 (Trenches 9-22 and 24 indicated in red) were excavated by OAN between 8th and 17th June 2009 as recorded *below*.



5.2 OAN reported that in the 15 trenches excavated no significant archaeological deposits or features were identified. The area had been subjected to relatively deep ploughing and the finds recovered from the trenching were mainly recovered from the ploughsoil. Finds were mainly mid-late eighteenth-century and later, although some pottery of possible Romano-British or medieval date was retrieved, albeit residual. These finds were likely to have been deposited through manuring. Their relatively fair condition indicates that, despite it being deep, the occurrence of ploughing appears to have been limited. The occupation of the area by a large army training camp, particularly during World War II, was also thought to have contributed to the truncation or disturbance of any features. Two Pits recorded in Trenches 15 and 24 were recognised on initial investigation as being mortar craters or similar, from the site's use as a training camp in World War II, and were consequently not fully excavated.

5.3 The report concluded that the area evaluated was shown to contain little of archaeological significance and development at this location was likely to have little impact on any archaeological remains or features.

5.4 The OAN Report was subsequently submitted to Shropshire Historic Environment Officer.

6. POST 2009 – ADDITIONS TO SHROPSHIRE HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT RECORDS

6.1 Following the submission of OAN's Evaluation Report in 2009, five new archaeological digital records were added to Shropshire Historic Environment Record database, directly derived from the excavation together with a record for the previously unrecorded Park Hall Military Training Camp (HER No. 21713).

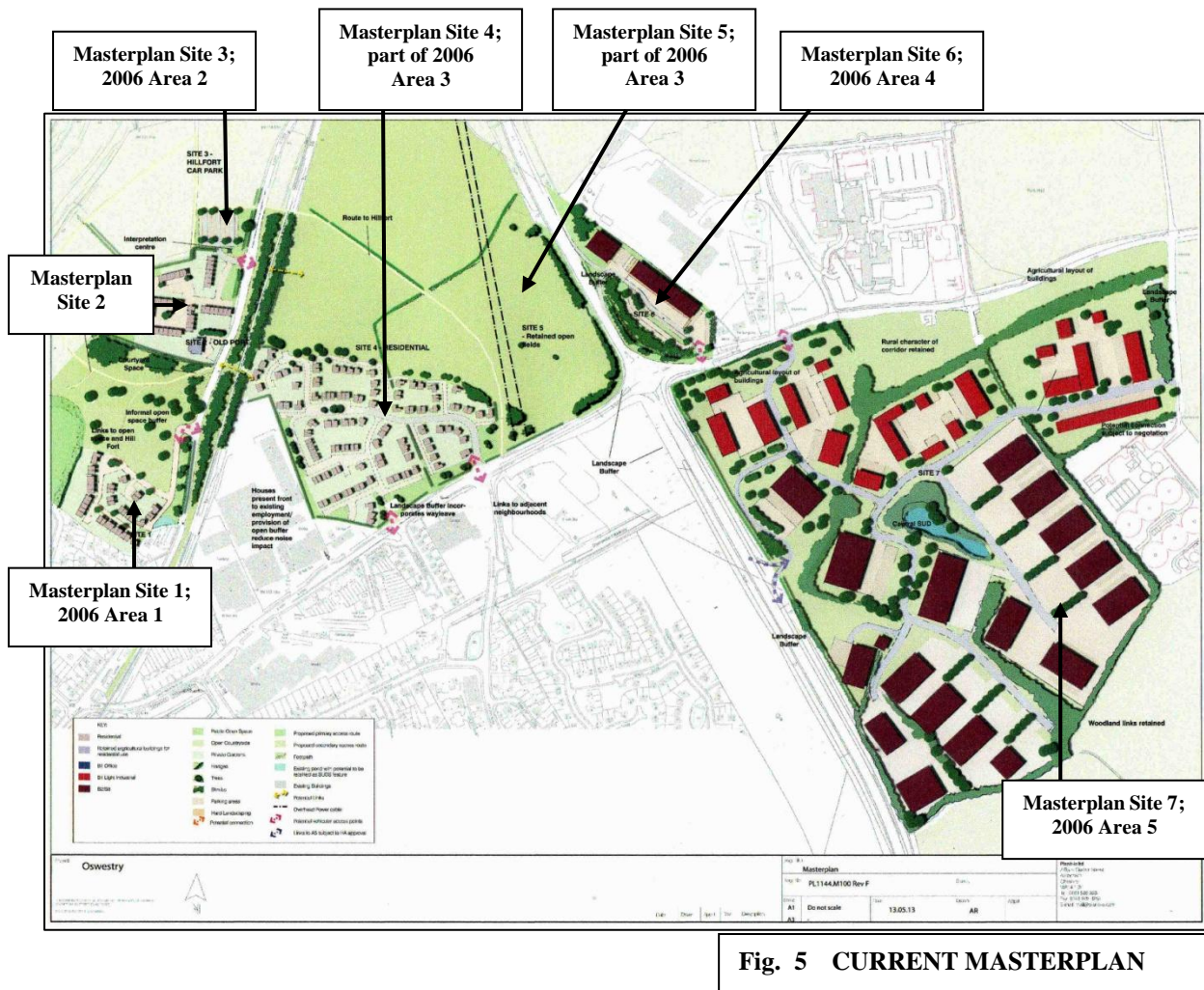
6.2 The five records (HER Nos 21710-21712 & 21714-5) comprise two poorly defined pits; the ditch of post-medieval date and the two potential mortar craters (referred to in 5.2 *previous*), presumably associated with training exercises at Park Hall Camp. In archaeological terms the features are of low significance. Only one of these records, HER No. 21712, the post-medieval ditch, lies directly within the proposed development in Site 4 of the current masterplan (Fig. 5 *following*).

6.3 The HER records are recorded in more detail in Section 9 *following*.

7. CURRENT ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITUATION

7.1 Since 2009, no further archaeological work has been undertaken or required as part of the planning process. Since 2006 various options have been explored in respect of the development resulting in the masterplan *overleaf*.

7.2 The current proposals comprise development only on the southwest side of Site 4 (considerably scaled back from the 2006 proposals); the re-introduction of Site 6 and extended development in Site 7 (enlarged since 2006). In addition Oldport Farm buildings have been introduced as Site 2.



7.3 Table 1 *below* records the archaeological work undertaken to date in Sites 1-7 of the masterplan

| 2014 Masterplan Site No. | 2006 Site No. | 2006 Desk-based Study | 2007 Geophysics | 2009 Evaluation |
|--------------------------|------------------|-----------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| 1 | 1 | √ | √ | |
| 2 | | | | |
| 3 | 2 | √ | √ | |
| 4 | 3 | √ | √ | √ |
| 5 | 3 | √ | √ | √ |
| 6 | 4 | √ | | |
| 7 | 5 (part of 7) | √ | | |

Table 1

7.4 It is acknowledged that further archaeological work is required in the sites not fully evaluated. Sites 1, 3, 6 and 7 will require further archaeological field evaluation. Site 2, Oldport Farm buildings have been evaluated in the Heritage Impact Assessment submitted as part of the application (De Figueiredo 2013).

8. MITIGATION

8.1 While no archaeological works are currently required, G.F. Kempster and Son are aware that at this stage it is not possible to accurately assess the impact of proposed development on unidentified buried archaeological remains over the proposed development site as a whole.

8.2 Mitigation measures in the form of further archaeological work will be agreed following further consultation with Dr Andy Wigley, Historic Environment Manager for Shropshire Council, in order to provide a full archaeological record.

8.3 An agreed mitigation strategy in accordance with NNPF (2012) will allow for a programme of archaeological recording to be undertaken as a condition of planning approval.

8.4 Mitigation has the potential for an increase in knowledge arising from the opportunity to research and investigate potential archaeological remains as a result of development. Allowing for an agreed mitigation strategy, proposed development will have limited adverse impact on the archaeology of the site.

9 REFERENCES

De Figueiredo, Peter, 2013, *Proposed Development at Oldport Farm, Whittington Road, Oswestry, Heritage Impact Assessment*

Frost, P., 2006, *Land at Oldport Farm, Oswestry, Shropshire, Archaeological Assessment*. Castlering Archaeology Report No.243, September 2006

GSB Prospection Ltd., 2007, *Land at Oldport Farm, Oswestry, Shropshire*. Report 07/12, (Geophysical Surveys of Bradford unpublished report)

Department for Communities and Local Government, 2012, *National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)*. London: March 2012 (Online: <http://www.communities.gov.uk>)

Oxford Archaeology North, 2009, *Land at Oldport Farm, Oswestry, Shropshire, Archaeological Evaluation*. OAN, August 2009

10. HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT RECORDS REFERRED TO WITHIN THE TEXT

DESIGNATED HERITAGE ASSETS

| EH LIST NO. / HER. | SITE NAME | NGR | SHORT DESCRIPTION |
|--------------------|-------------------------------|----------------|--|
| 00332 | Oswestry Castle | SJ 2905 2981 | Grade II Listed remains of 13 th century masonry Castle on 12 th century motte (EH List No. 101 1367336). Approximately 0.9km southwest of Site 1 |
| 00351 | Old Oswestry Hill Fort | SJ 2956 3108 | Scheduled Monument of Iron Age date, boundary Approximately 700m west of Oldport Farm buildings |
| 00645 | Rhyn Park Roman military site | SJ 305 369 | The remains of a multi-phase Roman military site, including those of a 1st century AD legionary fort believed to have been part of Agricola's campaign in Wales. c.6 km north of the study area Scheduled Monument No. 1003716. Approximately 6 km north of the study area |
| 01001 | Wat's Dyke | SJ 2950 3100 | Scheduled Monument; linear earthwork that extends in the north-south direction to either side of the hillfort. Approximately 800m west of Site 1 |
| 01003 | Whittington Castle | SJ 32539 31132 | Standing, earthwork and buried remains of Whittington Castle. Scheduled Monument EH List No. 1019450; standing remains Grade I Listed EH No. 1178307. Approximately 1.7km northeast of Site 7 |

NON-DESIGNATED HERITAGE ASSETS

| HER. No. | SITE NAME | NGR | SHORT DESCRIPTION |
|----------|---|-----------------|---|
| 05779 | Shrewsbury, Oswestry and Chester Junction Railway | SJ 3007 3154 | In 1845 the Shrewsbury Oswestry and Chester Junction Railway was formed with the intention of constructing a line from the Shrewsbury to Chester railway at Gobowen, through Oswestry to Llanymynech. The line was only completed as far as Oswestry, in December 1848. Operated until 1966, when all Oswestry rail links were severed by Beeching. Runs parallel to Site 4 |
| 21491 | Vyrnwy Aqueduct | SJ 3171 3441 | Aqueduct opened in 1891, taking water from Lake Vyrnwy to Liverpool. Buried deeply below Sites 1, 4 and 7 |
| 21710 | Post-medieval Pit | SJ 3029 3083 | Pit forming a shallow sub-oval cut, probably truncated by modern ploughing. Excavated by OAN in 2009 in Site 5 |
| 21711 | Post-medieval Pit | SJ 3033 3070 | Shallow concave pit. Excavated by OAN in Trench 15 in 2009 in Site 5 |
| 21712 | Post-medieval Ditch | SJ 3019 3074 | Ditch, function not ascertained. Excavated by OAN in 2009 in Site 4 |
| 21713 | Park Hall Military Training Camp | SJ 3046 3107 | Park Hall estate given to military as local HQ; WWI & WWII training camps established. Troops trained on Hillfort & Oldport Farm land, with the area to the east of Old Oswestry Hillfort being used for excavating trenches and setting off explosives. Conveyed to the War Office in 1920; training camp used again from WW2 until 1968. Closed 1975. Adjoins Site 6 |
| 21714 | Mortar Crater | SJ 3033 3070 | Potential WW2 mortar crater located in Trench 15 by OAN in 2009. Not fully excavated. Fragments of ballistics and other unknown metal objects were partially excavated in Site 5 |
| 21715 | Mortar Crater | SJ 3018 3074 | Potential WW2 mortar crater located by OAN in 2009. Partially excavated in Site 5. South end of feature truncated, probably by subsequent ploughing. Metal fragments observed may be from a large mortar or shell casing. It was concluded, based on the shape of the pit and the number of metal objects present, that this feature was most likely to represent a crater, created as a result of mortar detonation and associated with the military training activities on the site |
| 26499 | Oldport Farm | SJ 2987 3077 | Farmstead first identified and classified by the Historic Farmsteads Characterisation Project, 2008 – 2010, largely from the digital version of the c.1900 OS large scale mapping |