

**Land at Great Barr, Sandwell, West Midlands**

**Archaeology & Heritage Assessment**



# Land at Great Barr, Sandwell

## Archaeology and Heritage Assessment

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Previously Identified Heritage

## Section 1: Introduction and Methodology

- 1.1. This Heritage Statement has been prepared by BSA Heritage Limited on behalf of Himor Group as an initial appraisal of archaeological potential and heritage interest for an area of land on the western edge of Great Barr, Sandwell, West Midlands.
- 1.2. It considers a site centred at NGR SP 03915 95491 and as shown in Figure 1. The overall area considered totals approximately 24 hectares. The site lies north west of the centre of Great Barr, on the northern edge of Sandwell Metropolitan Borough where it meets Walsall Borough. The site itself currently comprises of fifteen irregular pasture fields defined by hedgerows and with predominantly long grass.
- 1.3. The site area is bounded to the north west by pitches which form part of an extensive Aston University sports facility, to the north east by the A34 dual carriageway and to the south-west by a field. The Q3 Academy and its grounds also lie to the south. In the east, property boundaries off Peak House Road and Wilderness Lane mark the boundaries, with properties to the east of the latter.
- 1.4. A number of existing sources of information have been consulted to inform the assessment including both the Sandwell and Walsall Historic Environment Records (HER). These council databases hold records relating to known or suspected archaeological and heritage sites, findspots<sup>1</sup> and listed buildings within their respective areas.
- 1.5. The Borough websites and English Heritage's online National Heritage List for England, which was also consulted, hold details of designated heritage assets including listed buildings, conservation areas, scheduled monuments and registered landscapes.
- 1.6. Section 4 summarises the historical development of the area and site and was informed by resources consulted at Staffordshire Record Office and the William Salt Library in Stafford. The English Heritage Archive in Swindon was also visited and relevant secondary sources and aerial photographs of the site and environs viewed.
- 1.7. A site walkover was completed in good conditions in July 2014.
- 1.8. The above sources have allowed the potential for sub-surface archaeological remains within the site to be assessed. On-site and nearby heritage assets have also been identified. Further work which may be required to support development is outlined.

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<sup>1</sup> Findspots record the location of the recovery of archaeological material only, without associated features.

## Section 2: Policy Context

### National Policy

- 2.1. The *National Planning Policy Framework* (NPPF) covers all aspects of planning in one document in sixteen paragraphs under Section 12 of the NPPF (DCLG 2012). These paragraphs require developers secure an understanding of the significance of 'heritage assets', including archaeological remains which may be affected by proposals. The key objective asset out in relation to heritage is that significance should be sustained and enhanced. It is noted that definition of the heritage interest of an area may be informed by desk based assessment and, where appropriate, evaluative field investigation.
- 2.2. Heritage assets are defined in the NPPF glossary as any designated or undesignated element of the historic environment which is identified as being of such significance that it is a material consideration in the planning process. In determining applications which cause harm to heritage assets directly, or indirectly, through affecting a complementary setting, the NPPF recommends that considerable importance and weight should be given to their conservation when reaching a planning decision. However, this does represent a change from the 'presumption in favour of conservation' explicit in earlier policy.
- 2.3. The more important the asset, the greater the weight that should be ascribed. As heritage assets are irreplaceable, it is noted that any harm or loss should require clear and convincing justification. It notes that 'substantial harm' to or loss of designated heritage assets of the highest significance should be wholly exceptional (Paragraph 133). Paragraphs 134 and 135 clarify that, where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal, including safeguarding its future.
- 2.4. Paragraph 135 also notes that effects on the significance of non-designated heritage assets require a balanced judgement weighing the scale of impact and the significance of the heritage asset against the benefits of the proposed development. Where heritage assets are to be lost, the final paragraph in Section 12, Paragraph 141, confirms that a record of the elements to be lost should be provided and disseminated by the developer.

### Local Policy

- 2.5. The current local policy includes relevant policies of the Black Country Core Strategy 2011. In particular, Policy ENV2 Historic Character and Local Distinctiveness, echoes the NPPF and requires that these aspects are safeguarded and enhanced as part of any development proposals.
- 2.6. Although the Policy mentions a number of particular aspects of the area's distinct historic environment, that which is most relevant to the site is a requirement that any proposals have been informed by the distinctiveness of the location. The policy notes that an Historic Landscape Characterisation may be required to support an application.

## Section 3: Identified Heritage

### Designated Heritage

- 3.1. This section details the known designated heritage and past archaeological finds and identified sites within the study area. The section has been informed by information provided by both the Sandwell and Walsall Historic Environment Records (HER) and also available via the English Heritage 'National Heritage List for England'.
- 3.2. The closest designated heritage asset to the site itself is the Grade II registered Great Barr Park which extends around Great Barr Hall, well to the east of the site. Merrion's Wood is included in this historic landscape designation and, at its closest point, lies on the far side of the A34, north of the site (Figure 1). Merrion's Wood was a late 18<sup>th</sup> century addition to the park design, with replanting of an earlier wood and a drive running from Walsall or Merrion Lodge through the woodland.
- 3.3. The closest listed buildings to the site include Walsall or Merrion Lodge, the Grade II 1854 lodge at the western entrance to Great Barr Park and 200m north of the site is thought to have been the work of George Gilbert Scott (A, Figure 1). Listed Building B, over 400m east of the site, is the former Vicarage which is also Grade II listed and dates to the 19<sup>th</sup> century. South east of the site, Building C is the Grade II Poolside House which is of 18<sup>th</sup> century date.
- 3.4. The only designated heritage within the study area and west of the site is an 1840s' accommodation bridge across the Rushall Canal, which opened in 1847. This is of cast iron on brick and stone footings and lies circa 250m south west of the site (Figure 1).
- 3.5. The Sandwell HER designates all of the site and also adjacent land to its south as 'an area of potential archaeological interest' (Figure 1). This is a Borough designation which highlights the area as worthy of further archaeological investigation should development proposals come forward for the site.

### Other Records

- 3.6. The earliest find or record for the site is HER 1721 which records the find of a broken polished stone axe dating to the Neolithic (Figure 1). This was found in the northern tip of the site according to the Sandwell HER, but unfortunately, there is no further information which confirms when and how this was recovered.
- 3.7. The only other potentially prehistoric record held by either HER is HER 4756, south of the site. This notes several linear marks seen on aerial images which appeared to form an enclosure. The Sandwell HER notes that this feature now lies under a running track, presumably part of the Q3 Academy. There is no information on any archaeological investigations completed as part of the construction of either the Academy, or the sport pitches north of the site.
- 3.8. Perhaps the most conclusive evidence for remains within the site is recorded under HER 2824, which also defines a whole field in the east of the site, rather than a single point (Figure 1). This record is for a possible medieval moat within the field. This is based partly on fieldname evidence; two fields are recorded as Great and Little Moat Piece to its north east. The field also has a long pond running along its northern boundary and other depressions and linear features have been noted within the field during field visits and on certain aerial images.

- 3.9. The conclusion is that the features are likely to reflect a medieval moat in an area which is likely to reflect medieval enclosure. The extant linear pond may be a fishpond rather than an arm of the moat, whilst two entrances into the moated area and dimensions of 80m by 40m for the moat 'platform' have been postulated. The moat is noted as earlier than the hedgerows around it.
- 3.10. Moats are a typical medieval monument type, and the best are scheduled monuments. They appear to have often been built away from settlement and although some contained high status residences, others have been proven to have been left undeveloped, perhaps for orchards or stock. Although the moat may well have provided security, it is thought owning a moat became a fashionable symbol of high status. Important archaeological deposits can be preserved within associated waterlogged deposits.
- 3.11. A large number of the Sandwell HER records are based on an ecological survey of hedgerows in the area completed by the 'Urban Wildlife Trust'. Within or on the edge of the site, HERs 4262, 4264 to 4266 and 6424 record hedgerows which were defined as 'ancient' given their flora. The survey also concluded that the hedgerows might be woodland remnants, suggesting the fields might have been created from woodland through a process known as assarting. 'Ancient' might actually suggest a medieval or even early post-medieval origin to the field system. Ditches and banks are also noted in places (HERs 4264, 6424). HERs 6425 and 4500, beyond the site to the west, record an ancient wood and hedgerow respectively.
- 3.12. Almost certainly of post-medieval date is Peak House Farm, immediately east of the site (HER 10273). The HER notes it being marked as 'Pig Lane Farm' on the first edition Ordnance Survey map.
- 3.13. Two other HER records within the site, HERs 4757 and 6355, record cropmark features noted on aerial photographs. As linear features noted under HER 4757 respect the surviving field boundaries, they are likely to be contemporary or later. The sinuous appearance of the linear cropmark noted under HER 6355 in the south west of the site suggests it might reflect a natural feature such as a watercourse.
- 3.14. Two records relating to a findspot in the west of the site (HER 9083) and fieldwork to the south east (HER 5722) shed little light on the potential of the site. HER 9083 notes the find of 'undated' coins reported by the farmer, whilst HER 5722 records that a watching brief during limited excavation of foundations observed no archaeology, but confirmed a sandy natural geology.
- 3.15. Information supplied by Walsall HER was limited to records relating to Great Barr Park, including Merrion Wood and also other 'ancient' hedgerows beyond the site. No records relating to archaeological finds or investigation were available which might have informed an assessment of the site's archaeological potential.

## Section 4: Documentary & Other Sources

- 4.1. Staffordshire Record Office and the William Salt Library were both visited as Great Barr lay historically in the parish of Aldridge in Staffordshire. Indexes were searched and relevant documents were consulted. These sources were complemented by aerial photographs and secondary sources held by the English Heritage Archive in Swindon.
- 4.2. Although Wate's 1775 map and early 19<sup>th</sup> century maps of the area show Wilderness Lane and the road to the north, the earliest detailed map for the site is the 1852 Aldridge Tithe map. The field layout at this time was almost identical, although three of the larger fields were subdivided (Figure 1). The fields in the east have subsequently been truncated by development along Peak House Road and those in the north by the A34.
- 4.3. The Tithe apportionment confirms that the site was a mix of arable, pasture and meadow at the time, with more than half the area cultivated, where the land is more level, with meadow and pasture on the steeper ground. Wilderness Lane was in place, whilst that to the north was 'Pig Lane', not 'Peak Lane'. The change probably reflects late Victorian prudery and was also applied to the farm, which was in place by 1852 too.
- 4.4. The only field names which suggest archaeological potential are Little and Great Moat Piece, as noted above. The former lay beyond the site area, whilst the latter actually relates to the field north of the long pond. To the south the field noted by Sandwell HER as containing a moat was called 'Hockett Meadow'.
- 4.5. Little change is apparent on the Ordnance Survey six inch maps, although three larger fields had been created by the second edition map through the loss of intervening boundaries and the farm and road names had been 'prettified'. The OS maps confirm that only a small number of buildings lay nearby at this time. No change is apparent within the site on later pre-war maps, although the development of the surrounding area is clear, with some housing east of the site by 1938.
- 4.6. Secondary sources do not provide any further information for the site area itself. Horowitz confirms that Aldridge parish is documented in the 10<sup>th</sup> century, with Great Barr one of its manors. Hodder confirms evidence for prehistoric activity in the area, but no reference specific to the Neolithic axe itself could be found (Hodder 2004).

### Aerial Photographs

- 4.7. More than a hundred images of the site and its environs were available to view at the English Heritage Archive. Although many of these were of the M6's construction in the late 1960s, images of the site itself were available from every decade and between 1948 and 2000.
- 4.8. Some of the features recorded by the Sandwell HER could be seen on aerial images. In the south west of the site, a number of broad linear marks looked likely to reflect watercourses. Features were apparent within the moat field, with 1969 photographs suggesting a linear running across much of the field south west to north east and two shorter linears running off it to the north west, with the hint of a corner in the south east.
- 4.9. Not previously recorded, a linear runs in the centre of the site which appears to have an enclosure type feature at its northern end. Such cropmarks tend to reflect late prehistoric field patterns or farmsteads. HER 4756 to the south west of the site sounds to have been a similar type of cropmark.



- 4.10. The aerial images also confirm the development of the surrounding area and show farming activity within the site, with arable cultivation across much of the land in the post-war period, including the moat field at times.
- 4.11. A small building is shown in the west of the site in the 1940s, whilst not all of the housing to the east was in place until the early 1960s. The Q3 Academy was built on the site of a 1960s' school, whilst the sports pitches appear to have all been in place by the late 1980s'.

## Section 5: Site Walkover

- 5.1. The site was visited in July 2014 in order to check the known features within the site and for any hitherto unidentified heritage features. The visit was also useful in confirming current land use and topography. The site visit also allowed a consideration of the nearby designated heritage assets and how, given topography, built form and vegetation, their settings might be affected.
- 5.2. The site itself consists of a total of fifteen fields which are covered in long grass or rough pasture. The land slopes steeply downwards from east to west and from circa 160m Above Ordnance Datum to circa 130m AOD.
- 5.3. The fields are bounded in large part by well vegetated hedgerows, with some field boundaries also demarcated by ditches with running water. The hedgerows are particularly well established in the west and south of the site.
- 5.4. The field which may contain a moat was also overgrown, but the long pond running along its eastern boundary and smaller pond to its west, on the northern boundary, were visible. Although the height of grass in the field limited visibility, there was no indication of any platform within the 'moat'. A number of greener areas of grass did suggest marshy ground, with one such area in the north western corner of the field, but no indication of any linear ditches so revealed.
- 5.5. No significant built structures lie within the site, although the northern fields are in use as horse paddocks. The Victorian farmhouse and some related buildings lie adjacent to the site's north eastern corner. Next to these is a likely industrial or commercial brick structure in poor condition and which forms part of a plot with planning permission.
- 5.6. No designated heritage assets are inter-visible with the site apart from the western part of Great Barr Registered park and its Grade II lodge. These have views across the dual carriageway and past the sports complex's parking and entrance area to the north western corner of the site. All nearby listed buildings were proven to be screened from the site by later buildings and topography.
- 5.7. The areas surrounding the site are all more urban in character except a field to the south west. The gardens of houses on Peak House Road give way to house frontages overlooking the site on Wilderness Lane, whilst the new Academy buildings and grounds and the sports facilities to the north give the environs an urban character.

## Section 6: Archaeological Potential

- 6.1. No designated archaeological assets have been identified as lying within or close to the site other than Great Barr Registered Park and listed buildings of post-medieval date. Indeed, only one of the records held by either HER for the study area is pre-medieval, being to the find of a Neolithic axe in the northern tip of the site, with no further information on this find.
- 6.2. The field arrangement has an irregular form which may reflect quite early enclosure and possibly 'assarting' or the creation of fields from land which had been wooded. Great Barr was certainly settled and farmed by the medieval period and there is field name evidence and water bodies which suggest that a moat lay in a field on the eastern side of the site, by Wilderness Lane. Such sites tend to be discrete and not necessarily associated with related settlement activity. They can rate as of local to national significance.
- 6.3. A number of cropmarks have been recorded from aerial photographs, and one of these does appear to indicate ditches including one which has the appearance of a late prehistoric enclosure. Other marks are more likely to reflect either slighted field boundaries or natural features.
- 6.4. Although there are likely to be sub-surface archaeological remains within the site, the site has seen cultivation in the past and any remains are likely to have been truncated by such activity. Away from the potential moat, if prehistoric sub-surface remains survive, these are unlikely to rate as of greater than local significance.

## Section 7: Summary and Conclusions

- 7.1. This assessment has been prepared on behalf of Himor Group to inform an understanding of the known heritage constraints and archaeological potential of an area of agricultural land west of Great Barr, Sandwell, West Midlands.
- 7.2. The statement has been informed by consultation with both the Sandwell and Walsall Historic Environment Records and visits to the Staffordshire Record Office and William Salt Library in Stafford and English Heritage Archive in Swindon. English Heritage's National Heritage List for England and both councils' websites have complemented these sources. A walkover survey in July 2014 completed the work informing the report.
- 7.3. In relation to archaeology, there is some evidence for remains within the site including the find of a Neolithic stone axe in the north, cropmark features in the centre and the possible remains of a moat in the east. The archaeological potential of the site and land to its south is recognised by a local designation.
- 7.4. Although any such remains may have been truncated by ploughing in the past, any planning application will need to be supported by archaeological evaluation. Assuming the long grass is cut, geophysical survey might be an efficient first phase. Targeted trial trenching could then focus on anomalies identified by the geophysics.
- 7.5. If remains relating to a medieval moat are proven, it is likely that these would need to be preserved in situ under open space. However, the ponds are likely to have to be retained for ecological reasons and this area is well located to provide open space as it lies opposite existing properties. It is unlikely that any significant related archaeological remains are extensive.
- 7.6. Other archaeological remains are unlikely to require preservation in situ and should not constrain design of a scheme. It is likely that such remains could be dealt with through further investigation ahead of construction.
- 7.7. The field pattern within the site is a rare survival of a possibly medieval landscape within this part of the West Midlands conurbation. Any proposals should seek to retain as much of the hedgerows and ditches as possible. These have landscape and ecological significance too and would help to screen development from surrounding areas.
- 7.8. It is likely that any planning application would need to be supported by a full Historic Landscape Characterisation. Although there is no actual national or local historic landscape designation covering the site, proving proposals are sympathetic to this significance is likely to be a key issue. However, it is clear that the landscape surrounding the site is dynamic and much altered.
- 7.9. Although part of the Registered Great Bar Park and a number of listed structures lie within the study area, none of these is likely to be adversely affected by sensitive development of the site.

## Section 8 References and Sources

Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) 2011 *Draft National Planning Policy Framework* London

Dudley, Sandwell, Walsall and Wolverhampton Metropolitan Borough Councils 2012 *Black Country Core Strategy*

English Heritage (EH) 2010 *Planning Policy Statement 5: Planning for the Historic Environment – Historic Environment Planning Practice Guide* London (with DCLG and DCMS)

Field J. 1972 *Field Names: a Dictionary* London

Gould J. 1983 *Men of Aldridge* Stroud

Hodder M. 2004 *Birmingham – the Hidden History* Stroud

Horowitz D. 2005 *The Place Names of Staffordshire* Brewood

Oakeden J. P. 1984 *The Place-Names of Staffordshire* Cambridge

Smith J. F. 1889 *Notes and Collections Relating to the Parish of Aldridge in the County of Stafford* Stafford

### Maps

Yate's map of Staffordshire, 1775

Greenwood's map of Staffordshire, 1820

Ordnance Survey two inch to the mile map of Staffordshire, 1815 - 1820

Aldridge Tithe map and apportionment, 1852

First, second, third and provisional edition six inch to the mile Ordnance Survey maps of 1886/7, 1903/4, 1920/1 & 1938 (Sheets 63 SE & 68 NE)

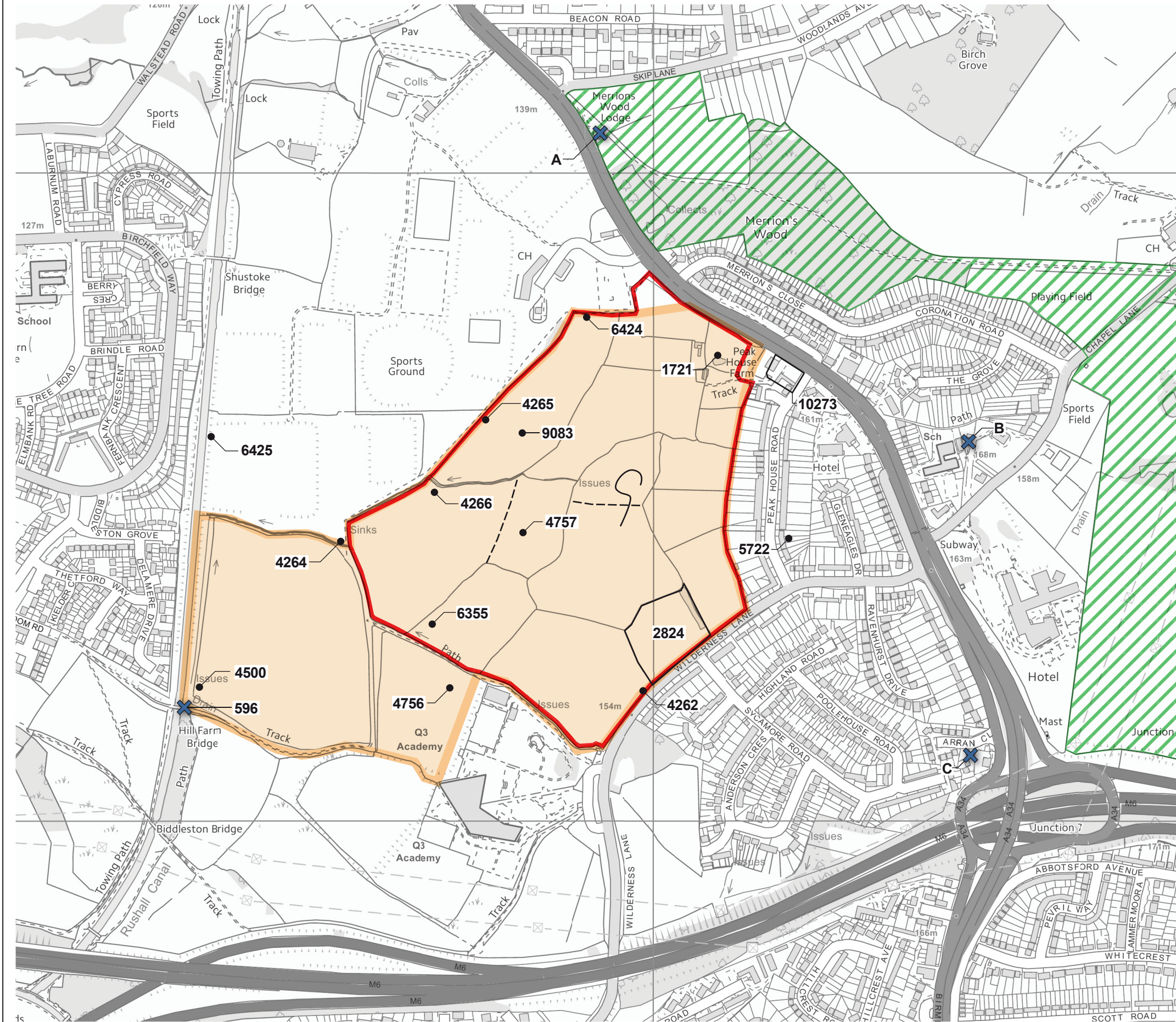
### Web Sources

English Heritage's National Heritage List for England accessed at [www.english-heritage.org.uk/professional/protection/process/national-heritage-list-for-england](http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/professional/protection/process/national-heritage-list-for-england)

Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council website accessed at [www.sandwell.gov.uk](http://www.sandwell.gov.uk)

## Figure 1: Previously Identified Heritage





- KEY:
- Site boundary
  - Great Barr Park
  - Listed building
  - Historical field boundaries
  - Cropmark feature
  - Area of Potential Archaeological Interest
  - HER record



Project Land at Great Barr, Sandwell, West Midlands  
 Drawing Title **Figure 1: Previously Identified Heritage**  
 Scale As shown (approximate at A3)  
 Drawing No. BSA 1432\_f01  
 Date August 2014  
 Checked BS/MP