



GMAAS
Greater Manchester Archaeological Advisory Service

Greater Manchester Archaeological Advisory Service
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Mr R. Grant
Principal Planning Officer (Growth)
Planning & Development
Rochdale Borough Council
Floor 3, Number One Riverside
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Date: 19th May 2025

Dear Ryan

RE: Archaeological Consultation: Application 25/00418/OUT - Application for outline planning permission (all matters reserved) for a national-scale employment development, comprising Storage & Distribution (Use Class B8) and Industrial (Use Classes B2, E(g)(ii) and E(g)(iii)) uses (including, but not limited to, Logistics, Manufacturing Processes and Data Centres), with supporting ancillary uses including Hotel (Use Class C1), Commercial & Business & Service (Uses Class E(a - g)), Education (Use Class F1(a)), Local Community (Use Class F2(a - c) uses, Sui Generis uses (in accordance with the Uses Schedule), and associated demolition works, landscaping, drainage, ecological enhancements, highway works, cycleway and footpath linkages and other ancillary infrastructure - Land Bound to the North by Brightley Brook, Pilsworth Fisheries, Pilsworth Road & Heywood Distribution Park; the West by Whittle Brook; the East by Birch Industrial Park & Agricultural Fields; and the South by the M62 Corridor

Thank you for consulting GMAAS on the above application.

The application site is of considerable archaeological interest, as has been demonstrated by several investigations that have previously identified significant evidence for a deserted medieval settlement and associated iron-smelting activity. This was confirmed in 2022 via an extensive programme of archaeological evaluation trenching and test pitting that was undertaken to inform the Northern Gateway development proposals and uncovered rare physical evidence for tap slag from an iron furnace of probable medieval date, together with considerable quantities of other types of smelting slag and some evidence for ore roasting. An interesting assemblage of medieval and post-medieval pottery was also recovered from the excavated trenches and test pits. A report presenting the result from this evaluation was prepared by L-P Archaeology in December 2022. Recommendations for further analytical work on the dataset are set out in the report, including radiocarbon dating of charcoal in some samples recovered from the fieldwork, although GMAAS is unclear whether this recommended analytical work has been progressed.

The proposed development allows for the demolition of several buildings, including Meadowcroft Fold Barns and Farmhouse, Higher Fields Farm and Broomhill Farm, which are all considered to constitute non-designated heritage assets. Delivery of the proposed scheme will also necessitate extensive ground-breaking works, which have potential to damage or remove below-ground remains of archaeological interest. This impact on the historic built environment and the below-ground archaeological resource will require a strategy to be implemented that offsets the harm of development.



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The application is supported by an archaeological assessment prepared by Orion in April 2025, which acknowledges the potential significance of the archaeological resource of the application site, but falls short of making specific recommendations for a strategy to offset the impact of development on archaeological remains. That said, a Written Scheme of Investigation for a programme of intrusive archaeological investigation is included as Appendix C to the desk-based assessment, which allows for a 'strip, map and record' excavation targeted on part of the site known to contain significant archaeological evidence for medieval ironworking. This document sets out an appropriate strategy for investigating the archaeological remains known to exist in the central part of the site, but fails to consider the historic farm buildings that are to be demolished and the potential for archaeological remains to exist within their footprint. In particular, there is potential for medieval remains to extend beneath Meadowcroft Fold Barns, which will require investigation following the demolition of the standing structures. It is also noted that the Written Scheme of Investigation was prepared by a company that has since ceased trading, and should be updated to include details of the archaeological contractor that will be undertaking the work.

GMAAS recommends that a programme of archaeological investigation will be required in advance or and during development. In the first instance, a historic building investigation of the redundant barns and farmhouses proposed for demolition should be implemented to clarify their construction date and the extent of surviving original fabric. The merits of implementing scientific dating techniques such as dendrochronology to timber members should be assessed as part of the investigation. The potential for below-ground remains of archaeological interest across the sites of these buildings should also be investigated following demolition. In addition, the area of medieval ironworking in the central part of the application site should be subject to a 'strip, map and record' excavation, in line with the methodology set out in the Written Scheme of Investigation submitted with the application, although this document needs to be updated before it can be approved.

GMAAS accepts that any below-ground archaeological remains that do survive across the application site will not be of national importance requiring preservation *in-situ*, and therefore archaeological interests can be secured through a condition attached to planning consent. The condition should be worded as follows:

'No development works shall take place until the applicant or their agents or successors in title has secured the implementation of a programme of archaeological works. The works are to be undertaken in accordance with a Project Design submitted to and approved in writing by Rochdale Planning Authority. The Project Design shall cover the following:

1. Informed by the updated North West Archaeological Research Framework, a phased programme and methodology of investigation and recording to include:

- historic building investigation commensurate with a Level 2/3 survey, including an assessment of structural timbers for dendrochronology;***
- an archaeological evaluation of sites of buildings proposed for demolition;***
- targeted 'strip, map and record' excavation of the area known to contain evidence for medieval ironworking.***

2. A programme for post-investigation assessment to include:

- production of a final report on the significance of the below-ground archaeological interest.***

3. Deposition of the final report with the Greater Manchester Historic Environment Record.

4. Dissemination of the results of the archaeological investigations commensurate with their significance, which may include preparation of a booklet in the Greater Manchester's Past Revealed series.

5. Provision for archive deposition of the report and records of the site investigation.

6. Nomination of a competent person or persons / organisation to undertake the works set out within the approved Project Design.

Reason: In accordance with Policy JP-P2 of the Places for Everyone Joint Development Plan and NPPF Policy 218 – ‘To record and advance understanding of heritage assets impacted on by the development and to make information about the heritage interest publicly accessible.’

All archaeological work should be undertaken by a suitably qualified and experienced archaeological contractor, funded by the applicant. GMAAS will approve the Project Design and will also monitor the implementation and progress of the archaeological works on behalf of Rochdale Planning Authority.

Yours sincerely



Ian Miller BA FSA

Heritage Management Director

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