

Planning and Heritage Management in a World Heritage Site. A case study

The Proposal

12NP0108 *Construction of additional car parking area to create a further 40 No. Parking bays.* Housesteads Visitor Centre, Haydon Bridge, Hexham, Northumberland NE47 6NN.

Applicant: Northumberland National Park Authority. LPA: Northumberland National Park Authority

Details

In October 2012 Northumberland National Park Authority submitted a planning application for the extension of Housesteads car park (12NP0108), creating an additional 40 spaces on land to the south between the southern boundary of the existing site and the highway verge.

The proposal site lay within an area of high archaeological sensitivity, adjacent to Scheduled Monument 101858 (*Housesteads Fort, section of Wall and Vallum between the field boundary west of Milecastle 36 and the field boundary west of turret 37a in wall miles 36 and 37*) and 1018531 (*Bowl Barrow 420m south west of New Beggarbog*). Owing to this sensitivity, extensive discussions took place between the Authority and Historic England and a pre-application archaeological evaluation was commissioned, which took place in June 2012. No archaeological features were observed in either of the two evaluation trenches excavated, which comprised a 5% sample across the proposal area.

During the application process, acting upon advice from Historic England, further information was provided which highlighted the potential for the survival of unknown



The morning of 15th February and conditions on site deteriorate

archaeological remains and a suggested that archaeological monitoring of the construction of the car park was necessary. The development was granted permission subject to conditions, including (Condition 4) which required a programme of archaeological works to be commissioned by the applicant, in the form of an archaeological watching brief. The Archaeological Practice were duly appointed to provide the watching brief.

During the construction of the car park extension in late January 2016, the monitoring archaeologist halted works following the identification of archaeological remains. These consisted of a line of medium sized cobbles observed running across the site on an approximately north-west/south-east orientation, apparently forming a kerb. It was clear that this was an extensive feature, of potential if unknown significance, which required careful cleaning in order to define it. Discussions between the applicant, the National Park Historic Environment Officer and Historic England agreed that the Archaeological Practice would have additional time and resources in order to better understand the feature and inform further discussions on their appropriate treatment.

Owing to the time of year and location, the project was vulnerable to poor weather conditions. Wintry weather led to the effective postponement of detailed cleaning due to the presence of ice and snow on site. Once the ice had thawed this presented a problem of excessively wet conditions and water had to be pumped off site to allow any archaeological work to take place.

As a result of lost time, additional personnel were drafted onto site, consisting of six professional archaeologists were on the site, working with a further six volunteers.

The feature

The principal feature was a cobble road aligned ENE-WSW, running at an oblique angle to the carriageway of the B6318 "Military Road" and extending over a distance of 37m to the western end of the site. This included a kerb of glacial boulders and sandstone slabs which formed the northern edge of the road, with a surface comprising small sandstone cobbling and sandstone slabs laid flat. No evidence of a kerb was observed on the south side of the road. Some 2nd or 3rd century pottery and tile on the excavated surface and, in places, wedged between the stones, though none to provide



Further cleaning reveals the quality of the road surface

a date for the construction of the road. The absence of post Roman pottery on the surface and its relationship to features in the landscape suggest a Roman date for the newly discovered road.

Preservation in situ

As a result of the discussions, it was agreed that the Roman road should be preserved in-situ beneath the new car park area. Preserving the feature in-situ required it to be covered with layers of sand and geotextile beneath the sub-base beneath the finished car park level. This required redesign of the car park layout and a further planning application. In this, the finished level was raised 700mm, the number of spaces reduced to 36 and moved to the north in order to avoid the location of the road.

Outreach and public engagement

Given the site location in adjacent to the Housesteads Visitor reception building, some form of explanation to members of the public was considered beneficial. This consisted of on-site banners, social media announcements and site tours by the excavation team. Internal communications were also maintained to ensure that National Park Authority staff and members received up-to-date information on the progress of the work.

The Archaeological Practice, who carried out the watching brief and additional on site investigation and recording, completed a report on the work and plans for the publication in summary form are well advanced.



The site viewed from the air adjacent and underneath the 18th century military road

Conclusions

The development has tested the robustness of the existing policy framework and also drawn upon existing best practice, demonstrating that a significant find could be appropriately protected whilst enabling development to take place. There were significant financial and time costs to the developer which resulted in a reduction in additional capacity and lost revenue as a result of this and the delay in completing the development. The approach taken has been in line with best practice, however, informed by careful treatment of the remains and in consultation with both Historic England and acknowledged experts in the field of Roman archaeology.

Further information can be accessed in the report by The Archaeological Practice which followed the work.

Rushworth, A and Johnstone, M (2017) *Northumberland National Park Car Park, Housesteads Roman site, Northumberland: Report on an Archaeological Watching Brief and Mitigation Excavation*. The Archaeological Practice (AP16/05)

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