

Effective EIA and community involvement for archaeologically sensitive sites

Introduction

Marham Park is a planned residential development north west of Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk. Acting as archaeological and heritage advisors, we were responsible for EIA and the discharge of archaeological conditions attached to the planning permission. Our role also included overseeing land acquisition, local plan promotion, providing assessment to inform the masterplan, and the negotiation of archaeological mitigation before construction.

- 1 We provided heritage due diligence to Countryside Properties to inform their land tenancy agreement. This made us aware of the nationally significant archaeological landscape close to the site, none of which lay above ground. Without early heritage advice the agreement would have included fields containing and adjacent to the archaeological sites that would have sterilised developable land.
- 2 As part of our EIA, we undertook extensive consultation with the Suffolk County Council Archaeology Officer (SCCAO) and commissioned several stages of site-specific archaeological evaluation to better understand the resource on site. All reports were technical appendices to the cultural heritage chapter in the submitted ES. Planning consent was achieved in 2015.
- 3 Following the grant of planning consent, a small number of local residents lodged a complaint with the Local Government Ombudsman. The complaint centred around the scope and findings of the archaeological surveys. However, the Ombudsman rejected the complaint, concluding that it failed to acknowledge the transparent nature of our EIA, which was prepared in negotiation with the SCCAO and clearly evaluated the location, extent and significance of archaeology to allow a suitable mitigation strategy to be agreed with the local planning authority.
- 4 When the agreed scheme of archaeological mitigation was implemented between March 2016 and October 2017, Countryside Properties sought to explain the excavation strategy through public open days and sharing information with local schools, parish councils, local societies and interest groups. In total Suffolk Archaeology undertook four successful Open Days with over 1,000 visitors.
- 5 During the excavations a volunteer project gave members of the public a chance to excavate Iron Age pits on the site under the supervision of professional archaeologists. The volunteers learnt about all aspects of field archaeology and also helped to process their finds for specialist analysis. A number of volunteers have been employed within Suffolk Archaeology because of their aptitude and enthusiasm, with one assisting with future public outreach.

Commentary

The professional and transparent manner in which the archaeological scheme of investigation has been implemented by all parties has fully satisfied the mitigation measures outlined in our EIA. Our early consultation with key stakeholders, as well as involvement in due diligence, reaped rewards in terms of ensuring good professional relationships were nurtured early and reducing risks to the development.



Further information

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