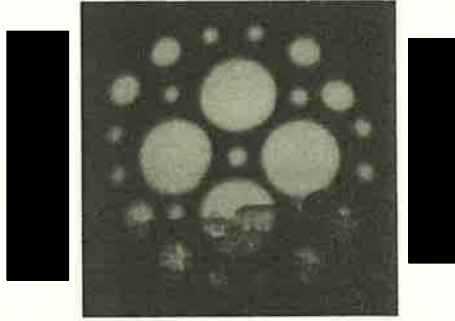


Jemma Foster
Case Officer
Planning Dept.
Milton Keynes Council

RE: TY/2025/09486

"Land south of
Trowbridge"



Dear Jemma Foster,

18th January 2026

Ideally, sites with significant archaeology are not allocated for housing development. In the case of Southwicks Court Fields "Land south of Trowbridge", this is exactly what has happened.

A compromise has been reached whereby the whole site is to be excavated prior to building work, but this will destroy remains of national importance and Historic England accordingly maintain an objection.

Their opinion has partly been based on a 1976 aerial photograph (from their collection) suggesting a late Roman courtyard villa (as large as anything discovered in this country to date) at the Southeastern 'wood marsh' end of the site.

Cotswold Archaeology (on behalf of the Outline applicant) have ignored any evidence (the 1976 photograph, LiDAR, my analysis and interpretation) not produced by their own investigations. This has consistently underplayed the importance of the remains. First there was 'nothing there', then perhaps there were 'channels for watermeadows' (previously dismissed). Then undeniably Roman material came to light, but since a concentration of high status pottery from the courtyard villa was lumped in with coarser material from across the whole site, it was possible to argue the villa was a small 'low status rural farmstead' (by such means the significance of the site can remain 'undiscovered' until it has been destroyed and it is too late to save it).

Most of the complex has been robbed out (likely for building materials in the middle ages) which explains why nothing appeared

on the previous geophysical survey, which Cotswold argue proves the villa does not exist. In fact, the slightly grainy quality of the parching in the 1976 photo is caused by the backfill of robbed foundations drying quicker than the surrounding clay (which geophysicists would not detect). However there is much of archaeological interest and the waterlogged system of drainage ditches contain rare and fragile organic material.

This proposal would build over the North East third of the villa and obliterate the adjoining commercial settlement along the Roman road (from Bradford on Avon to Westbury). This includes ^{indications of a} ~~a~~ cemetery, a smithy (a statue of Vulcan, god of metalworking - now in Devizes Museum - was ploughed up in a neighbouring field) and shops which were timber framed buildings (and so did not show up on either the aerial photo or LiDAR).

The higher ground at the western end of the site appears to have been the site of the first (c2?) phase of the villa, surrounded by a defensive V section ^{double} ditch that was exposed during Cotswold's trenching in Spring 2023 (though they have claimed this is "watermeadow features"). Previously they had identified this as a "former droveway"; now they apply this term to the Roman road. This phase I villa will disappear under the three westernmost blocks of proposed housing and is also of national importance since these smaller, earlier villas are usually concealed by later phases of elaboration. In this case the later villa appears to have moved to lower ground in order to channel water from the stream to the baths. That in turn necessitated the drainage ditch system organized using the Roman system of centuriation (which Cotswold's trenching has corroborated). Again, as far as I know, this is a unique feature.

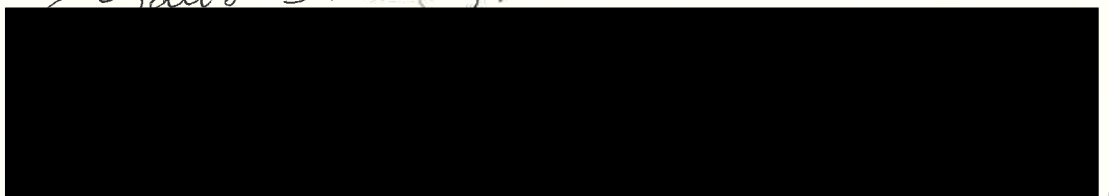
Stone fragments (trimmed off when blocks were squared down for recycling) at the South west end of the mound likely indicate a mausoleum or shrine in the late Roman period.

~ and the concentration of flints in the same area indicates a long established (likely seasonal) prehistoric settlement. Some of these have been identified as "neolithic at least" (by Exeter University), but their typology and the fact the tools are embedded in clay may indicate they date from the ice age. Only a handful of open-air paleolithic settlements are known from Britain (much of what we know has come from caves) - so again "potentially of national importance". This settlement is threatened by a drainage pond and the western end of the house building.

Even if the current situation is something of a political quagmire, the site could still be scheduled (in the way buildings threatened by development can be spot-listed). It is of a part with the medieval moated Southwicks court (which has re-used roman stones - shaped in roman inches - in the paving of the gatehouse) and would make a splendid extension to Southwicks Country Park. Certainly, detailed consent should be withheld until the full significance of the remains have been appreciated and can be accordingly evaluated.

Alternatively, if archaeological material of national importance is going to be lost, then what replaces it should make a contribution to the country's building stock that is of equal value. The quality of the current proposal from Wain Homes is pitiful and entirely without architectural merit or sense of place. It should therefore be rejected.

Yours sincerely,



(Committee member, West Wilts. Campaign to protect Rural England).

cc- Neil Adam, Wilts. Archaeological Service.