



Comments on: The 2019 *Black Country* *Historic Landscape* *Characterisation Study*

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Cover image: An approximate representation of the residential and industrial development around Stourbridge from c.1814 to c.2008. Adapted from: Ordnance Survey surveyor's drawing of Stourbridge, Amblecote, Halesowen and Hagley (1814); Ordnance Survey 6" County Series maps (1903 and 1948); Stourbridge Planning Department's *Development of Stourbridge* map (1963), and Ordnance Survey 1:25000 Explorer sheet 219 (2008).

Comments on the 2019 *Black Country Historic Landscape Characterisation Study*¹

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This 'Final Report' (hereafter referred to as the 'HLC Study') produced by Oxford Archaeology Ltd. and dated 30th October 2019, is part of the evidence base to be used by Dudley MBC planners, informing their choice of sites for development in the forthcoming Black Country Plan. It is available online at:

https://blackcountryplan.dudley.gov.uk/media/13895/comp_black-country-hlc-final-report-30-10-2019-lr_redacted.pdf

It covers the whole of the Black Country region, but only those parts pertaining to Stourbridge's Green Belt and adjacent land are discussed in the present document.

The HLC Study assigns relevant areas of the landscape to one of four categories (i.e. Historic Environment Designations):

- APA = Archaeological Priority Area
- AHHLV = Area of High Historic Landscape Value
- AHHTV = Area of High Historic Townscape Value
- DLHHV = Designed Landscapes of High Historic Value

These designations are broadly self-explanatory, but further details of their meanings, and the criteria used to identify each designated area of the landscape, are given in section 5 of the HLC Study (pages 52–8). In the vicinity of Stourbridge's Green Belt, only the first two designations are relevant. Of the designated areas defined in the report, only the following four will be commented on here:

AHHLV29: Buckbury

This covers the following *Call for Sites* (development) submissions:

- 10114: Stourbridge Golf Course and the fields south of Racecourse Lane
- 10045: Small area adjacent to County Lane
- 10339: Small area near the south end of Ounty John Lane
- 10137: Small area near the south end of Ounty John Lane, overlapping site 10114
- 10050: Two fields between Worcester Lane and the railway track
- 10103: Field south of Bromwich Lane

AHHLV30: Pedmore and Foxcote

This covers the following *Call for Sites* development submissions:

- 10142: Two large areas of Wychbury hill, north and south of Pedmore Hall
- 10203: Field overlapping the southern part of site 10142
- 10230: A small site near Oldnall
- 10216: A very extensive site at Oldnall, covering 'Flint Field' and adjacent land
- 10178: Field at Foxcote
- 10271: Field at Foxcote
- 10295: A very large expanse at Foxcote and Sidens Hill; overlaps site 10178
- 10225: Fields near Caslon Primary School, Cradley
- 10218: Field at Lutley

10219: Field at Lutley
10319: Field at Lutley

The foregoing list excludes *Call for Sites* submissions related to Local Green Space (LGS) applications and similar, although it should be noted that a number of these green space submissions now overlap the Oldnall 'development' submissions and the north-west corner of submission 10295 at Foxcote.

APA35: Pedmore Roman Road

This covers that section of the Droitwich-to-Greensforge Roman road (M 192) lying between the south end of County Lane and the south end of Clent View Road, together with a narrow strip of adjacent land. The portion of the Roman road lying within the proposed development site (10280) at Clent View Road is not covered in the HLC Study, as this section falls within Staffordshire rather than one of the four Black Country local authority areas. APA35 partially overlaps with *Call for Sites* submission 10114.

APA39: Prehistoric Flint Scatter and Burnt Mound

This corresponds to an area, wholly within AHHLV29, in which evidence of prehistoric settlement (including a Neolithic pit alignment and Bronze Age artefacts and pits), and an undated set of 'D'-shaped crop marks, have been discovered.

Apparent Omissions from the HLC Study

Section 3.2.4 acknowledges that '...less is known about the historic environment of the Green Belt areas' and that '...the distribution of known archaeological sites within the HERs is unlikely to represent the true distribution of archaeological remains within the Black Country; instead it represents the distribution of previous archaeological investigation'.

While it is not to be expected that the HLC Study would contain detailed or extensive archaeological information, it does present a brief overview of each designated area, together with examples of the most prominent or important archaeological features present. In that regard, there are some notable omissions relating to the abovementioned AHHLVs and APAs. These are described below in, perhaps, slightly more detail than would be appropriate for the summaries contained in the HLC Study.

AHHLV29 (Buckbury), APA35 (Pedmore Roman Road) and APA39 (Prehistoric...)

Sections B.8.17 and B.8.18 omit the following evidence:

- a) The track (now a footpath) running from the south end of Ounty John Lane to the south end of County Lane appears to represent an important ancient route-way. There is good evidence for its use (perhaps as part of the salt-way network) during the Anglo-Saxon period.² The same track probably also served to connect Wychbury's Iron Age hill fort to those at Kinver and Drakelow, as well as to Ismere, the likely moot site of the British province of *Husmerae*. An early incarnation of the track may even have serviced the prehistoric settlement(s) noted in APA39.
- b) The discovery of heat-shattered stones and associated pits and Bronze Age artefacts, together with D-shaped crop marks, underlies the designation of APA39 in the south-east section of AHHLV29. However, further heat-shattered stones, probably related to so-called 'burnt mounds' have been found along, and to the south of, the aforementioned track (section (a) above)³; and crop-marks of a potentially Bronze Age ring-ditch exist to the north of the track⁴. These features all lie outside (i.e. to the west) of APA39; and it would not seem unreasonable to suggest that APA39 should be extended to encompass them: i.e. across the entire tract of high ground in the Buckbury / Burys Hill area.

- c) Place-name and crop-mark evidence suggests that the land on the high ground between Burys Hill, Buckbury fields and Norton Covert may have been the location of a medieval open field.⁵
- d) An Anglo-Saxon fortified site, known as *sicanbyrig* in the tenth century, seems to have been located in Long Buckbury field⁶ where a tree-covered mound survived until the early twentieth century. The high ground in this area formed part of the boundary of Kinver Forest in 1300 CE at which time a fortification known as *Feckebury* (perhaps a survival of *sicanbyrig*) was recorded in this area. The modern place-name Burys Hill and the field-name Buckbury probably derive from these medieval fortifications.

Pages 8–11 of *The Historical Landscape of Stourbridge's Green Belt* (rev. 01c)⁷ provide fuller details of most of these archaeological features.

AHHLV30 (Pedmore and Foxcote)

Sections B.8.22 omit the following evidence:

- a) The lower slopes of Wychbury hill (i.e. the area outside that designated as a scheduled monument) contain potentially important archaeological features. Eroded earth banks, which may have been defensive in nature and related to the hill fort, as well as ring-ditch crop marks (possibly Bronze Age) fall within the areas of *Call for Sites* submissions 10143 and 10203.⁸
- b) Pedmore's road pattern suggests the outline of an early infield system. This mid-Anglo-Saxon settlement and its agricultural development may have developed from earlier land use on the adjacent slopes of Wychbury hill, perhaps leaving archaeological traces within sites 10142 and 10203. This location may have been important because of its proximity to the intersection of two ancient roads: the Droitwich-to-Penkridge salt-way (now the A491) and an eastward extension of the aforementioned 'Buckbury track' which seems to have previously served a number of Romano-British farmsteads near Hodge Hill, Foxcote, Lutley and Oldnall.
- c) Archaeological surface finds (e.g. Roman pottery sherds, a cache of Roman coins and jewellery, as well as prehistoric flint artefacts) have been recovered from multiple locations around the hill, suggesting land use both ante-dating and post-dating the fort.⁹

Section B.8.23 omits the following evidence:

- a) A possible Romano-British farmstead (identified by a field-walking find-spread) spans the county boundary near Hodge Hole Dingle.¹⁰

Section B.8.26 omits the following evidence:

- a) A group of five potential Romano-British farmsteads (identified from crop-marks and rich find-spreads) are located within this area; i.e. at Hodge Hole Dingle; Sidens Hill (the north end of Hodge Hill); Oldnall; Foxcote, and Lutley. Each falls within a separate parish or township, suggesting that the administrative boundaries here might originate in the Romano-British period.¹¹
- b) Although non-specific prehistoric remains are mentioned in the HLC Study, a spread of very numerous flint artefacts at Oldnall¹², probably representing a seasonal Mesolithic camp, is of such rarity in the midlands that it may warrant designation as a separate APA.

Comments on sections 8.1 and 8.2

Section 8.1 of the HLC Study states that ‘This review considered the information held by Dudley, Sandwell, and Wolverhampton and Walsall HERs [Historic Environment Records] as well as existing characterisation studies and the information held by Historic England in the National Heritage List for England’.

Section 8.2.8 ‘strongly’ recommends the four Black Country authorities review and enhance their Historic Environment Records, particularly for areas currently within the Green Belt which have hitherto not received the same level of HER enhancement as urban areas. It suggests that, ‘as a result, there is potentially a number of non-designated heritage assets that have not been identified and recorded on the HER...’.

With this in mind, it should be noted that additional archaeological information is held by local historians and archaeological / field-walking groups. This tends to be in unpublished or privately published form or within academic papers which may not have come to the notice of Oxford Archaeology Ltd (the authors of the HLC Study). Much of this ‘missing’ information is, however, contained in *The Historic Landscape of Stourbridge’s Green Belt* (revision 01c) and its Addenda cited in the References section below. It may be worthwhile emphasizing these additional details in public responses to the forthcoming consultation and in any subsequent planning objections.

References

1. Oxford Archaeology Ltd. (2020) *Black Country Historic Landscape Characterisation Study, Final Report, Issue 2*, <https://blackcountryplan.dudley.gov.uk/media/13895/comp_black-country-hlc-final-report-30-10-2019-lr_redacted.pdf>.
2. James, K. (2020) ‘Windsor, windofer and Iverley: Illustrating the place-name element *ofer within the Anglo-Saxon road network’. *Journal of the English Place-Name Society*, **51**, 37–64.
3. Cole, M. (2020) *Pers. comm.*
4. James, K. (2019) *The Historical Landscape of Stourbridge's Green Belt*. <<http://sgb.kjdocs.co.uk/Historical%20Landscape%20of%20Stourbridges%20Green%20Belt%2001c.pdf>>, 11.
5. James (2020) *op. cit.* in note 2, 43–4.
6. James (2014) ‘The Swinford Charter (S579); A more complex origin for Oldswinford?’, *Transactions of the Worcestershire Archaeological Society, Third Series*, **24**, 134.
7. James (2019) *op. cit.* in note 4, 8–11.
8. James, K. (2021) *The Historical Landscape of Stourbridge's Green Belt - Addendum 1*. <<http://sgb.kjdocs.co.uk/Historical%20Landscape%20of%20Stourbridges%20Green%20Belt%20-%20Addendum%201%2001a.pdf>>, 3–4.
9. James (2019) *op. cit.* in note 4, 12–3; James (2021) *op. cit.* in note 8.
10. James (2019) *op. cit.* in note 4, 12, 15.
11. James (2019) *op. cit.* in note 4, 12, 14–20.
12. James (2019) *op. cit.* in note 4, 14–7.