

Stoke Mandeville and Aylesbury

STOKE MANDEVILLE DESERTED VILLAGE SITE

HS2 references: Area CFA11 - Unique ID SMA003

Summary:

Although it would be best if HS2 avoided this historically important site altogether (as in the original 2011 route), in the absence of this solution we welcome the High heritage value that the ES has placed on all elements of the deserted village site and the recognition that HS2 will have the most serious impact.

It is our view

- that this rating must ensure the fullest professional archaeological excavation of the whole site, well before any construction work begins;
- that the budget for HS2 should include funded provision for the long-term storage and archiving of all finds and documentation resulting from this excavation;
- that special provision should be made for the human remains from the old churchyard in a new building purpose-built, permanent and local to Stoke Mandeville.

Assessment:

The ES recognises the historic significance of Stoke Mandeville deserted village site and the ruins of St Mary's Church and gives a good outline of their known history (Appendix CH-001-011 page 20 paragraphs 3.9.1 to 3.9.9). This summary also suggests that the village may be 'an example of a Saxon settlement that developed close to an established Romano-British estate focus' (Appendix CH-001-011 page 13 paragraph 3.5.7)

The ES rates the heritage value of the site as a whole as 'High', stating that: 'The principal attribution of high value to the site of the former church ... and the likely associated leats and earthworks lies in its buried archaeological resource. ... An essential facet of this asset's value is its potential origin as an important Episcopal manor associated with the Saxon Bishopric of Dorchester-on-Thames. ...

'The buried archaeological resource of this asset includes the buried remains of a church dating to at least the 12th century and an associated burial ground. It is likely that the buried remains of a former medieval manor house and features associated with an Episcopal desmesne and mill centre are also present, along with buried features associated with any surrounding settlement and agricultural system(s). These remains could date to at least the mid-Saxon period and possibly as far back as the 7th century AD.' (Appendix CH-001-011 page 20 paragraphs 3.9.2 to 3.9.4)

The surveys done for the ES have already enhanced our understanding of the site: 'LIDAR imaging indicates the presence of two or three platforms adjacent to the eastern leat to the south-east of the church enclosure. A third platform appears to be present at the junction of the two leats near Mill House Farm (SMA095). These may indicate the former location of buildings (such as mills)...' (Appendix CH-001-011 pages 21-22 paragraph 3.9.13)

Construction work for the HS2 rail line will completely destroy the deserted village site, including the church ruins and burial ground.

The site today is shown on the Location map (CH-004-11.09B), where the centre of the site is marked as 'Field 1', and on the Remote Sensing Survey Interpretation map (CH-004-11.02), where the church ruins are marked 'K04'. In contrast, its obliteration by construction work for the HS2 rail line and its accompanying maintenance loop is shown by the Construction Phase maps (CT-05-040b and CT-05-41).

Ironically, the 'Site of Church of St Mary' is arrowed on both of the 'Proposed Scheme' maps for the area (CT-06-40b and CT-06-41). Its outline can just be discerned, overridden by the four-track rail line.

The ES impact assessment therefore correctly rates the impact of HS2 construction on remains of the church, its burial ground, the deserted settlement and any mills as 'High adverse' with the effect as 'Major adverse' – the maximum possible. It is strange, though, that it suggests that the 'archaeological remains ... will be removed ... temporarily or permanently'. This is hardly going to be temporary!

Conclusion

It would be best if this high-speed rail line might avoid this historically and archaeologically important site altogether. In the absence of such an ideal solution however, we welcome the 'High' heritage value that the ES has placed on the site, the inclusion of all its elements in this valuation (church, settlement, leats, mills and fields), and the recognition that the construction of HS2 will have the most serious impact.

It is our view

- that this rating must ensure the fullest professional archaeological investigation and excavation of all elements of this deserted village site, starting well before any construction work begins in order to ensure its completion;
- that provision should be made within the budget for HS2 for the long-term storage and archiving of all finds and documentation resulting from this investigation and excavation;
- that special provision should be made for the exhumed human remains from the estimated 2,600 burials in the old churchyard in a new building purpose-built, permanent and local to Stoke Mandeville – again funded from the HS2 budget.