

Technical Note:

Chapel Lane Widnes: Important Hedgerows

Introduction

- 1.1. This technical advice note has been produced to provide further information in regard to the Chapel Lane, Widnes proposed residential development (23/01037/OUT). An application for the proposed development at Chapel Lane was submitted in May 2023 which includes a Historic Environment Desk-Based Assessment produced by Cotswold Archaeology in 2023.
- 1.2. The note has been prepared following the consultation response from Jonathon Henderson, the Technical Assistant for Arboriculture and Ecology. Mr Henderson requested clarification on whether the hedgerow that borders Chapel Lane is classes as an 'important' hedgerow under the Hedgerow Regulations.
- 1.3. An assessment of 'important' hedgerows is included within the Historic Environment Desk-Based Assessment (HEDBA) which should be read alongside this note. However, following the consultation response from Mr Henderson, the assessment was reviewed and both the eastern and western hedges along Chapel Lane were identified as important. Only the eastern hedge lies within the redline boundary and thus the hedgerow along the west of Chapel Lane is not discussed further. As such, this note provides an updated assessment on the 'important' hedgerows with the Site which meet the historical or archaeological criteria.

Hedgerow Regulations

- 1.4. Under the Hedgerow Regulations 1997, hedgerows are afforded statutory protection should they qualify as being 'important' for historical or archaeological reasons (amongst others). The 1997 regulation state several different criteria for important hedgerows. In this case, some of the hedgerows within the Site meet criterion 1 and 5 of the regulations. Criterion 1 states that '[the hedgerow] marks the boundary, or part of the boundary, of at least one historic parish or township; and for this purpose, "historic" means existing before 1845'. Criterion 5 states that '[the hedgerow] is recorded in a document held at the relevant date at a Record Office as an integral part of a field system predating the Inclosure Acts'. The criteria then reference the 1896 Short Titles Act, inferring that the Inclosure Act in question is the Act of 1845. This is pertinent, as it sets a date of 1845 as a benchmark test. Accordingly, tithe

maps, which often pre-date 1845, are a reliable indicator for the status of a hedgerow as 'important' under the criteria for archaeology and history. '

Important' Hedgerows within the Site

- 1.5. A number of hedgerows within the Site (Fig. 1) mark surviving boundaries as shown on the 1840 tithe map (see Fig. 7 in the HEDBA). These hedgerows thus qualify as 'important' hedgerows under the 1997 regulations. In addition, both the northern and western boundaries of the Site follow the length of a parish boundary and thus, the hedgerows qualify as 'important' under criterion 1 and 5. These hedgerows were all mapped in the submitted desk-based assessment. Following further review, the map of historic hedgerows has been revised to include the hedgerow on the eastern side of Chapel Lane (which forms a part of the site boundary) which was not included within the previous assessment. This update is shown on Fig. 1, below.

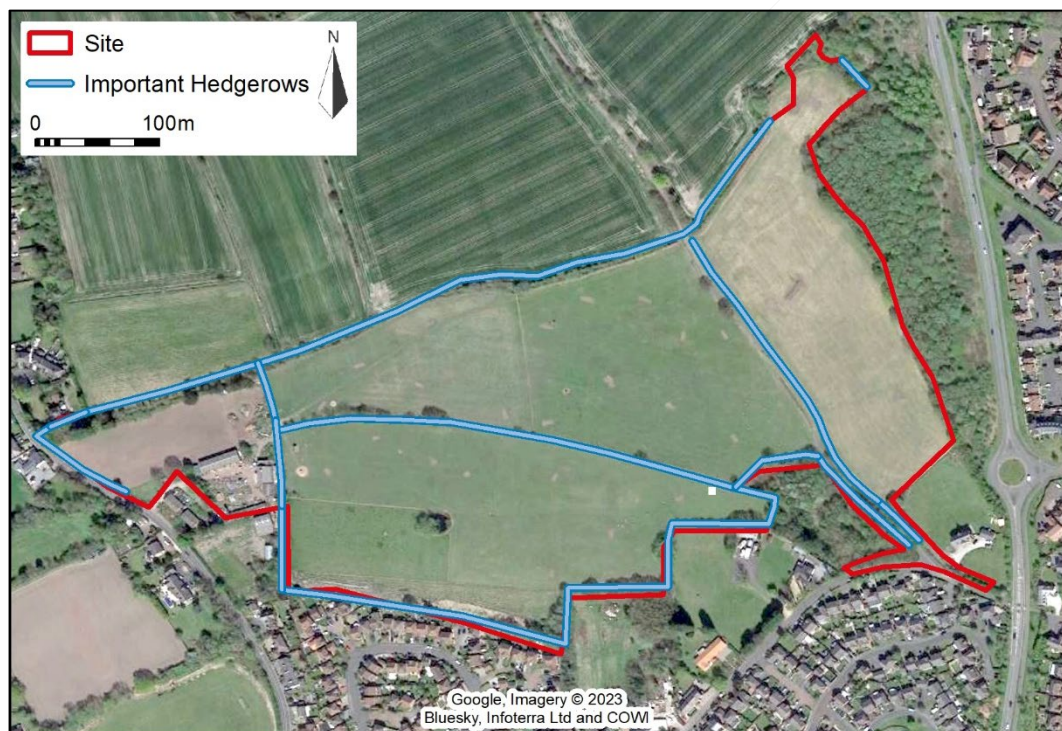


Fig. 1: 'Important' hedgerows within the Site

Significance

- 1.6. The 'important' hedgerows within the Site are of post-medieval date. As set out in the desk-based assessment (paragraphs 3.23-3.44) there is no evidence for medieval landuse or field organisation within the site (such as sometimes represented by remnant 'ridge and furrow' earthworks, reflecting former medieval manorial-period ploughing techniques). Similarly, the boundaries do not exhibit characteristics suggesting that they follow boundary lines established in the medieval period (such

as can sometimes be reflected in distinctive 'dog-leg' boundaries, following former furlong boundaries). Thus the enclosures appear to be of post-medieval piecemeal enclosure.

- 1.7. The 'important' hedgerows thus form part of a local system of hedgerows which may be defined as a 'heritage asset', as it has a degree of historical interest, albeit of a limited nature. This is a 'non-designated' heritage asset. The value of the system is 'low', as it is of post-medieval date, and does not have a greater time-depth with regard to its historic landscape character.

Impacts

- 1.8. The objective with 'important' hedgerows is to emphasise retention, in order to retain legibility of the evolved system. A degree of removal is normally achievable (in order to suitably facilitate access and circulation in new place-making) whilst still retaining overall legibility. The proposed development largely retains the 'important' hedgerows within the masterplan, and this emphasis on retention retains the overall intelligibility of the hedgerow pattern. There is some level of alteration to enable internal and external access, however, this results in the minimal removal of larger tracts of hedges which does not impact the ability to understand the previous landscape character. Accordingly, it is the case that the proposed development will not result in harm to the overall heritage significance of the 'important' hedgerow system within the Site.