

CONSERVATION RESPONSE

Alton Towers, Alton, Staffordshire



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Prepared on behalf of: Merlin Attractions Operations Limited
Date of compilation: 01/2023
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Checked by: Lucie McCarthy
Approved for issue by: Lucie McCarthy
Planning Reference: SMD/2022/0556
Local Authority: Staffordshire Moorland District Council
Site central NGR: SK 07146 43009

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Project Name: Alton Towers, Alton, Staffordshire
Planning Authority: Staffordshire Moorlands District Council
Planning Reference: SMD/2022/0556
Location: Alton
Parish: Farley
Bedrock Geology: Helsby Sandstone Formation - Sandstone
Superficial Geology: Unrecorded
Soils: Freely draining very acid sandy and loamy soils
Site central NGR: SK 0714 4300
Date of Report: 4th January 2023

Archaeological Research Services Ltd was commissioned by Merlin Attractions Operations Limited to produce an Historic Environment Desk-Based Assessment (DBA) of an area of land at Alton Towers Resort, Alton, Staffordshire (Frazer 2022). This is to accompany planning application SMD/2022/0556, for the removal of existing structures and construction of a new building to house an indoor attraction, associated ground works, infrastructure and landscaping. The report addresses potential impacts to buried archaeological remains and provides an initial assessment for the potential impacts to the settings of designated heritage assets surrounding the proposed development area.

The Inspector of Buildings and Areas for Historic England and Conservation Officer for Staffordshire Moorlands District Council provided responses regarding Bunbury hillfort (NHLE 1014686, Taylor 2022 & Holland, 2022). It was suggested by the Conservation Officer for Staffordshire Moorlands District Council that the planning application mentions the removal of trees from the Alton and Farley Conservation Area (HER DST5656), which would be replaced by trees and shrubs elsewhere. However, the potential impact of this new tree planting scheme and possible ground disturbance for landscaping associated with the new attraction should be considered in relation to the Scheduled Monument (Holland 2022).

Bunbury hillfort: a univallate hillfort southwest of Alton Towers (NHLE 1014686) represents an example of a Late Bronze Age to Early Iron Age slight univallate hillfort within this part of Staffordshire, c. 5m to the southwest of the proposed development area. The Scheduled Monument to a large degree draws its significance from its *evidential value*. Trial excavations conducted on a section of the north western rampart established that in this area of the Scheduled Monument there were preserved features that provided evidence for timber lacing and information relating to the construction of the hillfort and the wealth and status of its inhabitants.

The entry for the Scheduled Monument states that ‘most of the interior of the hillfort has been greatly modified by the construction of the amusement park, which has resulted in a number of terraces being cut deeply into the gently western sloping interior’ (NHLE 1014686). However, it is also suggested that there is still potential for archaeological remains immediately adjacent to the Scheduled Monument. The proposed development site and associated landscape planting falls outside the Scheduled Ancient Monument and so will not directly impact the Scheduled Ancient Monument. As stated, this means the survival of below ground remains beneath the current level of development is *negligible*.

The significance of Scheduled Monument is also based upon its setting. The hillfort occupies a prominent position that utilises a natural defensible spur of land. The location would have ‘not only provided defence, but could have also displayed the status of its builder’ (NHLE 1014686). The

earthworks associated with the hillfort have already been adapted, when the north western ramparts were incorporated within the early 19th century Alton Towers landscaped gardens and modified to create a garden walk (NHLE 1000191). The designated heritage asset is currently enclosed within woodland that is a deviation from the hillforts earlier historical setting. The hillfort as stated was intended to command views to and from the surrounding landscape. As Bunbury hillfort is now enclosed within woodland associated the RPG, it is considered that further trees and landscaping associated with screening the new attraction will produce no change in the setting of the Scheduled Monument. Further tree planting and the introduction of evergreen varieties that screen the new attraction represent a continuation of the current setting of Bunbury hillfort.

To conclude, it is considered that a large degree of the significance of the Scheduled Monument is drawn from its *evidential value*. Yet as the proposed landscaping and ground clearance fall outside of the scheduled area and has previously been developed, the potential for archaeological remains of *evidential value* to be directly impacted is *negligible*. There would be no change in setting that could impact the significance of Bunbury hillfort, as the current level of tree cover provided as well as the proposed tree and shrub planting scheme and landscaping will mean that proposed new attraction will be largely imperceptible above the treeline from ground level, once coverage has matured. An indicative timescale for the planting to mature will be provided by the applicant. It is therefore suggested that evergreen varieties of trees and shrubs suggested in the Landscaping Plan (373/104 Drawing N°4), such as holly and privet should be utilised to provided year-round coverage to the south and west of the proposed new attraction to maintain the current setting for Bunbury hillfort. A detailed planting scheme could be secured through the use of a suitably worded condition.



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