Heneb: Clwyd-Powys Archaeology

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Trevor Public Realm

Desk Based Assessment



Archaeoleg Clwyd-Powys
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Summary

This Desk-Based Assessment conducted by Heneb: The Trust for Welsh Archaeology was commissioned by the Canal and River Trust to determine the historical and archaeological potential of a proposed development located adjacent to the Pontcysyllte aqueduct, a Scheduled Monument and World Heritage Site in Trevor, North Wales. The proposed development involves upgrading an existing public footpath that connects Trevor Basin to Ty-Mawr Country Park. The assessment identified and located known and undocumented archaeological assets which provide a baseline for the historical and archaeological potential of the site. These were then combined with research to determine the potential for encountering sub surface assets.

The assessment has highlighted a relatively low probability of encountering subsurface assets associated with the prehistoric, Roman and medieval periods, however, there is a high potential for features associated with post-medieval activity, which due to the proximity and potential association with the Pontcysyllte World Heritage Site, would hold high to very high archaeological significance.

Crynodeb

Cafodd yr Asesiad Wrth Ddesg hwn gan Heneb: Ymddiriedolaeth Archaeoleg Cymru ei gomisiynu gan yr Ymddiriedolaeth Camlesi ac Afonydd i benderfynu ar botensial hanesyddol ac archaeolegol datblygiad arfaethedig yn agos at ddyfrbont Pontcysyllte, sef Heneb Gofrestredig a Safle Treftadaeth y Byd yn Nhrefor, Gogledd Cymru. Mae'r datblygiad arfaethedig yn galw am uwchraddio llwybr troed cyhoeddus sydd eisoes yn bodoli ac sy'n cysylltu Basn Trefor â Pharc Gwledig Tŷ Mawr. Nododd yr asesiad asedau archaeolegol hysbys a rhai a oedd heb eu dogfennu, a phennwyd eu lleoliad gan ddarparu llinell sylfaen ar gyfer potensial hanesyddol ac archaeolegol y safle. Yna, cyfunwyd y rhain ag ymchwil i benderfynu ar y potensial ar gyfer dod o hyd i asedau o dan y wyneb.

Yn ôl yr asesiad, cymharol isel yw'r tebygolrwydd o ddod o hyd i asedau o dan y wyneb sy'n gysylltiedig â'r cyfnodau cynhanesyddol, Rhufeinig a chanoloesol. Fodd bynnag, mae'r potensial yn uchel ar gyfer nodweddion sy'n gysylltiedig â gweithgarwch ôl-ganoloesol a allai fod o arwyddocâd archaeolegol uchel i uchel iawn, oherwydd eu bod yn agos at Safle Treftadaeth y Byd Pontcysyllte ac oherwydd eu cysylltiad posibl â'r safle.

1 Introduction

1.1. The Canal and River Trust commissioned the Clwyd-Powys office of Heneb: The Trust for Welsh Archaeology to conduct a Desk Based Assessment regarding proposed upgrades and modifications to an existing public footpath that connects Trevor Basin to Ty-Mawr Country Park (Figure 1). The proposed work involves the installation of new stairs and improvements to the existing footpath located adjacent to the Pontcysyllte aqueduct, a Scheduled monument and World Heritage Site in Trevor, Wrexham County, North Wales (SJ 27077 42113).

1.2. This assessment was requested to determine the historical and archaeological potential of the site and to better inform the level of mitigation that may be required as a result of the proposed works. The assessment was undertaken in consultation with the regional Cadw Monuments Inspector who has given conditional approval to the proposed development, subject to the investigations and the use of appropriate materials in their construction.

Aims and objectives.

1.3. This assessment aims to provide a baseline for the historical and archaeological sub-surface potential of the site which will be used to inform the level of mitigation that may be required as a result of the proposed works. This can also be used as the basis for determining the potential impact of the proposed development on existing assets.

1.4. The objectives of this assessment will be to identify and locate known archaeological assets and, through a combination of mapping analysis, a site walkover and documentary research, identify undocumented assets.

2 Nature of the Proposed Development

2.1. The proposed development comprises upgrades to pre-existing footpaths that link Trevor Basin to the River Dee and Cefn Mawr Country Park. The proposed works will consist of the following key areas and modifications:

I. The construction of new steps and handrails along the footpath immediately to the east of the aqueduct, leading down from Trevor Basin to the river dee and under the aqueduct toward Llangollen.
II. Maintenance of the current path, constructing a new bound gravel path where it is not currently made (primarily around the meadow).
III. Partial rerouting of part of the norther section of pathway.
IV. Proposed locations for future art installations, perch seating and/or interpretational signage.

2.2. As part of the proposed works, an existing historic hedge row will be retained and protected from the associated groundworks



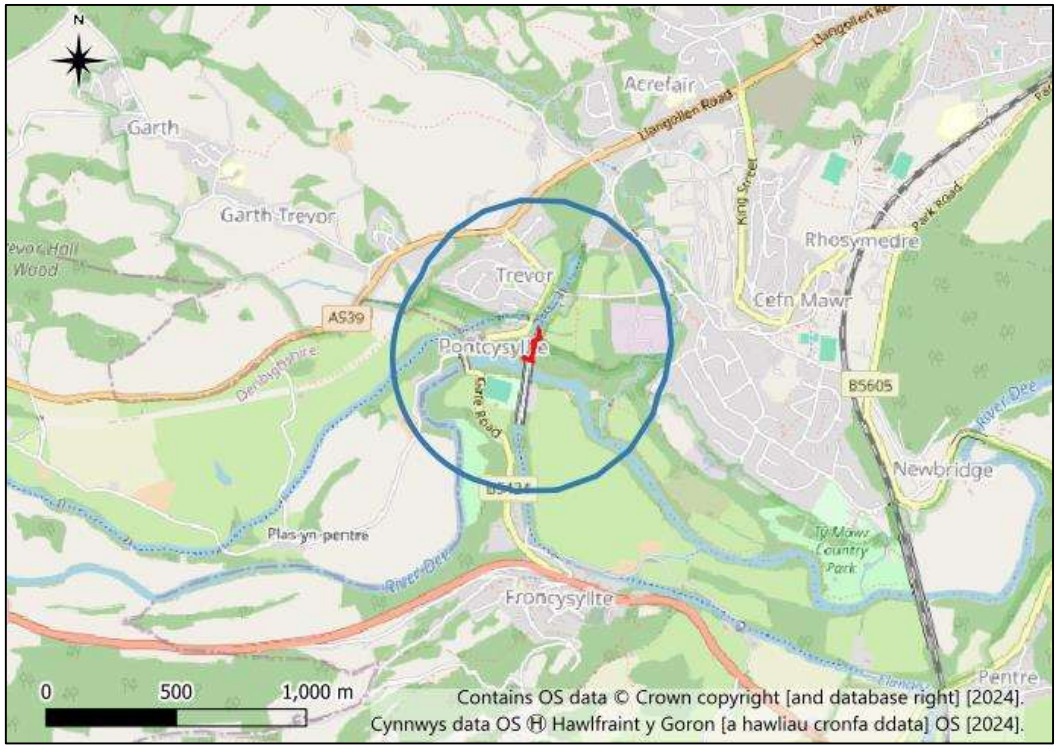


Figure 1: Location of proposed development

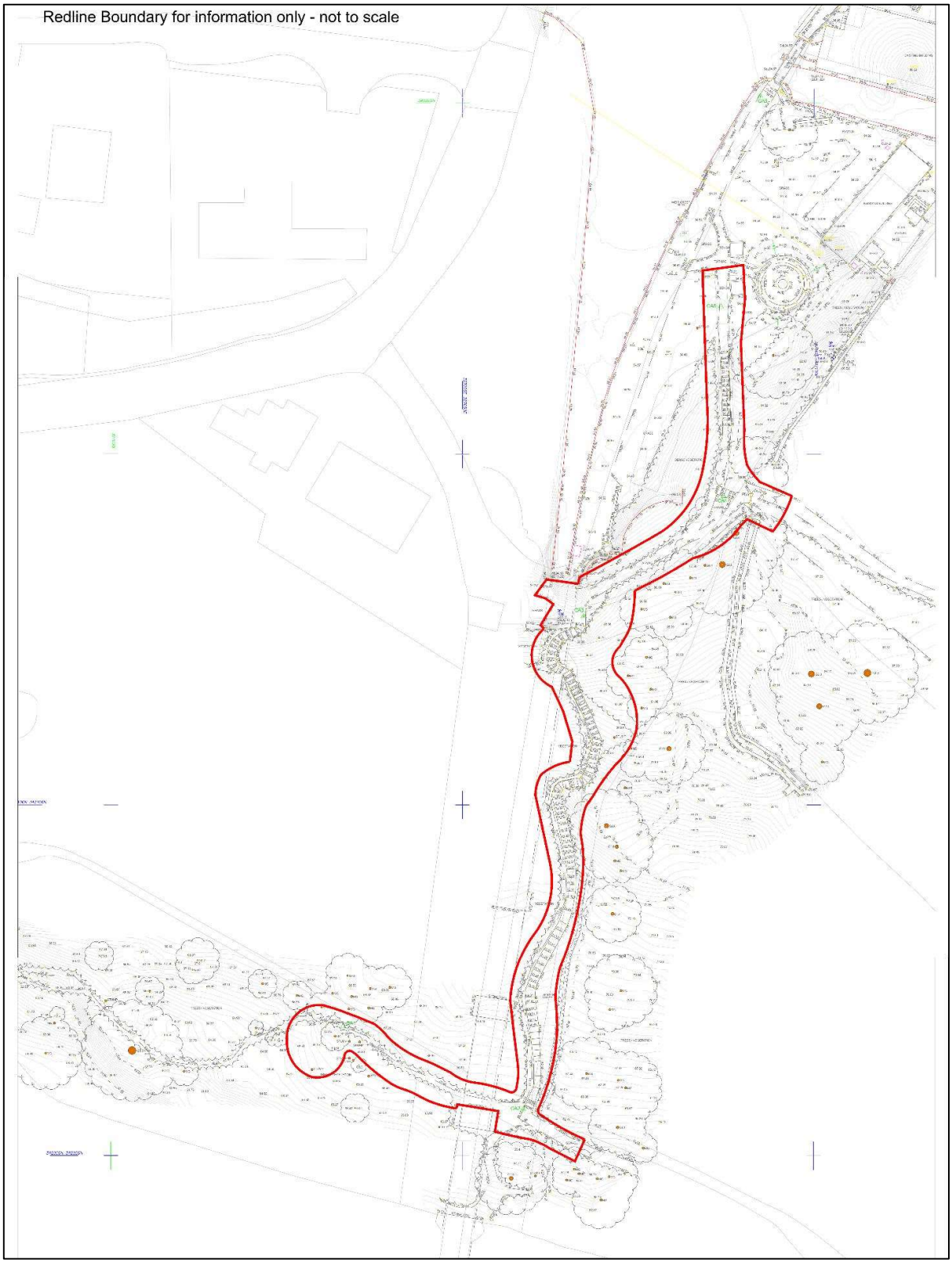


Figure 2: Proposed footpath development brief from the Canal and River Trust

3 National and Regional Planning Framework

Legislation

3.1. The legislative framework for the historic environment in Wales was revised by the Historic Environment (Wales) Act 2016. The 2016 Act amended the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979 and the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. It extended the definition of scheduled monuments and enhanced their protection, as well as making changes to the process of scheduled monument consent. Changes were also made to the protection of listed buildings. The 2016 Act also provided for a statutory register of historic landscapes, a statutory list of place names, and imposed a statutory duty on Welsh Ministers to compile and maintain Historic Environment Records (HERs).

Planning Policy

3.2. National policy for Wales regarding planning is stated in the Planning Policy Wales (11th edition, 2021) (PPW). PPW has been recently revised to align with the Well-being of Future Generations Act (2015). Historic environment issues are addressed in Chapter 6, Distinctive and Natural Places. The chapter emphasizes that protecting, conserving, and enhancing historic assets is most effective when done at the earliest stage of a project. Therefore, it is necessary to conduct a reasonable and proportionate evaluation to ensure that any proposed development is sustainable and does not cause any unnecessary damage to historic assets.

3.3. PPW is supported by Technical Advice Note 24: The Historic Environment (TAN 24) of 2017. TAN 24 is intended to help local authorities develop their local plans and determine planning applications or listed building consent concerning historic assets. Additionally, PPW is supported by Cadw best practice guidance on the historic environment.

3.4. Supplementary Planning Guidance for World Heritage Sites were published in 2012 and adopted by each of the relevant planning authorities. Urban characterisation studies for Cefn Mawr and District and Llangollen were published by Cadw in 2014 and 2016. The SPD *'amplifies development plan policies of the three respective Councils and is a material consideration in the determination of planning applications that affect the World Heritage Site and its setting'. The aim of the SPD is to 'ensure the integrity of the Pontcysyllte Aqueduct and Canal World Heritage Site, its buildings, structures and landscape are maintained. New development should ensure no adverse impact'.*

3.5. With respect to regional archaeology and planning, Wrexham County Borough Council follows the policies stated in the Unitary Development Plan (adopted 2005) which is set to be replaced by LDP 2013-2028.

4 Methodology

4.1. This assessment was conducted according to the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists' (CIfA) *Standard and Guidance for Historic Environment Desk-based Assessment* (2020). This states that:

> ***Standard***
>
> *Desk-based assessment will determine, as far as is reasonably possible from existing records, the nature, extent and significance of the historic environment within a specified area. Desk-based assessment will be undertaken using appropriate methods and practices that satisfy the stated aims of the project, and that comply with the Code of conduct and other relevant regulations of CIfA. In a development context, desk-based assessment will establish the impact of the proposed development on the significance of the historic environment (or will identify the need for further evaluation to do so), and will enable reasoned proposals and decisions to be made on whether to mitigate, offset or accept without further intervention that impact.*
>
> ***Definition***
>
> *Desk-based assessment is a programme of study of the historic environment within a specified area or site on land, in the inter-tidal zone or underwater that addresses agreed research and/or conservation objectives. It consists of an analysis of existing written, graphic, photographic and electronic information in order to identify the likely heritage assets, their interests and significance; the character of the study area, including appropriate consideration of the settings of heritage assets; and, in England, the nature, extent and quality of the known or potential archaeological, historic, architectural and artistic interest. Significance is to be judged in a local, regional, national or international context as appropriate.*

4.2. The research for this assessment was compiled through a combination of records and data retained by Heneb including historic maps and academic publications as well as designated and non-designated asset data obtained from Cadw and the regional Historic Environment Record (CPA-HER). Data for designated assets has been obtained for a 500m buffer zone around the proposed development boundary. Non-designated asset data was requested for a 250m buffer zone around the proposed development boundary.

4.3. As part of this assessment, on April 16th, 2024, a site walkover was carried out to visually inspect and photograph the condition of the present pathway. The purpose of this survey was to document and record the setting in relation to the planned development, with the primary aim of identifying any undocumented surface features that might be impacted by the proposed development but that have not been previously documented.

4.4. All features identified were photographed with a high-resolution digital camera, using a photographic scale where appropriate. The location direction and nature of each photograph were catalogued, with a descriptive account given within this report.

Assessment Criteria

4.5. As part of this assessment, the probability of encountering archaeological assets will be determined. These will each be assigned significance based on the following criteria:

Table 1: Criteria for the assessment of significance

Value	Description
Very High	World Heritage Sites; designated or undesignated sites, buildings or landscapes of international importance
High	Scheduled monuments; Grade I and II* Listed Buildings; Conservation Areas or Parks and Gardens containing very important monuments or buildings; designated or undesignated sites, buildings or landscapes of national importance
Medium	Grade II Listed Buildings; Conservation Areas or Parks and Gardens containing monuments or buildings that contribute to their historic character; designated or undesignated sites, buildings or landscapes of regional importance
Low	Locally Listed monuments and buildings; designated or undesignated sites, buildings or landscapes of local importance
Negligible	Sites, buildings or landscapes with little or no significant historical interest
Unknown	Archaeological sites where the importance has not yet been ascertained; buildings with hidden

Limitations

4.6. This statement relies on the accuracy of the information outlined in sections 6, 7, 8 and 9, as well as the ability to obtain information from a walkover survey. Some of the potential limitations identified in respect to this study are as follows:

- Documentary sources may be biased, inaccurate or difficult to interpret.
- Data obtained in reference to designated or non-designated assets may be misrepresented or broadly categorised.
- Poor accuracy of coordinates may result in some assets not appearing within a search boundary or being inaccurately located within the search area, leading to potential bias.

5 Geology and topography

5.1. The proposed development is situated on a slightly terraced south-facing hillside to the east of Pontcysyllte Aqueduct (DE175) (Figure 3). The area is wooded, forming part of a restored ancient woodland, and is steep at its northern and southern extent but with a shallower gradient in the middle. The proposed development currently incorporates an existing dirt footpath which winds down the eastern side of the aqueduct, this has been recorded as part of the site walkover in Section 0 (p16).

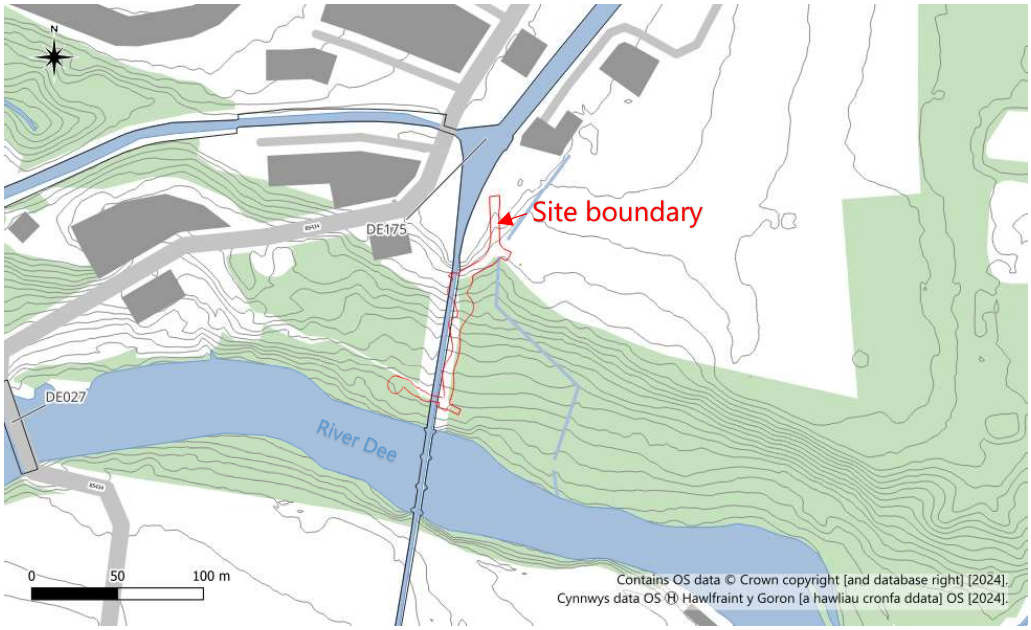


Figure 3: Site topography showing landfall contours and woodland.

5.2. The bedrock geology as recorded by the British Geological Survey (BGS, 2024) is divided between the upper northern half and the southern half of the south-facing hillside above the River Dee. The upper half consists of Pennine Lower Coal Measures and Pennine Middle Coal Measures Formation with mudstone, siltstone and sandstone from between 319 and 309.5 million years ago during the Carboniferous period. The lower hillside is made up of Gwespyr Sandstone and argillaceous rocks interbedded. Sedimentary bedrock formed between 320 and 318 million years ago during the Carboniferous period.

5.3. The superficial geology consists of alluvial clay, silt, sand and gravel forming the southern half of the hillside. These are sedimentary superficial deposits formed between 11.8 thousand years ago and the present during the Quaternary period. BGS does not note any superficial deposits in the northern half of the development area (*ibid*).

6 Historical Background

6.1. This section provides an assessment of all known archaeology and history within the immediate vicinity of the study area and where absent, a general contextual account of known archaeology relevant to the study area. Each period will be assigned an assumed potential and significance in relation to the proposed development.

Prehistoric Era (10,000BC – AD 43)

6.2. There is no known prehistoric activity within the boundary of the proposed development, however, within the study area there are two prehistoric assets, the first of which is a placename illuding to a possible former hillfort, Cae Castell (Castle field), speculated as being destroyed by the construction of the aqueduct (PRN 101631). The second is a Bronze Age or early Iron Age bone needle found within the river Dee opposite Pontcysyllte, however, the exact find location is uncertain (PRN 101708).

6.3. The focus of documented prehistoric activity in this area is situated 2.5Km to the northwest of the site and is predominantly defined by upland settlement and funerary monuments including the designated Pen-Y-Caer Iron Age hillfort (DE231) and a non-designated upland Bronze Age funerary landscape comprised of cairns and barrows (Jones, 1999). The HER dataset further reflects a prevalence for upland occupation, with most lowland-based records tending to be artefactual. It is however highly likely that this reflects a bias in the archaeological dataset, with a lack of investigation and poor survival leading to a poor representation of lowland sites.

6.4. 2km to the west of the study area within the river valley is a Mesolithic find spot consisting of a collection of flint blades and flakes (PRN 81464). 900m to the northwest on the south-facing hills of Trevor is a group VII Graig Llwyd type Neolithic stone axe find spot (PRN: 101203). Also located on the south-facing hills of Trevor 1.4Km to the west, there is a possible prehistoric enclosure at Trevor Hall (PRN 101837), however, this is more likely to be associated with mining. Top Farm defended prehistoric enclosure is located on a promontory 1.5 km to the northeast (PRN 102881).

Summary assessment:

6.5. The potential for prehistoric activity is **low,** however, due to the prevalence of upland occupation within the archaeological record, if any *in situ* features relating to occupation from this period are identified during the groundworks then they would be considered to be of **low to medium** significance.

Roman Period (AD 43 – 410)

6.6. There are no documented Roman assets within the proposed development area or study area, with the closest significant asset being the projected line of the Rhyn Park to Rhug Roman road which follows the route of the A5 on the opposite side of the valley from Trevor. This road was identified in the 1999 Roman Roads of North Wales publication by E Waddelove (Waddelove, 1999).

6.7. Within the lowlands 850m to the west of the proposed development was a find spot of a Roman brooch (PRN 85699).

6.8. There is a relative lack of recorded investigations in this area, therefore there is likely to be some level of bias in the apparent absence of activity. This is becoming apparent across

Wrexham county with an increase in prospection leading to significant Roman discoveries (such as Rossett Roman villa, unpublished).

Summary assessment:

6.9. The potential for Roman activity is **low,** with the landform of the proposed development likely discounting significant settlement activity. However, any features associated with the period would be considered to be of **low to medium** significance.

Medieval Period (410 - 1500)

6.10. There are no early medieval or medieval assets recorded within the proposed development area, however, there are two medieval coins recorded by the Portable Antiquities Scheme as metal detecting finds from a field 113m to the east of the proposed development area. These consist of a Henry III silver penny dated AD1250-1272 (PAS ID 5689) and a second short cross penny dated AD1223-1242 (PAS ID 5690).

6.11. The most prominent early medieval monument within the vicinity of the proposed development is the route of Offa's Dyke, which runs 2.3 km to the east of the site (DE141). Offa's Dyke is an Early Medieval boundary earthwork that runs for about 120km along the border between modern-day Wales and England.

6.12. During the high medieval period, the area formed part of the Welsh kingdom of Powys and from the late 12th century formed part of the commote of Maelor Gymraeg. The Vale of Llangollen was largely under the control of the church, specifically Vale Crucis Abbey to the west, and occupied by predominantly agricultural communities, with the HER noting medieval ridge and furrow cultivation on the south-facing hills of Trevor, 0.5 and 1 km to the north of the proposed development. Research by Williams (1990) and Pratt (2011) identified two possible monastic granges associated with Vale Crucis, these include 'Ruabon lands' (PRN 120665) 800m to the north of the site, and Trevor Mills Grange (PRN 35782) located 1.2 km to the southwest of the site. Both have been tentatively identified through historical taxation records, but their exact locations are unclear.

6.13. The placename Trevor derives from the Trevor family of Brynkynall, a prominent Welsh aristocracy descended from the 10th century *Tudur Trevor*, 'son-in-law of Hywel Dda and reputed 'king' of the borderland from the Maelors down to Gloucester' (Dodd, 1959). The present Trevor Hall, which is located 1.4 km to the west of the site, is believed to occupy a long-standing manorial site linked to the Trevor's, with an earlier phase of the hall having been home to Bishop John Trevor, who built the Llangollen Bridge in 1345 (Trevor Hall, 2024). The 19th century tithe maps show agricultural land, including those contained within the development area as being owned by the Trevor's, suggesting this was likely also the case during the medieval period.

6.14. Located 2 km to the northwest of the proposed development area, the HER records a place name noted in Historic Ordnance Survey maps as 'Bryn Llys' (PRN 142270). This may allude to the presence of a Welsh manorial llys, which although undocumented, may also represent a similar link to a Welsh aristocratic presence in Trevor.

6.15. A Cadw scheduled enhancement program for medieval and early post-medieval industry in East and North-East Wales identified a quarry in Cefn Mawr 1 km to the northeast of the site as the source of stone used to construct the 13th century Chruch of St Mary in Ruabon (LB 1622).