



## TACKLEY ROMAN MOSAIC FEASIBILITY STUDY



## **Tackley Roman Mosaic**

### **Feasibility study**

#### **The Mosaic**

The mosaic is one of three that were laid in the Street Farm Roman villa in the late 3<sup>rd</sup>/early 4<sup>th</sup> century AD during the final phase of its rebuilding. The other two were destroyed by ploughing. In its current state the mosaic measures 5.25 x 4.6 metres and the room that housed it was 5.5 x 5.5 metres. It has suffered modern agricultural damage and a central strip approximately 1 metre wide is missing. It is solely geometric in design and made up of thousands of red (terra cotta) and white (limestone) tiles, and was probably made by craftsmen from Cirencester (Roman Corinium).

The only other mosaic readily accessible to the public in Oxfordshire is in the Roman villa at North Leigh, although it is poorly housed, presented and interpreted. Only a few communities in the country are the sites of or owners of Roman mosaics.

**This is a unique opportunity for Tackley to acquire an important part of our heritage and to place it at the heart of our village community and history.**

#### **Summary**

In June 2018 Deanfield Homes, the developer of the Street Farm housing site, offered the mosaic to the village.

In July 2018 the Parish Council set up a subcommittee to take the project forward and to assess the feasibility of accepting the mosaic. This assessment covers the following:

- Local interest and support
- Benefits to the village
- Ownership
- Conservation and protection
- Building and location
- Display and interpretation
- Maintenance and security
- Costs
- Sources of funding
- Timescale

We have taken advice from professionals in the fields of archaeological conservation; building design; planning; museum display, interpretation and educational outreach; and fund-raising.

The donation of the mosaic has the support of the Oxfordshire County Council Archaeological Service, Oxfordshire Museums Resource Centre, Standlake, and Thames Valley Archaeological Services who carried out the excavations at Street Farm.

WODC Conservation Officers have welcomed the proposal and given advice on location, building design and display.

Extensive village interest in local archaeology and history is a pre-requisite for the success of a project such as this. Tackley residents have demonstrated this interest on many occasions and this has informed the sub-committee's recommendations.

## **Recommendations**

### Ownership

1. The Parish Council should accept the donation of the mosaic on behalf of the village.
2. The Council should own the mosaic.

### Location

3. The mosaic should be re-sited on land owned by the Parish Council, specifically the playing field.
4. It should be housed in a new building designed to:
  - 1) Maximise accessible public viewing of the mosaic;
  - 2) Provide optimal environmental conditions for its conservation;
  - 3) Provide easy access for maintenance, close-up viewing and study;
  - 4) Ensure the mosaic's security;
  - 5) Meet conservation area planning requirements.
5. The building should be sited along **either** the north-eastern edge of the playing field roughly opposite the table tennis table and south of the footpath **or** the eastern edge, south of the sports court [See the map in Appendix 2].

### Cost and funding

6. The project is likely to cost about £100,000 and the bulk of the funding will be sought from appropriate charities and other public bodies, companies and individuals. Major applications will be submitted by the end of 2019.
7. The Council will receive regular reports on the progress of fund-raising together with an assessment as to whether or not there is a realistic chance of completing the project. If the Council decides to stop the project ownership of the mosaic will be transferred to the Oxfordshire Museums Service and it will be deposited in the Museums Resource Centre at Standlake. Any funds raised will be returned or put to an alternative use approved by the donors.

### Display and interpretation

8. The mosaic should be displayed and presented as an important part of Tackley's history and heritage and should complement the exhibition spaces in St Nicholas Church and the Village Hall coffee shop.

### Implementation

9. The Council should instruct the sub-committee to take the project forward by producing detailed specifications and costings, making funding applications and obtaining the appropriate planning consents, with a view to installing the mosaic by December 2020.
10. The Council should receive regular updates on the project's progress.
11. The village should be kept informed of progress and villagers should be given opportunities to get involved. The School should be involved in all stages of the project.

## REPORT

This feasibility study has been put together by a subcommittee of the Parish Council made up of members of the Council and the Tackley Local History Group: Sue Ashton, Hilary Laughton, Councillor Katy Layton-Jones, Councillor Andrew Lines, John Perkins (chair), Jan Read (secretary), Malcolm Ridout, Sue Whitaker. It has been compiled with input from an advisory panel whose members are:

Carol Anderson	Oxfordshire County Council Museums Services Manager, Curator of Woodstock Museum
Anthony Beeson	Association for the Study and Protection of Roman Mosaics; archivist and newsletter editor, Association for Roman Archaeology
Paul Booth	Oxford Archaeology, director of the Roman excavations at Dorchester-on-Thames
Alison Brookes	Collections Development Manager, Cirencester Museum
Anni Byard	Finds Liaison Officer for Oxfordshire & West Berkshire, Portable Antiquities Scheme, archaeologist on the Gibraltar Point dig
Karen Knight	Previously Collections Manager for Oxfordshire Museums, then Director of Reading Museums and Archives, expert panel member and mentor for the Heritage Lottery Fund
Laura Preston	Archaeologist, Tackley resident
David Sanchez	Thames Valley Archaeological Services, director of the excavations at Street Farm, Tackley

Advice about the mosaic's preservation and display has been provided by Tom Flemons of Cliveden Conservation (<https://www.clivedenconservation.com/>) and architectural advice by Anthony Fell and James Thien of Watson Bertram & Fell, architects and surveyors (<http://www.wbf-bath.co.uk/>). Planning advice has been given by the WODC Conservation Officers.

### 1. Local interest and support

Village interest in local archaeology and history, and in the Street Farm villa and mosaic, is extensive:

About 300 people attended the open day at the Street Farm site in April 2018 and 120 people went on early evening tours of the site in June 2018.

The series of monthly evening history talks have a regular attendance of between 25 and 60. Members of the history group show artefacts and give talks to classes in the village school.

The opening of the *Tackley Through Time* exhibition in St Nicholas Church in April 2018 was attended by 250 people. 120 copies of the booklet have been sold at £8 each. Special visits have been organised for classes from the school and the scouts.

The archaeological identification workshop in April 2016 was attended by 40 people and over 100 attended the exhibition of local archaeological finds in February 2017.

40 people have worked on the Heritage Lottery Fund-funded dig at Gibraltar Point and the site has had 130 visitors including 80 children.

### 2. Benefits to the community

We believe that the appropriate arrangement and display of the Tackley Roman mosaic will offer our community the opportunity to become further engaged and involved with the interpretation and

understanding of our past. We intend to inspire and encourage both young and old to think differently about their locality, environment and the relevance of their history from several perspectives.

## 2.1 Educational

Roman history is a key part of every child's primary education, featuring heavily in year 4. Local History is a theme throughout schooling. The Local History Group currently works with the school including giving hands-on talks on Roman and pre-historic Tackley. It would be our intention to create a strong link between the mosaic and Tackley Primary School to bring history to life for our school children. We would extend this offer to the primary schools in Bletchingdon, Kirtlington, Wootton, Woodstock, Islip, Heyford, Middle Barton, Bladon and Kidlington. The site, together with associated displays, booklets and educational resources (including a loan collection of local roman artefacts), will be available to other schools in the county.

## 2.2 Children & Families

Children aged four and upwards have visited the Gibraltar Point site and participated in the excavations there. We have built relationships with the 1<sup>st</sup> Tackley & Heyford Scout Group and involved them in this work and will continue to involve them as we go forward with celebrating our Roman history. Involving the village's families in excavations has encouraged a more diverse audience to be active in our community.

## 2.3 Identity

Whilst we are sad that housing development progress in the village has destroyed an element of its history, the village is adamant that we still celebrate Tackley's ancient history and bring it's Roman past into the public consciousness as part of who and what we are. The mosaic acts as a memorial to this. It will contribute to the wider role played by Tackley's history and heritage, via the activities of TLHG, in sustaining the village's sense of community, especially as it faces the challenges of a rapid 30% increase in population over the next two years as new housing developments come on stream. By bringing our Roman history to the forefront we can ensure it is cemented into the future identity of our village.

## 2.4 Tourism

Tackley is popular with walkers and cyclists and has excellent public transport links by road, rail, bus and canal. These visitors enjoy supporting our local businesses; specifically the Gardiner Arms Public House and the village shop. It is anticipated that these businesses would benefit further from an additional tourist attraction. TLHG are currently considering producing a glossy guide to the sites and monuments in Tackley, as well as adding these to an expanded Tackley footpath guide.

Local history groups and societies in and around Oxfordshire will be invited to arrange group visits to the site and its associated exhibition spaces.

## 2.5 Bringing Communities Together

We are reaching out to the organisers of the Roman Way walk, a walk following Roman roads through Oxfordshire, Gloucestershire, Wiltshire, Hampshire and Berkshire using public rights of way [Elaine Steane, *The Roman Way* (Cheltenham: 2010), 208 pp.]. We are contacting other local areas with archaeological sites in order to network and share best practice in community involvement, fund-raising, the use of local expertise, visitor experience, and maintenance. We will be initiating

dialogue with these communities with a view to establishing lasting relationships with other groups in our area involved with archaeological conservation.

## 2.6 Local participation in the project

Local residents and Tackley School will be encouraged to become involved in all aspects of implementing the project. It will make use of the skills of people in or connected to the village, including in print and book design, printing, model-making, website design, architectural drawing, copying Roman wall-painting.

Building works will have to be put out to tender, but if they were to be carried out by local firms a significant percentage of the external funding for the project would come into the locality, probably considerably more than that brought in by the two current multi-million-pound housing developments in the village.

**There are significant benefits to the community.**

## 2.7 Potential dis-benefits: traffic impacts

The mosaic is educationally important. There are approximately 140 primary schools and 25 secondary schools within a twenty-mile radius of Tackley. While it will be available as a resource to Oxfordshire schools the continuing decline in budgets for school trips will mean that few will be able to visit it and these are likely to be those most local to Tackley, i.e. within 10 miles, where there are 50 primary schools and 8 secondary schools. If a class from as many as one in five of these local schools visited the mosaic every year that would mean, on average, one extra minibus or coach journey to the village per month.

Since it is not an outstanding example of a figurative mosaic it is unlikely to become a major visitor attraction. It will therefore lead to only a small increase in visitor road traffic—at most perhaps an average of one car per day. Some visitors, especially those walking the 174-mile long Roman Way which passes along Akeman Street, will be either pedestrians or will use public transport.

**There will be a negligible increase in road traffic.**

The committee has not been able to identify any other potential dis-benefits.

## 3. **Ownership**

There are two options:

1. The mosaic becomes the property of the Parish Council;
2. It is donated to the Oxfordshire Museums Resource Centre along with all the other finds from the excavation and is then deposited with the Parish Council on a long-term loan.

Option 2 would not give the Council full control over the preservation, protection and maintenance of the mosaic for which it would have financial responsibility.

**We therefore recommend option 1: that the mosaic becomes the property of the Council.**



## 4. Conservation and protection

### 4.1 Conservation

Although they have survived for 2000 years under the soil, once they are exposed Roman mosaics need expert conservation and protection. As with the Street Farm mosaic they are cut into sections (approx. 50cm x 50 cm), encased in cloth and PVA adhesive and lifted. The 46 sections of the Street Farm mosaic are currently in storage. The original mortar is then cleaned off and the hundreds of individual tiles re-set in a new resin substrate which is in turn set in an aluminium honeycomb. The protective cloth and adhesive is removed and the tile surfaces cleaned. The sections can then be re-assembled and fixed to either a floor, a wall or steel mounts for display, re-creating the original mosaic.

### 4.2 Conservation costs

This is a major cost. Cliveden Conservation who have wide experience of conserving mosaics have identified three stages and estimated the cost of each as:

Stage 1	Examining each of the 46 sections, identifying materials and condition, measuring individual tile depths, cleaning & preparing the back of each section	£2,900
Stage 2	Setting each section in a new resin substrate ensuring all are of the same thickness, mounting each onto a lightweight honeycomb backing system, removing the original cloth and PVA protection, filling joints with a lime grout, cleaning and waxing the surface	£28,500
Stage 3	Designing and manufacturing the steel mounts, fixing the 46 panels to them and installing them in the building	£8,200
<b>Total conservation and installation cost</b>		<b>£39,600</b>

### 4.3 Protection

Where mosaics have been sited outside, exposed to the elements, whether in this country or Italy, they rapidly deteriorate due to rain, damp, mould, bird droppings, rodent activity, litter, etc. This is the case even when they are protected by a roof but with open sides—e.g. the sorry state of the superb ‘Orpheus’ mosaic at Littlecote Roman villa near Hungerford—or when covered by glass which itself is subject to damage, scratching, needs regular cleaning and has to be removable so that the mosaic can be maintained. We have been advised by archaeologists, conservators and museum curators that our mosaic should be placed in a building, either on a wall or a floor. There is no such building in Tackley: the only possibility would be the Village Hall but the walls are not strong-enough for wall mounting, there is no floor space that could be cordoned off and the building is not generally open to the public.

**We therefore propose a purpose-built building for the mosaic.**

## 5. The mosaic building and its location and costs

Since any building has to fit its surroundings we consider the question of location first.

### 5.1 Location

Because of the legal and other complications that might arise we have rejected the idea of siting the building on either private land or land that is publicly-owned but not by the parish council.

We have assessed potential council-owned sites against the following criteria:

- Public accessibility, including disabled access
- Centrality to the village
- Competition with other uses/users
- Impact on surroundings
- Environmental issues, e.g. damp, flood risk, shade
- Safety, especially for children
- Security

The most appropriate site is the playing field. Siting it on the edge of the field would avoid conflict with other users. The major risk is flooding, but the architects we have consulted have devised a solution to this problem—see # 5.2 ‘key features’ below.

We have identified 4 possible locations—see map in Appendix 2:

1. North-east edge, between the sports court and the village hall, to the south of the footpath opposite the table tennis table.
2. East side, between the sports court and the stream.
3. South-west corner
4. West side, halfway down.

Locations 3 and 4 would probably involve moving the football pitch eastwards by between 5 and 10 metres. Locations 1 and 2 are more central and would add to the cluster of buildings and facilities that define the centre of the village. We have rejected sites alongside the car park on safety grounds.

**We recommend that the building is on the edge of the playing field at either location 1 or 2.**

**This view is shared by the WODC Conservation Officers.**

## 5.2 The Building

The architects Watson Bertram & Fell who have a practice in Bath that specialises in projects in conservation areas have undertaken preliminary design work on a *pro bono* basis. In the brief we specified that the building should:

1. Echo the design and construction materials of the Roman villa;
2. Maximise accessible public viewing of the mosaic;
3. Provide optimal environmental conditions for the its conservation, preferably passively and without the need for services;
4. Provide easy access for maintenance, close-up viewing and study;
5. Ensure the mosaic’s security;
6. Be appropriate for a playing-field location;
7. Meet conservation area planning requirements.

Sketches of two versions of the preliminary designs are given in Appendix 3. One uses oak posts and beams, the other steel and wood. The windows are double-glazed. The single-pitched roof and



extensive windows have appropriate echoes of sports pavilions. We have considered a building with a dual-pitched roof but are not recommending it since it would have to be considerably higher than a single-pitched roof.

The key features are:

1. The mosaic is **not** set onto the concrete floor but is mounted on a steel-frame a minimum of 40cm above floor level, giving the mosaic protection from flooding;
2. The mosaic is inclined at a shallow angle to improve viewing;
3. The design takes advantage of the fact that the central strip of the mosaic was lost to agricultural damage by using this space for a walkway through the middle of the mosaic;
4. A system of passive ventilation will provide environmental control with zero running cost;
5. Walls will be of blockwork, rendered on the inside and faced with local field stone on the outside. The roof will be of Roman tiles.

**NB. These sketches are preliminary and open to modification.**

### 5.3 Dimensions

Length = 6.7 m

Width = 5.5 m

Gross external area = 36.85 m<sup>2</sup>

Gross internal area = 30.9 m<sup>2</sup>

Minimum roof height = 2.5 m

Maximum roof height = 4.5 m

### 5.4 Building costs

At this stage we have only commissioned design sketches. Detailed designs from which accurate costings can be generated will be provided only if the project is given the go-ahead by the Council.

**However, preliminary discussions suggest that the building is likely to cost up to £50,000.**

## 6. Display and interpretation

The focus will be on presenting the mosaic, and other objects, as found, rather than restoring them, and will integrate the process of their archaeological rediscovery into their display and interpretation. We therefore do not intend to fill in the gaps in the mosaic with modern imitation tiles and we will always indicate the state in which objects were found and how they were uncovered.

There would be three places in the village for displaying interpretations of the mosaic, the villa and their wider historical and archaeological contexts. These three exhibition spaces would complement each other:

### 6.1 The Mosaic Building. Focus on the mosaic and villa

**The building will normally be locked** but can be opened for visits by schools and other groups. [This will be the responsibility of the History Group exhibitions curator.]

Inside:

The mosaic would be on a sloping rack in 2 sections with a walkway between them and a scatter of tesserae bedded in substrate along edges of walkway.

On the rear wall: reconstruction of a Roman painted plaster wall based on fragments found during the Street Farm excavations.

There would also be space for displays and the storage of objects, etc.

Outside:

On the rear wall--display panels showing:

Mock-up of the complete mosaic

Method of construction

How the villa and mosaic were found and excavated

Plans of successive phases of the site and of the villa

Life at the villa

## 6.2 Village Hall café: exhibition space

On 20/9/18 the Village Hall Management Committee agreed in principle to provide an exhibition space at the rear of the café. The focus will be on the villa in the wider context of Roman Tackley. Part of the exhibition will be designed with children in mind--the space is adjacent to the playground.

2 display panels and 2 cabinets—all wall-mounted

Model of the villa in its final phase

Information sheets and resource materials

There will be a range of Roman-related activities for children.

See Appendix 1 for more detail.

## 6.3 St Nicholas Church: exhibition space in the south porch

Already set up. Focus on the whole history of Tackley.

4 display cabinets

3 display panels

Wherever appropriate the displays will be interactive. The various displays, information material, activities and resources will be linked through digital media and a website.

The History Group will develop plans for an annual Tackley History Day focused around the mosaic and villa.

## 6.4 Cost of display and interpretation

This will be very dependent on the range and quality of display and interpretive materials that are finally decided.

**At this stage they can be estimated at £10,000.**

## 7. Maintenance, security and insurance

The requirements for a regular condition survey and a maintenance schedule will be determined in consultation with the Oxfordshire Museum Service, the Association for the Study and Preservation of Roman Mosaics and the Association for Roman Archaeology.

The curator of the History Group, together with a nominated member of the Council, will inspect the mosaic at regular (e.g. three-monthly intervals) and monitor its condition against a checklist which will indicate the stage at which various remedial actions might need to be taken. They will report to the Council and the History Group and will be responsible for instigating any remedial action agreed by the Council.

Since the mosaic will be in a purpose-designed building with passive environmental control maintenance is likely to be minimal (e.g. cleaning) and, unless specialist work on the mosaic is required, will be undertaken by the History Group. If specialist work is required the History Group will seek to raise funds to cover it.

Advice about the security of the building will be taken from the Council's insurers and the owners of similar facilities. The building and the mosaic will become part of the Council's asset register. The risk of vandalism will be affected by the building's location: the more central and frequented the lower the risk. Serious and sustained vandalism is unlikely in Tackley, but if it occurs, it will be covered by the Council's insurance policy.

## 8. Costs

The three major elements are: conservation; the building; display and interpretation. These costs are approximately:

Conservation & installation	(see # 4.2)	£39,600
Construction of the building	(see # 5.4)	£50,000
Display and interpretation	(see # 6.4)	£10,000
<b>Total cost</b>		<b>£100,000</b>

## 9. Funding

### 9.1 Funding sources

A portion of the project's costs will be met in kind through the provision of time, expertise and the supply of materials by individuals and organisations at no or reduced charge.

We aim to meet most of the project's monetary cost from outside the village through applications to appropriate charities and other public bodies, companies and individuals. The central application, for most of the cost, will be to the Heritage Lottery Fund. The HLF has provided £9,600 to the Gibraltar Point Dig, which our HLF grants' officer visited as an example of a thriving community archaeology project and has indicated that the mosaic project meets their funding criteria.

Tackley residents will be invited to contribute through fund-raising events such as a 'tessera tombola', sponsoring an object, and direct donations as well as through contributions of time and expertise.

## 9.2 Timescale and cut-off date for fund-raising.

If the Council gives the go-ahead to the project in April 2019, we will submit major funding applications by the end of the year, bearing in mind the application cycles of funding bodies.

We will report to the Council on the progress of fundraising on a regular (e.g. three-monthly) basis. From January 2020 this will include an assessment as to whether or not there is a realistic chance of raising the funds and a recommendation as to whether or not to continue with the project. If the Council decides to stop the project the mosaic will be donated to the Oxfordshire Museum Service. Any funds raised will be returned or put to an alternative use approved by the donors.

At this stage the aim is to complete the project by December 2020.

## **10. Timescale**

April 2019	Decision by Parish Council
31 December 2019	Major Funding applications submitted
December 2020	Completion
Spring 2021	Official opening

## Appendix 1: Resources, activities, publications

### Resources and activities, including for schools

1. Boxes of tesserae: both original tiles from the site and modern replicas. Guide to designing and making a mosaic.
2. A collection of local Roman pottery and coins.

Possible activities:

Make your own mosaic;  
Complete a quiz about life in Roman Tackley;  
Lay out the ground-plan of the villa on the playing field—practical mathematical skills;  
Design your own villa;  
Write stories/plays around characters from the villa and other Roman sites—owner, wife, children, workers, slaves, soldiers, priests—and from other historical periods;  
Paint or draw life in Tackley in the past.

### Information sheets

Making a mosaic  
Pre-Roman Tackley  
Roman Tackley  
Excavating a site  
The stages of the villa complex  
Life in Roman Tackley: agriculture; food and drink; clothing; leisure; religion  
Tackley and the wider Roman world: trade, transport, travel and migration  
Tackley after the end of the Roman Empire

### Publications

Book: *A villa in North Oxfordshire: the development, decline and re-discovery of Roman Tackley*  
Edited by members of the Local History Group with contributions from Anni Byard and David Sanchez, director of the Street Farm excavation. Approx. 100 pages in length.

Indicative contents:

*Prehistoric Tackley.* History group  
*Layers of occupation—the Gibraltar Point site.* Anni Byard & history group  
*Akeman Street, early Roman settlement and the roadside village at Sansom's Platt.* History group  
*The Street Farm Roman villa.* David Sanchez  
*Roman farmsteads and field systems: field-walking and crop-marks.* History group  
*After the end of the Roman Empire.* History group

## Appendix 2

### Possible locations of mosaic building





### Appendix 3





