

The **Archaeology**
of Barrow upon Soar



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Barrow is renowned for its marine fossils, plesiosaurs and ichthyosaurs. These date to the Jurassic period, 150-200 million years ago, long before man existed. The first evidence for man in and around Barrow is from the Palaeolithic period (*Old Stone Age*) which started 800,000 years ago.

Archaeology is defined in the dictionary as “the study of man’s past by scientific analysis of the material remains of his cultures” whilst history is “the discipline of recording and interpreting past events”, implying the use of documentary evidence.

So what archaeological evidence is there? Evidence of the past comes in many forms:-

- Stones, mostly flint used as tools
- Pottery
- Metalwork & coins
- Wooden items
- Leather, furs and skins
- Earthworks and buildings

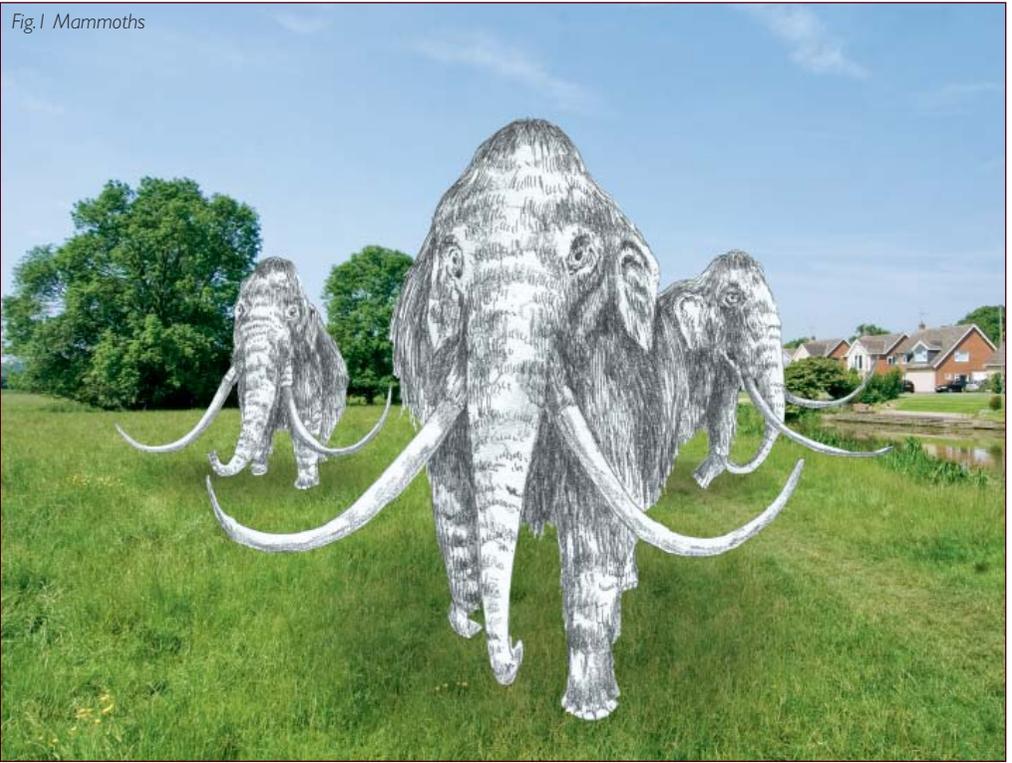
There are also hints in the landscape and vegetation that can suggest buried features such as pits, ditches and buried stonework from walls or foundations.

To protect the remaining archaeology from damage or abuse some of the locations in this document are kept deliberately vague. If you want to know more please ask.

Prehistory

Prehistory covers most of our past from 800,000 in the Palaeolithic to 2000 years ago at the end of the Iron Age. Few items remain as buildings and many tools were made from wood or leather/skins which have not survived. Pottery is first seen in Britain from the Neolithic (*New Stone Age*) which starts about 6000 years ago. However, in Barrow, pottery only survives from the Bronze Age. Metalwork, also from the Bronze Age (*4000 years ago*) onwards was only for the very rich and powerful and none is known from Barrow. Coins only started being used towards the end of the Iron Age. Most of our evidence for early Barrow is therefore from finds of flint tools or the leftovers from tool making.

Fig.1 Mammoths



Palaeolithic (*Old Stone Age*) 500,000 - 9,500 BC

It is believed that the earliest evidence of man in Barrow upon Soar is a possible hand-axe – the Swiss Army Knife of its time – from about 430,000 years ago. The making of tools like this is described as the “first time one tool was deliberately hit by another to make something useful”. At least three species of humans have lived in Britain, and at this particular time, it would have been our ancestor, *Homo heidelbergensis*.

Gravel working in the early 20th century unearthed bones of mammoth and woolly rhinoceros, potentially food for our “caveman”.

A possible stone tool found within the village in the 1950s is a type often associated with Neanderthal man (30,000 to 160,000 years ago). The flint would have been struck to remove flakes which could then be used as scrapers and blades. The River Soar at this time flowed north to south along the Soar Valley and then through the Wreake Valley and onwards. Ultimately it ran into the River Thames and then finished in the North Sea. The Soar Valley was likely to have been a major transit route for game, and humans moved north as the glaciers retreated.

Fig. 2 Flint working in Mesolithic Barrow



Mesolithic (*Middle Stone Age*) 9,500 - 4,500 BC

The Mesolithic period commenced after the glaciers of the last ice age retreated. Britain was covered by forest and inhabited by bands of roving hunter-gatherers of modern humans, *Homo sapiens* – us! Mesolithic flints are characterised by very small tools called “microliths” which have been found in Barrow during field walking. The number of flints found suggests that flint working took place within the parish. Flint is not natural to the Barrow area and it was brought to the area by the glaciers. Two Mesolithic flints and a scraper have been found in local fields.



Fig.3 Three microliths (blades) that have been split off from a blade core



Fig.4 Neolithic flints: Core (left) and Fabricator (right)

Neolithic (*New Stone Age*) & Bronze Age 4,500 - 700 BC

During the Neolithic era people started to clear trees, settle down and begin to farm. Pottery also started to be used but none has yet been found in Barrow. The Bronze Age is named after the first metalwork to be in regular use but only the elite were able to have bronze during the Bronze Age. The majority of the people continued to use flint in ways which changed little over these 3000 years, so many of the 120 flints found around Barrow can only be approximately dated.



Fig.5 Hand-held axe

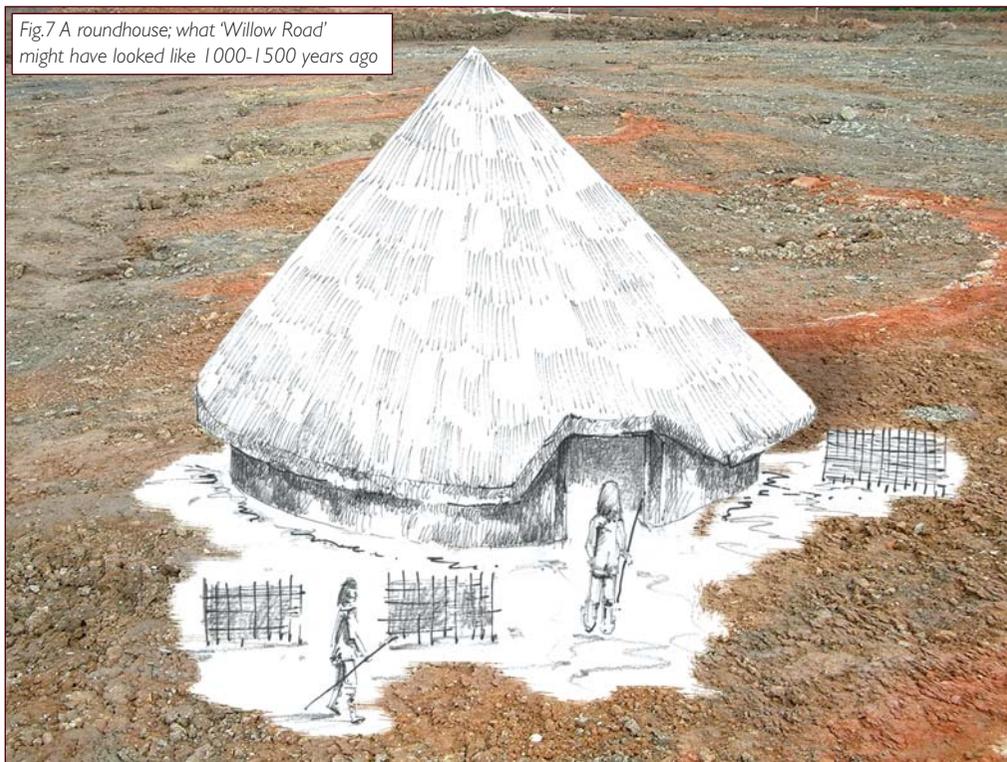
Large monuments, such as stone circles start to appear but none have yet been identified locally. A single aerial photograph of the village has shown a circular feature called a ring ditch. This has not been excavated and field walking has not provided any evidence to suggest a use, however, a burial mound (*barrow*) is a possibility.

A selection of prehistoric flint items have been found such as the sharpened Neolithic flints (Fig. 4), the hammer (Fig. 5) and axe-hammer (Fig. 6).



Fig.6 Axe-hammer

Fig.7 A roundhouse; what 'Willow Road' might have looked like 1000-1500 years ago



Iron Age 700 BC - 43 AD

The Bronze Age merged into the Iron Age. Iron was used for tools and weapons. It became increasingly common as time passed. Major cultural changes occurred with coinage being minted and used for the first time and "proto-towns" starting to form.

Although metal jewellery had existed for some time, remains are now seen in Barrow along with both Bronze Age and Iron Age pottery. The residents of Barrow would have belonged to the Corieltavian tribe which were based on a settlement called Ratae (*modern day Leicester*). The River Soar was probably also named at this time. It is thought to mean "flowing one".

The Willow Road excavations unearthed two circular ditch features which are probably the remains of two Iron Age roundhouses and field boundary ditches. Pottery has been found in two local fields and two coins in another. A brooch, in the Hallstadt artistic style, has also been found and is similar to examples from Italy and the former Yugoslavia.



Fig.8 Hallstadt brooch

Fig.9 Pack mules carrying salt in Roman times



The Romans 43 - 411 AD

The Romans landed in the south of England in AD43 and quickly moved northwards, either conquering the local tribes or accepting them as client kingdoms.

Barrow does not appear on any Roman maps or itineraries. However, archaeological remains suggest a significant settlement or even a small town. Barrow is similar to many of the other small Roman Leicestershire towns in that it is on a well-used road, a "Salt Way" from Lincolnshire and where a river crossing was made on the river Legro (now Soar).

Pack mules would have carried salt down this road for distribution across Britain. Barrow certainly had a high status Roman building, probably a "villa". Field walking has found roof tiles, wall plaster, tessellated stones from a patterned floor (*probably not good enough to be a mosaic*) and hypocaust tiles meaning that central heating was in use in Barrow 2000 years ago!

Barrow's outstanding finds were made in 1867 on the discovery of a Roman cemetery. Much of the cemetery was undisturbed and the preservation of some of the grave goods was outstanding – the highlight being three large and intact vessels in green glass sealed with lead.



Fig.10 Tessellated cubes cut from stone and brick



Fig.11 Cremation urn

All the vessels contained cremations. A further two glass vessels were found broken and probably contained wine. The cemetery contained the skeletal remains of at least a further five people. Roman finds of archaeological material in the village have been significant including more than 1600 shards of pottery, over 50 coins, 5 pieces of jewellery and over 1000 pieces of building material.



Fig.12 Bone needle

Pottery remains in Barrow cover all of the Roman period. Most are of utilitarian cookware made locally, but other fragments come from all over Britain. 'Sunday-best' crockery has also been found including Samian ware from France.



Fig.13 Roman dish



Fig.14 Coin showing Emperor Valens of 4th Century AD

Two locations have shown concentrations of coins suggesting high status buildings, possibly villas. Many of the coins are in poor condition but some are sufficiently well preserved to show they were minted in Trier (Germany), Lyon (France) and Sisack (Croatia).

Five brooches have been found in various styles all of which would have been used to hold clothing in place. They are from the early period of Roman Britain, AD 43 - 200. One brooch was originally highly decorated and still retains an incised pattern and traces of enamel.

Another find is a Roman dish from the Nene valley transported to Barrow.



Fig.15 Dolphin brooch

Fig.16 Flagon
(for holding wine or olive oil)



Fig.17 Girdle ring (a belt)

Early Medieval 411 - 1066 AD

There is evidence that settlement continued into the Early Medieval period, the “Dark Ages”, and then first the Anglo Saxons, and later the Vikings, settled alongside the descendents of the Roman inhabitants. Barrow remained important through to the arrival of the Normans in 1066. The Barrow parish/estate belonged to Harold Godwinson, the King Harold who died at Hastings. Barrow was his largest estate in Leicestershire.

One certainty is that the name Barrow is written down for the first time as “Barhou”. The modern Barrow can be derived from the Old English word “bearu” meaning a “wood or grove”. Barrow upon Soar therefore means a “grove on the flowing river”.

1950's excavations found large quantities of pottery from this period prompting some experts to suggest that Barrow was a major pottery production area. Material in the pottery is only found close to Barrow and Mountsorrel. This pottery is common throughout the East Midlands and even as far as East Anglia.



Fig.18 Metal spearhead

Two early Saxon brooch fragments were found by metal detectors in one field suggesting a burial. Another single Saxon burial was excavated in the 1950s revealing a spear (the head survived) and a iron knife. As Christianity was introduced these pagan burial rituals were then gradually replaced by the modern practice of burying bodies in the ground around churches and chapels. We see evidence of this after 800 AD in Thurmaston and the Wreake Valley.



Fig.19 Central shield boss to give added strength



Fig.20 Bridle cheek piece to hold the reins of a horse's harness

The Medieval 1066 - 1485 AD

Barrow appears in the Domesday Book which gives a good idea of the size and importance of the village. Barrow was a huge village with land covering 4850 hectares (12,000 acres), much larger than its present size of 930 hectares. Barrow included the modern parishes of Quorn, Woodhouse, Beaumanor, part of Mountsorrel, Woodhouse Eaves and Charley – about a third of Charnwood Forest.

Barrow was given to Hugh Lupus, Earl of Chester, who built a castle at Mountsorrel (which was then part of Barrow) in 1088. When Earl Hugh died he was followed by six more Earls of Chester until it passed, via a female co-heir, to the Earls of Arundell and then Dudley.

Of the churches you can see today, the earliest is Holy Trinity which was built in the 12th century. It was heavily restored in the 19th century but is mostly 15th century with some 14th century masonry and is potentially the earliest building in the village. The remains of a cross shaft in the churchyard are thought to be medieval in date.

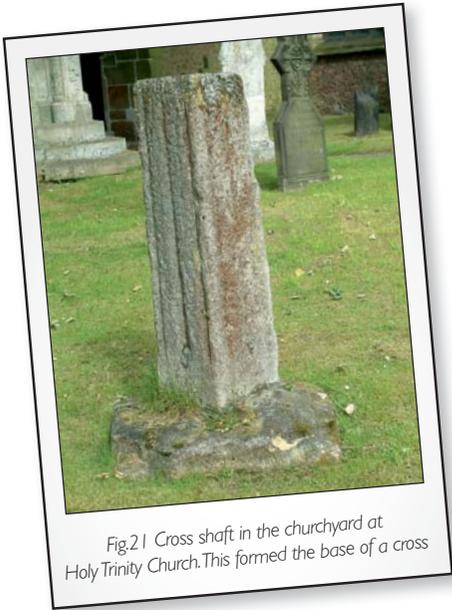


Fig.21 Cross shaft in the churchyard at Holy Trinity Church. This formed the base of a cross

*Note: Fig. 22, 23, 24, 26 & 32 were not found in Barrow upon Soar



*Fig.22 Copper belt buckle



*Fig.23 Seal for identification



*Fig.24 Ampulla for holding oil

Fig 25. Farmer ploughing a field in Barrow



Most of the inhabitants of Barrow would have been farmers. Barrow only had three huge fields which were farmed collectively with each farmer working a series of strips. Crops were planted in a raised mound called a ridge which was surrounded on both sides by lower areas, "furrows" (see Fig. 25 above).



*Fig.26 Medieval decorative mount

These "Open" fields disappeared in the 1760s. However, remnants of "Paudy Field" can still be seen, the ridge and furrows appearing as low earthworks.

The Willow Road excavations of 2006 have shown that Barrovians were also digging for limestone and making lime at this time (see Fig. 27 & 28). Circular areas of burnt soil were found along with traces of coal indicating shallow kilns. There is documentary evidence for Barrow lime being used in Leicester Abbey and at Kirby Muxloe Castle.

Finds of medieval pottery are fairly common in the Parish. Much of this pottery is very poor in quality. Other small finds suggest that some of the people of Barrow had managed to lose, or more probably, throw away some expensive items.

Fig 27. The 'Willow Road' excavations of 2006

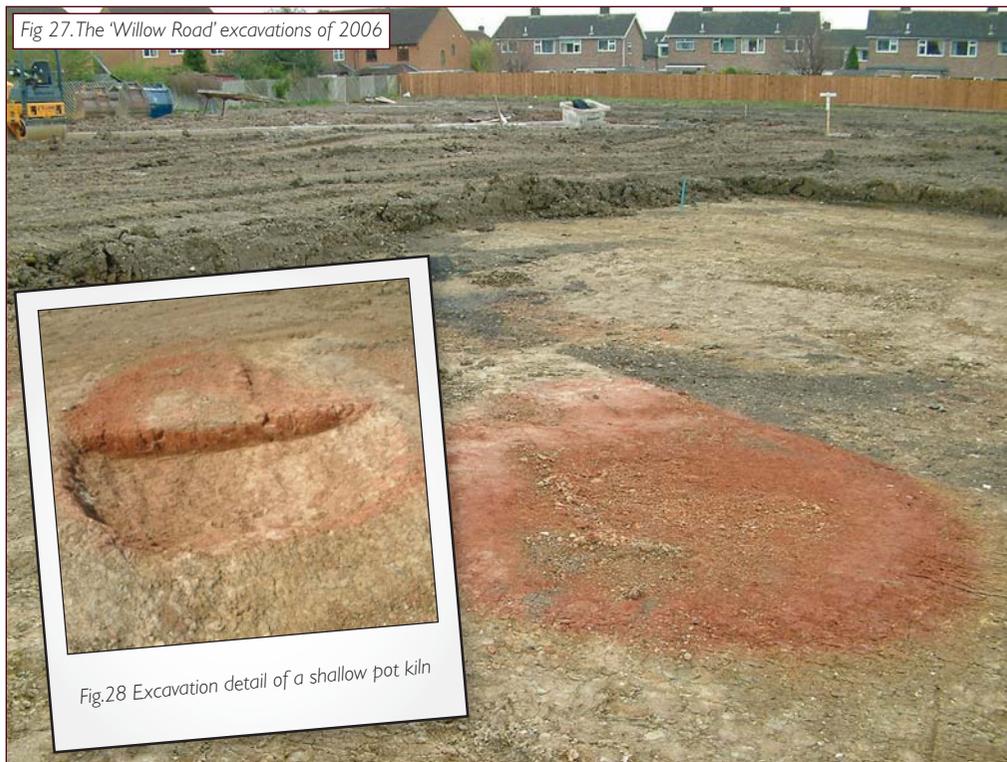


Fig.28 Excavation detail of a shallow pot kiln

The Early Post Medieval 1485 - 1750 AD

The Medieval period came to an end on 22nd August 1485 with the battle of Bosworth Field, 25 km (15½ miles) to the south-west. Documents tell us that Barrow Manor was in the hands of the Earls of Huntingdon in the 1480's although the Lord of the manor had not been in residence since 1467. The manor then passed to the Herricks of Beaumanor Hall in 1608. The leading families in Barrow at this time were the Beaumonts and Beveridges, now immortalised in current street names.

There are several buildings in Barrow that survive from this time. The earliest is one of the cottages next to the church which dates to the early 16th century. The half timbered building in Beveridge Street and Bishop Beveridge's house itself date to the end of the 16th century.

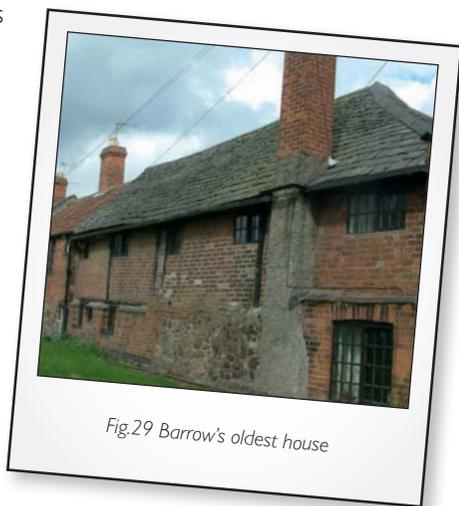


Fig.29 Barrow's oldest house

Fig.30 Lime pot kiln



There is also evidence of lime working, again from the Willow Road excavations. A range of kiln designs were discovered from this period (*definitive dating is still awaited*). Many were cone shaped and sunk into the earth, or possibly built up using spoil from neighbouring lime delphs (*or quarries*).

Other than pottery, which is very common as it is found amongst waste used to manure fields, little in the way of small finds are recorded from the village. A single coin (*a silver penny of Elizabeth I*) and two tokens, used as a substitute for coinage particularly for very low values, have also been found.



Fig.31 Elizabethan silver penny



*Fig.32 Token for bartering

The Late Post Medieval 1750 - 1850 AD

This hundred year period saw great change within the parish. First the open fields were enclosed (1761), which ended strip farming and brought in small fields surrounded by hedges or sometimes fences, as we continue to do today. Then the canal arrived (1794) and, at the end of this period, the railway was built (1840). The streets were paved (1840) and the current bridge over the Soar was built (1845). Industry also arrived with the construction of Barrow's first factory, Black and Drivers in Sibley Road.

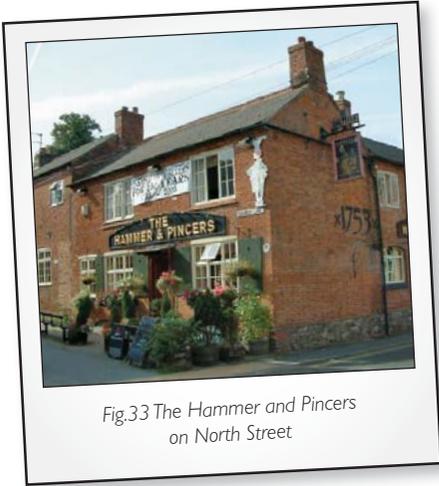


Fig.33 The Hammer and Pincers on North Street

Many buildings in Church Street, Beveridge Street and North Street date from this time. Others can be seen in South Street and Melton Road. This remains the core of the village. The Roundhouse, the village gaol and "fire station," also dates from this time as do two of the village's oldest surviving pubs, "The Hammer and Pincers" (1753) and the "Navigation" (1794).

Lime continued to be the staple industry of the village with some 11 delphs in operation in 1845. The first Ordnance Survey map shows them distributed throughout the village. During the Willow Road excavations, lime kilns of a more sophisticated type containing

a flue system were found, dating from this period. They were last fired at the turn of the 19th century and had all disappeared by 1904 when the land reverted to agriculture.

Framework knitting was an important industry in the village with scores of men and women employed. Beveridge Street was the centre of business with 150 frames reported in 1830. Another important trade was that of cane and rush work – unfortunately no archaeological traces have yet been found of these, nor of the frame knitting industry.

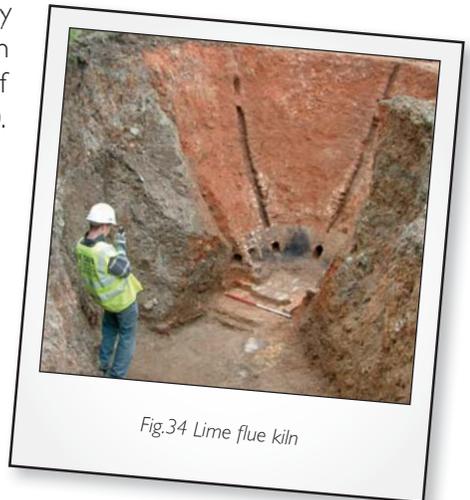


Fig.34 Lime flue kiln



Fig.35

Fig.36

Fig.37

Fig.38

Fig.39

How can I get involved?

Contact: Barrow upon Soar Archaeology Group
through the Parish Council Office on High Street **01509 416016**

Barrow upon Soar Archaeology Warden: Terri Davies **01509 416206**

Young Archaeologists Club

& Leicestershire Museums Archaeological Field work Group:

Peter Liddle, c/o LCC Environmental & Heritage Services, Room 500 County Hall,
Glenfield, Leicester, LE3 8TE – **0116 305 8326** or e-mail **pliddle@leics.gov.uk**

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