

# Open Letter to the Planning Committee

The battle of Bosworth was one of the most significant events in English history. It is remarkable for the fact that it featured the final cavalry charge of the last English king to die in battle. This event led to the end of over three hundred years of Plantagenet rule, and the beginning of the Tudor era.

Despite being a Society with a research focus firmly on events of the past, we are in no way opposed to technological progress. It was indeed more recent advances in genetics and DNA fingerprinting which allowed King Richard himself to be identified once his remains were located beneath the Social Services car park in Leicester in 2012. However, we are concerned that something as historically and culturally important as the battlefield, which has a direct relevance to the king now buried in Leicester Cathedral, will be adversely impacted by this development. We appreciate the need to test this new technology but by its nature, and bearing in mind the speed of future technological advances, it is likely to become quickly obsolete, whereas the damage done to the battlefield will be irreparable. We are therefore concerned that the battlefield will be lost for a project which may be important in the short term, but is unlikely to have a significant lasting value across centuries to come. This being the case, surely an alternative site can be found, where our heritage will not be destroyed?

We appeal to the Councillors on the Planning Committee of Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council to listen, not just to us, but to many of the local residents who have recently commented publicly and signed a petition against this development along with other groups who feel as we do and whose work supports important local tourism in the area. Amongst those are the Battlefields Trust, the Richard III Loyal Supporters, the Henry Tudor Society, and the many, many other experts in their fields who hold such strong opinions on this issue they have sent us the statements of support that are included with this letter (below).

Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council are the custodians of this unique and historically important place. We implore you to make the right decision and protect the battlefield for future generations. Our trust is in you to ensure that the site can be enjoyed in years to come, as it has been over its long and revealing history.

Statements in  
Support of the  
Campaign to  
preserve Bosworth  
Battlefield

**Professor Robert Bartlett FBA, Professor of Medieval History Emeritus, University of St Andrews, presenter ‘The Plantagenets’ (BBC2)**

“The proposed development on the site of the battle of Bosworth threatens permanent damage to a location of great historical importance. Research into battlefield sites is one of the most exciting new areas of historical activity and will continue to produce new results as new methods are applied. It is thus particularly important to preserve these sites. The battle of Bosworth was a major turning point in the political history of England and its site ranks high among those places that should be given special protection.”

## **Philippa Gregory, award-winning author of ‘The White Queen’**

“Bosworth Battlefield is a site of immense historical interest, importance and continuing relevance. Whether you go as a tourist, a visitor, or as an historian, the place has much to offer. I have gone for an educational and entertaining day out at the historic re-enactment, I have attended as part of the Time Team research. I have never come away without learning something new or experiencing something wonderful. As we go into the 21<sup>st</sup> century these evocative places of the past matter more than ever. Heritage is precious in itself and also marketable – the Bosworth battlefield is valuable in every sense and I urge you to preserve it.”

**Richard Armitage, award-winning actor (‘North & South’ ‘The Hobbit’), born in Leicestershire.**

“I was born on the anniversary of the Battle of Bosworth, and named after King Richard III who lost his life that day in 1485, so I have always felt a special connection to the place, and been aware of the battle’s significance in the history of this country. Being a local I’ve visited the battlefield many times, something I continue to do whenever I come home, so I was saddened to hear of the plans to build on part of it.

We are proud of our connection to King Richard in Leicestershire, what a pity it would be to destroy this important part of our heritage. Who knows what is still waiting to be discovered there? Please preserve this important site for future generations, once it is taken away from us, it is lost forever. I urge Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council to do the right thing and reject this application.”

## **Chris Skidmore, MP and Historian**

“The battle of Bosworth is one of the most important battles in British history, leading to the end of the Plantagenet dynasty and the birth of the Tudor dynasty. The battle site is remarkably well preserved – as recent archaeological investigations have shown, there is still much evidence buried beneath its fields. As the discovery of Richard III’s remains under the tarmac of a Leicester car park demonstrate, our hidden past can unearth remarkable finds. Yet this planning application for a huge driverless car testing track due to be decided on 25<sup>th</sup> September threatens to tarmac over a historic battlefield – setting a dangerous precedent for battlefields and archaeological heritage across the country that deserves to be protected for future investigation. I realise that as an author of a book on the battle and more recently a biography of Richard III I have a personal interest in preserving the battlefield having spent hours researching it – but I’m standing up for future historians and archaeologists, as well as the British public who don’t deserve to lose this vital piece of our history.”

**Philippa Langley MBE, writer / producer. Led the search for Richard III through her original ‘Looking for Richard Project’. Producer of the award-winning ‘Richard III: The King in the Car Park’ (Channel 4)**

“It was a visit to the battlefield that began the search for the king’s grave. Had I visited a noisy industrialised area it is very doubtful whether I would have connected with King Richard’s story in the way that I did, and he would remain today under a busy city centre car park. Please do not make this iconic site into another car park and destroy our heritage for future generations. Historic England – our collective trust is in you.”

**Mike Ingram MA, Medieval Historian, author and battlefield guide. Author of 'Battle Story: Bosworth 1485'**

“It is beyond belief that anyone would even consider building on a single square metre of such a nationally iconic battlefield as Bosworth. The site of the development is close to the heart of the fighting and it has been my long-held belief that it is not only where Henry’s French mercenaries gathered before the battle but also close to where he positioned his cannons.

There are still many questions to be answered about the battle and how it fitted into the landscape. It is therefore essential that it is preserved intact, without further disruption to the surrounding landscape for future generations to study and understand. We must also not forget that as well as the site of the death of Richard III, many more lost their lives during the fighting and rout. Their bodies have never been found and may still lie under the quiet Leicestershire countryside. The proposed development with its associated noise and structures will irrevocably change the sense of place currently experienced when visiting the actual battlefield.”

**Annette Carson, biographer and internationally award-winning copywriter. Author of 'Richard III: The Maligned King' and key member of the Looking For Richard Project.**

“As shown by the reburial of Richard III, preserving our history can provide unforeseen and ongoing benefits, something worth weighing seriously before we damage a heritage site forever. Present day interests have no difficulty being heard. We need to have confidence that our elected representatives will give equal hearing to advocates for our past, which has no voice of its own. Decisions taken today will profoundly influence what future generations will think of us.”

**Matthew Lewis, historian and author of the latest biography of Richard III – ‘Loyalty Binds Me’.**

“The Battle of Bosworth is used as a marker for so many things. It saw the end of the Plantagenet dynasty, the beginning of the Tudor era and is still used today to represent the transition from the medieval to early modern period. Men bled and died on the fields of Leicestershire for what they believed in and thought was worth preserving. The same battle, waged in ink rather than blood, needs to be fought again, in those same rolling meadows.

This is not, in the case of anyone I have engaged with, an instance of a phobia about progress as some wish to insist. The heritage and history community is not opposed to change and development. It is what most of us study and love. What is history if not the study of progress, change and development? The overwhelming concern is that one should never come at the cost of the other. There is space for both to coexist and we should recognise, encourage and nurture that harmony. The United Kingdom has long been a land proud both of its heritage and its unrelenting innovation. It can be no coincidence that both have existed here for centuries.

Janus, the Roman god who protected doorways and entrances, was able to perform his task because he had two faces. One looked forward, and one looked back. It has always been an important ability and one that the UK has balanced well. As pressure for even more progress builds, we should remain mindful of the need to look back too. It will always be hard to tell where you are going if you lose sight of how you got where you are. We are all doorkeepers, standing at the intersection of the past and the future with a responsibility to guard both, to look both ways.

If we must be more mercenary, progress is not the only way to make money. Heritage is a huge draw in terms of internal and external tourism. Do millions flock to these shores each year to

spend their money visiting driverless car test tracks, or castles, stately homes and battlefield sites? Once more, the two do not need to compete, but each should recognise the vital economic role of the other. Leicestershire has seen better than most counties in recent years the financial benefit of a tangible link to our medieval history. To seek to burn those ties seems like folly.

So why is there such a groundswell of opinion against this development? It certainly isn't for fear of progress and dread that our robot overlords will arrive in unchauffered hatchbacks. It's only 1% of the battlefield, we're told. It doesn't matter whether it's 1% or 100%. Either registered battlefield sites are protected, or they aren't. My left eye probably accounts for less than 1% of my body, but I consider it important. The area the proposed would cover is a spot identified as the likely site on which the Tudor army was gathered and is very near to where some of the fighting took place, including Richard III's death. It is a critical part of the site. In fact, I would argue there isn't a portion that isn't significant and worthy of protection. This development will set no precedent we are told, as objections are countered by the use of precedent; there are roads and a visitor centre, so it must be okay to build there. It is impossible to insist precedent is not at stake whilst simultaneously relying on it to make your case.

It has been less than a decade since the positioning of the battle was radically altered by archaeological finds. There is more to be discovered, interpreted and understood. No one is saying there should not be a driverless car test track. We are simply insisting that heritage should not be compromised, archaeology should not be lost and a significant piece of countryside should be preserved. I look forward to the day a driverless car can take me to Bosworth Battlefield, and I can enjoy the past and the future in perfect harmony, not watch them tear each other apart. That landscape has seen its fighting. Let it rest in peace.”

**Alison Weir, historian and author.**

“Bosworth Battlefield witnessed the end of the Plantagenet dynasty and the birth of Tudor England. It is one of the most significant and important historical sites in Britain, and should be preserved as such for future generations to enjoy, and for archaeologists to explore further. So many battle sites have been lost to development over the centuries. We must not lose this one.

You wouldn't drive a track through Hampton Court Palace, which is arguably less important historically, so why allow a track on Bosworth Battlefield? Those whose remit is to protect the site should be doing their utmost to protect it. There are other places where the track could be built, so why choose this one. I am astonished, no, horrified, that the local authority would even consider such an application. For Heaven's sake, have 'some touch of pity'!”

**Professor Christine Carpenter, Professor of Medieval History,  
Cambridge University**

“So many battlefields in this country were destroyed in one way or another before their importance was properly realised that it is an act of sheer vandalism wantonly to destroy those that are left, perhaps even more so in this case when it is for such a comparatively footling reason and when there must be so many other spaces which lack such significance which could be used.

This comment would apply to all our surviving battlefields but this is one of such historical significance that I am astonished that this should even be contemplated. That this is happening just as Leicestershire is putting so much energy into the whole ‘Richard III’ project makes it even odder. And the recent discovery of the real battle site shows how careful we must be not to destroy any part of the area in and around battlefields.”

**Paul Parker, Captain of Les Routiers de Rouen (Conflict 1485), re-enactors at Bosworth Battlefield.**

“My group have represented Good King Richard III for 34 years, 26 of those years as resident society at Bosworth Field. We provided the honour guard around the gravesite whilst the archaeology was taking place and also had the great honour of escorting his remains from Fenn Lane back to the hearse, then to be escorted by the Knights to Leicester. We also were the four flame bearers that provided the dawn vigil at the nearest point to the king’s death. We are so disgusted with the proposal of building on the battlefield as it is a memorial to the fallen. There have been three events to change the course of our history – the Norman invasion, the birth of the Tudors (being Bosworth), and the Battle of Britain. Who in their right mind would want to desecrate this monument in English history? If we allow this to happen then our whole heritage is at stake. Please respect our past, as it represents our future.”

**Dr David Santiuste, Historian, Centre for Open Learning,  
University of Edinburgh.**

“I was shocked and disappointed to learn about the proposed development by Horiba Mira on the battlefield of Bosworth, Recent archaeological work has established the battle’s location beyond question, as well as providing new insights into the tactics and technologies of medieval warfare. Further discoveries are likely if the battlefield is preserved. Moreover, like all battlefields, Bosworth is a heritage site that encourages reflection and reverence – a place where people may feel a connection with the past. It has therefore attracted thousands of visitors to the area – and will doubtless continue to do so if the battlefield is protected. The ongoing campaign to halt the proposed development has my full support and I urge Horiba Mira to reconsider their plans.”

**Dr David and Wendy Johnson, founder members of the Looking for Richard Project.**

“The astonishing discovery of Richard III’s mortal remains in 2012 provides the most vivid example of how historical research, archaeology, and science and recover the human story of our national history. The threatened segment of Bosworth battlefield possesses the same potential to unlock the secrets of the past, despite the assurances of the developer that the scheme will not encroach upon vital parts of the site. Historians are agreed that the full extent of Bosworth battlefield has yet to be defined, and until the establishment of a more informed and precise demarcation, planning proposals should not be considered let alone approved. Men fought and died yards from the proposed development and it is entirely possible that many of them still lay beneath these fields. Surely, we cannot permit the destruction of such a sensitive and important site, one of our principal battlefields, where Richard III the last English king to die in battle, fought valiantly to the last.”

**Gwilym Dodd, Associate Professor of Medieval History,  
University of Nottingham**

“Bosworth Battlefield is a site of national, indeed international importance, and any development which threatens the integrity of this area, even if on its outer edge, must be considered with utmost circumspection. We have an absolute duty to future generations to preserve all historic sites from development which could seriously change their original character and aspect.”

**Professor Mark Ormrod, Emeritus Professor of History,  
University of York.**

“Bosworth Field is a location of truly international historical importance, and any violation of its integrity will rightfully be judged by future generations as an act of cultural vandalism. I call on all reasonable parties to desist from plans for the inappropriate development of the site.”

**Arthur Kincaid D.Phil (Oxon), editor of Sir William Cornwallis' Encomium of Richard III (c.1600) and Sir George Buc's History of King Richard III (1619) and author of seminal article 'The Dramatic Structure of Sir Thomas More's History of King Richard III'.**

“I remember when Bosworth was virtually unchartered, and some of it belonging privately to a farmer who was, I suppose understandably, adverse to people tramping over his field. Since then it has become an organized site for both tourists and educational visitors. Recently its parameters have been more clearly established by archaeological excavations. Archaeology is still in progress on the site. And the battlefield includes the site where the driverless car track is proposed to go. The battle of Bosworth Field is one of the most signal events of English history, which not only occasioned a change of ruling dynasty but signalled a transition from the middle ages to the beginnings of the modern era. Nothing is more vivid educationally than to visit an historical site and picture there on the spot how the event for which the place is famed happened, in what precise spot, in as much detail as can be established. While there are countless sites that would serve for a driverless car track, there is not anywhere on earth another Bosworth Field. And for this reason it should have protected status.”

**Joanna Laynesmith DPhil, Visiting Research Fellow,  
University of Reading, Author of ‘The Last Medieval Queens’.**

“No amount of printed words or photographs can create the thrill that comes from standing where the course of history shifted. Bosworth, even more than the similarly threatened Agincourt, is one of the key hooks on which we hang our understanding of where we came from. The political institutions and religious framework that we inhabit today grew out of the consequences of who lived and who died at Bosworth. This is a landscape central to Britain’s story and should be preserved as such.

Every time we carve a little further into major heritage sites, as with fragile environmental locations, we make it easier to do so again and again. Each such act of vandalism comes at a cost to future generations, whatever the economic dividends their proponents anticipate.

The ‘Second Battle of Bosworth’ is not just about a corner of the field on which the last medieval king of England died. It represents a wider debate about who and what we choose to respect as a society.

Rejecting this particular location for contentious experimentation with driverless cars is not a matter of shunning progress per se. It is just the wrong place for such building. Bosworth battlefield is worth far more to the future protected as a space in which we can appreciate and comprehend our past.

For all these reasons, I would urge the Hinckley-Bosworth planning committee to choose to protect Bosworth battlefield in its entirety.”

**Professor Martial Staub, Professor of Medieval History,  
University of Sheffield.**

“It is with bewilderment and distress that my colleagues and I have learnt that Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council are currently considering an application to build a test track for driverless vehicles on a section of the registered battlefield of Bosworth.

The battle of Bosworth was perceived in its own day as a momentous event beyond the English and, indeed, British borders. While a site of memory for people of these isles, it is to this day rooted in Western memory as a turning point in the transformation of the country and European civilisation from medieval society to early modernity. It is not surprising that the recent discovery of Richard III’s remains was commented in the news worldwide.

The significance of Bosworth Battlefield goes beyond local and national remembrance. It is the visible trace of a shared history in which the world as we know it was created and a reminder of the role of violence in it. Any tempering with this legacy would muddle this memory and ultimately debase it. This is in nobody’s interest: neither locally nor nationally, nor, indeed, internationally.”

**David Horspool, Historian, Author of ‘Richard III – A Ruler and his Reputation’, Sports Editor of The Times Literary Supplement.**

“You don’t have to be a medieval historian to know that new facts emerge about our medieval past all the time. The discovery of the body of Richard III in Leicester in 2012 reminded the world that there are new answers to old questions. When I was researching my book about Richard, I realised that, the king’s skeleton aside, the source of the most interesting and ongoing discoveries was the place where he lost his crown and his life, Bosworth Field. In recent years, archaeologists have completely recast our view of the course of that epoch-defining battle, based on a great mass of discoveries in the field. That process continues, and the historical discussion evolves as a result.

So it seems inconceivable, or perhaps not to be contemplated that those with the power to do so would not protect this unique place. Plans to encroach on the battlefield, including on the site where it is now widely agreed that the victor of the battle, Henry Tudor, arrayed part of his army, will destroy for ever an irreplaceable site if they are allowed to go ahead. What’s worse, this threat to Bosworth Field seems only to have been uncovered at an alarmingly late stage. The public debate that such a project would naturally generate is having to be held at double speed and without due consideration. This feels like a sleight of hand.

Bosworth is not in my back yard. My objections to the plan to develop part of the battlefield are motivated by personal, national and historical concerns. Of course development must happen. Let us see some alternatives that do not ruin forever a place where English history was made.”

**Anne F Sutton MA, PhD, FSA, FRHistS, Editor of ‘The Ricardian’.**

“Bosworth Field is a site of historical and political importance in the story of the British nation. It is an area that can not only serve as a memorial to the dead, but a restorative green space for the people of Leicestershire, a lungs for the city of Leicester.”

**Robert Lindsay, BAFTA, Tony, and Olivier Award winning actor, star of stage and screen ('GBH', 'My Family')**

“It is 20 years since I played Shakespeare’s version of King Richard III at the Royal Shakespeare Company. In the intervening years not only have I attended the king’s reburial (something I never expected), but I have also learned much about the real man and the significance of his life – and death – in the history of this country.

It is therefore with some dismay that I have heard of the current proposals to build a driverless car testing track on part of the Bosworth battlefield, close to the spot where King Richard died. Our history is so important, and it is vital that it be protected. A test track can be located in many different places, Bosworth Field will never be anywhere else. It should – indeed must – be preserved for future generations. I urge Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council to reject these proposals and preserve this historic place that they are privileged to be the custodians of.”



**Peter Hammond, author of ‘Richard III and the Bosworth Campaign’.**

“When first researching my book on the battle of Bosworth, I found, as previous writers had found that it was difficult to work out the course of the battle and what were the troop positions. Excavations over a wide area have revealed the exact site of the battle and we can now describe the true course of events. For this to remain true we need the whole of the battle site. Removing any part, large or small, makes the course of the battle more difficult to understand, each part helps to make sense of the whole. I therefore oppose this development.”