



Bedford Borough Council Policy for Metal Detecting on Council Owned Land

This policy for Metal Detecting on Bedford Borough Council owned land takes effect from 1 April 2025 and supersedes any previous arrangements, and states that:

- (a) Metal detecting on land owned, leased, managed or tenanted by Bedford Borough Council is **only** permitted where a metal detecting survey is part of an approved archaeological investigation being carried out in accordance with a written project design and method statement pre-agreed with the Council's [Bedford Borough Historic Environment Team](#), and where satisfactory funding and other resources are demonstrably in place to provide supporting archaeological field investigation, post-excavation assessment, analysis, conservation, publication and archiving. An adequate risk assessment and method statement and public liability insurance up to £10,000,000 must also be in place. Unless this is the case, the Council does not have the in-house resources to either enable or monitor metal detecting activities on council land.
- (b) Deliberate removal of any archaeological object(s) (a portable antiquity) from Bedford Borough Council owned land is prohibited unless as part of an approved archaeological investigation which meets the requirements of (a) above
- (c) Any portable antiquity(s) found or uncovered by accident should be immediately reported to the [Portable Antiquities Scheme Finds Liaison Officer for Bedfordshire](#) or alternatively the [Bedford Borough Historic Environment Team](#) (if the former is not available) to ensure that they are investigated and recorded in line with best practice guidance and for potential acquisition to The Higgins Art Gallery & Museum's archaeological collections, determined with reference to the Museum's Collections Development Policy.

Bedford Borough Council owns any portable antiquities found on its land, except for items classified as "Treasure" under the Treasure Act 1996 (and its amendments).

Treasure includes:

- Gold and silver objects and groups of coins from the same find that are over 300 years old.
- Prehistoric base-metal collections found after 1 January 2003.
- Objects that are rare and provide significant historical, archaeological or cultural insight.

If an item is considered Treasure, it legally belongs to The Crown unless officially disclaimed. Local museums, including the British Museum, have the first right to acquire these items. The Council may also submit a claim as the landowner.

In the event of an object being unsuitable for The Higgins Art Gallery & Museum's collections as determined by the museum's Collections Development Policy, the Museum will decline the acquisition and may redirect the finder to an alternative collecting institution.

Background

This policy has been adopted to provide a consistent approach to the management of the Council's assets and to prevent:

- Removal of antiquities/artefacts from their original location with potentially significant loss of information as to their archaeological context and consequently what we can learn about the historic and archaeological landscapes of the past
- Damage to related archaeological deposits
- Partial recovery of assemblages which may neglect non-metal finds, again with a loss of significant archaeological information
- Unreported discoveries leading to an accumulated loss of knowledge. Once an item is dug up from the ground it is divorced from its archaeological context and meaning and further study and appreciation is prevented if it is not scientifically recorded and provenanced in accordance with best practice guidance or made publicly available
- Metal detecting on undisturbed land and permanent pasture or below the depth of ploughing where there is no imminent threat of destruction, as archaeological features may lie close to the surface and could be damaged by digging to recover detected objects
- Damage to tree roots, plants and wildlife
- Trip hazards where land is disturbed and not correctly reinstated, and consequent claims against the council

Further Information

There are lots of private open spaces in the borough that don't belong to us, so before you set out with your metal detector, please get permission from the landowner.

- Information regarding the Council's property ownership is available via the Council's website via [the Land ownership enquiries webpage](#).
- Any questions relating to the Council's land ownership can be raised with our [Property Services](#) team via the email address given on this page.
- [Land Registry](#) can also tell you who owns land – they charge a fee for this service.

For Scheduled Ancient Monuments, use of metal detectors and all other types of fieldwork requires permission from the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport. You will also need the written consent of Natural England to use a metal detector on land that is in an Environmental Land Management scheme or is a Special Scientific Site of Interest (SSSI).

Further guidance can be found on the [Portable Antiquities Scheme](#) and [National Metal Detecting Council](#) websites including the [Code of Practice for Responsible Metal Detecting in England and Wales](#) (2017).

Working to protect our historic environment

The Bedford Borough Council Historic Environment Team (BBHET) provides archaeological advice and advises on the appropriate management of the authority's heritage assets in conjunction with [Property Services](#) and the [Parks and Open Spaces Team](#).

The council recognises the valuable contribution made by metal detecting in locating previously unknown sites and as a survey technique. It supports metal detecting survey as part of a structured programme of archaeological research including as a component of archaeological mitigation programmes where appropriate, as part of the planning process, and works closely with the national [Portable Antiquities Scheme](#) to ensure that all portable artefacts are properly recorded. There may be opportunities for you to volunteer your services as part of this work. You may also wish to consider offering your services to local archaeological units. Details of units registered with the Chartered Institute of Archaeologists [on their website](#).