

***A Watching Brief at
The Old Vicarage, Baschurch,
Shropshire, 2012***

by
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Archaeology Service



**A WATCHING BRIEF AT
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A Report for

Select Healthcare Developments Ltd

CONTENTS

	Page No
SUMMARY	1
1 INTRODUCTION	2
2 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND	3
3 THE WATCHING BRIEF	5
4 REFERENCES	6
APPENDIX 1 Context summary	7

ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure 1: The location of the study area

Figure 2: The location of features noted in the text

Figure 3: West-facing section at the NW corner of the development site; 1:20 scale

Photo 1: The development site, looking N

Photo 2: The sandstone wall (7) at the NW corner of the site, looking NE (scale 2m)

Photo 3: The area of the former cellarage (10) in the central part of the site, looking SE

Photo 4: The pond deposits, looking W

Photo 5: The pond deposits, looking S

Photo 6: The eastern side of the development, looking W

SUMMARY

In October 2012 the Archaeology Service, Shropshire Council carried out a watching brief at The Old Vicarage, Baschurch, Shropshire. The watching brief accompanied groundworks associated with construction of an extension to the existing care home on the site. An evaluation of the site in 2011 had located a former pond, possibly a medieval fish pond, within the development site. The watching brief defined the western, southern, and eastern extent of the pond, and recorded the buried remains of an 18th century wall and a 19th century cellar. No other significant archaeological features or deposits were seen during the watching brief.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Baschurch is a village in north Shropshire situated 11km northwest of the county town of Shrewsbury. The Old Vicarage, Baschurch, lies on the western side of the village, opposite the parish Church of All Saints at NGR SJ 4233 2196.

1.2 The village of Baschurch can trace its origins back to the late Saxon period at least, when a collegiate church is known to have existed in the village. In the medieval period the manor was held by Shrewsbury Abbey. In the 13th century the abbey founded a borough at Baschurch, and the eastern side of the village is still known as Newtown. It has been suggested that The Old Vicarage may have lain within the area of a former manorial enclosure run by Shrewsbury Abbey.

1.3 In October 2012 work began on the construction of a single storey extension to the existing care home at The Old Vicarage, Baschurch.

1.4 An archaeological evaluation and desk-based assessment of the development site had been carried out in 2011 and had located a possible former medieval fish-pond or moat within part of the study area. A quantity of late medieval and early post-medieval pottery was recovered from the upper silts of the former pond. It was recommended that the development be accompanied by a programme of archaeological work in order to record the archaeological deposits that would be disturbed by the groundworks associated with the development.

1.5 The programme of archaeological work comprised a watching brief on these groundworks. The aim of the programme of archaeological work was to allow for the preservation by record of any archaeological remains that were encountered during the works.

1.6 The Archaeology Service, Shropshire Council, was commissioned to carry out the archaeological watching brief by Select Healthcare Developments Ltd. in accordance with a written scheme of investigation (WSI) approved by the Principal Archaeologist, Shropshire Council.

2 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 Prehistoric activity around the study area is indicated by a number of cropmark features. A Bronze Age barrow cemetery marked by a number of cropmark ring ditches (Historic Environment Record [HER] nos. 02396, 02397, 02398, 04038, 04086) lies immediately to the north of the present village, c.200m north of the study area. A second Bronze Age cemetery (HER 02451) lies to the west of the village at Moor Farm (three areas within this cemetery have been scheduled as an Ancient Monument, National Monument No. 32297, Round barrow cemetery and parts of a field system 500m west of Whitmore House). The northeastern part of this barrow cemetery was subject to an archaeological evaluation in 2002. Here a geophysical survey identified a number of features, confirmed by trial excavation. Dating evidence was scant, but two hearths produced radiocarbon dates of between AD 420-700 (Appleton-Fox, 2002). Cropmark enclosures (HER 02394 & 04869) and field systems (HER 04036 & 04037) to the east of the village suggest the presence of farmsteads of Iron Age and/or Romano-British date.

2.2 It has been suggested that Baschurch may be the burial place of an early 7th-century British hero, Cynddylan, (Gelling, 1992, p75). Baschurch (*Eglwysseu Bassa*) is named as such in a 9th-century Welsh poem, the *Canu Heledd*, and Gelling also notes a suggestion that the use of the plural “churches” indicates a Celtic *clas* with many small shrines – possibly the remains of the barrows in the Bronze Age cemeteries. The Dark Age radio-carbon dates from the hearths in the area of the western barrow cemetery is significant here. Gelling also notes in this context the presence The Berth hillfort, which lies 1.5km north-northeast of the village, an atmospheric site once surrounded by pools and marshes and which in the post-medieval period (and more recently too) attracted traditions of Dark Age activity. However, Gelling does not consider that the poem represents a reliable historical tradition of events, and warns against building on the identification of places within it.

2.3 On the other hand, the presence of a late Saxon settlement is reliably recorded in the Domesday Book of 1086. In the late Saxon period, Baschurch was a royal manor, and was the *caput* or head place of Baschurch Hundred (an administrative area stretching from just north of Shrewsbury up to the Cheshire border). The Domesday Book shows that Baschurch was a prosperous manor, and also records the presence of a church (HER 00834). After the Norman Conquest, the manor was held by Roger of Montgomery, Earl of Shrewsbury. The Domesday Book records that by 1086 Shrewsbury Abbey already held 2½ hides of the manor from Earl Roger. His son, Robert of Belleme, subsequently gave the abbey the remainder of the manor. (Thorn & Thorn, 1986, 4.1.3 & notes). Shrewsbury Abbey established a borough in the town in the early 13th century (mentioned in a charter of 1229) possibly based on land on the east side of the village which still bears the name “Newtown”. The borough does not appear to have thrived, however, and the settlement may even have contracted before expanding again in the 18th century. (Priestley, 2008)

2.4 The study area lies within the area covered by the Central Marches Historic Towns Survey (CMHTS) assessment of Baschurch (Buteux, 1996). Although this study pre-dated any of the more recent archaeological interventions in and around the village, it's analysis of the medieval and post-medieval urban form remains largely unchanged by later work. The proximity to the church of the land parcel (HER 05087) within which The Old Vicarage sits and the shape of the parcel's eastern boundary suggest that it was part of the original settlement of Baschurch. The CMHTS study considered it possible that it functioned as a manorial enclosure and was the centre of the manor run by

Shrewsbury Abbey, or that it was part of the precinct of the Saxon collegiate church, or both.

2.5 A plan of the parish of Baschurch of 1794 (SA P22/L/1/1) shows a pond lying in the grounds of the Old Vicarage to the south of the vicarage building. The 1st edition OS 25" map of 1880 shows an earthwork feature (HER 05082) that corresponds with the north side of this pond, though the pond itself is no longer present. The CMHTS study suggested that the earthwork feature shown on the 1880 OS map may have been the remains of a moat of medieval to post-medieval date belonging to the earlier manorial site. The 1794 map suggests that the pond may perhaps have been a fish-pond rather than the remains of a moat. By the time of the 2nd edition plan of 1902, this feature has gone, and a carriage drive is shown running past the south side of the vicarage. The present terrace and ha-ha on the south side of the vicarage probably date to the 20th century.

2.6 Two evaluations have taken place on land immediately to the southwest of the study area (Vyce, 2000; Jeffery, 2001). The results of both evaluations were entirely negative, with no archaeological features or deposits being encountered.

2.7 A field evaluation was carried out for the current development in July 2011 by the Archaeology Service, Shropshire Council. Trial excavations on the site located an area of former wet, waterlogged deposits beneath the present lawns of The Old Vicarage, and desk-based research indicated that a pond, possibly a former medieval fish-pond or moat, covered part of the study area up to the mid 19th century. A quantity of late medieval and early post-medieval pottery was recovered from the upper silts of the former pond. (Hannaford, 2011)

3 THE WATCHING BRIEF

3.1 An archaeological watching brief was carried out on the excavation of the foundation trenches for the new development in October 2012. The foundation trenches were excavated to a width of c. 0.6m. The depth varied according to the depth of the natural clay subsoil. The northern half of the site was roughly level, but then dropped away to the south, following the line of a terrace on the south side of The Old Vicarage building.

3.2 The natural grey clay (Fig. 3; 8) was seen in the western part of the study area at a depth of 0.8m below the ground surface. Here it lay beneath a deposit 0.2m thick of a sticky, buff clay (6), probably a weathered surface to the natural clay. In the eastern part of the development site, the natural comprised a light yellowish brown sandy clay (25) and lay at 1.2m below the ground surface. The natural was similar in the southern part of the site (20) and here lay at a depth of 0.6m below the ground surface.

3.3 The natural clay deposits were cut by the former pond (Fig.2; 16). The southern edge of the pond was seen in the two southern trenches (Fig. 2, D & E) and its western edge in the foundation trenches running west-east (trenches C & F). At its centre (in trenches C & F) the bottom of the pond was seen to lie 3.7m below the ground surface. The pond was also seen in the northeastern corner of the development site (in the junction of trenches B & E), and here the pond deposits were seen to extend to a depth of 3.25m below ground level. The western edge of the pond had clearly been cut, indicating that even if the pond was of natural origin, it had at some time in the past been managed. The pond had completely silted up and was filled with an organic peaty deposit (12).

3.4 In the northwest corner of the development, a wall (Figs. 2 & 3; 7) was seen cut into the natural clay (8). The wall was seen to run west to east and was made of mainly red sandstone fragments (some of which were faced and with toolmarks), with some buff Grinshill sandstone, and some brick, indicating a probable 18th-century date for this feature. The wall pre-dated the current Old Vicarage building.

3.5 In the western part of the site, the remains of the cellarage (Fig. 2; 10) beneath the demolished eastern extension of The Old Vicarage were exposed in the foundation trenches. The cellar had been filled with loose brick demolition rubble.

3.6 No further significant archaeological features or deposits were encountered during the watching brief.

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- SA P22/T/2/1** Tithe Map of the Parish of Baschurch, 1844
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ABBREVIATIONS

- AOD** Above Ordnance Datum
- OS** Ordnance Survey
- HER** County Historic Environment Record, Shirehall, Shrewsbury
- SA** Shropshire Archives, Castle Gates, Shrewsbury
- TSAHS** Transactions of the Shropshire Archaeological and Historical Society
- TSAS** Transactions of the Shropshire Archaeological Society

APPENDIX 1

Context summary

No	Site context	Category	Description
1	1001	Layer	Recent demolition debris
2	1002	Drain	20 th century foul drain
3	1003	Wall	19 th century brick wall
4	1004	Cut	Cut for wall 1003
5	1005	Layer	Sandy silty loam soil
6	1006	Layer	Weathered natural clay
7	1007	Wall	Sandstone & brick wall
8	1008	Layer	Natural clay
9	1009	Fill	Rubble backfill of cellar 1010
10	1010	Cellar	19 th century brick cellar
11	1011	Layer	Humic loamy soil
12	1012	Fill	Peaty fill of pond
13	1013	Layer	Re-deposited humic loam with recent building debris
14	1014	Layer	Turf and topsoil
15	1015	Layer	Re-deposited humic loam with sandstone and cobbles
16	1016	Cut	Former pond
17	1017	Cut	Foundation cut for wall 1007
18	1018	Layer	Turf and topsoil
19	1019	Layer	Sandy clay soil
20	1020	Layer	Natural clay
21	1021	Layer	Turf and topsoil
22	1022	Layer	Sandy loam soil with soot
23	1023	Layer	Sandy silt soil with pebbles, brick and sandstone fragments
24	1024	Layer	Silty loam soil
25	1025	Layer	Natural clay



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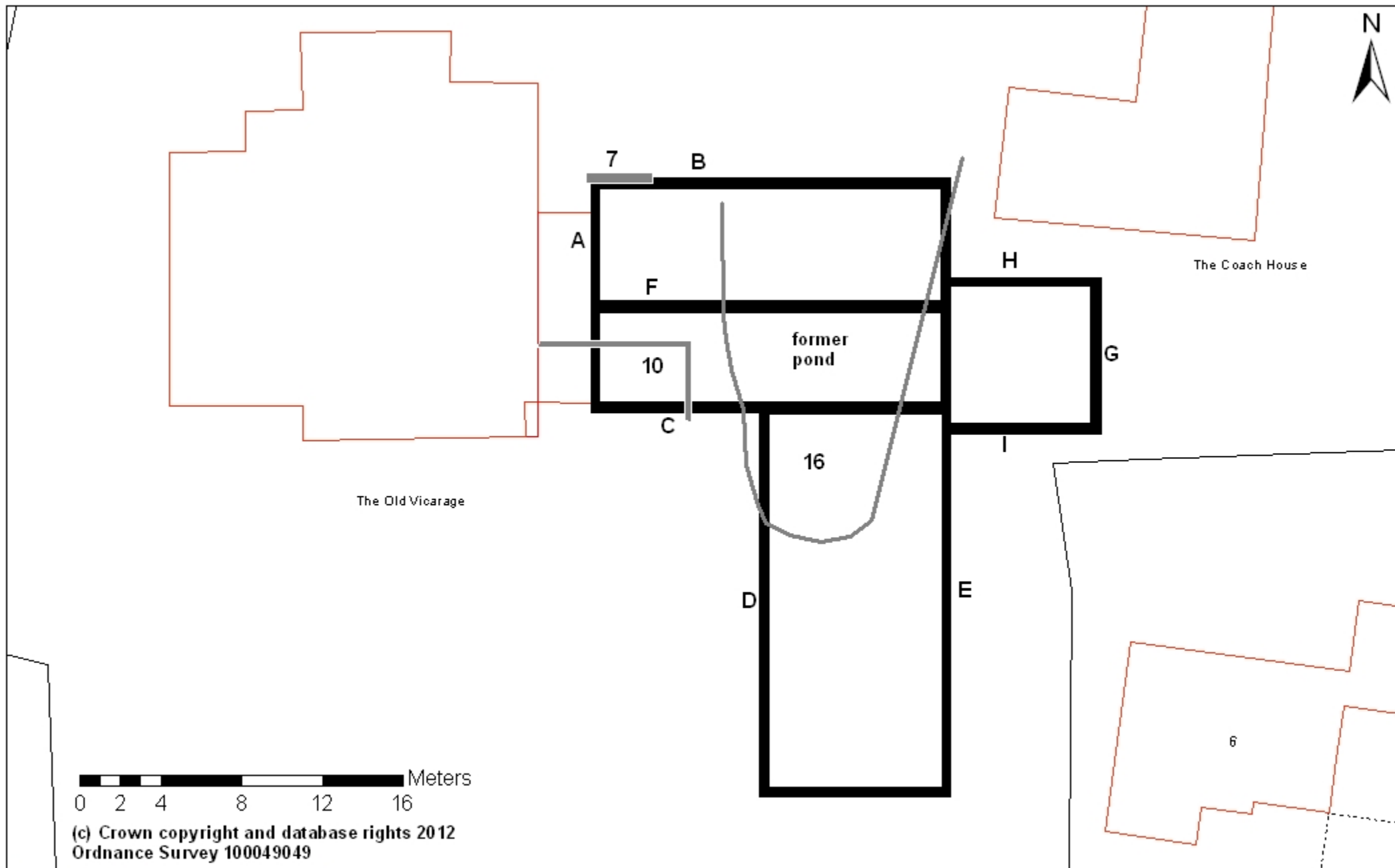
The Old Vicarage, Baschurch 2012

Figure 1: The location of the study area

Archaeology Service

Shropshire Council
 Historic Environment Team, Business Growth & Prosperity,
 Shirehall, Abbey Foregate, Shrewsbury, SY2 6ND

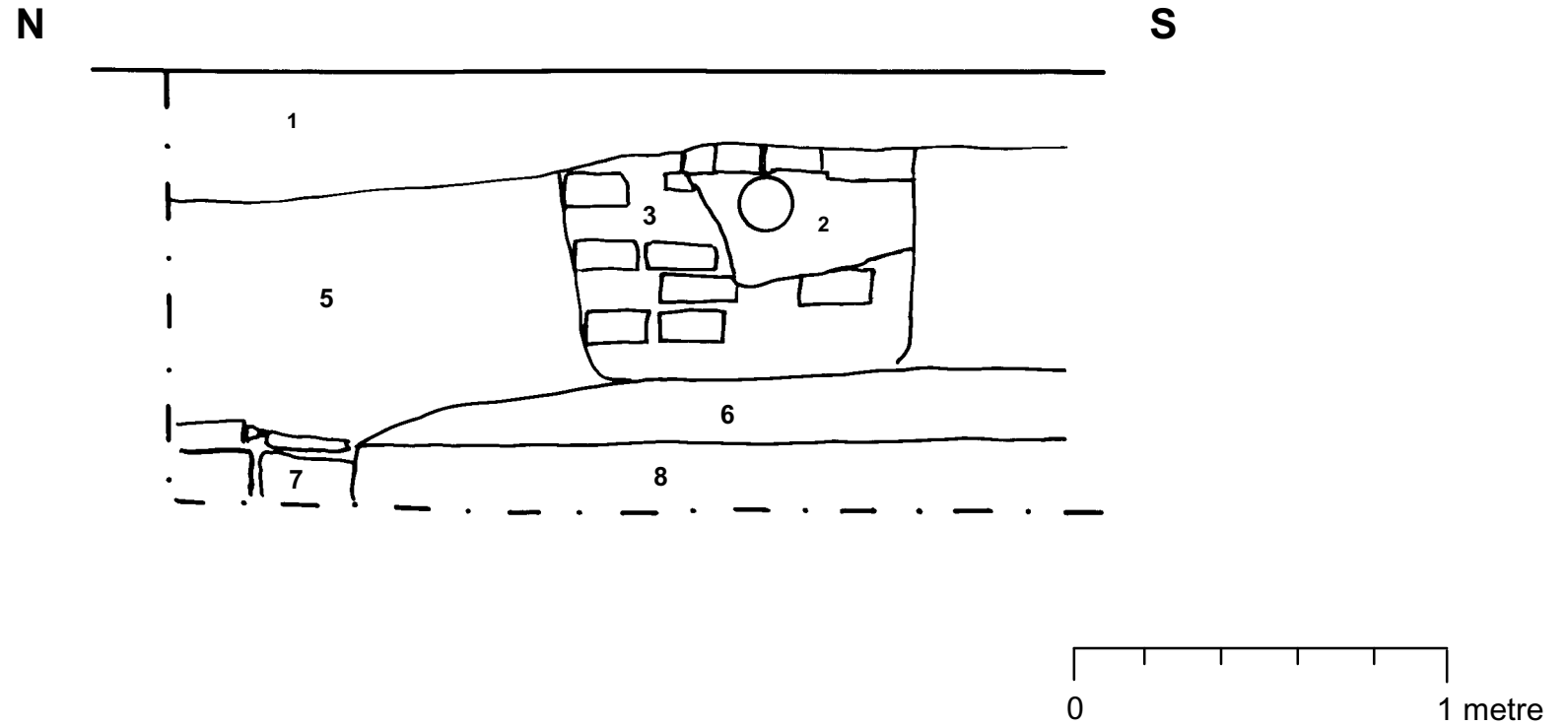
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The Old Vicarage, Baschurch 2012

Figure 2: The location of features noted in the text



THE OLD VICARAGE, BASCHURCH 2012

Figure 3: West-facing section at the NW corner of the development site; 1:20 scale



Photo 1: The development site, looking N



Photo 2: The sandstone wall (7) at the NW corner of the site, looking NE (scale 2m)



Photo 3: The area of the former cellarge (10) in the central part of the site, looking SE



Photo 4: The pond deposits, looking W



Photo 5: The pond deposits, looking S



Photo 6: The eastern side of the development, looking W