

**AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF AT  
APPLETREE RISE, CORBRIDGE,  
NORTHUMBERLAND**

**An Archaeological Watching Brief at Appletree Rise, Corbridge,  
Northumberland**

*Central National Grid Reference: NY 9932 6437*

*Site Code: ARC 06*

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May 2006**

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## **1. NON-TECHNICAL SUMMARY**

- 1.1 This report describes the results and working methods of an archaeological monitoring and recording exercise undertaken by Pre-Construct Archaeology Limited at Appletree Rise, Corbridge, Northumberland, in association with geotechnical site investigations in advance of a proposed development.
- 1.2 Prime (UK) Developments Limited intend to develop the site, which lies to the east of the historic core of Corbridge. The proposed development site is currently open grassland covering an area of approximately 0.5 hectares, set in a residential area.
- 1.3 Corbridge has a rich archaeological heritage, with find spots and archaeological sites known in the area from the Mesolithic period through to the post-medieval period. Due to the proximity of the development to other sites of known archaeological interest, Northumberland County Council Conservation Team advised that archaeological monitoring must be undertaken in association with the excavation of a series of geotechnical trial pits.
- 1.4 The archaeological investigation comprised monitoring and recording of 13 geotechnical trial pits located within the proposed development area.
- 1.5 The investigation did not encounter any archaeologically significant deposits or features. Natural sub-stratum was recorded in each of the trial pits, sealed by post-medieval soils, most likely deposited during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. These deposits may derive from landscaping of the area, possibly associated with a large house, Appletree Grange, which occupies an elevated position immediately to the east of the site. A possible alluvial deposit was revealed in one trial pit (Trial Pit 8) in the centre of the site and this may have accumulated as result of flooding of a spring at this location. Topsoil/turf formed the ground surface in each of the trial pits, with the exception of one trial pit (Trial Pit 13), which was located within ornamental borders at the southern limit of the site.
- 1.6 No artefactual material was recovered during the investigation.

## **2. INTRODUCTION**

### **2.1 General Background**

- 2.1.1 An archaeological monitoring and recording exercise (watching brief) was undertaken by Pre-Construct Archaeology Limited (PCA) on 26<sup>th</sup> April 2006 at Appletree Rise, Corbridge, Northumberland (Figure 1). The watching brief was commissioned by WSP Environmental (WSP), on behalf of Prime (UK) Developments Limited, who intend to develop the site as a surgery.
- 2.1.2 The proposed scheme would involve the construction of an L-shaped building in the centre of the site, along with an access road, utility services and car parking. The archaeological watching brief was undertaken in association with exploratory site investigations, in advance of the proposed development.
- 2.1.2 The site investigations comprised machine excavation of 13 geotechnical trial pits, located across the development area, with one situated immediately adjacent to the retaining wall forming the southern limit of the site (Figure 2). The archaeological watching brief was undertaken according to a Specification prepared in advance by WSP.<sup>1</sup>
- 2.1.3 The broad aim of the watching brief was to allow the impact of the development proposals upon the archaeological resource to be assessed by archaeological monitoring of geotechnical site investigations, in order to inform the planning decision.
- 2.1.4 At the time of writing, the project archive is housed at the Northern Office of PCA, at Unit N19, Turdale Business Park, Durham. The completed project archive, comprising written, drawn, and photographic records will be ultimately deposited with the Museum of Antiquities, University of Newcastle, under the site code ARC 06. The Online Access to the Index of Archaeological Investigations (OASIS) reference number is preconst1-15036.

### **2.2 Site Location and Description**

- 2.2.1 The site lies to the east of the historic core of the town of Corbridge. It occupies a trapezoidal parcel of land encompassing c. 0.5 hectares. At the time of the investigation, the site was undeveloped, open grassland. The central National Grid Reference of the site is NY 9932 6437.
- 2.2.2 To the west, the site is bounded by a small housing development, Appletree Rise and, to the north, it is bounded by extensive gardens associated with properties fronting onto Appletree Lane. To the east, the boundary is formed by the western limit of a garden belonging to Appletree Grange, which overlooks the site from an elevated position. To the south, it is bounded by a retaining wall, overlooking the B6530 road.

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<sup>1</sup> WSP, 2006.

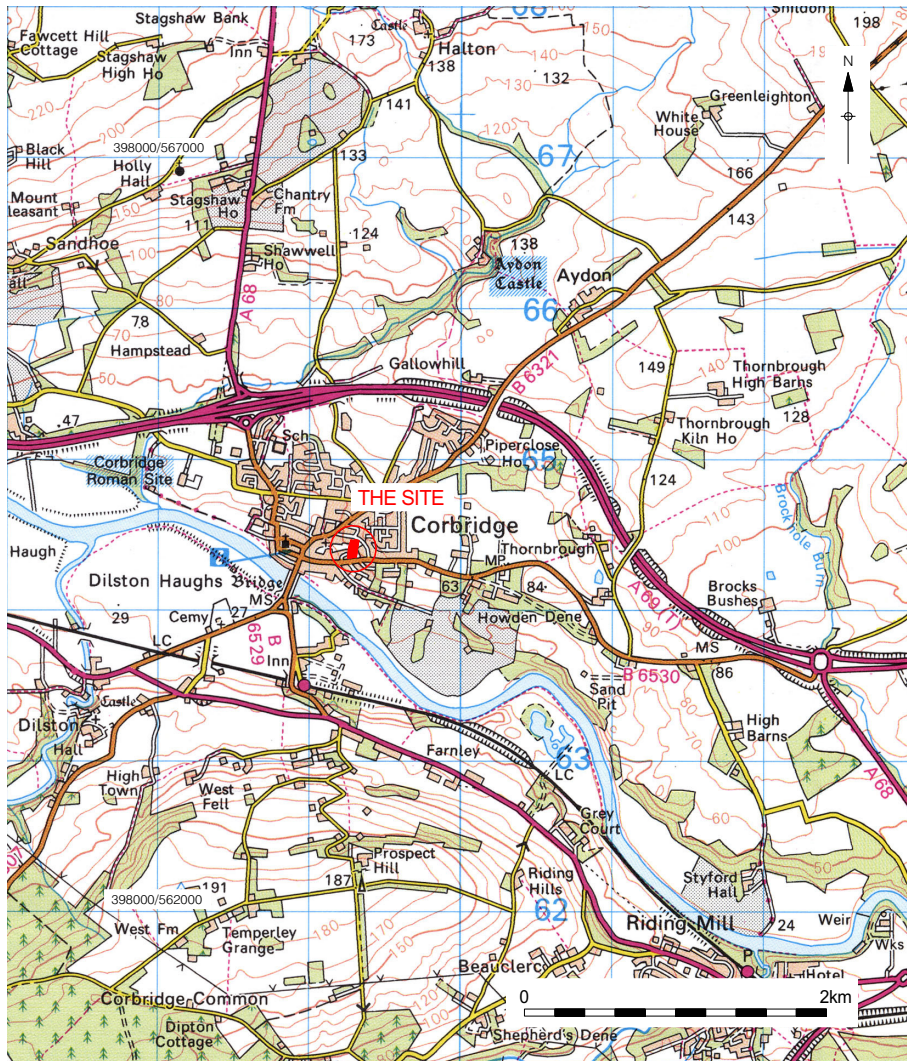
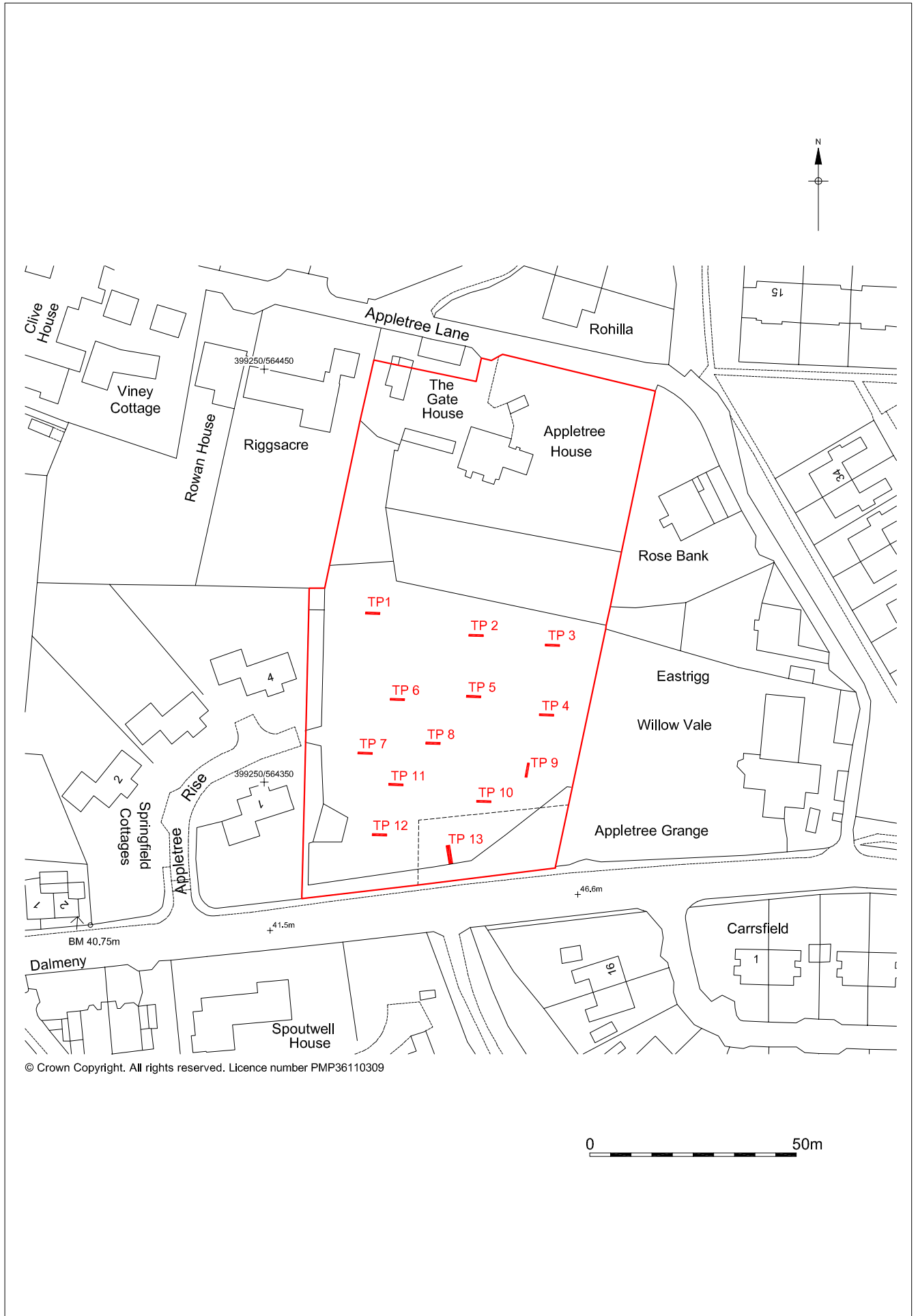


Figure 1. Site location  
Scale 1:50,000



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Figure 2. Location of Trial-pits  
Scale 1:1250

## **2.3 Topography and Geology**

- 2.3.1 The site occupies sloping ground, roughly south-west facing. Ground level rises from the south-western corner of the site, at an elevation of c. 43.30m OD, to the north-eastern corner, at an elevation of c. 51.45m OD.
- 2.3.2 The underlying geology of the area is characterised as Millstone Grit overlain by Diamicton Till.

## **2.4 Planning Background**

- 2.4.1 Prime (UK) Developments Limited has applied for planning permission to construct a surgery at Appletree Rise, Corbridge. The proposed development will involve the construction of an L-shaped building, along with associated utility services, access roads and car parking.
- 2.4.2 National guidance on the need for early consultation in the planning process in order to determine the impact of development schemes upon the archaeological resource is identified in the document '*Planning Policy Guidance Note 16: Archaeology and Planning*' (PPG 16).<sup>2</sup> The Northumberland County Council Conservation Team (NCCCT) identifies planning proposals that should be subject to archaeological conditions and advises the County Council Development Control Team accordingly. Local planning policy guidance in Northumberland is set out in various Local Plans. The site herein described lies within Tynedale District, whose Local Plan was adopted in April 2000. Section 5 of the Local Plan, '*The Built Environment*', describes various policies relating to archaeology, historic buildings, listed buildings and historic parks and gardens. Sub-section 5.10, '*Archaeology and Development*', sets out policies specifically related to archaeological sites.
- 2.4.3 A considerable number of archaeological sites and finds are known from the Corbridge area and the proposed development site lies a short distance to the east of the historic core of Corbridge. As the site lies within an area of perceived archaeological sensitivity, NCCCT recommended that a watching brief be undertaken in association with invasive site investigations, namely the excavation of geotechnical trial pits. The results of the watching brief are intended to inform the planning decision and form the basis for any recommendation for further work.
- 2.4.4 The aforementioned Specification for the archaeological watching brief set out the aims and methodology for the archaeological project and this was approved by NCCCT prior to commencement of the work.

## **2.5 Archaeological and Historical Background**

- 2.5.1 The earliest evidence for human activity in the Corbridge area comes from the Mesolithic period. Chance finds of flint tools have been recorded from the area and point to the exploitation of resources in this part of Tynedale during the period.

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<sup>2</sup> Department of the Environment, 1990.



- 2.5.2 Later prehistoric activity in the Corbridge area is also well documented. Neolithic artefacts include a large cup and ring marked stone slab from the area of the Roman fort to the west of the village. Numerous Bronze Age finds have been recovered from the area, such as a hoard of various bronze implements and weapons discovered at Farnley, c. 2km to the south-east of Corbridge, a palisaded enclosure and hut found beneath the Roman fort and an unusual coracle burial also found within the settlement area.
- 2.5.3 Specific evidence of Iron Age date in Corbridge is largely absent and very little Iron Age activity has been identified within the wider area around the town.
- 2.5.4 Corbridge has a rich Roman history, with the remains of the Roman settlement of *Corstopitum* lying immediately to the west of the modern town. The remains of a succession of forts have been excavated at the site, the earliest being built by Agricola c. AD 79/80. The fort was rebuilt in stone c. AD 139 with the Antonine advance into Scotland and it probably remained in use until the early 3<sup>rd</sup> century. During the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries, the town itself flourished as a supply depot for Hadrian's Wall, the course of which runs c. 4km to the north of the present town.
- 2.5.5 Dere Street, the Roman road from York to Crammond on the Firth of Forth, ran along the south bank of the River Tyne. It approached Corbridge from the Roman fort (*Vindomora*) at Ebchester and ultimately crossed the river on its northern course to the south-west of the modern town, where the Roman bridge was sited.
- 2.5.6 A second major Roman road, the Stanegate, ran to the north of the River Tyne in the vicinity of Corbridge, forming the east-west route along the Tyne–Solway isthmus. This road formed the main line of supply and communication for the line of forts, which existed to support the Wall. The conjectured line of the Stanegate runs across the northern part of the modern town of Corbridge, north of the development site.
- 2.5.7 The Anglo-Saxons chose a spur of land c. 0.5km to the east of the Roman site of *Corstopitum* as the focus for a village and monastery site, although this choice may have been affected by the proximity of the still-standing Roman bridge. The church of St. Andrew, now the Parish Church, is thought to have been founded by St. Wilfred, and is one of four churches dedicated to this saint in the Tyne valley. The earliest reference to the Anglian settlement occurs in the '*Northumbrian Annals*', under the year 786, where it is called '*Et Corabriga*'. It is not certain that the monastery of Corbridge was a church of great stature at this time, although it is likely that the settlement was one of some prominence.
- 2.5.8 The location of Corbridge, at the junction of two ancient routeways and a crossing point of the Tyne made it an obvious focal point for the surrounding area and during the medieval period Corbridge grew into an important market town. It was granted the status of a royal borough by King John in 1201 and it is known to have hosted a profitable annual fair, along with the weekly market, which was held in the town from the 13<sup>th</sup> century.
- 2.5.9 The old Roman bridge was replaced by a new structure on the site of the present bridge in 1235, which was replaced by the present bridge in 1674.
- 2.5.10 By the 13<sup>th</sup> century Corbridge had become the second largest borough town in the region after Newcastle and much of the present street pattern probably dates to this period. However, its fortunes began to decline with the Border Wars after the 14<sup>th</sup> century as its location left it vulnerable to repeated attack.

- 2.5.11 By the late 17<sup>th</sup> century the market had disappeared and the town had declined to the status of a village. Its commercial fortunes did not markedly improve until the 18<sup>th</sup> century, with a further impetus for an upturn in fortunes provided by the opening of the Newcastle to Carlisle Railway in 1835.
- 2.5.12 There are no archaeological sites or findspots listed on the Sites and Monuments Record (SMR) for Northumberland within the site boundaries and little is generally known about the history of the site. The 1841 Tithe Map shows the site, along with the surrounding land, as open land with no evidence of structures. All the area is marked as being in the ownership of a Francis Tweddell, with the exception of a plot to the north-east of the site, which was held by a J. Harrison. The 1<sup>st</sup> edition Ordnance Survey Map of 1860 shows a similar layout with the large block of land held by Tweddell on the Tithe Map apparently forming a single field, separate from the plot to the north-east of the site.
- 2.5.13 By the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition Ordnance Survey Map of 1897, the single field incorporating the development site had been partitioned. The area to the east of the site had become the house and gardens of 'Beaconfield' (Appletree Grange as it is known today), with two further properties, Eastrigg and Rosebank, constructed on the parcel of land to the north-east of the site once held by J. Harrison. Whether the development site ever formed part of the gardens of 'Beaconfield' prior to 1897 is uncertain.
- 2.5.14 The houses fronting onto Appletree Lane to the north of the site were constructed during the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the small housing estate on Appletree Rise to the west of the site is of very recent origin.

## **2.6 Aims and Objectives**

- 2.6.1 The aim of the watching brief, as set out in the aforementioned Specification, was to determine the extent, condition, nature, character, quality and date of any archaeological remains encountered during the course of geotechnical site investigations.
- 2.6.2 In general, the project aims were to:
- Characterise the nature of the main stratigraphic units encountered in terms of their physical composition and archaeological formation;
  - Assess the overall presence and survival of structural remains relating to the main periods of occupation revealed and the potential for the recovery of additional structural information given the nature of the deposits encountered;
  - Assess the overall presence and survival of the main kinds of artefactual evidence, its condition and potential;
  - Assess the overall presence and survival of the main types of ecofactual and environmental evidence, its condition and potential;
  - Appraise the relative value of the main stratigraphic units revealed in the context of known nearby archaeological deposits.

### **3. ARCHAEOLOGICAL METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Fieldwork**

- 3.1.1 A total of 13 geotechnical trial pits (TPs 1 to 13) were excavated by a JCB-type, back-hoe excavator under archaeological supervision. Each pit measured c. 3.5m x 0.5m at ground level, with the exception of TP 13, which measured 4.5m x 0.5m. The trial pits were located across the site, with TP 13 positioned directly against the retaining wall marking the southern boundary (Figure 2).
- 3.1.2 Excavation of each trial pit was initially undertaken using a toothless bucket, removing spoil in spits of c. 100mm, down to the top of the natural sub-stratum. All such work was carried out under archaeological supervision and each trial pit was recorded at this point. When the attendant archaeologist was satisfied that no further archaeological deposit or features remained within the footprint of each trial pit, machine excavation continued using a toothed bucket, for the purposes of gathering geotechnical data.
- 3.1.3 All deposits were recorded on *pro forma* sheets; a 'Test Pit Recording Sheet' was compiled for each trial pit excavated. A photographic record of the investigations was compiled using SLR cameras and this comprised black and white prints and colour transparencies (on 35mm film).

#### **3.2 Post-excavation**

- 3.2.1 The stratigraphic data for the project is represented by the written, drawn and photographic records. A total of 31 archaeological contexts were defined during the investigations. A written summary of the archaeological sequence was then compiled, as described below.
- 3.2.2 No artefactual or organic material was recovered from the site. The palaeoenvironmental sampling strategy for the project was to recover bulk samples where appropriate, from well-dated (where possible), stratified deposits covering the main periods or phases of occupation and the range of feature types represented. To this end, no features of significance were encountered to warrant the recovery of bulk samples.
- 3.2.3 Survival of all materials from archaeological fieldwork depends upon suitable storage. The complete project archive, in this case comprising only written, drawn, and photographic records (including all material generated electronically during post-excavation), will be packaged for long term curation. The depositional requirements of the receiving body, in this case the Museum of Antiquities, Newcastle University, will be met in full.
- 3.2.4 The Online Access to the Index of Archaeological Investigations (OASIS) reference number for the archaeological project is: pre-const1-15036.

## **4. THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL SEQUENCE**

### **4.1 Phase 1: Natural**

4.1.1 Natural deposits were encountered in each trial pit (TP). TPs 1 to 5 and 9 revealed firm, mottled clay and sandy clay deposits, [3], [6], [8], [10], [12] and [20], respectively, with bedrock, [4], exposed in TP 1. Loose sandy deposits, [14], [16], [22], [24] and [27], were revealed in TPs 6, 7, 10, 11 and 8, respectively. Deposits, [26] and [31], comprising mainly fractured or degraded sandstone were encountered in TPs 12 and 13.

4.1.2 The depth at which natural deposits were encountered varied across the site between 0.45m and 1.10m below the present ground surface.

### **4.2 Phase 2: Undated Flooding**

4.2.1 A single deposit, [18], has been assigned to this phase. It comprised soft, mid greyish brown sandy clay and was encountered in TP 8, forming a layer 0.15m thick. The composition and consistency of the material suggests that it was deposited by water action. A natural spring was visible close to this trial pit and it is suggested that flooding of the spring at some point in antiquity formed the deposit. However, no artefactual material was recovered from the deposit and, therefore, it is not possible to suggest a date for this putative episode of flooding.

### **4.3 Phase 3: Post-Medieval Landscaping**

4.3.1 Deposits [2], [5], [7], [9], [11], [13], [15], [17], [19], [21], [23] and [25] were encountered in TPs 1 to 12, respectively, and probably represent a single extensive layer. The layer comprised friable, mid brown silty sandy clay, with some slight localised variations. It varied in thickness across the site, from 0.27m in TP 2 to 0.80m in TP 9. The deposit is interpreted as a developed soil of post-medieval or earlier origin. Sherds of 19<sup>th</sup> century pottery were observed within the deposit in several of the trial pits, but the ceramic material was not retained for further analysis. It is tentatively suggested, due to its homogenous composition, overall extent and thickness, that this deposit had been extensively reworked during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, possibly through ploughing, but perhaps more likely through landscaping associated with the construction of Appletree Grange (previously known as 'Beaconfield') which overlooks the site from the east.

4.3.2 In TP 13, feature, [30], was recorded on an approximate east-west orientation, forming the construction cut for the sandstone retaining wall, [28]. The feature, as seen, was 1.60m wide, with a depth of 0.60m, and contained a loose rubble backfill, [29], infilled against the wall.

#### **4.4 Phase 4: Modern**

- 4.4.1 The modern ground surface, [1], comprised topsoil/turflite, up to 0.30m thick, in TPs 1 to 12 inclusive, and was formed by a an ornamental border of garden soil and plants, up to 0.70m thick, in TP 13.

## **5. CONCLUSIONS**

- 5.1 No features or deposits of archaeological significance were recorded during the investigations. No artefactual material was recovered from any of the deposits exposed, although 19<sup>th</sup> century ceramic material was noted within an extensive site-wide soil layer.
- 5.2 The soil layer recorded in Trial Pits 1-to 12 suggests that the upper strata of the site have been subject to considerable reworking, probably through landscaping during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It is possible that the site was landscaped during the later 19<sup>th</sup> century, when Appletree Grange (originally known as 'Beaconfield') was constructed immediately to the east. This property overlooks the development site and documentary evidence indicates that both plots of land were under the same ownership during the 19<sup>th</sup> century.
- 5.3 It is recommended that no further work be undertaken on the information recovered from the investigations.

## 6. REFERENCES

Department of the Environment, 1990. *Planning Policy Guidance Note 16: 'Archaeology and Planning'*, HMSO.

Institute of Field Archaeologists, 1999. *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Brief*, IFA unpublished.

Pre-Construct Archaeology Limited, 1999. *Field Recording Manual*, PCA unpublished.

WSP Environmental UK, 2006. *Specification for an Archaeological Watching Brief at Appletree Rise, Corbridge*, WSP unpublished.

## 7. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND CREDITS

### **Acknowledgements**

Pre-Construct Archaeology would like to thank WSP Environmental for commissioning the archaeological project on behalf of Prime (UK) Developments Limited. The roles of Sally Randell (Principal Consultant) and Simon Jones (Senior Consultant) at WSP Environmental are particularly acknowledged.

The curatorial role of Karen Derham of the Northumberland County Council Conservation Team is also acknowledged.

### **PCA Credits**

*Fieldwork and Report:* Gavin Glover

*Project Management:* Robin Taylor-Wilson

*CAD:* Adrian Bailey



**APPENDIX A  
CONTEXT INDEX**

Context No.	Type	Trial Pit	Phase	Description	Interpretation
1	Layer	All	4	Friable; dark brown; silty clay; occasional small sub-angular stones; 0.18m-0.30m and 0.70m thick in Trial Pit 13	Turf & topsoil forming modern ground surface in TPs 1-12 and garden soil in TP 13
2	Layer	1	3	Friable; mid brown; silty sandy clay; occasional small sub-angular stones; 0.50m thick	Developed soil, possible landscaping or ploughing
3	Natural	1	1	Firm; mottled mid grey/yellow/mid brown; clay; frequent degraded sandstone fragments	Natural boulder clay
4	Natural	1	1	Indurated; mid grey; (?)sandstone	Natural bedrock
5	Layer	2	3	Friable; mid brown; silty sandy clay; occasional small sub-angular stones; 0.27m thick	Developed soil, possible landscaping or ploughing
6	Natural	2	1	Firm; mottled mid grey/yellow/mid brown; clay; frequent degraded sandstone fragments	Natural boulder clay
7	Layer	3	3	Friable; mid brown; silty sandy clay; occasional small sub-angular stones; 0.55m thick	Developed soil, possible landscaping or ploughing
8	Natural	3	1	Firm; mottled mid grey/yellow/mid brown; sandy clay; frequent degraded sandstone fragments	Natural boulder clay
9	Layer	4	3	Friable; mid brown; silty sandy clay; occasional small sub-angular stones; 0.66m thick	Developed soil, possible landscaping or ploughing
10	Natural	4	1	Firm; mottled orange/yellow/mid brown; sandy clay and degraded sandstone	Natural boulder clay
11	Layer	5	3	Friable; mid brown; sandy silty clay; occasional small sub-angular stones; 0.76m thick	Developed soil, possible landscaping or ploughing
12	Natural	5	1	Firm; mottles orange/yellow/mid grey; sandy clay and sandstone fragments	Natural boulder clay
13	Layer	6	3	Friable; mid brown; sandy silty clay; occasional small sub-angular stones; 0.50m thick	Developed soil, possible landscaping or ploughing
14	Natural	6	1	Friable; mid orange brown; sand; occasional sandstone fragments	Natural sand
15	Layer	7	3	Friable; mid brown; silty clay; occasional small sub-angular stones; 0.40m thick	Developed soil, possible landscaping or ploughing
16	Natural	7	1	Loose; mid orange; sand; frequent degraded sandstone slabs	Natural sand
17	Layer	8	3	Friable; mid brown; clayey sandy silt; occasional small sub-angular stones; 0.50m thick	Developed soil, possible landscaping or ploughing
18	Layer	8	2	Soft; mid greyish brown; sandy clay; 0.15m thick	Alluvial? Deposit, from flooding of nearby spring?
19	Layer	9	3	Friable; mid brown; sandy silt; occasional small sub-angular stones; 0.80m thick	Developed soil, possible landscaping or ploughing
20	Natural	9	1	Friable; mottled yellow/mid grey/mid brown; sandy clay and degraded sandstone	Natural boulder clay
21	Layer	10	3	Friable; mid brown; sandy silt; occasional small sub-angular stones; 0.55m thick	Developed soil, possible landscaping or ploughing
22	Natural	10	1	Friable; mid yellowish orange; sand; occasional sandstone fragments	Natural sand
23	Layer	11	3	Friable; mid brown; silty sandy clay; occasional small sub-angular stones; 0.30m thick	Developed soil, possible landscaping or ploughing
24	Natural	11	1	Friable; mid orange; sand and degraded sandstone	Natural sand
25	Layer	12	3	Friable; mid brown; clayey silt; occasional small sub-angular stones; 0.60m thick	Developed soil, possible landscaping or ploughing
26	Natural	12	1	Loose; light grey; fractured sandstone and silt	Natural fractured stone
27	Natural	8	1	Loose; mid yellowish orange; clayey sand; frequent sandstone fragments	Natural sand
28	Wall	13	3	Dressed sandstone blocks; irregular coursing; no bonding material visible; E-W orientated; 1.30m high	Retaining wall between garden and the road to the S
29	Fill	13	3	Loose; dark brown; rubble and sandy silt; 1.60m x 0.60m thick	Fill of construction cut [30]
30	Cut	13	3	Linear; steep side; base not visible; 1.60m wide x 0.60m deep; E-W orientated	Construction cut for retaining wall [28]
31	Natural	13	1	Compact; mid yellowish grey; degraded sandstone and clayey sand	Natural stone and sand