

**An Archaeological Watching Brief at Longbenton Community College,  
Hailsham Avenue, Longbenton, North Tyneside, Tyne and Wear**

**Central National Grid Reference: NZ 2740 6955**

**Site Code: LBN 09**

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## CONTENTS

	<i>page</i>
1. NON-TECHNICAL SUMMARY	1
2. INTRODUCTION	2
3. ARCHAEOLOGICAL METHODOLOGY	8
4. RESULTS: THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL SEQUENCE	10
5. CONCLUSIONS	12
6. REFERENCES	13
7. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND CREDITS	14

### APPENDIX

#### Appendix A Ceramic Assessment

#### List of Figures

Figure 1	Site location	3
Figure 2	Location of monitored areas	4
Figure 3	View of topsoil stripping, east end of new build footprint in Area 2, January 2009, looking south-west	11
Figure 4	View of stripped area, west end of football pitch in Area 2, September 2009, looking south	11

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

- 1.1 A programme of archaeological monitoring and recording was undertaken in association with the initial construction phases of a new school and associated facilities at Longbenton Community College, North Tyneside, Tyne and Wear. The central National Grid Reference for the site is NZ 2740 6955.
- 1.2 The archaeological work was commissioned by WYG Environment and undertaken by Pre-Construct Archaeology Limited intermittently between January and November 2009.
- 1.3 Previous archaeological work – a desk-based assessment and evaluation incorporating geophysical survey, earthwork survey and monitoring of geotechnical test-pits - indicated that the school site had generally low potential for archaeological remains of all eras, although a lack of previous development towards the eastern end of the site, within the area of proposed new build, would mean that any archaeological remains there would have probably survived. The highest potential was probably for archaeological remains of the prehistoric, Roman or medieval periods.
- 1.4 The programme of monitoring was undertaken in accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigation prepared by WYG Environment. One area (Area 1), taking in the western portion of the main new build footprint and a car park and access road to the south, was to be only briefly inspected following topsoil stripping as this was considered to have negligible archaeological potential due to previous disturbance. An adjacent area (Area 2), taking in the eastern portion of the main new build footprint, a football pitch and nature area, was to be subject to archaeological monitoring during topsoil stripping and initial construction groundworks as this was considered to have somewhat greater potential for the survival of archaeological remains, with remains of the former agricultural practice of ridge and furrow ploughing having been detected there by geophysical survey.
- 1.5 No archaeological remains of significance were recorded during the programme of archaeological monitoring. Across the monitored areas, removal of topsoil generally revealed a sandy sub-soil, which in places was removed to expose natural boulder clay. Numerous features of likely early modern origin – possibly relating to refuse disposal - were observed in the northern part of Area 2 and the probable remains of a former path shown on late 19th century mapping were observed at the western limit of Area 2.

## **2. INTRODUCTION**

### **2.1 General Background**

- 2.1.1 This report describes the methodology and results of a programme of archaeological monitoring and recording (hereafter 'watching brief') carried out in association with the initial construction phases of a new school at Longbenton Community College, North Tyneside, Tyne and Wear (Figure 1).
- 2.1.2 The watching brief was undertaken by Pre-Construct Archaeology Limited (PCA) intermittently between January and November 2009 having been commissioned by WYG Environment (WYG) on behalf of North Tyneside Council.
- 2.1.3 The work was undertaken following a recommendation by the Tyne and Wear Archaeology Officer (TWAO). The development area generally had low potential for important archaeological remains, as identified in an archaeological desk-based assessment (DBA) undertaken in 2008.<sup>1</sup> A follow-up programme of archaeological evaluation, comprising geophysical survey, earthwork survey and monitoring of geotechnical test-pits, largely confirmed the generally low potential of the site for archaeological remains.<sup>2</sup>
- 2.1.4 The watching brief was necessary to fulfil the requirements of a condition regarding archaeology attached to planning permission (Ref: 08/02200/LAREG3) for the development. A Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI)<sup>3</sup> for the work was prepared by WYG, following discussions with the TWAO regarding the scope of the work required. The broad aim of the work was to identify and record any features of archaeological interest revealed during initial construction groundworks.
- 2.1.5 At the time of writing, the project archive is housed at the Northern Office of PCA, at Unit N19a, Tursdale Business Park, Durham. The completed project archive, comprising written, drawn, and photographic records will be ultimately deposited with Tyne and Wear Museums, under the site code LBN 09. The **Online Access to the Index of Archaeological Investigations (OASIS)** reference number is: preconst1-69035.

### **2.2 Site Location and Description, including Landscape Character**

- 2.2.1 Although lying within North Tyneside for administrative purposes, Longbenton lies close to the southern limit of the 'landscape character area' defined as the 'South East Northumberland Coastal Plain',<sup>4</sup> that is, the area between the north Pennines and the Northumberland coast. The North Sea lies c. 10km to the east of the site and Newcastle city centre lies c. 6km to the south. The key characteristics of this character area include: widespread urban and industrial development, extending north from the urban edge of Newcastle across the coastal plain, with mining towns and villages, merging into the rural landscape towards the north; large open arable fields, with scattered large country houses, in open countryside, and extensive urban fringe effect near settlements.

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<sup>1</sup> Tyne and Wear Museums 2008.

<sup>2</sup> WYG 2009a.

<sup>3</sup> WYG 2009b.

<sup>4</sup> Information from [www.naturalengland.org.uk](http://www.naturalengland.org.uk).



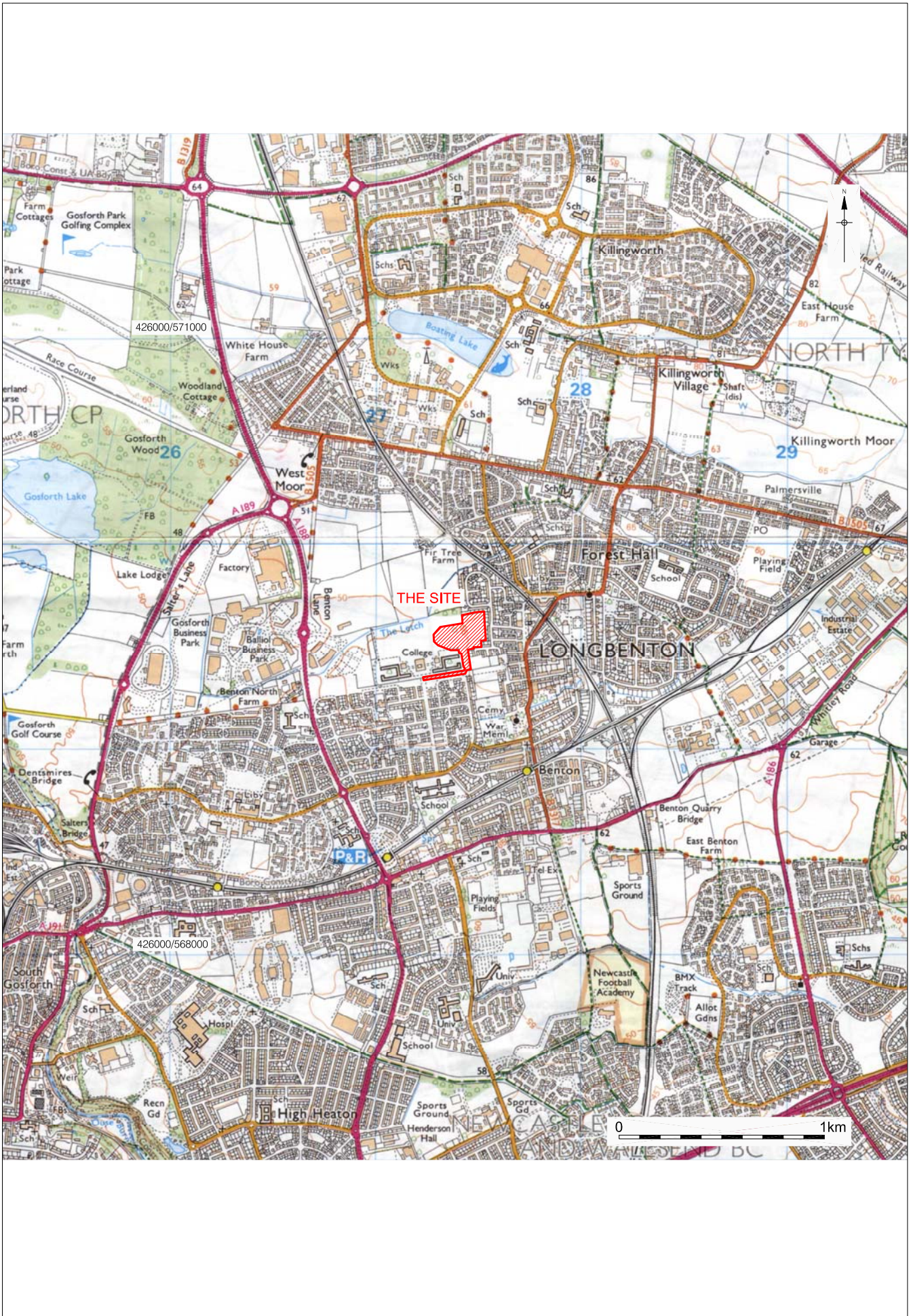


Figure 1. Site location  
Scale 1:25,000



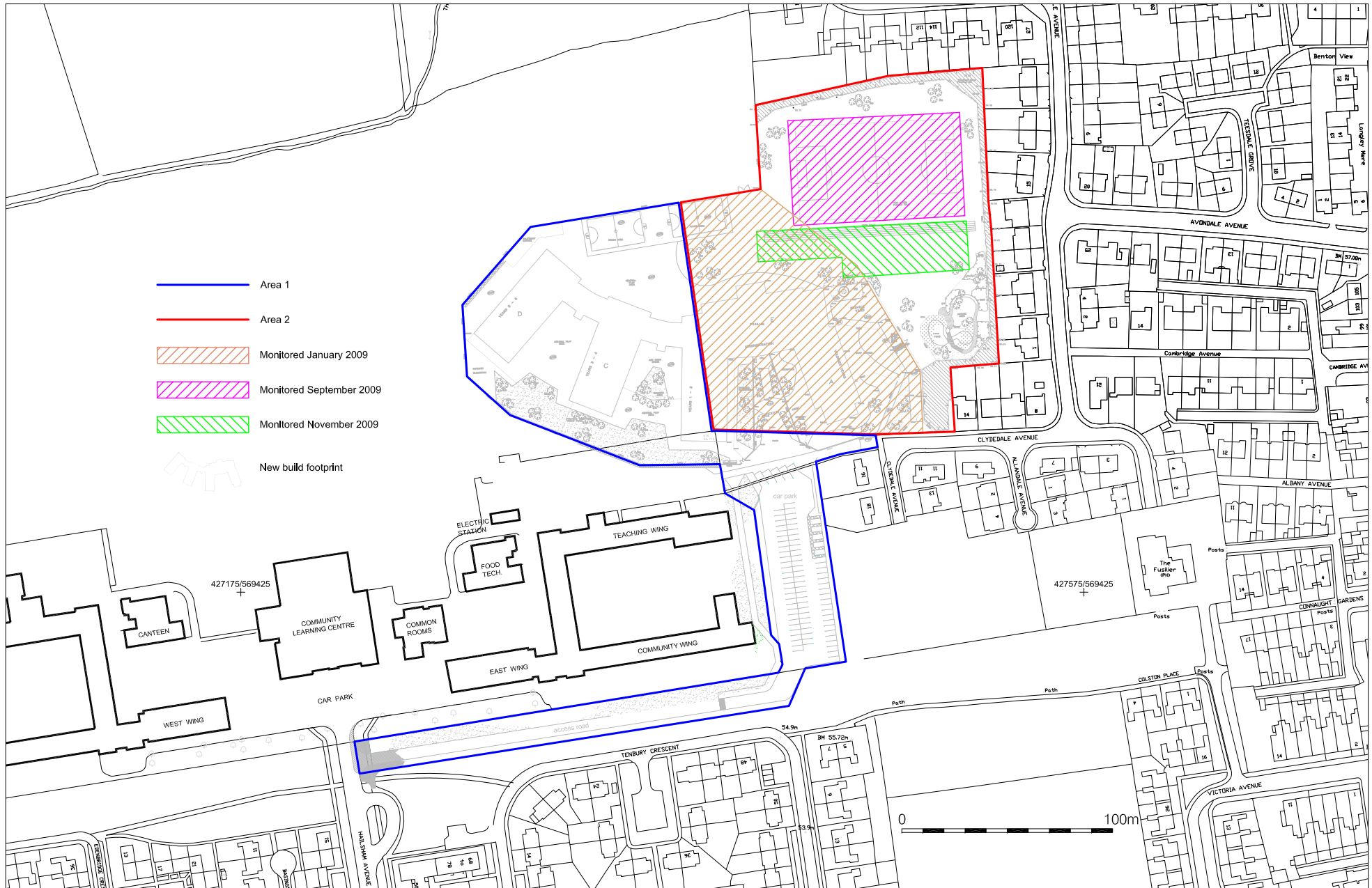


Figure 2. Location of monitored areas  
Scale 1:2,500

- 2.2.2 Longbenton Community College is situated on Hailsham Avenue, Longbenton (Figure 1). The school campus covers a total of c. 13 hectares and has a central National Grid Reference (NGR) of NZ 2725 6950. Access to the campus is from the south, along Hailsham Avenue, which runs north from Goathland Avenue, which runs eastwards from a roundabout junction with the north-south running A188 Benton Lane.
- 2.2.3 The existing school buildings - dating from the 1950s and more recently - occupy the southern portion of the overall campus. South of the buildings are areas of hardstanding, car parking, access roads and mature trees. To the north is a large area of open ground, used as sports and recreational fields, bounded to the north for the most part by a watercourse called 'The Letch', beyond which are open fields. On all other sides the school grounds are bounded by residential housing. The area of the new school development forms the easternmost portion of the overall school grounds and this has a central NGR of NZ 2740 6955.
- 2.2.4 The aforementioned WSI identified two areas of differing archaeological interest within the development area (Figure 2). Area 1, c. 1.90 hectares in size, took in the westernmost portion of the new build footprint, an area of car park to the south and the route of a west-east access road from Hailsham Avenue. This area had likely suffered disturbance during the construction of sports fields and surrounding buildings and was considered to have negligible archaeological potential. Area 2, c. 2.10m hectares in size, included the easternmost portion of the new build footprint, a new football pitch to the north-east and an area proposed for a nature wetland beyond the south-eastern corner of the football pitch. This area had some potential for surviving archaeological remains, having likely suffered less previous disturbance and with denuded ridge and furrow detected there by geophysical survey.

### **2.3 Geology and Topography**

- 2.3.1 The 'solid' geology of the Longbenton area is formed by the Upper Carboniferous Coal Measures, which consist mainly of mudstones and sandstones with numerous coal seams.<sup>5</sup> Throughout the South East Northumberland Coastal Plain, bedrock is heavily mantled by glacial debris, with an average of c. 10m of material, mainly boulder clay or till, deposited during the last (Late Devensian) glaciation. Such material forms the 'drift' geology' of the area of the site.
- 2.3.2 The school campus occupies generally flat land, at c. 55m OD, with just a gradual rise to the east across the development area. It is not until c. 11km further west, beyond Ponteland, that the land begins to rise gradually from the undulating coastal plain to the higher ground beyond.
- 2.3.3 Some or all of the overall school site is likely to have been landscaped to some extent ahead of or during the development of the land as the school. Prior to the work herein described, the new development area in the eastern part of the campus was relatively flat and covered in grass, this being part of the area used by the school as sports and recreational fields.

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<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*

- 2.3.4 The initial archaeological assessment of the site identified faint traces of west-east aligned ridge and furrow on the fields to the north of the school buildings, with the relatively broad (c. 9m) wavelength suggesting a probable late medieval to early post-medieval date.<sup>6</sup> However, the follow-up survey and analysis established that that no extant earthwork remains survived within the proposed development area.<sup>7</sup>

## 2.4 Planning Background

- 2.4.1 Planning permission for the development of Longbenton Community College (Ref: 08/02200/LAREG3) had a condition attached relating to archaeology. The requirement was for a watching brief to identify and record any features of archaeological interest exposed during initial construction groundworks.
- 2.4.2 Government guidance on archaeology and heritage conservation is set out in '*Planning Policy Guidelines Note 16: Archaeology and Planning*' (PPG16),<sup>8</sup> which is currently under review as part of a consultation paper (July-October 2009) on a new national Planning Policy Statement (PPS 15) on the historic environment. At a local level, the Local Planning Authority, North Tyneside Council, implements various relevant policies with regard to the historic environment.

## 2.5 Archaeological and Historical Background

*Information contained within the aforementioned desk-based assessment (DBA) of the archaeological potential of Longbenton Community College has been used as the basis for this section of the report. The research and writing of those responsible is fully acknowledged. Historic Environment Record (HER) numbers are not included here and the DBA should be consulted for full details and references.*

- 2.5.1 There are no known sites from the various prehistoric eras within the vicinity of the school, the nearest 'stray' prehistoric artefact being a worked flint found at Benton c. 1.5km to the south-east. However, over the past decade, the distribution and density of prehistoric sites in North Tyneside and adjacent areas has steadily increased. The site lies on the Benton Ridge, a relatively high area of ground that runs east-west between Benton and Newcastle, sloping gradually southwards towards the River Tyne. Similar topographical situations were often the locations of settlement in later prehistory.
- 2.5.2 There is no known evidence of activity from the Romano British period on the site or within its immediate vicinity.
- 2.5.3 There is no evidence of activity, including within documentary sources, in the early medieval period on the site or within its immediate vicinity.
- 2.5.4 Although the village of 'Long Benton' is not mentioned in the Boldon Book of 1183, its name is believed to derive from the late 12th century, when Long Benton was held by the Barony of the Merlays, the barons of Morpeth at that time. Benton church, Saint Bartholomew's, of likely 12th century or earlier origin, is mentioned in a document of 1339 relating to Balliol College, Oxford.

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<sup>6</sup> Tyne and Wear Museums 2008, 6.

<sup>7</sup> WYG 2009a, 6.

<sup>8</sup> Department of the Environment 1990.



- 2.5.5 During the medieval period, Longbenton developed as a 'linear-type' village, with housing ranged along a central front street and long plots extending to the rear. The school site is situated c. 750m north of the historic village core, while St. Bartholomew's church lies c. 100m south-east of the site boundary. This however is a structure from 1790, built to replace the medieval church on the same site.
- 2.5.6 During the post-medieval and early modern periods, the site and surrounding area remained largely agricultural in nature. The area had been subject to enclosure through the 17th century and the resulting field systems shown on the earliest maps demonstrate this. The first detailed map to show the site is from 1719 and this indicates that the site lay within land owned by Balliol College, Oxford.
- 2.5.7 A map of 1767 shows the land was still agricultural in nature with further division of the fields from that shown on the previous map. A watercourse depicted on the 1767 map is evidently not 'The Letch', which skirts part of the northern site boundary today. Fryer's map of 1820 shows little change to the rural nature of the general area, apart from a coal pit to the east of Longbenton church. The sinking of many pits in this era greatly accelerated the spread of urban development across what had previously been an essentially rural landscape.
- 2.5.8 The 1st edition Ordnance Survey map of 1858 shows the school site lying within a network of fields, with the only significant built structure in the vicinity being the church. The 2nd edition map of 1898 shows the site had altered little since the 1st edition. The area of new build is shown crossed by a path running roughly south-north through the fields and this remained in place until the current development. Balliol College Farm appears on the cartographic evidence for the first time on this edition; it lies beyond the south-western corner of the school campus. The site appears largely unchanged on the 3rd and 4th and editions of the Ordnance Survey map, from 1920 and 1938 respectively.
- 2.5.9 The oldest buildings of Longbenton Community College that currently occupy the site were built in 1951 and opened in 1953. Initially named after Thomas Addison, the facility became Longbenton High School in the 1960s when additional structures were added. The buildings conform to the utilitarian design typical of educational institutions in the 1950s-1960s and are not of architectural importance.

## **2.6 Aims and Objectives**

- 2.6.1 In broad terms, the aim of the watching brief was to identify and record any features of archaeological interest discovered during initial construction groundworks. Thus the impact of the works on the archaeological resource would be mitigated thereby allowing the archaeological planning condition to be discharged.
- 2.6.2 The specific objectives of the fieldwork were:
- to monitor topsoil stripping and excavation to archaeologically sterile sub-soils;
  - to identify archaeological features and deposits of interest;
  - to record unidentified archaeological features and deposits to a level appropriate to their extent and significance.

### **3. ARCHAEOLOGICAL METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Fieldwork**

- 3.1.1 The fieldwork was undertaken on the recommendation of the TWAO and in accordance with the aforementioned WSI prepared by WYG. This identified two areas of differing archaeological interest within the development area (Figure 2). Area 1, c. 1.90 hectares in size, covered the westernmost portion of the new build footprint, an area of car park to the south and the route of a west-east access road from Hailsham Avenue. Area 2, c. 2.10m hectares in size, covered the easternmost portion of the new build footprint, a new football pitch to the north-east and an area proposed for a nature wetland beyond the eastern end of the new build footprint. Area 2 was considered to have somewhat higher potential for surviving archaeological remains due to lesser previous disturbance.
- 3.1.2 The fieldwork was undertaken in accordance with the relevant standard and guidance document of the Institute for Archaeologists (IfA).<sup>9</sup> PCA is an IfA-Registered Organisation (RO 23) and the Project Manager has MIfA status.
- 3.1.3 Site attendance was provided on 14-16 and 21 January, 16 September and 12 November 2009.
- 3.1.4 The work in January 2009 involved monitoring topsoil stripping by a 360° tracked excavator, fitted with a toothless bucket, in the eastern half of the new build footprint in Area 2 (Figure 2 shows the approximate extent of the monitored area) and also ground inspection in Area 1 where the western half of the new build footprint had been previously stripped of topsoil. In places in Areas 1 and 2, the underlying sub-soil was also removed, down to the level of the natural sub-stratum, but this varied according to the relative formation level for construction required by the Principal Contractor. The first three days of constant monitoring of topsoil stripping in Area 2 in January 2009 produced largely negative archaeological results. At that point it was agreed with the TWAO that monitoring in Area 2 could be undertaken on a more intermittent basis.
- 3.1.5 The work in September 2009 involved examination of the footprint of a football pitch, measuring 79m x 49m, in the northern part of Area 2 (Figure 2 shows the extent of the monitored area), after it had been stripped of topsoil and, in places, the underlying sub-soil by a 360° tracked excavator fitted with a toothless bucket. Numerous archaeological features, both linear and discrete in form, were observed across the area of the football pitch, although the overall impression was that most, if not all, of these contained early modern ceramic material and thus the activity was evidently of low archaeological significance. Given the size of the area under examination, hand cleaning would have been impractical and investigation was restricted to a close inspection of the exposures. The decision not to undertake detailed cleaning and excavation of these remains was approved by the TWAO.
- 3.1.6 The work in November 2009 involved monitoring topsoil stripping by a 360° tracked excavator, fitted with a toothless bucket, along a corridor of land for an athletics facility, measuring 100m x up to 25m, to the south of the football pitch. To the west, this area overlapped with the area stripped in January (Figure 2 shows the extent of the monitored area).

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<sup>9</sup> IfA (then IFA) 2001.

- 3.1.7 Construction work within the area proposed for a nature wetland beyond the eastern end of the new build footprint was not monitored after discussions with the TWAO.
- 3.1.8 Archaeological deposits revealed during the groundworks were recorded by the 'single context recording' method using the PCA *pro forma* 'Context Recording Sheet'. Very limited hand cleaning of exposures was undertaken. No features or deposits were encountered that warranted planning to scale and at no point did it prove necessary to record heights above Ordnance Datum. A general photographic record of the archaeological operation was compiled.

## **3.2 Post-excavation**

- 3.2.1 The stratigraphic data for the project is represented by the written, drawn and photographic records. Three context numbers were allocated during the watching brief. Post-excavation work involved checking and collating site records. A written summary of the archaeological sequence was then compiled, as described below.
- 3.2.2 A small assemblage of artefactual material was recovered during the watching brief, but no organic material was recovered and no bulk samples for palaeoenvironmental remains were collected. An assessment of the artefactual material was undertaken (see Appendix A).
- 3.2.3 The complete Site Archive, in this case comprising written, drawn and photographic records (including all material generated electronically during post-excavation) and the small ceramic assemblage will be packaged for long-term curation. No material was recovered that required specialist stabilisation or an assessment of potential for conservation research. In preparing the Site Archive for deposition, all relevant standards and guidelines documents referenced in the Archaeological Archives Forum guidelines document<sup>10</sup> will be adhered to, in particular a well-established United Kingdom Institute for Conservation (UKIC) document<sup>11</sup> and a forthcoming IfA publication.<sup>12</sup>
- 3.2.4 At the time of deposition of the Site Archive, the depositional requirements of the receiving body, in this case Tyne and Wear Museums, Arbeia Roman Fort and Museum, Baring Street, South Shields, will be met in full.

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<sup>10</sup> Brown 2007.

<sup>11</sup> Walker, UKIC 1990.

<sup>12</sup> IfA forthcoming.

## **4. RESULTS: THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL SEQUENCE**

### **4.1 Phase 1: Natural Sub-stratum**

- 4.1.1 The earliest deposit to be exposed in any monitored area comprised compact, mid to light brownish yellow silty clay, [103]. This was the underlying natural boulder clay sub-stratum of the area.

### **4.2 Phase 2: Early Modern?**

- 4.2.1 Natural clay was generally overlain in the monitored areas by a layer of compact mid yellowish brown yellow silty sandy clay, [102], with moderate inclusions of fine and medium stones. Very occasional ceramic material, including clay tobacco pipe, and glass observed within the layer – appeared to be largely early modern in date. Two earlier sherds from this layer were collected, one of medieval date, the other probably early 18th century (see Appendix A). These sherds attest to usage of the land at the site or in the near vicinity during earlier archaeological eras. This deposit has been interpreted as a developed sub-soil, areas of which may have been redeposited during previous landscaping, possibly at the time of initial construction of the school or during subsequent development. Across large parts of the monitored areas, it did not prove necessary for this deposit to be removed in its entirety (Figure 3).
- 4.2.2 Across the area of the football pitch in the north of Area 2, examined after topsoil stripping had taken place, numerous archaeological features, both linear and discrete in form were observed. Given the size of the area under examination, meaningful hand cleaning could not be undertaken and investigation was restricted to a close inspection of the exposures. The overall impression was that the features probably cut through the aforementioned sub-soil. The features were generally filled with firm dark brownish grey sandy silt but no context numbers were allocated given the apparent extent of the remains and the impracticality of hand cleaning. Most if not all of the features appeared to contain early modern ceramic material – a sample of which was collected for specialist assessment (see the unstratified material in Appendix A). This widespread concentration of features is considered likely to be the result of significant ground disturbance in this area in the early modern era or later, possibly related to refuse disposal.
- 4.2.3 A strip of crushed and fragmented brick, c. 2.0m wide and aligned roughly north-south, was briefly examined at the boundary of Areas 1 and 2, within the central portion of the new build footprint. Revealed below topsoil, this is likely to represent the remains of a former path shown on late 19th century mapping continuing to the south, then turning east and running into towards the grounds of St Bartholomew's church.

### **4.3 Phase 3: Modern**

- 4.3.1 The uppermost deposit across Areas 1 and 2 was a layer of firm, mid to dark grey sandy silt, [101], with developed turf. This topsoil was observed to contain very occasional early modern ceramic material, one sherd of which was retained.



Figure 3. View of topsoil stripping, east end of new build footprint in Area 2, January 2009, looking south-west.



Figure 4. View of stripped area, west end of football pitch in Area 2, September 2009, looking south



## **5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **5.1 Conclusions**

- 5.1.1 No features or deposits of archaeological significance were recorded during the watching brief.
- 5.1.2 The natural clay sub-stratum was exposed in places across the monitored areas. It was generally overlain by a developed sub-soil, areas of which may have been disturbed during previous landscaping.
- 5.1.3 A small assemblage of artefactual material recovered during the work included a sherd of medieval pottery and a sherd of possible early 18th century pottery, both from the sub-soil. The majority of the ceramic assemblage was of early modern date, collected during examination of the area stripped for the new football pitch in the northernmost part of Area 2 and evidently originating from a concentration of features possibly related to refuse disposal.
- 5.1.4 The uppermost deposit throughout the monitored areas was topsoil and turf.

### **5.2 Recommendations**

- 5.2.1 No further work is required on the information recovered during the watching brief, with the Site Archive, including this report, being the permanent record of the archaeological remains encountered.

## 6. REFERENCES

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### *On line source*

[www.naturalengland.org.uk](http://www.naturalengland.org.uk). Countryside Commission, nd. 'Joint Character Area 13. South East Northumberland Coastal Plain', *Countryside Character Volume 1: North East*.

## 7. **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND CREDITS**

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### **PCA Credits**

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*Report:* Amy Roberts and Robin Taylor-Wilson

*Illustrations:* Adrian Bailey

### **Other Credits**

*Ceramic Assessment:* Jenny Vaughan

**APPENDIX A  
POTTERY ASSESSMENT**

## Ceramic Assessment

By Jenny Vaughan (Northern Counties Archaeological Services)

### Introduction

A small assemblage of ceramic material, comprising 17 sherds of pottery, eight fragments of clay tobacco pipe and single fragment of tile, was recovered during the watching brief at Longbenton Community College. All but four of the pottery sherds were unstratified, while five of the pipe fragments were stratified and the tile fragment was also stratified.

### Pottery Catalogue

Context	Pottery ID	Count	Weight (g)	Comment
Unstrat.	Late red slipware	4	76	Two bowl rims
Unstrat.	Transfer printed whiteware	3	36	Bowl rim and piece of base – blue printing
Unstrat.	Marmalade jar	1	26	
Unstrat.	Misc. earthenware	3	15	Two buff yellow glazed including bowl rim. One small brown glazed.
Unstrat.	Stoneware	2	14	One salt glazed (pale buff), one brown glazed
101	Transfer printed whiteware	2	20	Plate rim green, base blue.
102	Medieval	1	6	Dark grey gritty fabric with pink surface.
102	Red slipware	1	7	Pie crust dish rim with combed slip decoration

### Discussion

#### Pottery

The unstratified pottery was 19th century as were the transfer printed fragments from topsoil [101]. Sub-soil [102] produced a medieval sherd, probably early/mid 13th century, while a fragment of slipware from the same context could be early 18th century.

#### Clay Pipe

Eight fragments of clay pipe stem were recovered: three were unstratified, three were from topsoil [101] and two were from sub-soil [102]. The stem bores (between 4/64" and 6/64") indicated a later 18th/19th century date. One of the unstratified stems was marked 'Wm Tennant/Newcastle' and therefore dates to after 1873 when William Tennant left the family business in Berwick and started pipemaking on Tyneside.

#### Glazed Tile

A fragment of brown glazed tile of 20<sup>th</sup> century date was recovered from topsoil [101].

### Conclusion

Other than providing broad dating evidence for the overburden layers and possible refuse disposal activity in Area 2, this group of finds is of no particular interest.

### Reference

Roberts, J. E., 1988. 'Tennant's Pipe Factory, Tweedmouth', *The History of the Berwickshire Naturalists' Club*, Vol. 44, 2, 96.