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NORTHAMPTONSHIRE

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION REPORT

CP. NO: 10252

28/06/2012

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Quality Assurance

This report covers works as outlined in the brief for the above-named project as issued by the relevant authority, and as outlined in the agreed programme of works. Any deviation to the programme of works has been agreed by all parties. The works have been carried out according to the guidelines set out in the Institute for Archaeologists (IfA) Standards, Policy Statements and Codes of Conduct. The report has been prepared in keeping with the guidance set out by WA Archaeology Ltd on the preparation of reports.

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SUMMARY

In June 2012 Wardell Armstrong Archaeology Ltd were commissioned by Blaise Vyner Consultancy on behalf of Towcester Racecourse Co Ltd, to undertake an archaeological evaluation at Towcester Racecourse, Towcester, Northamptonshire (NGR 470480 247860). This work follows a planning application (Planning Application No. S/2011/1219/MAF) for the construction of a greyhound track at the site. Northamptonshire County Council granted planning consent for the development, on the condition an archaeological evaluation be undertaken. The work is required as the site lies within an area where there is archaeological evidence for late prehistoric and Romano-British activity, and it is considered that there is the possibility that archaeological remains may exist on the site.

The archaeological evaluation was undertaken over three days between the 18th June and 20th June 2012. The evaluation involved the excavation of four trenches, totalling 144m^2 of the development area. Possible archaeological remains were identified in Trench 1, in the form of a possible terminus or small pit, found running under the trench edge. However, this could also be a natural feature resulting from root disturbance prior to the landscaping of the racecourse. The remains of ridge-and-furrow earthworks were visible in Trench 2 and Trench 4 and were subsequently recorded.

As this archaeological evaluation was conducted as part of a condition in association with the development of a new greyhound track, no further work is deemed necessary. However, given the high archaeological potential of the area, it is recommended that any future work be subject to a programme of archaeological investigation.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Wardell Armstrong Archaeology Ltd would like to thank Blaise Vyner Consultancy, for commissioning the project, and for all assistance throughout the work. Wardell Armstrong Archaeology Ltd would also like to thank Liz Mordue, Assistant Archaeological Officer, Northamptonshire County Council [DCO] for her help during the project.

Wardell Armstrong Archaeology Ltd would also like to extend their thanks to Robert Hawtin of the groundworks company, and all staff at Towcester Racecourse Co Ltd, for their help during this project.

The archaeological evaluation was undertaken by Damion Churchill and Miranda Haigh. The report was written by Miranda Haigh and the drawings were produced by Adrian Bailey and Martin Railton. The project was managed by Martin Railton, Project Manager for WAA Ltd. The report was edited by Martin Railton, Project Manager for WAA Ltd.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE PROJECT

1.1.1 In June 2012, Wardell Armstrong Archaeology Ltd were invited by Blaise Vyner Consultancy to undertake a archaeological evaluation at Towcester Racecourse, Towcester (NGR 470480 247860; Figure 1), prior to the development of a new greyhound track. The proposed works lie within an area where there is archaeological evidence for late prehistoric and Romano-British activity. The site contains the eroded remains of ridge and furrow earthworks, thought to be of medieval date. It is also believed that there was a Civil War encampment in the vicinity. Furthermore, this area was used in 1913 for training manoeuvres. (Northamptonshire County Council 2012a).

1.1.2 As a result, Northamptonshire County Council requested a programme of archaeological investigation, prior to the development taking place. This is in line with government advice as set out in Section 12 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF 2012).

1.1.3 The archaeological evaluation was undertaken following approved standards and guidance (IfA 2008), and was consistent with the project design provided by Wardell Armstrong Archaeology (Railton 2012) and generally accepted best practice.

1.1.4 This report outlines the evaluation works undertaken on-site, the subsequent programme of post-fieldwork analysis, and the results of this scheme of archaeological works.

2 METHODOLOGY

2.1 PROJECT DESIGN

2.1.1 A project design was submitted by Wardell Armstrong Archaeology Ltd in response to a request by Towcester Racecourse Co Ltd, for an archaeological evaluation of the study area (Railton 2012). Following acceptance of the project design by Northamptonshire County Council, Wardell Armstrong Archaeology Ltd was commissioned by the client to undertake the work. The project design was adhered to in full, and the work was consistent with the relevant standards and procedures of the Institute for Archaeologists (IfA), and generally accepted best practice.

2.2 THE FIELD EVALUATION

2.2.1 The evaluation consisted of the excavation of four trenches covering 144 m^2 of the proposed development area. The purpose of the evaluation was to establish the nature and extent of below ground archaeological remains within the vicinity, the evaluation trenches being located to provide a sample of the whole area. Trenches 1 and 2 were located within the area to be most impacted upon, where the development will involve excavation to a depth of upto c.1.2m. All work was conducted according to the recommendations of the Institute for Archaeologists (2008).

2.2.2 In summary, the main objectives of the field evaluation were to establish the presence/absence, nature, extent and state of preservation of archaeological remains and to record these where they were observed; to establish the character of those features in terms of cuts, soil matrices and interfaces; to recover artefactual material, especially that useful for dating purposes; to recover palaeoenvironmental material where it survives in order to understand site and landscape formation processes.

2.2.3 Turf and topsoil was removed by mechanical excavator under close archaeological supervision. The trial trenches were subsequently cleaned by hand and all features were investigated and recording according to the Wardell Armstrong Archaeology Ltd standard procedure as set out in the Excavation Manual (Giecco 2012).

2.2.4 No archaeological finds were recovered.

2.2.5 All deposits encountered were deemed unsuitable for environmental sampling, and therefore no samples were obtained.

2.2.6 The four evaluation trenches were backfilled following excavation and recording.

2.2.7 The fieldwork programme was followed by an assessment of the data as set out in the Management of Archaeological Projects (2nd Edition, 1991).

2.3 THE ARCHIVE

2.3.1 A full professional archive has been compiled in accordance with the specification, and in line with current UKIC (1990) and English Heritage Guidelines (1991) and according to the Archaeological Archives Forum recommendations (Brown 2011). The archive will be deposited within an appropriate repository, with copies of the report sent to Northamptonshire Historic Environment Record where viewing will be available upon request. The archive can be accessed under the unique project identifier WAA12, TRC-A, CP 10252.

2.3.2 Wardell Armstrong Archaeology Ltd, and Northamptonshire County Council, support the **O**nline **A**cces**S** to the **I**ndex of Archaeological Investigation**S** (**OASIS**) project. This project aims to provide an on-line index and access to the extensive and expanding body of grey literature, created as a result of developer-funded archaeological work. As a result, details of the results of this project will be made available by Wardell Armstrong Archaeology Ltd, as a part of this national project.

3 BACKGROUND

3.1 LOCATION AND GEOLOGICAL CONTEXT

3.1.1 The site of the proposed greyhound track is to the southeast of Towcester, on the northeast side of London Road (the A5), and is situated within the circuit of the existing horse racing track at Towcester Racecourse. Towcester Racecourse lies within Easton Neston registered park (Grade II) but is not included within Easton Neston Conservation area. The park has existed as parkland since 1499 and was probably under pasture before that since Medieval times (Vyner 2012, 4.2.3). The evaluation area consists of an area of land on the south side of the racing track, to the west of the Empress Stand, centred on NGR 470480 247860 (Figure 2). The site lies at a height of approximately 110m AOD and is on the south bank of the River Tove.

3.1.2 The underlying geology is in the Great Oolite Group of sandstone, limestone and Argillaceous rocks, formed approximately 164 to 169 million years ago in the Jurassic Period (British Geological Survey 2001). This is overlain by glacial till in the vicinity of the racecourse. The overlying soils are slowly permeable calcareous clayey soils, known as Hanslope soils (SSEW 1980). The site slopes downhill slightly from north to south, with elevations ranging between 105m and 110m OD.

3.2 HISTORICAL CONTEXT

3.2.1 *Introduction:* this historical background is compiled mostly from secondary sources, and is intended only as a brief summary of historical developments specific to the study area. References to the County Historic Environment Record (HER) are included where known.

3.2.2 *Prehistoric:* There is no known evidence for prehistoric activity within the proposed development area. However, there have been a number of finds of prehistoric stone implements in the wider area, which suggest activity from the Mesolithic period onwards. Mesolithic flints (HER 6044 and HER 4766) were discovered adjacent to the Broad Water, a tributary stream of the River Tove nearly 1km to the north-west of the site, and a single tranchet axe of Mesolithic type was recovered from around 0.5km to the southeast of the site (HER 4766). These may demonstrate a preference for lightly drained river valley locations which extend into the study area (Vyner 2012, 5.2.3). Flint debris of Bronze Age type from the Broad Water fringes to the north-west (HER 6045), together with a

widespread scatter of Neolithic and Bronze Age flints recovered as surface finds during fieldwalking, less than 0.8 km to the south of the site (HER 7065), underline the presence of prehistoric populations (*ibid*.).

3.2.3 Records for the Iron Age from the study area show increasing activity in the area and it is clear that there was extensive settlement in and around the location where the Roman town later developed. A ditch, postholes and pits have been noted over a 30m section of the eroding south bank of the Broad Water, a canalised section of the River Tove in Neston Eston Park, an area which has also produced burials of that date (HER 6042). The location is within 300m of the north of the racecourse, although on the north side of the River Tove, while evidence for Iron Age and early Roman settlement is present some 0.5km south of the site (HER 4775).

3.2.4 *Roman:* The site lies 1.3km southeast of the Roman town at Towcester, which is situated on the north bank of the River Tove. The extent to which Roman settlement extended to the south of the Tove remains unclear. An extensive collection of metal items found during metal detecting within 400m to the south-west of the site includes coins dating from the 2nd to the 4th century AD (HER 1619), indicative of Romano-British settlement over a lengthy period. Within the study area evidence for settlement or other activity in the period succeeding Roman administration is sparse, although evidence for Romano-British and Saxon settlement has been noted from fieldwalking 1.3km to the east of the site (Vyner 2012, 5.2.7).

3.2.5 *Medieval:* The remains of the medieval hamlet of Heathencote lie 0.6km to the southeast of the site (HER 1620). In addition to the surviving buildings there are the earthworks of medieval house platforms, while metal detecting has recovered coins. The remains of ridge & furrow earthworks, which probably represent evidence for the open field of the village, extend northwards beneath the racecourse stand and across the area now occupied by the racecourse (HER 6564). A windmill mound stands to the north-east of the grandstand (HER 4773).

3.2.6 *Post-medieval and Modern:* Easton Neston Park was first created in 1499, when Sir Richard Empson obtained a licence to impark 400 acres of land and 30 acres of wood, and was given permission to embattle the manor house which stood 'between the river and a wood' (HER 4771). That house was replaced by one somewhat to the south, built in 1685-95 (HER 4770). The new house and park was altered and extended during the 18th and 19th centuries, with further amendments done by the first Baron Hesketh around 1930 (Vyner 2012, 4.2).

From 1928 onwards the racecourse was formalised and a grandstand was constructed. (Vyner 2012, 5.2.9).

3.3 PREVIOUS WORK

3.3.1 An English Heritage and Northamptonshire County Council report *Turning the Plough: Midland Open Fields: Landscape Character and Proposals for Management* (2001, p.61) highlighted the ridge-and-furrow earthworks that survive in Easton Neston Park.

3.3.2 Blaise Vyner Consultancy produced a baseline assessment in 2012 (Vyner 2012). This assessed the archaeological and historical background and included a site visit on 20th June 2011, when the location and surroundings of the proposed development were checked for visible historic environment features. Remnants of ridge and furrow earthworks were identified at the site, but it was noted that these were better preserved elsewhere at the site, including the area to the east of the Empress Stand.

4 ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION RESULTS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

4.1.1 The evaluation was undertaken in one phase between the 18th and 20th June 2012. Topsoil and subsoil were removed by a JCB 3CX using a 1.6m wide ditching bucket to the level of the natural substrate. The areas under investigation were subsequently cleaned by hand and investigated and recorded fully. All trenches measured 20m in length and 1.8m in width.

4.2 RESULTS

4.2.1 ***Trench 1****:* Trench 1 was located toward the southwestern corner of the proposed greyhound track, closest to the entrance way and to the main road into Towcester. It was aligned westnorthwest-eastsoutheast (Figure 2). The trench was excavated to a maximum depth of 0.62m revealing natural geology varying between glacial till and oxford clay **(102)** below *c*.0.24m of mid-yellow/brown compacted sandy clay subsoil **(101)** and *c*.0.23m of dark grey/brown silty clay topsoil **(100)** (Plate 1).

4.2.2 A possible archaeological feature **[103]** was noticed within the northwestern half of the trench (Plate 2, Figure 3). A ceramic land drain of 0.15m width was found at either end of the trench, following a northwest-southeast alignment.

4.2.3 The feature **[103]** was thought to be a possible gully terminal or small pit. However as only half of the feature was exposed, it is hard to state whether it could also have been a naturally formed feature. It was filled with a dark brown silty/sandy clay **(104)** and contained no archaeological finds (Plate 2, Figure 3).

4.2.4 ***Trench 2:*** Trench 2 was located toward the southeastern corner of the area of development and was aligned northeast-southwest (Figure 2). The trench was excavated to a maximum depth of 0.70m revealing glacial till with outcrops of limestone (**202**) below *c*.0.27m of mid-orange/brown sandy clay subsoil (**201**) and *c*.0.19m of dark brown silty clay topsoil (**200**) (Plate 3).

4.2.5 Two ceramic land drains of 0.15m width were found at the northeastern end of the trench aligned north-south. No cut archaeological features were present. However, the remains of ridge-and-furrow were evident in section.

4.2.6 Evidence for ridge-and-furrow earthworks could be seen in the top of the trench sections (Plate 4). Consequently a 1:20 section drawing was drawn of the north-west facing section (Figure 4). These earthworks appeared to run approximately north-south across the trench and were spaced between five to six metres apart.

Plate 1: Trench 1, looking west

4.2.7 ***Trench 3****:* Trench 3 was located toward the northeastern corner of the proposed greyhound track. It was aligned northwest-southeast (Figure 2). The trench was excavated to a maximum depth of 0.92m revealing natural geology varying between glacial till and oxford clay **(302)** below *c*.0.20m of mid-orange/brown -sandy gravels **(301)** and *c*.0.20m of mid grey/brown silty clay topsoil **(300)** (Plate 5).

4.2.8 Two parallel services in a trench measuring 0.3m wide were found running north-south in the southeastern end of the trench. A two metre wide sondage was dug at either side of this, to determine the relationship between **(301)** and the natural deposits. **(301)** was found in patches along the trench. It appeared denser with gravel towards the centre and sandier towards the northwestern of the trench. No archaeological features were present.

Plate 2: Feature [103] within Trench 1, facing north

Plate 3: Trench 2, facing north-east

Plate 4: Trench 2 showing ridge-and-furrow in profile

Plate 5: Trench 3 overall shot, facing south-east

4.2.9 ***Trench 4***: Trench 4 was located toward the northwest corner of the proposed development. It was aligned northeast-southwest (Figure 2). The trench was excavated to a maximum depth of 0.60m revealing glacial till **(402)** which had some considerably larger limestone pieces within,

below *c*.0.15m of mid-yellow/brown sandy silty clay subsoil **(401)** and *c*.0.22m of dark grey/brown loose sandy loam topsoil **(400)** (Plate 6).

4.2.10 A ceramic land drain was uncovered within the northeastern end of the trench, which was aligned roughly northeast-southwest. No cut archaeological features were present.

4.2.11 Evidence for ridge-and-furrow earthworks could be seen in the top of the trench sections. (Plate 7). Consequently a 1:20 section drawing was drawn of the southeast facing section (Figure 4). These earthworks appeared to run approximately north-south across the trench, spaced between six and seven metres apart.

Plate 6: Trench 4 facing north-east

Plate 7: Trench 4 showing ridge-and-furrow in section, facing north

4.3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL FINDS AND ENVIRONMENTAL SAMPLING

4.3.1 No archaeological finds were recovered, and no environmental samples were obtained during the groundworks.

5 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 CONCLUSIONS

5.1.1 During the archaeological field evaluation at Towcester Racecourse, four trenches were excavated covering 144m^2 of the proposed development area. The purpose of the evaluation was to establish the nature and extent of below ground archaeological remains within the vicinity, the evaluation trenches being located to provide a representative sample of the development area. All trenches were excavated down to the top of the natural substrate.

5.1.2 Trench 3 was devoid of any archaeological features or deposits, whilst Trenches 2 and 4 revealed the remains of medieval ridge-and-furrow earthworks in profile, which were subsequently photographed and recorded in section. Only Trench 1 showed a possible cut feature [103], but this contained no dating evidence and too little of the feature was uncovered to be able to provide a definitive function. It may have been a natural feature resulting from root disturbance.

5.1.3 The results obtained during the present evaluation suggest that the study area has not been intensively used in the past other than for agriculture and as a landscaped park.

5.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

5.2.1 As the purpose of this archaeological field evaluation was to establish the nature and extent of below ground remains within the proposed construction area as specified by Northamptonshire County Council, no further work is deemed necessary associated with the present study. However, given the significance of previous archaeological discoveries within the immediate vicinity of the study area, it is recommended that any future invasive work be subject to a similar programme of archaeological investigation.

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APPENDIX 1: CONTEXT TABLE

Context Number	Context Type	Description
100	Deposit	Topsoil
101	Deposit	Subsoil
102	Deposit	Natural
103	Cut	Cut of possible feature
104	Deposit	Fill of [103]
200	Deposit	Topsoil
201	Deposit	Subsoil
202	Deposit	Natural
300	Deposit	Topsoil
301	Deposit	Subsoil
302	Deposit	Natural
400	Deposit	Topsoil
401	Deposit	Subsoil
402	Deposit	Natural

Table 1: List of Contexts issued during Evaluation

APPENDIX 2: FIGURES