

**LAND ADJACENT TO
2 ASHWELL STREET,
ASHWELL,
HERTFORDSHIRE**

NGR REF: TL 27454 39844



ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

FEBRUARY 2020

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Land adjacent to 2 Ashwell Street, Ashwell, Hertfordshire: Archaeological Evaluation

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Summary

An archaeological evaluation was conducted by Independent Archaeology Consultants on 13 February 2020. The proposed development entailed the erection of a new dwelling. Two evaluation test trenches were opened up across the site but contained nothing of archaeological interest.

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The site was located on land adjacent to 2 Ashwell Street, Ashwell, Hertfordshire (NGR: TL 27454 39844) (Figure 1-3). The proposed development entailed the erection of a new dwelling on previously undeveloped land.
- 1.2 The project was carried out in accordance with the *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Evaluation* issued by the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CifA 2015), as well as discussions with Simon Wood, Archaeological Officer at Hertfordshire County Council. The project was based on a WSI, which complies with the principles of the NPPF (National Planning Policy Framework 2012).
- 1.3 Independent Archaeology Consultants is an archaeological consultancy company based in Peterborough, Cambridgeshire. The company subscribes to the Code of Conduct issued by the CifA. All relevant CifA Codes of Practice were adhered to throughout the course of the project.

2 PROJECT BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Planning Permission has been granted (19/01809/FP) for a new development on land adjacent to No. 2 Ashwell Street, Ashwell, Hertfordshire. The proposed development entailed the erection of a detached 3 bedroom dwelling and single garage, ancillary works and new vehicular access onto Ashwell Street.
- 2.2 The proposed development site was located about a mile east of central Ashwell. It enclosed an area of some 900m² at an average height of 56m AOD. The site was at the time of the fieldwork vacant and with existing trees and hedging to the street frontage. A two-storey house existed at No. 2 Ashwell Street adjacent to the site boundary in west. Ashwell Street was situated to the south of the site. To the east was a two-storey semi-detached dwelling which formed part of the housing development accessed from Station Road.
- 2.3 The site was situated within an area of archaeological potential, as defined by the Hertfordshire County Council HER. Therefore, an archaeological evaluation was required prior to any construction within the site. This

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condition was mentioned in the Planning Permission granted by North Hertfordshire District Council, and was in line with standards described in the NPPF (National Planning Policy Framework).

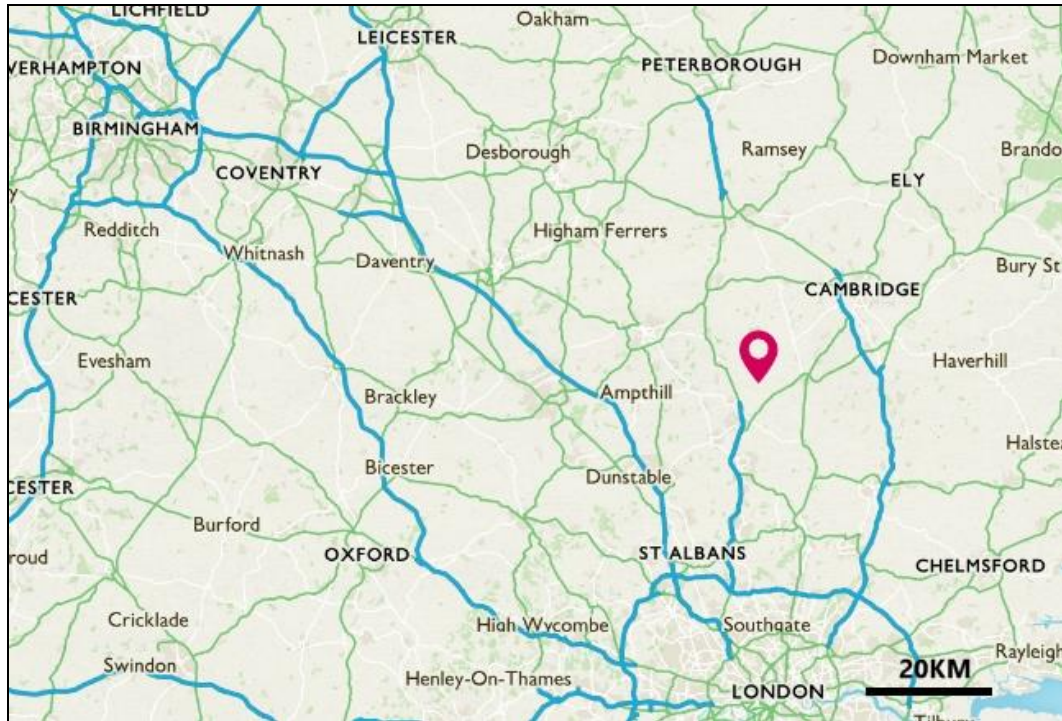


Figure 1. Site Location in England.



Figure 2. Site Location in Ashwell.

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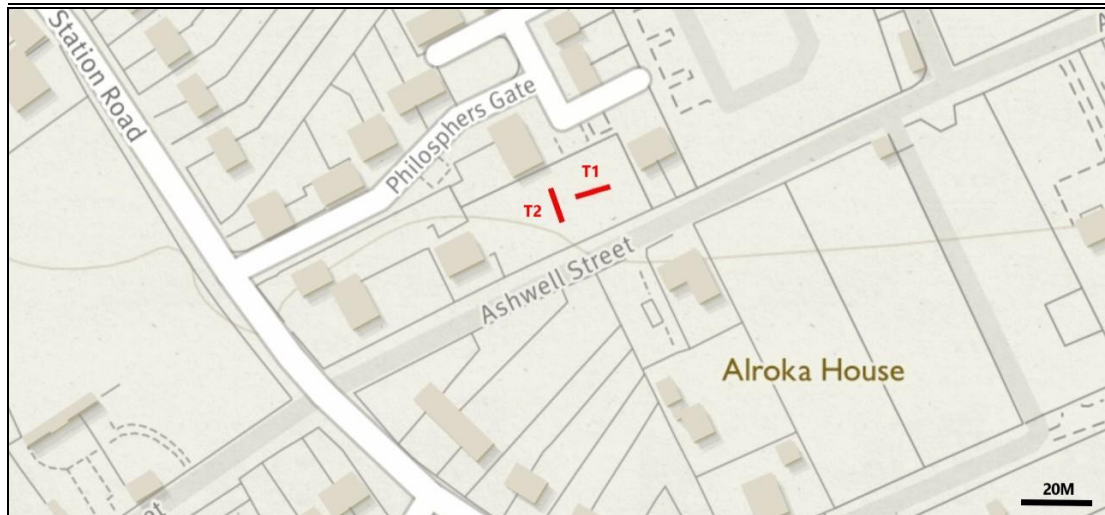


Figure 3. Trench Locations in Ashwell.

3 THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

Prehistoric Remains

- 3.1 Some 140m southwest of the site was a late Neolithic and/or Bronze Age henge at the Walkdens, Station Road (MHT30533). A ring ditch identified by geophysics in the field just behind The Walkdens, in the angle between Ashwell Street and Station Road, was found upon investigation to be the surrounding ditch of a probable earlier Bronze Age barrow. Other ring ditches are known in the same field and beyond it. They lie on rising ground overlooking Ashwell Street and the source of the river Rhee at Ashwell Springs. An evaluation trench dug across the ring revealed no trace of any burial, primary or secondary, in the small part excavated. The ditch surrounds an area about 25m across, and appeared at least in part too shallow to have provided material for more than a very low mound. It was partially truncated by ploughing, but another segment of the ditch was deeper, and the degree of truncation overall is unclear. The only other features were two small undated pits or hollows within the ring, one left unexcavated. Finds from the ring ditch itself consisted only of a scrap of undiagnostic pottery, a broken late Mesolithic/early Neolithic flint blade, heavily patinated, and two animal bone fragments (a cattle tooth and a pig tooth). Environmental samples included sparse carbonized plant remains, probably of prehistoric hulled wheat (emmer or spelt), and abundant snail shells typical of the chalk geology. Full excavation of the north end of the field in 2015 found that this is not a barrow, but a late Neolithic Class II henge monument, with two opposing entrances (NW and SE). Within the boundary of the henge ditch were eight pits, some possibly forming an inner ring; others may have been lost due to truncation. Outside the ring 28 more pits were found within the excavated area; eight of these clustered around a curving ditch which may have been a ploughed-out barrow. The pits were however of various sizes and probable dates (Neolithic

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- to earlier Iron Age), some similar in form to those within the henge. Three contained cremation burials; one, dug at a later date into one of the ditch terminals at the SE entrance, contained cremated human bone radiocarbon dated to the Bronze Age. The site was investigated in 2013 and 2015 (Phillips, T. 2013) and (Greef, A. 2015) (Figure 4).
- 3.2 Some 250m southwest of the site was a series of circular ring ditches (MHT 2469). It was showing as a cropmark of a small circular enclosure with continuous single ditch. The diameter was ca. 24m. The site was interpreted as the ring ditch of a barrow, probably of Bronze Age date. The site was identified from aerial photos and is a Scheduled Monument.
 - 3.3 Some 250m south of the site was an undated ring ditch (MHT2468). Cropmarks were showing up on aerial photos and seem to consist of a small circular enclosure, possibly a single continuous ditch. The diameter was ca.18 m. The site was interpreted as the ring ditch of a plough razed barrow, probably of Bronze Age date from aerial photos. The site is a Scheduled Monument.
 - 3.4 Some 280m southeast of Station Road was an undated ring ditch (MHT4717). The site was identified as cropmarks consisting of a small circular continuous univallate enclosure. The diameter was ca. 25 m. The site was identified through aerial photos and is a Scheduled Monument.
 - 3.5 Some 420m southeast of the site was an undated circular enclosure (MHT7911). The site was showing up on aerial photos as cropmarks of a circular enclosure, which was approximately 20m in diameter. The site is probably representing the ploughed-down remains of a round barrow and is a Scheduled Monument.
 - 3.6 Some 480m southeast of the proposed development site was a possible ring ditch (MHT2424). The site was showing up on aerial photos as cropmarks from a small circular, single ditched enclosure. A gap in the ditch could be a north facing entrance. The diameter was ca. 22m. The ditch had no visible internal features and is a Scheduled Monument.
 - 3.7 Some 140m southeast of the proposed development site was a late Neolithic and early Bronze Age ring ditch (MHT7687). The site showed up as cropmarks of a circular feature on aerial photos of the area. The site probably consisted of the ploughed-down remains of a round barrow. Ashridge Farm has today been laid out over the site since the photograph was taken. Stripping of parts of the field before construction of tennis courts east of the farmstead did not go deeper than the overburden, and no archaeology was disturbed (Ashworth 2010).
 - 3.8 The trial trenching evaluation revealed the remains of a possible late Iron Age/Roman road with roadside ditches and other linear features, and a

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possibly earlier trackway concentrated in the northeastern and central area of the site respectively. These are considered to have medium significance of local and regional interest. Other remains included medieval and post-medieval pitting concentrated in the south-western area of the site.

- 3.9 In 2018 a geophysical survey and trial trenching evaluation revealed the remains of a possible late Iron Age/Roman road with roadside ditches and other linear features, and a possibly earlier trackway concentrated in the northeastern and central area of the site respectively. These were considered to have medium significance of local and regional interest. Other remains included medieval and post-medieval pitting concentrated in the south-western area of the site, which is considered to have low-medium significance of local interest. Further features were furrows located in the central and eastern areas of the site which are considered to have low significance of local interest (Prisino 2018).

Roman Remains

- 3.10 Just to the southwest of the site were two Roman ditches at Station Road (MHT11397). The terminal ends of two parallel ditches were found during groundwork. They contained worked flint flakes, probably not earlier than the Neolithic, late Iron Age to 2nd century sherds and a small amount of animal bone with one oyster shell. All the finds were small and abraded rubbish from occupation nearby. There were also five undated pits. The ditches were evidently Roman; snail shells in the ditch fills indicated that they were dry ditches within open grassland at the time. The site was investigated in 2001 (Ashworth, 2001).
- 3.11 Some 480m northeast of the proposed development site was a possible Roman camp site (MHT4692). A route through Ashwell parish, still a byway, has been called Ashwell Street since at least the 12th century. It was also called Ashwell Street Way on the 1841 tithe map. There is no certain evidence that it is Roman or even earlier in origin, although it is Viatores' route 230. It extends along the foot of the Chilterns scarp well into Cambridgeshire and is there considered one of a series of parallel routes which may be alternatives of prehistoric and Roman date. During the Roman period there may have been alternatives, connecting the farms and villas. It may not have settled into one definite line until later. In Cambridgeshire the present road is in part the product of post-enclosure straightening in the later 19th century, but the green lane in the parish of Ashwell itself is not a 19th century road. West of the village its ancient line is unclear. The 1841 tithe map shows a number of routes fanning out from the street grid at West End, some of which are labelled 'roads' and some green ways into the common fields. The present road pattern was established at enclosure in 1863 and some of the green ways disappeared. One had carried the line of Ashwell Street on for another 200m towards the road to Newnham. A cropmark of double ditches appears to continue the course for another 330m, south of and still parallel to Newnham Way, and this

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cropmark is cut by another leading up to Arbury Banks. The date of these tracks is unknown but they are earlier than the medieval strip fields, which survived until 1863 (Gover, J E B, Mawer, Allen, & Stenton, F M. 1938. *The Place Names of Hertfordshire*, p154).

- 3.12 Some 250m southwest of the site was a Roman ditch investigated in 2011 (MHT17600). Work before the construction of a house within the grounds of 22 Lucas Lane revealed a length of a ditch, with a terminus at the north end. In the fill were an unworn base sherd of 2nd century Roman pottery, and fragments of animal bone including a jaw bone. The bone was from a single animal, possibly a horse. Nearby was a pit without dating evidence (Jones 2011 and Jones 2011).
- 3.13 Some 250m south west of the proposed development site was late Iron Age and Roman pottery and coins discovered in 1977 (MHT2973). 2nd and 3rd century pottery sherds, a bronze coin of Galerius Maximian and two other coins found with a metal detector in 1977 in 'Lloyd-Davies Field'. They were deposited at Letchworth Museum. In 1985 the field was surveyed and metal-detected by North Herts Museums and North Herts Archaeological Society. The finds included late Iron Age and Roman pottery, a Celtic coin, three or possibly four Roman coins and a lead weight. These late Iron Age and Roman items were concentrated towards the western edge of the field (Unpublished document: Information from Keith Fitzpatrick-Matthews, North Hertfordshire Museum. 10 Feb 2014).
- 3.14 Some 450m west of the proposed development site was the findspot of some Romano-British coins (MHT4848). Bronze coin of Hadrian (very worn), bronze memorial coin of Faustina II and other much worn coins were found in 1977 in the Springhead lane (Letchworth Museum Catalogue. 1977, p1041).

Medieval Remains

- 3.15 Some 300m southwest of the site were several metal objects including bronze buckles, a pewter pilgrim's badge, a bronze purse bar loop of 15th century date, parts of several horseshoes and other metal objects dating to the 13th-17th century found with a metal detector in 1977 (MHT2549). It has been suggested that the finds may be a bronzeworker's hoard. The finds were all deposited with Letchworth Museum in 1977, and have now been found to include a 10th century copper alloy sword chape decorated with a tree of life design, different on each side; and a 9th century copper alloy and enamel decorative strip with an image of a dog looking back over its shoulder. The field was surveyed and metal-detected in 1985 by North Herts Museums and North Herts Archaeological Society. The medieval material was concentrated towards the north end of the field and post-medieval to the east (Unpublished document: Information from Keith Fitzpatrick-Matthews, North Hertfordshire Museum. 10 Feb 2014).

Post Medieval Remains

- 3.16 Directly northwest of the proposed development site was a concentration of post-medieval chalk pits at Station Road (MHT31272). Three large pits found in an evaluation trench in the centre of a triangular plot were dug into the natural chalk, and were evidently chalk extraction pits. They were each roughly circular in plan, and 4m-5m across. In the fills were small quantities of post-medieval pottery, brick and tile including brown-glazed red earthenware. The 1841 tithe map shows surviving medieval strip fields here, although with broader areas to each side. Enclosure took place in the 1860s in Ashwell parish, and the 1877 OS map shows the recent formation of the large triangular field which remained as ploughland until the 1930s. The site was investigated in 2014 (Woolhouse 2014).
- 3.17 Some 300m southwest of the site was a Second World War crash site (MHT30282). Fragments of a German Dornier bomber shot down in World War II were found in this field during a metal-detecting and fieldwalking survey in 1985 (Unpublished document: Information from Keith Fitzpatrick-Matthews, North Hertfordshire Museum. 10 Feb 2014).
- 3.18 Some 200m northwest of the proposed development site is a war memorial monument (MHT18808). Ashwell's war memorial, standing at the east end of the village on the corner of Lucas Lane and Station Road, was designed in ca. 1919 by Sir Edwin Lutyens. In Portland stone, it is a 'simple yet elegant' tapering cross on a stepped three-stage plinth with rectangular podium and two circular steps on a square podium. The names of the First World War victims are inscribed on the plinth, and those of the Second World War on the podium. The memorial was unveiled on 4 December 1921.
- 3.19 Some 250m northwest of the proposed development site was a former malting (MHT5336). The building is made of yellow brick with blue brick quoins, comprising two floors, six 10ft. bays with windows, weather-boarded W end with lucam, one large suxe kiln with brick malt store beyond and a slate roof. The building was erected in 1911 by E. K. and H. Fordham and housed German prisoners in the First World War. It had various uses between the wars. In 1965 it was owned by Wright's Walkern Brewery and used as a store. The building remains intact and has been converted into offices and private dwellings. A stone plaque reads 'R White and Sons Ltd 1964'.

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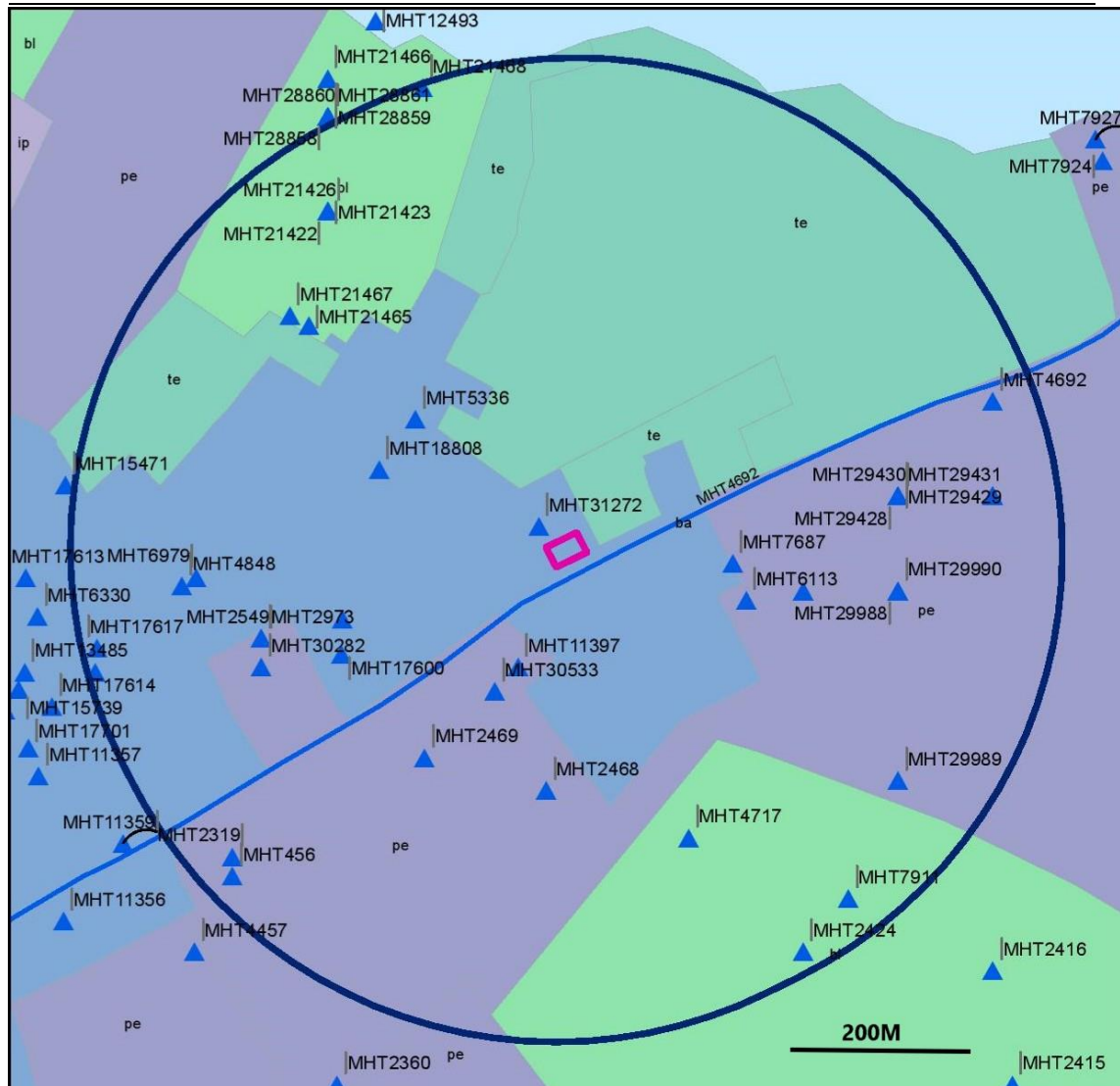


Figure 4. Known archaeological features and findspots (Blue) close to the proposed development site (Pink).

4 AIMS

4.1 The aims of the archaeological evaluation were achieved through pursuit of the following specific objectives:

- Gain information about the heritage assets within the proposed development areas;
- Provide detailed information regarding the date, character, extent, integrity and degree of preservation of the identified heritage assets;
- Inform a strategy for the recording, preservation and/or management of the identified assets;

- mitigate potential threats;
 - Inform proposals for further archaeological investigations (namely, targeted area excavations) within the ongoing programme of research;
 - Define the sequence and character of activity at the site, as reflected by the excavated remains;
 - Interpret the archaeology of the site within its local, regional, and national, archaeological context.
 - If applicable, provide a predictive model of surviving archaeological remains detailing zones of relative importance against known development proposals.
 - If applicable, provide an impact assessment.
- 4.2 The evaluation also considered the general investigative themes outlined by: Medlycott, M. 2011 (ed.) *Research and Archaeology Revisited: a Revised Framework for the East of England*, East Anglian Archaeology Occasional Paper 24; *Research and Archaeology: A Framework for the Eastern Counties* (Glazebrook 1997; Brown & Glazebrook 2000), *English Heritage Archaeology Division Research Agenda* (1997); *Discovering the Past, Shaping the Future: Research Strategy 2005 - 2010* (English Heritage 2005).
- 4.3 Specifically, the following investigative aims were accommodated in the programme of archaeological work:
- *characterisation of the site in the broader landscape;
 - *characterisation of the activities identified on the site;
 - *characterisation of changes affecting land-use through time

5 METHODOLOGY

5.1 Trial Trenching

It was suggested that two 11.5m long machine cut trenches, both with a width of 2m, would be excavated under constant archaeological supervision using a flat bladed ditching bucket. The total length of trenching was therefore 23m, totalling 46m², or ca. 5% of the 900m² large development area.

The location of the trenches targeted areas of proposed ground disturbance and provided representative sample coverage. The location of the trenches were slightly flexible and took into consideration potential above- and below-ground constraints

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and/or hazards, such as trees, utility trenches, overhead cables and areas of modern disturbance.

The trenches were excavated to the upper interface of secure archaeological deposits or, where these were not present, to the upper interface of natural deposits. Thereafter, cleaning and hand-excavation were required to sample any features exposed. The field evaluation was not carried out at the expenses of the heritage assets and was minimally intrusive to archaeological remains.

5.2 Metal Detecting

Thorough metal detector sweeps of exposed features and spoil heaps were carried out in advance of, and during, the excavation process. The metal detector was not set to discriminate against iron.

5.3 Recording

A numbered single context-based recording system, written on suitable forms and indexed appropriately, was used for all elements of the archaeological recording programme.

Measured plans were produced to show all exposed features (including natural features, modern features, etc.) and excavated areas. Individual measured plans and sections in the scales 1:20 and 1:50 were also produced for all excavated features and deposits. These were accurately tied in to trench plans/trench location plans that in turn were accurately related to the Ordnance Survey grid and to suitably mapped local features (boundaries, buildings, roads, etc.). All sections and plans were related accurately to Ordnance Datum.

A photographic record comprising monochrome and digital photos formed part of the excavation record. A selection of digital photographs was also used in this report (a maximum of two photographs per A4 sheet).

6 RESULTS

Trench 1

- 6.1 Trench 1 was east-west orientated, 11.5m long and 2m wide. The lowest deposit encountered consisted of the natural geology of yellow-white, soft chalk. The trench contained no finds or features (Figure 5).
- 6.2 The subsoil (102) in Trench 1 was up to 0.35m thick and consisted of light brown, soft silty clay with occasional inclusions of chalk. Covering the subsoil in Trench 1 was the up to 0.20m thick topsoil (101) of dark brown, soft silty clay with frequent inclusions of roots.

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Trench 2

- 6.3 Trench 2 was north-south orientated, 11.5m long and 2m wide. The lowest deposit encountered consisted of the natural geology of yellow-white, soft chalk. The trench contained no finds or features, but two plough-marks were visible in its southern parts (Figure 6-7).
- 6.4 The subsoil (202) in Trench 2 was up to 0.25m thick and consisted of light brown, soft silty clay with occasional inclusions of chalk. Covering the subsoil in Trench 2 was the up to 0.27m thick topsoil (201) of dark brown, soft silty clay with frequent inclusions of roots.

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Figure 5. Trench 1 from east.

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Figure 6. Trench 2 from south.



Figure 7. The two plough marks in the southern parts of Trench 2.

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7 DISCUSSION

- 7.1 The archaeological evaluation on land adjacent to No. 2 Ashwell Street, Ashwell, Hertfordshire indicated that no significant archaeological finds or features are present within the proposed development area.
- 7.2 Two plough marks were present in the Trench 2 and indicated that the land has been farmed at some point. It is likely that this happened before the land was used as a garden, as the upper part of the topsoil had the character of modern garden soil, which might have been brought into the site in recent years.
- 7.3 The archaeological evaluation in February 2020 indicated, therefore, that the proposed development area did not contain any archaeological remains that are risking to be destroyed due the future development.

8 ARCHIVE

The archive consists of the following:

Paper Record

The project brief

Written Scheme of Investigation

The photographic and drawn records

The project report

The primary site records

The archive is currently maintained by Independent Archaeology Consultants.

The archive will be transferred to: The archaeological collections at Hertfordshire County Council

9 REFERENCES

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APPENDICES

OASIS ID: independ1-384883

Project details

| | |
|--|---|
| Project name | Land adjacent to 2 Ashwell Street, Ashwell, Hertfordshire |
| Short description of the project | A two trench evaluation for a new development. |
| Project dates | Start: 13-02-2020 End: 14-02-2020 |
| Previous/future work | No / No |
| Any associated project reference codes | 19/01809/FP - Planning Application No. |
| Any associated project reference codes | SRAH19 - Sitecode |
| Type of project | Field evaluation |
| Site status | Local Authority Designated Archaeological Area |
| Current Land use | Vacant Land 2 - Vacant land not previously developed |
| Monument type | N/A None |
| Monument type | N/A None |
| Significant Finds | N/A None |
| Significant Finds | N/A None |
| Methods & techniques | "Sample Trenches" |
| Development type | Urban residential (e.g. flats, houses, etc.) |
| Prompt | Planning condition |

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Position in the planning process After full determination (eg. As a condition)

Project location

Country England
Site location HERTFORDSHIRE NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE ASHWELL Land adjacent to 2 Ashwell Street, Ashwell, Hertfordshire
Postcode SG7 5QF
Study area 900 Square metres
Site coordinates TL 27454 39844 52.041888188719 -0.14144416244 52 02 30 N 000 08 29 W Point
Height OD / Depth Min: 55m Max: 57m

Project creators

Name of Organisation Independent Archaeology Consultants
Project brief originator Local Authority Archaeologist and/or Planning Authority/advisory body
Project design originator Independent Archaeology Consultants
Project director/manager Christer Carlsson
Project supervisor Christer Carlsson
Type of sponsor/funding body Developer

Project archives

Physical Archive recipient Hertfordshire County Council
Physical Contents "other"
Digital Archive recipient Hertfordshire County Council
Digital Contents "none","other"

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| | |
|-------------------------|--|
| Digital Media available | "Images raster / digital photography","Images vector" |
| Paper Archive recipient | Hertfordshire County Council |
| Paper Contents | "none","other" |
| Paper Media available | "Context sheet","Photograph","Plan","Report","Section" |

Project bibliography 1

| | |
|-------------------------------|---|
| Publication type | Grey literature (unpublished document/manuscript) |
| Title | Land adjacent to 2 Ashwell Street, Ashwell, Hertfordshire |
| Author(s)/Editor(s) | Carlsson, C |
| Date | 2020 |
| Issuer or publisher | Independent Archaeology Consultants |
| Place of issue or publication | Peterborough |
| Entered by | Christer Karlsson (contact@independentarchaeology.co.uk) |
| Entered on | 14 February 2020 |

CONTEXT DESCRIPTIONS

| Context | Depth (m) | Description | Younger than | Older than |
|----------------|------------------|---|---------------------|-------------------|
| | | Trench 1 (11.5m x 2m) | | |
| (101) | 0.20 | Topsoil of dark brown, soft silty clay with frequent roots | (102) | - |
| (102) | 0.35 | Subsoil of light brown, soft silty clay with occasional chalk | Natural | (101) |
| Natural | - | Yellow-white chalk | - | (102) |
| | | | | |
| | | Trench 2 (11.5m x 2m) | | |
| (201) | 0.27 | Topsoil of dark brown, soft silty clay with frequent roots | (202) | - |
| (202) | 0.25 | Subsoil of light brown, soft silty clay with occasional chalk | Natural | (201) |
| Natural | - | Yellow-white chalk | - | (202) |