

A REPORT ON THE GEOARCHAEOLOGICAL FIELD INVESTIGATIONS AT HILLVIEW HOUSE, WEST STREET, NEWBURY, WEST BERKSHIRE (SITE CODE: HVH13)

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INTRODUCTION

This report summarises the findings arising out of the geoarchaeological field investigations undertaken by Quaternary Scientific (University of Reading) in connection with the proposed development at Hillview House, West Street, Newbury, West Berkshire (Quest site code: HVH13; National Grid Reference: SU 4700 6740; Figure 1 & 2). The site is located on the floodplain of the Kennet Valley approximately 200m to the north of the current course of the Kennet and Avon Canal.

The British Geological (1:50,000) shows the site underlain by Peat deposits, resting on Chalk bedrock, and that it lies <150m to the south of the floodplain gravel terrace edge. Previous archaeological investigations at the site itself (Pine & Weale, 2010; Figure 2) and elsewhere in Newbury (e.g. Ellis *et al.*, 2003; Ford, 2002; Hammond, 2007; Weaver, 1996; Hull & Hall, 1997; Froom, 2012) indicate a more complex sequence of deposits overlying the Chalk bedrock including: River Terrace Gravels, Marl, Alluvium, Peat, Tufa, and occasionally, a basal black organic-rich horizon with some characteristics of a buried soil (Figure 1). Investigations further along the Kennet Valley at Thatcham (e.g. Churchill, 1962; Healy *et al.*, 1992; Barnett, 2009), Ufton Nervet (Bell, pers. comm.) and Reading (e.g. Batchelor *et al.*, 2013; Young & Batchelor, in prep) record a similarly complex sequence of floodplain deposits. Radiocarbon dating at sites such as Greenham Dairy Farm / Faraday Road in Newbury (Ellis *et al.*, 2003) and Thatcham reedbeds (Barnett, 2009) indicate these sediments accumulated during the early Mesolithic, whilst early Mesolithic to Neolithic dates have just been derived at Kenavon Road in Reading (Young & Batchelor, in prep).

The Kennet Valley floodplain deposits are often recorded in association with early Mesolithic archaeology providing unequivocal evidence for utilisation of the floodplain landscape during this period. These have included: (1) a small number of worked flints at Victoria Park, ca. 350m to the southeast of the site (Froom, 2012); (2) abundant worked flint directly associated with animal bone, together with charcoal and possible evidence for hearths at Greenham Dairy Farm / Faraday Road ca. 600m to the east of the site (Ellis *et al.*, 2003); (3) two distinct concentrations of worked flint suggestive of two episodes of activity at Newbury Sewage

Works on the outskirts of Thatcham (Healy *et al.*, 1992); (4) charcoal and pollen evidence suggestive of early Mesolithic burning at Thatcham Reedbeds (Barnett, 2009), and (5) a Maglemosian flint industry in Thatcham (Wymer, 1962).

Archaeological evaluation at Hillview House did not record any evidence of prehistoric activity (Pine & Weale, 2010). However, the floodplain deposits recorded do have good potential to provide a reconstruction of environmental changes, and possibly evidence of human activity via geoarchaeological investigation (i.e. detailed investigation of the sediment, plant and animal remains). Indeed, the potential of such investigations is clearly demonstrated by similar work carried out at Greenham Dairy Farm / Faraday Road (Ellis *et al.*, 2003) and Thatcham Reedbeds (Barnett, 2009).

The main aim of the geoarchaeological field investigations at Hillview House was to produce a basic model of the sub-surface stratigraphy by putting down three new geoarchaeological boreholes, and combining these records with existing geotechnical and archaeological data from both on and immediately adjacent to the site. This model will be used to provide a reconstruction of the site's former landscape and its evolution through time, as well as its potential utilisation by prehistoric people. The report will also provide recommendations on the suitability of the borehole core samples for further geoarchaeological investigations (i.e. assessment and analysis).



Figure 1: Location of (1) Hillview House, West Street and selected nearby sites: (2) Former Kerridge Computers, Northcroft Lane (Ford, 2002); (3) Former Feltham Tyres, Park Way (Hammond, 2007); (4) Cinema Site, Park Way (Weaver, 1996); (5) 6-12 Northbrook Street (Hull & Hall, 1997); (6) Victoria Park (Froom, 2012) & (7) Greenham Dairy Farm / Faraday Road (Ellis et al., 2003). *Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown copyright and database right [2013]*

METHODS

Field investigations

Three boreholes (boreholes QBH1 and QBH3) were put down at the site in October 2013 (Figure 2). Borehole core samples were recovered using an Eijkelkamp window sampler and gouge set using an Atlas Copco TT 2-stroke percussion engine. This coring technique is a suitable method for the recovery of continuous, undisturbed core samples and provides sub-samples suitable for not only sedimentary and microfossil assessment and analysis, but also macrofossil analysis. The recovered core samples were wrapped in clear plastic to prevent moisture loss, labelled with the depth (metres from ground surface) and orientation (top and base) and returned to Quaternary Scientific for storage in a purpose built facility at 2°C. This temperature prevents fungal growth on the core surface, which may lead to anomalous radiocarbon dates, and moisture loss. The spatial attributes of each borehole were recorded using a Leica Differential GPS (Table 1 and Figure 2).

Table 1: Spatial data for the new geoarchaeological boreholes at Hill View House, West Street, Newbury, West Berkshire

Borehole	Easting	Northing	Surface elevation (m OD)
QBH1	447007	167390	76.20
QBH2	446956	167392	76.05
QBH3	446962	167405	76.20

Lithostratigraphic descriptions

The lithostratigraphy of the boreholes was described in the laboratory using standard procedures for recording unconsolidated sediment and organic sediments, noting the physical properties (colour), composition (gravel, sand, clay, silt and organic matter) and inclusions (e.g. artefacts) (Tröels-Smith, 1955). The procedure involved: (1) cleaning the samples with a spatula or scalpel blade and distilled water to remove surface contaminants; (2) recording the physical properties, most notably colour using a Munsell Soil Colour Chart; (3) recording the composition; gravel (*Grana glareosa*; Gg), fine sand (*Grana arenosa*; Ga), silt (*Argilla granosa*; Ag) and clay (*Argilla steatoides*); (4) recording the degree of peat humification and (5) recording the unit boundaries e.g. sharp or diffuse. The results are displayed in Tables 2 to 4 and Figure 3.

RESULTS, INTERPRETATION AND DISCUSSION OF THE FIELD INVESTIGATIONS

The results of the lithostratigraphic descriptions are displayed in Tables 2 to 4, and in Figure 3.

The lowermost sediments recorded at the site were coarse flint gravels, which were laid down on the valley floor within a high energy riverine environment, probably at the end of the Late Glacial period (Marine Isotope Stage 2, Late Devensian, *ca.* 16,000-11,500 cal BP). The surface of the Gravel was recorded on the western side of the site at 73.20m OD (3m bgs) in QBH3, and somewhere between 72.20 and 71.44m OD (4-4.76m bgs) in QBH1 on the eastern side of the site. No boreholes were put down towards the south of the site due to likely truncation of the sedimentary sequence by the former Hillview House building (see Figure 2). During the course of the archaeological excavations, the Gravel surface was only recorded on the western side of the site in Trenches 4 (73.67 to 73.36m OD; 2.41-2.72m bgs), 5 (73.36m OD; 2.78m bgs) and 6 (73.28 to 72.94m OD; 2.86-3.20m bgs). Towards the centre of the site, the gravel surface had still not been reached by 71.88m OD (4.2m bgs). In addition, BGS borehole SU46NE155 from the south-eastern corner of the site records the gravel below 4.70m bgs (*ca.* 71.40m OD; Figure 2). Previous BGS borehole investigations to the west, south and north indicate that the gravel surface lies at between 2 and 4m bgs (Figure 2).

Combined, these results indicate a gravel surface that slopes downwards from west to east across the site. This depression in the Gravel surface might represent the position of a former channel. However, since none of the BGS investigations carried out beyond the margins of the site were measured relative to ordnance datum, it is not possible to directly compare them with the findings from Hillview House and thus speculate further.

The Gravel surface is overlain by a complex sequence of Peats, Tufa, Alluvium and possibly Marl, overlain by Made Ground. As would be expected, these deposits are generally thickest where the Gravel surface is lowest (*i.e.* on the eastern side of the site). The transitions between Peat, Tufa, Alluvium and potentially Marl are indicative of multiple changes in the environment and hydrology of the floodplain.

The first sediments recorded overlying the Gravel surface were a thin horizon of stiff mineral-rich silty clay (potentially marl), suggesting the deposition of calcareous-rich mud within a very low energy aquatic environment. These sediments were only recorded in boreholes QBH2 and QBH3 towards the west of the site, where the Gravel surface is higher. Whether the same sediments are present towards the east of the site is uncertain due to the void in

the sedimentary sequence in QBH1.

The first sediments recorded on the eastern side of the site, was a thick horizon of highly-humified unidentifiable and wood Peat. The thickest horizons were recorded towards the base of the sequence in Trench 3 (>3.30m thick) and QBH1 (1m thick). Thinner horizons of Peat were recorded in Trenches 4, 5, 6, QBH2 and QBH1 (<50cm thick). A semi-terrestrial land surface is indicated by periods of Peat accumulation; an environment which may have been utilised by prehistoric people. On the basis of previous investigations in the Kennet Valley, it is hypothesised that these Peat horizons might date to the Mesolithic or Neolithic cultural periods. However, since very few sequences have been dated in Newbury area (e.g. Ellis *et al.*, 2009), the chronology is far from certain. Furthermore, the Peat is recorded at different altitudes (e.g. QBH1 vs QBH2/QBH3), and thus it is possible that formation was not contemporaneous across the whole site.

Thick horizons of Tufa-rich deposits overlie the Peat in all areas of the site. The Tufa is of varying grain size (silt to gravel) and includes Tufa tubes, varying quantities of Mollusca (whole and fragments), and wood remains. Alluvial silts, sands and gravels were also a frequent and important component. The presence of Tufa is indicative of the accumulation of calcareous sediment in a low energy and probably shallow aquatic environment. Periods of more organic, almost peaty sediment were recorded within the Tufa, suggestive of transitions towards more marginal semi-aquatic/semi-terrestrial environments. The identification of charcoal within these deposits between 74.03 and 74.33m OD in borehole <QBH2>, is significant as it suggests nearby/*in situ* natural or anthropogenic burning. The identification of a probable hazelnut within these deposits between 73.69 and 73.20m OD in QBH3 is also of interest.

Towards the top of the sequence, (above *ca.* 74.50m OD in all boreholes), the Tufa-rich deposits were overlain by mineral-rich alluvium with various coarse grained and anthropogenic inclusions, prior to Made Ground.

Table 2: Lithostratigraphic description of borehole QBH1, Hillview House, West Street, Newbury

Depth (m OD)	Depth (m bgs)	Description
76.20 to 74.58	0 to 1.62	Made Ground dominated by Red Brick
74.58 to 74.52	1.62 to 1.68	10YR 5/1; Ag2, As1, Ga1, charcoal+, Gg+ brick/tile fragments+; Grey silty sandy clay with charcoal, brick/tile and gravel inclusions; diffuse contact into:
74.52 to 74.41	1.68 to 1.79	10YR 6/1; Ag2, As1, Ga1, charcoal+, Gg+; Grey sandy clayey silt with charcoal and gravel inclusions; diffuse contact into:
74.41 to 74.24	1.79 to 1.96	10YR 6/1; Ag2, As1, Ga1, Gg+, charcoal+; Grey clayey silt with tufa sands and gravels and charcoal inclusions; diffuse contact into:
74.24 to 74.20	1.96 to 2.00	10YR 7/2; Ga2, Gg2; Light grey tufa sands and gravels; sharp contact into:
74.20 to 73.97	2.00 to 2.23	10YR 3/1; As2, Sh2, TI+; Very dark grey clayey peat with increasing concentration of tufa sands and gravels downwards; diffuse contact into:
73.97 to 73.91	2.23 to 2.29	10YR 5/1; Ga2, Gg1, Ag1, Sh+; Grey tufa sands and gravels with silty clay of limited organic content; diffuse contact into:
73.91 to 73.84	2.29 to 2.36	10YR 7/2; Ga2, Gg2; Light grey tufa sands and gravels; sharp contact into:
73.84 to 73.77	2.36 to 2.43	10YR 4/2; As1, Ag1, Sh1, Ga1, Gg+; Dark greyish brown organic-rich silty clay with tufa sands and gravels; sharp contact into:
73.77 to 73.69/73.64	2.43 to 2.51/2.56	10YR 6/2; Ga2, Gg1, Ag1; Light brownish grey tufa sands and gravels with silt; sharp and uneven contact into:
73.69/73.64 to 73.20	2.51/2.56 to 3.00	10YR 5/1; Ag2, Ga2, Sh+, TI/DI+, seeds+; Grey silty sand with organic, wood and hazelnut inclusions; unknown contact into:
73.20 to 72.20	3.00 to 4.00	10YR 2/1 to 7.5YR 4/4; Sh3, TI ³ 1; Black to brown very well humified wood peat; unknown contact into:
72.20 to 71.44	4.00 to 4.76	VOID?
71.44 to 71.20	4.76 to 5.00	10YR 6/6; Gg4; Brownish yellow coarse gravel.

Table 3: Lithostratigraphic description of borehole QBH2, Hillview House, West Street, Newbury

Depth (m OD)	Depth (m bgs)	Description
76.05 to 74.08	0 to 1.25	Made Ground
74.08 to 74.59	1.25 to 1.46	10YR 5/1; Ag2, As1, Gg1, charcoal+; Grey gravelly clayey silt with charcoal inclusions; sharp contact into:
74.59 to 74.55	1.46 to 1.50	10YR 5/1 to 10YR 7/2; Ag2, Ga1, Gg1; Grey to light tufa sands and gravels with silt; sharp contact into:
74.55 to 74.54	1.50 to 1.51	10YR 4/1; As2, Ag1, Sh1; Dark grey organic-rich silty clay; sharp contact into:
74.54 to 74.33	1.51 to 1.72	10YR 7/2; Ga3, Gg1, Ag1, Sh+; Light grey tufa sands and gravels with organic-rich silt concentrated around 1.58, 1.62 and 1.68cm bgs; very sharp contact into:
74.33 to 74.27	1.72 to 1.78	10YR 4/2; Ag2, Sh1, Ga1; Dark greyish brown organic rich silt and tufa sands with charcoal inclusions; diffuse contact into:
74.27 to 74.05	1.78 to 2.00	10YR 5/2 to 10YR 5/3; Ga3, Ag1, Mollusca+, charcoal+,

		Sh+; Greyish brown to brown tufa sands and silts with organic-rich remains, charcoal and frequent whole/fragmented Mollusca; diffuse contact into:
74.05 to 74.03	2.00 to 2.03	10YR 5/2 to 10YR 5/3; Ga3, Ag1, Sh+; Greyish brown to brown tufa sands and silts with organic-rich remains; sharp contact into:
74.03 to 73.99	2.03 to 2.07	10YR 4/1; Ga2, Sh1, Ag1; Dark grey organic-rich silty sand; sharp contact into:
73.99 to 73.95	2.07 to 2.10	10YR 5/2 to 10YR 5/3; Ga3, Ag1, Sh+, DI/TI+; Greyish brown to brown tufa sands and silts with organic-rich and wood remains; sharp contact into:
73.95 to 73.81	2.10 to 2.24	10YR 4/1; Sh2, As2, Mollusca+ Ga+; Dark grey very organic-rich silty clay with Mollusca and tufa sand inclusions; sharp contact into:
73.81 to 73.75	2.24 to 2.30	10YR 4/1 to 10YR 5/3; Ga1, Gg1, Sh1, As1, Mollusca+; Dark grey to brown tufa sands and silts with organic-rich clay and Mollusca fragment inclusions; sharp contact into:
73.75 to 73.25	2.30 to 2.80	10YR 2/1; Sh3, TI ³ 1; Black highly humified wood peat ; diffuse contact into:
73.25 to 73.16	2.80 to 2.91	10YR 4/1; As2, Sh1, Ga1, TI+; Dark grey organic-rich silty sand with wood peat inclusions; sharp contact into:
73.16 to 73.05	2.91 to 3.00	10YR 5/1 to 10YR 7/1; As2, Ga1, Gg1; Grey becoming light grey, stiff gravelly sandy clay (possible marl?).

Table 4: Lithostratigraphic description of borehole QBH3, Hillview House, West Street, Newbury

Depth (m OD)	Depth (m bgs)	Description
76.20 to 75.02	0 to 1.18	Made Ground dominated by Red Brick
75.02 to 74.78	1.18 to 1.42	10YR 6/2; As2, Ag1, chalk rubble fragments 1, Ga+; Light brownish grey silty clay with fragments of chalk rubble and sand inclusions; sharp contact into:
74.78 to 74.69	1.42 to 1.51	10YR 5/2 to 10YR 4/2; Ag2, Sh1, Ga1, Gg+; Greyish brown to dark greyish brown organic-rich sandy silt with very occasional gravel fragments; gradual contact into:
74.69 to 74.60	1.51 to 1.60	10YR 5/2 to 10YR 5/3; Ag1, As1, Ga2; Greyish brown to brown tufa sands and silty clay sharp contact into:
74.60 to 74.20	1.60 to 2.00	10YR 7/2; Ga2, Gg2; Light grey tufa sands and gravels
74.20 to 74.16	2.00 to 2.04	10YR 2/1 and 10YR 7/2; Sh2, Ga1, Gg1, TI+, Mollusca+; Mixture of black unidentifiable peat and tufa sands and gravels with inclusions of Mollusca fragments and wood; sharp contact into:
74.16 to 74.09	2.04 to 2.11	10YR 6/2; Ga3, Gg1, Mollusca+; Light brownish grey tufa sands and gravels with Mollusca fragment inclusions; diffuse contact into:
74.09 to 73.97	2.11 to 2.23	10YR 5/8; Ga3, Gg1; Yellowish brown tufa sands and gravels; diffuse contact into:
73.97 to 73.66	2.23 to 2.54	10YR 7/2; Gg3, Ga1; Light grey tufa gravels and sand; sharp contact into:
73.66 to 73.54	2.54 to 2.66	10YR 5/1 to 10YR 4/1; Ga2, Gg1, Sh1, Mollusca+; Grey to dark grey tufa sands and gravels with concentrations of unidentifiable peat towards the centre of the unit. Mollusca fragments also noted; sharp contact into:
73.54 to 73.37	2.66 to 2.83	10YR 6/2; Ga3, Gg1, Mollusca+; Light brownish grey

		tufa sands and gravels with frequent Mollusca fragments; sharp contact into:
73.37 to 73.30	2.83 to 2.90	10YR 4/1; Sh2, Tl ³ 1, Gg1; Dark grey unidentifiable and well humified wood peat with gravel; sharp contact into:
73.30 to 73.20	2.90 to 3.00	10YR 7/1; Ga3, Gg1; Light grey stiff sandy gravel (possible marl?); sharp contact into:
73.20 to 72.20	3.00 to 4.00	10YR 6/6; Gg4; Brownish yellow coarse gravel.

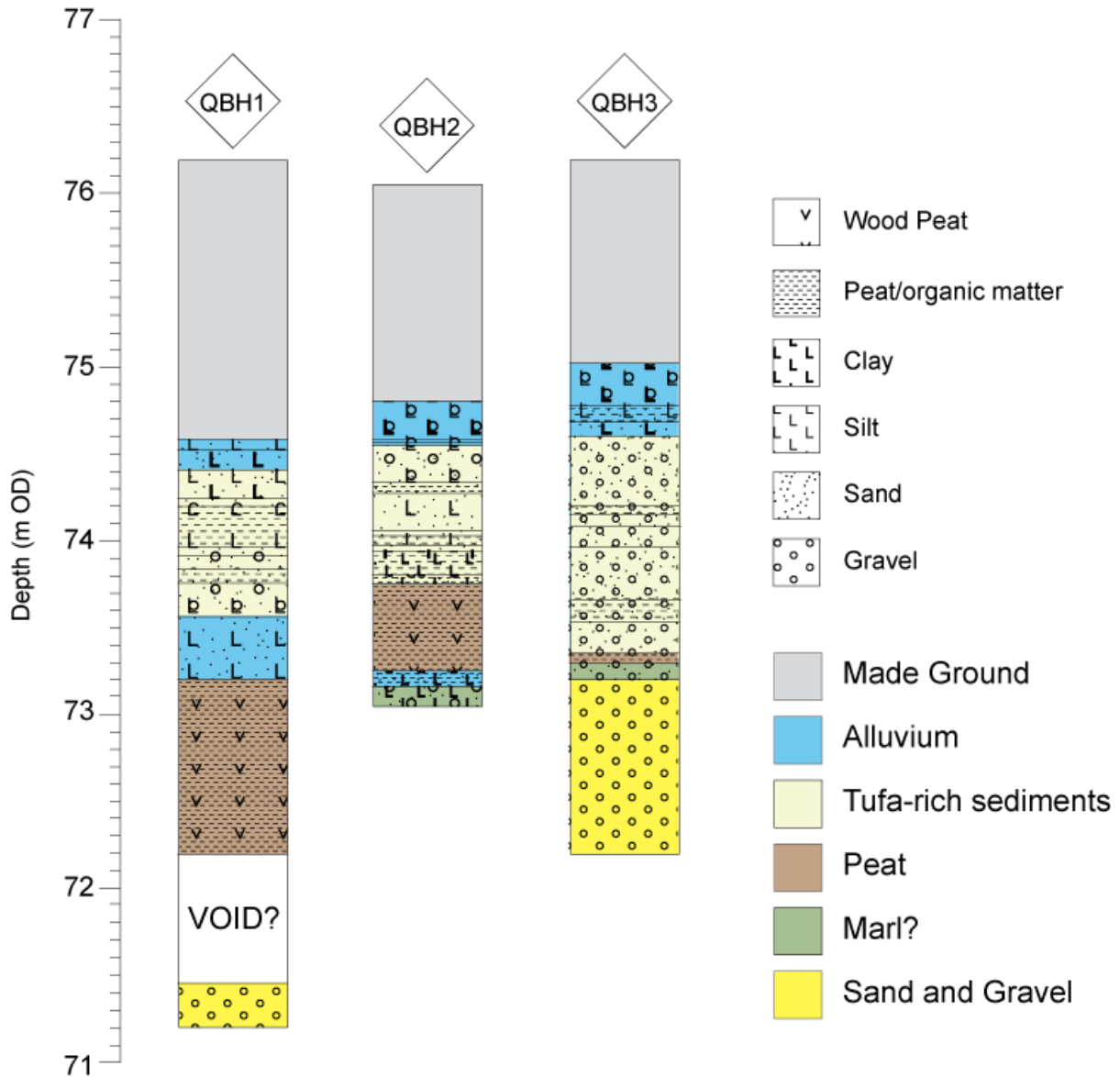


Figure 3: Lithostratigraphy of boreholes QBH1 to QBH3, Hillview House

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Holocene sediments recorded at the Hillview House rest upon a Gravel surface that slopes down from west to east across the site (potentially representing a former channel). These sediments include Peat (representative of a semi-terrestrial landscape), Tufa-rich sediments, Alluvium and possibly Marl (all representative of differing types of fluvial environment). Previous archaeological and geoarchaeological investigations in Newbury, Thatcham, Ufton Nervet and Reading have demonstrated the high potential of these sediments for providing significant evidence of environmental changes and human activity in the Kennet Valley during the Mesolithic and Neolithic cultural periods. As a consequence of this, and due to the thick sequence of deposits recorded at Hillview House (including charcoal), it is strongly recommended that further geoarchaeological investigations are carried out on the collected sequences.

Initially, these investigations should consist of an assessment of the QBH2 and QBH1 borehole sequences, which lie in differing topographic settings and have Peat horizons at different elevations; QBH2 also contains the charcoal. This assessment should incorporate: (1) radiocarbon dating, to provide an age for the onset and cessation of peat formation in each area of the site; (2) organic matter determinations to aid identification of the sedimentary units; (3) assessment of the palaeobotanical remains (pollen, waterlogged wood and seeds) to provide a provisional reconstruction of the vegetation history; (4) assessment of the diatoms to provide an indication of the palaeohydrology (e.g. marine, brackish or freshwater), and (5) assessment of the zooarchaeological remains (insects and Mollusca) to provide information on the general environmental conditions, climatic change and hydrology of the site. The assessment will also highlight any indications of nearby human activity, and provide recommendations for further analysis (if necessary).

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APPENDIX 1: OASIS

Project details

Project name	Hillview House, West Street, Newbury: Geoarchaeological Field Investigations
Short description of the project	Three geoarchaeological boreholes were put down at the site following a previous archaeological evaluation carried out by Thames Valley Archaeological Services. The results indicate a gravel surface that slopes downwards from west to east across the site. A complex sequence of Holocene Peat, Tufa, Alluvium and possibly Marl overlies the Gravel capped by Made Ground. The Peat and Tufa deposits are considered likely to be of Mesolithic and possibly Neolithic age with very good potential for providing evidence for natural environmental changes and human activity.
Project dates	Start: 09-10-2013 End: 28-10-2013
Previous/future work	Yes / Yes
Type of project	Environmental assessment
Site status	None
Current Land use	Industry and Commerce 2 - Offices
Monument type	PEAT Early Prehistoric
Monument type	TUFA Early Prehistoric
Survey techniques	Archaeology

Project location

Country	England
Site location	BERKSHIRE WEST BERKSHIRE NEWBURY Hillview House
Study area	0 Square metres
Site coordinates	SU 4700 6740 51 -1 51 24 11 N 001 19 27 W Point

Project creators

Name of Organisation	Quaternary Scientific (QUEST)
Project brief originator	CgMs Consulting
Project design originator	Dr C.R. Batchelor
Project director/manager	C.R. Batchelor
Project supervisor	C.R. Batchelor
Type of sponsor/funding	Developer

body

**Project
bibliography 1**

Publication type Grey literature (unpublished document/manuscript)

Entered by C R Batchelor (c.r.batchelor@reading.ac.uk)

Entered on 28 October 2013