

SSBB11



SUN STREET, BIGGLESWADE, BEDFORDSHIRE

Archaeological Evaluation

for Grand Union Housing Group

August 2011

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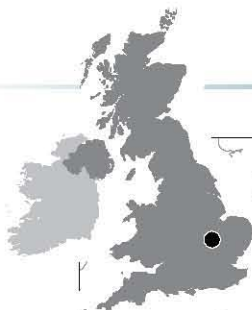
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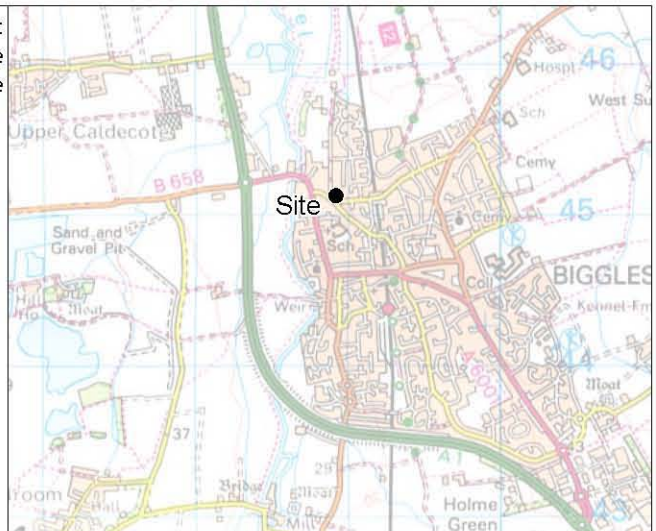
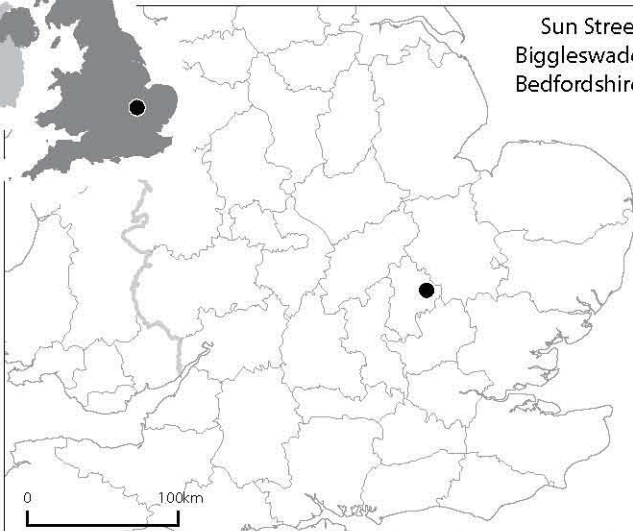
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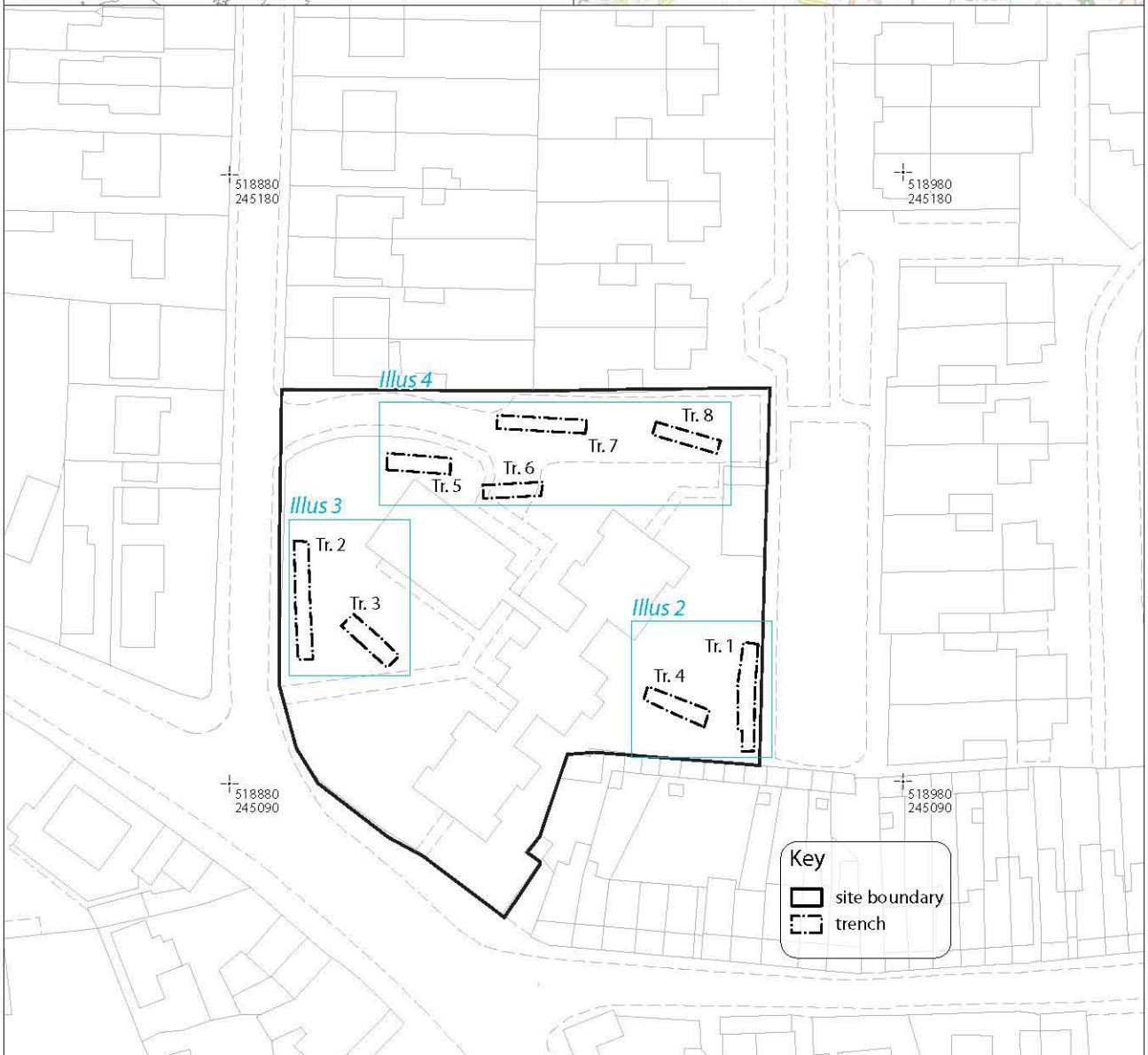
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Sun Street
Biggleswade
Bedfordshire



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Scale 1:1,000 @ A4



0 50m

Illus 1
Site location

SUN STREET, BIGGLESWADE, BEDFORDSHIRE

Archaeological Evaluation

Headland Archaeology Ltd conducted an evaluation at a proposed development area (PDA) at the site of the former Fairholme Care Facility, Sun Street, Biggleswade, in order to provide further information on its archaeological potential. The work was commissioned by Grand Union Housing Group. Eight trenches were excavated within the PDA. This resulted in the uncovering of two large linear ditches and several pits. Together these remains comprise evidence of post-medieval activity within the immediate vicinity of the site. That activity is most likely to be connected with contemporary settlement activity within or adjacent to the PDA.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Planning background

Grand Union Housing Group (client) have developed proposals for the re-development of the former Fairholme Care Facility on Sun Street, Biggleswade (proposed development area - PDA). The proposals comprise the erection of a mixture of two and three bedroom residential units with associated access and car parking.

The local planning authority (LPA) is advised, on archaeological matters, by the Central Bedfordshire Council Archaeological Officer (AO). The AO advised that the PDA lay in an archaeologically sensitive area and, therefore, the applicant must commission an archaeological evaluation (CBC 2010 and as per the CBC Local Validation Checklist Major Developments) in order to obtain information on sub-surface archaeological potential, and to include a description of the significance of any heritage assets affected by the proposed re-development. An assessment of the impact of the development on that significance was required to be submitted as part of the planning application for the site which is in keeping with HE6.1 and HE6.2 of PPS5: Planning for Historic Environment.

The client commissioned Headland Archaeology to undertake the evaluation (the fieldwork took place between 19th and 20th July 2011) and this report outlines the results.

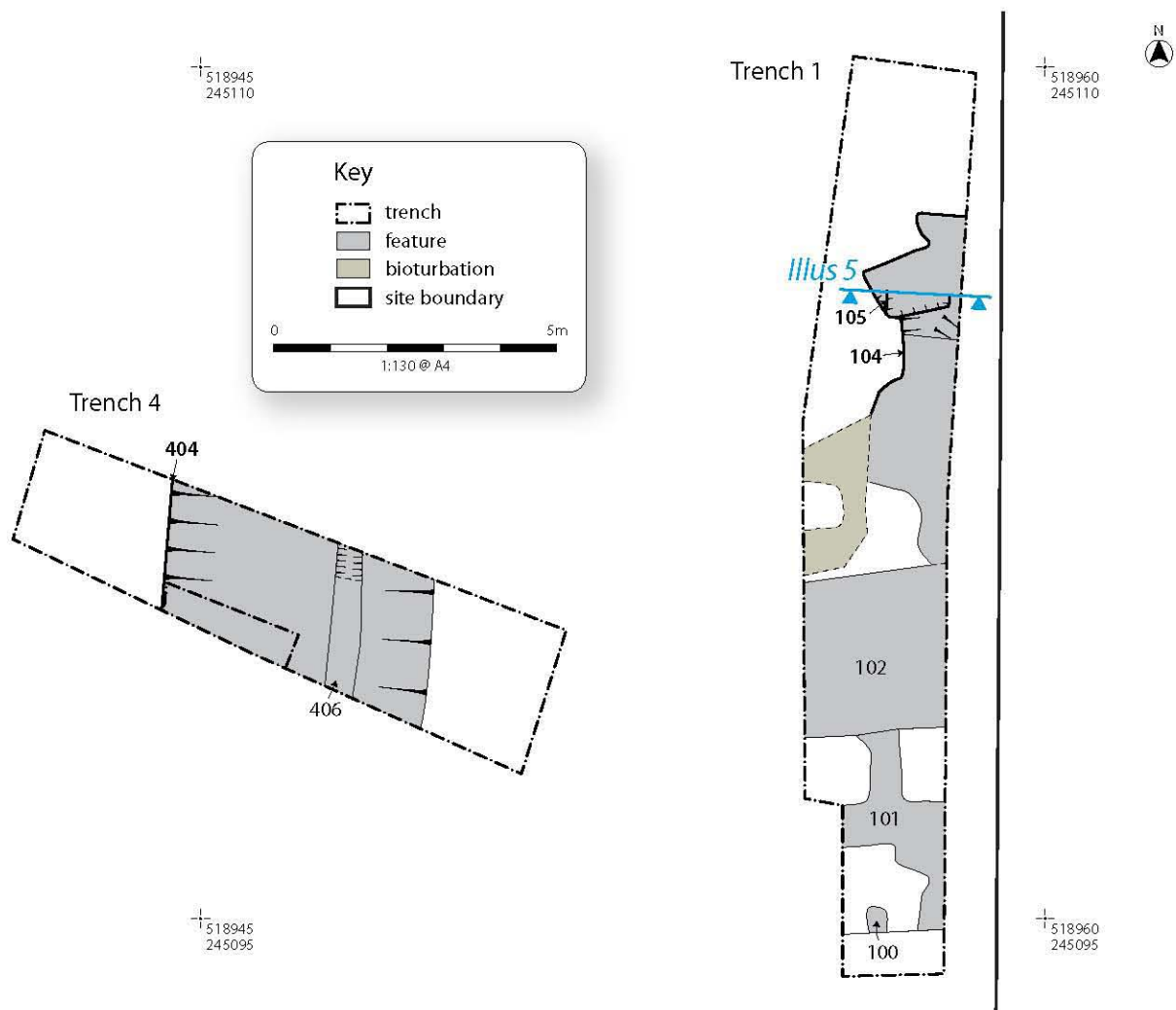
1.2 Site Location and Geology

The PDA lies on the north-western edge of Biggleswade (centred on NGR TL 18929 45116) and is bounded by Sun Street to the south, Fairfield Road to the west, and housing to the north and east. The PDA lies in the valley of the River Ivel, at a height of c. 35m AOD. The underlying geology of the PDA is river terrace gravels overlying greensand.

1.3 Archaeological background

A search of Central Bedfordshire Historic Environment Record (HER) has been undertaken. The HER search was conducted for an area of 500m radius centred on the site. This search drew in 100 HER records, 95 of these records relate to post-medieval buildings and five record the site of significant archaeological find spots/monuments. That ratio of buildings: archaeology reflects an historic lack of knowledge about the below ground archaeology of Biggleswade, something which is being gradually corrected via investigations such as this one at the former Fairholme site (PDA).

Within 500m of the PDA lies a site of Iron Age occupation (HER15877), the line of a possible Roman Road from Biggleswade to Old Warden (HER706) and the find spot of a Roman coin (HER20178). The site of an early medieval castle (HER468) lies across the River Ivel (but within 500m) and the PDA lies within the putative boundaries of the Biggleswade medieval settlement (HER17124).



Illus 2

Site plan showing Trenches 1 and 4

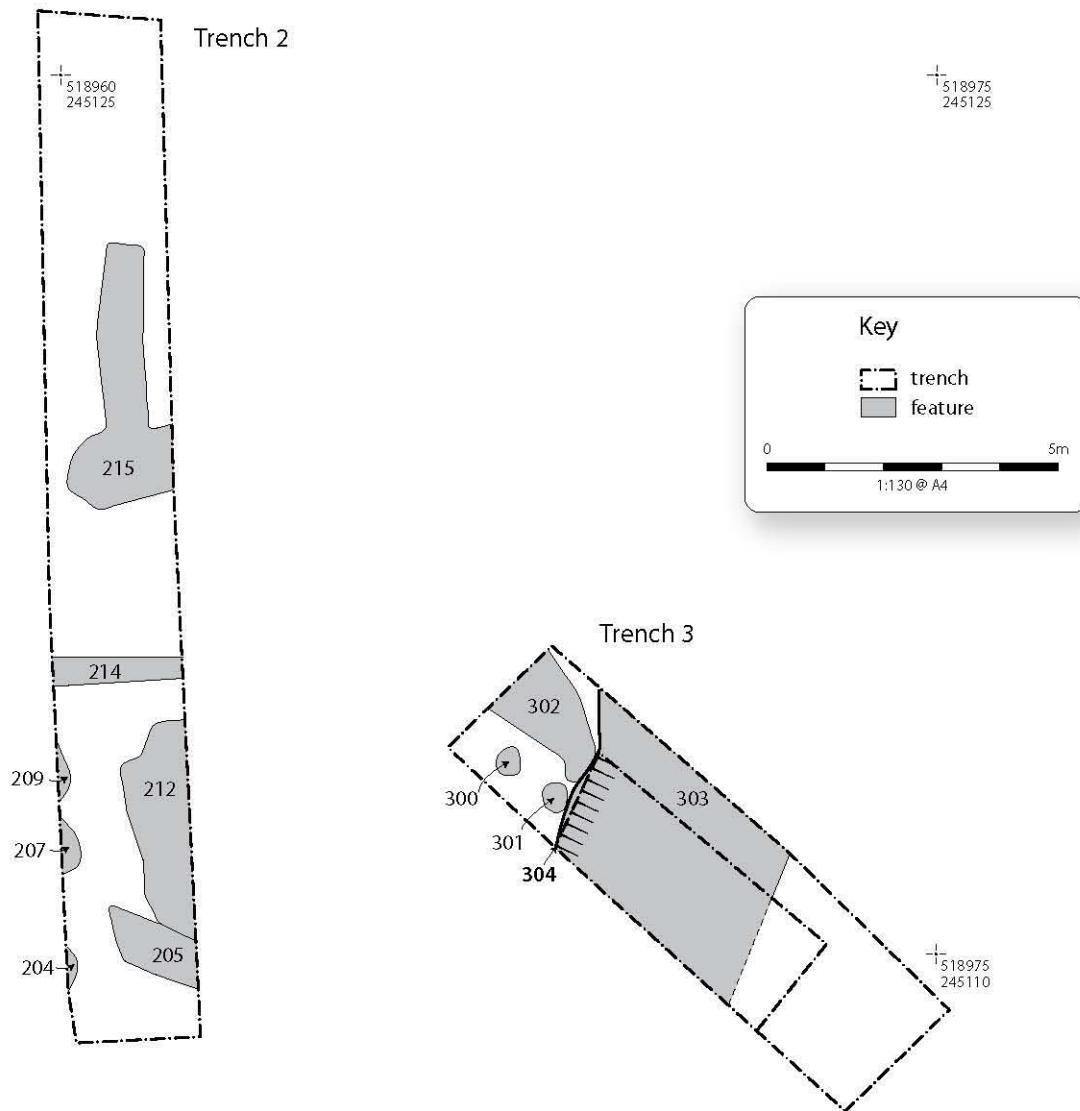
While this HER data confirms that Biggleswade is a historic town retaining the potential for below ground remains, we need to be mindful of the precise location of the PDA in relation to the bulk of those remains. The PDA lies outside, and to the northeast of the current town centre and it also lay to the northeast of what was always the historic core of the town (not necessarily ‘outside’ the edges of historic settlement, but away from their core). This means its potential for containing medieval, below ground remains is reduced when compared to sites within that historic core.

The AO has advised the proposed development area (PDA) lies “within the core of the medieval town of Biggleswade (HER17124); this is an archaeologically sensitive area and locally identified heritage asset as defined by PPS5: Planning for the Historic Environment” (CBC 2011, Section 1.3). The CBC HER officer (Stephen Coleman pers. comm.) suggested that Sun Street, upon which the PDA sits, may have functioned as a Medieval/post-medieval way of going around (bypassing) the market place, in order to reach the bridge across the Ivel (to the north of the town). However, alternative views exist;

indeed, the Extensive Urban Survey for Bedfordshire, Biggleswade Archaeological Assessment (EUS) describes Sun Street as being named after “the Sun Inn, formerly the principal Inn of the town. It is unlikely this route could have existed in the medieval period” (EUS 2003, 16). The EUS places the PDA around 100m outside the ‘medieval settlement’ at Biggleswade.

A high potential for revealing sub-surface remains of a post-medieval date, in Sun Street, is also supported by the findings of a recent evaluation (Archaeological Solutions 2009). This evaluation targeted the site of the Rising Sun public house, immediately south of the PDA, and revealed a small number of post-medieval features.

From this evidence, the PDA occupied an area with potential to contain remains relating to the medieval/post-medieval settlement of Biggleswade. The chances of finding post-medieval remains seemed higher than finding medieval remains (based on the above). The above findings were noted prior to trial trenching being undertaken and have been considered in the production of this report.

**Illus 3**

Site plan showing Trenches 2 and 3

3

2. METHODOLOGY

(2007), Glazebrook (1997), Brown & Glazebrook (2000) and Medlycott & Brown (2008); and

2.1 Objectives

The objectives of the evaluation were:

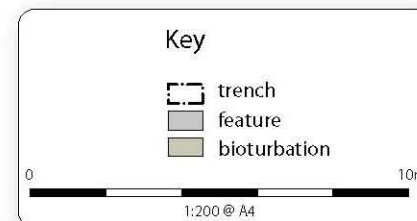
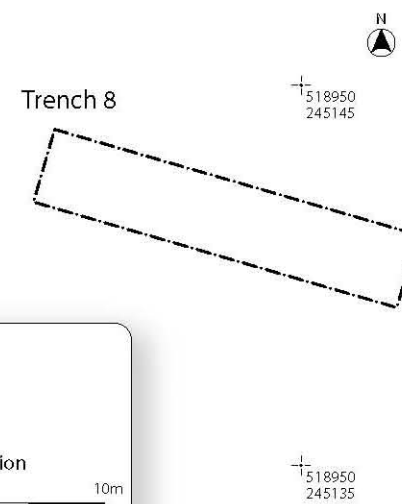
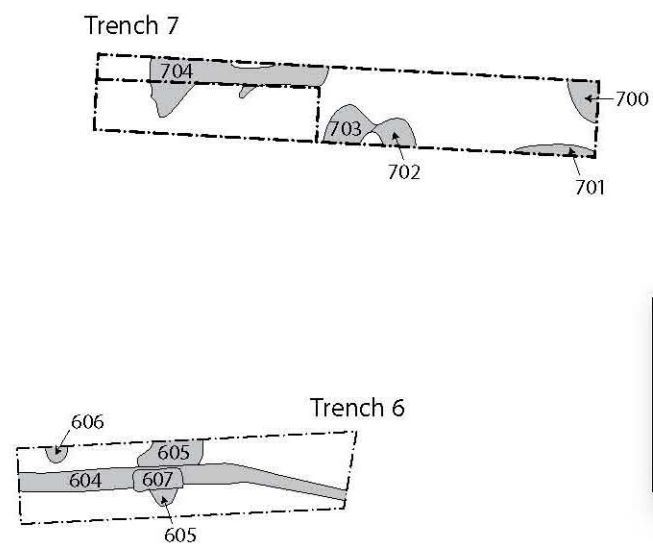
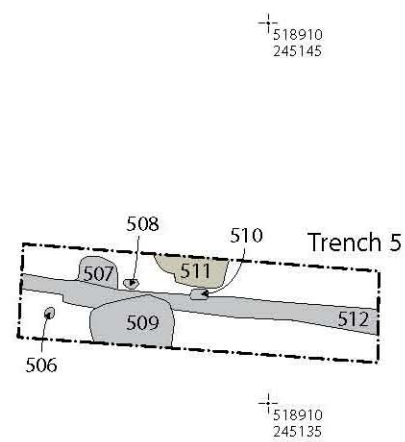
- to identify and assess the particular significance of any element of the historic environment that may be affected by the relevant proposal (as well as the affect on setting of a heritage asset);
- to determine and understand the nature, function and character of any remains on the site, in their cultural and environmental setting;
- to analyse any evidence retrieved in light of objectives contained within the frameworks of local and regional research. In this case they are provided by Oake *et al.*

- to establish the integrity and state of preservation of any archaeological features or deposits;

2.2 Methodology

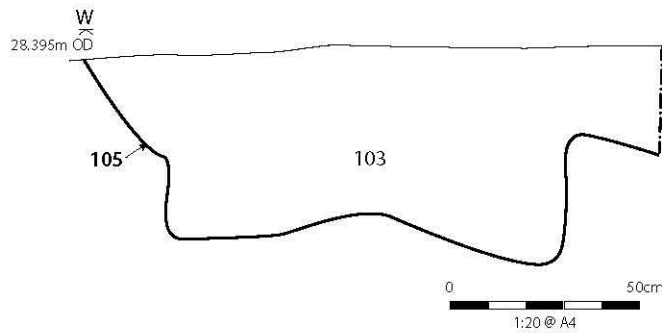
A total of eight trenches were excavated amounting to approximately 95 linear meters, between 2 and 2.5m wide. The trenches were laid out in order to sample land which fell within zones of proposed development impact (Illus 1 and 2).

A wheeled mechanical excavator equipped with a flat-bladed bucket was used to remove overburden under direct archaeological control. Excavation continued until clean geological sediments or significant archaeological deposits were encountered.



Illus 4
Site plan showing Trenches 5 to 8





Illus 5

Pit [105], south facing section

The trenches were all placed outwith the footprint of the former Fairholme Care Facility (on the advice of the AO), and their locations adapted in the field so as to avoid services and trees. This meant that the majority of the trenches were shorter than originally planned (Illus 1 and 2) and also that two of the trenches could not be excavated (Headland Archaeology 2011, Illus 1). Full trench descriptions, including orientation, length and soil profile, can be found in Appendix 1.1.

Further excavation required to satisfy the objectives of the evaluation was continued by hand. A representative sample, sufficient to meet the objectives of the evaluation, of identified features was investigated by hand and all features were recorded. The stratigraphy of each trench was recorded in full.

2.3 Recording

All recording was in accordance with the code of practice of the Institute for Archaeologists. All trenches and contexts were given unique numbers and all recording was undertaken on pro forma record cards that conform to accepted archaeological standards. All stratigraphic relationships were recorded.

An overall site plan at an appropriate scale and relative to the National Grid was recorded by digital survey using a differential GPS. A full photographic record including colour slide and black and white print photographs was taken, supplemented with digital photography. A metric scale was clearly visible in record photographs.

3. RESULTS

In general, the soil profile comprised 0.15 to 0.3m of dark brown sandy silt topsoil overlying a number of levelling and/or rubble layers with a total thickness of

between 0.7 to 1m. Only Trenches 6-8 differed in their soil profile, with 0.08m thick tarmac overlying a 0.45m thick layer of hardcore. The natural geology uncovered within all the trenches was a light to mid yellowish brown and reddish brown sand, with occasional gravel patches. Large areas of bioturbation were visible within the natural geology in Trenches 1, 4, 5, and 7.

The features uncovered during the evaluation can generally be divided into two categories: pits, and linear features. These features are described in more detail below.

3.1 Pits

A large number of small pits were uncovered within Trenches 1, 2, 3, 5, 6 and 7. These pits ([100], [204], [207], [209], [300], [301], [506], [507], [508], [510], [605], [606], and [702]) were all either circular or sub-circular in plan and measured between 0.25 to 0.75m in diameter. Post-medieval pottery and glass was clearly visible within the fills of all these pits.

Two large intercutting pits [104] and [105] (Illus 5 and 6) were uncovered towards the northern end of Trench 1. Both of these appeared to be rectangular in shape and continued beyond the confines of the trench. Pit [104] measured approximately 3m in length, while Pit [105] measured 1.2 by 1m. Both pits had a maximum depth of 1.2m, and were filled with a single reddish brown slightly gravelly sand deposit which contained fragments of post-medieval roof tile.

A large rectangular pit [102] was also uncovered within Trench 1 with a width of 2.75m again continuing beyond the



Illus 6

Pits [104] and [105], looking east



Illus 7

Ditch [404], looking NNW

trench edges. A very large concentration of post-medieval roof tiles was contained within the fill of this feature.

6 Pits [212] and [302] within Trenches 2 and 3 were roughly sub-oval in plan and measured 3.7m and 1.5m in length respectively. Pit [605] within Trench 6 and Pit [703] within Trench 7 were irregular in shape and measured 1.8 by 1.65m, and 1 by 1.2m respectively. All of these pits contained post-medieval brick and pottery.

Four modern pits [509], [607], [700], and [701] were uncovered during the evaluation. These pits contained modern pottery and plastic.

3.2 Linear features

A possible linear feature or group of features [101] was uncovered within Trench 1, truncated by post-medieval pit [102]. This feature contained post-medieval pottery and was not excavated. A further four linear features [205], [215], [512], and [604], containing post-medieval pottery were uncovered within Trenches 2, 5, and 6. A modern cable trench [214] was recorded in Trench 2.

Two large linear ditches [304] and [404], approximately 5m wide were located running north-south within Trenches 3 and 4 respectively. They were both roughly 1m deep and contained a single dark reddish brown and grey sandy silt deposit [303] and [405], which contained post-medieval brick and pottery. A small linear ditch [406], 0.5m wide was located at the base of ditch [404]. As a result of their size these ditches were investigated by means of machine-dug slot; because of their nature they were recorded by sketch section only.

3.3 Description of the significance of the heritage assets

Research carried out ahead of this evaluation (Section 1, Archaeological Background) suggested the most pertinent objectives for this project were to gather evidence useful in augmenting our knowledge of the extent of Medieval/post-medieval Biggleswade. A lack of Medieval features, but a small quantity of Medieval artefactual material, suggest the PDA was close to, but not within the Medieval town. The presence of a variety of pits and ditches datable to the post-medieval period confirm the town had grown to absorb the PDA by that time. Therefore, the project has succeeded in gathering useful data.

Two sets of remains have been grouped together as two heritage assets and described below.

Description of Heritage Asset	Trench no.	Feature Nos	Significance of heritage asset (Low, Medium, High) and of local, regional, national, international interest
Heritage Asset 1 (HA1) – post-medieval pits	1, 2, 3, 5, 6, & 7	[100], [102], [104], [105], [204], [207], [209], [212], [300], [301], [302], [506], [507], [508], [510], [605], [606], [702], & [703]	Low significance of local interest
HA2 – post-medieval ditches	3 & 4	[304], [404] & [406]	Low significance of local interest

4. FINDS ASSESSMENT

Julie Franklin

4.1 Ceramic building material

Thirteen pieces of ceramic building material were recovered in order to date features across the PDA. Amongst the thirteen pieces, there were nine pieces of post-medieval pan tile and four pieces of medieval tile.

The four pieces dating to the medieval period were flat, and typically covered in a pale slip. None retained any peg holes or nibs by which more refined dating might have been possible, but they can be broadly dated to between the 12th and 16th centuries. They were recovered from deposits [407] (Trench 4) and [704] (Trench 7). In both cases these pieces were recovered from deposits also containing post-medieval pan tile and other more recent material. The Medieval pieces are small and a little abraded, suggesting they may have travelled a certain distance to the PDA. Their finding implies the existence of a building somewhere in the vicinity. The use of ceramic roofing material in the medieval period was typically limited to higher status or ecclesiastical buildings.

The nine pieces dating to the post-medieval period were more widely spread, ([102], [103], [407], [702], [704]), including some particularly large sherds from Trench 1. These date from the 17th century onwards.

4.2 Clay pipe

Two clay pipe stems were recovered from deposit [407] (Trench 4). They are unmarked and date to between the 17th and early 20th centuries.

4.3 Pottery

One fragment of unglazed red earthenware was recovered from deposit [702] (Trench 7). It is of post-medieval or modern date, though is too small to provide more refined dating evidence.

5. DISCUSSION

All of the features uncovered within the evaluation were dated to either the post-medieval or modern periods. Although medieval tile fragments were uncovered from a couple of features these were also associated with post-medieval artefacts and are residual within the infill of later features. The majority of the pits uncovered appear to be rubbish pits, with the exception of pits [104] and [105] whose function is unknown, but may represent gravel extraction pits. The large number of post-medieval rubbish pits would suggest settlement activity within/adjacent to the PDA at this time. The lack of any structural remains suggests that the areas investigated within the PDA would have been located within gardens or communal land immediately adjacent to structures along Sun Street.

Two large linear ditches [304] and [404] run parallel on a broadly north to south alignment. They are spaced c. 40m apart and may have functioned as post-medieval boundary ditches dividing land north of Sun Street into smaller plots. A similar ditch on the same alignment was uncovered within excavations at The Rising Sun to the south of the PDA (Archaeology Solutions 2009), and it is likely that these ditches are contemporary and similar in function.

The PDA was considered to have potential for producing evidence of activity from the medieval and post-medieval periods. In the event, physical remains from the post-medieval period and artefactual material from both periods was recovered. By combining the results of work at the nearby (former) Rising Sun site (Archaeological Solutions 2009) and those conducted within the PDA, a picture emerges of Sun Street being (possibly) active in the Medieval period, perhaps acting as a bypass around the market area and taking traffic around the Medieval town to the bridge over the River Ivel. During that period Sun Street crossed open farmland, close to the town. As the town grew in the post-medieval period, Sun Street became lined with settlement activity and a number of boundary ditches divided land up either side of this route way. Land to either side was absorbed into the core of the town. Whether this suggested picture holds will be determined by the results of future fieldwork.

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Description of Heritage Asset	Trench no.	Description of development affecting	Significance of heritage asset (Low, Medium, High) and of Local, Regional, National, International interest	Impact of development on heritage asset (None, Low, Medium, High)
Heritage Asset 1 (HA1) – post-medieval pits	1, 2, 3, 5, 6, & 7	Construction of housing	Low Local	High
HA2 – post-medieval ditches	3 & 4	Construction of housing	Low Local	High



5.1 Assessment of the impact of development on the significance of heritage assets

The re-development of the PDA involves the building of new housing and associated car parking. Sub-surface heritage assets at the PDA are located at between 0.5 and 1.0m below the existing ground surface. The groundworks for this re-development work will involve exceeding this depth and, therefore, the impact of the development upon any underlying remains is considered high.

6. REFERENCES

6.1 Bibliography

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- Archaeological Solutions, 2009, *The Rising Sun, Sun Street, Biggleswade: An Archaeological Evaluation*, Unpublished Report 3379.
- Central Bedfordshire Council, 2011, *Brief for a programme of archaeological field evaluation at the former Fairholme Facility, Sun Street, Biggleswade, Bedfordshire*, CBC.
- Headland Archaeology (UK) Ltd, 2011, *Archaeological evaluation, Sun Street, Biggleswade, Bedfordshire: Written Scheme of Investigation*, Unpublished client report.

7. APPENDICES

7.1 Appendix 1 – Site Registers

Trench register

Trench no.	Orientation	Length (m)	Width (m)
1	N-S	16	2.3
2	N-S	18	2.5
3	NW-SE	9.7	2.6
4	ESE-WNW	9.5	2.5
5	E-W	9.6	2.5
6	E-W	9	2
7	E-W	13.3	2.1
8	ESE-WNW	10.2	2

Context register

Context no.	Area	Description
100	Tr. 1	Possible post-medieval (PM) pit
101	Tr. 1	Possible PM linear or group of linears
102	Tr. 1	PM pit
103	Tr. 1	Fill of (F/O) large pit [104]
104	Tr. 1	Large pit
105	Tr. 1	Pit
106	Tr. 1	F/O pit [105]
107	Tr. 1	Topsoil
108	Tr. 1	Subsoil
109	Tr. 1	Natural
200	Tr. 2	Topsoil
201	Tr. 2	Made ground
202	Tr. 2	F/O Pit [204]
203	Tr. 2	Lower fill of pit
204	Tr. 2	Modern pit
205	Tr. 2	PM Linear/ Pit
206	Tr. 2	F/O pit [207]
207	Tr. 2	PM pit
208	Tr. 2	F/O pit [209]
209	Tr. 2	PM pit
210	Tr. 2	Possible pit?

Context no.	Area	Description
211	Tr. 2	Modern post
212	Tr. 2	PM Pit
213	Tr. 2	Modern Post
214	Tr. 2	Cable trench
215	Tr. 2	PM Linear
300	Tr. 3	PM Pit
301	Tr. 3	PM Pit
302	Tr. 3	PM Pit
303	Tr. 3	F/O Linear ditch [304]
304	Tr. 3	Linear Ditch
400	Tr. 4	Topsoil
401	Tr. 4	Made ground
402	Tr. 4	Made ground
403	Tr. 4	Natural
404	Tr. 4	Linear Ditch
405	Tr. 4	F/O Linear ditch [404]
406	Tr. 4	Linear Ditch
407	Tr. 4	F/O Linear ditch [406]
500	Tr. 5	Topsoil
501	Tr. 5	Made ground
502	Tr. 5	Levelling layer
503	Tr. 5	Build up
504	Tr. 5	Made ground
505	Tr. 5	Natural
506	Tr. 5	PM pit
507	Tr. 5	PM pit
508	Tr. 5	PM pit
509	Tr. 5	Modern pit
510	Tr. 5	PM pit
511	Tr. 5	Bioturbation
600	Tr. 6	Tarmac
601	Tr. 6	Hardcore
603	Tr. 6	Natural
604	Tr. 6	PM linear
605	Tr. 6	PM pit
606	Tr. 6	PM pit
607	Tr. 6	Modern pit
700	Tr. 7	PM Pit
701	Tr. 7	PM Pit
702	Tr. 7	PM Pit



Context no.	Area	Description
703	Tr. 7	PM Pit
704	Tr. 7	Bioturbation
705	Tr. 7	Natural
706	Tr. 7	Subsoil
707	Tr. 7	Tarmac
708	Tr. 7	Hardcore
800	Tr. 8	Tarmac
801	Tr. 8	Hardcore
802	Tr. 8	Natural

Drawing no.	Plan	Section	Description
9	–	Y	S facing section of pit [105]
10	–	Y	N Facing section of pit [104]
11	Y	–	Pits [104] and [105]

Photographic register

Photo no.	Direction facing	Description
1	–	ID Shot
2	N	Trench 2
3	SE	Trench 3
4	N	Trench 1
5	SE	Trench 4
6	W	Trench 5
7	N	S Facing section of Pit [105]
8	SE	N facing section of pit [104]
9	E	Slot through pits [104] and [105]
10	NNW	Ditch [404]
11	W	Trench 6
12	NW	Trench 8
13	W	Trench 7

10

Drawing register

Drawing no.	Plan	Section	Description
1	Y	–	Trench 1
2	Y	–	Trench 2
3	Y	–	Trench 3
4	Y	–	Trench 4
5	Y	–	Trench 5
6	Y	–	Trench 6
7	Y	–	Trench 7
8	Y	–	Trench 8

7.2 Appendix 2 – Finds catalogue

<i>Trench</i>	<i>Context</i>	<i>Material</i>	<i>Qty</i>	<i>Object</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Period</i>
1	102	CBM	3	Pan Tile	large sherds, including one complete length, with nib one end and cut out corner at other	PM-Mod
1	103	CBM	3	Pan Tile	small sherds	PM-Mod
4	407	CBM	1	Pan Tile	small sherd	PM-Mod
4	407	CBM	3	Roof Tile	corner sherd, flat tile, streaky red and pale buff clay, with pale buff slip on surface; two further fragments	Medi
4	407	Clay Pipe	2	Stems	one mouthpiece	PM-Mod
7	702	Pottery	1	Red Earthenware	unglazed fragment	PM-Mod
7	702	CBM	1	Pan Tile	small sherd	PM-Mod
7	704	CBM	1	Pan Tile	large edge sherd	PM-Mod
7	704	CBM	1	Roof Tile	corner sherd, flat tile, red clay with buff streaks, buff slip on surface	Medi



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