

HNSH



HIGHOVER JMI SCHOOL, CAMBRIDGE ROAD, HITCHIN,  
HERTFORDSHIRE

*Archaeological Evaluation*

*for Ashe Construction Ltd*

*February 2012*



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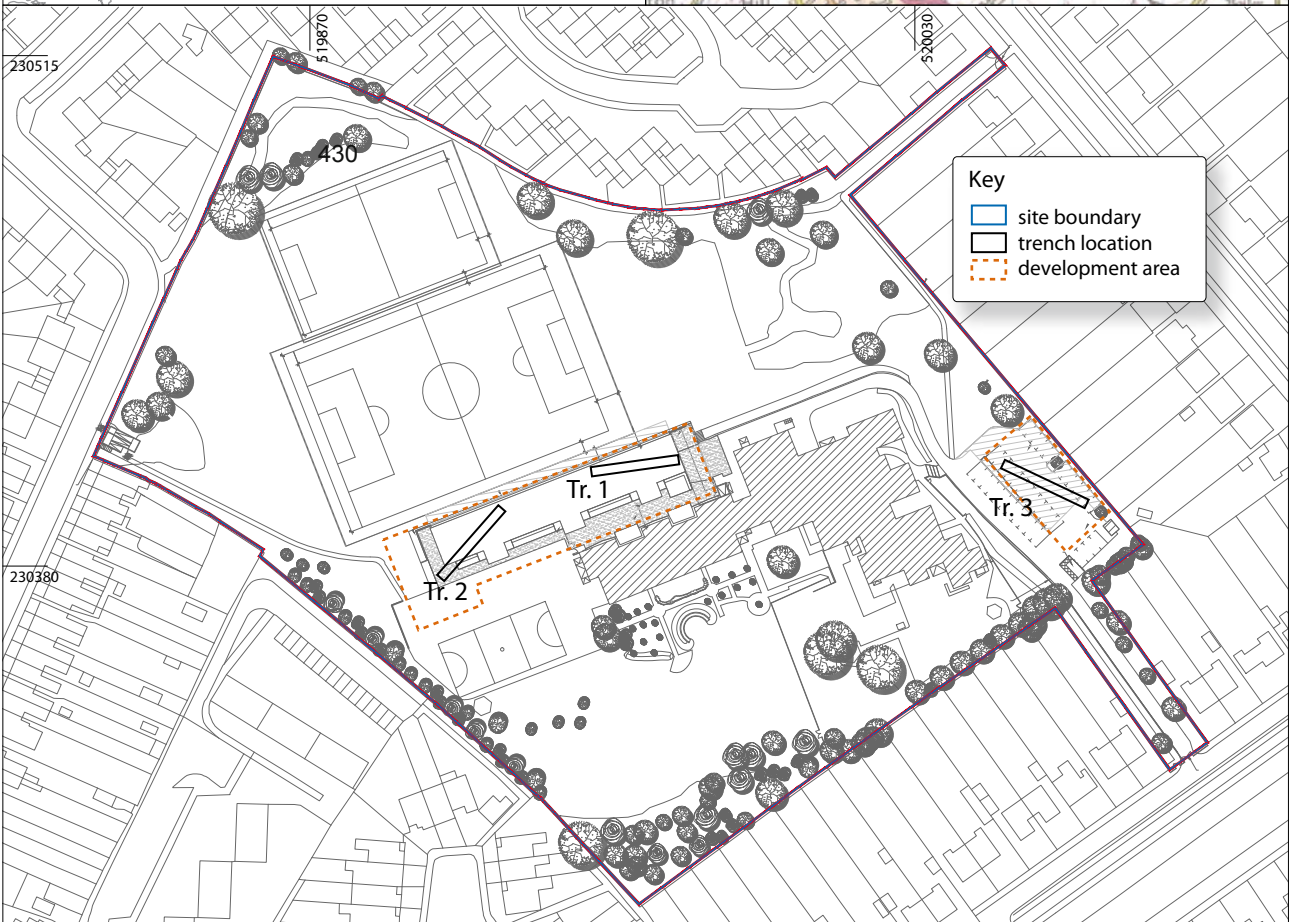
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Scale 1:2,000 @ A4



0 100m

Illus 1  
Site location and trench plan



# HIGHOVER JMI SCHOOL, CAMBRIDGE ROAD, HITCHIN, HERTFORDSHIRE

## Archaeological Evaluation

*Headland Archaeology Ltd conducted an evaluation at a development area at Highover JMI School, Hitchin, in order to provide further information on its archaeological potential. The work was commissioned by Ashe Construction Ltd. A total of three trenches were excavated over the development area. No significant sub-surface archaeological remains were revealed.*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Planning background

Ashe Construction have proposed development works at Highover JMI School for the erection of a new classroom block and canopy link, as well as sixteen new car parking spaces at the school (development area – DA).

The local planning authority (LPA) is advised, on archaeological matters, by the Hertfordshire County Council, Historic Environment Officer (HEO). The HEO advised that a condition should be placed on consent requiring that a programme of archaeological work, comprising field evaluation, should be undertaken prior to development.

The client commissioned Headland Archaeology to undertake the evaluation and produce a report (this document) on the results. Fieldwork took place on 23rd January 2012.

#### 1.2 Site location and geology

The DA is located on Cambridge Road in the north-east of Hitchin in Hertfordshire (site centre TL 19928 30396). It is currently occupied by a large single storey school building with playing fields located to the north-west of the building.

The geology of the area comprises Zig Zag Chalk Formation overlain by chalky silt, clay, sand and gravel (British Geological Survey website). The DA is bounded by hedgerows and housing on all sides and lies at a height of c. 68m AOD.

#### 1.3 Archaeological background

The DA is located 1.8km north-east of the historic core of Hitchin, the origins of which are thought to be in the eighth century AD when King Offa of Mercia founded a religious house. In the Domesday Survey of 1086, Hitchin is recorded as a Royal Manor and by the medieval period it was a thriving market town. It was not until the 1850s onwards, with the introduction of the railway, that Hitchin grew outwards from its historic core.

The majority of the records held by the HER within a 500m radius of the DA related to post medieval buildings of model farms, farmsteads, houses and public houses; the majority are still standing including Highover Farm (HER 17200) located 400m north of the DA.

Within the immediate vicinity of the DA, there are a number of find spots which include an Iron Age Coin (HER 130), a Roman Coin (HER 1416) and a collection of Neolithic flint scrapers (HER 291). Further from the DA, sites of interest include a Late Iron Age cremation cemetery (HER 107) which is an area of archaeological significance (1km NNW of the DA), and a Romano-British inhumation (HER 1428). Other find spots include the discovery of a Late Iron Age butt beaker (HER 108) and a Roman coin hoard (HER 470). The site of a possible Saxon burial mound (HER 1610) is located 900m SW of the site, however this area is now covered by a housing estate.

The situation of the DA within the outskirts of the historic market town of Hitchin would suggest potential for similar archaeological finds to what has previously been discovered in the area. The above findings were noted prior to trial trenching being undertaken and have been considered in the production of this report.



## 2. METHODOLOGY

### 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; and
- 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 Medlycott (2011), Glazebrook (1997), Brown & Glazebrook (2000) and English Heritage (1991 & 1997).

Specifically, the aims of the investigation were:

- to establish the depth and character of archaeologically 'sterile' overburden; and
- to identify, characterise and date any potential archaeological remain within the site.

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### 2.2 Methodology

Three 20m by 1.6m trenches were excavated across the DA, representing a 5% sample of area. The trenches were placed on various alignments, with Trench 1 orientated ESE – WNW, Trench 2, NE – SW and Trench 3, NW – SE. This orientation was used to sample the land that fell within zones of proposed development impact (the classroom building footprint and car park). Full trench descriptions, including orientation, length and soil profile, can be found in Appendix 1.1.

A JCB mechanical excavator equipped with a flat-bladed bucket was used to remove topsoil under direct archaeological control. Excavation continued until clean geological deposits were encountered.

Further excavation required to satisfy the objectives of the evaluation was continued by hand. 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 (IfA). All trenches were given unique numbers and all recording was undertaken



Illus 2

*Trench 3 – typical trenching result*

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. A full photographic record including colour slide, black and white print and digital photographs was taken. A metric scale was clearly visible in record photographs.

## 3. RESULTS

In general, the soil profile of the DA comprised 0.30m of mid to dark brown friable sand clay topsoil lying over a subsoil of mid brown orange friable sand clay. The subsoil varied in depth from 0.10 to 0.55m (average 0.40m), with the deepest deposits encountered within Trench 1 and the SW end of Trench 2. The subsoil lay above a natural geology of mixed brown, orange and yellow clay with chalk and flint stone inclusion (See Illus 3).

No archaeological remains were revealed in any of the three trenches.

### 3.1 Description of the significance of the Heritage Assets



**Illus 3**  
Soil profile within Trench 3

The local and regional research contexts that are provided by Medlycott (2011), Glazebrook (1997), Brown & Glazebrook (2000) and English Heritage (1991 & 1997) outline various gaps in knowledge in the Hertfordshire area. Due to no archaeological remains being identified by trial trenching, the site does not contribute to these research aims.

## 4. DISCUSSION

The DA is situated 1.8km north-east of the historic medieval core of Hitchin. It is likely that this was a landscape of open field systems until the modern expansion of the town in the 1850s. The results of this evaluation support this assertion. This is also supported by the HER records which mainly comprise find spots with no evidence of settlement activity within the DA and the surrounding land.

Deep sub-soil deposits were encountered within Trench 1 and the SW end of Trench 2 and are likely representative of soil creep downslope (colluviation) as they were both located at the base of a hill. The presence of subsoil across the DA indicates that land within it had not been disturbed by the construction of the school or by modern ploughing and therefore condition for the preservation of archaeological remains within the DA is considered to be good. Consequently, the paucity of remains indicates a genuine reflection of the archaeological potential of the DA.

### 4.1 Assessment of the impact of development on the significance of Heritage Assets

The change of use in the DA is from recreational school grounds into a classroom building and car park area. This change which will involve destructive groundworks.

However, as no archaeological features were uncovered, the impact of these groundworks on heritage assets is considered to be nil.

## 5. REFERENCES

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- Medlycott, M 2011 (ed.) *Research and Archaeology Revisited: A revised framework for the East of England*, East Anglian Archaeology Occasional Paper 24.

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### 5.2 Websites

- Open Geoscience – British Geological Survey Website <[www.bgs.ac.uk](http://www.bgs.ac.uk)> Accessed: 13 Jan 2012.



## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1 – Site registers

#### *Trench register*

Trench no.	Area	Orientation	Description	Length (m)	Max depth (m)
1	Building footprint	ESE – WNW	Topsoil of mid to dark brown friable sand clay (garden soil) overlaying a subsoil of mid brown orange friable sand clay with a mid percentage stone inclusion. This overlay natural geology of mixed brown, orange, yellow clay with chalk and small percentage flint stone inclusion.	20	0.90
2	Building footprint	NE – SW	As Trench 1 - Topsoil of mid to dark brown friable sand clay, overlaying a subsoil of mid brown orange friable sand clay with a mid percentage stone inclusion( More substantial presence in the SW end of trench). This overlay natural geology of mixed brown, orange, yellow clay with chalk and small percentage flint stone inclusion.	22.5	0.80
3	Car park area	NW – SE	As with previous trenches - Topsoil of mid to dark brown friable sand clay, overlaying a subsoil of mid brown orange friable sand clay with a mid percentage stone inclusion( More substantial presence in the SW end of trench). This overlay natural geology of mixed brown, orange, yellow clay with chalk and small percentage flint stone inclusion.	22	0.60

#### *Photographic register*

Photo no.	Direction	Description
001	NW	Trench 3
002	NE	Section in Trench 3 showing sub soil and natural geology
003	WSW	Trench 1
004	SW	Trench 2
005	SW	Test of clay bands in trench 2 - Natural
006	SE	Test of clay bands in trench 2 - Natural
007	SW	Working shot
008	SE	Working shot
009	E	Working shot
010	SE	Deep part of trench 1 - working shot
011	W	Working shot of trench 3 at car park area





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