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FIGURE LIST

SUMMARY

In Feburary 2003 Foundations Archaeology undertook a programme of archaeological evaluation at 124-126 High Street, Stevenage, Hertfordshire (NGR: TL 23391 24908). The project was commissioned by CgMs Consulting Ltd. on behalf of Laing Homes North Home Counties.

The evaluation comprised the excavation and recording, across the proposed development area, of five 10m x 2m trenches and one 8m x 2m trench (116m^2).

Excavation of these trenches revealed two discrete pits, tentatively dated to the Roman period and a late post-Medieval working pit, possibly associated with industrial activity. An undated north/south aligned linear cut was also identified and partially excavated.

A moderate amount of modern disturbance was identified across the site. Preservation conditions, however, were generally favourable. The area adjacent to the High Street was an exception, having been subjected to a high level of disturbance.

GLOSSARY OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL TERMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

Archaeology

For the purpose of this project, archaeology is taken to mean the study of past human societies through their material remains from prehistoric times to the modern era. No rigid upper date limit has been set, but AD 1900 is used as a general cut-off point.

CBM

Ceramic Building Material.

Medieval

The period between the Norman Conquest (AD 1066) and *circa*. AD 1500.

Natural

In archaeological terms this refers to the undisturbed natural geology of a site, in this case middle chalk.

NGR

National Grid Reference from the Ordnance Survey Grid.

OD

Ordnance datum; used to express a given height above sea-level. (AOD Above Ordnance Datum).

OS

Ordnance Survey.

Post-Medieval

The period after *circa.* AD 1500.

Roman

The period between AD 43 – *circa* AD 410.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 This report presents the findings of an archaeological evaluation undertaken by Foundations Archaeology in Feburary 2003 at 124-126 High Street, Stevenage, Hertfordshire (NGR: TL 23391 24908). The project was commissioned by CgMs Consulting Ltd. on behalf of Laing Homes North Home Counties.

1.2 The work was undertaken in accordance with a specification prepared by CgMs Consulting Ltd. (Bourne, 2003). The archaeological works were undertaken in response to a condition relating to a planning application submitted by Laing Homes North Home Counties in accordance with Planning & Policy Guidance Note 16 (DoE 1990) and the archaeological policies of Hertfordshire County Council and Stevenage Borough Council. The evaluation was undertaken in accordance with the *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Evaluations* issued by the Institute of Field Archaeologists (1994, revised 2001). The code of conduct of the Institute of Field Archaeologists was adhered to throughout.

2 PROJECT BACKGROUND

2.1 The proposed development area is bounded by the High Street to the east and Primett Road to the west and covers an area of approximately 0.94ha (Figures 1 and 2). The underlying natural geology consists of sands and gravels. The area within which the Trenches were excavated consisted of tarmac and concrete hardstanding.

2.2 A brief for the evaluation, issued by Hertfordshire County Council (2002), outlines the archaeological backround:

The proposed development site lies within area of Archaeological Significance No. 2, as designated in the Local Plan. This notes evidence that Stevenage was a Medieval Settlement, focused on the High Street, and became an important Medieval and post-Medieval staging post northwards from London.

2.3 The study area therefore contained the potential for the preservation of archaeological features and deposits, predominantly associated with the Medieval and post-Medieval periods. This in no way prejudiced the evaluation works against the recovery of finds or features relating to other periods.

3 AIMS

3.1 The aims of the archaeological evaluation were to gather high quality data from the direct observation of archaeological deposits, in order to provide sufficient information to establish the nature, extent, preservation and potential of any surviving archaeological remains; as well as to make recommendations for management of the resource, including further archaeological works if necessary. In turn this would allow reasonable planning decisions to be taken

regarding the archaeological provision for the areas affected by the proposed development.

3.2 These aims were achieved through pursuit of the following specific objectives:

i) To define and identify the nature of archaeological deposits on site, and date these where possible;

ii) To attempt to characterise the nature of the archaeological sequence and recover as much information as possible about the spatial patterning of features present on the site;

iii) To recover a well dated stratigraphic sequence and recover coherent artefact, ecofact and environmental samples.

4 METHODOLOGY

4.1 The archaeological specification required the excavation of five trenches measuring 10m long by 2m wide and one trench measuring 8m long by 2m wide.

4.2 On-site constraints resulted in the minor relocation of Trenches 2 and 5 from the initially planned position. Final trench locations are detailed on Figure 2.

4.3 Hardstanding layers and non-significant overburden were removed, under constant archaeological supervision, to the top of the archaeological deposits or the underlying natural sands and gravels, whichever were encountered first. This was achieved through the use of a JCB-type mechanical excavator with a toothless grading bucket. Thereafter cleaning and excavation was conducted by hand. Spoil tips were scanned for finds.

4.4 All excavation and recording work was undertaken in accordance with the specification prepared by CgMs Consulting Ltd. (Bourne, 2003) and the Foundations Archaeology Technical Manual 3: Excavation Manual.

5 RESULTS

5.1 **Trench 1** was aligned north/south and was excavated onto the natural sands and gravels at an average depth of 0.79m (90.10m OD at the northern end and 90.14m OD at southern end) from the modern ground surface. The natural sands and gravels were sealed beneath a mid-brown clay-gravel buried soil (103), up to 0.50m thick. Overlying this, context (102) consisted of an orange-brown sandy-gravel make up layer, up to 0.20m thick. Context (102) was sealed beneath a tarmac-hardcore layer (101), up to 0.10m thick. Limited root disturbance was apparent towards the northern end of the trench. One feature, [104], was present within the trench.

5.2 Feature [104] was a flat based, vertically sided curvilinear cut that extended across and beyond the southern end of the trench to a width of up to 2.61m. It was cut into layer (103) and the natural deposits and sealed beneath layer (102). The cut contained fill (105), up to 0.59m thick, which consisted of a dark brown clay-gravel mix. Charcoal/clinker, CBM and oyster-shell were recovered from this context.

5.3 **Trench 2** was aligned east/west and was excavated onto the natural sands and gravels at an average depth of 0.66m (90.17m OD at the eastern end and 90.33m OD at western end) from the modern ground surface. The natural sands and gravels were sealed beneath a dark brown clay-gravel buried soil (204), up to 0.38m thick. Overlying this, context (203) consisted of a dark grey-black clay-silt make up layer, up to 0.15m thick. Context (203) was sealed beneath a yellow-orange hardcore layer (202), up to 0.15m thick and an overlying tarmac layer (201), up to 0.07m thick. Two features, [205] and [207], were present within the trench.

5.4 Feature [205] was a flat based, vertically sided sub-rectangular cut, up to 0.90m wide by 2.10m long. The cut was aligned approximately north-west/south-east and occurred at the eastern end of the Trench. It was cut into the natural deposits and sealed beneath layer (204). Context [205] contained fill (206), up to 0.75m thick, which consisted of a compact mid brown clay-sand containing frequent flint nodules and occasional charcoal flecks. Two small and abraded pottery sherds dating to the Roman period, ceramic tile (with nail-holes) and animal bones were recovered from this context.

5.5 Feature [207] was a flat based, vertically sided sub-square cut, up to 1.50m wide by 1.65m long. The cut occurred at, and extended beyond, the eastern end of the Trench. It was cut into the natural deposits and sealed beneath layer (204). Context [207] contained fill (208), up to 0.60m thick, which consisted of a friable mid brown clay-sand containing frequent flint nodules, occasional charcoal flecks, rare chalk fragments and limited root disturbance. Ceramic tile and animal bone were recovered from this context.

5.6 **Trench 3** was aligned north/south and was excavated onto the natural sands and gravels at an average depth of 0.81m (90.18m OD at the northern end and 90.02m OD at southern end) from the modern ground surface. The natural sands and gravels were sealed beneath a mid brown sandy-clay buried soil (304), up to 0.47m thick. Overlying this, context (303) consisted of a dark grey-black clay-silt make up layer, up to 0.15m thick. Context (303) was sealed beneath a yellow-orange hardcore-gravel layer (302), up to 0.28m thick and an overlying tarmac layer (301), up to 0.06m thick. Frequent modern disturbance occurred throughout the Trench. One feature, [305], was present within the Trench.

5.7 Feature [305] was an irregularly based, shallow profile oval shaped cut, up to 0.60m wide by 1.70m long. The cut occurred at, and extended beyond, the northern end of the Trench. It was cut into the natural deposits and sealed beneath layer (304). Context [305] contained fill (306), up to 0.28m thick, which consisted of a dark grey-brown clay-silt containing frequent flint

nodules and root tubers throughout. A single, incomplete sheep bone was recovered from the upper part of this context.

5.8 **Trench 4** was aligned east/west and was excavated onto the natural sands and gravels at an average depth of 1.09m (89.64m OD at the eastern end and 89.66m OD at western end) from the modern ground surface. The natural sands and gravels were sealed beneath a mid orange-brown silty-clay buried soil (404), up to 0.69m thick. Overlying this, context (403) consisted of a dark grey-black clay-cinder make up layer, up to 0.15m thick which contained frequent CBM fragments. Context (403) was sealed beneath a yellow-orange hardcore-gravel layer (402), up to 0.29m thick and an overlying tarmac layer (401), up to 0.09m thick. Three features, [405], [410], and [412] were present within the Trench.

5.9 Feature [405] was a flat based, vertical sided sub-square cut, up to 1.40m wide by 1.50m long. Patches of burnt and vitrified gravel were apparent at the base of the feature. The cut occurred at, and extended beyond, the western end of the Trench. It was cut into the natural deposits and sealed beneath layer (404). The primary fill of [405] was context (406), up to 0.13m thick, which consisted of an orange-brown loose gravel/flint mix, containing occasional CBM fragments and frequent charcoal/clinker fragments. Overlying (406), fill (407), up to 0.34m thick, consisted of a mid-dark brown clay-silt containing frequent flint. Pottery sherds dating to the late post-Medieval period, clear green glass, clay pipe, CBM fragments and frequent charcoal fragments were recovered from this fill. Overlying (407), context (408), up to 0.22m thick, consisted of a dark orange-brown loose gravel/pea-gravel mix. No artefacts were recovered from this fill. Both contexts (407) and (408) were overlaid by fill (409), up to 0.19m thick, which comprised a mid grey-brown clay-silt containing frequent flint nodules. Sherds of modern, glazed pottery were recovered from this fill.

5.10 Feature [410] was a flat based, shallow profile curvilinear cut, up to 0.42m wide by 3.40m long. The cut occurred at, and extended beyond, the western end of the Trench. It was cut into contexts (409) and (408) and sealed beneath layer (404). Context [410] contained fill (411), up to 0.07m thick, which consisted of a dark brown-black clay-silt containing occasional flint flakes. Sherds of modern, glazed pottery were recovered from this context.

5.11 Feature [412] was a steep sided, linear cut, up to 1.10m wide. The feature occurred at the eastern end of the Trench and was aligned north/south. It was cut into the natural deposits and sealed beneath layer (404). Context [412] contained fill (413), up to 0.80m thick, which consisted of an extremely waterlogged mid grey clay/gravel mix containing frequent flint nodules. Post-Medieval pottery sherds, CBM fragments and charcoal/clinker fragments were recovered from this context. At this point, the excavation of this feature was abandoned due to collapsing feature and trench sections and constant flooding. Prior to cessation of excavation, a brown-black waterlogged clay fill, occurring beneath (413) was identified but not investigated. No detailed examination of this feature was possible due to health and safety constraints.

5.12 **Trench 5** was aligned north/south and was excavated onto the natural sands and gravels at an average depth of 1.02m (89.78m OD at the northern end and 89.78m OD at southern end) from the modern ground surface. The natural sands and gravels were sealed beneath a mid grey clay-silt layer (504), up to 0.55m thick, which contained occasional CBM fragments and charcoal flecks. Overlying this, context (503) consisted of a black cinder make up layer, up to 0.22m thick which contained occasional CBM fragments and metal artefacts. Context (503) was sealed beneath a yellow-orange hardcore-gravel layer (502), up to 0.31m thick and an overlying tarmac layer (501), up to 0.07m thick. One feature, [505], was present within the trench.

5.13 Feature [505] was a substantial, vertical sided cut that extended across most of the trench. It was cut into the natural deposits and sealed beneath layer (504). Context [505] contained fill (506), up to 0.43m thick, which consisted of a compact, mid-dark brown clay-sand containing frequent flint nodules. Frequent sherds of modern, glazed pottery and CBM fragments were recovered from this context.

5.14 **Trench 6** was aligned east/west and was excavated onto the natural sands and gravels at an average depth of 0.85m (89.81m OD at the eastern end and 89.99m OD at western end) from the modern ground surface. The natural sands and gravels were sealed beneath a mid grey-brown sandy loam (605), up to 0.46m thick, which contained occasional CBM fragments and charcoal flecks. Overlying this, context (603) consisted of an *in-situ* brick, mortar and rubble layer, up to 0.37m thick. Context (603) was sealed beneath a yellow-orange hardcore-gravel layer (602), up to 0.20m thick and an overlying tarmac layer (601), up to 0.06m thick. Sealed by (602) and cut into the natural deposits, a linear brick wall, up to 0.40m (three brick courses) wide by 0.48m (six brick courses) deep displayed an *English Bond* brick alignment. This feature occurred at the western end of the trench and was aligned north/south. Context (604) overlaid the natural deposits and consisted of a brick and rubble mix, up to 0.45m thick, which contained frequent cinder and charcoal. Overlying (604) and sealed by (602), context (606) consisted of a bright yellow sand, up to 0.09m thick. Both (604) and (606) occurred immediately to the west of the brick wall. The trench was heavily disturbed throughout. No archaeological features were present within the trench.

6 DISCUSSION

6.1 The stratigraphic sequence was essentially uniform throughout, consisting of tarmac/gravel make-up layers overlying a buried soil horizon, which in turn overlaid the natural sands and gravels.

6.2 Modern and late post-Medieval disturbance occurred across the site but was particularly prevalent in Trenches 3, 5 and 6. Limited root disturbance, often cutting into the natural deposits, occurred across the site and may be associated with orchard activity. On site excavation conditions were, in general, dry and well drained.

6.3 Feature [104] yielded no dating evidence. It was, however, directly sealed by a gravel make-up layer (102) associated with the construction of the tarmac (101) surface. This feature is therefore unlikely to be of archaeological significance.

6.4 Features [205] and [207] shared similar depths, profiles and fills and are potentially contemporaneous. Context (206) yielded two small and abraded, undiagnostic Roman pottery sherds, weighing 9g in total. Features [205] and [207] may therefore be tentatively dated to the Roman period.

6.5 Feature [305] is probably root disturbance. A single, incomplete sheep bone recovered from the upper part of fill (306) is likely to be residual.

6.6 Limited evidence for industrial activity is present within Trench 4. Burnt patches occurring at the base of cut [405] along with charcoal and clinker fragments recovered from fills (406) and (407) indicate that this feature was likely to have been associated with a burning event. Pottery sherds and glass fragments recovered from fill (407) securely date the feature to the late post-Medieval period. Context (409), the uppermost fill of [405], is likely to be associated with modern disturbance.

6.7 Cut [410] is associated with modern disturbance.

6.8 Due to on-site restraints, feature [412] was not fully defined. Pottery sherds recovered from context (413), the uppermost fill, are datable to the post-Medieval period. This data, in itself, is inadequate evidence in terms of dating the cut. As opposed to the rest of the site, feature [412] was extremely waterlogged throughout.

6.9 Both Trenches 5 and 6 contained no archaeological features and had been subjected to modern disturbance throughout. This disturbance is likely to have been associated with the buildings shown on the 1962 1:1,250 OS map.

7 CONCLUSION

7.1 The evaluation has indicated that, although a moderate amount of modern disturbance has occurred across the site, preservation conditions were favourable. The area adjacent to the High Street is an exception, having been subjected to a high level of disturbance.

7.2 A limited potential for the further survival of Roman remains is demonstrated by the presence of one or possibly two Roman pits.

7.3 The general absence of artefactual evidence relating to the Medieval period, either stratified or unstratified, is surprising. This negative evidence may be due to the previously indicated level of disturbance rather than by a lack of settlement or activity in this area.

7.4 A number of features datable to the late post-Medieval/modern period are of limited archaeological significance.

7.5 The proposed development is likely to have a significant impact on any surviving archaeological deposits. The results of the evaluation suggest that archaeological features within the study area are of a low/medium density, with a limited potential for *in-situ* Roman remains to be present.

8 BIBLIOGRAPHY

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