

**NORTON SCHOOL, NORTON ROAD
LETCWORTH,
NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE**

NGR: TL 225 340

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

December 2008
Report No. 584

Quality Assurance

This Document has been compiled and authorised in accordance with
AMS's Quality Procedures (BS EN ISO 9001: 2000)

Author M. Hogstrom and Diana King

Date 19th December 2008

Approved R. King

QA Checked D. King

This report has been compiled with all reasonable skill care and attention to detail within the terms of the project as specified by the client and within the general terms and conditions of Archaeological Management Services Ltd trading as Foundations Archaeology but no explicit warranty is provided for information and opinions stated. AMS Ltd accepts no responsibility whatsoever to third parties to whom this report or any part thereof is made known. Any such party relies on this report at their own risk. Copyright of this document is retained by AMS Ltd, but unlimited licence to reproduce it in whole or part is granted to the client and/or their agents and/or assignees on payment of invoice.

CONTENTS

List of Illustrations

Summary

Glossary of Archaeological Terms and Abbreviations

- 1 INTRODUCTION
- 2 PROJECT BACKGROUND
- 3 AIMS
- 4 METHODOLOGY
- 5 RESULTS
- 6 NATURE OF THE RECORD
- 7 DISCUSSION
- 8 BIBLIOGRAPHY

Appendix 1: HER Summary Form

Appendix 2: Site Visit Sheet

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure 1: Site Location

Figure 2: Site Plan

Figure 3: Trench Plan

Figure 4: Trench Section

Figure 5: Photographs

SUMMARY

On the 24th and 29th January 2008, and the 5th February 2008, Foundations Archaeology undertook an archaeological watching brief on land at Norton School, Norton Road, Letchworth, North Hertfordshire (NGR: TL 225 340) on behalf of CgMs Consulting Ltd (CgMs).

Planning permission had been granted by North Hertfordshire District Council for the proposed building works (Ref 04/00199/1). A planning condition stipulating a programme of archaeological monitoring and recording was required by North Hertfordshire District Council in accordance with PPG16 (DoE 1990).

The archaeological watching brief was to monitor the groundworks associated with the construction of new domestic units. This involved the monitoring of foundation trenches cut by a mechanical excavator. Only one from a total of five areas was observed during the course of the monitoring works.

No archaeological finds, features or deposits were present within the study area.

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.

Medieval

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

Natural

In archaeological terms this refers to the undisturbed natural geology of a site.

NGR

National Grid Reference from the Ordnance Survey Grid.

OD

Ordnance datum; used to express a given height above sea-level.

OS

Ordnance Survey.

Post-medieval

The period from *c.* AD 1500 onwards.

Prehistoric

The period prior to the Roman invasion of AD 43. Traditionally sub divided into; *Palaeolithic* – *c.* 500,000 BC to *c.* 12,000 BC; *Mesolithic* – *c.* 12,000 BC to *c.* 4,500 BC; *Neolithic* – *c.* 4,500 BC to *c.* 2,000 BC; *Bronze Age* – *c.* 2,000 BC to *c.* 600 BC; *Iron Age* – *c.* 600 BC to AD 43.

Romano-British

Term used to define the fusion of indigenous Iron Age traditions with invasive Roman culture. Traditionally dated AD 43 to *c.* AD 410.

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 In January and February 2008 Foundations Archaeology undertook an archaeological watching brief on land at Norton School, Norton Road, Letchworth, North Hertfordshire (NGR: TL 225 340) on behalf of CgMs Consulting. Planning permission had been granted by North Hertfordshire District Council for building works (Ref 04/00199/1). A planning condition stipulating a programme of archaeological monitoring and recording was required by North Hertfordshire District Council in accordance with PPG16 (DoE 1990).
- 1.2 The watching brief was undertaken in accordance with a Specification prepared by CgMs (2007). The Specification was approved by the Archaeological Officer for Hertfordshire County Council and was prepared in accordance with the *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs* issued by the Institute of Field Archaeologists (1999, revised 2001) and Archaeological Guidance Paper 4: *Archaeological Watching Briefs: (guidelines)* issued by English Heritage (London Region).
- 1.3 This document presents the findings of the archaeological watching brief and conforms to the specification set out in Appendices 4 and 5 of *The Management of Archaeological Projects* (English Heritage 1991).

2 PROJECT BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Planning permission had been granted by North Hertfordshire District Council for building works (Ref 04/00199/1), which include 1 and 2 bedroom flats, 2, 3 and 4 bedroom houses, the conversion of the existing school building into 28 units, access road, car parking and landscaping.
- 2.2 A pre-determination archaeological condition requiring a programme of archaeological works was attached to the planning permission in accordance with PPG16 and the archaeological policies of North Hertfordshire District Council. The archaeological condition required the production of a desk-based assessment.
- 2.3 An Archaeological desk-based assessment of the site was undertaken by CgMs Consulting (Darton & Bourn 2006). It identified a modest number of late prehistoric, Iron Age and Roman sites and finds recorded on the Historic Environment Record, within a 1km radius of the application site. The nearest find consisted of a flint scraper some 50m west of the application site. Therefore, the site was considered to have a low-moderate potential for late prehistoric, Iron Age and Roman Settlement evidence and a low potential for evidence of all other periods.
- 2.4 The desk based assessment was sent by Miller Homes on the 15th December 2006 to the Planning Officer at North Hertfordshire District Council to be forwarded to Andy Instone, the Archaeological Officer at Hertfordshire County Council.

- 2.5 However, no comments of the findings of the desk study were received until 3rd March 2007. By this time the foundation trenches for Plots 1 to 24 had been excavated and the access road had been laid.
- 2.6 CgMs Consulting were notified by Miller Homes and a Specification for a watching brief on the remaining plots (Plots 53-56) was produced and submitted to Andy Instone for approval (approved April 2007). The excavation of the foundation trenches for Plots 43-46 were thereafter monitored by Foundations Archaeology.
- 2.7 The main potential of the site was, in accordance with the results of the desk-based assessment, for the low-moderate potential chance for late prehistoric, Iron Age and Roman Settlement evidence and a low potential for evidence of all other periods. This in no way prejudiced the archaeological monitoring works against the recovery of finds or features related to other periods.

3 AIMS

- 3.1 The aims of the watching brief 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.
- 3.2 These aims were to be achieved by the pursuit of the following specific objectives as stated in the Specification (CgMs 2007).
- i) to define, identify and record any 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) where possible to recover a well dated stratigraphic sequence and recover coherent artefact, ecofact and environmental samples.

4 METHODOLOGY

- 4.1 The Groundworks comprised the excavation of a series of trench footings, which were undertaken by a mechanical excavator fitted with a toothless grading bucket.
- 4.2 The project methodology (CgMs 2007) required that all groundworks which had the potential to impact upon buried archaeological deposits were to be undertaken under constant archaeological observation.

- 4.3 Where groundworks were to be undertaken by a mechanical excavator, the machine was equipped with a toothless grading bucket as appropriate. Any required excavation of archaeological deposits was to be conducted manually by archaeologists. All archaeological deposits and features were to be subject to appropriate levels of investigation. Spoil tips were scanned for finds which were to be retained for study during the post-excavation phase.
- 4.4 Any human remains which may be encountered were to be initially left in situ and reported to the appropriate authorities. If removal is necessary this would comply with the relevant regulations and current archaeological best-practice.
- 4.5 Decisions about the relative value of archaeological deposits and features were to be made in consultation with the Hertfordshire County Council Archaeological Officer and CgMs Consulting.
- 4.6 All artefactual and ecofactual remains, whether stratified or not, were to be collected, bagged and labelled. All artefactual and ecofactual evidence was to be treated in accordance with the Foundations Archaeology Technical Manual 4 (Finds Manual) and archaeological best practice.

5 RESULTS

- 5.1 The development consisted of five areas, only one of which, containing Plots 53-56, was monitored by an archaeologist (Figure 2).
- 5.2 The surface of the building area mainly consisted of yellow and/or blackish bedding sand for the tarmac that had been stripped prior to excavation of the foundation trenches. The surface had been badly disturbed by the groundworks on site, but showed no evidence of any archaeological remains.
- 5.3 Foundation trenches were typically 0.6m wide although some trenches were wider, up to 1.4m. The depths of the trenches ranged between 1.2-1.5m below the modern ground level and were most shallow in the north-central part of the excavation. The stratigraphy of the open trenches was observed and safely recorded.
- 5.4 The stratigraphy was consistent across the investigated area. Natural geology was revealed in every trench and comprised light orange-brown, grey hued clay with inclusions of chalk flecks (106), encountered at a depth of between 0.40m and 0.50m from the existing ground level. The natural substrate was overlain by a layer of grey clay (103) 0.4m deep on average. It contained inclusions of decomposing roots, which were more frequent in the top of the layer and especially frequent in Plot 43. It is likely that (103) was the continuation of the natural subsoil. In the northeast section of Plot 43 layer (103) was overlain by modern levelling layer (105), 0.20m deep. Layer (105) consisted of brick rubble in a soil composed of 50% sand and 50% clay with frequent inclusions of flint and small stones. This layer did not occur anywhere else in the investigated area. Elsewhere, layer (103) was overlain by (102), a thin black layer with frequent inclusions of rotting vegetation, up to

0.02m thick, which probably represented a temporary land surface prior to Tarmac covering of the area. Layers (102) and (105) were covered by a layer of bedding sand (101) for tarmac, between 0.10m-0.12m thick. An isolated layer of tarmac, (104), approximately 0.10m deep, was present overlying the bedding layer (101) in an area corresponding with the extent of (105). This layer continued NW beyond the edge of excavation, although its full extent is unknown.

- 5.5 Three modern drainage pipes were identified in the trenches in Plot 43.
- 5.6 Spoil had been removed by the time the archaeological investigations took place, and could therefore not be scanned for unstratified finds.

6 NATURE OF THE RECORD

- 6.1 The stratigraphic archive for the site consists of the following elements:
 - Context Sheets
 - Photographs
 - Index Sheets
- 6.2 The on-site methodologies used to recover any evidence were set out in the Specification (CgMs 2007). In summary the following excavation methods were utilised: observation of all notified groundworks associated with the construction of the dwellings. The groundworks were undertaken by a mechanical excavator equipped with a toothless bucket. All site recording was undertaken in accordance with the Specification. The records are available in the archive.
- 6.3 Following the completion of the Watching Brief an ordered, indexed, and internally consistent site archive has been compiled in accordance with Appendix 3 of The Management of Archaeological Projects (English Heritage 1991).

7 DISCUSSION

- 7.1 No archaeological deposits were identified during the watching brief. The natural geology and subsoils were directly overlain by modern levelling layers. The area did not seem to have been truncated, therefore the absence of archaeological finds features or deposits was likely to be a true representation of the archaeological potential in the area.
- 7.2 When the monitoring archaeologist arrived on site on 24th January excavation had already started in Plot 45. The top surface of the area, which had previously comprised car-parking and gardens, had already been stripped without archaeological supervision. A number of the trenches in Plot 45 had also been reduced to foundation depth and concreted before the archaeologists arrived, although several were still open and could be examined. The same

procedure was repeated on 29th January when further trenches in Plots 43, 44 and 45 had been excavated and concreted without archaeological supervision.

- 7.3 On 5th February Foundations Archaeology was notified that further works had been undertaken. The archaeologist immediately visited the site. The foundation trenches in Plot 46 had, however, already been excavated and were ready for concreting. Unlike the trenches in Plot 45, these trenches were deemed too unsafe to enter and were therefore recorded from the top edge of the trenches.
- 7.2 The percentage of excavated area within this area of the site was significant and, where available, the trenches were wide and deep enough so as to offer satisfactory access to any potential archaeological remains. The artificial layers which were uncovered contrasted well with the natural substrate, and any modern cuts and organic activity were clearly visible in the natural geology.
- 7.3 Artefactual evidence was very sparse across the study area and comprised modern pottery sherds, which were not retained.
- 7.4 The results of the watching brief suggest a low archaeological potential for the monitored areas of the site. However, it should be noted that only one out of five areas were monitored by an archaeologist, with the remaining areas being developed unsupervised. The presence of archaeological deposits within the unmonitored areas, or the within the immediate vicinity of the study area cannot, therefore be rule out.
- 7.5 The archive will be deposited with North Hertfordshire Museums Service under an accession number issued by the museum on deposit of the archive. An OASIS record will be compiled and submitted on acceptance of the report.

8 BIBLIOGRAPHY

CgMs 2007 *Written Scheme of Investigation for an Archaeological Watching Brief Norton School, Norton Road, Letchworth*

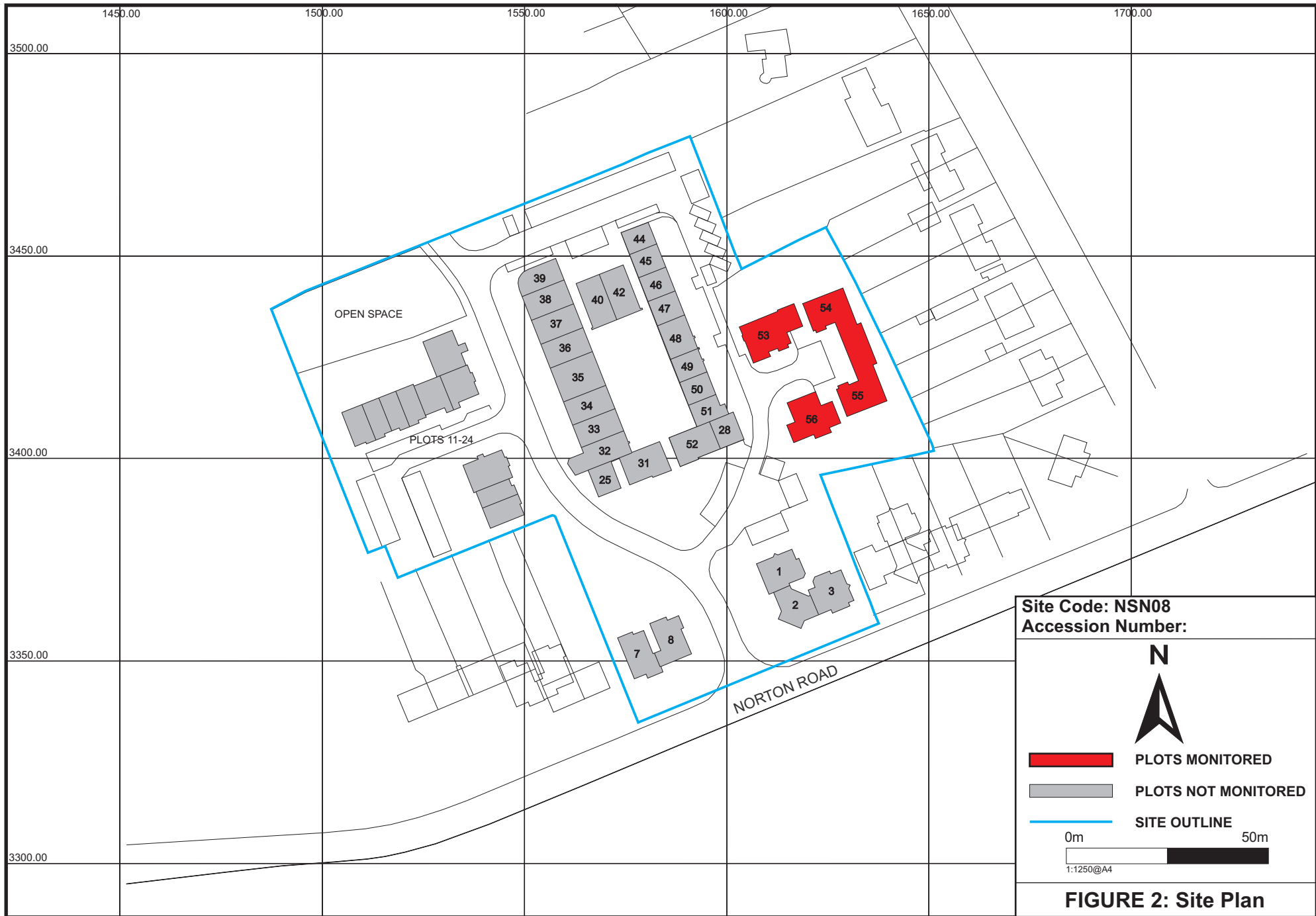
Institute of Field Archaeologists. 1999 (revised 2001). *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs*. Unpublished.

APPENDIX 1: HER Summary Form

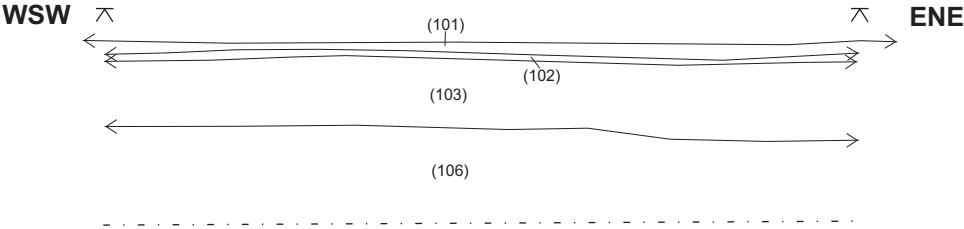
HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT RECORD SUMMARY SHEET


Site name and address: Norton School, Norton Road		
County: North Hertfordshire		District: North Hertfordshire
Village/Town: Letchworth		Parish: Letchworth Garden City
Planning application reference: 04/00199/1		
Client name, address, and tel. no.: CgMs Consulting Ltd, Morley House, 26 Holborn Viaduct, London, EC1A 2AT, 0207 8321390		
Nature of application: Construction of new domestic dwellings.		
Present land use: School buildings with associated car parking		
Size of application area: 1.3 hectares		Size of area investigated: 0.08 hectares
NGR (to 8 figures): TL 2237 3381		
Site code (if applicable): NSN08		
Site director/Organization: Roy King, Foundations Archaeology		
Type of work: Watching Brief		
Date of work:	Start: 24 th Jan 2008	Finish: 5 th Feb 2008
Location of finds & site archive/Curating museum: Unit 69 Pembroke Centre, Cheney Manor, Swindon SN2 2PQ/North Hertfordshire Museum		
Related HER Nos:		Periods represented: Post-Medieval/Modern
Relevant previous summaries/reports		
Summary of fieldwork results: The archaeological watching brief was to monitor the groundworks associated with the construction of new domestic units. This involved the monitoring of foundation trenches cut by a mechanical excavator. Only one from a total of five areas was observed during the course of the monitoring works. No archaeological finds, features or deposits were present within the study area.		
Author of summary: Roy King		Date of summary: 11/04/08

APPENDIX 2: Site Visit Sheet



NORTH NORTHWEST FACING SAMPLE SECTION OF TRENCH AT SOUTHERN END OF PLOT 55



Site Code: NSN08 Accession Number:
0m 2m  1:50@A4
FIGURE 4: Trench Section



**WEST FACING SHOT OF PLOT 56,
EXCAVATED**



**NORTH FACING SHOT OF PLOTS 55 AND 54,
55 EXCAVATED AND CONCRETED AND 54
PREDOMINANTLY EXCAVATED.**



**EAST NORTHEAST FACING SHOT PLOT 53,
EXCAVATED**

Site Code: NSN08
Accession Code:

FIGURE 5: Site Photographs