

**BALANCING POND 2 & FORMER NURSERY SITE
PRIORS GREEN
TAKELEY
ESSEX**

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF
ON
GEOTECHNICAL SITE INVESTIGATION
TEST PITS**



**Essex County Council
Field Archaeology Unit
March 2006**

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TEST PITS**

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As part of our desire to provide a quality service, we would welcome any comments you may have on the content or the presentation of this report.

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TEST PITS**

Client: RPS Planning (on behalf of Countryside Properties)

FAU Project No.: 1585

NGR: TL 5720 2148

Site Code: TAPG 06

Date of Fieldwork: 23 January to 25 January 2006

SUMMARY

As part of an ongoing programme of construction works in the Priors Green area of Takeley, Essex, Essex County Council Field Archaeology Unit (ECC FAU) was commissioned by RPS Planning to archaeologically record geotechnical test pits to assess the site potential.

Twenty-six geotechnical trial pits spread across two development areas were recorded. The trial pits excavated in the area of the balancing pond revealed no cut archaeological features, although a palaeochannel was identified, running approximately east-west, approximately 2.5m below the surface. The northern end of the second area, the former nursery site, was truncated. However, a few archaeological features were identified below the disturbance.

It is therefore likely that some archaeological remains do exist on the former nursery site, although they may be partially disturbed or truncated. No evidence was uncovered for remains on the area of the balancing pond. However, truncation and/or disturbance in the area is minimal and any archaeological features present are likely to survive.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This report is an assessment of the results of an archaeological monitoring of twenty six geotechnical pits, undertaken by RSK ENSR Ltd, on the former nursery site and Balancing Pond 2 at Priors Green, Takeley, Essex (Fig. 1).

Essex County Council Field Archaeology Unit (ECC FAU) carried out the monitoring for RPS Planning on behalf of Countryside Properties. The project was carried out in accordance with a Method Statement produced by RPS Planning. The site archive will be deposited at Saffron Walden Museum. A copy of this report will be deposited with the Essex Heritage and Conservation Record (EHCR), a further copy will also be uploaded to the OASIS database.

Both the fieldwork and the reporting have been carried out to professional standards and guidance issued by the Institute of Field Archaeologists (1999) and the *ALGAO* standards for fieldwork (Gurney 2003).

The report is structured to describe the background to the project, followed by an assessment of the results of the fieldwork, followed by a discussion of the archaeological potential of the two areas. Appendices include descriptions of the test pits, details of the archive contents and the EHCR summary. All illustrations are placed together towards the back of the report.

2.0 BACKGROUND

2.1 Location and Topography (Fig 1)

The location of the Balancing Pond is to the west of the Phase 3 development site whilst the Former nursery site is bounded to the north by Jacks Lane, to the south by Dunmow Road and to the east and west by property boundaries (TL 5720 2148).

2.2 Geology

The depth of the topsoil averaged c.0.3m, with between 0.1 and 0.5m of mid brown clay subsoil below this.

The drift geology of the site was generally that of pale brown chalky boulder-clay of the Lowestoft Formation, although this was became chalkier approximately 2m below ground level. The underlying solid geology of the area is London Clay (BGS map EW222 Great Dunmow v.2).

2.3 History and Archaeology

The site is located within a wider agricultural landscape, dating from the Bronze Age through to the present day. This landscape is becoming increasingly better understood and documented as a result of archaeological fieldwork taking place in advance of extensive construction development in the Takeley area. This is particularly evident in the recent work at Stansted Airport (Havis & Brooks 2004; Framework Archaeology in prep), evaluation and excavation work undertaken in advance of the re-alignment and construction of the A120 (Fitzpatrick 2001), Frogs Hall (Ennis in prep) and also by recent work undertaken in Takeley itself (Robertson 2005 and 2006) and some 1.5km to the west of the present site (Roberts 2003).

To the immediate south of the site Dunmow Road is thought to be on the approximate line of Stane Street, the Roman road from Braughing/Puckridge to Colchester (Drury and Rodwell 1980). To the northeast at Frogs Hall is a presumptive Roman villa (ESMR 9140) with associated Roman landscape features whilst Warish Hall (ESMR 4572), a Scheduled medieval moated site (protected under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act, 1979), lies 1km to the north. Another medieval moated site, Jacks Green (ESMR 4655), is located immediately to the north of the current investigation area but still within the limits of the site. Jacks Lane, a bridleway that runs east-west immediately through the site, is also thought to have medieval origins. The nursery itself has its origins in the years between 1896 and 1915 (2nd & 3rd ed OS maps). It was previously open fields.

3.0 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The general aim of the project was to establish the potential for archaeological remains in the proposed development area, with a view to developing an archaeological mitigation strategy if there is potential for significant remains.

4. METHOD

The project comprised of monitoring and recording geotechnical test pitting across the development area. The test pits were excavated using a mechanical excavator. The sections and location of each pit was recorded and a photographic record comprising of colour slides and monochrome prints was maintained throughout the fieldwork. All plans were linked to the Ordnance Survey National Grid.

Standard FAU methodologies were employed with regard to the recording. All *IFA* standards and by-laws and *ALGAO's* Standards for Field Archaeology in the East of England (Gurney 2003) were adhered to throughout the project.

5. FIELDWORK RESULTS (Fig 1)

Twenty-six test pits (TP) were machine excavated by the geotechnical investigation contractor at various locations across two areas, the former nursery site and the balancing pond. All measured 3 x 0.5m and were between 2.5 and 4m deep. Each test pit is briefly described below. Further information can be found in Appendix 1.

Two areas of the site were investigated, the former nursery site and the site of Balancing Pond 2. Six test pits were excavated in the area of the balancing pond (TPs 1-6) with the remaining twenty excavated over the former nursery site.

The balancing pond is located to the northeast of the 2005 excavation in an area that is currently under crop. The pond lies in a roughly linear depression which runs along the northern edge of the field, and extends into the adjacent ones.

The former nursery site is located immediately to the west of the 2005 excavation. The northern part of it was formerly occupied by a number of greenhouses, which have been demolished. The southern area was covered by mature trees and scrubby bushes. In the area of the former greenhouses the ground had been truncated and no topsoil and very little subsoil remained. The northern end of the development area, towards the moated site, was not test pitted due to ecological restrictions. The land falls gently southwards towards Dunmow Road.

5.1 Balancing Pond Site (Fig 2)

5.1.1 Test pit 1 (Fig 2)

Located at the south eastern end of the balancing pond this test pit was excavated to a depth of c.3m. Three distinct layers were recorded; from the top down these were 0.3m of topsoil, 0.3m of mid brown clay subsoil and 2.5 m of light brown chalky till with large flint nodules towards the bottom. No archaeological features were identified.

5.1.2 Test pit 2 (Fig 2)

To the north of TP1, TP2 was approximately 4m deep. Five layers were identified in the section; 0.25m of topsoil, 0.26m of mid brown clay subsoil, 2 m of light brown chalky till, 1.4m of dark grey black silty clay (probably the fill of a palaeochannel) and 0.5m of white and light brown sand. No other archaeologically significant features were identified. The only cut feature visible was a modern land drain filled with ballast.

5.1.3 Test Pit 3 (Fig 2)

TP3 was located in the approximate centre of the balancing ponds, to the west of TPs 1 and 2. It was approximately 3m deep and cut through four layers; 0.31m of topsoil, 0.17m of mid brown clay subsoil, 2.3 m of light brown chalky till and 0.5m of the probable palaeochannel. No archaeological features were identified in this test pit.

5.1.4 Test pit 4 (Fig 2)

To the west of TP3, TP4 was again located in the approximate centre of the balancing ponds. It was approximately 4m deep and contained four distinct layers; 0.23m of topsoil, 0.14m of mid brown clay subsoil, 2.1 m of light brown chalky till and 1.7m of a dark grey-black clay fill of a palaeochannel. No archaeological features were identified in either section.

5.1.5 Test pit 5 (Fig 2)

Situated at the north eastern corner of the balancing pond, TP5 was excavated to a depth of 4m. Four distinct soil layers were identified, 0.22m of topsoil; 0.43m of mid brown clay subsoil, 2.3 m of light brown chalky till and 1.1m of palaeochannel. No archaeological features were identified in the section.

5.1.6 Test pit 6 (Fig 2)

Located in the southwest corner of the balancing ponds, TP6 was excavated to a depth of c.3m. Three soil layers were seen in the section, 0.23m of topsoil, 0.36m of mid brown clay subsoil and 2.5 m of light brown chalky till. No archaeological features were identified.

5.2 Former Nursery Site (Fig 3)

5.2.1 Test pit 7 (Fig 3)

TP 7 was not recorded as it was not observed prior to backfilling.

5.2.2 Test pit 8 (Fig 3)

Located to the south of the former green houses, TP8 was excavated to a depth of 3m. Three separate layers were recorded, 0.1m of topsoil, 0.5m of mid brown clay subsoil and 2.5m of light brown chalky till. No archaeological features were identified in this test pit.

5.2.3 Test pit 9 (Fig 3)

To the north of TP8 lay TP9 which was also 3m deep. Again as with TP8 three layers were identified, 0.2m of topsoil, 0.15m of mid brown clay subsoil and 2.7 m of light brown chalky till. No archaeological features were seen in the section.

5.2.4 Test pit 10 (Fig 3)

Situated to the west of TP7, this test pit was excavated to a depth of approximately 3m. Three distinct layers of soil were recorded, 0.2m of topsoil, 0.2m of mid brown clay subsoil and 2.7 m of light brown chalky till. A single archaeological feature was seen cutting through the brown subsoil layer. The feature was only partially seen in the test pit but extended 1.73m from the southern baulk. It was 0.73m deep and was filled by a dark brown silty clay. No finds were recovered from the fill of the feature and it is difficult to assign a form to it, it did however appear in both sections of the test pit which suggests that it may be a ditch.

5.2.5 Test pit 11 (Fig 3)

TP11 lay to the north of TP10. It was 4m deep and the section showed three distinct layers; 0.15m of topsoil, 0.2m of mid brown clay subsoil and 2.7m of light brown chalky till. One feature, a possible large ditch, was seen in the section. The ditch was approximately 1.2m deep and extended beyond the limits of the test pit. It was filled with a mid brown chalky till with pink mottles, no finds were recovered from the fill. The size and location of this feature suggests that it may be a continuation of the large east-west running ditch seen in Area 4 of Priors Green Phase 1, Stage 2 (Robertson 2006).

5.2.6 Test pit 12 (Fig 3)

Lying to the north of TP11, TP12 was excavated to a depth of 3m. Three distinct soil layers were recorded in the section; 0.2m of topsoil, 0.2m of mid brown clay subsoil and 2.5m of light brown chalky till. No archaeological features were identified and no finds were collected.

5.2.7 Test pit 13 (Fig 3)

TP13 was located in the southwest corner of the area formerly covered with green houses. It was excavated to a depth of 1.6m where a large obstruction prevented any further excavation. Only modern rubble was seen in the section.

5.2.8 Test pit 14 (Fig 3)

Situated in the centre of the southern limits of the former greenhouses TP14 was excavated to a depth of 3m. Four soil layers were identified in the section; 0.3m of modern rubble, 0.1m of mid brown clay, 0.4m of modern rubble and 2.2 m of light brown chalky till. No archaeological features were identified.

5.2.9 Test pit 15 (Fig 3)

In the southeast corner of the area of the former greenhouses TP15 was excavated to a depth of 3m. Three distinct layers were identified; 0.3m of modern rubble, 0.3m of mid brown clay subsoil and 2.5 m of light brown chalky till. No archaeological features were identified in the section.

5.2.10 Test pit 16 (Fig 3)

Located along the eastern edge of the greenhouses TP16 was machine excavated to a depth of c.3m. Three separate layers were identified; 0.5m of modern rubble, 0.3m of mid brown clay subsoil and 2.3 m of light brown chalky till. A single feature was seen in both sections of the test pit. The probable ditch ran northwest to south east and was 0.7m wide and 0.6m deep. It was filled by dark brown silty clay but no finds were recovered from it.

5.2.11 Test pit 17 (Fig 3)

Situated in the northeast corner of the site TP17 was approximately 3m deep. It contained three distinct layers; 0.3m of modern rubble, 0.3m of mid brown clay subsoil and 2.5 m of light brown chalky till. No archaeological features were identified in either of the sections.

5.2.12 Test pit 18 (Fig 3)

Lying along the northern limits of the area of investigation TP18 was machine excavated to a depth of approximately 3m. Three distinct layers were identified in the section of the test pit; 0.5m of modern rubble, 0.2m of mid brown clay subsoil and 2.3m of light brown chalky till. A possible east – west running ditch was recorded along the northern edge of this test pit. It was in excess of 1m wide and was 0.7m deep. It was filled with dark brown silty clay from which no finds were recovered.

5.2.13 Test pit 19 (Fig 3)

Situated in the centre of the northern limits of the area of investigation TP19 was excavated to a depth of 2.7m. Four soil layers were identified in the section; 0.2m of modern rubble, 0.4m of mid grey brown silty clay, 0.1m of mid brown clay subsoil and 2m of light brown chalky till. No archaeological features were identified.

5.2.14 Test pit 20 (Fig 3)

Located at the north western corner of former greenhouses TP20 was excavated to a depth of 2.5m. Two distinct soil layers were identified in the section; 1m of modern rubble, and 1.5m of light brown chalky till. No archaeological features were identified.

5.2.15 Test pit 21 (Fig 3)

Situated in the southwest corner of the green house area TP21 was approximately 2.5m deep. It contained two distinct layers; 0.35m of topsoil, and 2.2 m of light brown chalky till. No archaeological features were identified in either of the sections.

5.2.16 Test pit 22 (Fig 3)

Located to the east of TP21, TP22 was excavated to a depth of 2.5m. Four separate layers were identified in the section; 0.4m of modern rubble, 0.1m of blue grey silty clay, 0.4m of brown clay and 1.6 m of light brown chalky till. No archaeological features were identified.

5.2.17 Test pit 23 (Fig 3)

Situated to the north of TP14, TP23 was approximately 3m deep. It contained three separate layers; 0.3m of modern rubble, 0.1m of mid brown clay subsoil and 2.5 m of light brown chalky till. No archaeological features were identified in the test pit.

5.2.18 Test pit 24 (Fig 3)

Located to the north of TP23, TP24 was machine excavated to a depth of 2.5m. Two distinct layers were identified in the sections; 0.3m of modern rubble and 2.2m of light brown chalky till. A single feature, a presumptive gully, was seen running east-west through the test pit and was over 0.3m wide, 0.4m deep and was filled by dark brown clay. No finds were collected from either the feature or the test pit.

5.2.19 Test pit 25 (Fig 3)

Positioned over a fuel tank in the centre of the area of the former green houses, TP25 was approximately 4m deep. Only two layers were identified in the section; 0.3m of modern rubble and 3.7m of light brown chalky till with mid brown clay lenses. No archaeological features were identified in either section.

5.2.20 Test pit 26 (Fig 3)

Located immediately to the east of TP25, TP26 was situated down the southern side of a fuel tank. It was machine excavated to a depth of approximately 4m and three separate layers were identified; 0.2m of modern rubble, 1.7m of dirty yellow clay which was probably redeposited and 2m of light brown chalky till. No archaeological features were identified, although the top 2m of the test pit was disturbed.

6. FINDS AND ENVIRONMENTAL MATERIAL

No finds were recovered from the fills of the features or the subsoil. No deposits with perceived environmental potential were identified and so no soil samples were taken. Given the general lack of artefacts recovered from the excavations on Phase I, Stage II of the development, immediately to east of the former nursery site, this lack of finds is not out of character with the recorded archaeological remains.

7. CONCLUSIONS

The two areas that were test pitted, the balancing ponds and the former nursery site, have different potential for the survival of features, primarily due to the differing previous land-use of the two areas. It is clear that the area of the balancing ponds has never been subjected to any kind of development, while the former nursery site, or at least the northern part of it, has been subject to truncation and /or disturbance by the construction and demolition of greenhouses and other structures.

Balancing Pond 2

The test pits in the area of the balancing pond, while revealing no archaeological features, did indicate that there was little disturbance to any potential archaeological levels, however no archaeological features were actually identified in the test pits. The palaeochannel, which was identified some 2.5m below the surface, was the only potentially archaeologically significant deposit in the area. The potential for environmental analysis in the form of pollen etc from this deposit is reasonably high as it is sealed, with natural features providing important information about changing environments in the surrounding landscape.

Former Nursery site

The northern end of the former nursery site, with the possible exception of the moated area, has been partially truncated by the construction and subsequent demolition of the greenhouses, although archaeological features were recorded in five of the twenty excavated pits. On average the amount of modern rubble covering this area seems to be about 0.5m. If the topsoil and subsoil was similar in depth to that seen to the east on the Priors Green Phase 1, Stage 2 excavation then it would have been originally c.0.5m in depth. The remnants of the subsoil was identified in a number of the test pits in this area, usually to a depth less than 0.2m, suggesting that the area has in general been truncated by approximately 0.3m. Given the apparent lack of substantial truncation and the identification of some presumptive archaeological features the potential for the survival of archaeological remains in the area formerly occupied by the greenhouses is moderate, especially along the eastern side of the area.

The southern end of the former nursery site was covered with mature trees and bushes. It seems likely that this area has not been subjected to any great degree of truncation, although an amount of root damage is to be expected. Some presumptive archaeological features were seen in the test pits, which indicates that there is a moderate potential for survival of features.

Overall, it is likely that some archaeological features do survive in the former nursery site, although the truncation over the area formerly occupied by the greenhouses suggests that only the larger/

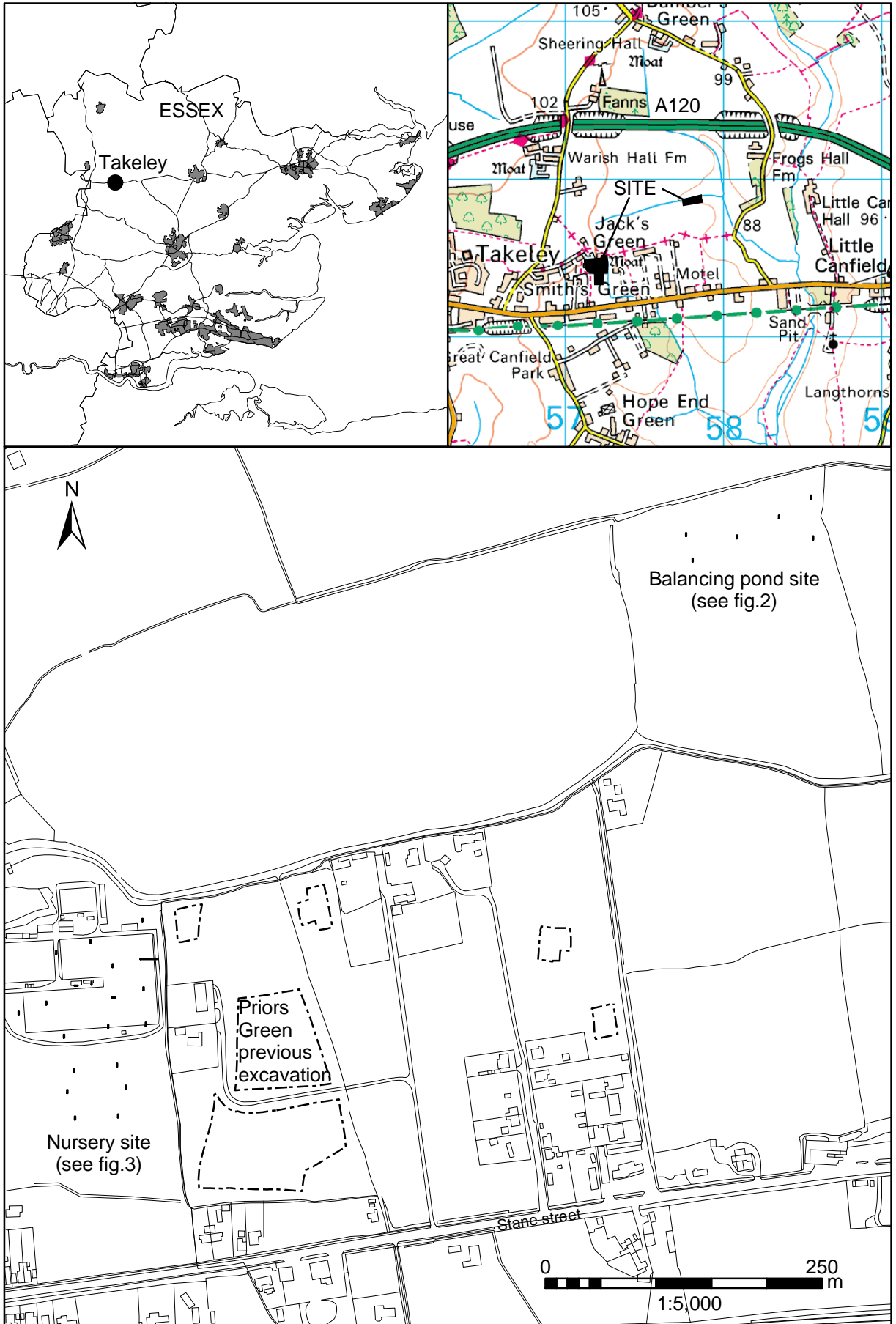
deeper features will survive. It is further likely that the density of archaeological features in this area is not high and may be similar in character to those seen during the Phase 1 mitigation works.

Acknowledgements

This project was commissioned by RPS Planning on behalf of Countryside Properties. Thanks go to Simon Blatherwick for his assistance throughout the project. Thanks are also due to RSK ENSR Ltd and especially Matthew Kennett for his assistance on site. A. Lewsey undertook the on site survey and prepared the illustrations. M. Atkinson managed the project and the author carried out the fieldwork.

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Fig.1. Site location

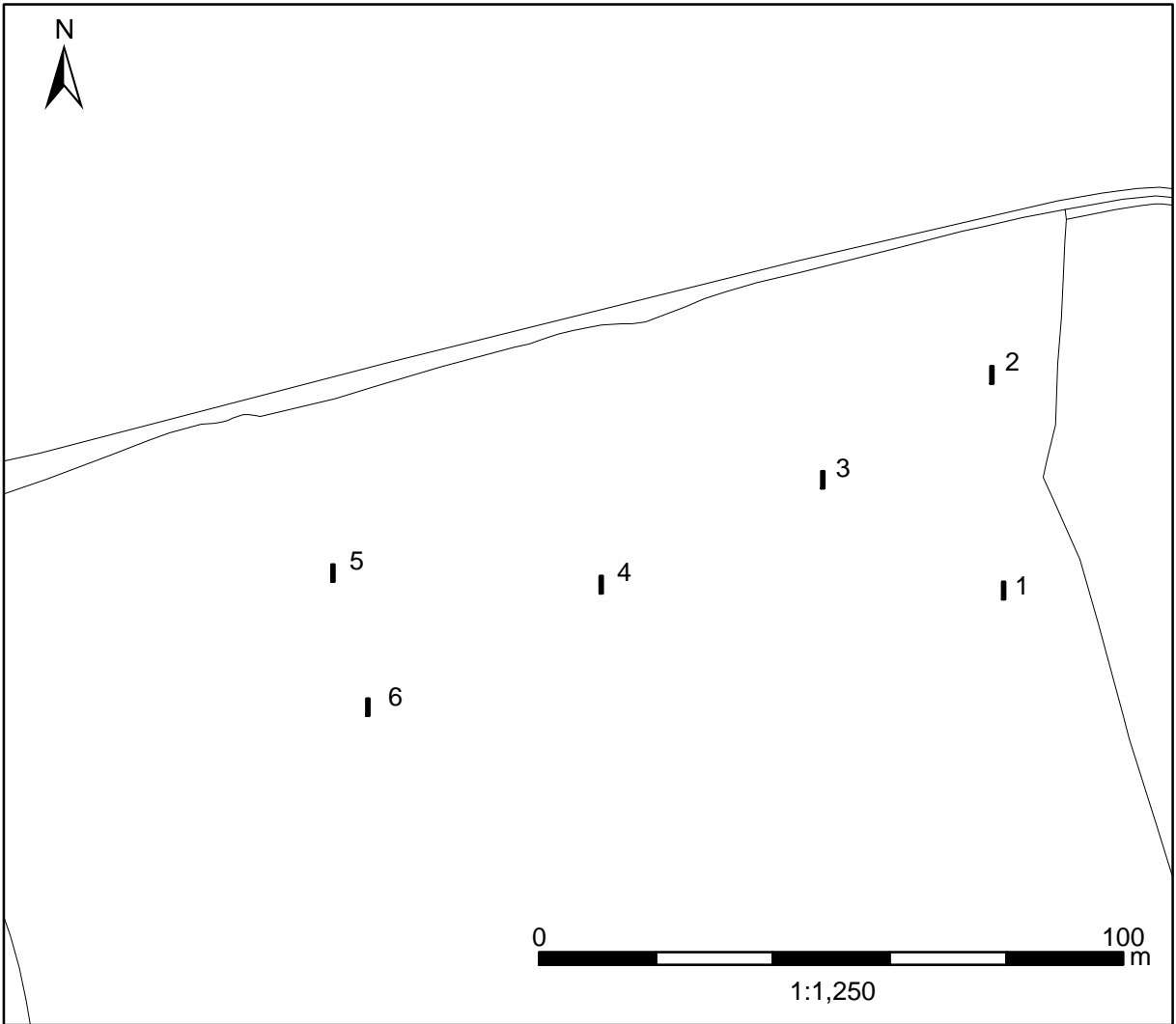
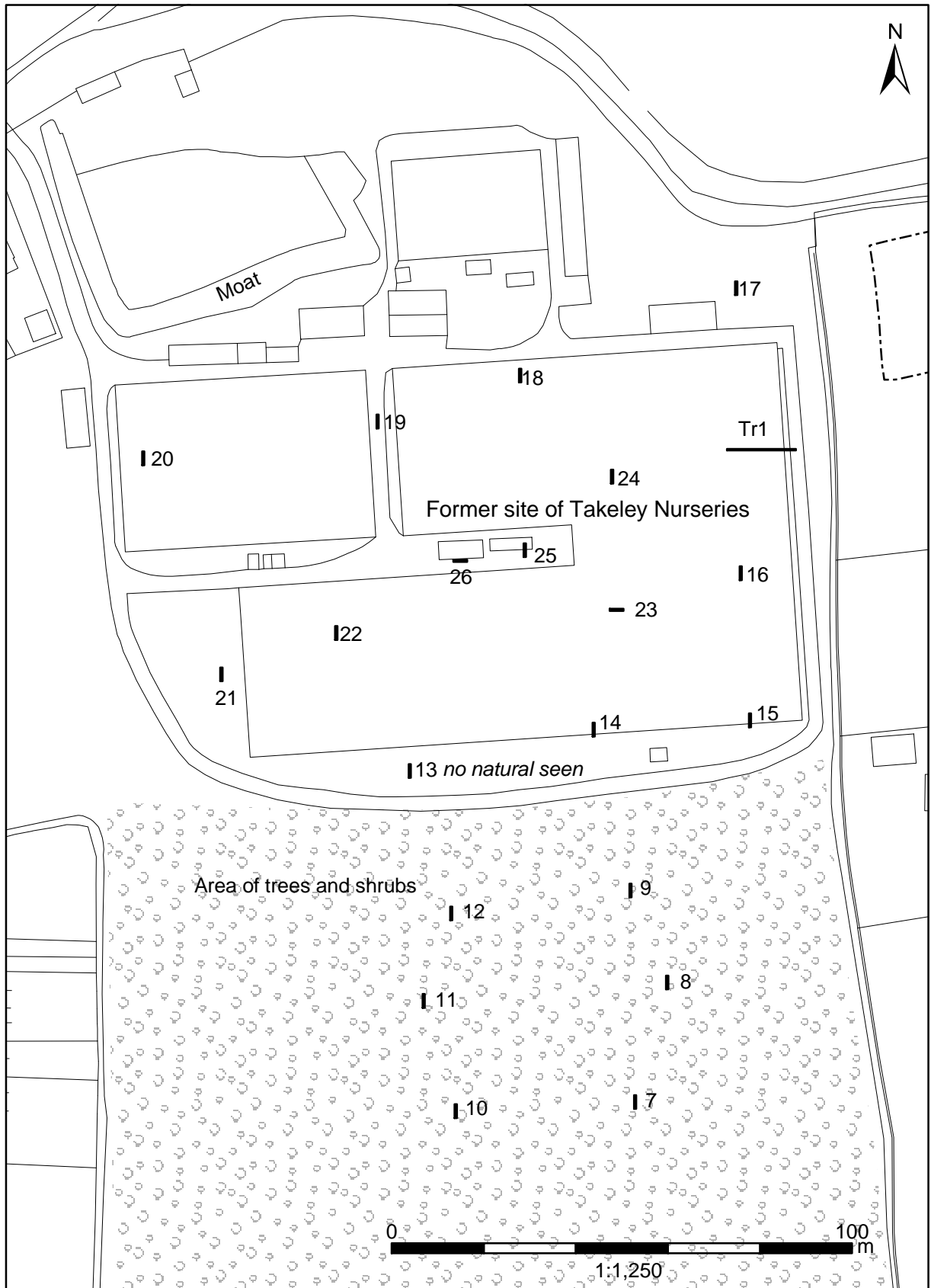


Fig.2. Location of geotechnical pits at the balancing pond site



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Fig.3. Location of geotechnical pits at the nursery site

APPENDIX 1: FIELDWORK DATA

All dimensions are given in metres.

Test Pit	Dimensions (L x W)	Depth	Truncation of ground level?	Archaeological Features
1	3 x 0.5	3	No	No
2	3 x 0.5	4.5	No	No
3	3 x 0.5	3	No	No
4	3 x 0.5	4	No	No
5	3 x 0.5	3	No	No
6	3 x 0.5	3	No	No
7	3 x 0.5	?	?	?
8	3 x 0.5	3	No	No
9	3 x 0.5	3	No	No
10	3 x 0.5	3	No	Yes
11	3 x 0.5	4	No	Yes
12	3 x 0.5	3	No	No
13	3 x 0.5	1.1	Yes	No
14	3 x 0.5	3	Yes	No
15	3 x 0.5	3	Yes	No
16	3 x 0.5	3	Yes	Yes
17	3 x 0.5	3	Yes	No
18	3 x 0.5	3	Yes	Yes
19	3 x 0.5	2.5	Yes	No
20	3 x 0.5	2.5	Yes	No
21	3 x 0.5	2.5	No	No
22	3 x 0.5	2.5	Yes	No
23	3 x 0.5	3	Yes	No
24	3 x 0.5	3	Yes	Yes
25	3 x 0.5	4	Yes	No
26	3 x 0.5	4	Yes	No

APPENDIX 2: ARCHIVE INDEX

SITE NAME : Balancing Pond 2 & former Nursery Site, Priors Green, Takeley (TAPG 06)

Index to the Archive

File containing:

1. Research Archive

1.1 Client Report

2. Site Archive

2.1 26 x Test pit section drawings and notes

No finds

APPENDIX 6: EHER SUMMARY SHEET

Site Name/Address: Balancing Pond 2 and former Nursery Site, Priors Green, Takeley	
Parish: Takeley	District: Uttlesford
NGR: TL 5720 2148	Site Code: TAPG 06
Type of Work: Watching brief on Geotechnical test pits	Site Director/Group: A. Robertson ECC Field Archaeology Unit
Date of Work: 23rd to 25th January 2006	Size of Area Investigated: Development area c.18ha
Location of Finds/Curating Museum: Saffron Walden Museum	Funding Source: RPS Planning (on behalf of Countryside Properties)
Further Work Anticipated? Yes	Related EHER Nos: 4572; 4655; 9140
Final Report: N/A	
Periods Represented: Unknown	
SUMMARY OF FIELDWORK RESULTS:	
<p>As part of an ongoing programme of construction works in the Priors Green area of Takeley, Essex. Essex County Council Field Archaeology Unit (ECC FAU) was commissioned by RPS Planning to archaeologically record geotechnical test pits to assess the site potential.</p> <p>Twenty-six geotechnical trial pits spread across the two development areas were recorded. The trial pits excavated in the area of Balancing Pond 2 revealed no cut archaeological features, although a palaeochannel was identified, running approximately east-west, approximately 2.5 below the surface. The northern end of the former nursery site was partially truncated. However, a few archaeological features were identified below the disturbance.</p> <p>It is therefore likely that some archaeological remains do exist on the former nursery site, although it may be disturbed or truncated. No evidence was uncovered for remains on the area of the balancing pond. However, truncation and/or disturbance in the area is minimal and any archaeological features present are likely to survive.</p>	
Previous Summaries/Reports: N.A.	
Author of Summary: A. Robertson (ECC FAU)	Date of Summary: March 2006