

**SPINE ROUTE SOUTH
PRIORS GREEN
TAKELEY
ESSEX**

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION
BY
TRIAL TRENCHING**



**Essex County Council
Field Archaeology Unit**



December 2006

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**SPINE ROUTE SOUTH
PRIORS GREEN, TAKELEY**

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION BY
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Client: RPS Planning (on behalf of Countryside Properties Plc)

FAU Project No.: 1663

NGR: TL 5730 2140 (Central)

Site Code: TAPG 06

OASIS No.: essexcou1-18989

Date of Fieldwork: 15 August to 21 September 2006

SUMMARY

As part of an ongoing programme of construction works for a housing development in the Priors Green area of Takeley, Essex, Essex County Council Field Archaeology Unit was commissioned by RPS Planning to evaluate the route of the southern spine road by evaluation trenches.

Of the original 10 trenches only six were excavated, the remaining four will be integrated into the archaeological evaluation of a later phase of the development. Trenches 5 and 6 lay within Broadfield wood, 7 and 8 lay in the area of a former orchard and 9 and 10 were in the area of the former Takeley Nursery. No archaeological features or deposits were identified in any of the trenches, nor any artefacts collected.

There is no indication that significant archaeological remains are present along the route. However, if remains are present beyond the confines of the evaluation trenches, the general lack of truncation suggests that the potential for survival, of larger features at least, will be good.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This report presents the results of an archaeological evaluation by trial trenching along the route of the Southern spine road at the Priors Green housing development, Takeley, Essex (Fig. 1).

Essex County Council Field Archaeology Unit (ECC FAU) carried out the evaluation for RPS Planning on behalf of Countryside Properties Plc.

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. Appendices include descriptions of the test pits, details of the archive contents and the EHER summary. All illustrations are placed together towards the back of the report.

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 Historic Environment Record (EHER). A further copy will also be uploaded to the OASIS database.

2.0 BACKGROUND

2.1 Location and Topography (Fig 1)

The investigation area runs, from north to south, through the former nursery site, the former orchard and Broadfield wood. With the exception of the trenches in the former nursery site, which were dug through demolition debris, the rest of the trenches were situated in wooded areas, of varying density. The southern spine route is surrounded by Phase II of the Priors Green development. In general the land rises gently to the north between Dunmow Road and Jacks Lane.

2.2 Geology

The two western trenches in Broadfield Wood revealed only a shallow depth of topsoil, c.0.2m, which was comprised mostly of degraded leaf mould. The topsoil in the two trenches in the former nursery site was heavily contaminated by modern debris. On average the depth of topsoil along the southern spine route ranged from 0.16m to 0.41m. Most of the trenches also revealed a thin

underlying layer of mid brown clay subsoil; although in Broadfield wood this was light grey brown, with an average depth of c.0.15m.

The drift geology of the site was generally that of pale brown chalky boulder-clay of the Lowestoft Formation, although this was mixed with patches of mid orangy brown clay. 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, that has evolved 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 further west of the present site (Roberts 2003).

To the 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 (EHER 9140) with associated Roman landscape features. Jacks Green medieval moated site, (EHER 4655), is located c.300m to the north of the current investigation area. Warish Hall (EHER 4572), another medieval moated site (a scheduled Ancient Monument), lies further to the north. Jacks Lane, a bridleway that runs east-west to the north of the site, is also thought to have medieval origins.

Recent excavations within the Phase 1 area of this development revealed a range of multi-period remains across a 10ha area, to the east of the current site. This included Iron Age boundaries and occupation remains, a medieval farmstead alongside Jacks Lane, and three phases of apparently post-medieval cultivation trench systems (Robertson 2006 a).

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 to be present across the wider site area.

The specific aims of this part of the project are broadly similar to those for the Phase I evaluation (RPS 2005). The following two aims have also been added

- Do the Phase 1 Iron Age landscape features extend into the Phase 2 area and if so is there evidence of associated settlement?
- Do the possible horticultural ditches of post-medieval date, found in Phase 1, extend into the Phase 2 area?

4.0 METHOD

The evaluation originally comprised the excavation and recording of ten trenches along the length of the southern Spine Route. Due to the presence of overhead cables at the western end of the Spine Route, Trenches 1 – 4 were not excavated at this stage but will be included in the evaluation of the wider Phase 2 development area.

Trenches 5 – 10 were excavated using a mechanical excavator under archaeological direction and supervision. A written description of each trench was compiled on pro-forma trench sheets. All the trenches were planned and located using GPS; representative sections of the baulks were drawn and a photographic record comprising monochrome print and digital images 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.

5.0 FIELDWORK RESULTS (Fig 1)

Six trenches were machine-excavated under archaeological supervision. Trenches 5 and 6 were located in Broadfield Wood, Trenches 7 and 8 were located in the former orchard and 9 and 10 in the former Nursery site. Each trench is briefly described below. Further information can be found in Appendix 1.

5.1 Trench 5

Trench 5 was located in western part of Broadfield Wood. It measured 30m x 1.6m and was excavated to a depth of 0.35m and aligned east - west. The topsoil had a high humic content, as would be expected in the middle of a mature wood, and was approximately 0.23m deep. A thin

layer of mid grey brow clay silt subsoil, 0.12m deep, was identified between the topsoil and the mid orange brown clay natural geology.

No archaeological remains were identified and only disturbance observed was caused by tree roots. No finds were collected and no environmental samples were taken from this trench.

5.2 Trench 6

Situated in the eastern part of Broadfield Wood, Trench 6 was aligned east-west and measured 30m x 1.6m and was excavated to a depth of 0.3m and orientated east - west. As with Trench 5, the 0.16m deep topsoil had a high humic content. Below the topsoil was the same subsoil as trench 5, which was 0.14m deep and overlay the mid orange brown clay natural geology.

The only disturbance in this trench was caused by root action. No archaeological features or deposits were identified and no finds were collected or environmental samples taken.

5.3 Trench 7

Located immediately to the east of Broadfield Wood, in the south west corner of the former orchard, Trench 7 measured 20m x 1.9m and was excavated to a depth of 0.3m. It was orientated southwest – northeast. The length of the trench was reduced due to the presence of thick undergrowth and concerns, raised by the project ecologists, over its removal while ecological monitoring was taking place. The topsoil was 0.3m deep and no subsoil was identified between its base and the light brown chalky clay natural.

A significant amount of root disturbance was noted along the length of this trench. However, no archaeological remains were identified and no finds or environmental samples taken.

5.4 Trench 8

Along the northern edge of the former orchard, trench 8 was orientated approximately north – south. It measured c.27m x 1.9m and was excavated to a depth of 0.44m. The topsoil was 0.19m thick and covered a mid brown slity clay subsoil 0.22m deep. The natural is a mid orange brown clay.

No archaeological features or deposits were identified in this trench and no finds were collected or environmental samples taken.

5.5 Trench 9

Situated roughly in the centre of the former nursery site Trench 9 was aligned north – south. It was moved slightly eastwards from the original planned position to avoid the bases of fuel tanks, which had been identified during the geotechnical pit monitoring of the area. The trench measured 30m x 1.9m and was excavated to a depth of 0.58m. The topsoil was 0.41m deep and was heavily contaminated by modern rubble and glass. Below, the mid brown slity clay subsoil was 0.17m thick and was also heavily contaminated by modern debris. The natural geological deposit ranged from mid orange brown clay to light brown chalky clay.

Although no archaeologically-significant features or deposits were identified in the trench, three modern gullies, filled with ash and degraded breeze block were identified running approximately northwest – southeast across this trench. Also within the trench were four concrete blocks, which were presumably the remains of post settings. All of these features were likely associated with the nursery buildings which formerly occupied the site. No finds were collected and no environmental samples were taken.

5.6 Trench 10

Located in the far north east corner of the former nursery site, Trench 10 was orientated approximately north – south. The trench measured 30m x 1.9m and was excavated onto the pale brown chalky clay natural geology at a depth of 0.49m. The topsoil was 0.38m deep and was contaminated by modern debris. An underlying mid brown clay silt subsoil, 0.11m deep, was present and also contaminated by modern debris.

The northern end of the trench was truncated by modern disturbance containing brick and glass. Three concrete post settings were observed along the length of the trench. No archaeological remains were identified within the trench and no finds collected or environmental samples taken.

6.0 FINDS AND ENVIRONMENTAL MATERIAL

No finds were recovered any of the trenches. No deposits with perceived environmental potential were identified and so no soil samples were collected.

7.0 CONCLUSIONS

Along the eastern and central parts of the southern spine route no archaeological remains were uncovered in any of the six excavated trenches. Trenches 5, 6, 7 and 8 all revealed significant root disturbance to the natural geology, suggesting that only larger features are likely to survive in the, if present, wider vicinity. Trenches 9 and 10 were within the former nursery and heavily disturbed by building footings and demolition activity; as has been found to be the case in other archaeological works undertaken in this part of the site (Robertson 2006b).

The first edition Ordnance Survey map of 1861 - 76 indicates that the whole area was open fields prior to becoming a nursery, orchard and woodland. It is clear from the excavated trenches that over the majority of the investigation area there has been little or no truncation of the ground level and with the exception of Trenches 9 and 10, little modern ground disturbance was noted.

If present, the survival of the archaeological remains along the eastern part of the spine route can be predicted to be reasonably good. However, there is no evidence from the excavated trenches that any such remains exist.

Acknowledgements

This project was commissioned by RPS Planning on behalf of Countryside Properties Plc. Thanks go to Simon Blatherwick for his assistance throughout the project. Thanks are also due to Breheney for their assistance on site. R Havis of HEM monitored the project on behalf of the local planning authority. M. Atkinson managed the project and the author carried out the fieldwork.

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Fig.1. Location plan

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APPENDIX 1: FIELDWORK DATA

All dimensions are given in metres.

Trench	Dimensions (L x W)	Depth	Truncation of ground level?	Archaeological Features	Co-ordinates (NW and SE corners)
5	30 x 1.6	0.35	No	No	TL 57006 21294 / TL 57031 21289
6	30 x 1.6	0.3	No	No	TL 57064 21285 / TL 57092 21279
7	20 x 1.9	0.3	No	No	TL 57166 21297 / TL 57185 21303
8	27 x 1.9	0.44	No	No	TL 57188 21371 / TL 57193 21245
9	30 x 1.9	0.58	Yes	No	TL 57205 21451 / TL 57201 21422
10	30 x 1.9	0.49	Yes	No	TL 57245 21495 / TL 57246 21465

APPENDIX 2: ARCHIVE INDEX

SITE NAME : Spine Road South, Priors Green, Takeley (TAPG 06)

Index to the Archive

File containing:

1. Research Archive

1.1

1.2 Written Scheme of Evaluation

1.3 Client Report

2. Site Archive

2.1 6 x Trench Recording Sheets inc plans and sections

2.2 6 x Digital photographs of Trenches

2.3 2 x Photographic registers

2.4 12 x photographs of trenches (6 x B+W; 6 x Colour slide)

No finds

APPENDIX 3: EHER SUMMARY SHEET

Site Name/Address: Spine Road South, Priors Green, Takeley	
Parish: Takeley	District: Uttlesford
NGR: TL 5730 2140 (Central)	Site Code: TAPG 06
Type of Work: Evaluation by trial trench	Site Director/Group: A. Robertson ECC Field Archaeology Unit
Date of Work: 15 August to 21 September 2006	Size of Area Investigated: Development area c.1ha
Location of Finds/Curating Museum: Saffron Walden Museum	Funding Source: RPS Planning (on behalf of Countryside Properties Plc)
Further Work Anticipated? no	Related EHER Nos: 4572; 4655; 9140
Final Report: N/A	
Periods Represented: modern	
SUMMARY OF FIELDWORK RESULTS: <p>The route of part of a spine road associated with the Priors Green housing development was evaluated by trial trenching. The road ran approximately east - west between Dunmow road to the south and Jacks Lane to the north.</p> <p>Six trenches (Tr 5 – 10) were excavated. Trenches 5 and 6 lay within Broadfield wood, 7 and 8 lay in the area of the former orchard and 9 and 10 were in the area of the former nursery. No archaeological features or deposits were identified in any of the trenches, nor any artefacts collected. The former woodland had caused significant disturbance in trenches 5 – 8 and the area of the former Nursery contained severe modern disturbance and truncation seen in trenches 9 and 10.</p> <p>There is no indication that archaeological remains are present along the route. However, if remains are present beyond the confines of the trenches then the general lack of truncation suggests that the potential for survival, of larger features at least, will be good.</p>	
Previous Summaries/Reports: N.A.	
Author of Summary: A. Robertson (ECC FAU)	Date of Summary: November 2006