

**LAND ADJACENT TO THE
FORMER NURSERY
PRIORS GREEN
TAKELEY
ESSEX**

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION
BY
TRIAL TRENCHING**



Essex County Council
Field Archaeology Unit



November 2006

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Prepared By: Andrew Robertson Position: Project Officer	Signature: Date:
Approved By: Mark Atkinson Position: Unit Manager	Signature: Date:

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Please contact the Archaeological Fieldwork Manager, at the
Field Archaeology Unit,
Fairfield Court, Fairfield Road, Braintree, Essex CM7 3YQ
Tel: 01376 331470
Fax: 01376 331428

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**LAND ADJACENT TO THE FORMER NURSERY
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Client: RPS Planning (on behalf of Knights Developments Ltd)

FAU Project No.: 1706

NGR: TL 57189 21233

Site Code: TAPG 06

OASIS No.: essexcou1-20814

Date of Fieldwork: 21 - 24 November 2006

Planning Application No: UTT1042/02/OP

SUMMARY

As part of an ongoing programme of housing development construction works in the Priors Green area of Takeley, Essex County Council Field Archaeology Unit was commissioned by RPS Planning to evaluate by trial trench a roughly grassed area along the northern side of Dunmow Road. The trenching was a follow-up to the archaeological monitoring of geotechnical test pits previously undertaken on this parcel of land.

Five archaeological trial trenches were excavated across the area. No significant truncation was revealed across the majority of the site, although some modern services and modern soil discolouration, due to leaching, were noted in the northwest corner. A single modern feature was investigated in trench 1 and was judged to be the base of a modern flowerbed associated with a previous structure that stood on the site.

There is no hint that significant archaeological remains survive within this area. Historical mapping suggests that the extant boundaries are long-established and that the area was open fields from at least the late 19th century. No indication of the westward continuation of the Iron Age, medieval and post-medieval remains previously found in the adjacent Phase I development area were uncovered.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This report describes the results of the archaeological trial trenching on the land adjacent to the former Nursery at Priors Green, Takeley, Essex (Fig. 1).

Essex County Council Field Archaeology Unit (ECC FAU) carried out the trenching for RPS Planning on behalf of Knights Developments Ltd. The project was carried out in accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigation produced by RPS Planning (RPS 2006).

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 the results of the fieldwork, and a discussion of the archaeological potential. Appendices include descriptions of the trenches and contexts, details of the archive contents and the EHER summary. All illustrations are placed together towards the back of the report.

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 for development by Knight Developments is located to the south of the Priors Green development spine road and the former Nursery Orchard (the Priors Green, Takeley development is the major residential development currently underway to the North of Dunmow Road in adjacent areas by Countryside Properties). The Knight Developments site is bounded to the east by woodland, to the west by residential property boundaries and Broadfield Wood, to the south by Dunmow Road (the former A120) and to the north by a drainage ditch. The land falls gently from south to north, away from Dunmow Road.

The site is mainly covered with rough pasture. The trees and shrubs that recently occupied the eastern end have been cleared and an area of tarmac hardstanding/ road is located along the southern and western sides. It has formerly been used as stabling and grazing for horses. Part of the central area of the site was unavailable for trial trenching due to a lizard protection zone.

2.2 Geology

Over the southern and western edges of the site the topsoil has been previously removed and a layer of modern hardcore laid down to create a hardstanding. The depth of the topsoil, where present, averages c.0.4m, with between 0.3 and 0.7m of mid brown clay subsoil below this.

The drift geology of the site is generally that of pale brown chalky boulder-clay of the Lowestoft Formation, although this becomes 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, which has evolved from the Bronze Age through to the present day. This landscape is becoming increasingly well 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 for the Priors Green development (Robertson 2005 and 2006) and further 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 (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 Priors Green Phase 1 area of the adjacent housing development revealed a range of multi-period remains across a 10ha area, almost immediately 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).

Prior to being occupied by hardstanding and a small paddock, this site was open fields, as shown by historic mapping. The central and western sections of the area were previously subject to

geotechnical test pitting, which was monitored for archaeological remains (Robertson 2006 b). Seven test pits were observed (fig.1), though no archaeological significant remains were observed.

3.0 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The general aim of the monitoring works was to establish the character, date and function of any archaeological features within the areas of development and link these results to existing Resource Assessments and Research Agenda (Brown and Glazebrook 2000).

The specific aims for the project are based upon those for the Phase 1 excavation at Priors Green (Robertson 2006 a), with the following additions identified by the project Written Scheme of Investigation (RPS 2006):

- Do the Iron Age landscape features, identified at Priors Green Phase 1, extend into this land parcel and if so is there evidence of associated settlement?
- Do the possible horticultural ditches of post-medieval date, seen on the Priors Green Phase 1 area, extend into the Knight Development land parcel?

4.0 METHOD

The project comprised of excavating and recording five trenches across the development area. The trenches were excavated using a mechanical excavator under the supervision of an archaeologist. The sections and location of each trench were recorded, written descriptions on pro forma trench sheets compiled and a photographic record comprising monochrome print and digital images 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)

Five trenches were machine-excavated under archaeological supervision across the investigation area. All measured 30 x 1.7m and were between 0.32 and 0.55m deep. Each trench is briefly described below. Further trench information can be found in Appendix 1 and context information in Appendix 2.

5.1 Trench 1

Located in the south west corner of the investigation area, this trench was excavated to a depth of 0.4m. It was orientated east-west and lay between two concrete footings; the remains of previously demolished structures. The topsoil was 0.32m deep. It overlay 0.08m of mid grey brown silty clay subsoil which in turn overlay the undisturbed natural geology of mid orange brown clay silt.

Four modern service trenches were identified within this trench, all running northwest-southeast, these were likely associated with the building which formerly occupied this area. At the eastern end of the trench the base of a rough tarmac road was identified. The natural geology below the footprint of the road was stained dark green, presumably due to leaching from the tarmac.

A single feature [1] was identified in this trench; a rectangular cut measuring 0.7m x 0.8m and 0.18m deep. It extended northwards out of the trench and seemed to follow the line of the road. A single piece of modern (20th century) roofing tile was recovered from the fill (2) and a reasonable quantity of charcoal and clinker was noted. All the finds were discarded on site. It seems likely that this feature is modern in origin and may represent the base of a flower bed/garden feature (the topsoil in this general area had been much improved with compost) running along the side of the roadway.

5.2 Trench 2

To the immediate south-east of trench 1, trench 2 was orientated north-south and was excavated to a depth of 0.55m. The topsoil was 0.4m deep and was heavily contaminated by modern debris. Below this a 0.15m-thick layer of mid grey brown silty clay subsoil lay above the undisturbed natural geology, a mid orange brown clay silt, that sloped gently down towards the north. No archaeological features or deposits were identified. The trench was moved slightly to the east from its planned position to avoid the heavily stained ground beneath the existing roadway (as noted within trench 1).

5.3 Trench 3

Situated along the southern edge of the site, trench 3 ran east – west. It was excavated to a depth of 0.32m onto the undisturbed natural geology, a mid orange brown clay silt. The topsoil was 0.24m thick and contained a significant amount of modern debris. Below this, but directly above the undisturbed natural, was a 0.08m-thick mid green brown silty clay subsoil. No archaeological features or deposits were identified

5.4 Trench 4

Orientated north – south, trench 4 was situated to the north of trench 3. It was excavated to a depth of 0.38m. The topsoil was 0.28m thick and lay on top of a mid grey brown silty clay 0.1m thick, which in turn lay on top of the undisturbed natural geology; a mixture of mid orange brown clay silt and a pale yellow brown chalky till. A significant amount of root disturbance was noted within this trench but no archaeological remains were observed.

5.5 Trench 5

Located to the east of trench 4, trench 5 ran east - west and was excavated to a depth of 0.5m. The topsoil was 0.25m deep and overlay 0.1m of mid grey brown silty clay subsoil. The undisturbed natural geology, mid orange brown clay silt, lay directly below the subsoil and similar to trench 4 was disturbed by roots. No archaeological features or deposits were identified within this trench

6.0 FINDS AND ENVIRONMENTAL MATERIAL

No significant finds were collected and retained from any of the trenches. No deposits with perceived environmental potential were identified and so no soil samples were taken for analysis.

7.0 CONCLUSIONS

It is clear that over the majority of the site there has been little or no truncation of the ground level. Trench 1 contained modern service trenches as well as the footprint of a modern surfaced track and trenches 4 and 5 contained root disturbance. However, none of the disturbance was significant enough to mask anything more than the most ephemeral of archaeological features, should they have been present.

There is no indication from the trenches that any significant archaeological remains are present within the area of the site. The only feature identified was the base of a modern flower bed, which was likely associated with the demolished structure.

The lack of any noteworthy archaeological features within the trenches suggests that there is unlikely to be significant archaeological remains in the surrounding area. It further suggests that the existing boundaries, primarily the extant ditch to the north and Dunmow Road to the south are long-established and that historically this area was open fields. This is supported by historical mapping as the 1st edition Ordnance Survey map of 1875 shows the boundaries as they are today.

It is somewhat noteworthy that very little archaeological remains have been uncovered during trenching on the areas to the north and west of this site (Robertson, In prep). Only undated field boundaries were identified but these did not seemingly continue into the area under discussion, even though their alignment suggests that they could have. The archaeological remains uncovered to the immediate east of the site, in the Phase I of the Priors Green housing development, were tentatively identified as sequences of late medieval or post-medieval horticultural ditches. The fact that these remains do not seem to continue to the west of the current boundary again suggests that the extant field divisions, both ditches and hedgerows, are long-established and have probably defined this part of the landscape for a number of centuries.

Acknowledgements

This project was commissioned by RPS Planning on behalf of Knights Developments Ltd. Thanks go to Rob Masefield for his assistance throughout the project. M. Atkinson managed the project, the author carried out the fieldwork and A. Lewesy undertook the surveying and produced the digital illustrations; all are employed by ECC FAU. R Havis of HEM monitored the work on behalf of the local planning authority.

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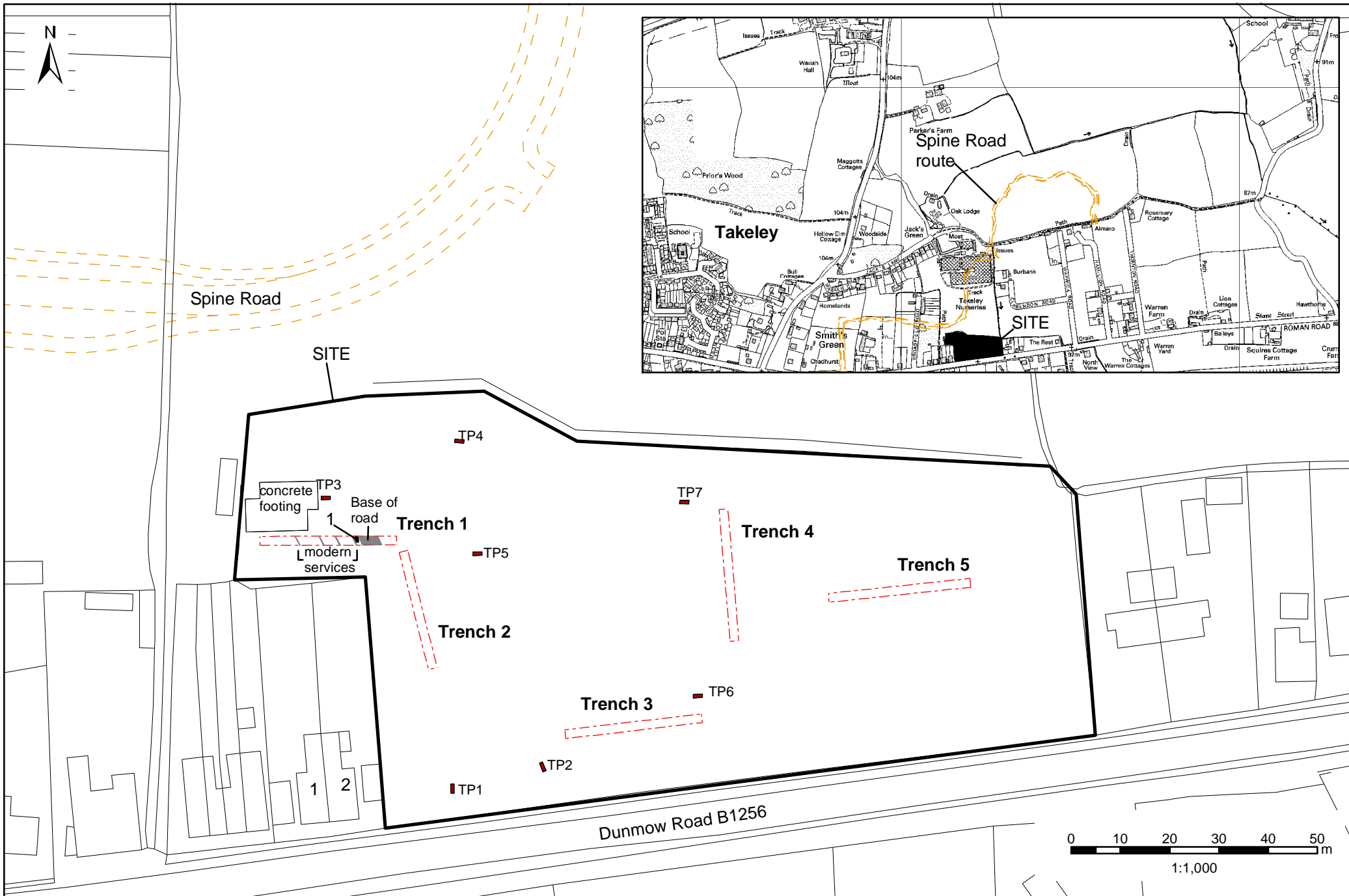


Fig.1. Site and trench location plan

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APPENDIX 1: TRENCH DATA

All dimensions are given in metres.

Trench	Dimensions (L x W)	Depth	Truncation of ground level?	Archaeological Features	Co-ordinates
1	30 x 1.7	0.4	No	Yes	TL 57131 21145 / TL 57159 21245
2	30 x 1.7	0.55	No	No	TL 57161 21243 / TL 57167 21220
3	30 x 1.7	0.32	No	No	TL 57193 21206 / TL 57221 21209
4	30 x 1.7	0.38	No	No	TL 57226 21252 / TL 57228 21225
5	30 x 1.7	0.5	No	No	TL 57247 21234 / TL 57276 21237

APPENDIX 2: CONTEXT DATA

All dimensions are given in metres

Context No	Type	Filled By	Trench No	Dimensions (L x W)	Depth	Date
1	Flower Bed	2	1	0.7+ x 0.8	0.18	Modern
2	Fill	-	1	0.7+ x 0.8	0.18	Modern

APPENDIX 3: ARCHIVE INDEX

SITE NAME: Land Adjacent to the Former Nursery Site, Priors Green, Takeley (TAPG 06)

Index to the Archive

File containing:

1. Research Archive

- 1.1 Brief of Archaeological Works
- 1.2 Written Scheme of Investigation
- 1.3 Client Report

2. Site Archive

- 2.1 5 x Trench recording Sheets (inc representative trench sections)
- 2.2 2 x Context sheets
- 2.3 1 x Photographic registers
- 2.4 5 x Black and White photographic prints
- 2.5 8 x Digital images (and hard copies)

No finds

APPENDIX 4: EHER SUMMARY SHEET

Site Name/Address: Land adjacent Dunmow Road, Priors Green, Takeley	
Parish: Takeley	District: Uttlesford
NGR: TL 57189 21233	Site Code: TAPG 06
Type of Work: Trial Trenching	Site Director/Group: A. Robertson ECC Field Archaeology Unit
Date of Work: 21st – 24th November 2006	Size of Area Investigated: Development area c.0.75ha
Location of Finds/Curating Museum: Saffron Walden Museum	Funding Source: RPS Planning (on behalf of Knight Developments Ltd)
Further Work Anticipated? No	Related EHER Nos: 4572; 4655; 9140
Final Report: EAH Summary	
Periods Represented: Modern	
SUMMARY OF FIELDWORK RESULTS:	
<p>As part of an ongoing programme of housing development construction works in the Priors Green area of Takeley, Essex County Council Field Archaeology Unit was commissioned by RPS Planning to evaluate by trial trench a roughly grassed area along the northern side of Dunmow Road. The trenching was a follow-up to the archaeological monitoring of geotechnical test pits previously undertaken on this parcel of land.</p> <p>Five archaeological trial trenches were excavated across the area. No truncation was revealed across the majority of the site, although some modern services and modern soil discolouration, due to leaching were noted in the northwest corner. A single feature was investigated in trench 1 and was judged to be the base of a modern flowerbed associated with a previous structure that stood on the site.</p> <p>There is no hint that significant archaeological remains survive within this area. Historical mapping suggests that the extant boundaries are long established and that the area was open fields from at least the late 19th century. No indication of the westward continuation of the Iron Age, medieval and post-medieval remains previously found in the adjacent Phase I development area were uncovered.</p>	
Previous Summaries/Reports:	
Robertson, A. 2006. <i>Areas E and F, Priors Green, Takeley, Essex. Archaeological Monitoring of Geotechnical Site Investigation Test Pits.</i> ECC FAU/ RPS client rep 1706	
Author of Summary: A. Robertson (ECC FAU)	Date of Summary: November 2006