BELLROPE MEADOW, SAMPFORD ROAD, THAXTED, ESSEX

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

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AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

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NGR: TL 6115 3170	Report No.2122
District: Uttlesford	Site Code: TX14
Approved: Claire Halpin	Project No. 2808
Signed:	Date: October 2006

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CONTENTS

Project details			
Project name	*Bellrope Meadow, Sampford Road, Thaxted, Essex*		
Project description (250 words) *In October 2006, Archaeological Solutions Limited conducted an archaeological evaluation on land at Bellrope Meadow, Sampford Road, Thaxted, Essex. The site is located c.0.5km to the north of the modern town. Thaxted is known to have been a busy industrial centre in the medieval period, concerned with cutlery production. It is also known to lie within a substantially occupied Roman landscape.* *The archaeological evaluation revealed twelve archaeological features consisting of a pit/ditch terminus, a possible plough furrow, seven ditches, two pits, and a probable modern geotechnical pit. Ditch F1010 Trench 3 produced early Roman pottery. Ditches F1003 Trench 7 and F1019 Trench 9 also dated to this period. Pit/ditch terminus F1006 Trench 7 produced late Iron Age pottery. The remaining features were modern or undated. Subsoil layer L1002 also produced late Iron Age and early Romano-British pottery and CBM in all but five of the twelve trenches. The dating of the site is of interest as it suggests that a late Iron Age phase of activity was superseded by an early Romano-British phase, and it is possible that there was a degree of continuity between the two periods.*		
Project dates (fieldwork)	*9/10/06-17/10/06*		
Previous work (Y/N/?)	*N*	Future work (Y/N/?)	*?*
P. number	*2808*	Site code	*TX14*
Type of project	*Trial Trench Evaluation*		
Site status	*None*		
Current land use	*Vacant former meadow*		
Planned development	*Residential*		
Main features (+dates)	*Ditches of late Iron Age/Roman date*		
Significant finds (+dates)	*Southern British Glazed Ware. AD 70 – 120.*		
Project location			
County/ District/ Parish	*Essex*	*Uttlesford*	*Thaxted*
HER/ SMR for area	*Essex Historic Environment Record*		
Post code (if known)			
Area of site	*c.1.4ha*		
NGR	*TL 6115 3170*		
Height AOD (max/ min)	*c.100mAOD*		
Project creators			
Brief issued by	*ECC HEM*		
Project supervisor/s (PO)	*C Hallybone*		
Funded by	*Mantle Projects Limited*		
Full title	*Bellrope Meadow, Sampford Road, Thaxted, Essex; An Archaeological Evaluation*		
Authors	*C Hallybone, P Weston*		
Report no.	*2122*		
Date (of report)	*October 2006*		

OASIS SUMMARY SHEET

BELLROPE MEADOW, SAMPFORD ROAD, THAXTED, ESSEX AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

SUMMARY

In October 2006, Archaeological Solutions Ltd conducted a programme of archaeological evaluation on land at Bellrope Meadow, Sampford Road, Thaxted, Essex. The site is located c.0.5km to the north of the modern town. Thaxted is known to have been a busy industrial centre in the medieval period, concerned with cutlery production. It is also known to lie within a substantially occupied Roman landscape.

The archaeological evaluation revealed twelve archaeological features consisting of a pit/ditch terminus, a possible plough furrow, seven ditches, two pits, and a probable modern geotechnical pit. Ditch F1010 (Trench 3) produced early Roman pottery. Ditches F1003 (Trench 7) and F1019 (Trench 9) also dated to this period. Pit/ditch terminus F1006 (Trench 7) produced late Iron Age pottery. The remaining features were modern or undated. Subsoil layer L1002 also produced late Iron Age and early Romano-British pottery and CBM in seven of the twelve trenches. The dating of the site is of interest as it suggests that a late Iron Age phase of activity was superseded by an early Romano-British phase, and it is possible that there was a degree of continuity between the two periods.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 During October 2006, Archaeological Solutions Ltd (AS) conducted an archaeological trial trench evaluation of land at Bellrope Meadow, Sampford Road, Thaxted, Essex (NGR 6115 3170; Figs. 1 & 2). The evaluation was commissioned by Mantle Projects Limited prior to the construction of a proposed residential development on the site (planning ref. UTT/2134/03/OP & UTT/0368/06/DFO), to comply with a planning condition imposed by the LPA.

1.2 The evaluation was conducted in accordance with a brief issued by the Essex County Council Historic Environment Management Team (dated 21/09/06), and a specification prepared by AS (dated 02/10/06). The project followed the procedures outlined in the Institute of Field Archaeologists' *Code of Conduct, Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment*s (revised 2001) and *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Field Evaluation* (revised 2001). It also adhered to the relevant sections of *Standards for Field Archaeology in the East of England* (Gurney 2003).

1.3 The aims of the evaluation were to determine the location, extent, date, character, condition, significance and quality of any surviving archaeological remains liable to be threatened by the proposed development.

2 DESCRIPTION OF THE SITE

2.1 Thaxted is situated in the north-west of the county of Essex, equidistant along the B184 from Saffron Walden to the north and Great Dunmow to the south. The site lies directly to the north of the historic town of Thaxted, just to the east of the junction between the B184 Walden Road and the B1051 Sampford Road. It is bounded to the north by the Sampford Road, to the south by private housing, playing fields to the

west and agricultural land to the east. The site is approximately 1.42ha in area and was formerly a meadow (Figs 1 & 2).

3 TOPOGRAPHY, GEOLOGY AND SOILS

3.1 Thaxted lies on the cusp between two solid geologies with London Clay Formation to the south and Woolwich Beds to the north with localised chalky till capping. The soils of the area are of Hanslope Association, described as slowly permeable calcareous clayed soils. Some slowly permeable non-calcareous clayed soils with a slight risk of water erosion (SSEW 1983). The site lies at *c*. 100m AOD (Fig. 1).

4 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

4.1 Prehistoric

4.1.1 Evidence of prehistoric activity in the Thaxted area is limited to surface finds. A fine Neolithic polished axe of greenstone, perforated for hafting, was found just south of Thaxted at TL 61 30,000 20 E 51 56 N and a fieldwalking survey at Goddard's Farm north of Thaxted located a scatter of Prehistoric finds at TL 608 313 (http://ads.ahds.ac.uk/).

4.2 Romano-British

4.2.1 Within the town, Romano-British archaeology is also limited to stray finds. A brass struck coin (290-293AD) of Carausius was found within the structure of the Post Office, Watling Street and gold coin, also of Carausius, was found within the daub of another old house in the town. These finds suggest that a Romano-British site may have existed at Clay Pits Farm as clay from extraction pits on the farm was extensively used in the construction of the older buildings of Thaxted.

4.2.2 Modern agricultural activity north of Thaxted has also provided evidence of Romano-British activity in the area. Romano-British pottery and animal bones were found in 1950, possibly from a ploughed out rubbish pit at TL 6082 3301, and surface finds of oyster shell, Romano-British coarse ware pottery and Samian ware, building material including flints, tegulae and bricks were recovered at TL 614 329, again north of Thaxted, during hedge grubbing. The finds, especially the building material, recovered from the second site suggests the possibility that a Roman villa had once occupied the area.

4.2.3 Thaxted is thought to stand close to the route of the Roman Road between Great Dunmow and Radwinter (Garwood 1998) and excavations at Proud's Farm to the north-west of Thaxted revealed a short section of the Road (www.ads.ahds.ac.uk/).

4.3 Anglo-Saxon

4.3.1 An Anglo-Saxon church is known have been upstanding in Thaxted *c*. 981AD and there is some excavation evidence to suggest that it lies underneath the extant fourteenth to fifteenth century church. The Domesday Book records Thaxted as a well-established and prosperous community by the end of the Saxon period. It was a

very large village in Essex terms, and may well have been a proto-urban settlement. (www.ads.ahds.ac.uk/).

4.4 Medieval

4.4.1 During the medieval period the area of the town was divided between a number of manors, the largest being Thaxted Manor which was based within the town itself. Thaxted was granted a market in 1205, but it probably had already had a market function before that date.

4.4.2 Fourteenth century documentary evidence records rapid expansion of the town, as it became the centre of a thriving cutlery industry. In the Poll Tax returns of 1393 there were 79 cutlers, 11 smiths, 4 sheathers and 2 goldsmiths, suggesting that over a third of the adult male population were employed in the cutlery and associated trades. There is no obvious reason why the cutlers chose Thaxted, although it is known that the manor of Thaxted encouraged the industry by introducing cheaper rents. The earliest references to the cutlery industry in Thaxted are late thirteenth century and fourteenth century surveys suggest that a large number of immigrants had come to the town attracted by the prospect of employment. The cutlery industry needed sites close to water. The cutlers therefore congregated by the stream that ran through the centre of the town. Middle Row was built at the Mill End of Town Street and appears to have largely consisted of cutlers premises (www.unlockingessex.essexcc.gov.uk). Some excavation evidence, in the form of bone-working debris, has been recovered from sites on Town Street and Weaverhead Lane (Medlycott, 1999). The industry appears to have died out by the sixteenth century.

4.4.3 The earlier Anglo-Saxon church was replaced by an ambitious rebuilding programme in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, probably financed by the cutlery industry. Town Street runs downslope from the church in a south-western direction. The Manor House stood on the west side of Town Street. A survey made in 1348 describes a structure with two courtyards surrounded by ranges of buildings and gardens. By 1393 some of the manor buildings were ruinous, and the list of 'new rents' describes the building of dwellings along the western side of Town Street. The main dwelling house itself appears to have survived until the mid-eighteenth century. (www.unlockingessex.essexcc.gov.uk).

4.4.4 The evidence from the surviving buildings indicates that Town Street was originally considerably wider and that it extended northwards as far as the south side of the church and Mill Row. It is suggested that originally much of this area served as the market-place. At some point (possibly the fifteenth century) the area immediately to the south of the church door was incorporated into the churchyard. The guild-hall at the head of Town Street was built in 1450, and the area between it and the church infilled by the building of Stoney Lane in the fourteenth to fifteenth century. Middle Row, between Mill End and Orange Street, at the lower end of Town Street also appears to be market-place infill, and was almost totally developed by 1393 (ibid).

4.4.5 Settlement spread out from the core along Bolford Street, Newbiggin Street, Park Street and Weaverhead Lane. Fieldwalking and metal-detecting in the Park Farm fields around the Church Mill have produced a number of medieval coins and tokens,

including three from France, suggesting active cross-channel trade with the town. It is possible that the quantity of money and tokens found in this field indicates that it had an occasional use as a fair green.

4.5 Post Medieval

4.5.1 The cutlery industry appears to have died out by the sixteenth century. The charter of 1556 refers to 'greate ruine and decay by reason of greate povertie and necessyti', and granted Thaxted the status of a full borough in an attempt to halt the decline. In the sixteenth century weaving was present, and an attempt was made to establish a Guild of Clothiers in 1583. They appear to have congregated on Newbiggin Street.

4.5.2 After the completion of the building of Newbiggin Street, the size and plan of Thaxted remained relatively unchanged until recent times. The market at Mill Row had been abandoned as a trading-place by the sixteenth century and was instead used as the 'town bombey' or midden. In the mid-nineteenth century the extant row of cottages was built there. The Manor House continued in use until the mid-eighteenth century, but the remainder of the buildings had disappeared by then, and no trace of the house itself can be found now.

4.5.3 Thaxted became a stronghold of Nonconformity in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, as reflected in the number of chapels built in the town (ibid). The site lies in the vicinity of a windmill, depicted on the Chapman & Andre map of 1777 (HER 1515), known to have been demolished by 1893. The ECC HEM brief notes that other mill sites in Essex have frequently revealed associated building complexes. The position of the site on the northern periphery of Thaxted, with the former windmill to the east still surviving, is shown on the 1882 Ordnance Survey map of Thaxted (Fig. 7).

5 METHOD OF WORK

5.1 Twelve trenches measuring 30m x 1.85m (providing a 4% sample of the 1.42ha site) were excavated using a 360º tracked mechanical excavator fitted with a toothless ditching bucket. The trench locations were approved by ECC HEM, though the presence of dense vegetation/trees in parts of the site necessitated a slight rearrangement of the proposed trench plan in the southern part of the site. Undifferentiated overburden was mechanically excavated, thereafter all further investigation was undertaken by hand. Exposed surfaces were cleaned as appropriate and examined for archaeological features and finds. Deposits were recorded using *pro-forma* recording sheets, drawn to scale and photographed. Excavated spoil was checked for finds and trenches were scanned by metal detector.

6 DESCRIPTION OF RESULTS

Individual trench descriptions are presented below;

6.1 Trench 1

North eastern end, south east facing *Sample section: 0.00 = 100.45m AOD*		
0.00 – 0.34m	L1000	Topsoil. Mid to dark brown clayey silt with frequent medium-sized CBM.
0.34 – 0.60m	L1002	Subsoil. Light greyish brown compact silty clay with frequent CBM and moderate small lumps of chalk. A Roman pottery sherd was recovered (2g)
0.60m+	L1001	Natural Drift. Light to mid yellowish orange clay with frequent pockets of chalk and occasional flint gravel pockets.

South western end, south east facing *Sample section: 0.00 = 100.42m AOD*		
0.00 – 0.30m	L1000	Topsoil. As above.
0.30 – 0.52m	L1002	Subsoil. As above.
0.32m+	L1001	Natural Drift. As above.

Description: No archaeological features or finds were present in Trench 1.

6.2 Trench 2 (Fig. 3)

Northern end, east facing *Sample section: 0.00 = 100.23m AOD*		
0.00 – 0.41m	L1000	Topsoil. As Trench 1.
0.41 – 0.58m	L1002	Subsoil. As Trench 1.
0.58m+	L1001	Natural Drift. As Trench 1.

Centre of trench, east facing *Sample section: 0.00 = 99.89m AOD*		
0.00 – 0.12m	L1000	Topsoil. As Trench 1.
0.12m+	L1001	Natural Drift. As Trench 1.

Southern end, east facing *Sample section: 0.00 = 99.77m AOD*		
0.00 – 0.35m	L1000	Topsoil. As Trench 1.
0.35m+	L1001	Natural Drift. As Trench 1.

Description: Trench 2 contained a modern, stone- filled linear ditch aligned east to west.

6.2.1 Ditch F1008 (dimensions: 1.10m+ x 0.82m x 0.34m) had moderately sloping sides and a flat base. It was aligned east to west and contained a single fill, L1009. L1009 was light orange, firm silty clay with frequent medium to large flint inclusions. A plastic doll's leg was recovered from the base of the feature. This feature terminated in Trench 2 and it is thought it could be a drainage ditch with a flint rubble fill (L1009).

6.3 Trench 3 (Fig. 3)

Northern end, east facing *Sample section: 0.00 = 100.12m AOD*		
0.00 – 0.40m	L1000	Topsoil. As Trench 1.
0.40 – 0.71m	L1002	Subsoil. As Trench 1. CBM fragments (140g) and burnt stone (127g)
0.71m+	L1001	Natural Drift. As Trench 1.

Southern end, east facing *Sample section: 0.00 = 100.10m AOD*		
0.00 – 0.32m	L1000	Topsoil. As Trench 1.
0.32 – 0.63m	L1002	Subsoil. As Trench 1.
0.63m+	L1001	Natural Drift. As Trench 1.

Description: Trench 3 revealed an east to west aligned linear ditch as well as areas of tree rooting.

6.3.1 Ditch F1010 (dimensions: 1.85m+ x 1.09m x 0.44m deep) had moderately sloping sides and a concave base. It was aligned east to west and contained two fills. Primary fill L1011 was a mid orange/brown, compact silty clay with moderate small flint and chalk from which 2 sherds (2g) of Romano-British pottery was recovered. Upper fill L1012 was a mid greyish brown, firm to compact clayey silt with occasional small flint and gravel from which a 29g iron fragment was recovered. The ditch was sealed by subsoil L1002. Ditch F1010 is similar in profile to Ditch F1003 in Trench 7 and exhibited similar fills, though the ditches were on differing alignments.

6.4 Trench 4 (Fig. 3)

Northern end, east facing *Sample section: 0.00 = 99.88m AOD*		
0.00 – 0.30m	L1000	Topsoil. As Trench 1.
0.30 – 0.54m	L1002	Subsoil. As Trench 1.
0.54m+	L1001	Natural Drift. As Trench 1.

Southern end, east facing *Sample section: 0.00 = 99.86m AOD*		
0.00 – 0.33m	L1000	Topsoil. As Trench 1.
0.33 – 0.56m	L1002	Subsoil. As Trench 1.
0.56m+	L1001	Natural Drift. As Trench 1.

Description: Trench 4 revealed a linear ditch aligned north east to south west.

6.4.1 Ditch F1037 (dimensions: 3.20m+ x 0.92m x 0.31m deep) had moderately steep sides and a narrow base. It was aligned north-east to south-west and contained a single fill, L1038. L1038 was a light greyish brown, compact silty clay with small lumps of chalk and flint. The feature contained no finds and it has been interpreted as a possible field boundary or drainage ditch. It may represent a continuation of Ditch F1019, seen in Trench 9.

6.5 Trench 5 (Fig. 4)

Northern end, east facing *Sample section: 0.00 = 100.05m AOD*		
0.00 – 0.35m	L1000	Topsoil. As Trench 1.
0.35 – 0.62m	L1002	Subsoil. As Trench 1. Two sherds of possible late Iron Age pottery were recovered, in addition to CBM fragments (594g).
0.62m+	L1001	Natural Drift. As Trench 1.

Southern end, east facing *Sample section: 0.00 = 100.09m AOD*		
0.00 – 0.30m	L1000	Topsoil. As Trench 1.
0.30 – 0.64m	L1002	Subsoil. As Trench 1.
0.64m+	L1001	Natural Drift. As Trench 1.

Description: Trench 5 revealed a pit which was cut by a modern rectangular geotechnical pit.

6.5.1 F1021 (dimensions: 1.30m x 0.80m+ x 0.46m deep) is thought to have been a pit though its western half lay beyond the limits of the trench. It had moderate to steeply sloping sides and although much of the base was cut away by Pit F1023, the sides appeared to break into a rounded base. It contained a single fill L1022 which was a dark orange/brown compact sandy clay with occasional small inclusions of chalk, charcoal and sub angular gravel. It contained no finds.

6.5.2 Modern rectangular Pit F1023 (dimensions: 1.45m x 0.45m+ x 1.13m deep) had straight, almost vertical sides and a rounded base. The cut of this feature was observed in section to truncate the topsoil L1000 and was considered to be a possible geotechnical pit, dug in the 1990's when planning permission was originally sought for the land. It contained seven fills which are tabulated here from basal to uppermost.
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Context	**Description**	**Finds**
L1024	Dark blackish-brown, firm to compact silty clay with occasional chalk and sub-rounded flint fragments.	-
L1025	Light brownish-orange-yellow, firm sandy clay with frequent chalk fragments and flint nodules.	-
L1026	Dark blackish-brown compact silty clay with occasional small chalk and charcoal inclusions.	CBM (1g), Fe nail (1g)
L1027	Light brownish-yellow, firm sandy clay with frequent small inclusions of chalk and flint.	Fe nail fragment (5g)
L1028	Dark blackish-brown, compact silty clay with occasional small inclusions of chalk and charcoal.	-
L1029	Light brownish-yellow, firm sandy clay with frequent small inclusions of chalk and flint.	-
L1030	Mid greyish-brown, compact silty clay with moderate inclusions of charcoal, chalk and degraded pottery.	Fe nails (7, 37g)

6.5.3 All seven fills are interpreted as dumps of natural material originating from the backfilling of the possible geotechnical pit.

6.6 Trench 6 (Fig. 4)

Northern end, east facing *Sample section: 0.00 = 100.10m AOD*		
0.00 – 0.33m	L1000	Topsoil. As Trench 1.
0.33 – 0.62m	L1002	Subsoil. As Trench 1. Cbm fragments (355g) and animal bone (101g) were recovered.
0.62m+	L1001	Natural Drift. As Trench 1.

Southern end, east facing *Sample section: 0.00 = 100.06m AOD*		
0.00 – 0.40m	L1000	Topsoil. As Trench 1.
0.40 – 0.74m	L1002	Subsoil. As Trench 1.
0.74m+	L1001	Natural Drift. As Trench 1.

Description: Trench 6 revealed a ditch (F1033) and its probable recut (F1031), both aligned north-east to south-west. A third shallow linear feature (F1035), aligned north to south, abutted the north-east terminus of F1031.

6.6.1 Ditch F1031 (dimensions: 6.50m+ x 0.94m x 0.23m deep) was aligned north-east to south-west with its southern terminus visible in the trench. Ditch F1031 had gently sloping sides and a rounded base and contained a single fill, L1032. L1032 was mid greyish-brown with orange flecks, consisting of a compact silty clay with occasional flint and chalk. It contained no finds and the fill appeared to represent the natural silting of the ditch. F1031 was observed to truncate Ditch F1033 and may have been a recut of the earlier boundary.

6.6.2 Ditch F1033 (dimensions: 5.10m+ x 0.62m+ x 0.11m deep) exhibited gently sloping, shallow sides and a fairly flat base. It was aligned north east to south west and was cut by Ditch F1031. It contained a single fill, L1034. L1034 was a light to mid greyish brown, compact silty clay with occasional flint and chalk. It contained no finds.

6.6.3 Shallow linear feature F1035 (dimensions: 3.40m+ x 1.05m+ x 0.03m deep) was aligned north to south and had very shallow, moderately sloping sides and a flat base. It contained a single fill, L1036, L1036 was a light to mid greyish brown, compact silty clay with occasional flint inclusions. It contained no finds and the fill appeared to be the result of natural silting. There was no clear relationship between F1035 and F1031. F1035 may represent the remnant of a plough furrow.

6.7 Trench 7 (Fig. 4)

Eastern end, north facing *Sample section: 0.00 = 100.10m AOD*		
0.00 – 0.32m	L1000	Topsoil. As Trench 1.
0.32 – 0.64m	L1002	Subsoil. As Trench 1.
0.64m+	L1001	Natural Drift. As Trench 1.

Western end, north facing *Sample section: 0.00 = 100.07m AOD*		
0.00 – 0.35m	L1000	Topsoil. As Trench 1.
0.35 – 0.69m	L1002	Subsoil. As Trench 1.
0.69m+	L1001	Natural Drift. As Trench 1.

Description: Trench 7 revealed a ditch and a pit/ditch terminus.

6.7.1 Ditch F1003 (dimensions 2.00+ x 0.95 x 0.45m deep) had moderately steep sides and a concave base. It was aligned north-east to south-west and contained two fills. The upper fill, L1004, was a dark orange/brown, compact silty clay which produced 2g of animal bone and 45 sherds (434g) of late Iron Age/Romano-British pottery. The lower fill, L1005, was a light orange-grey, compact silty clay which produced 65g of oyster shell, 7g of animal bone, 61g of CBM and 24 sherds (104g) of late Iron Age/Romano-British pottery.

6.7.2 Pit/ditch terminus F1006 (dimensions 0.90+ x 1.00 x 0.16m deep) was shallow, with gently sloping sides and a concave base. It was aligned north to south and contained a single fill, L1007. L1007 was a mid grey-orange, firm silty clay that produced 9 sherds (33g) of Iron Age pottery.

6.8 Trench 8 (Fig. 5)

Eastern end, north facing *Sample section: 0.00 =99.94m AOD*		
0.00 – 0.35m	L1000	Topsoil. As Trench 1.
0.35 – 0.69m	L1002	Subsoil. As Trench 1.
0.69m+	L1001	Natural Drift. As Trench 1.

Western end, north facing *Sample section: 0.00 = 99.90m AOD*		
0.00 – 0.30m	L1000	Topsoil. As Trench 1.
0.30 – 0.67m	L1002	Subsoil. As Trench 1.
0.67m+	L1001	Natural Drift. As Trench 1.

Description: Trench 8 revealed a pit and a ditch. Both features were located at the western end of Trench 8.

6.8.1 Ditch F1015 (dimensions: 3.50+ x 0.46 x 0.13m deep) had steep sides and a concave base. It was aligned north-west to south-east and contained a single fill; L1016. L1016 was a light to mid orange/brown, compact silty clay which produced no finds. Ditch F1015 was truncated by pit F1017.

6.8.2 Pit F1017 was sub oval in plan (dimensions: 1.63+ x 1.00 x 0.51m deep) and exhibited moderate to steep sides breaking sharply to a flattish base. F1017 contained a single fill (L1018). L1018 was a light greyish orange, compact sandy clay which produced an 18g iron fragment.

6.9 Trench 9 (Fig. 5)

Eastern end, north facing *Sample section: 0.00 =99.92m AOD*		
0.00 – 0.34m	L1000	Topsoil. As Trench 1.
0.34 – 0.54m	L1002	Subsoil. As Trench 1. Two possible late Iron Age pottery sherds (47g), CBM fragments (98g), animal bone (5g), charcoal (2g) and shell (2g) were recovered.
0.54m+	L1001	Natural Drift. As Trench 1.

Western end, north facing *Sample section: 0.00 = 99.90m AOD*		
0.00 – 0.23m	L1000	Topsoil. As Trench 1.
0.23 – 0.62m	L1002	Subsoil. As Trench 1.
0.62m+	L1001	Natural Drift. As Trench 1.

Description: Trench 9 revealed two ditches.

6.9.1 Ditch F1013 (dimensions: 2.00+ x 1.38 x 0.20) had moderately steep sides and a flattish, slightly irregular base. It was aligned north to south and contained a single fill, L1014. L1014 was a light to mid grey-brown, compact silty clay that produced 10g of animal bone and 133g of CBM.

Ditch F1019 was similar in dimensions, but slightly deeper (dimensions: 2.5+ x 1.8m x 0.34m). It was aligned north north east to south south west. Its single fill (L1020) was a light to mid grey-brown, compact silty clay , similar to L1014. Finds from the deposit comprised 11 Romano-British pottery sherds (77g) and animal bone (77g). F1019 may be a continuation of Ditch F1037, seen in Trench 4.

6.10 Trench 10

Northern end, east facing *Sample section: 0.00 = 100.06m AOD*		
0.00 – 0.39m	L1000	Topsoil. As Trench 1.
0.39 – 0.57m	L1002	Subsoil. As Trench 1.
0.57m+	L1001	Natural Drift. As Trench 1.

Southern end, east facing *Sample section: 0.00 = 100.10m AOD*		
0.00 – 0.29m	L1000	Topsoil. As Trench 1.
0.29 – 0.50m	L1002	Subsoil. As Trench 1.
0.50m+	L1001	Natural Drift. As Trench 1.

Description: No archaeological features or finds were present in Trench 10.

6.11 Trench 11

Northern end, east facing *Sample section: 0.00 = 99.90m AOD*		
0.00 – 0.28m	L1000	Topsoil. As Trench 1.
0.28 – 0.50m	L1002	Subsoil. As Trench 1. A single medieval pottery sherd (31g), CBM fragments (87g) and animal bone (10g) were recovered.
0.50m+	L1001	Natural Drift. As Trench 1.

Southern end, east facing *Sample section: 0.00 = 99.88m AOD*		
0.00 – 0.24m	L1000	Topsoil. As Trench 1.
0.24 – 0.45m	L1002	Subsoil. As Trench 1.
0.45m+	L1001	Natural Drift. As Trench 1.

Description: No archaeological features or finds were present in Trench 11.

6.12 Trench 12

Northern end, east facing *Sample section: 0.00 =99.81m AOD*		
0.00 – 0.35m	L1000	Topsoil. As Trench 1.
0.35 – 0.65m	L1002	Subsoil. As Trench 1. Medieval pottery sherds (28g), CBM fragments (233g), shell (11g) and charcoal (1g) were recovered.
0.65m+	L1001	Natural Drift. As Trench 1.

Southern end, east facing *Sample section: 0.00 = 99.85m AOD*		
0.00 – 0.51m	L1000	Topsoil. As Trench 1.
0.51 – 0.78m	L1002	Subsoil. As Trench 1.
0.78m+	L1001	Natural Drift. As Trench 1.

Description: No archaeological features or finds were present in Trench 12.

7 CONFIDENCE RATING

7.1 It is not felt that any factors inhibited the recognition of archaeological features and finds during the archaeological trial trench evaluation on land at Bellrope Meadow, Thaxted, Essex.

8 DEPOSIT MODEL

8.1 The deposit model was uniform across the site. Topsoil L1000 was a mid to dark brown firm clayey silt with frequent CBM. This context was heavily disturbed by tree and large vegetation roots and it varied in thickness from 0.23 to 0.51m.

8.2 Beneath L1000 was subsoil L1002, a light greyish brown compact silty clay with frequent CBM and moderate small lumps of chalk. It varied in thickness between 0.17 and 0.39m and was present across the site, apart from in the southern end of Trench 2 where the subsoil has been removed. It is thought that this removal (along

with that of much of the topsoil in this part of the site) was carried out to provide the materials for the large bund at the entrance to the site.

8.3 At the base of the stratigraphic sequence lay L1001, the natural clay drift, a light to mid yellowish orange compact clay with frequent pockets of chalk and occasional gravel and flint nodules. It lay at a depth of 0.12 – 0.78m with the shallowest depths being in the north eastern area of the site, Trench 2, where a hollow existed with topsoil (L1000) overlying the natural clay (L1001) directly. This likely derives from earthmoving to create the existing bund at the site frontage.

9 DISCUSSION

9.1 Summary of the Archaeology

9.1.1 The archaeological evaluation carried out on land at Bellrope Meadow, Thaxted, revealed twelve archaeological features consisting of a pit/ditch terminus, a plough furrow, one modern ditch/drain, seven ditches and two pits.

9.1.2 Ditch F1010 in Trench 3 produced early Roman pottery. Ditch F1003 (Trench 7) and Ditch F1019 (Trench 9) also dated to this period. Pit/ditch terminus F1006 (Trench 7) produced late Iron Age pottery. Subsoil layer L1002 also produced pottery dating to the late Iron Age and early Romano-British periods in seven of the twelve trenches. It is possible that there was a degree of land use continuity between the two periods.

9.2 Interpretation of the Site: Archaeology and History

9.2.1 As noted above (Section 4), Thaxted appears to have had an Anglo-Saxon origin and then been the subject of large-scale expansion during the medieval period as the town became an industrial centre concerned with the production of cutlery. Debris associated with the cutlery production was recovered during excavations at Town Street and Weaverhead Lane (Medlycott, 1999).

9.2.2 However, no evidence was recovered during the evaluation of Bellrope Meadow to suggest that the medieval expansion of the town reached the study area. The dated features encountered during the evaluation indicate that the site was used during the later Iron Age and on into the Romano-British period. The substantial assemblage of Romano-British pottery from Ditch F1003, along with the smaller assemblages in Ditches 1010 and F1019, suggests that a hitherto unrecorded Roman occupation site lay within the vicinity. Iron Age pottery in Pit/ Ditch Terminus F1006 indicates still earlier activity at the site. Iron Age and Romano-British pottery, as well as Romano-British tegula fragments, were also recovered from the subsoil (L1002).

9.2.3 The site was undoubtedly located within a substantially populated Romano-British landscape. Roman settlement is known at Shillingstone Field, Great Sampford, 5km to the north-east of Thaxted, where a field system was identified, which produced a pottery assemblage indicating the main period of activity occurred in the 4th century AD (Garwood 1998). At Great Dunmow, 9km to the south, archaeological investigations have established the presence of a Roman 'small town' and also a small fort with earthen defences (Wickenden 1996, 1988). Further Romano-British

settlement sites to the south-west have been excavated at Takeley, ahead of the expansion of Stansted Airport, and at Elsenham amongst many others in the Uttlesford District (www.ads.ahds.ac.uk/). Thaxted is also though to lie on a Roman route between Great Dunmow and Radwinter.

9.3 Preservation of Archaeology

9.3.1 The archaeological features were generally sealed by subsoil where present and generally moderately-well preserved. The presence of finds from within the subsoil indicates that some truncation by ploughing may have taken place as suggested by the possible plough furrow F1035 in Trench 6.

9.4 Finds and Environmental Evidence

9.4.1 The evaluation produced a total of 102 sherds (835g) of pottery, predominantly Romano-British but also including late Iron Age and medieval sherds. Ten sherds (124g) of the total pottery assemblage, including the medieval wares, were recovered from subsoil, L1002. The Roman fabrics are unremarkable with the exception of a sherd of Southern British Glazed Ware which is typically found within the London basin and surrounding counties, with outliers in western Britain. The ware principally dates to 70 – 120AD and is a rare occurrence on archaeological sites.

9.4.2 The majority of the stratified pottery was recovered from two features. Pit/Ditch Terminus F1006 produced nine sherds (33g) of Late Iron Age flint-tempered ware. Whilst Ditch F1003 produced a total of 70 sherds (599g) of Romano-British pottery from a single one-metre wide section. Fragments from two Black-surfaced/ Romanising grey ware jars, comparable to Chelmsford types, were recovered. Both forms are consistent with a date in the early 2nd century AD. Further Black-surfaced/Romanising grey ware body sherds were also present in ditches F1010 and F1019 and are consistent with the pottery in Ditch F1003.

9.4.3 The CBM recovered from site consists of two fabrics; one Romano-British and the other Romano-British or early medieval.

9.4.4 The poorly preserved animal bone recovered from the site indicates that sheep/goat, cattle and horse were exploited, presumably for food, though no butchery marks were identified. Shell of oyster and mussel was identified indicting the site had access to trade links that imported sea food inland from the coast.

9.5 Research Potential

9.5.1 The site has the potential to provide further information regarding the character of late Iron Age/Romano-British agricultural exploitation of the area, but failed to reveal any evidence of medieval settlement associated with the outskirts of the town of Thaxted or occupation associated with the windmill site.

ARCHIVE DEPOSITION

The archive will be deposited with Saffron Walden Museum within the next six months, and will be prepared in accordance with the UK Institute for Conservation's *Conservation Guideline No. 2.* The archive will be quantified, ordered, indexed, cross-referenced and checked for internal consistency. In addition to the overall site summary, it will be necessary to produce a summary of the artefactual and ecofactual data.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Archaeological Solutions Limited would like to thank Mantle Projects Limited for commissioning and funding this archaeological evaluation (in particular Mr Guy Baker for his assistance).

AS would also like to acknowledge the input and advice of Mr Richard Havis of ECC HEM.

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Internet source:

www.ads.ahds.ac.uk *accessed 30/10/06*
http://unlockingessex.essexcc.gov.uk/ *accessed 30/10/06*

APPENDIX 1

ESSEX HERITAGE CONSERVATION RECORD/ESSEX ARCHAEOLOGY AND HISTORY. SUMMARY SHEET

Site name/Address: *Bellrope Meadows, Sampford Road, Thaxted, Essex*	
Parish: *Thaxted*	District: *Uttlesford*
NGR: *6115 3170*	Site Code: P2808
Type of Work: *Trial Trench Evaluation*	Site Director/Team: *Claire Hallybone*
Date of Work: *6th – 17th October 2006*	Size of Area Investigated: *c. 1.4ha*
Location of finds/Curating Museum: *Saffron Walden*	Funding Source: *Mantle Projects Limited*
Further seasons anticipated: *Yes*	Related HER Nos: -
Final Report: Hallybone, C. & Weston, P. 2006. Bellrope Meadow, Sampford Road, Thaxted, Essex. An Archaeological Evaluation. *Archaeological Solutions unpublished report No 2122*	
Periods Represented: *Iron Age, Romano-British.*	
Project description (250 words) *In October 2006, Archaeological Solutions Limited conducted an archaeological evaluation on land at Bellrope Meadow, Sampford Road, Thaxted, Essex. The site is located c.0.5km to the north of the modern town. Thaxted is known to have been a busy industrial centre in the medieval period, concerned with cutlery production. It is also known to lie within a substantially occupied Roman landscape.* *The archaeological evaluation revealed twelve archaeological features consisting of a pit/ditch terminus, a possible plough furrow, seven ditches, two pits, and a probable modern geotechnical pit. Ditch F1010 Trench 3 produced early Roman pottery. Ditches F1003 Trench 7 and F1019 Trench 9 also dated to this period. Pit/ditch terminus F1006 Trench 7 produced late Iron Age pottery. The remaining features were modern or undated. Subsoil layer L1002 also produced late Iron Age and early Romano-British pottery and CBM in all but five of the twelve trenches. The dating of the site is of interest as it suggests that a late Iron Age phase of activity was superseded by an early Romano-British phase, and it is possible that there was a degree of continuity between the two periods.*	
Previous Summaries/Reports: *None*	
Author of Summary: *P. Weston*	Date of Summary: *31/10/06*

APPRENDIX 2 CONCORDANCE OF FEATURES

Feature	Context	Interpretation	Date
-	L1000	Topsoil	-
-	L1001	Natural drift	-
-	L1002	Subsoil	-
F1003	L1004, L1005	Ditch	Roman
F1006	L1007	Pit/ ditch terminus	Late Iron Age
F1008	L1009	Ditch	Modern
F1010	L1011, L1012	Ditch	Roman
F1013	L1014	Ditch	-
F1015	L1016	Ditch	-
F1017	L1018	Pit	-
F1019	L1020	Ditch	Roman
F1021	L1022	Pit	-
F1023	L1024, L1025, L1026, L1027, L1028, L1029, L1030	Geotechnical pit	Modern
F1031	L1032	Ditch	-
F1033	L1034	Ditch	-
F1035	L1036	Ditch/ plough furrow	-
F1037	L1038	Ditch	-

APPENDIX 3
CONCORDANCE OF FINDS

Feature	Context	Trench	Description	Spot Date	Pottery	CBM (g)	A. Bone (g)	Other
1002			Subsoil	?Roman	(1), 3g	249		
		1		Roman	(1), 2g	114		Oyster Shell (3), 6g
		3				140		Burnt Stone (2), 127g
		5		?LIA	(2), 13g	594		
		6				355	101	
		9		?LIA	(2), 47g	98	5	Oyster Shell (1), <1g
								Mussel Shell (1), <1g
		11		?Medieval	(1), 31g	87	10	
		12		?Medieval	(3), 28g	233		Oyster Shell (1), 11g
1003	1004	7	Ditch Fill	LIA/Roman	(45), 434g		2	
	1005			LIA/Roman	(24), 104g	61	7	Oyster Shell (8), 65g
1006	1007	7	Pit/Ditch Terminus Fill	Late Iron Age	(9), 33g			
1008	1009	2	Linear Feature Fill					Plastic Doll Leg (1), 25g
1010	1011	3	Ditch Fill	Roman	(2), 2g			
	1012							Fe Fragment (1), 29g
1013	1014	9	Linear Feature Fill			133	10	
1017	1018	8	Pit Fill					Fe Fragment (1), 18g
1019	1020	9	Linear Feature Fill	Roman	(11), 77g		186	
1023	1026	5	Pit Fill			1		Fe Nail Fragment (1), 1g
	1027							Fe Nail Fragment (1), 5g
	1030							Fe Nails (7), 37g

APPENDIX 4: SPECIALIST REPORTS

The Romano-British Pottery

Andrew Peachey

The evaluation produced a total of 102 sherds (835g) of pottery, predominantly Romano-British but also including late Iron Age and medieval sherds. The pottery was quantified by sherd count, weight (g) and R.EVE, and all fabrics were examined at x20 magnification and assigned an alpha-numeric fabric code (see below).

Fabric Codes and Descriptions

F1	Late Iron Age flint-tempered ware. Bonfire fired fabric with sparse calcined flint (0.5-3mm)
SOB GL	Southern British glazed ware (Going 1987, 5: Fabric 10)
BSW	Black-surfaced/Romanising grey ware (Going 1987, 9: Fabric 45)
BB2	Black-burnished ware 2 (Going 1987, 8: Fabric 41)
EMW	Early Medieval ware. Oxidised buff to brown-orange containing well-sorted common quartz (0.1-0.4mm) and sparse iron rich grains (<0.5mm). Hard with a slightly abrasive feel and an irregular fracture.

Ten sherds (124g) of the total pottery were recovered from Subsoil L1002 in Trenches 1, 5, 9, 11 & 12. Trench 1 contained small sherds of BSW and a single sherd of SOB GL probably derived from a beaker, Trench 5 small sherds of BB2, and Trench 9 small sherds of BSW, all consistent with the early Roman date of the bulk of the stratified features. Subsoil 2001 in Trenches 11 & 12 contained small rim sherds in EMW from similar necked cooking pots with flat topped rims.

Medieval pottery is absent in the stratified features. Pit/Ditch Terminus F1006 L1007 contains very small body sherds (9 sherds, 33g) of late Iron Age fabric F1, while the remainder of the assemblage is Romano-British. The only pottery group of substance in the assemblage was recovered from Ditch F1003, L1004 & L1005, in total 70 sherds (599g). L1004 contains fragments from two BSW jars, the first a necked, everted rim jar with a plain shoulder cordon comparable to Chelmsford type G16 2/2, and the second a neck-less jar with lid seated rim comparable to Chelmsford type G7 1/1. Both forms are consistent with a date in the early 2nd century AD. L1005 contained BSW body sherds, although these are probably from different vessels. Small BSW body sherds are also present in Ditch F1010 L1011 and Linear F1019 L1020 and are consistent with the pottery in Ditch F1003.

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The Ceramic Building Materials
Andrew Peachey

The evaluation produced 52 fragments (2004g) of CBM although none was present in significant concentrations. The CBM was quantified by fragment count and weight (g), and fabrics were examined at x20 magnifications (see below).

Fabric Descriptions

Fabric 1: Oxidised yellow-red (5YR 5/6) with inclusions of common, ill sorted quartz (0.2-2mm)and occasional flint (<10mm). Hard with an abrasive feel and irregular fracture. It is unclear whether the small fragments of flat tile in this fabric that dominate this assemblage are Romano-British or early Medieval.

Fabric 2: Oxidised orange-red (%YR 5/8) with inclusions of common, well sorted quartz (<0.25mm) with sparse mica and iron rich grains (0.25-3mm). Hard with a slightly powdery feel and an irregular fracture. This is a Romano-British fabric.

The bulk of the CBM assemblage was recovered from Subsoil L2001 in Trenches 1, 3, 5, 6, 9, 11 & 12, totalling 46 fragments (1870g). Of this total only three fragments (594g) in Trench 5 were in Fabric 2 and were almost certainly derived from 20mm thick tegula tile. The remainder of the CBM in the subsoil is comprised of small, abraded, 14mm thick sherds of Fabric 1 flat tile that are probably early medieval, although a Romano-British date cannot be discounted. Linear F1013 L1014 and modern Geotechnical Pit F1023 L1026 also contained sparse Fabric 1 fragments but neither are associated with any pottery that could clarify the probable early Medieval date.

The Animal Bone
Carina Phillips

A small animal bone assemblage of only eight fragments was recovered. Seven contexts contained animal bone, and these have been spot dated to the late Iron Age-Roman period. The animal bone is of varied condition; half the assemblage exhibited severe erosion, the other bone was of moderate condition.

Only domestic species were identified in the assemblage, these were cattle (*Bos* sp.), sheep/goat (*Ovis/Capra* sp.) and horse (*Equus* sp.). There was no evidence of butchery on any bone.

Species	NISP
Cattle	2
Sheep/goat	2
Horse	1
Large sized	2
Unidentifiable	1

Table 1: The animal bone (NISP= number of identified specimens/fragments)

The poor preservation of some of the animal bone and small size of the assemblage is likely to have influenced the amount of bone identifiable to species and identification of butchery evidence (particularly cut marks). Further excavation may also produce an animal bone assemblage with a similar potential.

The Shell
Carina Phillips

Six fragments of shell were recovered. The assemblage consisted of four oyster valves, derived from a minimum of three oysters, in addition to one fragment of oyster shell and a mussel valve. Both these shellfish species were commonly exploited for food and are frequently found at inland archaeological sites. Further excavation may produce more evidence of shellfish exploitation and trade.

PHOTOGRAPHIC INDEX

DP1
Feature F1008. View to the east

DP 2
Ditch F1010. View to the east

DP 3
Feature F1013, Trench 9. View to the north

DP 4
Feature F1015, Trench 8. View to the south east

DP 5
Feature F1015, Trench 8. View to the west north west

DP 6
Feature F1019, Trench 9. View to the north

DP 7
F1021 & F1023, Trench 5. View to the south

DP 8
Ditch F1003. View to the north east

DP 9
Trench 4. View to the north

DP 10
Trench 9. View to the west

DP 11
Feature F1037, Trench 4. View to the north east

DP 12
Features F1035 & F1031, Trench 6. View to the east

DP 13
Features F1031 & F1033, Trench 6. View to the north east

DP 14
Features F1021 & F1023, Trench 5. View to the west

DP 15
View across site during site walkover

DP 16
View across site during site walkover

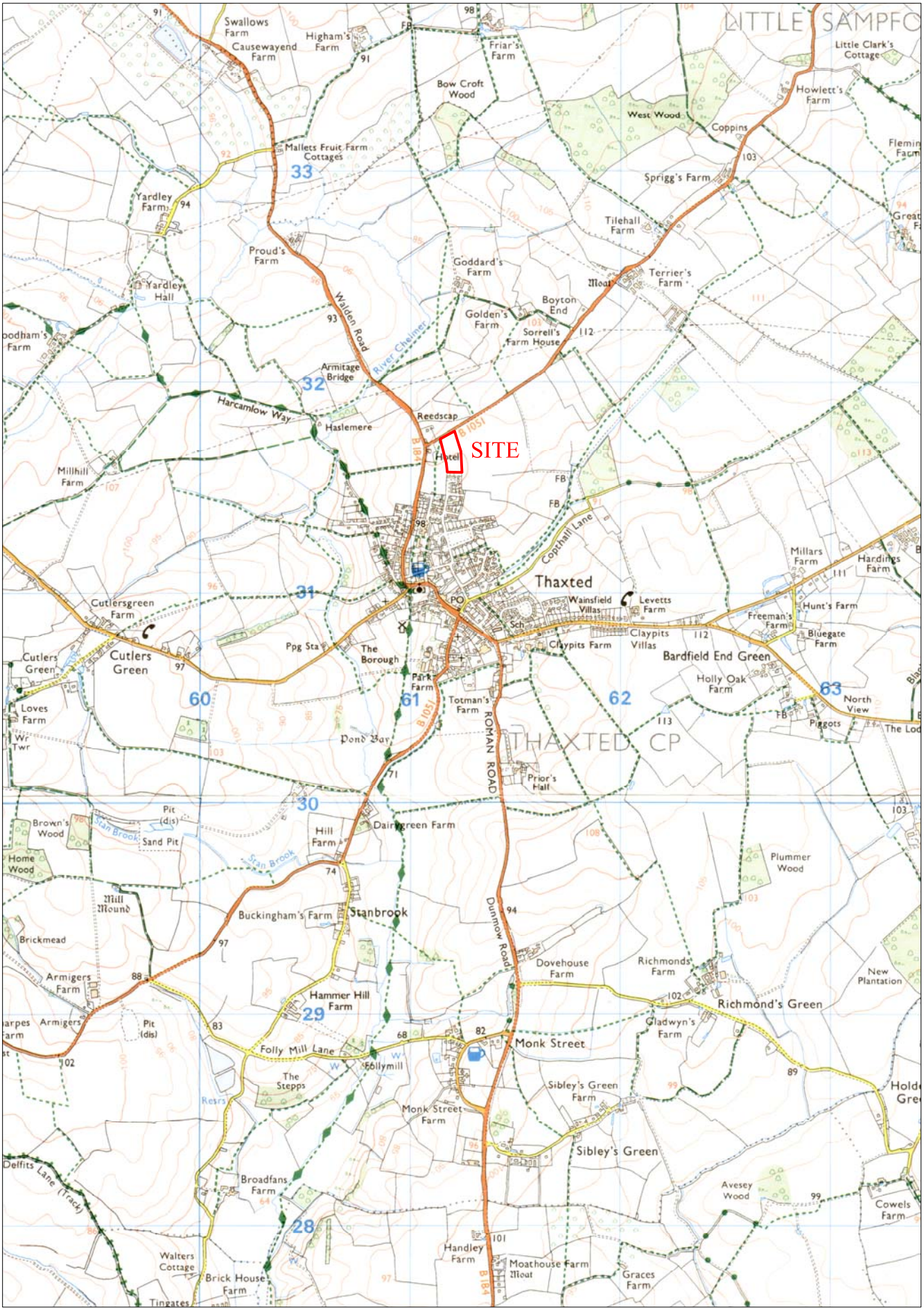

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Fig. 1 Site location plan

Scale plans 1:25000

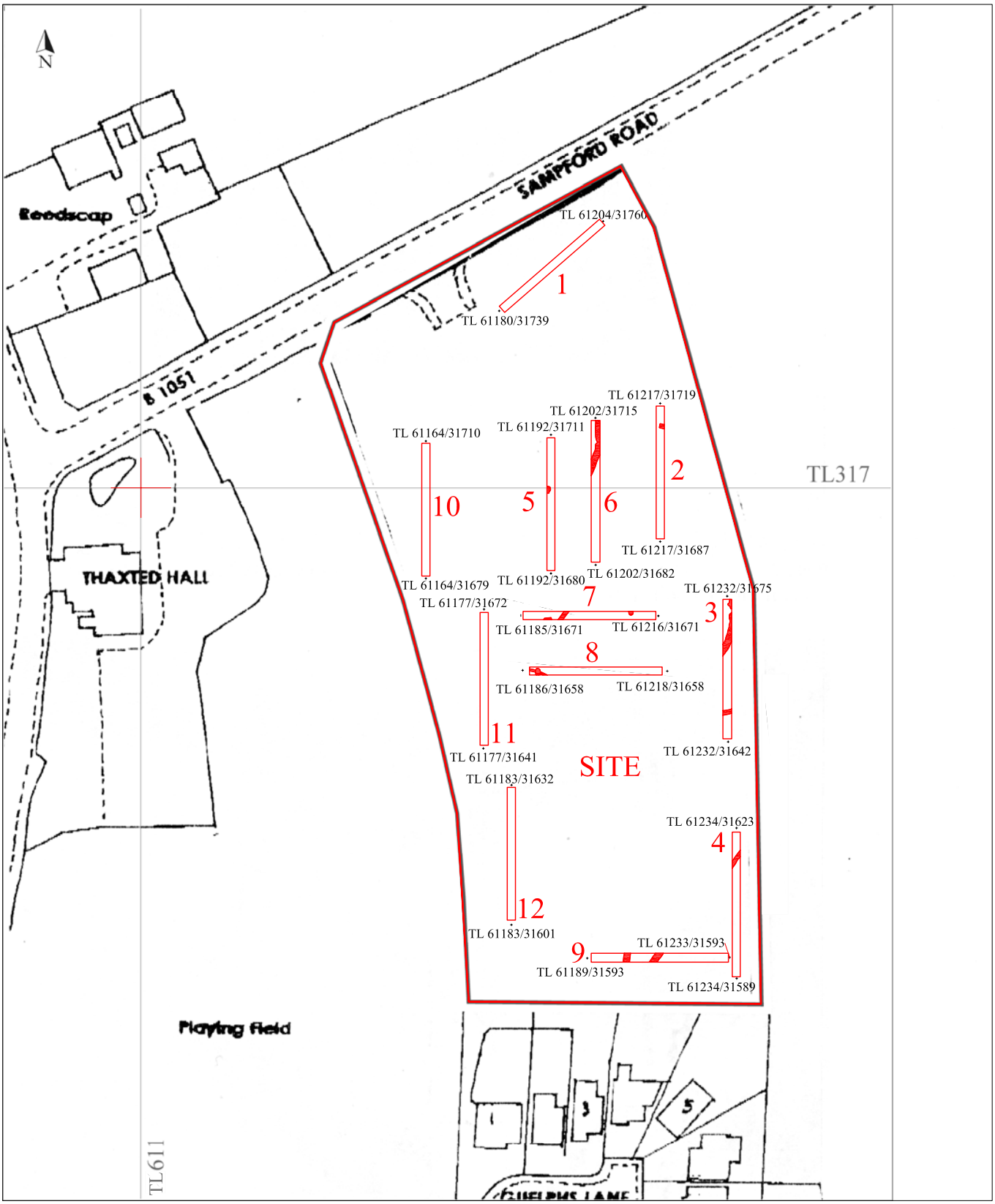

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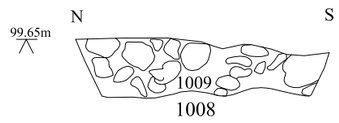
Fig. 2 Detailed site location plan

Scale: 1:1250

TRENCH 2



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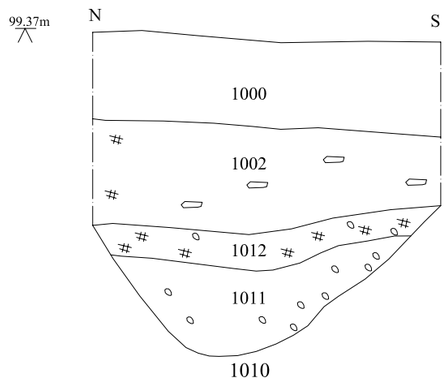

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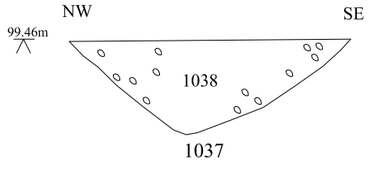

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Fig. 3 Plans and sections

Scale plans 1:100; section 1:20

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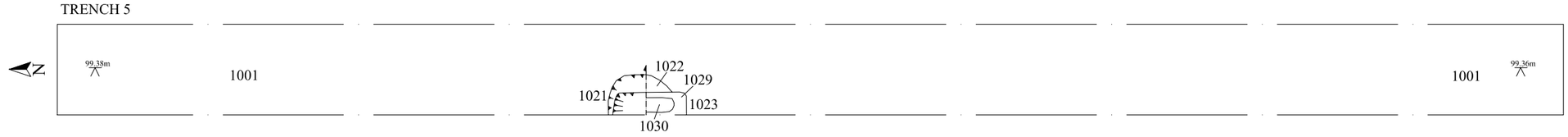

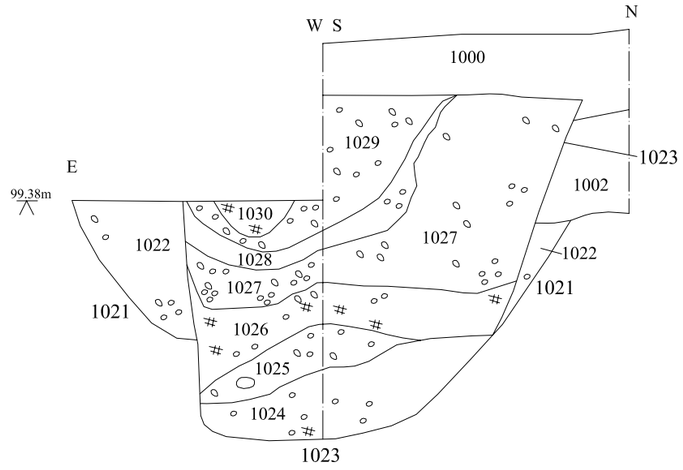

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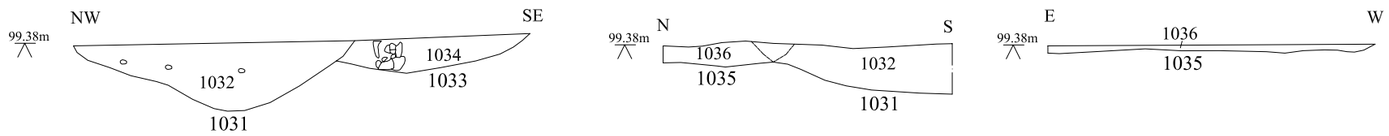

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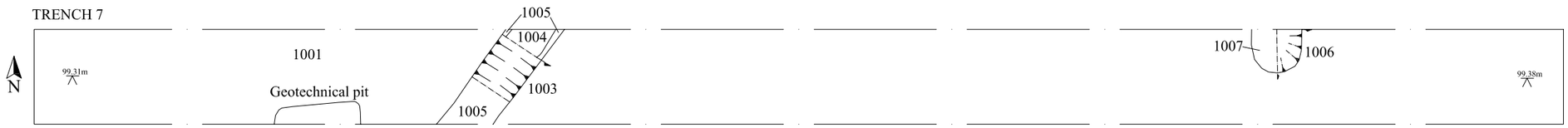

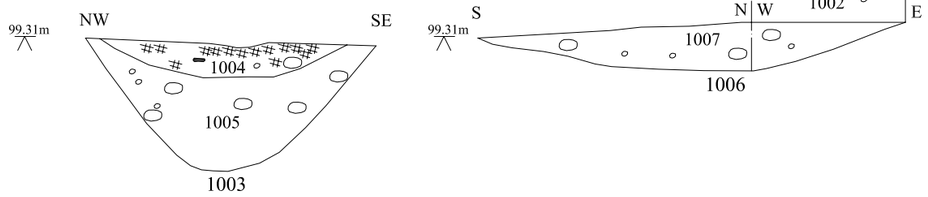

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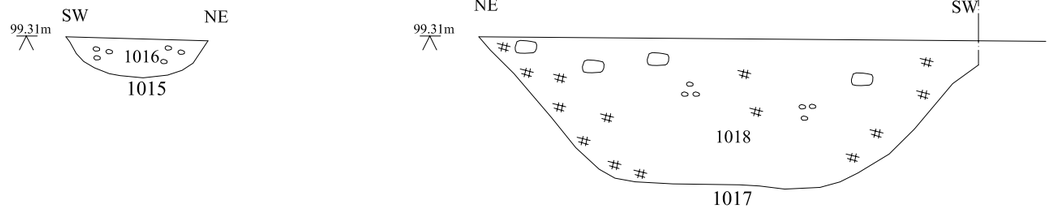
Fig. 4 Plans and sections

Scale plans 1:100; section 1:20

TRENCH 8



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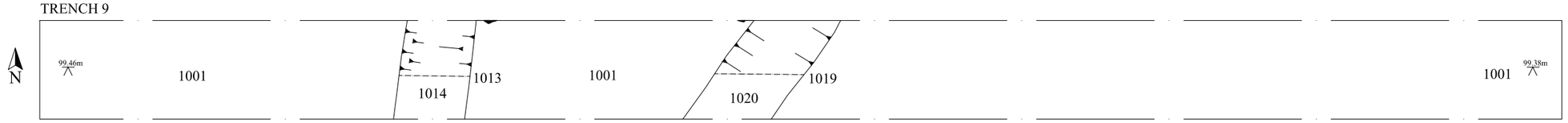

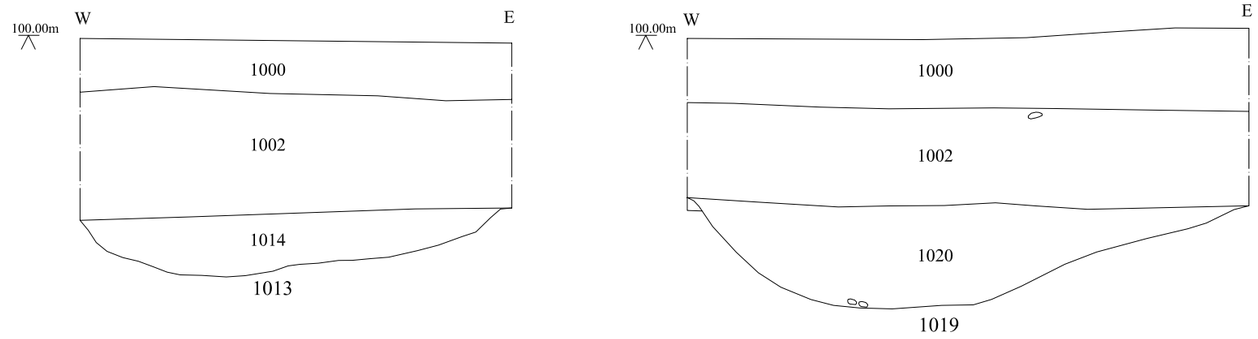

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Fig. 5 Plans and sections

Scale plans 1:100; section 1:20

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Fig. 6 Proposed development

Scale 1:750