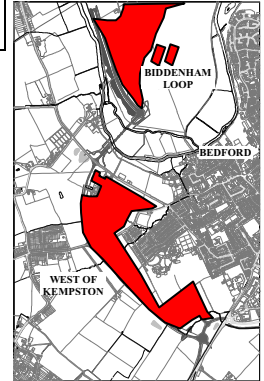




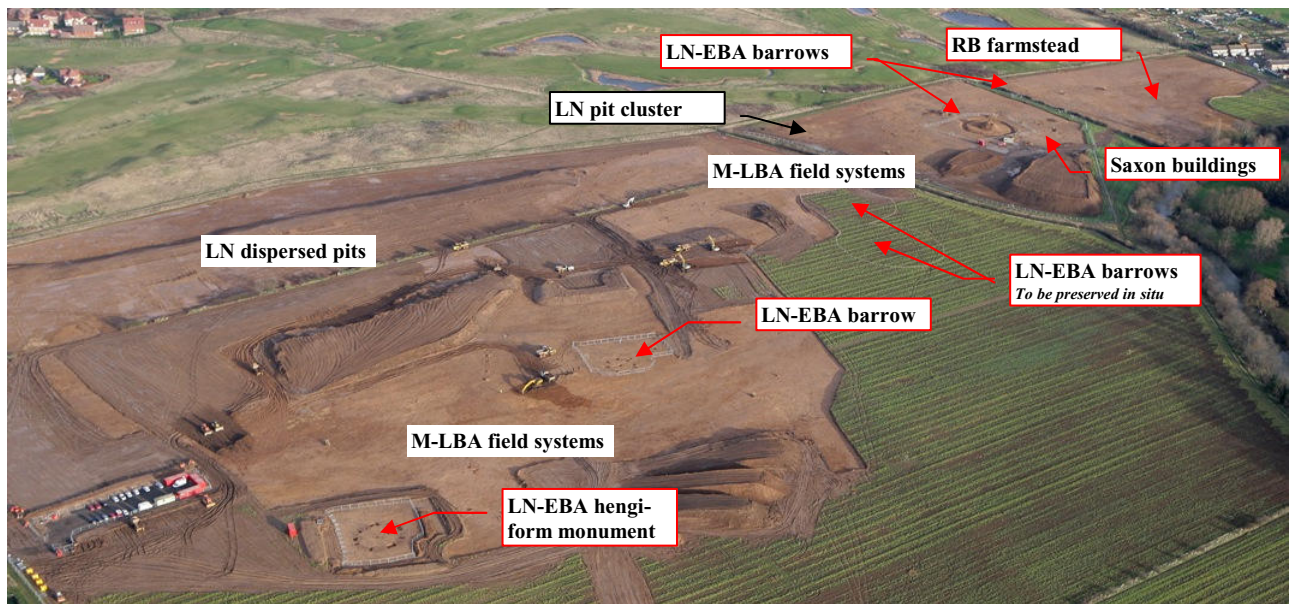
LAND WEST OF BEDFORD

Interim Archaeological Report 2

Over the last 10 weeks Albion Archaeology has undertaken extensive investigations within the Land West of Bedford development area. We have overseen PJ Construction stripping c. 20ha on the Biddenham Loop and c. 2ha on Land West of Kempston. The archaeological remains discovered on the Biddenham Loop are highly significant and include evidence from the late Neolithic through the Bronze Age and Romano-British periods into the early-middle Saxon period. Evidence for monuments, settlements, burials and field systems has been uncovered.



This interim report on the results is presented in chronological order and concentrates on remains that have been fully investigated.



BIDDENHAM LOOP: most significant archaeological discoveries

KEY: LN=Late Neolithic, EBA= early Bronze Age, M/LBA= middle/late Bronze Age (see page 5 for details of chronological periods)

LATE NEOLITHIC

DISPERSED & CLUSTERED PITS

Several isolated and one cluster of small pits have now been identified. Pits of this period are rare nationally and are often the only sub-surface evidence for settled communities at this time. They are hugely significant because they belong to the time when human society was changing from dependence on hunting and gathering to a more settled lifestyle, centred around farming.

As reported on in Interim Report 1 some of the pits contained *structured deposits* – *i.e.* not simply rubbish. The items within them were deliberately chosen, and

possibly ritually broken, for deposition as an offering to the gods.

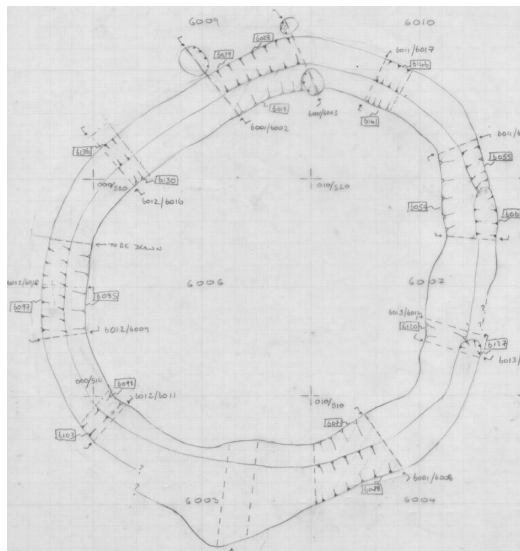
It is noteworthy that no pits have yet been found adjacent to contemporary monuments. This may suggest the deliberate zoning of different types of activities within the landscape.

HENGI-FORM MONUMENT

Monument L63, as reported on in Interim Report 1, was identified by cropmarks and geophysical survey. Prior to the recent investigations it was presumed to be a barrow like the others known within the Biddenham Loop. However, the recent investigations now suggest it may be a hengiform monument.



This interpretation is based on its unusual shape (see plan), the absence of burials within the interior, the presence of unusual artefacts and the fact that it appears to have remained in use for a longer period of time than the barrows.



Provisional site plan of hengi-form monument L63

This monument is located in the centre of the Loop, suggesting that it was deliberately built in this important position as a focus for the community’s ceremonial events. No doubt, these would have been associated with drinking, singing, dancing and feasting – the small quantities of wood charcoal in the ditches may derive from cooking fires.

EARLY BRONZE AGE

BARROWS

The Biddenham Loop is a well known prehistoric monument complex containing over 30 barrows. The latter are the typical burial monument of the early Bronze Age, but some may originate in the late Neolithic. They comprise a mound or bank within the interior of a circular “ring” ditch. Three barrows have been located within the stripped areas and the investigation of two of these has been completed.

The “disappearance” of two barrows was reported in Interim Report 1, but now a previously undetected one has been

located. This was “hidden” under the remains of the post-medieval buildings associated with “Honey Hill” farm.

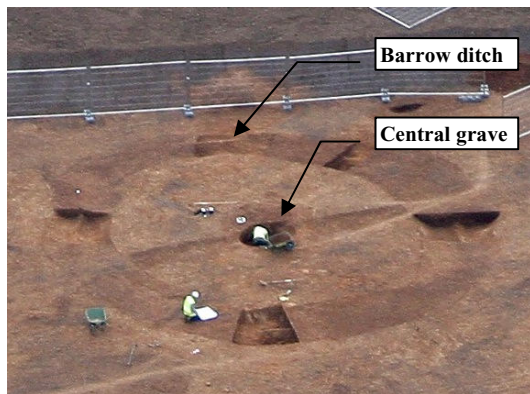
The discovery of the new barrow is particularly interesting because:

- 1) Its existence supports the view that the barrows on this side of the Loop were arranged into a linear cemetery. This would have been a striking landscape feature visible for miles from the floodplain.
- 2) If a mound associated with the barrow still existed in the post-medieval period, this may be why the later farm got its name, “Honey Hill”.
- 3) Its ditch was substantial but had not been recut (see photograph).



Recording of the large ditch of the barrow on Honey Hill

The ditch surrounding barrow L42 was redefined on a number of occasions (see photograph), indicating that the monument was long-lived. Redigging of the ditch, presumably to redefine the mound or the monument, may have taken place at the anniversary of the death of the individual for whom it was created. There was no evidence for a similar occurrence within the other barrows. It may be significant that L42 is the nearest known barrow to the hengi-form monument L63.



Barrow L42 under investigation; note the central grave

Both of the fully investigated barrows have featured burials within the interior. One of the two inhumations within L42 was placed within a large central grave (see photograph). By contrast, three off-centre inhumations were found within the Honey Hill barrow.



One of the inhumations within the Honey Hill barrow

FLAT GRAVES

In addition to burials associated with monuments, one crouched inhumation has been found. Although it is impossible to date this accurately without radiocarbon dating, it is probably contemporary with the barrows. This demonstrates that society was sufficiently structured at this time for there to be a clear distinction in burial practice between different individuals.

MID-LATE BRONZE AGE

FIELD SYSTEMS

Numerous lengths of ditches have been identified on Site 2, Honey Hill and within the central areas of the

Loop. The majority are part of former fields systems.

Their alignments do not coincide with those of known medieval and post-medieval fields. They do appear to respect the early Bronze Age barrows, although no direct stratigraphic relationships were available for investigation. Despite excavating up to 20% of their fills, the ditches have only produced small quantities of artefacts. These have included late Neolithic/early Bronze Age flint, along with later Bronze Age, Iron Age and Roman pottery. However, a middle-later Bronze Age date is most likely for the creation of the field system.



Bronze Age ditch on Site 2

It is recognised nationally that field systems are notoriously difficult to date. In an attempt to retrieve better dating evidence, an innovative approach of machining out all the fills for closer examination is currently being attempted.

Previous evidence for human activity within the Loop during the middle-later Bronze Age comprised settlement (within the adjacent Bovis development) and an extensive pit



alignment (which also continues into the present development area).

Nationally, few land-divisions of this period have been recognised, although they are becoming more common especially in the Middle-Upper Thames valley. The identification of such boundaries within the present investigations raises the possibility that some of the boundaries within the Bovis investigations assigned to the Roman period (on the basis of limited dating evidence) may in fact have their origins in the middle-late Bronze Age.



Bronze Age ditches on Site 2

Although the identification of ditches associated with field systems may not seem particularly exciting they are a very significant discovery. The establishment of fields represents a dramatic change from the earlier periods, when the landscape was open and dominated by burial and ritual monuments. Although dramatic, this change did not include the wholesale removal of the previous landscape because the earlier monuments were incorporated into the new system.

It remains to be seen whether further contemporary settlement will be identified. On present evidence it appears to have been deliberately sited away from the earlier monuments. This is likely to be out of respect to the

ancestors and may even suggest that former monuments retained a sacred significance for people at this time.

ROMANO-BRITISH

FARMSTEAD

Archaeological investigations on the farmstead to the northeast of the development area are at an early stage.

They will, therefore, be reported on in a future Interim.

CEMETERY

A cremation cemetery containing 21 graves was located within the Honey Hill site. The graves were concentrated in a relatively small area in the southeastern part of the Bronze Age ring ditch. They were mainly unurned and the dating of the few pots used as urns is still uncertain. If, as seems likely, they do belong to the early Romano-British tradition of cremation burial, they will almost certainly be associated with the farmstead currently under investigation to the east.



Cremation burial under investigation on Honey Hill



EARLY- MIDDLE SAXON

SETTLEMENT

No evidence for early-middle Saxon activity in any shape or form was found within the adjacent Bovis development. However, the Honey Hill site has already produced two buildings of this period and a variety of artefacts.



Sunken area of a Saxon building on Honey Hill

The evidence for the buildings comprised shallow, rectangular pits, containing postholes for timbers that supported the roof. The sunken area is often interpreted as a cellar but this has been disputed by some archaeologists, leading to their description in archaeological jargon as “sunken-featured buildings”!! The two investigated so far were c. 8m apart, on the edge of the Romano-British farmstead. However, others have been tentatively identified within the area of the Romano-British farmstead.

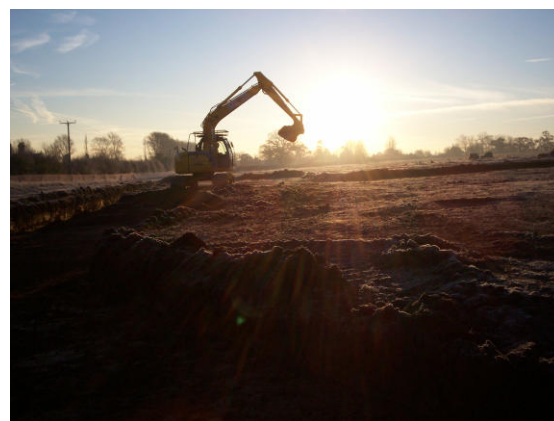
A more detailed account will be given in a future Interim.

LATE SAXON

SETTLEMENT

Archaeological investigations have only just commenced on the Land West of Kempston part of the development. The majority of the archaeological remains in this area date to the late Saxon period – there is no similar evidence from the Biddenham Loop. The remains are concentrated in the vicinity of The Bury, supporting the idea that this may have been the location of one of the medieval manorial settlements within Kempston.

As investigations are at an early stage these will be reported on in a future Interim.



Sunset and machining on Kempston investigations

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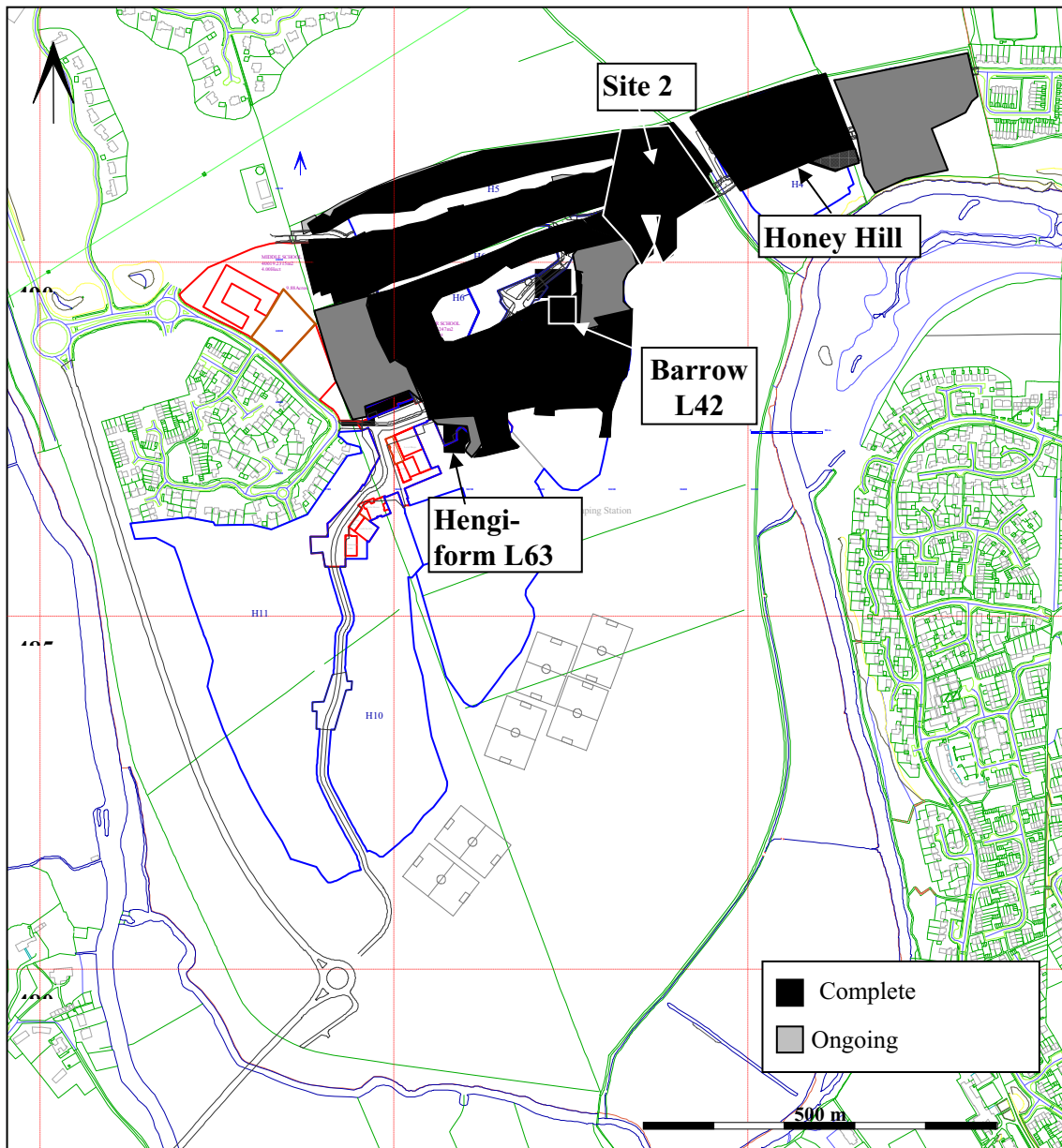
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CHRONOLOGICAL PERIODS USED IN THIS INTERIM

These are simply handy shorthand for a specific chronological range.

Late Neolithic	3,000-2,600 BC	Up to 5,000 years ago
Early Bronze Age	2,600-1,600 BC	Up to 4,600 years ago
Middle/late Bronze Age	1,600-700 BC	Up to 3,600 years ago
Iron Age	700 BC-AD 43	Up to 2,700 years ago
Roman	AD 43-410	Up to 2,000 years ago
Early-middle Saxon	AD 410-800	Up to 1,600 years ago
Late Saxon	AD 800-1066	Up to 1,200 years ago
Medieval	AD 1066-1500	Up to 1,000 years ago

NOTE. The date ranges are approximate and not absolute. They are often disputed between different archaeologists!!



Archaeological progress on Biddenham Loop (18/12/07)