



NEW VISITOR FACILITIES AT DITCHES LANE CAR PARK Farthing Down, Coulsdon London

London Borough of Coulsdon

Watching brief report

February 2011



**New Visitor Facilities at
Ditches Lane car park
Farthing Down, Coulsdon
London Borough of Croydon CR5**

Site Code FID10

A report on the archaeological watching brief

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Summary (non-technical)

This report has been commissioned by Ashtead Estate Office on behalf of the City of London in order to record and assess the results of a watching brief carried out at Ditches Lane car park at Farthing Downs, Coulsdon CR5. In recognition of the exceptionally well-preserved prehistoric landscape occupying this area of public open-space the whole area (including the car park) forms part of a Scheduled Ancient Monument (No: London 88). Therefore as a condition of Scheduled Monument Consent an archaeological watching brief was carried out to monitor groundwork's connected with the construction of new visitor facilities at the Ditches Lane car park. Works monitored during November 2010 to January 2011 included the construction of a new area of hard standing to the east of the toilets and a new footpath to the north of the car park, where a series of parallel plough marks probably of 20th century date were recorded. Generally the level of ground reduction was quite shallow and only revealed top and subsoil deposits (rather than chalk bed rock).

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Front cover: Ditches Lane car park before the present redevelopment started, view looking south

Fig 1 Site location plan.

Fig 2 Plan of proposed works at Ditches Lane car park, showing the extent of groundwork's which were monitored.

1 Introduction

1.1 Site background

The watching brief took place at Ditches Lane car park at Farthing Downs, Coulsdon, in the London Borough of Croydon CR5, hereafter called 'the site'. The site is bounded to east by Ditches Lane and to the south by a block of public toilets (see Fig 1). The centre of the site is at OS National Grid Reference: 53011571. The ground surface of the site slopes from south (c 148.6m OD), to north (c 146.4m OD). The site code is FID 10. A Method Statement was prepared for the watching brief (MOLA 2010).

1.2 The planning and legislative framework

The legislative and planning framework in which the archaeological exercise took place was summarised in the *Method Statement* which formed the project design for the watching brief (see Section 1.2, MOLA, 2010)

1.3 Origin and scope of the report

This report was commissioned by Ashted Estate Office on behalf of the City of London and produced by Museum of London Archaeology (MOLA). The report has been prepared within the terms of the relevant Standard specified by the Institute for Archaeologists (IFA, 2001).

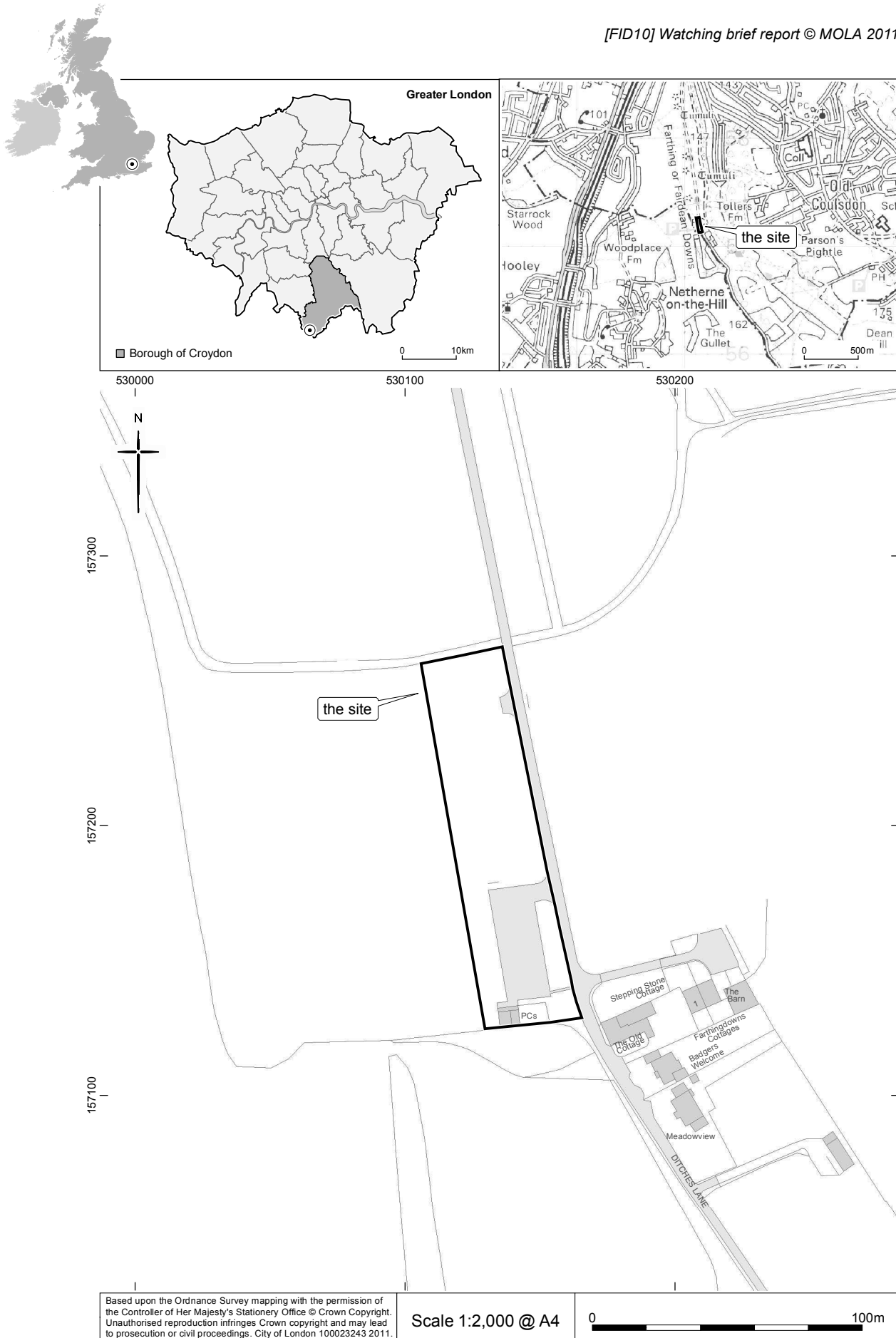
The purpose of the watching brief was to determine whether archaeological remains or features were present on the site and, if so, to record the nature and extent of such remains. A number of more site-specific research aims and objectives were established in the preceding *Method Statement* (MOLA 2010), and are outlined in the following section.

1.4 Aims and objectives

The following research aims and objectives were established in the *Method Statement* for the watching brief (Section 2.2):

- What is the level of natural topography?
- What were the earliest deposits identified?
- What were the latest deposits identified?

All research is undertaken within the priorities established in the Museum of London's *A research framework for London Archaeology, 2002*.



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Scale 1:2,000 @ A4

0 100m

Fig 1 Site location

2 Topographical and historical background

Farthing Down is comprised of a whaleback chalk ridge aligned approximately north to south, rising from c 115m OD on its east and west flanks to c 140m OD on the top of the ridge. The site is located in the North Downs, consisting of solid geology of Cretaceous Upper Chalk, overlain in places by a drift deposit of clay-with-flints. A thin layer of topsoil approximately 0.20m thick overlies the ridge of Farthing Down.

Finds of flint axes show that from the later Neolithic period (c 3,200 – 2000 BC) that this area of Downland was being utilised and probably its woodland being cleared so the area could be farmed. A series of rectilinear fields defined today by low banks were probably established here during the Bronze Age (c 2000 - 650 BC), these fields certainly continued in use during the Iron Age (c 650 BC - AD 43). It is probably that these fields also were used in the Roman period (AD 43 - 410), judging by scattered finds of Roman ceramics. During the Neolithic and Bronze Age periods a number of round barrows were constructed here as funerary monuments. During the early Saxon period (c AD 410-650) a number of graves were dug into these prehistoric barrows.

Due to the relatively thin soils this area of Downland is best suited to its current usage as grassland opposed to arable. Certainly, during the post-medieval period almost all this area was used as pasture, which resulted in the prehistoric earthworks not being flattened by cultivation, which has happened across huge swathes of southern England. In recognition of the survival of this area of prehistoric Downland landscape, it has been scheduled in the 1940s as an Ancient Monument (Scheduled Monument No. LO 88). The Greater London Sites and Monuments Record contains a great range of archaeological entries for the prehistoric and later periods for Farthing Down and its environs.

Farthing Down was acquired by the Corporation of London in 1883 as public open space to prevent its development and has been managed by them ever since.



Fig 2 Plan of proposed works at Ditches Lane car park, showing the extent of groundworks which were monitored

3 The watching brief

3.1 Methodology

All archaeological excavation and recording during the watching brief was done in accordance with the *Method Statement* (MOLA, 2010) and the *Archaeological Site Manual* (MoLAS, 1994).

The groundwork's, deemed to be deep enough to possibly reveal archaeological features such as pits or ditches cut into natural chalk, were monitored. Also the stripping of areas of top soil was monitored in case any stray or unstratified prehistoric flint artefacts were uncovered. The extent of the areas monitored was recorded on the plan of the proposed works (see Fig 2).

The site finds and records can be found under the site code FID10 in the MoL archive.

3.2 Results of the watching brief

There were four areas where significant ground reduction took place. First, the creation of a new area hard-standing (length 13.40m, width 6.00m), to the east of the toilets, which is intended for parking a mobile canteen. This area was formerly occupied by scrub and trees, so there were three extensive areas of root disturbance. The topsoil (depth 25-35cm, including turf) consisted of an organic dark greyish-brown fine sandy silt, containing abundant flecks and fragments of weathered chalk. The impression is that a short depth below the limit of excavation a subsoil horizon of brown stained, angular chalk fragments would have been found. There were also patches of clean yellow-brown sand, presumably of modern origin. Also there were two deeper oval areas filled with top soil, which appeared to be tree holes, one of which contained a plastic carrier bag confirming that it is a modern feature. The impression is that the combination of root disturbance and the installation of services (running from the nearby road to the toilets) had already caused extensive localised disturbance of the subsoil horizon.

Secondly, to the north or front of the toilets the excavation of foundations for the new porch and associated ground reduction (of an existing area of hard-standing) were not deep enough to reach solid natural geology (chalk). The excavations only revealed a subsoil horizon comprised of a mass of frost shattered, brown stained, angular chalk fragments, plus a few flint pebbles and nodules.

Thirdly, two shallow linear trenches each 1.6m wide and about 15cm deep (including turf) were excavated by mini digger on the eastern and western sides of the existing car park hard standing. Both trenches revealed only top soil. In both trenches with depth the frequency of brown stained weathered chalk fragments increased, but the subsoil horizon was not reached in either trench. Surplus top soil from these excavations was used to build a bank along the western edge of the car park.

Fourthly, the last piece of monitoring, which was carried on 26th January 2011, was the mini digger excavation of the new footpath leading from the area of hard standing (across the grass car park) northward to the new mound. The length of this trench was 69.70m, its width 1.60m and its depth 20cm. The northern end of the trench will be constructed over a modern dump of surplus top soil (derived from the

excavation of the rest of the path) and therefore its excavation will not be monitored. The sequence within the new footpath trench consisted of a 15cm thick accumulation of turf and top soil overlying a mass of frost shattered, brown stained, angular chalk fragments, plus a few flint pebbles, cobbles and nodules (up to 25cm long), interpreted as a subsoil horizon overlying chalk bed rock. Again the trench was not deep enough to reach bed rock and no artefacts were recovered from the top or sub soil. It appears that this area had been cultivated during the 20th century, as within the top soil were a series of parallel stripes interpreted as the result of mould-board ploughing. These plough marks consisted of a series of parallel stripes aligned north-west to south-east, some 15-20cm wide and 50cm apart, which at top soil level were present as dense concentrations of small chalk fragments. At a depth of 15cm below ground level (the top interface of the subsoil horizon) these stripes were generally 30cm wide and about 1.2 m apart. At this level the stripes were a mixture of small angular chalk fragments set in an orange-brown slightly clayey silt matrix. The location of these various areas of monitoring is shown on Fig 2.

4 Potential of archaeology

4.1 Original research aims

- *What is the level of natural topography?*

In the area of former arable land (the new foot path) the tuft and topsoil were 15cm thick, below this was subsoil horizon comprised of frost shattered chalk, the underlying chalk bed rock was not reached as the excavations were relatively shallow.

- *What were the earliest deposits identified?*

The subsoil horizon probably was formed during the early Holocene (c 10,000 BC).

- *What were the latest deposits identified*

One feature contained a plastic carrier bag.

4.2 Significance of the data

The monitoring of the groundwork's connected with the construction of the new visitor facilities revealed no significant archaeological features, but they did confirm an area of high modern disturbance to the east of the toilets and reveal the presence of mould-board plough marks across the area of the new footpath.

5 Publication and archiving

Information on the results of the excavation will be made publicly available by means of a database in digital form, to permit inclusion of the site data in any future academic researches into the development of London.

The site archive containing original records and finds will be stored in accordance with the terms of the *Method Statement* (MOLA, 2010) with the Museum of London within 12 months of the end of fieldwork.

In view of the very limited potential of the data (and the relatively limited significance of the data (Section 4) it is agreed that a short note outlining the results of the watching brief will appear in the annual fieldwork round up of the *London Archaeologist* for 2010 (already submitted at time of writing).

6 Acknowledgements

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John Ibbotson, site manager of Brymac Construction and his colleagues for their assistance and cooperation during the fieldwork; and thanks to Andrew Thwaites, Head Ranger (Resources) City of London for providing the digital plan of the new visitor facilities.

The fieldwork and production of this report was sponsored by the Ashtead Estate Office on behalf of the City of London.

7 Bibliography

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8 NMR OASIS archaeological report form

http://www.oasis.ac.uk/schema/1_2/oasis.xsd>

Oasis: molas1-92336, 01-Feb-11"

Project name: new visitor facilities at Ditches Lane car park, Farthing Down

Project description: A watching brief to monitor ground reduction connected with the construction of new visitor facilities at the Ditches Lane car park, Farthing Down, was carried out within part of the Scheduled Ancient Monument (No: Lo 88). Works included the construction of a new area of hard standing to the east of the toilets and a new footpath to the north of the car park, where a series of parallel plough marks probably of 20th century date were recorded. Generally the level of ground reduction was quite shallow and only revealed top and subsoil (frost shattered chalk fragments) deposits. None of the excavations were deep enough to reveal chalk bed rock

Project duration: 16-Nov-2010 to 26-Jan-2011

Project ID: FID10

Associated ID type : SM No. Lo 88

Project type: Watching Brief

Prompt: Scheduled Monument Consent

Status: Scheduled Monument (SM)

Land-use: Other 14 - Recreational usage