NORTH PENNINES ARCHAEOLOGY LTD

Client Report No. 426/06

REPORT ON AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF AT CHURCH ROAD, MELMERBY, CUMBRIA

FOR

EDEN HOUSING ASSOCIATION LTD

NGR NY 61175 37445

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CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES AND PLATES

SUMMARY

During November and December 2006, North Pennines Archaeology Ltd carried out an archaeological watching brief at Church Road Melmerby, Cumbria on behalf of Eden Housing Association Limited (NGR NY 61175 37445). The work followed a planning application for an affordable housing development by Eden Housing Association. This work was requested by Cumbria County Council Historic Environment Service, as the development site was in an area considered to have archaeological potential. Previously North Pennines Archaeology carried out a Rapid Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment on the site (*Hewitt and Beatty, 2005)* and an Archaeological Field Evaluation *(Liddell, 2006)*.

The archaeological desk based assessment indicated that whilst the potential for prehistoric, Romano-British and early medieval activity within the development site was low, the actual potential for a later medieval and post-medieval presence was high, based on observations recorded in the Historic Environment Record (CCHER), aerial photograph survey, and the knowledge that the village had a tower and church as early as the 13th century. The desk-based assessment also indicated the presence of a potential earlier village, in which the development area was located centrally. This suggested the likelihood of potential property boundaries and strip landholdings, as well as possible medieval building remains within the proposed development area.

The archaeological field evaluation on the site resulted in the discovery of two archaeological features, a north-south aligned ditch and a possible east-west aligned wall foundation. A single sherd of medieval pottery was found in the subsoil overlying the north-south aligned ditch. Although no dating evidence for the archaeological features was discovered the features do confirm the presence of human activity within the confines of the development area. These findings resulted in a request by Cumbria County Council Historic Environment Service to include an archaeological watching brief on all further groundworks carried out on the site.

On 18 July 2006 an initial watching brief was carried out during the excavation of five test pits as trial soak-aways (*Liddell, 2006*). No archaeological features were observed.

The watching brief outlined in this report was carried out over nine non-consecutive days during 2006. One archaeological feature of significance was observed during the groundworks. This comprised a fire pit of unknown date.

AKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Kevin Mounsey carried out the fieldwork. The report was prepared by Kevin Mounsey. Martin Railton, North Pennines Archaeology Project Officer managed the project. Thanks are due to Eden Housing Association Limited for commissioning the project, and to Jeremy Parsons, Assistant Archaeologist for Cumbria County Council Historic Environment Services, for his support on site.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Site Background

1.1.1 In November and December 2006, North Pennines Archaeology Limited undertook an archaeological watching brief at Church Road, Melmerby, Cumbria, (NGR: NY 61175 37445), following a request by Eden Housing Association Limited for archaeological monitoring during groundworks on the site (Figure 1). This followed on from an archaeological evaluation undertaken by North Pennines Archaeology in June 2006, which revealed traces of human activity. The watching brief was carried out over a period of nine non-consecutive days between 22nd November 2006 and 8th December 2006 and focussed on all groundworks undertaken on the site during a residential development.

1.1.2 Melmerby is located on the A686 road leading from Penrith in the west over Hartside Pass to Alston in the east, and presently has a population of around two hundred residents. The village is bisected by a winding stream, and is typical of many of the fell side villages in the Eden Valley, with the village buildings primarily constructed of red sandstone and overlooking an 11-acre green, once home to wrestling and cock-fighting and now used for grazing horses. The development site is located on the eastern side of the northern end of Church Road, between two existing housing schemes. St. John the Baptist's Church lies diagonally opposite the development, on the western side of the road (Figure 2).

1.1.3 The results of the desk-based assessment indicated that whilst the potential for prehistoric, Romano-British and early medieval within the development site was low, the actual potential for a later medieval and post-medieval presence was high, based on observations recorded in the Historic Environment Record (CCHER), aerial photograph survey and the knowledge that the village had a tower and church as early as the 13th century. The desk-based assessment also indicated the presence of a potential earlier village, in which the development area was located centrally. This suggested the likelihood of potential property boundaries and strip landholdings, as well as possible medieval building remains.

2 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

2.1 General Objectives

2.1.1 In summary, general objectives of the watching brief were:

Observe and record archaeological remains should they occur within the defined watching brief area;

Establish the presence/absence, nature, extent and state of preservation of archaeological remains as far as possible within the remit of the archaeological watching brief condition;

Recover artefactual material, especially where useful for dating purposes;

Recover palaeoenvironmental material where it survives.

2.2 Site Specific Aims

2.2.1 Site-specific requirements were defined as follows:

Monitor the area during excavation to impact depth (average 1.80m below present-day ground level) for foundation insertion.

Investigate and record any archaeological remains encountered, and to protect them from damage where appropriate;

Define the location, character, extent and state of preservation of any archaeological features encountered.

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Fieldwork

3.1.1 The watching brief comprised of nine non-consecutive days of observation on the area of development. Excavation was concentrated in the northern eastern sectors of site with machine excavated trenches reaching depths between 1.20m and 2.10m in depth (Plates 3 and 4).

3.1.2 NPA standard pro-forma watching brief sheets were completed and observations recorded on a daily basis. Archaeological features were investigated and recorded, in accordance with the NPA standard procedure as set out in the company Manual (*Giecco, 2001*) and the Institute of Field Archaeologists *Standards and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs* (IFA 1994).

3.1.3 Photography was undertaken using Canon EOS 500, Canon EOS 3000 Single Lens Reflex (SLR) automatic cameras and a Fujifilm A330 (3.2 mega pixels) digital camera. A photographic record was made using 200 ISO colour slide film and 400 ISO black and white print film as well as a digital record.

3.1.4 All references to cardinal directions refer to site grid north.

3.2 Project Archive

3.2.1 The full archive has been produced to a professional standard in accordance with the current English Heritage guidelines set out in the Management of Archaeological Projects (*English Heritage, 2nd Ed. 1991*).

3.2.2 The archive will be deposited within an appropriate repository, and a copy of the report given to the County Sites and Monuments Record, where viewing will be available on request. The archive can be accessed under the unique project identifier NPA 06, MEL-C. North Pennines Archaeology is registered with the **O**nline **A**ccess to the **I**ndex of archaeological investigations **(OASIS)**.

4 RESULTS

4.1 Introduction

4.1.1 Archaeological observations at Church Road, Melmerby began on 22nd November 2006 for three days; a further five days of the watching brief were undertaken from 29th November to 5th December 2006. A final day was worked on the 8th December 2006. A brief period of time was obtained by the archaeologist to conduct a thorough examination of all material excavated and removed and to examine and record the sections and bases of all excavated trenches before the concrete foundations were inserted.

4.12 Groundworks on the site were essentially carried out in four main phases by mechanical excavator. The site was initially levelled. Two sets of foundation trenches were then excavated for four units (Units 1-4). Finally a service trench was excavated to accommodate the main foul drain (Figure 3).

4.2 Phase 1

4.2.1 Phase 1 consisted of the removal of the turf and a dark brown topsoil [100] from the entire designated development area. This layer had inclusions of post-medieval pottery (19th and 20th century) and animal bone within it. The topsoil varied in depth from 0.50m on the northern edge of the site to 0.20 m on the southern edge of the site. An average depth of 0.35m was observed.

4.2.2 The site had a natural gentle slope downwards from north to south. In order to facilitate building construction this had to be levelled off. The 360 mechanical excavator extracted subsoil [102] from the site, in order to create a relatively level working platform. The subsoil consisted of an orangey brown, sandy layer averaging 0.50m thick. This overlay the light orange, sandy natural ground [101]. A depth of 0.70m of subsoil was excavated from the northern periphery of the site, diminishing to 0.20m on the southern edge. Church Road at this stage was 0.30m above the excavated surface.

4.2.3 During the levelling of the site an archaeological feature was observed at the northern edge on the subsoil / natural soil interface. The feature was half sectioned as part of the archaeological investigative process (Plates 1 and 2). It consisted of a sub-oval pit [103] measuring 1.20m by 0.80m and having a depth of 0.18m. Within the pit were several stones < 0.20m. The sloping edges of the pit contained irregular patches of black burnt material [104] containing charcoal (Figure 4). This material was collected as environmental sample <1>. Around the wider periphery of the pit pieces of charcoal were observed embedded in the natural. No datable finds were recovered from the feature and it has been interpreted as a small fire pit.

4.3.4 After levelling the site was covered in a geotextile membrane [106] over which was spread a 0.20m layer of off white hardcore [105].

4.3 Phase 2

4.3.1 Phase 2 consisted of the excavation of a series of foundation trenches for Units 1 and 2. These were excavated in the eastern corner of the site by a 360 mechanical excavator with 0.60m wide toothed bucket. The trenches penetrated the hardcore, geotextile membrane, any remaining subsoil and into the natural ground. Due to the sandy nature of the natural ground the foundation trenches were dug down until the sand became sandstone in order to provided a firm footing. This happened at various depths between 1.20m and 1.85m (Plate 5) No archaeological features were observed.

4.4 Phase 3

4.4.1 Phase 3 consisted of the excavation of a series of foundation trenches for Units 3 and 4. These were excavated in the northern corner of the site by a 360 mechanical excavator with 0.60m wide toothed bucket. The trenches penetrated the hardcore, geotextile membrane, any remaining subsoil and into the natural ground. Due to the sandy nature of the natural ground the foundation trenches were dug down until the sand became sandstone in order to provided a firm footing. This happened at various depths between 1.50m and 2.10m. No archaeological features were observed.

4.5 Phase 4

4.5.1 Phase 4 consisted of the excavation of a service trench for the foul drain serving the four units. The trench extended from the eastern corner of the development area and ran parallel and adjacent to the southern boundary hedge of the adjacent field (Plate 6). The excavation was 0.50m wide with an average depth of 1.0m. Stratigraphy consisted of 0.20m of hardcore [105] over a Bontec membrane [106] over 0.20m of topsoil [100] over 0.60m of subsoil [102]. The natural soil [101] was just beginning to appear at a depth of 1.0m. A cast iron water supply pipe crossed the trench in a north-south direction, 18.3m from the south west end. No archaeological features were observed.

5 THE FINDS

5.1 The pottery and other artefactual material was cleaned and packaged according to standard guidelines, and recorded under the supervision of F Giecco (NPA Ltd Technical Director). The finds are quantified in Table 1. The whole assemblage was retrieved from the post-medieval topsoil deposit [100] and consist of late 19th century / 20th century material. These finds do not justify any further work and they were discarded.

Context	Material	Quantity	Weight (kg)	Period
100	Post Medieval Pottery	6	0.058	Post Medieval
100	Bottle Glass	1	0.007	Post Medieval
100	Steel (Knife Blade)	1	0.018	Post Medieval

Table 1 Finds recovered during the watching brief

6 ENVIRONMENTAL EVIDENCE

6.1 Environmental Remains

6.1.1 Throughout the period of the watching brief only one context was considered worth sampling. This sample came from the fill of a possible fire pit [104]. All of the whole earth sample was selected for processing in order to assess the environmental potential. This will help provide further information as to the depositional processes involved in the formation. The methodology employed required that the whole earth sample be broken down and split into their various different components. This was achieved by a combination of water washing and flotation. The recovered remains were then assessed for content.

6.1.2 Flotation separates the organic, floating fraction of the sample from the heavier mineral and finds content of sands, silts, clays, stones, artefacts and waterlogged material. Heavy soil and sediment content measuring less than 1mm falls through the retentive mesh to settle on the bottom of the tank. Flotation produces a 'flot' and a 'residue' or 'retent' for examination, whilst the heavier sediment retained in the tank is discarded. The method relies purely on the variation in density of the recovered material to separate it from the soil matrix, allowing for the recovery of ecofacts and artefacts from the whole earth sample.

6.1.3 The retent, like the residue from wet sieving, will contain any larger items of bone, or artefacts. The flot or floating fraction will generally contain organic material such as plant matter, fine bones, cloth, leather and insect remains. A rapid scan at this stage will allow further recommendations to be made as to the potential for further study by entomologists or palaeobotanists, with a view to retrieving vital economic information from the samples. Favourable preservation conditions can lead to the retrieval of organic remains that may produce a valuable suite of information in respect of the depositional environment of the material, which may include anthropogenic activity, seasonality and climate and elements of the economy. The contents of the samples are listed below in Tables 2 and 3.

SAMPLE **NUMBER**	CONTEXT **NUMBER**	**SAMPLE SIZE (litres)**	**FLOT SIZE (cm^3)**	**RETENT SIZE (cm^3)**
1	104	5	50	700

Table 2 Details of samples and contexts

DETAILS			RETENT FRACTION							LIGHT FRACTION												
Context	Context type	Sample number	Root material	Charred wood	Waterlogged wood	Burnt bone	Bone	Gravel	Stones	Insects	Charred wood	Root material	Charred wheat	Charred oats	Charred barley	Grass	Chenopodium	Raspberry	Brassica	Dogwood	Other seeds	Charred organic	Woody plant parts
104	Fill	1	3	1	0	0	0	3	1	0	3	3	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2

Table 3 Contents of flot and retent residues from samples.

Key to tables: Fill = ditch, posthole or pit fill. Contents assessed by scale of richness 0 to 3. 0 = not present, 1 = present, 2 = common, 3 = abundant.

6.2 Sample 1 (Context 104)

6.2.1 This sample was from the fill of a pit. The matrix was a dark grey, moderately compacted, mainly carbon fill, with inclusions of stones up to 20cm wide. The retent was made up of fire cracked stones and gritty gravel with some charcoal present. The flot contained only one fragment of charred grain, identified as oat from its general shape and size. The only other seed present was one of uncharred *Chenopodium* species. Charcoal was frequent throughout the flot.

6.3 Discussion

6.3.1 The fire cracked stones and charcoal are indicative of the feature being a fire pit.

6.4 Dating

6.4.1 It was not considered necessary to carry out any scientific dating methods on material recovered from the site as the finds were all Post Medieval and the pit did not seem to be linked with any industrial or grain drying processes.

6.5 Animal Remains

6.5.1 There was only one fragment of bone. This was the end of a large mammal bone, probably male cattle but the material was too degraded to make a firm identification. It was probably the lower third of a right radius, with a recently fused epiphysis.

6.5.2 No mollusc remains were recovered from the site.

7 CONCLUSIONS

7.1 The archaeological watching brief carried out at Church Road, Melmerby, Cumbria, detected one archaeological feature during the excavation of the foundation and foul drain trenches.

7.2 The watching brief revealed that the ground within the development area appears to be a fairly shallow topsoil overlying a sandy subsoil covering the natural geology of degraded red sandstone.

7.3 One feature, a possible fire pit containing several stones < 0.20m, was observed at the centre of the north west edge of the site at a depth of 1.20m below the existing ground level.

7.4 The north-south aligned ditch and the possible east-west aligned wall foundation, revealed during the previous evaluation work were not observed during the watching brief.

7.5 All three features uncovered failed to provide any satisfactory archaeological dating evidence.

7.6 One sample was taken for environmental analysis from the blackened area [104] in the possible fire pit. Given the limited information retrieved further investigation or dating analysis is not deemed necessary in relation to this site. Potential for further useful information being gained from the examination of this material is limited and so it is recommended that no further work be done.

7.7 In summary the presence of three undated features confirms the presence of human activity within the confines of the development area.

7.8 The work detailed here constitutes the final report on the full programme of archaeological watching brief undertaken at the site. It is therefore recommended that no further archaeological work would be required.

9 BIBLIOGRAPHY

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APPENDIX 1: FIGURES

APPENDIX 2: PLATES

Plate 1 Fire pit [103], [104] looking west

Plate 2 Fire pit [103], [104] looking north west

Plate 3 Unit 1 foundation trench looking south west

Plate 4 Unit 4 foundation trench looking south west

Plate 5 Development site foundation trenches looking south east

Plate 6 Trench for foul drain looking north east

North Pennines Archaeology Ltd
2007

PROJECT:	Watching brief at Church Lane, Melmerby
DRAWING No:	Fig 1
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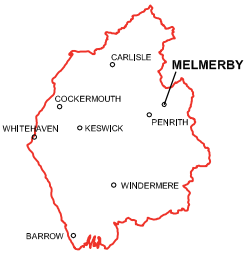
TITLE:	Location Plan
CLIENT	Eden Housing Association Ltd
DRAWN BY:	MDR
DATE:	January 2007

LOCATION:



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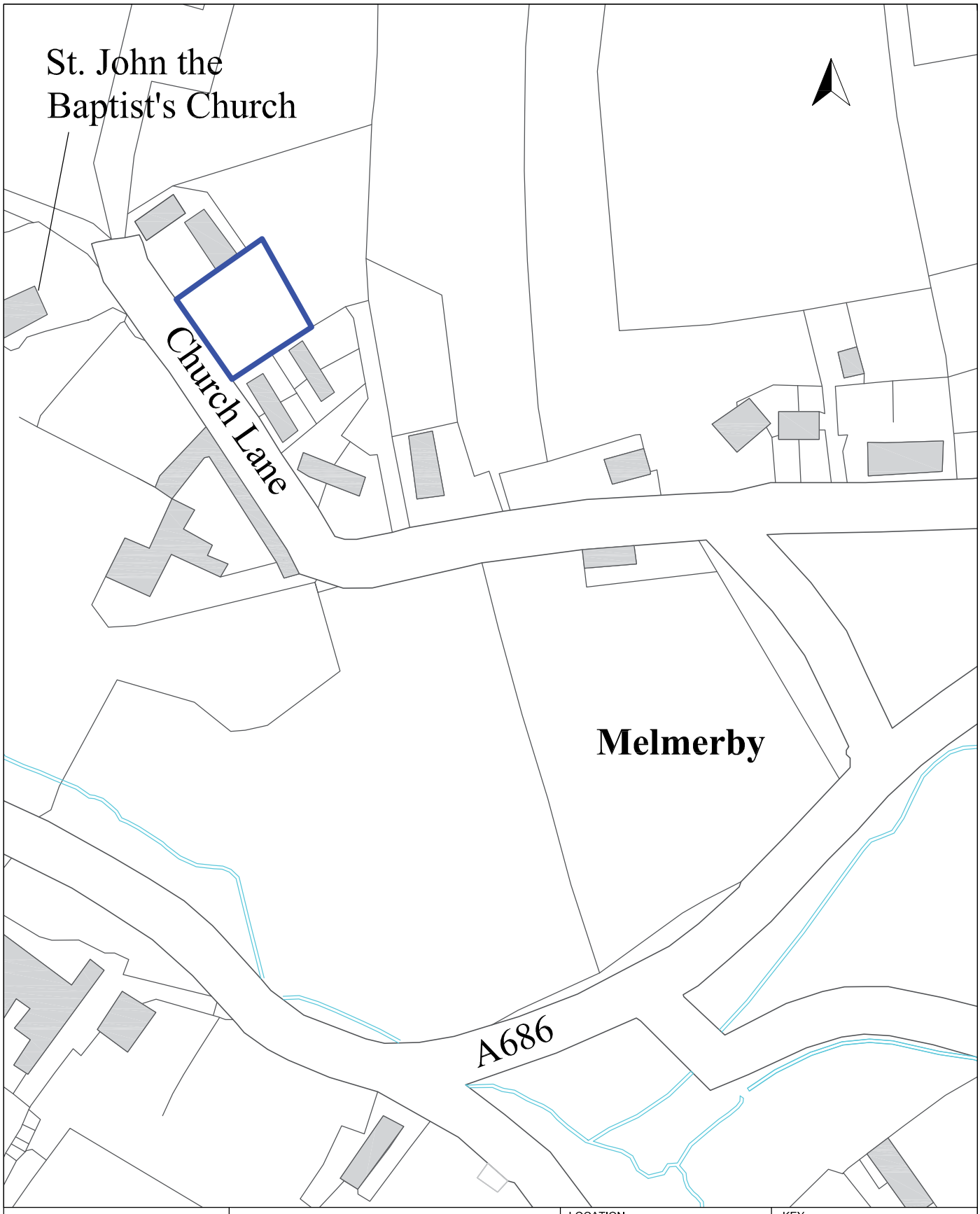

North Pennines Archaeology Ltd
2007

PROJECT:	Watching brief at Church Lane, Melmerby
DRAWING No:	Fig 2
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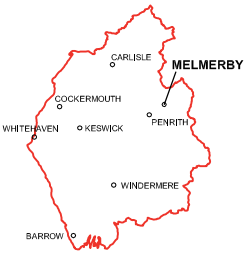
TITLE:	Location of development area
CLIENT	Eden Housing Association Ltd
DRAWN BY:	MDR
DATE:	January 2007

LOCATION:



KEY:

OUTLINE OF DEVELOPMENT AREA

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2007

PROJECT:	Watching brief at Church Lane, Melmerby
DRAWING No:	Fig 3
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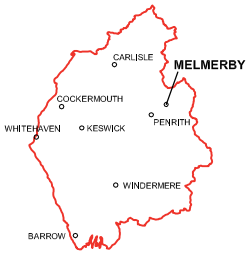
CLIENT	Eden Housing Association Ltd
DRAWN BY:	KM & MDR
DATE:	January 2007

LOCATION:



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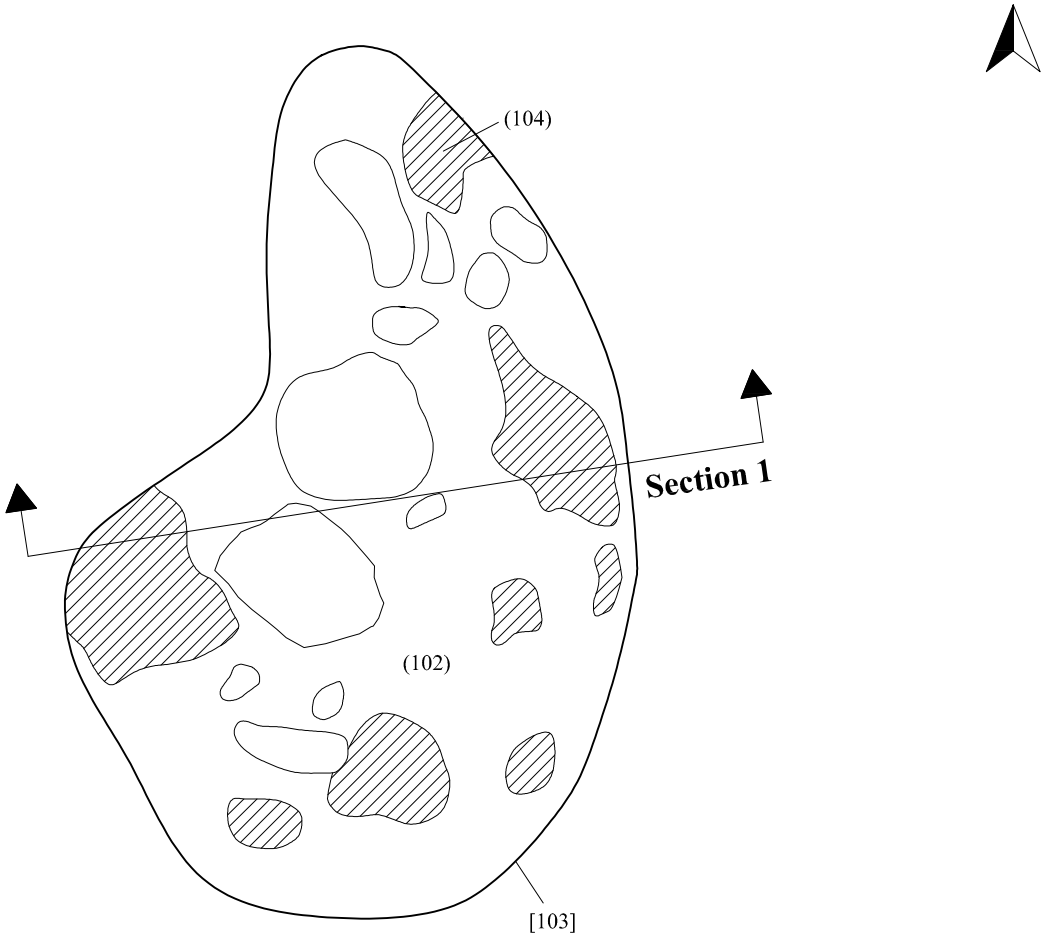
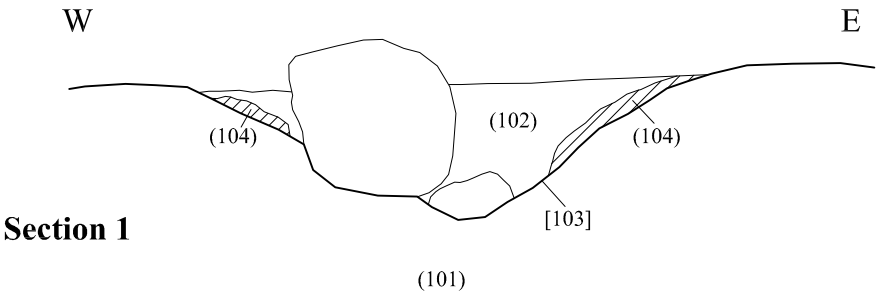
OUTLINE OF DEVELOPMENT AREA

AREA OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL MONITORING



Plan 1



Section 1

North Pennines Archaeology Ltd 2007	PROJECT: Watching brief at Church Lane, Melmerby DRAWING No: Fig 4 SCALE: 1:10 TITLE: Plan and section of feature [103] CLIENT Eden Housing Association Ltd DRAWN BY: KM & MDR DATE: January 2007	LOCATION: [103] SCALE: 1:1000	KEY: OUTLINE OF DEVELOPMENT AREA AREA OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL MONITORING