

Archaeological Services & Consultancy Ltd

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION:
MIDDLE MILL ROAD
COLCHESTER
ESSEX**

NGR: TL 9970 2559

on behalf of N R Powell Developments Ltd



David Kaye BA PIFA

February 2008

ASC: 1018/CMM/1

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Site Data

| | | | |
|---------------------------------------|---|----------------------------|------|
| <i>ASC project code:</i> | CMM | <i>ASC project no:</i> | 1018 |
| <i>OASIS ref:</i> | N/A | <i>Event/Accession no:</i> | N/A |
| <i>County:</i> | Essex | | |
| <i>Village/Town:</i> | Colchester | | |
| <i>Civil Parish:</i> | Colchester | | |
| <i>NGR (to 8 figs):</i> | TL 9970 2559 | | |
| <i>Extent of site:</i> | 0.13 hectares | | |
| <i>Present use:</i> | Disused garaging and car park | | |
| <i>Planning proposal:</i> | Construction of seven new houses | | |
| <i>Planning application ref/date:</i> | F/COL/07/1726 | | |
| <i>Local Planning Authority:</i> | Colchester Borough Council | | |
| <i>Date of fieldwork:</i> | 24 th January 2008 | | |
| <i>Commissioned by:</i> | Richard Powell N R P Developments Limited Howard Hall Benfleet Road Benfleet, Essex SS7 1QG | | |
| <i>Client:</i> | As above | | |
| <i>Contact name:</i> | Richard Powell | | |

Internal Quality Check

| | | | |
|---------------------------|--------------------|--------------|-------------------------------|
| <i>Primary Author:</i> | David Kaye BA PIFA | <i>Date:</i> | 6 th February 2008 |
| <i>Revisions:</i> | | <i>Date:</i> | |
| <i>Edited/Checked By:</i> | | <i>Date:</i> | |

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Figure 1: General location (scale 1:25,000)

Summary

In January 2008 ASC Ltd conducted an archaeological evaluation at Middle Mill Road, Colchester, in advance of the construction seven new houses, to be located on the site of the former Council Depot. Two trenches were excavated within the footprint of the proposed development area. The stratigraphy of the trenches consisted of the existing concrete hard standing and associated construction layers, overlying up to 1.55m of alluvial deposit. The natural geology consisted of dark orange sandy gravel. Five sub-circular features were observed in Trench 1. However, due to flooding only two were accessible for excavation. Both appeared to be shallow pits containing ceramic building material, probably Roman in date.

1. Introduction

1.1 In January 2008 *Archaeological Services and Consultancy Ltd* (ASC) carried out an evaluation at Middle Mill Road, Colchester, Essex (NGR TL 9970 2559: Figure 1). The project was commissioned by N R P Developments Ltd, and was carried out according to a brief (Winter 2007) prepared on behalf of the local planning authority (LPA), *Colchester Borough Council*, by their archaeological advisor (AA), *Colchester Museum Service*, and a project design prepared by ASC (Barclay and Fell 2007). The relevant planning application reference is F/COL/07/1726.

1.2 *Planning Background*

This evaluation was required under the terms of *Planning Policy Guidance Note 16* (PPG16), as a condition of planning permission for the development of the site.

1.3 *Archaeological Services & Consultancy Ltd*

Archaeological Services & Consultancy Ltd (ASC) is an independent archaeological practice providing a full range of archaeological services including consultancy, field evaluation, mitigation and post-excavation studies, historic building recording and analysis. ASC is recognised as a *Registered Archaeological Organisation* by the Institute of Field Archaeologists, in recognition of its high standards and working practices.

1.4 *Management*

The project was carried out under the overall direction of **David Fell** MA MIFA. David is an experienced archaeologist with extensive fieldwork and post-excavation experience, and also of historical research and building recording. David holds a first degree from the University of York, and a master's degree from Birmingham University. He has held a range of supervisory appointments since 1990, including *Milton Keynes Archaeology Unit*, *Bucks County Archaeology Service*, *Beds County Archaeology Service*, *Archaeological Project Services*, *Hertfordshire Archaeological Trust* and the *Museum of London Archaeology Service*.

1.5 *The Site*

1.5.1 *Location & Description*

The site is located in the Borough of Colchester, Essex (Figure 1). It lies north of the town centre, immediately south of the River Colne, at the junction of

Middle Mill Road and St Peter's Street and is centred on Ordnance Survey National Grid Reference TL 9970 2559 (Figure 2). It comprises a sub-rectangular area of c.0.13 ha and is currently surfaced with tarmac and concrete. Single storey, brick built storage units are present on the western side of the site.

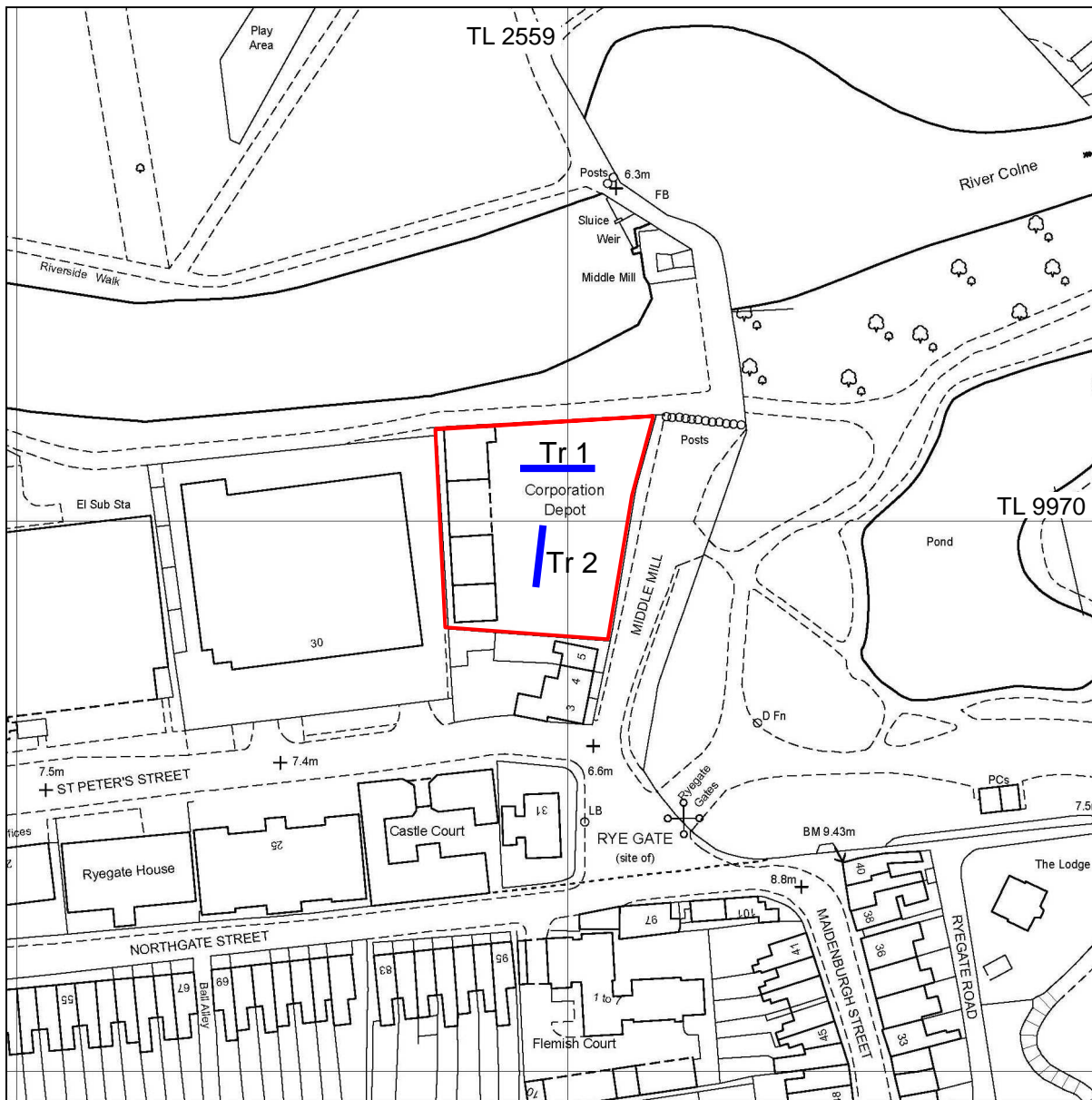


Figure 2: Site plan (scale 1:1250)

1.5.2 Geology & Topography

The site is in an urban area and the soils have not been mapped. If the natural soils survive they are likely to comprise the *Wix Association*, namely permeable coarse loamy soils over glaciofluvial drift (Soil Survey 1983, 573b). The solid geology is London Clay. The natural drainage of the area is dominated by the river Colne, which flows close to the north side of the site, before draining into the North Sea near Brightlingsea. The site is essentially flat and lies at an elevation of c.6.5m OD.

1.5.3 Proposed Development

The planning proposal is for the demolition of all extant buildings on the site, and the construction of seven new houses, garages and storage (Figure 3).

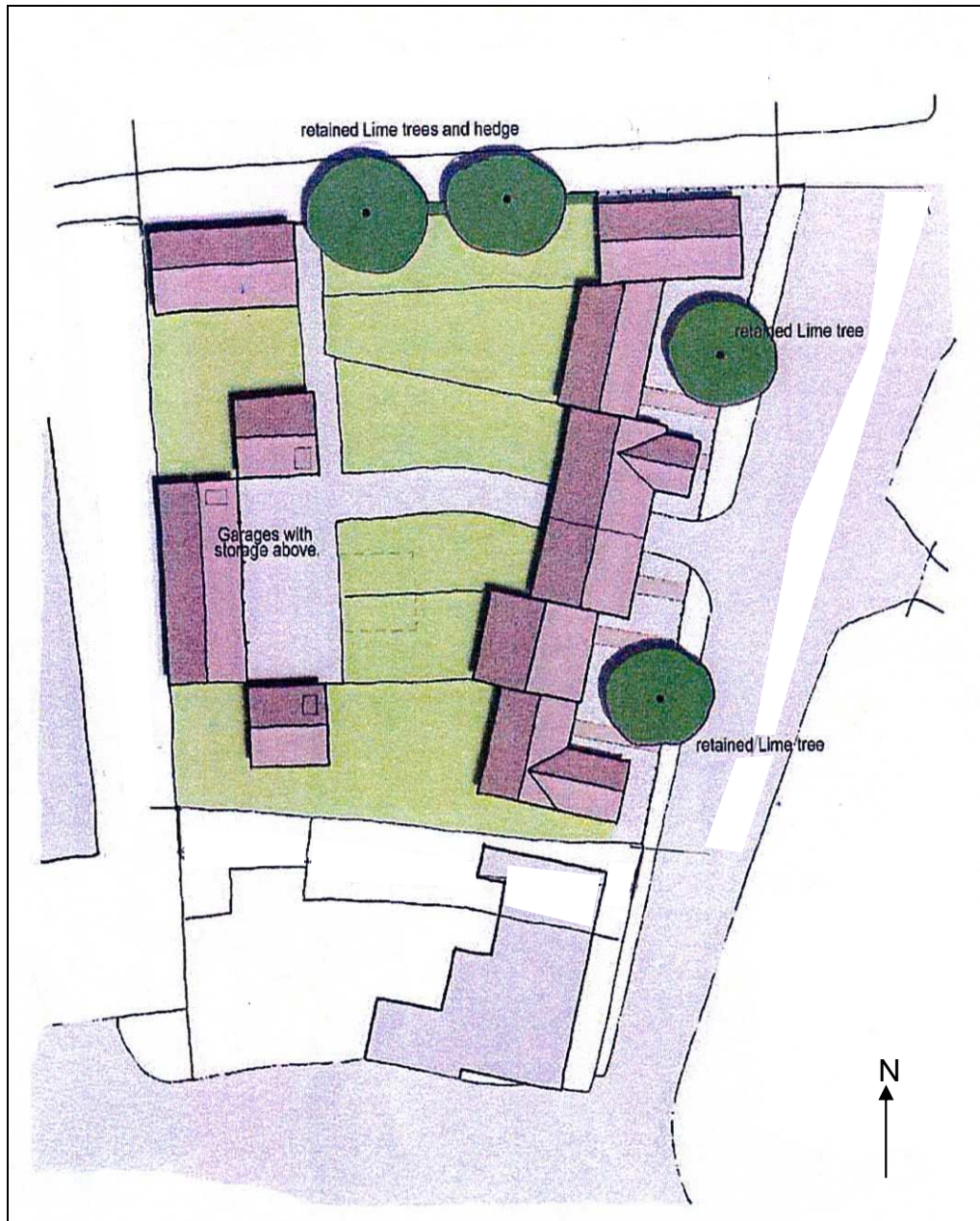


Figure 3: Proposed development (*not to scale*)

2. Aims & Methods

2.1 Aims

As described in the brief (Section 5), the aims of the evaluation were:

- To establish the extent, character, date and complexity of any surviving archaeological deposits within the proposed development area.

2.2 Standards

The work conformed to the project design, to the relevant sections of the Institute of Archaeologists' *Code of Conduct* (IFA 2000) and *Standard & Guidance Notes* (IFA 2001), to the Association of Local Government Archaeological Officers East of England Region *Standards for Field Archaeology in the East of England* (ALGAO 2003), to the *Guidelines on Standards and Practices for Archaeological Fieldwork in the Borough of Colchester*, to the *Guidelines on the Preparation and Transfer of Archaeological Archives to Colchester Museum*, and to the relevant sections of ASC's own *Operations Manual*.

2.3 Methods

The work was carried out according to the approved Project Design (Barclay and Fell 2007), which required:

- Two trenches totalling 25m in length to be excavated within the footprint of the proposed development area. Their location is shown on Figure 2.
- ASC's general methodology is described in detail in Sections 2.4 of the Project Design.

2.4 Constraints

Due to the nature of the stratigraphy and the height of the water table, the sides of the first trench to be excavated were undermined, leading to continual significant collapse. This trench had to be abandoned 3m short of its proposed length (Plate 1). The second trench was lengthened by 3m to compensate, and the sides were stepped to ensure safe access to the base.

3. Archaeological & Historical Background

- 5.1 The following section provides a summary of the readily available archaeological and historical background to the development site and its environs. The site lies within an area of archaeological and historical interest, and has the potential to reveal evidence of a range of periods.
- 5.2 Colchester is an area of considerable archaeological and historical interest (eg Denny 2004; Crummy 2001). The site has the potential to reveal evidence of a variety of periods but the main focus of interest is likely to lie in the Roman period.
- 5.3 There is evidence for human activity from the early prehistoric periods and, for example, a number of handaxes and Beaker pottery sherds have been recorded in the area (Davies 1992, 7).
- 5.4 The area to the west of the modern city centre, now occupied by the suburban areas of Lexden and Stanway, was of considerable importance during the late Iron Age and was the site of an *oppidum* (defended settlement). The area was defined by a number of earth defences referred to as 'dykes' and was known as *Camulodunum* (Romanised form), meaning the 'stronghold' or 'fortification' of *Camulos* (Crummy 2001, 13-15).
- 5.5 Following the Roman invasion of Britain AD43 a legionary fortress was constructed at Colchester and this lay in the area of the modern city centre, to the south of the site (eg Crummy 2001, 39). Following the departure of the legions the fortress site was redeveloped as the Roman city of Colchester (*Camulodunum*) and had the status of a *colonia* (Wacher 1995).
- 5.6 The site is situated north of the city wall, within an area of possible extramural settlement. Parts of the north side of the city, beyond the wall, are also known to have comprised cemeteries (eg Wacher 1995, Figure 26) and the site therefore has the potential to contain human remains.
- 5.7 The earliest evidence of Saxon activity within Colchester comes from the 5th and 6th centuries, where settlement evidence has been recorded within the walls of the former Roman town (Denney 2004). The settlement developed during the later Saxon period and is included in the Domesday survey (1086) where it is referred to as *Colecestra* (Morris 1983).
- 5.8 The site lies to the south of *Middle Mill* (Figure 2). The origins of the mill are not known in detail but a mill may have been located in the area since the Saxon period. It was first recorded in 1101 as part of the estate of Colchester castle and is referred to as the *Kings Mill*. The mill is shown on Thomas Sparrow's map of Colchester, which was compiled in 1797 and, in more detail, on the first edition large scale Ordnance Survey map, which was published in 1896. The latter shows that the site was divided into five separate land parcels, with buildings at the northeast and southeast corners respectively.

4. Results

4.1 Two trenches were excavated within the proposed development area. Trench 1 was 15.5m in length, and orientated east-west, parallel to the northern site boundary (Figure 2). Trench 2 was 9.5m in length and orientated north-south.

4.2 Trench 2 (Plates 1 & 2)

The stratigraphy of Trench 2 consisted of the existing concrete and modern construction layers to a depth of 0.35m, overlying up to 1.55m of very dark grey silty clay alluvium. The natural geology consisted of dark orange sandy gravel (Plate 1).

4.3 The site is located c.7m south of the river Colne, within the historical flood plain. The trench was excavated to the first archaeological horizon or the natural geology, and its depth was such that the water table was encountered. The combination of the machining action and the depth of the water led to the sides of the trench being eroded and undermined. The resulting collapses meant the trench had to be abandoned 3m short of its intended length (Plate 2).

4.4 Despite the severity of the subsidence within the trench, it was possible to observe the natural geology as it was freshly exposed, and no archaeological cut features or deposits were noted.

4.5 Some worked stone was recovered from a modern construction layer directly below the existing concrete surface. This appears to be fragments of medieval window tracery and possible doorjamb. This material may have originated from the 11th century Benedictine Abbey which was located c.1km to the south of the site, and was extant until the 17th century. There were also a number of finds recovered from the alluvium, including animal bone and oyster shell.

4.6 Trench 1 (Figure 4, Plate 3)

Trench 1 was 15.5m in length and orientated east-west. It was extended by 3m from its proposed length to compensate for the reduction in Trench 2. As the ground had proved to be unstable, the second trench was widened and stepped to allow safe access to the base.

4.7 The stratigraphy consisted of the existing tarmac surface and construction layers overlying a mid orange brown, sandy gravel layer of made ground, 0.6m in depth. Below this was up to 0.8m of alluvial deposit overlying the sandy gravel natural. Within the alluvial deposit, at the western end of the trench, was a lens of yellowish, fine sandy gravel, up to 0.4m in depth and at least 3m in length.

4.8 At the eastern end of the trench, cut into the layer of sandy gravel made ground, were the remnants of two red brick walls. The bricks measured 228mm x 114mm x 63mm (9" x 4.5" x 2.5"), were unfrogged and appeared to be hand made. The clay contained very few inclusions, and there was no evidence of skintlings. This may suggest they were locally made, probably on a small scale.

- 4.9 The bricks were bonded with a lime mortar and a single layer of the same type of brick formed a floor between the two walls. There was no evidence of a sand base or any other bedding material below this surface.
- 4.10 At the western end of the trench, cut into the same layer of made ground, was the remnant of a modern, cement mortared wall. Below this lay the alluvial deposit and the lens of fine sandy gravel. Beneath this was a deposit of roughly cut wooden planks and a small tree trunk c.0.2m in diameter, within the alluvium. This may be the result of either building debris being discarded in the river during the construction of the adjacent buildings, or the presence of the buildings creating a backwater thereby causing the material to be deposited during one or more floodings.
- 4.11 At the base of the trench, cut into the natural gravel, five sub-circular features were observed while the trench was being excavated. Due to the rapid rise in the water level, only two of the features [101] and [103] were accessible for investigation (Plates 4 & 5). Both were shallow, measuring less than 0.15m, and both contained the same very dark grey, silty fill, with frequent sub-ovoid flint <80mm in diameter, (102) and (104). Both fills also contained low grade CBM, and (104) contained oyster shell and one fragment of cattle bone.
- 4.12 Whilst the CBM is fragmentary, the size and fabric of some of the pieces would suggest it may be Roman in date. Other fragments of CBM, also probably Roman in date, were recovered from unstratified contexts. Detailed information regarding the trial trench and its contents appears in Appendix 1.



Plate 1: Trench 2, stratigraphy



Plate 2: Trench 2, facing north



Plate 3: Trench 1, facing east

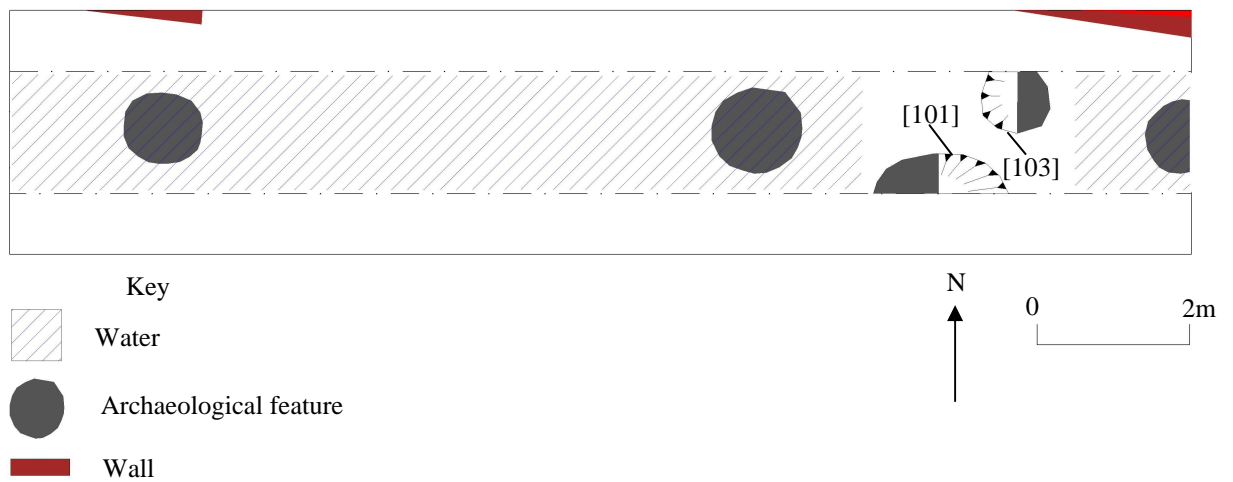


Figure 4: Plan of Trench 1. Scale 1:100



Plate 4: Pit [101], facing east



Plate 5: Pit [103], facing west

5. Conclusions

- 5.1 The site lies within a rich, well-documented archaeological landscape, most notably relating to the Roman period. However, it was considered that the present evaluation had the potential to reveal information relating to a much broader chronology.
- 5.2 The wall exposed in the made ground at the eastern end of Trench 1 may relate to the mill that once stood adjacent to the site. It could have formed part of the mill itself or be a remnant of the mill owner's house that is thought to have been a later extension.
- 5.3 The wall fragment at the western end of the trench is modern and probably relates to a structure that was present immediately prior to the construction of the extant buildings.
- 5.4 The excavated archaeology in Trench 1 consisted of two pits, probably Roman in date, containing fragments of low-grade ceramic building material and domestic debris. They were shallow in depth and both contained the same very dark grey mixture of silty clay and gravel. Three other features of similar appearance were noted in the trench but the high level of the water table prevented further investigation. However, it seems probably that they all represent domestic refuse pits.
- 5.5 A sample of unstratified finds was recovered from the spoil, and these are consistent with the types of artefacts normally present on sites close to domestic settlement.
- 5.6 No archaeological cut features relating to any structures were encountered during the present project. This is probably because the site's location lies within the historical flood plain.
- 5.7 *Confidence Rating*

The height of the water table and the nature of the stratigraphy of the site led to the collapse of Trench 2 and the partial flooding of Trench 1. However, clean natural geology was observed during the machining and two out of five similar features were excavated and recorded. A moderate to high confidence rating is attached to the results of the evaluation.

6. Acknowledgements

The evaluation was commissioned by N R P Developments Limited. The writer is grateful to Richard Powell for his assistance. The project was monitored by Martin Winter on behalf of the local planning authority. The project was managed for ASC by David Fell MA MIFA. Fieldwork was carried out by David Kaye and Jenny Richards. The report was prepared by David Kaye and edited by Bob Zeepvat BA MIFA.

7. Archive

7.1 The project archive will comprise:

1. Brief
2. Project Design
3. Initial Report
4. Clients site plans
5. Site records
6. Finds records
7. Finds
8. Site record drawings
9. List of photographs
10. B/W prints & negatives
11. CDROM with copies of all digital files.

7.2 The archive will be deposited with Colchester Museum.

8. References

Standards & Specifications

ALGAO 2003 *Standards for Field Archaeology in the East of England*. East Anglian Archaeology Occasional Paper 14.

EH 1991 *The Management of Archaeological Projects*, 2nd edition. English Heritage (London).

IFA 2000a Institute of Field Archaeologists' *Code of Conduct*.

IFA 2001 Institute of Field Archaeologists' *Standard & Guidance documents (Desk-Based Assessments, Watching Briefs, Evaluations, Excavations, Investigation and Recording of Standing Buildings, Finds)*.

Secondary Sources

BGS *British Geological Survey 1:50,000 Series, Solid & Drift Geology*.

Crummy P, 2001 *City of Victory. The story of Colchester- Britain's first Roman town*. Colchester Archaeological Trust

Davies M, 1992 'Prehistoric and Roman Colchester' in Pounds N J G (ed) *The Colchester Area*. Royal Archaeological Institute


Denny P, 2004 *Colchester. History and Guide*. Tempus


Morris J 1983 *The Domesday Book. Essex. History of the Sores*. Phillimore

Soil Survey 1983 *1:250,000 Soil Map of England and Wales, and accompanying legend* (Harpenden).

Wacher J S, 1995 *The Towns of Roman Britain*. Routledge

Appendix 1: Trench Summary Tables

| Trench 1 | | | | | | |
|---|---------------------------|--|--------------------|------------------------|--------------------|-----|
|  | Max Dimensions (m) | | | | | |
| | Length | 15.5 | Width | 1.6 | Depth | 1.9 |
| | Levels | | | | | |
| | Trench base east | | | 6.36m OD | | |
| | Trench top east | | | 4.40m OD | | |
| | Trench base west | | | 3.33m OD | | |
| | Trench top west | | | 6.02m OD | | |
| | NGR Co-ordinates | | | | | |
| | E | TL 25672 99789 | | W | TL 25517 99788 | |
| | Orientation | | | E-W | | |
| Reason for Trench | | | Planning condition | | | |
| Context | Type | Description and Interpretation | Width (max: mm) | Thickness (max: mm) | Depth (BGL: mm) | |
| 101 | Cut | Sub-circular, shallow pit | >0.80 | 1.70 | 0.15 | |
| 102 | Fill | Very dark grey, silty clay fill of [101] | >0.80 | 1.70 | 0.15 | |
| 103 | Layer | Modern tarmac surface | >3.20 | >15.5 | 0.05 | |
| 104 | Layer | Made ground of gravel, sand and rubble | >3.20 | >15.5 | 0.70 | |
| 105 | Layer | Very dark grey silty clay, alluvium | >1.60 | >15.50 | 0.80 | |
| 106 | Layer | Lens of yellowish sandy silt, alluvium | >1.00 | >3.00 | 0.40 | |
| 107 | Layer | Gravelly clay natural | >1.60 | >15.50 | - | |

| Trench 2 | | | | | | |
|---|---------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------|------------------------|--------------------|-----|
|  | Max Dimensions (m) | | | | | |
| | Length | 9.5 | Width | 1.6 | Depth | 1.9 |
| | Levels | | | | | |
| | Trench base north | | | 4.67m OD | | |
| | Trench top north | | | 6.30m OD | | |
| | Trench base south | | | 4.57m OD | | |
| | Trench top south | | | 6.43m OD | | |
| | NGR Co-ordinates | | | | | |
| | N | TL 25550 99664 | | S | TL 25540 99570 | |
| | Orientation | | | N-S | | |
| Reason for Trench | | | Planning condition | | | |
| Context | Type | Description and Interpretation | Width (max: mm) | Thickness (max: mm) | Depth (BGL: mm) | |
| 201 | Layer | Modern concrete slab | >1.60 | >9.50 | 0.20 | |
| 202 | Layer | Rubble and stone construction layer | >1.60 | >9.50 | 0.10 | |
| 203 | Layer | Very dark grey silty clay, alluvium | >1.60 | >9.50 | 1.55 | |
| 204 | Layer | Gravelly clay, natural | >1.60 | >9.50 | - | |

Appendix 2: Finds Concordance

| Context | Pottery | | Bone | | Flint (no) | Shell (g) | Stone (no) | Other Finds | |
|---------|---------|-----|------|-----|---------------|--------------|---------------|--------------------------|------|
| | (no) | (g) | (no) | (g) | | | | Type | (no) |
| 102 | | | | | | | | C.B.M | 3 |
| 104 | | | 1 | 263 | | 6 | 46g | C.B.M. | 16 |
| U/S | | | | | | 2 | 49g | Architectural Element | 3 |
| | | | | | | | | C.B.M | 2 |
| | | | | | | | | Brick | 1 |
| | | | | | | | | (Decorated)Tile | 1 |

Appendix 3: List of Photographs

| SITE NAME: MIDDLE MILL ROAD COLCHESTER ESSEX | | | SITE NO/CODE: 1018/CMM |
|--|-----|---------|---|
| Shot | B&W | Digital | Subject |
| 1 | | ✓ | General view of site, facing NW |
| 2 | | ✓ | General view of site, facing NE |
| 3 | | ✓ | General view of site, facing SE |
| 4 | | ✓ | General view of site, facing SW |
| 5 | | ✓ | Stratigraphy of Trench 2, facing west |
| 6 | | ✓ | Stratigraphy of Trench 2, facing west |
| 7 | | ✓ | Stratigraphy of Trench 2, facing north-east |
| 8 | ✓ | ✓ | Trench 2 collapse, facing north |
| 9 | ✓ | ✓ | Trench 1 machined, facing east |
| 10 | ✓ | ✓ | Trench 1 machined, facing east |
| 11 | ✓ | ✓ | Pit [101], facing east |
| 12 | ✓ | ✓ | Pit [101], facing east |
| 13 | ✓ | ✓ | Pit [103], facing west |
| 14 | ✓ | ✓ | Pit [103], facing west |

Appendix 4: ASC OASIS Form

| PROJECT DETAILS | | | |
|--|--|--|-------------------------------|
| Project Name: | Middle Mill Road, Colchester, Essex | | |
| Short Description: | On January 23 rd 2008 Archaeological Services and Consultancy Ltd. (ASC) undertook an evaluation at Middle Mill Road, Colchester, Essex in advance of the construction of seven new dwellings on the former council depot site. Archaeology in the form of two shallow pits was present in one of the two trenches excavated. Low grade CBM and animal bone was recovered from the fills. Three other potential features were noted but were not accessible for investigation due to the height of the water table. | | |
| Project Type: | Trial trenching | | |
| Site status: | None | Previous work: | None |
| Current land use: | Council depot | Future work: | Unknown |
| Monument type: | Wall fragments | Monument period: | Post-medieval |
| Significant finds: | CBM, animal bone, shell. | | |
| PROJECT LOCATION | | | |
| County: | Essex | OS reference: (8 figs min) | TL 9970 2559 |
| Site address: | Middle Mill Road, Colchester, Essex | | |
| Study area: (sq. m. or ha) | 0.13 ha | Height OD: (metres) | 7.87mOD |
| PROJECT CREATORS | | | |
| Organisation: | Archaeological Services & Consultancy Ltd | | |
| Project brief originator: | Martin Winter | Project design originator: | C Barclay & D Fell |
| Project Manager: | D Fell | Director/Supervisor: | David Kaye |
| Sponsor / funding body: | N R Powell Developments Ltd | | |
| PROJECT DATE | | | |
| Start date: | 23 rd January 2008 | End date: | 23 rd January 2008 |
| PROJECT ARCHIVES | | | |
| | Location (Accession no.) | Content (eg. pottery, animal bone, files/sheets) | |
| Physical: | | CBM, animal bone, shell | |
| Paper: | | Report, Field records | |
| Digital: | | Cd | |
| BIBLIOGRAPHY (Journal/monograph, published or forthcoming, or unpublished client report) | | | |
| Title: | ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION: MIDDLE MILL ROAD COLCHESTER ESSEX | | |
| Serial title & volume: | ASC Ltd Report ref. 1018/CMM/1 | | |
| Author(s): | David Kaye BA PIFA | | |
| Page nos | 20 | Date: | 6 th January 2008 |