

Archaeological Services & Consultancy Ltd

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION 3 HIGH STREET HOUGHTON CONQUEST BEDFORDSHIRE

on behalf of Cowlgrove Developments Ltd



**By
David Fell BA MA MIFA
November 2004**

ASC:617/ HCH/2

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Site Data

<i>ASC site code:</i>	HCH	<i>Project no:</i>	617
<i>County:</i>	Bedfordshire		
<i>District:</i>	Mid Bedfordshire		
<i>Village/Town:</i>	Houghton Conquest		
<i>Parish:</i>	Houghton Conquest		
<i>NGR:</i>	TL 0446 4156		
<i>Extent of site:</i>	0.38 ha		
<i>Present land use:</i>	Former house and garden		
<i>Planning proposal:</i>	Construction of 7 houses with garages		
<i>Extent of development:</i>	0.38 ha		
<i>Planning application ref/date:</i>	03/881/FULL		
<i>Client:</i>	Cowlgrove Developments Ltd C/o Aragon Land and Planning UK LLP Aragon Lodge 1 The Avenue Flitwick Bedfordshire MK45 1BP		
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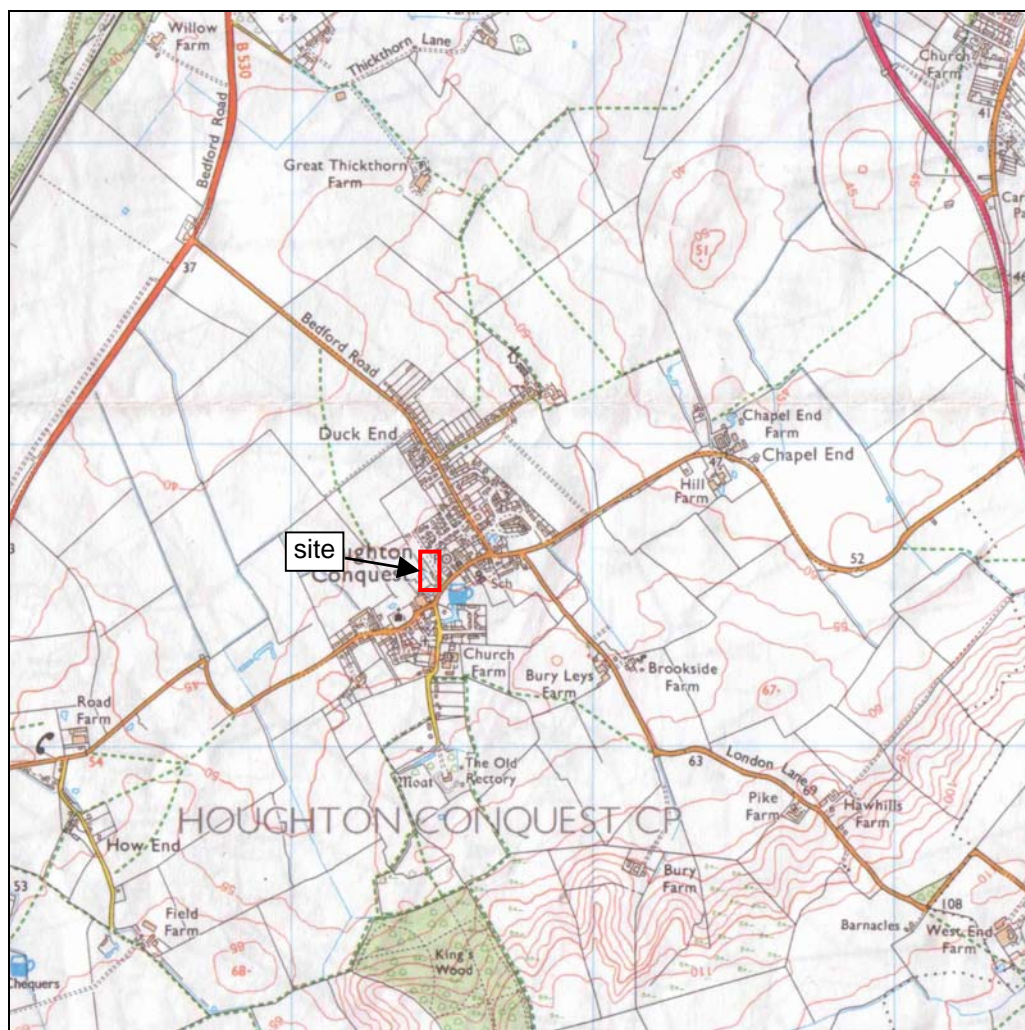


Figure 1: General location (*scale 1:25,000*)

Summary

In November 2004 an archaeological evaluation was undertaken at 3 High Street, Houghton Conquest. The site was adjacent to a medieval moated site which may have extended into the development area. Three trial trenches were excavated but archaeological remains were not present. The natural strata was present in all the trenches but the area may have been truncated in the past. It is unlikely that significant archaeological remains survive on the site.

1 Introduction

1.1 Planning Background

1.1.1 *Cowlgrove Developments Ltd* intend undertaking development on land at 3 High Street, Houghton Conquest. The developer's planners *Aragon Land and Planning UK LLP* applied to *Mid Bedfordshire District Council* for planning permission in support of the development (planning application no. 03/881/full) and, in line with the guidance contained in the document PPG 16 *Archaeology and Planning* the County Archaeological Officer (CAO) of *Bedfordshire County Council* advised that the site may be archaeologically sensitive, required the developer to commission an archaeological evaluation of the site and issued a *brief* for the work (Mather 2004).

1.1.2 The developer commissioned *Archaeological Services and Consultancy Ltd* (ASC) to undertake the evaluation and this document presents the results of the work.

1.2 Reason for Work

The work was necessary because the site is situated in the historic core of Houghton Conquest, close to a number of significant archaeological sites. The development had the potential to damage or destroy significant archaeological remains.

1.3 Setting

1.3.1 Location and Extent

The site is situated in Houghton Conquest, in the administrative district of Mid Bedfordshire (Figure 1). It is situated in the centre of the village, on the north side of the High Street and is centred at Ordnance Survey National Grid Reference TL 0446 4156. The site comprises an approximately rectangular shaped area of 0.38 hectares (Fig. 2). Prior to the commencement of the evaluation it was in unmanaged condition. The land is at a lower level than the adjacent properties, indicating that the topsoil may have been removed.

The building fronting onto the High Street had been demolished and a temporary haul road partially constructed through the site. The remaining vegetation and topsoil had also been removed.

1.3.2 *Geology and Topography*

The soils of the area comprise the *Evesham 3 Association*, namely slowly permeable calcareous clayey soils over Jurassic and Cretaceous clay (Soil Survey 1983, 411c). The site is flat and lies at an elevation of c.49m OD.

1.3.3 *Nature of the proposed development*

The development comprises the construction of seven houses and garages, with associated services, etc (Fig. 2).

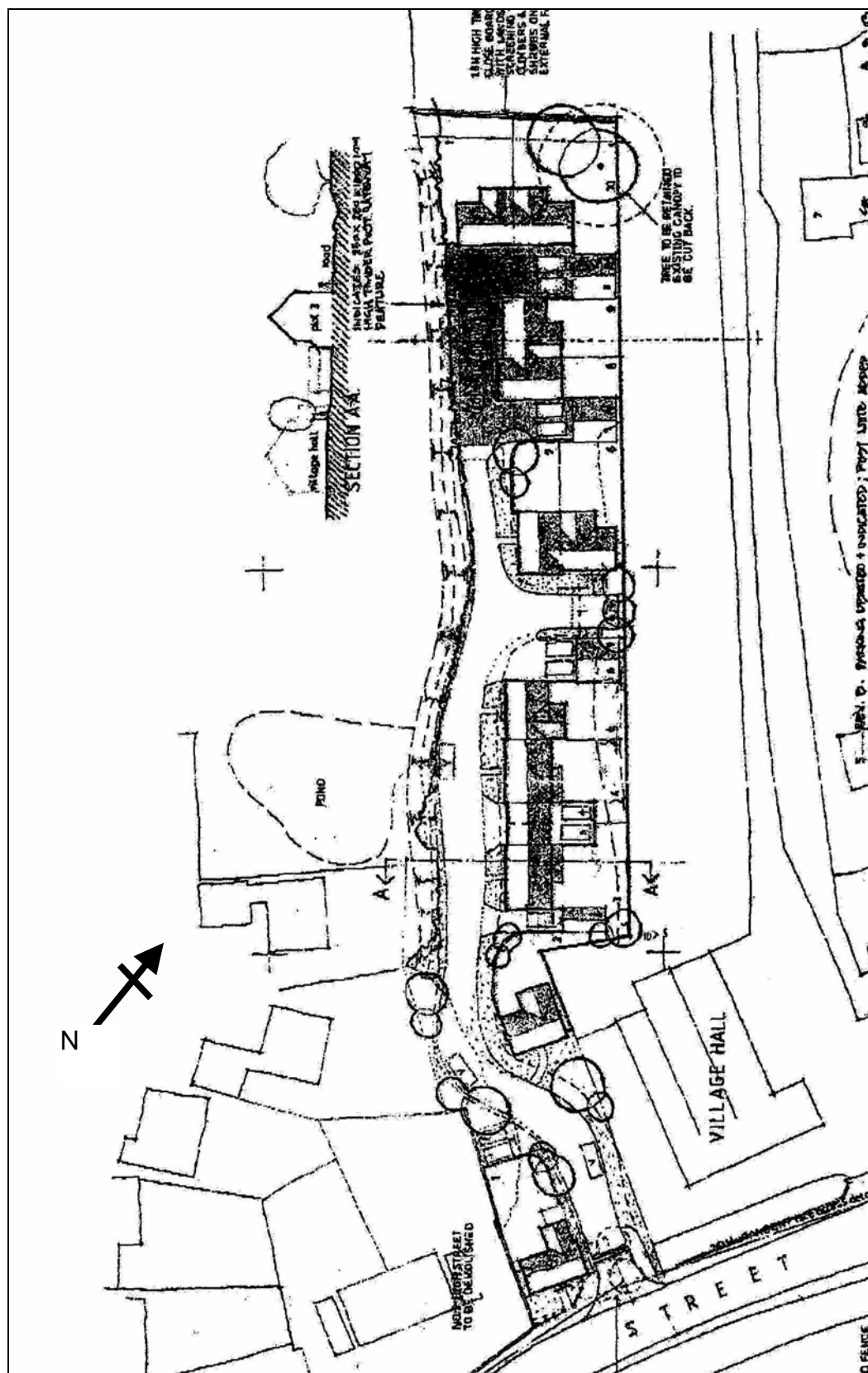


Figure 2: Plan of the proposed development (*scale 1:500*)

2 Aims and Methods

2.1 Aims

In line with the requirements of the *brief* (Section 5.2), the aims of the evaluation were:

- To establish the date, nature and extent of any archaeological remains on the site
- To recover artefacts to assist in the development of type series within the region
- To recover palaeo-environmental remains in order to determine local environmental conditions

2.2 Methods

2.2.1 In line with the requirements of the *brief* (Section 3.7.2), the methods to be adopted for this project were:

- A programme of archaeological evaluation comprising 142 square metres of trial trenches. The location of the trenches is shown on Figure 3
- A contingency provision for a further 16 square metres to allow for further investigation of any significant archaeological features or deposits was also in place

2.3 Standards

The work conforms to the project design, to the relevant sections of the Institute of Archaeologists' *Code of Conduct* (IFA 2000) and *Standard & Guidance Notes* (IFA 2001), *Standards for Field Archaeology in the East of England* (Gurney 2003) and to the relevant sections of ASC's own *Operations Manual*.

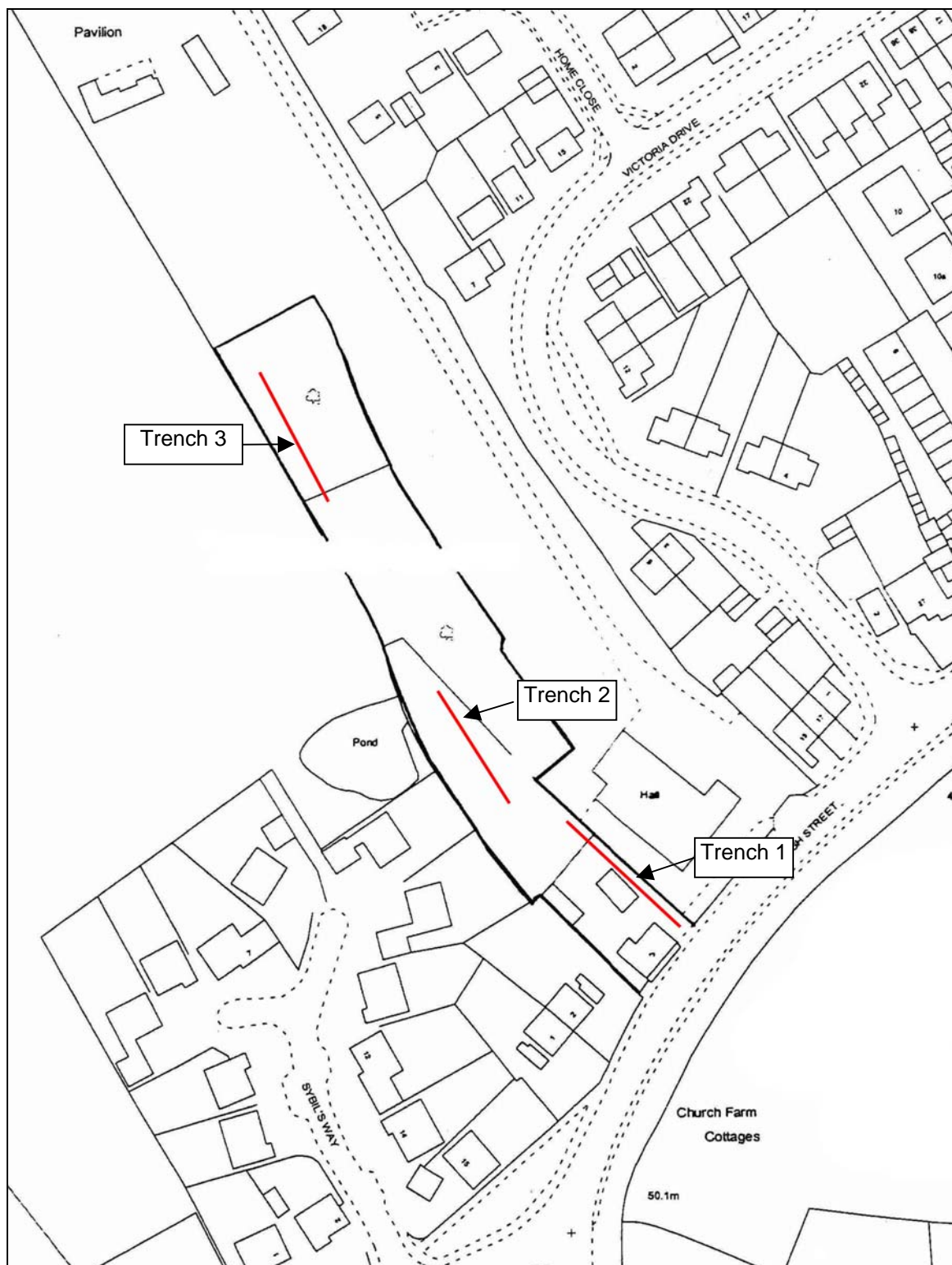


Figure 3: Trench location plan (scale = 1,1250)



Plate 1: The site during the evaluation, looking south east



Plate 2: The site during the evaluation, looking north west

3 Archaeological and Historical Background

- 3.1 Houghton Conquest is an area of considerable archaeological and historical interest. A number of archaeological remains are known in the area and the site has the potential to reveal evidence of a variety of periods.
- 3.2 Prehistoric period remains have not been recorded in Houghton Conquest and the earliest evidence currently known dates to the Roman period. A 'Roman trackway' has been recorded near Church Farm c.300m southeast of the site (Sites and Monuments Record (SMR) 18192) and a scatter of Roman pottery have been recorded on the north side of the village, off Mill Lane (SMR 15975). A 4th century coin has been recorded in an adjacent field (SMR 16156).
- 3.3 The village of Houghton Conquest probably originated during the Saxon period, but little is known of the origin of the village. It was in existence by the 11th century and is mentioned in the Domesday survey (1086), where it is referred to as *Houstone* (Morris 1977).
- 3.4 The form and layout of the village during the medieval period is not understood in detail. The site is in the medieval core of the village (SMR 17037), close to the church of All Saints, which dates from 1393 (Pevsner 1968, 101) and which was built on the site of an earlier church.
- 3.5 Little archaeological work has taken place in the village, but the area was clearly of considerable importance. A number of medieval moated sites are present in the area, indicating that the village and the surrounding countryside were of some significance. One such moated site (SMR 3391) is situated on the opposite side of the High Street and has recently been investigated (Albion 2004; Northants Arch 2004). Work on the southern part of the moat, at the Limes, has revealed earthworks and evaluation trenches proved that the moat was in excess of 1.5m deep but was filled with modern debris (Albion 2004). Work closer to the High Street provided material dated to the medieval period and demonstrated that the moat extends towards the High Street. Remains of ridge and furrow cultivation strips were also recorded (Northants Arch 2004).
- 3.6 Three further moated sites are known on the edge of the village (SMR 3236, 3390 and 16367). The example at the west end of the present High Street (SMT 3390) is c.2m deep and 5m across and a dovecote is shown in an adjacent field on the 1808 Enclosure map (SMR 13985). A second moat and sunken way, at The Old Rectory is situated on the south side of the village (SMR 3236). This is a *Scheduled Ancient Monument* (SAM 20430) and the moat is 2m deep and 5-8m wide. The Old Rectory (SMR 5681) is an early 18th century house, built for rector, one Zachary Grey. Cropmarks (SMR 14755) have been recorded between the Old Rectory and Church Farm, and while these may indicate further medieval settlement, their date and function has not been established. A third moat (SMR 3392) has been identified to the east of the village at Chapel End. Ridge and furrow has been recorded in neighbouring fields and the area may have been the site of a separate 'end' during the medieval

period. The SMR records that it may be the site of a separate *deserted medieval village*.

- 3.7 A red brick cottage was constructed on the street frontage during the late 19th or early 20th centuries (Fell 2004, Plate 3). This was demolished immediately prior to the commencement of the evaluation.

4 Results

- 4.1 The following paragraphs provide a summary of the results of the trial trenches. A full description of the soils, with illustrations of the trenches, is provided in Appendix 1.
- 4.2 No significant archaeological features or finds were revealed during the fieldwork and the trenches revealed a consistent pattern of soil formation. The topsoil and vegetation had been almost entirely removed prior to the commencement of the evaluation, but survived to a depth of c.0.1m in the north side of the site, in Trench 3 (301). It had been entirely removed from the street frontage during the construction of the house or during the construction of the haul road, but survived as a thin layer (203) in Trench 2.
- 4.3 The ground was at a slightly lower level than the adjacent properties, indicating that the site may have been reduced on a previous occasion (Fell 2004, 4). Consequently the topsoil and subsoil boundary was not present.
- 4.4 A variety of modern features were present. A large number of modern ceramic drains were present and were observed in all the trenches. A linear ditch or culvert [201] was present in the centre of the site, at the east end of Trench 2. It was c.3m wide and 0.8m deep and was filled with a single deposit of light greyish brown clay (202). The deposit of obviously modern broken bricks as present at the base and this feature is interpreted as a modern boundary/drainage ditch. A number of lenses of modern building material were present in the profile of Trench 1, which were associated with the standing building and its garden/yard.
- 4.5 The natural strata comprised light greyish brown clay (100), (200) and (300). It was reached in all the trenches and was also observed in a number of locations at the edge of the haul road (Plate 2). It had been truncated by the building on the street frontage and also the modern service runs and culvert.

5. Conclusions

- 5.1 The fieldwork successfully addressed the aims of the *brief*. Building work had started on site prior to the commencement of the evaluation, but was limited to demolition and clearance works and the partial construction of a haul road. Due to the imposition of a 'stop order' by the local authority all construction work on the site had ceased and full co-operation was received from the building contractors. The work took place in overcast weather conditions with occasional light rain. A high degree of confidence is attached to the results of the evaluation.
- 5.2 Archaeological deposits were not observed in the trial trenches. The spoil heaps were scanned for artefacts and other areas of exposed natural strata, notably adjacent to the haul road were examined but nothing was found. While the presence of occasional isolated features away from the trenches cannot be entirely excluded, it is unlikely that large quantities of archaeological remains are present on the site.
- 5.3 Adjacent to the street frontage the surface of the site comprised modern building debris, associated with the former house and its garden/yard. The natural topsoil was present in parts of the central and northern part of the site, although this had been truncated, either during the clearing operations for the current works, or on a previous occasion. The site was lower than the surrounding area indicating that the area may have been levelled in the past. Any shallow archaeological features which may have been present might have been destroyed during the earlier ground reduction operations.
- 5.4 Modern material and/or features were present in all the trenches. The upper part of the profile of Trench 1 comprised modern building debris. A brick built manhole was present at the southeast end of this trench. Ceramic drainage runs were recorded in all the trenches and a modern backfilled ditch was present at the south east end of Trench 2. A partially filled pond is present on the west side of the site (Fig. 3) and this ditch and the drainage runs may have channelled water towards the pond.
- 5.5 A medieval moated site is present close to Trench 1, on the east side of the High Street (Albion 2004: Northants Arch 2004). Remains of the moated site were not present in the trial trenches. While some degree of truncation may have taken place (above section 5.3), the moated site contained a number of substantial ditches which, if present in the trenches, are likely to have survived the truncation operations. The absence of such features from the trial trenches indicates that the moated site may have been an isolated feature and did not extend across the present High Street. The Sites and Monuments Record (SMR) records a number of other moated sites in the area and the landscape during the medieval period may have comprised nucleated sites of this type surrounded by ridge and furrow cultivation strips.

6. Acknowledgements

The writer is grateful to Mr Francis Caldwell of *Aragon Land and Planning UK LLP* for commissioning the evaluation on behalf of *Cowlgrove Developments Ltd*. Lesley-Ann Mather Archaeological Officer of *Bedfordshire County Council* acted as curatorial officer. Access to the Historic Environment Records was provided by Steve Coleman. The co-operation of the building contractors, who supplied the operated the excavation machinery is also gratefully acknowledged.

The work was supervised for *ASC Ltd* by David Fell BA MA MIFA, assisted by Claire Griffiths BSc. The report was prepared by David Fell 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. List of photographs/slides
7. Colour slides
8. B/W prints & negatives
9. CDROM with copies of all digital files.


7.2 The archive will be deposited with: *Bedford Museum* ref. 2005.16


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Appendix 1: Trench Summary Tables

Trench 1							
	Max Dimensions						
	Length	32m	Width	1.6m	Depth	c.0.4m	
	Levels						
	Trench base north			47.78m OD			
	Trench top north			47.93m OD			
	NGR Co-ordinates						
	NW	TL 04478 41548		SE	TL 0450 41527		
	Orientation			NW-SE			
	Reason for Trench			Testing area at street frontage			
Context	Type	Description and Interpretation			Max Width (mm)	Max Thckn (mm)	Depth BGL (mm)
101	Layer	Mixed modern building debris			-	300	0
100	Layer	Light greyish brown clay. Natural strata			-	100+	300

Trench 2							
	Max Dimensions						
	Length	27.1m	Width	1.6m	Depth	c.0.6m	
	Levels						
	Trench base north			46.65m OD			
	Trench top north			47.28m OD			
	NGR Co-ordinates						
	NW	TL 04449 41577		SE	TL 04466 41553		
	Orientation			NW-SE			
	Reason for Trench			Testing central part of site			
Context	Type	Description and Interpretation			Max Width (mm)	Max Thckn (mm)	Depth BGL (mm)
203	Layer	Dark greyish brown silty loam. Partially removed topsoil			-	50	0
202	Fill	Light brown silty clay mixed with modern building debris. Filling of modern drain/culvert 201			3m	800	50
201	Cut	Linear cut with ‘U’ shaped profile. Construction cut of modern drain/culvert			3m	800	50
200	Layer	Greyish brown clay. Natural strata			-		c.100

Trench 3							
		Max Dimensions					
		Length	30m	Width	1.6m	Depth	0.35m
		Levels					
		Trench base north		45.95m OD			
		Trench top north		46.00m OD			
		NGR Co-ordinates					
		NW	TL 04415 41640		SE	TL 04429 41613	
		Orientation		NW - SE			
		Reason for Trench		Testing rear part of the site			
Context	Type	Description and Interpretation			Max Width (mm)	Max Thckn (mm)	Depth BGL (mm)
301	Layer	Dark greyish brown silty loam. Partially removed topsoil			-	100	-
300	Layer	Greyish brown clay. Natural Strata			-	250+	100