

## Archaeological Services & Consultancy Ltd

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION :  
LAND AT THE LENS  
34 BROMHAM ROAD  
BIDDENHAM  
BEDFORDSHIRE**

*on behalf of Integra Group*



**Nigel Wilson HND, AIFA**

**February 2005**

**ASC: 568/BRB/2**

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## Site Data

<i>ASC site code:</i>	568/BRB	<i>Project no:</i>	568
<i>Date of fieldwork</i>	21/2/2005 to 23/2/2005		
<i>County:</i>	Bedfordshire		
<i>District:</i>	Bedford Borough		
<i>Village/Town:</i>	Biddenham		
<i>Parish:</i>	Biddenham CP		
<i>NGR:</i>	TL 02400 5050 (centre)		
<i>Extent of site:</i>	c.0.86ha		
<i>Present land use:</i>	Orchard and Residential		
<i>Planning proposal:</i>	Residential development		
<i>Extent of development:</i>	c.0.86ha		
<i>Planning application ref/date:</i>	2004/2859/FUL		
<i>Client:</i>	Integra Group Ver House London Road Markyate Hertfordshire		
<i>Contact name:</i>	Geoff Rice (Director)		
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## Internal Quality Check

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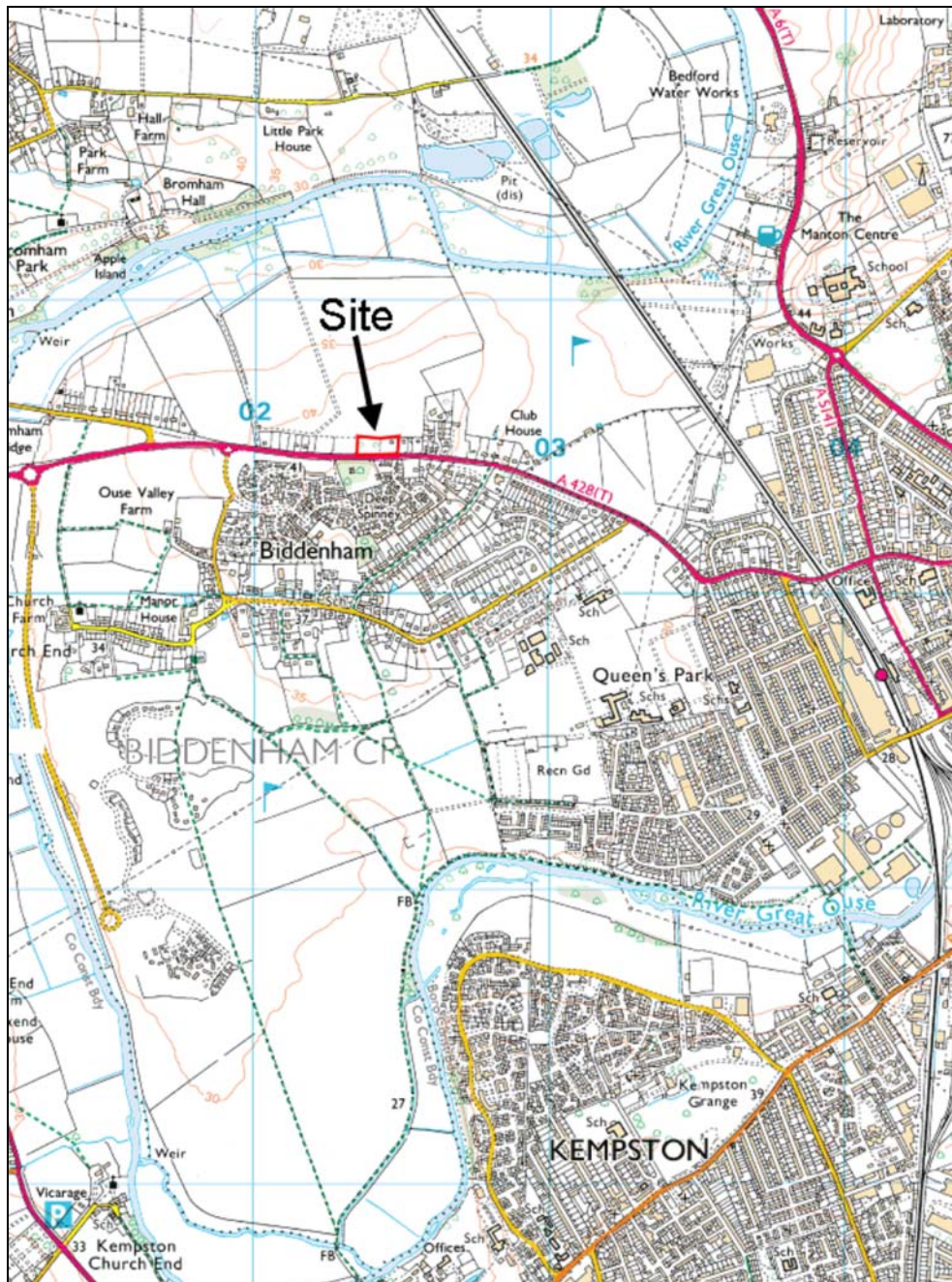
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**Figure 1:** General location (scale 1:25,000)

## Summary

*During February 2005 seven archaeological evaluation trenches were excavated at the Lens, 34 Romham Road, Biddenham, Bedfordshire. Previous work in the adjacent site to the west had revealed a series of cremation burials and a ditch. These features were dated to the late Bronze Age or early Iron Age. When plans were submitted to develop the current site it was considered desirable to investigate if the prehistoric activity continued eastwards.*

*The results of the evaluation indicate that the prehistoric site did not continue eastwards. The only features identified were two small undated pits in the western half of the site, and a series of garden features and an old field drain in the garden of Number 34.*

## 1 Introduction

1.1 During February 2005 *Archaeological Services and Consultancy Ltd (ASC)* carried out a evaluation on a site at the Lens, 34 Bromham Road, Biddenham, Bedfordshire (NGR TL 02400 50500: Fig. 1). The project was commissioned by Integra Group, and was carried out according to a brief (BCC 2005) prepared by the County Archaeological Officer (CAO), and a written scheme of investigation prepared by ASC (Hancock 2005).

### 1.2 Reason for Work

Under current planning guidance legislation archaeology can be a material factor in the deciding of planning applications. Planning Guidance No 16 (PPG 16) specifically deals with archaeology. When Integra Group submitted plans to Bedford Borough Council (BBC) ( 2004/2859/FUL) to construct nine houses on the site the CAO advised BBC that the area was archaeologically sensitive. In line with the guidance given in PPG 16 the CAO recommended that an archaeological evaluation should be undertaken to assess the likely impact the development was going to have on the archaeological resource. This advice was accepted and Integra Group were requested to commission an evaluation. This report details the results of the evaluation.

### 1.3 Setting

1.3.1 The site lies to the south of a loop of the river Great Ouse situated c.2.5km west of the centre of Bedford on the northern margin of Biddenham (Fig 1). The rectangular plot is c.0.86 hectares in area and is centered on NGR TL 02400 50500, and is bounded to the south by the A428 (Bromham Road), and to the east, west and north by hedges and fencing.

1.3.2 The soils of the area have been mapped by the soil survey as comprising part of the *Biggleswade Association*; namely gleyed brown earth with an underlying gravely and loamy drift below which are river terrace gravels (Soil Survey 1983). The site is flat and lies at an elevation of c.41m above OD.

- 1.3.3 The majority of the site contained significant tree cover originating from its former use as an orchard although an extant residential property, associated outbuildings and garden areas are located in the eastern third. Access to the site is from Bromham Road. The western part of the site is accessed via a gate through the hedge, whilst the eastern portion is along the driveway belonging to number 34.

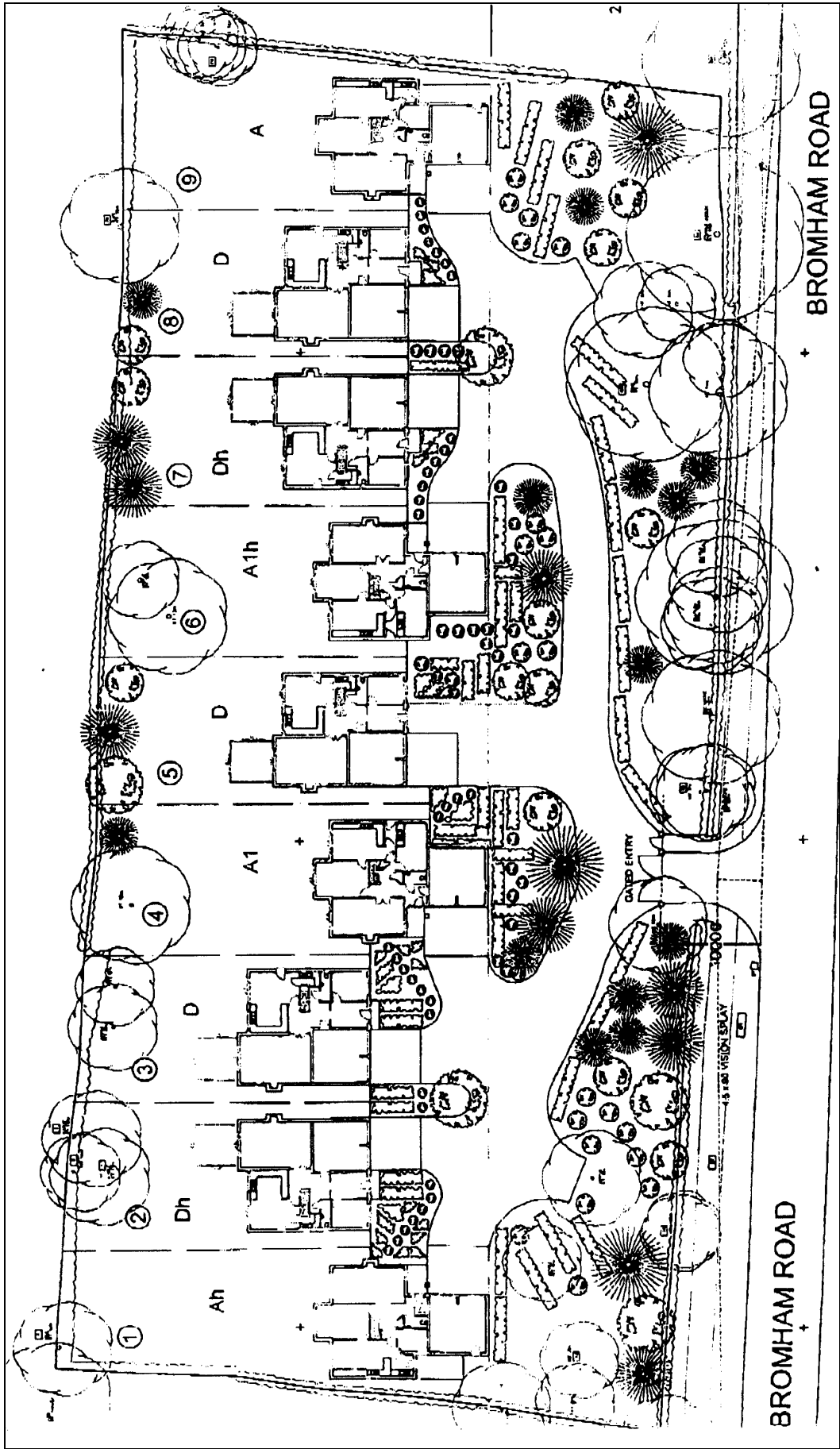


Figure 2: Proposed development plan (not to scale)

## **2 Aims & Methods**

### **2.1 Aims**

As described in the brief (Section 2.2), the aims of the evaluation were:

- to locate and examine the extent and nature of any archaeological feature present
- to determine the integrity and state of preservation of any archaeological features or deposits present
- to provide information that will enable the development of a strategy for further investigation of the site prior or during the early phases of its development

### **2.2 Methods**

The work was carried out according to the brief (Section 3), which required:

- evaluation trenching, to a maximum of 5% of the site (430 square metres)
- contingency trenching, up to a maximum of 43 square metres
- appropriate sampling, and recording by hand of any archaeological features/deposits revealed, sufficient to characterise and date them
- post excavation analysis by appropriate specialists of all finds and samples
- preparation of a report ( this document) and project archive

### **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), and to the relevant sections of ASC's own *Operations Manual*.



### 3 Archaeological & Historical Background

#### 3.1 *Introduction*

Biddenham is an area of considerable archaeological and historical importance. Complex cropmarks, isolated finds and recent archaeological work within the immediate vicinity suggest that the site has the potential to reveal evidence of a variety of periods. The evidence summarised below is the result of an Historic Environment Record search that examined entries within a c.1 km radius of the site centre.

#### 3.2 *Prehistoric (before 600BC)*

Palaeolithic flint artefacts were found in 19<sup>th</sup> century gravel pits at locations west and south of the evaluation area (HER No's: 327 and 328). More recent examinations of these areas have recovered further lithic assemblages and environmental evidence (Harding *et al.*, 1991). Late Bronze Age activity has been suggested by a recent archaeological excavation located immediately to the west (Turner, 2004).

#### 3.4 *Iron Age (600BC-AD43)*

Cremations and a late Bronze / early Iron Age butt ended ditch were discovered immediately to the west during recent excavations (Turner, 2004). An isolated late IA coin is also noted c.500m to the west (HER No: 15945). An arc of complex cropmarks that may date to this period runs from the west to north of the site (HER No's: 730, 1866, 1867, 1868, 8677 and 14978).

#### 3.5 *Romano-British (AD43-c.450)*

A small R-B settlement has recently been discovered immediately north of the current evaluation area (Foundations Archaeology, 2002). A well containing R-B ritual deposits was discovered during the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the west (HER No: 330) and a Roman road runs NE-SW c.1km to the east (HER No: 485).

#### 3.6 *Medieval (1066-1500)*

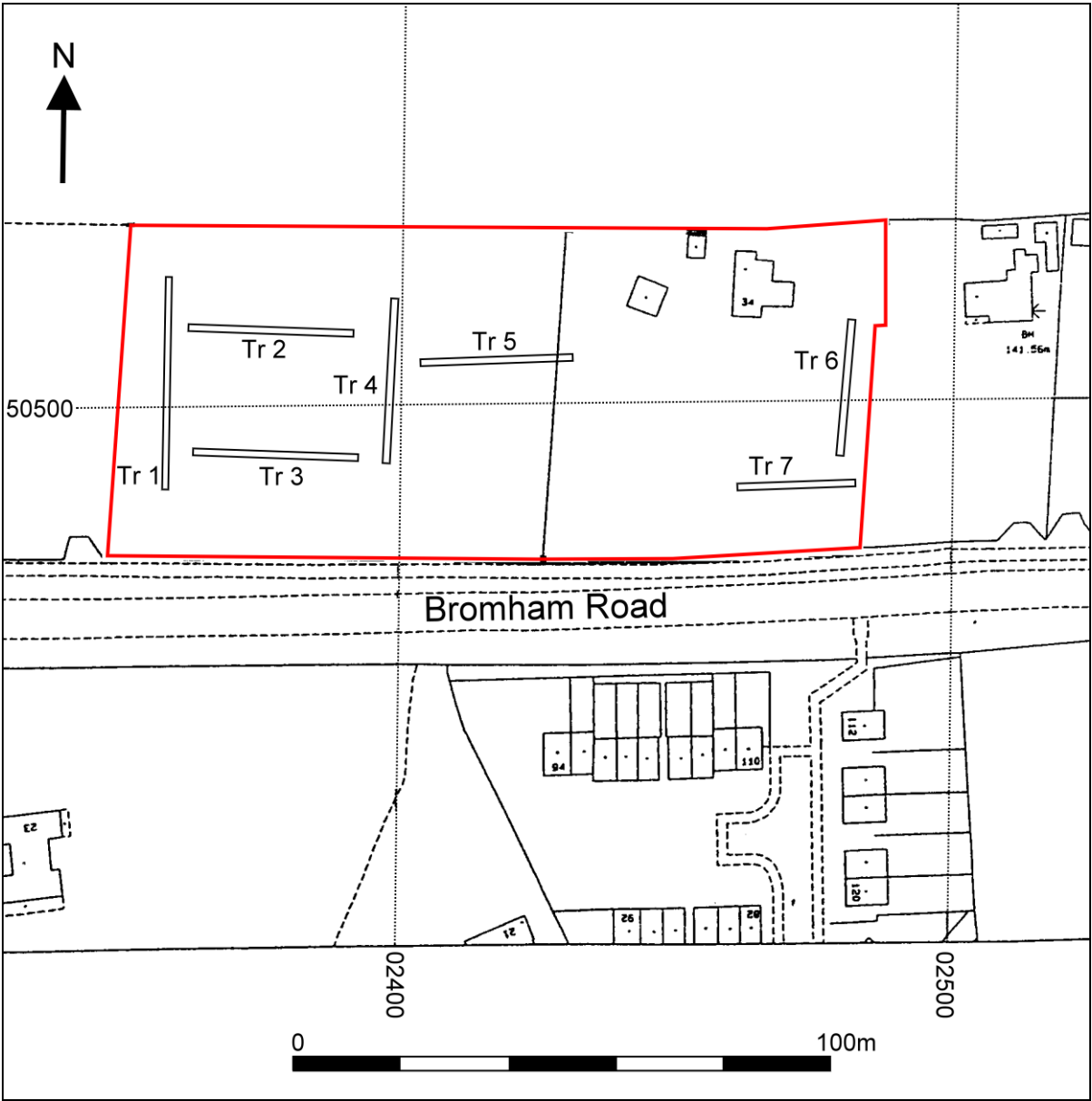
Although little is known of earlier Saxon activity, Biddenham was in the Kingdom of Mercia by the 7<sup>th</sup> century. The area was held by the Danes during the 9<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup> and early 11<sup>th</sup> centuries. The Domesday Survey records Ralph and Serlo de Ros tenancing Forde End Manor, which was held by William Le Espec. The tower of St James's Church contains Norman masonry. The land was subsequently held by the Earls of Gloucester and Stafford. A rabbit warren (HER No: 1935) belonging to William de Ponte (1251) is located c.0.5 km NW of the site in an area called Conyger on pre enclosure mapping. Although extensively damaged by modern ploughing, a rectilinear earthwork (HER No: 1770) that may have a Medieval origin is recorded c. 1 km to the southwest.

#### 3.7 *Post-Medieval (1500-1900)*

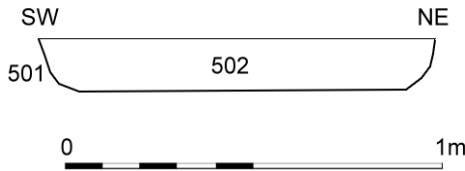
The site of a windmill is noted immediately northeast of the site (HER No: 192). There are many buildings dating to the 17<sup>th</sup> and subsequent centuries in the wider village, the nucleus of which forms a conservation area. Small scale industrial activity of uncertain date is represented by gravel and clay pits dotted around the area and the "slake pits" (HER No: 168), which may indicate the production of lime, located to the northeast.

## 4 Results

- 4.1 Seven 1.6m wide trenches were mechanically excavated across the site (Fig 3). The soil was removed in a series of spits to enable any potential features to be identified at the highest possible level. A similar natural profile was observed in each trench, namely about 250-300mm of turf and dark topsoil above natural yellow sandy clays containing varying amounts of gravel. Intrusive features were observed in four of the trenches.
- 4.2 Trench 4, a single irregular roughly oval shaped feature [401] (Appendix 1) was excavated. This feature had a maximum length of c.400mm and was 200mm deep. The fill comprised dark yellowish brown silty clay, no artefacts were recovered from the fill, and it seems likely that this feature was formed naturally probably as a result of root action.
- 4.3 Trench 5, a circular pit [501] (Fig 4) c.1100mm in diameter with a maximum depth of 250mm was uncovered (Appendix 1 & Plate 1). The sides were almost vertical to a flat base. The fill (502) comprised dark yellowish brown silty clay. Though no artefacts were recovered from the pit the shape and sharp sides indicate that it was deliberately cut rather formed by natural means.
- 4.4 A number of garden features were observed in Trenches 6 and 7 (Appendix 1 & Plate 2). A NE-SW red sectional ceramic pipe field drain was also noted in Trench 7. No features predating the field drain were observed in either of these trenches.



**Figure 3:** Trench location plan (scale 1:1250)



**Figure 4:** Section across Pit 501 (scale 1:20)



**Plate 1:** Pit 501



**Plate 2:** Bedding trench 601

## 5. Conclusions

- 5.1 Sites from a variety of periods have been found along the Ouse valley. Bedford Borough Council imposed the evaluation condition on the current site as it lies in a known area of archaeological interest. Previous archaeological work in the immediate vicinity of the site and further a field in Biddenham found evidence for prehistoric and Roman occupation. Immediately to the west of the site a recent excavation found six late Bronze/ early Iron Age cremations in a natural hollow, the butt end of a ditch was also exposed dating from a similar period.
- 5.2 The trenches and especially Trench 1 were laid out to investigate if the site to the west continued eastwards. It was clear from examination of the strata within in the trenches that the site did not continue eastwards. However the single pit [501] seen in Trench 5 suggests that a limited number of isolated features may be present on the site.
- 5.3 The field drain seen in Trench 7 probably dates to the late 19<sup>th</sup> or early 20<sup>th</sup> century when the site was still open farmland, before residential development along Bromham Road. The garden features identified in Trenches 6 and 7 probably represent the locations of flowerbeds, which have been removed.
- 5.4 From the evaluation it can be concluded that the site lies in an area of general prehistoric interest, but the area to be developed has a low potential for finding substantial remains.
- 5.5 *Confidence Rating*

Despite frequent sleet and snow during the evaluation it was possible to clean the trenches satisfactorily for deposits to be distinguished, and staff moral was high during the project. In assessing these factors it seems likely that the poor weather will not have seriously affected the outcome of the evaluation, and a confidence rating of 8 out of 10 can be attributed to the results.

## **6. Acknowledgements**

The writer is grateful to Geoff Rice of Integra Group for commissioning the evaluation. We would also like to thank Peter Cain for arranging access to the site. The machine was supplied by Hewden Plant, Olney Depot. The brief was prepared by Lesley-Ann Mather who also monitored the fieldwork on behalf of Bedford Borough Council Planning Dept. Bob Zeepvat managed the project, Alastair Hancock prepared the project design and Nigel Wilson and Calli Rouse undertook the fieldwork. Finally the current occupants of number 34 must be thanked for their patience as they watched their lawn being destroyed by the JCB.

## **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/digital images
7. B/W prints & negatives
8. Original specialist reports and supporting information
9. CDROM with copies of all digital files.

7.2 The archive will be deposited with Bedford Museum.


## 8. Bibliography


- Bedfordshire County Council 2005 *Brief for a Programme of Archaeological Investigation of Land at The Lens, 34 Bromham Road, Biddenham, Bedfordshire* (Beds CC)
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- Morris J. ed. 1977 *Domesday Book Bedfordshire* (Phillimore)
- Soil Survey 1983 *1:250,000 Soil Map of England and Wales, and accompanying legend* (Harpندن).
- Turner, C 2004 *Land off Bromham Road, Biddenham, Bedfordshire: Archaeological Excavation and Watching Brief*. (The Heritage Network Ltd) Ref HN475.


## Appendix 1: Trench Summary Tables

Trench 1							
	Max Dimensions (m)						
	Length	38.6	Width	1.6	Depth	0.3	
	NGR Co-ordinates						
	S	02357 50485	N	02358 50525			
	Orientation		S-N				
	Reason for Trench		Investigate if the prehistoric activity in the plot to the west continues.				
Context	Type	Description and Interpretation			Max Width (mm)	Max Thckn (mm)	Depth BGL (mm)
100	Layer	Turf and dark greyish brown topsoil			>1600	250	0-250
101	Layer	Natural, orange sandy clay, with gravel especially at the north end of the trench.			>1600		>250

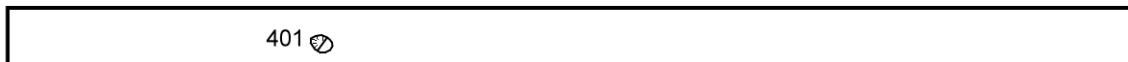


Trench 2							
	Max Dimensions (m)						
	Length	30.0	Width	1.6	Depth	0.4	
	NGR Co-ordinates						
	W	02361 50514		E	02392 50513		
	Orientation			W-E			
	Reason for Trench			General pattern of evaluation trenches.			
Context	Type	Description and Interpretation			Max Width (mm)	Max Thckn (mm)	Depth BGL (mm)
200	Layer	Turf and topsoil			>1600	300	0-300
201	Layer	Natural			>1600		>300


Trench 3							
		Max Dimensions (m)					
		Length	30.0	Width	1.6	Depth	0.3
		NGR Co-ordinates					
		W	02362 50492		E	02393 50490	
		Orientation		W-E			
		Reason for Trench		Part of general pattern of evaluation trenches			
Context	Type	Description and Interpretation			Max Width (mm)	Max Thckn (mm)	Depth BGL (mm)
300	Layer	Turf and topsoil			>1600	250	0-250
301	Layer	Natural			>1600		>250

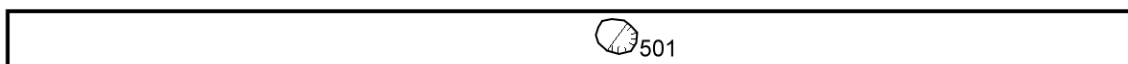
Trench 4							
		Max Dimensions (m)					
		Length	30.0	Width	1.6	Depth	0.3
		NGR Co-ordinates					
		N	02397 50489		S	02398 50520	
		Orientation		N-S			
		Reason for Trench		General pattern of trenches			
Context	Type	Description and Interpretation			Max Width (mm)	Max Thckn (mm)	Depth BGL (mm)
400	Layer	Turf and topsoil			>1600	250	0-250
401	Cut	Small irregular shaped cut, root hole?			400	200	250-450
402	Layer	Natural			>1600		>250

←



0 10m

Trench 5							
		Max Dimensions (m)					
		Length	30.0	Width	1.6	Depth	0.35
		NGR Co-ordinates					
		W	02403 50507		E	02432 50508	
		Orientation		W-E			
		Reason for Trench		General pattern of trenches			
Context	Type	Description and Interpretation			Max Width (mm)	Max Thckn (mm)	Depth BGL (mm)
500	Layer	Turf and dark greyish brown topsoil			>1.6	250	0-250
501	Cut	Roughly circular pit, near vertical side, flat base.			1100	250	250-500
502	Fill	Fill of 501, comprises greyish brown silty clay, no finds or inclusions.			1100	250	250-500
503	Layer	Natural, silty clay with some gravel.			>1.6		>250




0 10m

Trench 6								
Image not available			Max Dimensions					
			Length	25.0	Width	1.6	Depth	0.35
			NGR Co-ordinates					
			S	02480 50490		N	02482 50525	
			Orientation		N-S			
			Reason for Trench		Investigate eastern boundary of the site			
Context	Type	Description and Interpretation			Max Width (mm)	Max Thckn (mm)	Depth BGL (mm)	
600	Layer	Turf and topsoil			>1600	250	0-250	
601	Cut	East to west garden feature terminates midway across the trench			600	200	250-450	
602	Layer	Natural			>1600		>250	

z ←



0 10m

Trench 7							
		Max Dimensions (m)					
		Length	23.0	Width	1.6	Depth	0.3
		NGR Co-ordinates					
		W	02461 50484		E	02484 50485	
		Orientation		W-E			
		Reason for Trench		General pattern of trenches			
Context	Type	Description and Interpretation			Max Width (mm)	Max Thckn (mm)	Depth BGL (mm)
700	Layer	Turf and topsoil			>1600	250	0-250
701	Cut	NE-SW field drain			150	100	250-350
702	Cut	Bedding trench			300	150	250-400
703	Cut	Tree bole, irregular in shape				200	250-450
704	Layer	Natural			>1600		>250

