

## Archaeological Services & Consultancy Ltd

### **MONITORING & SAMPLE EXCAVATION: SITE C, SNELSHALL WEST, MILTON KEYNES**

*on behalf of* **JOHN SISK & SON LTD**



**Jonathan R. Hunn BA PhD MIFA**

**March 2004**

**ASC: 551/MKS/02**

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## Site Data

ASC site code:	MKS	Project no:	551
MKC Event No:	865		
County:	Buckinghamshire		
Planning Authority:	Milton Keynes		
District:	Snelshall West		
Parish:	Shenley Brook End CP		
NGR:	SP 8295 3290		
Extent of site:	c.0.9ha		
Present land use:	Pasture		
Planning proposal:	Construction of industrial unit		
Extent of development:	c.0.9 ha		
Planning brief ref/date:	PS/537/2/A/C 1212		
Client:	John Sisk & Son Ltd 1750 Solihull Parkway Birmingham Business Park Birmingham B37 7YD		
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## Internal Quality Check

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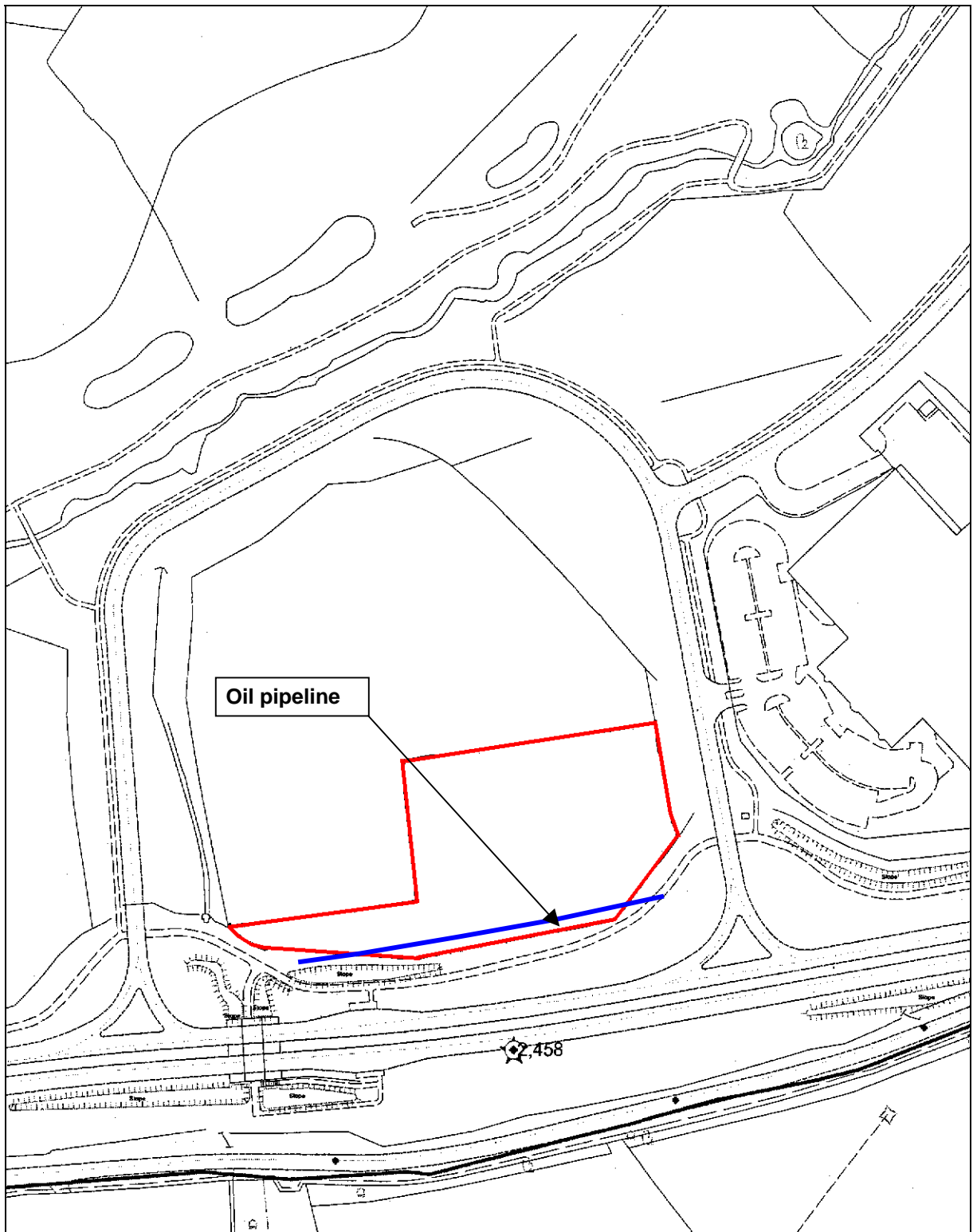
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**Figure 1:** General location (scale 1:25,000)



**Figure 2:** Site plan (scale 1:2500)

## Summary

*In March 2004 ASC Ltd undertook a 'strip and sample' excavation on Site C, Snelshall West, on the western margins of Milton Keynes. The removal of the topsoil revealed a uniform horizon of olive-brown clay. There was no evidence for the presence of ridge and furrow and only two small, undated features were noted on the extreme eastern edge of the development area. Apart from broken fragments of drainage tiles, no artefacts were noted. The lack of structural and artefactual evidence suggests that the area was never occupied or exploited in the past.*

## 1 Introduction

1.1 In March 2004 *Archaeological Services and Consultancy Ltd* (ASC) carried out a 'strip & sample' excavation on a site at Snelshall West, Milton Keynes (NGR SP 8295-3290: Fig. 1). The project was commissioned by Guy Osborne on behalf of *John Sisk & Son Ltd*, and was carried out according to a brief (PS/537/2/A/C 1212) prepared by Brian Giggins of Milton Keynes Council, and a written scheme of investigation prepared by ASC (ASC:551/MKS/01).

### 1.2 Reason for Work

The post-determination condition was imposed due to the proximity of five 7<sup>th</sup>-century inhumation burials that were revealed in 1992, during the construction of the A421 road to the south of the site (Fig. 1).

### 1.3 Setting

#### 1.3.1 Site Location & Description

Snelshall West is located on the western edge of the new city of Milton Keynes. Site C, which covers c.0.9ha, is bounded to the south-east by the A421 Buckingham road, by a large industrial unit to the north-east, and to the north-west and south-west by open farmland. The site itself is former farmland, now disused, and is under grass. Access to the site is from the Buckingham road.

#### 1.3.2 Geology & Topography

Site C is located on a north-west facing slope, between 105m and 100m AOD. At the foot of the slope, c.150m to the north-west, is Loughton Brook, which flows to the north-east. Soils on the site belong to the Hanslope association (Soil Survey 1987, 411d), described as 'slowly permeable calcareous clayey soils. Some slowly permeable non-calcareous clayey soils. Slight risk of water erosion'. The underlying geology comprises chalky boulder clay.

1.3.3 There were no building or overhead services crossing the site. The only service which had any impact on the site, and the archaeological investigation, was an oil pipeline that traversed the south side of the site, more or less parallel with the A421, at a depth of only 900mm (Fig. 2).

## **2 Aims & Methods**

### **2.1 Aims**

As described in the brief (Section 3), the aims of the ‘strip & sample’ excavation were:

- To investigate and record any archaeological features contemporary to the adjacent Saxon cemetery, and any other features that may be revealed.

### **2.2 Methods**

The work was carried out according to the brief (Section 6), which required:

- Removal of topsoil and overburden from the area shown in Fig. 2 by suitable excavating plant fitted with a toothless bucket, working under archaeological direction;
- Sampling and recording of any archaeological features present;
- Preparation of an overall plan of the site, to a scale of not less than 1:100;
- Preparation of a report (this document);
- Deposition of the project archive with the Buckinghamshire County Museum.

### **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*.

### **2.4 Variations**

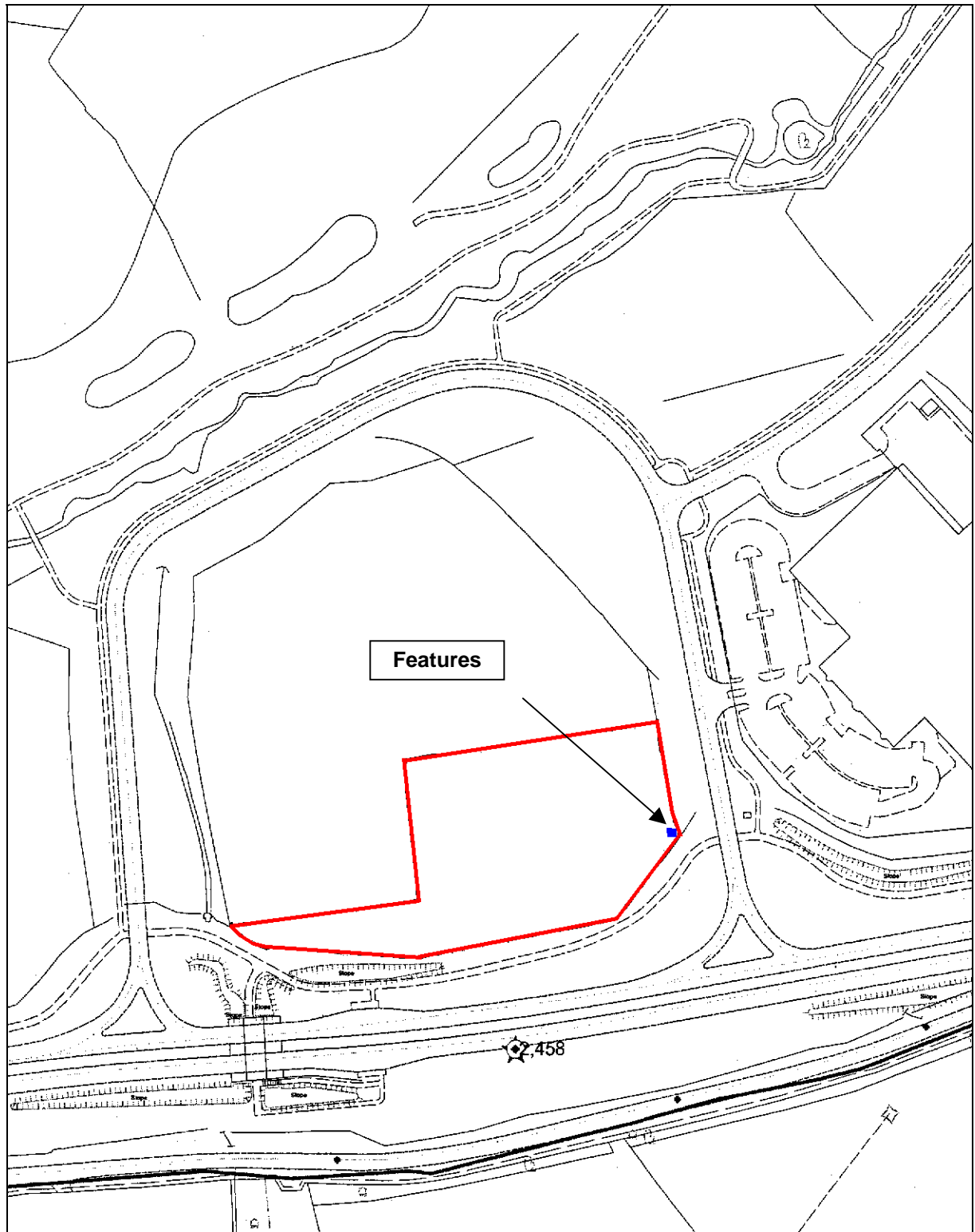
Because of the location of the oil pipeline on the south side of the area designated for excavation, a strip of land on the south edge of the site, comprising the pipeline corridor and the ground between it and the site boundary, was excluded from the excavation.

### 3 Archaeological & Historical Background

- 3.1 The site lies within the historic parish of Tattenhoe, now part of the civil parish of Shenley Brook End. In contrast to the area of the Shenleys, to the north, little is known regarding the archaeology of Tattenhoe. Recent watching briefs and an excavation undertaken by ASC have revealed evidence of a Romano-British occupation site adjacent to Portishead Drive, 0.9km north of Site C (Abrams 2002). An evaluation by the writer for the former Milton Keynes Archaeology Unit in Emerson Valley, 1.7km to the north-east, also revealed evidence of Roman activity.
- 3.2 In 1992, construction of the present line of the A421 to the immediate south of Site C revealed a 7<sup>th</sup>-century Saxon cemetery, which was subsequently excavated (*Recs. Bucks* 36, 103-119). The cemetery comprised five adult burials in a north-south orientation, accompanied by a range of grave goods.
- 3.3 The deserted village of Tattenhoe, excavated in 1990 by the former Milton Keynes Archaeology Unit (Ivens *et al* 1995), is centred 1.0km north of Site C, extending 0.5km north-westwards from Loughton Brook to the site of the manor house and surviving moat and chapel. In the valley bottom, 0.6km north-west of Site C, the remains of medieval fishponds survived until recently adjacent to a covert, known as *Water Spinney* (Croft & Mynard 1993, 162). The survey of medieval ridge-and-furrow ploughing in the parish carried out by MKAU (*ibid*, fig. 64) shows the site as having retained evidence of ridge and furrow running down the slope to the brook.
- 3.4 The greater part of Tattenhoe parish was enclosed during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, when it was held by the Selby family. Thomas James Selby bequeathed the manor of Tattenhoe, along with his adjoining estates in Whaddon, to William Lowndes, in whose family it remained until the establishment of Milton Keynes.

## 4 Results

- 4.1 The depth of topsoil removed from the site never exceeded 0.3m and in some areas was no more than 0.25m. This material was deposited in two linear mounds and landscaped in order to facilitate drainage. Superficial observation indicated that the topsoil contained very few datable artefacts. Beneath this top organic horizon the ground consisted of an almost uniform layer of natural, olive brown clay (Mun: 2.5Y 4/3). Apart from the occasional score marks derived from deep ploughing there were virtually no other distinguishable features cutting into clay. It was also noted with interest that no evidence of 'ridge and furrow' (*i.e.* residual fills of the plough furrows) survived. Plates 1-6 provide a general overview of the stripping operation.
- 4.2 The only possible archaeological features revealed were located on the eastern edge of the site (Fig. 3). Feature 1 (Plates 7 & 8) consisted of a small oval depression, measuring 0.5m in length 0.35m wide and 0.23m deep, with a V-shaped profile. Its fill comprised orangey-brown clay containing much charcoal, but no dating evidence. Feature 2, located a short distance to the north, comprised a patch of greyish-brown soil containing occasional flecks of charcoal. This feature (Plates 9 & 10) extended beyond the edge of the excavation and was also undated.



**Figure 3:** Location of Features 1 & 2 (scale 1:2500)



**Plate 1:** Western end of Site C



**Plate 2:** Southern part of site



**Plate 3:** Central part of the site during stripping



**Plate 4:** General view across the site



**Plate 5:** Central part of the site after stripping



**Plate 6:** Cleared western extension of the site



**Plate 7:** Feature 1 before excavation



**Plate 8:** Section through Feature 1



**Plate 9:** Feature 2 before excavation



**Plate 10:** General view, Features 1 & 2

## **5. Conclusions**

- 5.1 With the exception of two small, shallow features on the eastern extremity of the site the area was devoid of any archaeological features. Apart from several deep east-west striations on the southern edge of the site, believed to relate to modern ploughing regimes, there was no physical evidence of 'ridge and furrow' from the site, though it has been previously identified from air photographs. This suggests that the area was never intensively cultivated in the past. This would accord with the results of an examination of the topsoil, which was unable to identify any artefacts apart from fragments of broken land drain. The site was never occupied by permanent settlement and, to judge from the lack of discarded artefacts, was not even close to any previous settlement.
- 5.2 Although it would be unwise to base too much on negative evidence, it is possible that the Anglo-Saxon burials found nearby were located within a marginal zone, at a distance from any settlement activity. This examination of Site C further reinforces this impression, though the question of the extent of the early medieval cemetery remains to be answered. All that can be concluded is that the site is devoid of any evidence for pre-modern activity, both in terms of settlement, burial or even agricultural activity.

## **6. Acknowledgements**

The writer is grateful to Guy Osborne of *John Sisk & Son Ltd* for commissioning this project and to Brian Giggins of Milton Keynes Council for his advice. The author is also grateful to Bob Zeepvat for the historical and archaeological background to the site and for marking out the area for excavation. Thanks are also due to George Cheshire and his assistant Paul for the careful excavation of the topsoil from the site. Finally, my thanks to Bob Zeepvat for editing this report.

## **7. Archive**

7.1 The project archive will comprise:

1. Brief
2. Project Design
3. Initial Report
4. Client's site plans
5. CDROM with copies of all digital files.

7.2 The archive will be deposited with Buckinghamshire County Museum.

## 8. Bibliography

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