

Cotswold Archaeology

Land off Baldock Road Letchworth Hertfordshire

Archaeological Evaluation



for Green Frog Connect Ltd

> CA Project: 660450 CA Report: 15303

Site Code: BRL 15

June 2015



Andover Cirencester Exeter Milton Keynes

Land off Baldock Road Letchworth Hertfordshire

Archaeological Evaluation

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SUMMARY

Project Name:	Land off Baldock Road		
Location:	Letchworth, Hertfordshire		
NGR:	TL 2366 3297		
Туре:	Evaluation		
Date:	26 to 28 May 2015		
Planning Reference:	13/00609/1		
Location of Archive:	To be deposited with North Hertfordshire Museum		
Site Code:	BRL 15		

In May 2015, an archaeological evaluation was undertaken by Cotswold Archaeology on land off Baldock Road, Letchworth, Hertfordshire. The work was carried out in order to fulfil a planning condition that was attached to planning consent for the construction of a power plant, with associated tanks and access, on the site. The evaluation comprised the excavation of six evaluation trenches.

The site lies immediately adjacent and to the south of an area where possible archaeological remains have been identified from cropmarks shown on aerial photographs. The evaluation identified archaeological features concentrated towards the southern edge of the site. The earliest feature encountered comprised a ditch containing pottery dating from the Late Bronze Age to earlier Iron Age. A further ditch containing 12th to 13th-century pottery and conforming to the orientation of the current field system was identified. An undated pit adjacent to this ditch may be contemporaneous. Other investigated features were shown to be geological in origin.

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 In May 2015, Cotswold Archaeology (CA) carried out an archaeological evaluation of land off Baldock Road, Letchworth, Hertfordshire (site centred on NGR: TL 2366 3297; Fig. 1). The evaluation, which was commissioned by Green Frog Connect Ltd, was undertaken to fulfil a planning condition (North Hertfordshire District Council planning ref. 13/00609/1; Condition 9). The development comprises a Capacity Mechanism generation compound with associated access.
- 1.2 The project was carried out in accordance with a detailed *Written Scheme of Investigation* (WSI) produced by CA (2015) and approved by Andy Instone, Historic Environment Advisor, Hertfordshire County Council (HEAHCC). The fieldwork also abided by the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists' *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Evaluation* (CIfA 2014) and the Historic England (formerly English Heritage) procedural documents *Management of Archaeological Projects 2* (EH1991) and *Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment (MoRPHE): Project Manager's Guide* (EH 2006).

The site

- 1.3 The proposed development site, which covers an area of *c*. 0.7ha, is situated on the eastern outskirts of Letchworth Garden City, to the south of Baldock Road (B656), approximately 2.2km to the north-east of the town centre. It comprises a rectangular block of land in the north-western corner of an arable field that borders the A1 (M) Motorway to the east. The site is bounded to the north-west by Back Lane, arable fields to the north-east and south-east, and by an existing electrical plant to the south-west. Topographically the site is located on the north-facing slope of a foothill to the north of the Chiltern escarpment, with ground level lying at *c*. 82m above Ordnance Datum (aOD).
- 1.4 The underlying bedrock geology of the area is mapped as Holywell Nodular Chalk Formation and New Pit Chalk Formation of the Cretaceous period (BGS 2015). No superficial geological deposits are recorded within the site. The geology was confirmed as light grey white chalk by the evaluation.

2. ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Reference to the Hertfordshire Historic Environment Record (HER) shows that the site is located in an area where there is the potential for the discovery of archaeological remains, with recorded sites in the wider vicinity dating from the Mesolithic to modern periods. The following is a summary of sites in close proximity to the proposed development area (HER numbers in parentheses).
- 2.2 Cropmarks identified through aerial photography show two ring ditches, possibly the remains of Bronze Age barrows, in the field immediately to the north of the site (PRN 2342 and PRN 2343), as well as other small enclosures and ditches of probable prehistoric date (PRN 2335 and PRN 2336). It was considered likely that elements of these features could extend into the proposed development area.
- 2.3 Approximately 500m to the north-east, an Early Bronze Age cremation in a collared urn was found in a small pit in the yard of New Farm (13146) and a Bronze Age hoard, comprising palstaves, axes, ingots and swords (244) was also found in the Baldock area. Passing to the north of the site is the modern route of the Icknield Way, an ancient track that predates the Roman occupation and follows the chalk escarpment from Norfolk, along the Chilterns, down into the Upper Thames Valley.
- 2.4 To the east of the A1(M) Motorway, approximately 1km to the east of the site, a Roman road (the modern B197) leads north-eastwards towards the site of the small Roman town at Baldock, which was established on the site of a Late Iron Age *oppidum.* Iron Age coins have been found in and around Baldock (112 and 4859) and a Roman burial, with an accompanying bronze brooch set with a blue stone, has been found nearby (1421). A length of Late Iron Age/Roman ditch was investigated at New Farm, approximately 500m to the north-east of the site (13689).

3. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

- 3.1 The objectives of the evaluation, as stated in the WSI (CA 2015), were to:
 - Establish the location, extent, nature, and date of any archaeological features or deposits that may be present;
 - Determine if the archaeological remains associated with cropmarks in the field to the north of the site extend within the development area;

- Determine the palaeoenvironmental potential of the site through the assessment of bulk soil samples taken from any suitable archaeological deposits;
- Determine the integrity and state of preservation of any archaeological features or deposits that may be present.
- 3.2 The evaluation results will enable HEAHCC, archaeological advisor to North Hertfordshire District Council, to identify and assess the particular significance of the site's heritage resource, consider the impact of the proposed development upon that significance, and develop plans to avoid or minimise conflict between heritage resource conservation and any aspect of the development proposal, in line with the *National Planning Policy Framework* (DCLG 2012).

4. METHODOLOGY

- 4.1 The fieldwork comprised the excavation of six trenches, in the locations shown in Figure 2. The trenches were 30m long and 1.8m wide.
- 4.2 Trenches were set out on OS National Grid (NGR) co-ordinates using Leica GPS and surveyed in accordance with CA *Technical Manual 4: Survey Manual* (CA 2009). All trenches were excavated by mechanical excavator equipped with a toothless grading bucket. All machine excavation was undertaken under constant archaeological supervision to the top of the first significant archaeological horizon or the natural substrate, whichever was encountered first. Where archaeological deposits were encountered they were excavated by hand in accordance with *Technical Manual 1: Fieldwork Recording Manual* (CA 2007)
- 4.3 Deposits were assessed for their palaeoenvironmental potential in accordance with *Technical Manual 2: The Taking and Processing of Environmental and Other Samples from Archaeological Sites* (CA 2003). Bulk soil samples for charred plant remains and plant macrofossils were taken for assessment; these will be processed, subject to discussions with HEAHCC. All artefacts recovered were processed in accordance with *Technical Manual 3: Treatment of Finds Immediately after Excavation* (CA 2010).

4.4 The archive and artefacts from the evaluation are currently held by CA at their offices in Milton Keynes. Subject to the agreement of the legal landowner the artefacts will be deposited with the recipient museum, along with the site archive. A summary of information from this project, as set out within Appendix C, will be entered onto the OASIS online database of archaeological projects in Britain.

5. RESULTS

- 5.1 This section provides an overview of the evaluation results (Fig. 1); detailed summaries of the recorded contexts and finds are to be found in Appendices A and B respectively.
- 5.2 A ditch of later prehistoric date and one of medieval date were encountered in Trenches 5 and 6 respectively. An undated pit, which may be associated with the ditches, was also identified in Trench 6. There were no archaeological features in Trenches 1 to 4, although several 'ditch-like' features were investigated and were demonstrated to be geological in origin

General Stratigraphy

5.3 A broadly similar stratigraphic sequence was identified within all of the trenches. The geological substrate, which comprised light grey white chalk, was identified at an average depth of 0.45m below present ground level. This was overlain by subsoil, *c*.
0.15m thick, which comprised light orange brown sandy silt. This was in turn sealed by topsoil, *c*. 0.3m thick.

Later prehistoric

Trench 5

5.4 Located near the centre of the trench was north-east/south-west orientated ditch 503 (Fig. 3, section AA). It had a symmetrical profile with moderately sloping sides and a slightly concave base, suggestive of a field system ditch. Its single silty clay fill (504), deposited by gradual silting, contained a single sherd of pottery, considered to date from the Late Bronze Age to earlier Iron Age.

Medieval Trench 6

5.5 Located at the south-western end of the trench was north-east/south-west orientated ditch 606 (Fig. 4, section BB). It had a symmetrical profile with moderately steeply sloping sides and a flat base. The primary fill 607, deposited by initial collapse of the edges was devoid of artefactual material. The secondary fill 608 was deposited by natural silting and contained a sherd of pottery dating from the 12th to 13th centuries.

Undated

Trench 6

5.6 Located to the north-east of ditch 606 was sub-oval pit 603, the northern edge of which lay beyond the limits of the trench (Fig. 4, section CC). It measured 2.55m long by at least 1.4m wide by at least 0.6m deep (base not attained). There was no artefactual material in the fills of the pit (604 and 605).

Geological Trenches 1 to 4

5.7 A number of geological features were investigated, which superficially had the appearance of archaeological remains (Figs 2, 5 and 6). These 'ditch-like' features were investigated in Trenches 1 to 4. Investigation of the features demonstrated that they had a sinuous form with somewhat irregular edges. They measured between 0.35m and 2.8m wide and varied between 0.09m and 0.3m deep, with asymmetrical profiles, irregular slopes on both sides and uneven bases. They were filled with firm, sterile, mid red brown silty sand.

6. THE FINDS

6.1 Artefactual material, entirely comprising pottery of late prehistoric and medieval date, was recorded from three deposits (appendix B). The condition of the recovered material is poor, consisting of small and unfeatured bodysherds, and context dating must be regarded as tenuous.

Pottery

6.2 Pottery of probable later prehistoric type amounting to two sherds (4g) was recorded from ditch fill 504 and subsoil 501. That from ditch fill 504 comprised a bodysherd in a handmade fabric characterised by common medium coarse flint and rounded quartz inclusions. The second sherd, from deposit 501, is a small (<1g) unfeatured crumb in a fabric with coarse flint inclusions. Flint tempering is long-lived tradition in the region, beginning in the earlier Neolithic; however dating in Late Bronze Age and earlier Iron Age is suggested based on characteristics of fabric/sherd thickness and firing.

6.3 Medieval pottery occurs as a single bodysherd (9g) from ditch fill 608. The fabric consists of an unglazed quartz-tempered type, which is comparable to 'medieval sandy coarsewares' described from the region and considered to date to the 12th to 13th centuries (Whittingham 2009, 156-7).

7. DISCUSSION

- 7.1 To the north of the site, cropmarks probably representing archaeological features have been identified from aerial photographs. These comprised a number of ring ditches, isolated enclosures and ditches (PRN 2335 and PRN 2336). Evaluation was undertaken across the site to determine if the archaeological remains associated with the cropmarks in the field to the north of the site extend into the development area.
- 7.2 The evaluation has recorded evidence for archaeological features within the site, comprising two linear ditches and an undated pit. The ditches contained pottery dating to the later prehistoric and medieval periods and appear to represent further components of enclosures seen to the north and subdivisions of the current field system respectively.

Later prehistoric

7.3 Ditch 503, located within the southern part of the site (Trench 5), may form the continuation of enclosures and ditches identified as cropmarks in the field to the north of the site.

Medieval

7.4 Ditch 606 is parallel with a boundary depicted on the 1880 1st Edition Ordnance Survey map, located *c*. 200m to the south-east, and with Baldock Road, located *c*.
135m to the north-west. It fits within the alignment of the current field system and as such, it probably relates to a subdivision or drainage within this field system.

Undated

7.5 An undated pit was revealed within Trench 6. The exact function of this feature is uncertain. It may be associated with the adjacent later prehistoric or medieval activity, but may equally relate to later activity.

Geological

7.6 A number of geological features were investigated, which superficially had the appearance of archaeological remains, excavation demonstrated that the features were geological formations, although it is also possible that some of the identified features may relate to the later prehistoric or subsequent field activity.

8. CA PROJECT TEAM

The fieldwork was undertaken by Jeremy Mordue, assisted by Ronan Mooney, Jonathan Whitmore and Kim Deveraux-West. The report was written by Stuart Joyce, and the illustrations were prepared by Dan Bashford. The archive has been compiled by Emily Evans and prepared for deposition by Hazel O'Neill. The project was managed for CA by Stuart Joyce.

9. **REFERENCES**

- Beresford, G. 2009 Caldecote: The Development and Desertion of a Hertfordshire Village London, Society for Medieval Archaeology. Monograph 28
- BGS (British Geological Survey) 2015 *Geology of Britain Viewer* <u>http://maps.bgs.ac.uk/geology viewer_google/googleviewer.html</u> Accessed 4 June 2015
- CA (Cotswold Archaeology) 2015 Land off Baldock Road, Letchworth, Hertfordshire: Written Scheme of Investigation for an Archaeological Evaluation

Whittingham, L. 2009 'Medieval and Post-medieval pottery', in Beresford, 2009, 173-78

APPENDIX A: CONTEXT DESCRIPTIONS

Trench No.	Context No.	Туре	Fill of	Context interpretation	Description	L (m)	W (m)	D (m)	Spot-date
1	100	Layer		Topsoil	Mid grey brown sandy silt			0.27	
1	101	Layer		Subsoil	Light orange brown sandy silt			0.2	
1	102	Layer		Natural geological substrate	Light grey white chalk				
2	200	Layer		Topsoil	Mid grey brown sandy silt			0.36	
2	201	Layer		Subsoil	Light orange brown sandy silt			0.1	
2	202	Layer		Natural geological substrate	Light grey white chalk				
3	300	Layer		Topsoil	Mid grey brown sandy silt	P		0.29	
3	301	Layer		Subsoil	Light orange brown sandy silt			0.11	
3	302	Layer		Natural geological substrate	Light grey white chalk				
4	400	Layer		Topsoil	Mid grey brown sandy silt			0.3	
4	401	Layer		Subsoil	Light orange brown sandy silt			0.1	
4	402	Layer		Natural geological substrate	Light grey white chalk				
5	500	Layer		Topsoil	Mid grey brown sandy silt			0.27	
5	501	Layer		Subsoil	Light orange brown sandy silt			0.18	
5	502	Layer		Natural geological substrate	Light grey white chalk				
5	503	Cut		Ditch	E/w orientated ditch. Moderately sloping even sides, flat base. Gentle break of slope at base	>1.8	1.95	0.52	
5	504	Fill	503	Single fill of ditch	Mid brown orange silty clay. Common chalk and flint inclusions	>1.8	1.95	0.52	
6	600	Layer		Topsoil	Mid grey brown sandy silt			0.2	
6	601	Layer		Subsoil	Light orange brown sandy silt			0.17	
6	602	Layer		Natural geological substrate	Light grey white chalk				
6	603	Cut		Pit	Presumed circular in plan. Steeply sloping, stepped sides. Depth not fully excavated	>1.4	2.55	>0.6	
6	604	Fill	603	1st fill of pit	Mid to light yellow brown, sandy silt			>0.23	
6	605	Fill	603	2nd fill of pit	Dark red brown, sandy silt	>1.4	2.55	>0.6	
6	606	Cut		Ditch	Moderate to moderately steeply sloping sides. Flat base with gentle break of slope	>1.8	1.3	0.44	
6	607	Fill	606	1st fill of ditch	Light grey brown sandy silt		0.71	0.17	
6	608	Fill	606	2nd fill of ditch	Mid grey brown sandy silt	>1.8	1.3	0.35	

APPENDIX B: THE FINDS

Context	Class	Description	Ct.	Wt. (g)	Date
501	Prehistoric pottery	Coarse flint inclusions	1	<1	Late prehistoric
504	Prehistoric pottery	flint/quartz inclusions	1	4	Late prehistoric
608	Medieval pottery	Reduced sandy coarseware	1	9	C12-C13

11

APPENDIX C: OASIS REPORT FORM

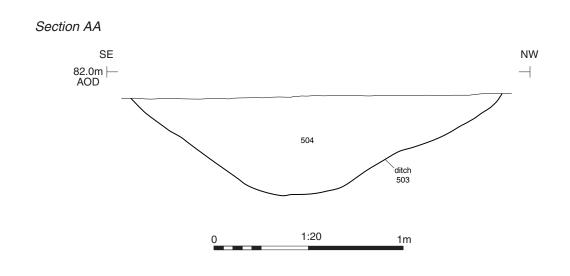
Project Name	Land off Baldock Road, Letchworth, H	ertfordshire			
Short description	In May 2015, an archaeological evaluation was undertaken by Cotswold Archaeology on land off Baldock Road, Letchworth, Hertfordshire. The work was carried out in order to fulfil a planning condition that was attached to planning consent for the construction of a power plant, with associated tanks and access, on the site. The evaluation comprised the excavation of six evaluation trenches.				
	The site lies immediately adjacent and to the south of an area where possible archaeological remains have been identified from cropmarks shown on aerial photographs. The evaluation identified archaeological features concentrated towards the southern edge of the site. The earliest feature encountered comprised a ditch containing pottery dating from the Late Bronze Age to earlier Iron Age. A further ditch containing 12th to 13th-century pottery and conforming to the orientation of the current field system was identified. An undated pit adjacent to this ditch may be contemporaneous. Other investigated features were shown to be geological in origin.				
Project dates	26 to 28 May 2015				
Project type	Archaeological field evaluation				
Previous work	Unknown				
Future work	Unknown				
PROJECT LOCATION					
Site Location	Land off Baldock Road, Letchworth, H	ertfordshire			
Study area (M ² /ha)	0.7ha				
Site co-ordinates (8 Fig Grid Reference)	TL 2366 3297	TL 2366 3297			
PROJECT CREATORS					
Name of organisation	Cotswold Archaeology				
Project Brief originator	N/A				
Project Design (WSI) originator	CA type Cotswold Archaeology				
Project Manager	Stuart Joyce				
Project Supervisor	Jeremy Mordue				
MONUMENT TYPE	None				
SIGNIFICANT FINDS	None				
PROJECT ARCHIVES	Intended final location of archive	Content			
Physical	North Hertfordshire Museum	Pottery			
Paper	North Hertfordshire Museum	WSI, pro-forma registers, recording forms			
Digital	North Hertfordshire Museum	Digital photographs, digital survey data			
BIBLIOGRAPHY					

APPENDIX D: HERTFORDSHIRE HER SUMMARY SHEET

Site name and address:	Land off Baldock Road, Letchworth, Hertfordshire
County: Hertfordshire	District: North Hertfordshire
Village/Town:	Parish: Baldock
Planning application reference:	13/00609/1
Client name:	Green Frog Connect Ltd
Nature of application:	Construction of a Capacity Mechanism generation
••	compound with associated access
Present land use:	Arable agriculture
Size of application area:	Size of area investigated: 0.7ha
NGR:	TL 2366 3297
Site Code:	BRL 15
Site director/Organization:	Jeremy Mordue/Cotswold Archaeology
Type of work:	Archaeological field evaluation
Date of work:	26 to 28 May 2015
Location of finds/Curating museum:	North Hertfordshire Museum
Related SMR Nos:	Periods represented: None
Relevant previous summaries/reports:	None
Summary of fieldwork results:	In May 2015, an archaeological evaluation was undertaken by Cotswold Archaeology on land off Baldock Road, Letchworth, Hertfordshire. The work was carried out in order to fulfil a planning condition that was attached to planning consent for the construction of a power plant, with associated tanks and access, on the site. The evaluation comprised the excavation of six evaluation trenches. The site lies immediately adjacent and to the south of an area where possible archaeological remains have been identified from cropmarks shown on aerial photographs. The evaluation identified archaeological features concentrated towards the southern edge of the site. The earliest feature encountered comprised a ditch containing pottery dating from the Late Bronze Age to earlier Iron Age. A further ditch containing 12th to 13th-century pottery and conforming to the orientation of the current field system was identified. An undated pit adjacent to this ditch may be contemporaneous. Other investigated features were shown to be geological in origin.
Author of summary: Stuart Joyce	Date of Summary: June 2015



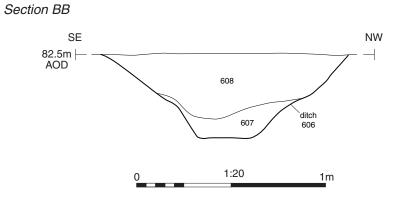






Ditch 503, looking west (scale 1m)

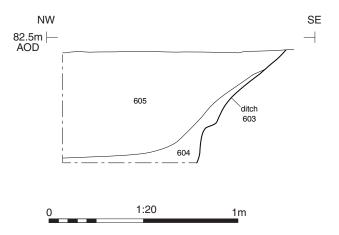
Andover 01264 347630 Ciencester 01285 771022 Exter 01392 826185 Millon Keynes 01908 56460 www.cotswoldarchaeology.co.uk e enquiries@cotswoldarchaeology.co.uk e enquiries@cotswoldarchaeology.co.uk
FIGURE TITLE Trench 5: section and photograph
DRAWN BY DJB PROJECT NO. 660450 FIGURE NO. CHECKED BY JB DATE 08-06-2015 APPROVED BY 3





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Ditch 606, looking south-west (scale 1m)
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Pit 603, looking north-east (scale 1m)



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PROJECT TITLE Land off Baldock Road, Letchworth Hertfordshire

FIGURE TITLE Trench 6: sections and photographs

DRAWN BY DJB CHECKED BY JB APPROVED BY SJ

 PROJECT NO.
 660450

 DATE
 08-06-2015

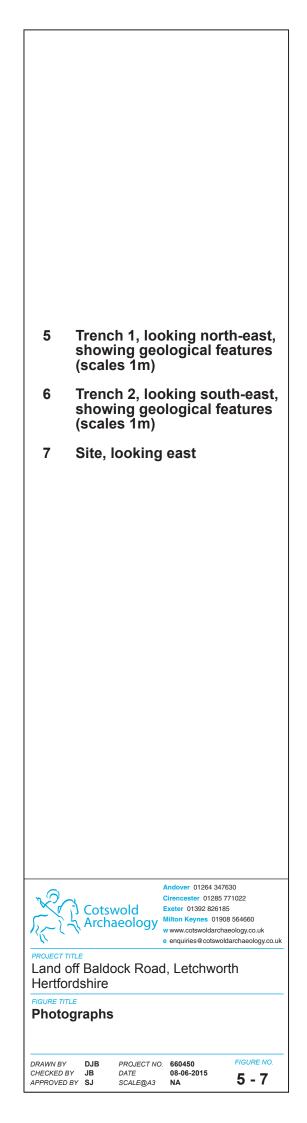
 SCALE@A3
 1:20

FIGURE NO. 4











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