Land at Holsworthy Livestock Centre, Holsworthy, Devon

NGR SS 3440 0340

Results of an archaeological trench evaluation

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On behalf of
Cavanna Homes (Devon) Ltd

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archaeology

LAND AT HOLSWORTHY LIVESTOCK CENTRE, HOLSWORTHY, DEVON

(NGR SS 3440 0340)

Results of an archaeological trench evaluation

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Summary

*An archaeological trench evaluation was undertaken by AC archaeology during November 2011 at Holsworthy Livestock Centre, Holsworthy, Devon (*NGR SS 3440 0340). *The site lies on the southern edge of Holsworthy and is bordered to the south by the River Deer. While much of the site is occupied by buildings, or areas of hardstanding associated with the livestock market, the southern edge of the site, adjacent to the river, is largely undeveloped and had the potential for the survival of palaeo-environmental remains.*

The evaluation comprised the machine-excavation of five trenches, with a combined length of 53.50m and located in the southern part of the site close to the river. The work established the presence of disturbed ground and substantial dumped deposits in many of the trenches, probably resulting from general ground clearance and levelling of land carried out during construction of the livestock market in the 20th century. While no pre-modern archaeological deposits or features were recorded during the evaluation, alluvial deposits were present adjacent to the River Deer in the southeast corner of the site. These deposits were present below over 1m of modern overburden and no organic material, charcoal, ecofacts or other palaeo-environmental remains were present.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 An archaeological trench evaluation carried out in support of a forthcoming planning application for the redevelopment of Holsworthy Livestock Centre, Holsworthy, Devon, was undertaken by AC archaeology during November 2011. The work was commissioned by Cavanna Homes (Devon) Ltd, and was undertaken following consultation with Devon County Historic Environment Service (hereafter DCHES). The location of the site is shown on Fig. 1.

1.2 The site lies on the southern edge of Holsworthy and to the north of the River Deer. Much of the livestock market is occupied by buildings or hardstanding. However, the southern part of the site adjacent to the river has not been developed and it was considered that there was the potential for the survival of archaeological deposits, particularly palaeoenvironmental remains. This part of the site slopes moderately to steeply down from north to south. The underlying geology is sandstone of the Bude Formation, which beside the river is overlain by alluvial deposits of clay, silt, sand and gravel.

2. ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 The main archaeological interest in the site is the potential for waterlogged alluvial deposits to be present adjacent to the river, which may contain preserved organic cultural remains (wood, leather etc) and/or ecofacts (pollen, beetles etc).

2.2 The historic landscape of the area has been characterised as modern development, but is surrounded by medieval enclosures based on strip fields. Prior to the development of the livestock market in the 20th century, these medieval enclosures are likely to have been present within the proposed development area.

3. AIMS

3.1 The aim of the trench evaluation was to establish the presence or absence, extent, depth, character and date of any archaeological features, deposits or finds or deposits containing palaeo-environmental material within the site. The results as set out in this report will be reviewed and used to inform any subsequent mitigation as a second stage of archaeological works.

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1 The evaluation was initially meant to comprise the machine-excavation of six trenches with a combined total length of 100m, as set out in the Project Design approved by DCHES prior to commencement on site (Passmore 2011). However, owing to the presence of various on-site constraints, in particular wildlife, dense woodland vegetation and the steep sloping nature of the natural ground level, the total number of trenches was reduced to five, with a combined total length of 53.50m. The location of the trenches as excavated is shown on Fig 1.

4.2 The site was recorded in accordance with the *AC archaeology pro forma* recording system, comprising written, graphic and photographic records, and in accordance with AC archaeology's *General Site Recording Manual, Version 1*. All plans were drawn at a scale of 1:50 and sections at 1:10 or 1:20, as appropriate. All levels have been related to Ordnance Datum.

5. RESULTS

5.1 No archaeological features were present in any of the trenches and the recorded layer sequence varied across the site. It comprised between 0.20-0.30m of dark brown silty clay disturbed soil or topsoil in all trenches, which overlay a light yellow clay and shillet natural subsoil within Trenches 1 and 5, with an additional subsoil layer overlying natural subsoil within Trench 3. The layer sequence recorded in Trenches 2 and 4 comprised substantial modern made-ground levelling deposits. The trenches are discussed below, with relevant sections included as Figs 2a-e and photographs as Plates 1-4.

5.2 **Trench 1** (Section Fig. 2a)
This trench was L-shaped in plan, was aligned northeast-southwest and northwest-southeast and was 20m in total length. The trench was excavated to a depth of 0.25m below ground level, through a dark brown silty clay topsoil (100) and directly onto a light yellow brown clay and shillet natural subsoil (102).

5.3 **Trench 2** (Section Fig. 2b, Plate1 & 2)
This trench was northeast-southwest aligned, 20m in length and was excavated to a maximum depth of 1m below ground level. The recorded layer sequence comprised 0.20m of reinstated dark brown silty clay topsoil (200) over 0.80m of modern dump and levelling material (201). A sondage was excavated through this to a depth of 1.40m below ground level onto a dark grey silty clay dumped deposit (202), containing a fragment of 19th/20th century brick. Modern finds (brick, tile, metalwork, ceramics etc) were present in overlying layers, but these were not retained.

5.4 **Trench 3** (Section Fig. 2c)
This trench was northeast-southwest aligned, measured 3.50m long and was situated across steep south sloping ground forming a natural bank to the north of an access track. The trench was excavated to a depth of between 0.40-0.60m below ground level onto a light yellow brown clay

and shillet natural subsoil (302). The overlying layer sequence comprised 0.20m of reinstated dark brown silty clay topsoil (300), over between 0.20-0.40m of light yellow brown silt clay subsoil (301).

5.5 **Trench 4** (Section Fig. 2d, Plate 3)
This trench was northeast-southwest aligned, measured 5.50m in length and was excavated to a maximum depth of 1.10m below ground level onto a soft dark grey silty clay alluvium (403). The overlying layer sequence comprised 0.20m of reinstated dark grey brown silty clay topsoil (400) over 0.90m of mixed modern dump/levelling deposits (401) and (402). A sondage was excavated through alluvial layer (403) to a depth of 1.30m below ground level onto a light grey silty sand alluvial deposit (404). Modern finds (brick, tile, metalwork, ceramics etc) were present in overlying layers, but these were not retained.

5.6 **Trench 5** (Section Fig. 2e, Plate 4)
This trench was north-south aligned, measured 4.50m in length and was located across the bank of the River Deer. It was excavated to a depth of 0.40m below ground level through 0.30m of reinstated dark grey brown silty clay topsoil (500), which was directly overlying a light yellow clay natural subsoil (501).

6. DISCUSSION

6.1 Much of the site to the south of the cattle market and to the north of the River Deer was inaccessable for trial trenching, due to wildlife constraints, the presence of dense, impenetrable vegetation and woodland, the steep sloping nature of the terrain and the presence of low overhead cables and buried services. This was particularly the case in the lower-lying part of the site, where it was only possible to excavate two trenches. It is considered, however, that the evaluation has been successful in establishing the land-use history of the site and its potential for the survival of archaeological remains.

6.2 The evaluation has established that much of the site has been subject to general ground clearance where much of the original topsoil has been stripped away, presumably during construction and landscaping works associated with construction of the cattle market, sometime during the second half of the 20th century. Due to the steep south sloping terrain of the original ground surface, much of the area has been subject to repeated episodes of dumping and levelling. Trenches 2-5 all contained a reinstated or disturbed soil deposit, which in Trenches 2 and 4 overlay substantial dumps and levelling deposits in excess of 1m in thickness. Trench 1, located within the southwest part of site, was, however, excavated through largely undisturbed ground.

6.3 Alluvial deposits were exposed within Trench 4, which was located within the floodplain of the River Deer in the southeast part of the site. These were present at a depth of 1.10m below ground level, beneath modern overburden. The absence of alluvial deposits within Trench 5 to the southwest helps provide a clearer indication of the extent of these river floodplain deposits. The two alluvial layers identified within the trench were generally sterile and undated, with no organic material, charcoal or other palaeo-environmental remains present.

6.4 The waterlogged deposit noted within the base of the sondage within Trench 2, located along the crest of steep south sloping ground, is unlikely to be an *in situ* layer and more likely represents redeposited alluvial material from the clearance of lower-lying land within the river floodplain.

7. CONCLUSION

7.1 The evaluation has established that excavation and ground reduction works associated with the proposed redevelopment of the site are, unlikely to impact upon hirterto unknown pre-modern archaeological remains. This is based on the extent of substantial modern-made dumped and levelling deposits and absence of recorded archaeological features and deposits. Groundworks carried out within lower lying ground adjacent to the River Deer within the southeast corner of the site may, impact upon alluvial deposits, particularly where such operations are carried out at greater depths. However, no deposits of palaeo-environmental interest were identified during the work.

8. ARCHIVE AND OASIS

8.1 The paper and digital archive are currently held at the offices of AC archaeology Ltd, at 4 Halthaies Workshops, Bradninch, near Exeter, Devon, EX5 4LQ. They will be deposited at the Museum of Barnstaple and North Devon under the accession code NDDMS 2011.57.

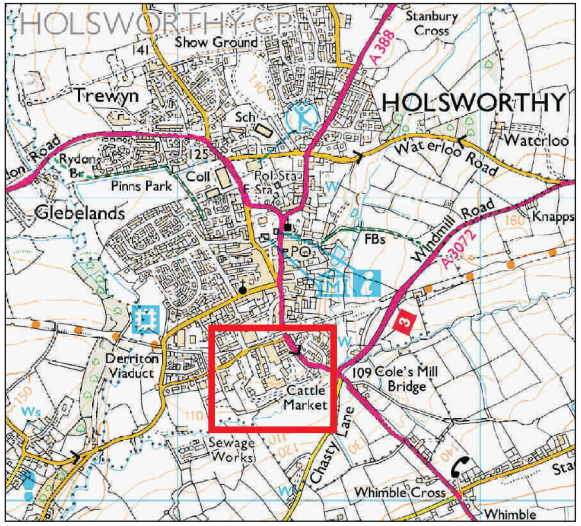
8.2 The OASIS (Online AccesS to the Index of Archaeological InvestigationS) number for this project is 115433.

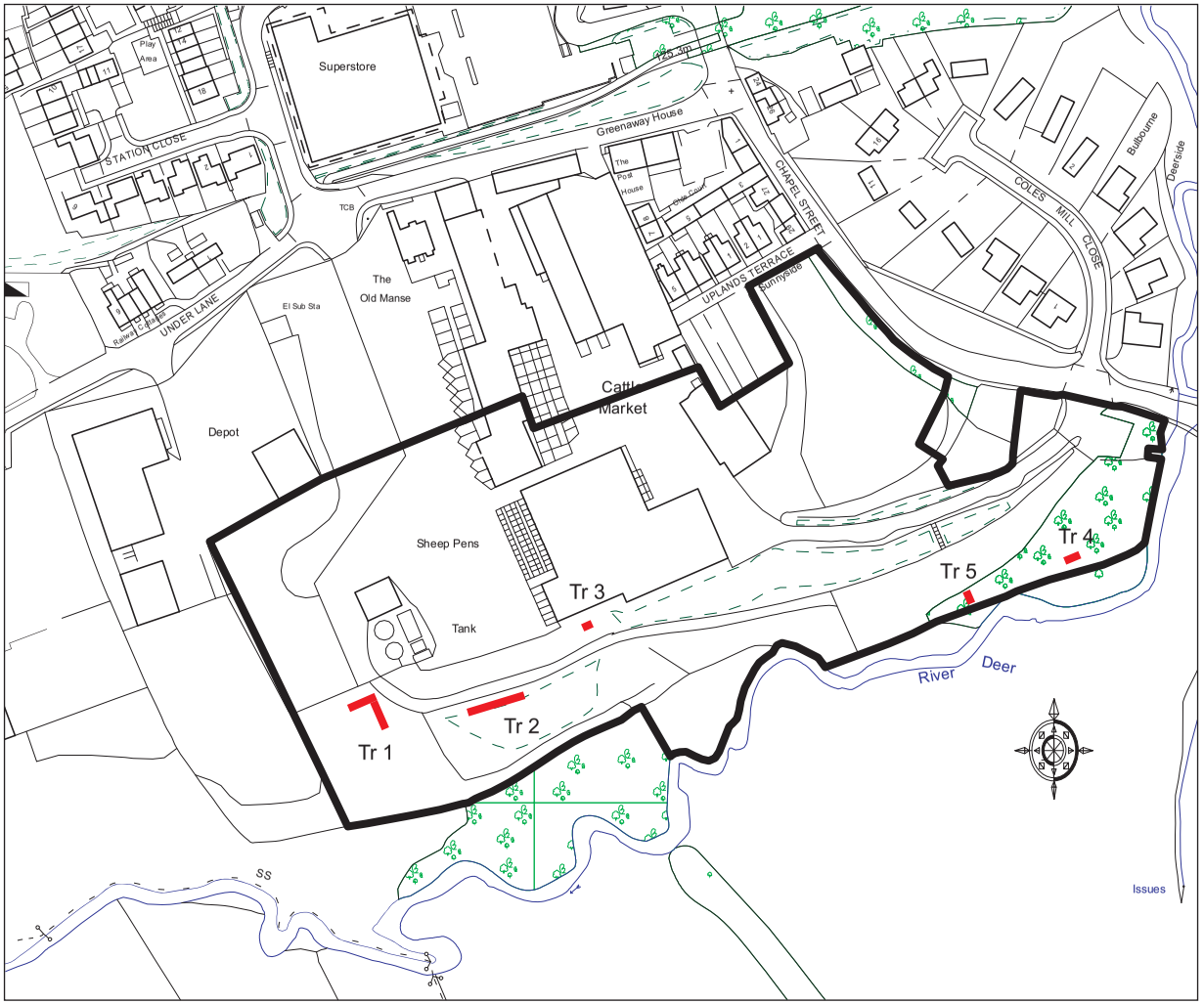
9. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

9.1 The evaluation was co-ordinated on behalf of Cavanna Homes (Devon) Ltd by Simon Longthorpe. The site trial trenching was carried out by Richard Sims and Kerry Tyler, with the illustrations for this report prepared by Sarnia Blackmore. The advice and collaboration of Ann Dick, Devon Archaeology Officer, is duly acknowledged.

10. REFERENCES

Passmore, 2011, *Holsworthy Livestock Centre, Devon: Project Design for an archaeological trench evaluation*. Unpublished AC archaeology document for client, ref. ACD398/1/0





0 100m

Scale 1:2500@A4

site location

site boundary

trench location

PROJECT

Holsworthy Livestock Centre

TITLE

Fig. 1: Site and trench locations

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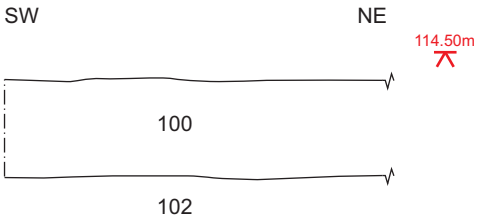
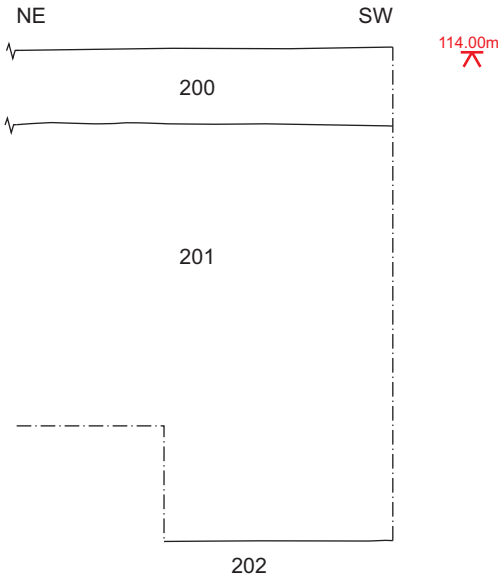
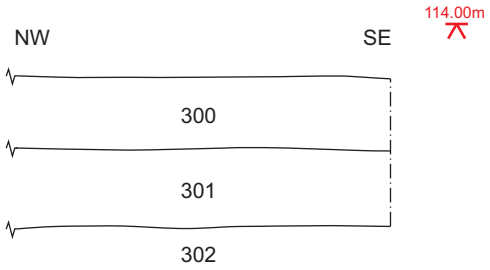
a) Representative section of Trench 1



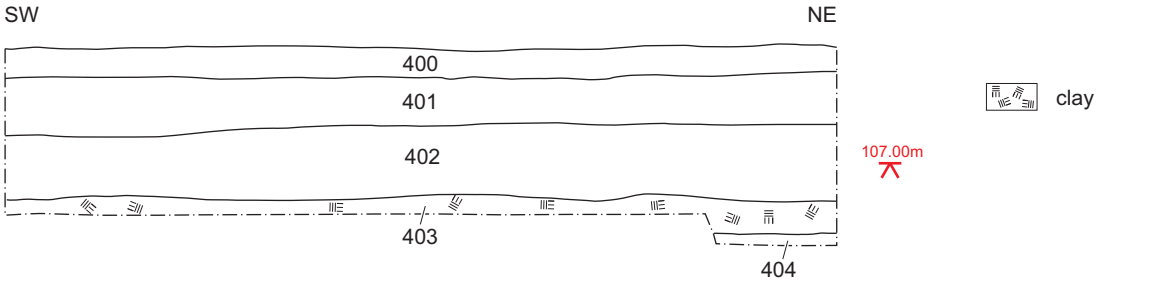
b) Representative section of Trench 2



c) Representative section of Trench 3

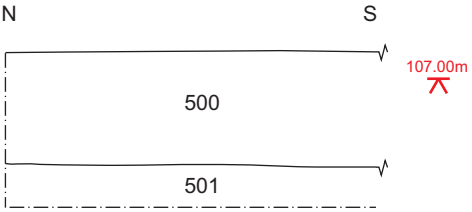


d) Southeast facing section of Trench 4



d) 1:50@A4

e) Representative section of Trench 5



a), b), c), & e) 1:20@A4

PROJECT

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TITLE

Fig. 2: Sections of all trenches

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Plate 1: General view of site in vicinity of Trench 2, showing raised ground. Looking to northeast.

Plate 2: Recorded layer sequence Trench 2, showing modern dumped layer (201). Looking to northwest (scale 1m).

Plate 3: Alluvial deposit (403), Trench 4, looking to northeast (scale 1m).

Plate 4: General view of Trench 5, looking to south (scale 1m).

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