

Land off Chard Road, Axminster, Devon

(NGR SY 3033 9865)

Results of an archaeological trench evaluation

East Devon District Council Planning Reference 10/0132/MFUL
(condition 15)

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On behalf of:
CgMs Consulting

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AC archaeology

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SUMMARY

An archaeological trench evaluation was undertaken by AC archaeology on land off Chard Road, Axminster, Devon, in March 2013. A total of 19 trenches were machine excavated within two fields forming part of phase 3 of a permitted residential development. Limited evidence for prehistoric activity had been found in an adjacent field during the phase 2 development.

No significant archaeological remains were found, with the only exposed features being post-medieval or modern land drains associated with agricultural improvement. There was no evidence that the prehistoric activity recorded in the adjacent field continued into the present development area.

1. INTRODUCTION (Fig. 1)

- 1.1 An archaeological trench evaluation was carried out by AC archaeology in March 2013 in advance of a phase 3 residential development within two parcels of land either side of the Mill Brook off Chard Road, Axminster, Devon (NGR SY 3033 9865). The location of the site is shown on Fig. 1. The trench evaluation was undertaken as part of a programme of archaeological works, to fulfil condition 15 of planning application 10/0132/MFUL granted by East Devon District Council, as advised by the Devon County Council Historic Environment Service (DCHES). The archaeological work was commissioned by CgMs Consulting on behalf of Wainhomes (South West Holdings) Ltd.
- 1.2 The overall development site situated to the east of Chard Road between Prestaller Farm to the northeast and Axminster County Primary School to the southwest. The fields evaluated are under pasture and lie between 45-65m aOD, with the underlying superficial geology comprising alluvial silts, sands, clays and gravels overlying a solid geology of Upper 'Keuper' Marls.

2. ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Chard Road to the west of the site is thought to occupy the same alignment as the Fosse Way, the Roman road linking Exeter to Lincoln via Ilchester, Cirencester, and Leicester. Due to this, there is potential for Romano-British occupation beside the road.
- 2.2 To the west of the site, a large ditch containing Neolithic pottery and worked flint was identified during investigations in 2008 as part of the Phase 2 development, as well as a further linear feature of prehistoric date and a pit. Further archaeological monitoring in the close vicinity has shown limited evidence for prehistoric activity in the area (Pugh 2012).
- 2.3 The nearby Millwater House was documented in the post medieval period as being a mill, and is likely to have earlier origins. The mill leat to the north of the site was investigated in 2008 (Hughes 2008). It had been regularly cleaned out, and its infill contained 19th-century pottery.

3. OBJECTIVES

- 3.1 The aim of the trial trenching was to establish the presence or absence, extent, depth, character and date of any *in situ* archaeological deposits within the site.

3.2 The specific aims, set out in a written scheme of investigation (WSI) prepared by CgMs consulting (Pugh 2012), were to:

- i. Establish the presence/absence of archaeological remains;
- ii. Determine the extent, condition, nature, character, date and significance of any archaeological remains encountered;
- iii. To determine whether the prehistoric activity recorded in the southern part of Phase 2 continues into phase 3 areas;
- iv. To establish the nature of the activity on the site;
- v. To record, in mitigation of their loss, any significant archaeological remains likely to be destroyed by this development;
- vi. To recover any environmental evidence from archaeological features;
- vii. To identify any artefacts relating to the occupation or use of the site; and
- viii. To provide further information on the archaeology of Devon from any archaeological remains encountered.

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1 The trench evaluation was undertaken in accordance with the WSI prepared by CgMs Consulting (Pugh, 2012) which was approved prior to commencement by the DCHES.

4.2 The investigations comprised the machine excavation of nineteen trenches each 30m long (or as close as is permissible) and 1.6m wide.

4.3 All soil removal was undertaken under the control and direction of the aite archaeologist. Topsoil was removed by 5 ton-rubber tracked mechanical excavator, using a 1.6m wide toothless grading bucket, and stored alongside each trench, separated from any underlying deposits as necessary. Stripping by mechanical excavator ceased at the level at which archaeological deposits or natural subsoil was exposed (whichever was reached first).

4.4 'Negative' trenches were recorded using trench records forms; if present, 'positive' trenches were recorded using the full range of the standard AC Archaeology Ltd. *pro forma* recording system in accordance with AC archaeology's *General Site Recording Manual, Version 2*. In addition, a photographic record was made using a high-quality digital camera.

5. RESULTS (Plates 1-4)

5.1 All of the trenches were 'Negative' and are outlined in Table 1 (Plate 1). Trenches 2, 4, and 13 contained land drains and these have been briefly summarised.

Trench	Depth below ground	Contexts	Description
1	0-200mm 300-450mm 450mm+	Topsoil – context 100 Alluvium – context 101 Natural - context 102	N – S aligned 30m long trench, situated at the northwestern extent of the site on a northeast-facing slope. Topsoil comprised soft mid greyish brown silty clay, with abundant roots. An alluvial layer comprised of light yellowish brown soft silty clay with sparse gravels and stone. Natural comprised light yellowish-brown silty clay with sparse river gravels.

2	0-120mm 120-280mm 280mm+	Topsoil – context 200 Alluvium – context 201 Natural – context 205	N – S aligned 30m long trench, situated in the northeastern portion of the site on a gentle southwest-facing slope. Topsoil comprised a grey brown silty clay loam. An alluvial layer of a plastic mid grey silty clay with occasional small gravels. Natural comprised a light grey loose clay, with frequent mixed sub angular river gravel (<100mm in size). Trench 2 contained four land drains all on a NW – SE alignment, one of which being wider was excavated and recorded in detail as F203; another, F204, was recorded to act as a representation of the others present in the trench (Plate 2). All of these were of post-medieval or modern date.
3	0 – 150mm 150 – 300mm 300mm+	Topsoil – context 300 Alluvium – context 301 Natural – context 302	E – W aligned 30m long trench, situated in the western portion of the northeastern side of the Mill Brook; runs parallel with a west-facing slope. Topsoil comprised mid bluish-grey silty clay loam of soft consistency with abundant roots. Below this was an alluvial layer comprising light yellowish-grey silty clay loam with rare rounded river gravels. Natural comprised of mid yellowish-brown silty clay overlying rounded river gravels. At the west end of the trench the geology changed to a mid-bluish grey firm clay containing abundant rounded gravels.
4	0 – 200mm 200 – 380mm 380mm+	Topsoil – context 400 Alluvial silts and gravels – context 401 Natural – context 404	SE – NW aligned 30m long trench, situated running roughly parallel to a west-facing slope. Topsoil comprised a grey-brown loose silty clay loam, overlying an alluvial layer of brownish grey, with red/orange mottling, soft silty clay with small angular gravels. Natural comprised a light grey loose silty clay with frequent angular river gravels (<100mm). One land drain F403 (Plate 3) was noted as being present on a N-S alignment; likely to be the same as F204.
5	0 – 220mm 220 – 320mm 320mm+	Topsoil – context 500 Alluvial silts and gravels – context 501 Natural – context 502	NE – SW aligned 30m long trench, situated on the west side of the southern parcel of land along a northeast-facing slope. Topsoil comprised mid brown silty clay with occasional small sub angular gravels. An alluvial layer of greyish-brown silty clay with occasional sub angular gravels, overlaid the natural that comprised grey-brown friable silty clay, with frequent sub angular gravels (<120mm).
6	0 – 210mm 210 – 380mm 380mm+	Topsoil – context 600 Alluvial silts and gravels – context 601 Natural – context 602	E – W aligned 30m long trench, situated towards the base of a northeast-facing slope. Topsoil comprised friable dark greyish-brown silty clay loam, overlying an alluvial layer of mid grey-brown friable sandy silty clay with moderately occurring sub angular gravels (<30mm). Natural comprised a friable mid brown silty clay with frequent gravels.
7	0 – 280mm 280 – 390mm 390mm+	Topsoil – context 700 Alluvium – context 701 Natural – context 702	N – S aligned 30m long trench, located across a north-northeast – south-southwest-facing slope on the southeastern side of the Mill Brook. Topsoil of friable mid brown silty clay overlying an alluvial layer of mid grey friable clay with occasional gravels (<30mm). The natural comprised a friable mid grey-brown sandy silty clay with very frequent angular gravels (<150mm).
8	0 – 170mm 170 – 290mm 290mm+	Topsoil – context 800 Alluvium ? – context 801 Natural – context 802	N – S aligned 30m long trench, situated parallel to a north-facing slope. Topsoil comprising a sticky mid brown silty loam, overlying a mid brown silty clay with occasional rounded gravel. Natural comprised friable mid grey-brown sandy silty clay with frequent gravels (<100mm).
9	0 – 200mm 200 – 350mm 350mm+	Topsoil – context 900 Alluvium – context 901 Natural – context 902	E – W aligned 30m long trench, situated across a north – south-facing slope. Topsoil comprised a mid greyish-brown soft loamy silt clay with abundant roots, overlying a light yellowish-grey alluvial layer of soft silty clay with common sub rounded gravel. Below this was a variable natural of mid yellow firm clay and sub rounded gravel (<60mm) which changed towards the east end to a mid yellow-grey silty clay with common gravel.

10	0 – 200mm 200 – 450mm 450mm+	Topsoil – context 1000 Alluvium – context 1001 Natural – context 1002	E – W aligned 30m long trench, situated towards the bottom of an east-facing slope. Topsoil comprised mid grey-brown loamy silty clay with abundant roots, overlying a soft light grey alluvial silty clay with common flint, chert and lias gravel (<80mm). Below this was the natural made up of light greyish-yellow soft sandy clay silt with abundant chert and lias gravel (<40mm). This gradually changed to a mid yellow-brown silty clay with common gravel.
11	0 – 200mm 200 – 300mm 300mm+	Topsoil – context 1100 Alluvium – context 1101 Natural – context 1102	N – S aligned 30m long trench, situated at the base of an east-facing slope. Topsoil comprised light grey-brown loamy silty clay of soft consistency with abundant roots, overlying an alluvial layer comprised of soft light grey silty clay with common gravels. Natural comprised soft light greyish-yellow silty clay with abundant flint, chert and lias gravels.
12	0 – 250mm 250 – 400mm 400 – 500mm 500mm+	Topsoil – context 1200 Alluvium – context 1201 Alluvium – context 1202 Natural – context 1203	E – W aligned 30m trench, located at the base of an east-facing slope. Topsoil comprised a loose mid greyish-brown silty clay loam overlying a loose light grey silty clay with common sub rounded gravels (<60mm). Below this was another alluvial layer of friable mid grey-brown silty clay, with common sub-angular to rounded gravel (<60mm). Natural comprised light yellowish-brown firm silty clay with abundant sub rounded gravel (<100mm).
13	0 – 250mm 250 – 300mm 300mm+	Topsoil – context 1300 Alluvial silts and gravels – context 1301 Natural – context 1302	N – S aligned 30m trench, located mid way up a northeast-facing slope. Topsoil comprised mid greyish-brown, silty clay loam with abundant roots overlying an alluvial layer of light grey soft silty clay with common rounded gravel (<40mm). Natural comprised a variable light blue to mid yellow firm clay with common manganese and rare rounded gravel (<50mm). Several variations were investigated within this trench and were shown to be of natural or geological origin. A probable 20th-century land drain on an east-northeast – west-southwest alignment was recorded in detail as F1303 (Plate 4).
14	0 – 100mm 100 – 270mm +270mm	Topsoil – context 1400 Alluvial/Colluvial interface – context 1401 Natural – context 1402	E – W aligned 30m trench, situated near to the crest of the high ground on the southwest side of the 'Mill Brook'. Topsoil comprised a mid grey-brown loose silty clay loam with abundant roots. Below this was an interface of loose light grey silty clay with common sub rounded gravels (<60mm). The natural geology comprised of highly variable light yellow to mid grey brown firm clay and loose sub rounded gravels (<100mm).
15	0 – 170mm 170 – 380mm 380mm+	Topsoil – context 1500 Alluvium/Colluvium – context 1501 Natural – context 1502	E – W aligned 30m trench, situated running parallel with an east-facing slope, towards the southern end of the plot. Topsoil comprised mid grey brown silty clay loam of loose consistency, overlying a layer of either alluvial or colluvial nature composed of light grey-brown clayey silt with common sub-angular gravel (<60mm). Natural comprised mid yellow firm clay to greyish brown soft clayey silt with abundant sub-angular gravels throughout (<100mm).
16	0 – 200mm 200 – 380mm 380mm+	Topsoil – context 1600 Alluvial/Colluvial interface – context 1601 Natural – context 1602	N – S aligned 30m trench, positioned on the higher ground at the southwest end of the plot. Topsoil comprised mid greyish-brown loose silty clay with abundant roots, overlying an alluvial or colluvial interface (likely a combination of both processes) of light greyish-brown, clayey silt with common sub-angular to rounded gravel (<60mm). Natural comprised a mid yellow firm clay to light brown clayey silt with abundant gravels (<100mm, concentrated in patches at the middle of the trench).
17	0 – 170mm 170 – 340mm 340mm+	Topsoil – context 1700 Alluvium – 1701 Natural – 1702	N – S aligned 30m trench, situated obliquely towards the bottom of a north east-facing slope. Topsoil comprised a well sorted mid grey-brown loose silty loam with abundant root, below which was an interface deposit likely to be of alluvial nature comprised of a mid to light grey clayey silt loam. The natural subsoil comprised light yellow firm silty clay with common sub-angular gravels (<50mm).

18	0 – 200mm 200 – 350mm 350mm+	Topsoil – context 1800 Alluvium/Colluvium – context 1801 Natural - 1702	N – S aligned 30m long trench, situated at the southern extent of the plot. Topsoil comprised dark brown soft silty clay overlying a deposit likely to be of combined alluvial and colluvial nature composed of light greyish-brown compacted silty clay with rare sub-angular to rounded stones. Below this the natural comprised a yellowish-grey clay with sparse gravels (<100mm) that changed towards the north to an alluvial silty clay with common gravels (<100mm).
19	0 -150mm 150 – 300mm 300mm+	Topsoil – context 1900 Alluvia /Colluvial interface – context 1901 Natural – context 1902	E – W aligned 29m long trench, situated in the southern corner of the plot. Topsoil comprised loose mid grey silty clay loam with abundant roots overlying a mid to light grey clayey silt loam with common roots and rounded gravel (<60mm). Below this the natural geology comprised a light yellow to mid brown firm silty clay with common sub angular to rounded gravel.

Table 1: Negative Trench Summary

6. THE FINDS, by Emma Firth

6.1 Introduction and Methodology

All finds recovered on site have been retained, cleaned and marked where appropriate. Finds were then quantified according to material type within each context. The assemblage was then scanned by context to extract information regarding the range, nature and date of artefacts represented. This information is briefly discussed below. Finds are summarised by context and material type in Table 2.

Trench	Context	Flint		Chert		Clay Pipe		Ceramic Building Material		Medieval Pottery		Post Medieval Pottery	
		no	wt (g)	no	wt (g)	no	wt (g)	no	wt (g)	no	wt (g)	no	wt (g)
2	201	-	-	-	-	1	1	7	89	-	-	7	93
	203	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	1
	204	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	12
4	401	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	122
9	901	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	26
11	1100	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	18
12	1201	-	-	2	7	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
16	1601	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	4	-	-	1	9
17	1701	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	467	2	7	-	-
	1702	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
18	1801	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	5	27
Total		1	1	2	7	1	1	10	560	2	7	25	308

Table 2: Quantification of finds by material type and by context.

6.2 Flint and Chert

A single fragment of flint (1g) and two pieces of chert (7g) were recovered during the evaluation. The flint was recovered from Trench 17 (context 1702) and is a small snapped piece showing signs of working, in a dark grey waxy flint. The chert was recovered from Trench 12 (topsoil 1201) and are possibly worked. Both pieces are pale orange and are possibly waste flakes, though chert can be more difficult to positively identify due to the nature of the material. Neither the flint nor the chert are closely dateable but are likely to be of Bronze Age date.

6.3 Clay Pipe

A single piece (1g) of clay pipe stem was recovered from Trench 2 (topsoil 201). The clay pipe is of post medieval date, and is undiagnostic.

6.4 Ceramic Building Material

A total of 10 fragments (560g) of ceramic building material was recovered from Trenches 2, 16 and 17 and in all cases this material was found from the topsoil. All the ceramic building material is of post medieval and modern date and includes broken bricks fragments. A single curved tile (possibly ridge tile) was recovered from Trench 17 (topsoil 1701).

6.4 Later medieval, post-medieval, and modern pottery

Two sherds (7g) of later medieval pottery were recovered from Trench 18 (topsoil 1801). The sherds are small and conjoining, and are of a fine silty fabric with clay pellets. They are tentatively dated as being of later medieval date, though the source for the sherds is not known and the sherds are small and undiagnostic. However, the fabric of these sherds differs from the post-medieval earthenware pottery.

A total of 25 sherds (308g) of post-medieval and modern pottery was recovered, the majority of which was recovered from topsoil contexts and from land drains in Trench 2. All the post-medieval pottery comprises red earthenware that are fairly local in origin and are, and possibly derive from the kilns at Donyatt, some 20km to the north of Axminster. These kilns were supplying much of Somerset and Devon. The only diagnostic forms present were a bifid rim from a jug or jar with an olive glaze, rim from a bowl and a decorated sherd from Donyatt slipware bowl. All the remaining sherds were plain or glazed body sherds. Also present is an undiagnostic single sherd of North Devon gravel-tempered coarseware which is from one of the post-medieval kilns at Bideford, Barnstaple or Great Torrington.

Modern pottery included small sherds of blue and white transfer wares and industrial whitewares dating from the 19th to 20th centuries.

7. COMMENTS

7.1 A consistent deposit sequence of topsoil and alluvium overlying natural was encountered across the site. The presence of alluvium is consistent with the topography of the being on the sides of a valley containing a stream – the Mill Brook. No significant archaeological features (or deposits) were present, either above or below the alluvium. The only features present were a series of land drains, of later post-medieval and modern date, that were laid to drain the low-lying valley. The small finds assemblage is also consistent with other investigations in immediate vicinity.

7.2 No evidence was found for the prehistoric activity located to the west continuing into this part of the development area. The results of the evaluation, taken in conjunction with the results of previous monitoring to the west (adjacent to Chard Road), and the monitoring of the phases 1 and 2 development areas indicate that whilst there is some prehistoric activity, probably of Neolithic and early Bronze Age date, this is not extensive, and is unlikely to continue into the present development area. There is no evidence for later (e.g. Romano-British) settlement, and the archaeological evidence indicates that the phase 3 development area was unsettled, and has been used only as agricultural land.

8. ARCHIVE AND OASIS ENTRY

- 8.1** The site archive is currently held at AC archaeology's Wiltshire Office at Manor Farm Stables, Chicklade, Hindon, nr. Salisbury, Wiltshire SP3 5SU. It will be deposited under the relevant accession number at the Royal Albert Memorial Museum, Exeter, once the acquisition of archives policy has been formalised.
- 8.2** An entry onto the OASIS (Online AccesS to the Index of Archaeological investigationS) database has been created using the identifier 148456.

9. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

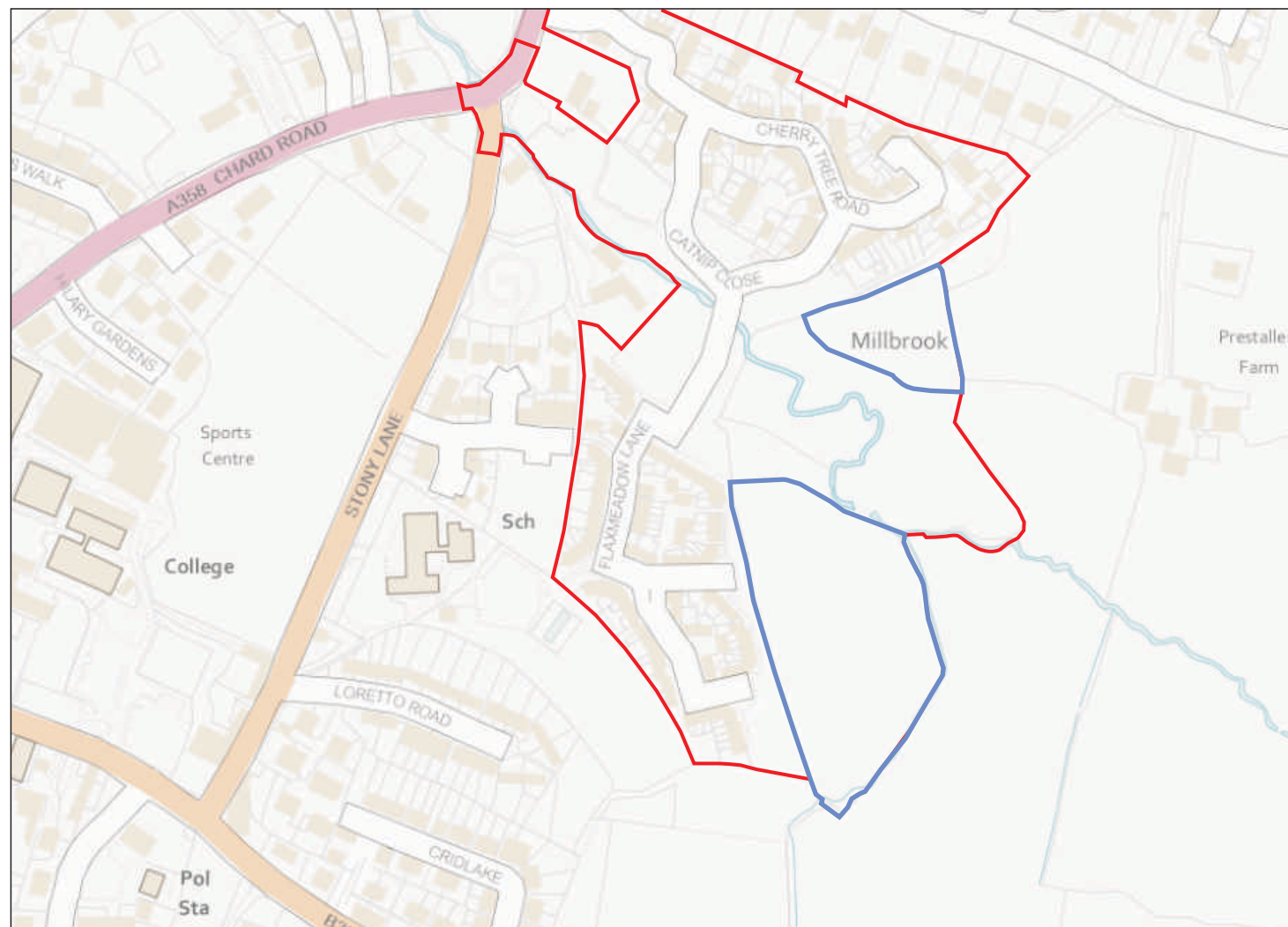
- 9.1** This report was commissioned by CgMs, and was managed for them by Greg Pugh. The project was managed for AC archaeology by John Valentin. The evaluation was supervised by Dan Brace. The report was prepared by Dan Carter, with the illustrations produced by Sarnia Blackmore.

10. SOURCES CONSULTED

Hughes, S., 2008, *Results of a Stage 1 Archaeological Evaluation on Land at Millbrook, Axminster, Devon*, AC archaeology document ref. **ACD09/2/0**

Pugh, G., 2012, *Written Scheme of Investigation for a Staged Programme of Archaeological Investigation and Mitigation: Land at Chard Road, Axminster, Devon*, CgMs Consulting document ref. **JG/13841**

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- Site boundary
- Area of Trial Trenches 1-19



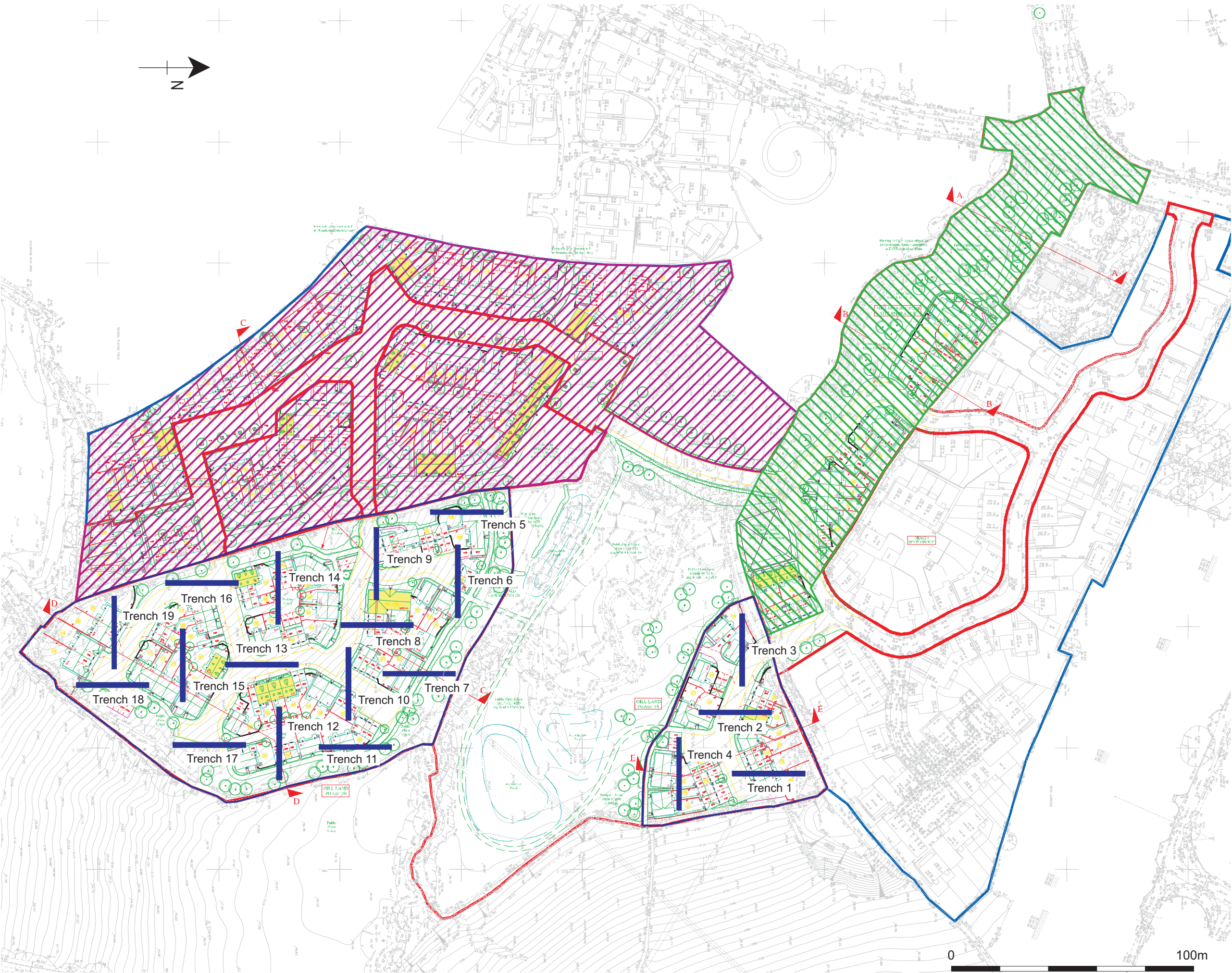
PROJECT

Chard Road, Axminster, Devon

TITLE

Fig. 1: Location of site





Additional information:

- Site Boundary
- Phase 1 & 2 Boundary
- Area of Strip & Record
- Phase 2 Development Already Mitigated
- Area for Proposed Trial Trenching (5% Sample)
- Trial Trench Location (30m x 1.8m)

Plan supplied by client

PROJECT
Chard Road, Axminster,
Devon

TITLE
Fig. 2: Trench location plan





Plate 1: General view showing a typical trench (4), viewed from the northwest. 2 x 2m scales



Plate 2: Trench 2 showing land drain F204, viewed from the northwest. 1m scale



Plate 3: Trench 4 showing land drain F403, viewed from the north. 1m scale



Plate 4: Trench 13 showing land drain F1303, viewed from the west. 1m scale

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