Land at Duke's Way, Axminster, Devon

A Programme of Archaeological Monitoring and Recording

context one
ARCHAEOLOGICAL SERVICES LTD

Land at Duke's Way, Axminster, Devon

A Programme of Archaeological Monitoring and Recording

for

Betterment Properties (Weymouth) Ltd

By

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COAS reference: C1/WBF/11/DWA
National Grid Reference: SY 29774 97896
East Devon District Council Planning Reference: 09/2350/MFUL
Royal Albert Memorial Museum: N/A
OASIS Reference: contexto1-123831

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Graphics: Tara Fairclough

October 2012

Front cover image: Anti-tank ditch (from south west). © Context One Archaeological Services 2012

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Non-technical Summary

Context One Archaeological Services Ltd conducted a programme of archaeological monitoring and recording during groundworks associated with the construction of 70 dwellings with provision of open space and associated roads, on an area of Land at Duke's Way, Axminster, Devon (centred on NGR SY 29774 97896). The project was commissioned and funded by Betterment Properties (Weymouth) Ltd and was carried out over three days in July 2012.

The archaeological works were required by the Local Planning Authority (East Devon District Council) as a condition of granting planning permission for the above works (Planning Application No: 09/2350/MFUL) Records held by Devon County Historic Environment Service showed that notable prehistoric and Roman activity has been identified in the surrounding area. In addition, Axminster was part of a World War 2 defensive 'Stop Line', significant parts of which survive in the area.

A previously surveyed anti-tank ditch forming part of the town's defences was identified during the watching brief. No finds were observed or collected from this feature or elsewhere on the Site, with the exception of a brick observed in the side of a geotechnical test pit.

1. Introduction

1.1 Context One Archaeological Services Ltd (COAS) conducted a programme of archaeological monitoring and recording during groundworks associated with the construction of 70 dwellings with provision of open space and associated roads, on an area of Land at Duke's Way, Axminster, Devon (centred on NGR SY 29774 97896; hereafter referred to as the Site). The project was commissioned and funded by Betterment Properties (Weymouth) Ltd and was carried out over three consecutive days from 10th to 12th July 2012.

1.2 The archaeological work was required by the Local Planning Authority (East Devon District Council) as a condition of granting planning permission for the above works (Planning Application No: 09/2350/MFUL). The nature of the work required was determined by Mr Stephen Reed (Archaeologist, Devon County Historic Environment Service (HES)). In a consultation email dated 15th December 2009 Mr Reed stated that:

> *"The proposal is sited in a location of archaeological potential, where significant prehistoric and Roman activity has been identified in the surrounding area. The junction of the Fosse Way and the Dorchester to Exeter Roman Roads is located to the south of the proposal, and the projected line o the Fosse Way may run along the eastern boundary of the site down to the Roman Fort at Woodbury Farm, about 300 meters to the south of the site. Roman settlement may have extended alongside the Fosse Way, and evidence of these settlements may be revealed during development…"*

1.3 In a second email dated 14th March 2011 Mr Reed reviewed his original recommendations as:

> *" archaeological work on the site to the west did not reveal any archaeology so I have revised my advice on the works required and now suggest a watching brief is undertaken on the site."*

1.4 Given the limited recorded archaeological and historic evidence, it was determined that a reasonable archaeological response in mitigation of the proposed works would be to carry out a programme of archaeological monitoring and recording in those areas deemed most likely to include archaeological evidence. At the request of Mr Reed, COAS issued a *Written Scheme of Investigation for an Archaeological Watching Brief* (Milby 2011), which provided a strategy for the archaeological works. This was submitted to and approved by Mr Reed prior to the commencement of the watching brief. No monitoring visit was made by a member of the HES team during the investigation.

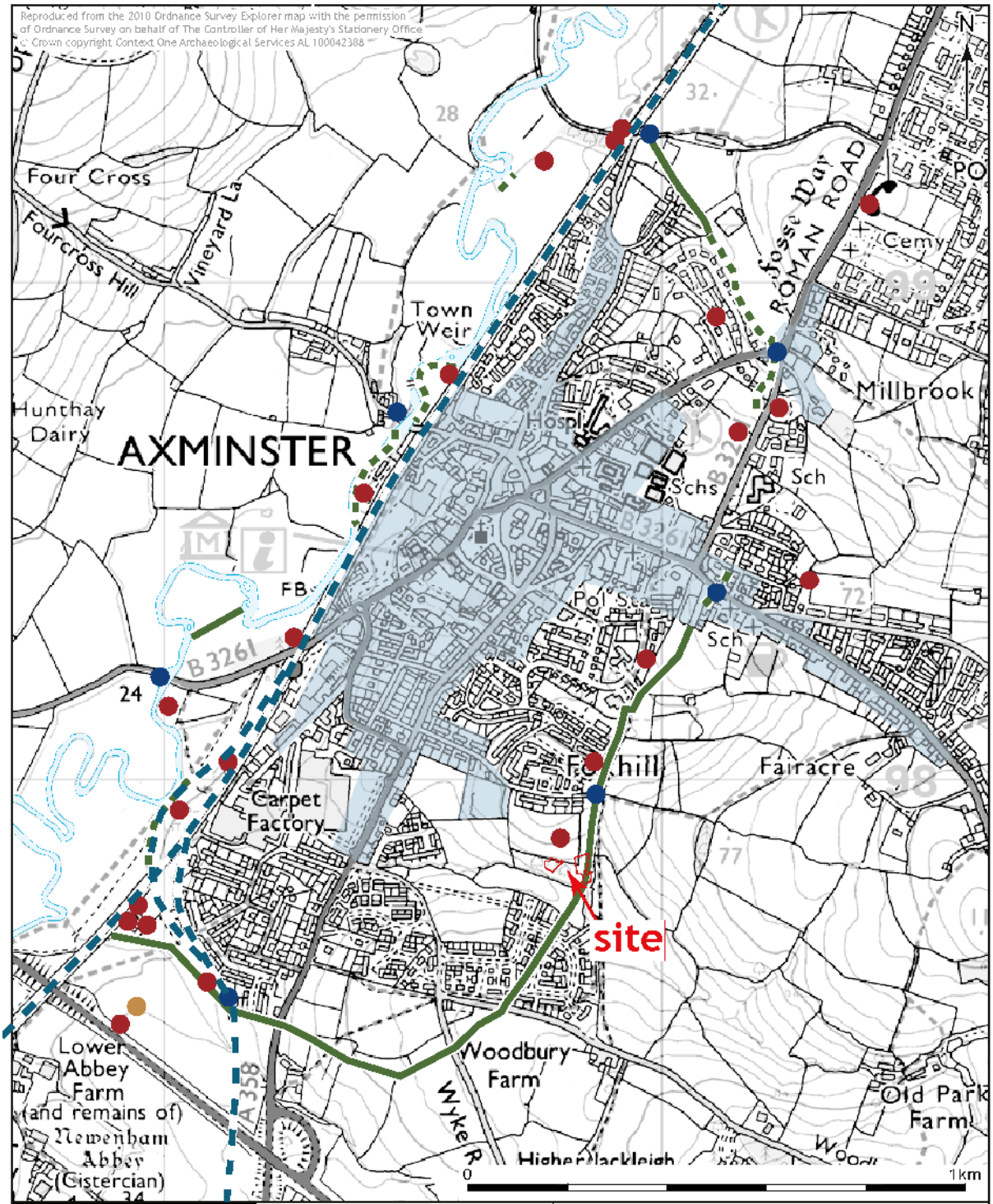
1.5 The requirement for the archaeological work follows advice given by Central Government as formerly set out in Planning Policy Statement (PPS) 5: Planning for the Historic Environment (2010) and in the Local Development Framework Policy on Archaeology.

1.6 This report summarises the topographical, geological and relevant archaeological setting of the site, and presents the results of the watching brief.

2. Site Location, Topography and Geology

2.1 Axminster is *ca*. 9km north-north-east of the mouth of the River Axe, from which the fore part of its name is derived. The Site is *c*. 600 south-south-east of the Minster Church of St Mary, situated on an east-north-east to west-south-west slope on the north side of a tributary to the river, the ground falling from *ca*. 51m above Ordnance Datum (aOD) to *ca*. 45m aOD. The Site was defined by the rear garden fences of the Foxhill housing estate to the north and the remaining three boundaries were field hedges.

2.2 The Site is set on Blue Anchor Formation Triassic Sedimentary Mudstone (BGS 2012) under free-draining, slightly acid, loams of low fertility (NSRI 2012).


Reproduced from the 2010 Ordnance Survey Explorer map with the permission of Ordnance Survey on behalf of The Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office © Crown copyright Context One Archaeological Services AL 100042388
N
Four Cross
Fourcross Hill
Vineyard La
Town Weir
Hunthay Dairy
AXMINSTER
Fosse Way ROMAN ROAD
Millbrook
Cemy
PO
Hospl
Schs
Sch
FB
Pol Sta
B 3261
24
Carpet Factory
Fairacre
site
Lower Abbey Farm (and remains of) Newenham Abbey (Cistercian)
A358
Woodbury Farm
Old Park Farm
Wyke R
0
1km
DEVON
pillbox
anti-tank roadblock/ rail block
Vickers Machine Gun emplacement
Approximate extent of built up area in 1941
Railway lines in 1941
Anti-tank ditch
Anti-tank obstacle
PROJECT TITLE
Land At Dukes Way, Axminster, Devon
FIGURE TITLE
Site setting showing World War 2 defensive features
SCALE
as shown
PROJECT CODE
C1/WBF/11/DWA
FIGURE NO.
1

3. Archaeological Background

3.1 The archaeological background relevant to the Site has been dealt with at length in an earlier report concerning adjacent land (Mason 2010, 4-5) and more extensively in an unrelated desk-based assessment (Hawtin and McConnell 2010). Both projects identified World War 2 defensive features relating to anti-invasion defences constructed in the area in the early 1940s as part of the Taunton Stop Line. The Stop Line extended from Seaton, on the Devon coast, to Highbridge, on the Bristol Channel, and comprised 'a wide variety of defensive features including numerous pill boxes anti-tank obstacles; barricades and ditches; barbed wire entanglements; artillery gun emplacements; machine gun emplacements; fortified buildings; moveable anti-tank road and rail blockades; and mined roads and bridges' (Mason 2010, 4-5).

3.2 The defences at Axminster were intended to make the town a tank-proof stronghold from which fire might be directed at the enemy in the event of the breaching of the Stop Line (Mason 2010, 5). An anti-tank road block structure was identified and recorded during the project (Mason 2010, 5-8; the known locations of Axminster's defences are shown in **Figure 1**) but no archaeology of other periods was encountered.

4. Methodology

Construction Methodology

4.1 Two areas, of c. 30m x 50m and c. 40m x 80m (**Figure 2**), were stripped of topsoil by a JCB type machine using a toothless grading bucket, although in some places the subsoil was not fully exposed. In addition, the opportunity was taken to record a previously excavated *c.* 0.40m wide, *c.* 1.10m deep probable geotechnical pit which remained open.

Archaeological Methodology

4.2 The programme of archaeological work was carried out in accordance with the codes, standards and guidelines set out by the Institute for Archaeologists (IfA 1985, rev. 2010; 1990, rev. 2008; 1994, rev. 2008) and Devon County Council (DCC 2009) at all times during the course of the investigation. Current Health and Safety legislation and guidelines were followed on site.

4.3 During periods when it was deemed appropriate the removal of the topsoil was carried out under supervision by a qualified archaeologist who inspected the surface for potentially significant features or deposits.

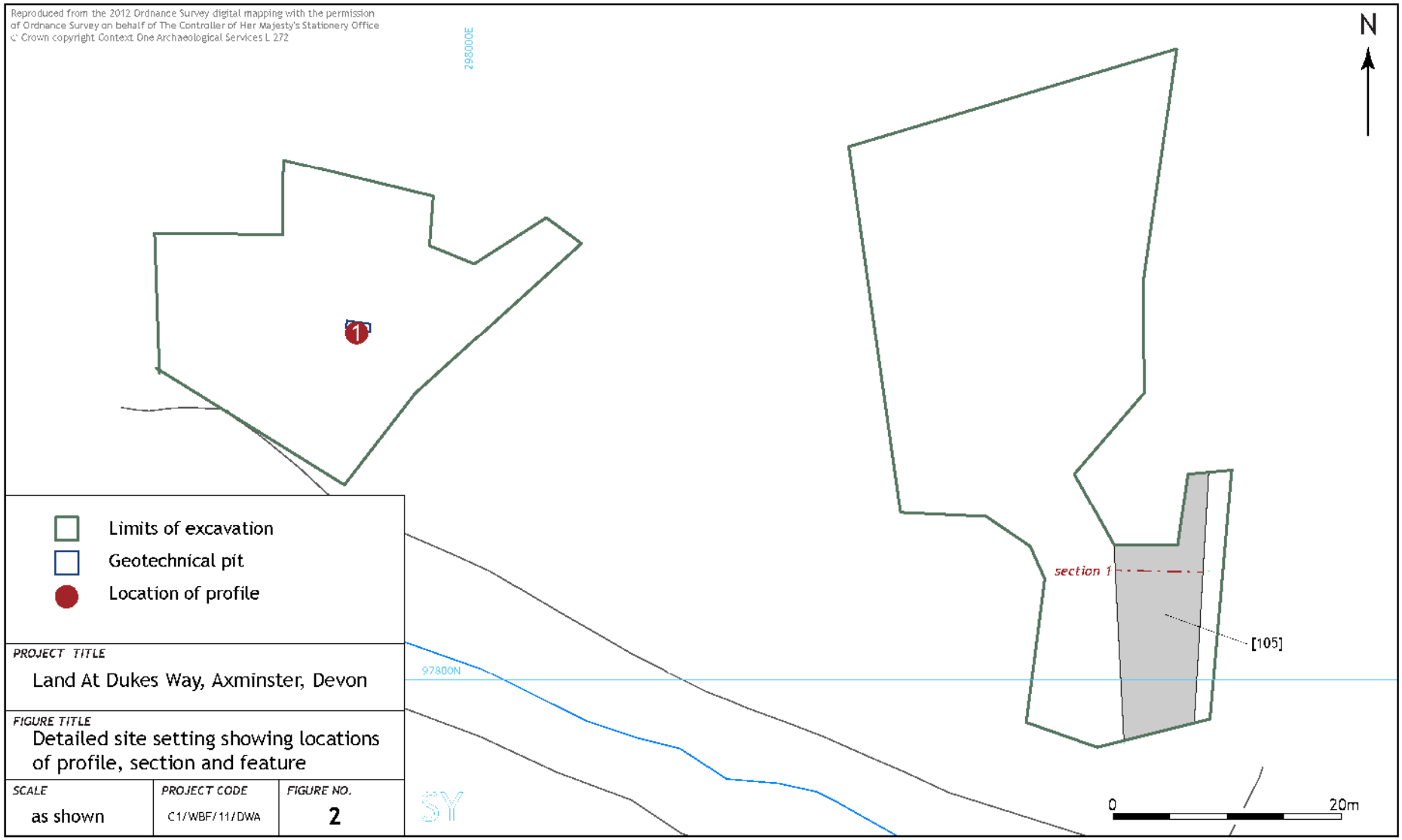
4.4 A single identified archaeological feature was sampled by manual excavation and drawn on dimensionally stable media at scales of 1:50 (plan) and 1:20 (section). The feature was recorded using standard COAS *pro forma* sheets, indicating stratigraphic relationships on a 'Harris-Winchester matrix' diagram. A digital photographic record comprised shots of the excavated area, individual features and working shots to illustrate the nature of the archaeological operation mounted.

4.5 The location, extent and altitude of the archaeological work, features and deposits were mapped relative to the National Grid and Ordnance Datum using a TopCon GRS-1 Global Positioning System receiving real-time calibrations to produce accuracies of 1-2cm.

5. Results

5.1 The weather varied from overcast to heavy rain.

5.2 The deposits and features encountered during fieldwork are listed and described in **Appendix 1**. In the text, context numbers for cuts appear in square brackets, e.g. [104]; layer and fill numbers appear in standard brackets, e.g. (102). Where the feature is discussed, it is referenced with its cut and associated fill numbers.


Reproduced from the 2012 Ordnance Survey digital mapping with the permission of Ordnance Survey on behalf of The Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office © Crown copyright Context One Archaeological Services L 272
298000E
N
1
section 1
[105]
97800N
Limits of excavation
Geotechnical pit
Location of profile
PROJECT TITLE
Land At Dukes Way, Axminster, Devon
FIGURE TITLE
Detailed site setting showing locations of profile, section and feature
SCALE
as shown
PROJECT CODE
C1/WBF/11/DWA
FIGURE NO.
2
SY
0
20m

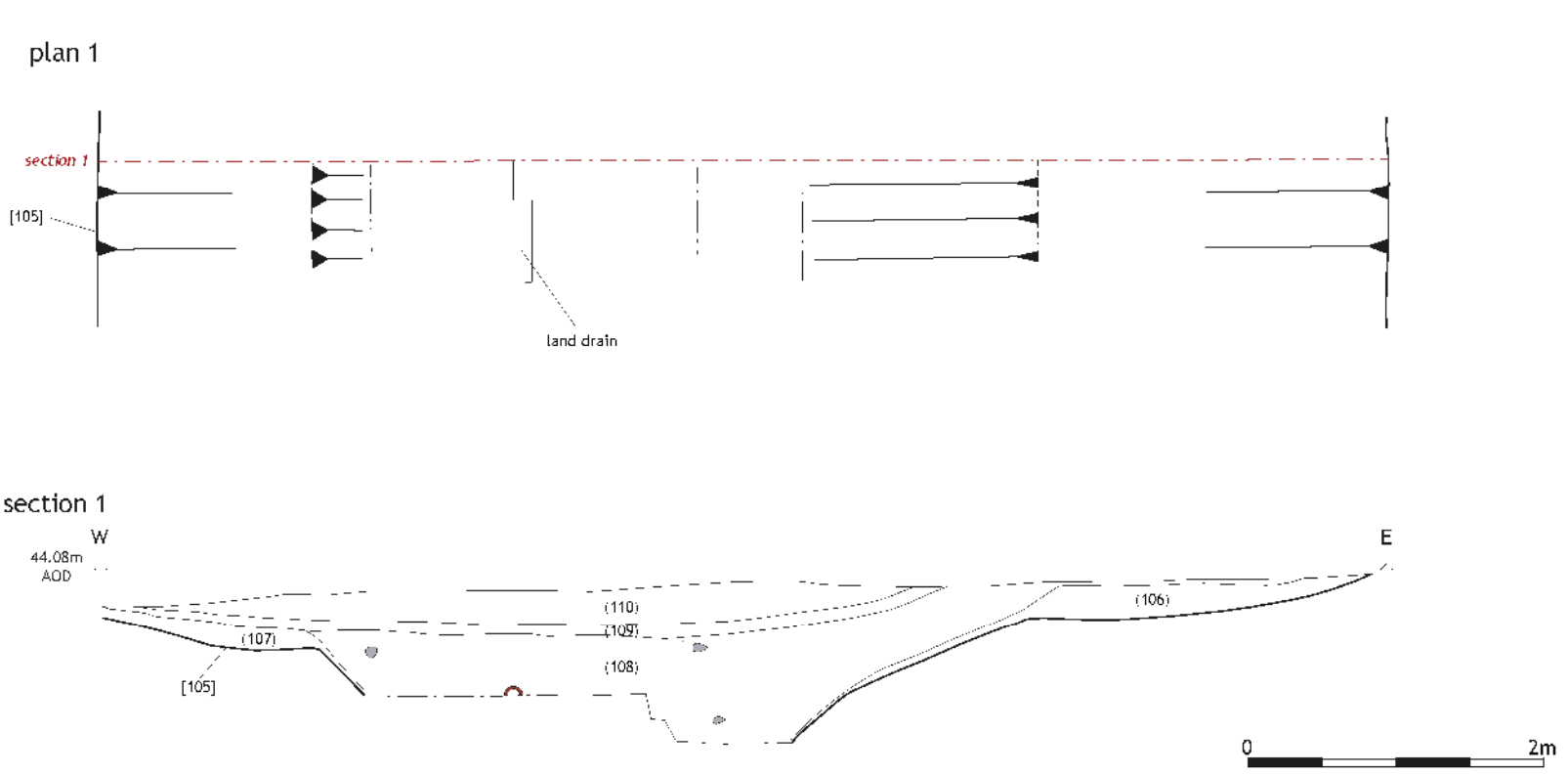

plan 1
N
section 1
[105]
land drain
section 1
W
44.08m
AOD
E
(110)
(109)
(107)
(108)
(106)
[105]
0
2m
(000) deposit/fill number
[000] cut number
XX.Xm AOD height above ordnance datum (AOD)
stones
land drain
PROJECT TITLE
Land At Dukes Way, Axminster, Devon
FIGURE TITLE
Plan and section
SCALE
as shown
PROJECT CODE
C1/WBF/11/DWA
FIGURE NO.
3

Plate 1. Profile 1 (from N; 0.80m scale)

Plate 2. Anti-tank ditch [105] (from ESE; 1m scale)

Soil Sequence and Geology

5.3 The topsoil (100) was of slightly gravelly silty clay. Below it the sequence was revealed most fully in a 1.10m deep geotechnical pit recorded as profile 1 **(Figure 2**; **Plate 1**). A *ca*. 0.34m deep, mid grey brown, slightly gravelly, clay (101) was probably an alluvial deposit which sealed a yellowey brown clay colluvium (102) of up to 0.30m depth. The presence of a brick at *ca*. 0.60m below the stripped surface, towards the base of (102), suggests that the colluvium (**Plate 1**, lower left) formed in recent centuries. It sealed what appeared to be two layers of natural clay, (103), which was *ca*. 0.25m deep, and (104), which was not fully excavated.

5.4 In the south east of the Site a broad linear cut [105] (**Figure 2**) with a maximum width of *ca*. 8.70m was identified between the topsoil and alluvium (101), corresponding with the line of the previously identified anti-tank ditch. A recent deposit of dark brown grey, clayey, loam (110) had formed in its residual channel over a thin deposit of silty clay (109) (**Figure 3**; **Plate 2**) which sealed the principal fill, (108), of compacted clay occupying the *ca*. 5m wide main body of the ditch. Fill (108) butted *ca*. 0.05m thick bands, (106) and (107), which were probably primary silts derived from the fills of respectively *ca*. 0.80m and *ca*. 0.20m wide shallow depressions on either side of the main cut. Fill (108) was excavated to *ca*. 1.20m, the depth at which a land drain utilising the existing ditch was exposed. The full depth of the ditch was not established.

5.5 The excavator noted that the feature had been visible when a survey was carried out in 2009 and that the upper fill had formed since then. At that time it was described as an anti-tank ditch.

6. Discussion

6.1 The interpretation of the single identified feature as an anti-tank ditch is consistent with current knowledge of Axminster's World War 2 defences. No finds were observed or collected from this feature or elsewhere on the Site, with the exception of a brick observed in the side of the geotechnical pit.

7. Archive

7.1 The site archive is currently held at the offices of Context One Archaeological Services Ltd and consists of a written paper record of four context sheets, two COAS *pro forma* profile log sheets, 36 digital images in .jpg format, three scaled sections on stable drawing film and related registers. The archive will be prepared to comply with guidelines set out in *Environmental Standards for the Permanent Storage of Excavated Material from Archaeological Sites* (UKIC 1984, Conservation Guidelines 3)/ *Guidelines for the Preparation of Excavation Archives for Long-term Storage* (UKIC 1990)/ *Standards in the Museums Care of Archaeological Collections* (Museum and Galleries Commission 1992)/ *Management of Archaeological Projects 2* (English Heritage 1991). Arrangements will be made to deposit the archive with the Museum of Barnstaple and North Devon within 12 months following the submission of this report.

7.2 Copies of the watching brief report will be deposited with:

Betterment Properties (Weymouth) Ltd
2 Stavordale Road
Weymouth
Dorset
DT4 0AB

Historic Environment Service
Devon County Council
Environment, Economy and Culture
Directorate
Matford Offices
Exeter
Devon
EX2 4QW

8. COAS Acknowledgements

8.1 Context One Archaeological Services Ltd would like to thank Mr Keith Harris (Site Manager, Betterment Properties (Weymouth) Ltd) for facilitating access to the Site and Mr Stephen Reed (Archaeologist, Devon Historic Environment Service) for information and advice.

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National Soil Resources Institute (NSRI) — http://www.landis.org.uk/soilscapes/ Cranfield University (accessed: 10th October 2012)

Appendix 1. Context Summary

Context no.	Period	Type	Description	Earlier than	Contemp. with	Later than	Length	Width/ Diameter	Thickness/ Depth
100	Modern	Layer	Topsoil. Deep grey brown silty clay including <6% gravel (<30mm)			108, 101			<0.24m
101		Layer	Alluvium. Yellowish grey brown compacted clay including <5% gravel (<5mm)	105, 100		102			<0.35m
102	Geology	Layer	Colluvium. Light grey brown compacted clay	101		103			<0.25m
103	Geology	Layer	Natural. Mid bluish grey compacted clay	102		104			<0.25m
104	Geology	Layer	Natural. Light grey brown compacted clay	103					
105	Modern	Cut	Anti-tank ditch. Truncated V-profiled north to south linear cut with shallow splayed concave upper cut on each side	106, 107		101	0.8m exc	8.70m	>1.2m
106	Modern	Fill	Fill of ditch [105]. Filling shallow upper and side of lower cut on east side. Light yellowish brown clay silt including <2% gravel (<25mm)	108	107	105	2.2m exc	0.80m exc	0.20m
107	Modern	Fill	Fill of ditch [105]. Filling shallow upper and side of lower cut on west side. Light reddish brown silty clay including <2% gravel (<20mm)	108	106	105	1.6m exc	0.20m	Unexc
108	Modern	Fill	Fill of ditch [105]. Light grey brown compacted clay including very rare gravel (<70mm)	109		106, 107	0.8m exc	5m	>1.2m
109	Modern	Fill	Middle fill of ditch [105]. Light grey brown compacted clay including very rare gravel (<70mm)	110		108	0.8m exc	5m	>0.05m
110	Modern	Fill	Upper fill of ditch [105]. Dark grey brown friable clayey loam	100		109	0.8m exc	5m	>0.12m