

INTRODUCTION

Perth & Kinross Council has granted outline planning consent to Mr William Burton to erect a dwelling house to the north of Garden Cottage, Nether Tullicro, near Aberfeldy, Perthshire (Planning Application reference number 07/01856/OUT). On the advice of its archaeological advisers, Perth and Kinross Heritage Trust (PKHT), the council attached a condition that an archaeological evaluation should be undertaken prior to the commencement of this development in order to assess whether any significant archaeological record might survive on the site.

Terms of Reference relating to this investigation were supplied by PKHT. The archaeological work was carried out in the context of Scottish Planning Policy and Scottish Historical Environment Policy and in accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) whose contents were based on the requirements set out in the Terms of Reference. A copy of the WSI was forwarded to PKHT and approved by the council's planning authority before fieldwork began.

The archaeological programme comprised a field evaluation by means of trial trenching, the results of which could have resulted in a subsequent programme in which a larger area would have been investigated or the surviving record preserved *in situ*. Trenching was undertaken on 31st October 2009, the investigation being supervised by John Lewis of Scotia Archaeology.

THE SITE

Nether Tullicro is located between the villages of Camserney and Dull, on the north side of the Tay valley, and centred on NN 81387 49216. The first edition Ordnance Survey map (Perthshire 1867 sheet xlviii) depicts Nether Tullicro as seven roofed buildings, three unroofed buildings and an enclosure, two of the buildings probably being byre dwellings. Some of those buildings are still occupied while others are in the process of renovation. Cartographic and visual evidence suggests that this township dates from the late 18th or early 19th century and is typical of this part of Perthshire.

The south-facing slope upon which Nether Tullicro stands contains many known archaeological sites and monuments, ranging from prehistoric ritual monuments to post-medieval settlements. Several sites have been identified very close to the development area. These, referenced by the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland (eg NN84NW 53) and PKHT (eg MPK1050), are:

a round barrow cemetery (NN84NW 53/ MPK1050) which was identified by aerial photography at NN 8130 4889, to the north of the B846 Aberfeldy to Keltneyburn road;

a house platform (NN84NW 37/MPK1033) centred on NN 8127 4903, at Drumdewan;

a possible standing stone (NN84NW 1/MPK1005) at NN 8129 4915; and

the post-medieval settlement of Nether Tullicro (NN84NW 42/MPK8523) itself which is located around NN 814 492. Approximately 100m to its north was the township of Upper Tullicro (also MPK8523).

From this evidence, it was considered quite possible that hitherto undetected archaeological features, dating from prehistoric to post-medieval in date, might survive within the area of the proposed development.

Nether Tullicro is approached by an unmade track from the Aberfeldy to Keltneyburn road, the ground rising fairly steeply to a level area set into the hillside. The development site is located on the north side of the settlement and consists of a roughly rectangular area, measuring approximately 55m east/west by 28m wide, giving an overall area of some 1,500m². It was covered with rough grass except for its north-west corner where there is a dense thicket of scrub. The plot is defined on its north and south sides by drystone rubble field walls, on its east by a timber fence whereas its western limit opens onto the access track. To the west of the track is another drystone wall, beyond which is a field which was being grazed by sheep at the time of the investigation.

THE EVALUATION

The general aim of the project was to ensure that any archaeological remains surviving on the site which were threatened by its development were preserved, either *in situ* or by record. If such remains were uncovered during the evaluation, a further phase of mitigation fieldwork might be required by the planning authority.

During the evaluation, eight trenches were excavated across the development site. An indicative layout of trenches had been agreed between all relevant parties prior to the commencement of fieldwork although the arrangement of trenches was altered slightly during the evaluation. PKHT's Terms of Reference stipulated that at least 5% of the site should be trenched.

In order to minimise damage to any surviving archaeological features or deposits, vegetation and topsoil were removed using a toothless bucket on a tracked, 360° mechanical excavator, this procedure being under the direct control of the archaeologist. All the trenches were 1.25m wide, their lengths being:

- Trench 1: 10m
- Trench 2: 10m
- Trench 3: 5m
- Trench 4: 10m
- Trench 5: 4m
- Trench 6: 10m
- Trench 7: 10m
- Trench 8: 5m.

The overall area excavated was 80m² (5.3% of the site).

Topsoil of mid-brown silty loam was only 100-150mm deep and overlay glacially deposited pale orange-brown, silty clay and boulders, some of them very large. These materials varied locally, deep deposits of silt predominating towards the northern edge of the site and a small,

naturally deposited boulder field evident at its east end. Trench 3 was excavated through the boulder field to confirm its composition.

No features or deposits of archaeological significance were uncovered during the evaluation and the only artefact retrieved during trenching was a single body sherd of undecorated white china of probable 19th- or early 20th-century origin. It was not retained.

CONCLUSIONS

The complete absence of occupation evidence within the development site strongly suggests that this area lay just beyond the limits of the settlement of Nether Tullicro. Furthermore, it was clear from the depth of topsoil (maximum 150mm) that it was unlikely that this ground had ever been ploughed. Prior to excavation, it was thought possible that the boulder field at the east end of the site was either debris from a demolished building or a field clearance cairn resulting from ploughing nearby. However, excavation demonstrated that neither option was valid and that the boulders had been deposited by glaciers.

The presence of so many large boulders near the surface of the ground probably made this area unfit for arable farming during pre-Improvement times as it does today, this tract of land being more suitable for grazing.

PHOTOGRAPHIC ARCHIVE

The photographs described below form part of the project archive. They are not reproduced in this report.

- 1 Trench 1, viewed from the east
- 2 Trench 2, viewed from the east
- 3 Trench 3, viewed from the east
- 4 Trench 4, viewed from the south
- 5 Trench 5, viewed from the south
- 6 Trench 6, viewed from the south
- 7 Trench 7, viewed from the east
- 8 Trench 8, viewed from the east
- 9 The site at the end of excavation, viewed from the west
- 10 The site at the end of excavation, viewed from the east.