

**AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF ON DEVELOPMENT WORK AT  
TIMBERLEE HOUSE, 13 FISHERS WOOD, SUNNINGDALE, BERKSHIRE**

**Summary**

*An archaeological watching brief was undertaken by the Surrey County Archaeological Unit (SCAU) on the groundworks associated with the construction of a new residential property on the site of Timberlee House a property built during the 1980s at 13 Fishers Wood, Sunningdale, Berkshire. The watching brief was recommended due to the presence of several features of prehistoric date in the near vicinity and the location of the site within an enclosure of unknown date or function. Observation of the groundworks in the location of the former house indicated that the site had been truncated to the level of the natural geology. In the remainder of the site the ground was intensely disturbed by many service pipes and field drains associated with the former house and the former use of the land as part of Sunningdale Golf Course. No features of archaeological interest were identified, but a couple of pieces of burnt flint of probable prehistoric date were recovered from the southern part of the stripped area of the garden .*

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Date of fieldwork	9th-15th July 2008
Date of report	29 <sup>th</sup> September 2008
NGR	SU 9609 6619
Application No	08/00677
Client	A & O Properties Ltd



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## **1. Introduction**

1.1 An archaeological watching brief was undertaken by staff of the Surrey County Archaeological Unit (SCAU) between 9th and 15th July 2008 on the groundworks associated with the construction of a detached residential property, on the site of the previous residential property Timberlee House at 13 Fishers Wood, Sunningdale, Berkshire (figs 1-3), which has received planning approval from the Local Planning Authority (Application No 08/00677).

1.2 The archaeological watching brief was recommended 'during the groundworks, to mitigate the impact of the development and ensure preservation by record of any surviving remains' (Fiona MacDonald, Principal Archaeologist at Berkshire Archaeology, consultation comments 7 April 2008). The consultation comments of Fiona MacDonald indicate that 'there are some potential archaeological issues with this development as prehistoric remains are known from this area.' SCAU were commissioned to undertake the watching brief by the developers A & O Properties Ltd, and the author would like to thank the site contractors for their help and co-operation during the watching brief.

## **2. Site Background**

2.1 The development site (c0.255ha) is located on deposits of Bracklesham Beds forming part of the Bagshot Beds sandy geology in this part of the county (Geological sheet no 269 Windsor 1:50,000, 1981). Deposits of Plateau Gravel are apparent on the higher ground, and these high lying gravel deposits are believed to represent ancient terraces (Shaikhley 2008, 1).

2.2 The development site was observed to slope down from west to east and from south to north, with terraced flower beds between the higher lawn area on the western side of the site and the lower level of the house platform in the eastern half of the site.

2.2 The site is located within a large enclosure (BHER 4063) which most likely dates to the prehistoric period and which is recorded by the Berkshire Historic Environment Record (BHER). Other associated features and finds are likely to exist below ground and the proposed works would potentially disturb these (Fiona MacDonald consultation comments 7<sup>th</sup> April 2009). Until the late 1970s/early 1980s the area of the development site stood within the grounds of Sunningdale Golf Course which was created in 1901. During groundworks associated with the construction of the golf course in 1901 features of archaeological interest were excavated including a mound which produced three Bronze Age urns containing cremated human bone (fig 4: VCH I, 187 & 195); upon further investigation 17 other urns containing cremated human bone were recovered (Berks, Bucks & Oxon Jnl, 1902, 38). A

number of Bronze Age barrows remain in the local area, including one c860m west of the development site at Round Barrow House, Ridge Mount Road, Sunningdale which is a Scheduled Monument (No 23004).

### **3. Methodology**

3.1 The redevelopment of the site of Timberlee House, Sunningdale involved several stages of groundworks: demolition of the existing detached house and detached garage, removal of the ground slab of the house and garage, removal of all paving and walls associated with the garden area, levelling of the site in preparation for the construction of the new house, stripping and grading of part of the lawn area, excavation of the house footings and service trenches and associated landscape work. The watching brief was undertaken on the following stages of the groundworks:

- a) Observation of the mechanical removal of the ground slab of the old house and garage (Areas A and C)
- b) Observation of the mechanical removal of the paving and terrace walls in the garden area (Area B)
- c) Observation of the site strip along the existing lawn area by a tracked machine with a toothless ditching bucket along the western and southern sides of the development area (Area D)
- d) Observation of the excavation of the footings for the new house (Area E).

3.2 It was noted that the earlier development of the site during the 1980s, when the first house was constructed, may have impacted on the areas of new development in such a way as to have removed or seriously damaged any potential archaeological material that may have existed *in situ*. (Shaikhley 2008, 1).

3.3 Site visits were made in liaison with the developer and the on-site contractors in order to monitor the various stages of the groundwork, and to identify any features or finds of archaeological interest.

### **4. Results**

4.1 The results of the watching brief on the various stages of the groundworks are summarised below.

#### 4.2 Area A: the removal of the concrete slab of the demolished house.

The footings and concrete ground slab of the former house, and the underlying hardcore, were removed by machine under archaeological supervision (fig 3). Removal of the ground slab and hardcore revealed that this part of the development site had previously been truncated to the level of the natural geology, most likely during the previous development of the site in the 1980s during the construction of the former house. The stratigraphy observed to a depth of 0.85m below the existing ground surface following the removal of the ground slab was 0.10m soil, over 0.15m compact 'natural' olive-green clayey sand, over 0.60m orange/green clayey sand, over pale green and orange heavy clay (fig 5). These observations demonstrated that a large part of the area of the footprint of the new house had been truncated down to the level of the natural clayey sand, therefore it was not necessary to observe the excavation of the footings in the western and southern part of the new house footprint. Only the footings in the north-eastern part of the site would potentially be cut through *in situ* undisturbed deposits (see below).

Nothing of archaeological interest was observed in Area A during the removal of the ground slab.

#### 4.3 Area B: the removal of the paving, garden steps and garden walling.

All of the paving around the old house, the garden steps leading westwards up to the lawned garden area (which was at a much higher level than the house) and the low garden walls which retained the terraced flower beds along the length of the lawned area on the western side of the former house were removed by machine in order to clear the site in preparation for the stripping of the lawn area (fig 3). Following the clearance of these areas, the profile of the ground at the site edge adjacent to the lawn was recorded down to the level of the house platform: 0.15m topsoil, over 0.10m redeposited orange/blue-green clay, over 0.25m dry compact mid/dark-brown silty sand subsoil, over 0.30m mottled orange-green sandy clay ('natural'), over 0.15m green clayey sand, over 0.70m orange clay with occasional green mottling (a total of 1.65m depth of section recorded). In summary, the western area of the development site which is under lawn is observed to have been preserved at its original higher level, with evidence for the levelling up of the eastern edge of the lawn area by the deposition of 0.10m orange/blue-green clay over the subsoil to level out some of the natural slope.

A depth of c1.15m of natural clay/sandy clay was observed in section at the edge of the lawn providing evidence for the reduction of the ground on the north-eastern side of the lawn during the previous development in order to create a level platform for the construction of the house.

#### 4.4 Area C: The removal of the concrete slab of the former garage

The concrete base (6m x 9m) and underlying layer of hardcore of the detached garage that stood in the south-east corner of the site was removed by machine (figs 3 and 6). Removal of the concrete revealed that this part of the site had been truncated to the level of the natural geology, most likely during the previous development. Following the removal of the concrete slab the stratigraphy observed at the south-western edge of the garage footing (section C1), was 0.15m topsoil, over 0.70m natural silty green/orange clayey sand (becoming sandier with depth) with a band of occasional round flint pebbles at the base of the sand, over light-grey clay with orange and black flecks. The stratigraphy revealed on the north-eastern edge of the garage footing trench (section C2) was 0.10m topsoil, over 0.25m orange/green sandy clay (possibly redeposited), over 0.15m natural dark orange clay, over 0.45m orange clay with green mottling and small round flint pebbles. The ground adjacent to the north-eastern side of the garage footings appears to have been levelled up slightly in order to create a level area. Nothing of archaeological interest was revealed during the watching brief in this part of the development site.

#### 4.5 Area D: Stripping of the lawn area

Part of the lawn area in the development site (Area D) was stripped in order to grade the slope in preparation for the proposed sloping planting beds and low retaining wall to be built along the edge of the lawn. The lawn area appeared to be one of the only areas of potential *in situ* deposits remaining following the previous development of the site in the 1980s. The strip of the lawn area has been split into three different parts (D1-3) for ease of description: a 5.25m wide strip of lawn and flower beds along the western side of the house (area D1), the lawn in the southern corner area (area D2), and the lawn area in the south-eastern part of the lawn (area D3).

4.5.1 Area D1 of the lawn was a 5.25m wide strip running for a length of c30m along the western side of the house (fig 3). It was reduced by up to 0.50m using a tracked excavator with a toothless ditching bucket, revealing a stratigraphy of 0.10m topsoil, over 0.15m redeposited green/orange/yellow sandy clay, over 0.25m mid/dark-brown silty sandy subsoil, over the natural which varied along the length of the strip from orange-green clayey sand, to yellow sand to greeny-orange clay. A couple of features of potential interest were identified following the strip of the overburden. As a result of sampling of the features by hand excavation, one was revealed to be a modern field drain and the other was a shallow sausage-shaped hollow of 18th century or later date which produced a small fragment of clay pipe and a few brick fragments. A number of other field drains and service pipes crossed this part of the site. Nothing of archaeological interest was revealed in this part of the site.

4.5.2 Area D2 of the lawn in the southern part of the site (fig 3) was reduced by 0.40m revealing a stratigraphy of 0.10m topsoil, over 0.10m finely crushed coke fragments (a presumed drainage layer), over 0.20m dark grey loamy subsoil over the natural orange/green sandy clay or very soft, waterlogged greeny-orange clay. The coke layer was possibly laid down when this land was part of the golf course in order to assist with drainage. Following the strip, this part of the site was observed to be intensely criss-crossed with field drains and service pipes. Some of the field drains may date from when the land was under agriculture, prior to the creation of the golf course in 1901. The service pipes, many of which are live, serve adjacent properties as well as the former house on the development site. Parts of the stripped area were very waterlogged. This part of the site had been severely disturbed and no features or finds of archaeological interest were identified.

4.5.3 Area D3 of the lawn in the south-eastern area of the site (fig 3) was reduced by 0.30-0.80m and revealed a stratigraphy of 0.10cm topsoil, over 0.20-0.70m mixed soil containing modern construction debris, over natural orange/green heavy clay or sandy clay. At the most south-easterly part of the strip, only 0.30m was stripped off due to the land sloping down from west to east. This great amount of redeposition of material is an indication that the land was stripped during the previous development and subsequently levelled up in order to create a more level lawn area. No features of archaeological interest were recovered from this part of the site, but a handful of very small fragments of heavily calcined (burnt) flint was recovered from the stripped surface of the natural waterlogged sandy clay. Although flints can be burnt by heathland fires, these examples were too intensively calcified to result from such a fire and may therefore have originated from deposits of prehistoric date further upslope.

#### 4.5.4 Area E: Excavation of the north-eastern footings for the new house

As a result of the watching brief on the removal of the concrete slab (Area A) and removal of the paving in the western and southern area of the new house footings (Area B), which revealed that these parts of the new house footprint had been truncated to the level of the natural geology (orange-green sandy clay), the only footings to be observed were those within the north-eastern part of the site, a part of the site that appeared to be more or less at the level of the original ground level (fig 3). The watching brief on the excavation of the north-eastern footing trenches revealed that this part of the site had also been truncated to the level of the natural clay: the stratigraphy observed was 0.10-0.15m topsoil over 0.20m disturbed subsoil, over natural green/yellow-brown clay. No features of archaeological interest were observed in this part of the site.

Due to the observations that the north-eastern part of the site had been truncated down to the level of the natural geology, it was not necessary to observe the excavation of service trenches through this part of the site which would connect the new house to the existing services.

## **5. Summary, conclusion and recommendations**

5.1 The watching brief demonstrated that the 1980s development of the site at 13 Fishers Wood, Sunningdale had truncated a large part of the site down to the level of the natural geology. The naturally sloping land in the area of the house had been levelled down to provide a flat platform for the construction of the house and thereby removed any potential archaeological material that may have existed. The site strip in the southern and south-eastern area of the lawn revealed that the land had previously been stripped of its topsoil and subsoil, and subsequently levelled up in order to provide a more level garden area. The only area of the site that appeared to have *in situ* deposits of sub-soil was the western part of the site under lawn. The site strip did not reveal anything of archaeological interest.

5.2 No features of archaeological interest were identified during the watching brief of the groundworks on the development site; only a handful of very small fragments of calcined flint of possible prehistoric origin were recovered from the surface of the natural clay in southern area of the site. It is therefore recommended that no further archaeological work is required for this development site. This recommendation will need to be confirmed by the relevant planning body acting under the advice of Fiona MacDonald, Principal Archaeologist at Berkshire Archaeology.

## **Bibliography**

*Berks, Bucks & Oxon Arch Jnl*, 1902, **VIII**, 38, 111-112

Shaikhley, N 2008 Specification for the conduct of an archaeological watching brief during development work at Timberlee house, 13 Fishers Wood, Sunningdale, Berkshire (*SCAU limited circulation report*)

*Victoria County History for Berkshire*, 1906, **I**, 187, 195







# Fig 2 Timberlee House, 13 Fishers Wood, Sunningdale,

## Berkshire: plan showing existing site layout

496131,166244



Timberlee  
House

FISHERS  
WOOD

496058,166149

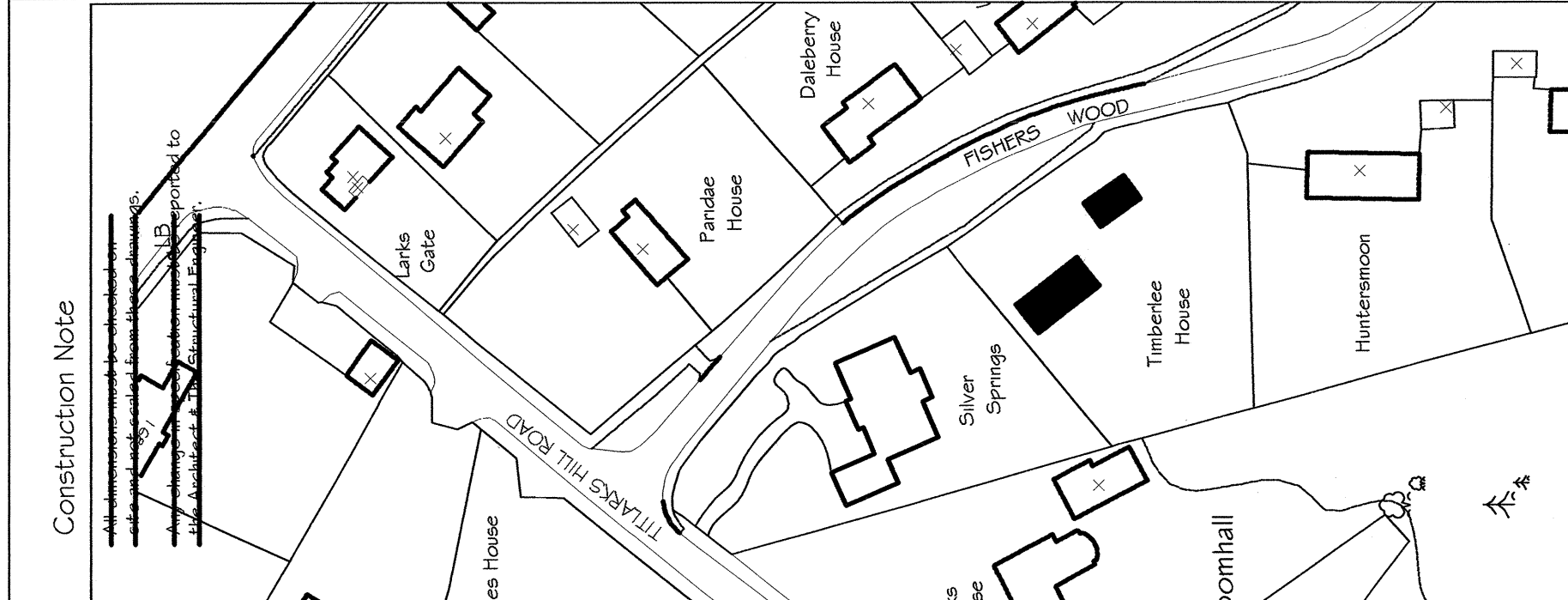
Date: 21/09/2011

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Scale 1:400

Surrey County Council, LA076872, 1996.





LOCATION PLAN : 1:250

Revision	Date	Drawing title
A		

**SITE & LOCATION PLANS**  
 Planning Drawing  
 NEW HOUSE

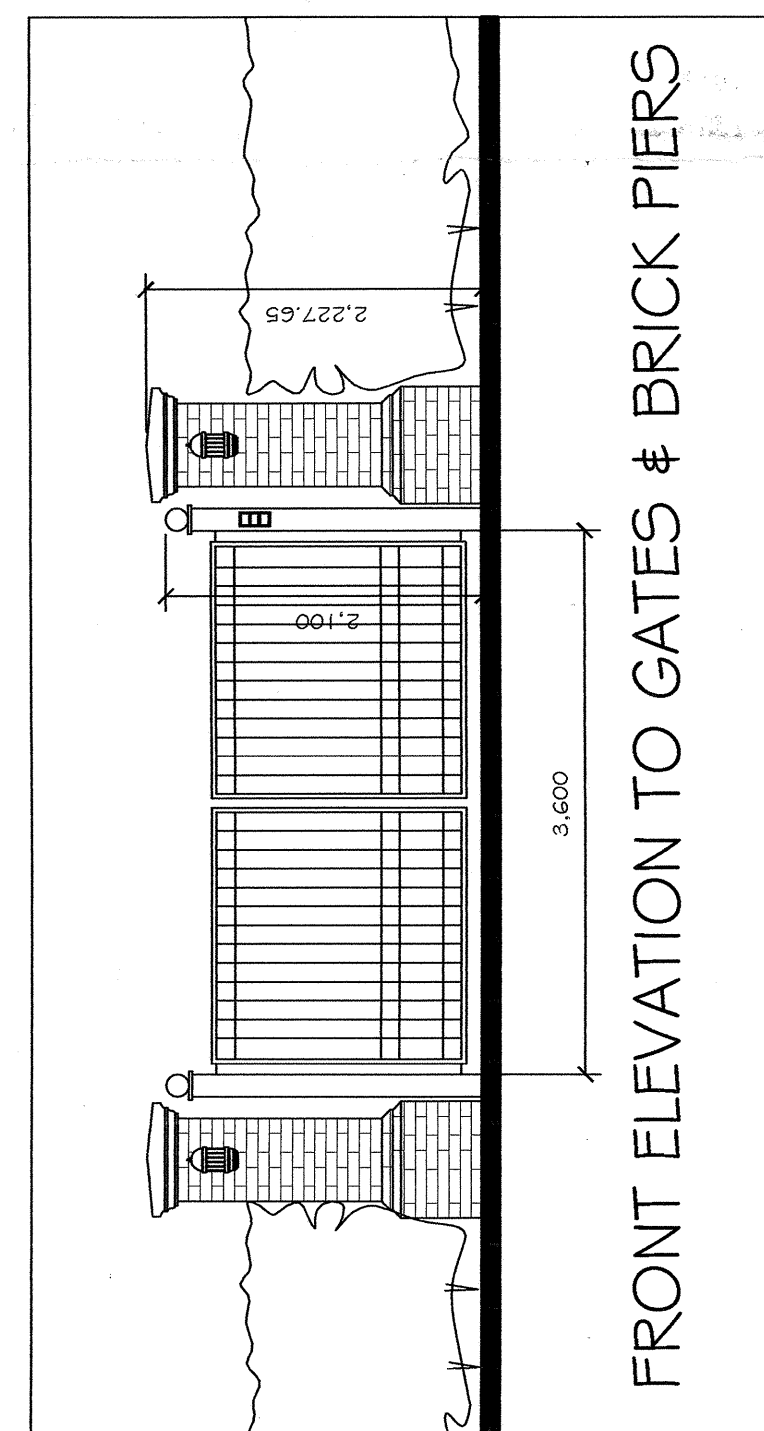
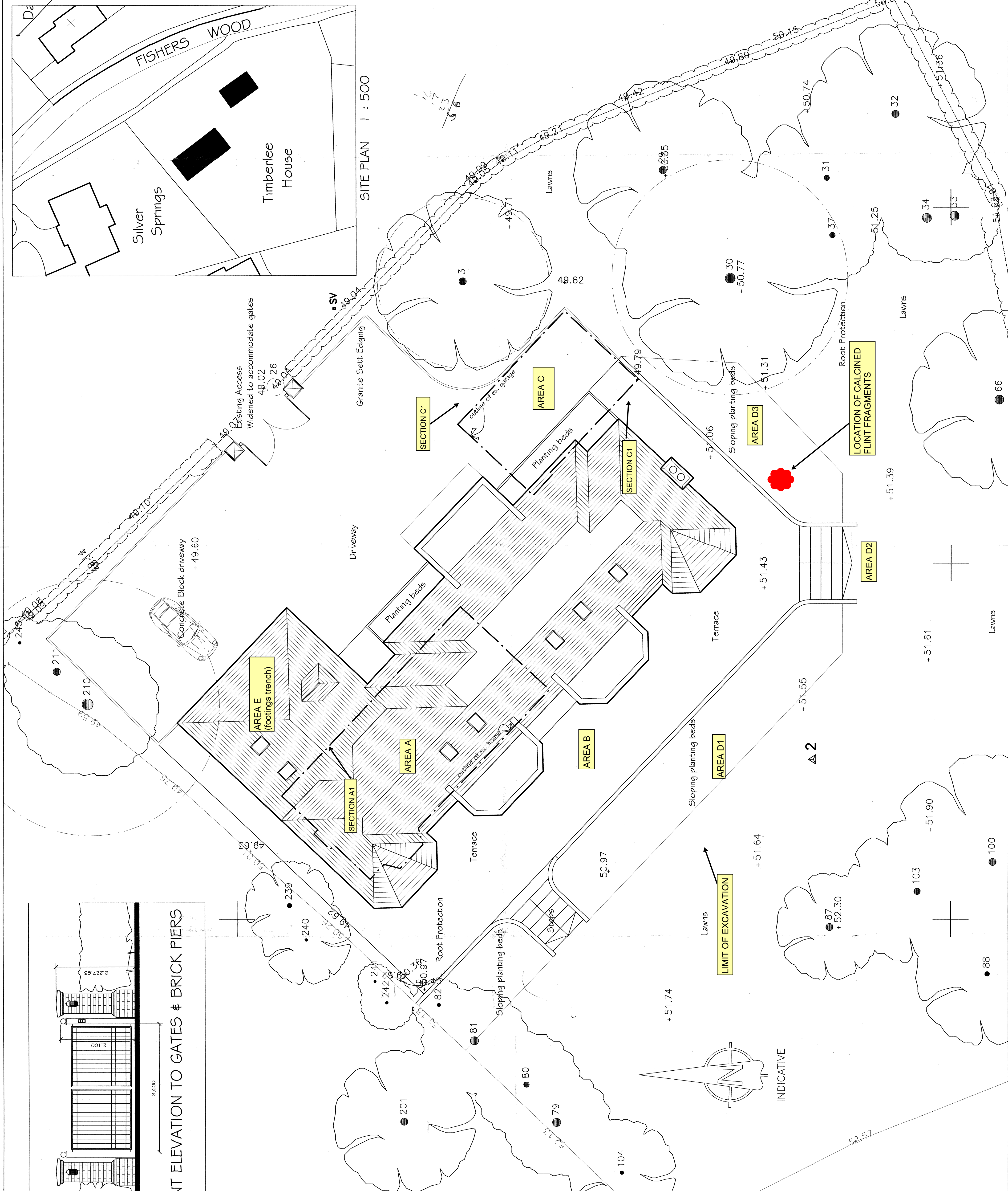
Client: **A & O Properties Ltd.**  
 Job title: **Timberlee House  
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Scale: 1:100, 1:500, 1:1250

Date: February, 2008  
 Drawn by: N.J.H.  
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Rev. No. **08/260/P.001**



**FIG 3 TIMBERLEE, 13 FISHERS WOOD, SUNNINGDALE:  
 PLAN OF THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT SHOWING THE DIFFERENT AREAS OBSERVED DURING THE WATCHING BRIEF**





Urn from Sunningdale (4).



Urn from Sunningdale (5).

Fig 4 Timberlee House, 13 Fishers Wood, Sunningdale, Berkshire: two of the Bronze Age urns recovered during the construction of Sunningdale Golf Course in 1901.





Fig 5 Timberlee: section A1 recorded following the removal of the house ground slab



Fig 6 Timberlee: view to the east showing the ground slab of the garage prior to its removal (Area C)





Fig 7a Timberlee: view to the north-west showing the area of the lawn (Area D1) to be stripped



Fig 7b Timberlee: view to the north-west following the site strip along the lawn area (Area D1)