

**Report on an Archaeological Watching  
Brief at 'Garage Court at Bracken Road, Thetford, Norfolk'  
NHER ENF 126259**

Prepared for:  
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## **Contents**

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<i>Section</i>	<i>Page</i>
<i>Summary</i>	1
1.0 Introduction	1
2.0 Project Background	1
3.0 Archaeological and Historical Background	1, 2
4.0 Geology and Topography	2
5.0 Observations	2 - 4
6.0 Conclusions	4

## **Acknowledgements**

## **Bibliography**

**Plate 1** Example of foundation trenches, looking east

**Figure 1** Site location

**Figure 2** Site plan

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## **Summary**

Archaeological monitoring was carried out on 21 and 22 December 2010 during excavations associated with the construction of three new residential dwellings at 'Garage Court at Bracken Road, Thetford, Norfolk' (NHER ENF126259). No archaeological finds, features or deposits were present and there were no indications of a Late Saxon defensive ditch known to exist in this area.

## **1.0 Introduction**

- 1.1 Archaeological monitoring ('Watching Brief') was carried out during residential development at 'Garage Court at Bracken Road, Thetford, Norfolk' (Grid refs. TL 86659 81887, centred at) and was requested by the Norfolk County Council Historic Environment Service (ref. CNF41570, James Albone, 09 April 2010).
- 1.2 Planning Application 3PL/2007/1765/O applies.
- 1.3 Norfolk Historic & Environment Record ENF126259; OASIS ID: chrisbir1-95667.
- 1.4 This report, CB237R, details how Chris Birks undertook these works and summarises the results.

## **2.0 Project Background**

- 2.1 A proposal for the construction of three new residential dwellings was made by OC Properties Limited. Permission was granted by Breckland District Council subject to a condition for a Programme of Archaeological work. Archaeological Monitoring ('Watching Brief') was required at a level of constant attendance to determine the presence/absence, date, extent, state of preservation and significance of any archaeological layers or subsoil archaeological features.
- 2.2 The proposed development site lies just outside of the area of the Saxon defences of Thetford.
- 2.3 This work was undertaken in accordance with a Brief issued by the Norfolk County Council Historic Environment Service (ref. CNF41570, James Albone, April 2010) and a generic Project Design for Watching Briefs by Chris Birks (Birks 2004). Full details of research aims, methodology and standards are provided in the Project Design.
- 2.4 The site archive will be held by the Norfolk Museums and Archaeology Service, in accordance with the relevant policy on archiving standards. An OASIS record has been raised – reference number chrisbir1-95667.

## **3.0 Archaeological and Historical Background**

- 3.1 A number of entries exist in the Norfolk Historic and Environment Record (NHER) for Thetford and the surrounding area and only those within the immediate vicinity of the site are described in this report. Full details of these and all other entries can be seen at the NHER office based at Gressenhall, near Dereham, by prior appointment.
- 3.2 The origins of modern Thetford arise in the Late Saxon period; centred on the principal river crossing which permeates in the place name *Theodford*.

Expansion south of the river in the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries saw the town occupy a large area on this side of the river and by the Norman conquest Thetford occupied land on both sides of the river. The town declined in the subsequent period with a perceived shift of focus north of the river and by at least the 13<sup>th</sup> century the settlement south of the river was almost entirely abandoned (Andrews *et al*, 1999). Thetford remained an important local centre through the medieval period and as the commercial and residential areas retracted in the 12<sup>th</sup> century they were transformed for Ecclesiastical buildings such as the Cluniac priory established 1107-14 (NHER 5748) or the Priory of the Austin Canons (NHER 5749).

- 3.3 The site lies to the south of the Saxon town (NHER 5758) at Thetford where several excavations have taken place in the post-war period that identified a cobbled roadway running northwest-to-southeast across arable land west of Bury Road. Late Saxon buildings and pits have also been revealed in excavations with finds dated to the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries. A Late Saxon defensive ditch (NHER 1092) encircles the Late Saxon town although the exact course of this ditch is unknown.

#### **4.0 Geology and Topography**

- 4.1 The site lies upon a solid Upper Chalk geology containing characteristic flint nodules (Funnell 2005) with an approximately southeast-to-northwest meandering band of blown sand, shingle and river gravels extending through the parish (Funnell 1994). Thetford lies within the Breckland soil landscape typified by soils developed in coversand over a chalk-sand drift (Corbett and Dent 1994). Breckland is a low plateau with gentle slopes to the lower lying areas. The dominant soil on the plateau is a brown sand with a thin red line of clay enrichment at the boundary with the underlying chalky-drift (Corbett & Dent 1994). A sandy colluvium that can develop a distinctive podzol can be seen in the low lying areas. The tendency for these soils to maintain water has made farming practices much harder.
- 4.2 The development site lies to the south of Thetford town, north of Barnhamcross Common and west of the A134 carriageway (*Fig. 1*). The site was generally level at c. 300D

#### **5.0 Observations**

- 5.1 Monitoring was carried out on 21 and 22 December 2010 during excavations associated with the construction of three new dwellings (*Fig. 2, Plate 1*).
- 5.2 Site conditions were good and access was gained via Bracken Road to the north of the site. The weather was extremely cold but dry.
- 5.3 Foundation trenches in Plot 1 measured 0.6m wide and were excavated to a depth of 0.9m beneath the present ground level. Initially, 0.15m of dark yellowish brown gravelly sand and concrete rubble was removed that overlay 0.1m dark greyish brown sandy silt topsoil confined to an area within 4m of the northeast corner of the plot. Topsoil overlay between 0.3m and 0.45m of brownish yellow

sand subsoil with frequent small to medium sub-rounded and sub-angular flint pebbles overlying a white chalk undisturbed 'natural' deposit.

**Plate 1.** Example of foundation trenches during excavation, looking east



- 5.4 Foundation trenches in Plot 2 measured 0.6m wide, the adjoining trench between plots measured 0.45m wide to the north and south of the plot. Trenches were excavated to a maximum depth of 0.9m beneath present ground level. Initially, 0.05m of concrete rubble and red brick rubble was removed that overlay between 0.3m and 0.45m of brownish yellow sand subsoil with frequent small to medium sub-rounded and sub-angular flint pebbles. Subsoil overlay a white chalk undisturbed 'natural' deposit. In the northeast foundation trench, a mains service trench cut the foundation trench to a maximum depth of 0.6m. This contained an electricity cable and a low pressure gas main c. 0.15m in diameter. Approximately 1m to the south of this, a shallow foundation associated with the garages that previously occupied the site was present just beneath present ground level. The service trench (gas main) was also present in the west foundation trench at the corresponding northerly point.
- 5.5 Foundation trenches in Plot 3 measured 0.6m wide, the adjoining trench between plots measured 0.45m wide to the north of the plot. They were excavated to a maximum depth of 0.9m beneath present ground level. Initially, 0.1m of red brick rubble and broken tarmac was removed that overlay between 0.3m and 0.45m of brownish yellow sand subsoil with frequent small to medium sub-rounded and sub-angular flint pebbles. Subsoil overlay a white chalk undisturbed 'natural' deposit. In the southeast foundation trench, a mains service

trench was present to a maximum depth of 0.85m and contained a cast iron water main c. 0.3m in diameter. It was also present in the southwestern foundation trench. Approximately 0.9m from the boundary of plot 2, a modern concrete foundation was removed that extended to a maximum depth of 0.45m from present ground level.

- 5.6 The same deposits as observed in foundation trenches were present in the service trench and no archaeological remains were encountered.

## **6.0 Conclusions**

- 6.1 Monitoring during excavations associated with the construction of residential buildings did not reveal any finds, features or deposits of archaeological significance. The exact reason for this is unknown, activities may have occurred outside of the limited areas of excavation or simply did not occur on this site. A difference in ground level between the development site and that to the immediate west indicates that the area formerly occupied by garages had been stripped of deposits, graded at the time of their construction and may this have truncated any archaeological features present.
- 6.2 There were no indications of the Late Saxon defensive ditch known to surround the Late Saxon town close to this development site.

## **Acknowledgments**

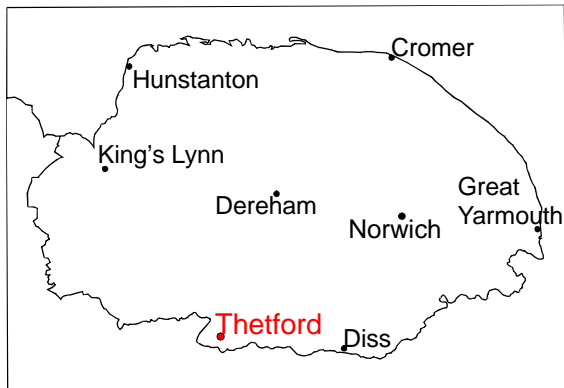
The project was undertaken by Chris Birks on behalf of Simon Osbourne, O.C. Properties Limited who also funded the work. Fieldwork was undertaken by John Simmons. The report was written by John Simmons and edited by Chris Birks.

Many thanks to Alice Cattermole and Sarah Howard at the Norfolk Historic and Environment Record office based at Gressenhall. Thanks also to James Albone, Ken Hamilton, David Gurney, David Robertson and Andrew Rogerson at the Norfolk County Council Historic Environment Service.

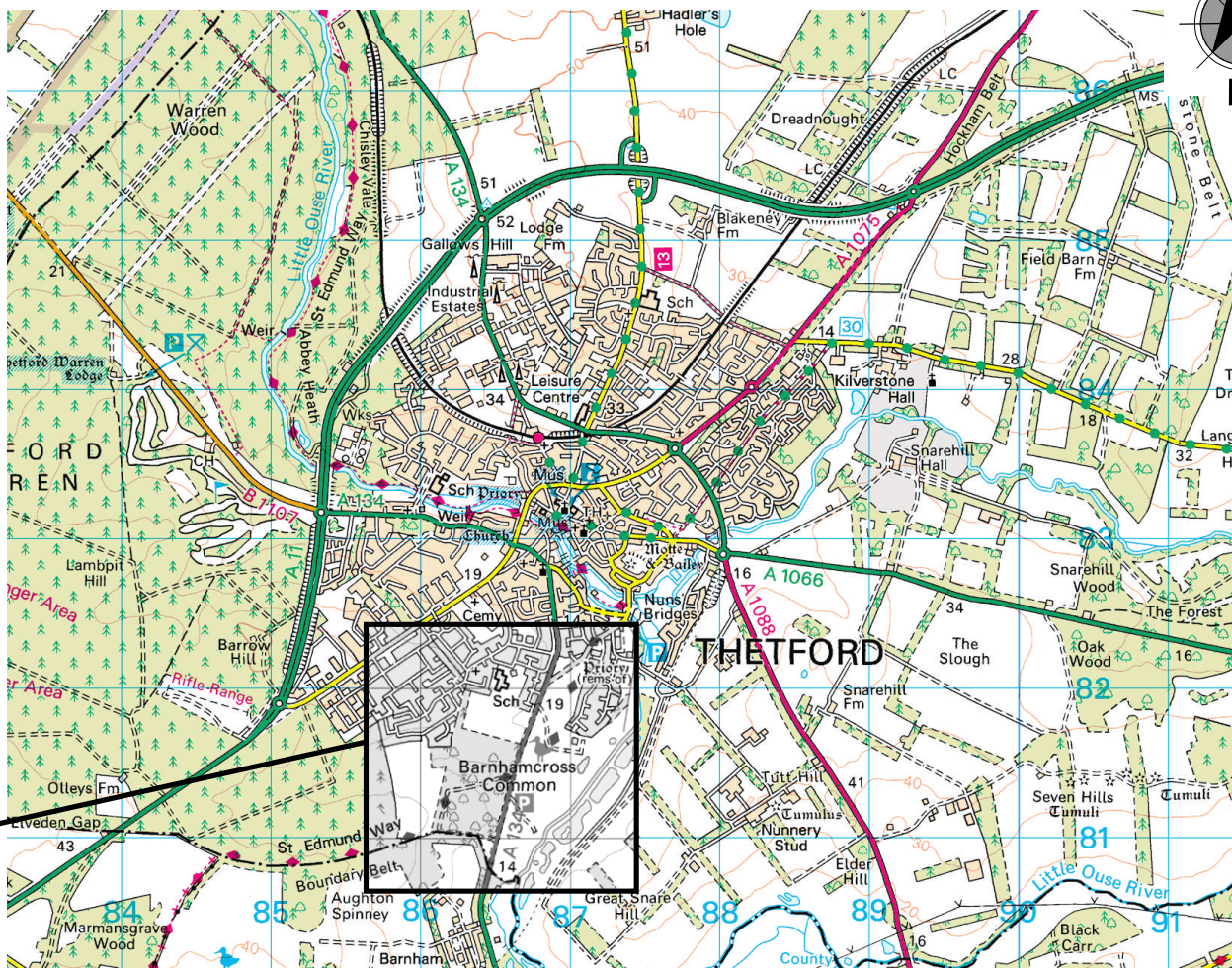
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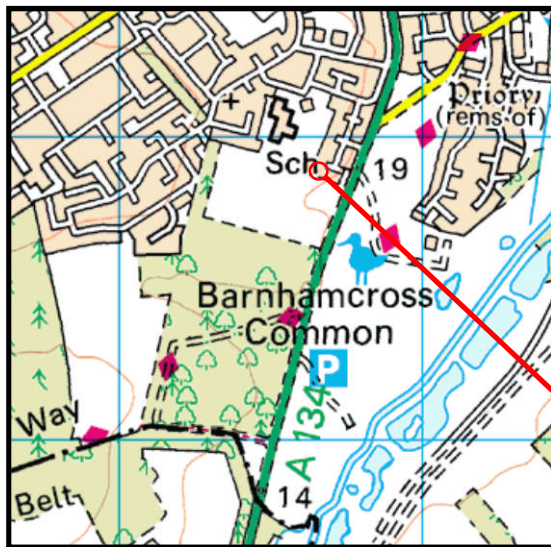




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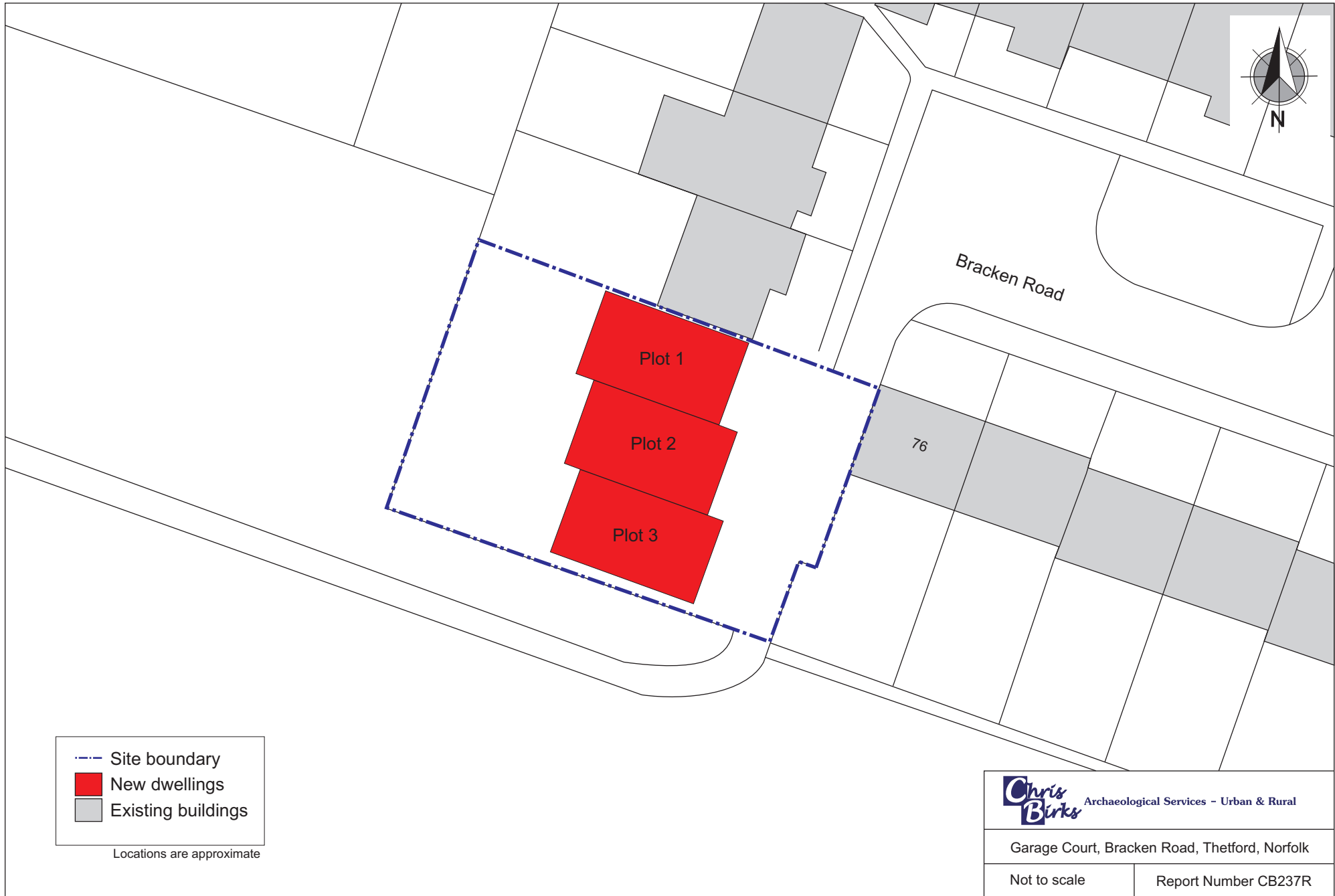
The Site

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Garage Court, Bracken Road, Thetford, Norfolk

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Figure 1. Site Location



**Figure 2.** Site plan