JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

AT

HEMDEAN HOUSE SCHOOL, KNIGHTON CLOSE, CAVERSHAM, READING

SU 7122 7524

On behalf of

Morse Homes Ltd.

January 2007

REPORT FOR	Morse Homes Ltd Walled Garden House Binfield Heath Henley-on-Thames RG9 4DP
PREPARED BY	David Gilbert
FIELDWORK	20th December 2006
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ENQUIRES TO	John Moore Heritage Services Hill View Woodperry Road Beckley Oxfordshire OX3 9UZ Tel/Fax 01865 358300 Email: info@jmheritageservices.co.uk
Site Code	RGKC 06
JMHS Project No:	1679
Archive Location	Reading Museum Service REDMG: 2006.929

CONTENTS

FIGURES

Summary

An evaluation of this site was conducted by John Moore Heritage Services on 19th December 2006. A single trench 20m in length was excavated to a depth of 1.6m below ground surface. There were no archaeological features present.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Site Location *(Figure 1)*

The site is located on land to the rear (northeast) of Hemdean House School and at the end of Knighton Crescent, Caversham, Reading. The site is centred on NGR SU 7135 7519. The site is on currently unoccupied as overgrown spare land, approximately 0.045ha in area within the grounds of Hemdean House School. The site lies at approximately 45m above OD on sloping ground and the underlying geology is chalk.

1.2 Planning Background

There is a proposal for new residential buildings to be erected on the site. Due to the potential for remains of archaeological significance to be present on the site, an archaeological evaluation of the site has been required as a condition of the planning permission (05/00916/FUL). This is in line with PPG 16 and Local Plan Policies.

1.3 Archaeological Background

The site lies in an area of archaeological potential, due to its proximity to several known areas of archaeological activity, specifically relating to Palaeolithic and Bronze Age remains. A desk based assessment (DBA) carried out by CgMs Consulting in 2002 advised of the potential for encountering Lower Palaeolithic remains towards the south of Caversham at Marshlands Square. A further DBA carried out on 70 and 72 Peppard Road prior to a planning application in 1996 concluded that the area was of particular interest. The development site was located within an area of Plateau Gravel which produced a considerable number of Palaeolithic artefacts. It was concluded that surviving areas of the deposit deserve careful consideration.

During drainage work on Balmore Drive, adjacent to Peppard Road, in 1930-1, a collection of Palaeolithic material of Lavallois typology was recovered in excellent condition. The amount of material indicated a probable site in the immediate vicinity, although the whereabouts of only a few of these finds is currently known. Sutton's Pit was a gravel extraction pit from which Neolithic and Bronze Age material was also recovered.

A 4th century Roman coin was recovered from Hemdean School grounds, located south of the main building. Although an isolated find, it must be borne in mind that the northern part of Caversham is an area of high potential regarding the location of Roman remains, and such the possibility of their survival farther south in the town cannot de dismissed. A 15-16th century "Holy Well" was discovered on the southern side of Priest Hill. The find was also mentioned in 1727, as St. Anne's Well, being between a field called The Mount and Priest Lane.

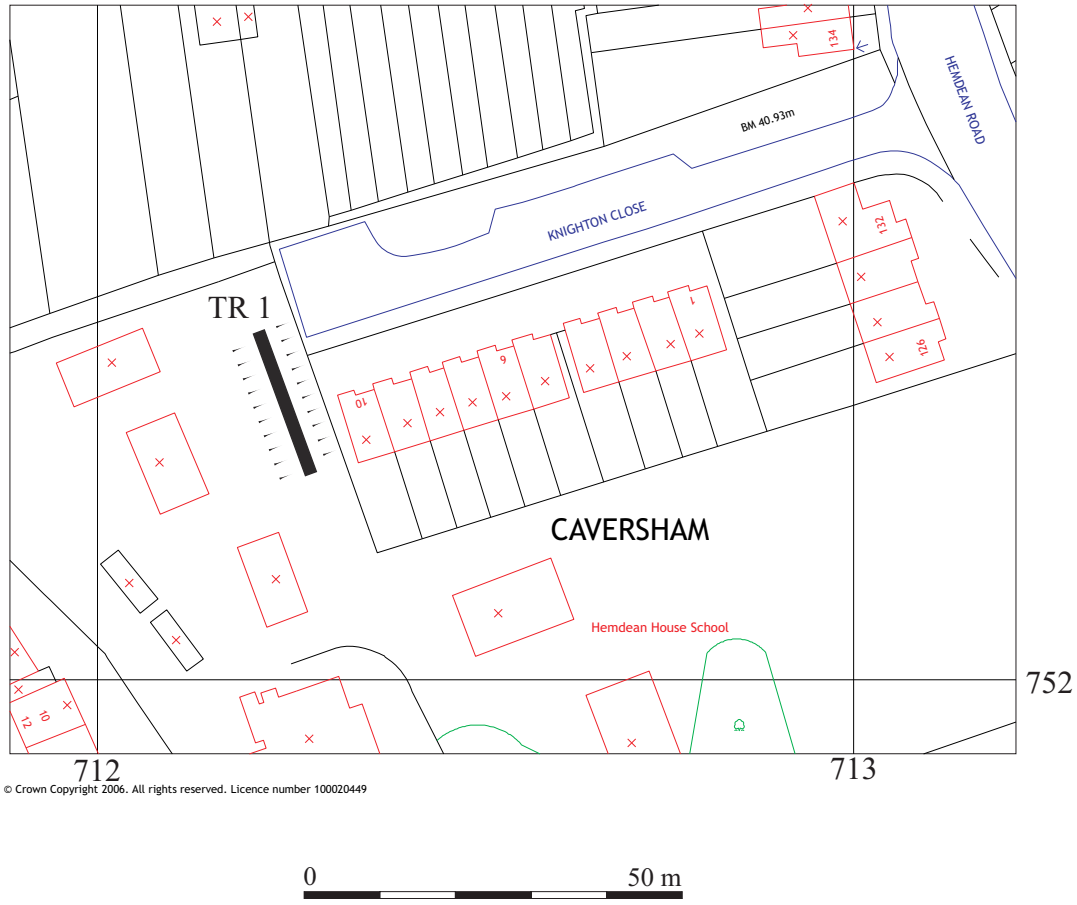

Figure 1. Site and trench location

2 AIMS OF THE INVESTIGATION

The aims of the investigation as laid out in the Written Scheme of Investigation were as follows:

- To establish the presence/absence of archaeological remains within the site.
- To determine the extent, condition, nature, character, quality and date of any archaeological remains encountered.
- To assess the ecofactual and environmental potential of the archaeological features and deposits

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- To determine the impact of the proposed development on any remains present.
- To make available to interested parties the results of the investigation subject to any confidentiality restrictions.

3 STRATEGY

3.1 Research Design

In response to a *Brief* issued by Berkshire Archaeology a scheme of investigation was designed by JMHS and agreed with the Berkshire Archaeology and the applicant. The work was carried out by JMHS and was to involve the excavation of a total of 25m of trenches across the site (Fig. 1).

Site procedures for the investigation and recording of potential archaeological deposits and features were defined in the *Written Scheme of Investigation*. The work was carried out in accordance with the standards specified by the Institute of Field Archaeologists (1994) and the principles of MAP2 (English Heritage 1991).

3.2 Methodology

The trenching sample specified within the brief was achieved through the excavation of one 20m trench (figure 1). This trench was shortened by 5m from the specified length due to space limitations within the site.

The trench was 1.6 m wide and was excavated by a mechanical mini-excavator fitted with a toothless ditching bucket. The resultant surfaces were cleaned by hand prior to limited hand excavation of any identified archaeological deposits. The deposits were then inspected by Dr Alex Brown and Rowena Banerjea of Reading University to evaluate the need for soil sampling.

Standard John Moore Heritage Services techniques were employed throughout, involving the completion of a written record for each deposit encountered, with scale plans and sections drawings compiled where appropriate. A photographic record was produced. The trenches were backfilled after recording.

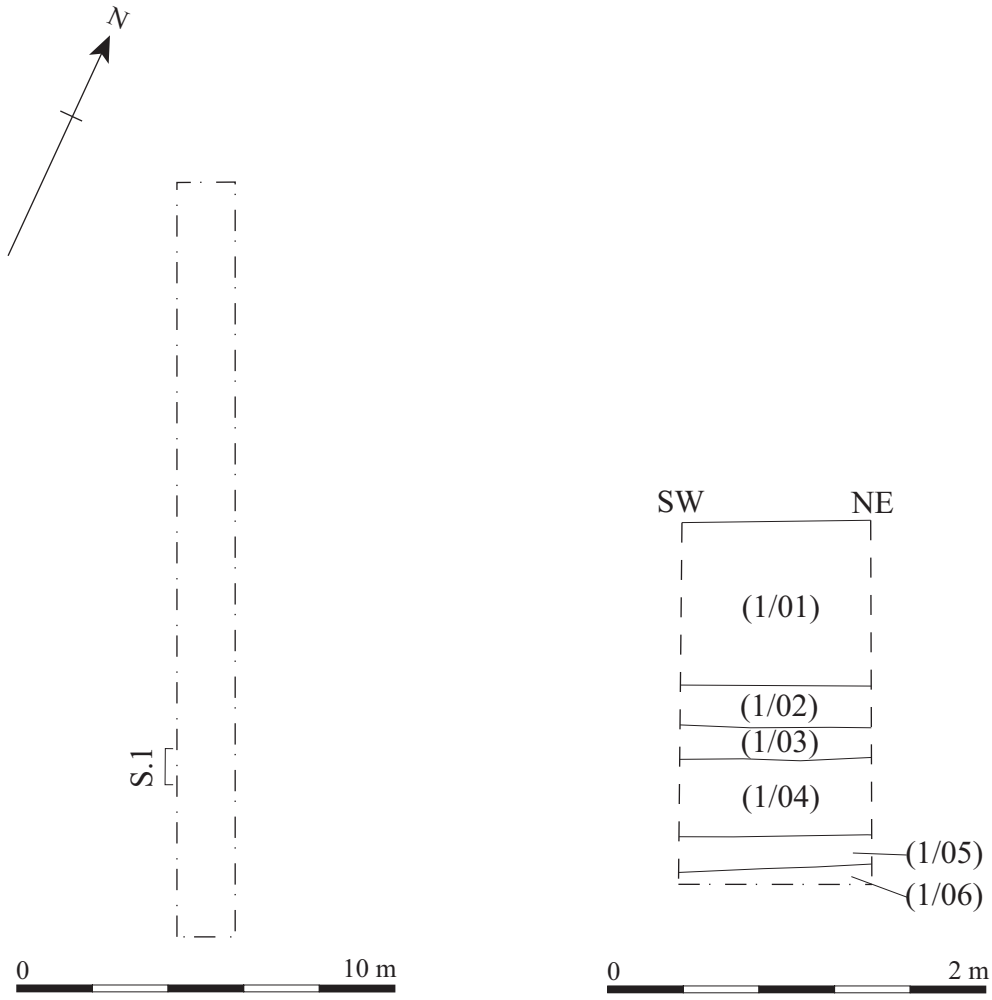

Figure 2. Trench 1 plan and section

4 RESULTS

All deposits and features were assigned individual context numbers. Context numbers in [ ] indicate features i.e. pit cuts; while numbers in ( ) show feature fills or deposits of material.

The natural in the area was chalk (1/06) with some large flint nodules. The upper surface of the chalk showed signs of penetrating tree root action. Above this was a 0.2m thick layer of orange brown clay (1/05) with approximately 40% small chalk pieces. Directly over this was a layer of orange brown clay (1/04) with approximately 20% small chalk pieces. It was flecked with charcoal and contained a few small fragments of CBM and was 0.3m thick.

Above this was a layer of dark grey silty clay loam flecked with charcoal (1/03) and with some rare chalk fragments. It was on average 0.07m thick. Overlying this was a deposit of loose black silt clay with a high content of ash and charcoal (1/02) that was 0.1m thick on average.

The uppermost layers were made ground (1/01) up to 0.9m thick. This had notable banding of differing coloured clay dumps. The upper most dump-layer contained a considerable amount of small chalk fragments. All displayed obviously modern finds including sherds of mass-produced white earthenware and plastics.

5 FINDS

A single sherd of glazed Red Earthenware (REW) dating to the mid 16th to late 18th century was recorded from context (1/03). It was recorded using the same code as used for the pottery from the Reading Waterfront excavations (Underwood, 1997). It was not retained.

6 DISCUSSION

Context (1/03) represents a buried land surface with (1/04) its subsoil and (1/05) a lower subsoil just above the natural chalk (1/06). The area was cleared by burning at some point, possibly at the time of the construction of Knighton Close. It is also likely that the made ground was deposited at the same time. The western end of Knighton Close is terraced into the natural slope of the hill. It is presumed that this material was dumped further up hill causing the 2.50 height difference between the Close and site.

Dr Alex Brown and Rowena Banerjea of Reading University concluded that there was no need to undertake a programme of soil sampling of the deposits located.

Whilst any decision regarding further work on the site must rest with Berkshire Archaeology, it is the opinion of John Moore Heritage Services that no further archaeological work needs to be conducted regarding the development of the site.

7 BIBLIOGRAPHY

English Heritage 1991 *Management of Archaeological Projects*

Institute of Field Archaeologists. 1994: *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Field Evaluations.*

Underwood, C, 1997 Pottery in JW Hawkes and PJ Fasham 'Excavations on Reading Waterfront Sites, 1979-1988' *Wessex Archaeological Report* 5, 142-161

APPENDIX – ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

Context	Type	Description	Depth (m)	Width (m)	Length (m)	Finds	Date
Trench 1			1.6	1.6	20		
1/01	Deposit	Made ground	0.9	Tr.	Tr.	Pot, Plastic	Modern
1/02	Deposit	Black silty clay	0.1	Tr.	Tr.	Pot	Modern
1/03	Layer	Dark grey clay	0.07	Tr.	Tr.	Pot	C17th - 18th
1/04	Layer	Orange brown clay	0.3	Tr.	Tr.	-	-
1/05	Layer	Orange brown clay	0.2	Tr.	Tr.	-	-
1/06	Natural	Chalk	-	Tr.	Tr.	-	-