Land at junction of Old Knebworth Lane and London Road, Stevenage, Hertfordshire

An Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment

for Bellwinch Homes

by Jennifer Lowe

Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd

Site Code LRS 03/41

May 2003
Summary

Site name: Land at Junction of Old Knebworth Lane and London Road, Stevenage, Hertfordshire

Grid reference: TL 2460 2200

Site activity: Desk-based assessment

Date and duration of project:

Project manager: Steve Ford

Site supervisor: Jennifer Lowe

Site code: LRS 03/41

Area of site: Approximately 0.5ha

Summary of results: Archaeological potential for this site appears to be moderate

Monuments identified: None

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Report edited/checked by: Steve Ford✓ 29.05.03
                          Steve Preston✓ 29.05.03
Introduction

This desk-based study is an assessment of the archaeological potential of a parcel of land located at the junction of Old Knebworth Road and London Road, Stevenage, centred on NGR TL2460 2200 (Fig. 1). The project was commissioned by Mr Alan Simpson, of Bellwinch Homes, Malcolm House, Empire Way, Wembley, Middlesex, HA9 0LW and comprises the first stage of a process to determine the presence/absence, extent, character, quality and date of any archaeological remains which may be affected by redevelopment of the area.

Site description, location and geology

The site lies to the south-west of Stevenage in an area known as Broadwater. The site currently consists of a triangular parcel of land bounded to the south-west by a railway line, to the north-west by Old Knebworth Road and the north-east by London Road/Great North Road. A site visit on the 15th May 2003 revealed the area is enclosed by a fairly dense growth of trees, with an opening from London Road providing access to the site. Opposite the site entrance is a distinctive crossroads where London Road, Stevenage Road and Hertford Road meet, at the centre of which is a hotel called the Roebuck Inn. The plot is covered by grass and towards the south-east corner of the site rubbish dumping has occurred. The site covers approximately 0.5 hectares and is centred on TL 2460 2200. The underlying geology is chalky sand and gravel (BGS 1995), and the site lies at a height of approximately 95m above OD.

Planning background and development proposals

Planning permission (Application No. 02/00127/FP) has been granted to erect 20 houses and 4 flats with an access road from London Road, associated car parking and play space (Fig. 9). The planning permission is subject to the completion of several conditions; this desk based assessment comprises one of those requirements (13).

Archaeology and Planning (PPG 16 1990) provides guidance relating to archaeology within the planning process. It points out that where a desk-based assessment has shown that there is a strong possibility of significant archaeological deposits in a development area it is reasonable to provide more detailed information
from a field evaluation so that an appropriate strategy to mitigate the effects of development on archaeology can be devised:

Paragraph 21 states:

‘Where early discussions with local planning authorities or the developer’s own research indicate that important archaeological remains may exist, it is reasonable for the planning authority to request the prospective developer to arrange for an archaeological field evaluation to be carried out...’

Should the presence of archaeological deposits be confirmed further guidance is provided. *Archaeology and Planning* stresses preservation *in situ* of archaeological deposits as a first consideration as in paragraphs 8 and 18.

Paragraph 8 states:

‘...Where nationally important archaeological remains, whether scheduled or not, and their settings, are affected by proposed development there should be a presumption in favour of their physical preservation...’

Paragraph 18 states:

‘The desirability of preserving an ancient monument and its setting is a material consideration in determining planning applications whether that monument is scheduled or unscheduled...’

However, for archaeological deposits that are not of such significance it is appropriate for them to be ‘preserved by record’ (i.e., fully excavated and recorded by a competent archaeological contractor) prior to their destruction or damage.

Paragraph 25 states:

‘Where planning authorities decide that the physical preservation *in situ* of archaeological remains is not justified in the circumstances of the development and that development resulting in the destruction of the archaeological remains should proceed, it would be entirely reasonable for the planning authority to satisfy itself ... that the developer has made appropriate and satisfactory provision for the excavation and recording of remains.’

The county’s Structure Plan Review (HCC 1998) broadly adopts the guidance of PPG16 in its treatment of archaeological remains and lists

‘vii) Scheduled Ancient Monuments and other archaeological remains of national and more local importance, and their setting;

‘viii) Listed buildings and their settings, and other buildings of architectural, archaeological or historic merit’ as ‘Critical capital’ which will be given appropriate protection.

According to the emerging District Plan the site lies within the Broadwater Farm Area of Archaeological Significance, and policy EN9 of the adopted plan states:

Where a development proposal affects an Area of Archaeological Significance, developers are
required to submit the results of an archaeological field evaluation before a planning application is
determined.

In this particular case, it appears that the limits of the Area of Archaeological Significance have been taken to be
subject to review, and the nature of the archaeological mitigation required under the condition may be varied
dependent upon the results of the current report.

Methodology

The assessment of the site was carried out by the examination of pre-existing information from a number of
sources recommended by the Institute of Field Archaeologists paper ‘Standards in British Archaeology’ covering
desk-based studies. These sources include historic and modern maps, the Hertfordshire Sites and Monuments
Record, geological maps and any relevant publications or reports.

Archaeological background

Stevenage is probably best known as being the first New Town in Britain, formally established as such in 1946
(Collings 1987), however the town does have much older origins. A Roman road is thought to pass by the site,
through Knebworth and on into Stevenage, following the current route of the Great North Road (Margary 1955).
As the route reaches the south-western edge of the town it passes close to the Six Hills Barrows (burial mounds),
which are also thought to be Roman (Ashby 1995).

The name Stevenage is Saxon in origin and is derived from Stithenaecce meaning ‘stiff or strong oak’ (Mills
1998). The original Saxon settlement is thought to have been located on or near the site of the old church of St
Nicholas and the ‘Bury’ in Stevenage (VCH 1912). Several other Saxon villages are known to have developed
close to Stevenage, including one at Broadwater (Ashby 1995).

Stevenage is mentioned in Domesday Book (AD1086) as being in the Broadwater Hundred, land owned by
the Abbey of Westminster, and is assessed at 8 hides. Old Knebworth is also mentioned, held by Eudo
fitzHubert, and this is assessed at 8½ hides (Williams and Martin 2002); in the time of King Edward (Domesday
code for before the Norman Conquest), this manor, then held by an King’s Thegn, owed the King the traditional
duty of ‘cartage’, or the provision of transport for the King. By 1281 Stevenage was granted a Royal Charter for
a weekly market and a three day annual fair, and by 1315 the number of households had exceeded 140 (Collings
1987).

The route from Knebworth to Stevenage, which runs past the Roebuck Inn, became a turnpike road in the
18th century and was the main thoroughfare from Broadwater to Stevenage (Ashby 2002), also at this time
Broadwater Farm was established, which lies to the north of the site (Collings 1987). In the 18th and 19th centuries, Stevenage continued to expand and became a prominent market town serving the coach trade. However, after the arrival of the Great Northern railway in 1850 this came to an end (Collings 1987). By the 20th century the hamlet of Broadwater consisted of just four cottages, a blacksmith shop, the Roebuck Inn and Broadwater farm (Ashby 1995).

**Hertfordshire Sites and Monuments Record**

A search of the Hertfordshire Sites and Monuments Records (SMR) was made on the 14th May 2003, covering a 1km radius around the site. This revealed only 17 entries in close proximity to the site. No entries lay within the development area itself. The results from this search are listed in Appendix 1, and summarized below, their locations are plotted on Figure 1.

**Prehistoric**

The Great North Road, which runs past the site, is thought to follow the route of an earlier prehistoric trackway [Fig 1; 1], which was later reused by the Romans. The trackway is thought to run from the Roebuck Inn, which stands adjacent to the site, through to Stevenage.

An evaluation 500m to the east of the site uncovered several Iron Age ditches, relating to field systems or enclosures, and a pit [2] (Hounsell 2001), implying a settlement of this period nearby.

**Roman**

As mentioned above, a Roman road [3] is recorded passing the site, probably on the same alignment as the prehistoric trackway. A coin of Tetricus (AD 270–3) [4] was recovered to the north-east of the site at Broadwater Crescent.

**Saxon**

An iron spearhead [5] was uncovered in the hamlet of Broadwater, west of the site, dating from the late 6th to 7th century.

**Medieval**

A Medieval manor house is recorded in Domesday Book, at Shephall Bury [7; 8]. The house was demolished and replaced by a larger brick-built house with Bath stone facings in 1865. Adjacent to the site of the manor
house, traces of ridge and furrow (resulting from medieval cultivation) were recorded [9]. These were originally visible on aerial photographs (Zeepvat, 1996), and later investigated. The evaluation failed to locate the ridge and furrow but did identify a ditch on a similar alignment (Walker 1996). To the south-west of the site, aerial photographs also revealed cropmarks, earthworks and parchmarks [10], representing two intersecting trackways, probably medieval/post medieval in date. Fragments of medieval pottery [6] were retrieved north of the site, at Monks Wood, dating from the 13th or 14th century.

Post Medieval
A post-medieval milestone [11] is also noted on the Great North Road, recording the distance to London as 29 miles; apparently mid 18th century in date.

Modern
To the south, west and north of the site, several railway bridges are recorded in the SMR as post medieval [12; 13; 14; 15], but are treated here as modern, and a road bridge built in 1918 but now replaced [16]. The only other entry for this period is a road bridge built in 1850 and replaced in 1916 [17].

Scheduled Ancient Monuments
There are no Scheduled Ancient Monuments on or close to the site.

Listed Buildings
There are no Listed Buildings present on the site.

Registered Parks and Gardens, Registered Battlefields
The site does not lie within or contain any Registered Parks and Gardens, nor Registered Battlefields

Cartographic Sources
A range of Ordnance Survey and other historical maps of the area were consulted at Hertfordshire Archives and Local Study Centre in order to ascertain what activity had been taking place throughout the site’s later history and whether this may have affected any possible archaeological deposits within the proposal area (see Appendix 2).
The earliest map of the area consulted is Saxton’s map of Hertfordshire 1577 (Fig. 2). This shows very little detail of the study area. Knebworth is noted on this map, which lies to the south-west of Stevenage, as is Ashton which lies to the east, however, there is no documented activity on the site at this time. The 1845 tithe map for Knebworth (Fig. 3) shows the area in more detail. At this time Old Knebworth Road is not present but the junction between London, Stevenage and Hertford Roads is notable, with a structure, presumably the public house, located at the centre of this junction. The junction lies to the east of the site and to the north, Broadwater Farm is located. The site appears to be an undeveloped area of land at this time.

The First Edition Ordnance Survey 1881 (Fig. 4) shows a few minor changes in the area. Broadwater Farm is more developed with several additional outbuildings, as is the building at the junction of the roads, which is now named as the Roebuck Inn. Old Knebworth Lane is still undeveloped at this time, however a footpath lies to the north of the site in the exact location of the Lane. The train route from London to Hertford has now appeared however the branch of the railway, which forms the current western boundary of the site, has not yet been constructed. Again the site at this time remains undeveloped; it is divided between two plots of land, both open space or fields.

The Second Edition Ordnance Survey 1898 shows no significant change in the area (Fig. 5). The 1923 Ordnance Survey map shows the triangular plot of land much as it is today. The second branch of the railway has now been completed and marks the western boundary of the site, and Old Knebworth Road is fully developed to the north; the site has remained undeveloped although it is no longer divided between two fields. The 1937 Ordnance Survey (Fig. 6) is identical as regards the site. The Ordnance survey maps for 1965 and 1971 combined (Fig 7) again show no significant development on site apart from the depiction of trees.

Discussion

In considering the archaeological potential of the study area, various factors must be taken into account, including previously recorded archaeological sites, previous land-use and disturbance and future land-use including the proposed development.

The cartographic and documentary evidence indicates the site has undergone no significant development in its recent history. In the early 20th century the site developed its distinctive triangular shape and this has remained unchanged over the subsequent years without modern development, other than possible ploughing and/or tree planting. As a result of this, any archaeological deposits which were ever present on the site can reasonably be expected to be undisturbed.
The majority of the entries in the Hertfordshire SMR date to the Post-Medieval or modern periods, however there are a few entries, which indicate earlier activity in the area. Perhaps most significant is the presence of the Roman road, which is thought to pass close to the site, and could follow the route of a much earlier trackway. This route, through a fairly narrow valley, appears to be continuously reused into the post-medieval period and therefore there is the possibility of encountering some associated roadside activity from any period. The Roman coin, and the late Iron Age ditches to the east of the site may be too far removed to represent roadside settlement, but do provide evidence for some activity of these periods in the area.

The lack of positive evidence of archaeological remains on the site need not imply that none are present, only that systematic investigation has not taken place.

This study therefore concludes that there is a moderate potential for the site to contain archaeological remains of almost any period, and that any such remains as are present are likely to be well preserved. It will be impossible to determine the actual presence or absence of such remains with further investigation.

Combining the factors of good preservation on site, the proximity of known archaeological remains and the fact that the site lies within an area of Archaeological Significance which, according to the emerging Local Plan, would normally require the submission of the results of an archaeological field evaluation, it would seem most likely that further work will be required. If this is the case the work should be carried out by a competent archaeological contractor according to a written scheme of investigation approved by the archaeological adviser to the Local Planning Authority. The information provided by the fieldwork can be used to draw up a mitigation strategy to minimise the effects of development on any archaeological deposits present.

References
Ashby, M, 1995, Stevenage Past, Phillimore and Co Ltd, Chichester
Hounsell, D, 2001, ‘Proposed Coptic Church/Community Hall, Shephalbury Manor, Broadhall Way, Stevenage, Hertfordshire; An Archaeological Evaluation’, Hertfordshire Archaeological Trust
Margary, I D, 1955, Roman Roads In Britain, London
Zeepvat, B, 1996, Shephalbury Centre, Lodge Way, Stevenage; A desk based archaeological assessment, Hertfordshire Archaeological Trust
## APPENDIX 1: Sites and Monuments Records within a 1km search radius of the development site

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<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>SMR Ref</th>
<th>Grid Ref (TL)</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Period</th>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>10558</td>
<td>2464 2209</td>
<td>Trackway</td>
<td>Prehistoric</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>11604</td>
<td>2542 2239</td>
<td>Occupation site</td>
<td>Late Iron Age</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>4637</td>
<td>2340 2500 to 2499 2028</td>
<td>Road</td>
<td>Roman</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>440</td>
<td>2478 2219</td>
<td>Coin</td>
<td>Roman</td>
<td>Coin of Tetricus AD270–3</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>1627</td>
<td>24 22</td>
<td>Iron Spearhead Pottery</td>
<td>Saxon-Early Medieval</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>1759</td>
<td>245 231</td>
<td>Medieval</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>10225</td>
<td>2546 2242</td>
<td>Manor and Manor House of Shephall Bury</td>
<td>Medieval/Post Medieval</td>
<td>Reference in Domesday</td>
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<td>10226</td>
<td>2536 2240</td>
<td>Manor house</td>
<td>Medieval/Post Medieval</td>
<td>Manor house of Shephall</td>
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<td>Ridge and Furrow</td>
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<td>23512 21735</td>
<td>Cropmarks</td>
<td>Medieval/Post Medieval</td>
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<td>5072</td>
<td>247 219</td>
<td>Milestone</td>
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<td>Post Medieval</td>
<td></td>
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<td>247 219</td>
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<td>Post Medieval</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>5100</td>
<td>240 227</td>
<td>Road Bridge</td>
<td>Modern</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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</table>
APPENDIX 2: Historic and modern maps consulted

1577  Saxton’s Map of Hertfordshire
1845  Knebworth Tithe Map
1881  First Edition Ordnance Survey, Hertfordshire Sheet, XX.8
1898  Second Edition Ordnance Survey, Hertfordshire Sheet, XX.8
1923  Ordnance Survey, Hertfordshire Sheet, XX.8
1937  Revision Ordnance Survey, Hertfordshire Sheet, XX.8
1965  Ordnance Survey sheet TL 2422-2522
1971  Ordnance Survey Sheet TL 2421-2521
Land at the junction of Old Knebworth Lane and London Road, Stevenage, Hertfordshire, 2003

Figure 1. Location of site within Stevenage and Hertfordshire.

Reproduced from Ordnance Survey Pathfinder TL22/32 1:25000
Ordnance Survey Licence AL52324A0001
Land at the junction of Old Knebworth Lane and London Road, Stevenage, Hertfordshire, 2003

Figure 2. Saxton’s map of Hertfordshire, 1577
Land at the junction of Old Knebworth Lane and London Road, Stevenage, Hertfordshire, 2003

Figure 3. Knebworth Tithe Map, 1845
Land at the junction of Old Knebworth Lane and London Road, Stevenage, Hertfordshire, 2003

Figure 4. First Edition Ordnance Survey, 1881
Land at the junction of Old Knebworth Lane and London Road, Stevenage, Hertfordshire, 2003

Figure 5. Second Edition Ordnance Survey, 1898
Land at the junction of Old Knebworth Lane and London Road, Stevenage, Hertfordshire, 2003

Figure 6. 1923 Edition Ordnance Survey
Land at the junction of Old Knebworth Lane and London Road, Stevenage, Hertfordshire, 2003

Figure 7. 1937 Revision Edition Ordnance Survey
Land at the junction of Old Knebworth Lane and London Road, Stevenage, Hertfordshire, 2003

Figure 8. 1965/1971 Ordnance survey

Reproduced from Ordnance Survey TL 2422-2522, TL2421-2521, 1:2500
Ordnance Survey Licence AL52324A0001
Land at the junction of Old Knebworth Lane and London Road, Stevenage, Hertfordshire, 2003

Figure 9. Plan of proposed development