Land north of Queen Mother Reservoir, Majors Farm Road, Colnbrook, Berkshire

An Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment

for St James Homes Ltd

by Lisa-Maree Hardy
Thames Valley Archaeological Services
Ltd

Site Code MFR02/59

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Introduction

This desk-based study is an assessment of the archaeological potential of a parcel of land to the north of Queen Mother Reservoir, Majors Farm Road, Colnbrook, Berkshire (TQ 0126 7775) (Fig. 1). The project was commissioned by Mr Anthony Webber of St James Homes, Wellington House, 209–217 High Street, Hampton Hill, Middlesex, TW12 1NP 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

A site visit was made on 28th June, 2002, in order to determine the current land use on the site. The site comprises a triangular shaped parcel of land to the north of the Queen Mother reservoir, Colnbrook. The site is bounded to the south by the reservoir and to the north by the new Honda headquarters and Majors Farm Road. To the east of the site are the rear blocks of residences accessed from Hill Rise. The site is currently open space, and is traversed by a major sewer, evidenced by a series of manholes.

The site is located on gravels, with floodplain gravel in the southern portion of the site, and Taplow Gravel to the north (BGS 1987). The site lies at a height of between 20m and 25m above Ordnance Datum.

Planning background and development proposals

Planning permission is to be sought for the redevelopment of the site, which will comprise the construction of residential apartments, car parking and associated amenities.

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 Berkshire Structure Plan 1991–2006 (BBC 1994) also outlines policy regarding the archaeological potential of development sites: Policy EN5, para 6.16:

‘Archaeological remains are irreplaceable. They are the evidence, in some cases the only evidence, of the past development of our civilisation. They comprise a varied resource, including buried objects, and standing structures ranging in date from prehistory to the industrial era. Particular care must be taken to ensure that archaeological remains and evidence are not needlessly or thoughtlessly destroyed’.

Policy EN6:

‘Scheduled Ancient Monuments and the most important non-scheduled remains, together with their settings, will be protected and managed to ensure that they are not damaged or destroyed. Where a lack of information precludes the proper assessment of a site or sites with archaeological potential, this information will have to be provided in advance of any decision to affect that site or area. Where preservation is not possible local planning authorities should be satisfied before granting planning permission that appropriate arrangements have been made for excavation and recording to take place prior to development.’

This is reiterated in the Slough Borough Local Plan (SBLP 1999).

Policy EN21: (Protection of Archaeological Sites)

There is a presumption in favour of the preservation of the integrity of all Scheduled Ancient Monuments and other archaeological remains of importance and their setting. Development will not be permitted if it fails to preserve the archaeological value and interest of the archaeological value and interest of the archaeological remains or their setting.
Policy EN22 (Archaeological Remains)

In areas with archaeological potential, a prospective developer will be required to carry out an archaeological field evaluation before any decision is taken on a planning application.

Where archaeological remains will be affected by a development, conditions will be imposed to preserve the remains in situ. Where preservation is not required, appropriate arrangements will be required by condition for the excavation and recording of archaeological sites prior to the commencement of development.

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 Berkshire Sites and Monuments Record, geological maps and any relevant publications or reports held in the Buckinghamshire Local History Studies and Archives (the site was historically part of Buckinghamshire), and Thames Water Archives.

Archaeological background

General Archaeological Background

Previous archaeological research and excavations along the River Thames and its tributaries clearly indicate that the alluvial deposits offer extensive archaeological potential, especially for early periods, such as the Upper Palaeolithic and the Mesolithic, during which the area was widely exploited by hunter-gatherer communities (Gaites 1975). In the Middle Thames Valley and the Colne Valley, in which the proposal site is situated, there is a strong emphasis on low-lying and riverside locations (Ford 1991).

Within the British Isles as a whole, sites and finds belonging to the Upper Palaeolithic and early Mesolithic periods are very rare (Barton 1989). The relatively small numbers of known sites in West London and beyond may be explained by their burial by post-glacial sedimentation in the Colne Valley 23000–13000 BP. The later deposition of alluvial material has also tended to preserve sites of these periods (MoLAS 2000).

One of the most significant finds of the Upper Palaeolithic in the Colne Valley, and indeed in all of southern Britain, is situated in western London, in Uxbridge. Known as Three Ways Wharf, the site consists of flint and bone scatters sealed beneath alluvial silts, which have been dated from the Upper Palaeolithic to Mesolithic periods. This site was abandoned at the same time as melting ice sheets caused a rise in water levels and sedimentation, followed by peat formation in areas such as the Colne Valley around 8000 BC. Evidence from this site suggests that islands and bars in braided river systems were locations for animal butchery during hunting expeditions and possible temporary encampments (Boucher 1990; Lewis 1989; MoLAS 2000).
Other sites in the Colne Valley have also produced well-preserved late Upper Palaeolithic and early Mesolithic flints of similar stratigraphy. At Church Lammas (Staines), an in situ long blade assemblage was recovered. The assemblage, which consisted of utilised and retouched tools and debitage, was similar to that recovered from Three Ways Wharf.

Neolithic sites have also been excavated in the Colne Valley. At Manor Farm, Horton (south of the proposal site) a horseshoe shaped enclosure surrounded by an oval ditch was excavated. Finds were dated to the later part of the early Neolithic. A Roman field system overlay the Neolithic finds (Ford, forthcoming).

Excavations at Prospect Park, Harmondsworth, also revealed occupation in several periods. The archaeology included late Mesolithic, later Neolithic, middle Bronze Age, Roman and Saxon periods. Other excavations in the Harmondsworth area have revealed Bronze Age pits, Roman tesserae, Saxon sunken buildings and medieval pits. Saxon settlement of the area seems to be concentrated along the Thames and its tributaries, especially the Colne River. A settlement at Harmondsworth revealed an extensive area of land use along the edge of the river terrace in the 5th and 6th centuries (Andrews 1996).

Within the vicinity of the proposal site, a number of cropmarks have been identified. However, a lack of archaeological investigation in the area has resulted in information being limited to that gained from aerial photographs.

A fieldwalking exercise to the south-east of the proposal site, at Kingsmead, Horton, revealed evidence for prehistoric, Roman and medieval settlement in the area. The evidence for the prehistoric period included a small amount of pottery from the areas adjacent to Colne Brook, possibly indicating the focal point of settlement was the banks of the brook (Ford 1990; Hall and Ford 1992).

To the west of the proposal site is Ditton Park, which was a medieval deer park, first documented in 1335 (Ford 1987). This park is an English Heritage Registered Park (GD 23 12). Within the park were a moated manor, fishponds and a hunting lodge. The width of the moat suggests that it may have been used as a fishpond, however there is evidence to suggest that the area was heavily landscaped in the 18th or 19th centuries. A watching brief on the moat did not find any features or finds of archaeological interest (Ford 1999). A later watching brief during decontamination works nearby also failed to find any archaeological deposits (Hindmarch 2001).

_Berkshire Sites and Monuments Record_
A search for previously recorded archaeological sites was made for an area of 500m surrounding the study area on the Berkshire Sites and Monuments Record (SMR) during June 2002. Only two relevant entries were revealed. Each record has been allocated a number and they are summarized in Appendix 1 with locations illustrated on Figure 1.

**Post-medieval**

The first entry relates to a milestone situated on the Bath Road. The milestone bears the inscription ‘London 18 Slough 2 Colnbrook 1’. Also inscribed in ‘XVIII miles to Hyde Park Corner 1741’ [Fig. 1; 1].

**Undated**

The A4 Bath Road is also recorded in the SMR and is situated to the north of the proposal site [2].

**Thames Water Archives**

In order to determine the extent of the Queen Mother Reservoir occupying the area to the south of the proposal site, and whether or not its construction has affected the site, a search was made of the archives of Thames Water. Numerous plans and sections of the reservoir were studied. Those features of direct relevance to this study have been summarized and represented in Figure 12.

Plans of the proposed outline of the Reservoir from the 1940s through to the construction phases of the 1970s revealed that the proposal site lies on the periphery of the north-eastern corner of the outer reservoir berm. The site was included in land allotted for deviation works, and was part of land transferred to Buckinghamshire County Council during the 1950s.

Plans of the area indicate that an extension of the interceptor sewer truncates the proposal site from the north-west, through to the south-east. The site may also have been affected by the diversion of a stream that ran along the course of what was then Ditton Road (superseded by Majors Farm Road).

The construction of the M4 motorway, linking South Wales and London, may also have affected the proposal site. Plans of works held by Thames Water indicate that during the construction of the Langley Roundabout and Exit 5 of the motorway, the western portion of the proposal site was partitioned off by fencing, and was included in the construction/works area.

**Aerial Photographs**

In order to ascertain the extent of disturbance to the site possibly caused by the construction of both the Queen Mother Reservoir and the M4 Motorway, it was determined that aerial photographs should be consulted. During
the course of this project, both Babtie and the Map Library of the University of Reading’s Geography Department were consulted in order to gain access to relevant aerial photographs. However, it was not possible to view photographs within the relevant time frames in either case.

**Documentary sources**

Originally a part of the Stoke Hundred, the vicinity of the proposal site historically formed a part of the County of Buckinghamshire, although it now falls under within Berkshire. The parish of Horton, of which the site is a part, contains an area of 1366 acres. At the time of Domesday, the Manor of Hortone in the Stoke Hundred was owned by Walter Fitz Other, whose descendants were the Windsors, who continued to hold it for the king. The village of Horton itself occupies a central position in the parish. The Parish was subject to Enclosure in 1799, and the award map of the period indicates that the parish contained three gravel and clay pits, 8 acres of land for the poor and 260 acres for the Lord of the Manor (VCH, 1969).

**Cartographic evidence**

A range of Ordnance Survey and other historical maps of the area were consulted at the Buckinghamshire Local Studies Library 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 consulted was a map of Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire and Berkshire by Saxton (1594, not illustrated) which was probably the main source for the map of Buckinghamshire by Speed, 1666 (Fig. 2). Although at a small scale, it is possible to discern the vicinity of the site through geographical markers, such as Langley Park and Colnbrook (noted as Colbroke) and Horton. It is interesting to note the emphasis placed on Colnbrook at this time, which is indicated as having a similar size (or importance) as, for example, Staines or Uxbridge. This is presumably due to its location on the Bath Road and the many bridges in the vicinity. Saxton showed the same emphasis in his earlier map. These map do not show the area in any great topographical detail.

Jeffrey’s map of 1770 shows the area in some detail, with major towns and roads marked, including the Bath Road, Ditton Road and Ditton Park. The area of the site is discernible using these markers and is shown as open space, presumably farm land (Figure 3). Bryant’s map of 1825 is similar although at a larger scale than Jeffrey, and thus shows less detail. The area of the site is represented by open space (Figure 4).

The first site-specific map consulted was the Horton Enclosure Map of 1799 (not illustrated). This small scale map showed the field configuration of the time and the land owners. The site is part of a parcel of land
owned by Joel Hetheridge, and is presumably arable. A plan of the parish produced in 1838 shows the area to have the same field configuration, although no details are given as to ownership or land use (not illustrated).

The First Edition Ordnance Survey of 1868 (not illustrated) shows the site is part of the same field system as previously noted. The Ordnance Survey of 1900 and 1920 show no changes (Figures 5 and 6 respectively). By 1925 the small parcel of land to the north-east of the proposal site is now occupied by ‘Shirley Lodge’, comprising two large buildings, outbuildings and landscaped gardens. By this time the parcels of land to the east have become more built up with semi-detached houses (Fig. 7).

By 1932 the parcel of land to the immediate east of the proposal site has been developed with a small arrangement of semi-detached and detached houses. There are no changes within the proposal site (Fig.8). This eastern area has become more intensively built up by the 1960s, but again there are no changes within the proposal site itself (Fig. 9).

By 1971, the M4 motorway has been constructed to the north of the proposal site. The western boundary of the proposal site is now bound by the A331, giving rise to the current shape of the parcel of land (Fig. 10). By 1989, the A331 has become the B470 and the Queen Mother Reservoir has been constructed, with the outer berm of the bank forming the southern boundary of the site. There is now a drain running along the eastern half of the northern boundary and along the eastern boundary of the site (Fig. 11).

**Listed buildings**

The proposal site does not contain any listed buildings.

**Registered Parks and Gardens**

The proposal site is not located within a registered park or garden. To the west of the site is Ditton Park (GD 23 12).

**Discussion**

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

A review of cartographic and historical sources indicates that prior to the development of the reservoir and the M4 motorway, the site had been subject to little previous disturbance. During the construction of the
motorway, the western portion of the site was included in the works area, and was included in the area fenced off for the construction of Majors Farm Road. The site might have been used as a contractors’ compound though no evidence of this was found. A sewage extension pipe transects the site, and the diversion of a drain during road construction has also resulted in a ditch being dug along the north-western boundary of the site along Majors Farm Road. A drain is also included on the maps along the northern and eastern boundaries of the block, although these are not clearly visible on site.

The close proximity of the Honda building, nearby residences, the reservoir and Majors Farm Road made it difficult to determine the original ground level of the site. It is believed that part of the rampart of the reservoir bank occupies a portion of the site. It is also not known if surplus spoil from creation of the M4 was dumped on the area as for other locations adjacent to the motorway.

The known archaeological resource of the surrounding area is undoubtedly rich, due its position within the Colne Valley, with extensive evidence of prehistoric settlement, such as at Horton, to the south east of the proposal site. Little is known of the archaeological resource in the immediate vicinity of the site; there was no archaeological investigation of the large areas utilised by development of the M4 and the reservoir. Little is therefore known regarding the depths of any potential archaeologically relevant layers in the area. While the general location within the Colne Valley might be considered to have high archaeological potential, it would seem that the potential of the site itself can be considered to be limited both in terms of the lack of known sites or finds in the immediate vicinity and by some development of the area, particularly the sewer traversing the site and the rampart of the reservoir.

It is very rarely possible to be able to conclude unambiguously from a desktop study that a parcel of proposed development land has no archaeological potential. However, for some sites all of the indications produced by a desktop study point towards a low potential, and which may not justify further work in the form of invasive field evaluation. The proposal site here falls within this category.

Should the results of archaeological evaluation still be required by the Local Planning Authority to assess more fully the presence/absence and nature of any archaeological remains, any such work would need to be undertaken by a competent archaeological contractor, such as an organisation registered with the Institute of Field Archaeologists, according to a written scheme of investigation drawn up with the approval of the archaeological adviser to the Local Planning Authority. For this site evaluation trenches would need to be strategically placed so as to avoid damage to the sewer traversing the site and to avoid destabilising the reservoir rampart.
References


Ford, S (forthcoming), A Neolithic ring ditch and Roman features at Manor Farm, Lower Horton, Berkshire, in S Preston (ed) Prehistoric and Roman Sites in Eastern Berkshire Thames Valley Archaeological Services monogr 2, Reading

Gaites, T, 1975, The Middle Thames Valley: An Archaeological Survey of the River Gravels, Berkshire Archaeol Comm Pubn 1, Reading


Hindmarch, E, 2001, Rainbows, Ditton Park Road, Slough, Berkshire: An archaeological watching brief’, Thames Valley Archaeological Services Report 01/76, Reading


PPG 16, 1990, Archaeology and Planning, Department of the Environment Planning Policy Guidance 16, HMSO

VCH, 1969, Victoria County History of Buckinghamshire, 3, London
**APPENDIX 1: Sites and Monuments Records within a 500m search radius of the development site**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>SMR</th>
<th>NGR (TQ)</th>
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<td>015 778</td>
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APPENDIX 2: Historic and modern maps consulted

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<th>Year</th>
<th>Description</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>Speed’s map of the County of Buckinghamshire (Fig. 2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1770</td>
<td>Jeffreys’ map of the County of Buckinghamshire (Fig. 3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1799</td>
<td>Enclosure Map of Horton Parish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1825</td>
<td>Bryant’s map of the County of Buckinghamshire (Fig. 4)</td>
</tr>
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<td>1838</td>
<td>Plan of the Parish of Horton</td>
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<td>1868</td>
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<td>1900</td>
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<td>1920</td>
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<td>1925</td>
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<tr>
<td>1932</td>
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<td>1989</td>
<td>Ordnance Survey Sheet TQ 07 NW (Fig. 11)</td>
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Land north of Queen Mother Reservoir, Majors Farm Road, Colnbrook, Berkshire, 2002

Figure 1. Location of site within Colnbrook and Berkshire, showing SMR entries.
Land north of Queen Mother Reservoir, Majors Farm Road, Colnbrook, Berkshire, 2002

Figure 2. Speed, 1666.
Land north of Queen Mother Reservoir, Majors Farm Road, Colnbrook, Berkshire, 2002

Figure 3. Jeffreys, 1770.
Land north of Queen Mother Reservoir, Majors Farm Road, Colnbrook, Berkshire, 2002

Figure 4. Bryant, 1825.
Land north of Queen Mother Reservoir, Majors Farm Road, Colnbrook, Berkshire, 2002

Figure 5. Second Edition Ordnance Survey, 1900.
Land north of Queen Mother Reservoir, Majors Farm Road, Colnbrook, Berkshire, 2002

Figure 6. Ordnance Survey, 1920.
Land north of Queen Mother Reservoir, Majors Farm Road, Colnbrook, Berkshire, 2002

Figure 7. Ordnance Survey, 1925.
Lund north of Queen Mother Reservoir, Majors Farm Road, Cumnor, Berkshire, 2002

Figure 8. Ordnance Survey, 1932.
Land north of Queen Mother Reservoir, Majors Farm Road, Colnbrook, Berkshire, 2002

Figure 9. Ordnance Survey, 1960
Land north of Queen Mother Reservoir, Majors Farm Road, Colnbrook, Berkshire, 2002

Figure 10. Ordnance Survey, 1971.
Land north of Queen Mother Reservoir, Majors Farm Road, Colnbrook, Berkshire, 2002

Figure 11. Ordnance Survey, 1989.
Land north of Queen Mother Reservoir, Majors Farm Road, Colnbrook, Berkshire, 2002

Figure 12. Areas affected by previous development.