



New Road, Littleborough, Rochdale, Greater Manchester

Archaeological Watching Brief Report

April 2021

Client: Russell Homes

Issue No: 1

OA Reference No: L2103-2020-21

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Archaeological Watching Brief Report

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With illustrations by Mark Tidmarsh

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Summary

Oxford Archaeology (OA) North were commissioned by Russell Homes to undertake a watching brief at the site of a housing development off New Road (A58), Littleborough, Rochdale, Greater Manchester. The work took place over 5 days between 14TH November 2019 and 16th April 2020, and was focused on an area measuring approximately 0.9ha located along the northeastern perimeter of the wider development. Unfortunately, a large amount of the topsoil strip within the monitoring area was undertaken without OA Norths knowledge and therefore without archaeological monitoring. Parts of the area were subsequently used for spoil storage and the construction of a haulage road. In an attempt to compensate for this oversight, spoil bunds within the area were cleared and the area was again subject to mechanical cleaning of the exposed natural surfaces. No archaeological remains were observed during the watching brief exercise.

Acknowledgements

Oxford Archaeology (OA) North would like to thank Russell Homes for commissioning this project. Thanks are also extended to Greater Manchester Archaeological Advisory Service (GMAAS) for monitoring the work.

The project was managed for OA North by Dr Adam Tinsley. The fieldwork was directed by Aidan Parker, who was supported on occasion by Steve Clarke. Thanks are also extended to the teams of OA staff that prepared the archive under the management of Karen Barker.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Scope of work

- 1.1.1 Oxford Archaeology (OA) North was commissioned by Russell Homes to undertake a watching brief at a site off New Road, Littleborough, where a proposed development of 96 dwellings had the potential to impact buried archaeological remains.
- 1.1.2 The work was undertaken as condition 21 of Planning Permission (planning ref. 15/00830/OUT; subsequently amended to condition 21 of 19/00262/FUL; and then condition 15 of 20/00607/FUL). A brief was set by Greater Manchester Archaeological Advisory Service (GMAAS) and a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) was produced by OA North detailing the Local Authority's requirements for work necessary to discharge the planning condition (*Appendix A*). This document outlines how OA North implemented the specified requirements.

1.2 Location, topography and geology

- 1.2.1 The site is located within the Metropolitan Borough of Rochdale, part of the modern urban conurbation of Greater Manchester, approximately 1km west of Littleborough town centre. The development area is located to the south of New Road/Halifax Road (A58) (Fig. 1).
- 1.2.2 The area of proposed development consists of an irregular shaped area of green field land, that drops sharply away from New Road to the north, following the contour of the river valley, to the course of the River Roch to the south. The site is bordered to the west by houses fronting New Street, to the south by Stubley Mill Road, and to the east by Stubley Lane. A Grade II listed building, Stubley Old Hall, lies beyond the northeastern boundary of the site.
- 1.2.3 The geology of the area is mapped as Milnrow Sandstone, dating to the Westphalian epoch. This is overlain by superficial deposits of Pleistocene Till (BGS 2020; Cranfield 2020).

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

- 1.3.1 The full archaeological and historical background of the site is covered within a Desk-Based Assessment (DBA) produced by OA North (May 2015) and will not be repeated here. What follows is a summary of the most pertinent information relating to the site based upon the results of the DBA.
- 1.3.2 Roman finds were uncovered during excavations for the new Stubley Hall in the late nineteenth-century (*ibid*, 8, *Section 3.1.3*), which may indicate Roman activity within the wider area of the site. Furthermore, it has been suggested that a Roman road ran along the line of the modern A58 (*ibid*).
- 1.3.3 Stubley Old Hall lies beyond the northwestern boundary of the site (*ibid*, 10, *Section 3.1.9-11*). First erected as a timber framed building in the fifteenth-century, a crosswing was added in 1530, with further building work carried out in the seventeenth and eighteenth-centuries. The survey of 1626 described the hall as 'an ancient manor...with stables, barns, dove cote, water mill and 110 acres of land'.

2 WATCHING BRIEF AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Aims

2.1.1 The project aims and objectives were as follows:

- i. To undertake archaeological monitoring of groundworks in the form of a watching brief during a controlled strip of topsoil within the targeted area.
- ii. To compile an archival record of the results of the watching brief, to inform GMAAS in their decision and design of any further targeted excavation.
- iii. To produce a written report detailing the findings and assessing their significance within a local context. An archive will be prepared in accordance with guidelines and industry best practice (ClfA 2019; 2020a; 2020b; EH 1991; HE 2015)

2.2 Methodology

2.2.1 The full methodology is available in the WSI document produced by OA North (*Appendix A*) and will not be repeated here. What follows is an outline of the most pertinent elements of the method statement.

2.2.2 The area under investigation (Fig. 2) was to be mechanically stripped of topsoil under archaeological supervision using a toothless ditching bucket. However, due to works commencing prior to archaeological involvement, a large area of the site, mainly comprising the western half of the target area, was stripped of topsoil without recourse to archaeological monitoring. This area was subsequently used to stockpile soil from other areas or to form a haulage road to provide access to the site. The eastern half of the area was also used to stockpile spoil, although here bunds were created on top of existing topsoil and turf layers. In this area, a large concrete septic tank had also been constructed prior to the current development of the site. Due to these circumstances it was therefore arranged for the exposed surface of natural deposits to be checked for archaeological potential, where topsoil had previously been removed. This required the removal of substantial spoil bunds from across much of the area and subsequent mechanical cleaning of the surfaces under archaeological supervision. Furthermore, to the north of the area, the ground level had been significantly reduced beyond the initial topsoil strip. Where spoil bunds had been created, but topsoil not previously removed, it was possible to arrange for the bund to be removed and archaeological monitoring to be conducted during further reduction of ground levels.

2.2.3 Prior to work starting, the area was checked for services by the principal contractor, who was responsible for marking any the position of such services. The same contractor was also responsible for fencing any areas of deeper excavation.

3 RESULTS

3.1 Introduction and presentation of results

3.1.1 The results of the watching brief are presented below and include a stratigraphic description of the areas under observation, as well as a general discussion of ground conditions.

3.2 General soils and ground conditions

3.2.1 The soil sequence was fairly uniform. The natural geology of light to medium orange clays and gravels was overlain by a mid-brown silty subsoil, which in turn was overlain by a dark silty topsoil.

3.2.2 Ground conditions throughout the watching brief varied, as several visits were made, most being weeks apart. The site was prone to waterlogging during the winter months, with parts often submerged under standing water or dammed to prevent wider egress (Plate 1). This resulted in some difficult ground and working conditions, although generally the underlying natural was distinct and readily identifiable. The presence of archaeological features or deposits should therefore have been relatively easily identifiable, despite the difficult conditions, although none were noted across the areas subject to monitoring.. With this said, a section of the area had been reduced substantially below existing ground conditions prior to observation and could theoretically have removed any archaeological features or deposits, if originally present (see *Section 4.2.3*).



Plate 1: An example of adverse ground conditions during fieldwork.

3.3 General distribution of archaeological deposits

3.3.1 No Archaeological remains were encountered during the watching brief

3.4 Finds summary

3.4.1 No finds were recovered during the watching brief.

4 DISCUSSION

4.1 Reliability of field investigation

- 4.1.1 The main problem encountered during the watching brief was that the area had largely been stripped without archaeological supervision. and in some areas (chiefly to the north) this had gone far beyond the level of topsoil, with a reduction extending to approximately 2m below existing ground .
- 4.1.2 In those areas where stripping had halted at the topsoil, subsequently being used for storage of spoil, a second machining likely also reduced the ground beyond the horizon of natural deposits. While the second machine cleaning in these areas was monitored, it is possible that potential features may have been lost (Plate 2 and 3).



Plate 2: Study area facing east, prior to spoil removal



Plate 3: Study area facing north, prior to spoil removal

4.2 Watching Brief objectives and results

- 4.2.1 The objectives of the watching brief (*Section 2.1.1*) were to monitor the stripping of topsoil within the defined area and assess the archaeological remains in order to inform the necessity for further work, compiling the information in a report.
- 4.2.2 Regarding the first objective, monitoring of the initial stripping (with the exception of a small area to the east) went ahead unmonitored with an archaeological presence only requested and established after the fact. Attempts were made to address this by arranging for and attending to monitor areas during a second cleaning. Those areas previously stripped were cleared of stockpiled material and assessed to determine whether archaeological remains were indeed present. Although this process also took place within the north of the area, the ground level had been significantly reduced beyond the topsoil, to a maximum depth of 2m in some sections. Therefore, any previous archaeological deposits, if present, were likely removed entirely (Plates 3 -5).
- 4.2.3 Where monitoring was possible, no archaeological remains were observed during the process. Where previous groundworks had not removed substantial elements of overburden deposits, it can be stated with greater confidence that no archaeological features were present, although the same level of confidence cannot be developed in relation to areas subjected to more extensive groundworks.



Plate 4: Level of reduction in northern area



Plate 4: Eastern area post spoil removal and clean



Plate 5: Northern area post spoil removal and clean

4.3 Interpretation

- 4.3.1 No archaeological deposits or remains were observed during the watching brief. While it has been highlighted that areas were over-excavated in the absence of archaeological monitoring, it should also be considered that no remains were observed in the areas where this was not the case. This suggests that the area under scrutiny was devoid of archaeological activity. While the conditions under which the watching brief were conducted were not ideal, it is considered that the objectives of the project, as set out in the WSI (*Appendix A, Section 2, 5*) were met and that, subject to formal acceptance of this report, Condition 21 of planning consent can be discharged.

5 BIBLIOGRAPHY

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6 FIGURES

APPENDIX A WRITTEN SCHEME OF INVESTIGATION

APPENDIX B

SITE SUMMARY DETAILS / OASIS REPORT FORM

Site name: New Road, Littleborough, Rochdale, Greater Manchester
Site code: NRL19
Grid Reference: NGR 392847 415876
Type: Watching Brief
Date and duration: 14/11/19 – 16/4/20 5 days
Area of Site: 0.9ha
Location of archive: The archive is currently held at OA, Mill 3, Moor Lane Mills, Moor Lane, Lancaster, LA1 1QD and will be deposited with GMAAS and the local HER in due course.

Summary of Results: Oxford Archaeology North were commissioned by Russell Homes to undertake a watching brief at the site of a housing development off New Rd (A58), Littleborough, Rochdale, Greater Manchester. The work took place over 5 days between 14/11/19 and 16/4/20 and was focused on an area measuring approximately 0.9ha located along the northeastern perimeter of the wider development. Due to miscommunication, a large amount of the topsoil strip was undertaken without OAN's knowledge and therefore without archaeological monitoring. OAN attempted to compensate for this oversight by arranging for the area to be cleared of stockpiled spoil and mechanically cleaned again. No archaeological remains were observed during the watching brief exercise.

Project Details

OASIS Number			
Project Name	New Road, Littleborough, Rochdale		
Start of Fieldwork	November 2019	End of Fieldwork	April 2020
Previous Work	DBA	Future Work	

Project Reference Codes

Site Code	L11102	Planning App. No.	15/00830/OUT; 19/00262/FUL; and 20/00607/FUL
HER Number		Related Numbers	
Prompt			
Development Type			
Place in Planning Process	Choose an item.		

Techniques used (tick all that apply)

- | | | |
|--|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Aerial Photography – interpretation | <input type="checkbox"/> Grab-sampling | <input type="checkbox"/> Remote Operated Vehicle Survey |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Aerial Photography - new | <input type="checkbox"/> Gravity-core | <input type="checkbox"/> Sample Trenches |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Annotated Sketch | <input type="checkbox"/> Laser Scanning | <input type="checkbox"/> Survey/Recording of Fabric/Structure |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Augering | <input type="checkbox"/> Measured Survey | <input type="checkbox"/> Targeted Trenches |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Dendrochronological Survey | <input type="checkbox"/> Metal Detectors | <input type="checkbox"/> Test Pits |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Documentary Search | <input type="checkbox"/> Phosphate Survey | <input type="checkbox"/> Topographic Survey |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Environmental Sampling | <input type="checkbox"/> Photogrammetric Survey | <input type="checkbox"/> Vibro-core |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fieldwalking | <input type="checkbox"/> Photographic Survey | <input type="checkbox"/> Visual Inspection (Initial Site Visit) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Geophysical Survey | <input type="checkbox"/> Rectified Photography | <input type="checkbox"/> Watching Brief |

Monument	Period	Object	Period
	Choose an item.		Choose an item.
	Choose an item.		Choose an item.
	Choose an item.		Choose an item.

Insert more lines as appropriate.

Project Location

County	Greater Manchester	Address (including Postcode) New Road, Littleborough, Rochdale, Greater Manchester
District	Rochdale	
Parish		
HER office	GMAAS	
Size of Study Area		
National Grid Ref	NGR 392847 415876	

Project Originators

Organisation	
Project Brief Originator	GMAAS
Project Design Originator	OA North
Project Manager	Adam Tinsley
Project Supervisor	Aidan Parker

Project Archives

	Location	ID
Physical Archive (Finds)	NA	
Digital Archive	OA North Office	
Paper Archive	OA North Office	

Physical Contents	Present?	Digital files associated with Finds	Paperwork associated with Finds
Animal Bones	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ceramics	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Environmental	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Glass	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Human Remains	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Industrial	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Leather	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Metal	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Stratigraphic		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Survey		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Textiles	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Wood	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Worked Bone	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Worked Stone/Lithic	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
None	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Digital Media

Database	<input type="checkbox"/>
GIS	<input type="checkbox"/>
Geophysics	<input type="checkbox"/>
Images (Digital photos)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Illustrations (Figures/Plates)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Moving Image	<input type="checkbox"/>
Spreadsheets	<input type="checkbox"/>
Survey	<input type="checkbox"/>
Text	<input type="checkbox"/>
Virtual Reality	<input type="checkbox"/>

Paper Media

Aerial Photos	<input type="checkbox"/>
Context Sheets	<input type="checkbox"/>
Correspondence	<input type="checkbox"/>
Diary	<input type="checkbox"/>
Drawing	<input type="checkbox"/>
Manuscript	<input type="checkbox"/>
Map	<input type="checkbox"/>
Matrices	<input type="checkbox"/>
Microfiche	<input type="checkbox"/>
Miscellaneous	<input type="checkbox"/>
Research/Notes	<input type="checkbox"/>
Photos (negatives/prints/slides)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Plans	<input type="checkbox"/>
Report	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sections	<input type="checkbox"/>
Survey	<input type="checkbox"/>

Further Comments



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