



Land to the rear of 4-14 Claybush Road, Ashwell

Archaeological Watching Brief Report

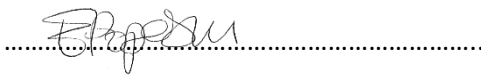
October 2020

Client: Croudace Homes

| | |
|--------------------------|----------------|
| Planning application no. | 17/01797/1 |
| Site code | XHTCRA19 |
| Event number | EHT8894 |
| Report number | 2456 |
| Project type | Watching Brief |
| NGR | TL 26780 39253 |



Client Name: Croudace Homes
Document Title: Land to the rear of 4-14 Claybush Road, Ashwell
Report No.: 2456
Grid Reference: TL 26780 39253
Planning Reference: 17/01797/1
Site Code: XHTCRA19
Event No.: EHT8894
Receiving Body: North Hertfordshire District Council Museum Service/Ashwell Museum
OASIS No.: oxfordar3-404868

Issue No: 1
Date: October 2020
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Land to the rear of 4-14 Claybush Road, Ashwell

Archaeological Watching Brief Report

Written by Tom Collie MA PCIfA

With illustrations by Severine Bezie BA MA

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Summary

Between 15th and 22nd July 2020, Oxford Archaeology conducted an archaeological watching brief for development occurring on land behind 4-14 Claybush Road, Ashwell. The work involved an examination of ground exposed after the excavation of top and subsoils and the monitoring of groundworks associated with the excavation of building foundations and service roads. No archaeological features or finds were identified.

Acknowledgements

Oxford Archaeology would like to thank Croudace Homes for commissioning this project. The project was managed for Oxford Archaeology by Louise Moan. The fieldwork was undertaken by Tom Collie. Thanks are also extended to the illustrator and editor.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Scope of work

- 1.1.1 Oxford Archaeology (OA) was commissioned by Croudace Homes to undertake archaeological monitoring on groundworks relating to the development of 1.8ha of land off Claybush Road, Ashwell (Fig. 1).
- 1.1.2 The work was undertaken as a condition of Planning Permission (planning ref. 17/01797/1). A specification was set by Simon Wood, Hertfordshire County Council's Historic Environment Advisor (HCC HEA). A Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) was produced by OA (Moan 2020) detailing the Local Authority's requirements for work necessary to inform the planning process/discharge the planning condition. This document outlines how OA implemented the specified requirements.

1.2 Location, topography and geology

- 1.2.1 The site is located on the southern side of the village of Ashwell. Situated within the District of North Hertfordshire, it is located c.7km south-east of Biggleswade and c.7.5km west of Royston.
- 1.2.2 Ashwell parish is located along a chalk belt forming part of the Chiltern Hills which runs from the south-west of England in a north-easterly direction to East Anglia. The village is located on a scarp of this chalk belt, on a spring line where the chalk of the hills meets the impermeable clay of the lowlands. Ashwell Springs can be found 500m to the north-east of the site, to the north of the High Street and west of Springhead where they form the source of the River Rhee.
- 1.2.3 The site is located on a north-facing slope, situated at a height of around 77m OD, falling to 70m OD to the north. The geology of the area is mapped as chalk, with deposits attributed to the Zig Zag Chalk Formation over most of the site, and Holywell Nodular Chalk Formation outcropping on the eastern and southern edges of the site.

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

- 1.3.1 The archaeological and historical background of the site has been set out in detail in a previous Heritage Impact Assessment (Bush 2016). A brief, summary, background is presented below and is accompanied with a map of selected local HER assets (Fig. 2).

Neolithic

- 1.3.2 A single cropmark (HER 2360) of a possible Neolithic long barrow is known of c.360m to the east of the Site. It consists of an east-west aligned sub-rectangular ditched enclosure with an entranceway to the north.

Bronze Age

- 1.3.3 There are an extensive number of Bronze Age burial mounds located to the south of Ashwell. Situated approximately 260m and 380m south of the site are the cropmark remains of two ring ditches (HER 4750 & 2379) that probably represent the ploughed-out remains of burial mounds.

Iron Age

- 1.3.4 The only recorded Iron Age activity within the vicinity of the site is Arbury Banks Scheduled Monument (SM number 1008981), which is situated 0.6km to the south-west. Arbury Banks is an Iron Age univallated hillfort. Measuring 290m by 245m, the defences consisted of a ditch with an internal bank. The ditch, although no longer visible as an earthwork survives as a buried feature and is visible on aerial photographs. The interior of the monument contains cropmark features, identified through aerial photography. These cropmarks consist of rectangular, square, and curvilinear enclosures, hut circles and pits which survive as sub-surface remains.

Roman

- 1.3.5 The closest known archaeological remains from this period are located approximately 160m north-east of the site and consist of a substantial ditch containing Roman pottery in its upper fills (HER 13707).
- 1.3.6 The site is located to the south of Ashwell Street (HER 4692) which is historically recorded as a Roman road. Branching off from Ashwell Street in a south-westerly direction is another trackway (HER 31086); the northern entrance to the site is located off this route. The track originally led from Ashwell Street to Newnham and then joined to the Roman road north of Baldock.

Anglo-Saxon

- 1.3.7 Ashwell is probably a Late Saxon planned town, with its original location believed to either be situated on the northern side of the present village, around the curving boundaries of Mill Street or possibly in the vicinity of Ashwell Bury.

Medieval

- 1.3.8 The closest known archaeological remains of this date are located at Ashwell Primary School, c.160m north of the site (HER 15270). Here, an archaeological watching brief identified two north-east to south-west aligned ditches of a medieval date. A pilgrim's badge dating to the first half of the 15th century (HER 4879) has also been found on land off the High Street (c.0.3km to the north-west of the site).

Post-medieval and modern

- 1.3.9 Records show that a windmill (HER 5979) used to stand within the proposed site boundary. Belonging to William Kitchener, it was in production from at least 1822 until around 1890. The mill first appears on Bryant's Map of 1822 and is last seen on the 1888 OS County Series. Other mills are also recorded close to the site. Located 150m to the north-east was Edward Fordham's post mill (HER 11356), which was also in production between approximately 1822 and 1890.
- 1.3.10 A number of lime kilns and chalk pits are also located in the vicinity. To the immediate north-west of the site are the remains of one such chalk pit and kiln (HER 11358) which dates to around 1840.

Trial trench evaluation

- 1.3.11 During October 2016 OA undertook a nine trench evaluation on the site (Fairbairn 2016). Fig. 3 shows the location of the evaluation trenches overlain on a plan of the proposed development. A north-northwest to south-southeast aligned palaeochannel was recorded across several of the trenches. Archaeological features comprised a ditch containing a sherd of Roman greyware pottery, an undated ditch and pit, a post-medieval ditch and a probable robber trench associated with the foundations of a post-medieval/early modern windmill known to have been located within the site.

2 WATCHING BRIEF AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Aims

- 2.1.1 The watching brief aimed to identify, investigate and record any archaeological features or deposits encountered during ground works.
- 2.1.2 Metal detecting was also be undertaken of both the excavated areas and spoil heaps to aid recovery of metal objects.

2.2 Methodology

- 2.2.1 The archaeological strategy involved monitoring groundworks related to the development, including all ground reduction associated with the formation of forthcoming roads for the development as well as foundation trenches for the proposed housing.
- 2.2.2 Machine excavation was carried out by the client using a 13-tonne 360° tracked mechanical excavator with a 1.8m toothless ditching bucket.
- 2.2.3 The excavation took place under the supervision of a suitably qualified and experienced archaeologist.
- 2.2.4 The excavated area and spoil heaps were scanned with a metal detector by the on-site archaeologist. The metal detector was not set to discriminate against iron.
- 2.2.5 All excavation works were photographed, and an appropriate written record made. General working shots were taken throughout the monitoring to provide a detailed account of work undertaken.
- 2.2.6 Selected photographs of the groundworks are reproduced here as Plates 1-7. The location/viewpoint of each of these photographs is shown on Fig. 3, overlain on a plan of the layout of the proposed development layout and the evaluation trenching. The Plates include shots of the excavation of the service road and trench (Plate 1), terracing of the southern part of the site (Plates 2 and 3), general views of the groundworks from the northern boundary of the site (Plates 4-6) and excavation of building foundations (Plate 7).

3 RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

3.1 Results

- 3.1.1 The soil sequence across the site was fairly uniform. The natural geology of grey/white chalk was overlain by a mid-grey brown sandy silt subsoil, which in turn was overlain by topsoil consisting of dark friable sandy silt.
- 3.1.2 Ground conditions throughout the watching brief were generally good, and the site remained dry throughout. No archaeological features were recorded during the monitoring visits and it is thought that the extremely pale underlying natural geology would have enabled any features to be easily identified.
- 3.1.3 Service road foundations were deep, typically measuring between 1-1.4m, and extended way below the archaeological horizon (see Plate 1). Natural geological deposits were present from 0.3m below the topsoil surface and consisted throughout of pale white chalk. Strip foundations for the housing development, excavated to a depth of approximately 1m, were cut into the same geological deposits (Plate 7).

3.2 Conclusion

- 3.2.1 No archaeological features or finds were uncovered during the excavation of the service road or strip foundations. No archaeological artefacts were recovered. The lack of archaeological remains may partly reflect the nature of the groundworks, which took place in areas where archaeological remains were not identified during the evaluation.

APPENDIX A HERTFORDSHIRE HER SUMMARY SHEET

| | | |
|--|----------------|----------------------------------|
| Site name and address: Land to the rear of 4-14 Claybush Road, Ashwell, Hertfordshire SG7 5RA | | |
| County: Hertfordshire | | District: North Hertfordshire |
| Village/Town: Ashwell | | Parish: Ashwell |
| Planning application reference: 17/01797/1 | | |
| HER Enquiry reference: | | |
| Nature of application: Residential | | |
| Present land use: Arable | | |
| Size of application area: 1.8ha | | Size of area investigated: 1.8ha |
| NGR (to 8 figures minimum): TL 26780 39253 | | |
| Site code (if applicable): XHTCRA19 | | |
| Contractor: Oxford Archaeology | | |
| Type of work: Watching brief | | |
| Date of work: | Start: 15/7/20 | Finish: 22/7/20 |
| Location of finds & site archive/Curating Museum: North Herts District Council Museum Service / Ashwell Museum | | |
| Related HER Nos: EHT8156 | | Periods represented: N/A |
| Relevant previous summaries/reports Fairbairn, J. 2016 <i>An archaeological evaluation on land west of Claybush Road, Ashwell</i> . OA Report No. 2007 | | |
| Summary of fieldwork results: Between 15th and 22nd July 2020, Oxford Archaeology conducted an archaeological watching brief for development occurring on land behind 4-14 Claybush Road, Ashwell. The work involved an examination of ground exposed after the excavation of top and subsoils and the monitoring of groundworks associated with the excavation of building foundations and service roads. No archaeological features or finds were identified. | | |
| Author of summary: L. Moan | | Date of summary: 8/6/21 |

APPENDIX B

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- | | | |
|---------------|------|--|
| Bush, L. | 2016 | <i>Land West of No. 1 Claybush Road, Ashwell, Hertfordshire. Heritage Impact Assessment.</i> OA Report No. 1939. Unpublished |
| Fairbairn, J. | 2016 | <i>An Archaeological Evaluation on Lane West of Claybush Road, Ashwell.</i> OA Report No. 2007. Unpublished |
| Moan, L. | 2020 | <i>Land to the Rear of 4-14 Claybush Road, Ashwell. Written Scheme of Investigation.</i> Unpublished |

APPENDIX C OASIS REPORT FORM

Project Details

| | | | |
|--------------------|---|------------------|----------|
| OASIS Number | oxfordar3-404868 | | |
| Project Name | Land to the rear of 4-14 Claybush Road, Ashwell | | |
| Start of Fieldwork | 15.07.20 | End of Fieldwork | 22.07.20 |
| Previous Work | Yes | Future Work | No |

Project Reference Codes

| | | | |
|------------|----------|-------------------|------------------|
| Site Code | XHTCRA19 | Planning App. No. | 17/01797/1 |
| HER Number | EHT8894 | Related Numbers | oxfordar3-267652 |

| | |
|---------------------------|---|
| Prompt | HCC HEA |
| Development Type | Residential |
| Place in Planning Process | After full determination (eg. As a condition) |

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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> Watching Brief |

| Monument | Period | Object | Period |
|----------|--------|--------|--------|
| None | None | None | None |

Project Location

| | | |
|--------------------|---------------------|--|
| County | Hertfordshire | Address (including Postcode) Claybush Road Ashwell Herts SG7 5RA |
| District | North Hertfordshire | |
| Parish | Ashwell | |
| HER office | Hertfordshire CC | |
| Size of Study Area | 1.8ha | |
| National Grid Ref | TL 26780 39253 | |

Project Originators

| | |
|---------------------------|--------------------|
| Organisation | Oxford Archaeology |
| Project Brief Originator | HCC HEA |
| Project Design Originator | Louise Moan |
| Project Manager | Louise Moan |
| Project Supervisor | Tom Collie |

Project Archives

| | Location | ID |
|--------------------------|-----------------------|----------|
| Physical Archive (Finds) | N/a | N/A |
| Digital Archive | Oxford Archaeology | XHTCRA19 |
| Paper Archive | NHDCMS/Ashwell Museum | EHT8894 |

| Physical Contents | Present? | Digital files associated with Finds | Paperwork associated with Finds |
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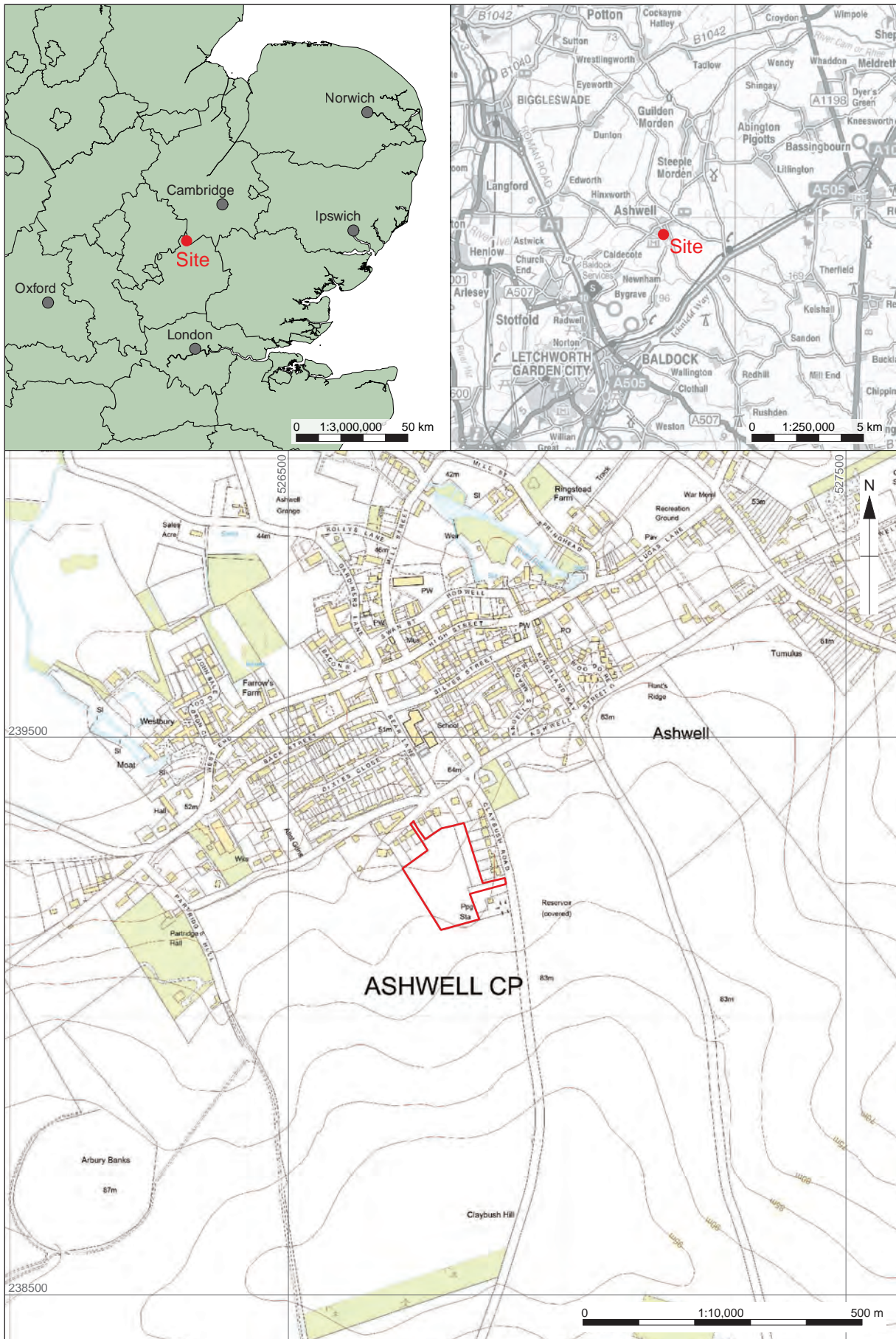
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Paper Media

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| 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Sections | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Survey | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Further Comments



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Figure 1: Site location showing development area outlined (red)

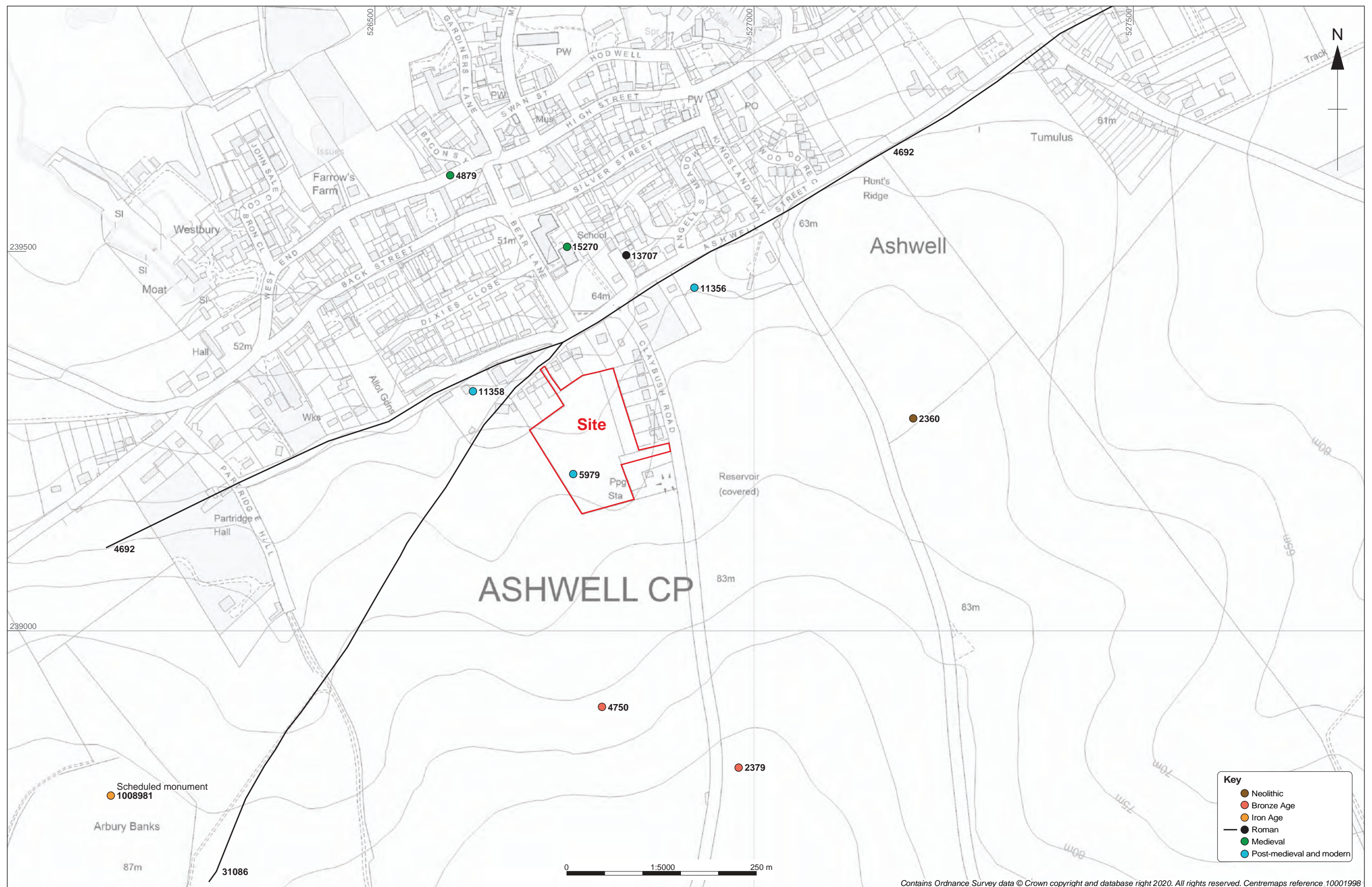


Figure 2: HER plots and monuments



Figure 3: Plan of proposed development with previous evaluation trenches and location of Plates 1-7



Plate 1: Excavation of service road and service trench, looking north east



Plate 2: Terraced excavation in preparation for strip trenching cut deeply into natural geological chalk, looking north northwest



Plate 3: Chalk terracing, looking southwest



Plate 4: Site overview, looking north



Plate 5: Site overview, looking northwest



Plate 6: Site overview, looking northeast



Plate 7: Strip foundations of house, clearly excavated below archaeological horizon into the natural geological chalk, looking east northeast



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