Land at Bennell Farm, West Street, Comberton (within Toft parish), Cambridgeshire

Desk-Based Assessment

Client: Beechwood Estates and Development

OA East Report No: 1776
OASIS No: oxfordar3-212141
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May 2015
Land at Bennell Farm, West Street, Comberton (within Toft parish), Cambridgeshire

Desk-Based Assessment

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Report Number: 1776
Site Name: Bennell Farm, Comberton (Toft parish)
HER Event No: N/A
Date of Works: May 2015
Client Name: Beechwood Estates and Development
Client Ref: N/A
Grid Ref: TL 37470 56168
Site Code: TOFBEN15
Finance Code: COMBEN15
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Position: Project Officer
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Position: Senior Project Manager
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Summary

In May 2015 Oxford Archaeology East (OA East) were commissioned by Pegasus Group on behalf of Beechwood Estates and Development to undertake a desk-based assessment in advance of a proposed planning application for the construction of 90 houses, a football pitch, changing facilities and a parking area on 6.27ha of land just north-west of Comberton village in Toft parish. The land presently comprises a pasture field for Bennell Farm.

A 1km-radius search of the area around the proposed development area (PDA) was carried using records from Cambridgeshire HER, in addition cartographic and historic sources were researched at the Cambridgeshire Records Office. The closest records for prehistoric to Romano-British remains (including undated cropmarks) lie at a distance of more than 200m from the site. No Anglo-Saxon remains were found within the search area.

It is possible that medieval occupational remains extended up to the PDA on its eastern border as closes were recorded here on the pre-Enclosure (1812) map and these may represent a continuation of settlement from Comberton village into Toft parish. This 1812 map shows the PDA as part of a large arable field but given the proximity of likely occupation, it is possible that there had been houses within the PDA fronting Comberton Road in the medieval period and that these were later abandoned and the site reverted to agriculture. It is likely the rear part of the site (and possibly the whole site) had been used as fields in the medieval period, given the presence of remnants of north to south furrows recorded 200m to the north and south of the PDA. Maps for the last 200 years show the site being used as field(s).
1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Planning Background

1.1.1 The Pegasus Group have commissioned Oxford Archaeology East to produce a desk-based assessment of land at Bennell Farm, Comberton (Toft parish), Cambridgeshire (TL 37470 56168; Fig. 1). The aim of this assessment is to attempt to determine the likely nature and extent of any archaeological remains present on the proposed development area (PDA).

1.1.2 This document is entirely based on desk-based research and does not include any data from physical investigation at the PDA.

1.1.3 This desk-based assessment has been prepared in advance of a proposed planning application for the construction of 90 houses, a football pitch, changing facilities and a parking area within a 6.27ha (15.49 acre) area.

1.2 Location, Geology and Topography

1.2.1 The PDA is a large field located directly to the west of the present village of Comberton and although is currently the second field outside the village lit actually lies within Toft parish. It is c.1km to the east of Toft village and is directly to the north of the main road (B1046) from Toft to Comberton and this road then continues on to Cambridge, c.7km to the north-east. This road becomes West Street directly to the east of the site and this location is significant as this street is on a spit of river gravel which might well have attracted primary settlement (RCHM 1968, 48). West Street was of some importance, being the main route between Cambridge and Oxford until the late 18th century (Taylor 1997, 32).

1.2.2 The bedrock geology of the PDA is clay of the Gault Formation, which is overlain by Drift geology comprising Till: chalky, sandy, stony clay of the Lowestoft Formation. Gault mudstone lies directly to the south of the PDA and River Terrace Deposits to the east (British Geological Survey (BGS) 2001). The PDA is located on flat ground and is currently used as an open pasture field (Plates 1 and 2).

1.3 Acknowledgements

1.3.1 The author would like to thank Pegasus Group for commissioning the report and Beechwood Estates and Development for funding the project. The project was managed by Stephen Macaulay. Sarah Bultz of Cambridgeshire County Council supplied the CHER information. Cambridgeshire Records Office helped in sourcing historic maps and records for the parish. Mike Coles and Terry Dymott of Cambridge Archaeology Field Group (CAFG) kindly supplied data from their group's fieldwalking around Bennell Farm in 2010.
2 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL SOURCES

2.1 Historical Sources

2.1.1 Toft has been influenced by its position on two north to south and two east to west routes (Taylor 1997, 105). The north to south routes consist of Armshold Lane, an ancient route from Arrington Bridge through Hardwick and the Cambridge St Neots Road (ibid, 105-6). The east to west routes comprise Lot Way, which is likely to be Roman in date, and Millers Way (ibid, 106). It is worth noting that Lot Way links the three churches of Comberton, Toft and Caldecote (RCHM 1968, 207).

2.1.2 The ancient parish of Toft originally consisted of 2723 acres and it stretched all the way north to the main Cambridge-St Neots road and included Hardwick (Duncombe 1973, 127). In the Domesday book Hardwick (1438 acres) was assessed with Toft (1285 acres).

2.1.3 Toft manor in the Late Saxon period appears to have originally been part of the royal demesne (Oosthuizen 2006, 119-120). Oosthuizen suggests this as Toft is recorded as having paid one week’s food farm to the Abbey of Ely in 1035 and all food farms are believed to have been derived from feorm (tax paid in food) originally to the king. Toft's former link to kings can also be seen in that King Edgar founded a Benedictine monastery in Toft in AD 973. Another land charter has survived in an early will which records that the monk Goding gave the Abbot of Ely a hide of land in Toft (Hart 1966, 222).

2.1.4 Oosthuizen (2006, 130) uses Toft as an example of the 'accelerating process of fission of bookland estates by grant or lease from the 10th century onwards'. Ten hides at Toft/Hardwick were granted to Wulfwin at a date before 975, when they were given to the Abbey of Ely (ibid, 130). The abbey still held the two parishes as a single estate between 1029 and 1035 when they paid a week's feorm by Abbot Leofsig. By 1066 Ely Abbey had sold or granted away nearly all this land in Toft. Toft was assessed in Edward the Confessor's time at 8 hides and 40 acres, of which just over 3 hides were owned by Ely, Eddeva the fair held 2 hides, 1 virgate and 8 acres (from Ely Abbey since 1035), a sokeman of King Edward held 1 hide and 4 acres and six of the abbot's sokemen held 1½ hides and 6 acres (Duncombe 1973, 129). Hardwick continued to form most of the Abbey's demesne holdings with only Hardwick confirmed to the abbey between 1042 and 1057 (Oosthuizen 2006, 60 and 130).

2.1.5 Eddeva's estates were granted after the Conquest to Count Alan (later owned by Barnwell Priory), with 1½ hides and 10a to Picot (Leventhorpe manor), although Duncombe could not trace this manor after 1684. Erchenger, the king's baker, held a hide in 1086: this land was later owned by Burdeleys manor in Comberton.

2.1.6 The 1086 Domesday Survey records the settlement as Toft(e), which is translated as being 'small homestead' (Reaney 1973, 164). According to Lewis and Pryor (2013, 14) this is an old Viking word meaning "curtilage" or "homestead" or "site of a house or farm". Toft is in the Longstow hundred (whilst Comberton is in the Wetherley hundred). In the 13th century the residences of 11 people and the Benedictine monastery established by King Edgar in the northern part of the former Toft parish were separated to become the new parish of Hardwick.

2.1.7 The earliest settlement within the present village area is likely to have been in the two small areas on either side of the crossing of the Bourn Brook (Taylor 1997, 106).
2.1.8 Research by Sue Oosthuizen on the parishes of Bourn Valley (including Toft) has identified an extended system of medieval field boundaries and trackways aligned north-east to south-west covering an area of around 72km², many of which extend for over a kilometre across the valley (Oosthuizen 2003, fig. 4). Oosthuizen suggests this was evidence for planned medieval settlement and organisation of the area that persisted through time and has left its mark on the present layout of the village and surrounding area. The regular grid pattern of the village itself reveals its origins in colonisation of the arable land (Oosthuizen 2006, 60-1), which lay in geometric divisions, framed by prehistoric alignments running from south-west to north-east, intersected at right angles by the long, narrow commons of the 8th century proto-common field.

2.1.9 The population of Toft parish comprised 21 peasants and 2 slaves in 1086 (Williams and Martin 2003, 532 and 545); around 50 houses in 1279; 29 taxpayers in 1327; 76 in 1377; 33 in 1525 and 14 families in 1563 (Duncombe 1973, 128). In the post-medieval period this grew to around 50 families in c.1630, 86 adults by 1676 and 173 people by 1793. The population doubled to 380 by 1851, dipped in the later 19th century and early 20th century down to as low as c.200, but rose to 332 in 1961 (ibid, 128). It has grown considerably since the mid-20th century to stand at 583 individuals in 2001 living in 219 households (Lewis and Pryor 2013, 8). Taylor in analysing these population figures says the decline in Toft happened early and noted that in 1377 empty tenements were recorded (Taylor 1997, 106).

2.1.10 In the early 13th century two open fields (east and west) were recorded and a third in 1700 and these survived to Enclosure in 1815 (ibid, 132). In the medieval period the arable lands within the two fields were divided fairly uniformly between them with almost equal division between the campo australi and the campo boreali (Oosthuizen 2006, 46-7).

Bennell Farm

2.1.11 The land comprising the present Bennell Farm within which the PDA lies can be directly traced from the Enclosure awards of 1815 and this history has been recorded by the Toft Historical Society (Johnson and Lumley nd). The section below utilises this online report. The land was part of the estate of the Reverend Samuel Smith as a result of the Enclosure Act, and on whose death in 1841 and conjoined with other lands of the estate including Great Priory Close, was purchased by the Sons of the Clergy. Bennell farmhouse itself dates from before 1892, at which time it was referred to as 'Top Lodge' and later 'Bennell Lodge'.

2.1.12 Bennell Farm was purchased in 1922(?) by Richard Claude Tebbit. Between 1919 and 1924 brothers Claude and Bernard (Bert) Tebbit ran the Old Farm, part of Orchard Farm, and Bennell Farm in partnership. Derrick Tebbit sold Bennell Farm to Willy Stephens in 1973, a racehorse trainer. Clifford Tebbit acquired the farm in 1983, by which time the older farm buildings were in a poor state. In 1985 he sold on the farmhouse and farm buildings, with 25 acres, to Robert Arnold. In 1994 the farmstead was divided and the stabling converted to form 13 lettable units. The farmland, at one time comprising 310 acres, is now contract farmed.

2.2 The Historic Environment Record (HER) (Fig. 2)

2.2.1 The standard collation of all known archaeological sites and spot finds within Cambridgeshire comes from the Cambridgeshire Historic Environment Record
(CHER). The HER database was searched for all known entries within an approximate 1km radius of the PDA.

2.2.2 In the 1km search around the PDA, just over half of the area lies within Toft parish and comprises just four records (03337, 09569, MCB19601 and MCB20133). The remainder are in Comberton parish and this contains the vast majority of the records. None of the HER records lie within the PDA, with all records being at least 250m away.

Prehistoric (Bronze Age dates from c.2000-1000BC)

2.2.3 A possible Bronze Age round barrow was recorded on Ordnance Survey 1" map. It was subsequently excavated but apparently nothing was found (Gentleman's Magazine Library 1887). Air photographs suggest there may be a barrow nearby at TL 3766 5552 (CHER 03317) and was probably the barrow recorded by Walker (1910, 171) c.700m to the south of the PDA.

Undated enclosures

2.2.4 Three undated cropmark enclosures have been recorded within 1km of the PDA. An undated cropmark enclosure (CHER 09569) is c.1km to the south of the PDA, while undated rectangular and sub-circular cropmark enclosures are recorded (CHER MCB20133) 1km to the north-west. MCB19601 (TL 3724 5648) consists of a group of rectilinear and square enclosures identified on Google Earth directly to the north of Bennell Farm, more than 200m to the north of the PDA.

2.2.5 These cropmark enclosures are likely on morphological grounds to be prehistoric in date. Two of the cropmark enclosures (MCB19601 and MCB20133) were fieldwalked by CAFG and produced no pre-modern pottery.

Roman (AD 43–c.410)

2.2.6 Only one definite Roman site lies within 1km of the PDA. CAFG found a moderate scatter of 110 Roman pottery sherds dating to the 2nd to 4th century in a c.100 by 50m area c.1km to the north of the PDA centred on TL 3778 5707 (this does not have an CHER number).

2.2.7 More than 1km to the south-east a Roman villa was found in 1842 between Comberton church and the Bourn Brook (Taylor 1997, 31; not illustrated). More than 1km to the west seven skeletons with part of a Roman lamp and a metal plate were found by labourers digging gravel in 1851 between the church in Toft and the Bourn Brook, near the Lot Way (not illustrated)

Medieval (AD 1066–1540)

2.2.8 Medieval remains within 1km of the PDA were found only in Comberton parish. Two manors are recorded at CHERs 01101 and 01102, c.0.8km to the north-east and south-east respectively. A village cross lay c.0.7km to the east (CHER 03415) and a few Saxo-Norman pottery sherds (CHER 07761) were found 0.5km to the south-east.

2.2.9 Ridge and furrow aligned north to south is recorded c.200m away to the north and to the south of the PDA and ridge and furrow aligned east to west has been identified 0.5km to the north-west. In Comberton parish, ridge and furrow was recorded abutting the southern section of the Comberton Road, 100m to the south-east of the PDA.

Post-medieval and modern (1540 to present day)

2.2.10 A windmill is recorded c.400m to the west (CHER 03337) of the PDA on both the 1815 Enclosure map and the 1845 map. Many post-medieval listed buildings lie along the four roads which make up Comberton village to the east. The nearest two listed
buildings (DCB 4922 and 6072) lie more than 250m to the east of the PDA and are houses which date from the early 17th century and c.1660 respectively.

2.3 Cartographic Evidence

2.3.1 The map evidence for the PDA is unfortunately poor with the earliest dating from the early 19th century:

1812 Pre-Enclosure (Fig. 3)

2.3.2 The earliest map shows that the PDA was largely part of a field owned by John Bennett and partly within part of a common (land fronting onto Comberton Road) and a narrow routeway from this common to Solder's Way to the north. The western and eastern boundaries of the field have not changed in the last 200 years. The whole area of the field (including common etc.) was recorded as totalling 18a/2p/10r.

1812 Enclosure map (Fig. 4) and award

2.3.3 The Enclosure map shows that the 'only' change for the PDA was the removal of the common and routeway through it. The field is still owned by John Bennett and the size given as 18a/2p/10r. Details for Enclosure survive in a copy of the award (CRO R56/20/13/1). The award locates the PDA in relation to surrounding fields, but it also states that the boundaries of the field were fenced off completely, including along Comberton Road and that John Bennett had to maintain these. To the west of the PDA there is a public drain. Three closes (61-59) are shown to the east of the PDA. These empty closes would presumably once have originally held houses fronting Comberton Road, and may have marked a continuation of the Comberton settlement beyond the parish boundary. A corresponding close is recorded on the south side of Comberton Road. A routeway called Moor Way Lane (see below) was aligned north to south to the east of the closes and beyond this lane was the parish boundary with Comberton.

1846 Tithe map (Fig. 5) and apportionment award

2.3.4 The only change to the PDA is that it has been divided onto two (plots 169 and 170) by a north to south boundary. Allotment 169 is described in the award as belonging to 'himself', was an arable field 7a/0p/2r in size and charged yearly £2 4 shillings and 5 pence to the rector. Allotment 170 was described in the award as belonging to 'himself', was an arable field 8a/1p/39r in size and charged yearly £2 10 shillings to the rector. The three former closes to the east seem to have amalgamated with two buildings in the centre.

1887 1st Edition Ordnance Survey map (Fig. 6)

2.3.5 The PDA is part of a large field 22.252 acres in size. Bennell Lodge has been built some time between the Tithe map and this 1st Edition OS map.

1902-1938 2nd to 4th Edition Ordnance Survey map (Fig. 7)

2.3.6 The field boundaries of the PDA did not change from the 1902 2nd Edition Ordnance Survey map to the 1938 4th Edition, with the latter map being the only one illustrated.

2.4 Earthworks

2.4.1 No earthworks lie within the PDA.

2.5 Archaeological Excavations and Surveys

2.5.1 Only one excavation has been carried out with 1km of the PDA and this took place in the 19th century at CHER 03317 (recorded above). CAFG have carried out extensive fieldwalking over 10 mornings starting in September 2010 to the west, south and north
of the PDA; all these areas are more than 0.1km away (Fig. 2). Only a single Roman site was found in this survey, nearly 1km to the north (see above), with all other areas largely sterile of pre-modern artefacts with only occasional isolated single Roman and medieval sherds recovered. There were no 'manure' scatters of artefacts found, which possibly suggests there had been no settlements near the area fieldwalked. The PDA itself was under grass and was therefore not fieldwalked.
3 DEPOSIT MAPPING

3.1 General
3.1.1 This section aims to broadly predict the existence of archaeological remains within the development area based on the mapping of the distribution of all known heritage assets outlined in the previous sections.

3.2 Prehistoric and Roman
3.2.1 A single prehistoric barrow is postulated 0.7km to the south of the site and a single Roman site 1km to the north. The only other probable prehistoric and/or Roman sites comprise three areas of undated cropmarks with the nearest more than 200m to the north. Fieldwalking by CAFG took place at least 0.1km away and apart from isolated single sherds no other pre-modern artefacts were found. The site is on Drift Geology comprising Till, which makes it less likely that the PDA was occupied in this period as settlement in the prehistoric and Early Roman periods tended to be on other type of geologies.

3.2.2 There is a low possibility of finding prehistoric or Roman remains within the PDA.

3.3 Saxon
3.3.1 No Early or Middle Saxon remains have been found within the 1km of the PDA. Settlements of this period mostly comprise small farmsteads scattered across the landscape and these were nearly always located adjacent to rivers or streams. The PDA is well away from rivers and streams.

3.3.2 There is low possibility of finding Early to Middle Saxon remains within the PDA.

3.4 Middle/Late Saxon to modern
3.4.1 At some stage in the Middle or Late Saxon periods the Saxon farmsteads in Toft parish would probably have nucleated to the present village. The PDA is well away from the nucleated centres of Comberton and Toft suggesting that later Saxon remains are unlikely to be within the site.

3.4.2 The 1812 pre-Enclosure and Enclosure maps record regular width closes directly to the east of the PDA: three on the northern side of Comberton Road and one on the southern side. These closes look distinctly like they once contained houses fronting onto the Comberton Road and were presumably an extension of Comberton village along the road frontage, continuing just into Toft parish. These closes are possibly medieval in date. It is perhaps significant that ridge and furrow was recorded abutting the southern section of the Comberton Road to the west of this close. Presumably the Comberton settlement declined in size after the period of the Black Death and some areas reverted to agriculture. Toft village (only 1km away) was clearly similarly affected with earthworks of former house platforms still surviving presumably linked to empty tenements recorded in 1377 (see Section 2.1.9).

3.4.3 Unlike the adjacent closes, the PDA itself was recorded as a moderate sized field on these 1812 maps which may mean the site was either just outside the medieval (and post-medieval) settlement or had been part of it and then reverted back to agriculture at a later date. All maps from 1812 onwards show the PDA as comprising fields.

3.4.4 There is therefore a low or low to medium possibility of medieval occupational remains particularly along the frontage within the PDA and low possibility for early post-medieval remains.
3.5 Rating

3.5.1 Based on the description of known finds and sites within the study area, as defined in the previous sections, a rating of low, moderate or high can be predicted for the survival of further remains within the Site.

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*Table 1: Predicted rating for archaeological remains within the Site*
4 Degree of Survival

4.1 General

4.1.1 This section broadly assesses the degree of likely survival of any archaeological remains in the site. It has not been possible to provide a detailed predictive deposit model as there have been no site investigation reports and there are no recorded finds from the site, therefore the following is intended as a guide only.

4.1.2 All map evidence seems to suggest the site has only been used for agriculture (both arable and pasture) in modern times. There is no evidence of quarrying within the site and no structures seem to have been built within it. The site visit on 24th May shows that hedges have been planted around the boundary of the site including along Comberton Road. These hedges must be relatively modern as the field was recorded in the 1815 Enclosure Awards document as being fenced off. Over the last 20 or so years trees have recently been planted within parts of the site, both isolated and forming a couple of small clumps (see Plates 1 and 2).
5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

5.1 General
5.1.1 The object of this desk-based assessment was to assess the archaeological potential of the proposed development site by drawing together all accessible documentary, cartographic and archaeological evidence from the surrounding area.

5.1.2 There is low potential for prehistoric, Roman and Saxon archaeological features within the development area, although there is a possibility that medieval occupational remains may be present close to Comberton Road. The 1812 pre-Enclosure map records closes continuing from Comberton village into Toft parish up to the PDA on its eastern side, although the site itself is recorded as being part of an arable field. Therefore it is uncertain if the PDA was always fields in the medieval and post-medieval times or whether there was settlement within the site and then it reverted to fields at a later date. All subsequent maps record the site as being part of fields.

5.1.3 It may be important to note that the site is currently pasture and that archaeological remains, should they be present, may have not been detected as a result of no below ground disturbance (e.g. as a result of plough) in recent years.

6 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MANAGING ARCHAEOLOGICAL RISK

6.1 Summary
6.1.1 The nature of the nearby known archaeological remains, will potentially require a programme of archaeological investigation (e.g. trial trench evaluation) to be carried out as a planning condition. Should significant archaeological remains be encountered at this stage, then mitigation (preservation by record) is the most likely outcome required by the Local Planing Authority, in advance of the development.
APPENDIX A. BIBLIOGRAPHY


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APPENDIX B. OASIS REPORT FORM

All fields are required unless they are not applicable.

**Project Details**

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**Monument Types & Period**

List feature types using the **NMR Monument Type Thesaurus** together with their respective periods. If no features were found, please state “none”.

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<tr>
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**Project Location**

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<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>Site Address (including postcode if possible)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Cambridgeshire</td>
<td>Bennell Farm Comberton Road Comberton</td>
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<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Parish</th>
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<tr>
<td>South Cambridgeshire</td>
<td>Toft</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HER</th>
<th>Study Area</th>
<th>National Grid Reference</th>
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<tr>
<td>Cambridgeshire</td>
<td>1 sq km</td>
<td>TL 37470 56168</td>
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# Project Originators

<p>| | |</p>
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<tr>
<td>Organisation</td>
<td>OA EAST</td>
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<tr>
<td>Project Brief Originator</td>
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<tr>
<td>Project Design Originator</td>
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<tr>
<td>Project Manager</td>
<td>Stephen Macaulay</td>
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<tr>
<td>Supervisor</td>
<td>Rob Atkins</td>
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## Project Archives

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<th>Digital Archive</th>
<th>Paper Archive</th>
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## Archive Contents/Media

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<th>Physical Contents</th>
<th>Digital Contents</th>
<th>Paper Contents</th>
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### Digital Media

- Database
- GIS
- Geophysics
- Images
- Illustrations
- Moving Image
- Spreadsheets
- Survey
- Text
- Virtual Reality

### Paper Media

- Aerial Photos
- Context Sheet
- Correspondence
- Diary
- Drawing
- Manuscript
- Map
- Matrices
- Microfilm
- Misc.
- Research/Notes
- Photos
- Plans
- Report
- Sections
- Survey

## Notes:
Figure 1: Site location map showing proposed development area outlined red
Figure 2: Selected CHER records within 1km of development area
Figure 3: 1812 pre-Enclosure map (CRO 124/P80)
Figure 4: 1812 Enclosure map (CRO R86/6)
Figure 5: 1846 Tithe map (CRO P/157/27/1)
Figure 6: 1887 1st Edition OS map 46.7 1:2500 scale
Figure 7: 1938 4th Edition OS map 46.7 1:2500 scale
Plate 1: Site, looking east from gate entranceway on Comberton Road

Plate 2: Site, looking west from gate entranceway on Comberton Road