



Application for the release of funds for the analysis and production of an archive summary report for human remains recovered from Heathley Chase, Stantonbury, Milton Keynes

1: The circumstances of the investigation

The Taylor Wimpey (South Midlands) housing development at Heathley Chase, Wolverton Road, Stantonbury, Milton Keynes is situated within an archaeologically sensitive part of Milton Keynes. The surrounding area, particularly northwards in the valley of the River Great Ouse, has produced extensive evidence for Roman and medieval settlement. The current development was subject to an archaeological planning condition, under PPG16.

The development area had been subject to three episodes of archaeological evaluation: in 1991, part of it was trial trenched by the Oxford Archaeological Unit in connection with an earlier proposed development; in 2004 the site was included in a wider, non-intrusive study carried out by Albion Archaeology as part of the Environmental Statement for the present development proposal; and in April 2007 Albion Archaeology undertook an archaeological field evaluation by trial trenching.

The most significant discoveries were two field boundary ditches, a drainage gully and a shallow depression that were dated to the mid-late Iron Age. However, the overall paucity of artefacts and occupational debris suggested that these remains were not located in the immediate vicinity of a domestic settlement and the planning condition was discharged.

During construction works, in early 2012, unexpected human remains were discovered. The remains were subject to forensic investigation, which judged that the remains were of “ancient origin and not of forensic interest”. Following consultation with the Milton Keynes Council Archaeological Officer, Albion Archaeology was commissioned by Taylor Wimpey South Midlands to carry out an emergency area excavation and watching brief. All work was carried out in accordance with an agreed written scheme of investigation (Albion, 2012 *Heathley Chase, Wolverton Road, Milton Keynes: Written Scheme of Investigation for Archaeological Excavation and Watching Brief*). The fieldwork concluded in February 2012.

2: The outcome, including an assessment of importance:

A total of 44 contexts were identified: 12 related to deposits of human skeletal material; 15 related to layers; 3 to stone deposits; 6 to ‘cut’ features; and 7 to ‘fill’ deposits. A total of 32.2kg of human bone was recovered, in addition to 52 fragments (477g) of animal bone, mainly cattle skull and vertebra fragments. Six worked flints, including three flakes, one bladelet and a single core were also recovered. The core is typologically dated to the late Mesolithic/early Neolithic period.

The majority of the human remains were disarticulated and had been disturbed by ploughing and modern services. However, in places, the remains appeared to have been protected by in-situ placed stones (see Fig. 1 and 2 below). The material recovered from these contexts appeared to suggest the deposition of multiple



individuals. It is likely the remains recorded are of early prehistoric date and have been recovered from a highly truncated burial monument. The communal nature of the burials and their placement within a monument is highly suggestive of an early Neolithic date. This provisional interpretation is supported by the association of the typologically dated flint core.



Figures 1 & 2: The human remains and placed stones under excavation

Well dated and recently excavated early prehistoric monuments are rare within the Milton Keynes and Buckinghamshire area. Although better preserved examples, such as Whiteleaf Hill do exist, the remains unearthed at Heathley Chase are still of considerable significance within the county. A recent resource assessment of the Neolithic to Early Bronze Age in Buckinghamshire (http://www.buckscc.gov.uk/assets/content/bcc/docs/archaeology/A_ST_Bucks_4_Ne_o-EBA_Bucks_resource_assessment_final.pdf, accessed 18/04/2012) notes only 4 long barrows, 1 oval barrow, and 17 burials as being listed in the HER. Rapid assessment of the site records suggest that, although highly truncated, the monument does not easily fit into either the chambered tomb, long or oval barrow typology of monuments. The Solent Thames Research framework (http://thehumanjourney.net/pdf_store/sthames/phase3/Research%20Agendas/Neolithic%20and%20Early%20Bronze%20A%20ge%20Research%20Agenda.pdf, accessed 18/04/2012) states that: “A much better understanding is needed of date range of the very varied burial monuments of the 4th millennium”. In this light the record of the investigation is likely to be of significant regional importance. The human remains have value as a resource for early prehistoric population studies and potential evidence for mortuary practices, such as excarnation, which would provide a greater understanding of the function of the monument itself.

3: The justification for the expenditure

Taylor Wimpey South Midlands have fulfilled all aspects of the archaeological planning condition that was imposed on the development. In addition, they have funded the fieldwork to ensure the investigation and safe recovery of the human remains. They are unable to fund any further work, having fulfilled their statutory and planning obligations. Nonetheless, the human remains that have been recovered



are likely to be of regional importance and, as such, need to be accessible for future research.

4: Proposals for further analysis and publication with appropriate justifications and costings

It is proposed that two AMS radiocarbon dates should be obtained from the skeletal material and that an archive report, that quantifies the remains and summarises the context of the findings, should be written. The material (skeletal, artefactual, site records and summary report) will then be deposited with Buckinghamshire County Museum. A detailed breakdown of the proposed tasks and associated costs are set out below:

| Project Stage | Task | Item | Unit | Days/Quantity | Cost per unit | Item total | |
|-------------------------|--------------------------|------|------|---------------|---------------|------------------|------------------|
| Assessment of finds | Other artefacts | FO | 1 | 0.25 | 190.00 | 47.50 | |
| | C14 dating (2 samples) | | 1 | 2 | 290.00 | 580.00 | |
| | Project admin | PO | 1 | 0.25 | 190.00 | 47.50 | |
| | | | | | | Sub total | £675.00 |
| Reporting and archiving | Report preparation | OM | 1 | 0.15 | 290.00 | 43.50 | |
| | | PM | 1 | 0.25 | 265.00 | 66.25 | |
| | | PO | 1 | 2.5 | 190.00 | 475.00 | |
| | | FO | 1 | 0.5 | 190.00 | 95.00 | |
| | | CT | 1 | 1 | 190.00 | 190.00 | |
| | Archiving | AO | 1 | 1 | 172.00 | 172.00 | |
| | Transport Museum storage | Box | 1 | 12 | 18.00 | 216.00 | |
| | | | | | | Sub total | £1,307.75 |
| | | | | | | TOTAL | £1,982.75 |

Key: PM= Project Manager; OM= Operations Manager; AO= Archives Officer; FO= Finds Officer; PO= Project Officer; CT= CAD Technician

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