

CGE02

**A Proposed Housing Development
at 144-166 Cowgate, Edinburgh:**

Project Design for an Archaeological Excavation

Client: Castle Rock Housing Association

February 2003

INTRODUCTION

Castle Rock Housing Association have been granted planning permission to build sheltered housing at the former Cowgate Nursery School. The site lies on the Cowgate frontage, at the foot of Old Fishmarket Close and measures 660 m² in area. The area proposed for development was formerly occupied by a nursery school with associated playground, an access road and off-street car parking.

The City of Edinburgh Council Archaeology Service (CECAS), who is advising the Council as Local Planning Authority, requested that an archaeological evaluation was undertaken on the site to establish whether there were any archaeological issues. The evaluation was undertaken in two phases and established that remains relating to post-medieval buildings and medieval midden deposits survived on the site.

This project design is for a programme of work that will mitigate against archaeologically destructive elements of the proposed development works. It provides for preserving any threatened remains by record and is based on discussions between Richard Murphy Architects, Headland Archaeology and CECAS.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

The site lies within the historic core of medieval Edinburgh, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The Cowgate, which lies at the bottom of the ridge on which the High Street stands, appears to have been formally laid out in the 14th century, sometime after the High Street, which was in existence by at least the 12th century. The evaluations have shown that deep midden deposits accumulated beneath the proposed development site during the medieval period. The material is likely to have formed through refuse dumping from medieval properties further upslope. The site appeared to have been developed by the 16th century, although the nature of these properties remains unclear.

OBJECTIVES

The main objectives of the excavation are:

- To preserve by record any archaeological remains threatened by the proposed development works.

METHODS

The area available for excavation shall not comprise the entire site, as standing buildings, roadways and footpaths, surround it. To avoid undermining these a border of at least 1 m will surround the area of excavation. In addition, where adjacent to standing buildings at the base of foundation level of those buildings the edge of excavation will be battered at an angle of 45 degrees.

Coring

Previous borehole surveys had indicated that the deepest archaeological deposits had accumulated at the east end of the site. These were likely to prove difficult to examine through machine excavation. As a result a series of 5 cores from the centre to the east of site will be examined by a qualified soil scientist (Dr Stephen Carter). The cores will be logged and recorded on site, and sub-samples will be retrieved. These will be sieved and assessed for the survival of environmental remains, including waterlogged remains. Mhairi Hastie will undertake the lab-based analysis.

Site Strip

Modern overburden, comprising recent make-up and demolition deposits seal the post-medieval archaeological remains. These shall be removed using a mechanical excavator using a flat-bladed bucket under direct archaeological control. The spoil will be removed from site.

Mechanical excavation shall stop at the first significant archaeological horizon (post-medieval structures). The resulting surfaces and structures shall be cleaned by hand and recorded.

Recording

All recording will be by Headland Archaeology Ltd standard method. All contexts, small finds and environmental samples will be given unique numbers. Bulk finds will be collected by context. Colour transparency and print photographs will be taken. An overall site plan will be recorded at 1:500 relative to the National Grid with 1:20 plans of the individual features. The sections/elevations will be drawn at 1:10. Small finds will be 3D plotted where appropriate. All recording will be undertaken on *pro forma* record cards.

Further Excavation

Further hand excavation will be carried out where appropriate. Features shall be completely excavated.

Once the post-medieval horizon is recorded and investigated the structural remains shall be excavated by machine. This will halt at the next significant archaeological horizon (likely to be midden deposits) or formation level, whichever is encountered first. The machine will be equipped with a flat-bladed bucket and monitored directly by an archaeologist.

The formation level is 65.305 m OD in the west of the site and 64.855 m OD over the majority. The latter will extend into the top of medieval midden deposits. Machine excavation will be stopped at the top of midden deposits. A series of test pits will then be excavated through the midden to the next archaeological layer. These will be positioned to achieve a representative sample across the site and will cover 10% of the exposed midden. The test pits will enable the recovery of finds and environmental information. Once this is completed machine excavation will proceed to either the next midden deposit or formation level, guided by the hand-excavated test pits.

Once formation level is reached excavation shall cease and hand-excavated test pits excavated across the site in the location of a representative sample of the proposed development's pile caps. A plan showing the location of these is included as part of this Design, and as proposed covers around 25% of the pile caps. The pits shall be excavated to a depth of around 1 m. Any finds from the midden deposits shall be retrieved and samples taken. The stratigraphy and location of each pit shall be recorded in full.

If archaeological features are exposed at formation level, but extend below it, they shall be hand excavated to below formation level and recorded.

Watching Brief

A watching brief shall be maintained on any works on or around the periphery of site relating to alterations necessary to provide services to the new development. An archaeologist shall monitor any ground disturbance works associated with these and will be afforded the opportunity to record any exposed deposits or features.

Samples and artefacts

Any artefacts retrieved during the trial trenching will be catalogued and will be subject to standard Treasure Trove procedures. Archaeological deposits will be sampled systematically in accordance with Headland Archaeology Ltd standard environmental sampling practice. Bulk samples, a minimum of 10 litres but up to 30 litres if possible, will be taken for wet sieving and flotation. These will be processed and analysed as part of the contract. Bulk samples will be taken from any waterlogged deposits present for assessment of organic remains. Any organic artefacts that are retrieved during the excavation will be stored in appropriate conditions and assessed by a qualified archaeological conservator as a part of this contract.

Reporting and archive

The results of the excavation will be presented in a report, which will take the form of a Data Structure Report (as defined by Historic Scotland). There shall also be an assessment of the post-excavation analysis and reporting considered necessary to complete the work to the satisfaction of the Council as Local Planning Authority.

A summary report will be prepared for submission to *Discovery & Excavation in Scotland*. The records of the archaeological works will be archived at the National Monuments Record of Scotland.

SCHEDULE AND STAFFING

It is currently envisaged that the site strip will be undertaken in a week. The post-medieval remains will be cleaned and recorded in a week. Further machine excavation will take a week. Further hand excavation will take a week. In summary it is envisaged that a team of up to 5 archaeologists shall undertake the fieldwork over 4 weeks. The excavation will be directed by Project Supervisor Liz Jones and managed by Simon Stronach.

LIAISON

Headland will maintain close contact with the client and all significant findings will be reported immediately. CECAS will be kept informed of progress and will be afforded access to the site for monitoring purposes.

HEALTH & SAFETY

A risk assessment will be prepared in advance of the start of fieldwork and will be available to the client for inspection.