



REPORT FOR AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF:

**Farmcroft, Church Street, Higham, Rochester,
Kent, ME3 7LP**



Farmcroft, Church Street, Higham, Rochester, Kent, ME3 7LP

Planning Reference: 20251230

NGR: 571601,174123

BAL Site Code: FCH26-WB

BAL report reference : BAL26-163

Report for an Archaeological Watching Brief

Report prepared for Mr and Mrs Wellspring

By Brook Archaeology Limited

July 2026

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Summary

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken on Monday 23rd March 2026 by B. Cichy. It comprised monitoring of excavations of 32 post holes 0.3m to 0.4m deep and arranged in four rows. The WB area was located in South West corner of the garden and consisted of modern made ground raised to the level of the garden that is about 1m higher than ground level behind the garden wall to the west and south. Before made ground the area was occupied by chicken coop and its concrete foundations were revealed underneath made ground

All the upcast from excavations of the post holes was sieved by trowel and all anthropological inclusions were recovered. Made ground consisted of a black silty loam with wood chippings, moderate CBM, occasional glass, asbestos, porcelain ware, LPM pottery fragments, concrete, 3 metal nails and later 20th c metal, fragment of clay pip, a mid-sized fragment of an 18th century bottle, two small fragments of medieval tile of which one has a trace of paint.

1. Introduction

- 1.1. An archaeological Watching Brief has been carried out on the request of Mr Graham Wellspring ('the client') at Farmcroft, Church Street, Higham, Rochester, Kent, ME3 7LP centred on NGR: 571601,174123 (hereafter 'the site'). The Watching Brief aimed to record the presence of any potential archaeological resource present on the site. The site was prepared for the erection of a detached garden building for use as a hobby room and garden storage.
- 1.2. The site is approximately 14m² and lies within the garden of the property
- 1.3. No archaeology is considered at risk by the proposed development. However, proximity to St Mary's Church, Toman burials and a Roman kiln site necessitated the condition according to the KCC Archaeological Officer,
- 1.4. The Watching Brief consisted of monitoring the digging of 40 pile slots approximately 0.35m deep x 0.20m in diameter to support the installation of a wooden frame. The Watching Brief aimed to record the presence of any potential archaeological resource present on the site. This work followed the Kent County Council's methodologies and guidelines in Generic Standard Specification for an Archaeological Watching Brief (Kent County Council, 2020) and in accordance with requirements of the National Planning Policy Framework (UK Government, 2024).

2. Site Setting

2.1. Site Location

The development site comprised the rear garden of Farmcroft, Church Street, Higham, Rochester, Kent ME3 7LP, centred on National Grid Reference 571601, 174123, within the parish of Higham in the Borough of Gravesham. Archaeological monitoring was undertaken during the excavation of post holes associated with the construction of a detached timber-framed garden building to be used as a hobby room and garden store. The works were carried out in fulfilment of a pre-commencement archaeological planning condition attached to planning permission 20251230, requiring an archaeological watching brief to be undertaken in accordance with an approved specification.

The development site occupies the rear garden of an established residential property on the eastern side of Church Street within the historic core of Higham. The site lies within the Church Street Conservation Area, designated on 5 April 1979, reflecting the architectural and historic significance of this part of the village.

2.2. Landscape Character

The site is situated within the historic landscape of the southern Hoo Peninsula, occupying gently elevated ground overlooking the lower-lying Thames and Medway estuarine marshes. Higham represents one of the principal historic settlements within this landscape, with development focused around Church Street and the parish church. The surrounding landscape comprises a mixture of historic village development, agricultural land and estuarine marsh, reflecting a long-established pattern of settlement influenced by access to navigable waterways and fertile agricultural land.

2.3. Topography

The monitored area occupied broadly level ground within the south-west corner of the rear garden. The wider landscape falls gently towards the north and east in the direction of the Thames estuary, while slightly higher ground extends southwards across the interior of the Hoo Peninsula. This elevated position above the surrounding marshland has provided favourable conditions for human occupation throughout prehistory and the historic period.

2.4. Geology and Soils

According to the British Geological Survey, the site is underlain by the Lambeth Group, comprising sand, silt and clay deposited within fluvial, palustrine and shallow marine environments. These sedimentary deposits represent channel, floodplain and deltaic sediments formed within a coastal setting subject to periodic marine inundation.

The bedrock is overlain by Alluvium comprising clay, silt, sand and peat. These superficial deposits are of fluvial origin and represent channel, floodplain and levee deposits associated with former river and estuarine environments. Such deposits may provide favourable conditions for the preservation of buried archaeological remains where they have not been disturbed by later activity.

2.5. Hydrology

The site lies within the Thames and Medway estuarine catchment. Although no watercourse passes directly through the development site, the proximity of the Thames marshes has strongly influenced the historic development of the surrounding landscape. Access to estuarine resources and navigable waterways has contributed to the long-term occupation of Higham from prehistory through to the present day.

2.6. Archaeological Implications of the Physical Environment

The combination of elevated ground adjacent to extensive estuarine resources, favourable geological conditions and the site's position within the historic core of Higham created conditions attractive for settlement throughout successive archaeological periods. Consequently, there was considered to be potential for archaeological remains to survive beneath the existing garden soils despite the limited scale of the proposed development.

3. Archaeological and Historical Background

3.1. Introduction

The archaeological potential of the development site derived from its location within the historic core of Higham, an area containing evidence of occupation from the Palaeolithic period through to the modern era. The site lies within the Church Street Conservation Area and is surrounded by numerous designated and non-designated heritage assets that collectively illustrate the long-term development of the settlement.

Kent County Council Heritage Conservation advised that the site lay within an area of multi-period archaeological potential and recommended that archaeological monitoring be undertaken because of the site's proximity to known Romano-British remains and the historic medieval core of Higham.

3.2. Designated Heritage Assets

The development site lies within the Church Street Conservation Area, designated in 1979.

The Grade I-listed Church of St Mary is situated approximately 85 m north-east of the development site boundary. The church is of early medieval origin and has remained the focal point of the historic settlement throughout much of its history.

Approximately 185 m north-east of the development site lies the Scheduled Monument of St Mary's Priory, an alien Benedictine priory established during the medieval period. Together with the church, the priory demonstrates the ecclesiastical importance of Higham during the medieval period.

Other designated heritage assets in the vicinity include The Old Vicarage, Clerk's Cottage and the Barn Adjoining Church, all of which contribute to the special architectural and historic character of the conservation area.

3.3. Prehistoric

Evidence for prehistoric activity within the wider area includes discoveries of Palaeolithic handaxes and associated debitage from Odgers Street, demonstrating human activity within the local landscape from the earliest periods. Although no prehistoric remains had previously been identified within the development site itself, these discoveries indicate that the surrounding area formed part of a landscape utilised during prehistory.

3.4. Romano-British

The Romano-British period is particularly well represented within the vicinity of the site. Recorded remains include a Roman kiln, an associated Roman cemetery, an individual Roman burial and fragments of Roman ceramic building material. The close proximity of these discoveries indicates that the development site lay within a landscape that experienced significant Romano-British activity, probably associated with industrial production and associated burial practices.

3.5. Early Medieval

Evidence of early medieval occupation includes the discovery of an Anglo-Saxon pit together with an early medieval pit at Abbey Farm Cottages, demonstrating continuity of activity following the Roman period and supporting the documented origins of Higham as an early medieval settlement.

3.6. Medieval

The medieval development of Higham centred upon the parish church and the Benedictine Priory. Archaeological evidence from the surrounding area includes medieval foundations at Abbey Farm Cottages, the remains of a medieval ferry, causeway and putative Roman ford, together with the site of St

Mary's Priory. Collectively, these remains illustrate the importance of Higham as a medieval ecclesiastical and agricultural settlement.

3.7. Post-medieval and Modern

Post-medieval and modern activity is represented by the continued occupation of historic farmsteads, surviving agricultural buildings, possible post-medieval structural remains at Abbey Farm House, earthwork field boundaries across Higham Marsh and twentieth-century military remains associated with the Church Street barrage balloon site. These remains demonstrate the continued evolution of the landscape following the medieval period.

3.8. Summary of Archaeological Potential

The archaeological and historical evidence indicated that the development site occupied a sensitive location within the historic core of Higham, surrounded by evidence of prehistoric, Romano-British, Anglo-Saxon, medieval and post-medieval activity. Of particular significance was the concentration of Romano-British remains immediately adjacent to the site and the proximity of the Grade I-listed Church of St Mary and the Scheduled Monument of St Mary's Priory.

The archaeological watching brief provided an opportunity to investigate whether archaeological remains associated with this known activity survived within the footprint of the proposed development. The monitored groundworks demonstrated that the development area comprised modern made ground deposited to raise the rear garden over the remains of a former chicken enclosure and its associated concrete foundations. No archaeological features, deposits or artefacts were identified in situ during the monitored excavations. The residual finds recovered from the made ground indicate that the imported material incorporated redeposited late post-medieval and modern material, together with occasional residual earlier fragments, but no evidence was identified to demonstrate the survival of archaeological deposits within the limited area affected by the proposed development.

4. Methodology

- 4.1. All work was undertaken following the methods set out within the KCC Specification (Kent County Council, 2020) which was an appendix to the HER form submitted in lieu of a full WSI and according to best practice as set out by ClfA.
- 4.2. The archaeological Watching Brief work comprised monitoring the excavation of the pile slots; observing and recording to understand the stratigraphic make-up of the ground better and scanning for the presence of potential archaeological remains during the pile excavations.
- 4.3. The archaeological Watching Brief aimed to undertake observation work of the groundworks to understand the stratigraphic make-up of the ground better and for the presence of potential archaeological remains.
- 4.4. Aim

The aim of the archaeological watching brief was to provide an archaeological record of any heritage assets or archaeological remains exposed during the excavation of the foundation post holes associated with the construction of a detached garden building at Farmcroft, Church Street, Higham. The works were undertaken to satisfy the archaeological planning condition attached to planning permission and to ensure

that any archaeological remains affected by the development were identified, investigated and appropriately recorded.

4.5. Objectives

The objectives of the archaeological watching brief were to:

- monitor all intrusive groundworks associated with the excavation of the proposed foundation post holes;
- identify the presence, extent, nature, date, character and significance of any archaeological deposits, features or structures encountered during the groundworks;
- establish, where possible, the stratigraphic sequence and character of the deposits exposed;
- recover, record and preserve by record any archaeological remains encountered in accordance with the principles set out in the approved specification and current ClfA Standards and Guidance;
- recover and retain any artefactual or environmental material where appropriate to assist in the interpretation and dating of archaeological deposits;
- produce a permanent archive and report describing the archaeological works and their results, thereby contributing to the archaeological record of Higham.

4.6. Excavation

All groundworks were excavated using a machine excavator with bladed bucket. An archaeologist used hand tools to investigate any subsequent archaeological contexts.

5. Results

- 5.1. The Archaeological watching brief was undertaken on Monday 23rd March 2026. It comprised monitoring of excavations of 32 post holes 0.3m to 0.4m deep and arranged in four rows. The WB area was located in South West corner of the garden and consisted of modern made ground raised to the level of the garden that is about 1m higher than ground level behind the garden wall to the west and south. Before made ground the area was occupied by chicken coop and its concrete foundations were revealed underneath made ground.
- 5.2. All the upcast from excavations of the post holes was sieved by trowel and all anthropological inclusions were recovered.
- 5.3. A total of 1 phase associated with the site was established during the excavation:

Phase 1 = Modern made ground
- 5.4. No archaeological features or remains were encountered.
- 5.5. During the groundworks, a total of two contexts over one phase were investigated and recorded (Table 1):

Table 1: Context list and stratigraphic sequence

Context List (LCH25-WB-RH)				
Context No.	Trench	Type	Description	Phase
1001	1	topsoil	Dark brownish-grey silty loam	1
1002	1	Made ground	Black silty loam with wood chippings, moderate CBM, occasional glass, asbestos, porcelain ware, LPM pottery fragments, concrete, 3 metal nails and later 20th c metal, fragment of clay pip, a mid-sized fragment of an 18th century bottle, two small fragments of medieval tile of which one has a trace of paint.	1

6. Finds

- 6.1. Several items were encountered while monitoring the subsoil and topsoil extraction. There were occasional sherds of pottery and shards of glass encountered in the subsoil dating from the 19th century to the Modern period
- 6.2. Pottery provides accurate diagnostic dating evidence and is subject to additional photographic analysis in Appendix B.

Find Type	Quantity	Location	Context No.
Pottery	14 sherds	Trench 1	1002
Glass	12 shards	Trench 1	1002
CBM	27 items	Trench 1	1002
Fe	3 items	Trench 1	1002

(Table 2 – Finds according to Type, Quantity, Location & Context Number)

- 6.3. Pottery – a small assemblage of 14 sherds of pottery from 4 different vessels. Some sherds are subject to additional photographic analysis in appendix B

7. Interpretation

- 7.1. The results of the watching brief revealed a single-phase deposition of made ground with mixed assemblage of late-postmedieval and modern material.
- 7.2. The monitored groundworks demonstrated that the development area comprised modern made ground deposited to raise the rear garden level. No archaeological features or deposits were encountered within the monitored excavations, and consequently the groundworks did not identify evidence for the Roman or medieval activity known from the surrounding area.

8. Conclusion

- 8.1. The Watching Brief has fulfilled the KCC Watching Brief Specification aims and objectives and the Written Scheme of Investigation. The monitored groundworks confirmed that the development area had previously been subject to landscaping and ground raising associated with the creation of the present garden
- 8.2. No archaeological features, deposits or artefacts associated with the Romano-British or medieval activity identified within the surrounding area were encountered during the monitored groundworks. Residual pottery, metal items and CBM fragments were encountered. These fragments were late post-medieval or modern in date and were likely imported when the made ground was deposited to level the garden.

9. Acknowledgements

- 9.1. Sincere thanks are extended to the client Mr Graham Wellspring and the groundworks crew for their patience during the archaeological process. Thanks also to Jake Warrender from KCCHC for guidance.

10. References

Kent County Council. (2020). *Specification for an archaeological watching brief in Kent*. Maidstone: Kent County Council.
UK Government. (2024). *The National Planning Policy Framework*. London: GOV.UK.

www.bgs.ac.uk

<https://webapps.kent.gov.uk/KCC.ExploringKentsPast.Web.Sites.Public/Default.aspx>

Figures

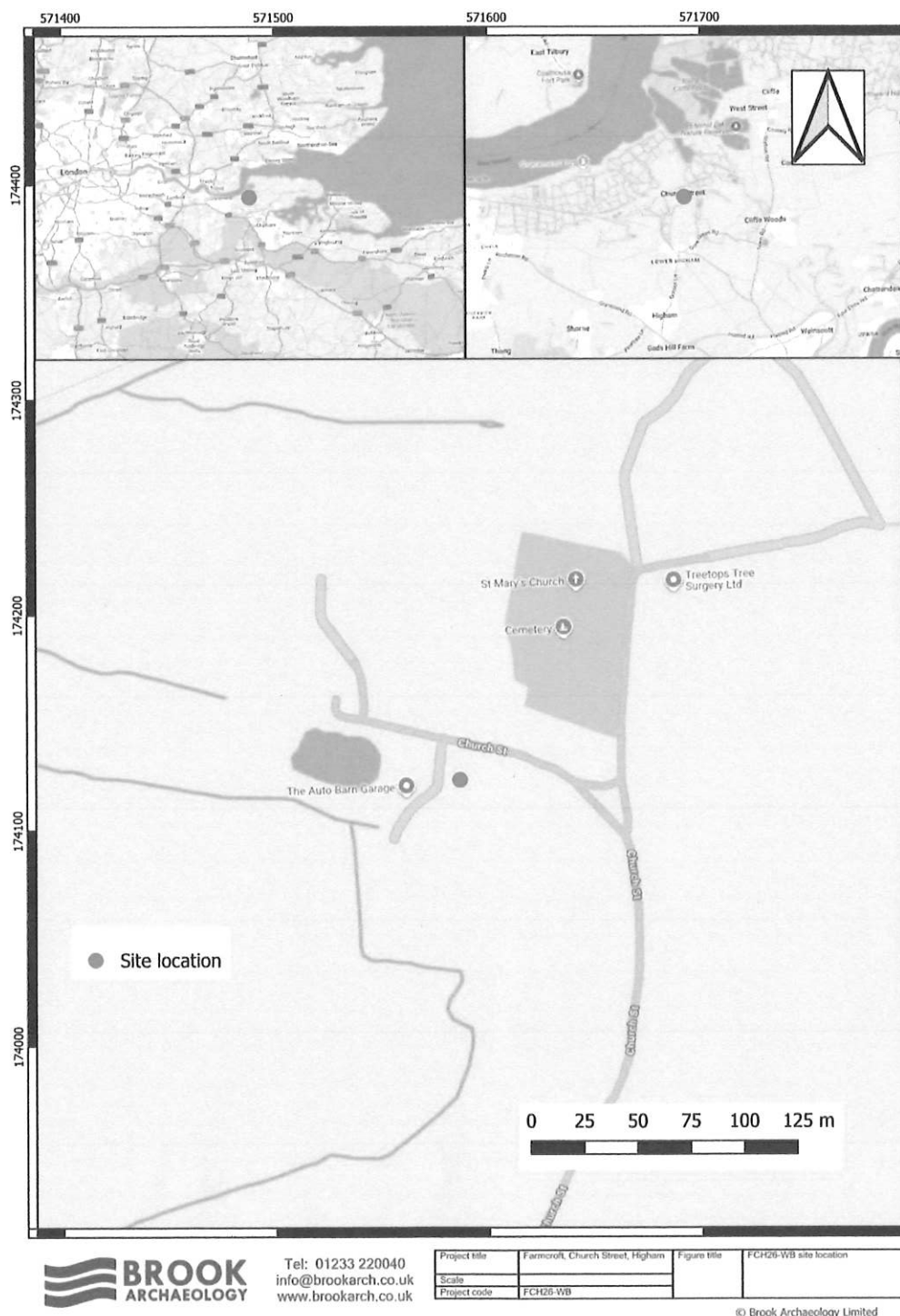


Figure 1: FCH26-WB site location

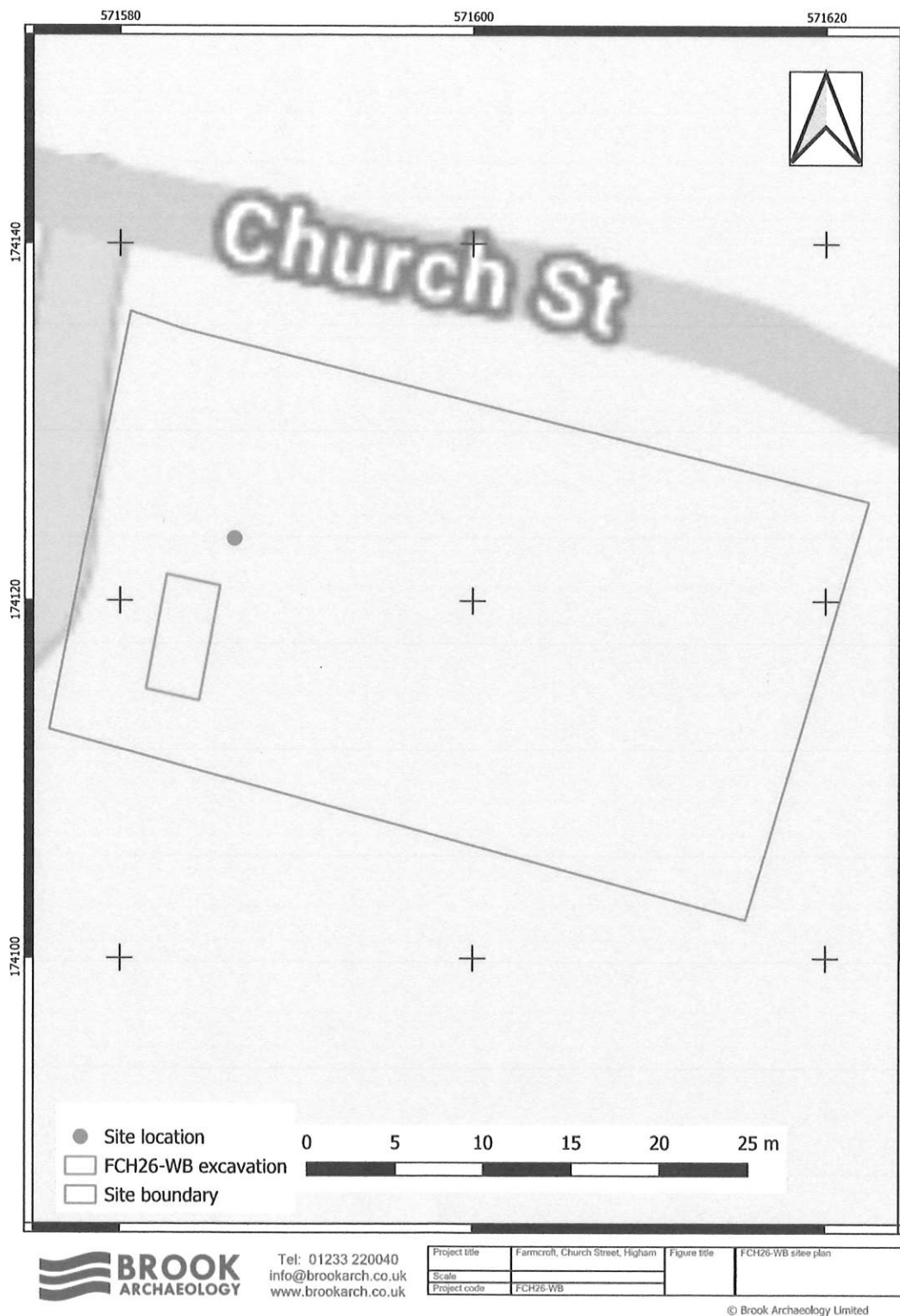


Figure 2: FCH26-WB site plan

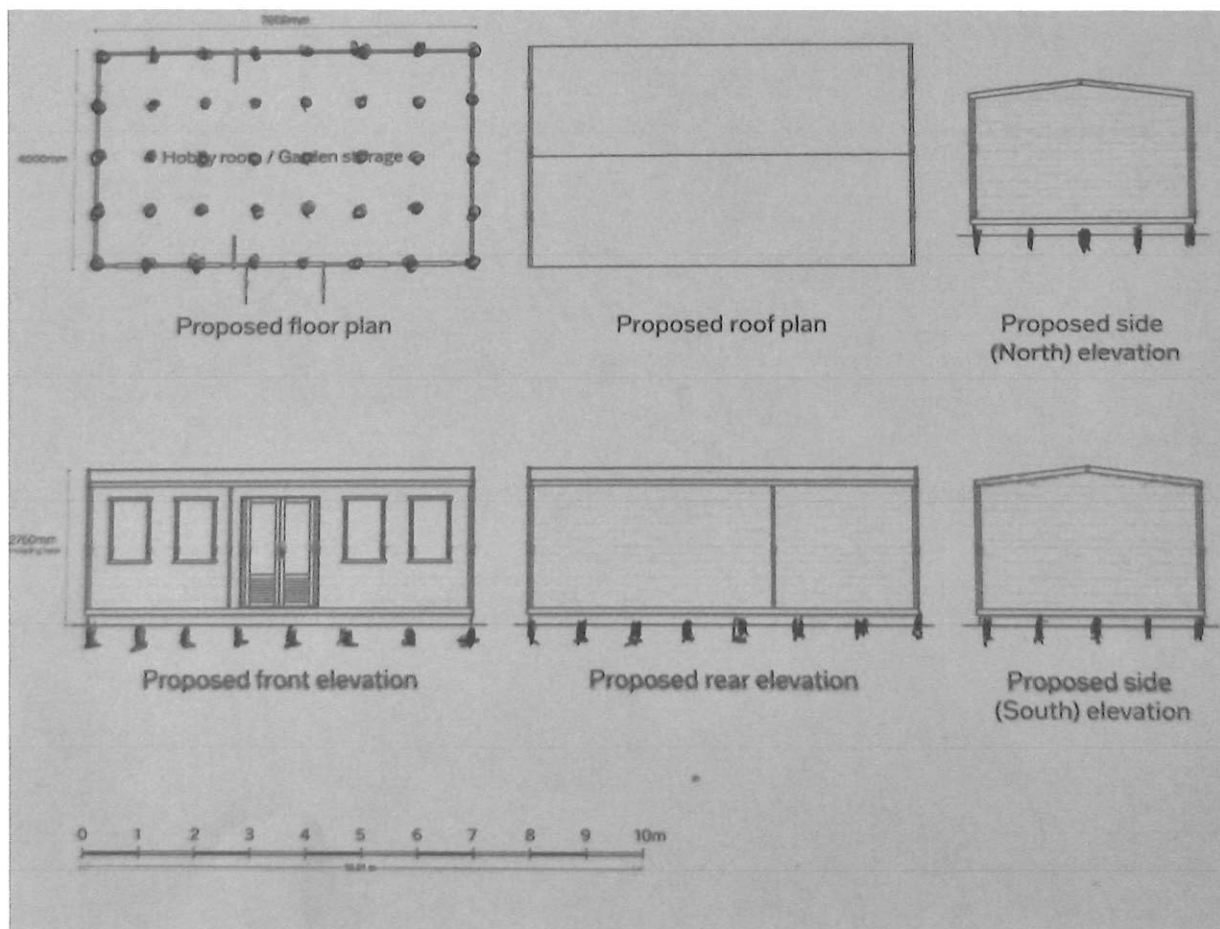


Figure 3: FCH26-WB development plan

Site images



Plate 1: watching brief area



Plate 2: plan of a post hole



Plate 3: section of a post hole

Finds Images



Plate 4: collection of finds



Plate 5: late-medieval tile fragments

Appendix 1 – HER form

Kent County Council Specification and HER summary form

Site Name: Farmcroft, Church Street, Higham	
Site Address: Farmcroft, Church Street, Higham, Rochester, Kent, ME3 7LP	
Summary: A watching brief was requested by Gravesham Borough council the Local Planning Authority as a pre-commencement condition of planning application 20251230. The watching brief was conducted and has been completed	
District/Unitary: Gravesham	Parish: Higham
Period(s): Modern	
NGR (centre of site : 8 figures): (NB if large or linear site give multiple NGRs) 571601,174123	
Type of archaeological work (delete) Watching Brief	
Geoarchaeological investigation	
Date of Recording: 23/03/2026	
Unit undertaking recording: Brook Archaeology Limited	
Geology:	
Title and author of accompanying report: REPORT FOR AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF: Farmcroft, Church Street, Higham, Rochester, Kent, ME3 7LP	
Summary of fieldwork results (begin with earliest period first, add NGRs where appropriate) The excavations were limited to the modern made-ground layer. Two fragments of residual medieval roof tile were recovered	
(cont. on attached sheet)	
Location of archive/finds:	
Contact at Unit: Fred Birkbeck	Date: 27/07/2026

Appendix 2 – OASIS entry

OASIS Summary for brookarc1-544693

OASIS ID (UID)	brookarc1-544693
Project Name	Watching Brief at Farmcroft, Church Street, Higham
Sitename	Farmcroft, Church Street, Higham
Sitecode	FCH26-WB
Project Identifier(s)	FCH26-WB
Activity type	Watching Brief
Planning Id	20251230
Reason For Investigation	Planning: Post determination
Organisation Responsible for work	Brook Archaeology Limited
Project Dates	23-Mar-2026 - 23-Mar-2026
Location	Farmcroft, Church Street, Higham NGR : TQ 71599 74119 LL : 51.44007484209527, 0.467621296030886 12 Fig : 571599,174119
Administrative Areas	Country : England County/Local Authority : Kent Local Authority District : Gravesham Parish : Higham
Project Methodology	4.4.Aim The aim of the archaeological watching brief was to provide an archaeological record of any heritage assets or archaeological remains exposed during the excavation of the foundation post holes associated with the construction of a detached garden building at Farmcroft, Church Street, Higham. The works were undertaken to satisfy the archaeological planning condition attached to planning permission and to ensure that any archaeological remains affected by the development were identified, investigated and appropriately recorded. 4.5.Objectives The objectives of the archaeological watching brief were to: •monitor all intrusive groundworks associated with the excavation of the proposed foundation post holes; •identify the presence, extent, nature, date, character and significance of any archaeological deposits, features or structures encountered during the groundworks; •establish, where possible, the stratigraphic sequence and character of the deposits exposed; •recover, record and preserve by record any archaeological remains encountered in accordance with the principles set out in the approved specification and current CIFA Standards and Guidance; •recover and retain any artefactual or environmental material where appropriate to assist in the interpretation and dating of archaeological deposits; •produce a permanent archive and report describing the archaeological works and their results, thereby contributing to the archaeological record of Higham.

Project Results	An archaeological watching brief was undertaken on Monday 23rd March 2026 by B. Cichy. It comprised monitoring of excavations of 32 post holes 0.3m to 0.4m deep and arranged in four rows. The WB area was located in South West corner of the garden and consisted of modern made ground raised to the level of the garden that is about 1m higher than ground level behind the garden wall to the west and south. Before made ground the area was occupied by chicken coop and its concrete foundations were revealed underneath made ground. All the upcast from excavations of the post holes was sieved by trowel and all anthropological inclusions were recovered. Made ground consisted of a black silty loam with wood chippings, moderate CBM, occasional glass, asbestos, porcelain ware, LPM pottery fragments, concrete, 3 metal nails and later 20th c metal, fragment of clay pip, a mid-sized fragment of an 18th century bottle, two small fragments of medieval tile of which one has a trace of paint.
Funder	Private individual
HER	Kent HER - unRev - STANDARD
Person Responsible for work	Frederick Birkbeck
HER Identifiers	

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