

Archaeological monitoring for a new sculpture garden at Firstsite, Lewis Gardens, High Street, Colchester, Essex, CO1 1JH

October 2021



by **Megan Seehra**

with contributions by Dr Matthew Loughton and Laura Pooley
figures by Sarah Veasey and Emma Holloway

fieldwork by Megan Seehra

**Commissioned by Purcell
on behalf of Firstsite Ltd**

NGR: TM 0008 2516 (centre)

CAT project ref.: 2021/10g

CHER code: ECC4668

OASIS ref.: colchest3-433473



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CAT Report 1756
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1 Summary

Archaeological monitoring took place at Firstsite, Lewis Gardens, Colchester, Essex, during groundworks for the construction of six temporary sculptures. There is significant Roman activity in and around the development site; more specifically, it lies within *Insulas* 31/32 of the Roman town. Excavations did not go deep enough to disturb any possible archaeological remains, and only modern layers were identified.

2 Introduction (Fig 1)

This is the report for archaeological monitoring at Firstsite, Lewis Gardens, Colchester which was carried out on the 27th October 2021. The work was commissioned by Purcell on behalf of Firstsite Ltd in advance of the construction of a temporary sculpture garden for six sculptures and any associated groundworks. Monitoring was carried out by Colchester Archaeological Trust (CAT).

As the site lies within an area highlighted by the EHER/CHER as having a high potential for archaeological deposits, an archaeological condition was recommended by the Colchester Borough Council Archaeological Advisor (CBCAA). This recommendation was for an archaeological evaluation by trial-trenching and was based on the guidance given in the *National Planning Policy Framework* (MHCLG 2019).

All archaeological work was carried out in accordance with a *Brief for Archaeological Monitoring*, detailing the required archaeological work, written by Dr Simon Wood (CBCAA 2021), and a written scheme of investigation (WSI) prepared by CAT in response to the brief and agreed with ECCPS (CAT 2021).

In addition to the brief and WSI, all fieldwork and reporting was done in accordance with *Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment (MoRPHE)* (Historic England 2016), and with *Standards for field archaeology in the East of England (EAA 14 and 24)*. This report mirrors standards and practices contained in the Institute for Archaeologists' *Standard and guidance for archaeological field evaluation* (CIfA 2014a) and *Standard and guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials* (CIfA 2014b).

3 Archaeological background

The following archaeological background includes extracts from CAT Report 477 and the Colchester Historic Environment Record (CHER/ECC numbers; accessible via Colchester Heritage Explorer (<https://colchesterheritage.co.uk/map>)).

The site lies within *Insulas* 31/32 of the Roman town in an area of dense archaeological remains. A summary of some of the key finds in the area include:

In the 1920s a skeleton of a female was found on top of a Roman tessellated pavement in an area then known as 'Berry Field', 'Bury Field' or 'Berryfields', which now coincides with the former grounds of East Hill House and the current location of Firstsite. The skeletal remains were originally thought to be evidence of a violent end to Roman Colchester, but more recently believed to be a burial of later Roman or post-Roman date, laid in a grave, the base of which happens to be close to the floor level (Crummy 1997, 130, MCC1050-1).

Excavations in 1955 and 1958 uncovered the remains of a number of Roman buildings in Lewis' Gardens (the now former Bus Station). These were numbered as 'houses I-V' by the excavator (Richardson 1961), but thought to actually represent three Roman houses and not five (MCC1679 and MCC1681).

When the Mulberry Tree Family Centre was built on what was then the vegetable garden of East Hill House in 1983-84, a watching brief by CAT recorded Roman street gravel,

buildings and burials (CAR 6, 374-8). CAT also excavated two Roman inhumation burials at this site, ie on the eastern side of *Insula* 40, in 1983-84 (CAR 6, 375-6). The discovery of one loose skull on the same site shows that there was a third, presumably Roman, burial somewhere in the vicinity (MCC1467, MCC1469, MCC1471-4, MCC1477, MCC1479).

The area around Firstsite has been subject to geophysical survey: magnetometry in April 2003 by Oxford Archaeotechnics, and resistivity and ground-penetrating radar by Stratascan in July 2004 (Johnson 2003; Sabin 2004). In particular, the work in the northern lawn area of East Hill House suggests the presence of possible structural remains (ECC2918).

A series of nine evaluation trenches was excavated by CAT in 2004 (CAT Report 305, ECC2747). Roman levels were found to lie at depths of between 15 cm and 60 cm, beneath soils which support the hypothesis that the trenched area, known from the later medieval period as the 'Berryfield', probably remained open from the end of the Roman period onwards. The archaeological evidence has been summarised by Oxford Archaeological Associates Ltd (Johnson et al 2003).

CAT undertook evaluations in 2003 in the garden of the Minorities art gallery which exposed Roman floor and demolition layers (ECC2599, MCC3025) and in the bus station which revealed Roman demolition and robbing material (CAT Report 234, ECC2651, MCC2654) and a watching brief on a sewer-trench and test-pits in the bus station in 2006 (CAT Report 385).

In advance of the installation of services to Firstsite within the grounds of East Hill House and on the site of the former bus station, test-pitting and a combination of machine-dug and hand dug trenches (between 2006-8) revealed parts of a Roman building, presumably a town house.

The metalled street on the southern side of *Insulas* 31/32 was exposed in three places, and thus we were able to plot the line of the street more accurately, i.e. its eastern end is now approximately 3m to the north of the earlier projection. In this new position, medieval Bastion 1 on the external face of the Roman town wall now aligns precisely with the northern side of the Roman street. An interesting group of finds was 1.07kg of unused Roman stone tesserae. These were found in a redeposited layer of Roman debris sandwiched between post-medieval topsoil layers, where they were presumably dumped during modern landscaping. These may indicate the presence of a workshop which produced or stored tessera for use in mosaic floors (CAT Report 477).

Interpretation of some of the later strata on the site is complicated by the fact that there has been much movement of soil here, mainly due to landscaping associated with the grounds of East Hill House. After the Roman period, there is no evidence of any activity until the 13th century, when fragments of pottery may be associated with the medieval robbing of the Roman buildings. Finds of 15th- to 16th-century pottery may be associated with houses to the north which fronted onto the southern side of East Hill. Three clay tobacco-pipe 'wasters' indicate that a clay tobacco-pipe maker was at work nearby in the later 17th century. The kiln site could have been on the open ground south of the East Hill frontage, and the maker was presumably resident or tenant of one of the East Hill houses which were subsequently demolished for the construction of East Hill House in the mid 18th century. Later finds – both cut features and loose finds in soil layers – are associated with East Hill House. Of particular interest is a group of cess-pits in which sewage from East Hill House was disposed of until the later 19th century (CAT Report 477).

4 Aims

Archaeological monitoring was undertaken to excavate and record any archaeological deposits which were exposed by the groundworks.

5 Results (Figs 2-3)

All groundworks were machine-excavated under the supervision of a CAT archaeologist. Trenches totalling c 120m in length were excavated to 0.4m wide by 0.2-0.5m deep. An area of deeper excavation on the west side of site was 1.5m by c 2m, and 0.55m deep (Photograph 1). Two layers were identified throughout. The topsoil (L1, dark grey-brown clayey silt, c 0.13m thick) sealed a similar-looking layer of medium-dark grey-brown clayey-silt (L2). Two areas of minor modern disturbance were noted in the west and south-east ends of site. These were evidenced by patches of modern orange stony sand, and tarmac-like material (Photograph 2). No significant archaeological features or horizons were impacted by the groundworks..



Photograph 1 Area of deeper excavation for lighting, looking north-east.



Photograph 2 A small area of modern disturbance in plan.



Photograph 3 General view of site from west end, looking roughly east.



Photograph 4 General view of trenches from location of sculpture 3, looking north-west.

6 Finds

6.1 Ceramic finds by Dr Matthew Loughton

The watching brief uncovered six sherds of post-medieval and modern pottery weighing 65g with an EVE of 0.34, all of which came from the topsoil L1. There was a large bowl/pancheon (EVE: 0.02) in post-medieval red earthenware (fabric F40) dating to c 1500-19th/20th century, and sherds from several flowerpots (EVE: 0.32) in fabric F51B, which date to the 19th-20th century.

6.2 Miscellaneous finds by Laura Pooley

Two fragments of clay tobacco pipe stem (10.1g) came from L1 (finds no.1).

7 Conclusion

Groundworks at Firstsite for the new sculpture garden cut through modern topsoil and a layer of medium-dark grey-brown clayey-silt. No archaeological remains were exposed, showing that the groundworks did not go deep enough to impact any significant archaeological horizons.

8 Acknowledgements

CAT thanks Purcell and Firstsite Ltd for commissioning and funding the work. The project was managed by C Lister and A Wightman, fieldwork was carried out by M Seehra. Figures are by S Veasey and E Holloway. The project was monitored for Colchester Borough Council by Dr Simon Wood.

9 References

Note: all CAT reports, except for DBAs, are available online in PDF format at <http://cat.essex.ac.uk>

- | | | |
|--|-------------------|--|
| Brown, D | 2011 | <i>Archaeological Archives: A guide to best practice in creation, compilation, transfer and curation</i> |
| CAR 6 | (2nd ed.)
1992 | <i>Colchester Archaeological Report 6: Excavations at Culver Street, the Gilbert School, and other sites in Colchester, 1971-85</i> , by P Crummy |
| CAT | 2021 | <i>Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) for an archaeological monitoring for a new sculpture garden at Firstsite, Lewis Gardens, High Street, Colchester, Essex, CO1 1JH</i> by E Holloway |
| CAT Report 234 | 2003 | <i>An archaeological evaluation at the First Eastern National bus station, Queen Street, Colchester, Essex May-June 2003</i> , by B Holloway |
| CAT Report 305 | 2005 | <i>An archaeological evaluation and watching brief in the grounds of East Hill House and the Colchester bus station, Colchester, Essex, October 2004</i> , by C Crossan |
| CAT Report 385 | 2006 | <i>Archaeological monitoring at Firstsite: Newsite and in Queen Street, Colchester, Essex, April 2006</i> , by B Holloway |
| CAT Report 477 | 2011 | <i>Roman houses and streets in Insulas 31/32 of Roman Colchester: excavations in advance of the construction of the Visual Arts Facility, East Hill, Colchester, Essex November 2006-December 2007 and June 2008</i> , by H Brooks, K Orr and W Clarke |
| CBCAA | 2021 | <i>Brief for an Archaeological Monitoring at "Firstsite", Lewis Gardens, Colchester</i> by S Wood |
| CIfA | 2014a | <i>Standard and Guidance for archaeological evaluation</i> |
| CIfA | 2014b | <i>Standard and guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials</i> |
| Cotter, J P | 2000 | <i>Colchester Archaeological Report 7: Post-Roman pottery from excavations in Colchester, 1971-85</i> . Colchester: Colchester Archaeological Trust Ltd. |
| Crummy, P | 1997 | <i>City of Victory: the story of Colchester – Britain's first Roman town</i> |
| Gurney, D | 2003 | <i>Standards for field archaeology in the East of England</i> . East Anglian Archaeology Occasional Papers 14 (EAA 14) |
| Historic England (HE) | 2016 | <i>Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment (MoRPHE)</i> |
| Johnson, A P | 2003 | <i>East Hill House, Colchester, Essex: magnetometer (gradiometer) and topographic survey</i> , produced by Oxford Archaeotechnics Limited on behalf of Colchester Borough Council) |
| Johnson, A P, Petchey, M R, & Colcutt, S N | 2003 | <i>St Botolph's Quarter regeneration schemes, Colchester, Cultural Heritage (Archaeology) Statement, Part 1: background and existing situation</i> , Oxford Archaeological Associates Ltd |
| Medlycott, M | 2011 | <i>Research and archaeology revisited: A revised framework for the East of England</i> . East Anglian Archaeology Occasional Papers 24 (EAA 24) |
| MHCLG | 2019 | <i>National Planning Policy Framework</i> . Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. |
| Richardson, K M | 1961 | 'Excavations in Lewis's Gardens, Colchester, 1955 and 1958', in <i>Transactions of the Essex Archaeological Society</i> , 1 , part 1 (third series), 7-36 |
| Sabin, D | 2004 | <i>Geophysical survey report: Colchester Visual Arts Facility</i> , produced by Stratascan Limited on behalf of English Heritage |

10 Abbreviations and glossary

CAT	Colchester Archaeological Trust
CBC	Colchester Borough Council
CBCAA	Colchester Borough Council Archaeological Advisor
CBM	ceramic building material, ie brick/tile
CHER	Colchester Historic Environment Record

CIfA	Chartered Institute for Archaeologists
context	specific location of finds on an archaeological site
EHER	Essex Historic Environment Record
feature (F)	an identifiable thing like a pit, a wall, a drain: can contain 'contexts'
Iron Age	period from 700 BC to Roman invasion of AD 43
layer (L)	distinct or distinguishable deposit (layer) of material
medieval	period from AD 1066 to c 1500
modern	period from c AD 1800 to the present
natural	geological deposit undisturbed by human activity
NGR	National Grid Reference
OASIS	Online Access to the Index of Archaeological Investigations, http://oasis.ac.uk/pages/wiki/Main
post-medieval	from c AD 1500 to c 1800
Roman	the period from AD 43 to c AD 410
section	(abbreviation sx or Sx) vertical slice through feature/s or layer/s
wsj	written scheme of investigation

11 Contents of archive

Finds: none retained

Paper record

One A4 document wallet containing:

The report (CAT Report 1756)

CBC monitoring brief, CAT written scheme of investigation

Original site record (sections)

Site digital photos and log

Digital record

The report (CAT Report 1756)

CBC monitoring brief, CAT written scheme of investigation

Site digital photographs, thumbnails and log

Graphic files

Survey data

12 Archive deposition

The paper and digital archive is currently held by the Colchester Archaeological Trust at Roman Circus House, Roman Circus Walk, Colchester, Essex CO2 7GZ, but will be permanently deposited with Colchester Museum under project ref. ECC4668.

Distribution list:

Purcell
Firstsite Ltd
Dr Simon Wood, Colchester Borough Council Planning Services
Essex Historic Environment Record



Colchester Archaeological Trust

Roman Circus House,
Roman Circus Walk,
Colchester,
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tel.: 01206 501785
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Checked by: Philip Crummy
Date: 22/12/21

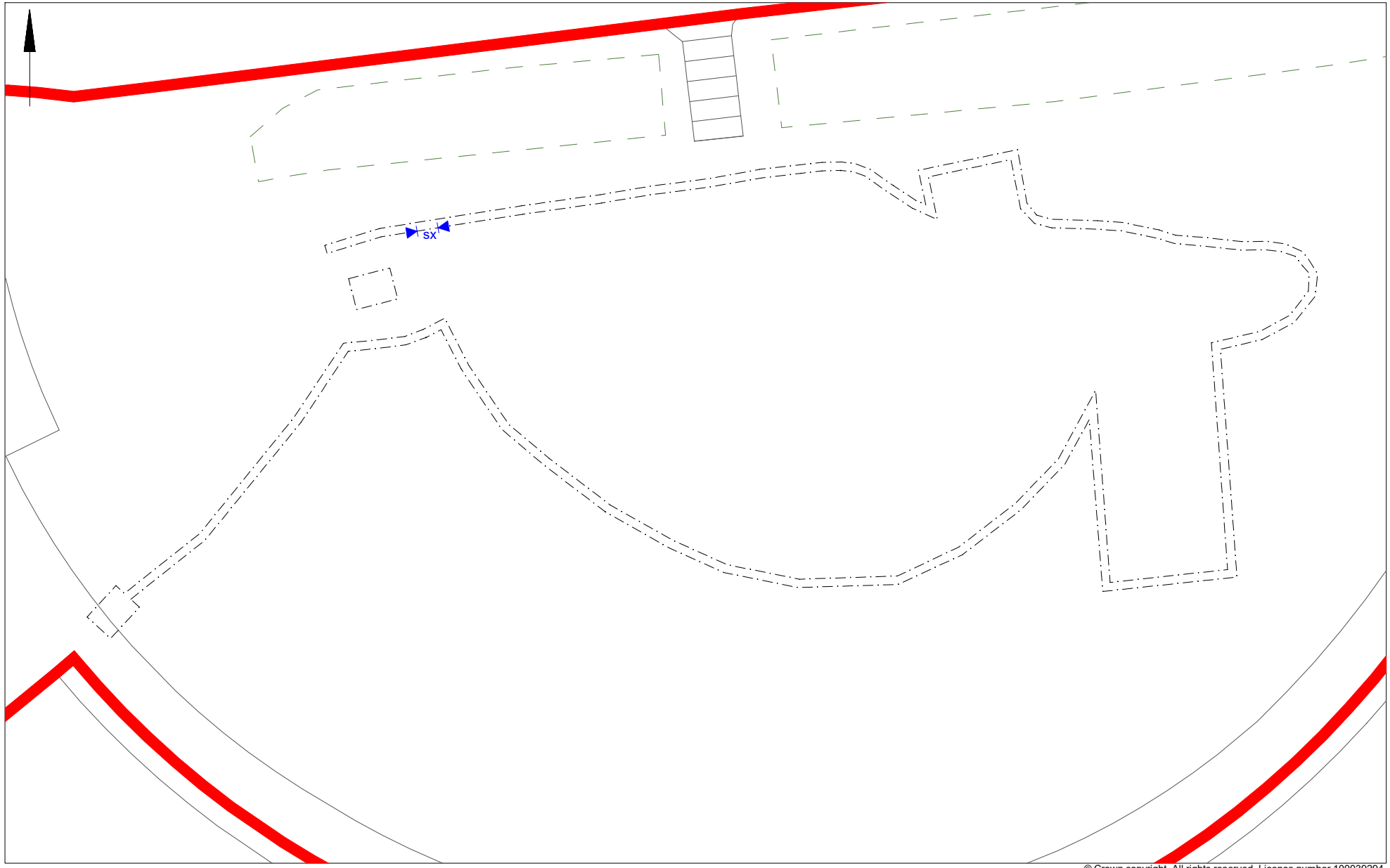


Fig 2 Results.

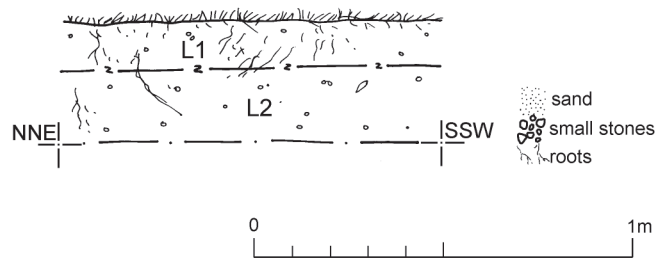


Fig 3 Representative section.

Essex Historic Environment Record/ Essex Archaeology and History

Summary sheet

Address: Firstsite, Lewis Gardens, High Street, Colchester, Essex, CO1 1JH	
Parish: Colchester	District: Colchester
NGR: TM 0008 2516 (centre)	Site code: CAT project ref.: 2021/10g CHER ref: ECC4668 OASIS ref: colchest3-433473
Type of work: Monitoring	Site director/group: Colchester Archaeological Trust
Date of work: 27th October 2021	Size of area investigated: c 48m ²
Location of curating museum: Colchester museum	Funding source: Colchester Borough Council
Further seasons anticipated? No	Related CHER/SMR number: MCC1050-1, MCC1679, MCC1681, MCC1467, MCC1469, MCC1471-4, MCC1477, MCC1479, ECC2918, ECC2747, ECC2599, MCC3025, ECC2651, MCC2654
Final report: CAT Report 1756	
Periods represented: Modern	
Summary of fieldwork results: Archaeological monitoring took place at Firstsite, Lewis Gardens, Colchester, Essex, during groundworks for the construction of six temporary sculptures. There is significant Roman activity in and around the development site; more specifically, it lies within Insulas 31/32 of the Roman town. Excavations did not go deep enough to disturb any possible archaeological remains, and only modern layers were identified.	
Previous summaries/reports: -	
Historic England Inspector of Ancient Monuments: Dr Jess Tipper	
Keywords: -	Significance: -
Author of summary: Megan Seehra	Date of summary: December 2021

Summary for colchest3-433473

OASIS ID (UID)	colchest3-433473
Project Name	Archaeological monitoring for a new sculpture garden at Firstsite, Lewis Gardens, High Street, Colchester, Essex, CO1 1JH
Activity type	WATCHING BRIEF
Project Identifier(s)	2021/10g
Planning Id	212354
Reason For Investigation	Planning requirement
Organisation Responsible for work	Colchester Archaeological Trust
Project Dates	27-Oct-2021 - 27-Oct-2021
Location	Firstsite, Lewis Gardens, High Street, Colchester, Essex NGR : TM 00080 25160 LL : 51.8890744043275, 0.906094328599086 12 Fig : 600080,225160
Administrative Areas	Country : England County : Essex District : Colchester Parish : Colchester, unparished area
Project Methodology	All groundworks were machine-excavated under the supervision of a CAT archaeologist. Trenches totalling c 120m in length were excavated to 0.4m wide by 0.2-0.5m deep. An area of deeper excavation on the west side of site was 1.5m by c 2m, and 0.55m deep.
Project Results	This was not collected in OASIS IV when this record was originally created
Keywords	
HER	Colchester Borough Council - unRev - STANDARD
HER Identifiers	
Archives	Digital Archive - to be deposited with Archaeology Data Service Archive Physical Archive - to be deposited with Colchester & Ipswich Museum Sevice (Colchester Collection)