RPS Planning, Transport and Environment

INDEX DATA	RPS INFORMATION
Scheme Title Eastern Approaches Road.	Details Arch. Eval. of route.
Road Number	Date
Contractor Colch Arch. Trust	
County Essex.	
OS Reference TM02.	
Single sided ✓ Double sided A3 1 Colour 0	

3|93 B ✓

COLCHESTER ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

Archaeological evaluation of the route of the Eastern Approaches Road, Phase 1

Summary

Nine small areas were examined in accordance with the evaluation brief prepared in August 1992. Of these, six produced no archaeologically significant observations, two (Trenches 6 and 7) contained minor evidence of late or post-medieval activity in their vicinity, and one (Trench 8) revealed well-preserved remains of occupation originating in the late 12th or 13th centuries if not before. The remains of the latter lie near the modern ground-level and it appears that they will need to be removed during groundworks for the new road. It seems likely that at least one complete medieval plot will be affected, not just the remains of the house(s) themselves.

Archaeological background

The port facilities played an important role in the development and success of Colchester from the late Iron Age onwards. Apart from their obvious economic significance in terms of the history of the town, they are likely to represent important archaeological remains in their right because of the way in which timbers and other organic remains can be preserved in the water-logged conditions which prevail close the river. However, knowledge about the whereabouts and character of its waterfronts/landing areas is very scant.

The Hythe was clearly important from the Norman period onwards if not before. It seems to have been established in the 11th or 12th centuries when it was known as 'New Hythe', its predecessor being further downstream at 'Ealdehethe' (now Old Heath). The extent of the original Norman waterfront is not known for certain but there are good reasons to suppose that it was on the west river bank and extended for about 195 yards downstream starting 37 yards from the site of the former bridge. Last century this was still referred to as The Town or The Common Quay. In the medieval period, warehouses and other buildings would have Lined the quay. The principle buildings in medieval Hythe would have lined the west side of the street now referred as Hythe Quay. It is not clear how far up Hythe Hill houses would have extended, but the position of St Leonard's church being well up the hill suggests an extensive built-up frontage by the end of the 12th century.

From the late 17th century onwards, various other quays were added downstream of the Common Quay, the earliest on the east river bank apparently being in 1823. The King Edward Quay was constructed in 1910-1912. Although the latter seems to have been built where there were no existing quays, there is some documentary evidence of much earlier ship yards and quays somewhere in this area.

The port facilities in the Roman period are obscure but, no doubt, a place as important and wealthy as Colchester would have been served by substantial waterfronts. Whilst there is some evidence for a landing area downstream at Fingringhoe, the location of the Roman waterfronts

are problematic particularly since the course of the river in Roman times is not clear because of later man-made changes.

There is some evidence for two Roman bridges in the Hythe area. A road has been traced as cropmarks from Mistley for about 8 miles to within half a mile of the Colne which presumably it crossed via a bridge a short distance upriver of the site of the present river. The road is absolutely straight and appears to have provided a link between the Roman town and a deep water facility on the Orwell.

Although not attested as cropmarks or by excavation, the modern Elmstead to Colchester road is straight in stretches suggesting that it too may have originated in the Roman period. If this is true, then there must have been another crossing point in the Hythe area, in this case around the site of the proposed new River Colne bridge. A Roman bridge in this position would have inhibited the passage of shipping in which case the Roman waterfront(s) must have downstream of here, perhaps even from this point southwards. (Of course the exact position of any such crossing points will depend on to what extent the river has been diverted since Roman times.)

The most-likely location for a waterfront in the Anglo-Saxon period is at Old Heath where, not only is the name indicative of such an origin, but so was the discovery in the area of an unusual Merovingian pot of 7th-century date.

There appears to be some evidence for prehistoric occupation. A series of at least five ring ditches has been recorded by aerial photography close by the east river bank. One of them, a double-ring ditch, lies in an area that has since been used as a dumping ground for debris from the Moler Works factory. Earlier the Ordnance Survey described these as tumuli although no earthworks seem to have existed when the aerial photographs were taken. Bronze Age barrow cemeteries commonly occur by the water's edge in this way. They can occur in large numbers and be accompanied by later 'flat' cemeteries which consist of scatters of cremations, usually in pots, set in the ground in and between the barrows.

A late Bronze Age socketed axe is recorded as having been found in the Hythe area although the exact find-spot is not known.

Results of the Field Evaluation

Trenches 1-7 were mechanically excavated to the stated levels, then selectively cleared by hand where necessary. Trench 8 was excavated entirely by hand. The trench locations are shown on figure 1.

East of the Colchester-Clacton Railway Line

Trench 1
Length: 10 m
Width: 1.6 m
Depth: 1.5 m
Location: adjoining the Elmstead Road frontage of the Tesco construction site.
This part of the Tesco site had previously been stripped by the contractor to a depth of 0.55 m,

leaving a reduced machine-trampled surface extending to the Elmstead Road frontage formerly occupied by the Mann Egerton garage. Partial removal of the recent machine debris exposed a widespread area of ground disturbance over the proposed course of the road. This wholesale disturbance was reflected in the exploratory trench which contained two phases of modern infill material to either side of a concrete retaining wall. The infills were found to extend to a depth of at least 1.5 m from the reduced level and are almost certainly related to groundworks for fuel storage under the former garage forecourt.

Trench 2
Length: 10 m
Width: 1.6 m
Depth: 1.4 m
Location: southern end of the Tesco construction site.
Beneath a 0.2 m thick concrete ground slab trenching revealed a natural stratigraphy of sand, gravel and silty clay, heavily contaminated in places by seepage of black oil. The only features present were a drain, brick wall foundation and a shallow pit; all of 19th-20th century date.

Colchester-Clacton Railway Line

Trench 3
Length: 9 m
Width: 1.6 m
Depth: 1.5 m
Location: Hepworth site, adjacent to railway footbridge path.
Twentieth-century demolition debris sealed two distinct deposits of ground make-up. The earlier deposit, a pink-tinged greyish brown sandy loam with a low ashy content, contained no datable inclusions but is possibly associated with the 19th century construction of the railway. This material extended to a depth of 1.1 m, where it directly sealed natural sand, gravel and clay.

Between the Railway Line and the River Colne

Trench 4
Length: 10 m
Width: 1.6 m
Depth: 1.3 m with probe to 1.6 m
Location: Moler Works forecourt.
Turf and imported topsoil sealed a thick dumped deposit of medium brown sandy loam which extended to a depth of 0.85 m. At that point lay a 0.1 m to 0.2 m thick modern spread of orange-red mortar lumps with occasional brick, slate and rare asbestos-cement fragments, which was present over the full length of the trench. Beneath this rubble was a subsoil layer of mid brown gravel-dominated loamy sand which merged into underlying clean reddish brown coarse natural gravelly sand at an overall depth of 1.1 m to 1.2 m.

Trench 5
Length: 5 m
Width: 1.75 m
Depth: 1.2 m, with probe to 1.5 m
Location: western end of Travis Perkins yard.
Immediately below the reinforced concrete slab was up to 0.12 m of very mixed but predominantly clayey soil which sealed a thin patch of charcoal-rich material at the southern end of the trench. Underlying these deposits was a 0.45 m thick layer of mid brown sandy clay loam subsoil, the upper levels of which were found to contain occasional fragments of peg-tile and rare flecks of white lime-rich mortar. The lower horizon of this soil gradually merged into natural gravel and sand at an overall depth of approximately 0.7 m.

New Swinging Basin

Trench 6
Length: 10 m
Width: 1.6 m
Depth: 1.1 m to 2.2 m
Location: land south of Moler Works
This trench provided a short profile of part of the raised river bank and the lower lying ground to the north-east. The bank displayed two stages of construction. The earlier phase appears to be of late or post-medieval date and was represented by a 1 m high mound of soil almost identical in appearance to the underlying greyish-brown natural clay, but with a higher stoney content. The height of the bank has subsequently been increased by a further 0.7 m by relatively modern deposition of a dark greyish brown sandy loam which extends north-eastward beyond the foot of the bank, where it was found to be sealed by a recent substantial dump of industrial refuse.

Trench 7
Length: 10 m
Width: 1.6 m
Depth: 1.4 m
Location: Land south of Moler Works
Up to 0.65 m of recently deposited topsoil and silt loam sealed a malodorous dump of powders, sawdust and other modern refuse from Moler Works. This material extended to an overall depth of 1.3 m, where it appeared to interface directly with underlying natural mid to dark grey clay. Although no other subsoil was discernible at that point it is possible that any present was obscured by staining from the overlying industrial waste. Excavation ceased on reaching the water table at a depth of 1.4 m.

Trench 8
Length: 4.9m
Width: 2 m
Depth: 0.3 m to 0.4 m, with probes to 1.1 m
Location: front of former Colchester Tractors premises, 79 Hythe Hill.
The numbers quoted below in brackets refer to contexts illustrated in figures 2 and 3.
Removal of 0.3 m of post-18th century material revealed a mortared septaria east-west wall (F4) which appears to be part of the street frontage of a late or post-medieval building. At a right angle to the wall, in the central part of the trench, was a 0.2 m wide north-south slot, partly filled with mortar (F7), possibly representing the removal of an internal partition associated with this or a later phase of building. In the absence of deeper modern features suitable for excavation by hand, two small exploratory pits were dug to either side of the internal wall to assess the underlying stratigraphy. To the east a spread of pebbles and peg-tile was found to lay over a thin deposit of mortar-flecked clay loam (L5), which covered a clay floor (L6). Stratigraphically, the floor appeared to be either earlier than, or contemporary with the frontage wall, but further excavation will be necessary to clarify the relationship between the two. Part of the floor surface adjacent to the wall exhibited *in situ* burning and this may be associated with a more extensive area of burnt material, possibly a hearth, which was partially exposed in the area to the west. Beneath the floor were thick deposits of pale brown clay loam with occasional charcoal and oyster fragments (L7). Two features of interest were noted within these deposits: a pit containing late 12th/13th century pottery (F12); and a small area of mortar which possibly represents an earlier phase of wall construction. No floors were discernible in the exploratory pit at the western end of the trench; instead a deep layer of dumped clay loam, identical to the material beneath the floor to the east, extended as far as the natural sand at the bottom of the pit.
The key depths are as follows:

Stone frontage wall: 0.3 m
Clay floor: 0.4 m
Possible earlier construction level: 0.55 m
Late 12th/13th century pit: 0.65 m
Natural sand and gravel; 1.1 m

Section South of Hythe Hill

The original brief recommended investigation on the site for the southern stretch of the Hythe Hill by-pass. The need for trenching there was avoided by the discovery of an exposed section at the edge of terraced ground at the rear of industrial premises facing Hythe Quay. The section contained an unremarkable stratigraphy consisting of 0.5 m of dark soil above natural sand, much of which has been removed by the earlier terracing.

31st March 1993

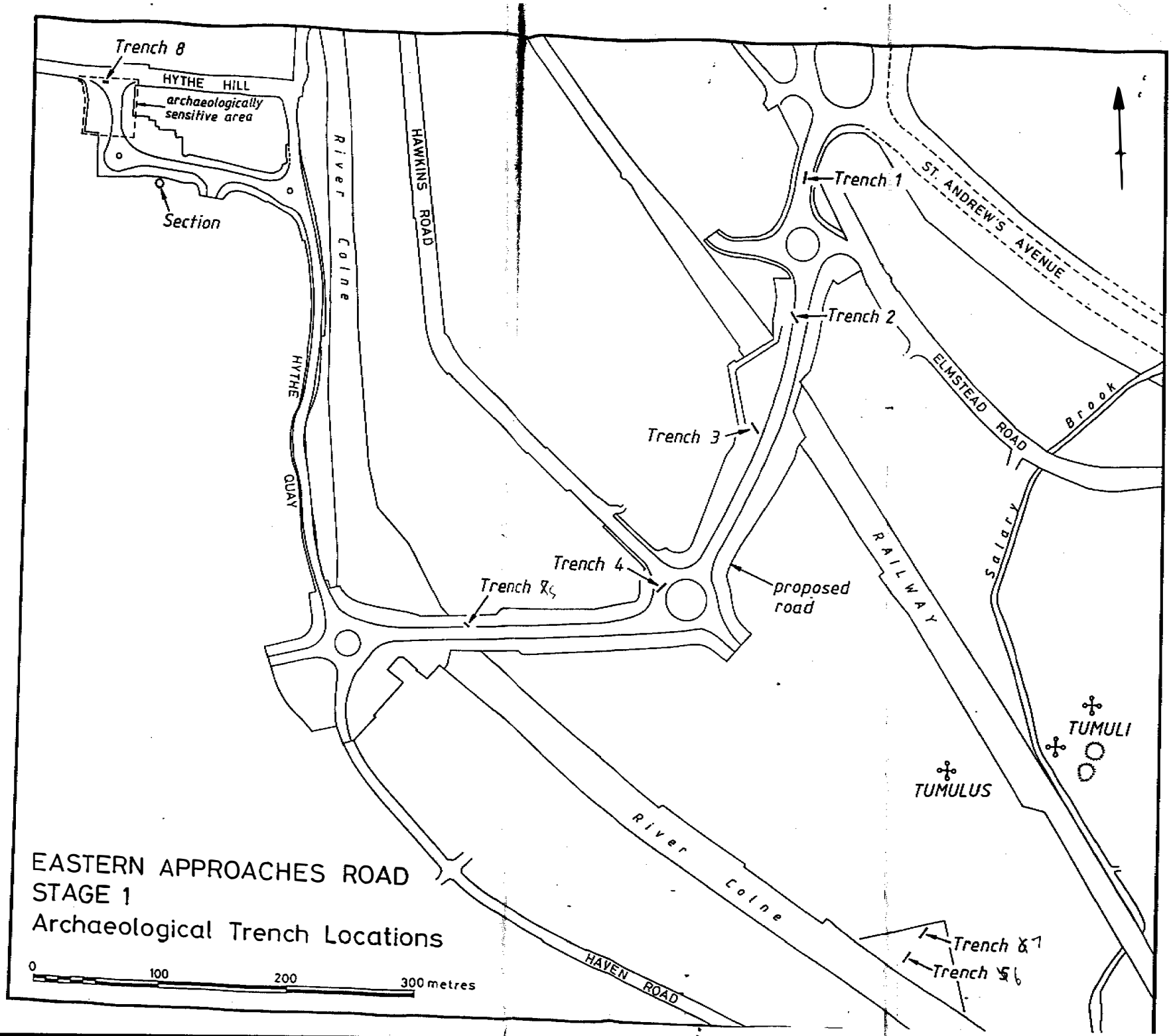
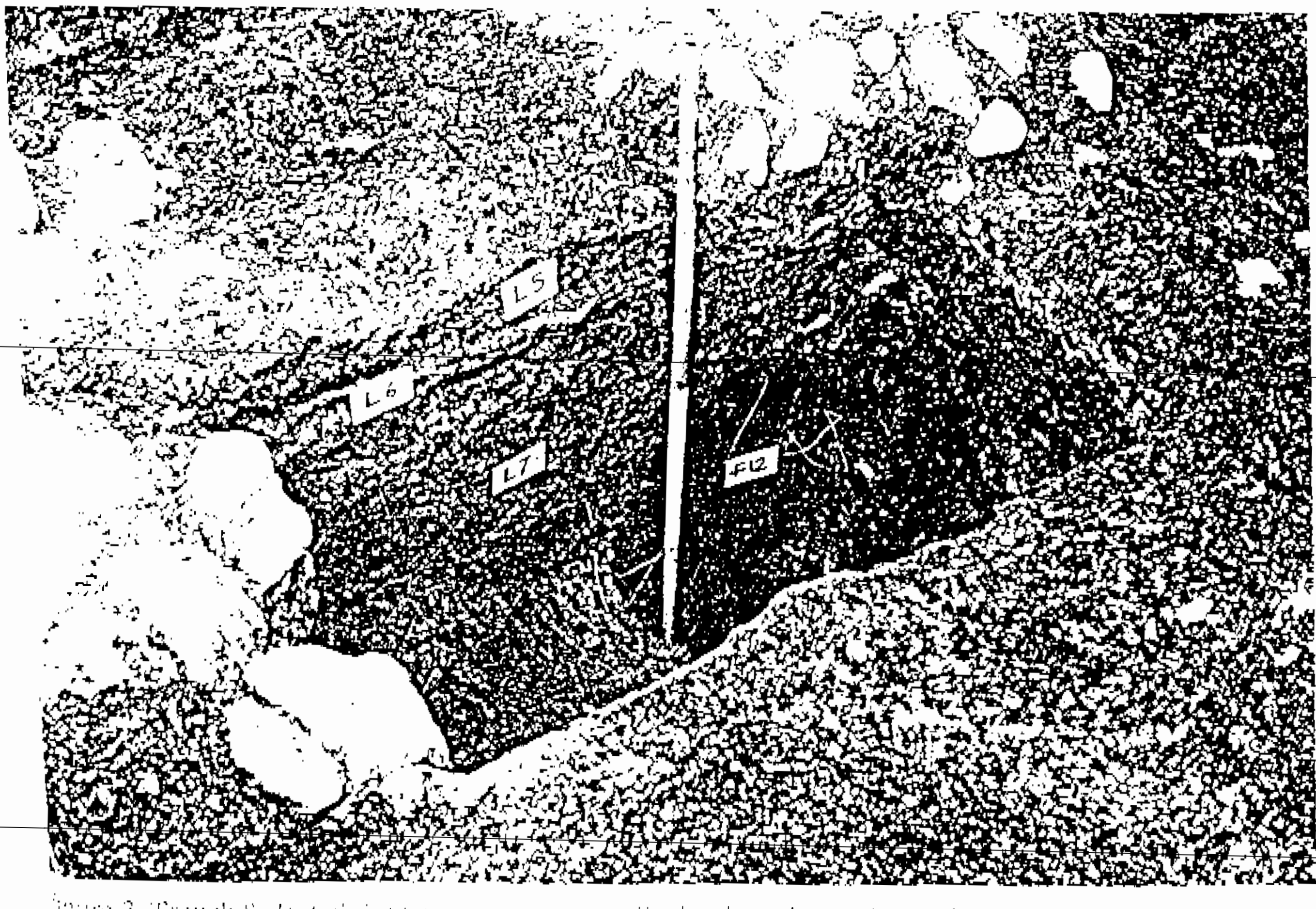

Trench 8
HYTHE HILL
archaeologically sensitive area
Section
River Colne
HAWKINS ROAD
HYTHE QUAY
Trench 1
ST. ANDREW'S AVENUE
Trench 2
ELMSTEAD ROAD
Brook
Trench 3
Trench 4
Trench 5
proposed road
RAILWAY
Salary
TUMULI
TUMULUS
River Colne
Trench 6
Trench 7
HAVEN ROAD
EASTERN APPROACHES ROAD
STAGE 1
Archaeological Trench Locations
0
100
200
300 metres

Figure 2. Trench 8. No 79 Hythe Hill.



igure 3. Trench 8. Detail showing p[illegible] wall, clay floor (L[illegible]) and [illegible] stratigraphy

Suggested mitigation programme

We suggest that to reduce the likely impact of the scheme on the archaeological remains to an acceptable level, the development consortium should consider undertaking the following:

1) A full programme of excavation and post-excavation to be commissioned on the former site of Colchester Tractors premises to a depth of 0.3 m below the formation level of the road or to the top of natural, whichever is less. The area concerned is indicated on the enclosed plan and is around 1500 square metres.

2) Within the construction programme, an assessment on the site of the western abutment of the new bridge to be commissioned and to be followed up if necessary by a full programme of excavation and post-excavation of areas where more than four per cent of significant archaeological remains will be or are likely to be destroyed.

3) A watching brief to be undertaken during the major phases of ground disturbance.

4) The work to be carried out by an accredited archaeological agency or agencies, according to nationally-accepted standards and practices.

5) A ground-level photographic survey be undertaken of the existing buildings and street scenes along the line of the route and suitably annotated prints and negatives be deposited in the Colchester Museums.

Colchester Archaeological Trust,
31st March 1993