

Almond Tree Avenue Coventry

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION



EXPERTISE WHERE YOU NEED IT

Archaeology Warwickshire Report No 2036

APRIL 2020



*Working for
Warwickshire*

Project: Almond Tree Avenue evaluation
Commissioned by: Seddon Construction Ltd
Site Code: ATA20
Planning Reference: FUL/2019/1778
Planning Authority: Coventry City Council
National Grid Reference: SP 36169 82929
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SUMMARY

An archaeological evaluation was carried out on behalf of Seddon Construction Ltd, in advance of housing development on land off Almond Tree Avenue, Coventry. The site lies within the River Sowe Archaeological Constraint Area and was thought likely to contain significant palaeo-environmental data.

The evaluation has demonstrated that no significant alluvial deposits are present on the site.

A north-south ditch which contained post-medieval finds corresponds with a boundary on 19th century mapping and was associated with a similarly dated east-west ditch.

A large modern pit contained tips of material associated with the construction of the Almond tree housing estate.

The evaluation demonstrated that no significant archaeological remains will be disturbed by the development.

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Planning permission has been granted by Coventry City Council for the erection of 36 new dwellings at land off Almond Tree Avenue, Coventry CV2 1JR (FUL/2019/1778). The site lies within the River Sowe Archaeological Constraint Area, which has been designated for its palaeo-environmental potential. A condition of planning permission required that a programme of trial trenching be carried prior to the development taking place, in accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) approved by the Planning Authority.
- 1.2 Archaeology Warwickshire were commissioned to undertake an archaeological evaluation in accordance with a WSI (Hillman 2020) approved by Coventry City's archaeological advisor Matt Parker Wooding, which took place on the 9th -11th March 2020. This report presents the results of that work.
- 1.3 The archive will be stored at Coventry Herbert Museum and Art Gallery under the site code ATA20.
- 1.4 This work was carried out in accordance with the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists Standard and guidance for field evaluation (2014).

2 SITE LOCATION

- 2.1 The application area, centred on National Grid Reference SP 36169 82929, to the east of Almond Tree Avenue is approximately 5 km from Coventry city centre.
- 2.2 The site comprises an area of grassed public open space bounded to the west by Almond Tree Avenue and to the south by Hillmorton Road.
- 2.3 The site lies on gently sloping land with a small north-south unnamed stream shrouded in dense scrub and light tree cover on its eastern boundary (Figs 1 - 3). The stream drains from Wyken Pool located approximately 240m to the north and then joins the River Sowe approximately 300m to the south. Significant quantities of made ground comprising bricks and building detritus is recorded to depths of up 1.6m, especially on the eastern edges of the site along the line of the proposed development.
- 2.4 The area is recorded as Helsby Sandstone Formation (a fine- to medium-grained, locally micaceous, cross-bedded and flat-bedded sandstones, weathering to sand near surface) in which pebbles are present. Superficial deposits of alluvium are recorded immediately adjacent to the stream, and diamicton of the Thrussington Member on the higher (terrace) ground, probably adjacent (west) of the Almond Tree Avenue (British Geological Survey 2020).

3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The Heritage Gateway and National Heritage List for England were consulted to inform this background. There are no archaeological records for the area immediately surrounding the application site, although recent excavations along the Sowe Valley to the south of Coventry have revealed considerable evidence for prehistoric, Roman and Anglo-Saxon land use (Archaeology Warwickshire forthcoming) which demonstrate the importance of the valley to the development of the area.
- 3.2 On the First Edition Ordnance Survey map of 1887 (old-maps.co.uk) the application area is depicted as a field bounded by hedges to the west of the River Sowe. By 1962 the land to the west had been fully developed, with the application area remaining as open ground albeit traversed by footpaths.
- 3.3 The area has been designated as an Archaeological Constraint Area by Coventry City Council due to the proximity of a tributary of the River Sowe and the potential for palaeo-environmental remains to be preserved on the site.
- 3.4 The importance of environmental data is well-established within the West Midlands Research Framework process, with a particular emphasis on ‘natural deposits’ such as alluvial sequences, palaeochannels and peat deposits which have their own intrinsic archaeological value (Pearson 2017).
- 3.5 A geotechnical study report (ASL 2018a) and subsequent geotechnical investigations (ASL 2018b) were undertaken along the line of the proposed housing development (see Fig A1, Appendix 1) on behalf of Coventry City Council. The field investigation comprised 11 fieldwork interventions:
- 5 x windowless sample boreholes (WS) to a maximum depth of 5.10m and;
 - 6 x machine excavated trial pits (TP) to a maximum depth of 3.70m
- This work encountered topsoil (often with building debris and bricks), made ground (including former topsoil and geology (recorded as Thrussington Sands and Helsby Sandstone Formation). In just one location alluvium (*sic.* ‘Aluminium’ trial pit 2 log; ASL 2018b) occurred at 1.60 to 2.10 meters depth and was described as ‘soft green grey and locally black slightly gravelly sandy CLAY with occasional pockets (<200mm) of soft black organic clay with frequent fragments of organic matter. Gravel is sub-rounded fine to coarse quartzite. Moderate organic odour.’

4 AIMS AND METHODS

- 4.1 The main aim of the evaluation was to determine if there are any significant palaeoenvironmental remains in the area to be developed; to form an understanding of their value and their potential to shed light on human use of the area.
- 4.2 Because the site is close to River Sowe Archaeological Constraint Area, which has been identified for its palaeo-environmental potential, the more explicit aims were to
- establish if there are alluvial layers,
 - how many there are,
 - whether we can date them, and
 - what potential environmental information they contain
- 4.3 The area was evaluated by means of 140m of trial trenching. The northern part of Trench 1 was not excavated due to the presence of reportable asbestos.
- 4.4 Topsoil, former ploughsoils and demonstrably modern overburden were removed by an appropriate machine using a toothless bucket under direct archaeological supervision. Ground reduction was carried out in shallow spits.
- 4.5 Sondages at both ends of Trench 4 and the southern end of Trench 1 were designed to establish the presence of alluvial layers and assess their potential for environmental information.

The aims were to record the presence, character and extent of overbank floodplain in the evaluation trenches, and to sample these, as appropriate, as undisturbed sediment samples (monolith) for more detailed geoarchaeological recording and subsampling for pollen and diatoms as appropriate. In addition, an attempt to date the onset and end of any alluvial facies would be made.

5 RESULTS

Geological Natural

- 5.1 The uppermost geological stratum across the site was reddish-brown or yellowish-brown sandy clay (106, 204, 303 and 403). This was exposed 0.75 - 1m below the current ground surface (Photos 2-3).

Deposit Sequence

- 5.2 A thin layer of alluvially derived greyish brown silt loam with sand inclusions (402), 0.17m thick, was recorded in the south-eastern end of Trench 4 (Photo 4) and an incipient alluvial B (ie, the base of a former alluvial soil) at the northern end (Photo 5). Both of these thin 'alluvial' horizons have a component of weathered parent material (aka 'natural'), so are not entirely overbank floodplain alluvium *sensu stricto*.

Table 1: Evaluation Trench 4, southern end

Depth (m)	Unit	Description
0-0.4	400 A: topsoil	Very dark grey (10YR 3/1) humic silt loam, weak poor small to medium crumb structure in upper 5-7cm, many fine fleshy and fibrous roots, almost stone-free (rare small and medium rounded and subrounded stones), rare glass bottles, sharp wavy, locally indurated, boundary
0.4-0.98	401: Made up ground	Brown (10YR 4/5) sandy silt loam, slightly sticky, several whole bricks, tiles and glass bottles distributed through deposit, rare large patches of coal/coke, rare medium to large rounded pebbles, some strong yellowish brown sand lenses, clear smooth boundary to locally indurated and mixed boundary
0.98-1.15	402 : Alluvium	Greyish brown to brown (10YR 5/2-3) looks grey, silt loam with sand inclusions – silty sand loam, massive, becoming sandier with depth clear boundary but grading into deposit below
	403: Weathered sandstone	Yellowish brown sandy loam, looks reddish brown, and grey/brownish grey in patched Parent material: Weathered Helsby Sandstone Formation

Table 2: Evaluation Trench 4, northern end

Depth (m)	Unit	Description
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0-0.28	400 A: topsoil	Dark brown to dark yellowish brown (10YR 3/3-4) humic silt loam, weak poor small to medium crumb structure in upper 5-7cm, many fine fleshy and fibrous roots, essentially stone-free, clear to mixed gradual boundary
0.28-0.67	401: Made ground	Brown silt loam with brick, tile, charcoal and subsoil material, sharp smooth boundary
0.67-0.75	402: Alluvium	Dark brown to brock (10YR 4/3-3) sandy silt loam, massive, stone-free, abrupt, and locally clear boundary Alluvial B / weathered parent material
	403: Weathered sandstone	Mixed reddish brown, and greenish yellow (?gleyed) silty sands Parent material: Weathered Helsby Sandstone Formation

Trench 1

5.3 The southern end of the trench was geoarchaeologically evaluated with a 2m deep sondage. Machine excavation of the trench beyond 15m north of this point was temporarily halted due to the presence of reportable asbestos. A second profile was cursorily record c. 10m from the southern section.

Table 3: Trench 1, southern end

Depth (m)	Unit	Description
0.3	100 A: topsoil	Dark brown to dark yellowish brown (10YR 3/3-4) humic silt loam, , weak poor small to medium crumb structure in upper 5-7cm, many fine fleshy and fibrous roots, essentially stone-free, clear to mixed gradual boundary
0.3-0.8	103: made up ground	Brown to yellowish brown loose and crumbly silt loam, few inclusions
0.8-1.4	108: fill of ditch or pit 107	Dark greyish brown (10YR 4/2) humic silty sand to silt loam, with few, occasional, small and medium rounded pebbles, sharp to abrupt cut
	106: weathered sandstone	Brown (10YR 5/2) but looks reddish brown sandy loam

Post-medieval/ modern

- 5.4 Archaeological features were encountered in Trenches 1 and 2. In Trench 1, a north-south aligned ditch 102 was disturbed by a further east-west running ditch or pit 107. Ditch 102 was at least 1.7m wide and extended for approximately 5m in the trench. Ditch or pit 107 was c. 2m wide and 1.4m deep with an uneven bowl-shaped profile (Fig 4, Section A; Photo 6). Both features contained a similar dark grey sandy silt loam, 103 and 108 respectively, which yielded fragments of brick and glass, none of which were retained.
- 5.5 A large pit, 202, extended for c. 29m across the Trench 2 (Fig 4, Section B; Photo 7). A machine slot was excavated at its northern end to determine the depth and character of the feature. It was infilled by several layers of tip material: its lower fill 207, 0.15m deep, comprised brownish grey sandy silt with frequent small sized stones. Above this was a 0.6m thick layer of red brown silty clay, 208, sealed by a 0.1m thick yellowish grey sandy silt loam (205). The pit was sealed by dark grey sandy silt loam (203), c.0.25m thick, which incorporated small brick fragments, none of which were retained. The pit was not fully excavated due to its depth and instability of the sides.

Augering

- 5.6 As a consequence of the lack of overbank alluvium in evaluation trenches 1 and 4, a 40mm diameter *dutch combination* hand auger hole was sunk closer to the stream (c. 30-40m), within the area of the proposed attenuation depression (Photo 8; Fig 2) to the weathered sandstone formation (Fig 7). The deposits here were shallow; only 0.65m to the weathered geology, and no overbank alluvial deposits were detected.

Geoarchaeological and palaeo-environmental sampling

- 5.7 No well-preserved nor deeply stratified deposits of overbank floodplain alluvium were encountered. The most significant was the 0.17m thick of undated and undateable alluvium (403) in the southern end of trench 4. No sampling was deemed necessary nor useful; this was discussed on site with the Historic England Regional Scientific Advisor, Lisa Moffett, who concurred.
- 5.8 The lack of overbank floodplain alluvium here suggests that regular and season, flooding with mineral loaded water did not occur, or did not historically extend this high

up the valley floodplain or valley side. In fact, the auger record questions the presence of any significant overbank floodplain deposits.

- 5.9 The valley side shows a gentle, almost uniform, slope (note vertical scale exaggerated), with trench 4 between 1 and 2 m above the base of the valley. Notably the valley side increases in steepness at its western edge as it rises onto the terrace edge, and into the area of the proposed build. This topography helps explain the lack of alluvium at this location, and fact that it is c. 80m from the course of the current small stream.
- 5.10 The “Alluvium” recorded by ALS Geotechnical in trial pit 2 (see Table A1. Appendix 1), and described as ‘black slightly gravelly sandy clay with occasional pockets (<200mm) of soft black organic clay with frequent fragments of organic matter’, was probably not alluvium, but equivalent to the ditch fill (108), in Trench 1.

6 CONCLUSIONS

- 6.1 No significant archaeological or palaeo-environmental deposits were recorded in the evaluation trenches. This evidence can be extrapolated to reason that none was recorded in the previous geotechnical field investigations. A shallow thin alluvium and an incipient alluvial B horizon in the northern part of Trench 4 indicate that floodplain alluvium was so slight so as not to form formal alluvial deposits, but is expressed in a slightly alluvial nature of the lower horizon of a former soil (eg, context 402, northern end).
- 6.2 The evaluation was able to establish:
- the overall lack of alluvial layers within the development area
 - what limited alluvial deposits are present are undated, and contained no obvious, nor suitable organic matter to date them
 - the limited alluvium has extremely low palaeo-environmental potential, despite the possibility of containing pollen or diatoms
 - there would be no way of easily relating and short palaeo-environmental sequence, to any of the known archaeological activities in the immediate area and catchment (eg, Baginton etc.)
- 6.3 The north-south ditch 102 in Trench 1 most likely represents a former boundary ditch shown on 19th century mapping. The function of ditch 107 remains unknown but brick and glass fragments recovered from the infilling suggests a post-medieval date.
- 6.4 In trench 2, a large pit 202 which produced post-medieval building material appears to represent deep landscaping works and levelling of the area prior to, or contemporary with the construction of the 20th century houses fronting the western side of Almond Tree Avenue. The pit was not fully excavated due to the trench depth and instability of the sides.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Archaeology Warwickshire would like to thank Seddon Construction Ltd for commissioning the work, facilitating a UEXO toolbox talk and providing an asbestos specialist to oversee the trenching. Thanks also to Lisa Moffett (Historic England Regional Scientific Advisor) for her attendance on site and Matt Parking Wooding for monitoring the works on behalf of Coventry City Council.

REFERENCES

ASL 2018a *Desk Study Report: Land off Almond Tree Avenue, Coventry, ASL Report No. 114-18-566-11*. Unpublished report for Coventry City Council.

ASL 2018b *Ground Investigation: Land off Almond Tree Avenue, Coventry, ASL Report No. 114-18-566-09*. Unpublished report for Coventry City Council.

Hillman, B, 2020 *Archaeological Evaluation, Written Scheme of Investigation, Almond Tree Avenue Coventry*, Unpublished Archaeology Warwickshire document.

Hodgson, J, M, 1997 *Soil Survey Field Handbook*. Silsoe: Soil Survey and Land Research Centre



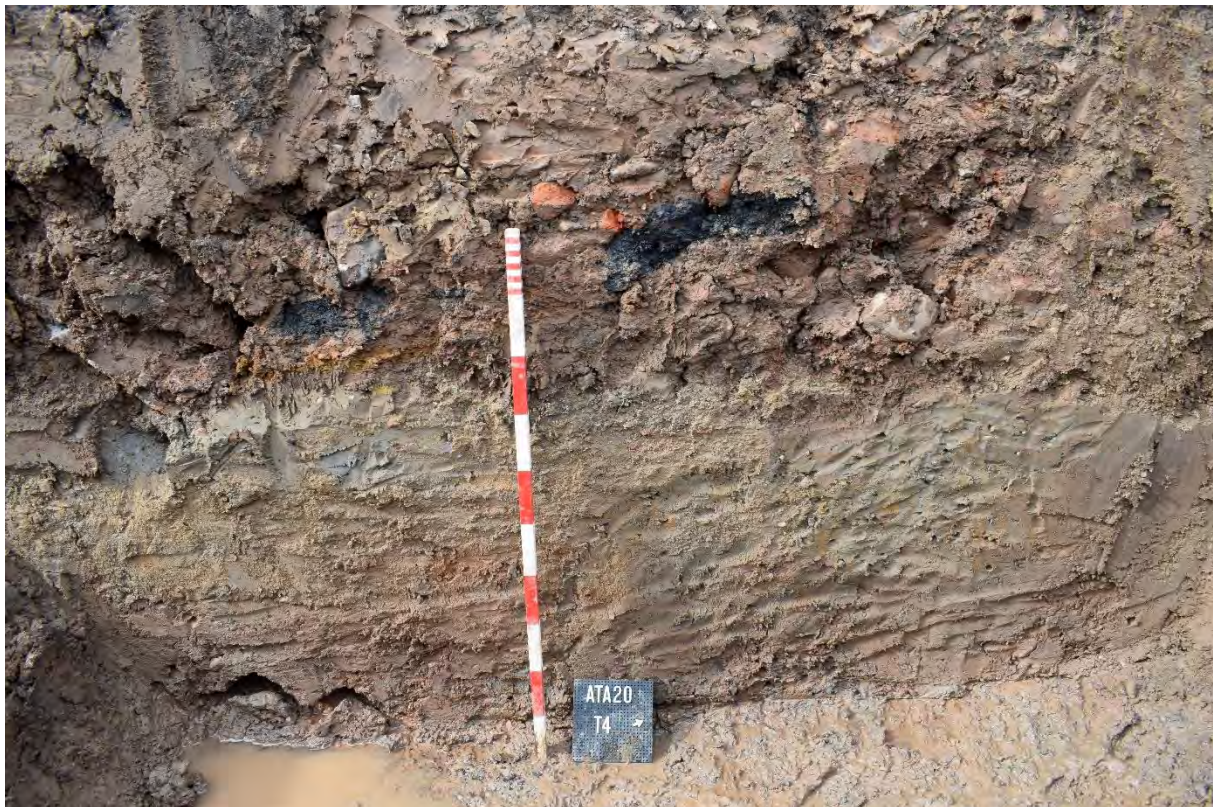
1: Land off Almond Tree Avenue looking south with the stream in the woods to the left
(Image © M.J. Allen 2020)



2: Trench 2, looking south



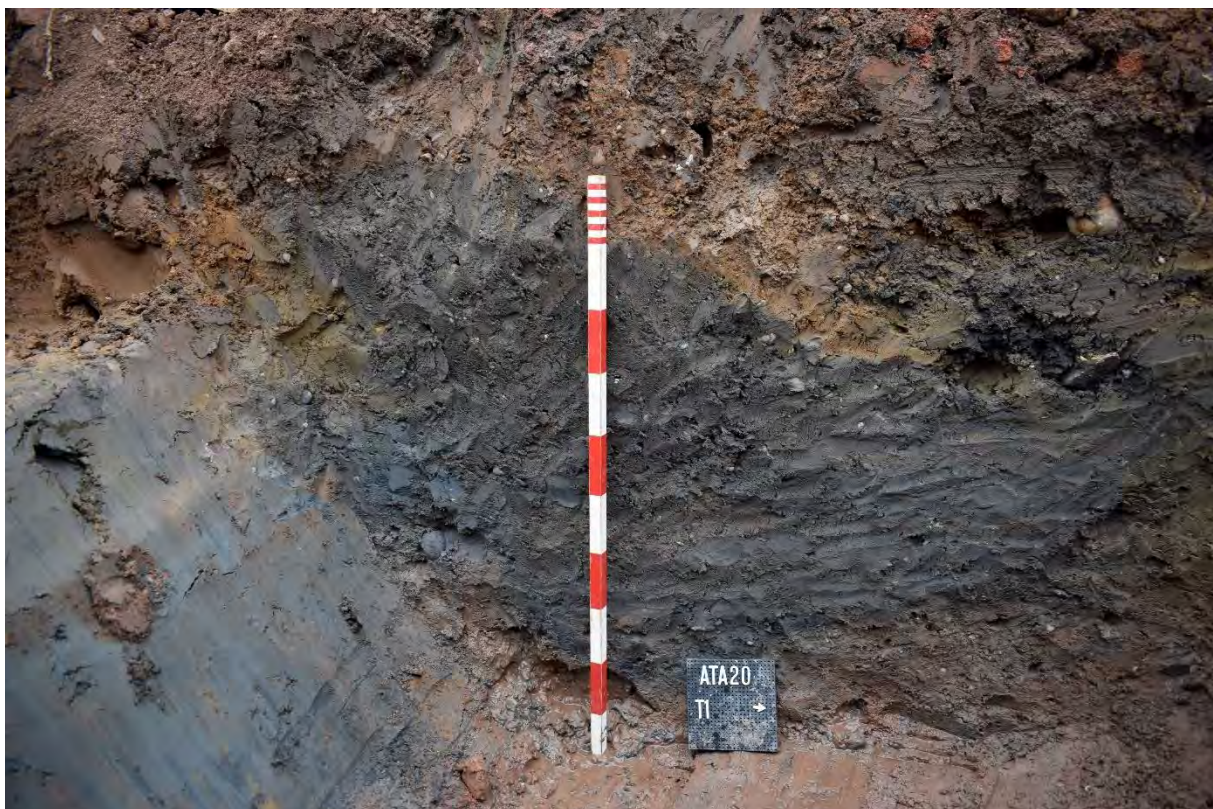
3: Trench 3, looking north



4: Trench 4, southern end: profile 1



5: Trench 4, northern end: profile 2



6: Trench 1, southern end profile 3



7: Pit 202



8: Auger core: top if to the left, for location see Fig. 2(Image © M.J. Allen 2020)

APPENDICES

A List of contexts

<i>Trench</i>	<i>Context</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Depth (m) or height AOD</i>	<i>Comment</i>
1	100	Dark brown silty loam	0.4	Topsoil
1	101	Reddish brown clay containing bricks and building material	0.45	Made up ground
1	102	Bowl shaped profile	1.4	Ditch cut
1	103	Dark grey sandy silt loam		Fill of ditch 102
1	104			VOID
1	105			VOID
1	106	Yellowish brown sandy clay		Geological natural
2	200	Dark brown silty loam	0.35	Topsoil
2	201	Reddish brown clay containing bricks and building material	0.4	Made up ground
2	202	Steep sides, base not excavated		Pit cut
2	203	Dark grey sandy silt loam	0.24	Fill of pit 202
2	204	Reddish or yellowish brown sandy clay		Geological natural
2	205	Yellowish grey sandy silt loam with roots	0.1	Fill of pit 202
2	206	Grey sandy silt with occasional roots	0.2	Fill of pit 202
2	207	Brownish grey sandy silt with frequent rounded stones	0.15	Upper fill of pit 202
2	208	Reddish brown silty	0.6	Made up ground

		clay		
3	300	Dark brown silty loam	0.25	Topsoil
3	301	Firm grey silty sand		Made up ground
3	302	Greyish brown silty clay	0.13	Alluvial subsoil
3	303	Yellowish or reddish brown sandy clay		Geological natural
4	400	Dark brown silty loam	0.25	Topsoil
4	401	Brown sandy silt loam	0.9	Made up ground
4	402	Greyish brown silt loam	0.13	Alluvium overbank
4	403	Yellowish or reddish brown sandy clay		Geological natural
4	404	Dark brown silty loam		Alluvial subsoil

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OASIS ID: archaeol27-319092

Project details

Project name	Almond Tree Avenue, Coventry, Archaeological Evaluation
Short description of the project	An archaeological evaluation was carried out on behalf of Seddon Construction Ltd, in advance of housing development on land off Almond Tree Avenue, Coventry. The site lies within the River Sowe Archaeological Constraint Area and was thought likely to contain significant palaeo-environmental data. The evaluation has demonstrated that no significant alluvial deposits are present on the site. A north-south ditch which contained post-medieval finds corresponds with a boundary on 19th century mapping and was associated with a similarly dated east-west ditch. A large modern pit contained tips of material associated with the construction of the Almond tree housing estate. The evaluation demonstrated that no significant archaeological remains will be disturbed by the development.
Project dates	Start: 09-03-2020 End: 11-03-2020
Previous/future work	Yes / No
Any associated project reference codes	ATA20 - Sitecode
Any associated project reference codes	FUL/2019/1778 - Planning Application No.
Type of project	Field evaluation
Site status	None
Current Land use	Other 14 - Recreational usage
Monument type	BOUNDARY DITCH Post Medieval
Significant Finds	NONE None
Methods & techniques	"Targeted Trenches"
Development type	Housing estate
Prompt	National Planning Policy Framework - NPPF
Position in the planning process	After full determination (eg. As a condition)

Project location

Country	England
Site location	WEST MIDLANDS COVENTRY COVENTRY Almond Tree Avenue
Postcode	CV2 1JX
Study area	200 Square metres

Site coordinates SP 36169 82929 52.442755495275 -1.467824434761 52 26 33 N 001 28 04 W Point

Project creators

Name of Organisation Archaeology Warwickshire

Project brief originator Local Planning Authority (with/without advice from County/District Archaeologist)

Project design originator Matt Parker Wooding

Project director/manager Caroline Rann

Project supervisor Eri Kleisoura

Type of sponsor/funding body Developer

Name of sponsor/funding body Seddon Construction

Project archives

Physical Archive Exists? No

Digital Archive recipient HERBERT ART GALLERY AND MUSEUM

Digital Contents "none"

Digital Media available "Images raster / digital photography", "Text"

Paper Archive recipient HERBERT ART GALLERY AND MUSEUM

Paper Contents "none"

Paper Media available "Context sheet", "Drawing", "Report", "Unspecified Archive"

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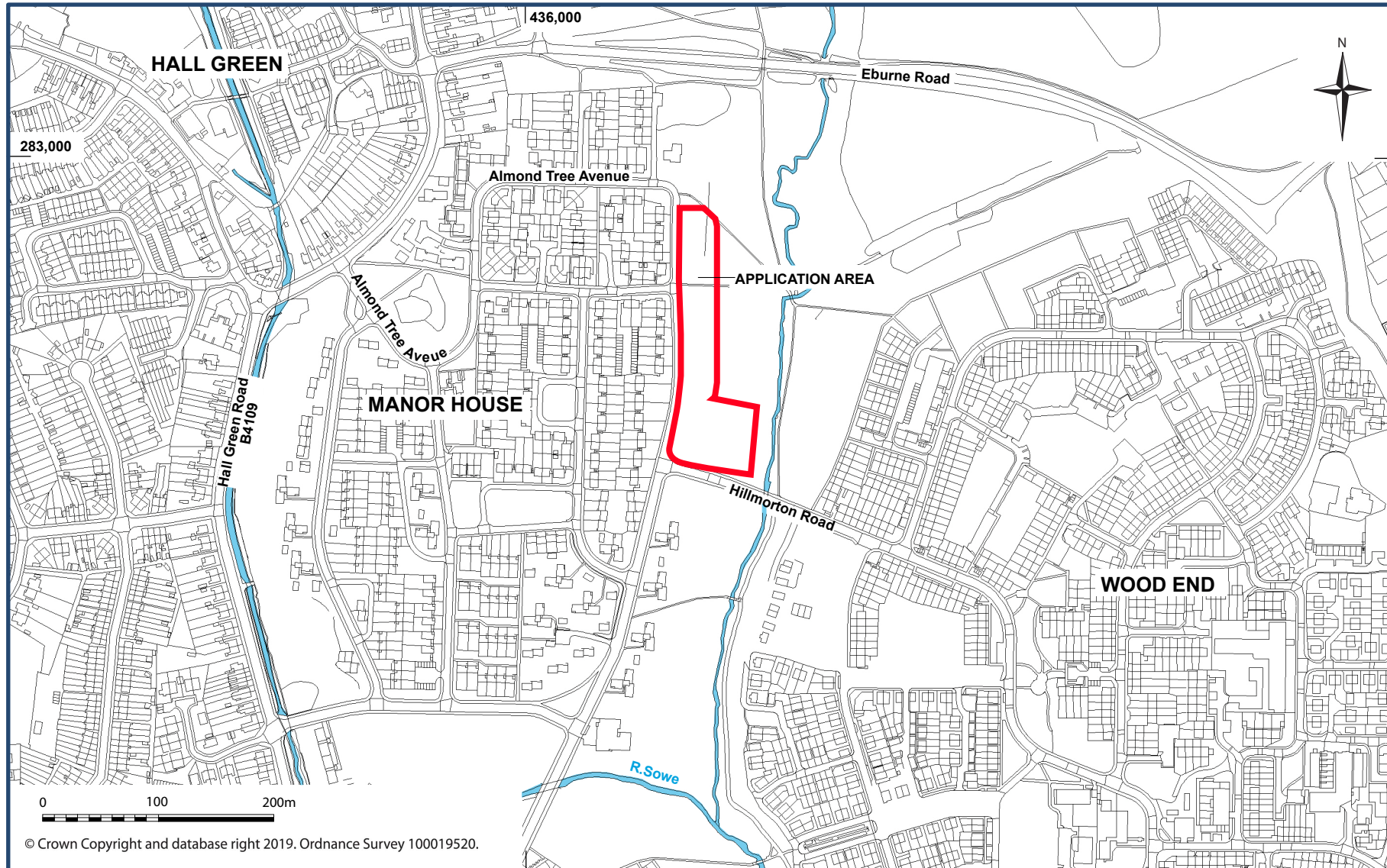
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Fig 1: Location of application area

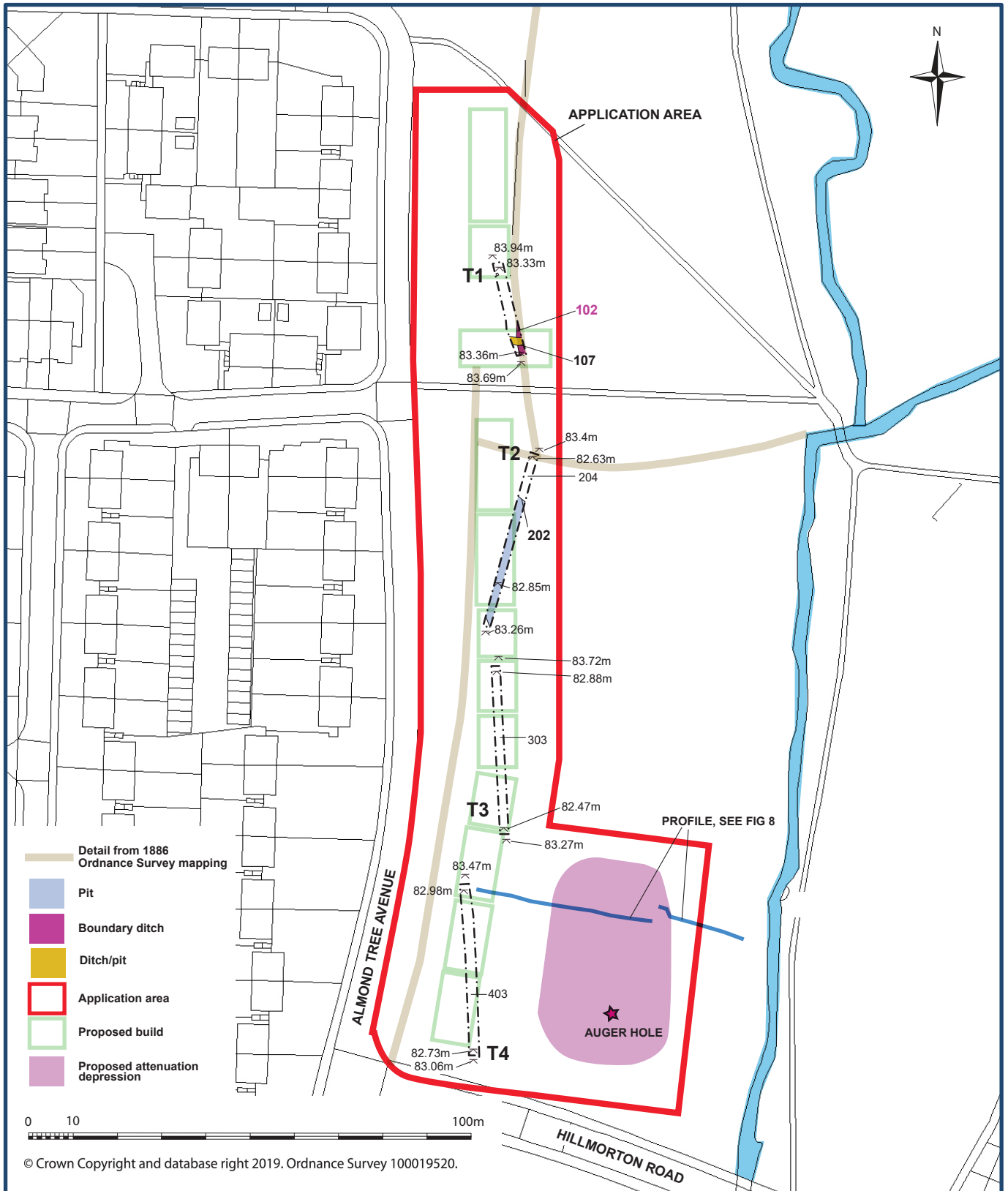


Fig 2: Location of excavated trenches

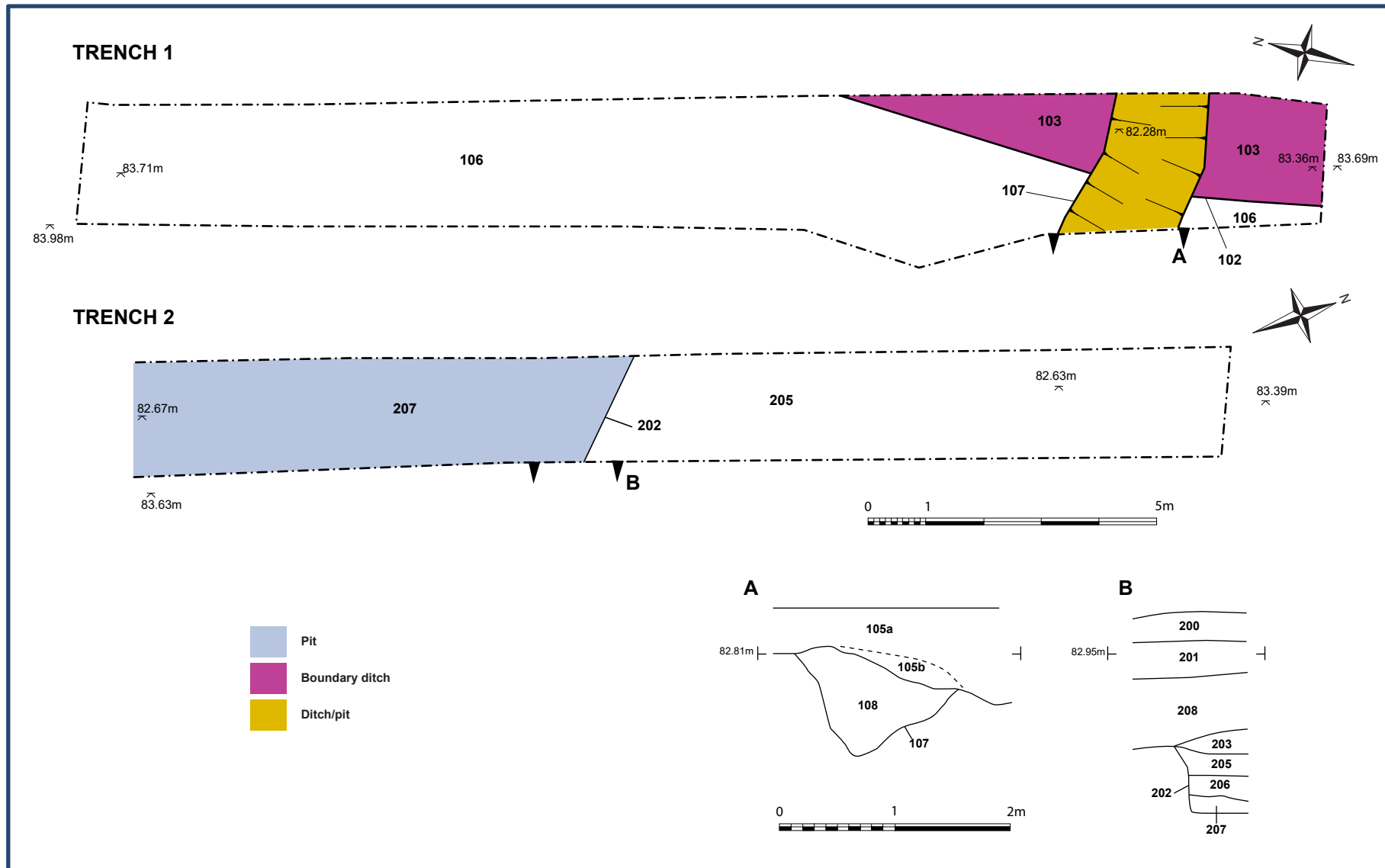


Fig 3: Detail of trenches 1 and 2, with sections A and B

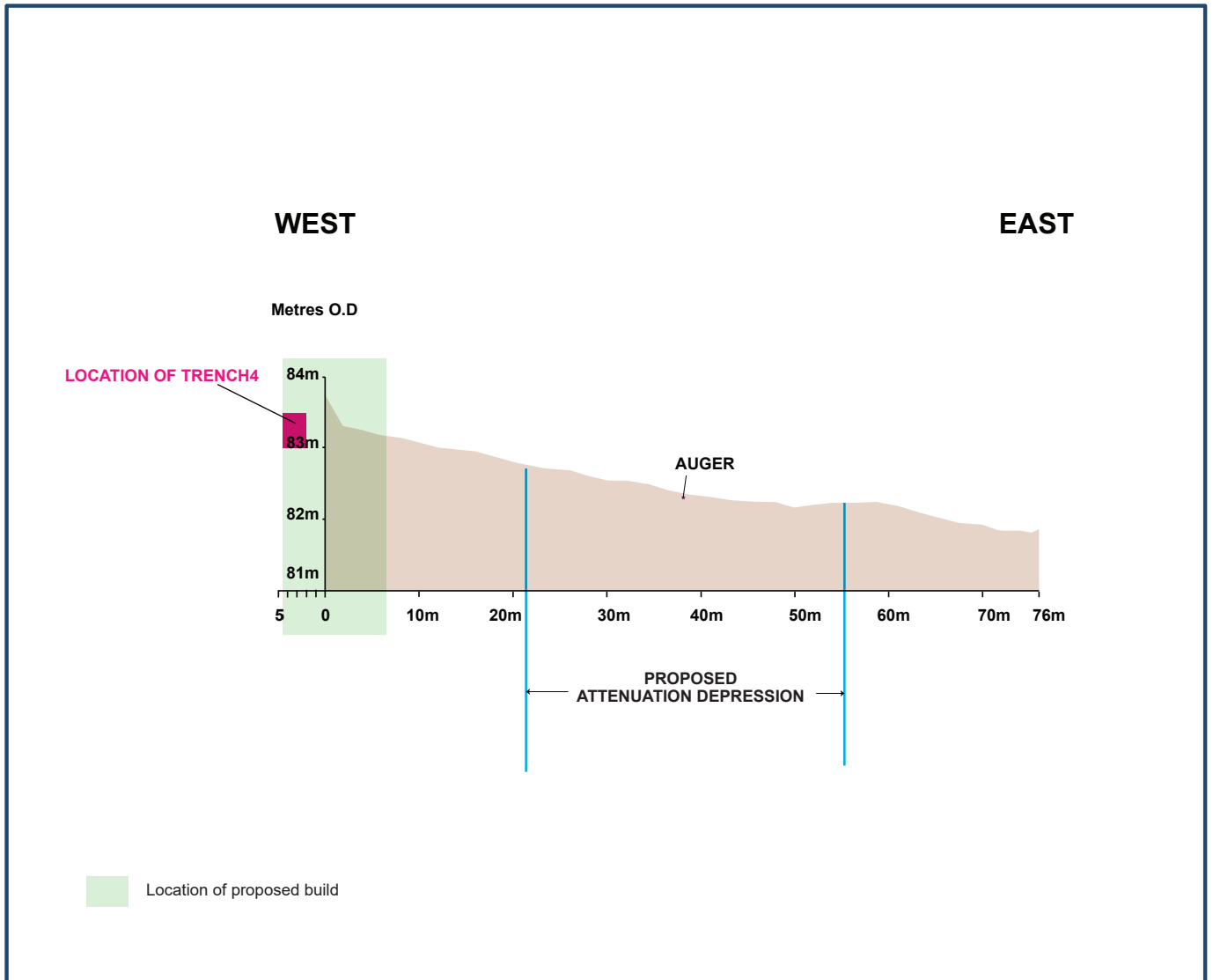


Fig 4: Profile of the west side of the stream valley (vertical scale exaggerated)