

# Summerleys Road Princes Risborough Buckinghamshire

## ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION



**EXPERTISE WHERE YOU NEED IT**

Archaeology Warwickshire Report No 17103

NOVEMBER 2017



*Working for  
Warwickshire*

**Project:** Land between the railway & Ercol  
Furniture, Summerleys Road, Princes  
Risborough

**Commissioned by:** Matt Sutton, on behalf of Blakelands LLP

**Project Report No:** 17103

**Site Code:** BPR17

**Planning Reference:** 17/05705/FUL

**Planning Authority:** Wycombe District Council

**Planning Archaeologist:** Phil Markham, Bucks CC

**National Grid Reference:** SP 7986 0283

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## SUMMARY

*An archaeological evaluation, consisting of seven trial trenches, was undertaken on behalf of Blakelands LLP prior to the erection of two light industrial units with associated bin/ cycle store, landscaping, hardstanding and car parking. The proposed development lies within an area of archaeological potential.*

*The remains of a twentieth century railway line and probable associated postholes were revealed.*

*No other archaeological evidence was found therefore the proposed development is unlikely to impact on archaeological deposits with a local significance.*

# 1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Planning permission has been granted by Wycombe District Council for the erection of two light industrial units with associated bin/ cycle store, landscaping, hardstanding and car parking at land between the railway and Ercol Furniture, Summerleys Road, Princes Risborough, Buckinghamshire.
  
- 1.2 A planning condition attached to the consent requires that the applicant secure the implementation of a programme of archaeological work in accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigation approved by the planning authority.
  
- 1.3 Archaeology Warwickshire were commissioned to undertake an archaeological evaluation, which was carried out on 16<sup>th</sup> November 2017. This report presents the results of that work. 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 site is centred on national grid reference SP 7986 0283 on the south western edge of Princes Risborough, immediately to the west of the railway station. It is situated to the rear of the modern factory unit of Ercol Furniture, Summerleys Road, from which it is separated by a wire mesh fence. It is mostly level, with a fairly steep slope down the western end. The overall site area is 1.12 ha.
  
- 2.2 The underlying bedrock geology of the site is West Melbury Chalk Formation overlain by Head Deposits of clay, silt, sand and gravel (British Geological Survey 2017).

### 3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

- 3.1 A discussion of the archaeological background for the site was prepared previously as part of the Desk Based Assessment in the pre-application (predetermination) phase (Archaeology Warwickshire 2016). This was based on the currently available Buckinghamshire HER data for a one kilometre search area. The general background is summarised below:

*The earliest material found in the study area dates from the Neolithic period, although no occupation sites are known. An axe fragment was found c.700m south west of the PDA (MBC1009). Neolithic to Bronze Age finds include a flint flake recovered in foundation trenches for the British Legion Hall in the 1950s (MBC1431; MBC1427 is a general number covering finds of all periods from this site), a residual flake in a later pit from an evaluation at Picts Lane in 2006 c.300 to the south (EBC16878; MBC 25099), and four hammerstones, a core and flint flakes at Manor Farm c.700m to the north east (MBC1630/31).*

*Amongst the material from the British Legion Hall were two Bronze Age socketed axe heads (MBC1322/3). Part of a spearhead of this date was found c.700m south of the PDA (MBC2153), and another spearhead came from a garden c.600m to the north east (MBC 3027). The Picts Lane evaluation recorded a ditch dated as Bronze Age on the basis of two hard-hammered flakes, and an undated ditch thought to be possibly of the same period (EBC 16878; MBC 25098).*

*A geophysical survey and evaluation in 2003/4 c.650m to the north recorded an Iron Age occupation site, including a ditch, storage pits and post/stake holes (EBC16849/16678; MBC24744). Evaluation and excavation c.800m to the north east at Princes Risborough swimming pool in 1993 recorded Iron Age features with pottery and other artefacts, including a ditch containing fragmentary human remains (EBC11594; MBC21947-502).*

*Several Iron Age coins have been found by metal-detector within the study area, all given a general location c.150m to the east on the other side of the railway (MBC2683/4, 27821, 27834, 27775, 27780, 27816). A ring of the same date (MBC27691) and an Iron Age to Roman brooch (MBC28796) were found in separate locations to the north west. The Icknield Way is reputed to follow the route of a*

*prehistoric trackway, but this is now thought not to be the case and it is not shown on Fig 1 (MBC2585; Bucks CC 2016b).*

*The site of Church Farm Roman villa, c.1km south of the PDA, is a Scheduled Monument (National Mon. No. 1016788; Bucks CC 2016b; MAGIC 2016). The Scheduled site is just outside the study area from which HER data was obtained, but finds of Roman pottery and tile, coins and other metalwork at the southern edge are associated with it (MBC1185-8). An enclosure visible on aerial photographs just to the north east of the Scheduled Area is also suggested to be of Roman date (MBC1207).*

*Apart from these features, Romano-British activity throughout the study area is represented by several chance finds of pottery and tile, and metal-detector finds of coins and other metalwork (MBC1189/90; 1427/8; 2122; 3026; 7183; 8008; 15196; 22264; 26772/3; 27188; 27486; 27983-5).*

*The HER has two records of Anglo-Saxon metal-detector finds in the north of the study area: a brooch c.900m to the north west of the PDA (MBC27186) and a strap fitting c.1km to the north (MBC27210). Most significantly, a cemetery of this period c.750m to the south of the PDA is a Scheduled Monument (MBC7181; Nat. Mon. ref. 1020290), associated with inhumations (MBC7182), brooches and a coin of Cenwulf (MBC 22264). The site was investigated by geophysical survey in 1977, which revealed a pattern of grave-like features (EBC13200).*

*There are three concentrations of medieval and earlier post-medieval occupation within the study area. Approximately 400m to the west of the PDA is the medieval and post-medieval settlement of Horsenden (MBC 24157). The present Horsenden House dates from 1810, but is on the site of a (probably) medieval and later manor house, and is set in contemporary ornamental gardens which incorporate a curvilinear, probably post-medieval fishpond thought to have formed part of defences during the Civil War (MBC1057-9; 21754; 21755; Bucks CC 2016c). Immediately north-west of Horsenden House is the Grade II\* Listed Church of St Michael and its churchyard. Although rebuilt in the 18th century it retains 14th-century tiles in the chancel and tower (MBC 12183-5). A 13th-century jug handle was recovered as a chance find nearby (MBC2130), and medieval coins were found by metal detector (MBC 27986-8). Gate Cottage, with its dovecote and barn are Listed Grade II*



*(MBC12134-6), as is Glebe Cottage, a former farmhouse (MBC19733). The manor had a medieval and post-medieval mill; its location is not certain but may a field called 'Home Close and Millbank' (MBC6726).*

*South of Horsenden, c.600m south west of the PDA, is the Scheduled moated site of Roundabout Wood, which includes medieval fishponds, building platforms and ridge and furrow (Nat. Mon. No. 1015211; MBC1004-8). The HER historic ridge and furrow map shows a small area between Horsenden and the PDA (not reproduced), on the Horsenden side of the stream which separates the two; modern air photography suggests this no longer exists ([www.google.maps.uk](http://www.google.maps.uk); [www.bing.maps.uk](http://www.bing.maps.uk)).*

*Most of the historic core of Princes Risborough is just beyond the 1km radius HER data area, to the north west of the PDA, but the medieval church (rebuilt in the 19th century) and its churchyard with Listed tombs and war memorial is just within it (MBC3048-52; MBC33346 EBC16930; EBC 17335; EBC17540). Immediately adjacent is the 15th-century Grade II Listed Monks Staithe, the former vicarage (MBC6112), and a medieval moated enclosure known as The Mount, a Scheduled Monument in which archaeological excavations were carried out in 1955 (MBC1305/6; Nat. Mon. No. 1006951; EBC12355).*

*A medieval deer park was attached to the manor of Princes Risborough (MBC3036). The medieval / post-medieval Culverton Mill was c.300m south east of the PDA (MBC7727), and there are other post-medieval mill sites c.500m to the north (MBC7729) and c.750 to the south (MBC7716). Two medieval pits and a posthole, and a post-medieval pit or ditch containing smithing waste were recorded in the evaluation at Picts Lane c.300m to the south (EBC16878; MBC25099). Other than these, all medieval and earlier post-medieval HER records refer to chance finds of pottery etc, or metal-detector finds (MBC1430; 3047; 27370; 27817; 27992-4; 28591).*

*A watching brief c.600m to the south of the PDA in 2004 revealed undated pit and ditch (EBC16461; MBC 23602). An evaluation at the former Whiteleaf Furniture factory in 2011, c.250m to the south east found no archaeological remains; it was thought that there had been significant truncation when the factory was built (EBC17426). A watching brief was carried out in Horsenden in 2010; the HER does not record any finds (EBC17385).*

*The railway signal box has no relevance to the archaeological potential, but is Listed Grade II and consideration of its setting is relevant. The List description notes that it is 'the largest and only unaltered example of a "Churchward" era [G.J. Churchward - Great Western Railway Chief Mechanical Engineer, 1902-21] GWR design box' (List ref 1276408; MBC19832). Other late features of no relevance to the assessment, including the railway station, other 19/20th-century buildings, street furniture etc. are not discussed or shown on Fig 1.*

- 3.2 No archaeological features were noted during the walkover survey (Archaeology Warwickshire 2006). Long grass was present, preventing close visual examination of the ground surface and it was considered unlikely that any significant features were unobserved.
- 3.3 The site itself has historically been a single large field, identified as such on historic maps of 1821 and 1823 (Buckinghamshire Records Office (BRO) D42/G2T; BRO IR/87Q). The 1<sup>st</sup> edition OS map of 1887 shows the site to be an undeveloped field with a small shelter belt in the south-east (outside the site boundary). Later maps show the site to be essentially unchanged, although the extensive buildings of the Buildings Research Establishment (BRE) were built on adjacent land to the north, opened as the Forest Products Research Laboratory in 1927. The BRE closed in 1988, when the operation was moved to BRE Watford. The site was later developed for the new Ercol furniture factory and showroom, and the Regent Park/ industrial commercial estate. The PDA has remained essentially unaltered when compared to the historic mapping, except for a railway line running across the site from the south east corner to the nearest BRE building to the northwest.

## **4 AIMS AND METHODS**

- 4.1 The main aim of the evaluation was to determine if there are any significant archaeological remains in the area to be developed; to form an understanding of their value and their potential to shed light on the subsequent development of the area.
- 4.2 Secondary aims include placing the results in their wider local and regional contexts as appropriate.
- 4.3 The objectives were to locate, record and analyse archaeological materials and deposits and to disseminate the results in an appropriate format.
- 4.4 The seven 30m long trenches were opened up by a 360° excavator fitted with a 1.80m wide toothless ditching bucket. Topsoil and other plough soils were removed under the supervision of an experienced archaeologist until either the top of archaeological remains or geological natural was reached.

## 5 RESULTS

- 5.1 Trenches 1 to 7 were 30m long and 1.80m wide. Trench 1 was moved 5m south of the proposed location to avoid a fence and trench 2 was also moved 2m north-east of the proposed location to avoid a fence.

### Geological Natural

- 5.2 The natural across the site consisted of grey silty clay and was encountered in all the trenches, at a depth of c. 0.45m.

### Deposit Sequence

- 5.3 A layer of mid black brown / brown silty clay (subsoil) overlay the natural in all trenches and was between 0.08m - 0.29m deep. In trenches 2 to 7 it was overlain by mid-black brown silty clay topsoil which was 0.22m - 0.3m deep. These layers are likely to represent agricultural horizons.
- 5.4 In trench 1, overlying the subsoil, was layer of brown grey silty clay loam (103), a buried topsoil. Overlying this was a thick layer of light brown grey silty clay, which was most probably redeposited natural, formed either from clearing the ditch/stream which flanks the site to the north-west or from the construction of the industrial area to the north.
- 5.5 At the south-east end of trench 5 were the remains of a backfilled railway line (504), some 2.21m wide and aligned north-south. The railway line can be dated to the twentieth century from OS maps and it ran to the Building Research Station situated to the north of the site. The railway sleepers had been removed and it was backfilled with dark brown black gravel. Three sherds of modern pottery and an iron pin were recovered from this fill. This deposit was overlaid by a thin layer of mid black brown silty clay subsoil (502).
- 5.6 Running parallel to the railway line, were three probably associated postholes (505, 507, 509). They were between 0.29m – 0.3m wide. One was excavated (505) and found to be 0.19m deep. These postholes most probably formed a fence line bordering the railway.

## **6 CONCLUSIONS**

- 6.1 The results of the evaluation have established that there are no significant archaeological remains, other than the twentieth century backfilled railway line, within the site.
  
- 6.2 The proposed development is unlikely to impact on any significant archaeological features, finds or deposits.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Archaeology Warwickshire would like to thank Matt Sutton for commissioning the work and Phil Markham for monitoring on behalf of Wycombe District Council.

## REFERENCES

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Ordnance Survey 1877, 1898, 1921 1:2500 maps Buckinghamshire Sheet XXXVII.11



1: Trench 5 looking west



2: Trench 5 Looking north-east





## APPENDICES

### A List of contexts

<b>Trench</b>	<b>Context</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Depth (m)</b>	<b>Comment</b>
1	101	Black brown silty loam		Topsoil
1	102	Light brown grey silty clay		Redeposited natural
1	103	Brown grey silty clay loam		Buried topsoil
1	104	Brown grey silty clay		Subsoil
1	105	Grey silty clay		Geological natural
2	201	Mid black brown silty clay loam	0.22	Topsoil
2	202	Mid black brown silty loam	0.3	Subsoil
2	203	Grey silty clay		Geological Natural
3	301	Mid black brown silty clay loam	0.28	Topsoil
3	302	Mid brown grey silty clay	0.08	Subsoil
3	303	Grey silty clay		Geological natural
4	401	Mid black brown silty clay loam	0.28	Topsoil
4	402	Mid brown grey silty loam	0.19	Subsoil
4	403	Grey silty clay		Geological Natural
5	501	Mid black brown silty clay loam	0.3	Topsoil
5	502	Mid brown grey silty clay	0.13	Subsoil
5	503	Grey silty clay		Geological natural
5	504	Various	-	Backfill
5	505	Cut	0.19	Posthole
5	506	Light brown grey silty clay	0.19	Fill of posthole [505]
5	507	Cut		Posthole
5	508	Light brown grey silty clay		Fill of posthole [507]
5	509	Cut		Posthole
5	510	Light brown grey silty clay		Fill of posthole [509]
6	601	Mid black brown silty clay loam	0.29	Topsoil
6	602	Mid brown grey silty clay	0.22	Subsoil
6	603	Grey silty clay		Geological natural
7	701	Mid black brown silty clay loam	0.26	Topsoil
7	702	Mid brown grey silty clay	0.2	Subsoil
7	703	Grey silty clay		Geological natural

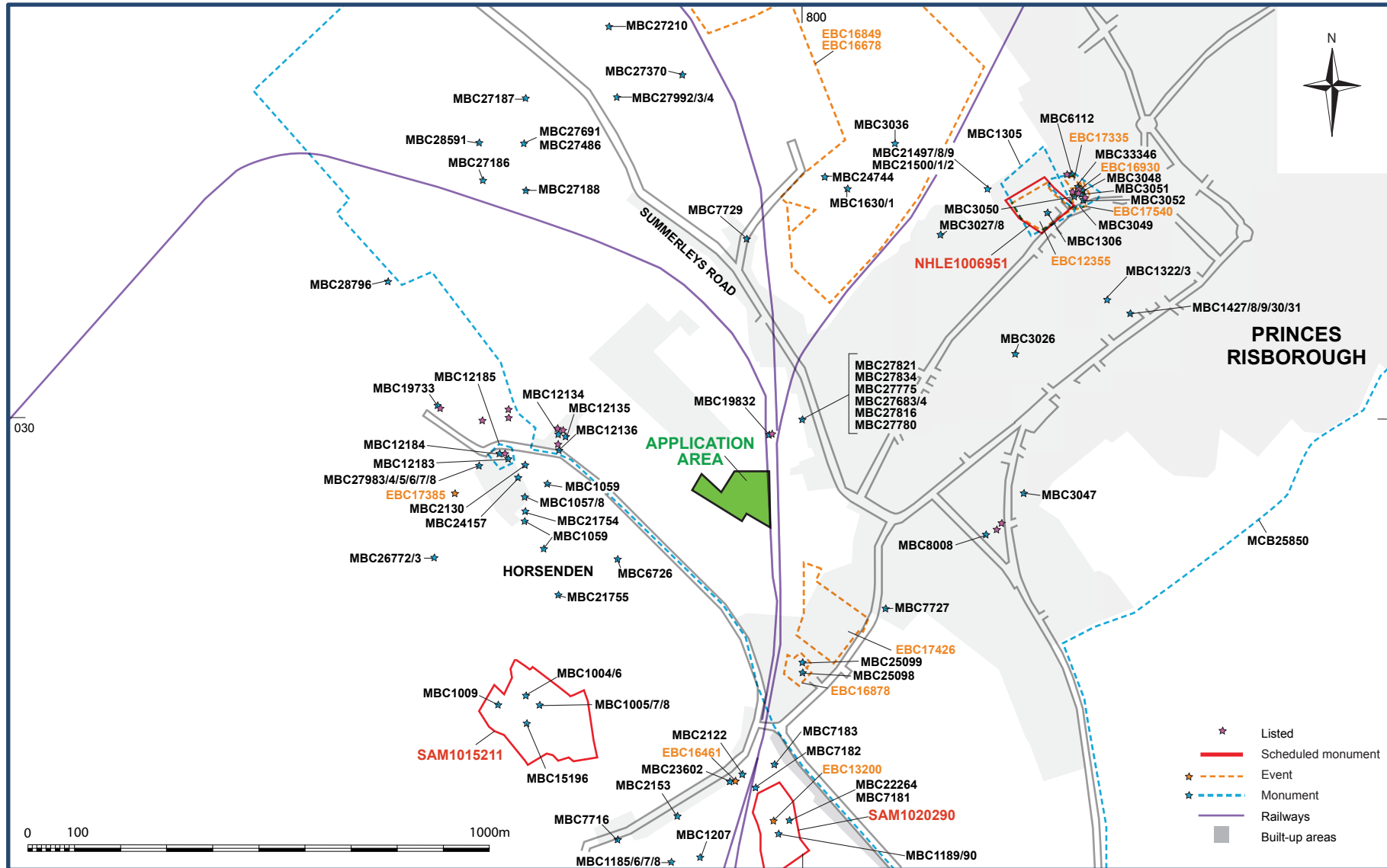


Fig 1: Location of application area and Historic Environment information

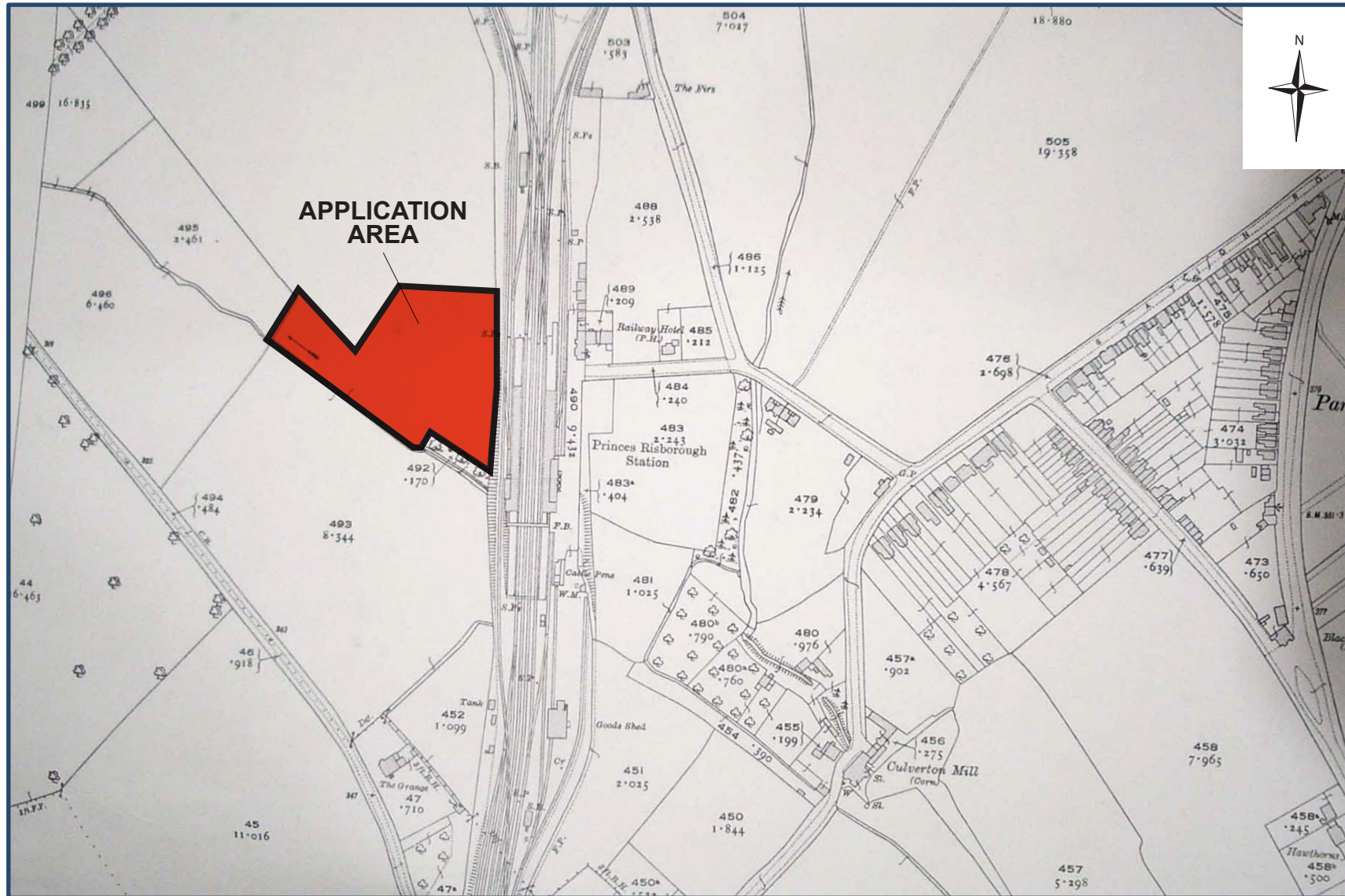


Fig 2: Detail from Ordnance Survey map 1:2500 map of 1921

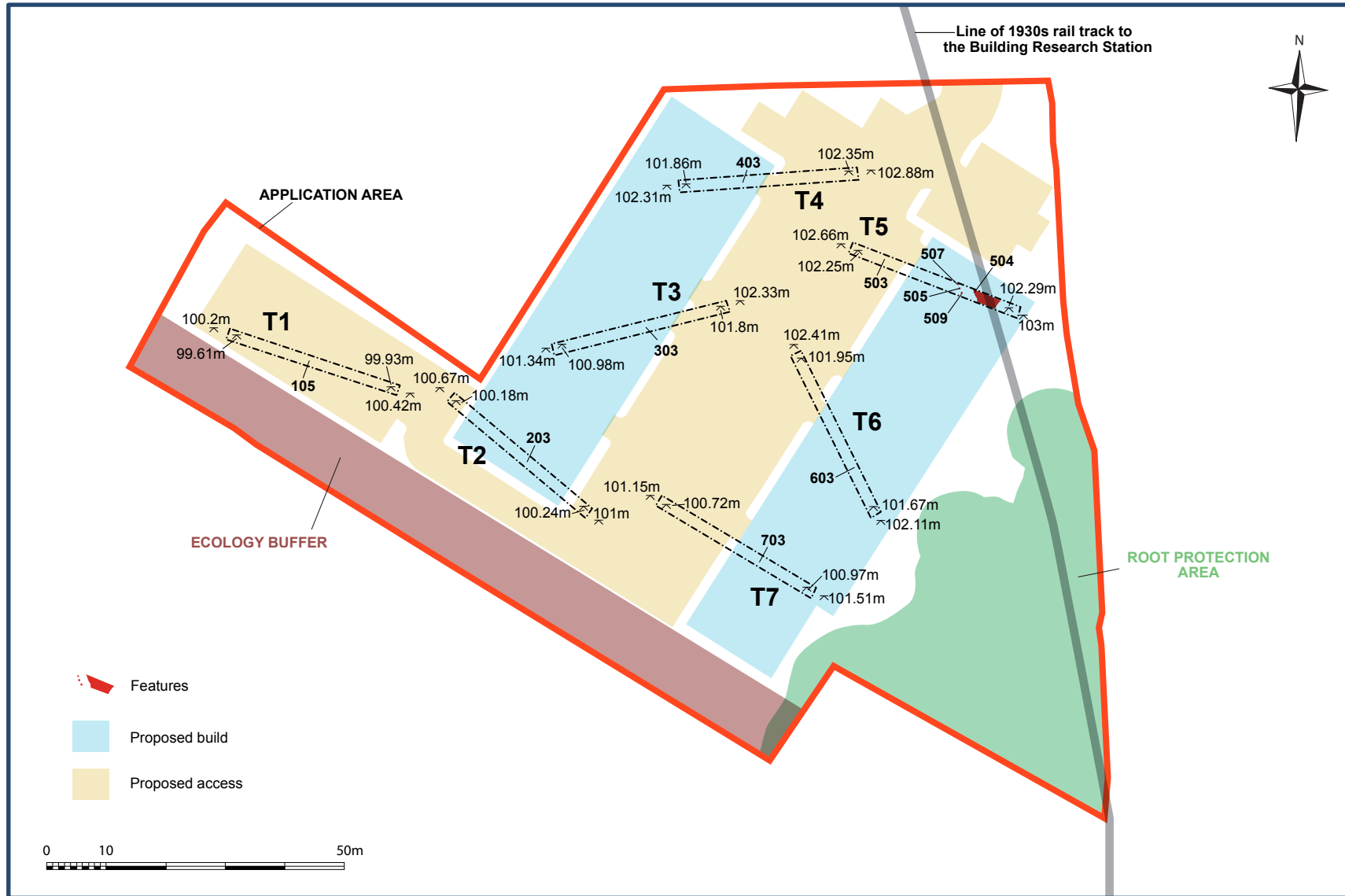


Fig 3: Location of excavated trenches