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Archaeological Services
University of Durham

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Priory Close, Northallerton, North Yorkshire

interim archaeological assessment

on behalf of
Castle Homes

May 2006

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1. Summary

The project

- 1.1 This report presents an interim assessment of the archaeological potential of land at Priory Close, Northallerton. This document is not a definitive statement regarding the archaeological remains preserved on the site.
- 1.2 The site is a plot of land of roughly 0.4 hectares in size, located at Priory Close on the northern side of the historic core of Northallerton (NGR. SE 3699 9422) (Figure 1). It is proposed to develop the site into a residential property (Planning ref 2/04/110/1472A). Two main structures are planned to occupy the majority of the site, forming four flats, with access gained from the street. Areas adjacent to the northern and southern boundaries of the site are proposed as car parks. It will be necessary to install services and drains onto the site. The site was previously occupied by the Di Palma Creamery.
- 1.3 Geotechnical test pits, undertaken in advance of the proposed development, located two human burials on the site, as well as a substantial stone wall. Documentary and cartographic evidence (Ian Farmer Associates 2004) illustrate that the site was occupied by a Carmelite Priory during the later medieval and early post-medieval periods. This institution was founded by Edward III in 1356, and existed until the Dissolution of the monasteries (approximately 1540). The site has subsequently been stripped to expose the archaeological horizon. This horizon has been cleaned and assessed.

2. The archaeological resource

- 2.1 In terms of the survival of archaeological remains, the site may be considered as three broad areas (Figure 2). These areas, representing different levels of archaeological survival, occupy the southern, central, and northern portions of the site. The land immediately to the south of the northern boundary remains an unknown quantity, as the modern overburden is yet to be removed here. This area, comprising roughly the northern eight to nine metres of the site, is not considered in this appraisal.
- 2.2 Remains relating to the Priory extend across the whole of the site, although the quality of survival of these remains differs. Human burials have been identified in the southern part of the site and near to the western boundary within the central area. Others may exist within the site boundary, although these are not confirmed. The remains of a building, constructed on substantial sandstone block foundations, is present in the western part of the site.
- 2.3 Cut features can be observed across the whole of the site. Some of these are of modern origin, and relate to recent services and drains, such as the foul water pipe and associated inspection chambers which may be seen aligned north to south near to the eastern boundary. A network of shallow modern cuts, arranged in a rough grid, extend across the whole site. These features are assumed to be related to groundbeams or other foundation constructions. Other discrete cut features appear to be medieval or earlier in date. Several robbed-

out walls associated with the Priory cross the site, identified as shallow trenches filled with crushed sandstone rubble and mortar fragments.

The southern area

- 2.4 The area next to the southern boundary of the site has suffered a substantial amount of modern truncation, presumably related to either the construction or the demolition of the Di Palma Creamery. The robbed-out wall of the corner of a building is visible [1], although no associated archaeological horizons appear to survive. However, this truncation does not extend far towards the north, and preservation becomes far better, with a sharp rise in the level of the archaeological horizon clearly visible. In the southwest corner, a raised plateau presents an area of very good archaeological survival. In this area, an east-west wall survives [2], with a substantial buttress and an associated later and smaller wall. A substantial north-south wall also extends out of this area [3]. Stratified archaeology exists in this area relating to the construction levels of the priory. To the east, the level of survival is lower, with no stratified horizons. However, a significant number of intercutting pits [4] and other features are present, possibly relating to activity outside the main Priory building. The wall that survives to the west continues as a robbed-out structure, extending up to the eastern boundary [5]. At the western side, three burials have been positively identified [6, 7 & 8].

The central area

- 2.5 Due to the truncating effect of several modern services, the physical level of archaeological horizon is lower than elsewhere on the site. Trenches for services, now removed, have been excavated across the width of the site, from east to west. Greater damage has been sustained by the archaeological levels here, but the deep disturbance is confined to this central area. No stratified archaeological deposits remain above the natural clay and gravel which is exposed in all but the western side. However, a number of archaeological features cut this natural subsoil. A robbed-out wall [9], heavily truncated, extends from the eastern boundary of the site, and five burials are located to the west [10 - 14]. All except grave 12 are damaged by either the geotechnical test pit or modern ground beam foundation. The north-south wall [3] observed further south projects across the western edge of this area, broken by several modern services, before running into the western boundary. A considerable amount of later medieval floor tile has been recovered during the stripping of this area.

The northern area

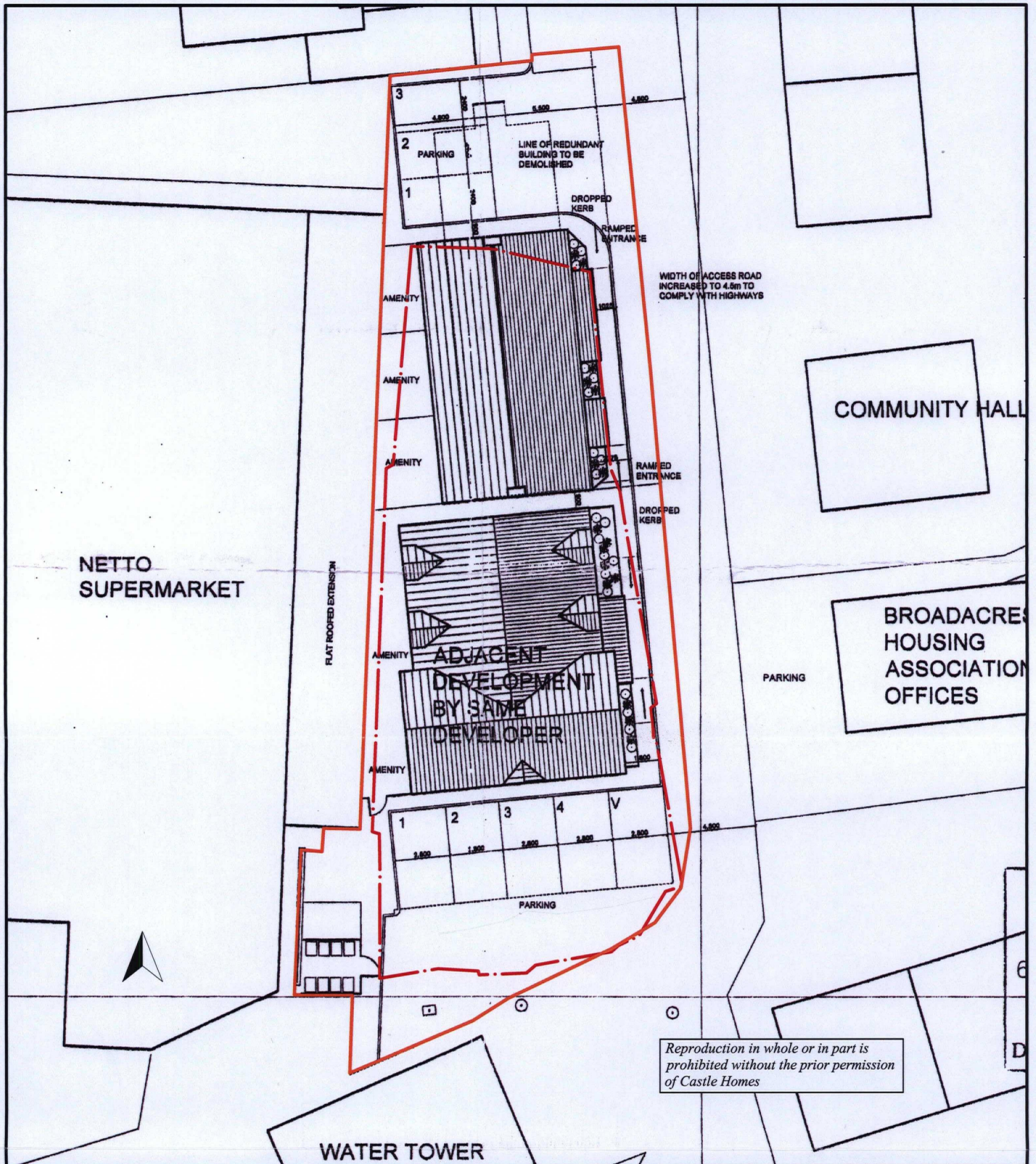
- 2.6 The level of damage suffered by archaeological deposits is at its lowest at the northern end of the site, and there is excellent survival of medieval horizons in some areas. A wall [15] parallel to the one in the southern portion crosses the area, although it does not extend all the way to the eastern boundary. This wall is preserved entirely as a robbed feature, with no solid stonework remaining. These two parallel structures are parts of the north and south walls of one of the main buildings of the Priory, with the interior of the building occupying the centre of the site. A small structure [16], again preserved in the form of stone-robbing trenches, extends southwards from the main wall, occupying a rectangular area roughly central in the northern part of the site. This structure

appears to form an enclosed small construction or room, contained within the body of the main building. A partition wall [17] crosses the centre of this structure, formed by three dressed blocks of sandstone separated by lines of cobbles, presumably to construct a screen or partition, and it is possible that the whole structure represents a chapel or oratory. Floor levels survive within this structure, with finds and general debris from the occupation clearly evident. These levels are related to the period of the actual use of the building, with no sign of the construction horizons visible. On the eastern side of the structure, a cobble surface extends southwards from the main wall and westwards from the eastern boundary of the site, again indicating that occupational floor layers survive within this area. A small area of east-west masonry [18] survives to the north of the main wall, with a possible floor layer lying to the north. However, this area is not fully exposed, and so a full understanding of this structure is impossible at this stage.

3. Conclusions

3.1 Although the degree of archaeological survival differs across the site, Priory Close presents a good general level of archaeological preservation. Two distinct 'islands' of very good survival occur; one is in the southwestern corner, surrounding the surviving masonry walls in this area, and the other is at the northern end of the site. Of these, the northernmost portion is especially interesting, as construction and foundations levels and horizons relating to the occupation of the building are present. Both these areas of archaeology are delicate, and the northern one is especially vulnerable. The majority of the southern 'island' lies underneath one of the proposed car parks, and the northern area occupies the position of one of the planned new buildings. Both these areas would be adversely affected by the proposed development, which will cause considerable damage to the surviving archaeology.

3.2 The site contains a substantial proportion of one of the Priory buildings. Very little is known about the Carmelite Priory, which would have been an important, wealthy and powerful institution in the later medieval town. The site offers the potential to greatly expand our knowledge of both the foundation and its role in Northallerton. Very specific information relating to the establishment is preserved within the site, and the survival of human burials presents the opportunity to study a unique, enclosed population. Given that areas of gravel extraction and modern construction surround the site, it must also be considered that this area perhaps contains the final surviving portion of the Priory preserved within the town.



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

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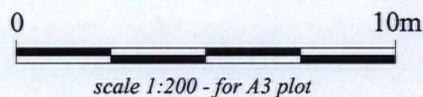
Priory Close, Northallerton,
North Yorkshire
archaeological evaluation

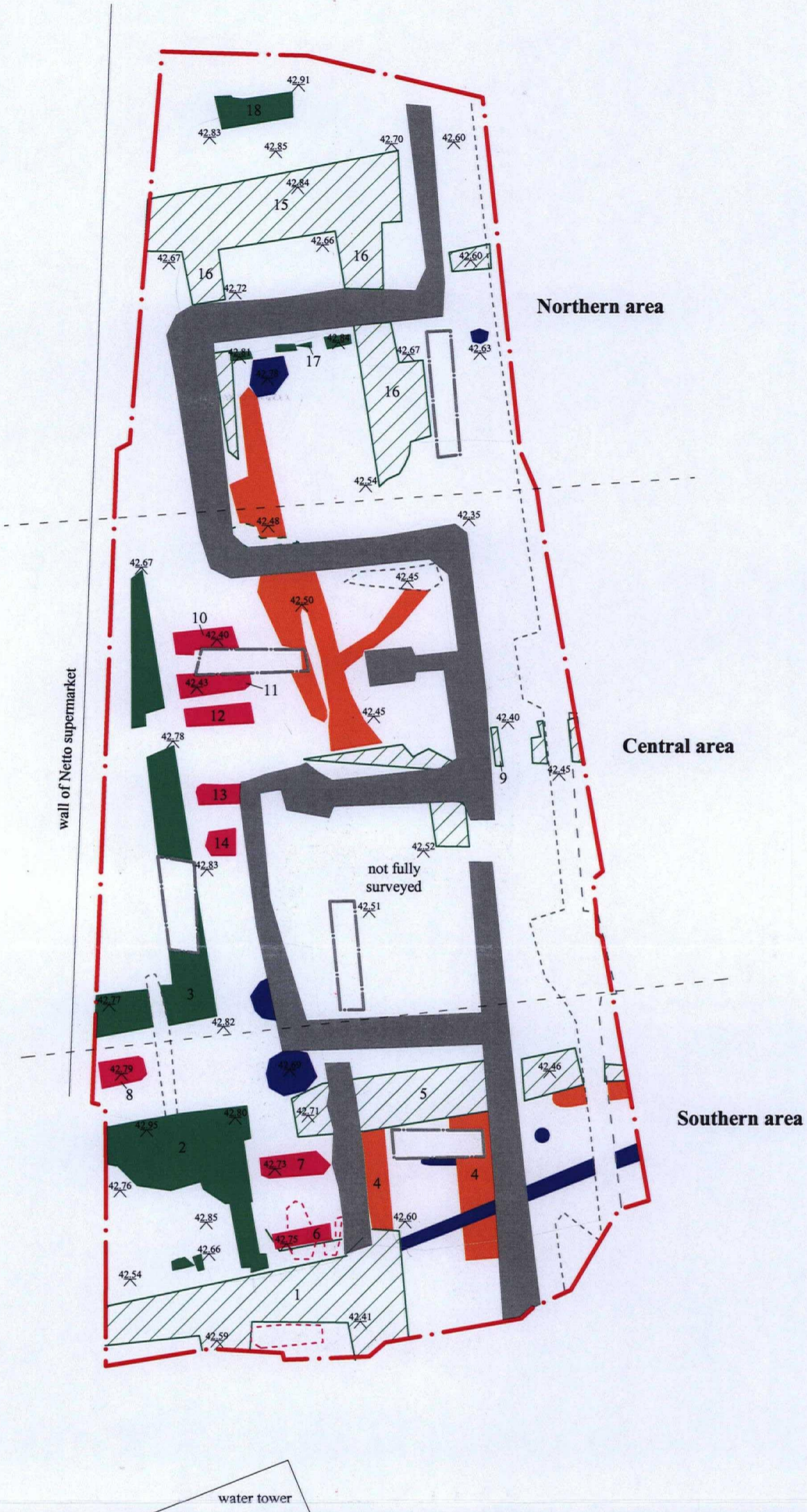
interim report

Figure 1
Plan showing the location of the
area of the evaluation and the
proposed development plan

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-  present limit of excavation
-  approximate location of the proposed development area





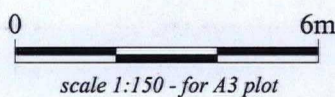
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Figure 2
Plan showing the location of the
archaeological features

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- | | | |
|------------------------|------------------------|---|
| limit of excavation | modern features | other features |
| ground beams | predating the priory | undated |
| services | priory wall | spot height showing level of surviving archaeological features (m OD) |
| geotechnical test pits | robbed wall | |
| priory wall | grave | |
| robbed wall | possible grave | |