# PRE-CONSTRUCT ARCHAEOLOGY LTD.

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# An Archaeological Watching Brief at East Road, Northallerton, North Yorkshire

**Central National Grid Reference: ~~NZ~~ SE 3702 9375 (centred)**

**Site Code: ERN 99**

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**Pre-Construct Archaeology Limited, August 1999**

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 General

1.1.1 This is a report on an archaeological watching brief undertaken by Pre-Construct Archaeology Limited (hereinafter PCA) during the week beginning Monday July 12th 1999 at East Road, Northallerton, North Yorkshire. The watching brief was commissioned by W. A. Fairhurst and Partners on behalf of Tesco Stores Limited who intend redevelop the site with a new store.

1.1.2 The site's central National Grid Reference is NZ 3702 9375 (Figure 1). It lies to the rear and east of properties 126-135 High Street, Northallerton and is bounded to the east by East Road, to the north by an alley to the rear of 125 High Street and to the south by the existing Tesco store and its car park (Figure 2).

1.1.3 The portion of the development area investigated during the fieldwork described herein measures *c.* 115m east-west by *c.* 85m north-south. The majority of the southern portion of the site was formerly a garage and car showroom while the majority of the northern portion was, at the time of the fieldwork, still occupied by the premises of a building contractor. A short terrace of brick properties (19-21 East Road) fronts onto East Road within the northern portion of the site.

1.1.4 The watching brief was undertaken as an archaeological planning condition after North Yorkshire County Council's Heritage Unit specified that the excavation of geotechnical trial pits and borehole inspection pits should be subject to archaeological monitoring as the site lies within the historic core of the town. The fieldwork was carried out in accordance with the Heritage Unit's '*Standard Written Scheme of Investigation for Limited Archaeological Recording ("Watching Brief")*'.

1.1.5 A copy of this report will be lodged with North Yorkshire County Sites and Monuments Record (SMR), at County Hall, Northallerton, as part of the project archive.

### 1.2 Archaeological Background

1.2.1 Northallerton is an ancient and historic town occupying a central position in the vale of York between the Hambleton Hills and the River Swale. A settlement existed there at least as early as the Roman period and All Saints' church in the town centre has a Saxon origin.[1] By the time of Domesday Book the town was called Alvertune and Alluerton. A castle was built on the north-western edge of the town in the 12th century only to be destroyed shortly afterwards on the order of Henry II. The Bishop of Durham's Palace – the site of which is now a Victorian cemetery - was built *c.* 1200 a little to the east of the former castle.[2]

1.2.2 Like many medieval towns Northallerton developed along a main market street. Buildings front the modern High Street with long narrow plots to their rear. The surviving form of these properties indicate that they broadly follow the boundaries of medieval plots held on burgage tenure. Plots were often delineated through the insertion of fences or the digging of boundary ditches. The effect was to parcel out the backlands and such plots were held by people who carried on trades and crafts independently of agriculture, though they often cultivated parts of their plots and kept livestock in outhouses. Middens and cesspits were often dug in the rear parts of the plots, well away from the dwelling.

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[1] Saywell 1885.
[2] Page (ed.) 1914.

1.2.3 The site described in this report occupies a backlot situation such as that described above. The plots fronting the High Street may have had some of their ancient boundaries removed, probably during the post-medieval period, in order to form larger plots as street frontage properties were amalgamated and rebuilt. The remains of these ancient boundaries could well survive at the site, and there is also potential for features such as those described above to be encountered.

1.2.4 The 1st Edition Ordnance Survey map (1857) shows the site straddling several well-defined gardens to the rear of properties fronting the High Street, with two buildings occupying the south-eastern portion of the site, these evidently amongst the earliest buildings to front East Road, known as Back Lane at the time. The 1894 Ordnance Survey map shows that there had been further development on the Back Lane frontage within the site (Figure 3).

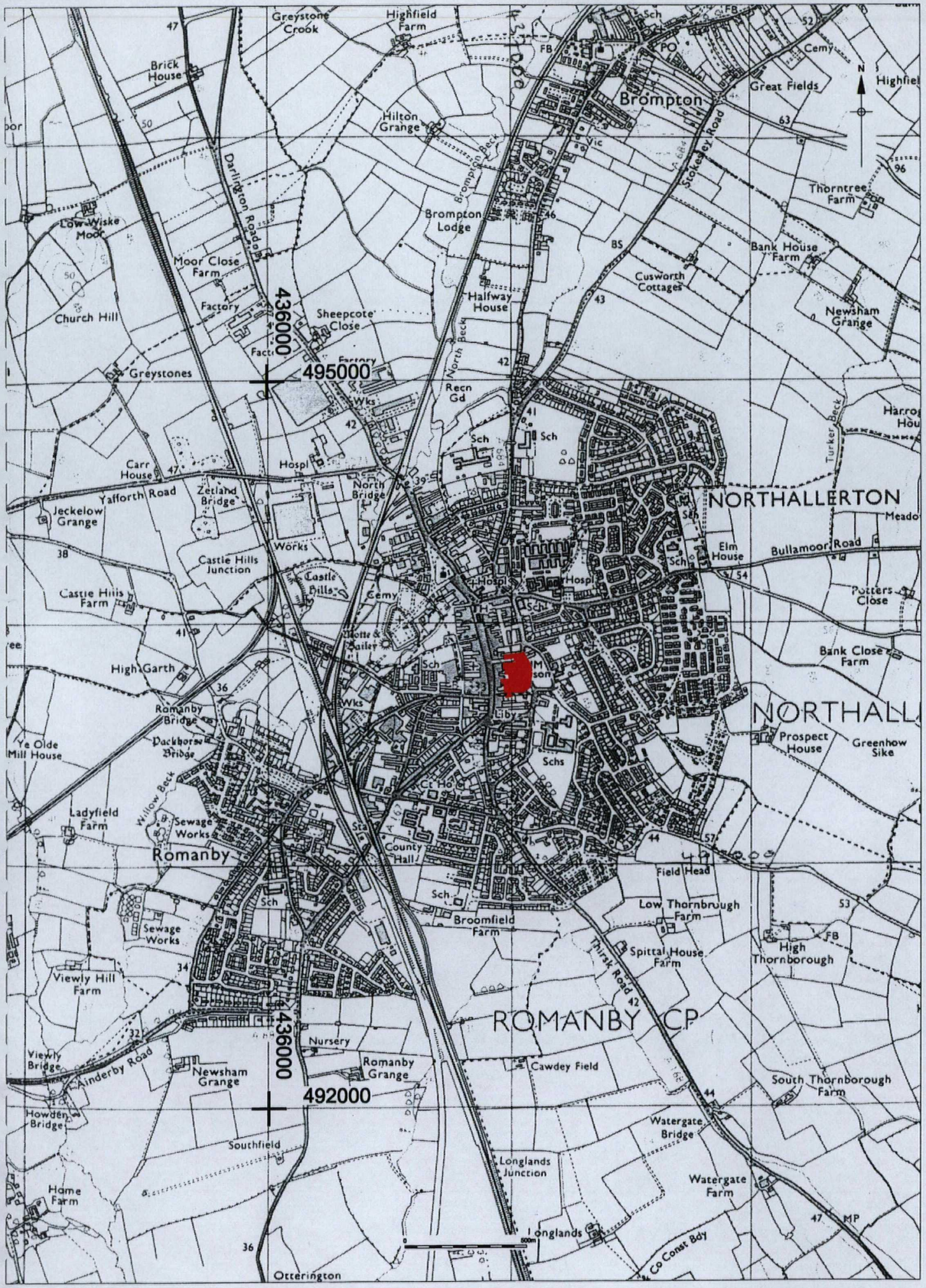




**Figure 1 : Site Location**
**Scale : 1:20,000**

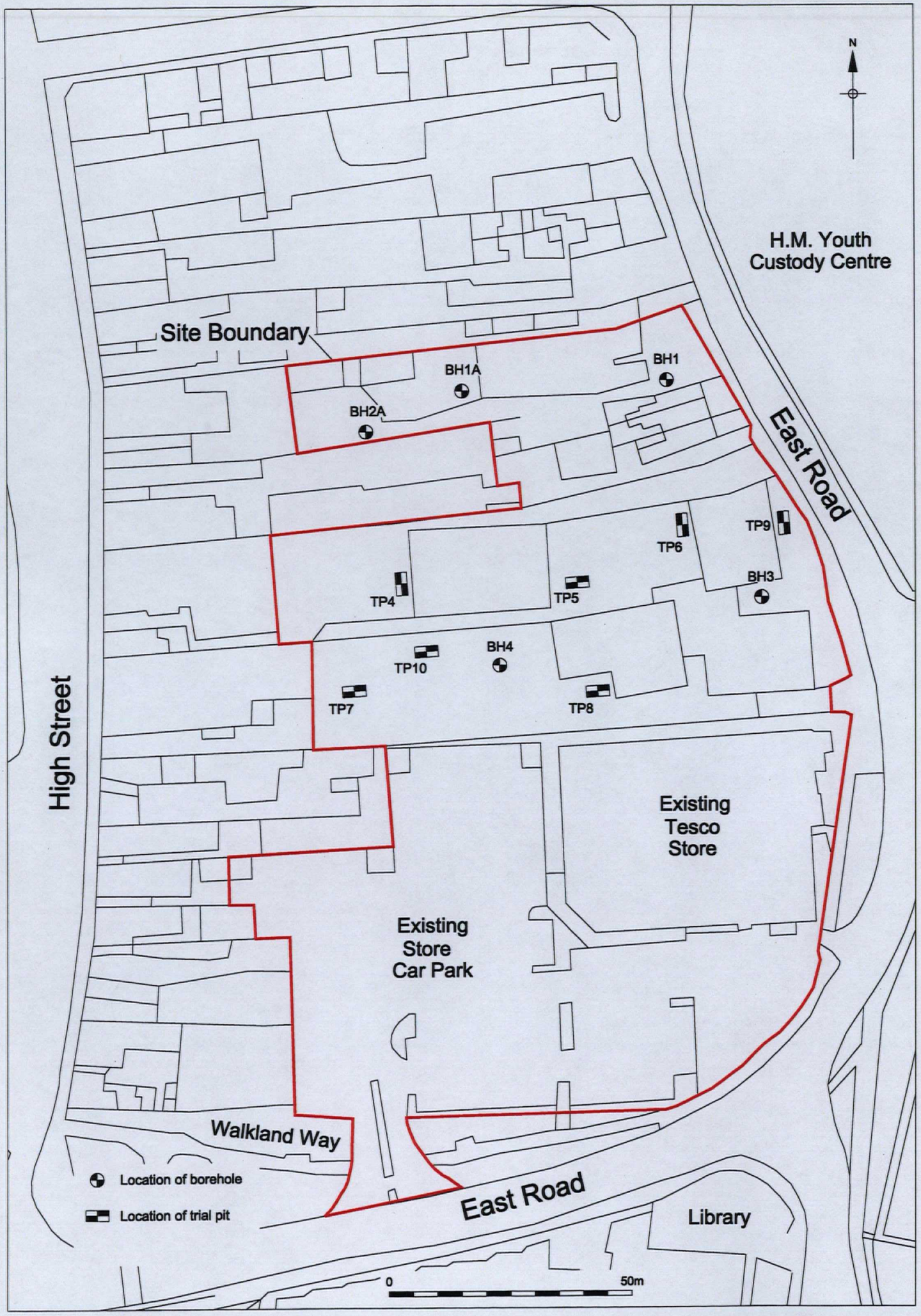


Figure 2 : Location of Trial Pits and Boreholes
Scale : 1:1000

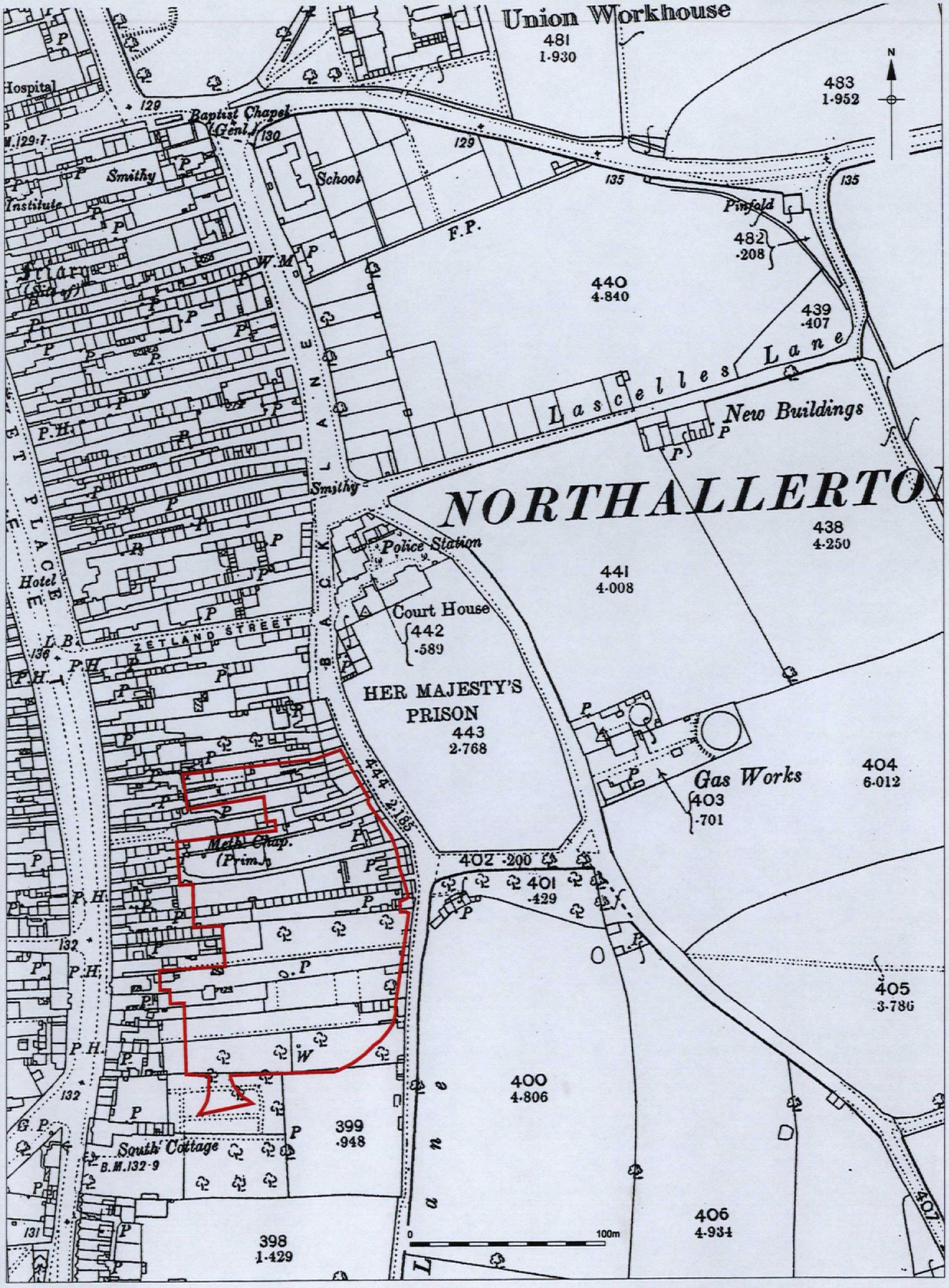


Figure 3 : Ordnance Survey map of 1894, showing extent of site
Scale : 1:2500

## 2. AIMS

2.1 The principal aim of the watching brief was to monitor the excavation of geotechnical trial pits and borehole inspection pits, undertaken in advance of the proposed redevelopment in order to inform upon local ground conditions and possible contamination. If significant archaeological remains were encountered they were to be adequately recorded and associated artefacts were to be recovered. Some record, however brief, of the stratigraphy in each trench was to be made, even if it was considered to be archaeologically insignificant. The results of the watching brief would, therefore, allow the formulation of an archaeological mitigation strategy in the face of the proposed development.

## 3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 A JCB back-acting mechanical excavator was used to excavate a series of geotechnical trial pits at the site. In addition, several boreholes were excavated, initially by hand by groundworkers from Allied Exploration and Geotechnics Limited (hereinafter AEG) to check for the presence of live services and then by deep drilling. These works were subject to visual monitoring by an archaeologist from PCA. Archaeological recording ceased after the natural sub-stratum was reached, although the trial pits and boreholes were ultimately excavated to depths of *c.* 4.0m to *c.* 10.0m respectively.

3.2 Written, graphic and photographic records were compiled while the trial pits and boreholes were being excavated. A basic record was made of the stratigraphy in each case. Spoil generated during the excavation of the trial pits and borehole inspection pits was visually scanned for artefactual material.

## 4. RESULTS

### 4.1 Borehole 1

4.1.1 The inspection pit for Borehole 1 measured *c.* 600mm by *c.* 600mm. It was excavated by hand to a depth of 1.0m through the surface of the alley to the south of the builder's premises. A layer of tarmac, 30mm thick, formed the uppermost deposit, at 41.15m OD. The tarmac had been laid upon a layer of rubble hardcore, up to 200mm thick. The tarmac and its make-up were collectively assigned context number [35].

4.1.2 A very mixed layer, [36], was observed beneath the hardcore. Consisting principally of sandstone rubble within a matrix of firm mid brown silt, it was up to 500mm thick. This deposit may have been an additional make-up layer or possibly the fill of a feature – but it was not possible to confirm this due to the limited degree to which the stratigraphy was exposed. Natural sub-stratum, [37], was encountered at a depth of *c.* 700mm, at c. 40.45m OD. It consisted of loose mid greyish brown clayey sand with frequent pea grit and fine and medium sub-rounded pebbles and occasional sub-rounded cobbles.

### 4.2 Borehole 1A

4.2.1 The inspection pit for Borehole 1A measured *c.* 600mm by *c.* 600mm. It was excavated by hand to a depth of 1.20m through the patchy concrete surface of the builder's yard. A layer of compacted rubble hardcore, [32], up to *c.* 400mm thick, formed the uppermost deposit, at 41.16m OD.

4.2.2 The hardcore gave way to a layer, [33], of soft mid grey clayey silt, up to 200mm thick. Few coarse components were observed within the latter deposit, although occasional flecks and small fragments of charcoal were noted. The deposit seemingly represents the surviving portion of a buried sub-soil. Natural sub-stratum, [34], was revealed below the latter horizon, at a depth of *c.* 600mm, at *c.* 40.56m OD. It consisted of firm dark reddish brown gritty clay with frequent fine and medium sub-rounded pebbles throughout.

**4.3 Borehole 2**

4.3.1 Borehole 2 was not monitored archaeologically.

**4.4 Borehole 2A**

4.4.1 The inspection pit for Borehole 2A measured *c.* 600mm by *c.* 600mm. It was excavated by hand to a depth of 900mm through the patchy concrete surface of the builder's yard. A layer of compacted rubble hardcore, [29], up to *c.* 250mm thick, formed the uppermost deposit, at 41.25m OD.

4.4.2 The hardcore gave way to a layer, [30], of soft mid greyish brown sandy clayey silt, up to 550mm thick. Few coarse components were observed within the latter deposit, although occasional flecks and small fragments of charcoal were noted. This deposit also evidently represents a buried sub-soil. Natural sub-stratum, [31], was revealed below the latter horizon, at a depth of *c.* 850mm, at *c.* 40.40m OD. It consisted of firm dark reddish brown gritty clay with frequent fine and medium sub-rounded pebbles throughout.

**4.5 Borehole 3**

4.5.1 The inspection pit for Borehole 3 measured *c.* 600mm by *c.* 600mm. It was excavated by hand to a depth of 930mm through the block-paving surface of the garage forecourt, at 40.86m OD. The paving (90mm thick), a sand levelling layer (150mm thick) and an underlying make-up layer of compact dolomite hardcore (500mm thick) were collectively assigned context number [1]. The latter layer gave way to a mixed deposit, [2], consisting of soft mid greyish orange silty clay, essentially the redeposited natural sub-stratum. Fragments of ceramic drainpipe and brick were noted throughout the deposit, which was evidently of recent origin. The lower interface of this deposit was not observed when excavation of the inspection pit ceased at *c.* 39.95m OD.

**4.6 Borehole 4**

4.6.1 The inspection pit for Borehole 4 measured *c.* 600mm by *c.* 600mm. It was excavated by hand to a depth of 950mm through the surface of the garage yard, which was in use as a car park during the fieldwork. A layer of tarmac, 20mm thick, formed the uppermost deposit, at 40.94m OD. The tarmac had been laid upon a make-up layer of compact black coarse sand and gravel, up to *c.* 300mm thick. Collectively the tarmac and its make-up were assigned context number [17].

4.6.2 Beneath the hardcore was a deposit, [18], consisting of firm dark grey sandy silt with occasional fragments of brick throughout. This deposit, which was evidently of relatively recent origin, was up to 300mm thick. It overlay a layer, [19], of soft mid greyish brown clayey silt with occasional flecks of charcoal and occasional fine sub-rounded pebbles throughout. The latter deposit, which was up to *c.* 350mm thick, represents a buried sub-soil. It gave way to the natural sub-stratum, at *c.* 39.99m OD. At this location natural consisted of firm light brownish orange sandy clay with frequent fine and medium and moderate large sub-rounded pebbles and occasional cobbles throughout.

### 4.7 Trial Pit 3

4.7.1 Trial Pit 3 was not monitored archaeologically.

### 4.8 Trial Pit 4

4.8.1 Trial Pit 4 measured *c.* 3m north-south by *c.* 800mm east-west. It was excavated by machine to a depth of 1.20m, through the surface of the car park to the rear of the Durham Pine shop at 131-132 High Street. A layer of tarmac, 30mm thick, formed the uppermost deposit, at 41.13m OD. The tarmac had been laid upon a layer of firm mid brown coarse sand and gravel, up to 100mm thick, which in turn overlay up to 250mm of compact rubble hardcore. The tarmac and its make-up layers were collectively assigned context number [13].

4.8.2 The hardcore gave way to a layer of soft mid grey clayey silt, [14], in which fragmented animal bones were noted. The deposit, which was up to *c.* 400mm thick, possibly represents buried topsoil, probably of post-medieval origin. It merged into a similar horizon, [15], consisting of mid greyish brown clayey silt with occasional pea grit, fine sub-rounded pebbles and very occasional flecks of charcoal throughout. This layer, which was up to *c.* 350mm thick, probably represents a buried sub-soil. It overlay the natural sub-stratum, [16], at a depth of 1.15m, at c. 39.98m OD. The latter consisted of firm light brownish orange sandy clay sand with frequent pea grit and fine and medium sub-rounded pebbles and occasional sub-rounded cobbles throughout.

### 4.9 Trial Pit 5

4.9.1 Trial Pit 5 measured *c.* 3m east-west by *c.* 800mm north-south. It was excavated by machine to a depth of 1.20m, through the surface of the garage yard. A layer of tarmac, 20mm thick, formed the uppermost deposit, at 41.10m OD. The tarmac had been laid upon a layer of compact rubble hardcore, up to 600mm thick. The tarmac and its make-up layer were collectively assigned context number [3].

4.9.2 A distinctive layer, [4], which consisted of soft black oily silty clay, was exposed below the hardcore. It was up to *c.* 200mm thick and probably represents buried topsoil, possibly contaminated by recent industrial spillage. Underlying the latter deposit was a layer, [5], which consisted of soft mid brown clayey silt, with occasional flecks of charcoal, occasional fragments of animal bone, occasional small fragments of brick or tile and occasional fine sub-rounded pebbles throughout. The latter deposit, which was up to 350mm thick, probably represents a buried sub-soil. It merged into the natural sub-stratum, [6], at a depth of *c.* 1.15m, at *c.* 39.95m OD. At this location natural consisted of firm mid brownish orange sandy clay with frequent fine and medium and moderate large sub-rounded pebbles and occasional cobbles throughout. This deposit gave way, after *c.* 300mm, to loose mid brown clayey sand, with frequent fine and medium and moderate large sub-rounded pebbles and occasional cobbles throughout.

### 4.10 Trial Pit 6

4.10.1 Trial Pit 6 measured *c.* 3m east-west by *c.* 800mm north-south. It was excavated by machine to a depth of 1.20m, through the surface of the garage yard. A layer of tarmac, 10mm thick, formed the uppermost deposit, at 40.88m OD. The tarmac had been laid upon a layer of compact rubble hardcore, up to 350mm thick. The tarmac and its make-up layer were collectively assigned context number [7].

4.10.2 Underlying the hardcore was a layer, [8], which consisted of soft mid brown clayey silt, with occasional flecks of charcoal and occasional fine sub-rounded pebbles throughout.. The latter deposit, which was up to 500mm thick, probably represents a buried sub-soil. It merged into natural at a depth of *c.* 0.95m, at *c.* 39.93m OD. At this location natural consisted of firm mid brownish orange sandy clay with frequent fine, medium and large sub-rounded pebbles, cobbles and fragmented mudstone throughout.

### 4.11 Trial Pit 7

4.11.1 Trial Pit 7 measured *c.* 3m east-west by *c.* 800mm north-south. It was excavated by machine to a depth of 1.20m, through the surface of a compound to the rear of the garage. A layer of tarmac, 20mm thick, formed the uppermost deposit, at 40.65m OD. The tarmac had been laid upon a layer of compact rubble hardcore, up to 250mm thick. The tarmac and its make-up layer were collectively assigned context number [21].

4.11.2 Underlying the hardcore was a layer, [22], which consisted of soft mid greyish brown clayey silt, with occasional flecks of charcoal, occasional fine sub-rounded pebbles and occasional fragments of degraded animal bone throughout. The latter deposit, which was up to 500mm thick, probably represents a buried sub-soil. It merged into natural at a depth of *c.* 0.75m, at *c.* 39.90m OD. At this location natural consisted of firm mid brownish orange sandy clay with frequent fine and medium and occasional large sub-rounded pebbles and occasional cobbles throughout.

### 4.12 Trial Pit 8

4.12.1 Trial Pit 8 measured *c.* 3m east-west by *c.* 800mm north-south. It was excavated by machine to a depth of 1.50m, through the surface of the garage yard, in use as a car park during the fieldwork. A layer of tarmac, 20mm thick, formed the uppermost deposit, at 41.14m OD. The tarmac had been laid upon a layer of firm dark greenish brown coarse sand and gravel, up to 100mm thick, which overlay a layer of compact rubble hardcore, up to *c.* 500mm thick. The tarmac and its make-up layers were collectively assigned context number [24].

4.12.2 Underlying the hardcore was a layer, [25], which consisted of soft mid brown clayey silt, with occasional flecks of charcoal and occasional fine sub-rounded pebbles throughout. The latter deposit, which was up to 500mm thick, probably represents a buried sub-soil. It merged into the natural sub-stratum, [26], at a depth of *c.* 1.15m, at *c.* 39.99m OD. At this location natural consisted initially of firm mid brownish orange sandy clay with frequent fine, medium and large sub-rounded pebbles and moderate cobbles throughout, giving way after *c.* 400mm to loose mid brown gritty clayey sand with frequent fine and medium sub-rounded pebbles throughout.

### 4.13 Trial Pit 9

4.13.1 Trial Pit 9 measured *c.* 3m north-south by *c.* 800mm east-west. It was excavated by machine to a depth of 1.0m, through the surface of the garage forecourt. A layer of tarmac, 10mm thick, formed the uppermost deposit, at 40.61m OD. The tarmac had been laid upon a layer of compact light brownish yellow dolomite hardcore, up to 400mm thick. The tarmac and its make-up layer were collectively assigned context number [10].

4.13.2 Underlying the hardcore was a layer, [11], which consisted of soft light to mid greyish brown silty clay with occasional flecks of charcoal and occasional fine sub-rounded pebbles throughout. The latter deposit, which was up to 400mm thick, probably represents a buried sub-soil. It merged into the natural sub-stratum, [12], at a depth of *c.* 0.90m, at *c.* 39.71m OD. At this location natural was very mixed, consisting of firm light to mid brown sandy clay, with perhaps 50% of the matrix composed of fine, medium and large sub-rounded pebbles and cobbles, as well as fragmented mudstone and sandstone.

## 4.14 Trial Pit 10

4.14.1 Trial Pit 10 measured *c.* 3m east-west by *c.* 800mm north-south. It was excavated by machine to a depth of 1.0m, through the surface of a compound to the rear of the garage. A layer, [27], of soft mid greyish brown clayey silt, with occasional flecks of charcoal and occasional fine sub-rounded pebbles throughout formed the uppermost deposit, at 40.96m OD. The deposit, which was *c.* 0.80m deep, could represent turned-over buried topsoil and sub-soil. It merged into the natural sub-stratum, [28], at a depth of *c.* 0.80m, at *c.* 40.16m OD. At this location natural consisted of soft light yellowish orange sandy clay with frequent fine and medium and occasional large sub-rounded pebbles and occasional cobbles throughout.

## 4.15 Summary of Results

| | Boreholes | | | | | | Trial Pits | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1 | 1A | 2 | 2A | 3 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
| Modern deposits | [35] [36] | [32] | - | [29] | [1] [2] | [17] [18] | - | [13] | [3] | [7] | [21] | [24] | [10] | - |
| Possible buried topsoil | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | [14] | [4] | - | - | - | - | - |
| Buried sub-soil | - | [33] | - | [30] | - | [19] | - | [15] | [5] | [8] | [22] | [25] | [11] | [27] |
| Natural sub-stratum | [37] | [34] | - | [31] | - | [20] | - | [16] | [6] | [9] | [23] | [26] | [12] | [28] |
| Depth of deposits (metres) | 0.70 | 0.60 | - | 0.85 | 0.93+ | 0.95 | - | 1.15 | 1.15 | 0.95 | 0.75 | 1.15 | 0.90 | 0.80 |

Notes: 1. [*] = Archaeological context.
2. Depth of deposits includes all material from modern ground level to top of natural sub-stratum.

**Table 1 - Summary of archaeological stratigraphy in borehole inspection pits and trial pits.**

## 5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 5.1 Conclusions

5.1.1 In historical terms the East Road site occupies a backlot location relative to medieval burgage plots fronting the High Street. The development area straddles several ancient properties and there is a very high potential for boundary features of medieval date to survive within it. In addition, medieval features, such as middens or cess pits, which would have been dug away from the domestic focus, could well be present at the site.

5.1.2 The watching brief broadly indicated that the site had evidently suffered relatively little horizontal truncation in recent times. In 3 out of the 5 monitored borehole pits and in all 7 of the monitored trial pits a horizon interpreted as being a buried sub-soil was recorded. Such a deposit may well have had a medieval or earlier origin, although it is likely that a variety of post-medieval activities subsequently introduced cultural material into it.

5.1.3 Any features of archaeological significance, such as medieval pits or boundary ditches, will be most likely sealed by the aforementioned sub-soil horizon and cut into the natural sub-stratum. That particular interface should be subject to close scrutiny during any further archaeological work at the site. Although no features of archaeological interest were observed during the watching brief, it must be acknowledged that the chances of geotechnical 'keyholes' encountering such features are low. The crucial factor is the apparent low degree of horizontal truncation at the site, which has been clearly demonstrated by the watching brief.

### 5.2 Recommendations

5.2.1 It is recommended that, given the historical location and size of the development area, an intrusive archaeological evaluation should be undertaken in order to inform any decision on the application for planning permission. The watching brief herein described suggests that the site has suffered limited horizontal truncation in the modern era. The broad aim of an evaluation should be to gain information about the archaeological resource at the site, thereby allowing the formulation of an appropriate mitigation strategy in the face of the development proposals.

## 6. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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## 7. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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