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**Wrexham Road Service Station,  
Wrexham Road (A483), Chester.  
October 2016 : V 1.0**





aeon archaeology

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# Wrexham Road Service Station, Wrexham Road (A483), Chester. October 2016 : V 1.0

Report no. 0109 v1.0

Archaeological Watching Brief

Aeon Archaeology

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Project Code: A0098.1

Date: 31/10/2016

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## 1.0 NON-TECHNICAL SUMMARY

Aeon Archaeology in partnership with *On-Site Archaeology* were commissioned by Euro Garages Ltd (hereafter the Client) to carry out a programme of archaeological watching brief on a proposed redevelopment of petrol filling station (**REF 16/02003/FUL**) at Wrexham Road Service Station, Wrexham Road (A483), Chester centred on (**NGR SJ 3952 6285**).

The archaeological watching brief at Wrexham Road Service Station took the form of a monitored topsoil strip along the eastern boundary of the development area. The archaeological watching brief succeeded in identifying relatively modern archaeological remains, however these were considered to be of low significance when compared with the archaeological potential of the site. Furthermore the site was covered in a layer of mixed overburden consisting of coarse building materials and modern refuse. The watching brief revealed that the site had previously been heavily disturbed and subsequently built up with an artificial embankment; as evidenced in the stratigraphy.

It must be stated that during the watching brief the natural glacial substrata was not encountered and there remains the potential for archaeology on the site although at a greater depth than the current works required. However, considering the results of the archaeological watching brief the potential for the preservation of remains at the site is considered low and as such no recommendations for further archaeological mitigatory works are proposed and it is recommended that the archaeological condition be discharged.

## 2.0 INTRODUCTION

Aeon Archaeology in partnership with *On-Site Archaeology Ltd.* was commissioned by the Client to carry out a programme of archaeological watching brief of a proposed redevelopment of petrol filling station at Wrexham Road Service Station, Wrexham Road (A483), Chester (NGR SJ 3952 6285). Planning permission was granted for the full demolition and redevelopment of the petrol filling station (Application number 16/02003/FUL).

The proposed development lies approximately 3.0km to the south-southwest of the historic core of the city of Chester, on the eastern side of the A483 Wrexham Road. The site lies to the west of the Lakeside Chester Business Park, and north of the Chester South Holiday Inn. The potential for archaeological remains stems from the excavations that took place during the development of Lakeside Business Park. An east-west aligned Roman Road was discovered during works along with a contemporary rural settlement; with ditched enclosures respecting the alignment of the road together with wells and circular structures (*reproduced from OSA 16WB36WSI*).

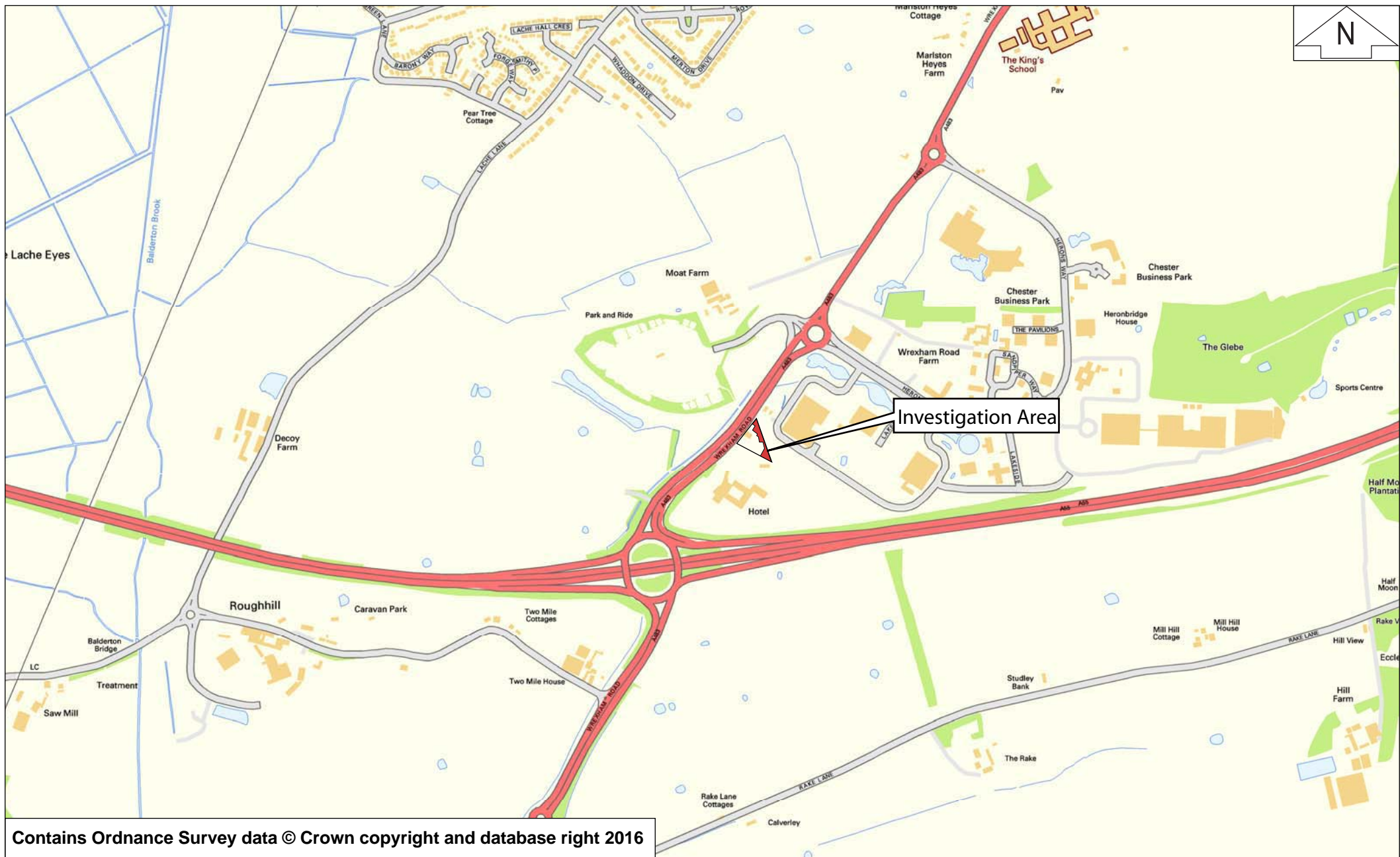
Condition 10 of the planning approval states that:

*No development shall take place within the area indicated until the applicant, or their agents or successors in title, has secured the implementation of a programme of archaeological work in accordance with a written scheme of watching brief which has been submitted by the applicant and approved in writing by the local planning authority. The work shall be carried out strictly in accordance with the approved scheme. Reason. This site is an area of archaeological importance.*

The Development Control Archaeologist (Mr Mark Leah) at Cheshire Archaeology Planning Advisory Service had confirmed that the archaeological watching brief should take the form of a monitored topsoil strip; in the areas which had not previously been subject to development, followed by a hand excavation and recording of archaeological features should they be present. Any areas that had been subject to significant previous disturbance were excluded (*reproduced from OSA 16WB36WSI*).

Relevant UK legislation on heritage includes the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979, and the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. The Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979 sets out the requirement for Scheduled Ancient Monument Consent for any works of demolition, repair, and alteration that might affect a Scheduled Ancient Monument. For archaeological sites that are not covered by the above Act, protection is afforded through development control, the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 and the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) Paragraph 141, Section 12 (Conserving and Enhancing the Historic Environment).

The current design conforms to the guidelines specified in the *CIFA Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Brief* (Chartered Institute for Archaeologists, 2014).

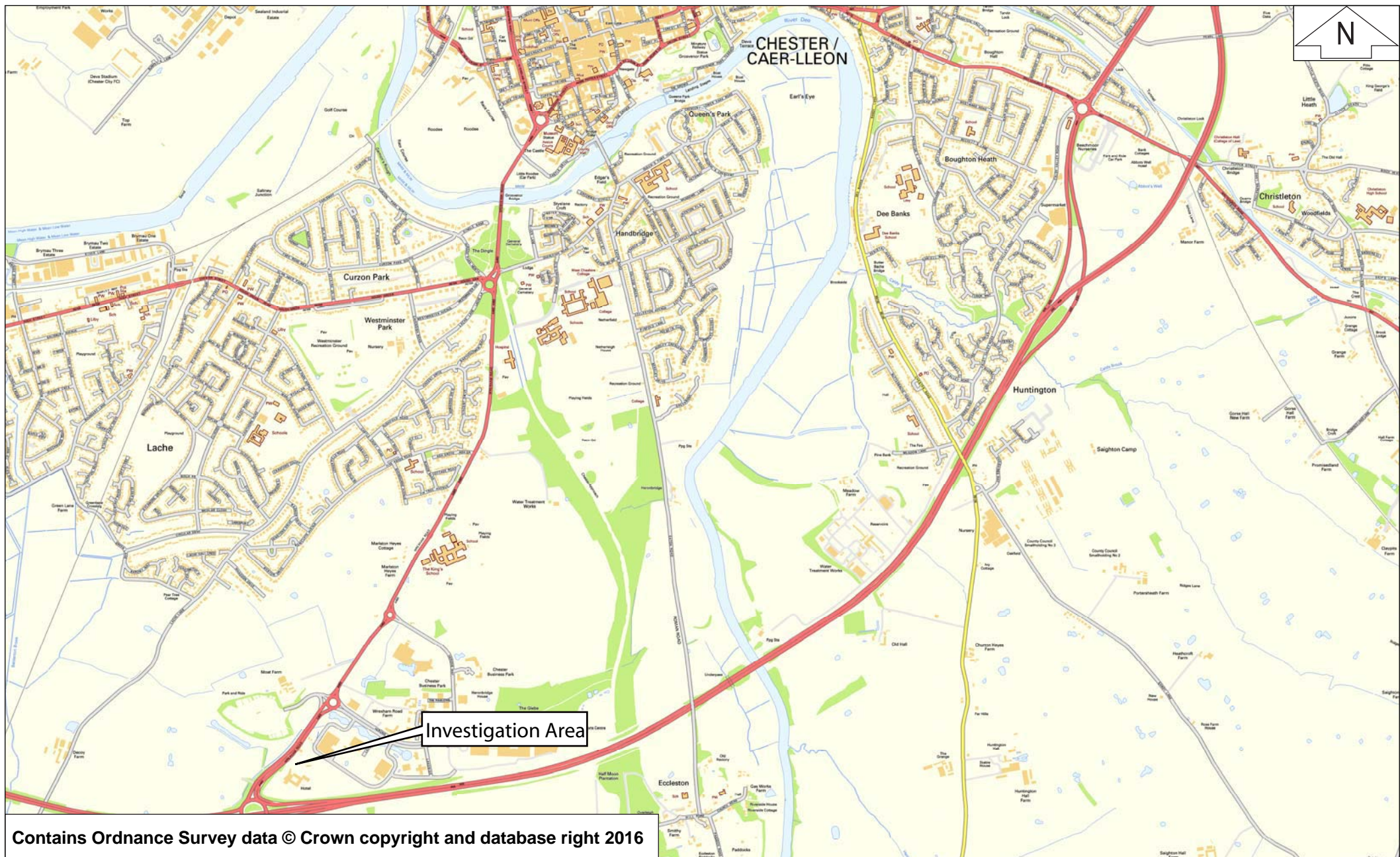


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**Figure 02:** Location of Site at East of A483 Wrexham Road, Chester. Scale 1:2500 at A4.



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**Figure 01:** Location of Site at East of A483 Wrexham Road, Chester. Scale 1:10,000 at A4.



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### 3.0 PROJECT AIMS

The aim of the watching brief was to characterise the known, or potential, archaeological remains uncovered during the excavation of the previously undisturbed areas.

The broad aims of the archaeological watching brief were:

- To determine, as far as is reasonably possible, the location, extent, date, character, condition, significance and quality of any surviving archaeological remains on the site, the integrity of which may be threatened by development at the site.
- To establish the nature and extent of existing disturbance and intrusion to sub-surface deposits and, where the data allows, assess the degree of archaeological survival of buried deposits of archaeological significance.
- To enable the client to establish a schedule for archaeological risks.
- To record and then report on the work and determine the need, if any, for further archaeological mitigation. This may consist of attempts to preserve significant remains in situ or, if this is not possible, more extensive excavation work and reporting. Less sensitive remains may require a watching brief. Any such further work may be secured by amendment to the condition.

The detailed objectives of the archaeological watching brief were:

- Insofar as possible within methodological constraints, to explain any temporal, spatial or functional relationships between the structures/remains identified, and any relationships between these and the archaeological and historic elements of the wider landscape.
- Where the data allows, identify the research implications of the site with reference to the regional research agenda and recent work in Cheshire

The management of this project has followed the procedures laid out in the standard professional guidance *Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment Project Manager's Guide* (English Heritage 2010) and in the *CIFA Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Brief* (Chartered Institute for Archaeologists, 2014). Five stages are specified:

Phase 1: project planning

Phase 2: fieldwork

Phase 3: assessment of potential for analysis and revised project design

Phase 4: analysis and report preparation

Phase 5: dissemination

The current document reports on the phase 4 analysis and states the means to be used to disseminate the results. In this case there was insufficient evidence to proceed with the phase 3 Assessment of Potential stage and the project moved directly to phase 4.

All the information gathered by this watching brief is to be presented in a report that will be held by the Cheshire Historic Environment Record and the OASIS database so that it can be accessible to the public and future researchers. This phase of work also includes archiving any material and documentary records from the project.

## **4.0 METHODOLOGY – ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF**

### **4.1 Watching Brief**

The CifA maintains a standard for archaeological watching brief which states that:

*An archaeological watching brief will record the archaeological resource during development within a specified area using appropriate methods and practices. These will satisfy the stated aims of the project, and comply with the Code of conduct and other relevant by-laws of CifA.*

An archaeological watching brief is defined by the CifA as a formal programme of observation and investigation conducted during any operation carried out for non-archaeological reasons (CifA 2014). The watching brief will take place within a specified area within the Site where there is a possibility that archaeological deposits may be disturbed or destroyed. The CifA further identifies the purpose of a watching brief as allowing, within the resources available, the preservation by record of archaeological deposits, the presence and nature of which could not be established in advance of development or other potentially disruptive works.

It is also important to note that a watching brief provides an opportunity, if needed, for a signal to be made to all interested parties, before the destruction of the archaeological materials, that an archaeological find has been made for which the resources allocated to the watching brief itself are not sufficient to support treatment to a satisfactory and proper standard. A watching brief is, therefore, not intended to reduce the requirement for excavation or preservation of known or inferred deposits, and it is intended to guide, not replace, any requirement for contingent excavation or preservation of possible deposits.

All soil removal was undertaken using a mechanical excavator fitted with a toothless ditching bucket. A photographic record was maintained throughout, using a digital SLR camera (Canon 600D) set to maximum resolution and any subsurface remains were to be recorded photographically, with detailed notations and measured drawings being undertaken if required.

In the event of archaeological discovery features were to be excavated by hand and fully recorded using Aeon Archaeology pro-formas, digital photographs, and plan and section drawings taken at a suitable scale (usually 1:20 for plan drawings and 1:10 for section drawings). The archive produced is held at Aeon Archaeology under the project code **A0098.1**.

### **4.2 Data Collection from Site Records**

A database of the site photographs was produced to enable active long-term curation of the photographs and easy searching. The site records were checked and cross-referenced and photographs were cross-referenced to contexts. These records were used to write the site narrative and the field drawings and survey data were used to produce an outline plan of the site.

All paper field records were scanned to provide a backup digital copy. The photographs were organised and precisely cross-referenced to the digital photographic record so that the Cheshire Historic Environment Record (HER) can curate them in their active digital storage facility.

### **4.3 Artefact Methodology**

All artefacts were to be collected and processed including those found within spoil tips. They would be bagged and labelled as well any preliminary identification taking place on site. After processing, all artefacts would be cleaned and examined in-house at Aeon Archaeology. If required, artefacts would be sent to a relevant specialist for conservation and analysis.

The recovery policy for archaeological finds was kept under review throughout the archaeological watching brief. Any changes in recovery priorities would be made under guidance from an appropriate specialist and agreed with the Client and the Development Control Archaeologist. There was a presumption against the disposal of archaeological finds regardless of their apparent age or condition.

#### **4.4 Environmental Samples Methodology**

The sampling strategy and requirement for bulk soil samples was related to the perceived character, interpretational importance and chronological significance of the strata under investigation. This ensured that only significant features would be sampled. The aim of the sampling strategy was to recover carbonised macroscopic plant remains, small artefacts particularly knapping debris and evidence for metalworking.

Advice and guidance regarding environmental samples and their suitability for radiocarbon dating, as well as the analysis of macrofossils (charcoal and wood), pollen, animal bones and molluscs would be obtained from Oxford Archaeology if required.

#### **4.5 Report and dissemination**

A full archive including plans, photographs, written material and any other material resulting from the project was prepared. All plans, photographs and descriptions were labelled, and cross-referenced, and will be lodged within a suitable repository to be agreed with the archaeological curator within six months of the completion of the project.

A draft copy of the report has been sent to the client and Upon approval from the Client copies of the report (Aeon report #0109) will be sent to the Cheshire Historic Environment Record, the Development Control Archaeologist at Cheshire Archaeology Planning Advisory Service, and the OASIS online database. Copies of all notes, plans, and photographs arising from the watching brief will be stored at Aeon Archaeology under the project code **A0098.1** with the originals being lodged in a suitable repository to be agreed with the archaeological curator.

## **5.0 QUANTIFICATION OF RESULTS**

### **5.1 The Documentary Archive**

The following documentary records were created during the archaeological watching brief:

Watching brief day record sheets	3
Digital photographs	50
Context Sheets	0
Drawings	0

### **5.2 Environmental Samples**

No environmental samples were taken during the archaeological watching brief as no suitable deposits or fills were encountered.

### **5.3 Artefacts**

No artefacts were recovered during the archaeological watching brief.

## 6.0 RESULTS OF THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

The archaeological watching brief was designed to characterise the known, or potential, archaeological remains should they be revealed. Following the discovery of an east-west aligned Roman road and associated features (as detailed in the introduction) during the Lakeside Business Park Development; there was some potential for preserved archaeological remains to be present on the previously undeveloped land close to the eastern boundary of the Wrexham Road Service Station site.

20<sup>th</sup> October - 2016  
(Plates 01, 03)

The watching brief began at the southern end of the site within the area designated by the Development Control Archaeologist (Figure 02, 03). The tracked excavator began to strip the topsoil south to north – the topsoil was roughly 0.12m in depth in the southern area of the site and consisted of a loose dark brown clay-silt with occasional sub rounded pebble inclusions. Following the removal of the topsoil no archaeology was revealed. Immediately beneath the topsoil was an extremely firm light brown silt-clay which was full of coarse building materials, brick fragments and frequent charcoal fleck inclusions. This deposit was characterised as an overburden, which had been previously placed in the area perhaps as an artificial embankment. This material was excavated to a depth of 0.50m from the surface and although it extended beyond that depth the development had reached its level and so work moved to the northern area of the site. No discernible archaeological features were discovered in this area.

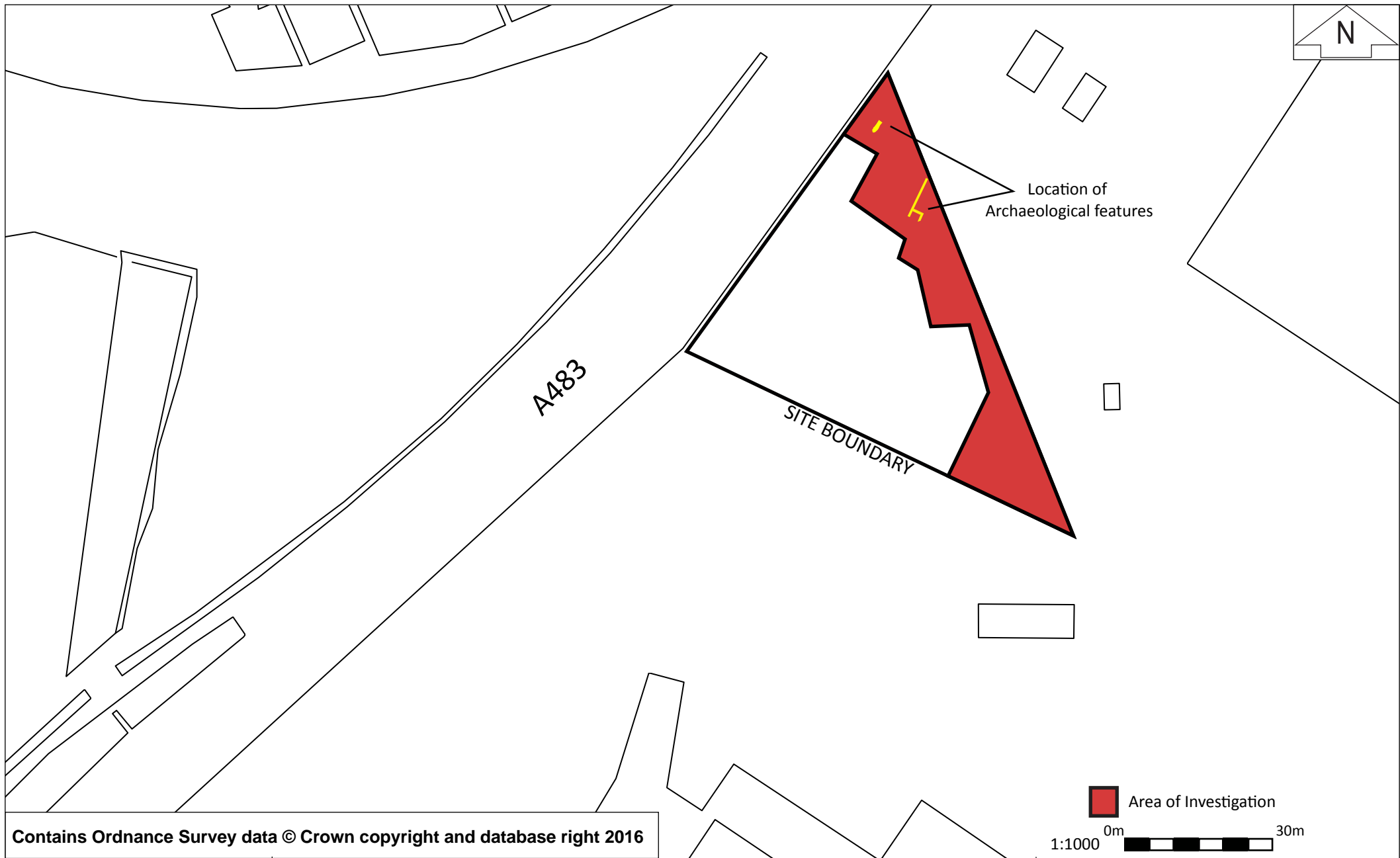
21<sup>st</sup> October 2016  
(Plates 02, 04-05)

The watching brief continued at the far northern end of the site and the tracked excavator began to strip the topsoil from north to south. No archaeology was discovered during this initial strip and the reduced dig was initiated in the central area of the site moving northward. It should be noted that the level for the redevelopment was sloped towards the north; so a greater amount of material was removed in this area. Once again the topsoil was a loose dark brown clay-silt and measured 0.20m in depth, with the hard light-brown silt-clay overburden directly beneath; this measured 0.45m in depth and overlaid a firm, light yellow-brown silt-clay. This deposit measured >0.10m in depth and can also be characterised as overburden due to the nature of its inclusions; coarse building materials, brick fragments and charcoal. Furthermore the very firm character of these lower deposits suggests compaction during a former phase of groundworks, possibly the construction of the existing Petrol Station .

A double skin brick wall was uncovered (Plate 04) in the central part of the watching brief area (**NGR 39263 62840**). The wall was aligned roughly east-west, the wall was 8.66m in length and 0.24m wide. It was constructed from frogged bricks printed 'LLAY HALL WREXHAM' (Plate 05); and measured 22.5cm in length by 11.0cm in width by 7.5cm in depth and were bonded to one another with a smooth pink mortar. The wall had a double-skinned spur emanating halfway along its length which stretched southward for 2.20m before turning westward for 1.84m; all along its western extremity the structure had been truncated by modern concrete intrusions associated with the previous service station; presumably this had previously formed a cell of brickwork before it was truncated. Interspersed within the brick walls was a network of salt glazed sewage pipes which appeared to respect the walls and did not truncate them. These brick walls were probably associated with an earlier incarnation of the garage and allude to a previous redevelopment of the site in the recent past.

22<sup>nd</sup> October 2016  
(Plates 06-10)



The watching brief moved once more to the far northern corner of the site to begin the final reduced excavation down to the building level required for the project. The topsoil was a dark brown sand-silt full of charcoal inclusions and was probably associated with up-cast material from the initial road works on the Wrexham Road A483. Within this discreet deposit was a concrete service culvert which was discovered directly below the topsoil at a depth of 0.20m. Immediately below this service culvert a shallow ditch was partially revealed (its extent appeared to carry on beyond the limit of excavation) that had been backfilled with modern ceramic sherds and fragments of painted glass within a matrix of 'rusty' orange brown silt-clay. The ditch (**NGR SJ 39248 62877**) was aligned northeast-southwest (the culvert above respected this alignment) and ran for 2.66m before it ran into the limit of excavation to the east, its maximum width was 0.57m. The ditch had shallow concave sides with a softly undulating base and was 0.11m at its maximum depth. This feature was full of modern ceramic fabrics mainly whiteware sherds and wire reinforced, painted glass; it was then photographed (*Plate 06,07*) and committed to record, although its significance is considered low and is more evidence for modern interference in this area.



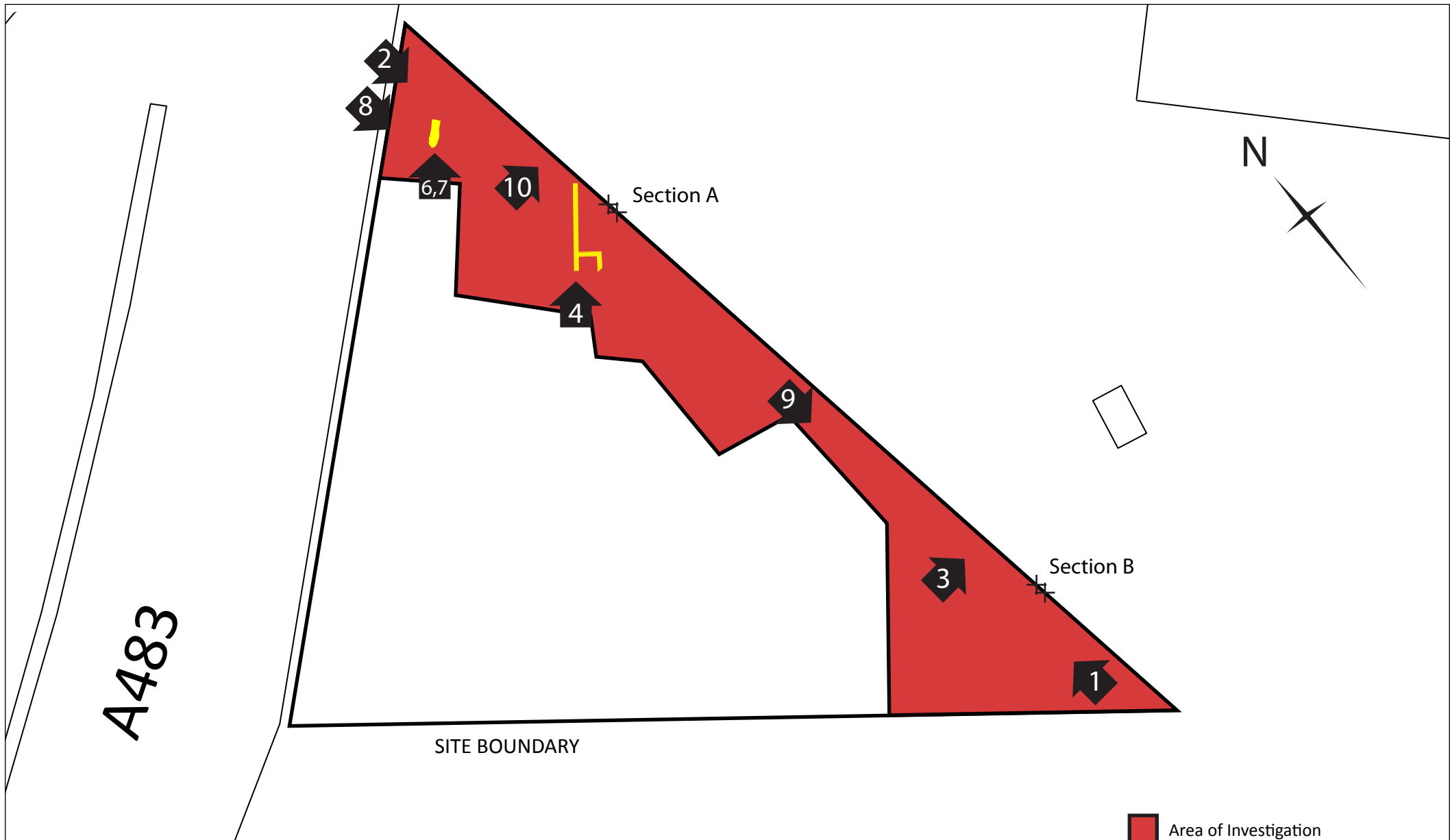
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**Figure 03:** Location of Site and Archaeological Features to East of A483 Wrexham Road, Chester. Scale 1:1000 at A4.

 Area of Investigation  
 1:1000  0m 30m

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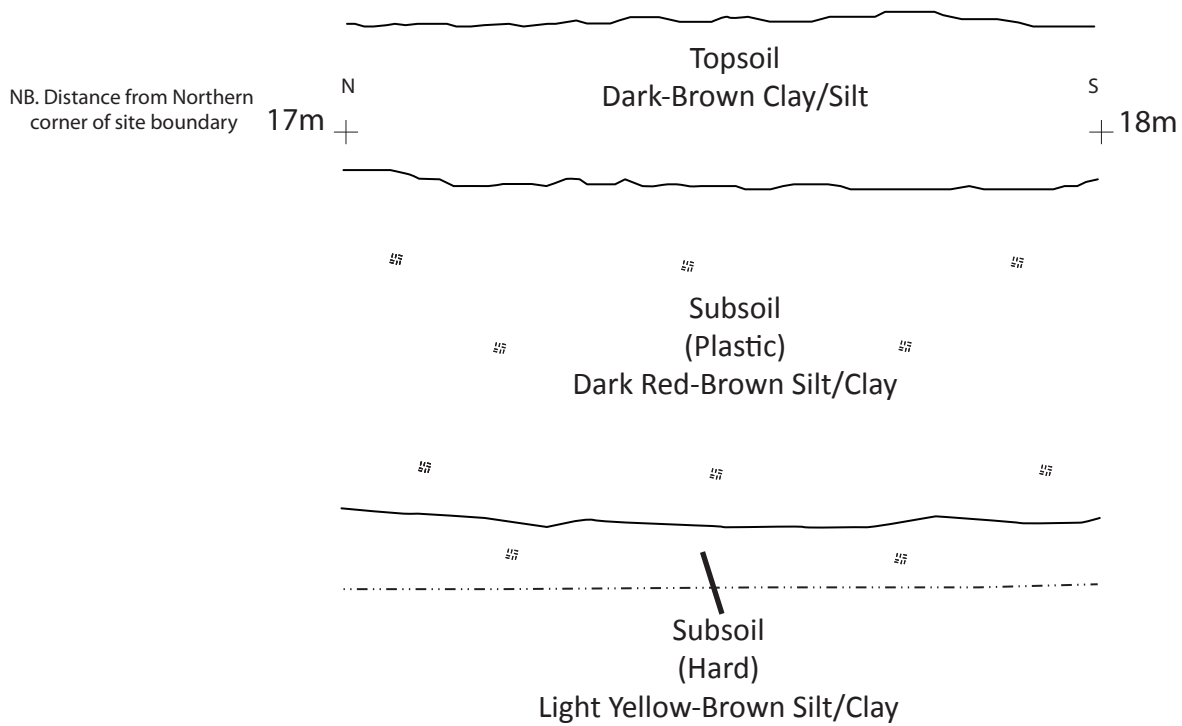


**Figure 04:** Location of Site Archaeological photography on site to East of A483 Wrexham Road, Chester. Scale 1:500 at A4.

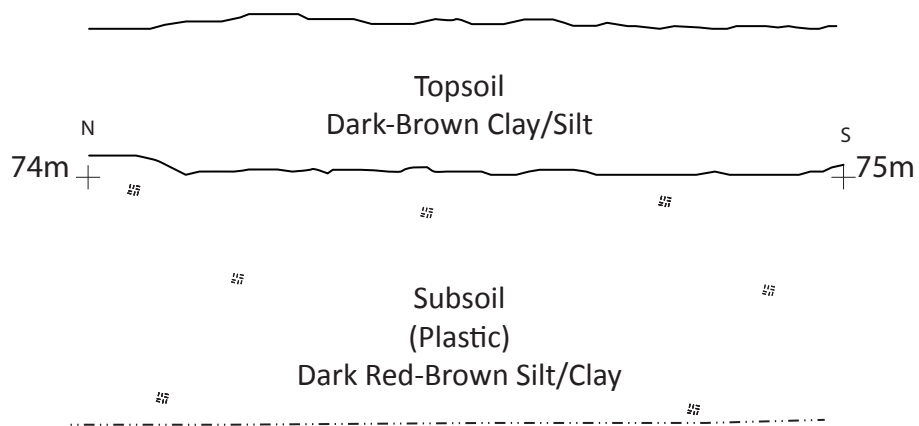
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**Section A: West facing section; Northern area of site (Visible on Fig 04)**



**Section B: West facing section; Southern area of site (Visible on Fig 04)**



1:10



Figure 05: Generic sections in northern and southern areas of site.

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**Plate 01:** Post excavation shot of southern portion of site from south - no scale



**Plate 02:** Post excavation shot of northern portion of site after topsoil strip - from north - scale 1m



**Plate 03:** Generic section following excavation to full depth in south of site - from west -scale 0.5m



**Plate 04:** Brick wall and salt glaze pipes near eastern boundary - from southwest - scale 1m



**Plate 05:** Example of brick used in wall construction, stamped "LLAY HALL WREXHAM" - scale 0.3m



**Plate 06:** Modern ditch filled with ceramic and glass - from west - 1m scale



**Plate 07:** Modern ditch half sectioned - from west - 1m scale





**Plate 08:** Post excavation shot of northern portion of site following reduced excavation - from north - scale 1m



Plate 09: Post excavation of central portion of site following reduced excavation - from north - scale 1m



**Plate 10:** Generic section following excavation to full depth in north of site - from west - scale 1m

## **7.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Following the archaeological watching brief at Wrexham Road Service Station, Wrexham Road (A483), Chester the anticipated archaeological potential of the sub-surface deposits and artefactual remains was not fully realised and the results of the watching brief mean that much of the aims and objectives could not be addressed in full. Although some features were uncovered and investigated these were all of modern date and considered to be of low significance.

The watching brief was maintained only to the depth required for the construction of the car park and therefore the natural glacial substrata was not encountered across any part of the area monitored. As such, there exists the potential for preserved remains at lower levels although these will not be disturbed by the development and any such remains will be preserved in-situ. Considering the results of the archaeological watching brief and the requirements of this project no recommendations for further archaeological mitigatory works are proposed and it is recommended that the archaeological condition be discharged.

## 8.0 SOURCES

### *OS Maps*

OS 1:10 000 Series sheet SJ 36 NE, SJ 36 SE, SJ 36 SW, SJ 36 NW, SJ 46 NE, SJ 46 SE, SJ 46 SW, and SJ 46 NW.

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