

**Pakefield House - Fortescue House,
St John's Street, Bicester**

Archaeological Evaluation Report

Churchill Retirement Living Ltd

April 2023


Ecus Ltd

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Summary

This document presents the results of an archaeological trial trench evaluation in advance of development at St Johns Street in Bicester, centred on National Grid Co-ordinate 458208, 222759 (Fig. 1).

In July 2022 Ecus produced a Historic Environment Desk-Based Assessment (HEDBA; Ecus 2022a) to inform planning application 21/01818/F (Cherwell District Council (CDC). This planning application was approved in October 2022. A programme of archaeological investigation was required for conditions attached to the planning application to be discharged; the first part of this programme comprised a 4% sample trial trench evaluation. The evaluation was conducted in accordance with the agreed methods and standards outlined in a Written Scheme of Investigation (Ecus 2022b).

Based on the HEDBA, the Site was believed to have low potential for prehistoric remains, with medium potential for Romano-British remains due to the close proximity to a Roman road. As the site was located outside of the settlement area during the early medieval-medieval period, the likelihood of encountering features of this date was considered very low to medium. The Site had remained undeveloped until construction of the existing residential dwellings during the post-medieval period and mid to late twentieth century; the likelihood of encountering remains relating to this later activity was therefore considered high.

Five trenches were excavated across the site. All showed a similar stratigraphic sequence; with a silty layer containing demolition/construction debris directly overlying the natural drift geology, followed by a thin layer of recent subsoil overlain by modern topsoil. The base deposit most likely represented a levelling event in advance of, or in conjunction with, construction of the residential properties occupying the site.

Trench 4 contained two intercutting north west to south east aligned modern ditches, which had been cut through the levelling deposit. The ditches are likely to have been excavated in order to direct excess water away from the property and towards the River Bure to the south-west of the Site.

The results conformed with the previously outlined archaeological potential of the site, with evidence of past human activity limited to the likely levelling of garden plots associated with the construction of the standing residential structures, and water management of the properties in the form of modern drainage ditches.

1. Introduction

1.1 Project Background

- 1.1.1 Ecus Ltd was commissioned by Churchill Retirement Living Ltd in October 2022 to carry out an archaeological trial trench evaluation in advance of development at St Johns Street in Bicester (hereafter the Site). The Site is centred on National Grid Co-ordinate 458208, 222759 (Fig. 1).
- 1.1.1 In July 2022 Ecus produced a Historic Environment Desk-Based Assessment (HEDBA; Ecus 2022a) to inform planning application 21/01818/F (Cherwell District Council (CDC)). This planning application was approved at appeal in October 2022. A programme of archaeological investigation was required for conditions attached to the planning application to be discharged; the first part of this programme comprised a 4% sample trial trench evaluation.
- 1.1.2 A Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) detailing the methodology and standards for the programme of archaeological investigations was produced by Ecus and approved by Oxfordshire County Archaeological Services (OCAS). The methods and standards outlined in the WSI were adhered to throughout the trial trench evaluation (Ecus 2022b).

1.2 Site Location and Description

- 1.2.1 The Site was located within Bicester, a town and parish in the Cherwell district of north eastern Oxfordshire. Bicester is located either side of the Oxford to Buckingham Road, with the River Bure flowing north-west to south-east through the town (Fig. 1).
- 1.2.2 The area of investigation was sited immediately south of the junction between Queens Avenue, Field Street and Saint John's Street and measured approximately 0.22 hectares (ha). The Site was occupied by four houses (Pakefield House, Gareloch, no. 21 and Fortescue House) along St John's Street (Fig. 2).
- 1.2.3 The houses were set back from the roadside and the Site was enclosed to the south by dense mature trees lining the bank of the River Bure. The immediate environs to the north, south east and west were characterised by modern urban development.
- 1.2.4 The Site was located on relatively level ground approximately 72m above Ordnance Datum (aOD). The underlying geology of the Site comprises Forest Marble Formation. Superficial deposits are recorded immediately south of the Site and comprise fluvial alluvium (clay, silt, sand and gravel; British Geological Survey 2022).

2. Archaeological and Historical Background

2.1 Introduction

2.1.1 The following is based on the HEDBA produced by Ecus in 2022 and should be referred to for additional detail (Ecus 2022a).

Prehistoric and Romano-British

2.1.2 No prehistoric remains are recorded within the Site and there are no Oxfordshire Historic Environment Record (OHER) data records for this period within the study area.

2.1.3 During the Roman period the Site was located just over 2km north east of the Roman town of Alchester, now designated a Scheduled Monument (National Heritage List for England (NHLE): 1006365). Alchester comprised a small town located at the junction of five Roman roads, including one running between Alchester and Bicester to the north east. This road, described on the OHER as part of the Alchester to Towcester Road, is postulated to roughly follow the course of Queens Avenue and at its closest point lies c.5m west of the Site.

2.1.4 Evidence of activity in the area on the OHER relates to a ditch with one single sherd of pottery recorded c.470m south west of the Site. The ditch may have represented an element of a field system relating to a farmstead in the vicinity, and the pottery was indicative of a high status settlement.

2.1.5 It is understood that from the fifth century AD the Roman drainage system in Bicester collapsed, with much of the landscaping reverting back to marshland around the watercourses in the area.

Early Medieval

2.1.6 No evidence of early medieval activity has been recorded within the Site.

2.1.7 Settlement during this period was established in the wider landscape to the north east, in the vicinity of the Roman road and a ford over the River Bure. Early settlement is suggested to have been located around King's End and founded by Birinus, the seventh century Bishop of Dorchester.

2.1.8 Archaeological evidence possibly associated with an early medieval minister and priory has been recorded c.480m south east of the Site. Data records on the OHER suggest that settlement was located to the south of the River Burne during this period; approximately 210m from the area of investigation.

Medieval

2.1.9 During the medieval period, the parish of Bicester covered a large area and was in the largest 20% of settlements recorded in the Domesday Survey. With activity centred around King's End and

Market End, linked by a causeway across the River Burne, settlement is thought to have been located along the following roads: St. John the Baptist's Street (the later Sheep Street), the Market Square at its southern end, Church Way and the Causeway.

- 2.1.10 Within the vicinity of the Site the remains of walls and ditches suggested to relate to a farmstead or isolated cottage were recorded c.140m south east of the Site. Documentary evidence describes the postulated location of a former church, St Johns Chapel, as c.70m east of the area of investigation. Whilst the remains of the farmstead or isolated cottage in the vicinity of the Site is indicative of settlement activity, they have been interpreted to represent settlement on the outskirts of the medieval core of Bicester and it has been suggested that the medieval settlement of Bicester is unlikely to have extended continuously this far north from Market End and King's End.
- 2.1.11 During this period the majority of the Site formed part of the historic parish of Market End, with the southernmost extent encompassed in the parish of King's End. Maps provided in the CDC Bicester Conservation Area Appraisal (2011, p. 10) illustrate that the Site was likely to have formed part of the settlement of Crockwell, located outside of the extent of settlements (both religious and residential) of Market End and King's End and was not located within close proximity to any major transport routes.

Post-Medieval and Twentieth Century

- 2.1.12 During the sixteenth and seventeenth century Bicester was subject to a period of expansion and rebuilding. The Site did not form part of the settlement until the eighteenth century onwards.
- 2.1.13 The post-medieval period is represented on the OHER by records of a former Wesleyan Chapel on North Street, c.120m to the east and the site of a former (now demolished) toll house c.190m to the north east.

2.2 Previous Impacts

- 2.2.1 The Site was undeveloped until the construction of the existing residential dwellings during the post-medieval period and mid to late twentieth century. Previous impacts are therefore largely associated with the demolition of former buildings within the Site and excavation for foundations and services of the extant residential dwellings.

3. Methodology for Archaeological Evaluation

3.1 Introduction

3.1.1 The following section sets out the methodology for the archaeological evaluation, as outlined in the WSI (Ecus 2022b).

3.1.2 Changes to the methodology are limited to trench location adjustment and sub-division due to the presence of below ground services, which was agreed with OCAS in advance of the work being undertaken.

3.2 Standards

3.2.1 The project conformed to the current national guidance as set out in the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists' (CIfA) *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Evaluation* (CIfA 2020a); *Standard and Guidance for the Collection, Documentation, Conservation and Research of Archaeological Materials* (CIfA 2020b); and *Standard and Guidance for the Creation, Compilation, Transfer and Deposition of Archaeological Archives* (CIfA 2020c).

3.2.2 The archaeological evaluation was carried out in accordance with the CIfA's *Code of Conduct* (CIfA 2019) and *Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment: The MoRPHE Project Managers' Guide* (Historic England 2015b).

3.3 Aims and Objectives

3.3.1 The specific aims of the evaluation were:

- to identify and record any archaeological deposits, structures or built fabric within the identified areas of interest;
- to determine the extent, condition, character, significance and date of any encountered or exposed archaeological remains;
- to recover artefacts disturbed by the site works;
- to recover samples from sealed waterlogged contexts for environmental processing;
- to prepare a comprehensive record and report of archaeological observations during the site work; and
- to identify mitigation strategies to ensure the recording, preservation or management of archaeological remains within the Site.

3.3.2 The objectives of the project were:

- to contribute further to the understanding of the Site's land use and development from the Romano-British to post-medieval periods and establish whether archaeological remains associated with settlement and occupation of Bicester from these periods survive within the Site; and
- provide evidence to address relevant regional research topics contained within the *Solent-Thames Research Framework for the Historic Environment Resource Assessments and Research Agendas*.

3.3.3 The objectives of the evaluation aimed to provide evidence to address relevant regional research topics, particularly taking into account the material contained within the *Solent-Thames Research Framework for the Historic Environment Resource Assessments and Research Agendas* (<https://library.thehumanjourney.net/2597/>). Key questions were categorised within the following topics, as outlined in the WSI (Ecus 2022):

Medieval agenda:

- what factors influenced the origins and growth of the principal towns;
- the origins and development of urban housing types;
- the development of specific building types using different materials in particular areas of towns and cities, and their relationship to social identity and status;
- further study of varieties and quality of pottery usage; and
- whether small finds, which are important indicators consumer activity, indicate about settlement and activity.

Post-medieval agenda:

- social hierarchy in settlements;
- the relationship between urban morphology, prosperity and backyard enterprise;
- the development and growth of settlement; and
- understanding of pattern and trade in material culture.

3.4 Trench Location

3.4.1 A trenching plan was devised to maximise the retrieval of archaeological information and to ensure that the significance of the archaeological resource is understood to a level of detail proportionate to its importance (Fig. 2).

3.4.2 The trenching plan comprised a 4% sample of the Site as part of a staged programme of archaeological investigation undertaken ahead of the removal of any below ground footings and

services.

3.4.3 The centre end point of each trench was located on the ground/recorded using differential Global Positioning System (dGPS) technology or hand-measured to an accuracy of ± 0.1 m.

3.4.4 Each trench was scanned with a cable avoidance tool (CAT) prior to excavation and rescanned at subsequent intervals.

3.5 Excavation Methodology

3.5.1 The trenches were excavated using a mechanical excavator fitted with a toothless ditching bucket under continuous archaeological monitoring.

3.5.2 All topsoil and recent overburden was removed down to the first significant archaeological horizon or natural subsoil, whichever was encountered first, in successive level spits.

3.5.3 Archaeological features were sampled sufficiently by hand to enable their date, nature, extent and condition to be described. The following strategy was proposed as a typical sample level for excavated features:

- 50% (by plan area) of each post hole;
- 50% (by plan area) of each pit;
- 20% (by plan area) of each linear feature; and
- 100% of ditch terminals.

3.5.4 The stratigraphy of all trial trenches was recorded even where no archaeological deposits were identified. Spoil heaps were monitored to allow analysis of the spatial distribution of artefacts. Metal detectors were used to recover metal finds from the spoil.

3.5.5 Excavated topsoil and subsoil was stored separately, set back at least 1 m from the edges of excavated trenches.

3.5.6 Both ends of trench were ramped to allow safe access and egress.

3.5.7 Plant was not permitted to track within excavated trenches prior to reinstatement.

3.6 Recording Methodology

3.6.1 All archaeological deposits were recorded using a continuous numbered context system on pro-forma recording system in accordance with industry standards. The written record is hierarchically based and centred on the context record. Each context record describes the location, extent, composition and relationship of the subject and has been cross-referenced with all other assigned

records. Written recording was undertaken in a digital format using the DiggIt application (<https://www.diggitararchaeology.com>).

3.6.2 Excavated features were surveyed by means of a differential Global Positioning System (dGPS) and recorded on at 1:20 scale, with sections drawn at 1:10. Drawings were made in pencil on permanent drafting film.

3.6.3 A full photographic record was maintained, using a digital camera equipped with an image sensor of not less than 10 megapixels. Digital images were subject to managed quality control and curation processes which embed appropriate metadata within the image and ensure long term accessibility of the image set. Digital records created as part of the project comply with specific data standards (Historic England 2015a).

3.6.4 The data collection strategy was in keeping with the *Solent-Thames Research Framework for the Historic Environment Resource Assessments and Research Agendas*.

3.7 Finds and Environmental Sampling

3.7.1 All artefacts from excavated contexts derived from late post-medieval to modern demolition deposits. The artefacts were photographed for the archive and discarded on site. No earlier residual artefacts of potential archaeological/historical value from modern features were encountered.

3.7.2 No archaeological features or deposits of environmental potential and suitable for environmental sampling were encountered during the archaeological evaluation.

4. Results

4.1 Introduction

4.1.1 The following section presents the results of the archaeological evaluation. The context descriptions for recorded archaeological features and deposits are presented in Appendix 1.

4.1.2 The evaluation consisted of five mechanically excavated trenches. The trench locations are shown in Figure 2 and their orientation and dimensions are listed in Table 1 below.

Table 1: trench dimensions and orientation.

Trench no.	Orientation	Length (m)	Width (m)	Depth (m)
1	NW-SE	10	0.9	0.80 (avg.)
2	NE-SW	3.6	0.9	0.70 (avg.)
3	NE-SW	5	0.9	0.70 (avg.)
4	NE-SW	11	1.8	0.68 (avg.)
5	NE-SW	16	1.8	0.63 (avg.)

4.1.3 All trenches showed a similar stratigraphic sequence; with a silty layer containing 19th Century demolition/construction debris and domestic waste, including glass bottles and Willow Pattern pottery, directly overlying the natural drift geology, followed by a thin layer of recent subsoil overlain by modern topsoil (depths of individually numbered deposits are given in Appendix 1). The base deposit most likely represented a levelling event in advance of or in conjunction with construction of the residential properties occupying the site.

4.1.4 Trenches 1, 2, 3 and 5 were devoid of archaeological features. Trench 4 contained a north west to south east aligned ditch (405, with recut 407), which had been cut through levelling deposit 403 and into subsoil 404 (Fig. 2; plate 8). Ditch 405 was c.0.7m wide and 0.6m deep with gradually sloping sides and a concave base. It contained a single fill (406) of brown-grey silty clay with moderate flecks of charcoal and occasional fragments of modern brick. Ditch 405 had been cut

along its north-eastern edge by ditch 407, which measured 0.86m wide and 0.54m deep with steep sides and a concave base. The single fill (408) comprised a dark brown-grey silty clay deposit with frequent demolition material, which appeared to have been deliberately deposited.

- 4.1.5 A possible field boundary or land partition is shown on the 1922 OS map (Ecus 2022a) in the same location and alignment as the ditches identified in trench 4. It is possible that they were excavated for drainage purposes, and it is clear from their stratigraphic relationship to the 19th century levelling deposit, that they are modern in date.

5. Conclusions

- 5.1.1 The archaeological evaluation fulfilled the aims and objectives set out in the WSI (Ecus 2022b).
- 5.1.2 The results confirmed the anticipated archaeological potential of the site, with evidence of past human activity apparently limited to the likely levelling of garden plots associated with the construction of the present residential structures, and modern water management of the properties in the form of drainage ditches. With reference to the regional research framework none of these features are considered archaeologically significant.

6. Archiving

6.1 Physical Archive

- 6.1.1 The site archive will be deposited with the appropriate museum (Oxfordshire Museums) within six months of the completion of fieldwork, subject to any additional stages of archaeological mitigation.
- 6.1.2 A digital, paper and artefactual archive will be prepared, consisting of all primary written documents, plans, sections, photographs and electronic data arising from the archaeological works in accordance with industry standards (ClfA 2020c).

6.2 Digital Archive

- 6.2.1 A digital archive will be deposited with the Archaeology Data Service (ADS) and made publicly accessible. The digital archive will be compiled in accordance with the standards and requirements of the ADS, which may be accessed through the ADS website (ADS 2011 and 2020).
- 6.2.2 The digital archive is currently held at Ecus' office in Basingstoke under the project code 20237, and will be deposited with OHER following completion of all archaeological work at the Site and approvals by OCAS of all associated reporting. An OASIS form (OASIS ID: ecusltd1-514585) has been created and copy of the final, approved version of this report will be uploaded to the Archaeology Data Service via the OASIS form.

7. Copyright

7.1 Paper and Digital Archive

7.1.1 The copyright and ownership of the paper and digital archive from the archaeological work will rest with Ecus Ltd. On completion of the contracted works, Ecus will deposit the material with the Oxfordshire Museums Service, to whom they will transfer title and/or licence the use of the records.

7.2 Report

7.2.1 Full copyright of each report shall be retained by Ecus Ltd under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 with all rights reserved, excepting that the Developer will be licensed:

- to use each report in all matters directly relating to the scheme; and
- to make each report available for public dissemination as part of the dissemination measures.

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Appendix 1: Context Descriptions

Context	Type	Feature	Cut no.	Trench	Description	Interpretation	Bulk finds	Provisional periods	Length (m)	Width (m)	Depth (m)
101	Layer			1	Topsoil of trench 1. Colour: dark greyish brown. Composition: silty clay. Compaction: moist, firm.	Topsoil		Modern			0.28 (avg.)
102	Layer			1	Demolition layer in trench 1. Colour: mid yellowish brown. Composition: silty clay. Compaction: moist, firm.	Modern layer filled with waste construction materials	CBM (1)	Modern			0.60 (avg.)
103	Layer			1	Natural in trench 1. Colour: mid orangey brown. Composition: silty clay. Compaction:	Natural					

Context	Type	Feature	Cut no.	Trench	Description	Interpretation	Bulk finds	Provisional periods	Length (m)	Width (m)	Depth (m)
					waterlogged, loose.						
201	Layer			2	Topsoil of trench 2. Colour: dark greyish brown. Composition: silty clay. Compaction: moist, firm.	Topsoil		Modern			0.22 (avg.)
202	Layer			2	Bioturbation in trench 2. Colour: mid yellowish brown. Composition: silty clay. Compaction: moist, firm.	Layer of rooting and bioturbation		Modern			0.10 (avg.)

Context	Type	Feature	Cut no.	Trench	Description	Interpretation	Bulk finds	Provisional periods	Length (m)	Width (m)	Depth (m)
203	Layer			2	Demolition layer in trench 2. Colour: very dark brownish grey. Composition: silty clay. Compaction: moist, malleable. Inclusions: occasional medium to large brick, evenly distributed.	Layer containing waste building materials.	Glass (1), CBM (1)	Modern			0.50 (avg.)
204	Layer			2	Natural in trench 2. Colour: mid orangey brown. Composition: silty clay. Compaction: waterlogged, loose.	Natural geology					

Context	Type	Feature	Cut no.	Trench	Description	Interpretation	Bulk finds	Provisional periods	Length (m)	Width (m)	Depth (m)
301	Layer			3	Topsoil of trench 3. Colour: dark greyish brown. Composition: silty clay. Compaction: moist, firm.	Topsoil		Modern			0.20 (avg.)
302	Layer			3	Bioturbation in trench 3. Colour: mid yellowish brown. Composition: silty clay. Compaction: moist, firm.	Layer of rooting and natural disturbances		Modern			0.10 (avg.)

Context	Type	Feature	Cut no.	Trench	Description	Interpretation	Bulk finds	Provisional periods	Length (m)	Width (m)	Depth (m)
303	Layer			3	Demolition layer in trench 3. Colour: very dark brownish grey. Composition: silty clay. Compaction: moist, malleable. Inclusions: occasional medium to large brick, evenly distributed.	Layer filled with water materials from construction		Modern			0.55 (avg.)
304	Layer			3	Natural in trench 3. Colour: mid orangey brown. Composition: silty clay. Compaction: waterlogged, loose.	Natural					

Context	Type	Feature	Cut no.	Trench	Description	Interpretation	Bulk finds	Provisional periods	Length (m)	Width (m)	Depth (m)
401	Layer			4	Topsoil of trench 4. Colour: dark greyish brown. Composition: silty clay. Compaction: moist, firm.	Topsoil		Modern			0.17 (avg.)
402	Layer			4	Subsoil of trench 4. Colour: very dark yellow-brown. Composition: silty clay. Compaction: moist, firm.	Subsoil		Modern			0.10 (avg.)

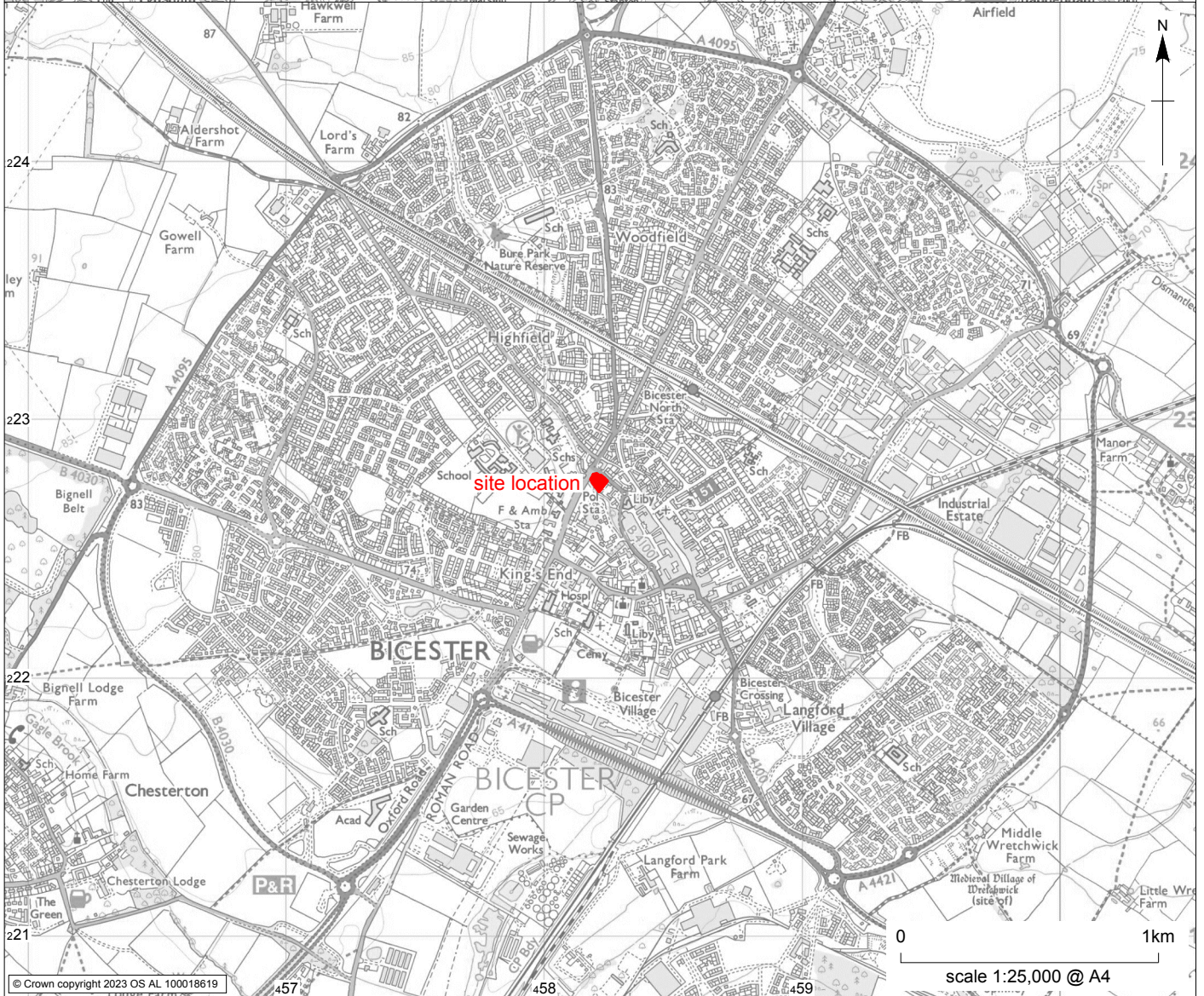
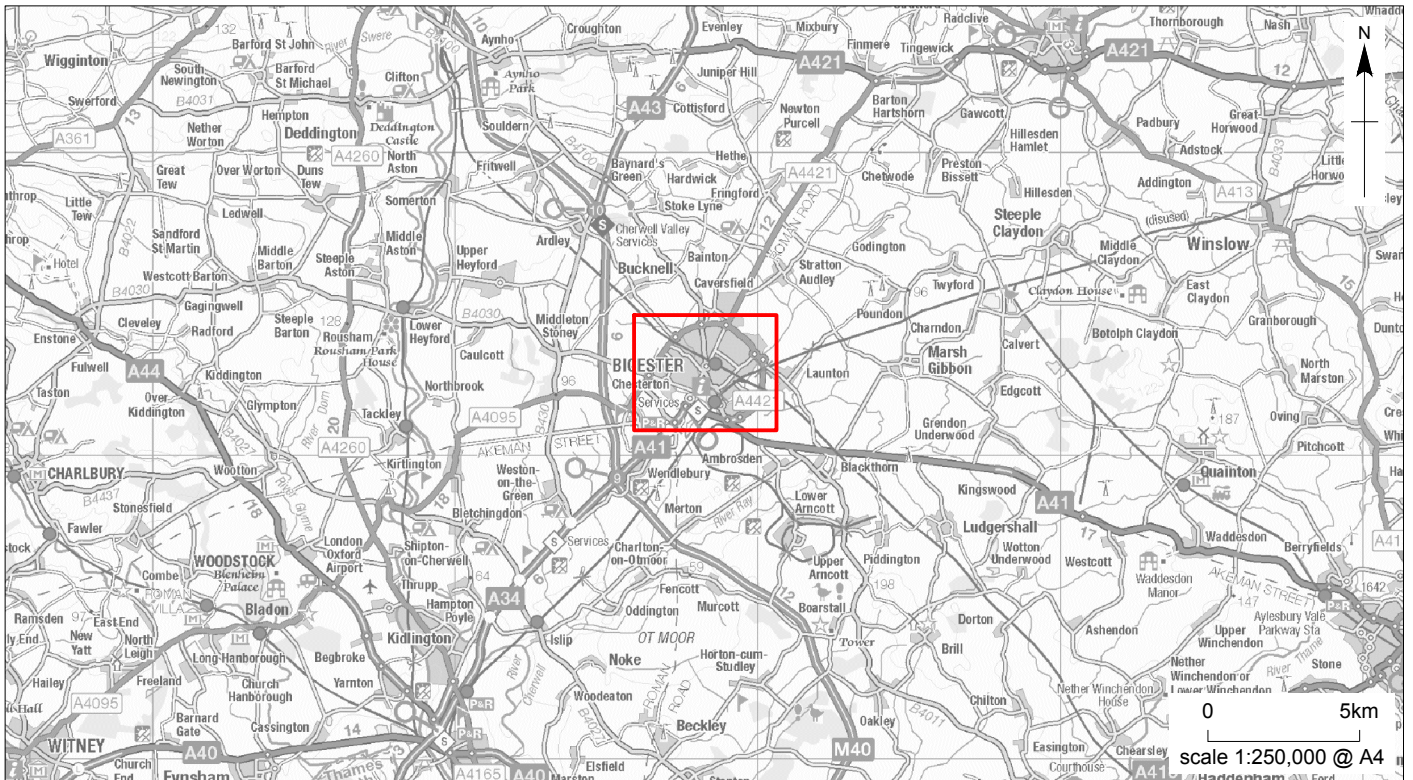
Context	Type	Feature	Cut no.	Trench	Description	Interpretation	Bulk finds	Provisional periods	Length (m)	Width (m)	Depth (m)
403	Layer			4	Construction waste layer in trench 4. Colour: dark greyish brown. Composition: silty clay. Compaction: moist, firm. Inclusions: moderate medium brick.	Modern layer featuring waste building materials	Pot (1), Bone (1), CBM (1)	Modern			0.50 (avg.)
404	Layer			4	Natural in trench 4. Colour: mid orangey brown. Composition: silty clay. Compaction: waterlogged, loose.	Natural geology					

Context	Type	Feature	Cut no.	Trench	Description	Interpretation	Bulk finds	Provisional periods	Length (m)	Width (m)	Depth (m)
405	Cut	Ditch		4	Cut of E-W ditch. Shape in plan: regular, linear. Break at top: sharp. Sides: moderate, straight. Break at base: gradual. Base: concave.	Post med - potentially modern gully or ditch. Cut by [407].		Modern	> 1.80	0.7	0.6
406	Fill	Ditch	405	4	Fill of ditch [405]. Colour: mid greyish brown. Composition: silty clay. Compaction: moist, malleable. Inclusions: moderate flecks of charcoal, evenly distributed.	Modern cbm seen in section, with charcoal and rooting damage at the base. Fill may have been natural, caused by natural silting processes.		Modern	> 1.80	0.7	0.6

Context	Type	Feature	Cut no.	Trench	Description	Interpretation	Bulk finds	Provisional periods	Length (m)	Width (m)	Depth (m)
407	Cut	Ditch		4	Cut of E-W ditch. Shape in plan: regular, linear. Break at top: sharp. Sides: steep, concave. Break at base: sharp. Base: flat.	Modern cut, containing modern waste material.		Modern	> 2.00	0.86	0.54
408	Fill	Ditch	407	4	Fill of ditch [407]. Colour: dark brownish grey. Composition: silty clay. Compaction: moist, malleable.	Single fill of ditch, appears deliberate backfill containing construction/demolition waste.		Modern	> 2.00	0.86	0.54

Context	Type	Feature	Cut no.	Trench	Description	Interpretation	Bulk finds	Provisional periods	Length (m)	Width (m)	Depth (m)
501	Layer			5	Topsoil of trench 5. Colour: dark greyish brown. Composition: silty clay. Compaction: moist, firm.	Topsoil		Modern			0.18 (avg.)
502	Layer			5	Subsoil of trench 5. Colour: very dark yellowish brown. Composition: silty clay. Compaction: moist, firm.	Subsoil		Modern			0.09 (avg.)
503	Layer			5	Demolition layer in trench 5. Colour: mid yellowish brown. Composition: silty clay. Compaction:	Demolition layer filled with brick.	Pot, Coin (1)	Modern			0.40 (avg.)

Context	Type	Feature	Cut no.	Trench	Description	Interpretation	Bulk finds	Provisional periods	Length (m)	Width (m)	Depth (m)
					moist, firm.						
504	Layer			5	Natural in trench 5. Colour: mid orangey brown. Composition: silty clay. Compaction: waterlogged, loose.	Natural geology					



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Bicester: site location

Figure 1



Bicester: trial trench locations

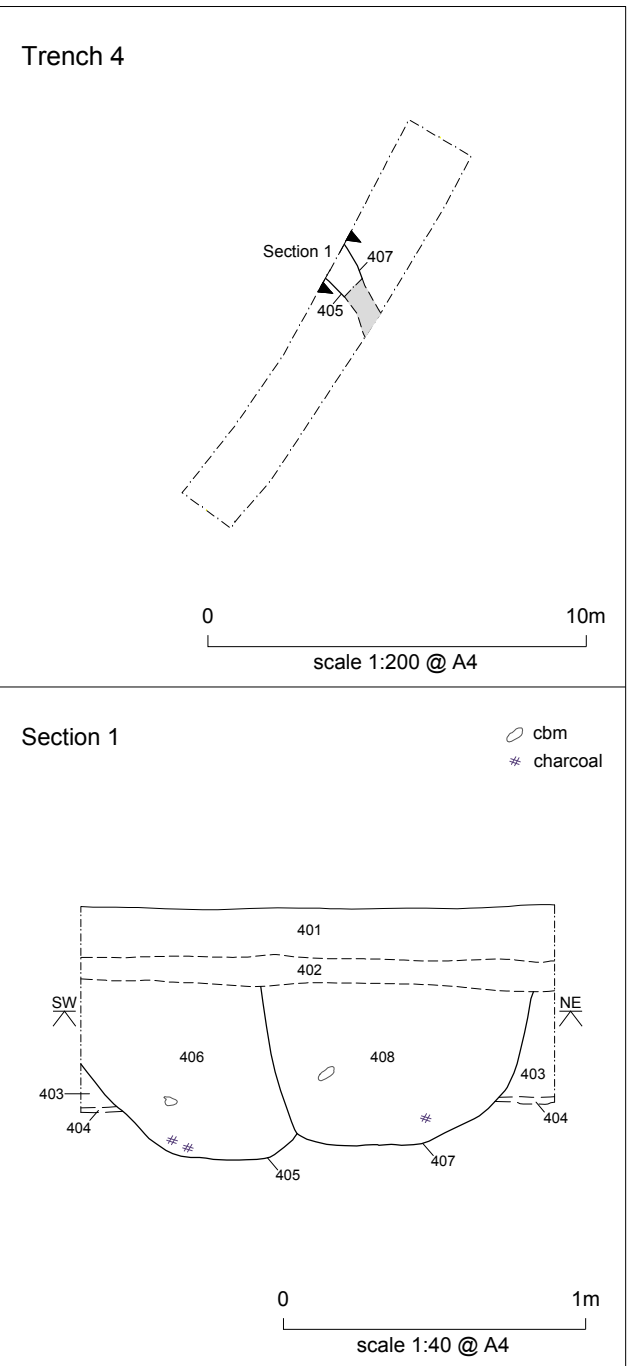


Figure 2



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Bicester: Trench 1,
looking south-east

Plate 1



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Bicester: representative section of Trench 1

Plate 2



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Bicester: Trench 2,
looking north-east

Plate 3



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Bicester: representative section of Trench 2

Plate 4



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Bicester: Trench 3, looking east

Plate 5



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Bicester: representative section of Trench 3

Plate 6



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Bicester: Trench 4, looking south-west

Plate 7



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Bicester: north-west facing section of ditches 405 and 407, Trench 4

Plate 8



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Bicester: Trench 5, looking
north-east

Plate 9



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Bicester: representative section of Trench 5

Plate 10

