



KDK ARCHAEOLOGY LTD

Archaeological Observation and Recording Report

26 Kingscroft Avenue
Dunstable
Bedfordshire

Event/Accession No. 2022/08



Quality Check

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Summary

In December 2022 KDK Archaeology Ltd undertook a programme of Observation and Recording at 26 Kingscroft Avenue, Dunstable, Bedfordshire in order to fulfil Condition 4 of planning permission for the development of the site. This necessitated the monitoring of ground reduction, the excavation of five foundation trenches and a soakaway pit. The excavations revealed a previously unrecorded well, with a 1m diameter shaft, though this wasn't excavated. The shaft was not lined with brick or stone but cut directly into the natural chalk. No dating evidence was recovered.

1 Introduction

1.1 In December 2022 KDK Archaeology Ltd undertook a programme of Observation and Recording at 26 Kingscroft Avenue, Dunstable, Bedfordshire. The project was commissioned by Richard Pearce and was carried out at the request of Central Bedfordshire Council Archaeology Team (CBCAT) Archaeological Advisor (AA) to the Local Planning Authority (LPA), Central Bedfordshire Council. The relevant planning application reference is CB/21/00342/FULL.

1.2 *Planning Background*

This project has been required under the terms of National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) as Condition 4 of planning permission for the development of the site.

1.3 *The Site*

Location

The development site is located within the town and civil parish of Dunstable, in the administrative district of Central Bedfordshire Council at National Grid Reference (NGR) TL 0203 2217 (Fig. 1).

Description

The development site at 26 Kingscroft Avenue is situated adjacent to the north-eastern edge of the Roman and medieval core of Dunstable. The site fronts on to Kingscroft Avenue to the southwest and is bounded on all other sides by private residences and associated gardens (Fig. 2).

Geology and Topography

The bedrock geology is chalk of the Holywell Nodular Chalk and New Pit Chalk Formations (undifferentiated), formed approximately 90 to 101 million years ago in the Cretaceous Period. No superficial deposits have been recorded (<http://mapapps.bgs.ac.uk/geologyofbritain/home.html>). The development site is situated at an approximate elevation of 153m AOD.

Development

The development calls for the erection of single storey side and rear extensions to the existing building (Fig. 3).



Figure 1: General location (scale 1:25,000)

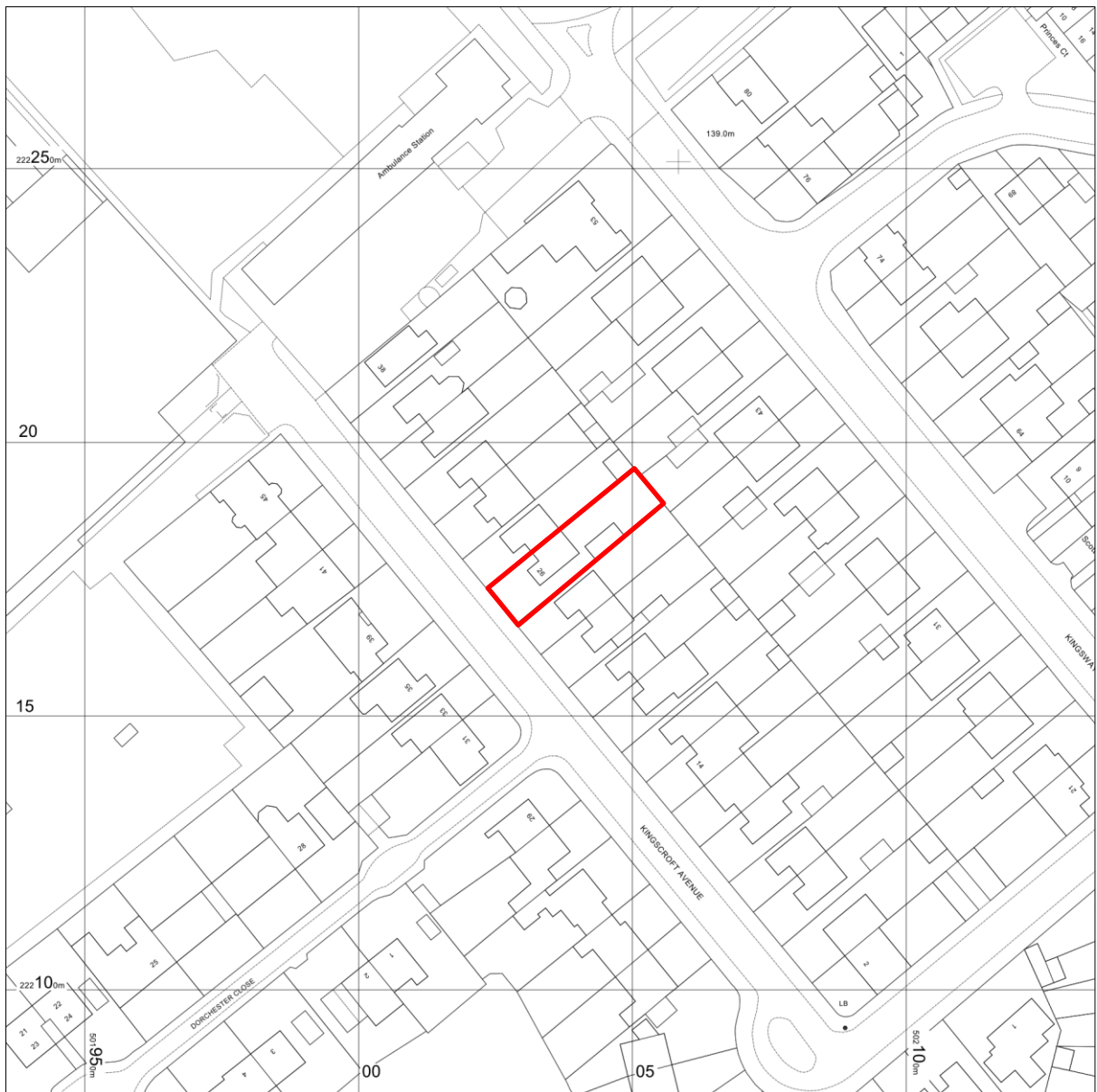


Figure 2: Site location (scale 1:1250)

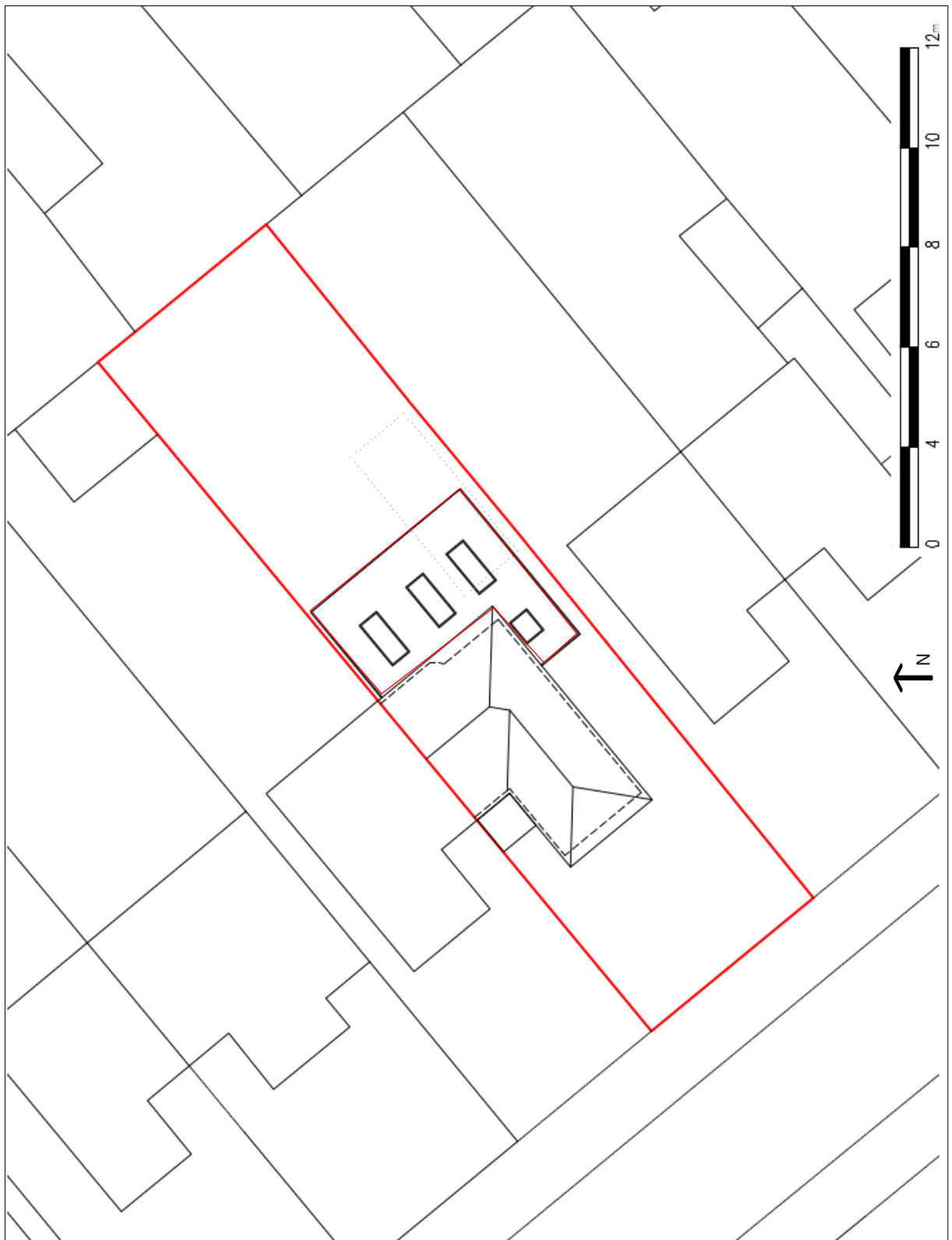


Figure 3: Proposed development plan (scale as shown)



2 Aims and Methods

2.1 Aims

The aims of this project as defined in the approved WSI (Watson 2022) were:

- To establish the date, nature and extent of activity or occupation within the development area
- To establish the relationship of any remains found to the surrounding contemporary landscape
- To recover palaeo-environmental remains to determine local environmental conditions.

In addition, the research aims *inter alia* considered various aspects of the origins and development of small towns, their inter-relationships with their hinterlands and early town planning from the Saxon/medieval through to the early post medieval periods (Ayers 2000, 27-32, Going and Plouviez, 21, Oake et al 2007, 11 and 14 and Medlycott 2011, 47-48, 58, 70 & 79).

As two inhumations were recorded during building works at 21 Kingsway, the contribution of human remains was also considered in relation to health and sickness in medieval urban centres, and the impact disease had on those centres, along with subsidiary issues such as improving our understanding of religious institutions within urban centres (East of England Research Framework, Medieval (Urban) 7,9,11,28).

2.2 Methods

The methods used were as follows:

- The archaeological monitoring of all groundworks related to the development, including foundation trenches, service trenches, ground reduction, landscaping and any other ground impact. This will include a contingency for preservation or further excavation of any remains encountered
- The analysis of the results of the archaeological work with provisions for subsequent production of a report(s) and/or publication(s) of these results & an archive
- Provisions necessary to protect the archaeological interests of the site

2.3 Standards

The work conformed to the following requirements:

- The relevant sections of the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists' *Standard & Guidance for an Archaeological Watching Brief* (CIfA 2020a)
- The Chartered Institute for Archaeologists' *Code of Conduct* (CIfA 2021)
- Current English Heritage guidelines (EH 2008, HE 2015)
- The Association of Local Government Archaeological Officers East of England Region *Standards for Field Archaeology in the East of England* (ALGAO 2003)



3 Archaeological and Historical Background

- 3.1 The development site lies at the north-eastern edge of the defined core of the medieval town of Dunstable (HER 16986) and is just outside of the defined edge of the Roman town of *Durocibrivae* (HER 135). It is situated c.290m north of the former Augustinian priory, the grounds of which are now a Scheduled Monument (NHLE: 1004676; HER 131). Despite increasing evidence for Iron Age activity, Dunstable is considered to have begun as a Roman settlement, though when the Romans departed Britain in the 5th century AD the area was largely abandoned until the present town was founded by Henry I in c.1119.

The meaning of the name Dunstable (*Dunestaple*) may be derived from 'boundary post (*stapol*) of a man called Dun(n)' (Mills 1991: 112) or from a combination of hill (*dun*) and wooden post (*staple*), potentially used to mark the site of a market during the Middle Ages (Lambert 2014).

This section has been compiled with information from the Central Bedfordshire and Luton Historic Environment Record (HER Ref. 202223/01), the Extensive Urban Survey for Bedfordshire (Albion 2003), reliable web sites and KDK's own library. The HER data, with a 500m search radius, is shown in Fig. 4.

3.2 *Prehistoric* (before 600BC)

Few prehistoric sites or artefacts have been found in the historic core of Dunstable, and most of the evidence for this period has been located in the surrounding area, particularly the Downs to the south.

Evidence for seasonal occupation in the area during the Mesolithic period is based on scatters of flint artefacts found around Dunstable (Albion 2003: 19). Neolithic settlements, ritual burial and field monuments have been found in the general area, such as at the Maiden Bower causewayed camp (HER 666, NHLE 1015593), and the Icknield Way (HER 353), a major communication and trade route that runs approximately west to east through Dunstable (now Church Street). Neolithic artefacts have also been found in the Mount Pleasant area (HER 13570, 13576-77) and in fields north of the Icknield Way between Dunstable and Leagrave (HER 1444), at Caddington (HER 13564) and in pits at Puddlehill Quarry (Albion 2003: 19).

Bronze Age barrows and burials have been found within Dunstable: at Marina Drive (Albion 2003: 19) where an Anglo-Saxon cemetery was interpreted as centred on a Bronze Age barrow as well as at Lancot Hill (HER 125), Union Street (HER 129), Edward Street (HER 128) and Albion Street (HER 150). A Bronze Age beaker base (HER 7733) was discovered on the site of Rollings Whiting Works and axe heads were also discovered at Montpelier house (HER 18784). To the south of the town is Five Knolls (HER 138, NHLE 1009892), a barrow cemetery that is reputed to be the finest group of burial mounds in the Chilterns.

3.3 *Iron Age* (600BC - AD43)

The area around Dunstable lay within the territory of the hillfort at Maiden Bower during this period (HER 666, Albion 2003: 20). A combination of excavation and geophysical surveys on and around the monument has identified significant features and activity dating to the Neolithic through to the Roman period. A potential Iron Age occupation site was revealed at Pond Cottage, Bullpond Lane (Hudspith 1991: 34; Dodd & Watson 2019).

Evidence for Iron Age/Roman occupation and an early Roman cemetery (HER 17802) was discovered in a 2002 excavation at Grove House Gardens, where a curving line of postholes suggested the presence of a segment of a roundhouse and internal features. A ditch in the southeast corner of the site is thought to be associated with the three-sided enclosure located on the site of Asda: this ditch might be the fourth side of the enclosure.



3.4 **Roman** (AD43 - c.450)

The Roman town at Dunstable (HER 135, 11270, 11284) recorded as *Durocobriuae* or *Durocobrivis*, developed around the crossroads between the prehistoric routeway known as the Icknield Way (HER 353) and Watling Street (HER 5508), one of the major arterial roads in Roman Britain which runs on the line of the High Street and was built soon after the Roman conquest. It is not clear what role the Roman town had in this period and there is no evidence for a military presence, which would suggest that the town may have been a form of staging post (*mansio*) or even an administrative centre (*pagus*; Albion2003: 20-21). The decline of *Durocobriuae* is likely to have taken place during the 5th century AD following the putative formal withdrawal of Roman rule from Britain.

Roman material has been found in all four quadrants of Dunstable. Most of the archaeological evidence is concentrated in the south-west quadrant, which was apparently the focus of occupation during the 1st- 4th centuries. Roman features include, but are not limited to burials/cemeteries (HER 122, 150, 11284, 14964), boundary ditches (HER 11281), wells and/or cess-pits (HER 16077, 11273), coins, pottery roads 'refuse pits', and industrial activity (HER 11276, 11277), and a possible farmstead (HER 1341; Albion 2003: 21-24). The core of the Roman town seems to have been centred on West Street-Church Street and High Street North-High Street South, and various Roman features including ditches, pits and wells have been found to the west and north-west of the development site (HER 11270). Settlement activity and an inhumation burial of a 2nd century mature female were discovered by KDK Archaeology Ltd at the Old Palace Lodge (HER 14965) on Church Street, c. 100m to the south east of the site. At Priory Middle School, a 3rd century ditch and the grave of a late Roman skeleton inhumed in the northern end of the ditch were found (HER 15822), and occupation debris has also been discovered on Priory Road (HER 20342).

3.5 **Saxon** (c.450 - 1066)

The Roman town appears to have been largely deserted following the Roman withdrawal, but Saxon settlement evidence has been found in the northwest quadrant, consisting of sunken featured buildings and a pagan Anglo-Saxon cemetery (HER 152; Albion 2003: 24). At present there does not appear to have been any continuity between the Roman and Saxon settlements. Despite the lack of archaeological evidence, it has been suggested that some form of settlement probably continued near the crossroads of Watling Street and the Icknield Way, precisely because these routes retained their importance long after the official Roman presence had ended (Albion 2003: 25).

3.6 **Medieval** (1066 - 1500)

The medieval town of Dunstable (HER 16986) dates from AD1119 when it was founded by Henry I as a market centre at the cross roads of Watling Street and the Icknield Way. He had a royal residence built in the vicinity of what is now the Old Palace Lodge Hotel (HER 148). He also subsequently founded the Augustinian Priory of St Peter (Scheduled Monument 1004676; HER 131) at Christmas 1131-1132. The priory complex was located between the High Street South and Church Street. The conventual church, the remains of which are now the parish church, was begun in the second half of the 12th century (HER 132; NHLE 1114581). The Priory was dissolved in 1540, and while the church survives most of the other buildings have been demolished. The remains of the gatehouse survive to the south west of the church (HER 6329; NHLE 1114581), and a 13th century undercroft that was formerly part of the Hospitium is now beneath an 18th century building known as Priory House (HER 6311; NHLE 114593). Cellars belonging to the bakehouse/brewhouse are known to survive to the rear of High Street South (EBD 852). Much of the rest of the priory area is now under grass, in which low earthworks show the locations of priory buildings and it has been the subject of c. 21 archaeological excavations and surveys.



A second monastic house was established in the southwest quadrant of Dunstable in 1259 for the Dominican Friars (HER 141). This was dissolved in 1539 and archaeological investigations undertaken since the 1830s have revealed various aspects of the friary, its inhabitants, and its grounds.

Medieval Dunstable is still evident in the layout of the town (HER 16986). The original parish boundaries to the north and east of the town were relatively straight and formed rectangular areas containing burgage plots. These are thought to have been the boundaries created when the town was mostly carved out of the parish lands of the king's manor of Houghton Regis. A range of archaeological remains and a few monuments dating to this period have been discovered in Dunstable. Excavations at Chapel Walk just north of the Dominican friary produced a number of features indicating medieval occupation such as malt kilns, maltings, an oven, postholes, a pit and a number of cess pits and a post-medieval road surface (HER 11280). Malting kilns (HER 11273, HER 17723) have been discovered on St Mary's St, adding to the number already found in the south-west quadrant, indicating a prosperous brewing industry in the town during the 13th/14th centuries; a large tile kiln and oven were also found. Part of a possible post-medieval hollow-way was found at 21-23 Princes Street (HER 16245) and near Kingsway (HER 16355). Faint remains of a medieval building, were noted at Blacksmiths Court, Matthew Street (HER 16101) and a Grade II listed building dating from the 15th century stands at 34 to 38 West St (HER 15496). A 15th century copper-alloy jetton (HER 19035) from First Avenue was discovered south-east of Bullpond Lane.

3.7 *Post-medieval (1500 - 1900) to Modern (1900 - present)*

Dunstable prospered during the 17th century and, particularly, in the 18th century as a coaching town, and numerous inns were established to cater for the travellers (Albion 2003: 35). The arrival of the railway in the 19th century resulted in the decline of the coaching industry and Dunstable began to develop from a small market town into an industrial community (*ibid*). The Craven's Trade Directory for 1853 indicates that, as elsewhere in the region, the straw plait and hat manufacture industry was important to Dunstable, and continued to be so to end of the century. However, by the early 20th century many factories had closed due to Luton's growing prosperity of having better rail links into London (Albion 2003: 50).

Quarrying was also a major local industry during this period and in the 19th century chalk pits, whiting works and lime kilns were in operation some distance to the southwest of the development. Moreover, excavations undertaken at the Victoria Allotments, to the northwest of the development site, revealed a post-medieval quarry which probably contributed to the maintenance of the road surface to the north.

The Kingsbury Court and Old Palace Lodge Hotel (HER 4355; Grade II, NHLE 1114582) on the north side of Church Street dates from the 18th century. It has long been conjectured that it was the site of a house or palace built by Henry I, but archaeological evidence for this is still lacking. This former farmhouse house was restored in the early 20th century and its barn converted for use as the town museum. In 1934 it was sold and divided up into the Old Palace Lodge (which became a hotel in 1960), Kingsbury Stables (which became the Norman King public house in 1961, now demolished after fire damage; HER 4353) and Kingsbury Court.

The 19th century saw the straw hat making industry come to Luton and a subsequent decline in Dunstable, to be replaced in the early 20th century by the printing and motor vehicle industries, with companies such as Waterlow's and Vauxhall Motors respectively. The Bedford Dunstable plant came into production in 1942 to support the British Army in World War II. It continued commercial truck and bus manufacture until 1992 when the main factories closed and manufacturing, in general, has declined in the area.



A WWII air raid shelter is located in the garden of 27 Kingsway (HER 21111), and undated human remains of two individuals were found at 21 Kingsway (HER 16165).

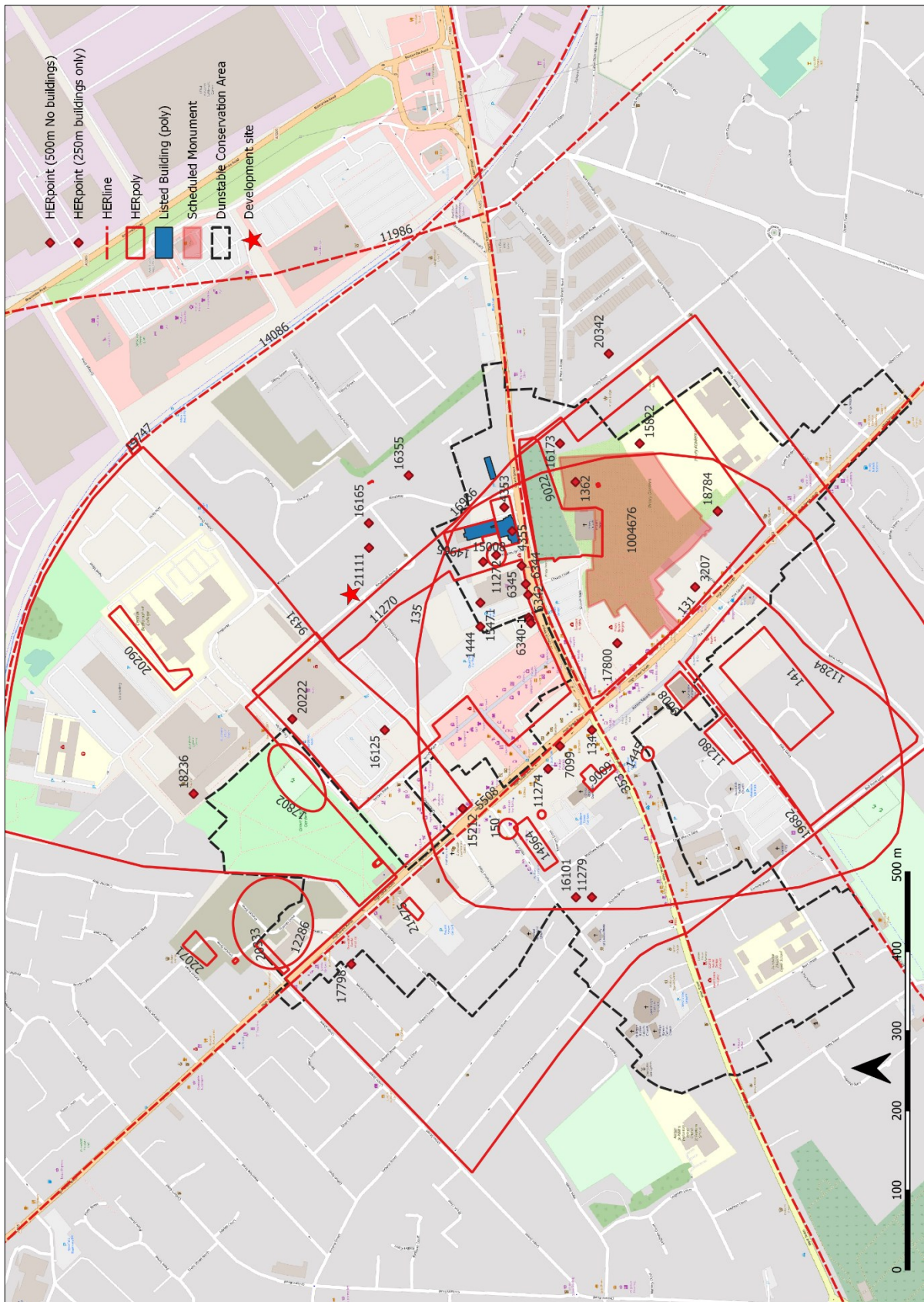


Figure 4: HER data plan (scale as shown)



4 Results

4.1 Introduction

This development project required the excavation of five foundation trenches arranged in a footprint measuring 8 x 6.7m for the proposed side and rear extension (Fig. 5, Plate 1). A large rectangular pit for a soakaway was also excavated to the northeast of the footings. The work was carried out using a 4 tonne tracked excavator fitted with a 0.6m wide toothless bucket

4.2 Description

The stratigraphy encountered was uniform across the site and consisted of 0.3m of dark brownish grey clayey loam topsoil (001), overlying a similar layer of mid brownish grey subsoil (002) measuring 0.4m deep. The underlying natural geology (003) was chalk and was exposed to a depth of 0.3m in Trench 1 (Fig. 5, Plate 1).

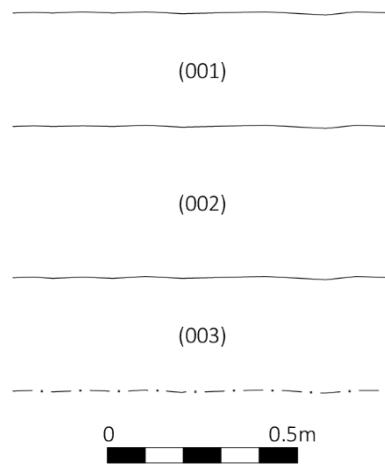


Figure 5: Trench 1 stratigraphy (scale 1:20)

The initial ground reduction covered the footprint of the extension, as well as an additional area to the northeast for a patio, comprising a total area of 66m². A depth of 0.4m was stripped from this area, removing the topsoil (001) and 0.1m of subsoil (002) (Plate 2).

The foundation trenches were all 0.6m wide and generally 0.8m deep below the level of the ground reduction, except for Trench 1 which was 0.6m deep, and Trench 5 which was 0.5m deep (Plates 3-7). A soakaway pit measuring 2.7 x 0.9m wide and 1.65m deep was excavated to the northeast (Fig. 6, Plate 8).

The only archaeological feature identified during the project was a large well [004] at the intersection of Trenches 1 and 2. Although this feature was not investigated in detail due to the health and safety hazard, it underlay the subsoil (002) and had a wide cut at the top measuring at least 2.5m in diameter. The full extent of the cut could not be confirmed as it extended beyond the limits of the footings trenches. The sides sloped down gently to a depth of 1m below original ground level (Plate 9). At this point the cut gave way to a shaft approximately 1m in diameter, with an estimated depth of at least 5m, though a large quantity of loose soil fell into the shaft during initial excavation. The well shaft was not lined but was cut directly into the natural chalk. There was a single fill (005) similar in composition to the subsoil, but it contained no finds. This fill overlay the shaft, which may have been loosely capped with stones, as a void was still present beneath (Plate 10). The Ordnance Survey map of 1880 does not record the presence of a well or any dwellings in this location, which appears to have been an open field until the 1930s (National Library of Scotland 2022).



Plate 1: Trench 1 stratigraphy, view NW



Plate 2: Ground reduction, view SW



Plate 3: Trench 1, view SW



Plate 4: Trench 2, view NW



Plate 5: Trench 3, view SW



Plate 6: Trench 3, view SW



Plate 7: Trench 5, view SW



Plate 8: Soakaway, view NNE



Plate 9: Well [004], view NNE



Plate 10: Well [004], view NW

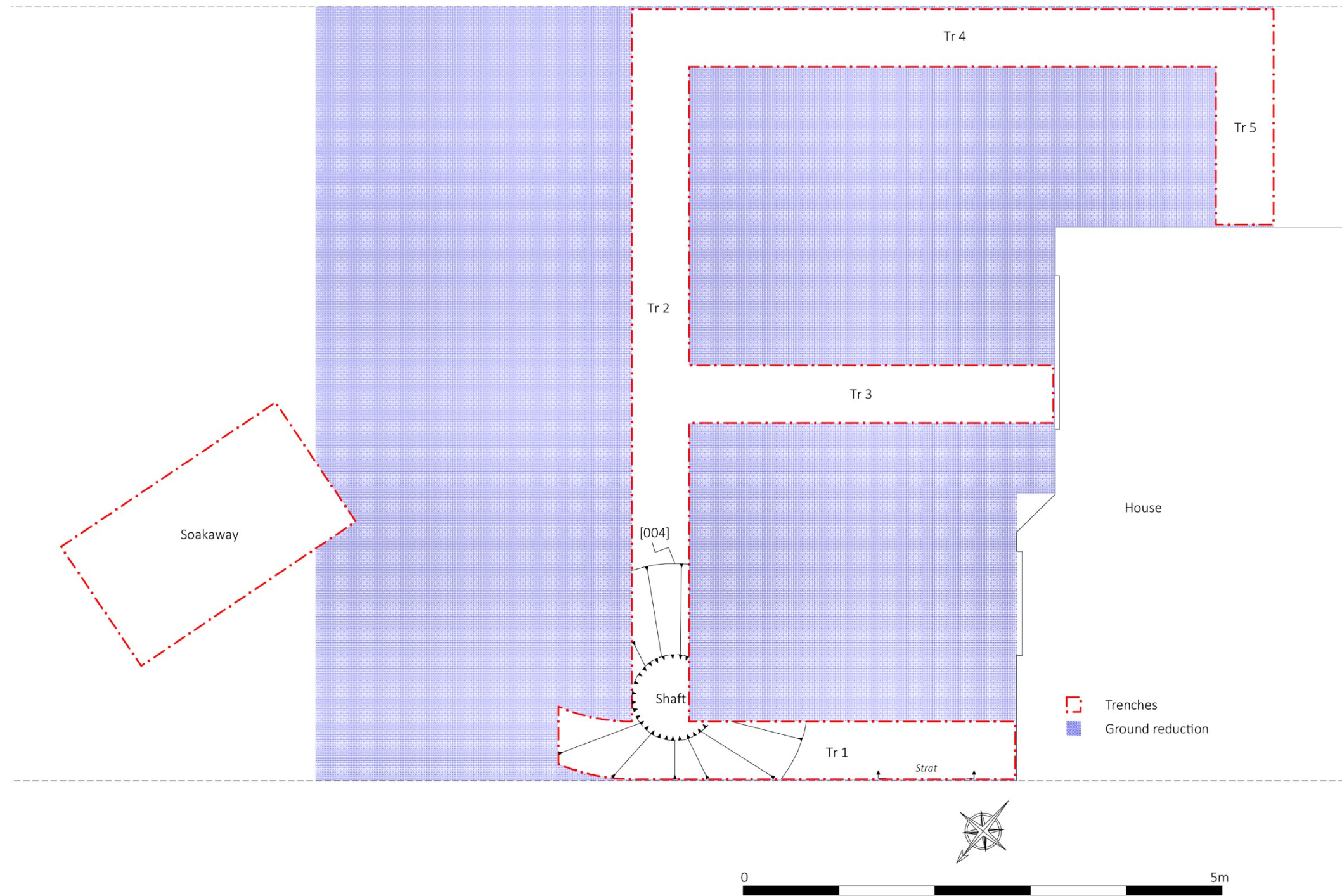


Figure 6: Excavation plan (scale 1:50)



5 Conclusions

The excavations during the development work at 26 Kingscroft Avenue, Dunstable comprised ground reduction, foundation trenches and a soakaway. This revealed the presence of a previously unrecorded well, with no lining that was cut directly into the natural chalk. This almost certainly pre-dates the post-medieval period. No well is marked in this location on any historic maps and the area was agricultural land until the 1930s.

It is possible that the well may be a remnant of the Roman or medieval town of Dunstable, as nearby archaeological excavations have demonstrated local settlement, particularly from the Roman period. Unfortunately, no dating evidence could be recovered to confirm this.

No other archaeological features were identified in the excavations. The presence of subsoil suggests the site has not been truncated by modern development and the archaeological horizon not impacted. However, the area under investigation was relatively small, and the well may be associated with other features not affected by the current works. Equally, it could be argued that as the site is set back from the main arterial roads by c. 150-200m, the density of occupation may have reduced and the well was situated in a hinterland.

As there was not a significant amount of archaeology present and no dating evidence was recovered, the original research aims of the project could not be advanced on this occasion.



6 Acknowledgements

KDK Archaeology is grateful to Richard Pearce for commissioning this report. Thanks are also due to the staff of Central Bedfordshire Council for providing historic environment records and other relevant documents and to Hannah Firth of Central Bedfordshire Council Archaeology Team (CBCAT) for monitoring the project.

Special thanks go to the site contractors for their assistance during the project.

The fieldwork was carried out by Chris Martin-Taylor BSc. The report was written by Chris Martin-Taylor, and edited by David Kaye BA ACIfA.



7 Archive

7.1 The project archive will comprise:

1. Written Scheme of Investigation
2. Initial report
3. Monitoring sheets
4. Site drawings
5. Client's site plans
6. List of photographs

7.2 The archive will be deposited with The Culture Trust, Luton. Accession No. 2022/08.

7.3 The digital archive will be uploaded to ADS and the DOI sent to the HER team as agreed in the Written Scheme of Investigation.



8 References

Standards & Specifications

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Appendix 1: Photograph List

SITE NO/CODE: 689/DKA			Site Name: 26 Kingscroft Avenue, Dunstable, Bedfordshire
Shot	JPEG	RAW	Subject
1	x	x	Reduced area, view SW
2	x	x	Reduced area, view SW
3	x	x	Trench 1 stratigraphy, view NW
4	x	x	Trench 1 stratigraphy, view NW
5	x	x	Well [004] in Trench 1, view NNE
6	x	x	Well [004] in Trench 1, view NNE
7	x	x	Well [004] in Trench 1, view NW
8	x	x	Well [004] in Trench 1, view NW
9	x	x	Well [004] in Trench 1, view NE
10	x	x	Well [004] in Trench 1, view NE
11	x	x	VOID
12	x	x	VOID
13	x	x	Trench 1, view SW
14	x	x	Trench 2, view NW
15	x	x	Trench 3, view SW
16	x	x	Trench 4, view SW
17	x	x	Trench 5, view SW
18	x	x	Soakaway, view NNE
19	x	x	Soakaway stratigraphy, view NNE



Appendix 2: OASIS and Site Data

PROJECT DETAILS			
Project Name & Address	26 Kingscroft Avenue, Dunstable, Bedfordshire	Project Site Code	689/DKA
OASIS reference	kdkarcha1-506465	Event/Accession no	2022/08
OS reference	TL 0203 2217	Study area size	70m ²
Project Type	Archaeological Observation & Recording	Height (mAOD)	153m
Short Description	In December 2022 KDK Archaeology Ltd undertook a programme of Observation and Recording at 26 Kingscroft Avenue, Dunstable, Bedfordshire in order to fulfil Condition 4 of planning permission for the development of the site. This necessitated the monitoring of ground reduction, the excavation of five foundation trenches and a soakaway pit. The excavations revealed a previously unrecorded well, with a 1m diameter shaft, which could not be investigated due to safety concerns. The shaft was not lined with brick or stone but cut directly into the natural chalk. No dating evidence was recovered, but it is thought that it p[re]-dated the post-medieval period.		
Previous work	None	Site status	Conservation Area
Planning proposal	Erection of single storey side and rear extensions to the existing building.	Current land use	Dwelling
Local Planning Authority	Central Bedfordshire Council	Planning application ref.	CB/21/00342/FULL
Monument type	Well	Monument period	Uncertain
Significant finds	Well	Future work	Unknown
PROJECT CREATORS			
Organisation	KDK Archaeology Ltd		
Project Brief originator	Hannah Firth	Project Design originator	KDK Archaeology Ltd
Project Manager	David Kaye BA ACIfA	Director/Supervisor	Chris Martin-Taylor BSc
Sponsor/funding body	Richard Pearce		
PROJECT DATE			
Start date	06.12.2022	End date	08.12.2022
PROJECT ARCHIVES			
	Location	Content (e.g. pottery, animal bone, files/sheets)	
Physical		N/A	
Paper	The Culture Trust, Luton	WSI, Record sheets, photographs	
Digital	ADS	Report, photographs, drawings	
BIBLIOGRAPHY (Journal/monograph, published or forthcoming, or unpublished client report)			
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Serial title & volume	689/DKA/2.2		
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