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Police OCU, Oak Road,
West Bromwich, Sandwell

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL
WATCHING BRIEF 2010**

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Police OCU

Oak Road, West Bromwich, Sandwell

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF 2010

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**for
Tesco Stores Ltd**

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Police OCU, Oak Road, West Bromwich, Sandwell

Archaeological Watching Brief 2010

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Police OCU, Oak Road, West Bromwich, Sandwell

Archaeological Watching Brief 2010

SUMMARY

Birmingham Archaeology was commissioned by Tesco Stores Ltd, to undertake an archaeological watching brief during groundworks associated with the construction of a new Police Operational Command Unit building at Oak Road, West Bromwich, Sandwell, centred on NGR SP 0020 9102.

The watching brief was undertaken between June and November 2010 during the excavation of foundation trenches, service trenches and lift shafts. No archaeological features or deposits were recorded and no artefactual material predating the 19th century was recovered. The natural subsoil was not exposed across the majority of the site and only deep probable 19th-20th century layers were excavated during the groundworks.

Police OCU, West Bromwich

Archaeological Watching Brief 2010

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1.1 Birmingham Archaeology was commissioned by Tesco Stores Ltd to undertake an archaeological watching during the construction of a new police Operational Command Unit (OCU) building at Oak Road, West Bromwich, Sandwell, centred on NGR SP 0020 9102. The watching brief was carried out as a condition of planning consent (Planning Application Number Reference DC/06/42981).
- 1.1.2 This report outlines the results of the watching brief carried out between June and November 2010 and has been prepared in accordance the brief produced by Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council (Appendix 1), and a Written Scheme of Investigation (Birmingham Archaeology 2010, Appendix 2) which was approved by the Local Planning Authority prior to implementation, in accordance with guidelines laid down in Planning Policy Guidance Note 16 (DoE 1990). The project conformed to the Institute for Archaeologists Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Brief (IfA 2008)

2 LOCATION AND GEOLOGY

- 2.1.1 The area of the proposed development is bounded by Oak Road, Moor Street and Bowater Street, West Bromwich (centred on NGR SP 0020 9102, hereafter referred to as 'the site') (Figs. 1 and 2).
- 2.1.2 The drift geology is mainly red marls with some boulder clay and undifferentiated drift (Geological Survey of Great Britain, England & Wales, Sheet 168).
- 2.1.3 The present use of the site is car parking.

3 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

- 3.1.1 The principal aim of the watching brief was to record any archaeological features, structures, deposits, or horizons exposed during intrusive groundworks across the site.
- 3.1.2 More specific aims were to:
- To establish the presence/absence of archaeological remains within the development area.
 - To determine the extent, condition, nature, character, quality and date of any archaeological remains encountered.
 - To provide further information on the origins and development of the general area.
 - To contribute to the existing corpus of academic knowledge.
 - To make available to interested parties the results of the investigation subject to any confidentiality restrictions.

4 ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

- 4.1.1 The Sandwell Sites and Monuments Record was consulted and a rapid map regression exercise based on the sources held at the Local Studies Section of Smethwick Library was undertaken. This information was used to assist in on-site interpretation. The following is a summary of information obtained during this research.
- 4.1.2 The site is located on an area formerly known as *Bromwich Heath*, which may have been settled during the medieval period. The site is also situated 300m to the northeast of 16th-century Oak House (MBL2510) and near the site of the former late 18th-century Oak Farm (MBL2511). Sandwell SMR also records that 'camp bank' an earthwork of unknown origin (MBL2692), thought to be of Civil War date in the 19th century, also existed in the vicinity of the site. However, its precise location is not known.
- 4.1.3 The site appears to have been undeveloped in the early 19th century (as depicted on the John Wood map, 1837). During the 19th century the site became built-up with roadside houses and gardens, a large Iron foundry and a school. By the 1930s an electrical and mechanical engineering works covered much of the site. These buildings were demolished in the 1990s.

5 METHODOLOGY

- 5.1.1 An experienced archaeologist attended site to monitor construction groundworks, as required in the Brief. Groundworks observed included the stripping of topsoil/recent overburden, B-horizon subsoils, and trenches cut into the natural subsoil. Following the stripping of topsoil/recent overburden the machined surface was inspected, and sufficient hand-cleaning was undertaken to facilitate the definition of archaeological or possible archaeological features and deposits.
- 5.1.2 Where it was safe to do so, the archaeologist entered construction trenches for the purpose of undertaking hand-cleaning of the trench sides and base for the better definition of any archaeological features or deposits present. No excavation of archaeological features, other than hand-cleaning, was undertaken.
- 5.1.3 All stratigraphic sequences were recorded, even where no archaeology was present. Features were planned at a scale of [1:20 or 1:50], and sections were drawn of all cut features and significant vertical stratigraphy at a scale of 1:10. A comprehensive written record was maintained using a continuous numbered context system on *pro-forma* cards. Written records and scale plans were supplemented by photographs using black and white monochrome, colour slide and digital photography.
- 5.1.4 The full site archive includes all artefactual remains recovered from the site. The site archive will be prepared according to guidelines set down in Appendix 3 of the Management of Archaeology Projects (English Heritage, 1991), the Guidelines for the Preparation of Excavation Archives for Long-term Storage (UKIC, 1990) and Standards in the Museum Care of Archaeological collections (Museum and Art Galleries Commission, 1992). The archive will be deposited with the appropriate repository, subject to permission from the landowner.

6 RESULTS

6.1.1 The watching brief was conducted over a series of visits with the various areas of the site evaluated depending on what type of work was occurring at the time. For ease of reporting the site has been split into four areas (Fig.3) and will be discussed below.

6.1.2 Area 1

6.1.2.1 This area encompasses the foundations for the new police OCU building where the majority of the deep groundworks were carried out.

6.1.2.2 The southern end of the new building foundations were not excavated through the existing ground surface as in this area the ground was built up using crushed stone/gravel in order to level the site in preparation for the new structure. Any potential archaeological deposits in this area may have been preserved as subsequent foundation trench excavation did not go below the recently deposited layers.

6.1.2.3 The northern end of the building foundations were dug to a depth of around 1.2m below the existing ground surface (Plate 1). The natural subsoil was not reached at this depth, with the earliest layer being a black silty clay that contained large amounts of brick rubble throughout. Overlying this layer was a 0.3m thick layer of pink/red sand. Sealing the red/pink sand was a layer of modern crushed stone, 0.3m in thickness, which was overlain by a layer of tarmac, 0.1m in thickness.

6.1.2.4 Two lift shafts were also excavated in the area of the building foundations, and these were dug to a depth of 1.95m below the existing ground surface (Plate 2). The natural subsoil here was located at a depth of c.1.45m below the existing ground surface and consisted of orange-red gravel. No significant archaeological deposits were visible.

6.1.3 Area 2

6.1.3.1 In this area, at the northern end of the site and to the west of the main building footprint, two pipe trenches and related manhole pits were dug (Plate 3).

6.1.3.2 These two pipe trenches, one east-west aligned, and one north-south aligned, were dug to a depth of c.2m below the existing ground surface. The natural subsoil was not located at this depth, with the earliest layer encountered being a black silty clay that contained fragments of 19th-century pottery and other 19th-century material. Sealing this was an orange silty clay, which was overlain by a brown silty gravel. Overlying the gravel was a tarmac surface. No significant archaeological deposits were noted in this area.

6.1.4 Area 3

6.1.4.1 This area encompasses the groundworks relating to the excavation of storage tanks and pipe trenches for new services. A large trench was excavated to provide access for the ground works, with this being dug to a level of around 2m below the existing ground surface (Plate 4).

6.1.4.2 The earliest layer encountered was a mid brown silty clay that contained brick rubble fragments throughout. This was overlain by a layer of pink silty sand, which was overlain by a layer of dark brown silty clay. Sealing this layer was a mixed brick

rubble/stone demolition layer. No significant archaeological deposits were recorded in this area.

6.1.5 Area 4

6.1.5.1 In this area, at the western part of the site, a trench was excavated for a fuel tank (Plate 5).

6.1.5.2 The tank was excavated to a depth of 4.5m below the existing ground surface (Fig. 3). The natural subsoil not located and the earliest layer encountered was a red-grey silty clay with stones throughout [403]. This was sealed by a layer of red-pink sand [402], which was overlain by a grey-black silty clay [401] that contained brick rubble throughout. Overlying this was a modern yellow crushed stone layer [400]. No significant archaeological deposits were identified in this area.

7 CONCLUSION

7.1.1 Despite the potential for archaeological remains within the site no significant archaeological deposits or features were identified.

7.1.2 The failure to identify any archaeological features or deposits can be explained by the depth of probable 19th-20th- century layers across the site. This meant that most of the new OCU building foundations and associated groundworks were not excavated to a depth likely to disturb any potential significant underlying archaeology, and any potential surviving archaeology may be preserved *in situ* below the depth of the new foundations.

7.1.3 In those areas where excavation reached depths where significant potential archaeology was likely to be encountered 19th or 20th- century industrial activity in the area may have either removed any potential surviving archaeological deposits or no archaeological deposits were present.

7.1.4 There remains the possibility that potential archaeology may be present on the site, buried by 19th-20th- century layers, or in areas that were not affected by the current groundworks.

8 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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9 REFERENCES

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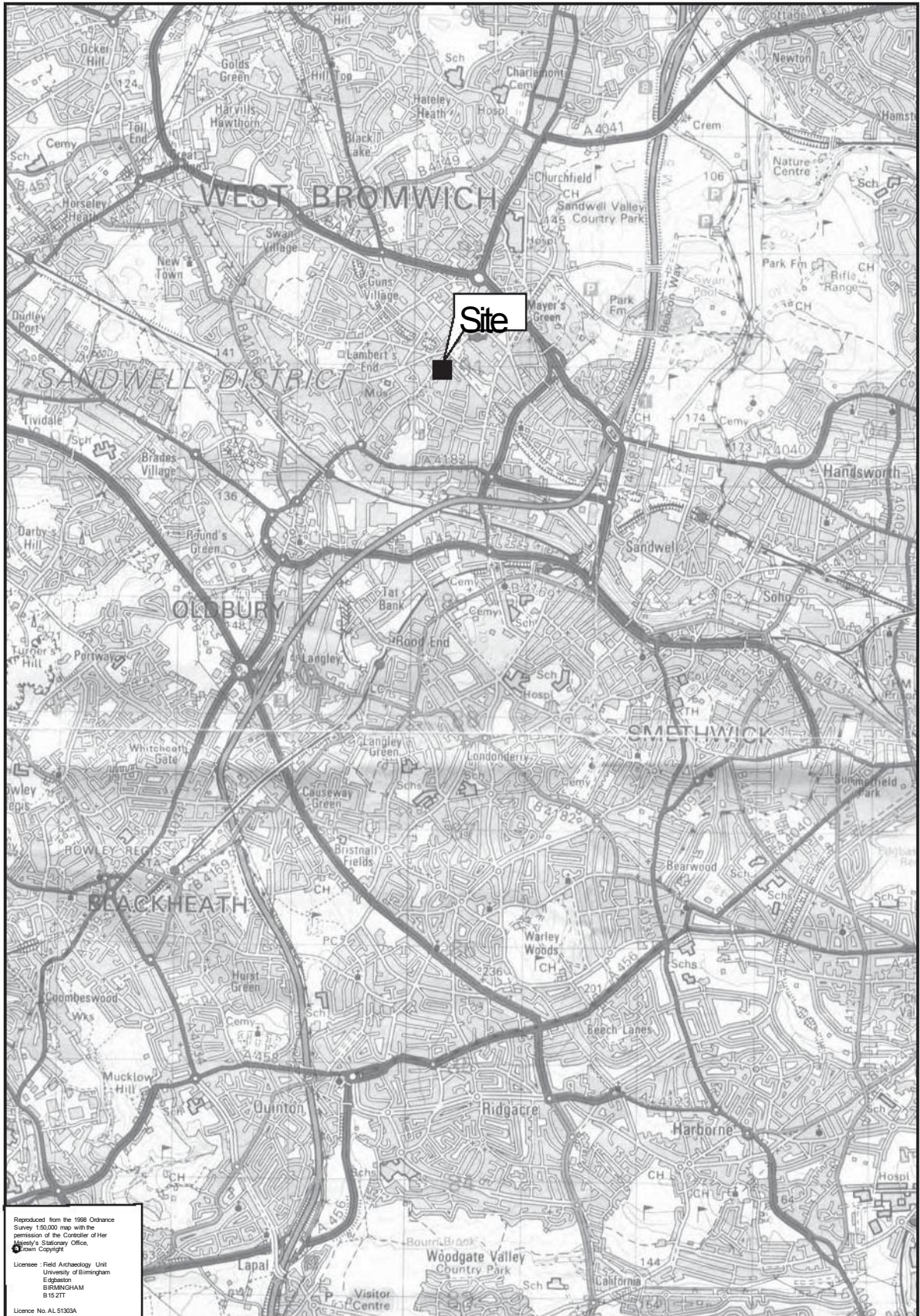


Fig.1

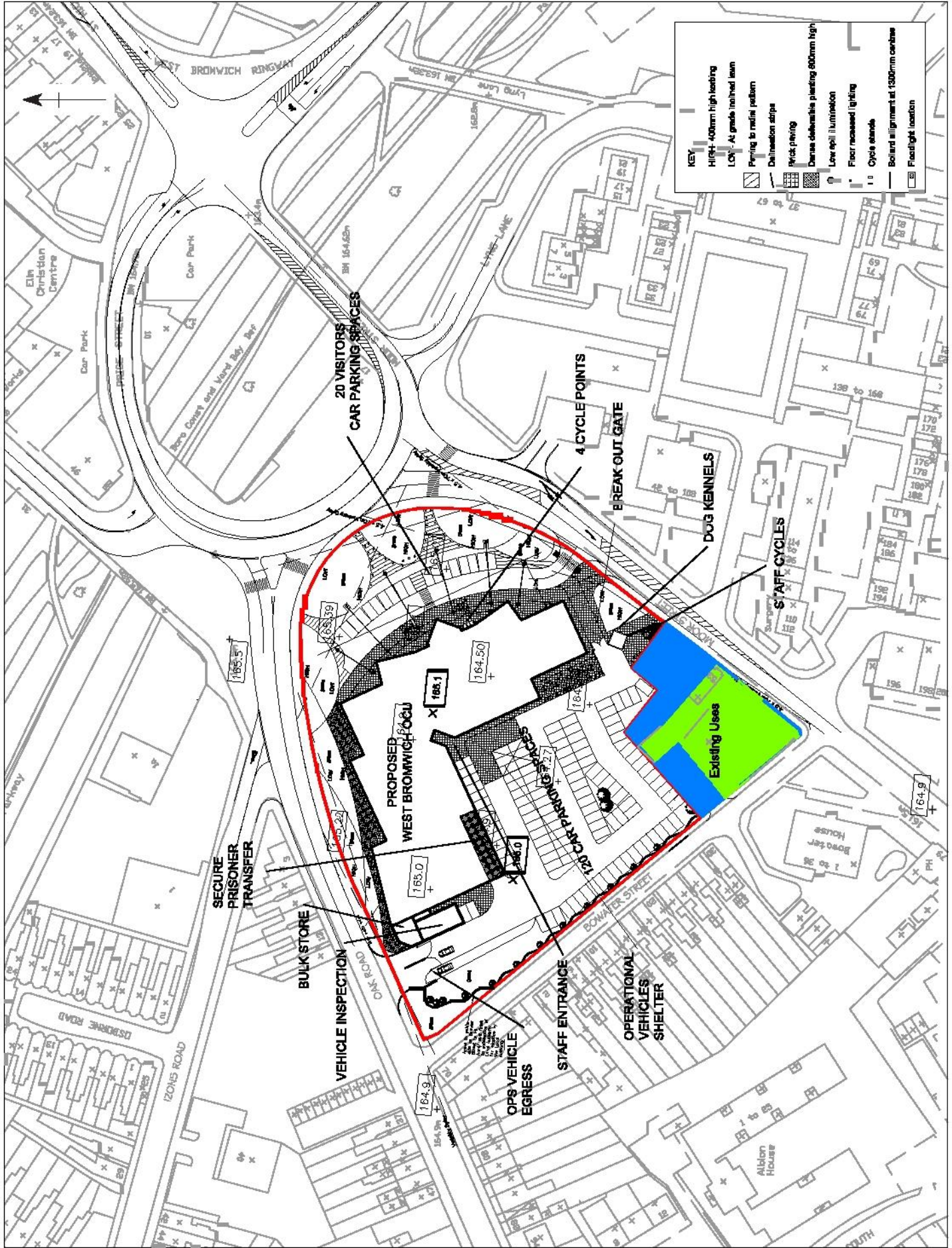


Fig.2

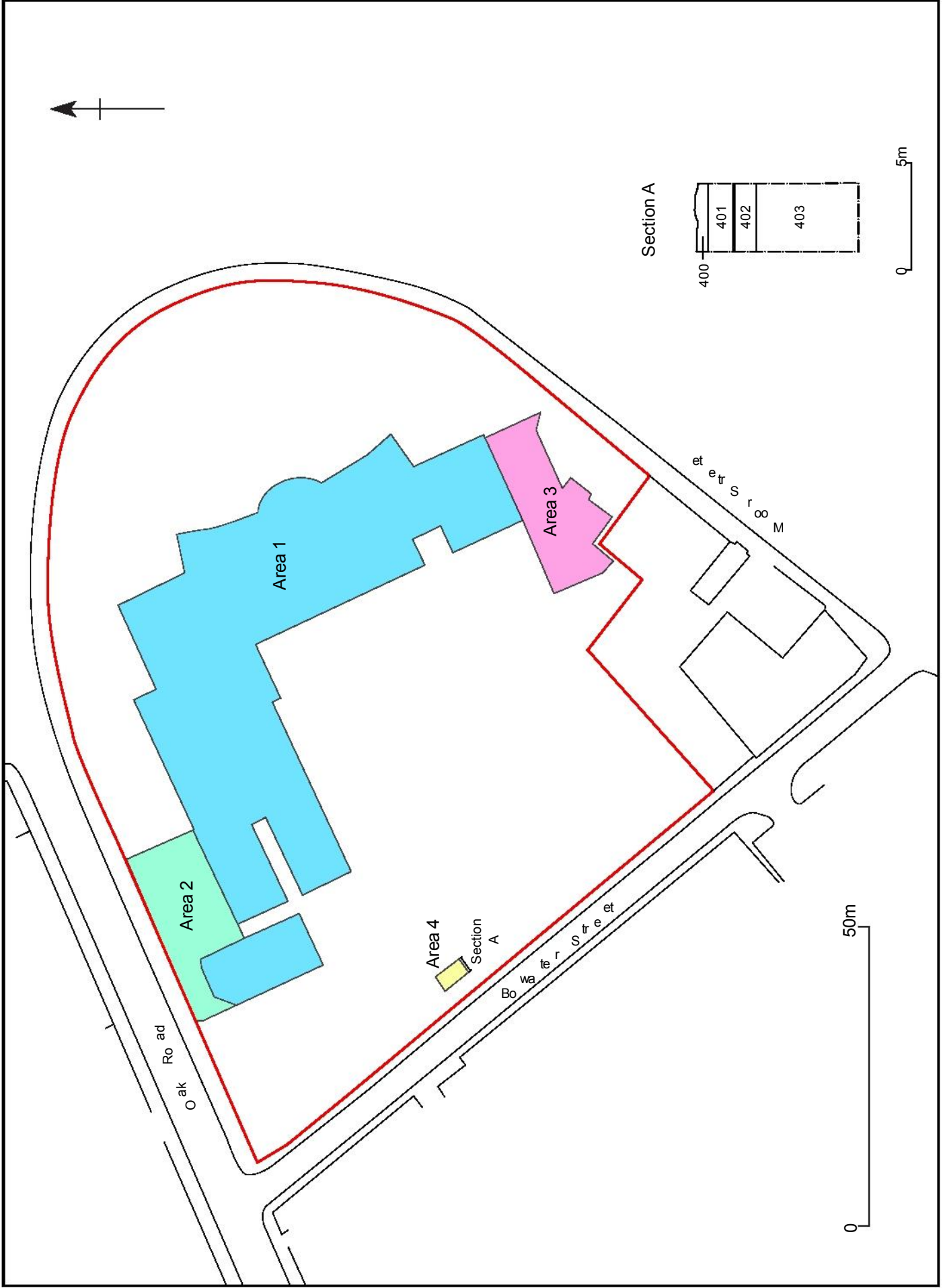


Fig.3



Plate 1



Plate 2



Plate 3



Plate 4



Plate 5

