



ARCHAEOLOGICAL
MONITORING REPORT

WITTON CASTLE LPG
WITTON-LE-WEAR
COUNTY DURHAM

prepared for
Witton Castle Country Park Ltd

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WITTON CASTLE LPG, WITTON-LE-WEAR, COUNTY DURHAM
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1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This document presents the results of archaeological monitoring during groundworks associated with the relocation of existing liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) infrastructure at Witton Castle Country Park, Witton-le-Wear, Co. Durham (centred on NZ 15300 30100; Fig.1). The report has been prepared by Northern Archaeological Associates Ltd (NAA) on behalf of Witton Castle Country Park Ltd.
- 1.2 Planning permission (Ref. DM/19/01441/FPA) was granted by Durham County Council for the installation of an LPG compound and associated infrastructure, inclusive of access road and sub-surface pipework. Condition 5 (Part 1 and 2) required the implementation of a programme of archaeological work in accordance with a written scheme of investigation (WSI; NAA 2019). Archaeological monitoring was undertaken between 17th and the 21st January 2022 in accordance with the produced WSI, and it is anticipated that production of this report, which details the results of that work, will permit discharge of Condition 5 of the planning permission.

2.0 LOCATION, TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY

Location

- 2.1 Witton Castle Country Park is located on the southern side of the River Wear. It lies to the immediate east of the A68, approximately 1km north of Etherley, and some 0.88km south-east of Witton-le-Wear village (Fig. 1). The Country Park is a holiday resort offering accommodation in lodges, log cabins, caravans and motorhomes. The castle buildings and associated walled gardens form the central hub of the resort, with the castle being used for administrative purposes associated with the running of the Country Park and social functions.
- 2.2 The development was undertaken within a limited area immediately north and west of the castle complex and within the castle courtyard (Fig. 2).

Geology and soils

- 2.3 The solid geology of the site consists of Carboniferous shales and sandstones, partially overlain by boulder clay quaternary drift deposits. The soils are mapped as Brickfield 3 and Dunkeswick association, comprising drift and till from Palaeozoic and Mesozoic sandstone and shale. Dunkeswick soils are typically stagnogley soils with a fine loamy topsoil and clayey subsurface horizons; Brickfield soils are loamy throughout and

commonly contain many sandstones (Jarvis *et al.* 1984, Soil Survey of England and Wales 1983).

Topography and land-use

- 2.4 Witton Castle and gardens occupy an elevated position on the first terrace above the river valley, with good views across Witton Park and the river valley towards Witton-le-Wear village. Despite this elevated position, the castle complex is sited within a natural bowl against a backdrop of mature woodland, creating a sheltered enclosure with relatively flat ground within the immediate development area.

3.0 SUMMARY ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

- 3.1 A detailed account of the site's archaeological and historic background is provided in a desk-based assessment (NAA 2011a) and has been further covered in a heritage statement (NAA 2016). It is not intended to repeat this information in full; a brief summary relevant to the area of proposed development follows.
- 3.2 To date, very little research has been undertaken on the foundation and development of the castle and its associated park and manor estates. Witton Castle appears to have originated as Barmpton Hall, a small 13th century or earlier estate belonging to the Barmpton family. It became the property and manorial residence of the Eures in the second half of the 14th century and remained in their ownership until the mid-17th century.
- 3.3 The castle has been besieged twice: once in 1405 and again during the Civil War (c.1648). As the level ground to the west of the castle would have been one of the most obvious areas both to defend and to attack from, the DBA raised the possibility that unrecorded archaeological deposits associated with defensive ditches, siege encampments or artillery debris could be present within the site.
- 3.4 The castle complex and its grounds underwent extensive rebuilding and modification throughout the 16th to 19th centuries. By the early 18th century, the castle had become a prestigious country house set in gardens and surrounding parkland. It remained thus until Witton Castle Country Park was established in the 1960s.
- 3.5 The Plan of Witton Castle Estate produced to accompany the sale of the castle in 1816, provides the earliest detailed layout of the castle and park complex (Durham University Library DHC 11/VI/107) (Fig. 3). This plan depicts the layout of the castle buildings after

it was repaired following a fire in 1796 and prior to the alterations undertaken by Bonomi on behalf of William Chaytor in the 1820s and 1830s.

- 3.6 The 1816 plan shows that the castle footprint was smaller than the present castle footprint and that to the west of the castle was a detached L-shaped range of buildings which was probably demolished as part of Bonomi's alterations in the 19th century.

Previous archaeological work

- 3.7 The area immediately west of the castle complex was subject to a trial trench evaluation prior to proposed development (NAA 2011b). Three trenches were excavated, targeting features shown on the 1816 estate plan and located in an area potentially containing features and artefacts associated with the 15th and 17th century castle sieges.
- 3.8 The evaluation uncovered no evidence for significant archaeological remains of any period, and all artefactual evidence was modern and related to the operation of the caravan park.
- 3.9 Land drains of types broadly dateable to the 18th and 19th centuries were identified in two of the trial trenches. The presence of these, and lack of any other pre-modern evidence led to the interpretation that this former garden area may have been bulldozed or otherwise heavily truncated in order to level the site during the construction of the caravan park, leaving only the deeper land drains intact.

4.0 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

- 4.1 The aim of the archaeological monitoring was to identify the presence and location of archaeological remains within the area of development, and sample, excavate and record any such remains in order to achieve their 'preservation by record'.
- 4.2 The objectives of the monitoring were:
- to establish the presence, nature, extent, preservation and significance of any archaeological remains within the area of development;
 - to provide a detailed record of any such archaeological remains;
 - to recover and assess any associated structural, artefactual and environmental evidence;
 - to undertake a programme of investigation that meets with national and regional standards (Historic England 2015a; ClfA 2014b; 2014c); and

- to prepare an illustrated report on the results of the archaeological investigations to be deposited with the County Durham HER and the Historic England archive.

5.0 METHODOLOGY

- 5.1 The trenches for the gas pipe were excavated by the construction contractor, working at all times under direct archaeological supervision. The excavation was carried out using a small, tracked excavator fitted with a toothless bucket. Trenches measured 0.4m wide and were excavated down to the required construction depth of 0.6m. All soil removed was visually screened by the monitoring archaeologist in order to recover any significant artefacts.
- 5.2 Mechanical excavation ceased where archaeological remains deemed to be significant by the monitoring archaeologist were identified. The archaeologist then cleaned, assessed and recorded these features as appropriate before allowing mechanical excavation to recommence. A list and summary description of all contexts are provided as Appendix A.

6.0 RESULTS

- 6.1 The groundworks included soil stripping of an LPG storage compound and access road, and a series of interconnecting trenches to accommodate a new LPG pipeline. The pipe trenches were located within the castle courtyard, and immediately to the west and north of the castle complex (Fig. 2). The trenches measured 0.4m in width and were excavated down to the required construction depth of 0.6m. No finds were identified during the works other than modern material.

The LPG Compound and Access Road (Plate 1)

- 6.2 The area for the LPG compound and access road was located to the north-west of the castle complex. It comprised disturbed and uneven ground that had previously been used for storage. Groundworks in this area were limited to stripping of c.0.1m thick layer of topsoil and modern debris in the footprint of the compound and access road. The compound area was c.18m by 18m in area and the access road was up to 5m wide. No archaeological features were exposed.

The Courtyard (Plate 2)

- 6.3 After removal of the existing tarmac surface within the courtyard a sterile sandy deposit (09) was exposed. This material contained occasional cobbles which may have been

derived from an earlier yard surface although none were in situ. Deposit **09** appeared to have been intentionally deposited as levelling for construction of the modern tarmac surface. It was the only deposit exposed within the trench to construction the depth of 0.6m. No archaeological features or finds were observed in this area and the courtyard was criss-crossed by drains and modern service trenches.

The West Area (Plate 3)

- 6.4 Deposit **09** continued beneath the tarmac road surface located to the west of the castle courtyard but thinned gradually to a depth of 0.1m at a distance from the castle. In the West Area, deposit **09** sealed a clayey levelling deposit (**02**) that contained large quantities of demolition debris. Levelling deposit **02** was sealed beneath a c.0.15m thick layer of turf and topsoil (**01**) at the westernmost end of the trench. Deposit **02** formed the full 0.6m depth of the pipe trench to the required construction level in this area. Natural sandy clay (**10**) was exposed occasionally in the West Area, although no archaeological features or deposits were present.

The North Area

- 6.5 Deposit **02** continued beneath the topsoil throughout the North Area of the pipe trench but decreased in depth from west to east. Towards the west end of the north area, deposit **02** sealed a north to south wall foundation (**07**; Fig. 3 and Plate 4). The wall foundation measured c.1.7m wide and comprised a single course of dressed sandstone with a rubble core. No bonding material was observed. Considering the location and alignment of wall **07**, it most likely represented the eastern wall of an L-shaped range of buildings that were once present in this area, as illustrated on the 1816 estate plan (Fig. 3). No other components of this range of buildings were encountered during trenching.
- 6.6 A north-northwest to south-southeast wall (**06**) was exposed c.43m to the east of wall **07**. Wall **06** was 2.2m wide and comprised sandstone facing stones with a rubble core (Plate 5). Traces of lime mortar were observed on the upper surface of the facing stones. The wall was overlain by dark ashy deposit (**03**), which was present for the full length of the trench located inside the bastion (Plate 6). Deposit **03** contained a particularly high concentration of burnt material around wall **06**. Wall **06** represented the remains of a previously unknown structure, and given its robust dimensions and location relative to the north elevation of the existing castle buildings, it is likely that it represented a building or defensive structure, rather than a less substantial feature such as a garden wall.

- 6.7 Another wall (**08**) was located at the east end of the pipe trench. Wall **08** was aligned north-west to south-east and comprised unbonded laminar sandstone blocks that survived to three courses (0.45m) high. The wall was overlain by deposit **03** and had been cut by a modern east to west aligned drain (Plate 7).
- 6.8 A cobbled surface (**04**) was exposed between wall **08** and the existing castle wall. Surface **04** consisted of densely packed rounded riverine cobbles and was exposed for 1.8m. It was cut and did not continue beyond a modern service trench at its north edge (Plate 8). Cobbled surface **04** was overlain by deposit **03** and its depth corresponded to the required construction depth, therefore it was retained in situ.
- 6.9 Deposit **03** had sealed walls **06** and **08**, and surface **04**. It comprised a dark ashy silt that contained frequent demolition material. Deposit **03** was cut by a north-east to south-west culvert **05** centrally within the bastion. Culvert **05** was most likely connected to a downpipe well adjacent to the castle wall. The walls of the culvert had been constructed with roughly squared sandstone and re-used 18th-century bricks. The capstones were laminar sandstone, with the largest measuring 0.6m by 0.4m (Plate 9). The pipe trench was widened at this point, allowing for the culvert to remain in situ as it was still functional.

7.0 DISCUSSION

- 7.1 The archaeological monitoring of the groundworks at Witton Castle achieved all aims and objectives set out in the WSI (NAA 2019). The works exposed the remains of both known, and unknown structures within the North Area of the development.
- 7.2 The location and alignment of wall **07** correspond to the eastern wall of the detached L-shaped range of buildings shown on the 1816 plan (Fig. 3), which was demolished during a programme of alterations undertaken in the 1820s and 1830s.
- 7.3 Based on the absence of cartographic evidence for the structural remains within the bastion, these features are assumed to have been demolished by 1816. The ashy rubble (**03**) overlying wall foundation **06** and abutting wall **08** may perhaps suggest that these structures were damaged in the 1796 fire resulting in their demolition.
- 7.4 No artefactual evidence predating the modern period was present within the trenches, which may have been partly due to the relatively small volume of soil excavated. Another reason for this absence was the fact that the courtyard (where items such as

pottery sherds and animal bone were likely to have accumulated) appeared to have been dug out and levelled at some point during the 20th century to facilitated construction of a tarmac surface.

8.0 ARCHIVE DEPOSITION

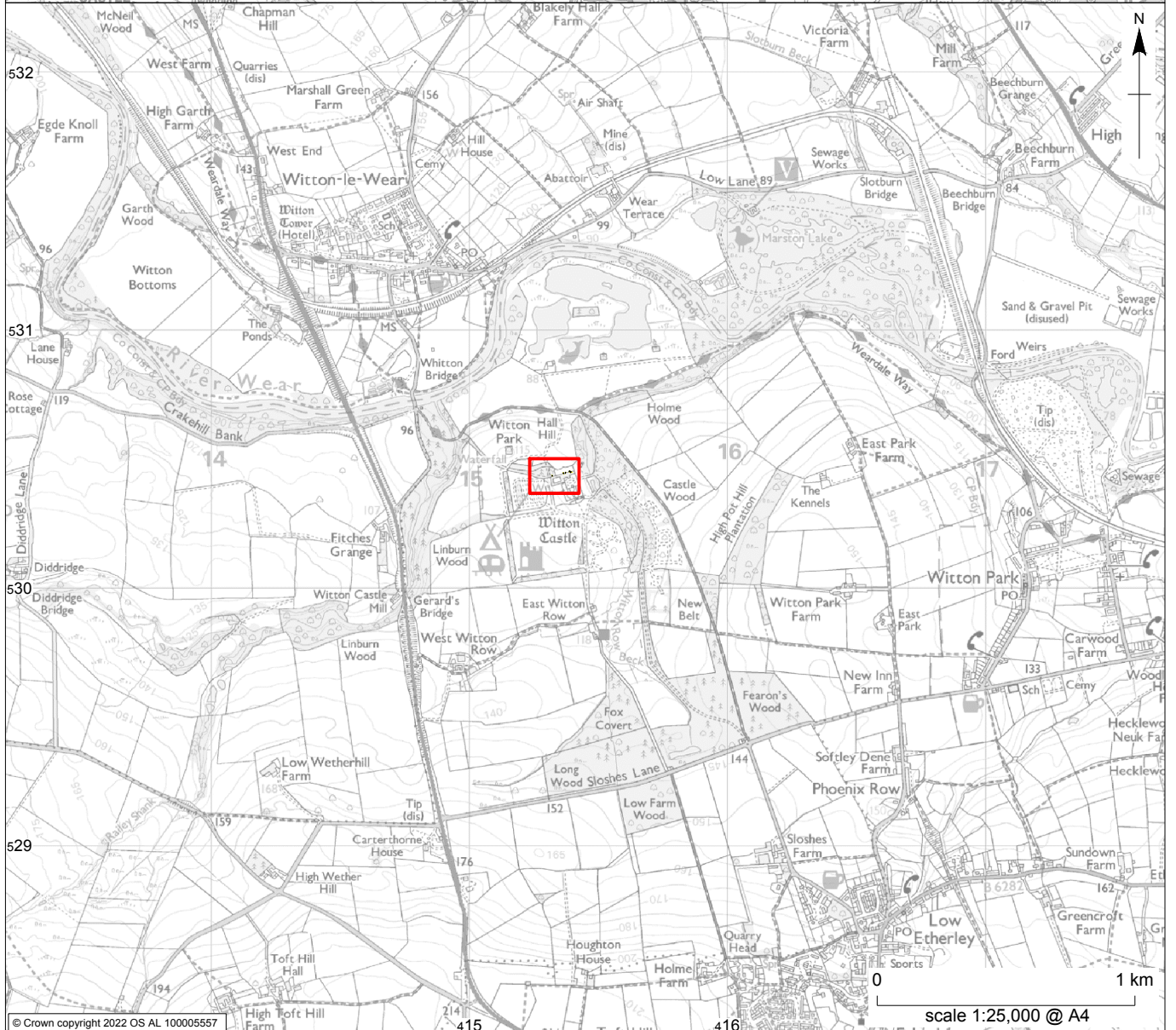
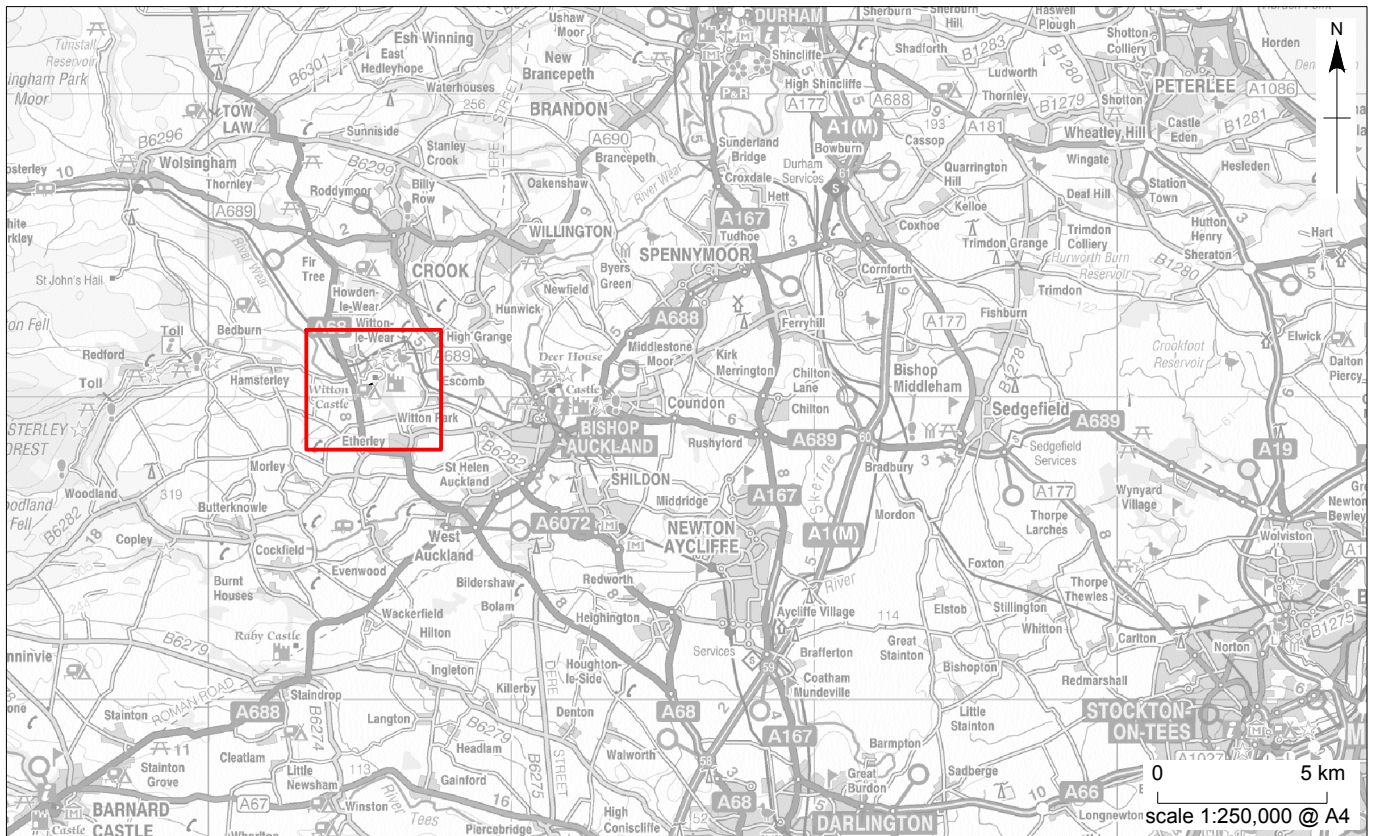
The archive resulting from the archaeological monitoring, including photographs and digital data will be deposited with ADS (Archaeological Data Service) upon completion of the project. An OASIS entry has been completed for the project (<http://oasis.ac.uk/england/northern1-504095>).

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APPENDIX A
CONTEXT CATALOGUE

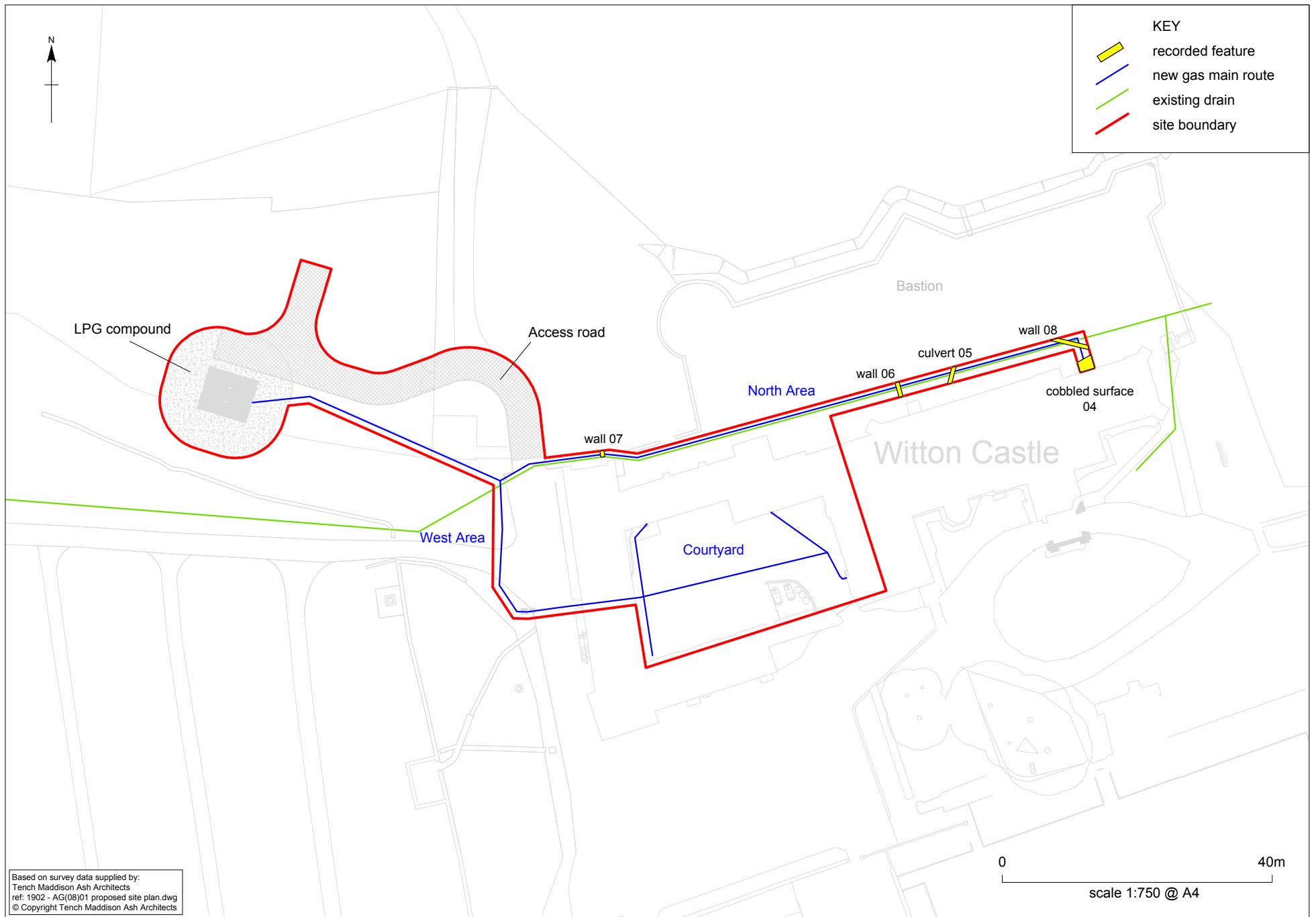
Context	Interpretative description
1	Topsoil
2	Levelling deposit
3	Ashy demolition deposit within the bastion
4	Cobbled surface
5	Culvert
6	Wall
7	Wall
8	Wall
9	Levelling deposit, courtyard
10	Natural



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Witton Castle, Witton-le-Wear: site location

Figure 1



Witton Castle, Witton-le-Wear: location of recorded features

Figure 2



Witton Castle, Witton-le-Wear: modern survey (green) overlain on 1816 estate plan (best fit)



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*Witton Castle, Witton-le-Wear: access road and
LPG compound, looking west*

Plate 1



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*Witton Castle, Witton-le-Wear: trench
within the courtyard, looking north*

Plate 2



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Witton Castle, Witton-le-Wear: the West Area, looking west

Plate 3



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Witton Castle, Witton-le-Wear: wall 07, looking south

Plate 4



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Witton Castle, Witton-le-Wear: wall 06, looking south

Plate 5



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*Witton Castle, Witton-le-Wear: the North Area
within the Bastion, looking east*

Plate 6



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Witton Castle, Witton-le-Wear: wall 08, looking west

Plate 7



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Witton Castle, Witton-le-Wear: cobbled surface 04, looking north-west

Plate 8



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Witton Castle, Witton-le-Wear: culvert 05, looking south-west

Plate 9