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An Archaeological Watching Brief at Downholland Embankment, Formby, Merseyside. Final Report.

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1. Introduction

This report describes the results of an archaeological watching brief conducted during the excavation of hand-dug test-pits excavated for site investigation works relating to improvements to the flood defences on the Downholland Brook east of Formby. The project was commissioned by the Environment Agency.

The watching brief covered a section of the brook running for *c.* 800 m North-South *c.* 0.5 km to the east of the centre of Formby situated between Downholland Moss Lane and Lord Sefton Way (Fig. 1). Fig. 2 gives the approximate location of the test-pits.

The geology of the subject area comprises freshwater alluvium of grey sandy/silt and grey silty clay overlying Mercia Mudstone of the Triassic geological period (1:50,000.B.G.S. Sheet 83. Formby).

2. Historical Background

The course of Downholland Brook was altered to its present course between 1848 and 1894. It was originally called Formby Brook which continued into Lamb Brook which followed an East-West course. On the 1893-94 O.S. mapping Downholland Brook appears has been reconstructed and now follows its modern course to irrigate the field systems in the area. On the later 1909 O.S. map, Altcar Road had been constructed and crosses the brook at its present position. The embankment itself, appears to be in excellent condition and rises to above 3 metres high toward the southern edge of the site with slope angles as high as 55 degrees, which would suggest some internal stone construction, although the subsequent investigation has uncovered no sign of this.

Previous investigation in the form of exploratory boreholes, had been undertaken on the site by Fugro Engineering Services Ltd in 2005, toward the northern end of the site. These explorations encountered a mixture of loose silts, soft silty sand and a peat layer approximately 1m thick at 4.5m to 5.5m depth.

3. Aims & Methodology

The site was visited by R.J. Gurney (Archaeological Excavation Services) on the 20th and 21st January 2010 on behalf of NMLFAU to assess the archaeological implications of the test-pitting.

The investigation consisted of the excavation of four small inspection pits along the top of the embankment at approximately 50m spaced intervals. These were hand dug into the embankment to a depth of 1.2 metres. Three

further boreholes along the embankment were drilled at the same time to a depth of 10-12 metres.

The make up and stratigraphy within the test-pits was recorded and the lower levels sampled.

4. Results

TP1 (HP1). This was 0.25 m long x 0.20 m wide x 1.2 m deep and was located approximately 50 m north of the bridge along the top of embankment. Below the turf, a layer comprised of light brown sandy/loam to a depth of 1.2m with a small amount of broken brick (less than 1%) at lower levels. A 20mm modern plastic pipe of unknown purpose was located within 0.30 m of the surface running North-South. A sample of lower soils were taken for environmental purposes (Sample 1)

TP2 (HP2). This was located 61 m north of TP1 and measured app 0.20 m long x 0.20 m wide x 1.2 m deep. Below the turf, a layer of mid-brown sandy/loam to a depth of 1.0m was encountered with a dark brown sandy clay/loam from 1.0 m to 1.2m depth which contained occasional small broken stones >10 mm diameter (less than 1%) at lower levels. A sample of which was taken for environmental purposes. (Sample 2)

TP3 (HP3). This was located 22 m north of TP2 and was approximately 0.20 m long x 0.20 m wide x 1.2 m deep. Below the turf, a layer of mid-brown sandy/loam to a depth of 1.2m depth was encountered with occassional small broken stones >10mm diameter (less than 5%) at lower levels. A sample of which was taken for environmental purposes. (Sample 3)

TP4 (HP4). This was located 70.2 m north of TP3 and was approximately. 0.25 m long x 0.20 m wide x 1.2 m deep. Below the turf, a layer of mid-brown sandy/loam to a depth of 1.0m was encountered with a light brown loamy/sand from 1.0 m to 1.2m depth and with occasdional small broken stones >10mm diameter (less than 1%) at lower levels. A sample of which was taken for environmental purposes. (Sample 4).

No finds were retrieved.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

The results of this fieldwork confirm the findings of the 2005 boreholes. These seem to show that the embankment is largely constructed of a mixture of loose silts, soft silty sand. No trace of the postulated stone reinforcement was found, though this may simply be a reflection of the relatively small size of the test-pits.

The environmental samples collected are very unlikely to provide meaningful data and are recommended for discard.

6. Figures

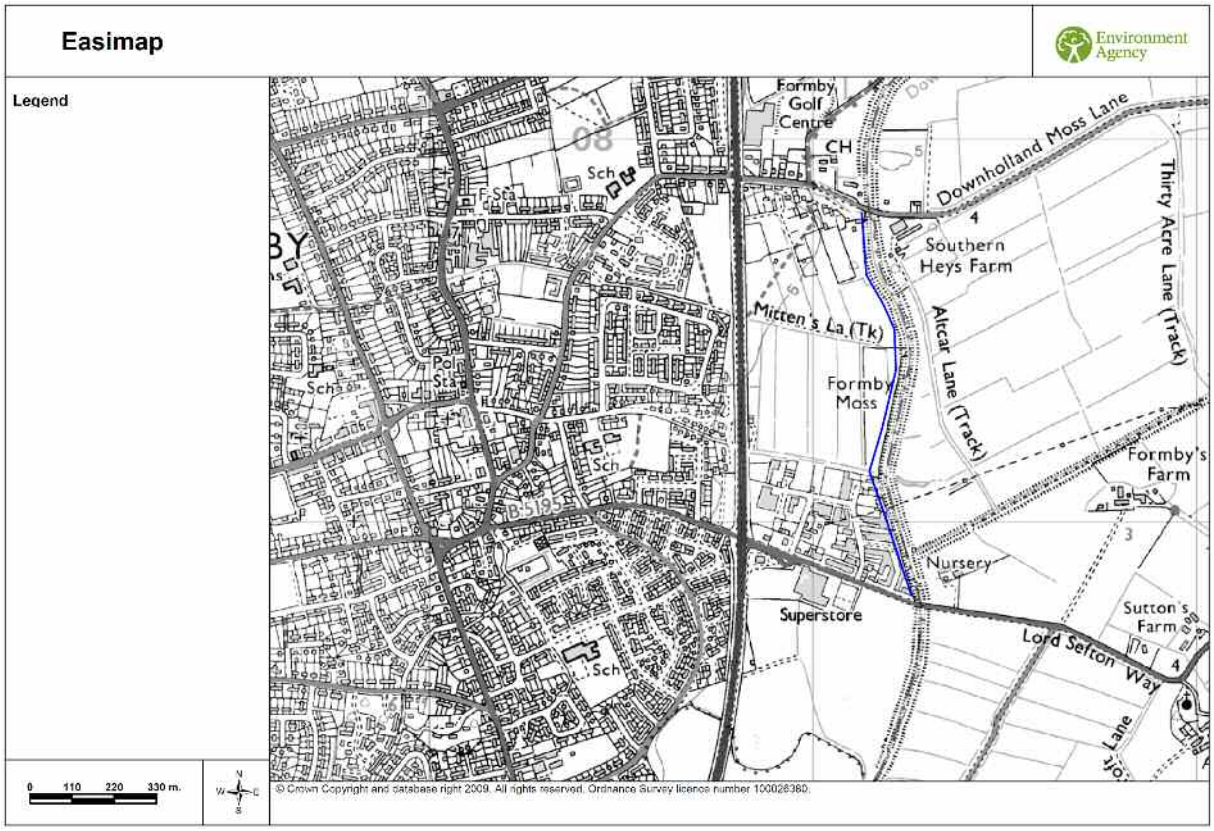

Fig. 1. Site Location

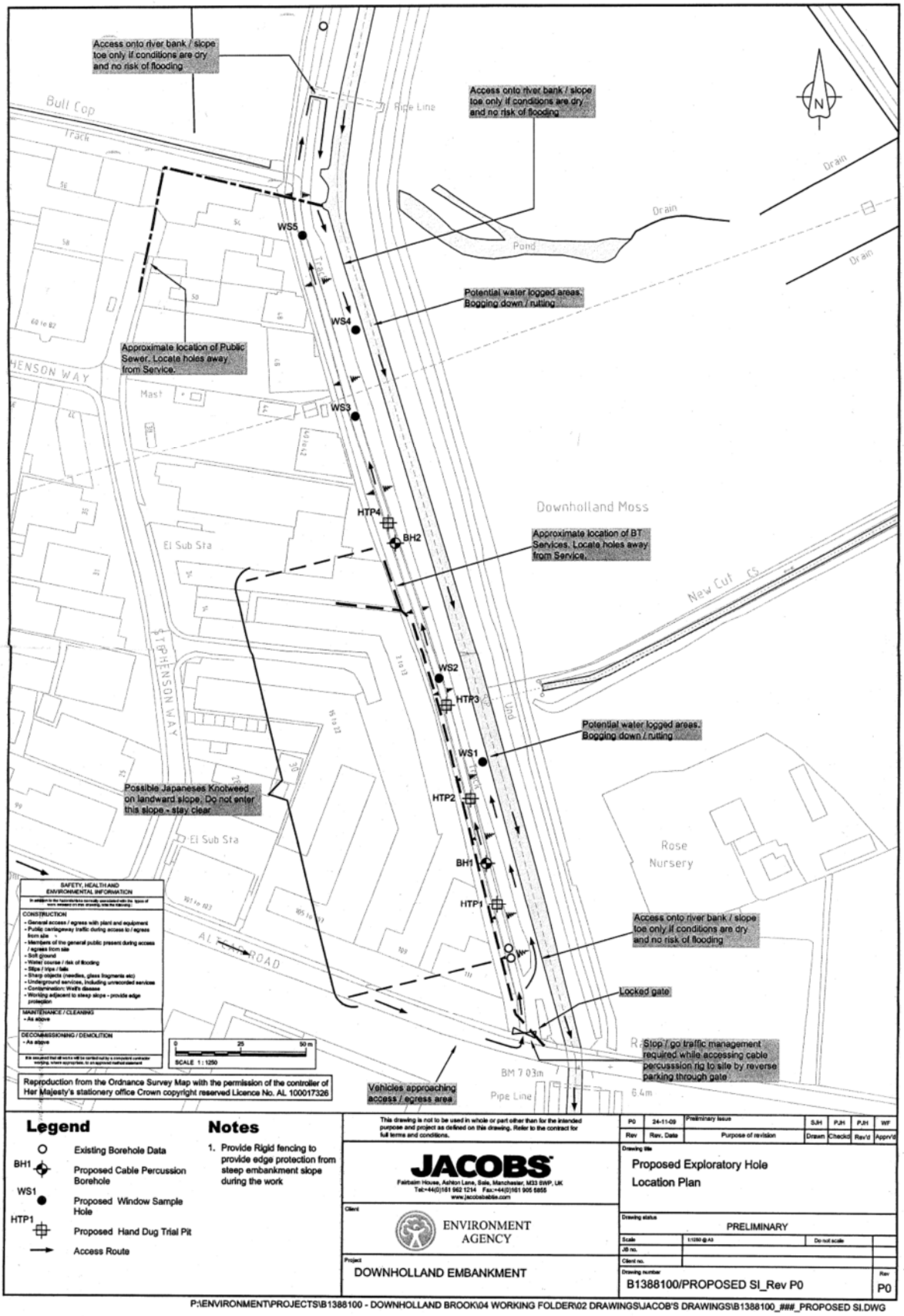

Fig. 2. Location of test-pits.