

# **BAMBURGH RESEARCH PROJECT**



## **LITTLE SWINBURNE COLWELL NORTHUMBERLAND**

### **REPORT OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL MONITORING AND RECORDING**

Compiled for Northern Structures Limited by The Bamburgh Research Project: Commercial Projects Section

BRP 12/03

August 2012

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### ***SUMMARY***

*This report has been compiled by The Bamburgh Research Project on behalf of Northern Structures Limited regarding monitoring carried out at Little Swinburne Farm, Colwell, Northumberland (NGR NY 94987762) and sets out the results of the archaeological watching brief undertaken by The Bamburgh Research Project during May 2012. The proposed development comprised the construction of a new stock building at the farm (Figures 1 and 2).*

*The monitoring was undertaken on Thursday 24<sup>th</sup> May 2012 following the contacting of the Bamburgh Research Project by Northern Structures Limited. The stripping and construction trench excavation had already substantially advanced in the absence of archaeological monitoring and BRP were responding to a request for a rapid presence to monitoring the remaining work. Inspection of the site and the monitoring of the remaining trenching was undertaken that day. The foundation trenches for the new development were excavated by machine to a depth c. 1-1.2m below the stripped soil level. The foundation trenches produced no features or finds of archaeological interest and there was no evidence for the disturbance of archaeologically sensitive material prior to the monitoring commencing.*

*Although the location of the site is close to a scheduled medieval settlement the results of the brief monitoring exercise would indicate that it lies outwith the extent of this settlement area in a zone of agricultural activity.*

**LITTLE SWINBURNE,  
COLWELL,  
HEXHAM,  
NORTHUMBERLAND**

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF  
REPORT OF MONITORING AND RECORDING**

**1.0 INTRODUCTION**

- 1.0.1 This report was compiled by The Bamburgh Research Project, Commercial Section for Northern Structures Limited. The document sets out the results of the archaeological monitoring and recording undertaken during groundworks associated with construction of a new agricultural stock building at Little Swinburne Farm, Colwell, Northumberland.
- 1.0.2 The work was undertaken in response to a request for a monitoring archaeologist to be sent to site where a substantial proportion of the stripping and construction trench excavation for the new structure had already been undertaken in the absence of archaeological monitoring. In the circumstances no Written Schedule of Investigation had been compiled in advance, however this report will follow the brief issued by the Northumberland County Council Conservation Team in advance of the work. The Planning Authority reference number is: 2/00088/FUL and the Northumberland County Council Conservation Team reference number is: T11/1b; 14119. The OASIS reference is: 133187.

**2.0 THE SITE**

**2.1 Location**

- 2.1.1 The site is located 2km to the north of Hallington Reservoir, off the B6342 and 1.5km to the east of the A68, and 14 km to the north of Hexham, Northumberland. The new building has been constructed on former pasture and immediately to the north of the standing farm buildings (NGR NY 94987762) (Figures 1 and 2).

**2.2 Archaeological background**

- 2.2.1 A settlement is known from records to have been present at Little Swinburne since at least the 13<sup>th</sup> century. A tower, Little Swinburne Tower, lies 120m to the north of the new development and is believed to have been erected after the fortification survey of 1415. The area immediately surrounding the tower is divided by low banks into small plots and small rectangular enclosures and platforms in a manner reminiscent of a number of defended settlements in the region. It is highly likely that these represent the steadings of buildings both domestic and agricultural. An area of medieval ridge and furrow ploughing, bounded by prominent banks and additional rectangular platforms, is visible in the centre of the field south

of the tower. In the south-eastern corner of the field there is a well preserved fishpond, consisting of a rectangular depression 30m by 18m with banks on either side. The tower and part of the settlement have been designated as a scheduled monument although settlement remains continue outside the scheduled area which have not been designated as their full extent, nature and date are not fully understood.

- 2.2.2 The upstanding earthworks of a line of house platforms are visible to the north-east of the proposed development area on a north-west to south-east alignment. In addition there is evidence of ridge and furrow across the proposed development area. This, however, may be relatively late in date

### **2.3 Impact of the development**

- 2.2.3 The development involved the construction of a stock building close to the site of a medieval settlement and its associated earthworks. The new building covered an area 26m east to west by 16m north to south. The foundations of the new stock building extend to 1.2m below ground level and were seen to have the potential to impacted on the potential survival of archaeological deposits on the site (Figure 2).

## **3.0 OBJECTIVES**

- 3.0.1 In the light of the potential for the construction works to impact upon preserved archaeological remains, a continuous watching brief was recommended by the curatorial authority and conducted from the point that the BRP were informed. Due to the late notification monitoring of the initial groundworks was not able to be undertaken.

## **4.0 METHODOLOGY**

### **4.1 Watching brief during excavation**

- 4.1.1 During all excavation activity a suitably experienced archaeologist, familiar with the archaeological background to the site, was to be present to record any items of interest that were revealed by these excavations. All work will be carried out in compliance with the codes of practice of the Institute of Field Archaeologists (IFA) and followed the IFA Standards for Watching Briefs. This watching brief conformed to the following methodology.

- 4.1.2 A contingency of up to 50 person days of investigation was available to be invoked following consultation with the Assistant County Archaeologist, the client and the monitoring archaeologist.

### **4.2 General standards**

- 4.2.1 All archaeological features identified during the monitoring would be recorded and sample excavated according to their type and form.

- 4.2.2 A 40 litre bulk palaeoenvironmental sample would be taken from all features recognised as suitable for the preservation of palaeoenvironmental remains.
- 4.2.3 Secure contexts would be sampled for dating where appropriate, whether on site or as sub samples of bulk samples. Any concentrations of charcoal or other carbonised material recovered on site would have been retained.
- 4.2.4 Pottery and animal bone would be collected as bulk samples whilst significant artefacts were three-dimensionally recorded prior to processing. All finds would be recorded and processed according to the BRP system and submitted for post-excavation assessment. Finds recovery and storage strategies would be in accordance with published guidelines (English Heritage 1995 and IfA Guidelines for Finds Work). Had artefacts of gold or silver, covered by the 1996 Treasure Act, been recovered appropriate procedures would have been followed.
- 4.2.5 In the event of Human burials being revealed they were to be left *in situ* and treated in an appropriate manner. After consultation with the County Archaeological Officer, if excavation was required, work would comply with the relevant Home Office regulations.
- 4.2.6 Any archaeological features encountered would be hand-cleaned, excavated and recorded:
- A photographic record would be taken using black and white print, colour slide film at 35mm format. In addition a digital photographic record would be compiled.
  - A written description of features would be recorded using the BRP *pro forma* context recording system.
  - All features would be drawn at an appropriate scale using pre-printed permatrace. Plans would be drawn at a scale of 1:20 and sections at a scale of 1:10.
- 4.2.7 All archaeological features and horizons would be accurately tied into the Ordnance Survey grid. All levels would be tied in to Ordnance Datum.
- 4.2.8 Arrangements were made with the appropriate museum for the deposition of the site archive within 6 month of the completion of the post-excavation report.

## **5.0 MONITORING**

- 5.0.1 Access was made available at all reasonable times to the archaeological representatives of the Northumberland County council Conservation Team to inspect the excavation site.
- 5.0.2 Access to the site was on the basis of prior notification and subject to relevant health and safety considerations.

## **6.0 RESULTS**

6.0.1 The foundation trenches that were examined revealed a dark grey-brown clay silt topsoil up to 0.3m thick over a layer of red-brown silty clay with lenses of small to medium sized pebbles over a yellow-brown clay subsoil within foundation pits in the the north-west corner (Plate 1). The depth of the red-brown silty clay layer diminished to the south and east with topsoil directly overlying the clay subsoil in the south-east corner. This layer is seen as a layer of colluvium or as a well developed B' horizon (Plate 2). No archaeological stratigraphy of any significance was encountered within the area of the foundation trenches.

## **7.0 DISCUSSION**

7.0.1 Although the location of the site is close to a scheduled medieval settlement the results of the brief monitoring exercise would indicate that it lies outwith the extent of this settlement area in a zone of agricultural activity.

## **8.0 CONCLUSIONS**

8.0.1 The absence of any settlement remains disturbed by the construction works would suggest that the immediate area of the site lay beyond the medieval settlement centred on Little Swinburne Tower. The work whilst not adding greatly to our knowledge does at least offer a little insight into the extent of the settlement in the middle ages.

Text and Illustrations: Graeme Young

BRP 12/03

July 2012



## REFERENCES

BRP Finds Manual, 2000

BRP Health and Safety Document

English Heritage *Management of Archaeological Projects 2*, 1991.

English Heritage *A strategy for the Care and Investigation of Finds*. Ancient Monuments Laboratory, 1995.

IFA 2010 Code of Conduct

IFA 2008 Standard and Guidance for Watching Briefs.

## **APPENDIX I: THE BRIEF**

### **LAND AT LITTLE SWINBURNE COLWELL, NORTHUMBERLAND**

Brief for a Programme of Archaeological Strip and Record

#### *Introduction*

A planning application has been submitted for the construction of an agricultural stock building, Little Swinburne, Colwell (Fig 1). There has been a settlement at Little Swinburne since at least the 13<sup>th</sup> century associated with Little Swinburne Tower in the north which was probably erected soon after 1415. The area immediately surrounding the tower is divided by low banks into small plots and small rectangular enclosures and platforms represent the steadings of buildings. An area of medieval ridge and furrow ploughing, bounded by prominent banks and additional rectangular platforms, is visible in the centre of the field south of the tower. In the south-eastern corner of the field there is a well preserved fishpond, consisting of a rectangular depression 30m by 18m with banks on either side. The tower and part of the settlement have been designated as a scheduled monument although settlement remains continue outside the scheduled area which have not been designated as their full extent, nature and date are not fully understood.

The upstanding earthworks of a line of house platforms are visible to the north-east of the proposed development area on a north-west to south-east alignment. While there is evidence of ridge and furrow across the proposed development area, it appears to be relatively late in date and as a result we cannot fully discount the possibility that it may overlie earlier remains associated with settlement and agricultural activity.

Northumberland Conservation has advised Northumberland County Council (NCC) Development Management Team (Western Area) that, should permission be granted, a condition should be attached to the permission requiring a programme of archaeological mitigation in advance of development commencing. In this instance, it has been concluded that the most appropriate mitigation response would be a programme of archaeological ‘strip, map and record’ in advance of groundwork associated with the development commencing on site.

This brief constitutes Northumberland Conservation’s justification for the investigation, its objectives and the strategy and procedures to apply to the programme of archaeological recording. This brief does not constitute the ‘written scheme of investigation’ required in the planning condition.

The applicant should discuss their intended scope of works with their archaeological contractor prior to work taking place in order that an appropriate programme of archaeological strip and record can be agreed. Failure to ensure an adequate level of strip and record may constitute a breach of planning consent.

The brief is intended to establish the project parameters to enable an archaeological consultant or contractor to tender for the work and once commissioned to prepare and submit an appropriate Method Statement, Project Design or Specification to Northumberland Conservation for approval prior to work commencing. The project design should be based on a thorough study of all relevant background information, in particular any assessment or evaluation reports or, in their absence, data held or referenced in Northumberland Historic Environment Record (HER).

The extent of the development (Fig 1) has been taken from plans attached to the planning application. The archaeological consultant or contractor will need to confirm the extent of the development and the nature of the works with the developer as part of the specification.

### *Method of work*

The purpose of this work is to ensure that important archaeological remains are not destroyed without first being adequately recorded.

Based on the available information, it appears that there is the potential for a moderate to low density of archaeological remains associated with the medieval and later settlement and associated land use.

The date and significance of these potential remains is such that they are unlikely to require full open area excavation but nevertheless warrant a greater degree of archaeological monitoring than would otherwise be possible under standard 'watching brief' conditions. For this reason, Northumberland Conservation has advised that the archaeological mitigation work on this site should take the form of a programme of 'strip and record' mitigation. This will enable the site to be stripped under archaeological supervision and for the targeted excavation of a representative sample of archaeological features and deposits.

The archaeological fieldwork will need to be completed prior to the commencement of groundworks required for the proposed development. It may be possible for construction to start on parts of the site where the archaeological fieldwork has been completed while archaeological work continues in other areas; however this must be agreed with Northumberland Conservation, the archaeological contractor and the developer prior to commencement of works. Should the Strip and Record area include areas of modern disturbance which exceed the depth of known natural deposits, Northumberland Conservation should be contacted in order to establish whether the programme of archaeological work need continue in these specific areas.

### General Standards

All work will be carried out in compliance with the codes of conduct of the Institute for Archaeologists (IfA)<sup>1</sup> and will follow the IfA Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Excavation<sup>2</sup> and will be in line with the Regional Statement of Good Practice<sup>3</sup>. Pre-site work preparation

- i) A specification in line with this brief must be submitted and approved by Northumberland Conservation prior to work commencing.
- ii) The appointed contractor must consult the Historic Environment Record as part of any required tender submissions or project costings.
- iii) All staff must familiarise themselves with the archaeological background of the site, and the results of any previous work in the area, prior to the start of work on site. All staff must be aware of the work required under the specification, and must understand the projects aims and methodologies.
- iv) All staff must be suitably qualified and experienced for their project roles.
- v) The archaeological contractor should note that the formulation of an appropriate environmental sampling strategy is a mandatory part of this project. Advice on such a strategy must be obtained from the English Heritage Scientific Advisor for North East England, Dr Jacqui Huntley, English Heritage Offices, Bessie Surtees' House, 41-44 Sandhill, Newcastle upon Tyne NE1 3JF (Tel. 0191 269 1250 or Mobile (preferred contact): 077134 00387) and Northumberland Conservation and included in the specification. Any variation from this scheme must be approved by Jacqui Huntley, Northumberland Conservation and representatives of the developer.
- vi) The Great North Museum, Newcastle-upon-Tyne should be contacted to discuss archiving prior to work commencing.

### Soil stripping

2 Topsoil and unstratified modern material may be removed mechanically by a machine using a wide toothless ditching bucket, under continuous archaeological supervision.

3 The topsoil or recent overburden should be removed down to the first significant archaeological horizon in successive level spits

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<sup>1</sup> Institute for Archaeologists, 2009. *By-Laws: Code of Conduct* (23 October 2009): [http://www.archaeologists.net/modules/icontent/inPages/docs/codes/code\\_conduct.pdf](http://www.archaeologists.net/modules/icontent/inPages/docs/codes/code_conduct.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Institute for Archaeologists, 2008. *Standard and Guidance for archaeological excavation* (28 October 2008): <http://www.archaeologists.net/modules/icontent/inPages/docs/codes/exc2.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Yorkshire, The Humber and the North-East: A Regional Statement of Good Practice for Archaeology in the Development Process (25 November 2009)

- 4 No machinery should track over areas that have previously been stripped.
- 5 The full nature and extent of archaeological features and deposits should be exposed
- 6 Areas containing archaeological features and deposits should be recorded on a pre-excavation plan within the

Strip and Record area.

#### Recording and excavation

All features exposed should be fully mapped and a full site plan prepared before decisions are made regarding the appropriate level of excavation. The aim of the strip and record exercise is to record all and any archaeological features present on the site and to undertake sufficient intrusive excavation to enable the date, character, form and stratigraphic relationships to be understood. This process will typically involve significantly less intrusive excavation than would be required under full excavation conditions but potentially more than would be required for a watching brief exercise. This process will typically require, as a maximum, the following level of sampling:

- Up to 100% of every discrete feature and features of particular interest
  - 10% of the area of linear/curvilinear features with a non-uniform fill
  - 5% of the area of linear/curvilinear features with a uniform fill
- All archaeological features and deposits must be excavated by hand

Additional targeted excavation may also be required in certain locations in the event that stratigraphic relationships or artefactual dating evidence cannot be recovered from archaeological features via the initial sampling process. A contingency allowance should be made for any additional work required under these circumstances. This is outlined in Section 3 of this document.

- i) This observation shall involve the systematic examination and accurate recording of all archaeological features, horizons and artefacts identified.
- ii) In the event of human burials being discovered, they should be left *in situ*, covered and protected and the coroners' office informed. If removal is essential, work must comply with relevant Home Office regulations.
- iii) Appropriate procedures under the relevant legislation must be followed in the event of the discovery of artefacts covered by the provisions of the Treasure Act 1996.
- iv) During and after the excavation, all recovered artefacts and environmental samples must be stored in the appropriate materials and storage conditions to ensure minimal deterioration and loss of information (this should include controlled storage, correct packaging, regular monitoring of conditions, immediate selection for conservation of vulnerable material)
- v) The area watched by the archaeologist should be accurately tied into the National Grid and located on a 1:2500 or 1:1250 map of the area.
- vi) A full and proper record (written, graphic and photographic as appropriate) should be made for all work, using pro-forma record sheets and text descriptions appropriate to the work. Accurate scale plans and section drawings should be drawn at 1:50, 1:20 and 1:10 scales as appropriate.
- vii) All archaeological deposits and features must be recorded with an above Ordnance Datum (aOD).
- viii) A photographic record of all contexts should be taken in colour transparency and black and white print and should include a clearly visible, graduated metric scale. A register of all photographs should be kept.
- ix) Where stratified deposits are encountered, a 'Harris' matrix should be compiled.

#### *Contingency arrangements*

In the event of the discovery of archaeological remains which are of a greater number or extent than anticipated, work will cease and the Assistant County Archaeologist and a representative of the developer will be notified. An assessment will be made of the importance of the remains and any provision for their recording or preservation in situ as appropriate.

In the event that such remains require full archaeological ‘excavation’ (as opposed to rapid excavation and recording as part of the ‘strip and record’ works), a contingency resource should be allocated to allow this phase of mitigation works. The contingency for this project has been set at up to 50 person-days.

In the event that hearths, kilns or ovens (of whatever period, date or function) are identified during the watching brief, provision should be made to collect at least one archaeo-magnetic date from each individual hearth surface (or in the case of domestic dwellings sites a minimum of one per building identified). Where applicable, samples are to be collected from the site and processed by a suitably trained specialist for dating purposes. In the event that such deposits or structures are identified, Northumberland Conservation should be contacted to discuss the appropriate response. This specific aspect of the sampling strategy should also be discussed in advance with English Heritage as per ‘General Standards’ above.

#### *Post excavation work, archive, and report preparation*

##### Finds

All finds processing, conservation work and storage of finds must be carried out in compliance with the IfA Guidelines for Finds Work <sup>4</sup> and those set by UKIC.

The deposition and disposal of artefacts must be agreed with the legal owner and recipient museum prior to the work taking place. Where the landowner decides to retain artefacts adequate provision must be made for recording them. Details of land ownership should be provided by the developer.

All retained artefacts must be cleaned and packaged in accordance with the requirements of the recipient museum.

##### Site Archive

Archiving work must be carried out in compliance with the IfA Guidelines for Archiving <sup>5</sup>.

The archive and the finds must be deposited in the appropriate local museum, within 6 months of completion of the post-excavation work and report.

Before the commencement of fieldwork, contact should be made with the landowners and with the appropriate local museum to make the relevant arrangements. Details of land ownership should be provided by the developer. Details of the appropriate museum can be provided by the Assistant County Archaeologist.

Northumberland County Council will require confirmation that the archive had been submitted in a satisfactory form to the relevant museum before recommending to the local planning authority that the condition should be fully discharged.

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<sup>4</sup> Institute for Archaeologists, 2008. *Standard and Guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials* (28 October 2008): <http://www.archaeologists.net/modules/icontent/inPages/docs/codes/Finds2008.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Institute for Archaeologists, 2008. *Standard and Guidance for the creation, compilation, transfer and deposition of archaeological archives* (October 2008): <http://www.archaeologists.net/modules/icontent/inPages/docs/codes/Archives2009.pdf>

## Report

The archaeological consultant or contractor must submit a copy of the report to their client and Northumberland Conservation within 2 months of completion of the work.

Northumberland Conservation requires one bound paper copy and one digital copy (in Word or PDF format) of the report.

Northumberland Conservation will need to approve the report before discharging the condition on the planning permission.

Each page and paragraph should be numbered within the report and illustrations cross-referenced within the text.

The report should include as a minimum the following:

- Planning application number, Northumberland Conservation reference, OASIS reference number and an 8 figure grid reference
- A location plan of the site at an appropriate scale of at least 1:10 000
- A location plan of the extent of the watching brief within the site. This must be at a recognisable planning scale, and located with reference to the national grid, to allow the results to be accurately plotted on the Sites and Monuments Record
- Plans and sections of archaeology located at a recognisable planning scale (1:10, 1:20, 1:50 or 1:100, as appropriate)
- A summary statement of the results
- A table summarising the deposits, features, classes and numbers of artefacts encountered and spot dating of significant finds
- A copy of this brief
- A copy of the 'check-list' appended to this brief
- Any variation to the above requirements should be approved by the planning authority prior to work being submitted

## OASIS

Northumberland Conservation and HER support the Online Access to Index of Archaeological Investigations (OASIS) Project. The overall aim of the OASIS project is to provide an online index to the mass of archaeological grey literature that has been produced as a result of the advent of large scale developer funded fieldwork.

The archaeological consultant or contractor must therefore complete the online OASIS form at <http://ads.ahds.ac.uk/project/oasis/>. If the contractors are unfamiliar with OASIS, they are advised to contact Northumberland HER prior to completing the form. Once a report has become a public document by submission to or incorporation into the HER, Northumberland HER will validate the OASIS form thus placing the information into the public domain on the OASIS website. The archaeological consultant or contractor must indicate that they agree to this procedure within the specification/project design/written scheme of investigation submitted to Northumberland Conservation for approval.

## Publication

A summary should be prepared for 'Archaeology in Northumberland' and submitted to Liz Williams, Northumberland HER Officer, by December of the year in which the work is completed.

A short report of the work should also be submitted to a local journal if appropriate.

## Monitoring

The Assistant County Archaeologist must be informed on the start date and timetable for the watching brief in advance of work commencing.

Reasonable access to the site for the purposes of monitoring the archaeological scheme will be afforded to the Assistant County Archaeologist or his/her nominee at all times.

Regular communication between the archaeological contractor, the Assistant County Archaeologist and other interested parties must be maintained to ensure the project aims and objectives are achieved.



Figure 1 Site location

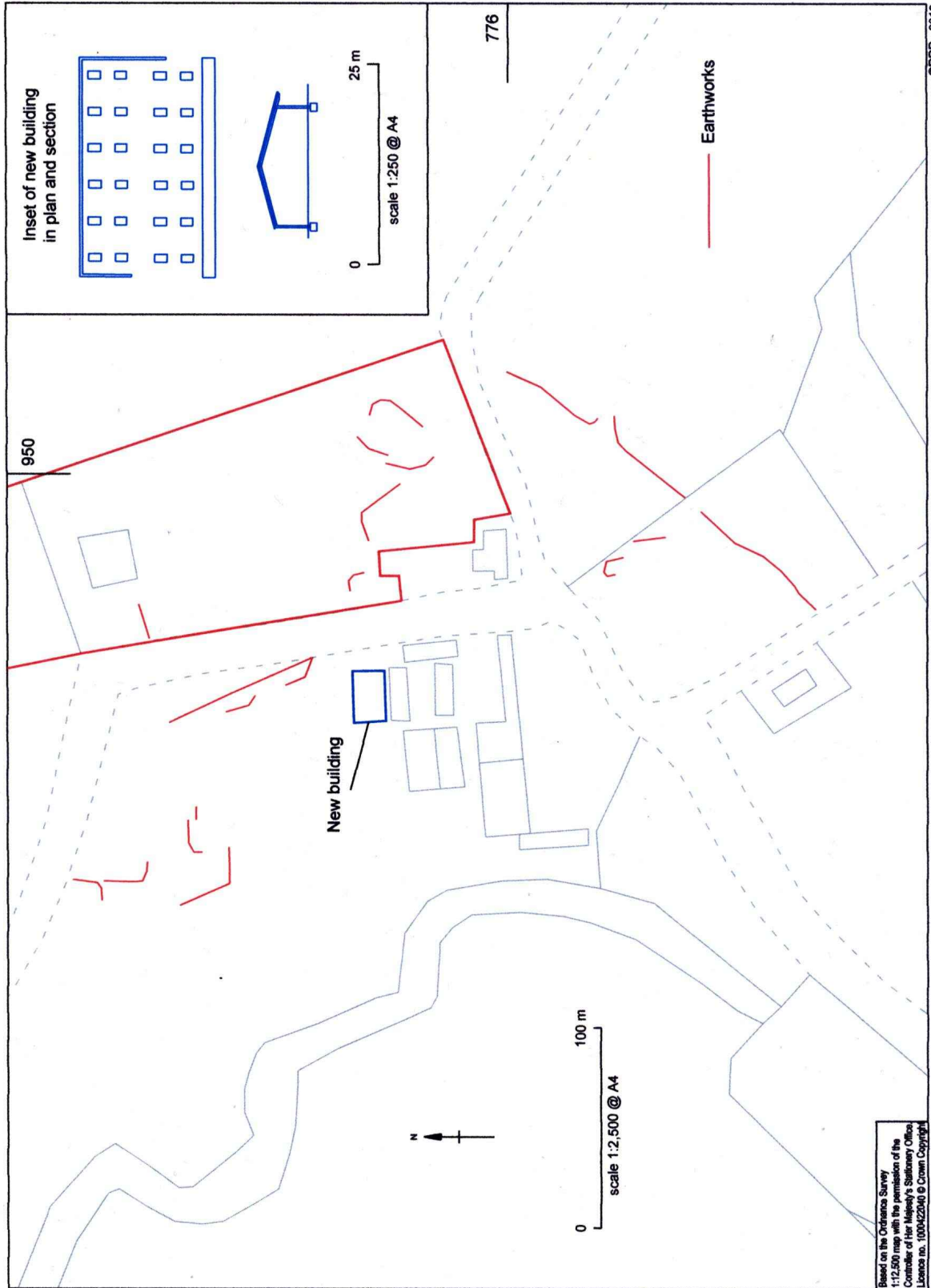


Figure 2 Location and plan of proposed development





*Plate 1: Foundation pits for the new building, facing east*



*Plate 2: Layer of 'colluvium' within a foundation pit, facing north*