



## New Skate Park, Victoria Park, Newbury, West Berkshire

### Archaeological Test Pit Evaluation Report





**NEW SKATEPARK  
VICTORIA PARK  
NEWBURY  
WEST BERKSHIRE**

**Archaeological Test Pit Evaluation Report**

Prepared for:  
**Newbury Town Council**  
Town Hall  
Market Place  
Newbury  
Berkshire  
RG14 5AA

By:  
**Wessex Archaeology**  
Portway House  
Old Sarum Park  
SALISBURY  
Wiltshire  
SP4 6EB

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## QUALITY ASSURANCE

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\* I= Internal Draft E= External Draft F= Final

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**NEW SKATEPARK  
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WEST BERKSHIRE****Archaeological Test Pit Evaluation Report****Summary**

Wessex Archaeology was commissioned by Newbury Town Council to undertake a test pit evaluation at the location of a proposed new skatepark in Victoria Park, Newbury, Berkshire (hereafter 'the Site'), centred on National Grid Reference 447450 167433. The fieldwork was undertaken in advance of the construction of the new skatepark, located c.20m to the north of the existing skatepark and comprised the machine excavation and recording of three test pits measuring 1.6m wide x 3m long x up to 1.1m deep.

Dark greyish brown sandy silt loam topsoil and, in Test Pits 1 and 2, greyish brown silt loam subsoil were recorded overlying a natural deposit of calcareous, tufa-like pale grey fine sandy silt, which was identified as alluvium. This deposit, probably associated with the river floodplain, was best preserved in Test Pit 3, and only patches of it, filling in hollows in the underlying gravels, were recorded in Test Pits 1 and 2. A single sample taken of the upper white calcareous marl from Test Pit 3 was found to be dominated by a single species of mollusc *Pupilla muscorum*, in particular its large form, which would date this deposit as being a late glacial sediment.

Excavations at Faraday Road undertaken by Wessex Archaeology (WA 1997) to the east of the Site identified the natural gravels at a height of 73.00m to 73.20m aOD, which were overlain by deposits of alluvium, a Mesolithic horizon, peat and tufa layer. Whilst alluvium and a tufa layer were observed on the Site there was an absence of any peat deposit and/or Mesolithic horizon aside from a smear of peat above the calcareous silty marl. The gravels at the Site were recorded at c.73.40m aOD, which is comparable to the evidence from Faraday Road.

The absence of the peat and the Mesolithic horizon could possibly be explained due to a number of reasons. The peat may have been cut away as has been seen in other parts of the Kennet Valley; there is the possibility that the Site sits on a higher gravel island although this seems unlikely given the comparable heights with Faraday Road; or by large scale ground reduction across the Site associated with 1930s levelling of Victoria Park to create public amenities such as cricket and football pitches and tennis courts.

The absence of the peat and Mesolithic horizon should not preclude that these deposits are not present elsewhere within Victoria Park, but the results of the test pit evaluation have shown that such deposits are unlikely to be present within the footprint of the proposed new skatepark.

The fieldwork was undertaken on 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2011.

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**Archaeological Test Pit Evaluation Report**

**Acknowledgements**

The programme of archaeological test pit evaluation was commissioned by Newbury Town Council, and Wessex Archaeology would like to thank Stephen Attrill in this regard. Wessex Archaeology would also like to acknowledge the assistance and advice of Duncan Coe and Sarah Orr of West Berkshire Archaeology Service. The help and advice of Professor Martin Bell of University of Reading is also appreciated.

The fieldwork was undertaken by Dave Murdie and Julia Sulikowska. This report was compiled by Julia Sulikowska. The illustrations were prepared by Liz James. The project was managed on behalf of Wessex Archaeology by Damian De Rosa.

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**Archaeological Test Pit Evaluation Report**

**1 INTRODUCTION**

**1.1 Project Background**

- 1.1.1 Wessex Archaeology was commissioned by Newbury Town Council to undertake a test pit evaluation at the location of a proposed new skatepark in Victoria Park, Newbury, Berkshire (hereafter 'the Site'), centred on National Grid Reference (NGR) 447450 167433 (**Figure 1**).
- 1.1.2 Permission has been obtained for the construction of a new skatepark (Planning reference – 10/02958/FUL), located c.20m to the north of the existing skatepark. The construction will entail the excavation of a c.40m x 20m area to a depth of up to 1.5m.
- 1.1.3 Due to the potential for significant archaeological remains dating to the Mesolithic period being present within the Site, Duncan Coe, District Archaeologist at West Berkshire Council (WBC), requested that a test pit evaluation be undertaken within the footprint of the new skatepark to assess the nature and survival of archaeological deposits that could be impacted upon by the development.
- 1.1.4 A Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI, WA 2011), setting out the methodologies and standards employed by Wessex Archaeology throughout the fieldwork, was prepared and submitted for approval to the District Archaeologist at WBC prior to the commencement of fieldwork.
- 1.1.5 The fieldwork was undertaken on 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2011.

**2 THE SITE**

**2.1 Location, Topography and Geology**

- 2.1.1 The Site is located within Victoria Park, which is bounded to the east by the A339, to the south by the River Kennet, to the west by Park Way and to the north by a housing estate. The new skatepark, which lies within a grassed area, is situated on the eastern side of the Park, to the north of the existing play area and skatepark (**Figure 1**).
- 2.1.2 The Site occupies a generally flat part of the Park and lies at 73.80m above Ordnance Datum (aOD).
- 2.1.3 The underlying solid geological formation has been recorded as Upper and Middle Chalk of the Cretaceous period with Pleistocene clay-with-flints and plateau gravel capping. These deposits are cut by the Rivers Kennet and Lambourn, draining in a west-east, northwest/southeast direction,

respectively. The solid geological deposits are overlain by drift deposits defined as Alluvium (Geological Survey of Great Britain – sheet 267).

- 2.1.4 The archaeological investigations in the vicinity of the Site revealed that the river gravel deposits are overlain by alluvium (Wessex Archaeology 1997), peat (HER data, records MWB3494 and MWB3496; Duncan Coe *pers. comm.*) and tufa (Wessex Archaeology 2008).

### **3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

- 3.1.1 The principal aim of the fieldwork was to identify, where present, intact archaeological features and deposits dating to the Mesolithic period. The details provided below therefore relate solely to this period, although this does not preclude the potential for the discovery of archaeological features/deposits dating to other periods.

#### **3.2 Mesolithic c.8500-4000 BC**

- 3.2.1 Archaeological evidence of national significance relating to activity during the Mesolithic period has been recovered from archaeological investigations undertaken in Newbury town centre.

- 3.2.2 The floor of the Kennet Valley around Newbury is rich in prehistoric finds, with a notable concentration of Mesolithic sites to the west and east of the town (Vince et al 1997, 153, Ellis et al 2003). Mesolithic artefacts were recovered during a number of investigations undertaken in the vicinity of the Site:

- the construction of the Newbury Pumping Station in 1894, c.230m to the east of the Site (HER data, record MWB16418);
- Victoria Park area, numerous 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century events (HER data, record MWB3494, MWB3496, MWB3497 and MWB3499);
- the construction of an abattoir at Faraday Road in 1963, c.230m to the east of the Site (HER data, record MWB3495 and MWB3500);
- Wessex Archaeology excavations at Faraday Road in 1997, c.235m to the east of the Site (WA 1997; HER data, record 16102); and
- excavations at Bartholomew Street and Cheap Street, c.500m to southwest of the Site (Vince, 1980; Vince et al 1997, 116, 153).

- 3.2.3 The 1997 Faraday Road excavations revealed an intact Mesolithic occupation horizon, which included discrete scatters of early Mesolithic worked flint (c.2000 pieces) and butchered animal bone, as well as burnt flint, burnt worked flint, burnt bone and burnt plant remains (hazelnut shells). The Mesolithic horizon was identified at c.0.45m below ground level at a height of 73.15m aOD. The natural River Gravel deposit was recorded at a height of c.73m aOD (c. 0.60m below ground level).

- 3.2.4 The site was identified as a specialist hunting camp rather than a more permanent residence, with a pronounced bias towards the hunting of young wild boar in evidence. The River Kennet valley would have been a relatively



rich environment allowing the neighbouring groups access to specific resources, such as a wide range of plant, animal and riverine resources. The river would also have been an important communication route for socio-economic interaction between territories.

3.2.5 The range and preservation of the artefactual assemblage, with very little post-depositional disturbance, made the findings of national archaeological importance and provided the opportunity to set the material excavated in 1963 in context. In combination, the material from the two excavations made a significant contribution to the understanding of human activity within the confines of a single site, and within the broader Mesolithic landscape of the River Kennet Valley.

3.2.6 From the Neolithic period onwards the Newbury area does not seem to have been a particular focus for activity, although isolated finds of stone implements and metal work have been made, often close to rivers.

## **4 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES**

### **4.1 Aims**

4.1.1 The aims of the archaeological work were:

- to identify the presence/absence of archaeological features and deposits, especially those dating to the Mesolithic period; and
- to set the findings of the investigation in relation to other archaeological work undertaken in the vicinity of the Site to enhance the understanding of human activity within the confines of a single site, and within the broader Mesolithic landscape of the River Kennet Valley.

### **4.2 Research questions**

4.2.1 The archaeological investigation would seek to address a research question, as detailed in the documents *Historic Towns in Berkshire: an archaeological appraisal* (Astill 1978) and in *Historic Newbury Fit for the Future: The Newbury Historic Character Study* (West Berkshire Archaeology Service 2006). The research question was:

- *Prehistoric*: Is there evidence to further suggest the nature and extent of Mesolithic occupation?

## **5 FIELDWORK METHODOLOGY**

### **5.1 Introduction**

5.1.1 All works were undertaken in accordance with the guidance and standards outlined in the Institute for Archaeologists' *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Evaluation* (2008) excepting where they are superseded by statements made below.

### **5.2 Fieldwork**

5.2.1 The test pit evaluation comprised the machine excavation of three test pits (**Test Pits 1-3**) within the footprint of the proposed new skatepark (**Figure**

1). The locations of the test pits were decided on Site in agreement with Duncan Coe, District Archaeologist at WBC. The test pits measured 1.6m wide x c.3m long x 1.10m (maximum) deep.

5.2.2 The machine excavation was carried out using a JCB mechanical excavator fitted with a toothless bucket under the constant supervision of an archaeologist. Following removal of the topsoil, all remaining overburden was carefully removed by the machine in 10 cm spits to the top of the first archaeological horizon, or natural geology, whichever was encountered first. Following on Site advice from Professor Martin Bell, the spit excavation continued through the Pleistocene gravels to ensure that no finds of Palaeolithic date were present.

5.2.3 On completion of machine excavation, the profile sections of the test pits were hand cleaned and recorded.

5.2.4 At the completion of the work, all test pits were reinstated using the excavated soil.

### **5.3 Recording**

5.3.1 A unique number was issued to each deposit, relating to the test pit number, in which it was found.

5.3.2 All exposed archaeological features or deposits were recorded using Wessex Archaeology's *pro forma* recording sheets and recording system. Details of Wessex Archaeology's recording system are available on request.

5.3.3 A complete drawn record of excavated archaeological features and deposits was compiled. This included representative sections, drawn at a scale of 1:10, for each of the test pits. The Ordnance Datum (OD) height of all principal features and levels was calculated and plans/sections were annotated with OD heights.

5.3.4 Areas under archaeological observation were surveyed using Global Navigation Satellite System (GNSS) and tied to the Ordnance Survey National Grid.

5.3.5 A full photographic record of the investigations and individual features was maintained, utilising digital images. The photographic record illustrated both the detail and general context of the archaeology revealed and the Site as a whole.

## **6 RESULTS**

### **6.1 Introduction**

6.1.1 This section includes all information on the natural deposits encountered and the archaeological features and deposits recorded. A detailed summary of the stratigraphic sequence, deposits and structural remains of each test pit are listed in **Appendix 1**.

### **6.2 Soil Sequence**

- 6.2.1 Dark greyish brown sandy silt loam topsoil (**101**, **200** and **301**) was recorded across the Site. It was up to 0.20m deep and overlay, in **Test Pits 1** and **2**, greyish brown silt loam subsoil (**102** and **201**).
- 6.2.2 Deposits **102**, **201** and **301** were seen to overlay a layer of very pale grey, tufa-like, calcareous fine sandy silt (**103**, **202** and **302**). This alluvial deposit, probably associated with the river floodplain, was best preserved in **Test Pit 3 (Plate 4)**, and only patches of it, filling in hollows in the underlying gravels, were recorded in **Test Pits 1 (Plate 1)** and **2 (Plate 3)**. The deposit was sterile, with very rare coarse sand inclusions. As no archaeological components were present, it was not possible to assess whether this deposit was of Holocene date, contemporary with the Mesolithic sites recorded in the vicinity, or of Late Pleistocene origin.
- 6.2.3 Small, thin patches of peat were seen to overlie in places the tufa alluvial deposit. This indicates that peat and possibly other archaeologically important layers may have been present within the Site at some point but are likely to have been removed during ground levelling undertaken in Victoria Park at some stage.
- 6.2.4 The tufa alluvial deposit overlay bands of Pleistocene river gravels, separated by lenses of silty alluvium and coarse sand.

### **6.3 Archaeological Results**

- 6.3.1 No archaeological features, deposits or finds were observed in the course of the investigation.

## **7 FINDS**

- 7.1.1 Three pieces of possible worked flint, recovered from deposits in **Test Pits 1** and **3**, were identified to have been of geological origin (Phil Harding *pers. comm.*) and were discarded.

## **8 ENVIRONMENTAL**

- 8.1.1 Professor Martin Bell sampled the upper white calcareous marl deposit **302** from **Test Pit 3** as by comparison with similar sedimentary units recorded in the Kennet Valley it was thought likely to be late glacial/early Holocene in date. Due to the observation in the field of one small shell within the deposit it was deemed suitable for further molluscan analysis to determine whether a date for this sediment could be determined. Two kilograms of the sample were sieved and it was found to be rich in shells overwhelmingly dominated by a single species, which is a large form of *Pupilla muscorum*. *Pupilla muscorum*, and especially its large form, is characteristic of certain Devensian late glacial sedimentary contexts. The silty marl deposit (**302**) which was interleaved with gravel is a late glacial sediment with molluscs present.

## **9 DISCUSSION**

- 9.1.1 No archaeological deposits, features or finds were encountered in the course of the evaluation.

- 9.1.2 Topsoil and, in **Test Pits 1 and 2**, subsoil were recorded to overlay natural deposit of calcareous pale grey fine sandy silt, which was identified as alluvium. The alluvium overlay layers of river gravels and sands with patches of fine sandy silts. A single sample of the upper white calcareous marl (**302**) from **Test Pit 3** was found to be dominated by a single species of mollusc *Pupilla muscorum*, in particular its large form, which would date this deposit as being a late glacial sediment.
- 9.1.3 The excavations at Faraday Road to the east of the Site identified the natural gravels at a height of 73.00m to 73.20m aOD, which were overlain by deposits of alluvium, a Mesolithic horizon, peat and tufa layer. Whilst alluvium and a tufa layer were observed on the Site there was an absence of any peat deposit and/or Mesolithic horizon aside from a smear of peat above the calcareous silty marl (**302**). The gravels at the Site were recorded at c.73.40m aOD, which is comparable to the evidence from Faraday Road.
- 9.1.4 The absence of the peat and the Mesolithic horizon could possibly be explained due to a number of reasons. The peat may have been cut away as has been seen in other parts of the Kennet Valley; there is the possibility that the Site sits on a higher gravel island although this seems unlikely given the comparable heights with Faraday Road; or by large scale ground reduction across the Site associated with the 1930s levelling of Victoria Park to create public amenities such as cricket and football pitches and tennis courts.
- 9.1.5 The absence of the peat and Mesolithic horizon should not preclude that these deposits are not present elsewhere within Victoria Park, but the results of the test pit evaluation have shown that such deposits are unlikely to be present within the footprint of the proposed new skatepark.

## **10 ARCHIVE STORAGE AND CURATION**

### **10.1 Archive**

- 10.1.1 The project archive was prepared in accordance with the guidelines outlined in Appendix 3 of *Management of Archaeological Projects* (English Heritage 1991) and in accordance with the *Guidelines for the preparation of excavation archives for long term storage* (Walker 1990). The excavated material and archive, including plans, photographs and written records, are currently held at the Wessex Archaeology Ltd Salisbury offices under the project code **76740**.

### **10.2 Deposition**

- 10.2.1 It is recommended that the archive on completion of all archaeological work should ultimately be deposited with the West Berkshire Museum.

### **10.3 Copyright**

- 10.3.1 Wessex Archaeology shall retain full copyright of any report under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 with all rights reserved. Excepting that it hereby provides an exclusive licence to the client for the use of the report by the client in all matters directly relating to the project as described in the specification.

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## 10.4 Security Copy

- 10.4.1 In line with current best practice, on completion of the project a security copy of the paper records will be prepared, in the form of microfilm. The master jackets and one diazo copy of the microfilm will be submitted to the National Monuments Record Centre (Swindon); a second diazo copy will be deposited with the paper records at the Museum, and a third diazo copy will be retained by Wessex Archaeology.

## 11 REFERENCES

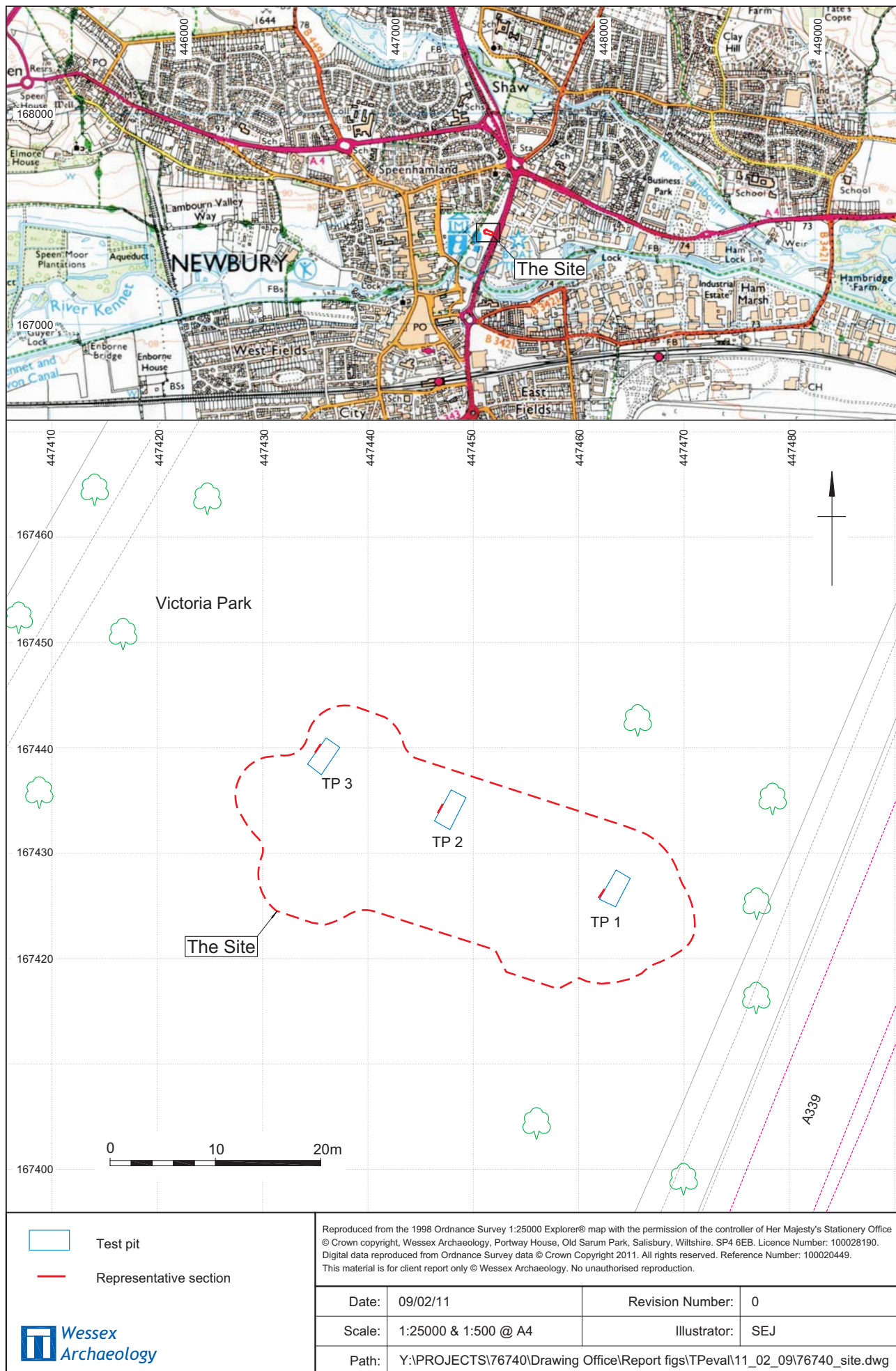
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## APPENDIX 1 – TEST PIT SUMMARY TABLES

Test Pit 1	Co-ordinates (S corner): 447463.501 167424.91	Dimensions: 3.2m x 1.6m Max.depth: 1.1m
	Ground Level (m AOD): 73.85	
Context	Description	Depth (m)
101	Topsoil. Dark greyish brown sandy silt loam with sparse flint gravels and modern glass and brick frags.	0 – 0.18
102	Subsoil. Light greyish brown sandy silt loam with root disturbance	0.18 – 0.27
103	Natural geology. Layer of fluvial very light grey fine sandy silt calcareous tufa like deposit with rare small flint grit	0.27 – 0.48
104	Natural geology. Fluvial flint gravels, light grey in a matrix of fine chalky sand	0.48 – 0.89
105	Natural geology. Band of light grey coarse sand	0.89 – 0.97
106	Natural geology. Mix of light grey and yellowish brown flint gravels in a matrix of coarse sand	0.97 – 1.10 +

Test Pit 2	Co-ordinates (S corner): 447447.785 167432.242	Dimensions: 3.4m x 1.6m Max.depth: 0.65m
	Ground Level (m AOD): 73.623	
Context	Description	Depth (m)
200	Topsoil. Very dark greyish brown sandy silt loam. No inclusions	0 – 0.20
201	Subsoil/made ground. Dark greyish brown silt loam with moderate flint inclusions, and modern brick rubble	0.20 – 0.40
202	Natural geology. Fluvial pale yellowish grey fine sandy silt calcareous deposit. Bioturbated	0.40 – 0.55
203	Natural geology. Coarse greyish river gravel in topsoil-like matrix (bioturbation)	0.36 – 0.44
204	Natural geology. Lens of light yellow coarse sand	0.44 – 0.53
205	Natural geology. Orangeey small river gravel in a sandy matrix	0.53 – 0.58
206	Natural geology. Fine pale yellow sand	0.58 – 0.64 +

Test Pit 3	Co-ordinates (S corner): 447435.574 167437.443	Dimensions: 3.1m x 1.6m Max.depth: 1.0m
	Ground Level (m AOD): 73.85	
Context	Description	Depth (m)
301	Topsoil. Dark greyish brown sandy silt loam	0 – 0.15
302	Natural geology. Very light grey fine sandy silt, calcareous tufa like deposit, heavily bioturbated	0.15 – 0.28
303	Natural geology. River gravels in dark topsoil like matrix, probably root disturbed	0.28 – 0.30
304	Natural geology. Light grey unsorted fluvial flint gravels	0.30 – 0.56
305	Natural geology. Very light grey fine sandy silt tufa deposit	0.56 – 0.65
306	Natural geology. Grey and brown flint gravels	0.65 – 0.77
307	Natural geology. Bands of silty tufa and coarse yellow sands	0.77 – 0.90
308	Mixed flint gravels in a coarse sand matrix	0.90 – 1.0 +



Site and test pit location plan

Figure 1





Plate 1: South-east facing representative section of Test Pit 1



Plate 2: Test Pit 2 viewed from the north-east



Plate 3: South-east facing representative section of Test Pit 2



Plate 4: South-east facing representative section of Test Pit 3





**WESSEX ARCHAEOLOGY LIMITED.**

**Registered Head Office:** Portway House, Old Sarum Park, Salisbury, Wiltshire SP4 6EB.

Tel: 01722 326867 Fax: 01722 337562 [info@wessexarch.co.uk](mailto:info@wessexarch.co.uk)

Regional offices in **Edinburgh, Rochester and Sheffield**

For more information visit [www.wessexarch.co.uk](http://www.wessexarch.co.uk)

