

***Highfields, 70-76 High Street,  
Hungerford, Berkshire***

Archaeological Evaluation Report



**HIGHFIELDS,  
70 - 76 HIGH STREET,  
HUNGERFORD, BERKSHIRE**

**Archaeological Evaluation Report**

Prepared on behalf of:

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**Contents**

<b>1</b>	<b>INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>1</b>
	1.1 Project Background .....	1
	1.2 Site Description and Archaeological Background .....	1
<b>2</b>	<b>EVALUATION METHODOLOGY .....</b>	<b>2</b>
	2.1 Project aims .....	2
	2.2 Fieldwork .....	2
	2.3 Test Pits .....	2
	2.4 Machine dug trenches .....	2
<b>3</b>	<b>RECORDING .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>RESULTS .....</b>	<b>3</b>
	4.1 Test Pit 1 .....	3
	4.2 Test Pit 2 .....	3
	4.3 Test Pit 4 .....	4
	4.4 Trench 3 .....	4
	4.5 Trench 5 .....	5
<b>5</b>	<b>FINDS .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>DISCUSSION.....</b>	<b>6</b>

**Appendix 1:** Evaluation test pit and trench summaries

**Figures**

Figure 1: Site and Trench/Test pit location showing archaeological features

Figure 2: Trenches 3, 5 and Test pit 4; Plans and sections

**Tables**

Table 1: All finds by context

**HIGHFIELDS,  
70 - 76 HIGH STREET,  
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**Archaeological Evaluation Report**

**Summary**

Wessex Archaeology was commissioned by Sovereign Housing Group to undertake the archaeological evaluation of an irregular plot of land, measuring approximately 2,000m<sup>2</sup>, located to the rear of 74-76 High Street, Hungerford, which has been proposed for residential redevelopment, and is centred on National Grid Reference (NGR) 433753, 168239.

The archaeological evaluation at Highfields comprised of three hand-dug tests (two 2x2m and one 1x2m test pits) and two machine-dug evaluation trenches (13x1m and 15x1m). The test pits and trenches identified a low density of archaeological features and material across the Site.

The earliest remains comprised of small group of prehistoric worked flints found within a tree throw. The condition and lack of patination on the artefacts suggests that the material may not have moved far. A small number of other flakes, which were patinated and found in a colluvium deposit and may have originated further up slope from the Site.

Two undated shallow ditches were also identified, both sealed below the colluvium. One of the ditches, Ditch **503**, appears to respect the alignment of, and may have formed part of the boundary of, the original medieval tenement plot boundaries, which are thought to have been laid out sometime in the 12<sup>th</sup> or 13<sup>th</sup> century. The absence of large quantities of domestic medieval refuse, of pits or any evidence for realignment or recutting of Ditch **503** suggests that the Site may have been maintained as agricultural plots until the 17<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, when large-scale development of this part of the town is known to have commenced.

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70 - 76 HIGH STREET,  
HUNGERFORD, BERKSHIRE**

**Archaeological Evaluation Report**

**Acknowledgements**

The archaeological evaluation was commissioned by Sovereign Homes and special thanks are extended to Tracy Spencer, Project Manager and to Viv Hawkins, Site Manager, both acting for Sovereign Housing Group, for their help and co-operation in ensuring that the project was completed successfully. Thanks are also offered to Duncan Coe of the West Berkshire Archaeological Service (WBAS) who monitored the work on behalf of WBAS.

The project was managed for Wessex Archaeology by Andrew Manning. The evaluation was directed in the field by Phil Harding, with assistance from Mike Dinwiddy and Gareth Chaffey. This report was prepared by Phil Harding. The finds report was undertaken by Lorraine Mephram and the illustrations compiled by S.E. James.

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**1 INTRODUCTION**

**1.1 Project Background**

1.1.1 Wessex Archaeology was commissioned by Sovereign Housing Group to undertake the archaeological evaluation of land proposed for residential redevelopment at Highfields, 70-76 High Street, Hungerford, centred on National Grid Reference (NGR) 433753, 168239 and hereafter referred to as 'the Site' (**Figure 1**).

1.1.2 Following a brief from WBAS, a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) for archaeological evaluation was prepared (Wessex Archaeology 2006). The WSI was submitted to, and approved by, WBAS before the commencement of the fieldwork.

**1.2 Site Description and Archaeological Background**

1.2.1 The Site comprised an irregular plot of land, measuring approximately 2,000m<sup>2</sup>, located to the rear (east) of three medieval tenement blocks, 74-76 High Street, Hungerford.

1.2.2 Of the three tenement blocks the two northern-most properties had been amalgamated to form a single piece of land formerly used as gardens and allotments. The southern-most tenement block, which had itself been divided into two properties, was overgrown, elevated above the blocks to the north by a lynchet type feature and separated from them by a discontinuous tree line.

1.2.3 The town of Hungerford has its origins in the 12<sup>th</sup> or 13<sup>th</sup> century and was an important market town in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century. While, there is no previous archaeological evidence for early activity within the Site, it does lie close to the south-eastern edge of the historic medieval core of the town and was considered by WBAS to have sufficient archaeological potential to warrant archaeological evaluation.

1.2.4 The fieldwork was carried out over four days in late January 2006.

## **2 EVALUATION METHODOLOGY**

### **2.1 Project aims**

2.1.1 The overall aim of the evaluation was to determine whether archaeological remains were present at the Site and, if so, assess their character, significance, date and extent.

2.1.2 The specific objectives of the project were:

- To examine whether evidence exists on the Site to assist with the dating of the laying out of the medieval town.
- To determine the extent of the medieval town.
- To determine whether deposits relating to Post-medieval activities are present on the Site.

### **2.2 Fieldwork**

2.2.1 The original specification for the evaluation accepted that access to the Site was extremely limited and made provision for the fact that it might not be possible to gain access by a mechanical excavator.

2.2.2 The approved WSI made provision for six hand-dug 2x2m test pits, with sufficient distance between the test-pits to provide a representative sample.

2.2.3 Once the evaluation had been started, it was apparent that it would be possible for a 1.5 ton tracked mini digger to access the site.

2.2.4 With the approval of WBAS, the evaluation strategy was changed to;

- Two 2x2m test pits and one 1x2m test pit, which were all hand dug in the north part of the site, and
- Two machine dug trenches, both 1 m wide and respectively 13m and 14m long to evaluate land to the east and to the south across the hedged tenement boundary.

### **2.3 Test Pits**

2.3.1 The topsoil/modern overburden was stripped by hand. Arisings were stockpiled adjacent to, but at a safe distance from the test pit edges. Hand excavation of topsoil and modern overburden continued to the top of the undisturbed natural or archaeological deposits, whichever were encountered first. Once archaeological deposits were exposed further excavation was undertaken by hand.

### **2.4 Machine dug trenches**

2.4.1 These two trenches were excavated using a broadly similar strategy to that undertaken in the hand dug test pits. Spoil heaps were routinely monitored for the retrieval of artefacts, although there was clearly a more reliable recovery rate from material from the test pits.

2.4.2 A sample of each archaeological feature was excavated and recorded by hand to a level acceptable to the WBAS and sufficient to resolve the principal aim of the evaluation.

- 2.4.3 Representatives of WBAS and Sovereign Homes attended a pre-arranged meeting at the completion of the work to assess the results of the evaluation and ensure that it had been completed in accordance with the terms of the WSI. All trenches were subsequently backfilled with the excavated arisings, levelled off and compacted.

### **3 RECORDING**

- 3.1.1 All exposed archaeological features and deposits were recorded using Wessex Archaeology's standard *pro forma* recording system. This includes the compilation of a complete drawn record of excavated archaeological features and deposits. Plans and sections were recorded to appropriate scales (1:20 for plans, 1:10 for sections) and referenced to Ordnance Datum (OD) heights.
- 3.1.2 A full photographic record was maintained using colour transparencies, black and white negatives (on 35mm film) and digital images. The photographic record illustrated not only the detail and context of the principal features but also the site in its immediate environs.

### **4 RESULTS**

#### **4.1 Test Pit 1**

- 4.1.1 Test pit 1, 2x1m, was located in the north-west corner of the Site, as near to the rear of the existing properties as it was considered appropriate to excavate.
- 4.1.2 The test pit revealed a black humic topsoil horizon (**101**), 0.30m in depth, that overlies a slab of concrete foundation. This feature occupied most of the extent of the trench.
- 4.1.3 A small area of mid brown silty clay subsoil (**102**) was preserved along the south edge of the test pit. This was sufficient to indicate that areas of the natural soil profile probably exist between relatively modern intrusive features; however a steep drop from the surface level of the test pit to the rear of the present buildings suggested that it is most likely that traces of earlier settlement were removed during the construction of the present buildings.
- 4.1.4 This test pit produced few artefacts, suggesting that the survival of extensive archaeological remains along the street front is unlikely.

#### **4.2 Test Pit 2**

- 4.2.1 Test pit 2, 2x2m, was located approximately 12m east of Test pit 1. This test pit produced a similar soil profile to that evident in Test pit 1. The topsoil (**201**) overlies mid brown silty clay subsoil (**202**), 0.25 m thick, that included chalk fragments, charcoal flecks and scattered natural flint pebbles.
- 4.2.2 The subsoil, which is thought to represent colluvium, lay on a surface of cryoturbated Chalk ('Coombe rock') (**203**), which was characterised by bands of mixed orange brown clay and silt, a phenomenon that is characteristic of periglacial activity on Chalk bedrock.



4.2.3 A small, shallow scooped pit (**204**) was visible in the southern section of the test pit, directly below the base of the topsoil, and clearly of recent date. The remains of a domestic animal, probably a dog, were also exposed in the surface of the cryoturbated Chalk. These remains were photographed for the archive but were left *in situ*.

4.2.4 All artefacts from the test pit were of Post medieval date with the exception of a two residual sherds of medieval pottery from subsoil **202** and an early Post-medieval copper alloy token from the base of the same deposit. This suggests that there is little stratigraphic significance of finds from the colluvium.

### **4.3 Test Pit 4**

4.3.1 A third 2x2m hand-dug test pit was located approximately 17m east of Test pit 2.

4.3.2 The soil profile repeated that seen in the other two test pits where well cultivated garden topsoil (**401**) was separated by a well defined boundary from an underlying colluvium (**402**). This deposit reached 0.54m in depth in the test pit.

4.3.3 Artefacts from the colluvium included Post-medieval Ceramic Building Material (CBM), which was more prevalent towards the upper part of the deposit and a scatter of patinated flint flakes.

4.3.4 Sealed below the colluvium, the basal 'Coombe rock' deposit (**405**) comprised bands of poorly sorted Chalk rubble in an orange brown matrix alternating with decalcified orange silty clay.

4.3.5 An irregular oval feature (**404**), 1.25m by 0.90m and 0.26m in depth, with sloping sides and rounded base was identified in the surface of the 'Coombe rock'. The feature was filled with dark grey brown silty clay (**403**) with angular and rounded flints and chalk pellets. It contained a number of unpatinated flint flakes and fragments of unworked burnt flint.

4.3.6 The edges of the feature were distinct, suggesting that this was not a product of solution of the Chalk, although the irregularity of the form suggests that it was not of deliberate construction. It seems most likely that this represents a tree throw feature into which flint debris has silted in from adjacent prehistoric occupation.

### **4.4 Trench 3**

4.4.1 This trench was dug by machine to evaluate the archaeological deposits at the eastern end of the site. It measured 13m long and was aligned approximately north-west/south-east.

4.4.2 The soil profile was identical to that seen elsewhere on the site where topsoil (**301**), colluvium (**302**) and 'Coombe rock' (**305**) were present in a sequence approximately 1m deep.

4.4.3 A shallow ditch (**304**), 0.60m wide and 0.15m in depth, with concave sides and base, ran obliquely east/west across the east end of the trench. It was filled with pale yellow brown silty clay (**303**). It was unclear from what height the ditch had been cut; however it seems most likely that it was

predominantly sealed by the colluvium (**302**). It contained a few fragments of burnt flint but otherwise no datable artefacts.

#### 4.5 Trench 5

4.5.1 Evaluation at the south-western end of the site was achieved by a machine dug trench 15m long that was positioned to establish whether traces of any medieval tenement boundaries survived beneath the present hedge bank which marked the division of the plots.

4.5.2 The sequence of topsoil (**501**) colluvium (**502**) and ‘Coombe rock’ (**505**) deposits were similar to that seen in trench 4. The remains of a shallow ditch (**503**), 0.42m wide and 0.10m deep, with rounded sides and base were observed, lying on the projected line of the tenement boundary. The ditch was cut into the surface of the ‘coombe rock’ and apparently sealed by the colluvium. It was filled with light orange brown silty clay (**504**). Apart from its position, there was nothing to indicate its date.

### 5 FINDS

5.1.1 Finds were recovered in small quantities from four of the test pits and trenches. **Table 1** presents a breakdown of finds by material type within each context.

5.1.2 The majority of the assemblage is of Post-medieval date; the most closely datable material (pottery) suggests a date range at least from the 18<sup>th</sup> century (possibly earlier) to the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Earlier Post-medieval material includes three fragments of wine bottle of later 17<sup>th</sup> or early 18<sup>th</sup> century date, and an early Post-medieval continental copper alloy token (both context **202**).

5.1.3 Exceptions to this include the prehistoric worked flint (core and flakes), the burnt, unworked flint (possibly also prehistoric in date), two sherds of medieval pottery (11<sup>th</sup>/12<sup>th</sup> century coarsewares from context **202**) and four fragments of medieval roof tile (contexts **101**, **102**, **402**). With the exception of the flint from context **403** all of this material occurred residually in Post-medieval contexts.

5.1.4 It is not recommended that any of these finds are retained for long-term curation.

**Table 1: All finds by context (number / weight in grammes)**

CBM = ceramic building material; Cu = copper alloy; Fe = iron

Context	Animal Bone	CBM	Flint	Glass	Pottery	Metal	Other Finds
101	3/19	14/765		6/137	34/458	1 Fe; 1 Cu	1 clay pipe; 1 burnt flint
102	10/25	3/121	1/3		7/132		1 oyster shell
201				3/48	23/246		4 clay pipe
202	5/55	5/257	2/17	6/105	17/338	1 Fe; 2 Cu	1 oyster shell; 2 clay pipe
303							1 burnt flint
401					4/123		
402	5/30	2/75	2/46	2/51	4/85	1 Cu	1 clay pipe; 1 burnt flint
403			5/25				1 burnt flint
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>23/129</b>	<b>24/1218</b>	<b>10/91</b>	<b>17/341</b>	<b>89/1388</b>	<b>2 Fe; 4 Cu</b>	

## 6 DISCUSSION

- 6.1.1 The archaeological evaluation at Highfields, Hungerford has demonstrated that there is a low density of archaeological features and material across the Site. Activity on or in the immediate vicinity of the Site can be demonstrated from the prehistoric period by small collections of worked flints.
- 6.1.2 The size of the assemblage is too small to allow detailed conclusions to be made regarding the nature of this activity and there is nothing diagnostic to provide an accurate date. The absence of specific flaking techniques and the general form of the material suggests that a date sometime after 2,500 BC (Late Neolithic or Bronze Age) is more likely than an earlier determination.
- 6.1.3 The survival of this material appears to be entirely due to the presence of a tree throw feature into which the material has silted. The condition and lack of patination on the artefacts suggests that the material may not have moved far; however other flakes, which were patinated and found in the colluvium may have derived from plough soil much further up slope.
- 6.1.4 There is no other evidence for prehistoric activity on the site. A ditch at the east end of the evaluation area was found that did not respect the alignment of the medieval tenement plot boundaries. There was nothing to indicate any likely date; fragments of burnt flint, which are frequently associated with prehistoric activity may have migrated down-slope with colluvium.
- 6.1.5 This part of the town of Hungerford is thought to have been laid out sometime in the 12<sup>th</sup> or 13<sup>th</sup> century from an original settlement site located near the parish church on the banks of the River Kennet. The results of the evaluation, as seen in Trench 5, suggest that the initial boundaries defining the tenement plots were probably marked out by ditches. There is nothing to confirm when this ditch was first cut, although its alignment, which follows the course of the present property boundary, and its position, beneath a thick deposit of colluvium, suggests that this is a likely medieval feature.
- 6.1.6 The absence of large quantities of domestic medieval refuse, of pits or any evidence for realignment or recutting of the ditch suggests that these tenements, near the outskirts of the town, may not have been settled, but were possibly maintained as agricultural plots defined by hedges.
- 6.1.7 The two sherds of medieval pottery from Test pit 2 may have been introduced with manure. It should be noted, however, that the only fragments of medieval tile were found in a test pit immediately behind the row of present houses, in a position where any traces of medieval structures are likely to have been destroyed by subsequent development. The primary artefact component dates from the 17<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> centuries and may indicate when large-scale development of this part of the town commenced.

## APPENDIX 1 – EVALUATION TEST PIT AND TRENCH SUMMARIES

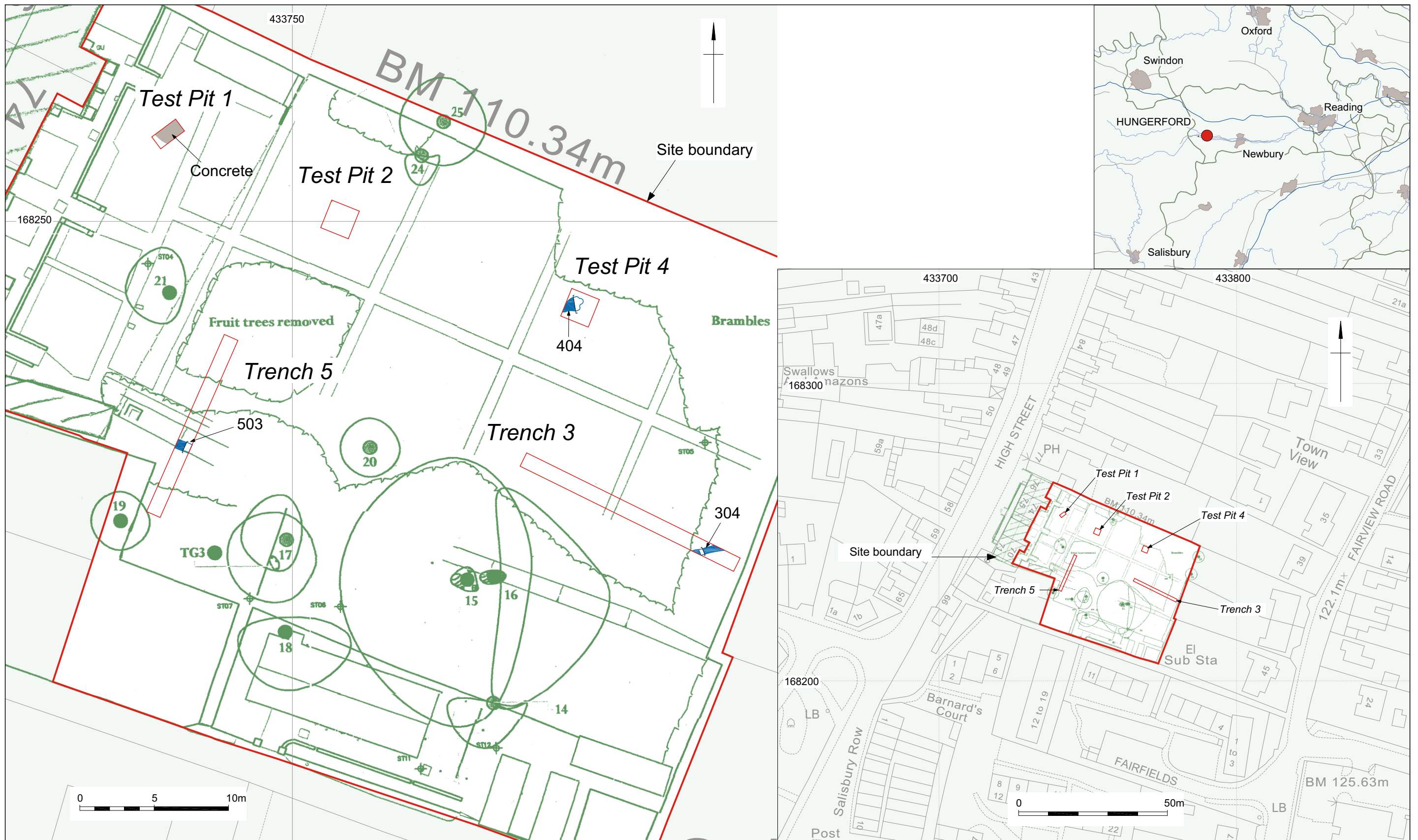
<b>Test Pit 1</b>		
<b>Context</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Depth</b>
101	Topsoil. Black soft humic silt	0-0.30
102	Subsoil. Soft mid brown silty clay. Occasional sub angular flint pebbles. Charcoal and chalk flecks.	0.30-0.70+

<b>Test Pit 2</b>		
<b>Context</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Depth</b>
201	Topsoil. Soft black humic silt	0-0.40
202	Subsoil. Soft mid brown silty clay, chalk and charcoal flecks with occasional flint pebbles.	0.40-0.65
203	Cryoturbated Chalk, mixed orange brown clay bands in periglacial stripes.	0.65+
204	Cut, seen in section, of shallow pit with Dog Burial	
205	As 201	
206	Dog burial, placed in pit that penetrated to 203. No grave cut seen in plan.	

<b>Test Pit 4</b>		
<b>Context</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Depth</b>
401	Dark grey/black silty clay loam of former garden topsoil with charcoal flecks, modern ceramics, CBM etc. Heavily rooted. Clear boundary with 402 below.	0-0.26
402	Dark grey brown silty clay with poorly sorted rounded flint pebbles, CBM and chalk flecks. CBM primarily near surface of layer. Worked flint further down. Colluvium.	0.26-0.80
403	Dark grey brown silty clay with mixed angular and rounded flints (<20mm) and sub angular chalk pellets. Worked and burnt flint. Fill of feature 404.	
404	Irregular oval feature, 1.25 m x 0.90 m, with sloping sides and rounded base. Regarded as tree throw feature.	0.26
405	'Coombe rock'. Alternating bands of poorly sorted chalk rubble (20-300mm) in orange brown silty matrix and decalcified orange silty clay.	0.80+

<b>Trench 3</b>		
<b>Context</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Depth</b>
301	Topsoil. Black humic silty clay loam of former garden soil.	0-0.45
302	Colluvium. Mid brown clay silt with charcoal and chalk flecks. Sub angular flint pebbles	0.45-0.80
303	Pale yellow brown silty clay with mixed sub rounded flint pebbles. Fill of ditch 304	0.15
304	Cut of undated ditch, 0.60 m wide, aligned E-W, with concave sides and base.	0.15
305	'Coombe rock'. Cryoturbated Chalk	0.80+

<b>Trench 5</b>		
<b>Context</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Depth</b>
501	Topsoil. Black humic silty clay loam of former garden soil.	0-0.35
502	Colluvium. Mid brown clay silt with charcoal and chalk flecks. Sub angular flint pebbles	0.35-0.75
503	Cut of ditch, 0.42 m wide, aligned NE-SW on line of former tenement boundary	0.10
504	Fill of ditch 503. Light orange brown silty clay with chalk flecks and common rounded flint pebbles.	0.10
505	'Coombe rock'. Cryoturbated Chalk	0.75+

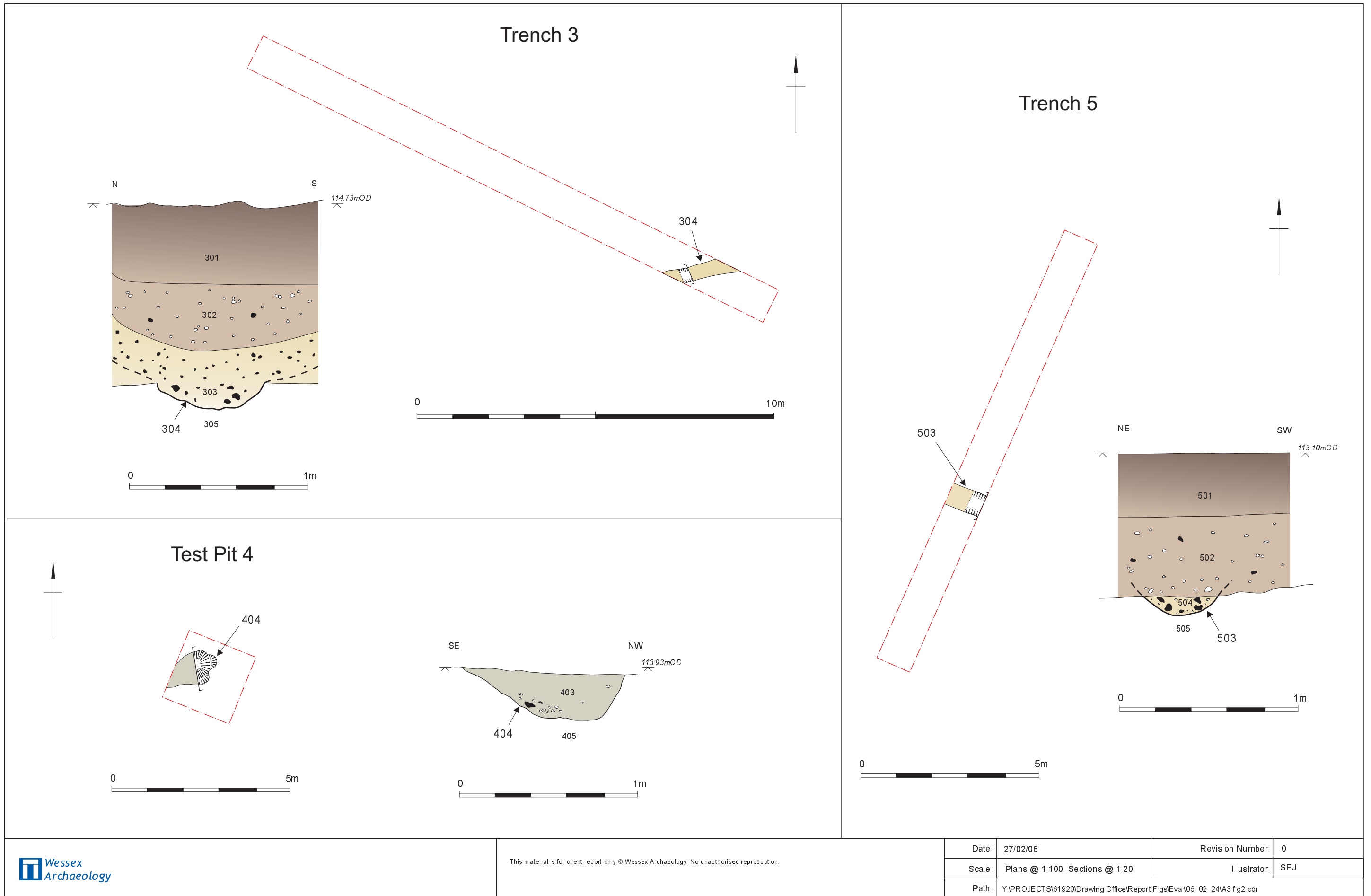


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Site and Trench/Test pit location showing archaeological features

Figure 1



Trenches 3 , 5 and Test Pit 4; Plans and sections

Figure 2



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