



*Avonmouth Sewage Treatment Works,  
Kingsweston Lane,  
Avonmouth, Bristol*

Archaeological Evaluation Report



**AVONMOUTH SEWAGE TREATMENT WORKS  
KINGSWESTON LANE  
AVONMOUTH  
BRISTOL**

**Archaeological Evaluation Report**

**Prepared on behalf of**  
**Wessex Water**  
Operations Centre  
Claverton Down  
Bath  
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by  
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**AVONMOUTH SEWAGE TREATMENT WORKS  
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BRISTOL**

**Archaeological Evaluation Report**

**Summary**

Wessex Archaeology was commissioned by Wessex Water, to undertake an Evaluation on land at Avonmouth Sewage Treatment Works, Kingsweston Lane, Avonmouth, Bristol, centred on National Grid Reference 353440 179547. The work is in support of the submission of a planning application (Ref. 06/01939/F) for the proposed construction of new stores building. The evaluation was undertaken between 31<sup>st</sup> July and 2<sup>nd</sup> August 2006.

Two trenches, with a total area of c. 100m<sup>2</sup>, were excavated. A peat horizon was observed at 4.6m above Ordnance Datum (aOD). Above this horizon was 1.8m of alluvial silts and clays, typical of the Wentlooge Formation. Probably in the last 200 years there was some slight truncation of the top of the Wentlooge Formation and organic material, possibly from mucking out of the adjacent Katherine Farm, was deposited across the Site. Overlying this was a layer of modern made ground, consisting mainly of gravel along with areas of concrete surface.

The Evaluation was not able to reveal any evidence of late Bronze Age activity which had been seen previously in excavations to the north-east and north-west of the Site.

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**Archaeological Evaluation Report**

**Acknowledgements**

Wessex Archaeology would like to thank Natalie Morant of Wessex Water for commissioning the work. Bob Jones and Katy Dryden (Bristol City Council) and Vanesa Straker (English Heritage) are thanked for advice and information. John Barrow, Health and Safety Manager for Wessex Water, is thanked for his advice.

The fieldwork was carried out by Jamie Wright and Matt Kendall, and Dr Catherine Chisham advised on the sampling strategy. The report was prepared by Jamie Wright with contributions from Grace Jones (Finds). The environmental sample was processed by Daniel Tarrant and the assessment is by Dr Chris J. Stevens, while the timber was described by Dr Catherine Chisham. The Illustrations were prepared by Liz James and the project was managed for Wessex Archaeology by Damian De Rosa.

**AVONMOUTH SEWAGE TREATMENT WORKS  
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AVONMOUTH  
BRISTOL**

**Archaeological Evaluation Report**

**1 PROJECT BACKGROUND**

**1.1 Introduction**

1.1.1 Wessex Archaeology was commissioned by Wessex Water to undertake an archaeological field evaluation on land at Avonmouth Sewage Treatment Works (hereafter 'the Site', **Figure 1**).

1.1.2 The work is in support of the submission of a planning application for the proposed construction of a new stores building (Ref. 06/01939/F). The evaluation followed the preparation and approval of a Written Scheme of Investigation (Wessex Archaeology 2006) in accordance with a brief written by the Bristol City Council's City Archaeologist (Jones 2006).

**1.2 Site location, topology and geology**

1.2.1 The Site comprising a rectangular area of c. 1100m<sup>2</sup> is located in the north-eastern area of the present Avonmouth Sewage Treatment Works (STW) at National Grid Reference 353440 179547 (**Figure 1**). Katherine Farm lies to the north-east of the Site.

1.2.2 The Site is flat, lying at 7.4m above Ordnance Datum (aOD). The solid geology comprises Triassic/early Jurassic mudrock (GSGB sheet 264). This is overlain by a thick band of post glacial alluvial deposits known as the Wentlooge Formation, which consists of estuarine silts and sands with peat layers, formed under marshy conditions (Allen 1992).

1.2.3 At the time of the Evaluation much of the Site was under concrete and gravel with some establishing vegetation. In the north-west was a derelict prefabricated building and to the south and east were trees and a drainage ditch.

**2 ARCHAEOLOGICAL/HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

**2.1 Archaeological and Historical Background**

2.1.1 The following summary is based on the two archaeological Desk-based Assessments (DBA) by Wessex Archaeology commissioned by Wessex Water (WA 1998 and 2006b). The first was in connection with the development of the STW, but since 1998 the area around the Site has undergone extensive redevelopment and a considerable amount of archaeological investigation has taken place in the vicinity. The second DBA (WA 2006b) was commissioned in connection with a proposal to demolish a

stone barn and other ancillary farm buildings associated with Katherine Farm, along with the construction of a new stores building.

## **2.2 The Henbury Level**

- 2.2.1 The Site lies in the historic parish of Henbury, which was formerly in Gloucestershire but is now in Bristol. The Henbury Level forms part of the Avon Levels.
- 2.2.2 The current dry pastoral nature of the Henbury Level is the product of centuries of human intervention involving the canalisation of a number of natural waterways and the creation of sea defences along the coast.
- 2.2.3 Rippon (1997) suggests human occupation started on high ground, in small nucleated settlements, and that gradual expansion then followed through the enclosure of characteristically 'lobe-shaped' land parcels. This pattern of irregular fields and dispersed small-scale settlements appears to develop from the Late Saxon period to the 12<sup>th</sup> or 13<sup>th</sup> century.
- 2.2.4 The small settlements expanded outwards, reclaiming land in more regularly arranged fields, and the final phase of reclamation is characterised by large rectangular, post-medieval fields.
- 2.2.5 Prior to the Late Saxon period, the Henbury Level was subject to varying degrees of seasonal inundation making long-term settlement unlikely away from the high ground near the coast and to the east.
- 2.2.6 This long sequence of inundations gradually deposited a series of estuarine silts/sands and peat up to 15m deep, known as the 'Wentlooge Formation'. Archaeological deposits are found sealed within this formation as buried soils containing finds and environmental evidence (and more rarely, features). These soil horizons represent brief and localized periods of stabilised higher ground, not subject to constant flooding, which would have taken the form of fenland islands within a reedy marshland. These small islands developed soil layers which were then preserved under later alluvial flooding.
- 2.2.7 It is on these 'stabilisation layers' that short term settlement activity has been recorded throughout the Levels. These layers indicate that an area was at one point, high and dry enough to have formed an island within the marshland. It does not follow that every such island was settled, but each stabilisation layer certainly has the potential to contain archaeological evidence of human activity.

## **2.3 Site specific potential**

- 2.3.1 The Site was believed to have a good potential to expose Mesolithic, Late Bronze Age and medieval remains. The potential for Late Bronze Age activity was particularly good as sites of that date had been excavated to both the north-east and north-west of the Site.
- 2.3.2 A radio carbon dated soil horizon of Mesolithic date had been examined to the north-west of the Site (Allen *et al* 2002).

- 2.3.3 A site known as Kites Corner, 130 metres to the north-east of the Site, had found Late Bronze Age structural evidence (two shallow postholes and a few stakeholes) accompanied by quantities of burnt stone, charcoal, pottery and animal bone, which was interpreted as a seasonally-occupied site, possibly for salt-making (Locock 2001). Excavation undertaken to the north-west of the Site in 1998 further uncovered a Late Bronze Age site similar to Kites Corner from which pottery sherds, imported stone and animal bone were recovered (Allen *et al* 2002).
- 2.3.4 Excavations near Katherine Farm, which lies adjacent to the Site, revealed evidence of medieval and post-medieval ditches. The farm itself may have had a medieval (perhaps moated) precursor. Among the outbuildings of the farm is an 18<sup>th</sup> century stone barn.

### **3 AIMS OF THE FIELDWORK PROGRAMME**

#### **3.1 Archaeological Field Evaluation**

- 3.1.1 The aims of the evaluation were to determine, as far as is reasonably possible, the location, extent, date, character, condition, significance and quality of any surviving archaeological remains liable to be threatened by the proposed development. An adequate representative sample of potentially threatened archaeological remains would be studied, with attention given to site remains of all periods (inclusive of evidence of past environments).
- 3.1.2 The specific aims of the evaluation, as laid out in the Brief, were to establish:
- The nature and quality of survival of the archaeological resource within the Site, and in particular the extent of any surviving features associated with the early settlement or subsequent uses of the Site
  - The character, formation processes and date of the sediments comprising the stratigraphic sequence.
  - The degree to which archaeological deposits and features have been disturbed by more recent activity, if any
  - The importance of surviving archaeological features and thus the proper strategy for managing these features.

### **4 METHODOLOGY**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

- 4.1.1 The Evaluation was carried out in accordance with the Written Scheme of Investigation (Wessex Archaeology 2006) and relevant guidance given in the Institute of Field Archaeologist's *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Field Evaluation* (revised 1999).

#### **4.2 Fieldwork**

- 4.2.1 Prior to the commencement of the evaluation the trench locations, within the footprint of the proposed new stores building, were surveyed using a Leica Smartlink GPS, and tied in to the Ordnance Survey.
- 4.2.2 The field work was undertaken between 31 July and 2 August 2006.



- 4.2.3 Before excavation the area of both trenches was visually inspected, and scanned using a Cable Avoidance Tool. The detection of live cables and the presence of manhole covers led to a slight relocation of Trench 1 to the north-west and the relocation of Trench 2 to the west
- 4.2.4 Trench 1 measured 12m by 6m x 2.8m deep and Trench 2 was 6m<sup>2</sup> x 2m deep. Both trenches were stepped, due to the depth of excavation, to comply with Health and Safety regulations.
- 4.2.5 Both trenches were excavated using a tracked mechanical excavator, under constant archaeological supervision. Modern overburden, to a maximum depth of 0.4m, was removed using a toothed bucket.
- 4.2.6 Excavation then continued under constant archaeological supervision in 0.1m spits using a toothless bucket. The exposed layers were cleaned by hand, where appropriate, and visually inspected for the survival of archaeological remains and/or environmental deposits.
- 4.2.7 On completion of the excavation phase, sections in both trenches were hand cleaned in order to try and further identify the survival of stabilization layers and/or soil horizons within the body of the exposed Wentlooge Formation.
- 4.2.8 The spoil from both trenches was scanned for artefacts.
- 4.2.9 All recording was on Wessex Archaeology *pro forma* sheets in accordance with Wessex Archaeology guidelines for fieldwork recording. A full photographic record was kept comprising black and white negatives, colour transparencies and digital images. All site drawings were at an appropriate scale, typically 1:10 for sections and 1:20 for plans.

## **5 RESULTS**

### **5.1 Introduction**

- 5.1.1 Context numbers were trench specific and consisted of the trench number followed by two digits, so that e.g. context **102** was in Trench 1 and **205** was in Trench 2. **Appendix 1** summarises the Trench and Context Record Sheets.

### **5.2 Vertical stratification**

- 5.2.1 In both evaluation trenches an almost identical sequence through the Upper Wentlooge Formation was revealed, although this was exposed to a greater depth in Trench 1 than in Trench 2. A representative section through the sequence revealed in Trench 1 is presented below, with cross references to Trench 2 (**Figure 2**).
- 5.2.2 An organic horizon, possibly peat, was present in Trench 1 at a depth of 4.6m aOD; Due to Health and Safety concerns, owing to the depth at which this layer was present, it was not possible to sample or closely examine the organic horizon. However the level of 4.6m aOD for the top of the layer was recorded and the presence of this possible landsurface at depth is of note.
- 5.2.3 Overlying the organic layer **104**, was a heavily mottled reddish brown/bluish grey, silty clay with a thickness of c.1.6m, representing a massive body of

Upper Wentlooge estuarine alluvium. The equivalent layer in Trench 2 was **204**. No archaeological features or artefacts were revealed during the excavation of this layer.

- 5.2.4 At the south-eastern end of Trench 1 a roughly horizontal layer of organic material (peat) at 6.3m aOD (**103**) was recorded. It was between 0.03m and 0.1m thick. Dry grass or straw, possibly a large dump of mulch, was present, and its lower boundary with **104** was sharp and straight with no obvious roots present, suggesting it was not an *in situ* peat. Layer **103** was bulk sampled and the report, indicating a post-medieval date, is included below (see 7.1). The equivalent layer in Trench 2 was **205**. If as suggested layer **103/205** was not an *in situ* peat then the top of the alluvium, **104/204** must have been truncated before this organic material was deposited, as no topsoil was present.
- 5.2.5 Redeposited alluvium, comprised a mixture of silty clay and large lenses of organic material overlay the thin peat-like layer **103**. This redeposited alluvium (**102**) had a maximum thickness of c. 0.5. The same layer in Trench 2, **205**, contained several fragments of post-medieval tile and a 0.4m long piece of possibly saw-cut wood (see 7.2 below).
- 5.2.6 Layers **102** and **103** were truncated by cut **105**, which contained fill **106**, a red sandstone-derived material, presumably imported to the Site in relatively modern times to raise the ground surface. Similar red sandstone-derived material, **202**, was present in Trench 2, although no equivalent cut feature to **105** was identified.
- 5.2.7 Layer **106** was overlain by c.0.50m of modern overburden (**101**) (**201**), consisting of plannings, brick and gravel, which itself lay below a thin concrete surface.

## **6 FINDS**

- 6.1.1 A small quantity of finds were recovered during the evaluation, consisting of ceramic building material (28 fragments; 827g), one iron fragment, and a fragment of wood, all deriving from modern overburden layer 201.
- 6.1.2 The ceramic building material comprises post-medieval flat roof tile and pantile fragments. The iron fragment is undiagnostic and probably modern. The wood is probably part of a modern fence-post. None of this material is recommended for long-term curation.

## **7 ENVIRONMENTAL REPORT**

### **7.1 Environmental sample**

#### *Introduction*

- 7.1.1 A single sample was taken from an organic layer in Trench 1 (context **103**) to examine for waterlogged material.

#### *Results*

- 7.1.2 The sample was examined under a scanning binocular microscope for the preservation of waterlogged plant and insect material. The sample was noted to contain many culms and interculms of grasses, including possibly

cereals. No rachis fragments or chaff was seen and from the size it is probable that most of the material is derived from grasses rather than cereals. The material was considerably broken down. A few seeds were seen of sedges (*Carex* sp.) and redshank/.persicaria (*Persicaria maculosa/lapathifolia*). A few insect remains were seen although these were generally rare.

#### *Discussion*

7.1.3 The samples would seem to comprise mainly of hay, and possibly cut straw. Although no dung was identified the sample is consistent with material from animal pens or farmyard waste. In this respect it may be derived from the bringing in of manure to the area, perhaps as part of muck spreading. Large numbers of seeds of Chenopodiaceae were not seen, as might be expected if the examined part of the deposit had been left exposed for any period of time. It is quite probable the material may have been covered with canvass prior to its deposition, as is often the case in recent times. It is also notable that there was little indication of any growth of plants upon the deposit prior to the alluviation or dumping that sealed it.

7.1.4 No material was present that is indicative of the date; however, as noted in the field, the material is very fresh and given that some of the deposit had dried out it is unlikely to be of great antiquity, and most probably associated with the last use of the Site as a farm.

## **7.2 Waterlogged Wood Identification**

#### *Introduction*

7.2.1 A single large timber was retrieved from context **203**, beneath the made ground and above the Upper Wentlooge estuarine alluvium, and removed to the offices of Wessex Archaeology.

#### *Results*

7.2.2 The timber measures 440x120x100mm, is very well preserved and is of a main branch or trunk with a lesser branch attached near one end. The bark is missing, one end is eroded or broken but the other is flat and very straight. The timber had been split longitudinally, with three sides straight, the fourth being the uncut sub-bark portion of the trunk. No cut marks could be discerned but clearly the wood had been processed, possibly machine cut. The timber is identified as larch (*Larix decidua*).

#### *Discussion*

7.2.3 That the wood was found to be in such a good state of preservation despite coming from a context that is not (now) waterlogged, was immediately suggestive that it is relatively recent in age. Larch is a non-native coniferous species, not introduced to Britain until the early seventeenth century, and not planted widely until the mid eighteenth century. Structural use of larch timber suggests a post-medieval or modern date.

## **8 DISCUSSION**

8.1.1 The evaluation has shown that a slightly truncated sequence through the Wentlooge Levels is present.

8.1.2 The top of an organic horizon was observed, possibly peat, at the base of Trench 1 at c.2.8m below ground level (c.4.6m aOD). This was not

examined further for health and safety reasons but the presence of this possible landsurface at depth is of note.

- 8.1.3 Above the organic horizon, a massive body of Upper Wentlooge estuarine alluvium, characteristically mid grey silty clays was observed. The upper part of the Upper Wentlooge sequence was dry with B horizon structure in the top, indicating the deposit had dried out, stabilised and oxidised after its deposition by water, and became subject to soil formation.
- 8.1.4 Above the Upper Wentlooge sequence a c.50mm horizontal extensive, but discontinuous, black band of highly organic black fibrous, largely undecomposed plant matter dominated by 'chopped hay/ straw/ grass: possibly a large dump of mulch was present. Such good preservation of the plant remains at the top of the Upper Wentlooge sequence, in what was clearly becoming a dry environment suggests very recent deposition (probably post-medieval or more recent), it may relate to the last use of the Site as a farm.
- 8.1.5 A number of post-medieval tiles were recovered from the dumped alluvial silty clays between the organic layer and overlying made ground. No archaeological artefacts, soil horizons or features were present within the main body alluvium, such as the Late Bronze Age activity or layers identified in previous archaeological investigations close to the Site.

## **9 ARCHIVE STORAGE AND CURATION**

### **9.1 Museum**

- 9.1.1 It is recommended that the project archive is deposited with the Bristol City Museum Service, from who an accession number for the completed archive will be obtained prior to deposition.
- 9.1.2 The archive is currently held at the offices of Wessex Archaeology, under the site code reference 63760 and has been issued with the number BSMR 22440 by Bristol City Council, Department of Planning, Transport and Sustainable Development.

### **9.2 Archive Storage**

- 9.2.1 The retained artefacts are currently stored and held at the offices of Wessex Archaeology. All material is packaged according to overall standards required for the acceptance of archaeological archives.
- 9.2.2 The complete site archive, which will include records, plans, photos, artefacts, ecofacts and sieved residues, will be prepared to comply with guidelines set out in *Environmental Standards for the permanent storage of excavated material from archaeological sites* (UKIC 1984, Conservation Guidelines 3), and *Guidelines for the preparation of excavation archives for long-term storage* (Walker 1990).

### **9.3 Copyright**

- 9.3.1 The full copyright of the written/illustrative archive relating to the Site will be retained by Wessex Archaeology Ltd under the *Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988* with all rights reserved. The Museum, however, will be

granted an exclusive licence for the use of the archive for educational purposes, including academic research, providing that such use shall be non-profitmaking, and conforms to the Copyright and Related Rights regulations 2003.

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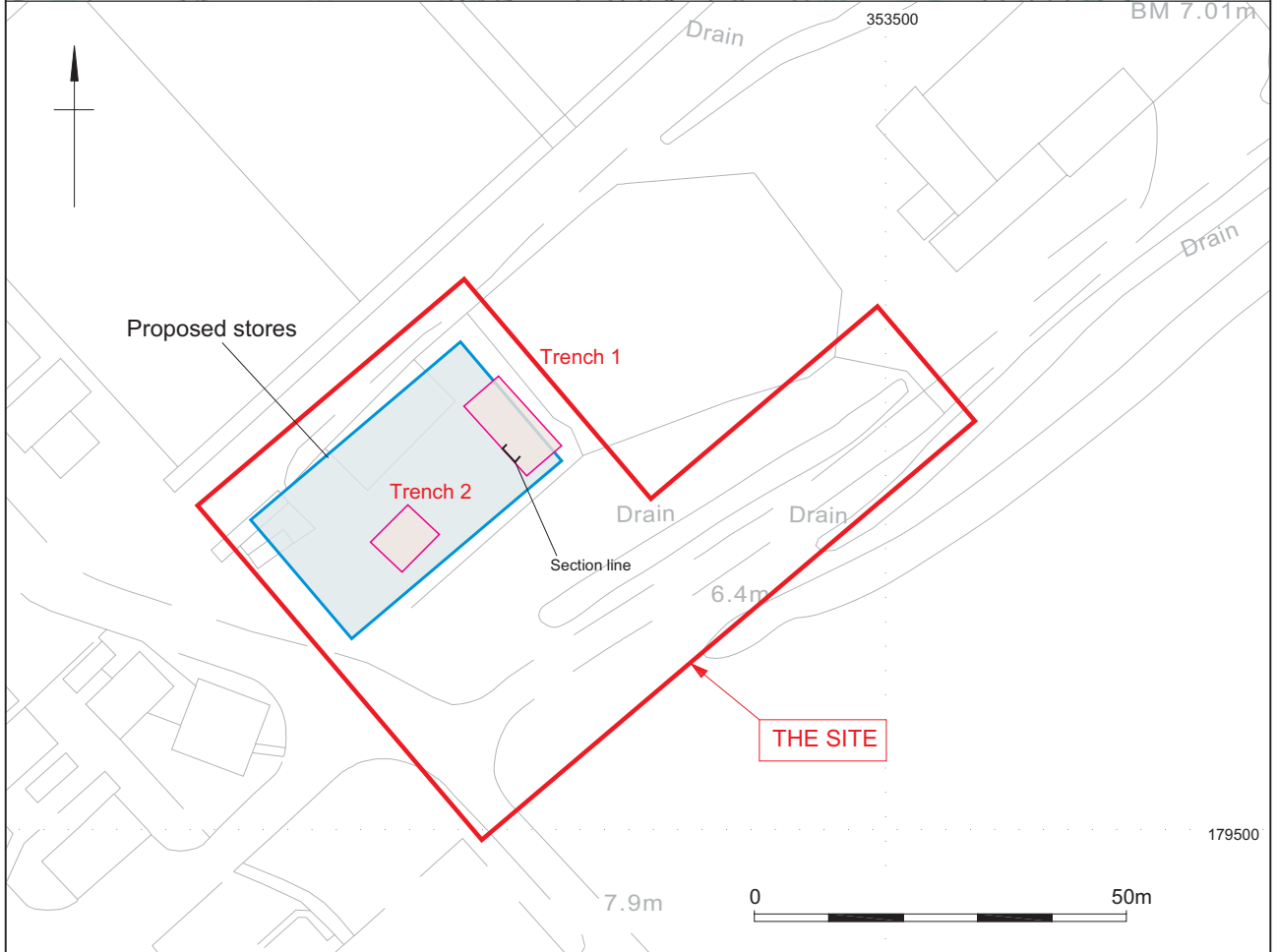
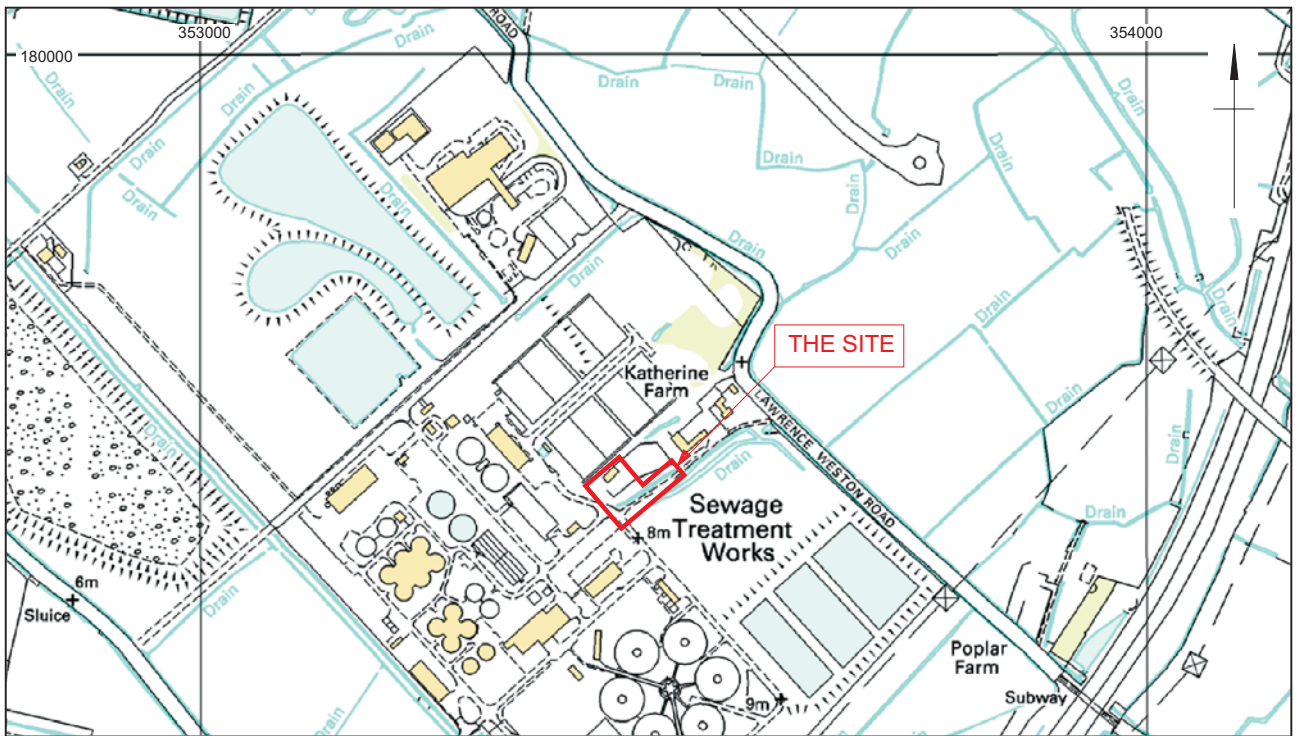
## APPENDIX: TRENCH SUMMARY TABLES


### TRENCH 1

NGR	353455, 179550, 7.4		353448, 179558, 7.4	
Dimensions	Length 12.5, Width 6.0, Max. depth 2.80 (m)			
Context	Description	Depth (m)		
101	<b>Modern layer.</b> Concrete slabs to 0.20m over scalplings over angular to sub angular gravel (0.02-0.10m) and complete and broken bricks. Modern glazed pottery fragments were noted but not retained.	0 – c. 0.5		
102	<b>Redeposited alluvium.</b> Bluish grey silty clay with no coarse components but with ?straw/grass and redeposited peaty material. Contained lenses of silty clay of different shades, and appeared to be redeposited alluvium excavated from different depths. This overlay <b>103</b> , was cut by <b>105</b> and only survived in the NW of the trench.	0.60 – 1.12		
103	<b>Vegetation band.</b> Peat-like material lying horizontally. No coarse components but with similar grass to <b>102</b> . Truncated after 1.20m from the W end of trench by <b>105</b> .	1.12 – 1.20		
104	<b>Alluvium.</b> Blue grey silty clay. No coarse components but had much reddish brown mottling throughout section.	1.20 – 2.80+		
105	<b>Cut.</b> Descended from NW of the trench at an angle of c. 20° cutting <b>102</b> and <b>103</b> before becoming horizontal after 1.80m at a depth of 1.30m. Filled with <b>106</b> .	0.70 – 1.30		
106	<b>Fill.</b> Reddish brown silty clay with occasional red sand stones (0.03-0.06m). An imported, Red Sandstone-derived layer.	c. 0.5 – 1.30		

### TRENCH 2

NGR	353433, 179536, 7.4		353438, 179542, 7.4	
Dimensions	Length 7.0, Width 5.80, Max. depth 1.90 (m)			
Context	Description	Depth (m)		
201	<b>Modern layer.</b> Comprised of concrete slabs (0.20m) over scalping material over ashy materials (black with occasional brick fragments).	0 – 0.45		
202	<b>Redeposited material.</b> Orange red silty clay with occasional small brick fragments and sub rounded gravel (0.03-0.05m); derived from Red Sandstone.	0.45 – 0.60		
203	<b>Redeposited alluvium.</b> Mix of peaty material and blue grey silty clay. No coarse components but whole layer contained dry ?grass/straw. Same as <b>102</b> and appeared to be redeposited alluvium. This contained several fragments of ?post medieval tile and a 0.4m long fragment of wood.	0.60 – 1.25		
204	<b>Alluvium.</b> Blue grey silty clay with no coarse components, apart from some Red Sandstone fragments near the boundary with <b>205</b> . Does contain much reddish brown mottling and evidence of fine roots (<1mm).	1.30 – 1.90+		
205	<b>Vegetation band.</b> A mostly c. 0.03m thick layer of peat-like material containing dry grass or straw. It lay above the truncated alluvium and below the redeposited material <b>203</b> . Its boundary with <b>204</b> below was sharp and straight with no roots, bioturbation etc.	1.25 – 1.30		

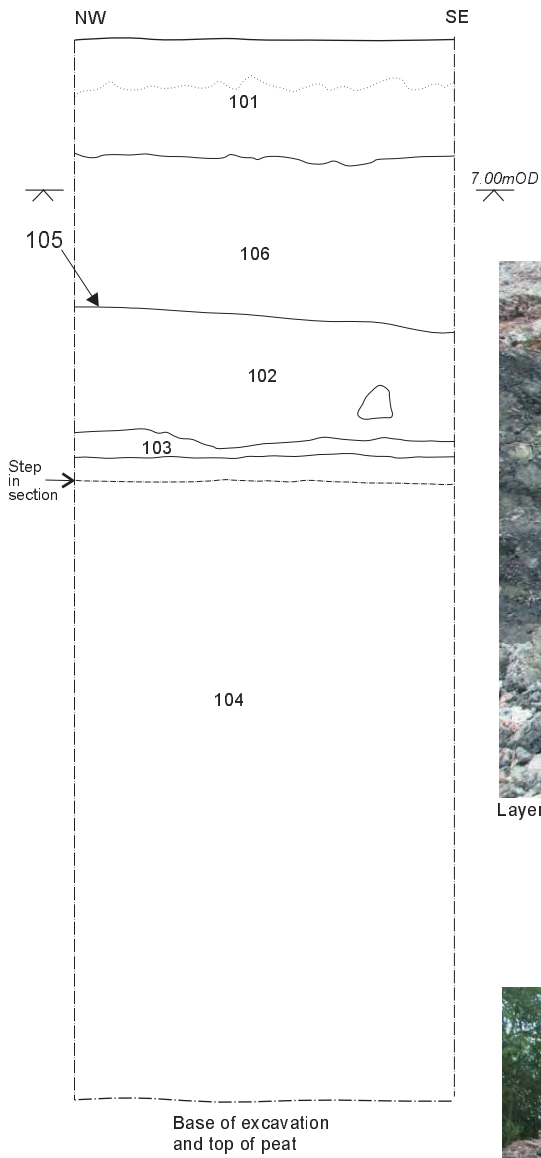


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Site and trench location

Figure 1

# Trench 1



Layers 102 and 103



Trench 1 section

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