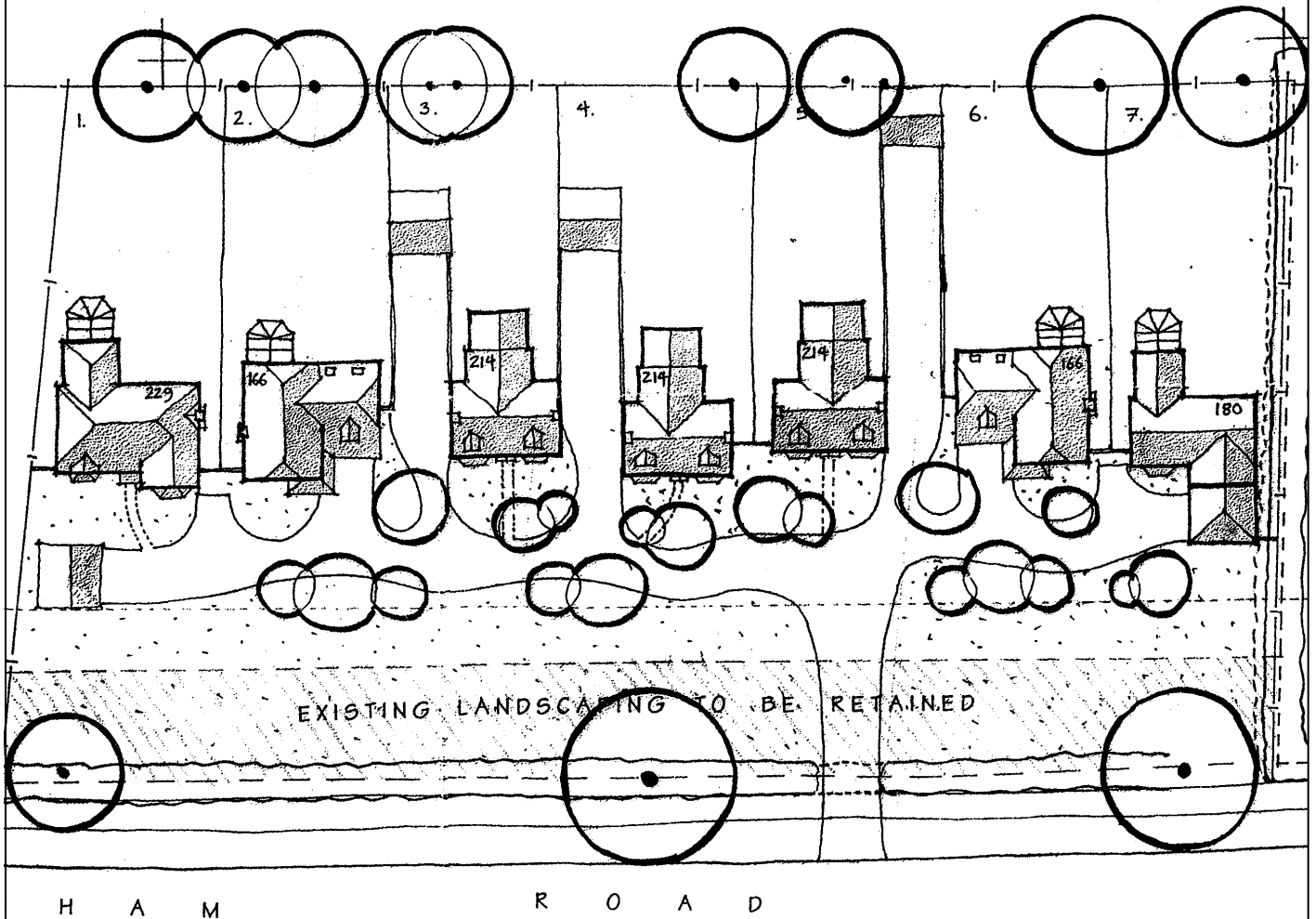


HERITAGE NETWORK



LAND AT BROMHAM ROAD Biddenham, Beds.

HN461

Archaeological Evaluation Report



THE HERITAGE NETWORK LTD

Registered with the Institute of Field Archaeologists as an Archaeological Organisation

Archaeological Director: David Hillelson, BA MIFA

Land off
BROMHAM ROAD
Biddenham, Beds.

HN461

Archaeological Evaluation

Prepared on behalf of Bewick Homes Ltd

by

Geoff Saunders, BA

Report no.234

May 2004

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Acknowledgements

The fieldwork for this project was carried out by Chris Turner and Geoff Saunders. The report text was written by Geoff Saunders and the illustrations were prepared by Karin Semmelmann. The report was edited by David Hillelson.

The Heritage Network would like to express its thanks to Ray Kane, Bewick Homes Ltd; Steve Bull, H Bull & Sons Plant Hire; and Lesley-Ann Mather, Heritage and Environment Section, BCC, for their co-operation and assistance in the execution of this project.

Summary

Site name and address:	Land off Bromham Road, Biddenham, Bedfordshire		
County:	Bedfordshire	District:	Bedford Borough
Village/town:	Biddenham	Parish:	Biddenham
Planning reference:	2004/121/FUL	NGR:	TL 02270 50503
Client name and address:	Bewick Homes Ltd, 40 Mill Street, Bedford, Bedfordshire		
Nature of work:	New Housing	Former land use:	Farmland
Size of affected area:	c.5500m ²	Size of area investigated:	c.265m ²
Site Code:	HN461	Other reference:	n/a
Organisation:	Heritage Network	Site Director:	David Hillelson
Type of work:	Evaluation	Curating Museum:	Bedford Museum
Start of work	04/05/2004	Finish of work	06/05/2004
Related HER Nos:	n/a	Periods represented:	L.Neolithic/E.Bronze Age
Previous summaries/reports:	n/a		

Synopsis:

In response to an archaeological condition on the planning permission for new housing on land off Bromham Road, Biddenham, the Heritage Network was commissioned by Bewick Homes Ltd to undertake a programme of archaeological evaluation in advance of development.

Five trenches were excavated in order to investigate whether archaeological features identified on the adjacent site to the north, extended into the present site. The two trenches at the eastern end of the study area revealed archaeological remains: a boundary ditch and posthole dating to the late Neolithic/early Bronze Age, running north – south across the northeast end of Trench 4, and a large feature in the southeast end of Trench 5 which yielded a single small abraded sherd of prehistoric pottery.

1. Introduction

1.1 This report has been prepared on behalf of Bewick Homes Ltd, as part of the archaeological evaluation of a proposed development site on land off Bromham Road, Biddenham, Beds. The planning permission for the development controlled by the Bedford Borough Council (BBC), has been granted subject to a standard condition requiring the implementation of a programme of archaeological work, in accordance with the provisions set out in Planning Policy Guidance Note No.16 (PPG16) on Archaeology and Planning. The scope of the required investigation was set out in a *Brief for a Programme of Archaeological Investigation* and a *Brief for Archaeological Field Evaluation* both dated 22 March 2004 prepared by the County Archaeological Officer (CAO) of Bedfordshire County Council, acting as adviser to the planning authority. The evaluation followed the provisions set out in the Heritage Network's approved Project Design dated April 2004.

1.2 The site lies on the north side of the A428 Bedford to Northampton Road, on the northern edge of the village, centred on NGR TL 0227 5050. It forms one of a series of plots bordering the road, and is currently under scrub vegetation. The development proposes the construction of seven detached dwellings with garages, together with associated access, landscaping and services. The existing landscaping on the road frontage is to be retained.

2. The site lies outside the core of the village, but the village lies in a documented archaeological landscape which includes cropmarks and other occupation evidence. Recent archaeological fieldwork immediately to the north has demonstrated the evidence of Romano-British settlement and other, more isolated prehistoric activity. There was considered to be a good probability that such remains would extend into the present development area.

2.1 The aim of the evaluation has been to consider the location, extent, date, character, condition, significance and quality of any such remains that are liable to be threatened by the development, and to provide a local and regional, archaeological and historical context for them, in accordance with the current published regional research agenda (Glazebrook 1997, Brown and Glazebrook 2000), if they were to be discovered.

2.2 The present report is intended to provide the planning authority with sufficient data to allow it to consider the archaeological implications of the proposed development, and to determine what further, if any, mitigation measures may be required to allow the development to proceed.

3. Fieldwork

SITE TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY

3.1 The site is situated on relatively level ground around the 40m contour. To the north the land drops away to the River Great Ouse. It is currently covered by scrub vegetation with light woodland to the site frontage and a covering of wood chippings in the middle of the site from recent tree clearance.

3.2 No known structures have been recorded as existing on the present site and cartographic evidence from 1887-88 shows the site lying within part of a larger field system which existed to the north of Bromham Road.

3.3 The underlying geology of the area consists of terrace deposits of sand and gravel.

RESULTS

Stratigraphy

3.4 The stratigraphy was broadly similar across all five trenches. It consisted of:

- topsoil of dark grey (10 YR 3/1) sandy silt, measuring between 0.20 and 0.40m in depth;
- a subsoil of reddish brown (2.5 YR 3/4) sandy silty gravels, measuring between 0.10 and 0.30m in depth;
- undisturbed natural of reddish brown (7.5 YR 6/6) sandy gravel, encountered at 0.45-0.55m below the existing surface.

Trench 1

3.5 Trench 1 was 30.30m in length and 2.00m in width, aligned northwest - southeast.

3.6 The trench showed evidence of natural glacial striations and tree root disturbance.

3.7 No archaeological features or deposits were observed within this trench.

Trench 2

3.8 Trench 2 was 29.90m in length and 2.00m in width, aligned northeast - southwest, to the northeast of, and perpendicular to the mid-point of Trench 1.

3.9 The trench showed evidence of natural glacial striations and silty hollows.

3.10 No archaeological features or deposits were observed within this trench.

Trench 3

3.11 Trench 3 was 27.30m in length and 1.60m in width, aligned northwest - southeast, to the southeast of and perpendicular to the mid-point of Trench 2.

3.12 The trench showed evidence of natural striations and silty hollows.

3.13 No archaeological features or deposits were observed within this trench.

Trench 4

3.14 Trench 4 was 30.00m in length and 1.60m in width, aligned north-east - south-west, to the north east of and perpendicular to the mid-point of Trench 3.

3.15 The trench showed evidence of natural striations.

3.16 A linear cut feature, ditch [401], was observed running north – south across the northeast end of the trench. The ditch was ‘V’ shaped, the west side being steeper than the east, with a curved base. The ditch contained three fills, (402), (403), and (404).

- Primary fill (402) consisted of a dark yellowish brown (10YR 3/6), very slightly clayey sandy gravel with frequent sandstone and flint inclusions and occasional charcoal flecks. Small fragments of pottery were observed in this fill, however the small size of the fragments and the poor state of preservation made collection impossible. The fabric of the pottery appeared to be the same as the sherds recovered from fill (404). This fill was very similar to the surrounding natural and may represent silting soon after it was originally excavated.
- Secondary fill (403) consisted of dark yellowish brown (10YR 4/4), slightly clayey sand with very frequent flint and sandstone inclusions and occasional charcoal flecks.
- Tertiary fill (404) consisted of brown (10YR 4/3), clayey sand with moderate flint and stone inclusions, moderate charcoal flecks, and occasional patches of light greenish brown clay. Pottery and a flint scraper dating to the late Neolithic/early Bronze Age was recovered from this fill.

3.17 Posthole [405] was cut through the base of ditch [401]. It had steep near vertical sides and a narrow pointed base. The single fill (406) was the same as primary ditch fill (402). The posthole may represent evidence of a palisade associated with the ditch.

3.18 The nature and size of the ditch suggests that it may have formed a boundary ditch, dated, from the finds, to the late Neolithic/early Bronze Age. No evidence for the ditch was observed within Trench 5, indicating that it either terminates or turns in the area between the two trial trenches.

Trench data:

Context	Type	Description	Dimensions (m)
401	Cut	Linear 'V' shaped cut feature with a curved base, aligned north to south. Boundary ditch.	Length: 1.65m+ Width: 1.55m Depth: 0.65m
402	Fill	Concreted, dark yellowish brown, very slightly clayey sandy gravel. Primary fill of [401].	Length: 0.55m+ Width: 0.65m Depth: 0.25m
403	Fill	Firm, dark yellowish brown, slightly clayey sandy gravel. Secondary fill of [401].	Length: 0.55m+ Width: 1.50m+ Depth: 0.30m
404	Fill	Soft, brown, clayey sand. Tertiary fill of [401].	Length: 1.65m+ Width: 0.90m Depth: 0.15m
405	Cut	Sub-ovoid cut feature with steep sides and a narrow pointed base. Posthole in base of ditch [401].	Length: 0.33m Width: 0.23m Depth: 0.40m
406	Fill	Concreted, dark yellowish brown, very slightly clayey sandy gravel. Fill of [405].	Length: 0.33m Width: 0.23m Depth: 0.40m

Trench 5

3.19 Trench 5 was 29.80m in length and 1.60m in width, aligned northwest - southeast, to the southeast of and perpendicular to the mid-point of Trench 4.

3.20 The trench showed evidence of natural striations and silty hollows.

3.21 Cut through a large silty hollow in the south-east end of the trench, a cut feature was observed [501]. The full shape of the feature in plan could not be observed within the confines of the trench. It may form either a large sub-circular feature, or a linear feature which is turning from a north – south alignment to a northwest – southeast alignment. The feature had shallow slightly concave sides and a flat base. The cut contained two fills (502), and (503).

- The primary fill (502) consisted of a grey (10YR 6/1), sandy gravel with frequent flint and sandstone inclusions. A single small undiagnostic sherd of prehistoric pottery was recovered from the fill. The sherd is probably late Neolithic/early Bronze Age in date.
- The secondary fill (503) consisted of a dark yellowish brown (10YR 4/6), slightly clayey sandy gravel with very frequent flint and sandstone inclusions and occasional charcoal flecks.

3.22 It was not possible to ascertain the form or function of this feature within the confines of the evaluation trench or from the single sherd of prehistoric pottery recovered from it. The profile of the feature differs from ditch [401] observed in Trench 4, and it is, therefore, unlikely to be a continuation of that feature.

Trench data:

Context	Type	Description	Dimensions (m)
501	Cut	Large cut feature with shallow slightly concave sides and a flat base. Feature of uncertain form or function.	Length: 7.30m+ Width: 1.60m+ Depth: 0.35m
502	Fill	Firm, grey, sandy gravel. Primary fill of [501].	Length: 7.30m+ Width: 1.60m+ Depth: 0.15m
503	Fill	Firm, dark yellowish brown, slightly clayey sandy gravel. Secondary fill of [501].	Length: 7.30m+ Width: 1.60m+ Depth: 0.20m

Concordance of finds

3.23 A total of five sherds of pottery, weighing 20g, including a rim sherd, were recovered from fill (404) in ditch [401], the poorly preserved fabric was black and appeared to be bonfire-fired. The pottery dated to the late Neolithic/early Bronze Age. A further two small pieces of poorly fired clay, weighing 5g, may represent pottery from the same period.

3.24 A single late Neolithic/early Bronze Age flint scraper, weighing 5g, was recovered from fill (404) in ditch [401]. The flint measures 33mm long by 26mm wide by 5mm deep, and shows signs of retouch along three edges.

3.25 A single piece of daub, weighing 4g, was recovered from fill (404) in ditch [401].

3.26 A single undiagnostic sherd of prehistoric pottery, weighing 4g, was recovered from fill (502) in feature [501]. The sherd probably dates to the late Neolithic/early Bronze Age.

3.27 No further work is proposed on these artefacts.

Bulk Samples

3.28 A single environmental sample was taken from fill (404) in ditch [401]. The sample was sieved and examined at a macroscopic level to assess its potential for yielding environmental data.

3.29 The sample yielded a few very small charcoal fragments, suggesting a limited potential to provide significant environmental data.

4. Discussion & Conclusion

4.1 Five trenches were excavated in order to investigate whether archaeological features identified on the adjacent site to the north, extended into the present site. The two trenches at the eastern end of the study area revealed archaeological remains but the remaining three were blank.

4.2 Trenches 4 and 5 revealed features of probable late Neolithic/early Bronze Age date including a boundary ditch [401] and posthole [405], and a large cut feature [501]. The posthole cut into the base of the ditch [401] is suggestive of a possible palisade. This may indicate that the ditch had a defensive function.

4.3 The form and function of cut feature [501] was unclear. It could form part of a very large sub-circular pit or of a shallow ditch which is turning. It is also possible that the feature is the result of natural disturbance associated with the natural silty hollow within which it is located. The presence of a small and abraded sherd of prehistoric pottery is not conclusive evidence that this feature is archaeological in origin.

4.4 The lack of archaeological features in Trenches 1-3 suggests that prehistoric activity may be focused to the east of ditch [401]. The lack of features of Roman-British date in any of the trenches suggests that the focus of activity at this date is located outside the study area.

Conclusion

4.5 The evaluation of the site has revealed evidence of prehistoric archaeological activity at the eastern end of the site. No features later in date than the prehistoric period were recorded.

4.6 On this basis, it is considered unlikely that development of the site will encounter or disturb significant archaeological features or deposits of any period to the west of Trench 4. There is however a high risk that features of prehistoric date will be encountered to the east of Trench 4 during the development.

Confidence Rating

4.7 Although there was intermittent rain in the course of the fieldwork, the conditions were generally acceptable for the identification of potential features and deposits, and for their investigation. There were no circumstances which would lead to a confidence rating for the work which was less than High.

5. Bibliography

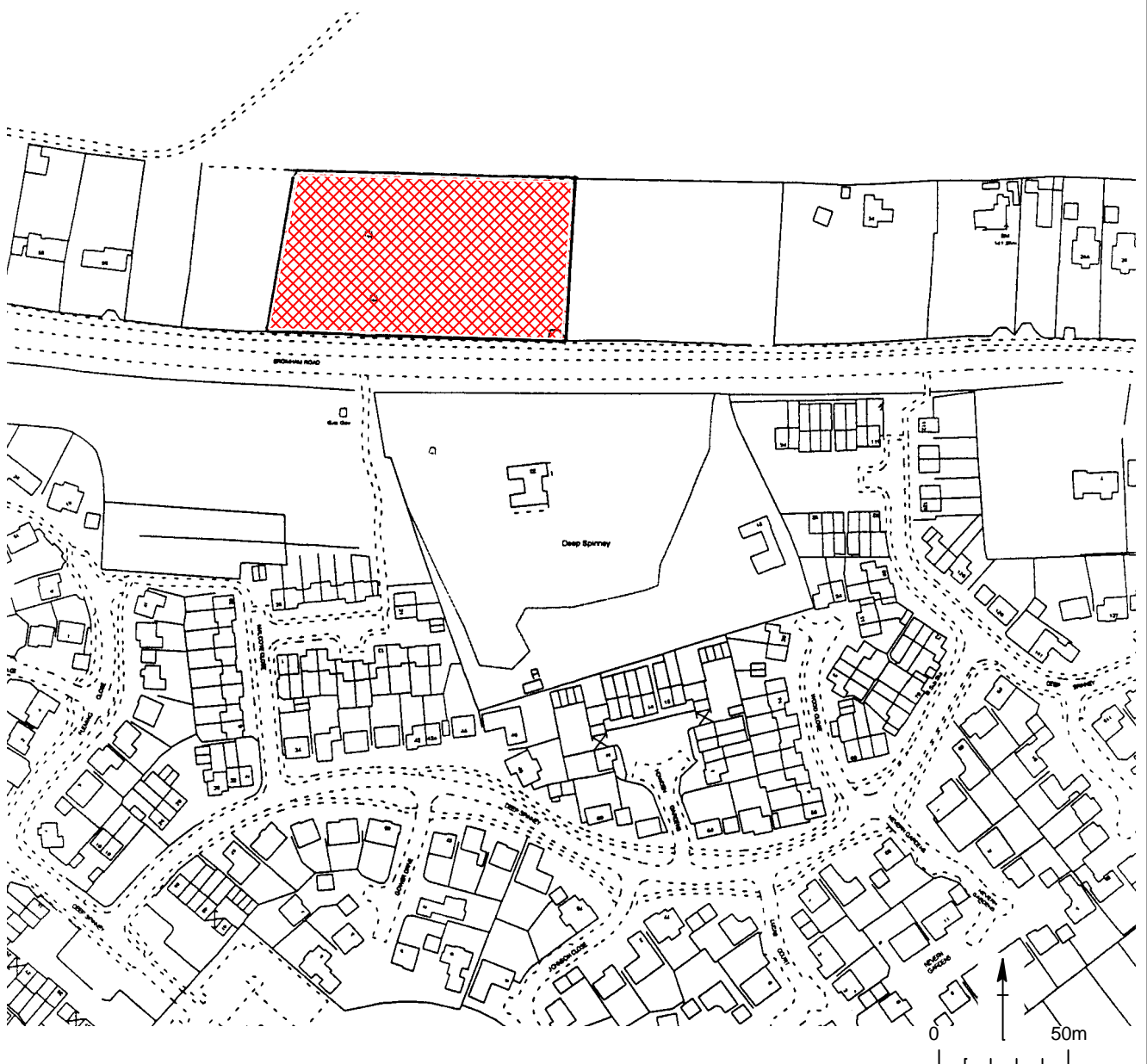
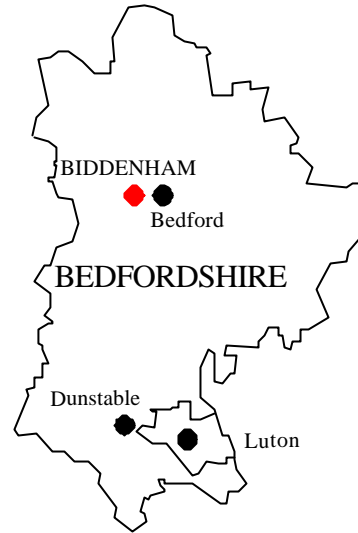
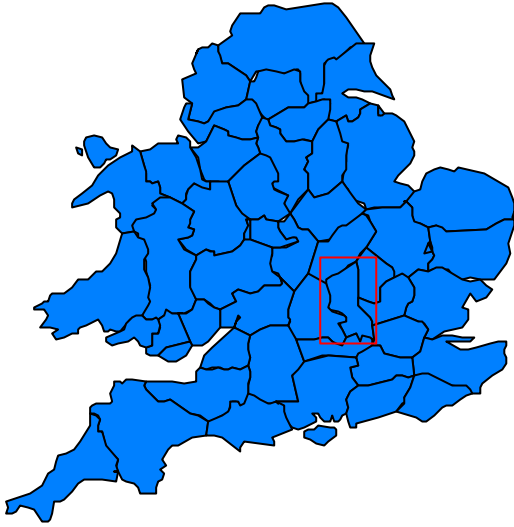
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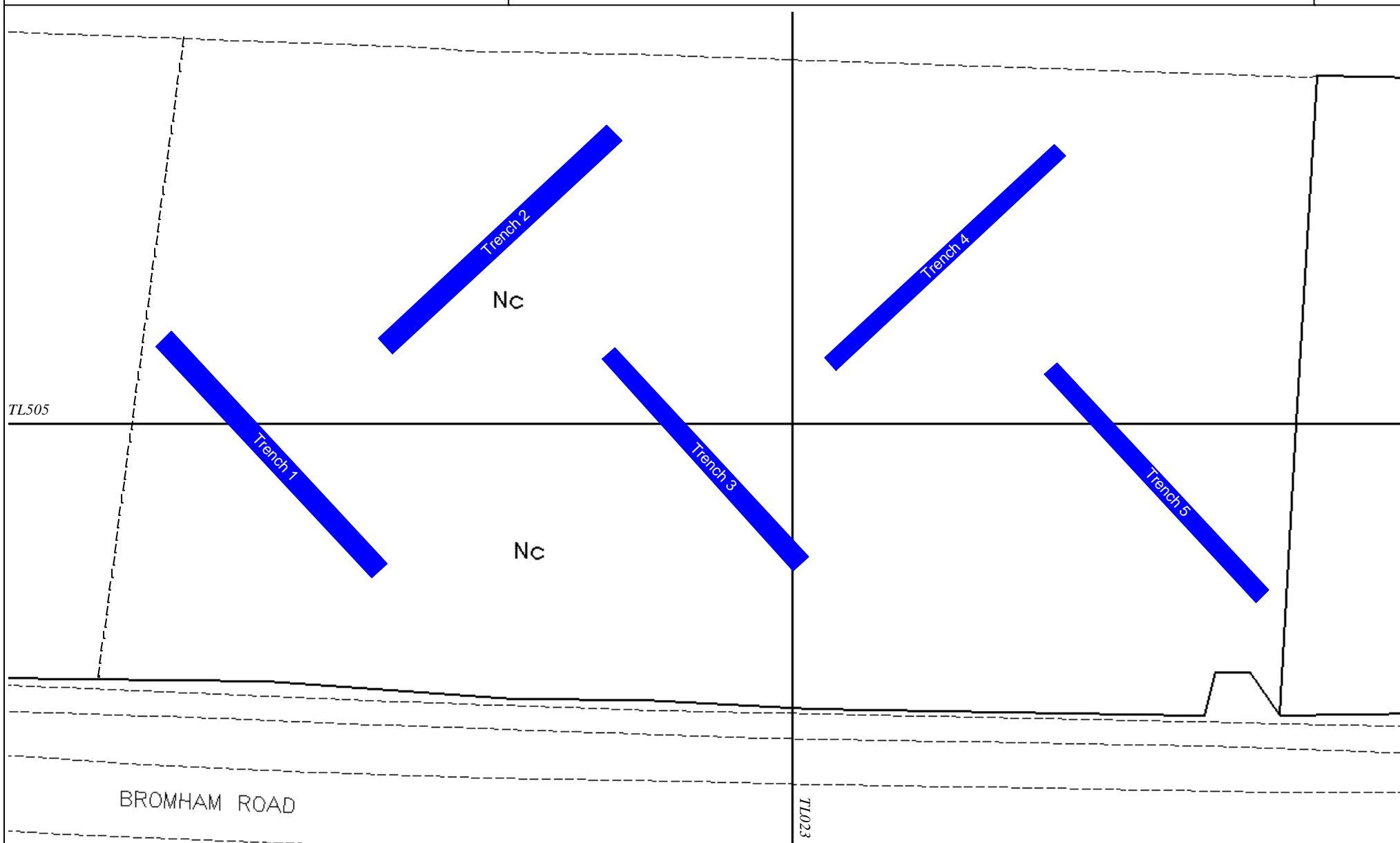
6. Illustrations

Figure 1	Site location
Figure 2	Trench location
Figure 3	Trench plans and sections



Site Location

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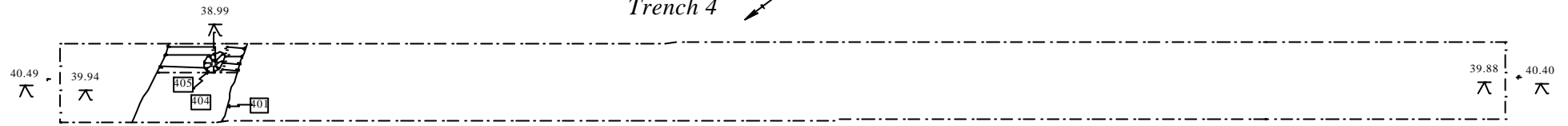


Trench location

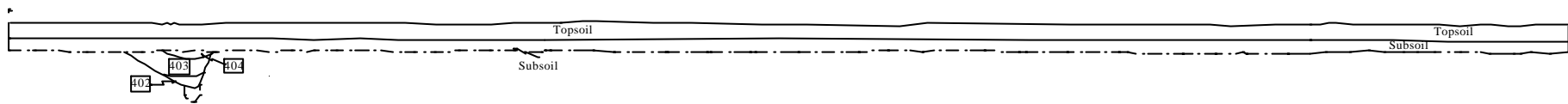
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Figure 2

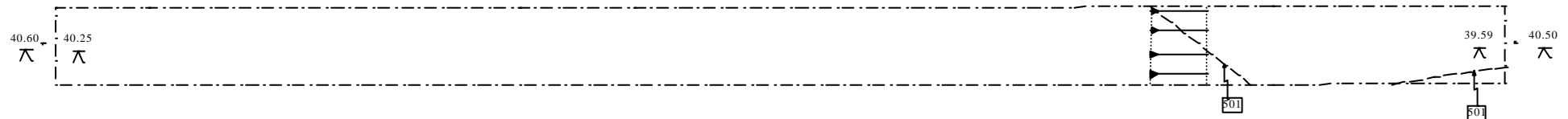
Trench 4 ↙



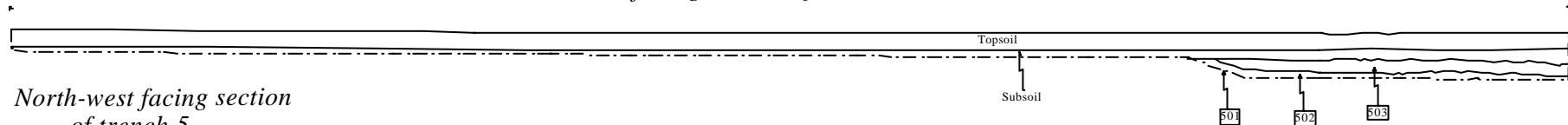
Northwest facing section of Trench 4



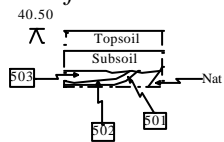
Trench 5 ↖



Southwest facing section of Trench 5



North-west facing section of trench 5



Trench plans & sections

Scale 1:125

Figure 3