

# **Land to the north of Whittlesey Railway Station, Cambridgeshire**

## **archaeological desk-based assessment**

*on behalf of*

**Reliant Building Contractors Ltd**

**Report 2129**  
December 2008

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*101 Elm Tree Court, London NW8 9JT*

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## **1. Summary**

- 1.1 This report presents the results of an archaeological desk-based assessment, conducted in advance of a proposed development on land to the north of the Railway Station, Whittlesey, Cambridgeshire. The assessment comprised a search of pertinent documentary and cartographic records, and a field visit.
- 1.2 The works were commissioned by Reliant Building Contractors Ltd and conducted by Archaeological Services Durham University.

### ***Results***

- 1.3 There are no historic or statutorily protected buildings in the vicinity of the site. The structures on site are of 20<sup>th</sup> century date. There is one Scheduled Ancient Monument in the vicinity of the site.
- 1.4 There is no direct evidence that the proposed development area was occupied during the prehistoric or Romano-British periods, but significant evidence has been discovered in the surrounding area and an as yet unidentified resource has the potential to exist. Any resource may also be waterlogged and hence in a good state of preservation.
- 1.5 During the medieval and post-medieval periods the area was outside the area of settlement; the area was not occupied until the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Evidence of agricultural activity and fen drainage may occur on the site, but evidence for settlement from these periods is unlikely.
- 1.6 The proposed development has the potential to impact upon any archaeological resource that is present through demolition, drainage and the construction of foundations and associated services.

### ***Recommendations***

- 1.7 No archaeological deposits have been identified which require preservation *in situ*. The development will not impact upon any statutorily protected or historic buildings.
- 1.8 Given the potential for survival of archaeological deposits, particularly from the prehistoric and Roman periods, it is probable that the planning authority will require that archaeological trial trenches are excavated in order to establish their nature and extent. This could be supplemented by an auger or borehole survey which will provide information on the depth and nature of deposits in the central and western part of the site, including potentially waterlogged remains.

## **2. Project background**

### ***Location (Figure 1)***

- 2.1 The site is located on land to the north of the Railway Station, Whittlesey, Cambridgeshire (grid reference TL 2759 9643). It covers an area of 3.67 ha, and is bound by the railway to the south, houses and gardens to the west and north-west, and allotment gardens and a recycling centre to the north.

### ***Development proposal***

- 2.2 Development of the land may require demolition of the warehouse, removal of the hard surface, railway lines and mature trees and draining of the western part of the site.

### ***Objective***

- 2.3 The objective of the scheme of works was to assess the nature, extent and potential significance of any surviving archaeological features within the proposed development area, so that an informed decision may be made regarding the nature and scope of any further scheme of archaeological works that may be required in advance of development.

### ***Specification summary***

- 2.4 The works have been undertaken in accordance with standard Archaeological Services procedures for desk-based assessments.

### ***Dates***

- 2.5 The field visit took place on 20<sup>th</sup> November 2008. This report was prepared between 17<sup>th</sup> November and 4<sup>th</sup> December 2008.

### ***Personnel***

- 2.6 Research was conducted by Judith Roberts. This report was prepared by Judith Roberts, with illustrations by David Graham. The Project Manager was Peter Carne.

### ***Archive/OASIS***

- 2.7 Archaeological Services is registered with the **Online Access to the Index of archaeological investigationS** project (OASIS). The OASIS ID number for this project is **archaeol3-52178**.

### ***Acknowledgements***

- 2.8 Archaeological Services is grateful for the assistance of Sarah Poppy and Sally Thompson, Historic Environment Officers for Cambridgeshire, and the personnel of Cambridgeshire Archive Office, in facilitating this scheme of works.

### **3. Landuse, topography and geology**

#### *Landuse*

- 3.1 At the time of the desk-based survey, part of the site was in use as a depot with large areas of hard standing. The northern and western part of the site is currently rough scrub, with a pond and disused railway tracks running along the northern boundary.

#### *Topography*

- 3.2 The parish of Whittlesey includes two islands rising out of the surrounding fenland. The town has developed on the larger of the islands, which rises to a maximum height of approximately 8m aOD. The development site lies on the south-eastern edge of the island, to the north of the railway line. The mean elevation is approximately 3m aOD.

#### *Geology and soils*

- 3.3 Whittlesey developed on a deposit of March gravels overlying Oxford Clay. Off the gravels, the surrounding fen is composed of peat, formed during prehistoric periods, sealed by alluvial silts. British Geological Survey boreholes to the west of the site (Whittlesey drainage boreholes 8 and 9) provide information to a depth of 6m.

### **4. Historical and archaeological development**

#### *The prehistoric period (up to AD 70)*

- 4.1 The gravel island of Whittlesey was occupied during prehistory to gain access to a wide range of natural resources. Palaeolithic artefacts were found in gravel quarries to the south and east of the development site (HERs 02958 and 10597). The fens, fen-edge and inter-tidal zones have also been identified as being prime locations for the recovery of well preserved Mesolithic and Neolithic sites (Brown and Murphy 1997, 12). Neolithic occupation in the fens was seasonal, and in many cases in the same location as Mesolithic sites. Palaeolithic and Mesolithic finds have been identified just over 1km to the west of the site (HER 07840). The Fenland Project (Hall 1987) identified flint implements around the edge of the island just over 1km to the north and east of the development site (HERs 10162 and 10163).
- 4.2 Bronze Age activity on the surrounding fen islands is extensive, with the nationally important site of Flag Fen lying to the west, with its well-preserved timber structures. Excavations on a small land bridge between the islands of Whittlesey and Northey encountered Neolithic monuments and Bronze Age settlement. Human remains tentatively dated to the Bronze Age were found 200m to the north-east of the development site (HER 01482), and a ground stone axe dated to the Bronze Age was found to the east of Gildenburgh Water (HER MCB16727).
- 4.3 Iron Age and Romano-British settlement activity was recorded during excavations at Burdett Nurseries (Dickens *et al* 2004, 186). Aerial

photographs of this area (HER 04335) and to the north-east (HERs 4154 and 4155) show a range of undated cropmarks which may belong to these periods.

- 4.4 There is no direct evidence of prehistoric activity in the proposed development site. However, the extensive archaeological resource relating to prehistory in the surrounding area indicates that an as yet unidentified resource has the potential to survive.

***The Roman period (AD 70 to 5<sup>th</sup> century)***

- 4.5 A considerable quantity of Roman material has been found in Whittlesey. One of the most significant Roman features is the Fen Causeway (HER CB15033), just over a km to the north of the development site. This 38 mile long route crosses the fens and is visible either as an earthwork or cropmark for much of its length. The route was laid out in the 1st century AD and settlement developed where it crossed the gravel islands. In the lower lying fens the route was initially a canal, which silted up and was later turned into a road.
- 4.6 The fens were drained and settled during the Roman period to take advantage of a wide range of agricultural and wild resources. The Fenland Project (Hall 1987) identified numerous sites in the area. To the south and south-east of the development site there is settlement evidence (HERs 02920 and 02949). Roman coins have been found to the north-east (HER 02938) and Roman pottery was found during excavations at Whittlesey Post Office yard (HERs 01963A; ECB501) and at Manor View (HER MCB 15935).
- 4.7 There is no direct evidence for Roman activity on the proposed development area, but the substantial resource in the surrounding area indicates that there is potential for a resource relating to this period to survive on the site.

***The medieval period (5<sup>th</sup> century to 1540)***

- 4.8 The name of Whittlesey is thought to derive from a combination of a personal name and 'Ea' being the Anglo-Saxon for island, i.e. *Wittel's Ea*. The island was occupied during the Anglo-Saxon period and an inhumation cemetery and settlement site were discovered in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (HER 02921).
- 4.9 Documentary records referring to Whittlesey date from AD973. Documents record two manors in the parish – the manor of St. Mary was granted to Thorney Abbey in 973 and the manor of St. Andrew was granted to Ely Abbey in 1000AD (Pugh 1953, 126). By the time of the Domesday survey in 1087 the village was known as Witesie.
- 4.10 Evidence for medieval activity in Whittlesey is concentrated in the present town centre, around the churches of St. Andrew (HER CB14921) and St. Mary (HER 02928), to the north-west of the development site. The church of St. Mary retains 13<sup>th</sup> century elements with later additions. The medieval settlement would not have extended as far as the proposed development area.
- 4.11 Medieval window glass and settlement remains were found during excavations at the Post Office (HERs 01359 and 01963; ECB501). An Edward I (1272-1307) silver groat (HER 01360) and a 14<sup>th</sup> century pilgrim's bottle (HER

01727) were also found in the town centre. A 'Poor Hospital' (HER 02916) was founded in Whittlesey in 1391 but apparently was never finished. The location of Burystead Manor is suggested by the presence of a moat (HER 12010) although there is little supporting evidence for this claim.

- 4.12 Excavations conducted in 1981-83 between St. Mary's church and Market Square (HER 11910) produced medieval domestic artefacts, pottery and animal bone in pits, sealed by a yard surface. More recent archaeological work in this area (HER MCB17978; ECB 2979) revealed quarry pits re-used as rubbish pits and a possible well in the back yards or gardens of properties around the Market Square.

***The post-medieval period (1541 to 1899)***

- 4.13 In 1563 there were 355 householders (approximately 1500 people) in Whittlesey and the town ranked second amongst the towns of the Isle, with Ely being first (Pugh 1953, 123). The economic importance of the town continued into the 17<sup>th</sup> century.
- 4.14 The right to hold a market and three annual fairs was granted in 1715. The Butter Cross (HER 02814; DCB1984; SAM 32) was built in the late 17<sup>th</sup> or early 18<sup>th</sup> century and is still in use as a market house.
- 4.15 Maps of Cambridgeshire from the 17<sup>th</sup> century onwards show the town to the north of the Whittlesey Dyke between the Old Nen(e) and the New Nen(e). These maps show the growth of the town around the market place and junction of the road from Peterborough to March and from Ramsey to Thorney and Crowland. The town did not encroach into the proposed development area. Several of the maps show the drainage of the surrounding fens, much of which was accomplished by wind pumps (HER 02894). The drained fens provided rich agricultural land, and windmills were visible across the flat landscape (HERs 02909 and 02912) as are the wind turbines of today.
- 4.16 The Inclosure Award for Whittlesey is dated 1844 (Figure 2) and at this time the development site was agricultural land, crossed by north to south running field boundaries, to the south of the Thirtythird Public Watercourse.
- 4.17 The Eastern Region railway between Peterborough and Ely was built in 1846 and it is likely that the sidings that occupy parts of the site were built around this time.
- 4.18 The 1st Edition Ordnance Survey map, dated 1888 (Figure 3), shows the development site north of the railway line with goods sheds and sidings. The development site is lower than the surrounding area but it is not clear whether this is the result of ground reduction work or embankment of the railway line and surrounding area. The western part of the site is shown as rough scrubland.



### ***The modern period (1900 to present)***

- 4.19 The 2nd Edition Ordnance Survey Map, dated 1903 (Figure 4), shows a similar layout for the development site as do the 1927 and 1950 Ordnance Survey maps (Figures 5 and 6).
- 4.20 The area around the development site was exploited from the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century by gravel quarrying and for tile and brick manufacture. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century over 12% of the population worked in the brick industry and over 40% worked in agriculture. In the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the town expanded along Station Road and New Road.
- 4.21 During the Second World War a series of pillboxes (HER CB15190) were constructed along the southern bank of the Whittlesey Dyke.

### ***Previous archaeological works***

- 4.22 A considerable amount of archaeological work has been carried out in Whittlesey in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Much of this has consisted of watching briefs and evaluations by trial trenching in the town in advance of developments (Appendix 1). These interventions produced mainly medieval, post-medieval or undated remains. Excavation to the west and north has found extensive prehistoric and Roman remains.

### ***The buildings***

- 4.23 There are no statutorily protected buildings on the development site. Whittlesey has numerous old stone-built houses and over seventy Listed Buildings. These are mainly clustered around the market place and churches and form the historic core of the town. The Manor House (HER 02918), south of St. Mary's Church, is 15<sup>th</sup> century in origin but was considerably enlarged in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Pottery of 16<sup>th</sup> century date was found at the Manor House (HER 01361) and at nearby properties (MCB15935).

## **5. Site reconnaissance**

- 5.1 A field visit was conducted to help ascertain the potential of the proposed development area to contain any archaeological resource. The visit noted site topography, earthworks and areas of modern overburden, modern services, boundaries, buildings and other upstanding remains. A *pro forma* recording sheet was completed.
- 5.2 Much of the southern part of the site is covered with a fenced compound with hard standing and a large metal warehouse (Figure 7). To the rear of the depot are several manholes and a considerable amount of modern rubbish.
- 5.3 Along the north-eastern part of the site the land rises. At the base of the slope are tracks of the disused railway with mature trees growing through them (Figure 8). The tracks are in relatively good condition with stone chippings between. There is no visible evidence for the railway goods shed shown on the historic Ordnance Survey mapping.

- 5.4 The central and western part of the development site is overgrown with trees and shrubby undergrowth (Figure 9).
- 5.5 A large part of this area was flooded at the time of the site visit (Figure 10). This is the area shown on all detailed maps as scrubland or marsh.

## **6. The potential archaeological resource**

- 6.1 There is no direct evidence for prehistoric or Roman activity within the study area but the presence of significant activity in the vicinity indicates that an as yet unidentified resource has the potential to exist.
- 6.2 Archaeological deposits relating to the medieval and post-medieval period may survive over the site. This evidence is likely to be restricted to drains and field boundaries, together with features related to the construction of the railway, rather than to settlement.
- 6.3 The western part of the site does not appear to have been occupied during the historic period, and the waterlogged nature of the ground indicates that the potential for preservation of any archaeological remains that survive on the site is high. The railway sidings and modern depot are unlikely to have deep foundations, so apart from truncation by drains and deep service trenches, any archaeological resource is likely to have been preserved.

## **7. Impact assessment**

### *Direct impact*

- 7.1 Development of the site will have an impact on any surviving archaeological resource through the demolition of existing buildings and removal of hard standing, services and trees. The exact nature of the proposed development is not known, but excavation of foundations and services will impact on any underlying archaeological deposits that may be present.
- 7.2 Draining of the site will have an impact on any deep and potentially waterlogged remains.

## **8. Recommendations**

- 8.1 No archaeological deposits have been identified which require preservation *in situ*. The development will not impact upon any statutorily protected or historic buildings.
- 8.2 Given the potential for survival of archaeological deposits, particularly from the prehistoric and Roman periods, it is probable that the planning authority will require that archaeological trial trenches are excavated in order to establish their nature and extent. This could be supplemented by an auger or borehole survey which will provide information on the depth and nature of deposits in the central and western part of the site, including potentially waterlogged remains.

## **9. Sources**

### ***Cartographic sources***

Ordnance Survey 1st Edition 1888, 6" sheet 134

Ordnance Survey 2nd Edition 1903, 6" sheet 134

Ordnance Survey 1927, Sheet 14NE

Ordnance Survey 1950, Sheet 14NE

(other maps were examined in secondary sources or on-line)

### ***Other sources***

Brown, N and Murphy P, 1997 Neolithic and Bronze Age in Glazebrook J (ed.) *Research and Archaeology: a Framework for the Eastern Counties, 1. resource assessment*, Norwich

Dickens, A, Grassam, A, Popescu, E and Poppy, S, 2004 Fieldwork in Cambridgeshire 2003, *Proceedings of the Cambridge Antiquarian Society* **93**

Pugh, R B (ed.) 1953 *Victoria County History: A History of the County of Cambridgeshire and the Isle of Ely* **4** (reprinted 1967) London

Hall, D, 1987 *Fenland Project 2: Fenland Landscapes and Settlement between Peterborough and March* East Anglian Archaeology **35** Norwich

### ***Cambridgeshire Archives***

PRO170/(R99/72) Tithe map and apportionment

### ***Websites***

[www.heritagegateway.org.uk](http://www.heritagegateway.org.uk)

[www.a2a.pro.gov.uk](http://www.a2a.pro.gov.uk)

[www.magic.gov.uk](http://www.magic.gov.uk)

[www.visionofbritain.org.uk](http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk)

<http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.ancestry.com>

<http://ads.adhs.ac.uk>

<http://venus.uflm.cam.ac.uk>

<http://www.imagesofengland.org.uk>

<http://pastscape.english-heritage.org.uk>

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk>

### ***Aerial photographs***

The built-up nature of the development site made it unlikely that aerial photographs would be of use in establishing the presence of archaeological remains on site or in the vicinity. A range of vertical photographs of the area around Whittlesey is available at the Cambridge University Centre for Aerial

Photographs. One oblique photograph of the area close to the development site shows vegetation in the old brickworks (Photograph no. BAA93, taken November 1969)

## Appendix 1: Historic Environment Record

The tables include sites recorded within 750m of the study area.

### Historic Environment Record (SAM = Scheduled Ancient Monument)

HER	SAM	Description	Date
01359		Window glass	medieval
01360		Edward I groat	medieval
01361		Ceramic jug	16th century
01482		Human remains	?Bronze Age
01727		Lead pilgrim's bottle	14th century
01963		Window glass	medieval
01963A		Pottery	Roman
01963B		Storage vessel	medieval
01963C		Bronze brooch	13th/14th century
01963D		Bone implement	?medieval
01963E		Large cooking pot	medieval
01963F		Tripod skillet	medieval
01963G		Stone object	undated
01963H		Pottery	medieval
02814	*	Market cross	post-medieval
02894		Wind pump	post-medieval
02909		Disused windmill	post-medieval
02912		Windmill	post-medieval
02916		Hospital	medieval
02917		Portland House and gate	16th-17th century
02918		Manor House	15th-17th century
02920		Pottery	Roman
02921		Cemetery	Anglo-Saxon
02928		St. Mary's Church	medieval
02938		Coins	Roman
02949		Settlement	?Roman
02958		Flint implements	Palaeolithic
4154		Cropmarks	undated
4155		Cropmarks	undated
04335		Cropmarks	undated
10597		Flint implements	Palaeolithic
11910		Pits	medieval
12010		Moat	medieval
CB14922		St. Jude's Church	1963
CB15033		Fen Causeway	Roman
CB15172		Military vehicle depot	modern
CB15190		Pillboxes	1939-45
CB15239		Pits	17th century
MCB15935		Settlement remains	medieval
MCB16624		Maltings	post-medieval
MCB17675		Quarry and dump	post-medieval
MCB17978		Quarry and dump	medieval

**Listed buildings**

<b>PRN</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Grade</b>
402414	27 Eastgate	II
402493	Vinpenta House	II*
402671	5 Market Place	II
402672	6 and 7 Market Place	II
402673	8 Market Place	II
402674	George Hotel	II
402675	Post Office	II*
402679	Market Cross	II*
403371	Portland Place gate pillars	II
403372	Portland Place piers	II
403373	War Memorial	II
403376	8 Market Place gate piers	II

**Previous archaeological work**

<b>ECB</b>	<b>Description</b>
501	Whittlesey Post Office; excavation
893	6 Inhams Road; archaeological evaluation
1881	North-west of Pump House, Station Road; archaeological evaluation
2412	Land at Station Road; archaeological evaluation
2957	Burdett Nurseries; desk-based assessment
2979	Old Post Office; archaeological evaluation



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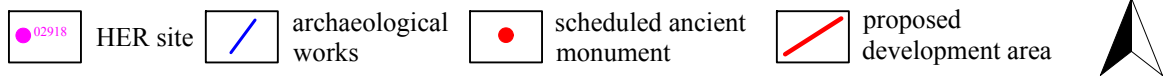
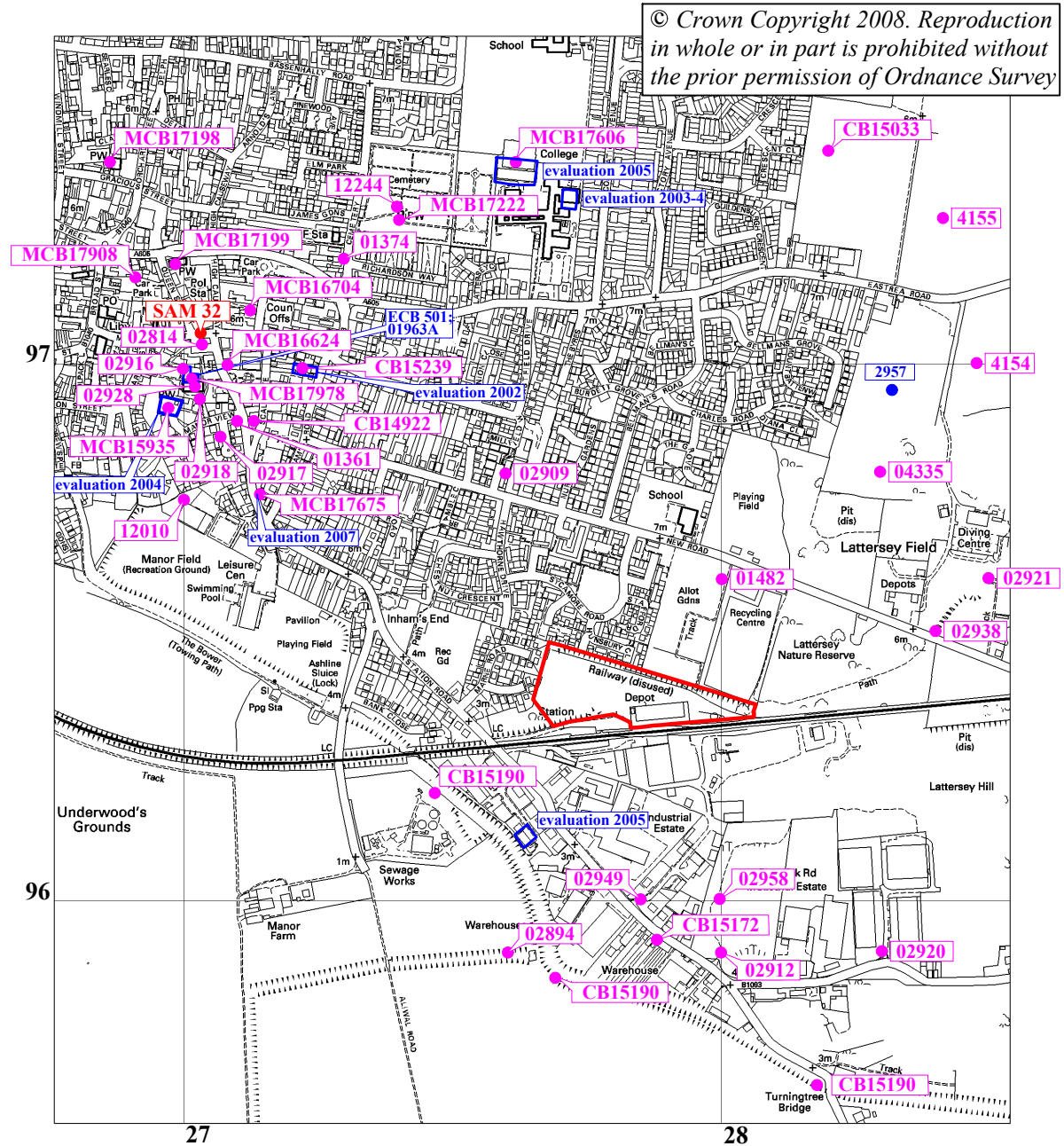
Figure 1

Location of the proposed development area and HER sites

0 500m



scale 1:12 500 - for A4 plot





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Figure 2

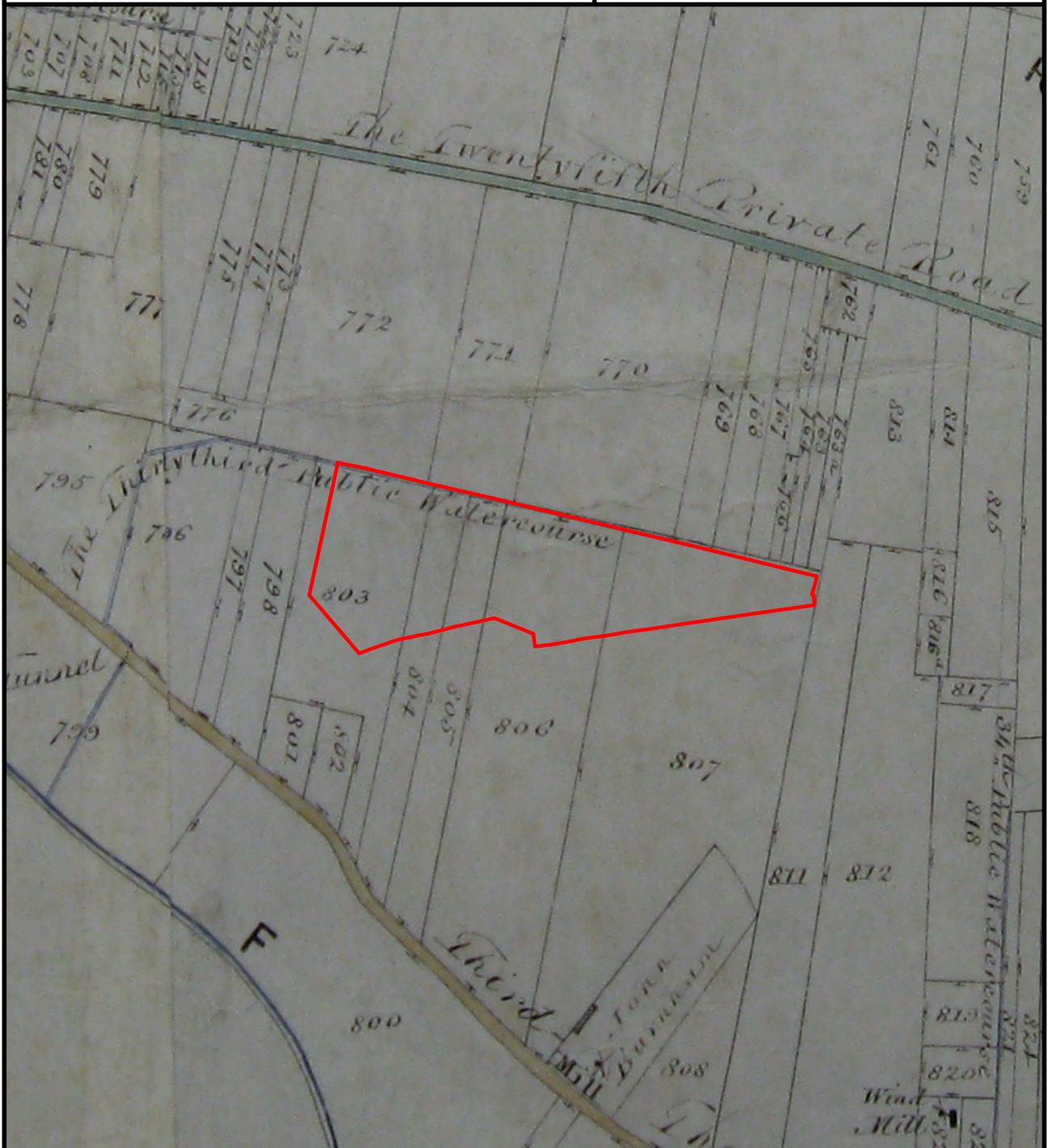
Extract from the Inclosure Award, 1844

on behalf of  
**Reliant Building Contractors Ltd**

0 250m



scale 1:5000 - for A4 plot



location of the proposed development area







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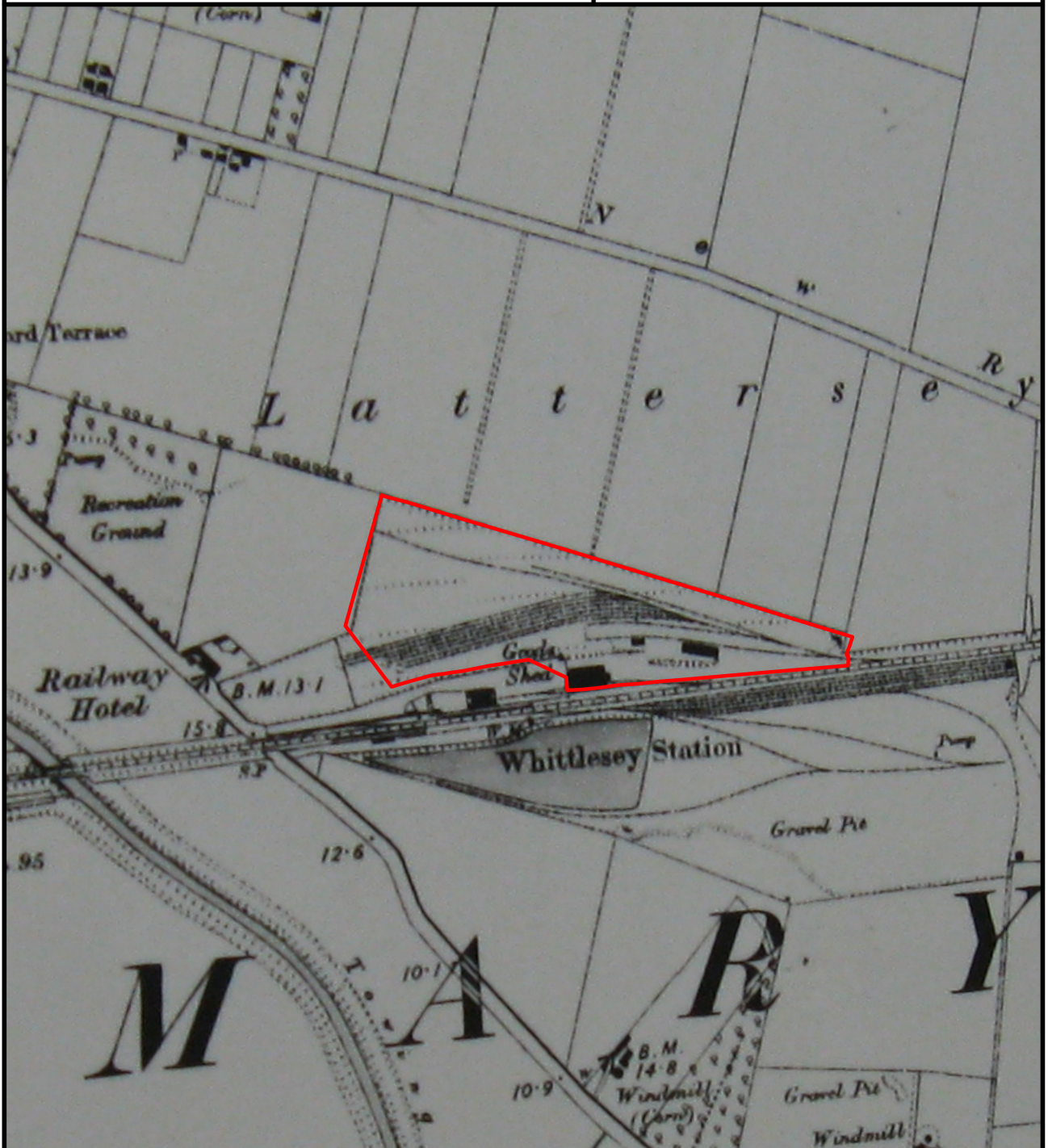
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Figure 3

*Extract from the 1st edition Ordnance Survey map, 1844*

0 250m

scale 1:5000 - for A4 plot



proposed development area





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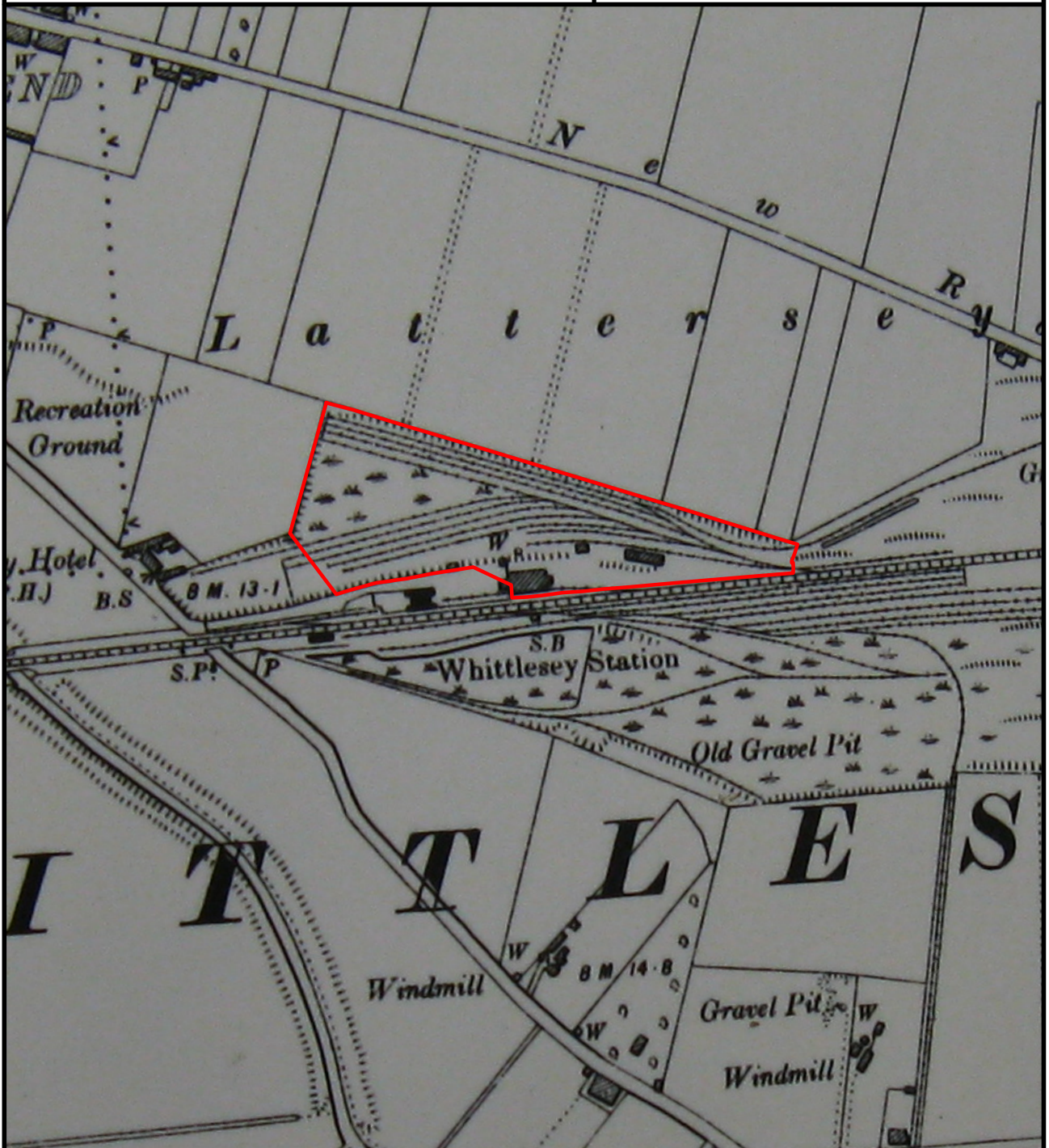
Figure 4

Extract from the 2nd edition Ordnance Survey map, 1903

on behalf of  
**Reliant Building Contractors Ltd**

0 250m

scale 1:5000 - for A4 plot



proposed development area





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Figure 5

*Extract from Ordnance Survey map, 1927*

0 250m

scale 1:5000 - for A4 plot



proposed development area





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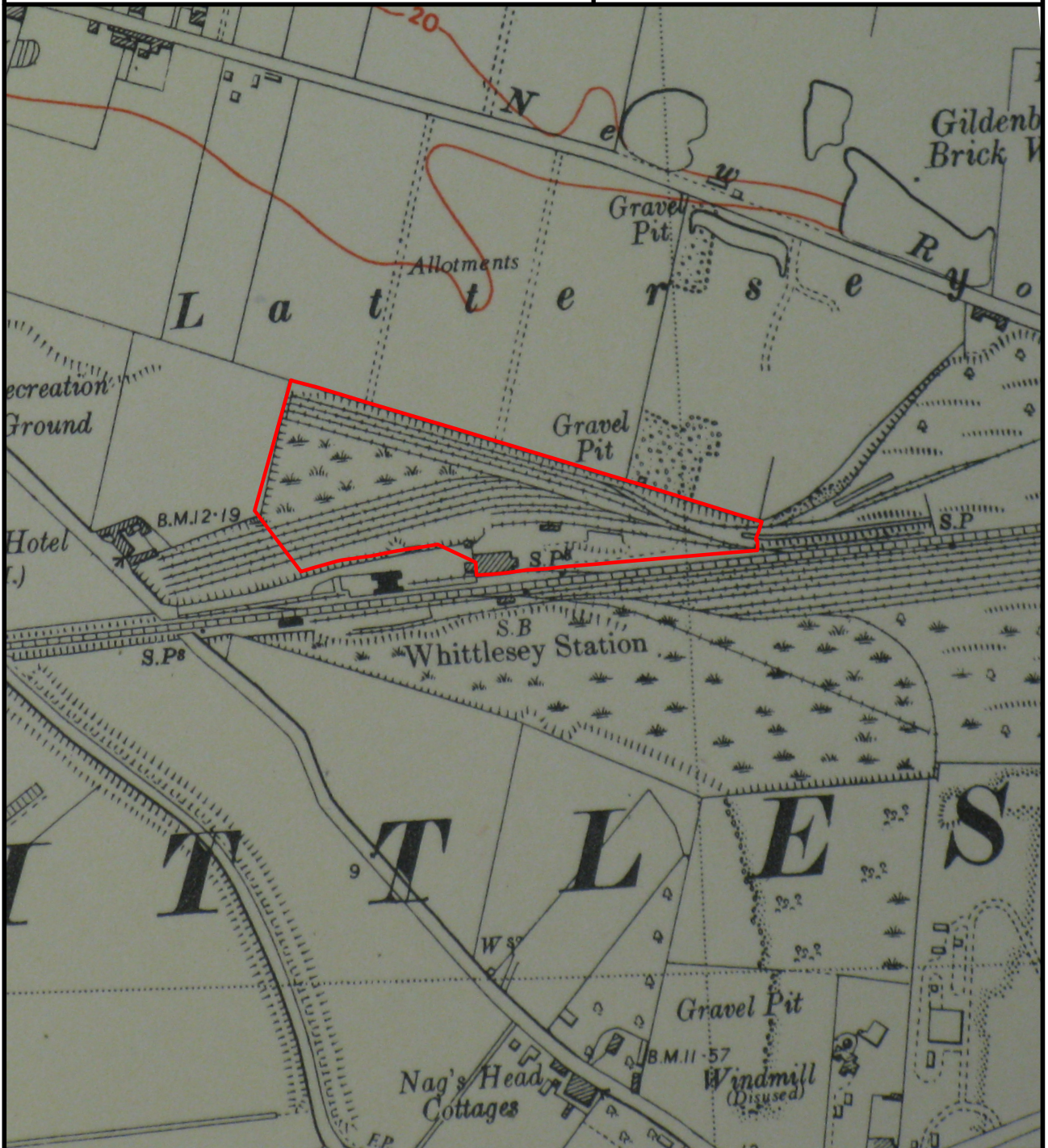
Figure 6

Extract from Ordnance Survey map, 1950

on behalf of  
**Reliant Building Contractors Ltd**



scale 1:5000 - for A4 plot



proposed development area





**Figure 7**  
View to south showing warehouse and hard standing



**Figure 8**  
View to west showing disused railway line



**Figure 9**  
View to north through undergrowth



**Figure 10**  
Flooded area in western part of the site