

**Lidsey Well Site, Lidsey Road  
Aldingbourne, West Sussex**

**NGR SU 945 032**

**Arun District  
Barnham Parish**

**Geoarchaeological  
Assessment Report**

**Planning reference: BN/31/05**

**Site Code: LWA 10**

**Project No: 4453**

**March 2011**

**By Dr Matt Pope,  
Dr Rob Scaife and Dr John Whittaker**

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**ASE Report no: 2011067  
OASIS no: archaeol6-97502**

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**Abstract**

*Archaeology South-East (ASE) the contracting division of the Centre for Applied Archaeology at the Institute of Archaeology, University College London were contracted by Moorhouse Petroleum Limited to conduct a geoarchaeological watching brief at Lidsey Road, Aldingbourne, West Sussex.*

*Groundworks ahead of the construction of an oil well, were initiated across the 4x4m area of the cellar construction to a depth of 1.1m to the basal limit of the made ground. At this level a stepped 3x3 metre area was taken down to 2.2 metres to the water table whereupon a sheeting wall was constructed around the walls of the cellar to prevent collapse.*

*A sequence comprising made ground, alluvium and disturbed marine deposits was recorded and sampled for palaeoenvironmental evidence. The sediments lacked microfossils but contained a pollen assemblage indicating a Mid-Late Holocene age for the deposits. The marine deposits may relate to the MIS 5e Pagham Raised Beach. The disturbed nature of the alluvial sediments and the poor degree of palaeoenvironmental preservation has led to the conclusion that further analysis of the samples would not be productive.*

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## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

**1.1** Archaeology South-East (ASE) the contracting division of the Centre for Applied Archaeology at the Institute of Archaeology, University College London were contracted by Moorhouse Petroleum Limited to conduct a geoarchaeological watching brief at Lidsey Road, Aldingbourne, West Sussex, hereafter referred to as 'the site' (Figure 1; NGR SU 945 032) during ground works for the construction of a new well site.

**1.2** Planning approval has been approved for planning application BN/31/05 with several conditions including Condition 20 which states:

*No development shall take place on the site until the applicant has secured the implementation of a programme of archaeological work in accordance with a written scheme of investigation which shall be submitted to and agreed in advance and in writing by the County Planning Authority.*

*Reason: The site is potentially of archaeological interest.*

**1.3** Groundworks were carried out on the 15<sup>th</sup> December 2010 and were monitored by Matthew Pope of Archaeology South East. This report provides an interim summary of results.

**1.4** The original WSI (ASE 2010) on which the programme of investigation was based was prepared on the basis of discussions between ASE and Moorhouse Petroleum Limited and was been prepared with reference to communication with John Mills, Senior Archaeologist, WSCC, and WSCC *Recommended Standard Archaeological Conditions* (WSCC 2007), henceforth "the Standard Conditions". All work will be carried out in accordance with these documents (unless otherwise specified below), and the relevant *Standards and Guidance* of the Institute of Field Archaeologists (IFA).

## **2.0 GEOARCHAEOLOGICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND**

- 2.1** The site is situated at 6m OD within part of the drainage system of the Lidsey Rife (NGR SU 945 032). The Lidsey Rife is a tributary of the Aldingbourne Rife system, a series of small misfit streams occupying an alluvium-filled former inlet of the English Channel. The inlet was formed when rising sea levels during the early Holocene flooded the mid-reaches of a glacial melt water channel draining the South Downs and coastal plain to the north. The Rife systems of the Sussex coastal plain are geoarchaeological significant providing an extensive records of marine, intertidal and alluvial sedimentation for the coastal plain of Sussex.
- 2.2** Previous investigations on similar Rife systems within 5km of the site have produced palaeoenvironmental evidence relating to landscape development from the end of the Pleistocene through the medieval period (Allen et al. 2004; Pine 2005; Whittaker 2007a, 2007b). We expected a similar range of sediment deposits to be present at the Lidsey site possibly comprising high energy Pleistocene fluvial deposits, marine inlet sediments, intertidal silts and fluvial alluvium. The possibility of localised peat deposits also existed at the site and for associated preservation of organic material.
- 2.3** At the contact between the basal marine/alluvial sequence and the underlying solid geology, which is mapped by the BGS as being Upper Chalk (Berry and Shephard-Thorn 1982) there also existed the possibility of encountering Pleistocene sediments associated with either the Merston or Pagham Raised Beaches (Bates et al. 1997; Bates et al. 2007a). These are of palaeogeographic significance and should also be considered archaeologically sensitive if terrestrial facies are present.

### **3.0 AIMS**

**3.1** The geoarchaeological investigations were targeted at providing a detailed characterisation of sedimentology, associated palaeoenvironmental evidence and indications of human activity under the following aims:

- To eventually develop a first order sedimentological model for the site incorporating spatial, lithological and clast constitution vectors of variation within the area investigated based on the results fo the archaeological investigation and incorporating any previous geotechnical results.
- To achieve the recovery of palaeoenvironmental samples for the off site assessment of plant macrofossil, micro palaeontology, mollusc analysis and pollen analysis.
- To provide dating samples for each major sedimentological horizon where possible to provide a chronometric control on subsequent analysis.
- To document and recover associated evidence for human activity within the sediment suites.

#### **4.0 METHODOLOGY**

**4.1** The works requiring geoarchaeological monitoring were machine excavations associated with the construction of a drilling cellar, namely the mechanical excavation of a 4m x 4m area up to 2m deep (Figure 2)

**4.2** Perimeter ditches also being excavated did not require geoarchaeological monitoring.

**4.3** Geoarchaeological monitoring was undertaken in the following way:

Groundworks were initiated across the 4m x 4m area of the cellar construction to a depth of 1.1m to the basal limit of the made ground. At this level a stepped 3m x 3m area was taken down to 2.2m to the top of the water table whereupon a sheeting wall was constructed around the walls of the cellar to prevent collapse. The cellar excavation then proceeded to a maximum depth of just over 3m.

**4.5** Recording was undertaken throughout the process and samples were taken directly from the machine bucket as entry to the hole was considered unsafe. Sections were photographed and recorded prior to shuttering.



## **5.0 RECORDING TECHNIQUES**

- 5.1** Sediments were recorded in the following manner. Beneath the made ground, detailed observations will be made of the lithological and sedimentological character of sediments encountered. These comprised detailed sediment descriptions at 0.25m intervals or at the junction of major stratigraphic or lithological boundaries. The descriptions comprised matrix lithology, coarse components, sediment cohesion and well as characterisation of superficial structures and likelihood of decalcification. Recording techniques and conventions for sedimentary units followed Jones et al 1999 and Tucker 1996.
- 5.2** Where deposits suitable for environmental sampling were encountered (such as dated excavated contexts of buried soils, well-sealed slowly silting features, sealed hearths, sealed features containing evident carbonised remains, peats, water-logged or cess deposits), bulk soil samples (40 litres or 100% of smaller features) were taken for environmental analysis.
- 5.3** As entry to the hole was not possible due to water logging and collapse it was not possible to take OSL samples from the intact sediments below made ground.

## 6.0 RESULTS

6.1 The following observations were made in the course of the watching brief; the observed sections are shown on Figure 2.

Depth	Sedimentology	Samples	Notes
0 – 0.8m	Made Ground 80% sub rounded flint gravel	None.	Imported Chichester fan gravels
0.8 -1.1	Made Ground 70% surrounded flint gravel. Terram Geotextile at base.	None.	Imported Chichester fan gravels
1.1 -1.3	Silty Clay Gley 1 5/Y Greenish grey Contorted and disturbed from earth moving.	Bulk Sample 1 Palynology Sample 1 MicroFossil Sample 1	Charcoal Flecks Noted. Occasional burnt flint fragments.
1.3-1.8m	Silty Clay. Firm to Compact. 10YR 6/6 Brownish yellow 20% subrounded white patinated flints 10-20mm, frost pitted. Some evidence of disturbance.	Bulk Sample 2 Palynology Sample 2 MicroFossil Sample 2	Brickearth/Head
1.8- 2.2m	Medium Sand. Firm 7.5YR 6/6 reddish yellow With 10% grey mottles Very occasional 40-150mm rounded marine flint gravel	Bulk Sample 3 Palynology Sample 3 MicroFossil Sample 3	Marine Sand Possible Raised Beach Deposits
2.2 - 3	Medium Sand. Waterlogged. 7.5YR 6/6 reddish yellow Very occasional 40-200mm rounded marine flint gravel	Bulk Sample 4 Palynology Sample 4 MicroFossil Sample 4 Possibly contaminated due to trench collapse.	Marine Sand Possible Raised Beach Deposits
3m	Base of Hole		

6.2 The recorded sequence appears to show facies of marine, head and alluvial origin. The basal marine deposits had the general characteristics of sands associated with raised beach deposits known to underlying the coastal plain in this area. Determining the age and character of these deposits will have to rely of careful correlation with other known beach deposits and characterisation based on microfauna. No OSL samples were obtainable due to waterlogging and safety concerns.

6.3 The marine sands were overlain by compact head deposits comprising silty clay brickearths with seams of small frost-pitted flints. The general character was a water lain Pleistocene deposit derived from solifluction gravel lobes to

the north of the site. Samples were taken but given the apparently decalcified and weathered character of these deposits the chances of significant palaeoenvironmental indicators surviving is considered small.

- 6.4** The head deposits were overlain by disturbed and contorted alluvium with a small but variable organic component and evidence of gleying. The disturbance appears to have occurred during the original preparation of the site for oil well construction although there was no clear evidence for actual contamination of the alluvial sequence to any great extent. The alluvium has modest potential for surviving pollen and small plant macrofossil remains. Charcoal flecks and brunt flint fragments may attest to human activity and intervention in the landscape at this level.
- 6.5** The entire site was covered in 1.1m of rounded flint gravel, obviously imported to raise the level of the site above the flood plan of the Lidsey Rife in advance of oil well contribution.
- 6.6** At no stage was any significant archaeology, in the form of features and artefacts identified.

## 7.0 PALAEOENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS

### 7.1 Palynological Assessment by Rob Scaife

7.2 The following three samples of alluvium were analysed to ascertain if sub-fossil pollen and spores are present and if so, to provide some background information on the vegetation and an indication of the age of the sediment sequence.

Palynology Sample 1:	1.1-1.3m:	grey alluvium
Palynology Sample 2:	1.3 -1.8m:	head deposit
Palynology Sample 3:	1.8m – 2.2m:	marine deposit

7.3 Samples 1 and 2 are of oxidised, buff and pale brown, predominantly silt and sample 3 an unoxidised and grey alluvium with higher organic content. Standard chemical pollen extraction techniques were used on larger than normal (4-5ml) samples. Much of the mineral material was removed using micromesh sieving (10 micron) and decanting. Hydrofluoric acid (boiling) was used to dissolve remaining silica. Pollen was largely absent in sample 2 and present in samples 1 and 3 from which totals of 100 to 150 grains were identified and counted. These data are listed in table 1 below.

<b>SAMPLE</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Trees</b>			
<i>Pinus</i>	1		7
<i>Quercus</i> (oak)	2	1	
<b>Herbs</b>			
<i>Dianthus</i> type (pinks)			1
<i>Plantago lanceolata</i> (ribwort plantain)	1		
<i>Centaurea nigra</i> type (knapweeds)	8		1
Lactucoideae (dandelion types)	109	1	78
Poaceae (grasses)	8		7
Cereal type			1
Cyperaceae (sedges)	20		7
Unidentified	1		
<b>Spores</b>			
<i>Pteridium aquilinum</i> (bracken)	1		2
<i>Polypodium</i> (polypody fern)	1		1
<i>Dryopteris</i> type (typical ferns)	1		1
<b>Misc.</b>			
Pre-Quaternary	1		3
<b>Total pollen</b>	153	2	102
<b>Total spores</b>	3		4

Table 1: Lidsey pollen count data

**7.4** Although pollen is present in samples 1 and 3, preservation is poor with strong indications of differential preservation in favour of robust pollen types. These include typically dandelion types (Lactucoideae) and other daisy family (Asteraceae) types such as knapweeds (*Centaurea* sp.). However, it is probable that these have been reworked from earlier soils on the interfluves or from earlier fluvial sediments because less robust types such as grasses (Poaceae) and sedges (Cyperaceae) are also present. These latter are probably more representative of the time of deposition coming from plant communities growing on the river floodplain.

**7.5** Overall, some useful conclusions can be drawn. It can be tentatively said that the environment at time of deposition was probably open, with few trees in the local area or within the pollen catchment. Even though pollen preservation is not good, if woodland existed locally, it is probable that there would be some pollen representation. The quantities of Lactucoideae (dandelion types) with grasses etc are indicative of grassland. A single grain of cereal pollen (large) indicates a Neolithic or later age for the sequence which is in accord with the suggested openness. Absence of lime (*Tilia*), even degraded/reworked further indicates a more recent (than Neolithic/EBA) age.

**7.6 Microfossil Assessment** by John Whittaker

**7.7** The following four samples were examined

Microfossil Sample 1:	1.1 - 1.3m:	grey alluvium
Microfossil Sample 2:	1.3 - 1.8m:	head
Microfossil Sample 3:	1.8m - 2.2m:	marine deposit
Microfossil Sample 4:	2.2m - 3.0m:	marine deposit

**7.8** A previous analysis of Holocene samples from the Aldingbourne Rife (Whittaker, 2007a) came from a proposed housing development site at North Bersted (NB 07). This work concerned 7 and 2 samples respectively from BH 502 and 503, 3 samples from BH 517 and 3 and 5 samples respectively from GTP 15 and BH 507. The samples from BH 502, 503 and 517 were barren. GTP 15 and BH 507, on the other hand, produced rich Holocene saltmarsh foraminifera from the Aldingbourne Rife, whilst those from BH 502 and from test pits in the Felpham-Flansham area (Whittaker, 2007b) to the southeast, yielded a Pleistocene assemblage of freshwater ostracods signifying cold/cool conditions and indicative of Devensian solifluction deposits which have proved to be quite widespread in the Bognor area (see discussion in Whittaker, 2007b).

**7.9** Microfaunal recovery then can be patchy in this area. Moreover, the present site may be situated too far north to be within tidal access at the time of deposition of the sediments, the North Bersted site being somewhat further south and west. It is true, however, that little is still known about the disposition of the Aldingbourne Rife in the Holocene or even in recent historical times. There is some evidence from BH 507 at North Bersted (Whittaker, 2007a), from the uppermost sample (7.00m), that a more marine influence developed latterly there, which may indicate sea-level rise and the area becoming more open-estuarine.

**7.10** The samples were processed in the normal way. Briefly, they were put into bowls and first dried in an oven. A teaspoon of sodium carbonate was added to help remove the clay fraction and boiling water was then added. Each sample was left to soak overnight. Washing was with warm/hot water through a 75 micron sieve. The samples were then dried again in an oven. Examination was undertaken under a binocular microscope.

**7.11** Unfortunately, all the samples were barren of microfauna (foraminifera and ostracods) and also lacked any material of a calcareous nature apart from a few reworked Cretaceous foraminifera.

Sample 1 contained a large amount of iron mineral many very small circular/oval organic objects which may be either algal cysts or spores.

Sample 2 contained iron minerals and virtually nothing else.

Sample 3 contained organic material. There are also the same circular/oval organic objects as found in Sample 1.

Sample 4 contained iron minerals, most notably goethite, which usually indicates weathering. No microfossils of any sort were found, although the sediment does look like marine sand.

**7.12** Samples 1-3 are may be freshwater, deposited beyond the limit of tidal access in the Aldingbourne Rife. The iron mineral suggests weathering and probably decalcification, but, in spite of a diligent search, no agglutinating foraminifera (indicative of saltmarsh), whose organic membrane would surely be preserved even in these circumstances, were found. There is no evidence that Sample 4 is a solifluction deposit and therefore it is unlikely to belong to the Devensian cold-climate deposits known extensively in the Bognor area, as mentioned in the Introduction. Instead, the sand appears to have a marine origin and perhaps belongs to the Pagham Raised Beach, if the height and location is in line with the known course of this deposit. In my experience, the Pagham Raised Beach (thought to be Ipswichian in age) is only patchily fossiliferous and is often completely barren.

## **8.0 CONCLUSIONS**

- 8.1** Taken together field observations and palaeoenvironmental analysis allows only tentative interpretation of the recorded sedimentary sequence at the Lidsey oil field site. The lack of microfossil evidence severely impedes any attempt to characterise the fluvial regime for the upper parts of the sequence. However, the greenish-grey silty clays encountered below made ground are almost certainly part of the Mid-Late Holocene alluviation and infilling of the Aldingbourne Rife system.
- 8.2** Pollen analysis is able to confirm that no early Holocene alluvium is present at the site, the presence of cereal grains and indicators of open vegetation conditions indicating a post Neo-EBA date for the alluvium.
- 8.3** The alluvium rests on deposits of apparent marine sand with occasional rounded flint gravel indicative of a medium to high energy marine environment. As the base of these gravels was not reached it is possible to definitively determine a platform height and, consequently, likely age of the marine deposits. However, on the basis of broad altitude correlations, a MIS 5e date is tentatively proposed.
- 8.4** These marine deposits appeared to be both disturbed and truncated at their upper contact with the overlying alluvium suggesting a high degree of reworking and mixing during the deposition of this latter. This probably explains the presence of pollen within their upper facies.
- 8.5** The investigation has therefore shown that while potential may exist locally for more intact and less disturbed palaeoenvironmental sequences, the deposits impacted upon by this localised development were both too disturbed and weathered to contain the level of detailed evidence required for significant palaeoenvironmental reconstruction. Given this fact and the lack of archaeology indicating human activity at the locality, no further analysis is proposed.

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WSCC, 2007 *Recommended Standard Archaeological Conditions*

## **Acknowledgements**

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## OASIS Form

**OASIS ID: archaeol6-97502**

### Project details

Project name	Lidsey Well Geoarch WB
Short description of the project	<p>Archaeology South-East (ASE) the contracting division of the Centre for Applied Archaeology at the Institute of Archaeology, University College London were contracted by Moorhouse Petroleum Limited to conduct a geoarchaeological watching brief at Lidsey Road, Aldingbourne, West Sussex.</p> <p>Groundworks ahead of the construction of an oil well, were initiated across the 4x4m area of the cellar construction to a depth of 1.1m to the basal limit of the made ground. At this level a stepped 3x3 metre area was taken down to 2.2 metres to the water table whereupon a sheeting wall was constructed around the walls of the cellar to prevent collapse. A sequence comprising made ground, alluvium and disturbed marine deposits was recorded and sampled for palaeoenvironmental evidence. The sediments lacked microfossils but contained a pollen assemblage indicating a Mid-Late Holocene age for the deposits. The marine deposits may relate to the MIS 5e Pagham Raised Beach. The disturbed nature of the alluvial sediments and the poor degree of palaeoenvironmental preservation has led to the conclusion that further analysis of the samples would not be productive.</p>
Project dates	Start: 15-12-2010 End: 15-12-2010
Previous/future work	Not known / Not known
Any associated project reference codes	LWA 10 - Sitecode
Type of project	Field evaluation
Site status	None
Current Land use	Woodland 8 - Other
Methods & techniques	'Test Pits'
Development type	Not recorded
Development type	oilfield
Prompt	Planning condition
Position in the	Not known / Not recorded

planning process

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**Project location**

Country	England
Site location	WEST SUSSEX ARUN BARNHAM Lidsey Well Site
Postcode	PO20
Study area	16.00 Square metres
Site coordinates	SU 945 032 50.8200576624 -0.658291810896 50 49 12 N 000 39 29 W Point
Height OD / Depth	Min: 6.00m Max: 6.00m

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**Project creators**

Name of Organisation	Archaeology South-East
Project brief originator	Archaeology South-East
Project design originator	west sussex county council
Project director/manager	Darryl Palmer
Project supervisor	Matt Pope
Type of sponsor/funding body	Client
Name of sponsor/funding body	Moorhouse Petroleum Limited

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**Project archives**

Physical Archive recipient	Local Museum
Physical Archive ID	LWA 10
Physical Contents	'Environmental'
Digital Archive recipient	Local Museum
Digital Archive ID	LWA 10
Digital Contents	'Environmental'

Digital Media available	'Text'
Paper Archive recipient	Local Museum
Paper Archive ID	LWA 10
Paper Contents	'Environmental'
Paper Media available	'Photograph','Report','Unpublished Text'

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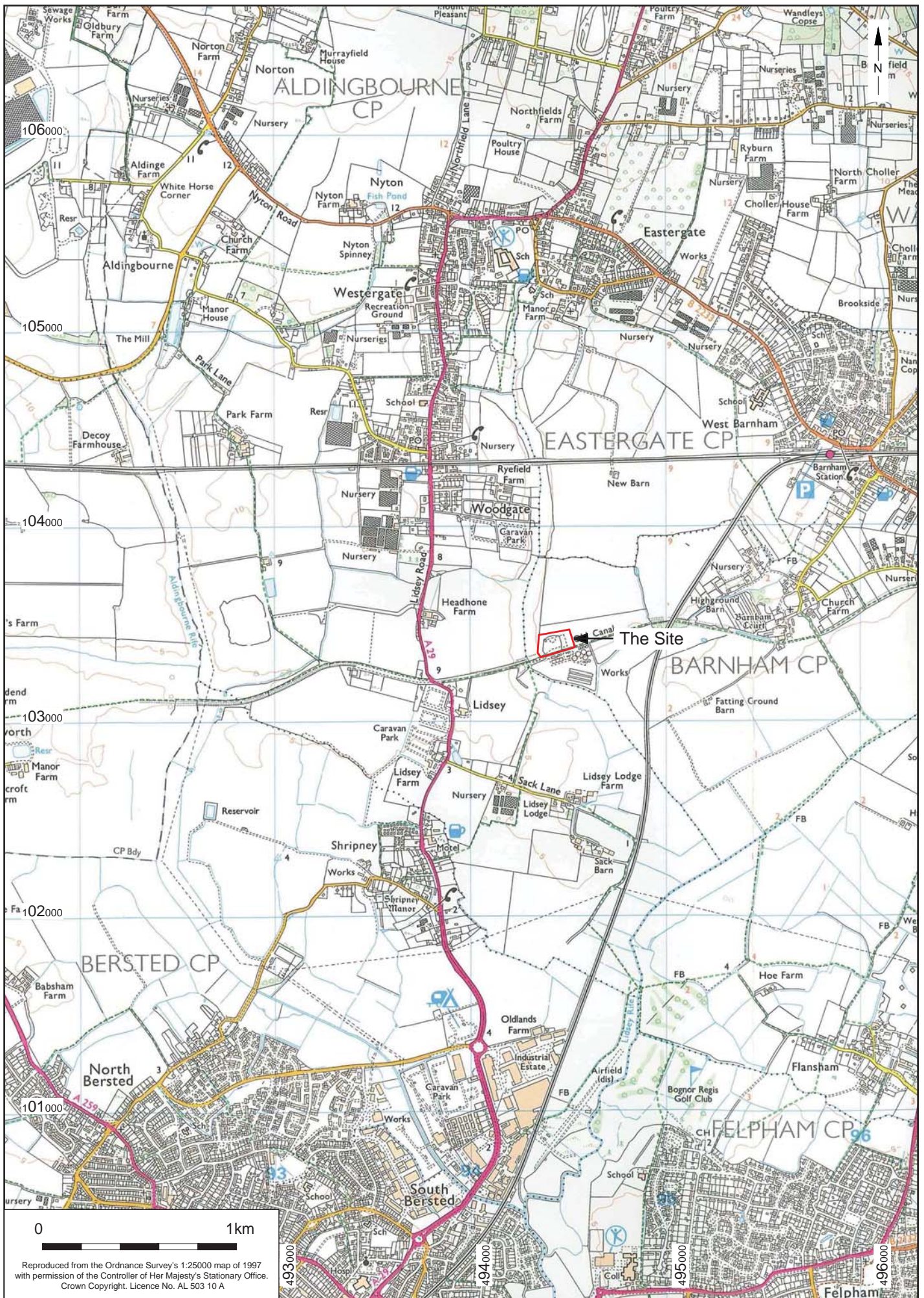
**Project bibliography 1**

Publication type	Grey literature (unpublished document/manuscript)
Title	geoarch WB at Lidsey Well Site, Lidsey, West Sussex
Author(s)/Editor(s)	pope, m
Other bibliographic details	ASE Report no: 2011067
Date	2011
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© Archaeology South-East		Lidsey Well Site, Bognor Regis		Fig. 1
Project Ref: 4453	March 2011	Site location		
Report Ref:	Drawn by: HLF			





Fig. 3.1: Footprint of excavation area looking east



Fig. 3.2: Section through groundworks at limit of observations (within marine sand)

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Project Ref: 4453	March 2011	Photographs	
Report Ref:	Drawn by: HLF		

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