
ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOLUTIONS LTD

**NATIONAL SPORTS CENTRE, BISHAM ABBEY,
BERKSHIRE**

ARCHAEOLOGICAL MONITORING AND RECORDING

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District: East Herts	Site Code: BPO.02
Approved: Claire Halpin	Project No: P3363
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APPENDIX 1: HER SUMMARY SHEET

OASIS SUMMARY SHEET

Project details			
Project name	<i>National Sports Centre, Bisham Abbey, Berkshire, An archaeological monitoring and recording</i>		
Project description: <i>From 26th January to 18th February 2009 Archaeological Solutions (AS) carried out a programme of archaeological monitoring and recording in association with construction of new tennis courts, access route and associated works. The work was commissioned by DOE Sport.</i>			
<i>The site is occupied by a sports hall with associated facilities, including, hard and grassed courts and pitches, accommodation blocks and access roads. In the western part of the site, the main administrative buildings occupy the Grade I Listed medieval and Tudor house. To the south of the main house, several other historic buildings survive, including a 15th century dovecote and a number of former barns and agricultural buildings of contemporary date.</i>			
<i>The site of the new clay tennis court lies within the original enclosure of the medieval monastic precinct; therefore high potential existed for medieval and post medieval remains to be encountered. No archaeological features were present and no finds were recovered in the area of works.</i>			
Project dates (fieldwork)	<i>27th January to 18th February 2009</i>		
Previous work (Y/N/?)	<i>N</i>	Future work (Y/N/?)	<i>N</i>
P. number	<i>P1539</i>	Site code	<i>BPO.02</i>
Type of project	<i>Watching Brief</i>		
Site status	<i>National Monument</i>		
Current land use	<i>National Sports Centre, Grassland</i>		
Planned development	<i>Construction of a new tennis court, access route and associated works</i>		
Main features (+dates)	<i>No archaeological features present</i>		
Significant finds (+dates)	<i>No archaeological finds recovered</i>		
Project location			
County/ District/ Parish	<i>Berkshire</i>	<i>Windsor & Maidenhead</i>	<i>Bisham</i>
HER/ SMR for area	<i>Berkshire SMR</i>		
Post code (if known)	<i>SL7 1RT</i>		
Area of site	<i>c. 5000m²</i>		
NGR	<i>SU 848 848</i>		
Height AOD (max/ min)	<i>c.28 – 29</i>		
Project creators			
Brief issued by	<i>No formal brief</i>		
Project supervisor/s (PO)	<i>Rozwadowski M.</i>		
Funded by	<i>DOE Sport</i>		
Bibliography			
Full title	<i>National Sports Centre, Bisham Abbey, Berkshire An archaeological monitoring and recording.</i>		
Authors	<i>Rozwadowski, M.</i>		
Report no.	<i>3264</i>		
Date (of report)	<i>February 2009</i>		

NATIONAL SPORTS CENTRE, BISHAM ABBEY, BERKSHIRE

ARCHAEOLOGICAL MONITORING AND RECORDING

SUMMARY

From 26th January to 18th February 2009 Archaeological Solutions (AS) carried out a programme of archaeological monitoring and recording in association with construction of new tennis courts, access route and associated works. The work was commissioned by DOE Sport.

The site is occupied by a sports hall with associated facilities, including, hard and grassed courts and pitches, accommodation blocks and access roads. In the western part of the site, the main administrative buildings occupy the Grade I Listed medieval and Tudor house. To the south of the main house, several other historic buildings survive, including a 15th century dovecote and a number of former barns and agricultural buildings of contemporary date

The site of the new clay tennis court lies within the original enclosure of the medieval monastic precinct; therefore high potential existed for medieval and post medieval remains to be encountered. No archaeological features were present and no finds were recovered in the area of works.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 From 27th January to 18th February 2009, Archaeological Solutions Ltd (AS) carried out a programme of archaeological monitoring and recording in association with construction of new tennis courts, access route and associated works at The National Sports Centre, Bisham Abbey, Berkshire (Figs. 1 & 2). The work was commissioned by DOE Sport.

1.2 The monitoring and recording was carried out in accordance with a specification prepared by HAT (now AS), dated 13/11/01, and approved by English Heritage under Scheduled Monument Consent.

1.3 The project followed the procedures outlined in the Institute of Field Archaeologists' *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs* (revised 1999) and also the relevant sections of the document *Standards for Field Archaeology in the East of England* (Gurney 2003).

1.3 The investigation was undertaken in conjunction with the relevant planning policies, which apply to the effect of development with regard to cultural heritage. Of particular relevance was Planning Policy Guidance Note 16 'Archaeology and Planning' (PPG16), which is widely applied by local authorities. PPG16 (1994) applies to archaeology and states that there should always be a presumption in favour of preserving nationally important archaeological remains *in situ*. However, when
National Sports Centre, Bisham Abbey, Berkshire

there is no overriding case for preservation, developers are required to fund opportunities for the recording and, when necessary, the excavation of the site.

1.4 The main project objective was monitoring of all aspects of the development programme likely to affect archaeological remains and to secure the adequate recording of any archaeological remains revealed by the development programme and to secure the analysis, conservation and long-term storage of the project archive.

2 DESCRIPTION OF THE SITE

2.1 The site is occupied by a sports hall with associated facilities, including, hard and grassed courts and pitches, accommodation blocks and access roads. In the western part of the site, the main administrative buildings occupy the Grade I Listed medieval and Tudor house (DP 6), while several surviving 18th and 19th century trees also provide an attractive setting. To the south of the main house, several other historic buildings survive, including a 15th century dovecote and a number of former barns and agricultural buildings of contemporary date, which have now been converted to private residential accommodation.

2.2 The site of the new clay tennis court is located in the middle of the site, approximately 80m east of the Tudor house, and lies within the original enclosure of the medieval monastic precinct (Fig. 2); therefore high potential existed for medieval and post medieval remains to be encountered.

3 TOPOGRAPHY, GEOLOGY AND SOILS

3.1 Bisham Abbey and its adjacent village occupy the floodplain of the river Thames at approximately 29m AOD. A flat tongue of land mirrors the river profile in its wide meander to the north-east, while the local topography rises steeply from the main A404 road to the south-east at Inkydown and Fultness Woods to an eminence at Cookham Dean between 100 and 113m (Fig. 1). Soil maps illustrate a narrow band of Thames alluvium occupying the river margins, indicative of the more recent limits of flooding and deposition, while the former fields and flat lands extending through the area comprise soils of the Sutton 2 Association, composed of a well-drained fine and coarse loamy soil (SSEW 1983).

4 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

4.1 The archaeological and historical background to the site is presented in detail in the preceding desk-based assessment, which is summarised below (Prosser, 2001, HAT Report 920):

4.2 The assessment recorded that many of the buildings and sports pitches lie within the original enclosure of the medieval monastic precinct, which is a Scheduled Ancient Monument containing a number of Grade I and Grade II Listed buildings.

4.3 Prehistoric activity in the Bisham area is poorly understood. Artefacts have been found extensively on the gravels of the river Thames, attesting long-term occupation, and cropmarks of possible Bronze Age burial mounds have been located close to the assessment area. Ephemeral Roman evidence is likewise found quite close to the abbey. Before the later Middle Ages however, East Berkshire was a poorly defined and peripheral area, in which colonisation and settlement is attested, though the archaeological resource remains inadequately quantified.

4.4 During the 12th century, the manor was granted to the Knights Templar, who established a preceptory on the present site. A number of buildings dating from the later period of their occupation still exist, including the magnificent hall and porch with its impressive door, which are notable and important buildings of their type. After the suppression of the Order, the site was granted to the earls of Salisbury, who founded a priory for Augustinian canons in 1334. During the following two centuries, members of the family continued to occupy the former preceptory buildings, which adjoined the priory range.

4.5 The priory was suppressed during the dissolution of the lesser monasteries in 1536, but refounded for a short time by King Henry VIII as a Benedictine abbey. After its second suppression in July 1537, the church was demolished and the associated buildings gradually removed by the Hoby family, who purchased the site and converted it to an aristocratic residence in Tudor Renaissance style. In 1780, the manor was purchased by the Vansittart family, who occupied the estate until a descendant gave the buildings over to the use of the Council for Physical Recreation in 1947. Though the site is now subdivided and has undergone much modification and alteration, it retains a wealth of historic landscape and buildings interest.

4.6 A trial trench evaluation carried out by HAT (now AS), targeted on linear anomalies revealed by a resistivity survey, revealed a single archaeological feature; a wide shallow ditch containing abraded pottery of a high medieval date. Sparse residual sherds of High Mediaeval (12th –14th century) pottery were found within the topsoil and an area of former topsoil (now overlain by hardcore) (Crank 2002).

5 METHODOLOGY

5.1 The archaeological monitoring comprised the observation of all ground works, inspection of subsoil and natural deposits for archaeological features, the examination of spoil heaps and the recording of soil profiles. Deposits were recorded by means of *pro forma* recording sheets, drawn to scale and photographed as appropriate. Excavated spoil was searched for archaeological finds.

5.2 The monitoring and recording was conducted on ground works associated with the ground reduction associated with the construction of the new tennis court, access path and associated drainage work. (Fig. 3). Site visits were undertaken to monitor these works on 26th January 2009 and on 18th February 2009.

6 DESCRIPTION OF RESULTS

6.1 Drainage Works

Sample Section 1:

Sample section facing south 0.00 = 28.5m AOD		
0.00 – 0.50m	L2000	Topsoil. As above.
0.50 – 0.70m	L2005	Subsoil. Dark greyish brown moderately compact clayey silt with moderate pebbles and occasional flint.
0.70 – 1.25m	L2002	Alluvium. Mid orangey brown moderately compact clayey silt with moderate small pebbles.
1.25 – 1.50m	L2003	Subsoil. Dark greyish brown moderately compact clayey silt with moderate pebbles and occasional flint.
1.50m+	L2004	Natural gravel. Light yellowish grey loose sandy gravel with moderate flint.

Description: No archaeological features or finds were present.

Sample Section 2: DP 2

Sample section facing south 0.00 = 28.5m AOD		
0.00 – 0.60m	L2000	Topsoil. As above.
0.60 – 0.75m	L2005	Subsoil. As above.
0.75 – 1.10m	L2002	Alluvium. As above.
1.10 – 1.35m	L2003	Subsoil. As above.
1.35m+	L2004	Natural gravel. As above.

Description: No archaeological features or finds were present.

Sample Section 3: DP 4

Sample section facing east 0.00 = 28.5m AOD		
0.00 – 0.10m	L2007	Gravel surface. Light whitish grey gravel.
0.10 – 0.40m	L2006	Clay courts ballast. Orangey red loose sandy gravel, including drainage pipe.
0.40m+	L2000	Topsoil. As above.

Description: No archaeological features or finds were present.

Sample Section 4:

Sample section facing north 0.00 ≈ 28.5m AOD		
0.00 – 0.15m	L2006	Clay courts ballast. As above.
0.15 – 0.25m	L2000	Topsoil. As above.
0.25 – 0.40m	L2005	Subsoil. As above.
0.40m+	L2002	Alluvium. As above.

Description: No archaeological features or finds were present.

Sample Section 5:

Sample section facing north 0.00 = 28.5m AOD		
0.00 – 0.10m	L2006	Ballast. As above.
0.10 – 0.25m	L2000	Topsoil. As above.
0.25 – 0.40m	L2005	Subsoil. As above.
0.40m+	L2002	Alluvium. As above.

Description: No archaeological features or finds were present.

6.2 Ground reduction (DP 1, 3, 5)

Ground reduction took place in the area of the new tennis court and along the line of the new access route, located to the NE of the court (Fig. 3).

Sample Section 6:

<i>Sample section facing east</i> <i>Facing west 0 = 28.5m AOD</i>		
0.00 – 0.15m	L2000	Topsoil. Dark brownish grey moderately compact clayey silt with occasional CBM and frequent small pebbles.
0.15m+	L2001	Hardcore. Mid greyish orange friable but compacted silty gravel.

Description: No archaeological features or finds were present.

Sample Section 7:

<i>Sample section facing east</i> <i>Facing south 0 ≈ 28.5m AOD</i>		
0.00 – 0.15m	L2000	Topsoil. As above.
0.15m+	L2001	Hardcore. As above.

Description: No archaeological features or finds were present.

7 CONFIDENCE RATING

7.1 It is not felt that any factors, inhibited the recognition of archaeological features or finds during the archaeological monitoring and recording

8 DEPOSIT MODEL

8.1 In the area north of the tennis courts, a sequence undisturbed by modern activity was recorded. The top most deposit was L2000, a dark brownish grey moderately compact clayey silt identified as modern topsoil. The depth of this deposit varied from 0.5m to 0.6m. Beneath this was located L2005, a dark greyish brown moderately compact clayey silt with moderate pebbles and occasional flint, probably an original level of topsoil prior to landscaping. The depth of this deposit varied from 0.15m to 0.2m and it is likely that it was truncated. The subsequent deposit was L2002, a mid orangey brown moderately compact clayey silt with moderate small pebbles. This deposit had a depth of 0.35m to 0.55m and represented alluvial deposits of the river Thames. The next layer in the sequence was L2003, a dark greyish brown moderately compact clayey silt with moderate pebbles and occasional flint. The depth of this deposit was 0.25m and seemed to be quite consistent across the site. The lowest encountered deposit was L2004, a light yellowish grey loose sandy gravel with moderate flint. This deposit most likely represented a former river bed. When the level of this deposit was reached, underground water started to flush into the trench indicating its proximity to the water table.

8.2 In the area of the new tennis court, beneath a 0.15m thick layer of modern topsoil (L2000) hardcore build-up L2001 was present. L2001 was mid greyish orange friable but compacted silty gravel. Ground reduction did not exceed the depth of this deposit.

8.3 In the drainage trench running along the northern edge of the court, L2007, a light whitish grey gravel surface with a depth of 0.10m, was recorded. In the same trench, beneath L2007 and along the western edge of the court, L2006, an orangey red loose sandy gravel clay court ballast with a depth of 0.10m to 0.15m, was present. Beneath these deposits, L2000 was visible, followed by L2005 and L2002 in sequence.

9 DISCUSSION

9.1 The site of the new clay tennis court lies within the original enclosure of the medieval monastic precinct, therefore a high potential existed for medieval and post-medieval remains to be encountered. However, no archaeological features or finds were present in the area of works. The site was covered by thick layers of topsoil and alluvium in areas which had not been subject to previous disturbance.

10 ARCHIVE DEPOSITION

Archive records (with an inventory) will be deposited at Reading Museum. The archive will be quantified, ordered, indexed, cross-referenced and checked for internal consistency.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

AS would like to thank DOE Sport for funding the project and to Rob McDonald from DOE for his assistance.

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PHOTOGRAPHIC INDEX



DP1 Area of new tennis court prior to works



DP2 Sample Section 2. Looking N.



DP3 Area of access road and north part of a new tennis court after ground reduction.



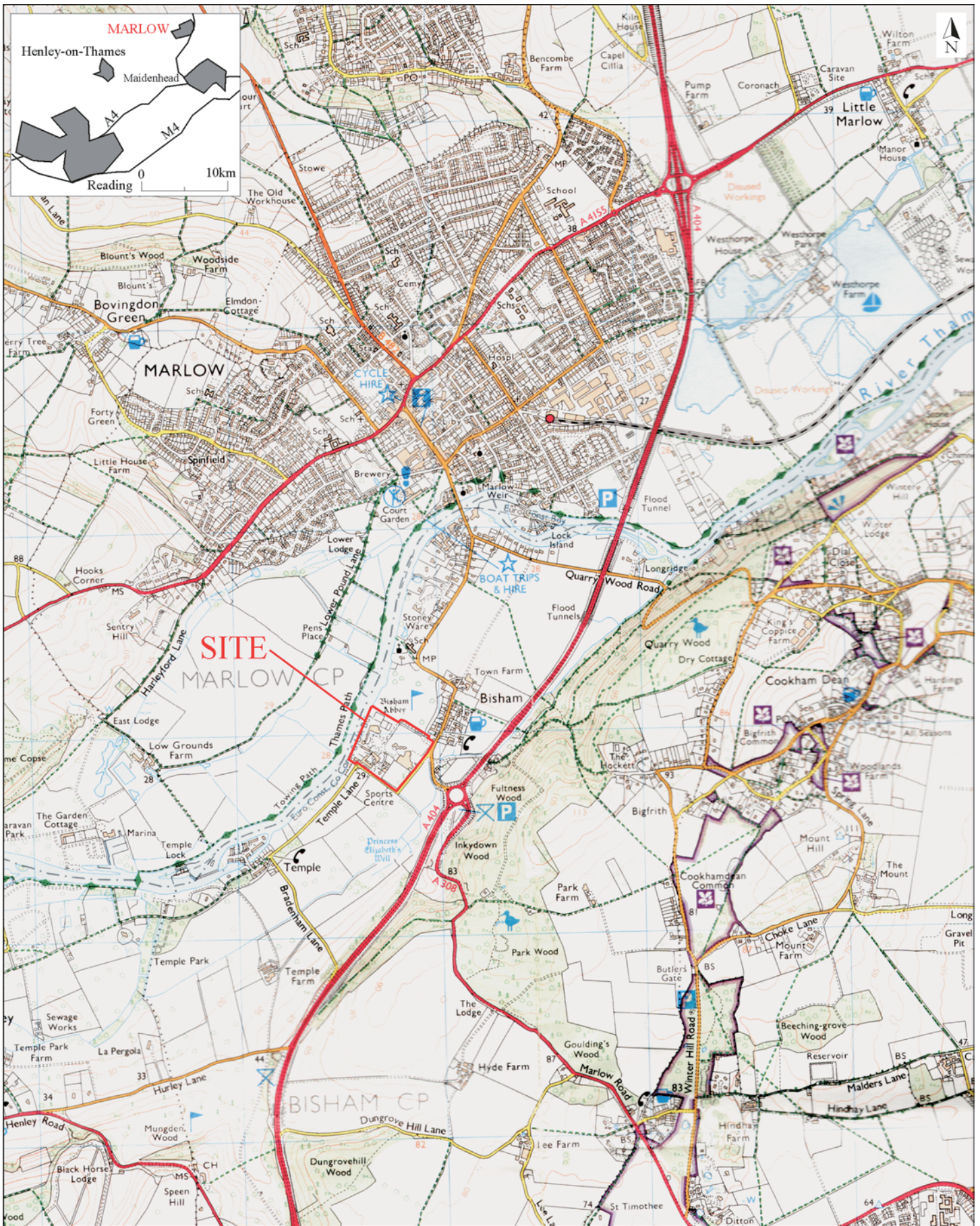
DP4 Sample Section 3. Looking W.



DP5. Area of existing clay courts after ground reduction.

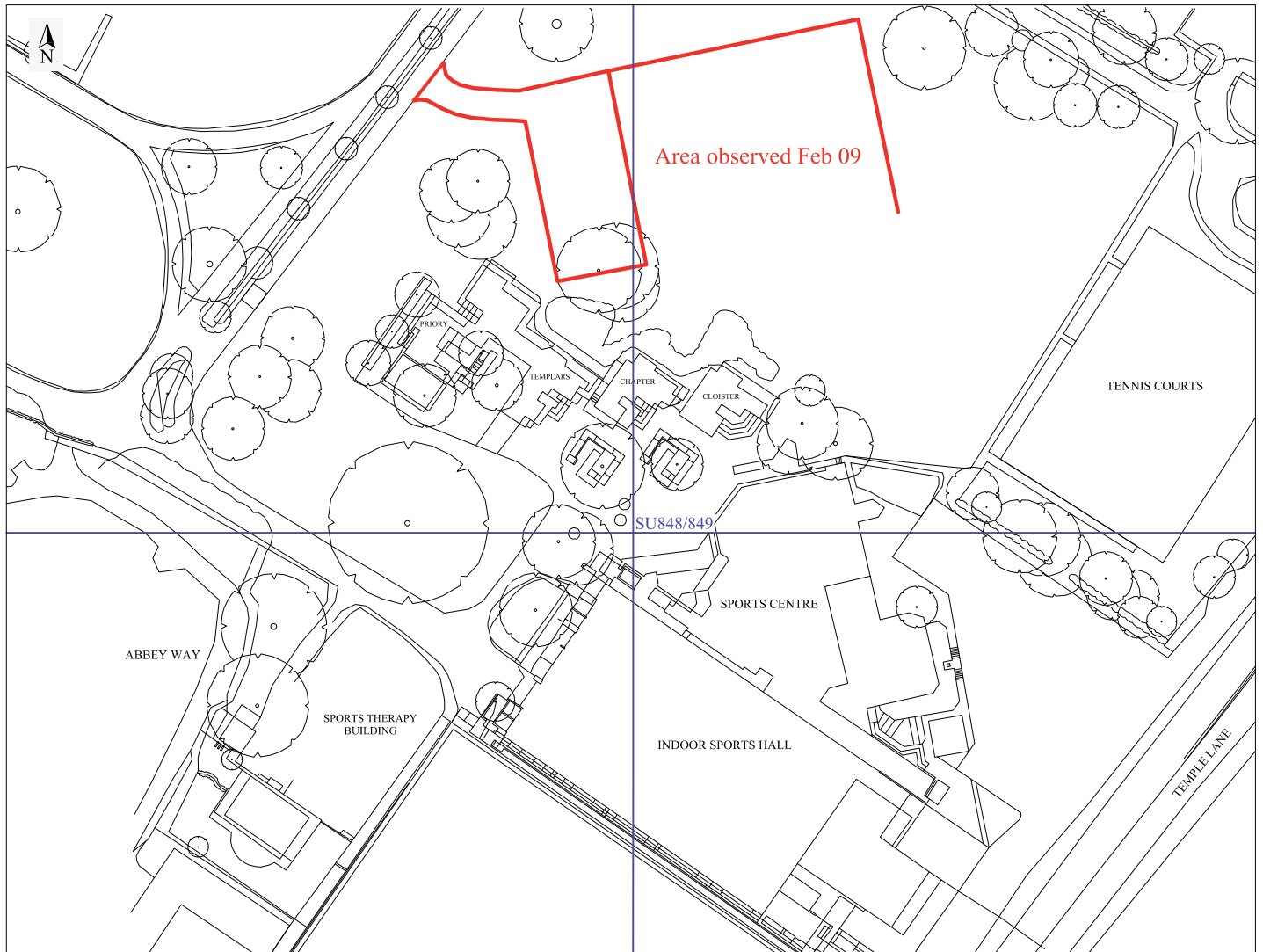


DP6. Bisham Abbey. Looking NW.

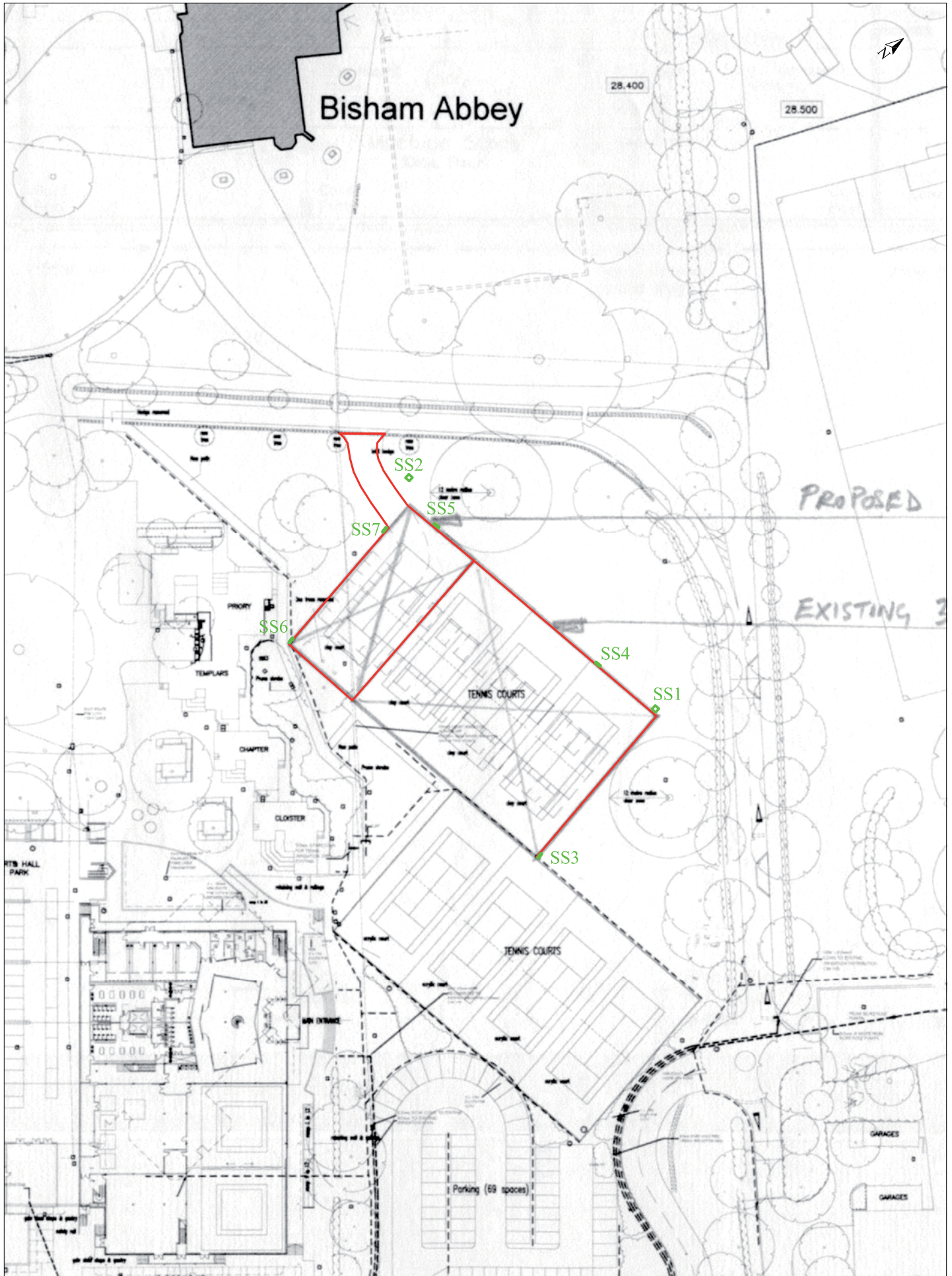


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Fig. 1 Site location plan
 Scale 1:25,000



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Fig. 2 Detailed site location plan
Scale 1:1250 at A4



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Fig. 3 Section location plan

Scale 1:1000 at A4