

T H A M E S V A L L E Y

ARCHAEOLOGICAL

S E R V I C E S

**Elizabeth House, West Street,
Newbury, West Berkshire**

Archaeological Evaluation

by David Platt

Site Code: EHN12/167

(SU 4694 6738)

**Elizabeth House, West Street, Newbury,
West Berkshire**

**An Archaeological Evaluation
for T A Fisher Developments Limited**

by David Platt

Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd

Site Code EHN12/167

November 2013

Summary

Site name: Elizabeth House, West Street, Newbury, West Berkshire

Grid reference: SU 4694 6738

Site activity: Archaeological Evaluation

Date and duration of project: 23rd January – 11th November 2013

Project manager: Steve Ford

Site supervisor: David Platt

Site code: EHN12-167

Area of site: c. 0.1ha

Summary of results: The trenches revealed a complex sequence of naturally occurring alluvial deposits with peat alluvium and tufa present. No archaeological features were observed in any of these deposits and no artefacts of archaeological interest recorded. The site is considered to have no archaeological potential

Location and reference of archive: The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited at West Berkshire Museum in due course.

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www.tvas.co.uk/reports/reports.asp.*

Report edited/checked by: Steve Ford ✓ 27.11.13

Elizabeth House, West Street, Newbury, West Berkshire An Archaeological Evaluation

by David Platt

Report 12/167

Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological field evaluation carried out at Elizabeth House, West Street, Newbury, West Berkshire, (SU 4694 6738) (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Mike Page, Madlin and Maddison on behalf of T A Fisher Developments Ltd, Windmill House, Victoria Road, Mortimer Berkshire RG7 3DF.

Planning consent has been gained from West Berkshire Council (12/00499/COMIND and 13/00392/COND1) to redevelop the site for a new hotel subject to a condition relating to archaeology. This is in accordance with the Department for Communities and Local Government's *National Planning Policy Framework* (NPPF 2012), and the Council's policies on archaeology. The field investigation was carried out to a specification approved by Ms Sarah Orr, Archaeological Officer for West Berkshire Council. The fieldwork was undertaken by David Platt, Sue Porter and Kyle Beaverstock and the site code is EHN12/167. The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited at West Berkshire Museum in due course.

Location, topography and geology

The site is located at the northern end of Newbury town centre, near the old boundary between Newbury and the suburb of Speenhamland, on a rectangular parcel of land (0.21ha) to the east of West Street (Figs 1 and 2). At the time of the evaluation Elizabeth House had been demolished and only the reinforced concrete foundation beams and tarmac parking area remained. The site is bounded to the West by West Street, The south by a public car park, the north by Regents Court and to the east by an area of development on the previous site of Hill View House. The site is generally flat at around 76m above Ordnance Datum. The natural geology in the area is mapped as alluvium above gravel (BGS 1971) which, together with peat, was observed within all of the trenches.

Archaeological background

The archaeological potential of the area stems from the location of the site on the fringes of the historic core of medieval and post-medieval Newbury and an area of dense prehistoric occupation on the floor of the Kennet

Valley (WBAS 2006). This location has been demonstrated as being prolific in the presence of Mesolithic occupation sites and stray finds (Froom 1971) with material recovered from relatively close by (Sheridan *et al.* 1967). Peat and alluvial deposits including a peat-filled river palaeochannel were observed at Northcroft Lane *c.* 100m to the south-west (Ford 2002) Newbury, or the ‘new market town’ is not mentioned in Domesday Book (AD1086) but is mentioned in a grant dating to *c.* 1080 (Astill 1978), and may have been preceded by a large Saxon manor (*Ulvritone*). The location and extent of the pre-Norman settlement has not been ascertained. The town prospered in Medieval and early post-medieval times (Astill 1978) largely based on the wool trade.

An evaluation at Hill View House (Pine and Weale, 2010) adjacent to the site revealed numerous pits and possible ditches of medieval date, an evaluation at 53 Northbrook Street, *c.* 100m to the north, uncovered two pits, one dated to the Medieval period, and a structure consisting of a wall and floor of unknown date. Post-medieval landfill was also noted overlying waterlogged deposits and a possible channel (Hammond 2007). Recent excavations in the Parkway revealed medieval property boundaries and back-land settlement activity. These included a ditch and fence boundaries dating from the late 12th century, and leather tanning pits of later medieval date. These were sealed by 1.5m of soil, which was dumped to raise the ground above what was considered a wet, low-lying area. The development site lies on what is thought to be the margins of the medieval town, close to the boundary with the separate historic parish/settlement of Speenhamland. The line of the Speenhamland ditch, one of the main historic drainage features, could run across the site, and waterlogged deposits might be present.

Objectives and methodology

The purpose of the evaluation was to determine the presence/absence, extent, condition, character, quality and date of any archaeological deposits within the area of development. This work was to be carried out in a manner which would not compromise the integrity of archaeological features or deposits which might warrant preservation *in situ*, or might better be excavated under conditions pertaining to full excavation.

The specific research aims of this project are:

- to determine if archaeologically relevant levels have survived on this site;
- to determine the presence and character of any Mesolithic deposits present;
- to examine whether any evidence exists on the site for the Domesday settlement of *Ulvritone*;
- to examine whether evidence exist on the site to assist with the dating of the laying out of the medieval town;
- to examine whether evidence for Speenhamland as a separate settlement survives and if so what does it tell us about the nature of this settlement; and
- to determine whether deposits relating to post-medieval industrial activities are present on the site

Results

It was proposed to dig two trenches, each 10m long and 1.6m wide (*c.* 5% of the site area). The trenches would be located to give as full spatial coverage of the site as was possible at the time of the works. A contingency for a further 5m of trenching was included, should this have been required to clarify the results of the initial trenching. This, however, was not possible due to the presence of reinforced concrete beams from the demolished buildings so the two trenches were divided up into four separate shorter trenches which were placed around these foundations. This was done after consultation with the monitor.

Tarmac, made ground, overburden, soil dumps, alluvial and fluvial deposits were removed by a JCB-type machine under direct archaeological supervision. Where archaeological features were certainly or probably present, the stripped areas were cleaned using appropriate hand tools. A programme of environmental sampling was to take place should sufficient significant, well-stratified deposits be located. Provision was made to recover samples from stratigraphic horizons considered to be of Mesolithic date.

A complete list of trenches giving lengths, breadths, depths and a description of sections and geology is given in Appendix 1.

Trench 1 (Fig. 3)

Trench 1 was aligned SSE – NNW and was 4.7m long and 1.95m deep. The stratigraphy consisted of 0.12m of Tarmac overlying 0.22m of scalpins. In turn this overlay 0.71m of dark brown/grey clay silt made ground with occasional post medieval brick inclusions which overlay 0.20m of pale brown/grey alluvium. This overlay 0.20m of peat which overlay 0.25m of mid brown/grey alluvium which overlay 0.20m of redeposited tufa. At this point the trench became flooded and excavation was stopped. No archaeological deposits or finds were recovered.

Trench 2 (Figs 3 and 4; Pls 1 and 2)

Trench 2 was aligned SSE – NNW and was 3.0m long and 2.60m deep. The stratigraphy consisted of 0.12m of Tarmac overlying 0.18m of scalping. In turn this overlay 0.30m of dark brown/grey clay silt made ground with occasional post medieval brick inclusions which overlay 0.40m of pale brown/grey alluvium. This overlay 0.70m of peat which overlay 0.30m of tufa which overlay another 0.5m thick layer of peat which in turn overlay the natural pale grey sandy gravel geology. No archaeological deposits or finds were recovered.

Trench 3 (Fig. 3; Pl. 3)

Trench 3 was aligned SSE – NNW and was 3.5m long and 2.5m deep. The stratigraphy consisted of 0.12m of Tarmac overlying 0.18m of scalpins. In turn this overlay 0.40m of dark brown/grey clay silt made ground with occasional post medieval brick inclusions which overlay 0.60m of pale white/grey alluvium. This overlay 0.30m of mid brown/grey alluvium which overlay 0.30m of tufa. This overlay 0.50m of peat which overlay the natural geology (gravel). No archaeological deposits or finds were recovered.

Trench 4 (Fig 3; Pl. 4)

Trench 4 was aligned SSE – NNW and was 5.0m long and 2.7m deep. The stratigraphy consisted of 0.5m of concrete overlying 0.40m of dark brown/grey clay silt made ground with occasional post medieval brick inclusions. This in turn overlay 0.40m of pale white/grey alluvium which overlay 0.50m of mid brown/grey alluvium which overlay 0.25m of mid brown/grey alluvium. This overlay 0.60m of peat which in turn overlay the natural gravel geology. No archaeological deposits or finds were recovered.

Finds

No finds were recovered.

Environmental Appraisal *by Jo Pine*

Sample 1 was taken from peat layer (60) in Trench 2 of approximately 20 litres. Under ten times magnification this sample was shown to contain large elements of biological material such as bark, twigs, grasses and possibly the remains of reeds. The sample exhibited slight hydrogen sulphide odour when freshly broken. The sample was heavily waterlogged and the organic preservation within this sample was high.

Conclusion

These trenches, as with the evaluation at Hillview House on the adjacent site, revealed a complex sequence of alluvial deposition, redeposited tufas, sands and peats and the presence of a likely peat-filled relict channel. However, no archaeological features were observed in, and no artefacts of archaeological interest recovered from any of these deposits. The peat deposits here, as already demonstrated for many other outcrops on the Kennet floodplain have high potential for palaeoenvironmental reconstruction. The site is not considered to have any archaeological potential.

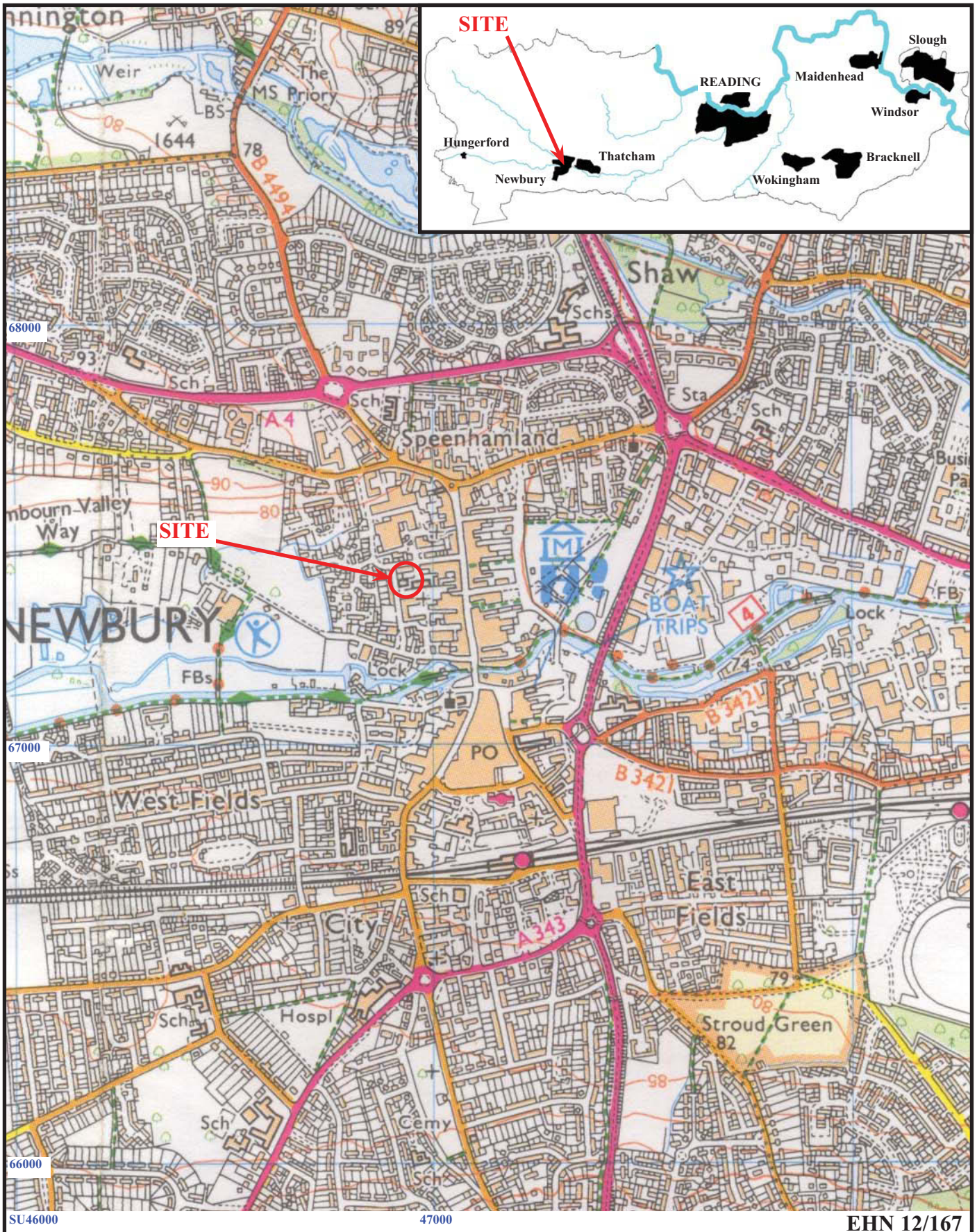
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APPENDIX 1: Trench details

0m at South end

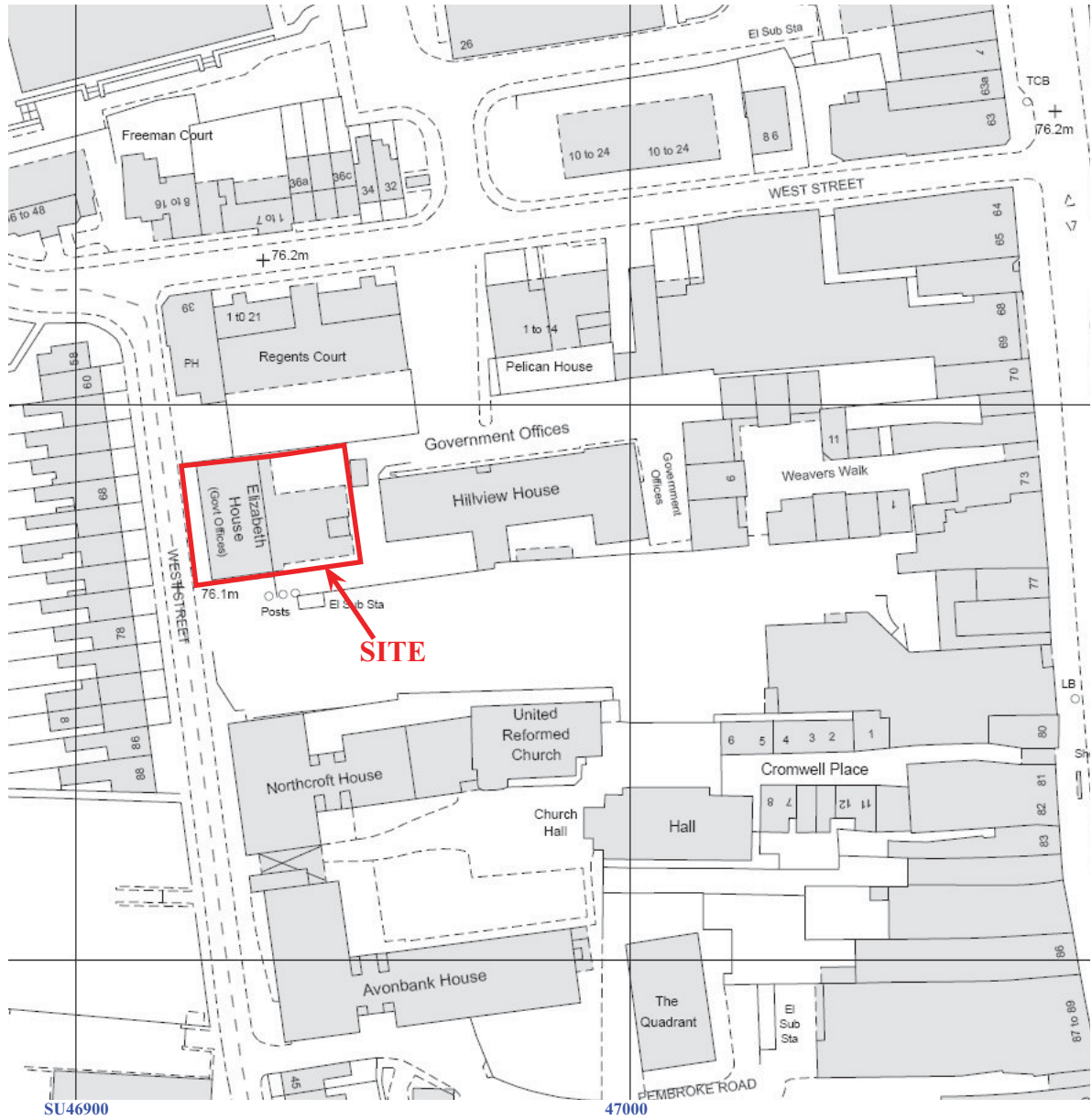
Trench	Length (m)	Breadth (m)	Depth (m)	Comment
1	4.7	1.6	1.95	0-0.12m Tarmac, 0.12-0.34m scalpins, 0.34-1.05m dark brown grey made ground, 1.05-1.25 pale brown grey alluvium, 1.25- 1.45m peat, 1.45-1.7 mid brown grey alluvium, 1.7-1.95m tufa. [Pls1 and 2]
2	3.0	1.6	2.6	0-0.12m Tarmac, 0.12-0.30m scalpins, 0.3-0.6m dark brown grey made ground, 0.6-1.0m pale grey alluvium, 1-1.7m peat, 1.7-2m light grey tufa, 2-2.5m peat, 2.5m+ Natural sand and gravel geology]
3	3.5	1.6	2.5	0-0.12m Tarmac, 0.12-0.3m scalpins, 0.3-0.7m dark brown grey made ground, 0.7-1.3m pale white grey alluvium, 1.3-1.6m mid brown grey alluvium, 1.6-1.9m tufa, 1.9-2.5m peat, 2.5m+natural geology. [Pl. 3]
4	5	2.2	2.7	0-0.5m concrete, 0.5-0.9m dark grey brown made ground, 0.9-1.3m pale white grey alluvium, 1.3-1.8m mid brown grey alluvium, 1.8-2.4m peat, 2.4m+ natural geology. [Pl. 4]



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Figure 1. Location of site within Newbury and Berkshire.

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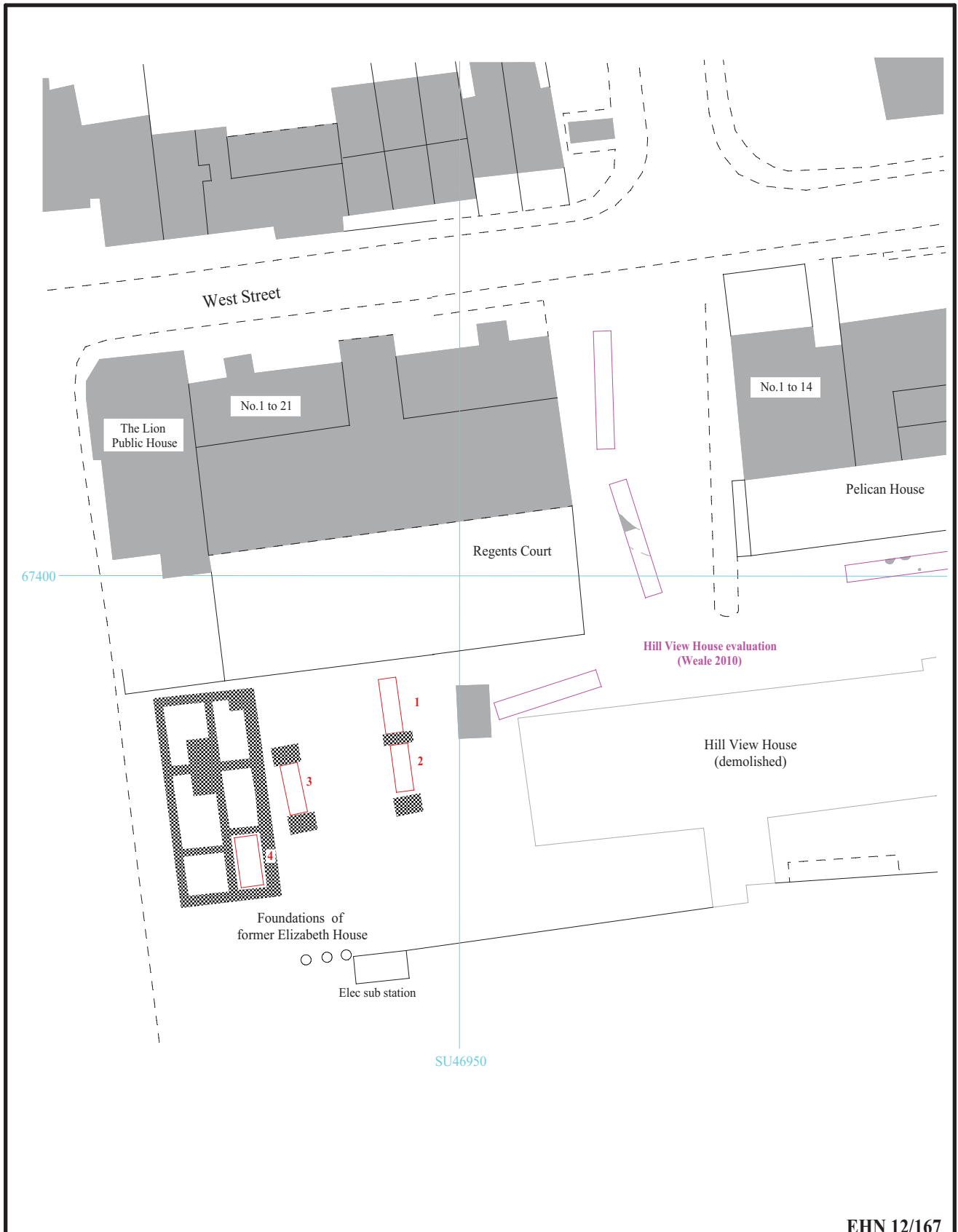


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Figure 2. Detailed location of site on West Street.

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Figure 3. Location of trenches, and nearby trenching from Hill View House evaluation.



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75.7m aOD



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Figure 4. Representative Section from Trench 2



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Plate 1. Trench 2 stratigraphy, looking west, Scales: 2m and 1m.



Plate 2. Trench 2, looking south, Scales: 2m and 1m.

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Plates 1 - 2.

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Plate 3. Trench 3, looking north, Scales: 2m and 1m.



Plate 4. Trench 4, looking south, Scales: 2m and 1m.

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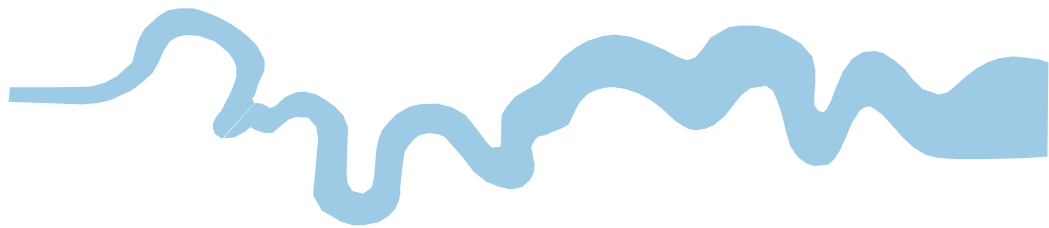
Plates 3 - 4.

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TIME CHART

	Calendar Years
Modern _____	AD 1901
Victorian _____	AD 1837
Post Medieval _____	AD 1500
Medieval _____	AD 1066
Saxon _____	AD 410
Roman _____	AD 43
Iron Age _____	BC/AD 750 BC
Bronze Age: Late -----	1300 BC
Bronze Age: Middle -----	1700 BC
Bronze Age: Early -----	2100 BC
Neolithic: Late	3300 BC
Neolithic: Early	4300 BC
Mesolithic: Late	6000 BC
Mesolithic: Early	10000 BC
Palaeolithic: Upper	30000 BC
Palaeolithic: Middle	70000 BC
Palaeolithic: Lower	2,000,000 BC





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