

**FORMER SITE OF THE ELSTOW
STORAGE DEPOT (AREA 7)
THE WIXAMS
BEDFORDSHIRE**

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRIAL TRENCH
EVALUATION**

Albion
archaeology



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Preface

Every effort has been made in the preparation of this document to provide as complete a summary as possible within the terms of the method statement. All statements and opinions in this document are offered in good faith. Albion Archaeology cannot accept responsibility for errors of fact or opinion resulting from data supplied by a third party, or for any loss or other consequence arising from decisions or actions made upon the basis of facts or opinions expressed in this document.

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The project was managed Rob Wardill (Project Manager). Fieldwork was conducted by Iain Leslie (Supervisor), with the assistance of Gary Manning (Archaeological Technician). Iain Leslie prepared this report and Joan Lighting (CAD Technician) produced the figures. The report was approved by Drew Shotliff (Operations Manager), who is responsible for the overall management of all Albion projects.

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Key Terms

The following terms or abbreviations are used throughout this report:

Albion	Albion Archaeology
SAO	Bedford Borough Council's Senior Archaeological & HER Officer
Client	Wixams First Ltd
HER	Bedford Borough Historic Environment Record
IfA	Institute for Archaeologists



Non-Technical Summary

Wixams First Ltd has been granted planning permission for the creation of four garden villages or neighbourhoods on land near Elstow, Bedfordshire. An archaeological evaluation of this land identified several areas of archaeological sensitivity and these were designated as Areas 1-6. All of these areas have been investigated and the results of that work have been disseminated. A further Area (7) was designated to cover the site of the former Elstow Storage Depot. At the time, Area 7 was not subject to below-ground archaeological evaluation due to the presence of the buildings, roads and ancillary structures

A meeting with the Bedford Borough Council Senior Archaeological & HER Officer (SAO) in August 2010 resulted in the SAO advising that the land would be best evaluated using trial trenching. The trenching would be utilised to test which parts of the site have no potential (due to 20th-century construction and demolition works) and which retain some potential (having not been affected by the above).

The trial trenching showed that although some areas were heavily disturbed (due to modern construction and demolition works) much of the evaluated area, especially those areas that have been left as open land, were relatively undisturbed. This meant that there was potential for the survival of archaeological remains. However no features of archaeological interest were observed in any of the trenches.



1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 **Project Background**

Wixams First Ltd has been granted planning permission for the creation of four garden villages or neighbourhoods on land near Elstow, Bedfordshire. An archaeological evaluation of this land identified several areas of archaeological sensitivity and these were designated as Areas 1-6. All of these areas have been investigated and the results of that work have been disseminated (Ingham 2010). A further Area (7) was designated to cover the site of the former Elstow Storage Depot. Area 7 was not subject to below-ground archaeological evaluation due to the presence of the Storage Depot buildings, roads and ancillary structures. A Research Design and Mitigation Strategy (RPS 2005) and a separate Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) (RPS 2007) were produced for approval of the Bedfordshire County Council, Archaeological Officer. These documents specified the work that would be undertaken to fulfil archaeological conditions at The Wixams. In relation to Area 7, Section 8.2.6 of the Research Design and Mitigation Strategy reads:

8.26 In the meeting of 28th September 2005 the County Archaeological Officer noted that the area of the bomb filling factory had not been suitable for pre-consent evaluation and thus should be the subject of archaeological investigation ahead of development, but following demolition. The appropriate method of further investigation, if required, has been left open at this stage pending a full review by RPS of the client geotechnical and borehole records. At the present time it appears that much of the area of the former bomb filling factory was heavily disturbed prior to and during construction of the factory and archaeological remains will not survive in these areas. Any areas of minimal disturbance that may exist will be identified by the above review and suitable procedures such as strip and map recording will be developed in accordance with WSI's where required.

The sub-surface archaeological potential of Area 7 has remained un-evaluated since that meeting was held. The Wixams now falls within Bedford Borough following the abolition of Bedfordshire County Council, and Wixams First Ltd representatives met with the Bedford Borough Council Senior Archaeological & HER Officer (SAO) in August 2010 in order to discuss specific requirements for the land. The SAO advised that the land would be best evaluated using trial trenching. This would not be targeted on any known remains (as there were none) but would be utilised to test which parts of the site had no potential (due to 20th-century construction and demolition works) and which retained some potential (having not been affected by the above). Even in the areas which retained potential, it was accepted that there might be no archaeological remains. The trial trenches would also determine the presence/absence of such remains.

Albion Archaeology was commissioned by Wixams First Ltd to investigate the level of destruction at the site and negotiate a proportionate trial trenching programme with the SAO. Following agreement of a Written Scheme of Investigation with the SAO, the trial trenching was carried out. The results will assist in determining whether there are any further archaeological requirements for this piece of land.



1.2 **Site Location and Description**

The former ROF16, Elstow Storage Depot, is centred at NGR TL 05490 44925, *c.* 5 km south of Bedford town (Figure 1). The site of the former ordnance factory is *c.* 185ha in size with a relatively level relief at a height of *c.* 35m OD.

The main line railway and the B530, Bedford to Ampthill road, lie to the west of the site; to the east are the A6 Bedford to Luton Road and Dane Lane. Thickthorn Lane runs along the southern boundary of the site.

After the war ROF Elstow became the Elstow Storage Depot and was used by the MoD for storage until the site was acquired by the Central Electricity Generating Board as a possible site for a power station. During this period the site was also considered for the storage of nuclear waste. None of these plans were ever brought forward and until relatively recently the former operational buildings were used for light industrial and retail use. The site now forms part of the Wixams redevelopment area.

Demolition of above ground structures has taken place and the majority of remediation works on contaminated soils have been completed.

1.3 **Archaeological and Historical Background**

The archaeological potential of The Wixams has been comprehensively covered elsewhere (RPS 2005). The specific history of The Elstow Storage Depot has also been documented (Albion Archaeology/RPS 2009). This section will summarise what can be inferred with regard to sub-surface archaeological potential for Area 7.

Previous archaeological assessment work in advance of the Wixams development identified a number of areas of archaeological significance. All, with the exception of the present area (Area 7), have been subject to below-ground archaeological investigation.

Evaluation on land bordering Area 7 recorded no below ground anomalies worthy of further investigation. The closest anomalies worthy of mitigation were included in Areas 3 and 5. Area 3 was stripped and found to contain no significant archaeological remains (Albion Archaeology 2006), while Area 5 was subject to earthwork survey (Albion Archaeology 2006) in order to record ridge and furrow (medieval/post-medieval field systems) within it. Area 5 was subsequently stripped under archaeological observation and two undated pits were recorded (Albion Archaeology 2008). Slightly further away, Area 4 revealed evidence for a low-status settlement dating from the late Iron Age through to the Roman period (HER 18246, Ingham 2010). Saxon pottery was also recovered from a number of water holes, perhaps suggesting that the site remained in use as a temporary camp for shepherds and drovers. Approximately 500m to the south-east, within Area 2, 2nd–4th-century pottery were recovered from a number of heavily truncated ditches and pits (HER 18262, Ingham 2010).

On the basis of the above results, the type of below ground archaeological remains expected within Area 7 would be field systems of medieval/post-medieval date, similar to those observed elsewhere in the area. Such remains are of low-local significance. Given the general background activity in the Iron Age and Roman



periods, as attested by the finds from Area 4 and to a lesser extent Area 2, the presence of similar remains within Area 7 could not be ruled out.

The potential of land within Area 7 has been reduced following the construction, and, equally significant, demolition/remediation of the Elstow Storage Depot. Figure 2 shows where land has retained some potential, where it is likely to have been at least partially removed and where it is so unlikely to survive that the archaeological potential is negligible. The process of creating this figure has been designed to reduce the chances of placing trenches in areas of no potential and to increase the chances of testing land which retains potential.

1.4 Project Objectives

The principal objective of the trial trenching was to recover as much information as possible on the extent, date, phasing, nature, status, significance and state of preservation of any archaeological remains on the site. The results will assist in determining whether there are any further archaeological requirements for this piece of land.



2. METHODOLOGY

No trial trenching percentage was agreed, but rather a more flexible approach taking into account the heavily disturbed nature of the site and areas where overburden had already been removed exposing undisturbed geological deposits. The trenches were placed to avoid areas of no archaeological potential and to increase the chances of testing land which retained potential.

Trial trenching took place between 28th November and 1st December 2011. A total of 11 trenches, measuring 30m x 1.8m, were opened. Of the trench layout agreed with the SAO, Trenches 1,3,5,7,9,11,13,19,21,23 and 25 were excavated (Figure 2).

Trench 9 was moved 12m to the south-west and Trench 11 was moved to a different area to the north of its original location. This was to avoid a concrete slab and a gravel bund respectively.

In addition, a number of areas where overburden had been removed during site remediation and preparation works were inspected for archaeological remains. Most notably, this included a large area of ground contamination remediation measuring approximately 500m x 100m to the north of the site (Figure 2, A) and the line of a drainage ditch c.500m long to the east (Figure 2, B).

A monitoring meeting was held on 5th December 2011 and it was agreed with the SAO and client that no further trenching was required.

The trenches were opened by a mechanical excavator fitted with a toothless bucket, under close archaeological supervision. Overburden was removed down to the top of either the undisturbed geological deposits or archaeological deposits, whichever was encountered first. The spoil heaps were scanned for artefacts. The bases and sides of all trenches were cleaned by hand as necessary.

Any potential archaeological features were investigated by hand and recorded using Albion Archaeology's *pro forma* sheets. Each trench was subsequently drawn and photographed as appropriate. All deposits were recorded using a unique number sequence, commencing at 101 for Trench 1, 201 for Trench 2 *etc.* A full method statement is provided in the Written Scheme of Investigation (Albion Archaeology 2011).

The project adhered throughout to the standards prescribed in the following documents:

• IfA	<i>Code of Conduct</i>
	<i>Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Field Evaluation</i>
• Albion Archaeology	<i>Procedures Manual: Volume 1 Fieldwork</i> (2nd edn, 2001)
• English Heritage	<i>Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment (MoRPHE) Project Managers' Guide</i> (2006)



3. RESULTS

3.1 Introduction

All the deposits of archaeological interest are summarised below and illustrated in Figure 3 and Plates 1-6. Detailed technical information on deposits can be found in Appendix 1.

3.2 Overburden and Geological Deposits

Trenches 3, 5, 19, 21 and 25 contained similar overburden consisting of a layer of topsoil 0.25–0.5m deep, overlying 0.1–0.25m of subsoil. The only exception was Trench 21 where no subsoil was present, and in the disturbed area at the north-east end of Trench 19. This is consistent with these areas representing open fields.

Trenches 1 and 7 contained either a layer of modern make-up or a 0.4–0.5m thick demolition layer, overlying 0.2–0.3m of subsoil.

A mixed topsoil 0.25–0.4m deep, containing frequent building rubble, was present in Trenches 9 and 11, overlying 0.2–0.4m of subsoil.

Trenches 13 and 23 were more heavily disturbed. There was only 0.3m of topsoil overlying disturbance in Trench 13 and 0.35m of topsoil overlying 0.2m of subsoil in the undisturbed area of Trench 23.

The underlying geological deposits comprised glacial clays.

3.3 Modern Disturbance

Trench 13 (Plate 4) was the most heavily disturbed trench, with a large brick-built drain with manhole cover observed. There would be no possibility of archaeology surviving within this trench.

Heavy disturbance was also present at the north-east end of Trench 19. This consisted of a 0.8m-deep excavation into the glacial clay, which had been backfilled with re-deposited clay. A sondage was excavated to test the depth of the disturbance (see Plate 5). No archaeological remains would be likely to survive in such a heavily disturbed area.

Trench 23 (Plate 6) was disturbed over 25m of its 30m length. Given the depth of glacial clay in the undisturbed area of the trench, compared to that of the disturbed area, it would seem likely that only *c.* 0.05–0.15m of archaeological deposits would have been destroyed. Therefore, deeper archaeological features could have survived in this area, if present.

Light disturbance less than *c.* 0.4m wide was observed in Trenches 1 (Plate 1), 5 (Plate 2) and 25, taking the form of discreet intrusions. These smaller intrusions would have had a minimal impact on archaeological survival.

Disturbance in the form of tree rooting or animal burrows was also observed in Trenches 7, 9, 11, 5 and 25. These would also have had a minimal impact on archaeological survival.



In addition to any disturbance noted above, Trenches 1, 7, 9, 11 and 13 contained modern disturbance in the presence of demolition layers, make-up or modern artefacts in the topsoil. In all cases, glacial clay was sealed by subsoil and therefore any damage would not have penetrated deep enough to negatively affect archaeological survival.

3.4 Archaeological Features

No features of archaeological interest were observed in any of the excavated trenches or areas where potential archaeological horizons were exposed during site preparation and remediation works.



4. CONCLUSION

The trial trench evaluation has been successful in characterising the archaeological potential of the development area. The levels of modern disturbance are relatively low in some areas, especially in the periphery of the development area where the land was predominantly open. It is possible that archaeological remains could have survived in these areas. However, no evidence for any such archaeological remains was observed in any of the trenches.

Therefore, although there is potential for the survival of archaeological remains in some areas of the development site, none were observed.



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6. APPENDIX 1: CONTEXT SUMMARY



Trench: 1

Max Dimensions: Length: 30.00 m. Width: 1.80 m. Depth to Archaeology Min: m. Max: m.

Co-ordinates: OS Grid Ref.: TL (Easting: 48074: Northing: 42329)

OS Grid Ref.: TL (Easting: 48308: Northing: 42519)

Reason: To evaluate archaeological potential

Context:	Type:	Description:	Excavated:	Finds Present:
101	Demolition layer	Firm dark green clay frequent small-large CBM Thickness 0.4m	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
102	Subsoil	Firm light orange brown sandy silt Thickness 0.3m	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
103	Natural	Firm light blue clay	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



Trench: 3

Max Dimensions: Length: 30.00 m. Width: 1.80 m. Depth to Archaeology Min: m. Max: m.

Co-ordinates: OS Grid Ref.: TL (Easting: 47618: Northing: 39567)

OS Grid Ref.: TL (Easting: 47370: Northing: 39396)

Reason: To evaluate archaeological potential

Context:	Type:	Description:	Excavated:	Finds Present:
301	Topsoil	Firm dark grey clay Thickness 0.4m	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
302	Subsoil	Firm light brown clay Thickness 0.15m	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
303	Natural	Firm light blue grey clay	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



Trench: 5

Max Dimensions: Length: 30.00 m. Width: 1.80 m. Depth to Archaeology Min: m. Max: m.

Co-ordinates: OS Grid Ref.: TL (Easting: 45003: Northing: 27588)

OS Grid Ref.: TL (Easting: 45003: Northing: 37888)

Reason: To evaluate archaeological potential

Context:	Type:	Description:	Excavated:	Finds Present:
501	Topsoil	Firm dark grey silty clay Thickness 0.5m	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
502	Subsoil	Firm light brown silty clay Thickness 0.25m	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
503	Natural	Firm light blue grey clay	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



Trench: 7

Max Dimensions: Length: 30.00 m. Width: 1.80 m. Depth to Archaeology Min: m. Max: m.

Co-ordinates: OS Grid Ref.: TL (Easting: 44923: Northing: 41394)

OS Grid Ref.: TL (Easting: 44700: Northing: 41194)

Reason: To evaluate archaeological potential

Context:	Type:	Description:	Excavated:	Finds Present:
701	Make up layer	Loose dark black clay gravel Thickness 0.5m	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
702	Subsoil	Firm light brown clay Thickness 0.2m	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
703	Natural	Firm light blue grey clay	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



Trench: 9

Max Dimensions: Length: 30.00 m. Width: 1.80 m. Depth to Archaeology Min: m. Max: m.

Co-ordinates: OS Grid Ref.: TL (Easting: 43418: Northing: 43925)

OS Grid Ref.: TL (Easting: 43656: Northing: 44107)

Reason: To evaluate archaeological potential

Context:	Type:	Description:	Excavated:	Finds Present:
901	Topsoil	Loose dark grey clay silt frequent small-large CBM Thickness 0.25m	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
902	Subsoil	Firm mid brown clay Thickness 0.25m	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
903	Natural	Firm light blue grey clay	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



Trench: 11

Max Dimensions: Length: 30.00 m. Width: 1.80 m. Depth to Archaeology Min: m. Max: m.

Co-ordinates: OS Grid Ref.: TL (Easting: 41840: Northing: 42397)

OS Grid Ref.: TL (Easting: 41601: Northing: 42206)

Reason: To evaluate archaeological potential

Context:	Type:	Description:	Excavated:	Finds Present:
1101	Topsoil	Loose dark grey clay silt Thickness 0.4m	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
1102	Subsoil	Compact mid brown silty clay Thickness 0.4m	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
1103	Natural	Firm light brown clay	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



Trench: 13

Max Dimensions: Length: 30.00 m. Width: 1.80 m. Depth to Archaeology Min: m. Max: m.

Co-ordinates: OS Grid Ref.: TL (Easting: 40046: Northing: 41008)

OS Grid Ref.: TL (Easting: 40143: Northing: 41296)

Reason: To evaluate archaeological potential

Context:	Type:	Description:	Excavated:	Finds Present:
1301	Topsoil	Loose dark grey silt moderate small-large CBM Thickness 0.3m	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
1302	Natural	Firm light blue grey clay	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



Trench: 19

Max Dimensions: Length: 30.00 m. Width: 1.80 m. Depth to Archaeology Min: m. Max: m.

Co-ordinates: OS Grid Ref.: TL (Easting: 42820: Northing: 36914)

OS Grid Ref.: TL (Easting: 43051: Northing: 37107)

Reason: To evaluate archaeological potential

Context:	Type:	Description:	Excavated:	Finds Present:
1901	Topsoil	Firm dark grey clay Thickness 0.3m	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
1902	Subsoil	Firm mid brown clay Thicknes 0.15m	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
1903	Natural	Firm light brown clay	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



Trench: 21

Max Dimensions: Length: 30.00 m. Width: 1.80 m. Depth to Archaeology Min: m. Max: m.

Co-ordinates: OS Grid Ref.: TL (Easting: 42020: Northing: 35091)

OS Grid Ref.: TL (Easting: 41837: Northing: 35328)

Reason: To evaluate archaeological potential

Context:	Type:	Description:	Excavated:	Finds Present:
2101	Topsoil	Firm dark grey clay Thickness 0.3m	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2102	Natural	Firm light blue grey clay	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



Trench: 23

Max Dimensions: Length: 30.00 m. Width: 1.80 m. Depth to Archaeology Min: m. Max: m.

Co-ordinates: OS Grid Ref.: TL (Easting: 38906: Northing: 34012)

OS Grid Ref.: TL (Easting: 39144: Northing: 34194)

Reason: To evaluate archaeological potential

Context:	Type:	Description:	Excavated:	Finds Present:
2301	Topsoil	Loose dark grey silt Thickness 0.35m	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2302	Subsoil	Firm light brown clay silt Thickness 0.2m	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2303	Demolition layer	Firm mid brown clay silt frequent small-large CBM Thickness 0.6m	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2304	Natural	Firm light brown clay	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



Trench: 25

Max Dimensions: Length: 30.00 m. Width: 1.80 m. Depth to Archaeology Min: m. Max: m.

Co-ordinates: OS Grid Ref.: TL (Easting: 39145: Northing: 38971)

OS Grid Ref.: TL (Easting: 39390: Northing: 39142)

Reason: To evaluate archaeological potential

Context:	Type:	Description:	Excavated:	Finds Present:
2501	Topsoil	Loose dark grey clay silt Thickness 0.4m	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2502	Subsoil	Firm mid brown silty clay Thickness 0.2m	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2503	Natural	Firm light brown clay	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

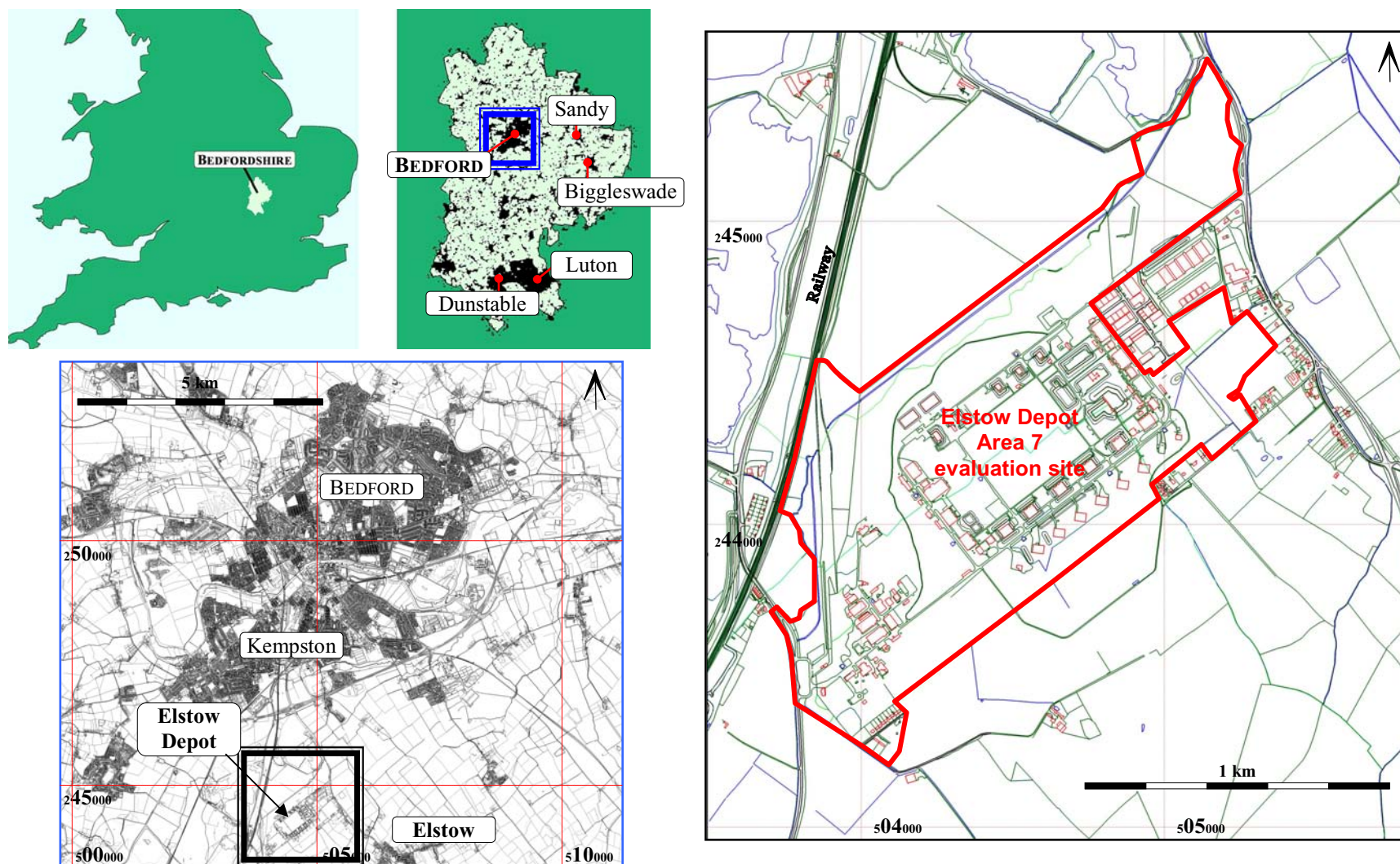
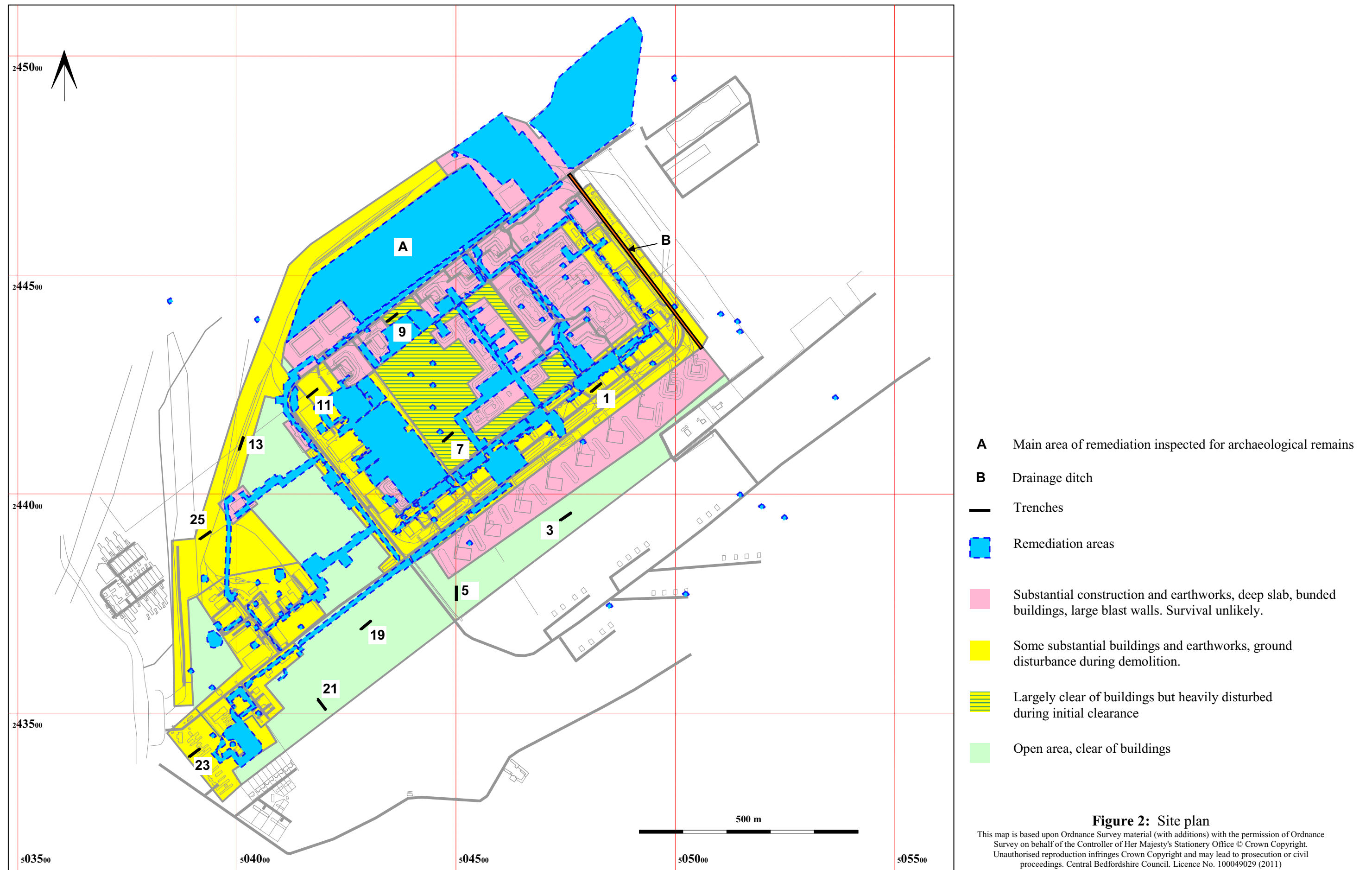


Figure 1: Location plan

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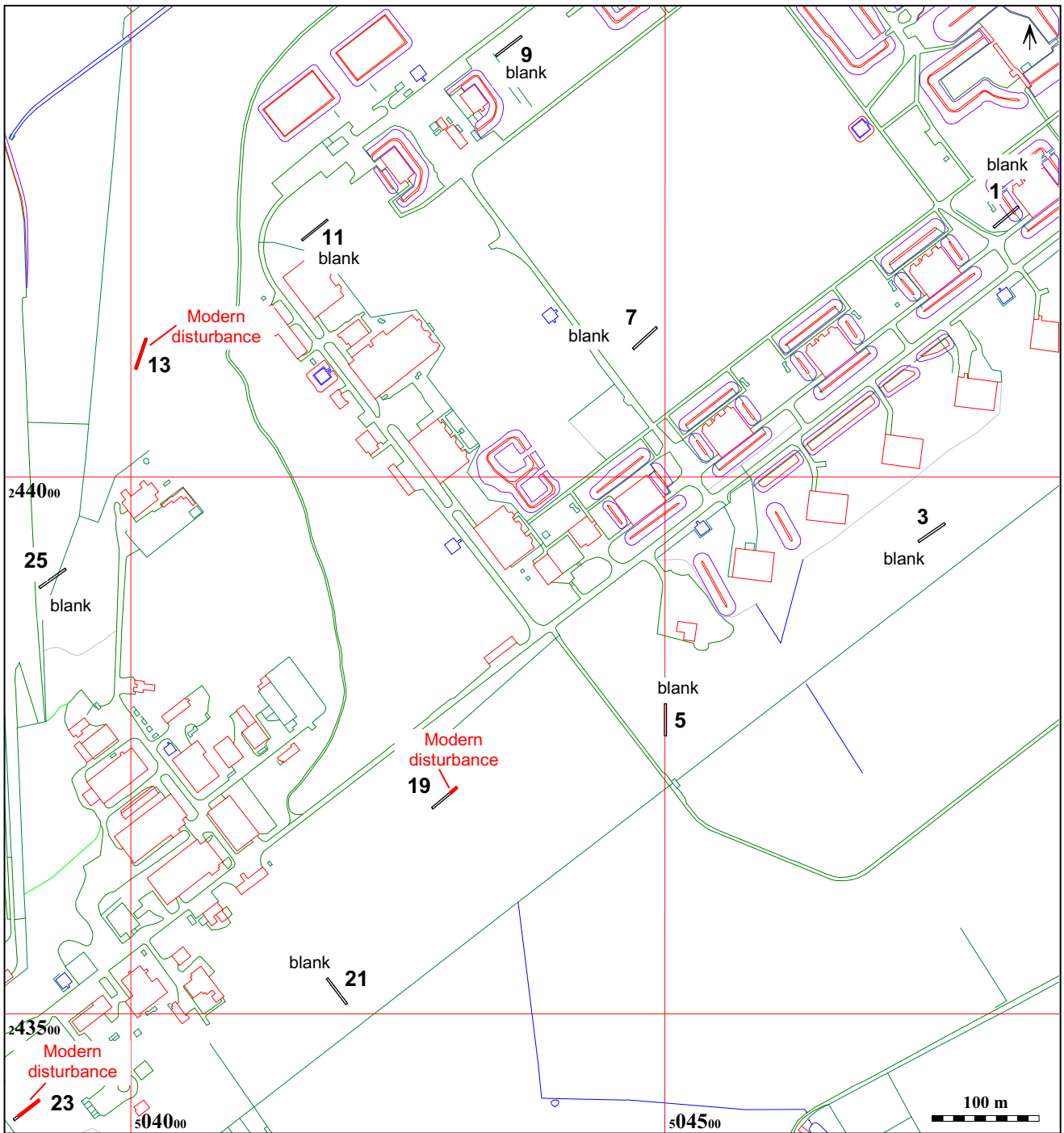


Figure 3: Trenching results

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Plate 1: Trench 1 looking north-west. Scale 1m



Plate 2: Trench 5 looking south. Scale 1m



Plate 3: Trench 11 looking west. Scale 1m



Plate 4: Trench 13 looking north-east. Scale 1m





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