Colworth Science Park Gas Main, Sharnbrook, Bedfordshire

Archaeological Watching Brief – Summary of Initial Visit

The initial site visit of 27th June 2013 was to monitor the excavation of thrust pits in the area of the previously recorded heritage asset (HER 722). In all, three pits were observed in connection with the drilling underneath the main access road and off into the side road leading towards the sewage works to the west (see attached plan). All three pits were excavated in the northern half of the road. Excavation was undertaken by a JCB mechanical digger fitted with a toothed bucket.

Pit 1

This was dug as an additional pit, *c*. 40m from the last pit on the main access road due to difficulties in getting the drill onto the right alignment after the bend. The pit was *c*. 11m from the junction. It measured *c*. 1m by 3m and was excavated to a depth of *c*. 1.3m. Modern services were encountered in the NE half of the pit.

The soil profile comprised *c*. 0.1m of tarmac, which capped a 0.4m thick layer of hardcore make-up comprising bands of limestone rubble, dark cinder-type material and gravel. These make-up deposits overlay a 0.5m thick deposit of mid red brown sandy clay, which is likely to represent the underlying geological strata. Bedrock was encountered at a depth of *c*. 1m. No archaeological features were observed during the excavation.

Figure 1: Pit 1 looking east, 1m scale

Pit 2

Pit 2 was located *c*. 100m from the last pit on the main access road down the side road to the west. It measured *c*. 1m by 3m and was excavated to a depth of *c*. 1.2m.

The soil profile comprised 0.1m of tarmac on top of *c*. 0.4m of hardcore, similar to that observed in Pit 1 but also containing some ceramic building material fragments. This road make-up layer directly overlay the undisturbed geological strata, comprising mid blue-grey brown silty clay; bedrock was not encountered. No archaeological feature were observed during the excavation

Figure 2: Pit 2 looking west, 1m scale

Pit 3

Situated 100m to the west of Pit 2, Pit 3 measured *c*. 1m by 3m and was excavated to a depth of *c*. 1.4m. The soil profile comprised 0.1m of tarmac, overlying a 0.4m thick hardcore deposit comprising several layers of stone rubble, gravel and dark cinder-type material. This overlay a *c*. 0.2m thick deposit of mid brown grey sandy silt/clay, which could represent a buried subsoil. The undisturbed geological strata comprised mid orange brown sandy clay. At a depth of 1.35–1.4m, light blue grey clay was visible in patches at the base of the pit. No archaeological features were observed during the excavation.

Figure 3: Pit 3, looking north, 1m scale

All three pits revealed a similar sequence of tarmac on hardcore. A possible subsoil horizon was observed in Pit 3. In Pit1 and Pit 3 the undisturbed geological strata comprised mid red brown to mid orange brown sandy clay at a depth of 0.5–0.7m. In Pit 2 this changed to mid blue-grey brown silty clay. Bedrock was encountered in Pit 1 at a depth of *c*. 1m. In Pit 3 light blue grey clay was present at a depth of *c*. 1.4m.

No archaeological features were present within the pits.

Wiebke Starke
28th June 2013

Colworth Science Park Gas Main, Sharnbrook, Bedfordshire

Archaeological Watching Brief – Summary of Second Visit

Monitoring of the excavation of thrust pits 4 and 5 was undertaken on Monday 1st July, in the area adjacent to previously recorded heritage asset (HER 722). The pits extended down the side of the valley in the area of the sewage works (Figure 1). In contrast to the three thrust pits observed previously (see Summary of Initial Visit), they were within grassed areas adjacent to the access road. Excavation was undertaken by a mechanical excavator with a toothed bucket.

Pit 4

Located *c.* 100m west of Pit 3, on the grass verge immediately south of the access road (Figure 1), Pit 4 measured 1m x 3m x *c.* 1.25m deep. The northern section was disturbed on its entire length by a modern cable trench. The soil profile comprised *c.* 0.2m of dark grey brown clay silt topsoil above mid grey brown subsoil *c.* 0.13m thick. Below this was a layer of limestone rubble, *c.* 0.2m thick with mid brown clay silt (Figure 2). This layer extended beyond the limits of the pit. It appears to be an external surface; the overlying deposits probably represent material brought in for landscaping.

Directly beneath the stone layer was a mid grey brown silty clay deposit, 0.2m thick. This appears to be the truncated remains of the soil profile, suggesting that the topsoil had been removed prior to spreading of the stone layer.

Figure 2: North facing section Pit 4, 1m scale

Below this, the sequence comprised mid orange brown sandy clay, *c.* 0.2m thick, above mid blue grey and mid blue brown silty clay. These deposits are likely to represent undisturbed geological strata. The orange brown sandy clay layer corresponds to a similar deposit in Pit 3. It is much thinner here, possibly due to erosion within the lower part of the valley. No archaeological features apart from the (probably) recent landscaping deposits were observed.

Pit 5

Pit 5 was situated at the base of the valley, on a grassed area to the south of the access road area, in the vicinity of HER 722 (Figure 1). It was *c.* 75m down slope and to the

south-west of Pit 4, in the vicinity of the sewage works. The area was heavily disturbed, with a large manhole immediately to the north; a further three smaller manholes were visible along the edge of the access route leading up to the science centre buildings to the north-east (Figure 4). The pit was *c.* 1m x 3m x 1.5m deep.

The pit revealed a series of deposits (Figure 3). Dark brown topsoil, 0.15m thick, overlay 0.2m of subsoil. Below this was the vertical-sided cut of a pipe trench, visible on the right hand side of Figure 3. Its fill was darker than the adjacent deposits and contained fragments of concrete. At a depth of 0.95m a concrete slab was revealed, protecting a pipe.

Figure 3: South facing section Pit 5

A 1.15m-thick series of deposits were visible upslope to the north. They comprised mid yellow brown mixed clay silt and sandy clay, with thinner, darker bands. This material contained frequent medium to large stones and brick fragments. It appears to represent a series of extensive deposits, designed to infill and level the base of the valley (Figure 4). Given the extensive and homogenous nature of this material, it was probably laid down in recent times rather than being associated with landscaping of the grounds of the house.

Undisturbed geological strata were not encountered in Pit 5.

Figure 4: Area of southward running stream, now level. Pit 5 marked out on the grass

Summary

Archaeological monitoring was undertaken to mitigate the impact of ground disturbance associated with insertion of the gas main on a known medieval heritage asset (HER 722). The gas main followed the route of an access road, construction of which had removed the upper soil profile. No archaeological features were observed truncating the underlying deposits.

Historical maps, the earliest of which dates to 1884, indicate that, originally, the main route to the house was via a tree-lined road from the north lodge. A more sinuous route from the south lodge intersected the main route at the eastern extent of the area of archaeological observations. The routeway curved across the artificially widened segment of the Sharn Brook to approach the house from the north. This was the only access to the house from the direction of Sharnbrook. Pits 1-3 were at the northern limit of woodland in a relatively wide linear band separated from the more open landscape to the north. This linear band stopped short of the western limit of the woodland.

In the first half of the 20th century, a second route to the house, corresponding to the access route was created. This extended from the junction of the routes from the northern and southern lodges, westwards along the linear band at the northern edge of the woodland, to curve across the southern limit of the ornamental lake, approaching the house from the south.

It is possible that infilling of the valley bottom was associated with the construction of the access route. Subsequently these deposits were truncated by pipe trenches which appear to be associated with the sewage works.

Wiebke Starke

2nd July 2013

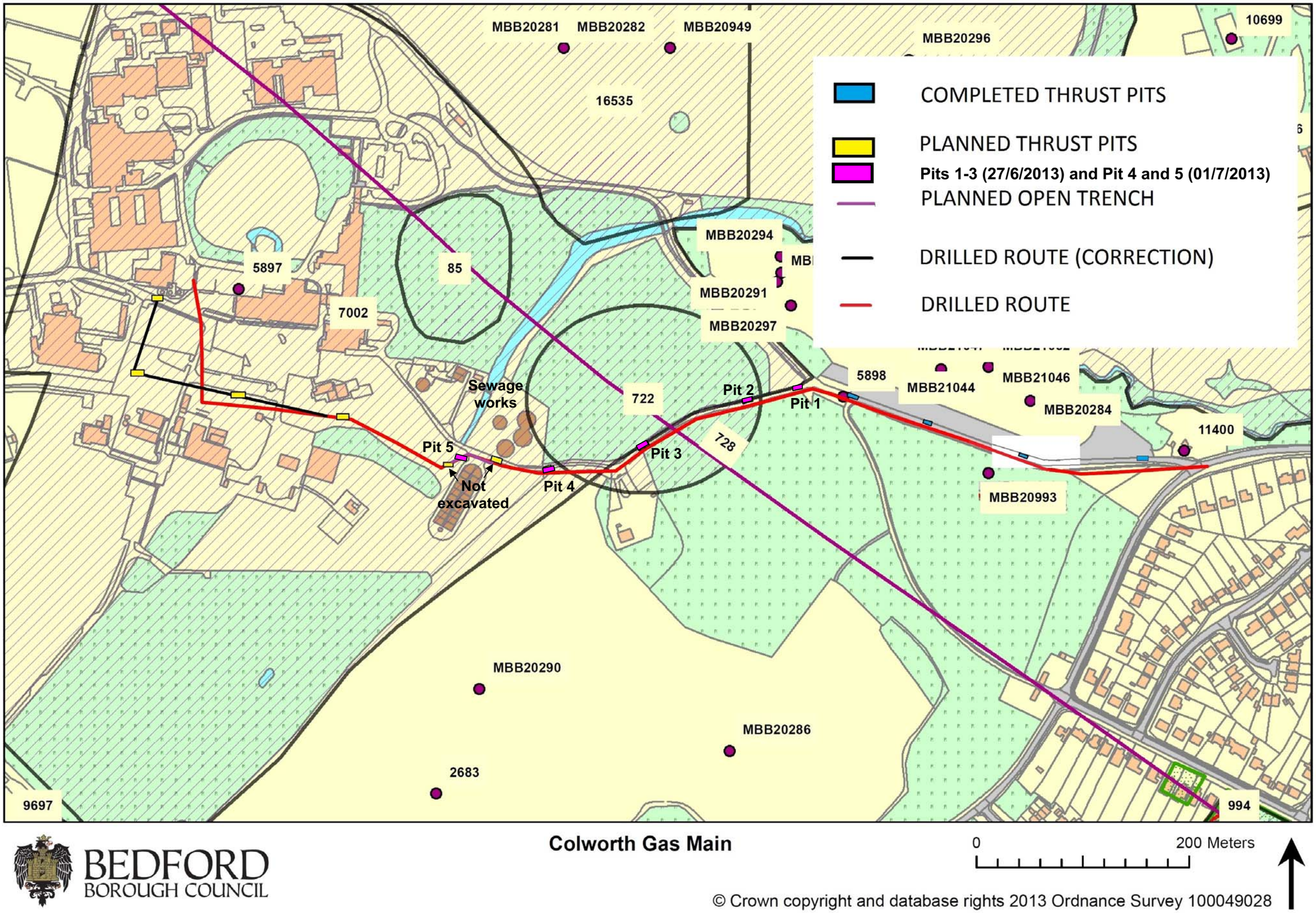

Figure 1: Locations of Pit1, 2, 3, 4 and 5