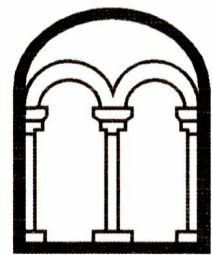


**BIGGLESWADE SOUTH
A1 ROUNDABOUT IMPROVEMENTS
BEDFORDSHIRE**

**ASSESSMENT OF POTENTIAL
AND UPDATED PROJECT DESIGN**

Albion
archaeology



**BIGGLESWADE SOUTH
A1 ROUNDABOUT IMPROVEMENTS
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**ASSESSMENT OF POTENTIAL
AND UPDATED PROJECT DESIGN**

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Preface

Every effort has been made in the preparation of this document to provide as complete an assessment as possible, within the terms of the brief and project design. 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.

Acknowledgements

This assessment has been prepared by Wiebke Starke (Project Supervisor), Ben Barker (Project Officer) and Gary Edmondson (Project Manager), with contributions by Holly Duncan (Artefacts Manager) and Jackie Wells (Artefacts Officer).

The fieldwork was undertaken by Wiebke Starke and Ben Barker, assisted by Kathy Pilkinton, Marcin Koziminski, Sławomir Utrata, Victoria Hainsworth and Allan King.

The project was monitored by Hannah Firth on behalf of the Local Planning Authority.

Version History

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Structure of the Report

After an introduction (Section 1) detailing both the planning and archaeological background and the project's objectives, Section 2 provides a summary of the results integrating finds data. Assessment of the data and an Updated Project Design is presented in Section 3, with a bibliography in Section 4.

Key Terms

<i>Albion</i>	Albion Archaeology
<i>CBCA</i>	Central Bedfordshire Council's Archaeologist
<i>Client</i>	Vectos Infrastructure Ltd on behalf of Central Bedfordshire Council



Non-Technical Summary

In 2008, arable land on the southern margins of Biggleswade, Bedfordshire, adjacent to Beauford Farm was subject to archaeological evaluation. The area was immediately west of the northbound carriageway of the A1 trunk road, at the A1/A6001 roundabout. The evaluation covered the area beyond the Beauford Farm balancing pond and associated feeder ditch, which had been investigated in 2004. The 2008 evaluation revealed two areas of archaeological significance. The Eastern Area, situated adjacent to the A1 trunk road, contained a series of undated features comprising ditches and pits. The nature of the fills of these features and the absence of modern finds indicated that they were of some antiquity.

The current investigation focused on the part of the Eastern Area impacted by the Biggleswade South – A1 Roundabout Improvements. Work was undertaken between 29th July and 23rd August 2013, prior to the start of construction works, in accordance with an approved Written Scheme of Investigation and supplementary Updated Method Statement.

Below the agricultural soil, the investigation revealed a series of features, ranging in date from the early Iron Age to modern times. A series of ditches indicate redefining of an early Iron Age enclosure, suggesting that the features identified in the vicinity, during the 2008 evaluation, were probably associated. Ditches thought to relate to Roman and post-medieval enclosure systems, as well as evidence for medieval arable cultivation were also identified.

This document presents a summary of the archaeological remains revealed during the investigation. The results of the investigation have been fully analysed both structurally and in terms of the small assemblage of finds recovered. It is intended that this summary will be integrated with the result of the wider programme of investigation, comprising the balancing pond, its subsequent extension and associated feeder ditch, to provide a more coherent understanding of the wider landscape. The end product will be publication of the results in the county journal, Bedfordshire Archaeology, and the deposition of the project archive (accession number 2013.38) with Bedford Museum.



1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 *Project Background*

Vectos Infrastructure Limited were commissioned by Central Bedfordshire Council to undertake improvements to the existing roundabout on the A1, situated to the south of Biggleswade, at its junction with the A6001 London Road (Figure 1). This included extension of the existing roundabout and the creation of a new spur road to the west, into the area of Beauford Farm. Albion Archaeology was commissioned to undertake the archaeological component of the project.

A Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) was prepared in 2011, covering the whole of the Beauford Farm site (Albion Archaeology 2011). With the agreement of the Central Bedfordshire Council Archaeologist (CBCA), an Updated Method Statement was produced as a supplementary document to the original WSI. This took into account the reduced footprint of the project and therefore smaller investigation area, as well as the approach for protecting the remainder of the Eastern Area. This was approved by the CBCA prior to the start of works.

Mitigation work was undertaken in advance of construction works, between 29th July and 23rd August 2013, in accordance with Written Schemes of Investigation and supplementary updated Method Statement.

1.2 *Site Location and Geology*

The mitigation area is located at the southern margin of Biggleswade, immediately west of the northbound carriageway of the A1 trunk road, adjacent to the A1/A6001 roundabout, near Beauford Farm (Figure 1). Centred on TL (5)20459/ (2)42919, the area extended westwards from the highway boundary for some 60m by up to 113m NW-SE, to define a roughly triangular area, comprising the SE corner of the previously defined Eastern Area. The site occupies a gentle south-facing slope which falls from c. 40–35m OD, towards a watercourse, the route of which has been modified in recent times.

The site comprises chalky till, overlying the Gault Formation (BGS 2004). The investigation revealed variable undisturbed geological strata, ranging from light grey-yellow-brown clay silt to more clayey areas with chalk flecks and bands and patches of light orange-brown silty gravel.

1.3 *Archaeological Background*

This investigation area lay within an archaeologically sensitive landscape, containing a variety of heritage assets which include evidence for prehistoric occupation with associated routeways, as well as the line of a Roman road, which is followed by the route of the A1 trunk road. It is also at the margins of the deserted medieval settlement of Holme, one of the three townships within the parish of Biggleswade.

Investigation of the balancing pond site, some 300m to the west of the current area (Figure 1) revealed evidence of occupation dating from the late Bronze Age through to the Iron Age, Roman, medieval and post-medieval periods.



Flint artefacts recovered from later features hinted at low intensity utilisation of the area from the Mesolithic period. In the late Bronze Age-early Iron Age, activity comprised the digging of a cluster of pits and creation of a ditched enclosure. The early Iron Age saw the first extensive sub-division of the landscape with the establishment of a double posthole alignment, which extended NW-SE across the site. Elements of this were later replaced by a ditched boundary on the same alignment. An associated perpendicular ditch probably defined part of an enclosure on the higher ground to the NW.

This major boundary feature seems to have influenced the location of two late Iron Age to early Romano-British enclosures and associated features. A smaller enclosure was situated within a larger, outer enclosure. Significant quantities of domestic debris suggest that at least one, if not both, of the enclosures were inhabited. The remnants of an extensive rectilinear enclosure system suggest a major reorganisation of the landscape during the Romano-British period. This extensive field system probably extended westwards from the Roman road.

Six roughly parallel, regularly spaced ditches on a distinctive alignment represent a period of activity between the Roman and early medieval periods. They may represent the surviving remains of a series of enclosures of uncertain function. In the early medieval period, the landscape reverted to the alignment seen during the Romano-British period with the establishment of E-W and N-S aligned routeways, which intersected at the margins of Holme. At this time, the majority of the site was under arable cultivation. During the post-medieval period further land divisions, associated with quarrying, were created in the southern part of the site.

In order to determine the archaeological potential of the remainder of the site, Albion undertook an evaluation of the wider area in 2008 (Albion 2008). A total of 24 trenches were opened, of which 14 contained archaeological deposits. Two archaeological areas were defined. In the Western Area, the continuation of the historic landscape revealed in the 2004 archaeological investigation was identified, including at least one substantial building, a short distance to the west of the balancing pond.

The Eastern Area, situated adjacent to the A1 trunk road, contained evidence for two undated enclosure systems as well as associated features such as pits. The nature of the fills suggested that they were of some antiquity; the alignments of the ditches indicated that some were the continuation of Roman and medieval activity identified at the balancing pond site.

1.4 Project Objectives

Based on the results of the evaluation, it was anticipated that elements of several phases of enclosure system would be exposed, possibly defining the margins of the settlement.

Although no datable artefacts were recovered from the evaluation, the features were considered to be of probable Iron Age to Romano-British date, based on the results of the previous work to the west.



The transition from the Iron Age to the Roman-British period is a key regional research theme (Medlycott 2011, 31), whilst the Bedfordshire research agenda seeks to understand settlement variation and interrelationship, for example between the settlements in the river valleys and the higher areas of the clay plateaus (Oake 2007, 11). Given the site's possible marginal location at the edge of the settlement, there was potential to examine the expansion and contraction of the settlement.

The aim of the investigations, in the areas beyond the 2004 investigation, was to understand the continuation of the previously investigated archaeological landscapes — in particular those dating to the prehistoric, Romano-British and medieval periods. The Updated Project Design for the 2004 investigation (Albion 2007) identified nine Research Objectives. Of the five objectives relating to the Eastern Area, the current investigations had the potential to contribute to several as indicated below:

Research Objective	Eastern Area
1. What was the nature of activity / settlement in the late Bronze Age-early Iron Age?	
2. How does land-use intensify in the early-middle Iron Age?	
4. What was the economic basis of the Romano-British farmstead site associated with the Phase 3 enclosures and the Phase 4 field system?	√
5. What happened on the site between the demise of the late Iron Age to early Romano-British enclosures and the early medieval (10th–11th century) reorganisation of the agrarian landscape?	√
6. What form did the margins of the settlement of Holme take and how did they develop during the medieval period?	√

1.5 Purpose of this Report

This report presents a detailed summary of the results of all stages of the archaeological investigations in the Eastern Area. Given the relatively small size of the data sets, they have been fully analysed. This component of the investigation can now be integrated with the previous work at the Beauford Farm site (funded separately) to allow a more coherent understanding of the wider landscape.

The intention is for the integrated synthesis, incorporating the summary in this report to be published in the county journal, *Bedfordshire Archaeology*, and the deposition of the project archive with Bedford Museum. The completion of these tasks will fulfil the criteria stipulated in the Written Scheme of Investigation (Albion 2011) for the LPA to discharge the archaeological planning condition for this component of the development.



2. SUMMARY OF RESULTS

2.1 Introduction

2.1.1 Methodology

The contextual data were analysed in order to establish a coherent spatial and chronological framework. The contexts were assigned to a structural hierarchy, with the recent work being integrated with the evaluation results from the Eastern Area to provide a greater understanding. This structural hierarchy was allocated a unique block of numbers, to facilitate integration into the wider Beauford Farm project. These hierarchical associations relate to coherent groups of contexts such as enclosure ditches, trackway ditches, postholes and pits (Table 1). The allocation of individual contexts to specific Groups was made on the basis of the following criteria:

- Do the contexts form a coherent spatial unit *e.g.* ditch length, pit group?
- Do the contexts represent similar positions within the stratigraphic sequence?
- Do the contexts contain suitable dating material?

The Groups were then assigned to Land-use Areas, which linked evidence of activity into contemporary spatial and functional analytical units, *e.g.* fields, trackways, occupation activity etc.

The Phases represent a distinct chronological period of contemporary activity.

The text which follows is structured by chronological period, and discussed by Group (G) and where appropriate Land-use Area (L).

A variety of archaeological features were identified within the investigation area, comprising boundary and enclosure ditches and furrows, as well as evidence of vegetation clearance. A large number of land drains of various types were observed crossing the area on various alignments

Phase	Chronological Period	L	G	Description
1	Iron Age	300	504.00	Early enclosure ditch - east
		300	505.00	Infilling of early ditch - east
		300	506.00	Early enclosure ditch - west
		300	507.00	Infilling of early ditch - west
		301	508.00	Redefined ditch
		301	509.00	Infilling of redefined ditch
2	?Roman	302	510.00	Narrow linear ditch
		302	511.00	Infilling of ditch
3	Medieval	303	516.00	Furrow
		303	515.00	Infilling - eastern element
4	Post-medieval	304	512.00	Southern ditch - main element in the west
		304	513.00	Infilling of main element of ditch
		304	514.00	Southern ditch - eastern element
		304	515.00	Infilling of element of ditch

Table 1: Summary of phasing



2.2 Overburden

The archaeological deposits were sealed below ploughsoil and underlying subsoil. The dark grey-brown silty clay ploughsoil was 0.25–0.33m thick, below which was firm mid yellow-brown silty clay subsoil, up to 0.22m thick.

2.3 Phase 1: Early Land Enclosure (Early Iron Age)

The northern part of the investigation area contained part of a NE-SW aligned enclosure ditch, which underwent modification. Its later form was dated to the early Iron Age by a small assemblage of finds.

2.3.1 Early enclosure Figure 2 – light green features

Two slightly off-set ditches G504 in the east and G506 in the west, define an entranceway less than 2.8m wide. The eastern ditch G504 was partly truncated by a later feature on a similar alignment. The surviving profile was 1.05m wide and up to 0.2m deep, with a generally shallow concave profile (Figure 2: section 1, Figure 3: image 1 and Figure 4: image 3).

The western ditch G506 was not truncated by later activity; it defined a rounded eastern terminal in plan. In section, the ditch was 1.44m wide, with a shallow concave profile, 0.32m deep (Figure 2: section 2 and Figure 3: image 2). The off-set arrangement of the ditches is typically associated with the control and management of livestock.

The main fills of both ditches were relatively dark, ranging from light to mid grey-brown clay silt, indicating unstable material derived from the upper soil profile. In the terminal of the western ditch G506, a mid red-brown primary fill was identified. This represents an initial episode of weathering of the lower edges of the cut, which based on the concave profile of the deposit, formed in dry conditions (Figure 2: section 2). No finds were recovered from the fills of these ditches. A sample <1> taken from the upper fill of the western terminal of the ditch contained very sparse charcoal flecks; the small size of the assemblage precludes any further meaningful analysis.

The western ditch G506 would appear to have continued further to the west, being identified in at least one evaluation trench within the Eastern Area. Located 12m to the SW, in Trench 18, ditch [1803] was aligned NE-SW, suggesting a curving rather than linear boundary (Figure 2). The undated ditch was 1.16m wide and 0.53m deep with a concave profile, filled with a mid orange-brown deposit. Some 23m further to the SW, ditch [2403] aligned roughly E-W, may be a continuation of this boundary. However, this ditch was recorded as truncating the local subsoil, which could suggest that it was post-medieval or later in date. This ditch was 0.85m wide, filled with a mid brown deposit. The dark fill again suggests material derived from an unstable upper soil profile.

2.3.2 Redefined boundary Figure 2 – dark green feature

Ditch G508 defined a continuous ditch, which blocked the earlier off-set entrance (G504 / G506). This ditch was significantly wider and deeper than the initial ditch, at up to 1.88m wide and 0.48–0.65m deep. It also had a more V-shaped profile (Figure 2: section 1 and Figure 4: image 3). The mid orange-brown clay silt fill



was derived from the natural silting of material derived from the adjacent soil profile.

A small assemblage of finds was recovered from the fill of the ditch, comprising pottery, animal bone and burnt stone. The pottery comprised eight early Iron Age sherds (37g), representing three vessels. The fragmented nature of the assemblage is demonstrated by a low mean sherd weight of 4g. All the sherds were abraded sand-tempered body sherds (fabrics F19, F28 and F29)¹, deriving from vessels of undiagnostic form. A small quantity of animal bone was also recovered — 13 pieces of long bone (8g). All were abraded and highly fragmented, with each piece weighing approximately 0.6g. Their poor condition precludes species identification. A small fragment of burnt stone (8g) was also recovered from the ditch fill. Sample <2> from the ditch fill contained a small quantity of charcoal flecks. The fragment size was too small for species identification and no further analytical work will be undertaken.

Despite its substantial form, no trace of the boundary was identified further west, possibly suggesting that it represents a short blocking ditch rather than extensive redefining of the enclosure boundary. As the early ditch had at least partly silted up when this was dug, it would suggest that an associated boundary feature, possibly a hedge rather than a bank, might have been present. The small quantity of artefacts would suggest that the area was some distance from the focus of associated human activity, indicating a marginal location, possibly associated with livestock management.

Four pits identified further to the west [1807], [1809], [1811] and [1813] were circular to oval in plan, ranging from 1.5m across to 2.5m by 1m and up to 0.33m deep with a concave profile. The fills varied from dark grey-brown to mid orange-brown. It is possible that a fifth pit was present, with [1805], further to the NW, possibly defining a more elongated pit, rather than a ditch; it was at least 1.6m long by 1.5m wide and 0.59m deep with a stepped profile. No finds were recovered from the mid orange-brown fill. A couple of the pits were clustered close to the ditch, suggesting that they were associated. These may indicate zoning of activity within the enclosure, or possibly, a change in activity related to the blocking of the former entrance.

2.4 Phase 2: Land Division (?Roman)

Situated towards the centre of the investigation area, a linear ditch G510 aligned roughly NE-SW extended 32m across the area (Figure 2 – orange feature). The ditch was 0.27m wide, with a shallow concave to U-shaped profile often only 0.08m deep, indicating a very truncated profile, (Figure 2: section 3 and Figure 4: image 4). The dark grey fill contained no finds.

This narrow ditch has a distinctive alignment compared to both ditches and land drains and would appear to correlate to a distinctive phase of land division initially identified in the balancing pond and feeder ditch investigations. This phase of

¹ Fabric types identified in accordance with the Bedfordshire Ceramic Type Series, currently maintained by Albion Archaeology.



activity is very poorly dated, relying on stratigraphic relations within the balancing pond site.

2.5 Phase 3: Arable Field (Medieval)

Distinctively wide but shallow features G516 aligned NNW crossed the investigation area (Figure 2 – brown features). They were up to 1.7m across, with a shallow, roughly concave profile, and up to 0.12m deep. They represent the characteristic sub-surface furrows of medieval and post-medieval arable cultivation. No finds were recovered from the mid grey-brown clayey silty fill, indicating that these features were some distance from the focus of habitation — the former settlement of Holme situated beyond the balancing pond to the west.

Land drains had subsequently been inserted into the furrows. Although a number of furrows were identified in the feeder ditch to the south, they were sparser upslope to the north, with the exception of furrows recorded in the continuation of Trench 19, immediately to the SW, within the Eastern Area (Figure 2). Later ploughing appears to have removed the continuation of the features upslope within the investigation area, although the spacing can be inferred by the location of land drains on a similar alignment. The close spacing of two furrows in this area may indicate an episode of realignment of the ploughlands (the raised areas that were cultivated).

2.5.1 Vegetation holes and tree throws

A number of tree-throws — the cavities created by the uprooting of trees or large shrubs were identified throughout the investigation area (Figure 2 – purple features). Though generally lighter in colour than the archaeological features, they were undated. A number would appear to pre-date cultivation furrows and may represent clearance associated with taking of the land into cultivation.

2.6 Phase 4: Arable Landscape (Post-medieval)

This period is characterised by a variety of features including traces of boundaries and general agricultural activity — principally attempts to drain the land. Several series of land drains were identified, the majority on a NE-SW or N-S alignment following the gradient of the slope. The N-S orientation may have utilised the depressions of the furrows, implying that these drains were laid when the earthworks were still prominent features.

2.6.1 Boundary Figure 2 – black features

An E-W aligned boundary ditch, G512 and G514, extended across the southern margin of the investigation area, separated by a c. 5m-wide entrance in the east. The ditch was substantial, c. 1.4m wide and up to 0.65m deep, with a V-shaped profile (Figure 2: section 4 and Figure 5: images 5 and 6). The main fill comprised mid orange-brown clayey silt, derived from surrounding soils. The western component of the ditch G512 was slightly less substantial, ranging from 0.78–1m wide and 0.4–0.56m deep. The only finds were recovered from the western ditch terminal, comprising two tapering portions of rectangular sectioned iron nail shank, the longest measuring 26mm. These fragments cannot be typologically dated. This ditch was previously investigated during the evaluation in Trench 22, [2204], where it was seen to truncate the subsoil, suggesting a post-medieval or later date.



A perpendicular ditch [2202] intersected the main ditch some 5m west of the entrance, where it would appear to have defined an earlier component some 0.8m wide and 0.6m deep with steep near vertical sides and a flat base. No finds were recovered from the grey-brown silty clay fill.



3. ASSESSMENT OF POTENTIAL AND UPDATED PROJECT DESIGN

3.1 *Assessment*

The investigation of this area has indicated the enclosure of the landscape in the early Iron Age, a pattern seen further west on the balancing pond site and also further east in the area around Stratton Farm. The initial form of the enclosure, with the relatively narrow off-set entrance, may indicate use for livestock management, with the subsequent blocking suggesting reorganisation or possibly even a change in function of the enclosure. Whilst the small assemblage of pottery does not provide unequivocal evidence for an early focus in the Iron Age, it does, however, indicate an intensification of land-use in the prehistoric period. It is not clear if this activity subsequently expanded to the west, into the area of the balancing pond.

A single ditch on an unusual alignment would, based on its orientation and spacing, be part of an enigmatic series of narrow boundaries, extending eastwards from the balancing pond site. Their insubstantial forms would indicate that they were not major boundaries, being more akin to plot divisions. Unfortunately, no finds were recovered to clarify the date of these features, which based on previous evidence (mostly stratigraphy) probably represent late Roman activity, which did not influence the subsequent early medieval landscape. This suggests extensive, though less intensive, utilisation of the landscape compared to the preceding enclosures of the late Iron Age to early Romano-British phases. Although apparently extending obliquely westwards from the Roman road, few finds or other evidence of associated activity have been identified.

Remains of medieval ridge and furrow cultivation have been recorded within the investigation area, confirming the impression, from previous fieldwork stages in the south and west, that the area was embedded within an agricultural landscape. Even these features had suffered severe truncation, particularly upslope to the north.

It is likely that two perpendicular boundaries, at the southern margin of the investigation area, define elements of a regular pattern of enclosures dating to the post-medieval period. Although they do not correspond to any land divisions shown on historic maps, they may define enclosures making use of the old Roman road, possibly following its creation as a turnpike. Extensive attempts at land drainage of this area utilised the slope and probably the linear depressions of the earlier cultivation furrows.

3.2 *Updated Project Design*

The structural data has been fully analysed, whilst the small artefactual data set, has been analysed for this summary, with very limited potential to achieve any further meaningful results from additional analysis. The small quantity of finds would suggest a marginal location, away from the focus of human activity in all phases represented. Whilst at one level this may seem surprising given the close proximity of a routeway to the east, extending from at least the Roman period, continuing to be utilised in the medieval period before being upgraded from the post-medieval period onwards. However, the land is relatively low-lying heavy soils, with more



favourable conditions further west in the balancing pond site and probably upslope further to the north.

As these results add to the understanding of the utilisation of the landscape of Beauford Farm, it is intended that this summary will be integrated with the results of the wider programme of investigation. This would comprise the balancing pond site, its subsequent extension and associated feeder ditch, which would provide a more coherent understanding of the wider landscape. The end product will be publication of the results in the county journal, *Bedfordshire Archaeology*, and the deposition of the project archive (accession number 2013.38) with Bedford Museum. In the meantime, this document will also be uploaded onto the Archaeological Data Services (ADS) website.



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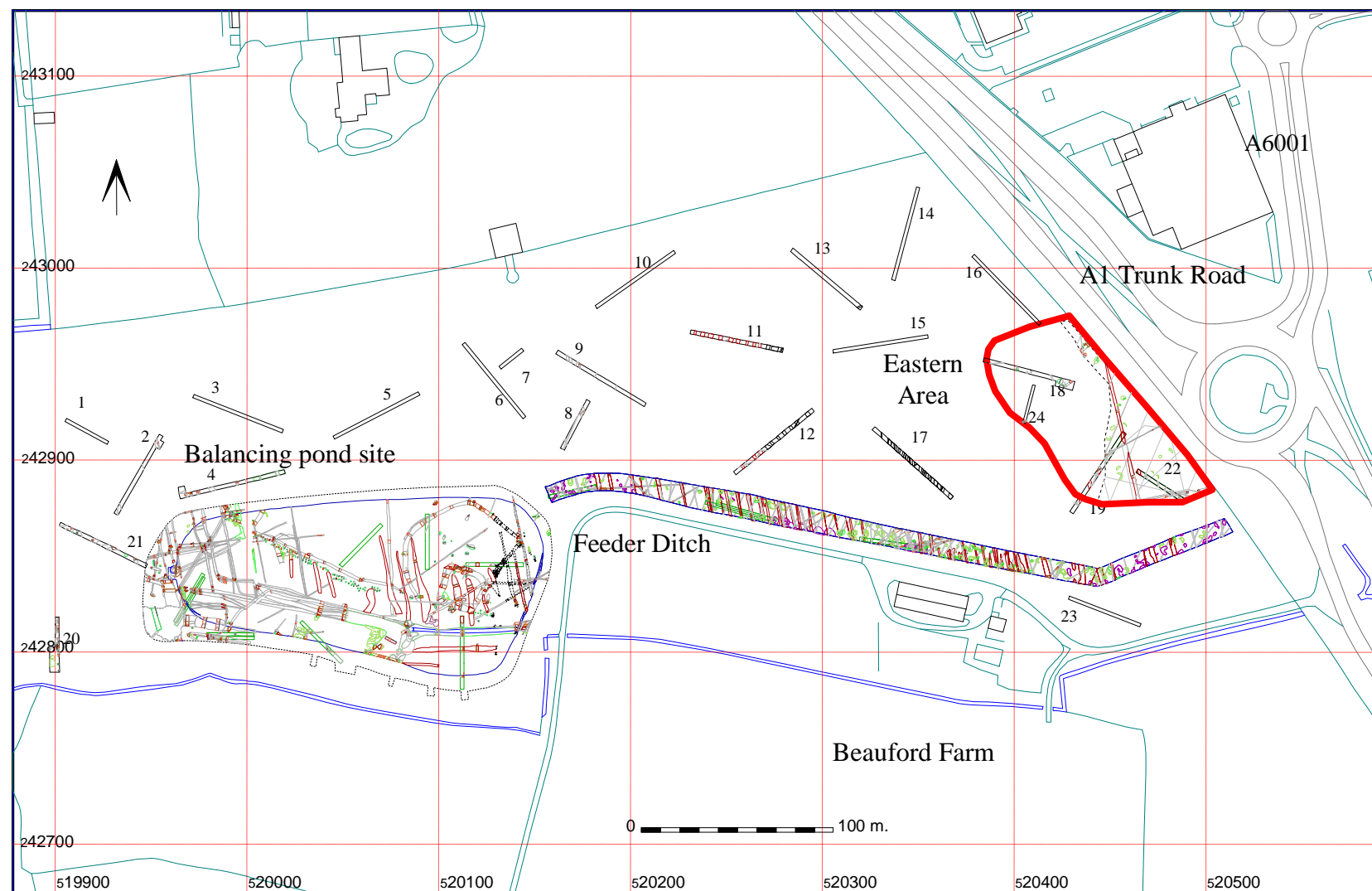
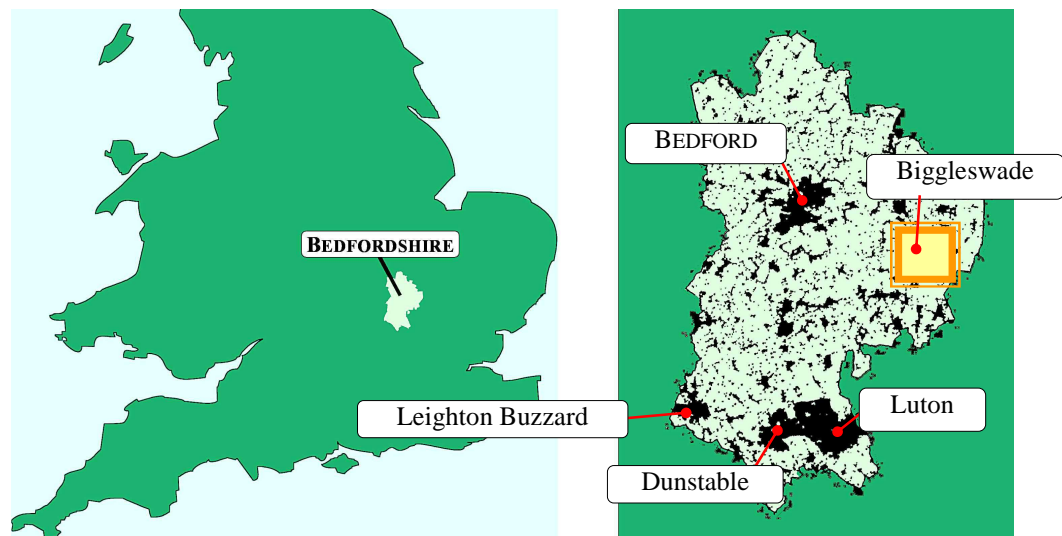
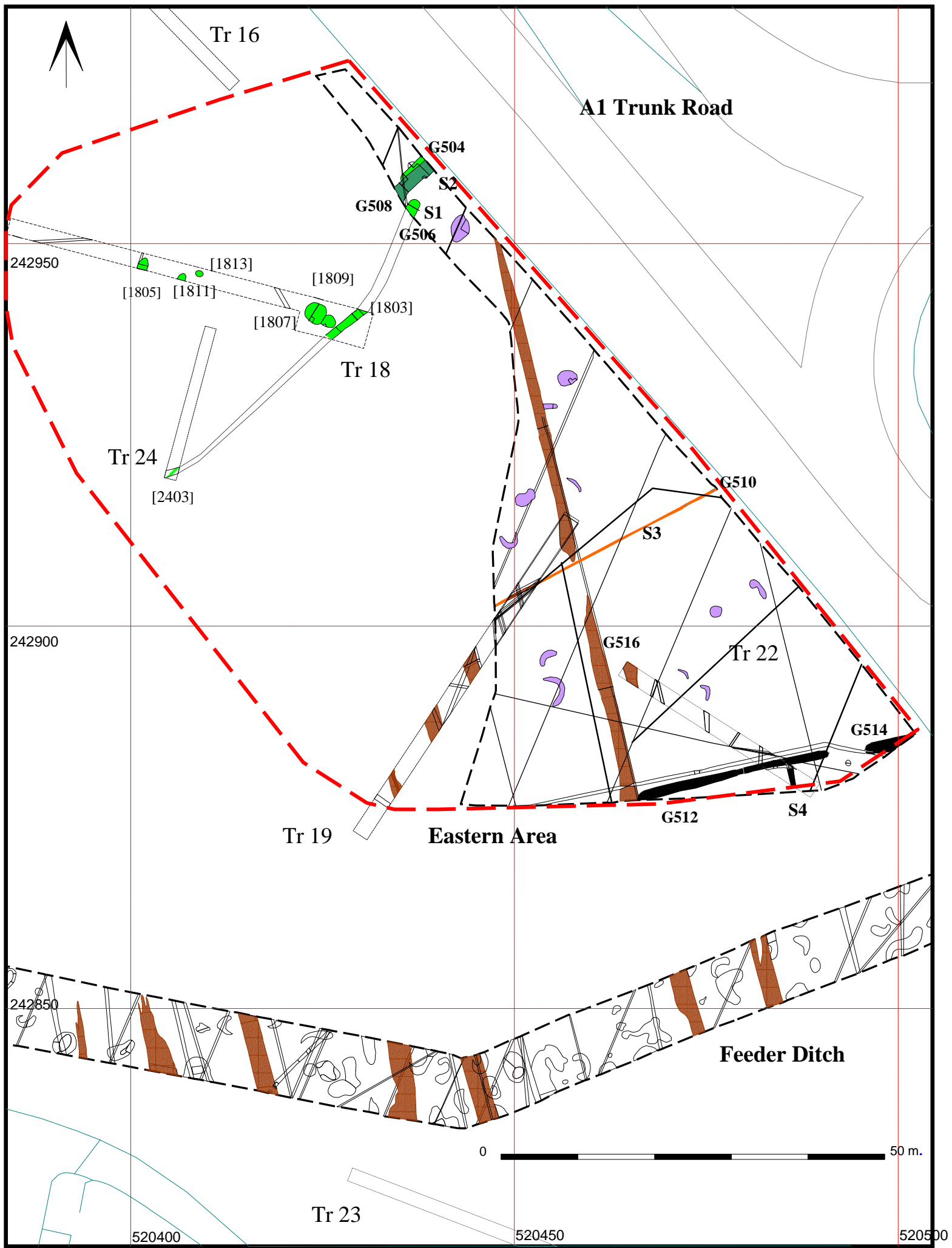


Figure 1: Site location plan

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Sections

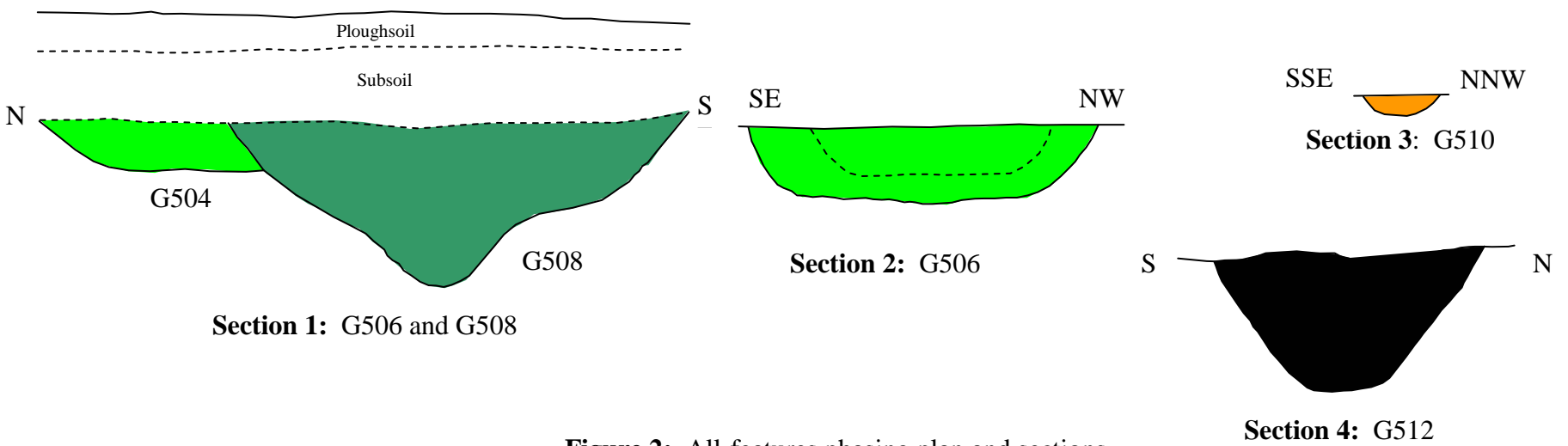


Figure 2: All-features phasing plan and sections



Image 1: General view of redefined early Iron Age enclosure — recut boundary in foreground, with early shallower ditch G504 to the right. The terminal of western ditch G506 is to the top left of the image. Later recutting, ditch G508, blocks the former entrance. Scale 1m in 50cm divisions.



Image 2: Terminal of western ditch G506, looking west. Scale 1m in 50cm divisions.

Figure 3: Selected images 1 and 2



Image 3: Recutting of early Iron Age enclosures, looking east — shallower early form of ditch to left (G504), recut by later deep form G508. Scale 1m in 50cm divisions.



Image 4: General view of truncated remains of possible Roman ditch G510. Scale 0.4m in 10cm divisions.

Figure 4: Selected images 3 and 4



Image 5: Possible post-medieval boundary ditch G512 at southern margin of the investigation area, looking west, with dark linear band defining parallel land drain immediately to the right. Scale 1m in 50cm divisions.



Image 6: Eastern terminal of possible post-medieval boundary ditch G514, with base of land drain immediately to the right. Scale 1m in 50cm divisions.

Figure 5: Selected images 5 and 6

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