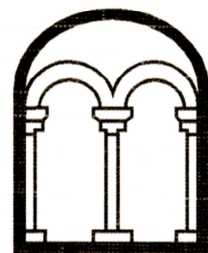


**PRIORY MIDDLE SCHOOL  
BRITAIN STREET  
DUNSTABLE  
BEDFORDSHIRE**

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL OBSERVATION,  
INVESTIGATION, RECORDING, ANALYSIS  
AND PUBLICATION**

**Albion**  
archaeology



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On behalf  
Priory Academy



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## Preface

*Every effort has been made in the preparation and submission of this document and all statements 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.*

*This document has been prepared by Ben Barker and approved by Drew Shotliff.*

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1.0	04/08/2015	n/a

## Key Terms

Throughout this document the following terms or abbreviations are used:

Albion	Albion Archaeology
CBCA	Central Bedfordshire Council Archaeologist
CIfA	Chartered Institute <i>for</i> Archaeologists
Client	Priory Academy, Dunstable
DA	Development area
HER	Central Bedfordshire Council Historic Environment Record
LPA	Local Planning Authority
Procedures Manual	Procedures Manual Volume 1 Fieldwork, 2nd ed, 2001 Albion Archaeology
WSI	Written Scheme of Investigation



### **Non-technical Summary**

*Planning consent (CB/14/00588/FULL) was granted for internal alterations to provide two classrooms and a new staff room, demolition of existing PE storage facility, and the erection of new changing rooms at Priory Middle School, Dunstable, Bedfordshire.*

*The development area lies within the core of the Roman and medieval towns of Dunstable, and close to the scheduled ancient monument of the Augustinian Priory of St Peter. Accordingly, a condition (no. 6) was attached to the planning consent to secure a programme of archaeological investigation as a consequence of the development. Albion Archaeology prepared a Written Scheme of Investigation (setting out a strategy for a programme of archaeological works), which was approved by the CBC Archaeologist.*

*Demolition work commenced on 14/07/2015; the groundworks requiring archaeological observation were completed on 15/07/2015.*

*The foundations for the new building consisted of a reduced dig of 0.35–0.5m below existing ground level, which was then filled with c. 0.15m of MOT Type-1 sub-base aggregate. The building sub-frame was to be supported by pre-cast concrete pads placed upon the Type-1 following compaction.*

*The base of the reduced dig was entirely within made ground across the entire footprint of the new building. No archaeological features or deposits pre-dating the present school were revealed. The north-west corner of the reduced area was, however, notably cleaner of demolition rubble and more ‘chalky’ than the rest of the area. This may suggest that the level of the archaeological horizon is shallower in this part of the school site than has been suggested by previous work in the vicinity.*



## 1. INTRODUCTION

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### 1.1 **Background**

Planning consent (CB/14/00588/FULL) was granted for internal alterations to provide two classrooms and a new staff room, demolition of existing PE storage facility, and the erection of new changing rooms at Priory Middle School, Dunstable, Bedfordshire.

A heritage assessment within the Design and Access Statement (DLA 2014, 9–10) was prepared to support the planning application. This concluded that the site had the potential to contain archaeological deposits relating to the Roman, medieval and post-medieval development of Dunstable.

The development area (DA) lies within the core of the Roman and medieval towns of Dunstable, and close to the scheduled ancient monument of the Augustinian Priory of St Peter. Nearby archaeological investigation (Albion 2005) suggested that any archaeological deposits were likely to be buried under a substantial depth of modern overburden; however, construction of the new changing rooms could have had a negative impact on these potential deposits. Accordingly, a condition (no. 6) was attached to the planning consent to secure a programme of archaeological investigation as a consequence of the development. The other elements of the consented development relate to the refurbishment of existing buildings (Figure 2), with no potential impact on sub-surface archaeological remains

The requirement for archaeological works as a consequence of the development is in line with national planning guidelines in the form of Policy 141 of the *National Planning Policy Framework* (NPPF).

Albion Archaeology prepared a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI), setting out a strategy for a programme of archaeological observation of the groundworks, investigation and recording of any archaeological remains that were revealed, and an appropriate programme of post-fieldwork analysis, reporting and archiving (Albion 2015). The WSI was approved by the CBC Archaeologist (CBCA). Demolition work commenced on 14/07/2015; the groundworks requiring archaeological observation were completed on 15/07/2015.

### 1.2 **Site Location and Description**

Priory Middle School (now Priory Academy) is located on the north side of Britain Street to the south Dunstable town centre. The site of the new changing rooms lies to the rear of the building and includes land previously occupied by a PE storage facility (Figure 1). The proposed new building is c. 120 square metres in area and is centred at National Grid Reference (NGR) TL 02276 21710.



The development area and lies on fairly level ground at *c.* 145m OD. The underlying geology is Upper Cretaceous Chalk (British Geological Survey materials ©NERC [2014]).

### **1.3 Archaeological Background**

The Heritage Assessment (section 7) within the Design and Access Statement (DLA 2014) presents the archaeological background to the proposed development. The archaeological background to the site is presented in more detail below.

Priory Middle School lies in the historic town of Dunstable, *c.* 400m to the south-east of the crossroads which marks the town centre. The town was known as *Durocbrivis* (HER 135) during the Roman period and developed at the crossroads of a Roman road known as Watling Street (HER 5508) and a prehistoric routeway known as the Icknield Way (HER 353). Watling Street connected London (*Londinium*) with north-west England and the Icknield Way ran from Ivinghoe Beacon in Buckinghamshire to Knettishall Heath in Norfolk.

Since the large-scale re-development and expansion of Dunstable from the mid-20th century onwards a considerable quantity of Roman remains have been excavated and recorded within the centre of the town, particularly near the crossroads, proving the existence of a sizable regional centre. The core of the Roman town seems to have radiated out for a distance of around 400m from the Icknield Way/Watling Street crossroads.

Archaeological evidence suggests that *Durocbrivis* is likely to have declined during the late 4th or 5th century when Roman urban life essentially came to an end. Saxon activity in Dunstable is largely restricted to the north-west part of the modern town. At present, there is little evidence for continuity between the Roman and Saxon settlements.

The intersection of Watling Street and the Icknield Way continued to make Dunstable a strategically important location for settlement and trade during later periods. In 1119, Henry I founded the medieval town (HER 16986), which, like the Roman settlement, was focussed on the Icknield Way / Watling Street crossroads. The town was laid out in burgh plots, some of which may be preserved in present-day property boundaries (particularly along High Street South). Medieval features including kilns, pits and ditches have been recorded at a number of locations. Henry I also had a royal residence within the town (HER 148) and founded the Augustinian Priory of St Peter (HER 131, SM 3). The remains of the latter are a scheduled ancient monument, located within Priory Gardens, between High Street South and Church Street.

The DA lies *c.* 100m to the south of the scheduled ancient monument, on the edge of the known core of the medieval town. Dunstable's position on the A5 (Watling Street) meant that from the medieval period it prospered as a stopping point for coaches on the way from London to the north-west.



From the 17th century onwards many coaching inns were constructed along High Street North and High Street South. One of the earliest plans of the town dates to 1762 and shows that it was relatively small at that time. By the beginning of the 19th century it had a population of only 1,296 people. The arrival of the railway in 1848 led to huge expansion, particularly around the London and North-Western Station, but it also resulted in the rapid decline of the coaching industry. Towards the end of the 19th century the straw hat industry became one of the town's principal businesses. In many cases the factories took over redundant coaching inns and a number are known along High Street South, e.g. the Grey House (HER 4548) at 59 High Street South, formerly the Star or Starr Inn, to the rear of which the remains of a brick-built water storage tank were found during redevelopment (KDK 2013).

### 1.3.1 Previous archaeological investigations

Several archaeological investigations have been undertaken within close proximity to the DA. The results of these investigations suggested that the DA might contain further significant remains.

Within the grounds of the school, less than 10m from the DA, a trial trench associated with the construction of the science block (Albion 2005) identified a medieval furrow and two undated ditches of probable earlier date (Figure 1). The evaluation indicated that archaeological deposits survived within the vicinity of the school building, but also that these deposits were protected by at least 1m of modern overburden.

The Manshead Archaeological Society (MAS) has undertaken a series of investigative works within and immediately adjacent to the grounds of the school (Hudspith 2004). To east of the development area a trial trench revealed the remains of a 17th–18th-century metalled track. Residual sherds of Roman and medieval pottery were also recovered during these works.

Further works in the northern corner of the school playing fields, c. 100m north-west of the DA, also revealed significant remains. The earliest feature was a north-south aligned ditch, dated to the early-mid Roman period and truncated by a late Roman inhumation. The ditch was also overlain by a series of medieval cart ruts and a metalled surface. This routeway would have served Dunstable Priory (HER 131) until it went out of use during the 16th century.

MAS undertook investigations at The White Swan public house located c. 150m south-west of the DA. This revealed a ditch containing medieval pottery and a well/pit containing late 19th- and early 20th-century artefacts.

Further investigations were undertaken by MAS at 3 Wellington Terrace c. 100m south-west of the DA. A small quantity of Roman and medieval pottery sherds were revealed, along with several post-medieval property boundaries and a wealth of 19th-century domestic refuse.

Trial trenching in Montpelier House, c. 150m north-west of the DA, revealed no significant archaeological remains. Evidence for post-medieval quarrying





and landscaping was revealed, suggesting that any earlier remains might have been removed in the relatively recent past (Bolderson 2002).

An archaeological watching brief at 65–75 High Street South (ASC 2008), c. 150m to the west of the DA identified an undated ditch terminus and a fragment of architectural masonry.

### 1.3.2 Historic Environment Record (HER)

A Roman ditch (HER 11281) was recorded 140m north-west of the DA. It was 2m wide and was sealed by a layer containing late 1st to early 2nd-century Roman pottery. The proportions of the ditch were such that it may originally have been used for a defensive purpose, rather than for drainage or to mark a field boundary.

Other sites listed on the HER include the findspot of a 12th-century seal, engraved with a representation of the martyrdom of St Katherine. This was found c. 140m north of the DA and immediately south of the site of Dunstable Priory, with which it was undoubtedly connected.

The domed building of Priory Middle School (HER 15807) dates to 1911 and contains several unusual architectural features, the most significant being its copper dome. A series of six late 19th-century houses (HER15469) are located c. 120m south-west of the site in Wellington Terrace.

## 1.4 Project Objectives

The DA had the potential to contain sub-surface archaeological remains relating to Roman, medieval and post-medieval Dunstable.

Accordingly, there was potential for the proposed archaeological investigation to contribute to research topics identified within the regional research frameworks — *Research and Archaeology Revisited: a revised framework for the East of England* (Medlycott 2011); and specifically for Bedfordshire: *Bedfordshire Archaeology. Research and Archaeology: Resource Assessment, Research Agenda and Strategy* (Oake *et al* 2007).

Both the local and regional research agendas highlight the need for further research into the origins and development of small towns (Going and Plouviez 2000, 21; Oake *et al* 2007, 11 and 14; Medlycott 2011, 47 48, 58, 70 and 79). Within Bedfordshire, the character and development of the medieval town of Dunstable has been specifically noted as worthy of further research (Oake *et al* 2007, 15).

The general objectives of the investigation were to:

- determine the date, nature and extent of any activity or occupation within the DA;
- determine the relationship of any remains found to the surrounding contemporary landscapes;
- recover palaeo-environmental remains to determine local environmental conditions.



As the project progressed and the archaeological potential of the site became clear, research objectives were to be revised as required.



## 2. METHODOLOGY

The methodological approach to the project is summarised below. A full methodology is provided in the WSI (Albion Archaeology 2015).

### 2.1 Methodological Standards

The standards and requirements set out in the following documents were adhered to throughout the project:

Albion Archaeology	<i>Procedures Manual: Volume 1 Fieldwork</i> (2nd edn, 2001).
ALGAO	<i>Standards for Field Archaeology in the East of England</i> . EAA Occasional Paper No. 14 (2003)
CIfA	<i>By-Laws and Code of Conduct</i> (2014)
	<i>Standard and guidance for an archaeological watching brief</i> (2014)
Gurney, D	<i>Standards for Field Archaeology in the East of England</i> , EAA (2003)
Historic England (formerly English Heritage)	<i>Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment (MoRPHE) Project Managers' Guide</i> (2015)
	<i>Environmental Archaeology: A guide to the theory and practice of methods, from sampling and recovery to post-excavation</i> (2nd edn, 2011)
Luton Culture	<i>Procedure for preparing archives for deposition with Luton Culture</i> (2013)

### 2.2 Description of Construction Works

The development works consist of the demolition of the existing PE storage facility and the construction of a new one-storey changing room extension on the existing north-facing aspect of the school building.

The foundations for the new building consisted of a reduced dig of 0.35–0.5m below existing ground level, which was then filled with c. 0.15m of MOT Type-1 sub-base aggregate. The building sub-frame was to be supported by pre-cast concrete pads placed upon the Type-1 following compaction.

The ground was reduced 0.3m beyond the footprint of the building to facilitate access to the foundations during construction. Drainage was largely confined within this reduced dig, except for a c. 2m-long run where it was connected to an existing manhole located on the north-western corner of the adjacent science block.



### 3. RESULTS

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#### 3.1 Introduction

The location of the groundworks that were subject to archaeological observation, investigation and recording is shown on Figures 1 and 2. No archaeological features or deposits were identified other than modern disturbance associated with the construction of the school.

#### 3.2 Overburden and Made-Ground

The area of the reduced dig that was not originally occupied by the external store room was covered by a 0.05–0.1m-thick layer of tarmac which formed part of the playground surface. This overlay a 0.05–0.1m-thick layer of yellow-brown sandy gravel aggregate, presumably deposited as sub-base for the modern playground surface.

Below the tarmac and sub-base layer the ground was highly disturbed, consisting of a mixture of redeposited chalk, grey silty clay, modern building rubble and patches of sand and gravel. The layer was consistent with made-ground comprising demolition rubble and disturbed geological deposits.

Traces of an earlier tarmac playground surface were observed at a depth of *c.* 0.3m below the present ground level (Plate 1), suggesting some remodelling of the playground surface, perhaps to improve run-off on to the adjacent field.

The area immediately adjacent to the school was heavily disturbed by concrete foundations relating to the external store, and service trenches for gas and drainage pipes.

The base of the reduced dig was entirely within made ground across the entire footprint of the new building. The north-west corner of the reduced area was, however, notably cleaner of demolition rubble and more ‘chalky’ than the rest of the area (Plate 2). On close inspection the structure of the chalk deposit was highly fractured and contained small fragments of slag-like material (presumably rake-out from the adjacent boiler room) and, as such, it is likely to have been redeposited.

#### 3.3 Interpretation and Conclusions

Whilst the absence of archaeological features or deposits at the level of the reduced dig (<0.5m) is consistent with the results of the adjacent earlier evaluation (Albion Archaeology 2005), there was a potentially significant change in the observed deposits. The much cleaner chalky material in the north-west corner of the building footprint may correspond with a shallowing in the depth of the archaeological horizon in this part of the site.



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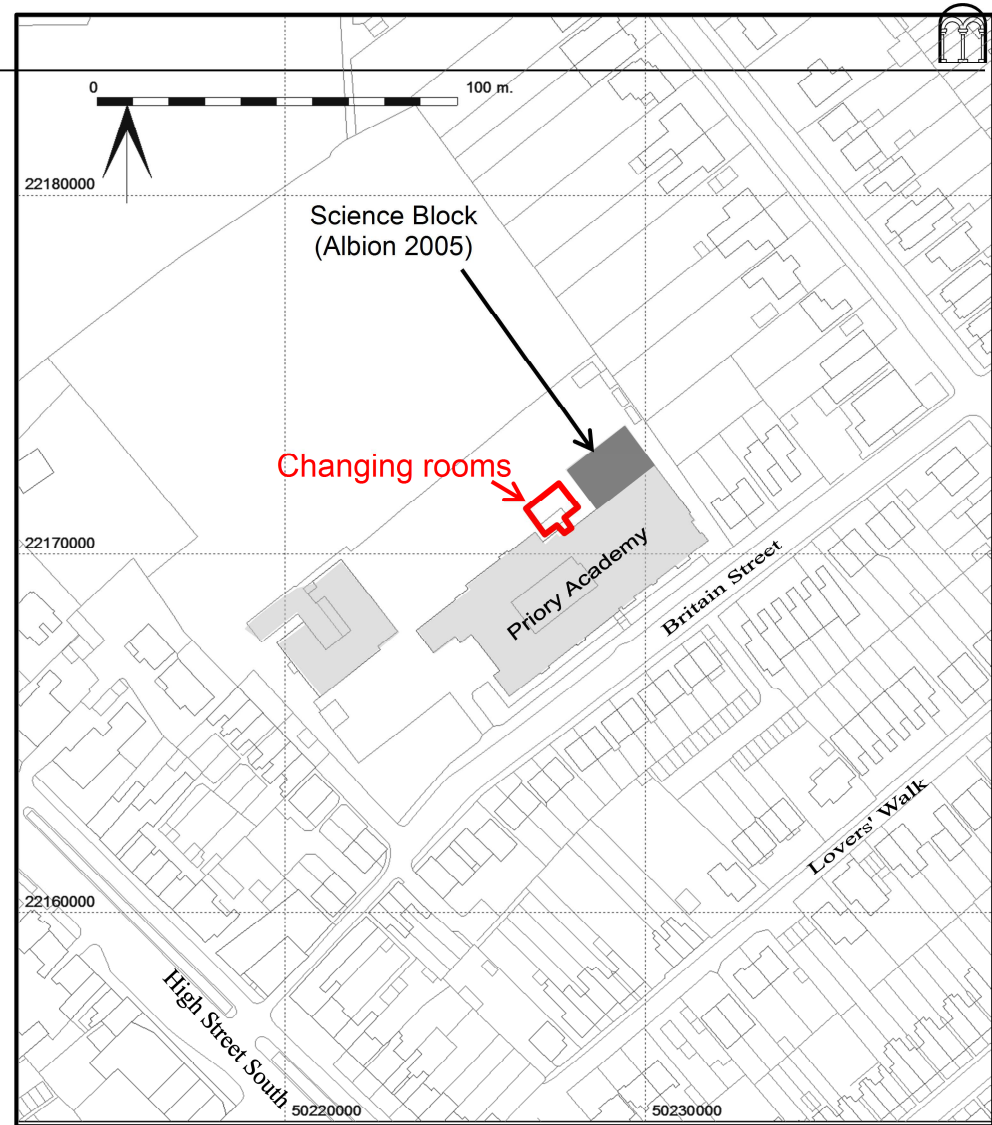
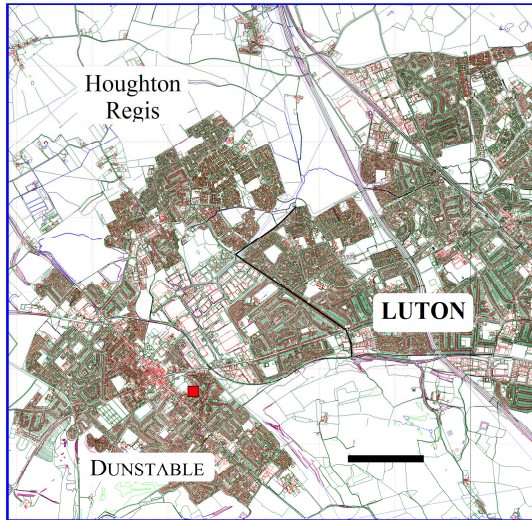
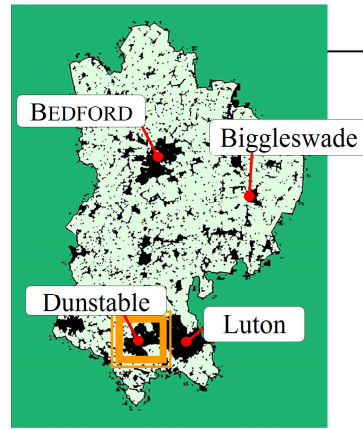


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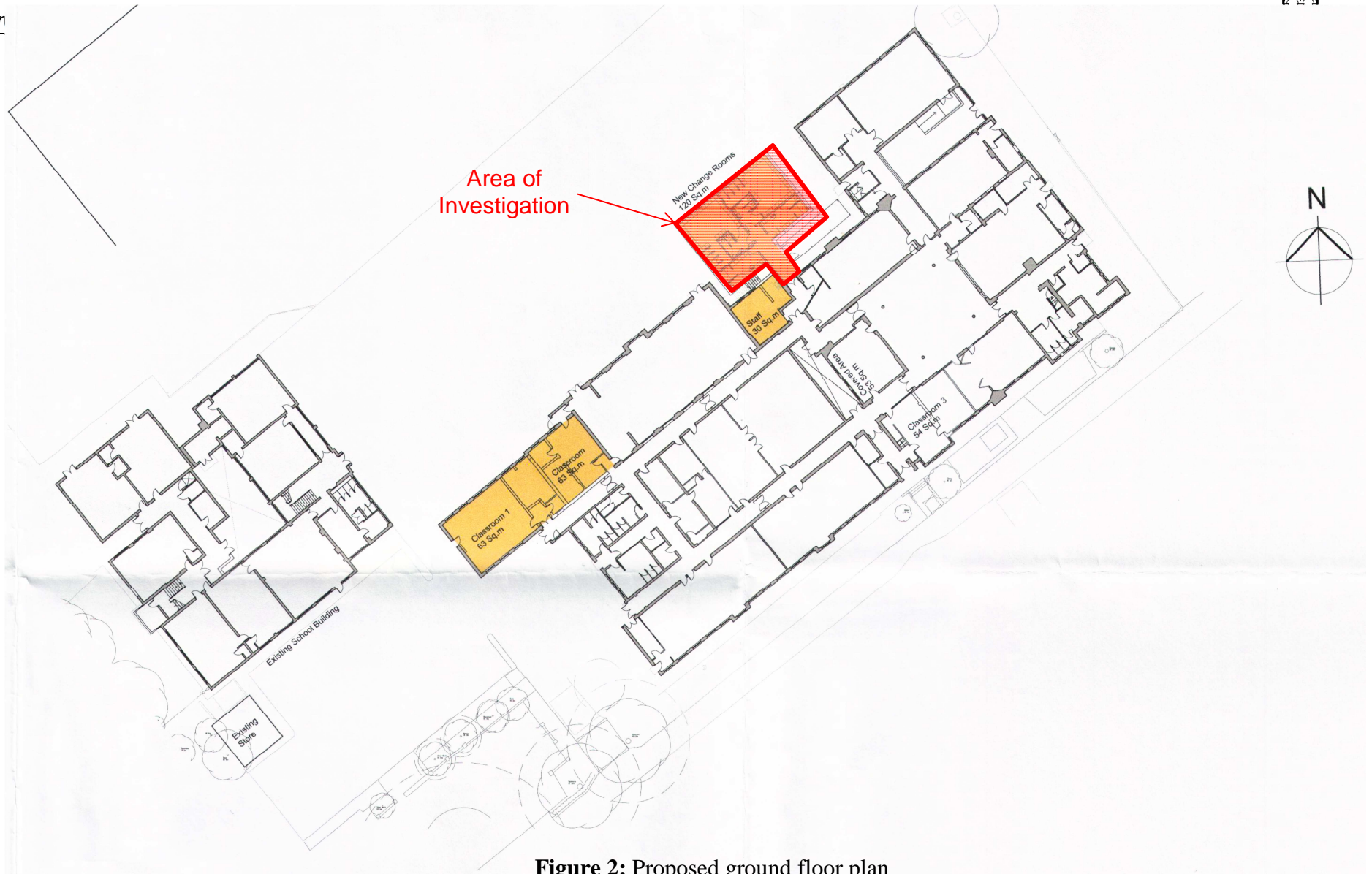
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**Figure 1: Site location**

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**Figure 2: Proposed ground floor plan**

After DC Coles Architects Drawing 13121 (D) 004





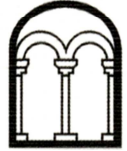
**Plate 1** (left): Eastern corner of reduced dig showing build-up layers and buried tarmac surface

**Plate 2** (below): Composite panorama of completed reduced dig from western corner



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