

**LAND ADJACENT TO THE OLD VICARAGE  
HIGH STREET, FLITTON  
BEDFORDSHIRE**

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL  
FIELD EVALUATION**

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Acting on behalf of:  
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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 specification. 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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## **Structure of this Report**

*Section 1 sets out the background to the project, describing its planning circumstances, location, aims and archaeological context. Section 2 is a summary of the fieldwork describing the methodology and results of the trenching. Section 3 provides a summary of the project findings and their significance. Section 4 is a bibliography and the Appendix contains detailed trench and deposit information.*

## **Key Terms**

*Throughout this document the following terms or abbreviations are used:*

<i>BCC</i>	<i>Bedfordshire County Council</i>
<i>CAO</i>	<i>County Archaeological Officer</i>
<i>HER</i>	<i>Historic Environment Record</i>
<i>IFA</i>	<i>Institute of Field Archaeologists</i>

## **Acknowledgments**

*The project was commissioned by John Gaddes of Hermes Project Services on behalf of the landowners, Dr and Mrs J. Hart. Lesley-Ann Mather of Bedfordshire County Council Heritage and Environment Service monitored the work on behalf of the Local Planning Authority.*

*This report was prepared by Robert Wardill with contributions from Jackie Wells (finds) and Joan Lighting (illustrations).*



### **Non-Technical Summary**

*During July 2007 Albion Archaeology carried out an archaeological field evaluation on land adjacent to The Old Vicarage, High Street, Flitton, Bedfordshire, on behalf of the landowners, Dr and Mrs J. Hart.*

*The site comprised 750m<sup>2</sup> of land located within the core of the medieval village and approximately 70m from the 15<sup>th</sup>-century church of St John the Baptist.*

*The evaluation comprised the excavation of a trial trench approximately 20m<sup>2</sup> in area. Around 0.80m of overburden was removed from the trench before archaeological remains were encountered. These remains comprised at least 15 human burials on a broadly east-west orientation, and probably dating to the early medieval period. The discovery of this cemetery confirms that a church stood in the village in the early medieval period, and also suggests that this earlier structure may have been sited at a different location to the existing 15<sup>th</sup>-century building.*



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## 1. PROJECT BACKGROUND

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### 1.1 Introduction

A planning application (05/1498) for the construction of a private dwelling on land adjacent to The Old Vicarage in Flitton was submitted to Mid Bedfordshire District Council.

Following advice received from the County Archaeological Officer (CAO), the Local Planning Authority attached a condition to the planning permission requiring that a programme of archaeological investigation be carried out at the site in advance of the proposed development.

Albion Archaeology was commissioned to carry out the first stage of the archaeological work which was detailed in the CAO's brief (BCC 2007 a, b) and a corresponding Albion Archaeology Project Design (2007). This latter document was approved by the CAO before the commencement of fieldwork.

The first stage of the investigation comprised the evaluation of the site of the proposed development by trial trenching and this was carried out on 16<sup>th</sup> July 2007.

### 1.2 Site Location and Description

Flitton lies within the valley of the River Flit, with the river itself situated approximately 300m to the north-west. The Old Vicarage is located in the centre of the village, on the south side of the High Street, approximately 70m to the south-east of the church of St John the Baptist (Figure 1).

The development site lies immediately to the east of The Old Vicarage, centred on NGR TL 06023580, and previously formed part of its gardens. It comprises approximately 750m<sup>2</sup> of rough ground that is stepped up from the High Street with its central area stepping up again to at a height of around 66m OD. The area is bordered on all sides by mature trees and shrubs. A number of trees were also sited in the vicinity of the proposed new buildings and trial trench but these were removed prior to the commencement of fieldwork.

The geology of the area comprises Lower Greensand over Jurassic clays. During the excavations these deposits were revealed as a light yellowish grey sand.

### 1.3 Archaeological Background

The site lies within the historic core of the village which is of medieval origin (HER 16999).

The nearby church of St John the Baptist dates to the 15<sup>th</sup> century although a 12<sup>th</sup>-century origin is suspected (Pickford 1994).

A number of small scale archaeological investigations have been carried out within the church but no significant archaeological work has taken place elsewhere in the village in recent years.



#### **1.4 Project Objectives**

Although no major archaeological investigation has taken place within the village, the Medieval Settlement Research Group identified still-inhabited settlements as a potentially fruitful source of information on the development of medieval settlement (MSRG 1996). Flitton village centre was therefore a potentially favourable location for the survival of archaeological remains, with the land adjacent to The Old Vicarage possibly containing preserved remains that could help to elucidate the origins and early development of the village.

Given that development of the site was likely to have a significant impact on any archaeological remains present, and in order to assess that impact and devise an appropriate mitigation strategy, information on the following was required:

- the location, extent, nature and date of any archaeological features or deposits that might be present;
- the integrity and state of preservation of any archaeological features or deposits that might be present.



## 2. FIELDWORK

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### 2.1 Methodology

A T-shaped trench totalling 20.25m<sup>2</sup> in area was opened in the approximate location of the proposed new house (Figure 1). Top and subsoils were removed by a mechanical excavator, fitted with a toothless bucket, under the supervision of suitably experienced and qualified Albion Archaeology personnel. Machine excavation ceased at the depth at which archaeological or undisturbed geological deposits were encountered and all subsequent cleaning of surfaces and investigation of deposits was carried out by hand. All spoil heaps were checked for artefacts and a full written, photographic and drawn record was made of the excavations. Detailed descriptions of all deposits encountered within the trench can be found in the Appendix.

Throughout the project the standards and procedures set out in the following documents were adhered to:

- Albion Archaeology Project Design
- Albion Archaeology *Procedures Manual for Archaeological Fieldwork and the Analysis of Fieldwork Records* (2001)
- BCC Project Brief
- IFA *Standards and Guidance for Field Evaluation and Code of Conduct*
- *English Heritage Management of Archaeological Projects* (1991)

The fieldwork was monitored on behalf of the Local Planning Authority by the BCC Archaeological Officer who inspected the excavations prior to backfilling.

### 2.2 Results

The first 0.3m of material removed from the trench comprised a dark grey sandy clay that contained frequent fragments of brick and tile. This deposit may represent an artificial dump of material corresponding with the stepping up of the central part of the site as described in Section 1.2 above. Beneath this material lay a further 0.3m of light brown sandy silt and this may form a layer of buried topsoil. A further 0.2m of disturbed yellowish grey sand subsoil was removed before archaeological remains were encountered.

All the excavated layers described above, and the deposits left *in situ*, contained a large quantity of roots left over from trees previously removed from the site. This rooting had disturbed the deposits and blended their interfaces to a greater degree than usual.

The archaeological remains encountered within the excavations comprised skeletal remains and, following cleaning of the machined surface by hand, it became apparent that a number of articulated human burials were present within the trench (Figure 2). The skeletons were not fully exposed or excavated but visible components included skulls and long bones. Remains constituting the bodies of at least 15 individuals were identified within the



trench (Plates 1 and 2). All the bodies appeared to be aligned ENE-WSW, similar to the alignment of the nearby church, with the heads at the western end of the grave. Although in some places the bodies were closely spaced, none of the exposed remains appeared to be overlapping. This suggests that the graves may have originally featured above ground markers.

The condition of the bones themselves varied depending on their type. The skulls and small bones were quite fragile; the larger long bones were much more robust. The remains all appeared to be buried at approximately the same depth within the subsoil with bones appearing just above the point at which machine excavation ceased at c.0.80m below the present ground level. However, in one of the trench sections (Figure 1, Section 1), remains were observed at a depth of 0.64m below ground level.

No grave cuts were apparent due to the homogeneity of the fills and surrounding soils, and there was no evidence suggesting that any of the bodies were originally buried in coffins. During cleaning of the trench a single sherd of early medieval pottery was found in the fill of one of the burials (see below for description). This piece of pottery was the only artefact recovered during the evaluation and it provides a possible date for the burial and cemetery.

### **2.3 Finds**

A single sherd of pottery was recovered from the fill of one of the burials. It comprised a hand made sand tempered body sherd (15g) of Hertfordshire-type greyware (fabric type C60<sup>1</sup>), broadly datable to the 11<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> centuries. The sherd has a heavily sooted exterior, indicating its use as a cooking vessel.

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<sup>1</sup> Fabric type defined in accordance with the Bedfordshire Ceramic Type Series, currently held by Albion Archaeology.





### 3. CONCLUSIONS

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The findings of the evaluation indicate that the proposed development is located on the site of an early medieval Christian cemetery. The skeletal remains were found between *c.* 0.64-0.80m below present ground level, however, there is evidence to suggest that the site has been deliberately built up by at least an additional 0.30m. Such a practice is not uncommon within graveyards and can represent efforts to minimise disturbance of earlier burials by later ones (Steane 1985). It was not possible to confirm whether further burials were present beneath the exposed ones, *i.e.* whether those encountered during the evaluation represent the latest and last phase of the site's usage as a cemetery.

The absence of coffin remains or grave goods associated with the burials suggests the graves uncovered were of lay individuals of average status.

The presence of the cemetery confirms the assumption (see Section 1.3 above) that a church existed in the village prior to the construction of the 15<sup>th</sup>-century structure. Assuming this later church was built on the same site as the earlier one, the location of the cemetery some 70-80m from the building, on the opposite side of the village thoroughfare, suggests two possibilities. Firstly that Flitton required an unusually large cemetery for a village of its presumed size during the early medieval period, or that a separate cemetery was established away from the main one sited in the immediate vicinity of the church.

A further intriguing possibility is that the cemetery points to an alternative location for the early church — on the south side of the High Street, possibly in the vicinity of the Old Vicarage. Indeed, the orientation and disposition of the buildings of the vicarage strongly resembles that of the later church and it could be hypothesised that these buildings were constructed on the site of the redundant early church. The land in this area clearly has historical connections with the church. However, further investigation of an archaeological or historical nature would be required to verify the true circumstances of the cemetery.

The discovery of an unknown medieval cemetery is a significant archaeological finding in itself. For Flitton, where little previous archaeological investigation has taken place, it provides valuable new information on the early history and possible layout of the village.



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## 4. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Steane, J. M. 1994. *The Archaeology of Medieval England and Wales.* Croom Helm, London.



## 5. APPENDIX: Trench Summary

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**Trench: 1**

**Max Dimensions: Length: 13.50 m. Width: 1.50 m. Depth to Archaeology Min: 0.64 m. Max: 0.85 m.**

**Co-ordinates: OS Grid Ref.: 1** (Easting: 50601925: Northing: 23580490)

**OS Grid Ref.: 2** (Easting: 50602708: Northing: 23580591)

**Reason: Evaluate archaeological potential of development site**

Context:	Type:	Description:	Excavated:	Finds Present:
1	Topsoil	Friable dark grey sandy clay frequent small ceramic building material 0.3m thick	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2	Subsoil	Friable mid orange brown sandy silt 0.3m thick	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3	Subsoil	Friable light orange brown sandy silt 0.2m thick	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4	Natural	Firm light yellow grey sand	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5	Grave	Linear ENE-WSW	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6	Human skeleton		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7	Fill	Firm mid orange brown sandy silt	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
8	Grave	Linear ENE-WSW	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9	Human skeleton		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10	Fill	Firm mid orange brown sandy silt	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11	Grave	Linear ENE-WSW	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12	Human skeleton		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
13	Fill	Firm mid orange brown sandy silt	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
14	Grave	Linear ENE-WSW	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
15	Human skeleton		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
16	Fill	Firm mid orange brown sandy silt	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
17	Grave	Linear ENE-WSW	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
18	Human skeleton		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
19	Fill	Firm mid orange brown sandy silt	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
20	Grave	Linear ENE-WSW	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
21	Human skeleton		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
22	Fill	Firm mid orange brown sandy silt	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
23	Grave	Linear ENE-WSW	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
24	Human skeleton		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
25	Fill	Firm mid orange brown sandy silt	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
26	Grave	Linear ENE-WSW	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
27	Human skeleton		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
28	Fill	Firm mid orange brown sandy silt	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
29	Grave	Linear ENE-WSW	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
30	Human skeleton		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
31	Fill	Firm mid orange brown sandy silt	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
32	Grave	Linear ENE-WSW	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
33	Human skeleton		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
34	Fill	Firm mid orange brown sandy silt	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



**Trench: 1**

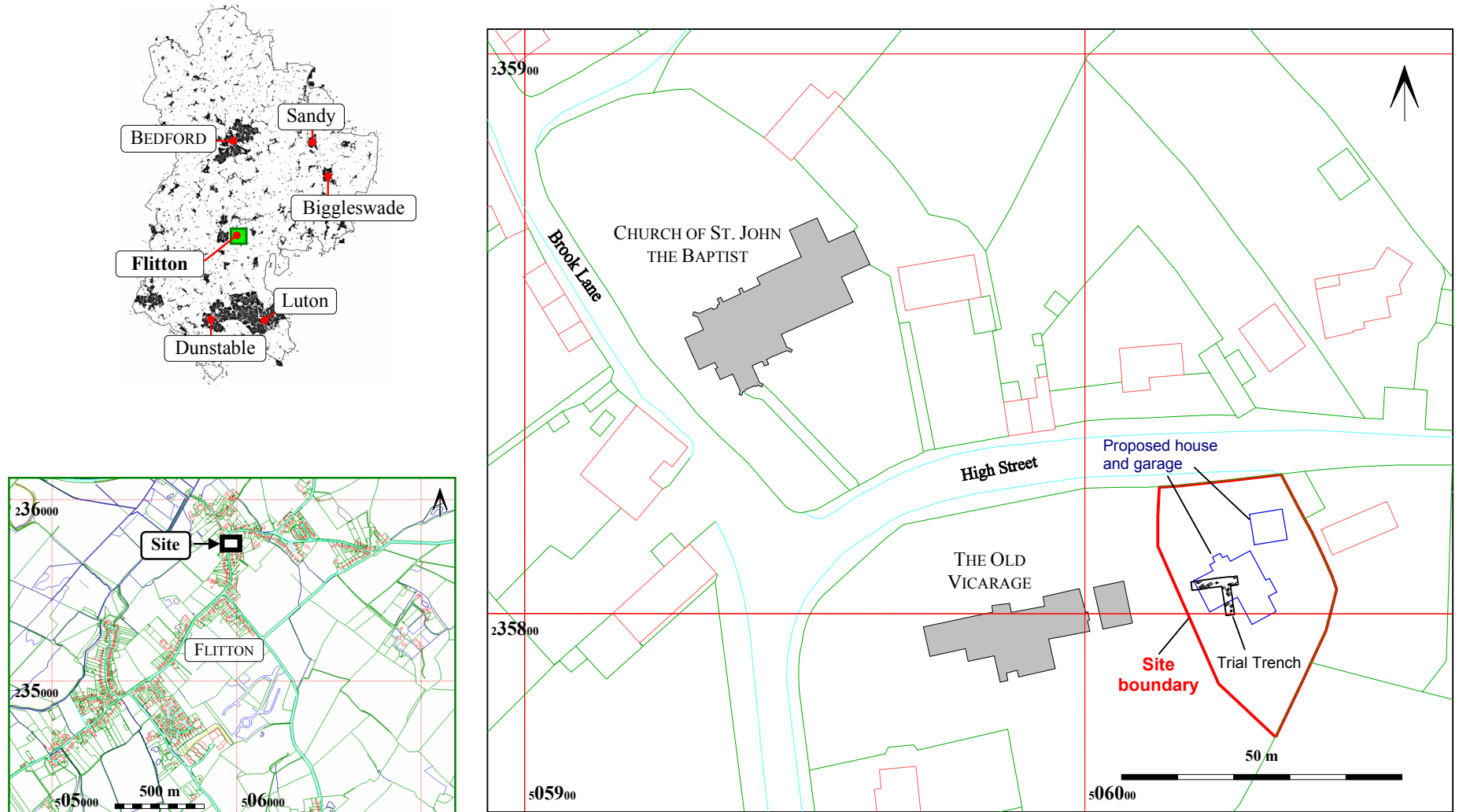
**Max Dimensions: Length: 13.50 m. Width: 1.50 m. Depth to Archaeology Min: 0.64 m. Max: 0.85 m.**

**Co-ordinates: OS Grid Ref.: 1** (Easting: 50601925: Northing: 23580490)

**OS Grid Ref.: 2** (Easting: 50602708: Northing: 23580591)

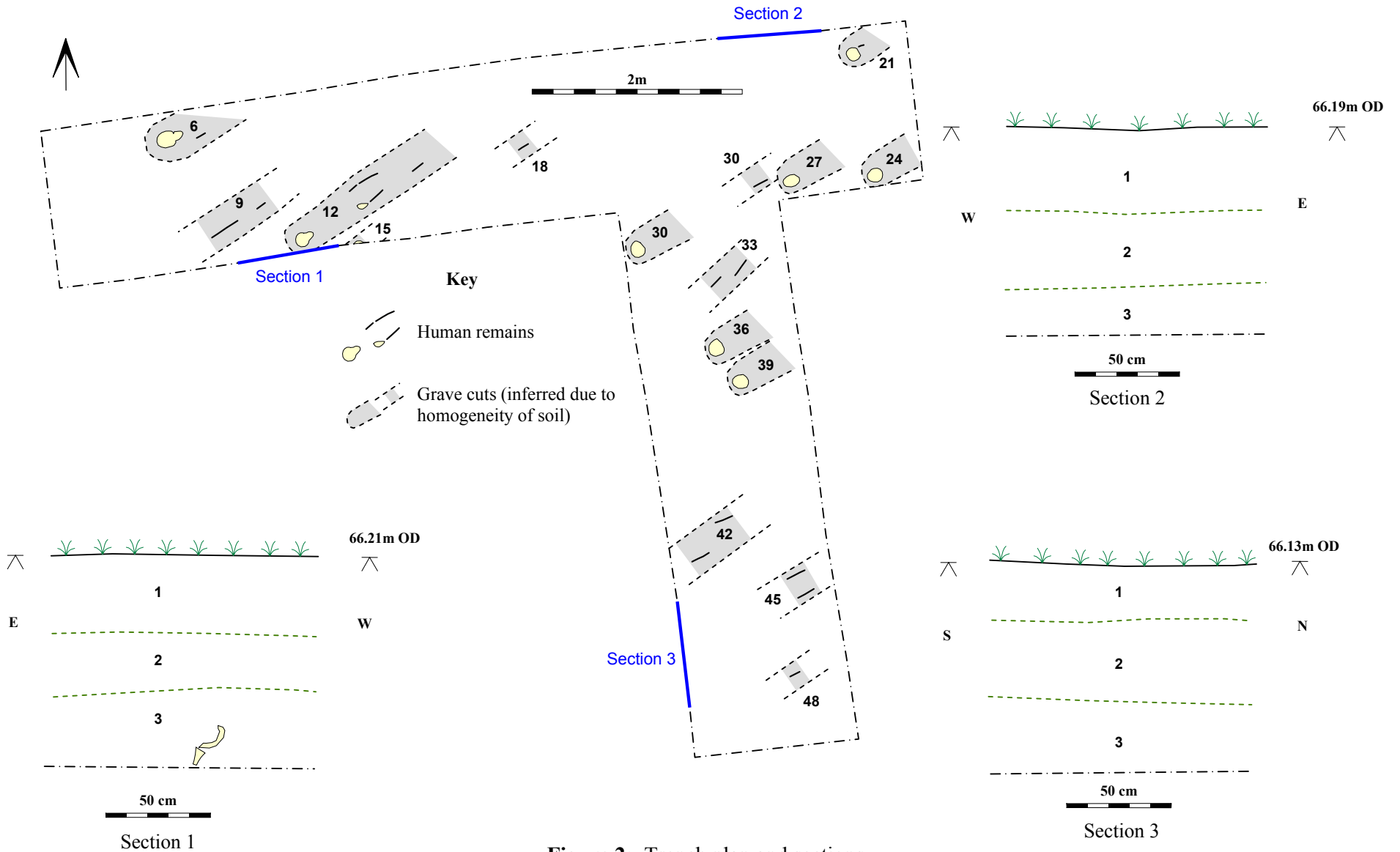
**Reason: Evaluate archaeological potential of development site**

<b>Context:</b>	<b>Type:</b>	<b>Description:</b>	<b>Excavated:</b>	<b>Finds Present:</b>
35	Grave	Linear ENE-WSW	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
36	Human skeleton		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
37	Fill	Firm mid orange brown sandy silt	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
38	Grave	Linear ENE-WSW	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
39	Human skeleton		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
40	Fill	Firm mid orange brown sandy silt	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
41	Grave	Linear ENE-WSW	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
42	Human skeleton		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
43	Fill	Firm mid orange brown sandy silt	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
44	Grave	Linear ENE-WSW	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
45	Human skeleton		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
46	Fill	Firm mid orange brown sandy silt	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
47	Grave	Linear ENE-WSW	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
48	Human skeleton		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
49	Fill	Firm mid orange brown sandy silt	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



**Figure 1: Site location**

Base map reproduced from the Ordnance Survey Land-line Map (2004), with the permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office, by Bedfordshire County Council, County Hall, Bedford. OS Licence No. 100017358. © Crown Copyright.







**Plate 1:** Burials 9, 12, and 15. Scale 1m



**Plate 2:** Skull remains from burial 21. Scale 25cm