LAND AT THE VICTORIA ALLOTMENTS
WEST STREET
DUNSTABLE
BEDFORDSHIRE

ARCHAEOLOGICAL FIELD EVALUATION

Project: DC 1274

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Version 1.0

Compiled by	Checked by	Approved by
Jo Archer	Joe Abrams and David Ingham	Drew Shotliff

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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.

The project was commissioned by Jacobs on behalf of Dunstable Town Council. It was monitored on behalf of the Local Planning Authority by Lesley-Ann Mather of Bedfordshire County Council Heritage and Environment Service.

Fieldwork for this project was undertaken by Jo Archer and Adam Lodoen (Archaeological Supervisors). This report has been prepared by Jo Archer with contributions from Joan Lighting (CAD Technician). It was edited by Joe Abrams (Project Manager) and David Ingham (Project Officer). All Albion projects are under the overall management of Drew Shotliff (Operations Manager).

Albion Archaeology
St Mary's Church
St Mary's Street
Bedford, MK42 OAS
☎: 01234 294017
Fax: 01234 294008
e-mail: office@albion-arch.com

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1.0	*11/09/07*	*n/a*

Structure of the Report

Section 1 is an introduction to the project. The methodology and results of the fieldwork are presented in Sections 2 and 3. Section 4 presents a synthesis of the results of the fieldwork. Section 5 is a bibliography.

Appendix 1 contains detailed descriptions of the archaeological deposits recorded on the site.

Key Terms

Throughout this report the following terms or abbreviations are used:

Albion	Albion Archaeology
CAO	Bedfordshire County Council's Archaeological Officer
IFA	Institute of Field Archaeologists
Procedures Manual	*Procedures Manual Volume 1 Fieldwork, 2nd Edition 2001*. Albion Archaeology

Non-Technical Summary

South Bedfordshire District Council has granted planning permission (04/812) for land at the Victoria Allotments in Dunstable to be used instead as an extension to the adjacent, existing cemetery.

The CAO advised that the proposed development area was archaeologically sensitive. As a result, a condition was attached to the planning permission requiring the implementation of a scheme of archaeological investigation as a consequence of the change of use.

In August 2007, Albion Archaeology was commissioned by Jacobs to undertake an archaeological field evaluation (trial trenching) of the site on behalf of Dunstable Town Council.

The proposed development area comprises land at the northern end of the Victoria Allotments, immediately south of West Street. It is c. *3.6ha in extent and is centred on (NGR) TL 0135 2147.*

The development area lies close to the historic core of Dunstable, which has its origins in the Roman period. A small town, known as Durocobrivis*, developed at the crossroads of a Roman road, Watling Street, and a prehistoric route-way, the Icknield Way. A previous archaeological investigation immediately west of the development area revealed the remains of roadside ditches and wheel-ruts, consistent with the continual use of this route-way, now known as West Street.*

The development area was evaluated using five trenches. These revealed the remains of post-medieval quarrying along the southern side of West Street. Modern made ground used to level the former quarry and evidence of root disturbance were also recorded. The quarrying activity has been attributed to the maintenance of the post-medieval road surface. Such remains are of low archaeological significance.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Project Background

South Bedfordshire District Council has granted planning permission (04/812) for land at the Victoria Allotments in Dunstable to be used instead as an extension to the adjacent, existing cemetery.

The CAO advised that the proposed development area was archaeologically sensitive. As a result, a condition was attached to the planning permission requiring the implementation of a scheme of archaeological investigation as a consequence of the change of use.

A brief was issued by the CAO, Bedfordshire County Council's Archaeological Officer, (BCC 2007a, 2007b). This recognised that further information on the archaeological impact of the proposed work was required.

These documents outlined a three-staged approach to the programme of archaeological work:

- Stage I – archaeological field evaluation.
- Stage II – appraisal of the results of the archaeological field evaluation.
- Stage III – implementation of an agreed programme of archaeological investigation and recording (if required, following completion of Stage II).

In August 2007, Albion Archaeology was commissioned by Jacobs, on behalf of Dunstable Town Council, to undertake the archaeological field evaluation in the form of the excavation of a series of trial trenches.

1.2 Site Location (Figure 1)

The development area comprises land at the northern end of the Victoria Allotments, immediately south of West Street. The development area is *c*. 3.6ha in extent; it is centred on (NGR) TL 0135 2147.

1.3 Topography, Geology, Soils and Land Use

The development area is roughly rectangular in plan. It lies at *c*.155m OD on land most recently in use as allotments (overgrown at the time of the fieldwork). It is bordered by West Street to the north-west, residential buildings to the north-east, an existing cemetery to the south-west and the remainder of the Victoria Allotments to the south-east. The natural soils of the area are derived from the underlying middle chalk and clay geology (Albion Archaeology 2004).

1.4 Archaeological Background

The development area lies close to the historic core of Dunstable, which has its origins in the Roman period. A small town, known as *Durocobrivis*, developed at the crossroads of a Roman road, Watling Street, (now approximated by the line of High Street North and High Street South) and a prehistoric route-way known as the Icknield Way (now defined by the line of Church Street and West Street).

Watling Street connected London (*Londinium*) with north-west England, and the Icknield Way is believed to have stretched from Ivinghoe Beacon in

Buckinghamshire to Knettishall Heath in Norfolk. The intersection of these two routes made Dunstable a strategically important location for settlement and trade during all subsequent periods. As a result, the town is situated within a landscape rich in archaeological remains, particularly of the prehistoric, medieval and Roman periods.

A thorough and detailed archaeological background to Dunstable is presented in Albion Archaeology's *Extensive Urban Survey for Bedfordshire: Dunstable Archaeological Assessment* (Albion Archaeology 2003). However, the data most relevant to this project were gathered during an archaeological evaluation undertaken to the immediate north and west of the development area (Albion Archaeology 2004).

Three trenches were excavated during that evaluation (Figure 1). One trench revealed a series of wheel ruts, indicating the presence of a well-rutted track or road which had formerly existed at this location. These are likely to have been the remains of part of the Icknield Way. The second trench contained a ditch from which an unabraded sherd of early Roman pottery was recovered. On this basis it was suggested that this ditch might have lined the Icknield Way during the Roman period. The third trench contained no significant archaeological features.

As a result of this earlier fieldwork, the remains of activity dating from the Roman period onwards were anticipated, most likely comprising roadside ditches and wheel-ruts associated with the long-lived road lying within/immediately north of the development area (West Street).

1.5 Project Objectives

The primary aim of the project was to assess the archaeological potential of the proposed development area. Given that the change of use will have a significant impact on any archaeological remains within the development area, the main objectives of the evaluation, identified in the project design (Albion Archaeology 2007), were as follows:

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

2. METHODOLOGY

The trial trenching took place between 20th and 22nd August 2007. Five trenches were opened, covering a total area of 260sqm (Figure 1). The south-western and north-eastern ends of the development area could not be evaluated due to the presence of mature trees. A full methodology is provided in the Project Design (Albion Archaeology 2007).

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

- IFA's *Code of Conduct (1999a)*
- IFA's *Standards and Guidance for Field Evaluation (1999b)*
- Albion Archaeology's *Procedures Manual for Archaeological Fieldwork and the Analysis of Fieldwork Records* (2001)
- English Heritage's *Management of Archaeological Projects* (1991)

The trench plan was agreed by the CAO prior before the trenching began.

The trenches were opened by a mechanical excavator, fitted with a toothless bucket and operating under close archaeological supervision. Overburden was removed down to the top of the archaeological deposits or undisturbed geological deposits. The spoil heaps were scanned for artefacts.

The bases and sides of all trenches were cleaned by hand. Any potential archaeological features were noted, cleaned, excavated by hand and recorded using Albion Archaeology's *pro forma* sheets. The trenches were subsequently drawn and photographed as appropriate. All deposits were recorded using a unique number sequence, commencing at 100 for Trench 1, 200 for Trench 2 *etc*.

The trenches were inspected by the CAO prior to backfilling.

3. RESULTS

Deposits and features of archaeological interest are summarised below in chronological order and by feature type. Detailed technical information on all deposits and archaeological features can be found in the Appendix.

3.1 Overburden and undisturbed geological deposits (Figure 7)

The overburden was homogenous across the site. The topsoil comprised a 0.3m thick deposit, while the underlying subsoil varied from 0.1m to 0.4m thick. Both layers contained artefacts dating to the modern period, none of which were retained.

Each trench was machined down to the top of the undisturbed chalk geology, which lay at an average depth of *c*. 0.6m.

3.2 Post-medieval (Figure 2)

The earliest archaeological remains consisted of post-medieval quarrying [104] (Figure 2) revealed in Trench 1. However, [104] appears to have extended well beyond the limits of this trench to form a *c.* 80m long NE-SW aligned linear quarry pit. Evidence for this comes from earthworks visible to the immediate south of Trench 1 (and *c.* 15m south of modern West Street, Figure 2).

3.3 Modern (Figures 2, 3, 5, 6 and 7)

A layer of modern made-ground (102) was revealed between the topsoil (100) and the subsoil (101). It was encountered in Trench 1 (Figures 2 and 7) and extended beyond the northern, western and eastern limits of the trench. Modern plastic bags and fragments of iron were encountered throughout, but were not retained.

Modern root disturbance was evidenced by five irregularly shaped features [205], [403] and [503] in the bases of Trenches 2, 4 and 5 (Figures 3, 5 and 6). Part of Trench 4 was extended in order to gain the full extent of [403]. These patches of disturbed ground varied in size and form, and contained no artefactual material.

3.4 Undated (Figure 3)

A geological feature [203] was recorded in Trench 2. Part of the trench was extended in order to record its full extent, revealing it to be curvilinear in plan. The feature contained no artefactual material.

4. SYNTHESIS

4.1 Summary of Archaeological Remains

The evaluation has revealed post-medieval quarrying activity, modern made ground and widespread root disturbance. No evidence was found of the ditch and wheel ruts identified by the earlier evaluation immediately to the west (Albion Archaeology 2004, Figure 1).

The occurrence of quarrying in close proximity to West Street may indicate that it was associated with the maintenance of the post-medieval road surface. The modern layer of made ground represents deliberate levelling of the depression left by the quarrying.

The widespread root disturbance is consistent with the use of the area for allotments and the current heavily vegetated state of the development area.

4.2 Significance of Archaeological Remains

No trace was found of the wheel ruts and possible roadside ditch recorded immediately to the west of the development area. The absence of any wheel ruts may indicate that, in the vicinity of the development area, the course of the route-way along the Icknield Way has always been primarily constrained within a relatively narrow corridor. This corridor appears to correspond with modern West Street.

The archaeological significance of the remains identified by the evaluation is considered to be low.

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6. APPENDIX 1

6.1 Context Summary

Trench: 1

Max Dimensions: Length: 20.00 m. Width: 1.60 m. Depth to Archaeology Min: 1.4 m. Max: 1.4 m.

Co-ordinates: OS Grid Ref.: TL *(Easting: 129927: Northing: 2160065)*

OS Grid Ref.: TL *(Easting: 127972: Northing: 2158995)*

Reason: To assess the archaeological potential of the development area.

Context:	Type:	Description:	Excavated:	Finds Present:
100	Topsoil	Friable dark brown silt	☑	☐
101	Make up layer	Friable dark grey brown silt frequent medium ceramic building material, frequent flecks chalk, frequent flecks charcoal, frequent medium stones	☑	☐
102	Subsoil	Friable light brown silt frequent flecks chalk	☑	☐
103	Natural	Compact white chalk	☐	☐
104	Quarry	E-W profile: near vertical base: flat dimensions: min length 80.m, min depth 1.4m	☑	☐

Trench: 2

Max Dimensions: Length: 30.00 m. Width: 1.60 m. Depth to Archaeology Min: 0.55 m. Max: 0.6 m.

Co-ordinates: OS Grid Ref.: TL *(Easting: 132694: Northing: 2156615)*

OS Grid Ref.: TL *(Easting: 130858: Northing: 2158989)*

Reason: To assess the archaeological potential of the development area.

Context:	Type:	Description:	Excavated:	Finds Present:
200	**Topsoil**	**Friable dark brown silt occasional flecks chalk**	☑	☐
201	**Subsoil**	**Friable light brown silt frequent flecks chalk**	☑	☐
202	**Natural**	**Compact white chalk**	☐	☐
203	**Natural Interface**	**Linear E-W profile: concave base: concave dimensions: max breadth 0.7m, min length 106.m, max depth 0.25m**	☑	☐
204	Fill	Friable light yellow brown chalky silt occasional small chalk	☑	☐
205	**Treethrow**	**Irregular profile: concave base: flat dimensions: max length 2.m, max breadth 1.m, max depth 0.1m**	☑	☐
206	Fill	Friable light yellow brown chalky silt frequent small chalk	☑	☐

Trench: 3

Max Dimensions: Length: 50.00 m. Width: 1.60 m. Depth to Archaeology Min: 0.35 m. Max: 0.6 m.

Co-ordinates: OS Grid Ref.: TL *(Easting: 129815: Northing: 2154067)*

OS Grid Ref.: TL *(Easting: 126877: Northing: 2157674)*

Reason: To assess the archaeological potential of the development area.

Context:	Type:	Description:	Excavated:	Finds Present:
300	Topsoil	Friable dark brown silt occasional flecks chalk	☑	☐
301	Subsoil	Friable light brown silt occasional small ceramic building material, occasional flecks chalk	☑	☐
302	Natural	Compact white chalk	☐	☐

Trench: 4

Max Dimensions: Length: 20.00 m. Width: 1.60 m. Depth to Archaeology Min: 0.5 m. Max: 0.55 m.

Co-ordinates: OS Grid Ref.: TL *(Easting: 126352: Northing: 2154816)*

OS Grid Ref.: TL *(Easting: 127974: Northing: 2156123)*

Reason: To assess the archaeological potential of the development area.

Context:	Type:	Description:	Excavated:	Finds Present:
400	**Topsoil**	**Friable dark brown silt occasional flecks chalk**	☑	☐
401	**Subsoil**	**Friable light brown silt occasional flecks chalk**	☑	☐
402	**Natural**	**White chalk**	☐	☐
403	**Treethrow**	**Oval profile: concave base: concave dimensions: min length 0.62m, max breadth 1.15m, max depth 0.12m**	☑	☐
404	Fill	Friable mid orange brown clay silt occasional flecks chalk, occasional flecks charcoal	☑	☐
405	**Treethrow**	**Sub-circular N-S profile: concave base: concave dimensions: max length 0.85m, max breadth 0.75m, max depth 0.1m**	☑	☐
406	Fill	Friable light yellow brown chalky silt frequent small chalk	☑	☐

Trench: 5

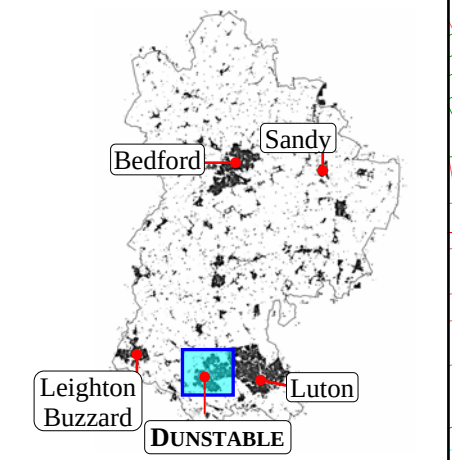
Max Dimensions: Length: 30.00 m. Width: 1.60 m. Depth to Archaeology Min: 0.2 m. Max: 0.4 m.

Co-ordinates: OS Grid Ref.: TL *(Easting: 128041: Northing: 2158312)*

OS Grid Ref.: TL *(Easting: 130231: Northing: 2155840)*

Reason: To assess the archaeological potential of the development area.

Context:	Type:	Description:	Excavated:	Finds Present:
500	Topsoil	Friable dark brown silt occasional flecks chalk	☑	☐
501	Subsoil	Friable light brown silt frequent flecks chalk	☑	☐
502	Natural	Compact white chalk	☐	☐
503	Treethrow	Sub-oval E-W profile: vertical base: flat dimensions: max length 0.85m, max breadth 0.25m, max depth 0.1m	☑	☐
504	Fill	Friable light yellow brown chalky silt frequent small chalk	☑	☐



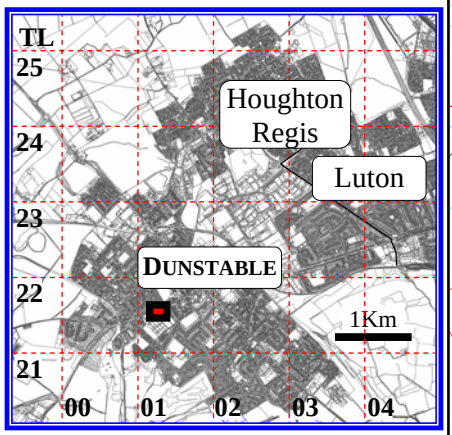
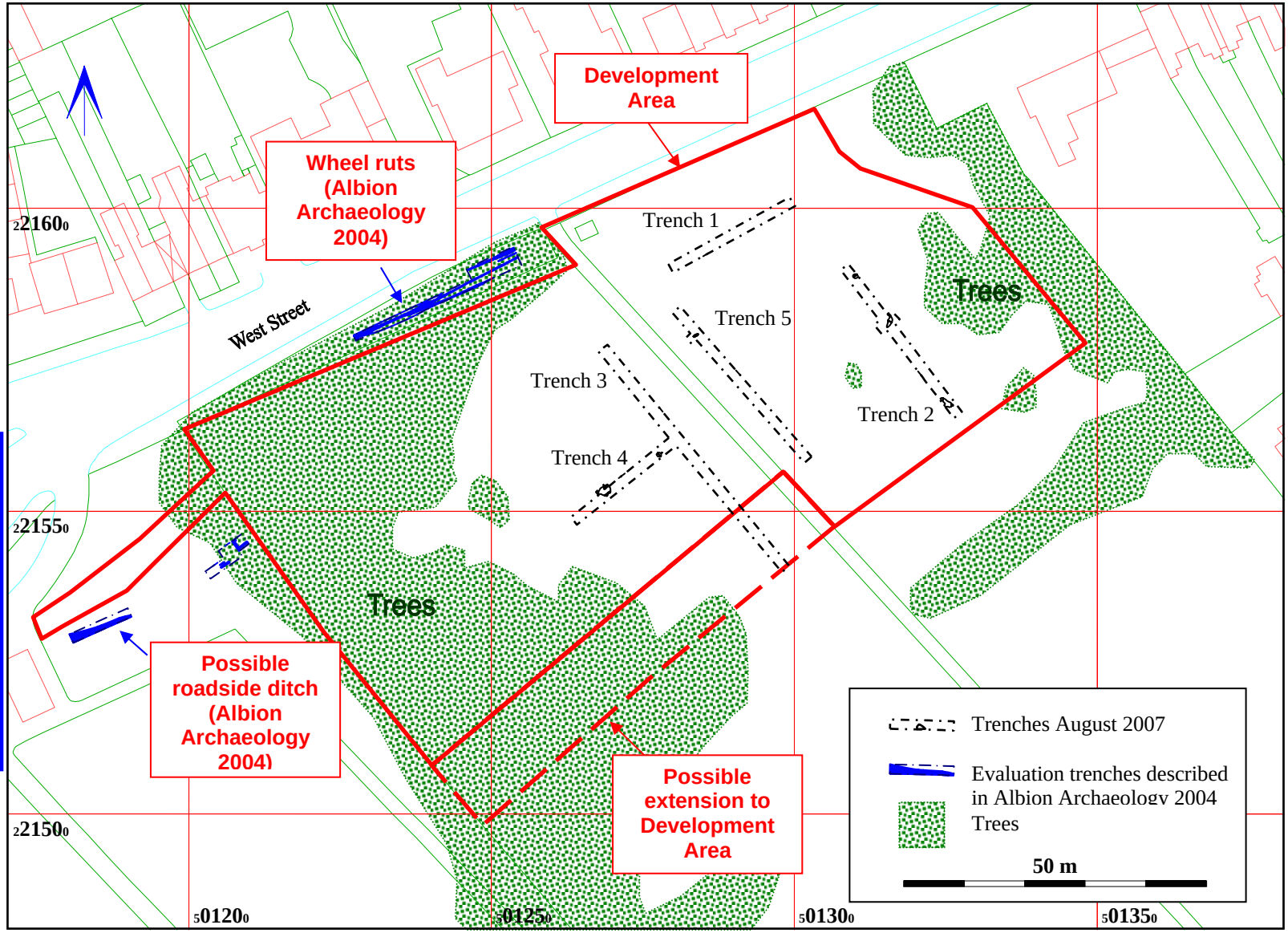
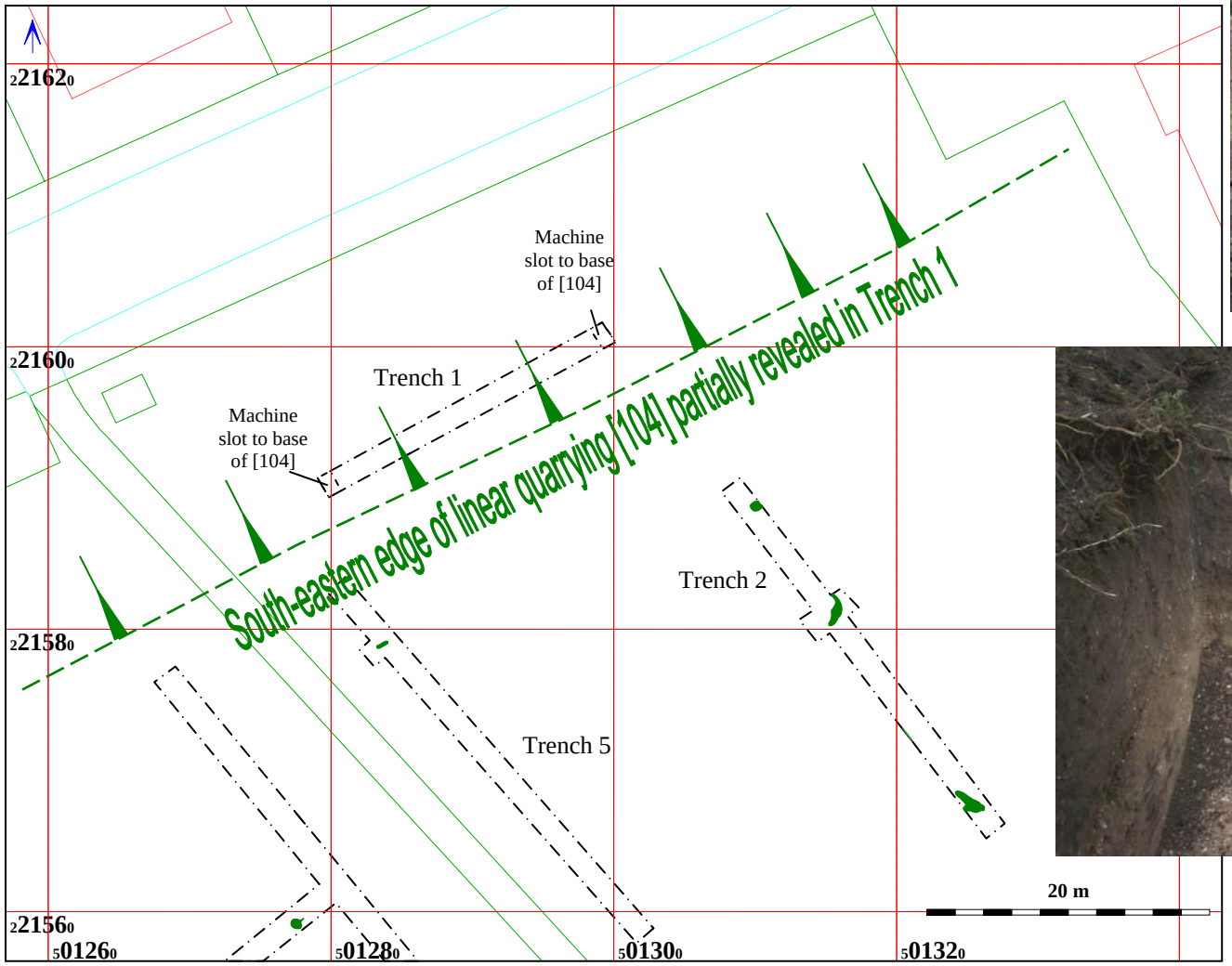


Figure 1: Site location map

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

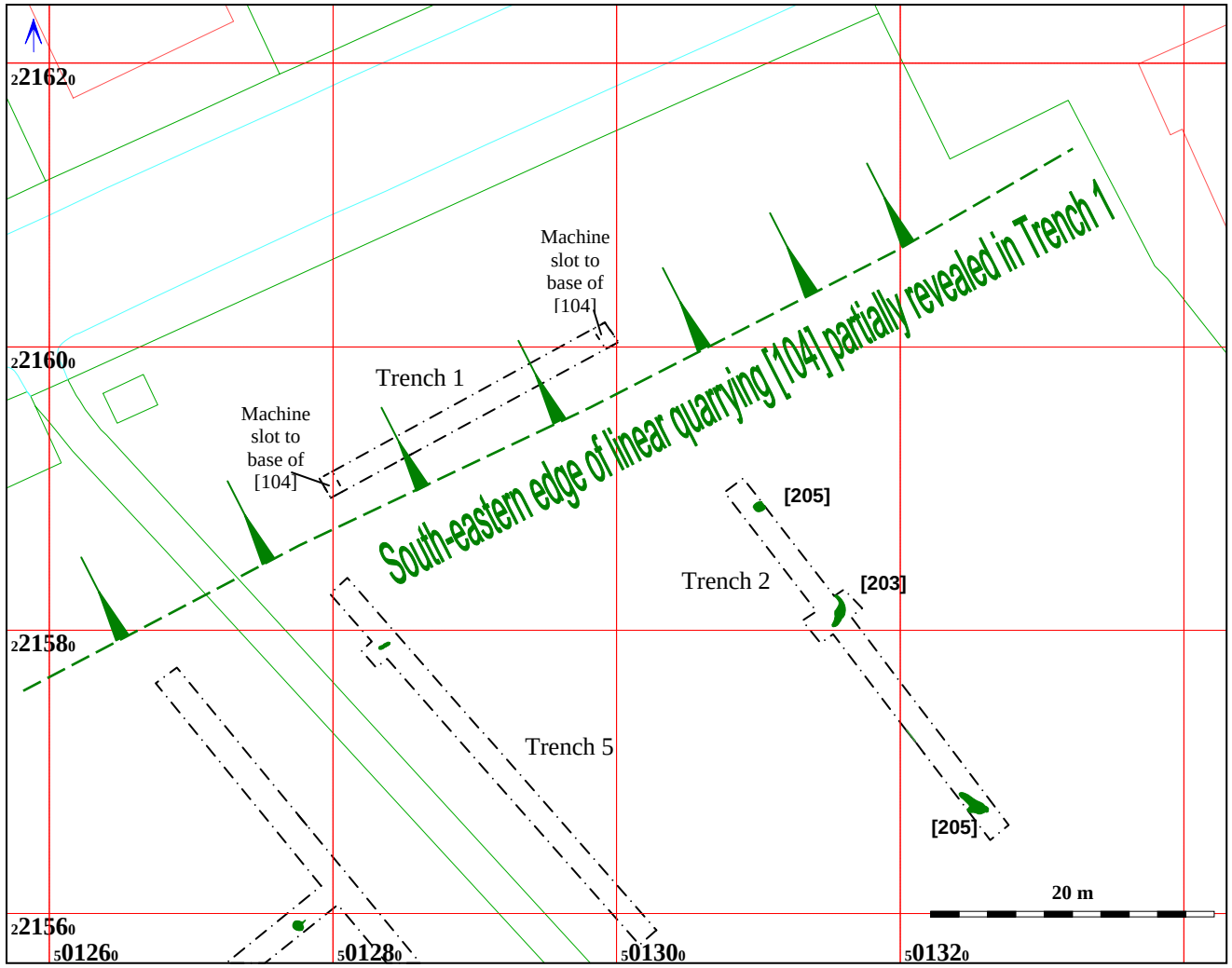




Photograph of Trench 1, looking south-west. Scales 1m

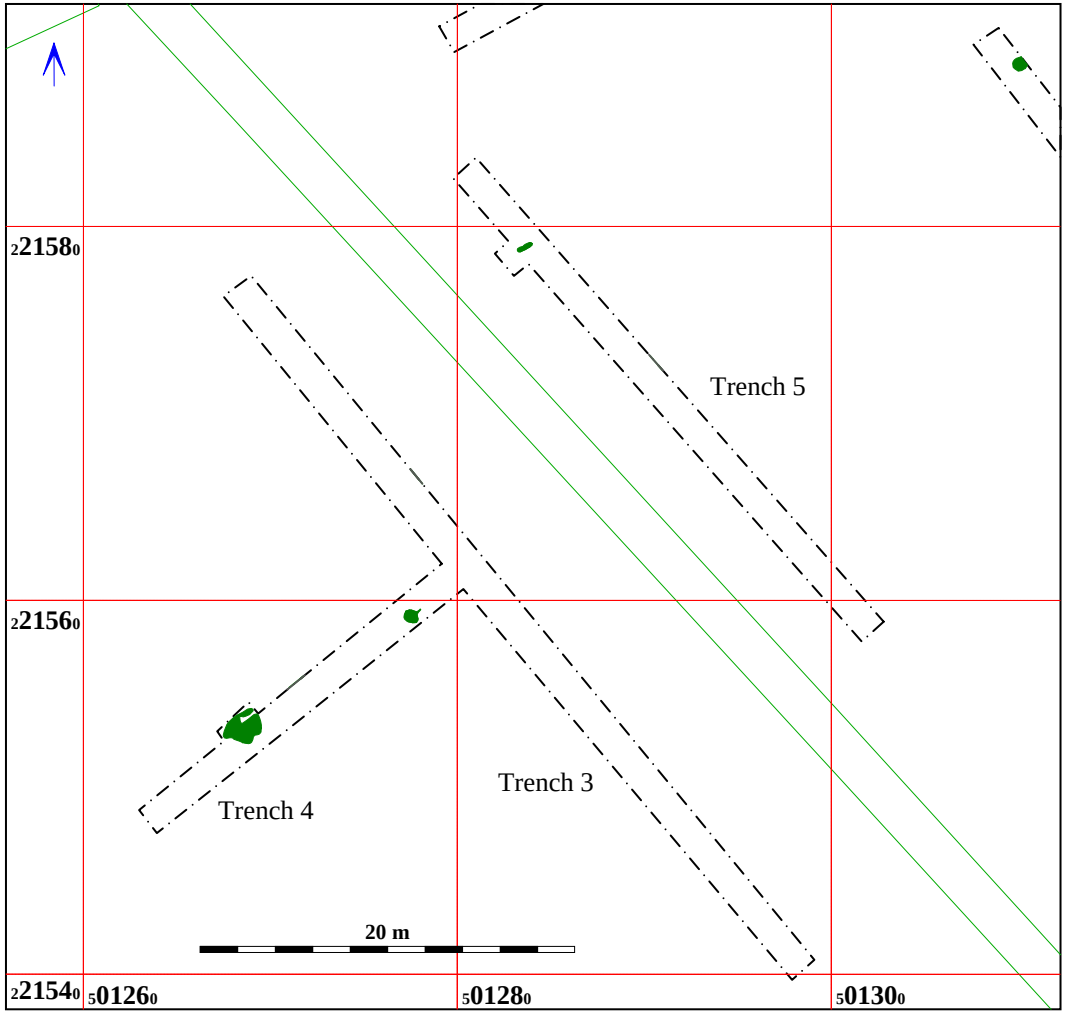
Photograph of Trench 1, looking north-east, showing edge of quarrying (marked with yellow dashed line)

Figure 2: Trench 1



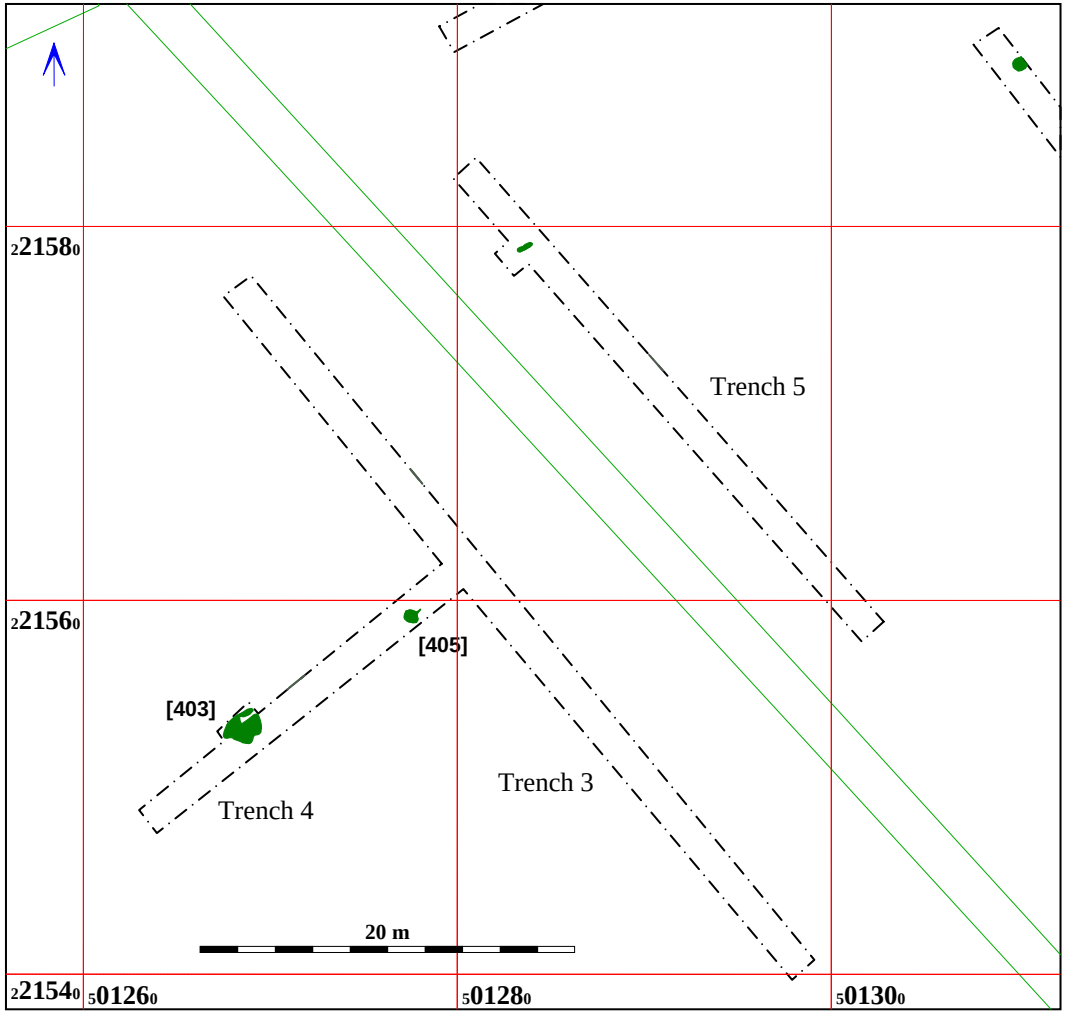
Photograph of Trench 2,
looking south-east.
Scales 1m

Figure 3: Trench 2



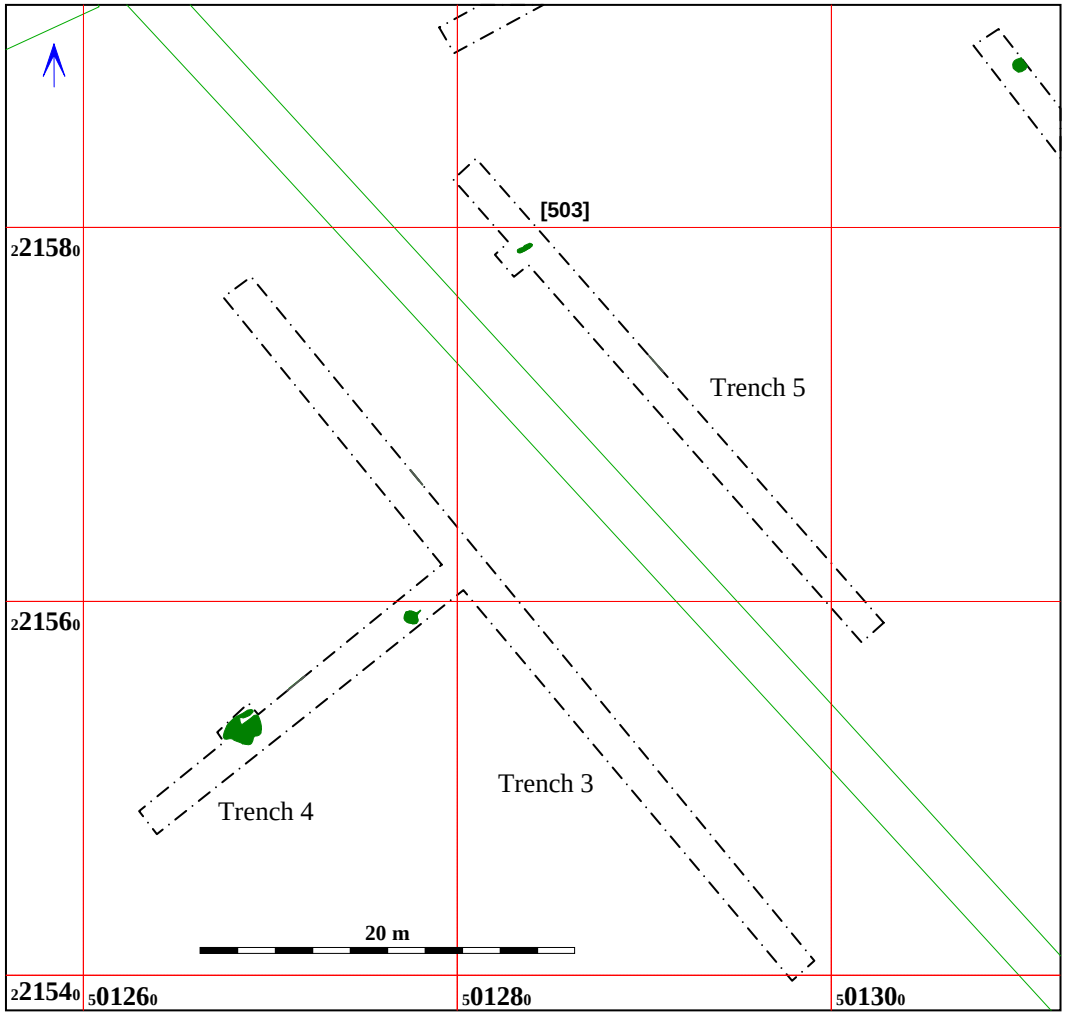
Photograph of Trench 3,
looking south-east.
Scales 1m

Figure 4: Trench 3



Photograph of Trench 4,
looking south-east.
Scales 1m

Figure 5: Trench 4



Photograph of Trench 5,
looking south-east.
Scales 1m

Figure 6: Trench 5

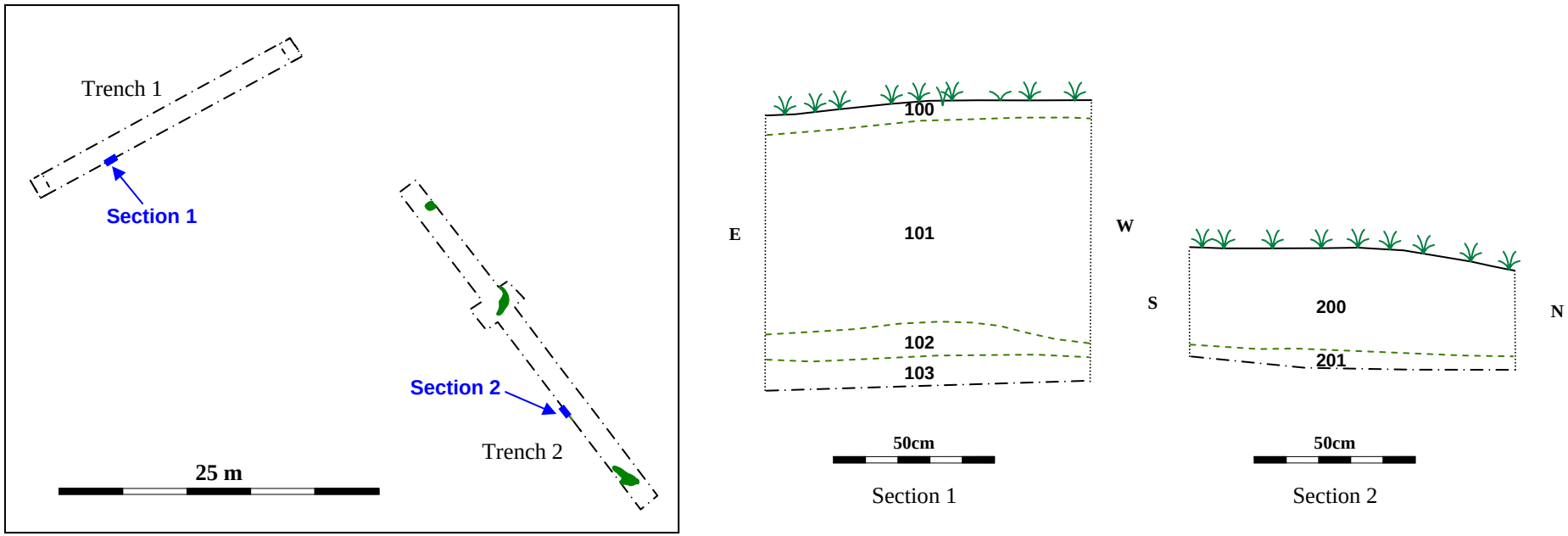


Figure 7: Selected sections