



CROWN WOODS SCHOOL
Riefeld Road
London SE9

London Borough of Greenwich

Watching Brief

September 2009

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Watching Brief

Site Code: RIF09

National Grid Reference: 544300 174800

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Summary (non-technical)

This report has been commissioned by Balfour Beatty Construction Ltd in order to record and assess the results of a watching brief carried out at Crown Woods School, Eltham.

Groundworks in preparation for the construction of new buildings, to replace the existing school buildings, were monitored between the 6th July and the 7th August 2009 in the area of the former school playing fields.

The results of the watching brief have indicated a low level of archaeological remains on the site. There were no archaeologically significant features or deposits revealed during the watching brief. There were, however, instances of residual burnt and struck flint across the entire area of the site. The retained struck flint consisted of 9 medium to high quality pieces of waste flint and a hollow end scraper of probable Neolithic/Bronze Age date. There was no direct physical evidence for occupation during these periods.

Additionally scatters, and one concentration, of small and abraded sherds of medieval pottery, from local coarseware jars or cooking pots, suggest some kind of domestic activity at a low level in the vicinity between the mid 13th and 14th centuries, possibly continuing as late as the 15th to 16th centuries. There were no structural or cut features or deposits indicating occupation on the site. All other finds could possibly be the result of manuring (i.e. brought from elsewhere) for agricultural purposes or were the result of very recent activity.

On the basis of the results of the watching brief no further archaeological mitigation is recommended in respect of the construction works for the new school buildings (Phase 1 works). It is likely that mitigation, in the form of a similar watching brief exercise, will be required relating to groundworks associated with the demolition of existing school buildings (Phase 2).

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1 Introduction

1.1 Site background

The watching brief took place at Crown Woods School, Eltham; hereafter called 'the site'. The site covers an area of approximately 86,500m², which is bound to the east by the gardens of houses along Riefield Road, to the south by the A210 (Bexley Road), to the west by a Nature Study Centre and to the north by Eltham Warren Golf Course (see Fig 1). The school buildings are on the northern part of the site and the remainder of the site is occupied by the school playing fields and an overgrown parcel of land to the west, known as the 'Ecology Area'. The National Grid Reference (NGR) for the centre of the site is 544300 174800. The site lies on a south-facing slope, between 57m OD and 69m OD, as indicated by spot-heights on Bexley Road to the south and on Riefield Road to the north-east. The site code is RIF09.

A chapter in an *Environmental statement* was previously prepared by MoLAS (now MOL Archaeology), which covers the whole area of the site (URS 2007, chapter 9). This document should be referred to for information on the natural geology, archaeological and historical background of the site, and the initial assessment of its archaeological potential. This document informed the design of a *Written scheme of investigation* prepared by Ove Arup and Partners Limited (Ove Arup 2008). In response, a *Method Statement for an archaeological watching brief* was prepared (MOL Archaeology 2009).

This report covers the works undertaken on the school playing fields and the Ecology Area between the 6th July and the 7th August 2009.

1.2 The planning and legislative framework

The legislative and planning framework in which the archaeological exercise took place was summarised in the *Environmental statement*.

1.3 Planning background

The watching brief was undertaken in accordance with a condition placed on the planning consent (London Borough of Greenwich, ref 08/2379F condition 32 (Archaeology), dated 19th December 2008).

1.4 Origin and scope of the report

This report was commissioned by Balfour Beatty Construction Ltd and produced by the Museum of London Archaeology Service (MOL Archaeology). The report has been prepared within the terms of the relevant Standard specified by the Institute for Archaeologists (IFA 2001).

The purpose of the watching brief was to determine whether archaeological remains or features were present on the site and, if so, to record the nature and extent of such remains. A number of more site-specific research aims and objectives were established in the preceding *Method Statement*, and are outlined in the following section.

The purpose of the present report is to analyse the results of the investigation against the original research aims, and to suggest what further work, including analysis or publication (if any), should now take place.

1.5 Aims and objectives

The following research aims and objectives were established in the *Method Statement* for the watching brief (Section 2.2):

- To determine the presence/absence, extent, condition, character, quality and date of any archaeological remains;
- To determine the local, regional and national importance of such remains, and the potential for further fieldwork to fulfil local, regional and national research objectives;
- To determine the extent and nature of any prehistoric occupation in the study area;
- To determine the extent and nature of any Post Medieval agricultural land use in the study area;
- To clarify the level of previous truncation across the site.

All research is undertaken within the priorities established in the Museum of London's *A research framework for London Archaeology*, 2002.

2 Topographical and historical background

A detailed description of the geology, archaeology and history of the site was included in the *Environmental statement*.

To summarise, the site was adjudged to have a low potential for archaeological remains of the prehistoric to early medieval periods, with a low-moderate potential for medieval and a moderate potential for post-medieval remains related to agricultural usage and landscaping of the site in both periods. Features cut into contemporary ground surface such as field ditches, drains and pits might survive.

In addition, background research for this report notes there was extensive gravel extraction works to the west of the site in the mid 19th-century, although their precise location and extent are not known.

3 The watching brief

3.1 Methodology

All archaeological investigation and recording during the watching brief was carried out in accordance with the *Written scheme of investigation* (Ove Arup 2008), the *Method statement* (MOL Archaeology 2009) and the *Archaeological Site Manual* (MoLAS 1994).

The topsoil was cleared by contractors under MOL Archaeology supervision and the subsequent reduction to formation levels was monitored. The locations of the areas of excavation were recorded by MOL Archaeology and plotted on to a Survey (Drg. No. 561ST-PL-004, rev 1, Nicholas Hare Architects LLP). This information was then plotted onto the OS grid. The heights of observations were recorded from the engineer's on-site datum points (63.13m OD and 64.57m OD).

The site has produced 25 site diary entries, 24 photographs, a box of finds and 4 plans annotated to record site works. No contexts number was allocated, as no archaeological deposits or features were encountered. The site finds and records can be found under the site code RIF09 in the MoL archive.

3.2 Results of the watching brief

The watching brief covered the entire area of the school playing fields and the Ecology Area (see Fig 2).

After the topsoil had been cleared by the contractors (Fig 3), the top of the underlying geology was exposed. The underlying geology consisted, in places, of sandy clay and in others of rounded pebbles, which crossed the site in bands. This was recorded across the area of the school playing fields at heights between 58.56m OD in the south-east, 62.79m OD in the south-west, 65.10m OD in the north-west and 66.09m OD towards the north-east; the north-east corner had previously been truncated by former tennis courts. The levels represent the natural topography of the site, probably only altered only by shallow ploughing. The upper surface of the geology was heavily weathered with fine roots present. Over the geological deposits there was no subsoil and only 100–150mm of topsoil.

Topsoil stripping across the playing fields area revealed a background of 19th- and 20th-century finds, mostly ceramics and metalwork, and very little earlier material. Earlier material consisted of struck and burnt flint and coarseware pottery in small quantities. The retained flintwork consisted of 9 medium to high quality pieces of waste flint and a hollow end scraper, which all had Neolithic\Bronze Age characteristics (Tony Grey pers comm.).

A large scatter of coarseware pottery was identified, in the central southern area of the playing fields (see section 3.2.1). After identification, an area approximately 5m by 5m was hand cleaned to check for associated features (see Fig 4). This area was also reduced by machine excavation (approximately 200mm) to clean natural to check that no deeper features had been missed. The results of these investigations were negative.

Other points noted included that at the western limit of the playing fields the ground had been raised with topsoil to level the slope to the west. Although not defined

clearly there appeared to have been an area just to the south of the Ecology Area on the western limit of the playing fields where the natural geology had been truncated, possibly as access to the quarry to the west.

In the Ecology Area, the trees and undergrowth had to be removed first. This required the “grubbing-out” of tree roots prior to the topsoil stripping. Only the southern half of the ecology area was topsoil stripped because the northern portion is not part of the present scheme of development. The northern half of the Ecology Area had, in any case, been severely impacted upon by several former school outbuildings. The stripped area sloped to the south-west, between 60.09m OD and 64.99m OD. The bank between the ecology area and the playing field was formed from the same topsoil used to level the west part of the playing fields and the possible ramp into the former quarry.

3.2.1 Pottery scatter

Jacqui Pearce

A total of 180 sherds of medieval pottery (432 g in weight) were recovered during the watching brief. All were unstratified, and almost all were recorded from the pottery scatter adjacent to the DT & Arts and the Assembly Hall (see Fig 2). Almost all the sherds collected were from vessels made in London-type ware (LOND), one of the chief fabrics in use in the London area from the 12th century and throughout the medieval period. All sherds were small and abraded, which is to be expected of material from a finds scatter of this kind. Most were body sherds with very few diagnostic features such as rims or handles surviving to help narrow down the dating. All sherds were unglazed and none carries any decoration, apart from a fragment from the handle of a baluster jug with thin white slip overall. This was one of the most readily datable finds recovered, coming from a type of baluster jug, of flared or tulip-necked form, current from the mid 13th to mid 14th centuries. It is on the basis of this find that a date of c 1240 has been suggested.

The remaining sherds of LOND could well include some of 15th- or 16th-century date, although the absence of diagnostic features makes this uncertain, since the fabric continued with little change throughout the medieval period. Most sherds probably come from jars or cooking pots, with two rims recovered. There was also a rim sherd from what appears to have been a large bowl, now badly abraded, and one from a possible drinking jug. One of the main centres of production for London-type ware was situated in Woolwich and the ware is found on sites throughout south-east London.

Other fabrics recorded on the site consist of two sherds of south Herts-type greyware (c 1170–1350) and one from a jug in Kingston-type ware (c 1240–1400). Overall, the collection suggests some kind of domestic activity at a low level in the vicinity between the mid 13th and 14th centuries, possibly continuing as late as the 15th to 16th centuries.

4 Potential of archaeology

4.1 Original research aims

- *To determine the presence/absence, extent, condition, character, quality and date of any archaeological remains;*

There were no archaeologically significant deposits or features revealed during the watching brief. There was, however, a background of residual burnt and struck flint across the entire area of the site. The retained struck flint consisted of 9 medium to high quality pieces of waste flint and a hollow end scraper. Their technology suggests Neolithic/Bronze Age characteristics.

Additionally, 180 sherds of medieval pottery were recovered from the entire area of the site, although the vast majority came from a single scatter. All the recovered sherds were small and abraded, and practically all in London-type ware, mostly from jars or cooking pots. Overall, the pottery suggests some kind of domestic activity at a low level in the vicinity in the medieval period, potentially dating from the mid 13th and 14th centuries and possibly continuing as late as the 15th to 16th centuries. All other finds could possibly be the result of manuring (i.e. brought from elsewhere) for agricultural purposes or very recent activity.

- *To determine the local, regional and national importance of such remains, and the potential for further fieldwork to fulfil local, regional and national research objectives;*

The pottery, burnt flint and struck flint are of local importance, although, as residual finds, their potential for further research is very limited.

- *To determine the extent and nature of any prehistoric occupation in the study area;*

The background of burnt and struck flint on the site indicates there was activity on or in the vicinity of the site in the prehistoric (possibly in the Neolithic – Bronze Age). However the absence of any features of this date indicates there was no significant occupation of the site.

- *To determine the extent and nature of any post-medieval agricultural land use in the study area;*

There was no direct evidence for any post-medieval agricultural land use on the site. Half a corroded hand shear found in the topsoil might indicate sheep shearing on the site but this could have been brought to the site in recent times. The results of the watching brief concur with the interpretation of aerial photographs that the ridge and furrow seen on the site had been completely removed (Ove Arup 2008, section 2.4.8).

- *To clarify the level of previous truncation across the site.*

The disappearance of the ridge and furrow from the site was suggestive that no stratified remains would survive, presumably because of ploughing, potentially during the Second World War, and the development of the playing fields. Any features should they have existed would have been cut into the natural geology. However the watching brief, with the exception of the possible ramped access to the west, indicated that the natural topography was unchanged by past development.

4.2 New research aims

There are no new research aims resulting from the present watching brief.

4.3 Significance of the data

The archaeological remains, in the form of residual or redeposited material in the absence of stratified deposits or cut features, are of limited local significance.

5 Publication and archiving

Information on the results of the excavation will be made publicly available by means of a database in digital form, to permit inclusion of the site data in any future academic researches into the development of London.

The site archive containing original records and finds will be stored in accordance with the terms of the *Method Statement* (MOL Archaeology 2009) with the Museum of London within 12 months of the end of the excavation.

In view of the limited potential of the material (Section 4) and the limited significance of the data (Section 4.3) it is suggested that a short note on the results of the watching brief should appear in the annual round-up of the *London Archaeologist*.

6 Acknowledgements

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- Jon Cassidy of Balfour Beatty Construction Ltd
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- Tony Grey and Jacqui Pearce of MoL Archaeology

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8 NMR OASIS archaeological report form

OASIS ID: molas1-64099

Project details

Project name	Crown Woods School, Eltham
Short description of the project	Work on new buildings, to replace the existing school buildings, was monitored during the redevelopment of the former school playing fields. The results of the watching brief have shown a low level of archaeological remains on the site. There were no archaeologically significant features revealed during the watching brief. There was a background of burnt and struck flint across the entire area of the site. The retained struck flint consisted of 9 medium to high quality pieces of waste flint and hollow end scraper of probable Neolithic/Bronze Age date. However this also indicates there was no significant occupation on the site. Scatter of small and abraded sherds medieval pottery, from local coarseware jars or cooking pots suggests some kind of domestic activity at a low level in the vicinity between the mid 13th and 14th centuries, possibly continuing as late as the 15th to 16th centuries. All other finds could possibly be the result of manuring (ie brought from elsewhere) for agricultural purposes or very recent activity.
Project dates	Start: 06-07-2009 End: 07-08-2009
Previous/future work	No / Not known
Any associated project reference codes	RIF09 - Sitecode
Site status	None
Current Land use	Other 14 - Recreational usage
Significant Finds	POTTERY Medieval
Project location	
Country	England
Site location	GREATER LONDON GREENWICH ELTHAM Crown Woods School, Eltham
Postcode	SE9
Study area	86500.00 Square metres
Site coordinates	TQ 44300 74800 51.4532568786 0.07704768519280 51 27 11 N 000 04 37 E Point
Height OD / Depth	Min: 56.00m Max: 67.00m
Project creators	
Name of	MoL Archaeology

Organisation	
Project brief originator	Greater London Archaeology Advisory Service
Project design originator	MOL Archaeology
Project director/manager	Robin Nielsen
Project supervisor	Isca Howell
Type of sponsor/funding body	Client
Name of sponsor/funding body	London Borough of Greenwich
Project archives	
Physical Archive recipient	LAARC
Physical Archive ID	RIF09
Physical Contents	'Ceramics','Worked stone/lithics'
Digital Archive recipient	LAARC
Digital Archive ID	RIF09
Digital Contents	'Ceramics','Worked stone/lithics'
Paper Archive recipient	LAARC
Paper Archive ID	RIF09
Paper Contents	'Ceramics','Worked stone/lithics'
Paper Media available	'Diary','Plan','Report'
Project bibliography	
Publication type	Grey literature (unpublished document/manuscript)
Title	Crown Woods School, Eltham
Author(s)/Editor(s)	Howell, I
Date	2009
Issuer or publisher	MoL Archaeology
Place of issue or publication	London
Description	Unpublished client report

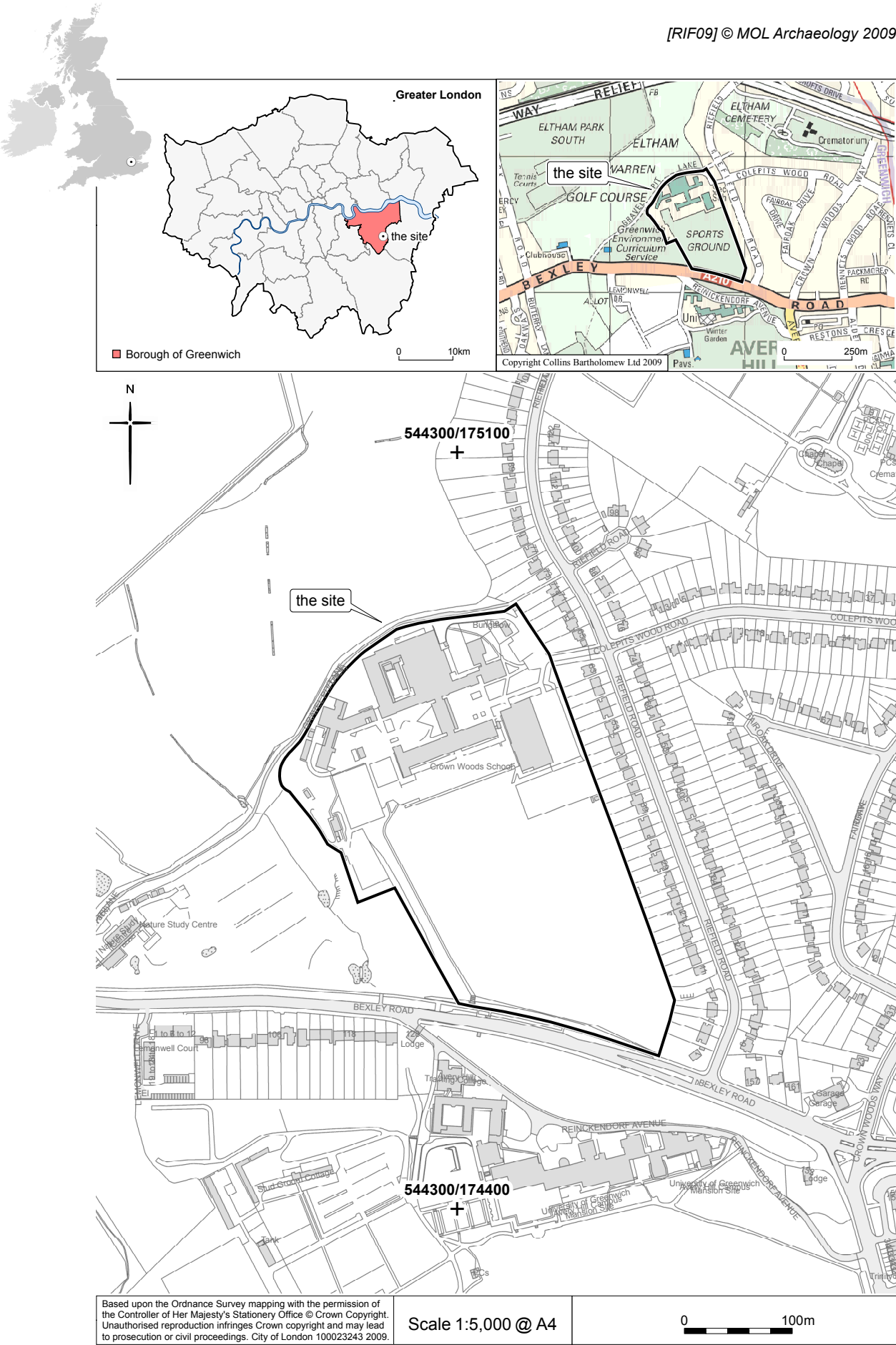


Fig 1 Site location

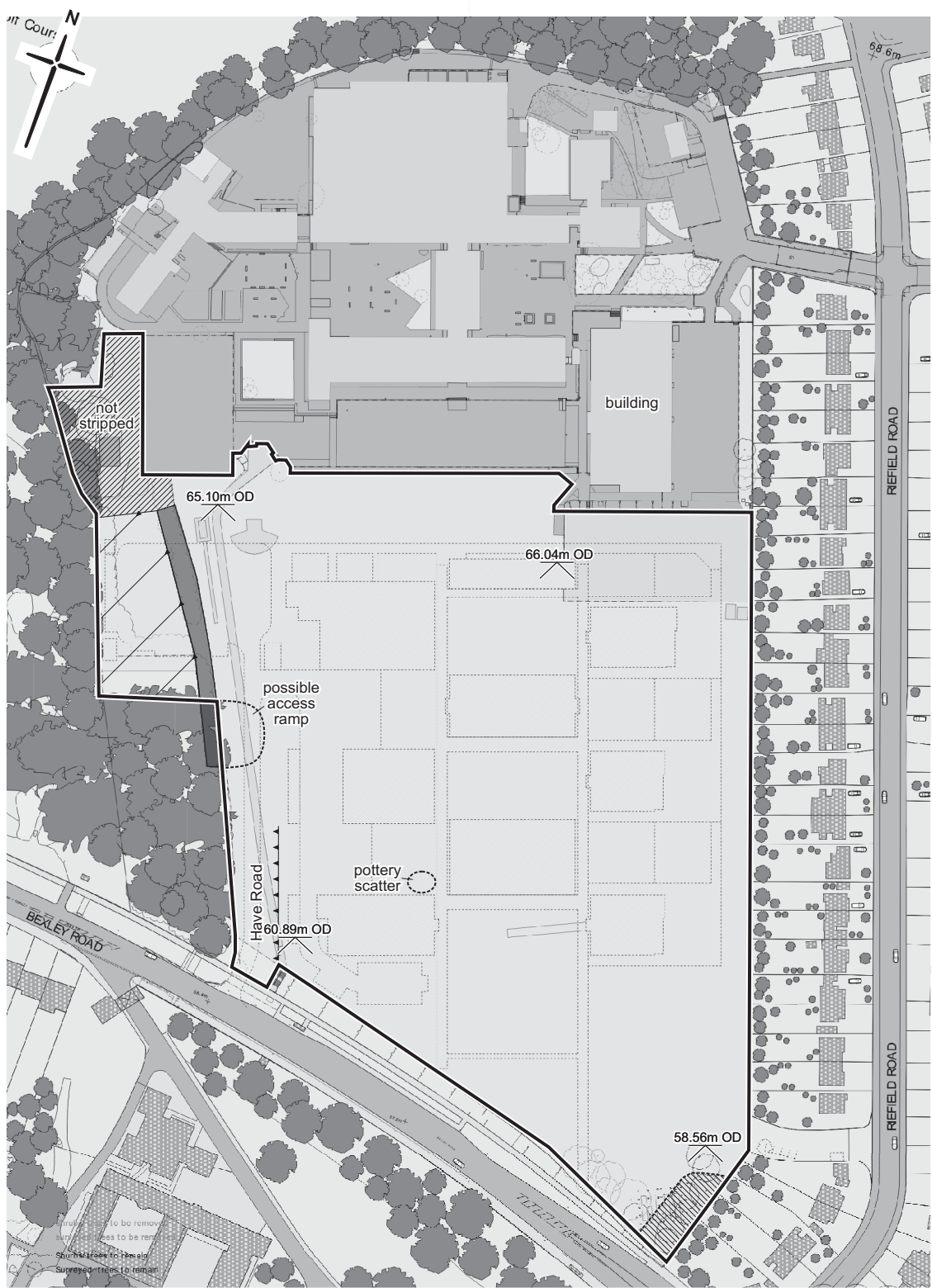


Fig 2 Areas of watching brief



Fig 3 Machine clearance of topsoil



Fig 4 Cleaning area of pottery scatter