

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT:  
UFTON NERVET LEVEL CROSSING, UFTON LANE, BERKSHIRE**

Planning Reference: 15/00954/COMIND  
NGR: SU 6158 6883  
AAL Site Code: UFNE 16  
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Report prepared for Hochtief Construction

By  
Allen Archaeology Limited  
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Allenarchaeology



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*Cover image: Topsoil stripping for compound, looking north*

## Executive Summary

- Allen Archaeology Limited was commissioned by Hochtief Construction Limited to undertake archaeological monitoring and recording of groundworks during construction of a of a new road and flyover at the existing level crossing at Ufton Nerve, Urton Lane, Berkshire.
- The site lies in an area of significant archaeological potential, with predictive modelling indicating the potential for prehistoric deposits within the southeast of the site. In the wider area, a Mesolithic encampment was identified at Ufton Green, while a concentration of probable Neolithic and Bronze Age barrows is recorded near Victoria Lodge. Evidence of Roman rural occupation and Anglo-Saxon settlement activities have also been discovered in the region.
- No clear evidence of prehistoric human activity was found during the archaeological monitoring. The possible remnants of a curvilinear ditch were identified and might be those of a ring ditch, although both the date and interpretation of the feature remain uncertain. The other evidence indicates only post-medieval activity within the area. A single piece of 16<sup>th</sup>-century pot was recovered from a pit, but none of the other features were datable. Two other artefacts of 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup>-century date were identified from the topsoil.
- None of the features has significant archaeological value and the groundworks had a negligible impact on the archaeological resource.

## **1.0 Introduction**

- 1.1 Allen Archaeology Limited (AAL) was commissioned by Hochtief Construction Limited to undertake an archaeological watching brief during topsoil and subsoil stripping in advance of the construction of a new road and flyover at the existing level crossing at Ufton Nervet, Urton Lane, Berkshire.
- 1.2 The excavation, recording and reporting conformed to current national guidelines, as set out in the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (2014) *'Standard and Guidance for an Archaeological Watching Brief'* and Historic England (2015) document *'Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment'*; regionally specific research aims, as outlined in the *'Solent Thames Research Framework for the Historic Environment: Resource Assessments and Research Agendas'* (Hey and Hind 2014); the *'Urton Nervet Overbridge Archaeological Strategy'* prepared by Atkins (2015), and specification for the scheme of works (AAL 2016).

## **2.0 Site Location and Description**

- 2.1 Ufton Nervet is situated in the administrative district of West Berkshire Council, approximately 10km west-southwest of central Reading. The development area is to the northwest of village and comprises a strip of land along Ufton Lane, between the A4 Bath Road and the River Kennet and is centred on NGR SU 6158 6883 (Figure 1).
- 2.2 The local bedrock geology comprises Lambeth Group clay, silt and sand, overlain by superficial sand and gravel deposits belong to the Beenham Grange Gravel Member (<http://mapapps.bgs.ac.uk/geologyofbritain/home/html>).

## **3.0 Planning Background**

- 3.1 Planning permission has been granted for *'Erection of new overbridge to replace the level crossing, including raised embankments to carry a two way single carriageway road and footway on the north and south approaches to the bridge forming a new section of Ufton Lane, with associated drainage and planting'* (Planning Ref: 15/00974/COMIND). Planning permission was granted subject to conditions, including a condition for a programme of archaeological monitoring and recording during groundworks for the scheme.
- 3.2 The approach adopted is consistent with the guidelines set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (Department for Communities and Local Government 2012).

## **4.0 Archaeological and Historical Background**

- 4.1 The archaeological background to the site is based on the information presented in the Archaeological Strategy document prepared in support of this scheme (Atkins 2015). The information presented below is a summary of this data.
- 4.2 The site lies in an area of high archaeological potential, particularly for the prehistoric period. Predictive modelling of the deposits in the Kennet Valley has recently been undertaken as part of the Kennet Valley Predictive Mapping Project suggests that the central portion of the site lies in an area of very high potential, with high potential in the southeast of the site.

- 4.3 A Mesolithic butchery and animal processing site was identified at Ufton Green, in the floodplain of the river, c.260m south of the site. Cropmark evidence of possible Neolithic and Bronze Age round barrows has also been identified nearby. The nearest cropmark was located c.110m to the west of the site, but the main concentration is noted at Victoria Lodge, c.470m to the northwest.
- 4.4 Immediately to the east of the site, excavations in 1961–1963 revealed a complex of Iron Age and Roman enclosures and a trackway, interpreted as probable agricultural fields and stock enclosures. Further cropmarks were recorded to the north, and included a possible courtyard villa, further trackways and enclosures.
- 4.5 The excavations to the east of the site also exposed evidence for Anglo-Saxon activity, with a grubenhaus, or sunken feature building, producing a quantity of 6<sup>th</sup> century pottery. There was also a single, late Saxon pit.
- 4.6 A geophysical survey of the site was undertaken in March 2015. The survey did not identify any features or deposits of potential archaeological interest, but it was noted in the report that geological variation might mask more subtle archaeological anomalies (Richardson 2015).

## 5.0 Methodology

- 5.1 Archaeological monitoring and recording was undertaken over 16 working days between the 11<sup>th</sup> April and 8<sup>th</sup> June 2016. The groundworks were monitored at all times by an experienced archaeologist. The topsoil and subsoil stripping of the area was undertaken using a mechanical excavator. During the scheme of monitoring the archaeologist on site halted groundworks in order to fully record all archaeological features and deposits identified, within the depth of the groundworks required for the scheme.
- 5.2 Accurate scale plan and section drawings were produced of all archaeological features and deposits exposed, as well as, 'natural' profiles to illustrate the soil stratigraphy. A base plan was produced to map all archaeological features and deposits. All drawn plans and sections were tied to the OS grid within Ordnance Datum heights shown.
- 5.3 All archaeological deposits were recorded photographically, with an identification number board, appropriate scales and directional arrow. General site shots were also taken to show the location of the groundworks and the stratigraphic sequence.
- 5.4 Standard AAL context recording sheets were used to record all descriptive context information relating to archaeological features and deposits, as well as stratigraphic relationships.
- 5.5 Finds collected during the fieldwork were bagged and labelled with appropriate deposit context number. All finds were processed (clean, marked and labelled, as appropriate) at AAL Head Office.

## 6.0 Results

- 6.1 The superficial geology was broadly consistent across the entirety of the site, comprising a compact, very dark grey, sandy gravel, with some sandy patches in places (004, 007 and 027). Few archaeological features were observed across the site and the superficial geology was primarily sealed by topsoil layer 100, comprising a loose, dark brown, sandy clay, with very frequent small stone inclusions, measuring c.0.5m thick (Plate 1). One fragment of modern pottery, three fragments of 16<sup>th</sup>-century pottery, and the stem of a 17<sup>th</sup>-century clay pipe were recovered from the topsoil (Appendix 1 Appendix 2).



*Plate 1: Representative section showing topsoil and superficial geology, scales 1m and 0.5m*

#### **Area A**

- 6.2 A northeast-southwest aligned linear feature, [026], with shallow concave sides and a relatively flat base, measuring c.12m wide, extended across the middle of the northern area of site. It is probably the remnant of an earlier watercourse (palaeochannel) and a machine was used to excavate a linear slot perpendicular to the alignment of the feature, showing the deposits in section. Three deposits were identified within feature [026]: 021, a dark grey silty gravel, 0.30m thick, sealed by 002; 022, an orange brown silty clay, 0.20m thick, sealed by 021 and 023; and 023, a light grey sandy gravel, 0.50m thick, sealed by 002 (Plate 2). A heavily corroded lump of iron, probably a large nail, was found in basal deposits 023, and is thought to be intrusive. No archaeological finds were recorded within the feature.



*Plate 2: Southwest-facing section of palaeochannel [026], scale 4m*

## Area B

- 6.3 At the northern limit of the southern area, [024], a northwest-to-southeast curvilinear ditch with moderately steep straight sides and a flat base, was recorded. At the maximum extent, the ditch measured 3.4m wide and 0.5m deep. It contained a single fill, 025, a hard, dark grey gravel with sandy patches. No datable evidence was recovered from the fill of [024]. Based on the shape in plan it was interpreted as the partially surviving remnant of a ring ditch, although given the absence of evidence for other prehistoric activity on the site this interpretation remains speculative (Figures 4 and 5; Plate 3).



*Plate 3: Southeast-facing section of curvilinear ditch [024], scales 1m and 2m*

- 6.4 Towards the centre of the southern area, the natural geology was cut by [006], a circular pit with a diameter of 1.0m and depth of 0.3m. Pit [006] contained fill 005, a compact, very dark grey, silty clay with frequent small pebbles (Plate 4; Figures 4 and 5). A single sherd of red glazed earthenware dating to the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century was identified from fill 006 (Appendix 1).



*Plate 4: Southeast-facing section of pit [006], scale 1m*

- 6.5 Cut [010]=[017], a northeast-to-southwest oriented curvilinear ditch with moderately steep sides and flat base, was located just over 1.3m south of pit [006]. At the maximum extent the ditch measured 1.2m wide and 0.4m deep and contained three fills: 015, a compact, light grey, silty clay, 0.1m thick, sealed by 014, a compact, mid grey, silty clay with orange mottling, 0.2m thick, sealed by 013=017; 013=017, a compact, dark brown sandy clay with occasional small pebbles, 0.2m thick. No datable evidence was recovered from any of the fills of ditch [010]=[017](Plate 5; Figures 4 and 5).



*Plate 5: West-facing section of cut [010]=[017] and [008]=[119]*

- 6.6 Cut [008]=[019], a northeast-to-southwest oriented curvilinear ditch with shallow concave sides and relatively flat base, truncated the uppermost fills of ditch [010]=[017] and probably represent its re-cutting. At maximum extent it measured 2.0m wide and 0.2m deep and contained a single fill: 009=020, a dark grey, silty clay with infrequent small stones. No datable evidence was recovered from the feature.
- 6.7 The fill of ditch [010]=[017] was overlain by 011, a layer of compact, mid brownish grey clay, measuring 0.1m thick, which was a localised spread of material that most likely accumulated naturally as a result of fluvial activity.

## **7.0 Discussion and Conclusions**

- 7.1 Although the desk-based assessment pointed to the possibility of uncovering evidence of prehistoric activity, no clear indications were identified. The remnants of a curvilinear ditch may be the remains of a ring ditch, but both date and interpretation remain uncertain.
- 7.2 A limited sequence of curvilinear ditches and a pit were uncovered, of which the latter contained a 16<sup>th</sup>-century potsherd and roof tile fragment. Late 16<sup>th</sup>-century potsherds and a 17<sup>th</sup>-century clay pipe stem were collected from the topsoil. None of the other features contained dating evidence and it was not possible to positively assign them a specific phase, although based on the weight of evidence these may also date from the post-medieval era.
- 7.3 None of the features were of significant archaeological value and the groundworks had a negligible impact on the archaeological resource.

## **8.0 Effectiveness of Methodology**

8.1 The watching brief methodology was appropriate to the nature and scale of the proposed development and enabled investigation of the nature and extent of the archaeology present, and the potential impacts of the proposed development.

## **9.0 Acknowledgements**

9.1 Allen Archaeology Limited would like to thank Hochtief Construction for this commission.

## **10.0 References**

AAL, 2016, *Specification for an Archaeological Scheme of Monitoring and Recording: Urton Nervet Level Crossing, Ufton Lane, Berkshire*, Unpublished planning document

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## Appendix 1: Pottery

By Paul Blinkhorn

The pottery assemblage comprised five sherds with a total weight of 179g. It is all post-medieval. The following fabric types were noted:

**BW:** **Border Ware**, 1550–1700 (Pearce 1988). 1 sherd, 71g

**GRE:** **Glazed Red Earthenware**, 16<sup>th</sup>–19<sup>th</sup> century (Brears 1969). 3 sherds, 93g.

**MOD:** **Miscellaneous 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century wares**. 1 sherd, 15g.

The pottery occurrence by number and weight of sherds per context by fabric type is shown in Table 1. Each date should be regarded as a *terminus post quem*. The range of fabric types is typical of post-medieval sites in the region (eg. Blinkhorn 2005). All the sherds of GRE are from bowls, with the fragment of BW being from the wide, flanged rim from a large deep dish. These are typical products of the respective traditions, with the latter dating to the late 16<sup>th</sup> – late 17<sup>th</sup> century in London (Pearce *et al.* 1992, 12). Overall, the pottery is in good condition, and appears reliably stratified.

A single, small fragment of flat roof tile weighing 18g also occurred in context 5. It is in a hard, red sandy fabric, and is 14m thick. It is most likely of late medieval or early post-medieval date.

Context	GRE		BW		MOD		Date
	No.	Wt	No.	Wt	No.	Wt	
001					1	15	Modern
002	2	63	1	71			Late 16 <sup>th</sup> century
005	1	30					Mid 16 <sup>th</sup> century
<b>Total</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>15</b>	

Table 1: Pottery occurrence by number and weight (g) of sherds per context by fabric type

## References

Blinkhorn, P, 2005, 'The Post-Roman Pottery of Reading and Windsor', in S Preston (ed.) *Reading and Windsor, Old and New*, Thames Valley Archaeological Services Monograph 7, 173–176

Brears, P C D, 1971, *The English Country Pottery: Its History and Techniques*, Newton Abbot: C. E. Tuttle Co

Pearce, J E, Lakin, D, and Edwards, J E C, 1992, *Border Wares. Post-medieval Pottery in London, 1500–1700*, London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office

## Appendix 2: Other Finds

By Mike Wood

### Introduction

A mixed collection of metal and clay tobacco pipe was collected during archaeological investigation at Ufton Nervet.

### Methodology

The material was counted and weighed in grams, then examined visually to identify any diagnostic pieces and the overall condition of the assemblage. Reference was made to published guidelines (Higgins and Davey 2004). Where no other identification has been possible for the clay pipe, stems have been dated by established stem bore guidelines (Oswald 1975). It should be noted that dates provided by stem-bore size can have an appreciable margin for error and are intended only as a general guide. A summary of the material is recorded in Table 2 and Table 3.

### Assemblage

Context	Date range	Stems	Bowls	Mouths	Weight (g)	Stem bore	Comments
001	c.1605-1695	1			10	7/64"	Abraded stem

Table 2: Clay tobacco pipe

Context	Material	Object	Date	No.	Weight (g)	Comments
023	Fe	undiagnostic	undated	1	24	Massively corroded lump

Table 3: Metal object

### Discussion

This small assemblage contains a single 17<sup>th</sup> century tobacco pipe stem and a corroded object, probably representing a large nail.

Such a limited assemblage offers little opportunity for further study, with the material all suitable for discard.

### References

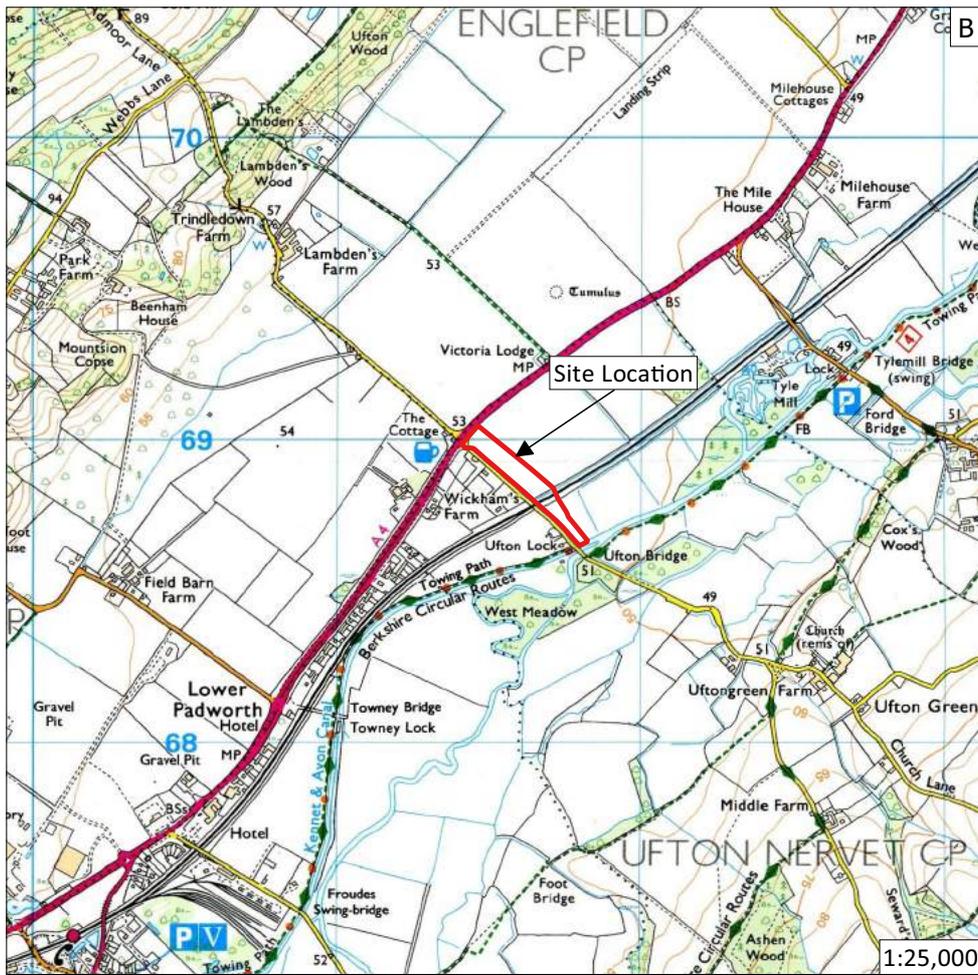
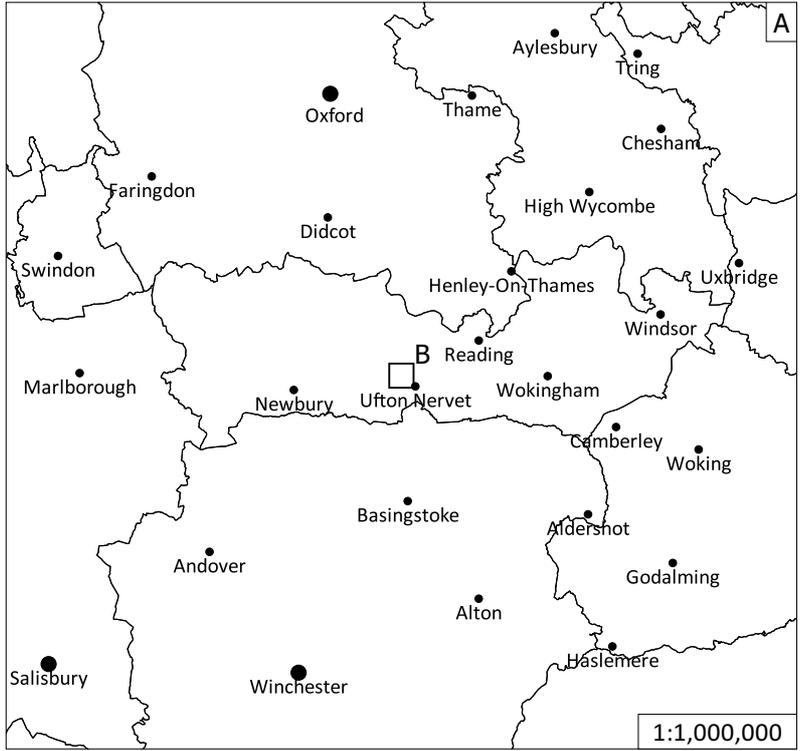
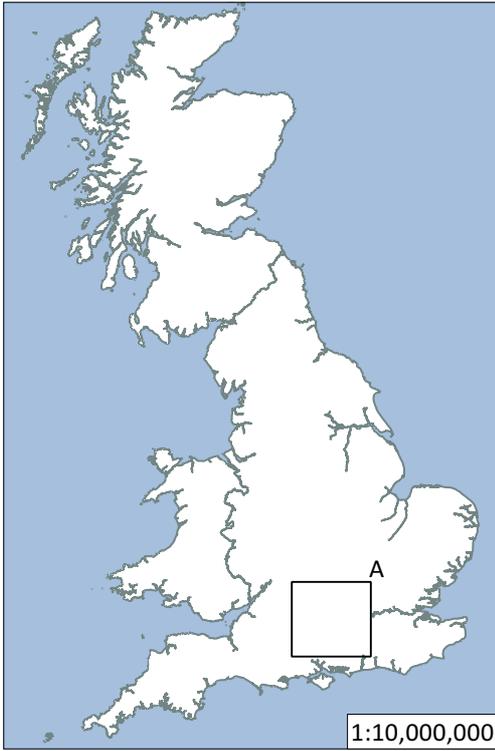
Higgins, D A and Davey, P J, 2004, 'Appendix 4: Draft guidelines for using the clay tobacco pipe record sheets' in S D White, *The Archaeology of the Clay Tobacco Pipe XVII: The Dynamics of Regionalisation and Trade: Yorkshire Clay Tobacco Pipes c1600-1800*, Oxford: British Archaeological Reports, 487–490

Oswald, A, 1975, *Clay Pipes for the Archaeologist*, Oxford: British Archaeological Reports

### Appendix 3: Context Summary List

Context	Type	Description	Interpretation
001	Layer	Loose, dark brown sandy clay with frequent small stones, 0.5m thick.	Topsoil
002	VOID		
003	VOID		
004	Layer	Compact, very dark grey sandy gravel; same as 007 and 027.	Natural geology
005	Fill	Compact, very dark grey silty clay, with frequent small stones, 0.3m thick; sealed by 202, fills [006].	Fill of pit [006]
006	Cut	Sub-circular shape in plan with moderately shallow concave sides and a flat base, 1.0m long x 1.0m wide x 0.3m deep; filled by 005, cuts 007.	Cut of pit [006]
007	Layer	Compact, mid brownish grey gravel with clay patches, same as 004 and 027.	Natural geology
008	Cut	Curvilinear shape in plan, NE-SW oriented with shallow concave sides and a flat base, 1.5m long (to l.o.e) x 1.8m wide x 0.2m deep; same as [019], filled by 009, cuts 013.	Cut of ditch [008]
009	Fill	Compact, dark grey silty clay with very occasional small stones, 0.2m thick; same as 020, fills [008], sealed by 011.	Fill of ditch [008]
010	Cut	Curvilinear shape in plan, NE-SW oriented with moderately steep straight sides and a flat base, 1.2m long (to limit of excavation) x 1.2m wide x 0.4m deep; same as [016], filled by 015, 014, 013, and 012, cuts 009.	Cut of ring ditch [010]
011	Layer	Compact, mid brownish grey clay with no inclusions, 0.1m thick; sealed by 002, seals 009.	Substratum
012	VOID	-	-
013	Fill	Compact, dark brown sandy clay with occasional small stones, 0.2m thick; fills [010], cut by [008], seals 014.	Fill of ditch [010]
014	Fill	Compact, mid grey silty clay with orange mottles, 0.2m thick; fills [010], sealed by 013, seals 015.	Fill of ditch [010]
015	Fill	Compact, light grey silty clay with no inclusions, 0.1m thick; basal fill of [010], sealed by 014.	Fill of ditch [010]
016	Cut	Curvilinear shape in plan with an irregular terminal, N-S oriented with very shallow straight sides and a flat sloping base, 1.6m long (to limit of excavation) x 2.0m wide x 0.3m deep; filled by 017 and 018, cuts 020.	Cut of ditch terminus [016]
017	Fill	Compact, dark brown sandy clay with occasional small stones, 0.1m thick; fills [016], sealed 018.	Fill of ring ditch terminus [016]
018	VOID	-	-
019	Cut	Curvilinear shape in plan with a pointed terminal, N-S oriented with moderately shallow concave sides and a flat base, 1.2m long (to limit of excavation) x 2.0m wide x 0.2m deep; filled by 020, cuts 017.	Cut of ditch terminus [019]
020	Fill	Compact, dark grey silty clay with very occasional small stones, 0.2m thick; fills [019]	Fill of ditch terminus [019]
021	Layer	Compact, dark grey silty gravel, 0.3m thick; fills [026] sealed by 002, seals 022.	Natural infilling of palaeochannel [026]
022	Layer	Compact, orange brown silty clay with grey clay mottles, 0.2m thick; fills [026], sealed by 021, seals 023.	Natural infilling of palaeochannel [026]
023	Layer	Compact, light grey sandy gravel with flint fragments, 0.5m thick; basal fill of [026], sealed by 022.	Natural infilling of palaeochannel [026]
024	Cut	Curvilinear shape in plan, NW-SE oriented with moderately steep straight sides and a flat base, 1.0m long (to limited of excavation) x 3.4m wide x 0.5m deep; filled by 025, cuts 004.	Cut of ditch [024]
025	Fill	Hard, dark grey gravel with sandy patches, 0.5m thick; fill of [024], sealed by 002.	Fill of ditch [024]

Context	Type	Description	Interpretation
026	Cut	Linear shape in plan, N-S oriented with moderately shallow concave sides and a flat base, 34.0m (to limited of excavation) x 12.0m wide x 0.5m deep; filled by 023, 022, and 021, cuts 004.	Palaeochannel [026]
027	Layer	Hard, dark brown gravel with no inclusions, same as 004 and 007.	Natural geology
028	Cut	Linear shape in plan with a rounded terminal, NW-SE oriented with moderately steep sides and a concave base, 0.5m wide x 0.2m deep; filled by 0.18m.	Palaeochannel [029]
029	Fill	Loose, dark grey silty sand with very frequent flint gravel, 0.2m thick; fill of [029].	Natural infilling of palaeochannel [029]



**Figure 1:** Site location outlined in red

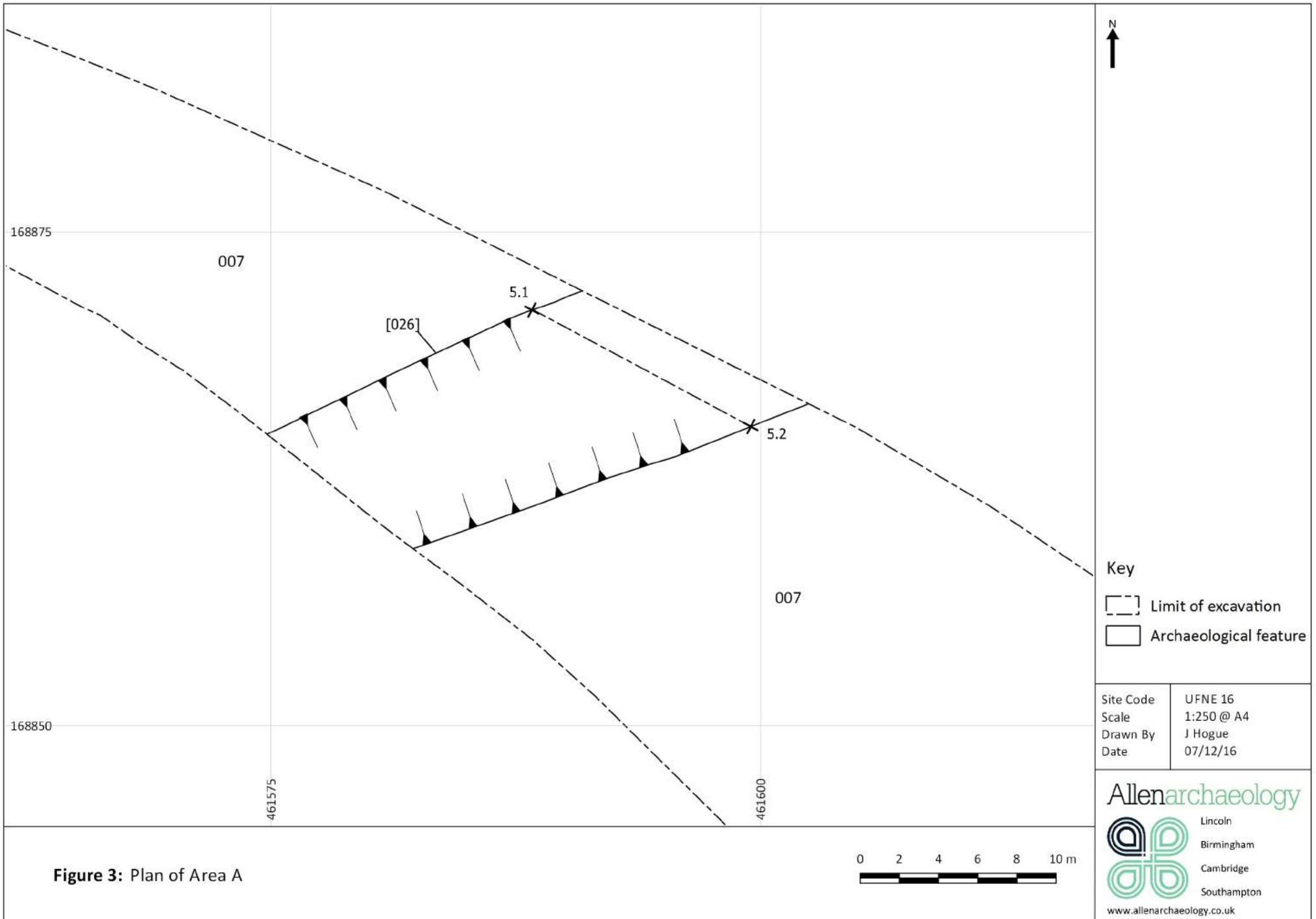
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Site Code	UFNE16
Scale	1:10,000,000 1:1,000,000 1:25,000 @ A4
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Figure 2: Location of archaeological monitoring



**Figure 3:** Plan of Area A

0 2 4 6 8 10 m

N ↑

Key

- ⋯ Limit of excavation
- ▭ Archaeological feature

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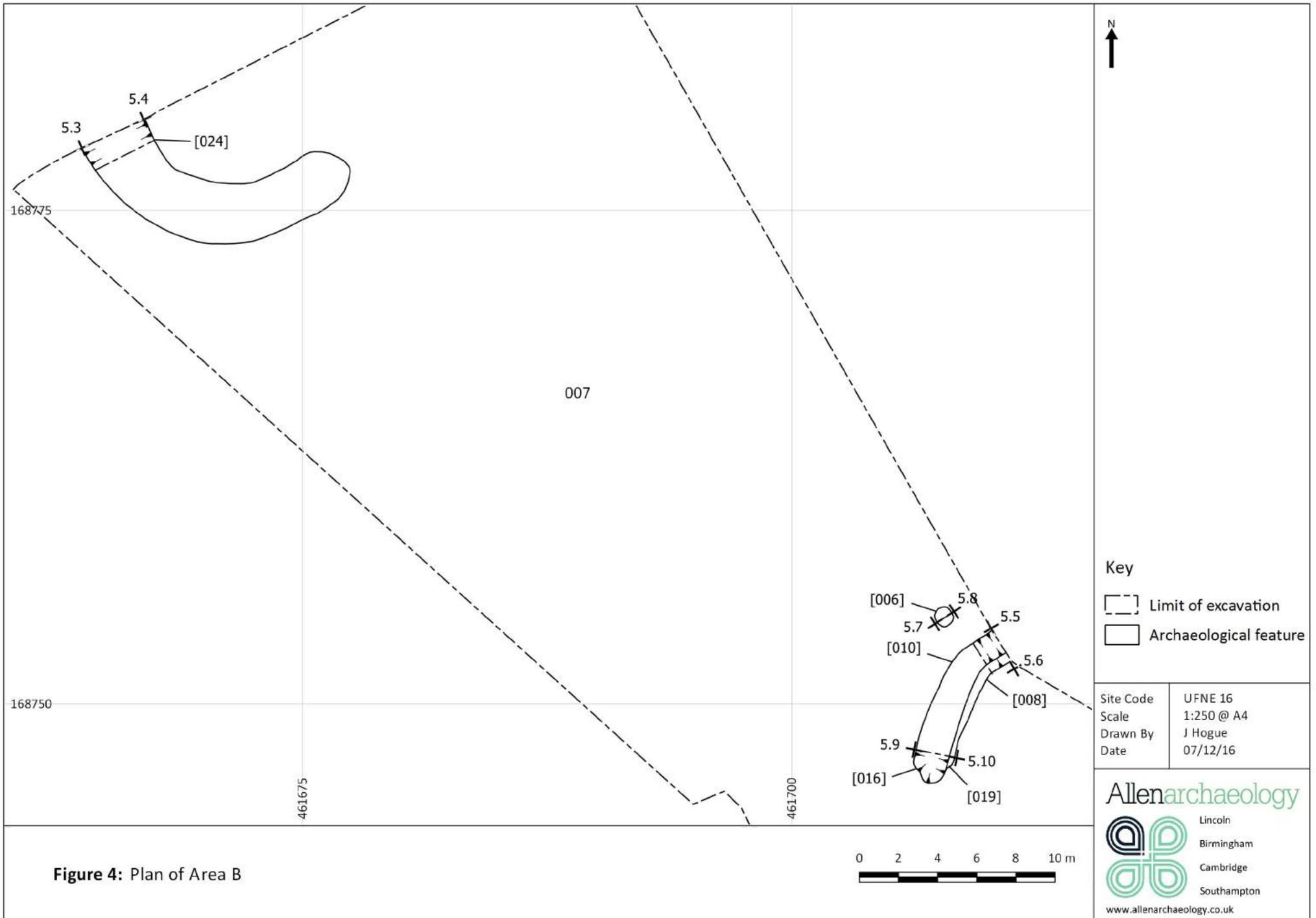
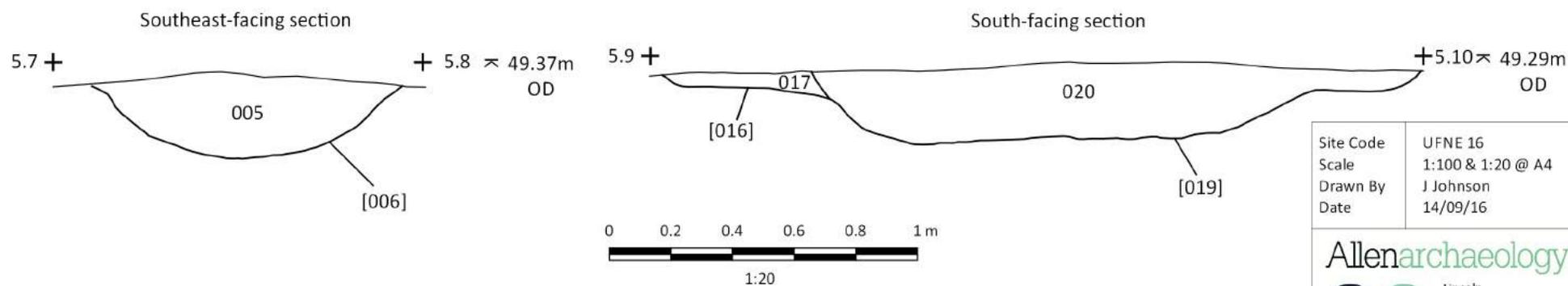
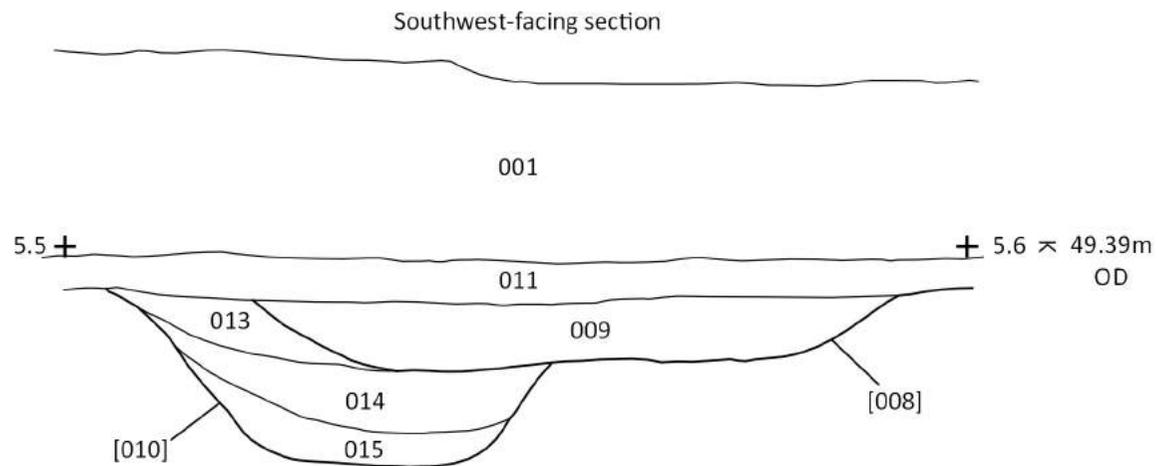
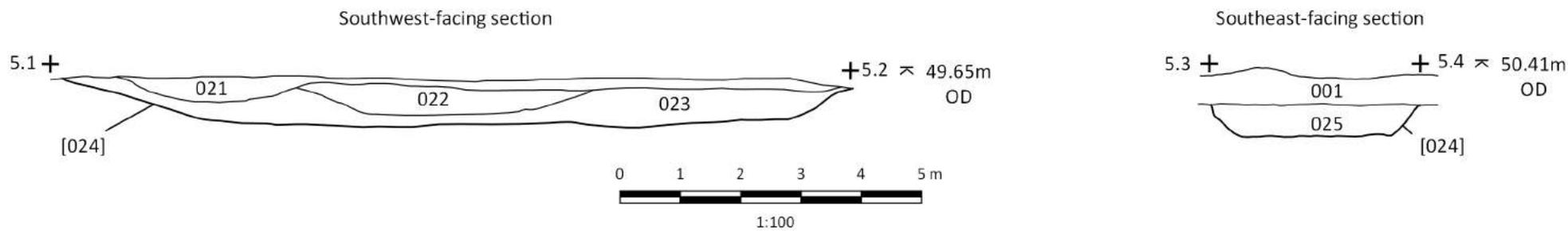


Figure 4: Plan of Area B

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Figure 5: Detailed sections



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