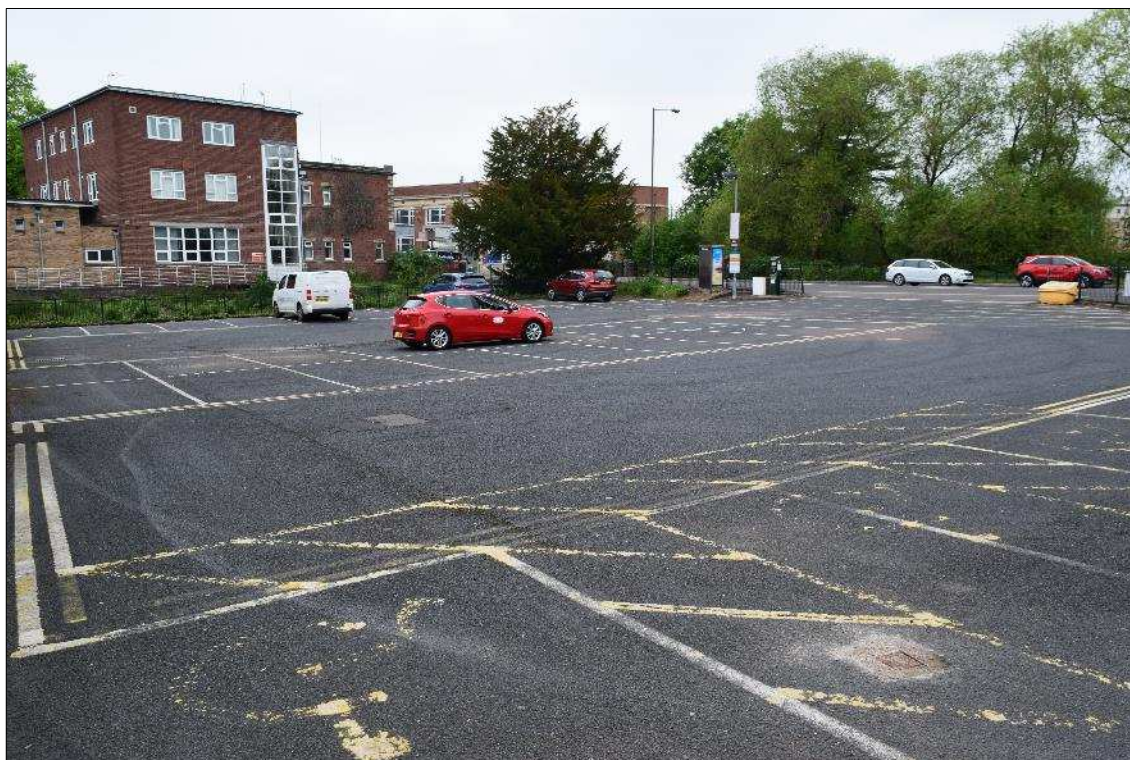


**STAGE 1 PALAEOENVIRONMENTAL SURVEY REPORT:  
LAND OFF CASTLE ROAD, KIDDERMINSTER, WORCESTERSHIRE**

Planning Reference: 22/0532/RG3  
NGR: SO 8314 7619  
AAL Site Code: KICR 23  
Event number: WSM80057  
OASIS Reference Number: allenarc1-518173



Report prepared for Stepnell Limited

By  
Allen Archaeology Ltd and The Environmental Archaeology Consultancy  
Report Number AAL2023102

August 2023



Allenarchaeology



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*Cover image: General view of site, looking northwest*

## Executive Summary

- Stepnell Limited commissioned Allen Archaeology Limited and The Environmental Archaeology Consultancy to conduct a programme of archaeological evaluation by borehole survey on land off Castle Road, Kidderminster, Worcestershire, as a condition of planning consent for a residential development.
- The site lies in the historic core of the town, immediately to the east of the medieval castle, and probably within a former deer park. The 1841 tithe map shows the site was entirely within a large mill pond, infilled by the time of the 1888 Ordnance Survey map.
- Three boreholes were excavated on a broadly east – west alignment across the site. They exposed a fairly uniform sequence of modern tarmac and levelling layers over a degraded sandstone, possibly demolition material from the castle. This sealed probable 19<sup>th</sup> century dumping layers, representing filling of the former pond, which in turn sealed a sequence of waterlain silts, over the glacio fluvial sands and gravels at the base of the sequence.
- There is no evidence for any archaeological activity or former land surfaces predating the mill pond and the evidence suggests a limited archaeological potential. However the black silts retain some palaeoenvironmental potential and radiocarbon dating of these deposits is recommended to further inform this potential.

## 1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 Stepnell Limited commissioned Allen Archaeology Limited and The Environmental Archaeology Consultancy to undertake a stage 1 palaeoenvironmental assessment, as a condition of planning consent for erection of short-term accommodation units on land off Castle Road, Kidderminster, Worcestershire.
- 1.2 The site works and reporting conformed to current national guidelines, as set out in the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists '*Standard and guidance for archaeological field evaluations*' (ClfA 2020), the Historic England document '*Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment*' (Historic England 2015), *Geoarchaeology. Using earth sciences to understand the archaeological record*' (Historic England 2015) and '*Environmental Archaeology: a guide to the theory and practice of methods, from sampling and recovery to post-excavation*' (English Heritage 2011). as well as the written scheme of investigation compiled for these works (AAL 2023).

## 2.0 Site Location and Description

- 2.1 The proposed development site is located within the centre of Kidderminster, in the administrative district of Wyre Forest. The site is approximately 0.12 hectares and presently functions as a car park. The site is centred at National Grid Reference (NGR) SO 8314 7619 and is c.34m above Ordnance Datum.
- 2.2 The bedrock geology comprises sandstone and conglomerate, interbedded in Chester Formation, with alluvium superficial geology deposits recorded (<http://mapapps.bgs.ac.uk/geologyofbritain/home.html>).

## 3.0 Planning Background

- 3.1 Planning permission has been granted by Wyre Forest District Council for '*Erection of a new building to provide short term accommodation units (sui generis) with ancillary office space, creation of new access, associated car parking and landscaping*' (Reference 22/0532/RG3). Planning permission was granted with conditions, including a condition for a programme of archaeological investigation and reporting in advance of development. The archaeologist at Worcestershire County Council, advising Wyre Forest District Council has recommended a programme of archaeological evaluation by borehole survey in the first instance, in order to provide information to allow the planning authority to make a reasoned decision as to whether any further intrusive investigations will be required to mitigate the effects of the proposed development upon the archaeological resource. This Written Scheme of Investigation for a programme of archaeological works details the scope of the evaluation and makes provision for further stages of works should the results of the evaluation indicate further work is needed. The scope of any further works cannot be laid out in detail until the evaluation has been undertaken.
- 3.2 The approach adopted is consistent with the recommendations of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), with the chapter of relevance being '*Section 16. Conserving and enhancing the historic environment*' (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government 2021).

## 4.0 Archaeological and Historical Background

- 4.1 A desk-based assessment was undertaken prior to determination of the planning application (AAL 2022), and the information presented below is a summary of this data.
- 4.2 There is little evidence for prehistoric activity in the vicinity, although recent studies have highlighted areas of potential for Palaeolithic activity in the wider area.
- 4.3 There is no evidence for Roman or early medieval activity in the study area. The site lies close to the historic core of the town and immediately to the east of the castle, built by Sir Hugh Cokesey in the early 14th century, although excavations on the site have uncovered a hall dating to the 12th century. The current tower is 15<sup>th</sup> or 16<sup>th</sup> century in date. The site is likely to have fallen within a deer park associated with the castle and surrounding lands during the medieval period.
- 4.4 The town developed in the post-medieval period largely due to the cloth and carpet trade, with numerous factories and other features recorded in the vicinity of the site.
- 4.5 The proposed development area is shown on the 1841 Tithe Map as being located within 'New Mill Pool' a large man-made mill pond, connected to the adjacent River Stour. The pond was entirely infilled by the time of the 1888 Ordnance Survey map.

## 5.0 Aims and Objectives

- 5.1 The purpose of the borehole survey was to gather sufficient information for the Archaeological Advisor to be able to formulate a policy for the management of the archaeological resources present on the site.
- 5.2 Evidence was gathered to establish the presence/absence, nature, date, depth, quality of survival and importance of any archaeological and palaeoenvironmental deposits to enable an assessment of the potential and significance of the archaeological remains, and to assess the impact of the development upon the archaeology.
- 5.3 Specific aims include the following site-based research questions:
  - Can the archaeological evidence within the core samples afford a chronological stratigraphy for any unexcavated archaeological deposits beneath the site and give any clue as to their character, identifying riverine, mill pond or 'archaeological' deposits?
  - Can the data from the cores be used to identify any phases of land reclamation after the mill pond went out of use if present?
  - Do the results indicate a need for any further archaeological investigations?

## 6.0 Methodology

- 6.1 The proposal recommended three boreholes, to be sunk through the historic sediments to the underlying gravels along a short transect laid out at right angles to the course of the adjacent river, broadly across the centre of the site. The deposits have been provisionally estimated as of 3 metres depth. A fourth borehole location was surveyed in on the day in case the results suggested that further drilling should be undertaken (ie a possible building sequence). The fieldwork was undertaken on July 6<sup>th</sup> 2023.
- 6.2 The boreholes were located on site using a survey grade Leica GS08 RTK NetRover GPS, allowing centimetre accurate real-time precision. The rig uses a percussion system to drive in a steel sampler unit containing a plastic sleeve of 86mm diameter and 1 metre in length in which the core samples are recovered. Since the sole focus of the coring was to recover the archaeological sequence, the borehole was taken to the underlying fluvio-glacial gravels and then stopped, a total depth in all three boreholes of 3m. Because the site lies within a built-up area, and despite having no buildings on it and no evidence from the service maps made available by the client of underground services or any 'hazards', the first metre of deposit was dug out by hand for health and safety reasons, to prove no underground hazards.
- 6.3 In addition to the cores collected from BH1, BH2 and BH3 an earlier programme of geotechnical work (Geocon 2022) included seven boreholes on the site which have been considered too. Unfortunately, geotechnical boreholes are not generally logged at the detail or accuracy normally applied to deposits in archaeological cores, often being described as 'made ground', so this data can only be used as a guide and cannot be relied upon for any significant interpretation of the archaeological deposits and their formation processes. The precise location of four of these seven holes was surveyed in when the archaeological coring was undertaken, but the other three have been estimated from the photographic image in the Geocon report (Figure 2).
- 6.4 The tarmac surface at each borehole site was removed using a breaker and the deposits beneath hand dug to a depth of 1m, after which coring was commenced. The borehole was cased to prevent contamination from material falling from the borehole walls into the base of the borehole.
- 6.5 A total of six 1m long cores were taken on site. The recovered cores were removed from site, the plastic casing split to reveal the sediment which was 'cleaned' to create a narrow section of the deposits underlying the site at the core location. These cleaned sections were photographed (Appendix 1), described and logged using standard sediment descriptions, colour definitions (using a Munsell Chart), and notes on visible inclusions. Normally samples would be taken at this stage and processed for dateable archaeological finds, but the deposits were deemed unsuitable for this procedure at this stage since no additional finds were expected from the deposits. All the cores were incomplete to varying degrees. This may have been caused by pushing through the soft silt sediments without recovering them and compression of the soft deposits.

## 7.0 Results

### *Geotechnical boreholes*

7.1 Comparison of the results from the archaeological boreholes with the geotechnical boreholes can be considered by looking at BH2 and WS04 which were adjacent to each other (within a metre) and on the basis of the general results across the site (see below) should have recorded a very similar sequence.

BH2	Archaeological core	WS04	Geotech core
0-43	tarmac and a hard core of blast furnace slag	0-5	asphalt
		5-30	Grey gravelly fine to coarse sand. Gravel-angular fine to coarse of limestone and asphalt
43-50	coal and stone in a silty matrix	30-90	Orangish red gravelly fine to medium sand. Gravel angular fine to coarse of asphalt and limestone
50-92	degraded red sandstone		
92-117	empty	90-160	Loose blackish grey gravelly fine to coarse sand. Gravel angular fine to medium of glass and asphalt
117-130	dark grey and red silty sand with occasional pebbles, coal and cinder		
130-170	ash, cinder and coal		
170-180	burnt sandstone	160-200	Soft black slightly sandy clay
180-200	soft black unoxidised silt		
200-222	empty	200-250	Medium dense black fine to coarse sand
222-250	banded soft black/dark grey fine silt - unoxidised		
250-262	brown silty clay	250-400	Medium dense brown gravelly fine to coarse sand. Gravel subrounded to rounded fine to coarse of sandstone
262-295	brown sandy gravels, sandstone & other pebbles to 20mm		
295-300	reddish brown fine to medium sand, gritty at top		

*Table 1: Comparison of archaeological and geotechnical boreholes*

7.2 There are major discrepancies between these two records. The blast furnace slag appears to have been recorded as a limestone/asphalt gravel. The degraded red sandstone recorded in BH2 has been recorded in WS04 as 'orangish gravelly fine to medium sand' with the gravel asphalt and limestone rather than sandstone. The glass and asphalt recorded in WS04 90-160 may be 'blast furnace slag' displaced from above since the borehole was reduced in diameter with each 1m rather than cased, so some contamination from above is inevitable. The 0.4m of ash deposit recorded in BH2 is not recorded in WS04, unless the 'loose blackish grey gravelly fine to coarse sand' corresponds with this. The 'soft black slightly sandy clay' in WS04 at 160-200 appears to correspond to the soft black unoxidised silt, while the medium dense black fine to coarse sand at 200-250 in WS04 would appear to correspond with the 'banded soft black/dark grey fine silt' of BH2. The silts recorded in BH1-BH3 are uniformly fine silts lacking both sand and gravel, except for rare 'pebbles'. These appear to be 'sandy clays', 'sandy gravelly clays' or 'dense sands' in the geotechnical boreholes.

7.3 The discrepancies between these two records means that the geotechnical logs cannot be used with confidence as an indication of the 'archaeological' character of the deposits. The



consistency between boreholes BH1 to BH3 suggests that the underlying deposits are probably fairly uniform across the site (Figure 3).

### **Geoarchaeological boreholes**

- 7.4 The site at all three borehole locations was capped with tarmac below which was a layer of hardcore. In BH1 this was stone but in BH2 and BH3 the hardcore used was blast furnace slags. In BH1 a layer of dark grey brown gritty 'soil' of 20cm thickness underlay the hardcore, while in BH3 a 10cm layer of similar gritty, stoney 'soil' lay between the tarmac and hardcore suggesting a period of exposure between hardcoring and tarmac or use of a 'dirty' hardcore at this location. In BH2 the hardcore was underlain by a thin silty deposit of coal and stone just 7cm thick.
- 7.5 In all three boreholes these upper deposits were underlain by a deposit of degraded red sandstone, thin in BH1 (10cm) but thickening towards New Road and reaching a thickness of at least 0.7m in BH3. In BH3 this deposit includes rounded cobbles and smaller pebbles. This deposit is 'clean' (Appendix 1) and may derive from a sandstone quarry or possibly from debris in the ruinous castle or Caldwell Hall immediately west of the present River Stour. It was clearly deposited to raise the ground level on the east side of the river.
- 7.6 Immediately underlying the sandstone in BH1 is a deposit of clean sands and an ashy layer, which produced a sherd of dark brown glazed pottery of 19<sup>th</sup> or 20<sup>th</sup> century date. In BH2 a dark grey and red (sandstone) silty sand with occasional pebbles, coal and cinder underlay the sandstone. Below these deposits an 'ash' layer of ash, coal and cinder was present in all three boreholes indicating a deposit possibly extending across the whole site. This was thickest in BH1, about 0.5m, thinning to the east where it was 0.31m thick. The scale of this deposit suggests that it must have an industrial origin, rather than domestic since it did not contain any visible finds, and was exclusively ash, coal and cinder with no evidence of weathering or soil formation. The site may have been used by a nearby factory to dump their ash debris or collected from more than one industrial site to raise the ground. In BH2 this deposit is underlain by a piece of burnt red sandstone, possibly part of the ash 'dump', and beneath this ash 'dump' across the whole site is an extensive layer of waterlain fine black silts deposited in fairly still open water. These latter clearly represent deposition of the sediments in the mill pond known to have been on the site in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The ash 'dump' therefore represents the first phase of intentional 'filling' and ground raising. The New Mill Pond is illustrated on a tithe map of 1841 (AAL 2022) but by the first Ordinance Survey map of 1888 the area has been reclaimed and the River Stour re-channelled, so the dump sequence of ash and degraded red sandstone can be assigned to the Victorian period. The whole of the development site appears to lie within the northern part of the mill pond (*ibid.*) and six of the Geocon boreholes also record deposits that could be describing these silts supporting a conclusion that they extend across the whole site. The depth of silts recorded is thinnest in BH1 (up to 0.51m) and thickest in BH3 (up to 0.82m). We cannot be sure of the actual depth of these silts because they were recovered in both cores in all three boreholes and the incomplete nature of these cores, possibly caused by pushing through the soft sediments, rather than cutting through them and compression of the deposit, makes precise figures impossible.
- 7.7 These black silts oxidise on exposure to air turned to a very dark grey indicating their anoxic condition and potential suitability for palaeoenvironmental study of their contained organic remains.
- 7.8 Underlying the black silts in BH1 is a deposit on banded silty sand, overlying fine to medium sands. These are associated with an area of current flow contrasting with the fine silts above

and may indicate the area where the water flowed through the pond or deposits created by the river predating the construction of the mill pond. Underlying these sands is a sandy pebble and stone gravel of glacio-fluvial origin. In BH2 the black silts are underlain by a pale silty clay with glacio-fluvial sands and gravels below, and in BH3 on the eastern side of the site the black silts are also underlain by pale silty clays, then clay and finally with gravelly sand recorded at the base of the sequence (Fig. 2). These clays appear alluvial in origin and it is possible that substantial deposits of clay may have been excavated to create the mill pond and possibly a retaining embankment downstream of the site. There is no evidence for any palaeosol (old land surface and soil) beneath the black silts and above the clays in the three boreholes supporting the suggestion that the old land surface may have been excavated to create the mill pond. The horizon between the black silts and the underlying pale clays marks the base of the mill pond.

## 8.0 Discussion

- 8.1 The results from the boreholes and mapping evidence suggests that the whole of the site is likely to lie within the original boundaries of the New Mill Pond recorded in the tithe map of 1841. The lack of any evidence for a 'soil' or 'old land surface' at the base of the three boreholes suggests that in this area the old land surface and alluvial clays were excavated out to create a broadly flat-bottomed pond. This will have removed much if not all of any underlying archaeology that might have been present on the site. It is probable that the clay removed was utilised to embank the sides and downstream end of the pond. If we use the base of the 'blackish sandy clay' or 'black sands' in the geotechnical holes as the equivalent of the base of the black silts in the archaeological boreholes then the bottom of the 'waterlain' silts (this is not overbank alluvium but organic rich sediments laid down in 'permanent' fairly still water) lies between 29.43 and 29.13m OD in the archaeological boreholes and 29.15 and 28.77 OD in the geotechnical holes, but with the geotechnical descriptions suspect and the 'empty' parts of the archaeological cores perhaps indicating some compression or 'push down' (ie the corer pushed through instead of collecting) the 'precise' base of the archaeological sequence cannot be established from these boreholes, although a base for the 'mill pond' must lie around 29.2-29.3m OD, and be broadly flat bottomed, but perhaps rising slightly to the east, with the New Road presumably marking the eastern boundary of the mill pond.
- 8.2 It is not known when the mill pond was constructed but the basal black silts should contain sufficient organic material for a radiocarbon date to be produced. This would establish the approximate date for the primary silting of the pond. Selection of this material from BH2 or BH3 should ensure that it does not include any sediments associated with the river predating the construction of the pond. The clean nature of the 'pond' silts indicates that identifiable archaeological finds that could date these sediments are unlikely to be found. The un-oxidised character of the silts indicates that the survival of preserved organic remains such as vegetation, twigs, pollen and invertebrate remains is highly likely, so the sediments have the potential for illustrating the character of aspects of the local palaeo-environment. If some of the sediments predate the post-medieval period then the deposits would be deserving of palaeo-environmental analysis, but if the radiocarbon analysis returns a post-medieval date then further work on the cores may not be justified.
- 8.3 On the basis that the mill pond was still in existence in the early Victorian period the upper silts in the pond sequence must date to the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This map evidence also indicates that the overlying dumps of ash debris, degraded red sandstone and blast furnace slags used to make up the ground level and establish a base for the tarmac are all of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century date.

- 8.4 There is no evidence from these three boreholes of a building sequence on the site and it would appear that no archaeological deposits (excluding the pond silts) are likely to have survived that predate the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. There is also no evidence from the geotechnical boreholes that is contra to this conclusion.

## **9.0 Conclusions and Recommendations**

- 9.1 The sequences recorded from the boreholes confirm the presence of the New Mill Pond and its waterlain silts. All subsequent deposits on the site comprise dumping and make up deposits to raise the land surface in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, utilising local industrial waste and degraded red sandstone, possibly from the castle, Caldwell Hall or local quarries. There is no archaeological building sequence on the site and little likelihood of other archaeological features beneath the mill pond which appears to have been excavated into the underlying alluvial clays.
- 9.2 The date of construction of the New Mill Pond is not known, but radiocarbon analysis of organic material in the base of the 'pond' silts from either BH2 or BH3 should give an approximate date for this primary silting, and therefore presumably the approximate construction of the mill pond.
- 9.3 The mill pond sediments are un-oxidised and will therefore contain surviving organic remains such as insects, seeds, plant matter, twigs and pollen which would allow some reconstruction of the contemporary vegetation of the Stour Valley in this area. Persevering with these analyses is probably only warranted if the sediments can be shown to start in the medieval period, and the most important surviving palaeo-environmental element is the pollen.
- 9.4 It is recommended that a radiocarbon date is obtained for the base of the black silts to establish an approximate construction date for the mill pond and if this falls in the medieval period then a pollen analysis of the silt sequence, with additional macrofossil analyses as appropriate, should be conducted on the material from whichever core the radiocarbon sample was selected. This report should be updated with the radiocarbon date and provisional assessment of the silts from the core selected for dating with any further proposals. The selected core will be chosen on the basis of the processing of the basal silts and their suitability for dating.
- 9.5 No further sampling is required from the site (the cores are sufficient) and this evaluation suggests that no further archaeological field work is justified.

## **10.0 Effectiveness of Methodology**

- 10.1 The borehole survey methodology was appropriate to the scale and nature of the project and has provided a clear indication of the archaeological and palaeoenvironmental potential.

## **11.0 Acknowledgements**

- 11.1 Allen Archaeology Limited would like to thank Stepnell Limited for the commission.

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## Appendix 1: Borehole Logs and Photos

### Borehole 1



#### 0 – 100cm hand excavated

0 – 19	Tarmac and hardcore
19 – 39	Dark grey brown silty 'soil'
39 – 49	Red sandstone
49 – 96	Degraded red sand and ashy layer at base



#### 100 – 200cm

0 – 30	Empty
30 – 68/73	Ash and cinder
68/73 – 100	Black 10YR 2/1 soft fine silt. Unoxidised



#### 200 – 300cm

0 – 10	Empty
10 – 19	Black 10YR 2/1 soft fine silt. Unoxidised – base pond silts
19 – 24	Dark grey 10YR 4/1 banded silty sand
24 – 61	Reddish brown 5YR 4/3 fine-medium sand
61 – 100	Reddish brown 5YR 4/3 sandy gravel, pebbles to 20mm

## Borehole 2



0 – 100cm hand excavated	
0 – 43	Tarmac and hardcore (blast furnace slag)
43 – 50	Coal and stone in silty matrix
50 - 92	Degraded red sandstone



100 – 200cm	
0 – 12	Empty
17 – 30	Dark grey and red sandstone silty sand, occ. pebble, coal and cinder
30 – 70	Ash, clinker and coal
70 – 80	Burnt sandstone
80 – 100	Black 10YR 2/1, soft silt unoxidised



100 – 200cm	
0 – 22	Empty
22 – 50	Black 10YR 2/1, banded soft fine silt
	Base pond silts
50 – 62	Brown 7.5YR 5/2, silty clay
62 – 95	Brown 7.5YR 4/3, sandy gravel pebbles to 20mm

**Borehole 3**



**0 – 100cm hand excavated**

<b>0 – 10</b>	Tarmac
<b>10 – 20</b>	Gritty, stony, silty sandy layer
<b>20 – 50</b>	Hardcore of blast furnace slag
<b>50 – 100</b>	Degraded red sandstone with occasional cobbles and pebbles



**100 – 200cm**

<b>0 – 17</b>	Empty
<b>17 – 46</b>	Degraded red sandstone
<b>46 – 77</b>	Ash, coal and cinder
<b>77 – 100</b>	Black 10YR 2/1, soft silt with occ. cinder, oxidising to very dark grey 7.5YR 3/1



**200 – 300cm**

<b>0 – 29</b>	Empty
<b>29 – 53</b>	Black 10YR 2/1, soft silt, traces of shell, unoxidised Black, soft silt, oxidising paler than above
<b>53 – 59</b>	Base pond silts
<b>59 – 78</b>	Grey brown 7.5YR 5/1-5/2, silty clay, oxidising to reddish grey 5YR 6/2
<b>78 – 91</b>	Grey 7.5YR 6/1, clay, oxidising to light brown 7.5YR 6/4



Figure 1: Site location outlined in red

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Site Code	KICR 22
Scale	1:10,000,000 1:1,000,000 1:25,000 @ A4
Drawn by	L Clempson
Date	10/06/2022

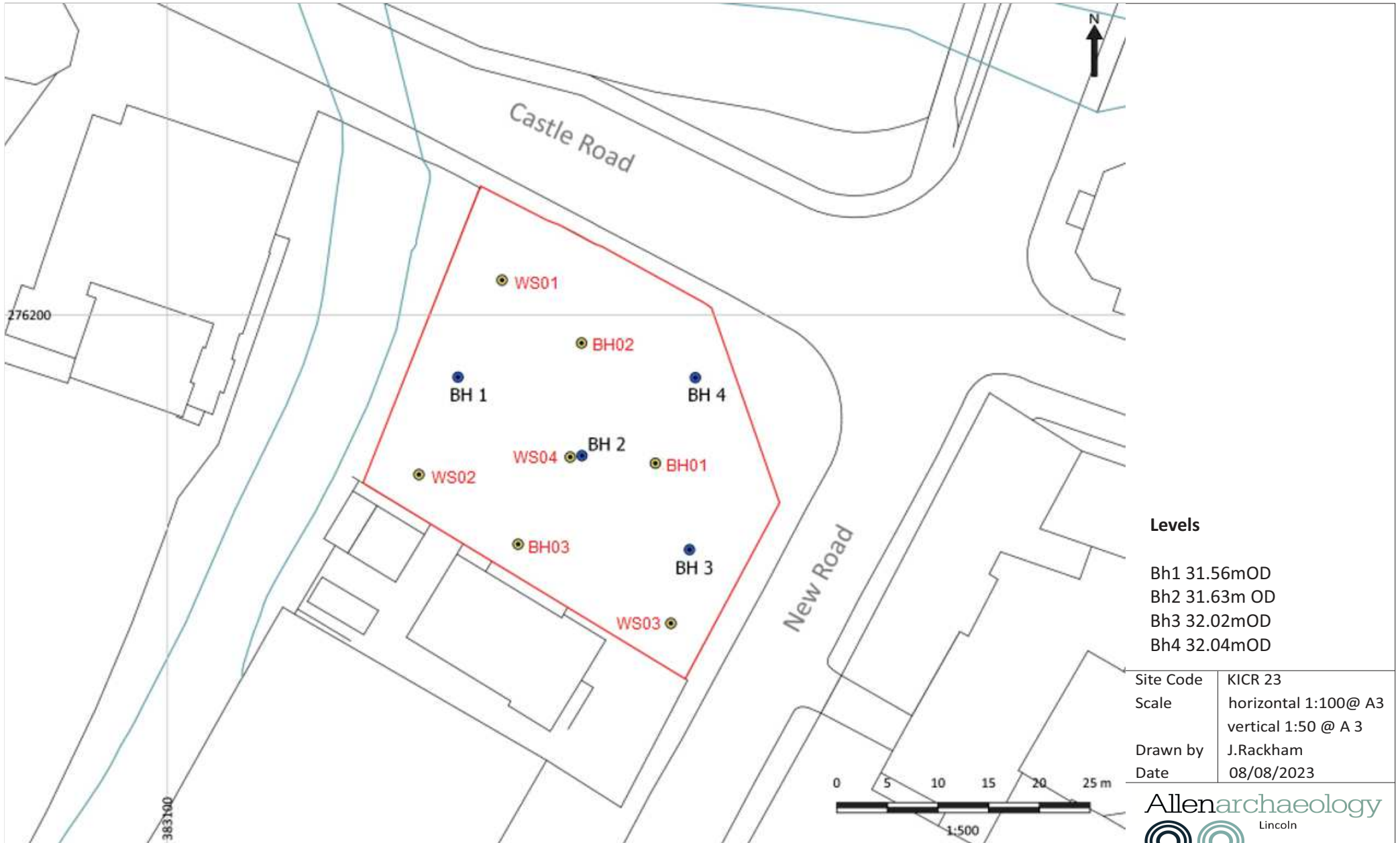
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**Levels**

- Bh1 31.56mOD
- Bh2 31.63m OD
- Bh3 32.02mOD
- Bh4 32.04mOD

Site Code	KICR 23
Scale	horizontal 1:100@ A3 vertical 1:50 @ A 3
Drawn by	J.Rackham
Date	08/08/2023

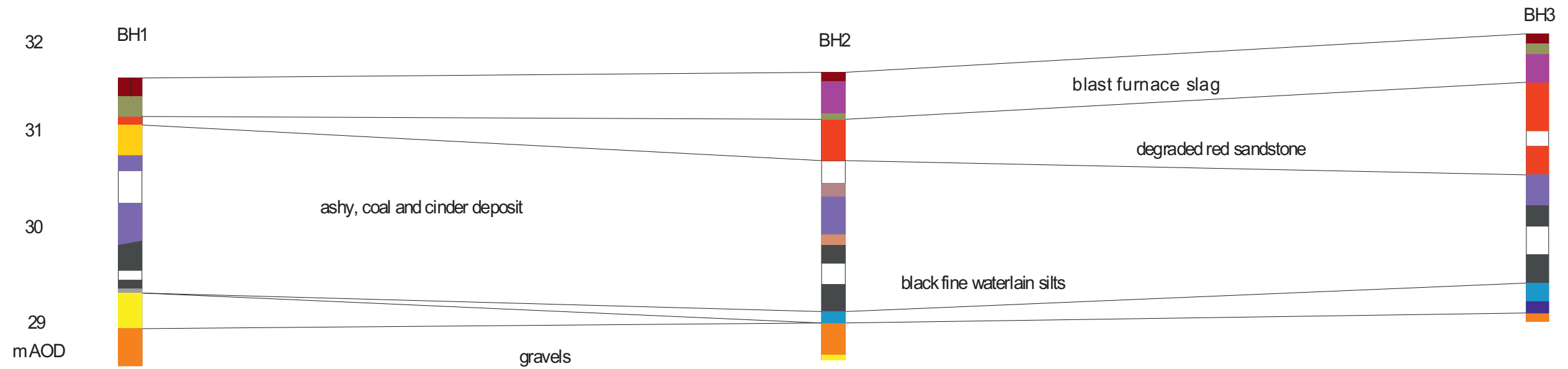
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**Figure 2:** Location of archaeological boreholes in blue (Bh1, Bh2, Bh3) and geotechnical boreholes in red

### Castle Road, Kidderminster - Archaeological cores



#### KEY



Site Code	KICR 23
Scale	horizontal 1:100@ A3 vertical 1:50 @ A 3
Drawn by	J.Rackham
Date	08/08/2023



**Figure 3:** Reconstructed section across the site based on the results from Boreholes BH 1 - BH 3 (blank represents a void in teh core sequence, ie no recovery and/or compression)



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