

Bracknell Town Centre Regeneration. Phase 2: North Retail Area



Archaeological Watching Brief Report

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Archaeological Watching Brief Report

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Summary

In September 2014, Oxford Archaeology (OA) conducted a watching brief during the excavation of new service trenches as part of the Phase 2 (Northern Retail Area) Bracknell Town Centre Regeneration programme.

The watching brief was focussed on the north-western corner and northern edge of the area, where an earlier phase of archaeological monitoring had identified potential archaeological horizons surviving below modern deposits which directly overlay natural formations across the rest of the site. The majority of the area under investigation had been truncated and the stratigraphy recorded consisted of modern landscaping deposits and a probable tarmac surface directly overlying the natural geology. No evidence for surviving archaeological deposits was observed.

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1.1 Oxford Archaeology (OA) was commissioned by Bracknell Regeneration Limited Partnership (BRLP) to undertake an archaeological watching brief on a defined area forming part of Phase 2 (Northern Retail Area) of the Bracknell Town Centre Regeneration, Berkshire (Figure 1).
- 1.1.2 The work was undertaken as a condition of Planning Permission. Although the Local Planning Authority did not set a brief for the work, discussions with Ben Jervis (Berkshire Archaeology) and Margaret McEvit (Bracknell Forest Borough Council) established the scope of work required, and a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) was prepared which outlined how OA would implement those requirements (OA 2013 a).
- 1.1.3 Agreement on work required was only in place for Phase 2, and Phase 3, Charles Square (which did not require a watching brief). Phase 1 comprised the Waitrose development and had already been completed. Further phases of development will be assessed when further site investigation information is available and mitigation measures agreed and presented in further WSIs if appropriate.
- 1.1.4 All work was undertaken in accordance with local and national planning policies.

2 LOCATION, GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

- 2.1.1 The Phase 2 area forms the northern part of the overall development. Centred on National Grid Reference SU 8710 6950 it is bordered on its eastern and western sides by part of The Ring, the road running around the town centre development. The northern boundary is the A329 Millennium Way and to the south the area extends to the line of the High Street.
- 2.1.2 The geology of the area consists of the Bagshot Beds, deposits of sand and clay. These overlay London Clay.
- 2.1.3 The site slopes down from c.77m OD on the High Street towards the north, where it lies at c. 67m OD on Millenium Way.

3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

- 3.1.1 The archaeological and historical background to the development as a whole is contained in a desk based assessment (OA 1997) and a summary is presented below.
- 3.1.2 No archaeological features earlier than the medieval period have been identified within the area of proposed development. Historic maps identified two possible medieval



moated sites within the Masterplan area, both of which are within areas developed in the second half of the 20th century. One lay in the area of Charles Square and the other to the east of the Police Station. Later maps also showed a pond, in the area now occupied by the Health Centre. The only other archaeological site within the Masterplan area is a find spot of a hoard of 17th century silver coins, found during the digging of foundations near the bus station in 1957 (OA 1997, 5-6).

- 3.1.3 The archaeological potential of the Bracknell area is generally poorly understood, based on limited levels of archaeological investigation in the past, although the records suggest that prehistoric and Roman activity was clustered nearer to the Thames and Kennet rivers. From the medieval period to 1813, when the forest was legally abolished, Bracknell lay within the Royal Forest of Windsor. There were two early settlement areas, Old Bracknell to the south of the modern town centre and New Bracknell strung out along a road through the forest, on the alignment of the later High Street, which passes through the overall development area (OAU 1997, 3).
- 3.1.4 Although the existing archaeological record suggests that the archaeological potential of Bracknell Town Centre is low, the absence of evidence may reflect the low level of previous archaeological work rather than a genuine absence of archaeology.
- 3.1.5 Most of the area was not developed before the late 19th century, and has undergone several phases of redevelopment since. A few of the buildings from the High Street frontage have survived and are now Listed Buildings.
- 3.1.6 As part of the current proposals OA have carried out an archaeological Impact Assessment (OA 2013 b) which reviewed the development plans with reference to the historical background information combined with a walkover survey for the development as a whole and also considered results from an archaeological watching brief of site investigation test pits and trenches allowing a more detailed assessment of the Northern Retail Area and Charles Street phases (2 and 3). The assessment confirmed that the Phase 2 and 3 areas have been extensively truncated by the previous development but that a small area on the northern margin of the proposed development, including ground under the existing A329 Millenium Way, may retain the potential to contain archaeological deposits.

4 PROJECT AIMS

- 4.1.1 To establish the presence or absence of archaeological remains within the proposed development area.
- 4.1.2 To record the extent, condition, nature, character, quality and date of any archaeological remains affected by the proposed works.
- 4.1.3 To establish the ecofactual and environmental potential of archaeological deposits and features within the site and to take samples where appropriate.
- 4.1.4 To make available the results of the investigation.

5 METHODOLOGY

- 5.1.1 A summary of OA's general approach to excavation and recording can be found in Appendix A of the WSI (OA, 2013 a). Standard methodologies for Geomatics and Survey, Environmental evidence, Artefactual evidence and Burials can also be found in that document (Appendices B, C, D and E respectively).
- 5.1.2 Site specific methodologies as laid out in the WSI were as follows:

- (i) Impacts of the development were initially mitigated by an archaeological watching brief on all below ground excavations within the area of potential as defined on the figure which accompanied the WSI (the north-western corner and northern edge of the site).
- (ii) After initial monitoring it became apparent that the level of disturbance indicated that preservation of archaeological deposits was unlikely in this area of the site. Consequently, an intermittent watching brief was carried out during the remaining works within the watching brief area identified in the WSI. The sections of trench observed during the watching brief are indicated on Figure 2.
- (iii) Had archaeological deposits been noted, the developer was to make access and time available for the archaeologists to adequately investigate and record them. However, no such deposits were encountered during the works.
- (iv) Had a significant archaeological find been made, the archaeologist was to immediately inform the developer and Berkshire Archaeology so that arrangements could be agreed for it to be properly dealt with. However, no such find was made during the works.

6 DESCRIPTION OF DEPOSITS

- 6.1.1 The natural geology was observed within all the monitored trenches at approximately 1m below ground level, and was generally overlain by a mixed deposit predominantly composed of re-deposited natural with concentrations of mid grey brown sandy silt; lenses and concentrations of gravel and occasional brick fragments.
- 6.1.2 In the western end of the monitored section of trenching, a section of tarmac was visible at the interface between the natural geology and the modern made ground (Fig. 2 and Plate 1).

7 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

- 7.1.1 The interpretation of the results of the earlier watching brief concluded that the absence of any surviving earlier soil horizons between the natural clay and modern deposits within the majority of the excavations suggest that the area of the shopping centre has been truncated, probably during the construction of the recently demolished development (the results were incorporated into the Impact Assessment (OA, 2013 b).
- 7.1.2 It was unclear to what depth this truncation took place, although the report suggested that the absence of any truncated features such as foundations from buildings which originally fronted the High Street indicated that this reduction was substantial. However, the possible buried soil horizon identified in the northern area of the site suggested that the truncation here may not have been as great.
- 7.1.3 No evidence for this horizon was observed during the recent works, which was initially thought to be likely to reflect the high degree of late 20th century truncation. However, the location of the section of tarmac observed at the interface between the modern landscaping deposits and the natural geology (Fig. 2 and Plate 1) corresponds with the alignment of Bull Lane, which is shown on the pre-1960s OS mapping continuing south to meet the High Street. If this does represent the surface of Bull Lane which pre-dates the 1960s redevelopment of the town centre, then it would also suggest that the truncation in this area of the site is less severe than that observed elsewhere. The fact that no archaeological features were revealed during the recent watching brief may reflect both a degree of truncation and/or the location of this area of the site on the periphery of the historic core of the town.

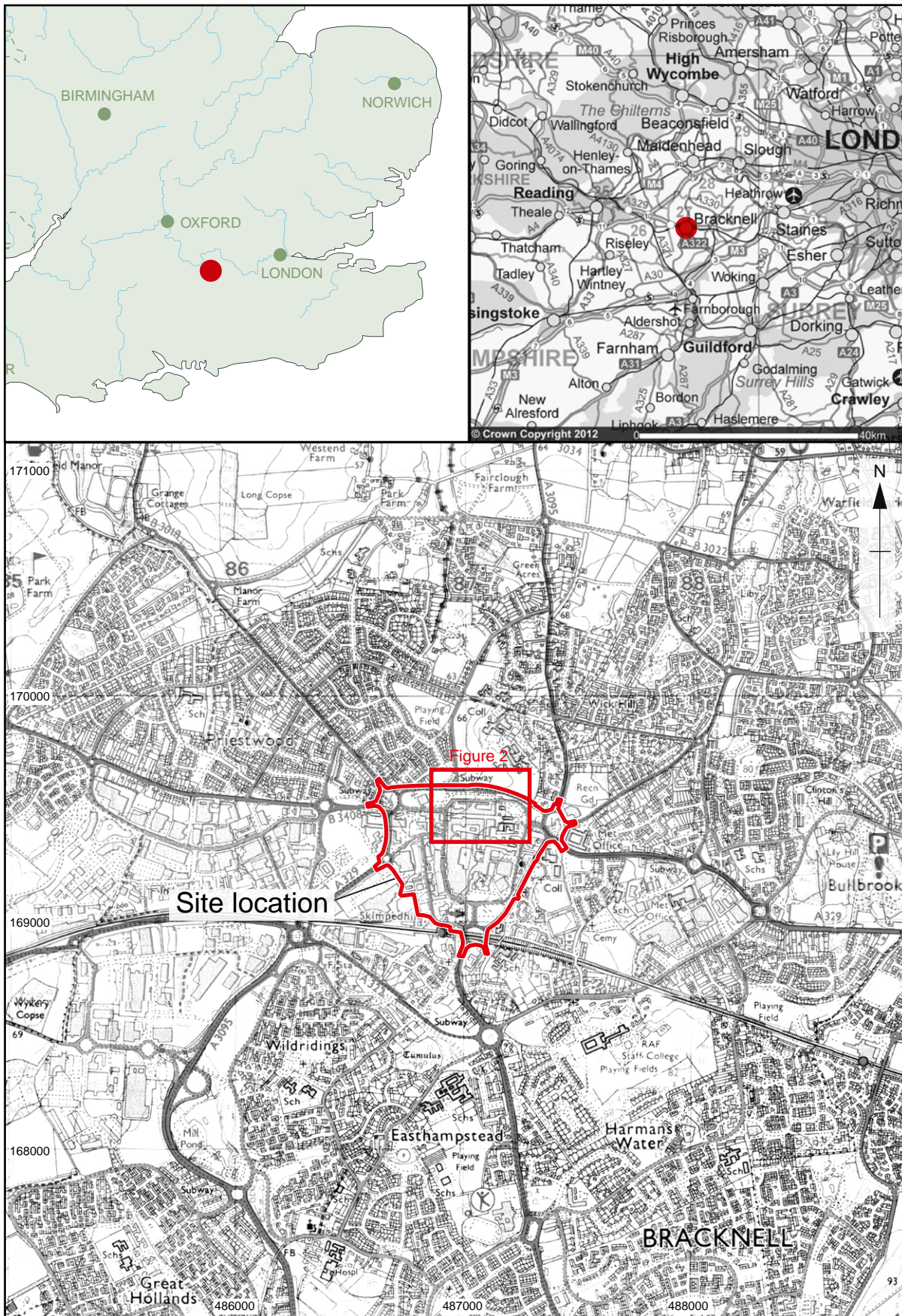


8 REFERENCES

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OA 2013 b, *Bracknell Town Centre Redevelopment Project. Impact Assessment. Issue 3.* unpublished client report.

OA 1997, *Bracknell Town Centre Redevelopment Environmental Assessment*, Oxford Archaeological Unit, unpublished client report.



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Figure 1: Site location

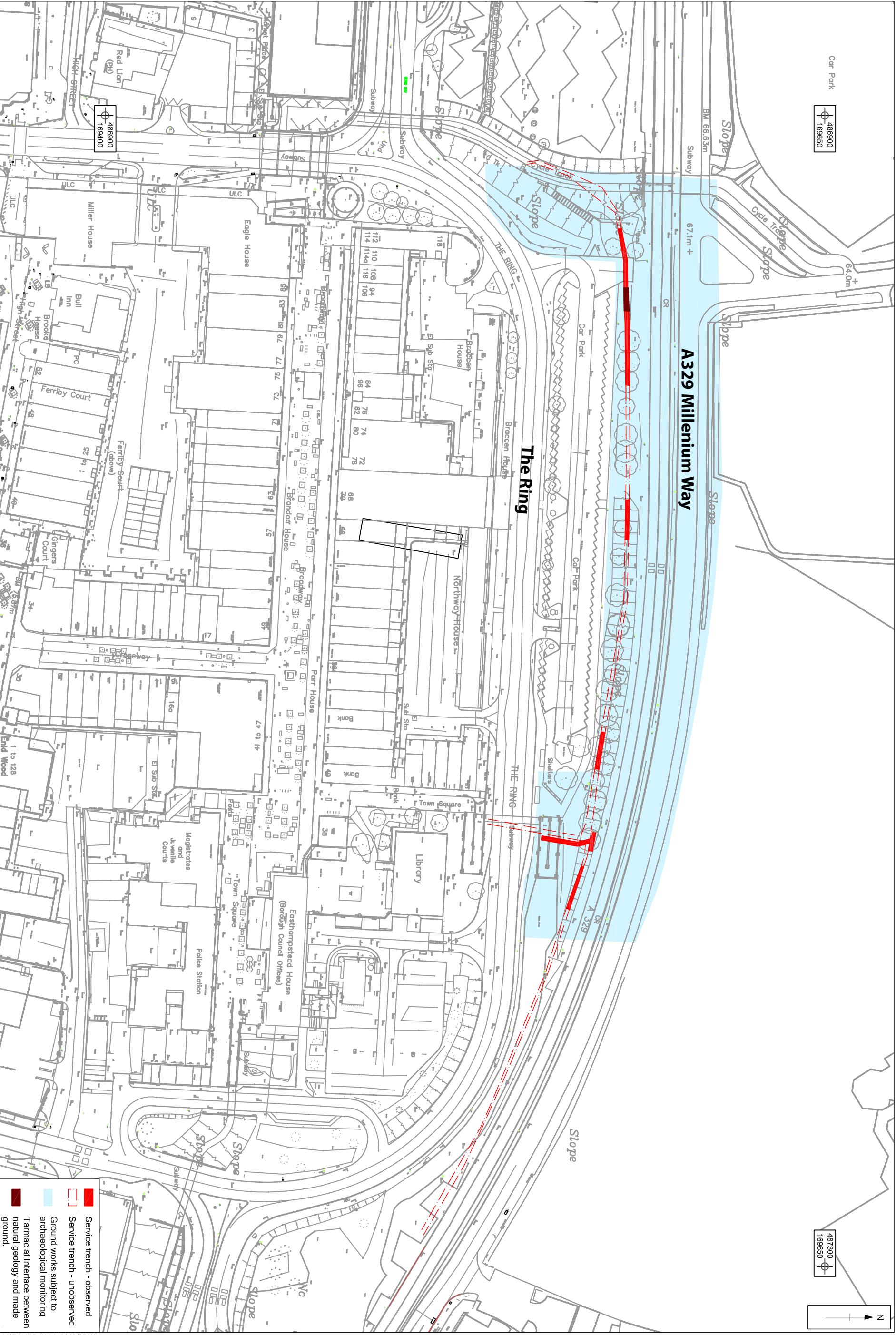


Figure 2: Watching brief location plan

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Plate 1: Tarmac surface at interface between natural geology and modern made ground



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