


# 1 Abbey Road Oxford



## Archaeological Evaluation Report


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# 1 Abbey Road, Oxford

*Archaeological Evaluation Report*

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## **Summary**

*Oxford Archaeology (OA) were commissioned by CgMs Consulting to undertake a three trench evaluation on the site at 1 Abbey Road, Oxford prior to development.*

*The proposed development (planning ref: 15/02512/FUL) involves the demolition of existing buildings at 1 Abbey Road, Oxford and the erection of nine 3-storey, 4-bed dwelling houses along with associated services.*

*Evaluation trenches were excavated to a depth of 1.2m revealing the upper surface of the alluvium of the flood plain. Deposits above this were modern imported bulk materials (mainly gravel) forming a platform which presumably was intended to elevate the property above possible flooding levels prior to construction of a builder's yard in the late 19th century.*



## 1.1 Introduction

- 1.1.1 Oxford Archaeology (OA) were commissioned by CgMs Consulting to undertake a Stage 1 evaluation, leading to Stage 2 Mitigation as required, of the site at 1 Abbey Road, Oxford (centred on SP 503 063).
- 1.1.2 The work was undertaken as a condition of Planning Permission (planning ref: 15/02512/FUL) for development of the site. The development proposal involves the demolition of existing buildings at 1 Abbey Road, Oxford and the erection of nine 3-storey, 4-bed dwelling houses along with associated services.
- 1.1.3 A brief/specification (OCC 2016) was set by David Radford, Archaeologist for the Local Planning Authority (LPA) at Oxford City Council detailing the Local Authority's requirements for work necessary to discharge the planning condition. The methodology for the evaluation and mechanisms for subsequent works if required were detailed in the Written Scheme of Investigation for the site (OA 2016).
- 1.1.4 This document sets out the results of the required trench evaluation carried out by OA.

## 1.2 Location, geology and topography

- 1.2.1 The site is located on Osney or 'Osney' Island, adjacent to a channel of the River Thames. The site is currently occupied by the extant remains of a timber yard, buildings and associated hard standing (centred on SP 503 063, Fig. 1).
- 1.2.2 The site lies on Oxford Clay Formation and West Walton Formations which are mudstones formed approximately 156 to 165 million years ago, in the Jurassic Period. Above the bedrock are deposits of alluvium (clay, silt, sand and gravel) formed up to 2 million years ago in the Quaternary Period (<http://mapapps.bgs.ac.uk/geologyofbritain>).

## 1.3 Archaeological and historical background

- 1.3.1 The archaeological and historical background to the site has been described in detail in a desk-based assessment (DBA) produced by CgMs Consulting (2013) and is not fully reproduced here.
- 1.3.2 The site is located on Osney Island, which may have been formed in the late Saxon period as a result of artificial channelling of the River Thames in order to create the channel now known as Castle Mill Stream. It has also been speculated that the sub-oval island has characteristics of a Late Iron Age oppidum but there is currently no firm evidence to support this hypothesis (Oxford Archaeological Resource Assessment- The Iron Age (2011)). The site is located on the Thames floodplain adjacent to a straightened channel of the Thames and has general palaeo-environmental potential.
- 1.3.3 The word 'Osney' is first mentioned in 1004 and is thought to be a personal name meaning 'Osa's Island' combining the name Osa or Osna with 'ey' the Old English word for an island. Documentary evidence suggests a small settlement or manor existed here in the Late Saxon period. An estate at Osney was devised by Archbishop Alfric of Canterbury (d. 1005) to St. Alban's abbey. The first firm evidence of settled activity occurs in the 12th century with the foundation of Osney Abbey and the subsequent development of the suburb at St Thomas's further to the east.
- 1.3.4 The site was previously occupied by a notable 19th-century building firm, Thomas H Kingerlee and Sons who remain an active local business, and it retained a number of late 19th century/early 20th century structures from this time. The Victoria County History notes that the growth of the Oxford suburbs in the later 19th preserved the building industry as a mainstay of the city's economy, and T. H. Kingerlee at times



employed between 400 and 500 men. A Level II building record of the standing buildings at this site has been undertaken by Richard K Morriss (2015).

## 2 EVALUATION AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

### 2.1 General

2.1.1 The aims of the archaeological works were to:

- Establish the presence/absence of archaeological remains within the development area
- Determine and confirm the character of any remains present
- Establish the date range of any remains from recovered artefacts etc
- Establish the palaeo-environmental potential of archaeological deposits by sampling relevant deposits
- Make available the results of the investigation

### 2.2 Methodology

2.2.1 The trenching comprised three trenches, two measuring 10m by 1.8m and the third 15m by 1.8m.

2.2.2 A mechanical excavator fitted with a toothless ditching bucket was used to excavate to a depth no deeper than 1.20m. The maximum depth of investigation was agreed in correspondence between archaeological consultant Michael Dawson and the Oxford City Archaeologist David Radford. The level reflects the depth of impact from services associated with the development, the likelihood of flooding following machine excavation into the underlying alluvial deposits and the low potential for any remains to be present within the alluvial sequence (likely to be several metres thick) or for any remains that are not visible from the upper horizon of those deposits (i.e. timber structures, stone structures associated with the medieval Abbey' etc).

2.2.3 The trenches were positioned (see Figure 2) to provide good spatial distribution of investigation of the site while avoiding known service runs and areas impacted by modern building foundations.

## 3 RESULTS

### 3.1 General ground conditions

3.1.1 Prior to the start of the evaluation the buildings on the site had been demolished and concrete hard standing had been removed. Most of the site had been scraped clean and some under ground services dug out. The trenches were situated outside the areas of the buildings and known service routes.

### 3.2 Trench 1

3.2.1 This trench was aligned north-west to south-east, but then turns to the south half way along the length due to site restrictions. It measured 10m long, 1.70m wide and 1.10m in depth. The trench was excavated to the top of a blue grey silty clay alluvium (102) at c 56.14 m OD. Overlying this was a very dark grey brown silty clay loam (101) up to 0.20m thick which was a disturbed buried soil horizon. This was sealed below a 1m-thick mix of redeposited gravel and alluvial clay (100) with concrete and brick fragments.



### **3.3 Trench 2**

- 3.3.1 This trench was aligned north-east to south-west and measured 15m long, 1.70m wide and 1.20m deep. The trench was excavated to the top of a blue grey silty clay alluvium (203) at c 56.04 m OD. Overlying this was a very dark grey brown silty clay loam (202) with fragments of brick, porcelain and modern wood up to 0.20m thick forming a disturbed buried soil horizon. This was sealed below a 0.65m thick compact yellowish brown gravel (201) with fragments of ceramic building material and mortar, below a 0.25m modern demolition layer. The last 3m of the south-west end of the trench had been truncated by the present demolition and grubbing out of services.

### **3.4 Trench 3**

- 3.4.1 This trench was aligned north-west to south-east and measured 10m long, 1.70m wide and 1.10m in depth. The trench was excavated to the top of a blue grey silty clay alluvium (302) at c 56.14 m OD. Overlying this was a very dark grey brown silty clay loam (301) with fragments of brick, porcelain and wood up to 0.30m thick representing a disturbed buried soil horizon. Sealing this was a 1m thick series of bands of gravel and cinder (300) with fragments of brick, concrete and pottery. The uppermost 0.20m layer of this was a mixture of recent demolition material pushed in.

### **3.5 Finds summary**

- 3.5.1 No finds were recovered or retained from the site. Material visible from the surface was clearly recognisable as dating from the late 19th century to 20th century.





## 4 DISCUSSION

### 4.1 Interpretation

- 4.1.1 The trenches were of sufficient depth to penetrate 19th/20th century made ground and reveal the upper surface of alluvial deposits. No structures or features were visible cut into the alluvial horizon.
- 4.1.2 A disturbed soil horizon overlaid the uppermost soft and wet light grey alluvium of the flood plain. This soil horizon had fragments of brick, wood and pottery dating to the mid to late 19th century and represents the ground surface prior to or during the elevation of the site in the 19th and early 20th century. The soil horizon was overlaid with a thick layer of gravels and cinder, presumably imported to build up the ground level and reduce flooding risk prior to building.



## APPENDIX A. TRENCH DESCRIPTIONS AND CONTEXT INVENTORY

Trench 1						
<b>General description</b>				<b>Orientation</b>	SE-NW	
Trench devoid of archaeology. Consists of soil horizon and 19 <sup>th</sup> to 20 <sup>th</sup> century made ground overlying alluvium.				<b>Avg. depth (m)</b>	1.10 m	
				<b>Width (m)</b>	1.70 m	
				<b>Length (m)</b>	10 m	
Contexts						
Context no	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Comment	Finds	Date
100	Layer	-	1 m	Made ground	-	-
101	Layer	-	0.20 m	Soil horizon	-	-
102	Layer	-	-	Alluvium	-	-

Trench 2						
<b>General description</b>				<b>Orientation</b>	NE-SW	
Trench devoid of archaeology. Consists of soil horizon and 19 <sup>th</sup> to 20 <sup>th</sup> century made ground overlying alluvium.				<b>Avg. depth (m)</b>	1.10 m	
				<b>Width (m)</b>	1.70 m	
				<b>Length (m)</b>	15 m	
Contexts						
Context no	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Comment	Finds	Date
200	Layer	-	0.25 m	Modern demolition	-	-
201	Layer	-	0.65 m	Made ground	-	-
202	Layer	-	0.20 m	Soil horizon	-	-
203	Layer	-	-	Alluvium	-	-

Trench 3						
<b>General description</b>				<b>Orientation</b>	SE-NW	
Trench devoid of archaeology. Consists of soil horizon and 19 <sup>th</sup> to 20 <sup>th</sup> century made ground overlying alluvium.				<b>Avg. depth (m)</b>	1.20 m	
				<b>Width (m)</b>	1.70 m	
				<b>Length (m)</b>	10 m	
Contexts						
Context no	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Comment	Finds	Date
300	Layer	-	0.80 m	Made ground	-	-
301	Layer	-	0.30 m	Soil horizon	-	-
302	Layer	-	-	Alluvium	-	-



## APPENDIX B. BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

Morriss, R, 2015 Abbey Road, Oxford, Oxfordshire. An Architectural & Archaeological Analysis & Survey of the Former Timber Yard

OCC, 2016 Oxford City Council Design, Heritage and Specialist Services Team. Brief for an Archaeological Excavation.

Oxford Archaeology, 2016 1 Abbey Road, Oxford, Archaeological Evaluation Written Scheme of Investigation



## APPENDIX C. SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

**Site name:** 1 Abbey Road, Oxford, Oxfordshire

**Site code:** OXAB 16

**Grid reference:** SP 503 063

**Type:** Evaluation

**Date and duration:** One day 17/10/2016

**Area of site:** Three trenches 2 x 10m and 1 x 15m

**Summary of results:** Oxford Archaeology (OA) were commissioned by CgMs Consulting to undertake a 3 trench evaluation on the site at 1 Abbey Road, Oxford prior to development. A proposed development (planning ref: 15/02512/FUL) involves the demolition of existing buildings at 1 Abbey Road, Oxford and the erection of nine 3 storey, 4 bed dwelling houses along with associated services. The evaluation trenches were excavated to a depth of 1.2m to top of the flood plain alluvium. No archaeological remains pre-dating the 19<sup>th</sup> century were revealed on the site.

**Location of archive:** The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with the Oxfordshire County Museum in due course, under the following accession number: OXCMS 2016.32

Trench 1 Looking toward the south east





Trench 2 Looking toward the north east



### Trench 2 Typical Section





Trench 3 Looking towards the west





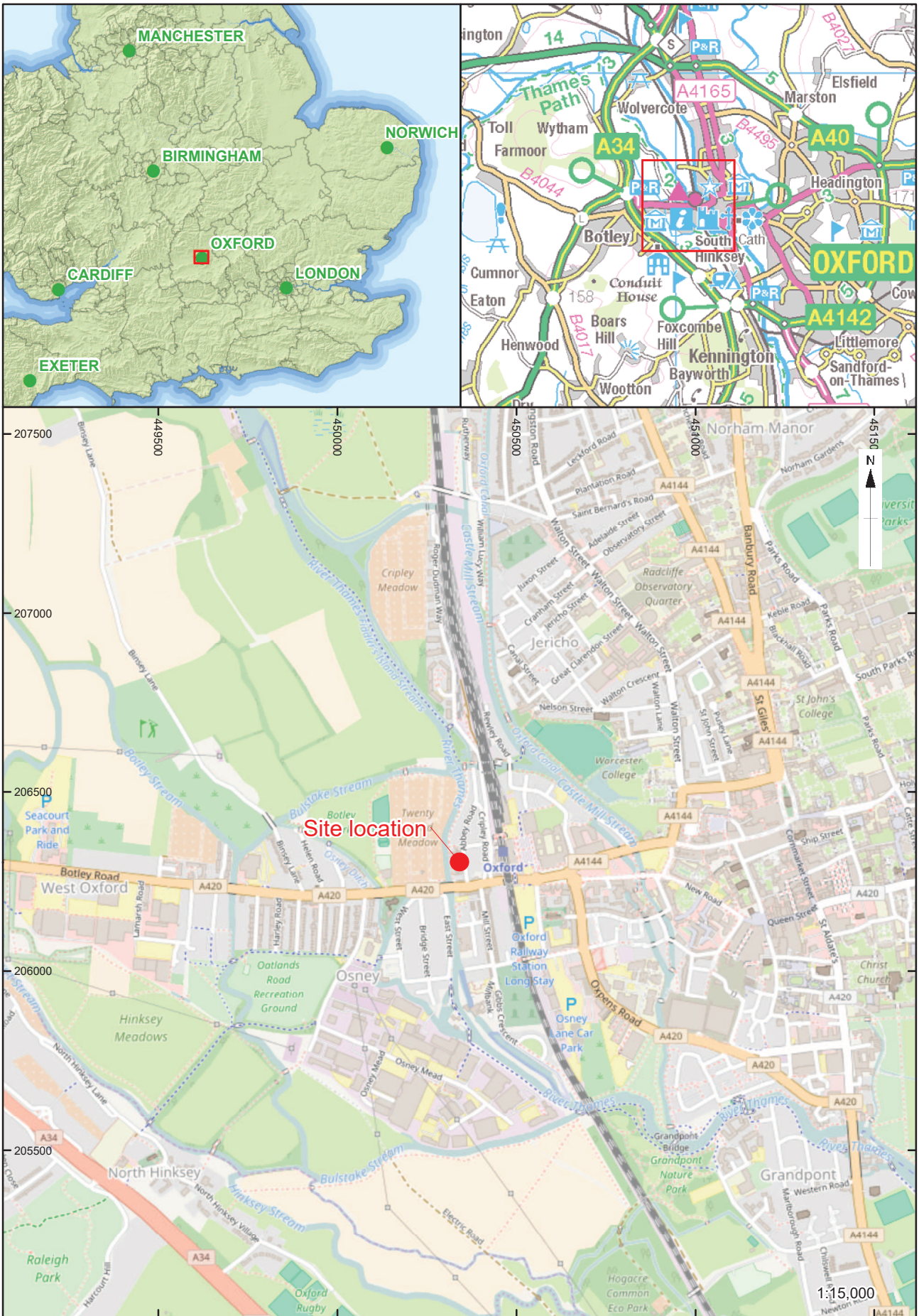
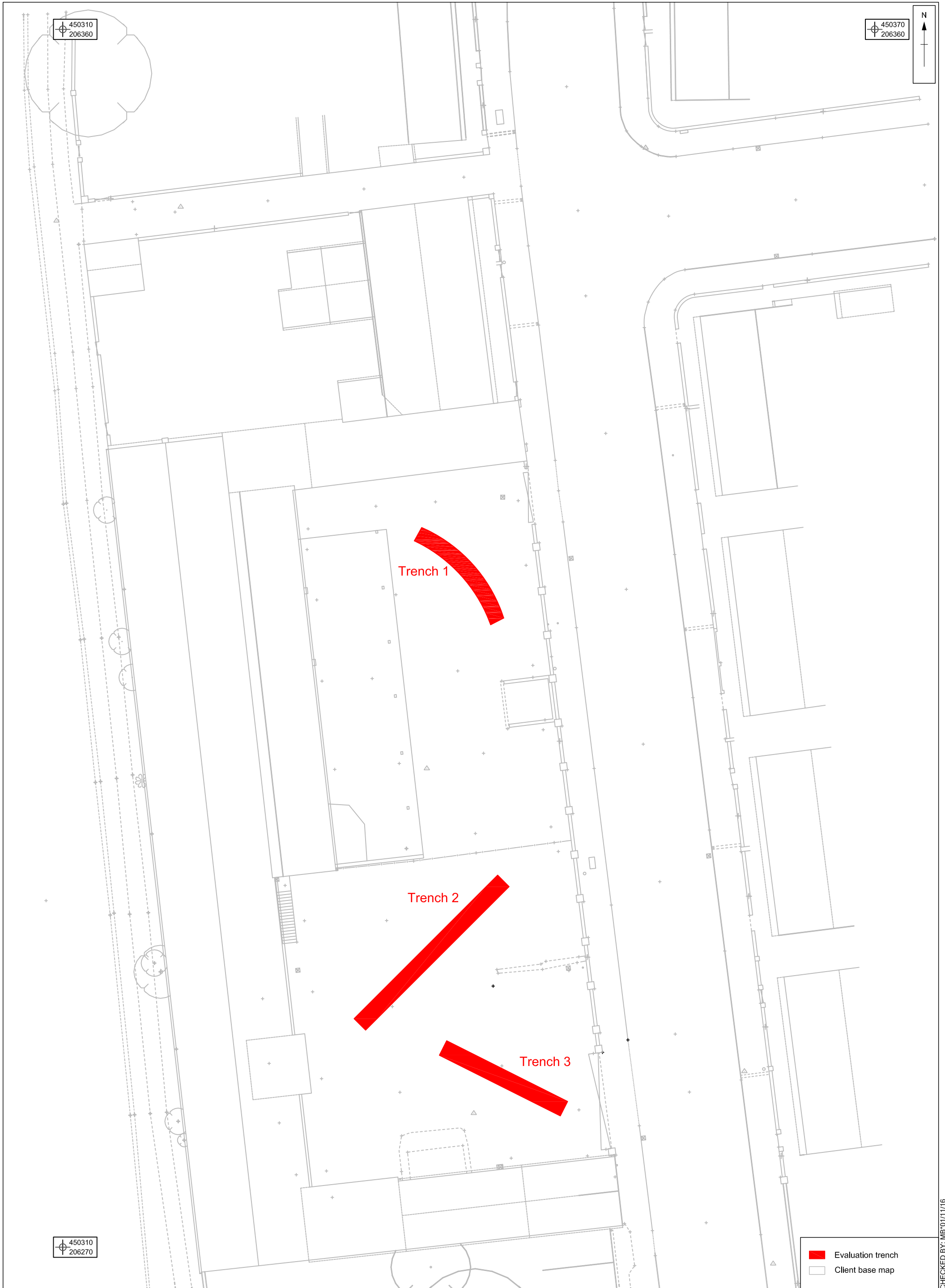


Figure 1: Site location



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