

LAND TO THE REAR OF ST JOHNS HOUSE, ST JOHN STREET, LICHFIELD, STAFFORDSHIRE

(NGR SK 11716 09258)

Results of archaeological monitoring and recording

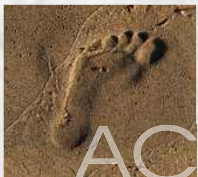
Lichfield District Council planning reference 15/01284/FUL,
condition 3

Prepared by:
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On behalf of:
Mr Dan Ralley

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AC archaeology

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Summary

Archaeological monitoring and recording was undertaken by AC archaeology in July 2016 during groundworks for the construction of a new dwelling at the rear of St Johns House, Lichfield, Staffordshire (SK 11716 09258).

The excavations produced no evidence (features, deposits or finds) for archaeology pre-dating the construction of St Johns House in the mid-late 18th century. The only archaeological deposit was a late post-medieval garden soil. A very small assemblage of residual post-medieval pottery contemporary with St Johns House was recovered from modern deposits.

1. INTRODUCTION (Fig. 1 and Fig. 2a)

1.1 This document sets out the results of archaeological monitoring and recording carried out by AC archaeology in July 2016 during groundwork for the construction of a new 3-bedroom detached dwelling on land to the rear of St Johns House, 28 St John Street, Lichfield, Staffordshire (SK 11716 09253; Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Mr Dan Ralley and was required by Lichfield District Council under condition 3 of the grant of planning permission (reference 15/01284/FUL) for the new building.

1.2 St Johns House is a Grade II* listed building (Listed Building Number 1292101), designated under the name *St Johns Preparatory School and attached garden wall*. It dates to the mid-late 18th century and was refronted c. 1820 or a little earlier. The property is located in the centre of Lichfield, within the Lichfield City Conservation Area, on the western side of St John Street, situated at a height of approximately 83.50 aOD (Fig. 2a). The underlying geology comprises Triassic pebbly (gravelly) sandstone of the Bromsgrove Sandstone Formation.

2. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 There is some evidence for prehistoric activity within the present urban area of Lichfield. Mesolithic tools have been found in two close locations whilst a Neolithic settlement has been excavated and there are further finds of Neolithic date. There are a few finds of Bronze Age date, but currently no evidence for Iron Age activity (Langley 2012, 19). Roman building material and pottery have been recovered from the centre of Lichfield, although as yet there is no evidence of actual activity or settlement (*ibid.* 21).

2.2 Lichfield is first documented in the 8th century, and there is evidence for early medieval settlement across the city. Close to the site at Friars Alley there is an undated, but potentially early medieval, boundary ditch, whilst to the east three sherds of Saxon pottery, possibly residual, have been found in agricultural soils (*ibid.* 24).

2.3 The site is located within the medieval core of Lichfield. There is debate over whether St Johns Street was a new street created after a fire of 1291 or whether its position is related to the pre-existing, pre-fire topography and settlement pattern (*ibid.* 31).

2.4 The general post-medieval historical background to the site has been set out in a *Heritage Statement* prepared to accompany the planning application (Heath 2015).

The site lies between two medieval establishments: Grey Friars – a Franciscan friary, established in c. 1237 and dissolved in 1538 and the Hospital of St John without the Barrs almshouses with an attached chapel, established in 1135.

- 2.5 John Speed's 1611 map of the town depicts some development between these establishments on the west side of St John Street, although the precinct of the friary remained as a landscape feature. John Snape's 1781 *Plan of the City* depicts the townscape in more detail. The southern end of the friary precinct is still standing but a new terrace of houses has been constructed along the St John Street frontage. To the south are a series of large detached properties including St Johns House. This is depicted with a large range of buildings behind the house and a garden beyond.
- 2.6 The property is depicted on the 1849 St Mary Lichfield tithe map but with fewer outbuildings than on John Snape's map. The accompanying apportionment (of 1848) describes the property as a "house, yards, stables, coachhouse, offices, gardens, etc" owned by William East Holmes and occupied by Thomas Webster Harby. To the south east was a series of small houses and yards in an area called Barrack Yard. By 1884, when the first edition Ordnance Survey maps of the town were produced, several large greenhouses had been erected in the garden behind the main outbuildings. Two further structures, probably pagodas or covered seats, were located at the west end of garden paths. Other than the gradual removal of the greenhouses during the 20th century, no further changes to the garden are depicted on Ordnance Survey maps.
- 2.7 In addition to an entry for the Listed St Johns House (MST10857), the Staffordshire Historic Environment Record has five entries (11997, 14757, 14758, 15029 and 15139) within the property, which relate to early medieval, Roman and post-medieval finds recovered through metal detecting within "Lichfield" or "Lichfield Parish". They are unlikely to actually relate to the site, with the records being based on a generic national grid reference that places them within the property. The property is bounded to the west by part of the Grey Friars complex (MST48), and it is possible that the stone base of the west boundary wall is of medieval date (Heath 2015).
- 2.8 The site is located with the Historic Urban Character Area (HUCA) 3: Lichfield Historic Core. This HUCA is considered to have high evidential value based on documentary evidence and previous archaeological investigations that have shown that there is high archaeological potential for below-ground deposits to survive, particularly in relation to the medieval and post-medieval development of the settlement, as well as for early medieval, Roman and earlier deposits.

3. AIMS

- 3.1 The aims of the monitoring and recording were to record any surviving archaeological features, deposits and artefacts, in particular any evidence for medieval and post-medieval activity, along with any earlier deposits. The principal aim was to observe, investigate, excavate and record any surviving below ground archaeological artefacts and deposits across the area affected by the development.
- 3.2 The investigation had the potential to contribute to a number of research aims set out in *The Archaeology of the West Midlands, A framework for research* (Watt 2011). Essentially, these relate to the development of the property (within a medieval burgage plot), potentially from the early medieval period, and certainly the medieval period onwards. Due to the location of the new dwelling at the very rear of the

property, evidence (pre-dating the 18th-century garden) was likely to take the form of features such as rubbish pits, and therefore had the potential to inform about (a) consumption in the form of artefacts and environmental evidence, and (b) industry, if such activity was taking place away from the street frontage as was common during these periods. The following themes outlined in the research framework were identified:

- For the early medieval period, continued work on urban sites with detailed studies of ceramic evidence.
- For the medieval period:
 - Cycles of urban growth and decline, and the accompanying trends in urban population, and
 - Industry and production,
- For the post-medieval period, cottage industries and consumption

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1 The watching brief was carried out in accordance with an approved written scheme of investigation (Passmore 2016), and the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists' *Standard and Guidance for An Archaeological Watching Brief* (2014). The monitored work comprised the excavation of the principal foundation trenches for the new building.

4.2 The excavations were undertaken with a mechanical excavator fitted with a 600mm toothless bucket under the supervision of a suitably qualified archaeologist. Overburden or modern material was removed and stopped at the formation level. Cleared material was scanned for the recovery of displaced finds.

5. RESULTS (Figs 2 and 3; Plates 1-4)

5.1 The location of the new building was within an area of uneven lawn, situated towards the rear of the property. The garden here is defined on three sides by the boundary walls of St Johns House, and by a car park to the northeast (Fig. 2a).

5.2 The foundation trenches were excavated directly from the surface, through the lawn without any prior ground reduction (Fig. 2b; Plates 1-2). The trenches measured 600mm wide, and were excavated to the top of the natural geology generally at depths of between 700-900mm from the surface, although locally were deeper to a maximum depth of 1100mm.

5.3 A simple deposit sequence was exposed (Plate 3). The turf and topsoil (100) measured 60mm deep and consisted of dark brown sandy silt with rare inclusions of post-medieval brick, blue-on-white industrial china, coke and coal fragments, and small to medium-sized rounded stones. This topsoil overlaid a lower soil layer (101) of dark reddish brown sandy silt clay with very rare inclusions of brick, small rounded stones and charcoal flecks. This layer measured between 640mm and 1040mm deep. It overlaid a natural deposit (102) of compact medium brown silty clay with abundant small rounded pebbles.

5.4 Cutting into 101, and sealed by the turf and topsoil 100, was a series of 20th-century rubble dumps mainly consisting of whole and fragments of brick, stone and concrete, as well as plastic and scrap metal (Plate 4).

5.5 No significant archaeological features or deposits were encountered during the excavations and no finds recovered.

6. THE FINDS *by Dr Naomi Payne*

6.1 A very small assemblage of residual post-medieval pottery was recovered from the topsoil (101) and one of the modern pits. From the topsoil two sherds of blue-on-white transfer-print plate/dish and a stoneware lid sherd (totalling 203g) were recovered. The rim and neck of a small stoneware jar and a rim sherd from a slipped earthenware jar (totalling 263g) were collected from one of the modern pits. All of these finds date to the later post-medieval period, after the construction of St Johns House.

7. COMMENTS

7.1 The monitored excavations produced no archaeological deposits that are likely to predate the later post-medieval period, or any residual early finds. The lower deposit (101) is almost certainly associated with the use of the area as the garden of the mid-late 18th-century St Johns House. Historic mapping records changes to this garden, and most recently, buildings and structures such as greenhouses have been removed, and a car park created to serve the current bed and breakfast hospitality use of the house. The rubble-filled pits and overlying turf and topsoil date to the late 20th-century and are probably associated with this current use of the property.

7.2 The investigations produced no evidence that could contribute to the research aims set out in *The Archaeology of the West Midlands, A Framework for Research* (Watt 2011).

7.3 Natural deposits were exposed throughout the excavations, except where some of the modern deep rubble-filled pits cut through the earlier deposits. The overall recorded deposit sequence is considered to be typical for this part of the garden, but this does not preclude the presence of earlier archaeological deposits elsewhere, in particular towards the front of the property nearer St Johns House.

8. ARCHIVE AND OASIS

8.1 The archive is currently held at the offices of AC archaeology Ltd, at 4 Halthaies Workshops, Bradninch, near Exeter, Devon, EX5 4LQ, and will be deposited with the Potteries Museum and Art Gallery, Stoke-on-Trent. A summary of the results of the fieldwork has been submitted to *West Midlands Archaeology*.

8.2 An online OASIS entry has been completed, using the unique identifier 263778, which includes a digital copy of this report.

9. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

9.1 The archaeological investigations were commissioned by Mr Dan Ralley, and were managed for AC archaeology by Andrew Passmore. The site monitoring was carried

out by Abigail Brown. The illustrations for this report were prepared by Sarnia Blackmore.

10. SOURCES CONSULTED

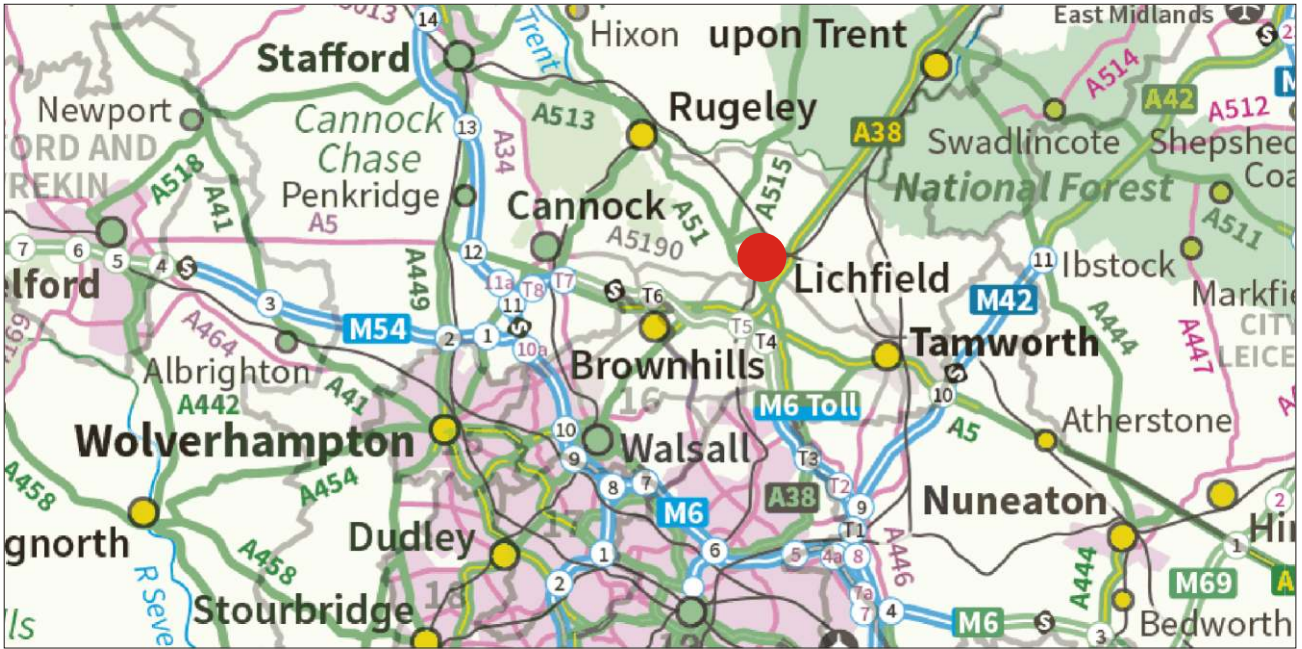
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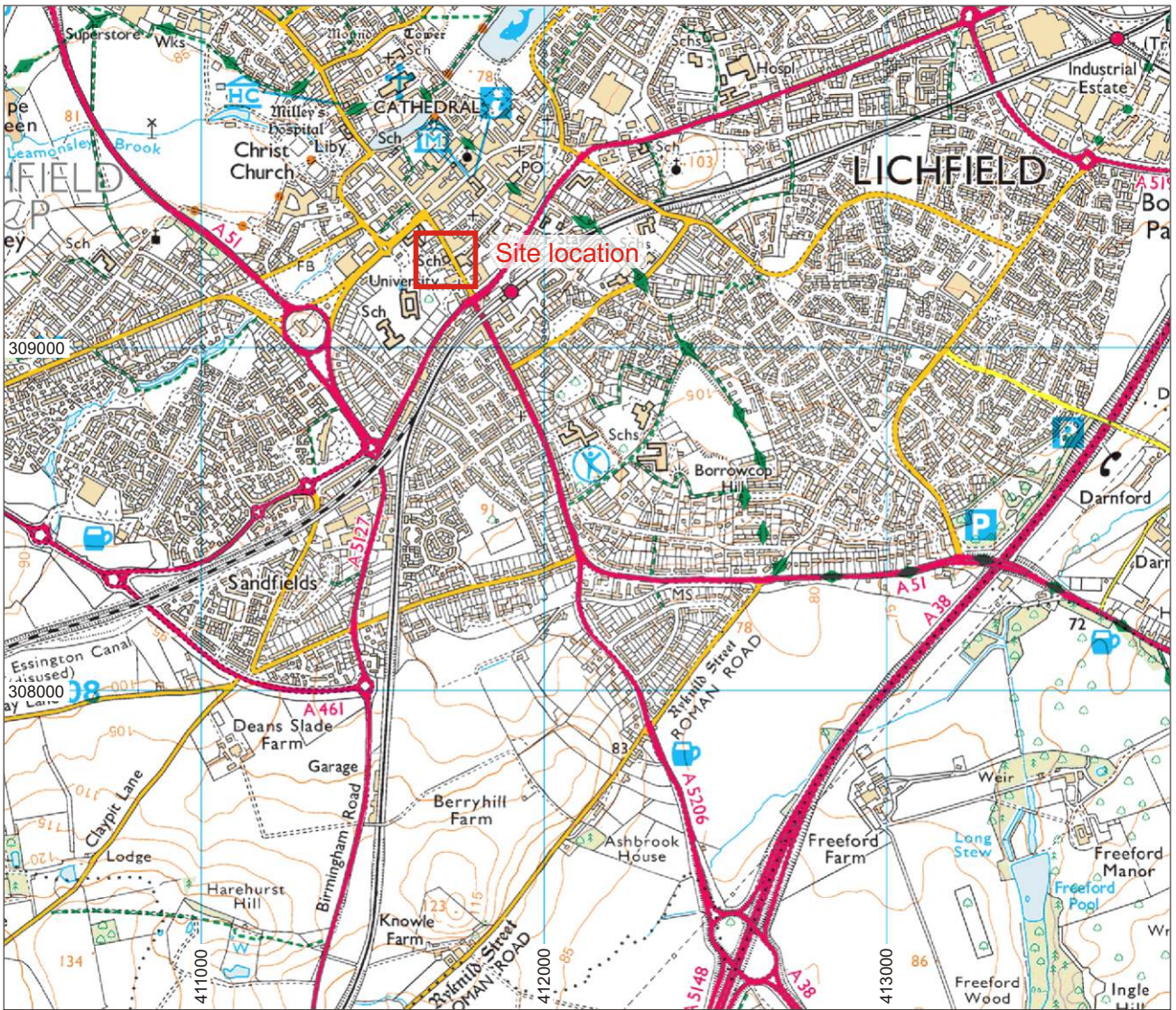
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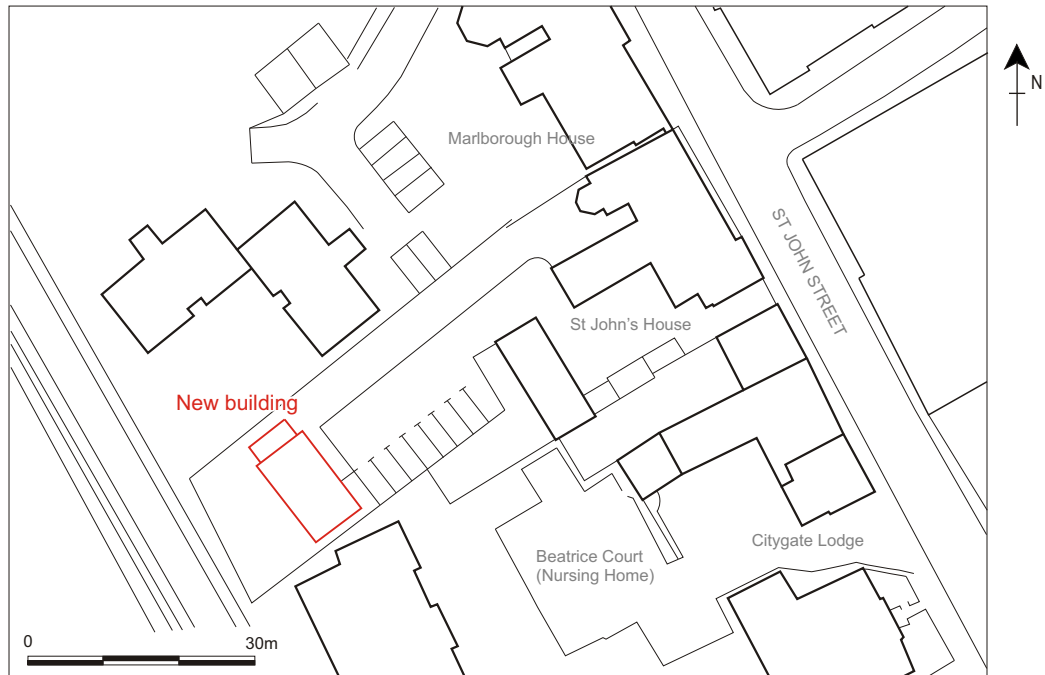
PROJECT
 Land to the rear of St Johns House, St John Street, Lichfield, Staffordshire

TITLE

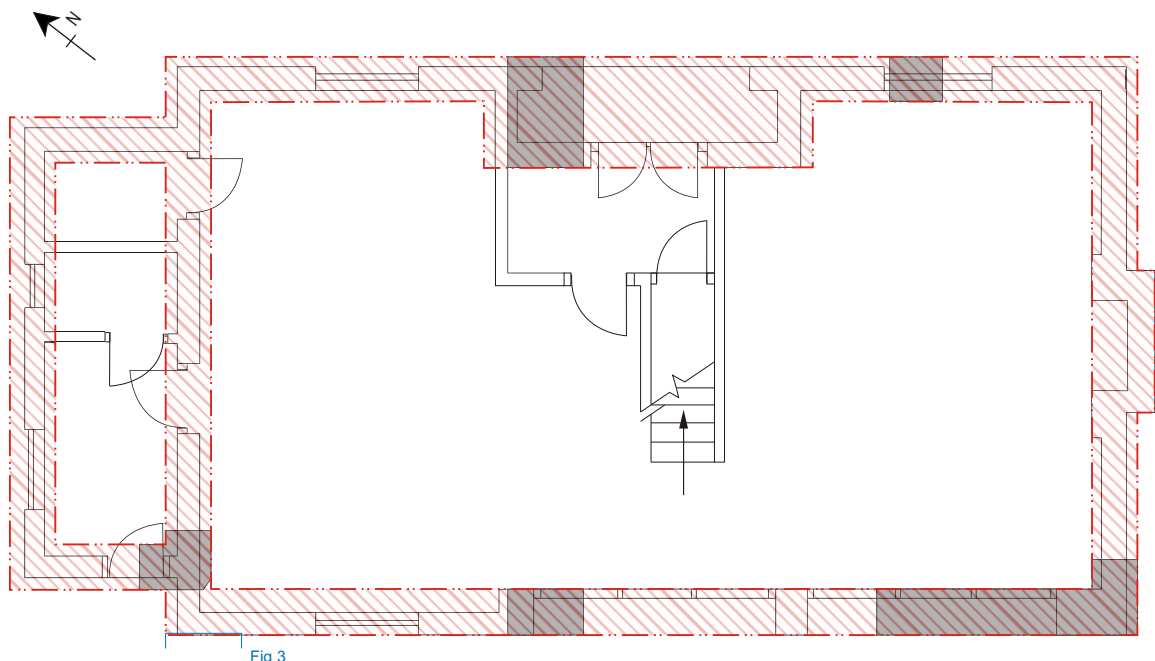
Fig. 1: Site location





a) Location of new building



b) Site plan



-  Monitored foundation trenches
-  Rubble-filled features

PROJECT

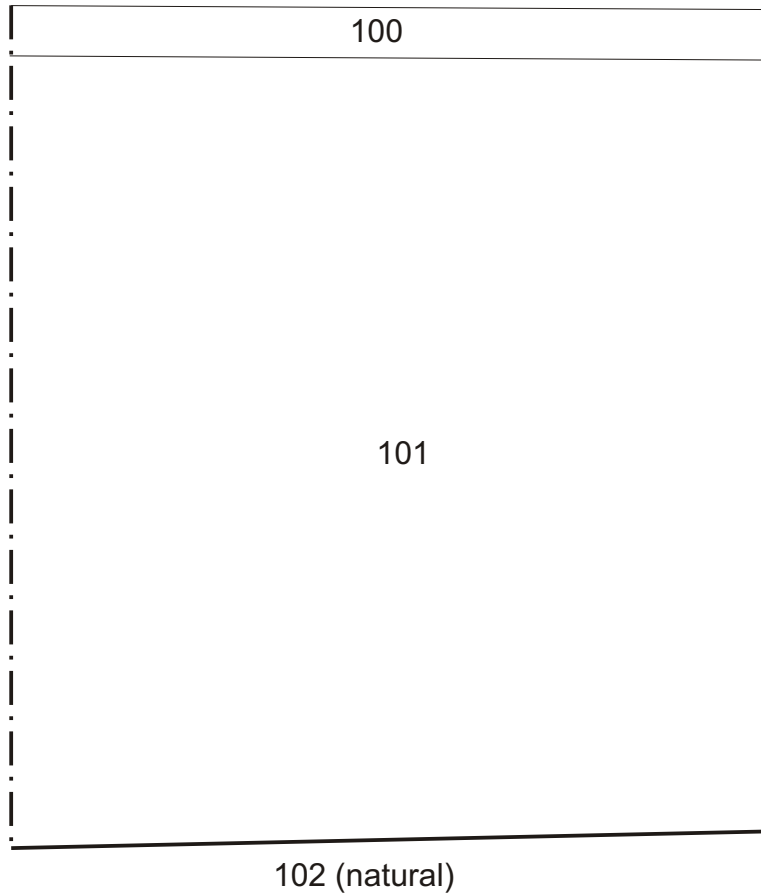
Land to the rear of St Johns House,
St John Street, Lichfield, Staffordshire

TITLE

Fig. 2: Location of new building
and site plan

NE

SW



0

1m



Scale 1:10 @A4

PROJECT

Land to the rear of St Johns House, St John Street, Lichfield, Staffordshire

TITLE

Fig. 3: Typical section through the deepest part of the foundations





Plate 1: General view of site, view to the northeast. (Scale 1m)



Plate 2: General view of site, view to the southwest. (Scale 1m)



Plate 3: A typical soil profile, view to the southwest. (Scale 1m)



Plate 4: Southwest corner of the new building showing a modern rubble-filled pit (partially collapsed) cutting into 101, view to the north. (Scale 1m)

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