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***SITE OF FORMER POLE BARN AT  
SHORTFLATT TOWER  
BELSAY  
NORTHUMBERLAND***

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF**

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JUNE 2021

***The Archaeological  
Practice Ltd.***



REPORT ON AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF  
FOR A RESIDENTIAL PROPERTY ON THE SITE OF  
THE FORMER POLE BARN

SHORTFLATT TOWER  
BELSAY



*Frontispiece: View looking NW across the watching brief site in June 2021.*

<b>Grid reference:</b>	<i>NZ 07877 81062</i>
<b>Date of fieldwork:</b>	<i>June 2021</i>
<b>NCC Planning Ref:</b>	<i>18/02621/FUL</i>
<b>Client:</b>	<i>Leazes Arcade Ltd.</i>
<b>Project code:</b>	<i>AP 21/46</i>
<b>Stage:</b>	<i>Final</i>
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## **CONTENTS**

### SUMMARY

1. PURPOSE OF THE WATCHING BRIEF
2. CULTURAL HERITAGE BACKGROUND
3. WATCHING BRIEF
4. RESULTS
5. CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

### APPENDIX 1:

Architectural plans for proposed new build residential, Pole Barn site,  
Shortflatt Tower.

*By Simon Timperley*

## ILLUSTRATIONS

**Front Cover:** View looking SW during excavation of the southern trench, with the Coach House visible in the background.

**Frontispiece:** View looking NW across the watching brief site in June 2021.

### **Location Maps and Plans:**

**Illus. 01:** Regional view, showing the location of Shortflatt Tower (circled in red), near Belsay in southern Northumberland.

**Illus. 02:** District view, showing the location of Shortflatt Tower (circled in red), south of Bolam Lake.

**Illus. 03:** Settlement view, showing the location of the watching brief area (highlighted in red), to the north-west of Shortflatt Tower.

**Illus. 04:** Architect supplied plan showing the location of the new development (bound in red) on the site of the former Pole Barn, to the north-west of Shortflatt Tower.

### **Historic Maps & Documents:**

**Illus. 05:** Extract from the 1st Edition Ordnance Survey Map of Northumberland c.1866, showing the watching brief site at Shortflatt Tower.

**Illus. 06:** Extract from the 2nd Edition Ordnance Survey Map of Northumberland c.1896, showing the watching brief site at Shortflatt Tower.

**Illus. 07:** Extract from the 3rd Edition Ordnance Survey Map of Northumberland c.1922, showing the watching brief site at Shortflatt Tower.

**Illus. 08:** Extract from the c.1974 Edition Ordnance Survey Map of Northumberland, showing the watching brief site at Shortflatt Tower.

### **Aerial Photographs:**

**Illus. 09:** Vertical aerial view of the Shortflatt Tower watching brief site (highlighted in red) and environs, taken in December 2002. Image courtesy of Google Earth.

**Illus. 10:** Vertical aerial view of the Shortflatt Tower watching brief site (highlighted in red) and environs, taken in July 2006. Image courtesy of Google Earth.

**Photographic Record of Watching Brief:**

*Photo 01. Pre-excavation shot. View looking west following demolition of the Pole Barn.*

*Photo 02. Pre-excavation shot. View looking south towards the Coach House, following demolition of the Pole Barn.*

*Photo 03. View looking north along the east trench, following excavation.*

*Photo 04. West facing section of east trench, following excavation.*

*Photo 05. View looking west along south trench, following excavation to finished depth.*

*Photo 06. View looking west at detail of 19th century deposit within the south trench, following excavation to finished depth.*

*Photo 07. North facing section of south trench, following excavation.*

*Photo 08. Selection of late-19th century pottery found within a deposit in the south trench, associated with the recently demolished (late-19th century) Pole Barn.*

## SUMMARY

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*An archaeological watching brief was conducted in June 2021, to mitigate the impact of groundworks associated with the construction of a residential property on the site of the former 19th century Pole Barn located approximately 74 metres to the north-west of Shortflatt Tower, Belsay (centred on NGR: NZ 07877 81062).*

*The site lies within the north-west portion of the grounds for Shortflatt Tower, a Grade I-listed building of 15th-16th century date, in an area occupied by agricultural outbuildings since at least the 19th century.*

*The groundworks involved monitoring the excavation of foundation trenches to a depth of 0.90 m for the south and east foundations of the new build, which measures 19 m (length) X 6 m (width). The north and west foundations were to build off the footings of existing walls associated with the former 19th century Pole Barn and a contemporary boundary wall, which were left insitu.*

*The aims of the watching brief were to identify and determine the character of any remains uncovered during groundworks on the site, and to make an appropriate record of such finds by photographic and other means.*

*Other than modern occupation material associated with the former Pole Barn, the results of the watching brief concluded that no significant finds or features were revealed by the excavations required for the new residential property. Therefore, it was concluded that no significant remains of cultural heritage value were impacted by the works.*

*The construction of the former 19th century Pole Barn and an associated terrace that cut-in to the bank at the southern part of the site, appears to have truncated any potential archaeological layers or features down to the natural clay sub-soil.*

*While virtually no potential remains for the survival of significant remains in the area surrounding the former Pole Barn site, it is recommended that, in view of the historic context of the broader site, any further works in the vicinity should be considered on their own merits with regard to potential archaeological intervention.*

# 1. PURPOSE OF THE WATCHING BRIEF

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## 1. Introduction

This document, prepared by the Archaeological Practice Ltd. for Mr Mohammed Ajaib of Leazes Arcade Ltd., reports on a process of archaeological monitoring conducted in June 2021, to mitigate the impact of groundworks associated with the construction of a residential property on the site of the former 19<sup>th</sup> century Pole Barn located approximately 74 metres to the north-west of Shortflatt Tower, Belsay (*centred on NGR: NZ 07877 81062*) (see *Illus. 01-04*).

The footprint of the proposed new build is specifically located over the northern half of the former Pole Barn site, which had been demolished prior to arrival. The new residential build is to be of identical length to the previous build and sits upon the same east-west alignment. Its western foundation is to utilize/build off the existing footing of the former Pole Barn, and its northern foundation is to utilize/build off the existing footing of the former 19<sup>th</sup> century site boundary wall, still evident on the ground and visible on the 1<sup>st</sup> Edition Ordnance Survey Plan c.1866 (see *Illus. 05*).

The site lies within the north-west portion of the grounds for Shortflatt Tower, a Grade I-listed building of 15<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> century date, in an area occupied by agricultural outbuildings since at least the 19<sup>th</sup> century (see *map progression Illus. 05-08*).

The proposed new residential build, with ground reduction of 0.90 m in depth required along its southern and eastern foundations, measures approximately 19 m (east-west) x 6 m (north-south).

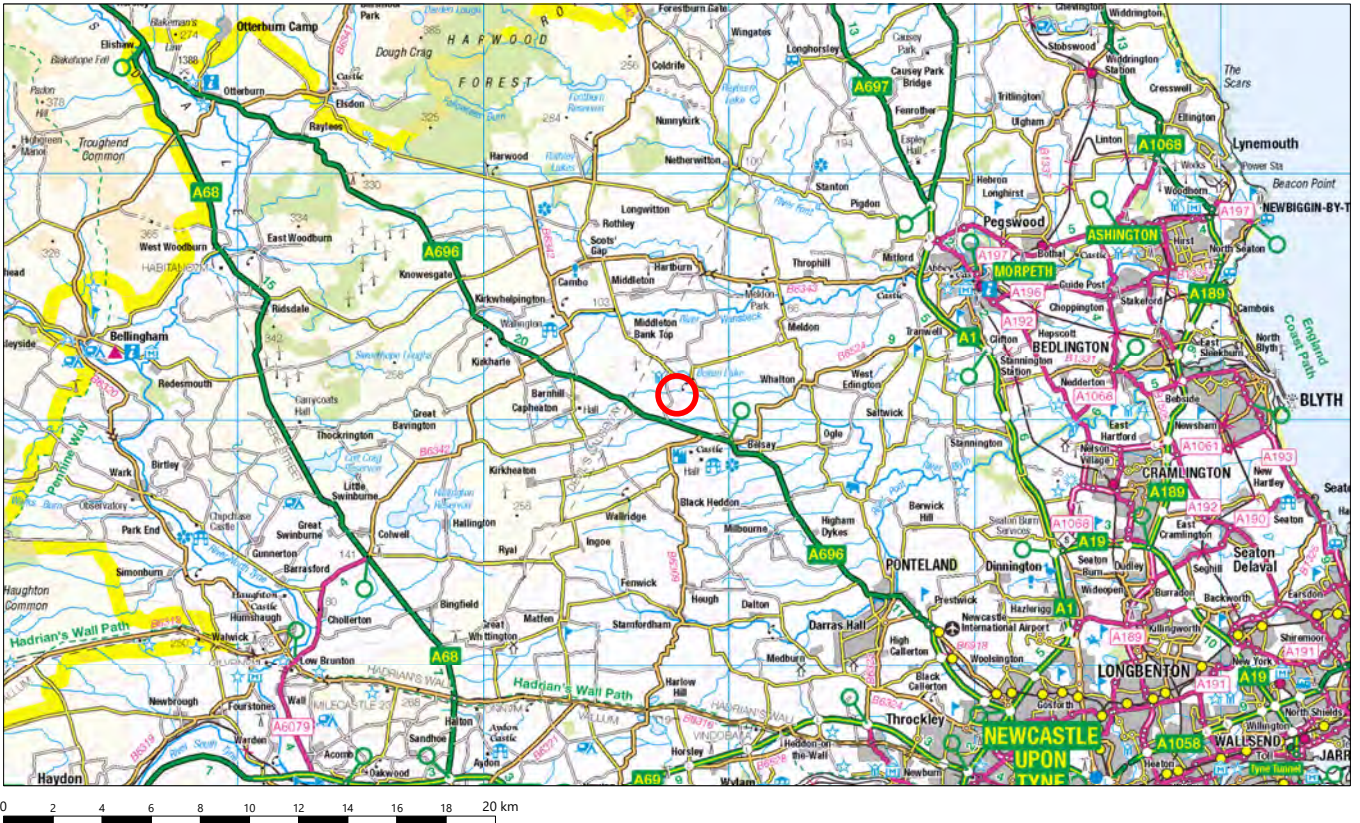
A written Scheme of Investigation was prepared by Border Reivers Archaeology Unit in March 2020, prior to the commencement of works, and provided a methodology for carrying out archaeological mitigation work to satisfy the terms of planning conditions on consent for the proposed development. Although the WSI for archaeological watching brief covered four separate planning applications across the wider Shortflatt Tower complex, the groundworks reported on during this phase of development specifically address the application for a new residential building of the site of the former Pole Barn (18/02621/FUL). This is in line with paragraphs 54, 55, 141, 199 of the National Planning Policy Framework (2018).

## 2. Cultural Heritage Background

The following brief description of the site and Listed Building records, are summarised from the written scheme of investigation (*BRAU, March 2020*) and focusses on the Shortflatt Tower and watching brief site area:

2.1 Shortflatt is in the civil parish of Belsay, Northumberland, first mentioned in 1223, it was part of the possessions acquired by Hugh de Reymes of Suffolk between 1293 and 1295. Shortflatt Tower (NHLE 1042821 HER 10574) is a Grade I-listed building (listed 1952), one of the best extant examples of a Northumbrian manor house. A licence to crenelate issued to Robert de Reymes II in 1305 is the first documented mention of the tower. The current tower is thought to date to the late fifteenth or early sixteenth century, additions and alterations have continued since.



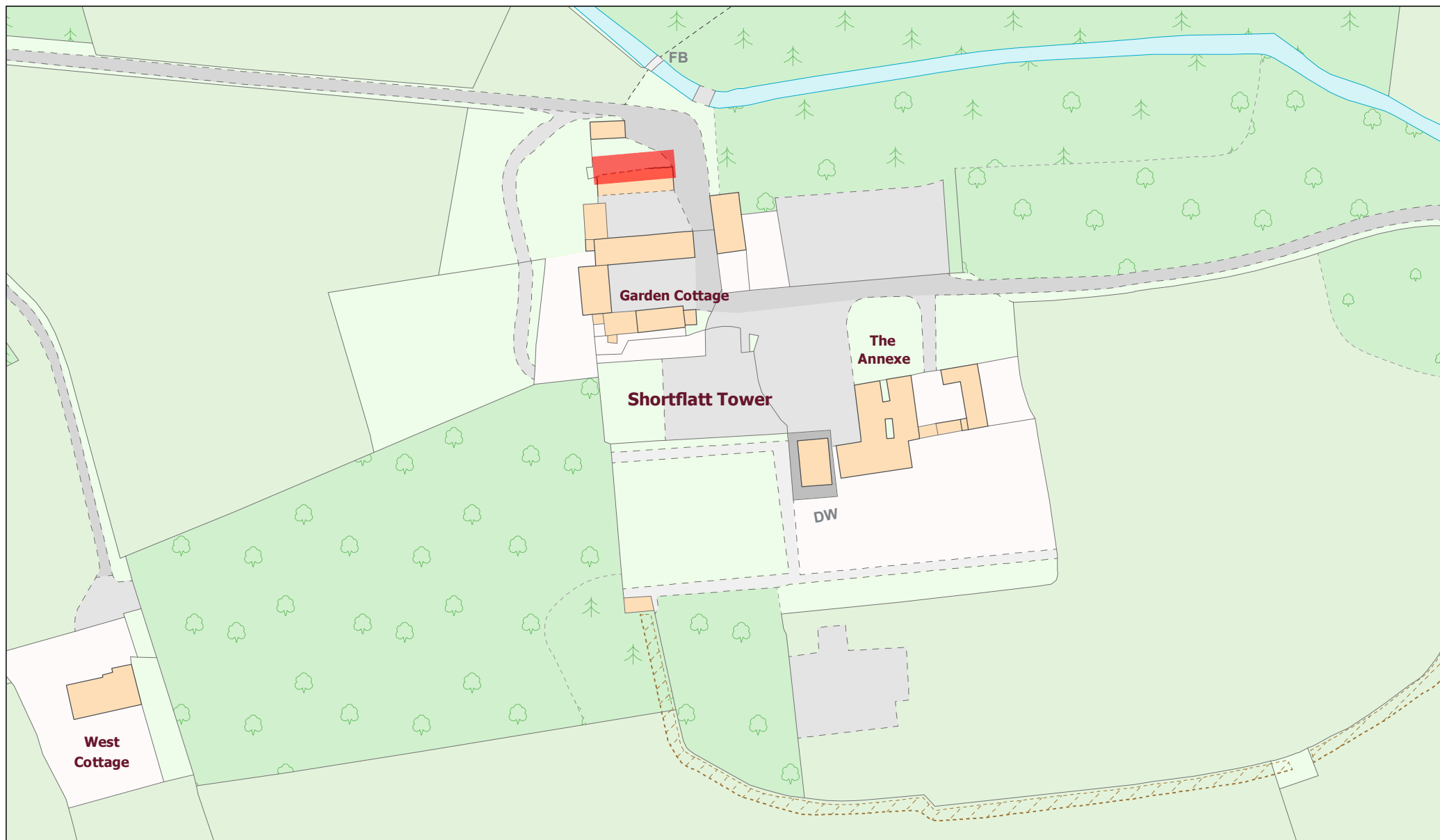


*Illus. 01: Regional view, showing the location of Shortflatt Tower (circled in red), near Belsay in southern Northumberland.*



*Illus. 02: District view, showing the location of Shortflatt Tower (circled in red), south of Bolam Lake.*





Scale 1:1250

0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100 m

*Illus. 03: Settlement view, showing the location of the watching brief area (highlighted in red), to the north-west of Shortflatt Tower.*



*Illus. 04: Architect supplied plan showing the location of the new development (bound in red) on the site of the former Pole Barn, to the north-west of Shortflatt Tower.*

## 2.2 Listing Details - 4/70 Shortflatt Tower 27.8.52

### GV I

House and tower. Licence to crenelate 1305 for Robert de Reynes, but most existing work is later. The tower seems late C15 or early C16, the attached house early C17 incorporating and re-using earlier masonry. Squared stone. Tower has stone slate roof, other parts Welsh slate.

3-storey tower; 2-storey house attached to east and 2 parallel wings running north from house.

South (garden) front: Tower, projecting on left, has chamfered plinth and irregularly-placed early C19 sashes. Inner return has Tudor-arched doorway, now a window; left half of lintel with relief carving of shield and panel, the right half uncarved. Hollow-chamfered base to battlemented parapet with stone water spouts. Steeply-pitched gabled roof with end stacks.

Attached house of 4 irregular bays has C18 12-pane sashes beneath early C17 string courses which rise above each window. Roof hipped on right. Enormous ridge stack between 3rd and 4th bays. Roof marks on stack reveal that the building was formerly 3 storeys (cf. interior).

North (entrance) side has C19 Tudor-style doorway into tower. Similar windows, several in double-chamfered surrounds. In tower one enlarged C16 window with chamfered surround and 3 blocked similar windows. North-east corner of tower has a small single-storey projection of older masonry with a double plinth.

Interior: tower has tunnel-vaulted ground floor; one jamb of a recently discovered (1985) large C16 or C17 fireplace on 1st floor; and a possibly re-set earlier medieval fireplace, with chamfered jambs and corbels supporting flat lintel, on the 2nd floor. Massive C16 roof timbers.

In the roof space of the adjoining wing a C16 or early C17 fireplace, also vestiges of plasterwork proving existence of former second floor. In the dining room a wood Rococo fire surround and contemporary Delft tiles. H. Honeyman considered the tower to be of 1305 but more recent information from Mrs. L. Milner (pers. comm.) suggest the later date.

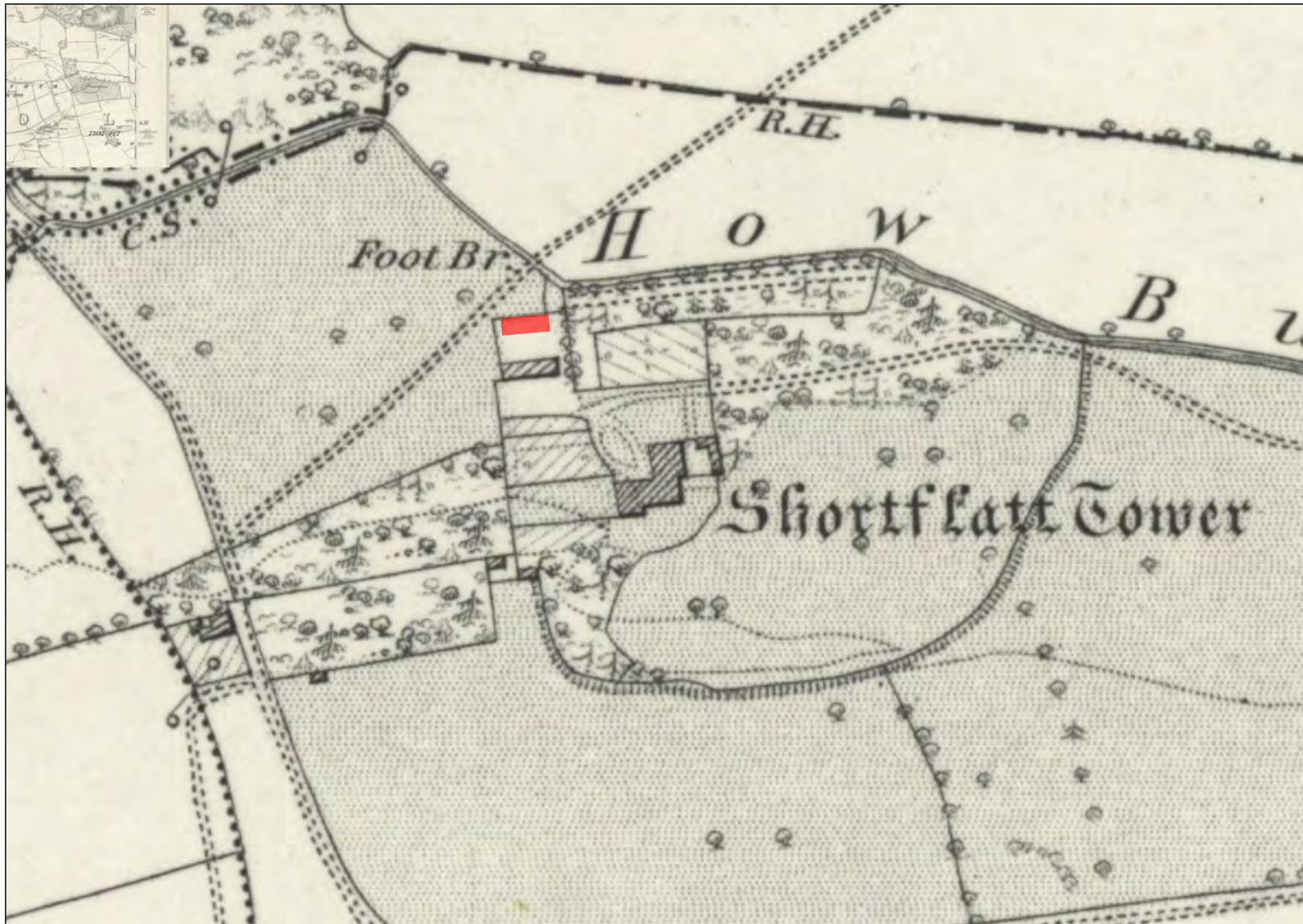
An extremely picturesque house. *Archaeologia Aeliana* 4th Series XXXII, 1954, pp 126-159.

Listing NGR: NZ0793780995.

## 2.3 Previous Archaeological Investigations

In November 2020, an archaeological watching brief was undertaken by the Archaeological Practice Ltd., as a condition of NCC planning application 19/00024/FUL, on land approximately 70 metres to the south of the current site, to monitor excavation works associated with the construction of a new function suite.

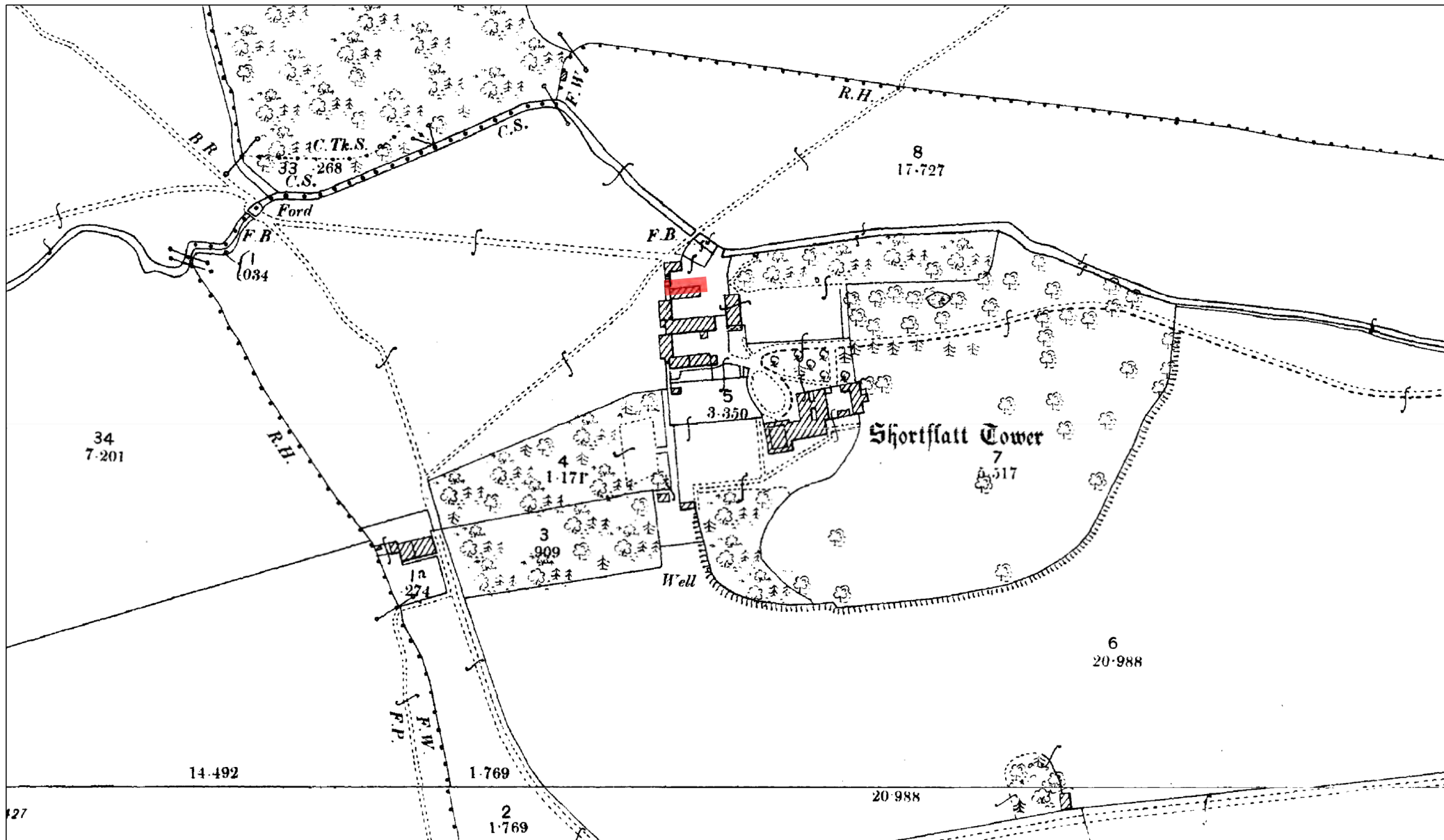
The results of the watching brief concluded that no significant finds or features of any kind were revealed by the excavations. The construction of a former post-1970s stable block, that covered the majority of the site, appeared to have truncated any potential archaeological layers or features down to the natural clay sub-soil.



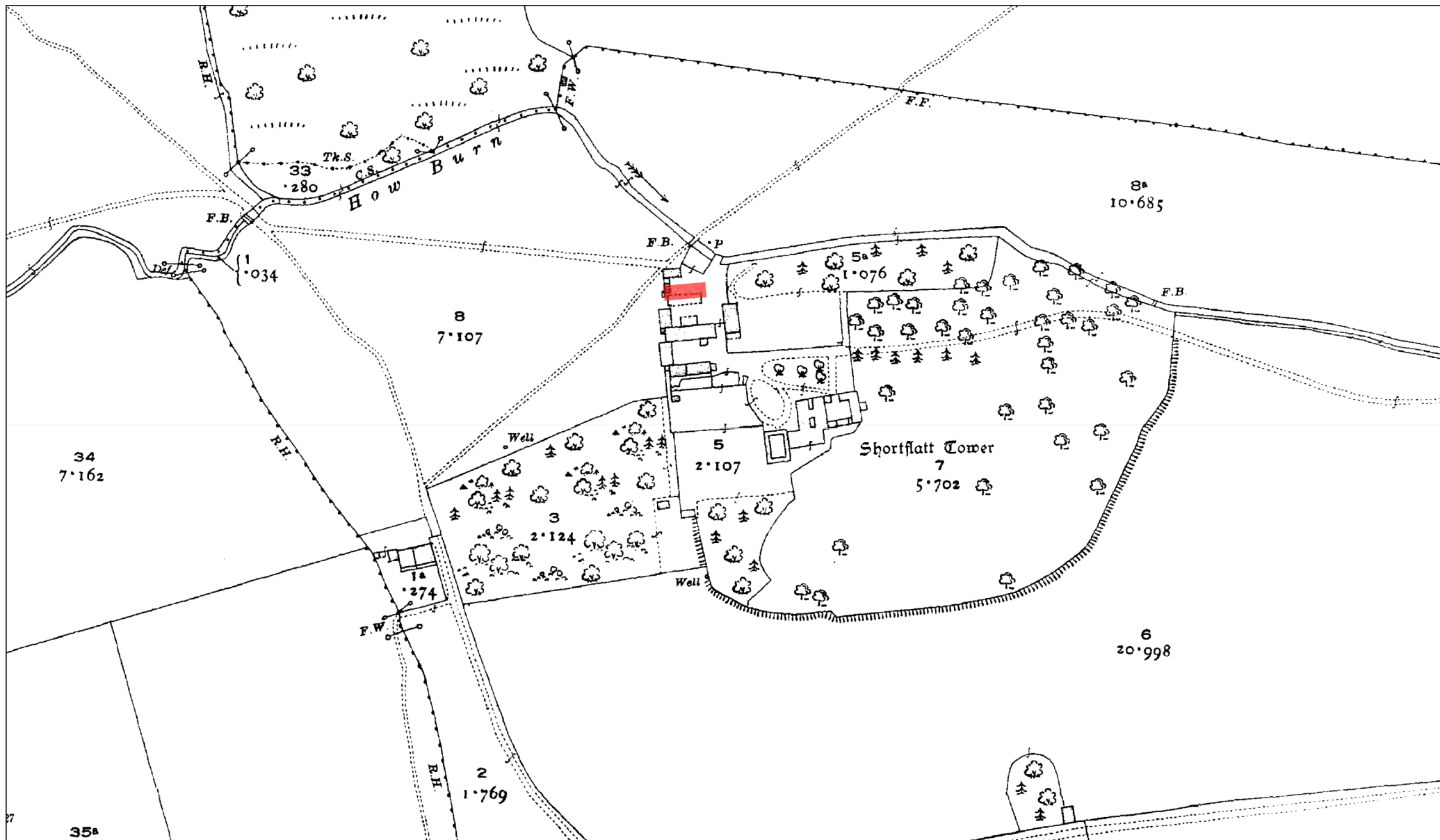
0 20 40 60 80 100 120 140 160 180 200 m

*Illus. 05: Extract from the 1st Edition Ordnance Survey Map of Northumberland c.1866, showing the watching brief site at Shortflatt Tower.*

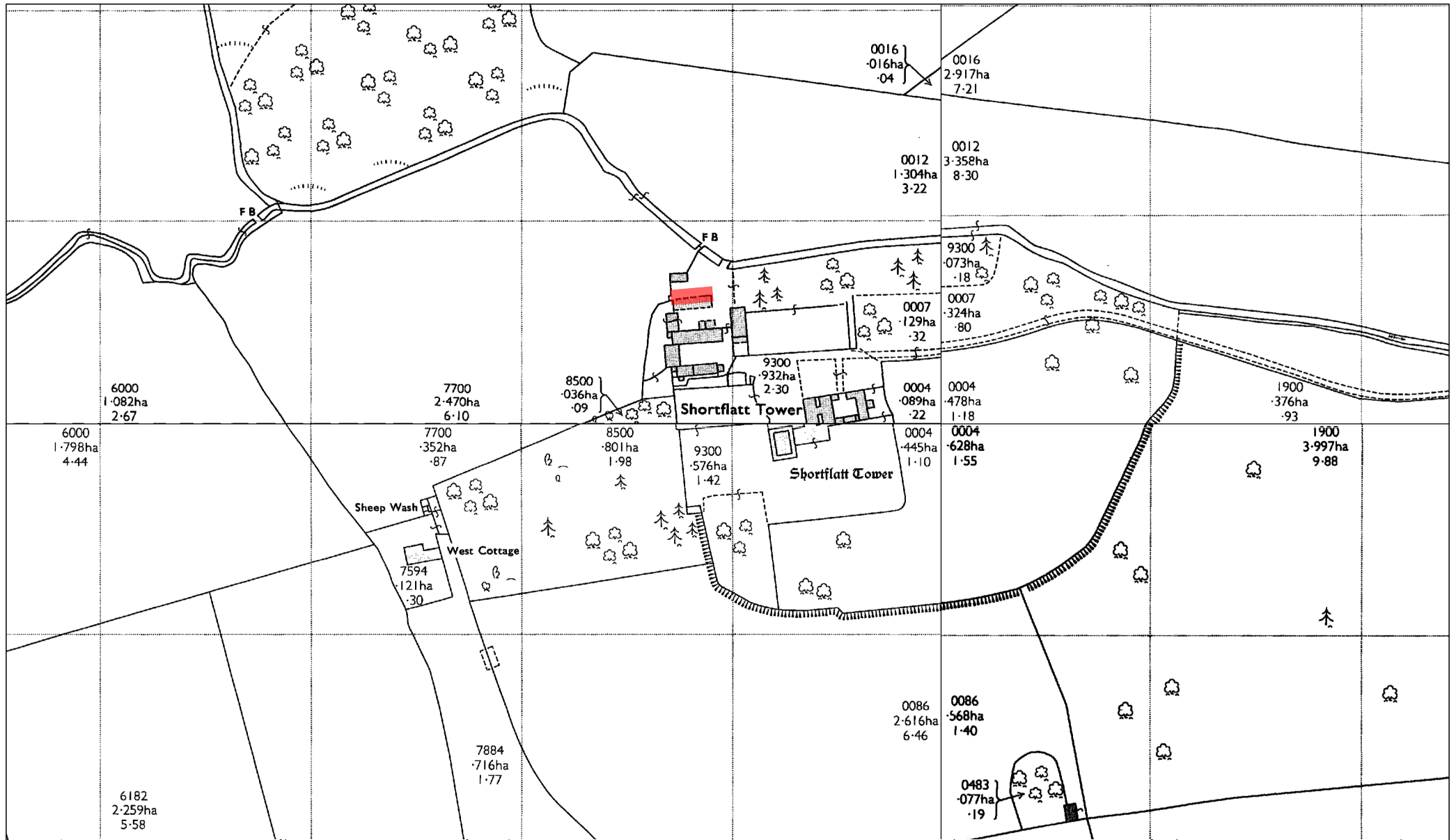




*Illus. 06: Extract from the 2nd Edition Ordnance Survey Map of Northumberland c.1896, showing the watching brief site at Shortflatt Tower.*



*Illus. 07: Extract from the 3rd Edition Ordnance Survey Map of Northumberland c.1922, showing the watching brief site at Shortflatt Tower.*



*Illus. 08: Extract from the c.1974 Edition Ordnance Survey Map of Northumberland, showing the watching brief site at Shortflatt Tower.*





*Illus. 09: Vertical aerial view of the Shortflatt Tower watching brief site (highlighted in red) and environs, taken in December 2002. Image courtesy of Google Earth.*



*Illus. 10: Vertical aerial view of the Shortflatt Tower watching brief site (highlighted in red) and environs, taken in July 2006. Image courtesy of Google Earth.*



### 3. WATCHING BRIEF

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The watching brief took place during groundworks in June 2021 and involved monitoring the excavation of foundation trenches to a depth of 0.90 m for the south and east foundations of the new build. The north and west foundations were to build off the footings of existing walls associated with the former 19<sup>th</sup> century Pole Barn and a contemporary boundary wall.

The foundation trenching was carried out by a mechanical excavator utilized a toothless ditching bucket for the excavation, which was closely monitored by a suitably trained and experienced archaeologist from the Archaeological Practice Ltd.

The aims of the watching brief were to identify and determine the character of any remains uncovered during groundworks on the site, and to make an appropriate record of such finds by photographic and other means.

## 4. RESULTS

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### 4.1 Location and Dimensions (*Illus. 03-04, Photos 01-08*):

The watching brief was located at the site of a former 19<sup>th</sup> century Pole Barn, a distance of approximately 74 metres to the north-west of Shortflatt Tower itself. The groundworks involved monitoring the excavation of foundation trenches to a depth of 0.90 m for the south and east foundations of the new build. The north and west foundations were to build off the footings of existing walls associated with the former 19<sup>th</sup> century Pole Barn and a contemporary boundary wall.

Dimensions: the south trench measured 19 m (length) x 1.20 m (width) x 0.90 m (depth at the north end) – 1.40 m (depth at south end where construction trench for Pole Barn forms a cut-in terrace); the east trench measured 6 m (length) x 1.20 m (width) x 0.90 m (depth).

### 4.2 Stratigraphy and Interpretation

Areas along the former south wall of the Pole Barn indicate that its footing was sitting directly upon natural clay. Indeed, the entire southern portion of the site, occupying the southern half of the former Pole Barn, has been terraced in to the bank to a depth of approx. 1 metre below ground level probably during the construction of the Pole Barn in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. It was noted that the gradient of the bank declines to the north by a depth of 1 metre or more by the time the east-west track is reached (see *Illus. 03-04*).

Beneath the mix of 19<sup>th</sup> century demolition material from the former Pole Barn and silt-loam topsoil [01], a fairly soft, dark brown-black dirty silt-clay deposit [02] was observed in the central portion of the southern trench, extending beyond the maximum depth of excavation. It was located 4 m from the east end of the trench and extended in length for the remaining 15 m of the trench – occupying the entirety of the Pole Barn footprint. This material contained 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century pottery exclusively and has been interpreted as an occupation layer associated and contemporary with the former Pole Barn. Crude soak away drains [03], located at the east and west extent of this occupation layer, were observed upon a north-south alignment and interpreted as contemporary 19<sup>th</sup> century drains associated with the former Pole Barn.

Elsewhere, both trenches excavated through modern overburden/topsoil, into firm, natural reddish-brown boulder clay [04] with common inclusions of sandstone chippings throughout.

No significant finds, features or diagnostic archaeological material, other than the modern material discussed above, were revealed within the watching brief area, observed during the trench excavations.

The construction of the former 19<sup>th</sup> century Pole Barn and its associated terrace, that covered the majority of the site, would appear to have truncated any potential archaeological layers or features down to the natural clay sub-soil.

Additionally, analysis of historic Ordnance Survey mapping (see *Illus. 05-08*) shows the site occupied by agricultural outbuildings throughout the 19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

### 4.3 Context List:

- [01] Mixed demolition material and topsoil. Comprising of mixed sandstone rubble from the demolition of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Pole Barn, together with topsoil comprising mid grey-brown rich silt-loam, fairly soft. Observed to average depths of 0.40 m below ground level.
- [02] Occupation level from former Pole Barn. Comprising of fairly soft, dark brown-black dirty silt-clay, observed in the central portion of the southern trench, extending beyond the maximum depth of excavation. Located 4 m from the east end of the trench and extended in length for the remaining 15 m of the trench – occupying the entirety of the Pole Barn footprint. Contained 19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> century pottery exclusively and has been interpreted as an occupation layer associated and contemporary with the former Pole Barn.
- [03] Crude soak away drains comprising of irregular sandstone pieces within a linear slot of N-S alignment, located at the east and west extent of the Pole Barn occupation layer [02]. Interpreted as contemporary 19<sup>th</sup> century drains associated with the former Pole Barn.
- [04] Natural. Mid reddish-brown boulder clay, firm, with frequent glacial sandstone fragments and mixed alluvium. Observed from depths of 0.40 m (average) below ground level.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

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**5.1** No significant finds or features of any kind were revealed by the trench excavations required for the new residential property located at the former Pole Barn site north-west of Shortflatt Tower in June, 2020. Therefore, it is concluded that no significant remains of cultural heritage value were impacted by the works.

**5.2** The construction of the former 19th century Pole Barn and its associated terrace, that covered the majority of the site, would appear to have truncated any potential archaeological layers or features down to the natural clay sub-soil.

**5.3** Additionally, analysis of historic Ordnance Survey mapping (see *Illus. 05-08*) shows the site occupied by agricultural outbuildings throughout the 19th-20th centuries.

**5.4** While virtually no potential remains for the survival of significant remains in the area surrounding the former Pole Barn site, it is recommended that, in view of the historic context of the broader site, any further works in the vicinity should be considered on their own merits with regard to potential archaeological intervention.





*Photo 01. Pre-excitation shot. View looking west following demolition of the Pole Barn.*



*Photo 02. Pre-excitation shot. View looking south towards the Coach House, following demolition of the Pole Barn.*





*Photo 03. View looking north along the east trench, following excavation.*



*Photo 04. West facing section of east trench, following excavation.*





*Photo 05. View looking west along south trench, following excavation to finished depth.*



*Photo 06. View looking west at detail of 19th century deposit within the south trench, following excavation to finished depth.*





*Photo 07. North facing section of south trench, following excavation.*



*Photo 08. Selection of late-19th century pottery found within a deposit in the south trench, associated with the recently demolished (late-19th century) Pole Barn.*

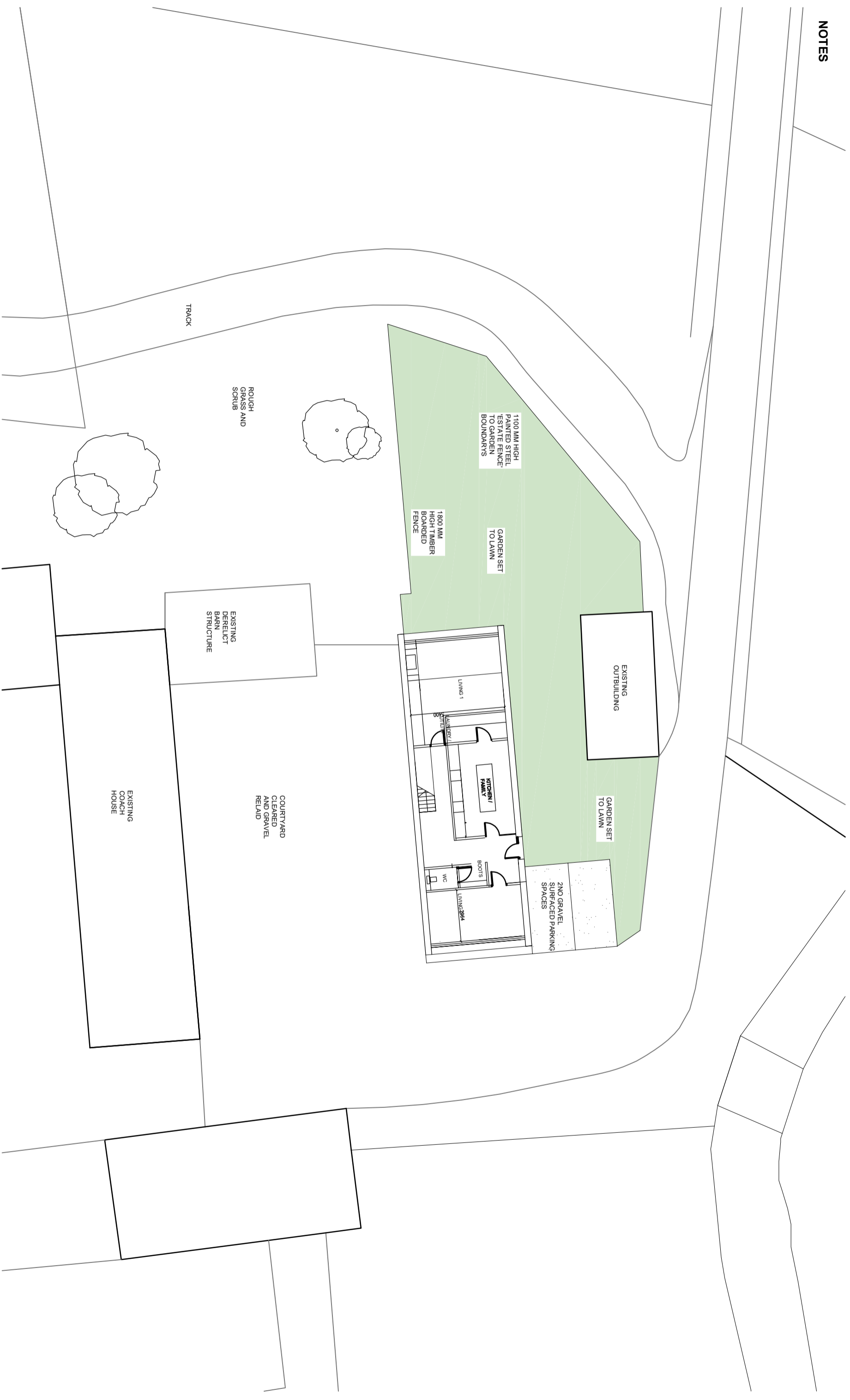
**APPENDIX 1:**

**Architectural Plans & Elevations, Existing and as Proposed.**

*By Simon Timperley*



NOTES



NEW BUILD RESIDENTIAL  
POLE BARN SITE  
SHORTFLATT TOWER

200\_01 REV C  
PROPOSED SITE PLAN  
1:200 @ A3

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