

Archaeological evaluation on Land at Shinfield West, Shinfield, Berkshire

Worcestershire Archaeology
for RPS Consulting on behalf of Reading University

April 2025



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SHINFIELD WEST SHINFIELD BERKSHIRE

Archaeological evaluation report



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SITE INFORMATION

Site name:	Land at Shinfield West, Shinfield, Berkshire
Site code:	SHIN25
Local planning authority:	Wokingham Borough Council
Planning reference:	221439, supplemented 221995
Central NGR:	SU 72657 67340
Commissioning client:	RPS Consulting Ltd
Client project reference:	JAC28463
WA project number:	P6834
WA report number:	3312
HER reference:	-
Oasis reference:	Fieldsec1-531962

DOCUMENT CONTROL PANEL				
Version	Date	Author	Details	Approved by
1	11/04/2025	Graham Arnold	Draft for comment	Rupert Lotherington

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Archaeological watching brief on land at Shinfield West, Shinfield, Berkshire

By Graham Arnold

Illustrations by Abbie Horton

Summary

During early spring 2025, an archaeological evaluation was undertaken at Shinfield West, Shinfield, Wokingham, Berkshire. The project was commissioned by RPS Consulting on behalf of their client the University of Reading, in advance of proposed new sports pitches and a pavilion. The site is the subject of a planning application to Wokingham Borough Council, planning reference 221439 for the sports pitches at the southern end of the Site. In addition, a second application for the pavilion and associated car-parking and infrastructure was submitted in October 2022 (planning reference 221995).

The archaeological advisor to the local planning authority, Linden Ellicott (Archaeology Officer, Berkshire Archaeology), considered that the proposed development has the potential to impact upon possible buried heritage assets. Specifically Iron Age and Roman settlement activity in the area. Accordingly, the Archaeology Officer (the Curator) requested a scheme of evaluation trenching be undertaken in order to determine the presence, degree of preservation and significance of any heritage asset preserved on the site in accordance with paragraph 207 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

Four 34m x 1.6m evaluation trenches were excavated in an area of manicured open space within the development area. The works outlined within this report detail the results the archaeological evaluation within the central portion of the development area. Additional trenches are anticipated during additional phases of work to the north and south.

The results of the present phase of evaluation demonstrated that the area had been heavily reworked and reduced to the natural substrate during previous modern landscaping events. A number of modern truncations were recorded within the trenches, with finds all dating to the 20th and 21st century. No finds, features or deposits of archaeological significance were found on the site, suggesting that the Iron Age and Roman activity found at Croft Road, 500m to the south of the site and the cropmarks present within the wider 9ha development are do not extend across the location of the proposed sports pitches.

The methods adopted allow a high degree of confidence that the aims of the project have been achieved. Conditions were suitable in all of the trenches to identify the presence or absence of archaeological features. It is considered that the nature, density and distribution of archaeological features provides an accurate characterisation of the development site as a whole.

Report

1 Introduction

1.1 Background to the project

An archaeological evaluation was undertaken by Worcestershire Archaeology (WA) on 31 March and 1 April 2025 at land at Shinfield West, Shinfield, Wokingham, Berkshire (NGR SU 72657 67340; Figure 1). The project was commissioned by RPS Consulting on behalf of their client the University of Reading, in advance of proposed new sports pitches and a pavilion. The site is the subject of a planning application to Wokingham Borough Council, planning reference 221439 for the sports pitches at the southern end of the Site. In addition, a second application for the pavilion and associated car-parking and infrastructure was submitted in October 2022 (planning reference 221995).

The archaeological advisor to the local planning authority, Linden Ellicott (Archaeology Officer, Berkshire Archaeology), considered that the proposed development has the potential to impact upon possible buried heritage assets. Specifically Iron Age and Roman settlement activity in the area. Accordingly, the Archaeology Officer (the Curator) requested a scheme of evaluation trenching be undertaken in order to determine the presence, degree of preservation and significance of any heritage asset preserved on the site in accordance with paragraph 207 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

Four 34m x 1.6m evaluation trenches were excavated in an area of manicured open space within the development area. Four 34m x 1.6m evaluation trenches were excavated in an area of manicured open space within the footprint of a pair of proposed sports pitches. The works outlined within this report detail the results the archaeological evaluation within the central portion of the development area. Additional trenches are anticipated during additional phases of work to the north and south.

No brief was provided but a written scheme of investigation (WSI) was prepared by RPS Group (2022) and approved by the Curator. The evaluation also conforms to the industry guidelines and standards set out by the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists in *Standard for archaeological field evaluation* (CIfA 2023a) and *Universal guidance for archaeological field evaluation* (CIfA 2023b)

1.2 Site location, topography and geology

The Site consists of a series of agricultural fields, proposed for use as sports pitches, and an adjoining pavilion with associated parking, and landscaped open spaces.

The evaluation initially focussed on the location of the two sports pitches in the centre of the site, covering an area of approximately 1.2 ha, with 4no. additional contingency trenches available for excavation if any archaeology was found.

The Site slopes gently southwards towards the River Loddon, approximately 1km to the south. The Site is located at a height of 49m above Ordnance Datum (aOD) in the north and descends to a height of 45m aOD in the south.

The underlying geology comprises bedrock of Palaeogene Clay Silt and Sand of the London Clay Formation overlain by superficial deposits of Quaternary River Terrace deposits of clay, silt, and sand (BGS 2025).

2 Archaeological and historical background

2.1 Introduction

The archaeological background was provided in the Written Scheme of Investigation (RPS Group 2022), with a summary provided below.

There has been a considerable amount of archaeological investigation in the Shinfield area in recent years. Cropmarks, indicating possible archaeological remains, have been observed on aerial photographs within the proposed Site (Wessex Archaeology 1999, CgMs 2008).

The Site lies within the area of a wide-ranging desk-based assessment (DBA) prepared by CgMs in 2008 (CgMs 2008). This DBA discusses the cropmarks, largely in the south-western part of the Site, and reports that they are interpreted as indicative of Iron Age or Roman settlement or a farmstead. A geophysical survey project undertaken in 2015 corroborated the cropmark evidence to some extent and located a number of linear features concentrated in the south-west part of the Site. Only the figures were available from the geophysical survey, and it is understood the reporting was never completed.

A map regression undertaken as part of the 2008 DBA shows that the Site was used as agricultural land into the early 20th century. High Copse Farm was developed in the south-east part of the Site during the 20th century and was demolished by 2020.

The archaeological interest of the Site is focussed on the Prehistoric period (Bronze Age and earlier Iron Age), and late Iron Age to Roman transition.

3 Project aims

In general, the WSI listed that the aims of the archaeological fieldwork were:

- To record the nature of the main stratigraphic units encountered in terms of their physical composition (stone, sand, gravel, organic materials, etc.) and their archaeological formation (primary deposits, secondary deposits, etc.);
- To assess the overall presence and survival of archaeological remains relating to the main periods of occupation revealed and the potential for the recovery of additional structural information given the nature of the deposits encountered (e.g. extent of later disturbance, etc.);
- To assess the overall presence and survival of the main kinds of artefactual evidence (including pottery, brick, tile, stone, glass, metal, bone, small finds, industrial residues, etc.), its condition, given the nature of the deposits encountered;
- To assess the overall presence and survival of the main kinds of ecofactual and environmental evidence (including animal bone, human bone, plant remains, pollen, charcoal, molluscs, soils, etc.), its condition and potential, given the nature of the deposits encountered.

Specific Aims for the site WSI were:

- To record any archaeological features of Prehistoric and Roman date, and to examine any available evidence for economic activity, environmental conditions and industrial or craft activity.
- To relate any archaeological discoveries to the Solent-Thames Research Framework for the Historic Environment (Hey & Hind 2014).
- In addition, further, more detailed, research aims may be generated from the results of the archaeological evaluation trenching.

4 Project methodology

A Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) was prepared by RPS in 2022 (RPS Group 2022 with a complimentary Method Statement produced by Worcestershire Archaeology (WA 2024). Fieldwork was undertaken between 31st March and 1st April 2025.

Four 34m long and 1.6m wide trenches, amounting to 216m² in area, were excavated over the reduced 1.2ha site, with a contingency for another 216m² trenching allocated if required. The location of the trenches is indicated in Figure 2.

The trenches were laid out in a broad grid array. The previous geophysical survey on site had demonstrated that there was limited targetable archaeological potential on the site.

Trenches were relocated to avoid a known underground HV cable that had replaced a previous overhead service which formerly crossed the site. The HV cable was visible on the geophysical survey, located by a Cable Avoidance Tool by both Worcestershire Archaeology staff and staff acting for the University of Reading. Accordingly, Trench 1 was moved from its original position to run parallel, at least 10m in distance from the located cable.

Deposits considered not to be significant were removed under constant archaeological supervision using a 360° tracked excavator, employing a toothless bucket. Subsequent excavation was undertaken by hand. Clean surfaces were inspected and selected deposits were excavated to retrieve artefactual material and environmental samples, as well as to determine their nature. Deposits were recorded according to standard Worcestershire Archaeology practice (WA 2012) and trench and feature locations were surveyed using a GNSS device with an accuracy limit set at <0.04m. On completion of excavation, trenches were reinstated by replacing the excavated material.

All fieldwork records were checked and cross-referenced. Analysis was undertaken through a combination of structural and artefactual evidence, allied to the information derived from other sources.

The project archive is currently held at the offices of Worcestershire Archaeology.

A copy of the report will be deposited with the Archaeology Data Service (ADS) via OASIS for validation with the Berkshire HER, in order to disseminate the results. Due to the negative results of the project no further archiving will take place.

5 Archaeological results

5.1 Introduction

The modern truncations and trench locations are shown in Figure 2, the geophysical survey of the site is presented in Figure 3 and photographs of the trenches are located within Figure 4. The trench and context inventory are presented in Appendix 1.

5.2 Phasing

5.2.1 Natural deposits

The natural substrate was revealed at the base of all of the trenches at an average depth of 0.48m below present ground level. The natural comprised a variable superficial drift geology of soft, grey clayey sand and firm, bright, orangey yellow sand and gravels of Quaternary River Terrace deposits

5.2.2 Modern deposits and truncations

The interface between the natural substrate and the modern topsoil deposit had been reworked and disturbed by modern landscaping deposits of redeposited natural substrate (101/201/301/401). The landscaping layers were visible immediately below the 0.30m thick topsoil and turf layers (100/200/300/400) which extended across the surface of each of the trenches. The horizontal truncation caused during the landscaping of the area extended to an average depth of 0.20m and sealed the natural substrate (102/202/302/402) during construction works from the surrounding development and creation of the existing public open space.

The area had been subject to known service diversions, including drainage and modern footpaths. Modern drainage and service truncations, backfilled with topsoil and mixed reworked grey material were observed in Trenches 1, 3 and 4 (See Figure 2).

6 Artefactual evidence

Recovery of artefacts was undertaken according to standard Worcestershire Archaeology practice (WA 2012). In the event no artefacts were identified which were considered to be suitable for analysis. Modern undiagnostic brick fragments and ceramic land drains were recovered within each of the modern service truncations and landscaping deposits on the site.

7 Environmental evidence

Environmental sampling was undertaken according to standard Worcestershire Archaeology practice (WA 2012). Following discussion with the WA Senior Environmental Archaeologist it was considered that none of the deposits revealed were suitable for environmental analysis.

8 Discussion and conclusions

The results of the evaluation demonstrate that the area had been heavily reworked and reduced to the depth of the natural substrate during previous modern landscaping events, relating to the creation of the existing parkland. A number of modern service truncations were recorded within the trenches, with finds all dating to the modern era. No finds, features or deposits of archaeological significance were identified on the site. It is therefore reasonable to assume that the Iron Age and Roman activity previously revealed at Croft Road, 500m to the south, and the activity linked to the creation of the cropmarks within the wider development area do not extend across the location of the proposed sports pitches bordering Trenches 1 -4.

The methods adopted allow a high degree of confidence that the aims of the project have been achieved. Conditions were suitable in all of the trenches to identify the presence or absence of archaeological features. It is considered that the nature, density and distribution of archaeological features provides an accurate characterisation of the development site as a whole.

9 Project personnel

The fieldwork was led by Graham Arnold, PCIfA.

The project was managed by Rupert Lotherington, MCIfA. The report was produced and collated by Graham Arnold, with the illustrations produced by Abbie Horton and Graham Arnold.

10 Acknowledgements

Worcestershire Archaeology would like to thank the following for the successful conclusion of the project: Richard Smalley, (Senior Director, Archaeology and Heritage, RPS Consulting UK & Ireland) Neil Wright, (Technical Director, RPS Consulting UK and Ireland), and Linden Ellicott (Archaeology Officer, Berkshire Archaeology).

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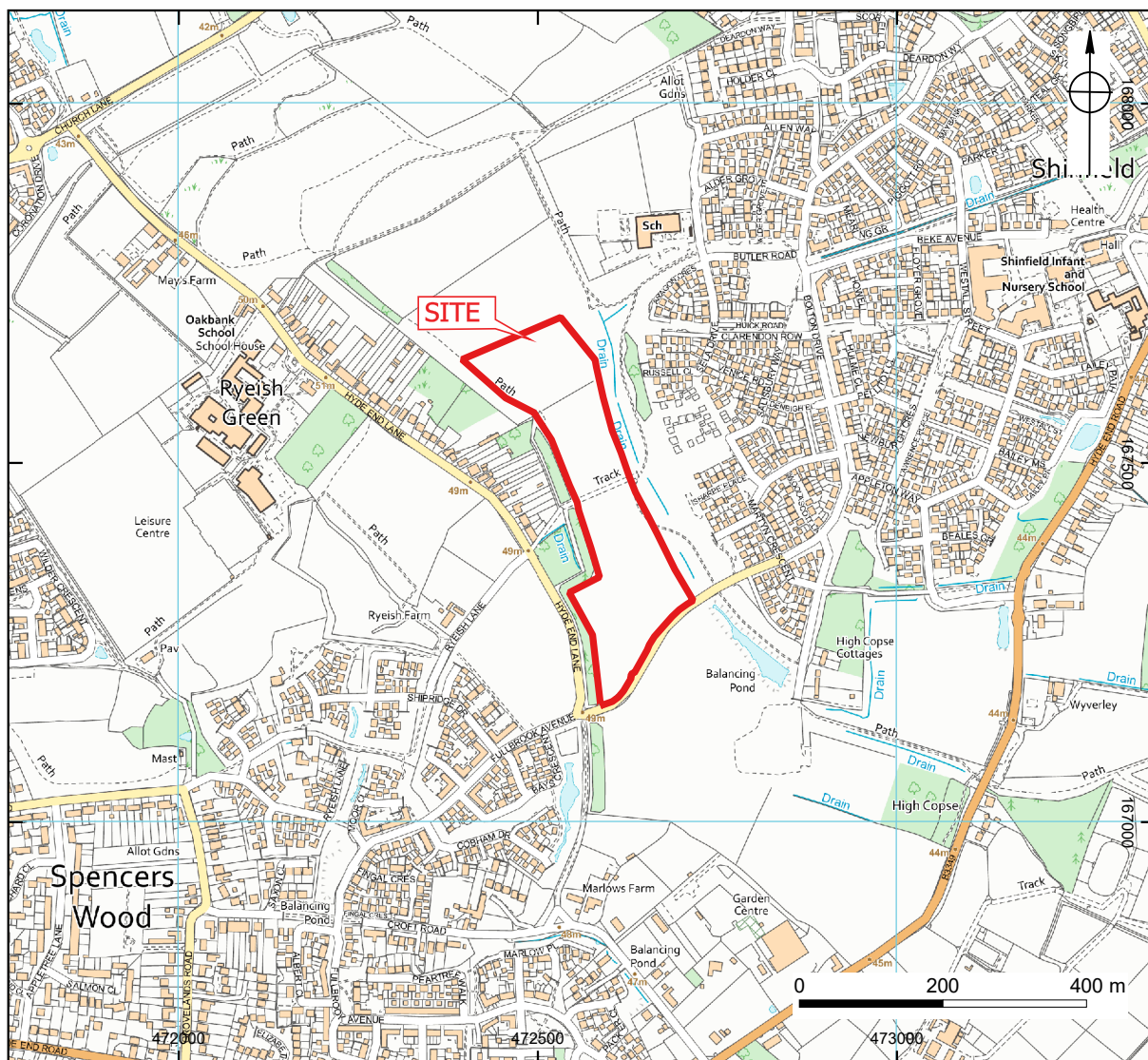
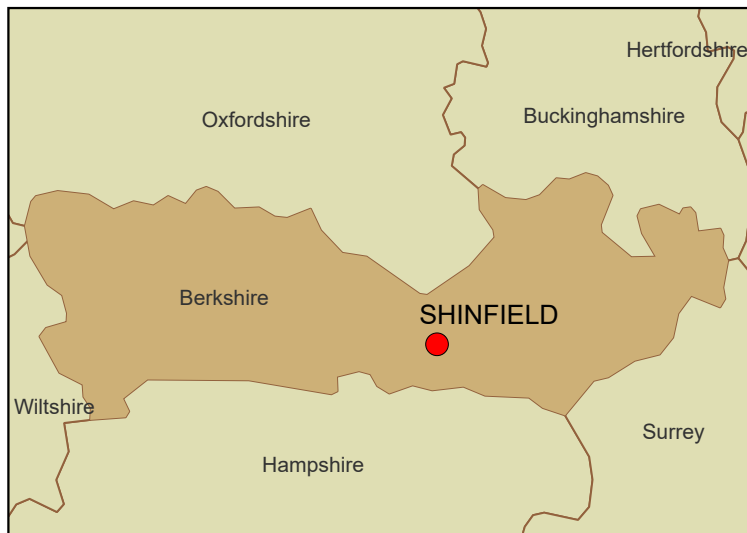
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Figures



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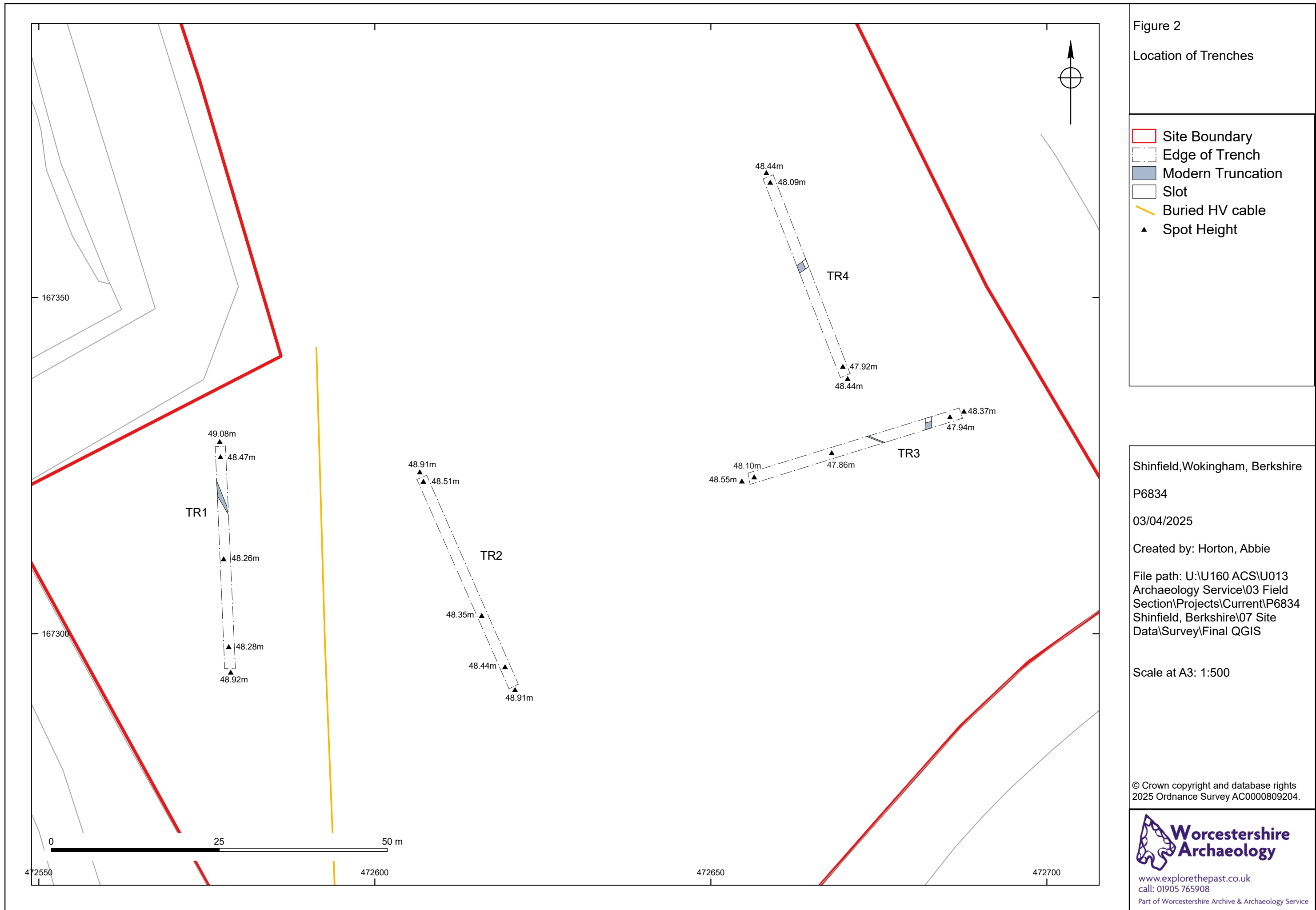
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Figure 1: Location of the site



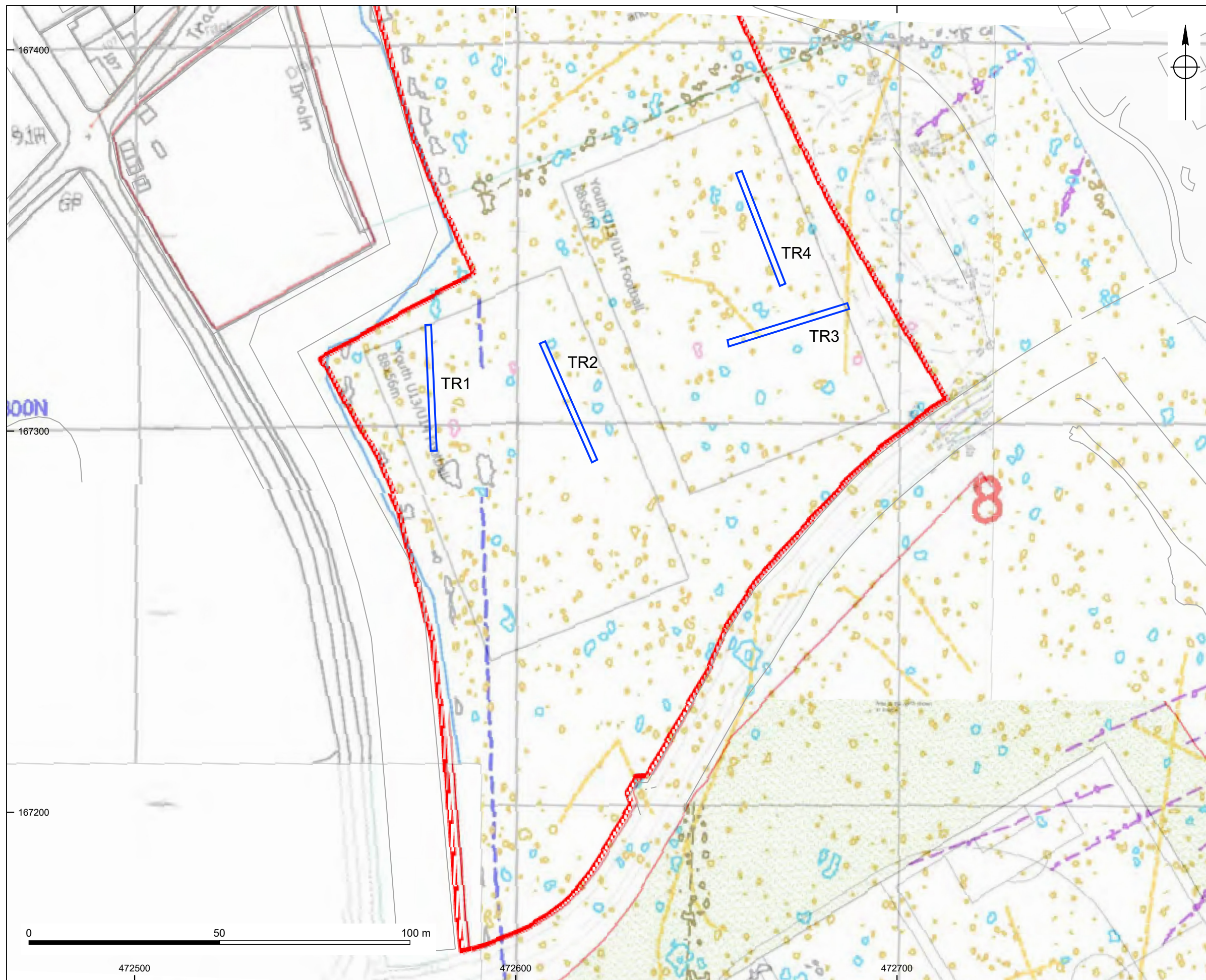


Figure 3

Location of Trenches overlaid on geophysics

- ▬ Site Boundary
- ▬ Edge of Trench

Shinfield, Wokingham, Berkshire

P6834

03/04/2025

Created by: Horton, Abbie

File path: U:\U160 ACS\U013
Archaeology Service\03 Field
Section\Projects\Current\P6834
Shinfield, Berkshire\07 Site
Data\Survey\Final QGIS

Scale at A3: 1:1000

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Figure 4.1: Trench 1, view north, 2 x 1m scales



Figure 4.2: Trench 1 sample section, looking west, 1m scales



Figure 4.3: Trench 2, oblique view looking north-west, 2 x 1m scales



Figure 4.4: Trench 2, sample section, view east, 1m and 0.4m scale



Figure 4.5: Trench 3, view east, 2 x 1m scales



Figure 4.6: Trench 3 modern truncation linear, south facing section, 1m and 0.4m scales



Figure 4.7: Trench 4, view south-east, 1m x 0.4m scale



Figure 4.8: Modern service trench truncation, oblique view south-east, 1m and 0.4m scales



Figure 4.9: Area of open field under evaluation, during backfilling, view north-west

Figure 4

Photos

Shinfield, Wokingham, Berkshire

WA Project number: P6834

10/04/2025

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Appendix 1: Trench descriptions

Trench 1

Length: 34 Width: 1.6 Orientation: N-S

Context summary:

Context	Feature type	Context type	Height/depth	Deposit description
100	Deposit	Topsoil - Trench 1	0.30 (avg.)	Colour: dark greyish brown. Compaction: moist, friable. Composition: sandy silt. Inclusions: occasional small rounded pebbles, evenly distributed. Notes: modern topsoil of park land.
101	Deposit	Other - Mixed reworked landscaping	0.20 - 0.60m	Colour: mid brownish grey. Compaction: moist, malleable. Composition: clayey sand. Inclusions: moderate small rounded gravel, evenly distributed. Notes: reworked natural from landscaping.
102	Deposit	Natural - Trench 1		Colour: bright yellowish orange. Composition: sand. Inclusions: frequent rounded gravels. Notes: soft gleyed grey clayey sand at south end.

Trench 2

Length: 34 Width: 1.6 Orientation: NW-SE

Context summary:

Context	Feature type	Context type	Height/depth	Deposit description
200	Deposit	Topsoil - Trench 2	0.30 (avg.)	Colour: dark greyish brown. Compaction: moist, friable. Composition: sandy silt. Inclusions: occasional small rounded pebbles, evenly distributed. Notes: modern topsoil of park land.
201	Deposit	Other - Mixed reworked landscaping	0.20 (avg.)	Colour: mid brownish grey. Compaction: moist, malleable. Composition: clayey sand. Inclusions: moderate small rounded gravel, evenly distributed. Notes: eworked natural from landscaping
202	Deposit	Natural - Trench 2		Colour: bright orangey yellow. Compaction: dry. Composition: sand. Inclusions: frequent rounded gravels. Notes: occasional grey clayey sand bands.

Trench 3

Length: 34 Width: 1.6 Orientation: NE-SW

Context summary:

Context	Feature type	Context type	Height/depth	Deposit description
300	Deposit	Topsoil - Trench 3	0.30 (avg.)	Colour: dark greyish brown. Compaction: moist, friable. Composition: sandy silt. Inclusions: occasional small rounded pebbles, evenly distributed. Notes: modern topsoil of park land.
301	Deposit	Other - Mixed reworked landscaping	0.20 (avg.)	Colour: mid brownish grey. Compaction: moist, malleable. Composition: clayey sand. Inclusions: moderate small rounded gravel, evenly distributed. Notes: reworked natural from landscaping
302	Deposit	Natural - Trench 3		Colour: bright orangey yellow. Compaction: dry, firm. Composition: sand. Inclusions: frequent rounded gravels. Notes: occasional grey clayey sand bands.

Trench 4

Length: 34 Width: 1.6 Orientation: NW-SE

Context summary:

Context	Feature type	Context type	Height/depth	Deposit description
400	Deposit	Topsoil - Trench 4	0.30 (avg.)	Colour: dark greyish brown. Compaction: moist, friable. Composition: sandy silt. Inclusions: occasional small rounded pebbles, evenly distributed. Notes: modern topsoil of park land.
401	Deposit	Mixed interface between topsoil and natural - Trench 4	0.20 (avg.)	Colour: mid brownish grey. Compaction: moist, malleable. Composition: clayey sand. Inclusions: moderate small rounded gravel, evenly distributed. Notes: reworked natural from landscaping
402	Deposit	Natural - Trench 4	0.10	Colour: bright orangey yellow. Compaction: dry, firm. Composition: sand. Inclusions: frequent rounded gravels. Notes: occasional grey clayey sand bands.

Appendix 2: Summary of project archive

TYPE	DETAILS*
Artefacts and Environmental	None retained – all modern undiagnostic material discarded on site
Paper	Context sheet, Correspondence, Diary (Field progress form), Report,
Digital	Database, GIS, Images raster/digital photography, Spreadsheets, Survey, Text

**OASIS terminology*

The project archive is currently held at the offices of Worcestershire Archaeology.

A copy of the report will be deposited with the Archaeology Data Service (ADS) via OASIS for validation with the Berkshire HER, in order to disseminate the results. Due to the negative results of the project no further archiving will take place.

Appendix 3: Summary of data for HER

No significant finds or environmental samples were found on the site