

Abbeytown Wastewater Treatment Works, Revised Pipeline Route, Cumbria



Archaeological Watching Brief



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SUMMARY

Following proposals by United Utilities for the revision of a pipeline route in Abbeytown, Wigton, Cumbria (NY 17620 50280 to 17840 51740), Oxford Archaeology North (OA North) were commissioned to prepare an archaeological assessment of the likely effects of the proposals on sites of archaeological interest. As a result of the potential for the disturbance of remains associated with the medieval Abbey of Holm Cultram, and additional medieval and post-medieval sites, OA North were subsequently commissioned by United Utilities to undertake a watching brief during preparatory ground works.

The only feature of archaeological interest that was encountered during the watching brief comprised a grassed linear bank. This bank appears to have predated the former Kirtlebridge, Annan, and Brayton Branch Railway, which was established in 1866-9, and might have extended into the scheduled area associated with St Mary's Abbey, Holm Cultram (SM 302). The function and date of the bank are unknown.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

OA North would like to thank United Utilities for commissioning the project. Thanks are also due to Jeremy Parsons of Cumbria Historic Environment Service.

For OA North, Nate Jepson undertook the watching brief, Alastair Vannan compiled the report, and Mark Tidmarsh produced the drawings. Alison Plummer managed the project and also edited the report.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE PROJECT

1.1.1 Following proposals by United Utilities for the revision of a pipeline route in Abbeytown, Wigton, Cumbria (Fig 1; NY 17620 50280 to 17840 51740), OA North were commissioned to prepare an archaeological statement outlining the likely effects of the proposals on sites of archaeological interest (OA North 2010). This was undertaken in addition to the previous desk-based research (OA North 2009). As a result of the potential for the disturbance of remains associated with the medieval Abbey of Holm Cultram, and additional medieval and post-medieval sites, OA North were subsequently commissioned to undertake a watching brief during preparatory ground works. This was undertaken during June and July 2011.

1.2 LOCATION, TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY

- 1.2.1 The pipeline route lies at the north-eastern extent of the Abbeytown Ridge. This ridge is one of the few areas in the immediate environs where the fertile soils are dry enough for arable agriculture. Elsewhere, in fields associated with reclaimed mosses, seasonal water-logging of the area makes pastoral agriculture more successful. Further to the north, between the agricultural land and the mud flats of the river Waver, there still remain strips of salt marsh, known as Newton Marsh and Skinburness Marsh (Hodgkinson *et al* 2000, 85).
- 1.2.2 The underlying geology of the area consists of a reddish Devensian till or boulder clay, deposited during the last period of glaciation (Evans 1975, 28). The soils to the north of Abbeytown are fine to coarse loams of the Cliffton association, and to the south the fine loams and clay-rich surface water glays of the Brickfield association occur, both of which are seasonally waterlogged (Bewley 1994, 14).

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 WATCHING BRIEF

- 2.1.1 During the course of all ground works associated with the establishment of the pipeline, a programme of field observation recorded the location, extent, and character of all surviving features and deposits of archaeological interest.

2.2 ARCHAEOLOGICAL RECORDING

- 2.2.1 The ‘preservation by record’ of all features of archaeological interest was achieved by the generation of a comprehensive archive, in accordance with the standard and guidance for archaeological excavations produced by the Institute of Field Archaeologists (2001). All of the features identified during the watching brief were recorded stratigraphically, using a system adapted from that used by the Centre for Archaeology Service of English Heritage, with accompanying graphic documentation (plans, sections, and digital photographs and black and white print photographs, both of individual contexts and overall site shots from standard view points). Photography was undertaken with 35mm cameras on archivable black-and-white print film, all frames including a visible, graduated metric scale. Digital photography was used extensively throughout the course of the fieldwork for presentation purposes. Photographic records were also maintained on photographic *pro-forma* sheets.

2.3 FINDS

- 2.3.1 Finds’ recovery and sampling programmes were carried out in accordance with best practice (following current Institute of Field Archaeologists guidelines).

2.4 ARCHIVE

- 2.4.1 The results of all archaeological work carried out will form the basis for a full archive to professional standards, in accordance with current English Heritage guidelines (*Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment*, 2006). The original record archive of the project will be deposited with the County Record Office in Carlisle.
- 2.4.2 The Arts and Humanities Data Service (AHDS) online database *Online Access to index of Archaeological Investigations* (OASIS) will be completed as part of the archiving phase of the project.

3. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

3.1 INTRODUCTION

- 3.1.1 In total, seven sites were identified during the initial desk-based assessment (OA North 2009), and the preparation of the subsequent archaeological statement (OA North 2010), that might have been affected by works associated with the revised pipeline route. They included sites dating from the medieval period and linked with the Abbey of Holm Cultram. These sites were the remains of St Mary's, the Abbey Church, a moat, Holm Abbey Almshouse, a hospital, a post-medieval building, and a row of post-medieval cottages that are no longer extant. The proposed pipeline also crossed the line of the former Carlisle to Silloth railway, which opened in 1856 with a station in Abbeytown, but was dismantled in the twentieth century.
- 3.1.2 St Mary's Abbey, Holm Cultram, is a Scheduled Monument (SM 302), and the Church of St Mary's is a Grade I Listed Building. The Abbey was founded in 1150 and was affiliated to the Cistercian House of Melrose in Scotland (OA North 2009, 9). It was a wealthy house but suffered in the border wars and was in a state of disorder for some time before its dissolution in 1538, although the church was spared and later became the parish church. The only visible feature associated with the earliest phase of the Abbey is the moat which surrounded the Abbey precinct, known as the inner moat, part of which is still visible to the north of the current St Mary's Church. The outer moat was constructed to enclose the land of Holm and Raby (*ibid*).
- 3.1.3 The original Abbey church of St Mary's is believed to have been much larger than the present church (*op cit*). The present graveyard covers the area to the north and east of the church. The field to the south shows irregularities, which suggest monastic buildings (*op cit*). It is believed a hospital for women lay outside the walls of Holm Cultram Abbey, although the exact location of this building is unknown (*ibid*). St Thomas Chapel or Bedehouse, an almshouse founded for resident Brothers, dissolved in 1538 was dependant on Holm Cultram Abbey A rental of 1649 mentions the ruined chapel of St Thomas and Bedehouse. Millgrove House was constructed in 1664 200 yards to the south of St Mary's Church and is a Grade II* Listed Building. The row of cottages was shown on an undated map titled "A Survey of the Demesne Lands in and about Abbeytown", which was possibly produced during the late eighteenth century. The three most northerly cottages survived until the late nineteenth century and were shown on the Ordnance Survey First Edition map of 1863, but had been demolished by the publication of the Ordnance Survey third Edition map of 1900.

4. RESULTS

4.1 WATCHING BRIEF

- 4.1.1 **Introduction:** the watching brief was undertaken during all topsoil stripping along the revised route of the pipeline easement (Fig 2). The watching brief continued during the excavation of the pipe trench, which measured approximately 5m deep and 0.5m wide. The pipeline route occupied grassed fields to the east and north-east of Abbeytown (Plate 1). The work was undertaken by 360° mechanical excavators and mini excavators, which were not under the direction of the attendant archaeologist. The watching brief occurred during June and July 2011.



Plate 1: The grassed landscape to the east of Abbeytown through which the pipeline was constructed

- 4.1.2 **Results:** the topsoil varied between approximately 0.2m and 0.4m thick and overlay a mid-grey and orange deposit of natural clay. The underlying natural was only occasionally exposed in small patches and a skim of topsoil remained across most of the stripped areas meaning that an intensive examination of a clean natural horizon was precluded (Plate 2).



Plate 2: A portion of the pipeline easement following the removal of topsoil

- 4.1.3 A linear bank was observed within the path of the easement to the east of St Mary's Church. The bank measured approximately 7-8m wide and 0.7m high and was aligned south-east/north-west (Plate 3; Fig 2). When the topsoil was removed in this area there was no clear indication of a discrete feature and only a slight rise in the level of the topsoil was observable.



Plate 3: A linear bank observed running south-east/north-west to the east of St Mary's Church

- 4.1.4 The pipeline route ran to the west of the dismantled Kirtlebridge, Annan, and Brayton Branch Railway (NMR 1674), which remains as a raised linear embankment (Plate 4), but no associated features were encountered. The pipeline route also crossed the course of the former Carlisle and Silloth Branch Railway, which was included as Gazetter Site 15 in the preceding archaeological desk-based assessment (OA North 2009). The course of the railway in this area was not indicated by visible earthworks and no associated features were identified following the removal of the topsoil. With the

exception of the raised bank (Plate 3), no features of archaeological significance were observed throughout the duration of the watching brief.



Plate 4: The raised linear embankment of the former Kirtlebridge, Annan, and Brayton Branch Railway

5. DISCUSSION

5.1 INTRODUCTION

5.1.1 As the watching brief was undertaken in association with stripping of topsoil that did not produce a clean exposure of the underlying natural horizon, it was not possible to confidently ascertain the presence or absence of sub-surface features that might have cut the natural deposits. However, no artefacts or sub-surface features were observed throughout the course of the works.

5.2 CONCLUSION

5.2.1 The only feature of possible archaeological interest that was observed within the pipeline easement comprised a raised linear bank that was aligned south-east/north-west and lay to the east of St Mary's Church (Plate 3). This feature was also visible on aerial photographs (Plates 5 and 6) as a slightly irregular linear bank that was visible running from the western side of the former Kirtlebridge, Annan, and Brayton Branch Railway and ran westwards to the boundary of the scheduled area associated with St Mary's Abbey, Holm Cultram (SM 302). A continuation of the bank appeared to lead south-west from the boundary of the scheduled area.



Plate 5: An aerial view of the linear bank lying to the north of the crooked Stank Beck

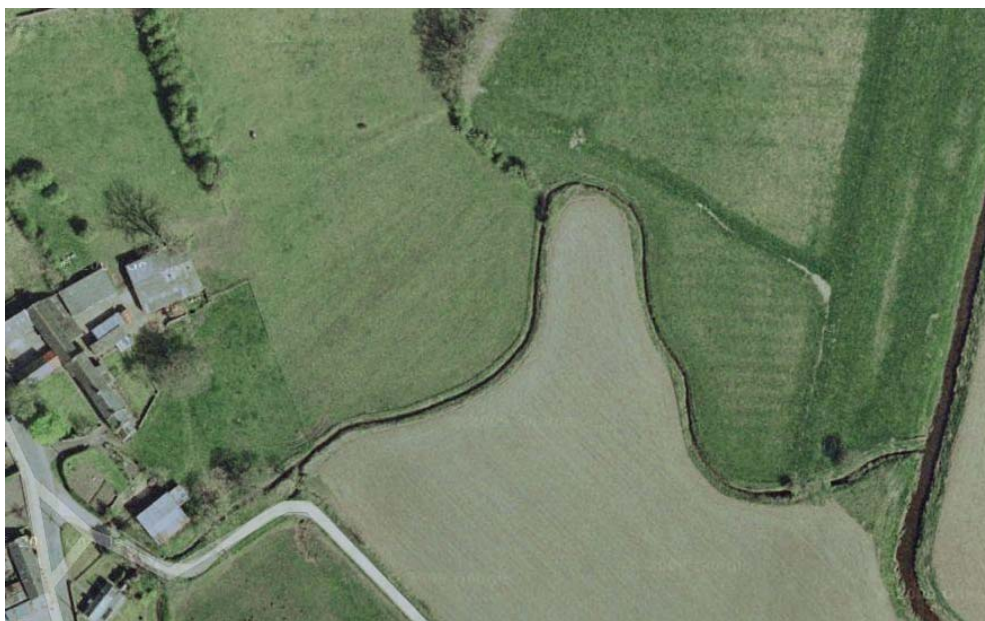


Plate 6: A second aerial image of the linear bank lying to the north of Stank Beck

5.2.2 As the aerial photographs show the eastern end of the bank stopping abruptly at the former railway embankment, with no indication that it turned at this point, it appears likely that the feature was truncated by the railway and, therefore, pre-dates the establishment of the line in 1866-9 (NMR 1674). There were no field boundaries, or other corresponding features, shown in this area on the Ordnance Survey (OS) maps that were published between 1866 and the present day and it is, therefore, possible that the bank had become obsolete by the mid nineteenth century. The bank is of unknown function or date and might have been associated with activity occurring within the scheduled area (SM 302), as the westward extension of the linear passed into this area. However, in the absence of further study, it can not be ascertained whether this activity was contemporary with, or associated with, St Mary's Abbey.

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7. ILLUSTRATIONS

7.1 LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Site location map

Figure 2: Detailed plan of the watching brief area

7.2 LIST OF PLATES

Plate 1: The grassed landscape to the east of Abbeytown through which the pipeline was established

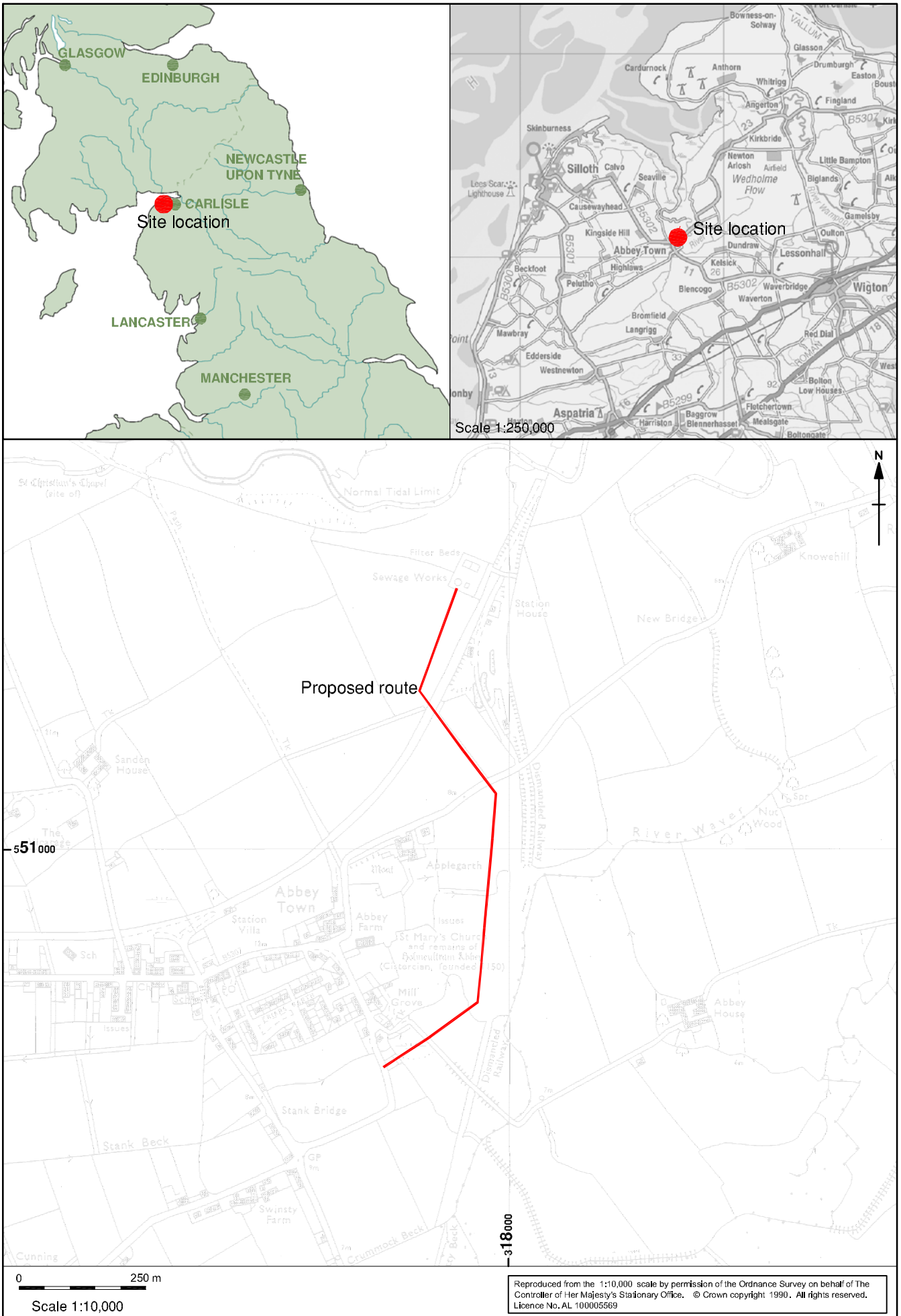
Plate 2: A portion of the pipeline easement following the removal of topsoil

Plate 3: A linear bank observed running south-east/north-west to the east of St Mary's Church

Plate 4: The raised linear embankment of the former Kirtlebridge, Annan, and Brayton Branch Railway

Plate 5: An aerial view of the linear bank lying to the north of the crooked Stank Beck

Plate 6: A second aerial image of the linear bank lying to the north of Stank Beck



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Figure 1: Site Location

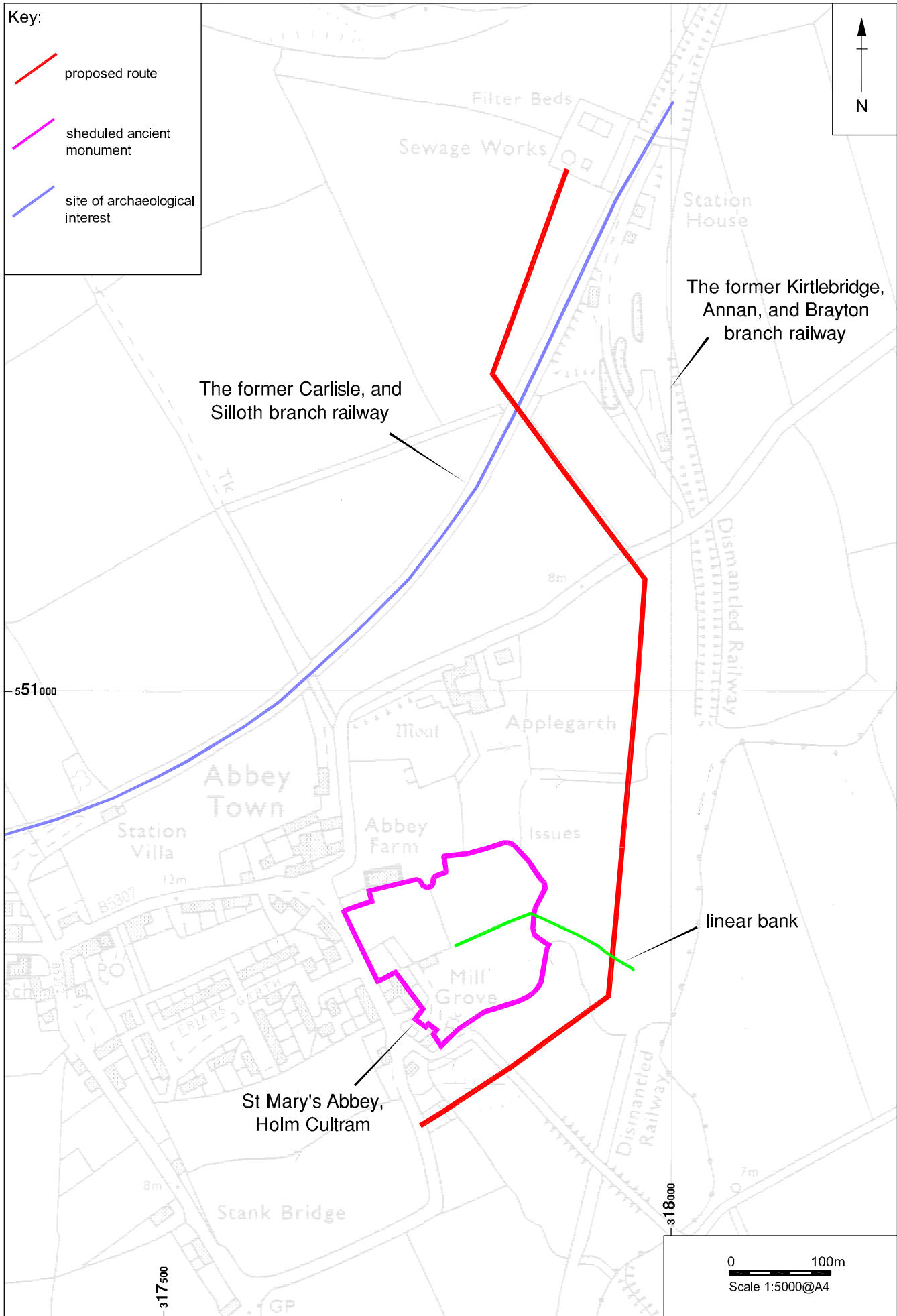


Figure 2: Detailed plan of the watching brief area