



DIDSBURY FLOOD STORAGE BASIN, GREATER MANCHESTER

Archaeological Watching Brief



Oxford Archaeology North

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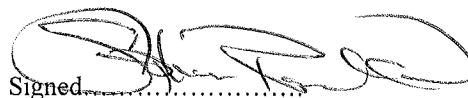
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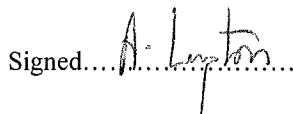
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Prepared by: Marc Storey
Position: Project Officer
Date: September 2010

Checked by: Stephen Rowland
Position: Project Manager
Date: September 2010

Approved by: Alan Lupton
Position: Operations Manager
Date: September 2010

Signed.....

Signed.....

Oxford Archaeology North

Mill 3
Moor Lane Mills
Lancaster
LA1 1GF
t: (0044) 01524 541000

© Oxford Archaeology Ltd (2010)

Janus House
Osney Mead
Oxford
OX2 0EA
t: (0044) 01865 263800
f: (0044) 01865 793496

w: www.oxfordarch.co.uk
e: info@oxfordarch.co.uk

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SUMMARY

The Environment Agency commissioned Oxford Archaeology North to undertake an archaeological watching brief during site investigative (SI) works in preparation for possible improvements to the flood defences within and around Didsbury, Greater Manchester (NGR SJ 8415 9074). The SI works, undertaken between 16th and 17th March 2010 at various locations between the Didsbury Allotment Gardens and Fletcher Moss Park, comprised the hand excavation of six inspection pits, followed by the mechanical extraction of soil cores, and five hand-excavated test pits dug to discern the location of a known high-pressure natural gas pipeline and other services. It was hoped that the watching brief of the SI works would help to define the potential for the preservation of any archaeological features in the area.

The groundworks revealed demolition deposits probably associated with a former brick-built building along Stenner Lane and sediments likely to be associated with a palaeochannel of the River Mersey and adjoining gravel terraces. Rivers have been foci for human activity since the prehistoric period and it is possible that significant archaeological horizons might also be preserved at depth below alluvial layers. As such, monitoring further intrusive groundworks associated with the development may be of value, potentially discovering the route of the palaeochannel, as would the systematic sampling of any encountered archaeological deposits for palaeoenvironmental remains and scientific dating.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

OA North would like to thank Mark Latimer, Jo Green and Philip Catherall of the Environment Agency for commissioning the project, and for their provision of information and advice. OA North is also grateful to the site investigation team from Ian Farmer Associates.

The watching brief was undertaken by Marc Storey, who also produced the drawings and compiled the report. The report was edited by Stephen Rowland, who managed the project.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE PROJECT

- 1.1.1 In 2009, the Environment Agency (EA) implemented a series of site investigation (SI) works into possible improvements to the flood defences within and around Didsbury, Greater Manchester (NGR SJ 8415 9074; Fig 1). The area of proposed improvement is located within an area of archaeological potential and, consequently, the EA Archaeologist requested that an archaeological watching brief be maintained during any ground-disturbance activities. The SI works, undertaken between the Didsbury Allotment Gardens, adjacent parts of the Simon Playing Field and Fletcher Moss Park, and also within a derelict yard north of Stenner Lane, comprised the excavation of six hand-excavated inspection pits (WS201-7), followed by the drilling of percussion boreholes. In accordance with the request from the EA, all of the pits were excavated in the presence of Oxford Archaeology North (OA North) between 16th and 17th March 2010. Given the low impact and limited capacity for interpretation of archaeological deposits associated with the actual boreholes, there was no requirement for archaeological monitoring of that element of the investigation. In addition, five hand-excavated test pits (HP201-203, 205, 207) were dug to ascertain the location and course of a buried high-pressure gas pipeline and other services.

1.2 SITE LOCATION, TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY

- 1.2.1 Didsbury is situated to the south of the City of Manchester (Fig 1), on the banks of the River Mersey. The investigation site was located between the carpark immediately south of the Allotment Gardens and the northern extent of Fletcher Moss Park, as bounded by Stenner Lane. Immediately to the south of the area is the River Mersey, which is crossed by Ford Lane.
- 1.2.2 The topography of the area forms part of a low-lying river flood plain with a rise to the north. This rise is curved and indicates the original course of the River Mersey. The solid geology is made up almost entirely of Permian and Triassic undifferentiated sandstones, including Bunter and Keuper formations, and the superficial geology is comprised of glacial till and gravels (EA 2009). A linear earthwork, which may represent the fossil bank of a palaeochannel or river terrace, was observed in Fletcher Moss Park at WS205-206.

1.3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL POTENTIAL

- 1.3.1 Didsbury was originally a small agricultural hamlet within the sub-manor of Withington. The earliest recorded reference is provided by the granting of land for the building of a chapel in 1235. This became the parochial church of St Oswald, later changing its name to St James in 1855 (Farrer and Brownbill 1911). Close to this on Stenner Lane, which runs approximately east/west through the proposed improvement area, was a spring or well that, through its provision of easily accessible water, enabled the hamlet to grow over the successive centuries (manchester.gov.uk).

- 1.3.2 Didsbury is traversed by Ford Lane which crosses the Mersey at one of its lowest points in the area and, hence, is thought to have been used as a 'saltway' by traders from Cheshire. This route is also said to have been used by Bonnie Prince Charlie in 1745 (Farrer and Brownbill 1911).
- 1.3.3 Recent archaeological investigations at Didsbury include a watching brief undertaken during the excavation of eleven window samples (OA North 2009). These samples revealed evidence for a palaeochannel of the River Mersey and have produced organic material deposited at a considerable depth, between 2m to at least 5.9m below ground level. The deposits observed, and their content of wood and herbaceous plant stem, probably accumulated in a low-energy backwater channel (*ibid*).

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 WATCHING BRIEF

- 2.1.1 The watching brief adhered to the OA North standard methodology presented in the project design (*Appendix 1*), which is consistent with the standards of the Institute for Archaeologists (IfA) and generally accepted best practice. The groundworks were conducted under constant archaeological supervision, and comprised the hand excavation of six inspection pits (WS201-207), followed by coring (Plates 1-3). The locations of the inspection pits are shown on Figure 2.
- 2.1.2 A further eight hand-excavated test pits were proposed (HP201-208). However, because of constraints regarding the excavation of three test pits adjacent to standing structures (a stone-built gated entrance at Stenner Lane and the Rugby Club at Simon Playing Field), only five were excavated (HP201-203, 205, 207). Of these, three (HP201-203) were excavated to confirm the location of a high-pressure gas pipeline.
- 2.1.3 The programme of field observation recorded accurately the location, extent and character of any surviving archaeological features and/or deposits exposed during the course of the excavation. The work comprised the systematic examination of all subsoil horizons exposed in the test pits, and the recording of all archaeological features and horizons, and any artefacts, identified during observation.
- 2.1.4 A daily record of the nature, extent, and depths of groundworks was maintained throughout the duration of the project. All archaeological contexts were recorded on OA North's *pro-forma* sheets, using a system based on that of the English Heritage Centre for Archaeology. A monochrome and colour slide photographic record was maintained throughout, with digital photographs taken for illustrative purposes.

2.2 ARCHIVE

- 2.2.1 A full archive has been compiled in accordance with current IfA and English Heritage guidelines (EH 1991). The paper and digital archive will be submitted to the County Record Office on completion of the project. Copies of the report will also be submitted to the Greater Manchester Historic Environment Record. The Arts and Humanities Data Service (AHDS) online database *Online Access index of Archaeological Investigations* (OASIS) will be completed as part of the archiving phase of the project.

3. RESULTS

3.1 WATCHING BRIEF

- 3.1.1 With the exception of WS203-204, 206 and 207, most hand-excavated test pits encountered made ground deposits. HP201 was excavated to a depth of 1.3m through tarmac, hardcore and loosely packed backfill (primarily comprising brick and wood) above the high-pressure gas pipeline. Similarly, HP202 and HP203, also positioned above the gas pipeline, encountered reinstated soils beneath topsoil. Beneath a 0.5m-thick layer of topsoil within Fletcher Moss Park, HP205 and 207 also encountered made ground. This may have related either to road works on Stenner Lane, immediately adjacent, or to landscaping within the public park. WS201-202 were located on the existing flood defences and, despite being excavated through a large amount of made-up ground in the high bund bordering the river, and the subsequent percussion boreholes were likely to have sampled the natural soils sealed beneath. Monitored excavations at WS203 and 204, positioned by the present river bank, revealed a layer of sandy loam topsoil, on average 0.5m thick, above a silty clay subsoil, the lower interface of which was not reached during any hand excavation.
- 3.1.2 During the course of the watching brief, various earthworks were observed in both the area identified as the 'Playing Field', south of Stenner Lane, and Fletcher Moss Park. A series of shallow and dispersed ridge and furrow, aligned roughly north to south, occupy an area at the east of the Playing Field. Historic maps confirm that this area was once indeed farmland.
- 3.1.3 A narrow linear earthwork (NGR SJ 84550 90405), aligned north-west to south-east, roughly parallel to the modern course of the River Mersey, was observed in Fletcher Moss Park. WS206 was positioned immediately above this earthwork and subsequent sampling revealed a layer of river-worn gravels at a depth of 2.5m. The window sample was relocated approximately 20m west of this location (WS207), and gravels were encountered at a depth of 4m. This would suggest a buried river terrace and the topography of the area, gradually sloping upwards west to east, would confirm that this might represent the eastern limit of the river flood plain.

3.2 FINDS

- 3.2.1 Other than a layer of demolition debris in WS205, approximately 0.15m thick and comprising red brick and stone rubble (Plate 4), no finds were observed in any of the monitored excavations.

4. CONCLUSIONS

4.1 DISCUSSION

- 4.1.1 The excavation of the inspection pits WS206-207 revealed evidence for a gravel terrace, possibly associated with a palaeochannel of the River Mersey. The borehole at WS206 encountered gravels at a depth of 2.5m and was soon after abandoned. WS207 similarly encountered gravels, though at a depth of 4m, suggesting a sloping gravel deposit, likely that of a terrace. Given their proximity to the modern course of the River Mersey, samples taken from cores WS201-202 may yield sediments suitable for further environmental assessment. Together, assessment of those samples from the recent window samples and those taken in March 2009 may yield considerable information regarding the palaeoenvironment.
- 4.1.2 The abundance of demolition material in WS205, and the presence of an extant out building, would suggest that a house once occupied this yard. Given the size of the yard (approximately 20 x 12m) and the condition of the extant adjacent cottages along Stenner Lane, this property may have been sizeable and of moderately high status. The yard is shown as vacant on the 1893-1894 1:2500 Ordnance Survey maps), confirming that any demolition occurred before this time.

4.2 IMPACT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.2.1 The monitored groundworks across the site did not appear to disturb any archaeological features, but the relatively restrictive size of the investigations may have also hindered clear identification of such features. Any deposits that are revealed by future investigation or development, and that are thought to be of archaeological potential, should be systematically sampled for environmental remains, which could also be subjected to scientific dating. In addition, any further works in the yard adjacent to the Stenner Lane cottages should be undertaken in association with a programme of archaeological works due to the potential of encountering remains associated with the early modern settlement of this area of Didsbury.

5. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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5.2 SECONDARY SOURCES

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6. ILLUSTRATIONS

6.1 FIGURES

Figure 1: Site location

Figure 2: Plan of site showing location of inspection pits and boreholes.

6.2 PLATES

Plate 1: General working shot, HP203 with WS201 in background

Plate 2: General working shot at WS206, above suspected river gravels

Plate 3: General working shot at WS207

Plate 4: View of WS107, note demolition rubble

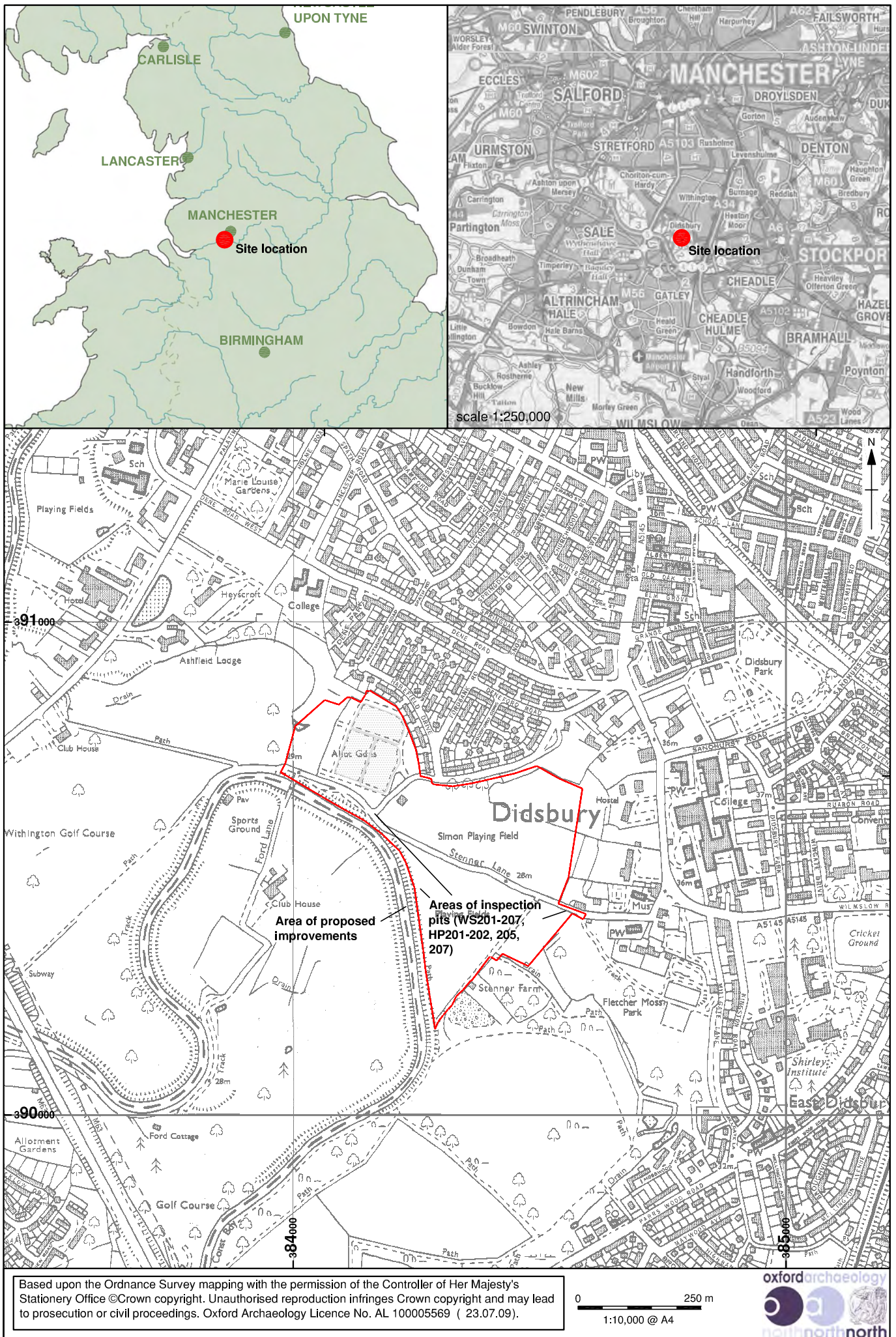


Figure 1: Site location

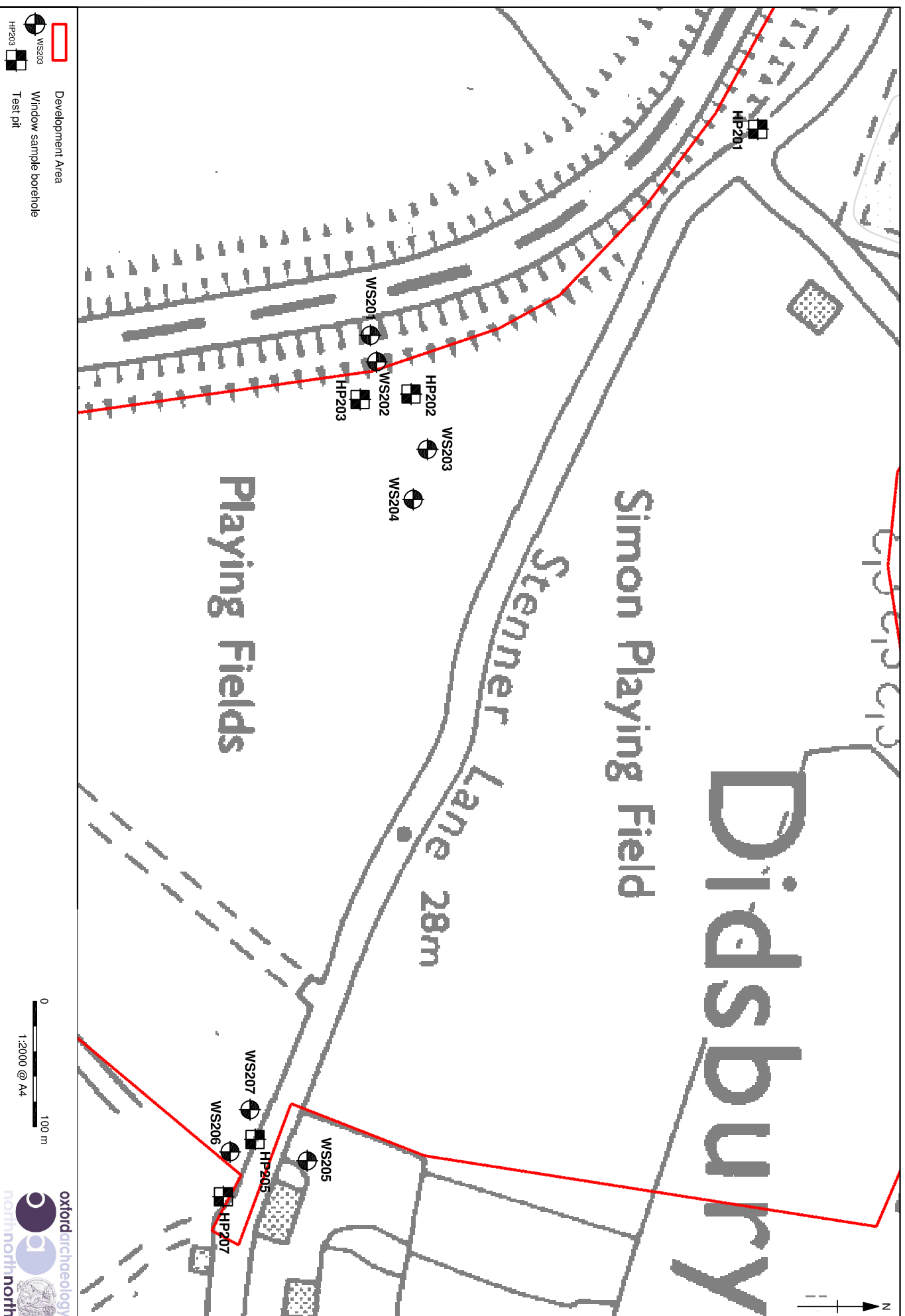


Figure 2: Plan of site showing location of hand inspection pits and boreholes



Plate 1: General working shot, HP203 with WS201 in background



Plate 2: General working shot at WS206, above suspected river gravels



Plate 3: General working shot at WS207



Plate 4: View of WS207, note demolition rubble

APPENDIX 1: PROJECT DESIGN

SITE INVESTIGATION WORKS AT DIDSBURY, GREATER MANCHESTER

Watching Brief Project Design



Oxford Archaeology North

March 2010

The Environment Agency

OA North Reference No:
NGR: SJ 8415 9074

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Project Background

- 1.1.1 The Environment Agency (hereafter ‘the Client’), has requested that Oxford Archaeology North (OA North) submit proposals for a programme of archaeological work to be undertaken during a geotechnical investigation to the south of Didsbury, Greater Manchester (NGR SJ 8415 9074). The overall programme of groundworks, which aims to inform proposals for a flood alleviation scheme (FAS), will comprise eight hand-dug test pits (HP201-8) and six windowless borehole samples (WS201-206) located at various strategic points around Stenner Lane and the bank of the Mersey (see figures 1-3). HP201 will be located within the carpark on Ford Lane, and will be placed to identify the location of a high pressure gas main. HP202-3, excavated on the bank of the Mersey, will again seek to identify the location of the high pressure gas main. HP204-7 lie at the eastern end of Stenner Lane; HP204 and HP206 will be excavated through the existing road surface in order to investigate existing services whilst HP205 and HP207 will be dug into the playing field. HP208 will be excavated against the wall of the Didsbury Rugby Club, in order to investigate the foundations of that building.
- 1.1.2 In order to mitigate the impact of the SI works on the cultural heritage resource, and to provide data that may help to inform future decisions, the Environment Agency Archaeological Advisor requested that an archaeological watching brief be conducted during the excavation of the test pits. Although the recording of sediments exposed during the boreholing is not considered a primary objective of the archaeological watching brief, data from such sources will be recorded where timetabling permits. The following document represents a project design to carry out the above programme of work and has been prepared in accordance with standard IfA and EH requirements.

1.2 Geographical and Archaeological Background

- 1.2.1 The investigation site lies within a playing field between the banks of the meandering Mersey and the southern edge of Didsbury. The topography of the area forms part of a low-lying river flood plain with a rise to the north. This rise is curved and indicates the original course of the river Mersey. The solid geology is made up almost entirely of Permian and Triassic undifferentiated sandstones, including Bunter and Keuper formations, and the superficial geology is comprised of glacial till and gravels (EA 2009).
- 1.2.2 Didsbury was originally a small agricultural hamlet within the sub-manor of Withington. The earliest recorded reference is provided by the granting of land for the building of a chapel in 1235. This became the parochial church of St Oswald, later changing its name to St James in 1855 (Farrer and Brownbill 1911). Close to this on Stenner Lane, which runs approximately east/west through the proposed improvement area, was a spring or well that, through its provision of easily accessible water, enabled the hamlet to grow over the successive centuries (manchester.gov.uk). Didsbury is traversed by Ford Lane which crosses the Mersey at one of its lowest points in the area and, hence, is thought to have been used as a ‘saltway’ by traders from Cheshire. This route is also said to have been used by Bonnie Prince Charlie in 1745 (Farrer and Brownbill 1911).

1.3 Oxford Archaeology North

- 1.3.1 OA North has considerable experience of excavation of sites of all periods, having undertaken a great number of small and large scale projects throughout Northern England during the past 25 years. Evaluations, desk-based assessments, watching briefs and excavations have taken place within the planning process, to fulfil the requirements of clients and planning authorities, to very rigorous timetables. OA North has the professional expertise and resources to undertake the project detailed below to a high level of quality and efficiency. OA North is

an Institute of Field Archaeologists (IFA) registered organisation, registration number 17, and all its members of staff operate subject to the IFA Code of Conduct.

2. OBJECTIVES

2.1 The following programme has been designed to identify and record any archaeological deposits affected by the proposed SI works, in order that they can be preserved by record. To this end, the following programme has been designed, in accordance with EH and IFA standards, to provide a watching brief. The required stages to achieve these ends are as follows:

2.2 *Archaeological Watching Brief*

To undertake a programme of observation and recording during any ground disturbance to determine the presence, quality, extent and importance of any archaeological remains on the site.

2.3 *Report and Archive*

A report will be produced for the Client within eight weeks of completion of the fieldwork. A site archive will be produced to English Heritage guidelines (1991) and in accordance with the *Guidelines for the Preparation of Excavation Archives for Long Term Storage* (UKIC 1990).

3. METHOD STATEMENT

3.1 WATCHING BRIEF

- 3.1.1 **Methodology:** a programme of field observation will accurately record the location, extent, and character of any surviving archaeological features and/or deposits within the whole area of the proposed ground disturbance. This work will comprise observation during all excavations for the test pits, the systematic examination of any subsoil horizons exposed during the course of the groundworks, and the accurate recording of all archaeological features and horizons, and any artefacts, identified during observation.
- 3.1.2 Putative archaeological features and/or deposits identified during the observation of groundworks, together with the immediate vicinity of any such features, will be cleaned by hand, using either hoes, shovel scraping, and/or trowels depending on the subsoil conditions and, where appropriate, sections will be studied and drawn. Any such features will be sample excavated (ie. selected pits and postholes will normally only be half-sectioned, linear features will be subject to no more than a 10% sample, and extensive layers will, where possible, be sampled by partial rather than complete removal).
- 3.1.3 During this phase of work, recording will comprise a full description and preliminary classification of features or materials revealed, and their accurate location (either on plan and/or section, and as grid co-ordinates where appropriate). Features will be planned accurately at appropriate scales and annotated on to a large-scale plan provided by the Client, which will also show the location and extent of the ground disturbance. Sections to a suitable scale will be drawn as and where appropriate. An indexed photographic record utilising monochrome print and colour digital imaging will be undertaken simultaneously.
- 3.1.4 **Treatment of finds:** all finds will be exposed, lifted, cleaned, conserved, marked, bagged and boxed in accordance with the United Kingdom Institute for Conservation (UKIC) *First Aid For Finds*, 1998 (new edition) and the recipient museum's guidelines.
- 3.1.5 **Treasure:** any gold and silver artefacts recovered during the course of the excavation will be removed to a safe place and reported to the local Coroner according to the procedures relating

to the Treasure Act, 1996. Where removal cannot take place on the same working day as discovery, suitable security will be employed to protect the finds from theft.

- 3.1.6 All identified finds and artefacts will be retained, although certain classes of building material can sometimes be discarded after recording if an appropriate sample is retained on advice from the recipient museum's archive curator.
- 3.1.7 **Human Remains:** any human remains uncovered will be left *in situ*, covered and protected. No further investigation will continue beyond that required to establish the date and character of the burial. CCCHES and the local Coroner will be informed immediately. If removal is essential, the exhumation of any funerary remains will require the provision of a Home Office license, under section 25 of the Burial Act of 1857. The removal of human remains will be carried out with due care and sensitivity under the environmental health regulations.
- 3.1.8 **Contingency plan:** in the event of significant archaeological features being encountered during the watching brief, discussions will take place with the Planning Archaeologist or his representative, as to the extent of further works to be carried out. All further works would be subject to a variation to this project design. In the event of environmental/organic deposits being present on site, it would be necessary to discuss and agree a programme of palaeoenvironmental sampling and or dating with the Planning Archaeologist.

3.2 Report and Archive

- 3.2.1 **Report:** bound, unbound and digital copies of a written synthetic report will be submitted to the Client, and further copies submitted to Greater Manchester HER within eight weeks of completion. Interim statements can be issued sooner, if required. The report will include:
- a front cover to include the planning application number and the NGR;
 - a site location plan, related to the national grid;
 - the dates on which the fieldwork was undertaken;
 - a concise, non-technical summary of the results;
 - a description of the methodology employed, work undertaken and results obtained;
 - plans and sections at an appropriate scale, showing the location of features;
 - other illustrations and photographic plates showing, as appropriate, features of interest or to demonstrate the absence of archaeological features;
 - a description of any environmental, finds, or other specialist work undertaken, and the results obtained;
 - an appropriate discussion the data generated and a consideration of its significance and implications for further development of the site;
 - the report will also include a complete bibliography of sources from which data has been derived;
 - a copy of this project design in the appendices, and indications of any agreed departure from that design.
- 3.2.2 **Archive:** 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 Archaeological Projects, 2nd edition, 1991). The project archive represents the collation and indexing of all the data and material gathered during the course of the

project. It will include summary processing and analysis of all features, finds, or palaeoenvironmental data recovered during fieldwork, which will be catalogued by context. All artefacts will be processed to MAP2 standards and will be assessed by our in-house finds specialists.

- 3.2.3 The deposition of a properly ordered and indexed project archive in an appropriate repository is considered an essential and integral element of all archaeological projects by the IfA in that organisation's code of conduct. OA North conforms to best practice in the preparation of project archives for long-term storage. This archive will be provided in the English Heritage Centre for Archaeology format and a synthesis will be submitted to the local HER (the index to the archive and a copy of the report). OA North practice is to deposit the original record archive of projects with the County Record Office. The material archive (artefacts and ecofacts) will be deposited with an appropriate museum following agreement with the client.
- 3.2.4 The Arts and Humanities Data Service (AHDS) online database project Online Access to index of Archaeological Investigations (OASIS) will be completed as part of the archiving phase of the project.
- 3.2.5 **Confidentiality:** all internal reports to the client are designed as documents for the specific use of the client, for the particular purpose as defined in the project brief and project design, and should be treated as such. They are not suitable for publication as academic documents or otherwise without amendment or revision. Any requirement to revise or reorder the material for submission or presentation to third parties beyond the project brief and project design, or for any other explicit purpose, can be fulfilled, but will require separate discussion and funding.

4. HEALTH AND SAFETY

- 4.1 OA North provides a Health and Safety Risk Assessment for all projects and maintains a Unit Safety policy. All site procedures are in accordance with the guidance set out in the Health and Safety Manual compiled by the Standing Conference of Archaeological Unit Managers (1997).

5. WORK TIMETABLE

- 5.1 **Archaeological Watching Brief:** the duration of this element is dependent upon the duration of any ground disturbing activities on the site.
- 5.2 **Report and Archive:** an evaluation report will be submitted within eight weeks of the completion of the fieldwork. However, should an interim statement be required this can be issued within two weeks but instruction must be received from the client prior to completion of the fieldwork.

6. PROJECT MONITORING

- 6.1 **Access:** it is assumed that all arrangements for site access will have been made by the client, or by the SI contractor.
- 6.2 Whilst the work is undertaken for the client, the EA Archaeological Advisor and the Greater Manchester County Archaeologist will be kept fully informed of the work and its results, and will be notified in advance of the commencement of the fieldwork. Any proposed changes to the project design will be agreed consultation with the client, with the EA Archaeological Advisor and the GM County Archaeologist.

7. STAFFING PROPOSALS

- 7.1 The project will be under the direct management of **Stephen Rowland** (OA North project manager) to whom all correspondence should be addressed.
- 7.2 All elements of the archaeological investigation will be supervised by an OA North Project Officer or Supervisor experienced in this type of project. Due to scheduling requirements it is not possible to provide these details at the present time. All OA North Project Officers and Supervisors are experienced field archaeologists capable of carrying out the proposed projects.
- 7.3 Assessment of any finds from the watching brief will be undertaken under the auspices of OA North's in-house finds specialist **Christine Howard-Davis BA MIFA** (OA North Finds Manager). Christine has extensive knowledge of all finds of all periods from archaeological sites in northern England. However, she has specialist knowledge regarding glass, metalwork, and leather, the recording and management of waterlogged wood, and most aspects of wetland and environmental archaeology.
- 7.4 Assessment of any palaeoenvironmental samples which may be taken will be undertaken by **Elizabeth Huckerby MSc** (OA North Palaeoenvironmental Manager). Elizabeth has extensive knowledge of the palaeoecology of the North West through her work on the English Heritage-funded North West Wetlands Survey. Assessment of any faunal material will be undertaken by **Andrew Bates MSc** (OA North Project Officer).

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APPENDIX 2: SUMMARY CONTEXT LIST

WS	Deposit	Description	Thickness (m)
110	Topsoil	Dark reddish-brown sandy loam	0.25-0.6
111	Subsoil	Mid orange/brown	<0.5
112	Demolition (HP201)	Dark brown/grey sandy silt	1.3
113	Made ground (HP205, 207)	Dark orange/brown silty clay with very humic content	<0.95
114	Demolition	Dark brown clay silt, largely composed of red brick fragments, stone rubble and mortar	0.15