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Parsons Brinckerhoff Infrastructure Ltd

The A428 Caxton Common to Hardwick Road Improvement Scheme, Cambridgeshire

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

NGR TL 297607 to TL 375 597

October 2001

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Prepared by: A. Simmonds Date: 8th October 2001
Checked by: J Hiller Date: 15th October 2001
Approved by: R. Hillier Date: ASSISTANT DIRECTOR 19/10/2001

October 2001

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ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

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SUMMARY

During September 2001 the Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) undertook a watching brief during the excavation by contractors of a series of geotechnical test pits along a section of the A428 west of Cambridge (TL 297 607 to TL375 597). The test pits were excavated as part of investigations assessing local ground conditions in advance of road improvements. The majority of the test pits revealed a soil sequence comprising natural clay sealed beneath a probable ploughsoil, in turn capped by the present ploughsoil. The only archaeological feature found was a probable ditch, for which no date was established. No associated features were identified in any of the other test pits. Modern building material was observed but not recovered from some of the test pits.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Location and scope of work

1.1.1 In September 2001 a scheme of ground investigation was undertaken in advance of proposed improvements to the A428 between Caxton Common and Hardwick, Cambridgeshire (TL 297 607 to TL375 597). These ground investigations consisted of a series of geo-technical test pits and bore-holes along the length of the proposed improvement, excluding part of the central section around the junction with the Cambourne development area (Figs 1-9).

1.1.2 As the road lies within an area of archaeological potential, the Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) were commissioned to carry out an archaeological watching brief by Parsons Brinckerhoff Infrastructure Ltd on behalf of their clients, the Highways Agency.

1.1.3 The watching brief was preceded by a two-part Desk-based Assessment concerning the impact of the Road Improvement (OAU 1998, 1999).

1.2 Geology and topography

1.2.1 The geology of the study area consists almost exclusively of a thick blanket of Boulder Clay that overlies the clays and shale of the Kimmeridge clays and the Corallian beds. Only on the very edge of the study area, around Knapwell and Caxton, do these deposits come to the surface.

1.2.2 The present A428 follows a broad east-west clay ridge/plateau that extends from St Neots to the west to Cambridge. The land immediately north and south, which also occupies this ridge, is generally flat with long to medium range views in both directions. The land is primarily under arable cultivation, which has resulted in the formation of large open and featureless fields. Beyond the plateau the land falls away to both the north and south.

1.2.3 To the south lies the valley of the Bourn Brook and the villages of Caxton, Bourn, Toft and Caldecote, which are strung out along the valley. To the north the land also drops away and is characterised by a series of small ridges and shallow valleys that shelter the villages of Knapwell, Dry Drayton and Madingley.

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

1.3.1 The archaeological background to the watching brief was prepared for the Desk Based Assessment for the project (OAU, 1998, 1999) and is summarised below. The section of the A428 under consideration crosses an area of moderate archaeological interest, particularly for the later prehistoric and Roman periods.

1.3.2 There is little evidence of Mesolithic or Neolithic activity in this area. A fieldwalking survey carried out by Wessex Archaeology in 1989 failed to locate any significant concentrations of artefacts (Chowne 1989). It has been suggested that early prehistoric settlement of the Cambridgeshire area was primarily centred upon the more easily accessible and fertile areas of the river valleys, and that the heavy clay lands such as that under consideration were generally unoccupied at this time (Taylor 1977).

1.3.3 This area does however contain a number of known or probable sites of Bronze Age and Iron Age. A study of air photographs of the road corridor carried out for this scheme (OAU 1998, 1999) recorded the cropmark of a probable Bronze Age ring ditch on the line of the road at Scotland Farm, and two such features south of the proposed route at Swansley Wood Farm.

1.3.4 The immediate vicinity of the road improvements contains evidence of quite extensive Iron Age activity, suggesting that by this period the clay lands were becoming more heavily settled. Excavations at Caldecote in 1991 uncovered the site of a late Iron Age building and field system (Leith 1996), while excavation and evaluation carried out by Wessex Archaeology in the Cambourne development area has also produced evidence for settlement of this period. The air photograph survey also revealed three cropmark sites, which would appear on typological grounds to be of Iron Age, or possibly Romano-British date.

1.3.5 In a field south of the road at Caxton Common are two enclosures and a network of linear features. South of this lies an area of irregular enclosures described by the NMR as being 'probably of prehistoric date'. There is another cropmark complex of likely prehistoric date in the fields to the north of the road in the area around New Inn Farm. These cropmarks include at least two rectangular enclosures, a banjo enclosure and a number of linear features. Further evidence of Iron Age activity has been found in the form of a gold coin of this period discovered at Childerley Gate in 1854.

1.3.6 The A428 itself is generally accepted as being the line of a Roman road and at the west end of the current scheme, at Caxton Gibbet, it forms a crossroads with Ermine Street (the A1198). Such crossroad sites are common locations for small settlements.

Chance finds of Roman pottery and other artefacts have been made in the parishes of Caldecote, Caxton, Madingley and Childerley, and although these are mostly not located in any great detail, they may indicate the presence of settlements of this date. The only excavated evidence of Romano-British activity in this area comes from excavations at Caldecote, which revealed evidence of a field system. Some of the cropmarks mentioned above may also relate to the Roman period. A Roman coffin was discovered during the construction of Bourn Aerodrome in 1941, but its precise location is not known (Taylor 1984).

1.3.7 There is little archaeological evidence for Saxon or medieval settlement on the line of the road, the settlement pattern seemingly consisting of nucleated villages located to the north and south of the clay ridge. The only known site crossed by the current scheme is a moated site shown on early 19th century maps at Childerley Gate.

1.4 Acknowledgements

1.4.1 OAU is grateful to Parsons Brinckerhoff Ltd for providing plans of the road route.

2 Project Aims and Methodology

2.1 Aims

2.1.1 To identify and record the presence/absence, extent, condition, quality and date of archaeological remains in the areas affected by the proposed road alterations, to supplement the background research undertaken in the desk-based assessments.

2.1.2 In the event of exceptional archaeological remains being discovered in the course of the geo-technical exercise, then OAU would signal to all parties that such an archaeological find had been made.

2.1.3 To make available the results of the archaeological investigation.

2.2 Methodology

2.2.1 The ground investigation consisted of the excavation of 73 test pits, 2 observation pits and 32 boreholes (Figs 1-9). An additional 5 test pits, 2 observation pits and one borehole, which had formed part of the original scheme, could not be dug due to difficulty of access. The test pits were 3 m long by 0.6 m wide, varying in depth between 3 m and 4 m, while the observation pits measured 3 m by 0.9 m and were 4 m deep.

2.2.2 The pits were excavated by a JCB with a toothed bucket, monitored by an archaeological supervisor. In addition, the spoil heaps were scanned visually for finds. The boreholes were not monitored, as there was no potential for observing archaeological deposits from these operations.

2.2.3 Recording followed procedures laid down in the *OAU Fieldwork Manual* (Wilkinson, 1992). Each deposit encountered was allocated a unique context number

and recorded on a *pro forma* sheet. Sample sections were drawn of all test pits at a scale of 1:20. Each test pit was also recorded photographically in colour slide and monochrome print. Finds were retrieved and bagged by context

3 RESULTS

3.1 Description of deposits

3.1.1 The test pits have been grouped by location and the results of each group are summarised together; plans showing the location of the test pits are presented as Figs 1-9. Selected sections showing the general soil layers encountered have been drawn as Fig. 10.

3.1.2 TEST PITS TP1/2, TP1/5, TP1/6, TP1/8, TP1/10, TP1/12, TP2/1 and TP2/2: This group of test pits was located at the western end of the proposed improvements, near the junction of the A428 with the A1198 at Caxton Common. They were sited in arable fields, which had recently been ploughed. The natural boulder clay was overlain by a layer of orangey grey clay, interpreted as a former ploughsoil, dating probably to the medieval or post-medieval periods. This was truncated and sealed by the modern ploughsoil. A single flint flake was retrieved from the modern ploughsoil of test pit TP1/8, but no archaeological features were observed with which it may have been associated.

3.1.3 TEST PITS TP4/2 (Fig.10), TP4/3(Fig.10) and TP4/4 (Fig.10): TP4/2 and TP4/3 were in scrub and TP4/4 in woodland along the south side of the current line of the A428, adjacent to the Cambourne development area. They were the only test pits not located on arable fields. A probable ditch [425] was observed cutting the boulder clay at the west end of test pit TP4/2, running on an approximate north-south alignment. The full width of this feature extended outside the limits of the test pit, but it was at least 0.75 m wide and 0.6 m deep, with steep sides and a flat base. No dating evidence was recovered, but it was clearly sealed by a former undated ploughsoil (Fig.10). Apart from this ditch these test pits were archaeologically sterile, each revealing only a ploughed soil underlying a topsoil of humic clay.

3.1.4 TEST PITS TP4/7 (Fig.10), TP4/8 (Fig.10), TP4/10, TP5/1, TP5/2 and OP5/4 (Fig.10): These five test pits and an observation pit were located between Cambourne and Bourne airfield on land owned by the University of Manchester and which is currently `set-aside' fallow land. These fields had been evaluated by Wessex Archaeology as part of a ten year rolling assessment of the Cambourne development area, but the results of this survey have not yet been published. The back-filled evaluation trenches were visible within the fields. These test pits all exhibited the same sequence of deposits, the boulder clay being overlain by an orangey brown clay subsoil, probably a former ploughsoil, and modern ploughsoil. There were no archaeological features present, and no artefacts were retrieved from the excavated layers.

3.1.5 TEST PITS TP5/6 (Fig.10), TP5/7, TP5/8, TP5/9, TP5/10, TP5/11, TP5/12, TP5/13, TP5/14, TP5/19, TP5/20, TP5/21, TP5/23, TP5/24, TP5/25, TP6/2, TP6/3, TP6/4, TP6/5 and TP6/7: These test pits at were excavated at Bourn airfield, located on arable land, which had recently been ploughed. The ploughsoil contained a considerable quantity of fragments of modern building debris, mostly brick, mortar and concrete, including particularly dense concentrations indicating the former location of two modern buildings half way along the road frontage and at the north east corner of the field. No archaeology was present in any of these test pits, which all displayed a consistent sequence of boulder clay, subsoil and modern ploughsoil.

3.1.6 TEST PIT TP6/6 (Fig.10): The only test pit on land belonging to Two Pots House farm was located on a grassy headland at the southern edge of a ploughed field. The natural boulder clay was overlain by a layer of orange-brown subsoil 0.2 m thick, which was in turn overlain by the ploughsoil. No archaeology was present in this pit.

3.1.7 TEST PITS T6/8, TP6/10, TP6/14, TP6/15, TP6/17, TP6/18, TP7/1, TP7/2 and TP7/3: These test pits were in a stubble field on the Childerley Hall estate. All of these pits were archaeologically sterile, the ubiquitous boulder clay underlying a ploughed and modern ploughsoil. A medieval moated site shown on early 19th century maps as being located in this field was not encountered by any of these pits.

3.1.8 TEST PITS TP7/5, TP7/6, TP7/7, TP7/9, TP7/10, TP7/11, TP7/13, TP7/14, TP7/15, TP7/16, TP8/4, TP8/5, TP8/6, TP8/7, TP8/10 and 8/13; Toward the eastern end of the proposed road improvement, on the west side of the minor road to Dry Drayton, this group of test pits was on ploughed fields belonging to the Scotland Farm estate. The clay here was even heavier than elsewhere on the scheme, and test pits TP7/13 to TP7/16 were on a gentle south-east facing slope. The boulder clay was once again overlain by a subsoil, which was more of a yellowish grey colour than the orange-brown subsoils encountered further west. This was overlain by modern ploughsoil. No archaeological features were present and no finds were observed in the deposits excavated.

3.1.9 TEST PITS TP8/14, TP8/17, TP8/19, TP8/23, TP8/25 and TP8/26: Extending from Scotland Farm to the eastern end of the scheme, these pits were again on heavier clay soil. The natural boulder clay underlay a yellow-grey clay former ploughsoil, which was overlain by the modern ploughsoil.

3.1.10 TEST PITS TP8/11, TP8/15, TP8/20, TP8/21 and TP8/22: These test pits, all of which were located at the eastern end of the project, on the Scotland Farm estate, were dug in the absence of an archaeological monitor, the day before the watching brief began, so no results are available.

3.2 Finds

3.2.1 A single flint flake of uncertain prehistoric date was recovered together with a single sherd of post-medieval pottery. Modern bricks observed in some of the test pits were not retained.

3.3 Palaeo-environmental remains

3.3.1 Although full consideration was given to various sampling strategies, due to the absence of any suitable deposits and the tight constraints of the excavation, no environmental soil samples were taken.

4 Discussion And Conclusions

4.1.1 The results of this watching brief have generally been negative; the majority of the test pits having proved to be archaeologically sterile. The one feature discovered, a probable ditch near Cambourne, remains undated, but since it cuts the natural and its fills were overlain by a probable ploughsoil, it is clearly of some antiquity and perhaps fits within an Iron Age or Romano-British context. The soil above the natural is probably a former ploughsoil, which would be consistent with the agricultural use of this area previously noted for the Saxon, medieval and post-medieval periods.

4.1.2 The dearth of archaeological features uncovered by this exercise is not unsurprising considering the relatively small size of the pits under observation, and should not be taken wholly to imply an absence of archaeology along the full length of the road scheme.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1 BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

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APPENDIX 2 SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

Site name: A428 Caxton Common to Hardwick Road Improvement Scheme
Site code: A428 01
Grid Reference: TL 297 607 to TL375 597
Type of watching brief: Monitoring of geotechnical ground investigation test pits
Date and duration of project: September 2001, 2 weeks
Summary of results: One undated ditch, ploughsoils, one flint flake and modern pottery and bricks.
Location of archive: The archive is currently held at OAU, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with the appropriate museum in due course.

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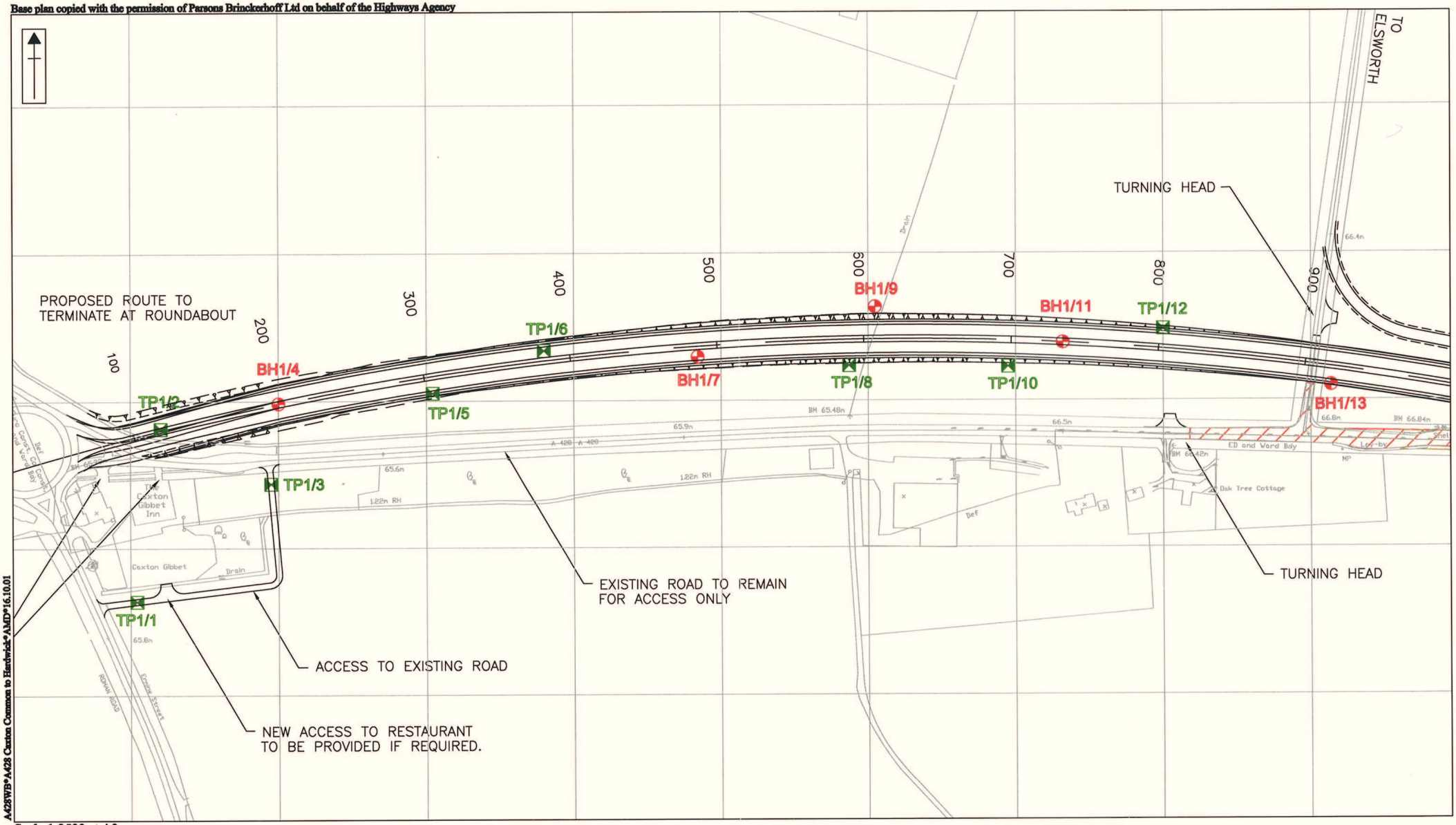

A428WB*AA28 Caxton Common to Hardwick*AMD*16.10.01

Scale 1:2500 at A3

BH Borehole location and reference

TP Test Pit location and reference

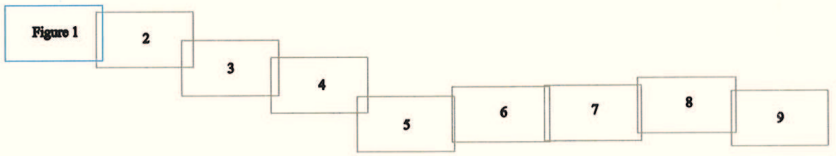

Figure 1: Test Pit Location Plan

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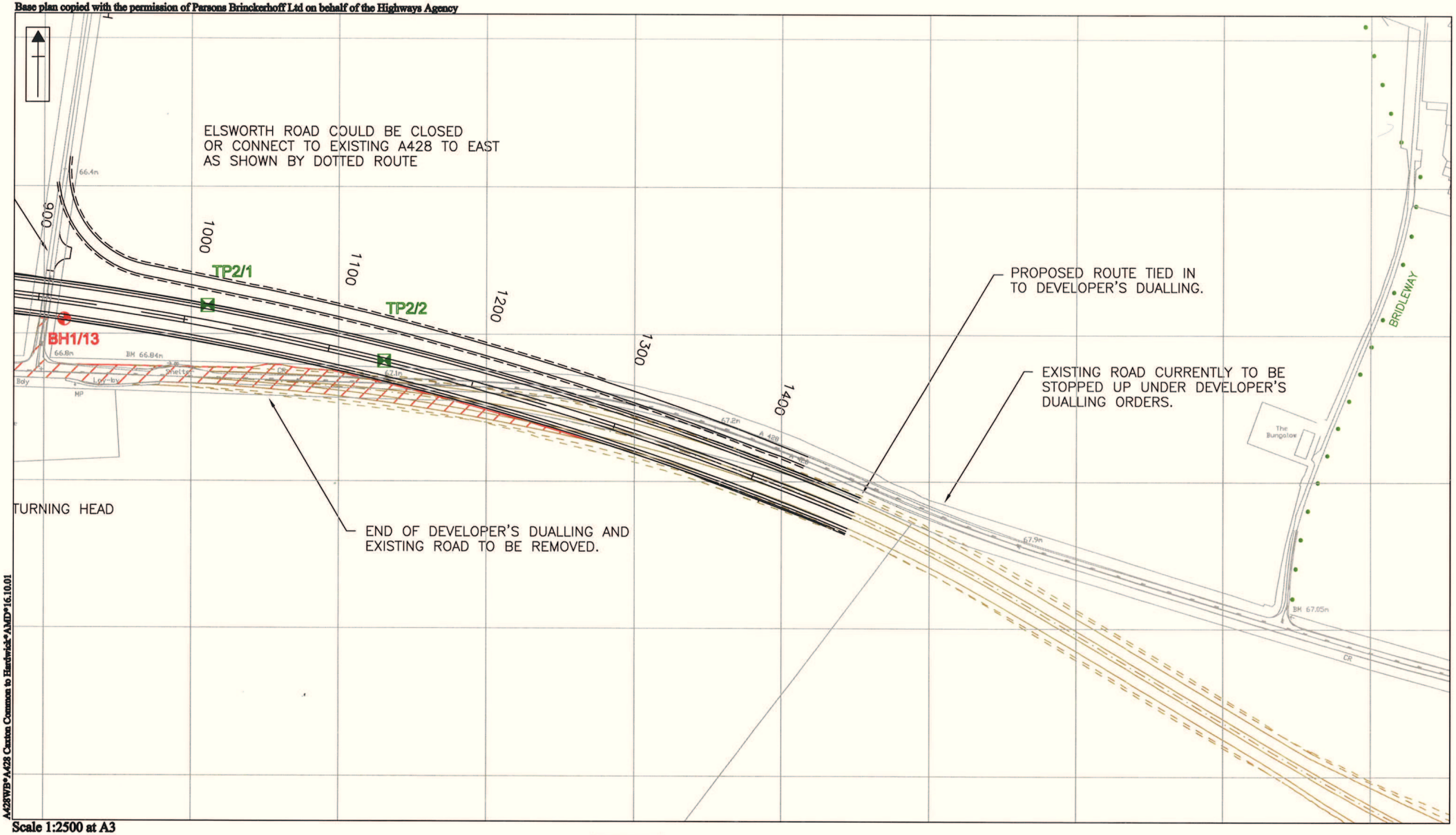
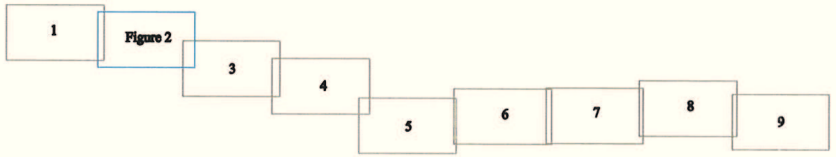


A428WB*A428 Caxton Common to Hardwick*AMD*16.10.01

Scale 1:2500 at A3

BH Borehole location and reference

TP Test Pit location and reference



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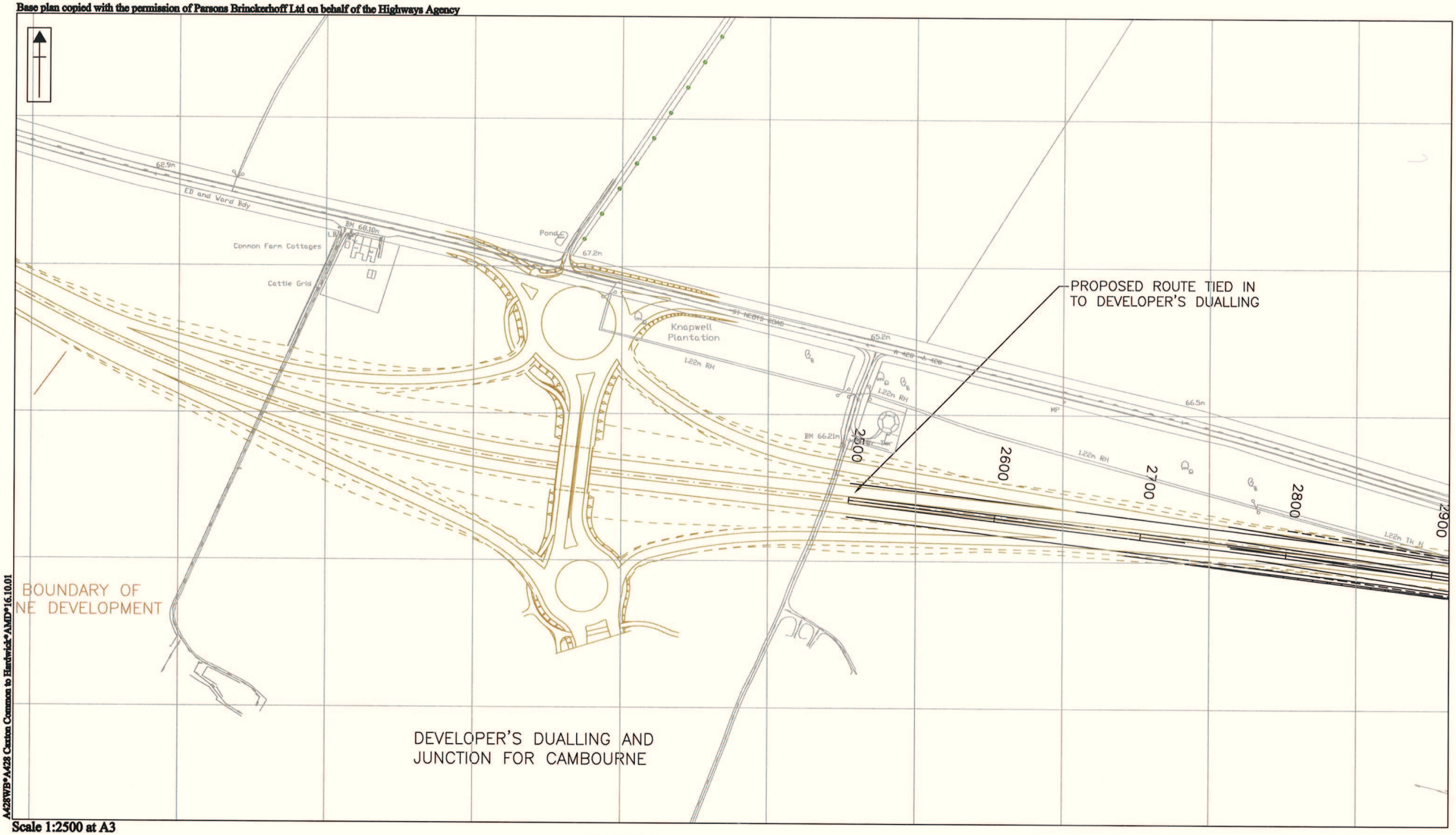

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Scale 1:2500 at A3

BH Borehole location and reference

TP Test Pit location and reference

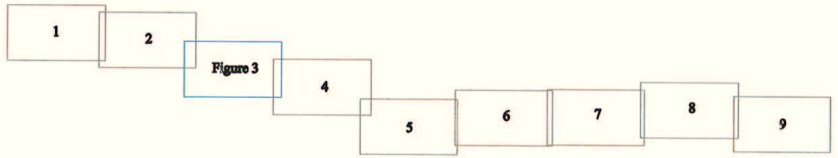

Figure 3: Test Pit Location Plan

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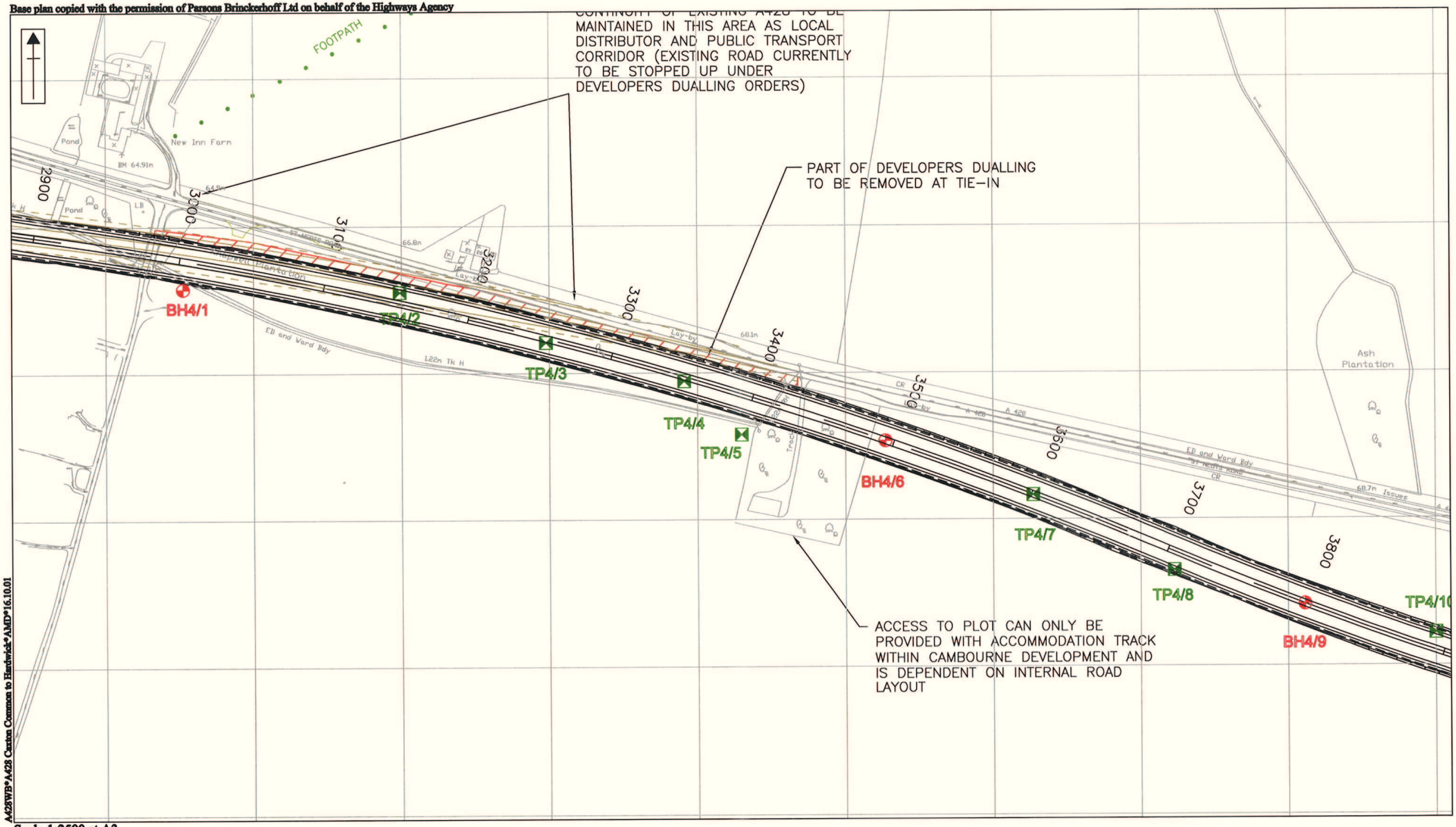

A428WB*A428 Caxton Common to Hardwick*AMD*16.10.01

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BH Borehole location and reference

TP Test Pit location and reference

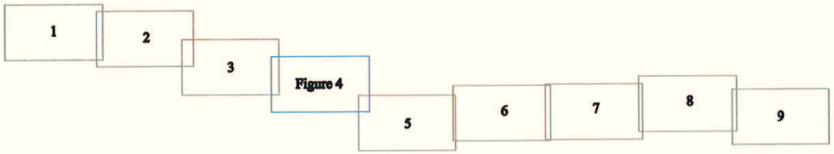

Figure 4: Test Pit Location Plan

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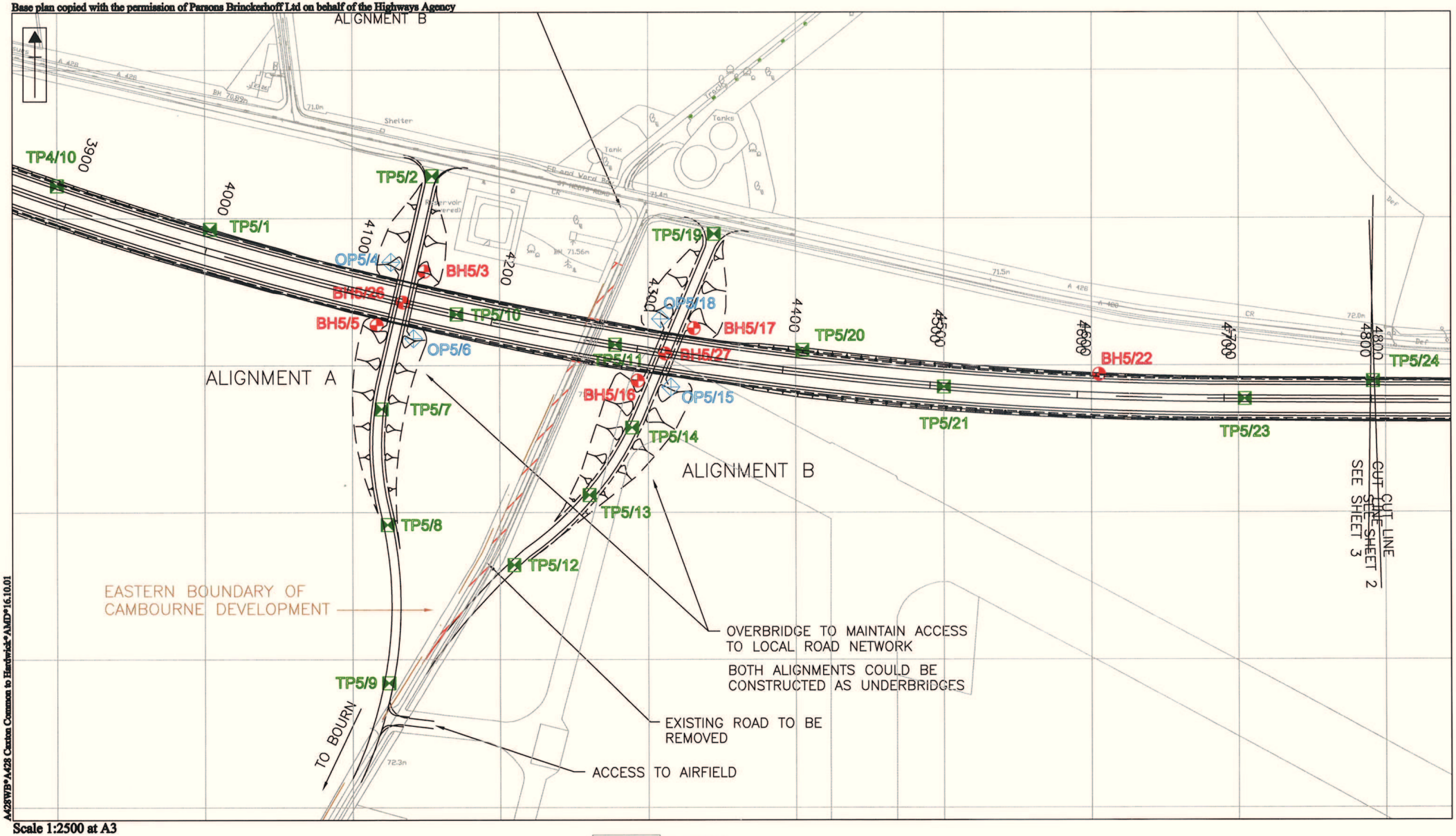


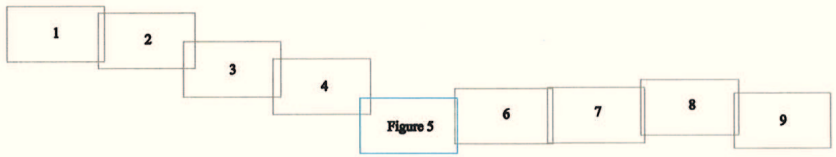
A428WB*A428 Caxton Common to Hardwick*AMD*16.10.01

Scale 1:2500 at A3

BH Borehole location and reference

TP Test Pit location and reference

OP Observation Pit location and reference



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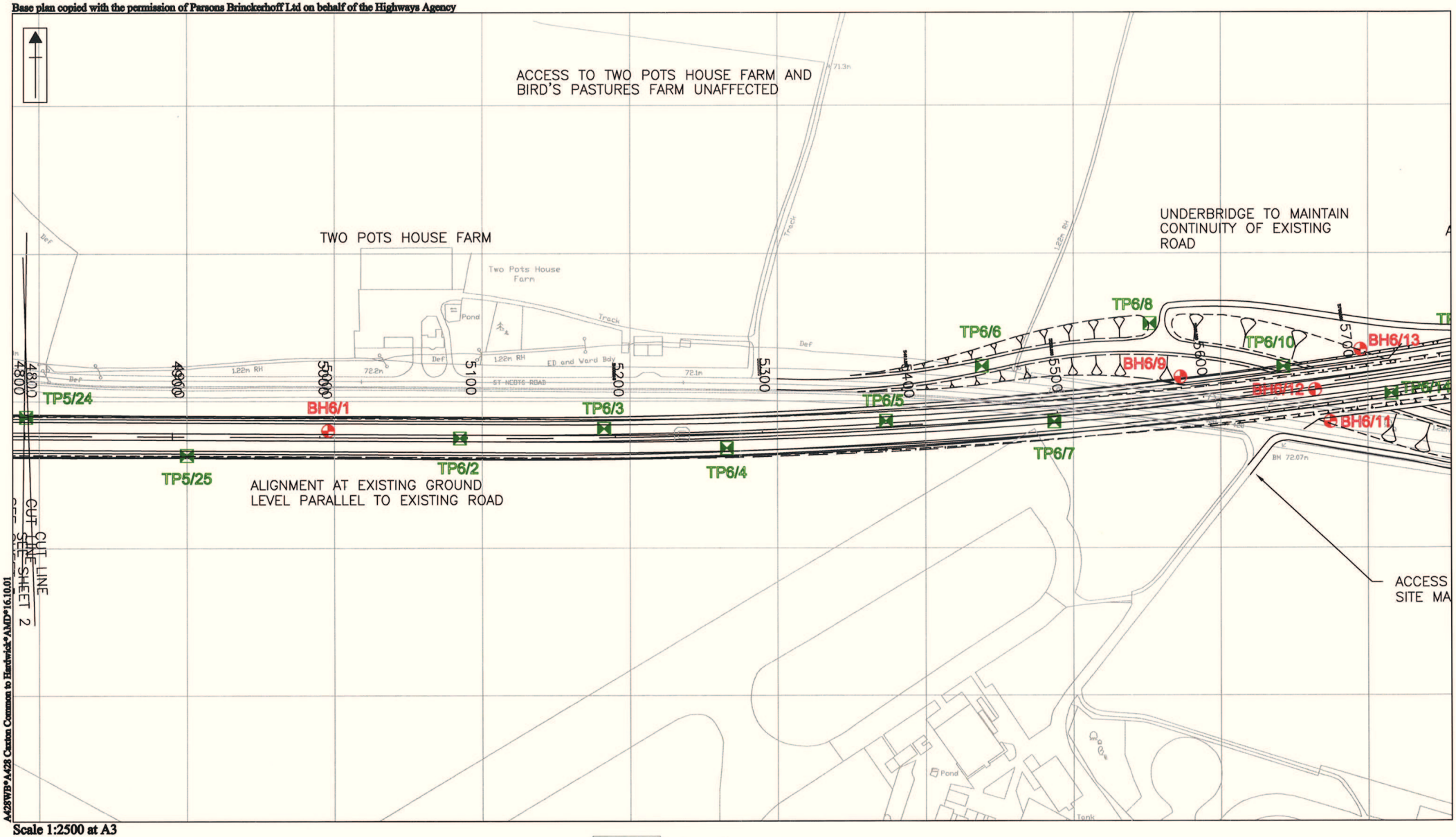

A428WB*A428 Caxton Common to Hardwick*AMD*16.10.01

Scale 1:2500 at A3

BH Borehole location and reference

TP Test Pit location and reference

1 2 3 4 5 Figure 6 7 8 9

Figure 6: Test Pit Location Plan

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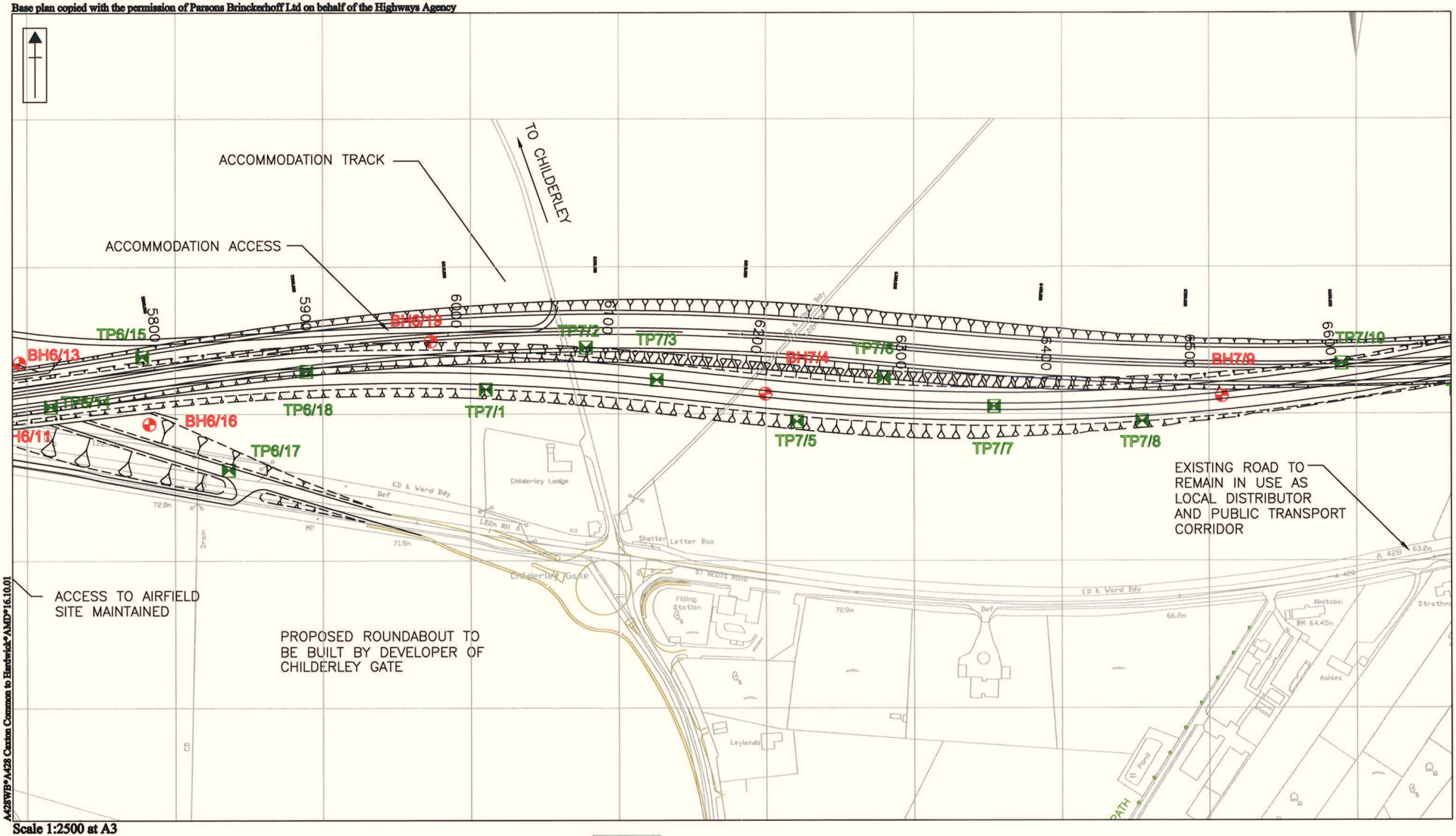

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Scale 1:2500 at A3

BH Borehole location and reference

TP Test Pit location and reference

1 2 3 4 5 6 Figure 7 8 9

Figure 7: Test Pit Location Plan

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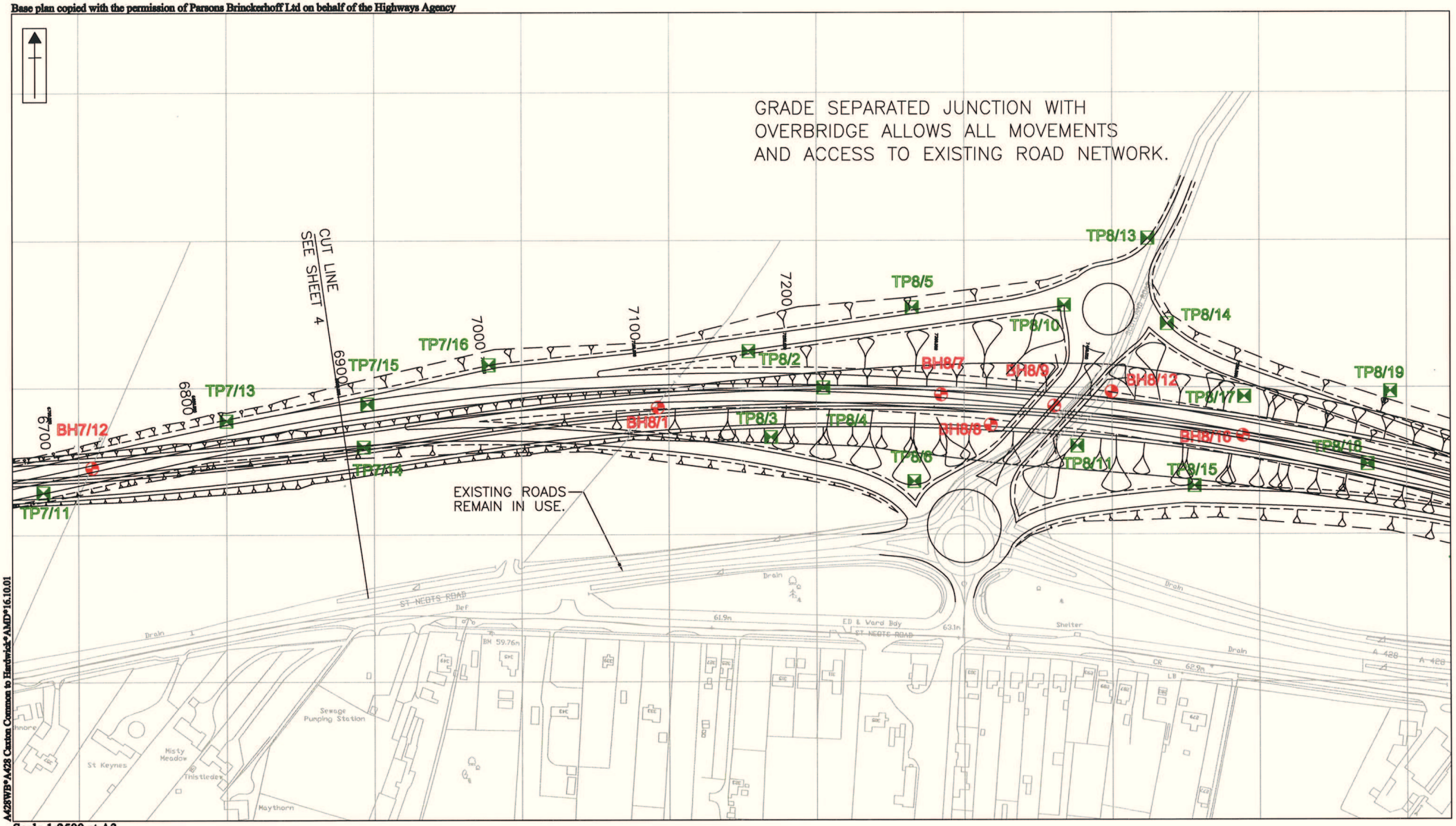

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BH Borehole location and reference

TP Test Pit location and reference

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Figure 8 9

Figure 8: Test Pit Location Plan

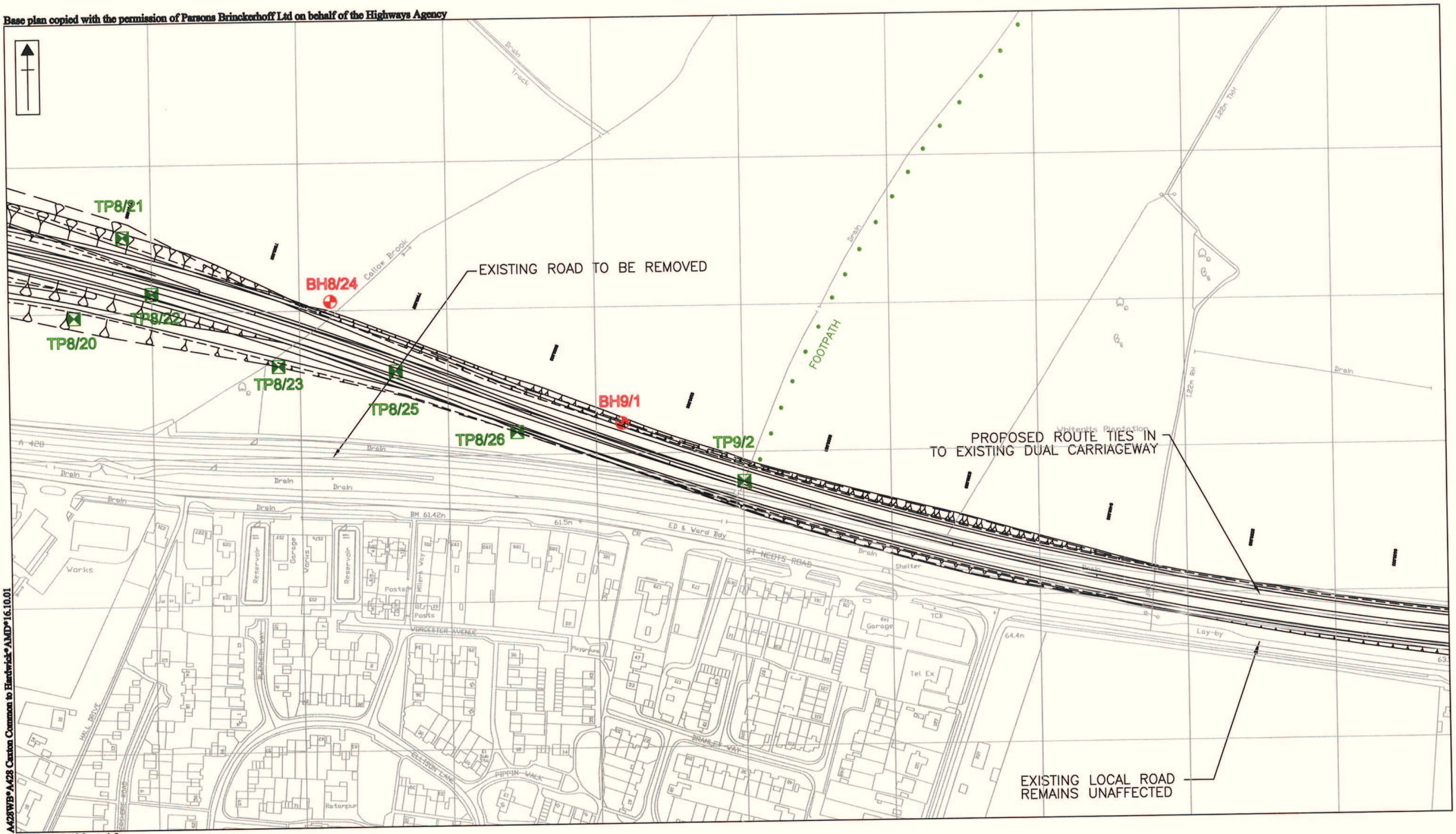

Figure 9: Test Pit Location Plan

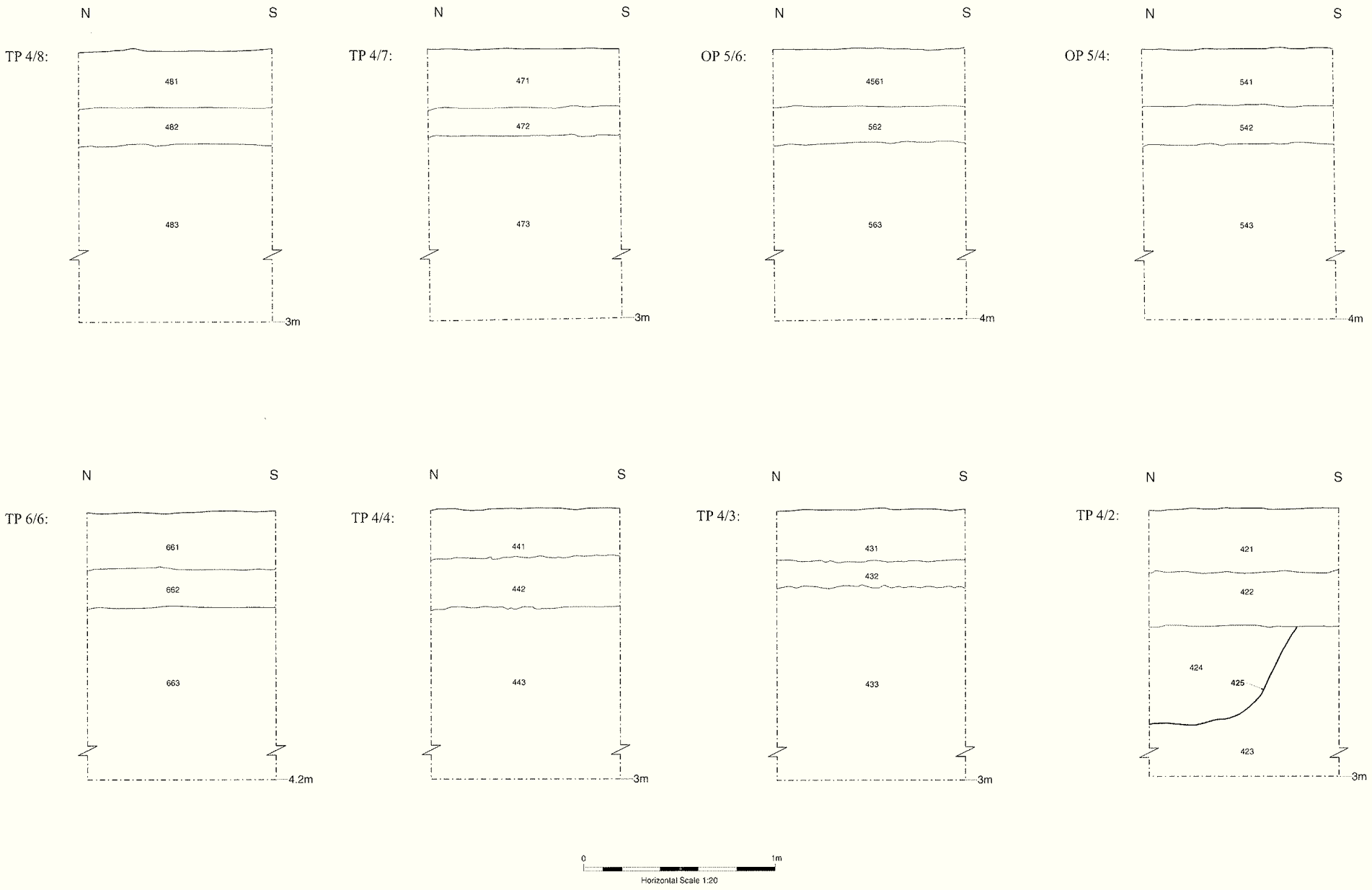

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Figure 10: Sample Sections

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