

# TAIT STREET, CARLISLE, CUMBRIA



## Archaeological Watching Brief



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## SUMMARY

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An archaeological watching brief was carried out by Oxford Archaeology North (OA North) on behalf of United Utilities during the trial trenching for a scheme of sewer-refurbishment in Tait Street, Botchergate, Carlisle (NY 4050 5550) (Fig 1). Cumbria County Council Historic Environment Service (CCCHES) recommended that an archaeological watching brief was carried out as the scheme affected an area with great potential for Roman remains.

The watching brief was undertaken during February, during the excavation of a trial trench on the east side of Tait Street, at its junction with Cecil Street. Due to the extensive disturbance from previous utility works and the relatively shallow depth of the trench, no features of archaeological significance were encountered. Subsequently, following consultation with both the client and the planning Archaeologist, it was agreed that any further trenching on Tait Street would not require the presence of an archaeologist.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Oxford Archaeology North (OA North) would like to thank Caroline Brumwell and United Utilities for commissioning and supporting the project.

Chris Ridings undertook the watching brief and also wrote the report. Mark Tidmarsh compiled the drawings and Alison Plummer managed the project, and also edited the report.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

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### 1.1 CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE PROJECT

1.1.1 United Utilities have submitted proposals for the refurbishment of existing sewers in the vicinity of Warwick Road and Botchergate in Carlisle (Fig 1). One section of this proposed scheme, along Tait Street (NY 4050 5550), could affect an area of archaeological potential, in which significant Roman remains may have been revealed. Consequently, Cumbria County Historic Environment Service (CCCHES) recommended that an archaeological watching brief was maintained during the trial trenching.

### 1.2 LOCATION AND TOPOGRAPHY

- 1.2.1 Carlisle is situated towards the northern edge of the Solway Plain, some eight miles upstream from the Solway Firth and about five miles above the tidal limit (Fig 1). The Scottish border, established finally in the 13th century, lies nine miles to the north of Carlisle, whilst the Roman frontier, marked by Hadrian's Wall, traverses the village-suburb of Stanwix, which lies on the opposite bank of the Eden immediately north of the city centre. For nearly two millennia, Carlisle has been a military and administrative centre for what is now known as Cumbria (McCarthy 1990, 1). The historic core of the city is located on the south bank of the river Eden, to the south-east of its confluence with the river Caldew. During the medieval period the city centre was clearly defined by the city walls, and there is evidence to suggest that the core of the Roman settlement was almost identical in size and situation to the medieval town (*ibid*).
- 1.2.2 Botchergate follows the course of the former Roman road believed to lead from the south to the civilian settlement and fort at Carlisle. It lies on the north-eastern side of the valley of the river Caldew, rising gently from a height of c 18m OD at its south-eastern end, near the junction with St Nicholas Bridge Road, to c 22.5m OD at its north-western end at the southern gateway, the English Gate, to the medieval city. The study area lies on the western side of Botchergate, some 400m from the English Gate.
- 1.2.3 The underlying geology of the area is composed mainly of mudstones and sandstones of Permo-Triassic age. The most important sandstone formation, the St Bees Sandstone, has been much quarried for use as building stone, and has imparted a distinctive character to much of the area's architecture (Countryside Commission 1998, 20). During the last glaciation, thick ice-sheets crossed the area, carrying with them vast quantities of rock debris, which was deposited as boulder clay (*ibid*). As a result of the extensive mantle of glacial deposits, exposures of the solid geology are few, although significant outcrops occur in some of the deeper valley sides to the south and east of Carlisle.

### 1.3 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

- 1.3.1 A limited amount of evidence for prehistoric activity has been found at a number of sites in the Carlisle area, including Annetwell Street (Caruana forthcoming), Blackfriars Street (McCarthy 1990, 13-4), 46-52 Lowther Street (Flynn 1995), and the Northern Lanes (Zant forthcoming), but little is known of any prehistoric settlement in the Botchergate area.
- 1.3.2 In AD 72-3 a fort was established by the Romans on the site of the later medieval castle. By the end of the 1st century the fort formed part of the Tyne-Solway isthmus frontier known as the Stanegate; indeed, the presence in Carlisle, known as *Luguvalium* in the Roman period, of an official known as the *centurio regionarius* suggests that Carlisle may have been the command centre for this early northern frontier (Shotton 2004, 49). The area continued to be important strategically in the following century, and though the focal point of the emperor Hadrian's new frontier moved to the nearby fort of Stanwix, the recent millennium project excavations have shown that the fort at Annetwell Street in Carlisle continued to be occupied into the post-Roman period (OA North 2002).
- 1.3.3 A large civilian settlement grew up around the fort at Carlisle and by the early 3rd century the town may have formed the *civitas* capital of the Carvetii, the indigenous tribal unit in the area. The full extent of this extramural settlement is not known but, though considered to be large in comparison to other Roman settlements in the North West, it was thought largely to be confined to the approximate area of the later medieval walled city (McCarthy 1991, 53).
- 1.3.4 The fate of Carlisle at the end of the Roman occupation is less clearly defined, although scattered traces of late 4th and 5th century occupation have been identified (McCarthy *et al* 1990, 4). An Anglian monastery is attested on documentary grounds, and archaeological evidence suggests the presence of an important church below the Cathedral in the 10th century (McCarthy *et al* 1990, 4). Other churches are also suspected to have existed between the 7th and 11th century, although the supporting evidence is slight (*ibid*). The archaeological evidence for this period is largely based on coin-finds, notably a *sceatta*, *stycas*, and pennies of Aethelstan, Edgar, and Aethelred II (*op cit*, 5). Following the arrival of the Normans in 1092, and the construction of the medieval castle and town walls, Carlisle became a major frontier city on the borders of England and Scotland, continuing in this role until the Jacobite rebellion of 1745.
- 1.3.5 During the medieval period, Botchergate appears to have formed an extramural suburb to Carlisle (Zant forthcoming b). Cartographic evidence shows that certainly during the early post-medieval period settlement fronted Botchergate outside of the town defences. By the early part of the 19th century much of the land to the rear of the buildings fronting Botchergate was still open, but by the time of the First Edition Ordnance Survey map of 1876, Carlisle's suburbs had expanded rapidly, infilling the backplots of earlier buildings on the Botchergate street frontage (*op cit*, 5).

## 1.4 PREVIOUS ARCHAEOLOGICAL WORK

- 1.4.1 Numerous chance discoveries of burials on both sides of Botchergate in the 19th century suggested that the area had been used as a cemetery for much of the Roman period (Charlesworth 1979): this was to be expected given that Roman cemeteries are conventionally situated alongside the main roads leading out of settlements.
- 1.4.2 Several archaeological investigations undertaken during the 1990s seemed to confirm that the Botchergate was the focus of the extramural settlement in Carlisle. In 1994 the former Carlisle Archaeology Unit (CAU) undertook an evaluation in the Cecil Street car park, south of Tait Street on the eastern side of Botchergate, which identified remains of cremation burials, together with boundary ditches, probably Roman in date (McCarthy and Flynn 1994). In 1997 the Lancaster University Archaeological Unit (LUAU) uncovered traces of Roman cremations and also of a small settlement, probably a Romano-British site, at St Nicholas Yard to the west of Botchergate (Howard-Davis and Leah 1999). Also in 1997, CAU undertook an excavation to the rear of the former Co-op building at 40-78 Botchergate, revealing a complex sequence of Roman activity, including part of a large-scale linear earthwork of unknown function, evidence of a prolonged period of landfilling and refuse disposal, and two truncated late 2nd century cremations (Zant forthcoming). In 1999 an evaluation was conducted by CAU to the rear of 114-132 Botchergate, again on the western side of the street, revealing evidence for Roman buildings, yards and roads, at least one phase aligned at an angle of  $c 60^{\circ}$  to Botchergate, and another parallel.
- 1.4.3 Significant new information of Roman Botchergate was provided by the excavation work undertaken by Oxford Archaeology North at 53-63 Botchergate in 2001 (OA North 2002), and the evaluation and excavation work undertaken on the adjacent site by the former Carlisle Archaeology Ltd between Mary Street and Tait Street in 1999 and 2000 (Giecco and Zant 2001). These combined works revealed deeply stratified archaeological deposits to survive in areas along the eastern side of Botchergate, particularly those closest to the street frontage. These excavations provided clear evidence for the late 1st century use of the site as a cemetery being supplanted by industrial activity. This included the remains of a lead smelting furnace, dated to the AD 120s (OA North 2002), associated workshops and several distinct phases of timber buildings. Roman activity seemingly declined during the 3rd century, and there was slight evidence for the area being used for agriculture during the early medieval period. The excavations demonstrated the site to have been re-occupied during the 12th/13th century, presumably as part of a suburb. However, occupation of the site appears to have been abandoned around the 14th century, and it was not completely redeveloped until the 20th century.



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## 2. METHODOLOGY

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### 2.1 PROJECT DESIGN

- 2.1.1 A project design (*Appendix 1*) was compiled in response to a written brief issued by CCCHES. The project design was adhered to in full, and the work was consistent with the relevant standards and procedures of the Institute of Field Archaeologists, and generally accepted best practice.

### 2.2 WATCHING BRIEF

- 2.2.1 An archaeological presence was to be maintained during the excavation of a trial trench, in advance of a full refurbishment of the sewer system in the Botchergate and Warwick Road area of Carlisle by United Utilities
- 2.2.2 Recording was by means of OA North's standard context recording system, with trench records and supporting registers and indices. A full photographic record in colour transparency and monochrome formats was made, but in light of the modern nature of the uncovered deposits, it was decided that only a sketch plan would be sufficient to record the trench.

### 2.3 ARCHIVE

- 2.3.1 A full archive has been compiled in accordance with the project design (*Appendix 1*), and in accordance with current IFA and English Heritage guidelines (English Heritage 1991). The paper and digital archive will be deposited with the Cumbria Record Office (Carlisle).

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### 3. WATCHING BRIEF RESULTS

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#### 3.1 RESULTS

- 3.1.1 A trench measuring 4.1m long, 0.6m wide and 1.2m deep was excavated on the east side of Tait Street, at its junction with Cecil Street, in Botchergate, Carlisle. The trenching was conducted by two members of staff from Balfour Beatty, using both mechanical and manual excavation techniques. The trench revealed five deposits of which, the uppermost layers were modern asphalt road surfaces, collectively measuring up to 0.35m in depth (Fig 2; Plates 1 and 2). Beneath these layers, there was a modern deposit of stone aggregate, which reached the optimum depth of the trench at 1.2m. This depth marked the horizon between the stone aggregate and a layer of hessian sheeting, which sealed a clay deposit containing both water and gas service pipes. In addition, towards the centre of the trench, there were four modern plastic pipes containing telecommunications cables and the narrow trench cut for these was infilled with sand.
- 3.1.2 Although Balfour Beatty and United Utilities were conducting a further investigation of the west side of Tait Street, it was evident that the below ground deposits would hold similar limited potential for archaeological remains. From the channel of tarmac running down that side of the road, it is clear that a telecommunication cable or cables has only recently been inserted, thus ensuring that the ground is heavily disturbed. Subsequently, following consultation with the client and the Planning Archaeologist for Cumbria, it was decided that any further investigations would not require the supervision of an archaeologist.

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## 5. ILLUSTRATIONS

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### 5.1 FIGURES

Figure 1: Site Location Map

Figure 2: Trench Location Plan

### 5.2 PLATES

Plate 1: The trial trench facing west.

Plate 2: The north-facing section of the trial trench

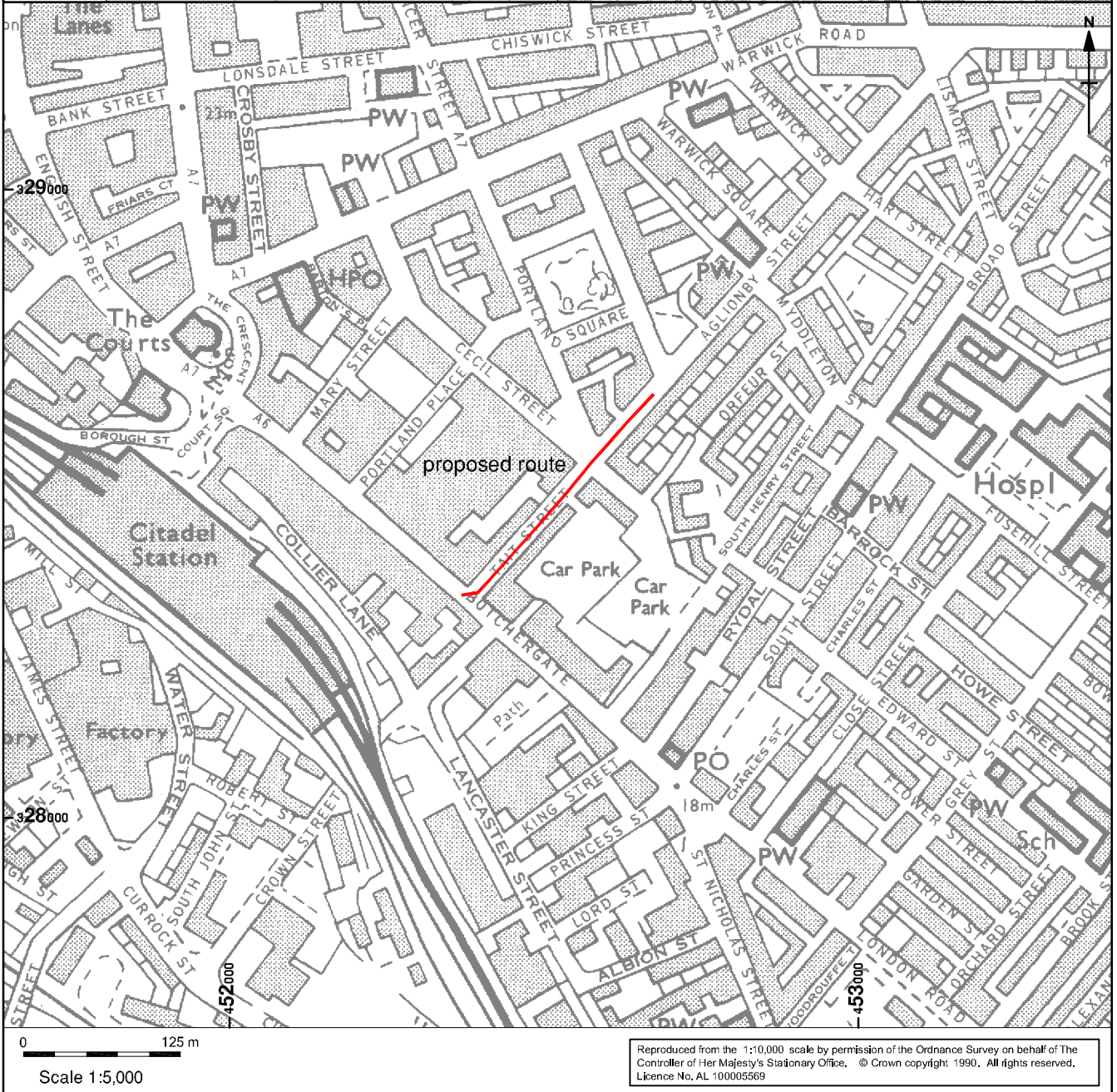
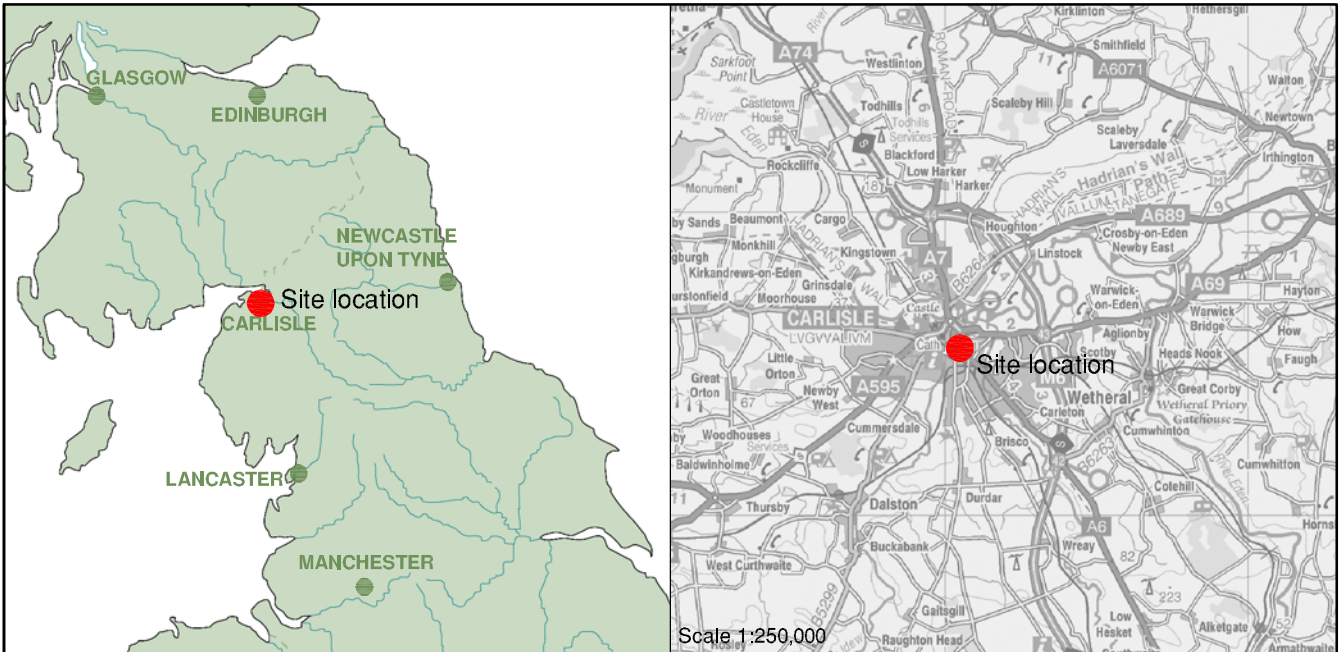


Figure 1: Site Location

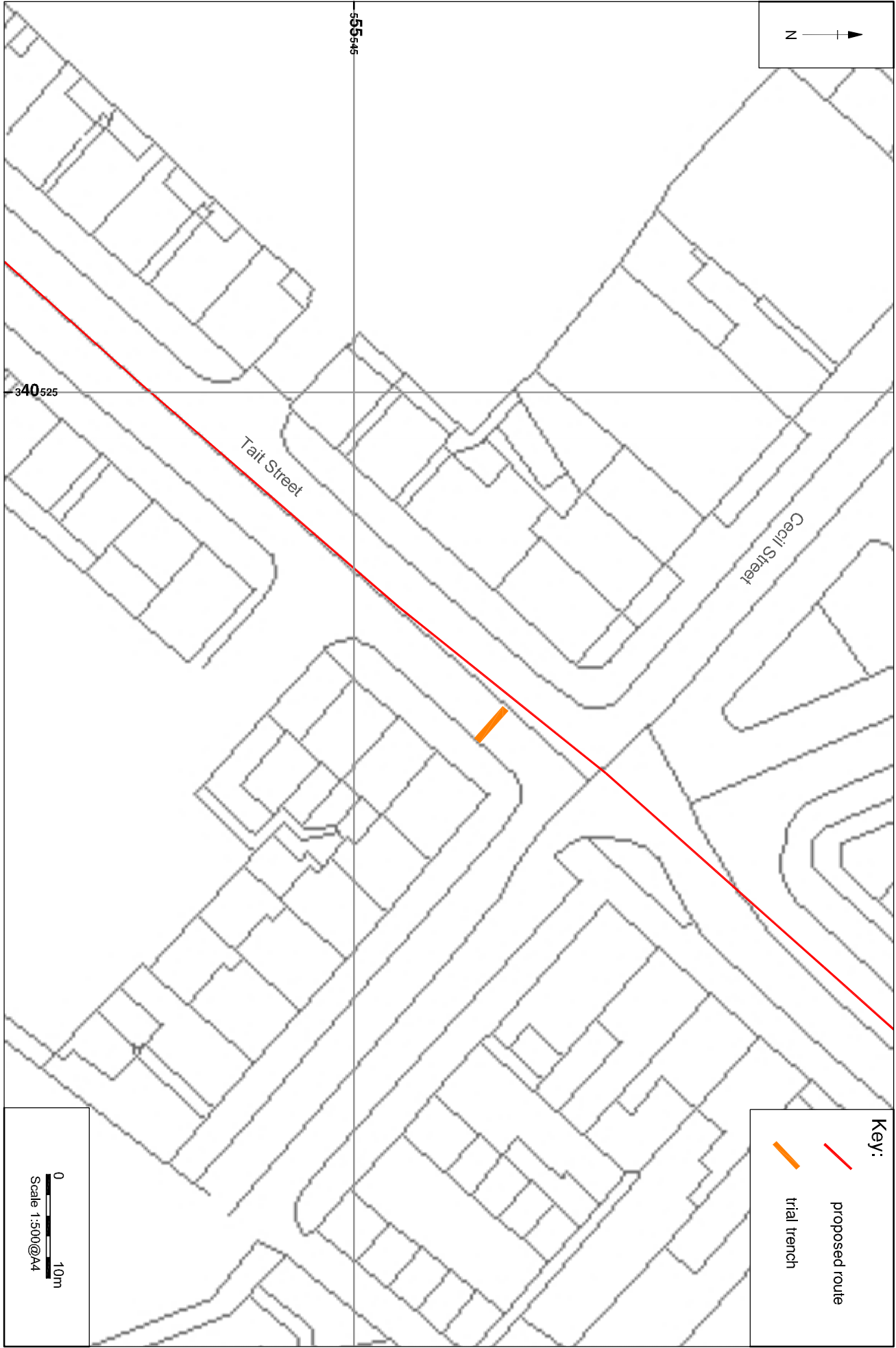


Figure 2: Trench location plan





Plate 1: The trial trench facing west.



Plate 2: The north-facing section of the trial trench



## APPENDIX 1: PROJECT DESIGN

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