



Oxford University Sports Centre, Iffley Road, Oxford

Archaeological Watching Brief Report

February 2018

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Oxford University Sports Centre, Iffley Road, Oxford

Archaeological Watching Brief Report

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Summary

Between September and December 2016, Oxford Archaeology (OA) undertook an archaeological watching brief during the construction of a new sports centre at Iffley Road, Oxford.

None of the monitored groundworks impacted below a layer of modern made ground previously identified during the construction of the adjacent swimming pool in 2002.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Scope of work

1.1.1 Oxford Archaeology (OA) was commissioned by Bidwells LLP on behalf of the University of Oxford to undertake an archaeological watching brief at Iffley Road Sports Centre, Iffley Road, Oxford .

1.1.2 The work was undertaken as a condition of Planning Permission (condition 19 of planning ref. 10/01006/FUL. A brief was set by David Radford, Archaeologist at Oxford City Council (OCC), and a written scheme of investigation was produced by OA detailing the Local Authority's requirements for work necessary to discharge the planning condition. This document outlines how OA implemented the specified requirements.

1.2 Location, topography and geology

1.2.1 The site lies just to the south-east of the historic centre of Oxford (centred at NGR: SP 5230 0550). The site is bounded to the east by the Iffley Road, to the north by the Christ Church sports ground, to the south by a rugby ground and to the west by a marshy area alongside the Shire lake Ditch (Fig. 1).

1.2.2 The site is terraced to the east and built up to the west to create a level sports surface. The tennis courts at the road frontage (east) of the site are lower than Iffley Road itself, and there is then a steep drop down to the main athletics area, which has been sculpted down at the east end and artificially raised up at the western end of the site.

1.2.3 The site is at an approximate level of 64m aOD and the underlying geology of the area is Oxford Clay and Summertown- Radley (2nd terrace) river gravels (BGS 1982).

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

1.3.1 A desk based assessment (DBA) of the site has been produced by Thames Valley Archaeological Services (TVAS, 2009). Research from the Oxford Urban Archaeological Database (UAD) contained within the DBA notes that several residual worked flints and late Saxon features were recorded during the construction of the New Swimming Pool in 2001-2002 (UAD Event Nos 1605 and 1606).

1.3.2 The 2001 evaluation trench and subsequent 2002 watching brief on the Swimming Pool footprint identified two gullies at right angles to each other and a pit. The archaeological surface was at a depth of 2m under modern fill at c56.03-56.18m AOD.

1.3.3 A 1.56m thick layer of modern made ground overlay a 0.25cm thick layer of clayey silt which contained 19th century pottery and a large fragment of burnt clay (weighing 62g). Below this was a mid-red-brown 'sandy-silt', post-glacial, brickearth. This was at least 0.70m thick and was cut by the gullies and pit.

1.3.4 The gullies yielded several sherds of pottery of 10th-11th century date, two likely residual Roman sherds, and over 160 fragmentary pieces of bone including horse, cattle, sheep and pig remains, some with butchery marks. The pit contained charcoal flecks and a single prehistoric flint core (TVAS 2001 & 2002).

- 1.3.5 An earlier watching brief by OAU in 1991 when the Rowing Practice Tank was constructed further south demonstrated that this footprint sat within the cinder and clay build up for the running track. The build-up overlay a brown clay which might have been alluvial. No archaeological features were observed during this work (UAD Event No 594).
- 1.3.6 A 19th century record by the noted local historian Herbert Hurst tells of workmen finding a rubbish pit full of animal bone, purportedly from a military camp (UAD Event No 1392), very roughly located at the western end of the site. It might plausibly relate to the Civil War siege, but it could equally be of any other period.

2 WATCHING BRIEF AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Aims

2.1.1 The project aims and objectives were as follows:

- i. To determine or confirm the general nature of any remains present.
- ii. To determine or confirm the approximate date or date range of any remains, by means of artefactual or other evidence.

2.2 Methodology

2.2.1 A summary of OA's general approach to excavation and recording can be found in Appendix A of the WSI. Standard methodologies for geomatics and survey, environmental evidence, artefactual evidence and burials can also be found in that document (Appendices B, C, D and E respectively).

2.2.2 An intermittent watching brief was maintained during the grubbing out of existing foundations of the sports hall buildings as they were demolished, while a detailed watching brief was maintained during site reduction works for the pile mat and the excavation of a trench for new gas and water connections. These were the deepest impacts on site, reaching a maximum depth of 56.05m OD, and did not penetrate below the modern made ground previously identified during the construction of the adjacent swimming pool in 2002 (TVAS 2001 and 2002).

3 RESULTS

3.1 General distribution of deposits

- 3.1.1 No archaeological features or significant deposits were encountered during the watching brief, as the groundworks did not impact below the modern made ground deposits.

4 DISCUSSION

4.1 Interpretation

- 4.1.1 None of the monitored groundworks impacted below a layer of modern made ground previously identified during the construction of the adjacent swimming pool in 2002.
- 4.1.2 The archaeological horizon identified during the earlier works was at c56.03-56.18m OD. The maximum depth of the reduced dig for the pile mat was 56.86m OD. The trench for the new service connections generally fell from 56.94m OD at its south-eastern end, to 56.14m OD at the north-western end, with some deeper areas due to the presence of large fragments of modern building rubble (Figure 2). Although this did impact below the previously identified archaeological horizon to the north, no evidence for the bottom of the modern made ground was revealed during the watching brief.
- 4.1.3 Consequently, it seems likely that the top of the archaeological horizon falls naturally to the south, or that the modern truncation is greater to the south of the swimming pool site.

APPENDIX A BIBLIOGRAPHY

TVAS, 2001 University Sports Centre, Iffley Road, Oxford An Archaeological Evaluation

TVAS, 2002 New Swimming Pool, University Sports Centre, Iffley Road, Oxford City Council

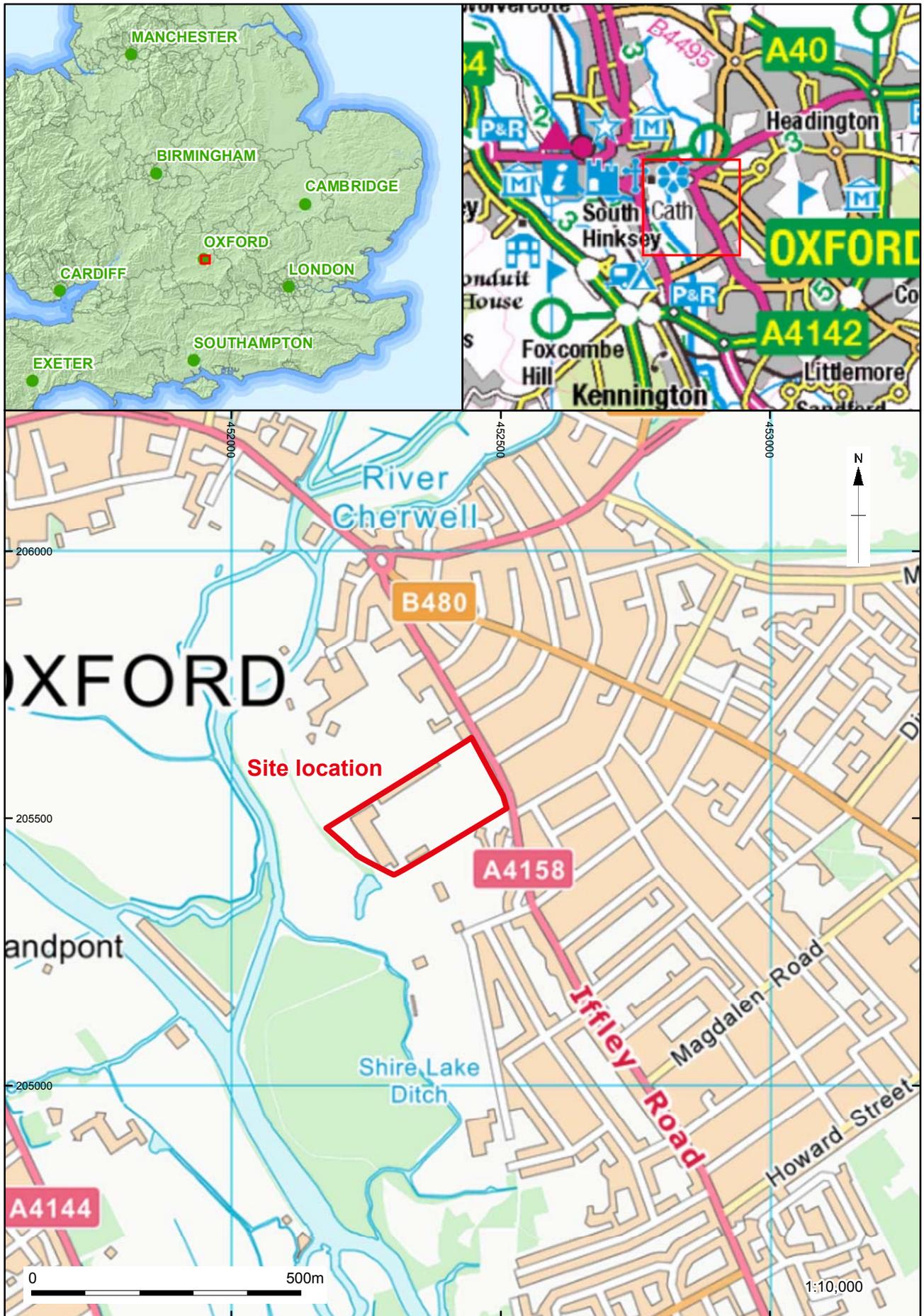
TVAS, 2009 Archaeological Desk Based Assessment: Oxford University Sports Centre, Iffley Road, Oxford

APPENDIX B**SITE SUMMARY DETAILS**

Site name: Iffley Road Sports Centre, Iffley Road, Oxford
Site code: OXIFSP16
Grid Reference SP 5230 0550
Type: Evaluation
Date and duration: September-December 2016

Location of archive: The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with Oxfordshire County Museum Service in due course, under the following accession number: TBC.

Summary of Results: Between September and December 2016, Oxford Archaeology (OA) undertook an archaeological watching brief during the construction of a new sports centre at Iffley Road, Oxford. None of the monitored groundworks impacted below a layer of modern made ground previously identified during the construction of the adjacent swimming pool in 2002.



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Figure 1: Site location

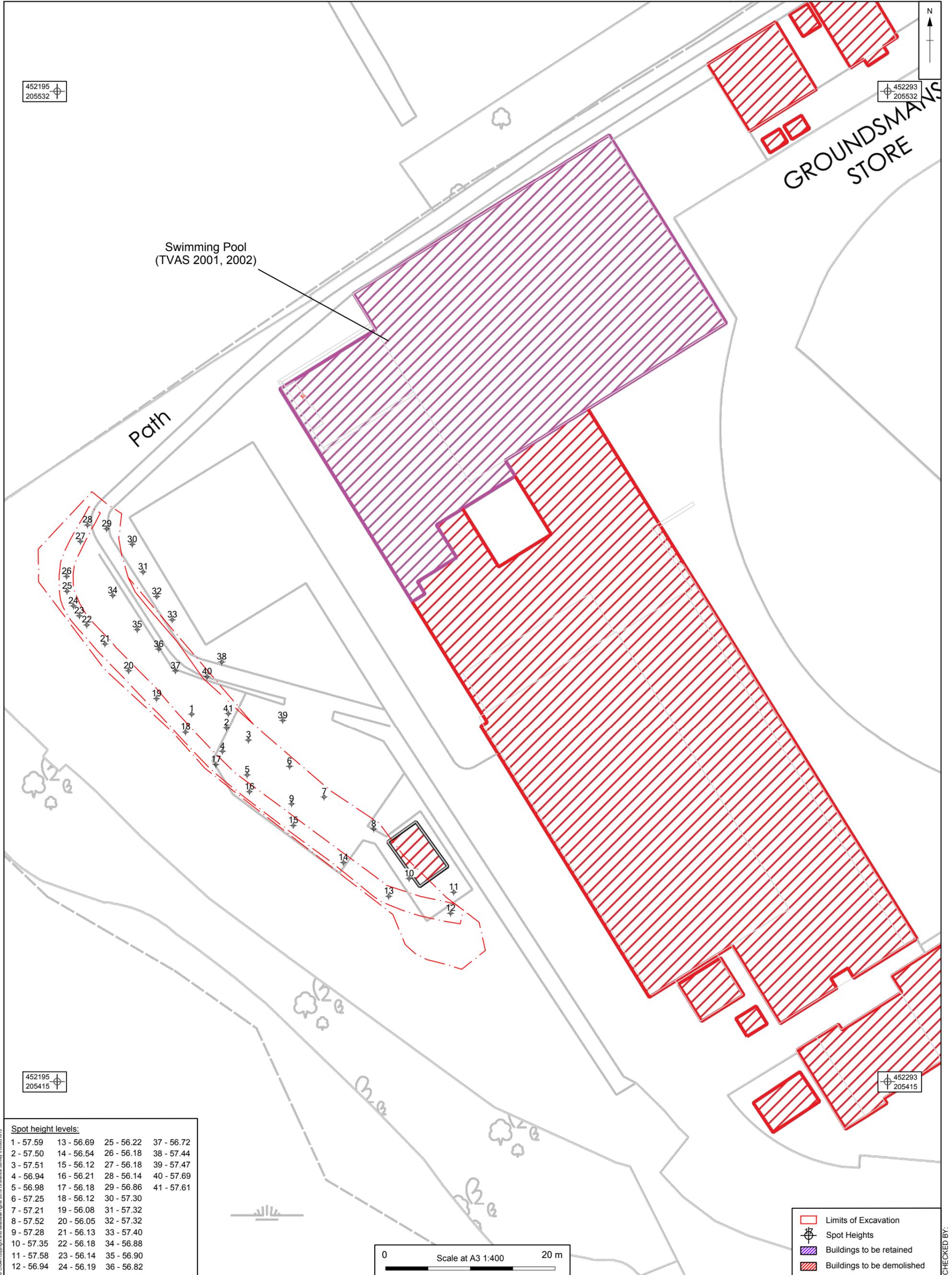


Figure 2: Extent of pile mat and trench for new gas and water connection



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