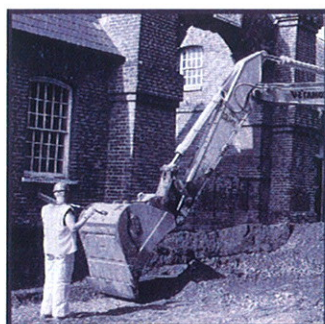


# Limborough Road Development Area 3 (Old Bus Depot) Wantage Oxfordshire



## Archaeological Watching Brief



**Oxford Archaeology**

10th October 2002

**Client Name: Bushbuy Ltd**

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Prepared by: Robin Bashford  
Position: Assistant Supervisor  
Date: 11th October 2002

Checked by: Jon Hiller  
Position: Project Manager  
Date: 11th October 2002

Approved by: Robert Williams  
Position: Director: Business Development and Operations  
Date: 11th October 2002

Signed.....

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**Oxford Archaeology**

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

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

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## Limborough Road Development, Wantage, Oxfordshire Area 3 (Old Bus Depot)

NGR SU 398 881

### *ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT*

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## SUMMARY

*In September 2002 Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief at The Old Bus Depot, part of the Limborough Road development, Wantage, Oxfordshire (SU 398 881). Made ground was observed across the site, overlying an outcrop of gault clay. No archaeological features or deposits were observed during the groundwork.*

### 1 INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Location and scope of work

1.1.1 In September 2002 Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief at The Old Bus Depot, part of the Limborough Road development, Wantage, Oxfordshire (SU 398 881).

1.1.2 The work was commissioned by Bushbuy Ltd as part of an integrated programme of archaeological mitigation work at the Limborough Road development, Wantage, Oxfordshire. The groundwork covered by the watching brief (Area 3) was to the northern end of the development site and involved the reduction of the existing road surface, demolition debris from the bus depot and underlying deposits. The ground reduction was in preparation for the construction of a new roundabout, and the eastern extension of Limborough Road, to provide access to the existing supermarket and proposed filling station (Fig. 2).

1.1.3 A project brief was set by Hugh Coddington, Oxfordshire's Deputy County Archaeological Officer, and OA prepared a Written Scheme of Investigation detailing how it would meet the requirements of the brief (OAU, 1998).

#### 1.2 Geology and topography

1.2.1 The underlying geology of the development site is composed of Head and younger Coombe deposits with outcrops of Gault clay and Upper Greensand. Alluvium covers the floodplain area of Letcombe Brook which lies immediately to the west of Area 3.

1.2.2 The site slopes to the south and west to 84.5 m OD, although Area 3 is located to the extreme north on an outcrop of Gault clay, and consequently lies at c 90.5 m OD.

#### 1.3 Archaeological and historical background

*1.3.1 - 1.3.4 are based largely on an offprint from Historic Towns in Oxfordshire: a Survey of the New County - Wantage (OAU, 1975)*

1.3.1 Wantage lies at an ancient crossroads, where routes along the chalk scarp intersect a Roman road to Alchester. The Letcombe brook separates the Roman and medieval settlements.

1.3.2 A large Romano-British Settlement is believed to lie on the west bank of the brook. Coins, particularly dating to the 4th century and large quantities of Roman pottery have been recovered during building operations since the 1950s. Fourteen graves

have been exposed during building work to the west of Witan Way and appeared to be part of a cemetery aligned on the road from Alchester to Frilford (and possibly the recently excavated Roman site at Marcham - excavated by Oxford University in 2002).

- 1.3.3 There was a royal residence at Wantage by the 9th century as the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle records that it was Alfred's birthplace (849) and in his will he bequeathed the town to his wife. Fitzwarren's manor house, on the west side of the brook, reputedly stood on the site of the Saxon palace - although there are a number of traditional locations. The manor remained in royal ownership until 1199 when it was granted to Baldwin de Bethune. A fair was granted in 1213 although no written grant of market rights has been found.
- 1.3.4 The medieval origins of the town are vague. It seems to have been in existence by the 12th century or even earlier but it is impossible to estimate the size of the settlement at this time. Elements of burgage plots and back lanes are discernable but they seem to have been grafted on to a more primitive street pattern. The town mill was in existence by Domesday and the minster was also mentioned, although the present church is largely 13th to 15th century in date.
- 1.3.5 In May 1997, Wessex Archaeology undertook an evaluation of the development site and identified the following features (Report No.35662a: 18th July 1997):
- 1.3.6 Ditches dating to the Romano-British period were encountered in two trenches in the east area of the site (Area 1). These ditches cut through an alluvial soil of indeterminate date. Only a single possible Saxon feature was encountered which was located to the south-west of the site, north of Mill Street (Area 4). Medieval deposits dating to the 12th-13th centuries were encountered throughout the areas investigated (notably areas 2, 3 and 4). The medieval features at the south of the site (Areas 2 and 4) represent rear of property activity for the residences that fronted both Mill Street and Grove Street. Those to the north of the site (Area 3) probably represent field boundaries.

## 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 development.
- 2.1.2 To make available the results of the archaeological investigation.

### 2.2 Methodology

- 2.2.1 Following the demolition of the disused bus depot, the area was stripped down to formation level. This process was the subject of the archaeological watching brief and the results are presented below.

- 2.2.2 A general photographic record of the work was made and all recording followed procedures detailed in the *OA Fieldwork Manual* (ed D Wilkinson, 1992). Details of the site visits are held in the archive.

### 3 RESULTS

#### 3.1 Description of deposits

- 3.1.1 The area was stripped to the top of the underlying Gault clay (101) which was exposed at an average depth of 0.8m below ground level. The clay was overlain by a deposit of made ground (100) which was predominantly composed of a dark brown clayey loam with modern demolition/construction debris throughout.
- 3.1.2 There was no evidence for the overlying alluvium which is known to cover the area of the floodplain of Letcombe Brook, and it can be assumed that this has been truncated during construction of the bus depot.

#### 3.2 Finds

- 3.2.1 No finds were recovered from the site.

#### 3.3 Palaeo-environmental remains

- 3.3.1 No environmental samples were taken from the site.

### 4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1.1 Given the absence of alluvium from the floodplain area, and the fact that the entire area is covered by a deposit of modern made ground, it is likely that the entire area has been levelled prior to the construction of the bus depot. Any archaeological features or deposits which may have been present have been destroyed during this process.

## APPENDICES

## APPENDIX 1 BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

D Wilkinson, Ed 1992, *OA Fieldwork Manual*.

OA, 1998, Written Scheme of Investigation for an archaeological watching brief at Limborough Road, Wantage, Oxfordshire

## APPENDIX 2 SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

**Site name:** Limborough Road Development, Wantage, Oxfordshire

**Site code:** WALIM01

**Grid reference:** NGR SU 398 881

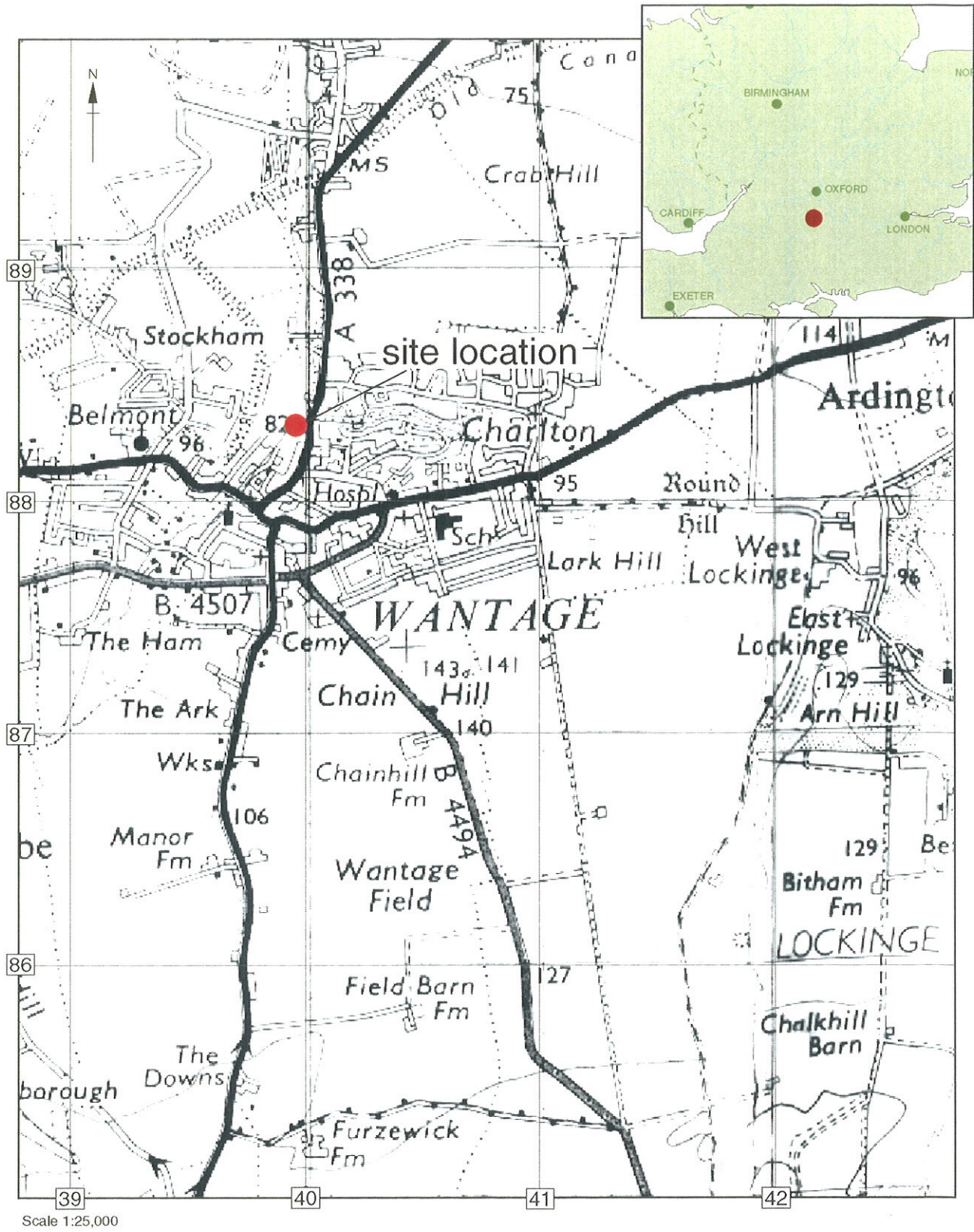
**Type of watching brief:** Site strip in advance of construction of new access road

**Date and duration of project:** September 2002.

**Area of site:** 2ha

**Summary of results:** No archaeological deposits or features were discovered.

**Location of archive:** The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with Oxfordshire County Museums Service in due course, under the following accession number: 2002.9



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Figure 1: Site location



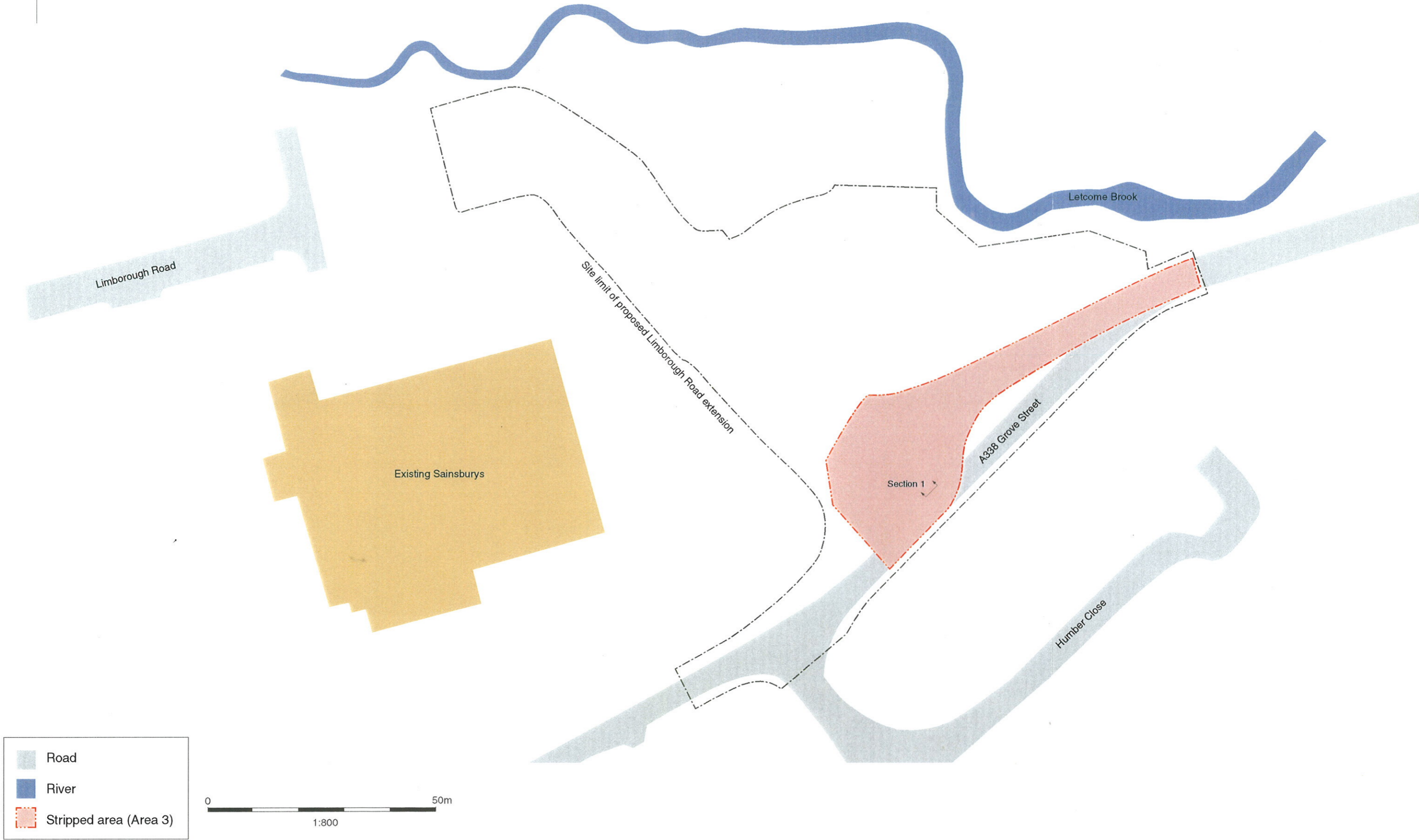
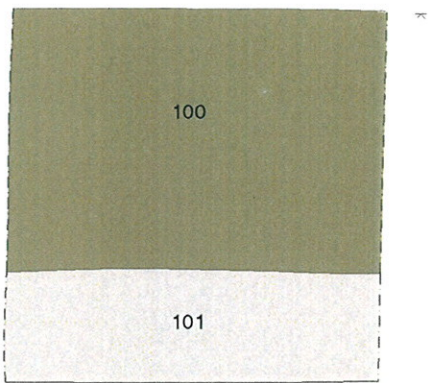


Figure 2: Site plan

Section 1



-  Dark brown clayey loam
-  Pale grey clay

Figure 3: Sample section



### **Oxford Archaeology**

Janus House  
Osney Mead  
Oxford OX2 0ES

t: (0044) 01865 263800  
f: (0044) 01865 793496  
e: [info@oxfordarch.co.uk](mailto:info@oxfordarch.co.uk)  
w: [www.oxfordarch.co.uk](http://www.oxfordarch.co.uk)



### **Oxford Archaeology North**

Storey Institute  
Meeting House Lane  
Lancaster LA1 1TF

t: (0044) 01524 848666  
f: (0044) 01524 848606  
e: [lancinfo@oxfordarch.co.uk](mailto:lancinfo@oxfordarch.co.uk)  
w: [www.oxfordarch.co.uk](http://www.oxfordarch.co.uk)

**Director:** David Jennings, BA MIFA FSA



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