



# Marcham Church of England Primary School, Marcham Oxfordshire

## Archaeological Watching Brief Report

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**Marcham Church of England Primary School, Marcham  
Oxfordshire**

**Archaeological Watching Brief Report**

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## Summary

Oxford Archaeology (OA) was commissioned by Kier Construction to undertake an archaeological watching brief during the ground works associated with the erection of a single building containing two classrooms and a single-story extension at Marcham Church of England Primary School, Morland Road, Marcham, Oxfordshire.

The works comprised monitoring of intrusive ground works; including foundation trenches, service trenches and a soak-away, with potential to reveal archaeological features or deposits.

The watching brief was conducted between the 28th October - 11th November 2019.

No significant archaeological deposits or features were recorded during the course of the works.

## Acknowledgements

The Oxford Archaeology would like to thank Kier Construction for commissioning this project. Thanks, are also extended to Richard Oram, Planning Archaeologist for Oxfordshire County Council (OCC), who monitored the work. The help and patience of the Rob Faulkner (Senior Site Manager Kier Construction) and the groundworkers (HBO Construction Limited).

The project was managed for Oxford Archaeology by John Boothroyd. Paul Murry, Lee Sparks and Gary Evans conducted the fieldwork.

Thanks, is also extended to the teams of OA staff that prepared the archive under the management of Nicola Scott.



## 1 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Scope of work

- 1.1.1 Oxford Archaeology (OA) was commissioned by Kier Construction to undertake an Archaeological watching brief during the ground works associated with the erection of a single building containing two classrooms and a single storey extension to create a storage room at Marcham Church of England Primary School Morland Road, Marcham, Oxfordshire (NGR SU458069684).
- 1.1.2 The work was undertaken as a condition of Planning Permission (planning ref. R3.0089/16). Oxfordshire County Council's Historic Environment Team (OHET) recommended, that an archaeological watching brief be maintained during the period of groundworks. A specification was set by OHET and a written scheme of investigation was produced by John Moore Heritage Services (JMHS 2019) detailing the Local Authority's requirements for work necessary to discharge the planning condition. This was approved by the Oxfordshire County Council prior to commencement of the works.
- 1.1.3 This document outlines how OA implemented the specified requirements and presents the results of the watching brief.

### 1.2 Location, topography and geology

- 1.2.1 The site lies on the eastern edge of the village of Marcham, Oxfordshire (Fig. 1). The site is bounded by residential properties on all sides with Tower Close and Orchard Way to the north, and Morland Road to the east.
- 1.2.2 The site lies within the grounds of Marcham Church of England Primary School and currently consists of playing fields and tarmacked playground (Fig. 2).
- 1.2.3 The geology of the area is mapped as Standford Formation Limestone, sedimentary bedrock formed approximately 157 to 164 million years ago in the Jurassic Period (BGS Online 2018).

### 1.3 Archaeological and historical background

#### *Prehistoric*

- 1.3.1 Several worked flint artefacts have been recorded within the vicinity of the site including six late Mesolithic / early Neolithic core fragments, a Neolithic knife, an axe-head and a Bronze Age arrowhead.
- 1.3.2 A geophysical survey of Anson fields, which lie immediately to the south-east of site, was undertaken in 2012 by Wessex Archaeology (WA 2012). The results of the survey indicate the presence of curvilinear ditches interpreted as the vestiges of a prehistoric settlement and funerary features along with anomalies indicative of linear and discrete cut features. Two subsequent phases of evaluation (WA 2012b and WA 2012a) confirmed the results of the geophysical survey. The first phase of evaluation recorded remains of numerous prehistoric features, including a Bronze Age Barrow with suspected central burial, and remains of Iron Age settlement indicated through storage

/ refuse pits and boundary ditches. Pottery dating from the early – middle Iron Age through to the 3rd/4th century AD was recovered from the features. Further evidence of Iron Age settlement was recorded during the second phase of evaluation, including two roundhouses, identified through postholes and a drip gully, along with additional storage pits.

1.3.3 Iron Age and possible Roman features were also recorded at The Red House located approximately 100m to the south-west of the development area. Remains of pits, postholes and ring ditches were present and may represent the continuation of the activity known within the development area.

1.3.4 A complex of cropmarks to the north-east of Marcham is indicative of further Iron Age settlement. Considerable quantities of Iron Age and Roman pottery have been recovered from the surrounding area as well.

### ***Roman***

1.3.5 The focus of Roman activity within the vicinity of the site lies to the south-west of Marcham. An extensive Iron Age settlement is overlain by a Romano-British temple complex which has been subject to excavations as part of the Vale and Ridgeway Project.

1.3.6 Several Roman finds are recorded in Marcham including a small bronze coin of Constantine II.

### ***Medieval***

1.3.7 The historic core and conservation area of Marcham lies to the west of the proposed development area. Marcham originates in the Anglo-Saxon period, King Edgar granted 50 hides of land in Marcham to Abingdon Abbey in 965AD. By 1086, while still under control of the Abbey, Marcham is recorded as consisting of 10 hides. In the 1538 the manor Marcham was surrendered to the crown by the Abbot along with the manors of Frilford and Garford.

1.3.8 Trial trench evaluation and geophysical survey to the south of the site revealed evidence of Saxon-Norman and medieval activity (NA 2012, MoLA 2014, and CA 2016). Boundary ditches of 11-12th century date were present along with isolated pits and postholes. Slag recovered from a large pit indicated smithing activity in the vicinity. In addition, two limestone walls were recorded, however, these are suspected to be of a later date.

### ***Post-Medieval***

1.3.9 The 1818 Marcham Enclosure Map shows development along Packhorse lane to the south of the site, with the development area still in agricultural use and belonging to John Higgins. The site is believed to have remained in agricultural use until being repurposed as playing fields. Trends associated with ploughing were recorded in the geophysical survey of the site

## 2 WATCHING BRIEF AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

### 2.1 Aims

- i. To determine and understand the nature, function and character of any archaeological remains within their cultural and environmental setting, should they present.
- ii. To mitigate the impact of the proposed development on any archaeological remains present.
- iii. To determine or confirm the approximate date or date range of any remains, by means of artefactual or other evidence.
- iv. To contextualize the finding within the local and regional landscapes.

### 2.2 Methodology

- 2.2.1 Archaeological monitoring was conducted during groundworks that had potential to reveal or disturb archaeological remains. This includes a soak-away, foundation trenches and service runs.
- 2.2.2 It should be noted that two phases of groundworks were not monitored by an archaeologist. The first was the installation of service trench across an existing road. This was work undertaken during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic and was not consider of sufficient archaeological potential to warrant archaeological attendance during the heightened risk associated with the pandemic. This was agreed with Richard Oram, Planning Archaeological for Oxfordshire County Council. The second works comprised excavations associated with the construction of store. These were to be entirely undertaken within the footprint of a disused swimming pool, an area with no archaeological potential.
- 2.2.3 The area of the soak-away was stripped to the geological horizon under archaeological supervision and the area inspected prior to the excavation continuing.
- 2.2.4 All deposits were recorded by means of Oxford Archaeology (OA) pro-forma recording sheets.
- 2.2.5 A complete drawn record, which incorporated, plans and representative sections, was made of the deposits uncovered. These were drawn at scales of 1:20 for plans and 1:10 for sections.
- 2.2.6 A full photographic record was maintained. The photographic record included photographs of all deposits as encountered and shots to illustrate work in progress.
- 2.2.7 All excavations were carried out by the site contractor (HBO Construction Limited). Where appropriate, overlying topsoil and modern layers were removed to the expose the geological horizon.
- 2.2.8 All spoil and upcasting from the excavations were scanned visually for artefacts and ecofacts.
- 2.2.9 All work was conducted in accordance with the Chartered Institute for Archeologists' 'Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Excavation' (CIfA 2014) and local and national planning policies.

## **3 RESULTS**

### **3.1 Introduction and presentation of results**

3.1.1 The results of the watching brief are presented below, and include a stratigraphic description of the deposits identified. The full details of all deposits can be found in Appendix A.

### **3.2 General soils and ground conditions**

3.2.1 Ground conditions throughout the watching brief were generally good, and the site remained dry throughout.

3.2.2 Beneath the soak-away the limestone geology was directly overlain by topsoil.

3.2.3 To the northern area of the site, beneath the playground and within service trenches, modern levelling deposits were recorded.

### **3.3 General distribution of archaeological deposits**

3.3.1 No Archaeological features or deposits were recorded during the watching brief.

### **3.4 Finds Summary**

3.4.1 No finds were recovered during the watching brief.

### **3.5 Environmental Summary**

3.5.1 No deposits suitable for environmental sampling were exposed during the course of the watching brief.

## 4 DISCUSSION

### 4.1 Interpretation

- 4.1.1 The watching brief did not identify any surviving archaeological features or deposits. The geological horizon was exposed in the soak-away (Plate 1), foundation and service trenches (Plates 2, 3). Modern rubble deposits were recorded at the northern area of the site, which appeared to indicate landscaping prior to the construction of the school.
- 4.1.2 Previous archaeological works at Anson fields (WA 2012), to the south of the site, recorded an Iron Age settlement. No evidence of this settlement was recorded during these works suggesting that the activity does not extend into the footprint of the school. However, given the limited scope of these investigations it can not be ruled out entirely.

## APPENDIX A DESCRIPTIONS AND CONTEXT INVENTORY

| Context Inventory |       |           |           |                    |       |      |
|-------------------|-------|-----------|-----------|--------------------|-------|------|
| Context No.       | Type  | Width (m) | Depth (m) | Description        | Finds | Date |
| 1                 | Layer | -         | 0.22      | Topsoil            | -     | -    |
| 2                 | Layer | -         | -         | Limestone Geology. | -     | -    |
| 3                 | Layer | -         | -         | Tarmac surface     | -     | -    |
| 4                 | Layer | -         | -         | Make up for (3)    | -     | -    |
| 5                 | Layer | -         | -         | Make up for layer  | -     | -    |
| 6                 | Layer | -         | -         | Subsoil            | -     | -    |

## APPENDIX B      BIBLIOGRAPHY

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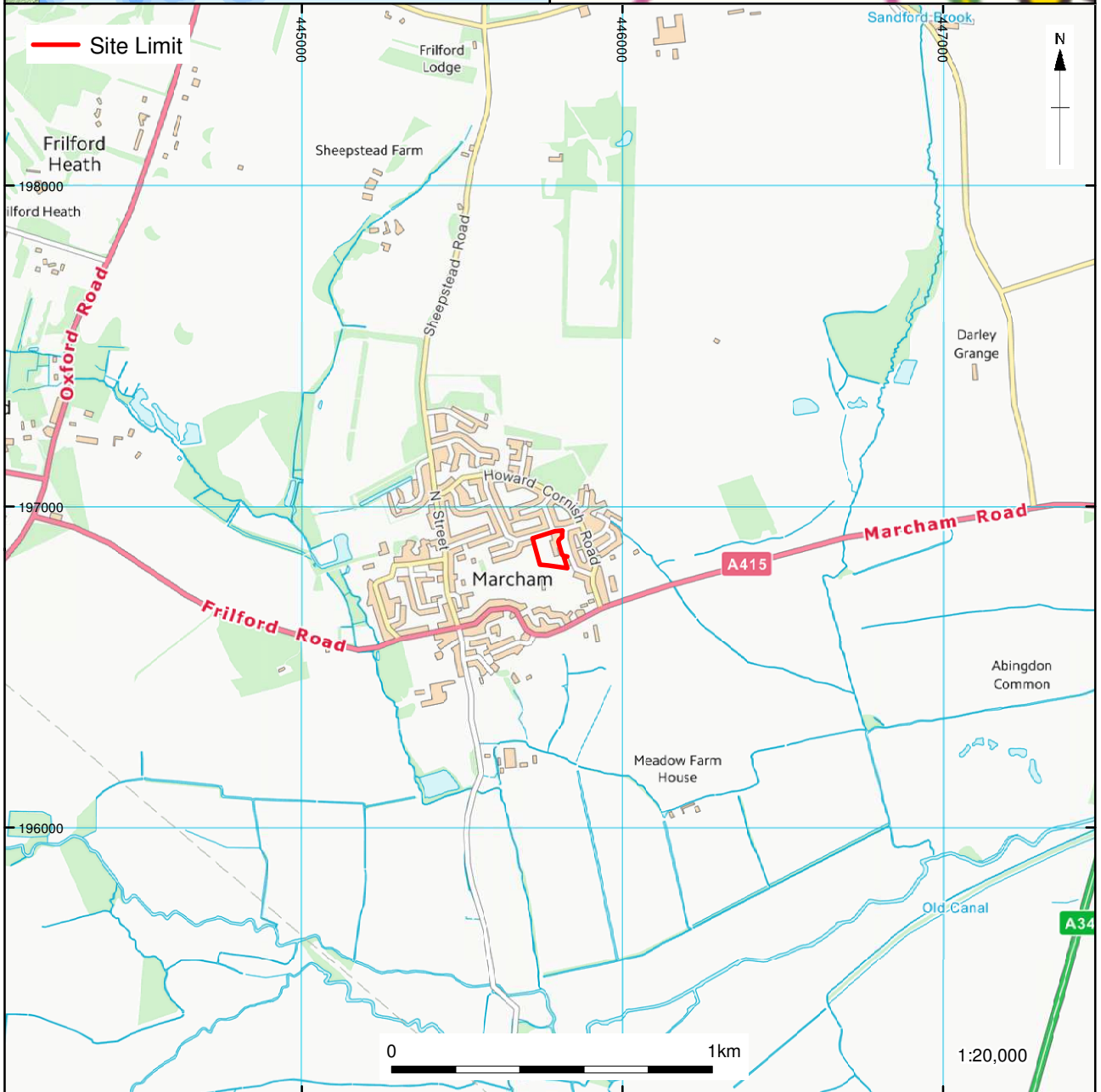
WA 2012c, Anson Field, Marcham, Oxfordshire, Archaeological Evaluation Report Phase II, Wessex Archaeology

**APPENDIX C****SITE SUMMARY DETAILS**

|                             |  |
|-----------------------------|--|
| <b>Site name:</b>           | Marcham Church of England Primary School, Marcham Oxfordshire  |
| <b>Site code:</b>           | MAPS19   |
| <b>Grid Reference</b>       | SU458069684  |
| <b>Type:</b>                | Watching Brief   |
| <b>Date and duration:</b>   | 28 <sup>th</sup> October-11 <sup>th</sup> November 2019. days  |
| <b>Area of Site</b>         | 700m <sup>2</sup>  |
| <b>Location of archive:</b> | The archive is currently held at OA South Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with Oxfordshire County Museum Service in due course, under the following accession number: OXCMS:2019.132. |

**Summary of Results:** Between October and November 2019, Oxford Archaeology undertook an archaeological watching brief during improvement works at Marcham Primary School, Marcham, Oxfordshire. The works comprised the monitoring during the excavation of a soak-away, foundation trenches and service runs. No archaeological features were recorded.





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Figure 1: Site location

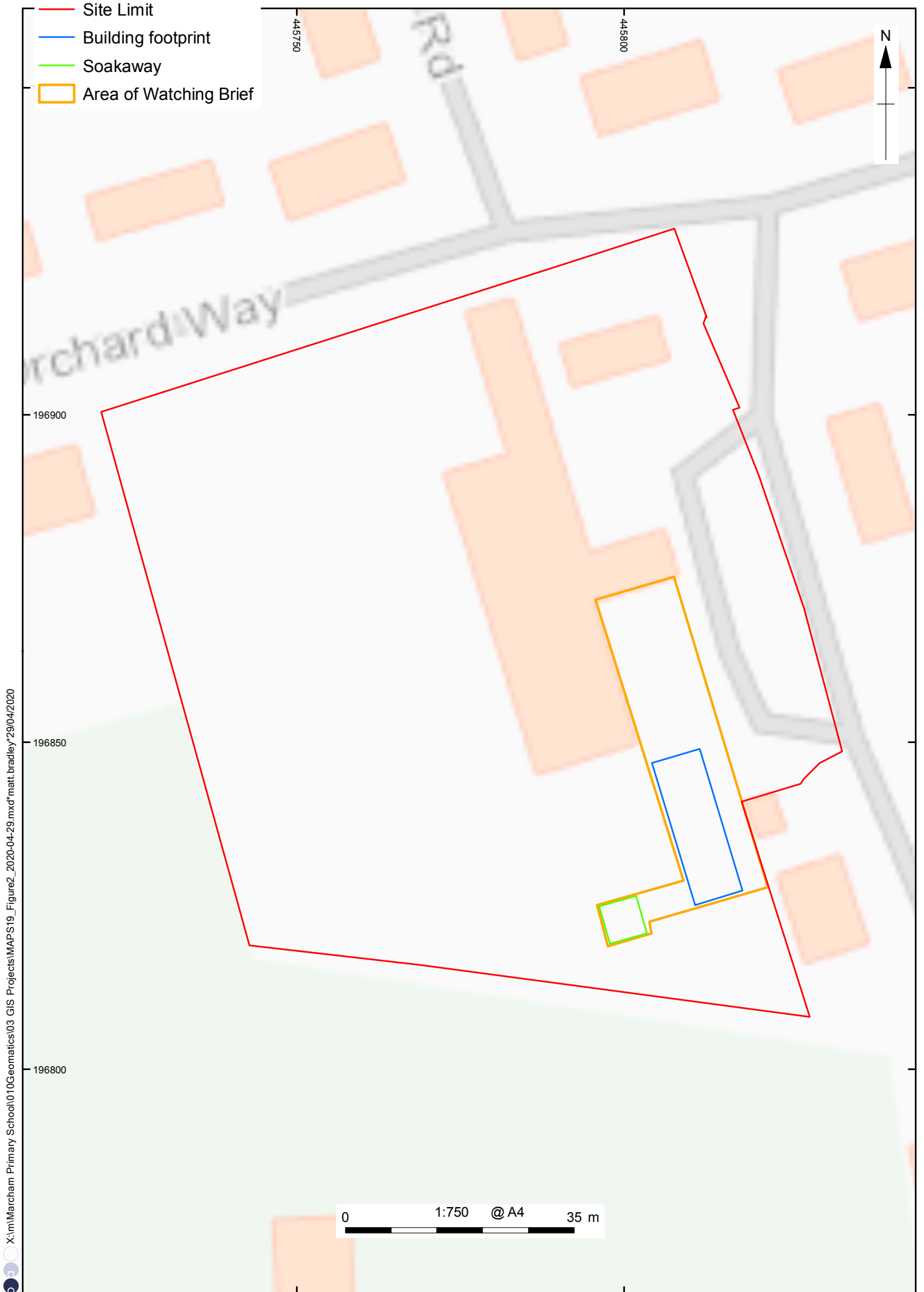


Figure 2: Site plan showing works undertaken with sections





Plate 1: Area strip for soak-away



Plate 2: Foundation trench

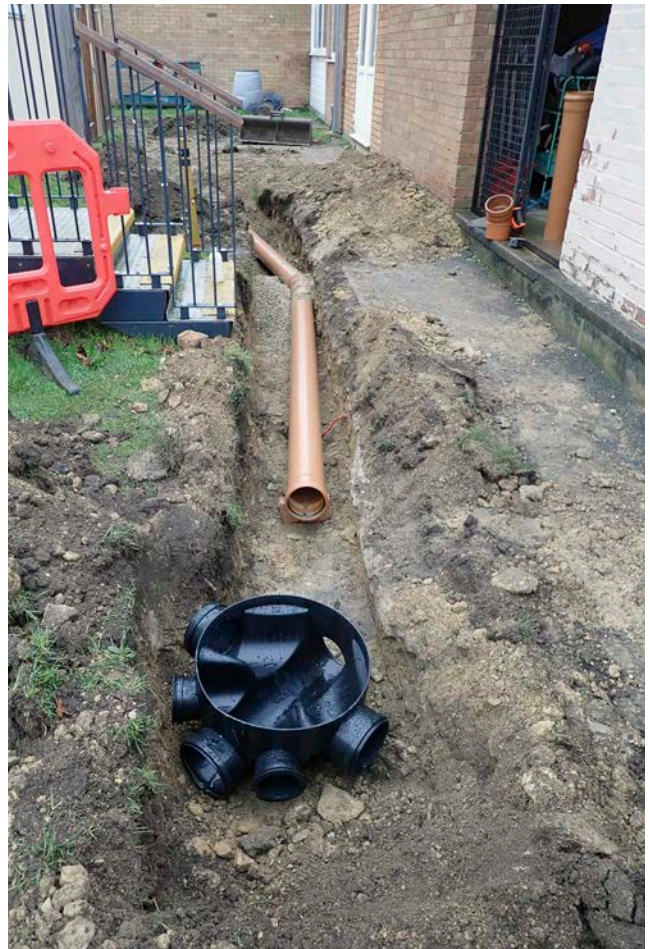


Plate 3: Service trench





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