



Purely Plants Nursery, Land off Wantage Road, Wallingford

Archaeological Evaluation Report

August 2023

Client: Nicholas King Homes

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Purely Plants Nursery, Land off Wantage Road, Wallingford

Archaeological Evaluation Report

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and illustrations by Marjaana Kohtamaki and Sophie Lamb

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Summary

In July 2023 Oxford Archaeology undertook a trial trench evaluation on land adjacent to Purely Plants, Wantage Road, Wallingford, Oxfordshire, ahead of the submission of an outline planning application by Nicholas King Homes for a proposed housing development. The trenches represented a 5% sample of the undisturbed areas of site, much of which comprised a former sand and gravel quarry in use during the first half of the 20th century, which has subsequently been infilled with landfill.

The only archaeological remains found during the trenching were an undated shallow curvilinear ditch and an undated north-west to south-east aligned ditch. Both were located in the southern part of the site and neither yielded any artefactual evidence. The curvilinear ditch has been very tentatively interpreted as a possible Iron Age ring gully associated with a roundhouse due to the presence of similar Iron Age features throughout the wider landscape. It was very shallow and indistinct and may not be an archaeological feature at all. It is possible that the undated linear ditch is related to a middle Bronze Age field system previously excavated to the south of the site.

The remainder of site was devoid of significant archaeological remains with only natural or modern features identified.

Acknowledgements

Oxford Archaeology would like to thank Sean Steadman of RPS Consulting for commissioning this project on behalf of Nicholas King Homes. Thanks are also extended to Richard Oram and Steve Weaver who monitored the work on behalf of Oxfordshire County Council.

The project was managed for Oxford Archaeology by Stuart Foreman. The fieldwork was directed by Thomas Bruce, who was supported by Emily Globe and Keaghan McClean. Survey and digitising was carried out by Marjaana Kohtamaki. Sections were drawn by Sophie Lamb. Thanks are also extended to the OA staff that prepared the archive under the supervision of Nicky Scott.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Scope of work

- 1.1.1 Oxford Archaeology (OA) was commissioned by RPS Consulting, on behalf of Nicholas King Homes, to undertake a trial trench evaluation at the site of a proposed housing development at Purely Plants Nursery, Land off Wantage Road, Wallingford, Oxfordshire (NGR: SU 59489 90620, Fig. 1), hereafter referred to as 'site'. This was in relation to the submission of an outline planning application (P23/S0872/O) for the erection of 63 dwellings by Nicholas King Homes (NK Homes).
- 1.1.2 The work has been undertaken to inform the planning authority in advance of the submission of the outline planning application. A brief was set by Oxfordshire County Archaeological Services (OCAS), detailing the Local Authority's requirements for work necessary to inform the planning process. RPS Consulting produced a written scheme of investigation (WSI) in response to the brief, detailing the trench plan. OA subsequently produced a method statement accepting the terms of the brief and WSI and detailing OA's working methods. This document outlines how OA implemented the specified requirements.

1.2 Location, topography and geology

- 1.2.1 The site covers a c 2.46ha area situated to the north-west of Wallingford, c 1.2km from the historic town centre on slightly higher ground. The site currently comprises an access road, buildings and grounds associated with the Purely Plants Nursery, located to the west of site, a Christmas tree plantation to the north, and a separate plantation adjacent to the nursery to the south-west of site. The site is bounded to the south-west by residential properties and Wantage Road, and by arable fields on all other sides. A hedgerow and fence line form the northern, north-eastern and southern field boundaries and there are several paddock fences located within the proposed development site (Fig. 1).
- 1.2.2 The area covered by this evaluation comprises three enclosed pasture fields situated at c 55m above Ordnance Datum (AOD). The ground is relatively flat in the south-east part and undulating to the north (within the area of the restored sand and gravel pit).
- 1.2.3 Desk studies and geotechnical site investigation have confirmed that the majority of the site was once a sand and gravel quarry (known as the Slade End Pit), in use during the first half of the 20th century, which has been subsequently infilled with landfill (Fig. 2). An area of c 0.2ha within the fields on the southern and north-eastern edges of site remain undisturbed by previous quarrying (WDE Consulting 2022).
- 1.2.4 The British Geological Survey (BGS 2023) mapping records the bedrock geology within the site as Upper Greensand Formation (siltstone and sandstone). This is overlain by superficial sand and gravel deposits belonging to the Summertown-Radley Sand and Gravel Member (Fig. 4).
- 1.2.5 The Cranfield Soil and Agrifood Institute identified the soils of the site as Freely draining, slightly acidic but base-rich soils ([Cranford University 2023](#)).

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

- 1.3.1 The archaeological and historical background of the site was reviewed in a Heritage Statement submitted with the planning application (RPS 2022).
- 1.3.2 Data obtained from Oxfordshire HER records two non-Designated Heritage Assets located within the proposed development site, within the area of former quarrying immediately to the north of the site covered by this report (Fig. 2).
- 1.3.3 The first HER record is the discovery of a Bronze Age crouched burial, along with Beaker pottery (HER reference 2934) during gravel extraction works at Slade End Pit in 1934. A subsequent field visit in 1963, confirmed the restored gravel pit had become part of a nursery garden.
- 1.3.4 The second HER record is the discovery of a Neolithic axehead and Bronze Age Beaker pottery (HER reference 1961) from a garden close to the Slade End Pit in 1946. The location of these finds recorded on the HER corresponds with an area of hardstanding within the south-western area of the site (not illustrated).
- 1.3.5 Although not located within the site, a deer antler possibly dating from the Neolithic period and Roman pottery fragments (HER reference 2924), were found in sand pits which were excavated close to a footpath leading to Clapcot Fields (located immediately east of the site). Based upon that description, these finds are likely to have been recovered close to the site, in the adjacent field to the north, although the exact location is uncertain.
- 1.3.6 Major excavations have been undertaken c 300m to the south of the site at Slade End Farm (Davies *et al.* forthcoming). Some c 31.5ha east of the bypass was evaluated, and c 19.5ha subject to open area excavation. Discoveries include early and late Neolithic pit clusters, early Neolithic inhumations, probable Neolithic circular monuments, a middle Bronze Age field system with more ephemeral settlement evidence, Bronze Age cremation burials, and an extensive area of Iron Age settlement. Middle Bronze Age features were located in the northern part of the Slade End Farm, closest to the present site, whereas the Neolithic and Iron Age features were further to the south. Middle Bronze Age field ditches in the were aligned north-west to south-east and north-east to south-west and continued north towards the present site.

2 AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Aims

2.1.1 The project aims and objectives were as follows:

- i. To determine the presence or absence of buried archaeological remains.
- ii. To provide detailed information regarding the date, character, extent, integrity and degree of preservation of the archaeological remains.
- iii. To determine levels of disturbance to any archaeological deposits from agricultural activity (eg ploughing or drainage works).
- iv. To determine the likely impact on any archaeological deposits as a consequence of the proposed development.
- v. To inform proposals for any potential further archaeological investigation/mitigation.

2.1.2 The programme of archaeological investigation was conducted within the general research parameters and address themes included in the regional research framework Solent-Thames Research Framework (Hey and Hind 2014).

2.2 Methodology

2.2.1 A total of four trenches were excavated across the site using a 14-tonne mechanical excavator fitted with a toothless ditching bucket. The trenches were positioned to the south and north-east of the site, within areas identified as being undisturbed by previous quarrying activity. Trench 1 was positioned closest to the recorded findspot of the possible Beaker burial. All four trenches measured 30m x 1.80m, representing 5% coverage of the site.

2.2.2 All trenches were set out as shown in Figures 2–5, prior to excavation, using a GPS with sub-15mm accuracy. The original planned locations of Trenches 2 and 3 were revised and moved to avoid existing fences.

2.2.3 Prior to excavation the location of the trenches were scanned with a Cable Avoidance Tool (CAT), and at subsequent 0.30m intervals during excavation. Trench locations were also scanned with a metal detector prior to and throughout the excavation process by an experienced archaeologist, with the associated upcast and spoil scanned by eye and by metal detector to aid the recovery of topsoil artefacts.

2.2.4 The trenches were machined under constant supervision by an experienced archaeologist to the top of the archaeological horizon or to the sterile natural geology, whichever was encountered first. All trenches were opened to their full length with topsoil and subsequent underlying deposits removed in even c 100mm spits.

2.2.5 Where archaeological remains were identified, a sample of the revealed features were hand excavated. Features were excavated and recorded in line with the standards set out in the WSI (OA 2023).

2.2.6 Upon completion of the works and in agreement with Richard Oram, Lead Planning Archaeologist at Oxfordshire County Council, and Sean Steadman, Director at RPS Consulting, the trenches were backfilled in reverse order of excavation and compacted using the mechanical excavator.

3 RESULTS

3.1 Introduction and presentation of results

3.1.1 The results of the evaluation are presented below and include a stratigraphic description of the trenches that contained archaeological remains. The full details of all trenches with dimensions and depths of all deposits can be found in Appendix A.

3.2 General soils and ground conditions

3.2.1 The soil sequence in the trenches was fairly uniform throughout the site. The natural superficial Summertown-Radley Sand and Gravel geology was overlain in Trenches 1 and 4 by a fine-grained yellowish brown sandy silt subsoil, possibly representing a reworked wind-blown 'supernatural' or similar brickearth-type deposit, upon which pedogenic processes have occurred. This deposit was overlain by a more recent light to pale grey sandy silt subsoil, present in all trenches, which was in turn overlain by topsoil. Twentieth century landfill deposits were present directly beneath the topsoil in the south-eastern c 5m of Trench 4.

3.2.2 Ground conditions throughout the evaluation were generally good, and the site remained dry throughout. Archaeological features, where present, were identifiable although not especially clear against the underlying natural geology.

3.3 General distribution of archaeological deposits

3.3.1 Archaeological features were present in Trenches 1, 2 and 3, while Trench 4 was devoid of archaeology. A possible ring gully typically associated with Iron Age roundhouses was present in Trench 1, while an undated ditch was seen in Trenches 2 and 3. Several natural features were identified and investigated throughout the site.

3.4 Trench 1

3.4.1 Trench 1 was located in the south-west part of the site and was the closest trench to the recorded findspot of the possible Beaker burial. It was aligned north-west to south-east and contained a shallow, undated, curvilinear ditch (105) which traversed the north-western end of the trench on a north-east to south-west alignment. It was 0.39m wide and 0.06m deep with a single fill (107) of dark yellowish brown sandy silt. It is possible that this forms part of a ring gully typically associated with roundhouses of Iron Age date. A return that would constitute the opposing side of the ring gully was not seen in the south-eastern part of the trench, although due to the shallow depth of 105 it is possible that this has been truncated away. No artefactual evidence was recovered from the possible ring gully.

3.4.2 A small, sub-circular feature at the north-western end of the trench (104) was investigated and found to be a natural variation in the underlying geology.

3.5 Trench 2

3.5.1 Trench 2 was located c 31m to the north-east of Trench 1 on a north-east to south-west alignment and contained a north-west to south-east aligned linear ditch (206) at the north-eastern end of the trench. The majority of the ditch was exposed in the

trench baulk and was 0.98m wide and 0.40m deep with a single fill (207) of light brown sandy silt that contained no archaeological artefacts.

- 3.5.2 Two probable natural features were investigated within the trench. A sub-circular feature interpreted as a tree-throw hole (203) was partially exposed and recorded in the south-western end of the trench. This was 0.90m long, 0.47m wide and 0.17m deep, with a single fill (204) of light greyish brown sandy silt that contained a single hand-recovered fragment of charred hazelnut shell, but no archaeological artefacts. The second natural feature (205) was located to the south-west of ditch 206 and comprised a shallow, irregularly curved feature likely to represent a small hollow or variation within the natural geology.

3.6 Trench 3

- 3.6.1 Trench 3 was situated to the immediate south and south-east of Trench 2, also on a north-east to south-west alignment. It contained a single linear ditch (303) located in the centre of the trench, on the same alignment as ditch 206 in Trench 2. Here the ditch was 0.80m wide and 0.22m deep, with a single fill of light orangey brown sandy silt that contained no archaeological artefacts.

3.7 Finds summary

- 3.7.1 No artefactual evidence was recovered from any of the features on site. A single fragment of charred hazelnut shell was recovered by hand from tree-throw hole 203 but was not retained.

4 DISCUSSION

4.1 Reliability of field investigation

- 4.1.1 The evaluation was undertaken during favourable weather conditions, with features generally well-defined, although not always easy to identify against the underlying superficial geology.
- 4.1.2 All four trenches were successfully excavated and represented a 5% coverage of the site area. The trench plan was followed, though Trenches 2 and 3 were relocated to avoid existing paddock fences, and the coverage achieved by the field evaluation was considered to be good. The results can therefore be seen as representative of the archaeological potential of the site.

4.2 Evaluation objectives and results

- 4.2.1 The archaeological remains identified consisted of a possible ring gully in Trench 1 and a north-west to south-east aligned ditch observed in Trenches 2 and 3. No artefactual evidence was recovered from any of the features recorded in the trenches so it is difficult to determine the date and character of these features, although the ditch found in Trenches 2 and 3 follows the alignment of a middle Bronze Age field system excavated at Slade End Farm c 300m to the south (Davies *et al.* forthcoming). The evaluation demonstrate that potential archaeological remains survive beneath the existing topsoil and subsoil. The proposed development, therefore, could impact on these remains.

4.3 Interpretation

- 4.3.1 The ditch found in Trenches 2 and 3 might belong to the extensive middle Bronze Age field system excavated at Slade End Farm to the south of the site (*ibid.*). The field system continues from Slade End Farm to the north, towards present site, and the ditch is on the same dominant north-west to south-east alignment. Artefactual recovery from the field system ditches at Slade End Farm was often low with single interventions typically not producing any finds (*ibid.*).
- 4.3.2 Ring gullies are typically associated with Iron Age roundhouses and can form shallow ephemeral features when excavated. Curvilinear ditch 105 has been tentatively interpreted as a ring gully associated with a roundhouse, although the absence of artefactual evidence makes this very uncertain. The cut was very shallow and poorly defined and it may not be an archaeological feature. Iron Age settlement activity, including a number of Iron Age roundhouses, have been identified during excavations in the wider Wallingford area (eg Slade End Farm, Winterbrook (*ibid.*), and St Martin's Field (Simmonds and Boothroyd 2020). These settlements include ditched enclosures, and it is possible that the ditch seen in Trenches 2 and 3 is of Iron Age date.

4.4 Significance

The two archaeological features identified during this evaluation lacked any artefactual evidence, making it difficult to determine their age or function. Ditch 206/303 might be from the middle Bronze Age field system excavated to the south, and curvilinear ditch 105 has been very tentatively interpreted as a ring gully

associated with a roundhouse, possibly of Iron Age date due to the occurrence of similar features in the wider area. However, it was very shallow and indistinct and may not be an archaeological feature at all.

APPENDIX A TRENCH DESCRIPTIONS AND CONTEXT INVENTORY

Trench 1							
General description					Orientation	NW-SE	
Trench devoid of archaeology. Deposits consist of topsoil overlying subsoil that overlies a yellowish brown brickearth-type deposit. This covers Summertown-Radley terrace gravel deposits					Length (m)	30	
					Width (m)	1.8	
					Avg. depth (m)	0.4	
Context No.	Type	Fill Of	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Finds	Date
100	Layer			0.18	Topsoil. Dark greyish brown loose sandy silt		
101	Layer			0.09	Subsoil. Mid greyish brown compact sandy silt		
102	Layer			0.1	Other Layer. Mid yellowish brown compact sandy silt. Possible supranatural / brickearth-type deposit situated above undulating surface of underlying sand and gravel deposit, filling in hollows		
103	Layer				Natural. Dark reddish brown compact coarse silty sand gravel. Frequent sa-sr poorly sorted small to very large pebbles (flint, quartzite), occurring in patches. Few mid to dark yellowish brown sandy patches. Summertown-Radley terrace gravel deposits		
104	Cut		0.41	0.06	Natural Feature. Colour variation in natural, thought to be pit and half sectioned.		
105	Cut		0.39	0.06	Ring Gully. Possible ring gully or natural depression		
106	Fill	104	0.41	0.06	Other Fill. Natural variation in colour filling natural feature [104].		
107	Fill	105	0.39	0.06	Secondary Fill. Fill of possible ring gully. Dark yellowish brown sandy silt		

Trench 2							
General description					Orientation	NE-SW	
Trench contains one NW-SE aligned ditch. Deposits consist of topsoil overlying subsoil that overlies Summertown-Radley terrace gravel deposits					Length (m)	30	
					Width (m)	1.8	
					Avg. depth (m)	0.45	
Context No.	Type	Fill Of	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Finds	Date
200	Layer			0.25	Topsoil. Dark greyish brown loose sandy silt		
201	Layer			0.14	Subsoil. Mid yellowish compact sandy silt with common sa-sr small to very large flint and quartzite pebbles. Possible subsoil derived from supranatural / brickearth-type deposit		
202	Layer				Natural. Dark reddish brown compact coarse silty sand gravel. Frequent sa-sr poorly sorted small to very large pebbles (flint, quartzite), occurring in patches. Few mid to dark yellowish brown sandy patches. Summertown-Radley terrace gravel deposits		
203	Cut		0.9	0.17	Tree Throw. Irregular base. NW side is gently sloping, SE side is steeply sloping.		
204	Fill	203	0.9	0.17	Secondary Fill. Light greyish brown compact sandy silt		
205	Cut		0.8	0.04	Natural Feature. Natural feature. Flat base with gently sloping sides.		
206	Cut		0.98	0.4	Ditch. Cut of a possible linear ditch. Same as [303] in Trench 3		
207	Fill	206	0.98	0.4	Secondary Fill. Natural secondary fill of ditch [206]. No finds.		
208	Fill	205	0.8	0.04	Secondary Fill. Fill of natural feature. Light greyish brown compact sandy silt		

Trench 3							
General description					Orientation	NE-SW	
Trench contains a possible NW-SE linear. Deposits consist of topsoil overlying subsoil that covers Summertown-Radley terrace gravel deposits					Length (m)	30	
					Width (m)	1.8	
					Avg. depth (m)	0.45	
Context No.	Type	Fill Of	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Finds	Date
300	Layer			0.24	Topsoil. Dark greyish brown loose sandy silt		
301	Layer			0.08	Subsoil. Mid yellowish brown compact sandy silt. Common sa-sr small to very large flint and quartzite pebbles. Subsoil possibly derived from supranatural / brickearth-type deposit		
302	Layer				Natural. Dark reddish brown compact coarse silty sand gravel. Frequent sa-sr poorly sorted small to very large pebbles (flint, quartzite), occurring in patches. Few mid to dark yellowish brown sandy patches. Summertown-Radley terrace gravel deposits		
303	Cut		0.8	0.22	Ditch. Cut of a possible ditch, significantly over cut to determine exact shape, and is distinct from underlying natural clay layer. Single basal fill (304) 1.2m length ex		
304	Fill		0.8	0.22	Secondary Fill. Natural secondary basal fill of possible ditch [303]. Light orange brown sandy silt with common sub angular natural flints.		

Trench 4							
General description						Orientation	NE-SW
Trench devoid of archaeology. Deposits consist of topsoil overlying subsoil that overlies sandy possible brickearth-type deposits. These cover Summertown-Radley terrace gravel deposits. There are 20th C landfill deposits present below the topsoil to the SE 5m of trench						Length (m)	30
						Width (m)	1.8
						Avg. depth (m)	0.5
Context No.	Type	Fill Of	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Finds	Date
400	Layer			0.25	Topsoil. Dark greyish brown loose sandy silt		
401	Layer			0.12	Other Layer. Light to mid grey sandy silt. Upper part of 20th C landfill. Seen in SE 3m of trench only		
402	Layer			0.08	Other Layer. Friable light yellowish brown fine to medium sand. Lower part of 20th C landfill deposits seen in SE 5m of trench only		
403	Layer			0.2	Other Layer. Light brownish grey medium to coarse silty sand. Common sa-sr small to very large flint and quartzite pebbles, few charcoal flecks. Possible colluvium or supranatural deposit, stained by overlying landfill deposits		
404	Layer			0.06	Subsoil. Firm but friable mid to pale greyish brown sandy silt. Frequent chalk flecks and common sa-sr small to very large flint and quartzite pebbles. Only seen in northern part of trench		
405	Layer			0.2	Other Layer. Compact but friable mid to light yellowish brown medium to coarse silty sand. Few sa-sr small to large pebbles. Possible supranatural / brickearth-type deposit		
406	Layer				Natural. Dark reddish brown compact coarse silty sand gravel. Frequent sa-sr poorly sorted small to very large pebbles (flint, quartzite), occurring in patches. Few mid to dark yellowish brown sandy patches, more frequent to NW end of trench. Summertown-Radley terrace gravel deposits		

APPENDIX B BIBLIOGRAPHY

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APPENDIX C**SITE SUMMARY DETAILS / OASIS REPORT FORM**

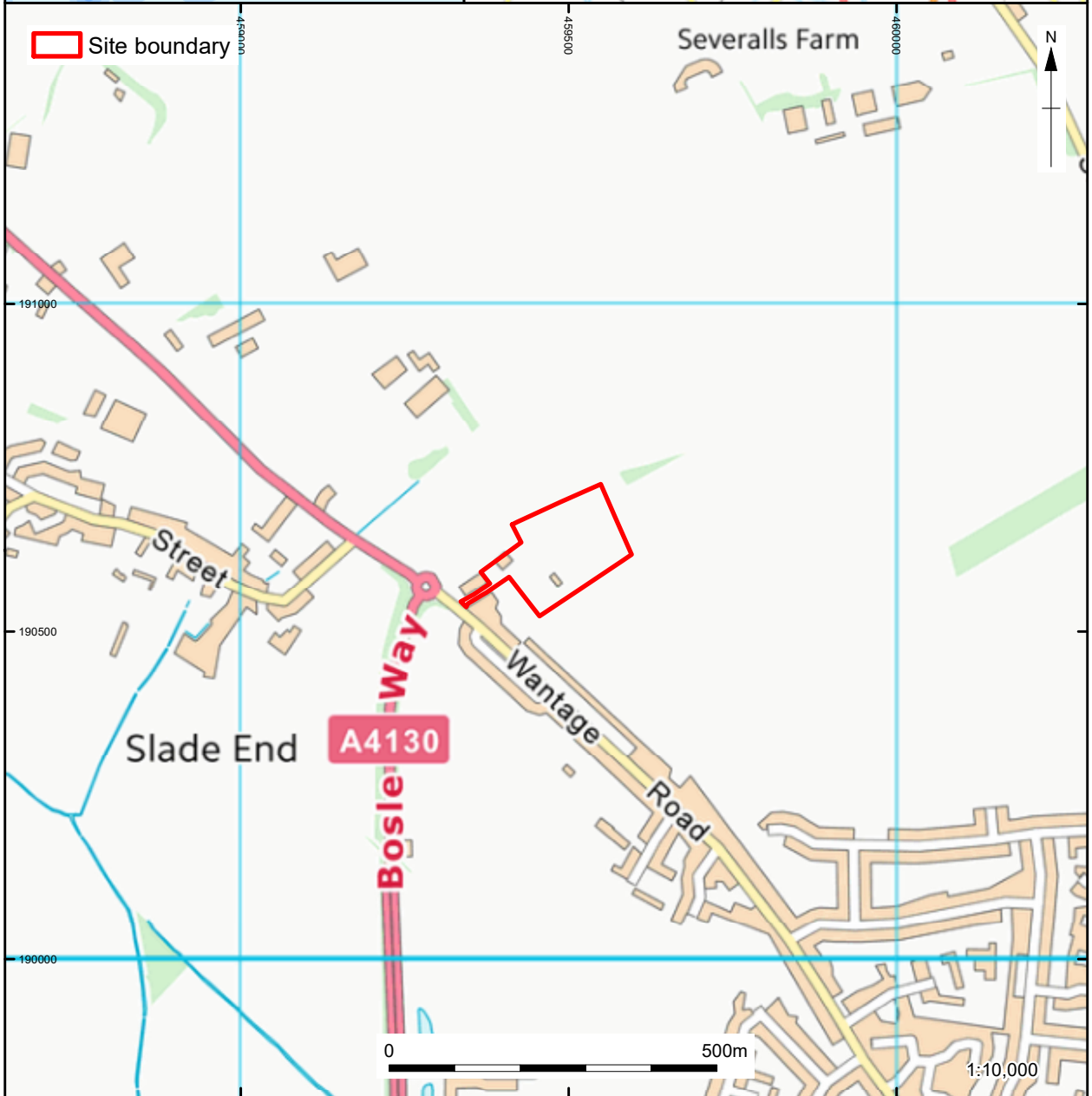
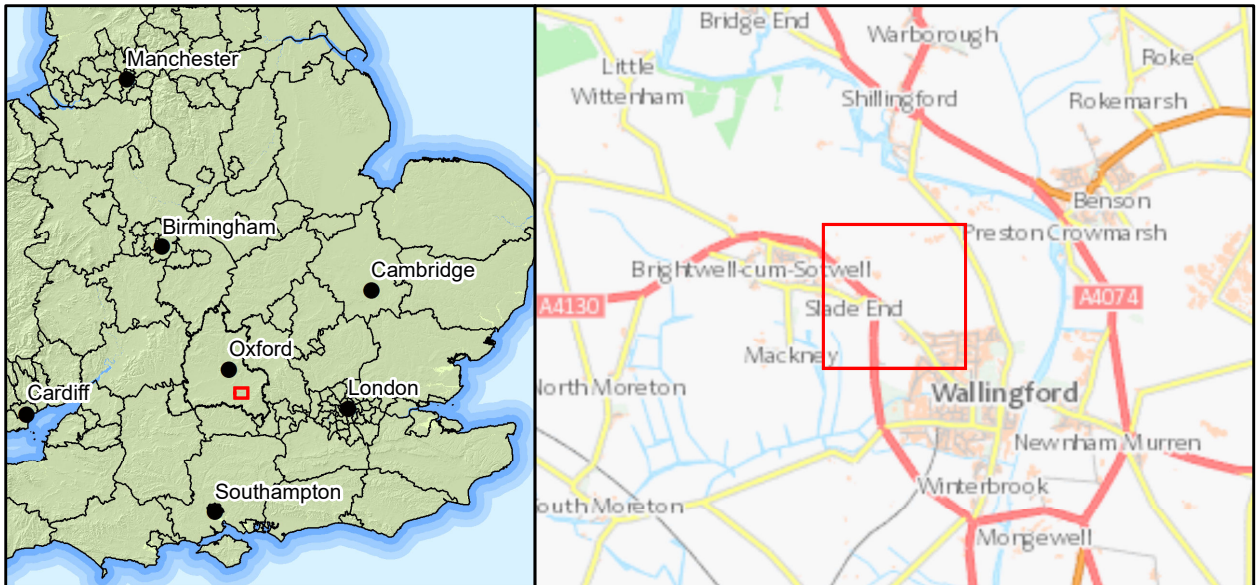
Site name:	Purely Plants, Land off Wantage Road, Wallingford
Site code:	WAPP23
Grid Reference	SU 59489 90620
Type:	Evaluation
Date and duration:	July 2023 – 3 days
Area of Site	2.46 ha
Location of archive:	The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, and will be deposited with Oxfordshire County Museum in due course, under the following accession number: OXCMS:2023.88

Summary of Results:

In July 2023 Oxford Archaeology undertook a trial trench evaluation on land adjacent to Purely Plants, Wantage Road, Wallingford, Oxfordshire, ahead of the submission of an outline planning application by Nicholas King Homes for a proposed housing development. The trenches represented a 5% sample of the undisturbed areas of site, much of which comprised a former sand and gravel quarry in use during the first half of the 20th century, which has subsequently been infilled with landfill.

The only archaeological remains found during the trenching were an undated shallow curvilinear ditch and an undated north-west to south-east aligned ditch. Both were located in the southern part of the site and neither yielded any artefactual evidence. The curvilinear ditch has been very tentatively interpreted as a possible Iron Age ring gully associated with a roundhouse due to the presence of similar Iron Age features throughout the wider landscape. It was very shallow and indistinct and may not be an archaeological feature at all. It is possible that the undated linear ditch is related to a middle Bronze Age field system previously excavated to the south of the site.

The remainder of site was devoid of significant archaeological remains with only natural or modern features identified.



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Figure 1: Site location

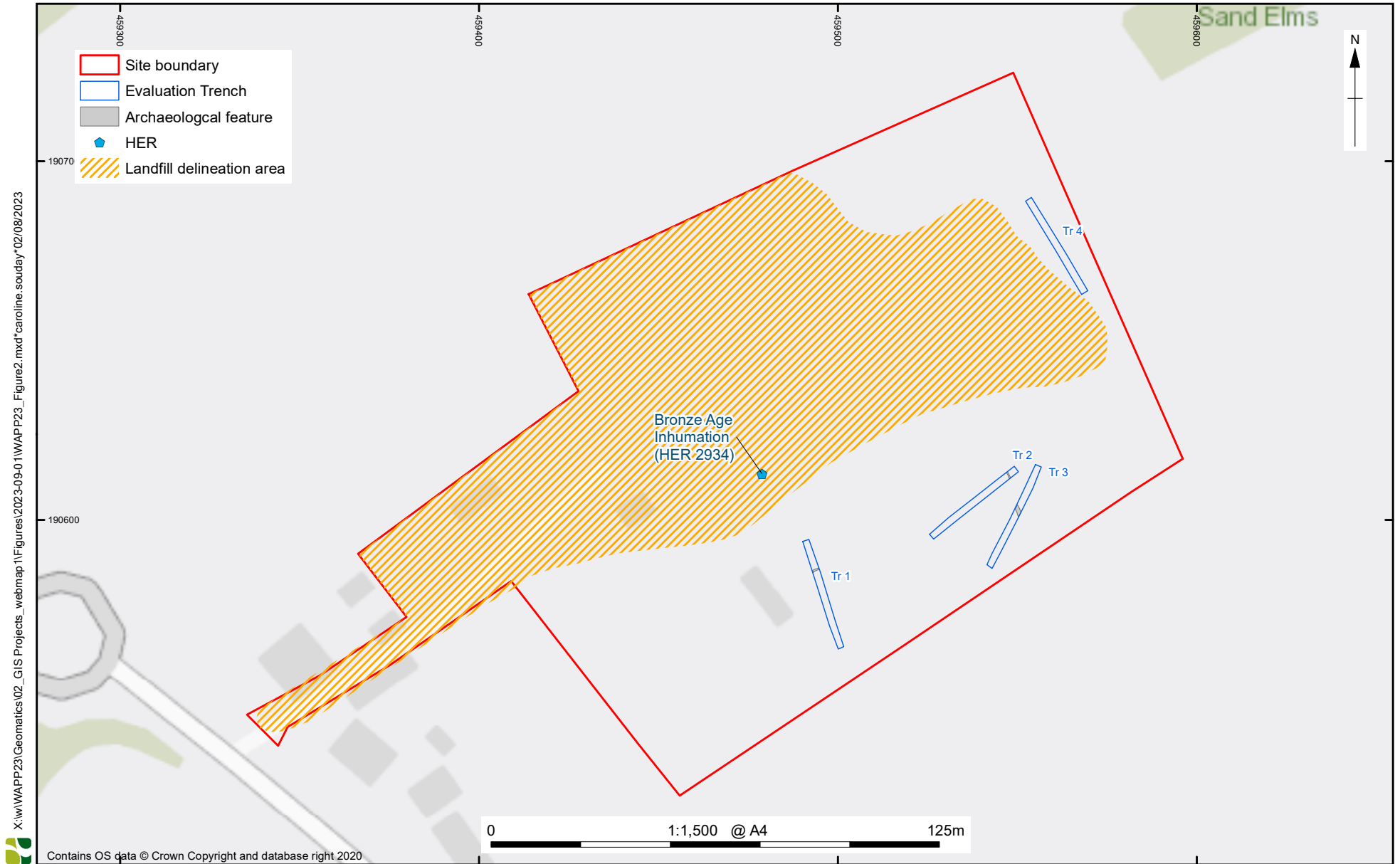


Figure 2: Site plan showing extent of the landfill area, trench locations and archaeological features

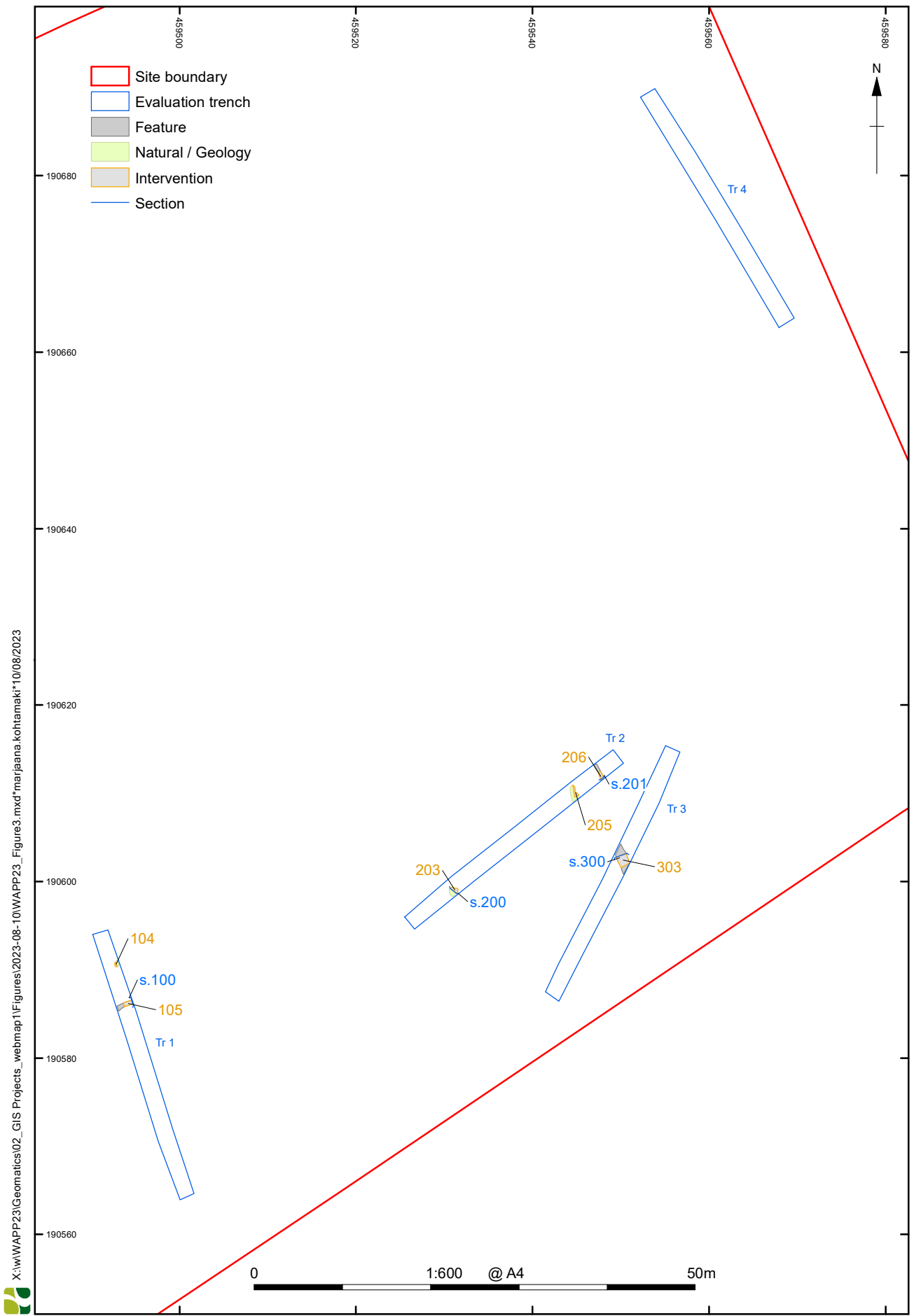


Figure 3: Trench locations with archaeology

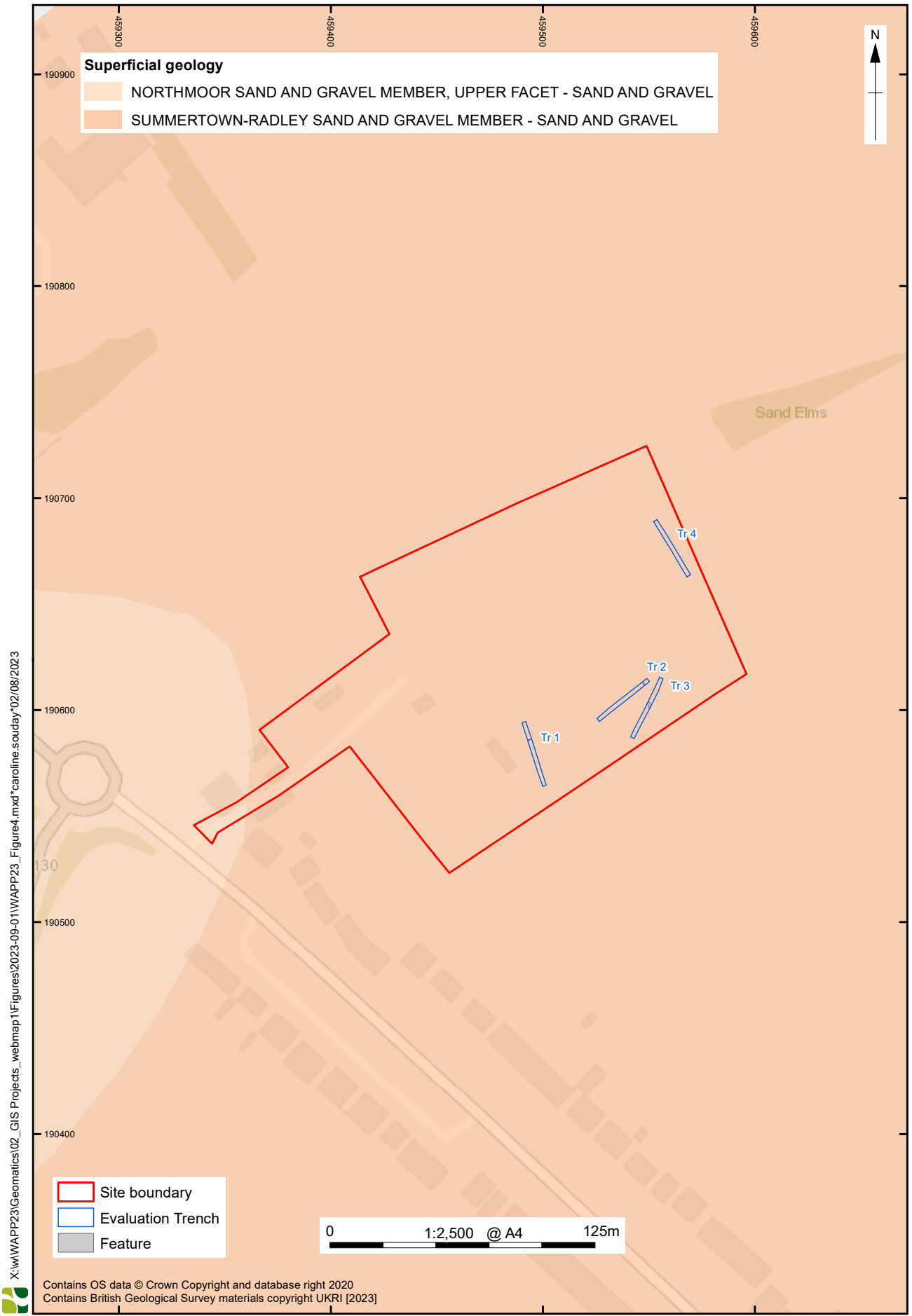


Figure 4: Trench locations with superficial geology

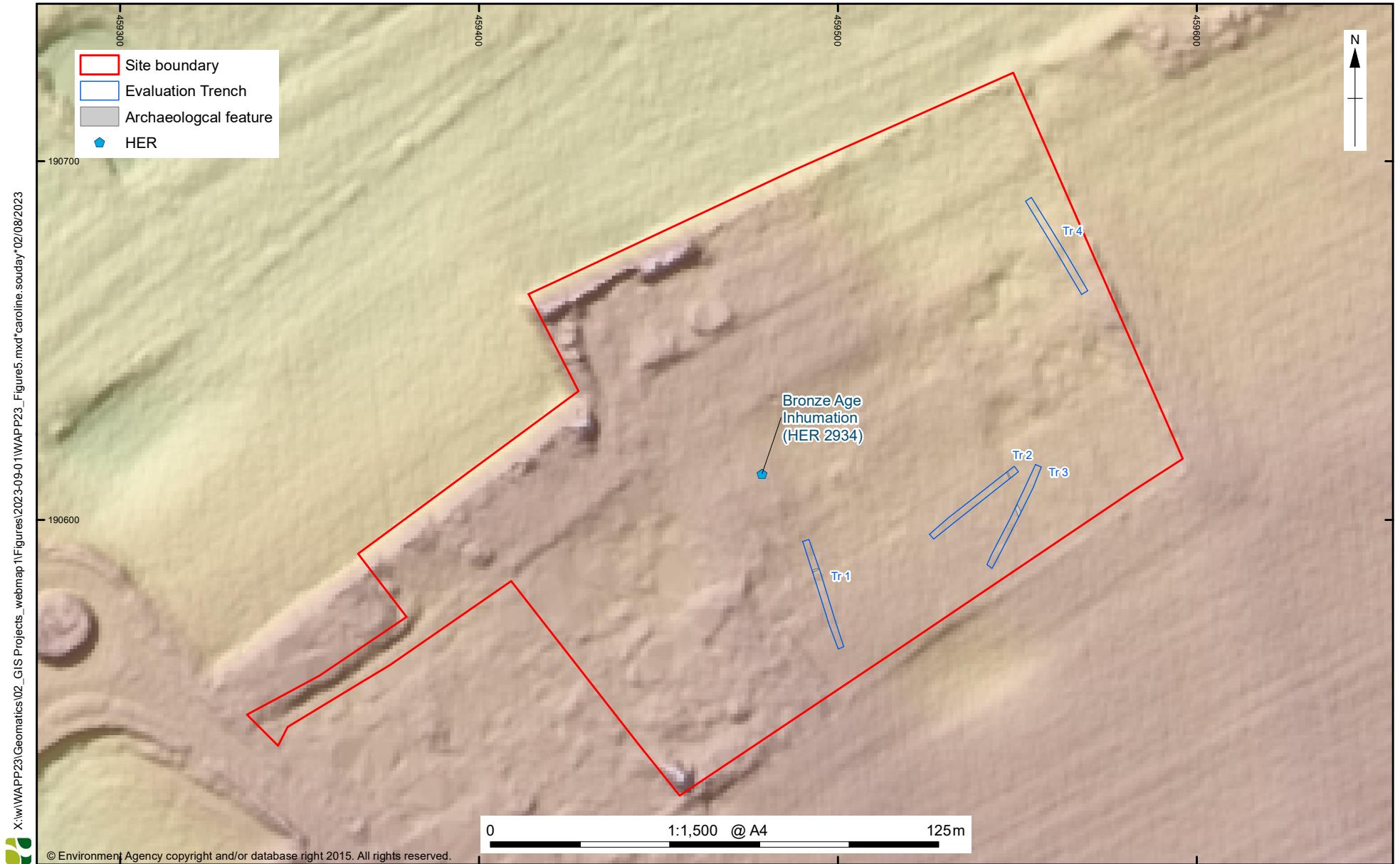


Figure 5: Trench locations with LiDAR

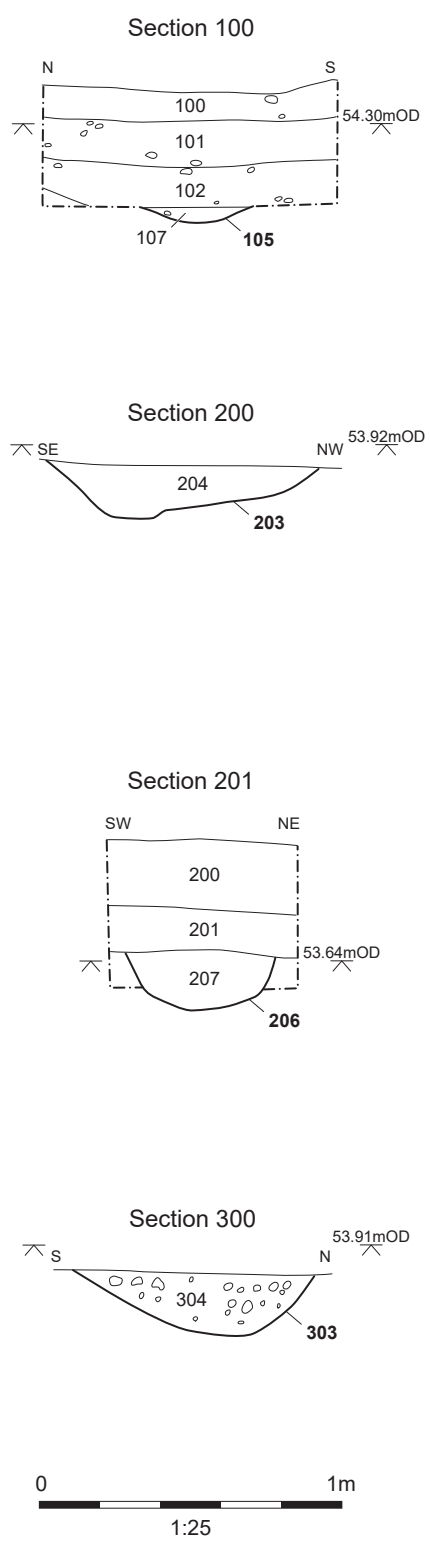


Figure 6: Archaeological sections



Plate 1: Trench 1, looking south-east (1x1m and 1x2m scales)



Plate 2: Trench 3, looking north-east (1x1m and 1x2m scales)



Plate 3: Trench 4, looking north-west (1x1m and 1x2m scales)



Plate 4: Trench 4, section in trench baulk showing 20th century landfill deposits at south-east end of trench, looking north-east (1x1m scale)



Plate 5: Trench 1, Section 100, ring gully 105, looking north-east
(1x0.5m scale)



Plate 6: Trench 3, Section 300, north-west to south-east aligned ditch
303, looking north-west (1x1m scale)



Plate 7: Trench 2, Section 201, north-west to south-east aligned ditch 206, looking south-east (1x1m scale)



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