Former GKN Site, East Cowes
Isle of Wight

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

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SUMMARY

In March 2005 Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief at the former GKN site, East Cowes (NGR SZ 4503 9584). The work was commissioned by SEEDA in response to recommendations made in a desk-based assessment (OA 2005). The watching brief revealed an area of low archaeological potential, as borne out by the desk-based assessment. No archaeological features were present within the test pits, which revealed areas of made ground cutting the natural geology and thus truncating any earlier archaeological features or layers that may have been present.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Location and scope of work

1.1.1 In March 2005 Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief at the former GKN site at East Cowes on the Isle of Wight (NGR SZ 4503 9584). The work was commissioned by SEEDA in response to recommendations set out in a desk-based assessment.

1.1.2 No specific project brief was set, therefore a standard field recording methodology was employed as set out in the *OAU Fieldwork Manual* (ed D Wilkinson, 1992).

1.2 Geology and topography

1.2.1 The site lies between c 8.4 m and 13.7 m OD on an east to west terrace within a river valley. The underlying geology consists of the Osbourne and Headon Clay beds. The site is situated along the Medina River waterfront and slopes up to the east. The site is bounded by residential housing to the east and south, and the River Medina to the west. The site is an irregular plot covering an area of approximately 340 by 220 m, c 0.8 ha.

1.2.2 The 1:50,000 Geological Survey of Great Britain (BGS sheet 331) shows that the underlying geology of the site consists of the Headon and Osborne beds. However, the geology of the Cowes region is stratigraphically ambiguous and it is not known which members of the Osborne and Headon beds are present (pers. com Martin Munt).

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

1.3.1 The archaeological background to the watching brief was prepared for the desk-based assessment (OA 2005) and is summarised below

1.3.2 Evidence from the prehistoric period in the Medina valley is virtually absent, although it is relatively well attested across the Isle of Wight as a whole. Despite the paucity of evidence from the development site, the location within a river valley would have been prime land for settlement and exploitation throughout this period.

1.3.3 Archaeological data is equally sparse for the Roman and Early Medieval period, although it is likely that the area was subject to human activity as a route of entry to Newport up the Medina River.

1.3.4 During the medieval period the Isle of Wight can be characterised as a rural area with a low population density, and indeed an Act of Parliament of 1488 is concerned with the perceived problem of depopulation of the island (Basford 1980). The Royal Survey of 1559-60 records that East Shamblerd (now East Cowes) was divided between a freehold belonging to the Manor of Swainston, in the ownership of Jordon de Kingston, and Norris Farm in the ownership of Richard le Noreys. This area of land was bought by Beaulieu Abbey in 1272 which held it until the dissolution in 1537.

1.3.5 During this period Newport was the main port on the Isle of Wight, and its municipal boundary extended north to include the Medina foreshore (including what is now the Cowes waterfront) as far as the Solent (William 1908:391). However, the deep draft merchant vessels could not navigate as far as Newport, leading to the development of Cowes as a transit 'port' to transfer cargoes onto shallow draught lighters for onward travel up river; the appointment of a port warden to Cowes in 1339 (Brading 1990:4) confirms the official nature of this arrangement. Despite its important role, there are no known structures associated with this function, and it is likely that activity was limited to the inter-tidal zone without any permanent landward structures.

1.3.6 The Later Medieval Period saw an increase in the importance of the Cowes anchorage, which resulted in the construction of coastal forts at East and West Cowes in the 1540's. By the end of the 16th century a hamlet had sprung up south of the castle as a direct result of the relocation of a Newport merchant, Robert Newland, who set up wharves and warehousing in East Cowes in an attempt to avoid the Newport Petty customs.

1.3.7 This period also provides evidence for substantial ship building and repair facilities in Cowes, which became an important base for the construction of naval vessels, especially in the Napoleonic period. Increased land reclamation to support the burgeoning trading port suggests a comparatively wealthy settlement of some importance.

1.3.8 Developments in the 19th and 20th centuries saw the construction of major industrial complexes such as the ship builders JS Whites and SE Saunders. In 1928 S.E Saunders was renamed Saunders-Roe after A V Roe took a financial interest in the company. In 1935 the company bought the boat yard in Castle Street, and built the Columbine works. They went onto to design and build flying boats through to the 1950s.

1.3.9 The desk-based assesment suggests that activity was focussed between Castle Street and the waterfront, with little activity to the east.

1.4 Acknowledgements

1.4.1 OA would like to thank MouchelParkman and Norwest Holst for their co-operation throughout the watching brief.

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 subject to geotechnical investigation.

2.1.2 To clarify the nature and extent of any modern disturbance and intrusion on the site.

2.1.3 To make available the results of the archaeological investigation.

2.2 Methodology

2.2.1 The site was subject to geotechnical investigation via test pits and boreholes at regular intervals to establish the nature of the underlying geology, and investigate potential contamination. Test pits were excavated with a JCB digger using a toothed bucket; the works were carried out under archaeological observation.

2.2.2 All archaeological features were planned at a scale of 1:100 and where excavated sections were drawn at a scale of 1:20. All excavated features were photographed using colour slide and black and white print film. A general photographic record of the work was made, and recording followed procedures detailed in the *OAU Fieldwork Manual* (ed D Wilkinson, 1992).

3 RESULTS

3.1 Description of deposits

3.1.1 The geotechnical investigations exposed the natural geology consisting of the Osbourne and Headon clay beds. No archaeological features were observed within the test pits, however, archaeological material was present in re-deposited layers, especially where the site had been subject to terracing.

3.2 Finds

3.2.1 Archaeological material dating from the 17th to 20th centuries consisting of CBM, and pottery was observed in redeposited layers, but not recovered.

3.3 Palaeo-environmental remains

3.3.1 No deposits suitable for environmental sampling were identified during the watching brief.

4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

4.1.1 This section reviews the success of the watching brief in addressing the original fieldwork aims and also the potential for further fieldwork and analysis to provide additional information.

Aim 1: To identify and record the presence/absence, extent, condition, quality and date of archaeological remains in the areas subject to geotechnical investigation.

4.1.2 No archaeological features were observed within the test pits, however a low level of archaeological material was present in re-deposited layers, especially in areas subject to terracing. The borehole on the Trinity Wharf site (PHE 1102) showed up to 1.60 m of made ground overlying an alluvial sequence. This evidence supports the cartography which clearly shows land reclamation in this area. Archaeological material within the core sample consisted of wood and brick, although the depositional nature of this material is unknown.

4.1.3 The results of this watching brief support the conclusion of the desk-based assessment (OA 2005) which suggests that the archaeologically significant areas are focused on the waterfront and to the west of Castle Street. It is likely that the areas subject to test pits are in zones of low archaeological significance. This view is supported by the lack of archaeological features.

Aim 2: To clarify the nature and extent of any modern disturbance and intrusion on the site.

4.1.4 Substantial deposits of made ground exist across the site. These deposits of made ground appear to cut into the natural geology (Osbourne and Headon beds) and thus also truncate earlier archaeological layers or features that may have been present. It is likely that the majority of the disturbance relates to terracing of the site and the construction of industrial facilities in the 19th and 20th centuries.

Appendix 1 Archaeological Context Inventory

Test Pit	*Context*	*Type*	*Test Pit*	*Depth*	*Comments*	*Finds*
TPD 3103	1001	Layer	TPB 3103	0.0-0.15	Concrete floor, 20th Century	-
	1002	Layer	TPB 3103	0.13-0.40	Made ground	Brick and charcoal
	1003	Layer	TPB 3103	0.40-1.0	Made ground	19th C pot
	1004	Layer	TPB 3103	1.0-4.5	Natural, stiff green/brown clay	-
TPD 3104	1005	Layer	TPB 3104	0.0-0.30	Made Ground	Brick and Tile
	1006	Layer	TPB 3104	0.30-1.0	Made Ground	Pot, brick, tile
	1007	Layer	TPB 3104	1.0-1.50	Made Ground	pot, wood, clinker
	1008	Layer	TPB 3104	1.50-2.20	Natural, Osbourne and Headon beds	-
TPB 3101	1009	Layer	TPB 3101	1.0-0.25	Made Ground	-
	1010	Layer	TPB 3101	0.25-1.60	Made Ground	-
	1011	Layer	TPB 3101	1.60-3.0	Natural, Osbourne and Headon beds	-
TPB 4100	1012	Layer	TPB 4100	0.0-0.10	Topsoil	-
	1013	Layer	TPB 4100	0.10-2.0	Made Ground	Glass, metal, brick, tile
	1014	Layer	TPB 4100	2.0-2.30	Made Ground	Glass, slate
	1015	Layer	TPB 4100	2.30-2.60	Made Ground	Glass, slate
	1016	Layer	TPB 4100	2.60-3.30	Natural, Osbourne and Headon beds	-
TPB 3102	1017	Layer	TPB 3102	0.0-0.30	Concrete Floor	-
	1018	Layer	TPB 3102	0.30-0.50	Made Ground	-
	1019	Layer	TPB 3102	0.50-1.25	Made Ground	-

Test Pit	*Context*	*Type*	*Test Pit*	*Depth*	*Comments*	*Finds*
TPB 3102	1020	Layer	TPB 3102	1.25-1.60	Made Ground, probably reworked head deposits	-
	1021	Layer	TPB 3102	1.60-2.0	Natural, Osbourne and Headon beds	-
TPE 3100	1022	Layer	TPE 3100	1.0-0.10	Made Ground	-
	1023	Layer	TPE 3100	0.10-0.60	Made Ground	-
	1024	Layer	TPE 3100	0.60-1.35	Made Ground	-
	1025	Layer	TPE 3100	1.35-1.50	Made Ground	-
	1026	layer	TPE 3100	1.50-1.90	Natural, Head deposits	-
TPD 3102	1027	Layer	TPD 3102	0.0-0.20	Topsoil	-
	1028	Layer	TPD 3102	0.20-0.25	Made ground	-
	1029	Layer	TPD 3102	0.25-0.40	Made Ground	brick, tile
	1030	Layer	TPD 3102	0.40-0.60	Made ground	brick, tile
	1031	layer	TPD 3102	0.60-0.80	Made ground	-
	1032	layer	TPD 3102	0.80-1.60	Natural, Osbourne and Headon beds	-
PHE 1102	1033	Layer	PHE 1102	1.0-0.70	Made ground	-
	1034	layer	PHE 1102	0.70-1.6	Made Ground	-
	1035	Layer	PHE 1102	1.6-3.0	Natural alluvial silt layer	Brick, tile, wood
	1036	Layer	PHE 1102	3.0-4.0	Natural alluvial clay	-
TPC 4100	1037	Layer	TPC 4100	0.0-0.10	Topsoil	-
	1038	Layer	TPC 4100	0.10-0.40	Made ground, probably reworked head deposits	-
	1039	Layer	TPC 4100	0.40-1.0	Natural, Osbourne and Headon beds	-

Test Pit	*Context*	*Type*	*Test Pit*	*Depth*	*Comments*	*Finds*
TPC 4101	1040	Layer	TPC 4101	0.0-0.20	Made Ground	-
	1041	Layer	TPC 4101	0.20-0.35	Made Ground	-
	1042	Layer	TPC 4101	0.35-1.0	Made ground	-
	1043	Layer	TPC 4101	1.0-1.40	Natural, head deposits	-
OPE 5100	1045	Layer	OPE 5100	1.0-0.60	Topsoil	-
	1046	Layer	OPE 5100	0.60-2.0	Natural, head deposits	-

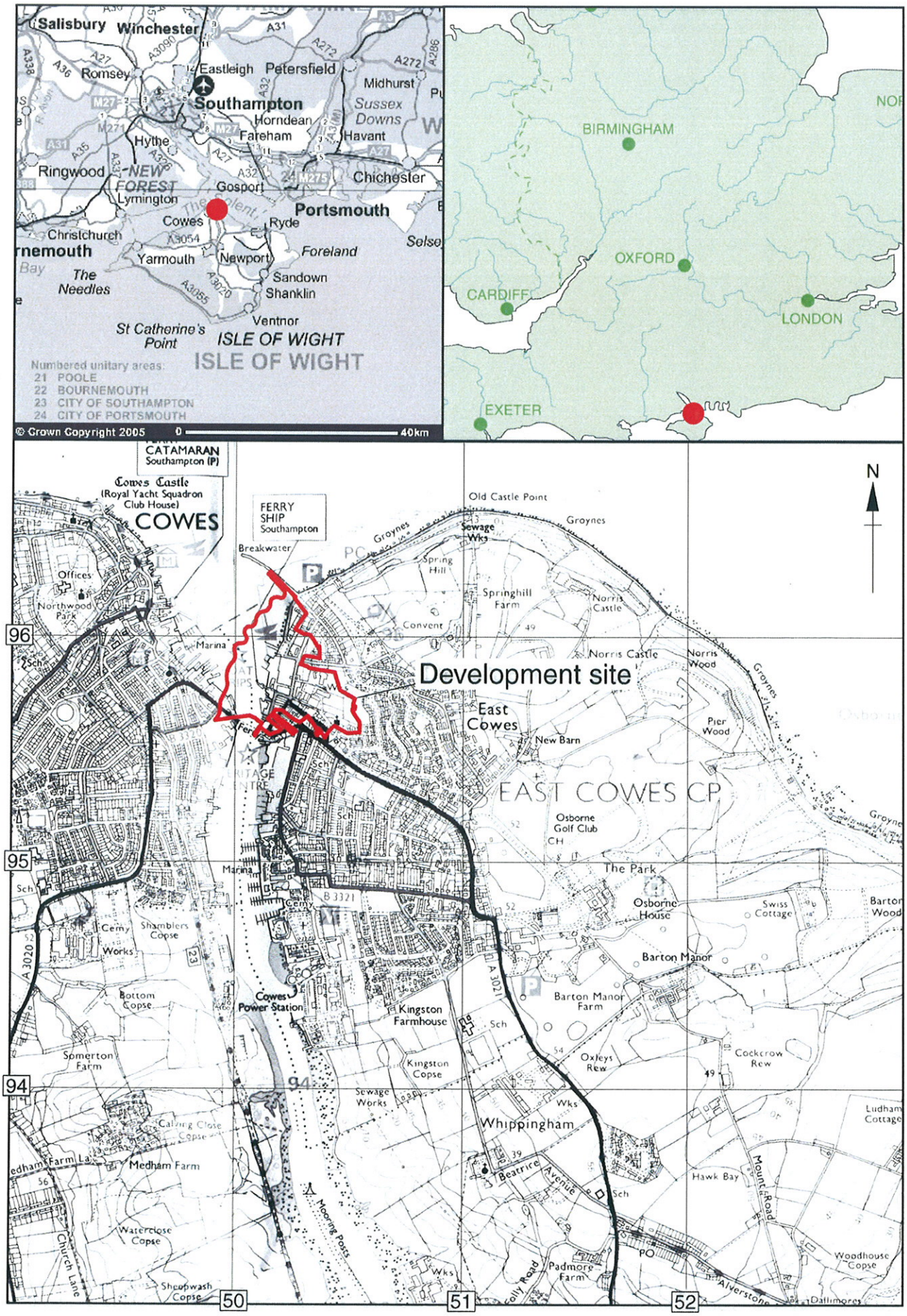
APPENDIX 2 BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

OAU 1992. Fieldwork Manual (ed. D Wilkinson, first edition August 1992).

OA 2005. Archaeological Desk-based Assessment, East Cowes Project: The isle of Wight.

APPENDIX 3 SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

Site name: Former GKN Site, East Cowes
Site code: IOWSMR5626
Grid reference: NGR SZ 4503 9584
Type of watching brief: Geotechnical investigation
Date and duration of project: 10 days 8/3/2005-17/3/2005
Area of site: Test pits TPD 3103, TPD 3104, TPB 3101, TPB 4100, TPB 3102, TPE 3100, TPD 3102, PHE 1102, TPC 4100, TPC 4101 and OPE 5100.
Summary of results: The watching brief confirmed that the area under investigation is of low archaeological potential with no surviving archaeological features or layers within the areas of the test pits.
Location of archive: The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with the Isle of Wight Museums Service in due course, under the following accession number:



Scale 1:25,000

Figure 1: Site location

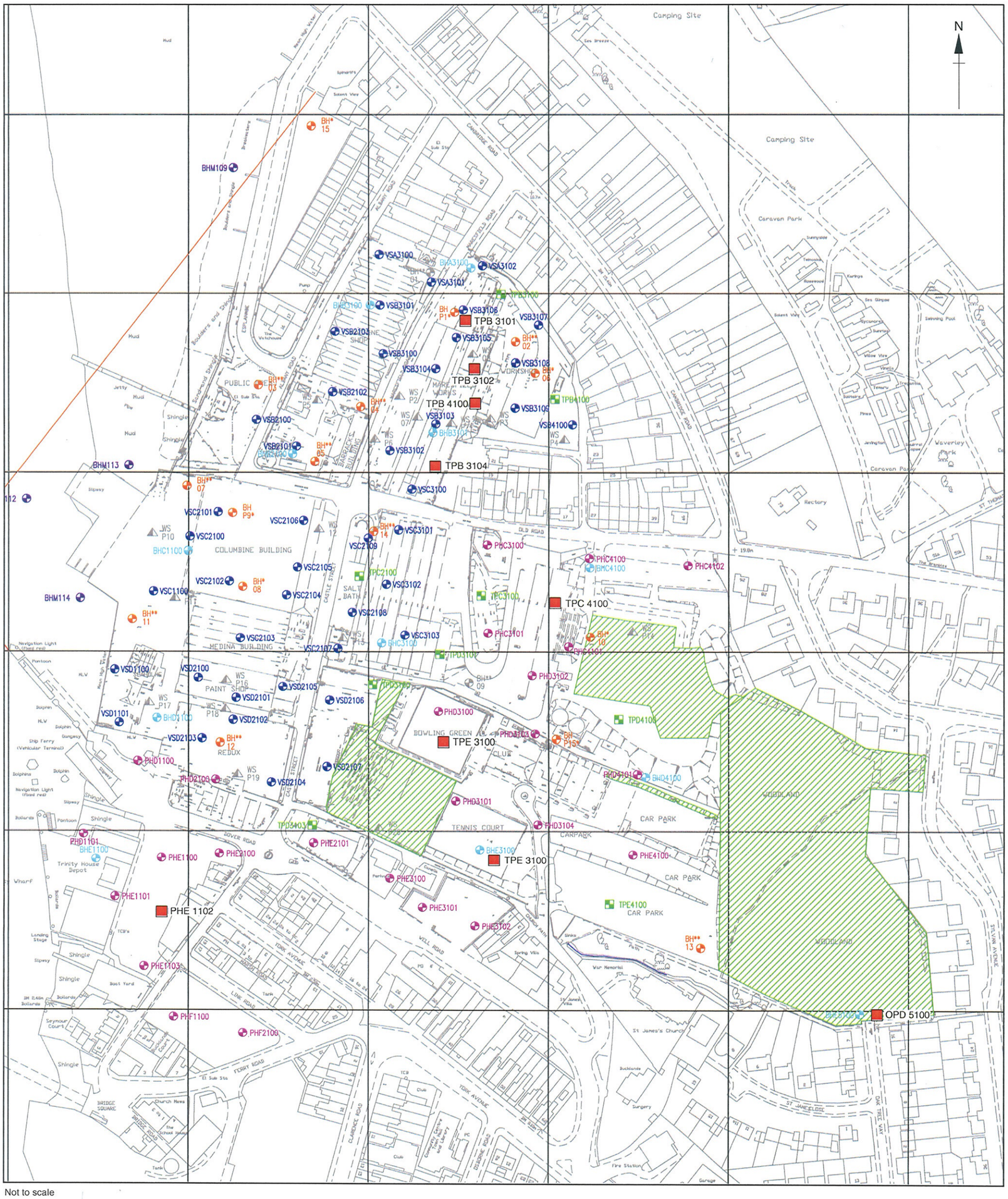


Figure 2 :Test pit and borehole location plan