

East Thamesmead
Business Park
Bexley
Greater London



**Archaeological
Watching Brief Report**



Oxford Archaeology

June 2005

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NGR TQ 487 798

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

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SUMMARY

In June 2005 Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief at East Thamesmead Business Park, Bexley, south-east London. The work was commissioned by Tilfen Land, in advance of development as a business park. The watching brief revealed no archaeological features or finds.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Location and scope of work

- 1.1.1 In June 2005, Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out a watching brief at East Thamesmead, in the Erith Marshes, south-east London, for Tilfen Land. This watching brief was part of the initial assessment of a proposed three phase development involving the construction of a business park totalling 63,200 m² of floor area, with car parking.
- 1.1.2 The development site lies at TQ 487 798, within the historic parish of Erith in Kent, situated within the London Borough of Bexley. The site is located on the former marshland of Erith, c 1.2 km to the south of the River Thames (Fig. 1).
- 1.1.3 Oxford Archaeology (OA) was commissioned by Scott Wilson Kirkpatrick Ltd, on behalf of Tilfen Land, in 2002 to undertake the Archaeology and Heritage chapter of the Environmental Impact Assessment. This study highlighted the potential for the development to affect palaeoenvironmental and archaeological remains in relation to Phase 1 of the development, which unlike Phases 2 and 3, has detailed planning permission.
- 1.1.4 A staged programme of evaluation was agreed in principal with English Heritage to further assess the archaeological and palaeoenvironmental potential of the site. This consists of a programme of environmental sampling and trenches, targeted to investigate known features and deposits that will be affected by the development. This phase of watching brief was carried out as a condition of planning consent and will inform the need for any further mitigation work.
- 1.1.5 A design brief was discussed in consultation with Mark Stevenson, Archaeological Advisor for the Greater London Archaeology Advisory Service (English Heritage)
- 1.1.6 The watching brief covered the excavation of a new ditch, just to the west of the previous evaluation in a area covering approximately 0.69 ha. This area is designated as Zone A in the development plan (Fig. 2).

1.2 Geology and Topography

- 1.2.1 The site lies on the former marshland of Erith, c 1.2 km to the south of the River Thames and c 400 m from the gravel terrace. It lies between Eastern Road, to the north, Yarnton Way, to the south, and is adjacent to the western side of Waldrist Way. The watching brief area lay immediately to the west of a large Londis depot warehouse. The site comprises an open area of rough grazing, with a NNE-SSW aligned drainage channel to the east. The ground level within the watching brief area varied between 0.53 m OD to the south and 0.8 m OD to the north.
- 1.2.2 The drift geology of this area is alluvium over Blackheath Beds in the northern part of the site and alluvium over Thanet Beds in the southern part of the site (BGS 271 & 257).

1.3 Archaeological and Historical Background

- 1.3.1 A detailed account of the archaeological, historical and palaeoenvironmental background and potential has been produced as part of the Environmental Statement (ES). The following sections represent only a summary of this data. Further details can be found in Chapter 5 of the ES.
- 1.3.2 The site is situated on the former low-lying floodplain. The floodplain may have been suitable for settlement and other activities at various times during prehistory, but with rising sea levels would have turned to marshland, until sea defenses were constructed and the land was reclaimed in the medieval and post-medieval period.
- 1.3.3 In the late Paleolithic period to the middle Mesolithic, the site would have been dry ground. In the post-glacial period, covering the last 12,000 years, the landscape of the Thames Estuary saw a number of changes associated with sporadic rises in sea level largely attributed to a rise in sea-level caused by the shrinking of the polar ice caps and tectonic subsidence. The Lower Thames Valley was subject to a number of marine transgressions, during which low-lying areas beside the river became inundated with estuarine muds and clays, and marine regressions, when the land was characterised by plant growth and the formation of peat, with numerous small creeks.
- 1.3.4 From the Late Mesolithic period much of the floodplain would have been a wetland marsh landscape with numerous small creeks and fleets used by boats for access to the Thames. Although the low-lying wetland would have been prone to flooding, which would have made permanent occupation difficult, investigations elsewhere along the Thames Estuary have indicated that from the late prehistoric period to the medieval period (prior to reclamation) it would have been utilised extensively for a range of economic activities.
- 1.3.5 Past archaeological investigations within the area of Erith marshes below the later medieval and post-medieval alluvial deposits have discovered evidence of Mesolithic, Neolithic and Bronze Age activity relating to the exploitation and utilisation of the marshland landscapes. Such evidence includes flint tools of

Mesolithic date, a Neolithic log boat (NMR 407927) the remains of Bronze Age prehistoric trackways (SMR 071351, 071352 and 071353) and a Romano-British farmstead (SMR 070515, NMR 408165).

- 1.3.6 The site contains no known archaeological sites as identified on the Greater London Sites and Monuments Record (GLSMR) and National Monuments Record (NMR) although a number of historic landscape features have been identified from aerial photographs, the walkover survey and studies of historic mapping. These include a possible sea wall, former paths, drainage ditches and field boundaries. These features are likely to date from the phases of marsh reclamation, in the medieval and post-medieval periods. Of these none was located within the watching brief area.
- 1.3.7 The potential of the area is difficult to ascertain, as there are substantial alluvial deposits present which may well mask earlier archaeological remains. Also floodplains have the potential to contain well preserved archaeology with good preservation of organic structures, artefacts, and environmental deposits.
- 1.3.8 A ground investigation and geotechnical engineering assessment was undertaken in September 2004 by Soil Mechanics and included the drilling of eight cable percussion boreholes and nine machine dug trial pits. Made ground was encountered in all boreholes and trial pits except one, to a depth between 0.30 and 2.10 m (Soil Mechanics 2004). The thickness of alluvium ranged from 2.05 to 2.20 m. River Terrace Deposits were encountered in all boreholes at depths between 6.10 and 9.65 m. Groundwater was encountered in all boreholes, at depths between 2.10 and 9.60 m.
- 1.3.9 In February 2005 Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological evaluation on land between the watching brief area and Waldrist Way (*OA March 2005*). No significant archaeological remains were found.

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 A watching brief was maintained over six days from 1.6.5 - 8.6.5, with close supervision of the machine excavation.
- 2.2.2 The ditch location was planned at a scale of 1:500 and sections drawn at scales of 1:20. A general photographic record of the work was made using colour slide and

black and white print film. Recording followed procedures detailed in the *OAU Fieldwork Manual* (ed D Wilkinson, 1992).

3 RESULTS

3.1 Description of deposits

3.1.1 A simple stratigraphic sequence was revealed, similar to the results from the previous evaluation (*OA January 2005*). The new ditch was excavated to a maximum depth of 2 m beneath ground level (-1.4 m OD). The earliest deposit uncovered was a brownish grey alluvial clay (3), which was at least 0.7 m thick. The clay (3) was overlain by an intermittent layer of brownish orange silty sand (4), which was up to 0.2 m thick. This layer was more predominant and thicker within the northern end of the ditch cut. The clay (3) and silty sand (4) were overlain by 0.7 m of orange brown silty clay alluvial (2) and up to 0.4 m of topsoil (1). Scattered modern debris was noted within the topsoil, particularly within the northern half of the ditch run, and west of the present Londis depot. Within the excavated ditch, underlying peat deposits were not revealed..

3.2 Finds

3.2.1 No finds were recovered. Modern deposits and debris were noted but not sampled.

3.3 Palaeo-environmental remains

3.3.1 No deposits suitable for Palaeo-environmental sampling were uncovered.

4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

4.1.1 The results of the watching brief are consistent with those from the previous evaluation (*OA January 2005*). The new ditch appears to be in an area of undeveloped pasture and cuts substantial alluvial deposits, but not the underlying peat deposits. No archaeological features or finds were seen. Modern debris was noted within the topsoil to the west of the adjacent Londis depot and it is likely that this is associated with the construction of the depot.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1 ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

<i>Context</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Depth (m)</i>	<i>Comments</i>	<i>Finds</i>
1	Layer	0.4	Topsoil	Modern debris
2	Layer	0.7	Silty clay alluvial	No finds
3	Layer	0.1 - 0.2	Silty sand	No finds
4	Layer	0.7 +	Alluvial clay	No Finds

APPENDIX 2 BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

OA 2005 *East Thamesmead Business Park, Written Scheme of Investigation for an Archaeological Evaluation and watching brief*. Prepared by OA for Scott Wilson Kirkpatrick & Co Ltd

OA 2002 *East Thamesmead Business Park, Environmental Impact Assessment*. Prepared by OA for Scott Wilson Kirkpatrick & Co Ltd

OA 2005 *East Thamesmead Business Park, Bexley, Greater London, Archaeological Evaluation Report*

OAU Fieldwork Manual (ed D Wilkinson, 1992)

Soil Mechanics 2004 *Innovation Centre, East Thamesmead Business Park, Volume 2: Ground investigation and Geotechnical engineering assessment*. Prepared by Soil mechanics for Bexley Council

APPENDIX 3 GLSMR/RCHME NMR ARCHAEOLOGICAL REPORT FORM

1) TYPE OF RECORDING: Watching Brief

2) LOCATION

Borough: Bexley

Site address: Waldrist Way, Abbey Woods, SE London

Site Name: East Thamesmead Business Park Site Code: ETB 05

Nat. grid Refs: TQ 487 798

centre of site: TQ 487 798

Limits of site: N 548720 179868 S 548630 179640

E 548746 179854 W 548606 179656

3) ORGANISATION

Name of archaeological unit/company/society: Oxford Archaeology

Address: Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford OX2 OES

Site director/supervisor: Bryan Matthews Project manager: Valerie Diez

Funded by: Tilfen Land

4) DURATION

Date fieldwork started 01/06/2005 Date finished: 08/06/2005

Fieldwork previously notified? YES

Fieldwork will continue? NO

5) PERIODS REPRESENTED

Modern

6) PERIOD SUMMARIES

No archaeological features or finds

7) NATURAL

Type: Alluvial clays

Height above Ordnance datum: 0.6 - 0.9 m OD

8) LOCATION OF ARCHIVES

a) Please provide an estimate of the quantity of material in your possession for the following categories:

NOtes 6 sheets PLans 1 PHotos 2 films plus digital archive

Ngtives 1 Film SLides 1 Film

Correspondence 0 MScripts (unpub reports, etc) 1

BUlk finds: None

SMall finds: None

SOil samples: none

Other 0

- b) The archive has been prepared and stored in accordance with MGC standards and will be deposited in the following location: Hall Place Museum
- c) Has a security copy of the archive been made?: NO

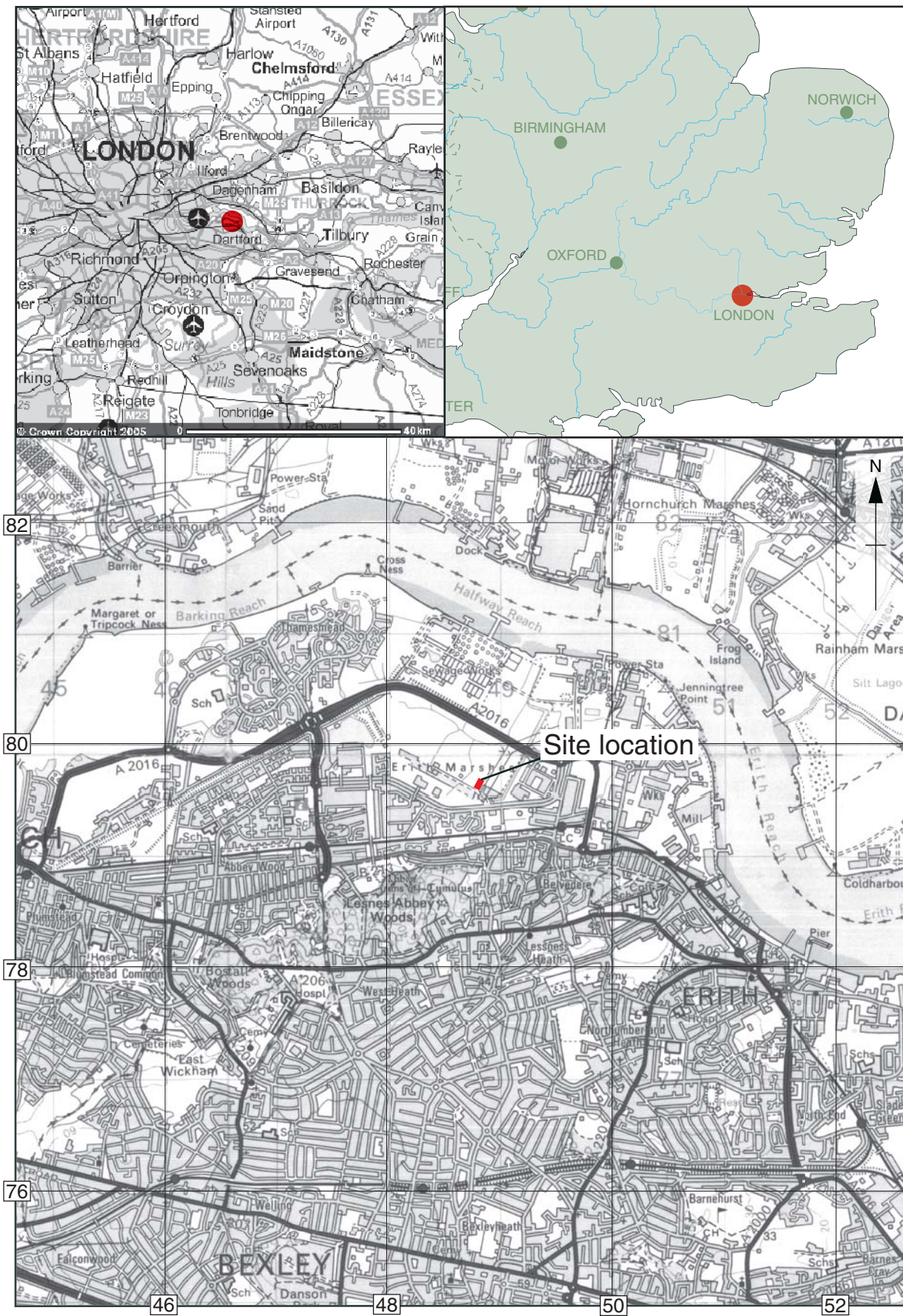
10) BIBLIOGRAPHY

See Bibliography and references

SIGNED:

DATE: 13/06/2005

NAME: VALERIE DIEZ



Scale 1:50,000

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Figure 1: Site location

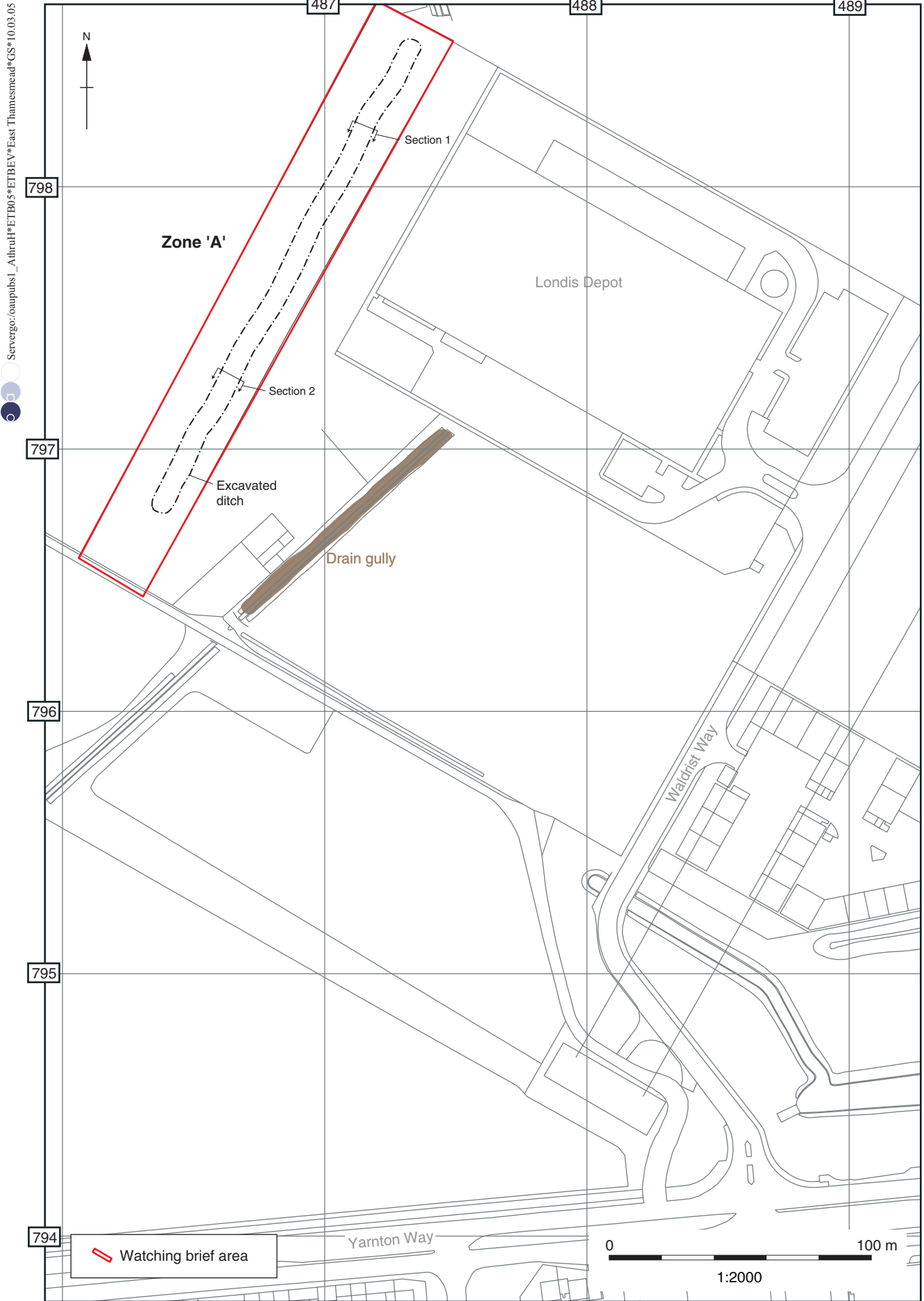


Figure 2: Plan of watching brief area

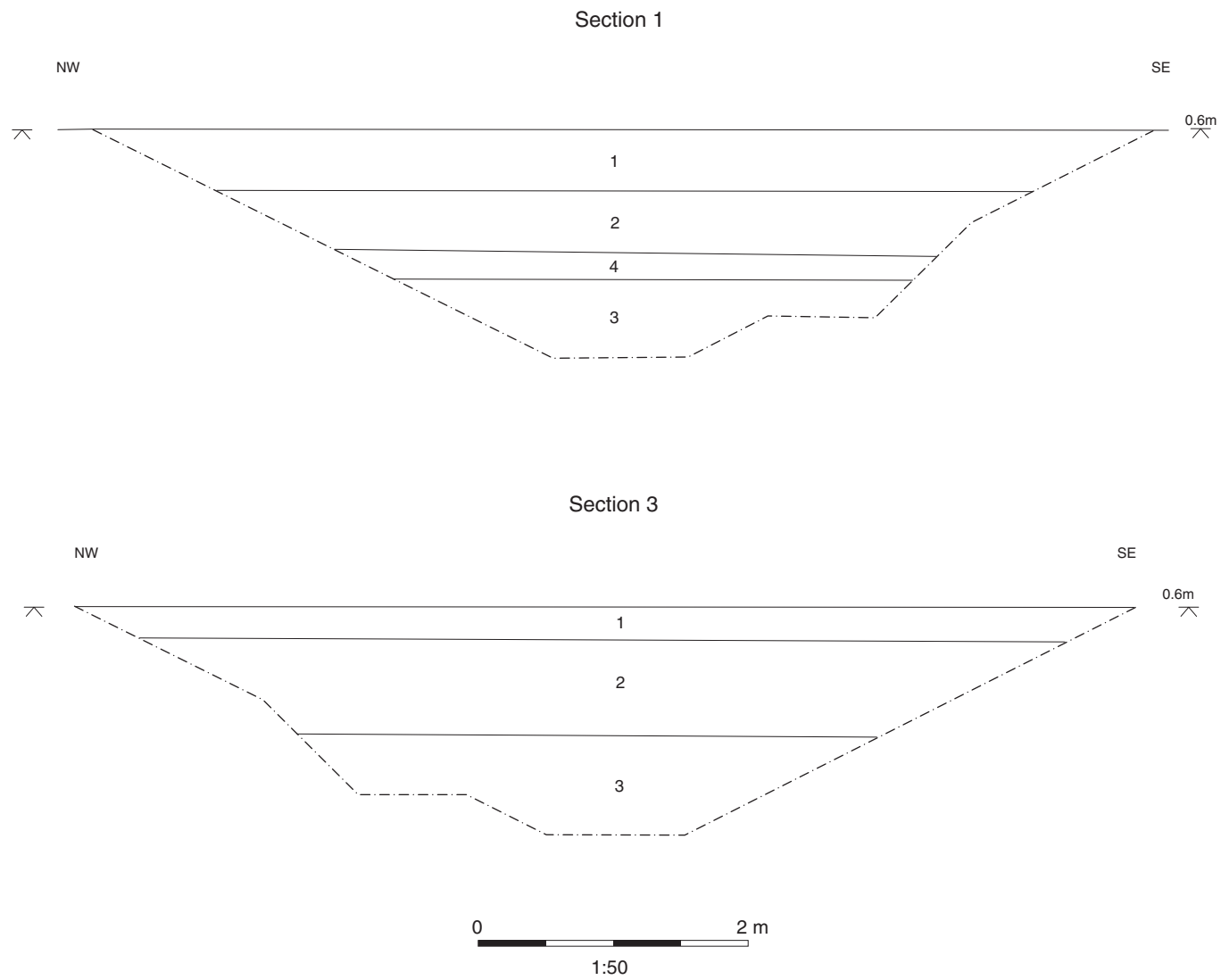


Figure 3: Sections