



# **NANTWICH POOL, WALL LANE, NANTWICH, CHESHIRE**

## **Archaeological Watching Brief**



**Oxford Archaeology North**

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**RSK, ON BEHALF OF CHESHIRE EAST  
COUNCIL**

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Prepared by: Lewis Stitt  
Position: Project Assistant  
Date: February 2013

Checked by: Emily Mercer  
Position: Project Manager  
Date: February 2013

Approved by: Alan Lupton  
Position: Operations Manager  
Date: February 2013

Signed.....

Signed.....

**Oxford Archaeology North**

Mill 3  
Moor Lane Mills  
Lancaster  
LA1 1QD  
t: (0044) 01524 541000  
f: (0044) 01524 848606

w: [www.oxfordarch.co.uk](http://www.oxfordarch.co.uk)  
e: [info@oxfordarch.co.uk](mailto:info@oxfordarch.co.uk)

**© Oxford Archaeology Ltd (2013)**

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

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## SUMMARY

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RSK commissioned Oxford Archaeology North (OA North), on behalf of Cheshire East Council, to undertake an archaeological watching brief during groundworks associated with the refurbishment and redesign of Nantwich Pool, Wall Lane, Nantwich, Cheshire (NGR SJ 6497 5263). The works included the removal of the external access ramps or steps, replacement of the existing canopy with an enclosed entrance/foyer and relocation of the reception desk. The watching brief was required as a condition to the planning permission but only for the new build elements of the development rather than the refurbishment, which were positioned to the east of the present structure. The main aim was to establish the nature of the strata in this area, with particular reference to the depth at which natural sand and clay occurs, the presence or absence of the waterlogged/organic deposits seen elsewhere in the town of Nantwich, and the depth of any modern overburden. The fieldwork was undertaken over five days, between the 10th and 14th December 2012.

The position of the site near to the town, that has developed as a result of the salt workings since the Roman period, suggests that there may be potential for archaeological finds and deposits. However, historical mapping shows the area to have been open agricultural land until the construction of the first pool building sometime between 1919 and 1939. During 1976 the pool buildings were redeveloped.

The watching brief comprised the monitoring of the excavation of three foundation trenches (Trenches 1-3) for an extension, positioned immediately to the east of the main pool building, with the northern end of the trenches abutting the reception building. The trenches measured 1m by 3m, although the unstable trench sides meant that Trench 3 extended to 3m wide, and they were excavated to between 2-2.3m depth. All three trenches comprised the same made ground deposits (**101, 102, 201, 202, 301, and 302**) to approximately 1.75m depth below ground level, associated with the construction of the current pool buildings. This overlay the natural sand and clay deposits (**103, 104, 203, 204, 303, and 304**). The area around the buildings appeared to be extensively disturbed and any deposits that may have been of archaeological potential, overlying the natural deposits, had been completely truncated. No archaeological finds or deposits were recorded, and no waterlogged deposits were observed. It is, therefore, recommended that no further archaeological work should be carried out.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Oxford Archaeology North (OA North) would like to thank Owen Raybould of RSK for commissioning the project. Thanks are also due to the staff of Mansell Build Ltd also for assistance on site.

The watching brief was undertaken by Lewis Stitt, with the drawings produced by Mark Tidmarsh. The project was managed by Emily Mercer, who also edited the report.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

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### 1.1 CIRCUMSTANCES OF PROJECT

- 1.1.1 RSK commissioned Oxford Archaeology North (OA North), on behalf of Cheshire East Council, to undertake an archaeological watching brief during groundworks associated with the refurbishment and redesign of Nantwich Pool, Wall Lane, Nantwich, Cheshire. The works included the removal of the external access ramps or steps, replacement of the existing canopy with an enclosed entrance/foyer and relocation of the reception desk. The watching brief was required as a condition of planning permission, stipulated by the Local Planning Authority (LPA), as advised by the Development Control Archaeologist, at Cheshire Archaeology Planning Advisory Service (a joint service providing archaeological advice to Cheshire West and Chester Council, and Cheshire East Council) (hereafter referred to as CAPAS). Monitoring was required on new built elements of the development, rather than the refurbishment, positioned to the east of the present structure. The main aim of the watching brief was to establish the nature of the strata in this area, with particular reference to the depth at which natural sand and clay occurs, the presence or absence of the waterlogged/organic deposits seen elsewhere in the town of Nantwich, and the depth of any modern overburden.
- 1.1.2 The fieldwork was undertaken over five days, between the 10th and 14th December 2012. The following report documents the results of the watching brief and the significance of the findings.

### 1.2 LOCATION, TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY

- 1.2.1 Nantwich Pool is located approximately 400m to the north-west of the historic market town of Nantwich (NGR SJ 6497 5263; Fig 1), which lies some 30km south-east of Chester and 6km south-west of Crewe. The pool is situated between Wall Lane and Waterlode Road, and approximately 150m due north-east of the River Weaver. The area of the groundworks measured 20m x 10m on the eastern side of the indoor pool and was covered in thick dense trees and shrubs. It was bound to the north by the reception area for the pool and gym (Plate 1, Fig 2).
- 1.2.2 Nantwich lies on an extensive low-lying tract of boulder clay, known as the Cheshire Plain, which separates the hills of North Wales and the Peak District of Derbyshire. The underlying solid geology of the area is Keuper Marl within which are salt beds from where brine was derived. Above this are drift deposits, comprising superficial river terrace material (gravel, sands, silts and clays) overlying boulder clay (British Geological Survey 1967; CCC 2003, 1). The underlying bedrock geology is Upper Keuper Saliferous Beds, known as Wilkesley Halite, consisting of halite with mudstone partings (Atkins 2011).



Plate 1: General view of the site facing south-west

### 1.3 HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

- 1.3.1 **Introduction:** the following is a very brief archaeological and historical background to the area to provide a wider archaeological context to the site.
- 1.3.2 Salt would presumably have been an important commodity for prehistoric communities, however, there is no evidence that has yet been discovered that points to the exploitation of Nantwich's salt springs in the pre-Roman period. Indeed, there is little evidence of prehistoric activity around the site. During the Roman period, on the other hand, evidence from the area shows there to have been significant activity, making Nantwich "an important part of the wider Roman landscape" (CCC 2003, 3). Amongst several antiquarian coin and artefact finds, and the identification of the Nantwich to Middlewich Roman road surviving as an earthwork (Margary 1957, 304-5), early indications of the industrial nature of Roman activity in Nantwich were provided by the discovery of two lead salt pans near Kingsley Field Farm in the 1880s (OA North 2007, 11). During the 1970s, excavations at the Crown Hotel in the town centre produced a large number of Roman pottery fragments (Williams 1975; McNeil *et al* 1981), indicating significant activity on the east bank of the River Weaver (Connelly and Power 2005, 33). Further evidence for Roman activity was provided in 1985 by the discovery of a timber-lined pit, perhaps intended for holding brine, in St Annes Lane, just to the south of the site (McNeil and Roberts 1987, 287-8), and excavations in the mid-1990s revealed a second-century ditch to the south-west of the site, to the south of Welsh Row (Earthworks 1997).
- 1.3.3 The most extensive evidence for Roman activity in Nantwich, however, was obtained from archaeological excavations carried out in 2001-2 at Kingsley

Fields (Connelly and Power 2005), positioned west of the site close to the River Weaver, off historic Welsh Row. The remarkable levels of waterlogged preservation led to the recovery of two large brine storage tanks and several wicker-lined pits, along with associated wooden artefacts, including a bucket and several large spades or paddles, which firmly attested the early second-century origins of Nantwich's salt industry, and a parallel development of cattle processing and leatherworking industry in the area during the third century (*op cit*, 38-9). It was concluded that this part of the town had formed as industrial quarter to the Roman settlement (OA North 2007, 11). Furthermore, a watching brief in the Snow Hill car park during the laying of foundations for a new electricity substation in 2004 confirmed the presence and preservation of a substantial second-century Roman structure (Reid *et al* 2004).

- 1.3.4 The Kingsley Fields excavations show that the industrial activity on the site was in decline by the second half of the third century, and by the Early Medieval period, the location and extent of settlement at Nantwich is unknown (CCC 2003, 4). However, the emergence of Nantwich as an urban centre during the later medieval period is closely linked with its dominance as a centre for salt production, leading to the development of a densely occupied commercial core around the market centres and High Street, incorporating Pepper Street, Beam Street, Hospital Street and Pillory Street, and a network of salt-trading routes to other towns (CCC 2003, 4). Evidence for the salt industry itself is clear by the time of the Domesday survey of 1087, which records eight salt houses in Nantwich (Morris 1978, 268).
- 1.3.5 There was also a castle within the town, although no upstanding remains are visible today. Nantwich castle was an important defensive structure during the medieval period. Built by William Malbank for his brother Piers about 1160 to 1170, the castle served as a look-out point and a defence against Welsh attack from the west (Whatley 2004). The castle served its purpose until 1282, when the Welsh were conquered. After that it became a ruin, and the stones were reused to build a chapel dedicated to the life of John de Kyngeslegh at St Mary's Church in the mid-fifteenth century (*ibid*).
- 1.3.6 In 1583 the town was partially destroyed by fire started in a wooden wick-house adjacent to Water Lode, which spread extensively around the area of Welsh Row, where 150 buildings and two barns were razed before the blaze was brought under control (CCC 2003, 6). During the civil war (1642-1651), Nantwich was once again subject to a level of destruction. As the only town in Cheshire to declare for Parliament it was attacked by Royalist forces (OA North 2007, 13). The siege was eventually lifted when the Parliamentary forces were victorious in the Battle of Nantwich on January 26th 1644.
- 1.3.7 During the eighteenth and nineteenth century the salt industry went into a period of slow decline as rock salt had been discovered at Northwich (McNeil *et al* 1983, 68), and the last salt works in Nantwich closed in 1856.
- 1.3.8 Despite the growth of the town from the Roman period onwards, the site appears to have lain just outside of this urban growth. Evidence from Ordnance Survey maps (Atkins 2011) show the site to have been open fields



until the “Brine Swimming Pool Baths” were built sometime between 1919 and 1939. By 1976 the pools were redeveloped into the existing indoor and outdoor swimming pools, and have remained relatively unchanged since (*op cit*, 2).

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## 2. METHODOLOGY

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### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1.1 The work was carried out in accordance with the method statement (*Appendix 1*), approved by Cheshire Shared Services, and was consistent with the relevant IfA and English Heritage guidelines (Institute for Archaeologists 2008a, 2008b, 2012; English Heritage 2006).

### 2.2 WATCHING BRIEF

- 2.2.1 A permanent archaeological presence was maintained during groundworks. The purpose was to identify, investigate and record any archaeological remains encountered.
- 2.2.2 A daily record of the nature, extent and depths of groundworks was maintained throughout the duration of the project. All archaeological contexts were recorded on OA North's *pro-forma* sheets, using a system based on that of the English Heritage former Centre for Archaeology. A monochrome and digital photographic record was maintained throughout.

### 2.3 ARCHIVE

- 2.3.1 A full professional archive has been compiled in accordance with the method statement (*Appendix 1*), and in accordance with current IfA and English Heritage guidelines (English Heritage 2006). There is currently no museum designated to accept the archives of archaeological fieldwork in Cheshire East. An attempt will be made to deposit the paper and digital archive for the project with a suitable repository as soon as one is made available. There were no finds retrieved and so there is no material archive.

### 3. WATCHING BRIEF RESULTS

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#### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

3.1.1 An archaeological watching brief was commissioned to oversee the excavation of three small slit foundation trenches within a general area of groundworks, measuring 20m x 10m, to house the footings for the extension of the swimming pool. The objective of the watching brief was to identify, investigate and record any archaeological remains encountered during the groundworks for the development, and the following is a summary of the findings. The area of the watching brief is plotted in Figure 2. A list of contexts used has been provided in *Appendix 2*.

3.1.2 The area of groundworks was stripped of the existing shrubs and trees, and the modern surfacing removed. Trenches (1-3) were excavated to a depth of between 2-2.3m from current ground level and were aligned north/south. The northern end of the trenches abutted the building that housed the reception and seating area for the pool (Fig 2).

#### 3.2 RESULTS

3.2.1 **Trench 1:** following the removal of the trees and shrubs in the vicinity of the extension, Trench 1 was excavated first, being the most southerly of the three trenches excavated (Fig 2). It measured 3m long by 1m wide and was excavated to c 2m depth.



Plate 2: South-facing view of Trench 1

- 3.2.2 The topsoil, a loose fine-grained dark brown sandy-silt topsoil (**101**), with small-medium rounded stone inclusions, was removed, which had a maximum depth of 0.3m (Fig 3). Beneath this, a modern deposit (**102**) was revealed to a maximum depth of 1.45m (Fig 3), which appeared to be a make-up deposit associated with the construction of the indoor pool. It was mixed greyish-orangey-brown coloured silty-sand, with 50% ceramic building material, 40% hardcore and 10% silty-sand.
- 3.2.3 Further excavation revealed a light grey compacted sand, with no inclusions, that appeared to be natural (**103**), beneath **102** (Fig 3). At the interface between the two deposits was a dark staining. The sand, **103**, was 0.2m deep and overlay a natural clay deposit (**104**) that was a mid-browny-grey colour, and very compact with no inclusions. The excavation proceeded 0.1m into clay **104** to establish its suitability for the concrete foundations (Fig 3, Plate 2).
- 3.2.4 **Trench 2:** this trench was positioned to the west of Trench 1 and east of Trench 3 (Fig 2), measured approximately 3m by 1m, and was excavated to a depth of 2.2m. The deposits revealed (**201-204**) were the same as those observed in Trench 1 (**101-104**).
- 3.2.5 **Trench 3:** this trench was situated to the west of Trenches 1 and 2, and also abutted the pool building to the west (Fig 2). It measured approximately 3m in length and although it was originally intended to be 1m in width it increased to 3m due to the unstable trench sides. The deposits revealed (**301-304**) were the same as those observed in Trench 1 (**101-104**).



Plate 3: North-facing view of Trench 3

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## 4. CONCLUSION

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### 4.1 DISCUSSION

- 4.1.1 The watching brief maintained during the excavation of the three foundation trenches for the extension showed that the area comprised made ground deposits (**101, 102, 201, 202, 301, and 302**) to approximately 1.75m depth associated with the construction of the current pool buildings, which date to 1976 when the pool was redeveloped. This overlay the natural sand and clay deposits (**103, 104, 203, 204, 303, and 304**). Historical mapping shows the area to have been agricultural land before the construction of the first pool building between 1919 and 1939. However, the area around the buildings appeared to be extensively disturbed and any deposits that may have been of archaeological potential, overlying the natural deposits, had been completely truncated. No archaeological finds or deposits were recorded and no waterlogged deposits were observed. It is, therefore, recommended that no further archaeological work should be carried out.

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## ILLUSTRATIONS

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### **FIGURES**

Figure 1: Site location

Figure 2: Plan showing position of foundation trenches

Figure 3: Representative section of Trench 1

### **PLATES**

Plate 1: General view of the site facing south-west

Plate 2: South-facing view of Trench 1

Plate 3: North-facing view of Trench 3



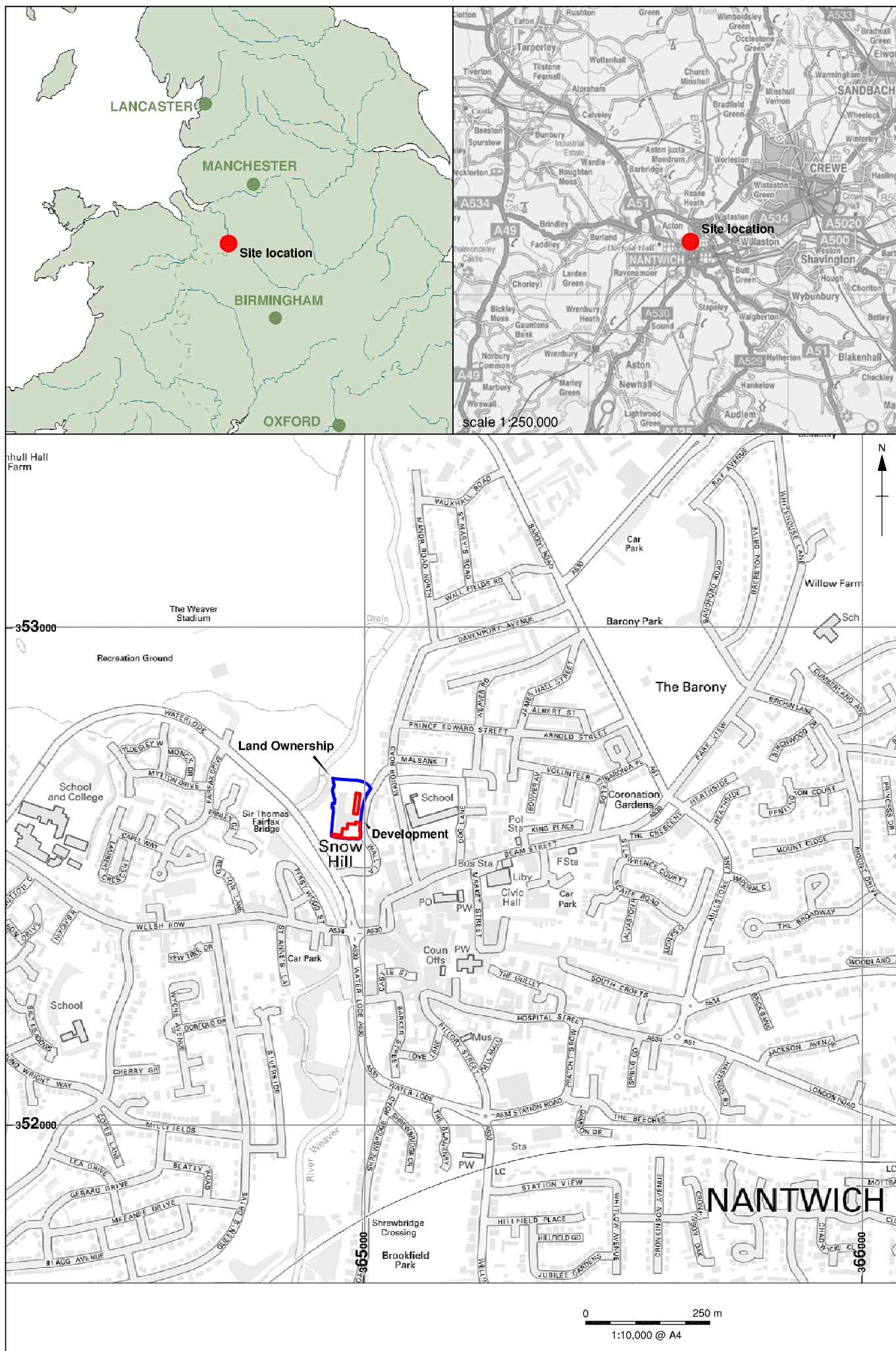
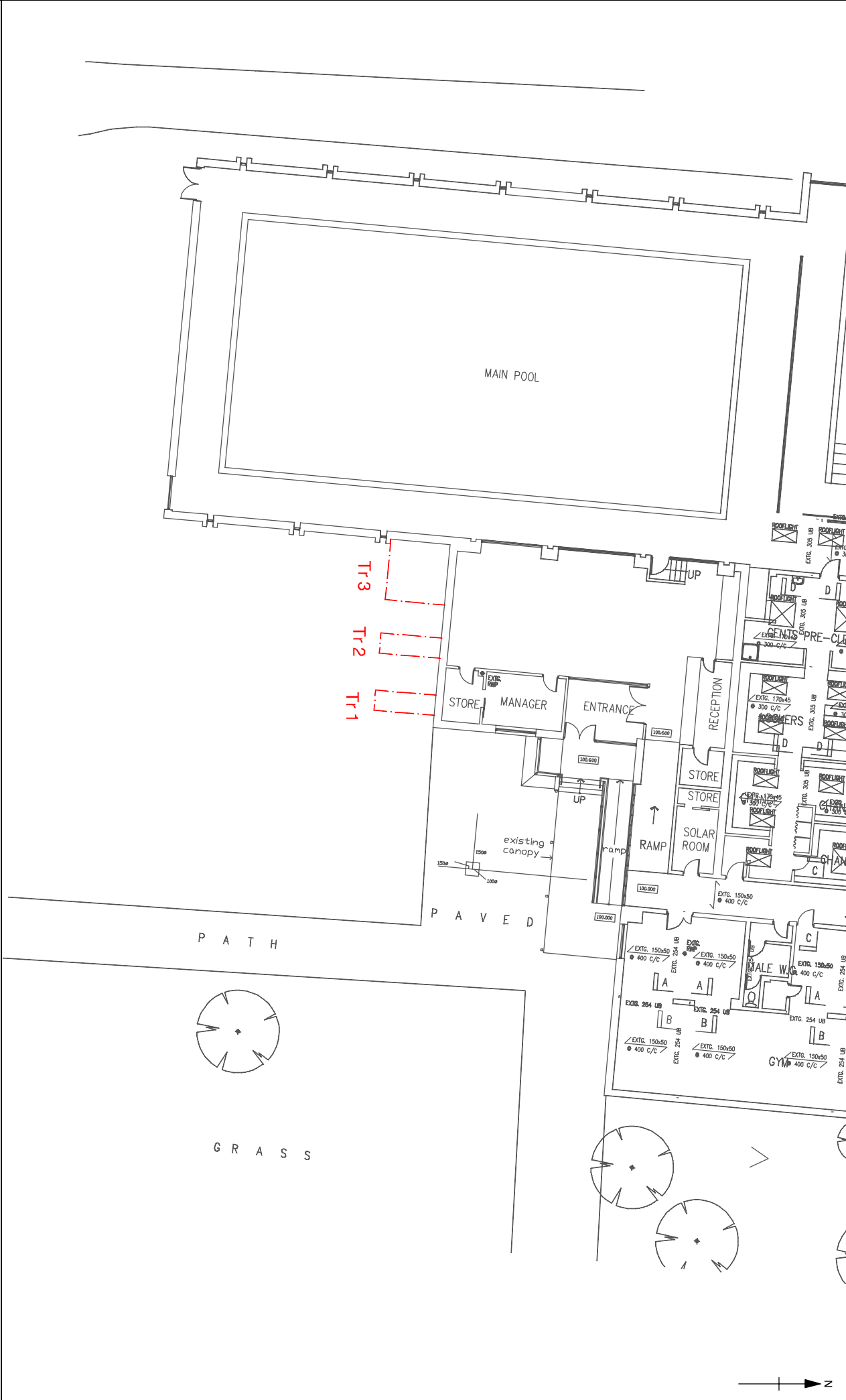


Figure 1: Site location





foundation trenches

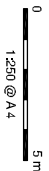
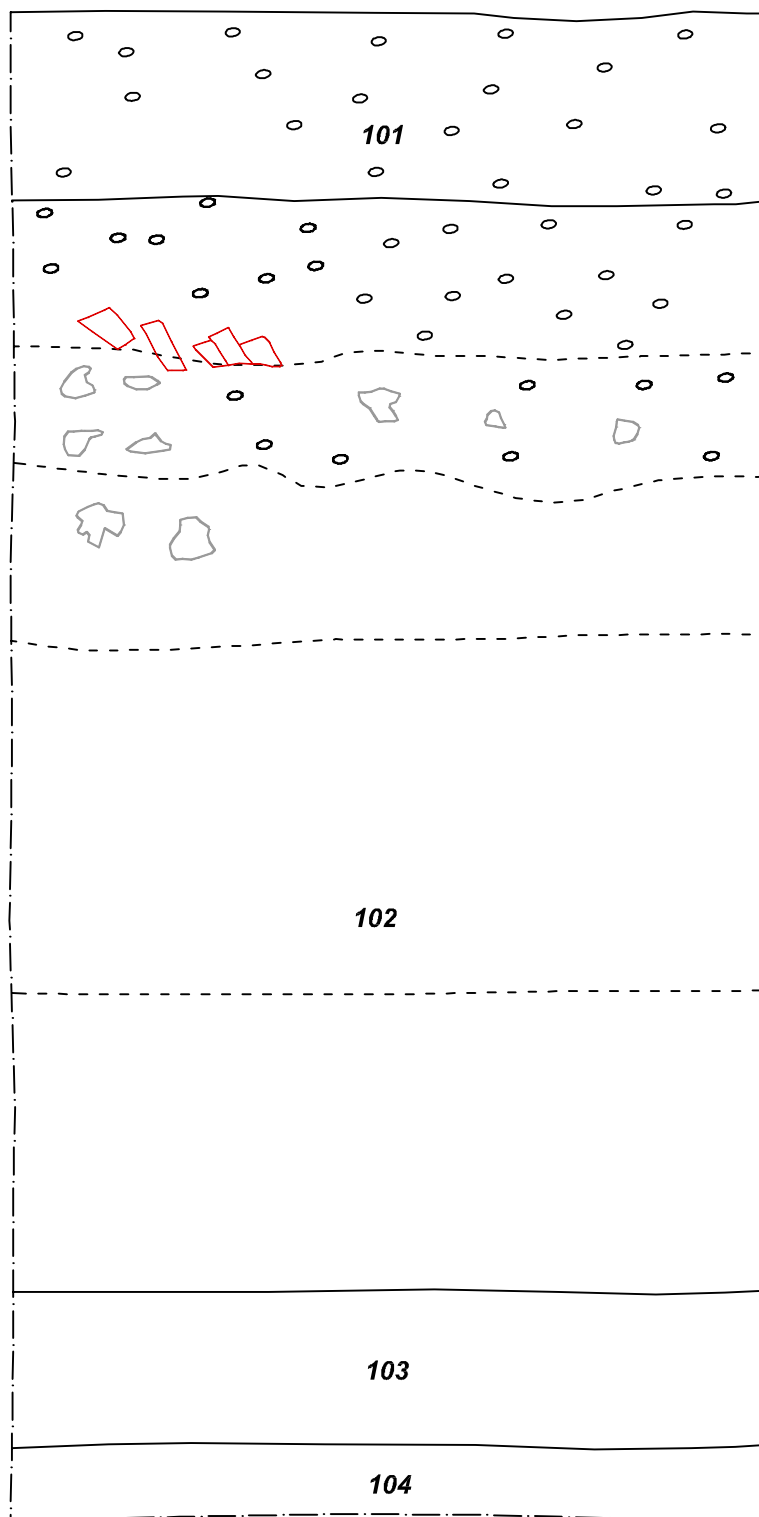


Figure 2: Plan showing position of foundation trenches



Limit of excavation



brick

stone

Layer/deposit

## Interface between modern make-up

0 0.25 m  
1:10 @ A4

Figure 3: Representative section of trench 1

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## APPENDIX 1: METHOD STATEMENT

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### 1. WATCHING BRIEF

- 1.1 **Health and safety:** the programme of archaeological monitoring will comply with the Oxford Archaeology North's (OA North) Health and Safety Policy and site Risk Assessment to prepared in advance of the site works. OA North will liaise with the client to ensure all health and safety regulations are met. The outline risk assessment will be continuously monitored during the fieldwork and updated accordingly. OA North staff will be wearing appropriate PPE, including steel toe-capped boots, hi-visibility vest or coat, and a hard hat. All project staff will be CSCS qualified, proof of which can be provided in the form of CSCS cards. It is assumed that OA North staff will be able to use the on-site contractor's welfare facilities.
- 1.2 **Project aim:** to accurately record the location, extent, and character of any surviving archaeological features and/or deposits during groundworks for the purpose of the refurbishment and redesign of Nantwich Pool, Wall Lane, Nantwich, Cheshire (NGR SJ 6497 5263).
- 1.3 **Method of working:** monitoring of the excavation or ground disturbance will be undertaken by the site contractor under archaeological supervision by a suitably qualified OA North member of staff. Excavation of any ground surfaces should be carried out using a toothless ditching bucket under archaeological supervision (toothed buckets inhibit observation of archaeological features and their recording). Any approach to the excavator will be made from the front of the machine (i.e. facing the driver) after signalling to the driver and being acknowledged.
- 1.4 Excavation is to be followed by the systematic examination of the structure and/or deposits at regular intervals, and the accurate recording of all archaeological features and horizons, and any artefacts, identified. The excavation area will only be entered by OA North staff if it is considered safe to do so.
- 1.5 Discovery of archaeological remains will require stoppage of the excavation. Areas of potential archaeological remains will require fencing-off from any construction works, preferably with netlon-type fencing, to allow OA North archaeologists sufficient time to undertake adequate recording under safe conditions. This will be carried out as efficiently as possible in order to minimise disruption. Depending on the deposits revealed, it is anticipated that the average time for the suspension of works will be approximately 2-4 hours. Clearance will be given for excavation to proceed once the archaeologist is satisfied that either no remains are present, or that they have been adequately recorded, or that the level of impact will not disturb any deeper remains that can be preserved *in situ*.
- 1.6 Putative archaeological features and/or deposits identified, together with the immediate vicinity of any such features, will be cleaned by hand, using either hoes, shovel scraping, and/or trowels depending on the subsoil conditions, and where appropriate sections will be studied and drawn. Any such features will be sample excavated.
- 1.7 Recording will comprise a full description and preliminary classification of the deposits and materials revealed on OA North *pro-forma* sheets, as recommended by English Heritage's Centre for Archaeology. A plan is to be with representative sections being drawn at a scale of 1:10 or 1:20. A photographic record, using monochrome and digital images, will also be maintained.
- 1.8 **Environmental Sampling:** samples (bulk samples of 40 litres volume, to be sub-sampled at a later stage) will be collected from stratified undisturbed deposits and will particularly target negative features (gullies, pits and ditches). Monolith samples will be collected from freshly exposed sections through all buried soils/old ground surfaces by trained staff. These will be returned to OA North's offices for processing.

- 1.9 **Human remains:** no human remains are anticipated on the site. However, should evidence of burials be identified, the 1857 Burial Act would apply and a Home Office Licence would be sought. This would involve all work ceasing until the proper authorities were satisfied before the burials are able to be removed.
- 1.10 **Contingency plan:** in the event of significant archaeological features being encountered during the watching brief, discussions will take place with the client and Development Control Archaeologist for Cheshire Shared Services as to the extent of further works to be carried out.
- 1.11 **Report and archiving:** the results of the fieldwork will culminate in a final report to be submitted within four to six weeks of completion of the fieldwork (subject to any specialist reports outstanding), and a site archive will be produced to current English Heritage guidelines. The information will be finally disseminated through the deposition of the archive with the relevant museum in due course, and a digital copy of the report to the County Historic Environment Record (HER) Office.

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**APPENDIX 2: SUMMARY CONTEXT LIST**

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<b>CONTEXT NUMBER</b>	<b>TRENCH</b>	<b>INTERPRETATION</b>
<b><i>101</i></b>	1	Topsoil
<b><i>102</i></b>	1	Backfill Deposit
<b><i>103</i></b>	1	Natural Sand
<b><i>104</i></b>	1	Natural Clay
<b><i>201</i></b>	2	Topsoil
<b><i>202</i></b>	2	Backfill Deposit
<b><i>203</i></b>	2	Natural Sand
<b><i>204</i></b>	2	Natural Clay
<b><i>301</i></b>	3	Topsoil
<b><i>302</i></b>	3	Backfill Deposit
<b><i>303</i></b>	3	Natural Sand
<b><i>304</i></b>	3	Natural Clay