



Bollinhurst Impounded Reservoir, Disley, Cheshire East

Archaeological Watching Brief - Supplementary Report



Oxford Archaeology North

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SUMMARY

Further to the results of previous research and a walkover survey (OA North 2009), the Archaeological Planning Advisory Service of Cheshire Shared Services recommended that an archaeological watching brief should be undertaken on an area of proposed safety works on Bollinhurst Impounded Reservoir, near Disley, Cheshire (NGR SJ 9732 8383). United Utilities subsequently commissioned OA North to undertake the works in June 2010. The reservoir is situated on the north-east fringes of Lyme Park, a National Trust property, which lies some 20km south-east of Manchester.

The previous report identified a number of landscape features including field boundaries and evidence of former cultivation, such as ridge and furrow. Also present were a dry-stone wall, two quarries, and a track. Of these, the works only affected the dry-stone wall. Only one additional feature of any archaeological significance was observed during the watching brief, and this was a single small pit within the rock removal area.

A number of surface finds were collected subsequent to the topsoil stripping. The most significant of these were several lithics, both in the form of tools and debitage, recovered from the rock removal area. The scatter of lithics and the limited range of lithic materials would suggest a small amount of activity rather than years of occupation. The assemblage is of late Neolithic to early Bronze age date.

Following the investigation undertaken during the watching brief, no further work is recommended.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Oxford Archaeology North (OA North) would like to thank United Utilities for commissioning and supporting the project. Thanks also go to Jamie Lund at The National Trust and Rob Edwards in the Archaeology Planning Department of Cheshire Shared Services.

Pascal Eloy, Liz Murray, and Lewis Stitt undertook the watching brief. Liz Murray compiled the report. Sean McPhillips and Pascal Eloy assessed the finds, and Mark Tidmarsh produced the drawings. Alison Plummer managed the project, and also edited the report.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 CIRCUMSTANCES OF PROJECT

- 1.1.1 United Utilities proposed a programme of safety works on the Bollinhurst Impounding Reservoir, near Disley, Cheshire (Fig 1). The works comprised the installation of a new spillway and the strengthening of the reservoir embankment. To this end a temporary access track was constructed, an area stripped for a site compound, and additional stripping for rock removal. Following recommendations made by the Archaeological Planning Advisory Service of Cheshire Shared Services, United Utilities commissioned Oxford Archaeology North (OA North) to undertake rapid archaeological desk-based research and a walkover survey of the proposed works (OA North 2009). Following the results of the subsequent report (OA North 2009) United Utilities commissioned Oxford Archaeology North to undertake a watching brief as specified by the Planning Archaeologist.
- 1.1.2 This document presents the results of the watching brief and should be read in conjunction with the previous report.

1.2 LOCATION, TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY

- 1.2.1 The study area is located on the western edge of the Peak District, at the south end of the Pennines, *c* 10km to the south-east of Stockport (SJ 9732 8383). The proposed works are located on both sides of the Bollinhurst Brook, the northern side being within the township of Disley, and the southern side within the township of Lyme Handley, and within Lyme Park, a National Trust property. Two reservoirs are located on the south side of the Bollinhurst Brook, immediately north of the Lyme Park boundary: Horse Coppice Reservoir to the west, and Bollinhurst Impounded Reservoir to the east, on which the works are proposed.
- 1.2.2 Lyme Park rises in a southerly and easterly direction and is drained by a number of streams, which, in the south of the park, have deep cut valleys or cloughs. Within the study area the land slopes down from *c* 230m AOD at the south extent, to *c* 210m AOD on the south side of the Bollinhurst Brook. On the north side of the brook, the land rises from *c* 200m AOD on the west side of the study area to *c* 220m AOD in the east.
- 1.2.3 The geology of the area consists of sandstones with coal measures and Carboniferous millstone grit. In the lower areas of Lyme Park in particular, the solid geology is overlain by boulder clay and fluvio-glacial Pleistocene gravels (Countryside Commission 1998). The coal measures and the streams ensured that the surrounding area was developed for industry, in particular coal mining and water and steam-powered textile production. Agriculturally, the area was marginal, and from the earlier medieval period seems to have been given over to woodland pasture, with areas of relatively dense tree cover existing until at least the later medieval period. This woodland pasture was primarily exploited for hunting and for common grazing (OA North 2006).

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 WATCHING BRIEF

- 2.1.1 A programme of field observation recorded accurately the location, extent, and character of surviving archaeological features within the topsoil strip for the access roads, associated compounds and the rock removal area. This work comprised observation during the excavation for these works, the systematic examination of subsoil horizons exposed during the course of the groundworks, and the accurate recording of all archaeological features and horizons and any artefacts identified during observation.
- 2.1.2 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 Centre for Archaeology. A monochrome and colour slide photographic record was maintained throughout, with digital photographs taken for illustrative purposes.
- 2.1.3 All work was consistent with the relevant standards and procedures of the Institute of Field Archaeologists, and generally accepted best practice.

2.2 ARCHIVE

- 2.2.1 The results of all archaeological work carried out will form the basis for a full archive to professional standards, in accordance with current English Heritage guidelines (*Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment* (MoRPHE) 2006). The original record archive of project will be deposited with Cheshire Museums Service.
- 2.2.2 The Arts and Humanities Data Service (AHDS) online database *Online Access to index of Archaeological Investigations* (OASIS) will be completed as part of the archiving phase of the project.

3. WATCHING BRIEF RESULTS

3.1 INTRODUCTION

- 3.1.1 The watching brief carried out during May and June 2010 aimed to identify any previously unrecorded sites within the proposed area of work (Fig 2).
- 3.1.2 Initially, a compound area was stripped at the northernmost end of the temporary access route, just off Red Lane. At the same time, the stripping of the overburden in the rock removal area exposed stone-rich natural geology. This was widened in a piecemeal fashion, whilst the access road was stripped. A further compound was located at the reservoir site.
- 3.1.3 All topsoil stripping was carried out using a 20 ton tracked mechanical excavator fitted with a toothless ditching bucket.

3.2 RESULTS

- 3.2.1 The initial compound area was stripped minimally, to a depth of 0.15m. This was too shallow to remove all of the topsoil. The area was covered immediately following the stripping with a membrane and hardcore. No archaeological features were observed, although a number of finds were recovered from the topsoil.
- 3.2.2 The stripping of the access road was undertaken in short sections, and, similarly not all of the topsoil was removed. It was promptly overlain with stone. No archaeological features were observed along the length of the access road (Plate 1).
- 3.2.3 The stone extraction site was stripped of topsoil down to stone-rich deposits, and often directly on to bedrock (Plate 2). The topsoil was a mid brown sandy-silt up to 0.4m in depth, overlying a subsoil of orange/yellow clayey-silt (0.3m maximum depth). This in turn overlay a pinkish glacial till. During this process a dry-stone wall (OA North Site 27) was demolished.
- 3.2.4 A small pit (Plate 3) filled with a burnt deposit was exposed in the north-east corner of the stripped area. The oval-shaped pit was shallow, measuring 0.43m in length x 0.28m in depth. The fill comprised very fragmented charcoal, with stones to the base. It is possible that this was a fire pit, but a total lack of finds makes, and the fragmented nature of the charcoal it impossible to ascribe a date or function to this feature.
- 3.2.5 Further topsoil stripping in the north-east corner of the rock removal area (Plate 4) exposed subsoil and glacial till the same as those within the general area of the extraction site. No archaeological features were noted in this area.



Plate 1: View of the access road illustrating the shallow nature of the topsoil strip



Plate 2: Rock removal area showing the stone-rich deposits



Plate 3: Plan view of the base of the shallow pit observed within the rock removal area



Plate 4: Stripped compound area to the north-east of rock removal area

3.3 THE FINDS

- 3.3.1 In total, 69 artefacts were collected from either the upper or lower levels of topsoil, or from above the glacial till. The assemblage is dominated by c 50 fragments of flint and chert, these being stone tools and waste products. Lesser amounts of other material were represented, including two fragments of roof tile that possibly date to the medieval or early post-medieval period, clay tobacco pipe (4 pieces), post-medieval pottery (4), iron objects (2), worked bone, and a copper alloy Victorian coin.
- 3.3.2 **Flint:** a small lithic scatter was retrieved from the rock removal area during the watching brief. The scatter was spread over the field, almost certainly as a result of ploughing. The geology of the field varied, with a millstone grit outcrop on the western side gradually disappearing towards the east, where a compact glacial till was present. The lithic scatter was found predominantly on the millstone grit outcrop. The topography was conducive to settlement, however the size of the scatter would suggest a small amount of activity rather than years of occupation, and the limited range of lithic materials would also suggest this. The assemblage is of a late Neolithic to early Bronze Age date possibly edging more towards the Neolithic. This is based on the tool typology and the mix of materials used.
- 3.3.3 The predominant flint is a dark brown glassy material of high quality, possibly from East Yorkshire. A poor quality beach pebble flint available along the west coast, and a small amount of black chert were also present. Most of the implements recovered are made of the higher quality brown flint; these included a side scraper, an end scraper, and a broken thumbnail scraper. Also of brown flint are three blades - two narrow and one broad. The poorer quality beach flint was also worked into a double-sided scraper, a broad blade, and two narrow blades. Debitage of both types was present, indicating that the implements were manufactured on site. Three small flakes of beach pebble show clear signs of burning. A piece of black chert had also been worked into a side scraper, and a small quantity of natural raw material was retrieved from site indicating that the chert was part of the local geology. A small amount of hematite or iron stone, often associated with prehistoric sites, was also present. A potential pebble implement, with striations on both planes and good ergonomics was noted due to its unusual shape and size in relation to the other geology present.
- 3.3.4 Other than a Bronze Age cup marked stone (OA North Site 20) located just to the west across the valley from the site (NGR SJ 9720 8320), no other prehistoric sites are known in the vicinity. For this reason the presence of the flints at Bollinhurst suggests nomadic activity rather than settlement.
- 3.3.5 **Ceramic Building Material:** two thin (50mm) oxidised and incomplete roof tiles of possible medieval date were recovered. No peg-holes were present, and less than two worked sides survived, so an accurate identification cannot be ascertained. Similar thickness tiles are commonly used on medieval buildings, such as the type used on Norton Priory, and other lesser status rural structures. The lack of other building material suggests that the fragments did not derive

from a building within the study area. The remaining fragments were too small to identify.

- 3.3.6 **Pottery:** the earliest datable pottery amongst the small assemblage included part of a hard-fired dark brown glazed trail slipware bowl, which resembles the type of product deriving from Staffordshire kilns in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The remaining fragments included three English produced stoneware kitchen and tableware vessels of Nottingham-type, a brown bottle, and a Denby teapot fragment. These broadly date between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.
- 3.3.7 **Clay Tobacco Pipe:** the four fragments included an incomplete spurred pipe decorated with a simple leaf design along the seam, and three narrow and medium-bored smooth stems. No maker's marks were present. The oblique angled bowl on the incomplete pipe suggests late eighteenth century manufacture, although decoration of this type was commonly used on pipes throughout the nineteenth century.
- 3.3.8 **Metal Work:** this category included a copper alloy coin and two iron objects. All of the objects are corroded, with the coin showing surface patina, which obscured much of the detail. However, sufficient detail survived to suggest that it was a Queen Victoria half penny and the angle of the stylised bust suggests it was minted between 1860 and 1870. The iron included part of a blade from a small agricultural tool and a nail, probably of nineteenth century.
- 3.3.9 **Worked bone:** this included a post-medieval button fragment, which may have derived from a shirt or blouse. The style of the button suggests a nineteenth century date.

4. CONCLUSION

4.1 DISCUSSION

- 4.1.1 The previous report (OA North 2009) identified a number of landscape features in the vicinity of the development relating to agricultural practice and stone extraction, with these likely to be post-medieval in origin. No archaeological features other than the small pit were encountered during the watching brief, and this was not dateable. However, the lithic collection is a significant find and the flint scatters, which include tools and debitage, suggest a prehistoric (late Neolithic to early Bronze Age) nomadic presence in the area.
- 4.1.2 The remaining finds were largely post-medieval in date, and are suggestive of continued ploughing across the area. The dry-stone wall (Site 27), located in the rock removal area was most likely to be post-medieval in date.
- 4.1.3 As a result of the work undertaken during the watching brief no further archaeological work is recommended.

5. BIBLIOGRAPHY

5.1 SECONDARY SOURCES

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6. ILLUSTRATIONS

6.1 LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Site Location

Figure 2: Areas subject to the Watching Brief

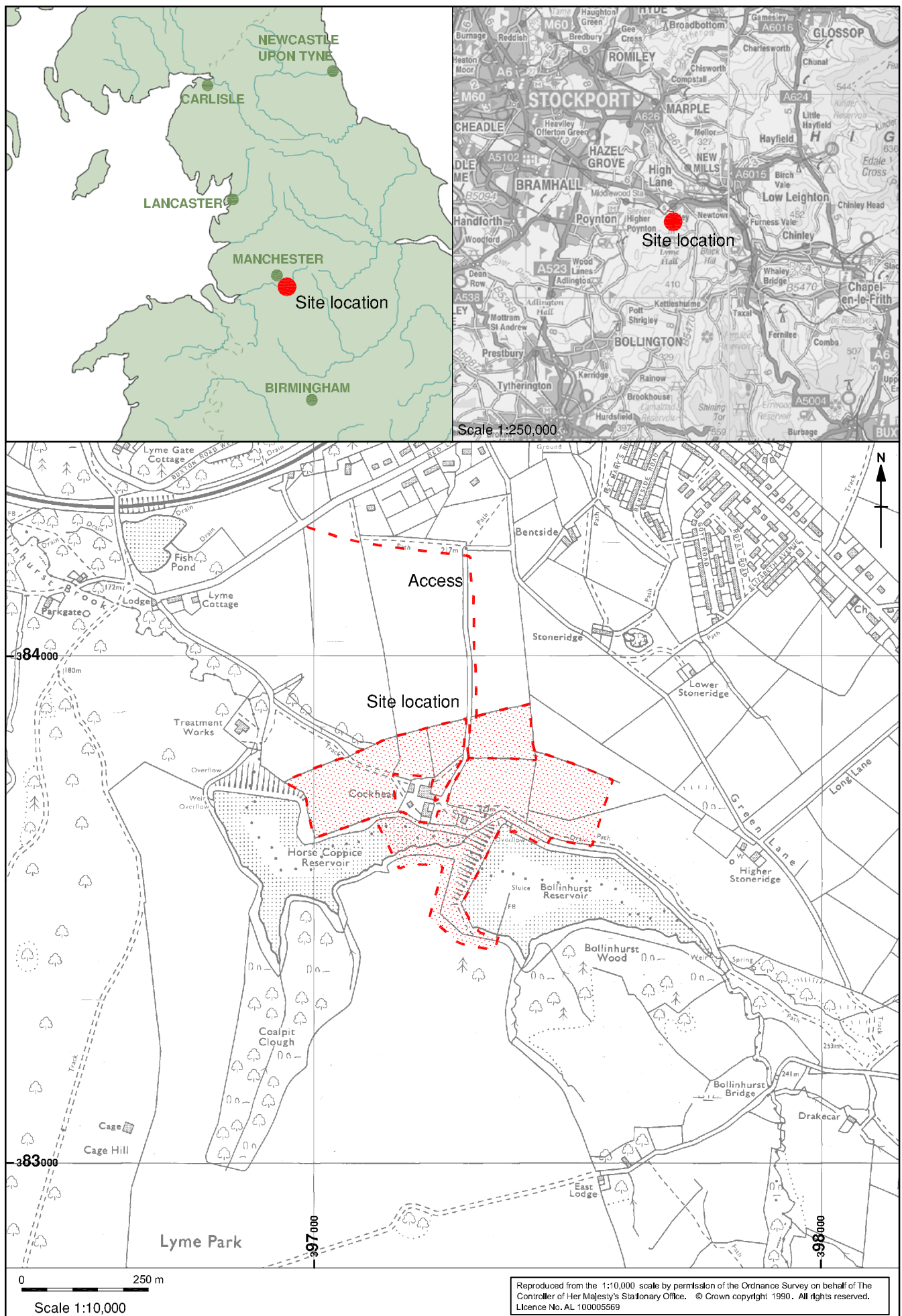
6.2 LIST OF PLATES

Plate 1: View of the access road illustrating the shallow nature of the topsoil strip

Plate 2: Rock removal area showing the stone-rich deposits

Plate 3: Plan view of the base of the shallow pit observed within the rock removal area

Plate 4: Stripped compound area to the north-east of rock removal area



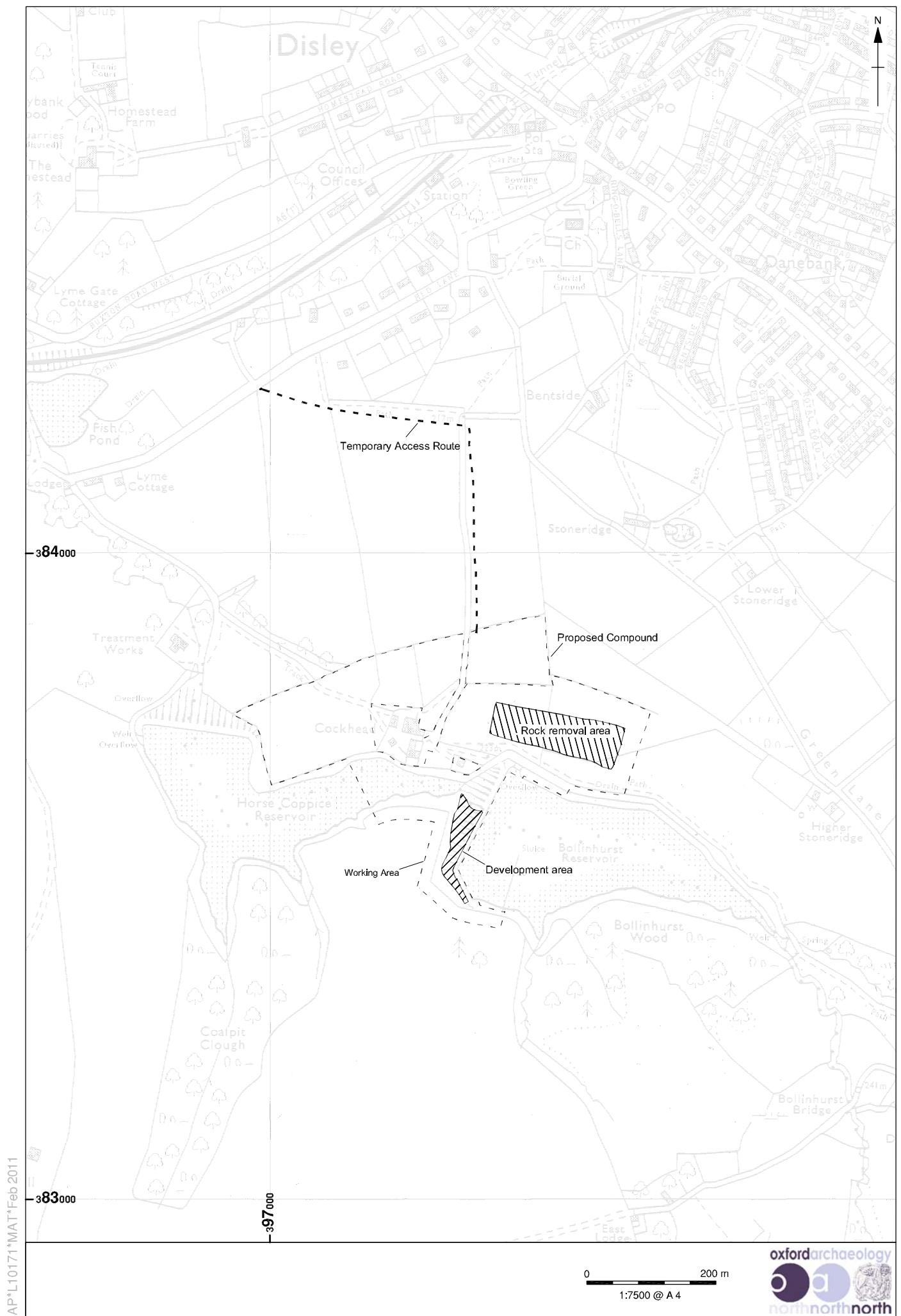


Figure 2: Areas subject to watching brief