

# Vyrnwy Pipeline, Old Marton, Shropshire



## Archaeological Watching Brief - Supplementary Report



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## SUMMARY

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United Utilities proposed the construction of 2km of pipeline, to be laid between Ellesmere and Whittington, Shropshire (from NGR SJ 33911 33328 to SJ 35439 34575). Following a brief produced by Shropshire County Council Historic Environment Countryside Advisor, Oxford Archaeology North (OA North) was commissioned to undertake rapid archaeological desk-based research and a walkover survey of the proposed pipeline route (OA North 2009). As a result of this report it was recommended that an archaeological watching brief be carried out during topsoil stripping activities along the route of the proposed pipeline easement. OA North was subsequently commissioned by United Utilities to carry out the watching brief, which took place during September 2009.

The rapid research served to highlight the presence of earthwork remains relating to Old Marton Hall (Site **12**), and the Grade 2\* listed Old Hall (Site **21**). Although neither of these sites lies within the direct route of the pipeline easement, the potential for further unknown remains to be associated with them could not be ruled out. The watching brief targeted the easement in the proximity of the two sites. In addition, an area of ridge and furrow (Site **10**) was also known to be present.

The topsoil stripping was shallow and did not expose natural geology, and therefore, no archaeological features or deposits were observed. Several fragments of post-medieval pottery recovered are likely to relate to manuring during this period. The area adjacent to Old Marton Hall (Site **12**) appears to have been heavily disturbed during the construction of the Vyrnwy Aqueduct. No further work is recommended.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Oxford Archaeology North (OA North) would like to thank United Utilities for commissioning the Project.

Ric Buckle undertook the watching brief, and Kelly Clapperton compiled the report. Mark Tidmarsh produced the drawings. Alison Plummer managed the project and also edited the report.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

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### 1.1 CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE PROJECT

- 1.1.1 United Utilities proposed the construction of a 2km pipeline between the town of Ellesmere and the village of Whittington, Shropshire, from NGR SJ 33911 33328OD to SJ 35439 34575OD, centred on the area around Old Marton Hall (NGR SJ 35083 34218OD, Fig 1). As a result of recommendations presented in the desk-based research and walkover survey report (OA North 2009), a watching brief was undertaken of a targeted area during the topsoil stripping activities associated with the construction of the pipeline
- 1.1.2 This supplementary report presents the results of the watching brief and should be read in conjunction with the 2009 report.

### 1.2 SITE LOCATION, TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY

- 1.2.1 The pipeline was constructed within an area of pastoral and arable fields, located approximately 2km north-east of the village of Whittington, bypassing the farms of Old Hall, Old Marton Hall and Old Marton Farm (Fig 1). The route is located on low, undulating land to the north-east of the Llangollen Canal, rising between 110m and 120m above sea level, and on the boundary of the Shropshire, Cheshire and Staffordshire Plain, and the foothills of the Welsh Mountains (Countryside Commission 1998, 145). Immediately to the west is an area known as the 'Shropshire Lakelands', where substantial hummocks of moraine are interspersed with large meres, often linked to salt extraction (*op cit*, 147).
- 1.2.2 The geology of the area comprises Triassic sandstones and marls, overlain by glacial boulder-clay, with local deposits of silt, sand and gravels, with peat accumulation in wetter areas (*op cit*, 148). The overlying drift geology consists of typical stagnogley soils (Ordnance Survey 1983).

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## 2. METHODOLOGY

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### 2.1 WATCHING BRIEF

- 2.1.1 The topsoil stripping entailed the partial removal of the topsoil prior to the laying of a temporary stone track and the excavation of the pipe trench. The watching brief was undertaken during these groundworks in order to determine the presence, character and extent of any sub-surface archaeological remains (Fig 2). The topsoil was removed by a 13 tonne, 360° tracked, mechanical excavator under the constant supervision of an archaeologist. All features and deposits of archaeological interest were manually investigated, and recorded using *pro forma* sheets provided by OA North.
- 2.1.2 The watching brief was undertaken in two phases. The initial phase monitored the easement in the vicinity of Old Hall (Site **21**), located in Fields 1 and 2 (Fig 2). This area was targeted due to the presence of Old Hall, which dates to at least the sixteenth century. The pipeline also crossed Site **14**, an inspection hatch for the Liverpool Corporation Water Works and Vyrnwy Aqueduct, and had the potential to disturb further remains relating to the aqueduct.
- 2.1.3 The second phase was undertaken within Field 3 to the north-east (Fig 2). Earthwork remains associated with Old Marton Hall (Site **12**) were known to be present in the general vicinity of the easement. Ridge and furrow (Site **10**) was also present to the north.

### 2.2 ARCHIVE

- 2.2.1 A full professional archive has been compiled in accordance with current IFA and English Heritage guidelines (English Heritage 2006). The paper and digital archive will be deposited in the Shropshire Archives in Shrewsbury on completion of the project. A copy of the report will be deposited with the Shropshire County Council Historic Environment Record.

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### 3. BACKGROUND

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#### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

- 3.1.1 The following section provides a summary of the Historical Background presented in the *Rapid Archaeological Desk-Based Research and Walkover Survey* (OA North 2009), in order to place the results of the watching brief in their historical and archaeological context. This section should be read in conjunction with this earlier report.

#### 3.2 SUMMARISED HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

- 3.2.1 The route of the proposed pipeline is located near the post-medieval township of Old Marton within the Parish of Whittington. No prehistoric activity is recorded in the area, with the majority of known activity focused around the mosses and meres to the south and east, although undated cropmarks are located just outside the assessment area (SMR 2335), and are thought to date to the later prehistoric period.
- 3.2.2 Medieval activity is also rare, and Old Marton was not recorded in the Domesday survey of 1086, although there is a possibility that Old Hall (SMR 12223; Site **21**), which provisionally dates to the sixteenth century, may have had earlier origins. This building, and the barn at Old Hall (SMR 19600; Site **22**) are the only two Listed Buildings in the area. Old Marton Hall is later in date, but it is possible that an earthwork platform associated with this site also has earlier origins.
- 3.2.3 Post-medieval activity suggests the continuation of a rural, pastoral landscape that had probably existed for centuries. The area has remained largely rural, with the land around the settlement of Old Marton being enclosed during the latter half of the eighteenth century (QE/1/22: 1781), and the Tithe map of 1839 indicating a pastoral economy. Site **10**, the ridge and furrow, is thought to date to this period.
- 3.2.4 Nevertheless, some influence of industrial growth and development can be seen in the vicinity, namely the creation of transport and communication networks. During the nineteenth century the Cambrian Railway was constructed to the south of the study area, later known as the Whitchurch and Aberystwyth Railway; and the Llangollen Canal, previously known as the Ellesmere Canal, to the west (Sivewright 1986). The line of the Vyrnwy Aqueduct (Site **04**) passed through the study area, and is depicted on the Liverpool Corporation Waterworks map of 1880 and Ordnance Survey maps of 1902 and 1929.



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## 4. WATCHING BRIEF RESULTS

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### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

- 4.1.1 In total, three fields were subject to the watching brief during the partial removal of topsoil down to subsoil undertaken in advance of the construction of a track and the digging of the pipeline. The three fields were specifically targeted due to the high potential for early post-medieval remains associated with Old Marton Hall (Site **12**) to the north-east; Old Hall (Site **21**) and associated barn (Site **22**), located to the south-east; and an area of ridge and furrow to the north (Site **10**). The area immediately to the north of Old Marton Hall proved to be heavily disturbed made ground.

### 4.2 RESULTS

- 4.2.1 **Field 1:** this field was located to the north of Old Hall (Site **21**). The pipeline easement ran north-east/south-west across the field and covered an area 4m in width, and 74m in length. The topsoil comprised a mid-light brown sandy-silt topsoil averaging 0.20m thick, above a light yellow/brown silty-sand subsoil, with inclusions of sub-rounded pebbles. Natural geology was not observed, and no features of archaeological interest were present. Towards the north-west of Field 1, three sherds of Staffordshire trailed slipware were recovered from the topsoil. This field contained Site **14**, a nineteenth century water supply inspection hatch.
- 4.2.2 **Field 2:** located immediately to the north-east of Field 1. The pipeline ran north-east/south-west across the field, and covered an area 4m in width and c 100m in length. The topsoil comprised a heavily disturbed, mid-light brown sandy-silt, 0.10m thick, overlying a light-mid yellow/brown silty-sand subsoil, with small sub-rounded pebble inclusions. No features, deposits or artefacts of archaeological interest were present.
- 4.2.3 **Field 3:** was located to the north-east of Field 2. The pipeline ran north-east/south-west across the field, exiting it immediately to the east of a pond (Site **01**), and covered an area 4m wide and c 220m long. The topsoil comprised mid-light brown sandy-silt averaging 0.15m thick, overlying a light yellow/brown subsoil, with gravel inclusions. No features or deposits of archaeological interest were present, although fragments of assorted post-medieval pottery were found within the topsoil.

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## 5. CONCLUSION

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### 5.1 DISCUSSION

- 5.1.1 Fields 1 to 3 all had potential to contain remains of archaeological significance associated with the early post-medieval site of Old Hall, the earthworks associated with the later Old Marton Hall (Sites **21** and **12** respectively), and the ridge and furrow (Site **10**). Nevertheless, no features or deposits of archaeological interest were identified during the topsoil strip, and it is likely that any structures relating to the Old Hall are situated beneath the extant modern buildings associated with Old Hall Farm.
- 5.1.2 The area with the highest potential for archaeological remains would likely have been towards the north-eastern end of the easement, within the vicinity of Site **01**, where the ground levels out and is adjacent to Old Marton Hall. The area, however, appears to have been heavily disturbed during the construction of the original Vyrnwy pipeline, and no remains of archaeological interest were observed. It is likely that the infrequent fragments of pottery recovered from the fields relates to manuring of the area during the post-medieval period.

## 6. ILLUSTRATIONS

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### 6.1 LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Site Location

Figure 2: Plan showing section of pipeline subject to watching brief

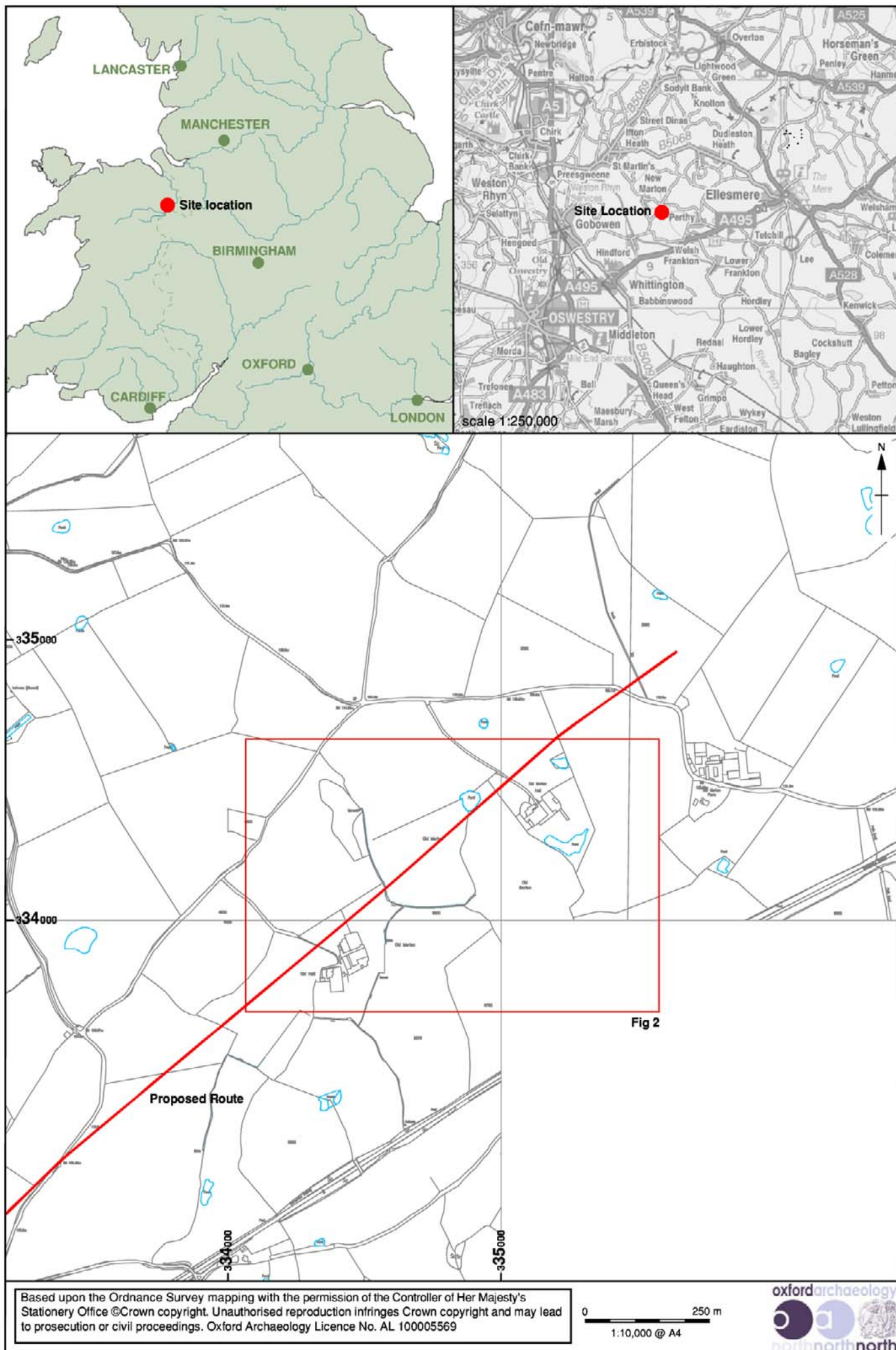


Figure 1: Site location

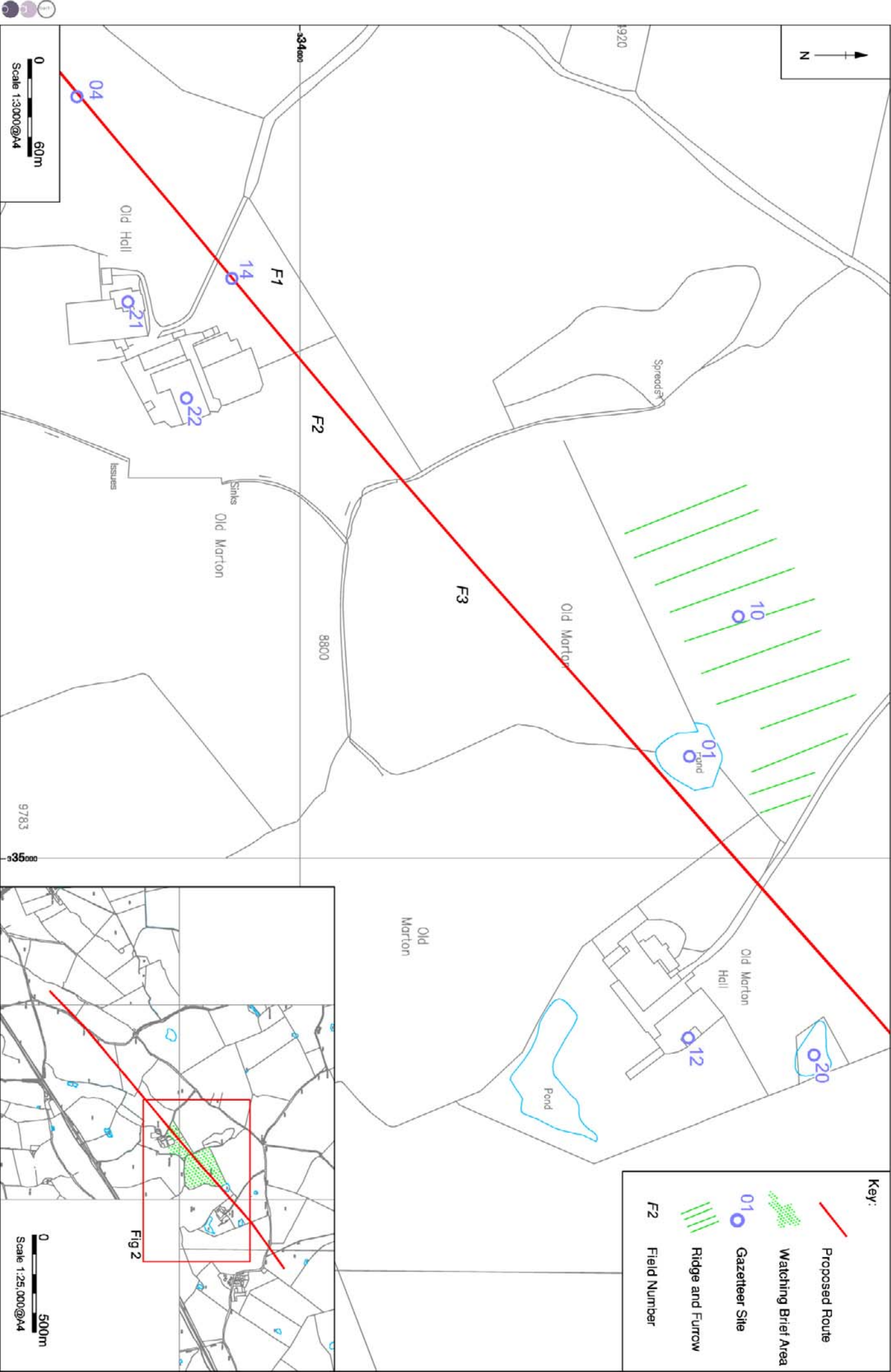


Figure 2: Plan showing section of pipeline subject to Watching Brief

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## 7. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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### 7.1 PRIMARY SOURCES

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