

St John's Roman Catholic
Comprehensive School
Gravesend
Kent



**Archaeological
Evaluation Report**

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**St. John's Roman Catholic Comprehensive School
Gravesend, Kent**

NGR TQ 659 733

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SUMMARY

In August 2008, Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out a seven trench archaeological field evaluation at St. John's Roman Catholic Comprehensive School, Gravesend, Kent (TQ 659 733) on behalf of Kent County Council and Kier Group PLC. The evaluation followed desk-based archaeological and development impact assessments of the site carried out for the Council, which form part of the ongoing BSF schools development programme in Kent. The evaluation revealed no evidence of significant archaeological occupation or activity. Deep deposits of made ground in two trenches may represent infilled clay quarrying areas associated with a 19th-century brick-works thought to have been situated to the south of the site.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Location and scope of work

- 1.1.1 In August 2008, as part of the Government's Building Schools for the Future (BSF) programme, Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out a field evaluation at St. John's RC Comprehensive School, Gravesend, Kent (Fig. 1) on behalf of the construction contractor, Kier Group plc, and the developer, Kent County Council. The evaluation work was undertaken in accordance with an archaeological specification prepared by Oxford Archaeology, which incorporates standard requirements for archaeological evaluation trenching in Kent, issued by KCC. The present evaluation is one of a series of archaeological investigations being carried out in compliance with archaeological planning conditions attached to each of the Wave 3 BSF Schools.
- 1.1.2 The site is within the ancient parish of Denton next Gravesend (now Milton parish) and in within the administrative area of Gravesham Borough Council.
- 1.1.3 The evaluation work was undertaken under archaeological guidelines issued by KCCThe development site is centred on NGR TQ 659 733 and is c 8.6 hectares in total area (Fig. 1). The planning application reference is GR/08/121.

1.2 BSF schools project background

- 1.2.1 The Kent Schools 2008 Project involves the archaeological assessment and recording of eleven schools in the County of Kent, prior to commencement of redevelopment works under the Government's BSF programme.
- 1.2.2 Through the BSF programme, significant investment in buildings and in Information and Communications Technology is being made to support the Government's educational reform agenda. Funds are intended to be devolved to Local Authorities and schools throughout England to spend on maintaining and improving their school buildings and in some cases for major rebuilding and remodelling projects.

- 1.2.3 Archaeological investigation in the form of trial trenching has been incorporated into this programme, in order to mitigate any damage to the archaeological resource present at any of the schools currently under redevelopment.

1.3 Geology and topography

- 1.3.1 The underlying geology of the site is mainly Palaeocene Upper Chalk although the south-west area of the school grounds lies on Palaeocene Thanet Beds (sands). (GSGB, 1974, Sheet 271). It is located on an area which has been levelled in places, the lowest point being the north-eastern area at an approximate height of 10 m OD, and the highest being the south-western area at an approximate height of 30 m OD.

1.4 Archaeological and historical background

- 1.4.1 The archaeological background to the evaluation has been the subject of a separate archaeological desktop study. OA was commissioned by Parsons Brinckerhoff to undertake the desktop assessment on behalf of KCC in 2007. A walkover survey of the development area formed part of the assessment strategy. The archaeological assessment examined an area of 1-km radius around the school and included a gazetteer of known archaeological findspots/investigations in the area of the development. Each of these was allocated an OA gazetteer number in the assessment document (OA/PB 2007).
- 1.4.2 Two post-medieval buildings (OA 8 and 66) are known on the site, which were thought might leave traces of below ground foundations. A number of archaeological investigations have taken place within the 1 km Study Area, (OA 55, 73-75, 77-79). One investigation recorded modern landscaping (OA 79), one revealed Iron Age and Roman activity (OA 74), two recorded medieval remains (OA 77 and 78), and four recorded post-medieval features (OA 55, 73, 75 and 78).
- 1.4.3 Evidence for Mesolithic activity within the Study Area comes from a Mesolithic tranchet axe found at the Gravesend gas works (OA 38, c 600 m north-east of the site). Some undated crop-marks (OA 40, c 885 m east of the site) visible in the eastern extent of the Study Area are thought from their morphology to be of Bronze Age date. Evidence for Iron Age activity within the Study Area is supplied by some late Iron Age-Roman field boundaries (OA 61, c 750 m east of the site), an Iron Age denehole (a chalk cave - OA 39, c 450 m south-west of the site) and a late Iron Age site (OA 74, c 550 m north east of the Site). Possible Roman field boundaries and a pit of late Iron Age-Early Roman date are known nearby (OA 61, c 750 m east of the site), and a Roman pit found during an evaluation (OA 74, c 550 m north east of the site).
- 1.4.4 The medieval town of Gravesend is c 900 m north-west of the site and Denton c 50 m to the north of the site, centred of St. Mary's Church (OA 14). Some 350 m north of the site the SMR records a deserted medieval village (DMV), also named Denton (OA 57). The SMR contains no further details and it is possible that the grid reference is inaccurate and it actually refers to the present settlement of Denton.

- 1.4.5 Three 18th-century and two 19th-century Listed Buildings (OA 25-29), a 16th-century historic building (OA 31) and sites of historic buildings (OA 59-60 and 62) were located in the original fields between Denton and Chalk. The 1845 Tithe Map shows a large field east of the site ('Great Field'); the smaller field to the west is called 'Brickfield', suggestive of a brick-making site. Geology maps show there to be area of clay in the vicinity, and the presence of a circular feature on the Tithe Map within this field (OA 9), suggests that clay quarrying took place here and may have affected any underlying archaeology. The 2nd edition OS map (1899) shows the site incorporated into parkland belonging to Milton Hall - a late Victorian country house that had been demolished by the time of the 1932 OS map.

1.5 Impact Assessment

- 1.5.1 The archaeological desktop assessment (OA/PB 2007) was supplemented by an Impact Assessment Report that assessed the potential effects of the development proposals on any archaeological remains thought likely to be present at St. John's School. OA was commissioned by Kier Group and Land Securities to carry out this work on behalf of KCC in March 2008 (OA 2008).

2 EVALUATION AIMS

- 2.1.1 The principal objective of the evaluation was to determine the quality, character, date and extent of any archaeological remains present on the site, to supplement information gathered during the desk-based archaeological and impact assessments made of the site.

3 EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

3.1 Scope of fieldwork

- 3.1.1 The evaluation consisted of seven evaluation trenches. These were each 20 m long and approximately 1.65 m wide (Fig. 2). Trench 8 was a contingency trench that wasn't excavated. It was only to be excavated if sufficient significant archaeological remains were uncovered in the other trenches.

3.2 Fieldwork methods and recording

- 3.2.1 The overburden was removed using a JCB mechanical excavator, fitted with a toothless ditching bucket and working under close archaeological supervision. Excavation proceeded to the first archaeological horizon or to undisturbed natural geology, whichever was encountered first. The trenches were then cleaned by hand and any revealed features were sampled to determine their extent and nature, and to retrieve finds and environmental samples.
- 3.2.2 All features and deposits encountered were issued a unique context number. A plan was drawn of each trench at a scale of 1:50, and each excavated feature was recorded in section at 1:10. Colour transparency and black-and-white photographs were taken

of each feature, as well as more general shots of each trench. Digital photography was also used. All recording was conducted in accordance with the procedures detailed in the *OA Fieldwork Manual* (OAU 1992).

4 RESULTS

4.1 Description of trenches

- 4.1.1 None of the trenches contained any significant archaeological deposits. The revealed stratigraphy is described below (Fig. 3, sample sections).

Trench 1

- 4.1.2 The earliest deposit (103) was a red/brown silty clay with sub-angular flint inclusions, at least 1 m deep. Its surface sloped down to the south-west from 18.26 m OD to 17.2 m OD. Layer 103 was overlain by a buried topsoil (102), a maximum of 0.25 m in depth. This in turn was sealed by a levelling layer of light brown silty clay (101) and a modern layer of grey brown silty clay (100). At the north-east end of the trench this was truncated by the construction of a long-jump runway base, make-up, and surface (104-6). No finds or features were revealed.

Trench 2

- 4.1.3 The lowest deposit revealed (204) was a red/yellow sandy clay natural at approximately 17.25 m OD. This was overlain by a probably natural layer of grey/yellow sandy clay (203), measuring *c* 1 m in depth. There followed in sequence a 0.02 m thick layer of pink sand, a layer of bitumen lining, and a brown/red sand up to 0.3 m in depth.

Trench 3

- 4.1.4 Natural was not reached in this trench. The earliest deposit was a red/brown clay (304) measuring at least 0.64 m in depth, containing clinker and chalk. This was overlain by a 0.04 m deep layer of chalk fragments in clay (303), and a brownish-yellow make up layer (302) up to 0.65 m deep. The surface of layer 302 was covered with a bitumen lining (301) and brownish-red sand layer (300).

Trenches 4, 5, 6 and 7

- 4.1.5 Natural chalk (402) was exposed at a level of 15.01 m OD. This was overlaid by a 0.18 m deep grey black silty loam topsoil (401). In trench 5, natural chalk (504) was exposed at a level of 17.6 m OD, overlain by natural layers of sand and flint (503), and grey/yellow sand (502), to a level of 1.5 m OD. This was covered by a bitumen liner (501) under a clinker make-up, and a top layer of red sand (500). Trench 6 revealed natural chalk (601) at a level of *c* 15.5 m OD. This was overlain by a 0.2 m thick grey brown silty loam topsoil (600). Natural was not exposed in Trench 7. In two sondages excavated to a maximum depth of 2.4 m, a sequence of five layers of sandy clay were revealed (706-702), sealed by a tarmac surface over a geo-textile membrane (701), which in turn was covered by a thin layer of sandy gravel (700).

4.2 Finds

4.2.1 No finds of archaeological significance were recovered.

4.3 Palaeo-environmental evidence

4.3.1 No deposits were considered suitable for paleo-environmental sampling.

5 DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION

5.1 Archaeology

5.1.1 No significant archaeological evidence of any period was found.

5.1.2 In two trenches (3 and 7) deep deposits of made ground were encountered, which clearly result from the formation of the existing terrace, which is occupied by sports pitches. The terrace was built by cutting back into the natural slope to the south, and building up the ground level to the north.

5.2 Potential impact of development

5.2.1 A new school building will be constructed east of the existing school in an area of terraced sports pitches. Earth moving and the excavation of foundation trenches will be the major impacts on site and minor impacts may be caused by the construction of roads and hard standing areas. The evaluation has shown substantial build up of soils and truncation caused by terracing during construction of the existing sports pitches.

5.3 Recommendations for further work

5.3.1 Given the evidence for extensive disturbance to the deposit sequence at the site of the new school building, and the entirely negative evidence from the evaluation trenching, no further archaeological work is recommended at this location.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1 ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

| <i>Trench</i> | <i>Ctx No</i> | <i>Type</i> | <i>Width (m)</i> | <i>Thick. (m)</i> | <i>Comment</i> | <i>Finds</i> | <i>Date</i> |
|---------------|---------------|-------------|------------------|-------------------|----------------|--------------|-------------|
| 001 | 100 | Layer | | 0.3 | Topsoil | | Modern |
| | 101 | Layer | | 0.4 | Levelling | | Modern |
| | 102 | Layer | | 0.25 | Buried topsoil | | Modern |
| | 103 | Layer | | 0.65 | Clay + flints | | Modern |
| | 104 | Layer | | 0.6 | silty clay | | Modern |
| | 105 | Layer | | 0.06 | Sand | | Modern |
| | 106 | Layer | | 0.04 | Sand | | Modern |
| 002 | 200 | Layer | | 0.3 | red sand | | Modern |
| | 201 | Layer | | 0.12 | tarmac/liner | | Modern |
| | 202 | Layer | | 0.20 | pink sand | | Modern |
| | 203 | Layer | | 1.02 | sandy clay | | Natural |
| | 204 | Layer | | >0.15 | sandy clay | | Natural |
| 003 | 300 | Layer | | 0.03 | red sand | | Modern |
| | 301 | Layer | | 0.14 | Tarmac | | Modern |
| | 302 | Layer | | 0.65 | sandy clay | | Modern |
| | 303 | Layer | | 0.04 | clay and chalk | | Modern |
| | 304 | Layer | | 0.64 | sandy clay | | Modern |
| | 305 | Layer | | | Chalk | | Natural |
| 004 | 400 | Layer | | 0.30 | Topsoil | | Modern |
| | 401 | Layer | | | Chalk | | Natural |
| 005 | 500 | Layer | | 0.005 | red sand | | Modern |
| | 501 | Layer | | 0.10 | Tarmac | | Modern |
| | 502 | Layer | | 0.65 | Sand | | Natural |
| | 503 | Layer | | 0.30 | Sand | | Natural |
| | 505 | Layer | | | Chalk | | Natural |
| 006 | 600 | Layer | | 0.20 | Topsoil | | Modern |
| | 601 | Layer | | | Chalk | | Natural |
| 007 | 700 | Layer | | 0.02 | Gravel | | Modern |
| | 701 | Layer | | 0.18 | Tarmac | | Modern |
| | 702 | Layer | | 0.40 | silty clay | | Modern |
| | 703 | Layer | | 0.40 | silty clay | | Modern |
| | 704-6 | Layer | | 0.90 | silty clay | | Modern |

APPENDIX 2 BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

OAU 1992 *Fieldwork Manual* (1st edn, August 1992)

Oxford Archaeology/Parsons Brinckerhoff 2007 *Kent County Council BSF Surveys. Archaeological Desktop Assessment: St. John's Roman Catholic Comprehensive School*

Oxford Archaeology/Parsons Brinckerhoff 2008 *Kent County Council BSF Surveys. Archaeological Desktop Assessment and Impact Assessment: St. John's Roman Catholic Comprehensive School*

APPENDIX 3 SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

Site name: St. John's Roman Catholic Comprehensive School

Site code: KS5 GRJ 08

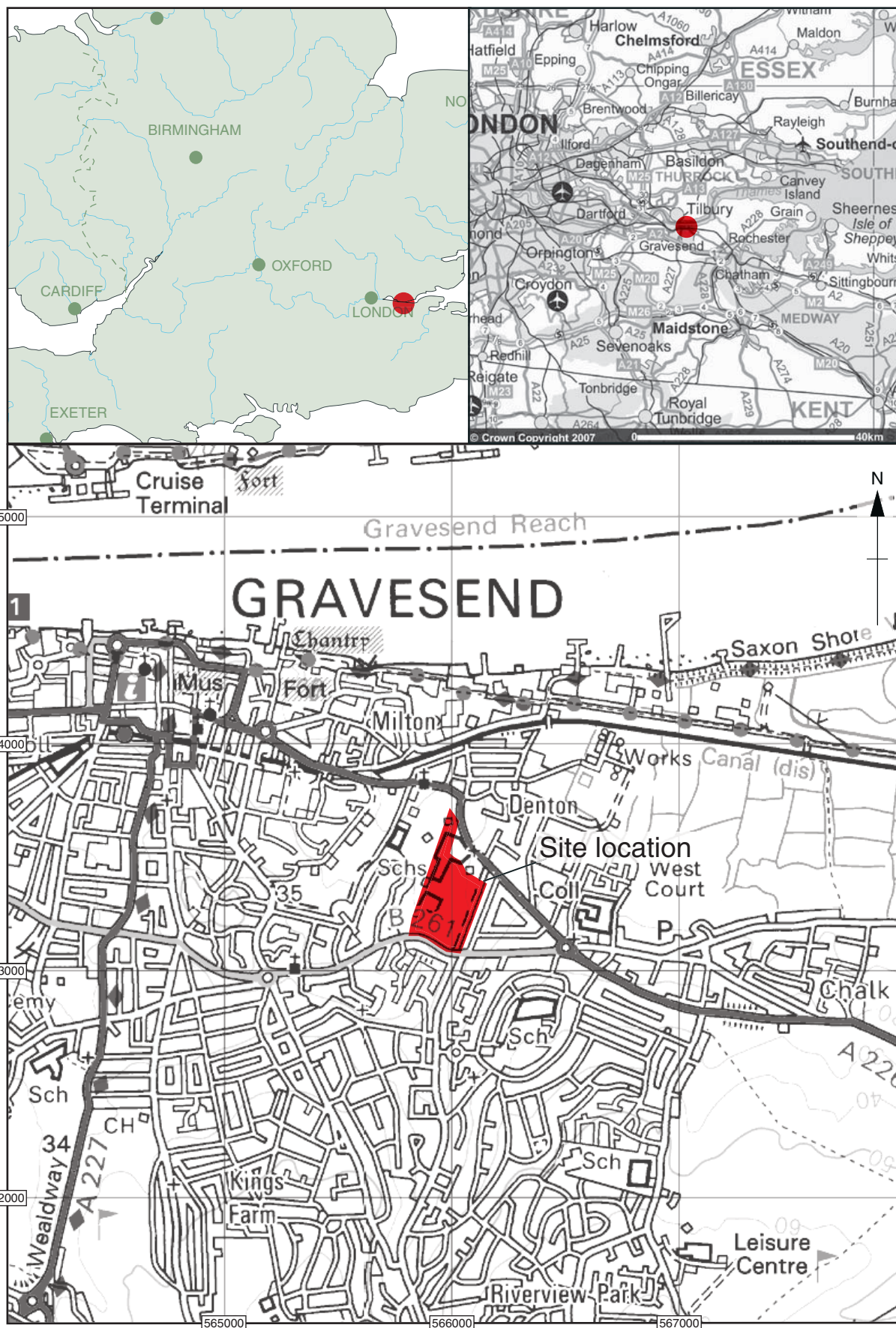
Grid reference: TQ 659 733 **Type of evaluation:** Seven 20 m x 1.65 m mechanically excavated trenches.

Date and duration of project: Fieldwork between 6th and 8th August 2008.

Area of site: 8.6 ha.

Summary of results: The evaluation revealed no evidence of significant archaeological occupation or activity. Deep deposits of made ground in two trenches may represent infilled clay quarrying areas relating to the 19th-century brick-works known to have been situated to the south of the site.

Location of archive: The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with an appropriate museum in due course.



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Figure 1: Site location

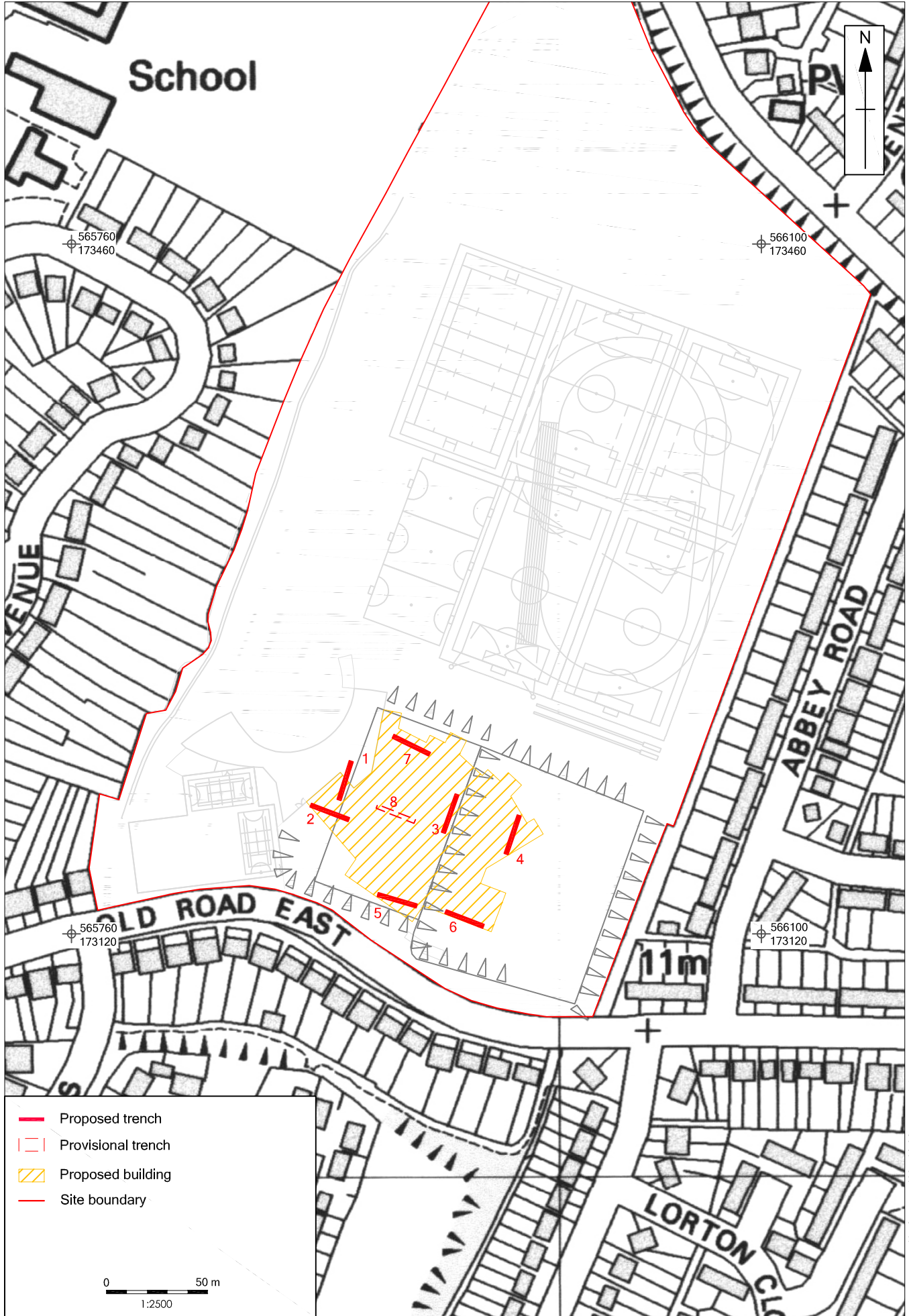


Figure 2: Trench layout

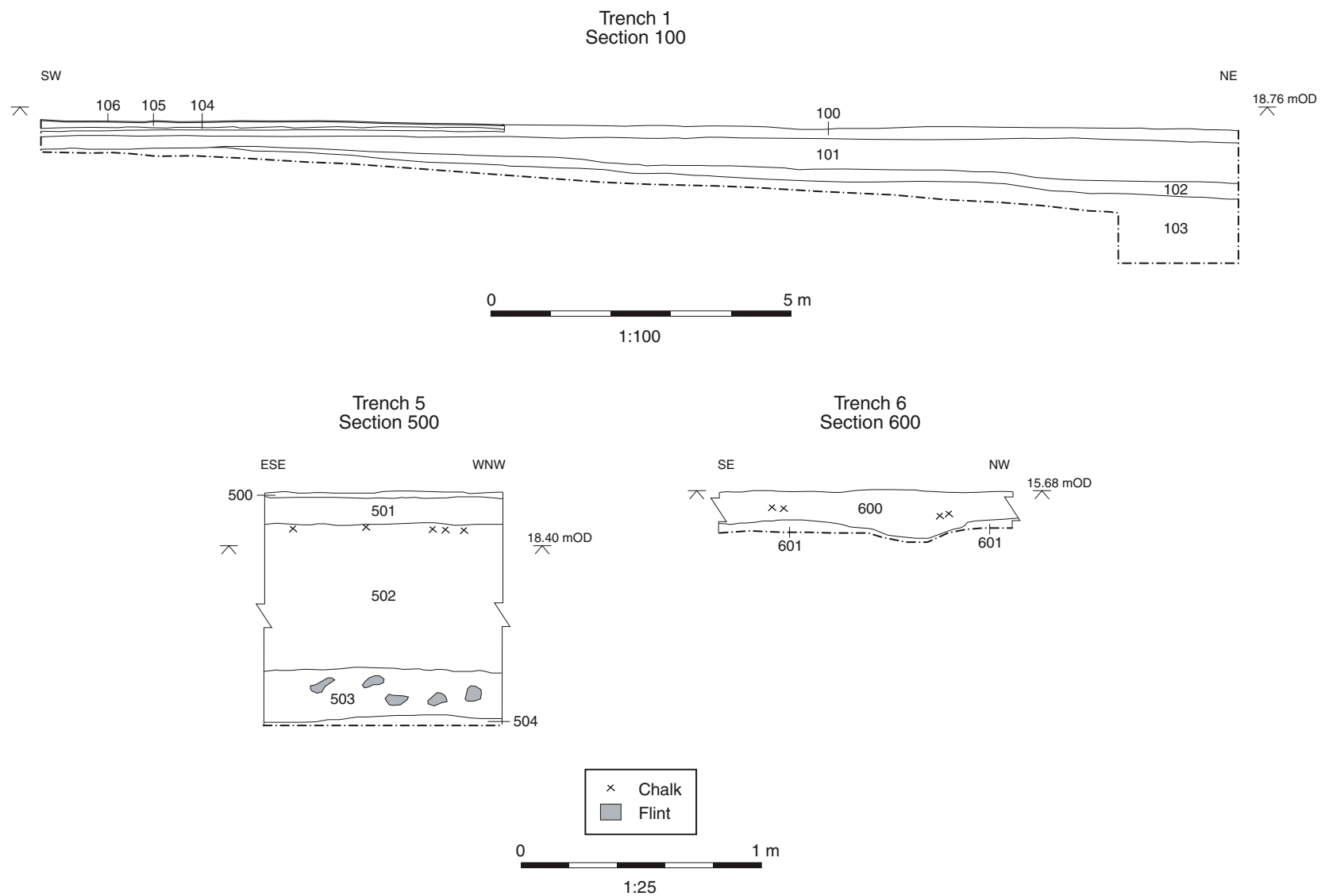


Figure 3: Sample sections - Trenches 1, 5 and 6



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