



Aldi Stores Car Park Extension, Dunstable, Bedfordshire Archaeological Watching Brief Report

December 2018

Client: Aldi Stores Ltd

Issue No: 2

NGR: TL 0200 2205

oxfordarchaeology



southsouthsouth

Client Name: Aldi Stores Ltd
Document Title: Aldi Stores Car Park Extension, Dunstable, Bedfordshire
Document Type: Watching Brief Report
Grid Reference: NGR 502006 222058
Planning Reference: CB/17/04825/FULL conditions 11-13
Site Code: DUALDI18
Invoice Code: DUALDIWB
Receiving Body: Luton Culture, accession number 2018/20 (which is the latest phase of 2004/111)

OA Document File Location: \\10.0.10.86\Projects\d\Dunstable_Ashton_St_Peters\ALDI
New Car Park\PX\Report

OA Graphics File Location: \\10.0.10.86\invoice codes a thru h\D\invoice
codes\DUALDIWB\PDFs

Issue No: 2
Date: December 2018
Prepared by: Martyn Allen (Post-Excavation Project Officer)
Checked by: David Score (Head of Fieldwork)
Edited by: Paul Booth (Senior Project Manager)
Approved for Issue by: David Score (Head of Fieldwork)
Signature:



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OA South

Janus House
Osney Mead
Oxford
OX2 0ES

t. +44 (0)1865 263 800

OA East

15 Trafalgar Way
Bar Hill
Cambridge
CB23 8SG

t. +44 (0)1223 850 500

OA North

Mill 3
Moor Lane Mills
Moor Lane
Lancaster
LA1 1QD

t. +44 (0)1524 880 250

e. info@oxfordarch.co.uk
w. oxfordarchaeology.com

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Aldi Stores Car Park Extension, Dunstable, Bedfordshire

Archaeological Watching Brief Report

Written by Martyn Allen

*With contributions from Edward Biddulph and John Cotter,
and illustrations by Matt Bradley and Charles Rousseaux*

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Summary

A watching brief was undertaken in August 2018 to monitor the groundworks of a car park extension at the rear of an Aldi store in Dunstable, Bedfordshire. The watching brief followed a previous evaluation of the site and further excavations to the south that revealed numerous Roman, medieval and post-medieval features. The aim of the work was to confirm the existence of any further remains extending north into this area.

In addition to the laying of the new car park surface, the groundworks included the insertion of an attenuation tank, man holes, drainage runs, tree planting and other landscaping. Digging for the foundations for the car park surface and the associated landscaping did not reach the depth of archaeological features. However, the cuts of the attenuation tank and the drainage runs were deeper and required archaeological mitigation.

The excavation exposed the remains of two ditches and two pits. The pits dated to the medieval period and were sealed by an overlying subsoil. One of the ditches cut this subsoil layer, and was later recut by the second ditch. Examination of early–mid-20th century OS maps show that the ditches align with a small enclosure and a bowling green, and both may relate to these modern features.

Acknowledgements

Oxford Archaeology would like to thank Alan Williams of Planning Potential for commissioning this project on behalf of Aldi Stores Ltd. Thanks are also extended to Hannah Firth, Archaeologist for Central Bedfordshire Council, who monitored the work for her advice and guidance.

The project was managed for Oxford Archaeology by David Score MCIfA, Head of Fieldwork. The fieldwork was undertaken by Christof Heistermann, Guy Cockin and Rachael Daniel. Geraldine Crann supervised the OA staff who cleaned and packaged the finds under the management of Leigh Allen, processed the environmental remains under the management of Rebecca Nicholson, and prepared the archive under the management of Nicky Scott.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Scope of work

- 1.1.1 Oxford Archaeology (OA) was commissioned by Planning Potential on behalf of Aldi Stores to undertake a watching brief at the site of a car park extension to the rear of Aldi in Dunstable.
- 1.1.2 The work was undertaken as part of the planning conditions for the construction of the new car park (Ref: CB/17/04825/FULL conditions 11-13). Although the Local Planning Authority did not set a brief for the work, discussions with Hannah Firth, Archaeologist for Central Bedfordshire Council, have established the scope of work required.
- 1.1.3 All fieldwork was undertaken in accordance with local and national planning policies and accepted archaeological standards (eg CIfA 2014).

1.2 Location, topography and geology

- 1.2.1 The site lies in the centre of Dunstable immediately to the north of the existing Aldi Store, north of Church Street and to the east of the A5 at NGR TL 0200 2205 (Fig. 1).
- 1.2.2 The area of proposed development is bordered to the east and north by the rear of housing on Kingsbury Avenue and Dorchester Close respectively. To the west, the site is bordered by another car park and its access road.
- 1.2.3 The site is fairly flat and is located at a height of c 145m above Ordnance Datum (aOD).
- 1.2.4 Dunstable lies at the foot of the Chilterns, just to the north of the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). The bedrock geology consists of undifferentiated Holywell Nodular Chalk Formation and New Pit Chalk Formation, though shallow clay deposits are sometimes encountered locally (BGS nd). The chalk is overlain by freely draining, lime-rich loamy soils (CSAI nd).

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

Dunstable: a brief history

- 1.3.1 The site lies within the historic core of Dunstable, centring on the junction of the reputedly prehistoric Icknield Way, now Church Street and West Street, and Roman Watling Street, now the A5/High Street. Little is known of prehistoric settlement activity in Dunstable, but the town has long been accepted as the site of Durocobrivis, a Roman roadside settlement established in the 1st century AD (Rivet 1970). Evidence of domestic occupation and burial activity has been found at several sites within the town (eg Matthews and Hutchings 1972; Matthews 1981; HAT 2000; Mudd 2004; Edwards 2010).
- 1.3.2 There is little evidence of Anglo-Saxon activity in the town and it is possible that the settlement was largely abandoned by the 5th century AD. Nonetheless, early–middle Saxon settlement and burial evidence has been found at Puddlehill to the north of Dunstable in Houghton Regis, and a late 6th/early 7th-century burial ground was discovered at Marina Drive, West Dunstable (Matthews 1962a; 1962b).

- 1.3.3 Henry I founded a new town out of his Houghton Regis estate at the Icknield Way/Watling Street crossroad, c 225m south-west of the site, in AD 1119 (Page 1912). A royal residence was established in Dunstable and this was regularly visited by monarchs until the reign of Henry VIII (HER 4355). Excavations at Kingsbury Court produced some medieval remains (HER 15079), though no remains of a royal residence were found despite suggestions that a building was located along Church Street around Kingsbury Court and Old Palace Lodge (HER 148).
- 1.3.4 St Peter's Augustinian Priory was founded by Henry I to the south of Church Street, immediately opposite the site, in AD 1132 (HER 131 and 132). The priory was dissolved in 1540 and the conventual buildings were demolished. The church nave remained, however, and now stands as Dunstable Parish Church.
- 1.3.5 In the later 19th century, the current site was occupied by an orchard or wooded area, just to the north of Ashton St Peter's Lower School, which was built in 1861.

Archaeological background of the site

- 1.3.6 An evaluation by Hertfordshire Archaeological Trust in 2000 examined the area of the present site, between St Peter's School and Dorchester Close to the north (HAT 2000). Trench 3 partly extended into an area that was subsequently re-examined by OA and found to contain features of Roman and medieval date, though remains were scarce in the other trenches (Fig. 2).
- 1.3.7 The first phase of archaeological evaluation of the Aldi store site was undertaken by OA in 2004. Two small trenches were dug to the south of St Peter's School, close to Church Street, and produced evidence of a possible Roman pit and quarries dating to the 11th–13th century AD (OA 2004).
- 1.3.8 A second evaluation was undertaken by OA in 2006. Three trenches to the south of the school building produced mostly post-medieval remains, supporting the results of the 2004 evaluation. Trench 3 was positioned east–west along the northern edge of the site and cut through the previously excavated HAT trench 3. Several features were identified containing ceramics dating between the 1st and the 4th century AD, plus a single sherd of residual late Iron Age pottery (OA 2006). Post-medieval building materials were found across the site and some were recovered from Roman features that were later truncated.
- 1.3.9 The school was demolished soon after the 2006 evaluation, allowing for an open-area excavation of the area of the Aldi store construction (OA 2018a). Excavation in 2007 consisted of one large trench (trench 1) and subsequent watching brief work to the north (trenches 2 and 3) and south-west (trench 4). Trench 1 measured c 62m x 40m covering the locations of one 2004 evaluation trench and three of the 2006 trenches. The smaller watching brief areas to the north were dug next to and over the evaluation trenches excavated by OA in 2006 and HAT in 2000.
- 1.3.10 Apart from a few worked flints, no prehistoric finds were identified during the excavation. An undated ditch in the north-eastern part of trench 1 may have been Iron Age, as it was cut by early Roman features, though this is uncertain.

- 1.3.11 Roman features consisted of three ditches in the northern half of the site. These features extended east–west and north–south, and appeared to have been roughly on alignment with Watling Street to the west and Icknield Way to the south. The area between these field boundaries was heavily truncated by medieval quarrying (see below), though the recovery of Roman finds suggest that the quarrying cut earlier features. Some Roman pits and one well were discovered further south in trench 1, probably relating to domestic activity.
- 1.3.12 No evidence of early medieval activity was found at the site, though later medieval features (late 12th–14th century AD) were common in trench 1. These consisted of three kilns, four large quarries, two wells and numerous pits. The kilns are thought to have been malting ovens, an interpretation based more on their form rather than environmental remains, though some sprouted grains were recovered from one of the features. The wells were contemporary with the kilns and probably provided water for brewing (if the kilns were for malting). Substantial areas of quarrying, mostly across the northern part of trench 1, were almost certainly for chalk extraction. Fence lines next to the quarries suggested that these areas were deliberately cordoned off.
- 1.3.13 Towards the end of the medieval period (15th–16th century AD), the kilns were abandoned and there was some evidence that the site was used as a knackers' yard for the processing of horse carcasses.
- 1.3.14 The post-medieval period saw extension to housing along the frontage of Church Street in the 16th/17th century AD. Later activity appears to have been associated with the construction and use of the school, including the digging of two Victorian wells.

2 AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Aims

2.1.1 Given the identification of Roman and medieval archaeology in the HAT evaluation (HAT 2000) and the northern part of the 2007 excavations (OA 2018a), there was some potential for the recovery of further remains in the Car Park extension site (see also OA 2017).

2.1.2 The general aims of the project were as follows:

- i. to establish the presence or absence of archaeological remains within the proposed development area, and to excavate and record them to an appropriate level;
- ii. to determine or confirm the approximate date or date-range of any remains by means of artefactual or other evidence;
- iii. to establish the ecofactual and environmental potential of archaeological deposits and features within the site and to take samples where appropriate;
- iv. and, to make available the results of the watching brief.

2.1.3 The specific objectives of the watching brief were to:

- i. establish to what extent the archaeological remains which were identified in the HAT evaluation and the OA excavation to the south continue into the new car park area;
- ii. record any further evidence of archaeological features in the area of the new store extension;
- iii. and, contribute to research aims as outlined in the published frameworks for the east of England and Bedfordshire.

2.2 Scope of works

2.2.1 The site consists of a c 0.45ha parcel of land adjoining the northern end of the existing Aldi store car park. This was originally intended to extend the car park to 184 parking bays, but was subsequently reduced to 125 bays to allow for the provision of an attenuation tank to the rear of the property (Fig. 2). The tank and associated services, including a ramp and drainage, were to be buried below ground and the overlying area landscaped. Further landscaping across the site included grassed areas and tree planting.

2.2.2 An extension to the south-east corner of the existing Aldi store for a welfare space also formed part of the current project. However, examination of the plan for the 2007 excavation demonstrated that the area of the extension was within the area of the previous excavation (see OA 2018a).

2.3 Methodology

2.3.1 The site of the car park extension was stripped of vegetation and topsoil and the ground was raised to the required level for the car park surfacing. In the event, the stripping did not reach the depth of any archaeological features. Equally, the excavation of tree-planting pits did not disturb the archaeological horizon.

2.3.2 The attenuation tank, service trenches and manholes required deeper excavation, between 1.2m and 2.0m deep, and these works were closely monitored for archaeological features.

2.3.3 The site-specific methodology undertaken was as follows:

- i. The watching brief was maintained throughout the removal of all deposits down to impact depth of the ground works or natural geology, whichever was encountered first, and the work was under the continuous and constant supervision of a qualified OA field archaeologist.
- ii. Overburden was removed by a suitably powered machine fitted with a toothless bucket.
- iii. The exposed surface was sufficiently cleaned to allow for the identification of archaeological features or deposits.
- iv. Where archaeological features were noted, the site contractor made sufficient time available for them to be properly investigated and recorded. Areas of archaeological interest were fenced off to protect them and allow safe investigation.
- v. Provision was made for environmental samples to be taken, if appropriate.
- vi. All archaeological features were hand cleaned and sample excavated.
- vii. Excavation was undertaken in accordance with the ClfA current *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs* (ClfA 2014) and in line with the methodologies stated in the *Written Scheme of Archaeological Resource Management for Watching Brief* (OA 2018b).
- viii. Updates on the progress of the work were supplied to the planning archaeologist, Hannah Firth.

3 RESULTS

3.1 Introduction

- 3.1.1 The results presented below focus on the excavation of the cuts for the attenuation tank and its associated ramp, as these were the only areas where archaeological features were encountered (Fig. 3).
- 3.1.2 Removal of the thin topsoil (1000) revealed a layer of made-up ground (1001) consisting of crushed tarmac and other rubble. This overlay a buried 'topsoil' (1002) and a subsoil layer (1003), which directly overlay the natural chalk (Fig. 4, sections 1 and 3).
- 3.1.3 The cut for the attenuation tank measured c 6.2m x 20.8m and was oriented NE–SW. Its access ramp led from the northern end of the south-eastern side of the tank cut for about 6.8m. Four features were discovered, including two ditches in the tank cut and two pits in the cut for the ramp (Fig. 3). All the features were easy to identify against the chalk bedrock.

3.2 Description of archaeological features

- 3.2.1 The stratigraphically earliest features were pits 1017 and 1019, both located in the ramp area. The pits cut the natural chalk and were overlain by subsoil 1003 (Fig. 4, sections 3 and 4). Pit 1017 was circular, measuring 1.35m across with a flat base 0.33m deep. No finds were recovered from its single fill. Pit 1019 was sub-circular, about 1.0m wide, and shallower than its counterpart, measuring 0.08m deep. Its fill (1018) contained three fragments of 13th–15th-century roof tile.
- 3.2.2 Ditch 1005=1013 was discovered in the attenuation tank cut. The ditch extended in a straight line from the north-eastern edge of the cut over 19.4m to where it either terminated or was lost due to truncation (see below). At its northern end (cut 1005), the ditch had sloping sides and a flat base, measuring just under 2.0m wide and 0.9m deep (Fig. 4, section 1). However, a few metres south in cut 1013, the ditch was shallower at 0.43m deep with a sloping, concave profile (Fig. 4, section 2). At its very southern end it measured 0.7m across.
- 3.2.3 Ditch 1005=1013 cut through subsoil 1003, making it stratigraphically later than pits 1017 and 1019. It contained four fills at the northern end in cut 1005, though only two fills were recorded to the south in cut 1013. A thin basal fill of firm clay silt was found in both interventions, which was overlain by a light brown/grey clay silt with chalk mottling. Fill 1008 contained 13th–14th-century pottery, while fill 1015 contained two sherds of late Roman pottery and 13th–15th-century roof tile. Later medieval pottery was also recovered from subsoil layer 1003.
- 3.2.4 Ditch 1005=1013 was cut at its north-eastern end on its southern side by ditch 1011. This feature was only partially exposed in section (Fig. 4, section 1), though a small part of it was observed to cut ditch 1005=1013 on the opposite side of the intervention. It appeared to have a slightly different orientation to ditch 1005=1013, aligning more to the north and south. Ditch 1011 was no more than 0.48m deep and contained a single silty fill, though no finds were recovered.

4 FINDS

4.1 Roman pottery by *Edward Biddulph*

- 4.1.1 Context 1015 contained two sherds of pottery weighing a total of 20g. Both are in a soapy shell-tempered fabric. One sherd is a fragment from a jar in a pale orange fabric with a thickened everted rim (the sherd representing 5% or 0.05 of the total rim circumference). The other sherd is a body fragment in a darker orange fabric. Dating is uncertain, but the pottery is consistent with the range of shelly wares produced in the South Midlands, most notably at Harrold in Bedfordshire (HAR SH; Tomber and Dore 1998, 115), and exported widely during the late 3rd and 4th centuries AD.
- 4.1.2 The Roman pottery should be retained alongside the ceramic material from the Ashton St Peter's School site to maintain the completeness of the archive.

4.2 Medieval pottery by *John Cotter*

- 4.2.1 Three sherds of medieval pottery weighing 22g were recovered from two contexts. Fabric codes follow those of the Bedfordshire County Type-Series (Baker and Hassall 1979; Brine 1988). The sherds are similar to material from the larger assemblage from Ashton St Peter's School, Dunstable (OA 2018a).
- 4.2.2 Two refitting sherds (17g) of coarse sandy greyware (fabric code C59A) were recovered from subsoil layer 1003. These sherds derived from a large, fairly thin-walled globular vessel, probably a jar/cooking pot or a jug. The vessel was wheel-thrown and made in a very hard, dark grey-brown fabric with abundant, coarse, rounded quartz. The pottery dated c AD 1100–1400 but was probably 13th or 14th century rather than earlier.
- 4.2.3 Another coarse sandy greyware sherd (fabric code C59A) was recovered from ditch fill 1008. This fragment was from the flat base of a fairly small vessel, possibly a jar/cooking pot. Smooth black surfaces with evidence of external sooting were visible. The vessel was wheel-thrown and consisted of a fairly hard, dark grey-brown fabric with much less visible quartz sand than the sherd in context 1003, with sparse coarse inclusions or pellets of brown iron-rich mudstone. The fabric identification remains uncertain.
- 4.2.4 It is recommended that the medieval pottery is retained as it has the potential to inform research through re-analysis when examined alongside other assemblages from any future excavations near the current site.

4.3 Ceramic building material by *John Cotter*

- 4.3.1 A total of six pieces (422g) of medieval ceramic building material (CBM) were recovered from two contexts. The CBM is identical to that from the much larger assemblage from Ashton St Peter's School, Dunstable (OA 2018a).
- 4.3.2 Ditch fill 1015 included three fragments (209g) dating approximately 13th–15th century AD. Two fragments were probable from a flat roof (peg) tile. One was a body fragment with a trace of a circular nail hole (or peg hole) typical of this type of CBM. The other piece was an edge fragment. Both pieces were 15–16mm thick in a very

hard, coarse sandy oxidised fabric with a slight grey core. The third piece was an unusually thick edge fragment (17–20mm) from a flat roof tile or possibly from a ridge tile. The fabric was the same as the other two fragments, but with sparse, very coarse, angular inclusions of flint and red iron oxide. The underside of all three pieces is rough and sanded.

- 4.3.3 Pit fill 1018 contained three fragments (213g) dating approximately 13th–15th century AD. These consisted of flat roof (peg) tiles and included two small joining fragments from a single tile with abraded edges. The fabric was the same as those in context 1015, with sparse, very coarse, angular flint. A much larger fragment from the lower right-hand corner of a flat roof tile (16mm thick) was also present. This had a slightly finer sandy oxidised fabric with one or two flint grits embedded in the sanded underside. The edges were fairly uneven and roughly finished, and the fragment was quite abraded.
- 4.3.4 The CBM has little potential for further analysis and interpretation. It has been adequately recorded and may be discarded if desired.

4.4 Animal bones by Martyn Allen

- 4.4.1 Context 1015 produced 13 fragments of animal bone. Five of these could be refitted and appear to be from a rib of a medium-sized mammal. Three more fragments were unidentifiable. The identifiable remains included, one horse astragalus with signs of a quite severe bacterial infection on the articulating distal surface, a cat metapodial, a sheep skull fragment (occipital), a sheep mandible fragment, and a fish skull bone possibly from a gadid species (ie cod).
- 4.4.2 The animal bones should be retained with the faunal material from the Ashton St Peter's School site to the south to maintain the completeness of the archive.

5 DISCUSSION

- 5.1.1 The excavation revealed four features located towards the northern end of the site. Pits 1017 and 1019 were the earliest features, both of which were found in the cut for the access ramp. Roof tile dating to the 13th–15th century was recovered from pit 1019, suggesting a later medieval date. Both pits were sealed by subsoil layer 1003, which contained 13th/14th-century pottery.
- 5.1.2 Subsoil layer 1003 was cut by ditch 1005=1013. The ditch appeared in plan to terminate at its south-western end. However, the way the feature narrowed and became shallower towards this end suggests that the ditch probably petered out, with its continuing line being lost through truncation rather than ending at a deliberately cut terminus. The fills of the ditch contained a mixture of Roman pottery, later medieval pottery and CBM, representing an accumulation of mixed material. No finds dated later than the 15th century, which was consistent with the material found in the nearby trench 3 of the 2000 HAT evaluation (HAT 2000).
- 5.1.3 While a later medieval date for the ditch is possible, the fact that it cuts subsoil 1003 suggests that it is a later feature. The 1880 25-inch OS map (surveyed in 1879) shows the current site as an orchard or a small wooded area. This was subsequently cleared as, by the time the 1925 and 1940 OS maps were published, the site contained a bowling green and enclosed areas to the north and west. Ditch 1005=1013 aligns very well with the southern boundary of the enclosure in the north-western part of the site, as shown in the 1940 map (Fig. 5). The ditch extends beyond the enclosure's north-eastern corner, but the 1925 map shows that the latter was originally longer. Ditch 1011 may also relate to the boundary of the bowling green. The enclosure was removed by 1950 and the Bowls Club moved to Hawthorn Close in 1971.

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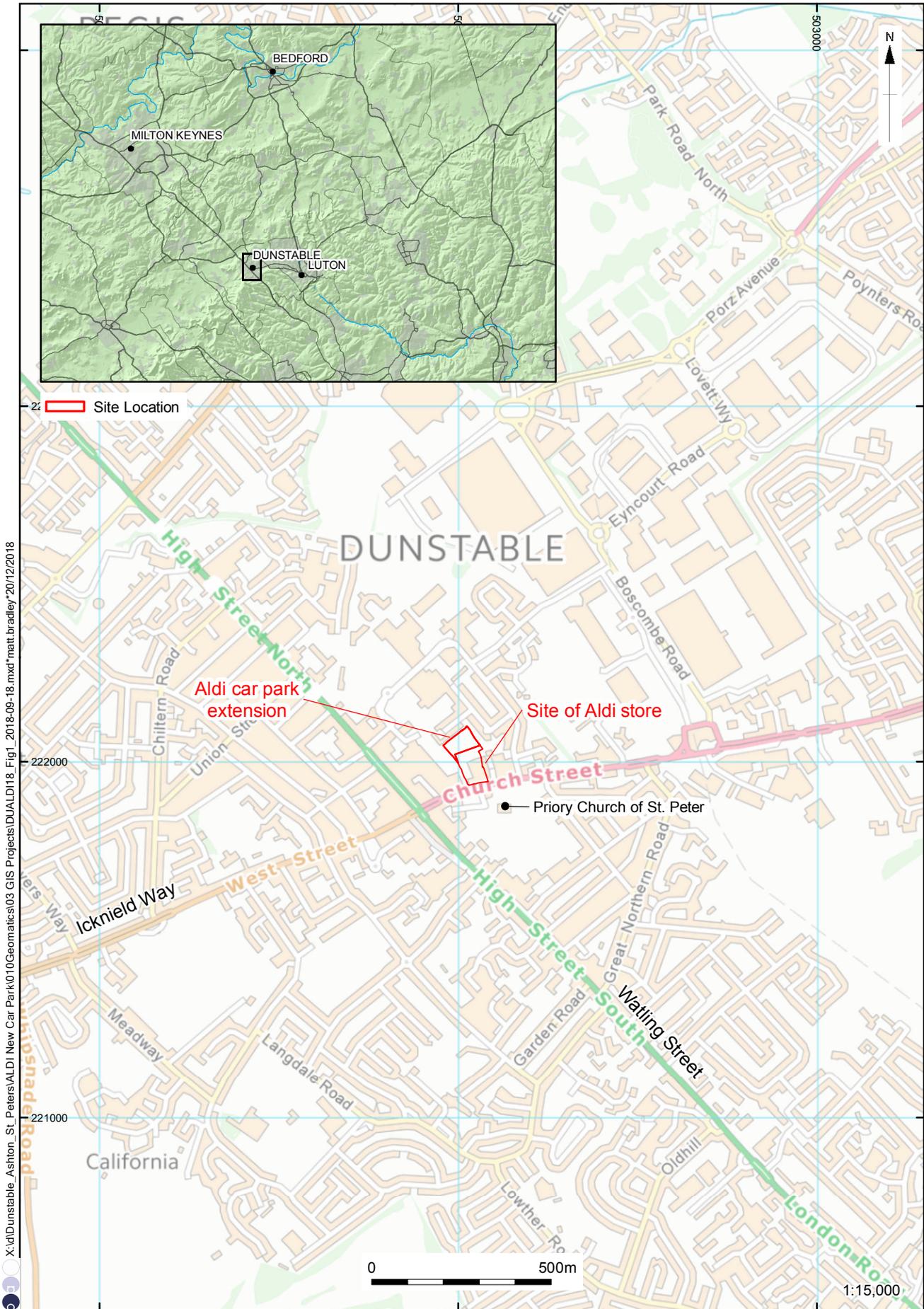
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7 SITE SUMMARY DETAILS

Site name:	Aldi Stores Car Park Extension, Dunstable, Bedfordshire
Site code:	DUALDI18
Grid Reference:	NGR 502006 222058
Type:	Watching brief
Date and duration:	06/08/2018–28/08/2018
Area of Site:	0.45ha
Location of archive:	The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited in due course with Luton Culture under accession number 2018/20 (which is the latest phase of 2004/111).
Summary of Results:	A watching brief was undertaken in August 2018 to monitor the groundworks of a car park extension at the rear of an Aldi store in Dunstable, Bedfordshire. The work followed previous excavations and evaluations at the site which have revealed numerous Roman, medieval and post-medieval features. The watching brief exposed the remains of two medieval pits and two linear features that probably related to a bowling green and an enclosure present in the early–mid-20th century.



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Figure 1: Site location

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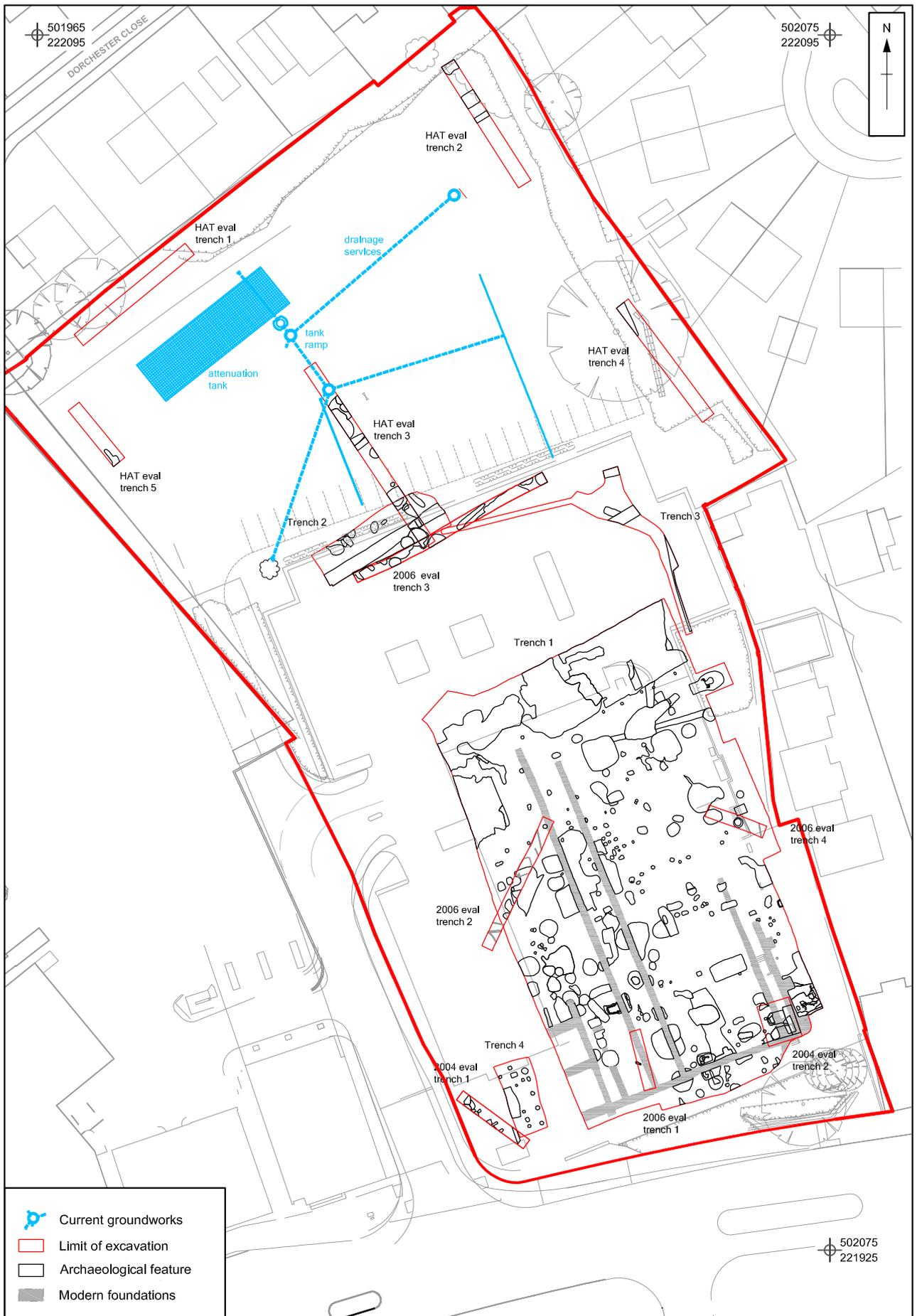
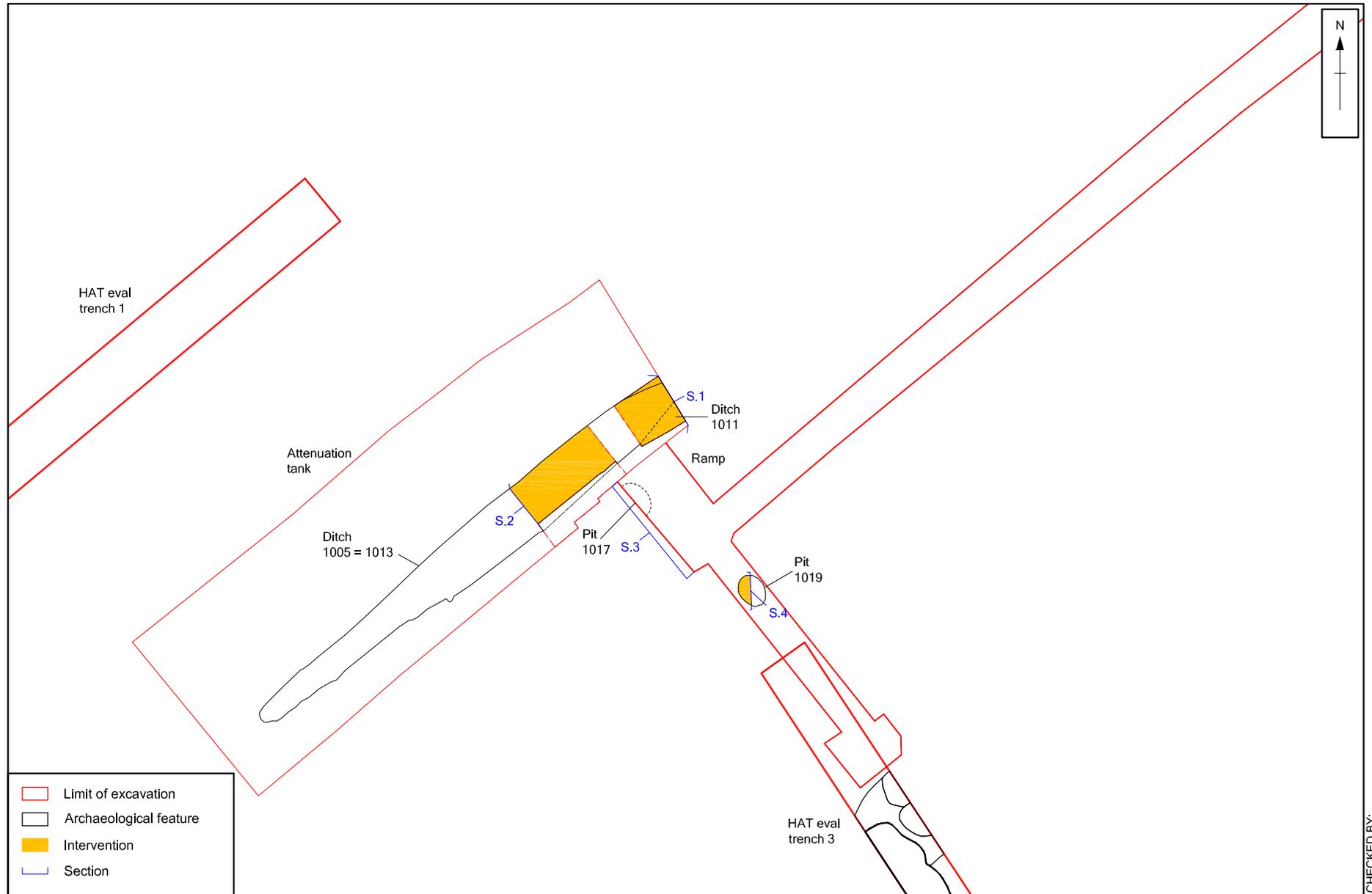


Figure 2. Position of trenches, groundworks for car park extension and previous excavations



0 10 m
Scale at A4 1:200

Figure 3. Archaeological features found in Aldi Car Park watching brief

CHECKED BY:

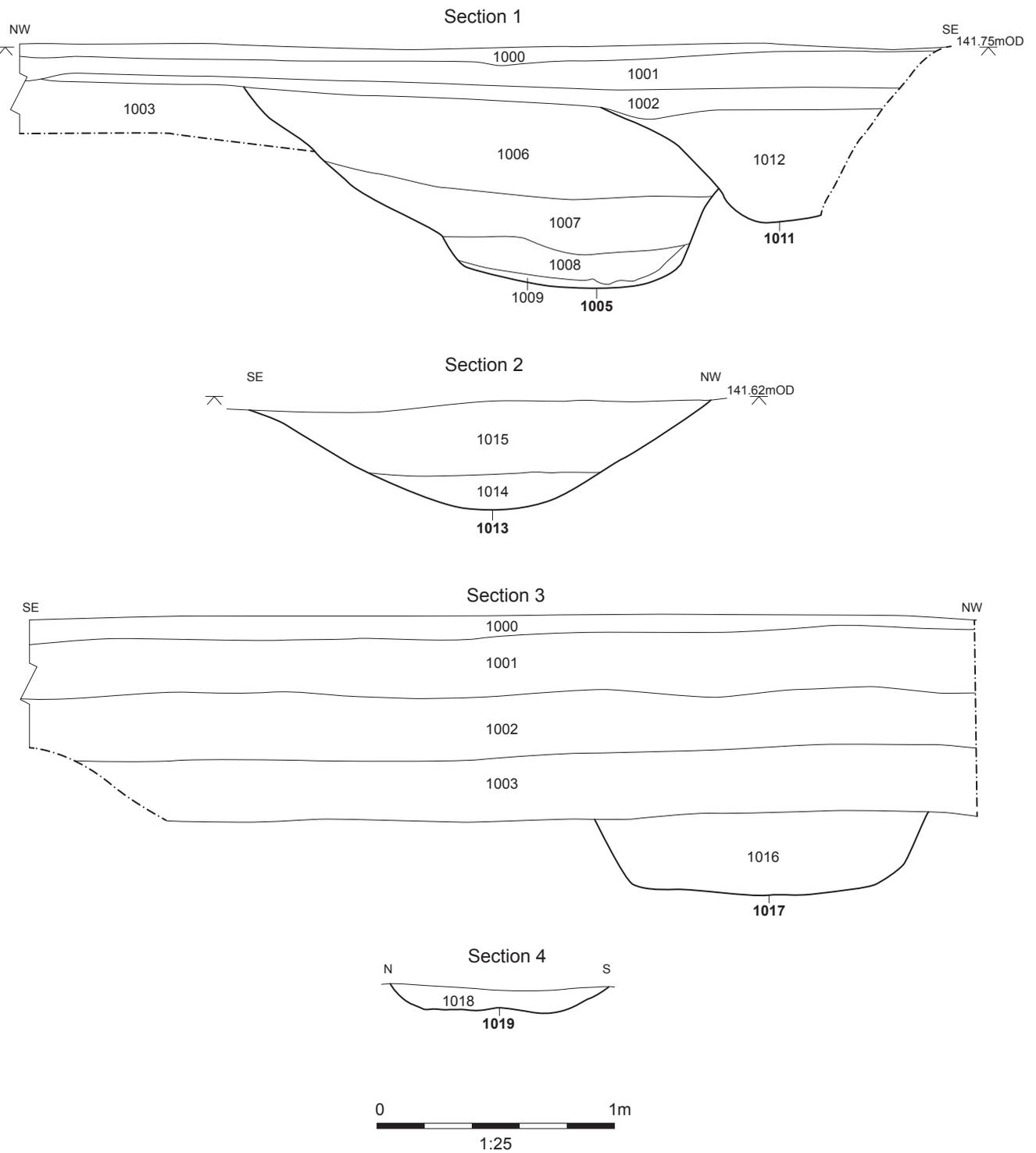
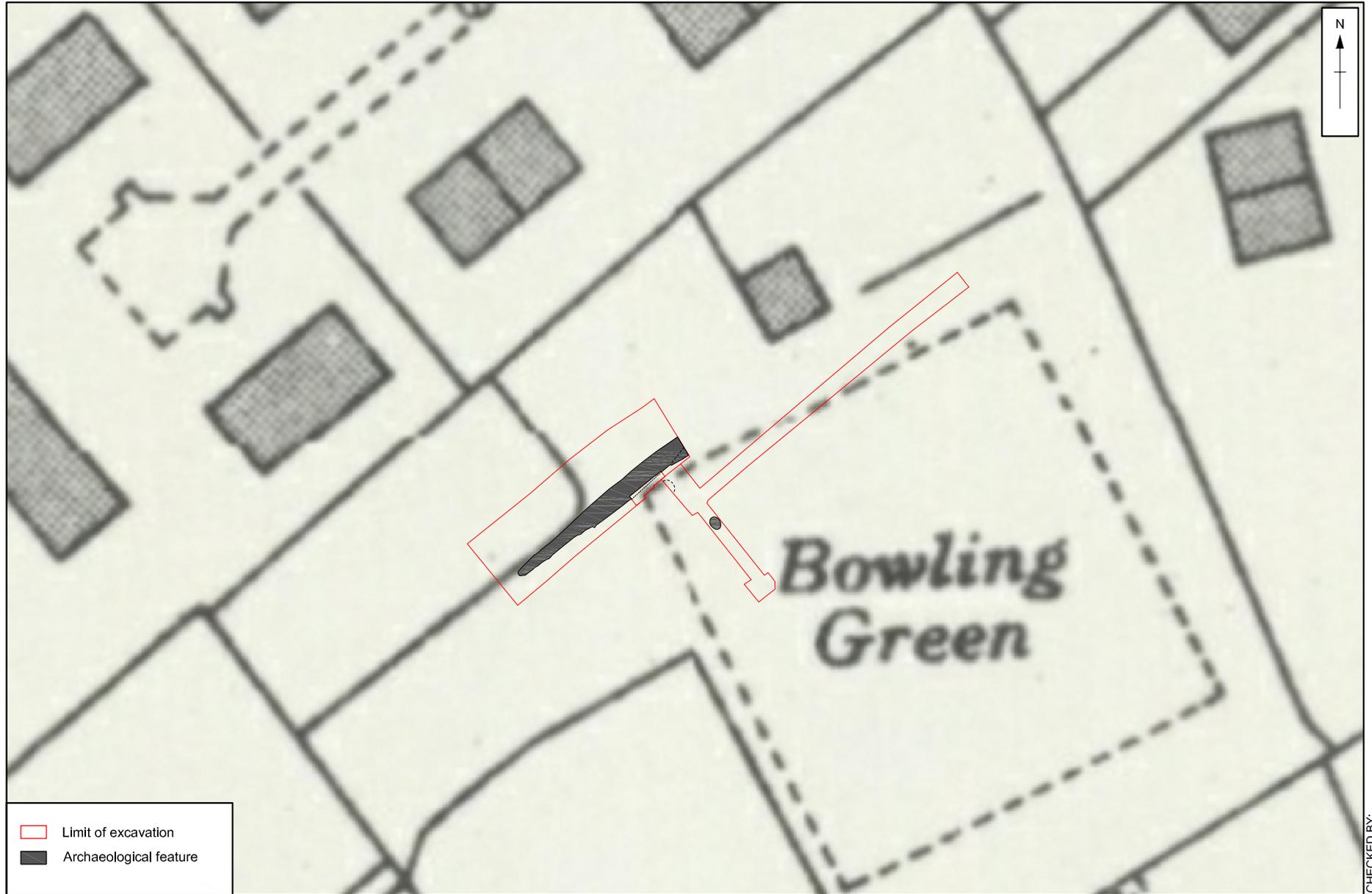


Figure 4: Ditch and pit sections



CHECKED BY:

0 10 m
Scale at A4 1:200

Figure 5. Archaeological features in relation to Ordnance Survey 1940 25 inch map



**Head Office/Registered Office/
OA South**

Janus House
Osney Mead
Oxford OX2 0ES

t: +44 (0) 1865 263 800
f: +44 (0) 1865 793 496
e: info@oxfordarchaeology.com
w: <http://oxfordarchaeology.com>

OA North

Mill 3
Moor Lane
Lancaster LA1 1QD

t: +44 (0) 1524 541 000
f: +44 (0) 1524 848 606
e: [oanorth@oxfordarchaeology.com](mailto: oanorth@oxfordarchaeology.com)
w: <http://oxfordarchaeology.com>

OA East

15 Trafalgar Way
Bar Hill
Cambridgeshire
CB23 8SQ

t: +44 (0) 1223 850500
e: [oaeast@oxfordarchaeology.com](mailto: oaeast@oxfordarchaeology.com)
w: <http://oxfordarchaeology.com>



Director: Gill Hey, BA PhD FSA MCIfA
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