



**Archaeological Evaluation of Land
adjacent Bellwood Cottages, Ratcliffe
Highway, Hoo St Werburgh, Rochester,
Kent**

December 2011

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Archaeological Evaluation of Land adjacent
Bellwood Cottages, Ratcliffe Highway, Hoo St
Werburgh, Rochester, Kent



NGR 578314 173900
Site Code: BHR-11
(Planning Application MC/08/1121)

Report for
Lambert and Foster LLP

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SUMMARY

Swale & Thames Survey Company (SWAT) carried out an archaeological evaluation of land adjacent Bellwood Cottages, Ratcliffe, Hoo St Werburgh in Kent. A planning application (MC/08/1121) for the construction of a fruit processing and storage facility with associated parking was submitted to Medway Borough Council whereby the Council requested that an Archaeological Evaluation be undertaken in order to determine the possible impact of the development on any archaeological remains. The work was carried out in accordance with the requirements set out within an Archaeological Specification (KCC 2011) and in discussion with the Archaeological Heritage Officer, Kent County Council.

The Archaeological Evaluation consisted of eleven trenches which encountered no archaeological features. The Archaeological Evaluation has therefore been successful in fulfilling the primary aims and objectives of the Specification.

INTRODUCTION

Swale & Thames Survey Company (SWAT) was commissioned by Lambert and Foster to carry out an archaeological evaluation and assessment at the above site. The work was carried out in accordance with the requirements set out within an Archaeological Specification (KCC 2011) and in discussion with the Archaeological Heritage Officer, Kent County Council. The evaluation was carried out on the 7th and 8th of November 2011.

SITE DESCRIPTION AND TOPOGRAPHY

The name Hoo comes from the Old English meaning *spur of land*, and the peninsula separates the estuaries of the rivers Medway and Thames. Marshes make way for isolated towns and villages surrounded by agricultural land, and the coastal areas encompass leisure and working marinas, industrial facilities and nature reserves. The development is situated on the site of an orchard which appears to have been maintained as agricultural land since at least the early 19th century. The site itself is located northwest of Ratcliffe Highway (A228), a new dual carriageway which replaced the single carriageway of the same name, a remnant of which survives outside the entrance to the orchard. Located approximately 40m aOD (above Ordnance Datum) at the entrance, the site slopes northwest by 1.3m. Bellwood Cottages borders the site to the southeast, the defunct Ratcliffe Highway to the south and orchards to the north and west. Ratcliffe Highway is located on a ridge running northeast/southwest, and the original single carriageway may have followed the route of a much older transport link. The surrounding area is essentially rural with land used for arable and fruit production. High Halstow is located roughly 1.5k to the north and Hoo St Werburgh approximately 1.2k to the

south.

According to the British Geological Survey the site lies on Head deposits of undifferentiated Clay, Sand, Silt and Gravel overlying London Clay.

PLANNING BACKGROUND

Planning consent (MC/08/1121) for the construction of a fruit processing and storage facility with associated access and parking was approved by Medway Borough Council (MBC). Medway Borough Council requested that an archaeological evaluation be undertaken in order to determine the possible impact of the development on any archaeological remains. The Local Planning Authority (MBC) placed the following condition on the planning consent:

No development shall take place (except as may be agreed in writing by the Planning Authority) until the developer has secured the implementation of a programme of archaeological work in accordance with a written specification and timetable which has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. Development shall be carried out in accordance with the approved specification

Reason: To ensure that features of archaeological interest are properly examined and recorded

Requirements for the archaeological evaluation comprised trial trenching targeting a representative 4% sample of the impact area with eleven trenches (Fig. 1) designed to establish whether there were any archaeological deposits at the site that may be affected by the proposed development. The results from this evaluation will be used to inform KCC of any further archaeological mitigation measures that may be necessary in connection with the development proposals.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL and HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

*'He that rides into the hundred of Hoo,
Besides pilfering seamen, will find dirt enow'*

The development site lies within an area of limited archaeological activity, as recorded in Kent County Council's Historic Environment Record (HER). Bronze Age implements were discovered 1k east of the development site on Roper's Farm in 1973. The horde (HER Number TQ 77 SE 27) consisted of 161 items including part of a crucible, buckle ends and old and damaged items possibly intended for smelting, axe heads and a large quantity of swords. A number of cropmarks have been located by aerial photography surrounding Tile Barn Farm 0.76k southeast of the development site including an enclosure of unknown date (TQ 77 SE 32) identified by the Kent Archaeological Rescue Unit, a possible Roman rectangular settlement which may be field boundaries (TQ 77 SE 30) and another undated linear cropmark feature (TQ 77 SE 31). An archaeological evaluation on an extensive gas pipeline by Archaeology South East (ASE) ran northeast near the roundabout at Ratcliffe Highway and

Roper's Lane in a northeasterly direction towards Stoke (TQ 77 SE 176). Trenches and test pits revealed a number of discrete areas of archaeological activity from the prehistoric to Saxon. Late Bronze Age sites included a settlement or funerary site and a possible industrial site, and a Romano British industrial site with a kiln was also found. Artefacts included a number of prehistoric flint tools, Iron Age and Roman pottery and metalworking waste material and Roman building material. Unlike most archaeological sites, pipelines offer a narrow but expansive view of a landscape and the archaeological environment over many kilometres, and this evaluation prior to the laying of a gas pipeline highlighted the nature of archaeological sites on the Hoo peninsula where discrete pockets of activity are surrounded by expanses of archaeologically sterile land.

Roman activity on the peninsula included two attempts to build a sea wall to reclaim lucrative grazing land for sheep from the marshes that dominate the low lying landscape. Saxon occupation marked the creation of land divisions called hundreds. The hundreds of Hoo included Hoo St Werburgh, High Halstow, St Mary's Hoo, Allhallows and part of Stoke. Hoo St Werburgh has Saxon origins including the construction of the Grade I church (TQ 77 SE 1197) sometime in the 8th century during the reign of king Æthelbald of Mercia and the earlier nunnery (TQ 77 SE 22) founded by Werburgh, daughter of King Wulfhere, c686-697. According to the HER, the site of the nunnery, disbanded sometime around 840, was located near what is now Hoo marina. The village of High Halstow is almost equidistant from the development site as Hoo St Werburgh and has known Roman, Saxon and Norman occupation. High Halstow was originally known as *Hagelstowe, Hagelsto and Angelstow* which means *high, holy place* in Old English, and it (and the development site) sit on some of the highest ground on the peninsula. The village is located at an ancient junction from Hoo and Cliffe to the Isle of Grain, now a crossroads north of the A228. The HER lists the Grade I St Margaret's Church (TQ 77 NE 1084) as dating from the 13th century, but the Domesday book records a church there in 1086.

Jumping forward to the modern era, transport routes and WWII activity mark the land surrounding the development site. Sharmal Street Railway Station (TQ 77 SE 114), northeast of the site, is visible on the Ordnance Survey 2nd to 4th Edition historical maps. It is now a station on a mineral highway. Chattenden Naval Tramway (TQ 77 SE 184), northwest of the site, was an early c 20th century transport link connecting Sharmal St. Station to Lodge Hill. WWII pillboxes and Royal Observer Corps observation posts line the route along the old Ratcliffe Highway as part of the anti invasion defences of 1940. Type 24 and 28 pillboxes are still visible in the fields. An underground concrete bunker used by the Royal Observer Corps consisted of a one man chambered shelter with a shaft to the surface (TQ 77 SE 145). The bunker still survives. A Royal Observer Corps nuclear observation post (TQ 77 SE 1264) was built during the Cold War to monitor nuclear blasts and radiation and is still visible on the surface though the site is heavily overgrown.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The purpose of the evaluation, as set out within the Archaeological Specification (2011) was

to determine if any significant archaeological remains survived and to ascertain the extent, depth below ground surface, depth of deposit, character, significance and condition of any archaeological remains on site.

METHODOLOGY

Trial trenching was carried out on 7th and 8th of November 2011 with the excavation of eleven trenches. Trenches 1-9 were in the original Specification, but Trenches 10 and 11 were added in an area outside the development zone that is earmarked for further development subject to planning approval. Trench location was agreed prior to the excavation between KCC and SWAT. Excavation was carried out using a tracked 360° mechanical excavator fitted with a toothless ditching bucket, removing the overburden to the top of the first recognisable archaeological horizon, or natural, under the constant supervision of an experienced archaeologist. All trenches measured about 25m in length and 1.8m wide. The trenches were subsequently hand-cleaned and photographed. All archaeological work was carried out in accordance with the specification. A single context recording system was used to record the deposits, and context recording numbers were assigned to all deposits for recording purposes. These are used in the report and shown in bold. All archaeological work was carried out in accordance with KCC and IFA standards and guidance.

MONITORING

Curatorial monitoring was carried out after the completion of the on site evaluation work.

RESULTS

All trenches were devoid of any archaeological features and cultural material. The only manmade 'artefacts' were two sherds of modern ceramic field drain. A common stratigraphic sequence was identified within the trenches consisting of the natural geology of Head deposits of gravels in a ferric mid orange brown sandy silty clay with areas of iron panning and manganese flecks (**003**). The natural was sealed by an agricultural subsoil of mid grey brown sandy silty clay (**002**) up to 0.28m thick, but averaging around 0.22m. Above the subsoil was a thin covering of topsoil (**001**) approximately 0.09m thick.

FINDS

No finds were found during the evaluation.

DISCUSSION

The development site adjacent Bellwood Cottages, Ratcliffe Highway, Hoo St Werburgh produced no archaeology. Given its location on high ground near a transport route with probable ancient roots and overlooking marshes and fields, one would have expected some archaeology relating to its locality near a well used road network. Nevertheless, the Hoo Peninsula is still a sparsely populated land, and results from earlier archaeological work such as the gas pipeline southeast of the development site have shown that settlement activity seems to cluster around discrete areas, with larger expanses of uninhabited land prevailing,

similar to the modern land use of the peninsula today.

CONCLUSION

The archaeological evaluation has been successful in fulfilling the primary aims and objectives of the Specification. A common stratigraphic sequence was recognised across the site comprised of the natural Head geology **(003)** sealed by an agricultural subsoil **(002)** under a thin covering of topsoil **(001)**.

No archaeological activity was found during the evaluation, and even this lack of activity will help inform the Archaeological Officer of the archaeological potential of site. The evaluation has, therefore, assessed the archaeological potential of land intended for development.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

SWAT would like to thank Lambert and Foster for commissioning this project. Thanks are also extended to Ben Found, Heritage Officer, Kent County Council for his advice and assistance.

Julie Martin and Paul Wilkinson undertook the fieldwork. Illustrations were produced by Jonny Madden for *Digitise This*. The project was managed by Dr Paul Wilkinson.

Julie Martin

November 2011

REFERENCES

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Archaeology South East (ASE), 2008. *An Archaeological Evaluation along the route of the proposed Isle of Grain gas transmission pipeline-Stage 1*. Unpublished document

Institute for Field Archaeologists (IfA), Rev (2008)_*Standard and Guidance for archaeological field evaluation*.

Glover, J. 1976. *The Place Names of Kent*. Batsford

Hasted, E. 1798. *The History and Topographical Survey of the County of Kent, Volume 4*.

Kent County Council (KCC), (2011) *Specification for an Evaluation of Land adjacent Bellwood Cottages, Ratcliffe Highway, Hoo St Werburgh, Rochester, Kent*.

Kent County Council (KCC) (2010) *Kent County Council Monument Full Report* for site centred at 578314 173900

Maps

Ordnance Survey 1st Edition (1871-1890)

Ordnance Survey 2nd Edition (1897-1900)

Ordnance Survey 3rd Edition (1907-1923)

Ordnance Survey 4th Edition (1929-1952)

Websites

Kent Landscape Information System <http://extranet7.kent.gov.uk/klis/home.htm>

Exploring Kent's Past <http://www.extranet7.krnt.gov.uk/ExploringKentsPast/>



Plate 1. View of site looking east, trench 7 is in front



Plate 2. View of site looking south-east, trench 8 is ahead



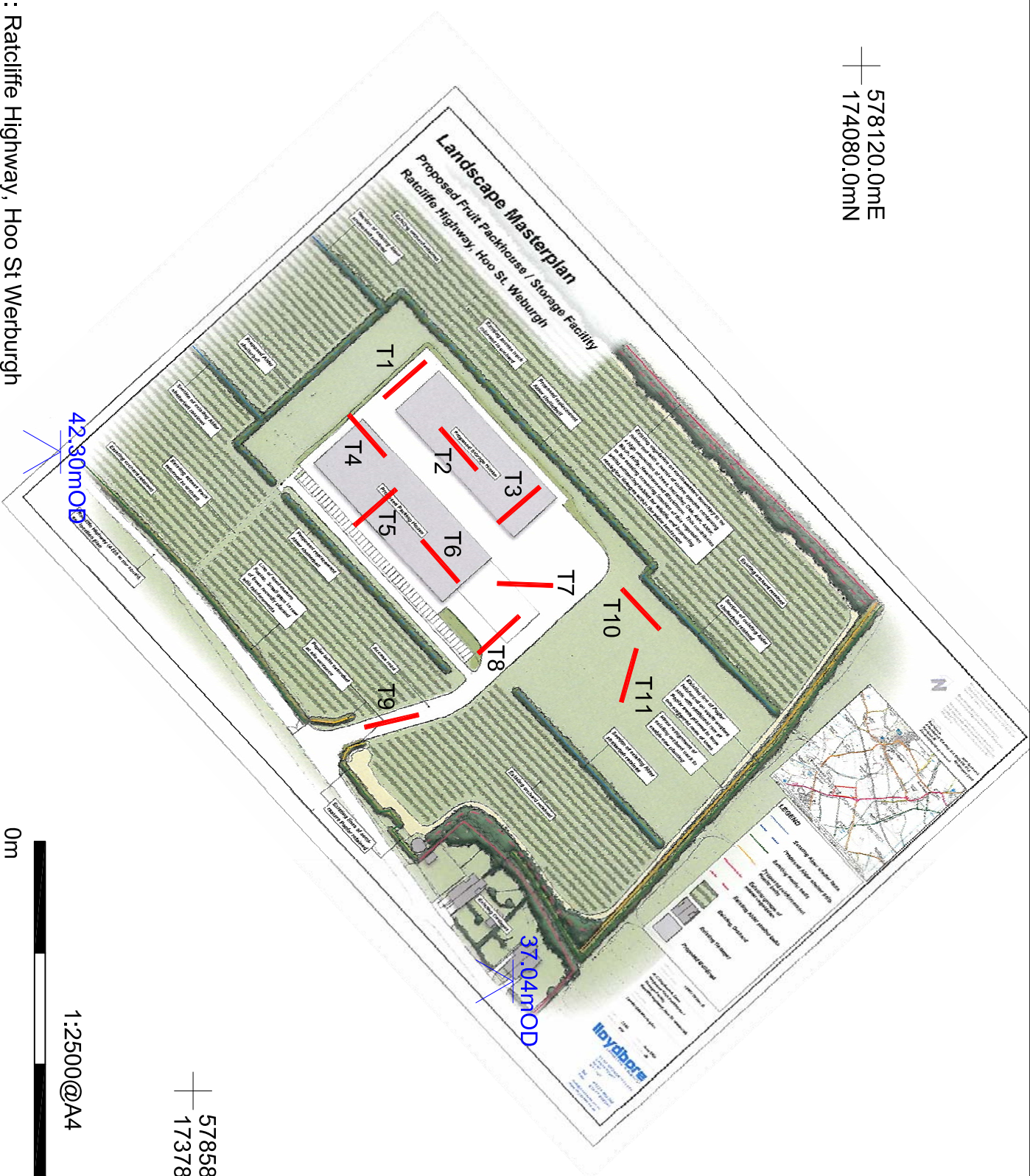
Plate 3. Typical section (trench 8)

APPENDIX 1 – Kent County Council HER Summary Form

Site Name: <i>Land adjacent Bellwood Cottages</i>	
SWAT Site Code: <i>BHR 11</i>	
Site Address: <i>Land adjacent Bellwood Cottages, Ratcliffe Highway, Hoo St Werburgh, Rochester, Kent</i>	
Summary: <i>Swale & Thames Survey Company (SWAT) carried out an archaeological evaluation on land adjacent Bellwood Cottages off of Ratcliffe (A228). A planning application for the construction of a new fruit processing and storage facility with associated car parking at the above site was submitted to Medway Borough Council (MBC) whereby Kent County Council Heritage and Conservation (KCCHC), on behalf of Medway Borough Council requested that an Archaeological Evaluation be undertaken in order to determine the possible impact of the development on any archaeological remains. The work was carried out in accordance with the requirements set out within an Archaeological Specification (KCC 2011) and in discussion with the Archaeological Officer, Kent County Council.</i> <i>The Archaeological Evaluation consisted of eleven (11) trenches which encountered no archaeological features or artefacts.</i>	
District/Unitary: <i>Medway</i>	Parish: <i>Hoo St Werburgh</i>
Period(s): Tentative: <i>Modern</i>	
NGR (centre of site : 8 figures): (NB if large or linear site give multiple NGRs): <i>NGR 578314 173900</i>	
Type of archaeological work (delete) <i>Evaluation</i>	
Date of Recording: <i>September 2011</i>	
Unit undertaking recording: <i>Swale & Thames Survey Company (SWAT)</i>	
Geology: <i>Head Deposits of undifferentiated Clay, Silt, Sand and Gravel over London Clay</i>	
Title and author of accompanying report: <i>Martin, J. An Archaeological Evaluation on land adjacent Bellwood Cottages, Ratcliffe Highway, Hoo St Werburgh, Rochester,, Kent</i>	
Summary of fieldwork results (begin with earliest period first, add NGRs where appropriate) <i>As above</i> <p style="text-align: right;">(cont. on attached sheet)</p>	
Location of archive/finds: <i>SWAT</i>	
Contact at Unit: <i>Paul Wilkinson</i>	Date: <i>21st November 2011</i>



578120.0mE
174080.0mN



578580.0mE
173780.0mN

1:2500@A4

0m 200m

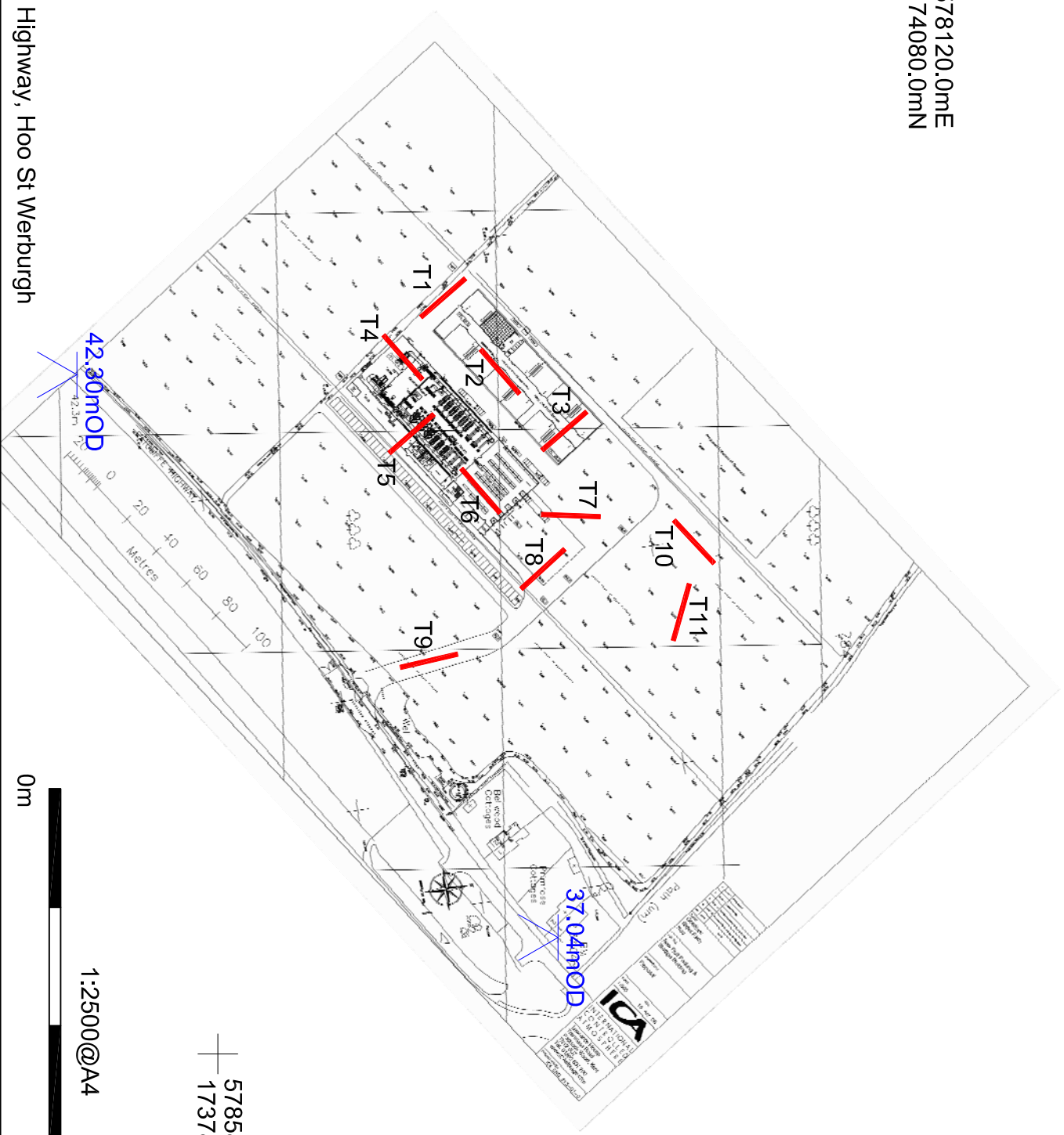
42.80mOD

37.04mOD

Figure 1: Ratcliffe Highway, Hoo St Werburgh



578120.0mE
174080.0mN



578580.0mE
173780.0mN

1:2500@A4

0m 200m

Figure 2: Ratcliffe Highway, Hoo St Werburgh