



**Archaeological Watching Brief at Amelia Project Adult Education
Center, Mount Pleasant Road,
Tunbridge Wells**



NGR: **558514 139537**

Site code: **TUN-WB-20**

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Archaeological watching brief was maintained at land at the Adult Education Centre, Mount Pleasant Road, Tunbridge Wells in Kent (Figures 1 and 2, Plates 1 and 2).

The site has planning permission for the partial demolition of the Adult Education Centre, Museum and Library and erection of extensions to the side and rear of the Adult Education Centre, Museum and Library. The Local Planning Authority's (Tunbridge Wells Borough Council) planning reference for the proposal is 17/03640/FULL.

The planning consent had Condition (17) attached requiring a programme of archaeological monitoring during ground reduction and excavation of foundations and drainage. The attached condition states:

No development shall take place until the applicant, or their agents or successors in title has secured the implementation of a Watching Brief to be undertaken by an archaeologist approved by the Local Planning Authority so that the excavation is observed and items of interest and finds recorded. The Watching Brief shall be in accordance with a written programme and specification, which has been submitted and approved by the Local Planning Authority.

REASON: This is a pre-commencement condition to ensure that features of archaeological interest are properly examined and recorded.

2.0 ARCHAEOLOGICAL POTENTIAL

Archaeological advice was sought from KCC Heritage by Tunbridge Wells Borough Council and Wendy Rogers Senior Archaeological Officer KCC responded on the 8th November 2016:

Thank you for this enquiry regarding the land off Monson Way Tunbridge Wells. I have undertaken a search on the HER and reviewed other sources of information on the heritage of this site. I can provide you with some preliminary comments on potential archaeological issues based on current information. This advice may change if new information comes to light.

The site of interest lies within the historic core of Tunbridge Wells which is considered to be a 17th and 18th century spa town. The site does not contain any designated heritage assets but, as noted, it lies directly adjacent to two Grade II Listed Buildings;

The Adult Education Centre which dates from 1902, and the Library and Museum which dates from c. 1939. Neither are particularly old but they are considered to be of distinctive architectural importance and of historic interest.

The site also lies opposite four further Listed buildings: Assembly Hall, Town Hall and Police Station, all built around 1939; and 9 to 10 Crescent Road (designed by Decimus Burton early 19th century). Taking these into consideration, the site lies within a key historic and architecturally distinctive area of Tunbridge Wells. 9 to 10 Crescent Road is the oldest

building in this area and is of historic significance but it is currently blocked from the site of interest by the large Multi-storey Car Park.

The impact of any proposed redevelopment would need to consider carefully these designated buildings but the District Conservation Officer would cover buildings and conservation area issues, including consideration of curtilage.

In terms of below ground remains, the current buildings seem to be the only past development on the site. The early OS maps suggest this area was a triangular patch of open ground backing residential properties including Calverley Terrace and Hollybanks. This limited development on the site could increase the potential for archaeological remains pre-dating post medieval period. There are some suggestions of prehistoric activity in this area of Tunbridge Wells but very little evidence for this so far. However, this may reflect the limited extent of formal archaeological work rather than a lack of archaeology. The site itself has been disturbed by construction of the current buildings and you mentioned the construction of a lift shaft which would have impacted on archaeology. In summary, the site is surrounded by historic buildings and this is likely to be the most significant heritage issue to address. The District Conservation Officer would be able to help further with that issue. In terms of archaeology, based on current information, the potential for archaeological remains is low. In addition, the site has been impacted by construction of the current buildings although there is still some potential for undisturbed areas to survive.

Subject to details of any redevelopment scheme, it may seem appropriate for some limited archaeological work but I do not envisage the need for a Desk-based Assessment for Archaeology. You are likely to need one for the historic buildings but again the District Conservation Officer (Mark Stephenson) can help with this element.

I hope this is helpful and happy to discuss further.

A KCC HER search revealed that there are no archaeological entries in the vicinity of the proposed development and above ground KCCHER entries are that within the vicinity there is the Education Centre, a Grade II Listed Building (TQ 53 NE 312), a Library and Museum (TQ 53 NE 342) and the Town Hall (TQ 53 NE 187).

3.0 GEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

The geology of the site according to the British Geological Survey is Lower Tunbridge Sand. Superficial Deposits are not recorded.

4.0 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the archaeological watching brief are to contribute to heritage knowledge of the area through the recording of any archaeological remains exposed as a result of excavations in connection with the groundworks. Particular attention was made to the character, height below ground level, condition, date and significance of the deposits.

5.0 MONITORED GROUNDWORKS

The groundworks comprised the partial demolition of the Adult Education Centre, Museum and Library and erection of extensions to the side and rear of the Adult Education Centre, Museum and Library (Figure 2).

The archaeologist has clarified the extent of the works with the developer before work begins to ensure that they target their attendance in accordance with the development programme. The archaeologist was maintaining a diary and description of all works observed and these are included in this report.

6.0 METHODOLOGY

The archaeological contractor was monitoring the excavations of all groundworks. Excavation were undertaken using a flat bladed bucket operating in a single direction to enabling archaeological remains to be recorded prior to disturbance from construction.

The archaeologist has inspected the surfaces revealed. Any archaeological structures or features revealed will be recorded in plan and section as appropriate according to the requirements stated within approved specification.

All watched ground reduction, foundations, manholes and drainage were watched, examined and subsequently photographed using hi-resolution digital SLR camera. Additionally monitored areas were surveyed using a GPS RTK surveying kit achieving centimetre accuracy in relation to National Grid.

7.0 RECORDING

All archaeological contexts were recorded individually on context record sheets. A further more general record of the work comprising a description and discussion is included in this report.

A full colour (digital) photographic record of the work is kept and constitutes a part of project archive. The selection of photographic images which reflect the investigation and monitoring undertaken on this site is included in this report.

The site archive, include all project records and cultural material produced by the project and is to be prepared in accordance with Guidelines for the preparation of excavation archives for long-term storage (UKIC 1990). On completion of the project the Developer will arrange for the archive to be deposited in a suitable museum or similar repository to be agreed with the Local Planning Authority.

8.0 PROJECT TIME-FRAME

Archaeological watching brief was carried out in April in May 2020. Intermittent fieldwork took place on 15th, 16th, 17th, 20th, 22nd, 23rd and 28th of April and on 6th, 11th, 12th,

15th, 21st and 27th of May. Watching brief was carried out in all instances by Peter Cichy who also prepared text for this report.

9.0 WATCHING BRIEF RESULTS

Archaeological watching brief was carried when required to oversee mechanical ground reduction and excavation of foundation pads what resulted in 12 days on-site.

The groundworks have not exposed any archaeological features or deposits. An old culver was exposed at the depth of one metre in southern part of the site. (Plates 9 and 10, Figure 2)

The exposed geology was Lower Tunbridge Sand, no superficial deposits noted during overseeing of groundworks.

10.0 WATCHING BRIEF DIARY

15th April

The groundworks commenced with removal of existing tarmac/concrete surfaces were. Slight ground reduction in the basement was carried out prior to installing a new surface floor.

16th April

Demolition of a part of existing building continues and ground reduction commenced in south-eastern part of the site. A made-up ground was observed to the depth of 0.6-0.7metre from the top just beneath freshly removed tarmac surface.

17th April

Ground reduction continues to the depth of 1 metre into natural geology comprising Lower Tunbridge Sand. Demolition of parts of adjacent buildings continues.

20th April

Ground reduction in south-eastern part of the site continues and another portion of the area reduced to the depth of 1 metre below recently removed tarmac.

21st April

Ground reduction continues in south-eastern part of the site, another portion was reduced on that day. Due to limited space on site the overall progress was determined by attendance of grab lorries that were taking excavated material out of the site.

22nd April

Demolition of Lending Library continues and it's near completion. The ground reduction to the depth of 1 metre was completed and further ground reduction commenced in south-eastern part of the site where levels were taken down. Now all excavations are within natural geology comprising Lower Tunbridge Sand.

An old culvert was exposed within eastern extent of area subjected to ground reduction. That was found at the depth of 1 metre and was still connected to existing manhole beneath a public pavement immediately to the south of the site.

23rd April

A foundation pads, trenches, manhole and drainage were excavated adjacently to existing building within southern part of the site where ground reduction took place. The averaged depth of excavated footing was 1.2metre but in some places the depth at finished level reached 1.7metre.

28th April

Further drainage and foundation were excavated within area subjected to ground reduction to the east. Steel bars were installed within foundation and a concrete was casted into excavated slots.

6th May

All foundations within south-eastern part of the site were filled up with concrete and a surface of a driveway in northern part of the site was removed and the revealed surface examined in term of any surviving archaeology but none was found.

11th May

Foundation pads beneath demolished Lending Library were excavated and simultaneously the construction of new building within south-eastern part of the site continues.

12th May

A manhole and drainage were excavated beneath demolished Lending Library. Foundation pads were also fully excavated on that day. Due to health and safety concerns the depth of these was not surveyed and according to the construction plans their depth exceeded 3 metres.

15th May

Foundation pads were filled up with concrete and another square trench was excavated in north-western part of the site adjacent to existing paved footpath.

21st May

The works continues drainage now back-filled and connections to existing services were established in southern part of the site.

27th May

Last checking visit, inspecting small limited ground disturbances beneath existing public footpath to the south where connections to existing services were made. No further excavations to take place on the site.

11.0 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Watching brief carried out at land at the Adult Education Centre, Mount Pleasant Road, Tunbridge Wells in Kent successively fulfilled the requirement stated in approved specification. No archaeology was exposed during the groundworks. Monitored excavations revealed a culvert cutting into natural geology comprising Lower Tunbridge Sand Formation. This was a part of recently demolished structures and was connected to a manhole beneath a public footpath denoting the site from the south. Culvert was capped by a modern made-up deposit comprising grey loam with moderate amount of demolition debris and of averaged thickness of one metre. No residual historic artefacts were noted during ground reduction, what suggest that this levelling represents only one phase associated with demolished building and its small car park.

The opportunity to oversee groundworks associated with this project has provided an insight into the past of this land prior to erection of recently demolished buildings. As no archaeological finds or sunken structures like cellars were found, it should be concluded that this land did not have had any major historical structures prior to erection of recently demolished ones. This however not precludes the existence of important historical remains beneath the existing building denoting the site from the west and from the north.

Plates



Plate 1: Showing southern part of the site where removal of existing surfaces commenced. Looking south-west.



Plate 2: Showing northern part of the site. Demolition of Lending Library in the background and removal of demolished material in foreground. Looking west.



Plate 3: Showing on-going demolition of Lending Library. Looking west.



Plate 4: Reduced ground in southern part of the site. Looking north-east with one metre scale.



Plate 5: Showing section through reduced made-up ground in southern part of the site. Looking east with 1 metre scale.



Plate 6: Showing section through reduced ground in southern part of the site adjacent to public footpath to the south. Looking south with one metre scale.



Plate 7: Showing further ground reduction in southern part of the site. Looking northwest with one metre scale.



Plate 8: Showing section in south-eastern corner of the site. Looking south, one metre scale.



Plate 9: Showing an old culvert revealed in southern part of the site. Looking southwest with one metre scale.



Plate 10: Provides more detailed overlook of exposed culvert. Looking south, one metre scale.



Plate 11: Culvert in southern section. Looking south with one metre scale.



Plate 12: Showing foundations in south-western part of the site, adjacent to existing building. Looking south, one metre scale.



Plate 13: Showing foundations in south-western part of the site, adjacent to existing building. Looking north, one metre scale.



Plate 14: Showing representative section of foundations in southern part of the site comprising Lower Tunbridge Sand geology. Looking west, one metre scale.



Plate 15: Showing east-west foundations in southern part of the site. Looking southwest, one metre scale.



Plate 16: Showing exposed ground beneath demolished Lending Library (north-western part of the site) prior to commencement of excavations. Looking north with two-metre scale.



Plate 17: Showing exposed ground in northern part of the site prior to excavation. Looking west with two metre scale.



Plate 18: Showing excavated foundation pads in north-western part of the site beneath demolished Lending library. Looking north; two one-metre scales.



Plate 19: Providing more detailed overlook on excavated foundation pad in north-western part of the site. Two one metre scales.



Plate 20: Showing further deepening of foundation pads in north-western part of the site with one metre scales.



Plate 21: Providing more detailed overlook on foundation pads excavated in north-western part of the site adjacently to existing building to the east. Looking east, one metre scale.



Plate 22: Providing more detailed overlook on foundation pads excavated in north-western part of the site adjacently to existing building to the east. Looking east, one metre scales.



Plate 23: Showing on-going excavation of foundation pads in north-western part of the site adjacently to existing building to the east. Looking south, one metre scales.



Plate 24: Providing more detailed overlook on foundation pads excavated in north-western part of the site adjacently to existing building to the east. Looking east, one metre scales.



Plate 25: Showing excavated manhole in north-western part of the site adjacent to existing paved footpath. Looking north-west with two one-metre scales.



Plate 26: An overlook onto southern part of the site as construction works progresses. Looking northwest.

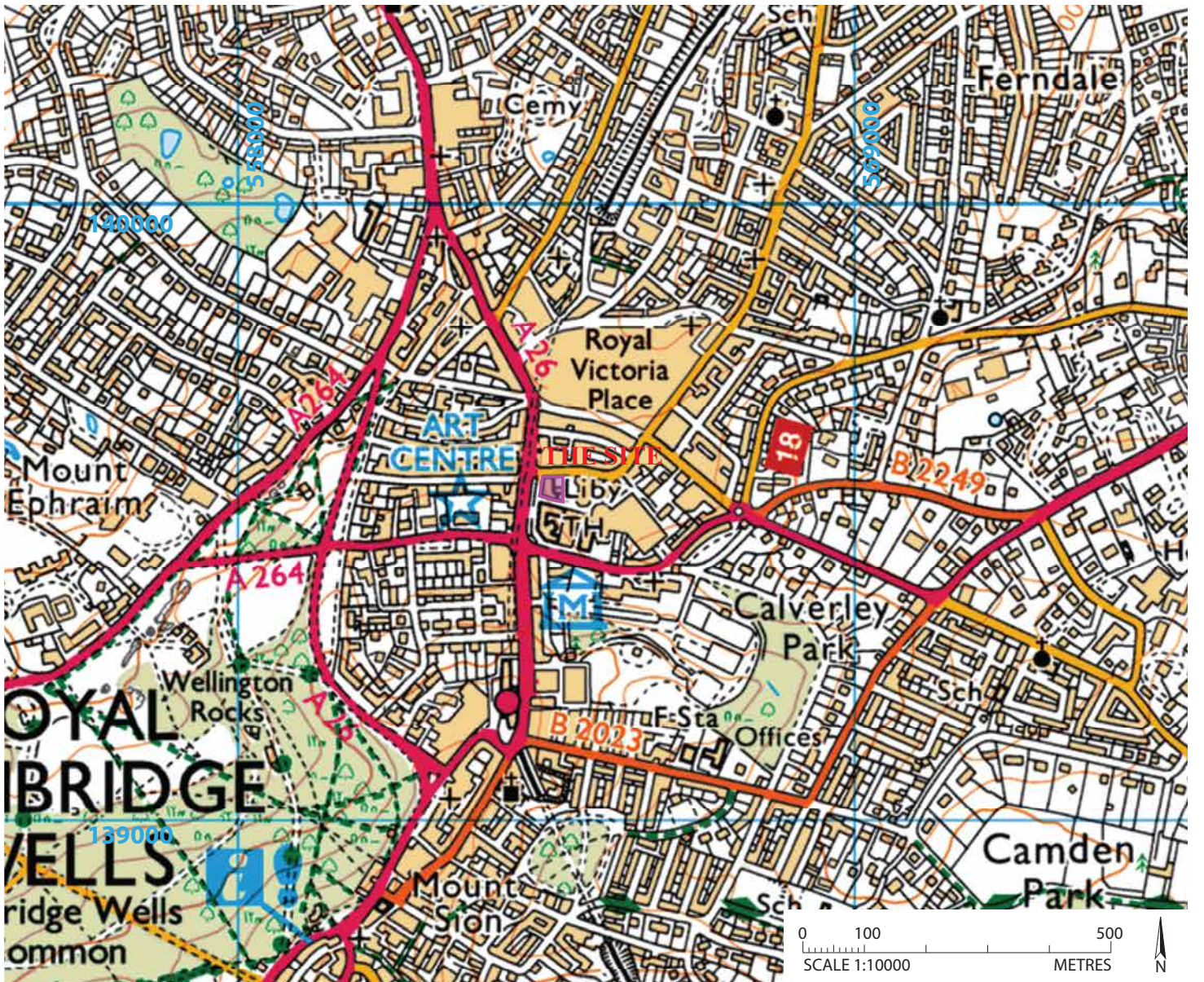


Figure 1: Site location map, scale 1:10000.

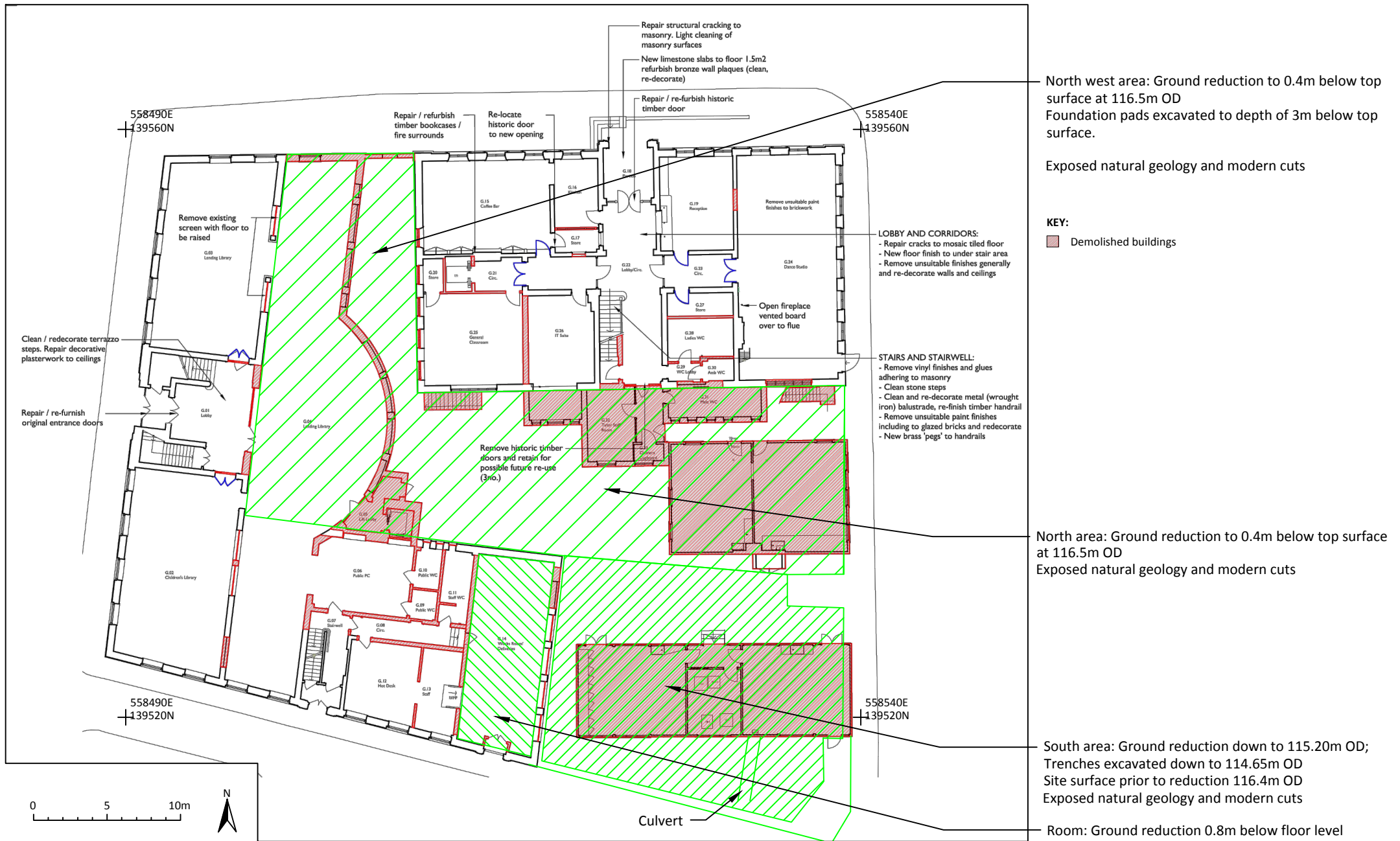


Figure 2: Watching brief plan