Archaeological Evaluation at Aylesham Village Expansion, Aylesham, Dover, Kent. Phase 2B Parcel 3 (Part 2)

NGR: 623721 152938

Site Code: AYL/EV/21

Planning Application: (DOV/07/01081)

SWAT Archaeology

The Office, School Farm Oast

Graveney Road Faversham, Kent, ME13 8UP

Email: info@swatarchaeology.co.uk

Tel.: 01795 532548 and 07885 700112

Contents

List of Plates

List of Figures

Abstract

Swale & Thames Survey Company (SWAT) carried out an archaeological evaluation of land as part of the ongoing development (Phase 2B Parcel 3) at Aylesham, Kent CT3 3NB. A Planning Application (DOV/07/01081) for residential development and all associated works, was submitted to Dover District 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 conducted in accordance with the requirements set out within an ongoing Archaeological Specification (AMEC 2013) and in discussion with the Senior Archaeological Heritage Officer, Kent County Council. The results of the excavation of the first 13 evaluation trenches in 2019 revealed that archaeological features were only present within two trenches, Trench 3 and Trench 12.

This report concerns the remaining nine trenches, excavated in August 2021 and concludes the archaeological evaluation investigation. The natural bedrock geology of superficial deposits of Head, Head Brickearth together with remnants of clay-with-flints above Upper Chalk were revealed. No additional archaeological finds or features were present.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Swale & Thames Survey Company (SWAT) was commissioned by Persimmon Homes Southeast to carry out an archaeological evaluation at the above site. The work was carried out in accordance with the requirements set out within an Archaeological Specification (SWAT 2019) and in discussion with the Senior Archaeological Heritage Officer, Kent County Council. The evaluation was carried out on the 9th of August 2021.

1.2 The evaluation forms the second element of fieldwork and supplements original trenching carried out by SWAT Archaeology, which are detailed in a separate report (2019).

2 Site Description and Topography

2.1 The evaluation area comprising Part 2, was situated within the extreme north-east corner of the development site and lay within a roughly formed L-shaped parcel of land; once woodland. The OS location is NGR 623721 152938, and the evaluation area was approximately 1.5 Hectares in size (Figure 1).

2.2 According to the British Geological Survey (1978, sheet 289), Aylesham is situated on the dipslope of the North Downs. The geology comprises superficial deposits of Head; Head Brickearth together with remnants of clay-with-flints above Upper Chalk. The location of the evaluation sits at an average height of 69m aOD.

3 Planning Background

3.1 The overall Aylesham Village Expansion project was the subject of a hybrid planning application for residential development and all associated works and infrastructure, together with alterations to existing shops and apartments, refurbishment of public open spaces, provision of new play and sports facilities, parks and gardens, street furniture, landscaping, temporary works access and compounds (Figure 1). The Local Planning Authority planning reference for the scheme is DOV/07/01081. A number of subsequent reserved matters applications and other submissions have been made to the Local Planning Application as the scheme has developed. The Local Planning Authority placed conditions (31 & 92) on the planning consent:

31 ARCHAEOLOGY: No development shall take place until the applicant, or their agents or successors in title, has secured the implementation of archaeological field evaluation works in accordance with a specification and written timetable which has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority; and following on from the evaluation any safeguarding measures to ensure preservation, in situ of important archaeological remains and/or further archaeological investigation and recording in accordance with a 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 evaluation works and safeguarding measurements. Reason: To ensure features of archaeological importance and interest are properly examined and recorded.

And:

92 ARCHAEOLOGY: No development of a phase or part phase shall take place until a report on a detailed archaeological investigation, which shall include full details of archaeological field evaluation works together with the identification of any safeguarding measures to ensure preservation in situ of important archaeological remains and/or further investigation and recording has been submitted to and approved by the Local Planning Authority. The agreed safeguarding measures and archaeological mitigation works shall be carried out prior to the commencement of development within that phase or part phase of the development, unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority. Reason: To ensure features of archaeological importance and interest are properly examined and recorded.

4 Archaeological and Historical Background

4.1 The Kent County Council Historic Environment Record (KCCHER) has provided details of any previous investigations and discoveries. The potential of this area has been gauged in relation to the proximity of known archaeological remains and is defined in the Archaeological Written Scheme of Investigation (AMEC 2013). Subsequent archaeological works at the site include Geophysical Survey (Wessex Archaeology) and Strip, Map and Sample excavations (SWAT Archaeology). The various studies have shown that the village of Aylesham lies within a rich archaeological landscape demonstrated by past discoveries and extensive areas of cropmarks that surround the village. The ongoing investigations, by SWAT Archaeology, have shown that the excavation at Aylesham comprises an extensive, previously unknown archaeological landscape.

4.2 The geophysical survey and subsequent excavation revealed a prehistoric landscape that originated in the late Neolithic including the appearance of a large rectangular-shaped monumental structure, with an inner bank sat on the highest point of the development site and

overlooked the Stour Valley from the edge of the North Downs. Having been backfilled, the monument was re-opened in the Mid Bronze Age at a time when an extensive drove way appeared. It was during this phase that the site experienced a wider use of the landscape, as pits, linear features and cremation burials were scattered across it.

4.3 The centre of the landscape was however, dominated by a series of Late Iron Age and Roman enclosures, and scattered amongst the northern half of the network of enclosures were four kilns that produced pottery from either side of the Roman invasion in AD 43. The enclosures were altered and expanded during the Late Iron Age and Roman periods with mortuary enclosures being added to house richly furnished cremations.

4.4 Activity on site during the Roman period also included a mix of industry and animal husbandry. In addition to the manufacture of pottery, Roman Aylesham also witnessed small scale iron smelting and the milling of flour, suggested by the presence of six millstones. The large percentage of horse bone and the presence of two horse skeletons would indicate that horse rearing/stockading was also part of the site's economic dynamics. The presence of military equipment on site suggests that the Roman Army may have played a significant role with the site's economy.

4.5 Activity during the later Roman period, though present is unclear, as is the implied Anglo-Saxon presence. Further study of the results of the Watching Brief (DANA-WB-14) and the excavation of Phase 3may improve our understanding of this transitional period at Aylesham.

4.6 The Medieval phase on site was only present toward the extreme west of the development in the form of two parallel and shallow linear features.

4.7 During the post-medieval period however, the development site experienced small-scale quarrying. A total of five quarries, probably for flint, were present and they were scattered across the landscape.

4.8 The excavation implies that activity on the site then ceased until the village of Aylesham was built in the 1920s. The site then became part of the defensive line, based on the railway line between Canterbury and Dover during the early years of World War II. The development site overlooked this defensive position and to deter enemy gliders from landing behind these defences, a series of inter-connecting ditches were dug across the site. After the war, the site was returned to arable farming.

5 Aims and Objectives

5.1 The primary objective of this archaeological investigation is to complete the evaluation begun in October 2019, and to determine whether any significant archaeological remains survive within the extreme northeast corner of the development site and also to investigate the geophysical survey anomalies (Wessex Archaeology Geophysical Survey. 2014). The results, discussed below, should provide guidance on what mitigation measures would be appropriate.

6 Methodology

6.1 The Archaeological Specification (SWAT Archaeology, 2019a) for Phase 2 called for an evaluation by trial trenching comprising 23 trenches (Figure 2). However, due to site constraints and ecological concerns, the evaluation was subsequently split into two parts, the first part, containing 14 trenches, was excavated and a report submitted in 2019 (SWAT Archaeology, 2019b). The second part, discussed in this report, contained nine trenches.

6.2 According to the specification, the evaluation would encompass the excavation of the remaining nine trenches, each being 25m long, in a layout agreed with the Senior Archaeological Heritage Officer, Kent County Council (Figure 1). However, approximately 75% of the evaluation area was inaccessible as a compound and number of large spoil bunds occupied the area at the time of the evaluation. Therefore, the evaluation area was severely restricted and resulted in the excavation of only 2.5 trenches.

6.3 A 14 ton 360° tracked mechanical excavator with a 1.8m wide flat-bladed ditching bucket was used to remove the overburden and expose the natural geology and/or the archaeological horizon.

6.4 All archaeological work was conducted 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. The work was also carried out in accordance with KCC, SWAT and CIfA standards and guidance.

7 Monitoring

7.1 Curatorial monitoring by the Senior Archaeological Heritage Officer, Kent County Council was available during the course of the evaluation.

8 Results

Trench 1

8.1 The plan is recorded in Figure 2 (see also Plates 1 and 2). The trench lay on a NW-SE alignment, measured 25m by 1.80m and had a maximum depth of 0.08m (70.62m aOD).

8.2 Undisturbed natural geology was identified across the trench as an outcrop of chalk and orange-brown clay-with-flints **(101)**, below contaminated natural **(100)**, exposed during ground clearance and reduction in the Spring of 2021.

Trench 2

8.3 The ground clearance and reduction in the Spring of 2021 revealed the presence of a 20th century quarry (Plate 3) backfilled with building debris, probably originating from the demolition of the Old Park Farmhouse (Kent HER: MKE86583). Due to the site conditions and the presence of the quarry, Trench 2 was not excavated. However, a survey took place to determine the profile of the quarry at the time of the evaluation and established that the interior had been reduced during the clearance and ground reduction, to a depth of 1.31m (69.43m aOD).

Trench 3

8.4 The plan is recorded in Figures 2 (see also Plates 4 and 5). The trench lay on a NW-SE alignment. Originally intended to be 25m long, the footprint of the trench was affected by the presence of the compound. Therefore, the trench measured approximately 12m by 1.80m. It had a maximum depth of 0.16m (69.70m aOD).

8.5 Undisturbed natural geology was identified across the trench as an outcrop of chalk and orange-brown clay-with-flints **(301)**, below contaminated natural **(300)**, exposed during ground clearance and reduction in the Spring of 2021.

Trench 4

8.6 The plan is recorded in Figure 2 (see also Plates 6 and 7). The trench lay on a NE-SW alignment, measured 25m by 1.80m and had a maximum depth of 0.08m (68.64m aOD).

8.7 Undisturbed natural geology was identified across the trench as an outcrop of chalk and orange-brown clay-with-flints **(401)**, below contaminated natural **(400)**, exposed during ground clearance and reduction in the Spring of 2021.

Trench 5

8.8 The footprint for Trench 5 lay underneath a large spoil bund (Plate 8) and was not excavated.

Trench 6

8.9 The footprint for Trench 6 lay underneath the compound (Plate 9) and was not excavated.

Trench 7

8.10 The footprint for Trench 7 lay underneath the compound (Plate 9) and was not excavated.

Trench 8

8.11 The footprint for Trench 8 lay underneath the compound (Plate 10) and was not excavated.

Trench 9

8.12 The footprint for Trench 9 lay underneath the compound (Plate 11) and was not excavated.

9 Discussion

9.1 The location of the evaluation trenches were within the L-shaped parcel of land, which had been woodland. Clearance of the woodland and the reduction of the ground to remove the resulting debris, had exposed contaminants; predominantly asbestos. The removal of the contaminants severely truncated any surviving layers of topsoil and subsoil and ultimately exposed the natural geological horizon (Plate 12).

9.2 An archaeological survey established that prior to the reduction, the original ground level within the evaluation area would have had an approximate height of 70.91m aOD and that the ground level had been reduced in places to a maximum depth of 0.75m (69.43m aOD).

9.3 The ground clearance and ground reduction resulted in the presence of a series of large spoil bunds situated across the north end of the area and vehicular movement within the evaluation area during the clearance and reduction contaminated the exposed natural geological horizon.

9.4 Due to the presence of a compound within the west and northwest section of the evaluation area and the spoil bunds, the archaeological evaluation was restricted and resulted in the excavation of only two and a half trenches: Trenches 1, 3 and 4 (Figure 2). Each trench sat within an area of exposed natural geology and the vehicular disturbance and new vegetation were removed in each trench to expose clean and undisturbed natural geology. Archaeological features were absent.

9.5 The excavation of the trenches, and archaeological survey therefore, demonstrated that the ground clearance and reduction within the evaluation area has most likely resulted in a total loss of any *in-situ* archaeological features.

10 Finds

10.1 The ground clearance and reduction of the area would have resulted in a total absence of archaeological artefacts, had they been present.

11 Conclusion

11.1 The final phase (Part 2) of the archaeological evaluation within the extreme northeast corner of the development site has revealed a landscape severely affected by the clearance of the woodland, the contaminants, the ground reduction, and the establishment of a compound.

11.2 The location of the evaluation trenches were also affected by the above and resulted in only two and a half trenches being excavated. The results of their excavation and an archaeological survey of the site confirmed that the landscape had been drastically altered prior to the evaluation taking place.

11.3 Therefore, the archaeological evaluation could not fulfil the primary aims and objectives of the Specification. It was not possible to establish a stratigraphic sequence, as the surviving layers and or deposits, sealing the natural geology had been removed. This removal exposed the natural geological horizon to contamination and vehicular movement and has most likely resulted in a total loss of any *in-situ* archaeological features.

12 Acknowledgements

12.1 SWAT Archaeology would like to thank the client, Persimmon Homes Southeast for commissioning the project. Site survey and illustrations were produced by 'Digitise This'. The fieldwork was undertaken and the report written by Simon Holmes MA. The project was managed by David Britchfield MCIfA and Dr Paul Wilkinson PhD MCIfA.

Dr Paul Wilkinson

10/08/2021

13 References

AMEC Environment & Infrastructure UK Limited. 2013. *Written Scheme of Investigation for Archaeological Mitigation*

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Wessex Archaeology. 2014. *Aylesham Village Expansion Phase 2-4, Aylesham, Kent.* Detailed Gradiometer Survey Report

APPENDIX 1 – TRENCH TABLES

Trench 1	Dimensions: 25m x 1.8m Mean Ground Level: 70.72m aOD Orientation: NW-SE		
Context	Description	Interpretation	Depth (m)
100	Dirty bedrock Chalk and orange-brown clay with flint.	Exposed Natural	0.00-0.08
101	Bedrock Chalk and orange-brown clay with flint.	Natural	0.08+

Trench 3	Dimensions: 25m x 1.8m (approx. 12m excavated) Mean Ground Level: 69.72m aOD Orientation: NW-SE		
Context	Description	Interpretation	Depth (m)
300	Dirty bedrock Chalk and orange-brown clay with flint.	Exposed Natural	0.00-0.14
301	Bedrock Chalk and orange-brown clay with flint.	Natural	0.14+

Trench 4	Dimensions: 25m x 1.8m Mean Ground Level: 68.93m aOD Orientation: NE-SW		
Context	Description	Interpretation	Depth (m)
300	Dirty bedrock Chalk and orange-brown clay with flint.	Exposed Natural	0.00-0.08
301	Bedrock Chalk and orange-brown clay with flint.	Natural	0.08+

Plate 1 Trench 1 facing towards the southeast

Plate 2 Trench 1, viewed from the southeast

Note exposed natural geology truncated by modern machine track in the foreground

Plate 3 The interior of the quarry, facing south. Note the back edge (arrowed)

Plate 4 Trench 3, northwest end, facing southeast

Plate 5 Trench 3, southeast end, facing northwest

Plate 6 Trench 4, northeast end, facing southwest

Plate 7 Trench 4, southwest end, facing northeast

Plate 8 Location of Trench 5, facing north

Plate 9 Location of Trenches 6 & 7, facing northeast

Plate 10 View along section of western boundary, location for Trench 8, facing northwest

Plate 11 Main compound and location for Trench 9, facing southwest

Plate 12 sampled of the exposed natural surface post-clearance (north of Trench 1)

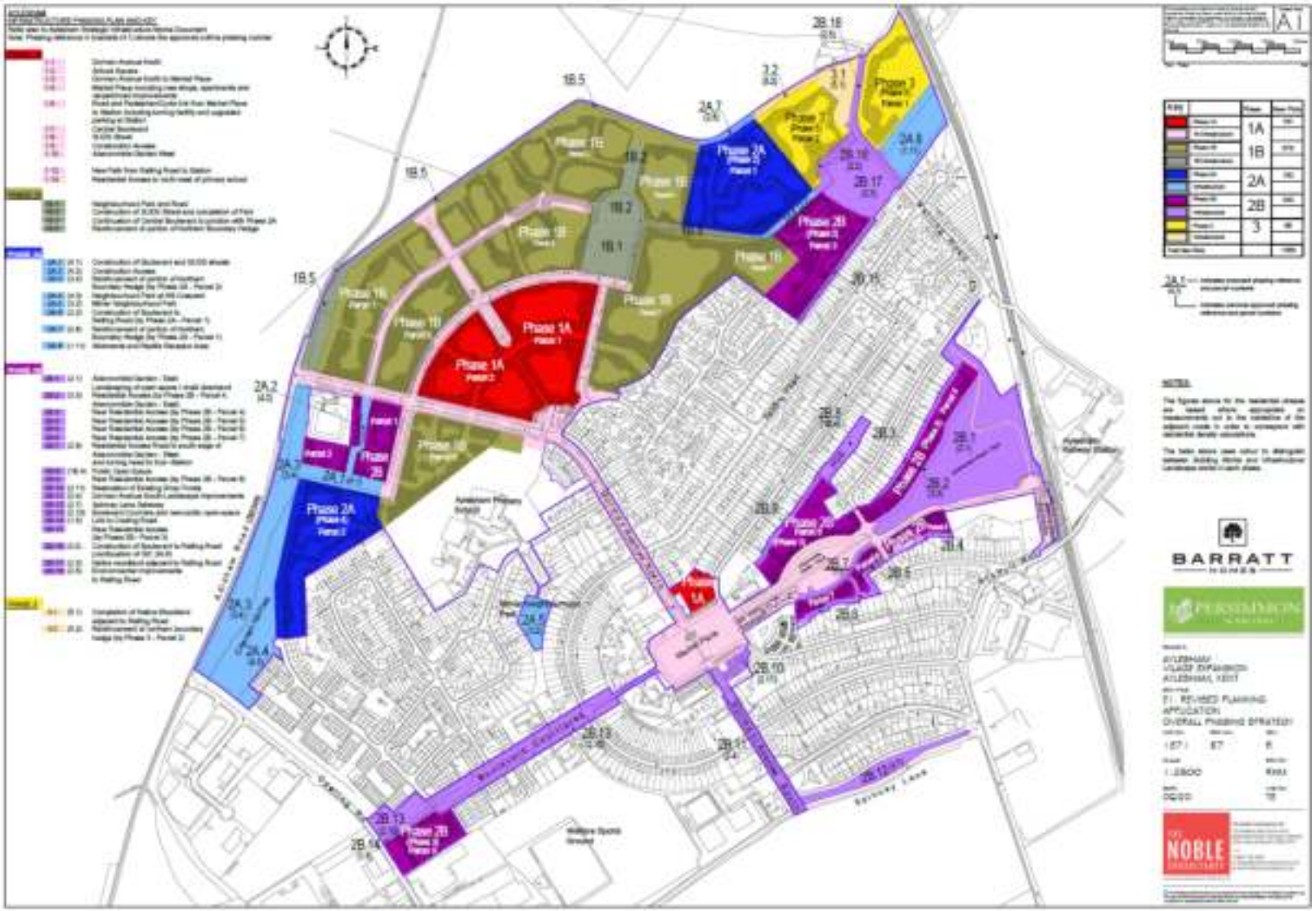

Figure 1 Site Location Plan

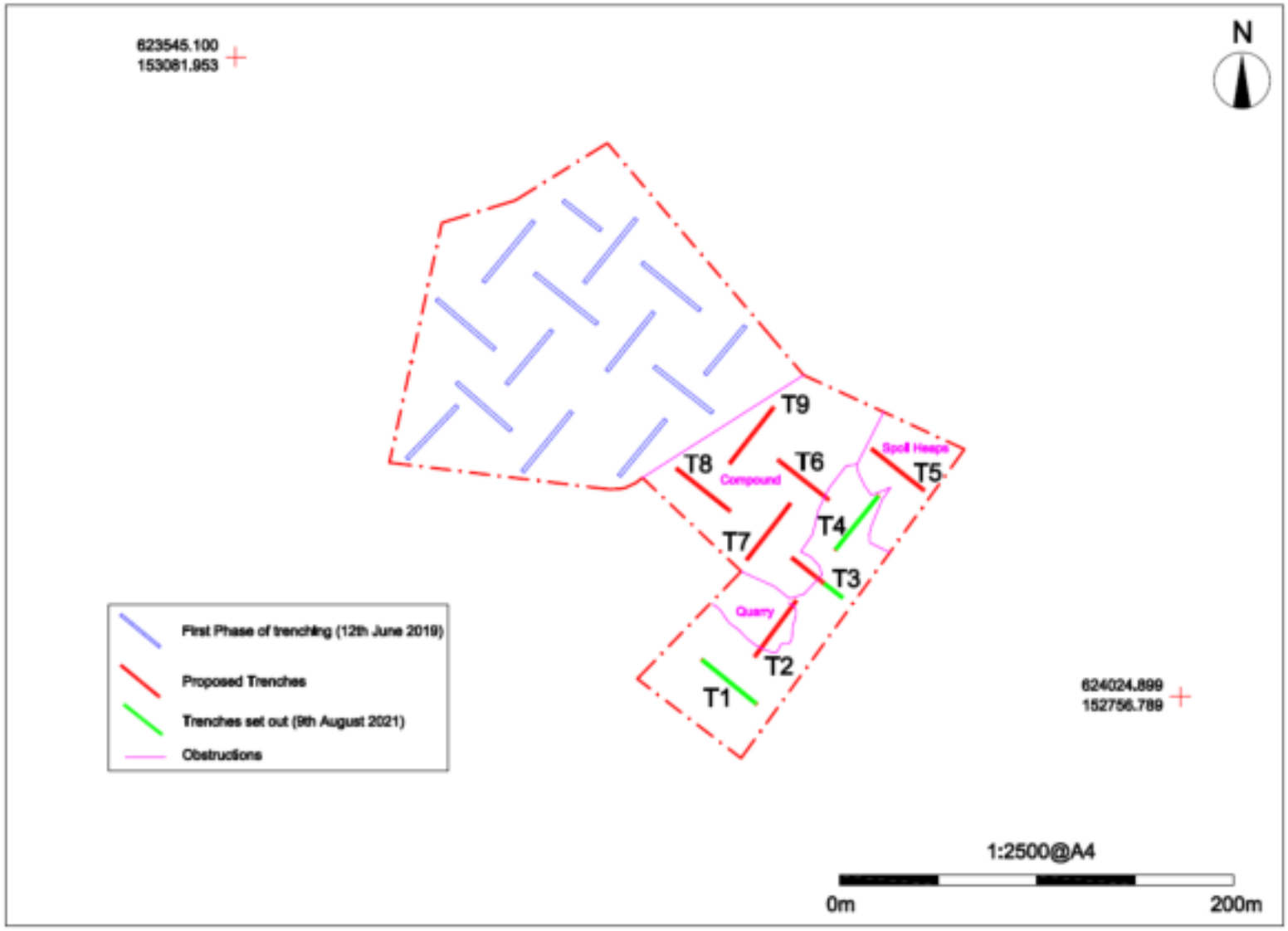

Figure 2 Area Location and Trench Layout