



## Land At British Gypsum Robertsbridge Site, Mountfield, Robertsbridge, East Sussex

### Archaeological Watching Brief Report





**LAND AT BRITISH GYPSUM ROBERTSBRIDGE SITE,  
MOUNTFIELD, ROBERTSBRIDGE, EAST SUSSEX**

**Archaeological Watching Brief Report**

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**January 2012**

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## Contents

|   |           |
|---|-----------|
| Summary .....   | iv        |
| Acknowledgements.....                                   | v         |
| <b>1 INTRODUCTION .....</b>                             | <b>6</b>  |
| 1.1 Project Background .....                            | 6         |
| 1.2 Site location, topography and geology .....         | 6         |
| <b>2 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND .....</b> | <b>7</b>  |
| <b>3 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES .....</b>                      | <b>7</b>  |
| <b>4 METHODOLOGY .....</b>                              | <b>9</b>  |
| 4.1 Introduction.....                                   | 9         |
| 4.2 Fieldwork .....                                     | 9         |
| 4.3 Recording .....                                     | 9         |
| 4.4 Health and Safety .....                             | 9         |
| <b>5 FIELDWORK RESULTS .....</b>                        | <b>10</b> |
| 5.1 Introduction.....                                   | 10        |
| 5.2 Stratigraphic Sequence .....                        | 10        |
| 5.3 Archaeological Results.....                         | 10        |
| <b>6 ARTEFACTS .....</b>                                | <b>11</b> |
| <b>7 ENVIRONMENTAL .....</b>                            | <b>11</b> |
| <b>8 CONCLUSIONS .....</b>                              | <b>11</b> |
| <b>9 ARCHIVE.....</b>                                   | <b>11</b> |
| 9.1 Preparation and Deposition .....                    | 11        |
| 9.2 The Archive .....                                   | 11        |
| 9.3 Copyright .....                                     | 12        |
| 9.4 Security Copy .....                                 | 12        |
| <b>10 REFERENCES .....</b>                              | <b>12</b> |
| <b>APPENDIX 1: CONTEXT SUMMARY TABLE.....</b>           | <b>13</b> |

## List of Figures

- 1 Site Location Plan
- 2 Site Plan

## List of Plates

### Front

- 1 Middle Terrace (**SP1**) during removal of the overburden, facing northeast
- 2 Southern Terrace (**SP2**) during removal of the overburden, facing northeast
- 3 Soils Profile (**SP3**) within the Test Pit facing southeast

## Summary

Wessex Archaeology was commissioned by URS Scott Wilson to undertake an archaeological watching brief on groundworks at land at the British Gypsum Robertsbridge Site, Mountfield, Robertsbridge, East Sussex, centred on National Grid Reference (NGR) 571977 119372. The watching brief was carried out in response to a planning requirement as part of redevelopment proposals comprising the demolition of existing buildings followed by the reinstatement of the site to grassland.

The British Gypsum Robertsbridge site is situated approximately 8km north of the town of Battle, to the west of the A2100, as shown on Figure 1. It extends to approximately 26ha – comprising the closed Mountfield Mine, plasterboard manufacturing facility, gypsum and desulphogypsum (DSG) stockpiles, gypsum processing, two gypsum landfill sites and a redundant coated roadstone plant site on land previously leased to Ready Mixed Concrete (RMC).

The archaeological watching brief relates to part of the site previously leased to Ready Mixed Concrete (RMC) which comprises an area of despoiled land historically utilised to access the Mountfield Mine and more recently used for the production of coated roadstone. The majority of the former RMC plant had been removed from the site, although the plant foundations still required removal prior to final restoration. The most significant area of potential for industrial archaeology was considered to be in the eastern half of the proposed site where the now demolished historic mining structures had been located.

The objective of the watching brief was, where possible, to identify and record the presence/absence, nature, extent, and date of any archaeological deposits or features associated with the 19<sup>th</sup> century industrial buildings. Specifically the watching brief was to record any structures revealed during the demolition and clearance phase of the works.

The archaeological monitoring and recording carried out at the site revealed that made ground existed to 0.6m deep (the depth of construction excavation for the watching brief). It is possible that archaeological remains are preserved below this depth but they would not be impacted upon by the development and therefore are preserved in situ.

A test pit excavated in the south of the site identified made ground to a depth of more than three meters but it is impossible to say if this is localised or representative of massive truncation across the site as a whole.

## **Acknowledgements**

This project was commissioned by URS Scott Wilson on behalf of British Gypsum and Wessex Archaeology is grateful to Nick Finch in this regard. Wessex Archaeology would also like to thank Casper Johnson (County Archaeologist) of Transport and Environment, East Sussex County Council, for his advice and assistance.

The report was researched and compiled by Steven Rawling. The project was managed for Wessex Archaeology by Mark Williams. All illustrations were prepared by Linda Coleman of Wessex Archaeology.

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**LAND AT BRITISH GYPSUM ROBERTSBRIDGE SITE, MOUNTFIELD,  
ROBERTSBRIDGE, EAST SUSSEX**

**Archaeological Watching Brief**

**1 INTRODUCTION**

**1.1 Project Background**

- 1.1.1 Wessex Archaeology was commissioned by URS Scott Wilson (hereafter 'the Client') to undertake an archaeological watching brief on groundworks at Land at British Gypsum Robertsbridge Site, Mountfield, Robertsbridge, East Sussex (hereafter 'the Site'), centred on National Grid Reference (NGR) 571977 119372 (**Figure 1**).
- 1.1.2 The watching brief was carried out in response to a planning requirement as part of redevelopment proposals. The redevelopment of the Site is to include the demolition of the existing buildings and the reinstatement of the Site to grassland.
- 1.1.3 The watching brief was undertaken in accordance with the *Specification for Archaeological Watching Brief* (URS Scott Wilson 2011), which was prepared in advance of the fieldwork. The Specification sets out the methodology that was followed in carrying out the watching brief and post excavation assessment. It was issued for approval to the County Archaeologist at East Sussex County Council (ESCC) prior to the commencement of fieldwork.
- 1.1.4 The watching brief comprised the monitoring of ground reduction across the Site, using a mechanical excavator under constant archaeological supervision. The fieldwork took place between the 28<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> November 2011, a duration of three days.

**1.2 Site location, topography and geology**

- 1.2.1 The British Gypsum Robertsbridge site is situated approximately 8km north of the town of Battle, to the west of the A2100, as shown on **Figure 1**. It extends to across approximately 26ha – comprising the closed Mountfield Mine, plasterboard manufacturing facility, gypsum and desulphogypsum (DSG) stockpiles, gypsum processing, two gypsum landfill sites and a redundant coated roadstone plant site on land previously leased to Ready Mixed Concrete (RMC).
- 1.2.2 The archaeological watching brief relates to part of the former RMC site – hereinafter referred to as 'the RMC Site'. The RMC Site comprises an area of despoiled land historically utilised to access the Mountfield Mine (gypsum) and more recently used for the production of coated roadstone.
- 1.2.3 The RMC Site lies in a landscape that slopes downwards from north to south and is terraced in three stages. The south terrace is a gradual slope to the

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south and is approximately 30m in width (north to south). The middle terrace is a level surface approximately 20m in width. The north terrace slopes gradually from the north boundary of the Site to the middle terrace. The remaining brick and concrete structures are sited on the concrete surface of the north terrace.

1.2.4 The RMC Site is bounded to the north by Limekiln Wood, to the north east by the wider Robertsbridge worksite, to the south and south east by Great Wood and to the west by Snep's Wood.

1.2.5 A concrete road surface runs along the south and west extents of the RMC Site.

## **2 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

2.1.1 Gypsum mining in Sussex can be traced back to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century when the Mountfield Mine first began operating in 1876 to extract gypsum used in production of plasterboard. During the 1890s, the workforce at the mine gradually rose from 15 to 27 workers employed underground and from 22 to 60 workers employed at the surface. This reflected the introduction of a processing plant at the mine, whose main market was plaster for building purposes. Output of gypsum during the period increased from 6,000 to 18,000 tons per annum but the value only increased from £3,000 to £6,000. Perhaps for these reasons the original company was wound up in 1903. After a 'short stoppage' of production in 1906-7, during which working methods were thoroughly overhauled, mining resumed on a larger (and presumably more profitable) scale.

2.1.2 Production increased again immediately after the Second World War and the winding shaft was replaced by a sloping adit with an electrically operated railway system. The mine closed in 1993. Following the closure of the mine the land was used for the production of coated roadstone.

## **3 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES**

3.1.1 With due regard to the Institute for Archaeologists (IfA) *Standard and Guidance for an Archaeological Watching Brief*, the generic aims of a watching brief were:

- To allow, within the resources available, the preservation by record of archaeological deposits, the presence and nature of which could not be established (or established with sufficient accuracy) in advance of development or other potentially disruptive works (IfA 2008, 2)
- To provide information concerning the presence or absence, date, nature and extent of any buried archaeological remains;
- To investigate and record all archaeological features revealed within the area of the ground works; and

- 
- To inform and provide information for any future mitigation that may be required.

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## 4 METHODOLOGY

### 4.1 Introduction

4.1.1 The watching brief was conducted in accordance with the methodology set out in the *Specification for Archaeological; Watching Brief* (URS Scott Wilson) which followed the requirements of a brief for the work issued by the County Archaeologist at ESCC and carried out in compliance with the standards outlined in the *IfAs Standard and Guidance for an archaeological watching brief* (IfA 2008).

### 4.2 Fieldwork

4.2.1 A 21 tonne mechanical excavator, equipped with a 1.8m wide toothless bucket, was employed to excavate existing concrete slabs and the underlying foundations across the extent of the RMC Site. The groundworks were undertaken in four distinct areas as described below and illustrated on **Figure 2**:

- A **Northern Terrace**. Following assessment of the ongoing results and approval from the County Archaeologist it was agreed that this area did not require monitoring.
- A **Middle Terrace** was located within the central extent of the RMC Site
- The **Southern Terrace** was located within the southern extent of the RMC Site; and
- A **Test Pit** excavated in the south west corner of the south terrace in order to locate one of the mine shafts.

### 4.3 Recording

4.3.1 All recording was undertaken using Wessex Archaeology's pro forma recording system.

4.3.2 Photographs were taken as appropriate, providing a record of the excavations to illustrate their location and context, and images of the RMC Site overall. The photographic record comprises digital photographs only. A photographic register of all photographs taken is contained within the project archive.

### 4.4 Health and Safety

4.4.1 All work was carried out in accordance with the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974, the Management of Health and Safety Regulations 1992 and Health and Safety in Field Archaeology 1997, as well as all other relevant Health and Safety legislation, regulations and codes of practice in force at the time.

4.4.2 A Health and Safety Risk Assessment was produced by Wessex Archaeology (2011), which was read and understood by all staff that attended the RMC Site.

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## 5 FIELDWORK RESULTS

### 5.1 Introduction

- 5.1.1 This section presents the results of the archaeological watching brief. Detailed descriptions of the contexts recorded are included in **Appendix 1**. **Figure 2** presents the RMC Site and the location of all groundworks.

### 5.2 Stratigraphic Sequence

- 5.2.1 A common stratigraphic deposit model was recognised across the Site comprising modern made ground.

### 5.3 Archaeological Results

#### *Middle Terrace*

- 5.3.1 The stratigraphic sequence within the **Middle Terrace** consisted of a thin layer of very compact chalk, gypsum and crushed brick (**108**) overlying a concrete and brick laid structural surface (**109**), recorded as soils profile **SP1**.

- 5.3.2 The concrete and brick surface was visible in parts of the elevation between the middle and south terrace. Upon excavation it became apparent that a modern concrete and brick surface covered the entire middle terrace and had removed earlier remains if they had been present. Due to the removal of the exceptionally compact layer (**108**), it was impossible to determine whether (**109**) was an unbroken floor or several adjoining structures. The surface followed a regular pattern of bricks laid in various bond types and patterns broken every 1.5 metres by a 0.5m wide concrete ridge on a north – south axis.

- 5.3.3 No other archaeological features, deposits or artefacts were recorded within this area.

#### *Southern Terrace*

- 5.3.4 The stratigraphic sequence recorded within the **Southern Terrace** comprised four distinct types of made ground. Layer (**101**), a layer of compact mid brownish orange clay directly overlay (**102**), a light grey yellow sand. Below this (**103**) consisted of demolition rubble comprising crushed modern bricks and crushed concrete overlying natural light grey sand (**104**). The location of the recorded soils profile is shown as **SP2** on **Figure 2**.

- 5.3.5 No archaeological features, deposits or artefacts were recorded within this area.

#### *Test Pit*

- 5.3.6 Excavations associated with a **Test Pit** dug to locate a mine shaft revealed redeposited clay (**101**) to a depth of approximately 3m overlying a tarmac surface approximately 0.2m thick (**105**), which in turn covered a concrete slab (**106**) 0.05m thick. Below the concrete slab crushed light grey stone (**107**) measured 0.5m in depth and an overall depth of approximately 3.8m below the existing ground level (**SP3**). The concrete road surface to the south of the site could be seen to continue north beneath (**107**).

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5.3.7 No archaeological features or deposits were recorded within this area.

## **6 ARTEFACTS**

6.1.1 No artefactual evidence was recovered from the excavated spoil or from exposed surfaces upon excavation.

## **7 ENVIRONMENTAL**

7.1.1 No features or deposits suitable for environmental sampling were identified during the archaeological watching brief.

## **8 CONCLUSIONS**

8.1.1 The archaeological monitoring and recording carried out at the RMC Site revealed that the Site comprised made ground to a depth of at least 0.6m across the Site, which was the limit of excavation of the watching brief. The excavation of a test pit in the south of the site showed 3m of made ground. It is impossible to say if this is localised or representative of the Site as a whole.

8.1.2 The watching brief has demonstrated that the redevelopment works will not impact on potential archaeological deposits. It is possible that archaeological deposits are preserved elsewhere on the Site or at deeper levels but these will be preserved in situ.

## **9 ARCHIVE**

### **9.1 Preparation and Deposition**

9.1.1 The complete project archive will be prepared in accordance with Wessex Archaeology's *Guidelines for Archive Preparation* and in accordance with *Guidelines for the Preparation of Excavation Archives for Long-Term Storage* (Walker 1990) and following nationally recommended guidelines (SMA 1995). On completion of the project, the archive will be deposited with the County Museum Service or similar repository to be agreed with the County Archaeologist for East Sussex County Council.

### **9.2 The Archive**

9.2.1 Following the fieldwork the archive were subsequently transported to Wessex Archaeology's Rochester office. The documentary records from the works have been compiled into a stable fully cross-referenced and indexed archive in accordance with Appendix 6 of *Management of Archaeological Projects* (English Heritage 1991).

9.2.2 The contents of the project archive, comprises an A4 ring-bound file containing the following (as further detailed in **Appendix 1**):

- 4 Trench Record Sheets
- 2 Photographic Records (62 digital images)

- 
- Day Book (6 sheets)
  - A copy of the WSI

9.2.3 The project archive including plans, photographs and written records are currently held at Wessex Archaeology's Rochester office under the code **84000**. The project archive will be deposited with an appropriate local museum in the East Sussex area. As no artefactual evidence was recovered no agreement from the landowner is required in relation to the deposition of the archive.

### **9.3 Copyright**

9.3.1 The full copyright of the written/illustrative archive relating to the RMC Site will be retained by Wessex Archaeology Ltd under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 with all rights reserved. The recipient museum, however, will be granted an exclusive license for the use of the archive for educational purposes, including academic research, providing that such use shall be non-profit making, and conforms to the Copyright and Related Rights regulations 2003.

### **9.4 Security Copy**

9.4.1 In line with current best practice, on completion of the project a security copy of the paper records will be prepared, in the form of microfilm. The master jackets and one diazo copy of the microfilm will be submitted to the National Monuments Record Centre (NMR) (English Heritage) in Swindon; a second diazo copy will be deposited with the paper records at the appropriate local museum, and a third diazo copy will be retained by Wessex Archaeology.

## **10 REFERENCES**

British Geological Survey 2011 *Geological map data*. [Online] Available at: <http://www.bgs.ac.uk/GeolIndex/>

English Heritage 1991 *Management of Archaeological Projects*. London, English Heritage

Institute for Archaeologists 2008 *Standard and Guidance for an Archaeological Watching Briefs*

SMA 1995 *Towards an Accessible Archaeological Archive*. Society of Museum Archaeologists

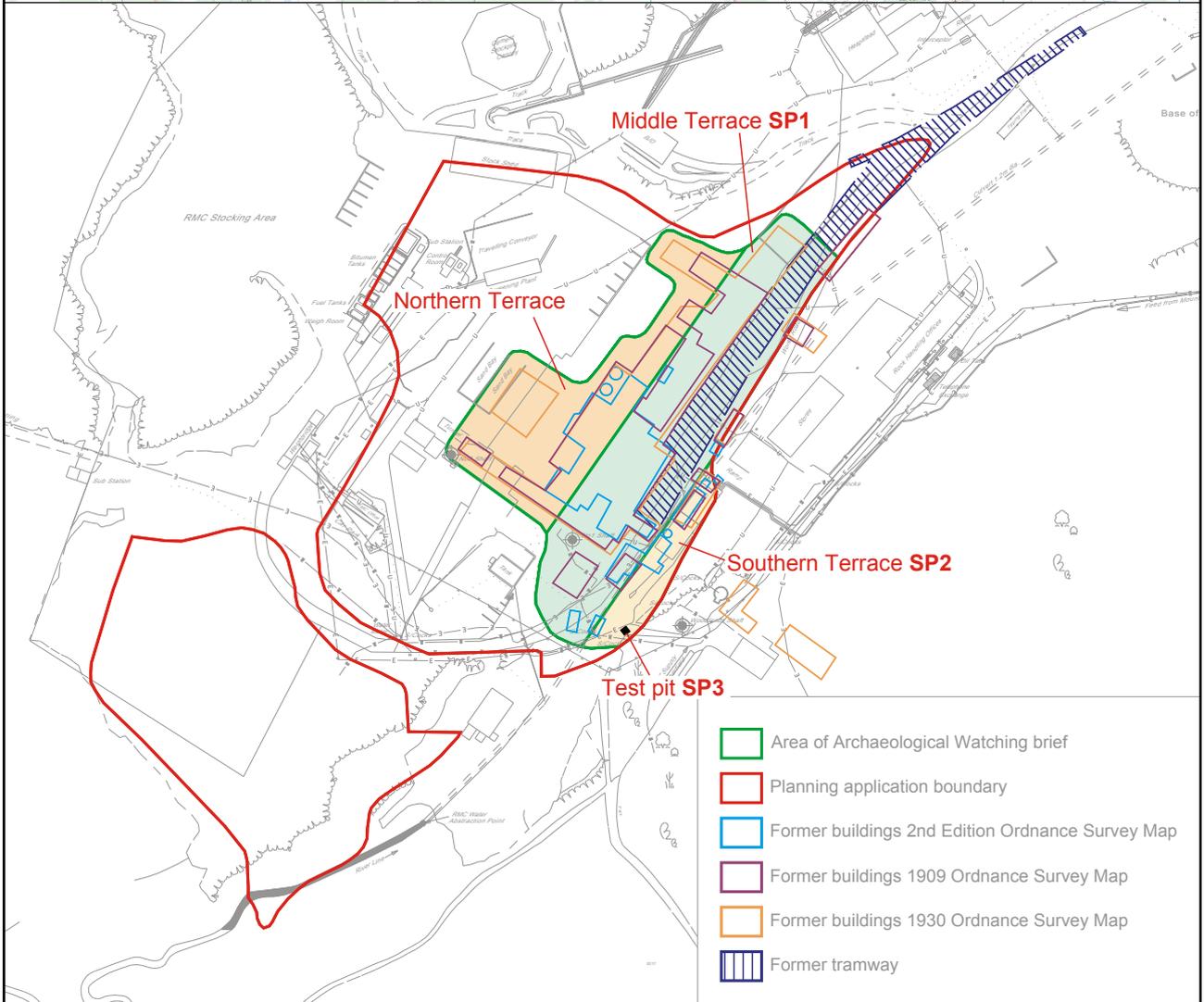
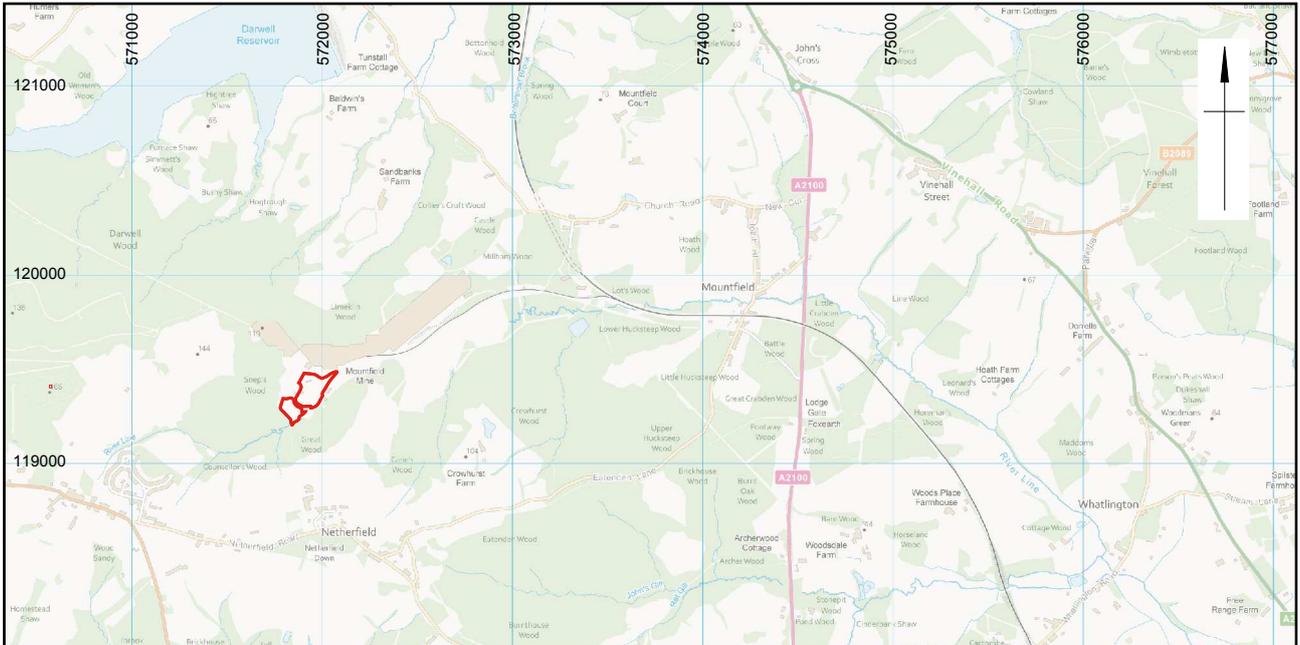
URS Scott Wilson 2011 British Gypsum Robertsbridge Site, Mountfield, Robertsbridge, East Sussex: Specification for Archaeological Watching Brief

Walker K. 1990 *Guidelines for the Preparation of Excavation Archives for Long-Term Storage*. UKIC Archaeology Section

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## APPENDIX 1: CONTEXT SUMMARY TABLE

| Context | Dimensions:                                      |                                      |               |
|---------|--|--------------------------------------|---------------|
|         | Coordinates:                                     |                                      |               |
| Context | Description                                      | Interpretation/Process of deposition | Thickness (m) |
| 101     | Compact mid brown orange clay.                   | Made Ground                          | c.3.0m        |
| 102     | Light yellow grey sand                           | Made Ground                          | -             |
| 103     | Crushed fragments of modern brick hardcore       | Made Ground                          | -             |
| 104     | Light grey fine sand                             | Natural (reduced)                    | -             |
| 105     | Tarmac   | Former Surface                       | 0.20m         |
| 106     | Concrete   | Former Surface                       | 0.05m         |
| 107     | Light grey reject stone (Type II)                | Formation                            | 0.5m          |
| 108     | Compact chalk, gypsum and crushed brick hardcore | Made Ground                          | -             |
| 109     | Concrete and bricks                              | Former Surface                       | -             |



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Site location plan

Figure 1



Plate 1: Middle Terrace (**SP1**) during removal of the overburden, facing northeast



Plate 2: Southern Terrace (**SP2**) during removal of the overburden, facing northeast

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Plate 3: Soils Profile (SP3) within the Test Pit facing southeast



Plate 4: Brick Surface (109)

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