Land at Chittoe Heath, Wiltshire

An Archaeological Watching Brief

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Avon Archaeology Limited

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Abstract

Groundworks undertaken as part of an application to construct new equestrian stables and facilities on land at Chittoe Heath were subject to archaeological monitoring (watching brief).

The works involved the reduction of a c465 square metre area, representing about two thirds of the total area flagged for ground reduction in the planning application, which also included a new driveway. The developer decided not to pursue the driveway at this stage.

The ground was reduced by between 0.3 and 0.5m across the area. No archaeological features or deposits were encountered.

CONTENTS

1. Introduction
2. Methodology
3. Site Location, Geology and Topography
4. Archaeological and Historical Background
5. Results
6. Discussion & Conclusions
7. References

Figures

Figure 1: Site Location Map

Figure 2: Site Boundary Plan

Figure 3: Site Boundary with Monitored Groundworks and Incomplete Groundworks

Plates

Plate 1. Looking north-east during ground reduction at the southern end of the site

Plate 2. Looking south during ground reduction

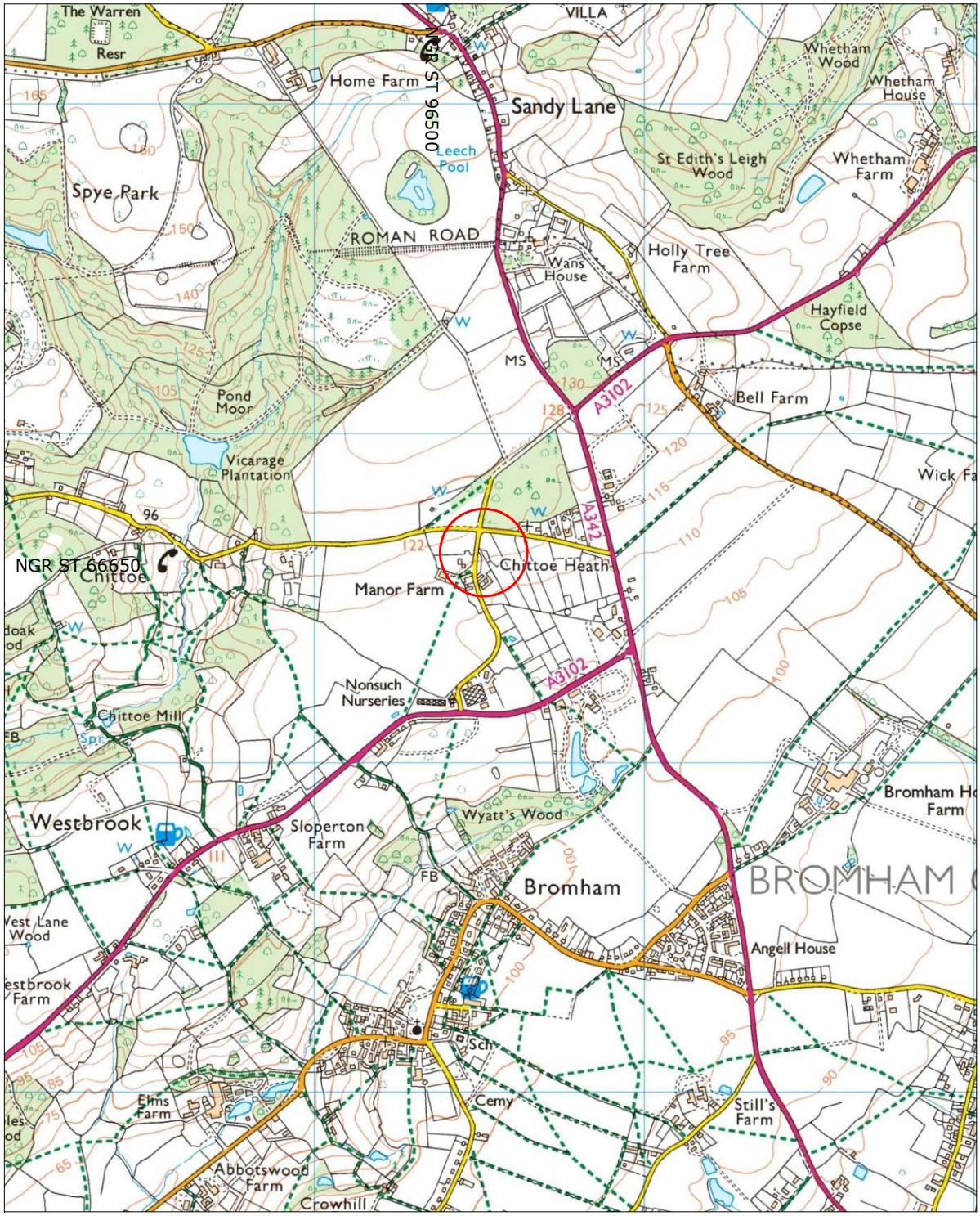
Plate 3. Looking south-east during ground reduction

Plate 4. Looking south at excavations along the eastern edge of the site

Plate 5. Looking south at the site after ground reduction

Figure 1

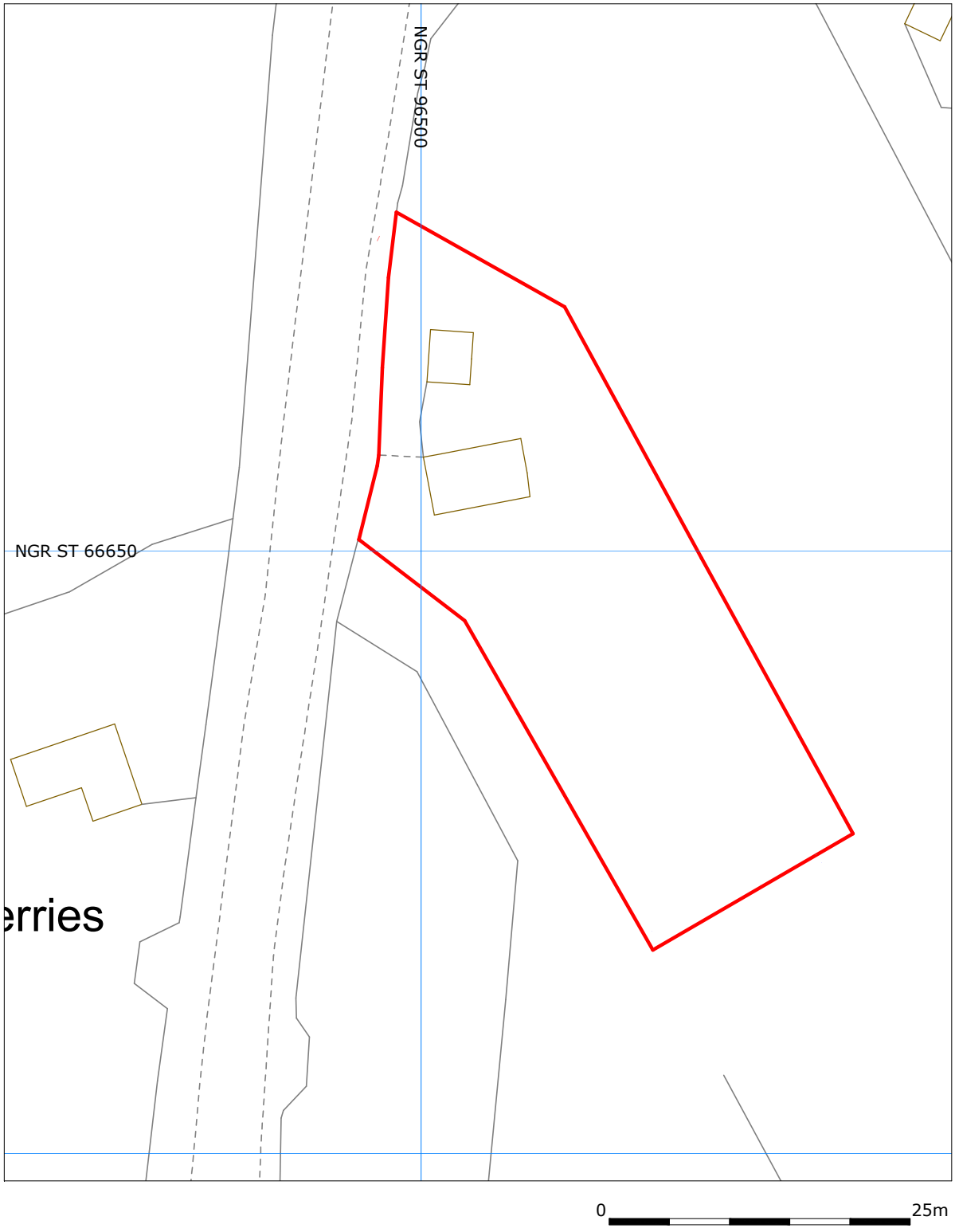
Site Location Map



Not to scale

Figure 2

Site Boundary Plan



1 Introduction

1.1 Avon Archaeology Ltd were appointed by Mr P Holliday to maintain archaeological monitoring (watching brief) during groundworks at Chittoe Heath, Bromham, Chippenham, Wiltshire (centred on NGR ST 96508 66665).

1.2 The work formed a condition of planning attached to an application to construct new stables and associated facilities on the site (application ref: PL/2023/04781).

1.3 The work was conducted in accordance with a written scheme of investigation prepared by Heritage Planning Services (IPS 2023) and the relevant guidelines for archaeological evaluation as issued by the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists, and most recently updated in December 2023 (*Universal guidance for archaeological monitoring and recording* - CIfA 2023).

1.6 An entry detailing the project has been lodged with the OASIS online archaeological database under the reference avonarch2-520729. Similarly an entry for the project will be made within the Wiltshire Historic Environment Record (pending). The project archive will be given to the care of Devizes Museum under the accession number DZSWS: 55-2023.

2 Methodology

2.1 The methodology for the evaluation, including the planning context and requirements, was set out in the Written Scheme of Investigation (IPS 2023), which was approved by Wiltshire County Council prior to commencement of fieldwork.

2.2 The objective of the watching brief was to monitor all intrusive groundworks for the presence of buried archaeology. The WSI, and county archaeologist,

noted the potential for buried agricultural features of Iron Age to Roman origin.

2.3 All groundworks were undertaken using a toothless grading bucket. The excavation methodology was not ideal from an archaeological perspective, as the area was machined in strips with excavated spoil thrown immediately back over the reduced area. Although this did not preclude examination of all newly cut ground, it meant that only small pockets were exposed at any given time (prior to later bunding of spoil). In the event this was not an issue as no archaeological features were observed.

2.4 A photographic record of the groundworks, using metric scales, was maintained. No features were recorded but details of the stratigraphic sequence encountered were recorded on pro-former context sheets. Depths and the extents of the excavations were recorded using a Topcon Hiper SR survey grade GPS rover.

3 Site Location, Geology and Topography

3.1 The site is located 30m south of Chittoe Heath Crossroads on agricultural land to the north of Manor Farm. It is bounded by agricultural land to the north, east and south, and to the west by the north-south section of the road that is Chittoe Heath.

3.2 The BGS online GeoIndex records the underlying bedrock geology of the site as Lower Greensand Group. Described as: "*mainly sands and sandstones (varying from well-sorted fine-grained to poorly sorted medium- to coarse-grained) with silts and clays in some intervals"*

4 Archaeological and Historical Background

4.1 The site lies within an area of suspected Iron Age – Roman activity. Aerial photographs show cropmarks on the land between Manor Farm and Wyatts Farm, which have been interpreted as reflecting Iron Age/Roman field systems and a possible trackway (Monument UID MWI4729). The cropmarks in question extend to within the southern extents of the field within which the site is contained.

4.2 A possible Roman Villa site is located only 180m northeast of the site at Chittoe Plantation, where Roman glass beads and ceramics have also been recorded (Monument UID MWI464 & MWI4609).

4.3 Slightly further away, *c*320m northwest of the site, there is a rectangular enclosure dated simply as 'late prehistoric' (Monument UID MWI4730).

4.4 There is no evidence to suggest that the site was occupied during the medieval period. The first recorded reference to Chittoe comes from the *Pipe Rolls* of 1167 (Gover, Mawer and Stenton 1939, 252). The *Victoria County History* for the area says that, in the medieval period, Chittoe was a detached part of the parish of Bishop's Cannings.

4.5 There is no evidence to suggest that the site has been developed in the post-medieval period, having remained essentially open agricultural land.

5 Results

5.1 Approximately 465 square metres of ground was reduced by between 0.3 and 0.5m (**Figure 3**). The excavations revealed a consistent depositional sequence comprising approximately 0.25m of fine grained mid-brown topsoil (100), sealing approximately 0.2m of slightly more compact, but very similar, mid-brown silty subsoil (101). Below the subsoil the excavations terminated at, roughly, the horizon of a deposit of mid yellow-

brown silty sand containing frequent, and seemingly evenly distributed, limestone chunks and occasional root disturbance (102).

5.2 No finds or features were recorded within the reduced area. The complete absence of anthropogenic material indicates that there has not been substantial human activity within the development site prior to the modern period. It cannot, however, be ruled out that archaeological deposits may exist at greater depths. Deposit (102) may reflect the weathered surface of the natural sand substrate, but excavation to greater depths would be needed to confirm this.

6 Discussion and Conclusions

6.1 The watching brief found no evidence of buried archaeological features or deposits and it is concluded that the development footprint does not impact upon any buried archaeology. It should be noted that an area of the site scheduled for ground reduction was not excavated (see **Figure 3**). Should the developer decide in future to excavate this area, the local authority archaeologist has said that that work would also need to be subjected to archaeological monitoring.

7 References

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Figure 3

Site Boundary with Monitored Groundworks and Incomplete Groundworks



Incomplete Groundworks

Monitored Groundworks

Site Boundary

0 25m

Plates



Plate 1. Looking north-east during ground reduction at the southern end of the site.



Plate 2. Looking south during ground reduction.



Plate 3. Looking south-east during ground reduction.



Plate 4. Looking south at excavations along the eastern edge of the site.



Plate 5. Looking south at the site after ground reduction