

**1A STRINGERS LANE,
ASTON,
HERTFORDSHIRE**



**WRITTEN SCHEME OF INVESTIGATION FOR
ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION**

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This document sets out details of the Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) for an archaeological evaluation at 1A Stringers Lane, Aston, Hertfordshire (NGR: TL 27527 22660) (Appendix 1-2) in accordance with the *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Evaluation* issued by the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists 2021, as well as discussions with Alison Tinniswood, Senior Historic Environment Officer at Hertfordshire County Council. The WSI also complies with the principles of the NPPF (National Planning Policy Framework 2021).
- 1.2 Independent Archaeology Consultants is an archaeological consultancy company based in Peterborough, Cambridgeshire. The company subscribes to the *Code of Conduct, the Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Evaluation* (CIfA 2021). All relevant CIfA Codes of Practice will be adhered to throughout the course of the project.

2 PROJECT BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Planning Permission has been granted (3/22/2639/FUL) for a new development at 1A Stringers Lane, Aston, Hertfordshire. The proposed development entails the erection of a new detached dwelling with garage. The proposed development site is located in the central parts of the village of Aston and is currently undeveloped.
- 2.2 The site encloses an area of some 2000m² at an average height of ca. 90m AOD. The geology of the site consists of Lowestoft Formation-Diamicton over Lewes Nodular Chalk Formations and Seaford Chalk Formations (British Geological Survey 2021).
- 2.3 The proposed development site is located within the village of Aston, a village known for its many old houses. The site is therefore located within an area of high archaeological potential, as defined by Hertfordshire County Council HER. An archaeological evaluation is therefore required prior to any construction within the site. This condition is mentioned in the planning permission for the site and is in line with standards described in the NPPF 2021.
- 2.4 The evaluation forms the first stage of an archaeological assessment of the site, and further stages may be required should significant remains be encountered.

- 2.5 If heritage assets of archaeological interest are identified during the evaluation the implementation of a programme of archaeological investigation shall be secured in accordance with a separate WSI, which must be submitted to and approved by the LPA.

3 HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

Monuments

- 3.1 There is in total about 50 entries in the local HER-archive for Aston, which consists of the village of Aston and parts of the surrounding landscape. A number of archaeological investigations have also been carried out in the area in recent years. The village of Aston has a rich cultural inheritance, with several 16th, 17th and 18th century buildings (MHT2653).
- 3.2 The house at Aston Park Farm (now No. 2 Stringers Lane) is a two-storey timber-framed hall and cross wing house, but the hall range dates to the 17th century while the cross wing on its east side is older (16th century). The cross wing is the parlour end; at the west end of the hall is a narrow chimney bay. The ground floor of the hall is cased in red brick. In the early 19th century a new parallel front range was added in yellow brick, with a slate roof. This frontage is three bays wide with central front door within a gabled porch with cusped bargeboard and corner buttresses of Hitch bricks; above are two gables with similar bargeboards. Canted bay windows flank the porch, and the other windows in this frontage have cast iron frames with Gothic pointed heads. The west wing, in painted brick and set back, was added c.1900. 'Unauthorised extensions and alterations' at the house were reported in 2012. The farm buildings include an 18th century timber-framed and weatherboarded barn, with adjoining earlier stable; these are now commercial premises in separate ownership (No. 4-6 Stringers Lane). With them (but west of the house) is an early 19th century granary, a small square timber-framed and weatherboarded structure with a pyramidal slate roof and a boarded door in the middle of the east side. This appears to have been enlarged since the Listing description was written. The farm is shown on the 1881 OS map as Aston Park, near the junction in the village centre with a garden between the house and the main street. The farm buildings lined a divided yard east and south of the house; a large barn stood between the house and Stringers Lane. By 1898 the only change was the addition of small lean-to buildings on the south side of the south range; the complex was then labelled Aston Park Farm. With the division of the property in the 20th century the farm buildings were demolished apart from the south range (MHT17705).

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- 3.3 No. 43-45 Benington Road is a timber-framed house on a painted brick sill, with two storeys and attic. The building is probably from the mid- to late 16th century. Upstairs is a room with painted designs on all four walls, dating to the 1600s; 'the survival of an entire room of decoration of this date is unusual' (MHT15747).
- 3.4 A 'Smithy' is marked on the later 19th century OS maps, projecting northwards into the roadway adjacent to the Boot public house. The smithy is an 18th century timber-framed and weatherboarded building, with a single-storey and L plan, with the red brickwork of the hearth visible in the front (west) wall and a short chimney above. To the south, the blacksmith's house is a two-storey building, two-cell cottage built in the early to mid 19th century, with a near-symmetrical front, gable chimneys at each end, and stairs at the rear. The property, which has a garden in front facing the road junction, is now used as offices (MHT17707).
- 3.5 The Boot Public House, New Park Lane is a 17th century timber-framed house, and has been used as a public house from at least the later 19th century. Listed as the Pig & Whistle, the pub is now in commercial use; it is shown on later 19th and earlier 20th century OS-maps as The Boot. It was built in the later 17th century as a two-storey, two-cell house, timber-framed and partly weatherboarded with single-storey parts at each end. It faces directly onto the street at the north end; on its south side is the yard, open to Benington Road. It was still a pub in the 1970s, when it was shown on the OS map as the Pig & Whistle. Lean-to extensions on the south side date to this period (MHT17708).
- 3.6 The Rose & Crown is a two-storey, three-cell, central chimney plan house facing south onto the main street. It is timber-framed on a low plinth, largely roughcast but weatherboarded at each end. Most of the house dates to the 17th century, but the east end is 16th century. Inside is a good deal of exposed heavy timber framing. At the west end is a single-storey weatherboarded stable; a red brick extension has been added at the east end and to the rear. The building was renovated by the brewery owners c.1950. The house, set back from the street, was already the Rose & Crown on later 19th century OS maps. The 1881 map shows that the stable had not yet been built; standing parallel but 10m behind the house was a large barn, 22m long, with a porch, and a well between the barn and the house. Smaller outbuildings stood at the western boundary, running back from the street. By 1898 the stable had been added at the west end of the house, and the barn much reduced to an L plan building. Since then the outbuildings on the west side of the yard have been demolished but the reduced barn survives. This is timber-framed and weatherboarded on a

brick sill, and consists of a tall single bay with a lower structure against its west side, both dating to the 17th century. In the 19th century this lower part had been extended to the rear and reroofed in line with the barn (MHT17706).

- 3.7 Aston House was part of a 17th century estate and the house may also have dated from that period. Formerly called Aston Place, its history is obscure, but the house appears to have been built by Samuel Reeve, citizen and grocer of London, when he bought the estate in 1665; 'an Oldfield drawing shows a late 17C house considerably altered in the 18C. It had an unusual arrangement of chimney-stacks flanking the front entrance, apparently for corner fireplaces'. In the 18th century the house was let to tenants. In the 19th century a two-storey flat-roofed extension was added to the right of the porch and a bay window to the left. During the Second World War it was used by the Special Operations Executive as a covert research station (Station XII) for experimental weapons and other devices. Officially a Signals Development Branch of the War Office, it carried out research, development and production until 1941, when it became solely a production centre after 'R & D' was moved to Station IX, at Welwyn. After the War it 'became the base for Stevenage Development Corporation', but was demolished when the Corporation moved out (MHT10246).
- 3.8 The Church of St Mary the Virgin in Broadwater Lane has a nave and chancel from ca 1230. The west tower is late 14th or early 15th century and low-pitched timber roof and new windows late 15th century. Restoration and the north aisle was built in 1850; general restoration and the north vestry and south porch were rebuilt in 1883. The Incorporated Church Building Society archives have plans for the north aisle and vestry are dated 1851-2; until this date the church consisted only of the chancel and nave with south porch and western tower. Close inspection and recording of the east face of the tower in 2004 indicated that although there are repairs, vertical stones in the tower do not represent an earlier phase. The scar of an earlier roof line shows that the tower was built, probably in the 15th century, against an existing nave which was then re-roofed or rebuilt; it is this 15th century roof which survives (MHT4352).
- 3.9 A site with a number of post-medieval farm buildings are located in Aston Dene. A large barn with a wagon porch, presumably timber-framed, is shown beside Dene Lane on the 1840 tithe map. This formed the west side of a farmstead with another range along the north side, and scattered smaller buildings west of a farmhouse. The 1881 OS map names this house The

Rectory, and shows details of the grounds. By 1881 the farm buildings had been demolished and gardens laid out. The 1898 map renames the house Aston Dene, so it was presumably no longer the rectory. Several outbuildings NE of the house survive, as does the pond shown on the tithe map (MHT31221).

- 3.10 Iron Age pottery and animal bones were found in the school sandpit, presumably during its excavation. The original NGR for this location was imprecise, but not far south of the Victorian school in Aston End Road. This has been replaced by a new school north of School Lane, further away (MHT476).
- 3.11 A site of a former school is located in Aston Road. A 'School (Boys & Girls)' is shown here on the 1881 OS-map, facing Aston End Road and well away from the village centre. By 1898 a Parish Room had been added on the south side. These are still shown on the 1923 map but by 1970 the school had been superseded by a new school north of what is now School Lane, and the old site covered with housing (MHT13631).
- 3.12 A site of a former mill is also located in Aston. This was probably a smock mill, described in an auction notice of 23 July 1864 as a tower windmill on a brick octagonal base, c.5.4m in diameter with 3 floors, 2 pairs of stones. Now demolished, not visible at ground level. It does not appear on the 1881 OS map, although there was still a house named Millhouse, presumably where the miller lived. The property is still called Millhouse, but has been rebuilt in a different position at some time in the 20th century. The mill itself is shown on the 1840 tithe map, a circular structure within a rectangular plot west of both the miller's house and outbuildings shown on the 1881 map. These were all within a much larger rectangular plot which in 1840 was still surrounded by strip fields (MHT5981).
- 3.13 A findspot with a Roman coin has been found near Millhouse in 1938 (MHT378).

- 3.14 A roughout for a neolithic handaxe found in Aston in 1971 (MHT375).
- 3.15 Two distinct foci of cropmarks, with many associated small features, have been identified in a field north of Benington Road, which contains other known ring ditches, linear ditches and pits. The 1881 OS map depicts an 'Old Chalk Pit' beside some of these features. This pit also shows slightly as a cropmark (MHT17108).
- 3.16 Further cropmarks of a small circular single-ditched enclosure; The enclosure seems to have a diameter of approximately 12m, no entrance and no internal features. Other ring ditches are known from the immediate vicinity [2304, 2879, 2899, 2970, 4025, 4422, 4431], but often interpreted as a plough-raised barrow (MHT2501).
- 3.17 A middle Acheulian flint handaxe, a flake, and a possible broken axe has been found in Aston, but the exact findspot within Aston parish is unknown (MHT472).
- 3.18 A twelve-sided object, each side pierced with a hole of a different diameter and each edge fitted with a pair of spherical feet has been found in Astor. It is very small, only 4.4cm in diameter, and now incomplete. Made of copper alloy, in 1878 it was compared with another from near Goodrich Castle in south Wales. It came from somewhere within Aston parish; the given NGR is arbitrary, in approximately the centre of the parish. Perhaps this is a measuring gauge. The purpose of these small articles is much debated. They are Roman in date (2nd or 3rd centuries), and about a hundred examples are known, from Wales to Hungary. The greatest number come from Gallo-Roman sites, and some are made of stone, not copper alloy (MHT381).
- 3.19 Cropmarks of a linear ditch and others, possibly making up an enclosure, are known from the west side of the river Beane at Benington Road (MHT17107).

- 3.20 Another ring ditch is known as a cropmark from a small circular single-ditched enclosure with a diameter of approximately 11m. The feature appears to have no entrance and no visible internal features (MHT4432). Two other ring ditches are known nearby [4433, 4483].
- 3.21 Another ring ditch is known as a cropmark from a small circular single-ditched enclosure with a diameter of approximately 11m. The feature appears to have no entrance and no visible internal features (MHT4433). Two other ring ditches are known nearby [4432, 4483].

Events

- 3.22 An assessment of the east face of the tower of St Mary's Church in Aston in January 2004 in advance of restoration works (EHT1294).
- 3.23 A number of air photos were taken of the ring ditches in the fields outside Aston in 1969 (EHT2103), (EHT2104), (EHT2105) and (EHT2106). Further air photos of the ring ditches were taken in 1976 (EHT1859), (EHT2531) (EHT2533) and (EHT2534), and finally in 1995 (EHT2774).
- 3.24 An evaluation trench was opened up in the garden of Aston Park Farm, 2 Stringers Lane in February 2017, but revealed no archaeological finds, features or deposits. Topsoil overlay a thin layer of mortar and clay, above clayey silt subsoil and gravelly sand natural (EHT8269).

4 AIMS

- 4.1 The aims of the archaeological evaluation will be achieved through pursuit of the following specific objectives:
- Gain information about the heritage assets within the proposed development area;

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- Provide detailed information regarding the date, character, extent, integrity and degree of preservation of the identified heritage assets;
 - Inform a strategy for the recording, preservation and/or management of the identified assets;
 - Inform proposals for further archaeological investigations (namely, targeted area excavations and/or monitoring) within the ongoing programme of research;
 - Interpret the archaeology of the site within its local, regional, and national, archaeological context.
- 4.2 The evaluation will also consider the general investigative themes outlined by: Medlycott, M: *Research and Archaeology Revisited. A revised framework for the East of England* (2011) and the *East of England Regional Research Framework* (2021).
- 4.3 Specifically, the following investigative aims will be accommodated in the programme of archaeological work:

- *characterisation of the site in the broader landscape;
- *characterisation of the activities identified on the site;
- *characterisation of changes affecting land-use through time

5 METHODOLOGY

5.1 Trial Trenching

It is suggested that three 10m long and 2m wide machine cut trenches will be excavated under constant archaeological supervision using a flat bladed ditching bucket. The total length of trenching will in that case be 30m, totalling 60m², or ca 6% of the ca 1000m² large development area (Appendix 2). In addition, further trenching will be carried out as a contingency (to be discussed with the Council in advance), should significant discrete remains or clusters of features be encountered.

The suggested trench locations will provide a representative sample coverage. Revisions and amendments of the sampling methodologies and percentages may be required in consideration of further details and ongoing fieldwork results.

The location of the trenches will therefore be slightly flexible and take into consideration potential above- and below-ground constraints and/or hazards, such as trees, utility trenches, overhead cables and areas of modern disturbance.

The trenches will be excavated to the upper interface of secure archaeological deposits or, where these are not present, to the upper interface of natural deposits. Thereafter, cleaning and hand-excavation will be required to sample any features exposed. The field evaluation will not be carried out at the expenses of the heritage assets and will be minimally intrusive to archaeological remains.

5.2 Metal Detecting

Thorough metal detector sweeps of exposed features and spoil heaps will be carried out in advance of, and during, the excavation process. Deeply buried signals will be investigated only if agreed as part of the hand excavation programme.

5.3 Hand Excavation

All man-made features will be investigated. Apparently natural features (such as tree throws) will be sampled sufficiently to establish their origin and to characterise any related human activity. Hand excavation and feature sampling will be sufficient to establish the date and character, and to allow appropriate levels of recording.

Deposits and layers (including buried horizons of top- and subsoils) will be sampled sufficiently to enable a confident interpretation of their character, date and relationships with other features. Descreet exposed features will be subject to a minimum of 50% excavation. At least 15% (or a percentage sufficient to achieve information on the character, function and dating) of linear features will be hand excavated. All slots through linear features will be at least 1m wide. Particular attention will be given to terminals and intersections, to ascertain stratigraphic and physical relationships.

Structural remains (stake holes, post holes and gullies, as well as masonry foundations or low masonry walls and associated features like hearths) will be handcleaned and documented in plan/phase, as appropriate to the requirements of the evaluation. The evaluation will provide a representative sample of the site's archaeology at no significant cost to the value or integrity of archaeological remains therein. Judgement regarding the removal of human remains, structural remains (*in situ* wood or masonry), or other special remains or deposits, will be led by this consideration, and will always be made in consultation with the Archaeological Officer from Hertfordshire County Council. If removal of human remains is essential an exhumation licence will be requested from the Ministry of Justice.

Should exceptional remains be encountered the Archaeological Officer for Hertfordshire County Council will be notified, and a new brief may be issued in conjunction with the present one. Normal conditions will apply with regard to finds ownership and the Treasure Act of 1996. Any finds that could be considered treasure under the terms of the Act made during the process of fieldwork will immediately be reported to the Finds Liaison Officer.

5.4 Palaeoenvironmental Sampling

The site is located in an area of high archaeological potential and has, as such, good conditions for the preservation of faunal/plant remains and/or waterlogged timber in deeper deposits. For this reason viable baulk samples to characterise soil profiles, as well as plant remains/charred plant remains, molluscs, small faunal remains and pollen sequences, will be taken from a representative selection of suitable deposits in accordance with the evaluation aims.

Special care will be taken to understand the stratigraphy of the site: Where the investigated deposits created in dry or wet conditions, and what can this, in that case, tell us about the development and history of the site? Buried soils and deposits will be carefully studied in order to understand the processes behind their creations. Waterlogged timber will be kept wet to prevent cracking and shrinking, and to facilitate dating and analysis of the wood.

Should Prehistoric features of uncertain age be discovered, as a result of the archaeological evaluation, environmental samples can be used for extraction of material suitable for Carbon Dating. All samples will be extracted and recorded in accordance with *Environmental Archaeology: A Guide to the Theory and Practise of Methods, from sampling and recovery to post excavation* (English Heritage 2011), and in consultation with the appointed specialist and English Heritage. The appointed Plant Remains and Environmental Samples Expert Val Fryer will also be available to assist throughout the project.

5.5 Recording

A numbered single context-based recording system, written on suitable forms and indexed appropriately, will be used for all elements of the archaeological recording programme.

Measured plans will be produced that show all exposed features (including natural features, modern features, etc.) and excavated areas. Individual measured plans and sections in the scales 1:10, 1:20 and 1:50 will be produced for all excavated features and deposits. These will be accurately tied in to trench plans/trench location plans that in turn will be accurately related to the Ordnance Survey grid and to suitably mapped

local features (boundaries, buildings, roads, etc.). All sections and plans will be related accurately to Ordnance Datum.

A photographic record comprising monochrome and high-resolution digital photos will form part of the excavation record. Even blank trenches will be photographically recorded. A selection of digital photos will also be used in the final report (a maximum of two photos per A4 sheet). The photographic record will follow the CIfA standards.

5.6 In Situ Preservation

Should preservation *in situ* strategy be applicable, following appropriate excavation and recording, all exposed surfaces will be cleaned and prepared for re-burial beneath construction materials. If necessary, the laying out of geotextile and/or buffering materials will be carried out under archaeological supervision. All decisions regarding an *in situ* strategy will be coordinated with the Archaeological Officer from Hertfordshire County Council.

6 ASSESSMENT AND REVIEW

- 6.1 The archaeological investigation may be followed by an assessment of the character and significance of all categories of the recorded evidence. The assessment will be undertaken by suitably qualified specialists in accordance with MoRPHE (English Heritage 2015).
- 6.2 The assessment report will contain a thorough appraisal of the recorded evidence within its local, regional and national context.
- 6.3 Arrangements for the long term storage and deposition of all artefacts will be agreed with the landowner and the HER before or during reporting stage. Transfer of title and the transfer of the ownership of the archive to a local registered depository, will be arranged at this time and the arrangements indicated in the project report. The complete site archive will be deposited at the Stevenage Museum.

7 REPORT

- 7.1 Specific publication requirements will be agreed during the assessment review. Publication of a short report within a refereed local journal or national journals will be anticipated. Copies of the final report will be submitted to the

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Hertfordshire HER and the client. Copies may also be offered to Historic England or submitted to the general public on request.

- 7.2 The report will also include a context list, a list of all finds, specialist reports, archive contents and an interpretation of the archaeological features exposed and their context within the surrounding landscape, and their local and regional context. A HER-summary sheet will also be added towards the end of the report.
- 7.3 The report will also be supported by sufficient photos, maps, plans and sections to complement the text. Phase plans, artefact- and reconstruction drawings may also form part of the report.
- 7.4 The investigation report will be concluded within four weeks from the completion of the fieldworks.
- 7.5 An OASIS form will be completed once all field work has finished. A Data Collection Form will be include in the report as required.

8 ARCHIVE

- 8.1 It is a requirement of the HER that significant excavation archives pertaining to Hertfordshire should be held close to source and made readily available to the general public and local and national researchers. The site archive will therefore conform to the guidelines in *HERTFORDSHIRE ARCHAEOLOGICAL ARCHIVE STANDARDS (2018)*.
- 8.2 The complete site archive will be deposited at Stevenage Museum once all fieldwork has been completed. Until the site archive has been put together Independent Archaeology Consultants will keep the archive in a secure facility in Peterborough on behalf of the client.
- 8.3 If alternative arrangements for storage are agreed, the archive will be prepared to the requirements of MoRPHE (English Heritage 2015) and to the CifA *Standard and Guidance for the Creation, Compilation, Transfer and Deposition of Archaeological Archives* (CifA 2014), *Selection, Retention and Dispersal of Archaeological Collections* 1993 (Society of Museum Archaeologists, 1993), and *Standards in the Museum Care of Archaeological Collections* 1992 (Museums and Galleries Commission, 1992).

- 8.4 In either case, the requirement for conservation of significant items for long term storage and display will be anticipated. As a supplement to a paper archive, proposals for the creation of a digital archive will be submitted.

9 MISCELLANEOUS REQUIREMENTS AND CONSIDERATIONS

- 9.1 The Archaeological Officer for Hertfordshire County Council will be given notice of when work is due to commence. The Hertfordshire County Council Archaeological Officer will also monitor implementation of the programme of works on behalf of the Local Planning Authority and evaluate the work being undertaken on site according to the methodology detailed in this specification.
- 9.2 The Archaeological Officer for Hertfordshire County Council will also be responsible for considering any changes to the specification of works. Any such alterations will be agreed in writing with the relevant parties prior to commencement of on site works, or at the earliest available opportunity.

10 STAFF

- 10.1 The site team will consist of an experienced archaeologist, who may be supplemented by additional staff as required. It is expected that the evaluation will take up to 2 days to conclude. Additional days may be needed, should exceptional finds or features be uncovered as a result of the fieldworks. Finds processing and dating is expected to take up to 2 days and the writing up of the site report another 2 days. Archiving is expected to take 1 day at the end of the project.
- 10.2 The Site Manager will be Dr. Christer Karlsson who has 20 years of experience from directing archaeological sites. Dr. Karlsson has wide experience from performing, monitoring and managing archaeological fieldwork projects of different periods throughout Britain. He is the Director of Independent Archaeology Consultants and a member of the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists.
- 10.3 Specialists who are likely to advise and report on specific aspects of the project include Paul Blinkhorn (Saxon, Medieval and Post-Medieval pottery), Sarah Percival (Prehistoric pottery), Val Fryer (Plant Remains and Environmental Samples), Dr Tania Kausmally (Human and Animal Bones) and Dr Sonia O'Connor (Archaeological Conservation). Any other categories of specialist reports will be provided by Museum of London Specialist

Services. The conservation specialists will be notified prior to the start of the project, so a stand-by system is in place should waterlogged artefacts, or other sensitive archaeological material, be uncovered.

11 MONITORING

- 11.1 The Archaeological Officer for Hertfordshire County Council may visit the site as appropriate. Site visits can be planned in during all stages of the fieldworks.

12 HEALTH AND SAFETY

- 12.1 The fieldwork will be undertaken with regard to all relevant Health and Safety legislation, in accordance with the *Independent Archaeology Consultant's Health and Safety Manual* (2021). Independent Archaeology Consultants is a CSCS-accredited organisation and has, as such, the necessary skills and requirements to direct working sites in a safe and secure manner. A copy of the Risk Assessment for the site can be sent to the Archaeological Officer for Hertfordshire County Council on request.

13 INSURANCE

- 13.1 Independent Archaeology Consultants carries appropriate levels of Public Liability, Employers Liability Insurance and Professional Indemnity Insurance. Copies of the certificates are available on request.

14 TIMETABLE

- 14.1 The archaeological evaluation can be conducted by Independent Archaeology Consultants as soon as all necessary permissions have been obtained, the WSI has been approved by the Council and the client gives the field team access to the site. It is anticipated, however, that the evaluation can be carried out during the spring of 2023.

15 REFERENCES

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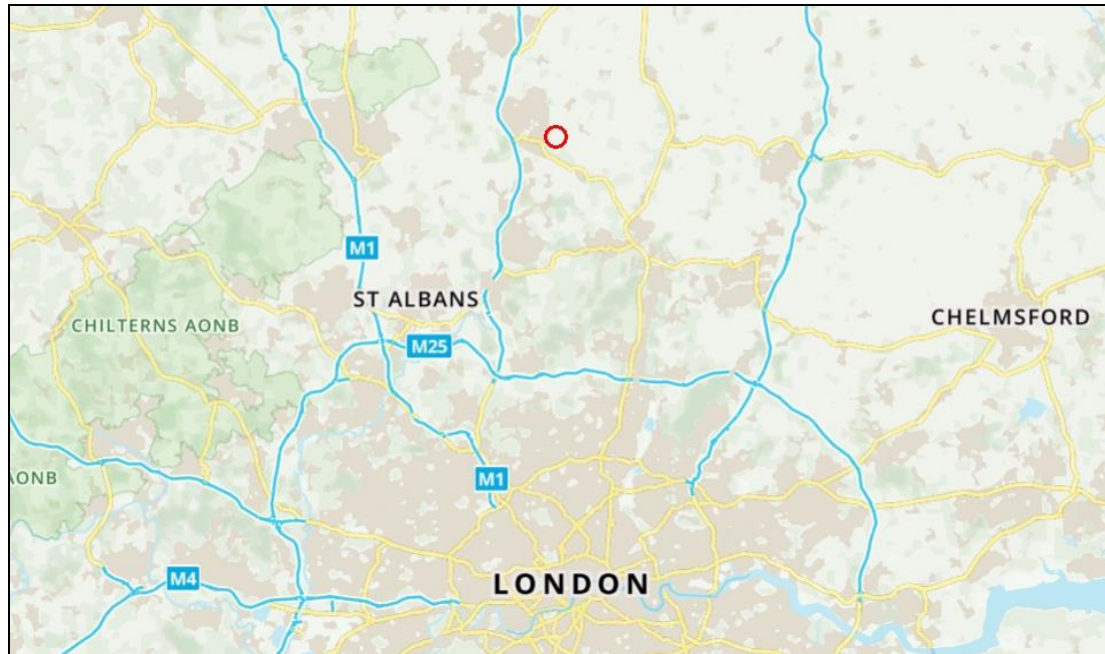
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APPENDIX 1. SITE LOCATION IN ENGLAND



APPENDIX 2. SITE LOCATION AND SUGGESTED TRENCH LOCATIONS

