



A419 Swindon Noise Barriers

Archaeological Watching Brief: Covingham and Kingsdown Trial Pits





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Watching Brief Report

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by

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Report reference: 58122.04

July 2009

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Summary

Wessex Archaeology was commissioned by WSP Civils (WSP) on behalf of the Highways Agency (HA) to monitor and record the excavation of 25 hand dug test pits excavated during a geotechnical investigation of two sites adjacent to the A419 at Swindon centred on NGR 416594, 188617 and NGR 419421, 185137 (Kingsdown and Covingham respectively).

Potential for archaeological deposits existed for both of these Sites with cropmarks in the area of the Covingham test pits and the Scheduled Ancient Monument of *Durocornovium* (Wanborough) next to the Covingham Site.

The southern half of the Covingham Site had been heavily landscaped during the construction of the A419 and adjacent housing development. At the northern half of the Covingham section, a widespread 'dark earth' deposit was noted, consistent with the findings of previous adjacent evaluation. In at least two test pits (TP 8 and 10), the 'dark earth' deposit sealed further Romano-British deposits, although, at least within TP 8, this underlying deposit contained a fragment of modern concrete. This would suggest either the presence of localised modern disturbance or that the 'dark earth' layer comprised redeposited material rather than representing an *in-situ* deposit, which would significantly reduce the archaeological significance of the findings in this area.

No archaeological deposits were observed at the Kingsdown Site. An outcrop of limestone was observed in the identified location of enclosure cropmarks, which may suggest an alternative explanation for the origin of the features.

The largely undisturbed 'dark earth' deposits noted in the northern part of the Covingham section are potentially related to the identified extent of known archaeological deposits associated with a Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM) of *Durocornovium* (Wanborough).

A419 SWINDON NOISE BARRIERS**Archaeological Watching Brief: Covingham and Kingsdown Trial Pits****Watching Brief Report****Acknowledgements**

This project was commissioned by WSP Civils (WSP) on behalf of the Highways Agency (HA) and the contractors WSP, through their consultant; Alan Thomas of Archaeology & Planning Solutions (APS). Wessex Archaeology is grateful to Alan Thomas (APS) and Russell Wheeler (WSP) in this regard. Wessex Archaeology would also like to thank Melanie Pomeroy-Kellinger, County Archaeological Officer for Wiltshire County Council, for her advice and help during the course of this project.

Wessex Archaeology would also like to extend their gratitude to the site staff, Iain Foster (Soil Structures) and Colin Chapman (WSP) for their help and assistance during the course of the fieldwork.

The project was managed by Andrew Manning on behalf of Wessex Archaeology. The fieldwork was undertaken by Jon Milward who also compiled this report. The finds assessment was undertaken by Rachael Seager Smith and illustrations were prepared by Linda Coleman.

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Watching Brief Report

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Project Background

1.1.1 Wessex Archaeology (WA) undertook an archaeological watching brief, commissioned by WSP Civils (WSP) on behalf of the Highways Agency (HA). The watching brief observed the excavation of 25 test pits dug for a geotechnical investigation along the proposed route of two noise barriers on the edge of the northbound carriageway of the A419, Swindon (Covingham centred on National Grid Reference (NGR) 419277,185322 and Kingsdown centered on NGR 416789,188534)(**Figure 1**).

1.1.2 The proposed noise barriers are located within/adjacent to areas identified by previous work to be of significant archaeological potential. The watching brief was requested by the Wiltshire County Archaeology Service (WCAS) to ascertain the presence or absence of archaeological features or deposits and to inform the nature and scope of any subsequent mitigation.

1.1.3 The watching brief was undertaken between 30th June and 7th July 2009.

1.2 The Site, Location and Geology

1.2.1 The two sections investigated during this project were 3km apart at Kingsdown and Covingham. The Kingsdown section lies between 111-118m above Ordnance Datum (aOD) and the Covingham section between 92- 96m aOD.

1.2.2 The underlying geology is Upper Corallian limestone at Kingsdown and Kimmeridge Clay at Covingham (BGS sheet 252).

1.3 Archaeological and Historical Background

1.3.1 The trial pits along the Covingham section lie immediately to the west of the Scheduled Monument of *Durocornovium* (Wanborough), a Romano-British roadside settlement (Monument No. SW888). *Durocornovium* was situated on Ermin Street, one of the main arterial Roman roads of Britain established during the 1st century AD, the line of which is in part followed by the modern A419.

1.3.2 Between 1967-1976 as part of the Commonhead Road Improvement Scheme and the creation of a flood lagoon, a series of excavations and salvage works was conducted in Covingham. The results of these excavations, which were not all fully published, are synthesised by Anderson *et al* (2001). As part of the archaeological investigations an aerial survey of surrounding undeveloped land was carried out (Phillips and Walters 1977) and archaeological evaluation was carried out by Oxford Archaeology (formerly Oxford Archaeological Unit) in 1986.

- 1.3.3 A Desk-Based Assessment (DBA) carried out by Wessex Archaeology (WA 2005) demonstrated that significant archaeological remains might still survive within the present roadside area. This was confirmed in late 2005, when an archaeological trenched evaluation (WA 2006) identified probable 'dark earth' deposits of late Romano-British date, lying beyond the limits of the Scheduled Monument boundary, which appeared to have only been partly truncated by previous road construction.
- 1.3.4 The test pits along the Kingsdown section lie within an area where prehistoric and Romano-British finds and undated cropmarks have been identified and also which lies less than 500m to the northeast of the line of the Ermin Street Roman Road (WA 2005). One large cropmark on this section was highlighted as representing the potential site of a small settlement by the updated revision of the 2005 DBA (WSP 2009) (shown on **Figure 2**).

2 SCOPE OF WORKS

2.1 Project Aim

- 2.1.1 With due regard to the IFA *Standard and Guidance for archaeological watching brief* (IFA 1999, revised 2008, 2), the generic aim of the project can be defined as;

- *To allow, within the resources available the preservation by record of archaeological deposits and to allow an assessment of its merit in the appropriate context, and inform the formulation of a strategy to mitigate the effects of (future) construction.*

2.2 Project Objectives

- 2.2.1 To achieve the project aim as outlined, the following objectives can be defined:

- *To determine and record, where possible within the limited area of proposed impact, the presence or absence, character, extent, date, integrity, state of preservation and quality of any archaeological remains that may survive.*

3 METHODOLOGY

- 3.1.1 Excavation of the test pits was undertaken by a geotechnical contractor (Soil Structures). These test pits were approximately 0.3m by 0.3m at the surface and up to 0.8m in depth. Archaeological records were made prior to geotechnical testing by subsequent probe or window sampling. Any further observations of archaeological relevance made during the sampling were noted.
- 3.1.2 Test pit records were made using Wessex Archaeology's *pro forma* recording system including the production of a digital photographic record. Test pits were located and tied into the Ordnance Survey National Grid using Global Positioning System (GPS) survey equipment.
- 3.1.3 A total of 25 test pits were numbered according to their order of excavation (**Figures 2 and 3 and Plates 1 and 2**). A single unique sequence of test pit

numbers was used across both sections, which differs from those originally indicated in the Written Scheme of Investigation (WA 2009).

- 3.1.4 Archaeological records could only be made at the geotechnical investigation locations where pits were dug by hand before a mobile drilling rig was set up. At a number of additional locations within the Kingsdown section, only a narrow probe was used, with no need for hand excavation. These locations were noted, although not formally numbered (**Figure 2**).

4 RESULTS

4.1 Test Pit Summary

- 4.1.1 Detailed test pit specific information is available in **Appendix 1**.

4.2 Fieldwork Results

Kingsdown

- 4.2.1 Test Pits (TP) 1-6 and 17-19 were located along the Kingsdown section (**Figure 2**).
- 4.2.2 An apparently undisturbed soil profile was recorded in the locations of TPs 3, 5, 6, 17, 18 and 19. It was not possible, however, to establish conclusively whether or not the topsoil recorded in these locations had been redeposited after a landscaping event. The area around TP 1 may have been truncated, as the topsoil above the natural clay was very thin.
- 4.2.3 In the vicinity of TP 4, the ground had been built up with 0.6m of redeposited clay placed on top of undisturbed natural clay.
- 4.2.4 An outcrop of limestone was located 0.2m below the ground surface in TP 2. Additional investigation using geotechnical probing identified the outcrop extending approximately 100m further to the northwest and approximately 50m to the southeast, although the limestone outcrop was not identified in any other test pits.

Covingham

- 4.2.5 Test pits 7-16 and 20-25 were located at the Covingham Site (**Figure 3**).
- 4.2.6 Archaeological deposits were identified and recorded in the six northernmost test pits (TPs 7-12). A thick dark soil was present in all of these six test pits and was consistent with the 'dark earth' deposit recorded in the previous evaluations, undertaken immediately to the northwest. Romano-British pottery was recovered from four of the test pits (TPs 7-8 and 10-11, **Table 1**).
- 4.2.7 In TPs 7, 8, 11 and 12, the archaeological deposit was between 0.25-0.5m below the present ground level and sealed by overburden/topsoil deposits. TP 9, was located within an area disturbed by a modern service trench and only a trace of 'dark earth' could be discerned, beneath the backfill of the service trench, at around 1m deep (**902**). In TP 10, no evidence of the characteristic clean topsoil deposit was observed, with the 'dark earth' deposit, containing pottery and animal bone, apparently present at ground level. However, it was impossible to confirm whether the deposit in this area was *in-situ* and heavily truncated or redeposited.

- 4.2.8 The 'dark earth' deposit ranged between 0.05-0.68m in depth. In TPs 7, 9 and 11, the deposit lay directly above natural clay. In TPs 8 and 10, the 'dark earth' deposit sealed other potential Romano-British layers. TP 8 contained a deposit of probable alluvial origin (**802**), which yielded pottery, but also contained a fragment of modern concrete, indicating some degree of likely disturbance or redepositing of the 'dark earth and underlying deposits. TP 10 contained a different very mottled deposit (**1001**) that sealed the top of natural clay at around 1.2m below the ground surface and yielded Romano-British pottery and bone.
- 4.2.9 In addition, the TP 12 'dark earth' deposit (**1201**) lay directly above a compact layer of stone (**1202**), probably archaeological rather than natural, at which level, test pitting ceased.
- 4.2.10 The remaining 10 test pits did not contain archaeological deposits. These were all sited within areas of land altered and landscaped either during construction of the highway or the adjacent housing development. TPs 13 – 16, 20, 22 and 24 were on land which had been built up with redeposited locally derived natural clay that had been laid directly on top of undisturbed natural clay. Test pits 21, 23 and 25 were at the base of a substantial drainage ditch running parallel with the highway. Only undisturbed natural clay existed in these locations beneath a thin modern soil at the bottom of the ditch.

4.3 Finds

- 4.3.1 A small collection of finds were recovered from TPs 7, 8, 10 and 11. These have been washed, marked and quantified by material type within each context; this information is summarised in Table 1. The artefacts were visually scanned to gain an impression of the range of types present, their condition and potential date range.

Table 1: Finds by Test Pit (number of pieces/weight in grammes)

CBM = ceramic building material

Test pit	Context	Animal bone	Pottery	CBM	Stone	Concrete
7	701			3/607g		
	702	2/8g	4/15g			
8	801		4/24g			
	802		1/2g		1/181g	1/775g
10	1000	2/3g	4/43g			
	1001		2/12g			
11	1102	1/7g	2/4g			
Totals:		5/18g	19/100g	3/607g	1/181g	1/775g

- 4.3.2 All the pottery was of Romano-British date, spanning the period between the mid 1st and 4th centuries AD. Local wares included ten sandy grey coarseware sherds, a single piece of thin-walled oxidised ware of uncertain provenance and three pieces (two joining from a grooved, corniced rim beaker) of North Wiltshire colour-coated ware dating to c. AD 125-140/150 (Seager Smith 2001, 240). The only Continental import was a piece from a mid to late 1st century AD South Gaulish samian form 18 platter, while

regional imports consisted of a piece of New Forest colour-coated ware and a Black Burnished ware dropped flange bowl/dish rim, both of later 3rd – 4th century AD date. All these fabrics and forms are well-paralleled among the pottery from other areas of *Durocornovium* (Seager Smith 2001).

- 4.3.3 All the animal bone fragments were from sheep; the associated pottery suggests that the bones were also of Romano-British date.
- 4.3.4 The three ceramic building material fragments retained from TP 7 are all of Romano-British date and included part of a 75mm thick brick. This is probably derived from a large, square brick known as a *bipedalis*, used to form the floor beneath the *pilae* of hypocausts, or to bridge the gaps between them or in bonding courses in walls (Brodrribb 1987, 41-43).
- 4.3.5 The piece of concrete found in TP 8 (context 802) is of relatively recent date and may indicate modern disturbance at this level, despite its association with a single sherd of Romano-British greyware pottery. Limestone pieces similar to the flat fragment from this same context have been extensively used as building stones, even roof tiles, in this area since the late 3rd or 4th century AD (Period 3A onwards at Wanborough; Anderson *et. al.* 2001, 21-36) but, of course, the individual stones are intrinsically undatable.

4.4 Environmental Sampling

- 4.4.1 Bulk environmental samples were taken from 'dark earth' deposits during the course of the watching brief. However, following discussion between the Client's consultant (APS), these samples remained unassessed and have been retained.

5 DISCUSSION

- 5.1.1 The test pits along the northern part of the Covingham section (TPs 7 – 12) confirmed the presence of largely undisturbed Romano-British deposits in a minimally landscaped area adjacent to the highway. In two of these test pits (TPs 8 and 10), the 'dark earth' deposit may have sealed further archaeological contexts, although due to the limited size of the test pits it is unclear if these contexts relate to sealed features or deposits. In TP 10, the 'dark earth' deposit appears to be present at the ground level, although it was unclear if the deposit had been heavily truncated or redeposited. In addition, a fragment of modern concrete was recovered from the context below the 'dark earth' deposit in TP8 and may suggest some degree of modern intrusion or redepositing of the 'dark earth' deposit.
- 5.1.2 In a third test pit (TP 12), the 'dark earth' deposited sealed a stone layer of uncertain origin.
- 5.1.3 The test pits occupying the southern half of the Covingham Site (13-16, 20-25) were all located on areas landscaped either during construction of the A419 or the adjacent housing development. Undisturbed soil profiles or archaeological deposits do not exist here, even below made ground. If the noise barrier were to run along the same alignment as the test pits, the potential for *in situ* archaeological remains to be disturbed is minimal.

- 5.1.4 Within the Kingsdown section, the test pits did not identify any archaeological features or deposits. However, a limestone outcrop was identified and traced in close association with the location of the large cropmark highlighted by the updated DBA (WSP 2009). It is possible that the cropmarks may result from the underlying geology rather than relating to archaeological features.
- 5.1.5 The largely undisturbed 'dark earth' deposits are clearly related to the widespread extent of archaeological deposits associated with the Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM) of *Durocornovium* (Wanborough) and indicate a further extension to the existing plan of surviving deposits. These deposits will be impacted by the proposed construction of the noise barrier.

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APPENDIX 1 TEST PIT DATA

TP 1	X coordinate	Y Coordinate	Surface level (m OD)
	416494.194	188665.851	115.125
Context No.	Description		Depth from Surface (m)
100	Topsoil. Mid – dark brown silty clay.		0 – 0.1
101	Natural. Light mottled grey-brown silty clay.		0.1 - >1

TP 2	X coordinate	Y Coordinate	Surface level (m OD)
	416692.867	188575.193	116.58
Context No.	Description		Depth from Surface (m)
200	Topsoil. Compact and cohesive light grey-brown silty clay.		0 – 0.2
201	Natural. Limestone bedrock.		>0.2

TP 3	X coordinate	Y Coordinate	Surface level (m OD)
	416797.344	188534.8634	113.528
Context No.	Description		Depth from Surface
300	Topsoil. Mid grey-brown silty clay.		0 – 0.23
301	Natural. Mottled mid grey-brown clay.		0.23 - >0.85

TP 4	X coordinate	Y Coordinate	Surface level (m OD)
	416459.043	188678.69	115
Context No.	Description		Depth from Surface
400	Made ground. Mainly naturally derived with some soil elements visible. Inclusions of plastic and wood throughout.		0 - 0.6
401	Natural. Compact and cohesive mid brown clay.		>0.6

TP 5	X coordinate	Y Coordinate	Surface level (m OD)
	416364.69	188719.534	117.785
Context No.	Description		Depth from Surface
500	Topsoil. Compact and cohesive dark brown clay. Gradual transition into 501.		0 – 0.24
501	Natural. Buff orangey-brown clay with rare fragments of limestone.		0.24 - >0.8

TP 6	X coordinate	Y Coordinate	Surface level (m OD)
	416243.069	188767.55	119.555
Context No.	Description		Depth from Surface
600	Topsoil. Mottled mid grey-brown compact and cohesive clay with rare small-med sized fragments of limestone.		0 – 0.28
601	Natural. Buff coloured compact and friable sandy clay.		0.28 - >0.75

TP 7	X coordinate	Y Coordinate	Surface level (m OD)
	419106.707	185558.973	95.613
Context No.	Description		Depth from Surface
700	Topsoil. Mid grey-brown compact and cohesive clay with small rare limestone fragments and small pieces of CBM.		0 – 0.4
701	Made ground. Deposit of small-large sized pieces of redeposited Romano-British CBM.		0.4 – 0.5
702	'Dark earth'. Very dark brown silty clay with fragments of Roman pottery and bone.		0.5 – c.1
703	Natural. Clay.		>c.1

TP 8	X coordinate	Y Coordinate	Surface level (m OD)
	419170.619	185495.349	95.655
Context No.	Description		Depth from Surface
800	Topsoil. Mid grey-brown compact and cohesive clay with rare small limestone fragments. Diffuse transition into 801.		0 – 0.28
801	'Dark earth'. Very dark brown silty clay loam with rare small flint and limestone fragments. Roman pottery also present.		0.28 – 0.78
802	Mid brown friable silty clay loam. Abrupt interface between this and 801. Romano-British pottery and modern (?) fragments of concrete recovered.		0.78 - c.1.1
803	Natural. Clay.		>c.1.1

TP 9	X coordinate	Y Coordinate	Surface level (m OD)
	419234.6603	185429.119	95.678
Context No.	Description		Depth from Surface
900	Topsoil. Mid grey-brown compact and cohesive clay.		0 – 0.3
901	Service cut backfill. Predominantly sand with sparse various sized fragments of limestone.		0.3 – c.0.95
902	'Dark earth'. Very Dark brown silty clay loam.		c.0.95 – c.1
903	Natural. Clay.		>1

TP 10	X coordinate	Y Coordinate	Surface level (m OD)
	419269.958	185373.225	95.978
Context No.	Description		Depth from Surface
1000	'Dark earth' deposit/disturbed topsoil? Very dark brown soft and cohesive silty clay with rare fine-small limestone fragments.		0 – 0.3
1001	Mottled grey/brown/dark brown clay with inclusions of fine fragments of CBM and pottery in rare quantities. Very gradual transition into 1002.		0.3 – 1.2
1002	Natural. Compact and cohesive clay.		>1.2

TP 11	X coordinate	Y Coordinate	Surface level (m OD)
	419317.3576	185315.3951	95.693
Context No.	Description		Depth from Surface
1100	Topsoil. Mid brown compact and cohesive clay mixed with some natural looking elements.		0 – 0.2
1101	Predominantly redeposited limestone and large fragments of CBM.		0.2 – 0.4
1102	'Dark earth'. Friable dark brown silty clay loam with moderate amounts of charcoal and Roman pottery and bone.		0.4 – 1.08
1103	Natural. Clay.		>1.08

TP 12	X coordinate	Y Coordinate	Surface level (m OD)
	419368.614	185249.521	94.654
Context No.	Description		Depth from Surface
1200	Topsoil.		0 – 0.25
1201	'Dark earth'. Very dark brown soft and cohesive silty clay loam.		0.25 - >0.7
1202	Stone. Unidentifiable.		

TP 13	X coordinate	Y Coordinate	Surface level (m OD)
	419421.7166	185137.1506	94.148
Context No.	Description		Depth from Surface
1300	Topsoil. Very thin and poor quality.		0 – 0.1
1301	Mottled mid grey/mid brown dry friable clay with plastic and metal visible to a depth of 0.3m.		0.1 – c.2
1302	Natural. Dark grey compact and cohesive clay.		>c.2

TP 14	X coordinate	Y Coordinate	Surface level (m OD)
	419439.0223	185110.1403	94.148
Context No.	Description		Depth from Surface

1400	Topsoil. Thin, poor quality.	0 – 0.1
1401	Redeposited natural. Locally derived mid brown/grey compact and friable clay with inclusions of modern CBM.	0.1 – 0.7
1402	Natural. Compact and friable mid grey-brown clay.	>0.7

TP 15	X coordinate	Y Coordinate	Surface level (m OD)
	419482.6871	185000.9428	
Context No.	Description		Depth from Surface
1500	Redeposited natural. Mixed locally derived clay.		0 – 2
1501	Natural. Mottled soft and cohesive dark brown clay.		2 - >2.7

TP 16	X coordinate	Y Coordinate	Surface level (m OD)
	419522.6980	184843.0178	
Context No.	Description		Depth from Surface
1600	Redeposited natural. Mixed locally derived clay.		0 – 2.6
1601	Natural.		>2.6

TP 17	X coordinate	Y Coordinate	Surface level (m OD)
	416834.395	188518.327	113.112
Context No.	Description		Depth from Surface
1700	Topsoil.		0 – 0.15
1701	Natural. Grey-brown compact and cohesive clay.		0.15 – >0.85

TP 18	X coordinate	Y Coordinate	Surface level (m OD)
	416871.9082	188497.4026	112.023
Context No.	Description		Depth from Surface
1800	Topsoil. Mid grey-brown silty clay.		0 – 0.15
1801	Natural. Light brown compact and cohesive clay.		0.15 – >0.85

TP 19	X coordinate	Y Coordinate	Surface level (m OD)
	416904.644	188476.902	111.423
Context No.	Description		Depth from Surface
1900	Topsoil. Mid grey-brown silty clay.		0 – 0.15
1901	Natural. Light brown compact and cohesive clay.		0.15 – >0.85

TP 20	X coordinate	Y Coordinate	Surface level (m OD)
	419544.173	184663.873	94.834
Context No.	Description		Depth from Surface

2000	Redeposited natural. Mixed light brown/grey brown compact and cohesive naturally derived clay.	0 – 0.95
2001	Natural. Clay.	0.95 - >c1.5

TP 21	X coordinate	Y Coordinate	Surface level (m OD)
	419547.492	184666.605	93.708
Context No.	Description		Depth from Surface
2100	Natural. Orangey brown soft and cohesive natural clay.		0 – >0.85

TP 22	X coordinate	Y Coordinate	Surface level (m OD)
	419527.759	184823.1418	93.234
Context No.	Description		Depth from Surface
2200	Natural. Mottled mid grey brown/reddish brown compact and friable clay.		0 - >0.85

TP 23	X coordinate	Y Coordinate	Surface level (m OD)
	419529.7298	184823.4411	92.434
Context No.	Description		Depth from Surface
2300	Natural. Mottled mid grey brown/reddish brown compact and friable clay.		0 - >0.85

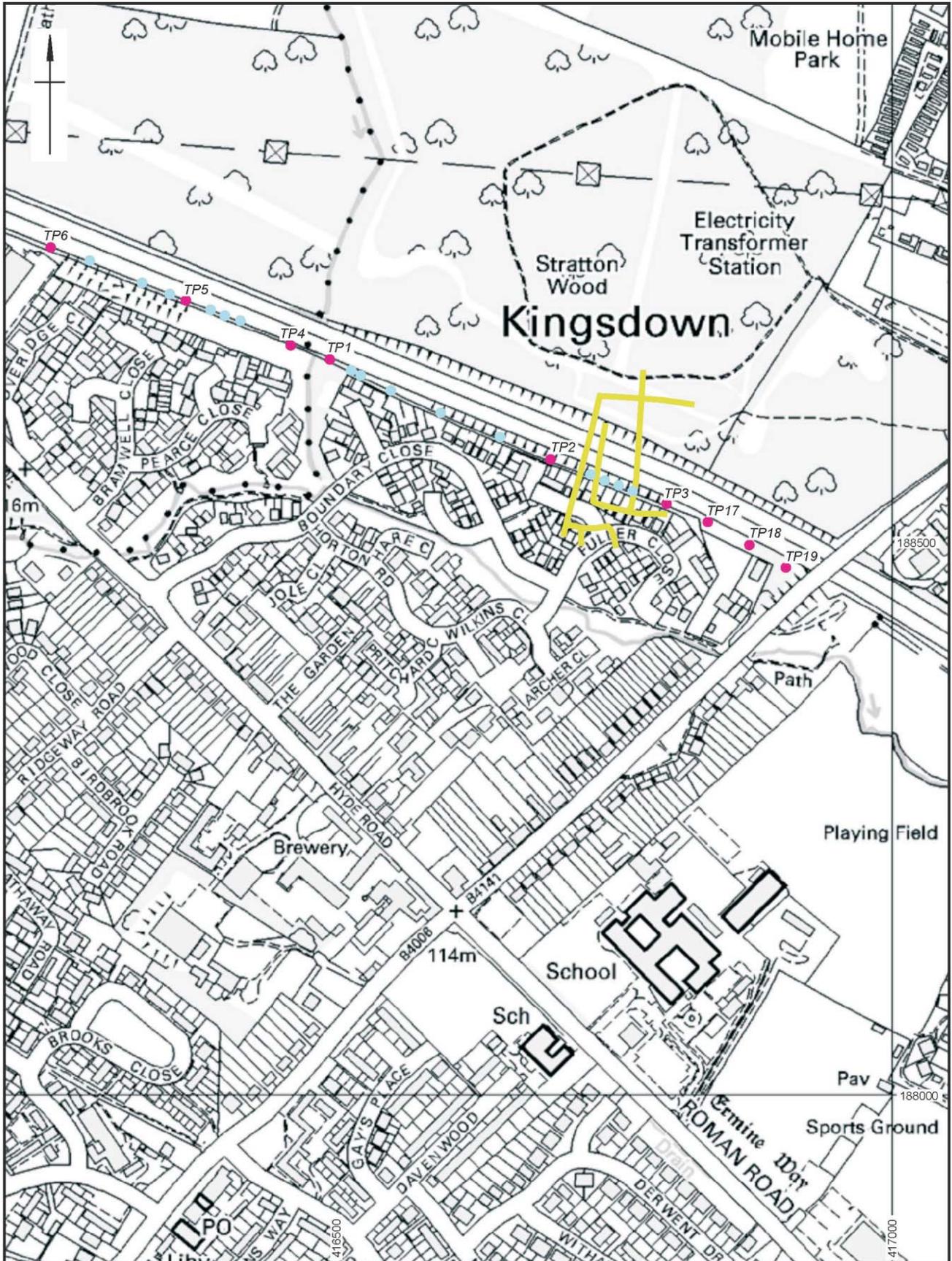
TP 24	X coordinate	Y Coordinate	Surface level (m OD)
	419507.35	184916.2238	93.577
Context No.	Description		Depth from Surface
2400	Topsoil. Compact and friable dark grey brown clay. Abrupt interface with 2301.		0 – 0.4
2401	Natural. Grey-brown compact and friable clay.		0.4 - >0.85

TP 25	X coordinate	Y Coordinate	Surface level (m OD)
	419509.921	184916.681	92.877
Context No.	Description		Depth from Surface
2500	Topsoil. Compact and friable dark grey brown clay. Abrupt interface with 2301.		0 – 0.4
2501	Natural. Grey-brown compact and friable clay.		0.4 - >0.85



Site location plan

Figure 1



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Kingsdown geotechnical test pits

Figure 2



<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Test pit ● Test pit with Romano-British deposits Scheduled Monument 	Reproduced from the 2000 Ordnance Survey Explorer © map with the permission of the controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office © Crown copyright, Wessex Archaeology, Portway House, Old Sarum Park, Salisbury, Wiltshire, SP4 6EB. Licence Number: 100028190.	
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Covingham geotechnical test pits

Figure 3



Plate 1: Made ground in TP 14



Plate 2: Romano-British dark earth below modern overburden in TP 11

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