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Written Scheme of Investigation for an Archaeological Evaluation

Site at Land Northeast of Great Ashby, Great Ashby,
Stevenage

Iceni Projects Limited on behalf of
Picture Estates Ltd

July 2026

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ON BEHALF OF PICTURE
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Written Scheme of Investigation for an
Archaeological Evaluation

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Non-technical Summary

This document is a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) for an archaeological evaluation of the Site at Land Northeast of Great Ashby, Great Ashby, Stevenage, SG4 7EA. It is prepared in support of a pre-determination archaeological investigation for a hybrid planning application (25/03080/HYA), which requires an archaeological investigation of the Site prior to redevelopment.

The evaluation will consist of 14 trenches, each measuring 40m by 1.8m, excavated by an archaeological contractor.

This phase of the evaluation will determine the presence or absence of archaeology within the BNG area and will inform the need for further archaeological fieldwork as part of the required mitigation, and guide design decisions for the scheme. The decision regarding the requirement for further work rests with the Archaeological Advisor to Hertfordshire County Council.

1. Introduction

1.1. Report Scope

- 1.1.1 This Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) is for an archaeological evaluation on the Site of *Land Northeast of Great Ashby* (Figure 1). It has been commissioned from Iceni Projects by Picture Estates Ltd.
- 1.1.2 The evaluation will be undertaken as part of the pre-determination process in support of a planning application (25/03080/HYA) which will be submitted to North Hertfordshire LPA.
- 1.1.3 The planning application includes:
Hybrid application for a residential-led development comprising residential (Use Class C3), educational use (Use Class F1), a community hub (Use Class F2/ Use Class E) with associated new internal roads, access, parking, cycling infrastructure, landscaping and other associated infrastructure.
Full application comprises the construction of vehicle access and an active travel link via Mendip Way, with associated landscaping and drainage works.
The outline application, for which all matters are reserved except means of access, comprises the erection of up to 640 dwellings (Use Class C3), a site for a primary school, further land reserved for educational use (Use Class F1), a site for a community hub (Use Class F2/ Use Class E), with associated infrastructure.
- 1.1.4 This archaeological evaluation follows previous evaluation works undertaken in 2023 as part of the same planning application.
- 1.1.5 The Site is currently occupied by arable farmland. The centre of the Site lies at National Grid reference TL 526176 228390.
- 1.1.6 The evaluation will comprise the excavation, investigation and recording of 14 trial trenches, each measuring 40m by 1.8m, equating to a 3% sample of the Proposed Development area (Figure 2 and Figure 3).
- 1.1.7 Where archaeological remains are encountered but are insufficiently exposed to allow an appropriate understanding of their character, extent or significance, a limited contingency may be used to clarify those remains. This may involve localised extensions to existing trenches or, only where this cannot reasonably be achieved, the excavation of a small number of additional targeted trenches. Any such works shall be the minimum necessary to meet the objectives of the evaluation and shall be agreed on a case-by-case basis between the Client, Iceni Projects and the Archaeological Advisor to Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) prior to implementation.
- 1.1.8 This evaluation is part of a staged approach to determining the archaeological potential of the Site, and follows other non-intrusive archaeological work, including;
- Geophysical Survey (Stratascan, 2007)
 - Trial Trench Evaluation (Oxford Archaeology, 2008)
 - Geophysical Survey (Magnitude Surveys, 2022)
 - Trial Trench Evaluation (Oxford Archaeology, 2024)
 - Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment (DBA) (Iceni Projects, 2025)

- Environment Statement (ES): Chapter 7 (Iceni Projects, 2026).

1.1.9 This WSI sets out the aims and objectives of the evaluation, and the methods and standards that will be employed. It conforms to current best practice, as well as the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists' relevant Standards and Guidance (CIfA 2014a;2023a-b) and the guidance in Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment (MoRPHE: Historic England 2015a).

2. Archaeological Background

2.1. *Site Location, Geology and Topography*

- 2.1.1 The proposed evaluation area is located to the south of Warrengreen Lane on arable farmland situated to the west of a wooded area in the parish of Weston, within the district of North Hertfordshire.
- 2.1.2 The proposed evaluation area is relatively flat, slightly sloping from east to west. Existing ground levels lie at approximately between 142.1m Ordnance Datum (OD) and 143.6m OD to the east and 142.1m OD to the west.
- 2.1.3 The entirety of the proposed evaluation area is situated on bedrock geology comprising of Lewes Nodular Chalk Formation (chalk), sedimentary rocks that are shallow-marine in origin and formed in the Cretaceous period, between approximately 86,300,000 and 93,900,000 years ago (British Geological Survey, 2026).
- 2.1.4 The entirety of the proposed evaluation area is situated on superficial deposits comprising of Lowestoft Formation (diamicton), sedimentary deposits that are glacial in origin and deposited in the Quaternary period between approximately 423,000 and 480,000 years ago (British Geological Survey, 2026).

2.2. *Archaeological and Historical Background*

- 2.2.1 A thorough description of the geology, archaeology, and history of the Site was provided in an earlier Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment (DBA) (Iceni Projects, 2025). For a full archaeological and historical background of the Site, this document should be read in conjunction with the DBA. A succinct summary is provided below, utilising a Study Area of 1 km from the Site Boundary.

Prehistoric: Palaeolithic period to Iron Age (Before AD 43)

- 2.2.2 Previous archaeological investigations at the Site have provided very limited evidence for prehistoric activity. Evidence comprised;
- an isolated potentially late Iron Age (or early Roman) pit identified during the 2008 trial trench evaluation (trench 20),
 - a single residual Mesolithic flint tranchet axehead recovered from the subsoil during the 2023 evaluation.
- 2.2.3 Based on the limited evidence to date for prehistoric remains, it is anticipated that there will be low potential within this evaluation area.

Roman period (AD 43 – 410)

- 2.2.4 Previous archaeological investigations at the Site have provided limited evidence for Roman activity. Evidence comprised;
- a small quantity of Roman pottery, recovered during the two evaluations undertaken at the Site, these were considered to be residual within later features.

- a single isolated pit identified in the 2008 evaluation (trench 20), may potentially date to the early Roman period
- a pair of ditches or structural features were recorded in the south of the Site during the 2023 evaluation (trench 102). These contained burnt flint, charcoal, chalk and burnt stone, which may potentially date to the Roman period.

2.2.5 Based on the limited evidence for Roman remains, it is anticipated that there will be low potential within this evaluation area. If further evidence is present, it will likely consist of remains of a residual nature or sparse rural occupational activity.

Saxon and Medieval period (AD 410 – 1485)

2.2.6 Previous archaeological investigations at the Site have provided evidence for medieval remains. Evidence comprised;

- a series of features were recorded during the 2008 trial trenching in the northwest of the Site. These have been interpreted as evidence for tile production and nearby settlement (in the vicinity of trench 11), located immediately to the south of Tile Kiln Farm,
- a possible field system
- a quarry pit was recorded in the north-eastern part of the Site during the 2023 evaluation
- a scattering of undatable ditches and pits were recorded from across the Site, these ditches may be either medieval or post-medieval in date.

2.2.7 Based on the evidence for medieval remains, it is anticipated that there it is anticipated that there will be low potential within this evaluation area.

Post-medieval to Modern period (AD 1485 – present)

2.2.8 Previous archaeological investigations at the Site have provided limited evidence for post-medieval activity. Evidence comprised;

- a possible trackway was recorded in the west of the Site during the 2023 evaluation,
- the undatable ditches and pits as mentioned above, which may be either medieval or post-medieval in date.

2.2.9 Based on the limited evidence to date for post-medieval remains and the information provided in the DBA, it is anticipated that there may be further evidence for post-medieval remains, which will likely be associated with agricultural activities.

Previous Archaeological Investigations

2.2.10 The Site has been subject to several archaeological investigations, comprising geophysical surveys in 2008 and 2022, and trial trench evaluations in 2008 (undertaken to the northwestern area of the Site only) and 2023 (undertaken on the majority of the remainder of the Site).

2.2.11 A geophysical survey was undertaken on part of the Site in 2008, which identified a limited

number of anomalies which indicated possible archaeology. In 2008, Oxford Archaeology undertook an archaeological evaluation (comprising of 42 trial trenches) on the land adjacent to Tile Kiln Farm, which encompasses the northwestern area of the Site. The evaluation identified part of a possible medieval settlement to the north of the Site, evidence for medieval tile manufacturing, and a possible medieval field system. Additionally, a single isolated pit dating to the late Iron Age or early Roman period was identified. Further evidence included, a number of undated ditches, pits and postholes.

2.2.12 As part of the current planning application, a geophysical survey was undertaken at the Site, on an area of 45.65ha. The geophysical survey identified a series of linear and curvilinear anomalies across the survey area, along with a number of discrete anomalies. In the northwest of the Site (in the same area as the previous 2008 evaluation), a weak rectilinear anomaly was identified within a natural spread. A further series of negative linear anomalies of undetermined origin were identified in the southeast of the Site. Subsequently in 2023, Oxford Archaeology undertook a second archaeological evaluation (comprising of 72 trial trenches). The evaluation identified relatively few archaeological remains across the Site: a single residual prehistoric artefact (Mesolithic flint tranchet axehead), a small quantity (eight sherds) of mostly residual Roman pottery, a potentially medieval or post-medieval quarry pit (likely associated with the tile production activity identified during the 2008 evaluation), a post-medieval trackway, and a small number of undated cut features.

2.2.13 The results of the previous phases of investigation indicate the presence of limited archaeological remains across the Site as a whole. Of the 114 trenches excavated across the two evaluations, 80 (70%) were either blank or only contained features of natural origin. Of the 34 trenches that did contain archaeological remains, six contained features dated to the medieval period (all located in the northwestern section of the Site), two trenches identified cut features potentially dating to the Roman period (trench 102 in the south of the Site and trench 20 in the northwest, the latter may possibly date to the late Iron Age), three trenches contained post-medieval features, and the remaining 23 trenches contained undated cut features that were largely devoid of artefacts.

3. Aims and Objectives

3.1. Aims

3.1.1 The overall aims of the evaluation are to:

- assess the archaeological potential of the Site; and
- determine the extent and nature of any additional archaeological work that may be required, or to guide the development of an appropriate mitigation or management strategy to address the impact of the proposed development on the archaeological resource.

3.2. General Objectives

3.2.1 The general objectives of an evaluation are to establish:

- identification of the earliest archaeological deposits;
- identification of the latest archaeological deposits;
- the nature and character of archaeological deposits encountered; and
- the extent of modern disturbance.

3.3. Site Specific Objectives

3.3.1 In light of the Site's archaeological and historical background, and the overarching aims of the East of England Research Framework, the following site-specific objectives have been identified:

General

- Trial trenching should aim to gather sufficient information to generate a reliable predictive model of the extent, character, date, state of preservation and depth of archaeological horizon.

Prehistoric

- Are any isolated/redeposited prehistoric artefacts present?
- Are any prehistoric features present? If so, what is their character and extent?

Roman

- Are any Roman features present, and do they relate to the isolated Roman activity identified during previous evaluations?

Saxon and Medieval

- Is there any further evidence for medieval activity that may relate to the medieval landscape identified in the northwest of the Site?
- Are any other medieval features or chance finds present?

Post-medieval to modern

- Are any post medieval features present, and do they relate to former agricultural land use, trackways or quarrying activity?

4. Fieldwork Methodology

4.1. *Introduction*

- 4.1.1 The archaeological evaluation will consist of the excavation of 14 trenches, each measuring 40m by 1.8m, the proposed locations of which are shown on Figure 2 and Figure 3.
- 4.1.2 The trenches have been strategically located to assess the archaeological potential of the Site and to establish the nature, extent, and significance of any archaeological remains that may be affected by the Proposed Development.
- 4.1.3 The precise locations of the trial trenches may be subject to minor adjustment to accommodate unforeseen obstructions, existing services, logistical or practical constraints, or health and safety considerations. Any necessary relocation of trenches will be determined using professional judgement by the supervising archaeologist. Should any proposed trial trench area be unavailable, equivalent additional trenching will be undertaken to maintain the agreed total level of trial trench coverage, where possible.
- 4.1.4 The archaeological works will be undertaken by an archaeological contractor, in collaboration with Iceni Projects, who is a Registered Organisation with the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CIfA) and a member of the Federation of Archaeological Managers and Employers (FAME).
- 4.1.5 The archaeological contractor will adhere to the methodology and scope of works set out in this document.

4.2. *Setting out of the trenches and constraints*

- 4.2.1 The archaeological contractor will set out the trench locations based on OS grid co-ordinates, using a Global Navigation Satellite System (GNSS). The trench locations will be tied into the Ordnance Survey (OS) National Grid and Ordnance Datum (OD) (Newlyn).
- 4.2.2 The client will supply details of any known above- or below-ground services, along with information on any ecological, environmental, or other relevant constraints.
- 4.2.3 Prior to the commencement of excavation, the evaluation area will be subject to a walkover survey and visual inspection to identify, where possible, the presence of any above- or below-ground services. All trial trench locations will be scanned before and during excavation using a Cable Avoidance Tool (CAT) to confirm the absence of live underground services.

4.3. *Excavation methodology*

- 4.3.1 The trenches will be excavated using a 360° tracked excavator fitted with a toothless bucket. All machine excavation will be carried out under the continuous supervision and direction of a monitoring archaeologist. Excavation will proceed in controlled, level spits of approximately 50–200 mm until the uppermost archaeological horizon or the natural geological substrate is exposed. Where necessary, the base of the trench and the surfaces of archaeological deposits will be cleaned by hand.

- 4.3.2 A representative sample of identified archaeological features and deposits will be excavated by hand, sufficient to address the aims of the evaluation. Minimum sampling requirements will be specified where applicable. Spoil generated during both machine stripping and hand excavation will be visually inspected for artefacts and, where appropriate, subjected to metal detection by suitably trained archaeologists. All finds will be collected and bagged by context.
- 4.3.3 In the event that an exceptional quantity or complexity of archaeological remains is encountered, sample excavation will be designed to be as minimally intrusive as possible while still meeting the principal objectives of the evaluation, at a level agreed with Iceni Projects, the Historic Environment Advisor to HCC and the Client.
- 4.3.4 Where complex archaeological stratigraphy is present, deposits will be preserved in situ and alternative methods employed to assess their depth, subject to agreement with Iceni Projects, and the Historic Environment Advisor to HCC. Where modern features are found to truncate archaeological deposits, these may be removed, where practicable, in a manner that avoids damage to adjacent remains, to allow the depth of stratification to be assessed.
- 4.3.5 In the event that human remains are encountered, they will be left in situ and appropriately protected. Excavation will only be undertaken where removal is deemed necessary, following consultation with Iceni Projects and the Historic Environment Advisor to HCC and once the appropriate Ministry of Justice licence has been obtained.

4.4. Recording System

- 4.4.1 An accession/site code will be obtained from the appropriate local body.
- 4.4.2 The recording system employed during the evaluation will follow the 'London system', as set out in the Museum of London Archaeology Service site manual (MoLAS 1994), and will be fully compatible with Museum of London Archaeological Archive requirements. The recording methodology will include, where appropriate:
- Written records completed on standard pro forma context sheets;
 - Hand-drawn plans produced on drafting film at a scale of 1:20;
 - Hand-drawn sections produced on drafting film at scales of 1:10 or 1:20;
 - Digital photographic recording;
 - Maintenance of context, photographic, and sample registers; and
 - Compilation and ongoing verification of a stratigraphic (Harris) matrix throughout the excavation.
- 4.4.3 The locations of archaeological trenches will be recorded using electronic survey equipment or, where appropriate, manual offset measurement techniques. All trench locations will be accurately tied into the National Grid system.
- 4.4.4 All trench sections will be fully recorded through measured drawings and photographic documentation.
- 4.4.5 All archaeological deposits will be levelled to Ordnance Datum (m OD) using a known height

benchmark.

- 4.4.6 Iceni Projects will notify the Historic Environment Advisor to HCC of the commencement of the evaluation and provide updates on its progress. Reasonable access will be facilitated to allow the Historic Environment Advisor to HCC to undertake site inspections and monitor the works. Any necessary amendments to the WSI, where required to more effectively meet the project objectives, will be agreed in advance with both the client and the Historic Environment Advisor to HCC.

4.5. *Reinstatement*

- 4.5.1 Once completed to the satisfaction of the client and the Historic Environment Advisor to HCC, trenches will be backfilled using the excavated material in the order in which it was removed and left level upon completion. No additional reinstatement or surface treatment will be carried out.

4.6. *Finds and Samples*

- 4.6.1 The recovery, retention, and treatment of all finds and samples will be undertaken in line with the overall archaeological objectives of the project and in accordance with Conservation Guidelines No. 2 issued by the United Kingdom Institute for Conservation. All finds and samples, including ecofacts, will be reviewed on Site for their potential contribution to the evaluation; retention of all material may not be necessary for the purposes of this stage of work.
- 4.6.2 Bulk environmental samples of approximately 40–60 litres may be collected from suitable stratified deposits where appropriate. Such samples may require off-site processing by tank flotation.
- 4.6.3 Organic samples from sealed contexts, where material suitable for radiocarbon dating may be present, will be selectively taken and wrapped in foil to minimise cross-contamination.
- 4.6.4 The sampling strategy may be reviewed and refined during the course of the evaluation, in consultation with the supervising archaeologist, Iceni Projects, the client, and the Historic Environment Advisor, should circumstances require. Environmental and scientific dating strategies may also be discussed with the Science Advisor.
- 4.6.5 All processed finds and samples will be assessed off site by appropriately qualified specialists provided by the Archaeological Contractor.
- 4.6.6 The labelling, bagging, and boxing of finds will be carried out in accordance with the guidelines of the designated archive receiving body, North Hertfordshire Museum.
- 4.6.7 The archaeological contractor will immediately notify Iceni Projects and the Historic Environment Advisor to HCC on discovery of any material meeting the statutory definition of 'treasure'. This will be reported to the Coroner in accordance with the Treasure Act (1996) and the Treasure Act Code of Practice (3rd Revision) (DCMS, 2023) within 14 days.
- 4.6.8 The archaeological contractor will seek permission from the landowner to deposit all recovered

finds with the designated archive receiving body. This will be formalised through a signed Deed of Transfer.

5. Post-Excavation Methodology and Reporting

5.1. *Stratigraphy*

- 5.1.1 All written, drawn, and surveyed records generated during the evaluation will be collated and checked for consistency. Key data will be entered into a database that can be updated during any subsequent analysis. Preliminary phasing of archaeological features and deposits will be established using stratigraphic relationships, spot-dating of finds—particularly pottery—and any other relevant evidence.
- 5.1.2 A written account will be prepared for all archaeologically significant features and deposits that were identified and excavated. This will be organised by trench, site subdivision, and/or period or phase, as appropriate. Full contextual details will be presented in trench tables included as an appendix to the report.

5.2. *Finds*

- 5.2.1 All retained finds will, as a minimum, be cleaned, counted, weighed, and identified. They will then be recorded to a level appropriate to the aims and objectives of the project. Recording and reporting will conform to a Type 2 (Appraisal) standard, in accordance with the *CIfA Toolkit for Specialist Reporting* (n.d. a), and will include appropriate quantification, characterisation, and assessment of significance and potential. The report will include a table summarising finds by feature, context, or trench.
- 5.2.2 Metalwork recovered from stratified contexts will be X-rayed and, together with other fragile or delicate materials, stored in a stable environment. X-radiography and any additional conservation requirements will be undertaken by an approved conservation facility.
- 5.2.3 All finds will be bagged and boxed in accordance with the guidance issued by the relevant museum and the CIfA (2014b).

5.3. *Environmental*

- 5.3.1 Bulk environmental soil samples will be processed using standard flotation techniques. Residues will be fractionated into 5.6/4 mm and 1/0.5 mm size ranges and dried where necessary. The coarse residue fraction (>5.6/4 mm), and the fine fraction where appropriate, will be sorted and subsequently discarded, with any recovered finds passed to the relevant specialist provided by the Archaeological Contractor. Flots will be retained on a 0.25 mm mesh and scanned to assess the range and preservation of environmental remains present. Unsorted fine residues will be retained until completion of any analysis and will be discarded following final reporting, in accordance with the selection policy outlined below.
- 5.3.2 For samples derived from cremation-related deposits, flots will be retained on a 0.25 mm mesh and residues fractionated into 4 mm, 2 mm, and 1 mm fractions. Samples from inhumation burial deposits will be wet-sieved through 9.5 mm and 1 mm meshes. The coarse fractions (9.5 mm) will be sorted, with any recovered finds forwarded to the appropriate specialist

provided by the Archaeological Contractor, along with the finer residues.

5.3.3 Any waterlogged samples will be processed using standard waterlogged flotation methods.

5.3.4 Recording and reporting will conform to a Type 2 (Appraisal) standard, in accordance with the *CIfA Toolkit for Specialist Reporting* (n.d. a), and will include appropriate quantification, characterisation, and assessment of significance and potential.

5.4. *Reporting*

5.4.1 An evaluation report will be prepared within four weeks of the completion of the fieldwork and issued to Iceni Projects, the Client and the Historic Environment Advisor to HCC. Submission of the report to the Local Planning Authority (LPA) will be undertaken by the client or their appointed planning consultant.

5.4.2 The evaluation report will comprise the following elements:

- A Non-Technical Summary;
- Introduction;
- Archaeological, historical, and topographic background;
- Methodology;
- Results;
- Finds summary;
- Assessment of the original research objectives;
- Discussion of archaeological potential and significance;
- Assessment of the proposed development impacts and conclusions;
- Location plans and figures illustrating the archaeological results;
- Bibliography;
- Details relating to archive location and deposition; and
- A completed OASIS form.

5.4.3 Upon satisfactory completion of the project, the Planning Adviser will confirm that the archaeological works have been completed and will recommend the discharge of any relevant planning conditions, subject to receipt of the following:

- A report detailing the results of the archaeological works;
- A completed online OASIS form; and
- A brief summary report suitable for submission to regional and period journals.

6. Archive Storage and Curation

- 6.1.1 It is recommended that the project archive be deposited with North Hertfordshire Museum, and provision for long-term storage has been included within the post-fieldwork budget. The museum will be notified of the project prior to the commencement of fieldwork and an accession number will be obtained.

6.2. *Archive preparation*

- 6.2.1 The physical archive will be prepared in accordance with the standard requirements for the acceptance of excavated archaeological material by North Hertfordshire Museum and, more generally, in line with nationally recognised guidelines (Brown 2011; ClfA 2014b; SMA 1995). Subject to the client's agreement, the archive will normally be deposited within one year of the completion of the project.
- 6.2.2 The digital archive will be deposited with the Archaeology Data Service (ADS). All digital data will be prepared in accordance with ADS guidance (ADS 2013 and current online standards) and will be supported by appropriate metadata.
- 6.2.3 All finds, including artefacts and ecofacts, will be prepared in accordance with the standard requirements for the acceptance of excavated archaeological material by North Hertfordshire Museum and, more broadly, in line with nationally recognised guidelines (Brown 2011; ClfA 2014b; SMA 1995). Subject to the client's agreement, the archive will normally be deposited within one year of the completion of the project.

7. Programme and Site Requirements

7.1. *Programme*

- 7.1.1 The evaluation will commence only once the WSI has been formally approved by the Historic Environment Advisor to HCC.
- 7.1.2 The Historic Environment Advisor to HCC will be provided with a minimum of five days' notice prior to the start of works on the Site and will be kept informed of progress throughout the evaluation. Reasonable access to the Site will be arranged to allow inspection and monitoring of the archaeological works.
- 7.1.3 The start date and duration of the archaeological evaluation will be determined by the Site Contractor's or client's programme of works and by the nature and extent of any archaeological remains encountered.

7.2. *Site Requirements*

- 7.2.1 The archaeological contractor will require safe and unrestricted access to the Site and to all trench locations.
- 7.2.2 Where a Principal Contractor is operating on Site, the archaeological contractor will require access to welfare facilities, and limited provision for on-site storage may also be necessary.
- 7.2.3 In the absence of a Principal Contractor, the archaeological contractor will require sufficient space on Site to establish a temporary compound to accommodate welfare and storage facilities, as well as parking for vehicles and plant.

8. Health and Safety

- 8.1.1 The archaeological contractor will produce a site-specific Risk Assessment Method Statement (RAMS). This should be read in conjunction with this document.

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10. Figures

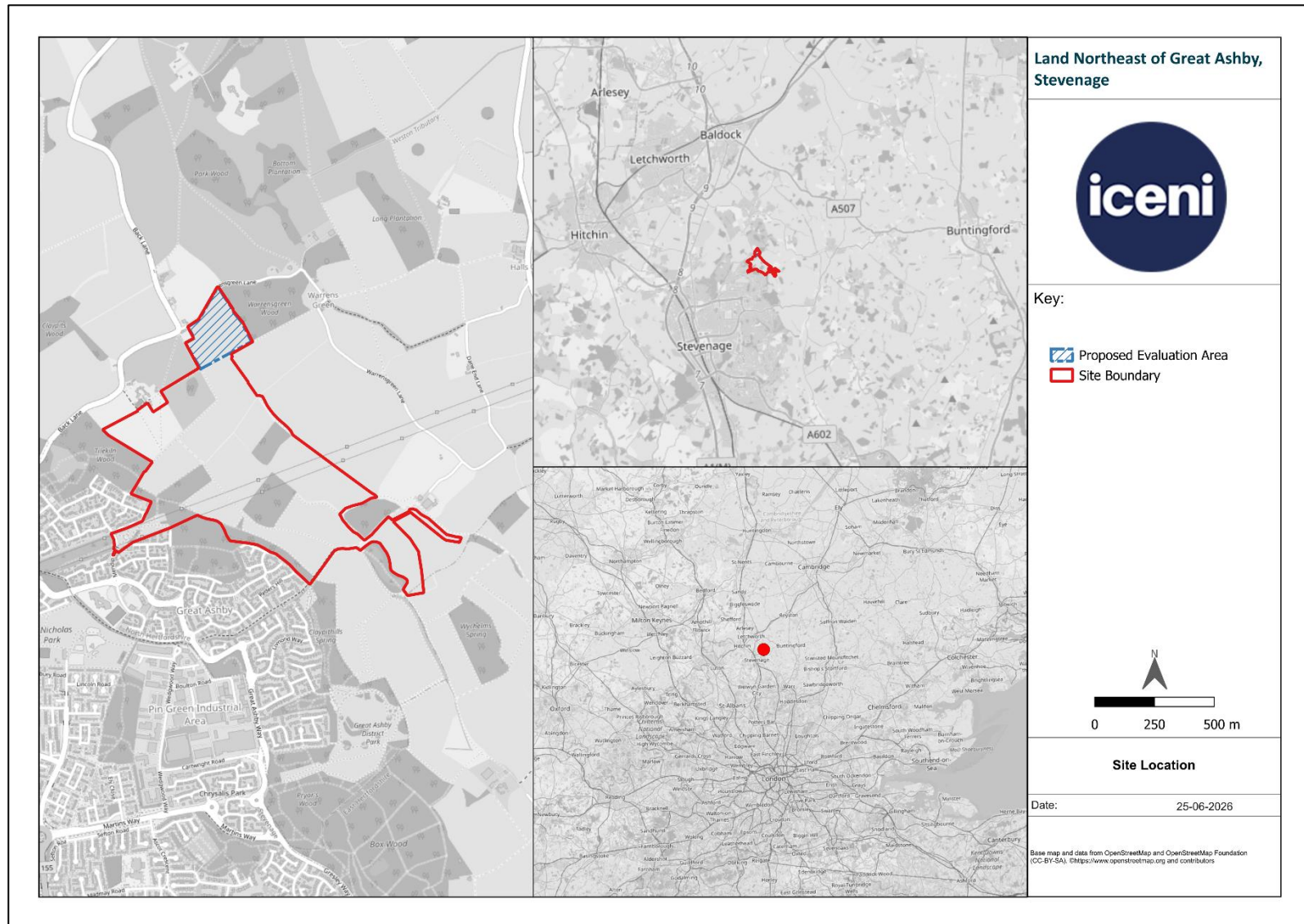


Figure 1 Site Location

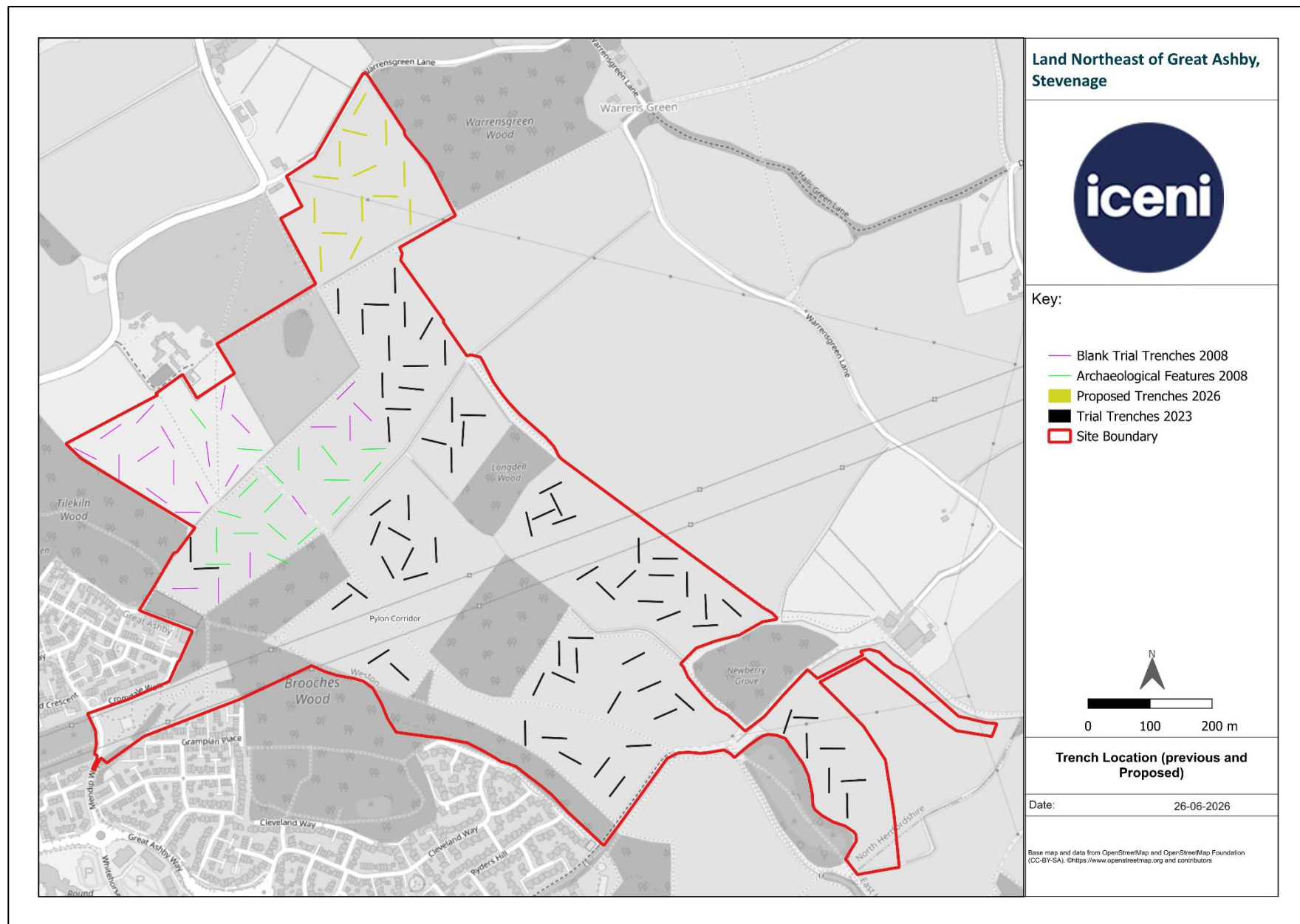


Figure 2 Proposed Trench Locations and Previous Trench Locations

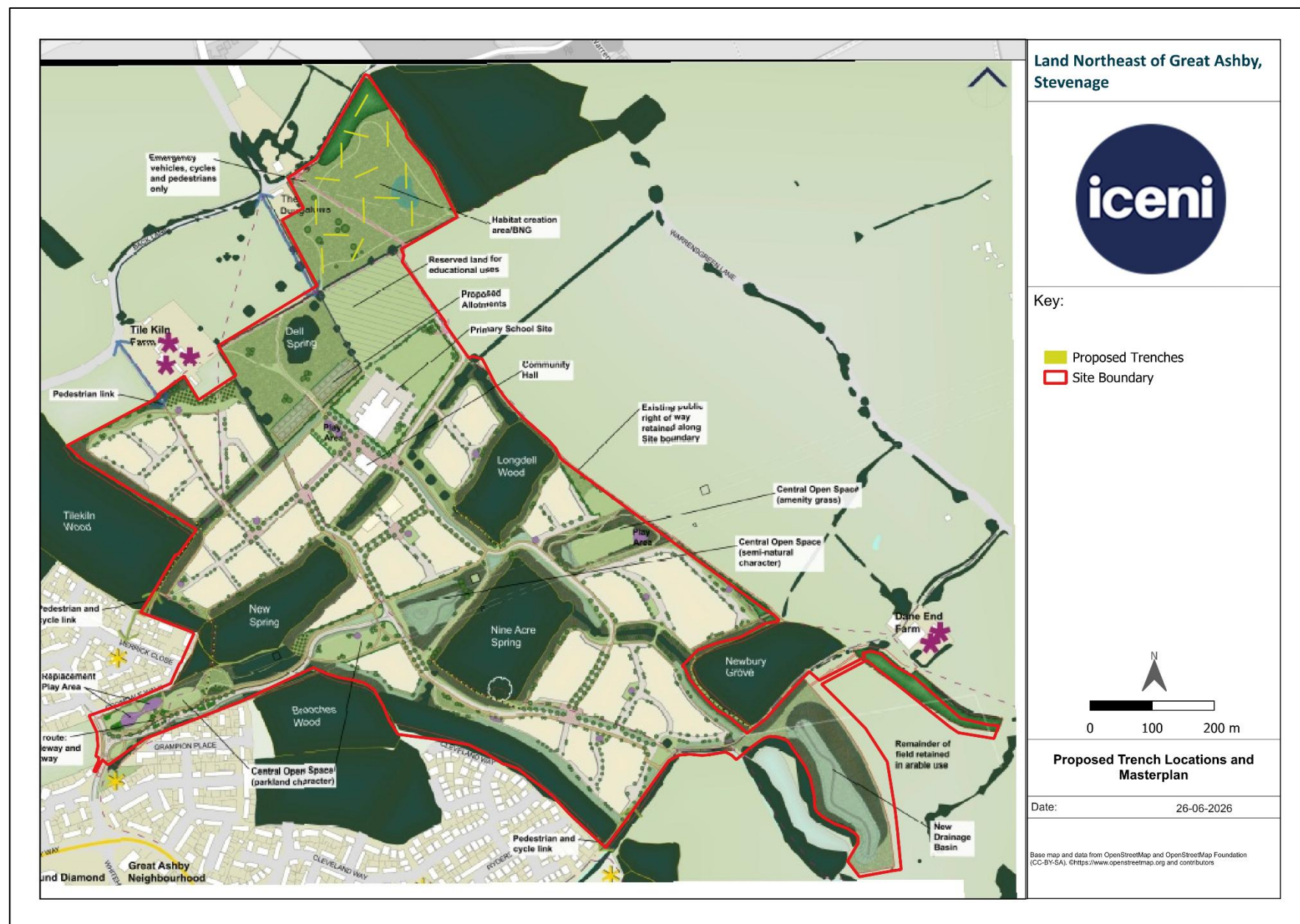


Figure 3 Proposed Trench Locations and Masterplan