

Archaeological Watching Brief Report Five Acre Wood School, Maidstone, Kent

NGR 576851 153086 (TQ 76851 53086)

Planning Reference: MA/14/504946

ASE Project No: 7141 Site Code: MFA 15

ASE Report No: 2015319 OASIS ID: archaeol6-222281

**By Simon Stevens** 

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# **Archaeology South-East**

WB: Five Acre Wood School, Maidstone ASE Report No: 2015319

## **Abstract**

An archaeological watching brief was maintained during groundworks associated with the construction of an extension to Five Acre Wood School, Maidstone, Kent (NGR 576851 153086).

No archaeological deposits were encountered and no artefacts were recovered from the overburden.

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#### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Site Background

Archaeology South-East (ASE) was commissioned by Faithful+Gould on 1.1.1 behalf of their clients Kent County Council to undertake an archaeological watching brief during groundworks associated with the construction of an extension to Five Acre Wood School, Maidstone, Kent (NGR: 576851 153086; Figure 1).

#### 1.2 **Geology and Topography**

- The site lies at a height of c. 87mAOD to the south of the modern commercial 1.2.1 centre of Maidstone, to the east of Boughton Lane. The location of the monitored works lies immediately to the north of the existing school buildings in an area currently used for car parking.
- 1.2.2 According to current data from the British Geological Survey the underlying geological strata at the site consists of the Hythe Formation of sandstone and limestone. There is no recorded superficial geology (BGS 2015).

#### 1.3 **Planning Background**

1.3.1 Planning permission was granted by Maidstone Borough Council for refurbishment and redevelopment work at the site, including an extension to the school in April 2015 (planning ref. MA/14/504946). Owing to the archaeological potential of the site based on the findings of a desk-based assessment carried out in 2014 (ASE 2014a), archaeological fieldwork (ASE 2014b), and following consultation between Maidstone Borough Council and Kent County Council (the Borough Council's advisers on archaeological issues), a programme of archaeological works was required as a condition of planning consent. Condition 12 stated that:

> 'No development shall take place until the applicant or their agents or successors in title has secured the implementation of a watching brief to be undertaken by an archaeologist approved by the County Planning Authority so that the excavation is observed and items of interest and finds are recorded. The watching brief shall be in accordance with a written programme and specification which has been submitted to and approved by the Local Planning Authority.

> Reason - to ensure that features of archaeological interest are properly examined and recorded.'

No site specific specification document for the work was issued by Kent County 1.3.2 Council, so the archaeological work was undertaken in keeping with the generic requirements for fieldwork in Kent (KCC 2011) and accepted nationwide guidelines (ClfA 2014).

# 1.4 Research Aims and Objectives

1.4.1 The general aim of the fieldwork given in the specification document (KCC 2011) was:

'The objectives of the archaeological watching brief are to contribute to heritage knowledge of the area through the recording of the archaeological remains exposed as a result of excavations in connection with the groundworks.'

# 1.5 Scope of Report

1.5.1 The current report provides results of the monitoring of groundworks undertaken during visits to the site in July and August 2015. The on-site work was undertaken by John Cook, Giles Dawkes and Simon Stevens (Senior Archaeologists) and by Pip Stephenson (Archaeologist). The project was managed by Paul Mason (Project Manager), Jim Stevenson and Dan Swift (Post-Excavation Managers).

#### 2.0 ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

#### 2.1 Introduction

The following archaeological background is taken from an archaeological desk-2.1.1 based assessment of the site which listed entries on the Kent County Council Historic Environment Record within a 1km radius of the site (hereafter 'the Study Area') (ASE 2014). Results of recent local archaeological fieldwork are also listed.

#### 2.2 **Prehistoric**

- 2.2.1 The site stands on the Lower Greensand ridge which encircles the Kentish Weald. Prehistoric communities appear to have settled this ridge as well as the Chalk uplands of the adjacent North Downs. The Weald to the south was covered in dense forest throughout this period, and much of the known settlement pattern concentrates around the rim of the Weald, where the Chalk and Greensand geology offers better soils. Mesolithic communities resettled the area as the climate began to improve at the end of the Ice Age. Expanding woodland provided a rich resource base for transient hunting groups, who also exploited the river valleys of the region such as the Len. A belt of Mesolithic settlement or activity sites are known along the Greensand ridge, but none occur within the Study Area.
- The Medway around Maidstone has been identified as an area likely to produce 2.2.2 evidence for human activity during the Lower and Middle Palaeolithic, representing the earliest such activity in the British Isles, up to 700,000 years ago (Wenban-Smith et al. 2007). The focus of study is the sand/gravel aggregate deposits formed during the Middle and early Late Pleistocene. contemporary with these periods of human activity. Although these deposits are concentrated c.5km north of the site, the mapped distribution of fluvial sediments within the Medway Gap is now thought to under-represent their true extent.
- 2.2.3 The early farming communities of the Neolithic saw a major phase of woodland clearance take place, opening up land for crops and the domestication of animals. Much of the evidence for this period in Kent is found in the north of the county, with high status 'monuments' such as the causewayed enclosures at Burham and Kingsborough Farm on the Isle of Sheppey, and complex burial monuments such as Kits Coty House and Julliberrie's Grave. Neolithic finds on the Greensand ridge tend to be axes and flint scatters - of which three are known within the Study Area – and may indicate a reliance on hunting in these less favourable locales.
- The Bronze Age is characterised by the introduction of metals and, initially, the construction of a distinctive burial tradition under round earthen barrows. The later Bronze Age period saw a change in emphasis away from the ritual landscape towards a more utilitarian landscape of agricultural settlement, albeit with spirituality as an integral part of the fabric. Recent studies of Late Bronze Age settlement have identified a bias towards the better soils and improved trading links of the coastal plain and estuaries, but settlement elsewhere in Kent is becoming clearer. Settlement foci are known along the Greensand ridge: a large assemblage of pottery sherds and a nearby suggested field system and

hut, both of provisional late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age date, are known within the Study Area.

- 2.2.5 The Iron Age saw a general continuation of trends from the preceding period, with increasing numbers of open settlements and defended enclosures evident. The known Early Iron Age settlement pattern is largely concentrated in the north-east of the county, although several small settlements are known along the Greensand belt, many of which can be associated with the ancient ridgeway known as the 'Pilgrim's Way' which runs along the North Downs. Later Iron Age settlement is much more evident across the county, with many sites along the Greensand belt, including within the Study Area.
- 2.2.6 Also within the Study Area, 700m south of the site but not recorded in the HER, a linear earthwork ran east/west between Loose Road and Boughton Lane, in the approximate location of the present Walnut Tree Avenue and Leonard Gould Way. It is undated, but thought to relate to a late Iron Age oppidum (proto-town) earthwork enclosure at Quarry Wood in Loose parish, 1600m south of the site (Kelly 1971). The Iron Age settlement at Queen Elizabeth Square would presumably have had close interactions with that site.
- 2.2.7 Six prehistoric sites are recorded within the Study Area:
  - Two Neolithic flint scrapers were found in 1952 when a rockery was constructed at the "Byeways", Lancet Lane, Loose;
  - The end of narrow flint axe of Neolithic date found at 64 Broadoak Avenue;
  - Archaeological work at Queen Elizabeth Square in 1998-9 produced evidence for a Neolithic activity site and a Middle Iron Age to Early Roman Settlement;
  - A flint core and a large collection of pot sherds, provisionally dated to the Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age, was found in association with a probable agricultural pond at the County Police Headquarters;
  - Archaeological work at Boughton Lane in 1998 revealed a series of gullies, ditches and postholes which may represent a late Bronze Age or early Iron Age field system and accompanying hut.
  - A linear earthwork, not recorded in the HER, has been identified running between Loose Road and Boughton Lane. It is undated, but is thought to relate to a late Iron Age oppidum at nearby Quarry Wood.

#### 2.3 Romano-British

2.3.1 As the nearest part of Britain to the Continent, Kent experienced contact with Rome from an early date. Following the Roman invasion of AD43, the region became heavily settled, particularly along the principal route, Watling Street, which linked Richborough with the major urban centres of Canterbury, Rochester and London. Stone Street was subsequently constructed southwards from Rochester, to access the iron resources of the Weald (Margary 1965, 208-228): it runs through Maidstone, and passes within 100m of the site. The former earthwork enclosure at Mangravet Wood lies adjacent

to this important road and appears to respect it, indicating its contemporaneity.

- 2.3.2 Much of Kent was characterised by pre-Roman native type farmsteads, although the distribution of other Roman sites and finds are widespread, with all the main river valleys being well populated. Maidstone appears to have been a significant settlement with at least six cemeteries and a bath-house during this period (English Heritage 2004). The foundations of Roman buildings together with assorted tiles were found near Stone Street at Eight Acres Field in 1840, c.950m south-east of the site.
- 2.3.3 Three Romano-British sites have been recorded within the Study Area:
  - A kite-shaped univallate earthwork enclosure was excavated in 1927 at Mangravet Wood;
  - An important Roman road, 'Stone Street', runs Rochester Maidstone Hastings;
  - Roman foundations and tiles were found in 1840 by Taylor Smythe in Eight Acres Field, south of Sutton Road.

## 2.4 Anglo-Saxon

- 2.4.1 Although Kent was one of the first areas to be heavily settled by Germanic peoples, they tended to prefer the more tractable soils of the coastal plain and the river valleys to those of the Greensand ridge. The densest occupation in the early Anglo-Saxon period seems to have been in the north-east of the county, the heartland of the kingdom of the Cantware, protected to the west by the Medway and to the south-west by the Weald. Penetration of the Greensand ridge seems to have taken place slightly later, in the 6th century, according to funerary evidence. Estates were set up, often with evidence for continuity with earlier land units, encompassing a range of resource areas: Weald, Greensand, river valley and downland – droving of animals between downland and Weald left a legacy of north-south aligned trackways. A line of estates can be traced down the Greensand ridge, forming the nucleus of the later parochial structure, with estate centres corresponding with later village centres such as Maidstone, although archaeological evidence (apart from cemeteries) is sparse.
- 2.4.2 Although there is little evidence for a significant population centre at Maidstone during the Anglo-Saxon period, it was nonetheless an important regional centre from an early date. The place-name Eccles, the location of a Roman villa site a short distance to the north-west of the town is rare evidence for the endurance of early Christianity in southern Britain during the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries AD (Blair 2005, 27-8). A minster church (a collegiate foundations servicing a large territories) was established at Maidstone in the mid-7<sup>th</sup> century (Everitt 1986; Riddler 2004). The place-name, first attested c. 975 as *de maeides stana*, may mean 'the maidens' stone' (Maegoastan) or 'the peoples' stone' (Maegoastan), the latter a probable reference to Maidstone's likely status as a political and judicial meeting-place for its hundred (English Heritage 2004). The exact location of this meeting-place is unknown, but it presumably was at a megalithic tomb on Stone Street and/or the crossing of the Medway.

2.4.3 During this period, the site appears to have been a liminal place, and was probably afforested with the predecessor of Mangravel Wood. The parish boundary between Maidstone and Loose ran across the site until 1887.

2.4.4 No Anglo-Saxon sites have been recorded within the Study Area.

#### 2.5 Medieval

- 2.5.1 The town of Maidstone grew up at the crossing of the Medway, around the Roman road. Sometime during the late eleventh or early twelfth century, a planned urban unit seems to have been laid out east/west along the present High Street. A number of churches were founded soon after, and by the mid-13<sup>th</sup> century Maidstone had become a significant commercial centre with three markets and an annual fair (English Heritage 2004).
- 2.5.2 As in the Anglo-Saxon period, the site was peripheral to Maidstone throughout the medieval period, during which time it was cleared for agricultural use.
- 2.5.3 No medieval sites are recorded within the Study Area.

#### 2.6 Post-Medieval

- 2.6.1 Maidstone continued to prosper as an important regional centre throughout the post-medieval period, and grew rapidly in population during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Despite this, the site remained in agricultural use until the construction of the existing school in the 1950s.
- 2.6.2 Four post-medieval sites are recorded within the Study Area:
  - A post-medieval drainage scheme was excavated at the County Police Headquarters in 1997 & 2001
  - The Maidstone Corporation Tramway opened in 1904 and closed in 1930
  - A 'pleasure ground' landscape was laid out during the 17th and 18th centuries at Mote Park
  - South Park was devolved from meadowland and designed by Bunyards of Maidstone in 1929

# 2.7 Recent Archaeological Investigations

- 2.7.1 The Canterbury Archaeological Trust carried out an archaeological watching brief at the County Police Headquarters, 900m south-east of the site in July 1997. This produced nothing of significance. The features found related to a post medieval drainage scheme, although one undated circular feature was noted. A later excavation, undertaken by ASE in July 2001 uncovered a flint core and a large collection of pottery sherds, provisionally dated to the Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age, in association with a probable agricultural pond.
- 2.7.2 The Kent Archaeological Rescue Unit carried out an archaeological evaluation at Queen Elizabeth Square, 750m east of the site in November 1998. This produced evidence for a Middle Iron Age to Early Roman Settlement. Further

excavation the following year uncovered further evidence for this settlement as well as a Neolithic activity site.

- 2.7.3 RPS Clouston carried out an archaeological excavation at Boughton Lane, 700m south of the site in June 1998. This revealed a series of gullies, ditches and postholes which may represent a Late Bronze Age or early Iron Age field system and accompanying hut. A large piece of slag was also found suggesting the potential for iron smelting although no furnaces were found.
- 2.7.4 ASE carried out an archaeological watching brief during sewer upgrade at Broadoak Avenue and Postley Road, 850m north-west of the site in January 2009. No archaeological deposits were uncovered.
- 2.7.5 Wessex Archaeology carried out an archaeological evaluation on land at Pickering Street, 600m south of the site in February 2010. No archaeological deposits were uncovered.
- 2.7.6 ASE carried out a geophysical survey at the New Line Learning Academy, which bounds the site to the south in January 2012. Despite the level of modern disturbance, several linear anomalies were identified, one of which survives as a visible earthwork. These anomalies potentially relate to buried archaeology such as buried pits and ditches, although a geological origin for these features should not be ruled out.
- 2.7.7 ASE undertook an archaeological evaluation at the current site in August 2014 (ASE 2014). An undated post-hole was identified in one of the trenches and was the only archaeological feature encountered during the evaluation of the area of the school grounds impacted during the works subsequently monitored in July and August 2015.

#### 3.0 ARCHAEOLOGICAL METHODOLOGY

- 3.1 Mechanical and limited manual excavation of service trenches and strip footings were monitored by a suitably qualified archaeologist. All sections were examined for the presence of archaeological features, and all spoil was scanned for archaeological artefacts.
- 3.2 All encountered deposits were recorded to accepted professional standards using standard Archaeology South-East context record forms. Deposit colours were recorded by visual inspection and not by reference to a Munsell Colour chart.
- 3.3 A digital photographic record of the work was kept and will form part of the site archive. The site archive is currently held by Archaeology South-East at the offices in Portslade, and has been offered to Maidstone Museum. The archive consists of the following material:

Number of Contexts	5
No. of files/paper record	1
Plan and sections sheets	-
Digital photos	31 images
Permatrace sheets	-
Watching Brief Record Forms	9

Table 1: Quantification of site archive

#### 4.0 RESULTS

(Figure 2)

#### 4.1 Introduction

4.1.1 An archaeological watching brief was maintained during groundworks at the site consisting of the mechanical and manual excavation of service trenches and strip footings. The service trenches were 900mm wide and a maximum of 2.9m deep, while the foundation trench monitored closer to the building was of equal width and a maximum of 1.2m deep.

## 4.2 The Stratigraphic Sequence

Context Number	Туре	Description	Max. Deposit Thickness
001	Layer	Tarmac	150mm
002	Layer	Made Ground	310mm
003	Layer	'Natural'	-

Table 2: Recorded Contexts

- 4.2.1 The encountered stratigraphic sequence was straightforward in all of the monitored excavations and consisted for the most part of a layer of tarmac forming the car-park surface, context [001] which overlay a mixed deposit of made ground consisting of a mixture of topsoil and brick rubble, context [002], which directly overly the brownish orange silty clay 'natural', context [003]. Closer to the building in areas not covered by the car-park (i.e. with no tarmac surfacing), the sequence consisted of the made ground deposit and 'natural' only. These results are consistent with those seen during the excavation of archaeological trial trenches at the site (ASE 2014)
- 4.2.2 No significant archaeological deposits were encountered and no artefacts were recovered from the overburden during the watching brief. In the circumstances, it was agreed with Wendy Rogers, Senior Archaeological Officer at Kent County Council, that no further monitoring of service trenches or foundations associated with the new extension was required to meet the terms of the planning condition placed on the works.

## 5.0 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

- 5.1 Close archaeological monitoring of mechanical and manual excavation at the site showed that no archaeological deposits were disturbed during the observed groundworks. The absence of an *in situ* topsoil and/or subsoil layer in the monitored excavation suggests extensive earthmoving has occurred at the site, presumably during the construction of the school buildings and associated car-parks.
- 5.2 Therefore the results of the archaeological watching brief, taken in conjunction with the outcome of the previous evaluation of the site (*ibid.*), suggest that no significant archaeological remains have survived in the area affected by the groundworks associated with the extension to the school.

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# **HER Summary**

Site Code	MFA 15				
Identification Name and Address	Five Acre Wood School, Maidstone				
County, District &/or Borough	Maidstone District, Kent				
OS Grid Refs.	576851 153086				
Geology	Hythe Formation (sandstone and limestone)				
Arch. South-East Project Number	7141				
Type of Fieldwork			Watching Brief		
Type of Site		Shallow Urban			
Dates of Fieldwork			27.07.2015 - 17.08.2015		
Sponsor/Client	Faithful+Gould on behalf of Kent County Council				
Project Managers	Paul Mason				
Project Supervisors	Simon Stevens				
Period Summary					

# Summary

An archaeological watching brief was maintained during groundworks associated with the construction of an extension to Five Acre Wood School, Maidstone, Kent (NGR 576851 153086).

No archaeological deposits were encountered and no artefacts were recovered from the overburden.

#### **OASIS Form**

#### OASIS ID: archaeol6-222281

**Project details** 

Five Acre Wood School, Maidstone, Kent Project name

Short description of

the project

An archaeological watching brief was maintained during groundworks associated with the construction of an extension to

Five Acre Wood School, Maidstone, Kent (NGR 576851 153086). No archaeological deposits were encountered and no artefacts were

recovered from the overburden.

Start: 27-07-2015 End: 17-08-2015 Project dates

Previous/future work Yes / Not known

Any associated project reference

codes

7141 - Contracting Unit No.

Any associated project reference

codes

MFA 15 - Sitecode

Any associated project reference

codes

MA/14/504946 - Planning Application No.

Type of project Recording project

Site status None

Current Land use Other 15 - Other

Monument type **NONE None** 

Significant Finds **NONE None** 

Investigation type "Watching Brief"

**Prompt** Direction from Local Planning Authority - PPS

#### **Project location**

## **Archaeology South-East**

WB: Five Acre Wood School, Maidstone ASE Report No: 2015319

Country

England

Site location

KENT MAIDSTONE MAIDSTONE Five Acre Wood School

Postcode

ME15 9QF

Study area

1 Hectares

Site coordinates

TQ 76851 53086 51.248922328881 0.534344331428 51 14 56 N

000 32 03 E Point

**Project creators** 

Name of Organisation

Archaeology South-East

Project brief originator

Kent County Council

Project design originator

Archaeology South-East

Project

director/manager

Paul Mason

Project supervisor Simon Stevens

Type of

Client

sponsor/funding body

Name of sponsor/funding body

Faithful+Gould on behalf of Kent County Council

Project archives

Physical Archive recipient

MAIDSTONE MUSEUM

Physical Contents

"other"

Digital Archive recipient

MAIDSTONE MUSEUM

Digital Contents "other"

Digital Media "Images raster / digital photography", "Text"

## **Archaeology South-East**

WB: Five Acre Wood School, Maidstone ASE Report No: 2015319

available

Paper Archive recipient

MAIDSTONE MUSEUM

Paper Contents

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Paper Media available

"Context sheet", "Miscellaneous Material", "Notebook - Excavation', '

Research', 'General Notes", "Report", "Unpublished Text"

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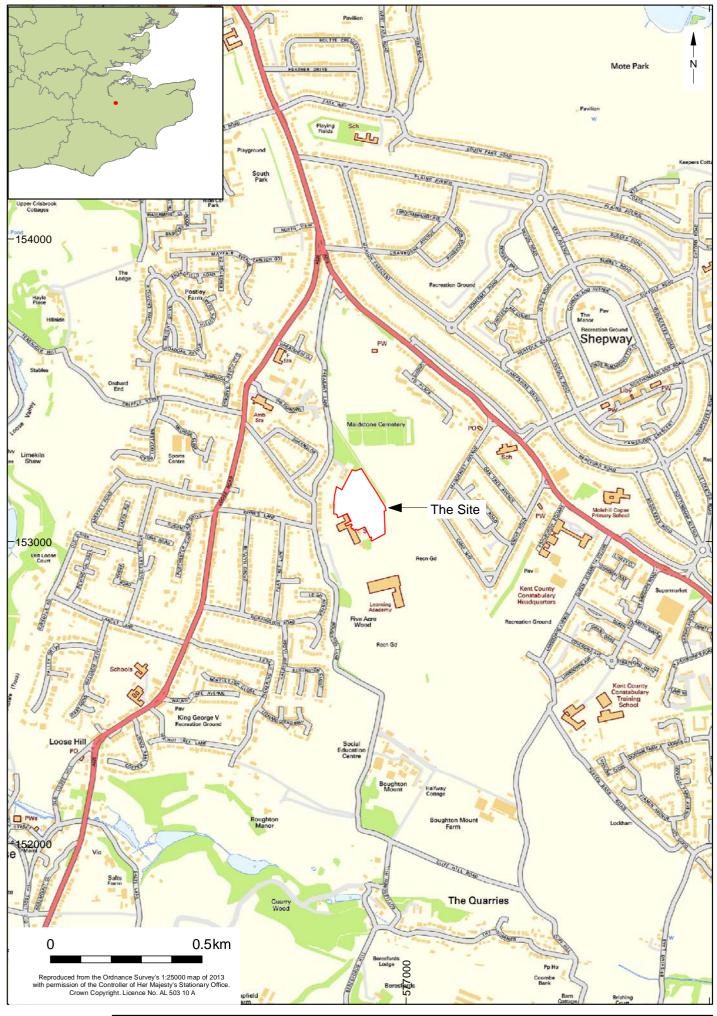
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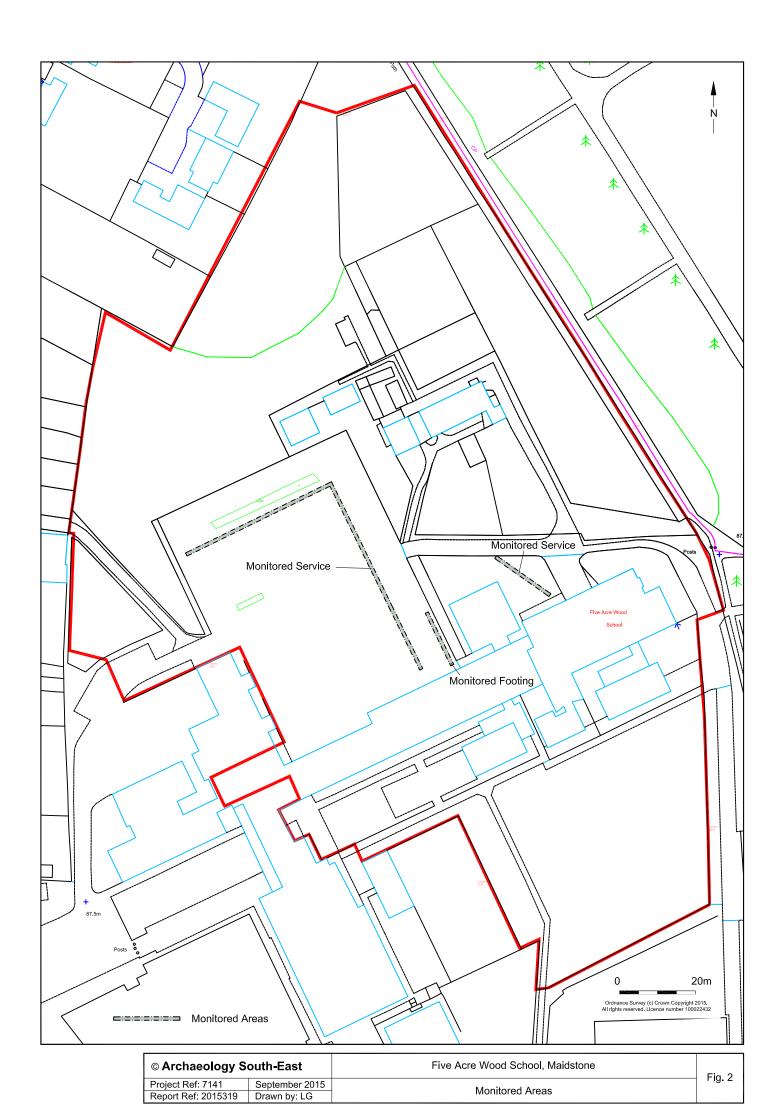
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Entered on 1 September 2015



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Project Ref: 7141	September 2015	Site location	Fig. 1
Report Ref: 2015319	Drawn by: LG	Site location	



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