GROUNDWORKS ARCHAEOLOGY

Report on a Programme of Archaeological Observation, Investigation and Recording, On Land Adjacent to Saracen House Washway Road Saracens Head Spalding Lincolnshire

Prepared for Kirk Homes

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Summary

Groundworks Archaeology undertook an archaeological watching brief on land adjacent to Saracen House, Washway Road, Saracens Head, Lincolnshire. The archaeological watching brief was carried out at the proposed development site between the 29th March and the 13th April 2021.

No archaeological features were present within the monitored area with the ploughsoil directly sealing the natural. The site is on the periphery of Saracens Head which may explain the lack of activity. However, the potential for outlying features related to the salt manufacturing industry remains high as these sites were often relatively isolated.

1. Introduction

1.1 Groundworks Archaeology was commissioned by Kirk Homes to undertake an archaeological watching brief on land adjacent to Saracen House, Washway Road, Saracens Head, Lincolnshire. The archaeological watching brief was carried out at the proposed development site between the 29th March and the 13th April 2021.

1.2 The work was carried out according to the requirements of an archaeological condition, which was attached to the granting of planning consent for this development by South Holland District Council, acting on the advice of Mr Ian Marshman in his capacity as archaeological advisor on planning issues to the Local Planning Authority. This is in accordance with the principles established in *NPPF: Planning for the Historic Environment: Historic Environment Planning Practice Guide* (Department of Culture, Media and Sport, 2018), and *Standard and guidance for archaeological watching briefs* (CIfA, 2017).

2. Site Location and Description

2.1 The site fronts onto Washway Road to the south-east of Saracens Head near Spalding Lincolnshire. The plot of land is sub rectangular and lies immediately to the east of Saracen House; it is bounded to the north by Washway Road and to the east and south by open arable field. It is centred on NGR TF 34305 26869 (figure 1).

2.2 Topographically, the site is situated in a flat, low-lying area of the Lincolnshire fens at a height of approximately 3m AOD. The bedrock geology comprises the West Walton Formation, a mudstone and siltstone sedimentary bedrock formed approximately 157 to 164 million years ago in the Jurassic Period. These sedimentary rocks are shallow-marine in origin. They are detrital, ranging from coarse to fine-grained (locally with some carbonate content) forming interbedded sequences.

2.3 Superficial deposits are recorded as Tidal Flat Deposits, clay and silt superficial deposits formed up to 2 million years ago in the Quaternary Period. These sedimentary deposits are shallow-marine in origin. They are detrital, generally coarse-grained forming beaches and bars in a coastal setting.

3. Planning Background

3.1 Planning consent has been granted by South Holland District Council (reference: H23-1087-20) for the "Erection of 3 Bungalows" adjacent to Sara-

cen House, Washway Road, Saracens Head, Spalding (figure 2). The outline application (H23-0980-17) contained a condition requiring the implementation of a scheme of archaeological mitigation.

2.2 Condition 8 states that "No development shall take place until a written scheme of archaeological investigation has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. This scheme should include the following and should be in accordance with the archaeological brief supplied by the Lincolnshire County Council Historic Environment advisor on behalf of the Local Planning Authority:"

1. An assessment of significance and proposed mitigation strategy (i.e. preservation by record, preservation in situ or a mix of these elements).
2. A methodology and timetable of site investigation and recording.
3. Provision for site analysis
4. Provision for publication and dissemination of analysis and records.
5. Provision for archive deposition.
6. Nomination of a competent person/organisation to undertake the work.
7. The scheme to be in accordance with the Lincolnshire Archaeological Handbook. The archaeological site work shall only be undertaken in accordance with the approved written scheme.

Reason: "To ensure the preparation and implementation of an appropriate scheme of archaeological mitigation in accordance with national guidance contained in Section 12 of the National Planning Policy Framework, 2012. This issue is integral to the development and therefore full details need to be finalised prior to the commencement of works."

2.3 Condition 10 states that "A copy of the final report required in connection with Condition 8 above shall be submitted within three months of the work being carried out to the Local Planning Authority and the Lincolnshire Historic Environment Record. The material and paper archive required as part of the written scheme of investigation shall be deposited with an appropriate archive in accordance with guidelines published in The Lincolnshire Archaeological Handbook.

Reason: "To ensure satisfactory arrangements are made for the recording of possible archaeological remains in accordance with national guidance contained in Section 12 of the National Planning Policy Framework, 2012."

4. Archaeological and Historical Background

4.1 A search was made of the Lincolnshire Historic Environment Record, secondary sources including journal articles were also consulted in the production of the historical and archaeological background.

Prehistoric

4.2 There is evidence of human settlement near the Fens from the Mesolithic onwards. The evidence suggests that Mesolithic settlement was focussed along the fen edges and on the low islands within the fens, to take advantage of the hunting and fishing opportunities of the wetlands. This is evidenced by the identification of the internationally important sites such as Flag Fen and Must Farm. No Prehistoric finds or features are recorded within the study area; this is likely due to the peaking of water levels in the Iron Age which would have buried earlier Bronze Age and Neolithic activity under thick alluvium which may be several meters thick.

Roman

4.3 During the Roman period the water levels dropped allowing settlement of the new silt soils deposited near the coast. It is known that sea defences were constructed in the Roman period. Roman pottery has been recovered from Holbeach at a depth of approximately 1m below present ground level from within tidal silts (Hallam 1970) which indicates the area was subjected to several tidal incursions. It is likely that the site would have been on marginal land throughout the Roman period and although probably exploited is unlikely to have been attractive for permanent settlement. With a rise in sea level in the 5th century much of the reclaimed land was abandoned.

Early-medieval

4.4 In the early Christian period of Anglo-Saxon England, a number of Christians sought the isolation that could be found in the wilderness of the Fens. Later classified as saints, often with close royal links, they include Guthlac, Etheldreda, Pega, and Wendreda. Hermitages on the islands became centres of communities which later developed as monasteries with massive estates. Monastic life was disrupted by Danish (Anglo-Saxon) raids and centuries of settlement from the 6th century but was revived in the mid-10th century monastic revival. In the 11th century, the whole area was incorporated into a united Anglo-Saxon England. The Fens remained a place of refuge and intrigue. It was here that Alfred Aetheling was brought to be murdered and here where Hereward the Wake based his insurgency against Norman England.

4.5 The British Geological Survey data suggests that the Saxon shoreline ran close to the A17 to the south and east of the site. Although there are no HER references to Early-medieval sites in the study area it is thought that a number of minor sea banks had been created by 850AD (Hallam 1965, 7). A substantial amount of early documentary material relates to the reclamation of the land from sea and fen. The nearest sea-bank that can be traced with confidence, *Saltnaygate* follows the line of the modern Washway Road which runs immediately north of the site and is believed to pre-date the Domesday Survey (Hallam 1954, 17). However, earlier sea-banks are suggested including a possible bank following the line of Low Lane.

Medieval

4.6 Fenland monastic houses include the so-called *Fen Five* (Ely Cathedral, Thorney Abbey, Croyland Abbey, Ramsey Abbey and Peterborough Abbey) as well as Spalding Priory. As major landowners, the monasteries played a significant part in the early efforts at drainage of the Fens and a number of their linear sea banks survive to the present day. Leases of land by Crowland Abbey involved the service and repair of sea-banks as part of the tenancy in the early 13th century.

4.7 Saracens Head stood on the sea bank of the wide estuary of the river Welland where travellers and drovers would wait for a guide and suitable tidal conditions to cross the estuary to Fosdike. The hamlet evolved to serve these travellers.

4.8 In the Medieval period the area around the wash developed into a major salt production area with a number of salterns known in the vicinity of the site. Extensive mounds of salt production waste were established at Saracens Head (at the mouth of the Whaplode river). There were salt-pans between Gosberton and Sutterton, against the bank of the Bicker haven and at Holbeach Hurn. Saracens Head was originally known as Saltney meaning island of salt. The name is said to derive from a mound originally up to 3m high which stood on the seaward side of the Roman bank. The mound comprised of pure salt with occasional layers of peat ash. This relic of the salt manufacturing industry derived from the industrial process. The process of making salt was to channel the sea water into a series of pits or pans and there let it remain until all the silt settled at the bottom. The clean water was then taken out and boiled in coppers. These were heated by peat or by reeds (a local fuel source). When the brine was boiled the water evaporated. Leaving the salt in the coppers. The resultant salt was mounded for storage which over time led to the creation of the salt mound. The 13th century saw a combination of wet seasons which caused flooding and the salt works were affected by abnormally high tides.

4.9 Within the study area the Lincolnshire HER records a natural sand hill (MLI20015) which was modified for use as a small saltern 786m north-west of the site with further evidence of salt manufacture (MLI20349) scattered along the sea bank to the west. Remains of salterns have also been identified closer to site with (MLI203376) only 254m north-west. A watching brief (ELI1971) undertaken 277m north-north-west of the site revealed pottery dating from the 11th-14th century while another watching brief (ELI2701) identified an undated ditch and burnt clay thought to be part of a furnace lining associated with salt manufacture.

Post-medieval

4.10 The Post-medieval period witnessed continued efforts to reclaim the fen and the area developed into an agricultural landscape. The hamlet of Saracens Head also developed in tandem with Holbeach Clough into the settlements we see today which still primarily serve the agricultural economy.

5 Aims and objectives of the project

5.1 The aims of the project were the archaeological monitoring of all ground reduction and excavation during the groundworks phase of the project.

5.2 The objectives of the project were:

To establish the presence/absence of archaeological remains within the area of the development site.

To determine the extent, condition, nature, character, quality and date of any archaeological remains encountered.

To allow the preservation by record of archaeological deposits.

5.3 For the purposes of this project, archaeologically significant remains and contexts are defined as remains and contexts relating to pre-19th century human use of the area.

6. Methodology

6.1 The archaeological watching brief was carried out at the development site between the 29th March and the 13th April 2021. The work comprised of the excavation of strip footings for three individual house plots (see figure 2).

6.2 All work was carried out according to the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CiFA) standards and according to the Written Scheme of Investigation.

6.3 A digital colour photographic record was also maintained, some of which is reproduced in this report as plates 1- 4 Appendix 1.

7. Results

7.1 The watching brief monitored the groundworks of all three house plots (figure 3 and plates 1-3). The strip footings measured 0.65m wide and varied between 0.55m and 0.85m deep. The site sloped down from north to south with shallow footings along the northern frontage of the site deepening to the south to provide a level plot.

7.2 The monitoring revealed a simple stratigraphy of a friable dark brown silty ploughsoil (201) up to 0.35m thick which overlay a friable dark orange silty natural which exceeded 0.85m in thickness (see plate 4 for sample section marked on figure 2 as S1). No archaeological features were present within the monitored area, and although pottery was recovered from the ploughsoil it was all datable to the 19th and 20th centuries.

8. Discussion and Conclusions

8.1 No archaeological features were present within the monitored area with the ploughsoil directly sealing the natural and no indication of truncation. The site is on the periphery of Saracens Head which may explain the lack of activity. However, the potential for outlying features related to the salt manufacturing industry withing close proximity to the site remains high as these sites were often relatively isolated.

9. Acknowledgements

9.1 Groundworks Archaeology would like to thank Kirk Homes for commissioning this work. Grateful thanks are also extended to Mr Ian Marshman for his kind assistance.

10. Bibliography

NPPF: Planning for the Historic Environment: Historic Environment Planning Practice Guide (Department of Culture, Media and Sport, 2010),

Standard and guidance for archaeological watching briefs (CiFA, 2017).

Groundworks Archaeology 2020: *Specification for a Programme of Archaeological Observation, Investigation and Recording, On Land Adjacent to Saracen House Washway Road, Saracens Head, Spalding, Lincolnshire*

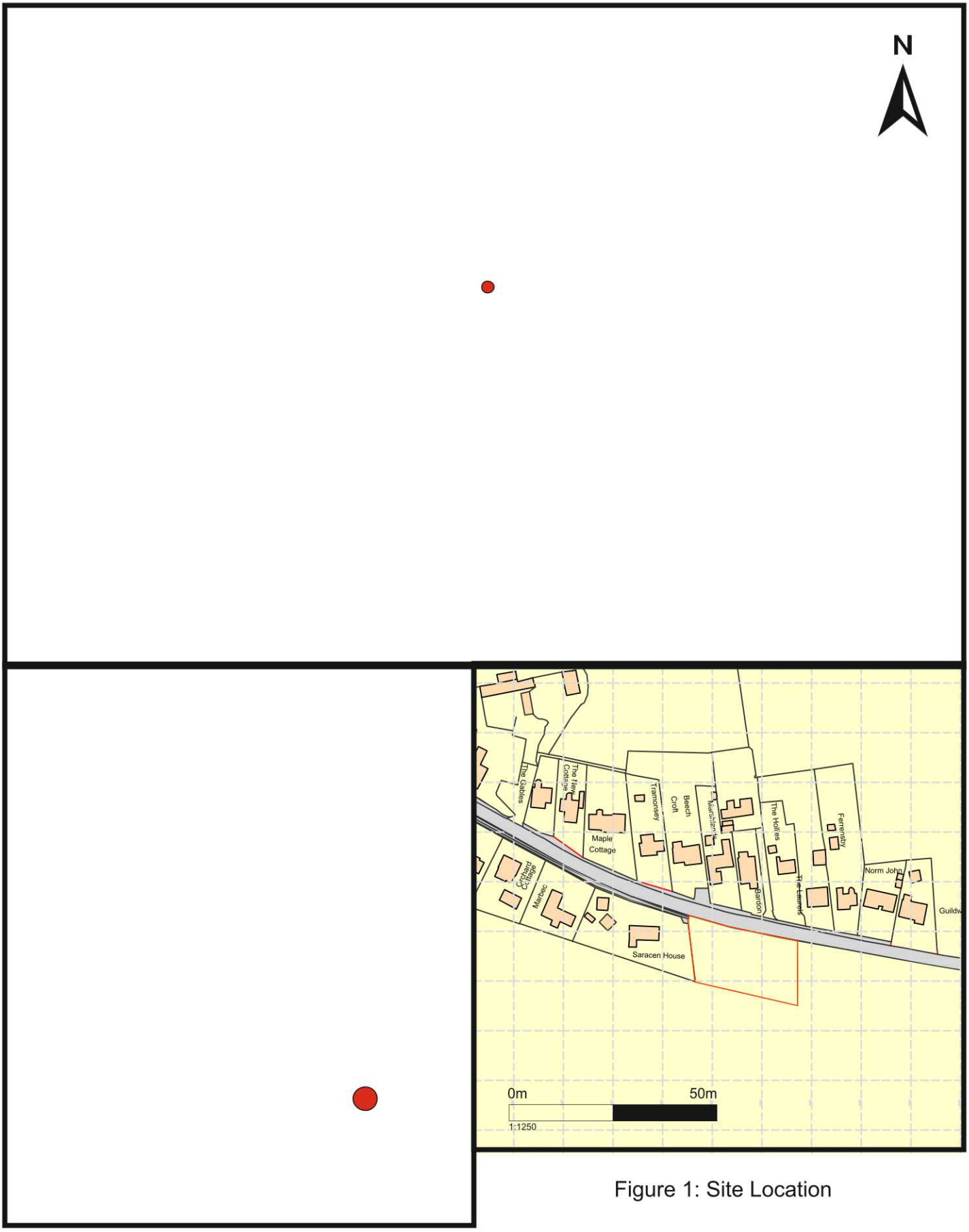


Figure 1: Site Location



Figure 2: Proposed development plan

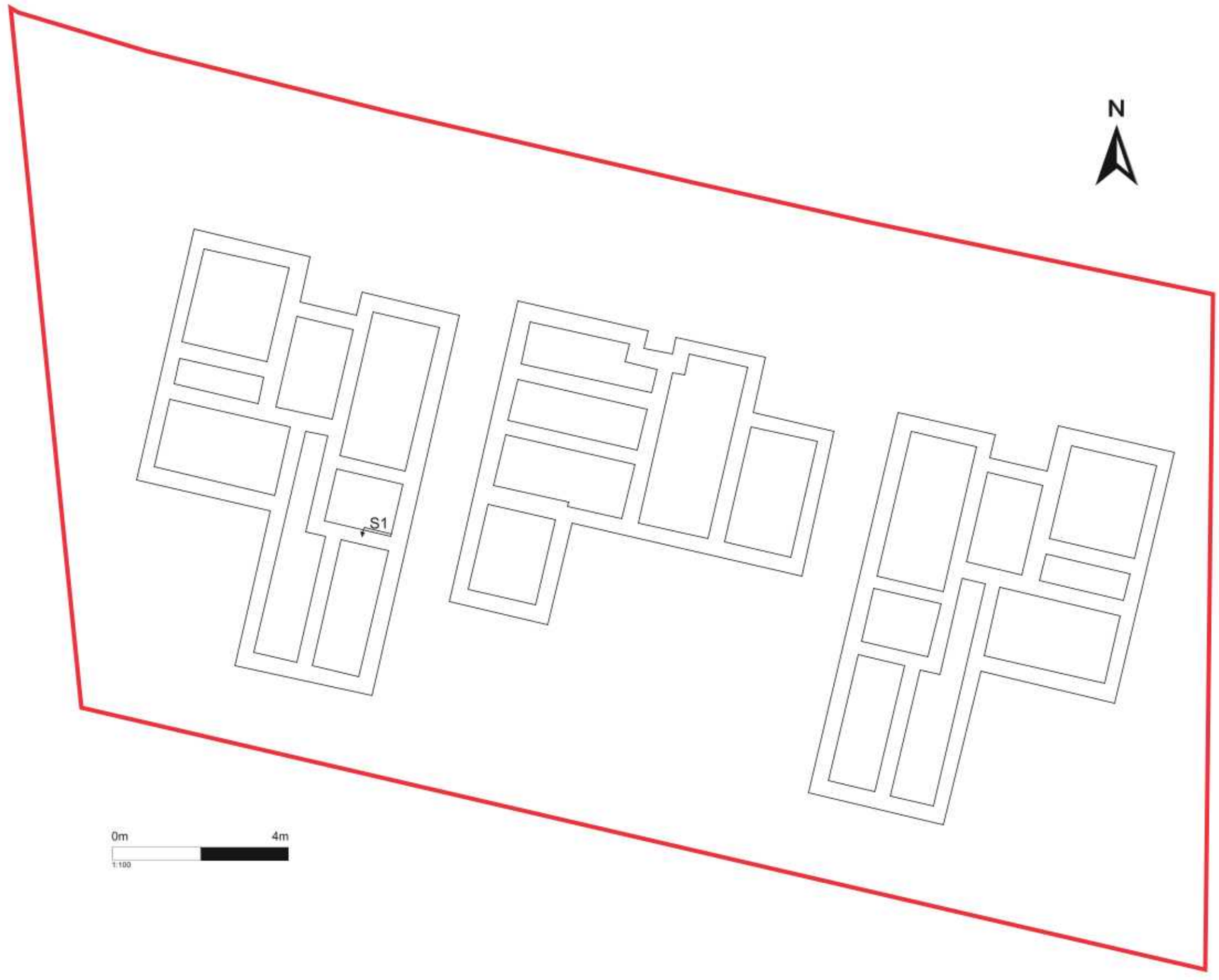


Figure 3: Foundation Plan

Appendix 1: Plates

Plate 1: General view of site looking east

Plate 2: General shop of plot 1 looking south-west

Appendix 1: Plates

Plate 3: General view of plot 2 looking north-west

Plate 4: South facing sample section