

Land at Abbey Road St Bees Cumberland



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**Archaeological Evaluation
Report EH341/02**

Land at Abbey Road St Bees, Cumberland

Archaeological Evaluation for High Grange Developments Limited

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Heritage Impact Assessment
Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment
Historic Landscape Survey
Written Scheme of Investigation

Geophysical Survey
Trial Trench Evaluation
Archaeological Excavation
Archaeological Watching Briefs

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Summary

In 2024 Eden Heritage Ltd was commissioned by High Grange Developments Limited (the Client) to undertake an archaeological evaluation of land at Abbey Road, St Bees, Cumberland. The work was to provide information in relation to a planning application for a proposed residential development.

The proposed development area had been identified as having high archaeological potential. The site lies close to the 12th century Priory Church of St Mary and St Bega which was built as part of a Benedictine priory established in 1120. Previous archaeological investigations had revealed structural remains of the priory and the associated cemetery surviving below ground as well as later remains of the 19th century Low Abbey Farm which is located to the northeast of the development site.

The evaluation was undertaken between the 28th and 30th May 2024, with four trenches excavated across the proposed development area. The trenches were located to target all the areas of the proposed development and to sample a series of earthworks which had been recorded at the site.

The archaeological evaluation revealed that the majority of the earthworks were modern. However, a low bank with stone revetment, was identified on the southeast side of the site which may be medieval. It is considered that the bank may have been constructed to define the edge of a former pond or area of marsh and/or to facilitate access. Material used in its construction included a deposit of burnt coal/clinker containing hammerscale, which suggests an industrial process was being undertaken nearby.

An uncertain linear feature containing organic material was also identified, which may have been associated with drainage. A former fence with upright timber posts and stone drain were also revealed.

1 Introduction

1.1 Project Circumstances

- 1.1.1 In 2024 Eden Heritage Ltd was commissioned by High Grange Developments Limited (the Client) to undertake an archaeological evaluation of land at Abbey Road, St Bees, Cumberland. The work was to provide information in relation to a planning application for a proposed residential development.
- 1.1.2 The site was c.0.5km to the northeast of St Bees, which is c.6km to the south of Whitehaven in Cumberland (Figure 1). The proposed development area comprised part of an uncultivated plot of land measuring c.0.6ha to the south of Abbey Road, immediately to the southwest of St Bees Priory, centred on National Grid Reference NX 9675 1204 (Figure 2).
- 1.1.3 The proposed development area had been identified as having high archaeological potential. The site lies close to the 12th century Priory Church of St Mary and St Bega which was built as part of a Benedictine priory established in 1120. Previous archaeological investigations had revealed structural remains of the priory and the associated cemetery surviving below ground as well as later remains of the 19th century Low Abbey Farm which is located to the northeast (Figure 2).
- 1.1.4 As a result, Westmorland and Furness Council's Historic Environment Service (W&FHES), acting as archaeological advisers to Cumberland Council, advised that an archaeological evaluation of the proposed development area was necessary, to provide information on the significance of any archaeological remains within the site, and to determine how that significance would be impacted by the proposed development (W&FHES 2024). This was in line with government advice as set out in Section 16 of the revised National Planning Policy Framework (DLUHC 2023).
- 1.1.5 In accordance with the advice of W&FHES, and the *Brief for an Archaeological Evaluation on land to the south of Holley Mews, Abbey Road, St Bees* (W&FHES 2024) a Project Design for archaeological evaluation was produced by Eden Heritage Ltd (Eden Heritage Ltd 2024). This was submitted to Jeremy Parsons, Historic Environment Officer for approval, prior to commencement of the project.

2 Methodology

2.1 Scope of the Work

- 2.1.1 The project comprised an archaeological trial trench evaluation, which was undertaken in order to provide information regarding the potential for buried archaeological remains within the proposed development area. The purpose of the evaluation was to obtain information on the date, quality, depth and state of preservation of potential archaeological remains at the site, if present. In particular, the archaeological importance of the earthworks that had previously been recorded on the site was to be determined as outlined in the project brief (W&FHES 2024, 3).

2.2 Documentary Research

- 2.2.1 A rapid desk-based assessment was undertaken in order set the results of the archaeological work into their geographical, topographical, archaeological and historical context. The documentary research focused on evidence for potential archaeological remains at the site and was undertaken in accordance with the recommendations of the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists in *Standards and Guidance for Historic Environment Desk-based Assessments* (CIfA 2020a).
- 2.2.2 The assessment included consultation of the Cumbria Historic Environment Record (HER) and a review of historic mapping and readily available aerial imagery. This work will also involve consultation of various online resources, including the National Heritage List maintained by Historic England and reports held by the Archaeological Data Service.

2.3 Archaeological Trial Trench Evaluation

- 2.3.1 The archaeological evaluation was undertaken following the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists' *Universal guidance for archaeological field evaluation* (CIfA 2023).
- 2.3.2 The evaluation as outlined in the Project Design comprised the excavation of four trenches measuring approximately 25m long by 1.6m wide (T1-T4). However, two trenches (T3 and T4) were reduced in length to 17m due to waterlogged conditions in the low-lying southeast portion of the site (Figure 3).
- 2.3.3 The general aims of these investigations were:

- to establish the presence/absence, nature, extent and state of preservation of archaeological remains and to record these where they were observed;
- to establish the character of those features in terms of cuts, soil matrices and interfaces;
- to assess the impact of the application on the archaeological site;
- to recover artefactual material, especially that useful for dating purposes;
- to recover palaeoenvironmental material where it survives in order to understand site and landscape formation processes.

2.3.4 Deposits considered not to be significant were removed by a traced 360 mechanical excavator with a toothless ditching bucket, under close archaeological supervision. The trial trenches were subsequently cleaned by hand. All possible features were inspected, and selected deposits were excavated by hand to retrieve artefactual material. Once completed all features were recorded in accordance with the Museum of London Archaeological Service Archaeological Site Manual (Museum of London 1994). A metal detector was utilised to maximise the collection of metal artefacts from the excavated spoil, in accordance with the Treasure Act 1996 Code of Practice.

2.3.5 All finds encountered were retained on site and returned to the Eden Heritage Ltd office where they were identified, quantified and dated to period. A *terminus post quem* was then produced for each stratified context, and the dates were used to help determine the broad date phases for the site.

2.3.6 On completion of the project, the finds were cleaned and packaged according to standard guidelines. Please note, the following categories of material will be discarded following the submission of this report within 6 months, unless there is a specific request to retain them (and subject to the collection policy of the relevant depository):

- unstratified material of no research value;
- modern pottery and finds;
- material that has been assessed as having no obvious grounds for retention.

2.3.7 The evaluation trenches were backfilled with the excavated material following the field evaluation.

2.3.8 The fieldwork programme was followed by an assessment of the data as set out in the *Universal guidance for archaeological field evaluation* (CIfA 2023) and the *Standard and Guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials* (CIfA 2020b).

2.4 Project Archive

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- 2.4.1 A full professional archive has been compiled in accordance with the Written Scheme of Investigation (Eden Heritage 2021), and the Archaeological Archives Forum recommendations (Brown 2011).
- 2.4.2 Eden Heritage Ltd supports the Online Access to the Index of Archaeological Investigations (OASIS) project. This project aims to provide an online index and access to the extensive and expanding body of grey literature created as a result of developer-funded archaeological fieldwork. As a result, details of the results of this study will be made available by Eden Heritage as a part of this project, and a copy of the report will be uploaded to the OASIS website within 3 months following approval by Cumbria County Council (Reference **edenheri1-526000**).

3 Background

3.1 Location and Geological Context

- 3.1.1 St Bees is a coastal village and civil parish in the Cumberland district of Cumbria, located on the Irish Sea. The village is c.6km to the south of Whitehaven situated to the southeast of St Bees Head (Figure 1). The proposed development area was to the northwest of the village, to the south of Abbey Road and west of The Priory, centred on Ordnance Survey grid references NX 9675 1204 (Figure 2).
- 3.1.2 The proposed development area comprised uncultivated land and occupied an irregular plot of land to the south of Holly Mews. A rectangular area between Abbey Road and the proposed development area has been evaluated previously in 2010 (Figure 2). The land occupied a relatively steep southeast-facing slope with elevations of between c.17m above Ordnance Datum (aOD) and c.10m aOD.
- 3.1.3 The geology of the site comprised sandstone, known as St Bees Sandstone Member. This sedimentary bedrock formed approximately 252.2 to 247.1 million years ago in the Triassic Period. This was overlain by glaciofluvial deposits of sand and gravel, formed between 116 and 11.8 thousand years ago in the Quaternary period (BGS 2024).

3.2 Historic Background

- 3.2.1 An archaeological desk-based assessment for land within the site boundary was undertaken in 2010 (North Pennines Archaeology Ltd 2010). A summary of the findings is provided here for context.
- 3.2.2 St Bees is alleged to have had early medieval origins in that a nunnery was supposed to have been founded on the site of the medieval Priory by the Irish saint Bega in c.650. Although there are stone sculptures dating from this period in the church no other evidence has been recovered. St Bees Priory was constructed for the prior and 6 Benedictine monks by William de Meschines in c.1120 as a cell of St Mary's Abbey in York (North Pennines Archaeology Ltd 2010, 11).
- 3.2.3 Nearly all the buildings of the medieval Priory have since been removed, but the 12th century Church of St Mary and St Bega stands 100m to the northeast of the site boundary and is a Grade I listed building (List Entry 1336027). The Church dates from re-foundation c.1120 (Historic England 2024).

- 3.2.4 St Bees Priory was dissolved in 1539 but previous archaeological investigations have revealed the survival of sub-surface structural remains of the Priory and cemetery. In 1977 geophysical survey of the area of new graveyard expansion showed that the area was heavily disturbed, but possibly representing the foundations or walls of farm buildings relating to the Priory (North Pennines Archaeology Ltd 2010, 12). A small archaeological excavation took place in 1979 in the area west of the church prior to the expansion of the graveyard. This revealed a yard, a well and drains possibly related to farm buildings at the Low Abbey Farm. Stone walls and a wattle fence were interpreted as outbuildings related to the medieval Priory (Ibid.).
- 3.2.5 A further excavation in 1980 produced well-preserved leather and wooden objects of later medieval date and the evidence of animal bone suggested specialized activity (North Pennines Archaeology Ltd 2010, 13). In 1981 an archaeological excavation in the ruined south chancel revealed numerous burials. The earliest were adults and slightly out of alignment with remaining buildings which may have been part of the monks' burial ground between AD 1120-1300 (Ibid.).
- 3.2.6 The First edition 25" Ordnance Survey map of 1865 shows the layout of the site in the mid-19th century to the west of the site of the medieval Priory and St Bees Church (Plate 1). This map depicts the proposed development area as a roughly triangular area to the south of Abbey Road, bounded to the south by a track. The feature marked 'T' probably relates to a tank or water trough.



Plate 1: First edition 25" Ordnance Survey map of 1865 (site area is circled in red)

- 3.2.7 Subsequent historic Ordnance Survey mapping suggests that the proposed development area may have continued as agricultural land throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, although the eastern part of the field was enclosed prior to 1957 to be used as a graveyard.
- 3.2.8 Google Earth imagery from 2008 shows the remainder of the field comprised rough pasture with several earthworks present (Figure 2). A row of properties known as Holly Mews was subsequently constructed to the north of the north of the graveyard and the area to the northwest of the proposed development area (immediately south of Abbey Road) appears to have been used as a compound.
- 3.2.9 The earthworks within the site are shown on Historic England's Aerial Archaeology Mapping Explorer, where they are interpreted as a series of possible banks and ditches. It has been suggested these earthworks define small rectilinear enclosures and a possible trackway and which may be associated with either the medieval priory or the 19th century Low Abbey Farm (W&FHES 2024, 2).

3.3 Previous Archaeological Work

- 3.3.1 As noted above, there have been several archaeological investigations at the site of the medieval Priory. In addition, an evaluation was undertaken on land immediately to the east of the proposed development area ahead of a site being developed into a wildlife garden (LUAU 1996). The excavations revealed that archaeological deposits associated with the Priory were only present below the maximum depth of the excavated trenches (0.50m). Above this level the deposits were consistent with levelling up layers possibly associated with the 19th century Low Abbey Farm.
- 3.3.2 In 2010 an archaeological evaluation was undertaken of the land immediately to the north of the proposed development area, prior to proposed development (area shown on Figure 3). Five trenches were excavated, revealing a substantial depth of moder rubble and subsoil, overlying the natural sand. A small number of post holes, and a pit and a ditch were identified (in Trench 1). One of the trenches (Trench 4) suggested the ground may have been terraced to the south of Abbey Road. Medieval and post-medieval pottery and metal objects were recovered (North Pennines Archaeology 2010). The results suggested that the area had been used as agricultural land and recently as a dump for excavated material. No evidence of any significant medieval activity was recorded on the site.

- 3.3.3 In 2013 an archaeological watching brief be maintained during ground works associated with the development of the eastern quarter of this area in the location of Trench 1. No archaeological remains were revealed by the works which comprised the stripping of topsoil and removal of a modern bank only. The natural geology was not reached over most of the site and further features may therefore have potentially survived at depth (Wardell Armstrong Archaeology 2013).

4 Evaluation Results

4.1 Introduction

- 4.1.1 The evaluation was undertaken between the 28th and 30th May 2024, with four trenches (T1-T4) excavated across the proposed development area (Figure 3). The trenches were located to sample all the areas of the proposed development and target the recorded earthworks at the site (Plate 2).



Plate 2: The evaluation site showing earthworks, looking southeast

- 4.1.2 Made ground was present across most of the proposed development area. This varied in depth between 0.6m and 1.8m within Trenches T1-T3. This directly overlay the natural yellow/orange clayey sand in the northwest part of the site, suggesting that this area had been terraced. Two separate terraces were defined on the south side by banks of made ground in Trenches T2 and T3. One of the banks was c.3m high, which made it necessary to move Trench T1 further to the south. This bank also extended eastwards into T3 where it was also shown to be modern made ground.
- 4.1.3 The southwest portion of the site was found to be waterlogged and is believed to have formerly been a pond or marsh. In Trenches T1 and T4 natural blue/grey clay was revealed beneath the yellow/orange clayey sand, which had undoubtedly led to the waterlogged conditions in this area. Due to the wet nature of the southeast corner of the site machine excavation here became unviable.

- 4.1.4 Archaeological features were only revealed in Trench 1 (T1) and Trench 4 (T4) which potentially dated to the medieval and post-medieval periods. These included a bank of sand with stone revetment, a linear feature, a stone drain and a partial fence. Ceramic drains also crossed Trench 1.
- 4.1.5 The following text discusses the archaeological features encountered in more detail.

4.2 Results

- 4.2.1 *Trench 1:* Trench 1 was situated on the south side of the proposed development area, located immediately to the south of a high bank, aligned approximately northwest to southwest (Figure 3).



Plate 3: Deposits in the west end of Trench 1, looking northwest (2 x 1m scales)

- 4.2.2 Natural blue/grey clay (**100**) was identified at a depth of 0.9m below ground level (blg) in Trench 1, with a notable decrease in height to the east where the ground quickly became waterlogged. A row of eight upright timber posts (**107**), aligned northeast-southwest was revealed at the centre of the trench. These were spaced on average 0.35m apart and were embedded in the natural clay to a depth of approximately 0.4m, with the upper 0.2m of post exposed (Figure 4). These were located

within the extent of a possible former pond or marsh which was quickly inundated with water. One of the posts was recovered as a sample and is discussed in more detail in Section 5 below.



Plate 4: Stone drain [105]/(106), looking northwest (2 x 1m scales)

- 4.2.3 In the west end of the trench the blue/grey clay (100) was overlain by a 0.3m-deep natural deposit of yellow/orange clayey sand (101) containing occasional small pebbles (Plate 3). The clayey sand (101) was cut by the linear trench for a stone drain [105] which measured between 0.2m and 0.4m wide and 0.5m deep, aligned northwest to southeast (Figure 4). The base of the drain was lined with flat stone slabs (106) measuring approximately 0.2m by 0.15m, above which were several unshaped stone pieces forming the sides of the drain (Plate 4). The upper part of the drain was backfilled with 0.15m of redeposited yellow/orange clayey sand. No finds were recovered from the drain.
- 4.2.4 The yellow/orange clayey sand (101) in Trench 1 was covered by 0.2m of grey/black clayey silt (102) containing occasional small pebbles and some sandstone pieces (Plate 2 and Figure 4). This layer is believed to have been formed under waterlogged conditions containing organic material. A 0.05m-deep layer of decayed organic matter (103) was also seen to overlay the grey/black clayey silt. This

was interpreted as a layer of vegetation that had once covered an area of wet ground.

- 4.2.5 This was covered by up to 0.6m of modern made ground comprising mixed yellow/brown clayey sand **(104)** containing frequent pieces of sandstone and cobbles and some modern pottery fragments. This deposit formed a low bank at the western end of the trench (Plate 2 and Figure 4).
- 4.2.6 *Trench 2 and Trench 3:* Trenches 2 and 3 were positioned on the north side of the proposed development area, aligned approximately northwest to southwest, to sample the identified earthworks, being located to the southeast of the previously evaluated area (Figure 3).
- 4.2.7 The natural yellow/orange clayey sand **(200)** was revealed at a depth of c.1.8m blg in Trench 2 (Plate 4). This was overlain by 1.7m of modern made ground comprising very mixed yellow/brown clayey sand **(101)** containing sandstone rubble, brick, concrete, metal objects and plastic ducting throughout (Plate 5). At the north end of the trench an area measuring approximately 10m across exhibited clear evidence of material having been deposited in layers down the slope (Plate 6).



Plate 5: Trench 2 showing made ground deposits **(201)**, looking northwest (2m scale)



Plate 6: Made ground deposits **(201)** in the north end of Trench 2, looking northeast (2m scale)



Plate 7: Trench 3 showing made ground deposits **(301)**, looking northwest (2m scale)

- 4.2.8 The natural yellow/orange clayey sand **(300)** was revealed at a depth of c.1.4m blg in Trench 3. This was overlain by 1.7m of modern made ground comprising very mixed yellow/brown clayey sand **(301)** containing further sandstone rubble, brick, concrete and metal objects (Plate 7).
- 4.2.9 Trench 3 had to be widened/stepped at the south end in order to be able to excavate a section across the earthwork bank. The two trenches revealed two separate terraces which were defined by banks of made ground on the southern edges of the terraces. There was no evidence of topsoil in either trench, confirming that the area had been subject to the dumping of modern materials.
- 4.2.10 *Trench 4:* Trench 4 was situated on the southeast side of the proposed development area, located immediately to the south of the modern graveyard, to sample a possible earthwork bank (Figure 3).



Plate 8: Bank of sand **(401)** in Trench 4, looking northwest (2 x 1m scales)

- 4.2.11 Natural blue/grey clay **(400)** was identified at a depth of 0.5m below ground level (blg) in the south end of Trench 4 and at a depth of 0.6m in the north end of the trench, with a notable decrease in height to the south where the ground quickly became waterlogged and may have been within a former pond or area of marsh (Figure 5). A 0.9m-high c.8m-wide bank of fine yellow/orange sand

(401) overlay the natural clay at the centre of the trench, aligned northeast-southwest. This bank appears to have defined the northwest edge of the former pond or marsh (Plate 8).

- 4.2.12 The sand bank was evidently deliberately constructed, as the sand **(401)** contained flecks of coal throughout and a lens of coal **(403)** was revealed within the sand on the south side, which was sampled (Sample #2). The sand also contained a revetment **(402)** towards the center of the bank. This comprised a 0.8m wide 0.3m high foundation of rounded cobbles and sandstone pieces which were bedded in the sand and appears to have been to reinforce the sand bank (Plate 9). A sherd of medieval pottery was recovered from between the stones forming the revetment (see Section 5).



Plate 9: Revetment **(402)** in Trench 4, looking northeast (2 x 1m scales)

- 4.2.13 A linear feature **[404]** was identified cutting the natural blue/grey clay **(400)** in the northeast corner of the trench, aligned northwest to southeast (Figure 5). This was 3.3m long and 0.5m wide but continued outside the trench to the north (Plate 10). Where excavated the feature was 0.2m deep with a shallow U-shaped profile and was lined with a 0.05m-deep mid-brown organic material **(409)**.
- 4.2.14 The linear feature was filled with black sandy silt **(405)** with visible fragments of vegetable matter throughout. This material was sampled for environmental assessment (Sample #1). Filling the top of the trench was a 0.2m wide 0.15m deep layer of crushed sandstone **(406)** which contained occasional stone pieces.



Plate 10: Trench 4 showing linear feature [404], looking southeast (2 x 1m scales)



Plate 11: Section through linear feature [404] showing organic deposit (405) (15cm scale)

- 4.2.15 The features in the north end of Trench 4 were covered by 0.3m of yellow/brown clayey sand **(407)** and 0.2m of grey/brown clayey sand **(408)** and vegetation. This was 0.1m deep to the south.

4.3 Discussion

- 4.3.1 Potentially the earliest archaeological features were identified in Trench 4, comprising a bank of sand **(401)** and revetment **(402)** which contained a sherd of medieval pottery. The bank **(401)** appears to define the north site of a very wet area (former pond or marsh) and may have been constructed to facilitate access to the pond or to help define the water's edge.
- 4.3.2 The row of timber posts in Trench 1 also appears to have been associated with the edge of the former pond or marsh and may have originally formed a fence or other barrier; the waterlogged conditions have preserved the posts below the level of the natural clay **(100)**. The posts and the adjacent land drain may potentially be post-medieval in date. A fragment of clay pipe stem was recovered from the layer of grey/black clayey silt **(102)** overlying these features; this deposit and a layer of decayed organic matter **(103)** appears to have formed under wet/waterlogged conditions and relates to the former pond/marsh. The linear feature **[404]** to the north contained a similar layer of organic material **(409)**, which appears to have formed under the same conditions.
- 4.3.3 All of the earthworks in the northwest position of the site were modern and were constructed from deposits of made ground. This appears to have been laid to form several terraces down the hillside. The client believes that this took place when houses were constructed to the north of the site along Abbey Road, when the field was reputedly used for the disposal of building rubble.

5 Finds Assessment

5.1 Introduction

- 5.1.1 Following the completion of the fieldwork all finds were returned to the Eden Heritage Ltd office for assessment. Most of the finds on site were modern and were recovered from layers of made ground during the excavation and were therefore not retained. Two of the deposits in Trench 1 and Trench 4 produced single finds, which are discussed in more detail below.
- 5.1.2 All finds were dealt with according to the recommendations of the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists Standard & Guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials (CifA 2020b). All artefacts have been assessed according to material type and conforming to the deposition guidelines recommended by Brown (2011).

5.2 Medieval Pottery

- 5.2.1 A single sherd of medieval pottery, weighing 13.8g, was recovered from the revetment **(402)** during the investigation of Trench 4. The sherd is in good condition with very little evidence of damage.
- 5.2.2 The sherd is a body fragment of late medieval reduced ware, of fine sandy grey to dark grey fabric. The outer surface has an apple green/yellow glaze with incised decoration of short curving lines.
- 5.2.3 The sherd may possibly be from a jug or jar. The pottery is part of a widespread northern 'Reduced Green ware' tradition which had a *floruit* in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

5.3 Clay Pipe

- 5.3.1 Part of a clay pipe stem, weighing 4.1g, was recovered from the deposit of grey/black clayey silt **(102)** in Trench 1. The fragment is 55mm long and 13mm in diameter with a stem hole size of 3.5mm.
- 5.3.2 The clay pipe stem is in good condition with little evidence of post-depositional ware.
- 5.3.3 The stem is undecorated and has no makers mark or other identifying features.
- 5.3.4 The object is post-medieval in date. A stem hole size of 3.5mm suggests a potential early 17th century date for the clay pipe (Oswald 1975).

5.4 Timber

- 5.4.1 A timber post was recovered from Trench 1 being one of a row of eight upright posts **(107)**. The post was formed from a halved timber with a tapering rectangular profile. The timber was 0.8m long, and 0.05m thick, with a tapering point narrowing from 0.13m wide to 0.05m wide at the tip (Plate 12).



Plate 12: Timber post from Trench 1 **(107)** (1m scale)

5.5 Research Potential

- 5.5.1 No further work is justified on the ceramic material.
- 5.5.2 The timber post is undated but is considered likely post-medieval given the location and context of the timber. No further work is recommended on the post.

6 Environmental Assessment

6.1 Introduction

- 6.1.1 Two bulk environmental samples were presented for assessment. Sample <1> was from fill **(405)** of a linear feature **[404]** and Sample <2> was from a coal-rich deposit **(403)** in Trench 4. The total combined weight of processed sediment was 20kg (20l).
- 6.1.2 This section presents the results of the assessment of the environmental samples, palaeobotanical and charcoal remains in accordance with Campbell *et al.* (2011).

6.2 Methodology

- 6.2.1 The bulk environmental samples were processed at Wardell Armstrong LLP in Carlisle. The colour, lithology, weight, and volume of each sample was recorded using standard Wardell Armstrong *pro forma* recording sheets cf. Table 2. The samples were processed with 500-micron retention and flotation meshes using the Siraf method of flotation (Williams 1973). Once dried, the residues from the retention mesh were sieved to 4mm and the artefacts and ecofacts removed from the larger fraction to be forwarded to Eden Heritage Ltd. The smaller fraction was scanned with a magnet for microslags such as hammerscales. This fraction was then examined for smaller artefacts such as beads.
- 6.2.2 The flots were retained and scanned using a stereo microscope (up to x45 magnification). Any non-palaeobotanical finds were noted on the flot *pro forma*. Once fully recorded and all relevant material removed the non-archaeological component of the flot was discarded.

6.3 Results

- 6.3.1 The samples yielded charcoal, charred plant remains, magnetised matter, industrial waste, iron and calcined bone. The charred plant remains, charcoal and calcined bone were considered for this report. One of the samples contained artefacts and ecofacts while the other was sterile.
- 6.3.2 Sample <1> was taken from **(405)** of linear feature **[404]** which was lined with an organic material **(409)**. After processing it was clear that the sample contained amorphous plant matter which had been persevered by anaerobic waterlogging of probable natural detritus, including wood and roots. It was considered this was probably of recent origin. It had a sterile flot with no dried residue.

- 6.3.3 Sample <2> was taken from a lens of burnt coal **(403)**, from a deliberately constructed sand bank **(401)**. The sample produced 2.75g of clinker from its flot. Material recovered from the dried residue consisted of magnetic material, bone, coal and clinker.

6.4 Discussion

- 6.4.1 There was not enough environment material present to say anything meaningful about the assemblage, although the absence of carbonised plant macrofossils indicates that the sampled features were not routinely receiving debris from domestic or arable processing activities and may have been situated away from core areas of contemporary human occupation.
- 6.4.2 The magnetic material from sample <2> contained pieces of microslags (plate hammerscale).
- 6.4.3 The presence of coal may be local to the area; whilst not directly above coal measures, the site is just to the south of the minefields along the west coast of Cumbria. The closest mines to the site were Whitehaven Croft pit (1888 to 1905), Whitehaven Ladysmith pit (1908 to 1930), and Mainband (1988 to 1996), located between 3.4kms and 4.8kms from the site (nmrs.org.uk).
- 6.4.4 The burnt coal, clinker, within sample <2>, could indicate that fuel residues were deliberately used as part of the construction of sand bank **(401)**. Whether these were derived from domestic or industrial hearths is difficult to determine, although the presence of hammerscale could imply an industrial origin.
- 6.4.5 No material suitable for radiocarbon dating was recovered.

6.5 Statement of potential and recommendations

- 6.5.1 No further work is recommended as there is no interpretive value to be gained from the small amounts of microslags recovered from this site.
- 6.5.2 The environmental material is currently held in the Wardell Armstrong LLP. Once a determination on any further requirements has been realised and prior to the deposition of the site archive, the environmental material may be discarded.

7 Conclusions

7.1 Origins, Development and Use

- 7.1.1 The proposed development area is in an area of known archaeological potential, being close to the site of a Benedictine priory established in 1120. The 12th century Church of St Mary and St Bega stands 100m to the northeast of the site boundary. St Bees Priory was dissolved in 1539 but previous archaeological investigations have revealed the survival of sub-surface structural remains of the Priory and cemetery surrounding the site. A geophysical survey of the area of the new graveyard immediately adjacent to the development area also indicated the presence of foundations or walls of farm buildings relating to the Priory (North Pennines Archaeology Ltd 2010, 12).
- 7.1.2 Four trenches were excavated to sample the proposed development area, targeting several earthworks which have been recorded from aerial imagery. The majority of the earthworks were found to be modern. However, archaeological features were revealed in Trench 4 on the southeast side of the site which are potentially medieval. These comprised a low bank of sand with stone revetment, from which a sherd of medieval pottery was recovered. It is considered that the bank may have been constructed to define the edge of a former pond or area of marsh or to facilitate access to the same. Material used in its construction included a deposit of burnt coal/clinker containing hammerscale, which suggests an industrial process was being undertaken nearby. An uncertain linear feature containing organic material was also identified in Trench 4, which may have been associated with drainage, but this appears to be of fairly recent origin.
- 7.1.3 On the south side of the site a former fence comprising upright timber posts, and a stone drain were revealed in Trench 1. This area also appears to have been partially waterlogged similar to Trench 4.

7.2 Research Potential

- 7.2.1 The southeast side of the site contains an earthwork which appears to define the northern edge of a former pond or marsh and may be associated with St Bees Priory or other medieval activity. However, the majority of the earthworks across the north and west portions of the site were proven to be modern.
- 7.2.2 It is anticipated that the southeast side of the site will not be developed for housing under the proposed scheme and therefore any features associated with the medieval earthwork should not be impacted.
- 7.2.3 The nature and scope of any further stage of archaeological recording at the site will need to be determined in consultation with the Historic Environment Officer at Westmorland & Furness Council

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APPENDIX 1: Figures

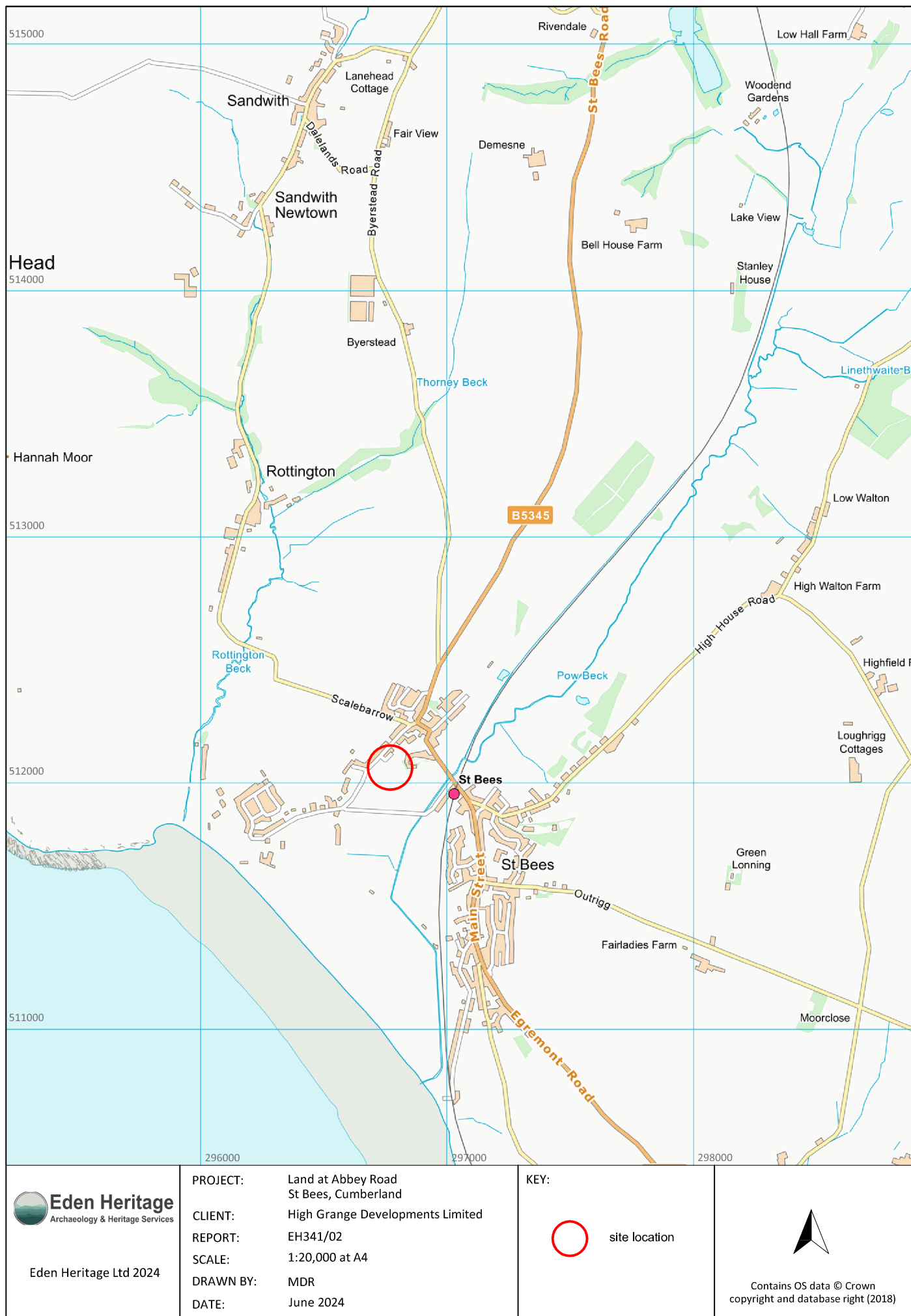
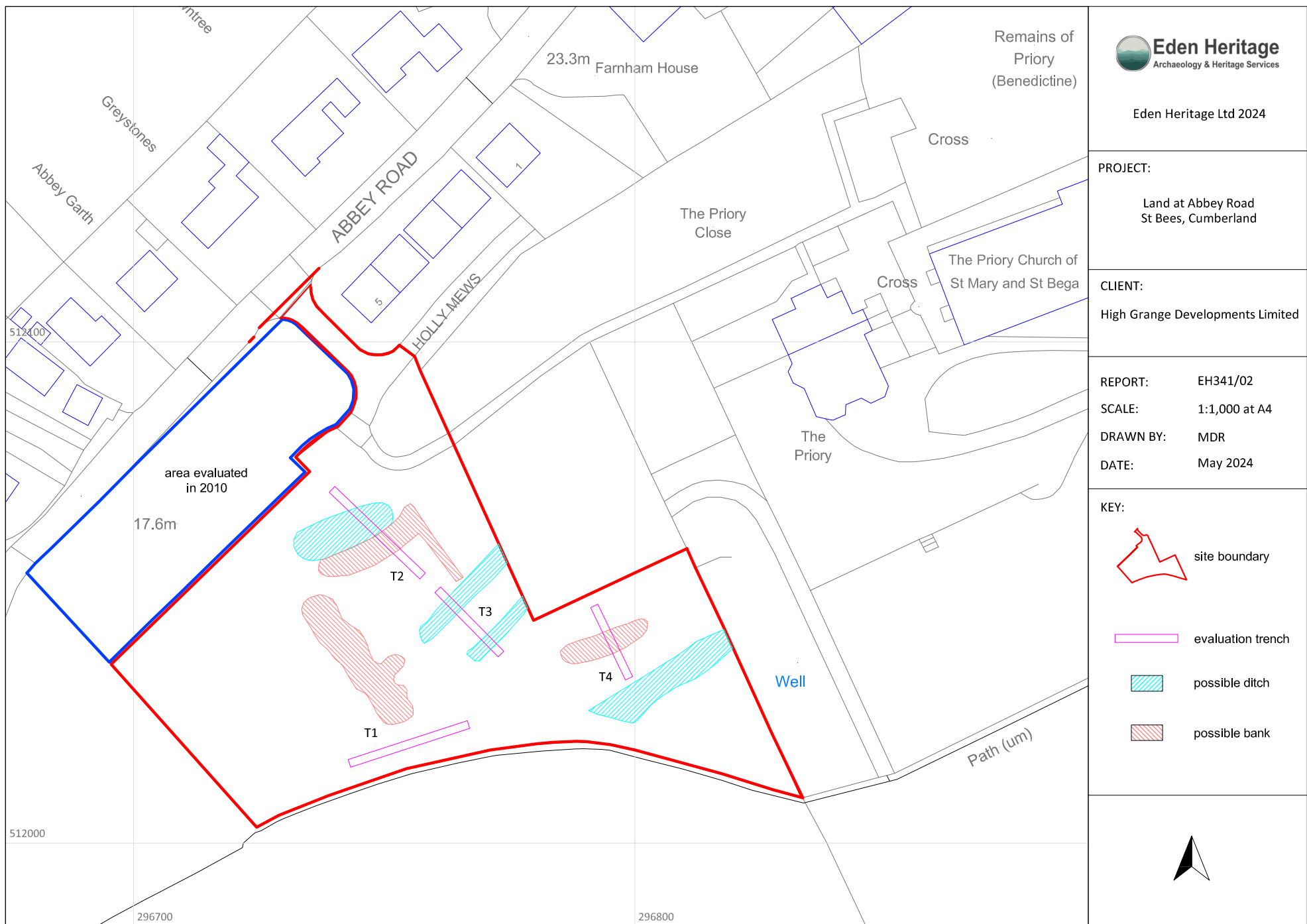


Figure 1: Site Location.



Figure 2: Location of the proposed development area showing satellite imagery from 2008.



Eden Heritage Ltd 2024

PROJECT:

Land at Abbey Road
St Bees, Cumberland

CLIENT:

High Grange Developments Limited

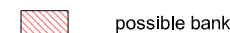
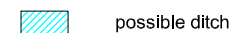
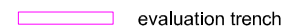
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DATE: May 2024

KEY:



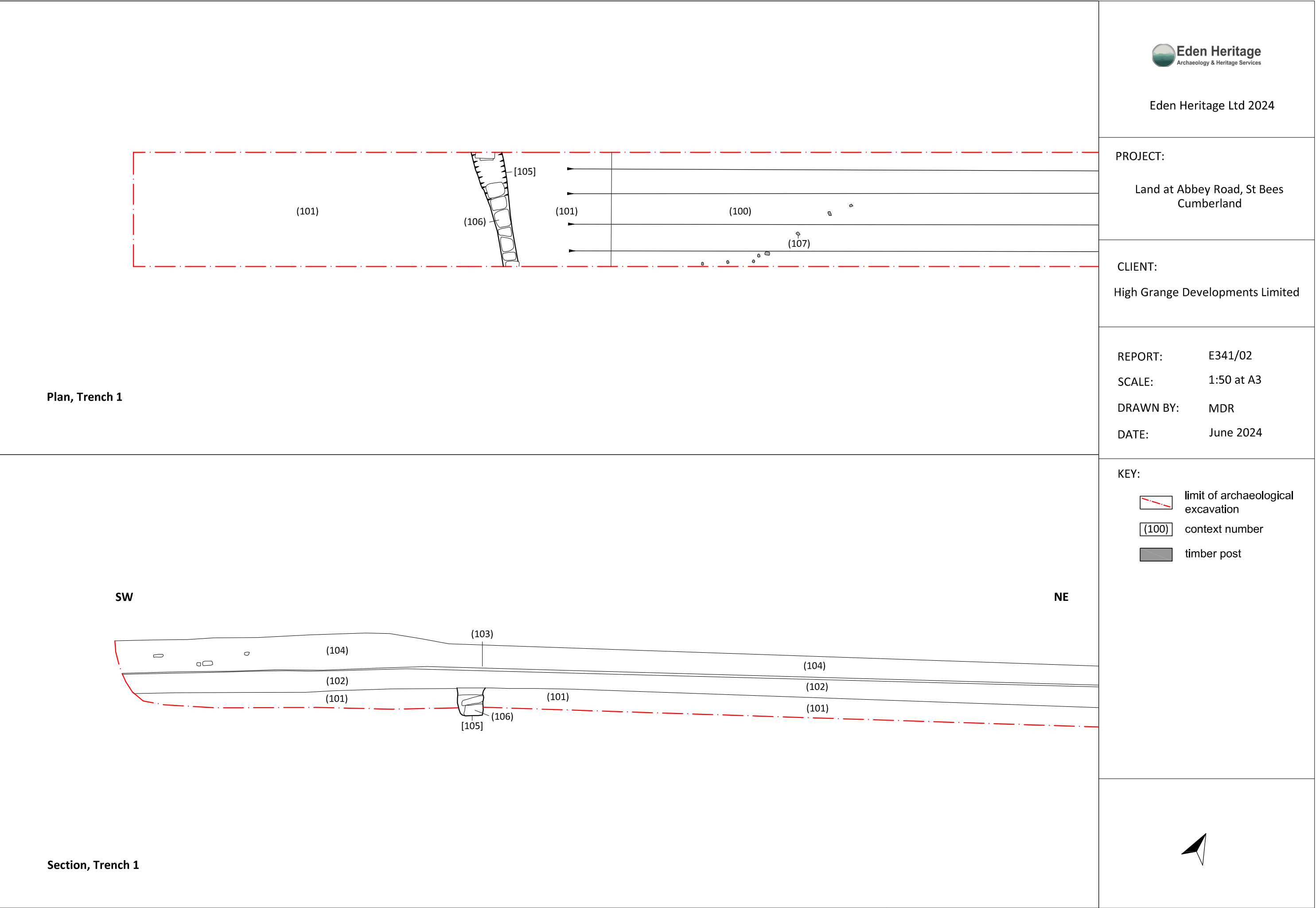


Figure 4: Plan and Section Trench 1.

PROJECT:




Land at Abbey Road, St Bees
Cumberland

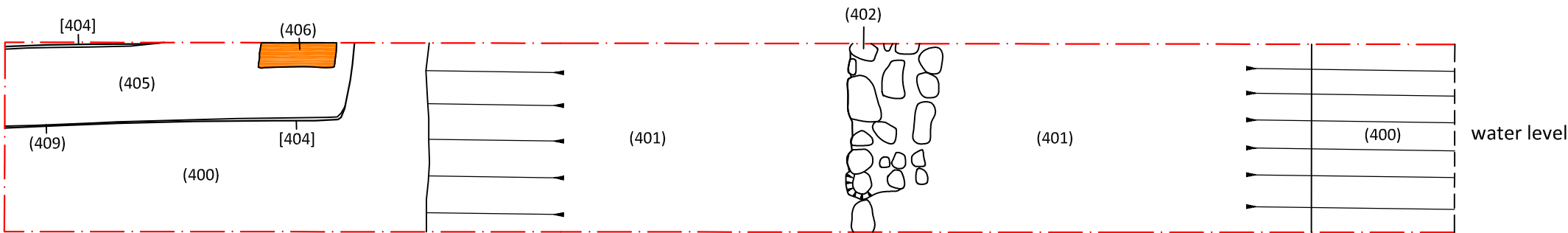
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High Grange Developments Limited

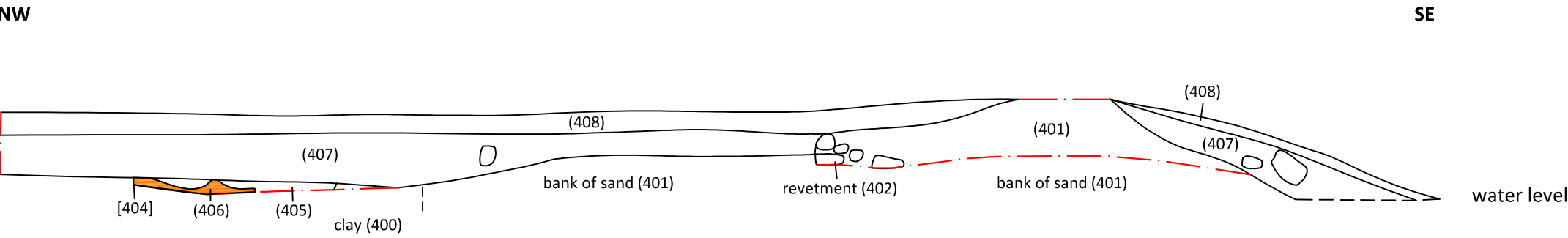
REPORT: E341/02
SCALE: 1:50 at A3
DRAWN BY: MDR
DATE: June 2024

KEY:

	limit of archaeological excavation
	context number
	crushed sandstone



Plan, Trench 4



Section, Trench 4

Figure 5: Plan and Section of Trench 4.

Heritage Impact Assessment
Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment
Historic Landscape Survey
Written Scheme of Investigation

Geophysical Survey
Trial Trench Evaluation
Archaeological Excavation
Archaeological Watching Briefs

