

CPAT Report No 1264

52-54 Vale Street, Denbigh

Archaeological Watching Brief



THE CLWYD-POWYS ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

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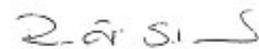
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SUMMARY

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken in connection with the initial phases of the redevelopment of 52-54 Vale Street in Denbigh (SJ 0550 6625). The work was undertaken as a condition of planning consent from Denbighshire County Council, and monitored all site groundworks during the initial phase of redevelopment, including site reduction within the footprint of the new building and the excavation of a new service trench across the width of the plot.

A pre-planning archaeological evaluation undertaken by CPAT (Grant 2012) had revealed evidence for potential medieval activity, the extent of which could not be determined at that time. The planning condition required that all groundworks should be conducted under archaeological monitoring and that any areas where significant archaeology might be identified should be the subject of more detailed excavation and recording.

The watching brief revealed limited evidence for occupation dating to the 15th – 18th centuries, some of which would appear to be contemporary with the features recorded in the 2012 evaluation, as well as the remains of a wall which may be associated with a structure along the street frontage which predates the former No. 54 Vale Street.

The initial phase of the redevelopment has now been completed, although further groundworks will be undertaken during the construction phase. This will involve the excavation of stanchion pits for the new building, as well as a lift shaft. The planning condition requires that these works will also be undertaken under an archaeological watching brief. Particular attention should be paid to groundworks along the street frontage, in the area of known archaeological features, and to the rear of No. 54, where the greater depth of overburden may have protected any archaeology from later disturbance.

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Field Services Section of the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust (CPAT) was invited by Tai Clwyd in November 2013 to undertake an archaeological watching brief during the initial phases of the redevelopment of 52-54 Vale Street in Denbigh (SJ 0550 6625).
- 1.2 Denbighshire Archaeology Service (part of Denbighshire Countryside Service within Denbighshire County Council), had determined that following the demolition of the standing buildings all ground reduction works and excavations for new services should be conducted under an archaeological watching brief in order to identify any significant features or deposits which might be revealed.
- 1.3 A pre-planning evaluation had been undertaken by CPAT in 2012 (Grant 2012) revealing evidence for potential medieval activity to the rear of the plot at a depth of around 0.7m, while along Vale Street it was apparent that the original street level lay considerably below the present ground surface. Full planning permission (01/2013/0080) was granted in March 2013 for the demolition of the existing street frontage buildings and the redevelopment of the plot with a single new building. Condition 13 of the permission related to archaeology and stated that:
- ‘No development shall take place within the application area until the applicant, or their agents or successors in title, has secured the implementation of a programme of archaeological work in accordance with a written scheme of investigation which has been submitted to the applicant and approved in writing by the local planning authority. The archaeological work will be undertaken to the standards laid down by the Institute for Archaeologists. On completion of site work and any post-excavation analysis a report on the investigation will be submitted for approval to the Local Planning Authority and the Development Control Archaeologist, Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust, 41 Broad Street, Welshpool, Powys, SY21 7RR. tel: 01938 553670.’
- 1.4 The nature of the archaeological works required to fulfil the planning condition were discussed at a meeting on 6 June 2013 attended by Fiona Gale (Denbighshire Archaeology Service), Alwyn Rowlands (Creu Architects), Peter Baker (Tai Clwyd), Rhys Dafis (Tai Clwyd) and Nigel Jones (CPAT), and at a subsequent meeting on 18 September between Bryn Davies and Peter Baker (Tai Clwyd), Fiona Gale and Nigel Jones. It was later agreed, in November 2013, that the initial phase of the development would proceed under a watching brief, with the proviso that should any significant archaeology be revealed the area in question would then be subject to detailed excavation to ensure the preservation by record of all features and deposits. A curatorial brief had been prepared by Denbighshire Archaeology Service detailing the works required.

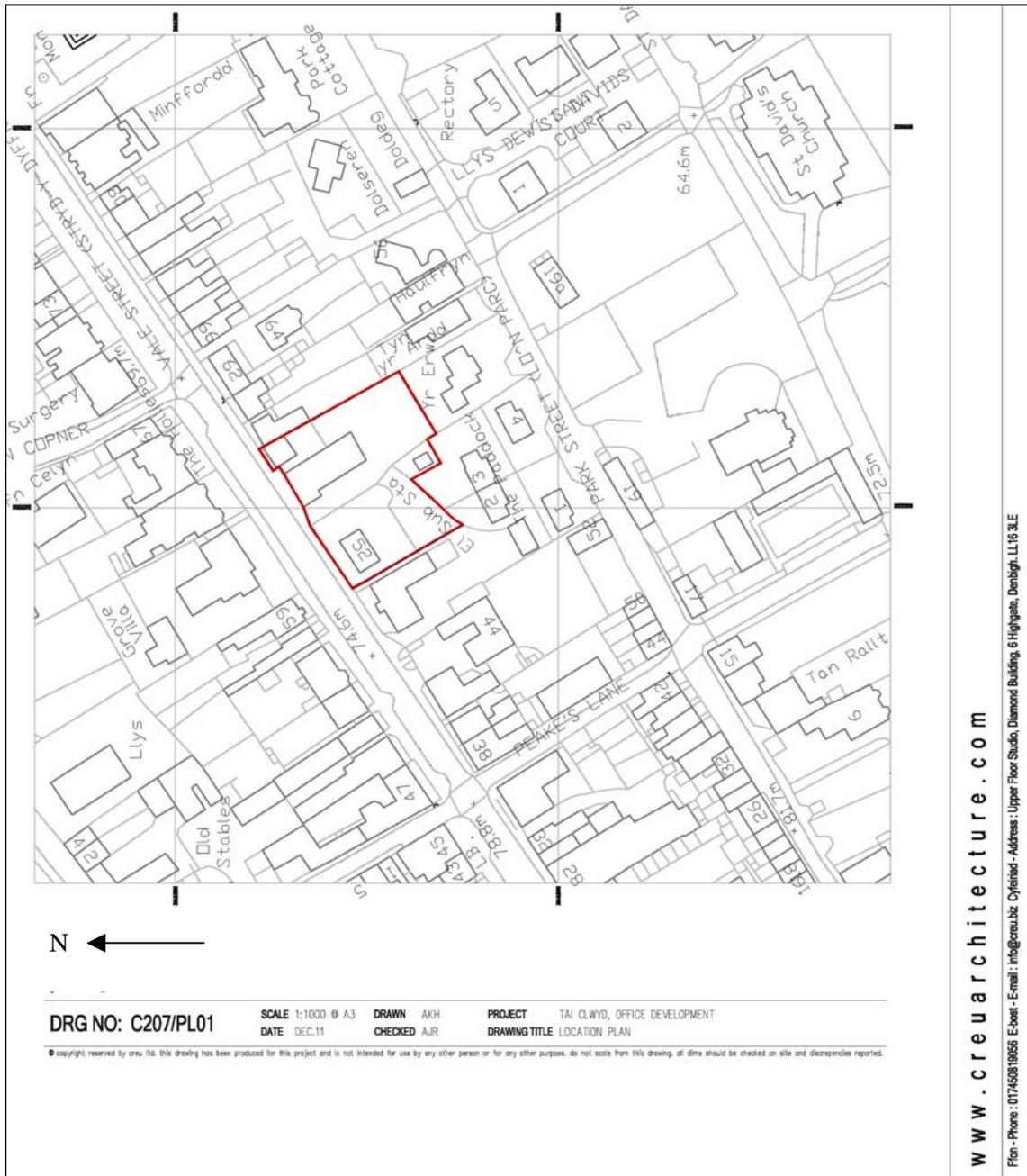


Fig. 1 Development Site location

2 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 The earliest detailed map available to us, John Speed's plan of Denbigh published in his *Theatre of the Empire of Great Britain* in 1611, but surveyed perhaps three or four years earlier, shows houses along the street frontage of what is now known as Vale Street though not in the area of the proposed development. Interestingly, this appears to have been part of a larger area which was depicted as a formal garden.

- 2.2 Over two hundred years separates Speed from the next informative map of the town. The Tithe map offers a detailed picture of Denbigh in 1840 and shows part of the development site as ‘Grove’, an area devoid of buildings and lined to either side by trees. Presumably, the tithe surveyor has used this descriptive term to differentiate the site from the more normal gardens. Down slope of the ‘Grove’, within the plot currently occupied by 54 Vale Street, the Tithe map indicates the presence of a building along the street frontage.
- 2.3 The Ordnance Survey 1:500 town plan of 1872 reveals little change from the townscape depicted in 1840, apart from showing trees along the street frontage.
- 2.4 Evidence from the 2012 evaluation indicated the possibility of 15th-century activity within the immediate vicinity of the site, buried beneath relic garden soil deposits which reinforced the belief that the plot had remained as an open space, known as the Grove, well into the 19th century.

3 WATCHING BRIEF

- 3.1 The watching brief was conducted between 16 December 2013 and 12 February 2014 with the timing being determined by the contractors’ programme of work. In all seven visits were made to site. The initial site works consisted of the relocation of existing services and the excavation of a new service trench in the area formerly occupied by No 52 Vale Street. The trench, which was 1.9m wide, was excavated by machine under archaeological supervision.



Fig. 2 The service trench (viewed from the street frontage), showing modern footings in the foreground. Photo CPAT 3747-0006

- 3.2 The service trench provided an opportunity to re-examine the stratigraphic sequence across the plot, and in particular this identified the level of the natural subsoil, which varied between 0.6m around the foundations of No. 52 to as little as 0.4m at the rear of the property. Along the street frontage the stratigraphic sequence indicated the presence of a terrace which corresponded with the position of the 'Grove', documented on earlier mapping. The new service trench cut across the western end of the 2012 evaluation trench to the rear of No. 52, but no further archaeological features were identified.
- 3.3 Following the relocation of services the ground level was reduced within the footprint of the new building. Again this was conducted under close archaeological supervision. Along the western edge of the footprint up to 1.1m of overburden was removed, the amount reducing to 0.45m along the eastern perimeter. In general the area had been heavily truncated by a combination of building footings and service trenches. However, small patches of a reddish/buff deposit were identified in an area measuring around 5m by 5m, which was similar to that associated with archaeological features revealed in the 2012 evaluation.

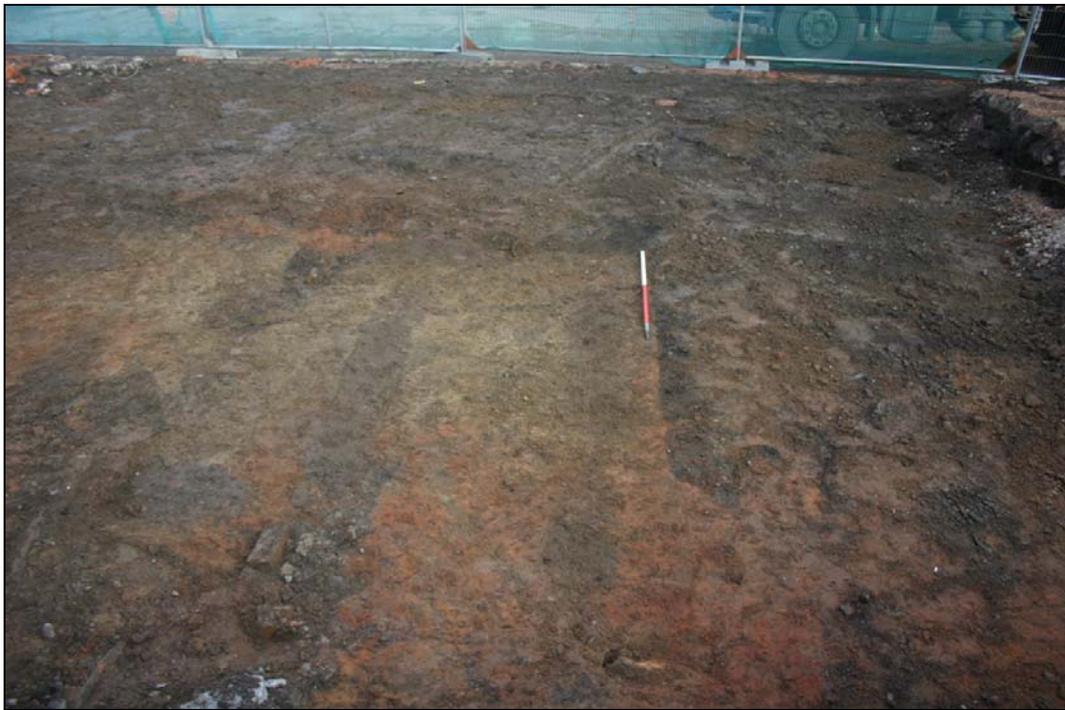


Fig. 3 The two parallel slots and other features prior to investigation. Photo CPAT 3747-0031

- 3.4 Further investigation by hand cleaning of the area revealed the outline of two parallel linear features (39 and 40; Fig. 3), orientated east to west and 0.3m apart. Each was approximately 0.4m wide and 0.18m deep and the investigation of one (39) revealed a post-hole (43) in its base. The features have been interpreted as possible beam slots associated with a timber building. They contained similar fills and from these a number of animal bones with butchery marks were recovered, as well as fragments of roofing tile. The features, together with a number of post-holes and pits (41–45) identified in the same area (see Figs 4-5), appear to be contemporary with a linear feature (16) excavated during the 2012 evaluation which was attributed to the later medieval period.



Fig. 4 Section through slot 39, which contained a post-hole (43) in its base. Viewed from the north. Photo CPAT 3747-0050

- 3.5 The area immediately to the east of the archaeological features was not subject to a reduction of ground levels and it is possible that further evidence survives beneath the post-medieval and later overburden.
- 3.6 On completion of the ground reduction works in the area where No. 52 Vale Street formerly stood similar groundworks commenced beneath the site of No. 54. This work also included the removal of a substantial concrete slab.
- 3.7 Approximately 3m south of and parallel to the street frontage, the remains of a wall were identified, measuring 0.9m wide and 0.4m high. The wall was built from limestone blocks, without the use of mortar, and extended beyond the area of groundworks to the east and west. The wall was sealed by a series of demolition layers dating from the 18th and 19th centuries. As a result of later disturbance within the area it was not possible to determine the date and function of the wall, though it is possible that it related to a building (see Figs 6 – 8).

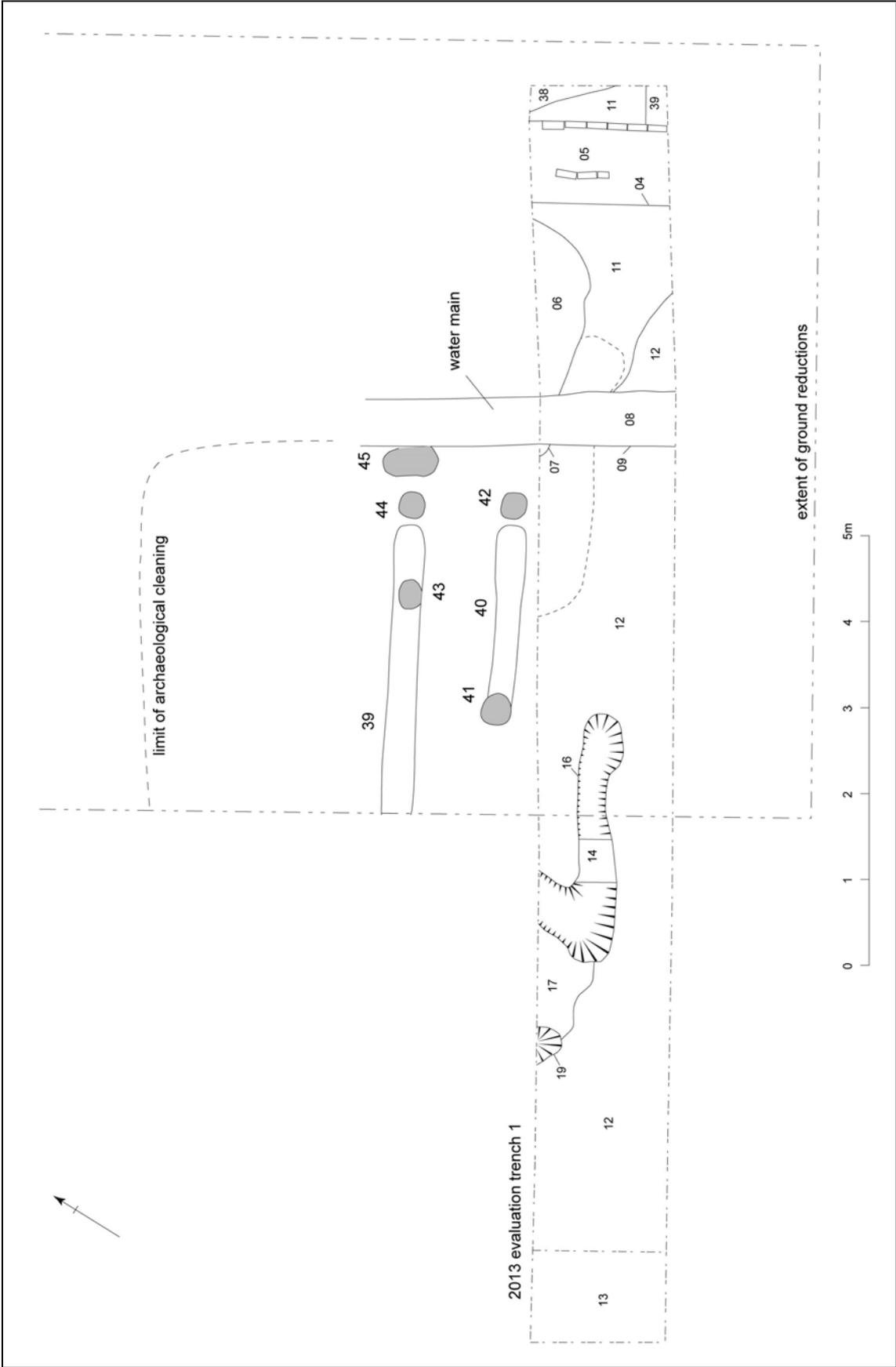


Fig. 5 Plan of 2013 trench 1 and adjacent features revealed during the watching brief



Fig. 6 The north-east-facing section of wall 50. Photo CPAT 3747-0062

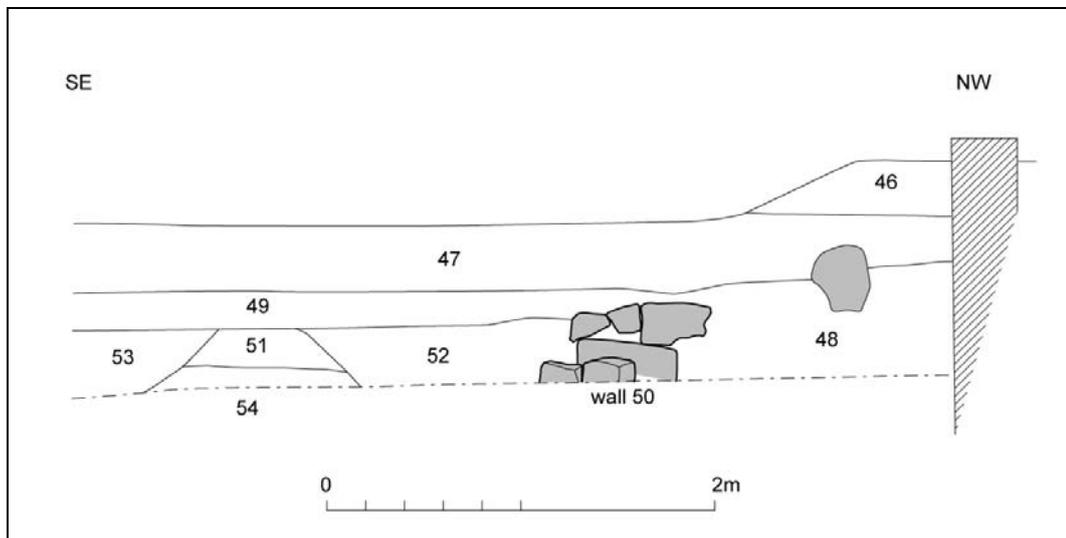


Fig. 7 The north-east-facing section of wall 50

- 3.8 Further monitoring to the rear of No. 54 demonstrated that the modern and post-medieval overburden was up to 1.3m in depth and there appeared to be a considerable amount of imported material overlying 18th and 19th-century garden deposits. The reduction of levels ceased at a point above the natural subsoil and no further archaeological deposits or features were identified.

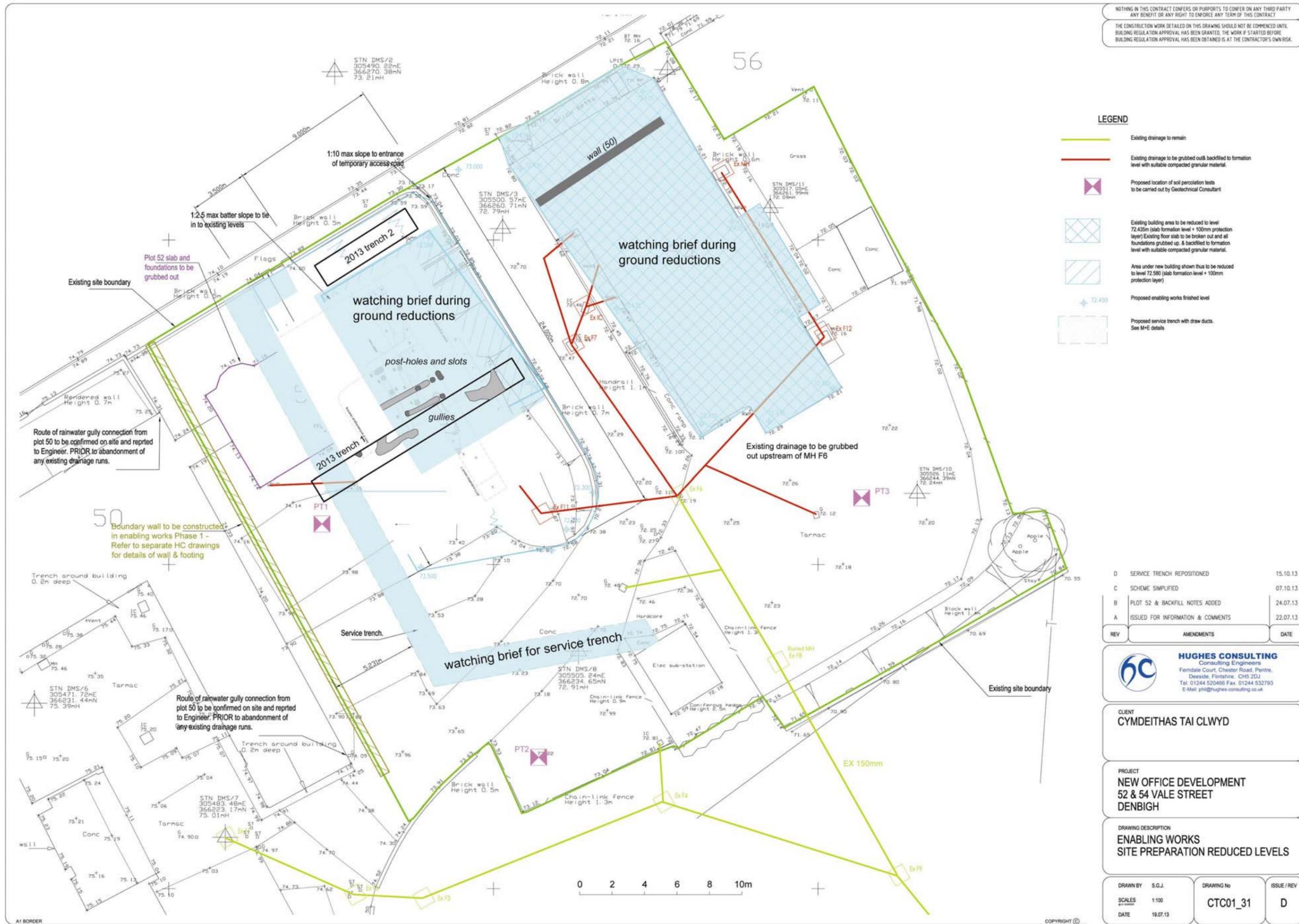


Fig. 8 Overall site plan showing areas monitored by the watching brief, archaeological features and the location of the 2013 trenches

4 CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1 The watching brief during the initial phase of site works revealed further evidence for occupation which is likely to date from the later medieval period. A pair of possible beam slots and a number of post-holes were identified beneath the site of No. 52 Vale Street, which appear to be associated with a timber building, although it was not possible to determine the structure's plan or extent. The features appear to be contemporary with a linear feature recorded in the 2012 evaluation trench. The remains of a stone wall were also uncovered beneath the site of No. 54 Vale Street which may be associated with an earlier building along the street frontage. The wall does not correspond with any structures shown on 19th-century map sources and is therefore likely to be earlier in date than these compilations.
- 4.2 The initial phase of the redevelopment has now been completed, although further groundworks will be undertaken during the construction phase. This will involve the excavation of stanchion pits for the new building, as well as a lift shaft. The planning condition requires that these works will also be undertaken under an archaeological watching brief. Particular attention should be paid to groundworks along the street frontage, in the area of known archaeological features, and to the rear of No. 54 where the greater depth of overburden may have protected any archaeology from later disturbance.

5 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- 5.1 The fieldwork was undertaken by Ian Grant, Richard Hankinson and Kate Pack. Post-excavation assessment and reporting has been undertaken by Ian Grant and Nigel Jones.

CPAT would like to thank Fiona Gale (Denbighshire County Archaeologist). Our thanks are also due to Ellis Plant Hire, specifically James and Tom Ellis, who carried out the site groundworks.

6 SOURCES

unpublished sources

Grant, I., 2012. *52-54 Vale Street, Denbigh: Archaeological Evaluation*. CPAT Report No 1152.

cartographic sources

1611 John Speed's plan of Denbigh published in *Theatre of the Empire of Great Britain*

1840 Tithe survey (apportionment and map) for Denbigh

1872 Ordnance Survey 1:500 town plan of Denbigh

1875 Ordnance Survey 1:2,500 1st edition: Denbighshire 13.04

APPENDIX 1

PROJECT ARCHIVE

Site records

05 Watching Brief forms

01 A3 annotated site plan (with additional watching brief notes)

Context Register (continuation of 2012 Evaluation site record)

Drawing Register

01 A3 site plan

02 A4 site sections

73 digital photographs, CPAT film 3747

Photographic register

2013/14 archive to be subsumed into 2012 site evaluation archive.