



KENT ARCHAEOLOGICAL PROJECTS

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**As Assessment of the Potential Impact on the Archaeological and Historic
Heritage of Fordwich Posed by the Proposed Canterbury Eastern
Movement Corridor, Kent (NGR TQ 179 595)**

Report by T. L. Allen BA CIFA 17th January 2023

1) Introduction and planning background

In December 2022 Kent Archaeological Projects was requested by Max Kimber, acting on behalf of Fordwich Council, to undertake an assessment of the potential impact on the archaeological and historic heritage of Fordwich following proposals outlined in the *Draft Canterbury District Local Plan to 2045*.

Only the proposed eastern alternative route (see Figure 1 below) affects the Fordwich area, as this route would pass through the southern part of Fordwich Conservation Area, intersecting areas of known high archaeological and historical potential and an area designated as of high Palaeolithic potential (for the latter see Knowles December 2022). Therefore only the impact of the eastern route alternative is assessed in this report. However, as the eastern route is the only one shown on the ‘concept masterplan’ of the East Canterbury strategic development area (see page 45 of that document and Figure 2 below), it is assumed that this is the favoured route.

2) The archaeological and historic heritage of Fordwich

i) The Palaeolithic evidence at Fordwich

Fordwich and nearby Sturry contain famous find-spots for Palaeolithic remains in the form of ‘pear-shaped’ (‘Abbevillian’) hand-axes thought to represent evidence ‘of the earliest traces of man in Britain’ (Ashmore in McIntosh 1975, 23), although it is now acknowledged that this subject requires further research. Drs. Ince, Willox and Bowes recovered the hand-axes at Fordwich from a gravel pit at NGR TR 180589 (just west of Moat Lane and about 600m south of Fordwich High Street) during commercial extraction in the 1920s. Much of that highly important archaeological material and the accompanying records now been lost due to flood and carelessness (*ibid*). However, Peter Knowles has, as part of his post-graduate doctoral research with Durham University, investigated the Fordwich gravels and what remains of previously collected evidence in some depth and his report therefore supplies much more detailed and comprehensive evidence than can be attempted here. It should be

noted that, largely as a result of his work, these ancient river gravels and the pit site are now acknowledged to be a critically important resource for our understanding of early human technological development. These will be impacted on by the proposed eastern route

ii) Geology, topography and historic strategic position of Fordwich

Fordwich lies ‘close to the southern limit of the broad alluvial flats that define the flood plain of the Great Stour’ (Houliston 1993, 34, quoting Smart *et al* 1966). The geological and topographic position of the town close to the river Stour meant that it was of high strategic importance as a major transportation route during the Roman and medieval periods, when the town appears to have acted as a staging post on the way from the coast to Canterbury.

The town’s name shows it to have been a river crossing point during the Anglo-Saxon period, the name being derived from the Anglo-Saxon for ‘Ford Farm’ or ‘farm close to a ford’ (OE *ford wīc* → *Forduic* 747 → *Fordwic* 1042 → *Fordwik* c.1100 → *Fordwich* 1610 [Glover 1982, 74]). Although there is little artefactual evidence for Anglo-Saxon settlement in Fordwich, there is ‘evidence of Saxon work’ in the blocked-up doorway on the south of the parish church of St. Mary the Virgin (Willmore 1970) and a single Anglo-Saxon potsherd was found during trial trenching off Fordwich High Street in advance of a housing development (Blockley 1986, 10). However, despite the paucity of artefactual evidence, various Anglo-Saxon texts reference Fordwich (Glover 1982, 74) suggest that the settlement had grown during the later Anglo-Saxon period, being described as a small village in 1086 in the Domesday Book.

iii) Prehistoric and Roman-British Fordwich

With the notable exception of the Palaeolithic material, none of the above-described remains will be directly affected by the proposed eastern route but this is not true of a group of Mid-Late Iron Age remains, some of which were recorded during gravel extraction some 500m south of the present town centre at NGR TR 184590 (Jenkins 1975, 119). The remains are described as:

‘a roughly 12ft. square covered by a deposit of ash containing burnt clay daub bearing the imprint of wattling associated with a small amount of pre-Roman Belgic type.

Although there were no signs of postholes it seems fairly certain that a hut stood there' (*ibid*).

The proposed eastern route will cut through the same gravel deposits in which these remains were found, these gravels being the same as those discussed in their Palaeolithic context by Knowles (December 2022).

Further examination of the above site by Jenkins revealed parts of a 3ft-deep and 9 ft.-wide enclosure ditch with a 'V' profile. It contained un-Romanised Late Iron Age pottery and part of a pre-Roman or Roman-period 'rotary hand-mill' was also recovered by a quarryman, with further evidence of Roman-period settlement activity provided by a clay-filled pit containing pieces of Roman tile. Further evidence for Roman-period occupation in this area took the form of an urned cremation of two vessels found just by King's Tree House, about 200m south-west of the Late Iron Age settlement, and two samian ware vessels found during quarrying at Lawton's field, Well Lane (Jenkins 1975, 120-121).

The remains of a Romano-British settlement have been identified north of the town and are describes as follows:

'A Roman settlement (TR 185604) located on low-lying ground to the north of the modern town and river was clearly of a more substantial nature. The settlement lay to the south of the junction of two Roman roads, and was connected by a causeway of rammed gravel on its western side to what appears to have been some form of quayside revetment. This may be evidence of the port associated with Roman Canterbury that has long been suspected to lie in the Sturry-Fordwich area near the upper limit of the Wantsum Channel' (Houliston 1993, 35)

Although these remains will not be impacted by the proposed eastern route they are included here as evidence that Fordwich and/or its wider environs acted at an intersection settlement linking two roads and the river during the Roman period, in a manner that presaged its role during the medieval period.

iv) Medieval Fordwich

The location of Fordwich next to the Stour meant that it achieved greater importance during the medieval period, during which the construction of many water mills and millponds upstream and the eventual revetting of the river prevented the frequent flooding of the riverside area. This allowed the nutrient-rich alluvia to be used, first as water meadow, then as grazing land and as cultivatable land. However, the medieval town's principal importance was as a strategically positioned port serving Canterbury, some 3.5km to the southwest, eventually becoming (at an unknown date) a 'Member' of the Cinque Port of Sandwich. Because it served in part as Canterbury's port, and because the abbot of St. Augustine's Abbey had the right to levy tolls on all goods imported through Fordwich, the port was in nearly permanent conflict with the abbot throughout the medieval period until it was given its freedom from tolls and customs as Cinque Port Member.

The many upstream mills and mill ponds meant that the river between Fordwich and Canterbury became increasingly difficult to navigate, this acting to increase the town's role as the principal disembarkation point for goods bound for Canterbury. An Act of Parliament of 1518, along with attempts during the reign of Henry VIII (1505-1547) to make the river navigable between Fordwich and Canterbury all failed, probably because of the vested interest of powerful parties such as the abbot of St. Augustine's (pre-Dissolution) and, post-Dissolution, the Archbishop of Canterbury (Hasted 1800, 140). This situation lasted at least until the late eighteenth/early nineteenth centuries, when further measures to remove the mills on that stretch of water were not successful. Hasted made the following observation about claims that this stretch of the river was navigable between 1695 and 1703:

'How this might be, I know not, as I can gain no kind of knowledge of the fact; but for a number of years past this river, between Canterbury and Fordwich, has been in no such state; and by the appearance of the several mills on it, there does not seem any probability of such a circumstance having ever taken place (*ibid*, 141)

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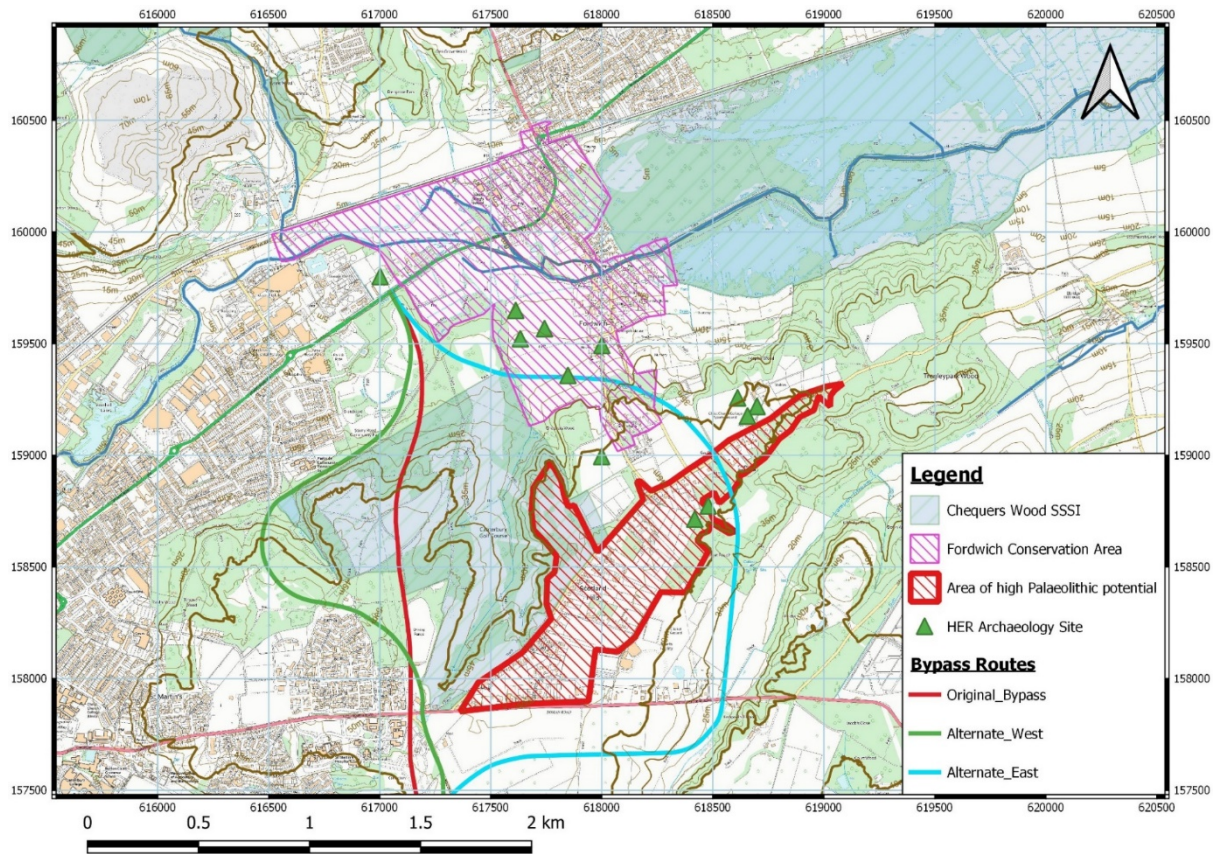
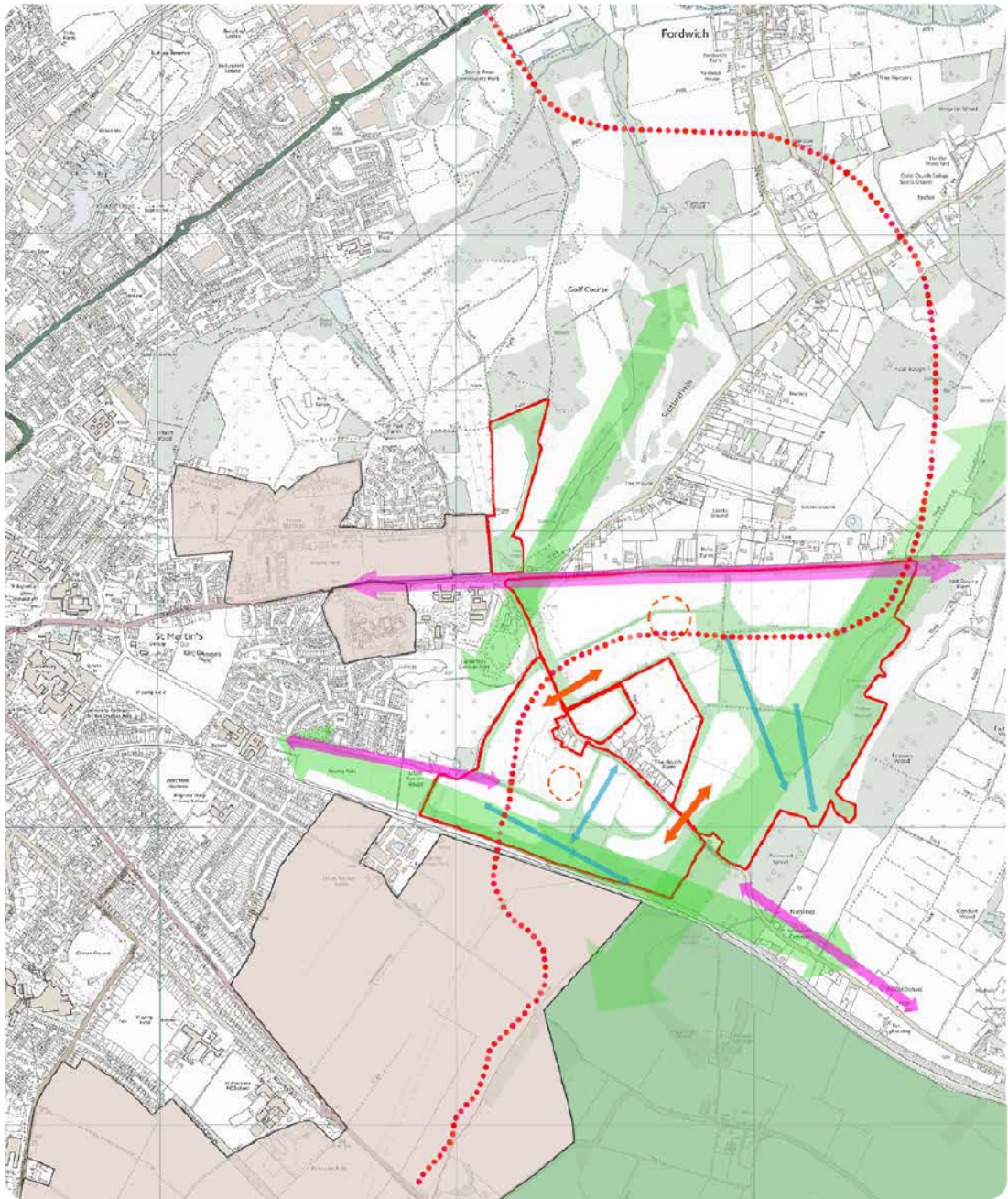


Figure 1: Map showing the impact of the proposed eastern route, on the: SSSI, Fordwich Conservation Area and area of high impact on potential Palaeolithic archaeology

East Canterbury strategic development area – concept masterplan



Key

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|  Site boundary |  Opportunities to improve cycling/walking access and safety |
|  Open space/ biodiversity opportunities- Indicative locations |  Opportunities for new cycling/walking connections |
|  Opportunities for green corridors |  Key views |
|  Community hub- Indicative location |  Eastern movement corridor |
|  Proposed green gap |  Sites allocated in Local Plan 2017 |