

Cascades Leisure Centre, Gravesend

Phase 1 Archaeological Evaluation – Interim Update

Between Monday 9th February and Friday 13th February, Wessex Archaeology undertook Phase 1 of a two-phase archaeological evaluation at Cascades Leisure Centre, Gravesend. The intention of Phase 1 was to excavate Evaluation Trenches 1–6, 9–10 and 12–15. Trenches 7, 8 and 11 are located within an active car park and are therefore scheduled for completion during Phase 2.

Trenches 1–6

Trench 1 was located within an overflow car park and was successfully completed during Phase 1. A palaeochannel (an ancient natural watercourse) was identified, investigated and recorded, sealed beneath a substantial deposit of made ground.

The feature appeared to originate from higher ground to the south-west and meander downslope towards the north-east. A silty colluvial deposit had accumulated within the channel. This contained a single, very small abraded pottery sherd (less than 4mm in size), which was insufficient for dating purposes. The feature could not therefore be securely dated during this phase of works.

Trenches 2, 3 and 4 were located within the tennis court area, immediately east of Trench 1. This area appears to have been subject to significant prior reduction, being approximately 2.5m lower than the ground level at Trench 1.

Once on site, Wessex Archaeology was informed by Wilmott Dixon that asbestos had been identified within several boreholes across the tennis court area, as well as within a borehole adjacent to Trenches 5 and 6 (near the children's play area).

Following this notification, a decision was made to postpone excavation of Trenches 2–6 pending detailed review of the borehole results and agreement of a robust methodology for safe excavation within an area of known asbestos contamination, ensuring protection of both staff and the public.

Trenches 9–10 and 12–15

Trenches 9–10 and 12–15 were located within a grassed area towards the southern boundary of the site. Within Trenches 9–10, evidence of modern (though not recent) ground disturbance was observed, and the natural geology appeared locally truncated. In Trenches 12–15, a consistent stratigraphic sequence was identified comprising a former ploughsoil, overlying an intact subsoil, which in turn overlay undisturbed natural geology.

In **Trench 15**, a small north-east to south-west aligned ditch was identified, likely representing the truncated remains of a former field boundary.

Despite 100% excavation of the feature within the trench, no dating evidence was recovered. The only other archaeological feature identified during the evaluation was a tree-throw hollow in **Trench 12**, which was also fully excavated but produced no datable material.

Monitoring and Next Steps

The County Archaeologist, Jake Warrander, attended site on 12th February. The results of the evaluation and the limitations imposed by the asbestos findings were discussed with him. He confirmed that the completed trenches could be signed off and agreed that the postponed trenches would be addressed during Phase 2.

He further advised that, should the client provide an updated design plan demonstrating that works are no longer required in the vicinity of Trenches 4 and 5, these trenches may be de-scoped from the programme.

All excavated trenches were fully recorded in accordance with the approved Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) and were backfilled with the agreement of the County Archaeologist by Friday the 13th February all site works were completed.