

**Archaeological evaluation of a site at
Woody's Nightclub, Wood Street,
Sheerness, Kent
*April 2008***

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**Former Woodies Nightclub, Wood Street, Sheerness,
Kent**

Archaeological Evaluation

**NGR: 592078 174710
Site Code: WNS-EV-08**

**Revised report for
Epps Construction Limited**

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ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION AT THE FORMER WOODIES NIGHTCLUB,
WOOD STREET, SHEERNESS, KENT

NGR: 592078 174710

Site Code: WNS-EV-08

SUMMARY

Under the direction of Dr Paul Wilkinson, Swale & Thames Survey Company (SWAT) carried out an archaeological evaluation of land at the former Woodies Nightclub site, Wood Street, Sheerness, Kent in April 2008. A planning application (PAN: SW/05/0191) for a new residential development along with associated access, car parking and services at the above site was submitted to Swale Borough Council (SBC) whereby Kent County Council Heritage and Conservation (KCCHC), on behalf of Swale Borough Council requested that an Archaeological Evaluation be undertaken in order to determine the possible impact of the development on any archaeological remains. The work was carried out in accordance with the requirements set out within an Archaeological Specification (KCC 2008) and in discussion with the Archaeological Officer, Kent County Council.

With the exception of a late barrel well/cess pit, the evaluation did not encounter any archaeological remains, suggesting that none survive within the immediate vicinity of the site. The location of the barrel well/cess pit within Mile Town suggests that the wall may have formed part of the later expansion of Sheerness dockyard, most likely associated with the construction of former domestic dwellings.

Alluvial/paludal silt encroachment upon natural London Clay was encountered within the southern extent of the site, indicative of the former marshland extant prior to the development of Mile Town in the early 19th century.

INTRODUCTION

Swale & Thames Survey Company (SWAT) was commissioned by Epps Construction Limited to carry out an archaeological evaluation at the above site. The work was carried out in accordance with the requirements set out within an Archaeological Specification (KCC 2008) and in discussion with the Archaeological Officer, Kent County Council. Initial phases of the evaluation were carried out during April 2008.

SITE DESCRIPTION AND TOPOGRAPHY

Sheerness is located on the northern most point of the Isle of Sheppey, approximately 2km north of Queenborough and 4km west of Minster. The proposed development site is situated within an area known as Mile Town, to the east of Wood Street and to the south of houses fronting Sheerness High Street (Fig. 1). The site is relatively flat, with surfaces comprising reject stone hardstanding and soft verges around the perimeter. Prior to recent demolition the site was occupied by Woodies Nightclub and surrounding parking areas.

PLANNING BACKGROUND

A planning application (PAN: SW/05/0191) for 22 flats, along with associated access, car parking and services at the above site was submitted to Swale Borough Council (SBC). Kent County Council Heritage and Conservation (KCCHC), on behalf of Swale Borough Council, requested that an *Archaeological Evaluation* be undertaken in order to determine the possible impact of the development on any archaeological remains. The following condition was attached to the planning consent:

No development shall take place 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 specification and timetable which has been submitted to and approved by the Local Planning Authority.

Requirements for the archaeological work comprised trial trenching targeting a minimum of 5% of the impact area, with trenches designed to establish whether there are any archaeological deposits at the site that may be affected by the proposed development. The results from this evaluation will be used to inform KCCHC and SBC of any further archaeological mitigation measures that may be necessary in connection with the development proposals.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

The proposed development site is situated within the historic core of Sheerness, in an area known as Mile Town. Mile Town, situated a mile to the east of Sheerness dockyard, came into existence during a period of early 19th century dockyard reorganisation and urban colonisation prompting the ever-growing need for suitable accommodation. Up to this point the landscape was dominated by the presence of the defensive earthworks and structures associated with Sheerness Fort, with meagre accommodation being provided on 'board hulks' and within Blue Town to the west. However the expansion of the dockyards eastern defences in the early 19th century resulted in the demolition of parts of Blue Town prompting a population shift. As a result the 1820's witnessed a 'colonising movement' (Harris 1984:270) towards a small hamlet of 'Mile Houses' to the east within reclaimed marsh on the road to Minster, that later became known as Mile Town.

Mile Town was far from adequate, comprising crude timber structures formed around a series of courts and alleys, without sanitation (KCC 2004:4). That said, the rapid expansion of the town was curtailed due to concerns over the location in front of the fortification, so a second population shift occurred to Marine Town, further to the east. Early Ordnance Survey maps show that the site was previously occupied by a series of terraced housing fronting Wood Street to the north and the High Street to the east. In fact little changes until the early-mid 20th century where the 4th Edition Ordnance Survey map shows that the terraced houses are

replaced by a large dominating structure that later became used as the nightclub.

Located immediately to the east of the site, Ride's Mill (or the Great Mill) stands, which originally dates to 1813 (KCC 2007:5). More recently, four circular cess pits comprising bottomless wooden barrels were identified by Archaeology South-East whilst conducting an archaeological watching brief during the construction of the Sheerness Inner Ring Road (TQ97SW79). 400m northeast of the proposed development site a Bronze Age axe is recorded (TQ97NW1040).

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The purpose of the evaluation, as set out with the Archaeological Specification (2007) was to:

- i) establish whether there are any archaeological deposits at the site that may be affected by the proposed development. The excavation is thus to ascertain the extent, depth below ground surface, depth of deposit, character, significance and condition of any archaeological remains on site (2006:3.1).
- ii) establish the extent to which previous development on the site has affected archaeological deposits (2006:3.2).

Particular issues that should be addressed by the evaluation include:

- iii) Is there any evidence for the post-medieval development of Sheerness and Mile Town on the site?
- iv) Is there any evidence for earlier activity within the development area?
- v) Has modern disturbance reduced the archaeological potential?
- vi) What impact will the development proposals have on any buried archaeology?
(KCC 3.3)

Additional aims were to:

- vii) gather sufficient information to enable an assessment of the potential and significance of any archaeological remains to be made and the impact development will have upon them.
- viii) enable an informed decision to be made regarding the future treatment of any archaeological remains and consider any appropriate mitigatory measures either in advance of and/or during development.

METHODOLOGY

Trial trenching commenced on the 7th April 2008, with the excavation of four trenches each measuring 1.80m in width and between 9-25m in length (see below). Trench locations were agreed prior to the excavation between KCCHC and SWAT. Each trench was initially

scanned for surface finds prior to excavation. Excavation was carried out using a 360° mechanical excavator fitted with a toothless ditching bucket, removing the overburden to the top of the first recognisable archaeological horizon, under the constant supervision of an experienced archaeologist. Trenches were subsequently hand-cleaned to reveal features in plan and carefully selected cross-sections through the features were excavated to enable sufficient information about form, development date and stratigraphic relationships to be recorded without prejudice to more extensive investigations, should these prove to be necessary. All archaeological work was carried out in accordance with the specification.

A single context recording system was used to record the deposits. A full list is presented in Appendix 1. Layers and fills are recorded (**100**). The cut of the feature is shown [**100**]. Context numbers were assigned to all deposits for recording purposes; these are used in the report (in **bold**).

MONITORING

Curatorial monitoring was carried out during the course of the evaluation by KCCHC, at which time methodologies and preliminary results were discussed.

RESULTS

A common stratigraphic sequence was recognised across the site comprising crushed hardcore overburden overlying paludal clays within the southern extent of the site and natural London Clay within central and northern areas of the site. A clear line of horizon giving way to underlying alluvium and natural clay strongly suggested the site has undergone extensive formation works prior to the construction of existing buildings, thus resulting in the potential loss of any discrete archaeological features, should they ever have been present.

Appendix 1 provides a stratigraphic sequence for all trenches.

Trench 1

(20 x 1.8m) Fig 3

Trench 1 was located within the southern extent of the site, directly adjacent to the 19th century Great Mill. Black reject stone (**101**) overlay redeposited clay silt with frequent inclusions of brick hardcore (**102**) which in turn sealed a naturally formed paludal alluvium (**104**) overlying natural London Clay (**105**). Within the south-eastern extent of the trench, the alluvium had been truncated by a shallow sloping cut [**107**] that was originally interpreted as a potential cellar. The southern extent of this cut feature was not determined as it disappeared beyond the extent of the trench, but the shallow depth and horizontal profile would seem to point more towards the landscaping of the site possibly associated with either the construction of the adjacent windmill and/or Portland Terrace to the south. The single fill of this feature (**103**) comprised redeposited alluvial clay with frequent inclusions of demolition hardcore. To the immediate east, a circular feature [**110**] with a diameter of c.0.6m contained a wooden

barrel lining (109) filled by dark grey brown silty alluvium (108). Cess pits within this area of Sheerness are to be expected and may be associated with 19th century colonisation of Mile Town.

Trench 2

(20 x 1.8m) Fig 4

Trench 2 was located within the eastern extent of the site (Fig. 2). Black reject stone and brick rubble (201) directly overlay natural London Clay (202) to a depth of 0.40m below the existing ground level.

No archaeological finds or features were present within this trench.

Trench 3

(10m x 1.8m) Fig 4

Trench 3 was located within the northern extent of the site, within the demolished nightclub building (Fig. 2). A concrete slab and brick rubble (301) directly overlay natural London Clay (302) to a depth of 0.40m below the existing ground level.

No archaeological finds or features were present within this trench.

Trench 4

(10m x 1.8m) Fig 4

Trench 4 was also located within the northern extent of the site, within the demolished nightclub building (Fig. 2). A concrete slab and brick rubble (401) directly overlay natural London Clay (402) to a depth of 0.20m below the existing ground level.

No archaeological finds or features were present within this trench.

FINDS

No finds were retrieved throughout the extent of the evaluation.

DISCUSSION

With the exception of the possible barrel well/cess pit located within Trench 1, the evaluation carried out at the former Woodies Nightclub, Wood Street, Sheerness, Kent, did not encounter any archaeological remains, suggesting that little survives within the immediate vicinity of the site. Alluvial and/or paludal silt encroachment upon natural London Clay was encountered within the southern extent of the site (Trench 1), confirming the natural inundation and encroachment of the marsh prior to the development of both Mile Town and any surrounding domestic and industrial works. The lack of such deposits within the central and northern

extents of the site suggests that the latter construction of the existing buildings would have removed earlier discrete deposits and that only deeper vertical features such as the exposed barrel well/cess pit in Trench 1 would have survived.

The location of the barrel well/cess pit so close to the adjacent windmill does suggest a potential relationship, although early Ordnance Survey maps do show the presence of small buildings at the rear of gardens, particularly first and second edition maps. That said the potential relationship with early Mile Town structures should not be ruled out as 19th century housing would have been present within the proposed development area (see Harris 1984 Fig.8 for 1871 plan).

CONCLUSION

The archaeological evaluation has been successful in fulfilling the primary aims and objectives of the Specification. Despite the archaeological potential of the surrounding area, the only archaeological remains surviving later development on site consisted of a truncated post-medieval barrel well or cess pit suggesting that the proposed development presents little or no impact upon the local archaeological resource.

This evaluation has therefore assessed the archaeological potential of land intended for development. The results from this work will be used to aid and inform the Archaeological Officer (KCCHC) of any further archaeological mitigation measures that may be necessary in connection with the development proposals.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

SWAT would like to thank Epps Construction Limited for commissioning the project. Thanks are also extended to Heritage and Conservation (Kent County Council) for their advice and assistance. Elliott Wragg and Roddy Mattinson carried out archaeological fieldwork, illustrations were produced by James Madden. This report was edited and collated by Paul Wilkinson.

David Britchfield
August 2008

REFERENCES

Harris, T M (1984) *The Dockyard Town of Sheerness*. Archaeologia Cantiana CI

IFA (1999) *Standards and Guidance for Field Archaeological Evaluations*

Kent County Council (2004) *Sheerness Historical Town Survey: Archaeological Assessment Document*

Kent County Council (2008) *Specification for an Archaeological Evaluation in Advance of the Construction of 23 Dwellings at the Woodies Nightclub Site, Wood Street in Sheerness*. Kent County Council Heritage & Conservation

CONTENTS OF SITE ARCHIVE

Correspondence:

Photographs: 12 colour slides, SWAT film nos. 08/20.

Photocopies of Ordnance Survey and other maps:

Drawings: One A3 permatrace site drawing, comprising trench plans and associated sections.

Finds: 1 box (as per KCC guidance)

Context Register including: Context Register (1), Drawings Register (1), Photographic Register (1), Levels Sheets (1), Environmental Samples Register (x) and Context Sheets (15)

APPENDIX 1 - Context Summary

Woodies Nightclub, Wood Street, Sheerness, Kent

Site Code: WNS-EV-08

Trench Number	Context Number	Type	Description	Interpretation	Extents	Assigned Date
1	101	L	Black reject stone and mixed rubble hardcore	Hardstanding car park surface	0.00-0.20m	Modern
	102	L	Hardcore and brick rubble	Formation level for (201) above	0.0m-0.45m	Modern
	103	L	Redeposited mid orange brown clay with frequent inclusions of hardcore brick rubble	Fill of [007]	0.45m-1.10m (SE extent only)	19 th century
	104	F	Stiff blue grey clay with occasional peat mottling	Paludal or alluvial clay	0.45m+	Unknown
	105		NOT USED			
	106		NOT USED			
	107	C	Possible terracing associated with construction of surrounding houses and/or windmill			19 th century
	108	F	Mid grey brown silty clay with occasional fragments of wood and brick	Fill of [110]		19 th century
	109	D	Wooden barrel	Forms lining for possible well or cess pit		19 th century
	110	C	Cut for possible well or cess pit			
2	201	L	Black reject stone and mixed rubble hardcore	Hardstanding car park surface	0.00-0.40m	Modern
	202	L	Light orange brown clean stiff clay	Natural London Clay	0.40m+	x
3	301	L	Black reject stone and mixed rubble hardcore	Hardstanding car park surface	0.00-0.40m	Modern
	302	L	Light orange brown clean stiff clay	Natural London Clay	0.40m+	x
4	401	L	Black reject stone and mixed rubble hardcore	Hardstanding car park surface	0.00-0.20m	Modern
	402	L	Light orange brown clean stiff clay	Natural London Clay	0.42m+	x

APPENDIX 2 – KCC Summary Form

Site Name: <i>Woodies Nightclub</i>	
SWAT Site Code: <i>WNS-EV-08</i>	
Site Address: <i>Wood Street, Sheerness, Kent</i>	
<p>Summary: <i>Under the direction of Dr Paul Wilkinson, Swale & Thames Survey Company (SWAT) carried out an archaeological evaluation of land at the former Woodies Nightclub site, Wood Street, Sheerness, Kent in April 2008. A planning application (PAN: SW/05/0191) for a new residential development along with associated access, car parking and services at the above site was submitted to Swale Borough Council (SBC) whereby Kent County Council Heritage and Conservation (KCCHC), on behalf of Swale Borough Council requested that an Archaeological Evaluation be undertaken in order to determine the possible impact of the development on any archaeological remains. The work was carried out in accordance with the requirements set out within an Archaeological Specification (KCC 2008) and in discussion with the Archaeological Officer, Kent County Council.</i></p> <p><i>With the exception of a late barrel well/cess pit, the evaluation did not encounter any archaeological remains, suggesting that none survive within the immediate vicinity of the site. The location of the barrel well/cess pit within Mile Town suggests that the wall may have formed part of the later expansion of Sheerness dockyard, most likely associated with the construction of former domestic dwellings.</i></p> <p><i>Alluvial/paludal silt encroachment upon natural London Clay was encountered within the southern extent of the site, indicative of the former marshland extant prior to the development of Mile Town in the early 19th century.</i></p>	
District/Unitary: <i>Swale</i>	Parish: <i>Sheerness</i>
Period(s):	
Tentative: <i>19th century - Modern</i>	
NGR (centre of site : 8 figures): <i>NGR: 592078 174710</i>	
(NB if large or linear site give multiple NGRs)	
Type of archaeological work (delete) <i>Evaluation</i>	
Date of Recording: <i>7th April 2008</i>	
Unit undertaking recording: <i>Swale & Thames Survey Company (SWAT)</i>	
Geology: <i>London Clay</i>	
Title and author of accompanying report:	
<i>Britchfield D (2008) Archaeological Evaluation at the former Woodies Nighclub, Wood Street, Sheerness, Kent:</i>	
Summary of fieldwork results (begin with earliest period first, add NGRs where appropriate)	
<i>As above</i>	(cont. on attached sheet)
Location of archive/finds: <i>SWAT</i>	
Contact at Unit: <i>Paul Wilkinson</i>	Date: <i>27th August 2008</i>

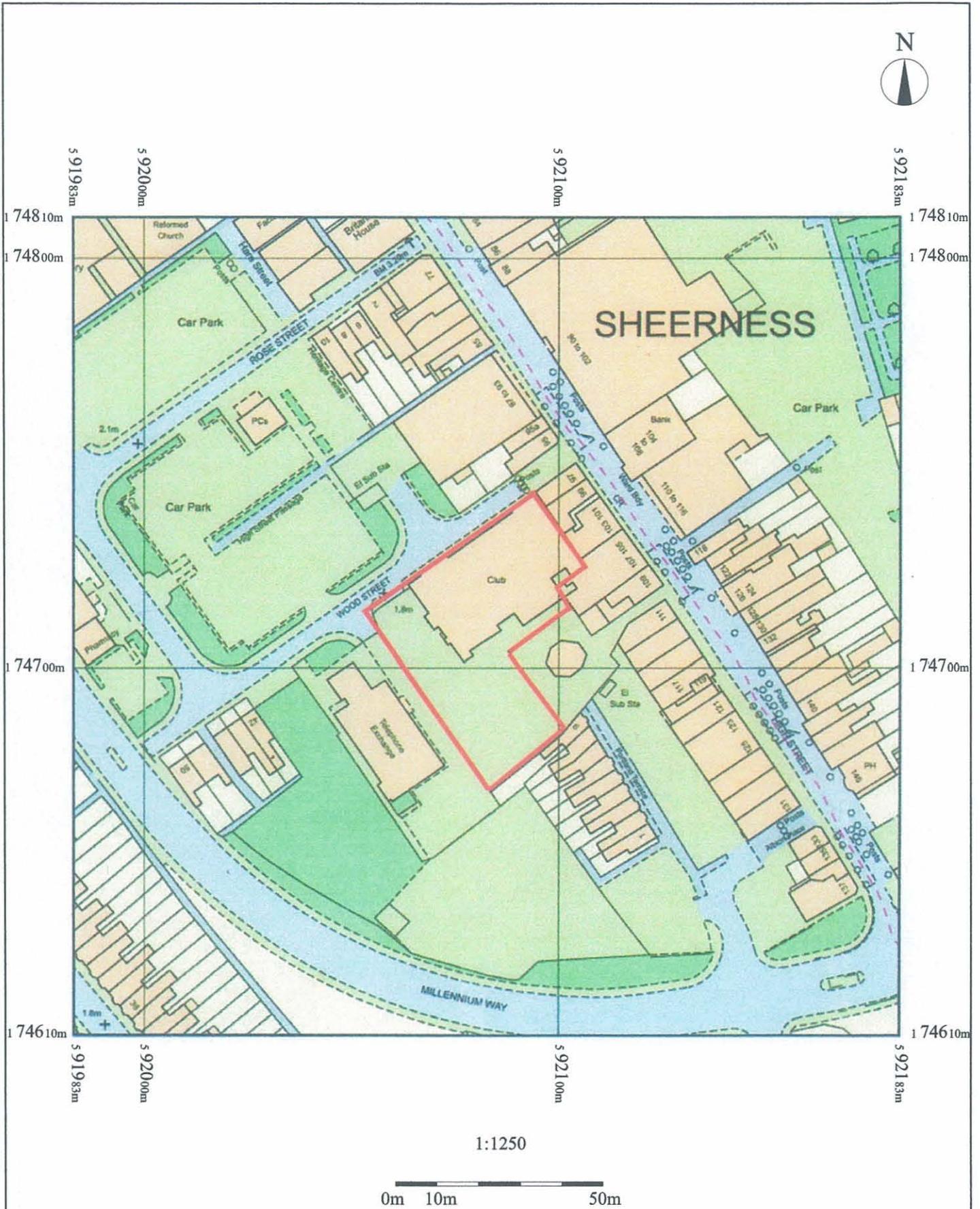


Figure 1: Location of site of proposed development at Woody's nightclub site, Sheerness, Kent. (NGR: 592078, 174710)

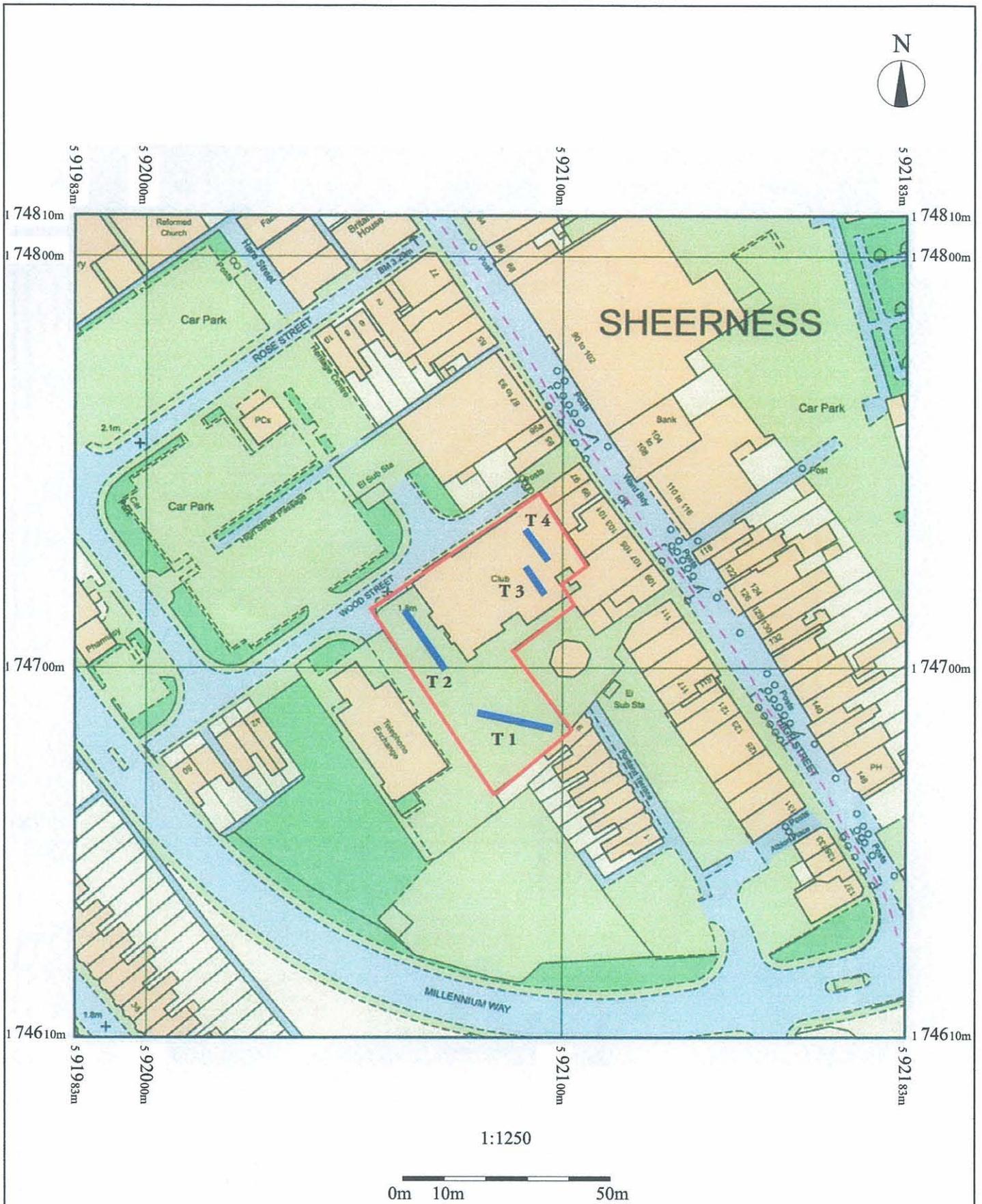


Figure 2: Location of evaluation trenches within the Development Site.

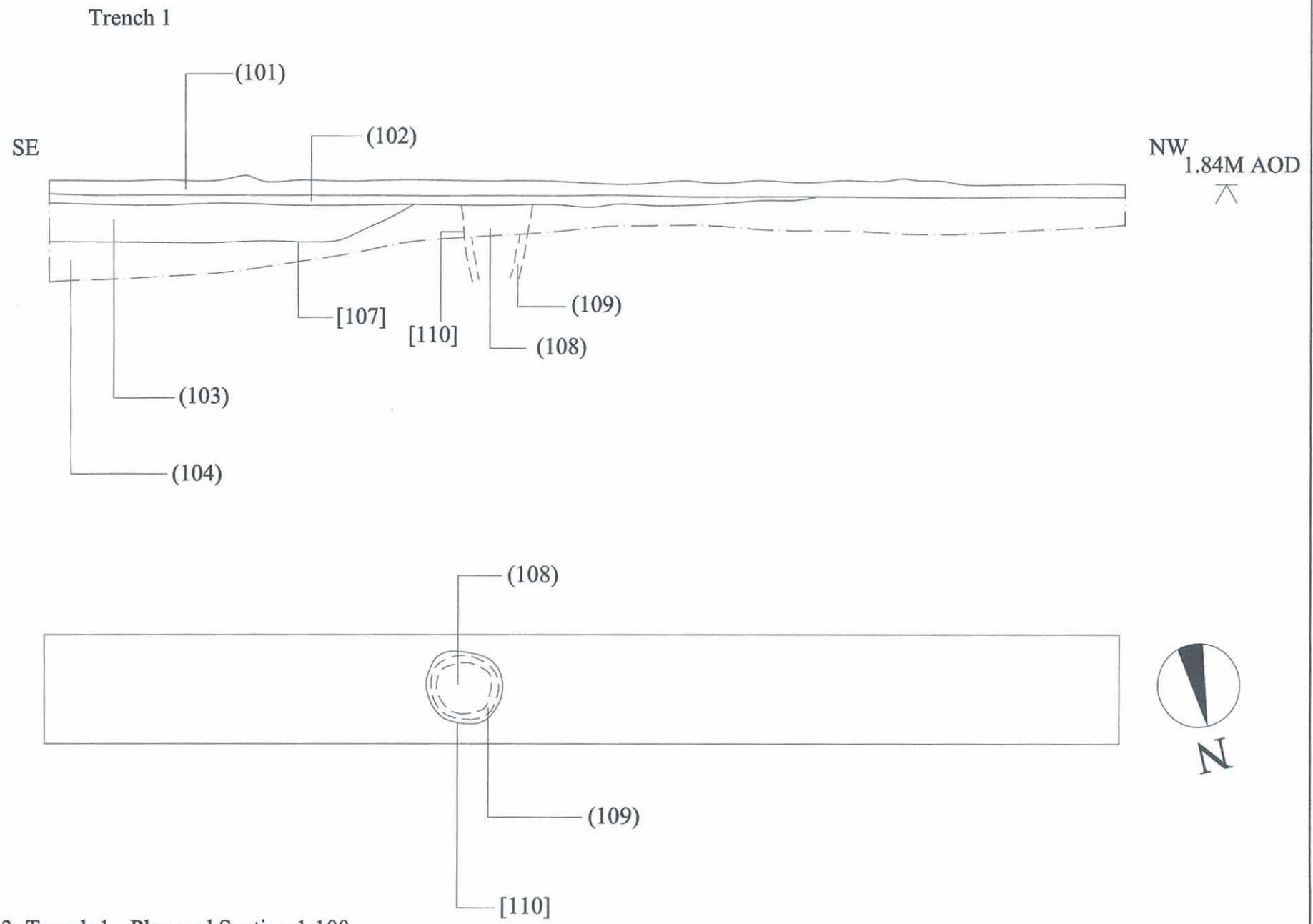


Figure 3: Trench 1 - Plan and Section 1:100

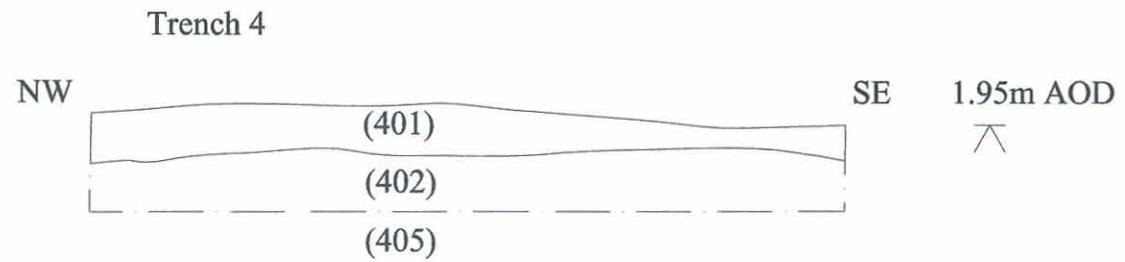


Figure 4: Trench Sections 1:100