

**CRAWLEY CHILDREN'S LIBRARY, NORTHGATE AVENUE, CRAWLEY,  
WEST SUSSEX**

**HISTORIC BUILDING RECORD**

**NGR: 527354 136883**



Commissioned by  
Faithful and Gould

**CRAWLEY CHILDREN'S LIBRARY, NORTHGATE AVENUE, CRAWLEY,  
WEST SUSSEX**

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**NGR: 527354 136883**

**ASE Project No:200694  
Site Code: NAC21  
ASE Report No: 2021040  
OASIS id: archaeol6- 416440**

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## **SUMMARY**

In February 2021 Archaeology South-East (a division of the UCL Centre for Applied Archaeology) carried out a historic building record of the children's library attached to the main library at Northgate Avenue, Crawley, West Sussex (NGR 527354 136883; Figures 1 & 2). The work was commissioned by Faithful and Gould prior to the demolition of the building.

Previously a small market town, Crawley was identified as a suitable site as part of the New Towns Act 1946. It was officially designated a new town on 9<sup>th</sup> January 1947, with the plans for the new town – covering 5920 acres of land (2,396 hectares) – being officially confirmed in December 1947. The children's library was purpose-built in 1963 as part of a development which included a public lending library, council offices and other facilities for Crawley New Town. The library was designed to provide adequate facilities for the growing population of the town, with a spatially distinct children's library in order to maintain the quiet atmosphere of the main library. It uses simple materials – mainly cast concrete – and is of a modern design, which would have been intended to differentiate it from old ideals as part of an 'out with the old, in with the new' post-war drive leading the country at the time. It seems likely its design can be attributed to F. R. Steele, the County Architect at the time of its construction, or possibly A. G. Sheppard Fidler, who was the chief architect of Crawley New Town from 1947 to 1952.

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- Plate 24: The library space viewed from the librarian's office (NAC21-0032).
- Plate 25: An example bookcase fitted to the external wall (NAC21-0021).
- Plate 26: Low bench at base of window (NAC21-0020).
- Plate 27: Ceiling showing the arrangement of the lights (NAC21-0038).

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

**1.1** In February 2021 Archaeology South-East (a division of the UCL Centre for Applied Archaeology) carried out a Historic Building Record of the children's library attached to the main library at Northgate Avenue, Crawley, West Sussex (NGR 527354 136883; Figures 1 & 2). The work was commissioned by Faithful and Gould ahead of the planned demolition of the building.

## **2.0 SCOPE & METHODOLOGY**

**2.1** The historic building recording work involved surveying the building to Level 2-3 standard, as defined by Historic England (2016) and as set out in the written scheme of investigation (ASE 2020).

**2.2** The site was visited by Susan Chandler and Amy Williamson on 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2021 to carry out the recording work. This entailed the production of a written, drawn and photographic record. The photographic record includes general external and internal elevations, setting, street frontages, surviving architectural detail, fixtures and fittings. An index of the digital photography is included as an appendix to this report and a selection of the photographs reproduced as plates.

**2.3** The drawn record comprises a location plan and an as-existing measured floor plan. The floor plan, which was provided by the client, was verified on-site and augmented with additional features where necessary. The plan has been reproduced as Figure 8.

## **3.0 SITE LOCATION**

**3.1** The site lies to the north-east of Crawley town centre, to the north side of Northgate Avenue. The site forms part of a complex of civic buildings including court buildings, council offices, a police station and the library. This complex is bound by Kilnmead Road to the north, Woodfield Road to the east, Exchange Road to the west and Northgate Avenue (the A2004) to the south.

**3.2** The site is generally level, with some landscaping relating to the construction of the buildings on it. The children's library is located to the east end of the site, which includes a purpose-built complex of town council buildings which included both a main library and children's library, council offices and court house.

**3.3** According to the British Geological Survey 1:50,000 scale geological mapping available online (BGS), the bedrock geology of the site is Tunbridge Wells Sandstone, a deposit of sedimentary sandstone and siltstone formed in the Cretaceous period, 134.9 to 133.9 million years ago.

## **4.0 RELEVANT DESIGNATIONS**

**4.1** The library building is not statutorily listed, nor does it lie in a conservation area. The Children's Library has recently been proposed as an addition to the Crawley Local Heritage List (Crawley Borough Council, February 2021), and the consultation draft is currently undergoing formal consultation. The demolition contract for the building had already been awarded and West Sussex County Council consider that the wider

long-term public benefits associated with progressing the development of the site remain advantageous.

- 4.2** Upon adoption, buildings included on a local list are not subject to listed building consent, although their inclusion is a material consideration when deciding planning applications. It is therefore anticipated that any future planning consent for the redevelopment of the site would require that the children's library be recorded prior to any work taking place.

## **5.0 HISTORIC BACKGROUND AND CARTOGRAPHIC EVIDENCE**

- 5.1** The following historical background summarises information available online at the time of writing, including historic mapping, The Crawley Borough Council website and Historic England's publication *The English Public Library 1945-85*.

- 5.2** The Ordnance Survey mapping shows that from the 1870s, the area of the site was agricultural land between Crawley to the south-west, and Three Bridges to the east. Three Bridges Road is shown as a lane linking Crawley and Three Bridges to the south of the site. By the mapping of the 1940s (Figure 3), the two villages have been linked by a band of development along Three Bridges Road, although the site remains as agricultural land.

- 5.3** Crawley was identified as a suitable site as part of the New Towns Act 1946. It was officially designated a new town on 9<sup>th</sup> January 1947<sup>1</sup>, with the plans for the new town – covering 5920 acres of land (2,396 hectares) – being officially confirmed in December 1947. The new town merged the villages of Ifield and Three Bridges with Crawley, which was a market town by this date. In the subsequent years, major development work filled in the land between the three former settlements, with the introduction of nine new neighbourhoods which included parks, industrial and commercial areas. In 1962 a further neighbourhood was added to the town.

- 5.4** Aerial photography from 1952 (Figure 4) shows the construction of housing and community buildings either side of Northgate, although the County Buildings site itself – including the future location of the library – had yet to be developed (Figure 3). In 1955 proposals were drawn up for new County Buildings for Crawley New Town, including a technical college, an ambulance station, a health centre, a police station, a court house, local council county offices, and a central library (West Sussex County Architects' Department 1955). These were completed by 1963,<sup>2</sup> and are first depicted on Ordnance Survey mapping in 1974 (Figure 5). Subsequent Ordnance Survey mapping shows no changes to the buildings.

- 5.5** Historic photographs held by the West Sussex 'Past Pictures' collection taken in the 1960s show the local county council offices and the main library, and have been included here to give an idea of the look of the building complex when first constructed (Figure 6). One such photograph (Figure 7), shows a group of dignitaries (including Bernard Marmaduke Fitzalan-Howard the 16th Duke of Norfolk) was clearly taken in the children's library as the distinctive windows can be seen in the background. The photograph also includes a table with standing books and a train set.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://crawley.gov.uk/culture/history-and-heritage/history-crawley>

<sup>2</sup> West Sussex Record Office, ref. WDC/AR17/60/34

**5.6** The Public Libraries and Museums Act of 1962 made it a duty for local authorities to provide a library service to the public. The Act required the library service to be 'comprehensive and efficient' and also encouraged provisions to allow access to pictures and records and to promote cultural activities. This led to a boom of libraries in the 1960s, which also reflected the larger budgets of local authorities and the more liberal culture of the time. The Department of Education and Science offered guidance for growing towns, suggesting libraries could be laid out to an informal plan with separate lending and children's facilities. This is clearly reflected in the design of the library at Crawley, where the round children's library is separated from the main library by a short walkway. At this time round library buildings were particularly constructed in West Sussex (Historic England 2016b). The Crawley children's library has notable similarities to the Grade II listed Chichester Library (National Heritage List for England, list entry number 1425462), which was built in 1965-6, and designed by the County Architect, F. R. Steele, who was involved with planning Crawley New Town.

## **6.0 DESCRIPTION OF THE BUILDINGS**

### *Overview*

**6.1** The general design of the civic building complex is Modernist, constructed using a combination of concrete and large metal-framed glazing units. The buildings are streamlined, with flat roofing and low profiles, best illustrated in the historic photographs taken not long after their (Figure 6). The buildings are arranged in two east – west ranging blocks, with the libraries forming part of the southern block along with the council offices. The northern block contained police services and the Crawley Magistrates' Court (Plate 1). The blocks were separated by an east – west road with central courtyard with water feature.

**6.2** The children's library is situated to the east side of the main library, to which it is connected by a simple glazed link corridor (Plate 2). At the time of the survey the library buildings were empty and had last been used by the West Sussex Fire and Rescue Service.

### *Exterior*

**6.3** The children's library is a single storey building, which is circular in plan (Plate 3). It sits on a simple, reinforced concrete plinth (Plate 4), which is recessed from the main body of the building above. The circular shape of the building is formed by twenty-three identical segmental panels. Each of these panels comprises a full-height, four-pane, metal-framed window, framed by deep-section cast concrete mullions which project outward to each side, a floor-level slate slab sill and a projecting head (Plates 5 & 6), the whole creating a deep setting for the window. To each panel, the window head and the plinth beneath the sill, are each finished with three cast-concrete blocks. Those blocks below the sills have a drip moulding to their soffit. The mullions stand proud of the facing blocks, reinforcing the vertical emphasis of the panels.

**6.4** The repetition of the panel design creates a simple but striking façade. In some areas, the larger mid-panes of the windows are blocked, indicating the positions of the shelving and librarian's office within (Plate 7). Over these, the two smaller upper panes open on centrally positioned horizontal pivots (Plate 5). Where the larger

panes are not blocked by shelving, they open inwards from a transom along the bottom of the pane. The smallest pane at the bottom of each window does not open.

- 6.5** Linking the children's library to the main library is a glazed corridor (Plate 8). This is the only interruption to the repeating panels of the building. The link corridor is slightly lower than the children's library and does not sit on a plinth since the ground level here is slightly higher. The north elevation of the link corridor comprises three large glazed panes with a frieze of concrete facing blocks above, matching those of the children's library. The south elevation has two large glazed panes with a centrally-positioned double doorway with over-light (Plate 9). As with the north elevation, there is a frieze of concrete facing blocks above.
- 6.6** Both the library and the link corridor have a flat roof with a slight, rounded parapet. Any rainwater that accumulates on these roofs drains via internal downpipes, incorporated within the structure of the building (Plate 10).

#### *Interior*

- 6.7** The children's library was accessed via the main library building. This access comprises a single door with a single, tall, wired safety glass panel, with similar side-lights (now covered with sheets of timber), which opens into the link corridor (Plates 11-13). The remains of simple plastic signage on the door indicates that it leads to the children's library.
- 6.8** The interior of the link corridor is simple, with a double-width doorway at the east end leading into the children's library. The opening is slightly splayed and set with simple timber panelling (Plate 14). Each door has a single, tall light of wired safety glass. At the time of the survey, some of the panelling lining the doorway had been removed, exposing some of the materials used in the construction of the building: Fletton bricks to the side of the doorway (Plate 15), and board-marked cast concrete forming the lintel of the doorway (Plate 16). Board-marked cast concrete was also observed through an area of removed ceiling in the corridor.
- 6.9** The interior of the children's library is simple, comprising two spaces: the library and a librarian's office, situated on the eastern side. The librarian's office is separated from the library space by a curving partition wall fitted with original bookshelves and heaters. This incorporates a centrally-positioned window which would have allowed the librarian to monitor the library space from within the office (Plate 17). The partition does not rise to the full height of the building, and above it, the two internal down-pipes from the roof are visible (Plate 18). The south and north sides of the office are formed by plain partition walls, the only feature being a doorway providing access on the north side (Plates 19 & 20). The north wall is set back from the end of the main partition wall, allowing it to screens a small sink with water heater (Plate 21)
- 6.10** Although small, the librarian's office is lined with shelving for the organisation and storage of books not in use (Plate 22); the shelving to the west side is curved to match the profile of the partition and appears original. The room retains original linoleum flooring (Plate 23).
- 6.11** In the main library space, six sets of bookshelves, which matching that fixed to the west side of the office, are affixed to the curving external walls (Plates 24 & 25). Between each set of shelves is an uncovered window with small fixed bench at a low level. The windows have timber sills with a simple strip moulding and the wall is

finished with a simple skirting (Plate 26). No fixtures or fittings for additional shelving were noted on the floor of the space, which had carpet tiles largely covering the original linoleum.

- 6.12** The ceiling of the building has a central light fitting, surrounded by two concentric rings of lights (Plate 27).

## **7.0 DISCUSSION**

- 7.1** The first libraries opened to the public in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century but they were uncommon and mainly found in larger cities. The later 19<sup>th</sup> century saw an uptake in the construction of libraries, largely due to the growth in literacy after the 1870 Education Act. Many libraries were constructed as philanthropic projects by figures such as Sir Henry Tate or Andrew Carnegie, or built to commemorate the Golden Jubilee of Queen Victoria in 1887.
- 7.2** Libraries grew in popularity in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, particularly serving the elderly, women and children, which led to the development of 'children's sections'. During the inter-war years, libraries were often provided as mobile services (in vans) or within converted shops in rural or smaller towns (Harwood & Powers, 2018). The provision of library services was formalised by the Public Libraries and Museums Act of 1962. This made it a duty for local authorities to provide a library service to the public and required the library service to be 'comprehensive and efficient'. It also encouraged provisions to allow access to pictures and records and to promote cultural activities.
- 7.3** Circular buildings had been used for libraries previously, influenced by the Round Reading Room (or 'Panoptican Reading Room') of the British Museum, completed in 1857. This round design was based on the idea of central supervision (Historic England 2014), which is reflected here in the layout of the children's library where the librarian's office is provisioned with a window to allow monitoring of the library space. The separation of the main library and children's library would have allowed the main library to operate the normal 'quiet' without the distraction of the children's noise.
- 7.4** The design of the building is striking externally, and functional internally, as was the aim of Modernist architecture. This would have been of importance to a new town such as Crawley, as in the post-war era there was an effort to move away from the past and into the future, with public buildings providing an opportunity to drive home this message. It appears likely that the library was the work of the County Architect, F. R. Steele, who was involved with planning Crawley New Town. F. R. Steele designed West Sussex Library in Chichester (Grade II listed; National Heritage List for England, list entry number 1425462), which was also built to a circular plan, with a strong motif of vertical separation between large areas of glazing.
- 7.5** Interestingly, the library also bears strong a resemblance to the Bourne Hall Library and Social Centre, in Epsom, which is also Grade II listed (National Heritage List for England, list entry number 1425772). This building was designed by Alwyn Gwilyn Sheppard Fidler, who was the chief architect of Crawley New Town from 1947 to 1952 and City Architect of Birmingham from 1952-64; it was one of his first private practice commissions in 1965 (Harwood & Powers, 2018). Bourne Hall Library features a motif of projecting cast concrete mullions between its glazing panels as seen at the children's library at Crawley. It is possible that Sheppard Fidler was

influenced by the design of the children's library at Crawley when designing Bourne Hall, or perhaps it was the case that he sowed the seeds for the design of the library at Crawley, prior to his departure.

## **8.0 DEPOSITION OF THE ARCHIVE**

**8.1** The project archive will be deposited with the West Sussex Record Office under the site code NAC21. The archive will comprise all survey material collected and produced in undertaking the project. A further digital copy of the report (including plans, illustrations and photographs) will be supplied to West Sussex County Council and the West Sussex HER on CD-ROM in a .pdf format.

## **9.0 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

**9.1** Archaeology South-East would like to thank Faithful and Gould for commissioning this historic building record.

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Online Resources:

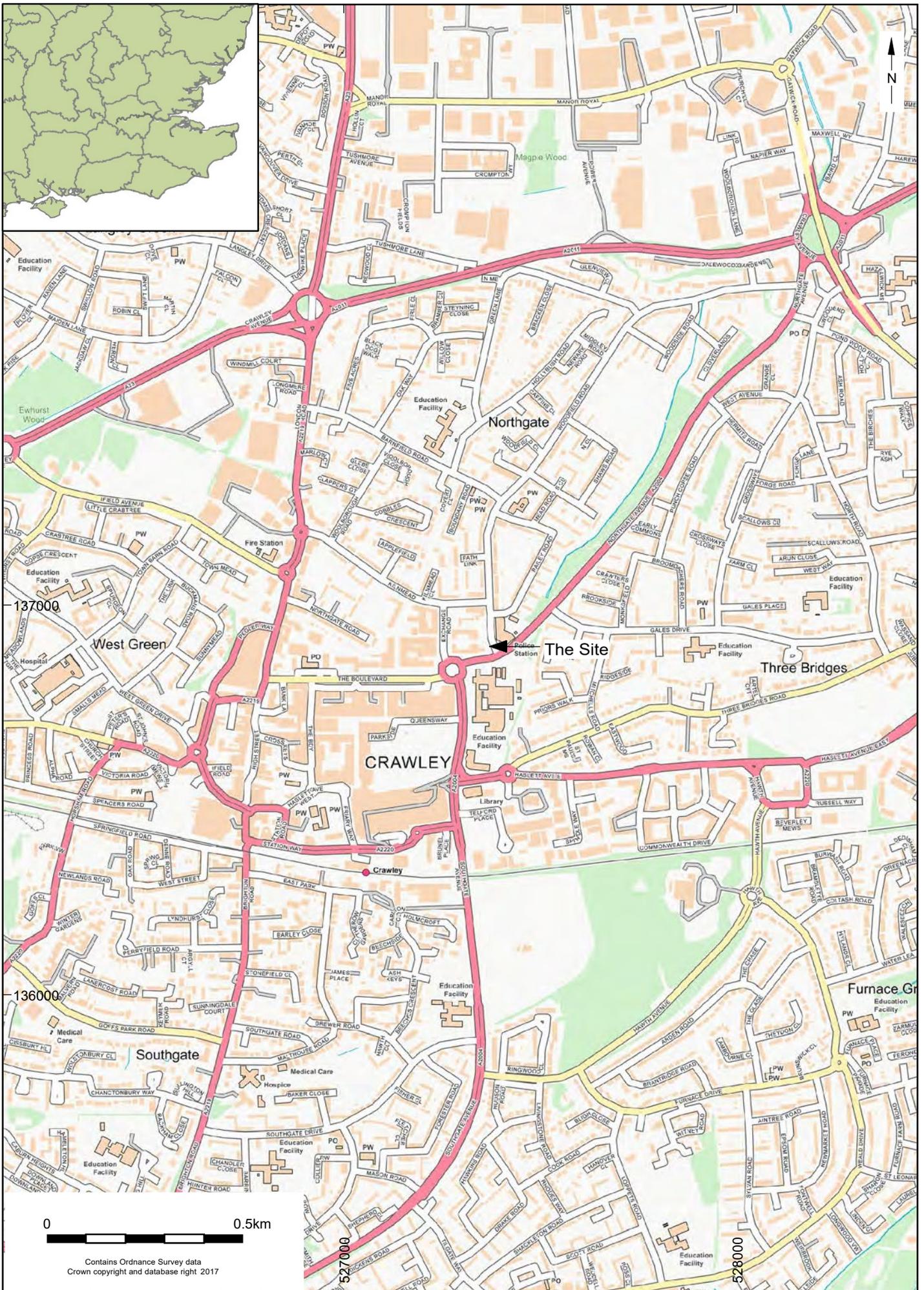
British Geological Survey (BGS), Geology of Britain Viewer  
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Accessed: 22/02/21

<https://digimap.edina.ac.uk/>  
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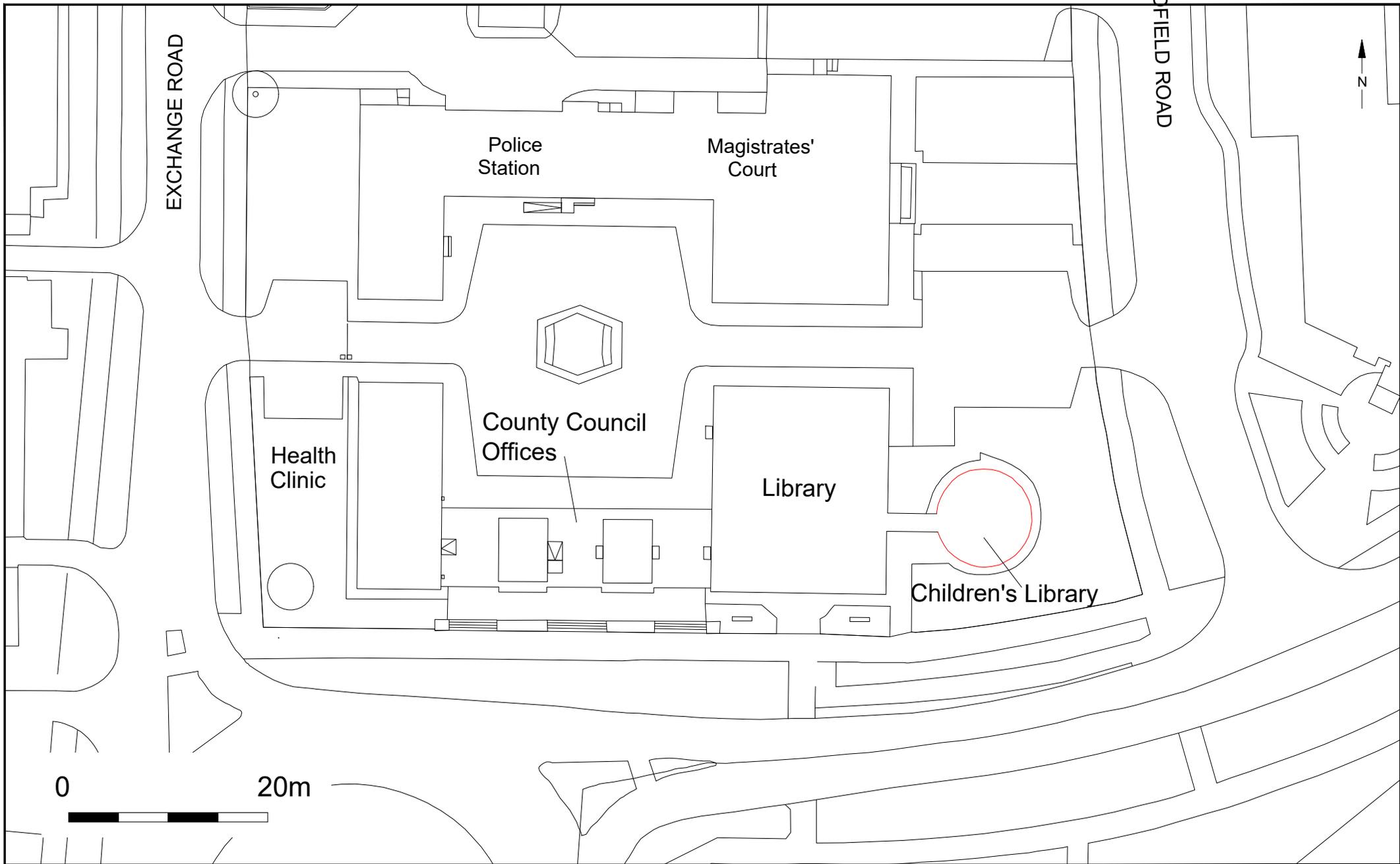
<https://crawley.gov.uk/culture/history-and-heritage/history-crawley>  
accessed 22/02/2021

<https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1425462>  
accessed 23/02/2021

<https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1425772>  
accessed 24/02/2021



© Archaeology South-East		Crawley Children's Library, Northgate Avenue, Crawley		Fig. 1
Project Ref: 200694	Jan 2021	Site location		
Report Ref: 2021040	Drawn by: SC			



© Archaeology South-East

Crawley Children's Library, Northgate Avenue, Crawley

Project Ref: 200694

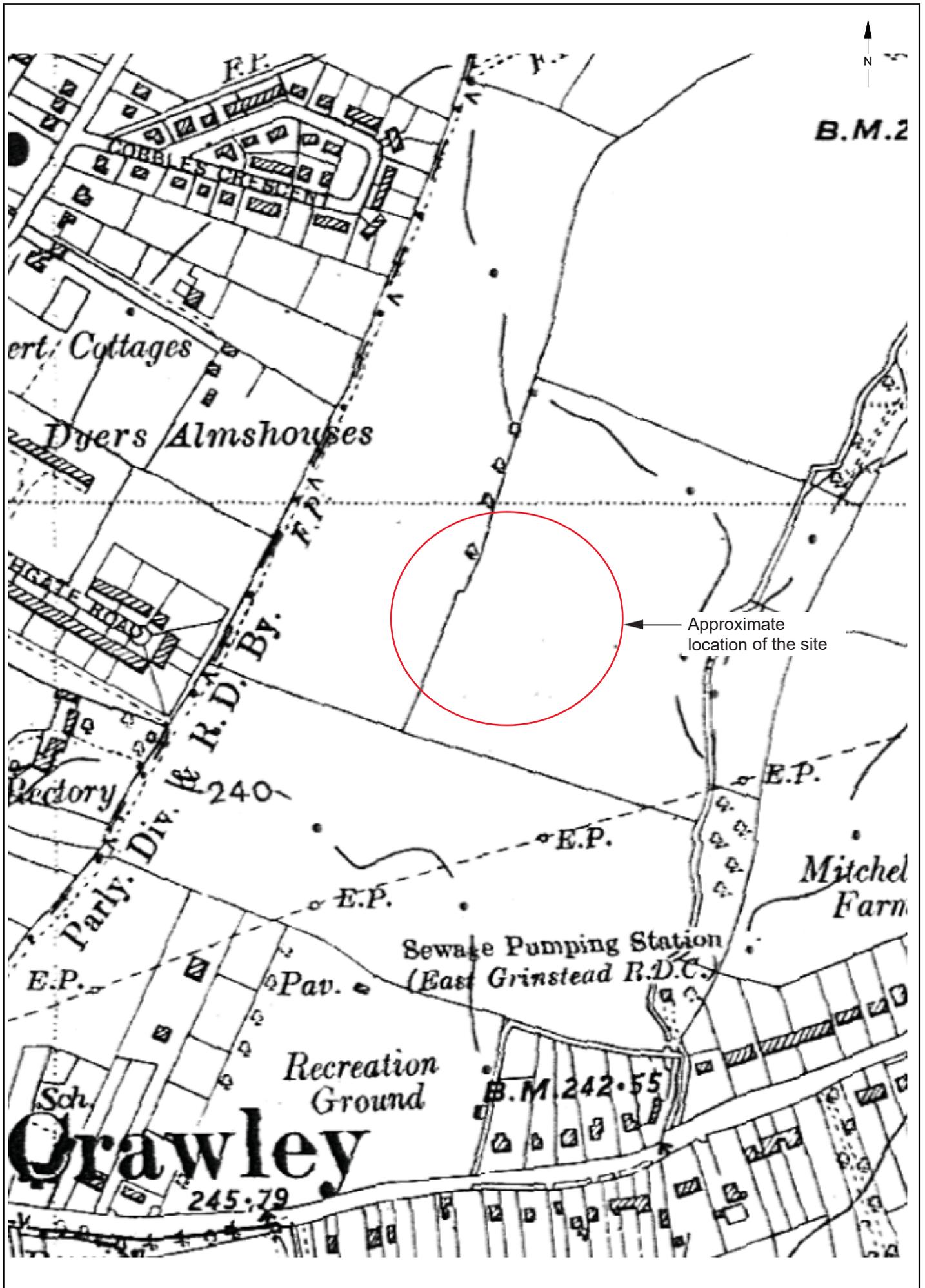
Feb 2021

Report Ref: 2021040

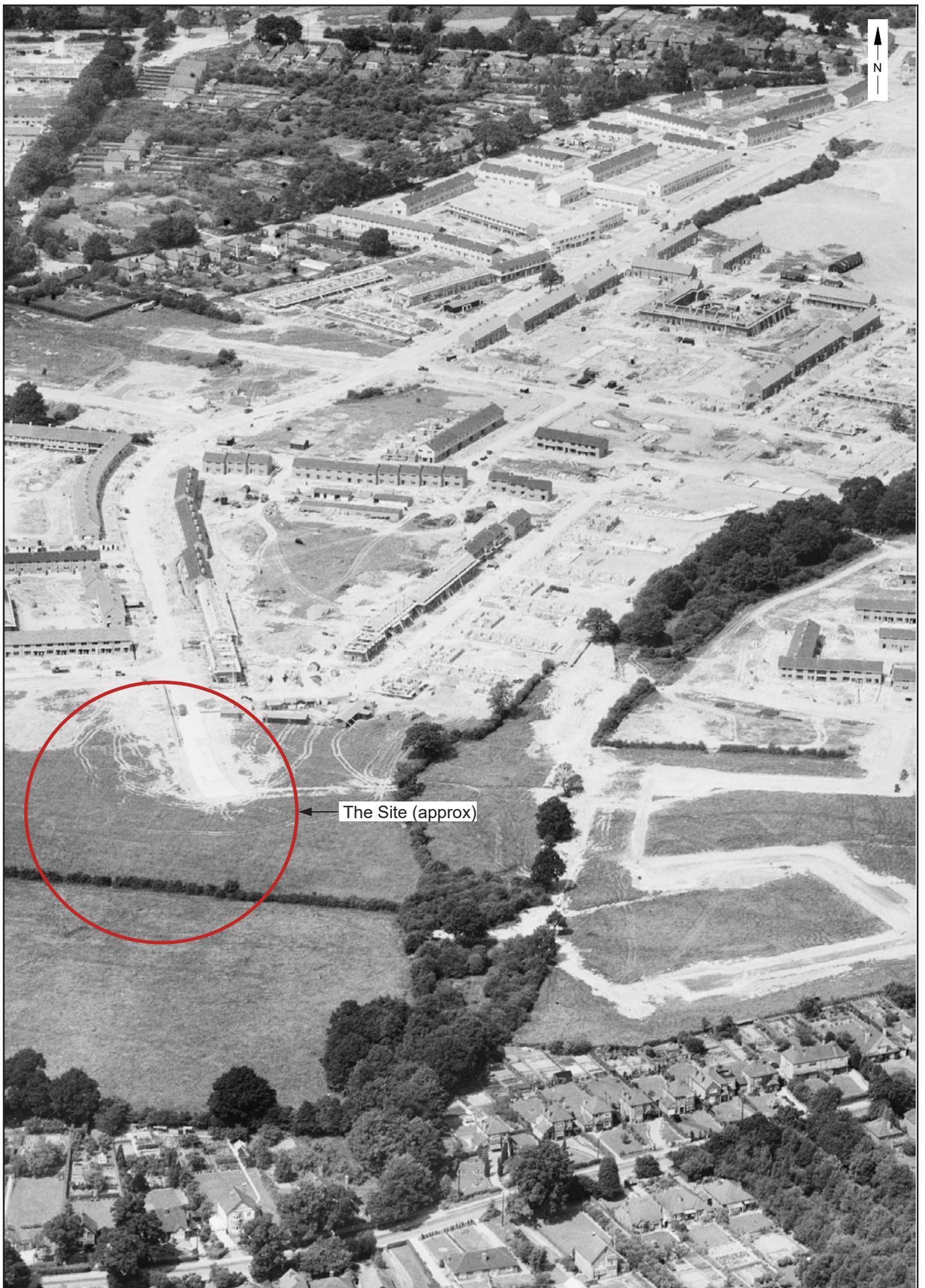
Drawn by: SC

Site plan

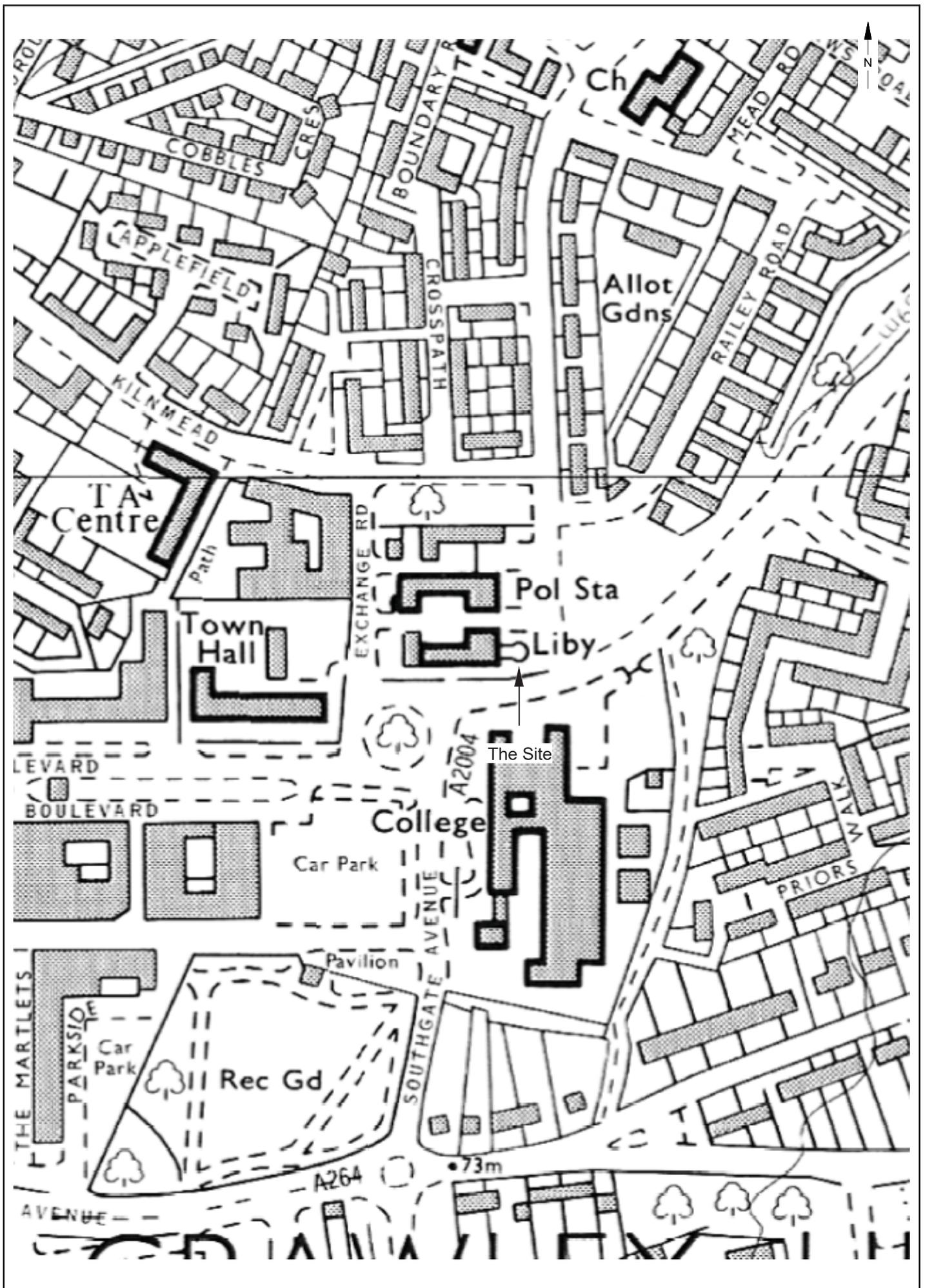
Fig. 2



© Archaeology South-East		Crawley Children's Library, Northgate Avenue, Crawley		Fig. 3
Project Ref: 200694	Feb 2021	Ordnance Survey map, 1946		
Report Ref: 2021040	Drawn by: SC			



© Archaeology South-East		Crawley Children's Library, Northgate Avenue, Crawley	Fig. 4
Project Ref: 200694	Feb 2020	Northgate Avenue in 1952, looking north (Britain from Above, ref. EAW044438)	
Report Ref: 2021040	Drawn by: MGS		



© Archaeology South-East		Crawley Children's Library, Northgate Avenue, Crawley	Fig. 5
Project Ref: 200694	Feb 2021	Ordnance Survey map, 1974	
Report Ref: 2021040	Drawn by: SC		



Courtyard with central pool towards council offices (ref: PP/WSL/N058765)



Council offices from the south-west (library to the left) (ref: PP/WSL/P0002278)



Interior of the main library (ref: PP/WSL/P0003685)



South elevation of the main library (ref: PP/WSL/T000028)

© <b>Archaeology South-East</b>		Crawley Children's Library, Northgate Avenue, Crawley	Fig. 6
Project Ref: 200694	Feb 2021	Historic photographs of the library and council buildings in the 1960s (Source: West Sussex Past Pictures, online)	
Report Ref: 2021040	Drawn by: SC		



From left to right is The Duke, a library assistant, Mrs H. C. Carman, J.P (Justice of the Peace) and Chairman, Mr Bearman, Associate of the Library Association and County Librarian and Peter Mursell, Chairman of West Sussex County Council

© <b>Archaeology South-East</b>		Crawley Children's Library, Northgate Avenue, Crawley	Fig. 7
Project Ref: 200694	Feb 2021	Photograph taken in the children's library during the opening of the buildings (Source: West Sussex Past Pictures, ref PP/WSL/HCP00019)	
Report Ref: 2021040	Drawn by: SC		

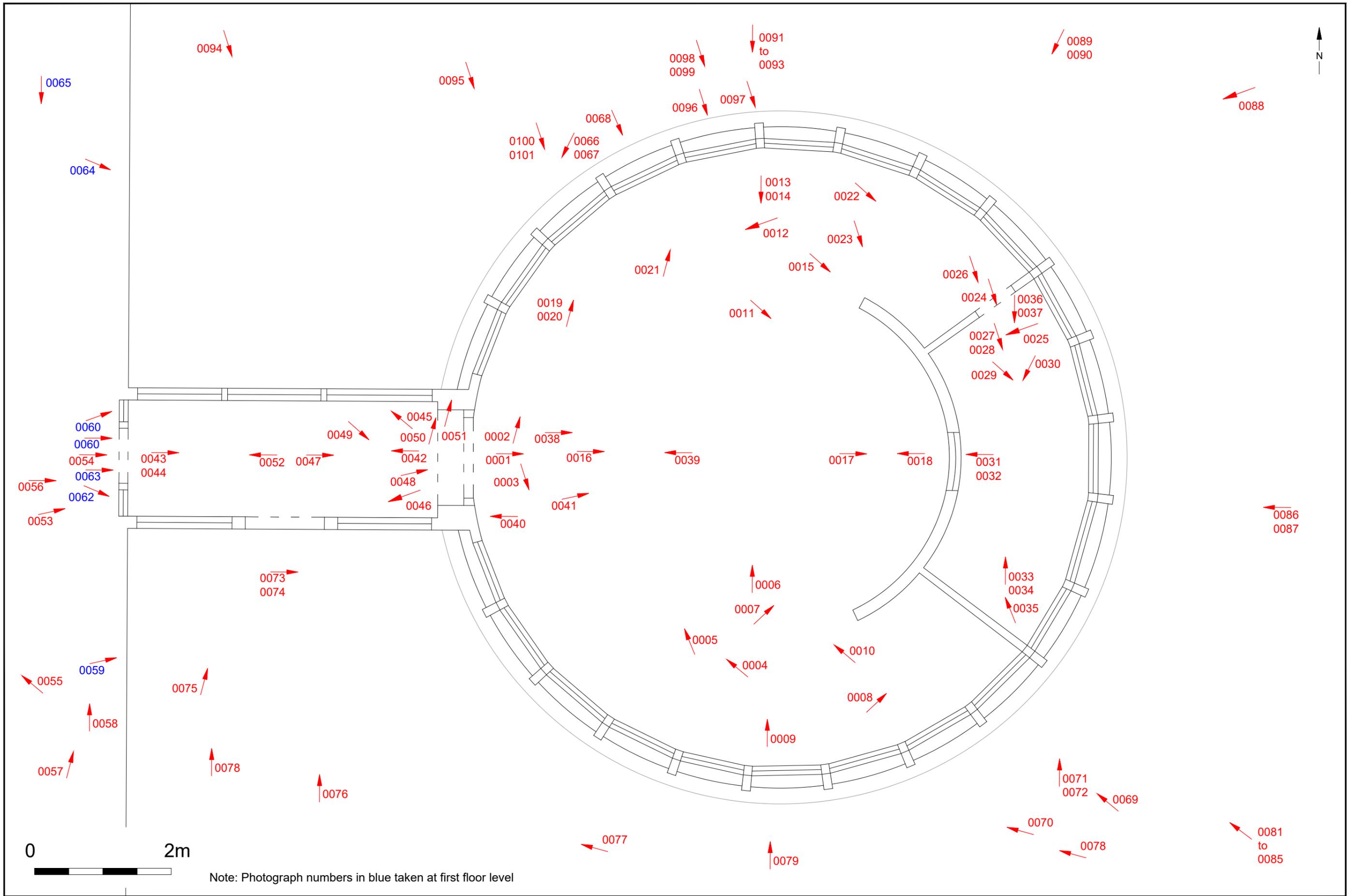




Plate 1: The site viewed from the south-east, showing the children's library with library and council buildings behind and Crawley Magistrates' Court to the north (NAC21-0084).



Plate 2: The children's library (left) with main library (right), looking south-west (NAC21-0090).



Plate 3: The children's library, looking south-east (NAC21-0094).



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Plate 5: An example panel showing glazing with concrete mullions to each side (NAC21-0099).



Plate 6: An example slate sill (NAC21-0101).



Plate 7: General view of the children's library looking north-west (NAC21-0069).



Plate 8: View of the children's library with link corridor (north elevation) connecting it to the main library, looking south-east (NAC21-0094).



Plate 9: South elevation of the link corridor, looking north (NAC21-000076).



Plate 10: The roofs of the children's library and link corridor, looking east. Arrows indicate the locations of the internal downpipes (NAC21-0060).



Plate 11: Doorway to the link corridor from the main library (NAC21-0053).

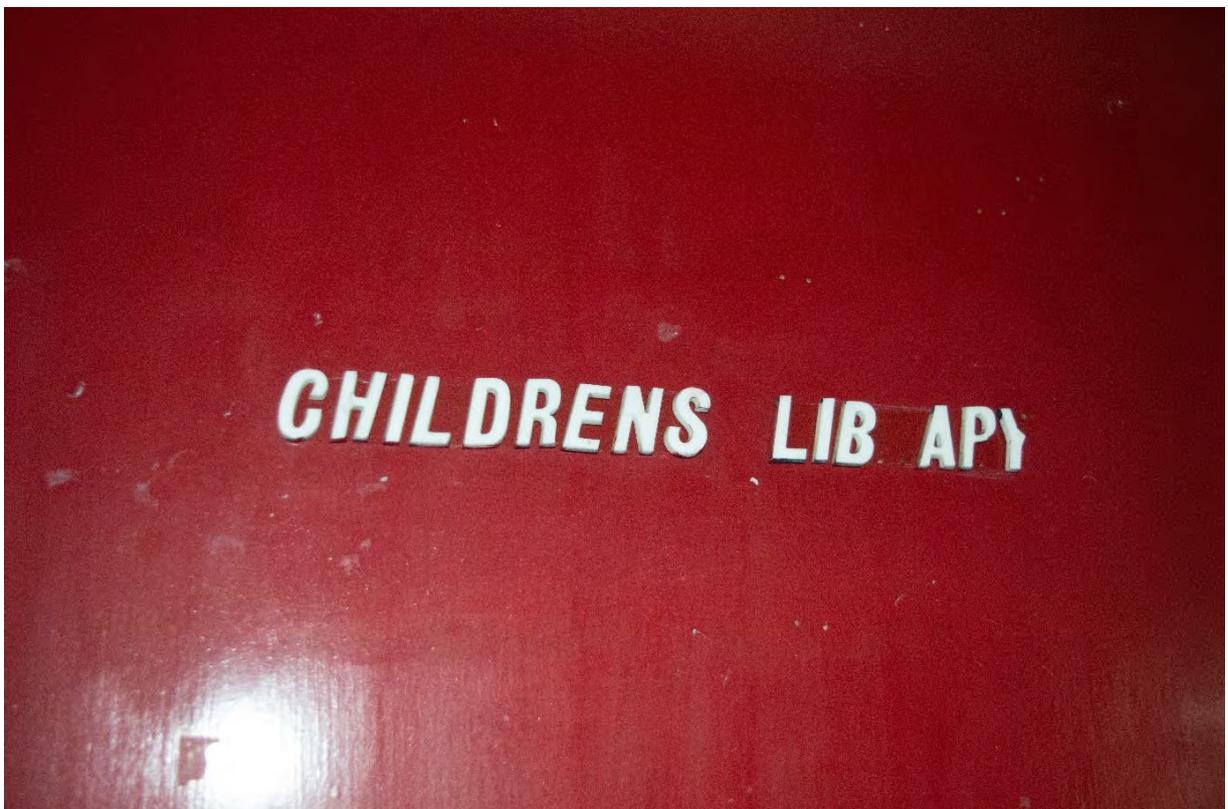


Plate 12: Children's library signage on the door from the main library (NAC21-0054).



Plate 13: Interior of the link corridor looking west (NAC21-0042).

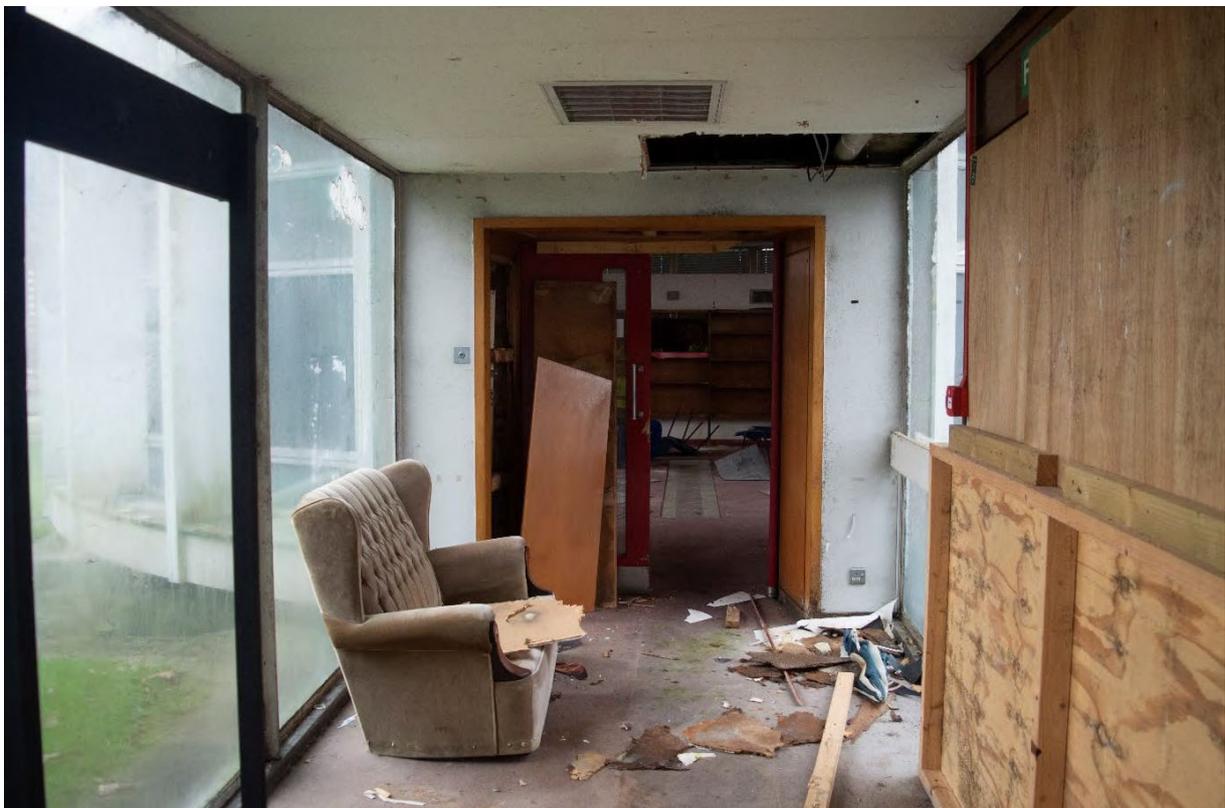


Plate 14: Interior of the link corridor looking east (NAC21-0043).



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Plate 16: Board-marked cast concrete forming the lintel of the doorway into the children's library from the link corridor (NAC21-0048).



Plate 17: Interior of the children's library, looking east (NAC21-0001).

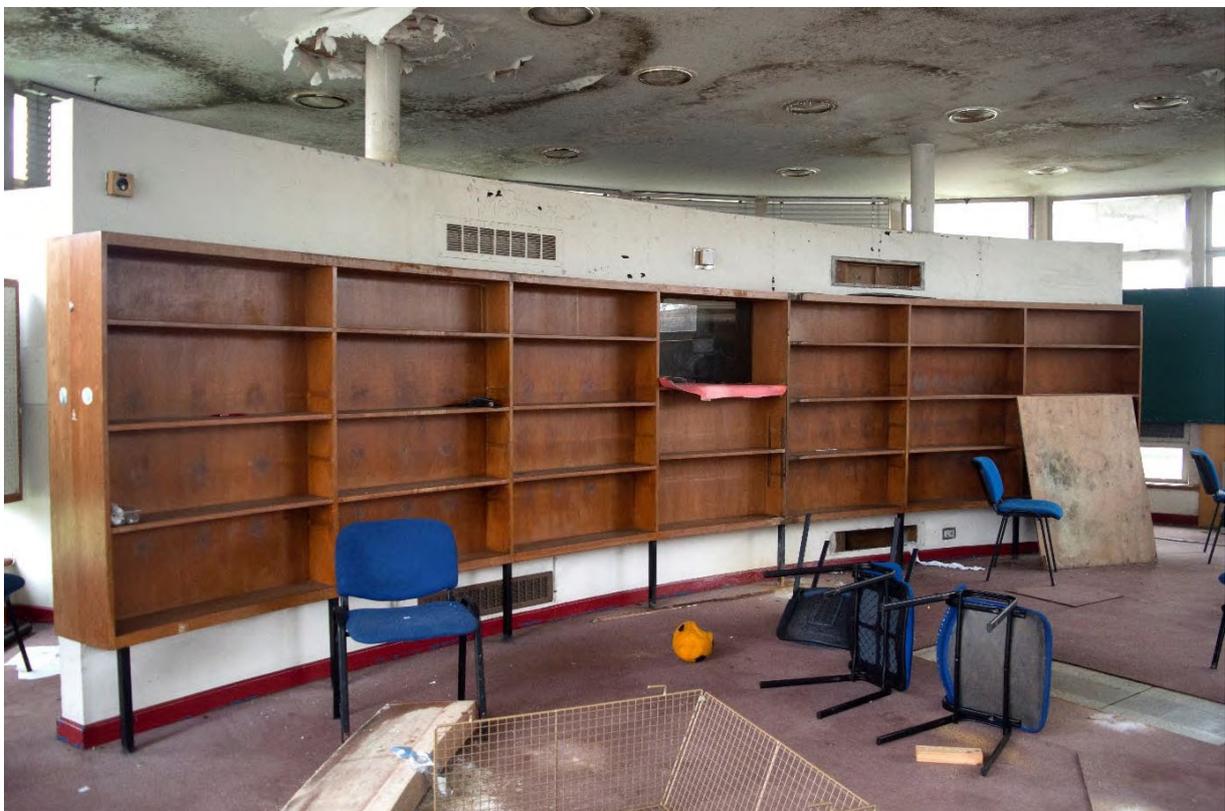


Plate 18: Partition wall separating the library and librarian's office with original bookshelves (NAC21-0011).



Plate 19: South wall of the librarian's office, looking north (NAC21-0008).



Plate 20: North end of the librarian's office, looking south (NAC21-0122).



Plate 21: Sink and water heater screened by the partition, looking south-west (NAC21-0123).



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Plate 23: Original linoleum flooring in the librarian's office (NAC21-0026).



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Plate 25: An example bookcase fitted to the external wall (NAC21-0021).



Plate 26: Low bench at base of window (NAC21-0020).



Plate 27: Ceiling showing the arrangement of the lights (NAC21-0038).

## Appendix 1: OASIS Form

### OASIS ID: archaeo16-416440

#### Project details

Project name	CRAWLEY CHILDRENS LIBRARY, NORTHGATE AVENUE, CRAWLEY, WEST SUSSEX
Short description of the project	In February 2021 Archaeology South-East (a division of the UCL Centre for Applied Archaeology) carried out a historic building record of the children's library attached to the main library at Northgate Avenue, Crawley, West Sussex (NGR 527354 136883; Figures 1 and 2). The work was commissioned by Faithful and Gould prior to the demolition of the building. Previously a small market town, Crawley was identified as a suitable site as part of the New Towns Act 1946. It was officially designated a new town on 9th January 1947, with the plans for the new town - covering 5920 acres of land (2,396 hectares) - being officially confirmed in December 1947. The children's library was purpose-built in 1963 as part of a development which included a public lending library, council offices and other facilities for Crawley New Town. The library was designed to provide adequate facilities for the growing population of the town, with a spatially distinct children's library in order to maintain the quiet atmosphere of the main library. It uses simple materials - mainly cast concrete - and is of a modern design, which would have been intended to differentiate it from old ideals as part of an 'out with the old, in with the new' post-war drive leading the country at the time. It seems likely its design can be attributed to F. R. Steele, the County Architect at the time of its construction, or possibly A. G. Sheppard Fidler, who was the chief architect of Crawley New Town from 1947 to 1952.
Project dates	Start: 22-02-2021 End: 09-03-2021
Previous/future work	No / Not known
Any associated project reference codes	NAC21 - Sitecode
Any associated project reference codes	2021040 - Contracting Unit No.
Any associated project reference codes	200694 - Contracting Unit No.
Type of project	Building Recording
Site status	None
Current Land use	Industry and Commerce 2 - Offices
Monument type	LIBRARY Modern
Methods & techniques	"Annotated Sketch","Photographic Survey"
Project location	
Country	England
Site location	WEST SUSSEX CRAWLEY CRAWLEY CRAWLEY CHILDRENS LIBRARY, NORTHGATE AVENUE, CRAWLEY, WEST SUSSEX
Study area	0 Square metres
Site coordinates	TQ 527354 136883 50.901862153707 0.172398074378 50 54 06 N 000 10 20 E Point
Project creators	
Name of Organisation	Archaeology South East
Project brief originator	ASE

Project design originator	ASE
Project director/manager	Ron Humphrey
Project supervisor	Susan Chandler
Type of sponsor/funding body	Client
Name of sponsor/funding body	Faithful and Gould
Project archives	
Physical Archive Exists?	No
Digital Archive recipient	West Sussex Records Office
Digital Media available	"GIS","Geophysics","Images raster / digital photography","Images vector","Survey","Text"
Paper Archive Exists?	No
Paper Archive recipient	West Sussex Records Office
Project bibliography 1	
Publication type	Grey literature (unpublished document/manuscript)
Title	CRAWLEY CHILDRENS LIBRARY, NORTHGATE AVENUE, CRAWLEY, WEST SUSSEX
Author(s)/Editor(s)	Chandler, S
Date	2021
Issuer or publisher	Archaeology South East
Place of issue or publication	Portslade
Description	A4 bound book
Entered by	Amy Williamson (amy.williamson@ucl.ac.uk)
Entered on	9 March 2021

**Appendix 2 Index of Digital Photographs**



NAC21-0001



NAC21-0002



NAC21-0003



NAC21-0004



NAC21-0005



NAC21-0006



NAC21-0007



NAC21-0008



NAC21-0009



NAC21-0010



NAC21-0011



NAC21-0012



NAC21-0013



NAC21-0014



NAC21-0015



NAC21-0016



NAC21-0017



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NAC21-0019



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NAC21-0100



NAC21-0101

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