

2. PROJECT BACKGROUND

2.1 The development

Headland Archaeology (UK) Ltd undertook a programme of archaeological works prior to the development of land north of Mauchline, East Ayrshire between November and December 2019 (Illus 1). The works were commissioned by Hayhill Developments to support a planning application for a housing development and were undertaken after consultation with West of Scotland Archaeology Service. The area was investigated in two phases. An initial trial trench evaluation identified a possible roundhouse and numerous pit features (Fitzpatrick-Sinclair 2019). This was followed by a monitored topsoil strip of two areas measuring 0.95ha in total and a programme of excavation and recording (McFarlane 2020).

2.2 Site location

The proposed development area lay at the northern end of the town of Mauchline, East Ayrshire, in an arable field on a slight rise which gently sloped from 174m above ordnance datum (AOD) in the north to 167m AOD in the south. Mauchline is located in the former comital district of Kyle not far from the north-western edge of the Carsphairn and Scaur Hills of the Southern Uplands.

The bedrock geology of the site consists of the Mauchline Sandstone formation formed between 298.9 and 272.3 million years ago during the Permian period; this was overlain by Devensian till (NERC 2024).

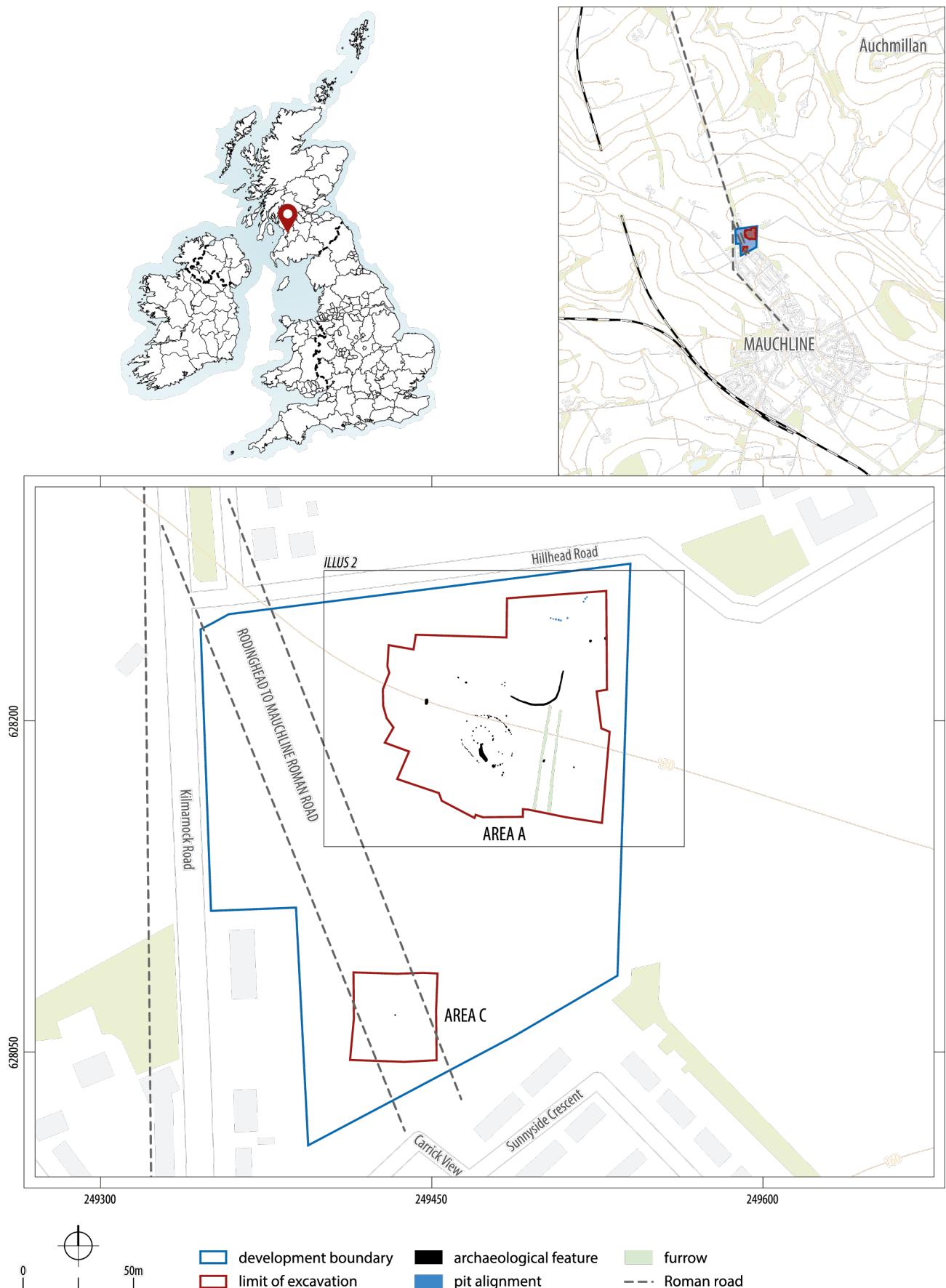
2.3 The archaeological background

The proposed development area contained two Historic Environment Records. The first record

is for the Rodinghead – Mauchline Roman Road (NRHE ID [73211](#)); a long stretch of straight road running through and to the north of the proposed development area that was identified as a possible Roman road in the 1950s (Illus 1).

The second record (Mauchline Old Road; NRHE ID [73209](#)) refers to an investigation carried out in 1959 by the same team who proposed the possible line of the road. During the works they recorded ‘a much perished road with a cobbled bottom and side-ditches’ (Clarke & Wilson 1960: 149). The same record notes that the Ordnance Survey team who visited the site in the 1970s found ‘no proof in the form associated with Roman finds or structures’ and no further investigations were carried out. No further evidence for the Roman road was noted during the trial trenching in 2019, although a number of natural features were identified. These could have been potentially misinterpreted as the ‘much perished’ Roman road (Fitzpatrick-Sinclair 2019).

The origins of the town of Mauchline date back to the medieval period, when it functioned as a grange for the Ayrshire estates of Melrose Abbey. The nucleus of the grange was Abbot Hunter’s Tower (NRHE ID [42697](#)) also known as Mauchline Castle, believed to date to the mid-15th century. An urban settlement grew around the grange and this settlement was granted a burgh charter in 1510. The parish church (NRHE ID [42706](#)) was constructed in 1829 on the site of a structure which dated back to the early 13th century. The town comprises 19th-century buildings in its centre with 20th-century housing estates on the periphery. Other known heritage assets in the wider vicinity of the development area relate to 18th- and 19th-century agricultural history and include a number of farmsteads.



Illus 1 Site location