

LOCAL GEOLOGICAL SITES

THURROCK DISTRICT



ThG14 Sandy Lane Pit (site of)

Site location: Sandy Lane Pit (site of), Sandy Lane, Aveley

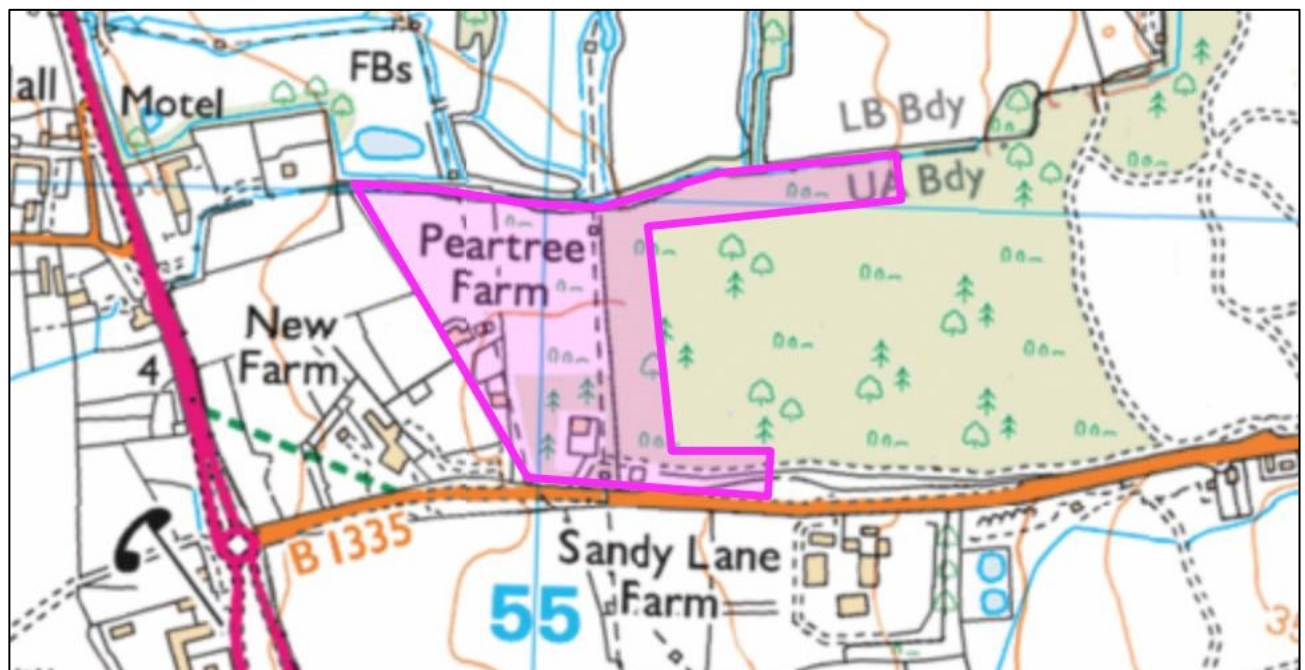
Grid reference: TQ 553 807

Status: Private land

Summary of the geological interest:

On the north side of Sandy Lane, west of Kennington Park, is the famous Sandy Lane Clay Pit where, in August 1964, the remains of a mammoth and a juvenile straight-tusked elephant were discovered in Ice Age deposits channelled into the London Clay. The discovery received considerable publicity in the national press. The fossils are now in the Natural History Museum, London. The precise location of the find was at TQ 5531 8081.

Attempts to conserve part of the Sandy Lane Pit (also known as Aveley No. 2 pit) as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) failed as planning consent for landfill had already been granted. The pit has therefore now been infilled. However, there is thought to be some undug land on the edges of the pit that could provide scope for future scientific investigation.



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Site Assessment. Local Geological Sites (LoGS) in Essex are assessed using criteria based on DEFRA guidance. An assessment form is used which asks key questions under four value categories: scientific, educational, historical and aesthetic. This site has been assessed and qualifies under these criteria.

The Aveley Elephants

The story began on 27th July 1964 when a young local amateur geologist named John Hesketh, after several previous visits to the site, noticed part of a mammoth skeleton protruding from the sloping sides of the pit. He notified geologists from the Natural History Museum in London who carried out an excavation lasting three weeks. The excavation received thousands of visitors, and staff from the Tunnel Portland Cement Company (owners of the pit) were said to have given up their spare time to control the crowds.

The mammoth skeleton, some of the bones of the straight-tusked elephant, and about 40 centimetres of sediment beneath them were removed from the site in two wooden crates to be transported to the Natural History Museum for preparation and eventual public display. Investigation of the site continued for some time afterwards, which led to part of a further mammoth being found in October 1964 and a further straight-tusked elephant skeleton between February and July 1965. A party from the Geologists' Association visited the site in May 1965 (Blezard 1966).

Fossils found with the skeletons clearly indicated that the elephants were living during an interglacial period but the exact age of the sediments has long been the subject of controversy. For some time the interglacial was considered to be the Ipswichian interglacial stage (about 120,000 years old) based on fossil pollen. However, recent research based on the fossil molluscs, beetles and mammals in the sediments has favoured an older date and they are now attributed to the penultimate interglacial (Marine Isotope Stage 7) and therefore about 200,000 years old. In recognition of this site this interglacial stage is now informally known as the 'Aveley Interglacial'.



The excavation of the Aveley elephants in August 1964

Photo: © G. R. Ward

References

- BLEZARD, R.G. 1966. **Field meeting at Aveley and West Thurrock.** *Proceedings of the Geologists' Association*. Vol. 77(2). Pages 273-276.
- BRIDGLAND, D.R. 1994. **The Quaternary of the Thames.** Chapman and Hall. Geological Conservation Review Series.
- BRIDGLAND, D.R., ALLEN, P. and HAGGART, B.A. (Editors). 1995. **The Quaternary of the Lower Reaches of the Thames – Field Guide.** Quaternary Research Association, Durham.
- BRIDGLAND, D.R., SCHREVE, D.C., ALLEN, P. and KEEN, D.H. 2003. **Key Middle Pleistocene localities of the Lower Thames: site conservation issues, recent research and report of Geologists' Association excursion, 8 July, 2000.** *Proceedings of the Geologists' Association*. Vol. 114. Pages 211-225.