WELLFIELD REDEVELOPMENT THE MENAI SHOPPING CENTRE BANGOR

ARCHAEOLOGICAL MITIGATION PHASE 1: BUILDING RECORDING

G1880



Report number: 605

Prepared for Gardiner and Theobald August 2005

Ymddiriedolaeth Archaeolegol Gwynedd Gwynedd Archaeological Trust

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By

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1. INTRODUCTION

Gwynedd Archaeological Trust has been contracted to carry out a programme of archaeological mitigation in advance of the demolition of the Wellfield Centre, Bangor and the construction of a new shopping centre and car park. The first phase of the mitigation consists of the production of a record of the standing structure.

2. METHODOLOGY

A programme of building recording was specified in the design brief produced by Gwynedd Archaeological Planning Service (2005) comprising as a minimum:

Photographic recording of internal elevations and structures
Photographic recording of external elevations and structures
Brief Written description of points of interest, distinctive features and current use of units
Any available plans or architects drawings
A location plan showing the position and perspective of each photograph

The structure was principally photographed using a Nikon D50 digital SLR. All details and general views were taken using this camera. All accessible elevations were also photographed using a Pentax K1000 conventional film SLR with a shift (perspective correction) lens. A shift lens is designed principally for use in architectural documentation to eliminate convergence (the impression that a building is leaning backwards when a photograph is taken from below). The internal elevations and those fronting onto Garth Road and the High Street were recorded in this fashion. Views of parts of the north-west and all of the north-east facing elevations were obscured by nearby buildings and oblique views were taken in these cases.

A written description was made of the building recording basic structural and distinctive features. A desk-based assessment was produced by Cambria Archaeology (Page 2003) which describes the history of the site prior to the building of the Wellfield Centre. A detailed history of the centre is not included so a small amount of desktop research was carried out during the present phase of the project in order to establish dates for its construction, later modification and general use.

A set of undated architectural plans apparently dating from the early 1980s was provided by the client. These are included, with demolition annotations removed, in the present report (Figs 1 to 4). They do not show the modifications that were carried out in the mid-1980s. The plans were amended to show the current layout using basic OS landline data and sketch drawings produced during the photographic recording process. The position that each photograph was taken from is shown on these plans along with an arrow showing the direction of the photograph (Figs 5 to 8). A catalogue of the photographs is also included in the report (Appendix 1). This provides a brief description of the subject matter of each frame. A total of 104 photographs were taken and these are presented as JPEG files on a CD included with this report.

3. RESULTS

3.1 History of the Wellfield Centre

Construction of the centre, designed to reinvigorate and modernise Bangor City Centre commenced in the latter part of 1962. The developers were Bredwood Investments Ltd and the chief Architect was Mr Roy Greenhalgh (*North Wales Chronicle* January 1963) The project was well underway by the time the foundation stone and plaque were laid by the Lord Lieutenant of the County of Caernarvonshire, Sir Michael Duff Bar on the 23rd January 1963. The *Chronicle* reported that the centre was close to opening in April 1964 and advertisements announcing Town centre shops to let appeared in the 1 May 1964 edition. The Wellfield Centre contained 53 shop units, a supermarket and

a store along with 10,000 feet of office space, underground car parks for 91 cars, underground delivery roads and bays and a petrol station. The central shopping area consisted of an open courtyard in an attempt to emulate modern European cities. The cost of the development was about £600,000 and was described in the *Chronicle* as "a shoppers paradise" that was "designed with the modern housewife in mind".

Reports in 1970 during a change of management of the centre to a local firm, Jones and Beardmore, were not so optimistic. The store and 34 of the units remained empty. A photograph shows many units still closed off with wooden slats. The situation was never completely resolved and many units remained empty until the 1980s. Shops present in the early stages of the Wellfield development included a Tesco supermarket, a large bookshop (Booklands), along with shops supplying musical instruments, records, fruit and vegetables and soft furnishings. A public house was set up at the end of the courtyard. The centre was partially refurbished in 1984 with the addition of a covered mall and a new entrance and lifts from Garth Road. An ambitious plan to roof the courtyard and add extra units was put before the planning committee in June 85 but the development company pulled out in response to plans to build two major new supermarkets in Bangor. The 1984 refurbishments heralded a slight upturn in the fortunes of the centre with the new covered mall attracting new retailers. Many units remained empty, however, and the building of the new Deiniol Centre and out of town supermarkets shortly after the refurbishments ensured that no further development would take place. In the latter years after most of the major concerns moved elsewhere (Tesco and Bookland had both left well before the refurbishment) most of the smaller units were taken up by local businesses and the centre could be seen to be providing significant niche accommodation for the smaller trader. The centre never fulfilled its original promise as a shopper's paradise, perhaps as a result of the lack of tenants in the early years or maybe the allure of an open air European style piazza was not so great in rainy North Wales. The Wellfield Centre is currently almost empty and is scheduled for demolition in November 2005.

3.2 Description of the Building

The Wellfield Centre was built on a sloping site on the south-west side of the wide valley that holds the city of Bangor. The site was formerly occupied by the Masonic Hall, Wellfield House and another house called Brynhyfrydd (see assessment report, Page 2003 for further details). The Woolworths store dating from 1939 and fronting on to the High Street was retained. The new shopping centre was built on four levels to accommodate the changes in ground level. The basic construction consists of a series of piers and reinforced concrete slabs. The external elevations are principally of brick. The internal walls are not generally load-bearing. This has allowed a fair amount of remodelling of the retail units, loading bays and stores over the lifetime of the centre by the simple method of either adding or removing walls between the concrete piers. External access was via stairs from Garth Road along with three ramps, one from the High Street, one from the top of Garth Road facing the town clock and one from close to the car park entrance. The first two ramps provided direct access to the fourth level, the latter to the level three courtyard.

The lowest level contains a car park and goods entrance. The goods entrance leads to a service road that slopes up to the second level following the original ground level. Stores and delivery bays stand beside the service road. A service road also runs externally along the north-eastern side of the centre serving further stores, delivery bays, and garages. The entrance to the both the lower and upper car park (via a ramp) is in the northern corner of the building. A petrol station formerly stood close to the car park entrance.

The second storey is taken up on the north-west by a further level of car parking. Stairs lead from the car park to the lower shopping level. The original stairs run from both the service road and the car park on the eastern side, a further set of stairs was added to join up with the end of the new mall in 1984. The service road continues from level 1 to run under the south-eastern side of the centre (Plate 1) before exiting and joining the external service road to the north-east. This road is again flanked by loading bays and stores. This was seen as an essential and somewhat revolutionary feature of the shopping centre in 1964. In contrast to the High Street shops, the customers were totally separated from delivery lorries and traffic. The second level also contains much of the infrastructure of the centre including air extraction ducting and an electricity substation. The lower level of the former public house also appears to have been adjacent to the original access stairs. A series of retail units one of which currently houses the Police Station run alongside Garth Road (Plate 2). The area around the

corner of the service road was significantly remodelled in 1984 with the addition of larger loading bays and platforms.

The third level storey contains most of the retail units and is roughly at the same level as the High Street and the top of Garth Road. Retail units fronting on to the High Street stand to either side of the earlier Woolworths building along with a ramp leading to the fourth level (Plate 3). An ornate steel arch was constructed over the entrance to the ramp as part of the 1984 refurbishments. The central open courtyard of the Wellfield Centre is surrounded on all sides by retail units (Plate 4). The pre-1984 refurbishment plans show that this was originally divided up into 20 small units with a larger unit on the north-western side. A feature of the original design was a tall, four-sided advertisement hoarding standing in the courtyard (Fig. 1c). This was removed during the 1980s. A concrete ramp joins the third and fourth levels thus providing a link with the High Street. Alternative access was either via stairs from Garth Road or stairs from the car park below. Public toilets were also on this level.

Significant changes were made in 1984. A new covered mall was constructed running from the top of Garth Road to the central courtyard. The precipitous ramp leading to the fourth level was demolished and lifts were installed leading from lower down Garth Road to all levels of the centre. The foundation stone is now in the wall of the lower foyer leading to the lifts and stairs. The new entrances and mall also entailed extending the main body of the Wellfield Centre out into Garth Road by several metres. The new building was faced with red brick (Plate 5). Several of the smaller retail units in the courtyard were knocked into larger units around this time and additional stairs were added leading to the car park. A later addition to the courtyard in the later 1990s was an extended frontage on the north-eastern side housing a new B'wise shop. The most recent occupiers of the various units are indicated on the photographic location plans.

The fourth level consists of a mixture of retail units and offices. The principal office space is in Wellfield House on the north-eastern side of the centre and in Stevenson House in the western corner. Both comprise two floors of offices. The North Wales Chronicle was based in Wellfield house for many years. The retail space on this level consist of two large units on the south-western side that formerly housed the Tesco supermarket and latterly were remodelled to house Argos and a succession of discount stores. The rest of the units, labelled the Wellfield Arcade, have largely retained their original character as a series of small shops. These run along the top of the balcony on the south-east of the courtyard and down the ramp to the High Street (Plate 6). A covered bridge across the level 2 service road also provided a link from this level to the upper storey of the Woolworths store. This fell out of use in the mid-1990s but was retained as an emergency exit.

4. FURTHER WORK

This report completes the first phase of the archaeological mitigation (building recording). The next phase will entail a programme of excavation following the demolition of the centre

5. REFERENCES

Page N 2003, Bangor Town Centre Redevelopment, Archaeological Desk Based Assessment. Cambria Archaeology report 2003/126

North Wales Chronicle, Jan 1963, April 1964, June 1964, May 1970, September 1984

Appendix 1 Catalogue of photographs on CD

Photo Record number	Date of photograph	Description	Facing	Building Level
G1880-001	17/08/2005	Goods entrance	S	1
G1880-002	17/08/2005	Parking bay and stairs to level 2 from service road	W	1
G1880-003	17/08/2005	Service road from close to goods	SW	1
G1880/004	17/08/2005	Upper part of service road beneath Woolworths link entrance	NE	2
G1880-005	17/08/2005	Upper part of service road beneath Woolworths link showing phase 2 loading bays	NE	2
G1880-006	17/08/2005	Phase 2 loading bays etc SW side	SE	2
G1880-007	17/08/2005	Electricity sub-station	W	2
G1880-008	17/08/2005	Electricity sub-station and phase two blocking wall at rear of Farmfoods unit.	NW	2
G1880-009	17/08/2005	Offices to SW of Farmfoods unit	SE	2
G1880-010	17/08/2005	Phase 2 loading bays and modified stores SW side	SW	2
G1880-011	17/08/2005	Woolworths link and level 2 stores, oblique view of SE	N	2
G1880-012	17/08/2005	Goods entrance and service road, NE end	SW	2
G1880-013	17/08/2005	Stairs from service road to Level 3 shopping area	NW	2
G1880-014	17/08/2005	Boarded up lower floor of former public house	N	2
G1880-015	17/08/2005	Upper car park to service road and shops link	SE	2
G1880-016	17/08/2005	Upper car park general view	SW	2
G1880-017	17/08/2005	Upper car park general view	SW	2
G1880-018	17/08/2005	Upper car park general view	W	2
G1880-019	17/08/2005	Upper car park general view, ramp to lower level	NW	2
G1880-020	17/08/2005	Upper car park, payment machine	SW	2
G1880-021	17/08/2005	Upper car park, stairs to level 3	SE	2
G1880-022	17/08/2005	Upper car park, stairs to lower car park	SW	2
G1880-023	17/08/2005	Upper car park, NW end and former van rental office	NE	2
G1880-024	17/08/2005	Lower car park, general view	SSW	1
G1880-025	17/08/2005	Lower car park, stairs to upper car park	SSW	1

Photo Record number	Date of photograph	Description	Facing	Building Level
G1880-026	17/08/2005	Lower car park, general view	Е	1
G1880-027	17/08/2005	Car park entrance	SE	1
G1880-028	17/08/2005	Level 3 mall general view	N	3
G1880-029	17/08/2005	Phase 2 mall entrance from high street	NW	3
G1880-030	17/08/2005	Phase 2 mall general view	NNW	3
G1880-031	17/08/2005	Phase 2 mall general view	NNW	3
G1880-032	17/08/2005	Former Bevans store interior	N	3
G1880-033	17/08/2005	Former Bevans store interior	NE	3
G1880-034	18/08/2005	Central shopping precinct, NE elevation	SW	3
G1880-035	18/08/2005	Central shopping precinct, SE elevation part 1 of 3	SE	3
G1880-036	18/08/2005	Central shopping precinct, SE elevation part 2 of 3	SE	3
G1880-037	18/08/2005	Central shopping precinct, SE elevation part 3 of 3	SE	3
G1880-038	18/08/2005	Former store interior	S	3
G1880-039	18/08/2005	Former His and Hers store interior	WNW	3
G1880-040	18/08/2005	Central shopping precinct, SW elevation	NE	3
G1880-041	18/08/2005	Central shopping precinct, NW elevation part 1 of 3	NW	4
G1880-042	18/08/2005	Central shopping precinct, NW elevation part 2 of 3	NW	4
G1880-043	18/08/2005	Central shopping precinct, NW elevation part 3 of 3	NW	4
G1880-044	18/08/2005	Central shopping precinct, general view	W	4
G1880-045	18/08/2005	Central shopping precinct, general view	N	4
G1880-046	18/08/2005	Central shopping precinct, site of former ramp to NW	NW	4
G1880-047	18/08/2005	General view of SE side of upper precinct	SSW	4
G1880-048	18/08/2005	View along Wellfield arcade and ramp to High Street	SE	4
G1880-049	18/08/2005	View along lower part of ramp to High Street	SE	4
G1880-050	18/08/2005	Wellfield house SE elevation	NW	4
G1880-051	18/08/2005	View along Wellfield arcade shops and ramp to High Street	SE	4

Photo Record number	Date of photograph	Description	Facing	Building Level
G1880-052	18/08/2005	View along Wellfield arcade and ramp towards Wellfield House	WNW	4
G1880-053	18/08/2005	Stairs between upper and lower precincts in E corner, former public house	SE	3
G1880-054	18/08/2005	Wellfield House, NW elevation	SE	1
G1880-055	18/08/2005	Stevenson House and car park	SW	1
G1880-056	18/08/2005	Stevenson House and car park	S	1
G1880-057	18/08/2005	Car Park, NE elevation	SW	1
G1880-058	18/08/2005	Wellfield House NE elevation oblique view	WNW	1
G1880-059	18/08/2005	Stores below Wellfield house	WSW	1
G1880-060	18/08/2005	Wellfield House NE elevation oblique view	WNW	2
G1880-061	18/08/2005	Garages below Wellfield Arcade and ramp area	SE	2
G1880-062	18/08/2005	General view of Stevenson Hose and frontage to Garth Road	ESE	2
G1880-063	19/08/2005	Phase 2 Wellfield frontage to Garth Road	NE	3
G1880-064	19/08/2005	Phase 2 Wellfield entrance, general and Garth Road frontage	NNW	3
G1880-065	19/08/2005	Phase 2 Wellfield entrance	N	3
G1880-066	19/08/2005	Phase 2 Wellfield entrance	NW	3
G1880-067	19/08/2005	Elevation to High Street (SE) 1 of	NW	3
G1880-068	19/08/2005	Elevation to High Street (SE)	W	3
G1880-069	19/08/2005	Elevation to High Street (SE) 2 of	NW	3
G1880-070	19/08/2005	Elevation to High Street (SE) 3 of	NW	3
G1880-071	19/08/2005	Elevation to High Street (SE) 4 of	NW	3
G1880-072	19/08/2005	Elevation to High Street (SE)	N	3
G1880-073	19/08/2005	Elevation to Garth Road (SW) 1	ENE	2
G1880-074	19/08/2005	Elevation to Garth Road (SW) 2	ENE	2
G1880-075	19/08/2005	Elevation to Garth Road (SW) 3	ENE	2
G1880-076	19/08/2005	Elevation to Garth Road (SW) 4	ENE	2
G1880-077	19/08/2005	Elevation to Garth Road (SW) 5	ENE	2
G1880-078	19/08/2005	Elevation to Garth Road (SW) 6	ENE	2
G1880-079	19/08/2005	Elevation to Garth Road (SW) 7of	ENE	2
G1880-080	19/08/2005	Elevation to Garth Road (SW) oblique	SE	2

Photo Record number	Date of photograph	Description	Facing	Building Level
G1880-081	19/08/2005	Elevation to Garth Road (SW) oblique	ESE	2
G1880-082	19/08/2005	Central shopping precinct, NE elevation rectified (scanned from negative)	SW	3
G1880-083	19/08/2005	Central shopping precinct, SE elevation rectified (scanned from negative) 1 of 3	NW	3
G1880-084	19/08/2005	Central shopping precinct, SE elevation rectified (scanned from negative) 2 of 3	NW	3
G1880-085	19/08/2005	Central shopping precinct, SE elevation rectified (scanned from negative) 3 of 3	NW	3
G1880-086	19/08/2005	Central shopping precinct, SW elevation rectified (scanned from negative)	NE	3
G1880-087	19/08/2005	Central shopping precinct, NW elevation rectified (scanned from negative) 1 of 3	SE	4
G1880-088	19/08/2005	Central shopping precinct, NW elevation rectified (scanned from negative) 1 of 3	SE	4
G1880-089	19/08/2005	Central shopping precinct, NW elevation rectified (scanned from negative) 1 of 3	SE	4
G1880-090	19/08/2005	Wellfield House elevation, rectified (scanned from negative)	SE	1
G1880-091	19/08/2005	Stevenson House, NE elevation, rectified (scanned from negative)	SW	1
G1880-092	19/08/2005	Stevenson House and car park, NE elevation, rectified (scanned from negative)	SW	1
G1880-093	19/08/2005	Wellfield Centre Phase 1, SW elevation to Garth Road, rectified (scanned from negative) 1 of 5 upper floors	ENE	2
G1880-094	19/08/2005	Wellfield Centre Phase 1, SW elevation to Garth Road, rectified (scanned from negative) 1 of 5 lower floors	ENE	2
G1880-095	19/08/2005	Wellfield Centre Phase 1, SW elevation to Garth Road, rectified (scanned from negative) 2 of 5 upper floors	ENE	2
G1880-096	19/08/2005	Wellfield Centre Phase 1, SW elevation to Garth Road, rectified (scanned from negative) 2 of 5 lower floors	ENE	2
G1880-097	19/08/2005	Wellfield Centre Phase 1, SW elevation to Garth Road, rectified (scanned from negative) 3 of 5 upper floors	ENE	2

Photo Record number	Date of photograph	Description	Facing	Building Level
G1880-098	19/08/2005	Wellfield Centre Phase 1, SW elevation to Garth Road, rectified (scanned from negative) 3 of 5 lower floors	ENE	2
G1880-099	19/08/2005	Wellfield Centre Phase 1, SW elevation to Garth Road, rectified (scanned from negative) 4 of 5	ENE	2
G1880-100	19/08/2005	Wellfield Centre Phase 1, SW elevation to Garth Road, rectified (scanned from negative) 5 of 5	ENE	2
G1880-101	19/08/2005	Wellfield Centre Phase 2, SW elevation to Garth Road, rectified (scanned from negative) 1 of 3	NE	2
G1880-102	19/08/2005	Wellfield Centre Phase 2, SW elevation to Garth Road, rectified (scanned from negative) 2 of 3	NE	2
G1880-103	19/08/2005	Wellfield Centre Phase 2, SW elevation to Garth Road, rectified (scanned from negative) 3 of 3 lower part	NE	2
G1880-104	19/08/2005	Wellfield Centre Phase 2, SW elevation to Garth Road, rectified (scanned from negative) 3 of 3 upper part	NE	2
G1880-105	19/08/2005	Wellfield Centre Phase 1, SW corner of Garth Road and High Street, rectified (scanned from	NW	3
G1880-106	19/08/2005	Wellfield Centre Phase 2, SE elevation entrance, rectified (scanned from negative)	NW	3
G1880-107	19/08/2005	Elevation to High Street (SE), rectified (scanned from negative) 1 of 4	NW	3
G1880-108	19/08/2005	Elevation to High Street (SE), rectified (scanned from negative) 2 of 4	NW	3
G1880-109	19/08/2005	Elevation to High Street (SE), rectified (scanned from negative) 3 of 4	NW	3
G1880-110	19/08/2005	Elevation to High Street (SE), rectified (scanned from negative) 4 of 4	NW	3

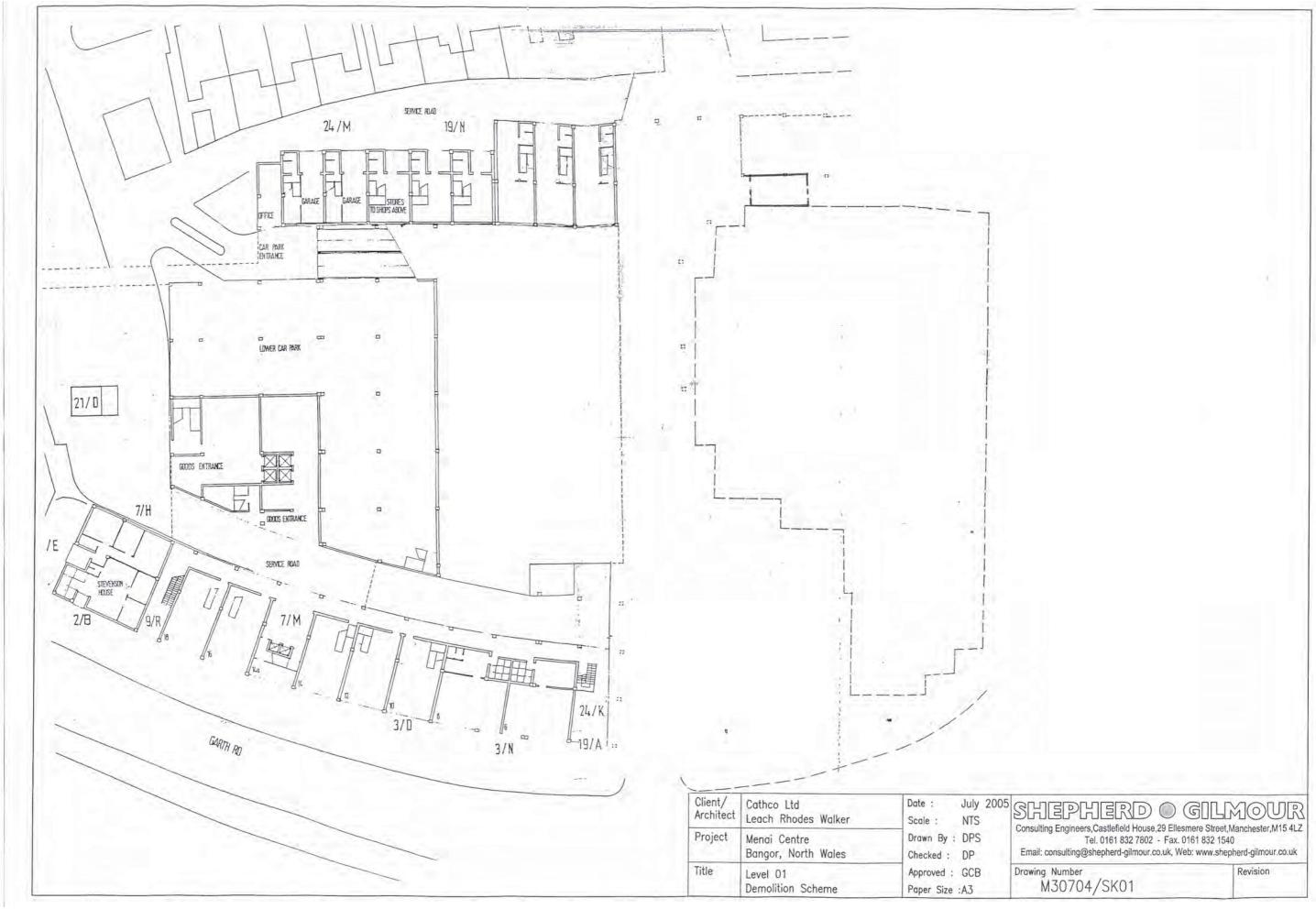


Fig. 1 Architect's plan (not to scale) originating from the early 1980s showing Wellfield Centre, Level 1

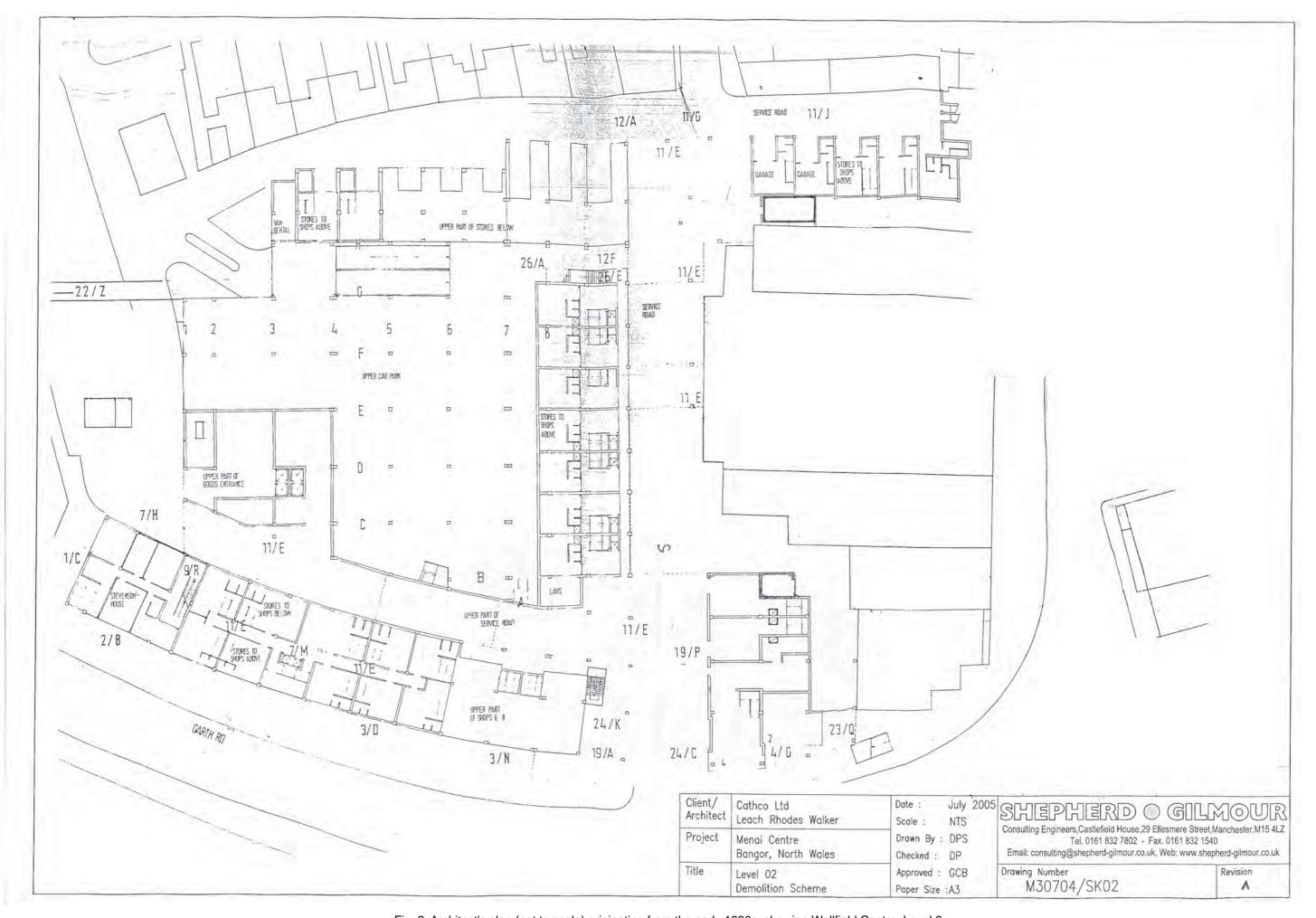


Fig. 2 Architect's plan (not to scale) originating from the early 1980s showing Wellfield Centre, Level 2

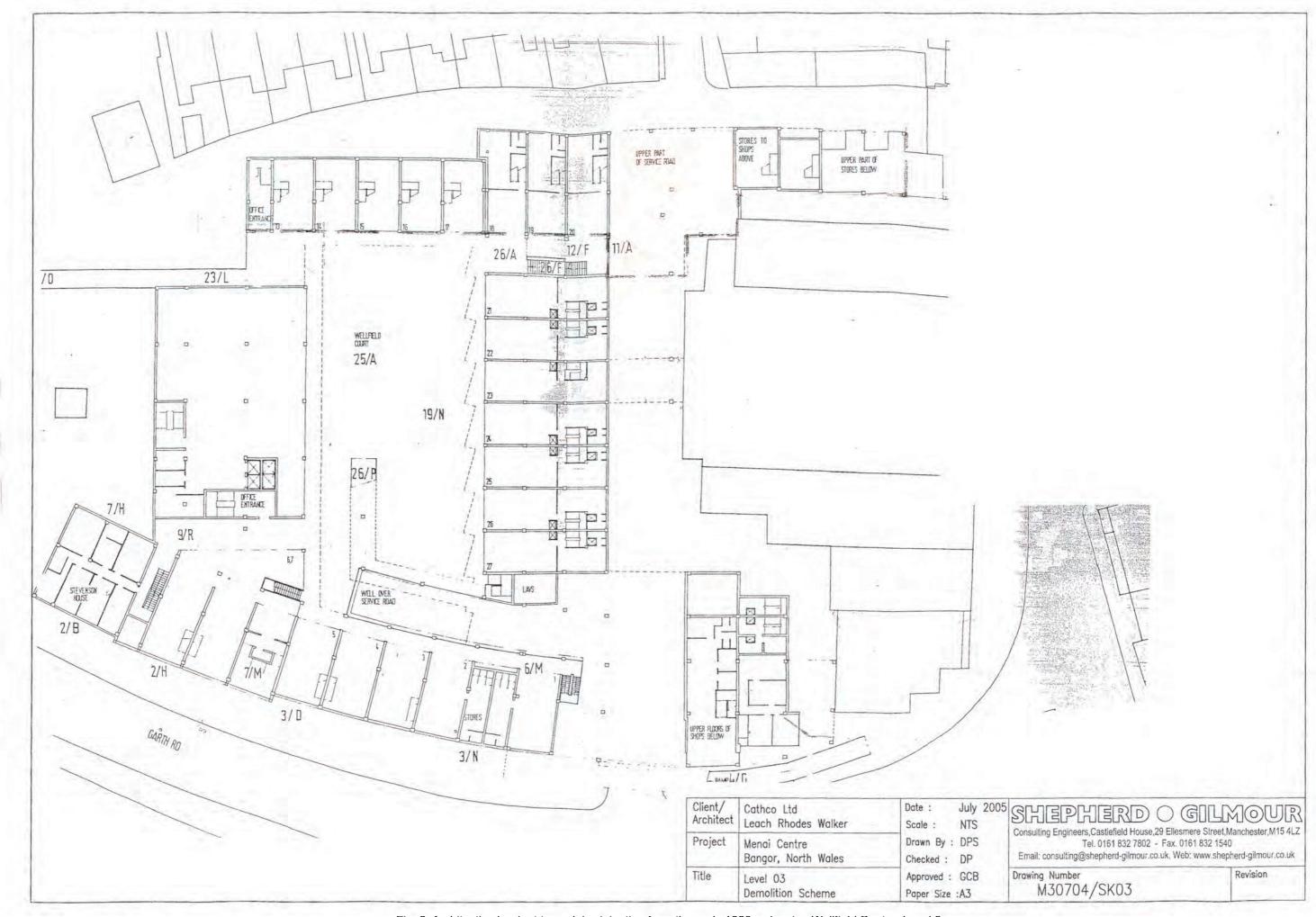


Fig. 3 Architect's plan (not to scale) originating from the early 1980s showing Wellfield Centre, Level 3

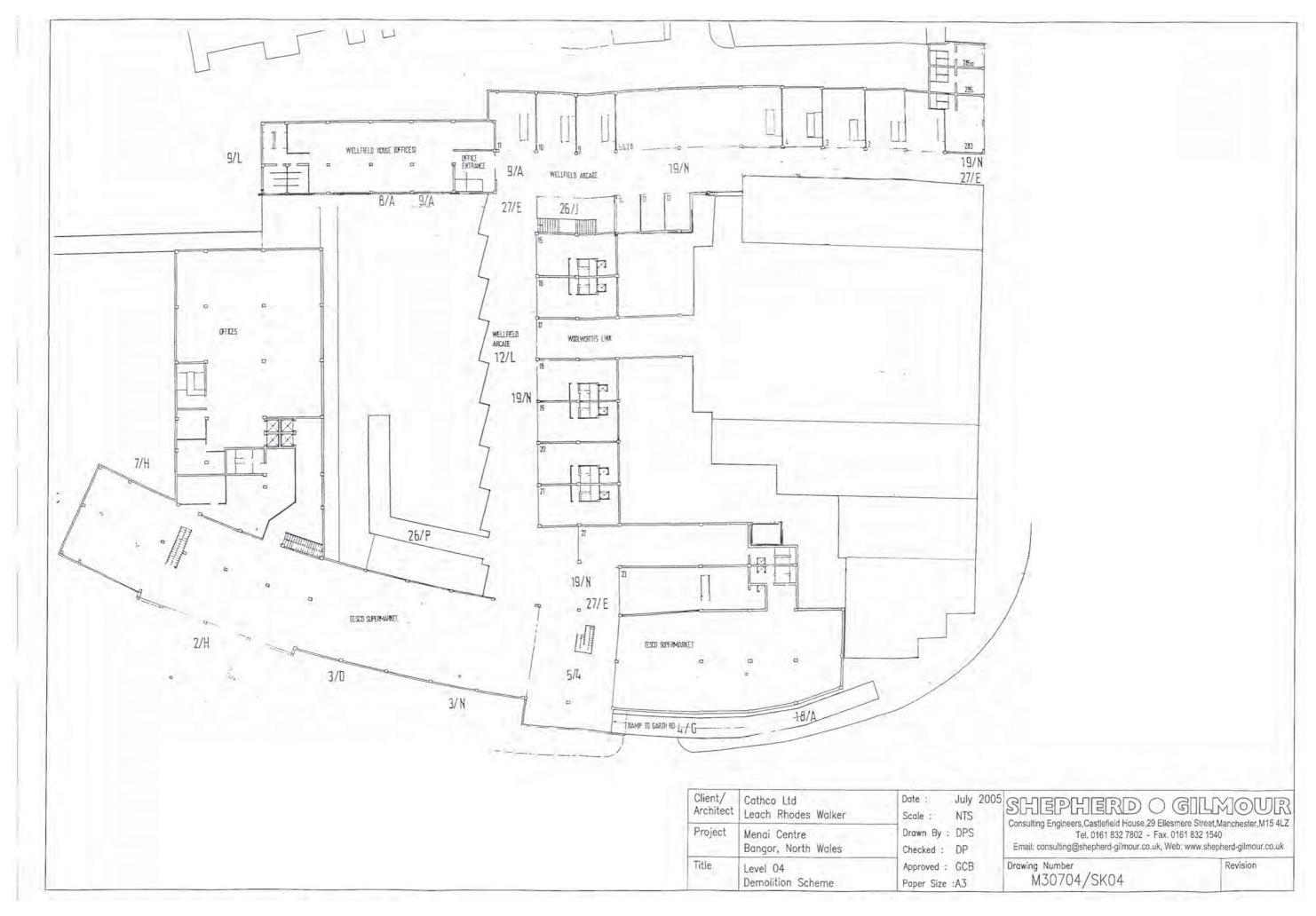
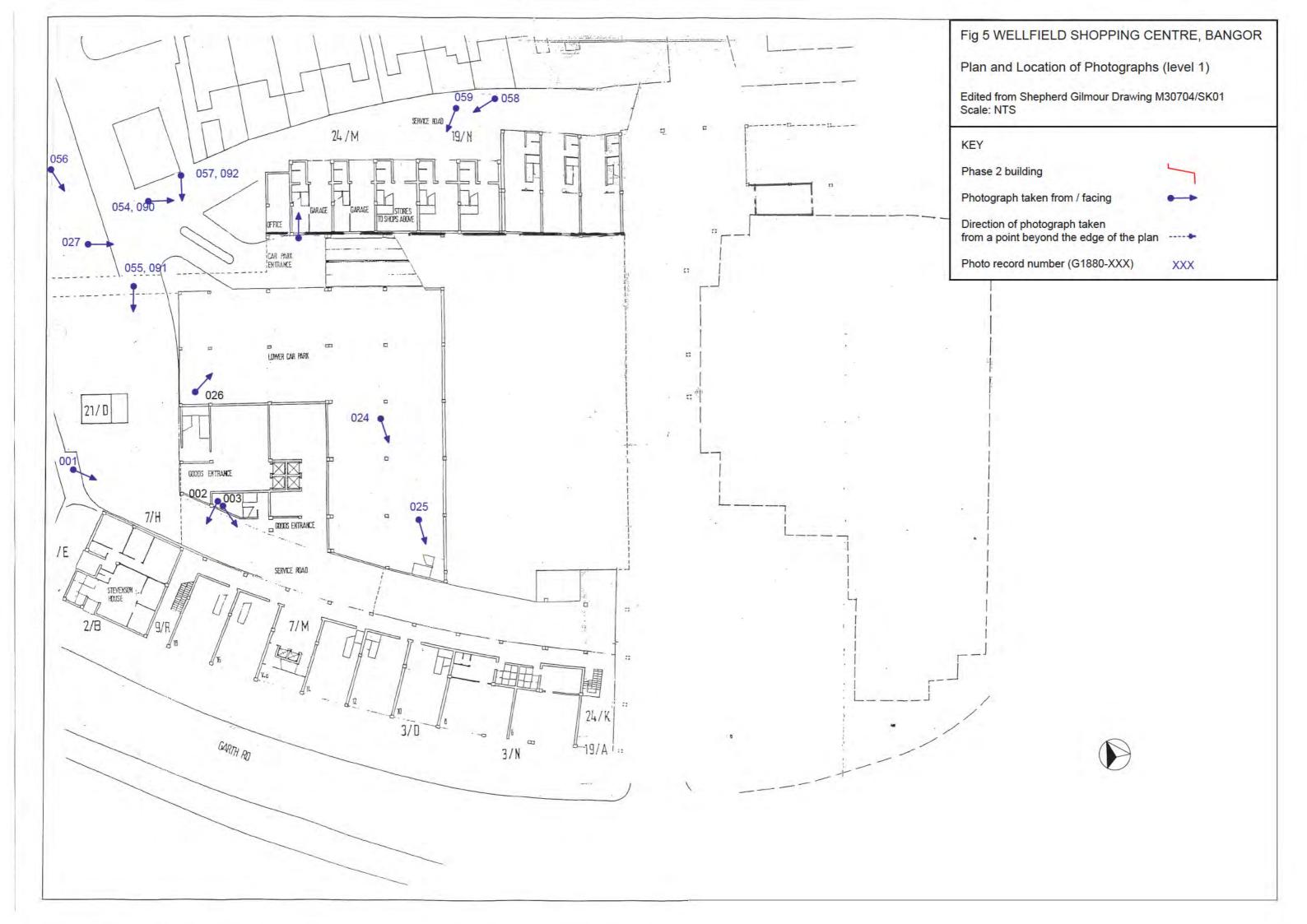
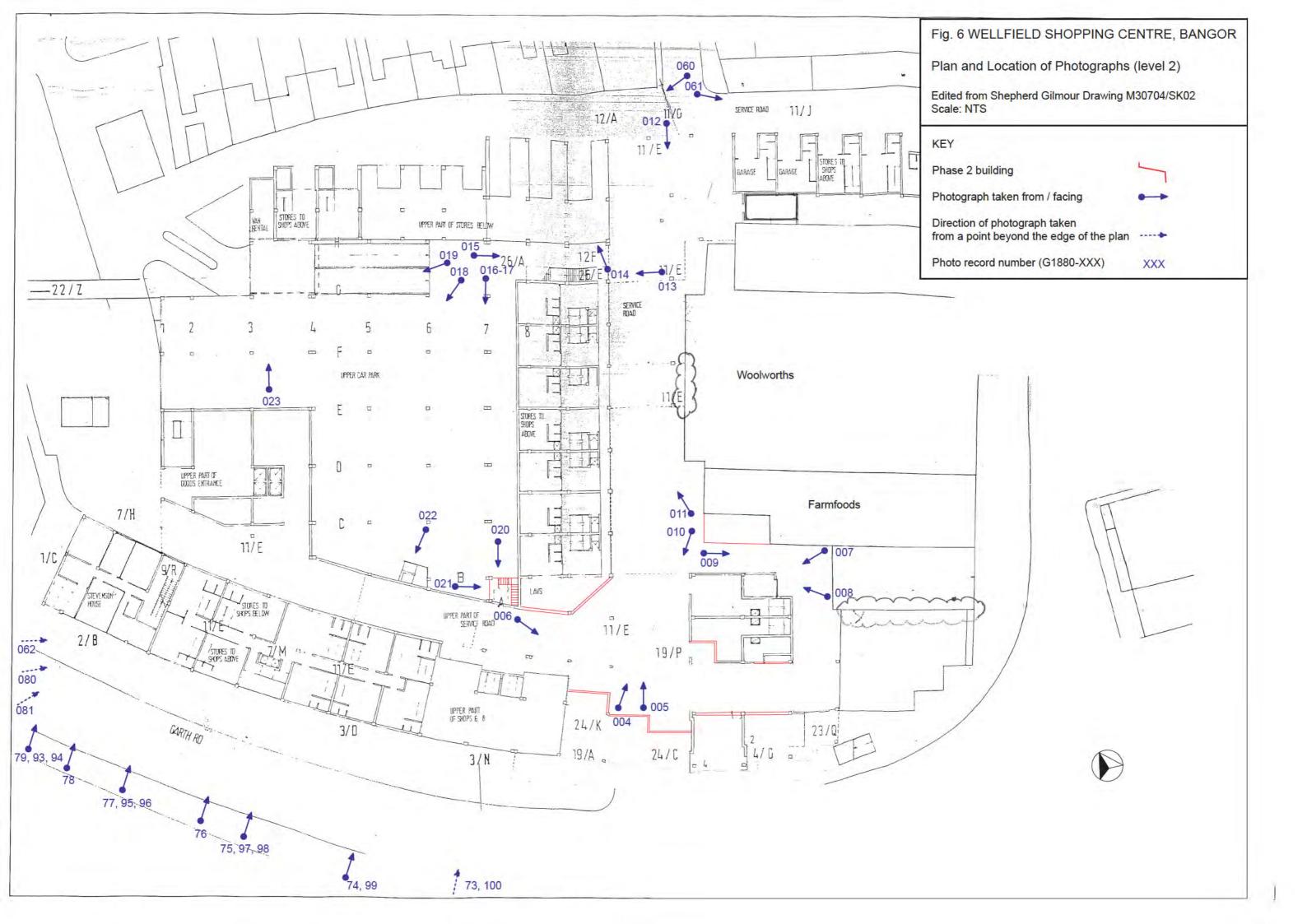
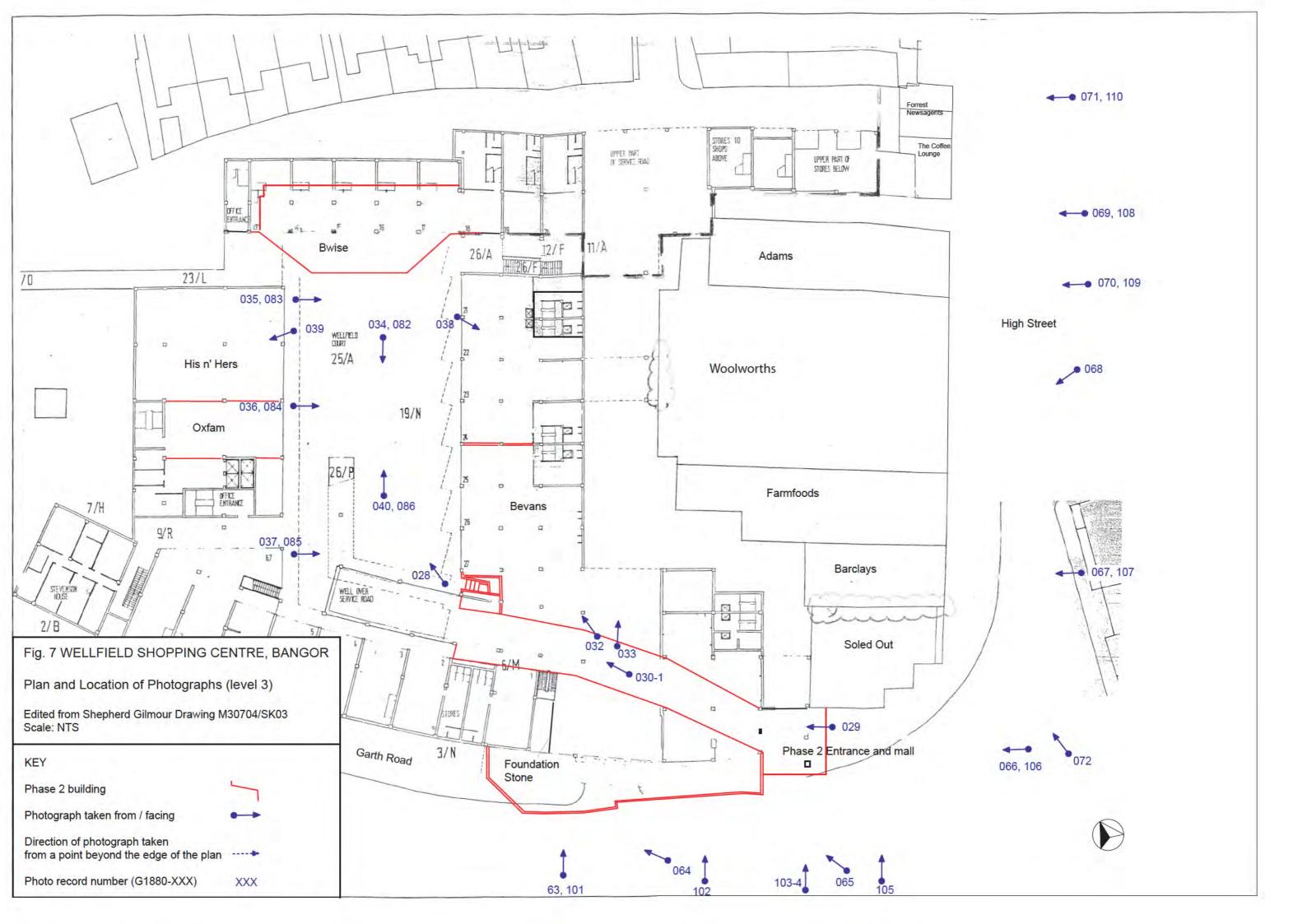
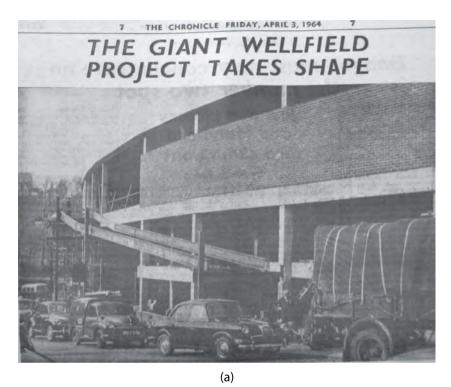


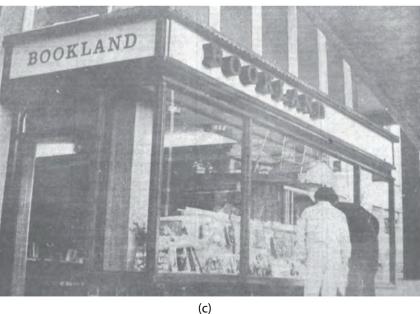
Fig. 4 Architect's plan (not to scale) originating from the early 1980s showing Wellfield Centre, Level 4













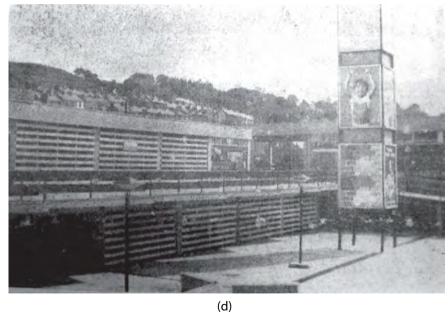


Fig. 7 Reports from the North Wales Chronicle on the progess of the Wellfield Centre (a) April 1964, nearing completion (b) May 1964 (c) Bookland's Shop July 1964 (d) Empty Units 1970

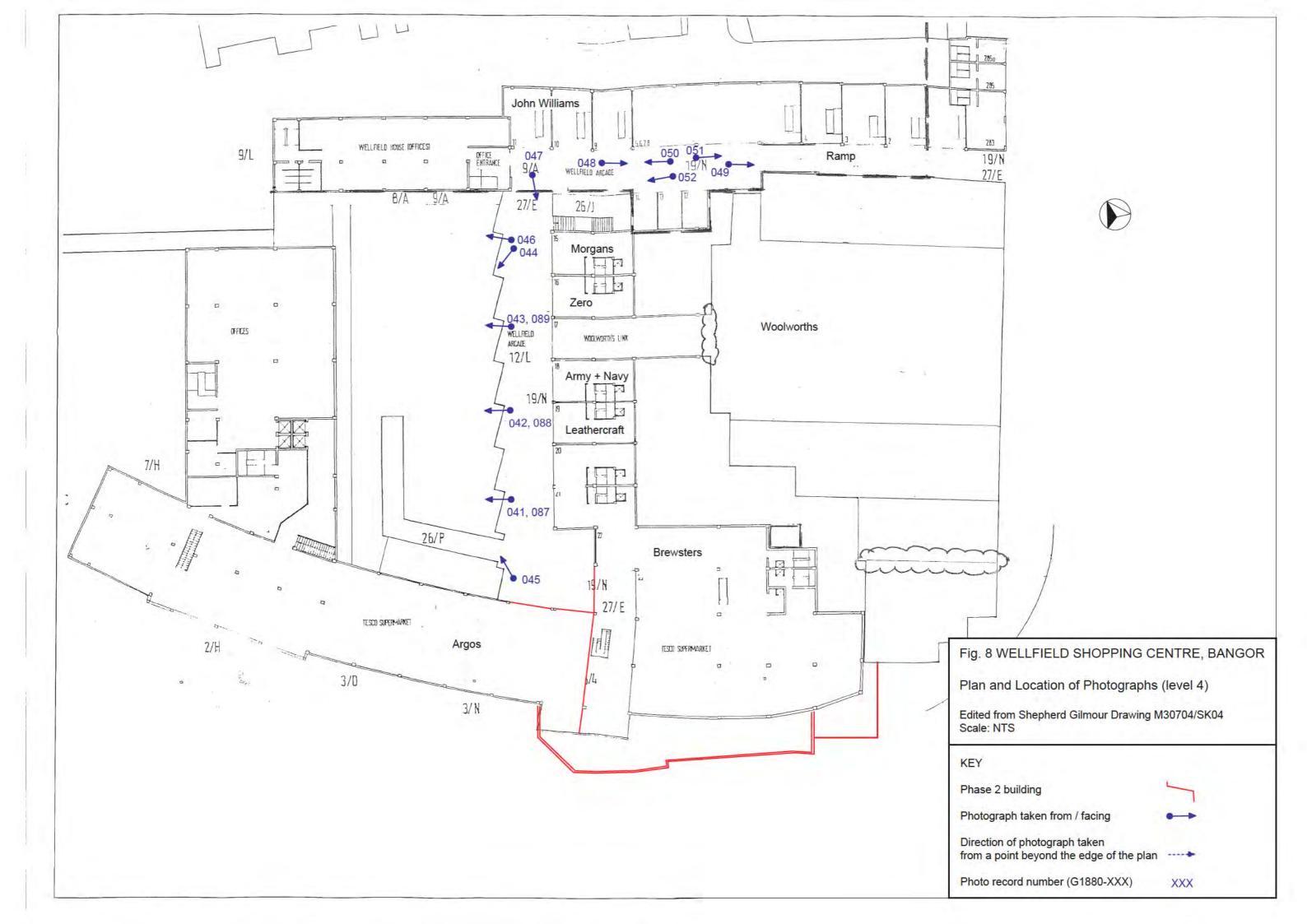




Plate 1. The SE side of the Wellfield Centre showing service road, and Woolworths link



Plate 2. The Wellfield Centre from the top of Garth Road



Plate 3. The Wellfield Centre from the High Street



Plate 4. The central courtyard



Plate 5. The 1984 extension housing the new mall and lifts



Plate 6. The Wellfield Arcade alongside the ramp leading to the High Street



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