Watching Brief Report

Twemlows Hall, Whitchurch, Shropshire

20/10/2015

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Neo Environmental was commissioned by Vogt Solar Ltd to undertake an archaeological watching brief at Land at Twemlows Hall, Whitchurch, Shropshire, centred at approximately NGR SJ 56481 37288. The watching brief was undertaken to address Condition 5 of the decision notice (15/01696/DIS) for the development at Land on Runaway at Twemlows Hall, Higher Heath, Whitchurch, Shropshire.

1.2 The site at Twemlows is located southwest of Whitchurch to the east side of the A41 (Figure 1). The ground investigations were concentrated on a large (29.96ha), flattish field of roughly triangular shape, located to the immediate west of a northwest/southeast aligned tarmac runway/private road. The field consisted of mowed grassland with a strip alongside the eastern boundary serving as a grass runway. Both Bronze Age and Roman finds have been discovered in the vicinity of the site and, more recently, it was utilised by the RAF as Tilstock Airfield during WWII.

2 SCOPE & AIMS OF THE PROJECT

2.1 A watching brief is defined by the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CIfA) Standards and guidance: Archaeological watching brief (December 2014) as a formal programme of observation and investigation that will define as far as reasonably possible the nature, depth and preservation of archaeological materials encountered during any operation conducted for non-archaeological reasons.

2.2 The broad aims of the project as set out in the Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) produced by Neo Environmental (McMorran 2015) were to:

- Monitor all invasive relevant ground-works during the construction phase of the solar farm, including access tracks, compound areas and substation/transformer bases. Trenches excavated for the cable runs were not required to be monitored for potential archaeological remains;
- Locate any archaeological features and deposits within the investigated areas;
- Assess the survival, quality, condition and relative significance of any archaeological features, deposits and structures within the investigated areas;
- Identify and recommend options for the management of the archaeological resource, including any further archaeological provision where necessary.

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 The watching brief was carried out in July and August 2015 and was undertaken in accordance with the WSI (McMorran 2015). The project followed current best archaeological practice, embodied in the by-laws, codes of professional conduct, and standards and guidance (specifically that for archaeological watching brief) of the CIfA.

3.2 Written records in the form of site notes and annotated sketches were made and high resolution digital photographs taken to show specific stages of fieldwork and the layout and relationship of archaeological features or deposits. Scales were included within the photographs where appropriate.

4 RESULTS

SUBSTATION

4.1 Excavation of the groundworks for the substation base revealed a 0.3m thick layer of moderate grey – brown, slightly silty sandy topsoil (this topsoil remained constant across the site) overlaying a 0.05m thick layer of mixed gravel and sand made ground (Plate 1). The thin layer of made ground overlaid a 0.25 – 0.35m thick dark brown silty sand slightly humic layer of relict topsoil. Underlying this was a 0.2 – 0.35m thick light white grey subsoil layer which formed the interface with the sterile natural Devensian sand and gravels. Nothing of archaeological interest was identified.

LAYDOWN AREA

4.2 In the area surrounding the substation a laydown area was constructed (Plate 2). The ground was excavated to a depth of 0.6m below the current ground level. Across most of the area the layers of overburden were similar to that found during the construction of the substation, though along the western boundary there were a spread of late Victorian rubbish and ash. A ceramic drain culvert, surrounded by brick with a concrete foundation, was located approximately 25m from the southern boundary, adjacent to the edge of the laydown area and the beginning of the access track. The trench for the ceramic drain was backfilled with the late 19th century rubbish and ash. This service was defunct, though it appeared to be contemporary with the construction of the neighbouring house.

Access Track

4.3 The access track (Plate 3) extended from the laydown area northwards, with three further lines running eastwards across the site (recorded as the northern, middle, and southern tracks). The original plan stated the tracks to be excavated to between 0.3 - 0.4m below the current ground level, however, it was decided by the ground workers to only dig to a depth of 0.25m. As the topsoil averaged 0.3m thick across the landscape, any underlying material, such as subsoil, natural, or made ground (consisting of crushed sandstone) was only seen occasionally when the topsoil was thinner. As seen during the later excavations of the invertors, most of the layer of 'natural sands' was actually re-deposited natural overlying made ground.

Test Pits

4.4 Two hand dug test pits were located at the eastern end of the middle access track where peat was seen underlying the topsoil. The first test pit, located 15m W of Inverter E (approximately NGR E356571 N337350), had a 0.15m layer of peat immediately underlying the topsoil. The second test pit (Plate 4), located 7m west of Inverter E, had 0.3m of topsoil over a 0.3m thick layer of sand subsoil. Under this was 0.7m thick layer of black brown peat, followed with a 0.25m thick layer of mid brown peat.

Water Pipe

4.5 The water pipe trench cut through a 0.25m thick layer of mixed topsoil and crushed stone, which overlay a 0.25m thick layer of crushed pink sandstone, overlying the natural sand and gravel. Approximately 40m east of the laydown area, a thin layer of peat was noted underlying the lower layer of made ground, above the natural, and thickened as the trench extended eastwards, becoming 0.4m thick by the centre of this area. At approximately 150m from the laydown the peat decreased in depth, and disappeared.

4.6 A linear feature, [105], interpreted as a ditch, was seen and recorded towards the eastern extent of the water main replacement trench. Located at 10.5m west from Point F 205 (NGR 356805 337078). The ditch on a NNW SSE alignment, was 1.2m wide, 0.31m deep, filled with two deposits, and had a concave base. The upper of the fills (103) was a 0.16m thick mid brown sandy silt secondary deposit, with occasional rounded pebbles. The lower fill (104) was a 0.15 mid grey sand silt with frequent charcoal flecking and occasional grit. The linear ditch is likely related to drainage or a former field boundary. The trench then turned northwards to run parallel alongside the runway. The makeup of the trench continued as before. Between Solar Panels rows 38 and 39 the underlying peat reappeared, which extended to the northern limit of the trench.

Inverter Pit Bases

4.7 The inverter pit bases were lettered A – F: A was located in the southwest corner near the wind sock, B in the centre of the southern access track and C located at the eastern end of the southern access track. Inverter D was located at the western end of the middle track and Inverter E was at the eastern end of the middle track. Inverter F was located in the northwest corner at the end of the northern track.

Inverter A

4.8 A 0.3m thick layer of topsoil overlay two 0.1m thick layers of re-deposited sand. Underlying this was a 0.1m thick layer of crushed pink sandstone and in turn overlay a 0.3m layer of peat. No archaeological features or cultural material was seen during the excavation of this pit (Plates 5 – 6).

Inverter B

4.9 A 0.3m thick layer of topsoil overlay a 0.65m+ layer of made ground that included crushed sandstone, gravel and crushed brick and tarmac. No archaeology was seen (Plate 7).

Inverter C

4.10 Under a 0.3m thick layer of topsoil the natural sand was immediately encountered, except along the western LOE of the inverter pit where the eastern edge of the peat was seen (Plate 8 & 9). It had a slope of roughly 45°. The peat was noted as being quite dry and desiccated. No archaeology was seen during the excavation of the pit.

Inverter D

4.11 This inverter was the same as Invertor B, a 0.3m thick layer of topsoil overlaying 0.65m+ layer of made ground (Plate 10).

INVERTER E

4.12 The section of the invertor pit (Plate 11) was as follows: 0.3m thick topsoil, over 0.2m thick pink crushed sandstone. This overlay 0.2 grey sand subsoil, which overlay 0.15m of grey yellow sand subsoil. Underlying this was a 0.85m thick layer of dark brown peat, over a 0.35m mid grey slightly sandy peat, over natural sand. No archaeological remains were encountered in this pit.

INVERTOR F

4.13 As shown in Plates 12 – 14, the eastern half of the pit had made ground at the base, the remaining area was peat. The top layer, of dark brown peat, was 0.5m thick, and overlay a 0.12m thick layer of mid grey peat. No archaeological remains were seen in this pit.

5 CONCLUSIONS

5.1 The archaeological watching brief undertaken at Twemlows during the excavation of groundworks for the solar farm revealed no features or deposits of archaeological interest. During the excavation of the trench for the replacement water pipe a linear ditch was uncovered and recorded. The ditch is likely to be related to field draining or a former field boundary.

6 REFERENCES

6.1 McMorran, R. 2015. *Twemlows Solar Farm: Written Scheme of Investigation*. Neo Environmental.

7 APPENDICES

APPENDIX A – FIGURES

Figure 1 – Site Location

APPENDIX B – PLATES

PLATE 1: SECTION OF SUBSTATION LOOKING SOUTHEAST SHOWING MADE GROUND OVERLYING NATURAL SAND

PLATE 2: LAYDOWN AREA FACING WEST. SUBSTATION IN CENTRE OF SHOT.

PLATE 3: STRIPPING OF ACCESS TRACK ONTO FORMATION LEVEL

PLATE 4: TEST PIT 2. LOCATED 7M WEST OF INVERTER E

Plate 5: Inverter A – General Shot, Looking East

Plate 6: Inverter A – North Facing Section

Plate 7: Inverter B – South Facing Section

Plate 8: South Facing View of Inverter C, Initial Strip, Eastern Edge of Peat Alongside Natural Sand

PLATE 9: NORTH FACING SECTION OF INVERTER C, SHOWING EDGE OF PEAT

PLATE 10: INVERTER D, NORTH FACING SECTION

Plate 11: Inverter E, South Facing Section

Plate 12: Inverter F, North Facing Section, Showing Made Ground over Peat

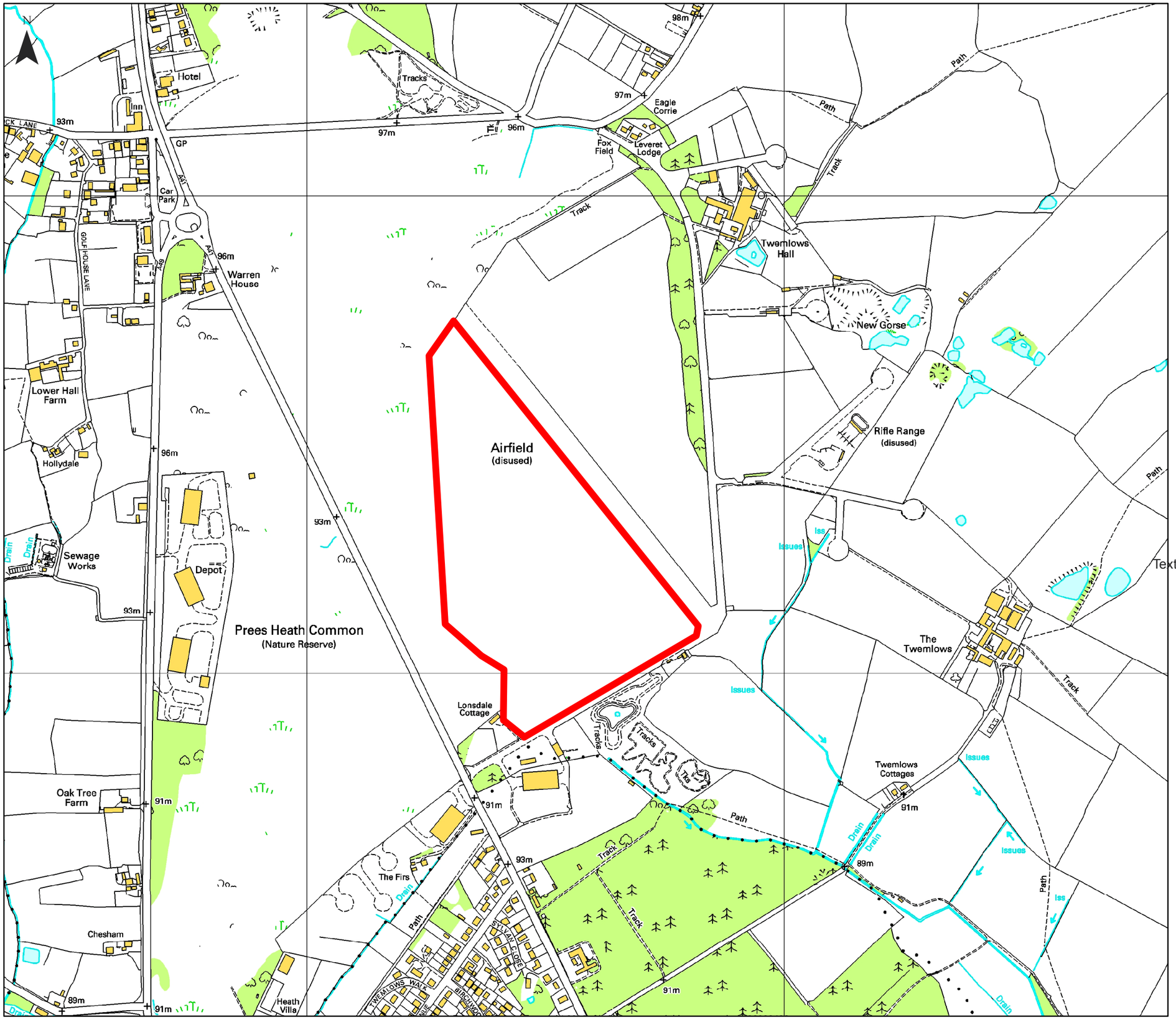
PLATE 13: INVERTOR F, EAST FACING PLAN SHOT

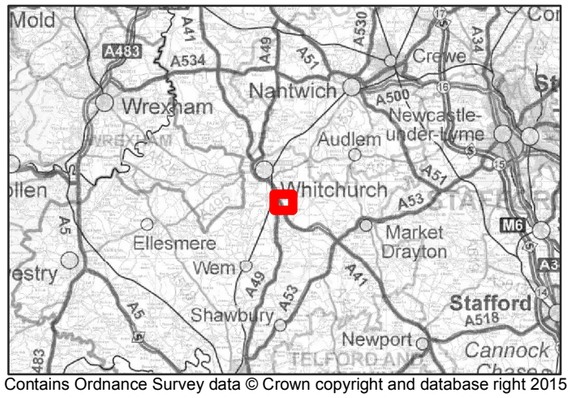
PLATE 14: INVERTOR F, NORTH FACING SECTION, SHOWING TIP LINES OF MADE GROUND

Twemlows
Site Location
Figure 1

Key

Application Site





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Date: 20/10/2015
Drawn By: RM
Scale (A3): 1:10,000
Drawing No: NEO00266/001/A

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