



# Archaeological trial trench evaluation on land at Harrington Road, Desborough Northamptonshire November 2014

Report No. 14/248

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Illustrations: Amir Bassir & James Ladocha



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## OASIS REPORT FORM

PROJECT DETAILS		OASIS No: molanort1-199672	
Project title	Archaeological trial trench evaluation on land at Harrington Road, Desborough, Northamptonshire, November 2014		
Short description	MOLA Northampton carried out an archaeological trial trench evaluation on land to the north of Harrington Road, Desborough. The area contained surviving ridge and furrow earthworks. Nine trenches were excavated across the site, but with the exception of the cultivation strip earthworks, no other archaeological features were encountered.		
Project type	Trial trench evaluation & earthwork survey		
Site status	none		
Previous work	Archaeological desk-based assessment (Walker 2012); Geophysical survey (Fisher 2013)		
Current land use	grassland		
Future work	unknown		
Monument type/period	medieval ridge and furrow		
Significant finds	none		
PROJECT LOCATION			
County	Northamptonshire		
Site address	land at Harrington Road, Desborough		
Postcode	n/a		
OS co-ordinates	SP 79390 83275		
Area (sq m/ha)	c2.4ha		
Height aOD	c135-140m aOD		
PROJECT CREATORS			
Organisation	MOLA		
Project brief originator	Liz Mordue, Northamptonshire County Council Planning		
Project Design originator	Jim Brown, MOLA		
Director/Supervisor	Jim Burke, MOLA		
Project Manager	Jim Brown, MOLA		
Sponsor or funding body	Persimmon Homes (Midlands)		
PROJECT DATE			
Start date	18 November 2014		
End date	21 November 2014		
ARCHIVES		Location (Accession no.)	Content
Physical	MOLA Northampton Archive Store ENN107778		none
Paper			site records, background data, photographs, one section on permatrace
Digital			survey data, digital report, digital photographs
BIBLIOGRAPHY		Journal/monograph, published or forthcoming, or unpublished client report (MOLA report)	
Title	Archaeological trial trench evaluation on land at Harrington Road, Desborough, Northamptonshire, November 2014		
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# Contents

<b>1</b>	<b>INTRODUCTION</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>BACKGROUND</b>
<b>2.1</b>	<b>Location, topography and geology</b>
<b>2.2</b>	<b>Archaeological background</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>AIMS AND OBJECTIVES</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>METHODOLOGY</b>
<b>4.1</b>	<b>Topographic survey</b>
<b>4.2</b>	<b>Trial trench evaluation</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>EVALUATION EVIDENCE</b>
<b>5.1</b>	<b>Topographic survey</b>
<b>5.2</b>	<b>Trial trench evaluation</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>CONCLUSION</b>
	<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>
	<b>APPENDIX 1: CONTEXT INVENTORY</b>

## Figures

Front cover: Trench 9, looking south

- Fig 1: Site location
- Fig 2: Aerial photograph of the site, showing ridge and furrow
- Fig 3: Geophysical survey with trench positions
- Fig 4: Topographic plan of the earthworks
- Fig 5: Trench 9, showing the pronounced ridge and furrow

Back cover: Proposed development site, looking north-west

# Archaeological trial trench evaluation on land at Harrington Road, Desborough Northamptonshire November 2014

## *Abstract*

*MOLA carried out an archaeological trial trench evaluation on land to the north of Harrington Road, Desborough. The area contained surviving ridge and furrow earthworks. Nine trenches were excavated across the site, but with the exception of the cultivation strip earthworks, no other archaeological features were encountered.*

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

MOLA was commissioned by Persimmon Homes (Midlands) to carry out archaeological trial trench evaluation on land at Harrington Road, Desborough, Northamptonshire (NGR SP 79390 83275; Fig 1). The development area comprises c2.4ha of land, which has previously been subject to geophysical survey and desk based assessment. This current phase of work was undertaken in two stages, comprising: a topographic survey of the ridge and furrow earthworks and a series of trial trench excavations, undertaken to confirm the presence or absence of earlier features that may have been obscured by the open field cultivation.

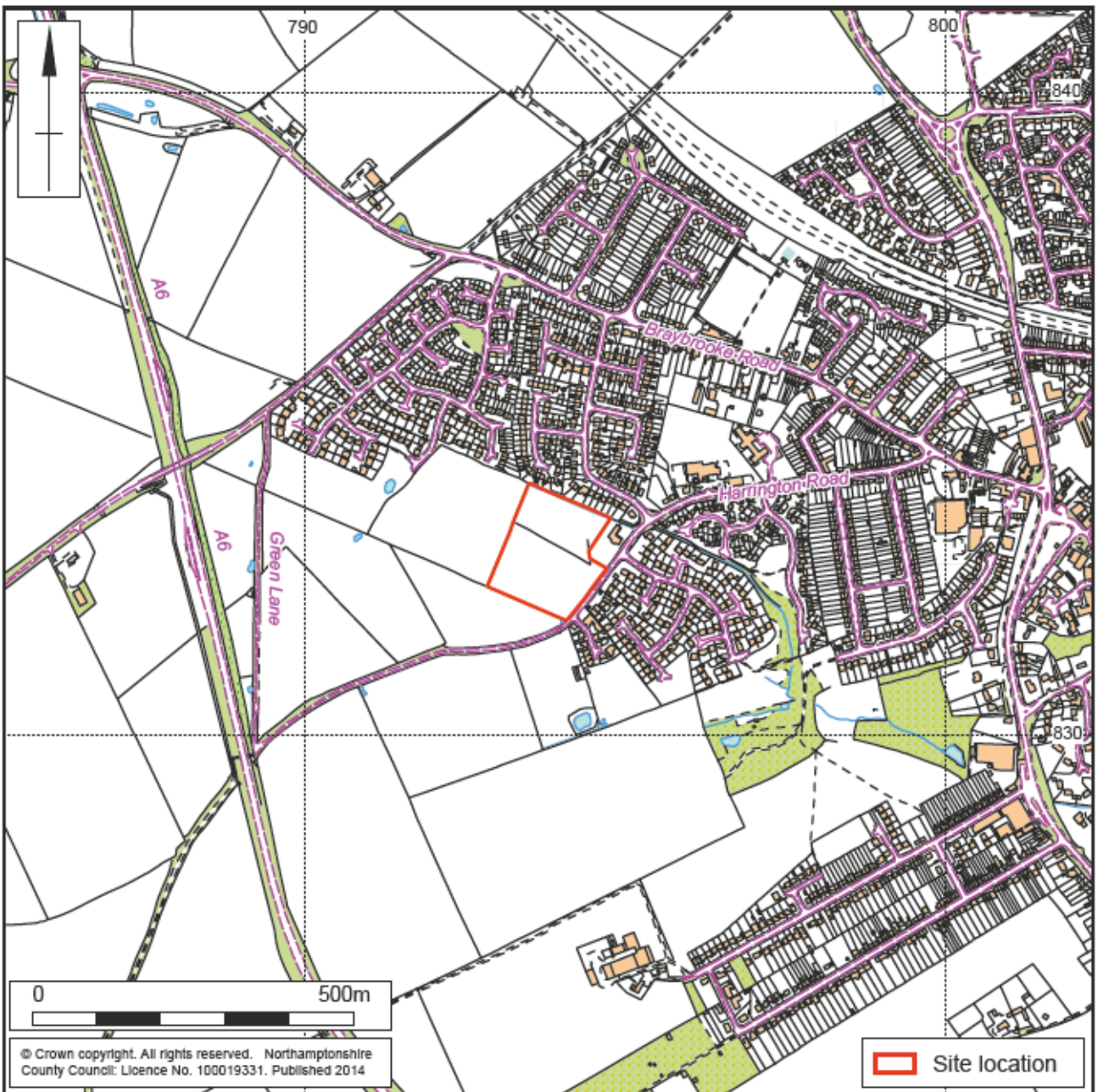
The Local Planning Authority required that the works were undertaken, following the advice of Northamptonshire County Council (NCC) Planning, and in accordance with the *National Planning Policy Framework* (DCLG 2012) a brief was issued for the work (Mordue 2014a-b). A *Written Scheme of Investigation* was prepared by MOLA and approved by NCC Planning prior to work commencing (Brown 2014). The evaluation was carried out following the guidelines suggested by the IfA's *Standard and guidance for archaeological field evaluation* (IfA 2008), and the *MOLA Fieldwork Manual* (MOLA 2014).

## **2 BACKGROUND**

### **2.1 Location, topography, and geology**

The proposed development area is located on the north edge of Harrington Road, on the west side of Desborough, Northamptonshire. The proposed development area comprises two fields of grassland divided into paddocks by electric fencing, occupying a total of c2.4ha. These fields are bounded to the north and east by housing estates, to the south-east by Harrington Road, and to the west and south-west by agricultural fields (NGR SP 79390 83275; Fig 1).

The site has a very gradual slope from the north-west at c140 above Ordnance Datum (aOD) to 132m aOD in the south-east, and is defined by clear ridge and furrow earthworks aligned perpendicular to the slope, with a shallow, sinuous curve. The underlying geology is identified as mid-Pleistocene diamicton till, overlying Northampton Sand Formation (BGS 2014).



Scale 1:10,000

Site location Fig 1

## 2.2 Archaeological background

An archaeological desk-based assessment carried out by Northamptonshire Archaeology indicated that there was a single Historic Environment Record (HER) monument within the application area (Walker 2012; HER 9980/0/2). This related to the extant ridge and furrow earthworks within the site. The earthworks are the surviving evidence for an open field system of agriculture which was implemented during the medieval period. No designated heritage assets fall within the application area boundary or within 700m of the site.

### **Prehistoric**

There are no recorded prehistoric sites or finds within the boundaries of the site or its wider search area, following the trend for a low density of prehistoric activity in this region of the county. Early in the 20th century, Bronze Age inhumations and pottery from possible cremation urns were found during demolition work in Paddock Lane, c1km to the east of the site, and during ironstone quarrying 'west of the town' (Walker 2012, 7). In addition, 600m to the south and south-east of the site, two areas of Bronze Age burials were discovered, together with evidence of Iron Age and Roman activity. The Iron Age finds included the Desborough Mirror, dating from the 5th to 1st century BC.

### **Roman**

A single Roman coin was found within 500m of the site (HER 4248/0/0). Some evidence for Roman settlement was found in the area during 19th and 20th-century mining operations (Walker 2012, 7).

### **Anglo-Saxon and medieval**

Desborough may have been associated with the Royal Manor of Rothwell during the Anglo-Saxon period, and could have hosted a princely residence attached to the estate centre (Foard *et al* 2009). This possibility is strengthened by the discovery of high status burials within the township; four Anglo-Saxon cemeteries have been found, although the whereabouts of two of these is uncertain. One cemetery to the north of the town produced evidence of high-status burial with multiple grave goods, whilst another to the south of the town, also around Paddock Lane, contained lower status burial items (Walker 2012, 7).

The proposed development site lies some way beyond the medieval historic core of Desborough and the presence of ridge and furrow earthworks indicates that the site was part of the open fields during the medieval period (*ibid*) (Fig 2).

### **Post-medieval/modern**

The common fields of the parish were enclosed by an Act of Parliament in 1776, although the good survival of ridge and furrow demonstrates that the land has not come under the plough since this time (Walker 2012, 8).

During the late 18th and 19th century, Desborough became a centre for several different local industries, including the production of hat fabrics, and the manufacture of boots and shoes. Ironstone quarrying was extensive after the mid-19th century (HER 2878), and as a consequence, land around the village has been extensively quarried (Ballinger 2000). Several brickworks also operated in the region, with one factory being situated on the opposite side of Harrington Road to the proposed development area (HER 6363/1/0).





Aerial photograph of the site, showing ridge and furrow (Walker 2012, fig 10) Fig 2

### 3 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The aim of the archaeological evaluation was to understand the nature, function and character of the site in its cultural and environmental setting, specifically to:

- establish the date, nature and extent of activity or occupation on the development site;
- recover artefacts to assist in the development of the type series within the region, and;
- to recover palaeo-environmental remains where they are encountered.

Initially geophysical survey across the proposed development area highlighted the medieval ridge and furrow which is visible as earthworks within the field (Fisher 2013). The present work maps surviving ridge and furrow cultivation earthworks, enabling a permanent record, before investigating the further archaeological potential of the site.

The work contributes to the research objectives drawn from national and regional research frameworks (EH 1997, Cooper 2006, Knight *et al* 2012).

## 4 METHODOLOGY

The evaluation conformed to the Institute for Archaeologists *Standard and guidance for archaeological field evaluation* (revised Oct 2008). All stages of the project were undertaken in accordance with English Heritage, *Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment* (MoRPHE) (EH 2006). The evaluation was carried out in accordance with Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) prepared by MOLA (Brown 2014).

### 4.1 Topographic survey

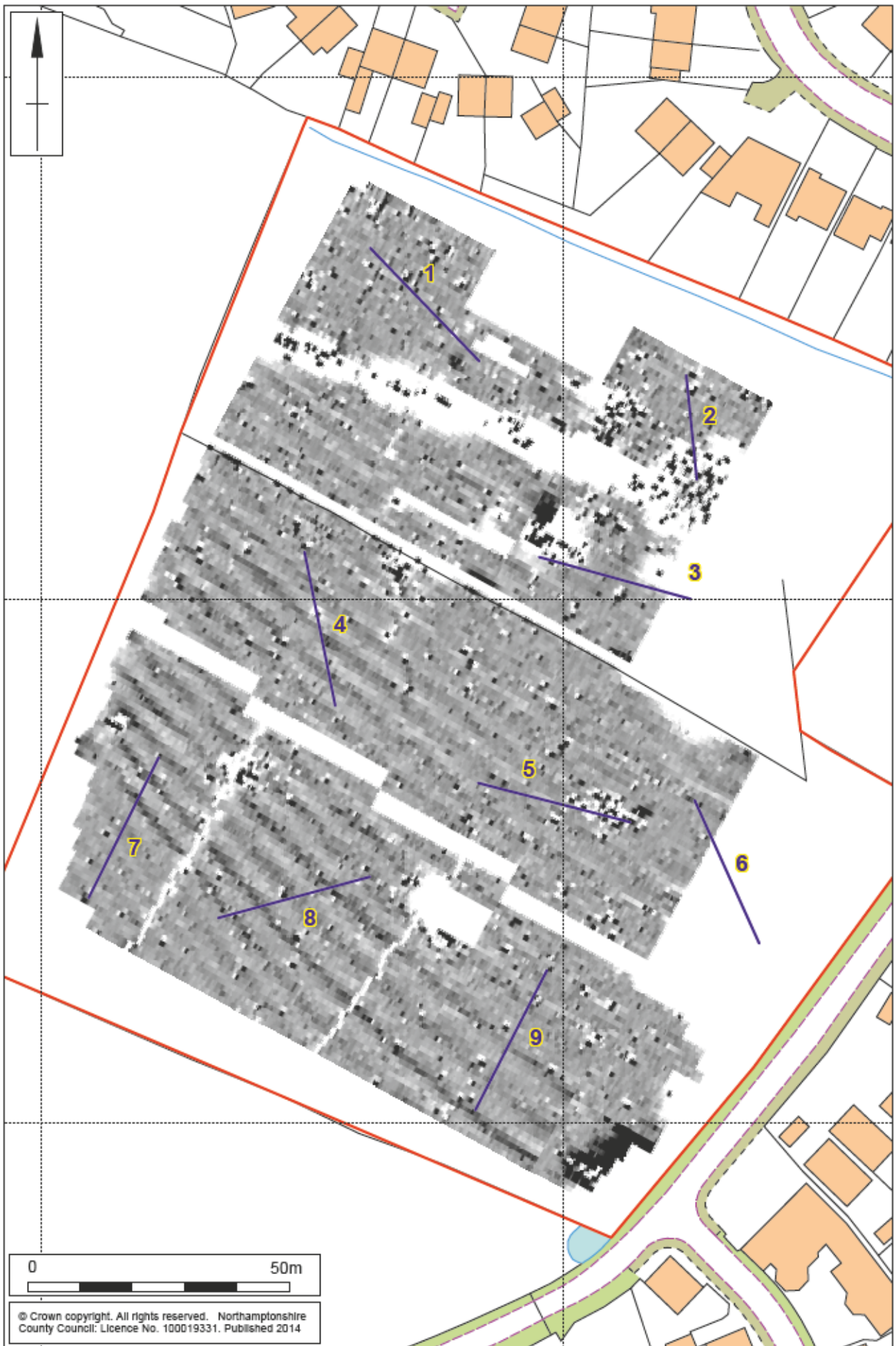
A topographic survey was undertaken of the medieval cultivation earthworks. The earthworks were surveyed using Leica Viva Global Positioning System (GPS) survey equipment using SMARTNET real-time corrections, and operating to a 3D tolerance of  $\pm 0.05\text{m}$ . The top and bottom of each slope was identified and recorded, along with sufficient data to generate an image of the natural topography.

### 4.2 Trial trench evaluation

Nine trial trenches were excavated within the proposed development area, with a total length of 260m. Eight trenches measured 30m long by 1.8m wide, and one trench 20m long by 1.8m wide. The trenches were positioned to target areas of ridge and furrow together with potentially blank areas indicated by the earlier geophysical survey (Fig 3; Fisher 2013). The trenches were excavated by machine using a toothless bucket to reveal archaeological remains or, where these were absent, undisturbed natural geology.

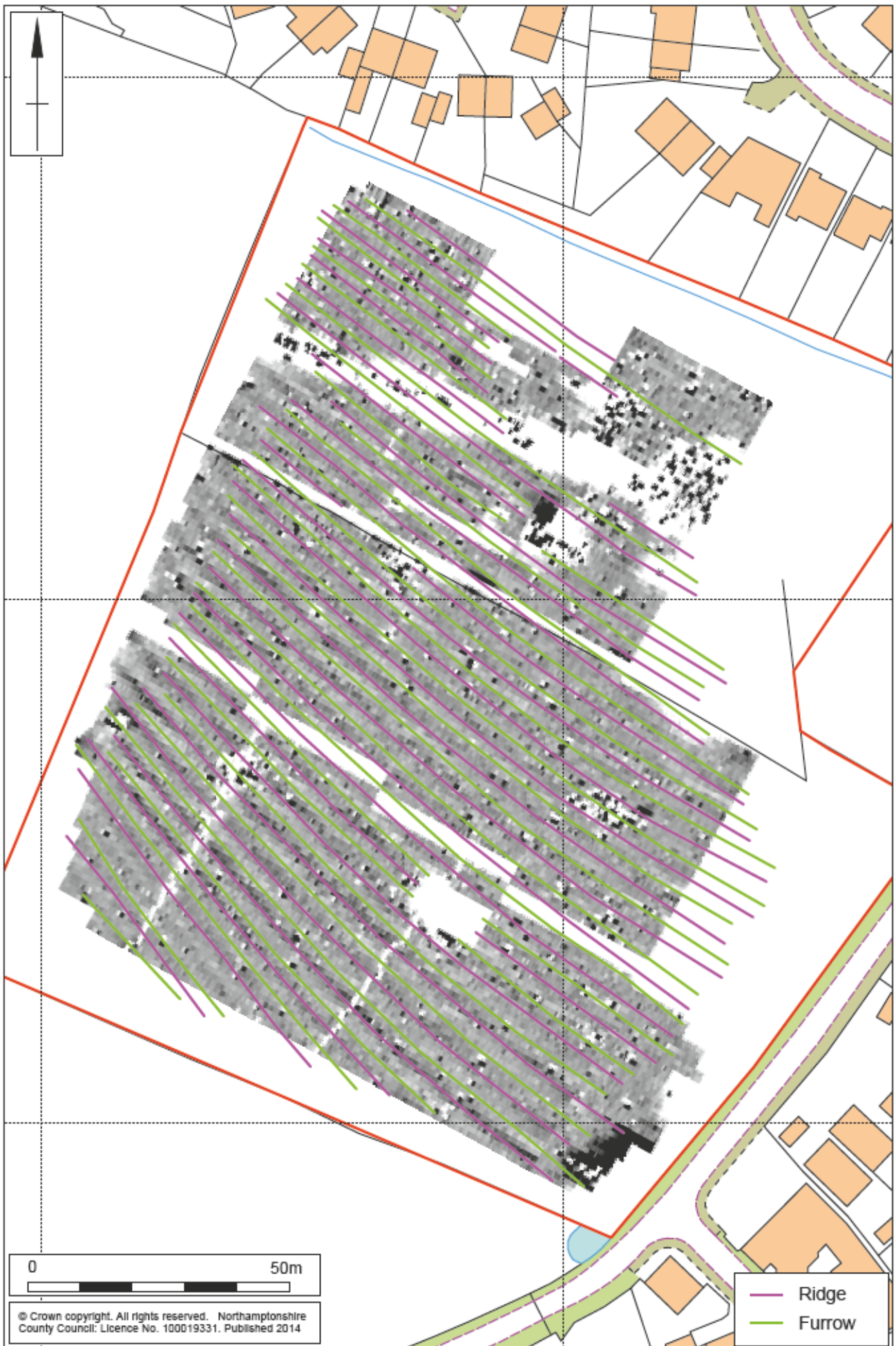
All archaeological features were given a separate context number. Deposits were described on *pro-forma* trench sheets to include details of the context, its relationships, interpretation and a checklist of associated finds (MOLA 2014). The trenches and spoil heaps were scanned with a metal detector to ensure maximum finds retrieval. All trenches were backfilled with their up-cast, lightly compacted by the mechanical excavator.

A section drawing at a scale of 1:10 was produced through trench 9 to show the profile of the ridge and furrow earthwork (see Fig 5), however, digital photographs formed the principal photographic record for report purposes.



Scale 1:1000

Geophysical survey with trench positions Fig 3



Scale 1:1000

Topographic plan of the earthworks Fig 4

## **5 EVALUATION EVIDENCE**

### **5.1 Topographic survey**

The earthwork survey was undertaken to illustrate and record the extant ridge and furrow cultivation strips (Fig 4). Northamptonshire has some of the best preserved earthworks of this type due to the region's fertile, clay soils and late date of enclosure, both of which encouraged ploughing to continue longer, giving earthworks which are deeper and have more definition. This makes the record of these earthworks particularly valuable (Hall 1993, 21).

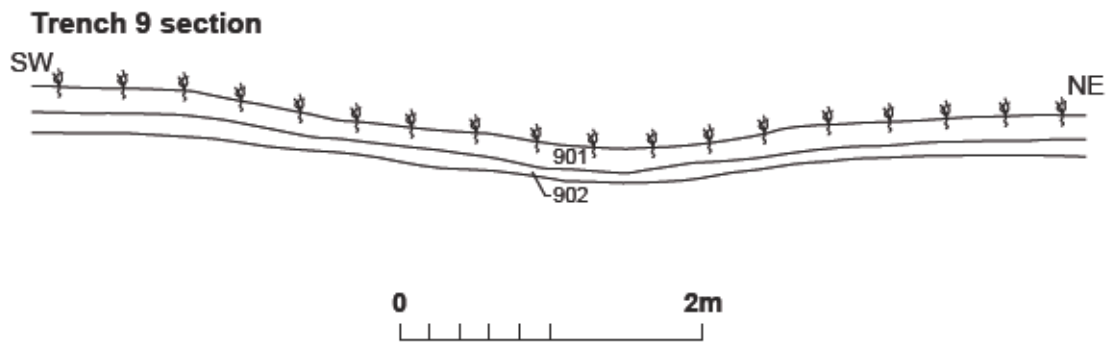
Ridge and furrow is the term used to describe the earthworks of medieval open field cultivation. The origin of ridge and furrow cultivation in Northamptonshire is thought to be towards the end of the middle Saxon period, around AD700-800, when settlements and field systems were being consolidated (*ibid*, 19). Before enclosure, during the 17th and 18th centuries, the open arable land was divided into long strips (lands) which were grouped into blocks (furlongs). Farms were formed by grouping strips from around the village area. Groups of furlongs (fields) were then cultivated from year to year according to the requirements of crop rotation (*ibid*, 8).

The ridges were formed by the repeated action of ploughing, and were advantageous in providing drainage and clearly visible boundaries between strips. The ends of most strips are curved where the plough turned at the end of the field. The earthworks at Harrington Road curve gently to the south-east.

Hall suggests that 7.0m width, or around a third of an acre, is about average for cultivation strips by the late medieval period (*ibid*, 8). At Harrington Road the strips are c5.0m wide, possibly indicating they are slightly earlier than this period. The alignment of the cultivation strips tends to be dependent upon the field topography to allow for the best drainage (*ibid*). At Harrington Road, the earthworks are indeed aligned along the natural incline as the land gradually slopes down towards the River Ise.

### **5.2 Trial trench evaluation**

With the exception of the cultivation earthworks, no other archaeological features were encountered on the site. All nine trenches contained three principal horizons; natural light brownish-orange clay overlain by dark brownish-orange clay subsoil and covered by dark brownish-grey sandy clay topsoil. A modern field drain was found aligned through Trenches 3 and 5. No archaeological remains preceding the ridge and furrow cultivation were found, and no finds were recovered from the earthworks themselves (Fig 5).



Trench 9, looking south

## 6 CONCLUSION

The evaluation of the land at Harrington Road, Desborough included both a topographic survey to record the extant ridge and furrow earthworks, and the excavation of nine trial trenches distributed evenly across the development area. The topographic survey recorded the quantity and direction of the cultivation strips using GPS survey equipment.

No archaeological finds were recovered, and no features were found below the ridge and furrow earthworks. The underlying natural geology was observed in all nine trenches.

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## APPENDIX 1: CONTEXT INVENTORY

Trench no.	Trench orientation and dimensions		Surface height, NW end (aOD)	Depth and height of natural (aOD)
1	NW-SE 31m x 1.5m		137.91m	0.24 – 0.36m 137.67 – 137.55m
Context	Context type	Description	Dimensions	Artefacts/Samples
101	Topsoil	Very dark brown-dark grey sandy clay with occasional small stones	0.19 - 0.23m thick	-
102	Subsoil	Dark brown-orange clay with occasional small stones	0.06 - 0.14m thick	-
103	Natural	Light brown-orange clay with occasional small stones	-	-

Trench no.	Trench orientation and dimensions		Surface height, NW end (aOD)	Depth and height of natural (aOD)
2	N-S 19m x 1.5m		135.56m	0.30 - 0.45m 135.26 – 135.11m
Context	Context type	Description	Dimensions	Artefacts/Samples
201	Topsoil	Very dark brown-dark grey sandy clay with occasional small stones	0.30 – 0.20m thick	-
202	Subsoil	Dark brown-orange clay with occasional small stones	0.10 – 0.15m thick	-
203	Natural	Light brown-orange clay with occasional small stones	-	-

Trench no.	Trench orientation and dimensions		Surface height, NW end (aOD)	Depth and height of natural (aOD)
3	NWW-SEE 31m x 1.6m		135.12m	0.28 – 0.40m 134.84 – 134.72m
Context	Context type	Description	Dimensions	Artefacts/Samples
301	Topsoil	Very dark brown-dark grey sandy clay with occasional small stones	0.18 – 0.20m thick	-
302	Subsoil	Dark brown-orange clay with occasional small stones	0.10 – 0.20m thick	-
303	Natural	Light brown-orange clay with occasional small stones	-	-

Trench no.	Trench orientation and dimensions		Surface height, NW end (aOD)	Depth and height of natural (aOD)
4	NW-SE 27m x 1.5m		136.96m	0.26 – 0.36m 136.70 – 136.60m
Context	Context type	Description	Dimensions	Artefacts/Samples
401	Topsoil	Very dark brown-dark grey sandy clay with occasional small stones	0.20 – 0.22m thick	-
402	Subsoil	Dark brown-orange clay with occasional small stones	0.06 – 0.14m thick	-
403	Natural	Light brown-orange clay with occasional small stones	-	-

Trench no.	Trench orientation and dimensions		Surface height, NW end (aOD)	Depth and height of natural (aOD)
5	NWW-SEE 31m x 1.6m		135.24m	0.30 – 0.40m 134.94 – 134.84m
Context	Context type	Description	Dimensions	Artefacts/Samples
501	Topsoil	Very dark brown-dark grey sandy clay with occasional small stones	0.20 – 0.22m thick	-
502	Subsoil	Dark brown-orange clay with occasional small stones	0.08 – 0.18m thick	-
503	Natural	Light brown-orange clay with occasional small stones	-	-

Trench no.	Trench orientation and dimensions		Surface height, NW end (aOD)	Depth and height of natural (aOD)
6	NW-SE 26m x 1.6m		132.87m	0.66 – 0.33M 132.21 – 132.54m
Context	Context type	Description	Dimensions	Artefacts/Samples
601	Topsoil	Very dark brown-dark grey sandy clay with occasional small stones	0.23m thick	-
602	Subsoil	Dark brown-orange clay with occasional small stones	0.10 – 0.43m thick	-
603	Natural	Light brown-orange clay with occasional small stones	-	-

Trench no.	Trench orientation and dimensions		Surface height, NW end (aOD)	Depth and height of natural (aOD)
7	NE-SW 28m x 1.5m		137.74m	0.30 – 0.39m 137.44 – 137.35m
Context	Context type	Description	Dimensions	Artefacts/Samples
701	Topsoil	Very dark brown-dark grey sandy clay with occasional small stones	0.17 - 0.20m thick	-
702	Subsoil	Dark brown-orange clay with occasional small stones	0.10 – 0.19m thick	-
703	Natural	Light brown-orange clay with occasional small stones	-	-

Trench no.	Trench orientation and dimensions		Surface height, NW end (aOD)	Depth and height of natural (aOD)
8	NE-SW 30m x 1.5m		135.66m	0.20 – 0.30m 135.46 – 135.36m
Context	Context type	Description	Dimensions	Artefacts/Samples
801	Topsoil	Very dark brown-dark grey sandy clay with occasional small stones	0.15 – 0.20m thick	-
802	Subsoil	Dark brown-orange clay with occasional small stones	0.05 – 0.12m thick	-
803	Natural	Light brown-orange clay with occasional small stones	-	-

Trench no.	Trench orientation and dimensions		Surface height, NW end (aOD)	Depth and height of natural (aOD)
9	NE-SW 27m x 1.5m		134.05m	0.24 – 0.30m 133.81 – 133.75m
Context	Context type	Description	Dimensions	Artefacts/Samples
901	Topsoil	Very dark brown-dark grey sandy clay with occasional small stones	0.15 – 0.19m thick	-
902	Subsoil	Dark brown-orange clay with occasional small stones	0.09 – 0.12m thick	-
903	Natural	Light brown-orange clay with occasional small stones	-	-



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