



**Archaeological trial trench evaluation at
Eynsham Nursery and Plant Centre
Old Witney Road, Eynsham
Oxfordshire
August 2015**

Report No. 15/166

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Illustrator: James Ladocha



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OASIS REPORT FORM

PROJECT DETAILS		OASIS No: molanort1-223069	
Project title	Archaeological trial trench evaluation at Eynsham Nursery and Plant Centre, Old Witney Road, Eynsham, Oxfordshire		
Summary	MOLA Northampton was commissioned by Vanderbilt Homes to carry out an archaeological trial trench evaluation on land at Eynsham Nursery and Plant Centre prior to the proposed development of the site. Nineteen trenches were excavated. A single undated shallow ditch/plough scar was identified. No other archaeological features or finds were seen.		
Project type	Trial Trench evaluation		
Site status	None		
Previous work	None		
Current land use	Garden centre grounds		
Future work	Unknown		
Monument type/period	Undated ditch/plough scar		
Significant finds	None		
PROJECT LOCATION			
County	Oxfordshire		
Site address	Eynsham Nursery and Plant Centre, Old Witney Road, Eynsham		
Postcode	OX29 4PU		
OS co-ordinates	SP 4221 0979		
Area (sq m/ha)	2.6ha		
Height aOD	c75m OD		
PROJECT CREATORS			
Organisation	MOLA Northampton		
Project Brief originator	Hugh Coddington, Oxfordshire County Council		
Project Design originator	Luke Jarvis, MOLA Northampton		
Director/Supervisor	Paul Clements, MOLA Northampton		
Project Manager	Jim Brown, MOLA Northampton		
Sponsor or funding body	Vanderbilt Homes		
PROJECT DATE			
Start date	24/08/2015		
End date	28/08/2015		
ARCHIVES		Location (Accession no.)	Content
Physical			None
Paper	Oxford Accession No: OXCMS2015.152		Site records; background data, photographs; one section on permatrace
BIBLIOGRAPHY			
Journal/monograph, published or forthcoming, or unpublished client report (MOLA report)			
Title	Archaeological trial trench evaluation at Eynsham Nursery and Plant Centre, Old Witney Road, Eynsham, Oxfordshire, August 2015		
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Author(s)	Claire Finn		
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Contents

1	INTRODUCTION
2	BACKGROUND
2.1	Location, topography and geology
2.2	Historical and archaeological background
3	AIMS AND OBJECTIVES
4	EXCAVATION METHODOLOGY
5	THE EXCAVATED EVIDENCE
5.1	General stratigraphy
5.2	The excavated evidence
6	DISCUSSION
	BIBLIOGRAPHY
	APPENDIX: Context Inventory

Figures

Cover:	Site overview, looking north
Fig 1:	Site location
Fig 2:	Trench layout
Fig 3:	Ditch [105] in Trench 1, looking south-west
Fig 4:	Trench 1 overview, looking north-west
Fig 5:	Trench 16 overview, looking north-west
Fig 6:	Example trench: trench 12 overview, looking north
Back cover:	General site shot after backfilling

Archaeological trial trench evaluation at Eynsham Nursery and Plant Centre Old Witney Road, Eynsham Oxfordshire August 2015

Abstract

MOLA Northampton was commissioned by Vanderbilt Homes to carry out an archaeological trial trench evaluation on land at Eynsham Nursery and Plant Centre prior to the proposed development of the site. Nineteen trenches were excavated. A single undated shallow ditch/plough scar was identified. No other archaeological features or finds were identified.

1 INTRODUCTION

Vanderbilt Homes commissioned MOLA to undertake archaeological trial trenching on the proposed development site at Eynsham Nursery and Plant Centre, Old Witney Road, Eynsham (NGR SP 4221 0979, Fig 1). The works were required in response to a forthcoming planning application for residential development and associated infrastructure (Planning application no: 15/00761/FUL), in line with the *National Planning Policy Framework* (DCLG 2012).

The Oxfordshire County Council Archaeological Services (OCC) advised that a programme of archaeological evaluation should be undertaken to determine the nature and extent of any archaeological remains within the development area. The requirements and methodology were outlined in a Brief (OCC 2015) and a Written Scheme of Investigation was subsequently prepared by MOLA (MOLA 2015). The fieldwork is recorded in the Oxford Historic Environment Record under **Event Number OXCMS2015.152**.

The evaluation conformed to the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists' *Standard and guidance for archaeological field evaluation* (2014a) and *Code of Conduct* (2014b). All stages of the project were undertaken in accordance with Historic England procedural documents (*MoRPHE*) (HE 2015).

2 BACKGROUND

2.1 Location, topography and geology

Eynsham is a village in the county of Oxfordshire, c9km to the north-west of Oxford. The settlement developed from its proximity to the Swinford ford of the River Thames, which was been a focus for significant activity in the past. The proposed development is located on the south of the A40 in Eynsham, to the south of the garden centre. The site is currently grassland, with some derelict former farm and greenhouse buildings standing. It is bounded on all sides by hedges, beyond which to the south and west, lie arable fields. The garden centre and properties of Elm Place, Old Witney Road, are to the north, and to the east beyond patchier hedgerow growth is a further strip of enclosed grassland with a trackway, and an area of woodland. The development site is c2.6ha in size, lying at c75m above Ordnance Datum. The geology is Oxford Clay overlain by superficial deposits of Summertown-Radley sand and gravel (BGS 2015).

2.2 Historical and archaeological background

Prehistoric activity in the parish is known, with Palaeolithic occupation known from the river gravels, and Neolithic ritual activity recorded to the north of the town (Hawkes and Gray 1969, Crossley 1990). A possible Neolithic causewayed enclosure is located 0.5km south of the town. A Bronze Age cemetery and other settlement features identified from cropmarks are known to the south of the village near Foxley Farm. Other Bronze Age sites have been discovered north of the village, at New Wintles Farm (Crossley 1990).

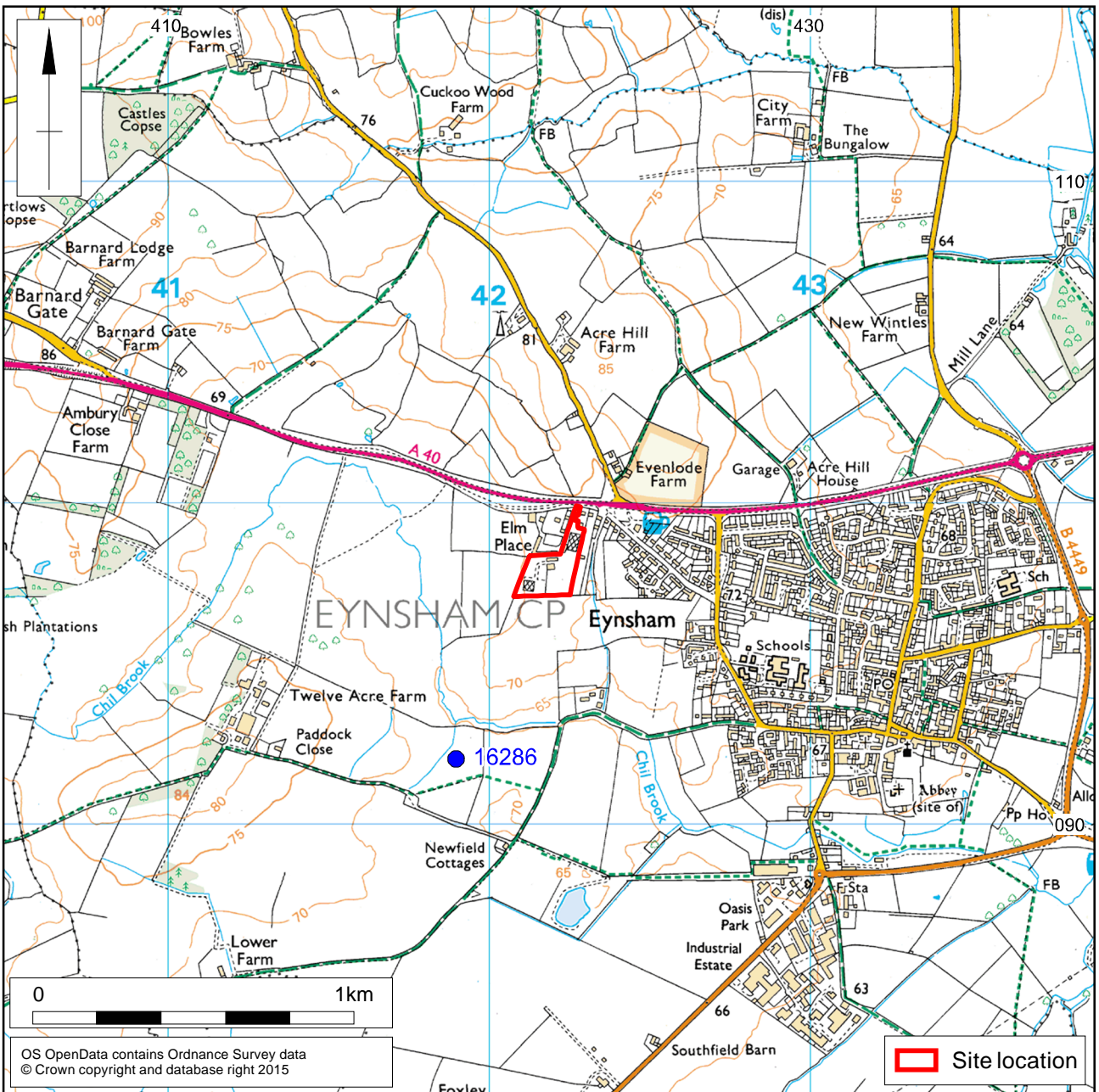
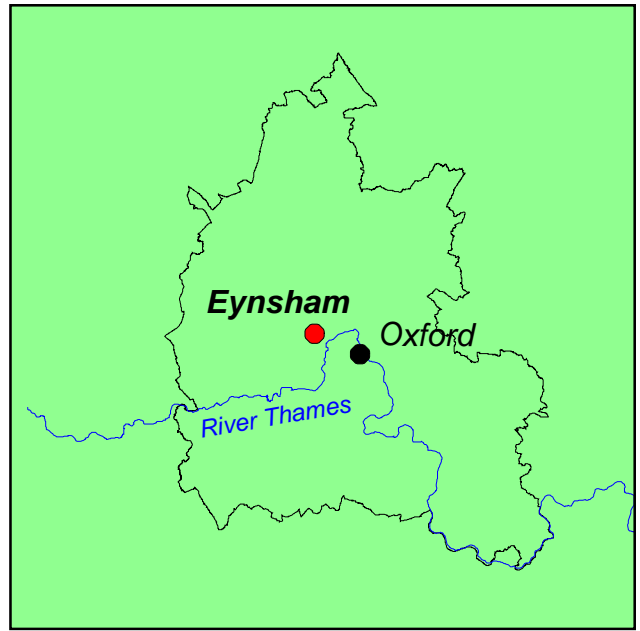
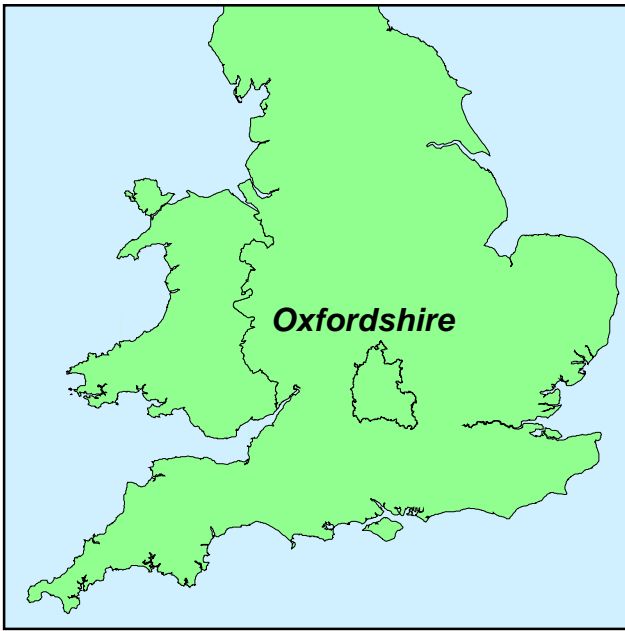
Settlement and cemetery activity at Foxley Farm continued into the early Iron Age, and another settlement of that period was located in the Hanborough area of Eynsham village. A large earthwork in Eynsham Hall Park probably dates in part from the Iron Age.

Romano-British settlement, artefacts and field systems have been identified to the north of the village between Cuckoo Lane and Mill Lane, and at sites within the core of the village at Newland Street, at the Gables and at the abbey site, as well as at Foxley Farm and New Wintles Farm areas. An important 4th-century Romano-British coin hoard was discovered in 1935 south of the village, although a detailed location is not known (Crossley 1990).

Eynsham's first historical mention is in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, when apparently in 571AD it was known as *Egonesham*. Early Anglo-Saxon settlement and burial sites are known from Newland Street and Wytham View (*ibid*). Evidence has been found of 6th- and 7th- century buildings at New Wintles Farm, 1.5km to the north of the town (Hawkes and Gray 1969). Eynsham Abbey, a Benedictine House, stood to the south of the village between 1005-1539. The abbey was founded on the site of an important 9th-century church, which may have been standing since the mid-7th century (Page 1907). There are indications that by the 9th century, Eynsham was an important royal estate. The town was flourishing sufficiently to be granted a market in the 1130s, but by the end of the 13th century the town was beginning to struggle, probably due to the proximity of Oxford, and it never recovered its former importance (Crossley 1990).

Historic maps indicate that the area was part of a large enclosed field until the 20th century. The area was divided into narrow plots of land after the development of houses along the south side of Old Witney Road in the second quarter of the 20th century. The small block of properties edging the site to the north-west was also constructed around this time, recorded as Cox's Barn Farm. By 1970, the current borders of the area were constructed.

There are no known designated heritage assets in the area. Settlement features indicative of a late prehistoric settlement are known to the south of the site (marked on Fig 1). A geophysical survey (BCC 2000), an aerial survey (APS 1999) and an open area excavation (CA 2001) revealed archaeological activity including ditches, pits and gravel extraction (Historic Environment Record 16286). The investigations were confined to an area 315m long by 15m wide, and therefore the full extent of this site was not determined. As such it was thought possible for the site to extend into the application area.



Scale 1:20,000

Site Location Fig 1

3 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The main objective of the evaluation was to record the location, extent, date, character, condition, significance, and quality of any surviving archaeological remains. The trenching specifically aimed to examine:

- the date, nature, significance and extent of activity or occupation in the development site;
- the relationship of any remains found to the surrounding contemporary landscapes;
- the potential for the recovery of artefacts to assist in the development of type series within the region;
- the potential for palaeo-environmental remains to determine local environmental conditions;
- the impact of the proposed works upon any surviving archaeological remains;
- and inform any future excavation and/or preservation *in-situ* strategy.

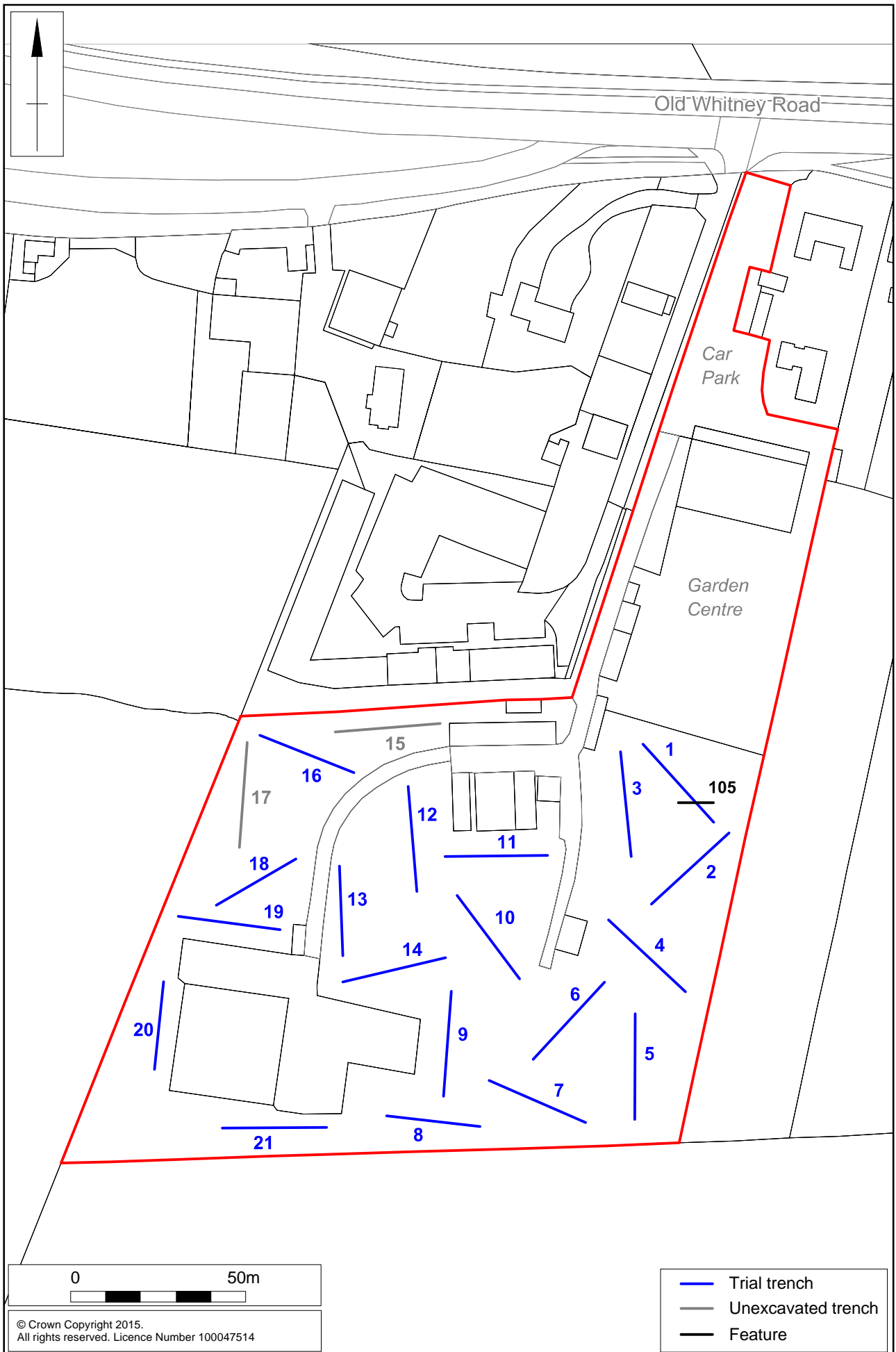
The *Solent-Thames Research Framework for the Historic Environment* provided the regional research agenda for the project (Hey and Hind 2014), while the national framework for research, as set out by English Heritage (now Historic England) was also consulted (EH 1997).

4 EXCAVATION METHODOLOGY

The original proposal was for twenty-one trenches, each 25m long, located to provide a varied and representative sample of the development area while avoiding numerous obstructions on site (Fig 2). Due to the presence of several large soil bunds on the western edge of the site, trenches 15 and 17 were not excavated, whilst the positions of 20 and 21 were adjusted. Trench 16 was shortened. Trenches were excavated using a JCB mechanical excavator fitted with a 1.8m-wide toothless ditching bucket. The topsoil and subsoil were removed under archaeological direction to reveal natural substrate and were stacked separately at the side of the trench. All procedures complied with MOLA Health and Safety at Work Guidelines.

All archaeological deposits encountered during the course of the excavation were fully recorded, following standard MOLA procedures (MOLA 2014). All deposits were given a separate context number in a sequence assigned to each trench. They were described on *pro-forma* context sheets to include details of the context, its relationships and interpretation. All trench locations were recorded using Leica Viva Global Positioning System (GPS) survey equipment using SMARTNET real-time corrections, operating to a 3D tolerance of $\pm 0.05\text{m}$. A full digital photographic record was maintained. The field data from the evaluation has been compiled into a site archive with appropriate cross-referencing.

All trenches were backfilled with their up-cast material and were then lightly compacted by the mechanical excavator.



Scale 1:1,500

Excavated trenches Fig 2

5 THE EXCAVATED EVIDENCE

5.1 General stratigraphy

The general stratigraphy was consistent in all trenches. The natural substrate comprised mid yellow-brown silty clay and gravel, between 0.27m and 0.54m below the present ground surface. This was overlain by mid-brown clay loam subsoil, 0.15-0.33m thick. The topsoil comprised dark brown clay loam, 0.12-0.28m thick.

5.2 The excavated evidence

A shallow ditch or possible plough scar around 150mm deep was found at the south-east end of trench 1 [105]. The cut was shallow, with a U-shaped base, aligned south-west by north-east (104). The fill was compact mid-brown silty clay, and contained no finds.



Ditch [105] in Trench 1, looking south-west Fig 3

No other archaeological features were seen, and no finds were recovered.

Two areas of modern disturbance were identified in trenches 7 and 16. In trench 7, this comprised an area of disturbed ground at its east end. In trench 16, a section of the modern bund edging the area to the north-west comprised a dump of rubble and construction materials, mixed with subsoil.

A series of modern land drains were seen in trenches 2, 19, and 20. Modern water pipes were identified in trenches 5, 10, 11, 12, and 13.

7 DISCUSSION

The evaluation identified a single undated possible shallow ditch or plough scar. No other archaeological features were identified and no finds were recovered. This indicates that this area has a low probability of containing archaeological remains.

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MOLA Northampton
11 September 2015

APPENDIX: CONTEXT INVENTORY

Trench No.	Length, width & alignment	Grid Reference (N end)	Surface height, N end (m aOD)	Depth & height of natural (m aOD)
1	25m x 1.8m NW-SE	442242.65, 209826.35	71.67	0.35-0.47m deep 71.32-71.20
<i>Context</i>	<i>Context type</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Dimensions</i>	<i>Artefacts/Samples</i>
101	Topsoil	Dark brown clay loam	0.35m deep	-
102	Subsoil	Mid brown clay loam	0.30m deep	-
103	Natural	Yellow brown silty clay and gravel	-	-
104	Fill of 105	Compact mid-brown silty clay	0.60m wide, 0.15m deep	-
105	Ditch/plough scar	Cut of shallow U-shaped ditch/plough scar	0.60m wide, 0.15m deep	-



Trench 1 overview, looking north-west Fig 4

Trench No.	Length, width & alignment	Grid Reference (N end)	Surface height, N end (m aOD)	Depth & height of natural (m aOD)
16	25m x 1.8m NW-SE	442133.34, 209828.85	71.43	0.44-1.45m 70.99-69.98
<i>Context</i>	<i>Context type</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Dimensions</i>	<i>Artefacts/Samples</i>
1601	Topsoil	Dark brown clay loam	0.35m deep	-
1602	Subsoil	Mid brown clay loam	0.30m deep	-
1603	Natural	Yellow brown silty clay and gravel	-	-
1604	Disturbance layer	Rubble and construction debris mixed with mid brown clay loam	0.24-0.90m deep	-



Trench 16 overview, looking north-west Fig 5

Trench No.	Length, width & alignment			Depth of natural (aOD)
2-15, 17-21	25m x 1.8m NW-SE			0.27m-0.54m deep
<i>Context</i>	<i>Context type</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Dimensions</i>	<i>Artefacts/Samples</i>
-	Topsoil	Dark brown clay loam	0.12-0.28m deep	-
-	Subsoil	Mid brown clay loam	0.15-0.33m deep	-
-	Natural	Yellow brown silty clay and gravel	-	-



Example trench: trench 12 overview, looking north Fig 6



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