

Archaeological trial trench evaluation at Potton Road, Biggleswade Central Bedfordshire March 2016

Report No. 16/68

Author: Adam Reid Illustrator: Olly Dindol



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MOLA Bolton House Wootton Hall Park Northampton NN4 8BN 01604 809800 www.mola.org.uk sparry@mola.org.uk

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STAFF

Project Manager Fieldwork Adam Yates BA MCIfA Adam Reid BSc MSc Laura Gutel BA Guillaume Gutel BA MA Sam Egan BSc

Text Pottery Ceramic roof tile Animal bone Adam Reid Tora Hylton Pat Chapman BA CMS ACIfA Adam Reid

Illustrator

Olly Dindol BSc

OASIS REPORT FORM			
PROJECT DETAILS	OASIS No: molanort1-2482	92	
Project title	Archaeological trial trench ev Biggleswade, Central Bedfor		
Summary	MOLA Northampton was cor and Bloor Homes to carry ou evaluation on land at Potton the submission of a planning development at the site. For excavated. A single ditch cor	mmissioned by Bellway Homes at an archaeological trial trench Road, Biggleswade, prior to g application for residential arteen trenches were ntaining post-medieval pottery dition to three undated linear	
Project type	Trial Trench evaluation		
Site status	None		
Previous work	Geophysics (Fisher 2015)		
Current land use	Arable field		
Future work	Unknown		
Monument type/period	Post-medieval ditch		
Significant finds	Post-medieval pottery		
PROJECT LOCATION			
County	Bedfordshire		
Site address	Potton Road, Biggleswade		
Postcode	SG18 0ES		
OS co-ordinates	TL 196 457		
Area (sq m/ha)	8.4 hectares		
Height aOD	c.29-33m aOD		
PROJECT CREATORS			
Organisation	MOLA Northampton		
Project Brief originator	Martin Oake, Central Bedfor	dshire Council	
Project Design originator	MOLA Northampton		
Director/Supervisor	Adam Reid, MOLA Northam	pton	
Project Manager	Adam Yates, MOLA Northan		
Sponsor or funding body	Bellway Homes and Bloor H		
PROJECT DATE			
Start date	21/03/2016		
End date	29/03/2016		
ARCHIVES	Location (Accession no.)	Content	
Physical		Pottery, CBM	
Paper	Bedford (BEDFM:2015.78)	Site records; background data, photographs; plans and sections on permatrace	
BIBLIOGRAPHY	Journal/monograph, publishe unpublished client report (MC	DLA report)	
Title	Archaeological trial trench evaluation at Potton Road, Biggleswade, Central Bedfordshire, March 2016		
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OASIS REPORT FORM

Contents

- 1 INTRODUCTION
- 2 BACKGROUND
 - 2.1 Location, topography and geology
 - 2.2 Previous archaeological work
- 3 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES
- 4 EXCAVATION METHODOLOGY
- 5 THE EXCAVATED EVIDENCE
 - 5.1 General stratigraphy
 - 5.2 Late or post-medieval ditch
 - 5.3 Undated features
 - 5.4 Geological features
- 6 THE FINDS
 - 6.1 The pottery by Tora Hylton
 - 6.2 The ceramic roof tile by Pat Chapman
- 7 THE ANIMAL BONE by Adam Reid
- 8 DISCUSSION

BIBLIOGRAPHY

APPENDIX: CONTEXT INVENTORY

Figures

- Cover: Trench 14, looking north-west
- Fig 1: Site location and excavated trenches
- Fig 2: Trench 11, ditch [1105], looking west
- Fig 3: Trench plans 11 and 12, sections 2 and 4
- Fig 4: Trench 10, feature [1005], looking east
- Fig 5: Trench 12, ditch [1205], looking north-west
- Fig 6: Trench plan 10, sections 1 and 3
- Fig 7: Trench 13, pit [1305], looking north-east
- Fig 8: Plan of Trench 13
- Back cover: View of backfilled trenches, looking north-west

Archaeological trial trench evaluation at Potton Road, Biggleswade Central Bedfordshire, March 2016

Abstract

MOLA Northampton was commissioned by Bellway Homes and Bloor Homes to carry out an archaeological trial trench evaluation on land at Potton Road, Biggleswade, prior to the submission of a planning application for residential development at the site. Fourteen trenches were excavated. A single ditch containing post-medieval pottery and tile was identified, in addition to three undated linear features and an undated pit.

1 INTRODUCTION

MOLA was commissioned by Bellway Homes and Bloor homes to undertake archaeological trial trenching on land at Potton Road, Biggleswade (NGR TL 196 457, Fig 1). The work was undertaken in advance of a planning application for a residential development.

The evaluation intended to provide additional information for the Archaeology Team of Central Bedfordshire Council (CBC) to comment on the application and to determine the necessity for any future archaeological mitigation that may be required. The archaeological evaluation was undertaken in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF; DCLG 2012).

It followed on from advice from the Archaeology Team at CBC that a programme of archaeological evaluation should be undertaken to determine the nature and extent of any archaeological remains within the proposed development area. The requirements and methodology were outlined in a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) prepared by MOLA (MOLA 2016) and the evaluation followed geophysical survey (Fisher 2015).

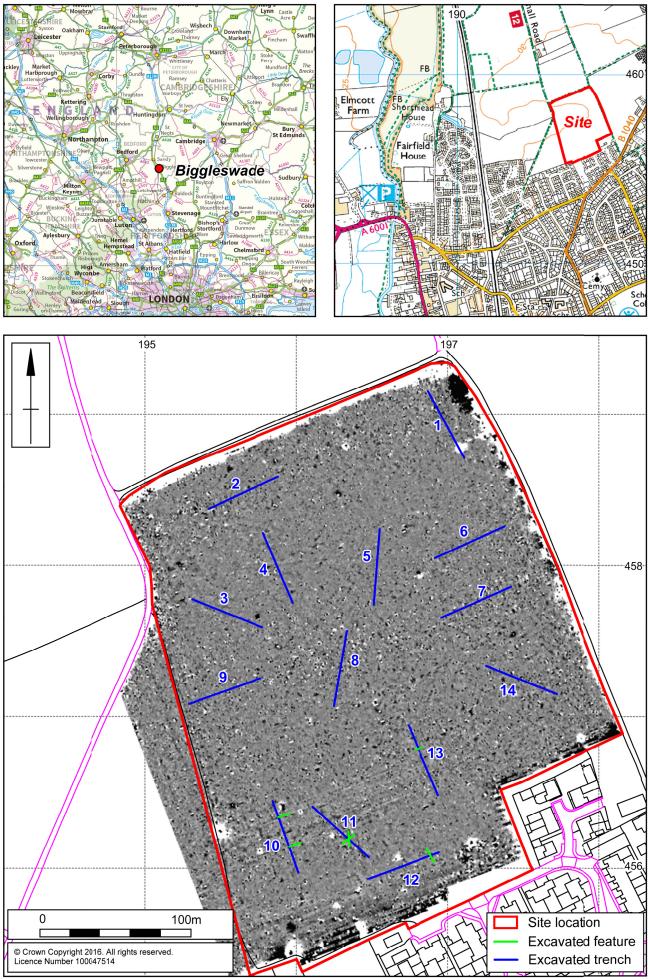
MOLA is a Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CIfA) registered organisation, and all works were undertaken according to the CIfA *Code of Conduct* (CIfA 2014b). The evaluation conformed to the current best archaeological practice as defined in the CIfA's *Standards and Guidance: Archaeological Field Evaluation* (CIfA 2014a), the EAA document *Standards for Field Archaeology in the East of England* (Gurney 2003), and the procedural document *Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment (MoRPHE)* (HE 2015).

2 BACKGROUND

2.1 Location, topography and geology

The site occupies a single rectangular arable field, approximately 8.6ha in area, on the northern edge of Biggleswade. It lies *c*1km north-east of the town centre. It is bounded to the north, east and west by farm tracks, and by housing to the south.

The survey area lies at an elevation of c29-33m aOD. The geology of the area is mapped as sandstone of the Woburn Sands formation, overlain by the 1st and 2nd river Terrace Sands and Gravels (BGS 2015).



Scale 1:2500

Site location and excavated trenches Fig 1

2.2 Previous archaeological work

A detailed magnetometer survey was undertaken on the site in 2015 by MOLA Northampton (Fisher 2015; Accession Number BEDFM 2015.78). The results from this site were generally weak and indistinct; with widespread background patterning that appears to be geological in origin. The possible archaeology was indicated by a very fragmentary pattern of rectilinear anomalies which are suggestive of Iron Age or Roman ditched enclosures similar to those excavated on the land to the north-east. The two pits identified in the archaeological evaluation at the southern end of the site (see 2.4 below, Patenall and Carlyle 2010) may be associated with the ditched enclosures. The one anomaly outlying to the north may have represented a section of ditch of indeterminate date. Whilst these anomalies were mostly weak and indistinct, it should be noted that a previous survey on land to the north-east recorded some similarly weak anomalies over known archaeology. This weakness probably reflected the fundamental magnetic properties of the local soils and geology, and need not be directly related to the size and preservation of the archaeological features themselves.

A number of previous archaeological works have been conducted in and around the survey area (Fig 1). Archaeological trial trenching (Patenall and Carlyle 2010) and watching brief (Upson-Smith 2010) were carried out in connection with a flood alleviation scheme on the southern boundary of the survey area. A geophysical survey (Chinnock 2013), trial trench evaluation (Fairclough 2014) and subsequent excavation (report underway) were carried out in the adjacent field to the north-east. To the south of Potton Road, trial trench evaluation (Jones 2009) and subsequent excavation (Chapman 2011) were carried out.

The archaeological evaluation carried out in the southern part of the survey area and identified two early to middle Iron Age pits that contained a wide range of vessels and a small quantity of animal bone and charred cereal grain. The domestic nature of the artefacts recovered from the pits suggests that there may be a small early to middle Iron Age settlement in the vicinity dating to the 4th to 5th centuries BC (Patenall and Carlyle 2010). The flood alleviation scheme plans were modified to avoid these features and no further archaeology was observed during the subsequent watching brief (Upson-Smith 2010).

The site to the north-east of the present survey area comprises a set of Iron Age and Roman ditched enclosures which were first identified from cropmarks (HER 15079). These were confirmed by geophysical survey (Chinnock 2013) and fully investigated by excavation. Post-excavation analysis of the mitigation results is currently ongoing. In addition to the enclosures, the excavation discovered a few burials, mostly of Roman date although one Saxon inhumation was also present.

Trial trenching further to the south, on the opposite side of Potton Road, uncovered three pits in a field south-east of Potton Road. The pits produced a pottery assemblage dating to the Middle Neolithic, the end of the 4th millennium BC (Jones 2009 and Chapman 2011).

To the north of the survey area, the eastern end of a possible cursus monument has been identified from cropmarks (HER 16818) and a second cursus has been identified 500m to the north (HER 644). Other cropmarks around the survey area suggest extensive Iron Age and Roman activity (HERs 15079, 15101 and 644).

In the Domesday survey of AD 1086, the Parish of Biggleswade with the hamlets of Stratton and Holme are recorded within the Hundred of Biggleswade. However, the survey area lies outside these historic centres of settlement and is not expected to contain substantial archaeological remains of medieval or post-medieval date. Historic maps from 1885 onwards show the survey area as undeveloped farmland.

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:

- establish the date, nature and extent of activity or occupation in the development site;
- establish the relationship of any remains found to the surrounding contemporary landscapes;
- recover artefacts to assist in the development of type series within the region;
- recover palaeo-environmental remains to determine local environmental conditions as an intrinsic part of the investigation.

4 EXCAVATION METHODOLOGY

The methodology conformed to the agreed WSI (MOLA 2016). Fourteen trenches, measuring 50m long by 1.8m wide, were excavated in the proposed development area (Fig 1). These were located to examine geophysical survey anomalies and blank areas. Trenches were excavated using a 360° mechanical excavator fitted with a 1.8m-wide toothless ditching bucket. The topsoil and subsoil were removed under archaeological direction to reveal archaeological features or natural substrate. All trenches were backfilled with their up-cast material and were then compacted by the mechanical excavator. All procedures complied with MOLA Health and Safety provisions and MOLA Health and Safety at Work Guidelines (MOLA 2014).

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 0.05m. A full digital photographic record was maintained. The field data from the evaluation has been compiled into a site archive with appropriate cross-referencing.

The evaluation conformed to the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists' *Standard and guidance: archaeological field evaluation* (2014a). All stages of the project were undertaken in accordance with Historic England, *Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment* (MoRPHE) (HE 2015) and the WSI (MOLA 2016).

5 THE EXCAVATED EVIDENCE

5.1 General stratigraphy

The general stratigraphy varied little across the site. The natural substrate comprised a mixture of silty sands and gravels and was located between 0.34m and 0.66m below the present ground surface. This was overlain by light yellow and brown-grey sandy silt subsoil, which ranged in thickness from 0.02m to 0.36m. The topsoil comprised dark grey-brown clayey, sandy silt, between 0.22m and 0.39m thick.

All features were cut into the natural and were overlain by the subsoil, unless otherwise stated.

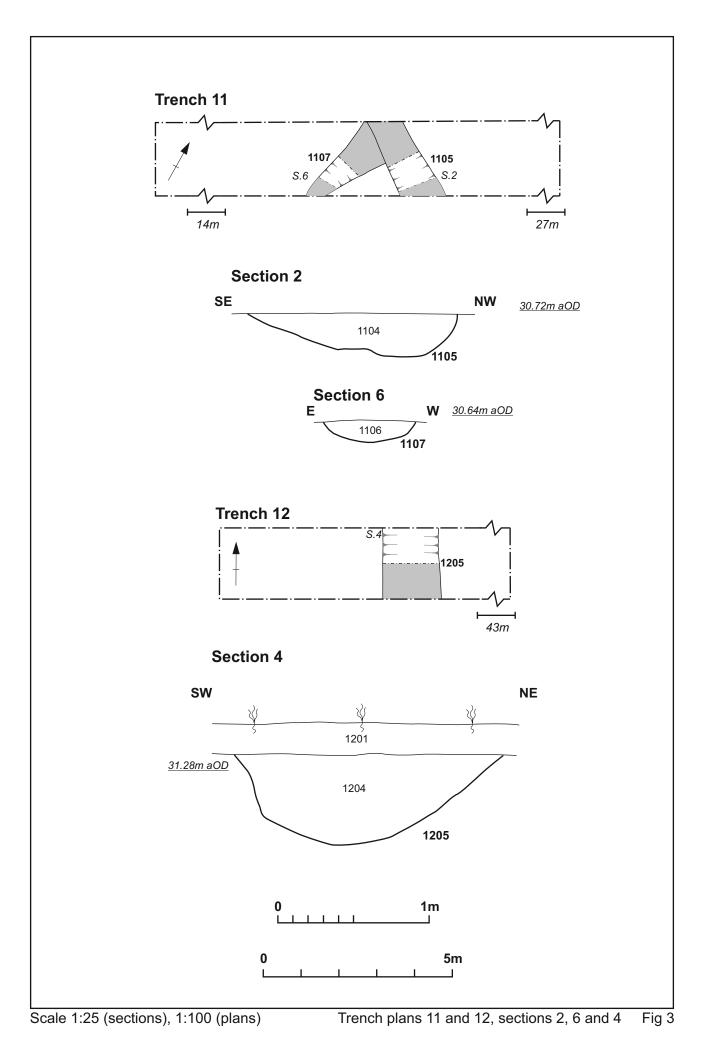
5.2 Late or post-medieval ditch

Trench 11 contained a ditch [1105], which was aligned east to west, with an asymmetrical root affected profile that comprised a steep northern edge and gently sloping southern edge (Figs 2 & 3, Section 2). It contained a fill (1104) that comprised loose mid brown silty sand and contained a single sherd of heavily abraded pottery of probably late medieval to early post-medieval date. It also contained several fragments of ceramic building material and a single fragment of animal bone.



Trench 11, ditch [1105], looking west Fig 2

Ditch [1105] cut an earlier ditch or gully [1107], which was aligned approximately north to south and had a gently sloping shallow concave profile. It contained a fill (1106) which comprised friable mid brown grey sandy silt and contained no finds.



5.3 Undated features

In Trench 10 there were two linear features, neither of which contained finds. Feature [1005] was aligned roughly north-west to south-east and had an irregular shape in plan with a gently sloped profile that demonstrated moderate evidence of root or animal disturbance (Figs 4 & 6, Section 1). It measured 1.05m wide, 0.46m deep and contained fills of firm mid brown-grey silty sand, although the lower fill (1004) contained frequent small sub-angular stones.



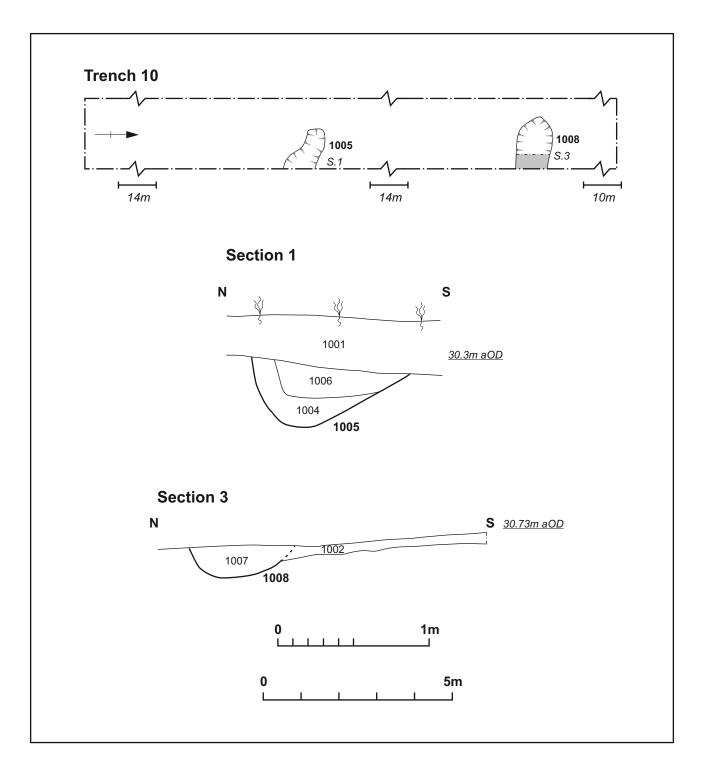
Trench 10, feature [1005], looking east Fig 4

Feature [1008] was aligned east to west and had a shallow, gently curving profile. It measured 0.70m wide and 0.23m deep and contained a single fill (1007), of loose mid brown silty sand (Fig 6, Section 8).

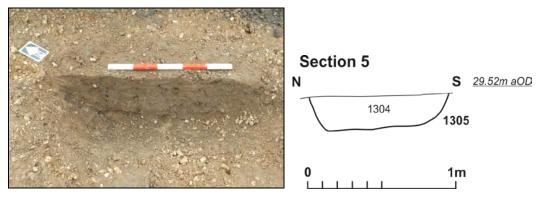
Trench 12 contained a ditch [1205], which was aligned north-west to south-east. It had an asymmetrical profile, with a steep south-western side and a gently curving north-eastern side and contained a fill (1204) of a friable mid brown-grey silty sand and no finds (Fig 3, Section 4 and Fig 5).



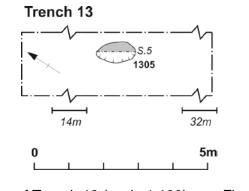
Trench 12, ditch [1205], looking north-west Fig 5



Trench 13 contained a pit [1305], which had a steeply sloping concave profile 0.61m wide and 0.15m deep (Fig 7, Section 5 and Fig 8). It contained a fill (1304), of friable dark brown-grey sandy silt and contained no finds.



Trench 13, pit [1305], looking north-east (scale 1:25) Fig 7



Plan of Trench 13 (scale 1:100) Fig 8

5.4 Geological features

Possible features were investigated in Trenches 1, 6, 7 and 13, but were found to be of natural origin.

6 THE FINDS

6.1 **The pottery** by Tora Hylton

An undiagnostic wheel-turned bodysherd, weighing 13g, was recovered from the fill of ditch [1105]. The fabric is hard with a grey core and oxidised surfaces. The sherd is abraded and displays signs of excessive wear. The remains of a worn off-white/cream coloured slip is visible on the internal surface, with vestiges also on the exterior surface. This sherd is difficult to date with certainty, but a late medieval or post-medieval date is suggested.

6.2 **The ceramic roof tile** by Pat Chapman

Ten small sherds of ceramic roof tile, weighing 185g, come from subsoil (1102) and fill (1104) of ditch [1105]. They are 11-15mm thick, nine are made with orange-brown or red-brown sandy clay with rare tiny angular flint inclusions, one sherd is made with a fine sandy buff-pink fabric. These are tiny dispersed fragments of plain flat roof tiles datable from the 14th to 19th centuries.

7 THE ANIMAL BONE by Adam Reid

A single cattle tooth fragment (21mm x 20mm x 14mm) in poor condition was recovered from the single fill of ditch [1105]. It adds little to the interpretation of the site but indicates the poor survivability of bone in the sandy and gravelly sediments.

8 DISCUSSION

The evaluation work identified a ditch of post-medieval date in addition to four other features of uncertain date. They correspond with anomalies identified by the geophysical survey. The paucity of finds indicates that these features relate to rural land use.

No evidence of earlier features was noted, which appears to suggest that the site lies outside of the Iron Age and later settlement that is located in the field directly to the east (Fairclough 2014, forthcoming).

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MOLA Northampton 14 April 2016

APPENDIX: CONTEXT INVENTORY

Trench No.	Length, width & alignment	Grid Reference (NW end)	Surface height, NW end (aOD)	Depth & height of natural (aOD)
1	50m x 1.8m SE-NW	519687, 245915	30.92m	0.66m deep 30.26m aOD
Context	Context type	Description	Dimensions	Artefacts/ Samples
101	Topsoil	Friable dark brown-grey clayey sandy silt.	0.30m thick	-
102	Subsoil	Friable mid brown-grey sandy silt with frequent charcoal inclusions.	0.36m thick	-
103	Natural	Loose mid red-orange silty sand with frequent gravel and occasional light yellow grey sandy patches.	-	-

Trench No.	Length, width & alignment	Grid Reference (NE end)	Surface height, NE end (aOD)	Depth & height of natural (aOD)
2	50m x 1.8m NE-SW	519588, 245859	30.49m	0.41m deep 30.08m aOD
Context	Context type	Description	Dimensions	Artefacts/ Samples
201	Topsoil	Friable dark brown-grey clayey sandy silt.	0.39m thick	-
202	Subsoil/ interface layer	Thin interface with natural comprising a mixture of topsoil and mid yellow orange silty sand.	0.02m thick	-
203	Natural	Friable light brown-orange silty sand with occasional root intrusions.	-	-

Trench No.	Length, width & alignment	Grid Reference (NW end)	Surface height, NW end (aOD)	Depth & height of natural (aOD)
3	50m x 1.8m SE-NW	519531, 245778	29.22m	0.57m deep 28.65m aOD
Context	Context type	Description	Dimensions	Artefacts/ Samples
301	Topsoil	Friable dark brown-grey clayey sandy silt.	0.32m thick	-
302	Subsoil	Friable dark grey-brown sandy silt with frequent charcoal.	0.25m thick	-
303	Natural	Loose light orange-grey silty sand.	-	-

POTTON ROAD, BIGGLESWADE

Trench No.	Length, width & alignment	Grid Reference (NW end)	Surface height, NW end (aOD)	Depth & height of natural (aOD)
4	50m x 1.8m SE-NW	519578, 245821	29.70m	0.48m deep 29.22m aOD
Context	Context type	Description	Dimensions	Artefacts/ Samples
401	Topsoil	Friable dark brown-grey clayey sandy silt.	0.33m thick	-
402	Subsoil	Friable mid grey-brown sandy silt with frequent charcoal.	0.15m thick	-
403	Natural	Loose light orange-yellow silty sand with frequent gravel.	-	-

Trench No.	Length, width & alignment	Grid Reference (NE end)	Surface height, NE end (aOD)	Depth & height of natural (aOD)
5	50m x 1.8m NE-SW	519655, 245824	29.90m	0.52m deep 29.38m aOD
Context	Context	Description	Dimensions	Artefacts/
	type			Samples
501	Topsoil	Friable dark brown-grey clayey sandy silt.	0.35m thick	-
502	Subsoil	Friable mid grey-brown sandy silt.	0.17m thick	-
503	Natural	Loose mixed light brown-grey sand and patches of orange gravel.	-	-

Trench No.	Length, width & alignment	Grid Reference (E end)	Surface height, E end (aOD)	Depth & height of natural (aOD)
6	50m x 1.8m E-W	519737, 245826	30.62m	0.50m deep 30.12m aOD
Context	Context type	Description	Dimensions	Artefacts/ Samples
601	Topsoil	Friable dark brown-grey clayey sandy silt.	0.35m thick	-
602	Subsoil	Friable light yellow-brown sandy silt.	0.15m thick	-
603	Natural	Friable-loose light yellow-grey silty sand.	-	-

Trench No.	Length, width & alignment	Grid Reference (E end)	Surface height, E end (aOD)	Depth & height of natural (aOD)
7	50m x 1.8m E-W	519742, 245785	30.75m	0.45m deep 30.30m aOD
Context	Context type	Description	Dimensions	Artefacts/ Samples
701	Topsoil	Friable dark brown-grey clayey sandy silt.	0.35m thick	-
702	Subsoil/ interface layer	Thin interface between topsoil and natural comprising dark grey- brown gravelly sandy silt.	0.10m thick	-
703	Natural	Friable-firm mid red-orange sandy silty gravel.	-	-

Trench No.	Length, width & alignment	Grid Reference (NE end)	Surface height, NE end (aOD)	Depth & height of natural (aOD)
8	50m x 1.8m NE-SW	519633, 245757	30.19m	0.48m deep 29.71m aOD
Context	Context type	Description	Dimensions	Artefacts/ Samples
801	Topsoil	Friable dark brown-grey clayey sandy silt.	0.29m thick	-
802	Subsoil	Friable mid grey-brown sandy silt with frequent charcoal inclusions.	0.19m thick	-
803	Natural	Loose light brown-orange silty sand.	-	-

Trench No.	Length, width & alignment	Grid Reference (E end)	Surface height, E end (aOD)	Depth & height of natural (aOD)
9	50m x 1.8m E-W	519576, 245725	30.01m	0.63m deep 29.38m aOD
Context	Context type	Description	Dimensions	Artefacts/ Samples
901	Topsoil	Friable dark brown-grey clayey sandy silt.	0.33m thick	-
902	Subsoil	Friable-firm mid grey-brown clayey silt with frequent charcoal.	0.30m thick	Tile/CBM (not retained)
903	Natural	Mixed red-orange silty sand with frequent gravel.	-	-

Trench No.	Length, width & alignment	Grid Reference (N end)	Surface height, N end (aOD)	Depth & height of natural (aOD)
10	50m x 1.8m N-S	519584, 245644	31.11m	0.34m deep 30.77m aOD
Context	Context type	Description	Dimensions	Artefacts/ Samples
1001	Topsoil	Friable dark brown-grey clayey sandy silt.	0.29m thick	-
1002	Subsoil/ interface layer	Thin interface between topsoil and natural comprising dark grey- brown gravelly sandy silt.	0.05m thick	-
1003	Natural	Light yellow-orange silty sand with patches of gravel.	-	-
1004	Fill of [1005]	Firm mid brown-grey silty sand with frequent small sub-angular stones.	1.80m long 0.85m wide 0.45m deep	-
1005	Ditch	Irregular linear cut aligned SE-NW with gently curving sides and broad base.	1.80m long 1.05m wide 0.46m deep	-
1006	Fill of [1005]	Firm mid brown-grey silty sand with rare small sub-angular stones.	1.80m long 0.90m wide 0.25m deep	-
1007	Fill of [1008]	Loose mid brown silty sand with occasional small sub-angular stones.	1.80m long 0.70m wide 0.23m deep	-
1008	Ditch	Linear cut aligned E-W with gently curving sides and broad base.	1.80m long 0.70m wide 0.23m deep	-

Trench No.	Length, width & alignment	Grid Reference (NW end)	Surface height, NW end (aOD)	Depth & height of natural (aOD)
11	50m x 1.8m SE-NW	519611, 245641	31.13m	0.39m deep 30.74m aOD
Context	Context type	Description	Dimensions	Artefacts/ Samples
1101	Topsoil	Friable dark brown-grey clayey sandy silt.	0.34m thick	-
1102	Subsoil/ interface layer	Thin interface between topsoil and natural comprising dark grey- brown gravelly sandy silt.	0.05m thick	-
1103	Natural	Mixed red-orange silty sand with frequent gravel.	-	-
1104	Fill of [1105]	Loose mid brown silty sand with occasional small stones.	1.80m long 1.40m wide 0.28m deep	Pottery, Bone, CBM.
1105	Ditch	Linear cut aligned E-W with gently curving side on southern edge and steep side on northern edge. Frequent root disturbance noted.	1.80m long 1.40m wide 0.28m deep	-
1106	Fill of [1107]	Friable mid brown-grey sandy silt.	0.61m wide 0.14m deep	-
1107	Gully	Machine truncated ditch or gully, aligned N-S. Gently sloped shallow profile with concave base.	0.61m wide 0.14m deep	-

Trench No.	Length, width & alignment	Grid Reference (NE end)	Surface height, NE end (aOD)	Depth & height of natural (aOD)
12	50m x 1.8m NE-SW	519694, 245610	31.57m	0.38m deep 31.19m aOD
Context	Context type	Description	Dimensions	Artefacts/ Samples
1201	Topsoil	Friable dark brown-grey clayey sandy silt.	0.22m thick	-
1202	Subsoil	Friable mid grey-brown sandy silt with frequent charcoal.	0.16m thick	-
1203	Natural	Friable-firm light red-orange- yellow silty sand.	-	-
1204	Fill of [1205]	Friable mid brown silty sand with occasional small sub-angular stones and occasional flecks of charcoal.	1.80m long 1.80m wide 0.60m deep	-
1205	Ditch	Linear cut aligned NE-SW with steep SW side, gently curving NE side and broad base.	1.80m long 1.80m wide 0.60m deep	-

Trench No.	Length, width & alignment	Grid Reference (NW end)	Surface height, NW end (aOD)	Depth & height of natural (aOD)
13	50m x 1.8m NW-SE	519674, 245694	30.01m	0.52m deep 29.49m aOD
Context	Context type	Description	Dimensions	Artefacts/ Samples
1301	Topsoil	Friable dark brown-grey clayey sandy silt.	0.34m thick	-
1302	Subsoil	Friable mid orange-brown sandy silt with frequent charcoal.	0.18m thick	-
1303	Natural	Friable-loose llight red-orange silty sand with freq gravel patches	-	-
1304	Fill of [1305]	Friable dark brown-grey sandy silt with frequent root intrusions.	0.60m long 0.95m wide 0.22m deep	-
1305	Pit	Regular oval cut with steep sides and irregular base.	0.60m long 0.95m wide 0.22m deep	-

Trench No.	Length, width & alignment	Grid Reference (NW end)	Surface height, NW end (aOD)	Depth & height of natural (aOD)
14	50m x 1.8m NW-SE	519725, 245734	30.92m	0.53m deep 30.39m aOD
Context	Context type	Description	Dimensions	Artefacts/ Samples
1401	Topsoil	Friable dark brown-grey clayey sandy silt.	0.34m thick	-
1402	Subsoil	Friable mid brown-orange sandy silt with frequent charcoal	0.19m thick	-
1403	Natural	Friable-loose light yellow-orange silty sand.	-	-









MOLA Bolton House Wootton Hall Park Northampton NN4 8BN 01604 809800 <u>www.mola.org.uk</u> sparry@mola.org.uk