



**Archaeological trial trench evaluation  
on Phase 1E at Earls Barton Spinney Quarry  
Earls Barton, Northamptonshire**

**June 2018**

**Interim Report**

Report No: 18/72

Authors: Paul Sharrock

Illustrator: Joanne Clawley



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Earls Barton Northamptonshire  
June 2018  
Interim Report**

Event number: ENN108732

Report No. 18/72

Manager: Liz Muldowney

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**OASIS REPORT FORM**

<b>PROJECT DETAILS</b>		<b>Oasis No. molanort1- 319279</b>	
Project title	Archaeological trial trench evaluation on Phase 1E at Earls Barton Spinney Quarry, Earls Barton, Northamptonshire, June 2018, Interim Report		
Short description	<i>MOLA was commissioned by Breedon Southern Ltd to carry out archaeological trial trenching on Phase 1E at Earls Barton Spinney Quarry, Earls Barton, Northamptonshire, prior to proposed quarrying activity on the site. Nineteen trenches were excavated revealing a series of ditches spread across the site in varying directions, most of which were shallow and undated. The densest remains were encountered in the north-west part of the evaluation area decreasing to the south and west.</i>		
Project type	Archaeological trial trench evaluation		
Previous work	WSI (Rees 2010), Geophysical Survey (Walford 2018) Method Statement (Finn and Muldowney 2018)		
Current land use	Agriculture		
Future work	Mitigation		
Monument type and period	Ditches, Roman		
Significant finds	Pottery, animal bone		
<b>PROJECT LOCATION</b>			
County	Northamptonshire		
Site address	Earls Barton Spinney Quarry, Earls Barton, Northamptonshire		
Easting and northing	NGR: 485230 262150		
Area (sq m/ha)	4.2 ha		
Height aOD	c 47.65-48.54m aOD		
<b>PROJECT CREATORS</b>			
Organisation	MOLA Northampton		
Project brief originator	Northamptonshire County Council (Windwood 2008)		
Project Design originator	MOLA Northampton		
Project Supervisor	Paul Sharrock (MOLA)		
Director/ Managers	Liz Muldowney (MOLA)		
Sponsor or funding body	Breedon Southern Ltd		
<b>PROJECT DATE</b>			
Start date	16th May 2018		
End date	28th May 2018		
<b>ARCHIVES</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Contents</b>	
Physical	<b>MOLA Northampton ENN108732</b>	Pottery, animal bone, flots	
Paper		Site records	
Digital		Survey data, report, photographs	
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>	Journal/monograph, published or forthcoming, or unpublished client report (MOLA report)		
Title	Archaeological trial trench evaluation on Phase 1E at Earls Barton Spinney Quarry, Earls Barton, Northamptonshire, June 2018, Interim Report		
Serial title & volume	MOLA Northampton report 18/72		
Author(s)	Paul Sharrock		
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**Archaeological trial trench evaluation  
on Phase 1E at Earls Barton Spinney Quarry,  
Earls Barton, Northamptonshire  
June 2018  
Interim Report**

**Abstract**

*MOLA was commissioned by Breedon Southern Ltd to carry out archaeological trial trenching on Phase 1E at Earls Barton Spinney Quarry, Earls Barton, Northamptonshire prior to proposed quarrying activity on the site. Nineteen trenches were excavated revealing a series of ditches spread across the site in varying directions, most of which were shallow and undated. The densest remains were encountered in the north-west part of the evaluation area decreasing to the south and west.*

**1 INTRODUCTION**

In May 2018 MOLA Northampton was commissioned by Breedon Southern Ltd to undertake archaeological trial trenching on land at Phase 1E of the Earls Barton Spinney Quarry, Earls Barton, Northamptonshire (NGR SP847 620, Fig 1). The works had been required by the Archaeological Advisor for Northamptonshire County Council (NCCAA) in a memo dated 9th May 2013, in line with the *National Planning Policy Framework* (DCLG 2012).

The works will be recorded in the Northamptonshire Historic Environment Record under event number **ENN108732**.

**2 BACKGROUND**

**Location and geology**

The area targeted by the current phase of archaeological trenching (1E) has been calculated at 4.2ha in size, in an area of arable fields positioned south of Earls Barton and Ecton villages (NGR SP847 620; Fig 1). The current excavation area is bounded on all sides by agricultural land forming part of the future quarry area. To the east lie further fields and a recycling centre. The evaluation area lies on a shallow, south-facing slope, above the River Nene.

The underlying geology of the site is mudstone of the Whitby Mudstone Formation, overlain by superficial River Terrace Deposits of sand and gravel becoming alluvium to the south (BGS 2018).

***Archaeological and historical background***

This phase of archaeological evaluation follows on from several previous evaluations, geophysical survey and mitigation excavation in the area of the quarry site undertaken between 1982 and 2017. These are summarised in Table 1.

The current area of investigation was targeted by partial geophysical survey and fieldwalking in 2003 (Masters and Fisher 2003) and with full geophysical survey in 2018 (Walford 2018).

*Table 1: Previous archaeological works in the area*

<b>Author</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Originator</b>
Windell 1982	Excavations at Clay Lane, 1980; An Iron Age and Roman rural settlement, <i>Northamptonshire Archaeology</i> Vol <b>18</b> , 33-42	Northamptonshire Archaeology
Edgeworth 2002	<i>Earls Barton Quarry, Northamptonshire, Western Extension, Archaeological Desk-based Assessment</i> , Albion Archaeology report, <b>2002/08</b>	Albion Archaeology
Masters and Fisher 2003	<i>Earls Barton Quarry Western Extension, Northamptonshire. Geophysical &amp; fieldwalking surveys</i> , Northamptonshire Archaeology report	Northamptonshire Archaeology
Walsh 2003	<i>An Archaeological Trial Excavation at Earls Barton Quarry Western Extension, Northamptonshire</i> , Northamptonshire Archaeology	Northamptonshire Archaeology
Newton 2006	<i>Land at Earl's Barton, Northamptonshire; An Archaeological Desk-based Assessment</i> , Archaeological Solutions report, <b>2146</b>	Archaeological Solutions
Tanner and Stephens 2010	<i>Earls Barton Spinney Quarry, Northamptonshire, Geophysical Survey</i> , GSB Prospection report	GSB Prospection
Burke 2014	<i>Archaeological Mitigation works: Spinney Quarry Phase 1b (Part), Earls Barton, Northamptonshire, January 2014</i> , Northamptonshire Archaeology report, <b>14/47</b>	Northamptonshire Archaeology
Kidd 2016	<i>Trial trench evaluation on land at Spinney Quarry (Breedon) Earls Barton, Northamptonshire June – July 2016</i> , <b>16/140</b>	MOLA
Shiple (Forthcoming)	<i>Mitigation excavation of Phase 1A and Phase 1B(North) at Spinney Quarry Earls Barton, Northamptonshire, June to August 2017</i>	MOLA
Walford 2018	<i>Archaeological geophysical survey at Earls Barton Spinney Quarry, Earls Barton Northamptonshire February 2018</i> , <b>18/34</b>	MOLA

**Prehistoric Activity:** Limited quantities of prehistoric material have been recovered during these works. A mammoth tusk, probably dating from the Palaeolithic was recovered from sediments below the gravels during the excavation of a Romano-British well in Phase 1B in 2017. Neolithic and Bronze Age lithics have been recovered in small volumes including a polished stone pebble hammer (mace head) possibly dating the Neolithic or perhaps the Mesolithic (Phase 1A, 2017). There is the potential for deposits of this date within the Phase 1E area (Rees 2010). Two probable bronze age pits containing cremated remains were excavated in Phase 1A.

**Iron Age and Romano-British Activity:** The main programmes of archaeological fieldwork have produced evidence for settlement of Iron Age and Romano-British date. The settlement was somewhat dispersed, and the excavation of the main settlement took place at Clay Lane in 1980, immediately to the west of the current evaluation site (Windell 1982).



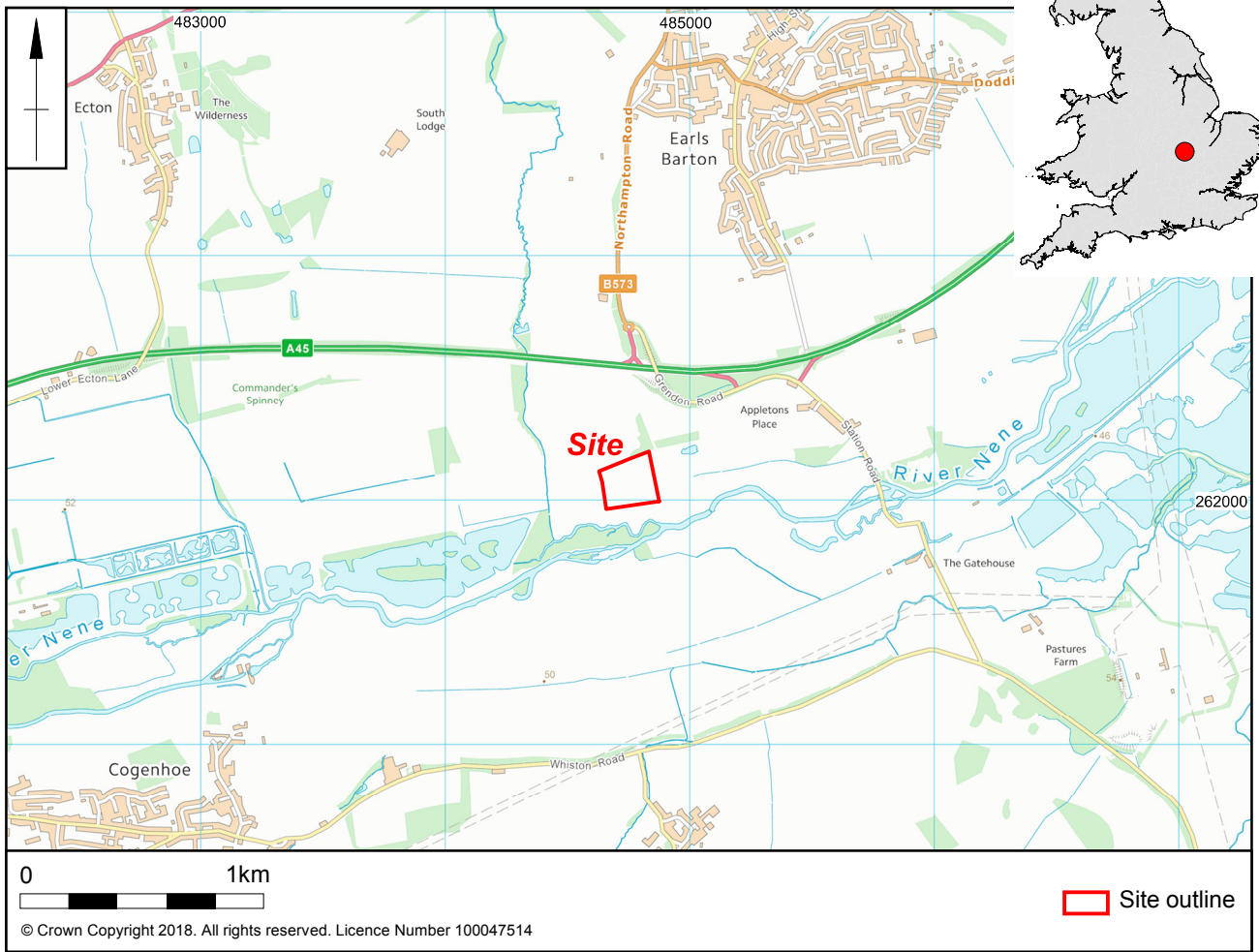
To the immediate west of the Clay Lane excavations, an early to middle Iron Age pit alignment was found adjacent to enclosures, field systems and structures of the Middle to Late Iron Age. The 2018 geophysical survey has identified the extension of the main settlement area (Phases 1F-G), a linear enclosure system and a series of enclosures and possible structures. Limited trench excavation in this area from 2003 indicates a likely date for the enclosures as Middle to Late Iron Age with continuation into the 1st century AD. Within the Phase 1A/B area to the east of the Clay Lane site, boundaries and enclosure ditches were identified dating from the Iron Age to Romano-British period as well a large well/watering hole.

Further extensive 2nd to 4th century AD settlement has previously been identified to the north of the A45, outside the area of the quarry.

During the medieval period, part of the assessment site lay within the boundaries of the open fields and meadows associated with the townships of Ecton and Earls Barton. Extensive evidence of ridge and furrow systems of medieval or post-medieval date were recorded during the 2002, 2003 and 2018 geophysical and fieldwalking surveys, and trial trench excavations.

### ***Archaeological Potential***

The geophysical survey has identified anomalies of possible archaeological origin within the current evaluation area (Walford 2018, Fig 1). The anomalies were predominantly sited in the north-west part of Phase 1E and are likely to represent the southern limit of the Romano-British linear settlement to the north. Elsewhere anomalies are likely to be of geological origin. In the southern part of the area the survey indicates alluvium is likely to be present which may have masked any anomalies present in this part of the area.



Scale 1:30,000

Site location Fig 1

### 3 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The purpose of the works was to determine and understand the nature, function and character of the archaeological site in its cultural and environmental setting. The general aims of the investigation were to:

- Establish the date, nature and extent of the activity or occupation on the development site;
- Recover artefacts to assist in the development of type series within the region;
- Recover palaeo-environmental remains to determine past local environmental conditions.

The detailed site objectives as given in the WSI (Rees 2010) were:

- to determine the chronological sequence of Iron Age and Romano-British occupation within the extraction area;
- to explore the relationship of later prehistoric settlement activity to micro topography and variation in the drift geology;
- to examine the co-joining enclosures to determine whether this characteristic is the product of a coherent build, a sequential build or fortuitous and further whether individual ditches have been cleaned or re-cut suggesting reworking of the form of enclosure over time;
- to explore the pattern of post-built structures to determine whether they are contemporary to individual enclosures and hence whether they are internal features or over/underlying unenclosed settlement;
- to consider the impact of earlier land division on the patterning of later settlement and enclosure;
- to consider the evidence for the process of abandonment of settlement especially any indication of causal factors;
- to recover palaeo-environmental evidence to clarify the nature and function of activities undertaken within individual structures and areas to enable a patterning of activity by area and time;
- focused recovery of animal bone from 'rich' contexts to maximize the potential for coherent analysis of these contexts given general poor preservation of bone on-site;
- to recover a sufficient pottery assemblage to enable the characterisation of the main forms of vessel present on-site (i.e. plain and scored ware middle Iron Age jars) and recognition of smaller elements of the assemblage (e.g. later globular vessels and imported wares).

Specific research objectives were drawn from national and regional research frameworks documents (Cooper 2006, updated by Knight, Vyner and Allen 2012) as relevant depending upon the results of the evaluation. These will be discussed in more detail in the reporting phase following mitigation.

#### 4 GENERAL METHODOLOGY

The development area was subject to archaeological trial trench evaluation comprised 19 trenches, each 50m long and 1.8m wide (Fig 2). Trenches were positioned across the area to sample both the geophysical anomalies and the apparently blank areas (Fig 2). A 20m stand-off area was maintained from the high pressure gas main located at the eastern limit of the area.

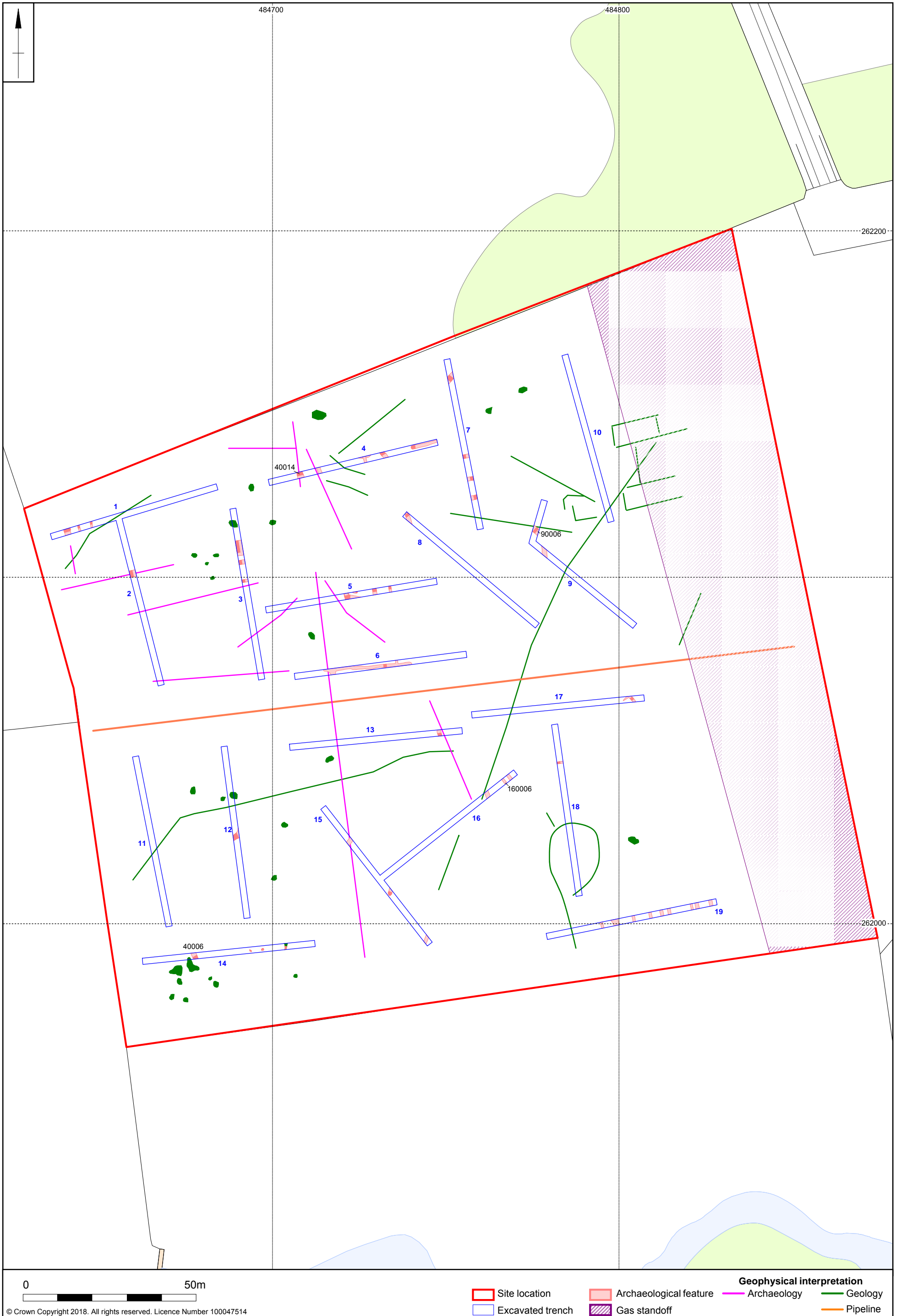
The trenches were located using Leica Viva Survey Grade RTK GPS using SMARTNET real-time corrections, operating to a 3D tolerance of  $\pm 0.05\text{m}$  to Ordnance Survey National Grid and Datum. Machine excavation was undertaken under the direction of a suitably experienced archaeologist. The trenches were excavated by a 360° mechanical excavator fitted with a 1.8m wide toothless ditching bucket, under the direction of a suitably experienced archaeologist to reveal archaeological remains or where these are absent, undisturbed natural horizons.

Following machine-excavation, the surface of the exposed archaeological horizon was cleaned in order to define the remains, with a selection of the extant archaeological features then sampled to attempt to determine character and date. Full excavation of features was not attempted at this stage of the investigation.

All archaeological deposits and excavated features were fully recorded following standard MOLA procedures (MOLA, 2014), with each distinct context given a unique number and described on *pro-forma* record sheets in terms of its composition, relationship to other contexts and interpretation. A full photographic record comprising digital images was also maintained.

Following completion of the site investigation, all trenches were mechanically backfilled with their original excavated material.

All works were carried out in accordance with the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists *Code of Conduct* (CIfA 2014a) and *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Field Evaluation* (CIfA 2014b); the Historic England procedural document, *Management of Field Projects in the Historic Environment* (HE 2015) and MOLA's in-house *Archaeological Fieldwork Manual* (MOLA 2014). All site recording procedures are detailed in MOLA's in-house *Archaeological Field Manual* (MOLA 2014), which is issued to all staff.



0 50m  
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**Geophysical interpretation**  
 Site location Archaeological feature Archaeology Geology  
 Excavated trench Gas standoff Pipeline

Scale 1:1000 (A3)

Excavated trenches and geophysical survey interpretation Fig 2

## 5 THE EXCAVATED EVIDENCE

### 5.1 General stratigraphy

A full account of the stratigraphy by trench can be found in the Context Inventory (Appendix 1).

The stratigraphy remained generally consistent across the field. The natural substrate comprised a mixture of orange / yellow brown sandy clay. This substrate was encountered between 0.31m and 0.90m below the present ground surface. Due to the proximity to the nearby river to the south of the site a layer of alluvium build-up was present most of the trenches up to a depth of 0.44m, the deepest of which is located towards the southern end of the site. This was sealed by a subsoil of varying thickness was recorded in all trenches; it comprised friable mid orange brown silty clay with occasional small stone inclusions of between 0.09m and 0.44m. Topsoil overlay this, and comprised dark grey brown clay loam with occasional small stone inclusions throughout. It had significant root disturbance and was between 0.15m and 0.32m thick (Fig 3).



Trench 4, representative section, facing south Fig 3

## 5.2 The archaeological features

The archaeology present at the site was predominantly linear ditches on varying alignments and distributed across the whole investigation (Fig 2). Most of these ditches were shallow in nature with little or no dating evidence. Features will be discussed in full detail following mitigation.

Table 1: Overview of archaeological feature distribution

Trench No	Ditches	Pits	Other	Total	Dating
1	4	0	0	4	Yes
2	1	0	0	1	No
3	3	0	0	3	Yes
4	3	0	0	3	Yes
5	4	1	0	5	No
6	1	0	0	1	Yes
7	4	0	0	4	Yes
8	1	0	0	1	No
9	1	0	0	1	No
10	0	0	0	0	No
11	0	0	0	0	No
12	1	0	0	1	No
13	1	0	0	1	No
14	1	2	0	3	No
15	3	0	0	3	No
16	3	0	0	3	No
17	1	0	0	1	Yes
18	1	0	0	1	No
19	9	0	0	9	No

### Notable features

Ditch [40004] located along the northern edge of the site in Trench 4 contained large quantity of Iron Age / Roman pottery (Figs 4 and 5). A south-west to north-east aligned ditch located within Trench 14 in the south-west corner of the site has also been identified. Although it did not produce any dating evidence the shallow fill did contain large quantities of heat exposed and worked limestone, although this appears to relate to backfilled material rather than an *in-situ* structure (Fig 6, 7 and 8).

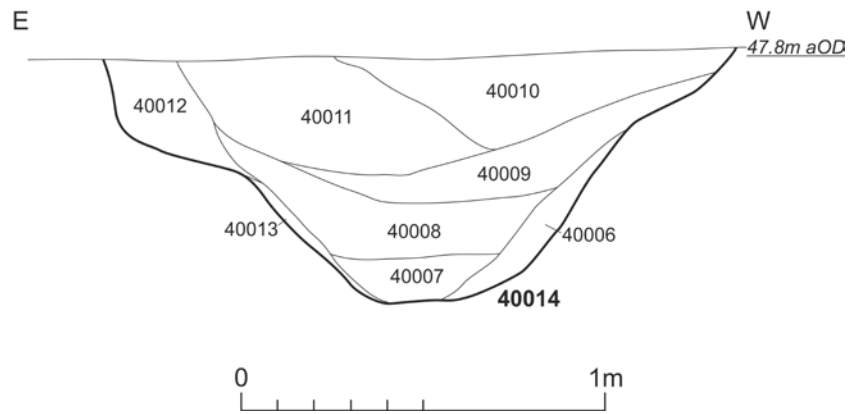
Another feature of note is the curved ditch found within Trench 9 located to the eastern edge of the site. This is visible emerging from the north-western edge of the L shaped trench and disappearing into the south-western edge of the trench (Fig 2, 9 and 10). This was not visible within the geophysical survey so its full extent is unknown; however, no sign of any continuation of the ditch was discovered in Trenches 7 and 8 to the west.

A number of linear features were also identified within Trench 19 along the southern end of the site on a north to south alignment. However, due to heavy rainfall and high water levels on the surface it was not possible to excavate these during the evaluation. Trench 15 and 16 suffered similar water constraints although a ditch terminus on slightly higher ground was able to be excavated within the middle of Trench 15 and two likely modern ditches at the north-eastern end of Trench 16, which cut through the substantial alluvium build-up, were able to be recorded in section (Fig 11 and 12).



Trench 4, N-S aligned ditch, facing north-east [40014] Fig 4

**Section 19**



Trench 4, Section 19, N-S aligned ditch [40014] Fig 5



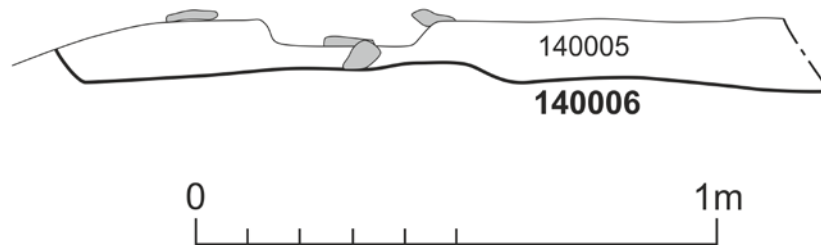
Trench 14, SW-NE aligned ditch containing worked limestone [14006] Pre-excavation facing east Fig 6



**Section 2**

SW

NE  
47.1m aOD



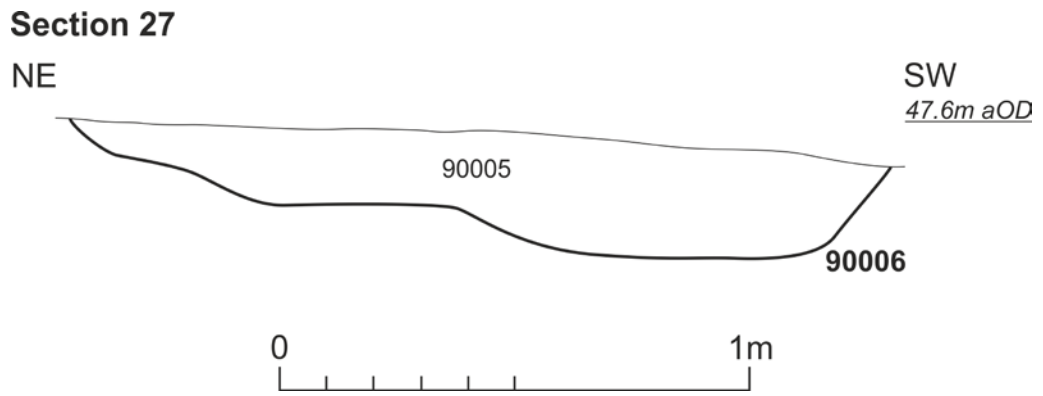
Trench 14, Section 2, SW-NE aligned ditch containing worked limestone [14006]  
Fig 7



Trench 14, SW-NE aligned ditch containing worked limestone [14006] facing north  
Fig 8



Trench 9, NW-SW curving ditch [90006] facing south east Fig 9

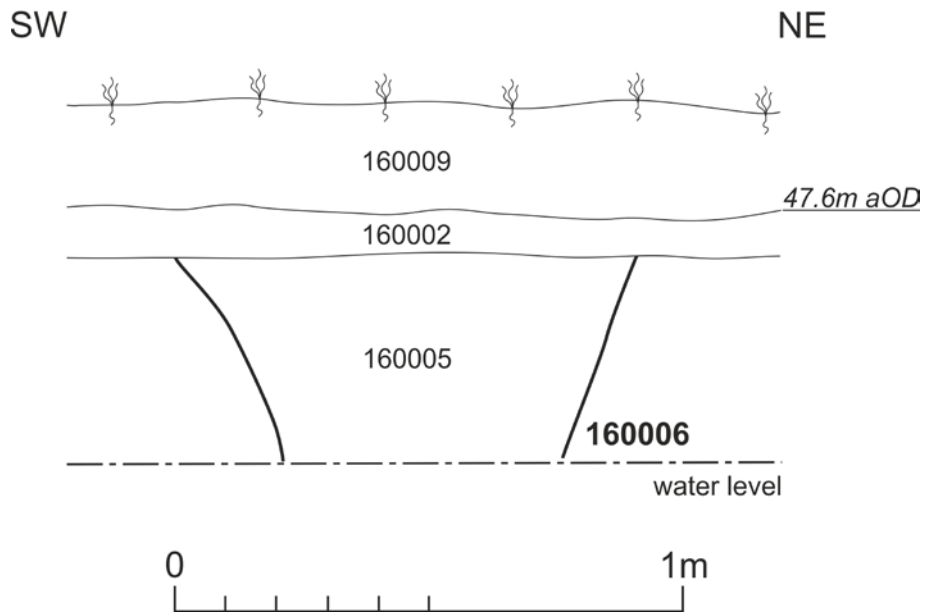


Trench 9, Section 27, NW-SW curving ditch [90006] Fig 10



Trench 16, NW-SE modern ditch [160006], facing south-east Fig 11

**Section 33**



Trench 16, Section 33, NW-SE modern ditch [160006] Fig 12

**6 POTTERY (Forthcoming)**

The pottery assemblage from the site has yet to be examined. The result of which will be incorporated at a later date.

**7 ANIMAL BONE** by Sander Aerts BA MSc**Introduction**

A small animal bone assemblage of 77 fragments comprising of 285 grams was hand collected from six different contexts. The bones were analysed at MOLA Northampton to assess the present taxa, preservation and taphonomy.

All fragments were washed prior to analysis. Identification took place with the aid of the MOLA Northampton reference collection and Schmid (1972). Unidentifiable fragment were categorised per size where possible: large mammal (cattle, horse) and medium mammal (sheep/goat, pig, large dog). Sheep and goat are grouped together due to the similarities in their skeletal morphology.

*Table 2: Animal bone per context by taxone*

Fill	Cut	Feature	Cattle	Sheep/goat	LM	MM	Unid	Wt (g)
10007	10008	Ditch	-	-	-	-	3	5
30008	30009	Ditch	-	-	9	-	-	33
40007	40014	Ditch	-	1	-	-	-	4
40008	40014	Ditch	1	-	-	2	-	5
40015	40016	Ditch	-	-	4	-	13	29
140005	140006	Ditch	5	-	28	-	11	209
<b>Totals</b>			<b>6</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>285</b>

**Results**

The animal bone is overall poorly preserved, being degraded and fragmented. A total of seven fragments (9%) could be identified; and 43 (56%) fragments were attributed to a size category. The identifications are summarised in Table 2. The identified remains belong to cattle teeth from (40008) and (140005), fills of ditches [40014] and [140006] respectively, and a burnt first phalanx of a sheep/goat. An additional two further long bone fragments from a medium sized mammal were observed from (40008). No butchering or gnawing marks were found.

**Discussion**

Due to the limited size of the assemblage and poor preservation, no conclusions can be drawn, other than the presence and exploitation of cattle and sheep/goat on the site. As some bones were burnt, the assemblage is presumably domestic refuse. This is supported by pottery fragments and carbonised plant remains from ditch [40014]. The fact that some remains were identifiable shows that there is potential for archaeozoological research in future mitigation projects.

**8 CHARRED PLANT REMAINS** by Sander Aerts BA MSc

One environmental soil sample of 40 litres from (40011), fill of ditch [40014] has been analysed for charred plant remains. The sample was processed in its entirety at MOLA Northampton through manual flotation, using a siraf tank fitted with a 1 millimetre nylon mesh and a 500 micron sieve to retrieve the flot. The remains were identified using the MOLA Northampton reference collection for grains and Bekker and Cappers (2006), with the aid of a low-powered binocular microscope.

The sample contained a relatively large number of domesticated grains, which were found in both the flot and the 10-2 millimetre fraction. Some of these were identified as wheat (*Triticum* sp.), although most grains were too distorted due to combustion during heating to identify, and could be either wheat or barley (*Hordeum*). A small number morphologically resembled oat (*Avena* sp.). The observations are summarised in table 1.

Table 3. Carbonised grains from (40011), fill of ditch [40014]

	Flot	10-2 mm
<i>Triticum</i> sp.	7	6
cf <i>Hordeum</i> sp.	1	-
<i>Triticum/Hordeum</i> sp.	19	30
cf <i>Avena</i> sp.	-	3

The preservation and presence of the grains in this sample show potential for archaeobotanical analysis during future mitigation projects. It may hold implications on the crop cultivation, food processing and waste disposal on the site.

**9 DISCUSSION**

The excavation of 19 trenches revealed the presence of archaeology within all but two of them. These features took the form of mostly shallow linear ditches likely dated to the Iron Age and Roman period although some ditches relate to more recent post-medieval activity. Due to the widespread presence of archaeology it is difficult to pinpoint any area of focused activity although a slightly greater presence of archaeology has been noted within the north-western area of the site.

The geophysical survey proved for the most part to be accurate in determining the presence of the larger ditches however the shallower ditches were not detected on the survey across the site. The geological features detected on the survey were not visible within the trenches.

Many of the original aims and objectives highlighted within the WSI (Rees 2010) will need to be looked at in greater detail during the mitigation and addressed within later reports as they are unable to be address at this interim stage for Phase 1E Earls Barton Quarry.

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