



# Clifton Meadows, Church Farm, Overy Mead, Little Wittenham Wood

Archaeological Mitigation Report

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Clifton Meadows, Church Farm, Overy Mead, Little Wittenham  
Wood

Archaeological Mitigation Report

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River of Life II project team

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## Purpose of document

This document has been prepared as an Archaeological Mitigation Report for the Earth Trust. Due to the high archaeological potential within the development area of the River of Life II project, Oxford County Archaeology Services advised a programme of archaeological investigation in order for the development to comply with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF 2019), which was carried out in accordance with the relevant Standards and guidance of the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CIfA 2014). The purpose of this document is to provide a comprehensive account of the fieldwork undertaken between June and September 2021. It is supported by an easily accessible online database of all written and drawn records. The results presented in this report detail that work and have been circulated for peer review and consultation with the wider specialist team.

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## Project summary

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## Executive summary

DigVentures was commissioned by the Earth Trust to undertake the archaeological mitigation at Clifton Meadows, Church Farm, Overy Mead and Little Wittenham Wood, as part of the River of Life II project. The 'River of Life II' project is focused on developing a wetland landscape comprising pools and wet woodland environments within areas of the floodplain of the River Thames and River Thame.

Following geoarchaeological boreholes (Law 2019), geophysical survey (Whittingham 2019), and a programme of archaeological evaluation trial trenching (Jago et al 2019), an archaeological strip map and sample along with a watching brief was carried out throughout the ground reduction aspects of the main excavation of the work (DigVentures project code: ROL21). The overarching aims and objectives for the archaeological strip, map and sample was to establish the character, date, state of preservation, and extent of any archaeological remains should they be encountered within the areas impacted through the development area (Casswell and Hogue 2020).

The aims were to:

- corroborate chronological phasing for the sites.
- understand the nature of typical and atypical features encountered.
- evaluate the results of the geophysical survey.
- establish the current state of survival of archaeology deposits.
- situate the sites into a wider research context.

The archaeological monitoring incorporated a synthesis of results from earlier stages of work. The archaeological mitigation has achieved the defined aims by helping to understand the archaeological resource in the wider landscape and provide necessary details for formulating recommendations for future work.

## Results summary

Monitoring of ground works at Clifton Meadows, Church Farm, Overy Mead, and Little Wittenham Wood began on the 3rd June 2021 and extended through to the 1st September 2021, undertaken as part of the River of Life II project. The monitoring took place across areas that had been agreed with Richard Oram of OCAS based on results from the programme of targeted evaluation trenches (Jago et al 2019) designed to investigate features identified from geophysical survey (Whittingham 2019) within the proposed development areas.

All data was recorded by project archaeologists using pro-forma primary records, including context records for all deposits, cuts, and features; GPS plans and levels; section drawings of features and digital photographs of all contexts. The site archive has been digitised and will be deposited with the Archaeological Data Service (ADS).

At Clifton Meadows, wetland pond and backwaters totalling 2,153m<sup>2</sup> were continuously monitored during the excavation stage. These areas were positioned to avoid geophysical anomalies or potential features encountered during the previous surveys and evaluation. No archaeological features were revealed in any of the areas monitored. A great deal of insight was gained in terms of the rapid nature of alluvial deposition for the area. Most noteworthy was the fact that all signs of truncation of the alluvium from the evaluation trenches from July 2019 had been diffused in just two years; only the cut into the gravel terrace was discernible.



At Church Farm, the area for Backwater 5 totalling 1266m<sup>2</sup> was monitored during the excavation stage. A possible trackway comprised of two possible ditches in the evaluation stage of works identified to the west of the site was more clearly characterised, proving to be a modern field drain to the east and possible rooting from a hedgerow or a slump in the gravel terrace to the east.

At Overy Mead, areas totalling 320m<sup>2</sup> were continuously monitored during the excavation stage. Any archaeological features identified in the evaluation stage were intentionally avoided with the placement of the development site, which encountered no archaeological deposits during the work. The only material recovered was a single block of sandstone which was recovered out of the existing pond. This was likely waste material used in the maintenance of the bridge which is located approximately 50-60m away and is made from a similar stone material. There were no obvious markings and it was irregular in shape, therefore it is possible that it was deemed unsuitable or unnecessary for use.

At Little Wittenham Wood, areas totalling 286m<sup>2</sup> were continuously monitored during the tree stump removal and the excavation stage. No archaeological features were identified during the monitoring of the excavation of these ponds.

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Project background

1.1.1 DigVentures was appointed by the Earth's Trust (hereafter the Client) to undertake an archaeological strip map and sample and watching brief at the sites of Clifton Meadows, Church Farm, Overy Mead, and Little Wittenham Wood as part of the River of Life II project. The project includes the development of a wetland landscape comprising ponds and backwater channels within areas of the floodplain of the River Thames and River Thame. The programme of works has been prepared in consultation with Richard Oram, Planning Archaeologist for Oxfordshire County Archaeological Services (hereafter OCAS) (planning application references P19/S4697/FUL and P19/S4408/FUL). Prior to this Strip, Map and Record stage, the project area has been subject to a preplanning phase including archaeological evaluation (Jago et al 2019), geoarchaeological assessment (Law 2019), magnetic gradient survey (Whittingham 2019) and desk-based assessment at Little Wittenham Wood (Hogue 2019). These were all undertaken in advance of this final stage of work to inform the archaeological mitigation strategy for the development of each habitat area.

1.1.2 The development area of the River of Life II project, centred on SU 55680 95737, comprises four habitat creation areas, Clifton Meadows, Church Farm, Overy Mead and Little Wittenham Wood. Two of the sites, Clifton Meadows and Church Farm, are located along the southern and western bank of the River Thames to the west of Dorchester-on-Thames, Oxfordshire. The third, Overy Mead, is situated to the east of Dorchester on the banks of the River Thame, a tributary of the River Thames. The fourth, Little Wittenham Wood is located on the southern bank of the River Thames south of Dorchester-on-Thames, Oxfordshire and on the foothills of Wittenham Clumps.

1.1.3 Due to the significant archaeological potential of the site, OCAS advised a programme of archaeological investigation to comply with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF 2019), which was carried out in accordance with the relevant Standards and guidance of the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CIfA 2014). The results presented in this report detail that work and have been circulated for peer review and consultation with the wider specialist team.

1.1.4 This report is one of several archive and dissemination products that have been generated by the project, including the digital archive and metadata, the paper archive and the artefacts recovered, recorded and processed. All archive material is currently held by DigVentures and will, when the project is completed, be deposited with the Oxfordshire Museums Service and ADS.

### 1.2 Site location and geology

1.2.1 Clifton Meadows is located at NGR SU 55680 95737. It comprises three fields, known as Little Mead, Clifton Meadow and Thomas's Meadow, situated along the south bank of the River Thames, opposite the village of Burcot and to the northwest of Dorchester-on-Thames, Oxfordshire (Figure 1). The fields lie along the southern flood plain of the River Thames, across land currently used for pasture.

- 1.2.2 Church Farm is situated to the west of the River Thames in Oxfordshire (centred at NGR SU 569 943) and is approximately 1 km to the west of Dorchester-on-Thames. The site encompasses three fields of pasture, known as Little Town, Meadows Furlong and Great Meadows, and cover an area of approximately 15.1 ha. The site is bordered in the east by the River Thames and fencing and hedgerows on all other sides (Figure 1).
- 1.2.3 Overy Mead sits to the north of the River Thames, to the east of the River Thame in Oxfordshire (centred at NGR SU 580 936) and immediately to the south-east of Dorchester-on-Thames. The site encompasses two fields of meadow, known as Old Bridge Meadow and Overy Mead Piece, and covers an area of approximately 3.6ha. The site is bordered to the south by the River Thames, the west by the River Thame and dense vegetation, and by a stone wall to the north and by fencing in the east (Figure 1).
- 1.2.4 Little Wittenham Wood is centered on NGR SU 57226 92832. It is located within an area of ancient woodland located on the south bank of the River Thames and approximately 5km northeast of Didcot, South Oxfordshire. Little Wittenham Wood is situated on the distinctive chalk ridge of the Sinodun Hills immediately north of the well-preserved hillfort of Castle Hill. Together with 'Wittenham Clumps' and Long Wittenham Wood it forms a distinctive and prominent landscape feature visible as a landmark over a wide area.
- 1.2.5 The geology is shown as Upper Greensand – sandstone and siltstone (BGS 2019). Streams rise 200-300m south of the south end of the proposed development and drain south-eastwards towards Brightwell. The land at the south end of the proposed development is often wet and was shown as 'liable to flooding' on early OS maps before drainage was improved. The bedrock geology of Little Wittenham Wood comprises of sedimentary rocks of mudstone belonging to the Gault Formation and glauconitic sands of the Upper Greensand Formation. No superficial geology has been recorded (BGS 2019).

## 2 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

### 2.1 Clifton Meadows

- 2.1.1 The earliest indication of human activity at the site dates to the Palaeolithic, with a single findspot of a flint flake recovered at Burcot, 200m north of the River Thame (MOX6072). Fieldwalking undertaken by Oxford Archaeology suggested that later Mesolithic activity was represented by a 'light scattering' of activity in region but with no significant concentrations (Allen and Munby 2006, 352). Two Mesolithic tranchet axes were found at Northfield Farm (MOX11078) and a flint scatter was collected in the 1980s (MOX6092), just south of the southern field boundary of Thomas' Meadow, comprising 21 objects including flakes, cores and microlith and an axe. The same area was subject to trial excavations, but no archaeological features were recorded. Excavations undertaken in 1969 in Scabbs Field, north of Northfield Farm, revealed a penannular ring ditch including Bronze Age ceramics and a possible cremation (Gray 1977, cited in Allen et al 2006, 9). The investigations at Northfield Farm also recorded a series of enclosures interpreted as pre-Roman and a north to south trackway, and the extent and complexity of cropmarks around the location of the farm led to the

area to the south of Clifton meadow being designated as a scheduled monument (List entry 1002925).

- 2.1.2 An extensive series of cropmarks to the south of Clifton Meadows and west of Church Farm reveals a landscape which has been utilised and settled since early prehistory. Interpretation of the cropmarks by Miles (1977, cited in Allen et al 2006, 3) and Baker (1999, cited in Allen et al 2006, 3) has suggested the presence of a Neolithic henge, early Bronze Age barrows, an extensive Bronze Age field system, Iron Age settlement and a Roman trackway with settlement alongside (Allen et al 2006, 9 and fig 1.3). Archaeological trenching in Clifton Meadows recorded the presence of the Roman trackway at three locations (Oxford Archaeology Trenches 12, 20 and 21), identifying two ditches running parallel on a north-south alignment. At the southernmost trench, Trench 12, the trackway ditches were overlain by 0.3m of deposits. At Trench 20, towards the centre of the field, the ditches were overlain by 0.5m of alluvial deposits and excavated to approximately 0.6m deep, 1.1m to the base from the land surface. No artefacts were recovered from the ditch features but waterlogged seeds from the basal layer were 14C dated to 80-250 cal AD (Allen and Munby 2006, 317). At the northernmost trench excavated (Trench 21), features were far more ephemeral, although the presence of an undated linear feature was recorded at a depth of 1m which followed the alignment of the western ditch of the trackway.
- 2.1.3 At Clifton Meadows, the geophysical survey provided further evidence for archaeological activity, in the form of several series of positive linear / curvi-linear responses and trends. The Roman trackway was clearly visible, continuing on a north-south trajectory through the field and almost meeting the southern bank of the River Thames. In addition to the archaeological features, a negative linear response was picked up in Little Mead, running east-west and extending into Clifton Meadows. This feature aligned with an area identified as a putative palaeochannel following work undertaken by Oxford Archaeology (Whittingham 2019).
- 2.1.4 Fieldwalking to the east of the area recovered flint dating to the late Mesolithic, Neolithic and early Bronze Age, and a scattering of Roman pottery and SBM, probably reflecting the peripheral location of the field examined to Northfield Farm (Field 3, Allen and Munby 2006, 330). The Roman trackways (MOX24186) running both north-south and east-west indicate a major communication links across the gravel terraces. Post Roman evidence is less comprehensively studied but Lambrick noted visible ridge and furrow over much to the gravel terrace (Gray 1977, cited in Allen 2006, 9).

## 2.2 Church Farm

- 2.2.1 Fewer finds have been recorded in the immediate vicinity of the Church Farm area, although the presence of an undated ring ditch recorded (MOX7358) to the northwest of Little Town field confirms the region was utilised to some extent. Fieldwalking undertaken as part of the Oxford Archaeology investigations to the southwest of the area examined a series of undated cropmarks (Field 5, Allen and Munby, 2006). Finds recovered included worked flint of Mesolithic, Neolithic and Bronze Age date, sherds of prehistoric pottery of later Bronze age and Iron Age date, a dense scatter of Roman pottery and a few sherds of Saxon pottery (ibid). To the west, cropmarks also suggest a linear feature running east to west, which is potentially part of the Roman series of trackways that are visible across the area (Allen and Munby, 2006). Immediately opposite, on the eastern bank of the Thames, Roman rectilinear enclosures are

situated at right angles to the river, with single finds spots of Iron Age pottery (MOX7246) and evidence for Saxon occupation and an inhumation cemetery (MOX11050), suggesting a concentration of multiple phases of activity in the area. Slightly further south but also on the eastern bank opposite Church Farm, evidence for prehistoric pits and a ring ditch was also recorded during gravel extraction in 1973 (MOX7319).

2.2.2 At Church Fields, the geophysical survey provided further possible evidence for archaeological activity in the form of positive linear / curvi-linear responses and trends. However, many anomalies highlighted by the geophysics have been attributed to modern services or land drainage. In addition, the fields showed a variable background with broad/diffuse positive and negative anomalies that were related to natural features/variations, including palaeochannel deposits (Whittingham 2019).

### 2.3 Overy Mead

2.3.1 A similarly low level of archaeological evidence has been recorded around the site at Overy Mead, although magnetometry survey published in 2011 revealed an extensive series of roadside enclosures linked to the Roman town of Dorchester (Ainslie 2011). The Roman road apparent in the survey, crosses the northern part of the Overy Mead site and potentially links with a Roman street which Frere identified during excavations located in allotments which were, at the time, threatened by housing development (Frere 1984, 91). The line of the street also appears to be reflected in the location of the earlier river crossing and site of the medieval Dorchester Bridge (MOX27265), first mentioned in 1146 and destroyed in 1816.

2.3.2 At Overy Mead, the geophysical survey provided further possible evidence for archaeological activity in the form of positive linear/curvi-linear responses and trends. However, anomalies highlighted by the geophysics have been attributed to modern services or land drainage. In addition, the fields showed a variable background with broad / diffuse positive and negative anomalies that were related to natural features / variations, including palaeochannel deposits (Whittingham 2019).

### 2.4 Little Wittenham Wood

2.4.1 Desk-based assessment revealed evidence of human activity spanning from the Mesolithic through to the present day within the 1 km study area, although direct evidence of activity was limited within the Site itself (Hogue 2019). No in situ archaeological features have been identified previously and there is relatively low potential for detecting archaeological remains as much of the area is likely masked by a thick sequence of fine-grained alluvial deposits related to the River Thames (BGS 2019).

2.4.2 Evidence of Later Prehistoric activity in the area is especially common for the Later Bronze Age and Early – Middle Iron Age. Most notably the site sits at the foot of Castle Hill (HE Entry No. 1006364), an Iron Age hillfort associated with extensive settlement to the southwest (Lambrick 2014). Previous archaeological interventions have concentrated on land to the south and west of Castle Hill and as such suggestions that the foci of settlement laid to the southwest may be misleading (cf. Allen et al. 2010). Dense woodland cover to the north and within the vicinity of the site restricts the use of non-invasive archaeological techniques and no ground proofing of the settlement

distribution has been provided through intrusive archaeological excavations. If the watercourse running through the site existed in antiquity, then it may have formed a focus for human activity and a natural routeway from Castle Hill to the River Thames.

- 2.4.3 Evidence of Roman, Early Medieval, Medieval, and Post-Medieval activity is relatively limited although isolated discoveries have been made nearby to the site and at the foot of Castle Hill. Historic Landscape Characterisation indicated that most of the site is covered by ancient woodland and cartographic sources support this assumption indicating that it was forested from at least the 18th century AD. However, LiDAR suggests ridge-and-furrow underlies the woodland to the east of the streams, sluices and embankment perhaps indicating much of the area was farmland and only more relatively recently forested. Irrespective, whether farmland or forested the archaeological potential is relatively low for the Early Medieval, Medieval and Post-Medieval era.

### 3 RESULTS OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

#### 3.1 Introduction

- 3.1.1 The following section details the results of pre-planning archaeological evaluation trenching at Clifton Meadows, Church Farm and Overy Mead, as part of the River of Life II project (Jago et al 2019). Previous works have not been undertaken at Little Wittenham Woods due to the overgrown nature of the site, although desk-based assessment provided detailed baseline information about the archaeological potential of the location, summarised above (Hogue 2019).

#### 3.2 Clifton Meadows

- 3.2.1 The archaeology recorded during the 2019 evaluation was relatively sparse at Clifton Meadows. A series of linear anomalies observed on the geophysical survey were targeted for investigation (Whittingham 2019), exposing a couple of ditches which most likely bounded the edges of a trackway and associated finds suggest that the feature is Roman dating from the C1st – C2nd AD (Jago et al 2019). A number of isolated geophysical responses were also targeted for further investigation, identifying a small number of features including a linear and three circular cut features, although none provided dating evidence. A large timber was recovered that may have been set or driven-in from the ground above, which was likely structural serving as a post/pile base. Most of the features suggest that activity took place when conditions were relatively wet, with the trackway bounded by drainage ditches.
- 3.2.2 All the archaeological features were masked and deeply buried by alluvium, with the uppermost archaeological horizon between 0.89 – 1.00 m below ground level, 45.55-45.66 m AOD. Even though the archaeology was encountered at a similar depth throughout Clifton Meadows, the underlying strata was highly variable, with archaeological features overlying alluvium, peat or river terrace gravels. This likely reflected variation in the underlying superficial geology. Interpolation of the available stratigraphic data suggests that the underlying river terrace gravels vary between approximately 45.1 to 45.6 m AOD (Jago et al 2019, Figure 12). Most of the archaeology was concentrated and survived where the underlying river terrace gravels are relatively high, along the route of the Roman trackway and this area may have been an advantageous choice for a trackway as it would have been slightly higher

above the floodplain. Conversely, the greatest potential for understanding the past environment resides with the peat horizons which survived only towards the east of Clifton Meadows, where they may fill a depression or palaeochannel in the underlying river terrace gravels.

- 3.2.3 Based on the sparsity of the archaeological features it appears likely that the activity on the site was relatively limited and at the periphery of the Roman settlement identified to the south of Clifton Meadow (Allen et al 2006, 9 and fig 1.3). The identified Roman trackway has been previously investigated through excavation and the age of the feature established through radiocarbon dating of environmental remains (Allen and Munby 2006, 317). The recent excavations provide the only finds from trackway and refine the age of the trackway indicating that it dates to the C1st – C2nd AD. Based on the results of the archaeological interventions, geophysical investigation and aerial photographic data it is highly probable that the trackway survives across Clifton Meadows up near to the river. However, it remains unclear what happens to the trackway at its most northern extent, at the southern edge of the River Thames. It is plausible that the trackway once served a river crossing-point (Forster et al. 2019a) and the archaeological resource may be of some regional significance for establishing the location of river crossing-points and the nature of riverine settlement along the River Thames during the Roman period, topics identified as needing further focused research in the Solent-Thames Research Framework for the Historic Environment (Heys and Hind 2014, 184).

### 3.3 Church Farm

- 3.3.1 At Church Farm, the 2019 excavations revealed a couple of ditches which, as at Clifton Meadows, are likely to mark the edges of a trackway that ran broadly parallel to the River Thames, curving slightly along its north – south alignment (Forster et al. 2019b). Even though the geophysical results were mostly inconclusive, the trackway was partially observable as negative curvi-linear responses in Little Town Field at the north of Church Farm (Whittingham, 2019). In Trench 26, intercutting linear and circular features were also identified, corresponding with an area of strong positive response and linear/curvi-linear anomalies. None of these features could be excavated due to wet conditions, although appeared likely to be drainage ditches cutting through earlier pits. In Trenches 37, a linear feature was identified that likely served as a drainage ditch, it did not correspond with any anomalies identified on the geophysical survey. No finds were recovered from any of the features in Church Farm, as such the chronological phasing for the archaeological features is unclear. However, the intercutting nature of the features suggest at least two phases of activity. Many of the features suggest that activity took place when conditions were relatively wet, with the ditches in-filled gradually by alluvium suggesting they likely functioned as drainage. In general, activity appears likely to have been relatively ephemeral. However, the identification of pit features truncated by later ditches suggests an earlier phase of activity.
- 3.3.2 As at Clifton Meadow, the archaeology was relatively sparse at Church Farm. All the archaeological deposits were covered by alluvium, with the archaeology exposed between 0.53 – 0.90 m below ground level, 46.02 – 45.65 m AOD. Most of the archaeological features were cut into the underlying river terrace gravels. Interpolation of the available stratigraphic data suggests that the underlying river terrace gravels varies between approximately 44.6 to 46.0 m AOD (Jago et al 2019, Figure 13). All

archaeology was identified to the western half of the Site, where the underlying river terrace gravels are relatively high and as a result overlying thicknesses of alluvium relatively shallow. An absence of archaeology to towards the east of the site, increased thickness of alluvium, and relatively deeply buried river terrace gravels suggests that the area was much wetter and less suitable for habitation in antiquity.

3.3.3 Based on the sparsity of the archaeological features it appears that activity was relatively limited. None of the features were datable and as such no absolute chronology can be established. However, intercutting features indicate at least two phases of activity. Evidence of human activity is relatively sparse in the immediate vicinity, although fieldwalking has recovered finds dating from the Mesolithic, Neolithic, Bronze Age, Iron Age, Roman and early Medieval periods (Allen and Munby, 2006). To the west, an E-W aligned linear cropmark has been identified from aerial photographs, which may potentially be part of series of trackways dating to the Roman period (Allen and Munby, 2006, fig 14.7). The trackway identified during the archaeological evaluation may potentially be part of this Roman series of trackways and was superficially comparable with the Roman trackway uncovered at Clifton Meadows.

#### 3.4 Overy Mead

3.4.1 At Overy Mead the 2019 evaluation trenching was distributed to investigate the nature of archaeological remains in the area, with the site located potentially on the alignment of a Roman street and an extensive series of roadside enclosures identified to the north and east of the area (Forster et al. 2019c). Layers of made ground were identified at the base of the sequence containing Roman pottery sherds dating from the 1st-century AD, overlain by a series of layers reflecting the alternation of episodes of intentional causeway maintenance/construction and subsequent accumulation. The archaeological deposits relating to the causeway were exposed immediately below ground level, 46.13 – 46.33m AOD. No dating evidence was recovered from the causeway and all archaeology identified was concentrated to the northwest of the site.

3.4.2 Previous geophysical survey results were inconclusive for Overy Mead (Whittingham 2019), however archaeological evaluation indicates survival of significant archaeological deposits associated with the building up of the ground level during the Roman period. An extensive series of Roman roadside enclosures were identified from magnetometry survey to the east of Overy Mead (Ainslie 2011, fig 1) and raising of the ground level may have been related to activities such as land reclamation and/or flood alleviation. No evidence of a Roman street was identified, as projected from magnetometry survey and excavations located in the centre of Dorchester-on-Thames (Frere 1984, 91). Nonetheless, Overy Mead is well located for helping to better understand the extent of settlement associated with Dorchester-on-Thames, which represents an opportunity to explore the diversity of settlement patterns during the Roman era (Hey and Hind, 2014, 161). No datable evidence was recovered from the causeway, but it has previously been considered based as relating to the earlier river crossing, first mentioned in 1146 AD and replaced in the early-19th century AD (Selway Richards, 2011).

### 3.5 Little Wittenham Wood

- 3.5.1 Due to the dense woodland coverage of the impacted areas at Little Wittenham Wood, previous invasive archaeological work has not been undertaken. However, an archaeological desk-based assessment was carried out (Hogue 2019) that identified evidence of human activity from the Mesolithic through to the present day within the study area. It was shown that the extant watercourse running through the proposed development had the potential to have been a focus for human activity and possible routeway from Castle Hill to the River Thames (Hogue 2019).

## 4 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

### 4.1 Archaeological aims

- 4.1.1 The development area of the River of Life II project is situated in a landscape with evidence for settlement and use since early prehistory. Each of the four locations demonstrates varying archaeological potential, evidenced through previous investigation and desk-based research. The archaeological strip, map and record will seek to establish the character, date, state of preservation, and extent of any archaeological remains encountered within the areas impacted through the development area.

- 4.1.2 The archaeological aims listed below take account of the aims and objectives set out in the Regional Research Framework for the Solent-Thames Region (Hey and Hind 2014). The archaeological works undertaken at each of the areas included in the development are designed to achieve the following:

- 4.2 **Aim 1 – To record, with sufficient detail, archaeological features impacted through the development of the site, and to establish the extent, nature and chronology of any recorded archaeology.**

Q1. Can we corroborate chronological phasing for archaeological features impacted at the Site?

Q2. What are the typical and atypical features of the area under investigation, and did this influence the functions and activities that took place?

- 4.3 **Aim 2 - To investigate the nature of surviving archaeological deposits, and the presence of deposits masking archaeological material.**

Q3. How well do deposits and artefacts survive, and how deeply are they buried?

Q4. What is the current state of the archaeological and palaeoenvironmental material across the site?

Q5. Can the palaeoenvironmental data recovered from sampling in the trenches inform us about past land use and activity?

## 5 METHODOLOGY

### 5.1 Monitoring of archaeological works

- 5.1.1 Archaeological work was undertaken on the commencement of groundwork. All work was undertaken with prior written approval of the scope of works and methodology





employed via submission of an area specific WSIs to the Planning Archaeologist, Oxfordshire County Council (Casswell and Hogue 2020).

- 5.1.2 DigVentures informed OCAS prior to the commencement of fieldwork. The strategy for archaeological monitoring, including the size and location of archaeological areas to be monitored was discussed in advance with Richard Oram, Planning Archaeologist, OCAS and is included below. Each area was stripped of topsoil mechanically under archaeological supervision and down to the archaeological horizon. Due to the nature of deposits and proximity to the river, there was a high probability that areas excavated would be inundated with water. Therefore, the archaeological methodology required a managed process of stripping – with enough flexibility to adapt to rising water levels – followed by immediate record and sampling of revealed archaeological features. Any presumed archaeological features were cleaned and excavated by hand to the level of natural deposits, where it was safe to do so.
- 5.1.3 Due to enhanced restrictions because of Covid-19, no site monitoring visit was undertaken in person to inspect the archaeological works. Instead, weekly email updates with plans and photos were sent to Richard Oram of OCAS to facilitate remote inspection and monitoring throughout the archaeological investigations. Variations to the WSI and method statements were agreed in advance with the Client and OCAS. No areas of archaeological investigation were handed back to the Client until formally signed off by OCAS.
- 5.1.4 All work complied with ClfA *Standard and guidance for archaeological field evaluation* (2014). All works were undertaken in accordance with the standards set out within the WSI provided by DigVentures (Casswell and Hogue 2020) and the requirements of OCAS. The Client afforded reasonable access so that all archaeological features and deposits revealed during excavations and groundwork could be investigated and recorded appropriately.
- 5.1.5 Expected depths of the archaeological horizons and the potential for encountering archaeological remains was calculated based on the evaluation results (Jago et al 2019). Archaeological potential was determined based on the results of the evaluation trial trenching and the maximum construction depth, with values assigned as follows:
- None – Top of archaeology is below the maximum depth of excavation.
  - Low – No archaeology was encountered during the evaluation stage and no significant remains are expected.
  - Medium – Low levels of archaeology were encountered during the evaluation stage and it is anticipated that similar results may be found.
  - High – Multiple archaeological features were encountered during the evaluation stage and it is expected that more will be found.
- 5.1.6 In areas of high and medium potential a Strip, Map and Record was required, and where the potential is deemed to be low, a Watching Brief. Where the maximum depth of excavation was not to exceed the top of the archaeological horizon, no further archaeological work was required. If archaeological features were exposed at the level of impact, a full strip, map and record or watching brief methodology was to be undertaken as appropriate (see sections 5.2 and 5.3).

5.1.7 Once the area was cleared of any archaeological remains and recorded appropriately, the site archive will be made available via DigVentures website. Any variations to the WSI and Method Statement were agreed in advance with the Client and OCAS.

## 5.2 Archaeological Strip, Map and Record methodology

5.2.1 All work complied with *CifA Standard and guidance for archaeological field evaluation* (2014). All works were undertaken in accordance with the standards set out within the WSI provided by DigVentures (Caswell and Hogue 2020) and the requirements of OCAS. The Client afforded reasonable access so that all archaeological features and deposits revealed during excavations and groundwork could be investigated and recorded appropriately.

5.2.2 All areas were stripped of overburden deposits with a mechanical excavator under continuous archaeological supervision from outside the exclusion zone of the excavator, down to the first archaeological horizon. All machine excavation was carried out using a ditched bucket and once each area had been stripped to depth, access was agreed with the construction contractor for archaeologists to enter the area so it could be cleaned and recorded in plan and investigated appropriately.

5.2.3 Ground water levels were expected to be high and it was known that most areas would become inundated with water within hours of them being open. Where features were excavated down to the depth of the archaeology within one day, it was expected that there would be enough time to enable investigations to take place before the water level encroached to cover the remains in the area. However, where ponds and backwater channels would take more than one day to excavate, a staged approach to the stripping was employed. Each area was split into manageable sections able to be excavated by machine in one day (around 250-300m<sup>3</sup>) and a physical barrier of unexcavated ground was left in situ between it and the area underwater from the earlier areas reduced. A team of at least two professional archaeologists were then able to record the area, investigating archaeological remains encountered prior to inundation by water. Work continued in this manner until the entire area of the proposed water feature was fully excavated, with the exception of the unexcavated areas between sections, which were subject to a watching brief upon removal.

5.2.4 Where archaeological excavation of features was possible, a sufficient sample of each feature type/deposit was examined in order to attempt to establish the date, nature, extent and condition of the archaeological remains, using the following percentage interventions:

- 100% excavation of structural remains and other areas of significant and specific activity (domestic, industrial, religious, hearths, 'special'/patterned deposits in pits or ditches etc.).
- 10% of non-structural linear features, including all intersections, terminals and at least one 'clean' intersection to minimise the risk of intrusive and/or residual finds.
- 50% sample of all pits.
- All post and stake holes that relate to specialised activities will be subject to a 100% sample.
- Post and stake holes that do not relate to specialised activities will be subject to a 50% sample.

### 5.3 Archaeological watching brief methodology

5.3.1 All work complied with ClfA Standard and guidance for archaeological field evaluation (2014). All works were undertaken in accordance with the standards set out within the WSI provided by DigVentures (Caswell and Hogue 2020) and the requirements of OCAS. The Client afforded reasonable access so that all archaeological features and deposits revealed during excavations and groundwork could be investigated and recorded appropriately.

5.3.2 All areas which were identified as requiring a watching brief were stripped of overburden deposits with a mechanical excavator while being continuously monitored by a professional archaeologist from outside the exclusion zone of the excavator. Any time archaeological remains were thought to be encountered, the archaeologist communicated with the machine operator to enable safe access to the area so that an assessment of the remains could be undertaken. Anything requiring investigation was rapidly assessed and recorded so that there was as little disruption to the project construction programme as possible.

### 5.4 Finds and environmental samples

5.4.1 Only modern material which was of no archaeological significance was observed and therefore not retained. The material was recorded in photographs and dimensions were taken (see Appendix A for detailed finds data of modern material not retained). The material observed was as follows: modern fencing composed of wooden posts still in the ground, but rotted off just below the topsoil, as well as the remains of the upper portion of the wire fence, pushed aside by the machine into the overgrowth (located in Clifton Meadows - Backwater 3, see Figure 7) and unfaced sandstone, similar to the material for the bridge into Dorchester, possibly from maintenance work on the bridge (Overy Mead - Backwater 7). Where encountered, this material was recorded and discarded in situ (again, see Appendix A for detailed finds data of modern material not retained).

5.4.2 No bulk environmental soil samples were taken as none of the deposits were considered to be appropriately sealed or demonstrated sufficient archaeological potential.

## 6 EXCAVATION RESULTS

### 6.1 Introduction

6.1.1 The principal purpose of the archaeological monitoring was to ensure any potential archaeology in the area was identified and recorded with sufficient detail, should it have been encountered, to establish the extent, nature and chronology of archaeology (Aim 1), and investigate the nature of surviving archaeological deposits, and the presence of deposits masking archaeological material (Aim 2). Figures 2–5 show the boundaries for each of the pond or backwater areas monitored. A detailed description of each context is included in Appendix 1. Each description is organised by area number, which corresponds to the pond or backwater number, e.g. "B2" for Backwater 2, or "P9" for Pond 9.

## 6.2 Stratigraphic sequence

6.2.1 In total, seven backwaters and 12 ponds were excavated and monitored across the four defined areas (see Figures 1 – 6):

- Backwater 1 - 4 and Ponds 1 - 9 at Clifton Meadows,
- Backwater 5 at Church Farm
- Backwater 6 - 7 at Overy Mead
- Pond 1 - 3 at Little Wittenham Wood, although these were recorded as one area as they were all interconnected.

6.2.2 A common stratigraphic sequence was recognised across Clifton Meadows and Church Farm, and similarities were seen in Overy Mead in accordance with the results from both the evaluation (Jago et al 2019) and borehole investigations (Law 2019). For example, B5 comprised (B5.01) i.e. "topsoil", overlying (B5.02) and (B5.03) i.e. "alluvial deposits", overlying (B5.06) i.e. "river terrace gravels". Peat was also observed at Clifton Meadows and Church Farm in particularly water rich areas or those nearest the river or water channels cutting through the landscape. The stratigraphic sequence fluctuated in depth across the sites predominantly due to proximity to the river, with areas closer to the river having thicker alluvial deposits. The significance of the depth of the stratigraphic sequence is explored fully in the discussion below (Section 8).

## 6.3 Clifton Meadows (Figures 2-3, and 7)

6.3.1 Backwater 1 - 4 and Ponds 1 - 9 were located within the area of Clifton Meadows. An evaluation trench from 2019 (Trench 25) located in Backwater 4 had yield evidence of what was suggested to be a possible Roman post. This recovery of a waterlogged wooden post came from the deposits which lay within the excavation area at its deepest point (Jago et al 2019). Linear anomalies were observed during the 2019 evaluation trenching in Trenches 13 and 14, this was noted as an area of high potential for a possible river crossing.

6.3.2 The area that had the highest potential for a river crossing was removed as part of the 2021 works in Clifton Meadows. The 2021 monitoring exercise did not provide any additional information regarding the possible river crossing.

6.3.3 In the western part of Clifton Meadows (Figure 2), the need for monitoring remained focused on the linear features identified in the geophysical survey and ensuring no associated features or material was encountered. No evidence to support or refute the presence of material associated with these linear features was observed in the monitored areas, as most excavation areas were intentionally placed to avoid interference with known features.

6.3.4 The only significant observation during monitoring in Clifton Meadows was the observation that all of the evaluation trenches which fell within the areas monitored showed the same phenomena that was seen in B4, which is to say that there was no evidence visible in the alluvium of the evaluation trenches excavated two years prior. The evidence of these trenches were, however, seen in the gravels in areas where excavations reached down through the alluvium and into the gravels.

6.3.5 The only material evidence encountered in any of the areas monitored in the 2021 exercise was seen during the excavation of the culvert for B3. A row of seven wooden fence posts (B3.01-B3.07) were revealed during the incremental strip. Because they were sawed off to be flat at the base with a bitumen treatment, it is likely that they would have been set into the lower alluvial deposit (B3.10), and extended into the upper alluvial deposit (B3.09), however, no cut or fill was visible so this lends support to them having been pile-driven. They were seen to have rotted away just below topsoil level, and showed their best preservation roughly where the water table began leeching alluvial deposits (where the colour of the alluvium changed to a bluish grey from the orangey brown). It should be noted that at places these were less than 0.1m from the exposed, open-air surface and a modern rotten fence with cross-slats was observed in the overgrowth in the immediate vicinity with very similar dimensions to that of the wood seen represented in B3.01-B3.07, thus it appeared clear that these were associated, modern features. The in situ wooden posts were recorded but not retained (see Figure 7 and detailed description in Table 1) and photos of the modern, extant fence were taken and can be made available upon request. Another modern, barbed wire fence with round wood posts, with ends which came to a point rather than sawed flat like the ones observed in B3.01-B3.07 (likely to allow for easy of driving into the ground) was also observed and photographed for evidence of the various land maintenance efforts seen discarded in situ during this monitoring action.

#### 6.4 Church Farm (Figures 4 and 8)

6.4.1 Backwater 5 was located in Church Farm (Figure 4). Although the evaluation trenching provided unclear results at Church Farm, the site is immediately adjacent to an area of heavy use in prehistoric through to Roman times, with a convincing trackway projected to run through the western edge of the excavation area. Despite potential features being discovered in the evaluation stage, due to the very wet conditions, none of these were able to be characterised with any confidence. No finds were recovered from any of the deposits.

6.4.2 A series of linear anomalies observed on the geophysical survey were targeted for further investigation and exposed as a couple of possible ditches in Trenches 26-29, 32 and 38 during the evaluation phase were not encountered during this phase of work. A number of isolated geophysical responses targeted in Trenches 34 as sub-circular cut features were also not encountered. There was a modern land drain which was encountered which corresponded with the eastern most possible trackway ditch seen in trenches 32 and 38. The western most presumed trackway ditch appeared to be either not present or possibly a natural dip in the geology. The only evidence of the evaluation trenches was seen in areas that reached depths intruding into the gravels. The evaluation trenches were apparent at the point of the gravels and beyond, but not in the superficial alluvium. Considering the lack of finds for many of the features identified in the evaluation, it is more than likely that these were natural geological changes rather than archaeological in nature.

#### 6.5 Overy Mead (Figures 5 and 9)

6.5.1 Backwater 6 and Backwater 7 were located in Overy Mead (Figure 5). Although the geophysical survey provided unclear results at Overy Mead, the site is immediately adjacent to an Iron Age/Roman settlement with a substantial road projected to run on the southern side of Henley Road across the northern boundary of the survey area.

6.5.2 Backwater 6 was nearest to Trench 46 and 47 from the evaluation conducted in 2019. The layers comprising this area were primarily seen to be of sandy clays and gravels representing five layers: (B6.01), (B6.02), (B6.03), (B6.04) and (B6.07). There was evidence at the lowest point excavated of river terrace gravels, (B6.04), overlain by a thick alluvial deposit, (B6.03), that differed considerably from that which was seen and photographed in the trenches only a few metres away. This alluvium spread across the entirety of the pond as it approached the River Thames and the other tributaries. It measured 1.20m in thickness at its deepest point observed, near to the culvert and was not associated with any archaeological finds. The alluvium may have accumulated as a result of the ground level being altered in the medieval or post medieval period as a means to act as a drainage or flood control measure. The alluvium was overlain by a layer of made ground in the northern most extent of the most superficial grading for the batters, which was possibly the same as the causeway identified in the evaluation, F4601, which was noted to have been formed by “a series of gravel-rich layers [...] separated by less inclusion-rich silt deposits” that had been thought to reflect prolonged and consistent maintenance of the surface (Jago et al 2019: 19). No finds were recovered from the layers constituting the causeway and, based on the superficial nature of these deposits from both the evaluation phase and this monitoring event, it is almost certainly of more recent provenance. This is confirmed by the fact that post medieval pottery was recovered from sealed deposits well below the gravel causeway.

6.5.3 Backwater 7 was located the furthest south in Overy Mead, about 80m south of Tr49 from the evaluation. The backwater was positioned in an area which had appeared on early maps to be a small cove on the riverscape. This cove appears to have been silted up rapidly at some time after OS map of the area in 1960 was created, as it is not present by the OS map dated 1972 (NLS). The earliest archaeological horizon was the river gravels seen in the deepest point excavated in the centre of the backwater, (B7.05), which was below alternating layers of alluvium (B7.04) and gravel (B7.03). The alluvium was overlain by topsoil (B7.01).

## 6.6 Little Wittenham Wood (Figures 6 and 10)

6.6.1 Three interconnected ponds were located in Little Wittenham Wood (Figure 6). No geophysical survey was conducted in this area, and the site has never been excavated before. It is in the immediately vicinity of a both Bronze Age and Iron Age hill forts and with substantial Roman activity across the immediate area surrounding the site.

6.6.2 The layers comprising this area were seen to be of sandy clays and gravels representing five layers: (LWW.01), (LWW.02), (LWW.03), and (LWW.04). At the lowest point excavated no gravel was encountered, rather it was a very compact, dark grey clay, overlain by a thick colluvial and alluvial deposit that differed considerably from that which was seen in the other areas excavated. This colluvium and alluvium spread across the entirety of the ponds in the area as they approached the river Thames. It measured 0.91m in thickness at its deepest point observed. It was not associated with any archaeological finds. The alluvium was overlain by a layer of colluvium, which was in turn overlain by forest soil.

6.6.3 Although the three interconnecting ponds were situated on a hillside, their composition was mirrored across the area, with the deepest pond also being the lowest point on the hillside as the ponds neared the river. The earliest archaeological

horizon was the river clay seen in the deepest point excavated in the lowest pond, (LW.04), which was below alternating layers of alluvium (LW.03) and colluvium (LW.02) (Figure 6). The colluvium was overlain by forest soil (LW.01).

## 6.7 Statement of Confidence

- 6.7.1 Due to the difficult conditions and nature of the works undertaken, confidence in the results spans from moderate (70%) to low (40%) during the most extreme conditions.

## 7 ARTEFACTS

- 7.1.1 As previously stated above, the only material evidence encountered in any of the areas monitored in the 2021 exercise was seen during the excavation of the culvert for B3 in Clifton Meadow. A row of seven wooden fence posts (B3.01-B3.07) were revealed during the incremental strip. Because they were sawed off to be flat at the base with a bitumen treatment, it is likely that they would have been set into the lower alluvial deposit (B3.10), and extended into the upper alluvial deposit (B3.09), however, no cut or fill was visible so this lends support to them having been pile-driven. They were seen to have rotted away just below topsoil level, and showed their best preservation roughly where the water table began leeching alluvial deposits (where the colour of the alluvium changed to a bluish grey from the orangey brown). It should be noted that at places these were less than 0.1m from the exposed, open-air surface and a modern rotten fence with cross-slats was observed in the overgrowth in the immediate vicinity with very similar dimensions to that of the wood seen represented in B3.01-B3.07, thus it appeared clear that these were associated, modern features. The in situ wooden posts were recorded but not retained (see Figure 7 and detailed description in Table 1) and photos of the modern, extant fence were taken and can be made available upon request. Another modern, barbed wire fence with round wood posts, with ends which came to a point rather than sawed flat like the ones observed in B3.01-B3.07 (likely to allow for easy of driving into the ground) was also observed and photographed for evidence of the various land maintenance efforts seen discarded in situ during this monitoring action. Photos of this fence can be made available upon request.

- 7.1.2 Apart from this modern fence posts and a few pieces of 19<sup>th</sup> century whiteware noted in the topsoil, there were no finds associated with the monitoring of the groundworks. The fence posts were recorded in situ and no finds were retained.

## 8 DISCUSSION

### 8.1 Introduction

- 8.1.1 This report details the results of watching brief carried out at Clifton Meadows, Church Farm, Overy Mead and Little Wittenham Wood, as part of the River of Life II project. It is intended to provide the Client and planning authorities, including OCAS, with the summary results of the work satisfying the condition for archaeological monitoring. The conclusions drawn from the data are outlined below.

### 8.2 Clifton Meadows

- 8.2.1 The series of linear anomalies observed on the geophysical survey that were targeted for further investigation in 2019 and exposed as a couple of ditches in Trenches 13

and 14 during the evaluation phase were not encountered during this phase of work. A number of isolated geophysical responses targeted in Trenches 12, 17, and 20 as linear and circular cut features were also not encountered. It should also be noted that the cut for evaluation trenches excavated in 2019 were also not visible, presumably erased from the constant fluctuation of the water table in the area. Evidence of evaluation trenches was seen in areas that reached depths intruding into the gravels but not visible in the superficial alluvium. Considering the lack of finds for many of the features identified in the evaluation, it is possible that these could have been natural geological changes rather than archaeological in nature. In addition, a timber post recorded in Trench 25 and previously interpreted as being structural, may be associated with more recent land management activities similar to those seen in the culvert of B3 (Fig 7).

8.2.2 The archaeological horizon in Clifton Meadows, should be considered to be the river terrace, deeply buried by alluvium, with the uppermost archaeological horizon between 0.72 – 1.65 m below ground level, 44.97 - 45.63 m AOD (Aim 2, Q3).

8.2.3 Based on the sparsity of the archaeological features, it appears likely that the activity on the site was relatively limited and at the periphery of the Roman settlement identified to the south of Clifton Meadow (Allen et al 2006, 9 and fig 1.3). The identified Roman trackway has been previously investigated through excavation and the age of the feature established through radiocarbon dating of environmental remains (Allen and Munby 2006, 317). The hypothesis that the trackway continued and survived across Clifton Meadows at its most northern extent up to the southern edge of the River Thames has been investigated and confirmed in both geophysical (Whittingham 2019) and archaeological evaluation (Jago et al 2019). In the approved WSI, it was stated that,

Based on the results of the archaeological interventions, geophysical investigation and aerial photographic data it is highly probable that the trackway survives across much of Clifton Meadows...It is plausible that the trackway once served a river crossing-point (Forster et al. 2019a) and the archaeological resource may be of some regional significance for establishing the location of river crossing-points and the nature of riverine settlement along the River Thames during the Roman period, topics identified as needing further focused research in the Solent-Thames Research Framework for the Historic Environment (Heys and Hind 2014, 184). (Casswell and Hogue 2020: 12)

8.2.4 However, during the evaluation in 2019, the suggestion that the trackway, seen in archaeological and geophysical investigation as well as cropmarks, leading to the southern bank of the Thames served as a river crossing-point was not supported by way of evidence of substantial structural infrastructure, but rather the observation that a trackway leading directly to a river would seem to imply an intention to access the river, whether to enter, travel or cross it. The area of the trackway was not included within this monitoring event. The area monitored near the trackway found no further evidence which would support or refute the hypothesis of a river crossing associated with these earlier findings, as would be expected.



- 8.2.5 The 2019 evaluation recorded a single post, which was recovered for further examination (see Bamforth in Jago et al 2019: 21). At the time it was suggested that the post might have Roman provenance based on residual finds recovered across the wider evaluation area, which was conveyed tentatively to the specialist who upon assessment could not rule this out based solely upon the physical properties of the recovered wood alone (ibid.). This most recent stage of monitoring in 2021 did not record any additional posts or archaeological features in the same area. However, a series of wooden posts were identified in the excavation area for the culvert of Backwater 3 (B3), but these were more clearly associated with a modern fence line (see 6.3.4 above). The wood from the 2019 evaluation was located in a low-lying area, seen on geophysical and walkover surveys to be a watercourse leading to the Thames which produces marshy conditions on the extant landscape. This is the only feature, natural or otherwise which the wood has been associated with at this time. It does not appear in alignment with any of the known historical or prehistorical cropmarks on the exceedingly active landscape to the south (Fig 11). As a result of both stages of monitoring and without additional dating evidence, it is not possible to conclude that the wood recovered from the 2019 evaluation was Roman, but the archaeological evidence suggests that while unlikely, the possibility remains.
- 8.2.6 Evidence collected during this phase of intensive monitoring, suggests that features identified above the gravel terraces (eg within the alluvial deposits) and located within the immediate flood plain on the southern bank of the Thames and leading into Clifton Meadows, should be considered with greater scrutiny due the unreliable and rapidly changing nature of the alluvium in this area. Of 14 evaluation trench cuts from 2019, none were still visible in the alluvium after just two years, suggesting that survival of superficial negative features of an earlier date would be ephemeral at best and extremely difficult to record under conditions as experienced during the 2021 monitoring exercise.
- 8.2.7 This is a significant result as there had been no clear idea prior to this stage of monitoring of how quickly these alluvial deposits might be seen to interfere with evidence of recent activities (Figure 12). There is a possibility that redeposited material from the previous evaluation phase was too similar to be detected by the field team. However, it seems unlikely that redeposited material would not be visible across each of the 13 locations, especially as lower material was more clearly visible. The current hypothesis provides an explanation as to why upper alluvial deposits might not retain this evidence as securely as the gravels and alluvial interface directly superior to the gravels. In addition, the impressions of the evaluation trenches were visible in satellite images date one month prior to the works starting, May 2021 (as seen in Google Earth Pro), which may support this interpretation as well. This is most important when considering the suggested dating of the wooden timber (found in evaluation Trench 25, Figure 3), was previously suggested to be potentially Roman in date (Jago et al 2019). This interpretation was founded on the basis of their being no evidence recorded in the upper alluvial layers for truncation or disturbance above the timber. Observations made during this recent phase of monitoring provides evidence that even known instances of disturbance (in this case, the 2019 evaluation trenches) also lack visible signs of truncation or soil disturbance in the upper alluvium. On this basis, it is suggested here that the nature and character of the alluvial deposits across this area should be considered unreliable and insufficient to be used as the sole basis for any diagnostic significance.

- 8.2.8 Archaeology was recorded in the evaluation stage in Trenches 12, 13, 14, 17, 20 and 25 (Jago et al 2019). The ponds which were nearest the features encountered in Trenches 12-14 were too shallow to encounter the archaeological horizon. Evaluation trenches 17 and 20 made identifications of archaeological features in 2019 which were both wholly within the alluvial deposits. As outlined above, and considering neither of these features produced material evidence or dating, it now appears more likely with our fuller understanding of the rapidly changing nature of the alluvial layers that these anomalies may not have been securely within the archaeological horizon. It is possible that these were natural, as upon excavation of a wider area, not only limited to the confines of a 2m wide window (as seen in an evaluation trench), it became clear that many potential features seen in the alluvium as the wider area was being stripped became clearly apparent and were seen to be fluctuations in the leeching of the alluvial layers, often seen to manifest as a dip or channel, which were irregular and intermittent. Some of these if only seen in a small segment, as within an evaluation trench, would have appeared quite convincing as a result of human action. No archaeological features or material was encountered in the monitoring phase in 2021 in these areas.
- 8.2.9 Features identified in 2019 evaluation trenches which were visible as cuts into the gravels (eg below the alluvial deposits), can be regarded with greater confidence as these deposits appear far more stable. Evidence of the evaluation trenches was seen to remain at that level across the area and proved more easily identifiable during the monitoring programme. This observation does not suggest that the archaeological works undertaken indicate little to no archaeological activity at this level, nor that there is no survival of archaeological remains within alluvial deposits. Rather, that the process of evaluation then monitoring has demonstrated that alluvial layers in this location are constantly in flux and the burial environment unstable. In addition, the conditions encountered during monitoring would mean that visibility of archaeological features which do survive at this level is unlikely.
- 8.2.10 The monitoring exercise was successful in mitigating the overarching threat to archaeological remains in the area by targeting areas where the likelihood of encountering archaeology was lowest. The design of the ponds and depth of interventions avoided areas where archaeology was likely to survive at the levels monitored. It also produced valuable insight into the alluvial deposits showing that they are fragile and highly mobile and poor at retaining archaeological information. It also revealed that evidence recorded within gravel deposits is far more likely to survive.
- 8.3 Church Farm**
- 8.3.1 Backwater 5 was located in Church Farm (Figure 4). Although the evaluation trenching provided unclear results at Church Farm, the site is immediately adjacent to an area of heavy use in prehistoric through to Roman times, with a convincing trackway projected to run through the western edge of the excavation area.
- 8.3.2 The archaeology during the evaluation was relatively sparse at Church Farm. All the archaeological deposits were covered by alluvium, with the archaeology exposed between 0.53 – 0.90 m below ground level, 46.02 – 45.65 m AOD (Aim 2, Q3). Most of the convincing archaeological features were cut into the underlying river terrace gravels. All archaeology was identified to the western half of the site, where the

underlying river terrace gravels are relatively high and as a result overlying thicknesses of alluvium relatively shallow. An absence of archaeology to towards the east of the site, increased thickness of alluvium, and relatively deeply buried river terrace gravels suggests that the area was much wetter and less suitable for habitation in antiquity (Aim 2, Q4).

- 8.3.3 Many of the features suggested that activity took place when conditions were relatively wet, with the ditches in-filled gradually by alluvium suggesting they likely functioned as drainage. In general, activity appears likely to have been relatively ephemeral. Despite potential features being discovered in the evaluation stage, due to the very wet conditions, none of these were able to be characterised with any confidence. No finds were recovered from any of the deposits.
- 8.3.4 The series of linear anomalies observed on the geophysical survey that were targeted for further investigation and exposed as a couple of possible ditches in Trenches 26-29, 32 and 38 during the evaluation phase were not encountered during this phase of work. A number of isolated geophysical responses targeted in Trenches 34 as sub-circular cut features were also not encountered. There was a modern land drain which was encountered which corresponded with the eastern most possible trackway ditch seen in trenches 32 and 38. The western most presumed trackway ditch appeared to be either not present or possibly a natural dip in the geology. The only evidence of the evaluation trenches was seen in areas that reached depths intruding into the gravels. The evaluation trenches were apparent at the point of the gravels and beyond, but not in the superficial alluvium. Considering the lack of finds for many of the features identified in the evaluation, it is more than likely that these were natural geological changes rather than archaeological in nature.

#### 8.4 Overy Mead

- 8.4.1 In Overy Mead evaluation trenching was initially distributed to investigate the nature of archaeological remains in the area, with the site located potentially on the alignment of a Roman street and an extensive series of roadside enclosures identified to the north and east of the area (Jago et al. 2019). Only two of these trenches were close to the area for Backwater 6 or Backwater 7 in Overy Mead. In Trench 46, layers of made ground were identified at the base of the sequence containing Roman pottery sherds dating from the 1st-century AD, however these were intermixed with layers containing post-medieval pottery. Backwater 6 was the area nearest to this material and while part of a recent gravel layer was encountered (identified as the causeway in the evaluation Trench 46), it produced no finds and appeared to be part of a hard standing access leading to the river. In the area of Backwater 6 which was closest to where Trench 47 had been located, a similar sequence of made ground levels was identified. These were overlain by a series of layers reflecting the alternation of episodes of more recent intentional causeway maintenance/construction and subsequent accumulation. No dating evidence was recovered from the causeway, however, sealed layers producing post-medieval pottery along with the extremely superficial position would indicate that it was from recent use and activities.
- 8.4.2 In Overy Mead, the underlying river terrace gravels were observed at 43.63-44.46m AOD (Aim 2, Q3). All archaeology identified was concentrated to the northwest of the site (Aim 2, Q4).

8.4.3 Previous geophysical survey results were inconclusive for Overy Mead (Whittingham 2019), however archaeological evaluation indicates survival of significant archaeological deposits associated with the building up of the ground level during the Roman period. An extensive series of Roman roadside enclosures were identified from magnetometry survey to the east of Overy Mead (Ainslie 2011, fig 1) and raising of the ground level may have been related to activities such as land reclamation and/or flood alleviation. No evidence of a Roman street was identified, as projected from magnetometry survey and excavations located in the centre of Dorchester-on-Thames (Frere 1984, 91). Furthermore, no datable evidence was recovered from the causeway, which has previously been considered to be related to the earlier river crossing first mentioned in 1146 AD and replaced in the early-19th century AD (Selway Richards, 2011; Jago et al 2019: 25) (Aim 3, Q6-7). However, based on the superficial elevation of the material constituting the causeway and the discovery of sealed material from the post-medieval period found well below this surface in context (46012) (Jago et al 2019: 70, Fig 10., 83), it is possible to have been from more recent activities in the area.

## 8.5 Little Wittenham Wood

8.5.1 In Little Wittenham Wood, no prior investigation was able to indicate what the nature of archaeological remains in the area would be. The only insight of the area was from the intense archaeological activity nearby. No archaeological features or dating evidence was recovered during the monitoring of the works in this area.

## 9 ARCHIVE RECOMMENDATIONS

9.1.1 This work was undertaken as the final part of an ongoing programme of archaeological works in association with the River of Life II project. The project archive comprises digital data relating to the investigations and will be deposited with accompanying metadata to an appropriate digital repository in line with ClfA Standards and guidance.

9.1.2 The archive consists of the following:

### Digital record

Written scheme of investigation  
 The project report (Evaluation)  
 The project report (Mitigation)  
 The digital site records

### Physical record

Ceramic  
 Animal bone  
 Wood (modern)

9.1.3 Archaeological finds recovered during the 2019 evaluation were not recommended by project specialists for selection and deposition as part of the archaeological archive (see Jago 2019). The ceramic assemblage will be retained as part of the DigVentures teaching collection and other groups named above will be discarded at completion of the project. The digital archive will be deposited with ADS and data shared with the HER and OCMS. The final version of the report will be submitted to the HER and a digital copy uploaded to OASIS within two weeks upon approval.

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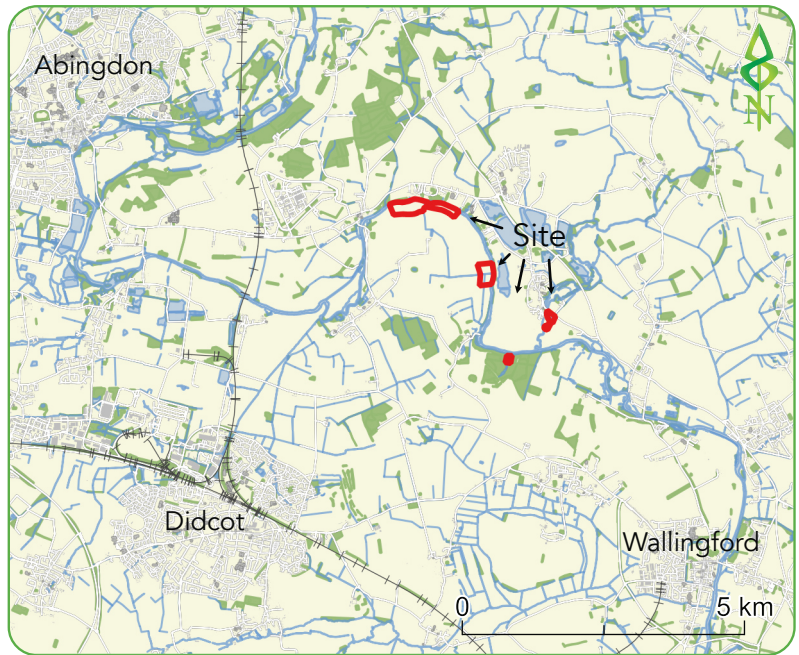


Figure 1 - Site location





Figure 2 - Clifton Meadows, west



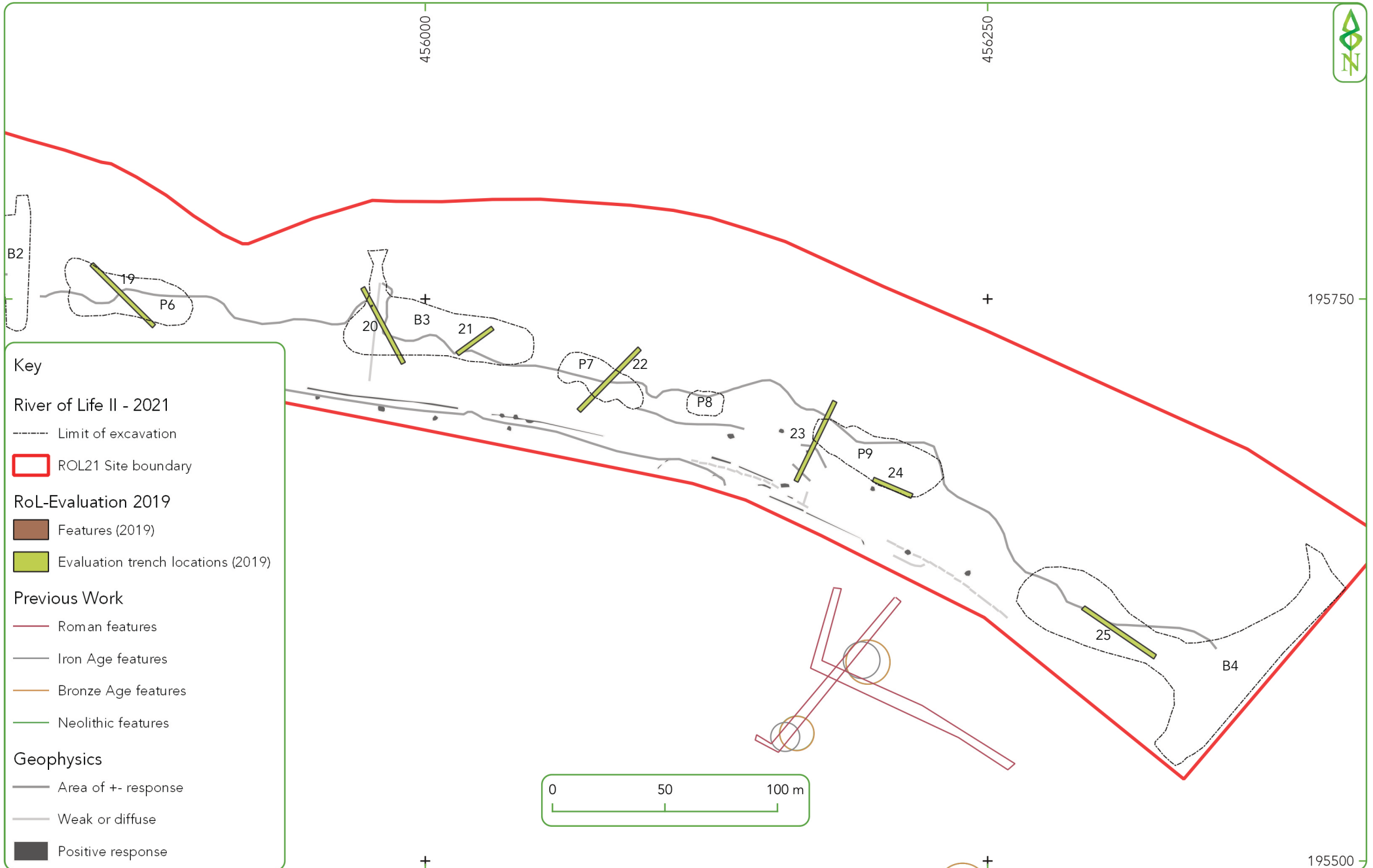


Figure 3 - Clifton Meadows, east

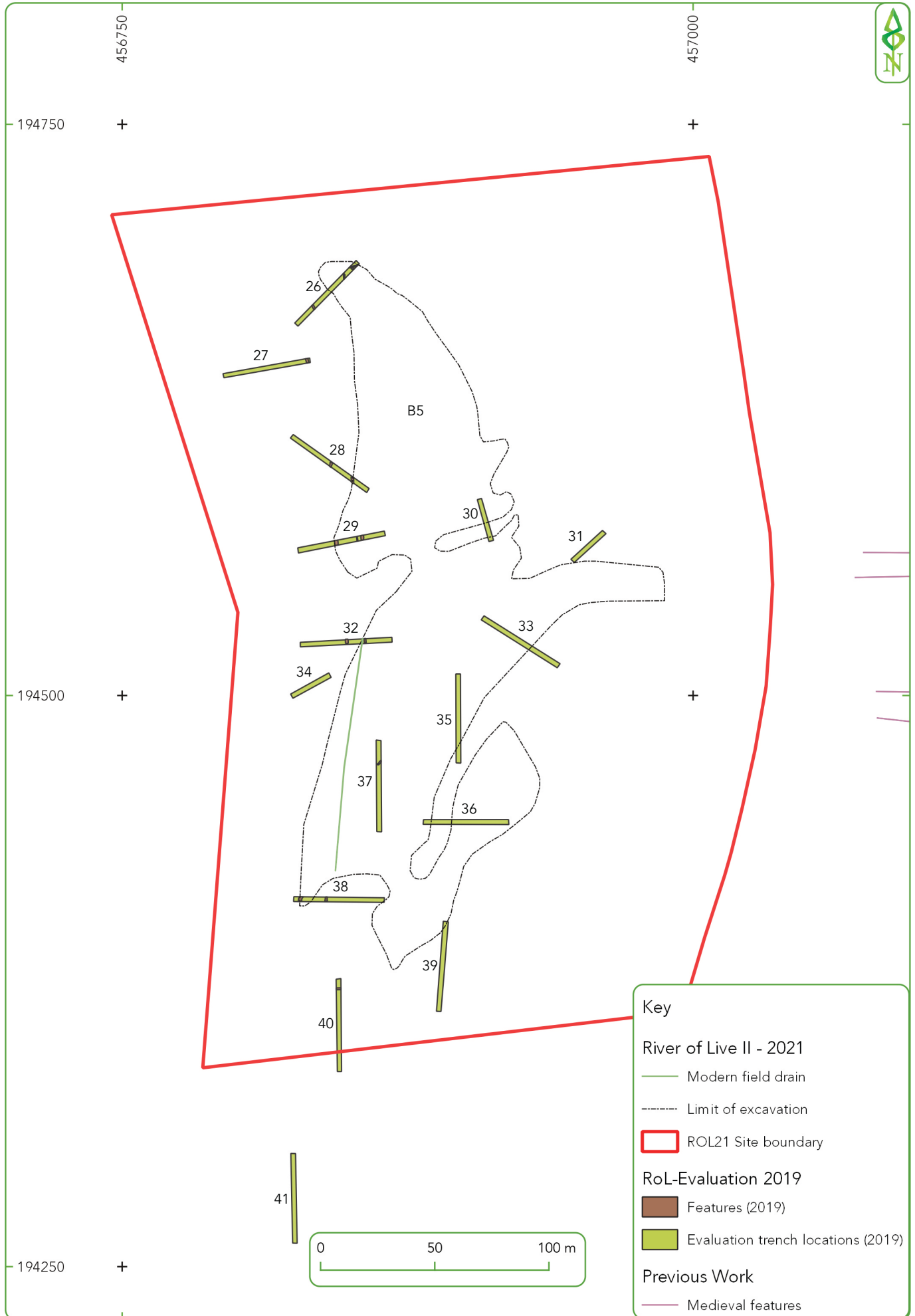


Figure 4 - Church Farm

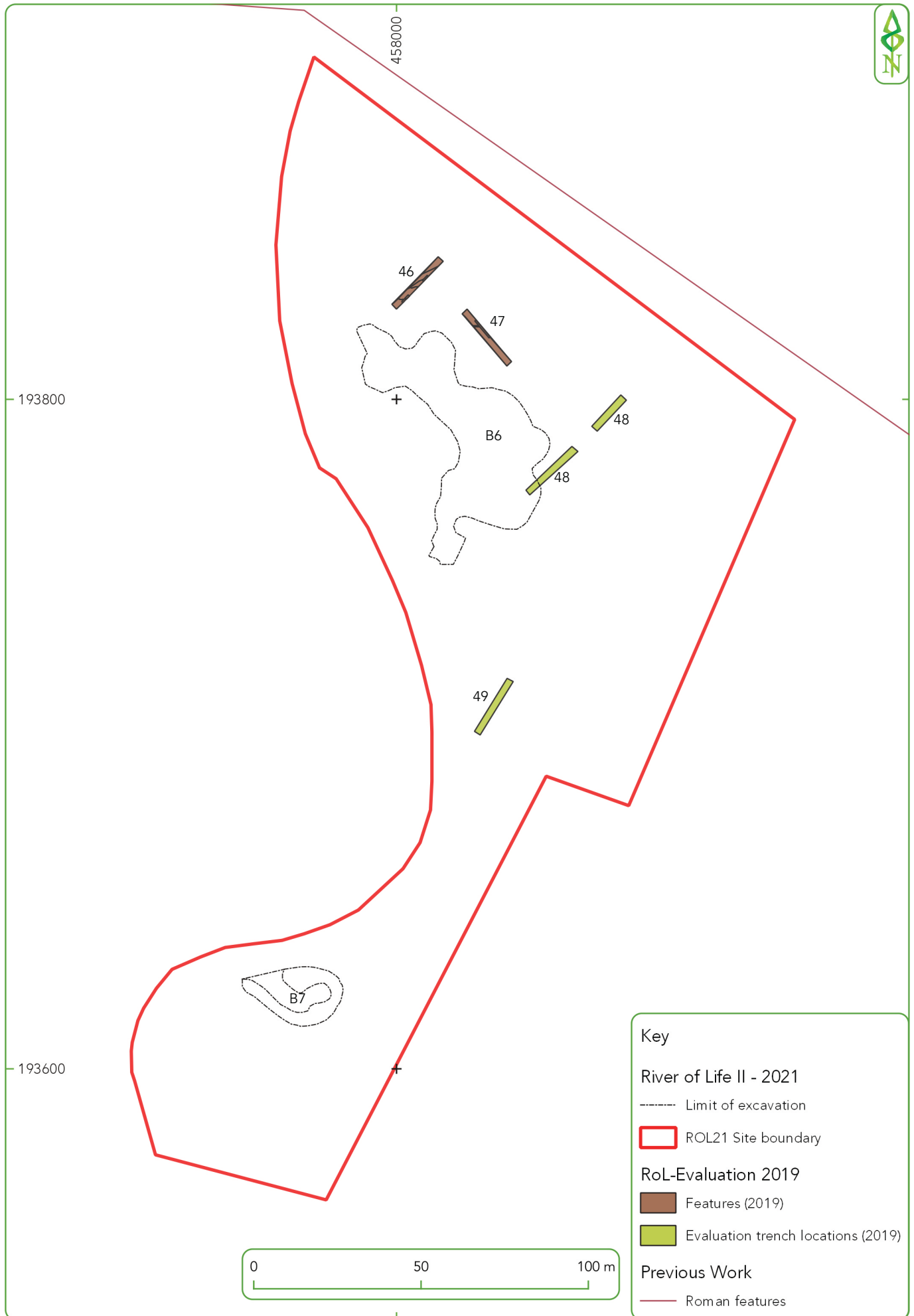


Figure 5 - Overy Mead



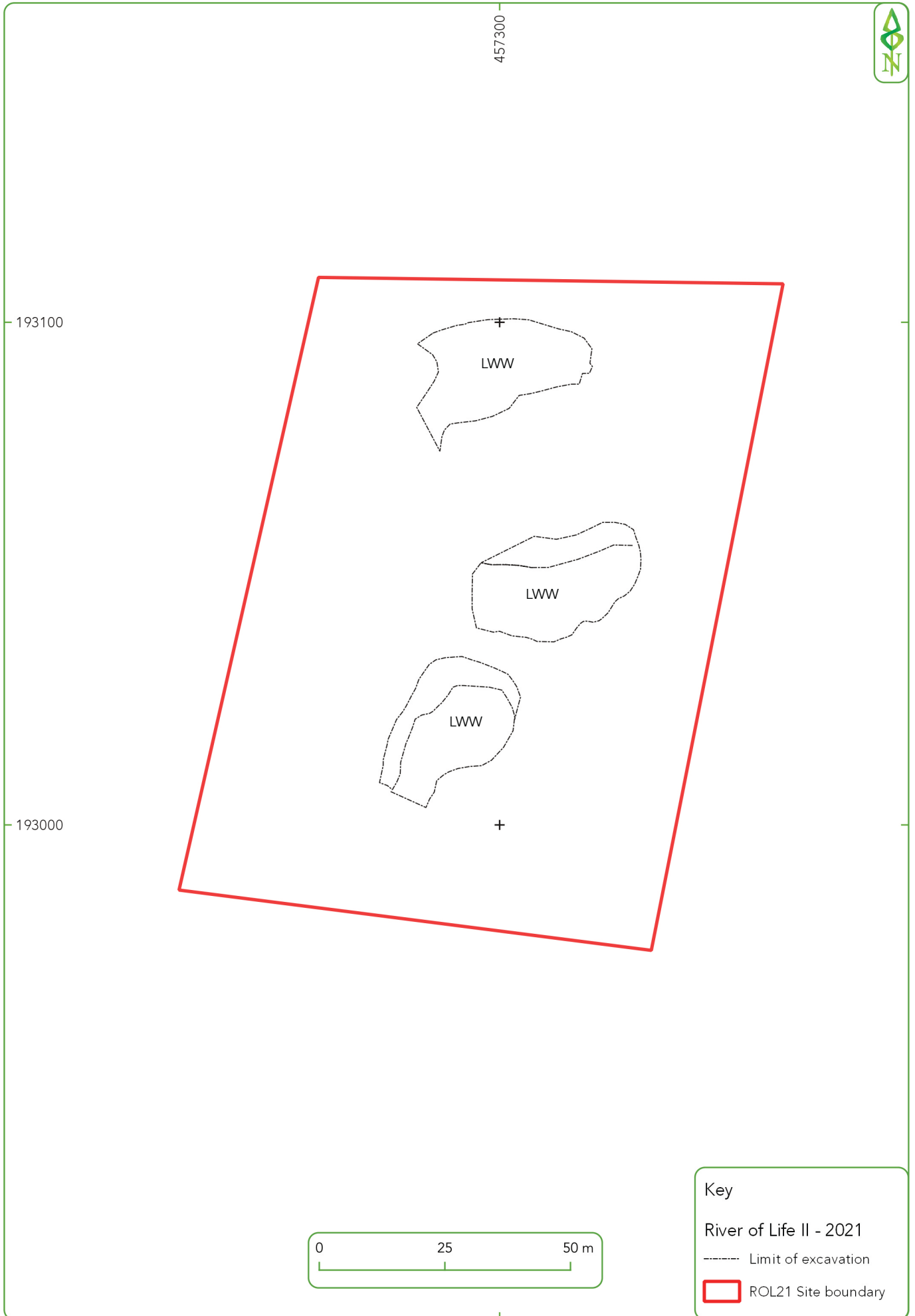


Figure 6 - Little Wittenham Wood

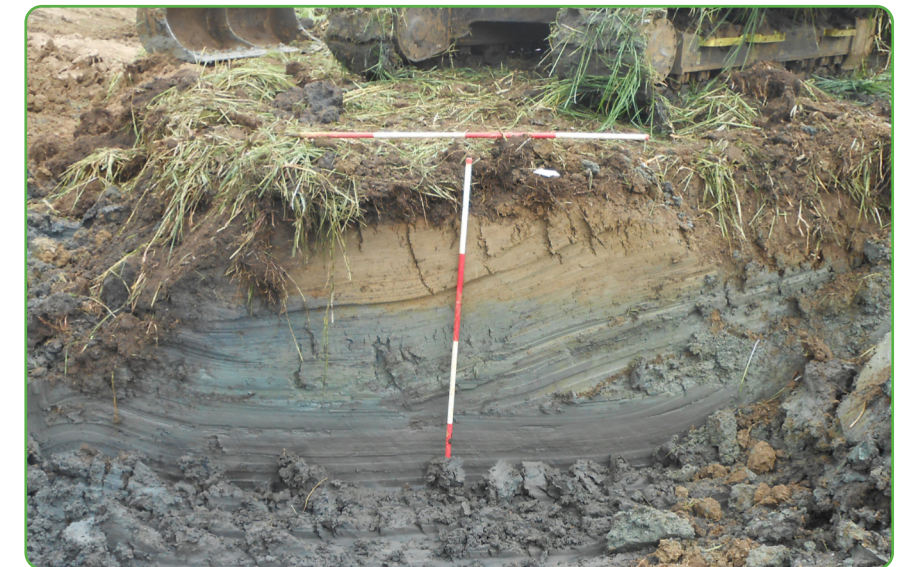




Topsoil: B1.01, B2.01, B3.08, B4.01, P1.01, P2.01, P3.01, P4.01, P5.01, P6.01, P7.01, P8.01, P9.01 - view South of B2.01



Upper Alluvium: B1.02, B2.06, B3.02, B4.02, P1.02, P2.02, P3.09, P4.02, P5.02, P6.02, P7.02, P8.02, P9.02 - view North of P9.02 (TR23)



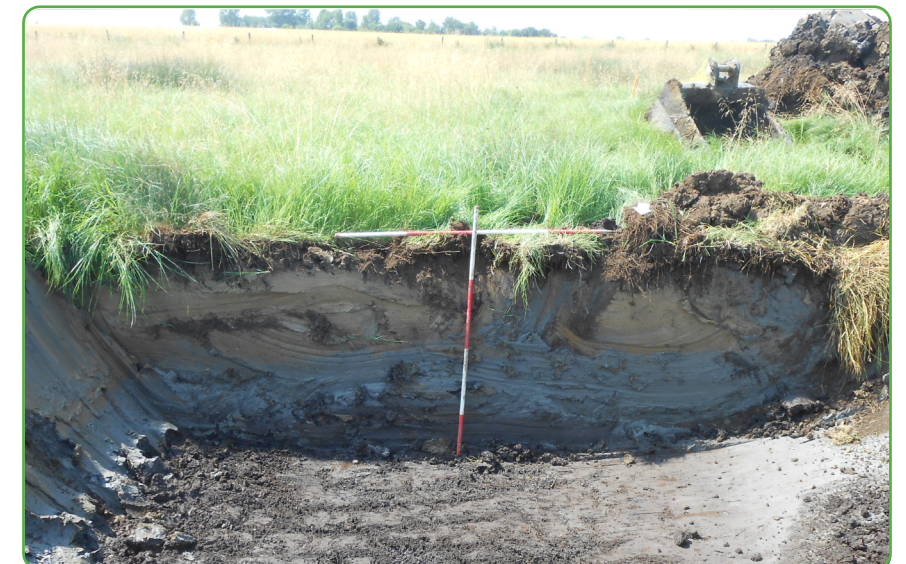
Lower Alluvium: B1.03, B2.03, B3.10, B4.03, P2.03, P4.03, P5.03, P6.03, P7.03, P8.03, P9.03 - view East of B1.03



Wet and difficult monitoring conditions - view SE, Backwater 4



River Terrace Gravels: B2.07, B3.11, B4.04, P1.03, P3.03, P5.04, P6.05, P7.05, P8.05, P9.05 - view North of B4.04



Peat: B4.05, P6.04, P7.04, P8.04, P9.04 - view South of P9.04



Feature No: F.B3.01: Modern Fence Line: B3.01, B3.02, B3.03, B3.04, B3.05, B3.06, B3.07 - plan view

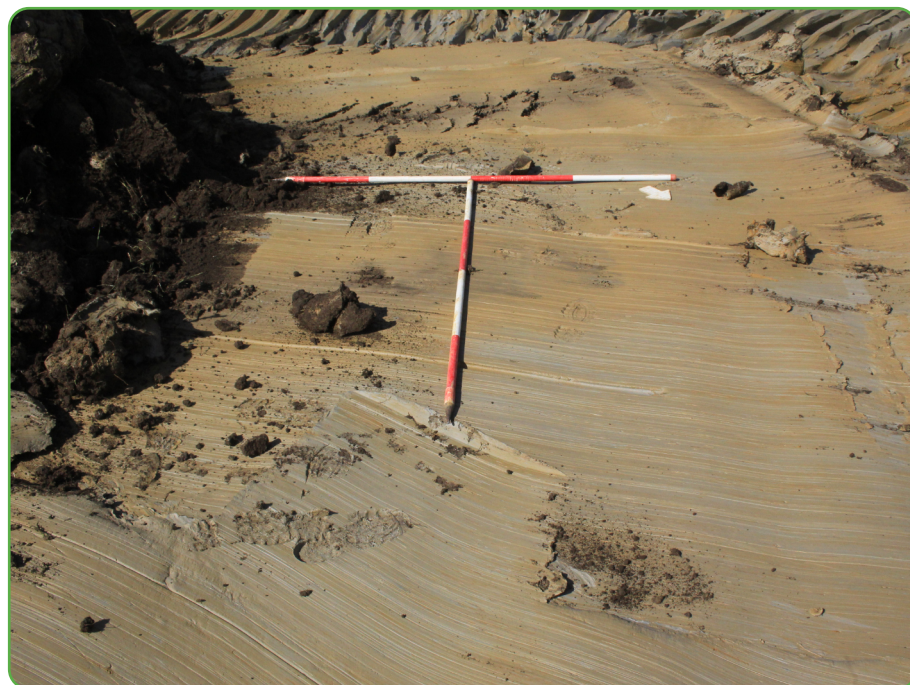


Modern Fence Line Post: Feature No F.B3.01 - plan view



Modern Drainage ditch: B2.02 (fill), B2.04 (cut) - view North

Figure 7 - Clifton Meadow Photos (first two rows are representative photos of the soil matrix found across the area).



Topsoil: B4.01, Upper Alluvium: B4.02, Lower Alluvium: B4.03 - Facing North



Modern Ditch: B5.04 (cut), B5.05 (fill) - Facing North



River Terrace Gravels: B5.07 - Facing North

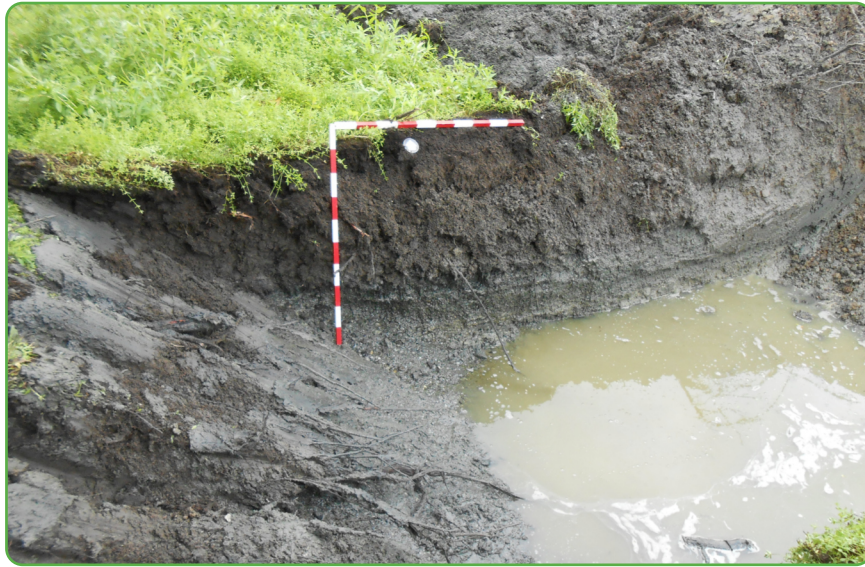


Monitoring in Church Farm - Facing SE

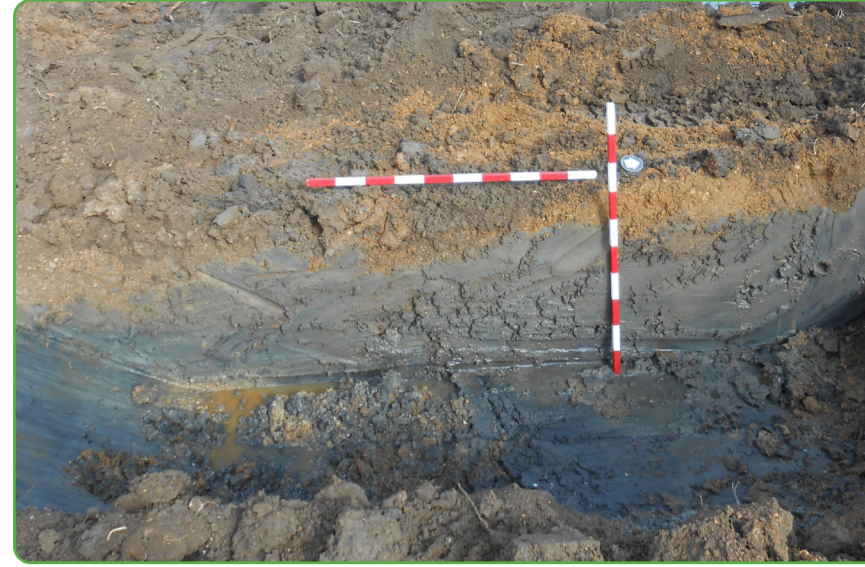


Wet conditions - Facing North of B5

Figure 8 - Church Farm Photos



Topsoil: B6.01, B7.01 - Facing North of B7.01



Fluvial deposits and Alluvium: B6.02, B7.02, B6.03, B7.04 - Facing West



River terrace gravels: B6.04, B7.03 - Facing South of B6.04



Causeway: B6.05 (cut), B6.06 (fill) - Facing East



Levelling deposit: B6.07 - Facing North



Large masonry stone recovered from existing backwater, B6.08

Figure 9 - Overy Mead Photos



Topsoil: LW.01 - Facing WNW



Removing tree roots - Facing ESE



Colluvium/Alluvium: LW.02, LW.03 - Facing North



Topsoil: LW.01, Colluvium/Alluvium: LW.02, LW.03 - Facing South



Colluvium/Alluvium: LW.02, LW.03 - Facing SWS

Figure 10 - Little Wittenham Woods Photos





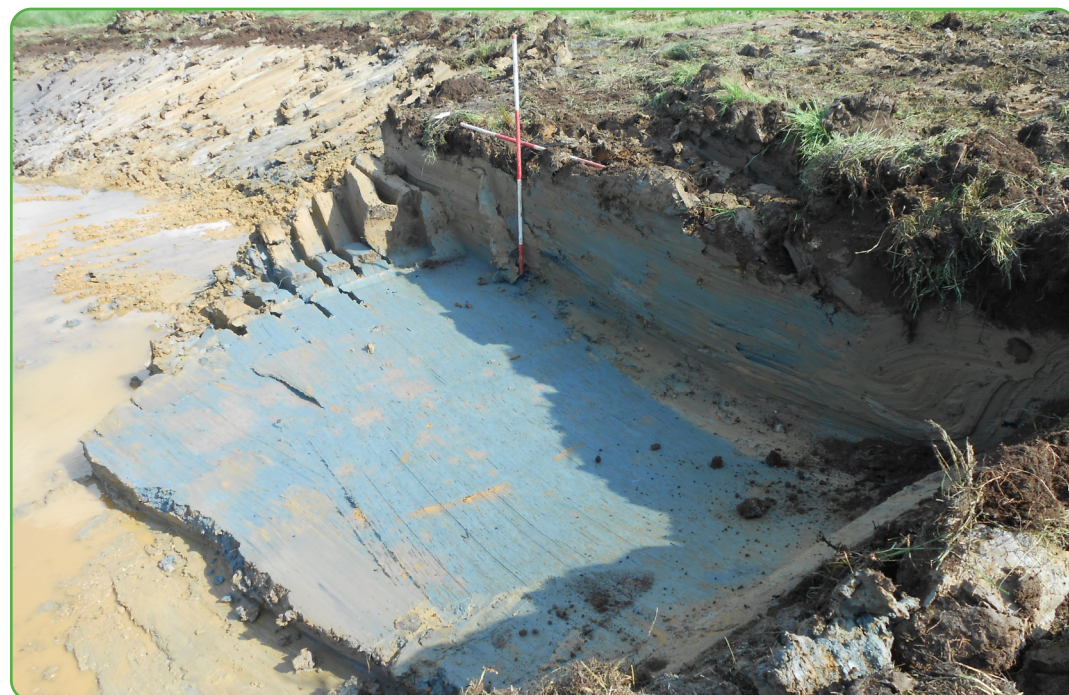
Figure 11 - Location of wood from 2019 evaluation, fence line comprised of B3.01-B3.07 and features on the wider landscape



Pond 7 facing SW - TR22 seen in gravels



Pond 9 facing North - TR23 not seen in alluvium



Pond 9 facing East - TR24 seen just above the gravels



B4 facing South - TR25 not seen in the alluvium

## Appendices

### APPENDIX A: AREA AND CONTEXT DATA

Table 1 - Clifton Meadows Context Data

| CLIFTON MEADOWS   |        |  |  |
|---|--------|--|--|
| Context No.   | Type   | Description  | Interpretation                           |
| B1.01, B2.01, B3.08, B4.01, P1.01, P2.01, P3.01, P4.01, P5.01, P6.01, P7.01, P8.01, P9.01 | Layer  | Soft, mid greyish brown, clayey silt, clear horizon clarity  | Topsoil                                  |
| B1.02, B2.06, B3.02, B4.02, P1.02, P2.02, P3.09, P4.02, P5.02, P6.02, P7.02, P8.02, P9.02 | Layer  | Plastic, light brownish orange, clay, clear horizons.  | Upper Alluvium                           |
| B1.03, B2.03, B3.10, B4.03, P2.03, P4.03, P5.03, P6.03, P7.03, P8.03, P9.03               | Layer  | Plastic, light blueish grey, clay, clear horizons  | Lower Alluvium                           |
| B1.04   | Layer  | Very soft, light- mid yellow brown, sandy silt, 10% shell inclusions, clear horizons.  | Alluvium                                 |
| B2.07, B3.11, P1.03, P3.03, P4.04, P5.04, P6.05, P7.05, P8.05, P9.05                      | Layer  | Loose, orangey yellow, gravel, good horizon clarity.   | River terrace gravels                    |
| B2.02   | Fill   | Very soft, dark brown grey, silty clay, to the northern limit are wooden planks with nails, clear to moderate horizon clarity, existing modern ditch fill-very water logged cutting topsoil B2.01 and overlain by a modern path B2.05.                   | Fill of modern drainage ditch            |
| B2.04   | Cut    | North - south linear with a sharp break of slope at the top, rounded sides, gradual break of slope at the base, concave base, truncates topsoil B2.01 and truncated by path B2.05, Fills B2.02. Visible standing post dimensions: 1.20m x 0.20m x 0.10m. | Cut of modern ditch                      |
| B2.05   | Layer  | Very hard, light grey concrete and pebbly gravel, clear horizon clarity, metal sheeting on north side, pathway ran across width of culvert (5m). Approximate width of path 2m.   | Modern pathway                           |
| B3.01, B3.02, B3.03, B3.04, B3.05, B3.06, B3.07   | Timber | Wood (oak?) pile-driven, north-south orientation, good condition, L=0.60m W=0.26m T=0.14, sawed tool marks, possible bitumen treatment on base   | Feature No: F.B3.01<br>Modern Fence Line |
| B4.05, P6.04, P7.04, P8.04, P9.04   | Layer  | Soft, dark blackish blue, peaty/silty clay, gravel at the base of context, clear horizon above, more diffuse with gravels beneath  | Peat                                     |

Table 2 - Church Farm Context Data

| <b>CHURCH FARM</b> |       |  |                                       |
|--------------------|-------|--|---------------------------------------|
| Context No.        | Type  | Description  | Interpretation                        |
| B5.01              | Layer | Friable, mid-brown grey, silty clay, good horizon clarity.   | Topsoil                               |
| B5.02              | Layer | Firm, mid yellowish brown, silty clay, good horizon clarity.   | Upper Alluvium                        |
| B5.03              | Layer | Soft and dense, light-dark blueish grey, silty clay, good horizon clarity.                           | Lower Alluvium                        |
| B5.04              | Cut   | North - south unexcavated linear, cutting top soil   | Modern drainage ditch                 |
| B5.05              | Fill  | Soft, silty clay, mid greyish blue   | Fill of modern drainage ditch [B5.04] |
| B5.06              | Layer | Soft, light orange brown, sandy clay, very small frequent grit inclusions, moderate horizon clarity. | River terrace gravels                 |
| B5.07              | Layer | Compact, mid orangey brown, gravel and sand, good horizon clarity.                                   | River terrace gravels                 |

Table 3 - Overy Mead Context Data

| <b>OVERY MEAD</b> |         |   |   |
|-------------------|---------|---|---|
| Context No.       | Type    | Description   | Interpretation  |
| B6.01, B7.01      | Layer   | Friable, mid to dark brown, sandy silt, gravel/natural stone (flint) irregular >0.06m diameter inclusions with good horizon clarity.  | Topsoil   |
| B6.02, B7.02      | Layer   | Friable to loose, mid yellowish brown, clayey sand, occasional natural flints/stones subrounded inclusions up to 0.03m diameter, good horizon clarity.  | Fluvial deposits  |
| B6.03, B7.04      | Layer   | Soft and dense, light-dark blueish grey, silty clay, good horizon clarity.  | Alluvium  |
| B6.04, B7.03      | Layer   | Compact, mid yellowish brown, gravels (sandier as you get deeper) gravel inclusions, good horizon clarity.  | River terrace gravels   |
| B6.05             | Cut     | East to West aligned linear with undefined sides and filled with B6.06.   | Cut of causeway   |
| B6.06             | Deposit | Friable, light brownish grey, sandy silt, 40% small sub-rounded stones and pebble inclusions, clear horizon clarity with B6.01 but moderate clarity with gravel layer B6.04.  | Fill of causeway  |
| B6.07             | Deposit | Compact, mid yellow brown, sandy clayey silt, very common gravel inclusions throughout  | levelling deposit   |
| B6.08             | Masonry | Limestone with small sub-angular inclusions, 0.51m x 0.38m x 0.27m, squared with one side flat though the other side appears to be roughly hewn, no coursing as it was an isolated stone, possible fragments of concrete bonding material, brought up under the water level within blue alluvial clay - not part of a wall/structure - isolated lone stone. | Large masonry stone, likely waste material associated with maintenance of bridge located <100m to north east. |

Table 4 - Little Wittenham Wood Context Data

| LITTLE WITTENHAM WOOD |       |   |                    |
|-----------------------|-------|---|--------------------|
| Context No.           | Type  | Description   | Interpretation     |
| LW.01                 | Layer | Friable, mid to dark greyish brown, clayey silt, lots of rooting inclusions, good horizon clarity.  | Topsoil            |
| LW.02                 | Layer | Friable, mid greyish brown, silty clay, common root inclusions, moderate to good horizon clarity  | Colluvium/Alluvium |
| LW.03                 | Layer | Soft, light brownish grey, silty clay, good horizon clarity   | Colluvium/Alluvium |
| LW.04                 | Layer | Very compact/dense, dark blueish grey, clayey silt, good horizon clarity, very crumbly, not plastic/elastic but very dense compact silt/clay. | Paleochannel       |

## APPENDIX B: STRATIGRAPHIC HEIGHTS

Table 5 - Summary of stratigraphic heights

| Area | Surface/<br>Topsoil<br>(m AOD) | Top of<br>Alluvium<br>(m AOD) | Top of<br>Archaeology<br>(m AOD) | Top of<br>Peat<br>(m AOD) | Top of<br>Gravel<br>(m AOD) | Base of<br>Excavation<br>(m AOD) |
|------|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------------|
| B1   | 46.02                          | 45.91                         | -                                | -                         | 45.30                       | >45.30                           |
| B2   | 46.62                          | 46.34                         | -                                | -                         | 45.62                       | >45.62                           |
| B3   | 46.66                          | 46.09                         | -                                | -                         | 44.99                       | 44.86                            |
| B4   | 46.69                          | 46.31                         | -                                | 45.78                     | 45.56                       | 44.54                            |
| B5   | 46.10                          | 45.90                         | -                                | -                         | 45.28                       | 44.81                            |
| B6   | 45.35                          | 45.15                         | -                                | -                         | 43.63                       | 42.88                            |
| B7   | 45.70                          | 44.56                         | -                                | -                         | 44.46                       | 43.98                            |
| P1   | 46.56                          | 45.87                         | -                                | -                         | 45.52                       | 45.52                            |
| P2   | 46.65                          | 46.31                         | -                                | -                         | 45.43                       | 45.28                            |
| P3   | 46.62                          | 46.30                         | -                                | -                         | 45.63                       | 45.09                            |
| P4   | 46.47                          | 46.10                         | -                                | -                         | 45.43                       | 45.43                            |
| P5   | 46.44                          | 46.11                         | -                                | -                         | 44.97                       | >44.97                           |
| P6   | 46.51                          | 46.24                         | -                                | 45.17                     | 45.02                       | >45.02                           |
| P7   | 46.60                          | 46.39                         | -                                | 45.27                     | 45.00                       | >45.00                           |
| P8   | 46.54                          | 46.40                         | -                                | 45.19                     | 45.08                       | >45.08                           |
| P9   | 46.74                          | 46.37                         | -                                | 45.21                     | 45.09                       | 45.09                            |
| LWW1 | 55.75-54.25                    | -                             | -                                | -                         | -                           | 54.25                            |
| LWW2 | 54.00-52.25                    | -                             | -                                | -                         | -                           | 51.75                            |
| LWW3 | 49.50-48.30                    | -                             | -                                | -                         | -                           | 47.30                            |