Land at Oak Tree Farm, Hawbridge, Stoulton, Worcestershire.

one ten archaeology

Land at Oak Tree Farm, Hawbridge, Stoulton, Worcestershire, WR7 4RJ.

Archaeological Evaluation

NGR: *SO 90857 48804*

Site code: *sto22*

HER ref: *wsm78118*

OASIS ID: *110archa1-506632*

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one ten archaeology

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Front cover; view northeast of trench 5

SUMMARY

An archaeological evaluation was carried out during April 2022 on land at the Oak Tree Farm, Hawbridge, Stoulton. Worcs., WR7 4RJ in advance of the construction of an agricultural building and rural workers dwelling. The proposals were conditional on the completion of an evaluation (trial trenching) the results of which would, if necessary, inform a mitigation strategy for further archaeological work on site prior to or during the commencement of development. The investigation revealed no evidence of an earlier settlement or human activity within the development areas but instead revealed a sequence of soil deposits characteristic of a prolonged open rural environment, this scenario is supported by the absence of residual finds, particularly flint artefacts, pottery sherds and metal objects suggesting historically little human activity other than that associated with the agricultural use of the land. The negative results of the investigation showed that archaeological deposits are unlikely to be present within the application area and that the development will have no impact.

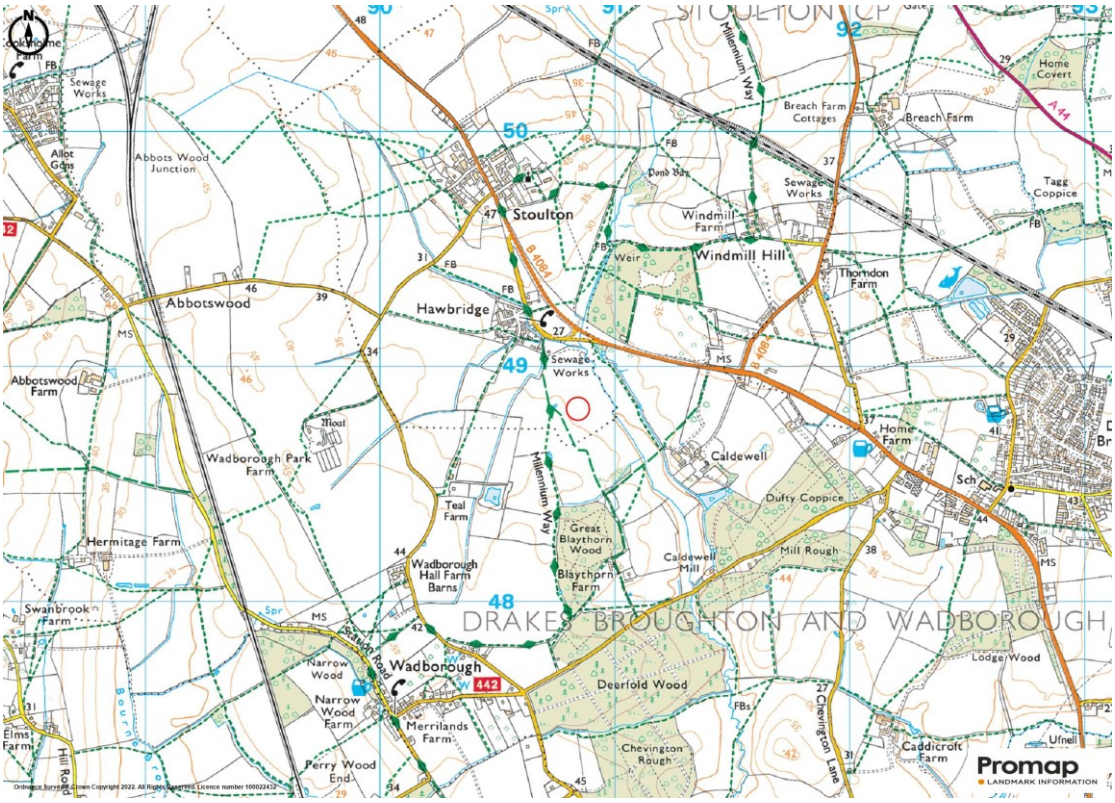

Fig. 1; Site location (circled in red).

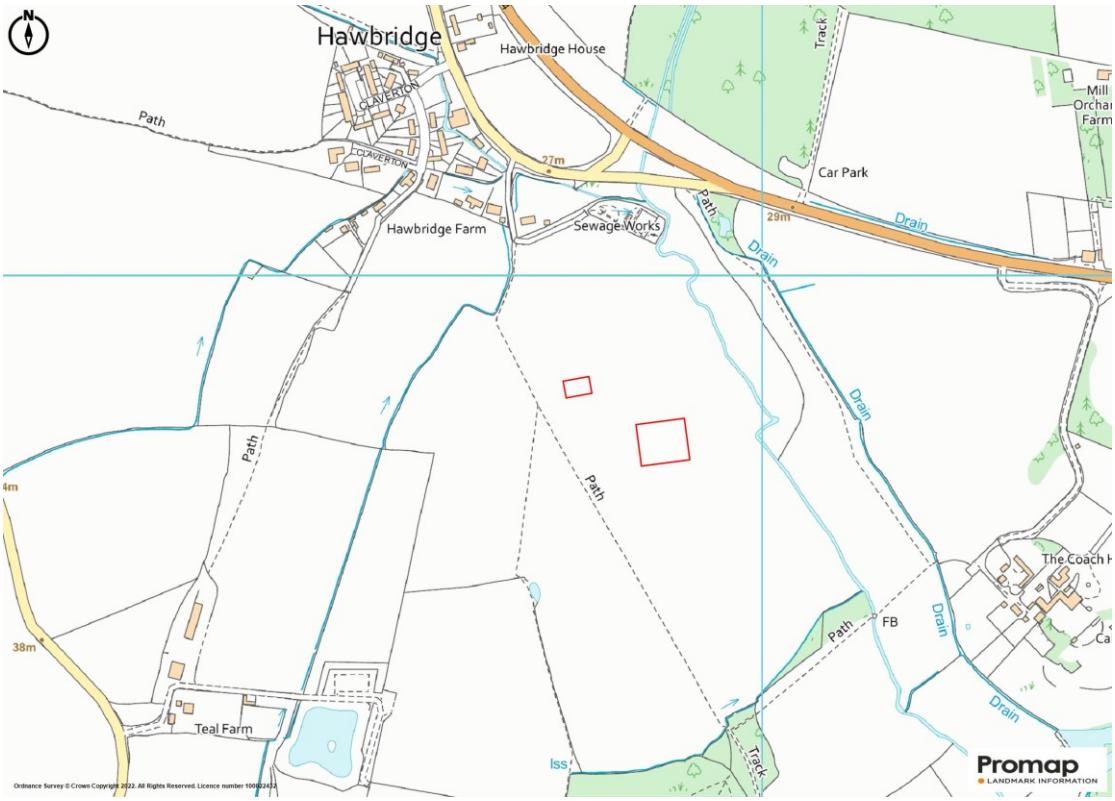

Fig. 2; Areas of study (outlined in red).

INTRODUCTION

Location and scope of works

This document sets out results of an archaeological evaluation at land at Oak Tree Farm, Hawbridge, Stoulton. Worcs., WR7 4RJ during 4th and 5th April 2022 at the request of the landowner. Planning applications (Planning refs. 21/02298/FUL & 21/02273/OUT) had been granted for the development of the site comprising a proposed agricultural building and rural workers dwelling including temporary provision of mobile home. The proposals were conditional on the completion of an evaluation (trial trenching) the results of which would, if necessary, inform a mitigation strategy for further archaeological work on site prior to or during the commencement of development.

The proposed development area may affect heritage assets of known archaeological significance. It lies to the east of a postulated Romano-British occupation site *(wsm32350)*. Within the site cropmarks are evident which are of a typology that are comparable to proven Romano-British occupation features. LiDAR confirms that some of the cropmarks do not accord with historic mapping but are consonant with archaeological features. Given the scale of the development, and the anticipated archaeological potential, the likely impact on the historic environment caused by this development was offset by the implementation of a conditional programme of archaeological works. This comprised initially of a programme of trial trenching to determine the presence or absence, extent, date, character, condition and significance of any remains and the likely impact of the development upon them. If archaeological remains were identified that would be damaged or destroyed by the development and they could not be preserved in-situ then the evaluation would be followed by a defined programme of archaeological excavation and/or a watching brief to record the remains prior to their loss.

Geology and topography

Stoulton is a small parish lying between Worcester and Pershore and covering an area of 1,959 acres, of which the greater part is arable land, 961 acres being permanent grass and 16 woodland (VCH, 1913). The soil is chiefly clay, gravel and sand, and the subsoil Lower Lias, producing crops of wheat, beans, barley, turnips and fruit. The ground varies in height from 79 ft. above the ordnance

datum in the south-east near Stonebow Bridge to about 200 ft. on the borders of White Ladies Aston in the north.

The parish is watered by the Bow Brook, which divides it from Peopleton, and by two of its tributaries, one of which, known as the Saw Brook, forms the boundary between Stoulton and White Ladies Aston. The village, which is composed of scattered houses and cottages, many of half-timber and brick dating from the C17th, is situated on rising ground on the main road from Worcester to Pershore. A wooden bridge and 'causey' over the stream near Hawbridge, where the road enters Holy Cross, were built in 1625 by George Allen, curate of Stoulton, with £5 given by the Dean and Chapter of Worcester and 5s. 4d. of his own money. The main road from Worcester to Evesham forms the north-eastern boundary of Stoulton for some distance. The Great Western railway passes through the parish and has a station on the south-eastern boundary.

The proposed development site lies near Hawbridge Farm in Hawbridge, a small hamlet about 500m to the southeast of Stoulton. Both development sites comprise an area of approx. 2,300m^2 and are situated at approximately 27m Above Ordnance Datum (AOD). The Geological Survey of Great Britain indicates that the underlying geology comprises Lower Lias Clay Formation with thin limestones (BGS, 1993).

ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Stoltun (ix and xi cent.); Stulton (xv cent.); Stowton (xvii cent.).

The first mention of STOULTON occurs in 840, when Bertwulf, King of the Mercians, is said to have restored it to the Bishop of Worcester, who had been unjustly deprived of it. Before the Conquest Stoulton was a berewick belonging to the Bishop of Worcester's manor of Kempsey and was assigned with Mucknell and Wolverton, two other berewicks of the same manor, to the support of the monks of Worcester, the three berewicks together containing 7 hides. At the time of the Domesday Survey these 7 hides were in the possession of Urse the Sheriff. (fn. 7) The overlordship belonged to the Bishops of Worcester until it lapsed, probably in the C15th.

Hawbridge, Stoulton *(WSM32038)* in the C13th was called "Hawbruggestrete". The name is a derivation from "haga" and as Hawbridge is located on the boundary between Stoulton and Pershore, the "haga" may possibly have been a boundary hedge, and the "strete" could have represented the road between Pershore and Worcester.

The church of ST. EDMUND consists of a chancel, west tower, and a small timber north porch. The history of the church is simple, as it has never been enlarged since it was built about the year 1120. Larger windows were inserted in the south wall of the chancel and on either side of the nave in the C14, c1320. The tower is about 120 years old; marks of fire on the northwest buttress of the nave suggest that the former tower was destroyed by fire. The church was restored in 1848, when new windows were inserted in the east wall of the chancel, the north and south walls of the nave, and in the west wall of the tower; at the same time the flat ceiling which then existed was removed.

An HER search was carried out on a 500m radius of the application site. There are 4 archaeological activities *(wsm34313, wsm35057, wsm73877, wsm77793)* and 4 HER monuments *(wsm02619, wsm02620, wsm57373, wsm70084)* recorded within the search area which sits within a rolling topography based on bedrock geology made up of mudstone and limestone. Superficial geology is made up of small deposits of sand and gravel and alluvial, the latter following the course of a tributary of the Bow Brook. The region comprises a sub-regular field pattern, which has survived well, except for the area around Stoulton where significant field amalgamation has overwritten this historic field pattern. Land use in this region is mix farming with large blocks of ancient woodland, the latter forming a band across the centre of this region. Settlement is dispersed with a moderate density of scattered farmsteads. Within the search area nucleated clustered settlement, modern expansion and an isolated farmstead are surrounded by large areas of piecemeal enclosure, field amalgamation and parkland, with smaller areas of meadow and ancient semi-natural woodland. Within the search area lie 2 unlisted, historic buildings, a former C18 cottage and a C19 farmstead. An Historic England funded project to identify the Historic Farmsteads of Worcestershire also recorded 1 farmstead within the search area dating to the C19. In addition to the built environment there are also monument records for medieval ridge and furrow *(wsm02619, wsm02621, wsm70084)* and post medieval farm buildings. There have been no intrusive archaeological investigations within the search, with only desk based assessments and a historic road survey recorded. Archaeology within the surrounding area centres on cropmark evidence of prehistoric settlement and boundaries and medieval below and above ground archaeological features, the latter seen as earthworks to the south of woodlands around Wadborough. Within the search area there could be potential for below ground archaeological features and deposits from all periods. Lack of intrusive archaeological investigations within this area, however, means that it is unknown what condition any remaining archaeological features and

deposits will be in. An Historic England funded project to identify the potential for Palaeolithic Archaeology in Worcestershire recorded deposits within the search area with potential for archaeology dating back 113,050 years.

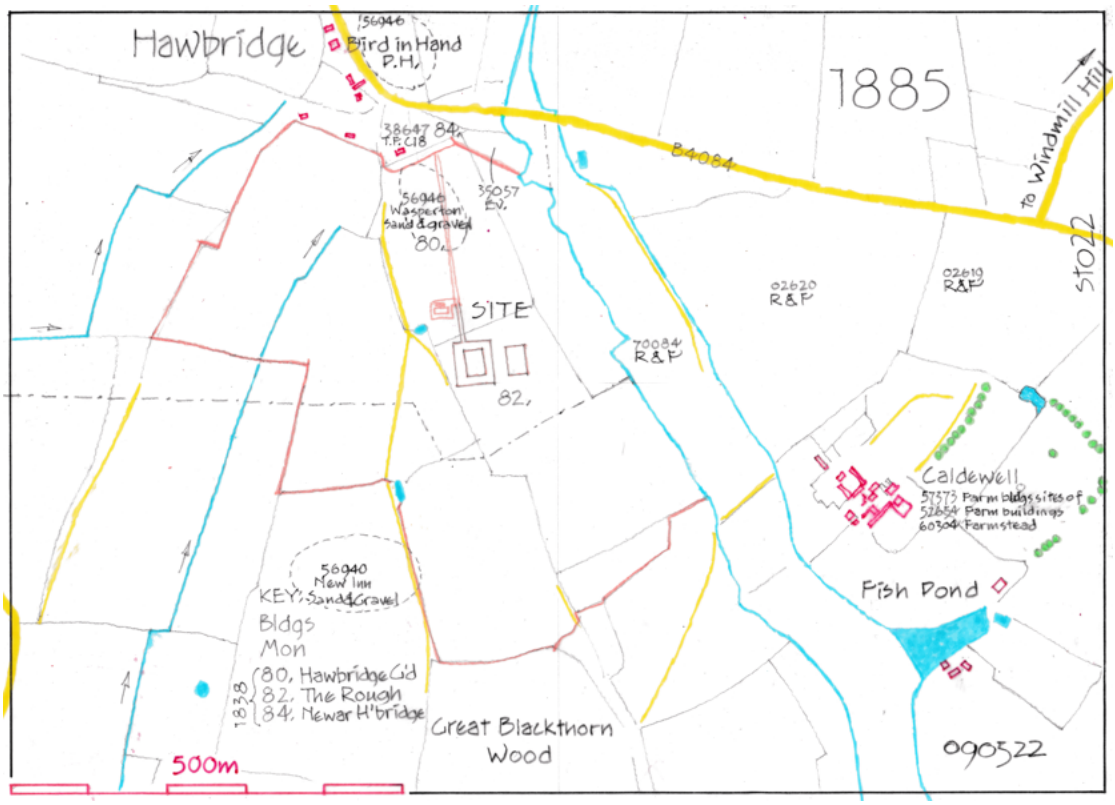

Fig. 3: Historic Environment plan based on OS 1885 with the location of the development.

EXCAVATION METHODOLOGY

Aims of the work

The objectives of the evaluation were to determine the date, character, quality, survival and extent of the archaeological deposits within the application area likely to be threatened by the proposed development in order that an informed decision on their importance in a local, regional and national context can be made. This information would clarify whether any remains should be considered for preservation *in situ* or form the basis of a mitigation strategy.

In particular, the aims of the investigation would include:

i) establishing the date, nature and extent of activity or occupation on the development site.

ii) recovering artefacts to assist in the development of type series within the region.

iii) recovering palaeo-environmental remains to determine local environmental conditions.

Sample size and scope of fieldwork

The evaluation comprised five trenches located within the main areas of impact. Trench 1 was approx. 15m long and positioned within the area of the proposed new agricultural dwelling. Trenches 2-5 were all excavated in the proposed shed area. All the trenches were excavated to a width of 1.50m.

Fieldwork methods and recording

The archaeological field work and post-excavation was carried out in accordance with standards and guidance for archaeological field evaluations produced by the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CIfA, 2020). All deposits were excavated removing the overburden under close archaeological supervision and investigated for archaeological features. Plans and sample sections of the trenches were made and recorded during excavation.

RESULTS: GENERAL

Soil and ground conditions

Conditions were generally dry during the excavation with the soil layers showing little moisture retention. Excavation was relatively smooth throughout the trench being made through alternate layers comprising of topsoil and an underlying subsoil, leaving a clean and visible surface within the natural substrate, a stiff clay.

Reliability of field investigation

There was little evidence of truncation of the underlying deposits apart from that associated with the insertion of a series of land drains across the area.

Distribution of archaeological deposits

No archaeological deposits were revealed during the investigation, instead the excavation revealed an overall stratigraphy across the site comprising of a natural geology consisting of clay overlain by a relict subsoil layer which was in turn sealed by modern topsoil.

Presentation of results

The results of the excavation (below) are described from the earliest to the latest deposits. Trenches were attributed context numbers with a numerical value equivalent to the number of the trench.

RESULTS: DESCRIPTIONS

TRENCHES 1-5

The stratigraphic sequence of deposits within each of the trenches across both areas was broadly similar, the surface of the natural geology (102, 202, 302, 402 & 502) comprised a stiff mid-yellowish-brown clay mottled with blue clay and occasional lenses of reddish-orange, sandy-gravel throughout all the trenches. It was situated at a height of about 27.88m AOD in trench 1, varying between 27.26m AOD at the south end of trench 5 and 26.72m at the north end. These values correspond with the natural contour of the land, which in this part slopes gently from west to east. No archaeological deposits or cut features were observed cut into or overlying this layer. Instead, it was directly overlain by a homogenous undated layer of relict subsoil (101, 201, 301, 401 & 501) comprising a mid-yellowish-brown, silty-clay varying throughout the trenches between 0.04m-0.20m thick. A few residual fragments of modern brick were the only finds recovered from this deposit during the excavation. Marking the upper deposit throughout all the trenches was the modern topsoil (100, 200, 300, 400 & 500) which consisted of a dark greyish-brown loam about 0.25m thick.

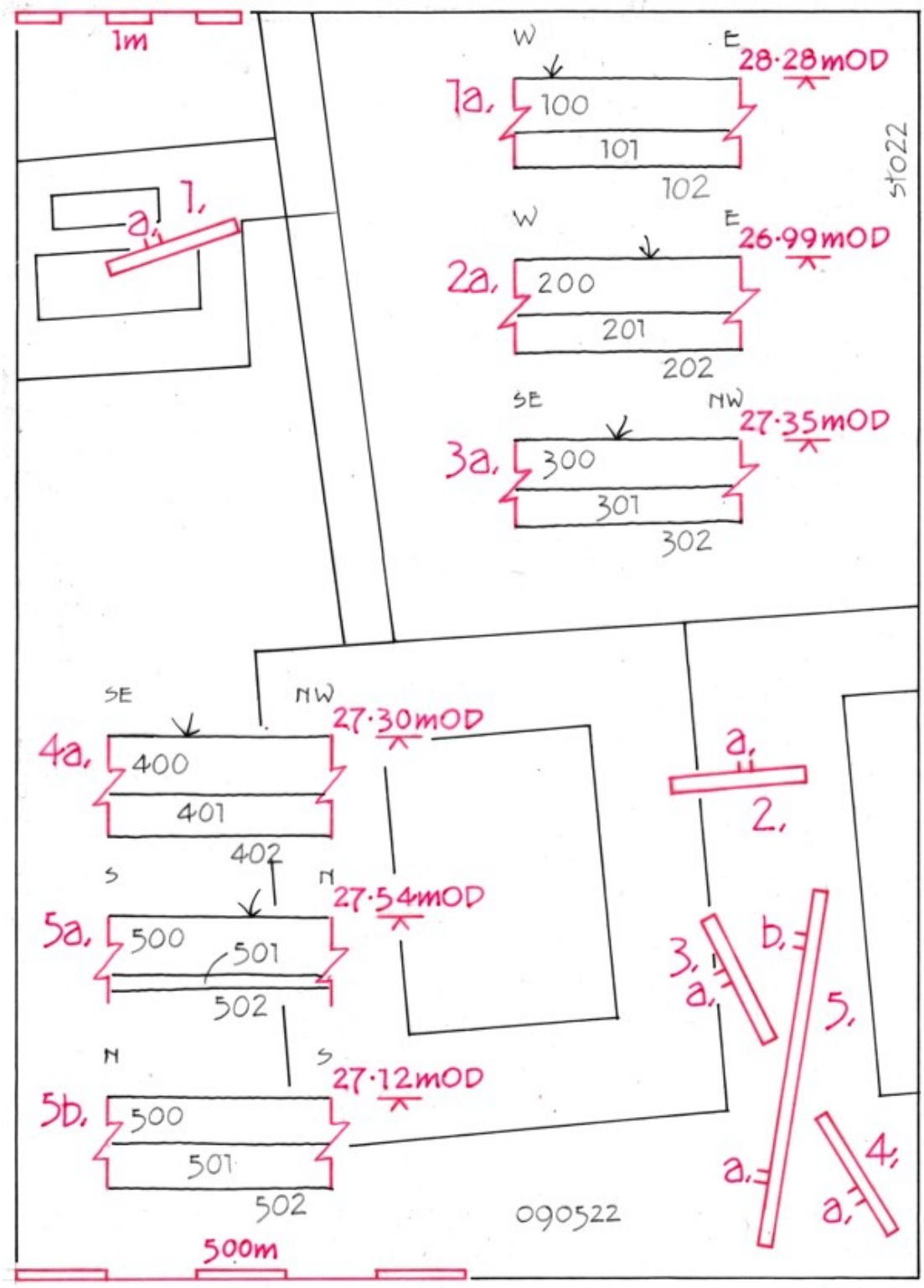

Fig. 4: trench plans and sections.

FINDS

No finds were retrieved during the excavation apart from the occasionally small fragment of red brick.

Environmental data

None of the deposits identified during excavation proved suitable for palaeo-environmental sampling.

DISCUSSION

Both the proposed development sites lie within an area where there is potential for archaeological deposits of all periods to be present. It lies to the east of a possible Romano-British occupation site *(wsm32350)* whilst LiDAR revealed cropmarks within the site which are of a typology comparable to proven Romano-British occupation features.

The investigation produced no archaeological evidence of previous settlement or human activity within the development areas that could be related to earlier occupation. Instead, it revealed a sequence of soil deposits characterising historically a prolonged open rural agricultural environment. This scenario is supported by an absence of residual finds, particularly any flint artefacts, pottery sherds and metal objects which could be expected to have been deposited if te area has been previously settled. It seems likely that any human activity within the areas of proposed development, and possibly the wider area, will have been associated with the agricultural use of the land.

Summary of results

The proposed developments lie in an area where there is potential for Romano-British occupation deposits to be present. A series of investigative trenches were excavated across both areas and produced negative results. A stratigraphic sequence of deposits was recorded indicative of a prolonged open rural environment. The paucity of residual finds, particularly flint artefacts, pottery sherds and metal objects, further supports the hypothesis that historically there

has been little human activity within the areas of investigation other than the general agricultural use of the land.

Significance

The negative results of the investigation show that the possible Romano-British occupation deposits recorded in the HER to the east of the site are unlikely to extend into the areas the proposed development. The cropmark-like features revealed by LiDAR could not be identified suggesting that they could lie further away or perhaps be geological in origin.

Impact of development

The negative results of the investigation show that archaeological deposits are unlikely to be present within the application area and that the development comprising a new detached agricultural dwelling and agricultural shed will have no impact.

Archive Location

The digital archive arising from the work will be deposited with the Archaeology Data Service (ADS) via the online portal OASIS.

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PLATES

Plate 1; trench 1, view northwest

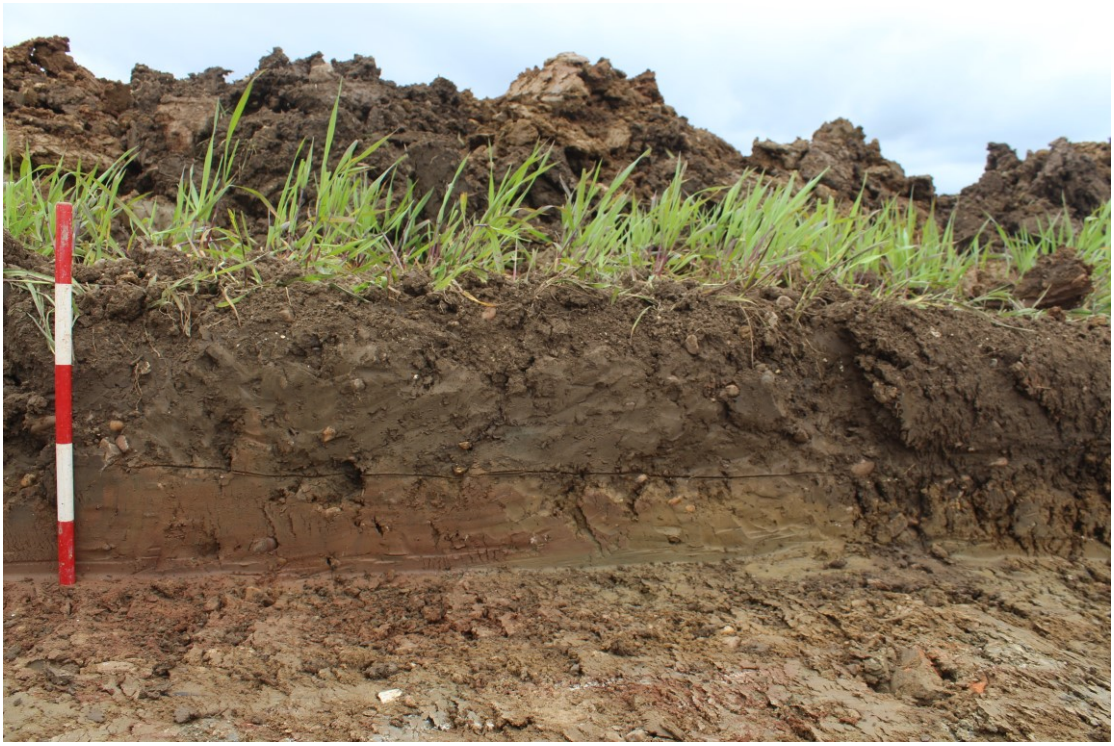

Plate 2; section 1a

Plate 3; trench 2, view west

Plate 4; section 2a

Plate 5: trench 3, view northwest

Plate 6: section 3a

Plate 7; trench 4, view northwest

Plate 8: section 4a

Plate 9: trench 5, view northeast

Plate 10: trench 5, view south

Plate 11; section 5b

Plate 12: trenches 2-5, overall view southeast