

Report 2975



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Archaeological Trial Trench Evaluation at Chalk Lane, Narborough, Norfolk

ENF128439



Prepared for
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Location:	Land at Chalk Lane, Narborough, Norfolk
District:	North Norfolk
Grid Ref.:	TF 7487 1225
Planning Ref.:	Pre-application
HER No.:	ENF 128439
OASIS Ref.:	119696
Client:	B Knights
Dates of Fieldwork:	1 February 2012

Summary

An archaeological evaluation was conducted for Bluebird Land and Planning Ltd on behalf of their client ahead of an application for planning permission to develop the site for residential purposes. The evaluation was undertaken to confirm the presence or absence of the Bichamditch in this location.

Two trial trenches were positioned on the conjectural line of the Bichamditch (Devil's Dyke), a large linear earthwork of Iron Age or Anglo-Saxon origin. An upstanding earthwork bank that lies on the eastern side of the proposed development site adjacent to Chalk Lane is likely to represent a woodland bank rather than the Bichamditch or Devil's Dyke.

Although, the results of this evaluation did not identify remains of the Bichamditch, north-south aligned linear features of an unknown date were identified in both trenches.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

A proposal to construct new houses and associated infrastructure on land off Chalk Lane to the south of Narborough (Fig. 1) in Norfolk resulted in Norfolk Historic Environment Service stipulating that a programme of archaeological works be undertaken prior to submission of the formal application for planning permission in accordance with the guidelines set out in *Planning Policy Statement 5: Planning for the Historic Environment* (Department for Communities and Local Government 2010).

This work was undertaken to fulfil a pre-application planning condition set by Breckland Council's *Breckland District Local Plan Adopted Version* and an archaeological brief issued by Norfolk Historic Environmental Services (Ref. HES 43618). The evaluation was conducted in accordance with a Project Design and Method Statement prepared by NPS Archaeology (Ref. NPS/BAU2975/NP).

NPS Archaeology were commissioned by Bluebird Land and Planning Ltd, on behalf of their client, to undertake an archaeological evaluation in the area of proposed access for residential development in order to assess the likely impact upon any surviving archaeological deposits and therefore allow an informed decision to be made regarding possible mitigation strategies.

This phase of works comprises a two-trench evaluation along a roadside verge bordering Chalk Lane. The verge lies on the conjectural line of the late prehistoric



Figure 1. Site location. Scale 1:5000

or Anglo-Saxon linear earthwork known as the Bichamditch or Devil's Dyke which forms the eastern boundary of the proposed development site.

The proposed development consists of new housing and associated roads which cover an area of approximately 2.3ha. A geophysical (magnetometer) survey of the site was conducted earlier in October 2011 and revealed a group of curvilinear anomalies and numerous linear anomalies, some of which formed field divisions. Subsequently, NPS Archaeology undertook a fourteen-trench evaluation in October 2011 and demonstrated that prehistoric, Iron Age, Early Saxon and medieval activity had occurred within the location of the development site.

This work was commissioned by Bluebird Land and Planning Ltd on behalf of their client.

The site archive is currently held by NPS Archaeology and on completion of the project will be deposited with the Norfolk Museums and Archaeology Service (NMAS), following the relevant policies on archiving standards.

2.0 GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

The information presented in this section has been taken from NPS Archaeology Report 2879 *Archaeological Evaluation of land off Chalk Lane, Narborough, Norfolk* (Ames 2011) and replicated here.

The underlying solid geology comprises of Cretaceous Upper Chalk (West Melbury marly chalk and zigzag chalk formations) (<http://www.bgs.ac.uk/opengeoscience/>) overlain by unrecorded ('undivided') pre-Quaternary deposits (BGS 1991). This area of 'west Norfolk lowlands' consists of poor, acidic soils formed in Cretaceous sands, low-lying waterlogged peat and small patches of clay (Williamson 2005)

The site is located to the south of Narborough, on land at between 15m and 10m OD elevation that slopes gently downwards towards the River Nar to the north-west.

3.0 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The information presented in this section is also replicated from Ames 2011.

A search of the Norfolk Historic Environment Record (NHER) produced evidence of prehistoric and later activity from the potential development site itself as well as from land flanking it on its west and east sides

A cropmark of a ring ditch with two gaps (NHER 11703) was recorded during an aerial photographic sortie in 1974. There are also two semi-circular marks recorded to its north. The feature is located approximately 130m south of the development sites southern boundary close to the 50ft (15m) contour.

Metal detector surveys (NHER 32878) of the triangular-shaped field within which the development site is located have produced finds of several periods including prehistoric, Roman and medieval. The finds include Neolithic and Bronze Age flints, a possible Bronze Age tanged chisel, Roman and Early Saxon brooches (which may indicate a Saxon cemetery), two medieval coins and medieval, post - medieval and undatable metal finds.

From the mid 20th century onwards, large quantities of objects have been recovered from the field to the west of the development site (NHER 3932) as stray finds or as a result of metal detector survey. The finds include a 70+ Roman coins, a Roman pin and brooch, Iron Age, Roman, Anglo-Saxon and medieval pottery fragments, and a fine medieval (late 14th- to early 15th-century) decorated copper alloy belt chape, a seal matrix and other Late Bronze Age, iron Age, Roman, medieval, post-medieval and undated metal finds..

Metal detecting on the old playing field to the immediate north-east of the development site in the late 20th century (NHER 32168) recovered Neolithic and Bronze Age worked flints, Roman coins and pottery fragments, a medieval brooch and buckle and a medieval jetton

A barbed and tanged arrowhead (NHER 15713) was found in the garden of 39 Eastfields in 1976 some 200m to the north-west of the development site.

The line of the Devil's Dyke or Bichamditch (NHER 3937) forms the eastern side of the site (Chalk Lane). This linear feature runs for approximately 11km between the River Nar at Narborough to the north (at the Iron Age fort) and a tributary of the River Wissey at Beachamwell. This is one of several roughly north-south aligned linear earthworks (all located in the western half of Norfolk). The date of construction of such earthworks is not clear - they could be of Iron Age or Early Saxon date – and their purpose perhaps was perhaps part of the definition of territorial areas. An excavation on the possible line of the earthwork at Narborough in 2000 found no evidence of it (Percival 2000).

The route of the King's Lynn to Dereham railway line (NHER 13600) forms the western part of the development area. The railway from King's Lynn reached Narborough in 1846 and Dereham in 1848. It was closed in 1968 (except for sand trains to the quarries at Middleton).

Trial trench evaluation undertaken in 2011 (ENF 127745) produced evidence of Late Neolithic, Early Bronze Age, Early Iron Age, Early Saxon and medieval activity (Ames 2011). Sixteen Neolithic and Bronze Age worked flints came from the topsoil and an exploited hollow of possible natural origin contained human skeletal remains and Early Iron Age pottery of 7th- to 6th-century BC date. (It was conjectured that the fill of this feature may contain an ancient buried soil). A possible pit or sunken featured building that produced a quantity of Early Saxon pottery of 6th-century date was located on the west side of the Bichamditch. This pottery is typical of urns sometimes found containing cremations and in association with inhumation burials. Ditches that were recorded correspond with the geophysical results but due to the lack of finds and the limited stratigraphic information; the majority of these features were undatable.

4.0 METHODOLOGY

The objective of this evaluation excavation watching brief was to determine as far as reasonably possible the presence or absence, location, nature, extent, date, quality, condition and significance of any surviving archaeological deposits within the development area.

The Brief required that two trenches each measuring 5m in length should be excavated across the line of an earthwork bank west of Chalk Lane to gain as

much information as possible on the form, date and state of preservation of the earthwork bank.

Machine excavation was carried out with a hydraulic 360° excavator equipped with a toothless ditching bucket and operated under constant archaeological supervision.

Spoil, exposed surfaces and features were scanned with a metal-detector. All metal-detected and hand-collected finds other than those which were obviously modern, were retained for inspection.

No environmental samples taken.

All archaeological features and deposits were recorded using NPS Archaeology pro forma. Trench locations, plans and sections were recorded at appropriate scales. Digital photographs were taken of all relevant features and deposits where appropriate.

The temporary benchmark used during the course of this work was transferred from the location of a previously surveyed area undertaken in 2011 (Ames 2011, NPS Archaeology report 2879) with a value of 15.25m OD.

Site conditions were very good, with the work taking place in fine weather.

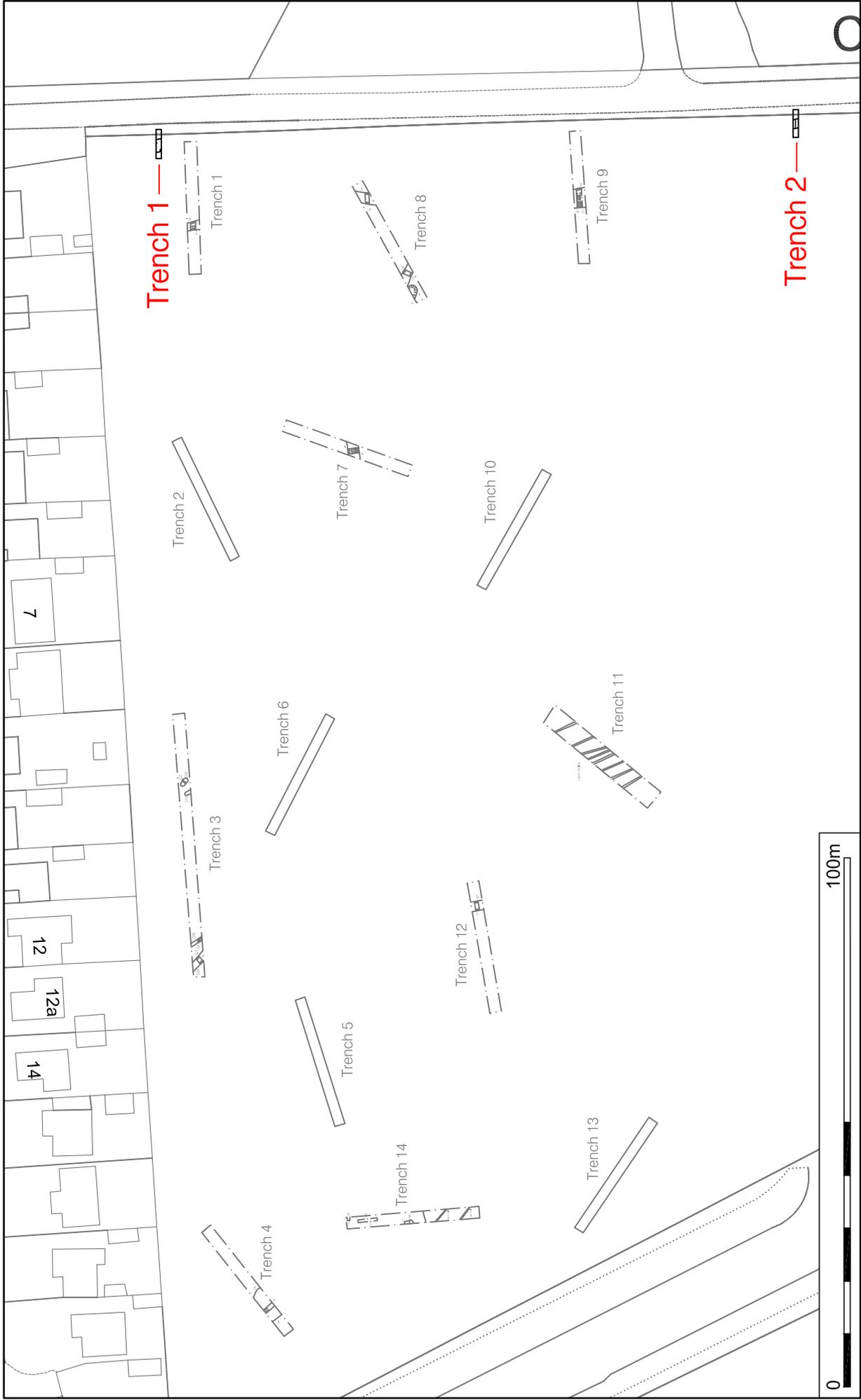


Figure 2. Trench locations. Scale 1:1000

5.0 RESULTS

Archaeological features and deposits were recorded in both Trenches 1 and 2 however no finds were recovered from either trench.

The survival of sub-surface archaeological remains was good as there was a deep topsoil and subsoil overburden which ranged between 0.70m and 1.10m deep.

Trench 1

Trench 1 was the northernmost of the two trenches excavated adjacent to Chalk Lane. It was located on the north-eastern corner of the development site and was aligned east-west. The trench measured 5.50m long by 1m wide and was 1.40m deep at its eastern end and 0.60m deep at its western end.

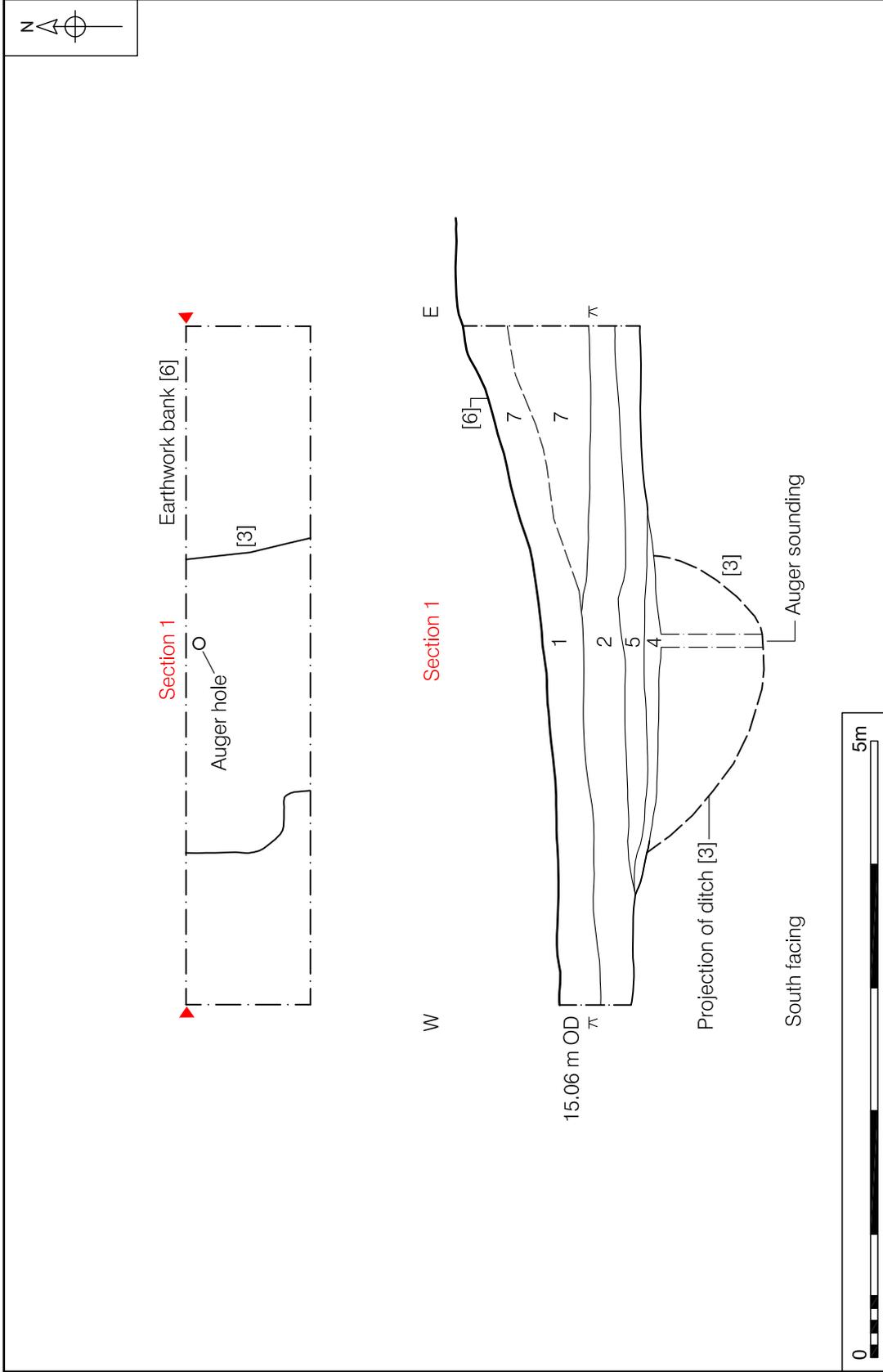
The trench was positioned partially on the earthwork bank (6) and extended into the arable field, (Figs. 2 and 3, Plate 1).



Plate 1. Trench 1, looking east

No clear interface between topsoil [1] and the earthwork bank [6] could be determined (Fig. 3, Section 1) and the upper part of earthwork bank [6] contained heavy vegetation and roots. However, below the upper 0.25m of the earthwork was a very fine and stoneless deposit of homogeneous dark brown silty sand [7] was encountered. The depth of 'bank' deposit [7] was 1.00m at the eastern end of the trench and it tapered towards the west for 2.30m before merging with topsoil [1] and subsoil [2]. Subsoil [2] was between 0.20–0.30m deep and consisted of mid brown silty sand observed to extend beneath deposit [7].

Below, deposit [2] was deposit [5] which was very similar in composition to [2] but [5] was much firmer and contained frequent amounts of flint. Deposit [5] was also seen to extend beneath the earthwork bank, (Fig. 4, section 1).



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Figure 3. Trench 1, plan and section. Scale 1:50

Ditch [3] (Fig. 3) was located beneath the subsoil deposits [5] and [2] and in part below the western extent of earthwork bank [6]. Ditch [3] was aligned north-south and was 2.40m wide. An auger sounding made through the ditch demonstrated that it was approximately 0.90m deep and contained a single fill consisting of mid orange brown sandy silt [4]. As the overlying deposits were approximately 0.80m deep and the feature 0.90m deep it was not possible to explore this feature further.

The stratigraphic sequences observed within this trench suggest that the subsoil deposits [2] and [5] and feature [3] are earlier than the earthwork bank ([6]).

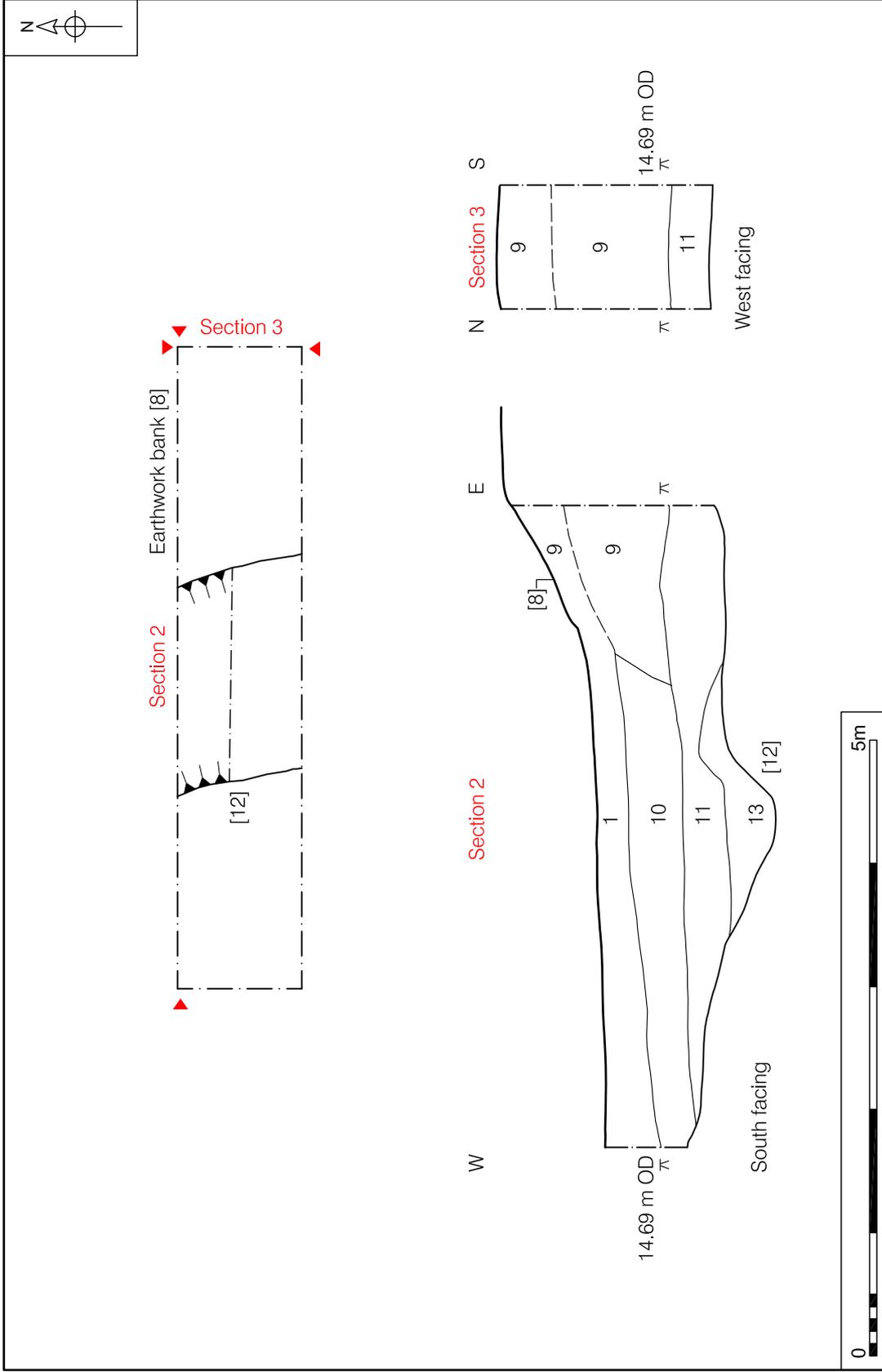
Trench 2



Plate 2. Trench 2, looking east

Trench 2 was the southernmost of the two trenches excavated and was located south of the south-eastern corner of the development site. The trench was aligned east-west and measured 5.20m long by 1m wide by 1.60m deep (eastern end) and 0.65m deep (western end). It was positioned partially on earthwork bank [8] and extended into the arable field (Figs. 2 and 4, Plate 2).

The upper part of earthwork bank [8] consisted of vegetation and roots that merged into topsoil [1]. Deposit [10] which lay below the topsoil was a very similar deposit to earthwork bank deposit [9]. Although there was a slight separation



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Figure 4. Trench 2, plan and sections. Scale 1:50

between the two deposits, they both consisted of very fine homogeneous dark brown silty sand which was stoneless and could perhaps be considered as wind blown material. Below deposits [9] and [10] was subsoil deposit [11] which consisted of mid orangey brown silty sand with occasional flint. Deposit [11] was observed to lie beneath the earthwork bank in the south and west facing sections (Fig. 4, Sections 2 and 3) and as with the deposits in Trench 1 suggests that the earthwork bank was later than subsoil [11].

Below subsoil deposit [11] was ditch [12] which was aligned north-south and measured 1.30m wide by 0.30 deep. It contained a single fill consisting of mid ginger brown silty sand ([13]). This ditch is likely to be the same feature as that recorded in Trench 1, both of which run parallel with earthwork bank [8]/[6] and Chalk Lane.

6.0 CONCLUSIONS

The Bichamditch is a linear earthwork aligned north-south and consists of a bank with ditch on its east side which survives intermittently above ground. It can be traced in the landscape between Narborough and Beachamwell in Norfolk; three sections of the earthwork survive as upstanding earthworks from Narborough Hall for a distance of up to 11km until reaching a tributary stream of the River Wissey at Beachamwell. The origins of the Bichamditch, and specifically whether it is an earthwork of Saxon or Iron Age origin has remained unresolved for some time (Wade-Martins 1974, Davies 1996).

Evaluation trenching undertaken in 2000 at 1-3 Chalk Lane (NHER 3937, Percival 2000) some 300m north of the present work proved negative. The 2000 evaluation was thought to lie on or adjacent to the line of the Bichamditch (believed to follow the same north-south alignment as Chalk Lane before it kinks at the railway to the south of the town). However, there are alternative routes posited for the Bichamditch which join the extant pieces of the earthwork, but route it some 150m further east of Chalk Lane (with a divergent course), terminating at the Iron Age fort (Percival 2000, fig1).

Although linear features and a bank were recorded in both of the evaluation trenches (Trenches 1 and 2) where the Bichamditch might be expected to be located it is considered unlikely that the ditch is associated with the Bichamditch. The upstanding earthwork bank west of Chalk Lane is likely to correspond to a woodland bank and seals the deposits below. Evaluation works undertaken in 2011 (NHER 127745, Ames 2011) recorded a medieval ditch system parallel to Chalk Lane which was located below a subsoil deposit that may have been medieval or later in date. Stratigraphy recorded here in Trenches 1 and 2 suggests that this ditch is of a similar date and may have formed part of the same system; both being aligned north-south and positioned 11m apart, parallel and to the west of Chalk Lane (Fig. 2).

As suggested above, the upstanding earthwork adjacent to Chalk Lane may represent a woodland bank. Byrant's Map of Norfolk in 1826 (Fig. 5) shows an avenue of trees at the crossroads south of Narborough Hall which indicates deliberate landscaping; the line of the woodland bank west of Chalk Lane may be marked today by a pollarded oak tree. The soils in the proposed development area are very light and may be prone to wind erosion; east of Chalk Lane a line of pine

trees is visible in the current landscape similar to the stands of Scots pine which acted as wind breaks in the Breckland landscape.

Recommendations for further mitigation work (if required based on the evidence presented in this report) will be made by Norfolk Historic Environment Service.

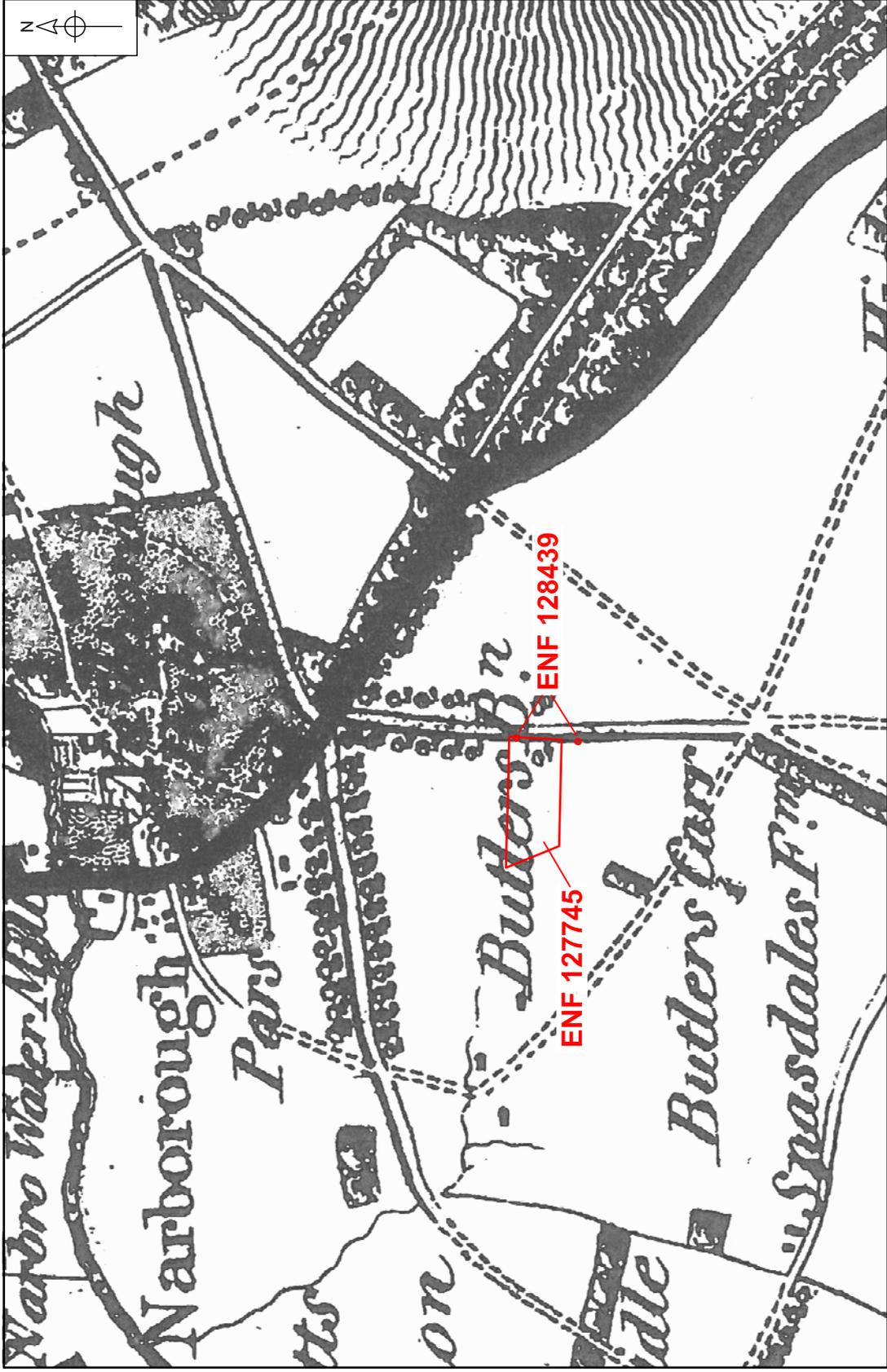


Figure 5. Bryant's map of 1826 (detail), showing Chalk Lane

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This report was produced by David Dobson and edited by Jayne Bown.

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Appendix 1a: Context Summary

Context	Category	Cut Type	Fill Of	Description	Period	Trench No.
1	Deposit			Topsoil	Modern	Trench 1 and 2
2	Deposit			Subsoil	Unknown	Trench 1
3	Cut	Ditch		North-south aligned	Unknown	Trench 1
4	Deposit		3	Mid orange brown sandy silt	Unknown	Trench 1
5	Deposit			Lower subsoil,	Unknown	Trench 1
6	Deposit			Earthwork bank	Unknown	Trench 1
7	Deposit			Earthwork deposit	Unknown	Trench 1
8	Deposit			Earthwork bank	Unknown	Trench 2
9	Deposit			Earthwork deposit	Unknown	Trench 2
10	Deposit			Very fine ? Topsoil	Modern	Trench 2
11	Deposit			Subsoil	Unknown	Trench 2
12	Cut	Ditch		North-south aligned	Unknown	Trench 2
13	Deposit		12	Mid ginger brown sandy silt	Unknown	Trench 2

Appendix 1b: OASIS Feature Summary

Period	Category	Total
Unknown	Ditch	2