Suffolk County Council

ARCHAEOLOGICAL MONITORING REPORT

SCCAS REPORT No. 2010/223

Modular Control System, RAF Lakenheath, LKH 331

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HER Information

Planning Application No:	**N/A**
Date of Fieldwork:	**June-July 2010**
Grid Reference:	**Centred at TL 74 82**
Funding Body:	**Defence Estates USAF**
Curatorial Officer:	**Judith Plouviez**
Project Officer:	**Andrew Tester**
Oasis Reference:	**1-90277**
	Digital report submitted to Archaeological Data Service: http://ads.ahds.ac.uk/catalogue/library/greylit

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Summary

An archaeological monitoring was carried out during the laying of cable around the airfield at RAF Lakenheath. Most of the trenching was not seen but two undated pits and a buried soil (LKH 331) were recorded beneath the access road to the airfield at Caudle Head.

1. Introduction

A limited programme of archaeological monitoring was carried out during the excavation of trenches and access pits during the laying of cables on RAF Lakenheath. The work was to involve the laying of c.10km of ducting in a continuous loop around the airfield. The majority of the work was dug through verges with selected crossing over the various minor roads. Access pits were dug where piping was to be joined. The principal contractor for the project is Volker-Fitzpatrick.

2. Geology and topography

The natural geology consists of chalk which is overlain by windblown sands. This natural landscape with light vegetation holding down drifting sand was levelled when the airbase was constructed. The varying depth of sands and chalk across the base reflects the earlier natural landscape.

3. Archaeological background

The airfield at Lakenheath includes numerous archaeological sites under both Lakenheath (LKH) and Eriswell Heritage Environment codes parish codes (ERL). In summary these include prehistoric finds of flint and pottery and extensive settlement remains from the Late Iron Age to Early Saxon periods; that extends intermittently to Mildenhall and to Lakenheath village and beyond. The Roman settlement appears to have been particularly dense close to Caudle Head and in the Early Saxon period at least 463 burials were made beneath new dormitory housing mainly under site codes ERL 104 and ERL 046 (Caruth and Anderson 2005). Other features of archaeological interest include the rabbit Warren banks which date from medieval times are known to have crossed the site in various places.

In the context of this project it was decided to concentrate the monitoring close to areas of known archaeology particularly towards the airfield access (sites LKH 167, 255 and 256) and towards the north-west (sites LKH 070, 211 and 127).

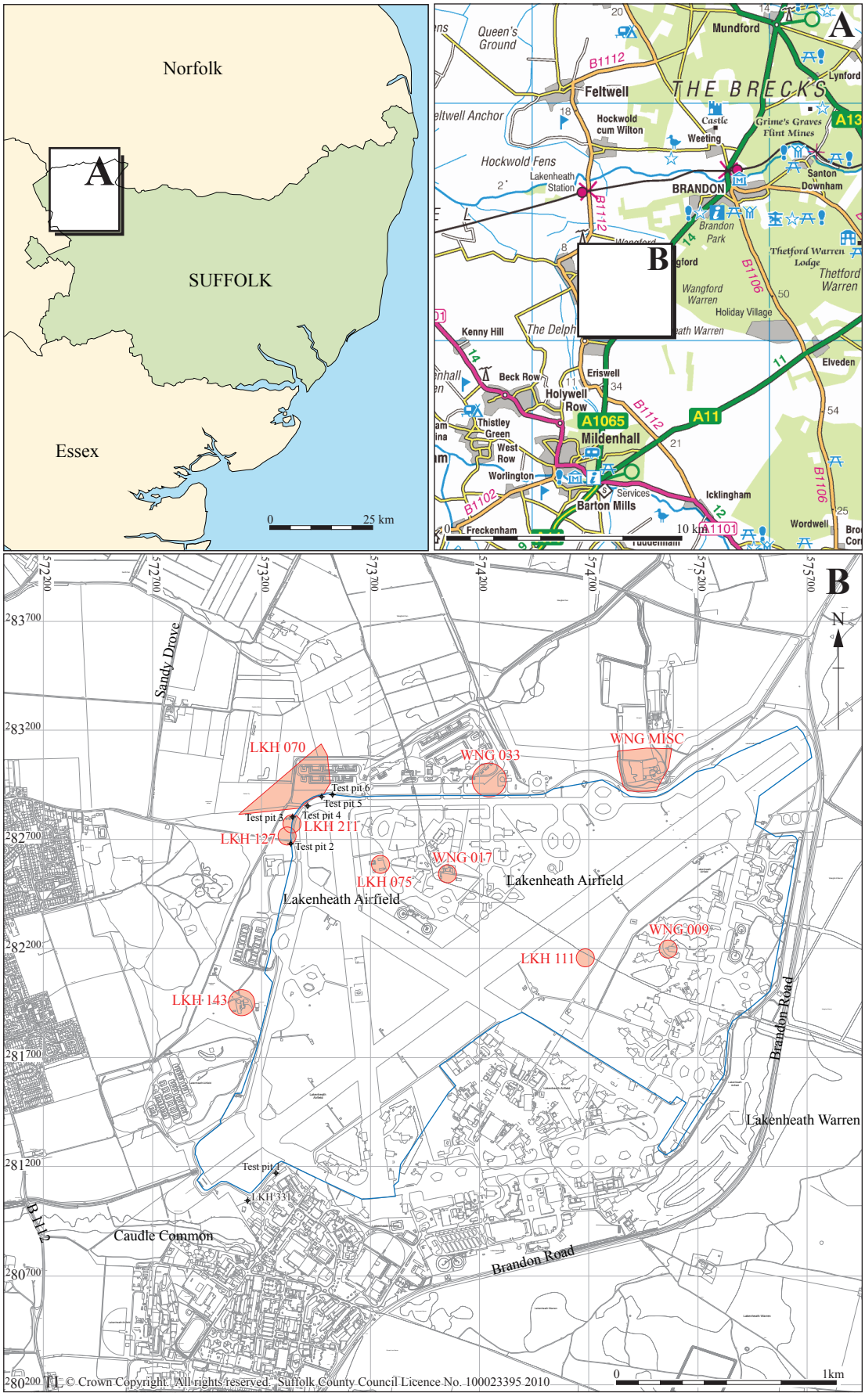

Figure 1. Site location showing areas of ducting (blue) and HER references (red)

4. Methodology

When the initial contact for the project was made a list of archaeological site areas of interest were identified. A programme of works was than established for excavating the various lengths of pipe and visits were planned to coincide with the laying of the ducting through these areas. Unfortunately the work programme was radically altered and the open, grass, areas between the roads and pathways were excavated and backfilled first and well ahead of the connecting areas of hard standing. As a mitigation strategy it was agreed to monitor the small connecting box excavations, where the lengths of ducting joined and the excavations beneath the various access roads in the targeted areas known to have archaeology. The length of the trench was also walked after it had been backfilled over large lengths of site in order to register any change in the soil profile exhibited by the backfilled trench.

5. Results

The monitoring is described travelling clockwise beginning with Pit 1(figure 2) towards the southern most access to the airfield.

Pit 1

Two rectangular connecting pits were seen in this area but only one had an undisturbed section that could be recorded and this has been recorded as pit 1. The pit was dug within the easement of a large water pipeline. The section was 1.3 deep (figure 4); the layers were 0.7m of disturbed ground above c. 0.12m was grey sand above 0.2m of pale brown sand with iron staining (caused by gleying); the last profiled layer was 0.3m of grey sand that contained fragments of charcoal. This layer was above natural yellow sand.

Site LKH 331

This included the excavation across the access road to the airfield. This was in the vicinity of site LKH 256, which was identified as Iron Age when the road was resurfaced. Very little of that site was excavated because the occupation surface was below the formation level of the road.

A trench 9.5m long was excavated of which 6.5m was across the road. The trench was between 1m and 1.15m deep from east to west. Of the soil profile c. 0.5m consisted of course gravel hardcore with a truncated layer of dark sandy silt immediately below, which was c. 0.15m thick. Two semi-circular features were visible in the side of the trench that are interpreted as circular pits (Sec. 1). Pit 0002 was c. 0.3m deep and c. 1.2m wide; it had dark sand silt fill with occasional burnt stones. In profile it was fairly shallow and was not hand excavated beyond the cleaning of the section and no finds were recovered. Pit 0003 was slightly larger being c. 1.3m in diameter and was also 0.4m deep. The pit was filled with dark grey sand and contained occasional natural flints.

Pit 0002 seen obliquely in section 1 looking north (1m scale).

Further visits were made in the vicinity of sites LKH 127, 211 and 070.

Test pits 3-7

Excavations in these areas occurred in the disturbances created by the much wider trench excavated for the 'Balfour Beatty' water pipeline. None of these trenches produced sections that warranted detailed recording. Hand made pottery was observed in the upper backfill of the trenching in the vicinity of holes 4 and 5, which is likely to be of Iron Age date and was left on site.

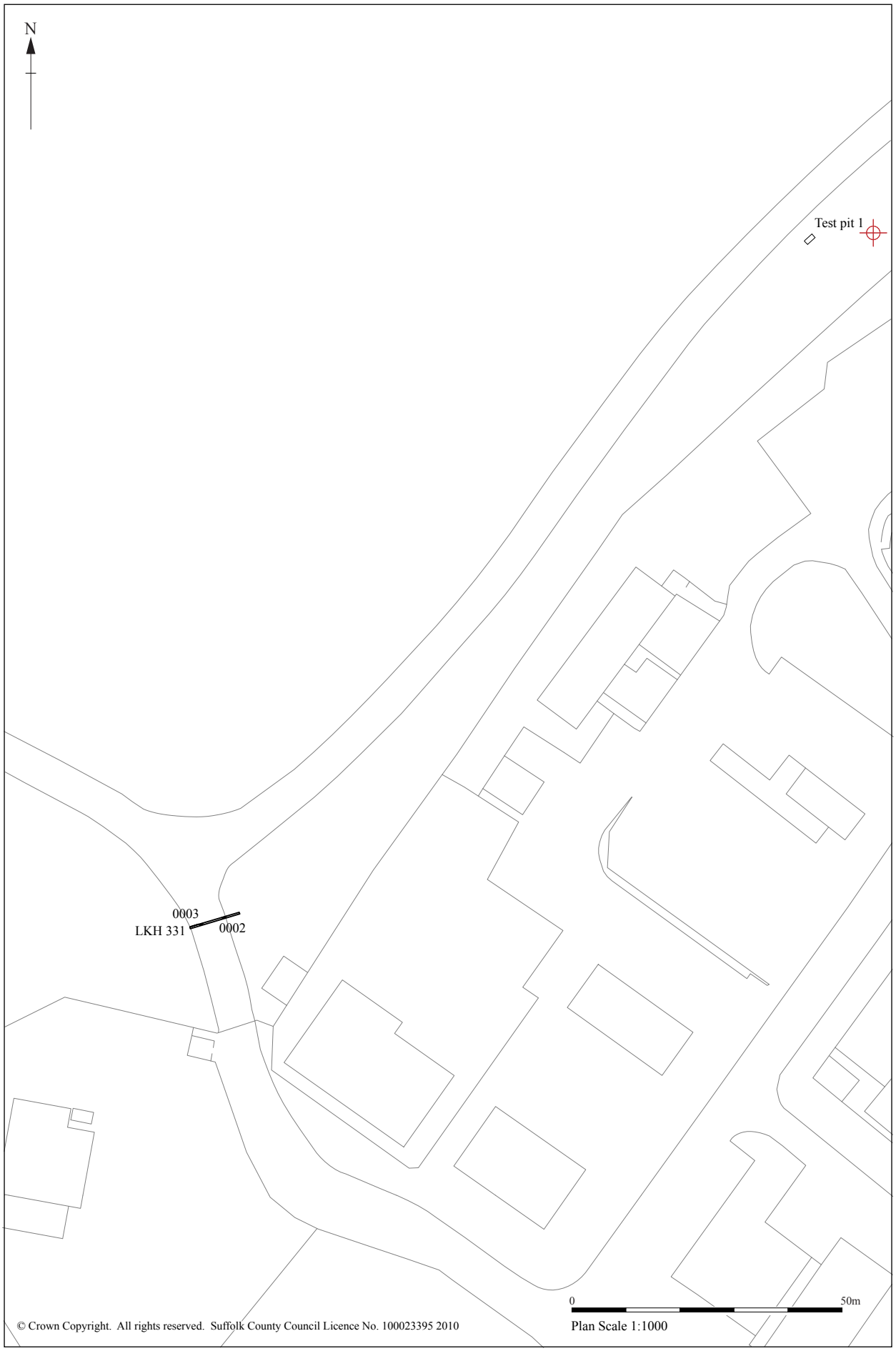

Figure 2. Location of test pit 1 and site LKH 331

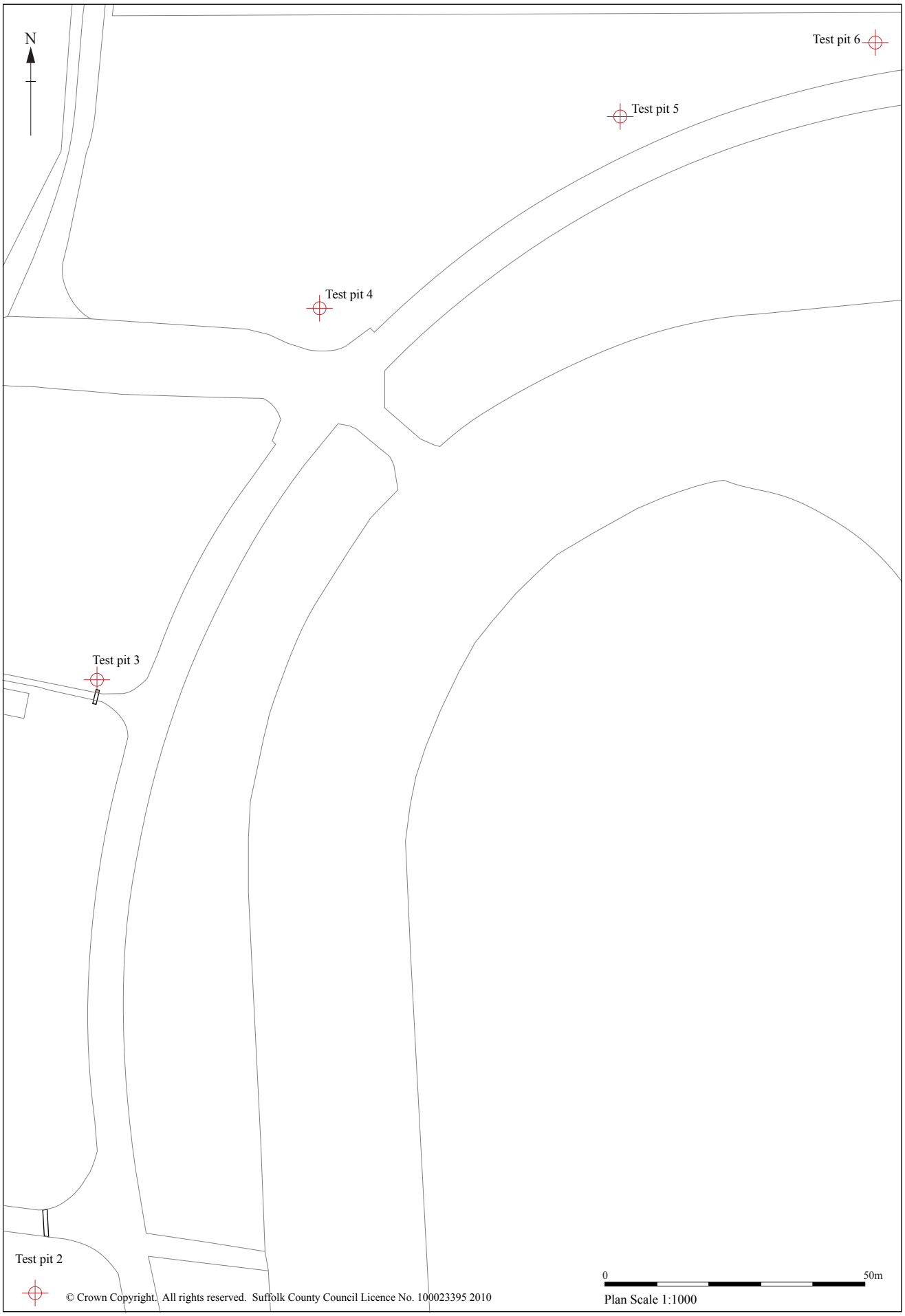

Figure 3. Location of test pits 2 to 6

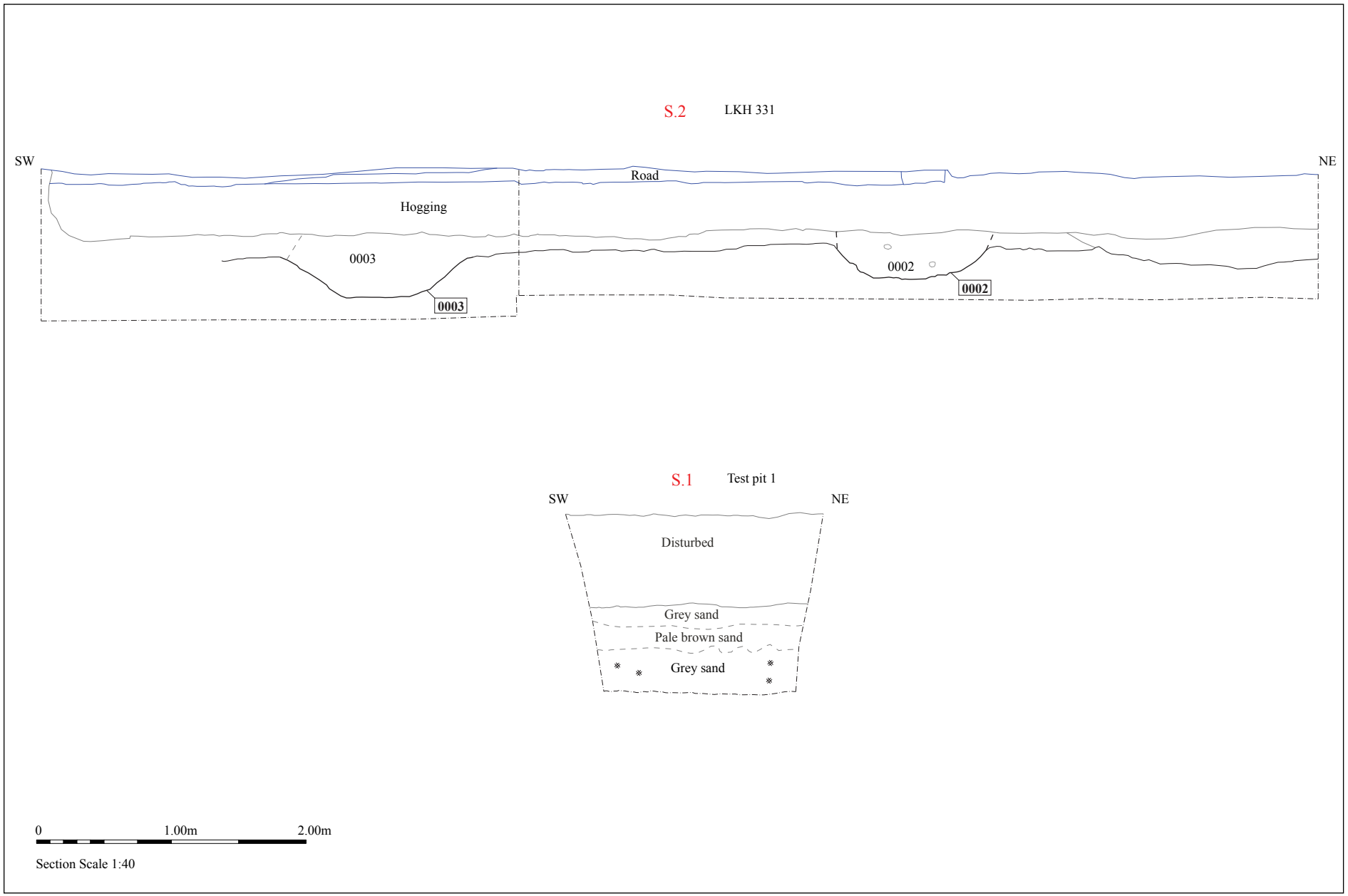

Figure 4. Sections

6. Discussion

Due to the variation in the work programme for the ducting very little of the trenching was monitored for archaeology in either of the targeted areas. The soil profile Test pit No.1 would appear to show a buried occupation soil with grey sand and charcoal (or more properly an anthropogenic podsol); the concentrated iron staining above this is evidence of gleying, which occurs when the water table fluctuates and causes minerals particularly iron to be concentrated in the soil. It is suggested that the lower soil was Late Roman or earlier; this is because the water table around the fen edge began to rise through the Iron Age continuing until the Late Saxon period. The gleying occurred above the buried soil implying that it was later.

7. Archive deposition

Paper and photographic archive: SCCAS Bury St Edmunds
T:arc\Allsite/RAFLakenheath

8. List of contributors and acknowledgements

The monitoring visits and report writing were all carried out by Andrew Tester. Crane Begg and Ellie Hillam completed the graphics. All of the staff are from Suffolk County Council Archaeological Service, Field Team. Joanna Caruth managed the project.

9. Bibliography

Caruth, J., Anderson S., 2005, Archaeological assessment report. 'RAF Lakenheath, Anglo-Saxon cemeteries ERL104, ERL 046 and ERL 114. A Report on the Archaeological Excavations,1997-2002' . (unpublished assessment report).