University of Leicester
Archaeological Services

An Archaeological Evaluation at the Temporary Workshop, MIRA Limited, Higham on the Hill, Leicestershire

NGR: SP 3685 9594

Andrew Hyam

ULAS Report No. 2014-036

An Archaeological Evaluation at the Temporary Workshop, MIRA Limited, Higham on the Hill, Leicestershire

NGR: SP 3685 9594

A R Hyam

For: MIRA Ltd

Checked by Project Manager

Signed: 

Date: 19.02.2014

Name: .....Patrick Clay.

University of Leicester
Archaeological Services
University Rd., Leicester, LE1 7RH
Tel: (0116) 2522848 Fax: (0116) 2522614

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An Archaeological Evaluation of the Temporary Workshop, MIRA Limited, Higham on the Hill, Leicestershire. NGR SP 3685 9594

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Summary

An archaeological evaluation was undertaken by the University of Leicester Archaeological Services (ULAS) at MIRA Limited on the 13th of February 2014. The work was carried out in advance of a planning application for a Temporary Workshop. Four short trenches with a total area of 40m^2 were excavated in the limited space available.

No archaeological features or deposits were observed during the evaluation.

The report will be archived with Leicestershire Museums Service under Accession Number X.A1.2014.

Introduction

In accordance with National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) Section 12 *Conserving and Enhancing the Historic Environment* this document forms the report for an archaeological evaluation on land designated for the Temporary Workshop, at MIRA Ltd, Higham on the Hill, Leicestershire, NGR SP 3685 9594. Planning permission is being sought by MIRA for the construction of four new buildings: MIRA Buildings 1 and 2 plus the Temporary Workshop and Sixpack buildings. This report covers the archaeological investigation for the Temporary Workshop. Following the NPPF the planning authority require that evaluation by trial trenching be undertaken in order to ascertain whether any archaeological remains are present and, if so, to their character and extent. This work is a pre-determination investigation.

Background

The MIRA site lies within the parish of Higham on the Hill, in the District of Hinckley and Bosworth, Leicestershire, approximately 3 km to the north of Nuneaton, 4km north-west of Hinckley and 8km south-east of Atherstone (Fig. 1). It is demarcated by the A5 (Roman Watling Street) to the south; which is also the border between Leicestershire and Warwickshire. The dismantled Ashby and Nuneaton Joint Railway runs to the south-east of the site, and to the north-west and north-east lie fields and local roads. The total area for the MIRA site, including the test track is around 310 hectares which is similar to the area covered by the former RAF base. The proposed Temporary Workshop will lie within the heart of the MIRA site and to the west of the original A-layout of the wartime runways (Fig. 2).

The British Geological Survey of England and Wales, sheet 169 (Coventry) shows that the underlying geology over most of the site is likely to be Thrussington Till overlain by Dunsmore Gravel and Anker Sand and Gravel to the south, with skerries of siltstone. To the north and north-west of the site lie Wolston Clay and alluvial

deposits. The site lies at a height of around 100m above OD, with the high point of the site lying at 104m above OD close to the southern edge.

University of Leicester Archaeological Services has undertaken an assessment of the archaeology and cultural heritage potential within the proposed overall development area, the results of which are relevant to the current proposal for the proposed MIRA Buildings 1, 3 (Clay 2013a;2013b), Temporary Workshop and Sixpack (Figs. 3 and 4). This included an initial desk-based assessment (Hunt and Speed 2010), an historic buildings survey (Richards 2011,), fieldwalking survey (Coward 2011), geophysical surveys (Austrams 2011), metal detector survey (Mackinder 2011) and a trial trench evaluation (Thomas 2011), which have been undertaken to assess the likely impact of the development on the archaeology and cultural heritage. The desk-based assessment was the initial stage in characterising the archaeological and cultural heritage resource of the site in order to assess the impact of the proposed work on known and potential archaeological deposits and historic structures within the area and included the area of the proposed MIRA Buildings 1 and 3. Fieldwalking and geophysical surveys are non-intrusive methods of attempting to detect underlying archaeological deposits. Trial trenching on the site of the proposed Buildings 1 and 3 revealed no definite features of an archaeological origin (Jarvis, 2014). Trial trenching has been undertaken to target some geophysical anomalies and part of the road infrastructure to the west of the present proposal.

The desk-based archaeological assessment confirmed that there are known sites of archaeological interest within the locality of the proposed MIRA Buildings, including the Watling Street Roman Road (Hunt 2011). The 1st edition OS map of 1886 and subsequent editions show the proposed locations to have originally been within an arable field prior to the construction of the airfield in 1941. The Temporary Workshop site currently lies within a small grassed area north-west of the MIRA testing circuit. Fieldwalking and geophysical survey in the fields immediately to the west located a few medieval and one prehistoric artefact and identified some geophysical anomalies of possible archaeological origin (Coward 2011; Austrums 2011).

The site of the proposed Temporary Workshop forms part of one of the concrete hard standing dispersal areas created when the airfield was first constructed. Dispersal points were spread around the airfield perimeter track and used as safe areas to load bombs into aircraft and to minimise risk of damage in case of enemy attack. A wartime RAF aerial photograph shows the proposed site to be just west of an aircraft dispersal hard standing point on the south western side of the main runway (Fig. 5). The Temporary Workshop will partially cover one of the concrete tracks and a small grass area within the centre of the dispersal point (Fig. 6).

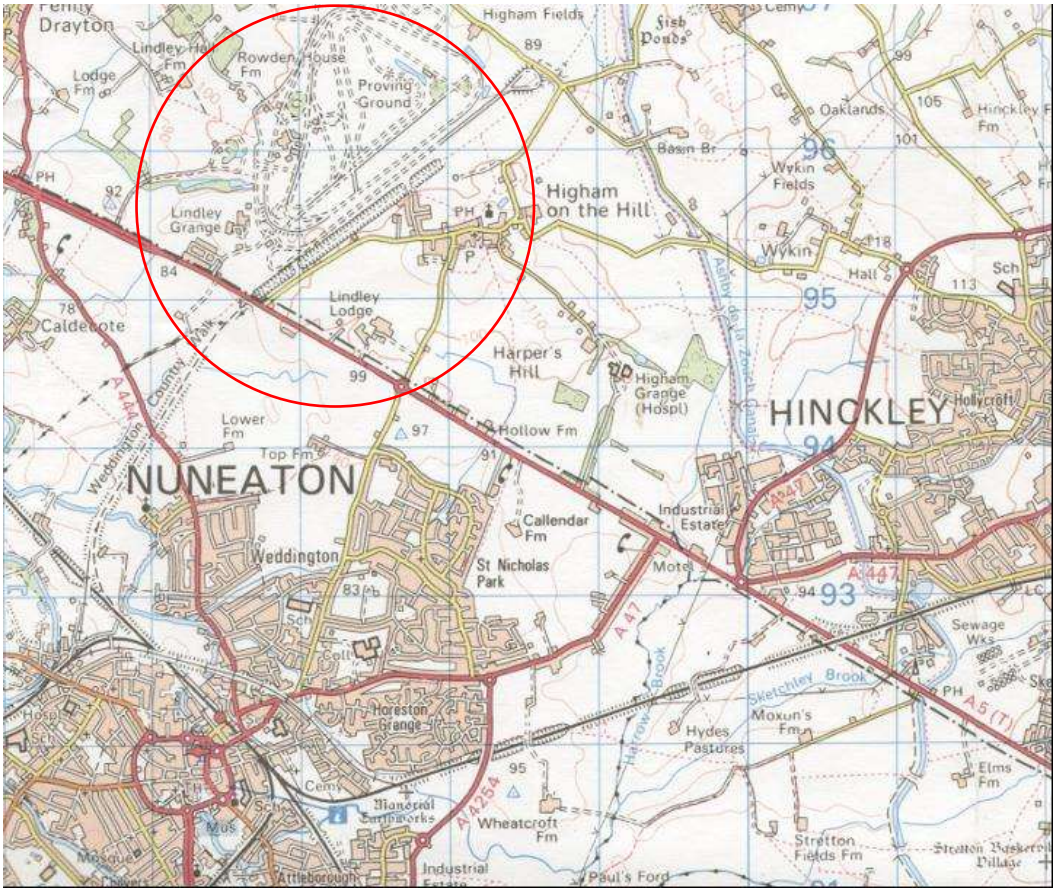

Figure 1 MIRA location

Figure 2 Site location

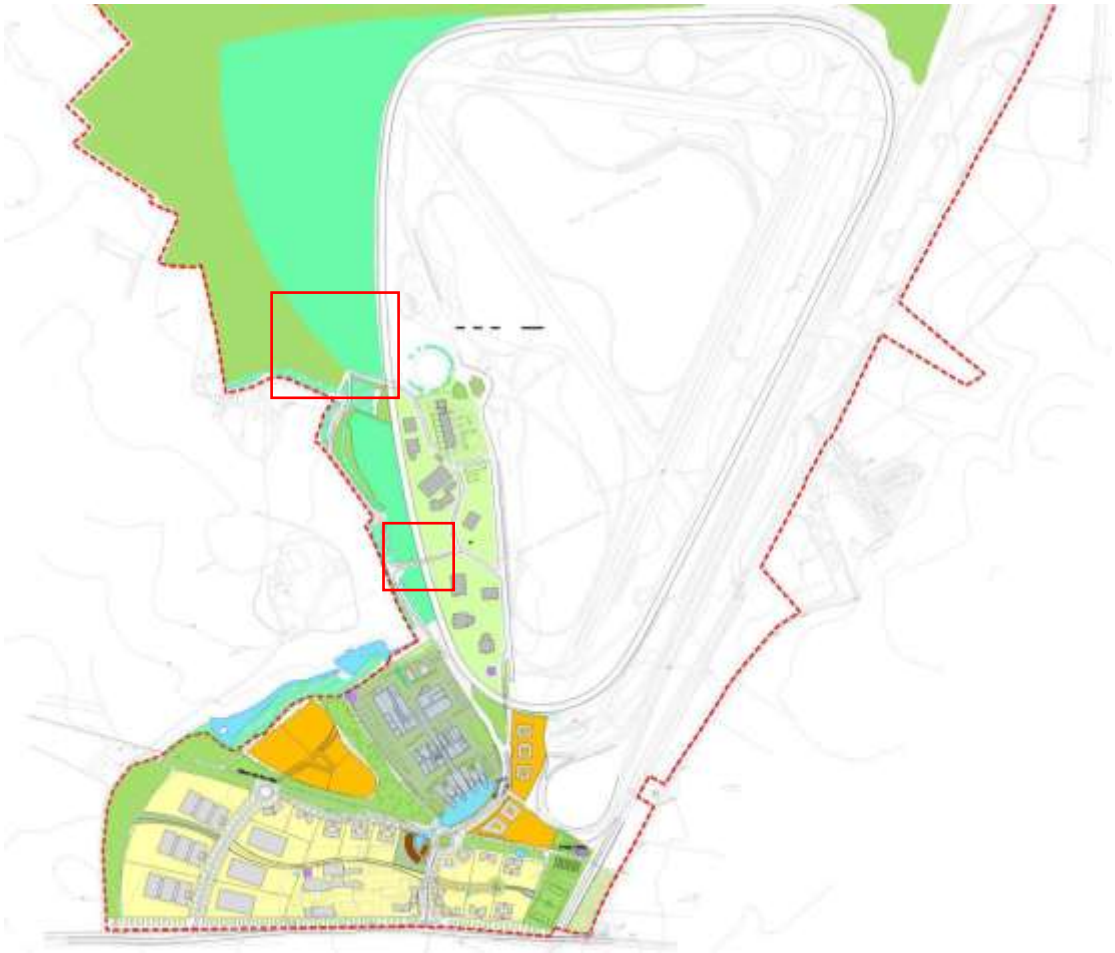

Figure 3 Proposed location of new buildings
Plan supplied by MIRA. Sixpack location to north, Temporary Workshop to south

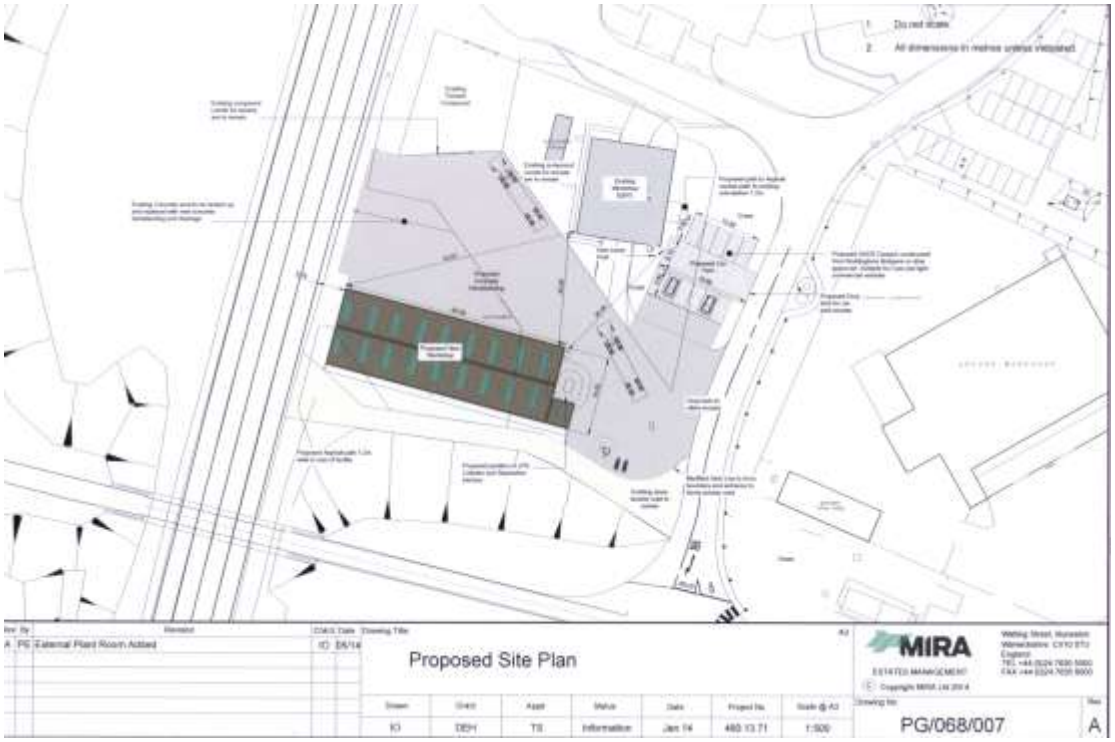

Figure 4 Proposed new Temporary Workshop. Plan supplied by MIRA

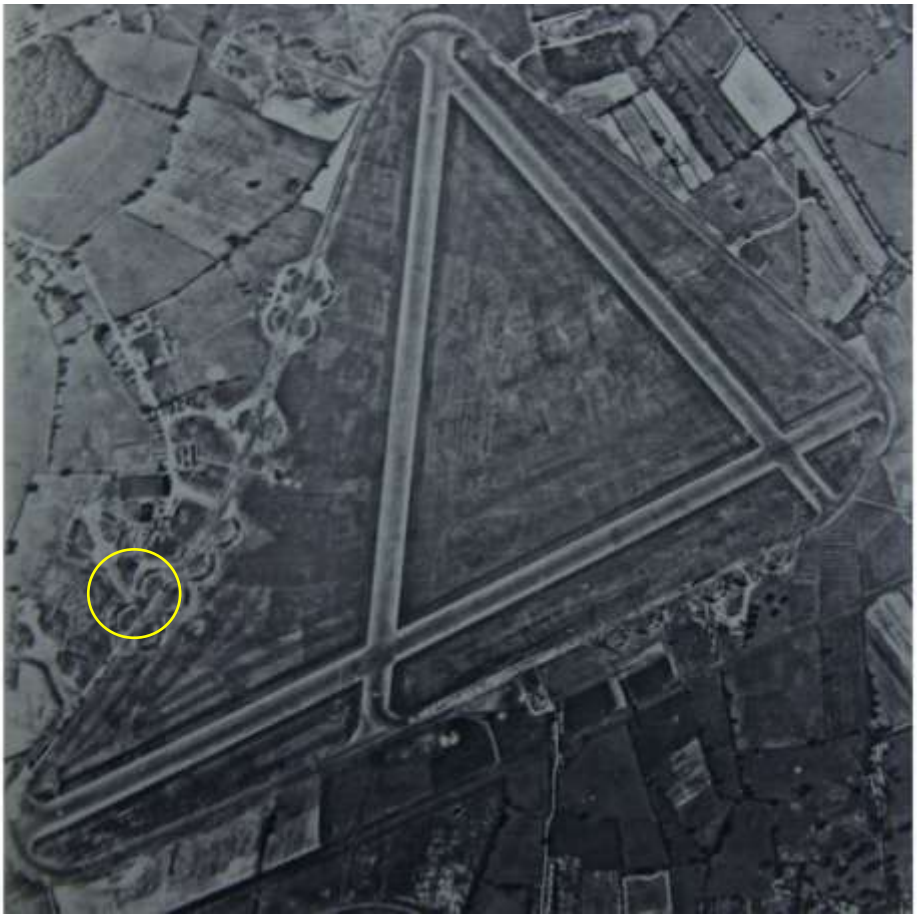

Figure 5 RAF photograph of airfield. Approximate location of the Temporary Workshop highlighted

Figure 6 Evaluation area looking north-west. Area outlined in red

Objectives

The archaeological evaluation was identified as having the potential to contribute to the following research aims.
The Roman Period (Taylor 2006; Knight et al 2012; English Heritage 2012)

There are several Roman sites close to the area including enclosures and a major Roman road. The evaluations could help to contribute to knowledge on Iron Age – Roman transitions in rural settlement, landscape and society. Artefacts recovered may identify trade links and economy.

Medieval (Lewis 2006; Knight et al 2012)
The area lies close to the medieval village and may contribute to the study of rural medieval settlement and East Midlands Research Strategy 6.7.7.2 (Knight *et al* 2012, 94; Lewis 2006).

The main objectives of the evaluation were:

- To identify the presence/absence of any archaeological deposits.
- To establish the character, extent and date range for any archaeological deposits to be affected by the proposed ground works.
- To produce an archive and report of any results.

Within the stated project objectives, the principal aim of the evaluation is to establish the nature, extent, date, depth, significance and state of preservation of archaeological deposits on the site in order to determine the potential impact upon them from the proposed development.

Methodology

All work followed the Institute for Archaeologists (IfA) Code of Conduct (2010) and adhered to their *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Field Evaluation* (2008). The LCC *Guidelines and Procedures for Archaeological Work Leicestershire and Rutland* (1997) were also adhered to.

A number of services were known to run across the proposed evaluation area. Prior to machining the area was CAT scanned and the location of an 11kv electric cable was clearly marked out. A 30m long by 1.6m wide trench was specified in the WSI. However, because of the available space and presence of live services and surrounding concrete roads it was necessary to excavate a number of short 1.8m wide trenches across the area. The plan was modified with the aim of achieving a series of open areas of similar size. Turf, topsoil and overburden were removed in level spits under continuous archaeological supervision using a mechanical excavator fitted with a toothless ditching bucket.

All work followed the Institute for Archaeologists (IfA) *Code of Conduct* (2011) and adhered to their *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Field Evaluation* (2008). The LCC *Guidelines and Procedures for Archaeological work Leicestershire and Rutland* (1997) were adhered to.

Prior to any machining of trial trenches general photographs of the site area were taken. Topsoil and overburden was removed carefully in level spits, under continuous archaeological supervision using a mechanical excavator using a toothless bucket. Trenches were excavated down to the top of archaeological deposits or natural undisturbed ground, whichever was reached first. All excavation by machine and by hand was undertaken with a view to avoid damage to archaeological deposits or features which appeared worthy of preservation in situ or more detailed investigation than for the purposes of evaluation. Should any exposed structures, features or finds appear to merit preservation in situ, they would adequately protected from deterioration.

Trenches were examined by hand cleaning and any archaeological deposits located were planned at an appropriate scale. Archaeological deposits would be sample-excavated by hand as appropriate to establish the stratigraphic and chronological sequence, recognising and excavating structural evidence and recovering economic, artefactual and environmental evidence. Particular attention was paid to the potential for buried palaeosols and waterlogged deposits in consultation with ULAS's environmental officer.

An adequate photographic record of the investigations was prepared illustrating in both detail and general context the principal features and any finds discovered. The photographic record also included 'working shots' to illustrate more generally the nature of the archaeological operation mounted.

Measured drawings of all archaeological features were prepared at a scale of 1:20 and tied into an overall site plan. All plans were tied into the Ordnance Survey National Grid. Relative spot heights were taken as appropriate.

Sections of any excavated archaeological features would be drawn at an appropriate scale. At least one longitudinal face of each trench was recorded. All sections would be levelled and tied to the Ordnance Survey Datum, or a permanent fixed benchmark.

Trench locations were recorded by an appropriate method and tied in to the Ordnance Survey National Grid.

Any human remains encountered would be initially left in situ, where appropriate the police and coroner would be informed. Human remains would only be removed following appropriate liaison with the Ministry of Justice and in compliance with their requirements and in accordance with appropriate professional standards and guidance, as well as other relevant environmental health regulations. In all circumstances the developer and Leicestershire County Council, would be informed immediately upon the discovery of significant human remains.

Results

The grassed area under the site of the proposed Temporary Workshop was approximately 10.5m wide and ran northwards for 15m before turning north westwards and narrowing to a thin point. However, running at an angle across the grass was an electric cable which cut down the available space for the evaluation (Fig. 7). Prior to the archaeological work a geotechnical pit, measuring approximately 6m by 1m, had also been dug within the evaluation area (see Fig. 6). Concrete and metalled roadways surrounded the grass area.

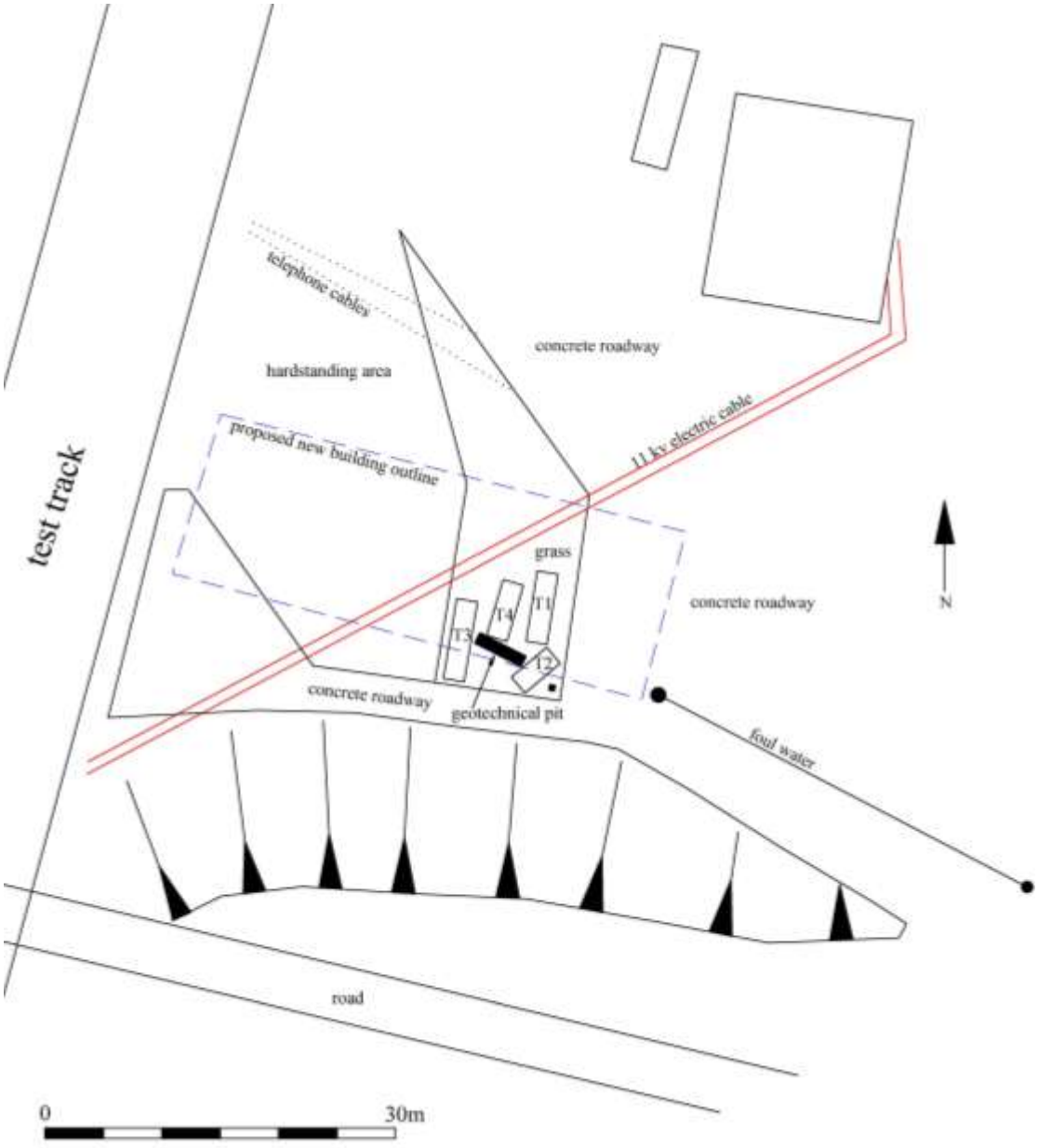

Figure 7 Trenches and service locations

Four 1.8m wide trenches were excavated within the area:

Trench 1

Trench 1 measured 6.1m in length and followed a north to south orientation. It was started at a safe distance from the electric cable and ran almost to the point of the geotechnical pit. An average depth of 0.29m of mid brown clay silt topsoil was observed along the length of the trench. Removal of the topsoil revealed a dark orange brown silty-clay subsoil with an average depth of 0.21m. Below this was the undisturbed natural substratum consisting of a mid-orange brown silty-clay (Fig. 8). No archaeological features or deposits were observed within the trench.

Trench 2

Trench 2 was angled across the south-east corner of the grass to avoid a manhole cover and the southern edge of the geotechnical pit and measured 3.95m in length. The topsoil and subsoil were the same as in Trench 1 and in all other trenches. An area of disturbance containing modern brick and ceramic drainpipe was noted in the eastern corner of the trench and probably led northwards from the manhole (Fig. 9). It is thought that this disturbance continues northwards out of the trench along the east border of the grass. Elsewhere the natural substratum was undisturbed. No archaeological features or deposits were observed within the trench.

Trench 3

Trench 3 was placed on the western edge of the grass and followed a parallel alignment to Trench 1. It had a total length of 6.95m. The exposed natural substratum was undisturbed and no archaeological features or deposits were observed within the trench (Fig.10).

Trench 4

The 5m long Trench 4 was fitted in between Trenches 1 and 3. The exposed natural substratum was undisturbed and no archaeological features or deposits were observed within the trench (Fig. 11).

Figure 8 Trench 1
Looking south. 1m scale

Figure 9 Trench 2
Looking north-east. 1m scale. Note modern disturbance top left

Figure 10 Trench 3
Looking north. 1m scale. Note route of cable (highlighted in red) at top of picture

Figure 11 Trench 4
Looking south. 1m scale

Trench details:

	Length	Av. Topsoil depth	Av. Subsoil depth
Trench 1	6.10m	0.29m	0.21m
Trench 2	3.95m	0.29m	0.20m
Trench 3	6.95m	0.28m	0.18m
Trench 4	5.00m	0.28m	0.20m

Discussion

The area of the proposed Temporary Workshop has been considerably disturbed by wartime and later activity and has left only a small area of grass suitable for evaluation. Despite the potential of the area for archaeological features no features or deposits were observed during the work. The only disturbance noted in the substratum had been caused by 20th century activity.

Archive

The archive consists of:
This report,
2 pro-forma trench recording sheets,
1 pro-former photographic record sheet for both 35mm and digital photographs,
24 digital photographs,
1 contact sheet of digital photographs,
10 35mm black and white negatives and contact sheet,
1 CD of this report and digital photographs.

Publication

A summary of the work will be submitted for publication in the *Transactions of the Leicestershire Archaeological and Historical Society* in due course. A record of the project will also be submitted to the OASIS project. OASIS is an online index to archaeological grey literature.

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Andrew Hyam
ULAS
University of Leicester
University Road
Leicester LE1 7RH

Tel:0116 252 2848
Fax: 0116 252 2614
Email: ulas@le.ac.uk

Appendix 1 OASIS Information

Project Name	Temporary Workshop, MIRA Ltd
Project Type	Evaluation
Project Manager	P Clay
Project Supervisor	A Hyam
Previous/Future work	Eval for Buildings 1,3 and Sixpack
Current Land Use	Test circuit
Development Type	Commercial
Reason for Investigation	As a condition
Position in the Planning Process	Pre planning
Site Co ordinates	SP 370 965
Start/end dates of field work	13.02.2014
Archive Recipient	LCC
Study Area	150m^2

ULAS Contact Details

Richard Buckley or Patrick Clay
University of Leicester Archaeological Services (ULAS)
University of Leicester,
University Road,
Leicester LE1 7RH

T: +44 (0)116 252 2848
F: +44 (0)116 252 2614
E: ulas@le.ac.uk
W: www.le.ac.uk/ulas

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