



UNIVERSITY OF
LEICESTER

Archaeological Services

**An Archaeological Evaluation
on Land East of
Little Lane, Desford,
Leicestershire**

Andrew McLeish



ULAS Report No 2020-065
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Site Name: Little Lane, Desford
NGR: SK 47797 03652
Client: Mrs Kirkman
Planning Authority: Hinkley and Bosworth Borough Council
Planning Ref: 18/00976/FUL
ULAS Job No: 20-279
Acc No/Site Code: X.A39.2020
ULAS Report No: 2020-065

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Summary

University of Leicester Archaeological Services (ULAS) carried out an archaeological evaluation on land east of Little Lane, Desford, Leicestershire, on behalf of Mrs Kirkham. Three trenches, totalling 55m² of the site, were excavated to evaluate an area in advance of a proposed housing development. The archaeological work was carried out on the 29th of April 2020, in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework, Section 12: Conserving and Enhancing the Historic Environment.

Evidence for medieval activity in the form of a single shallow pit containing early medieval pottery was recorded in one trench. The remaining trenches contained no archaeological features or finds.

The site archive will be held by Leicestershire Museums under the Accession Number X.A39.2020.

1. Introduction

University of Leicester Archaeological Services (ULAS) were commissioned by Mrs Kirkman to carry out an archaeological field evaluation on land east of Little Lane, Desford Leicestershire in advance of a proposed housing development. The fieldwork was intended to provide preliminary indications of the character and extent of any archaeological deposits, to be assessed by the Planning Authority.

In accordance with National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) Section 12 Conserving and Enhancing the Historic Environment, this document forms the report for the archaeological evaluation, with an assessment of the potential impact on buried archaeological remains from groundworks associated with future development. This report presents the results of archaeological trial trenching, which took place on April 29th 2020. All work followed the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CIfA) Code of Conduct and adhered to their Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Field Evaluation (2014).

2. Site Description, Topography and Geology

Desford is a village and civil parish in Hinckley and Bosworth district, 7 miles west of the centre of Leicester (Figure 1). The site is located on the edge of the village, 200m north-west of the historic village core. It consists of a broadly square area of trees and shrubs with an extension following Little Lane as far as Newbold Road. The south-west and north-east boundaries border existing residential properties. Land to the west and east of the site is predominantly pastoral farmland (Figure 2).

Planning permission has been granted for a proposed residential development of the site (18/00976/FUL, Figure 3). As a condition of the permission (3), the Planning Archaeologist at Leicestershire County Council, as advisor to Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council, has requested an archaeological field evaluation, the first part of a phased programme of archaeological work to determine the impact of the proposed scheme on any buried archaeology, and produce a mitigation strategy for the site.

The site covers around a quarter of a hectare of flat ground at a height of 125m aOD. The British Geological Survey website indicates the underlying geology as consisting of Edwalton Member-Mudstone. This is overlain by Sand and Gravel Glaciofluvial Deposits.

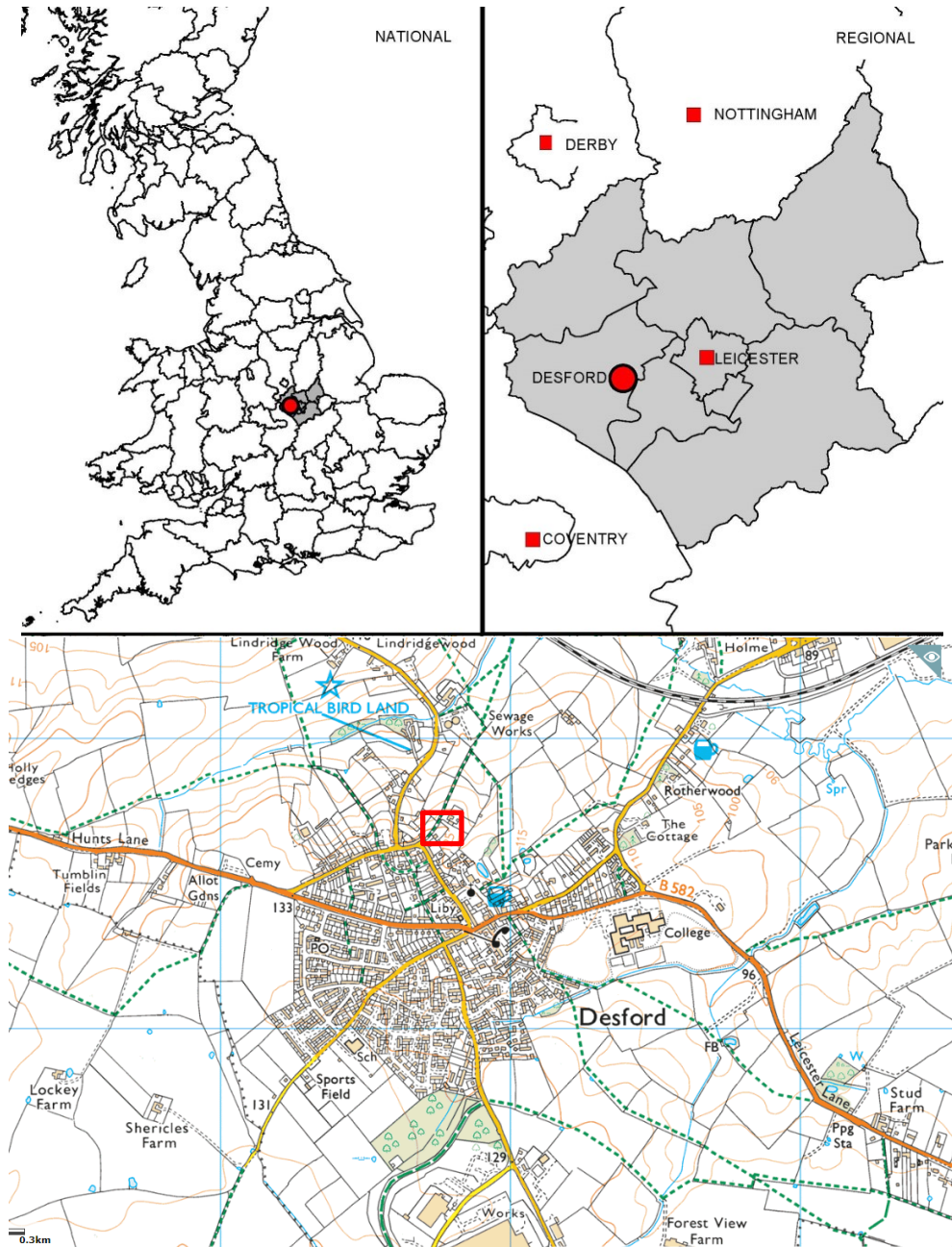


Figure 1: Site Location, within UK, county, and local.
Contains OS data © Crown copyright [and database right] 2019

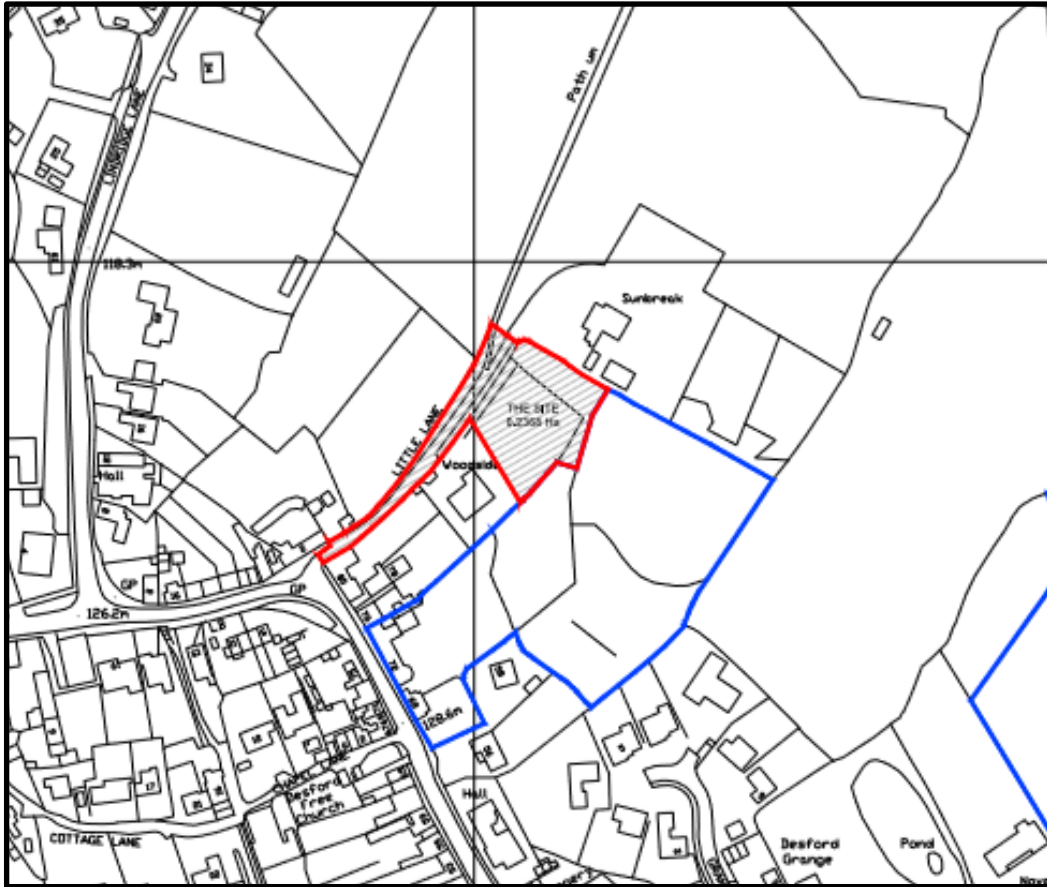


Figure 2: Plan of assessment area (provided by developer)

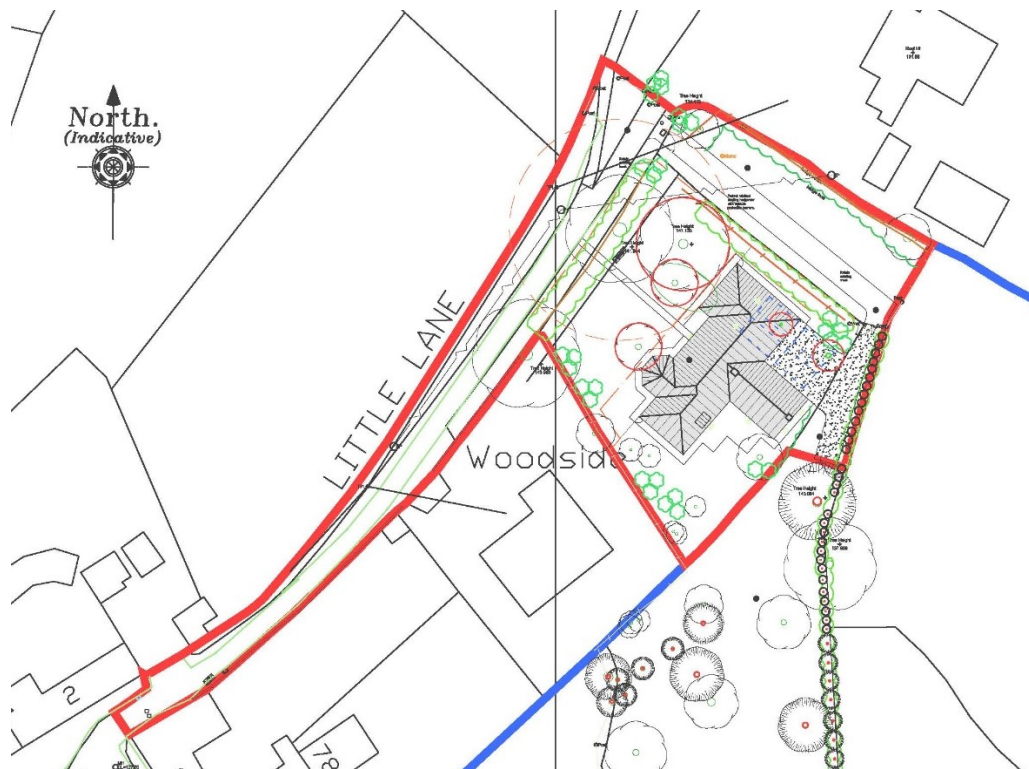


Figure 3: Proposed development plan (provided by developer)

3. Historical and Archaeological Background

Historical Background

Desford is recorded in the Domesday Book as Deresford and is noted as having one villager. It would seem likely that a ford was once to be found in the vicinity although the nearest watercourse is a tributary of the Rothley Brook and is 500m to the south-east of the village centre. The site is located 200m to the north of the historic village core (MLE2751) and beyond the anticipated former extent of the medieval and post-medieval village. The area north of the church is called 'Castlehill' on the late 19th century Ordnance Survey map. The name 'Castle Hill' was noted during research although no earthworks were visible when the area was checked (MLE2736).

Archaeological Background

An undated quern has been recorded as being in the possession of the owner of a property immediately adjacent to the site. Querns tend not to travel far, consequently they are a good indicator of activity in the area (MLE8292).

Bronze Age

Trial trenching carried out in 1999 near Old Manor Farm, 250m south-east of the site, found a Bronze Age thumbnail scraper and piercer.

Iron Age and Roman

Trial trenching on land off Leicester Road in 1999, 300m south-east of the site, recorded evidence of Iron Age/Roman activity. Pits, ditches and structural activity. Finds included several sherds of 1st BC/AD pottery. Most of the features were Romano-British including a possible corn drying oven with good organic preservation. A substantial ditch, which may enclose most of the features, was located (Thomas 2000). Later in 1999, 13 more trenches were excavated. This was followed by area excavation. This showed further evidence of late Iron Age and early Roman occupation. The large enclosure is thought to date from the 1st century BC/AD. A single pit was revealed within the enclosure, which remained undated. The features surrounding the enclosure included scattered post-holes indicating the vestiges of uninterpretable structures, pits and gullies that provided evidence of localised domestic activity. Later activity (2nd-4th century AD) on a smaller scale continued after the enclosure went out of use. Evidence of metalworking was found and a collection of roofing tile suggests stone building nearby. A well was inserted into the backfilled enclosure ditch, probably in the late Roman period (Thomas 2000). In 1960 a kiln was found, 200m south of the site, during building work. A second kiln was found 45m to the south-west. Trial trenching in 2013 found three pieces of Roman pottery but no further kiln features.

Anglo-Saxon and Medieval

Desford's historic core is believed to have its origins in the late Saxon period and to have been occupied throughout the medieval period (MLE2751). The evidence suggests that the site was situated away from any settlement activity; comprising part of Desford's agricultural hinterland. Trial trenching carried out in 2013 on Main Street, 200m south of the site, found a number of features including a pit, gully and posthole. The associated pottery assemblage provided a date range of 850-1539 AD. Another evaluation, also on Main Street, carried out by ULAS in October 2019, 150m south of the proposed development area, revealed a single undated pit and an undated post-hole. Another pit was found to contain medieval pottery dated 13th-15th century.

Post-medieval to Modern

Settlement in Desford during these periods expanded somewhat around the historic core to the south of the Site. The 1st edition OS map shows that the site still lay outside the settlement area, forming part of a large field (field parcel no 272). Trees are illustrated along the southern and western border, along with former field boundaries. The 1930 OS map shows the area covered in trees and a fence erected along the line of the currant borders. By 1950 a bungalow was built in the southern part of the site ('Woodside'). The site appears to have remained largely unchanged since this time.

4. Aims and Objectives

The main objectives of the archaeological work are:

- To identify the presence/absence of any archaeological deposits.
- To establish the character, extent and date range and significance of any surviving archaeological deposits.
- To establish the ecofactual and environmental potential of any archaeological deposits and features encountered.
- To provide sufficient information on the archaeological potential of the site to assess the impact of the proposed development on cultural heritage and to help formulate a mitigation strategy
- To record any archaeological deposits and produce an archive and report of any results.

The results of the evaluation will provide information in order for the local planning authority to make informed recommendations and to identify an appropriate mitigation strategy for the proposed development.

Research Objectives

The project has the potential to add to some objectives listed in *The Archaeology of the East Midlands: An Archaeological Resource Assessment and Research Agenda*, Leicester Archaeology Monograph 13, (ed. Cooper 2006), and *East Midlands Heritage: An Updated Research Agenda and Strategy for the Historic Environment of the East Midlands* (ed. Knight et al 2012), updated here: <https://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/researchframeworks/eastmidlands/wiki/>:

- *Medieval*: (dating; rural settlement pattern; agricultural economy; artefacts).
- *Post-Medieval*: (agricultural landscapes and the food-producing economy).

5. Methodology

The WSI (Speed & Naisbitt 2020) proposed the excavation of two 20m trenches and one 15m trench to cover the footprint of the proposed building and its access road. The location was adjusted slightly due to constraints on site (Figure 4). The overburden was removed in level spits under continuous archaeological supervision to the uppermost level of significant archaeological deposits, the natural substratum, or to a maximum safe working depth, depending on which was reached first. Trenches were excavated using a Case mini digger with a 1m wide flat bladed ditching bucket. The trenches were recorded and then backfilled at the end of the evaluation. The location of the trenches and features were recorded using GPS. All trenches, exposed sections and spoil heaps were visually inspected for features and finds. The trenches were recorded on pro-forma ULAS trench recording forms. A photographic record of

the excavation was prepared. Colour digital photographs were taken throughout the evaluation. The photographic record also included ‘working shots’ to illustrate more generally the nature of the archaeological operation mounted. All work was carried out in accordance with the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CIfA) Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Field Evaluation (2014b) and adhered to their Code of Conduct (2014a). The accession number (X.A39.2020) will be used to identify all records and artefacts.

6. Results

Three trenches were excavated across the proposed area to be developed (Figure 4). The trenches were all quite shallow, with a generally consistent thickness of topsoil and subsoil. The natural substratum was observed at depths between 0.32m and 0.48m. The topsoil was a dark brownish black loose loam (development area is a former orchard) with abundant sub-rounded gravel inclusions and common fragments of brick and 20th century pottery. The subsoil was a mid orangeish brown silty clay with common sub-rounded pebbles and charcoal flecks throughout and was heavily disturbed by rooting from the trees in the orchard. The natural substratum consisted bright to mid pinkish red clay with patches of yellow sandy clay, with common subrounded pebbles throughout. Trench 1 contained a solitary small shallow pit containing very abraded fragments of medieval pottery (Potters Marston Ware AD 1100-1300). Trenches 2 and 3 contained no archaeological finds or features.

Table 1: Trench details

Trench	Orientation	Min. Depth	Max. Depth	Length of Trench	Width of Trench	Total area of trench	Comments
1	ENE -WSW	0.38m	0.48m	20m	1m	20m ²	One small, shallow medieval pit at WSW end.
2	NE - SW	0.36m	0.42m	19.4m	1m	19.4m ²	No Archaeological features
3	NNE - SSW	0.32m	0.41m	13.8m	1m	13.8m ²	No Archaeological features

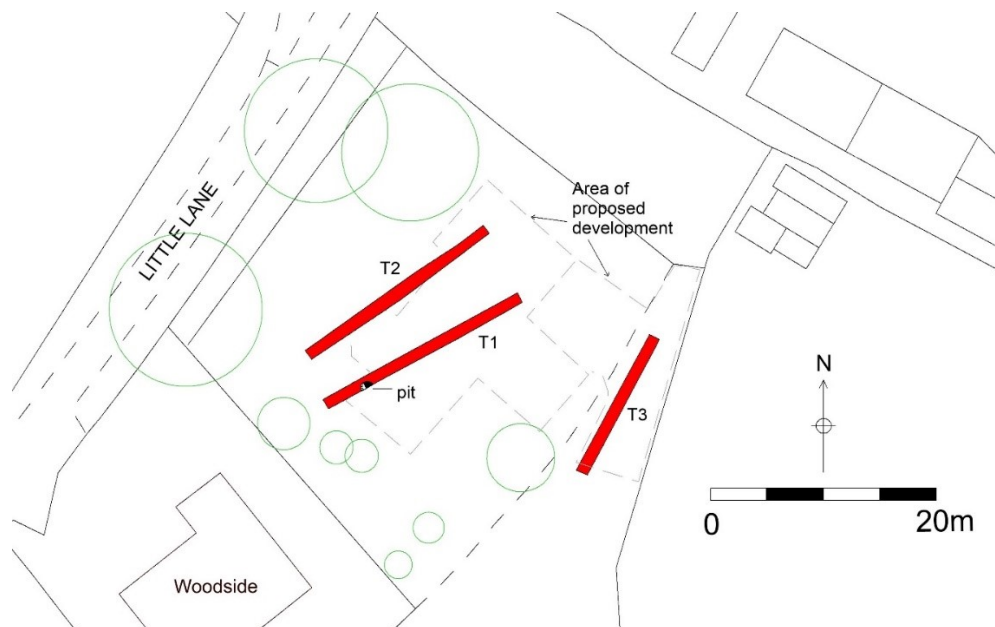


Figure 4 Trench location plan

Trench 1

Trench 1 was located in the centre of the development area and was aligned east north east – west south west. It had to be relocated slightly from its original projected location due to the presence of a chicken shed and a large bonfire pile. The subsoil to natural horizon had been heavily disturbed by rooting from the former orchard trees. The trench contained one small shallow medieval pit [102] (Figure 5 & Figure 6) at its western end. The fill (102) was mid greyish brown silty clay with occasional sub rounded pebble inclusions. Fill (102) contained five sherds of very abraded Medieval (Potters Marston ware AD 1100 – 1300) cooking pot (Figure 10).

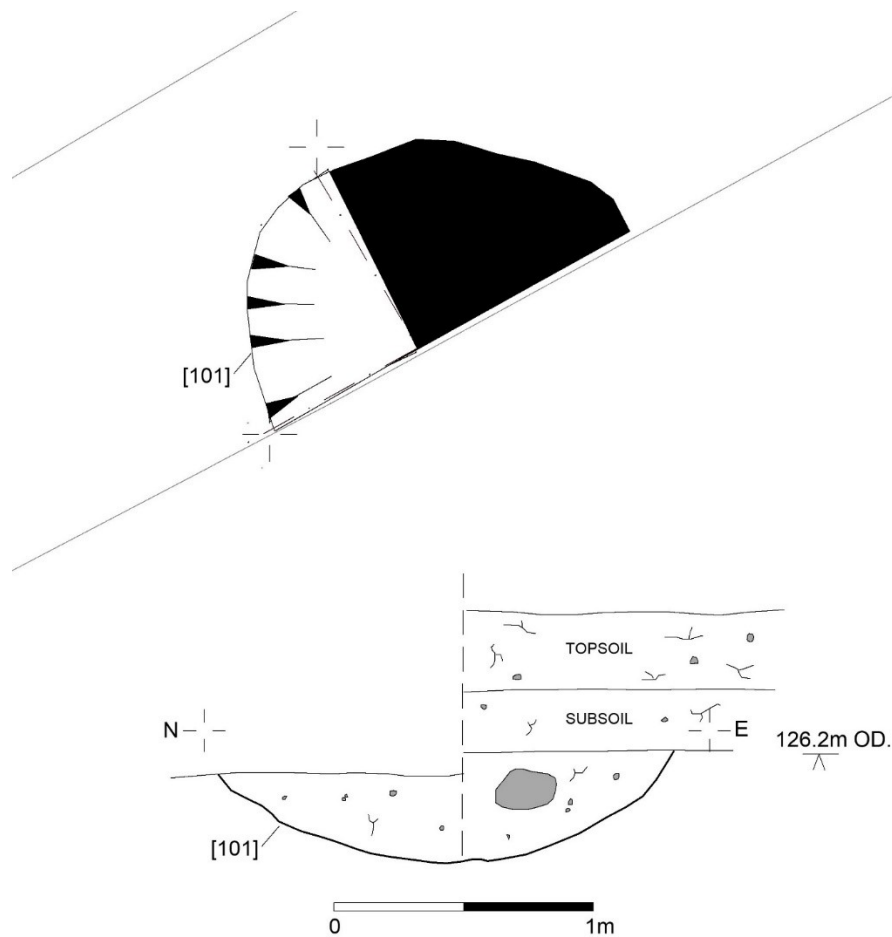


Figure 5 Plan and section of pit [102]



Figure 6 Pit [102] looking south – east.



Figure 7 Trench 1 looking south west.

Trench 2

Trench 2 was located to the north-east of trench 1 and was aligned north-east to south-west. It had to be relocated from its original projected location due to the presence of mature trees. Due to space constraints the trench was slightly shorter (at 19.4m) than the specified length. The subsoil to natural horizon had been heavily disturbed by rooting from the former orchard trees (Figure 8). No archaeological features or finds were recorded in this trench.



Figure 8 Trench 2 looking south west.

Trench 3

Trench 3 was located to the south east of trench 1 and was aligned north north east – south south west. It had to be relocated slightly from its original projected location due to the presence of vegetation and a gate. Due to space constraints for the machine the trench was slightly shorter (at 13.8m) than the specified length. The subsoil to natural horizon had also been heavily disturbed by rooting from trees on either side of the access way (Figure 9). In-between the top and subsoil layers was a 0.25m layer of well compacted hardcore for the access way in addition to a water feed pipe to an animal trough in the adjacent field. No archaeological features or finds were recorded in this trench.



Figure 9 Trench 3 looking south

The finds - Medieval pottery Nicholas J. Cooper

Five body sherds (50g) (Figure 10) probably belonging to the same early medieval cooking pot, were recovered from the shallow pit in Trench 1. The vessel was manufactured at nearby Potters Marston (Leics. medieval fabric ref collection code PM) to the south-west of Leicester, which was the major producer for the town and surrounding countryside between AD 1100 and 1300.



Figure 10 Medieval pot sherds recovered from pit [101], trench 1.

7. Conclusion

An archaeological evaluation was undertaken on the 29th of April 2020 by University of Leicester Archaeological services on behalf of Mrs Kirkham in advance of a proposed housing development. Three trenches were excavated to provide a representational sample of the development area. Remains of a single medieval pit were discovered in one trench, no other archaeological deposits were observed during the evaluation in the other trenches.

8. Archive

The site archive will be deposited with Leicestershire Museums Service under Accession No. XA39.2020.

The archive contains:

- 1 x A4 report

- 1 x Trench summary index sheet
- 3 x Trench sheets
- 1 x Digital photo index
- 2 x Digital photo sheets
- 2 x context sheets

PROJECT DETAILS	Oasis No	universi1-393628		
	Project Name	An archaeological evaluation at Land East of Little Lane, Desford, Leicestershire		
	Start/end dates of field work	29-4-2020		
	Previous/Future Work	None / Unknown		
	Project Type	Field Evaluation		
	Site Status	None		
	Current Land Use	Farming and pasture		
	Monument Type/Period	Pit/medieval		
	Significant Finds/Period	Pot/medieval		
	Development Type	Housing		
	Reason for Investigation	National Planning Policy Framework		
	Position in the Planning Process	After determination		
	Planning Ref.	18/00976/FUL		
PROJECT LOCATION	Site Address/Postcode	LE9 9GP		
	Study Area	0.25ha		
	Site Coordinates	SK47797 03652		
	Height OD	Min:125 m – Max: 126.2m		
	Organisation	University of Leicester Archaeological Services		
PROJECT CREATORS	Project Brief Originator	Local Authority Archaeologist		
	Project Design Originator	Gavin Speed		
	Project Manager	Gavin Speed		
	Project Director/Supervisor	Andrew McLeish		
	Sponsor/Funding Body	Developer: Mrs Kirkham		
PROJECT ARCHIVE	Recipient	Physical Leicestershire County Council Museum s	Digital Leicestershire County Council Museums	Paper Leicestershire County Council Museums
	ID (Acc. No.)	XA39.2020	XA39.2020	XA39.2020
	Contents	Pottery	Digital photography Miscellaneous Report	Context sheets Drawings Miscellaneous Report
PROJECT BIBLIOGRAPHY	Type	Grey Literature		
	Title	An archaeological evaluation at Land East of Little Lane, Desford, Leicestershire		
	Author	Andrew McLeish		
	Other bibliographic details	Report number 2020-065		
	Date	2020		
	Publisher/Place	University of Leicester, Leicester		
Description	Pdf_A			

9. Publication

A summary report will be submitted to the regional journal Transactions of the Leicestershire Archaeological and Historical Society. University of Leicester Archaeological Services supports the Online Access to the Index of Archaeological Investigations (OASIS) database held by the Archaeological Data Service at the University of York. The project is filed under universi1-393628. The online OASIS entry shall be completed detailing the results of the evaluation and once the report has become a public document following its incorporation into the Historic Environment Record it shall be placed on the website.

10. Acknowledgements

The project was managed by Dr Gavin Speed, the fieldwork was undertaken by Andrew McLeish with the assistance of Jonathan Landless. Thanks go to Norman Headley for operating the machinery.

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