

**LAND OFF SKIMMINGDISH LANE,
BICESTER,
OXFORDSHIRE.**

NGR: SP 5980 2350

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

December 2013
Report No. 925

Quality Assurance

This Document has been compiled and authorised in accordance with
AMS's Quality Procedures (BS EN ISO 9001: 2008)

Author: A. Hood

Date: 12th December 2013

Approved: R. King

QA Checked: D. King

This report has been compiled with all reasonable skill care and attention to detail within the terms of the project as specified by the client and within the general terms and conditions of Archaeological Management Services Ltd. trading as Foundations Archaeology but no explicit warranty is provided for information and opinions stated. AMS Ltd. accepts no responsibility whatsoever to third parties to whom this report or any part thereof is made known. Any such party relies on this report at their own risk. Copyright of this document is retained by AMS Ltd., but unlimited licence to reproduce it in whole or part is granted to the client and/or their agents and/or assignees on payment of invoice.

CONTENTS

Summary

Glossary of Archaeological Terms and Abbreviations

- 1 INTRODUCTION
- 2 PROJECT BACKGROUND
- 3 AIMS
- 4 METHODOLOGY
- 5 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
- 6 BIBLIOGRAPHY
- 7 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Appendix 1: The Stratigraphic Data

FIGURE LIST

- Figure 1: Site and Trench Locations
- Figure 2: Trench Plans
- Figure 3: Sections

SUMMARY

Between 25th and 29th November 2013 Foundations Archaeology undertook a programme of archaeological evaluation on land off Skimmingdish Lane, Bicester, Oxfordshire (NGR: SP 5980 2350). The works were commissioned by Tyler Grange on behalf of Taylor Wimpey UK Ltd. and Persimmon plc.

The project comprised the excavation and recording of ten trenches within a proposed development area. The trenches were located in order to provide a representative sample of the study area.

The evaluation identified the presence of a small number of features, which comprised former agricultural boundaries or drainage ditches and isolated possible pits.

The features remained undated. However, three of the ditches and one of the pits were demonstrably earlier than the subsoil and, as such, were likely to be of some antiquity.

The low number of features, along with a general paucity of artefacts within the site, indicated that this activity was likely to be situated on the periphery of any settlement or funerary focus.

GLOSSARY OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL TERMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

Archaeology

For the purpose of this project, archaeology is taken to mean the study of past human societies through their material remains from prehistoric times to the modern era. No rigid upper date limit has been set, but AD 1900 is used as a general cut-off point.

CBM

Ceramic Building Material.

Medieval

The period between AD 1066 and AD 1500.

Natural

In archaeological terms this refers to the undisturbed natural geology of a site.

NGR

National Grid Reference from the Ordnance Survey Grid.

OD

Ordnance datum; used to express a given height above sea-level. (AOD Above Ordnance Datum).

OS

Ordnance Survey.

Post-medieval

The period between AD 1500 and AD 1900.

Prehistoric

The period prior to the Roman invasion of AD 43, traditionally sub divided into; *Palaeolithic* – c. 500,000 BC to c. 12,000 BC; *Mesolithic* – c. 12,000 BC to c. 4,500 BC; *Neolithic* – c. 4,500 BC to c. 2,000 BC; *Bronze Age* – c. 2,000 BC to c. 800 BC; *Iron Age* – c. 800 BC to AD 43.

Roman

The period traditionally dated AD 43 until AD 410.

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This report presents the findings of an archaeological evaluation, undertaken between 25th and 29th November 2013, by Foundations Archaeology on land off Skimmingdish Lane, Bicester, Oxfordshire (NGR: SP 5980 2350). The works were commissioned by Tyler Grange on behalf of Taylor Wimpey UK Ltd. and Persimmon plc.
- 1.2 The project was conducted in accordance with the approved Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI), prepared by Foundations Archaeology (2013); IfA *Standards and Guidance on Archaeological Evaluation* (2008); and MoRPHE, issued by English Heritage (2006).
- 1.3 This report constitutes the results of the archaeological works.

2 PROJECT BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The site is located to the northeast of Bicester town centre, southwest of the former RAF Bicester and is centred on National Grid Reference (NGR) SP 5980 2350. It covers approximately three hectares (ha) and consists of two distinct areas, with rough grassland in the southern three quarters of the site and an area of short amenity grassland and trees in the northern quarter. Due to the potential presence of archaeological features a pre-determination archaeological field evaluation has been required by the Oxfordshire Planning Archaeologist in line with Para. 128 of the NPPF.
- 2.2 The application site is bounded to the east by a combined footpath and cycleway, with the recent Bicester bypass (Skimmingdish Lane) to its east. Residential properties lie to west, north and south. The site overlies Jurassic limestone geology and soils of the Worcester soil association, which are shallow clayey soils.
- 2.3 The site has been the subject of a Heritage Statement (Tyler Grange 2013) which notes that *“the site’s development would not affect any designated heritage such as listed buildings and scheduled structures within the former RAF Bicester to the northeast of the site. The closest designated structures to the site are screened from the site by surrounding vegetation whilst the site itself is screened by vegetation to its east. No significant sites or events are previously recorded within the site itself, although much of it was considered by an earlier desk based assessment.”*
- 2.4 The site is located approximately 100m north of two ring-ditches identified through aerial photographs (PRN D5630). Although undated, it is likely that these represent Bronze Age barrows. Further barrows have been identified from aerial photographs 440m west of the study area. A barrow cemetery has been recorded from aerial photographs 380m north of the proposal site, within Bicester Airfield itself, which records seven ring-ditches on the site before the development of the airfield (PRN D5828). Further crop-marked ring ditches

have been recorded to the southwest of the application site and it is therefore possible that further features related to the possible barrow cemetery could survive on the site.

- 2.5 A major Roman road from Alcester to Towcester (PRN 8922) runs through Bicester, 1km to the northwest of the site and a small amount of Roman settlement has been identified immediately adjacent to this road, 1km west of the proposed development area (PRN 16217). A larger settlement has been recorded 800m south of the site, which was identified through evaluation and subsequent excavation (PRN 26122). The excavation recorded field ditches, dated between the Late Iron Age and Roman periods, along with two wells, one of which was stone-lined. Remains of this date have been recorded closer to the Roman road course and to the southeast. Archaeological evaluation closest to the site, east of the new bypass, found “*no significant sub-surface remains*”.
- 2.6 A possible Medieval or Post-medieval windmill is recorded 300m east-southeast of the site (PRN 12695). The site survives as a mound with two earthwork banks forming an entrance. The Victoria County History (vol. 6) records that a demesne windmill is mentioned at Launton in 1279.
- 2.7 The Heritage Statement also identifies that “*cartographic sources go back to the early 19th century and confirm the site area was agricultural land at this time*”. No features of this date survive within the site, which is likely to have had a long history as farmed or common land, situated on the western edge of the parish of Launton. The village of Launton lies to the southeast and is likely to have Anglo-Saxon origins. Historic maps suggest a Second World War expansion of the airfield did extend into the northern part of the site, with an aircraft dispersal area, consisting of hard-standing, lying wholly within this area, which is now grassed open space. Vestiges of asphalt are apparent in this area, which is to remain open-space as part of the development proposals, such that any remains will be unaffected.
- 2.8 The site therefore contained the potential for the presence of archaeological remains, predominately dating to the Prehistoric and Roman periods. This did not prejudice the evaluation against evidence relating to other periods.

3 AIMS

- 3.1 The aims of the archaeological evaluation were to gather high quality data from the direct observation of archaeological deposits in order to provide sufficient information to establish the nature, extent, preservation and potential of any surviving archaeological remains; as well as to make recommendations for management of the resource, including further archaeological works if necessary. In turn, this would allow reasonable planning decisions to be taken regarding the archaeological provision for the areas affected by the proposed development.
- 3.2 These aims were achieved through pursuit of the following specific objectives:

- i) To define and identify the nature of archaeological deposits on site, and date these where possible;
- ii) To attempt to characterise the nature of the archaeological sequence and recover as much information as possible about the spatial patterning of features present on the site;
- iii) To recover a well dated stratigraphic sequence, which will attempt to determine the complexity of the horizontal and vertical stratigraphy present, and to recover coherent artefact, ecofact and environmental samples;
- iv) To determine the potential of the site to provide palaeoenvironmental and/or economic evidence and the forms in which such evidence may be present;
- v) To define any research priorities that may be relevant should further field investigation be required.

4 METHODOLOGY

- 4.1 A total of ten 30m by 1.7m trenches were excavated within the part of the site containing rough grassland, as shown in Figure 1. The trenches were located in order to provide a representative sample of the study area.
- 4.2 Non-significant overburden was removed, under constant archaeological supervision, to the top of the archaeological deposits or the underlying natural substrates, whichever was encountered first. This was achieved through the use of a JCB type excavator, equipped with a toothless grading bucket. Spoil tips were scanned for finds.
- 4.3 All excavation and recording work was undertaken in accordance with the WSI and the Foundations Archaeology Technical Manual 3: Excavation Manual.

5 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

- 5.1 A detailed description of all contexts identified in the course of the project is presented in Appendix 1. A summary discussion is given below.
- 5.2 The general stratigraphic sequence was fairly uniform across the evaluated area. The natural clay/limestone-brash substrates were encountered at an average depth of 0.45m (70.75m OD) below Modern ground. These were overlaid by a clay silt subsoil, up to 0.26m thick, which was, in turn, sealed by a silt sand topsoil, up to 0.31m thick. Visibility was good and there was no evidence for extensive disturbance or truncation within the investigated area, with relatively intact subsoils present within every trench.

- 5.3 The evaluation revealed the presence of features within Trenches 6, 8 and 9, in the central part of the site. These comprised five ditches and two possible pits. Due to a general paucity of artefactual evidence across the site, these features remained undated; although, the in-fills of ditches [603], [803] and [806], as well as pit [808], were demonstrably earlier than the subsoil and it is, therefore, likely that the features were of some antiquity. The fills of features [606], [903] and [905] were located directly beneath the topsoil, however, due to the intermittent occurrence of the subsoil in Trenches 6 and 9, it was not possible to demonstrate the relationship between these features and the subsoil. A single, possible struck flint, present within ditch fill (804), was highly patinated and probably represented residual material within a later fill.
- 5.4 The ditches were set on a northeast-southwest – northwest-southeast co-axial alignment and possibly represented the remains of former agricultural boundaries and/or drainage ditches.
- 5.5 The pits were not associated with any other features and appeared to represent relatively isolated features, which were situated within a generally agricultural landscape.
- 5.6 The evaluation has identified the presence of former agricultural boundaries or drainage ditches and isolated possible pits, within the central part of the site. The low number of features, along with an almost total absence of artefacts within the features and soils, suggested that this activity was likely to be situated on the periphery of any settlement or funerary focus.
- 5.7 The archive is currently held at the offices of Foundations Archaeology, but will be deposited with the Oxford County Museum Service in due course. A short note will be submitted for publication in the relevant local archaeological journal and an OASIS form will also be submitted to ADS.

6 BIBLIOGRAPHY

English Heritage. 2006. *Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment*. English Heritage (Swindon).

Foundations Archaeology. 2013. *Land off Skimmingdish Lane, Bicester, Oxfordshire: Written Scheme of Investigation for an Archaeological Evaluation*. Unpublished.

Institute for Archaeologists. 2008. *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Evaluation*. Unpublished.

Tyler Grange. 2013. *Land off Skimmingdish Lane, Bicester, Oxfordshire: Heritage Statement*. Unpublished.

7 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Foundations Archaeology would like to thank Richard Oram of Oxfordshire County Council and Ben Stephenson of Tyler Grange for their help during the course of the project.

Land off Skimmingdish Lane, Bicester: Archaeological Evaluation

APPENDIX 1: The Stratigraphic Data

CXT	L(m)	W(m)	D(m)	DESCRIPTION	CUTS/LATER THAN	CUT BY/EARLIER THAN
				Trench 1: 33m long by 1.7m wide. Natural = beige orange clay silt limestone brash, at 69.75m OD.		
101	na	na	0.28	Topsoil; dark brown friable silt sand.	102	na
102	na	na	0.17	Subsoil; light brown friable clay silt.	nat.	101
				No archaeological features, deposits or finds were present within the trench.		
				Trench 2: 30m long by 1.8m wide. Natural = beige orange clay silt limestone brash, at 70.03m OD.		
201	na	na	0.3	Topsoil; dark brown friable silt sand.	202	na
202	na	na	0.26	Subsoil; orange brown plastic clay silt.	nat.	201
				No archaeological features, deposits or finds were present within the trench.		
				Trench 3: 32m long by 1.7m wide. Natural = beige orange clay silt limestone brash, at 70.24m OD.		
301	na	na	0.31	Topsoil; dark brown friable silt sand.	302	na
302	na	na	0.16	Subsoil; light brown plastic clay silt.	nat.	301
				No archaeological features, deposits or finds were present within the trench.		
				Trench 4: 30m long by 1.7m wide. Natural = grey brown clay and limestone brash, at 70.20m OD.		
401	na	na	0.28	Topsoil; dark brown friable silt sand.	402	na
402	na	na	0.11	Subsoil; light brown plastic clay silt.	nat.	401
				No archaeological features, deposits or finds were present within the trench.		
				Trench 5: 30m long by 1.7m wide. Natural = grey orange clay and limestone brash, at 70.45m OD.		
501	na	na	0.28	Topsoil; dark brown friable silt sand.	502	na
502	na	na	0.21	Subsoil; light brown friable clay silt.	nat.	501
				No archaeological features, deposits or finds were present within the trench.		
				Trench 6: 30m long by 1.7m wide. Natural = grey orange brown clay and limestone brash, at 70.67m OD.		
601	na	na	0.29	Topsoil; dark brown friable silt sand.	602	na
602	na	na	0.14	Subsoil; light brown plastic clay silt. Occurred intermittently within the trench.	nat.	601

Land off Skimmingdish Lane, Bicester: Archaeological Evaluation

CXT	L(m)	W(m)	D(m)	DESCRIPTION	CUTS/LATER THAN	CUT BY/EARLIER THAN
[603]	2.25	1.05	0.25	Northwest - southeast aligned ditch with a shallow, rounded profile. Contained fills 604 and 605.	nat.	604
				Equivalent/related to ditch [606].		
604	?	0.58	0.12	Primary fill of ditch [603]; light brown grey silt clay, which contained frequent small stones.	[603]	605
605	2.25	1.05	0.13	Secondary fill of ditch [603]; orange brown silt clay, which contained frequent small stones.	604	602
[606]	3.1	0.6	0.21	Northeast - southwest aligned ditch with a shallow, rounded profile. Contained fill 607.	nat.	607
				Equivalent/related to ditch [603].		
607	3.1	0.6	0.21	Fill of ditch [606]; grey brown clay silt, which contained frequent small stones.	[606]	601
				Uncertain stratigraphic relationship with subsoil 602.		
				Trench 7: 30m long by 1.7m wide. Natural = grey orange beige clay and limestone brash, at 71.39m OD.		
701	na	na	0.26	Topsoil; dark brown friable silt sand.	702	na
702	na	na	0.26	Subsoil; light brown plastic clay silt.	nat.	701
				No archaeological features, deposits or finds were present within the trench.		
				Trench 8: 30m long by 1.7m wide. Natural = orange beige clay and limestone brash, at 71.25m OD.		
801	na	na	0.3	Topsoil; dark brown friable silt sand.	802	na
802	na	na	0.08	Subsoil; light brown plastic clay silt.	nat.	801
[803]	1.8	2.85	0.4	Northeast - southwest aligned ditch with a wide, rounded profile. Contained fills 804 and 805.	nat.	804
				Equivalent/related to ditch [806].		
804	?	1.8	0.16	Primary fill of ditch [803]; dark grey brown plastic silt clay, which contained occasional charcoal flecks, as well as a possible struck flint .	[803]	805
805	1.8	2.85	0.27	Secondary fill of ditch [803]; light grey plastic silt clay, which contained occasional charcoal flecks and frequent snail shells. Equivalent to fill 807.	804	802
[806]	1.7	2.5	0.24	Northeast - southwest aligned ditch with a wide, shallow profile. Contained fill 807.	nat.	807
				Equivalent/related to ditch [803].		
807	1.7	2.5	0.24	Fill of ditch [806]; light grey plastic silt clay, which contained occasional charcoal flecks.	[806]	802
				Equivalent to fill 805.		
[808]	1.9	0.6	0.32	Cut feature, possibly a pit, with a shallow, rounded profile. Contained fill 809.	nat.	809
809	1.9	0.6	0.32	Fill of feature [808]; light grey brown plastic silt clay, which contained frequent small stones and occasional charcoal flecks.	[808]	802

Land off Skimmingdish Lane, Bicester: Archaeological Evaluation

CXT	L(m)	W(m)	D(m)	DESCRIPTION	CUTS/LATER THAN	CUT BY/EARLIER THAN
				Trench 9: 30m long by 1.7m wide. Natural = light orange beige clay and limestone brash, at 71.49m OD.		
901	na	na	0.29	Topsoil; dark brown friable silt sand.	902	na
902	na	na	0.12	Subsoil; light brown plastic clay silt. Occurred intermittently within the trench.	nat.	901
[903]	2.05	0.47	0.1	Northwest - southeast aligned ditch with a shallow profile. Contained fill 904.	nat.	904
904	2.05	0.47	0.1	Fill of ditch [903]; tan brown plastic silt clay, which contained occasional small stones.	[903]	901
[905]	2	0.8	0.24	Cut feature, possibly a pit, with a shallow, rounded profile. Contained fill 906.	nat.	906
906	2	0.8	0.24	Fill of feature [905]; light brown plastic silt clay, which contained occasional small stones.	[905]	901
				Trench 10: 30m long by 1.7m wide. Natural = light beige clay and limestone brash, at 72.01m OD.		
1001	na	na	0.29	Topsoil; black brown friable silt sand.	1002	na
1002	na	na	0.1	Subsoil; light brown plastic clay silt. Occurred intermittently within the trench.	nat.	1001
				No archaeological features, deposits or finds were present within the trench.		



Tyler Grange LLP
© All rights reserved. 2013

© Crown Copyright
Reproduced under licence 100015722

Site Code: SLB13
Accession Code:

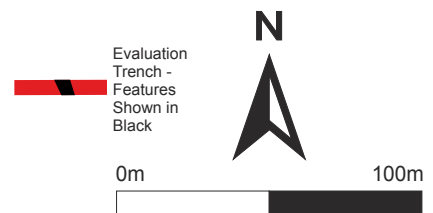
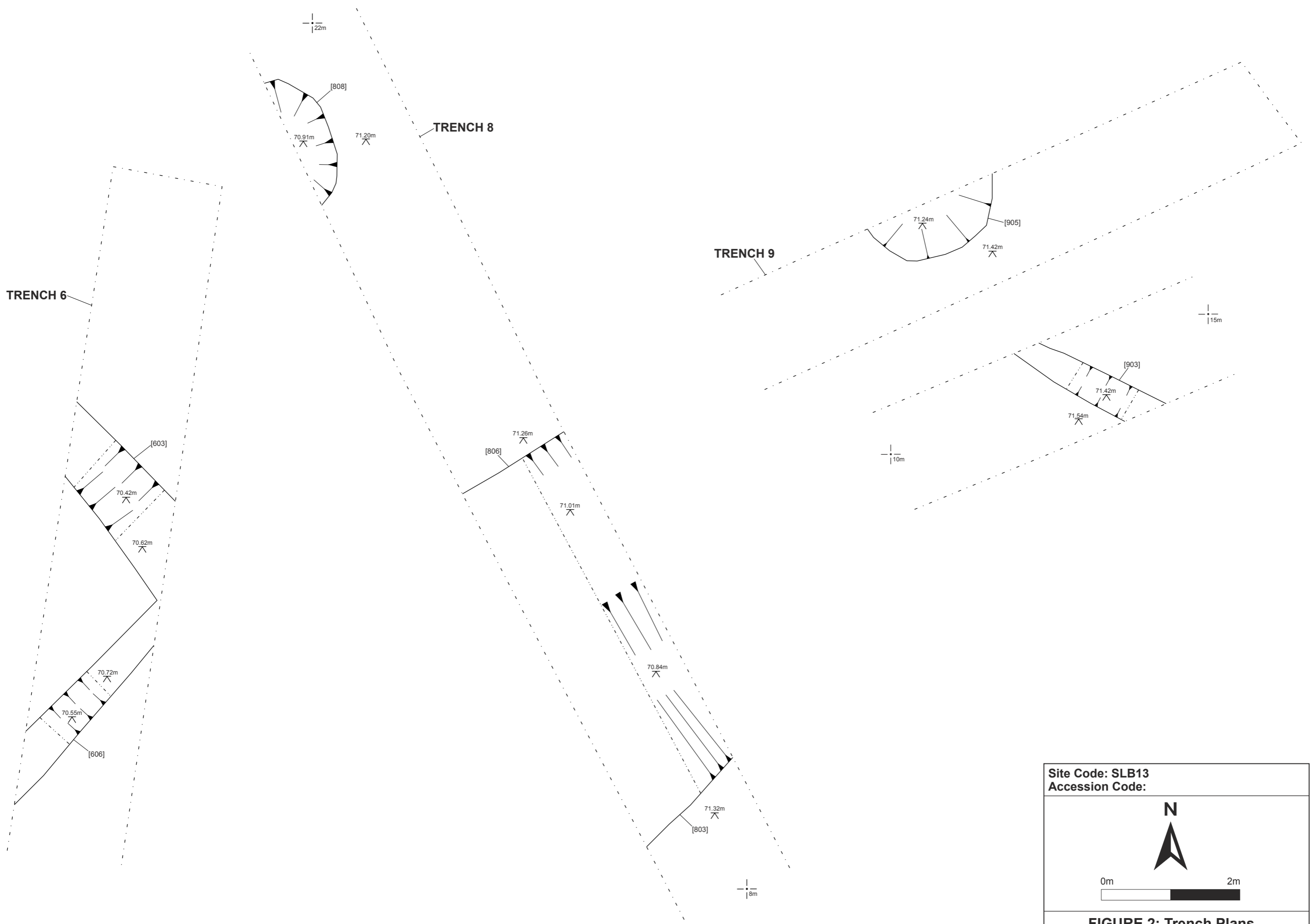


FIGURE 1: Site and Trench Locations



Site Code: SLB13
 Accession Code:

N

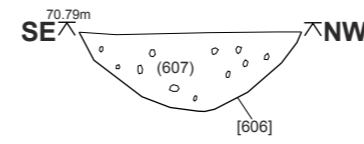
0m 2m

FIGURE 2: Trench Plans

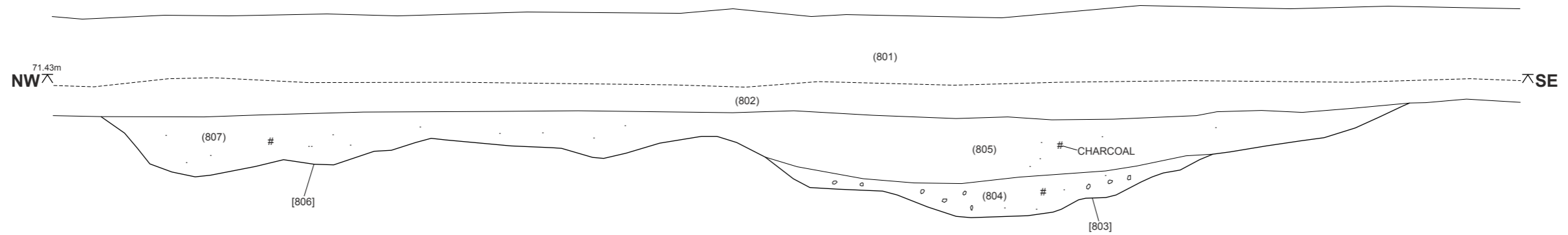
NORTHWEST FACING SECTION [603]



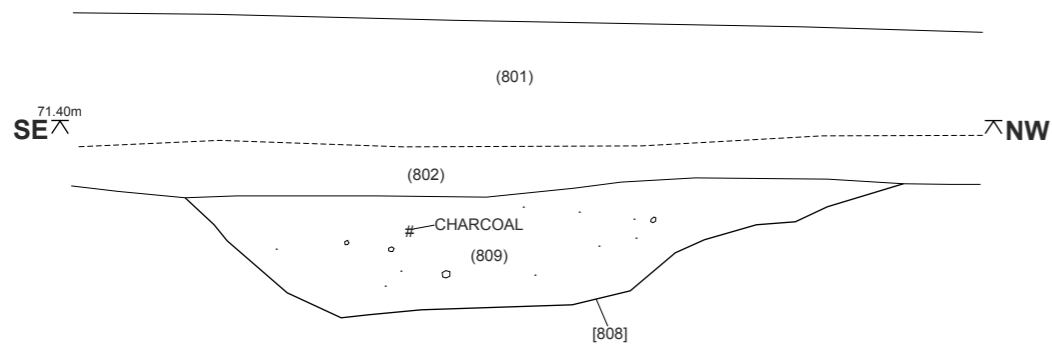
NORTHEAST FACING SECTION [606]



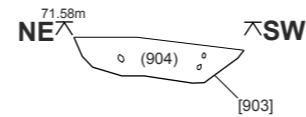
SOUTHWEST FACING SECTION [803] and [806]



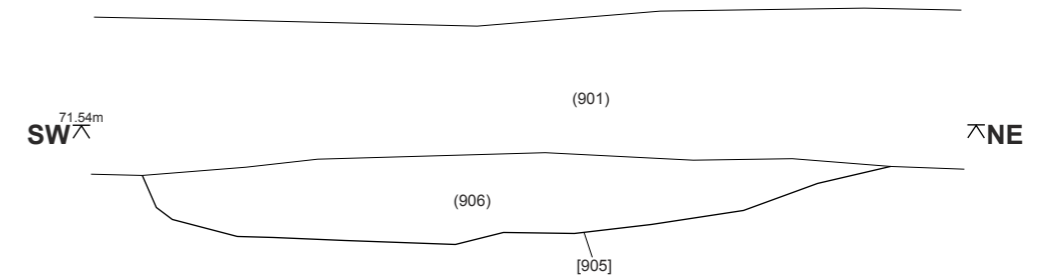
NORTHEAST FACING SECTION [808]



NORTHWEST FACING SECTION [903]



SOUTHEAST FACING SECTION [905]



Site Code: SLB13
Accession Code:



FIGURE 3: Sections