

**LAND AT SUTTON COURTENAY LANE,  
DIDCOT,  
OXON.**

**NGR: SU 502 921**

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION**

May 2008  
Report No. 600

**Quality Assurance**

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**SUMMARY**

In May 2008 Foundations Archaeology undertook a programme of archaeological evaluation on land at Sutton Courtenay Lane, Didcot, Oxon. (NGR: SU 502 921). The project was commissioned by Waterman CPM on behalf of Gazeley Properties Ltd.

The evaluation required the excavation and recording of thirteen trenches within the proposed development area.

The archaeological works revealed four undated features, which comprised a linear ditch and three linear gullies. A single sherd of probable prehistoric pottery was recovered from the subsoil in the vicinity of the gullies.

## 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, in this case Pleistocene second terrace gravel, which overlies Cretaceous Gault clay.

### 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.

### Prehistoric

The period prior to the Roman invasion of AD 43.

### Roman

The period traditionally dated AD 43 until AD 410.

### Saxon

The period between AD 410 and AD 1066.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This report presents the findings of an archaeological evaluation undertaken by Foundations Archaeology during May 2008, on land at Sutton Courtenay Lane, Didcot, Oxon. (NGR: SU 502 921). The project was commissioned by Waterman CPM on behalf of Gazeley Properties Ltd.
- 1.2 The project was undertaken in accordance with the Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) prepared by Foundations Archaeology (2008), based upon a brief issued by the Oxfordshire County Council Archaeological Officer. The fieldwork was undertaken in accordance with IFA *Standards and Guidance on Archaeological Evaluation* (1994, revised 2001) and Archaeological Guidance Paper 4: *Archaeological Evaluation: (guidelines)* issued by English Heritage (London Region).
- 1.3 This report constitutes the results of the archaeological works. The code of conduct of the Institute of Field Archaeologists was adhered to throughout.

## 2 PROJECT BACKGROUND

- 2.1 It is proposed to construct a distribution warehouse with ancillary offices and facilities, along with a service centre and the creation of access roads and landscaping (Planning Reference: SUT/12063/16). In accordance with the general principles of PPG 16 (DoE 1990) and the archaeological policies of Oxfordshire County Council, a programme of archaeological evaluation was undertaken by Oxford Archaeology (2003). Due to on-site constraints only part of the site was evaluated. Planning permission was granted with an attached condition requiring further archaeological evaluation and where necessary mitigation.
- 2.2 The site is located in the Parish of Sutton Courtenay, to the east of Sutton Courtenay Lane and to the north of Milton Road. The area was previously used for hire vehicles and the land surface varies between scrub vegetation and hard standing. The site lies at approximately 55m OD and the geology is second terrace gravel overlying gault clay.
- 2.3 The site lies in an area of considerable archaeological potential. To the south, an area of early Saxon settlement has been identified. This included burials with grave goods and Sunken Featured Buildings. A substantial later prehistoric site lies to the west. Another smaller settlement of that period lies to the north. Romano-British settlement is also found to the north and burials of that period have been found to the southeast. The OA archaeological field evaluation revealed a single undated gully.
- 2.4 The study area therefore contained the potential for the preservation of archaeological deposits, predominately associated with the prehistoric, Roman and Saxon periods. This did not prejudice the evaluation against features and finds 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. 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 and recover coherent artefact, ecofact and environmental samples.

### **4 METHODOLOGY**

- 4.1 The WSI required the excavation of thirteen 30m trenches across the study area. In practice, Trenches 1 and 2 had to be relocated due to the existence of an ecological restraint at the west end of the site. Trenches 9 and 12 were subject to minor relocation due to the occurrence of previously unidentified services. The final trench locations are shown in Figure 2.
- 4.2 Non-significant overburden was removed, under constant archaeological supervision, to the top of the archaeological deposits or the underlying natural deposits, whichever were encountered first. This was achieved through the use of a 360° tracked mechanical excavator with a toothless grading bucket. Thereafter cleaning and excavation was conducted by hand. 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**

- 5.1 The majority of the trenches had previously been subject to chemical contamination, which had caused green staining. In places, this staining had penetrated into the underlying natural deposits.

- 5.2 **Trench 1** (30m long, 1.8m wide) was aligned northwest-southeast and was excavated onto the natural substrate at an average depth of 0.50m (56.82m OD) below the modern ground surface. The natural deposits, which comprised gault clay with frequent gravel patches, were overlaid by a green clay silt subsoil (103), up to 0.27m thick. Subsoil (103) only occurred intermittently within the trench, due to frequent truncation by modern features. Context (103) was overlaid by a stone and grit layer (102), up to 0.13m thick. This was sealed by a layer of tarmac (101), up to 0.10m thick. The trench was partially contaminated. No archaeological finds or features were present.
- 5.3 **Trench 2** (30m long, 1.8m wide) was aligned northeast-southwest and was excavated onto the natural substrate at an average depth of 0.70m (56.32m OD) below the modern ground surface. The natural deposits, which consisted of gault clay, were overlaid by a green clay silt subsoil (204), up to 0.30m thick. Subsoil (204) contained occasional CBM fragments. Context (204) was overlaid by a dark brown clay (203), up to 0.14m thick. This was sealed by a stone and grit layer (202), up to 0.19m thick, which was, in turn, overlaid by a layer of tarmac (201), up to 0.07m thick. The trench was highly contaminated. No archaeological finds or features were present.
- 5.4 **Trench 3** (30m long, 1.8m wide) was aligned northwest-southeast and was excavated onto the natural substrate at an average depth of 1.15m (55.78m OD) below the modern ground surface. The natural deposits, which comprised gault clay with occasional gravel patches, were overlaid by a green clay silt subsoil (304), up to 0.36m thick. Subsoil (304) only occurred intermittently within the trench, due to frequent truncation by modern features. Context (304) was overlaid by a layer of dark grey green clay (303), up to 0.70m thick. This was sealed by a layer of clinker (302), up to 0.15m thick, which was, in turn, overlaid by tarmac (301), up to 0.19m. The trench was highly contaminated. No archaeological finds or features were present.
- 5.5 **Trench 4** (30m long, 1.8m wide) was aligned east-west and was excavated onto the natural substrate at an average depth of 0.73m (56.43m OD) below the modern ground surface. The natural deposits, which consisted of gault clay with frequent patches of gravel, were overlaid by a green clay silt subsoil (404), up to 0.24m thick. Subsoil (404) contained occasional CBM fragments. Context (404) was overlaid by a dark grey clay (403), up to 0.18m thick. This was sealed by a stone and grit layer (402), up to 0.22m thick, which was, in turn, overlaid by a layer of tarmac (401), up to 0.09m thick. The trench was highly contaminated. No archaeological finds or features were present.
- 5.6 **Trench 5** (30m long, 1.8m wide) was aligned northeast-southwest and was excavated onto the natural substrate at an average depth of 0.83m (56.54m OD) below the modern ground surface. The natural deposits, which consisted of gault clay, were overlaid by a green clay silt subsoil (504), up to 0.34m thick. Subsoil (504) contained occasional CBM fragments. Context (504) was overlaid by a dark grey clay (503), up to 0.14m thick. This was sealed by a stone and grit layer (502), up to 0.23m thick, which was, in turn, overlaid by tarmac (501), up to 0.12m thick. The trench was partially contaminated. No archaeological finds or features were present.

- 5.7 **Trench 6** (30m long, 1.8m wide) was aligned east-west and was excavated onto the natural substrate at an average depth of 0.57m (56.76m OD) below the modern ground surface. The natural deposits, which consisted of gault clay with frequent patches of gravel, were overlaid by a mid brown clay silt subsoil (603), up to 0.33m thick. Subsoil (603) contained a sherd of probable prehistoric pottery along with occasional CBM fragments. Context (603) was overlaid by a stone and grit layer (602), up to 0.15m thick, which was, in turn, sealed by tarmac (601), up to 0.09m thick. The western half of the trench was partially contaminated. Three features were present within the trench, cut into the top of the natural deposits.
- 5.8 Feature [604] was 4.5m long, 0.30m wide, 0.22m deep and comprised a northwest-southeast aligned linear gully with steep sides and a rounded base. Fill (605) consisted of a mid brown clay silt, which was similar to subsoil (603).
- 5.9 Feature [606] was 4m long, 0.40m wide, 0.14m deep and consisted of a northwest-southeast aligned linear gully with sloping sides and a rounded base. Gully [606] was located 1.2m to the northeast of, and was aligned parallel to feature [604]. Fill (607) comprised a mid brown clay silt, which was similar to subsoil (603).
- 5.10 Feature [608] was 2m long, 0.45m wide, 0.09m deep and comprised a northeast-southwest aligned linear gully with a shallow, rounded profile. Gully [608] was aligned perpendicular to and interacted with the eastern part of feature [606], although it was not possible to establish their stratigraphic relationship. Fill (609) consisted of a mid brown clay silt, which was similar to subsoil (603).
- 5.11 **Trench 7** (30m long, 1.8m wide) was aligned north-south and was excavated onto the natural substrate at an average depth of 0.66m (56.33m OD) below the modern ground surface. The natural deposits, which consisted of gault clay with frequent patches of gravel, were overlaid by a green clay silt subsoil (704), up to 0.30m thick. Subsoil (704) contained occasional CBM fragments. Context (704) was overlaid by a black cinder layer (703), up to 0.16m thick. This was sealed by a stone and grit layer (702), up to 0.14m thick, which was, in turn, overlaid by tarmac (701), up to 0.06m thick. The trench was partially contaminated. No archaeological finds or features were present.
- 5.12 **Trench 8** (30m long, 1.8m wide) was aligned east-west and was excavated onto the natural substrate at an average depth of 0.92m (55.92m OD) below the modern ground surface. The natural deposits, which consisted of gault clay, were overlaid by a green clay silt subsoil (804), up to 0.40m thick. Subsoil (804) contained occasional CBM fragments along with a single chinaware pottery herd. Context (804) was overlaid by a black cinder layer (803), up to 0.20m thick. This was sealed by a stone and grit layer (802), up to 0.26m thick, which was, in turn, overlaid by tarmac (801), up to 0.06m thick. The trench was highly contaminated. No archaeological finds or features were present.



- 5.13 **Trench 9** (30m long, 1.8m wide) was aligned northeast-southwest and was excavated onto the natural substrate at an average depth of 0.43m (56.82m OD) below the modern ground surface. The natural deposits, which consisted of gault clay with frequent patches of gravel, were intermittently overlaid by a mid brown clay silt subsoil (903), up to 0.09m thick. Context (903) was overlaid by a cinder layer (902), up to 0.24m thick, which was, in turn, sealed by tarmac (901), up to 0.10m thick. A low amount of contamination occurred within the trench. One feature was present, cut into the top of the natural deposits.
- 5.14 Feature [904] was 1.8m long, 1.16m wide, 0.36m deep and comprised a northwest-southeast aligned linear ditch with irregular, sloping sides and a rounded base. Primary fill (905), up to 0.24m thick, consisted of a light brown clay silt with occasional gravel. This was overlaid by fill (906), up to 0.13m thick, which comprised a grey brown clay silt. Due to differential drying, it was not possible to establish the stratigraphic relationship between subsoil (903) and feature [904].
- 5.15 **Trench 10** (30m long, 1.8m wide) was aligned northeast-southwest and was excavated onto the natural substrate at an average depth of 0.48m (57.03m OD) below the modern ground surface. The natural deposits, which consisted of gault clay with frequent patches of gravel, were overlaid by a mid brown clay silt subsoil (1003), up to 0.20m thick. Context (1003) was overlaid by a stone and grit layer (1002), up to 0.18m thick, which was, in turn, sealed by tarmac (1001), up to 0.10m thick. A low amount of contamination occurred within the trench. No archaeological finds or features were present.
- 5.16 **Trench 11** (30m long, 1.8m wide) was aligned northwest-southeast and was excavated onto the natural substrate at an average depth of 0.37m (56.71m OD) below the modern ground surface. The natural deposits, which consisted of gault clay with frequent patches of gravel, were intermittently overlaid by a green/brown clay silt subsoil (1103), up to 0.18m thick. Subsoil (1103) contained occasional CBM fragments. Context (1103) was overlaid by a stone and grit layer (1102), up to 0.13m thick, which was, in turn, sealed by tarmac (1101), up to 0.06m thick. The trench was partially contaminated. No archaeological finds or features were present.
- 5.17 **Trench 12** (30m long, 1.8m wide) was aligned northeast-southwest and was excavated onto the natural substrate at an average depth of 0.60m (56.85m OD) below the modern ground surface. The natural deposits, which consisted of gault clay with frequent patches of gravel, were overlaid by a green/brown clay silt subsoil (1203), up to 0.35m thick. Context (1203) was overlaid by a stone and grit layer (1202), up to 0.20m thick, which was, in turn, sealed by tarmac (1201), up to 0.05m thick. A low amount of contamination occurred within the trench. No archaeological finds or features were present.
- 5.18 **Trench 13** (30m long, 1.8m wide) was aligned northeast-southwest and was excavated onto the natural substrate at an average depth of 0.75m (56.54m OD) below the modern ground surface. The natural deposits, which consisted

of gault clay with frequent patches of gravel, were overlaid by a green clay silt subsoil (1303), up to 0.50m thick. Context (1303) was overlaid by a stone and grit layer (1302), up to 0.21m thick, which was, in turn, sealed by tarmac (1301), up to 0.04m thick. The trench was partially contaminated. No archaeological finds or features were present.

## **6 CONCLUSIONS**

- 6.1 A large part of the investigated area had been contaminated, with significant modern disturbance occurring throughout Trenches 1 and 3. A low amount of contamination/disturbance was noted in Trenches 6, 9, 10 and 12.
- 6.2 Ditch [904] is undated, however, the clay soil nature of the fills associated with this feature may indicate that it is of some antiquity, and possibly represents a field boundary or drainage ditch.
- 6.3 No artefacts were recovered from any of the gullies in Trench 6. The features were relatively shallow and possibly truncated, and as such are difficult to interpret. However, in light of the presence of a single sherd of prehistoric pottery recovered from the subsoil within Trench 6, it is possible that these features represent limited evidence for archaeological activity at this location.
- 6.4 The evaluation has indicated that, due to contamination and modern disturbance, there is a low potential for the survival of archaeological deposits across the majority of the site. However, possible archaeological features, along with low levels of contamination and disturbance were present within Trenches 6 and 9.
- 6.5 The archive is currently held at the offices of Foundations Archaeology, but will be deposited within 12 months with the Oxfordshire County Store. A short note will be submitted for publication in the relevant local archaeological journal and an OASIS form will also be submitted to ADS.

## **7 BIBLIOGRAPHY**

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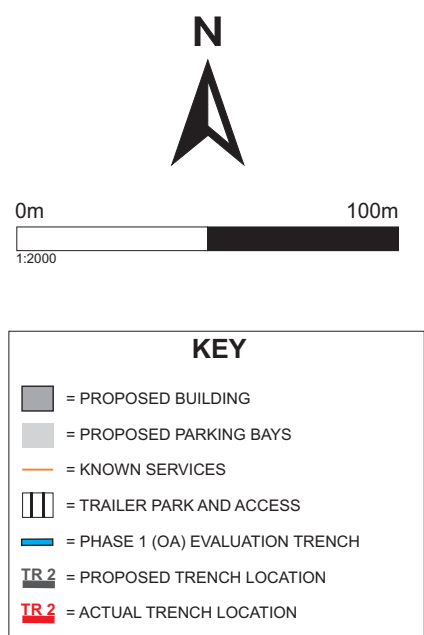
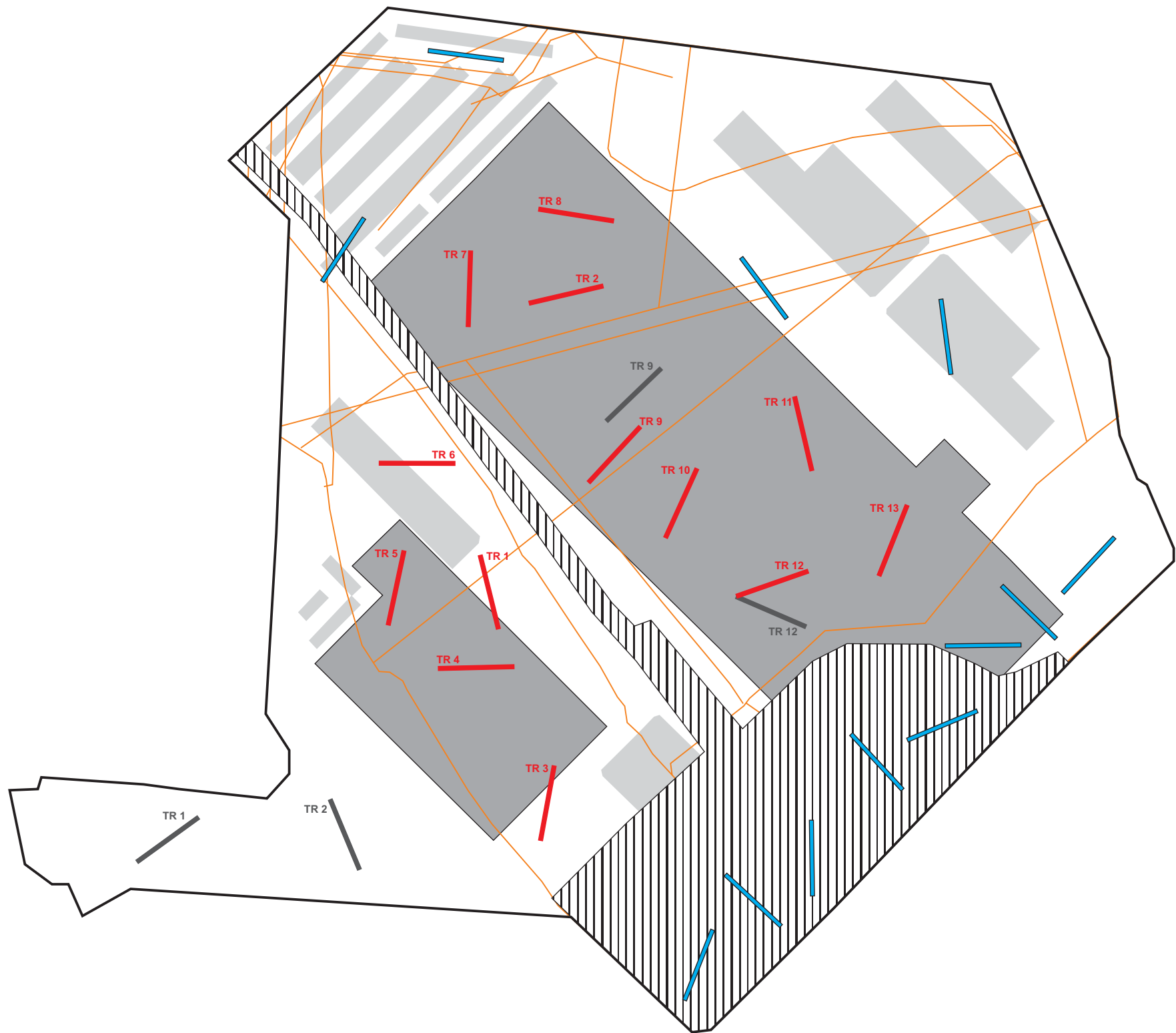
## **8 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Foundations Archaeology would like to thank Hugh Coddington of Oxfordshire County Council and Chris Cox and Ben Stephenson of Waterman CPM.



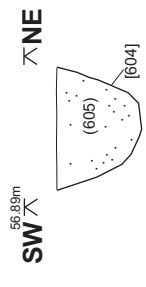
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FIGURE 1: Site Location

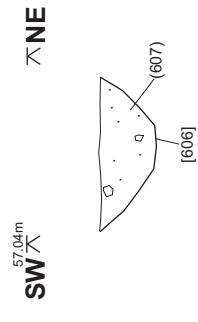


**FIGURE 2: Trench Locations**

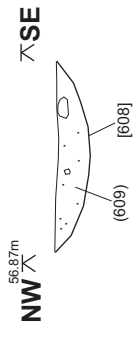
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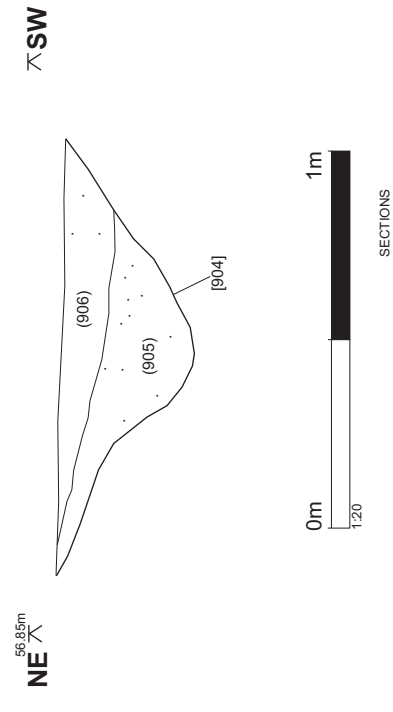
**SOUTHEAST FACING SECTION [606]**



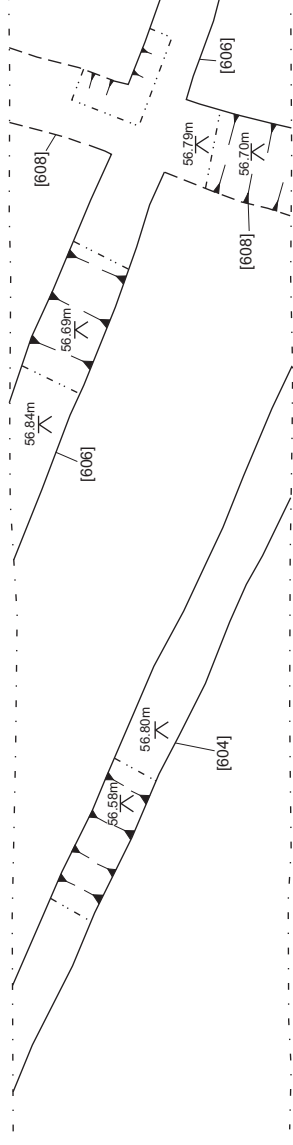
**SOUTHWEST FACING SECTION [608]**



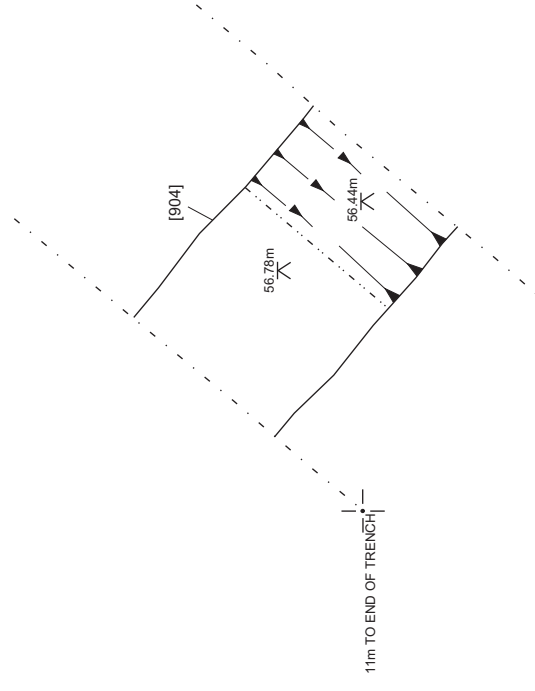
**NORTHWEST FACING SECTION [904]**



**TRENCH 6 PLAN**



**TRENCH 9 PLAN**



**FIGURE 3: Plans and Sections**