



PHOENIX CONSULTING
Archaeology Limited

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION
TRIAL TRENCHING**

Aircraft Hanger
Little Staughton Airfield
Little Staughton
Huntingdonshire

on behalf of:

IAE Ltd

PC511b

Event Number: **ECB6235**

By:

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&
A Richmond BA PhD MCI fA FSA

8th June 2020

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2020

Phoenix Consulting Archaeology Ltd

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Plate 1 General shot of trenching in progress, looking SW across Trench 1 (foreground) and along Trench 3

Non-Technical Summary

During May 2020 Phoenix Consulting Archaeology Ltd carried out an archaeological trench evaluation across the footprint of a proposed Aircraft Hanger on land at Little Staughton Airfield, Little Staughton, Huntingdonshire. The work was carried out on behalf of IAE Ltd and forms an archaeological evaluation required to assess the archaeological character of the Site. The evaluation forms the information required to inform Planning Application (19/02613/FUL).

Whilst the Site is in an area of known archaeology, predominantly dating from the Iron Age and Roman periods, no archaeological deposits or finds were encountered during the works. Deep overburden horizons representing levelling and landscaping deposits formed during the creation of the WWII airfield were encountered in all trenches. In places these deposits were c. 2m in depth, above buried top and subsoils that represented the original land surface. In all trenches, the original land surface was at a depth considerably below the impact of the proposed development.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

- 1.1.1 JGP MK Ltd on behalf of IAE Ltd are seeking planning permission for the ‘erection of aircraft maintenance and repair hangar, external plant building, apron hardstanding, car parking, landscaping, installation of foul water treatment plant and surface water drainage’ on land at Little Staughton Airfield, Huntingdonshire (Ref: 19/02613/FUL - Figure 1). The development area covers 0.9 hectares and is centred on NGR TL 11289 61333.
- 1.1.2 Pre-commencement advice from Cambridgeshire Historic Environment Team (CHET) outlined the requirement for a programme of archaeological trial trenching, in line with an issued *Brief* (CHET 2020). The trial trenching was requested by the Council in order to assess the impact of the proposed development on buried archaeological remains. Such requirements are in accordance with government guidance as set out in the NPPF (2019).
- 1.1.3 All works were conducted in accordance with the agreed *Specifications* (Richmond 2020) and followed Historic England guidance (MoRPHE 2015), the Council *Brief* (CHET 2020) and all relevant CIfA guidelines, most specifically the *Standards and Guidance for Archaeological Field Evaluations* (CIfA 2014).
- 1.1.4 IAE Ltd commissioned Phoenix Consulting Archaeology Ltd to carry out the investigations, which took place between the 18th and 21st May 2020. This report outlines the results of those investigations.

2.0 PHYSICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 Site location and geology (figure 1)

- 2.1.1 The Site lies within the former WWII Little Staughton Military Airfield, within a broadly open landscape, but also adjacent to an existing industrial estate. The Site is characterised by a small redundant building and areas of hard-standing, bordering arable farmland to the SE. In places the reinforced concrete bases of former buildings (no doubt associated with the former military airfield) were present. There was a noticeable drop-off of levels between the relatively level site, and the arable fields to the SE; which lay outside of the airfield’s curtilage (see plate 2).
- 2.1.2 The topography of the Site was generally level, at the c. 65m OD contour. The geology of the area is glacial till diamicton overlaying Oxford Clay.



Plate 2 General shot showing difference in levels between the Site (right of picture) and the open fields beyond the former airfield (left of picture) - 2m scale in mid-ground.

3.0 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

3.1 Aims and objectives

- 3.1.1 The general aim of the trench evaluation was to obtain useful information concerning the presence, character, date and level of preservation of archaeological remains that may exist across the Site. The results from the investigations will allow the curatorial authority to determine the impact of the proposed development on the archaeological resource.
- 3.1.2 Research objectives followed those as detailed in the relevant Research Framework documents (Glazebrook 1997, Brown & Glazebrook 2000, Medlycott 2011) and the relevant national research agendas (Historic England 1991; 1997, as updated).
- 3.1.2 Specific objectives included:
- Investigation of a representative sample of the Site, to define the nature, date and extent of any surviving archaeological features.
 - Identify and investigate any buried soils, if they survive, and site formation processes generally.
 - Investigation of any palaeochannels or palaeosols.
 - Further investigation across the Site to establish its archaeological potential for all periods.

- 3.1.3 To achieve the above, 5 trial trenches were excavated across the Site (see figure 2). Trenches measured between 22m and 30m in length by 2.1m width.

3.2 Trench evaluation methodology

- 3.2.1 The trial trench evaluation methodology followed that outlined in the agreed *Specification* (Section 3, Richmond 2020).
- 3.2.2 All archaeological operations were carried out in accordance with current FAME guidelines¹ and Health and Safety legislation. A detailed *Risk Assessment* was carried out and circulated to all staff prior to work commencing.
- 3.2.3 All trenches were surveyed and located using GPS systems and levelling equipment. Overburden was removed from each trench in a clean and methodical manner and stored alongside. This was carried out under the supervision of a suitably qualified archaeologist using a tracked excavator fitted with a 2.1m wide toothless ditching bucket. Where deep deposits were encountered, machine excavation was undertaken in stints to check for the presence of archaeology at various horizons.



Plate 3 Trench 5 during machine excavation. This part of the Site lay within the former airfield curtilage, but outside of the area of concrete hardstanding.

¹ Federation of Archaeological Managers and Employers, formerly known as SCAUM (Standing Conference of Archaeological Unit Managers).

- 3.2.4 Machine excavations took place to a level of either natural deposits or when potential archaeological horizons were encountered. All subsequent excavations were undertaken by hand. Sampling was designed to characterise and date features.
- 3.2.5 A detailed context record was maintained on individual pro-forma record cards. Each potential archaeological layer, fill, cut, etc., was individually numbered and described in terms of soil detail, stratigraphic position, dimensions, artefact content, samples and interpretation.
- 3.2.6 Trench plans and sections were drawn at scale 1:50 and 1:20, as necessary, and located on a site plan. A full photographic record was made using high resolution digital SLR cameras.



Plate 4 Trench 2 following machine excavation, revealing deep backfilled and levelling deposits criss-crossed by numerous service trenches.

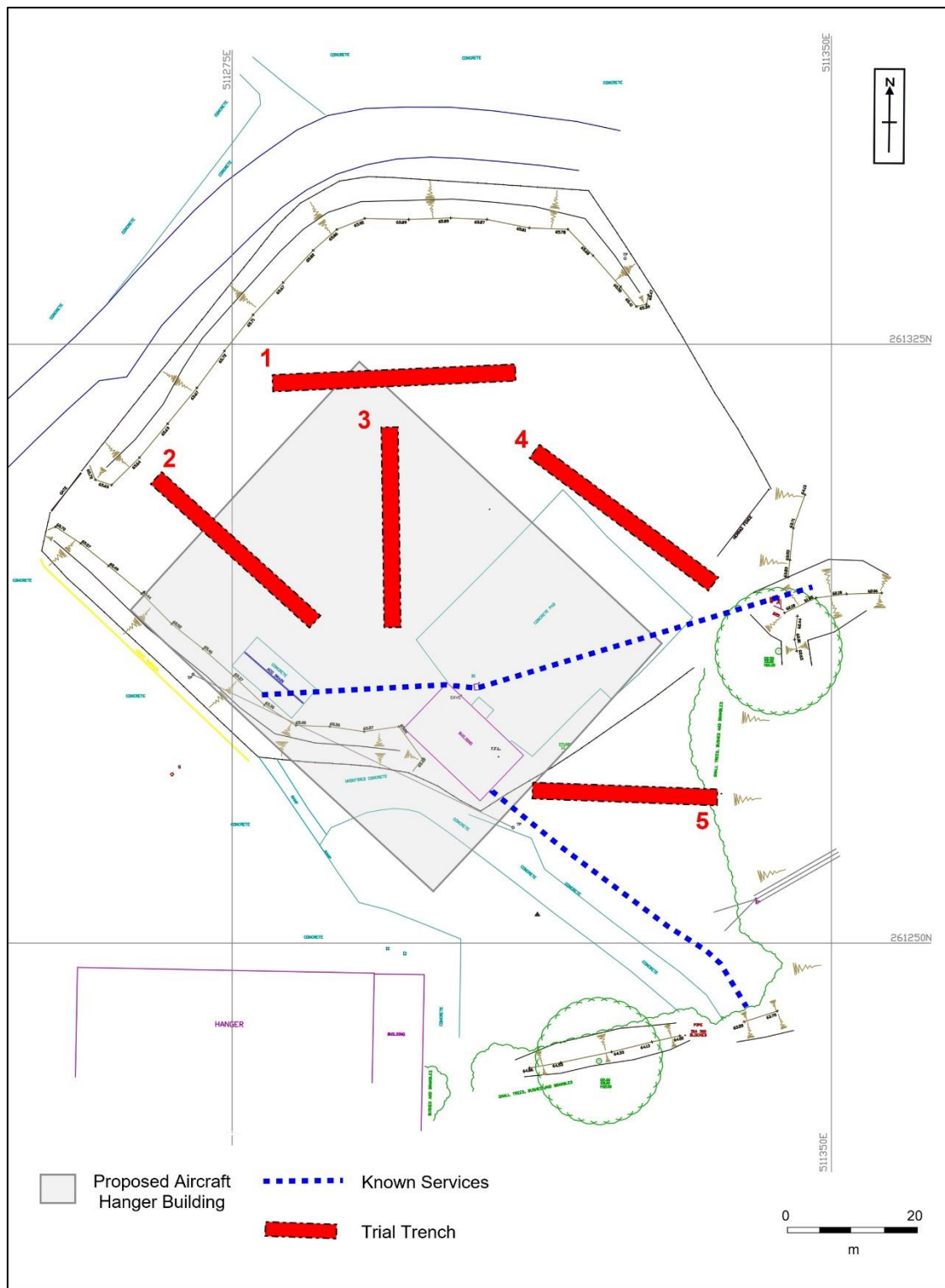


Figure 2
Location of archaeological trial trenches, superimposed on existing site layout plan.

3.3 The archive

- 3.3.1 The written, drawn and photographic records form the site archive; which is currently stored at *Phoenix Consulting's* Bedford office.
- 3.3.2 The archive has been organised using the standards set out by Historic England in the publication: *Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment (MoHRPE)* –2006, reissued 2015.
- 3.3.3 The ultimate recipient museum for the archive will be the Cambridgeshire County Council Archaeology Archive Facility, and their Conditions of Acceptance will be adhered to.

4.0 ARCHAEOLOGICAL & HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

4.1 Archaeological Context

- 4.1.1 The archaeological and historical background was detailed in heritage statement (Brown & Co 2020) and *Specification Document* (Richmond 2020). What follows here is a summary of the main points.
- 4.1.2 The airfield began military life as a USAAF Bomber Station in December 1942 (CHER reference MCB15137). By early 1944 the airfield had three runways and eleven hangars. It transferred from the USAAF to RAF Bomber Command on 1 March 1944 (see figure 3 & plate 5). With the end of WWII the airfield was slowly run down, with the last aircraft leaving in September 1945 and the airfield being used as barracks from October until December 1945, when the airfield was transferred to Care and Maintenance. In early 1946 it was sold and converted to private use.
- 4.1.3 Designated heritage assets in the vicinity include the former airfield's Control Tower (NHLE reference: 1391627), that is c. 900m to the NE of the Site. Other designated sites in the wider surrounding landscape include Bushmead Priory Scheduled Monument (NHLE ref. 1014455), Blaysworth Manor (NHLE 1214423) and Cretingsbury Norman motte castle and Medieval moated manor house (NHLE 1009590).
- 4.1.4 An evaluation carried out for the adjacent solar development scheme demonstrated the presence of Iron Age and Roman remains including an enclosure c.130m to the NE of the Site (CHER refs ECB 4542, 5133). Iron Age archaeology represented by ditches were recorded in 1976 during a watching brief on a development 100m to the SW; at the southern border of the airfield.
- 4.1.5 The county boundary is defined by the border of the airfield on the west side, and Bedfordshire's HER records cropmarks that resemble an Iron Age banjo enclosure and enclosures at this border, opposite Top End Farm (BHER ref 1593142). North of the airfield, numerous archaeological sites and monuments are recorded in the land around Crown Farm, many of which exist as cropmark sites visible on aerial photographs (e.g. MCB25117, BHER 10053, 18678).

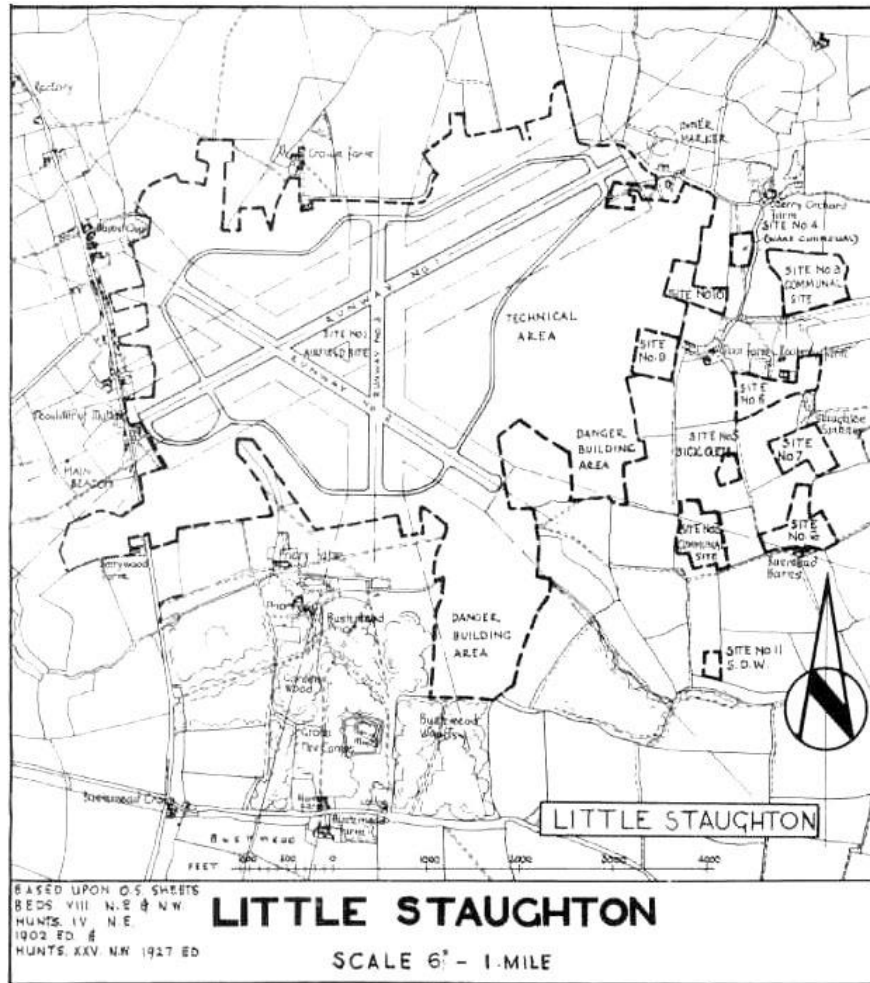


Figure 3 Airfield Map, 'as proposed' on OS third edition mapping



Plate 5 Little Staughton Airfield c. 1944, with area of Site depicted.

5.0 RESULTS

5.1 Summary (figure 2)

- 5.1.1 No archaeological deposits or finds were identified during the trenching exercise. All trenches were characterised by deep levelling deposits, believed to be associated with the creation of the airfield during the early years of WWII (see Appendix A). The identified levelling deposits existed beneath the present hardstanding (Trenches 1-4) and area of grass (Trench 5, Plate 6). The deposits comprised of disturbed soils, often clay-rich and containing rubble, concrete, bricks and metalwork of 20th century date. At their shallowest the infilling/levelling horizons were c. 0.5m in depth, but in places they extended to over 1.5m in thickness. They overlay (in places) the original (often truncated) top and subsoils. Traversing all trenches were 20th century services.
- 5.1.2 Where the natural geology was encountered, it was a light yellow/brown boulder clay (Plate 7). This was identified at a depth of between 1.3m and 2m beneath the modern ground surface. The level of the uppermost surface of the natural geology was reasonably consistent, at between 63.8m aOD (Trench 2) and 63.4m aOD (Trench 5), possibly indicating an original slope from north to south.

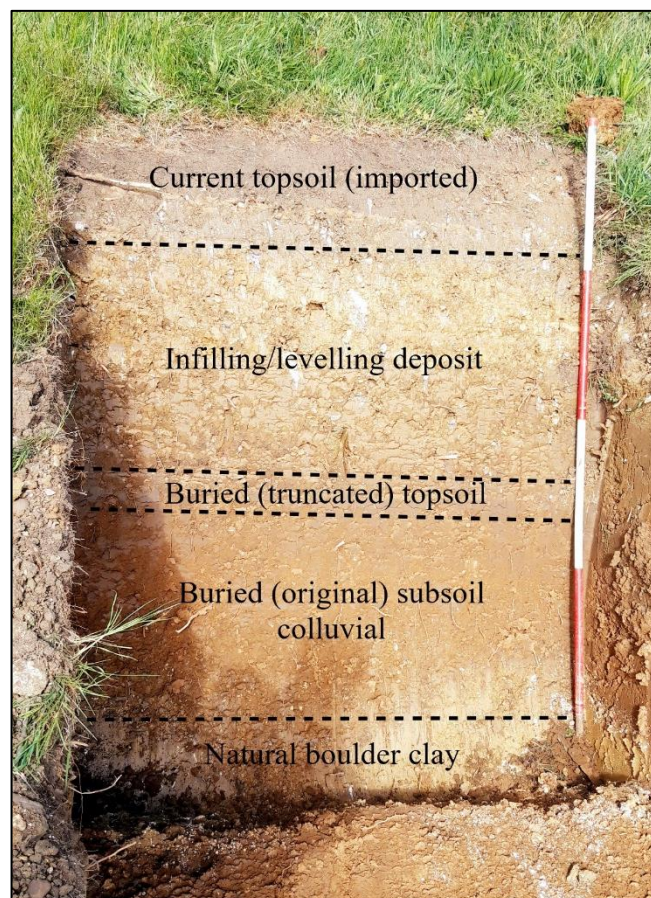


Plate 6 Site stratigraphy as revealed in western end of Trench 5.



Plate 7 Sondage cut into southern end of Trench 2, showing natural boulder clay at c.1.7m depth.

6.0 DISCUSSION

6.1 Concluding statement

- 6.1.1 Whilst the Site is in an area of known archaeology, predominantly dating from the Iron Age and Roman periods, no archaeological deposits or finds were encountered during the works. Deep overburden horizons, representing levelling and landscaping formed during the creation of the WWII airfield, were encountered in all trenches. In places these deposits were c. 2m in depth, above buried top and subsoils that represented the original land surface. In all trenches, the original land surface was at a depth considerably below the impact of the proposed development.
- 6.1.2 During WWII the location of airfields was considered carefully. Large flat areas, that were moderately elevated were preferred, so that minimal landscaping would need to take place in order to create suitable surfaces for the runways, perimeter roads and hangers. Where natural undulations existed on such sites, landscaping (usually involving bulldozers levelling off or infilling areas) took place. This certainly appears to have been the case at Little Staughton.



Plate 8 Airfield construction in Hertfordshire - 1941, showing the levelling of the land.

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Acknowledgements

Phoenix Consulting Archaeology Ltd would like to thank Jon Green, Director from JGP MK Ltd for his assistance during the project.

We would also like to thank Kasia Gdaniec, Cambridgeshire Historic Environment Team, for her advice and assistance.

The fieldwork was carried out by Gary Coates and Andy Richmond of Phoenix Consulting Archaeology Ltd. Surveying was carried out by Mercedes Planas.

Trench 4

Maximum Dimensions: Length: 27m Width: 2.1m Depth: 1.05m

Height (aOD): 64.99m (NW) 64.46m (SE)

Orientation: NW – SE

Main Deposit Description: No archaeological features

Context	Classification	Description	Depth below ground surface (b.g.s) – top and bottom of deposits
400	Surface	Compact crushed hardcore layer above geotextile.	0.00-0.25m
401	Backfill layer	Light grey/brown silt clay containing building rubble debris and CBM (mixed). Possible fill of drainage pipe trench (undefined in trench)	0.25-1.0m+

Trench 5

Maximum Dimensions: Length: 22m Width: 2.1m Depth: 1.50m

Height (aOD): 64.39 (E) 64.69 (W)

Orientation: E – W

Main Deposit Description: No archaeological features

Context	Classification	Description	Depth below ground surface (b.g.s) – top and bottom of deposits
500	Turf/ Topsoil	Turf above a mid grey/brown silt clay. Occ. small sub-/rounded stones. Very rooty.	0.00-0.25m
501	Backfill layer	Buff/brown silt clay containing building rubble debris and CBM (mixed).	0.25-0.65m
502	Layer	Dark grey Silt (W end of trench)	0.65-0.80m
503	Layer	Red/brown silt clay subsoil	0.65-1.30m
506	Natural	Yellow/brown boulder clay geology.	1.3m +

APPENDIX B

OASIS Form

OASIS DATA COLLECTION FORM: England

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OASIS ID: phoenixc1-395772

Project details

Project name	Little Staughton Airfield, Cambridgeshire
Short description of the project	During May 2020 Phoenix Consulting Archaeology Ltd carried out an archaeological trench evaluation across a proposed Aircraft Hanger on land at Little Staughton Airfield, Little Staughton, Huntingdonshire. The work was carried out on behalf of IAE Ltd and forms an archaeological evaluation required to assess the archaeological character of the site. The evaluation forms information required to inform the Planning Application (19/02613/FUL). The site lies in an area of known archaeology, predominantly dating from the Iron Age and Roman periods. The site lies within the World War 2 Little Staughton Military Airfield, developed in 1942 as a USAAF Bomber Station and decommissioned in 1946. Five trial trenches were excavated in order to appropriately evaluate the site. No archaeological deposits or finds were encountered during the trenching exercise. Deep overburden deposits were encountered during the trenching exercise, which is likely a result of the extensive landscaping of this part of the Airfield during the War.
Project dates	Start: 18-05-2020 End: 30-06-2020
Previous/future work	No / Not known
Any associated project reference codes	ECB 6235 - HER event no.
Type of project	Field evaluation
Site status	None
Current Land use	Industry and Commerce 1 - Industrial
Methods & techniques	"Sample Trenches"
Development type	Rural commercial
Prompt	Direction from Local Planning Authority - PPG16
Position in the planning process	Between deposition of an application and determination

Project location

Country	England
Site location	CAMBRIDGESHIRE HUNTINGDONSHIRE GRAFHAM Little Staughton Airfield
Postcode	MK44 2BN
Study area	0.9 Hectares
Site coordinates	TL 11289 61333 52.238516362868 -0.370017701143 52 14 18 N 000 22 12 W Point
Height OD / Depth	Min: 63m Max: 64m

Project creators

Name of Organisation	Phoenix Consulting Archaeology Ltd
Project brief originator	Local Authority Archaeologist and/or Planning Authority/advisory body
Project design originator	Phoenix Consulting Archaeology Ltd
Project director/manager	Andy Richmond
Project supervisor	Gary Coates
Type of sponsor/funding body	Developer
Name of sponsor/funding body	IAE Ltd

Project archives

Physical Archive Exists?	No
Digital Archive recipient	CHER
Digital Contents	"none"
Digital Media available	"Images raster / digital photography","Survey"
Paper Archive recipient	CHER
Paper Contents	"none"
Paper Media available	"Context sheet"
Paper Archive notes	Trench Sheets x 5 Photographic Register x 1

Project bibliography 1

Publication type	Grey literature (unpublished document/manuscript)
Title	Aircraft Hanger, Little Staughton Airfield, Little Staughton, Huntingdonshire. Report on Archaeological Evaluation. Trial Trenching
Author(s)/Editor(s)	G Coates and A Richmond
Other	PCAL Report PC 511b

bibliographic
details

Date 2020
Issuer or
publisher Phoenix Consulting Archaeology Ltd
Place of issue or
publication Grey Literature
Description Bound report, A4 format, 25 pages

Entered by Gary Coates (garycoates@phoenix-archaeology.com)
Entered on 5 June 2020

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Cite only: <http://www.oasis.ac.uk/form/print.cfm> for this page

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