MARSH FARM REGENERATION PROJECT
LUTON

ARCHAEOLOGICAL FIELD EVALUATION

Albion
archaeology

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Contents

List of Figures

The figures are bound at the back of the report.

Preface

Every effort has been made in the preparation of this document to provide as complete a summary as possible within the terms of the method statement. All statements and opinions in this document are offered in good faith. Albion Archaeology cannot accept responsibility for errors of fact or opinion resulting from data supplied by a third party, or for any loss or other consequence arising from decisions or actions made upon the basis of facts or opinions expressed in this document.

Acknowledgements

The project was commissioned by Luton Borough Council and monitored on behalf of the Local Planning Authority by Hannah Firth, Central Bedfordshire Council Archaeologist. The fieldwork was undertaken by Ian Turner (Archaeological Supervisor). This report has been prepared by Ian Turner with figures produced by Joan Lightning (CAD Technician). All Albion projects are under the overall management of Drew Shotliff (Operations Manager).

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1.0	*28/11/2014*	*n/a*

Key Terms

The following terms or abbreviations are used throughout this report:

CBCA	Central Bedfordshire Council Archaeologist
Client	Luton Borough Council
HER	Central Bedfordshire Council's Historic Environment Record
IfA	Institute for Archaeologists
LBC	Luton Borough Council
PDA	Proposed development area
WSI	Written Scheme of Investigation

Non-Technical Summary

Planning permission (LBC/13/00782/FUL) has been granted by Luton Borough Council (LBC) for the regeneration of the Marsh Farm housing and retail area in Luton.

The Central Bedfordshire Council Archaeologists (CBCA) act as archaeological advisors to LBC. In this instance, they advised that the development site had the potential to contain heritage assets with archaeological interest.

The CBCA issued a brief for the archaeological works, which advised that an archaeological field evaluation must be undertaken in the form of trial trenching (Stage 1). If significant archaeological remains were encountered during this stage of works, further archaeological investigation might be required and this would be the subject of a further brief from the CBCA.

Albion Archaeology was commissioned to produce a written scheme of investigation (Albion Archaeology 2014) and to undertake the trial trenching. The results are set out in this report.

The trial trenching revealed a pit that contained a small amount of unworked, burnt flint and no other artefacts. It was fully excavated during the trial trenching but remains undated.

The trenches also revealed modern intrusions associated with the demolition of blocks of flats and garages that occupied the site until recently. Modern pipe trenches associated with services to the former buildings were also identified.

It was noted that none of the trenches contained a buried topsoil or subsoil; the modern demolition layer directly overlay the undisturbed geological horizon. This indicates that some degree of truncation of the ground has occurred, either during levelling and landscaping associated with the construction of the blocks of flats, or during the process of their demolition. This suggests that if any shallow archaeological features were once present within the site, they would have been destroyed by development processes in the recent past.

The undated pit identified within the site is of negligible significance and has no potential to address regional archaeological research agenda.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Project Background

Planning permission (LBC/13/00782/FUL) has been granted by Luton Borough Council (LBC) for the regeneration of the Marsh Farm housing and retail area in Luton.

The Central Bedfordshire Council Archaeologists (CBCA) act as archaeological advisors to LBC. In this instance, they advised that the development site had the potential to contain heritage assets with archaeological interest. Consequently a condition was attached to the planning permission.

The CBCA issued a brief (2014) for the archaeological works required by the condition. The brief specified that a Stage 1 archaeological field evaluation should be undertaken in the form of trial trenching, with the proviso that if significant archaeological remains were encountered during this stage of works, further archaeological investigation might be required. In that case, any additional work would be the subject of a further brief from the CBCA.

Albion Archaeology was commissioned to produce a written scheme of investigation (WSI) for the archaeological trial trenching (Albion Archaeology 2014). The WSI was approved by the CBCA in advance of the fieldwork. The results of the trial trenching are set out in this report.

1.2 Site Location, Topography and Geology

The proposed development area (PDA) is located on the northern edge of the Marsh Farm housing estate, which itself lies within the northern outskirts of Luton, *c*. 5km from the city centre (Figure 1). It is centred on NGR TL 06471 25477 and lies at *c*. 125m OD on the edge of the Chilterns dip slope. The underlying solid geology comprises Holywell Nodular and New Pit chalk. No superficial geology is recorded.

The PDA covers *c*. 3.2ha, although the trial excavation was confined to the north-east end of the site. It is currently open ground but was formerly occupied by housing, car parks and various civic buildings. It is bounded to the north by The Moakes, to the east by Northwell Drive and by further areas of housing to the south and west.

1.3 Archaeological Background

The archaeological background to the site has previously been set out in both a desk-based assessment (WYG 2013), which accompanied the planning application, and in the brief (CBCA 2014).

The desk-based assessment examined historical maps, aerial photographs, known archaeological assets and previous archaeological interventions within a 1km radius of the site. A brief summary of the findings is given here.

The most significant heritage asset in the vicinity is Waulud's Bank (HER 820, SM 29383), a scheduled D-shaped earthwork enclosure that is associated with

the source of the River Lea. It lies over 600m to the south-west of the PDA. Artefacts of varying date have been recovered from the monument and several small-scale investigations have been undertaken within it. The interior has also been subject to geophysical survey.

Notwithstanding all this fieldwork, interpretation of the monument remains uncertain. English Heritage have classified it as a Neolithic "henge-enclosure"[1] but the form of the monument is generally more consistent with Iron Age enclosed or defended settlements (CBC 2014, 7). Given its location at the source of the River Lea, it is likely that the present-day monument is the product of millennia of development. It is likely to have had a variety of uses and significance for successive generations living on the headwaters of the river.

Evidence for such occupation includes a possible Roman road (HER 2836) and fragments of Bronze Age collared urns (HER 14674) found *c*. 600m to the west of the PDA. The presence of the prehistoric Icknield Way (HER 353) is also likely to have led to the development of settlement in the area. To the south, evidence for late Iron Age and early Roman occupation was found at Hurst Way / Ambleside / Willow Way (HER 167) and on Runfold Avenue (HER 115). The Limbury area, in general, was a focus of considerable settlement in the late Iron Age and early Roman periods.

Density of occupation seems to have fallen in this part of the upper Lea valley in the medieval period. The presence of ridge and furrow earthworks within Waulud's Bank suggest the incorporation of the area into arable fields associated with nearby settlements, for example the manorial site at Limbury. The available evidence suggests that the environs of the PDA remained largely rural and agricultural into the post-medieval period — cropmarks and earthworks represent former field boundaries depicted on the 1842 Tithe map (HER 12411–3, 170). Great Bramingham Wood (HER 13162) to the north-east of the PDA would have been another important element of the medieval and post-medieval landscape. Sub-surface remains of these aspects of the historic environment are of less significance than those associated with the prehistoric and Roman occupation of the area.

1.4 Project Objectives

The general objectives of the investigation were to provide information on the following:

- the location, date, nature and extent of any archaeological features or deposits that might be present within the PDA;
- the integrity and state of preservation of any archaeological features or deposits that might be present within the PDA.

The local and regional research contexts are provided by Glazebrook (1997), Brown and Glazebrook (2000), Oake et al (2007) and Medlycott (2011).

The PDA lies within an area that has produced evidence for extensive prehistoric

[1] http://list.english-heritage.org.uk/resultsingle.aspx?uid=1015558. Accessed 09/09/2014

and Roman settlement, focussed on the headwaters of the river Lea. Such remains have not, to date, been found within the PDA but it did clearly at least lie within the hinterland of significant foci of settlement. Therefore, the focus of research objectives for the site lie in the prehistoric and Roman periods, specifically in regards to landscape development and settlement patterns.

The specific objectives of the project are to investigate possible evidence for:

- the date range, character and economy of prehistoric/Roman activity in the headwaters of the river Lea;
- landscape development in the headwaters of the river Lea;
- settlement patterns during the prehistoric and Roman periods.

2. METHODOLOGY

The methodological approach to the project is summarised below. A full methodology is provided in the WSI (Albion Archaeology 2014).

2.1 Methodological Standards

The standards and requirements set out in the following documents were adhered to throughout the project:

Albion Archaeology	*Procedures Manual: Volume 1 Fieldwork* (2nd edn, 2001).
ALGAO	*Standards for Field Archaeology in the East of England. EAA Occasional Paper No. 14 (2003)*
CBCA 2014	*Stage One Brief for a Programme of Archaeological Investigation, Recording, Analysis and Publication in Association with the Marsh Farm Regeneration Project in Luton, Bedfordshire*
EAA	*Standards for Field Archaeology in the East of England (2003)*
English Heritage	*Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment (MoRPHE) Project Managers' Guide (2009)*
	Environmental Archaeology: A guide to the theory and practice of methods, from sampling and recovery to post-excavation, 2nd edition (2011a)
I*f*A	*By-Laws and Code of Conduct*
	Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Field Evaluations (updated 2008) and finds (updated 2008)
Luton Culture 2013	*Procedure for preparing archaeological archives for deposition with Luton Culture*

2.2 Trial Trenching

The trial trenching took place between 12th and 18th November 2014 and comprised the excavation of six trenches measuring *c.* 2m wide and 25m long. The trenches were opened using a mechanical excavator fitted with a flat-edged bucket, operated by an experienced driver under close archaeological supervision. The area and spoil from each trench was scanned for artefacts. All excavation and recording was carried out by Albion Archaeology staff.

Any potential archaeological features were cleaned, excavated by hand and recorded using Albion Archaeology's pro forma sheets. All deposits were assigned a unique context number commencing at 100 for Trench 1, and 200 for Trench 2 etc. Context numbers in square brackets refer to cuts [***] and round brackets to fills or layers (***). Each trench was subsequently drawn and photographed as appropriate

3. RESULTS

3.1 Introduction

All features and deposits found within the trial trenches are described chronologically below and shown on Figure 2. Detailed information on features and deposits can be found in Appendix 1. The artefacts recovered from the features and deposits are summarised within this section.

3.2 Overburden and Geological Deposits

The overburden comprised topsoil over levelling and demolition layers, which lay directly on undisturbed geological deposits. The layers are described from top to bottom.

The topsoil was a 0.13–0.20m thick layer of dark grey brown sandy silt (100) – (600).

A 0.16–0.67m thick levelling layer of light grey-white chalk with occasional modern brick fragments was present in all the trenches (101) – (601). Trench 4 contained different modern levelling deposits at either end of the trench — mid orange clay and dark orange-grey clay silt (404) and (405).

A 0.08–0.20m thick demolition layer of dark yellow-grey silty clay with frequent modern brick fragments, was present in all the trenches (102) – (602). The layer is judged to be associated with the demolition of the blocks of flats and garages which occupied the site until recently.

The undisturbed geological deposit was light grey-white silty clay with frequent patches of light orange-brown clay silt and occasional patches of hard chalk (103) – (603).

3.3 Archaeological Features and Deposits

The features and deposits are discussed in date order from earliest to latest.

3.3.1 Pit (undated)

Pit [204] in Trench 2 was significantly truncated by a large, modern, chalk-filled service trench [208]. The pit had concave sides with a slightly concave base; it was at least 1.8m long, 1.2m wide and 0.70m deep. It contained three deposits that varied from light orange-brown to dark brown-grey, clay silt. The top and secondary deposits contained fragments of unworked, burnt flint (124g and 90g, respectively). No other artefacts were present within the pit, which was fully excavated. Its date is, therefore, unknown.

3.3.2 Modern service trenches

Trenches 1, 2, 5 and 6 contained multiple service cable and pipe trenches associated with the recently demolished block of flats that formerly occupied the site.

3.3.3 Modern intrusions associated with the demolition of the flats and garages

All the trenches contained linear and irregular intrusions filled with concrete or loose modern brick and stones that are judged to be associated with the demolition of the block of flats and garages that formerly occupied the site.

4. CONCLUSION

The only archaeological feature present within the trial trenches was an undated pit [204] within Trench 2, which contained a small amount of unworked, burnt flint and no other artefacts.

All the trenches contained modern service trenches or intrusions of concrete, loose modern brick fragments or loose stone associated with the recent demolition of the flats and garages that formerly occupied the PDA.

It was noted that none of the trenches contained a buried topsoil or subsoil, the modern demolition layer directly overlay undisturbed geological deposits. This indicates that some degree of truncation of the ground has occurred, either during levelling and landscaping associated with the construction of the blocks of flats, or during the demolition process. This suggests that if any shallow archaeological features were once present within the PDA, they would have been destroyed by development processes in the recent past.

The undated pit identified within the PDA is of negligible significance and has no potential to address regional archaeological research agenda.

5. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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6. APPENDIX 1: TRENCH SUMMARY

Trench: 1

Max Dimensions: **Length: 25.00 m. Width: 2.00 m. Depth to Archaeology Min: 0.8 m. Max: 0.88 m.**

Co-ordinates: **OS Grid Ref.: TL** *(Easting: 6519: Northing: 25499)*

OS Grid Ref.: TL *(Easting: 6504: Northing: 25480)*

Reason: **Assess archaeological potential**

Context:	Type:	Description:	Excavated:	Finds Present:
100	Topsoil	Friable dark grey brown sandy silt occasional small CBM, moderate small stones C. 0.18m thick	☑	☐
101	Levelling layer	Firm light grey white chalk occasional medium CBM 0.46m to 0.54m thick.	☑	☐
102	Demolition layer	Friable dark yellow grey silty clay frequent large CBM A layer of large brick fragments of modern date. 0.16m to 0.20m thick.	☑	☐
103	Natural	Firm light grey white silty clay frequent flecks chalk Deposit contains frequent small patches of light orange brown clay silt and occasional large patches of hard chalk.	☐	☐

Trench: 2

Max Dimensions: **Length: 25.00 m. Width: 2.00 m. Depth to Archaeology Min: 0.4 m. Max: 0.5 m.**

Co-ordinates: **OS Grid Ref.: TL** *(Easting: 6514: Northing: 25513)*

OS Grid Ref.: TL *(Easting: 6493: Northing: 25498)*

Reason: **Assess archaeological potential**

Context:	Type:	Description:	Excavated:	Finds Present:
200	Topsoil	Friable dark grey brown sandy silt occasional small CBM, moderate small stones C. 0.17m thick.	☑	☐
201	Levelling layer	Firm light grey white chalk occasional medium CBM 0.16m to 0.23m thick.	☑	☐
202	Demolition layer	Friable dark yellow grey silty clay frequent large CBM A layer of large brick fragments of modern date. 0.10m thick.	☑	☐
203	Natural	Firm light grey white silty clay frequent flecks chalk Deposit contains frequent small patches of light orange brown clay silt and occasional large patches of hard chalk.	☐	☐
204	Pit	sides: concave base: concave dimensions: min breadth 1.2m, min depth 0.7m, min length 1.8m	☑	☐
205	Primary fill	Friable light orange brown clay silt occasional flecks chalk, occasional flecks charcoal, occasional small-medium stones Deposit contained moderate amounts of snail shell fragments.	☑	☐
206	Secondary fill	Friable dark brown grey clay silt occasional flecks chalk, moderate flecks charcoal, occasional small-medium stones Deposit contained occasional fragments of burnt flint and frequent snail shell fragments.	☑	☐
207	Upper fill	Friable mid grey brown clay silt occasional flecks chalk, occasional flecks charcoal, occasional small-large stones Deposit contained occasional fragments of burnt flint and occasional snail shell fragments.	☑	☐
208	Modern intrusion	Linear sides: near vertical dimensions: min breadth 0.8m, min depth 0.7m, min length 2.m A chalk back-filled pipe trench which truncated pit [204].	☑	☐
209	Fill	Hard light white chalk Deposit contained occasional fragments of modern brick and bottle glass.	☑	☐
210	Modern intrusion	sides: near vertical base: uneven dimensions: min breadth 0.6m, min depth 0.36m, min length 0.6m	☑	☐
211	Fill	Firm dark orange grey silty clay occasional small-medium stones Deposit contained occasional fragments of modern brick.	☑	☐

Trench: 3

Max Dimensions: Length: 25.00 m. Width: 2.00 m. Depth to Archaeology Min: 0.35 m. Max: 0.4 m.

Co-ordinates: OS Grid Ref.: TL *(Easting: 6488: Northing: 25530)*

OS Grid Ref.: TL *(Easting: 6480: Northing: 25507)*

Reason: Assess archaeological potential

Context:	Type:	Description:	Excavated:	Finds Present:
300	Topsoil	Friable dark grey brown sandy silt occasional small CBM, moderate small stones C. 0.13m thick.	☑	☐
301	Levelling layer	Firm light grey white chalk occasional medium CBM 0.12m to 0.15m thick.	☑	☐
302	Demolition layer	Friable dark yellow grey chalk frequent large CBM A layer of large brick fragments of modern date. c. 0.12m thick	☑	☐
303	Natural	Firm light grey white silty clay frequent flecks chalk Deposit contains frequent small patches of light orange brown clay silt and occasional large patches of hard chalk.	☐	☐

Trench: 4

Max Dimensions: Length: 25.00 m. Width: 2.00 m. Depth to Archaeology Min: 0.41 m. Max: 0.68 m.

Co-ordinates: OS Grid Ref.: TL *(Easting: 6482: Northing: 25558)*

OS Grid Ref.: TL *(Easting: 6470: Northing: 25535)*

Reason: Assess archaeological potential

Context:	Type:	Description:	Excavated:	Finds Present:
400	Topsoil	Friable dark grey brown sandy silt occasional small CBM, moderate small stones C. 0.18m thick.	☑	☐
401	Levelling layer	Firm light grey white chalk occasional medium CBM 0.13m to 0.34m thick.	☑	☐
402	Demolition layer	Friable dark yellow grey silty clay frequent large CBM A layer of large brick fragments of modern date. 0.13m to 0.16m thick.	☑	☐
403	Natural	Firm light grey white silty clay frequent flecks chalk Deposit contains frequent small patches of light orange brown clay silt and occasional large patches of hard chalk.	☐	☐
404	Levelling layer	Friable dark orange grey clay silt occasional small stones The layer contains occasional brick fragments of modern date. This layer is overlain by chalk layer (401). c. 0.15m thick.	☑	☐
405	Levelling layer	Firm mid orange clay moderate flecks chalk The layer contains occasional brick fragments of modern date. The layer overlies chalk layer (401). c. 0.15m thick.	☑	☐

Trench: 5

Max Dimensions: **Length:** 25.00 m. **Width:** 2.00 m. **Depth to Archaeology Min:** 0.45 m. **Max:** 1.03 m.

Co-ordinates: **OS Grid Ref.: TL** *(Easting: 6497: Northing: 25550)*

OS Grid Ref.: TL *(Easting: 6514: Northing: 25526)*

Reason: **Assess archaeological potential**

Context:	Type:	Description:	Excavated:	Finds Present:
500	Topsoil	Friable dark grey brown sandy silt occasional small CBM, moderate small stones 0.16m to 0.20m thick.	☑	☐
501	Levelling layer	Firm light grey white chalk occasional medium CBM 0.25m to 0.67m thick.	☑	☐
502	Demolition layer	Friable dark yellow grey silty clay frequent large CBM A layer of large brick fragments of modern date. 0.05m to 0.16m thick.	☑	☐
503	Natural	Firm light grey white silty clay frequent flecks chalk Deposit contains frequent small patches of light orange brown clay silt and occasional large patches of hard chalk.	☐	☐

Trench: 6

Max Dimensions: **Length:** 22.20 m. **Width:** 2.00 m. **Depth to Archaeology Min:** 0.62 m. **Max:** 0.67 m.

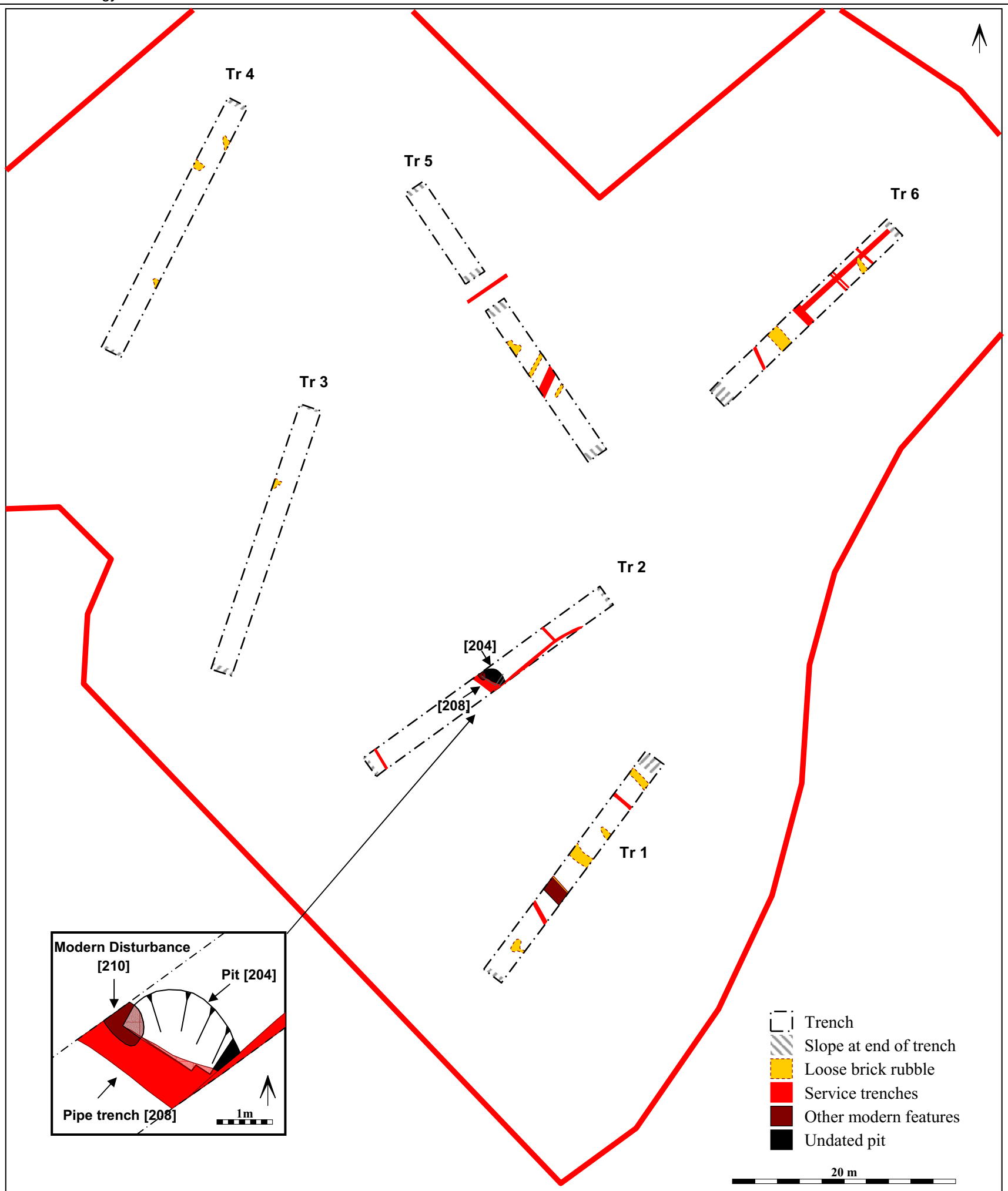
Co-ordinates: **OS Grid Ref.: TL** *(Easting: 6540: Northing: 25546)*

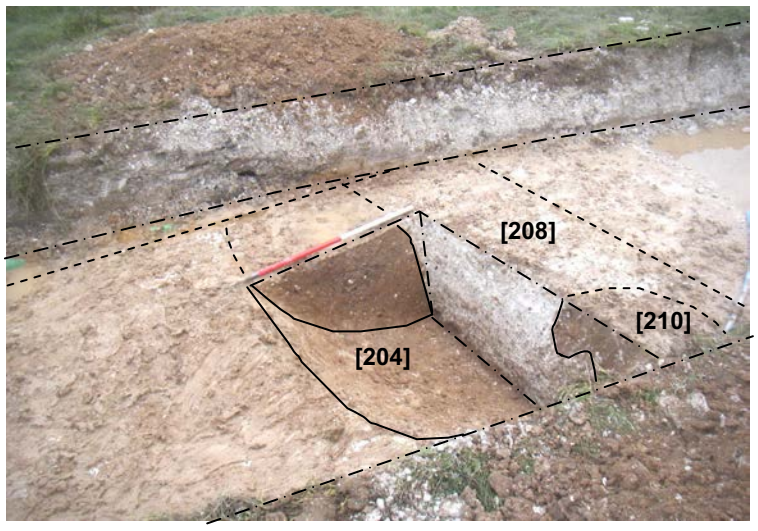
OS Grid Ref.: TL *(Easting: 6525: Northing: 25531)*

Reason: **Assess archaeological potential**

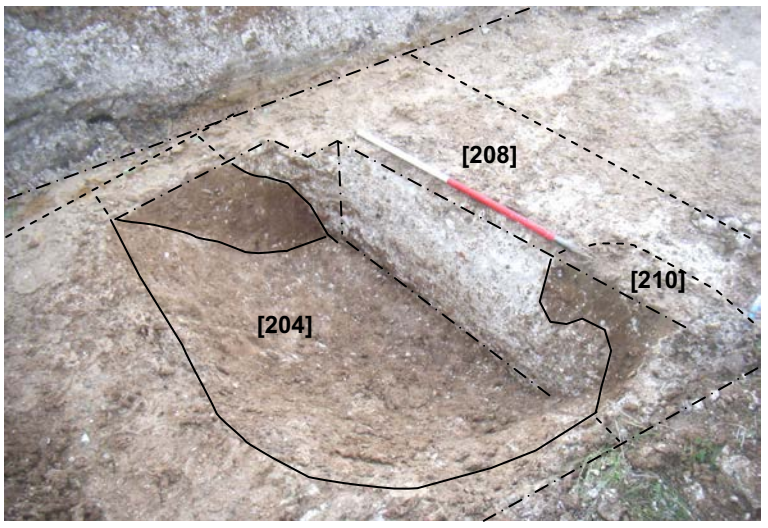
Context:	Type:	Description:	Excavated:	Finds Present:
600	Topsoil	Friable dark grey brown sandy silt occasional small CBM, moderate small stones C. 0.18m thick.	☑	☐
601	Levelling layer	Firm light grey white chalk occasional medium CBM C. 0.36m thick.	☑	☐
602	Demolition layer	Friable dark yellow grey silty clay frequent large CBM A layer of large brick fragments of modern date. 0.08m to 0.18m thick.	☑	☐
603	Natural	Firm light grey white silty clay frequent flecks chalk Deposit contains frequent small patches of light orange brown clay silt and occasional large patches of hard chalk.	☐	☐

Figure 1: Site location plan





Pit [204], pipe trench [208], and later disturbance [210]
Looking south, scale 1m



Pit [204], pipe trench [208], and later disturbance [210], after extension of excavated segment.
Looking south, scale 1m

Figure 2: Trenching results

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