

Archaeological Watching Brief Report for land at

HIGGINS LANE FARM RUDHEATH

For Ripple Developments (UK) Ltd

Blair Poole MSc MifA

L~P:ARCHÆOLOGY

Archaeological Watching Brief Report for land at

HIGGINS LANE FARM RUDHEATH

Client: Ripple Developments (UK) Ltd

Local Authority: Vale Royal Borough Council

NGR: 368457,371186

Planning App: 07-1693-FUM

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1. Introduction

- 1.1. This report details the results of an archaeological Watching Brief carried out on topsoil stripping at a new marina site, Whispering Reeds, at Higginslane Farm, Rudheath, Northwich. The site is located at NGR 368457,371186 (FIGURE 1).
- 1.2. Planning permission was granted (07-1693-FUM) for the development with an archaeological condition which entailed the monitoring of topsoil stripping.
- 1.3. The fieldwork was undertaken on 11th and 12th July 2013 and was monitored by Christopher Matthews of L – P : Archaeology on behalf of Ripple Developments.
- 1.4. The work was carried out in accordance with the archaeological method statement prepared by Claire Statter of L – P : Archaeology and agreed by Mark Leah of Cheshire Shared Service (STATTER 2008).

2. Site Background

2.1.PLANNING

2.1.1. As the planning application was submitted in 2007 this planing background relates to Planning Policy Guidance 16 (PPG16) rather than the current National Planning Policy Framework (2012). In November 1990 the Department of the Environment issued PPG 16, “Archaeology and Planning”. This document provides guidance for planning authorities, property owners, developers and others on the preservation and investigation of archaeological remains. The local planning authority, Vale Royal Borough Council are bound by this document.

2.1.2. The Vale Royal Borough Local Plan First Review Alteration was adopted in June 2006. Policy B8 refers to archaeology;

Where a listed building is also a scheduled ancient monument or it is known or suspected that either it has intrinsic archaeological interest or stands on grounds containing archaeological remains, the developer, in putting forward proposals for development, will be required to provide an appropriate assessment of the archaeological implications of the proposal to accompany the application. Adequate arrangements should be made by the develop and agreed by the council to record any remains that would be lost as a result of planning consent.

2.1.1. This document has been prepared in response to a planning condition set by the Local Authority who are advised by Mark Leah, of Cheshire Shared Service.

2.2.SCOPE OF WORK & ARCHAEOLOGICAL OBJECTIVES

2.2.1. The archaeological phase of this project was to consist of a watching brief during the topsoil strip of the new car park area.

2.2.2. The objectives of these works were to observe and record any archaeological deposits including their presence or absence, character and extent, integrity, state of preservation and relative quality.

2.3.METHODOLOGY

2.3.1. All groundworks were undertaken using a 360 degree tracked excavator with 2m wide toothless ditching bucket, unless specifically stated in the text below.

All topsoil stripping was monitored by a suitably qualified and experienced archaeologist.

2.3.2. All works was carried out in accordance with the agreed archaeological method statement (STATTER 2008).

3. Geology and Topography

3.1.GEOLOGY

3.1.1. The British Geological Survey Geoscience Data Index shows the site to be located on bedrock deposits of triassic mudstones, including Keuper Marl, dolomitic and conglomerate and rhaetic. The superficial deposits are recorded as Boulder clay and morainic drift.

3.2.TOPOGRAPHY

3.2.1. The subject site covers an area of approximately 30 acres, 5 of these are open water attached to the canal.

3.2.2. The site is located just to the south of the town of Northwich in an area which has been subject to intensive salt mining and brine extraction. This has resulted in subsidence of the land. The most part of the site is predominantly flat. Just to the left of the site is an area of what is known as flashes (areas of unimproved land which have been subject to subsidence as a result of salt extraction).

3.2.3. The site is bound on the west by the Trent and Mersey canal. The site is centred on the existing farm of Higginslane Farm.

4. Historic Background

4.1. The following section is based on a perviously submitted Environmental Impact Assessment heritage section previously produced by L – P : Archaeology. It is not intended as a complete history of the area, and should be treated as a guide to the historic development and character of the site.

4.2. PREHISTORIC

4.2.1. It is likely that the area in which the site is located in general has been exploited to some degree since Prehistoric times and settlement during this period probably focussed along the amenable gravels and river terraces of the rivers just to the west. However, the pattern of Prehistoric settlement within Cheshire is only partially understood at the moment, due to a general lack of evidence. This lack of evidence has been taken to indicate that the area was only sparsely populated, but it is also likely that this is merely due to a lack of information and recording.

4.2.2. It is unsurprising therefore that there is little known in this area. A search of the Cheshire Historic Environment Record (HER) revealed one record that related to the Prehistoric period, the Cheshire HER records the discovery of a Bronze Age palstave which has been dated to the early Middle Bronze Age and was found at a depth of one foot in dense clay. This unstratified find which was discovered just to the east of the study site does not indicate evidence for any significant remains being present in the area. It is possible that the site was inhabited or exploited at some point during the Prehistoric period, in particular its proximity to the river would increase this possibility.

4.3. ROMAN

4.3.1. The site is located between two small Roman settlements at Middlewich and Northwich and will have been part of a fairly complex Roman landscape.

4.3.2. The site itself is bound on the eastern side by King Street Roman road, which forms the present A530. The road will have run between Middlewich and Northwich and was described by Margary as 'A fine and typical example of a Roman road, raised 2-3ft generally and with the traditional name of King

Street' (MARGARY 1957).

- 4.3.3. The road is situated immediately to the east of the study site although there is no evidence to suggest that there was any Roman activity in the area, a search of the HER only revealed two entries relating to the Roman period, both of which related to the road.
- 4.3.4. The site itself is located some distance from the two nearby settlements and it is unlikely that there was anything other than possible agricultural activity related to the nearby settlements in the area during this period.

4.4.EARLY MEDIEVAL

- 4.4.1. The HER revealed two records dating to the Early Medieval period within the vicinity of the site. Both refer to the suggestion that there was a Norman castle located at Castle hill near Shipbrook bridge and Shipbrook hill farm.
- 4.4.2. Three stone lintels of ogee headed windows with carved heads were found nearby. There is a suggestion that these belonged to Shipbrook Castle, however the record is equally skeptical and it seems unlikely that these fragments can be attributed to a building with so little solid evidence for it.
- 4.4.3. It would appear from the documentary research that Shipbrook was part of the manor of Davenham which is recorded in Domesday, and was the seat of the Earls of Shipbrook. It is likely that some form of manor was located here during the period, although the definition of this as a Norman Castle is almost certainly incorrect.
- 4.4.4. The area of the site is located in very close proximity to the site of the proposed manor or castle, however it is at enough distance not to be associated with the occupation of the site. It is likely that the site was used as agricultural land perhaps associated with the castle/ manor during this period.

4.5.MEDIEVAL

- 4.5.1. It would appear that during the Medieval period the site area was used much as it is today as agricultural land, perhaps associated with the building at Shipbrook, perhaps with one elsewhere.

4.5.2. The site is situated some 1.6km south of the nearest substantial settlement at Rudheath and to the west of the settlement at Davenham. It is likely that during this period the landscape was similar with the King Street being the primary route way in the area connecting the two larger towns of Middlewich and Northwich.

4.5.3. The Cheshire Historic Landscape Characterisation defines some areas around the site as Ancient Field Systems, which are field systems that date from the Medieval period to the sixteenth century, many of which will have been a result of assarting. The proximity of these relict field systems does at least imply that the study site itself will have originally been part of these systems prior to Post Medieval improvements to the land.

4.5.4. A search of the HER did not reveal any records dating to the Medieval period.

4.6. POST MEDIEVAL

4.6.1. It is most likely that the site continued in use as agricultural land throughout this period. Clearly there were some substantial changes to the landscape during this period.

4.6.2. The HER contains two records dating to the Post Medieval period. One of these records the possible site of a structure, probably a house which is located on the bend in Crowder Lane, just to the northwest of the study site. The evidence for this is based on the field name, cartographic evidence and aerial photography. However it is probably evidence for a small farmstead and does not have much influence on our understanding of the study site which is situated c100 m to the south west.

4.6.3. The HER records the site of a Brick Kiln to the north of the site on King street. The site was subject to some an archaeological evaluation in 1993 which revealed no kiln structures, but did reveal a ditch filled with much burnt and fired clay. Again this record is located at some distance from the site and it is unlikely to have been in anyway associated with the site itself.

4.6.4. The major change to the landscape of the site area during this period was the construction of the Trent and Mersey canal which was built between 1766 and

1777. Originally called the Grand Trunk Canal it was conceived by Wedgewood to ease transportation to the potteries.

- 4.6.5. The area around the site mainly consists of Post Medieval field systems, resulting from 19th century enclosure. However the actual site itself is has been subject to later alterations classified by the historic landscape characterisation as 'Late Post Medieval Agricultural Improvement' which is defined as 'mainly nineteenth century re-organisation of field systems and field enlargement to support early mechanisation and improvement in agricultural techniques'. It is therefore unlikely that any traces of the earlier field systems will survive.
- 4.6.6. During the construction of the canal the only finds reported were large amounts of surface coal and fossils along its length.

5. Results

5.1. During the 11th and 12th July 2013 an archaeological watching brief was conducted in accordance of scheduled development of a marina for the Trent/Mersey canal. The development included the excavation of car parks and track-ways connecting the road to the marina facilities. These trenches were excavated by machine to a depth deemed appropriate for the surface and hardcore of the roads and car parks. These excavation were then closely monitored by the site archaeologist Christopher Matthews.

5.2. The excavation areas (FIGURE 2) included Area 1, the larger car park north of the site; Area 2, a new addition to the development connecting the farmer's property to the marina; Area 3, the main connector road at the entrance of the site, which on this occasion was not excavated; Area 4, the smaller car park along side Area 1; Area 5, the track connecting the car parks to the marina; Area 6, the smaller car park/lay-by next to the planned marina facility buildings. These trenches were then recorded through sample sections and photography to produce a database record of the land.

5.3. AREA 1

5.3.1. Initial excavations into the large car park revealed a very shallow topsoil reaching the natural boulder clay at up to 0.50m depth (FIGURE 3). Due to the compact clay, the machinist resorted to the use of toothed buckets for the majority of the car park excavations making features hard to determine. Despite this, it was clear on closer inspection of the area that very little discernible archaeology was present, aside from U-shape modern field drains, drain cut scars (PLATE 1) and a single shard of Post-Medieval 'mottled green ware' .



Plate 1: South facing section of topsoil strip, showing drains cut

5.4.AREA 2

5.4.1. Area 2 was a new track and car park added to the construction plan, leading towards the farm buildings. This area revealed a similar pattern to Area 1 with field drains and cut scars and a depth to natural of up to 0.50m. However, there was also the faint presence of a former field boundary in the trench's southern portion, in this instance only visible aboveground. Scattered across this trench were some shards of post medieval pottery disturbed by machine (PLATE 2).



Plate 2: Area 2 section, looking west

5.5.AREA 3

5.5.1. This area was not excavated.

5.6.AREA 4

5.6.1. Area 4, the smaller car park was similar to Area 1, with a depth of up to 0.50m. This trench contained a different form of natural with inclusions of a chalky gravel. However, this was intermixed into the natural boulder clay and was likely a result of the trees surrounding the trench which had caused clear disturbance to the soils and clays (PLATE 3).



Plate 3: Area 4 section

5.7.AREA 5

5.7.1. Area 5, connected the car parks to the marina buildings. This trench was excavated using a toothless bucket, making features easier to see. The upper section the trench (north) revealed a clear orange clay linear feature cut into the natural clay. This was part of a former field boundary still visible above ground (PLATE 4).



Plate 4: Remnant field boundary, 0.5m scale

5.7.2. The remainder of the trench contained regular field drains as well as linear sand deposits. These deposits appeared to be connected to the topography on the landscape and have accumulated within depressions of the natural (PLATE 5). This is likely to be a result of the levelling on the field. Finds within this trench included a small scatter of post-medieval pottery and glass.



Plate 5: Area 5 section

5.8.AREA 6

5.8.1. Area 6, the small car park next to the planned marina facility buildings, revealed similar patterns to Area 5 with linear sand deposits across the trench.

The depth of natural within this trench was up to 0.80m which is likely due to its topography at the lower end of the marina basin (PLATE 6). However, despite the sand deposits there again does not appear to be any form of notable archaeology aside from field drains.



Plate 6: Area 6 section

5.9. In addition to the excavations note above, the land owner over the past years, has uncovered a large quantity of copper alloy coins and objects including a small coin of what appears to be Roman origin. These finds were photographed and noted within this brief (PLATE 7).



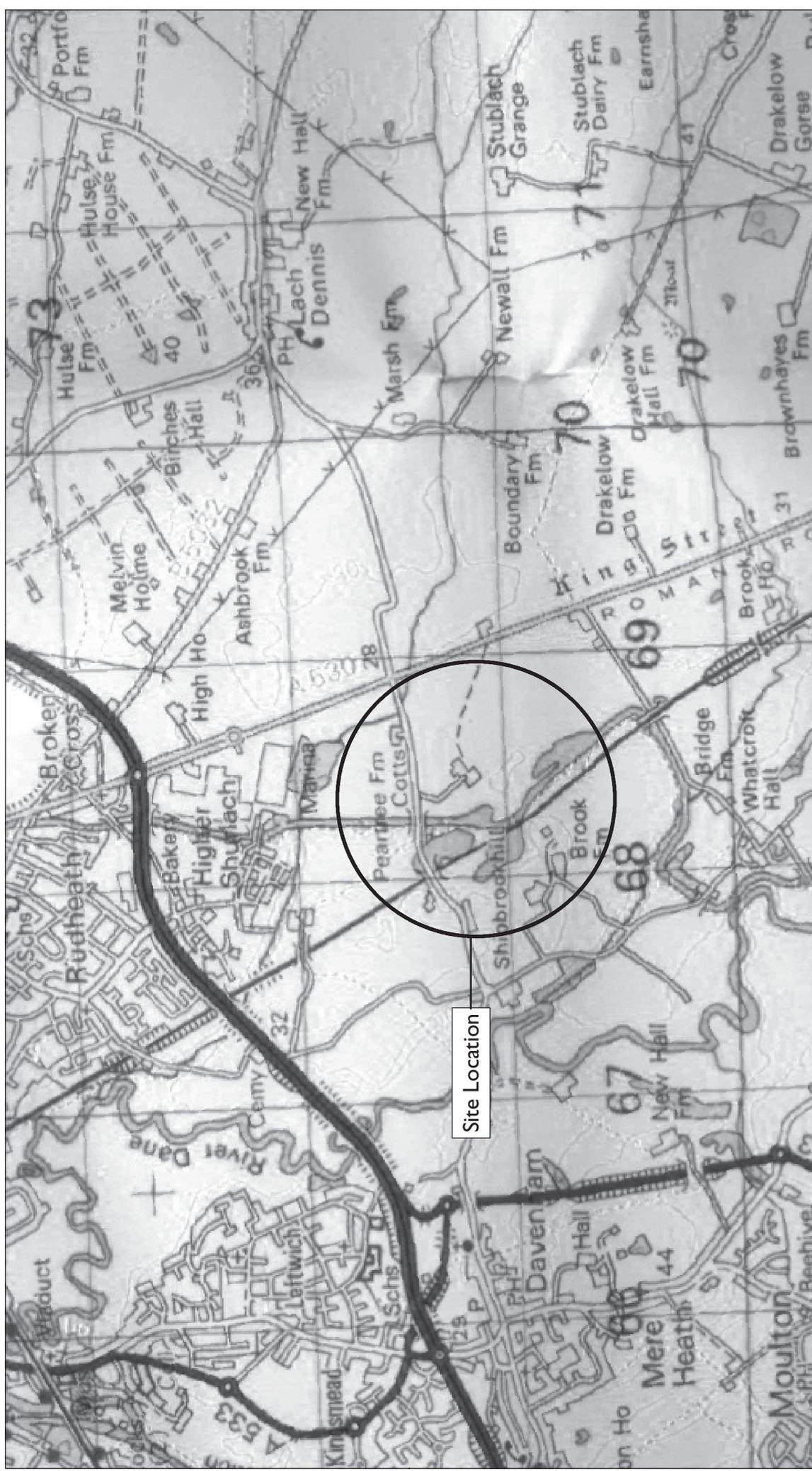
Plate 7: Coins recovered from site by owner

6. Summary & Conclusions

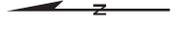
- 6.1. An archaeological Watching Brief was carried out on topsoil stripping at Higginslane Farm, Rudheath, Northwich, as part of a condition associated with planning permission 07-1693-FUM.
- 6.2. The fieldwork was undertaken on 11th and 12th July 2013 and was monitored by Christopher Matthews of L – P : Archaeology on behalf of Ripple Developments.
- 6.3. The work was carried out in accordance with the archaeological monitoring method statement prepared by Claire Statter of L – P : Archaeology and agreed by Mark Leah of Cheshire Shared Service.
- 6.4. Historic research suggests that although the area in which the site is located in general had been exploited to some degree since Prehistoric times there is no direct evidence that the site itself was utilised during this period.
- 6.5. The site is located between two Roman settlements at Middlewich and Northwich and will have been part of a fairly complex Roman landscape, bounded on the eastern side by King Street Roman road.
- 6.6. There is no evidence of settlement on the site during the Early Medieval or Medieval periods, although the surrounding area is clearly in use during these periods.
- 6.7. It is most likely that the site continued in use as agricultural land throughout the Post Medieval period.
- 6.8. The results of the watching brief indicate that there is little in the way of notable archaeology within the excavated areas of this site. Despite the finds presented by the framer, the low quantity of finds such as pottery within the trenches, indicate a lack of activity aside from modern agriculture.
- 6.9. No archaeological features were encountered during the course of groundworks on the site.

FIGURES

FIGURE 1 // Site Location General



0 1,000m



PROJECT // 0693C - Higgins Lane Farm, Rudheath

DESCRIPTION // Site Location General

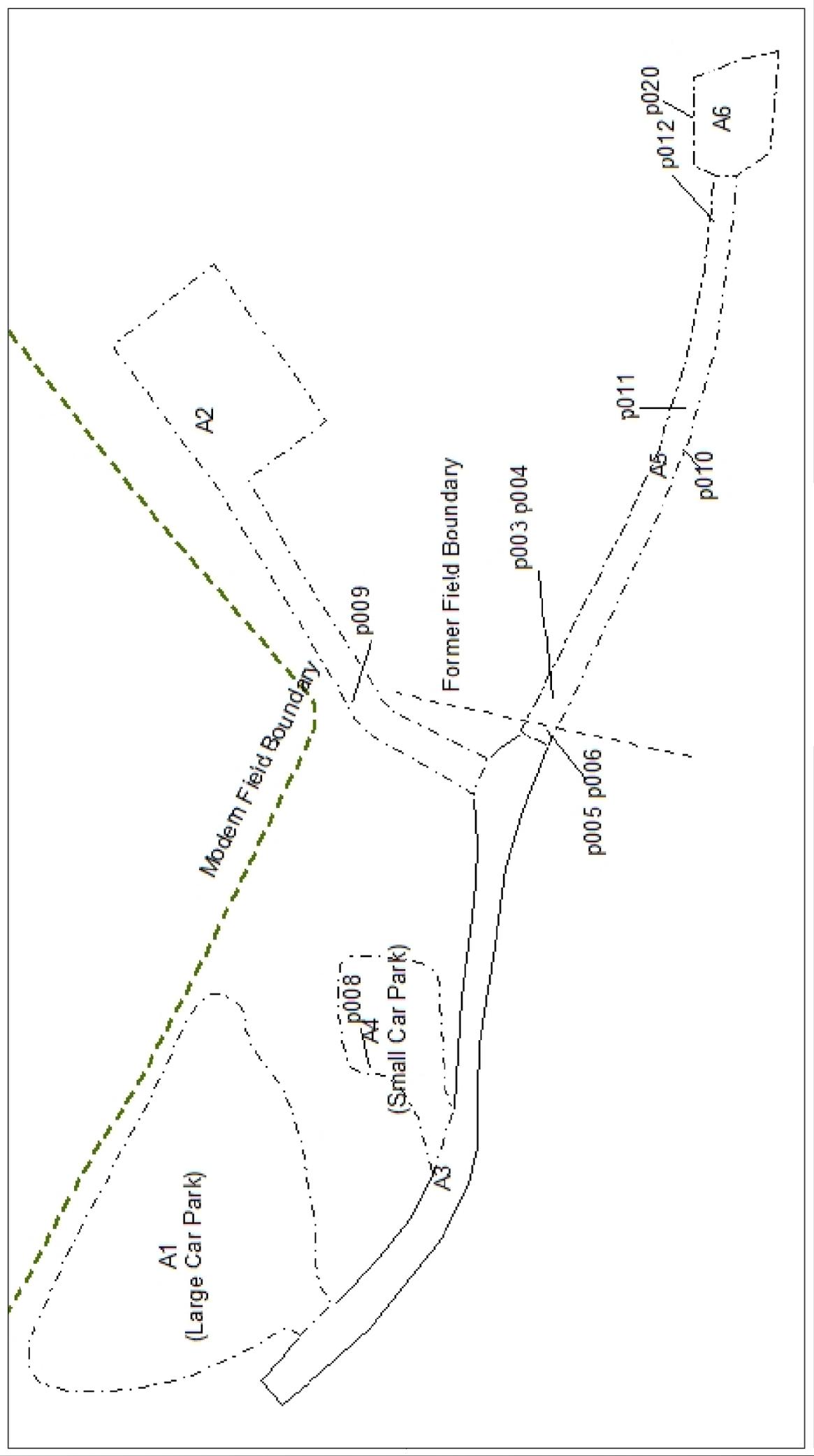
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Scale 1:25,000 @ A4

DOC REF: LP0693C-AWB-v1

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FIGURE 2 // Site Detail



0 10m

A numbers represent Areas excavated
P numbers respect site photography

Scale 1:250 @ A4

PROJECT // 0693C - Higgins Lane Farm, Rudheath

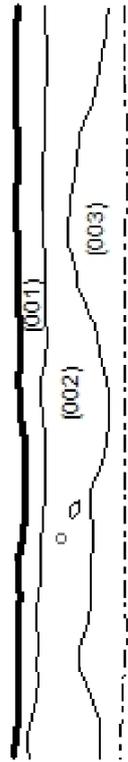
DESCRIPTION // Site Detail

DOC REF: LP0693C-AWB-v1

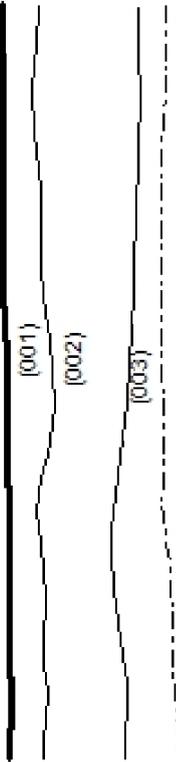
L-P: ARCHAEOLOGY

FIGURE 3 // Section Drawings

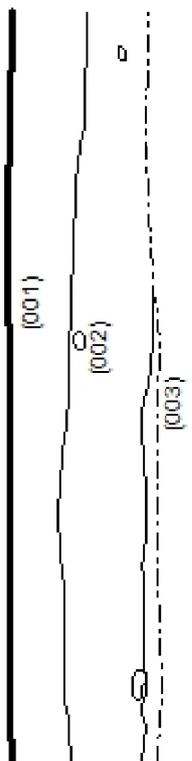
Sample Section
Area 1 (Large Car Park)
East Facing
1:20



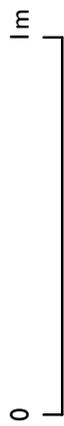
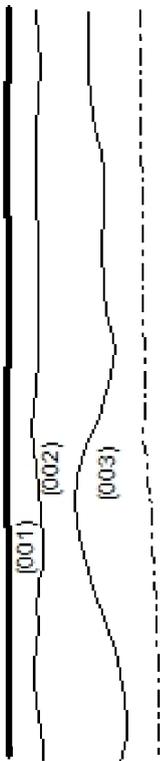
Sample Section
Area 2 New track
South Facing
1:20



Sample Section
Area 4 (small carpark)
East Facing
1:20



Sample Section
Area 5 Marina Track
East Facing
1:20



Scale 1:20 @ A4

PROJECT // 0693C - Higgins Lane Farm, Rudheath

DESCRIPTION // Section Drawings

DOC REF: LP0693C-AWB-v1

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APPENDIX I

OASIS DATA COLLECTION FORM: England

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OASIS ID: Iparchae1-155998

Project details

Project name	Whispering Reeds
Short description of the project	Archaeological watching brief at land at Higginslane Farm, Rudheath.
Project dates	Start: 01-10-2007 End: 30-07-2013
Previous/future work	No / No
Any associated project reference codes	LP0693C - Contracting Unit No.
Type of project	Recording project
Site status	None
Current Land use	Other 14 - Recreational usage
Monument type	NONE None
Significant Finds	NONE None
Investigation type	"Watching Brief"
Prompt	Direction from Local Planning Authority - PPG16

Project location

Country	England
Site location	CHESHIRE VALE ROYAL RUDHEATH Whispering Reeds
Postcode	CW6 7RY
Study area	2.00 Hectares
Site coordinates	SJ 368457 371186 52 -2 52 55 38 N 002 56 22 W Point
Height OD / Depth	Min: 10.00m Max: 12.00m

Project creators

Name of Organisation	L - P : Archaeology
Project brief originator	Local Planning Authority (with/without advice from County/District Archaeologist)
Project design originator	L - P : Archaeology

Project director/manager	Claire Statter
Project supervisor	Claire Statter
Type of sponsor/funding body	Developer
Name of sponsor/funding body	Ripple Developments Ltd

Project archives

Physical Archive Exists?	No
Digital Archive Exists?	No
Paper Archive recipient	Cheshire Museum Service
Paper Contents	"none"
Paper Media available	"Context sheet", "Drawing", "Plan", "Report", "Section"

Project bibliography 1

Publication type	Grey literature (unpublished document/manuscript)
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