



Northamptonshire Archaeology

Archaeological trial trench evaluation of land at Nene Country Park, Northampton February 2011



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**Northamptonshire
County Council**

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Report 11/62

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QUALITY CONTROL

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OASIS REPORT FORM

PROJECT DETAILS		
Project title	Archaeological trial trench evaluation of land at Nene Country Park, Northamptonshire, February 2011	
In February 2011 an archaeological trial trench evaluation of land at Nene Country Park, Northamptonshire, was carried out prior to the application for planning permission for the construction of a car park. Two pits, one of which contained considerable burnt stone and flint were present, together with a furrow of medieval field cultivation. Two of these features had been identified during a previous geophysical survey.		
Project type	Trial trench evaluation	
Previous work	Geophysical survey	
Current land use	Scrub	
Future work	Unknown	
Monument type and period	Two undated pits	
Significant finds	None	
PROJECT LOCATION		
County	Northamptonshire	
Site address	Nene country Park, Northampton	
Easting Northing	47196 25874	
Area (sq m/ha)	0.5 ha	
Height aOD	62m	
PROJECT CREATORS		
Organisation	Northamptonshire Archaeology	
Project brief originator	Northamptonshire County Council Assistant Archaeological Advisor	
Project Design originator	Northamptonshire Archaeology	
Director/Supervisor	Anne Foard-Colby	
Project Manager	Tony Walsh	
Sponsor or funding body	Halcrow Group Ltd	
PROJECT DATE		
Start date	22/02/2011	
End date	23/02/2011	
ARCHIVES	Location (Accession no.)	Contents
Physical		Site records (1 small archive box) Client report PDF
Paper		
Digital		
BIBLIOGRAPHY		Journal/monograph, published or forthcoming, or unpublished client report (NA report)
Title	Archaeological trial trench evaluation of land at Nene Country Park, Northamptonshire, February 2011	
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**ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRIAL TRENCH EVALUATION OF
LAND AT NENE COUNTRY PARK
NORTHAMPTON
FEBRUARY 2011**

Abstract

In February 2011 an archaeological trial trench evaluation of land at Nene Country Park, Northampton, was carried out prior to the application for planning permission for construction of a car park. Two pits, one of which contained considerable burnt stone and flint were present, together with a furrow of medieval field cultivation. Two of these features had been identified during a previous geophysical survey.

1 INTRODUCTION

In February 2011, an archaeological trial trench evaluation was carried out by Northamptonshire Archaeology (NA) on land at Nene Country Park, Northampton (NGR: SP 719 587; Fig 1).

The work was commissioned by Halcrow Group Ltd on behalf of The Homes and Communities Agency and was undertaken in order to inform a planning application (10/0059/FULWNN) for a proposed car park to Nene Country Park. The evaluation met the requirements of a specification prepared by Northamptonshire Archaeology (NA 2011) based on a brief issued by Northamptonshire County Council, Assistant Archaeological Advisor (NCCAAA January 2011).

The purpose of the evaluation were to determine the presence of any archaeological features or deposits within the application area and to date and characterise their extent, depth of burial and state of preservation.

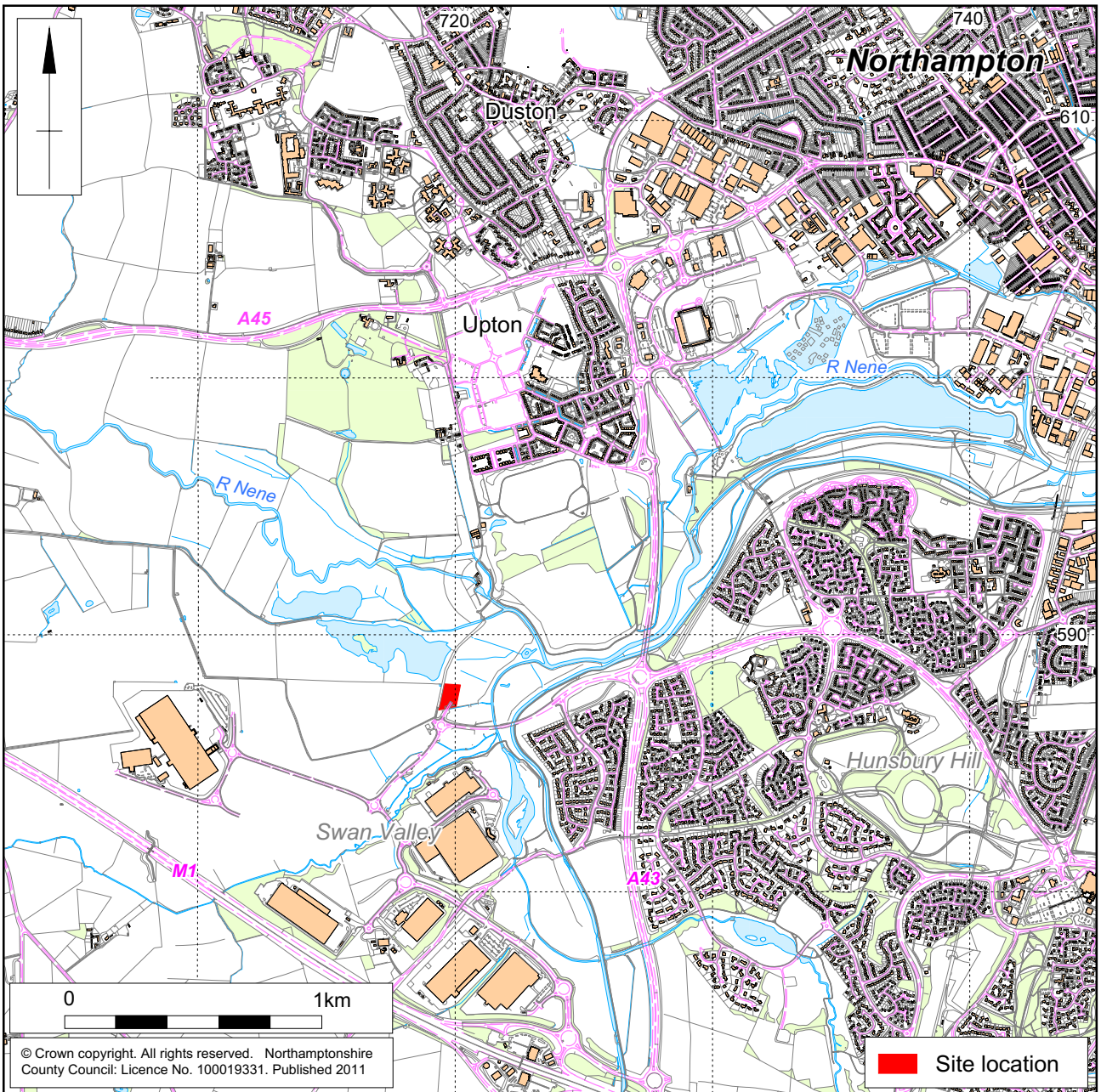
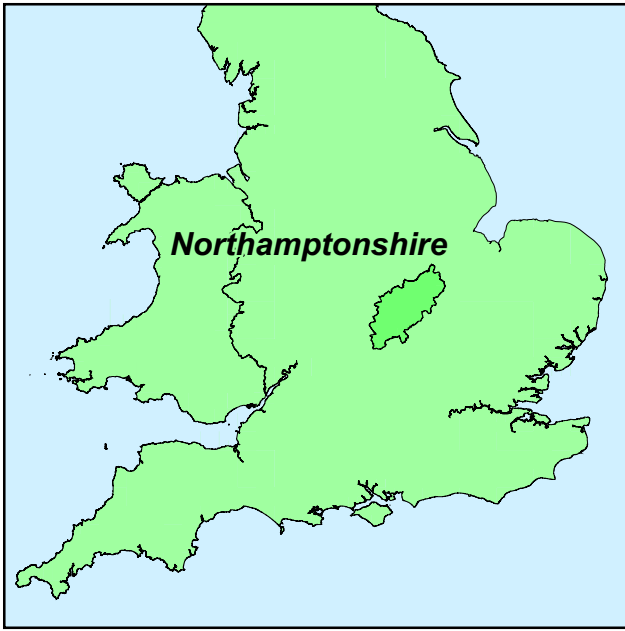
2 BACKGROUND

2.1 Topography and geology

The site, which covers an area of c0.5ha, is located on the south-western edge of Northampton. It is bounded to the north and east by pasture and the River Nene and to the south and west by roads and warehousing (Fig 1).

Topographically, the site is on floodplain and lies at a height of 62m OD. At the time of the evaluation the land was scrub, with grass tussocks and sedges and a high water table (Front and back covers).

The geology comprises superficial deposits of clay, silt, gravel and sand.
<http://maps.bgs.ac.uk/GeolIndex/default.aspx>



Scale 1:25,000

Site location Fig 1

2.2 Historical and archaeological background (Fig 2)

Reference to the Northamptonshire Historic Environment Record (HER) has not identified any presence of archaeological deposits or finds within the site.

The Nene Valley floodplain and the adjacent slopes are rich in artefacts and sites from the Palaeolithic period to modern times and reflects the continued use and management of the landscape. Surface flint artefacts from both the Palaeolithic and Mesolithic periods are recorded at Shelfleys (5025/0/0) and at Hunsbury Hill (4991/0/0, 4992/0/0). There are Neolithic and Bronze Age monuments in the area such as the causewayed enclosure at Briar Hill and the barrows at Pineham Barns (8865/0/1) and at Upton (5132/0/3). Settlement of the landscape continued into the Iron Age with a hillfort at Hunsbury Hill. There have been Iron Age settlements investigated to the south-west of the site at Swan Valley Business Park (5114, 1477; Holmes and Chapman 2006), at Pineham Barns (5092) and at Milton Ham. Hunsbury Hill saw a different type of settlement in the Roman period with a villa, burials and pottery production located near to it. However, the principal Roman settlement was at the Roman town at Duston which lay c3km to the north. There was an important routeway/droeway into the town which followed the course of the current Banbury Lane (8418/1).

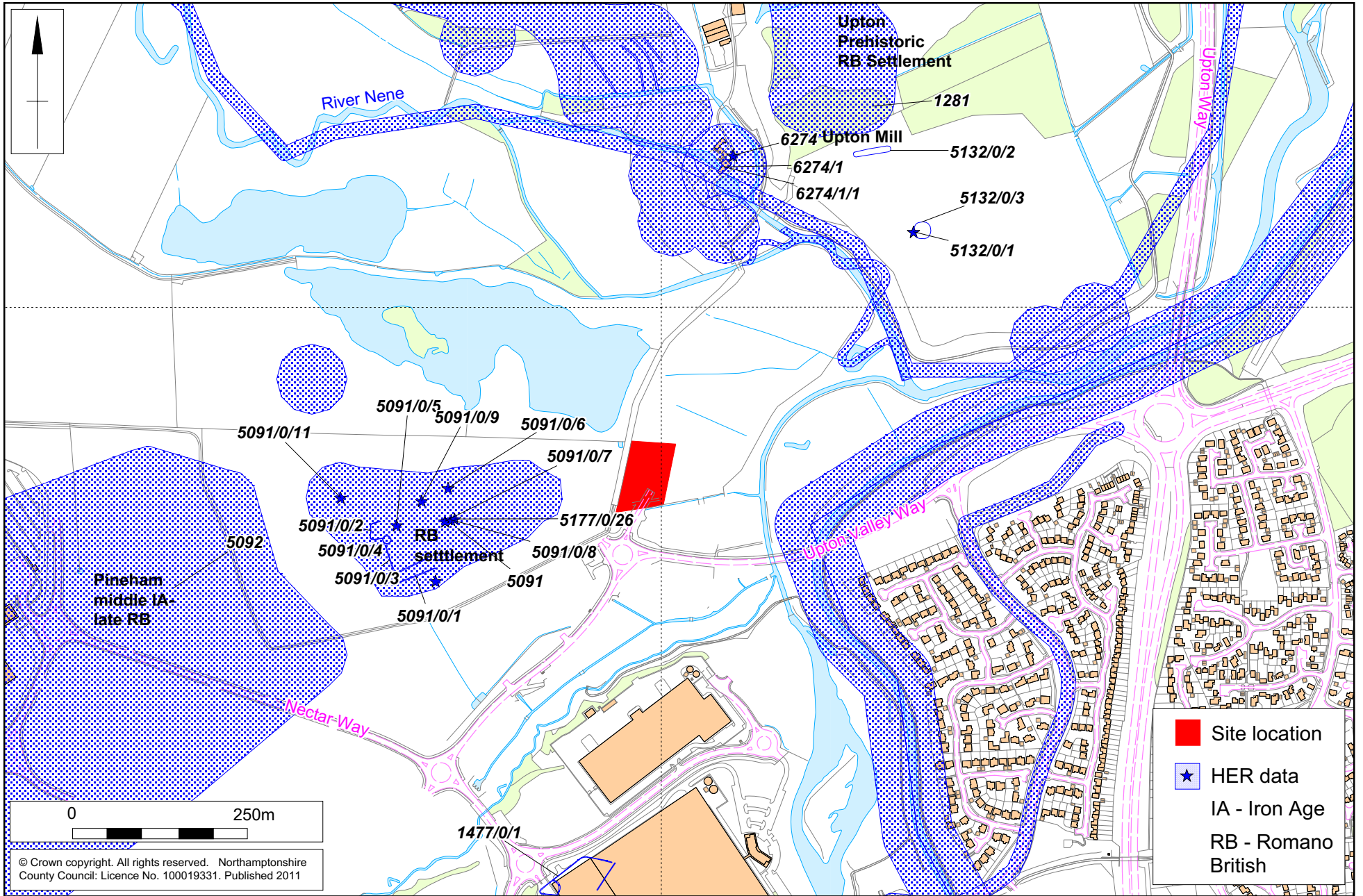
Immediately to the west of Upton Lane is the site of the earthwork remains of Upton Deserted Medieval Village (Scheduled Monument No 165; HER 5138). It survives as earthworks associated with former house platforms, hollow-ways and lanes. It is thought that the present Upton Hall stands on the site of the medieval manor (Shaw 1990), although it contains no medieval fabric. An evaluation carried out in the grounds of Quinton House School also revealed a medieval ditch that may indicate the northernmost extent of the medieval village (Foard-Colby 2007).

In the post-medieval and modern periods substantial changes to the landscape were made. Following enclosure in the late eighteenth century the principal additions came with new communication lines: the Grand Union Canal (7754/1) was completed in 1815, the London and North Western railway's Blisworth and Northampton Branch Line (6294/1) was complete by 1845 which was followed by the current A43 trunk road. In recent years modern residential and commercial development of the floodplain has been extensive.

A magnetometer survey of the area of the proposed car park was undertaken by Northamptonshire Archaeology (Walford 2011) for Halcrow Group Ltd. The survey identified one possible ditch and traces of ridge and furrow cultivation. However, much of the survey area was magnetically disturbed, demonstrating the widespread presence of hardcore and other magnetic debris within the topsoil.

1:7500

Historic Environment Record (HER) data Fig 2



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3 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The aims of the trial trench evaluation were to determine whether significant archaeological remains survive and in particular:

- To assess and determine the location, extent, nature and date of any archaeological remains present on the site
- To assess and determine the integrity of any archaeological remains present on the site
- To recover artefacts to assist in the development of type series within the region
- To recover palaeo-environmental remains to determine local environmental conditions
- To place the archaeology of the site within its local, regional and national archaeological context.

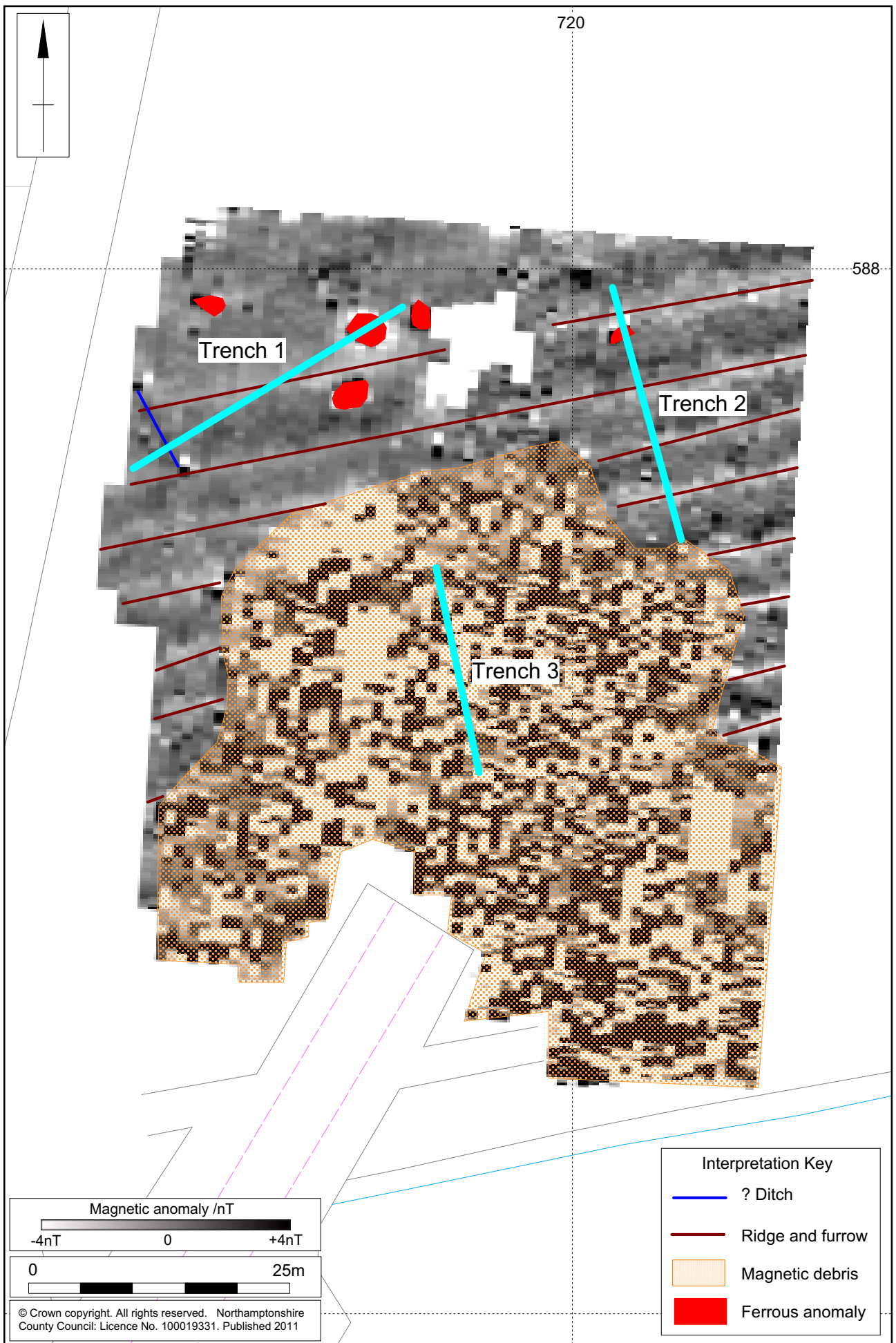
4 METHODOLOGY

The trial trench evaluation was undertaken in accordance with the Written Scheme of Investigation (NA 2011) approved by NCCCAA.

Three trial trenches, measuring 30m, 25m and 20m long (Trench 1, 2 and 3 respectively), were excavated. Trenches 1 and 2 were positioned to test a possible ditch and ferrous anomalies and Trench 3 was positioned to test an area of magnetic debris, identified from the geophysical survey (Fig 3). They were positioned using a Leica 1200 GPS surveying system. A mechanical excavator (JCB 3CX), fitted with a 1.6m-wide ditching bucket was used to remove overburden to the archaeological deposits or natural substrate.

Deposits were examined by hand excavation to determine their nature. The trenches were cleaned sufficiently to enable the identification and definition of archaeological features. A hand-drawn plan of the archaeological features was made at scale 1:50 and sections were drawn at a scale of 1:10 and related to the Ordnance Survey datum.

Deposits were described on *pro-forma* sheets to include measured and descriptive details of the context, its relationships, interpretation. Context sheets were cross-referenced to scale plans, section drawings and photographs. A photographic record was made using 35mm black and white negative film and digital images. Spoil heaps were scanned by eye and metal detector to maximise the recovery of artefacts.



Scale 1:500

Trench layout with magnetometer survey interpretation Fig 3

Recording followed standard NA procedures as described in the *Fieldwork Manual* (NA 2006). All works were conducted in accordance with the Institute for Archaeologists' *Code of Conduct* (IfA 2010) and *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Field Evaluation* (IfA 1994, revised 2008). All procedures complied with Northamptonshire County Council Health and Safety provisions and Northamptonshire Archaeology Health and Safety at Work Guidelines.

A table of contexts and features summary is provided in Appendix 1.

5 THE EXCAVATED EVIDENCE

5.1 General stratigraphy

The underlying geology consisted of sands and gravels, encountered at a depth of approximately 0.75m below the modern ground surface. Overlying this was mid grey-brown and orange mottled alluvium with occasional angular and rounded gravel between 0.10-0.30m thick. The subsoil was mid orange and brown mottled sandy clay, 0.15m thick. The topsoil was med to dark grey with orange mottled silty, sandy clay 0.30m thick. Both soils contained occasional angular and rounded gravel.

The orange mottling present in these layers, is indicative of seasonal flooding (Fig 4).



Trench 1, topsoil, subsoil and alluvium, looking north-west Fig 4

5.2 The archaeological evidence

With the exception of furrows of medieval ridge and furrow cultivation, there were no archaeological features or artefacts present in Trenches 2 and 3.

Trench 1

Trench 1 was aligned south-west to north-east at the west end of the site, to investigate a possible linear anomaly identified during geophysical survey. No archaeological feature was present at that point. There were two pits present within the trench [107] and [109] (Fig 5). At the north-east end of the trench was a pit [107], part of which lay beyond the limit of the trench (Figs 6 and 8). It was oval in shape, with steep sides, but was not bottomed due to the high water table and rapid ingress of water. It was 1.5m wide and at least 0.22m deep, and cut the alluvium (103). The mid orange-brown silty clay lower fill (106) was 1.4m wide and at least 0.10m thick. It was overlain by the dark grey-brown silty clay upper fill (108) which contained burnt cobbles and flint, and charcoal lumps and was sealed by subsoil (102). There were no finds present.



Trench 1, general view, looking south-west

Fig 5



Trench 1, pit [107], as partially excavated, looking north-west Fig 6

Five metres to the south-west was a small oval pit [109], 0.58m wide and 0.28m deep which cut the alluvium (103) (Fig 7). It was filled with dark grey-brown sandy clay (108) which was sealed by subsoil (102). The fill contained fragments of burnt bone and charcoal lumps. There were no finds present.



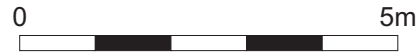
Trench 1, pit [109], looking north-west

Fig 7

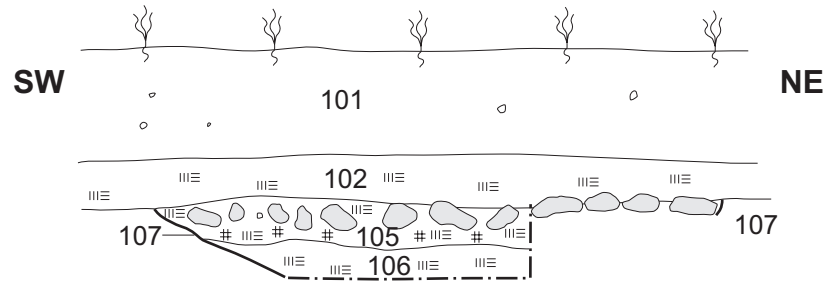
Scale: 1:100 & 1:20

Trench 1 and sections of pits [107] and [109] Fig 8

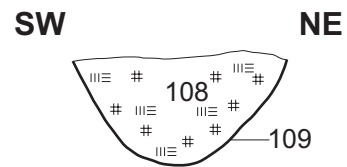
Trench 1






Section 1



Section 2



Key

-  Burnt cobble and flint
-  Clay
-  Charcoal



6 THE ENVIRONMENTAL EVIDENCE

Two bulk soil samples were taken to determine the presence, nature and preservation of ecofacts and to inform any future sampling strategies.

Method

The samples were processed using a flotation or siraf tank fitted with a 250micron mesh and flot sieve. The resulting flot and residue were dried. The flot was sorted with the aid of a microscope (10x magnification). Residues were dry sieved (3.4mm, 1mm) and the 3.4mm retent sorted by eye. The 1mm retent was scanned using a microscope.

Preservation

On the whole, the charcoal was heavy comminuted, rendering any further identification very difficult, although some (approx 5-10% of the sample) larger fragments were noted in sample 1.

Table 1: The taxa

Sample	1	2
Fill/cut	105/107	108/109
Feature	pit	pit
Volume (litres)	40	40
Charcoal (fragments)	1,000+	1,000+
Fat hen		1
Indet bone	17g	

Potential

The limited range of ecofacts and poor preservation encountered suggests the potential of any future sampling to aid in the understanding of the nature and economy of the site or to provide any inform on the local palaeoenvironment would be restricted. Assessment suggests that the scope to any future work may be limited to the collection and identification of larger charcoal fragments. If enough of this material could be classified to taxon it may provide information on the local woodland and timber exploitation at the site.

Conclusion

Assessment has shown a limited range of ecofacts and suggests potential for further work to be low.

7 DISCUSSION

The site of the proposed car park for the Nene Country Park lies on the floodplain, south of the River Nene. Extensive Iron Age and Roman sites lay to the north-east at Upton and to the south-west at Pineham. Earthwork remains of the deserted medieval village of Upton are located to the north.

The natural geology, consisting of sand and gravel with silty clay was present in all three trenches. This was overlain by alluvium, subsoil and topsoil, respectively. An orange mottling was present in these layers, indicating seasonal flooding of the area.

No archaeological feature was found corresponding to the linear anomaly identified in the geophysical survey.

Two pits, one of which contained burnt stone cobbles and flint in the upper layer, and quantities of charcoal in both, were present in Trench 1. The burnt stone filled pit was identified during the geophysical survey.

Furrows of medieval ridge and furrow cultivation present in all three trenches confirmed the results of the geophysical survey. The furrows were shallow and represent cultivation of marginal land.

There were no further archaeological features or deposits encountered within the other two trenches. No finds were recovered from the alluvium, subsoil or topsoil.

Northamptonshire Archaeology acknowledges the help and cooperation of the landowner Prologis, and Chris Lewis for arranging access to the land and facilitating our presence on site.

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APPENDIX 1: CONTEXT DATA

Trench no	Context	Type	Description	Dimensions /thickness (m)
1	101	Layer	Topsoil, mid-dark grey sandy clay with orange mottling	0.30m thick
	102	Layer	Subsoil, mid orange-grey mottled sandy soil	0.14m thick
	103	Layer	Mid grey-brown, orange mottled alluvium	0.30m thick
	104	Layer	Natural mid grey-brown sandy clay with sands and gravel	
	105	Upper fill of [107]	Dark grey-brown silty clay with very frequent charcoal, burnt cobbles and flint	1.50m wide 0.15m thick
	106	Lower fill of [107]	Mid orange-brown silty clay with charcoal lumps	1.40m wide, greater than 0.10m thick
	107	Cut of pit	Part oval, steep sided, but not bottomed due to high water table	1.50m wide, greater than 0.22m deep
	108	Fill of [109]	Dark grey-brown, sandy clay with charcoal lumps and burnt bone	0.58m wide 0.28m thick
	109	Cut of pit	Oval, E-W, steep sided with sharp break to rounded base	
2	201	Layer	Topsoil, mid-dark grey sandy clay with orange mottling	0.30m thick
	202	Layer	Subsoil, mid orange-grey mottled sandy soil	0.25m thick
	203	Layer	Mid grey-brown, orange mottled alluvium	0.15m thick
	204	Layer	Natural mid grey-brown sandy clay with sands and gravel	
3	301	Layer	Re-deposited mixed soils with concrete, tarmac	0.20m thick
	302	Layer	Topsoil, mid-dark grey sandy clay with orange mottling	0.20m thick
	303	Layer	Subsoil, mid orange-grey mottled sandy soil	0.14m thick
	304	Layer	Mid grey-brown, orange mottled alluvium	0.10m thick
	305	Layer	Natural mid red-brown silty clay with sand and gravel patches	



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