Northamptonshire County Council

Northamptonshire Archaeology

An Archaeological Watching Brief

at the M6 Carlisle to Guards Mill

Cumbria

September 2006-April 2007

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Report 07/044

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QUALITY CONTROL

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OASIS REPORT FORM

PROJECT DETAILS		
Project name	M6 Guards Mill	
Short description (250 words maximum)	An archaeological watching brief was carried out by Northamptonshire Archaeology alongside the current A74 road in preparation for the upgrade to M6 between Carlisle, Cumbria and Guards Mill, Gretna. Other than post-medieval pits and drainage features, no archaeological remains were encountered.	
Project type	Watching Brief	
Site status		
Previous work	Trial evaluation June 2006	
Current Land use	Agricultural	
Future work	No	
Monument type/ period		
Significant finds	None	
PROJECT LOCATION		
County	Cumbria	
Site address	A74 between Carlisle and Guards Mill.	
Study area (sq.m or ha)	5.4 miles (8.7km)	
OS Easting & Northing	339200 559900 – 333200 367900	
Height OD	28m – 6.50m AOD	
PROJECT CREATORS		
Organisation		
Project brief originator	John Samuels Archaeological Consultants / CgMs Consulting Ltd	
Project Design originator	JSAC	
Director/Supervisor	Ailsa Westgarth	
Project Manager	Adam Yates NA, Forbes Marsden JSAC / CgMs	
Sponsor or funding body	Highways agency / Carrillion PLC	
PROJECT DATE		
Start date	04/09/2006	
End date	24/04/07	
ARCHIVES	**Location**	**Content**
Physical		
Paper		Report, drawings and photos
Digital		
BIBLIOGRAPHY	Journal/monograph, published or forthcoming, or unpublished client report (NA report)	
Title		
Serial title & volume		
Author(s)		
Page numbers		
Date		

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AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF AT

THE M6 CARLISLE TO GUARDS MILL, CUMBRIA

SEPTEMBER 2006 TO APRIL 2007

Abstract

An archaeological watching brief was carried out by Northamptonshire Archaeology between September 2006 and April 2007 alongside the current A74 road in preparation for its upgrade to the M6 between Carlisle, Cumbria and Guards Mill, Gretna.

Other than post-medieval pits and drainage features, no archaeological remains were encountered.

1 INTRODUCTION

Northamptonshire Archaeology carried out a watching brief for John Samuels Archaeological Consultants (JSAC) / CgMs Consulting Ltd on behalf of Carrillion Plc along during the initial groundworks to improve the current A74 in (NGR 339200 559900 to 333200 367900, Fig 1). The site extends for 5.4 miles (8.7km) between J44 of the M6 at Carlisle, Cumbria and south of J23 of the M73 at Gretna, Dumfries and Galloway, to the east and west of the current A74. The watching brief was designed to meet the requirements of a specification written by JSAC in 2006.

2 ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

The area proposed for the upgrade to the A74 contains no known buried archaeology. There are several listed and unlisted buildings of historic interest including the remains of the First World War munitions works immediately north-east of the Mossband Viaduct and covering an area of several square kilometers. The area also had potential to provide information about the early environment of the lowlands of north-west Cumbria. Solway Moss, to the north-east of the road scheme, was recorded as part of the North West Wetlands Survey in 1990. The paleaoecological evidence suggested changes in the climate affected peat levels and sea levels. Cultivation of the moss and its surrounding area is recorded from the 17th century onwards. This may in part have been due to the climatic changes and to the more settled political conditions of the England – Scotland border in this period (Hodgkinson *et al* 2000). A separate programme of paleo-ecological investigations was carried out as part of the mitigation works.

A trial evaluation in 2006 found two areas of archaeology, both around the Mossband Viaduct (Westgarth 2006). Several post-medieval and undated ditches and a large quarry pit were found. The archaeological remains were found within the areas previously designated areas of high archaeological potential (JSAC 2003).

3 TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY

The scheme generally lies on low lying ground, crossing the River Esk, Rockcliffe Moss, Mossband and Guards Farm. The northern area of the site comprises the estuaries of the Rivers Esk and Eden, to the west is the Solway Firth. There are several areas of higher ground designated areas of high archaeological potential. The site is highest at the south end of the scheme, 28m AOD, lowest at the crossing of the River Esk at Metal Bridge, 6.5m AOD, rising up to around 10m AOD to the north. All of the land investigated was arable and grassland.

In the evaluation area the geology includes a wide variety of superficial deposits including peat, marine and river terrace gravels, alluvium and glacial sands and gravels, with bedrock deposits comprising Keuper Marl and Permian mudstones (www.bgs.ac.uk/geoindex/index.htm accessed 21/10/2006).

4 OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

The brief specified that initially all groundworks were to be continuously monitored until a decision could be made regarding the visibility and potential for archaeological remains. Four areas were monitored at Mossband, Metal Bridge, Todhills and the VOSA site (Fig 2). The topsoil was removed using a tracked dozer, before the alluvium (where present) was removed using a large toothed bucket.

Fieldwork was conducted in accordance with the Health and Safety Policy of Northamptonshire Archaeology and Northamptonshire County Council.

The work was carried out in accordance with the Institute of Field Archaeologists *Standard and Guidance for an Archaeological Watching Brief* (IFA 1999).

The specified groundworks within the area outlined for investigation were monitored by an experienced archaeologist. The aims of the work were as follows:

- Observation of topsoil and subsoil stripping and recording of any exposed archaeological deposits

- Any archaeological deposits encountered during the watching brief to be sampled sufficiently to determine their date and character.

Recording followed standard Northamptonshire Archaeology procedures (NA 2003). All archaeological features were given a separate context number. Deposits were described on pro-forma context sheets to include details of the context, relationships and interpretation.

Archaeological features and the extent of layers within the excavation were planned at 1:50 scale. Sections and features were drawn at a scale of 1:20 and related to Ordnance Datum. The location of the excavation was surveyed and related to the OS grid and datum level. A digital photographic record was kept during the watching brief. The field data has been compiled into a site archive with appropriate cross-referencing.

5 THE FINDINGS

Mossband

The Mossband area covers the ground works to the west of the current A74 and rail line, and is to the north of the road scheme (Fig 2). Works in this area comprise areas of piling and the building up of existing land and excavation to create stable foundations for the road extension.

An area of topsoil was stripped to a depth of between 0.25m and 0.35m. The topsoil in this area was mid grey-brown loam with some areas of modern disturbance. No archaeology was visible.

A further 0.75m deep of mixed alluvial layers was excavated. The main alluvium was mid grey-brown to blue silty clay.

An area was also topsoil stripped in advance of the piling platforms. The excavations uncovered an area of ground disturbance with dark grey-brown clay silt and modern debris greater than 0.50m deep.

No archaeology was present within this area.

Todhills

The Todhills area lies to the west of the current A74 on the opposite side of the road to the village of Todhills (Fig 2). Groundwork undertaken in this area comprised topsoil strip using a bulldozer.

The natural clay marls were encountered directly below the topsoil. The topsoil was the same as at Mossband with a maximum depth of 0.35m. No archaeology was present within this area.

Metal Bridge

An area of topsoil was removed in advance of the excavation for a settling pond to the east of the current A74, south of the River Esk (Fig 2). The natural geology comprised red brown clay marl, uncovered below approximately 0.25 – 0.35m of dark grey-brown clay silt topsoil.

This area was found to contain several modern land drains, boundary ditches and a large quarry pit. A single small pit was located in the south west, measuring 0.71m diameter and 0.10m deep [4509]. The primary fill (4508) measured 0.06m max depth and comprised very dark grey-brown silty clay with 5% small charcoal flecks. This was overlain by a mid grey brown silty clay fill measuring 0.04m deep (4507). There were no finds within the pit.

A narrow slightly curvilinear gully [4511] lay to the north of the pit, measuring 0.54m wide by more than 2.10m long. The gully had steep almost straight slopes to a flat base. The gully was truncated to the north west by a later quarry pit. The homogenous fill was mid brown-grey silty clay with occasional small gravel. No finds were recovered from the gully.

To the north of the gully lay a stone-lined drain aligned east – west and more than 2.5m long [4518] (Plates 1 and 2). The drain appeared to start close to the surface at the east with a shallow cut and several large sandstone slabs. The slabs were overlain by topsoil. The rest of the drain sloped to the east and was lined with upright sandstone slabs, creating a drain approximately 0.60m wide and 0.20m deep (4517). A single fill of dark grey-brown clay silt with frequent sandstone and occasional charcoal flecks lay below a very degraded and intermittent layer of sandstone slabs (4516). There were no artefacts within the drain.

The VOSA Site

The VOSA site was located to the west of the current A47 and immediately to the south of the north bound services (Fig 2). An area of topsoil was stripped using a D6 bulldozer in advance of the construction of new VOSA buildings and a road to accommodate non-motorway traffic. The natural geology comprised reddish brown clay marl which was immediately overlain by 0.30m-0.40m of dark grey silty loam topsoil.

No archaeological remains were present within this area.

6 CONCLUSIONS

The watching brief found very little evidence for archaeological remains outside of the Metal Bridge area. The drains and ditches within Metal Bridge are all modern features. Several of the wider drains align with existing boundaries and drainage ditches.

The stone-lined drain, pit and gully are probably related to earlier post-medieval drainage within the area. No artefacts were recovered to allow dating of the archaeology.

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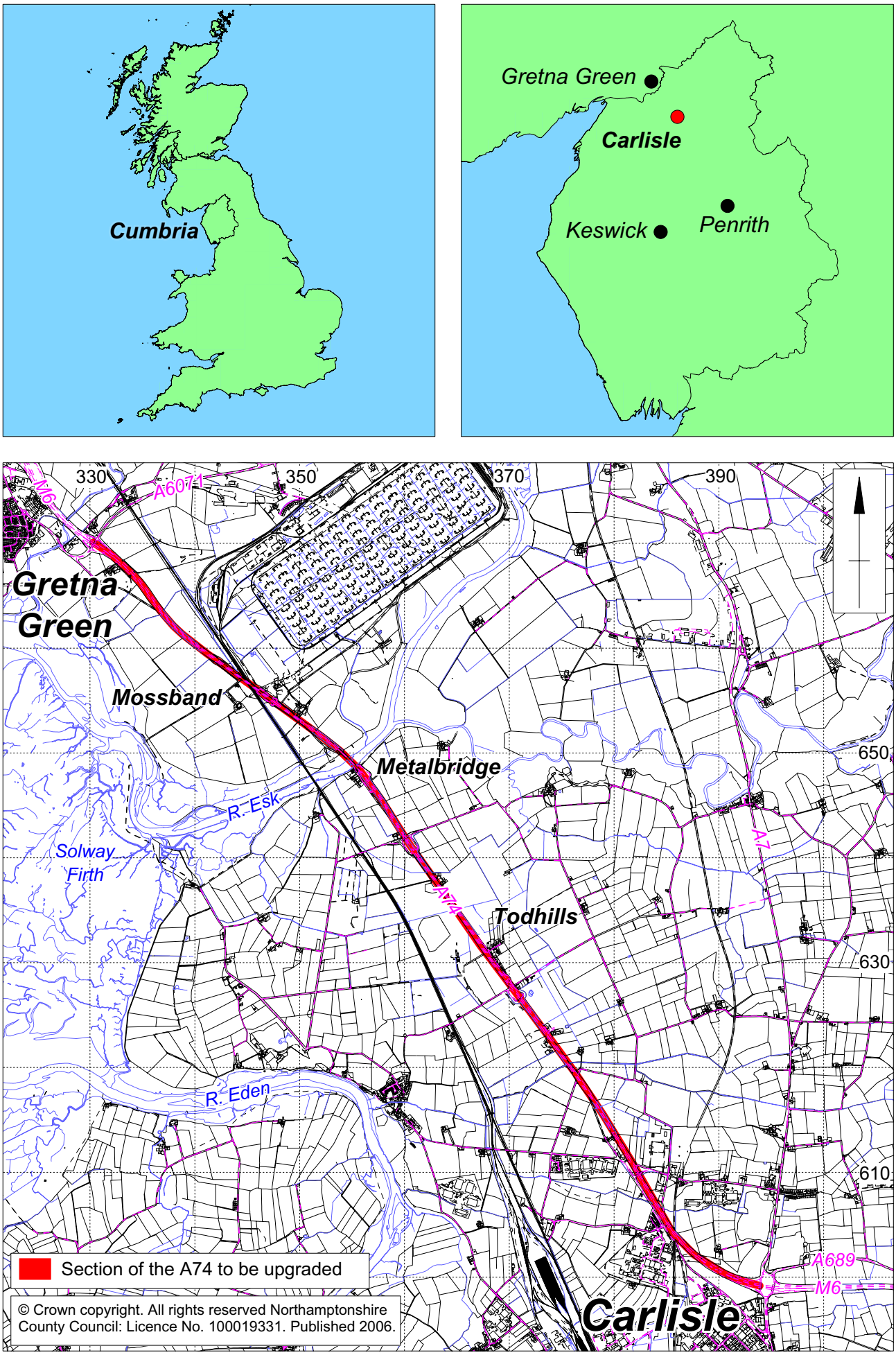
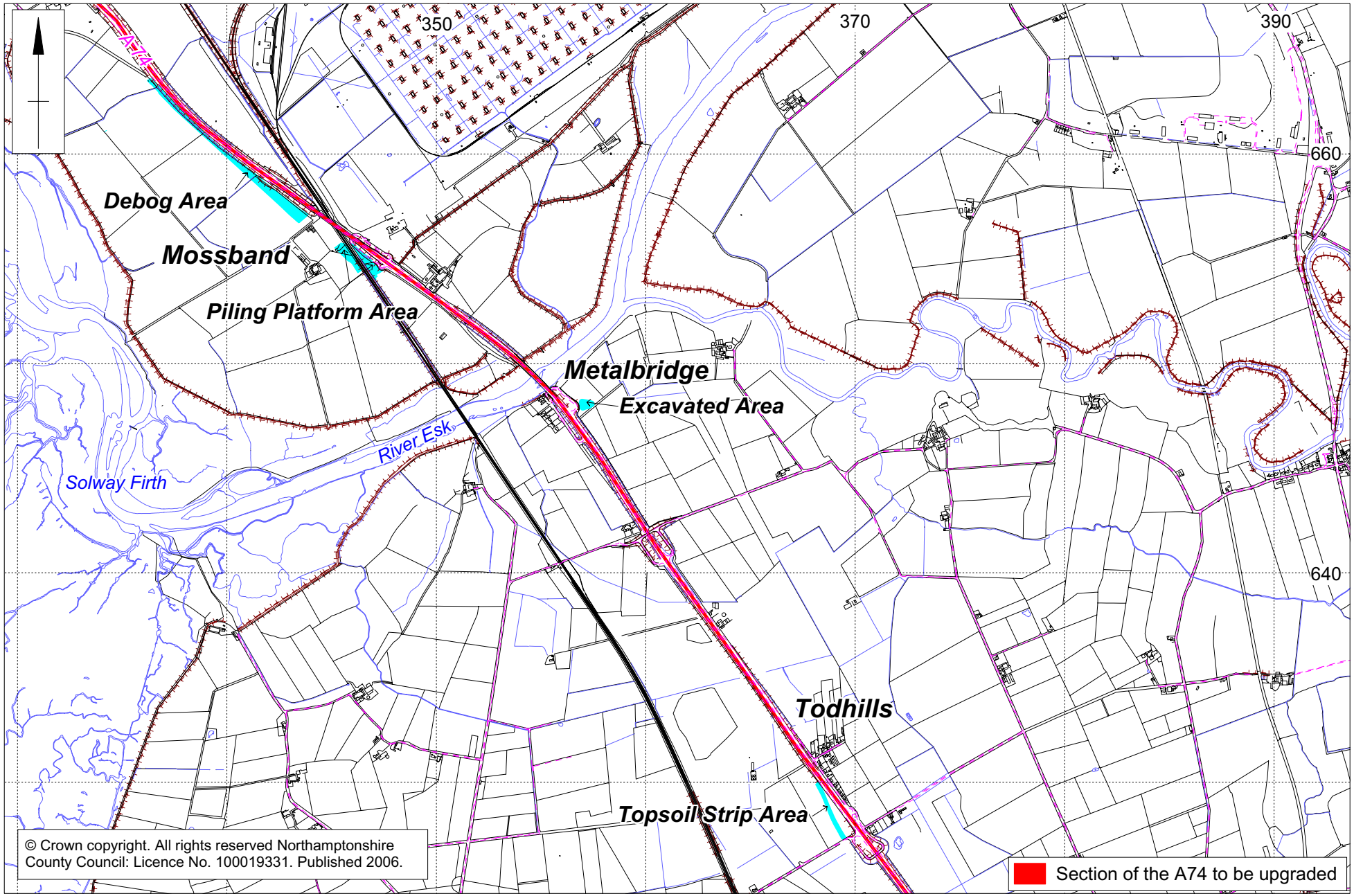


Scale 1:50,000

Site location Fig 1

Scale 1:25,000



Map showing excaveted areas Fig 2

Plate 1:Stone-lined drain, before excavation.

Plate 2: Stone-lined drain, before excavation of surface slabs