ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION REPORT: TRIAL TRENCHING ON LAND OFF ELM ROAD, MARCH, CAMBRIDGESHIRE

Planning Reference: F/YR11/0900/F NGR: TL 4194 9877 AAL Site Code: MAER 12 CHER Event Number: ECB3737 OASIS Reference Number: allenarc1-121849



Report prepared for Mr David Coe

By Allen Archaeology Limited Report Number 2012025

March 2012





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Executive Summary

- Allen Archaeology Limited was commissioned by Mr David Coe to undertake an archaeological evaluation by trial trenching on land off Elm Road, March, Cambridgeshire.
- The works were located in an undeveloped plot of land off Elm Road and lie within a rich archaeological landscape, including a large Romano-British settlement to the east of the site.
- The evaluation revealed features relating to post-medieval drainage and evidence of former greenhouses that occupied the site during the 1960s.
- A single pit containing a small polished Neolithic axe was discovered, however it is not clear if
 the pit is of prehistoric date as a palaeoenvironmental sample from the feature contained
 fragments of coal and other potentially modern detritus.

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 Allen Archaeology Limited (hereafter AAL) was commissioned by Mr David Coe to undertake an archaeological evaluation at land off Elm Road in March, Cambridgeshire.
- 1.2 The excavating, recording and reporting conforms to current national guidelines, as set out in the Institute for Archaeologists 'Standard and guidance for archaeological field evaluations' (IfA 1994, revised 2001 and 2008), regional guidelines 'Standards for Field Archaeology in the East of England' (Gurney 2003), a brief prepared by CAPCA (McConnell 2011), and a specification by this company (2012). All relevant English Heritage guidelines on archaeological best practice were also followed (www.helm.org/server/show/nav.7740).
- 1.3 The documentary archive will be submitted to the Cambridgeshire County Archaeological Store within six months of the completion of the project.

2.0 Site Location and Description

- 2.1 March is situated approximately 38km north of Cambridge, and 23km east of central Peterborough, in the administrative district of Fenland District Council. The proposed development area is to the north of the town, on the west side of Elm Road, centred on NGR TL 4194 9877.
- 2.2 The local geology comprises superficial deposits of Glacial Till (boulder clay). These overly a bedrock geology of Ampthill Clay (http://mapapps.bgs.ac.uk/geologyofbritain/home.html). The site is broadly flat and lies at a height of approximately 4m above Ordnance Datum.

3.0 Planning Background

- 3.1 A planning application has been submitted for the 'Erection of 3 x 2-storey 4-bed dwellings with detached single garages' (Planning Application Reference F/YR11/0900/F). The application was granted, with conditions, including the undertaking of a programme of archaeological trial trenching in order to determine the archaeological potential of the proposed development area.
- 3.2 The approach adopted is consistent with the recommendations of Planning Policy Statement 5 (PPS5) (Department for Communities and Local Government 2010), which superseded Planning Policy Guidance Note 16 'Archaeology and Planning' (PPG 16) in 2010.

4.0 Archaeological and Historical Background

4.1 Prehistoric activity has been noted in the vicinity of the development site. Late Mesolithic and Neolithic activity, together with a Bronze Age cremation cemetery is recorded 1km to the west of the site (Cambridgeshire Historic Environment Record, hereafter CHER, Reference MCB 18211-18213). A small quantity of Neolithic flints was found 600m to the north-west of the development (CHER Reference MCB 18547) and fragments of Neolithic polished axes were found at Flaggrass 1km to the east (CHER Reference 06032a) and 700m to the north-east (Hall 1987, 39). Approximately 400m to the west of the site, Bronze Age activity has been noted during

- redevelopment of the former railway marshalling yards (CHER References MCB 16673 and MCB 16674).
- 4.2 The site is situated in an area of significant archaeological potential for the Roman period. Cropmarks and pottery scatters are located 300m to the west of the site (CHER Reference 08972), 300m to the south-east (CHER Reference 7936) and 700m to the north-east (CHER Reference 08978). A large Roman settlement is situated in the Flaggrass area 1km to the east (CHER References 06032, 08448 and 08449), to the north of the Roman Fen Causeway. The Fen Causeway itself runs in a broadly east to west direction c.350m to the south of the site (CHER Reference CB 15033).
- 4.3 There is little Anglo-Saxon activity in the area, with settlement though to have been located on the gravels further to the south (Hall 1987, 46). The focus for activity in the area during this period is thought to have moved further south to Doddington (*ibid.*). In the Domesday Book of 1086, March was a relatively small place and is listed as a berewick of Doddington consisting of twelve villeins (Williams and Martin 2002, 525 526). It is thought that the place name March means 'boundary' (Hall 1987, 46).
- 4.4 Similarly, there is little evidence for medieval activity in the area, with activity still focussed on the Doddington area to the south of March (Hall 1987, 46 47). The area to the north of the River in March appears to have been meadow, although there is no evidence for medieval strip fields, with evidence for this mainly coming from the south of March (*ibid*.).
- 4.5 There seems to have been little activity in the area until the post-medieval period when a farmhouse was built to the north of the site. This existed by 1887 as it is shown on the First Edition Ordnance Survey map, and is known as Vinegar Hill Farm. The area to the immediate south of the farm building had by this time been enclosed and split into regular plots separated by drainage ditches.
- 4.6 This agricultural activity continued until the 1960s when a large greenhouse was built on the eastern part of the site as marked on the 1970 Ordnance Survey map.

5.0 Methodology

- 5.1 The fieldwork was carried out a team of experienced field archaeologists from AAL in the week beginning Monday 12th March 2012. Two trenches were opened; comprising one 30m long by 1.6m wide trench (Trench 1) and one 20m long by 1.6m wide trench (Trench 2), as shown in Figure 2.
- 5.2 The trenches were machine excavated to the natural geology or the first archaeological horizon, in spits no greater than 0.1m, using a JCB 3CX wheeled excavator fitted with a 1.6m wide toothless bucket. All further excavation were undertaken by hand.
- 5.3 A full written record of the archaeological deposits was made on standard AAL context recording sheets. Archaeological features and deposits were drawn to scale, in plan and section (at scales 1:20, 1:50 or 1:100). Photography formed an integral part of the recording strategy. All photographs incorporated scales, an identification board and directional arrow, and a selection of these images has been included in Appendix 1.

5.4 Each deposit, layer or cut was allocated a unique identifier (context number), and accorded a written description, a summary of these are included in Appendix 8. Two digit numbers within square brackets reflect cut features (e.g. ditch [08]).

6.0 Results (Figures 3 and 4)

- 6.1 A c. 0.25m dark brown grey loamy topsoil, 01, sealed a 0.1m 0.2m thick layer of subsoil, 02, consisting of mixed clay, silts and loam. These deposits contained modern debris including window glass, ceramic building material, charcoal and angular flints. The topsoil also contained a single abraded sherd of handmade pottery of Iron Age date. The subsoil sealed a number of features and the natural clay, 03, which consisted of a compact light to mid orange brown clay.
- 6.2 At the northern end of Trench 1 a single pit was excavated, [11]. This was an ovoid shape measuring 0.85m by 0.3m and was 0.3m deep with a steep V-shaped profile. The pit contained a mid-grey brown silty clay, 12, with frequent flecks of charcoal and angular stones. A Neolithic polished stone axe head was the only artefact recovered, and this may have been reused as a hammerstone or processor tool (Small Find 1, see Plate 7 and Appendix 5). An environmental sample was taken from this deposit which revealed charcoal and charred wood fragments, coal fragments and vitreous globules. The presence of coal is unusual in Neolithic contexts, especially in this area, and would suggest that the feature is of a later date and the axe head was re-deposited at a later time. However, it is also possible that the coal was worked in by later disturbance such as animal or root action.
- 6.3 Towards the northern part of Trench 1 was an amorphous feature, [06], oriented east west and continuing beyond the eastern edge of the excavation. This was an irregular shape and measured approximately 0.5m by 0.8m and was 0.05m deep. The fill, 07, consisted of a midgreyish brown clayey silt and was similar to the subsoil. This feature probably represents tree disturbance.
- 6.4 Three probable plough scars [04], [21] and [23] were noted cut into the natural clay, 03 in Trench 1. These ran diagonally across the trench in a north-west to south-easterly direction and were 0.07m to 0.1m wide. They were filled with 05, 22 and 24 which were all a dark brown silty clay and were indistinguishable from the overlying subsoil. One, [04] was sample excavated and proved to be 0.06m deep.
- 6.5 Sealed by the topsoil and cut through the subsoil 02 in Trench 2 was a ditch, [08], running north south with steep sloping sides and a pointed base. The ditch measured 2m wide at the top, 0.3m at the base and was 0.7m deep. The ditch contained a primary dumped deposit, 10, which was 0.06m thick and consisted of a dark grey clay with fragments of charcoal, coal, ceramic building material and clinker. It was sealed by a secondary deposit, 09, which was up to 0.64m thick and consisted of very dark grey gritty material with frequent clinker, coal, ceramic building material, window glass and wood. This deposit was interpreted as a deliberate dump of material to infill the ditch to make a level ground surface. The ditch was cut into the natural clay 03 and was likely to have been a drainage ditch which appears as a boundary on Ordnance Survey mapping up to the 1990s.
- 6.6 A ceramic drain, [25], was also noted which was of round section on a brick base. This was to the east of the drainage ditch and ran in an east west direction before turning north south.

6.7 To the west of the drainage ditch and cut into the natural clay 03 were a number of irregular features, [13], [15], [17], [19]. Posthole [13] was ovoid in shape, measured 0.2m by 0.3m and was 0.17m deep. It was filled by a dark greyish brown clayey silt, 14, containing charcoal and brick fragments. An irregular elongated pit [15] was adjacent to [14] and measured 0.7m long, 0.3m wide and 0.12m deep. This was filled with a greyish brown clayey silt again containing charcoal and brick fragments. Small pit [17] was ovoid in shape and measured 0.5m by 0.8m and was 0.55m deep. This contained a dark brown clayey silty sand, 18, with fragments of brick and modern window glass, the fill contained a single sherd of late 19th century transfer printed ware. Posthole [19] was circular in shaped and measured 0.45m in diameter, the fill, 20, contained large amounts of modern window glass and was not excavated.

7.0 Discussion

- 7.1 The majority of the archaeological features on this site relate to post-medieval or modern agricultural activities. The drainage ditch, as marked on the First Edition Ordnance Survey map of 1887, appears to have been deliberately infilled with modern material to make up a level ground surface. It is possible that this was done during the 1960s prior to the construction of greenhouses on the western part of the plot. The features to the west of the drainage ditch also relate to this phase of activity as indicated by the presence of window glass in their fills.
- 7.2 Evidence for earlier agricultural activity was apparent through plough scars which were running on a different alignment to the drainage ditch. This suggests agricultural activity which predates the drainage ditch.
- 7.3 A polished Neolithic axe head found within pit [11] is the most significant find from the site. It appears to have been reused as a hammerstone or processor tool, and has been damaged in antiquity. The missing fragment of axe was not within the palaeoenvironmental sample recovered from the feature. Such items are found in later deposits, such as Bronze Age and Iron Age pits and waterholes. The presence of small fragments of coal and other detritus within the soil sample does cast some doubt on the antiquity of the feature, although it is acknowledged that this material may be intrusive, perhaps caused by modern disturbance of the upper fill of the feature.
- 7.4 The sherd of Iron Age pottery found within the topsoil was abraded and residual and is not a surprising find given the high level of activity from this period in the surrounding areas. It does not indicate significant activity of this date occurring on the current site however.

8.0 Conclusions

- 8.1 The trial trenching revealed a number of feature related to post-medieval and modern activity, mainly the construction of greenhouses in the 1960s.
- 8.2 The single pit containing the Neolithic axe head was located towards the north of the site. No other features were identified which could relate to this, and it is unclear if the pit is of prehistoric or later date.

9.0 Effectiveness of Methodology

9.1 The archaeological evaluation methodology was appropriate to the nature and extent of the proposed development. It has demonstrated that there is a low potential for prehistoric activity to be present on the site, and that the majority of the site is characterised by modern features.

10.0 Acknowledgements

10.1 Allen Archaeology Limited would like to thank Mr David Coe for this commission.

11.0 References

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Appendix 1: Colour Plates



Plate 1: General view of the site during trial trenching. Taken from a position south-east of the excavation looking north-west with Trench 1 in the foreground and Trench 2 being machine excavated



Plate 2: General view of Trench 1 from the southern end looking north. Vertical scale is 2m and horizontal scale is 1m



Plate 3: General view of Trench 2 from the western end looking east. Vertical scale is 2m and horizontal scale is 1m



Plate 4: Ditch [08] looking north, scales are 1m



Plate 5: Posthole [17], looking south-west. Horizontal scale is 0.5m and vertical scale is 0.3m



Plate 6: Pit [11], looking north. Horizontal scale is 0.5m and vertical scale is 0.3m



Plate 7: Neolithic axe head

Appendix 2: Prehistoric Pottery Report

By Ian Rowlandson

A single bodysherd retrieved from topsoil context 01 was presented for study (16g). The sherd is handmade, probably from a large jar and the irregular firing colours suggest that it was fired in a simple clamp or bonfire. The fabric consists of a clay matrix with common sub-rounded glassy quartz 0.3-1mm; sparse sub-angular ferrous inclusions c.0.5mm and rare sub rounded flint up to 5mm. Also of note is the rounded and abraded state of the sherd that suggests the possibility it may have been water worn. Although extensive areas of Iron Age and Roman activity have been found in the parish of March any further assertions about occupation on this site on the basis of this single sherd would be spurious.

Appendix 3: Post-Roman Pottery Archive

By Kevin Trott

context	full name	Form type	sherds	weight	part	description	date
01	Transfer printed	Cup	1	1 g	Rim & handle	External and internal blue print	Late 19 th
	ware				stump		century
01	Ironstone China	Cup	1	15 g	Base	Clear glaze	Late 19 th
	White ware						century
18	Transfer printed	Bowl	1	3 g	Body	External blue print	Late 19 th
	ware						century

Appendix 4: Clay Tobacco Pipe Archive

By Kevin Trott

Context	Type	Fragments	Weight	Description	Date Range
01	Plain stem	1	2 g	Polished stem	19 th century

Appendix 5: Worked Stone Report

By Hugo Anderson-Whymark

A polished stone axe-head was the only artefact recovered from pit [11], fill 12 (SF1). The axe is manufactured from a mid to dark greenish-grey, coarse grained, igneous rock. This raw material is not local to the region and bears most similarity to greenstones from West Cornwall, however, this identification is only tentative and requires confirmation by a geologist.

The axe weighs 128 g and measures 71.2 mm long, but originally it would have been slightly longer as re-use as a processor has worn down the blade edge. The edges of the axe are straight but diverge equally from the butt (17.5 mm wide) to the blade edge (43 mm wide). The implement has an oval cross-section with flat sides and it is a maximum of 26.5 mm thick. The sides are roughly parallel, but converge by 3 mm towards the blade.

The axe was probably manufactured by pecking, as the raw material is not suited to flaking, but the surface has been ground and polished to achieve a good finish. The butt end has a rough texture, probably from reuse as a hammerstone or processor, while the blade edge exhibits two smooth, flat, facets resulting from use as a processor. A small chip removed from the corner of the blade edge results from damage in antiquity. The artefact dates from the Neolithic and it is possible that the artefact was re-used as a hammerstone/processor during this period. The axe is, however, not necessarily contemporary with pit [11] as Neolithic axes are commonly deposited in Bronze Age and Iron Age pits and waterholes (Roe 2006; Roe and Shaffrey 2010).

Recommendations

This axe should be examined by a geologist to confirm the source of the raw material, but as the artefact is complete it should not be thin sectioned.

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Appendix 6: Palaeoenvironmental Report

By Val Fryer

Introduction and Method Statement

Evaluation excavations at March, undertaken by Allen Archaeology Ltd, recorded a very limited number of features, most of which were relatively modern in date. However, pit [11] contained a very fine, small stone axe of Neolithic date. A single sample for the evaluation of the content and preservation of the plant macrofossil assemblage was taken from the pit fill (context [12]) and submitted for assessment.

The sample was processed by manual water flotation/washover and the flot was collected in a 300 micron mesh sieve. The dried flot was scanned under a binocular microscope at magnifications up to x 16 and the plant macrofossils and other remains noted are listed below in Table 1. All plant remains were charred. Modern roots, seeds and arthropod remains were also recorded.

The non-floating residue was collected in a 1mm mesh sieve and will be sorted when dry. Any artefacts/ecofacts will be retained for further specialist analysis.

Results

The recovered flot is small (<0.1 litres in volume) and is largely typical of isolated Neolithic pit assemblages, being almost entirely composed of charcoal/charred wood fragments. However, the assemblage also contains materials (including the coal fragments and vitreous globules) which are almost certainly intrusive within a context of this date. As roots and invertebrate remains are also recorded, such contamination almost certainly occurred as a result of bioturbation, with the coal probably being derived from the use of steam farm implements in early modern times.

Conclusions and recommendations for further work

In summary, the assemblage is both small and very limited in composition. In addition, the integrity of the context may have been compromised and, therefore, it is unclear how much (if any) of the material may be contemporary with the feature from which the sample was taken. However, despite these issues, it is still apparent that well preserved plant macrofossils are present within the archaeological horizon in the Elm Road area of March. Therefore, if further interventions are planned, it is recommended that additional plant macrofossil samples of approximately 20 – 40 litres in volume are taken, although only from well-sealed and dated contexts.

Sample No. 1
Context No. 12
Feature No. 11

Plant macrofossils

Charcoal <2mm xxxx
Charcoal >2mm xxx
Charcoal >10mm x

Other remains

Black porous and tarry residues x
Small coal frags. x
Vitreous globules x
Sample volume (litres) 18
Volume of flot (litres) <0.1
% flot sorted 100%

Key:

x = 1 – 10 specimens xxx = 51- 100 specimens xxxx = 100+ specimens

Appendix 7: OASIS Summary Form

OASIS ID: allenarc1-121849

Project details

Project name Land off Elm Road, March, Cambridgeshire

Short description of the project

Allen Archaeology Limited undertook an archaeological evaluation by trial trenching on land off Elm Road, March, Cambridgeshire. The works were located in an undeveloped plot of land off Elm Road and lies within a landscape rich in archaeological features, including a large Romano-British settlement to the east of the site. The evaluation revealed features relating to post-medieval drainage and use of the site as greenhouses during the 1960s. A single pit containing a small polished Neolithic axe was discovered, however the presence of coal in the feature suggests that the axe was in its

original context.

Project dates Start: 12-03-2012 End: 12-03-2012

Previous/future

work

No / Not known

Any associated project reference

codes

MAER 12 - Sitecode

Type of project Field evaluation

Site status None

Current Land use Cultivated Land 1 - Minimal cultivation

Monument type DITCH Modern

Monument type POSTHOLE Modern

Significant Finds AXE Neolithic

Methods & techniques

'Sample Trenches'

Development type Rural residential

Prompt Planning condition

Position in the After full determination (eg. As a condition)

planning process

Project location

Country England

Site location CAMBRIDGESHIRE FENLAND MARCH Land off Elm Road

Study area 80.00 Square metres

Site coordinates TL 4194 9877 52.5678292901 0.09449763796810 52 34 04 N 000 05 40 E

Point

Entered by Edward Oakley (info@allenarchaeology.ac.uk)

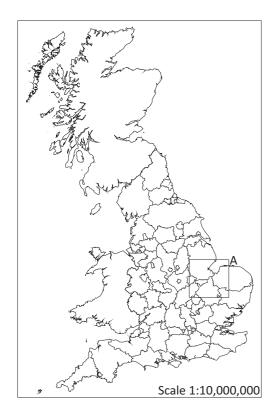
Entered on 23 March 2012

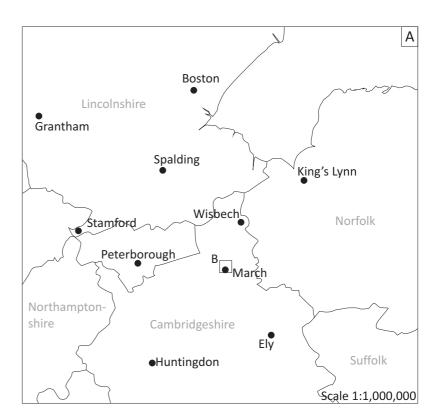
Appendix 8: Context Summary List

CBM = Ceramic Building Material (e.g. brick and tile)

Context	Туре	Description	Interpretation
01	Layer	Loose dark brown grey silty loam with moderate inclusions of	Topsoil
		sub-angular stone and flint with flecked charcoal and modern	
		glass. Seals 02	
02	Layer	Friable mid brown mixed clayey silt with some sand,	Subsoil
		occasional to moderate angular flint inclusions. Sealed by 01,	
		cut by [08]	
03	Layer	Compact light to mid orangey brown silty clay with moderate	Natural
		sub-angular flint inclusions with patches of clustered flint.	
		Sealed by 02, cut by [05], [06], [08], [11], [13], [15], [17], [19],	
		[21], [23] and [25]	
04	Cut	Linear running north-west to south-east. Shallow U-shaped	Plough scar
		profile continuing under eastern section. 0.2m wide, 0.06m	
		deep. Contains 05, cuts 03	
05	Fill	Friable dark brown sandy clay, sealed by 02	Fill of plough scar [04]
06	Cut	Amorphous linear oriented east to west, very shallow with	Natural hollow in top of
		gradual sloping sides. Contains 07, cuts 03	clay
07	Fill	Friable to firm mid greyish brown clayey silt. Occasional	Fill of hollow [06], similar
		angular flint inclusions. Sealed by 02	to subsoil 02
80	Cut	Linear running north to south. V-shaped with even sloping	Drainage ditch
		sides to concave base, 2.0m wide at top narrowing to 0.3m at	
		base, 0.8m deep. Contains 09 and 10, cuts 03	
09	Fill	Very dark grey gritty material consisting of clinker and	Secondary fill of ditch [08]
		containing large and small fragments of brick, tile, glass,	
		wood and general construction debris. Sealed by 01, seals 10	
10	Fill	Dark grey silty clay with fragments of charcoal, CBM and	Primary silting of ditch
		clinker. Sealed by 09	[08]
11	Cut	Oval in plan oriented north to south with a V-shaped profile.	Cut of small pit
	ļ	0.85m long, 0.3m wide and 0.3m deep. Contains 12, cuts 03	
12	Fill	Firm mid grey brown silty clay with frequent flecked charcoal	Fill of [11]
	_	and occasional flint and angular stones. Sealed by 02	
13	Cut	Sub-circular ovoid 0.3m by 0.2m oriented east to west.	Posthole
		Vertical sides with concave base, 0.17m deep. Contains 14,	
		cuts 03	
14	Fill	Friable dark greyish brown clayey silt with rare sub-angular	Fill of posthole [13]
		stone inclusions, moderate flecks of charcoal and brick.	
1 -	Cut	Sealed by 02	Cut of a satisfic
15	Cut	Irregular ovoid plan orientated east to west. Steep sides to	Cut of posthole, possibly
16	Fill	concave undulating base. Contains 16, cuts 03 Friable mid greyish brown clayey silt, occasional charcoal and	two intercutting postholes Fill of posthole [15]
10	' '''	brick fragments and some angular flint. Sealed by 02	Till of postfiole [15]
17	Cut	Ovoid in plan oriented north-east to south-west, 0.5m by	Cut of posthole
17	Cut	0.8m. Vertical sides with concave base, 0.55m deep. Contains	Cut of postfiole
		18, cuts 03	
18	Fill	Loose dark brown grey sandy silt with moderate amounts of	Fill of posthole [17]
10	"	sub-angular stones, and glass fragments. Sealed by 02	i iii oi postiiole [17]
19	Cut	Ovoid in plan oriented north to south 0.5m by 0.7m.	Cut of posthole
10		Containing frequent large shards of window glass. Not fully	cat of postiloic
		excavated due to presence of large amounts of glass.	
		Contains 20, cuts 03	
20	Fill	Loose dark brown black sandy silt with large amounts of	Fill of posthole [19]
	1	window glass. Sealed by 02	5. postriole [15]

Context	Туре	Description	Interpretation
21	Cut	Linear running north-west to south-east beyond excavation,	Plough scar
		0.07m to 0.1m wide. Contains 22, cuts 03	
22	Fill	Friable mid-dark brown silty clay. Sealed by 02	Fill of [21]
23	Cut	Linear running north-west to south-east beyond excavation,	Plough scar
		0.07m to 0.1m wide. Contains 24, cuts 03	
24	Fill	Friable mid-dark brown silty clay. Sealed by 02	Fill of [23]
25	Structure	Red ceramic, round section on brick base	Drain





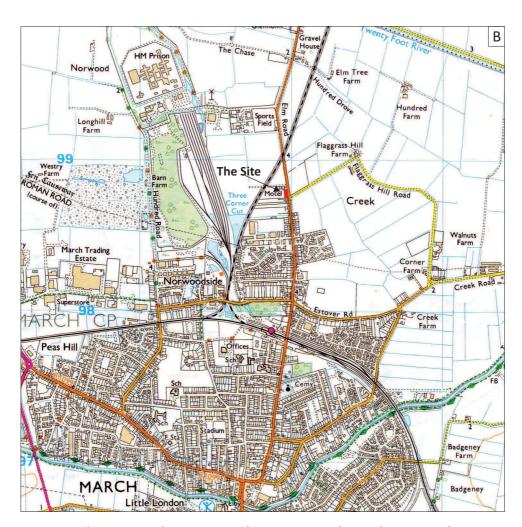


Figure 1: Site location at scale 1:25,000, with site shown in red © Crown Copyright 2006. All rights reserved. Licence Number 100047330

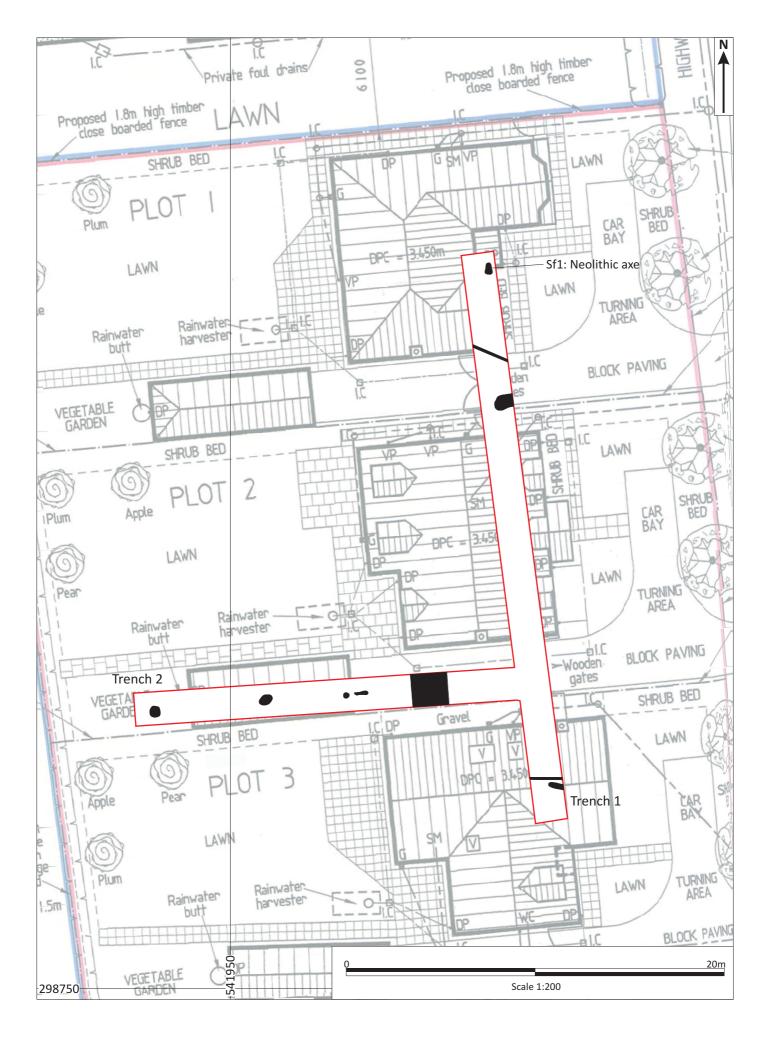


Figure 2: Site plan at scale 1:200, showing proposed development. Evaluation trenches in red and archaeological features in black

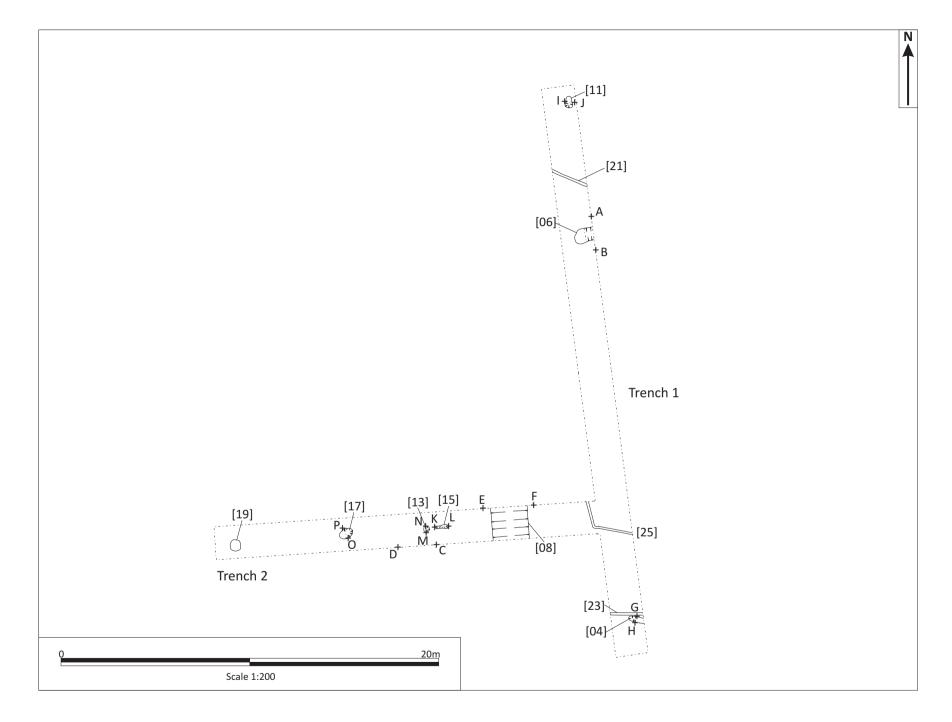


Figure 3: Trench plan at scale 1:200. Sections shown in Figure 4

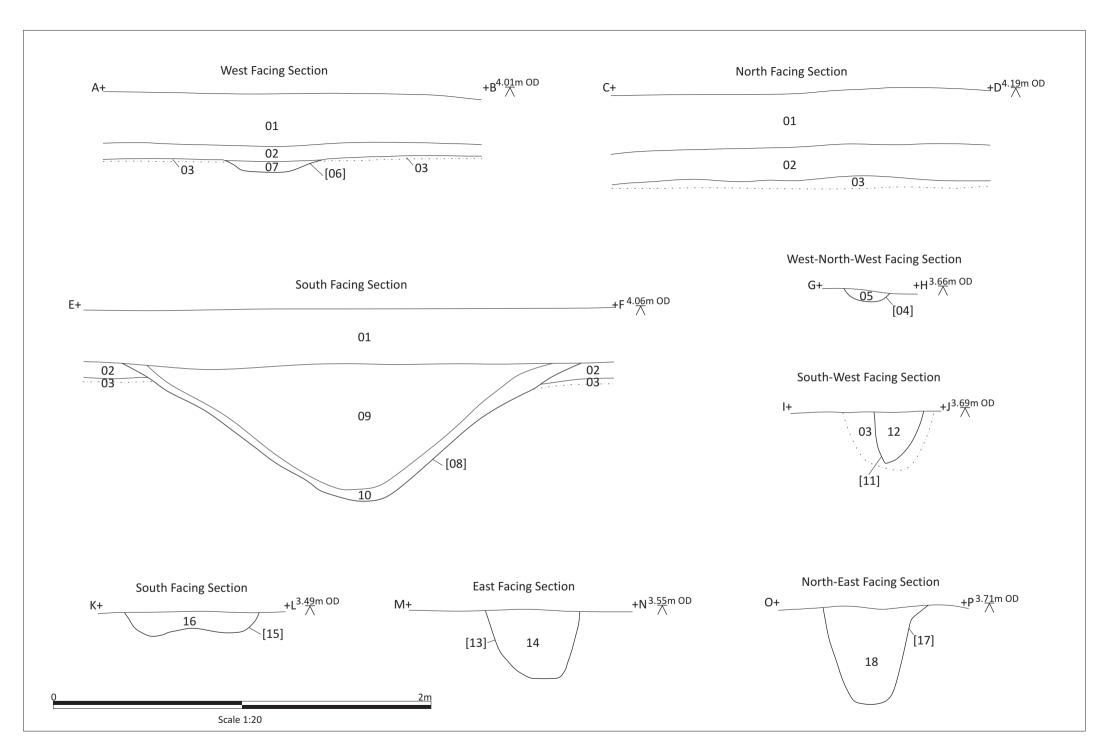


Figure 4: Sections at scale 1:20. Located on Figure 3



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