

Summary

- *This archaeological assessment has been prepared for DAS Services in respect of a proposed development on land off Fiskerton Road, near Cherry Willingham, Lincolnshire.*
- *The site lies across the northern edge of the Witham flood plain. A sandbank running across it marks the position of the Bronze Age river bank: to the south of this sandbank is prehistoric wetland; to the north, the ground rises towards the village, which is built on reliably dry ground.*
- *A group of three Bronze Age round barrows, with an associated cropmark that may be an Iron Age square barrow, has been identified on the east side of the site, positioned on the prehistoric river bank. Other sub-surface features have been observed on aerial photographs, but have not been identified: they may be associated with a Romano-British settlement recently discovered on the north side of Fiskerton Road.*

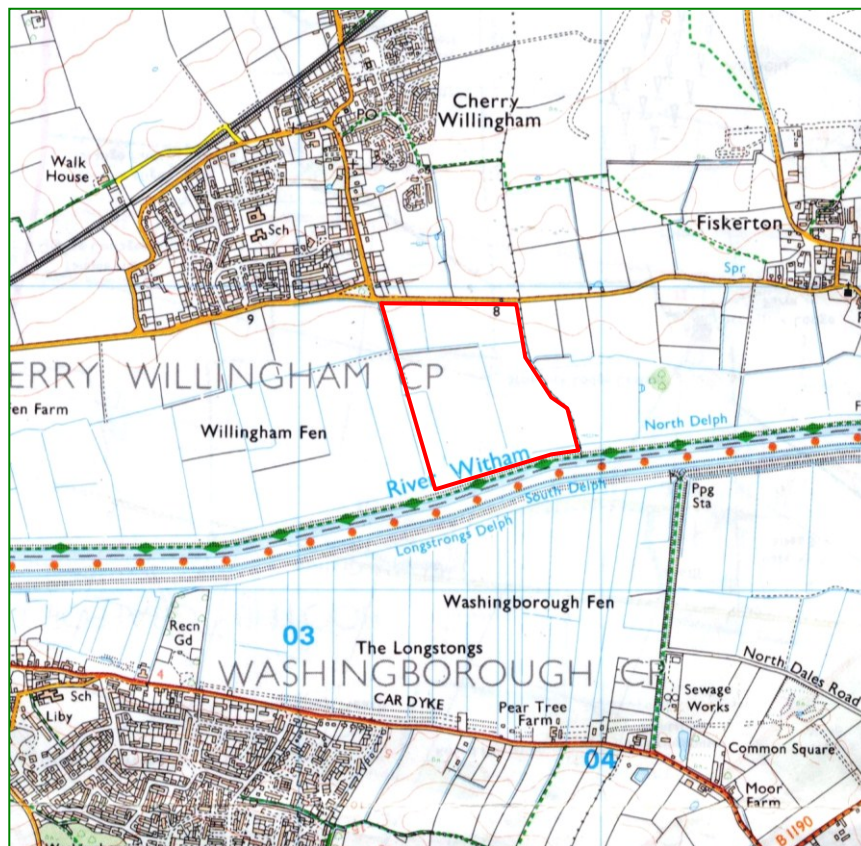


Figure 1: General location map. The proposed development area is outlined in red. Scale 1:25 000. (O.S. copyright licence no. AL 515 21 A0001)

1.0 Introduction

This desk-based assessment was commissioned by DAS Services Ltd. Its purpose is to assess the archaeological potential of the site of a proposed marina with associated leisure facilities on land off Fiskerton Road, near Cherry Willingham, without the use of intrusive methods, and to calculate the possible impact of the required groundworks on any areas of archaeological significance.

2.0 Location and description (figs. 1 and 2)

The village of Cherry Willingham falls within the administrative district of West Lindsey, and lies 3.5km to the east of the outer edge of Lincoln, near the north bank of the River Witham. To the west of Cherry Willingham, the Witham runs in a relatively narrow valley cut through the Lincoln Cliff: to the east, the valley widens as the river enters the fenland. The landscape here is largely artificial, with the straightened, embanked Witham, flanked by the subsidiary drains of the North and South Delph, running through drained, reclaimed arable land in a valley some 1.4km wide, originally occupied by a many-channelled watercourse winding through areas of tidally and seasonally flooded wetland.

The proposed development site lies between the village and the North Delph drain, on the north side of the River Witham, and comprises several fields around a group of farm buildings. The northern side of the site lies on the higher ground above the base of the river valley, and slopes gently to the south. The remainder of the site is within the ancient river bed, and is flat, artificially drained land, lying well below the current height of the Witham embankment. An auger survey of the Witham valley identified a shallow earthwork running roughly east-west across the site as a relict river bank, marking the north side of the course of the Bronze Age river (Savage *et al.*, 2005). To the north of the site, on the far side of Fiskerton Road East, is a new housing development, Lady Meers Road; most of the buildings visible on the south side of Cherry Willingham are mid-20th century or later.

The drift geology of the greater part of the site is alluvium with some peat laminations, overlain by a degraded peat 'black soil' with occasional sandbanks (*ibid.*). The northern side of the site, above the valley floor, has a deposit of boulder clay on the eastern edge, but drift is otherwise absent, exposing the solid Blisworth Clay. A change in the solid geology runs from north-west to south-east across the site: the underlying solid geology in the south-west corner is Great Oolite Limestone, with thin clays (BGS, 1973). The surface field drainage in the area of the site is largely already present on the 1850 tithe award plan, and probably dates to the enclosure period; the drain that divides the two largest fields was recut in 1994, when the sand bank of the old river channel was observed in the side of the cut. A system of piped field drainage was installed on the site in the 1970s (Mr. D. Sempers, *pers. comm.*).

Central National Grid Reference: TF 0360 7160.

3.0 Objectives and methods

The purpose of this report is to establish the likelihood of the presence of archaeological remains which may be vulnerable to groundworks associated with the proposed development; to assess their potential significance and the extent to which construction works are likely to affect them, and, if necessary, to suggest further methods by which the site may be evaluated in advance of such works, or by which the works can be mitigated to minimise the impact to any surviving archaeological remains.

The report is based on information derived from a variety of sources: -

- The Lincolnshire Historic Environment Record
- Records held by the Lindsey Archives Office
- Aerial photographs held by the National Monuments Record
- Material held by the Lincoln Local Studies Library
- Published and unpublished material in PCA's own library and archives
- Material freely available on the Internet
- A site visit by the author

4.0 Planning background

The development project is currently in a pre-planning stage. This archaeological assessment will be submitted in support of a future planning application.

5.0 General archaeological and historical background (fig. 3)

Although the study area contains fewer prehistoric sites and findspots than the area immediately downstream, to the south of Fiskerton, the archaeological record indicates that the area was utilised, if not occupied, with increasing frequency from the Mesolithic period onwards (Rylatt, 2002). Almost all of the recorded sites lie in the fenland at the bottom of the Witham valley, between Fiskerton Road to the north and the Car Dyke to the south.

Mesolithic worked flints have been discovered near Washingborough pumping station (HER ref. 60613), and scatters of worked flints dating to the Late Mesolithic or Early Neolithic periods were found to the south and south-west of Fiskerton village, including a spread near the site (HER ref. 55295). These finds probably indicate that the area was not permanently inhabited during this period, but used for occasional or seasonal activities such as hunting and fishing.

The density of artefactual material increases during the Neolithic period and into the Bronze Age, with finds of worked flints recorded from 7 locations during fieldwalking (HER refs. 55296, 60614, 60826, 61323, 61329, 61341, 61343). In June 1994, the cutting of the new drain running north-south through the southern part of the site was inspected, and the bank of sand left by the old river channel was observed, clearly distinguished from the surrounding peat. Several worked flints, including a barbed and tanged arrowhead, were retrieved from the top of the bank, which remains visible as a shallow ridge across the field, but no structures were seen in the peat (Palmer-Brown, 1994; HER ref. 51208). A Neolithic polished stone axe was found on the bank of the River Witham, directly to the south of the site (HER ref. 52935). Neolithic and Bronze Age flint artefacts have also been recorded on the higher ground to the north of Fiskerton Road: extensive scatters of artefacts and struck flints were found during a programme of archaeological works off Church Lane, Cherry Willingham (HER ref. 54514), and a fragment of a Neolithic stone axehead was found c. 100m to the north of the site (HER ref. 52848).

Permanent sites first appear in the study area during the Bronze Age. The most significant of these is the Washingborough Barrow Cemetery: at least thirty round barrows dispersed across a large area of the Washingborough Fen, south of the Witham (HER ref. 60327). The barrow at the north-west corner of this complex lies some 300m to the south of the south-east corner of the site. A row of five barrows, with an additional feature tentatively identified as an Iron Age square barrow, ran along a bank of river-deposited sand on the north side of the Witham (fig. 7). Three of the round barrows and the putative square barrow are on the eastern side of the site, and have apparently been disturbed by recent excavation (Mr. D. Sempers, *pers. comm.*); the remaining two, which have been located by geophysical survey as well as on aerial photographs, lie within Fiskerton parish (HER ref. 52850).

An archaeological excavation consisting of three small trenches around the Washingborough pumping station, c. 300m east-south-east of the south-east corner of the site, retrieved an important assemblage of Late Bronze Age to Early Iron Age artefacts (HER ref. 60612). No permanent structures were found, and it has been suggested that the site was associated with a river crossing point, preceding the Iron Age Fiskerton causeway (which does not fall within the study area), although pottery from this period, found on the surfaces of fields to the south and south-east of the pumping station, has also been taken to indicate the presence of a settlement in the neighbourhood (Rylatt, 2002). Further excavation work on this site, carried out in 2004, encountered numerous wooden posts and stakes driven into the river bed, and some evidence that metal-working had been carried out in the area (Allen, forthcoming).

Prehistoric metal artefacts have also been retrieved from this stretch of the Witham, although not in such great numbers as those found in the vicinity of the Fiskerton causeway. They include a Middle Bronze Age dirk and a hoard of bronze socketed axeheads, both found to the south of Fiskerton village (HER refs. 52882 and 52877), three Late Bronze Age swords found during the construction of the railway along the south bank of the Witham (HER ref. 61295), and a Bronze Age or Iron Age anthropoid-hilted dagger (HER ref. 52889). It is probable that at least some of these artefacts are ritual deposits, part of a long history of sacrificing valuable objects in particular bodies of water.

Other cropmarks seen on the site have not yet been dated (fig. 7). A linear series of trackways and enclosures, following the line of the relict river bank, have been recorded by the Royal Commission on Historic Monuments from aerial photographs (HER ref. 52854), while a rectangular enclosure has been noted in the south-west quadrant of the site (HER ref. 52861).

The Roman sites and finds within the study area are in two distinct groups: one on the higher ground to the north of the river, in and around the modern villages of Cherry Willingham and Fiskerton, and one in the Washingborough Fen, associated with the Car Dyke. A site believed to be a Romano-British farmstead was found in the area which is now the ongoing Lady Meers Road development, directly to the north of the present site: two pairs of ditches were found, dated by Roman coarse pottery and three late Roman coins, while the find of a loom-weight hinted at domestic activity (HER ref. 52852). Other Roman material has been retrieved within or close to the modern village, including a scatter of pottery, building stone and tile in the same field as the farmstead site (HER ref. 52853), suggesting that a villa might have stood near by (a villa is generally defined as any substantial Roman building in the countryside, where the walls are of stone and the roof of tiles (Whitwell, 1992, p. 79)).

To the south of the Witham is the course of the Car Dyke (HER ref. 60714), an artificial watercourse, some 92km long in all, running from Washingborough to Peterborough, although it may originally have started in Lincoln. Its best preserved sections are visible as a wide ditch with raised banks, but it is more often visible as a low earthwork, or as a series of crop- and soilmarks. It was first documented in the late 12th century, but is generally believed to be originally of Roman construction (Simmons and Cope-Faulkner, 2004, pp. 1-4). Fieldwalking in the Washingborough Fen has retrieved Roman pottery throughout the study area (HER refs. 61383, 61384, 61386), while a Roman skillet – a handled metal pan used in the army for cooking individual rations – was found while dredging the Witham on the eastern edge of the study area (HER ref. 52883), hinting at military usage of the river valley.

Settlement in Cherry Willingham continued uninterrupted from the Roman into the Anglo-Saxon period, although the position of the settlement appears to have moved slightly: a programme of archaeological works to the east of the present churchyard found evidence of occupation from the 5th to the 12th century AD (HER ref. 52684). However, the only Anglo-Saxon find made within the study area but outside the village was a single potsherd found while fieldwalking in the Washingborough Fen (HER ref. 61342).

The place-name ‘Willingham’ first appears as *Vlingeham* and *Wilingeham* in the Domesday Survey of AD 1086, but is probably itself of Anglo-Saxon origin: it derives from the Old English *hām*, ‘village’, and the group-name *Willingas*, ultimately deriving from the personal name *Willa*, to give ‘the village of Willa’s people or descendants’. The affix ‘Cherry’ first appears in 1373, presumably to distinguish ‘Willingham of the cherry trees’ from the two other villages called Willingham in Lincolnshire (Cameron, 1998, p. 139).

At the time of the Domesday Survey, Cherry Willingham was divided between the estates of the Bishop of Lincoln and Gilbert de Ghent. The farmland of both estates

consisted of arable land and meadow: this would have been water-meadow on the lower-lying land near the river, subject to seasonal flooding and unsuitable for cultivation. The total population is recorded as 22 households; a church and a priest are also listed. Gilbert de Ghent also received 32d in annual income from two fisheries, indicating that the Witham was being exploited commercially as well as for private use (Williams and Martin, 1992, pp. 900, 920).

Cherry Willingham was a small settlement throughout the Middle Ages, never exceeding the population listed in Domesday Book. In 1428, it was exempted from the parish tax by virtue of having less than 10 households, and its population continued between 15 and 20 households through the late medieval and into the early modern period (Everson, 1991). Outside the village, there is little archaeological evidence for medieval usage within the study area: medieval pottery has been found in the Longstongs Delph and during fieldwalking in the Washingborough Fen (HER refs. 61287 and 61386).

Cherry Willingham was bought as a single estate and privately enclosed in the 18th century: most of the arable land was then converted to pasture (Wood, 1999, p. 4). During this period, the medieval church was replaced by an integrated building, built in 1753 (Pevsner and Harris, 1989, p. 219).

Although Cherry Willingham in the 19th century was still so small that it never received its own railway station, the village has undergone rapid population growth since the mid 20th century. In 1981, the population was recorded as 2827 (which, assuming an average of 5 people per household, gives some 565 households), and the most recent archive notes for the parish, compiled in 1991, record that housing development had covered almost all the earthworks observed on early aerial photographs (Everson, 1991). The most recent development, Lady Meers Road, directly to the north of the site, is still under construction: its main surface water drain runs across the site (Mr. D. Sempers, *pers. comm.*).

During a recent programme of works to improve flood defences along the Lower Witham, several phases of archaeological investigation and recording took place along a section of river bank (section 17) directly to the south of the site. An evaluation trench between the North Delph and the Witham, before the flood defence works commenced, encountered only natural silt and peat deposits, with a fragment of medieval tile and a wooden stake that did not appear to be in its original context (Savage *et al.*, 2005). During the initial topsoil strip for the works in the following year, an archaeological watching brief was maintained – as significant finds of individual metal artefacts are frequent along this stretch of the Witham, the area was also examined with a metal-detector. No archaeological features were observed in section 17, and only modern metal objects such as nails and shotgun cartridges were found (Gardner, 2006).

6.0 Site-specific search/investigation results

6.1 Documentary information

As Cherry Willingham was enclosed privately, as a single estate, rather than in the Parliamentary Enclosures, no enclosure map exists for the parish.

The parish tithe award map, drawn up in 1850, shows the change from old dry land to recently reclaimed land across the site and its immediate area (fig. 4). To the north of the road that is now Fiskerton Road East, and for a short distance to the south of it, the field boundaries have no drains along them, and are slightly irregular, following traditional agreements or natural contours. The low-lying land adjacent to the river is divided up by drains, which chiefly run in straight lines: the exceptions are the parish boundary at the eastern edge of the site, which follows the line of a traditional boundary in any case, and a sinuous line running generally east-west across the site, which may be associated with the natural contour of the relict river bank. The fields on the higher ground are largely under grass, while those in the reclaimed land are largely arable, making the most of the fertile soil derived from the dried-out peat of the former wetlands. The embanked River Witham is shown, with the North Delph running parallel to it, labelled 'Sock [soke] Dike': the full length of the bank is labelled as the property of the Witham Commissioners. The entries in the tithe award, to which the numbers on the plan refer, are tabulated in full in appendix 3.

The 6" 1st edition Ordnance Survey map of 1891 shows more clearly the difference between the sharply regular edges of the fields in the valley bottom and the more irregular field boundaries on the slope above (fig. 5). The fields comprising the site itself have become more regular in shape since the tithe award plan was drawn, and the curvilinear field boundary has completely disappeared; however, a meandering boundary line running eastward through the fields of Fiskerton parish on roughly the same alignment may indicate the continuing course of the relict river bank. The drain dividing the two large lower fields appears on aerial photographs up to the 1970s, but eventually went out of use: a new drain was cut to serve the same purpose in 1994. A small area in the south-eastern corner of the site is shown as marshland.

6.2 Aerial photographs (figs. 6-8)

A cover search undertaken by the National Monuments Record found 22 specialist oblique aerial photographs, no military oblique aerial photographs, and 53 vertical images (see table in Appendix 4). Copies of vertical shots nos. 1239, 6037, 43 and 37 and oblique shot 34 were requested: photographs 1239, 37 and 34 are reproduced as figs. 6-8, but shot 43 could not be supplied, and 6037 proved to be unsuitable for reproduction, as the site was largely obscured by clouds.

The earliest available aerial photograph was taken in April 1947 (fig. 6). The village of Cherry Willingham is visible in the top left of the picture, a small rural settlement whose development boom has not yet begun. The site is divided into four fields: the Bronze Age river bank can be seen as a broad, diffuse, pale stripe. Two of the row of barrows on the bank show up clearly, one within the site and one outside. The maze of ancestral river channels can be seen on both sides of the modern course of the

Witham, and is particularly marked in the Washingborough Fen. Three of the Bronze Age barrows of the Washingborough Barrow Cemetery can be made out: other circular marks in the fen are clearer, but are not recorded by the HER. The course of the Car Dyke appears as a broken sequence of pale stripes, parallel to the Washingborough road.

An aerial photograph from July 1977 shows the southern part of the site in detail (fig. 7). The Bronze Age river bank shows up as a broad, white, curving stripe with dark lines along its edges, and the crop in the field is of a different colour and texture on either side, indicating the change from river deposits to the clays of the valley slope. The group of barrows within the eastern edge of the site stands out clearly; a narrow, dark track respects them, and moves westward along the bank. Towards the west, fragments of other linear features can be seen. The possible square enclosure in the south-eastern quadrant of the site is concealed by the lines of modern cultivation.

The most recent aerial photograph available shows the site in August, 1995: the first building of Eastfield Rise Farm can be seen in the north-western field. A dark line across the north-eastern field, aligned with extant field boundaries to north and south, may be a trace of a field boundary not appearing on any document, but probably represents the line of the modern surface water drain known to run across this field from the extensive new housing development to the north. Although late summer is normally a good time to see cropmarks, the Bronze Age river bank is unclear, and the position of the barrow alignment is represented only by a vague disturbance within it. The most north-westerly barrow of the Washingborough cemetery can be seen; a pattern of dark lines to the west of it, apparently outlining a field or enclosure, is not recorded by the RCHM. Within the built-up area, part of a recreation ground shows a pattern of north-south running lines that may be cropmark traces of medieval ridge-and-furrow, a remnant of one of Cherry Willingham's open fields.

6.3 Site visit

A site visit was made by the author on 23rd November 2006, for the purpose of recording the present appearance and condition of the proposed development site, and noting any visible areas of archaeological potential. This included a colour slide photographic record, extracts from which are reproduced in Appendix 1.

The site lies between Fiskerton Road East and the north bank of the North Delph. The buildings of Eastfield Rise Farm are near the north-west corner of the site, and are reached by a metalled track off Fiskerton Road; they stand on concrete rafts within an area of gravel and hardcore hard-standing. There is no farmhouse: the complex consists of recent, sheet metal clad portal-frame buildings on breeze-block bases. It was constructed in the closing years of the 20th and first years of the 21st century, and did not replace any earlier buildings (Mr. D. Sempers, *pers. comm.*).

The area immediately surrounding the farm buildings is in use as a horse ménage with pasture, divided into several paddocks: this occupies roughly the area of field 67 on the 1850 tithe award plan. To the east of the farm buildings is a belt of recently planted trees (plate 1).

The western site boundary is a deep, open drain, with no hedge or fence to the south of the farm buildings, the field beyond it is under grass, but no earthworks can be seen there. The slight ridge of the old river bank is most clearly visible at this side of the western main field, which was under seedling cereal when the visit took place (plate 2). This field is divided from the eastern main field, also under seedling cereal, by a narrow drain: a boundary drain is shown in this area on 19th century maps, but the present cut is recent. The relict river bank is less clear, although still perceptible, across the eastern field (plate 3).

To the south, the site is bounded by the cut of the North Delph. The field boundary opens directly on to the bank of the cut, with occasional willow trees along it, but no hedge or fence: the ground is slightly raised along the course of the Delph, as material has been deposited here during recutting and cleaning (plate 4). The possible rectangular enclosure seen on aerial photographs in the south-eastern quadrant of the site could not be seen from ground level, but the state of cultivation of the field was particularly unpropitious.

The eastern site boundary is contiguous with the boundary between the parishes of Cherry Willingham and Fiskerton, and is marked by a deep, open drain. The ground is higher on the east bank of the drain: this is caused by a meander in the relict river bank, curving round to the south across the corner of the neighbouring field (plate 5). The neighbouring fields to the east are under grass to the south and a brassica crop to the north. None of the group of barrows recorded along the relict river bank could be seen from ground level (plate 6); machine excavation and metal-detecting in the area encountered no recognisable archaeological material (Mr. D. Sempers, *pers. comm.*), and none was observed on the field surface during the site visit.

The field boundary that runs east-west across the full width of the site is a dry ditch edged with hawthorn bushes: it is shown as a drain on the 1850 tithe award plan. From this boundary, the land rises to the north, and the soil texture becomes heavier and stickier (Mr. D. Sempers, *pers. comm.*), indicating the change in drift geology to boulder clay. The highest point of the site is the north-east corner; this field is also under seedling cereal. The northern edge of the site lies slightly below the level of Fiskerton Road East, and is bordered by a small ditch and a recently planted hawthorn hedge connecting remnants of grown-out coppiced ash.

7.0 Assessment of archaeological potential

Although Mesolithic and Early Neolithic material has been retrieved from within the study area, the Late Neolithic and Bronze Age periods, possibly extending into the Iron Age, are of the greatest significance. The site is known to have contained three Bronze Age round barrows, with a possible square barrow that may indicate the continuation of cemetery usage into the Iron Age, all of which were visible as cropmarks on aerial photographs taken as recently as 1995. The field containing the barrows has been ploughed from at least 1850, and has recently been machine excavated in their immediate area, so it is doubtful whether any substantial remains, such as undisturbed burials, will be encountered, but it cannot be ruled out that deeply buried remains may survive.

Other crop-marks recorded on the site have not been dated, although the course of the track along the relict river bank indicates that it post-dates the barrows, as it appears to skirt them. Again, these features have been subjected to over 150 years of ploughing, and are likely to have been considerably truncated, but it is still possible that dating and other evidence may be retrieved from them.

While the prehistoric remains within the study area are concentrated in the flood-plain of the River Witham, the most significant Romano-British remains fall into two categories: those associated with the river and the Car Dyke canal, and those on the higher ground to the north, associated with a settlement, possibly one of substance. This settlement appears to have lain in or near the field directly to the north of the site, and it is possible that remains associated with it will be exposed on the higher land towards the north side of the site. The likelihood of encountering outlying buildings is small, but earth-cut features such as boundary ditches may well be present: it is possible that the undated features listed by the HER date to this period. No such features have been identified from aerial photographs, but variations in geology and land use may have masked them.

The post-Roman settlement of Cherry Willingham appears to have moved slightly to the north, and the paucity of Anglo-Saxon and early medieval remains elsewhere in the study area indicates that the likelihood of encountering such remains on the site is low, particularly in the light of the negative evaluation and watching brief carried out as part of the Lower Witham flood defence project.

Few traces now remain of Cherry Willingham's open fields, but evidence suggests that they lay to the north of the site. The land to the south of the Fiskerton Road appears to have lain within the meadows listed in the Domesday Survey: an area of water-meadow and hay-marsh, providing good seasonal grazing but unsuitable for permanent cultivation, and certainly uninhabitable. The archaeological potential of the site for the medieval period is consequently negligible, borne out by the very low level of medieval material recorded by the HER.

The site continued in use as farmland up to the present day. From at least the mid 19th century, improved drainage enabled it to be used as arable land: the tithe award plan of 1850 shows the majority of the site under cultivation. The archaeological potential of the site for the post-medieval and industrial periods is consequently also negligible.

8.0 Impact on archaeological resources (fig. 9)

The proposed groundworks will involve the raising of the ground level across much of the site, to enable the proposed marina to be connected to the River Witham, whose surface lies well above current site ground level. However, the construction of the marina and the associated smaller lakes will still require extensive excavation, obliterating any archaeological remains in these areas. The most archaeologically sensitive region, the barrow complex, appears to lie within a part of the proposed development that will be less disturbed, occupied by car parking and tree planting, but without being able accurately to plot the positions of the barrows on to the development plan, the barrow site must still be considered endangered. The negative effect of tree roots must also be taken into consideration.

9.0 Conclusions

The proposed development site contains known archaeological remains: three round barrows forming part of a Bronze Age barrow complex, with a potential later barrow associated with them, and a number of other features which have yet to be dated, but may be associated with the known Romano-British settlement directly to the north of the site. Further Romano-British remains may be encountered on the north side of the site. All of these remains are liable to have been truncated by ploughing, as the site has been under cultivation since at least the mid 19th century, and machine excavation has recently taken place in the area of the barrow complex.

Archaeological remains from any period post-dating the end of Roman occupation in Britain are unlikely to be encountered.

Further archaeological intervention is recommended. If a general topsoil strip is to take place as an initial part of the groundworks, an archaeological watching brief might be the best solution, with sufficient time to sample excavate and record any features encountered before groundworks continued: if no recognisable features were exposed during topsoil stripping, no further archaeological presence would be required. If a general topsoil strip is not to form part of the groundworks, targeted evaluation might be a better initial intervention.

10.0 Acknowledgements

Pre-Construct Archaeology would like to thank DAS Services Ltd. for this commission; particular thanks are due to Mr. D. Sempers for his assistance during the site visit.

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