

**LAND WEST OF FOLLY LANE, WEST FEN, NEAR STICKNEY,  
EAST LINDSEY, LINCOLNSHIRE**

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION REPORT**

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Prepared for  
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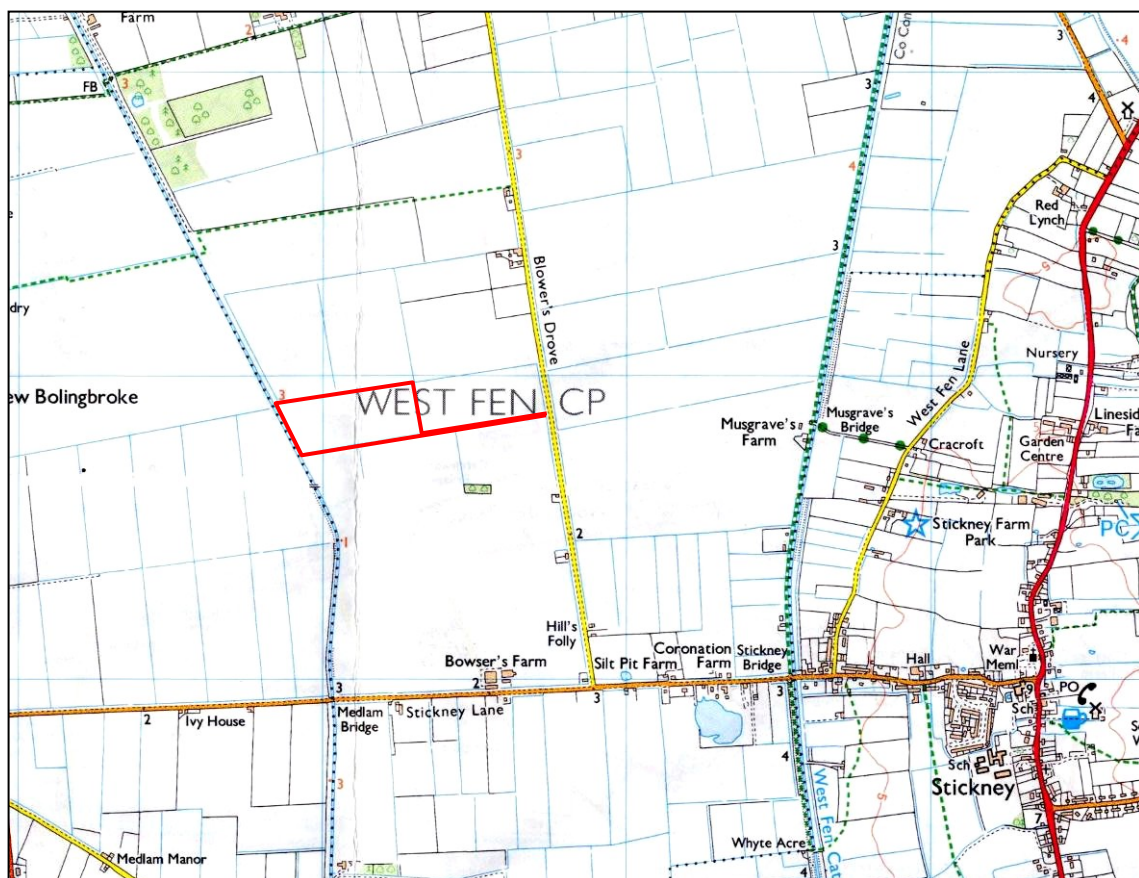
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## Summary

An archaeological evaluation consisting of four 40m x 2m trenches was undertaken on land to the east of Folly Lane in the civil parish of West Fen, between the villages of New Bolingbroke and Stickney in the East Lindsey district of Lincolnshire, in order to inform a forthcoming planning application for the construction of a solar farm.

The site lies in an area of reclaimed fenland to the west of the 'Stickney peninsula', an area raised slightly above the surrounding fen and consequently a focus of settlement and activity, certainly from the Anglo-Saxon period onwards, and possibly earlier. The site itself appears to have been unsuitable for habitation or cultivation until it was reclaimed following Parliamentary Enclosure at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century: a desk-based assessment and a geophysical survey indicated that its archaeological potential was slight.

The evaluation encountered only natural sand, peat and silt/clay deposits, confirming the findings of the previous non-intrusive surveys. No evidence of human activity pre-dating the drainage and enclosure of the West Fen was encountered.



**Figure 1:** Location plan of the site at scale 1:25,000. The proposed development site is outlined in red. OS mapping © Crown copyright. All rights reserved. PCAS licence no. 100049278.

## 1.0 Introduction

Pre-Construct Archaeological Services Ltd (PCAS) was commissioned by Solarcentury Holdings Ltd. to carry out an archaeological evaluation on land to the east of Folly Lane in the civil parish of West Fen, between the village of New Bolingbroke and the small town of Stickney in the East Lindsey district of Lincolnshire. The evaluation took place in advance of the construction of a new solar farm, as a condition of planning permission. It was carried out according to current best practice and appropriate national guidance including:

- NPPF, National Planning Policy Framework, 2012;
- CIFA Code of Conduct (2014 as revised);
- CIFA Standards and Guidance for Archaeological Evaluations (2014);
- Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment (MoRPHE v1.1, English Heritage 2009)
- Lincolnshire Archaeological Handbook (Lincolnshire County Council, 2010).

## 2.0 Location and Description (figs. 1 and 2)

The civil parish of West Fen is situated within the district of East Lindsey, approximately 12km to the north of Boston, between the village of New Bolingbroke and the small town of Stickney; West Fen parish itself contains no nucleated settlement, but is occupied only by scattered dwellings, chiefly farmsteads.

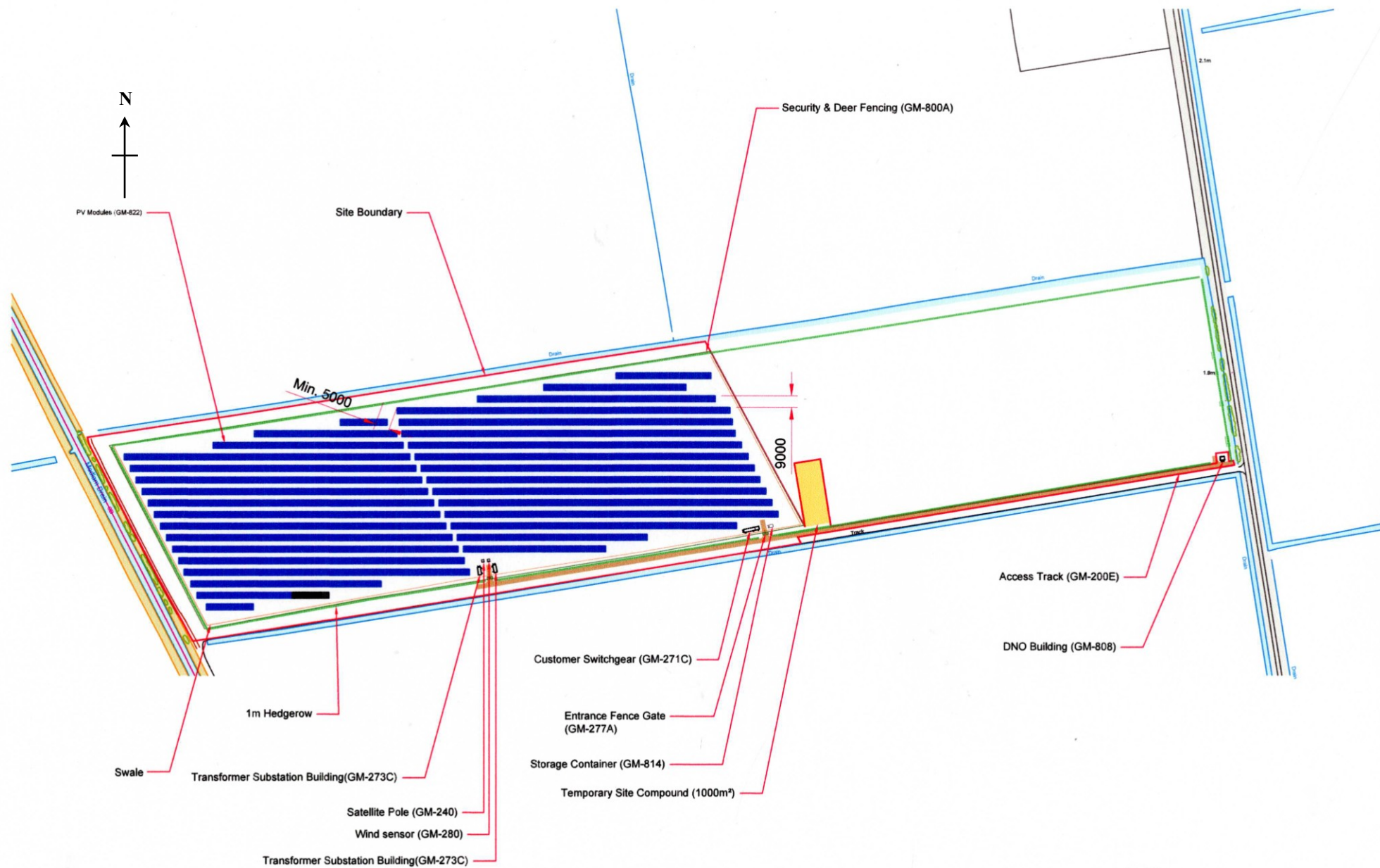
The site lies towards the centre of the west side of West Fen parish, between the Medlam Drain, which forms the western parish boundary, and the roughly north-to-south-running minor road known variously as Blower's Drove and Folly Lane.

The proposed development site is roughly rectangular in shape, occupying an area of some 8.26 hectares and at a central National Grid Reference of TF 3215 5785. It is bordered by Medlam Drain to the west and smaller field boundary drains to north, south and east; there are remnant hedges, grass margins and scattered trees around its edges (Neale, 2015). At the time of the evaluation, the site was under the stubble of a harvested cereal crop.

## 3.0 Topography and Geology

West Fen parish consists of level, artificially drained reclaimed fenland in which fields are divided by open drains emptying into the Medlam Drain to the west or the West Fen Catchwater Drain to the east. The site is almost flat, displaying a very shallow north-easterly slope, at an Ordnance Datum height of approximately 2m to 3m above sea level; the surrounding landscape is also generally flat, with slight rises towards Stickney and New Bolingbroke (Neale, 2015).

The site is located to the west of Stickney Moraine, a feature which marks the maximum extent of ice-sheets through the Wash Gap during the Devensian glacial episode. The moraine forms a promontory of glacial till which at various points in the past was surrounded by the sea or by salt-marshes (Neale, 2015), and the town of Stickney is situated on this promontory. The drift geology across the site itself consists of the marine and estuarine deposits of the coastal fen, recorded as silt and clay, peaty in parts. The underlying solid geology of the area is Ancholme Group Kimmeridge Clay Formation limestone and shale (Lane, 2015; BGS, 1995).



**Figure 2:** As-proposed plan of the site (outlined in red) not to scale. Plan supplied by developer.

## 4.0 Planning Background

Planning permission for the construction of a solar farm, including the installation of solar panels to generate up to 5MW of electricity, an access track, transformer substations a switchgear container, storage container, deer fencing, CCTV cameras, satellite dish, wind sensor, landscaping and other associated works, was granted by East Lindsey District Council in June 2015. As the archaeological potential of the site had not been ascertained, the planning permission was subject to archaeological conditions: Condition 11 required a written scheme of archaeological investigation (Lane, 2015) to be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority, while Condition 12 required the archaeological site work to be undertaken in full accordance with the approved WSI, and Condition 13 required the submission of the archaeological report within 3 months of the commencement of works, and the deposition of the project archive with an appointed museum of record.

## 5.0 Archaeological and Historical Background

An extensive archaeological and historical assessment of the site and its environs has already been carried out as an earlier part of this project (Neale, 2015).

By approximately 2500 BC, an increasingly wet climate had led to peat growth on either side of the 'Stickney peninsula', an elongated glacial island, demarcated by the two streams now known as the East and West Fen Catchwater Drains. Land suitable for sustained agricultural usage and permanent settlement became scarcer in the Fen region (Savage, 2011). The DBA notes that there is no evidence for permanent prehistoric occupation in the area; struck flints and other artefacts have been found in several places in and around Stickney, but none on or near the site. Traces of possible Bronze Age occupation found during the Hall Lane excavation in Stickney may represent a known period of lower sea levels, when previously marginal land could be occupied and brought into cultivation; however, it is unlikely that the fenland in which the site lay was ever habitable during this period.

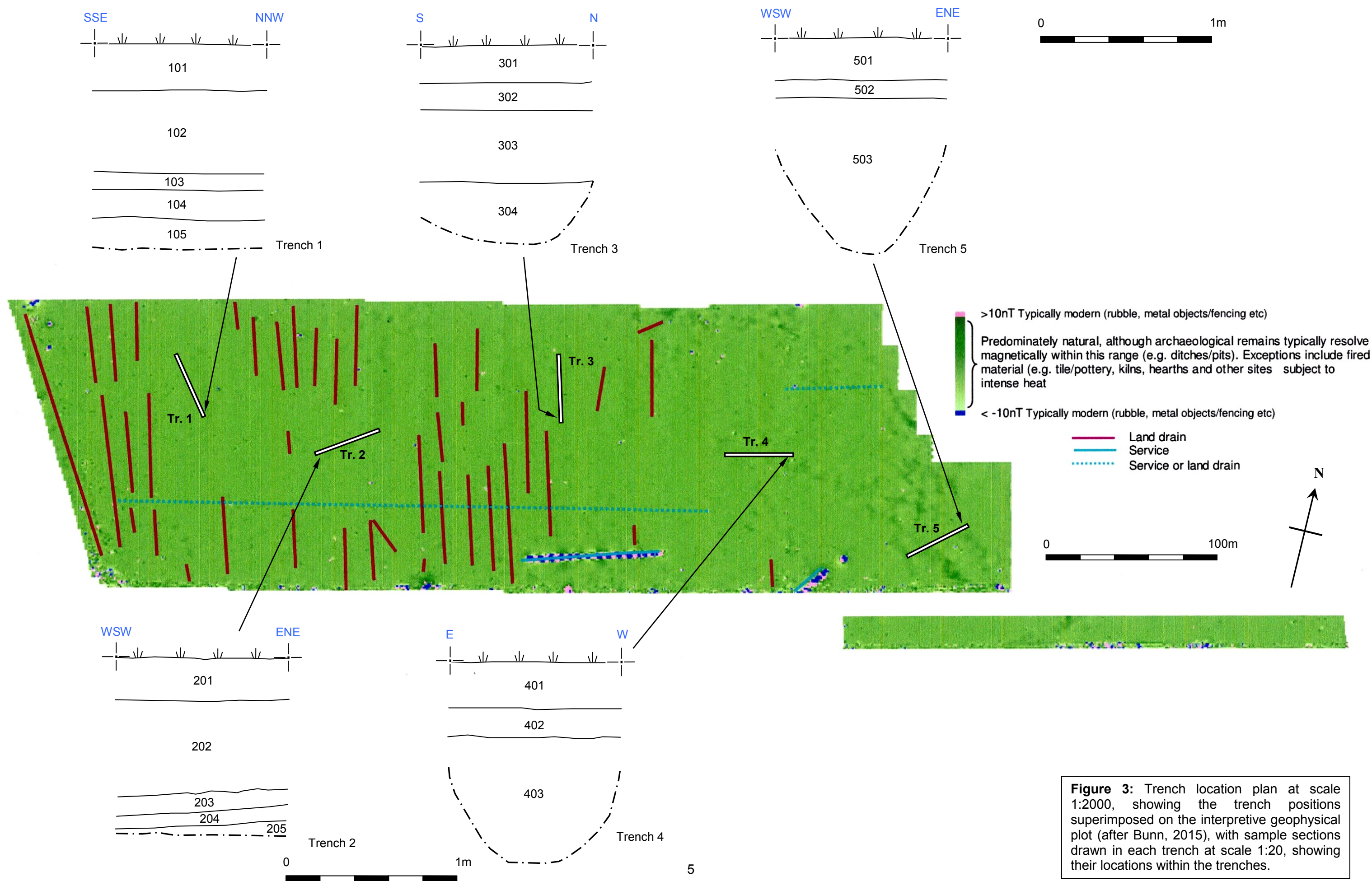
A similar reduction in sea levels took place during the Roman period, but again, there is no evidence of settlement on or near the site: two probable settlement sites have been identified within 2.5km, but both are on higher ground.

Stickney village, which is recorded in Domesday Book, is believed to have Anglo-Saxon or early medieval origins; late Saxon to early medieval features were encountered during the Hall Lane excavation. Archaeological work in the area has uncovered parts of the medieval settlement, including a possible religious foundation near the Hall Lane site. However, no remains from the early medieval or medieval periods have been recorded on or near the site, and it seems likely that the land remained too wet for habitation or cultivation, and was usable only for seasonal grazing as common land until the Parliamentary Enclosures.

The East and West Fens were enclosed and drained from 1801, leading to a general change from pastoral to arable use, although the site was still recorded as grassland by the assessors of the 1910 Land Tax: the present landscape derives from the post-enclosure period (Neale, 2015).

A geophysics survey undertaken on the site in September 2015 recorded only a network of land drains, lying on a broadly north-to south alignment, and the presence of modern services (Bunn, 2015; fig. 0).





**Figure 3:** Trench location plan at scale 1:2000, showing the trench positions superimposed on the interpretive geophysical plot (after Bunn, 2015), with sample sections drawn in each trench at scale 1:20, showing their locations within the trenches.

## **6.0 Methodology**

The evaluation consisted of four 40m x 2m trenches randomly positioned to sample the whole site, as there was no geophysical or other data on which they could be targeted (fig. 0). The trenches were located on the site by GPS, and their positions were checked for live services with a Cable Avoidance Tool before being machine excavated under archaeological supervision, using a 180° excavator fitted with a toothless ditching bucket. Machine sondages were excavated at one end of each trench in order to confirm that natural deposits had been reached.

Sample sections were drawn in each trench at a scale of 1:20, and located on scale 1:100 trench plans. Deposits were recorded on standard PCAS trench record sheets, and an excavation site diary was also kept; a digital photographic record, supplemented by colour slide photography, was made, and extracts from this are reproduced in Appendix 1.

The fieldwork was carried out by Richard Mandeville, and took place on the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> of October, 2015. Weather conditions were favourable throughout.

## **7.0 Results (fig. 3)**

Only natural deposits sealed by topsoil were observed in all trenches.

Trenches 1 and 2, towards the west end of the site, displayed natural sand at the full machined depth. This was overlain in both trenches by a thin layer of peat, which appeared to be desiccated and compressed, as would be expected in a drained, reclaimed landscape (plate 3); the peat was in turn overlain by two distinct layers of natural silty clay.

Trenches 3, 4 and 5 displayed only a sequence of natural clay and silt/clay layers. The uppermost layer in all trenches was a dark brownish-grey clayey silt, which could only be distinguished from the overlying topsoil by its much more compact texture: this presumably represents the surface layer of the pre-enclosure fen, whose texture has been altered by ploughing to a depth of approximately 0.25m, forming the modern topsoil.

## **8.0 Discussion and Conclusions**

The presence of natural sand and peat layers in the trenches at the western side of the site probably indicates a fen-edge position, with an area that may sometimes have been occupied by open water giving way to a marginal zone where alluvial material was only deposited by floods. No evidence of human activity pre-dating the drainage and enclosure of the West Fen in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was encountered.

The site appears to have been unsuitable for human habitation or cultivation, able to sustain only transient activities such as fishing, wildfowling and reed gathering, which rarely leave any trace in the archaeological record, until the industrial period. Its archaeological potential is consequently concluded to be negligible.

## **9.0 Effectiveness of Methodology**

The programme of archaeological evaluation has confirmed the findings of the geophysical survey, demonstrating that no archaeological remains are to be expected on the site. The body of data thus produced will be sufficient to inform the planning and development process.



## 10.0 Project Archive

The project archive, consisting of the site recording and a printed and bound copy of this report, will be deposited at The Collection, Lincoln; following deposition, the archive will be available for consultation under the LCNCC accession number 2015.192. Archive deposition was provisionally scheduled for June 2016, but can be expedited due to the absence of a finds corpus, and is now anticipated in December 2015. A copy of the full report will also be uploaded to the Archaeology Data Service OASIS (Online Access to the Index of archaeological investigationS) database, where it will be publicly accessible online.

## 11.0 Acknowledgements

Pre-Construct Archaeological Services would like to thank Solarcentury Holdings Ltd. for this commission.

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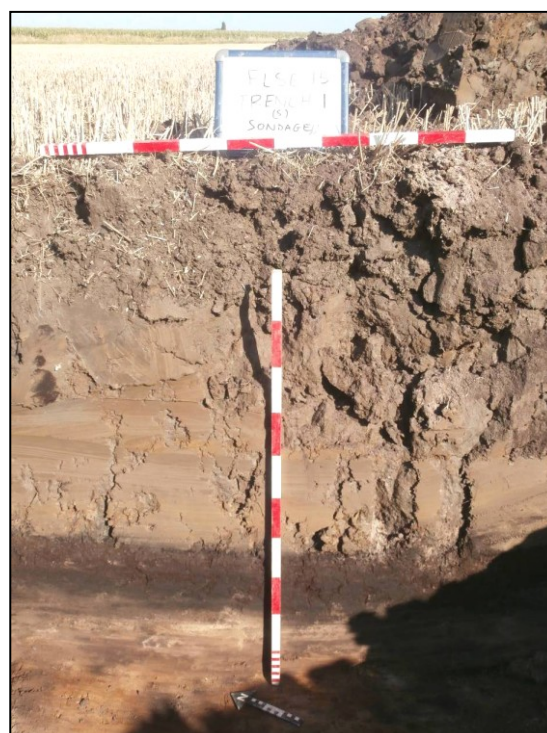
## Appendix 1: Colour Plates



**Plate 1:** General shot of the site, looking WNW from the SE site corner near Trench 5.



**Plate 2:** Trench 1 after excavation and recording, looking NNW.



**Plate 3:** Sample section in Trench 1, showing the peat layer, looking NE.





**Plate 4:** Trench 2 after excavation and recording, looking NE.



**Plate 5:** Trench 3 after excavation and recording, looking N.



**Plate 6:** Trench 4 after excavation and recording, looking W.



**Plate 7:** Trench 5 after excavation and recording, looking SW.

## Appendix 2: Context Summary

| Context no. | Type  | Description   | Finds/dating |
|-------------|-------|---|--------------|
| Trench 1    |       |   |              |
| 101         | Layer | Dark brownish-grey clayey silt topsoil with occasional small pebbles, 0.27m deep.   | Modern       |
| 102         | Layer | Dark brownish-grey, compact silty natural silty clay varying in depth from 0.49m at S end of trench to 0.58m at N end.  |              |
| 103         | Layer | Dark brownish-grey natural silty clay with orange patches, below clay layer 102 and overlying peat 104; no inclusions. Maximum depth 0.10m.                           |              |
| 104         | Layer | Very dark brown peat with occasional pebbles, below layer 103 and above natural sand 105; 0.15m deep.   |              |
| 105         | Layer | Natural sand at limit of excavation: yellowish-white, becoming darker and coarser with patches of light grey clay at S end.   |              |
| Trench 2    |       |   |              |
| 201         | Layer | Dark brownish-grey clayey silt topsoil with occasional small pebbles, 0.25m deep.   | Modern       |
| 202         | Layer | Dark brownish-grey, compact natural silty clay, 0.52m deep, distinguishable from topsoil 201 chiefly by its texture.  |              |
| 203         | Layer | Dark brownish-grey natural silty clay with orange patches and no inclusions, below clay layer 202 and above peat 204; 0.12m deep.                                     |              |
| 204         | Layer | Dark brown sandy peat with occasional pebbles, below layer 203 and above natural sand 205, 0.09m deep, present only at lower E end of trench.                         |              |
| 205         | Layer | Coarse yellowish-white natural sand at limit of excavation.   |              |
| Trench 3    |       |   |              |
| 301         | Layer | Dark brownish-grey clayey silt topsoil with occasional small pebbles, 0.23m deep.   | Modern       |
| 302         | Layer | Dark brownish-grey, compact natural silty clay varying in depth from 0.17m at S end of trench to 0.60m <sup>+</sup> at N end (full depth not penetrated at this end). |              |
| 303         | Layer | Mid-orange-grey natural clayey silt, below clay layer 302 and overlying clay layer 304; 0.43m deep.   |              |
| 304         | Layer | Natural compact grey clay with no inclusions  |              |
| Trench 4    |       |   |              |
| 401         | Layer | Dark brownish-grey clayey silt topsoil with occasional small pebbles, 0.27m deep.   | Modern       |
| 402         | Layer | Dark brownish-grey, compact natural silty clay, 0.12m deep, distinguishable from topsoil 401 chiefly by its texture.  |              |
| 403         | Layer | Mid-greyish-brown natural clayey silt with no inclusions, below clay layer 402.   |              |
| Trench 5    |       |   |              |
| 501         | Layer | Dark brownish-grey clayey silt topsoil with occasional small pebbles, 0.35m deep.   | Modern       |
| 502         | Layer | Dark brownish-grey, compact natural silty clay, 0.10m deep, distinguishable from topsoil 201 chiefly by its texture.  |              |
| 503         | Layer | Mid-greyish-brown natural clayey silt with no inclusions, below clay layer 502.   |              |



## Appendix 3: OASIS Summary

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| <a href="#">View 2</a> | 2       | Mrs. R. D. Savage | <a href="mailto:rachel@pre-construct.co.uk">rachel@pre-construct.co.uk</a> | 15 October 2015   |
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