

### Summary

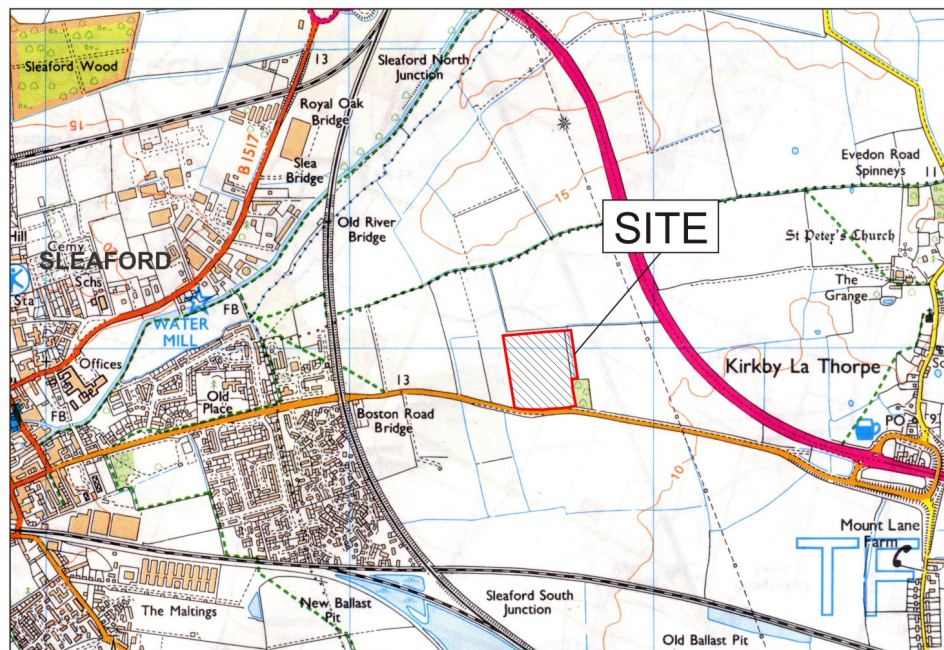
*Pre-Construct Archaeology (Lincoln) carried out an archaeological evaluation for Axis on behalf Eco2 Ltd on land to the north of Boston Road, near Sleaford, in the North Kesteven district of Lincolnshire (centred on NGR: TF 0868 4586).*

*Extensive evidence of activity of the Roman period, spanning the mid 1<sup>st</sup> – late 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries AD was recorded. The observed evidence consisted of several large pits, some reused as rubbish pits; boundary and possible enclosure ditches; gullies and postholes of possible structural origins; and possible ‘working hollows’ and furnace or oven pits. Two inhumation burials of Roman date and a possible truncated/disturbed cremation burial were also observed.*

*A large amount of residual material was identified within the plough soil, including fragments of ceramic building material and limestone blocks, providing further evidence that some structures and associated occupation may have occurred at this location. Both the residual material and the buried remains were concentrated in the southern third of the site and extended the full width of the site alongside the Boston Road.*

*The results of the evaluation indicate that the southern third of the site was densely utilised and possibly occupied during the Roman period and that the intensity of land use diminished notably to the north, although enclosures and field systems may be anticipated in this area. Evidence of medieval ridge and furrow agriculture was also recorded as well as post-medieval field boundaries.*

*Although the archaeology is considered to be of local and possibly regional significance, no remains have been identified that would preclude a proposed development of the area, provided that a suitable mitigation strategy is in place to ensure preservation of the most significant archaeological remains by record (ie excavation, recording and reporting). As such, at least as far as archaeology is concerned, it is recommended that planning permission should be granted by the local planning authority, with a condition being attached to ensure the implementation of a concluding programme of archaeological investigation in advance of development.*



**Fig 1:** Site location map. Scale 1:25 000 (O.S. copyright licence no: AL515 32 A0001)

## Introduction

In April 2008 Pre-Construct Archaeology (Lincoln) (PCA Lincoln) carried out an archaeological evaluation for Axis on behalf of Eco2 Ltd on land to the north of Boston Road, to the east of Sleaford, in the North Kesteven district of Lincolnshire (centred on NGR: TF 0868 4586).

This work was undertaken on the recommendation of Joanna Hambley, the North Kesteven Council Heritage Officer to determine the archaeological potential of the site in order to inform an application for planning permission for the construction of a renewable energy plant (Planning application N/57/1111/07).

The evaluation was carried out in accordance with a specification produced by PCA Lincoln (PCA Lincoln 2008) and approved by Joanna Hambley on behalf of North Kesteven District Council.

The scheme of investigation complies with the recommendations of *Archaeology and Planning: Planning Policy Guidance Note 16* (Dept. of Environment 1990) and also follows the *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Field Evaluation* (Institute of Field Archaeologists 1999), *Standards for Field Archaeology in the East of England* (EAA Occasional Paper 14) and the *Management of Archaeological Projects II* (English Heritage 1991).

### 1 Site location and description (Figs. 1 and 2)

The site is located within the parish of Kirkby la Thorpe in the North Kesteven district of Lincolnshire, c.1.7km east of the centre of the historic market town of Sleaford and c.1km west of the village of Kirkby la Thorpe. It is situated immediately north of the Boston Road and c.200m west of the modern A17 Sleaford by-pass (NGR: TF 0868 4586).

The site lies at the foot of the gentle dip slope of the eastern side of the Lincoln Heath, at the edge of the historic western fens. It is located c.8km east of the Ancaster Gap and c.800m southeast of the modern course of the River Slea. A ridge of higher ground is discernable c.300m to the north and the land rises gently to the west although the higher ground on which the town of Sleaford is situated is now obscured by the embanked course of the railway (Bennett and Bennett 1993).

The site is flanked by open farmland both to the north and west. A deep ditch and newly planted hedgerow defines the northern limit of the proposed development site, while there is no physical boundary on the western side. The east of the site is flanked by a small grove of older deciduous trees to the southeast and younger fir trees to the northeast. The south of the site is flanked by a mature hedgerow and the embanked Boston Road. The development site is currently arable land and encloses approximately 5.8Ha.

The site is flat with no discernable variations in levels and lies at c.10m AOD. The underlying solid geology is mapped as belonging to the Oxford Clay Formation of the Jurassic era. This is overlain by drift geology of Fen sand and gravel of the Pleistocene and Recent eras (British Geological Survey 1972).

## 2 Archaeological and historical background

A summary of the known history and recorded archaeology within the immediate area has been provided in an archaeological desk-based assessment produced by AOC Archaeology Group (AOC 2007). The results of which are only outlined here.

Currently, evidence for human activity within the immediate area during the early prehistoric period is limited to isolated finds. These include examples of worked flint dated to the Mesolithic and Neolithic periods, scattered widely around the area east of Sleaford. Activity during the Bronze Age is also attested by a small number of isolated finds of worked flint and metal-work (AOC 2007).

A number of cropmark sites have been identified by aerial photographs and record a settled presence within the immediate area, although at present most of these sites remain undated and could belong to any period from the earlier prehistoric-Roman period. All of these sites lie to the south of the proposed development area. Currently the earliest exploitation, settlement and development of the area around Sleaford remain obscure (*ibid.*).

However, there is an increasing amount of evidence that indicates the area around Sleaford had become a focus for settlement of some status by the middle Iron Age and continued to be so throughout the late Iron Age and the Roman periods. Excavations north of the Boston Road towards the eastern edge of modern Sleaford have identified part of a middle Iron Age palisaded enclosure believed to be 'of a size and type hitherto unknown in Lincolnshire' (Elsdon 1997 p.2).

It has been speculated that prior to the drainage of the Fens from the Roman period onwards the area around Sleaford may have had better access to the sea than at present and that the River Slea may have been navigable for some distance inland. Combined with its proximity to the Ancaster Gap through the Lincoln Heath, which would provide the easiest access route from the coast to the Trent Valley, the area may have had some strategic importance (Elsdon 1997).

The combination of local strategic importance and a diversity of local resources, including inland/agricultural resources and wetland fen resources, particularly developing salt production may have contributed to the increasing prosperity, which has been archaeologically recorded in the area around Sleaford during the late Iron Age.

Evidence of this increasing local wealth in the late Iron Age consists of high quality local pottery, an unusually rich collection of imported Gallo-Belgic pottery and the debris from a mint consisting of over 4000 fragments of coin-pellet mould and in excess of 200 crucible fragments, constituting the largest collection of such material currently known from Iron Age Europe. It is suggested that this material indicates that the settlement around Sleaford was at least equal to Lincoln or Leicester, in terms of its economic status, during the late Iron Age and early Roman period (*ibid.*).

The exact nature of this Iron Age settlement remains unclear but may be speculated to have been focused on the higher ground upon which modern Sleaford is situated. However, recent excavations associated with the Hatton to Silk Willoughby Gas Pipeline have identified two areas of settlement to the south of the proposed development site which attest to the increasing concentration of people around the Sleaford area at this time and perhaps a sprawling settlement pattern rather than a nucleated one (AOC 2007).

The evidence for localised population growth and economic development during the Roman period is even better recorded by archaeological remains. The desk-based assessment has identified 16 individual sites, mostly concentrated within the modern limits of Sleaford but also dispersed to the east of the town, recording the growth of activity within the local area at this time (*ibid.*).

The Roman town appears to have been centred on the north-south Roman road, known locally as Mareham Lane where it crosses the River Sleas, linking Roman Chesterton (Durobrivae) with the Fortress and later *colonia* at Lincoln (Whitwell 1992). The extent and nature of the settlement of the Roman period remains unclear, however, recent excavations, at the new Sleaford Football Ground site, suggest that it may have extended further east than has previously been thought and possibly retained some of its sprawling character from the earlier period.

It is speculated that the growing importance of road transport during the Roman period, perhaps combined with drainage and silting up of the fens and local waterways may have contributed to the gradual decline of the settlement during the later Roman period. The creation of the *colonia* at Lincoln established the city as the centre for local political power and the settlement at Sleaford on the Mareham Lane Road may have effectively been by-passed by the more direct north-south course of Ermine Street to the west (Elsdon 1997).

During the post-Roman period the settlement appears to have declined although recent excavation suggests that there may have been no hiatus of occupation in the area as has previously been thought. The focus for settlement appears to have shifted westward by the early medieval period and the extent and significance of the old centre has been only recently rediscovered by the eastward expansion of the modern town (AOC 2007).

### **3 Aims and objectives**

The aims of the evaluation were to identify and characterize the extent of any archaeological remains or potential for remains within the proposed development area. This information will assist North Kesteven District Council in making an informed judgment on the impact upon the archaeological resource of the proposed development.

### **4 Methodology**

A detailed account of the methodology is set out in the specification for a programme of archaeological trial excavation (PCA Lincoln 2008) and is only summarised here.

The evaluation methodology required the excavation of sixteen trenches, each 30m long by 2m wide. Initial excavation was carried out using a tracked excavator fitted with a 2m wide toothless ditching bucket. All over burden was mechanically removed down to the natural substrate or to the top of the first significant archaeological feature. Where archaeological deposits were encountered, all further excavation was by hand.

Archaeological features were sample excavated to establish depths and profiles and, where possible, date and function. Features were recorded in plan and in section at appropriate scales (1:50 and 1:20), and written accounts were prepared on pro forma context record sheets. A colour photographic record was maintained throughout the project, and selected prints have been reproduced in this report.

A seventeenth trench was opened at the request of Joanna Hambley, Heritage Officer for North Kesteven District Council. This was targeted on the area immediately adjacent to the Boston Road in an attempt to identify whether or not the Roman road identified during recent excavation at the nearby Sleaford Football Ground, to the west of the site, was present on the proposed development site.

### **5 Results**

All the excavated trenches revealed a uniform plough soil covering the whole site, consisting of sandy silt with frequent limestone gravel inclusions. This had an average depth of c.0.35m – 0.4m across the site. Modern plough scarring was also identified across the site and was observed to cut across many archaeological features. This intrusion was not more than 500mm in depth. However, because of this it was necessary to remove this ‘interface’ layer, including the top of the natural substrate in order to obtain a clear horizon in which to adequately identify the archaeology.

A total of 160 sherds of pottery were recovered from the plough soil prior to and during the mechanical excavation of the evaluation trenches. Details of these can be found in Appendix 3 (J. Young), and consist of 22 post-medieval sherds, 15 medieval sherds and 123 sherds from the Romano-British period. The post-medieval sherds were found to be evenly distributed across the site while the medieval and Romano-British material was found to be much more concentrated within the southern half of the site.

Along with the identified pottery sherds a quantity of ceramic building material was also recovered (see J. Young in Appendix 3). The majority of these fragments were of early modern date. Four fragments were dated to the 'medieval to post medieval' period and six fragments of tile and brick were dated to the Roman period. As with the pottery these were concentrated along the southern edge of the site.

### **Trench 1**

At the southern end of Trench 1 a roughly north-south aligned furrow was observed extending beyond the western side of the trench. This is most probably associated with medieval ridge and furrow agriculture and similar examples were observed elsewhere throughout the site.

To the north of the furrow a series of small shallow pits were recorded [103, 105, 107, 109, 111, 115, 117, 119 and 121]. These pits were mostly roughly oval in shape, had moderately sloping sides and levelled out to a flat base. Most of the pits were filled with a very dark soil and some appeared to have been subject to heating. Some of these pits inter-cut each other. However, no dating evidence was recovered from any of these features. A single post-hole [113] was also recorded cut into the back fill of pit [111] this too produced no dating evidence.

The concentration, overlapping distribution and general uniformity of the pits suggests that this location was used for an activity that was being repeated, possibly an industrial working area. At present these features remain undated and the activity that produced them is unknown.

### **Trench 2**

Only a single *c.* north-south aligned furrow was observed in this trench. This was probably part of the medieval agricultural system.

### **Trench 3**

A pair of parallel, *c.* east –west aligned, drainage gullies were recorded in this trench [307 and 311]. Both gullies produced finds which were clearly of the early modern period, including pottery shreds dated to the late 16<sup>th</sup> – early 18<sup>th</sup> century and bottle glass. The location of these gullies corresponds with the location of a former field

boundary recorded on the Ordnance Survey map of 1889 (see AOC 2007 Fig.8) and probably represent the remains of this former field boundary.

At the western end of the trench, the northernmost of the two gullies was observed to cut across two *c.* north-south aligned gullies [303 and 305]. Similarly at the eastern end of the trench a single *c.* north-south aligned gully [313] was recorded as being cut by the southern most of the two east-west aligned gullies. The short sections of these three gullies that were exposed within the evaluation trench did not produce any dating evidence. It may be speculated that they reflected some form of land division, possibly enclosures, although of what period remains unclear.

A single small pit or post-hole [309] was also recorded, partially truncated by the northernmost of the two east-west aligned gullies. This too remains undated.

#### **Trench 4**

The east-west aligned gullies [307 and 311] recorded within Trench 3 were observed to continue to the east through this trench [403 and 405 respectively]. The southernmost of which partially truncated an irregular shallow pit [407]. No dating evidence was recovered from this feature.

#### **Trench 5**

Four *c.* north-south aligned furrows were observed within this trench and are probably part of the medieval agricultural system.

At the north-western end of the trench a large round possible post pit was recorded [507]. It appeared to have a central post pipe [509] within it and fired clay, possibly daub, was observed within the backfill of the pit itself. No dating evidence was recovered from this feature.

A similar sized pit was recorded *c.* 15m to the southeast, extending beyond the northern side of the trench [513]. This too remains undated. The two features may be structural but may not belong to the same construction as they are so far apart.

Two ditches were also recorded within this trench. One aligned *c.* northeast-southwest [503] and the other aligned *c.* east-west [515]. The later had a roughly 'V' shaped profile and its fill was clearly truncated by one of the north-south furrows. Neither of these two ditches produced any finds although the later, and probably the former as well may represent elements of pre-medieval land division.

#### **Trench 6**

Only a single *c.* north-south aligned furrow was observed in this trench; probably part of the medieval agricultural system.

## Trench 7

A single *c.* north-south aligned furrow was recorded within this trench and was probably part of the medieval agricultural system.

Towards the southern end of this trench, two *c.* east-west aligned shallow ditches were observed [703 and 705], both truncated by the north-south aligned furrow. Neither of the two ditches produced any dating evidence. If contemporary they may define a track between two enclosures or, if of different dates they may indicate a realignment of pre-medieval land divisions.

## Trench 8

A *c.* north-south aligned drainage gully [810] was recorded within this trench and probably represents the former field boundary recorded upon historical maps, which has been in-filled in recent times (see AOC 2007 Fig.8).

This drainage gully cuts across the fill of one [820] of a cluster of small pits [820, 822, 824 and 826] at the northern limit of this trench. An iron buckle, probably of post-medieval date was recovered from the fill of the truncated pit [818] as well as some animal bone. A single sherd of post-medieval pottery, dated to the 19<sup>th</sup> - 20<sup>th</sup> century, was also recovered from the northernmost of these pits [826]. The function of the pits remains unclear, although the dating evidence suggests a post-medieval origin for at least two of them.

The north-south aligned drainage gully [810] also cut across the top of a large in-filled *c.* northwest-southeast aligned ditch [806]. Although not entirely clear, it appeared that this ditch may have been re-cut [803]. Two sherds of abraded Roman pottery, dated to the mid-late 2<sup>nd</sup> century, and a fragment of animal bone were recovered from the fill of the possible re-cut (802). Another section was excavated through this ditch where it was exposed in Trench 11 (see below).

Three small pits [808, 812 and 814] were also recorded towards the southern end of this trench. Pit [808] was cut by the drainage gully [810], and both pits [808] and [812] were cut into the backfill of the large ditch [806] and thus clearly post-date the infilling of the large ditch. None of these pits produced any dating evidence and their function and relationship, if any, to the pits at the northern end of the trench remain unclear.

A possible posthole [818] was recorded near to the southern end of the trench and a narrow gully [816] was also recorded nearby. Both of these features remain undated. The narrow gully [816] appears to run parallel to the drainage gully [810], and it may be speculated that these are contemporary and that this gully represents a former trackside gully flanking the former field boundary.



## Trench 9

Three or possibly four *c.* north-south aligned furrows were recorded within this trench, and as elsewhere they probably represent the remains of medieval agriculture.

More significantly, a large number of mostly rounded pits and/or postholes of varying size and depth were recorded this trench. Some of these features inter-cut each other, and some seemed to show signs of heating. No cohesive pattern could be discerned amongst these features, within the confines of the evaluation trench.

With the exception of one small pit or posthole [933] at the western end of the trench none of these features produced any dating evidence. The one feature that did provide dating evidence contained 31 sherds of heat damaged Roman period pottery, all from the same original vessel dated to the early 2<sup>nd</sup> century. It has been suggested that this vessel may have been used to contain 'pyre goods relating to cremation rites' (see R.S. Leary in Appendix 3).

As such one possible explanation is provided for at least some of these features, although despite extensive sampling of the features within this trench no burnt bone was observed within any of these features and they do not appear to cremation pits. The processed sample from the primary fill (949) of pit [903] produced very little charcoal and could not be convincingly interpreted as being involved with the cremation process.

The concentration of features within this trench reflects a concentration of activity, possibly involving ovens or furnaces and some screening or shelter, or possibly involving cremation activity, or even a combination of both. Dating can only be speculative at this stage, although one feature, [pit 933] is securely dated to the early 2<sup>nd</sup> century, although another, [929] may be cut through a furrow and thus of a much later date.

## Trench 10

Three *c.* north-south aligned furrows were recorded within this trench, and as elsewhere they probably represent the remains of medieval agriculture.

Also within this trench, two close and roughly parallel ditches, aligned *c.* northeast – southwest, were recorded [1006 and 1008]. A single fragment of a small Samian vessel was recovered from the larger of the two ditches [1008], dated to the late 2<sup>nd</sup> – mid 3<sup>rd</sup> century. Whether these ditches represent a realignment of land division or a track between enclosures remains unclear.

Two postholes [1010 and 1017] and two inter-cutting pits [1013 and 1015] were also recorded within this trench. None of these features produced any dating evidence. The two postholes, which were *c.* 3m apart, may be part of a structure or possibly a fence-line. The inter-cutting pits extended beyond the southern side of the trench and

their complete plan could not be recorded although the exposed sections appeared to be very regular, with steep sides and a flat base. As such these features may also have had structural origins.

## **Trench 11**

Two *c.* north-south aligned furrows were recorded within this trench, probably representing the remains of medieval agriculture.

One of the furrows at the southern end of the trench was cut by a *c.* north-south post-medieval gully [1124], probably the same field boundary drainage gully that was identified within Trench 8, [810].

To the north of the post-medieval drainage gully a shallow *c.* east-west aligned gully [1105] was recorded. A single fragment of animal bone and nine sherds of Roman period pottery, dated to the mid 2<sup>nd</sup> – early 3<sup>rd</sup> century, were recovered from this shallow feature.

To the north of this gully two large inter-cutting pits were recorded [1107 and 1109] (see Appendix 1, Photo No.1). The earliest pit [1109] appeared to be over 2m wide with steep sides cut to a gently concave base at a depth of 0.7m below the top of the natural substrate. This pit appears to have been deliberately backfilled mostly with soil. No dating evidence was recovered from this feature.

The later pit [1107] was cut into the top of the back-filled earlier pit [1109]. This pit [1107] had a larger circumference, but more shallow depth and shallow sloping sides. It appears to have been used for the disposal of domestic rubbish and the excavated section through it produced 124 sherds of Roman period pottery, mostly dated to the late 3<sup>rd</sup> – 4<sup>th</sup> century, but including earlier material. Thirty three fragments of animal bone, fragments of marine and land mollusc shell, six heavily corroded fragments of iron (including fragments of a 'hearth bottom') and a small scrap of lead were also recovered from the backfill of this pit.

The processed sample taken from this deposit (1108) provided evidence of cereal grains (spelt wheat, *Triticum spelta* L.) as well as chaff material and some arable weeds. Possible fragments of egg shell were also identified along with fragments of animal bone, some of which were burnt.

To the northeast of the two pits a section of the large ditch identified in Trench 8, [806] was also recorded (see Photo No.3). This ditch [1111] had a number of discernable fills (1112, 1113, 1114 and 1115) all of which produced Roman period pottery, and most of which produced animal bone as well. The lowest, primary fill (1112) was notable for being waterlogged and preserving within it recognisable fragments of wood. Seeds recovered from the processed sample were mostly derived

from plants growing in hedges, such as blackberry, raspberry, elder, sloe and cherry/plum. The bone recovered from this deposit was also notably well preserved and robust. No evidence of re-cutting was observed in this section of the ditch. Most of the pottery recovered from this ditch was dated to the 2<sup>nd</sup> -3<sup>rd</sup> century but late 3<sup>rd</sup> – 4<sup>th</sup> century material was also recovered from the tertiary fill, (1114).

At the north-eastern end of the trench a shallow gully [1122] and a small pit [1120] was also recorded. Neither of these features produced any datable evidence.

The large ditch identified within this trench [1111], and appearing to continue into Trench 8, [806], appears to represent a significant land boundary. The inclusion of domestic debris within this ditch may be interpreted to indicate that settlement was occurring nearby throughout the use of this feature. Settlement nearby may also be inferred by the presence of the large rubbish pit [1107], noted above, to the southwest of this ditch.

### **Trench 12**

A single *c.* north-south aligned furrow was recorded within this trench, and is probably part of the remains of medieval agriculture in the area.

To the south of the furrow a series of shallow rounded pits extended down the entire length of this trench. Towards the southern end of the trench a large pit or possible ditch terminus, [1219] was also recorded. Only animal bone was recovered from the fill of this larger feature. None of the shallow pits produced dating evidence except for a single pit [1221], which was cut into the top of the backfilled possible ditch terminus. The single pottery sherd recovered from this pit has been dated to the late Iron Age – Conquest period. The function of these pits and their date of origin remain unclear.

### **Trench 13**

A large pit, [1313], not dissimilar to the large pits in Trench 11, [1107 and 1109] was observed extending beyond the southern limit of this trench. Finds recovered from this pit included 15 sherds of Roman period pottery (dated to the late 2<sup>nd</sup> – mid 3<sup>rd</sup> century), animal bone and marine mollusc shell. A small fragment of possible medieval period pottery was also recovered from this feature but this small fragment is considered to be intrusive here.

Immediately north of the pit, a *c.* east-west aligned ditch [1311] was recorded. This feature was unusual as the short section exposed in the trench was much wider towards the east than it was to the west and may possibly be an intersection between two converging ditches. Seven sherds of Roman period pottery, dated to the mid 1<sup>st</sup> – 2<sup>nd</sup> century was recovered from the excavated section of this feature.

Immediately north of the possible converging ditches, three shallow pits [1303, 1305 and 1323] were recorded extending beyond the edges of the trench. Pit [1305] produced small amounts of Roman period pottery dated to the late 2<sup>nd</sup> – mid 3<sup>rd</sup> century. A single shallow posthole [1321] was also recorded between the pits and may represent a structural element associated with the activity that produced the pits.

In the middle of the trench a *c.* east-west aligned ditch [1307] was recorded. This shared the same alignment of ditches observed in Trenches 15 and 16, and may represent a property boundary or enclosure ditch. Roman period pottery (dated to the mid – late 2<sup>nd</sup> century), fragments of animal bone, land and marine mollusc shell and a single fragment of industrial slag material were recovered from the excavated section of this ditch.

Immediately to the north of this ditch a group of three shallow, elongated oval pits were observed [1315, 1317 and 1319] (see Photo No.8). They were evenly spaced and appeared to be deliberately laid out in a row. No dating evidence was recovered from any of these features. Their function and date remain unclear although they may indicate working areas associated with a nearby furnace or oven (see below).

To the north of the three pits a small pit [1309] extending beyond the limit of the trench to the west was recorded (see Photo No.7). This contained a distinct layer of charcoal and fired clay and may be part of a furnace or possible oven, with a clay ‘hood’ which has subsequently collapsed into the ‘fire pit’. No dating evidence was recovered from this feature.

#### **Trench 14**

A large pit, [1403], very similar to the large pits observed in Trench 11 [1107 and 1109] was recorded at the eastern end of this trench. It is possible that like the pits in Trench 11 this may have in fact been more than one pit with a later one cut into a backfilled earlier one, although in the narrow excavated section this was not clear. As with the latter pit in Trench 11 this pit appears to have been used as a domestic rubbish pit, with 61 sherds of Roman period pottery (including fragments of Samian and Mortaria, dated to the early – mid 2<sup>nd</sup> century) being recovered, as well as animal bone, fragments of horn and mollusc shells.

Immediately adjacent to this pit one of two human burials identified during the evaluation was observed (see Photo No.5). This grave [1405] consisted of a north-south aligned extended inhumation. Only sufficient bone was uncovered to confirm that this feature was a grave. The excavated section was recorded and then backfilled. Sixteen Roman period pottery sherds, dated to the mid – late 2<sup>nd</sup> century, were recovered from the backfill of the grave, including most of a single vessel, which may represent deliberate deposition of possible grave goods with the deceased.

To the west of the grave another large possible rubbish pit [1407] was observed (see Photo No.2). The small excavated section produced 35 sherds of Roman period pottery (dated to the mid – late 2<sup>nd</sup> century), animal bone and a small scrap of lead. Several small blocks of limestone were also observed within the upper fill of this pit.

To the west of this large pit a single undated posthole [1409] was recorded. To the west of the posthole, a pit [1411] extending beyond the southern side of the trench and a small curving gully [1413] extending beyond the northern side of the trench were also recorded. Ten sherds of Roman period pottery (dated to later than the mid 2<sup>nd</sup>), animal bone, mollusc shell and a single iron nail (a modern intrusion of probable agricultural origins) were recovered from the pit, but no finds were recovered from the smaller gully.

At the western end of the trench three small postholes [1415, 1417 and 1419] were recorded along with a small area of possible disturbance [1421] adjacent to the postholes (see Photo No.6). It is possible that these close-set postholes are structural and may represent the southern corner of a small construction. The area of disturbance may be the result of puddling outside of this structure.

## **Trench 15**

A single *c.* north-south aligned furrow was recorded within this trench, and is probably part of the remains of medieval agriculture in the area.

At the south-eastern end of the trench a large pit [1533] was recorded. This appears to have been deliberately backfilled with soil. Two sherds of pottery were recovered from the excavated section and have been dated to the late Iron Age – Conquest period. It appeared that this pit may have truncated an earlier pit [1525] and two ditches [1523] and [1527], although it is also possible that these shallow features may have been part of the original excavation of the large pit [1533], the true relationship was not clear within the confines of the evaluation trench.

To the northwest of the large pit a cluster of pits or possible postholes [1513, 1515, 1517 and 1519] were observed, possibly flanking a narrow ditch [1507] and gully [1521]. Most of these features inter-cut each other and appear to represent a succession of activities in one place, although the pits/postholes may have formed structural elements they do not all appear to have been contemporary and may possibly represent construction and rebuilding at this location.

The fills of some of these features (1518 and 1520) from pits [1517 and 1519 respectively] appeared to contain some heated or burnt material, although subsequent processing of the samples taken from these features only produced fragments of charred or burnt snail shell as the only confirmation of heated material.

Fifty One sherds of Roman period pottery (dated to the early 2<sup>nd</sup> century) and animal bone was recovered from the ditch [1507] which these features appeared to flank.

This ditch may be the same east-west aligned ditch that was recorded in Trenches 13 and 16 [1307 and 1607 respectively].

To the northwest of this cluster of features three parallel shallow ditches were recorded [1504, 1511 and 1529]. These may be a pair of former trackside ditches, with the third being a realignment or expansion of the trackway. A fragment of Roman period pottery was recovered from the eastern most of the ditches, [1511], associated with a quantity of burnt bone. This appears to be a truncated, or possibly even a redeposited cremation burial, deposited within, or disturbed by the original excavation of the possible trackside ditch.

The middle one of these three ditches [1504] cut through the second human burial, [1502]. This burial was also an extended inhumation, although aligned *c.* east-west. The grave cut was quite wide and very regular and combined with five nails, recovered from the fill of the grave a coffin burial may be speculated. Only the skull was uncovered, at the west end of the grave, to confirm that the feature was a grave. Two sherds of Roman period pottery, dated to the early – mid 2<sup>nd</sup> century, were also recovered from the backfill. This material appeared to be residual rather than the remains of associated grave goods.

An apparently linear feature [1531] was partially exposed at the north-western limit of this trench. Its full extent was not revealed and no dating evidence was recovered from it.

## **Trench 16**

A single *c.* north-south aligned furrow was recorded within this trench, and is probably part of the remains of medieval agriculture in the area.

At the southern end of the trench a large shallow pit, [1603], similar to the large pit in Trench 15 was recorded. Both of these features had very irregular bases and appear to have been deliberately backfilled. Eight sherds of Roman period pottery, dated to the late 2<sup>nd</sup> – early 3<sup>rd</sup> century, and fragments of animal bone were recovered from the fill of this pit.

Towards the northern end of this trench two converging ditches [1607 and 1611] and two apparently associated postholes [1609 and 1617] were recorded (see Photo No.4). Fragments of animal bone were recovered from the southern most of the two ditches [1607] which shared the same alignment as the ditches observed in Trenches 13 and 15 [1307 and 1507 respectively] and appear to be part of the same feature. Eight sherds of Roman pottery, dated to the late 2<sup>nd</sup> – 3<sup>rd</sup> century were recovered from the northern most of the two ditches [1611].

The two postholes [1609 and 1617] appear to respect one or both of the ditches although their exact relationship cannot be confirmed within the limited area of the evaluation trench. The arrangement of flanking postholes either side of a ditch is

similar to that observed around the ditch, [1507] in Trench 15 and it may indicate a flanking fence line or even palisade. No dating evidence was recovered from either of the two postholes.

Adjacent to the northern most ditch [1611], was an irregular feature [1613] was recorded and has been interpreted as root or burrowing disturbance. At the northern end of this trench a large shallow pit [1615] was recorded extending beyond the limits of the trench. No dating evidence was recovered from this feature and its full extent was not discernable.

### **Trench 17**

A short section of trench, only 9m long was excavated at the southern edge of the site in order to ascertain the presence or otherwise of the projected Roman road observed in nearby excavations at the Sleaford Football Grounds. No evidence of a road or roadside ditch was observed and it is concluded the Roman road may lie under the existing road at this location.

A *c.* north-south aligned furrow was observed within this trench, and is probably part of the medieval agriculture observed elsewhere. Four pits were also observed [1703, 1705, 1707 and 1709]. These features were not excavated as the trench was only opened with the specific aim of identifying the course of the Roman road and not to extend the evaluation. A plan and photographic record was made of the features exposed in this trench.

## **6 Discussion and conclusion**

The evaluation has identified a concentration of archaeological remains within the southern third of the proposed development site. The density of archaeological features appeared to be fairly consistent within the ten evaluation trenches (Nos.8-17) opened in the southern part of the site and it may be speculated that this density of archaeology is present across the whole of the road frontage extending for some 80m-90m to the north.

The remaining evaluation trenches (Nos.1-7) located in the northern two thirds of the site identified comparatively few archaeological features, although the northern part of the site could not be considered to be devoid of archaeology particularly around Trenches 1 and 5, there is no indication that the density of archaeological features observed in the southern part of the site extends across the whole site.

Although many of the features identified during the course of the evaluation remain undated, those features that have provided dating evidence are predominantly dated to the Roman period, specifically spanning the mid 1st–late 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries AD. Dated exceptions to the Roman period include two features potentially dated to the Late Iron Age–Conquest period, two post-medieval field boundaries and pits of the same

date, and the apparent medieval ridge and furrow, which has been dated typologically.

As such it may be concluded that the archaeological remains contained within the proposed development area are predominately dated to the Roman period, with the possibility of some limited Late Iron Age–Conquest period material being present as well as the remains of medieval agricultural systems and post-medieval field systems.

The post-medieval period archaeology identified during the course of the evaluation consists of former field boundaries, aligned *c.* east-west identified within Trenches 3 and 4 [gullies 307, 311, 403 and 405], and aligned *c.* north-south identified within trenches 8 and 11 [gullies 810 and 1124]. These are already recorded on historic maps and may be considered to be of very limited significance. The pits [818 and 826] dated to this period may also be considered to be of limited significance.

The medieval period archaeology identified during the course of the evaluation consists of only the remains of ridge and furrow agriculture. This may be considered to be of local interest although this evaluation has perhaps already provided a sufficient level of recording of such features, and it is suggested that little if any further investigation and recording would be worthwhile, other than perhaps to establish the full extent of these features.

It may also be noted that whilst no features, other than the in-filled furrows themselves, were positively identified as originating from the medieval period, 15 sherds of medieval pottery spanning the 13<sup>th</sup>–15<sup>th</sup> century were recovered as surface finds. These may be accounted for as evidence of manuring, associated with the ridge and furrow agriculture, and may possibly indicating the systematic disposal of waste from a near by medieval settlement, probably the village of Kirkby la Thorpe.

The Roman period archaeology is more significant and includes a notable land boundary identified within Trenches 8 and 11 [ditches 806 and 1111]. This feature contained well preserved waterlogged remains securely dated to the Roman period within its earliest fill (layer 1112). A number of smaller, probable enclosure ditches, identified within Trenches 11, 13, 15 and 16 are also securely dated to the Roman period [ditches 1105, 1307, 1310, 1507, 1511 and 1611]. Similar ditches identified in Trenches 3, 5 and 7, [ditches 303, 305, 313, 503, 515, 703 and 705], may also be part of the former Roman landscape which these features appear to represent.

Other identified Roman period remains include the large pits within Trenches 11, 13, 14, 15 and 16, [pits 1107, 1109, 1313, 1403, 1407, 1533 and 1603]. The original excavation of these pits appears to have been a regular activity, concentrated along the southern side of the site, although their purpose remains unclear. They may simply have served as ponds, perhaps for traffic along the former road or perhaps the ground water was being used as part of some industrial process focused in this area.



This concentration of large pits is unusual and is certainly worthy of further investigation.

No individual structures dating to the Roman period were positively identified during the course of the evaluation, although numerous postholes were recorded as well as possible drip gullies which may be interpreted as being the archaeological remains of small structures. Furthermore, the presence of a small amount of ceramic building material and limestone blocks within final fills of ditches and dispersed throughout the plough soil indicate that more substantial structures may have formerly occupied parts of the site and may have left some archaeologically recognisable remains; not identified during the evaluation.

A number of pits identified within Trenches 1, 5, 9, 10, 13 and 15 contained material that appeared to have been burnt or heated [pits 103, 105, 111, 117, 507, 901, 905, 915, 923, 935, 943, 949, 1017, 1309, 1517 and 1519]. It may be speculated that amongst these features are possibly domestic hearths and ovens and/or furnaces. As such these features may be indicative of normal domestic and/or industrial activity that may be anticipated to accompany a settlement.

However, the presence of a possible disturbed cremation identified within Trench 15, trackside ditch [1511], may indicate that funerary rites associated with cremation may also have produced at least some of these heated/burnt features. However, as no burnt/cremated bone was identified within any of these features the author is reluctant to speculate about the presence of a cremation cemetery (see R.S.Leary in Appendix 3), but rather like the two inhumation burials (see below) limited/isolated cremations may have taken place within the area.

The two human burials identified during the course of the evaluation, in Trenches 14 and 15, [grave cuts 1405 and 1502], appear to be securely dated to the Roman period. It may be speculated that they both belong to the same cemetery group as they are within *c.*25m of each other. However, in the absence of other graves being identified within the same evaluation trenches, it is just as likely that these are individual burials or two separate small groups. In either case it remains a distinct probability that other burials and possibly cremation burials may be located nearby and possibly elsewhere on the site.

The original excavation of a ditch, [1504] cutting through one of the burials, [1502] identified within Trench 15 provides the clearest example of the redevelopment of the site through the Roman period. A number of other inter-cutting features, such as the two large pits in Trench 11, [1107 and 1109] and other pits and gullies/ditches in Trench 15, such as [pits 1513, 1515, 1517, 1519, ditch 1507 and gully 1521] all indicate multiple phases of activity at this site. This indicates that the high concentration of features in the southern part of the site may be the result of a prolonged period of low-level occupation, perhaps shifting along the roadside over time, rather than a short period of intense occupation confined to a relatively small area.

The dating evidence provided by the recovered pottery indicates a period of activity that produced significant archaeologically recognisable features spanning the Late Iron Age-Conquest period to the mid 4<sup>th</sup> century AD, excluding the medieval furrows. Material from the earliest, Late Iron Age-Conquest, period consists of only three sherds of pottery, recovered from two features (pit 1221 and large pit 1533). This is perhaps not enough to suggest an entire phase of activity.

However, it may be noted that both features that produced material of this date had been cut into earlier features (pit [1221] cut into ditch terminus [1219] and the large pit [1533] cut into ditches [1523 and 1527]) and as such this material may in fact be redeposited from these earlier features or even possibly residual surviving in the soil until a later period. Thus their true origins remain unclear, although, limited remains of Late Iron Age-Conquest period landscape may be speculated to be present within the proposed development site, and possibly already encountered but not convincingly dated.

Material from the earliest Roman period identified (mid 1<sup>st</sup>-mid 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD) consists of 154 sherds of pottery from six features (pit [933], secondary fill of the large ditch [1111], ditch [1311], large pit [1403], grave cut [1502] and ditch [1507]). The deliberate deposition of material of this period, specifically the fragments of a heat damaged pot recovered from pit [933], the apparent large rubbish pit [1403] and numerous fragments recovered from within ditch [1507] provide convincing evidence of activity/occupation probably from the early 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD at this location. This is further supported by what may be residual material recovered from other features. As with the earlier material there are perhaps an insufficient number of dated features with which to discuss the nature of activity during this phase, although it may be noted that this material is predominantly concentrated in the southeast corner of the site around Trenches 9, 13, 14 and 15.

It may be speculated that activity/occupation intensified throughout the second Roman period identified (mid 2<sup>nd</sup> – mid 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries AD), as the total number of finds from this period and their distribution increases to a total of 170 sherds recovered from 13 features. This includes ditches [806, 1008, 1105, residual material in 1111, 1308, 1509 and 1611], pits [1306, 1314, 1408, 1412 and 1603] and grave cut [1405]. As with the earliest Roman period the greatest concentration of material from this period is located within the southeast corner of the site. The apparent grave goods recovered from grave cut [1405] securely date this burial to the mid-late 2<sup>nd</sup> century at the earliest and collectively this material appears to record activity/occupation is well established by this time.

Activity/occupation at this site appears to have been significantly reduced by the late 3<sup>rd</sup> – 4<sup>th</sup> centuries AD as only two features produced pottery sherds of this date. The main period of infilling of the large ditch [1111] contains material of this date. Similarly most of the finds from the nearby rubbish pit [1107] were also from this period. Both of these features are located at the southwest of the site and may possibly indicate that the former focus of activity in the southeast had by this time

come to an end and had shifted elsewhere, perhaps to the west beyond the limits of the proposed development site.

As such the exact nature and full extent of the Roman period activity/occupation of this site remains unclear, however, the dating evidence suggests a peak of activity in the mid-late 2<sup>nd</sup> century, perhaps with its origins in the mid 1<sup>st</sup>-early 2<sup>nd</sup> century and continuing until the mid 3<sup>rd</sup> century when the distribution pattern of material suggest that activity shifted to the west during the late 3<sup>rd</sup> century.

A small settlement of some prosperity, perhaps a farmstead incorporating a small burial ground perhaps for just one family group, may be speculated to have existed on or very near to the southeast corner of the proposed development site. A settlement here may have benefited commercially from its proximity to the Roman transport system and the nearby settlement at Sleaford and appears to have prospered during the mid-late 2<sup>nd</sup> century. It may even have been part of the suburban development of the settlement at Sleaford, initially expanding alongside the road to the east and wholly dependant upon the town's economic prosperity.

It may be concluded that this site is certainly of local importance, within its own right and in defining the extent and character of the settlement at Sleaford and its environs. It is also probably of some regional importance in understanding the broader development of Roman settlements within the region and their connection to the local, regional and wider imperial economy, specifically changing trade patterns, Romanisation and the growth and decline of such settlements.

However, nothing has been identified during the course of the evaluation that is of greater (*i.e.* national) importance, or that would preclude development of the site, and an agreed and structured programme of excavation, recording and reporting may be appropriate as part of the development, specifically targeting those area which will be most at risk for the development.

## 7 References

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