

# CFA Archaeology Ltd

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*Interpretation, Design & Display*

**Christchurch Primary School,  
Fairmile, Christchurch,  
Dorset**

**Archaeological Evaluation**

**Report No. MK074/17**

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**Christchurch Primary School, Fairmile, Christchurch,  
Dorset – Archaeological Evaluation  
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## **1. SUMMARY**

*CFA Archaeology Ltd carried out an archaeological evaluation for Dorset County Council Estates on proposed new school development site, on land off the Marsh Lane, Christchurch, Dorset (centred on SZ 152 946). The Site is located in north-eastern part of Christchurch, and consists of grazing lands and former quarries, bounded west by Marsh Lane and settling tanks for a water company to the east. Six trenches were excavated revealing shallow plough-truncated linear ditches aligned north-east to south-west in the central part of the Site and a single ditch, similarly aligned, to the north. No dating evidence or organic material was encountered in any of the features and they are thought to possibly be the remains of medieval or post-medieval land division or modern cultivation.*

## **2. INTRODUCTION**

### **2.1. General**

This document presents the results of an archaeological evaluation undertaken by CFA Archaeology Ltd (CFA) between the 10th and 11th January on the Christchurch Primary School development site (the Site) on land off Marsh Land, Christchurch, Dorset. The work was commissioned by Dorset County Council Estates.

### **2.2. Planning Background**

The County Archaeologist did not issued a Brief for the work required to fulfil the planning conditions, but indicated that five trenches would be excavated across the unquarried part of the Site. These locations were determined during a meeting with the County Archaeologist before the start of the evaluation.

The work was carried out in accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) dated November 2016, covering this programme of works produced by CFA Archaeology Ltd and approved by Dorset County Council's Planning Archaeologist.

### **2.3. Background**

The town of Christchurch is located on the south coast, east of Bournemouth where two rivers, the Stour and the Avon join. The proposed school development lies in the northern part of the town, between a suburban area called Fairmile (west) and the River Avon (east). The Site (Fig. 1) comprises grazing grounds and paddocks on a ridge above the River (at 8m aOD), with

some of the Site having been quarried away in the 20th century for gravel extraction. Overall the development measures 2.2 ha.

The Site is underlain by superficial River Terrace Deposits (sand and gravel) overlying the Branksome Sand Formation (sand, clayey fine sand, laminated sand and clay) of Eocene age.

#### **2.4. Archaeological Background**

There has been no previous archaeological work on the Site but, according to the Dorset Historic Environment Record, a variety of prehistoric artefacts have been recovered in and around the Site. These are mostly flints, but there were also two Bronze Age pots. The records of these finds describe them as being found in gravel quarries, presumably those extending into the Site boundary.

#### **2.5. Objectives**

The aims of the evaluation were to:

- establish the presence or absence, quality and extent of archaeological remains and their location within the development area
- gather sufficient information to enable an assessment of the potential significance of any archaeological remains to be made and the impact which development will have upon them
- enable an informed decision to be made regarding the future treatment of any archaeological remains and consider any appropriate mitigatory measures to be undertaken either in advance of and/or during development

### **3. WORKING METHODS**

#### **3.1. General**

CFA Archaeology Ltd follows the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists' Code of Conduct, Standards and Guidance.

#### **3.2. Trenching**

All the trenches were excavated in the non-quarried parts of the Site (see Fig. 1) on the top of the gravel ridge above the river, where archaeology was most likely to be found. Three trenches each measuring 50m long and 1.8m wide were excavated in the central part of the Site (Trenches 01, 02 and 03) and two 25m x 1.8m trenches dug on opposite orientations in a paddock at the northern end (Trenches 04 and 05). A sixth 25m trench (Trench 06) was opened as a contingency to clarify the extent and nature of the shallow ditches found in the central area.

#### **3.3. Excavation and Recording Strategy**

Topsoil and subsoil were removed by a mechanical excavator fitted with a toothless ditching bucket under constant archaeological supervision, to reveal archaeological remains or, where these are absent, the natural substrate.

Trenches containing archaeological features were planned at a scale of 1:50 with detailed plans and sections of the features themselves at 1:20; surveying of features and trenches was carried out with a Trimble Geo7X RTK GPS unit accurate to 8mm horizontally and 12mm vertically. Archaeological features were sample-excavated by hand in order to achieve the objectives listed in Section 2.5 above. Sections excavated through linear features were 1.0m wide. The character, composition and general depositional sequence of the site stratification were recorded on pro-forma sheets, with a unique context number being allocated to each distinct deposit and feature. A full photographic record comprising digital images was made. General views were taken to place the site in context, as well as specific features. The excavated area, spoil heaps and features were scanned with a metal detector.

## **4. ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESULTS**

### **4.1. General**

The locations of all trenches are shown in Fig. 1 and a summary of all trenches is contained in Appendix 1. Illustrations and photos referred to in the text can be found at the back of the report. An overview of the trenches is presented below, followed by the descriptions of trenches containing features. Archaeological context numbers are shown in brackets.

### **4.2. Trench Descriptions**

Topsoil and subsoil deposits were similar in all of the trenches. Both were composed of fine sand with organic material and the boundary between the two was often blurred. The topsoil (0101-0601) was darker and richer in organic material and its surface was covered by grass. The subsoil (0201-0602), an old cultivation soil, lay below and was mostly composed of grey fine sand with frequent traces of bioturbation including mole and rabbit holes. Cultivation of this layer was evident by the plough scars found scratched into natural geology below. A single tiny flint artefact was found in the topsoil along with two small pieces of non-diagnostic red brick or tile, probably 19th or 20th century. A single flint blade was also picked up from the Site surface. Across most of the trenches, the natural geology comprised light-beige fine to medium sands with occasional channels patches of reddish-brown gravel, though gravel was evident right across the Trench 01.

#### *Trench 1 (Fig. 1)*

This trench contained no archaeology.

#### *Trench 2 (Fig. 2)*

Two linear ditch features were found crossing the trench cut into natural sands and gravels on a north-east to south-west orientation. Ditch 0205 (Fig. 4), the most northerly of the two, measured 0.8m wide, 0.4m deep and had a U-shaped base. It was filled with a light medium grey sand (0204). The second ditch (0207) (Fig. 5), was located in the southern part of the trench was cut into natural gravels. This measured 1.3m in wide and 0.3m deep with a U-shaped profile. The fill (0206) was grey sand. A single piece of burned flint was found in the fill.

### *Trench 3 (Fig. 6)*

Three linear ditch features were found crossing the trench on the same alignment to those in Trench 02. At the northern end was ditch 0305 (Fig. 7), 0.85m wide and 0.3m deep with a U-shaped profile filled with a beige-grey sand (0304). A single pieces of undiagnostic struck flint was recovered from the fill. South of this was Ditch 0307 (Fig. 8), 0.7m wide and 0.35m deep filled with a similar fill to Ditch 0305 (0306). At the southern end was ditch 0309 (Fig. 9) measuring 0.9m wide and 0.5m deep with a U-shaped profile that was steeper on the northern side. The fill was a grey-beige sand (0308).

### *Trench 4 (Fig. 10)*

This trench contained no archaeology.

### *Trench 5 (Fig. 11)*

At the northern end of this trench was single ditch on the same alignment as the ditches in the other trenches (0505) (Fig. 12). The was 0.75m wide, 0.25m deep with a dished profile and was filled with a beige sand (0504) with patches of darker organic material representing tree rooting or animal burrows.

### *Trench 6 (Fig. 13)*

Trench 06 was excavated to try to further define the nature of the ditches between Trenches 02 and 03 and to see if they changed orientation. On excavation this revealed no new information, only the continuations of two of the ditch features identified in trenches 02 and 03. At the southern end of the trench was 0605 measuring 1m wide and 0.45m deep with a U-shaped profile filled with material identical to the fill of Ditch 0309 in Trench 03 (0605). At the northern end was ditch 0608, 0.9m wide and 0.3m deep filled with a grey sand (0607).

## **5. FINDS**

By Antoni Nowak, Jakub Mugaj and Tamlin Barton

### **Flint** (see table 1)

Three pieces of struck flint were recovered during the evaluation, a broad blade, a blade butt and a flake. In addition a single piece of burned flint was also recovered.

The largest object (1), recovered from the site surface, is a broken broad blade which has been detached from opposite platform core. The proximal



end of blade is absent. The lateral pseudoretouch on edges is post-depositional. The blade may possibly be upper Palaeolithic in date.

The small blade butt was found in the topsoil of Trench 02 and has been subjected to much less post-deposition abrading than (1). The flake (3) is was found in the fill of feature (0305). Both of these pieces are undiagnostic, though they are broadly prehistoric and the lack abrasion suggests they may be from a later period than (1). The burnt flint (4) is from a small halved flint nodule recovered from feature 0207. Such flint may have been burned through fire activity dating to any period, but it is often associated with the later prehistoric period.

Context Fill/Cut	Cat Number	Material	Condition	Type	Description	ML	MW	MT h
Site Surface	1	Grey flint	Post-deposition abrading of edges	Broad blade	A broad blade with	57	29	8
(0201)	2	Grey flint	Good	Blade butt	Broken off butt from a broad blade	23	14	4
(0304) [0305]	3	Grey flint with orange patina	Good	Irregular flake	Undiagnostic flake from early stage of processing of core with orange patina on two sides	35	25	9
(0206) [0207]	4	Flint	Good	Burnt flint	Burnt pieces of flint nodule, not struck	42	23	13

*Table 1. Summary of worked and burnt flint*

### **Ceramic Building Material (CBM)**

Two pieces of undiagnostic CBM were recovered from the topsoil in Trench 02 (0201). The fragments, probably from bricks, are in poor condition and are highly abraded, both of the same orange-red sandy fabric which is likely to be 19th or 20th century in date.

## **6. DISCUSSION**

The evaluation found the plough-truncated remains of five shallow ditches of similar widths (0.8-1.3m) aligned on the same northeast to southwest orientation. The first is represented by 0207, the second by 0205, 0605 and 0309, the third by 0305, the fourth by 0307 and 0607 and the fifth is in the northern part of the Site, 0505. The ditches contain no datable finds or indeed any organic material worthy of analysis; their fills are simply sands slightly darker than the surrounding natural sand. The pieces of burnt flint and the undiagnostic flint flake recovered from ditches 0207 and 0305 are not considered useful in terms of dating the ditches, as prehistoric lithics were also found on the site surface as well as in the topsoil and so may easily have

been incorporated into the fills of the ditches via bioturbation. This is particularly likely given the mole and rabbit holes noted in nearly all of the trenches. The presence of a few pieces of struck flint and burnt flint suggests that the ridges above the River Avon in this area were used by prehistoric people, possibly starting as early as the upper Palaeolithic and into later prehistoric periods; the reports of Bronze Age pots from the quarries shows that some activity may have continued at least till the Bronze Age. However, the lack of dense concentrations of lithic artefacts and any pottery in the evaluation trenches shows that that there is unlikely to have ever been sustained prehistoric activity within the Site boundary.

From the excavated evidence, the function and date of the ditches is unclear, however we know that they were not excavated for drainage purposes given the local free-draining geology. The orientations of the ditches are, interestingly, all at roughly 90 degrees to the River Avon. This may suggest that that may have been simple narrow ditches marking plot boundary divisions radiating up from the river. The gaps between them (just 6m between 0307/0607 and 0305 and 12m between 0307/0607 and 0309/0605/0205) do not at first appear to useful for agricultural plots, however they do fit within a range very similar to medieval and post-medieval ridge and furrow field systems. Though no ridge and furrow was noted during the evaluation, perhaps these ditches are some form of local variation marking the boundary between cultivated strips.

There is also a possibility that the ditches may represent a more modern form of agricultural cultivation however, the absence of modern pottery or brick fragments in the features is noteworthy and they appear a little too wide for cultivation trenches such as potato drills.

## **7. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION**

The evaluation has revealed the presence of prehistoric struck flint and burned flint on the Site, though this is sparse and appears not to represent significant prehistoric occupation or activity.

The closely spaced shallow ditches that are on the same orientation and contain no dating evidence are likely to be medieval or later in date and are likely to represent either agricultural land divisions or the remains of cultivation trenches. Though interesting in terms of understanding previous agricultural land divisions, these features are not considered significant.

## 8. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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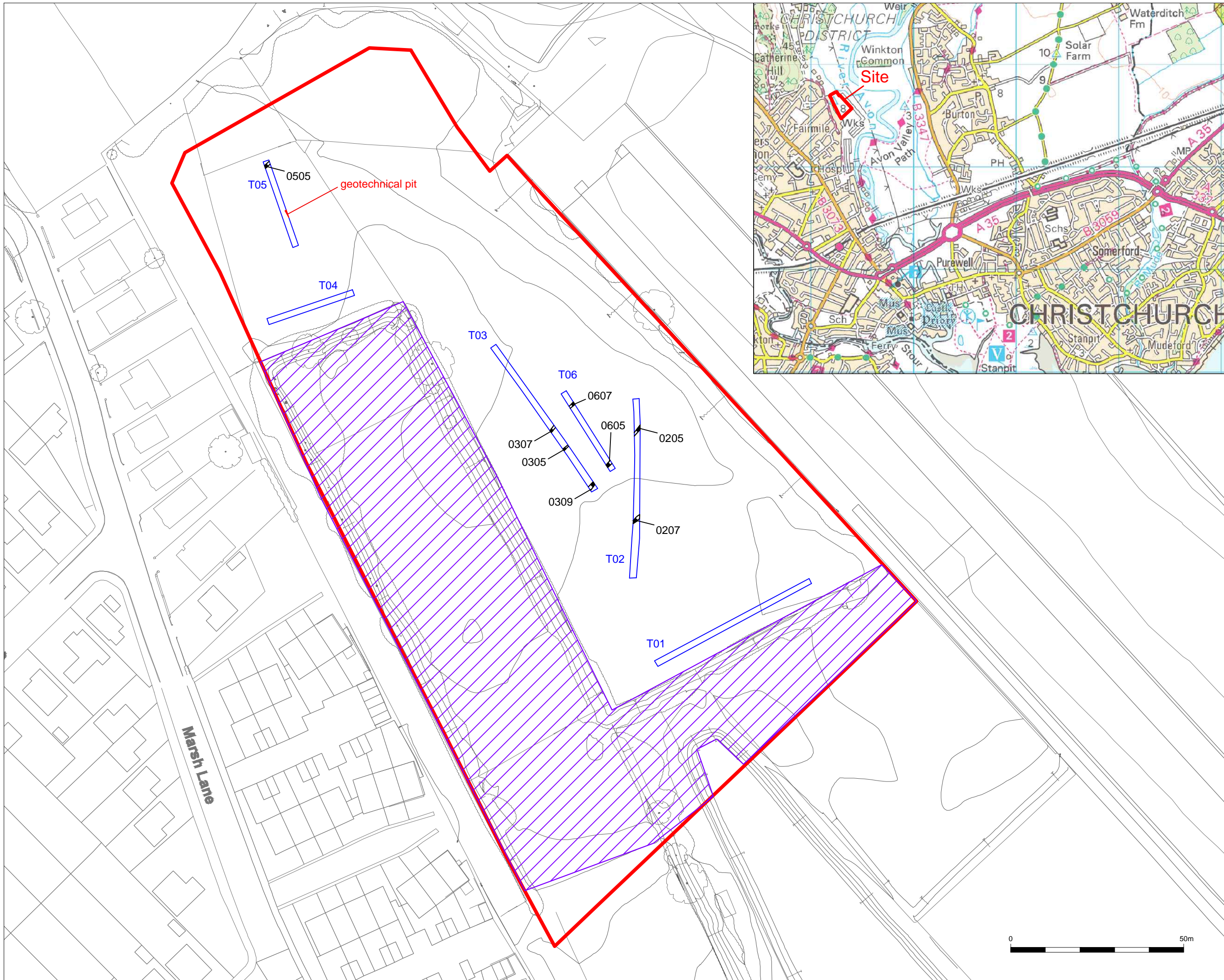
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## APPENDIX 1: Trench Summary

Trench 01		Trench Size 51 x 1.8m
Trench depth 0.55-0.77m	Topsoil depth 0.12-0.15m	Subsoil depth 0.3-0.35m
<i>No archaeology.</i>		
Trench 02		Trench Size 5 x 1.8m
Trench depth 0.m	Topsoil depth 0.m	Subsoil depth 0.m
0204	Fill of linear feature	Unknown, possibly modern
0205	Cut of linear feature	Unknown, possibly modern
0206	Fill of linear feature	Unknown, possibly modern
0207	Cut of linear feature	Unknown, possibly modern
Trench 03		Trench Size 50.5m x 1.8m
Trench depth 0.38-0.45m	Topsoil depth 0.1-0.24m	Subsoil depth 0.18-0.2m
0304	Fill of linear feature	Unknown, possibly modern
0305	Cut of linear feature	Unknown, possibly modern
0306	Fill of linear feature	Unknown, possibly modern
0307	Cut of linear feature	Unknown, possibly modern
0308	Fill of linear feature	Unknown, possibly modern
0309	Cut of linear feature	Unknown, possibly modern
Trench 04		Trench Size 26m x 1.8m
Trench depth 0.54-0.6m	Topsoil depth 0.28-0.36m	Subsoil depth 0.07-0.23m
<i>No archaeology.</i>		
Trench 05		Trench Size 26.5m x 1.8m
Trench depth 0.45-0.6m	Topsoil depth 0.16-0.26m	Subsoil depth 0.09-0.22m
<i>Context</i>	<i>Feature type</i>	<i>Date</i>
0504	Fill of linear feature	Unknown, possibly modern
0506	Cut of linear feature	Unknown, possibly modern
Trench 06		Trench Size 27m x 1.8m
Trench depth 0.45-0.47m	Topsoil depth 0.1-0.12m	Subsoil depth 0.23-0.27m
<i>Context</i>	<i>Feature type</i>	<i>Date</i>
0604	Fill of linear feature	Unknown, possibly modern
0605	Cut of linear feature	Unknown, possibly modern
0606	Fill of linear feature	Unknown, possibly modern
0607	Cut of linear feature	Unknown, possibly modern



**Key:**

- Site boundary
- Quarried area
- Evaluation trench
- linear feature

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Title:  
 Site location and trench plan showing linear ditches

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 Christchurch Primary School, Fairmile, Christchurch, Dorset – Archaeological Evaluation

Client:  
 Dorset County Council

Scale at A3:  
 1:1000

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Fig. 2 - General shot of Trench 01, from the NE



Fig. 3 - General shot of Trench 02, from the S

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Fig. 4 - Photo of linear 0205 in Trench 02, from the E



Fig. 5 - Very shallow linear 0207 in Trench 02, from the W

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Fig. 6 - Photo of Trench 03, from the SE



Fig. 7 - Photo of linear 0305 in Trench 03, from the NE

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Fig. 8 - General shot of linear 0307 in Trench 03, from the NE



Fig. 9 - Photo of linear 0309 in Trench 0, from the SW

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Fig. 10 - General shot of Trench 05, from the NE



Fig. 11 - General shot of Trench 05, from the NW

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Fig. 12 - Photo of 0505 in Trench 05, from the NE



Fig. 13 - General shot of Trench 06, from the SE

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Fig. 14 - Shot of linear 0605 in Trench 06,  
from the NE



Fig. 15 - Shot of linear 0607 in Trench 06,  
from the SW

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