

LAND SOUTH OF OWL'S HATCH ROAD, HERNE, KENT

(Centred on NGR TR 1606865645)

Results of an archaeological watching brief

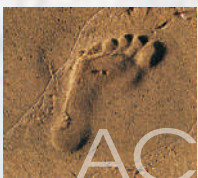
Planning Reference: Canterbury City Council CA/14/01792/FUL
Condition 21

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On behalf of:
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AC archaeology

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Summary

An archaeological watching brief was carried out by AC archaeology in January and February 2015 during the construction of a solar farm on land south of Owl's Hatch Road, Herne, Kent (centred on NGR TR 16068 65645). Only two archaeological features were exposed – a pit and a ditch – both located in the same field. Both contained fills indicative of nearby settlement, and the ditch contained pottery of late Iron Age/early Romano-British date. These results are consistent with the results of previous fieldwork north of the development site.

1. INTRODUCTION (Fig.1)

1.1 This report presents the results of a watching brief carried out at land south of Owl's Hatch Road, Herne, Kent (centred on NGR TR 16068 65645; Fig. 1) by AC archaeology in January and February 2015. The recording was commissioned by EDP Ltd, on behalf of their clients British Solar Renewables, and was required under condition 21 of the grant of Planning Permission by Canterbury City Council (reference CA/14/01792/FUL) for "Construction of a Photovoltaic Park with associated equipment and connection to grid".

1.2 The solar farm is located 1.3km west of Herne on land to the south of Owl's Hatch Road which extends parallel to the current A299 Thanet Way dual carriageway. It is situated over nine arable fields totalling 86.59 hectares on land that slopes gradually between 34m and 17m aOD (above Ordnance Datum) towards the Plenty Brook which bounds the site to the east. The underlying geology comprises Palaeogene clay and silts of the London Clay Formation.

2. ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 The development has been the subject of a previous archaeological and heritage assessment prepared by EDP (2014). The assessment established the site contains no designated or non-designated heritage assets. However, archaeological recording carried out during the construction of a pipeline along the north perimeter of the site and during the construction of the A299 Thanet Way dual carriageway exposed a possible Roman ditch and some limited evidence for late Iron Age and Romano-British settlement.

2.2 Historic mapping of the site shows the area as previously sub-divided into a number of smaller plots. The Chislet and Herne tithe maps of 1842 depict the site as consisting of 21 arable, pasture and tree plantation plots, with this arrangement shown on the first edition Ordnance Survey maps of 1871 and 1890. The subsequent mapping shows a gradual opening up of the land into its current arrangement of fields by the 1960s.

3. AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 The aim of the watching brief was to preserve by record any archaeological features or deposits exposed during groundworks associated with the scheme. The work was carried out in accordance with project design prepared by AC archaeology (Hughes 2015).

3.2 The excavation of the electricity cable trenches was monitored; these had been identified as having an impact on any potential archaeological deposits. This was undertaken by tracked excavators fitted with toothless buckets. Following discussions with the Canterbury City Council Archaeology Officer shallow groundworks (such as for the temporary access tracks and site compound), which were unlikely to impact on buried archaeological deposits, were not monitored. All monitoring and recording was carried out in line with the project design and the AC archaeology *General Site Recording Manual, Version 2* (revised August 2012).

4. THE WATCHING BRIEF RESULTS (Figs 2-3; Plates 1-4)

4.1 Two types of electricity cable trenches were excavated – those for the main high voltage cables, and those for the spur cables. The high voltage cable trenches measured 1.2m wide by 1.2m deep, with the spur trenches measuring 0.6m wide and 0.6m deep. Excavations involved the initial removal of topsoil and then the underlying subsoil, and into the natural where necessary (Plates 1-2).

4.2 The soil sequence was generally consistent across the site, and comprised the following deposit sequence: topsoil (101), which measured up to 0.40m thick, and comprised moderate mid brown silty-clay with occasional small to medium angular flint inclusion, subsoil (102), which measured up to 0.20m thick and consisted of mid greyish-brown silty-clay, and the natural (103) – compact light brownish-yellow silty-clay (Plate 2). Subsoil 002 was not present in every field.

4.3 Two features were identified in Field 7, a shallow pit and a ditch. The pit F105 measured 0.90m long by a minimum of 0.60m wide and was 0.20m in depth (Plate 3). The top break of slope was gradual, and the sides were straight to slightly concave with a straight and almost vertical step on the south side which was 0.08m from the top of the feature. The basal break of slope was sharp and the base was flat. The pit contained a single fill (104) of dark grey, moderate clayish-silt with very abundant small charcoal flecks and very occasional small heat affected natural flint inclusions.

4.4 The ditch F007 measured 1.20m wide by 0.50m deep, and was exposed on a north-south alignment for a distance of 1.20m (Plate 4). The top break of slope was sharp, the sides were steep and straight, the basal break of slope was gradual, and the base was concave. It contained a single fill (006) of dark grey, moderate clayish-silt with abundant small charcoal flecks, rare small heat affected natural flint and rare small pottery sherds.

5 THE FINDS, by Lorraine Mephram

5.1 Pottery

The 16 sherds (136g) recovered from context 106 are all in grog-tempered fabrics, with a soapy texture. There is one sherd from a footring base, but otherwise these are body sherds. Three have external one-directional scoring or multi-toothed combing, and one other has a rough exterior surface that might have been 'rusticated' (by the application of a deliberately roughened surface slip), although the sherd is abraded and the identification is not certain. The footring base is almost certainly from a wheelthrown vessel, but the body sherds are too small and/or abraded for manufacturing technique to be confidently determined.

This group of pottery has many characteristics of the Aylesford–Swarling or ‘Belgic’ style of pottery (as defined by Thompson 1982, 4-5), in the use of grog-tempered fabrics, wheel-throwing technique and scored or combed decoration. This style is typical of the 1st century BC and continues into the immediate post-conquest period. The absence of ‘Romanised’ wares here suggests a pre-conquest date, but the group is too small for definitive dating.

Parallels for this small grog-tempered group of pottery are numerous throughout east Kent. Similar wares have been recorded, for example, along sites of the Channel Tunnel Rail Link (Booth 2006), on a number of sites around Ashford (e.g. Jones 2012) and, most recently, in the large assemblage from the East Kent Access Road, Thanet (Seager Smith forthcoming).

5.2 Other finds

The other finds from context 106 comprise a piece of burnt, unworked flint (4g) and a fragment of fired clay, of uncertain function. Neither of these finds is datable.

6. COMMENTS

6.1 Across almost all the development site no archaeological features were present, with the exposed deposits comprising agricultural soils overlying the natural. The two recorded archaeological features were found in field 7, towards the northwest corner of the site. The fill of pit F105 was a charcoal-rich deposit comprising refuse from a fire, possibly a domestic hearth. There was no evidence of *in situ* burning around the feature, and it must represent deliberate burial of waste from a nearby settlement. Ditch F107 was only exposed in one trench making interpretation difficult – it could for example be a drainage ditch/field boundary, or an enclosure ditch around a settlement. The character of its fill and the finds from it may indicate the later, or at least (as with the pit) that settlement activity is located close by.

6.2 The date of ditch F107 (and presumably the contemporary pit F105) – late Iron Age/early Romano-British – is consistent with the dates of other recorded archaeological features immediately north of the site along the present A299. The two features are therefore interpreted as part of wider small-scale late Iron Age/early Romano-British settlement and agricultural activity west of Herne.

7. ARCHIVE AND OASIS ENTRY

7.1 The archive is currently held at the offices of AC archaeology in Bradninch, and will be deposited at one of the Canterbury Museums and Galleries.

7.2 An entry to the OASIS database, including a digital copy of this report, has been created using the unique identifier 207891.

8. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

8.1 This project was commissioned by EDP Ltd, and managed for them by Eddy Stratford and for AC archaeology by Simon Hughes. The watching brief carried out by Abigail Brown and Chris Caine. The report illustrations were prepared by Elisabeth Patkai.

9. SOURCES CONSULTED

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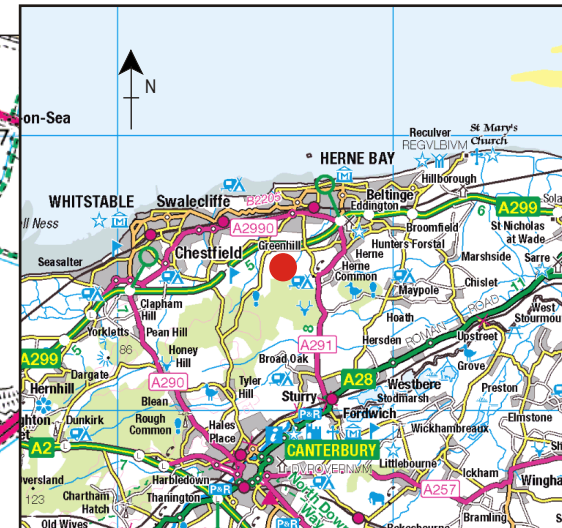
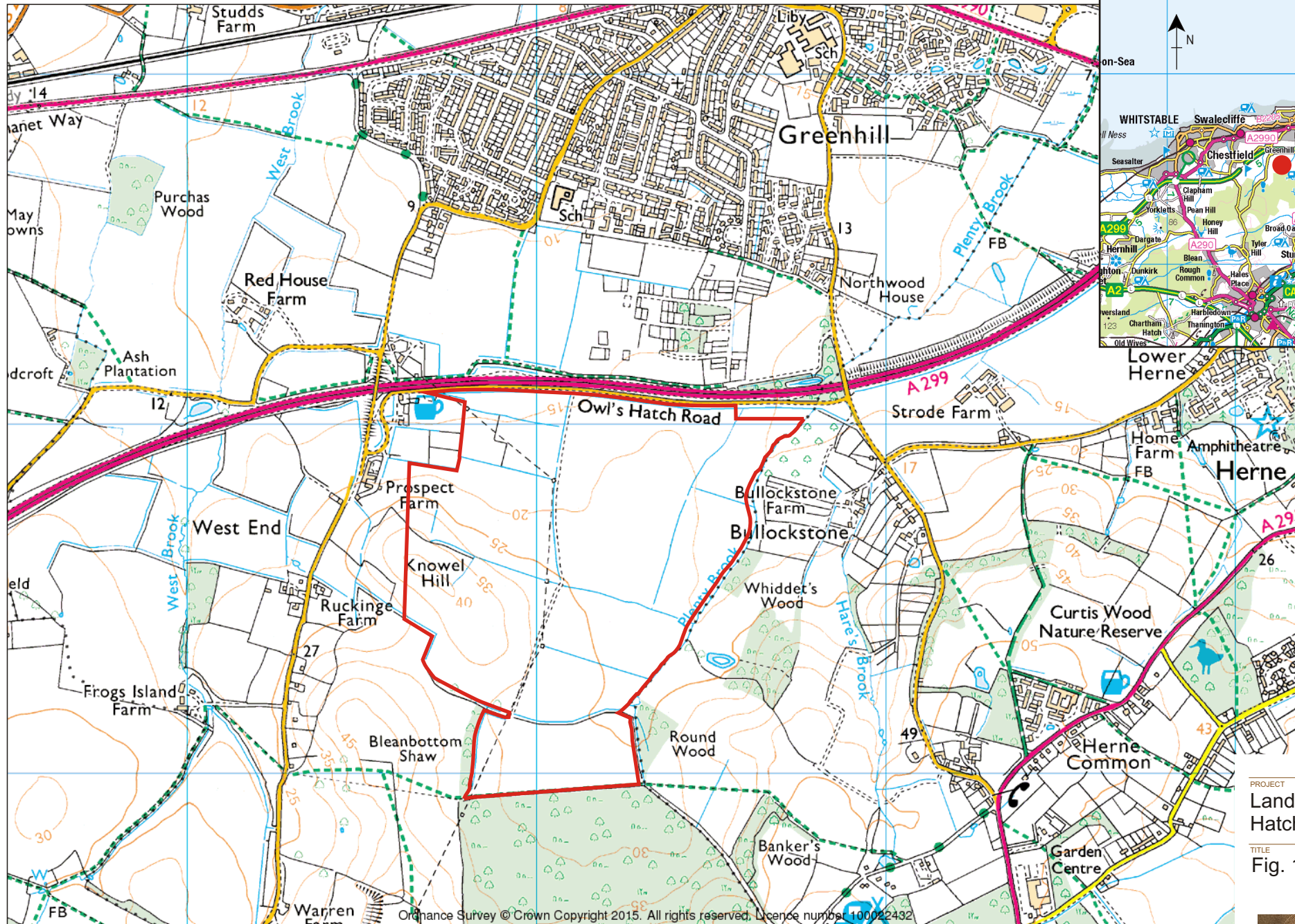
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 Site

PROJECT
Land South of Owl's Hatch Road, Herne, Kent

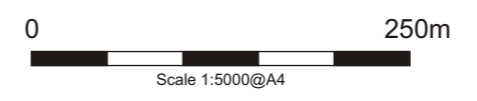
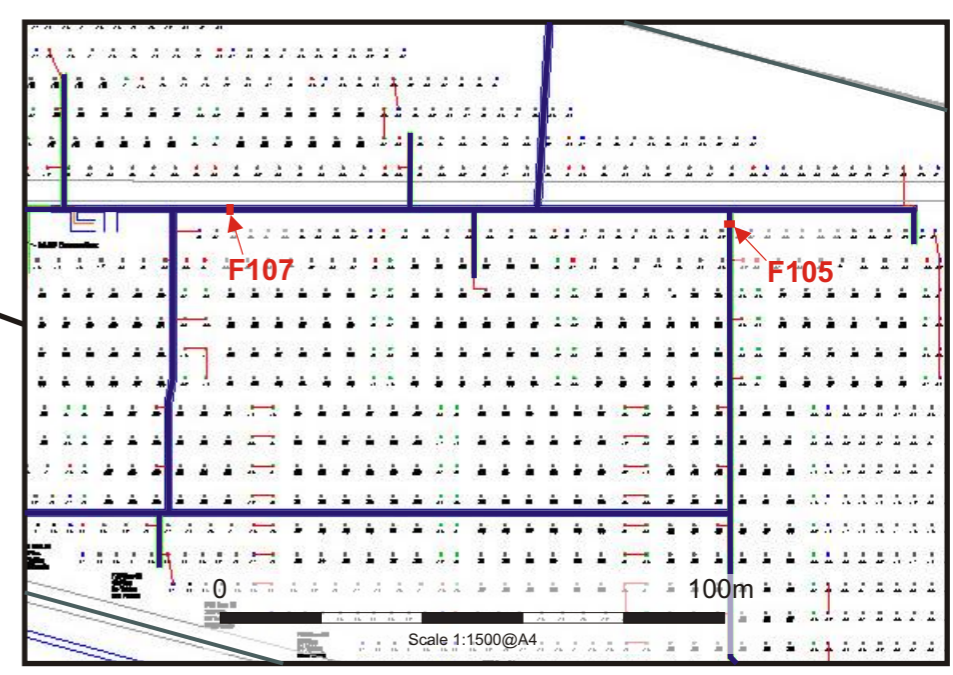
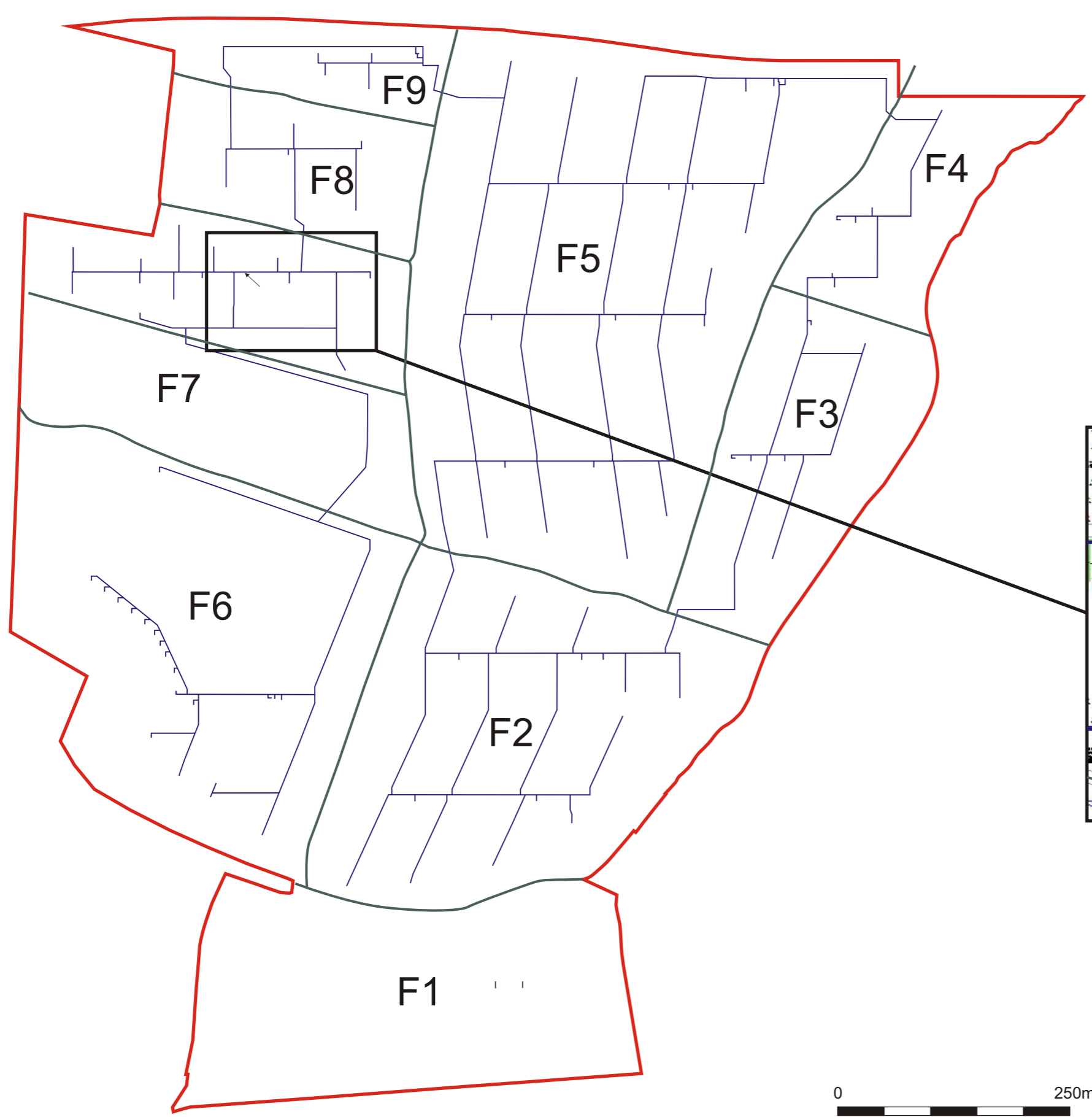
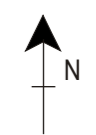
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Fig. 1: Site location

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Scale 1:1500@A4

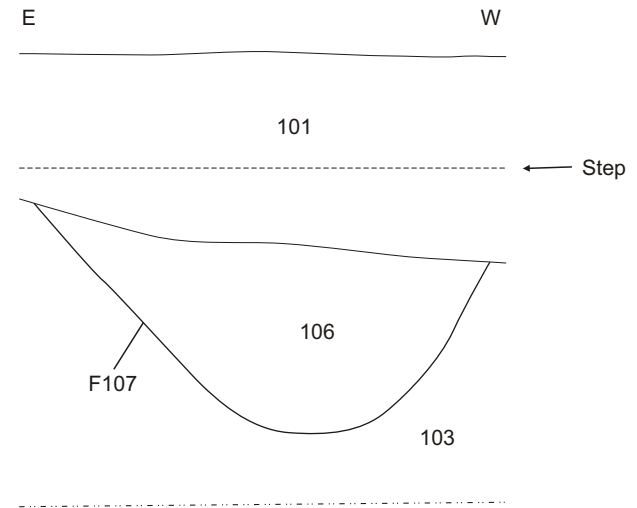
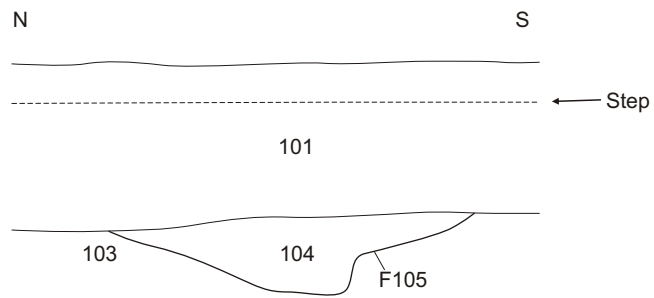




PROJECT
Land South of Owl's Hatch
Road, Herne, Kent

TITLE
Fig. 2: Development plan
showing location of monitored
areas and features





PROJECT
**Land South of Owl's
 Hatch Road, Herne, Kent**

TITLE
Fig. 3: Sections





Plate 1: Field 1, general view of development, looking northwest



Plate 2: Field 7, general view showing a cable trench, looking northwest



Plate 3: Pit F105, west facing section. 1m Scale



Plate 4: Ditch F107, south facing section. 1m Scale

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