

Identification of study areas

Introduction

Site locations for palaeoenvironmental analysis needed to be identified and assessed in order to meet the aims and objectives of the Suffolk River Valley Project. This section summarises the process through which suitable field locations were identified.

Taking into account the size of the County, five regions within Suffolk were to be chosen, thus concentrating the palaeoenvironmental investigations into smaller geographic areas. The sites were to be identified through collaboration with Suffolk County Council, utilising the current SMR data, whilst also assessing areas known to have limited previous palaeoenvironmental research. Due to there being greater potential for peat accumulation and preservation in valley lowlands (and hence preservation of material suitable for palaeoenvironmental analysis), the identification of suitable sites concentrated within the valley floodplains of the main drainage networks present within Suffolk. The considerable success of the Trent Tributaries Project (Knight & Howard, 2004), meant that the identification of palaeochannels within floodplains was a significant aspect of initial site assessments. As a consequence, the valley lowlands surrounding Beccles, Brandon, Hengrave, Hoxne and Ixworth were identified as areas where palaeoenvironmental potential was present. A summary of each region is provided, reviewing the known palaeoenvironmental and archaeological history of the sites. The location of each site is identified in Figure 1. Unless cited otherwise, the majority of the archaeological information was obtained through the Suffolk County Council SMR.

Beccles

Beccles is located on the southern valley side of the River Waveney (TM 642400, 290600), which flows west-east towards Lowestoft and the North Sea. The River Waveney also acts as with the County boundary between Norfolk and Suffolk. The Town centre positioned on a topographic ridge that extends north into the River Waveney floodplain. The floodplain is up to 3km wide and surrounds Beccles to the north, west and east. Small valley tributaries are present to the east and west of Beccles, flowing north from the high ground into the River Waveney. A meander bend of the River Waveney also flows proximal to the western margin of the Town. The valley side surrounding Beccles is comprised of glaciofluvial drift and chalk till, providing a mix of acidic soils and slowly permeable loamy and clayey soils. The River Waveney floodplain comprises deep peat soils with associated clay horizons. An archaeological investigation proximal to the River Waveney during the re-alignment of its levees, has revealed up to 7m of floodplain peat. An outcrop of glaciofluvial drift is present within the floodplain to the north of Beccles: Boney's Island. In addition, along the floodplain to the northeast of Beccles, marine alluvium becomes abundant due to palaeo-tidal influences (Alderton, 1983).

Archaeological discoveries within the Beccles region have concentrated along the floodplain (eg Barsham Marshes, Beccles Common and around Boney's Island) and along the outcrop of glaciofluvial drift that extends north into the floodplain. Historical maps suggests this sediment ridge was the original location of Beccles when the settlement was first established, from which it has developed and expanded into its present status. A palaeolithic hand-axe was dredged from the River Waveney floodplain at Lotmans Carr, c.1.5km northeast of Beccles. During the excavation for the development of the A416, Neolithic flint and a flint chopping tool was discovered on Beccles Common. A Neolithic flint axe was also discovered under peat on the Waveney floodplain north of Dole's Covert. An Iron Age Fort/settlement is believed to have been present on Boney's Island, whilst Roman metalwork finds have been found on Barsham Hill. A horde of Saxon coins were also found proximal to the River Waveney on Barsham Marshes, c.2km west of Beccles. The Town Centre of Beccles has uncovered an abundance of Medieval archaeology, which is a possible indicator of when Beccles was originally founded.

Brandon

Brandon is located on the western margin of the Brecklands in northwest Suffolk, where the River Little Ouse flows into the fenlands (TL 578400, 28610). To the east, the Little Ouse is steeply incised into the Brecklands and consequently its floodplain is very narrow until its emergence into Hockwold Fen. Well-drained calcareous soils underlain by glaciofluvial drift typifies the Brecklands. To the west of the Brecklands, the low-lying and flat topography has encouraged the development of thick sequences of fen peat proximal to the Little Ouse, whilst the floodplain and fens are composed of a mix of minerogenic and peat units. In addition, there is an abundance of inland sand dune deposits around the Hockwold Fens. Less than 10km west of Brandon, marine alluvium is present within the fenlands in response to Holocene sea-level influences from the north. Historical maps suggest that initial settlement in Brandon occurred immediately west of the Brecklands where the valley of the Little Ouse narrows due to subsurface geology. It has subsequently developed to incorporate much of the surrounding floodplain to the south of the Little Ouse.

Due to the narrow nature of the Little Ouse floodplains within the Brecklands, the majority of archaeological discoveries have been from the valley side. However, at Little Lodge Farm on the Breckland valley floor, 53 Palaeolithic hand-axes were discovered. In addition, at Stanton Downham, located on the floodplain and southern valley side of the Little Ouse, an abundance of Medieval and Saxon finds have been recorded. At Medieval sites such as Downham Hall, vessel fragments and 'The Square Plantation' have been identified. A Saxon brooch has also been found, along with a bronze escutcheon, and Ipswich sherds at Sycamore House.

A Bronze Age spearhead was discovered near the Little Ouse on the floodplain immediately northeast of Brandon. A spearhead and bronze rapier, also dating to the Bronze Age were found along the Little Ouse c. 2km west of Brandon. To the west of Brandon and c. 0.5km north of Fenhouse Heath, a number of barrows ring ditches of unknown age have been discovered, varying in diameter from 20-45m. Similar to Stanton Downham however, the majority of finds date to the Roman and Medieval – Saxon periods. Within the region proximal to Brandon Town, a Medieval ferry is believed to have connected the north and southern margins of the Little Ouse floodplain. In addition, the remains of a Medieval chapel was discovered to the north of the Brandon House Hotel, on the northern floodplain of the Little Ouse.

Hengrave

The study area incorporating Hengrave lies northwest of Bury St Edmunds, located along a c. 10km stretch of the River Lark (TL 582500, 268700). The valley floor is narrow, although generally increases in size downstream from c. 0.2 to c. 1.0km width. The surrounding valley catchment has a subsurface geology of predominantly glaciofluvial drift, overlain by well-drained sandy calcareous soils. The valley floor comprises river alluvium within the upper catchment, whilst beyond West Stow (north of Hengrave), thick sequences of fen peat is in abundance. Hunt *et al* (1991) identified Late Devensian and Holocene river activity within the Lark Valley between West Stow and Lackford. Early to Mid Holocene gravel sedimentation was replaced by organic mud and peat deposition in the Late Holocene, reflecting a reduction in fluvial energy during the Holocene. A number of smaller streams/ivers also enter the River Lark within the study area. One such tributary flows west from Great Livermere, converging with the River Lark at West Stow. Another flows north from the direction of Barrow and enters the River Lark near Icklingham.

Palaeolithic, Mesolithic and Neolithic archaeology has been found in the West Stow region, along with evidence for Iron Age, Romano-British and Medieval occupations (West, 1989). The

archaeology therefore suggests that the regions proximal to Hengrave are likely to have experienced occupation throughout much of the pre-historic and historic periods. There is an abundance of archaeological sites around Hengrave and to the south around Fornham All Saints. A Neolithic cursus is located immediately east of Hengrave whilst floodplain finds dating to the Romano-British and Medieval have also been recorded in the region. Bronze Age ditch and crop markings are evident directly opposite Fornham All Saints to the south. On the eastern valley side of the River Lark is Fornham Park, associated with the Medieval Fornham Hall. On the floodplain immediately south of West Stow, two Palaeolithic hand-axes were discovered. Medieval pill box was also identified in close proximity to this site. Just west of West Stow, prehistoric finds such as worked flints, pottery sherds and exposed wooden piles have been identified in the Lackford Quarry region. In Lackford, to the north of Hengrave, two possible Saxon settlement sites have been identified. Iron Age pottery sherds and Roman coins have also been found. To the north of Lackford, on the northern valley side, a substantial Roman Villa was present, with at least three Roman age stone coffins located on the floodplain to the south. Further north at Icklingham, Palaeolithic flakes have been identified in a ditch within the church, whilst a Neolithic leaf arrowhead and a Bronze Age plain square sectioned socketed axe was discovered to the northeast. An abundance of Medieval material has also been recorded in the Icklingham region.

Hoxne

Hoxne is a small village located in north Suffolk on the southern valley side of the River Waveney (TM 61800, 277300). The River Dove and a number of smaller unnamed tributaries drain the uplands to the south, converging with the River Waveney to the west of Hoxne. The topography of the surrounding landscape is controlled by the rivers in the immediate vicinity of Hoxne, with the floodplain of the River Waveney to the north, the River Dove valley to the west and smaller tributary valleys to the south. The village is surrounded by slightly permeable calcareous soils, whilst the floodplain of the River Waveney is composed of a mix of fen peat and river alluvium. In the River Dove valley, peat is overlain by river alluvium. To the west of Hoxne, excavations undertaken on the Waveney Valley floodplain during highway improvements proximal to Scole identified a palaeochannel rich in organic sediments (Ashwin & Tester, forthcoming). Biogenic sedimentation occurred within the palaeochannel from the early Bronze Age, confirming the palaeoenvironmental potential available within the regions surrounding Hoxne if suitable depositional archives are discovered.

Numerous archaeological finds are associated with Hoxne. The village is most famous for its association with the discovery of Palaeolithic flint industries dating to the early post-Anglian period. Due to the abundance of Quaternary deposits in which such Palaeolithic artefacts were found, the interglacial period that followed the Anglian glaciation was named the Hoxnian. A Palaeolithic hand-axe for example was discovered on the Waveney floodplain near Park Farm, east of Hoxne. Archaeology dating from the Mesolithic period onwards is also present in the region. The majority of finds were discovered along the floodplain of the River Waveney and River Dove, as well as along the hill sides and hill tops of the surrounding valleys. Dredging of the River Waveney also revealed an abundance of Roman Pottery proximal to Scole. Medieval pottery shards were discovered near Oakley, west of Hoxne, whilst Historical maps suggest a Medieval bridge over the river was located nearby. Medieval brickworks, kilns and drying sheds were also found c. 0.6km southwest of Hoxne.

Ixworth

The village of Ixworth is located on the eastern floodplain of the River Black Bourn, approximately 10km northeast of Bury St Edmunds (TL593400, 270300). The Black Bourn, in turn, flows north into The River Little Ouse which runs along the western Suffolk – Norfolk County border. The valley floors are narrow when compared to those of the River Waveney, varying in width from 0.25 to 0.50 km. The surrounding catchments surface geology is primarily composed of Chalk, chalk till,

and glaciofluvial drift and till. Deep fen peat soils are present along the floodplain of Pakenham Fen to the west, whilst sandy and peaty soils are found on the valley floor of Black Bourn proximal to Ixworth.

In contrast to most of the other study sites within Suffolk, previous archaeological discoveries outside the village of Ixworth are relatively sparse. This may be due to the majority of settlements and human activity being concentrated towards the Brecklands, southeast Suffolk and along main drainage networks during the prehistoric and early historic periods. The dense woodland and clayey soils within central Suffolk may have discouraged settlement, limiting access to the region via the valley floodplains. Roman finds increase in abundance towards the Black Bourn due to the presence of a major Roman settlement at Ixworth. Immediately south of the village and on the western valley side of the Black Bourn, a Roman settlement has been discovered. Directly opposite, on the eastern valley side, a Roman Villa was found. There is also evidence of Medieval occupation, indicative of continued settlement of the site after the decline of the Romano-British Empire.

Site Location Methodology

Once regions had been identified into which the palaeoenvironmental assessment was to be concentrated, specific site locations needed to be located that were suitable for in-depth field and subsequent laboratory analysis. A number of resources were utilised in order to identify such sites as being potentially suitable for further research, and are summarised as follows:

- The Suffolk County Council SMR provided information relating to the spatial distribution and diversity of archaeological finds throughout Suffolk. If a location had a) an abundance of archaeological finds, or b) archaeological evidence suggested multi-phase occupation, the site in question would be considered to have considerable geoarchaeological and palaeoenvironmental potential.
- Aerial photographs were utilised in order to identify visual topographic features that may suggest the preservation of peat deposits. Subtle changes in vegetation type and colour, for example, could suggest variations in the underlying soil type and moisture content; a common indicator for the presence of palaeochannels (Baker, 2003; see Figure 2). Comparisons were also made between aerial photographs taken in the 1940's (check date) and in 1999 to identify potential sites that may have been obscured through recent anthropogenic activity.
- The Suffolk County Council GIS (being developed as part of the Suffolk River Valleys Project) also contained a number of 'layers' that proved useful to the identification of suitable organic deposits. Surface soil data was available for the whole of Suffolk, which confirmed the presence of peatlands within specific valley lowlands, whilst also assisting in identifying valley catchments with a relative lack of surface organic material. In addition, the location of parish boundaries through the chosen valley lowlands provided valuable evidence for channel migration and palaeochannel preservation. Parish boundaries, officially recognised in the Anglo-Saxon period (check), commonly utilised river channels for boundary demarkation. Through comparisons between parish boundaries, modern maps and aerial photographs, the parish boundaries were occasionally found to not follow the route of the contemporary river channel. Instead, the boundary would follow a different route along the valley floor, before rejoining with the contemporary river channel further downstream (see Figure 3). This was therefore a potential indicator of a former river channel and hence may preserve organic deposits suitable for analysis.
- Once the five site research locations within Suffolk had been identified, an application was also made to Environment Agency to obtain airborne laser altimetry (LiDAR) data, to assist with the palaeoenvironmental prospection. An aircraft mounted laser projects a coherent beam of light to the ground surface, and the travel times to and from the ground surface are used to calculate the distance from the laser to the reflecting object (Challis, 2006). The resulting data produces 2x2m gridded surface models of topographic variations for each site in question. The topographic information can then be analysed and interpreted to identify potential palaeochannel site locations (see Figure 4).

Site Location Results

Through the analysis of the Suffolk SMR, GIS, aerial photography and LiDAR data, specific field locations within the five chosen areas were identified. A summary of each site location is provided, along with the reasons why each location was deemed to be suitable for palaeoenvironmental assessment;

Beccles

Shortly after the Suffolk River Valleys Project was commissioned, a major archaeological site was discovered *c.*1km north of Beccles during the re-development of the River Waveney flood defences (TM 642736,291986). The initial excavations identified a sequence of vertical oak posts within a thick peat sequence, and preliminary analysis suggested a Bronze Age or Iron Age origin. The feature, believed to be a trackway, was also found to be in rough alignment with Boney's Island, *c.*1.2km southeast of the site, where an Iron Age Fortress is believed to be present. As a consequence, this site was seen to contain significant palaeoenvironmental potential, and hence suitable for consideration as part of the Suffolk River Valleys Project. However, an in-depth analysis of the palaeoenvironmental potential of the regions surrounding Beccles was still undertaken.

A 10km stretch of the River Waveney floodplain surrounding Beccles was also assessed for alternative sites. The combination of LiDAR, aerial photography and GIS data suggested that the River Waveney has predominantly remained stable along this stretch of the Waveney Valley throughout much of the depositional history. Few palaeochannels could be identified using LiDAR with the exception of a potential infilled channel feature north of Shipmeadow (*c.*4km west of Beccles; see Figure 4). In addition, parish boundaries did not deviate from the present watercourse and few field boundary patterns suggested the location of palaeochannels. As a consequence, it is suggested that, along this section of the River Waveney at least, the river has experienced sedimentary accumulation through vertical accretion, resulting in limited channel migration and palaeochannel development.

Upon consideration of the potential sites available, the hypothesised Bronze-Iron Age trackway was chosen for Beccles as most suitable for the project (Figure 5). The initial stratigraphic investigation undertaken had identified a *c.* 6m thick peat sequence surrounding the trackway, which would provide a significant sedimentary archive suitable for the project (larger than most infilled palaeochannels). In addition, the palaeoenvironmental context obtained would contribute significantly to the archaeological investigation, hence justifying the site's inclusion within the project.

Brandon

Brandon, located between the upland Brecklands to the east and the Fenlands to the west, was an ideal choice for palaeoenvironmental analysis, especially when taking into account the abundance of archaeological finds found throughout the region. When considering potential site locations, the steep valley sides along the River Little Ouse within the Brecklands limited channel migration and subsequent palaeochannel development. Research therefore concentrated on the lowlands immediately west of Brandon. As with Beccles, very little evidence was present for river migration and subsequent palaeochannel development, suggesting overall channel stability and sedimentation through vertical accretion. One potential palaeochannel was identified *c.* 5km west of Brandon Town Centre, south of Hockwold cum Wilton. At this location, the parish boundary deviates away from the contemporary River Little Ouse, whilst LiDAR data identified a substantial topographic anomaly, commonly indicative of an infilled channel. Collaboration with Suffolk County Council however, identified this as being a feature of artificial realignment of the river in the last *c.* 30yrs. This was confirmed through comparisons between aerial photographs from 1945 and 1999. As a

result, no deposits of palaeoenvironmental significance would have developed. However, results from the survey indicated potential palaeochannel features *c.* 1.4km west of Brandon, in the grounds of Brandon Hall (Figures 6). The LiDAR data identified the presence of topographic hollows running broadly east-west along the floodplain (Figure 7a and b). These were interpreted as possible former palaeochannels of the River Little Ouse. An abundance of archaeological finds to the west of Brandon Hall discovered through field walking, in addition to the evidence for multi-phase occupation in the area around Brandon, suggested that this site would be suitable for further palaeoenvironmental analysis, and was subsequently chosen as the site for the Brandon area.

Hengrave

The identification of Hengrave as a site suitable for further palaeoenvironmental analysis was due to the abundance of regional archaeological evidence and the relative lack of environmental research undertaken in the region. The desk-based assessment of the area suggested that, when compared to Beccles and Brandon, there was more evidence for channel migration and palaeochannel preservation within the floodplains of the River Lark. On the floodplain *c.* 1 km southeast of Hengrave for example, aerial photographs suggest the presence of a substantial palaeochannel feature (see Figure 2), whilst field boundary locations identify other potential palaeochannel features further north proximal to Flempton (1km northeast of Hengrave). Other meander cut-offs and potential palaeochannels were identified scattered within the River Lark floodplain. However, immediately east of Hengrave, the parish boundary data separating Hengrave, Culford and Fornham St Genevieve, dissects the western River Lark floodplain (see Figure 3). Further analysis through the application of LiDAR identified subtle topographic variations that correlated with the location of the parish boundaries, confirming the location of a palaeochannel. The proximity of a Neolithic cursus, *c.* 0.4km south of the site confirmed the suitability of the palaeochannel for further investigation. In addition, ground investigations by the landowner, Mr Aitkens, identified up to 5m of peats overlying gravels in close proximity to the site. Consequently, this site was chosen as suitable for further investigation in the Hengrave area (Figure 8).

Hoxne

At Hoxne, the confluence of River Dove into the River Waveney provided two separate floodplain areas suitable for palaeoenvironmental consideration. The River Waveney floodplain, up to 0.75km wide proximal to Hoxne, contains a fen peat sequence capped by minerogenic overbank deposits. LiDAR analysis provided limited evidence for channel migration and palaeochannel development along much of the Waveney floodplain, suggesting channel stability and vertical sediment accretion occurred during much of the valley's depositional history. One potential palaeochannel however, *c.* 3km west of Hoxne was identified on the southern River Waveney floodplain using LiDAR. Whilst this was initially considered as a potential site for further investigation, another palaeochannel (or potentially part of the same palaeochannel), had previously been identified during ground investigation works for the Scole A143 highway improvements (TM 614730,278460; Ashwin & Tester, forthcoming). Radiocarbon dating of the peat preserved within the palaeochannel identified that meander cut-off and in-situ biogenic sedimentation had commenced by the Early Bronze Age and ceased by the Saxon times. Palynological assessment and analysis had also been undertaken within the 1.30m peat sequence (Wiltshire, forthcoming) to assist in the reconstruction of vegetation and land use history during sedimentary accumulation. Consequently, to prevent the potential duplication of research, the site was not deemed suitable for further assessment. No further sites along this section of the River Waveney floodplain were identified as having palaeoenvironmental potential.

The floodplain deposits of the River Dove provided the second potential palaeoenvironmental archive for the area. Soil records identified the presence of river alluvium underlain by fen peat along much of the River's course, whilst analysis of the LiDAR and SMR suggested a number of palaeochannels were present. Although smaller in scale to the palaeochannel proximal to Scole, the potential remains for in-situ organic sedimentation and preservation. Sites proximal to the Waveney

Valley were deemed of greater value to those further upstream, due to the potential correlation with other Waveney palaeoenvironmental archives. As a consequence, one such site was identified on the River Dove, *c.* 0.5km west of Hoxne and located proximal to where the valley converges with the Waveney Valley (Figure 9). LiDAR analysis suggested the presence of topographic hollows on the western floodplain of the River Dove, confirming this location as suitable for further palaeoenvironmental analysis.

Ixworth

Although Roman archaeology dominates the finds surrounding Ixworth, Palaeolithic and Neolithic artefacts have also been discovered immediately south, at Pakenham Fen. The narrow nature of the valley of the River Black Bourne restricts the potential for channel migration and palaeochannel preservation along much of its course. To the north, downstream of Ixworth, however, the floodplain widens to *c.* 0.5km, and LiDAR data suggests the location of a number of topographic depressions indicative of potential palaeochannel features. Whilst these were initially identified as having significant palaeoenvironmental potential, on closer inspection, the features were still used as small-scale drainage channels, reducing their ability to preserve complete stratigraphic archives. Immediately south of Ixworth, a small *c.* 0.3km wide floodplain is present. The site, known as Mickle Mere, is located between a Roman Fortress on the western valley side and Roman Villa to the east, whilst the Palaeolithic and Neolithic archaeological sites at Pakenham Fen are located *c.* 0.5km south. No clear palaeochannel features were identified through the interpretation of the LiDAR data, but this was a consequence of standing water present on the surface of Mickle Mere during data collection (preventing a clear radar signal being received by the drone). In addition, Mickle Mere is identified through the Suffolk SMR as being composed of deep sandy and peaty soils, suggesting the palaeoenvironmental potential remains. Further south, upstream of the River Black Bourn, the valley floor narrows further, preventing the potential for any channel movements from occurring. Consequently, due to the considerable lack of palaeoenvironmental information for the region around Ixworth, combined with the abundance of Roman archaeology immediately east and west of Mickle Mere, the site was identified as the most suitable for further assessment as part of the Suffolk River Valleys Project.

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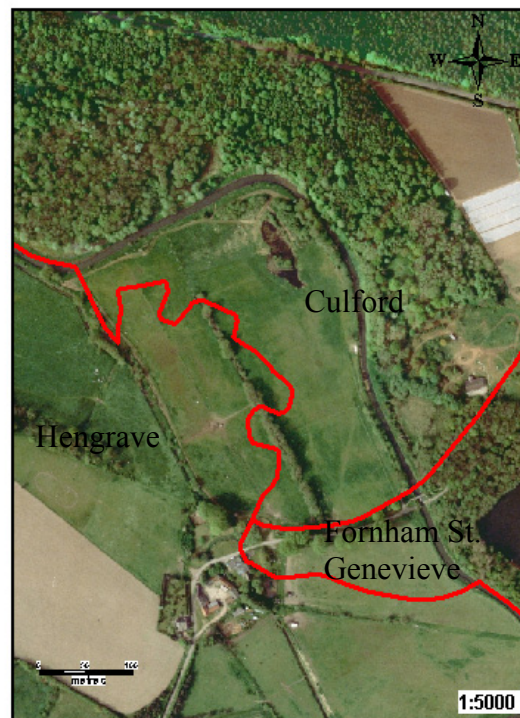
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Figure 2: Example of surface colour variation evident on aerial photographs, suggesting the possible location of a palaeochannel, located *c.* 0.75km northwest of Fornham All Saints, Suffolk.



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Figure 3: Parish boundaries of Hengrave, Culford and Fornham St. Genevieve, running through the Lark Valley. Site located *c.* 0.5km northeast of the village of Hengrave, Suffolk.

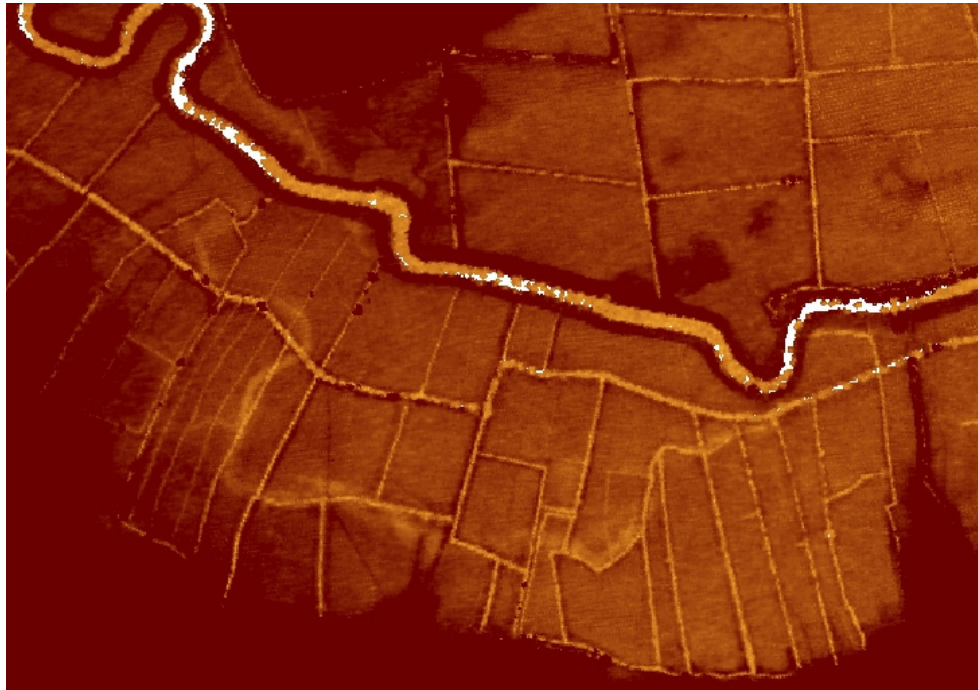
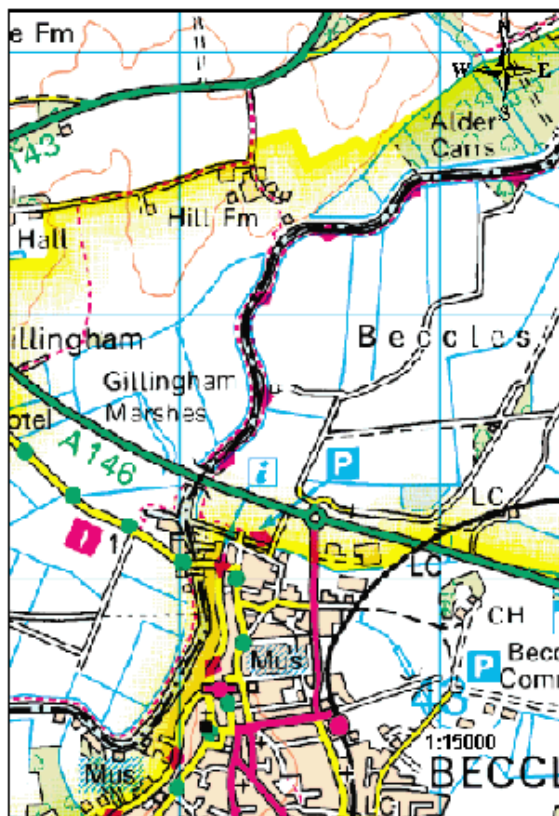
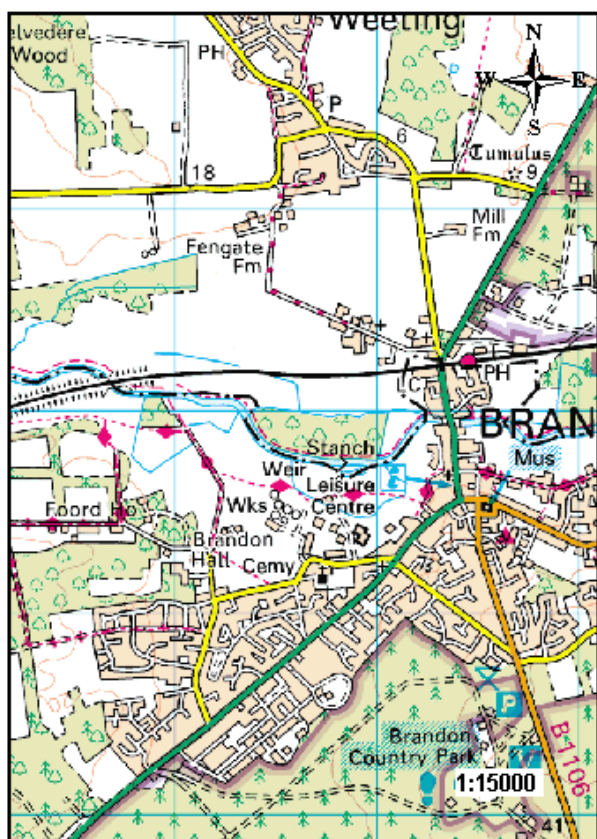


Figure 4: Example of LiDAR tile showing the modern River Waveney flowing east-west and palaeochannel to the south. Location, Shipmeadow, c. 4km west of Beccles, Suffolk. Notice some field boundaries follow the route of the palaeochannel, whilst others dissect it (LiDAR data © Environment Agency).



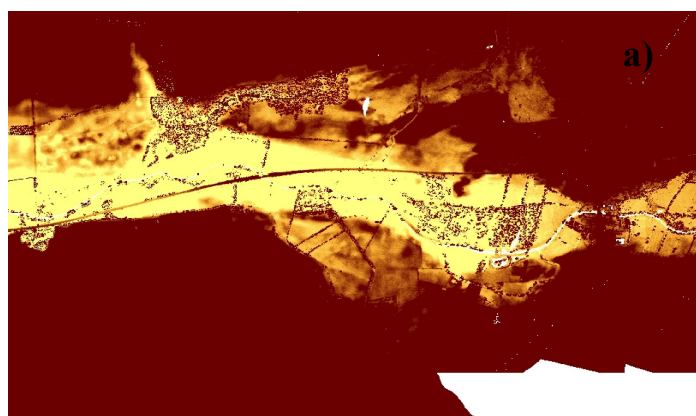
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Figure 5: OS Map and Aerial photograph of area surrounding Beccles trackway, with site location indicated by *.



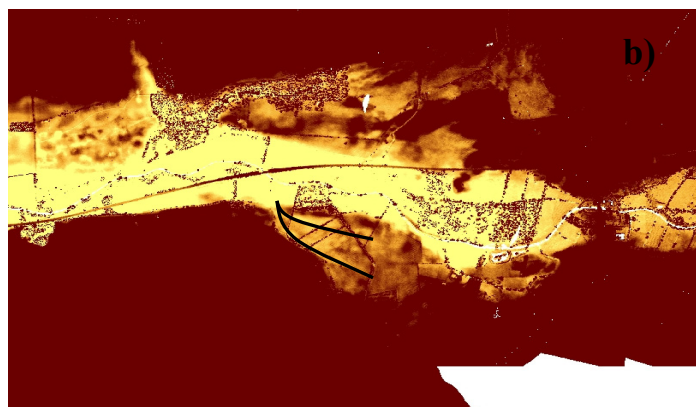
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Figure 6: OS Map and Aerial photograph of area surrounding Brandon site, with the site location indicated by *.

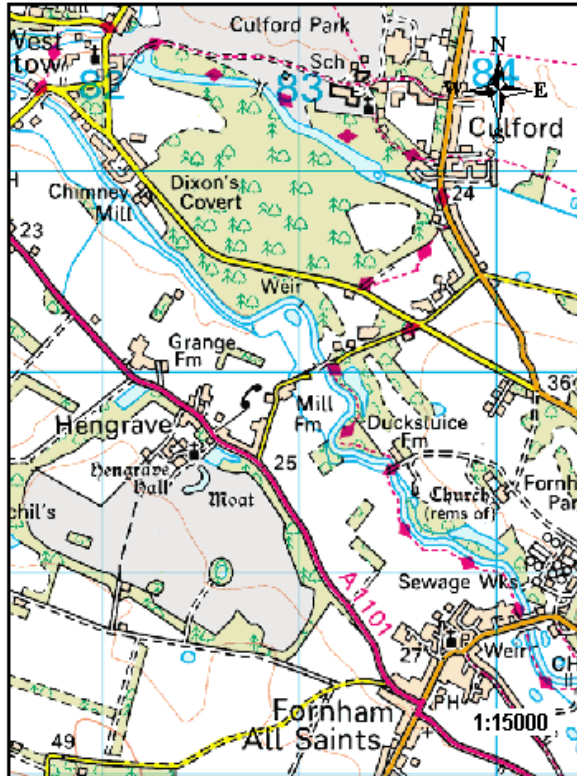


a)

Figure 7a: LiDAR data for the region proximal to Brandon and **b:** highlighting the potential palaeochannel locations. Tiles also include contours at 5m intervals (LiDAR data © Environment Agency).

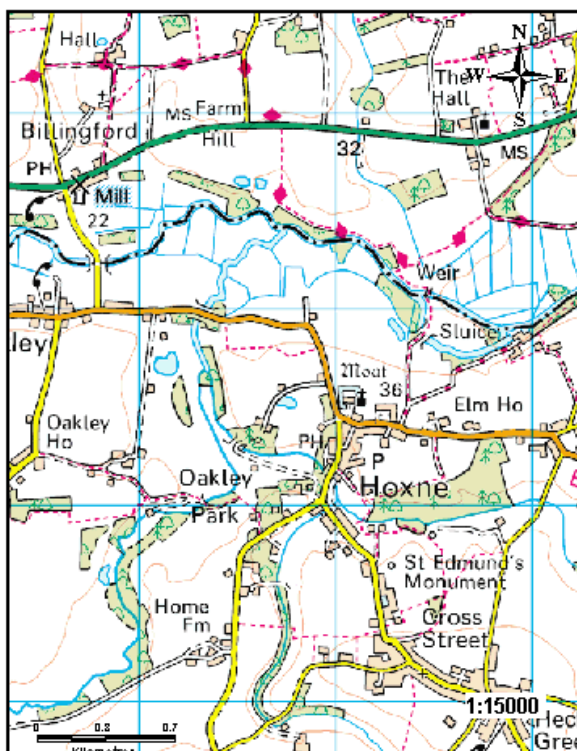


b)



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Figure 8: OS Map and Aerial photograph of area surrounding Hengrave site, with the site location indicated by *.



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Figure 9: OS Map and Aerial photograph of area surrounding Hoxne site, with the site location indicated by *.



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Figure 10: OS Map and Aerial photograph of area surrounding Ixworth site, with the site location indicated by *.