

JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION**

**AT**

**LAND WEST OF READING ROAD, CHOLSEY,**

**OXFORDSHIRE**

**NGR SU 6025 8793**

*On behalf of*

*S.A.T. Sun & Alternative Technology Ltd*

**MAY 2015**

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## **Summary**

*John Moore Heritage Services carried out an archaeological field evaluation at land west of Reading Road in Cholsey, Oxfordshire. Five machine-dug trenches with a total length of 90m were excavated across the site. Trenches 2 and 3 were targeted across areas of proposed substation building, equipment area, hard standing vehicle turning area and access. Trenches 1, 4, and 5 were placed across the areas of new planting (Fig. 1). The aims of investigation were to establish if features relating to the prehistoric and Roman landscapes are present on this site. During the fieldwork only one archaeological feature, linear ditch 4/11 was discovered in Trench 4. No finds were obtained from the ditch; however based on stratigraphic relationships it may possibly be of prehistoric date. Additional features investigated in Trench 4 were identified as natural features interpreted as tree throw holes and root or animal activities. Those features as well as ditch 4/11 were sealed by a thick alluvial deposit and lies c. 1.20m below present ground surface. Alluvial deposit was overlaid by two more layers, which represent a post-medieval cultivation layer and modern topsoil. The rest of the trenches were blank. In conclusion at least one archaeological features of significance is present on site and lies beneath an alluvial deposit below the impact level of cable runs and roadway, which should not be greater than 0.75m below existing.*

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Site Location (Figure 1)**

The site is located to the west of Reading Road and east of Wallingford Road, immediately south of Bosley Way, Cholsey (NGR SU 6025 8793). Topographically the site is reasonably level and lies at an approximate height of 47m above OD. The underlying geology is Second Terrace Gravel (Summerton-Radley) deposits with Head deposits of clay, silt, sand and gravel on the east side of the site. The site is currently grassland.

### **1.2 Planning Background**

South Oxfordshire District Council granted planning permission for erection of a solar photovoltaic (PV) facility to include solar panels, inverters, substation, access and associated infrastructure (P14/S2846/FUL).

Due to the potential disturbance of below ground archaeological features, the Oxfordshire Historic and Natural Environment Team (OHaNET) on behalf of the Local Planning Authority required that a targeted archaeological field evaluation should be undertaken as a first stage of archaeological investigation with the possibility of a subsequent mitigation strategy including a watching brief.

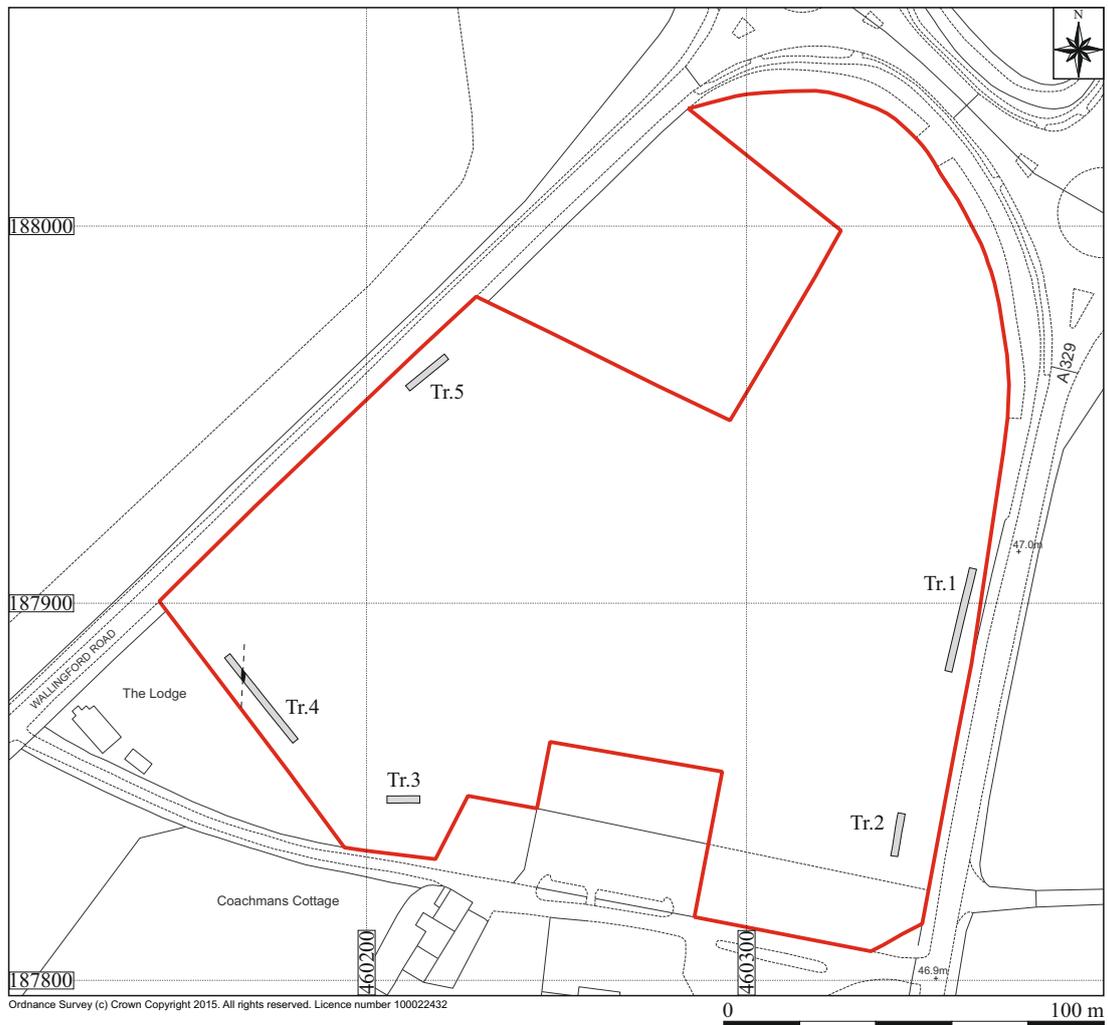
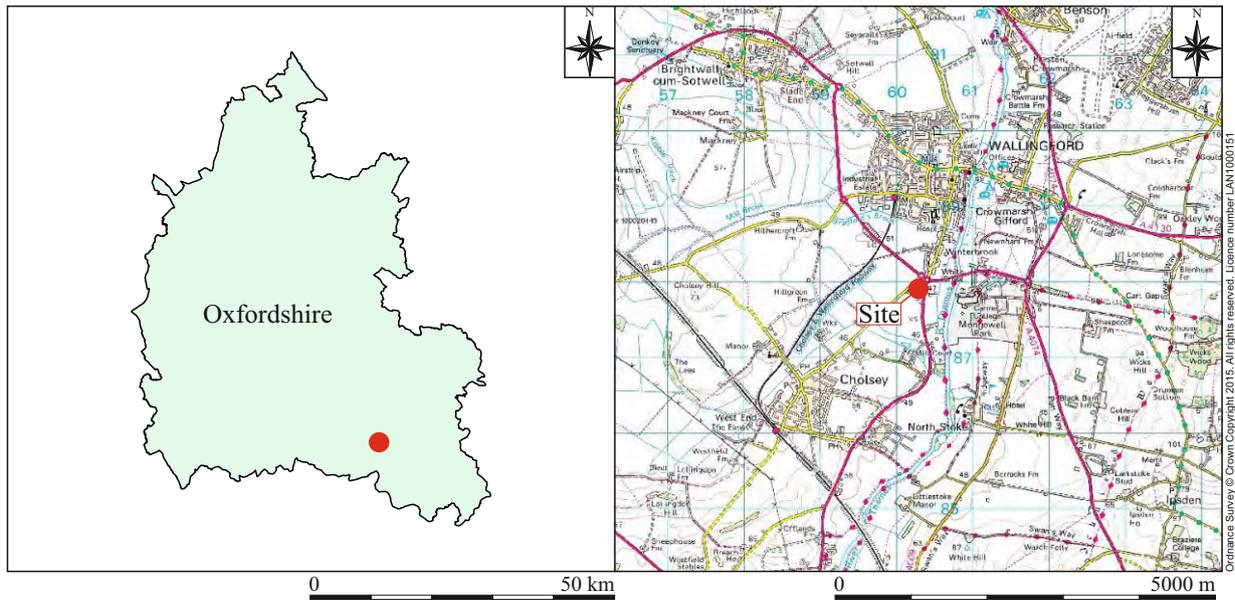
John Moore Heritage Services (JMHS) was commissioned to undertake this work, and a *Written Scheme of Investigation* (JMHS 2015) was prepared to satisfy the requirements outlined in Planning permission (conditions 7 and 8). This *Written Scheme of Investigation* (WSI) proposed the methodology by which the archaeological field evaluation was to be carried out.

### **1.3 Archaeological Background**

The site is located in an area of considerable archaeological interest located 160m south east of a possible Neolithic hengiform monument and a pit alignment or segmented ditch (Oxfordshire Historic Environment Record PRN 2995). A pit, recorded during a watching brief 180m north east of the proposed site, is dated to the Neolithic or Bronze Age (PRN 16420). Neolithic pottery has also been recorded from the north side of Wallingford. A Bronze Age barrow has been recorded 360m north of the site (PRN 8593) and a number of further barrows and a Beaker Burial have been recorded during an evaluation 470m north of the proposal site (PRN 26398).

Two further probable Bronze Age barrows have been recorded 4000m south of the site (PRNs 2990 and 28322) from aerial photographs and a geophysical survey. This geophysical survey also recorded clusters of possible pits or tree throws, field boundaries or trackways, possible ditches, hearth or similar burning, and a possible enclosure and structure (PRN 28323). A considerable number of Roman coins have been recorded for this field on the Portable Antiquities Scheme.

It is therefore considered likely that this development area could contain further Neolithic features, Bronze Age barrows and burials as well as archaeological deposits



**Key**  Site boundary  Evaluation trenches  Archaeological features

Figure 1: Site location

related to the Roman settlement site recorded to the south (JMHS 2015).

## **2 AIMS OF THE INVESTIGATION**

The aims of the investigation as laid out in the WSI were:

- To establish the presence/absence of archaeological remains within the site.
- To determine the extent, condition, nature, character, quality and date of any archaeological remains encountered.
- To assess the ecofactual and environmental potential of the archaeological features and deposits.

In particular:

- To establish if features relating to the prehistoric and Roman landscapes are present on this site

## **3 STRATEGY**

### **3.1 Research Design**

In accordance with the WSI (JMHS 2015), JMHS carried out the work, which comprised a scheme for the mechanical excavation of five trial trenches across the site. Site procedures for the investigation and recording of potential archaeological deposits and features were defined in the WSI (Sections 3.1 – 3.6 and 3.17-3.23).

The recording was carried out in accordance with the standards specified by the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (2014) and the principles of MoRPHE (English Heritage 2006).

### **3.2 Methodology**

A thirteen tonne excavator fitted with a toothless 1.8m wide ditching bucket was used to excavate the five trenches. The trench over the footprint of the proposed substation building and equipment area was 8.60m long orientated east to west while that over the hard standing vehicle turning area and access was 11.50m long orientated north to south. A 13.20m long trench and two approximately 30m long trenches were located to investigate areas of new planting (Fig. 1).

Archaeological deposits and features revealed were then cleaned by hand and recorded at an appropriate level. Archaeological features had written, drawn and photographic records made of them, and all deposits and features were assigned individual context numbers. All artefacts were collected, analysed and not retained.

## 4 RESULTS

### 4.1 Field Results

All features were assigned individual context numbers. Context numbers with no brackets indicate feature cuts, numbers in round brackets ( ) show feature fills or deposits of material and numbers in bold indicate any form of masonry.

### 4.2 Trench 1

Trench 1 was 27.90m long and 1.8m. It was orientated north to south and located at the east edge of the evaluated area (Fig. 1 & 2, Pl. 1, Appendix 1).



Plate 1: Trench 1, looking south

Four successive deposits were recorded within Trench 1. The lowest deposit encountered was natural mid brown sandy gravel (1/04) 1.25m below present ground level. It was overlaid by 0.44m thick sterile mid orange-brown silty sand (1/04) containing rare small stones. This deposit was interpreted as either natural Head deposit or an 'alluvial' deposit (see Trench 4). The following deposit was 0.50m thick mid brown sandy loam with occasional small stones (1/03). Seven fragments of post-medieval roof tile were recovered from this deposit, which suggest that it represents a buried cultivation layer. The entire trench was sealed by up to 0.40m thick topsoil (1/01) which was described as dark grey-brown sandy loam with occasional small stones (Fig. 2: S. 1.01, Pl. 2). No archaeological features were present within Trench 1.



Plate 2: Representative section S. 1.01

### 4.3 Trench 2

Trench 2 was 11.50m long and 1.8m wide. It was placed across the proposed hard standing area in the southeast part of the evaluation area, and aligned approximately north to south (Fig. 1, Pl. 3, Appendix 1).

Trench 2 was excavated down to the top of natural Head deposit or ‘alluvial’ deposit (2/03) which was 0.79m (c. 45.60m AOD) below present ground level. Deposit (2/03) was truncated by cultivation layer (2/02), and the entire trench was sealed with topsoil (2/01) (for more details see Appendix 1). No archaeological features were present within trench 2.



Plate 3: Trench 2, looking south

### 4.4 Trench 3

Trench 3 was 8.60m long and 1.8m placed across the proposed substation building and equipment area in the southwest part of the evaluation area. It was oriented east to west (Fig. 1, Pl. 4, Appendix 1).

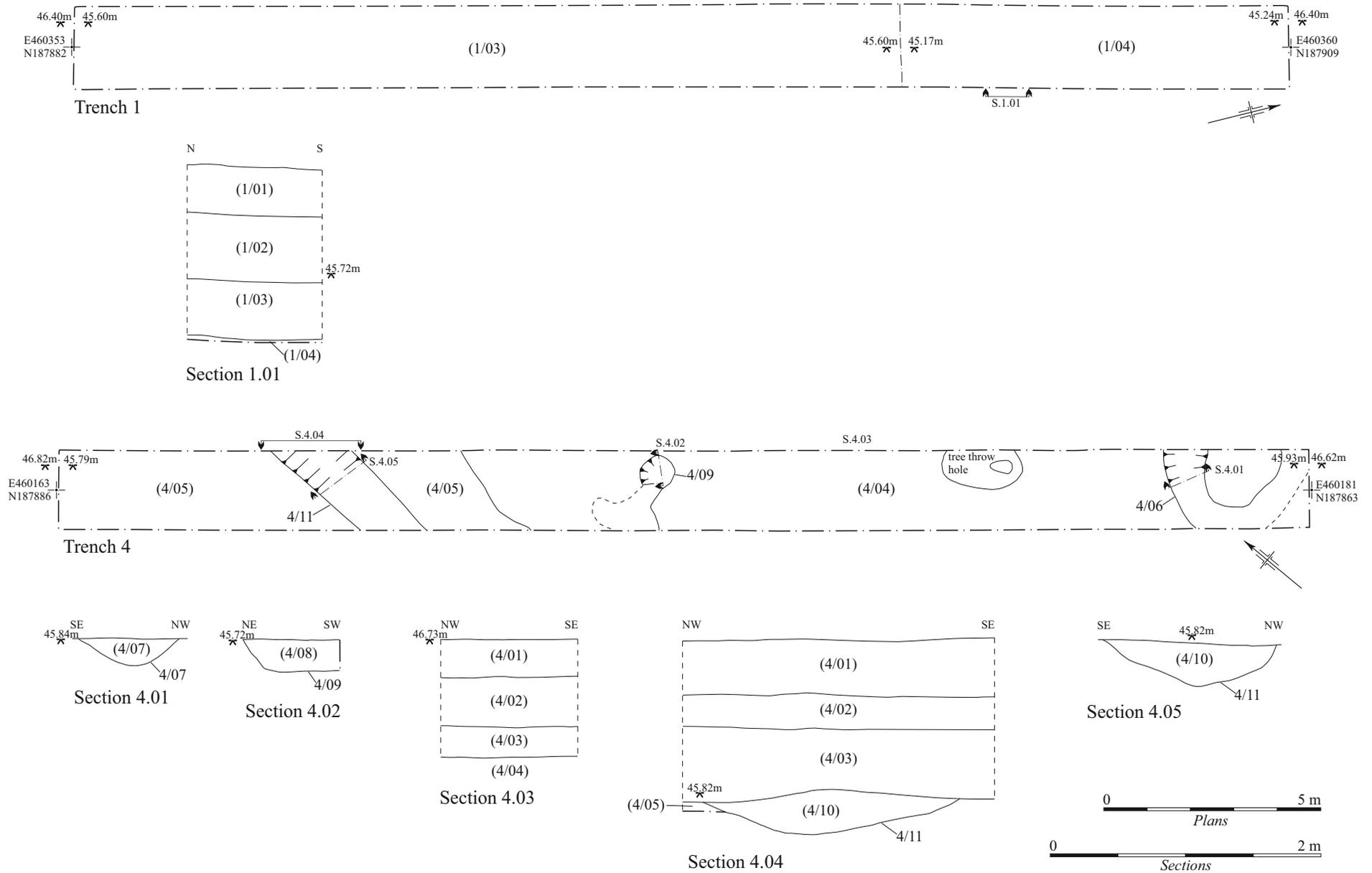


Figure 2: Trenches 1 and 4 - plans and sections

In Trench 3 a slightly different sequence of deposits was recorded than in Trenches 1 and 2. The lowest deposit encountered within Trench 3 was light yellow-brown sand with occasional fine gravel and flints (3/03), which appeared to be second terrace gravels. Deposit (3/03) was 0.60m (45.86m AOD) below present ground level. It was overlaid by cultivation layer (3/02) and the uppermost layer represents topsoil (3/01). The alluvial deposit seen in Trench 4 was not present nor were any archaeological features (see Appendix 1).



Plate 4: Trench 3, looking east

#### 4.5 Trench 4

Trench 4 was 28.70m long and 1.8m, aligned northwest to southeast. It was located parallel to the southwest boundary of the site (Fig. 1 & 2, Pl. 5 & 6, Appendix 1).

The lowest deposit within Trench 4 was natural light orange-brown fine sand (4/05) exposed at the northwest end of the trench. It was overlaid by upper natural terrace gravels deposit (4/04) described as light yellow-brown sand with occasional fine gravel and flints. These deposits were encountered c. 1.20m (c. 45.85m AOD) below present ground level.

At the northwest end of trench linear ditch 4/11 was discovered (Fig. 2, Pl. 6). It was 2.40m long (as seen), 1.30m wide and 0.35m deep. Its profile was of wide-open U-shape with shallow concave sides and relatively narrow concave base (Fig. 2: S. 4.04 & 4.05, Pl. 7). The single fill of the ditch (4/10) was mid to dark brown loamy sand with frequent small stones and flints. No finds were recovered from this fill. Stratigraphically ditch 4/11 cut in to the natural sandy deposits and was sealed by 'alluvial' deposit (4/03) (Fig. 2: S. 4.04).



Plate 5: Trench 4, looking northwest



Plate 6: Trench 4, looking southeast

Two additional features were investigated. Irregular cut 4/09 filled with mid orange-brown silty sand (4/08), located approximately in the middle of the trench was interpreted as an animal burrow or rooting (Fig. 2: S. 4.02). The second investigated feature 4/06 located at southeast end of the trench, represents a classical example of a tree throw hole of sub-circular shape filled with a ring of mid brown silty sand (4/07) surrounding redeposited natural sand (Fig. 2: S. 4.01, Pl. 5). Another smaller tree throw hole was observed 3.20m to the northwest from feature 4/06 (Fig. 2). These features were sealed by alluvial deposit (4/03). Deposit (4/03) was truncated by cultivation layer (4/02) and the entire trench was sealed by topsoil (4/01) (see Appendix 1)

The fact that deposit (4/03) sealed the ditch and tree throw holes appears to preclude it being a Head deposit as suggested in Trenches 1 & 2. The fact that its content was mostly sand with only *c.* 20% silt content would indicate a severe flood event as opposed to a slow one that mainly would produce silts leading to a clay alluvium.



Plate 7: Ditch 4/11, looking south

#### 4.6 Trench 5

Trench 5 was 13.20m long and 1.8m, orientated northeast to southwest. It was located parallel to the northwest edge of the site (Fig. 1, Pl. 8, Appendix 1).

In Trench 5 the same stratigraphic sequence as in Trench 1 was recorded. The lowest deposit was natural gravel (5/03) 1.02m (c. 46.19m AOD) below present ground level. It was overlaid by alluvial deposit (5/04), which was truncated by cultivation layer (5/02) and the final deposit representing topsoil (5/01) (see Appendix 1). No archaeological features were present within Trench 5.



Plate 8: Trench 5, looking north

## **4.7 Reliability of Results**

The reliability of results is considered to be good. The archaeological field evaluation took place in very good weather conditions with excellent light and visibility.

## **5 FINDS**

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

The assemblage of ceramic building material recovered from deposit (1/02) comprises 7 very fragmentary roof tiles with a total weight of 413g, presumably post-medieval in date. The finds have not been retained.

### **5.2 Palaeo-environmental Remains**

No deposits suitable for palaeo-environmental analysis were identified, and no samples were taken.

## **6 DISCUSSION**

The archaeological field evaluation was successful and meet the aims of the investigations, which were laid out in the WSI.

Although the application site lies in vicinity of Neolithic, Bronze Age and Roman sites, it shows a very low archaeological potential.

Only one archaeological feature, linear ditch 4/11 was discovered in Trench 4 during the fieldwork. No finds were obtained from the ditch, however based on stratigraphic relationships it may possibly be of prehistoric date. Additional investigated features 4/06 and 4/09 were identified as natural features interpreted as tree throw holes and root or animal activities. Those features as well as ditch 4/11 were sealed by a thick alluvial deposit (4/03) and suggest that the investigated area was presumably part of wider flood during the prehistoric period.

The alluvial deposit (1/03), (2/03), (4/03) and (5/04) was present in all trenches, except Trench 3. The absence of this deposit in Trench 3 suggests that this area of the evaluated site was higher ground during the course of the prehistoric and early historic period.

Two more successive deposits were encountered in all trenches. The lower deposit was interpreted as post-medieval cultivation and the upper deposit represents modern topsoil.

The discovery of ditch 4/11 confirmed human activities within the evaluated site and there is possibility that more archaeological features are presented on site, however they may possible lie beneath the alluvial deposit and below the lowest impact level of cable runs and roadway, which will not be greater than 0.75m.

## 7 ARCHIVE

### Archive Contents

The archive consists of the following:

#### Paper record

The project brief

Written Scheme of Investigation

The project report

The primary site record

The archive currently is maintained by John Moore Heritage Services and will be transferred to Oxfordshire Resource Centre under accession number OXCMS: 2015.53.

## 8 BIBLIOGRAPHY

English Heritage (2006). *Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment*. London: EH.

Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (2014). *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Field Evaluation*. Reading: CIfA.

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**Appendix 1: Trench Context Inventory**

ID	Type	Description	Depth	Length	Width	Finds	Interpretation	Date
<b>Trench 1</b> N end coordinates E460360, N187909, levels top 46.40m AOD, bottom 45.24m AOD S end coordinates E460353, N187882, levels top 46.40m AOD, bottom 45.79m AOD								
1/01	Deposit	Dark grey-brown sandy loam with occasional small stones	0.40m	27.90m	1.80m	-	Topsoil	Modern
1/02	Deposit	Mid brown sandy loam with occasional small stones	0.50m	27.90m	1.80m	CBM	Cultivation layer	Post-medieval
1/03	Deposit	Mid orange-brown silty sand with rare small stones	0.44m	27.90m	1.80m	-	'Alluvial' or Head deposit	-
1/04	Deposit	Mid brown sandy gravel	0.04m as exca.	27.90m	1.80m	-	Natural terrace gravels	-
<b>Trench 2</b> N end coordinates E460341, N187844, levels top 46.28m AOD, bottom 45.69m AOD S end coordinates E460339, N187833, levels top 46.35m AOD, bottom 45.50m AOD								
2/01	Deposit	Dark grey-brown sandy loam with occasional small stones	0.35m	11.50m	1.80m	-	Topsoil	Modern
2/02	Deposit	Mid brown sandy loam with occasional small stones	0.43m	11.50m	1.80m	-	Cultivation layer	Post-medieval
2/03	Deposit	Mid orange-brown silty sand with rare small stones	0.05m as exca.	11.50m	1.80m	-	'Alluvial' or Head deposit	-
<b>Trench 3</b> E end coordinates E460214, N187848, levels top 46.49m AOD, bottom 45.88m AOD W end coordinates E460205, N187848, levels top 46.48m AOD, bottom 45.86m AOD								
3/01	Deposit	Dark grey-brown sandy loam with occasional small stones	0.20m	8.60m	1.80m	-	Topsoil	Modern
3/02	Deposit	Mid brown sandy loam with occasional small stones	0.40m	8.60m	1.80m	-	Cultivation layer	Post-medieval
3/03	Deposit	Light yellow-brown sand with occasional fine gravel and flints	0.10m as exca.	8.60m	1.80m	-	Natural geology	-
<b>Trench 4</b> NW end coordinates E460163, N187886, levels top 46.82m AOD, bottom 45.79m AOD SE end coordinates E460181, N187863, levels top 46.62m AOD, bottom 45.93m AOD								
4/01	Deposit	Dark grey-brown sandy loam with occasional small stones	0.30- 0.42m	28.70m	1.80m	-	Topsoil	Modern
4/02	Deposit	Mid brown sandy loam with occasional to moderate small sub-rounded stones	0.26- 0.37m	28.70m	1.80m	-	Cultivation layer	Post-medieval
4/03	Deposit	Mid orange-brown silty sand with rare small stones	0.20- 0.50m	28.70m	1.80m	-	'Alluvial' deposit	-
4/04	Deposit	Light yellow-brown sand with occasional fine gravel and flints	0.06m min.	19m	1.80m	-	Upper natural geology	-
4/05	Deposit	Light orange-brown fine sand	n/a	9.70m	1.80m	-	Lower natural geology	-
4/06	Cut	Sub-circular	0.20m as exca	3.40m	1.80m	-	Tree throw hole	-
4/07	Fill	Mid brown silty sand with moderate flints and small stones	0.20m	2m	0.75m in sec.	-	Fill of tree throw hole	-
4/08	Fill	Mid orange-brown sandy loam with occasional gravel	0.25m	0.90m	0.90m	-	Fill of natural feature	-

4/09	Cut	Irregular cut	0.25m	0.90m	0.90m	-	Natural feature, animal barrow or rooting	-
4/10	Fill	Mid to dark brown loamy sand with frequent small stone and flints	0.35m	2.40m	1.30m	-	Fill of ditch 4/11	Prehistoric (?)
4/11	Cut	Linear cut with shallow concave sides and narrow concave base. Orientation N-S	0.35m	2.40m	1.30m	-	Ditch	Prehistoric (?)
<b>Trench 5</b> NE end coordinates E460221, N187965, levels top 47.18m AOD, bottom 46.26m AOD S end coordinates E460210, N187957, levels top 47.11m AOD, bottom 46.12.50m AOD								
5/01	Deposit	Dark grey-brown sandy loam with occasional small stones	0.22m	13.20m	1.80m	-	Topsoil	Modern
5/02	Deposit	Mid brown sandy loam with occasional to moderate small sub-rounded stones	0.46m	13.20m	1.80m	-	Cultivation layer	Post-medieval
5/03	Deposit	Mid brown sandy gravel	0.0.7m as exca.	13.20m	1.80m	-	Natural geology	-
5/04	Deposit	Mid orange-brown sandy loam with occasional gravel	0.34m	13.20m	1.80m	-	'Alluvial' deposit	-