

# Archaeological Evaluation at Highfields School Downham Rd, Ely



## Archaeological Evaluation Report



October 2014

**Client: Borrás Construction Ltd.  
For Highfields School**

OA East Report No: 1695  
OASIS No: oxfordar3-194795  
NGR: TL 5386 8089

## **Archaeological Evaluation at Highfields School, Downham Rd, Ely.**

*Archaeological Evaluation*

*By John Diffey BA*

*With contributions by Richard Mortimer*

*Editor: Stephen Macaulay BA MPhil MIfA*

*Illustrator: Charlotte Davies MPhil*

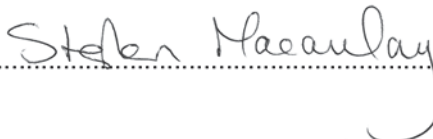
*Report Date: October 2014*

**Report Number:** 1695  
**Site Name:** Highfields School, Downham Rd, Ely  
**HER Event No:** 4286  
**Date of Works:** 28<sup>th</sup> October 2014  
**Client Name:** Borrás Construction Ltd. For Highfields School  
**Client Ref:** 17264  
**Planning Ref:** TBC  
**Grid Ref:** TL 5386 8089  
**Site Code:** ELYHIS14  
**Finance Code:** ELYHIS14  
**Receiving Body:** CCC Stores

**Accession No:**

Prepared by: John Diffey  
Position: Assistant Supervisor  
Date: 29/10/2014

Checked by: Stephen Macaulay  
Position: Senior Project Manager  
Date: 11/11/14  
Signed: .....



**Disclaimer**

*This document has been prepared for the titled project or named part thereof and should not be relied upon or used for any other project without an independent check being carried out as to its suitability and prior written authority of Oxford Archaeology being obtained. Oxford Archaeology accepts no responsibility or liability for the consequences of this document being used for a purpose other than the purposes for which it was commissioned. Any person/party using or relying on the document for such other purposes agrees and will by such use or reliance be taken to confirm their agreement to indemnify Oxford Archaeology for all loss or damage resulting therefrom. Oxford Archaeology accepts no responsibility or liability for this document to any party other than the person/party by whom it was commissioned.*

**Oxford Archaeology East,**  
15 Trafalgar Way,  
Bar Hill,  
Cambridge,  
CB23 8SQ

t: 01223 850500  
f: 01223 850599  
e: oaeast@thehumanjourney.net  
w: <http://thehumanjourney.net/oeast>

© Oxford Archaeology East 2011  
Oxford Archaeology Limited is a Registered Charity No: 285627

## Table of Contents

<b>Summary.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>1 Introduction.....</b>	<b>7</b>
1.1 Location and scope of work.....	7
1.2 Geology and topography.....	7
1.3 Archaeological and historical background.....	7
1.4 Acknowledgements.....	8
<b>2 Aims and Methodology.....</b>	<b>9</b>
2.1 Aims.....	9
2.2 Methodology.....	9
<b>3 Results.....</b>	<b>10</b>
3.1 Introduction.....	10
3.2 Trench 1.....	10
3.3 Finds Summary.....	10
<b>4 Discussion and Conclusions.....</b>	<b>11</b>
4.1 Interpretation.....	11
4.2 Significance.....	11
4.3 Recommendations.....	11
<b>Appendix A. Trench Descriptions and Context Inventory.....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Appendix B. Bibliography.....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Appendix C. OASIS Report Form.....</b>	<b>14</b>

### List of Figures

- Fig. 1 Site location map  
Fig. 2 Trench Plan and Section

### List of Plates

- Plate 1 Site Overview  
Plate 2 Trench 1 from West

## **Summary**

*On the 28<sup>th</sup> of October 2014 an archaeological evaluation took place at Highfield Special School, Ely. A single trench was excavated immediately east of the school building. Although no archaeological features were encountered the evaluation identified a layer of buried soil which contained pottery dating to the Late Iron Age and Early Roman periods.*



## 1 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Location and scope of work

- 1.1.1 An archaeological evaluation was conducted at Highfield Special School, Ely.
- 1.1.2 This archaeological evaluation was undertaken in accordance with a Brief issued by Andy Thomas of Cambridgeshire County Council (CCC; Planning Application), supplemented by a Specification prepared by OA East.
- 1.1.3 The work was designed to assist in defining the character and extent of any archaeological remains within the proposed redevelopment area, in accordance with the guidelines set out in *National Planning Policy Framework* (Department for Communities and Local Government March 2012). The results will enable decisions to be made by CCC, on behalf of the Local Planning Authority, with regard to the treatment of any archaeological remains found.
- 1.1.4 The site archive is currently held by OA East and will be deposited with the appropriate county stores in due course.

### 1.2 Geology and topography

- 1.2.1 The British Geological Survey indicates that the solid geology of the site comprises Kimmeridge Clay Formations. On site the geology encountered comprised layers of sands, sandy silts and sandy clays (described further below) and are more likely to represent superficial deposits of glacial till and outwash sands and gravels of the Oadby Member type. The site lies at 14m OD on a very slight north-west facing slope.

### 1.3 Archaeological and historical background

#### *From Wiseman 2014*

- 1.3.1 The site lies on the northern edge of the Isle of Ely, which appears to have been in continual use for farming since the Neolithic, until urban development over the last thirty years.
- 1.3.2 The main archaeological information for areas immediately around the Highfields School site come from aerial photographs, fieldwalking, and four evaluations: a single trench at the Highfields School (MCB17963), at Chevington Place (CHER10097); 11 trenches on the playing fields south of the College (MCB15798), and 35 trenches on 20 hectares north of the College (MCB15536).

#### **Prehistoric**

- 1.3.3 Bronze Age pottery was recovered from an isolated pit north of the College, 400 metres north of the site (MCB15536).
- 1.3.4 A small prehistoric or Romano-British ditch was found at the west end of the Highfields School, possibly forming part of a Bronze Age field system (MCB17963).

#### **Medieval**

- 1.3.5 The site lies about 500 metres north of the core of medieval Ely. The areas immediately around the Highfields School have produced a number of medieval finds (CHER10097, 16086).



- 1.3.6 A small medieval field system and enclosures dating to 1000-1400 were excavated on the playing fields (MCB15798). This was sealed by later ridge and furrow, which has also been identified to the north and east of the College (MCB 10097, 17963, 15536) – although it has all been levelled to create the playing fields.

#### **1.4 Acknowledgements**

- 1.4.1 The Author would like to thank Borrás Construction Ltd and Highfields School for commissioning the works and Alex Day for his work on site.

## 2 AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

### 2.1 Aims

- 2.1.1 The objective of this Evaluation was to determine as far as reasonably possible the presence/absence, location, nature, extent, date, quality, condition and significance of any surviving archaeological deposits within the development area.

### 2.2 Methodology

- 2.2.1 The Brief required that a programme of linear trial trenching and/or test pitting be implemented to adequately sample the threatened available area.
- 2.2.2 Machine excavation was carried out under constant archaeological supervision with a rubber tracked mini digger using a toothless ditching bucket.
- 2.2.3 Spoil, exposed surfaces and features were scanned with a metal detector. All metal-detected and hand-collected finds were retained for inspection, other than those which were obviously modern.
- 2.2.4 All archaeological features and deposits were recorded using OA East's *pro-forma* sheets. Trench locations, plans and sections were recorded at appropriate scales and colour and monochrome photographs were taken of all relevant features and deposits.
- 2.2.5 On site conditions were good however the limited size of the area available for excavation and the physical limits of working safely within that area made it impossible to excavate a trench of the proposed size. Thus a single trench 5m x 2m was excavated in the centre of the area available.

## 3 RESULTS

### 3.1 Introduction

- 3.1.1 The results below are ordered stratigraphically from earliest to latest deposits

### 3.2 Trench 1

- 3.2.1 With the removal of topsoil and subsoil trench 1 was machined to a depth of 0.4-0.6m. This initial strip revealed no natural geology so two test pits were excavated by hand through the deposits in the base of the trench to reach the natural below.
- 3.2.2 The natural geology was reached at a depth of 13.15mOD in the southern test pit and rose to the north to a height of 13.41mOD in the northern test pit. Excavation through this layer was carried out to ensure that it was a sterile natural deposit. This excavation revealed the natural to be made up of layers of sands, silts and clays described below.
- 3.2.3 Layer (006) was reached at a level of 12.86m in the southern test-pit and rose slightly to 13.01m in the northern test-pit it consisted of a mix of light grey and bright reddish yellow sands and gravels with protrusions of dark grey clay (Kimmeridge Clay formation). This layer was in turn overlain by (005) which consisted of a 0.16m thick layer of light yellowy grey soft sandy silt containing frequent flecks of manganese. Deposit (005) was overlain by (004), a layer of soft light reddish yellow sandy clay containing occasional small sub-angular flint stones. This layer was found to be 0.14m thick in the southern test-pit but thickened to 0.24m in the northern test-pit. All of the deposits described above are thought to represent superficial geological deposits most likely glacial in origin.

- 3.2.4 The natural glacial layers described above were overlain by (003) a 0.1-0.15m thick layer which extended across the whole of the excavated area. This layer comprised a soft mid brownish grey sandy clay with very occasional small sub-angular flint stones. This layer also showed signs of bioturbation acting on it in the past in the form of faint root traces within the deposit. This deposits upper boundary set the level of the initial machining within the trench. It is thought that this layer may represent a buried soil. Two pieces of pottery, piece of animal bone and an animal tooth were recovered from this deposit during excavation of the two test-pits and initial analysis suggests that one sherd of pottery dates to the Iron Age while the second dates to the first half of the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD (S. Wadeson BA 2014. *Pers. Comm.*).
- 3.2.5 The possible buried soil was overlain by a 0.1-0.3m thick layer of subsoil (002) comprising a soft mid yellowish grey sandy clay containing frequent small sub-rounded flint and chalk stones, frequent pieces of ceramic building material (CBM), charcoal lumps, slag and coal. The subsoil was overlain by a 0.3m thick layer of topsoil comprising a soft dark greyish brown sandy clay containing frequent small sub-rounded flint and chalk stones, large pieces of CBM, charcoal lumps and coal.

### 3.3 Finds Summary

- 3.3.1 The only finds recovered from site came from the buried soil layer (003) and consist of two pieces of pottery a fragment of animal bone and an animal tooth. Of the two pieces of pottery, one is dated to the Iron Age period and the second dating to the first half of the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD or Late Iron Age / Early Roman period. Of the animal remains the bone fragment was identified as a piece of cattle phalanx while the tooth was identified as a cattle first molar. (C. Faine MA, Msc, Alfa 2014. *Pers. Comm.*)

## 4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

### 4.1 Interpretation

- 4.1.1 With the limited size of the trench interpretation of the findings on site is difficult. No Archaeological features were identified however the presence of a buried soil and the later prehistoric date of the pottery found within it increases the archaeological potential of the site and the potential of archaeological features within the development site. Within the limited excavation area it would appear that the deposits recorded including the buried soil are deepest at the southern end of the site and thus thin or rise to the north. It is possible that a natural hollow toward the south of the trench may have led to the preservation of the buried soil however the size of the possible hollow or extent of the buried soil were impossible to determine with the spacial restrictions of the site.

### 4.2 Significance

- 4.2.1 The results of the evaluation have shown that although there is the potential for the presence of archaeological deposits and artefacts within the development area the lack of any specific features may limit the significance of these findings and the sites importance to the archaeological record.

### 4.3 Recommendations

- 4.3.1 Recommendations for any future work based upon this report will be made by the County Archaeology Office.

## APPENDIX A. TRENCH DESCRIPTIONS AND CONTEXT INVENTORY

Trench 1						
<b>General description</b>					<b>Orientation</b>	N-S
Trench consists of soil and subsoil overlying a layer of buried soil containing pottery dating to the Late Iron Age and Early Roman period this in turn overlay the natural geology consisting of layers of sands gravels clays and silts.					<b>Avg. depth (m)</b>	0.5
					<b>Width (m)</b>	2
					<b>Length (m)</b>	5
Contexts						
context no	type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	comment	finds	date
1	Layer	-	0.3	Topsoil	-	-
2	Layer	-	0.1-0.3	Subsoil	-	-
3	Layer	-	0.1-0.2	Buried Soil	Pot, Animal Bone	Late Iron Age-Early Roman
4	Layer	-	0.15-0.22	Natural	-	-
5	Layer	-	0.15-0.17	Natural	-	-
6	Layer	-	-	Natural	-	-

## APPENDIX B. BIBLIOGRAPHY

**Thomas. A,** *Brief for Archaeological Evaluation. Highfields School Downham Rd, Ely.* Unpublished, 2014

**Wiseman. R,** *Written Scheme of investigation Archaeological Evaluation, Highfield School, Downham Road, Ely.* Unpublished, 2014

<http://mapapps.bgs.ac.uk/geologyofbritain/home.html> viewed 29/10/2014

<http://www.heritagegateway.org.uk/Gateway/Results.aspx> viewed 29/10/2014

## APPENDIX C. OASIS REPORT FORM

All fields are required unless they are not applicable.

### Project Details

OASIS Number	oxfordar3-194795			
Project Name	Evaluation at Highfields School, Downham Rd, Ely			
Project Dates (fieldwork)	Start	28-10-2014	Finish	28-10-2014
Previous Work (by OA East)	Yes		Future Work	Unknown

### Project Reference Codes

Site Code	ELYHIS14	Planning App. No.	n/a
HER No.	4286	Related HER/OASIS No.	

### Type of Project/Techniques Used

Prompt	Direction from Local Planning Authority - Direction 4
Development Type	Public Building

### Please select all techniques used:

<input type="checkbox"/> Aerial Photography - interpretation	<input type="checkbox"/> Grab-Sampling	<input type="checkbox"/> Remote Operated Vehicle Survey
<input type="checkbox"/> Aerial Photography - new	<input type="checkbox"/> Gravity-Core	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Sample Trenches
<input type="checkbox"/> Annotated Sketch	<input type="checkbox"/> Laser Scanning	<input type="checkbox"/> Survey/Recording Of Fabric/Structure
<input type="checkbox"/> Augering	<input type="checkbox"/> Measured Survey	<input type="checkbox"/> Targeted Trenches
<input type="checkbox"/> Dendrochronological Survey	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Metal Detectors	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Test Pits
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Documentary Search	<input type="checkbox"/> Phosphate Survey	<input type="checkbox"/> Topographic Survey
<input type="checkbox"/> Environmental Sampling	<input type="checkbox"/> Photogrammetric Survey	<input type="checkbox"/> Vibro-core
<input type="checkbox"/> Fieldwalking	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Photographic Survey	<input type="checkbox"/> Visual Inspection (Initial Site Visit)
<input type="checkbox"/> Geophysical Survey	<input type="checkbox"/> Rectified Photography	

### Monument Types/Significant Finds & Their Periods

List feature types using the [NMR Monument Type Thesaurus](#) and significant finds using the [MDA Object type Thesaurus](#) together with their respective periods. If no features/finds were found, please state "none".

Monument	Period	Object	Period
Buried Soil Horizon	Iron Age -800 to 43	Pottery	Iron Age -800 to 43
	Select period...		Select period...
	Select period...		Select period...

### Project Location

County	Cambridgeshire	Site Address (including postcode if possible)	
District	Ely	Highfields School, Downham Road, Ely. Cambs. CB61BD	
Parish	Ely		
HER	Cambs		
Study Area	c.900 sqm	National Grid Reference	TL 5386 8089

### Project Originators

Organisation	OA EAST
Project Brief Originator	Andy Thomas
Project Design Originator	Rob Wiseman
Project Manager	Stephen Macaulay
Supervisor	John Diffey

### Project Archives

Physical Archive	Digital Archive	Paper Archive
CCC Stores	OA East	CCC Stores
ELYHIS14	ELYHIS14	ELYHIS14

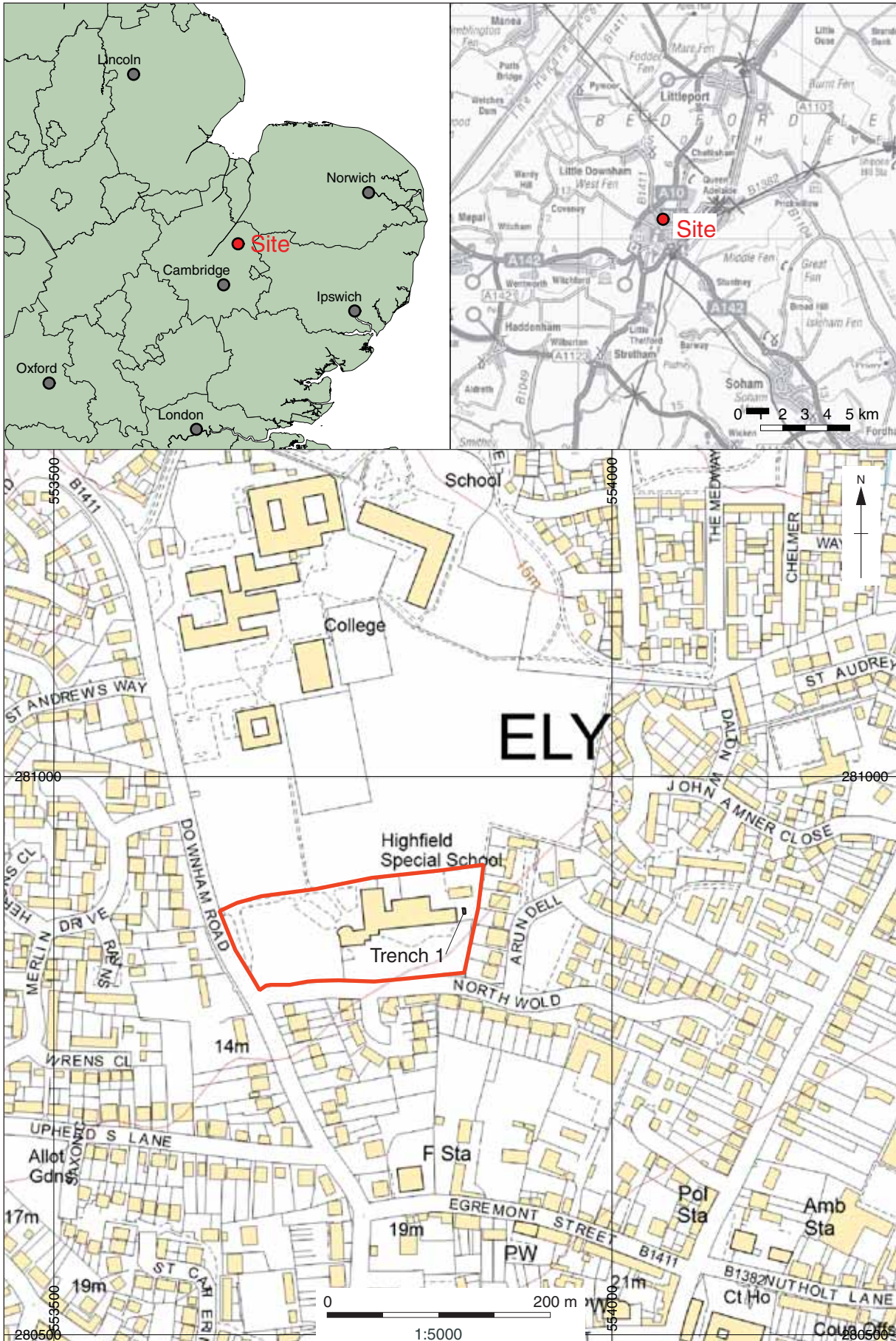
### Archive Contents/Media

	Physical Contents	Digital Contents	Paper Contents
Animal Bones	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ceramics	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Environmental	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Glass	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Human Bones	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Industrial	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Leather	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Metal	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Stratigraphic		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Survey		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Textiles	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Wood	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Worked Bone	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Worked Stone/Lithic	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
None	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Digital Media	Paper Media
<input type="checkbox"/> Database	<input type="checkbox"/> Aerial Photos
<input type="checkbox"/> GIS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Context Sheet
<input type="checkbox"/> Geophysics	<input type="checkbox"/> Correspondence
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Images	<input type="checkbox"/> Diary
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Illustrations	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Drawing
<input type="checkbox"/> Moving Image	<input type="checkbox"/> Manuscript
<input type="checkbox"/> Spreadsheets	<input type="checkbox"/> Map
<input type="checkbox"/> Survey	<input type="checkbox"/> Matrices
<input type="checkbox"/> Text	<input type="checkbox"/> Microfilm
<input type="checkbox"/> Virtual Reality	<input type="checkbox"/> Misc.
	<input type="checkbox"/> Research/Notes
	<input type="checkbox"/> Photos
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Plans
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Report
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Sections
	<input type="checkbox"/> Survey

Notes:





Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown copyright and database right 2014. All rights reserved. CM 10001998

Figure 1: Site location showing archaeological trenches (black) in development area (red)



Figure 2: Trench plan and section





Plate 1: Site Overview



Plate 2: Trench 1 from west



### **Head Office/Registered Office/ OA South**

Janus House  
Osney Mead  
Oxford OX2 0ES

t: +44 (0) 1865 263 800  
f: +44 (0) 1865 793 496  
e: [info@oxfordarchaeology.com](mailto:info@oxfordarchaeology.com)  
w: <http://oxfordarchaeology.com>

### **OA North**

Mill 3  
Moor Lane  
Lancaster LA1 1GF

t: +44 (0) 1524 541 000  
f: +44 (0) 1524 848 606  
e: [oanorth@oxfordarchaeology.com](mailto: oanorth@oxfordarchaeology.com)  
w: <http://oxfordarchaeology.com>

### **OA East**

15 Trafalgar Way  
Bar Hill  
Cambridgeshire  
CB23 8SQ

t: +44 (0) 1223 850500  
e: [oaeast@oxfordarchaeology.com](mailto: oaeast@oxfordarchaeology.com)  
w: <http://oxfordarchaeology.com>



**Director:** Gill Hey, BA PhD FSA MIFA  
*Oxford Archaeology Ltd is a  
Private Limited Company, N<sup>o</sup>: 1618597  
and a Registered Charity, N<sup>o</sup>: 285627*