



Land East of Park Road, Didcot, Oxfordshire

Archaeological Evaluation Report

June 2017

Client: EDP on behalf of Catesby Estates Ltd

Issue No: 1

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Land East of Park Road, Didcot, Oxfordshire

Archaeological Evaluation Report

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Contents

Summary	vii
Acknowledgements	viii
1 INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1 Scope of work.....	1
1.2 Location, topography and geology.....	1
1.3 Archaeological and historical background.....	1
2 EVALUATION AIMS AND METHODOLOGY	3
2.1 Aims	3
2.2 Methodology.....	3
3 RESULTS	4
3.1 Introduction and presentation of results	4
3.2 General soils and ground conditions.....	4
3.3 General distribution of archaeological deposits.....	4
3.4 Trench 2	4
3.5 Trench 3	5
3.6 Trench 6	5
3.7 Finds summary	5
4 DISCUSSION	6
4.1 Reliability of field investigation.....	6
4.2 Evaluation objectives and results.....	6
4.3 Interpretation.....	6
4.4 Significance	6
APPENDIX A TRENCH DESCRIPTIONS AND CONTEXT INVENTORY	7
APPENDIX B FINDS REPORTS.....	10
B.1 Pottery	10
APPENDIX C BIBLIOGRAPHY	11
APPENDIX D SITE SUMMARY DETAILS	12

List of Figures

Fig. 1	Site location
Fig. 2	Geophysical survey results, trench locations and archaeology
Fig. 3	Detailed plan for Trench 2
Fig. 4	Sections

List of Plates

Plate 1	Representative section Trench 1
Plate 2	Ditch 204 Trench 2
Plate 3	Posthole 206 Trench 2
Plate 4	Ditch 208 Trench 2
Plate 5	Feature 305 Trench 3

Summary

Between the 23rd and 25th May 2017, Oxford Archaeology undertook an archaeological evaluation on the site of a proposed housing development at Land East of Park Road, Didcot, Oxfordshire for Environmental Dimension Partnership (EDP) on behalf of Catesby Estates Ltd.

The evaluation comprised seven trenches and uncovered total of three ditches, three postholes and a feature interpreted as a possible tree-throw hole. The main focus of features, comprising the postholes and two of the ditches, were located in Trench 2, in the north-eastern part of the evaluation area. One of the ditches was dated by ceramic evidence to the Roman period and the other to the late Iron Age/early Roman period. Only one of the postholes was excavated, but produced no dating evidence. The paucity of artefactual material suggests that the features are likely to be situated away from, or on the periphery of, any associated settlement.

Acknowledgements

Oxford Archaeology would like to thank Eddy Stratford of the Environmental Dimension Partnership (EDP) on behalf of Catesby Estates Ltd for commissioning this project. Thanks are also extended to Richard Oram, Planning Archaeologist for Oxfordshire County Council, who approved the project design and for his advice and guidance.

The project was managed for Oxford Archaeology by Gerry Thacker. The fieldwork was directed by Robert McIntosh, who was supported by Jim Harris. Survey and digitizing was carried out by Matthew Reynolds, Benjamin Brown and Magdalena Wachnik. Thanks are also extended to the teams of OA staff that cleaned and packaged the finds under the management of Leigh Allen, and prepared the archive under the management of Nicola Scott.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Scope of work

1.1.1 Oxford Archaeology (OA) was commissioned by the Environmental Dimension Partnership (EDP) on behalf of Catesby Estates Ltd to undertake a trial trench evaluation of the site of a proposed residential development at Land East of Park Road, Didcot, Oxfordshire.

1.1.2 The work was undertaken to inform the Planning Authority in advance of a submission of a Planning Application. Although the local Planning Authority had not set a brief for the work, discussions between representatives of EDP and Richard Oram, Planning Archaeologist for Oxfordshire County Council, established the scope of work required. A written scheme of investigation was produced by OA detailing the Local Authority's requirements for work necessary to inform the planning process (OA 2017). This document outlines how OA implemented those requirements.

1.2 Location, topography and geology

1.2.1 The site is located to the east of Park Road, directly east of the Great Western Park urban extension, to the immediate south of Didcot and around 330m north of the hamlet of Coscote. The site is centered on NGR 451712 188661 (Fig. 1).

1.2.2 The area of proposed development comprised a single field under pasture. It was flat and lay at c 66-68m above Ordnance Datum.

1.2.3 The geology of the area is mapped as Upper Greensand Formation, overlain by superficial head deposits (www.bgs.ac.uk).

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

1.3.1 The archaeological and historical background of the site has been described in detail in an archaeological and heritage assessment (EDP 2017), the results of which are summarized below.

1.3.2 The site does not contain any designated heritage assets, such as world heritage sites, scheduled monuments, registered parks and gardens, registered battlefields or listed buildings.

1.3.3 The pattern of landscape use during the prehistoric and Roman periods, well established from previous investigations in the wider area, suggests there is greatest potential for the site to contain features and deposits associated with farming activity during these periods.

1.3.4 During the medieval and post-medieval periods, the site appears to have comprised agricultural land, where the presence of surviving ridge and furrow earthworks indicates it was subject to intensive ploughing for arable cultivation.

1.3.5 A geophysical survey of the site (Archaeological Surveys 2017; Fig. 2) confirmed the presence of anomalies relating to the extant ridge and furrow earthworks and the locations of former field boundaries. Further weak anomalies were also identified, but due to their fragmentary nature and lack of coherent pattern or layout it was not possible to determine whether they were natural or anthropogenic in origin. As such, aside from the evidence for

ridge and furrow cultivation, the results of the survey did not indicate the presence of any anomalies of definitively archaeological origin within the site.

2 EVALUATION AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Aims

2.1.1 The project aims and objectives were as follows:

- To determine or confirm the general nature of any remains present.
- To determine or confirm the approximate date or date range of any remains, by means of artefactual or other evidence.
- To determine the location, extent, date, character, condition, significance and quality of any archaeological remains within the development;
- To assess vulnerability/sensitivity of any exposed remains;
- To determine the potential of the site to provide palaeoenvironmental and/or economic evidence;
- To provide sufficient information on the archaeological potential of the site to enable the archaeological implications of any proposed developments to be assessed;
- To assess the impact of previous land use on the site;
- To inform a strategy to avoid or mitigate impacts of any proposed development on surviving archaeological remains;
- To test the results of the geophysical survey.
- To disseminate the results through the production of a site archive for deposition with an appropriate museum and to provide information for accession to the Oxfordshire Historic Environment Record.

2.2 Methodology

2.2.1 Site-specific methodologies were as follows:

- Trenches were set out by an OA Surveyor using a GPS system. Trench locations were CAT scanned prior to and during excavation.
- Trenches were machine excavated using a suitably powerful machine fitted with a toothless ditching bucket, under close archaeological supervision. Machining ceased at the surface of the natural geology.
- Spoil was stored like with like at a safe distance from the trench edges.
- Revealed features were planned and a selection hand excavated and recorded as per Appendix A of the WSI (OA 2017).

3 RESULTS

3.1 Introduction and presentation of results

3.1.1 The results of the evaluation are presented below, and include a stratigraphic description of those trenches that contained archaeological remains. The full details of all trenches, with dimensions and depths of all deposits, can be found in Appendix A. Finds data and spot dates are tabulated in Appendix B.

3.1.2 Context numbers reflect the corresponding trench number unless otherwise stated eg pit 102 is a feature within Trench 1, while ditch 304 is a feature within Trench 3.

3.2 General soils and ground conditions

3.2.1 The soil sequence was fairly uniform in all the trenches (Plate 1). The natural geology of sandy clay was overlain by Head deposits sealed beneath a subsoil corresponding to the extant ridge and furrow earthworks, which was in turn overlain by topsoil. An E-W aligned feature identified in Trench 1 was interpreted as being geological in origin.

3.2.2 Ground conditions throughout the evaluation were good and the trenches remained dry throughout. Archaeological features, where present, were easy to identify against the underlying natural geology.

3.3 General distribution of archaeological deposits

3.3.1 Archaeological features were present in Trenches 2, 3 and 6. These comprised drainage and/or boundary ditches, with Trench 2 additionally containing three postholes.

3.4 Trench 2

3.4.1 The trench contained two ditches (204 and 208), one at either end of the trench, as well as three postholes (206, 210 and 212, Figs 2 and 3).

3.4.2 Ditch 204 was orientated broadly E-W, and was only partially revealed at the extreme north-eastern end of the trench (Figs 2, 3 and 4; Plate 2). The ditch, which cut soil horizon 202, measured 1.85m wide (within the confines of the trench) and was 0.7m deep. The revealed edge sloped gently at the top, becoming much steeper with depth. The base of the ditch appeared to slope down to the north-east. The ditch contained a single light grey-brown sandy silt fill (205) with occasional fragments of sandstone. Four sherds of pottery dating from AD 50-200 were recovered.

3.4.3 Ditch 208 was located toward the south-western end of the trench and was aligned NNW-SSE. It measured 0.54m wide and 0.16m deep (Figs 2, 3 and 4; Plate 4). The ditch sides were fairly steep and the base sloped down to the east. The single fill (209) was a firm orange-brown sandy clay with occasional sandstone inclusions. A single small and abraded sherd of pottery dating from the late Iron Age or early Roman period was recovered from the fill.

3.4.4 Posthole 206 was located in the north-eastern part of the trench (Figs 2, 3 and 4; Plate 3). The posthole was circular in plan with a diameter of 0.38m and a depth of 0.14m. The sides were near vertical and the base was flat. The single fill (207) was a light grey-brown sandy silt, and contained no finds.

3.4.5 Postholes 210 and 212 were not excavated. They were both circular with a diameter of c 0.4m and were located towards the centre of the trench (Figs 2 and 3). They resembled posthole 206 very closely in both size and fill composition.

3.5 Trench 3

3.5.1 The trench contained a single possible tree-throw hole or ditch (305) that was located towards the centre of the trench and lay on a broadly E-W alignment (Figs 2 and 4; Plate 5). The feature was 1.2m wide and 0.38m deep and the southern side was slightly steeper than the northern edge, with the flat base sloping downward to the south. The lower fill (303) was a light grey-brown clayey sand and was overlain by a fill (304) composed of a darker grey-brown sandy clay with occasional sandstone inclusions. Although the feature appeared linear within the confines of the trench it is possible from the fill profiles that it represented a tree-throw hole.

3.6 Trench 6

3.6.1 The terminus of a ditch, 605, or possibly a pit, was located at the north-eastern end of the trench (Figs 2 and 4). The feature was aligned E-W and terminated on the western side of the trench. It measured 0.9m wide and 0.32m deep with irregular stepped sides and a flat base. The single fill (606) was a yellow-brown sandy silt from which no finds were recovered.

3.7 Finds summary

3.7.1 Finds were recovered from the two ditches in Trench 2. The finds comprised pottery sherds of Roman and possible late prehistoric dates.

4 DISCUSSION

4.1 Reliability of field investigation

4.1.1 The ground conditions were good during the period of the evaluation and features were easily identifiable against the natural geology.

4.2 Evaluation objectives and results

4.2.1 The evaluation confirmed the location, extent, date, character, condition, significance and quality of the archaeological remains within the footprint of the investigation. Where possible a date for the infilling of the revealed features was established from ceramic evidence. The accuracy of the geophysical survey was tested.

4.3 Interpretation

4.3.1 The evaluation revealed a sparse array of archaeological features with the focus of activity in Trench 2, in the north-eastern part of the site. The main focus of features, comprising the postholes and two of the ditches, were located in Trench 2, in the north-eastern part of the evaluation area. One of the ditches was dated by ceramic evidence to the Roman period and the other to the late Iron Age/early Roman period. Only one of the postholes was excavated, but produced no dating evidence. The paucity of artefactual material suggests that the features are likely to be situated away from, or on the periphery of, any associated settlement.

4.3.2 The geophysical survey (Fig. 2) identified a number of faint linear anomalies, and while several of these were in the vicinity of the revealed ditches, none corresponded with the features that were exposed in the trenches.

4.4 Significance

4.4.1 The ditches uncovered within Trench 2 are likely to represent agricultural activity at a remove from the location of settlement. The ditch in Trench 6 may also form part of this system of land management but, as with the postholes uncovered within Trench 2, did not contain any datable material.

APPENDIX A TRENCH DESCRIPTIONS AND CONTEXT INVENTORY

Trench 1						
General description					Orientation	NW-SE
Trench devoid of archaeology. Consists of topsoil and subsoil overlying a natural geology of Head deposits and silty clay with weathered sandstone. A single linear feature was identified but found to be geological upon excavation.					Length (m)	50
					Width (m)	1.6
					Avg. depth (m)	0.55
Context No.	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Finds	Date
100	Layer	-	0.2	Topsoil	-	-
101	Layer	-	0.5	Subsoil	-	-
102	Layer	-	0.15	Head deposits	-	-
103	Layer	-	-	Natural	-	-
104	Cut	0.65	0.08	Natural Feature	-	-
105	Fill	0.65	0.08	Fill of 104, dark brown silty clay	-	-

Trench 2						
General description					Orientation	NE-SW
Trench contained two ditches and three postholes. Both the ditches and one of the postholes were confirmed by excavation. Overlain by topsoil and subsoil and cut into Head deposits overlying a natural of sandy clay with weathered sandstone.					Length (m)	50
					Width (m)	1.6
					Avg. depth (m)	0.6
Context No.	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Finds	Date
200	Layer	-	0.2	Topsoil	-	-
201	Layer	-	0.4	Subsoil	-	-
202	Layer	-	0.3	Head deposits	-	-
203	Layer	-	-	Natural	-	-
204	Cut	1.85	0.7	Ditch	-	-
205	Fill	1.85	0.7	Fill of 204, firm light greyish brown sandy silt	Pottery	AD 50-200
206	Cut	0.38	0.14	Posthole	-	-
207	Fill	0.38	0.14	Fill of 206, firm light greyish brown sandy silt	-	-
208	Cut	0.54	0.16	Ditch	-	-
209	Fill	0.54	0.16	Fill of 208, firm mid orangey brown sandy clay	Pottery	Late Iron age-early Roman
210	Cut	0.4	-	Posthole (unexcavated)	-	-
211	Fill	0.4	-	Fill of 210, firm light greyish brown sandy silt	-	-
212	Cut	0.4	-	Posthole (unexcavated)	-	-
213	Fill	0.4	-	Fill of 210, firm light greyish brown sandy silt	-	-

Trench 3						
General description					Orientation	N-S
Trench contained a potential ditch or tree-throw hole. Consists of topsoil and subsoil overlying a natural geology of Head deposits and silty clay with weathered sandstone.					Length (m)	50
					Width (m)	1.6
					Avg. depth (m)	0.5
Context No.	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Finds	Date
300	Layer	-	0.2	Topsoil	-	-
301	Layer	-	0.15	Subsoil	-	-
302	Layer	-	0.15	Head deposits	-	-
303	Fill	1	0.38	Fill of 305, firm light greyish brown clayey sand	-	-
304	Fill	0.2	0.35	Fill of 305, firm dark greyish brown sandy clay	-	-
305	Cut	1.2	0.38	Ditch	-	-
306	Layer	-	-	Natural	-	-

Trench 4						
General description					Orientation	E-W
Trench devoid of archaeology. Consists of topsoil and subsoil overlying a natural geology of Head deposits and silty clay with weathered sandstone.					Length (m)	50
					Width (m)	1.8
					Avg. depth (m)	0.8
Context No.	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Finds	Date
400	Layer	-	0.1	Topsoil	-	-
401	Layer	-	0.2	Subsoil	-	-
402	Layer	-	0.5	Head deposits	-	-
403	Layer	-	-	Natural	-	-

Trench 5						
General description					Orientation	NW-SE
Trench devoid of archaeology. Consists of topsoil and subsoil overlying a natural geology of Head deposits and silty clay with weathered sandstone.					Length (m)	50
					Width (m)	1.6
					Avg. depth (m)	0.5
Context No.	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Finds	Date
500	Layer	-	0.2	Topsoil	-	-
501	Layer	-	0.4	Subsoil	-	-
502	Layer	-	0.1	Head deposits	-	-
503	Layer	-	-	Natural	-	-

Trench 6						
General description					Orientation	NE-SW
Trench contained one linear ditch terminus or pit confirmed by excavation. Overlain by topsoil and subsoil and cut into a natural geology of Head deposits and silty clay with weathered sandstone.					Length (m)	50
					Width (m)	1.8
					Avg. depth (m)	0.6
Context No.	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Finds	Date
601	Layer	-	0.1	Topsoil	-	-
602	Layer	-	0.2	Subsoil	-	-
603	Layer	-	0.3	Head deposits	-	-
604	Layer	-	-	Natural	-	-
605	Cut	0.9	0.32	Ditch terminus	-	-
606	Fill	0.9	0.32	Fill of 605, friable mid yellowish brown sandy silt	-	-

Trench 7						
General description					Orientation	E-W
Trench devoid of archaeology. Consists of topsoil and subsoil overlying a natural geology of Head deposits and silty clay with weathered sandstone.					Length (m)	50
					Width (m)	1.6
					Avg. depth (m)	0.5
Context No.	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Finds	Date
700	Layer	-	0.2	Topsoil	-	-
701	Layer	-	0.2	Subsoil	-	-
702	Layer	-	0.1	Head deposits	-	-
703	Layer	-	-	Natural	-	-

APPENDIX B FINDS REPORTS

B.1 Pottery

Identified by Edward Biddulph

Context	Description	Date
205	4 very worn sherds. 1 central Gaulish Samian dish, 1 sandy grey ware, 1 sandy glauconitic oxidised ware and 1 oxidised ware, 44g	120-200AD
209	1 very small worn sherd of sand and shell tempered ware, 3g	Late Iron age-early Roman

APPENDIX C BIBLIOGRAPHY

Archaeological Surveys Ltd, 2017 Land east of Park Road, Didcot: Magnetometer Survey Report, unpublished client document

EDP, 2017 Land east of Park Road, Didcot: Archaeological and Heritage Assessment, Environmental Dimension Partnership unpublished client document

OA, 2017 Land east of Park Road Didcot: Written Scheme of Investigation for an Archaeological Evaluation, Oxford Archaeology unpublished client document

APPENDIX D**SITE SUMMARY DETAILS**

Site name:	Land East of Park Road, Didcot, Oxfordshire
Site code:	DIPK17
Grid Reference	451712 188661
Type:	Evaluation (7 trenches)
Date and duration:	23rd-25th May 2017
Area of Site	6.59 hectares
Location of archive:	The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with the Oxfordshire Museum Service in due course, under the following accession number: OXCMS:2017.79.
Summary of Results:	Three of the trenches contained a total of three ditches, three postholes and a feature interpreted as a possible tree-throw hole. The main focus of features, comprising the postholes and two of the ditches, were located in Trench 2, in the NE part of the evaluation area. One of the ditches was dated by ceramic evidence to the Roman period and the other to the late Iron Age/early Roman period. Only one of the postholes was excavated, but produced no dating evidence.



Source: Esri, DigitalGlobe, GeoEye, Earthstar Geographics, CNES/Airbus DS, USDA, USGS, AEX, Getmapping, Aerogrid, IGN, IGP, swisstopo, and the GIS User

Figure 1: Site location

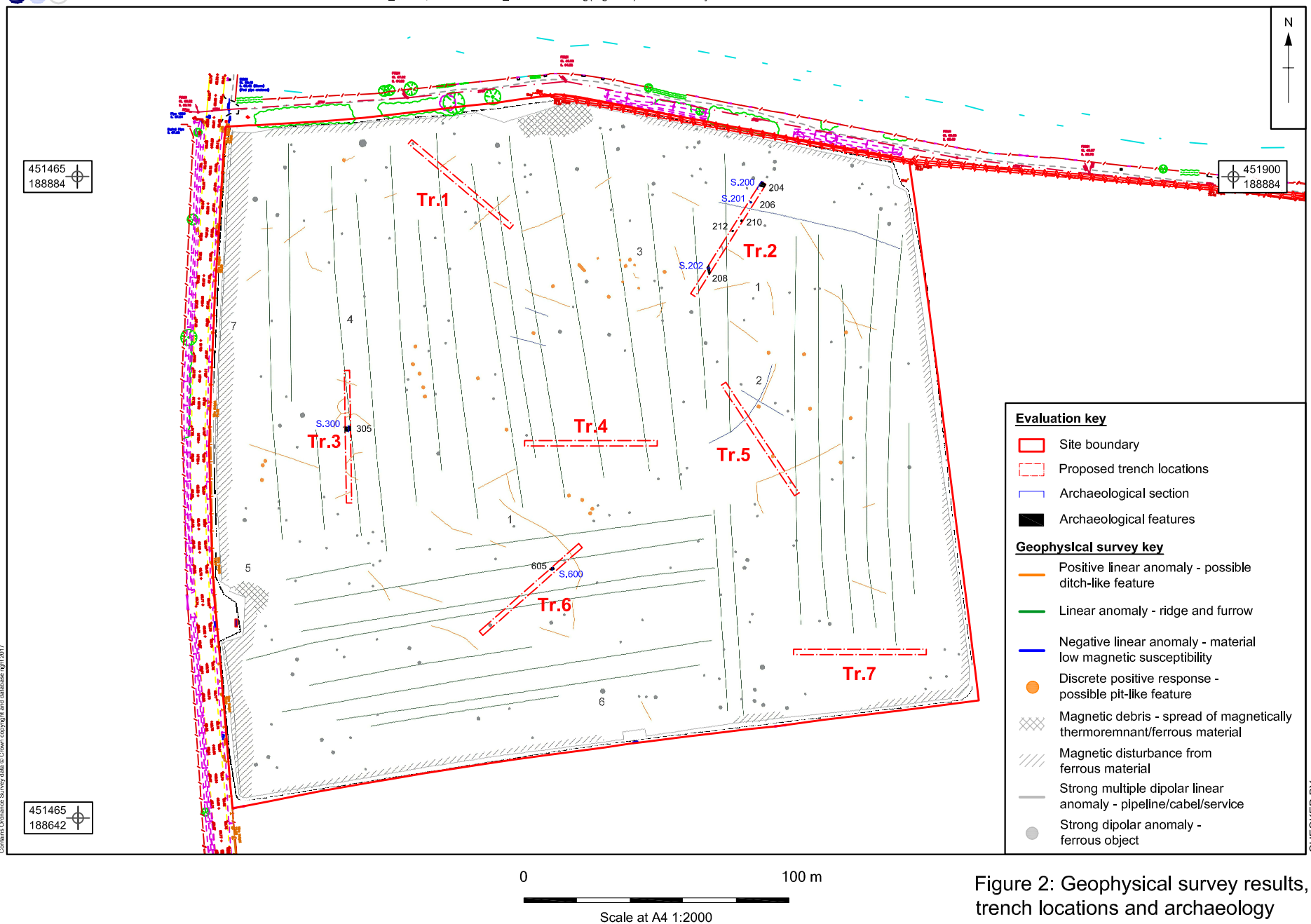
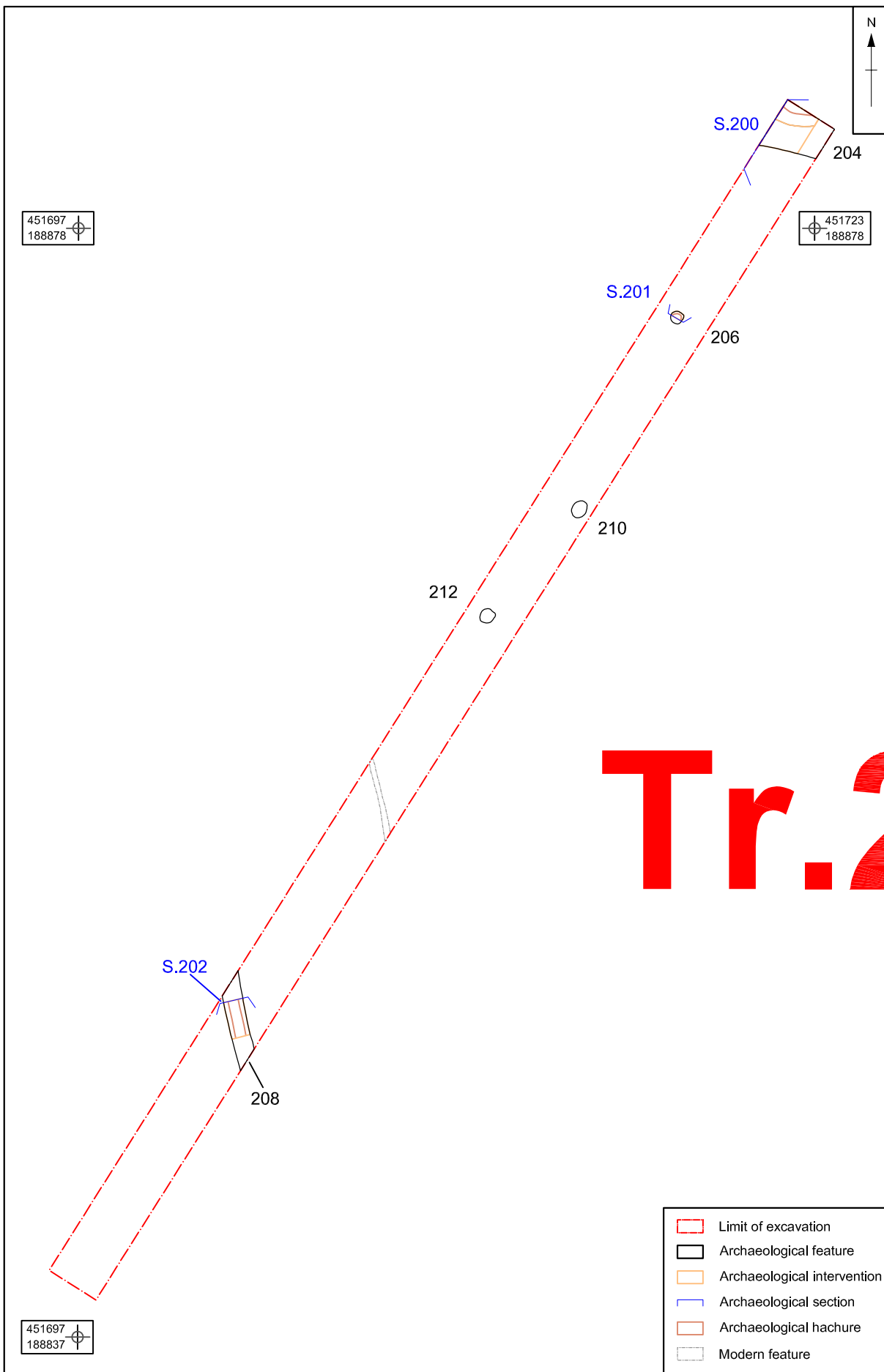


Figure 2: Geophysical survey results, trench locations and archaeology

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CHECKED BY:

Figure 3: Detailed plan for Trench 2

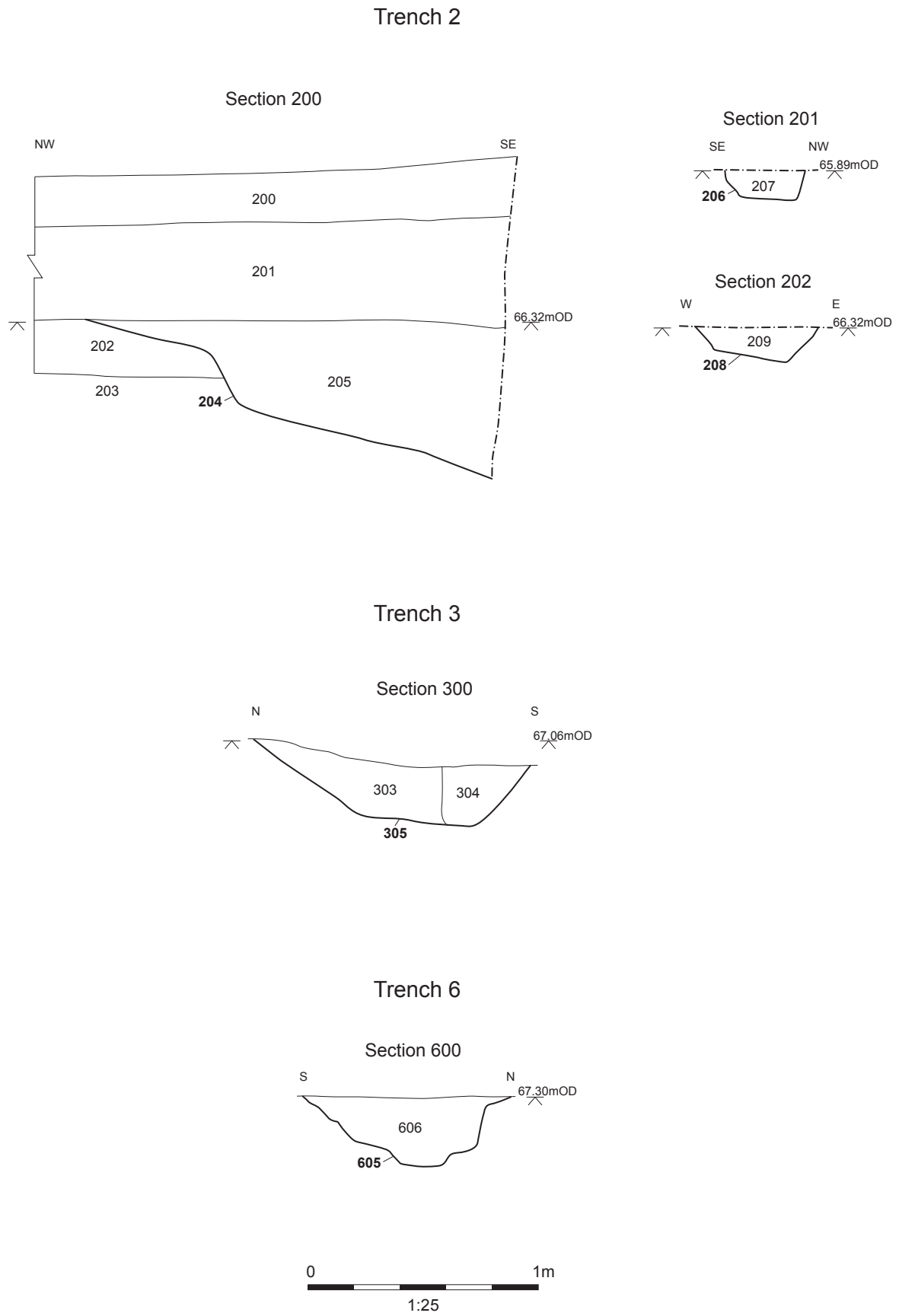


Figure 4: Sections



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