

Primary School Site
Great Western Park
South of Wantage Road
Didcot



Archaeological
Evaluation Report



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Primary School Site, Great Western Park,

South of Wantage Road, Didcot

Archaeological Evaluation Report

Table of Contents

Summary.....	3
1 Introduction.....	4
1.1 Project background, location and scope of work.....	4
1.2 Geology and topography.....	4
1.3 Archaeological and historical background.....	4
2 Evaluation Aims and Methodology.....	5
2.1 Aims.....	5
2.2 Methodology.....	5
3 Results.....	6
3.1 Presentation of results.....	6
3.2 General soils and ground conditions.....	6
3.3 General distribution of archaeological deposits.....	6
3.4 Trench 8.....	6
3.5 Trench 9.....	7
3.6 Trench 16.....	7
3.7 Finds and environmental evidence summary.....	7
4 Discussion.....	8
Appendix A. Trench Descriptions and Context Inventory.....	9
Appendix B. Bibliography and References.....	14
Appendix C. Summary of Site Details.....	15



List of Figures and Plates

Figure 1	Site location
Figure 2	Trench plan
Figure 3	Trenches 8, 9, 15 and 16
Figure 4	Sections 800, 801, 901 and 1600
Plate 1	Ditch 803, section 800
Plate 2	Trench 16



Summary

Oxford Archaeology completed a 12 trench evaluation at the site of a new Primary School within the Great Western Park development to the south of Wantage Road on behalf of Taylor Wimpey Oxfordshire. The evaluation identified a single undated linear ditch traced between several trenches. Several modern field drains and a historic field boundary ditch were also encountered. No significant archaeological features or artefacts were identified.



1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Project background, location and scope of work

- 1.1.1 Oxford Archaeology (OA) undertook an archaeological trial trench evaluation on the site of a new Primary School on land to the south of Wantage Road, Didcot, Oxfordshire centred on NGR SU 51050 89470 (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Taylor Wimpey (TW) through their consultants (RPS) as part of the ongoing Great Western Park (GWP) development. This evaluation was required within the scope of a condition to the Outline Planning Permission obtained by TW in July 2008 (planning ref: P02/W0848/O & HAR17774/X). Prior to this commission, RPS produced and agreed a detailed archaeological mitigation strategy with the County Archaeological Officer (CAO) for the development phase south of Wantage Road (RPS 2014). This evaluation forms part of the implementation of that strategy and OA produced a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) in accordance with that document (OA 2104a). The WSI was approved by the CAO prior to OA commencing the fieldwork.
- 1.1.2 The evaluation comprised fourteen trenches located within the area of the School development and was completed between 29th September and 3rd October 2014 (Fig. 2). This also follows a previous small evaluation undertaken ahead of construction of a temporary drainage pond and pipe to the immediate east of this site (OA 2014b). The same code references have been used for both phases of investigation resulting in the trenches for the current phase being numbered 3-16.

1.2 Geology and topography

- 1.2.1 The site lies on relatively flat land that gently slopes from north to south between approximately 77m to 75m OD within the Primary School boundary. The bedrock geology comprises Upper Greensands of the Lower Cretaceous period on the southern side of a broad plateau cresting to the north of the Wantage Road within the GWP area adjacent to the Stephen Freeman School. The Upper Greensand is overlain in places by superficial localised deposits of Head (Clay, Silt, Sand And Gravel).
- 1.2.2 The area covered by the Primary School boundary within the development is approximately 2.2 hectares and is surrounded on all sides by existing arable farmland.

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

- 1.3.1 The archaeological and historical background to the site has been described in detail in the mitigation strategy document including a summary of the results from the investigations to the north of Wantage Road (RPS 2014). The content of this document is not reproduced here and the mitigation strategy should be consulted for detailed background information although it is noted that there are no records of previous archaeological finds or known potential within the limit of the Primary School development boundary.



2 EVALUATION AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Aims

2.1.1 The general aims of the evaluation were to:

- (i) establish the presence/absence of archaeological remains,
- (ii) determine and confirm the character of any remains present, without compromising any deposits that may merit detailed investigation under more detailed open area excavation or Strip, Map and Sample recording,
- (iii) determine or estimate the date range of any remains from artefacts or otherwise,
- (iv) characterise any underlying archaeological strata down to undisturbed geology without significantly impacting upon significant younger (overlying) deposits where possible,
- (v) determine the geo-archaeological and palaeo-environmental potential of any archaeological deposits encountered,
- (vi) establish what archaeological remains/deposits may be affected by any proposed development,
- (vii) make available the results of the investigation to inform subsequent mitigation strategies,
- (viii) produce reports and full archive or summary reports where these will facilitate a rolling programme of investigation, and
- (ix) disseminate the results of the investigation at a level appropriate to their importance.

2.2 Methodology

2.2.1 The primary school development boundary encloses approximately 2.2 hectares. In accordance with the Mitigation Strategy and the WSI, this area was subjected to a 3% sample by area which equated to the excavation of 12 trenches measuring 30m long by 1.8m wide. These were arranged within the site boundary to provide an unbiased coverage of the whole area. Prior to excavation the location of each trench was marked out using GPS survey equipment.

2.2.2 The trenches were excavated under archaeological supervision using a JCB 3CX mechanical excavator fitted with a toothless bucket to remove modern ploughsoil and non-archaeological subsoil. Mechanical excavation proceeded to the top of undisturbed geological deposits in the absence of archaeological layers above these. During machine excavation, the overburden was observed for the presence of artefacts. Removal of the overburden was undertaken in spits of approximately 100-200mm. The excavated spoil was stockpiled adjacent to each trench. Ploughsoil and subsoil were excavated and stored separately to either side of the trench.

2.2.3 The trenches remained open for viewing by Rob Masefield (RPS), Richard Oram (CAO) and Steve Lawrence (OA) to confirm the presence/absence of archaeological features. Following the excavation of these trenches and during the site monitoring meeting, two short additional trenches (Trenches 15 and 16) were excavated to trace the line of an undated ditch identified in Trenches 8 and 9. Following this and the completion of all recording work, the trenches were backfilled with the soils replaced in reverse order of excavation.



- 2.2.4 All trenches were recorded using standard OA methodologies and in accordance with the OA manual (OA 1992). An appropriate and representative photographic record was made in both digital and monochrome formats.

3 RESULTS

3.1 Presentation of results

- 3.1.1 Summary details of all trenches and the associated context records are indexed in Appendix A. These record trench and feature alignments, dimensions, summary descriptions and an inventory of context numbers and associated finds. More detailed trench descriptions are presented below where archaeological features were present.

3.2 General soils and ground conditions

- 3.2.1 The evaluation was located within a recently cropped arable field with the existing crop stubble and ploughsoil present within each trench to a depth of 0.3m. This was a grey sandy silt ploughsoil which sealed an earlier ploughsoil horizon which was present to varying depths of between 0.05m and 0.3m at its greatest in Trench 11. This was of a similar appearance and composition to the overlying ploughsoil but was of a much more leached appearance generally being a lighter mottled yellow grey colour. No furrows were present suggesting that the site may have been truncated to a reduced level by more recent historic arable cultivation. The ploughsoil sequence overlay a sandy silt clay natural with frequent outcrops of fractured sand/silt stone representing the upper surface of the Upper Greensand geology.
- 3.2.2 The evaluation was completed during dry weather and with good light. The definitions between between the ploughsoil, subsoil and natural in all trenches were sufficiently clear to easily enable the recognition of the archaeological features present.

3.3 General distribution of archaeological deposits

- 3.3.1 The evaluation revealed only a small number of archaeological features. These comprised an undated linear ditch observed in Trenches 8 and 9 and further traced in Trench 16, a post-medieval field boundary ditch within Trench 8 and several historic and modern land drains (Fig. 3).

3.4 Trench 8

- 3.4.1 Three features were identified within Trench 8 (Figs 3 and 4, Pl. 1). These comprised two linear ditches and part of a possible circular feature that may have been a pit or the terminal of a ditch. The pit/ditch terminal (805) was shallow with a possible posthole in the base of the profile. The feature contained a single sterile light brown silty clay fill (806). This had been cut by a later ditch (803) aligned ENE-WSW across the trench with a rounded profile. It was filled with a similar sterile light grey silty sand clay (804). The pit/ditch (805) was cut directly into the geology and the fills of both features were overlain by the lower ploughsoil horizon (802).
- 3.4.2 Within the SE end of the trench another linear ditch (807) was identified and investigated. This was cut through the buried ploughsoil horizon with a flat-based profile that contained a sterile dark brown silty sand clay fill (808). The location and alignment of this ditch corresponds to that of a former field boundary present on the OS maps throughout the 20th century. The fill of this ditch was overlain by the existing ploughsoil (801).



3.5 Trench 9

- 3.5.1 The ditch identified in Trench 8 was recorded also in Trench 9 aligned slightly more E-W. Within this trench it was also present as a slightly broader and shallower ditch (905) with a flat base with an apparent recut along the same alignment (910) (Figs 3 and 4). Both ditch cuts contained similar fills that were light brown (906) and light grey brown (907) silty sands and clay with some small stone fragment inclusions. Both fills were sterile of artefacts and any obvious charred inclusions. An earlier circular feature and fill (908/909) was of probable natural origin.
- 3.5.2 A linear field drain (903) comprising a vertical sided trench with a flat base filled with stone fragments and a silty deposit (904) was also identified within the trench aligned NW-SE perpendicular to the southern former boundary of the field identified within Trench 8. An additional clay pipe field drain (not numbered) was also present alongside drain 903.
- 3.5.3 Each of the feature fills were overlain by the lower ploughsoil horizon (902) below the existing ploughsoil (901).

3.6 Trench 16

- 3.6.1 Trench 16 was excavated to trace the line of the ditch recorded in Trenches 8 and 9. A ditch (1604) aligned ENE-WSW and conforming to the predicted location between the ditches in Trenches 8 and 9 was identified and investigated (Figs 3 and 4, Pl. 2). This had a broad flat-based profile to a similar depth as the ditch in Trench 8 and, as recorded elsewhere, contained a single sterile fill (1603). The ditch fill was sealed by the buried ploughsoil deposit (1602) which was in turn overlain by the existing ploughsoil (1601). Trench 15, excavated to the east of Trench 9, failed to locate a continuation of this ditch.

3.7 Finds and environmental evidence summary

- 3.7.1 No archaeological finds or deposits considered suitable for palaeoenvironmental sampling were encountered during the course of the evaluation.



4 DISCUSSION

- 4.1.1 The results from the evaluation established the relative sparsity of archaeological features and deposits within the Primary School development boundary. The conditions and visibility were good throughout the investigation and the results are considered a reliable indicator for the archaeological potential of the site.
- 4.1.2 The only archaeological feature encountered within the evaluation was a single continuous ditch aligned approximately E-W through the centre of development area. This appeared to be increasingly truncated along its alignment to the east. Indeed, it was not identified within an additional trench (Trench 15) within the eastern boundary suggesting that it either changes course prior to this location, terminates or it has been entirely removed. The apparent absence of any ridge and furrow cultivation or other deep ploughing evidence could also suggest that the site has been reduced by modern cultivation or that this area was not subjected to arable cultivation until more recent times.
- 4.1.3 The excavated ditch fills did not produce any artefacts or other dating evidence. The alignment and appearance of the ditch strongly indicate that this predates the historic and current field boundary arrangement. The absence of any artefacts or ecofacts and the natural silting fill of the ditch possibly suggests that this feature lay away from any contemporary settlement or focus of activity.
- 4.1.4 In conclusion the area enclosed by the Primary School development boundary offers little archaeological potential based upon the evidence of this evaluation. It is certainly unlikely that a settlement location may exist here similar to those recorded to the north of Wantage Road within the GWP project.



APPENDIX A. TRENCH DESCRIPTIONS AND CONTEXT INVENTORY

Trench 3						
General description				Orientation	NW-SE	
No archaeology present. Light grey sandy clay natural with outcrops of fractured Greensand stone (302). Overlain by mottled light grey silty clay sand buried ploughsoil (301) and modern ploughsoil (300). Geotechnical trial pit from 2013 fieldwork present within the trench.				Avg. depth (m)	0.45m	
				Width (m)	1.8m	
				Length (m)	30m	
Contexts						
Context no	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Comment	Finds	Date
300	Layer	-	0.30m	Ploughsoil	-	-
301	Layer	-	0.15m	Buried ploughsoil	-	-
302	Layer	-	-	Natural	-	-

Trench 4						
General description				Orientation	NE-SW	
No archaeology present. Light grey sandy clay natural with outcrops of fractured Greensand stone (402). Overlain by mottled light grey silty clay sand buried ploughsoil (401) and modern ploughsoil (400). A brick-lined field drain crossed the centre of the trench on a N-S alignment.				Avg. depth (m)	0.35m	
				Width (m)	1.8m	
				Length (m)	30m	
Contexts						
Context no	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Comment	Finds	Date
400	Layer	-	0.30m	Ploughsoil	-	-
401	Layer	-	0.05m	Subsoil	-	-
402	Layer	-	-	Natural	-	-

Trench 5						
General description				Orientation	NE-SW	
No archaeology present. Light grey sandy clay natural with outcrops of fractured Greensand stone (502). Overlain by mottled light grey silty clay sand buried ploughsoil (501) and modern ploughsoil (500).				Avg. depth (m)	0.40m	
				Width (m)	1.8m	
				Length (m)	30m	
Contexts						
Context no	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Comment	Finds	Date
500	Layer	-	0.28m	Ploughsoil	-	-
501	Layer	-	0.22m	Subsoil	-	-
502	Layer	-	-	Natural	-	-



Trench 6						
General description				Orientation		NW-SE
No archaeology present. Light grey sandy clay natural with outcrops of fractured Greensand stone (602). Overlain by mottled light grey silty clay sand buried ploughsoil (601) and modern ploughsoil (600).				Avg. depth (m)		0.30m
				Width (m)		1.8m
				Length (m)		30m
Contexts						
Context no	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Comment	Finds	Date
600	Layer	-	0.25m	Ploughsoil	-	-
601	Layer	-	0.05m	Subsoil	-	-
602	Layer	-	-	Natural	-	-

Trench 7						
General description				Orientation		NE-SW
No archaeology present. Light grey sandy clay natural with outcrops of fractured Greensand stone (702). Overlain by mottled light grey silty clay sand buried ploughsoil (701) and modern ploughsoil (700).				Avg. depth (m)		0.35m
				Width (m)		1.8m
				Length (m)		30m
Contexts						
Context no	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Comment	Finds	Date
700	Layer	-	0.20m	Ploughsoil	-	-
701	Layer	-	0.15m	Subsoil	-	-
702	Layer	-	-	Natural	-	-

Trench 8						
General description				Orientation		NW-SE
Light grey sandy clay natural with outcrops of fractured Greensand stone (800). Linear ditch (803) aligned ENE-WSW truncating an earlier ditch terminal or pit (805). Sterile fills. Overlain by light grey silty clay sand buried ploughsoil (802). Post-medieval field boundary ditch (807) present within the southern end of the trench cut through the buried ploughsoil horizon. Ditch fill overlain by the modern ploughsoil (801).				Avg. depth (m)		0.40m
				Width (m)		1.8m
				Length (m)		30m
Contexts						
Context no	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Comment	Finds	Date
800	Layer	-	-	Natural	-	-
801	Layer	-	0.30m	Ploughsoil	-	-
802	Layer	-	0.10m	Subsoil	-	-
803	Cut	0.82m	0.26m	Ditch		
804	Fill			Fill of ditch	none	



805	Cut	0.70m	0.26m	Ditch terminal		
806	Fill			Fill of ditch	none	
807	Cut	0.82m	0.26m	Modern ditch		
808	Fill			Fill of ditch	none	

Trench 9

General description	Orientation	NE-SW
Light grey sandy clay natural with outcrops of fractured Greensand stone (900). Linear ditch and recut (905/910) aligned E-W. Sterile fills. Probable natural feature (908). Stone and silt filled drain also present (903) along with a clay pipe drain. Overlain by light grey silty clay sand buried ploughsoil (902) and the modern ploughsoil (901).	Avg. depth (m)	0.5m
	Width (m)	1.8m
	Length (m)	30m

Contexts

Context no	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Comment	Finds	Date
900	Layer	-	-	Natural	-	-
901	Layer	-	0.30m	Ploughsoil	-	-
902	Layer	-	0.20m	Subsoil	-	-
903	Cut	0.5m	0.13m	Ditch/land drain	-	-
904	Fill	-	-	Fill	none	-
905	Cut	-	-	Ditch	-	-
906	Fill	-	-	Fill	none	-
907	Fill	-	-	Fill	none	-
908	Cut	-	-	Natural feature	-	-
909	Fill	-	-	Fill	none	-
910	Cut	-	-	Ditch	-	-

Trench 10

General description	Orientation	NW-SE
No archaeology present. Light grey sandy clay natural with outcrops of fractured Greensand stone (1002). Overlain by mottled light grey silty clay sand buried ploughsoil (1001) and modern ploughsoil (1000). A large ceramic field drain was present within the NE end of the trench buried to a depth of 0.5m below the base of the current ploughsoil in a ditch-like trench. A smaller field drain aligned E-W fed into the large drain.	Avg. depth (m)	0.40m
	Width (m)	1.8m
	Length (m)	30m

Contexts

Context no	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Comment	Finds	Date
1000	Layer	-	0.30m	Ploughsoil	-	-
1001	Layer	-	0.10m	Subsoil	-	-
1002	Layer	-	-	Natural	-	-



Trench 11						
General description				Orientation		NW-SE
No archaeology present. Light grey sandy clay natural with outcrops of fractured Greensand stone (1102). Overlain by mottled light grey silty clay sand buried ploughsoil (1101) and modern ploughsoil (1100). A field drain was present aligned NW-SE along the trench.				Avg. depth (m)		0.60m
				Width (m)		1.8m
				Length (m)		30m
Contexts						
Context no	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Comment	Finds	Date
100.000	Layer	-	0.30m	Ploughsoil	-	-
100.001	Layer	-	0.30m	Subsoil	-	-
100.002	Layer	-	-	Natural	-	-

Trench 12						
General description				Orientation		NW-SE
No archaeology present. Light grey sandy clay natural with outcrops of fractured Greensand stone (1202). Overlain by mottled light grey silty clay sand buried ploughsoil (1201) and modern ploughsoil (1200). A modern feature with fencing wire and plastic protruding from the surface of the fill was noted within the northern end of the trench.				Avg. depth (m)		0.40m
				Width (m)		1.8m
				Length (m)		30m
Contexts						
Context no	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Comment	Finds	Date
1200	Layer	-	0.30m	Ploughsoil	-	-
1201	Layer	-	0.10m	Subsoil	-	-
1202	Layer	-	-	Natural	-	-

Trench 13						
General description				Orientation		NE-SW
No archaeology present. Light grey sandy clay natural with outcrops of fractured Greensand stone (1302). Overlain by mottled light grey silty clay sand buried ploughsoil (1301) and modern ploughsoil (1300).				Avg. depth (m)		0.40m
				Width (m)		1.8m
				Length (m)		30m
Contexts						
Context no	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Comment	Finds	Date
1300	Layer	-	0.30m	Ploughsoil	-	-
1301	Layer	-	0.10m	Subsoil	-	-
1302	Layer	-	-	Natural	-	-



Trench 14						
General description				Orientation		NW-SE
No archaeology present. Light grey sandy clay natural with outcrops of fractured Greensand stone (1402). Overlain by mottled light grey silty clay sand buried ploughsoil (1401) and modern ploughsoil (1400). Field drain aligned NW-SE across the trench.				Avg. depth (m)		0.45m
				Width (m)		1.8m
				Length (m)		30m
Contexts						
Context no	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Comment	Finds	Date
1400	Layer	-	0.30m	Ploughsoil	-	-
1401	Layer	-	0.15m	Subsoil	-	-
1402	Layer	-	-	Natural	-	-

Trench 15						
General description				Orientation		NW-SE
Trench excavated to trace the line of the ditch present in Trenches 8 and 9. However, this was not encountered and no archaeology was present. Light grey sandy clay natural with outcrops of fractured Greensand stone (1502). Overlain by mottled light grey silty clay sand buried ploughsoil (1501) and modern ploughsoil (1500).				Avg. depth (m)		0.40m
				Width (m)		1.8m
				Length (m)		15.5m
Contexts						
Context no	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Comment	Finds	Date
1500	Layer	-	0.30m	Ploughsoil	-	-
1501	Layer	-	0.10m	Subsoil	-	-
1502	Layer	-	-	Natural	-	-

Trench 16						
General description				Orientation		NW-SE
Trench excavated to trace the line of a ditch between Trenches 8 and 9. The ditch (1604) was aligned E-W with a shallow flat-based profile. Light grey sandy clay natural with outcrops of fractured Greensand stone (1600). Overlain by mottled light grey silty clay sand buried ploughsoil (1602) and modern ploughsoil (1601).				Avg. depth (m)		0.45m
				Width (m)		1.8m
				Length (m)		7.3m
Contexts						
Context no	Type	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Comment	Finds	Date
1600	Layer	-	-	Natural	-	-
1601	Layer	-	0.30m	Ploughsoil	-	-
1602	Layer	-	0.15m	Subsoil	-	-
1603	Fill	-	-	Fill	-	-
1604	Cut	0.8m	0.26m	Ditch	-	-



APPENDIX B. BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

OA, 1992, Fieldwork Manual, (Ed. D Wilkinson, first edition, August 1992)

OA, 2014a, Primary School Site, Great Western Park, South of Wantage Road, Didcot. Written Scheme of Investigation for an Evaluation. Unpublished document. October 2014

OA, 2014b, Temporary Pond Works, South of Wantage Road, Great Western Park, Didcot, Oxfordshire. Archaeological Evaluation Report. Unpublished client report. October 2014

RPS 2014 Great Western Park, Didcot. Archaeological Mitigation Strategy for Infrastructure, Phase 2, 7 and 9 (partial) South of Wantage Road.



APPENDIX C. SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

Site name:	Primary School Site, Great western Park, South of Wantage Road, Didcot, Oxfordshire
Site code:	DISWAN 14
Grid reference:	SU 51050 89470
Type:	Evaluation
Date and duration:	29th September to 3rd October 2014
Area of site:	2.2 hectares

Summary of results:

Oxford Archaeology completed a 12 trench evaluation at the site of a new Primary School within the Great Western Park development to the south of Wantage Road on behalf of Taylor Wimpey Oxfordshire. The evaluation identified a single undated linear ditch traced between several trenches. Several modern field drains and a historic field boundary ditch were also encountered. No significant archaeological features or artefacts were identified.

Location of archive:

The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with the Oxfordshire County Museum in due course with the accession number OXCMS 2014.92.



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Figure 1: Site location

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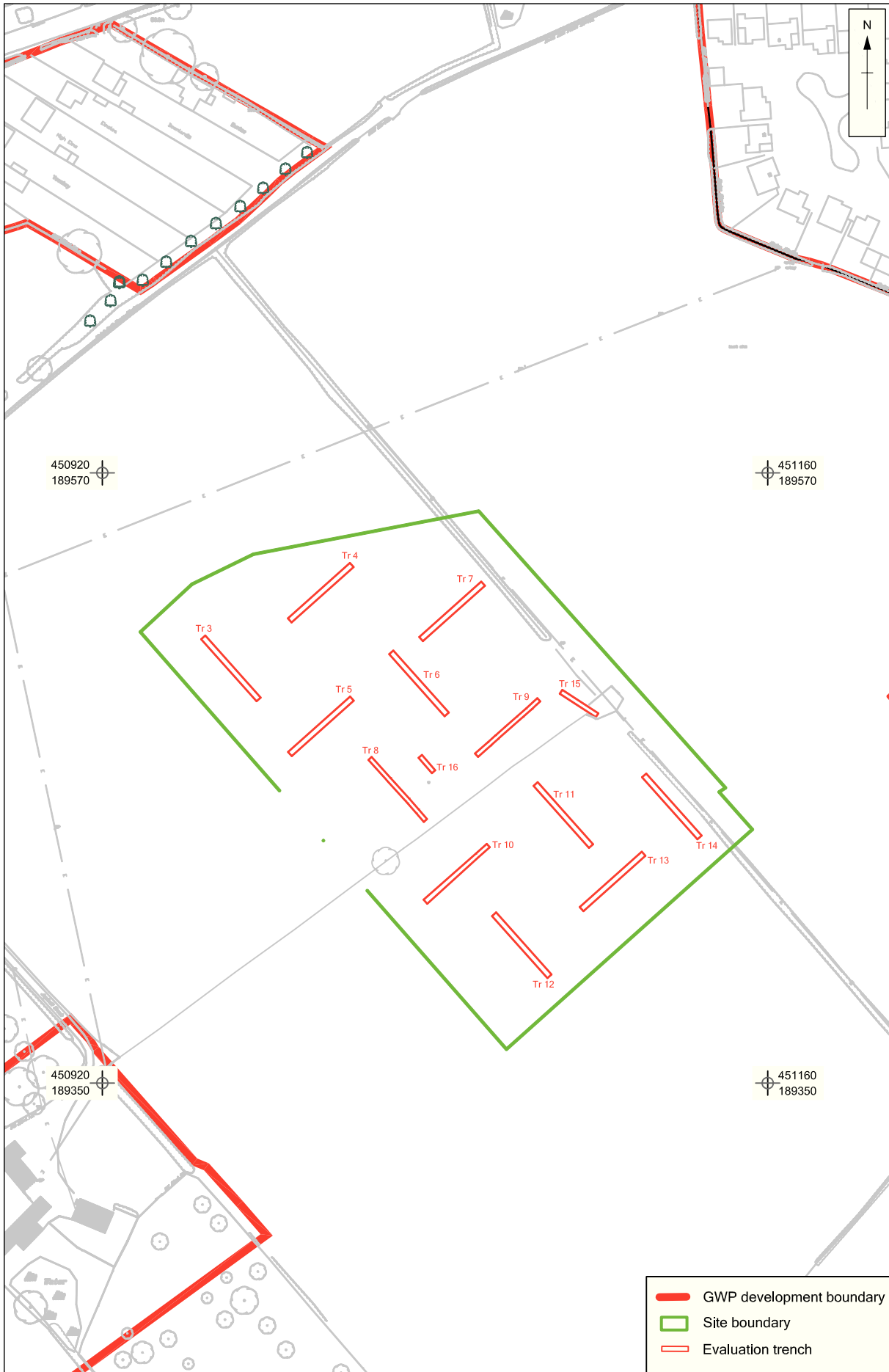
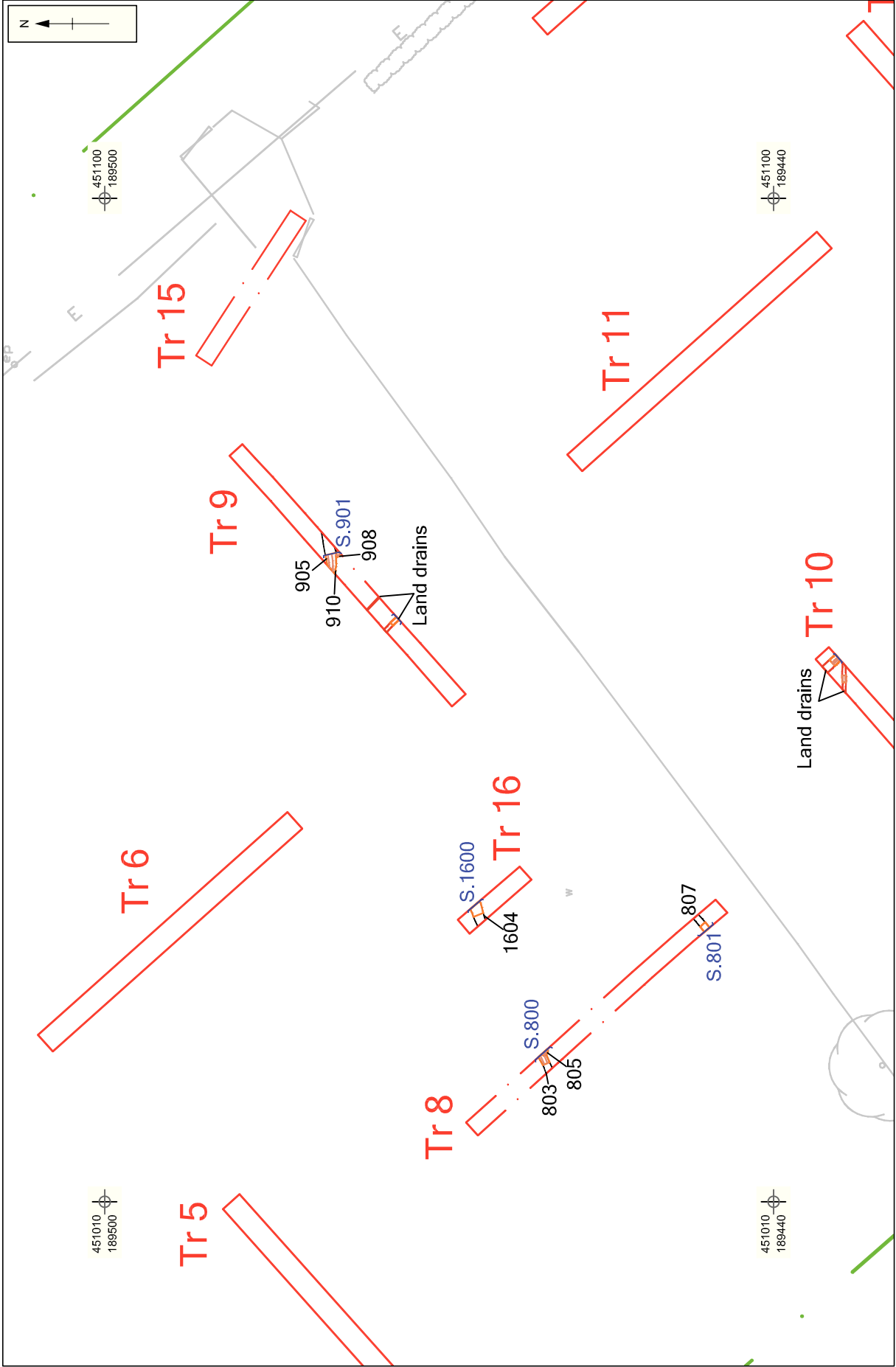


Figure 2: Trench plan

0 100 m
Scale at A4 1:2000

X:\DISWANEV_GWP_South_of_Wantage_Road_Diccat\010\Geomatics\02 CAD\001\current\DISWAN14_2014-10-14.dwg(figure 3)*DISWAN 14*DISWANEV**steve.lawrence* 21 Oct 2014



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Figure 3: Trenches 8, 9, 15 and 16

0 20 m
Scale at A4 1:500

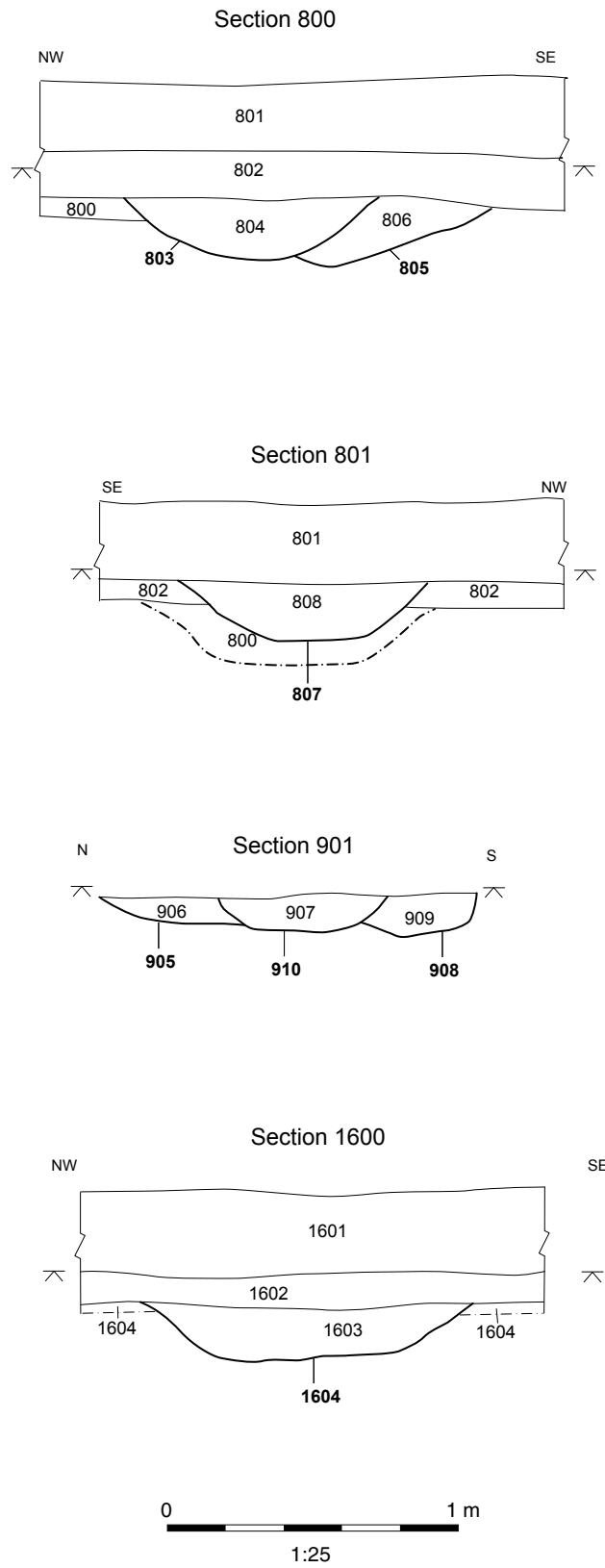


Figure 4: Sections 800, 801 and 1600



Plate 1: Ditch 803, section 800



Plate 2: Trench 16



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