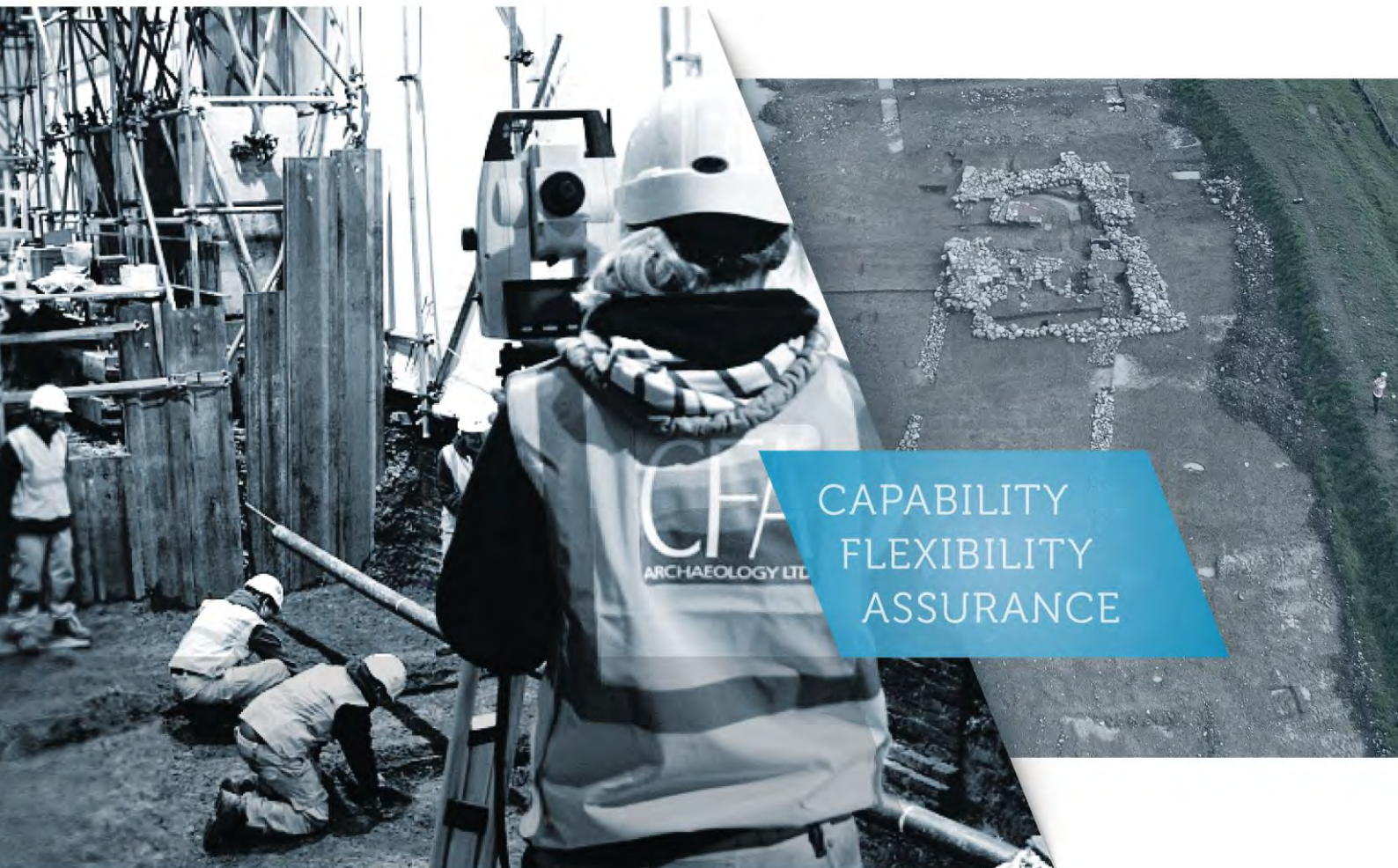




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CAPABILITY
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Land South of Langley Lane Birch Middleton

Archaeological Evaluation
Report No. 4385

Author: Rebecca Hunt BA MA ACIfA





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Date Issued	November 2023
Version	1.0
Planning Ref	18/00869/FUL
OASIS Reference	cfaarcha1-520493
Grid Ref.	SD 85237 07661

This document has been prepared in accordance with CFA Archaeology Ltd quality procedures.

**Land South of Langley Lane
Birch
Middleton**

Archaeological Watching Brief and Trial Trenching

Report No. 4385

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Summary

Archaeological investigation, consisting of a watching brief and trial trenching was undertaken by CFA Archaeology Ltd on land to south of Langley Lane, Birch, Middleton, Greater Manchester. The trial trenching included the excavation and recording of 5no. 50m by 1.8m trenches. No archaeological features were present within any of the trenches. A number of magnetic anomalies identified within previous geophysical survey were representative of natural runoff towards Whittle Brook to the south of the Site and previous geotechnical works.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 General

This report presents the results of an archaeological watching brief and trial trenching undertaken by CFA Archaeology Ltd (CFA) on behalf of Eccleston Homes Ltd, with the watching brief undertaken on the 21st of September 2023 and the trial trenching commencing on the 16th and concluding on the 18th October, 2023. The CFA site code and project number for the works are LNGB and 5671, respectively.

The work was carried out in accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigation (Litchfield 2023, Appendix 4) prepared by CFA Archaeology Ltd and approved by the Senior Planning Archaeologists for Greater Manchester Archaeological Advisory Service (GMAAS). The specification was requested in response to planning application 18/00869/FUL, involving the construction of a residential housing estate of 23 dwellings, with associated landscaping, access, and service installation works.

1.2 Site Location and Description

The proposed development was located on an open pasture field in the village of Birch, around 3.5 miles south-east of Bury (Fig. 1). To the north, the Site is bordered by Langley Lane. Whittle Brook, orientated east-west lies along the Site's southern boundary with areas of arable farmland beyond this to the south. Birch Stables, with associated open fields and yards, stands to the Site's east. To the west, limited residential development is present on the eastern side of the A6045 Heywood Old Road, which runs north-east-south-west west of the Site.

The geology of the Site consists of mudstone, siltstone, and sandstone of the Pennine Lower Coal Measures Formation, with superficial deposits of quaternary Diamicton Till (BGS 2023). The soils are characterised as freely draining and of sandy texture (LandIS 2023).

1.3 Historical Background

The following is taken largely from the WSI produced by CFA Archaeology Ltd (Litchfield 2023) which refers to archaeological and historical background summarised

from an Archaeological Assessment and a Heritage Statement produced by Kathryn Sather & Associates (Kathryn Sather & Associates 2018) to accompany the planning application for the Proposed Development.

Prehistoric

No evidence for prehistoric activity was recorded within the Site boundary or in a 1km Study Area.

The Archaeological Assessment suggested that the Site's topography and location were both deemed suitable to prehistoric hunting practices and thus there may be potential for below-ground archaeological remains, dating to the Mesolithic period (Kathryn Sather & Associates, 2018).

No Neolithic monuments are recorded in Rochdale, but there have been stray finds of stone axes dating to this period.

At Windmill Hill north of Heywood, a cairn with grave goods, is associated with the transitional period between the Neolithic and the Bronze Age, known as the Beaker Period.

The only find dating to the Iron Age from the Rochdale area is a chance find of a bronze torque found in Calderbrook, recovered in 1832.

Romano-British

No evidence for Romano-British activity was recorded within the Site boundary or 1km Study Area.

Within the district of Rochdale, single coins, coin hoards, pottery and tiles, a possible spearhead, and a silver arm from a statue have been found.

Early Medieval

No evidence for early medieval activity was recorded within the Site boundary or 1km Study Area.

The suffix *-ton* tends to indicate former Anglo-Saxon settlements, with 'Middleton' being one such example; suggesting the settlement may date to the early medieval period.

Medieval

The site of Langley Hall, which lies around 400m to the south-east of the Site, marks the former location of a medieval moated manor, first cited by documentary evidence

in 1332. This is more suggestive of a later medieval presence in the area, with the local landscape likely having been characterised by agricultural activity during the period.

Post-Medieval & Modern

The Lower Whittle Farmhouse (NHLE 1068502), a Grade II timber-framed structure constructed during the 17th century, stands around 630m to the north-west of Site, and has been altered throughout the post-medieval period. Birch itself did not begin to develop at pace until the 19th century, during which time the construction of the Birch Mill took place, providing the village with an industrial centre. By the mid-19th century, the parish church of St Mary's was constructed, indicating the growing population in the village. In 1888, Edgar Wood, whose architecture came to characterise the area, produced a drinking fountain (NHLE 1245928), including horse and hounds drinking troughs, which stands less than 200m to the Site's north-west.

During a historic map regression carried out as part of a 2022 Heritage Statement, it was found that successive editions of Ordnance Survey maps from 1848 to 1992, show the Site as a largely static parcel of open field, likely predominantly used for horse pasture with some crop activity interspersed.

1.4 Archaeological Background

A geophysical survey (magnetometry) was conducted across the Site in April 2022. The survey identified several unclear anomalies (Fig. 1).

A thin magnetically enhanced linear trend was identified in the centre of the Site, orientated approximately north to south. This was interpreted as a possible drainage feature, or possibly a feature which was natural in origin.

Two areas of magnetic disturbance were identified to the west of the linear trend. No clear interpretation was made, though it was suggested the disturbance could have been caused by grazing, or perhaps some form of extraction activity.

To the west of the areas of magnetic disturbance, several faint linear trends were recorded. It was suggested that there could be some 'form' to these anomalies, perhaps representing some sort of enclosure, but equally they could relate to temporary horse pens, or underlying geology.

On the eastern boundary of the Site, several faint magnetic linear trends were identified. These were considered most likely to be geological in nature, however an archaeological origin could not be ruled out.

No evidence of ridge and furrow cultivation was identified within the Site. Evidence of geological anomalies were recorded in the Site. A number of isolated dipolar anomalies (ferrous / iron spikes) were recorded throughout the Site which are likely modern in origin.

1.4 Project Aims

The aims of the watching brief and trial trenching were:

- To undertake a watching brief which determined and recorded the location, extent, date, character, condition, significance, and quality of any archaeological deposits located within the footprint of the proposed access which may have been exposed during groundworks;
- To undertake a trial trench evaluation in order to evaluate geophysical anomalies, and 'blank' areas, in order to establish the presence or absence, extent, condition, character, quality, and date of any archaeological features or deposits;
- To establish the potential impacts of the Proposed Development (where archaeological features may have occurred) and to allow mitigation measures to be proposed, where appropriate; and
- To disseminate the results of the archaeological evaluation to the wider public in a manner appropriate to their significance.

No archaeological remains were identified therefore this site does not contribute further to relevant research objectives from the North West Historic Environment Research Framework (Research Frameworks, 2023).

2. WORKING METHODS

2.1 General

CFA Archaeology is a Registered Organisation (RO) with the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CIfA). Work was conducted with regard to the Institute's Standards documents (CIfA 2020a-c), relevant Historic England guidance documents (Historic England 2011, 2015a, 2015b, 2015c and 2020), and the WSI. Recording of all elements was done following established CFA procedures.

A visual inspection of the site was undertaken which did not identify any archaeological surface features but did identify a series of geotechnical disturbances across site. The topography of the site was a severe, undulating, downhill slope from north to south which resulted in surface and soil runoff of precipitation, causing unsuitable conditions for a JCB 3CX, therefore a tracked machine was used for the excavation of the trenches.

2.2 Watching Brief

An archaeological watching brief was conducted during the groundworks, required in advance of setting out the Site access (see Fig. 1). This area is located in the north of the Site, adjacent to Langley Lane. Topsoil, subsoil and any other overburden was removed with a toothless grading/ditching bucket under direct archaeological supervision (Figs. 3.1 and 3.2). Excavation was carried out to the depth of the natural substrate.

The supervising archaeologist was allowed time to investigate the exposed deposits within the natural by hand (see Section 3.4).

2.3 Trial Trenching

Five trenches, measuring 50m by 1.8m (entailing a c.3% sample of the Site), were sited across the Site in order evaluate geophysical anomalies and 'blank' areas.

The trenches were machine excavated with a toothless ditching bucket under direct archaeological supervision. Excavation was carried out to the depth of the natural substrate. Any further excavation required to fulfil the objectives of the evaluation was carried out by hand.

The trenches were backfilled on completion of excavation and following sign-off from the Planning Archaeologist of GMAAS. The locations of the trenches were recorded using industry standard surveying equipment and tied to the National Grid. Vertical survey control was tied to the Ordnance Survey Datum.

2.4 Monitoring

The project was monitored by the Senior Planning Archaeologist for GMAAS, Ben Dyson, who was informed in advance of the commencement of site works taking place.

2.5 Dissemination and Archiving

A summary of the results of archaeological works has been submitted for inclusion in the Online Access to the Index of Archaeological Investigations (OASIS V, Appendix 3). The OASIS reference is cfaarcha1-520493. A summary of the contents of the archive is shown in Table 1 below.

Phase	File/Box No.	Description	Quantity
Evaluation	File no. 1	Trench Record Sheets	5
		Drawing Sheets	1
		Context Register	1
		Context Sheets	5
		Digital photographic register sheets	2
		Drawing Sheet Registers	1

Table 1: Contents of the Archive

Upon completion of the project and approval of the report, the digital archive will be uploaded to the Archaeology Data Service (ADS). Following approval of the final report and its deposition with the Greater Manchester HER, the dissemination element of the planning condition will be satisfied. After consultation with GMAAS, it has been deemed that there are no further requirements for further work on this site.

3. RESULTS

3.1 General

These results should be read in conjunction with Figures 1-3. A summary of the trenches can be found in Appendix 1. Appendix 2 contains a context summary. No archaeological remains were identified.

3.2 Topsoil, Subsoil, and Natural Deposits

The stratigraphy across the site was generally uniform, predominantly consisting of topsoil comprised of firm, dark grey-brown sandy clay soil, ranging from 0.15m to 0.50m in depth, subject to much bioturbation (001). Subsoil was not as uniform; trace amounts were identified over very firm clay natural substrate but was recorded up to 0.33m thick through a depression within the hillside. The subsoil comprised a mix of light brown-grey and orange-grey sandy and silty clays (002).

The geological substrata encountered across the site comprised mainly of mid brown-orange and grey-orange clay, and grey-yellow sandy clay, light white-grey silty clay and yellow orange sand with manganese, pebble and small sandstone inclusions of various colours; red, yellow and grey unevenly distributed throughout (see Figs. 3.3-3.6).

The upper horizon of the natural substrate was scoured with plough lines, and disturbed by rooting activity which was patchy in most places; concentrations were recorded in Trench 1 and during the watching brief (004; Figs. 2.1, 3.3 and 3.4) and identified during the groundworks for the site access.

3.3 Geotechnical Works

Evidence of previous geotechnical works were identified within Trench 3 (Fig. 2.2) in the form of a possible geotechnical drilling rig hole and subsequent reinstatement of the ground in the form of orange-red clay. This immediately underlay the existing topsoil, which was up to 0.4m thick, and sealed a thin layer of mixed topsoil, possibly having been driven in by machinery. The extent of this made ground, broadly conformed to the geophysical anomaly for which Trench 3 was targeted. It contained a mixed of modern detritus including fragmented pieces of wooden fence posts. Former plant movements, ground disturbance, and backfilled geotechnical pits were also identified elsewhere across Site, and likely account for the magnetic disturbances identified within the geophysical survey.

4. DISCUSSION and CONCLUSION

The archaeological investigation carried out at the proposed development site revealed no evidence for surviving archaeological feature. The presence of various disturbances from bioturbation to field drains and geotechnical works was noted across the Site, the majority of which were modern.

The magnetic linear trends identified within the geophysical survey conformed to the path of least resistance down the hillslope and are likely to reflect concentrated channels created by water runoff down the Site to Whittle Brook. No physical evidence of these channels were identifiable within this investigation, and it is likely that this runoff occurred through the soil structure.

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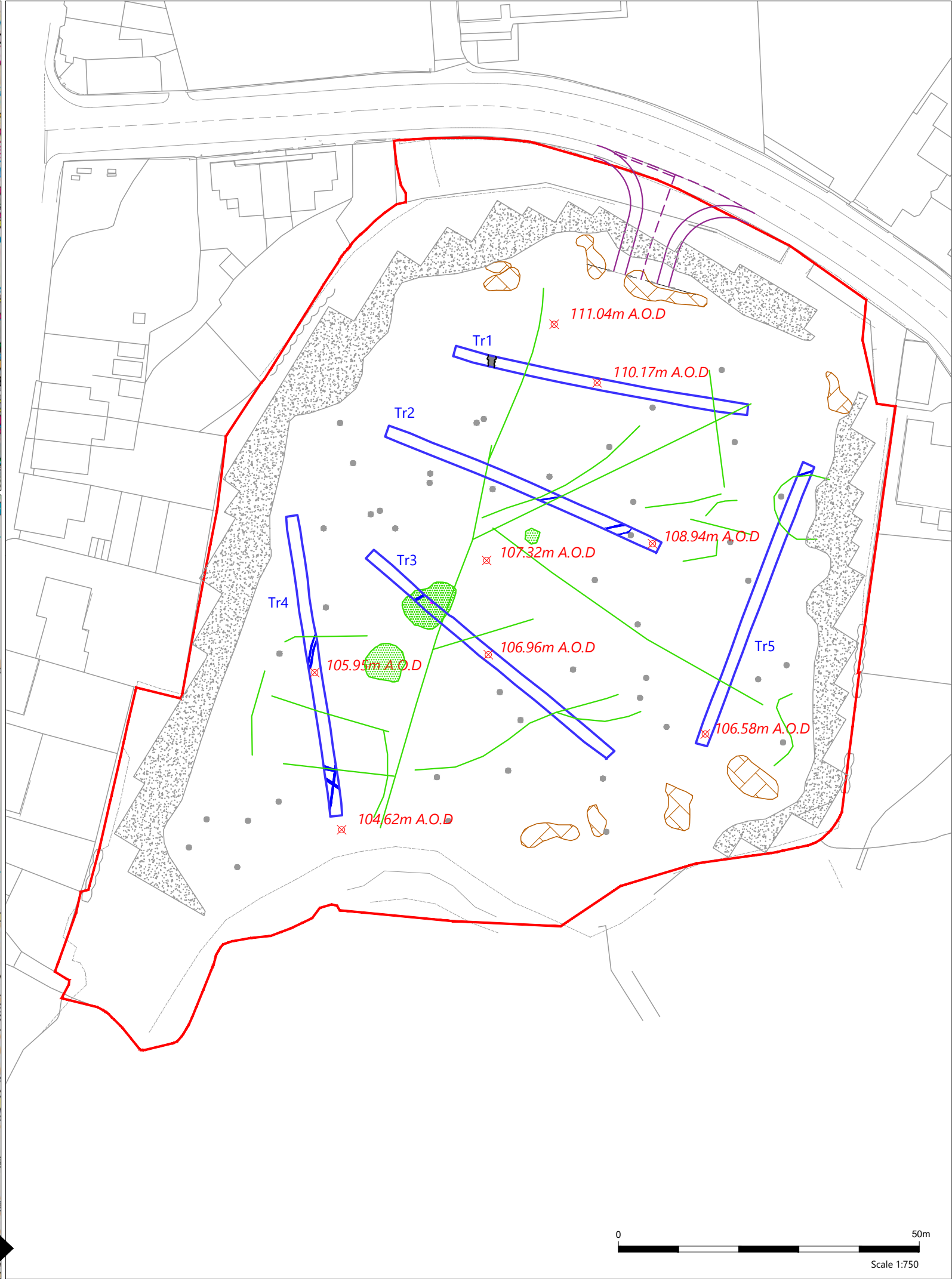
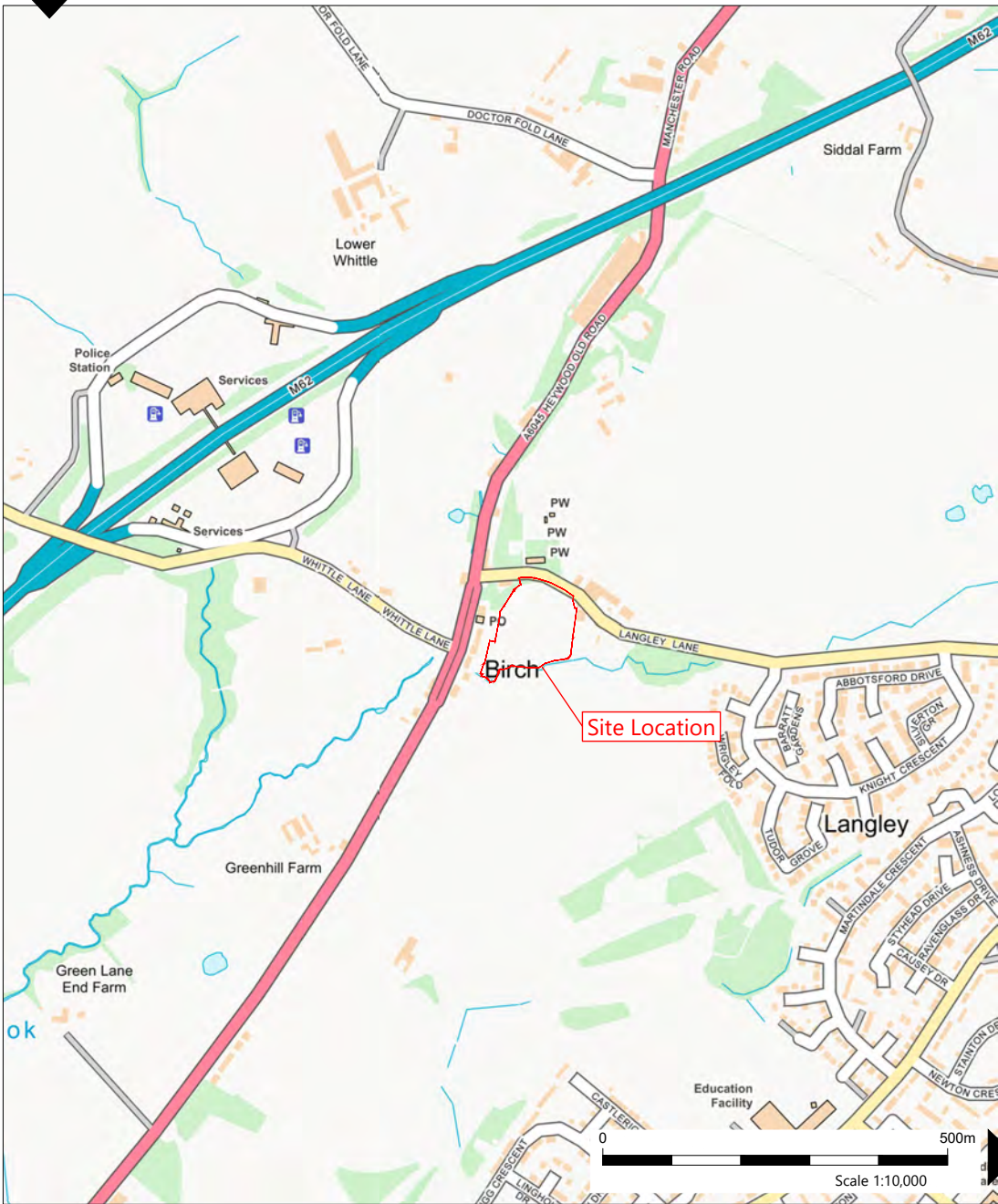
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FIGURES



Key:

- Site Boundary
- Proposed Access
- Watching Brief Area
- Trench
- Field Drain
- Bioturbation
- Possible Borehole

Geophys Interpretation © AOC Archaeology

- Area of Disturbance (Unclear Origin)
- Geology/Natural
- Area of Disturbance (Modern)
- Ferrous / Iron Spike
- Linear Trend Field Drain

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Title:
Site Location and Trench Location

Project:
Land South of Langley Lane, Birch Middleton

Client:
Eccleston Homes Ltd

Scale at A3:
Varies

Drawn by: SB	Checked: SW	Date: 09/11/2023
Report No: 4385		Fig. No: 1

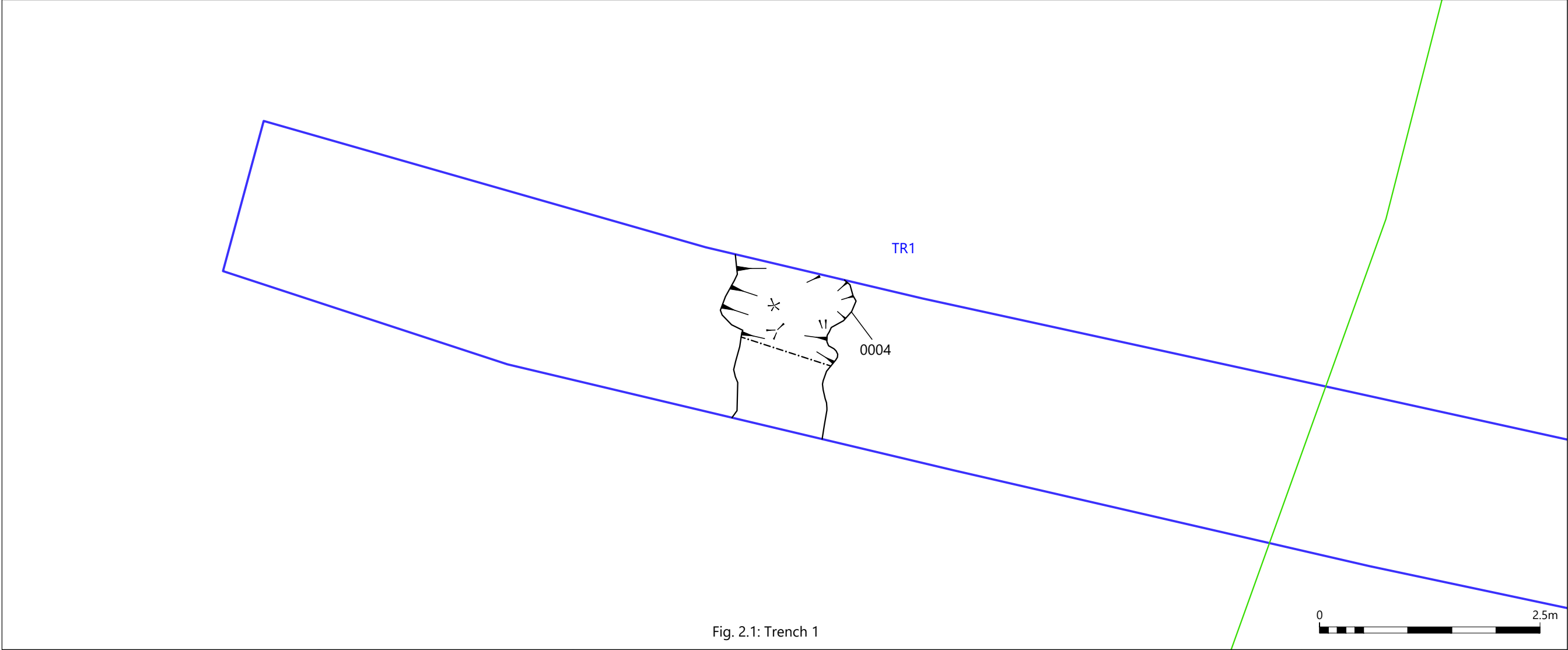


Fig. 2.1: Trench 1

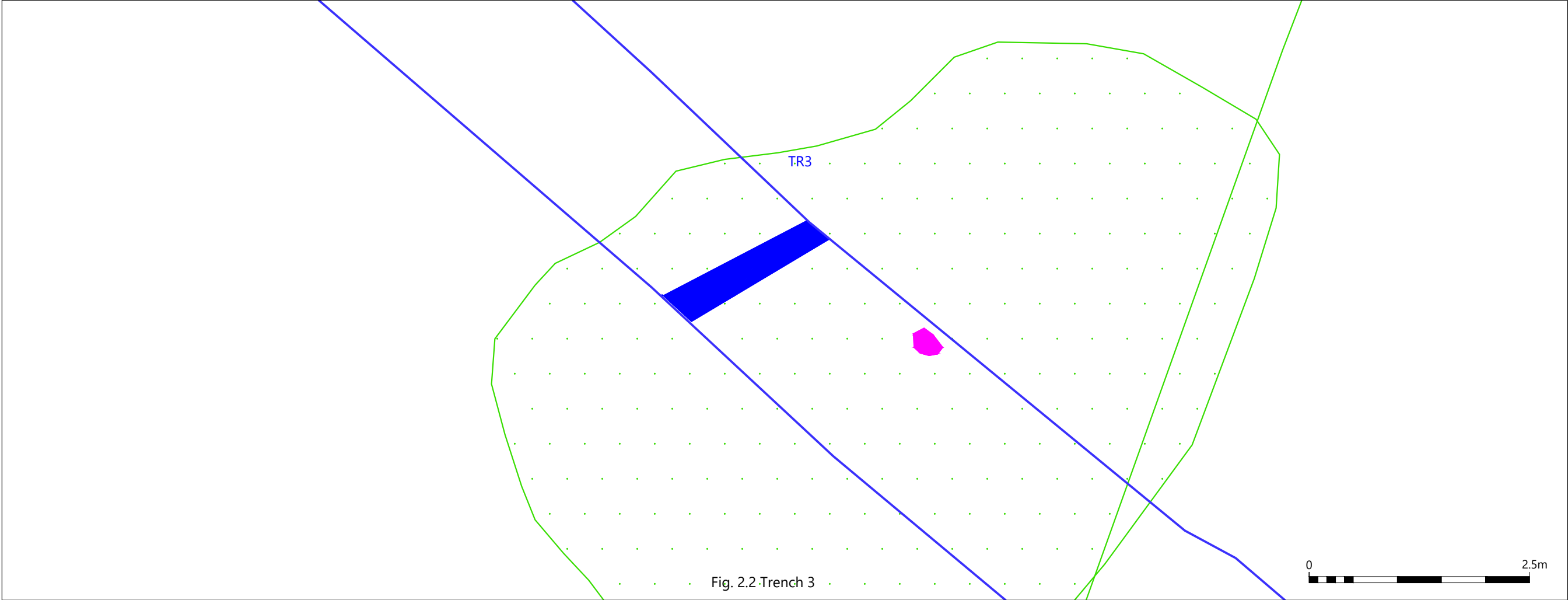


Fig. 2.2-Trench 3

Key:

- Trench
- Field Drain
- Bioturbation
- Possible Borehole

Geophys Interpretation ©
AOC Archaeology

- Area of Disturbance (Unclear Origin)
- Linear Trend Field Drain



Title: Trench Plans		
Project: Land South of Langley Lane, Birch Middleton		
Client: Eccleston Homes Ltd		
Scale at A3: 1:50		
Drawn by: SB	Checked: SW	Date: 09/11/2023
Report No: 4385		Fig. No: 2.1 - 2.2



Fig. 3.1: Plan of site access, stripped, facing north



Fig. 3.2: Overburden across site access, facing west



Client:
Eccleston Homes Ltd

Project:
Land South of Langley Lane, Birch Middleton

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SB

Date:
10/11/2023

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4385



Fig. 3.3: Location of tested bioturbation (004) at the north-west end of Trench 1, facing west



Fig. 3.4: South-west facing section of tested bioturbation (004), facing north-east



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Land South of Langley Lane, Birch Middleton

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Date:
10/11/2023

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SW

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4385



Fig. 3.5: Trench 2, facing north-west



Fig. 3.6: Trench 5, facing south-west



Client:
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Project:
Land South of Langley Lane, Birch Middleton

Drawn by:
SB

Date:
10/11/2023

Checked:
SW

Report No:
4385

Appendix 1: Trench Summary Table

Trench	Description
1	The trench was located on the north-west to south-east axis along the summit of a small hill within a grassy pasture. The stratigraphy consisted of topsoil (001) to a maximum depth of 0.32m at the south-east section. This was comprised of loose, dark, black silty clay soil. Topsoil depth at the north-west section was a maximum depth of 0.25m. Subsoil (002) came to a maximum depth of 0.19m in the center of the trench. No subsoil was located at the north-west portion. In the south-east section, subsoil depth was a maximum of 0.20m. The natural geology (003) comprised of mid to pale grey, orange mottled clay. A linear on north to south axis was discovered at the north-west end of the trench. It is not visible in trench two. Feature was excavated and is most likely a hedge bole with a very irregular base.
2	The trench was orientated north-west to south-east in a grassy pasture. Trench 2 has a depression in the center due to the topography of the field. The stratigraphy consisted of topsoil (001) to a maximum depth of 0.26m at the south-east section. This was comprised of dark black silty clay. Topsoil depth at the north-west end of the trench was a maximum of 0.15m. Subsoil came to a maximum depth of 0.15m at the south-east end of the trench. This was comprised of mid orange grey, silty clay. The maximum depth in the north-west section was 0.26m. The natural geology (003) comprised of pale grey, orange clay at the south end. This became more grey and less mottled within the depression. Three drains were present, orientated north-east to south-west. No archaeological features were present.
3	The trench was orientated north-west to south-east in a grassy pasture. There was a general trend downhill towards the south-east with a hill/ridge towards the south-east end. The stratigraphy consisted of topsoil (001) to a maximum depth of 0.27m at the north-west section. This was comprised of dark black silty clay. Topsoil depth at the south-east end of the trench was a maximum of 0.26m. Subsoil came to a maximum depth of 0.23m at the north-west end of the trench. This was comprised of mid orange grey, silty clay. This was situated at the north-west end of the trench. The maximum depth in the south-east section was 0.20m.

Trench	Description
	The natural geology (003) comprised of mixed light mottled grey, yellow fine sandy clay at the north-west end. Light grey, orange clay at the south-east end. North-west of the center of trench 3 was a bore hole orientated north to south. This coincided with the depression in the landscape and modern infilling of orange, red clay with a maximum depth of 0.40m. An anomaly line of modern detritus sealed in the topsoil was visible. Likely the result of boreholes/ geotechnical works disturbing the ground. 1 field drain was present in the north-west section, orientated north to south.
4	The trench was orientated south-east to north-west in a grassy pasture sloping downhill towards the south-east. The stratigraphy consisted of topsoil (001) to a maximum depth of 0.40m at the south-east section. This was comprised of dark black silty clay. Topsoil depth at the north-west end of the trench was a maximum of 0.18m. Subsoil came to a maximum depth of 0.09m at the south-east end of the trench. This was comprised of mid orange grey, silty clay. The maximum depth in the north-west section was 0.13m. The natural geology (003) comprised of mid to light mottled orange, grey silty clay. Mottled with rooting. At least 2 field drains were located at the south-east end of trench 4. They were orientated north-east to south-west, north-west to south-east. A linear orientated north-west to south-east was tested and found to be a field drain. Two field drains were located towards the north-west end of the trench orientated north-east to south-west.
5	The trench was orientated south-west to north-east in a grassy pasture. Steep incline towards the south with a ridge/plateau in the center. The stratigraphy consisted of topsoil (001) to a maximum depth of 0.18m at the south-west section. This was comprised of dark black silty clay. Topsoil depth at the north-east end of the trench was a maximum of 0.36m. Subsoil was not present at the south-east end of the trench. The maximum depth in the north-west section was 0.08m. This comprised of mid orange, grey silty clay with a disturbed interface with the natural. The natural geology (003) comprised of mid pale grey; orange clay mottled with pale white, grey silty clay. It becomes increasingly firm and mottled towards the top of the hill with fine yellow orange sand patches. Very occasional inclusions of manganese and pebbles.

Trench	Description
	One field drain located at the north-east end of trench orientated north-east to south-west.

Appendix 2: Context Summary Table

Context no.	Trench	Type	Fill of	Filled by	Length (m)	Width (m)	Height/Depth (m)	Description
001	N/A	Topsoil	N/A	N/A	Across Site	Across Site	<0.50	Topsoil: Dark greyish brown sandy clay. Firm compaction with heavy rooting.
002	N/A	Subsoil	N/A	N/A	Across Site	Across Site	<0.15	Subsoil: Light brownish grey sandy silt with heavy rooting
003	N/A	Natural	N/A	N/A	Across Site	Across Site	N/A	Natural: Mid brownish orange sandy clay. Inclusions of sandstone and rooting throughout.
004	1	Interface	-	005	>1.8	1.32	0.25	Cut of hedgerow bole. Interface between natural and remnants of former hedge or linear planting/vegetation. Tight root bole. Horizon is uneven due to large root system feeding through the natural. Wide comparative to the natural.
005	1	Infill	004		>1.8	1.32	0.25	Infill of depression left from the removal/decomp of former hedge/plant bole. Stones are concentrated within "channels" of fill material where they've been pulled by bioturbation.

Appendix 3: OASIS Summary

OASIS Summary for cfaarcha1-520493

OASIS ID (UID)	cfaarcha1-520493
Project Name	Evaluation at Land South of Langley Lane, Birch, Middleton
Sitename	Land South of Langley Lane, Birch, Middleton
Sitecode	LNGB
Project Identifier(s)	LNGB
Activity type	Evaluation
Planning Id	18/00869/FUL
Reason For Investigation	Planning requirement
Organisation Responsible for work	CFA Archaeology Ltd
Project Dates	21-Sep-2023 - 18-Oct-2023
Location	Land South of Langley Lane, Birch, Middleton NGR : SD 85237 07661 LL : 53.565350651902996, -2.224368619109001 12 Fig : 385237,407661
Administrative Areas	Country : England County/Local Authority : Rochdale Local Authority District : Rochdale Parish : Rochdale, unparished area

Project Methodology	A visual inspection of the site was undertaken which did not identify any archaeological surface features and did identify a series of geotechnical disturbances across site. The topography with a severe, undulating, downhill slope from north to south resulted in surface and soil runoff of precipitation, causing unsuitable conditions for a JCB 3CX, therefore a tracked machine was used. 2.2Watching Brief An archaeological watching brief was conducted during the groundworks, required in advance of setting out the Site access. This area is located in the north of the Site, adjacent to Langley Lane. Topsoil, subsoil and any other overburden was removed with a toothless grading/ditching bucket under direct archaeological supervision. The supervising archaeologist was allowed time to investigate the exposed deposits within the natural by hand. 2.3Trial Trenching Five trenches, measuring 50m by 1.8m (entailing a c.3% sample of the Site), were sited across the Site in order evaluate geophysical anomalies and 'blank' areas. The trenches were machine excavated with a toothless ditching bucket under direct archaeological supervision. Excavation was carried out to the depth of the natural substrate. The trenches were backfilled on completion of excavation and following sign-off from the Planning Archaeologist of GMAAS. The location of the trenches were recorded using industry standard surveying equipment and tied to the National Grid. Vertical survey control was tied to the Ordnance Survey Datum. All further excavation required to fulfil the objectives of the evaluation was carried out by hand.
Project Results	Archaeological investigation, consisting of a watching brief and trial trenching was undertaken by CFA Archaeology Ltd on land to south of Langley Lane, Birch, Middleton, Greater Manchester. The trial trenching included the excavation and recording of 5no. 50m by 1.8m trenches. No archaeological features were present within any of the trenches. A number of magnetic anomalies identified within previous geophysical survey were representative of natural runoff towards Whittle Brook to the south of the Site and previous geotechnical works.
Keywords	
Funder	Private or public corporation Ecclestone Homes Ltd
HER	Greater Manchester HER - noRev - LITE
Person Responsible for work	Phil Mann
HER Identifiers	
Archives	

Appendix 4: Written Scheme of Investigation



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WRITTEN SCHEME OF INVESTIGATION



Land South of Langley Lane, Birch, Middleton

Archaeological Watching Brief and Trial Trenching
[Planning Ref. 18/00869/FUL](#)

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Commissioned by	Hollins Strategic Land
Date issued	July 2023
Version	2
Planning Application No	18/00869/FUL
Grid Ref	SD 85237 07661

This document has been prepared in accordance with CFA Archaeology Ltd standard operating procedures.

Land South of Langley Lane, Birch, Middleton

Archaeological Watching Brief and Trial Trenching

Written Scheme of Investigation

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FIGURE (BOUND AT REAR)

Fig. 1: Site Location, Watching Brief and Trench Locations

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 General

This Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) has been prepared on behalf of Hollins Strategic Land. It outlines a phased programme of archaeological works, comprising an archaeological watching brief and trial trenching evaluation to be undertaken at Land South of Langley Lane, Birch, Middleton (NGR SD 85237 07661). This work follows the completion of a geophysical survey.

The Proposed Development comprises a residential housing estate of 23 dwellings, with associated landscaping, access, and service installation works. The archaeological works are required as part of Condition 17 for the consented development (Application No. 18/00869/FUL). Condition 17 states:

No development shall take place until a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) which has been submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. The WSI shall cover the following:

1. *A phased programme and methodology of site investigation and recording to include:*
 - a) *a geophysical survey;*
 - b) *an archaeological evaluation through trial trenching;*
 - c) *pending results of the above, targeted open-area excavation and recording (subject to an updated WSI).*
2. *A programme for post-investigation assessment to include:*
 - a) *analysis of the site investigation records and finds;*
 - b) *production of a final report on the significance of the heritage interest recorded.*
3. *Deposition of the final report with the Greater Manchester Historic Environment Record.*
4. *Dissemination of the results of the site investigations commensurate with their significance.*
5. *Provision for archive deposition of the report, finds and records of the site investigation.*
6. *Nomination of a competent person or persons/organisation to undertake the works set out within the approved WSI.*

The development shall not be occupied until the site investigation has been completed in accordance with the programme set out in the approved WSI and provision made for the completion of all elements of that programme.

Reason: To protect the significance of any archaeological remains on the site in accordance with Policy P2 of the adopted Rochdale Core Strategy and the National Planning Policy Framework.

Reason for pre-commencement condition: There is a risk of disturbance to below ground features of archaeological importance on commencement.

In the first instance, an archaeological watching brief (see Section 3.2) is proposed to be undertaken during the setting out of the site access (Figure 1) and the trial trenching (see Section 3.3) will be conducted across the remaining area of the Proposed Development Site (the Site) prior to any further construction work being commenced.

Should significant archaeological features be recorded during the watching brief and trial trenching an appropriate programme of targeted open-area excavation and recording will be defined in liaison with the Greater Manchester Archaeological Advisory Service (GMAAS), acting on behalf of Rochdale Borough Council. The further archaeological works will be defined by a separate WSI or WSIs.

1.2 Site Location and Description

The Proposed Development Site comprises an area of open pasture in the village of Birch, around 3.5 miles southeast of Bury (Figure 1). To the north, the Site is bordered by hedgerow and trees along Langley Lane. Areas of arable farmland lie to the south, just beyond the Whittle Brook, which runs east-west along the Site's southern border. Birch Stables, with associated open fields and yards, stands to the Site's east. To the west, limited residential development is present on the eastern side of the A6045 Heywood Old Road, which runs northeast-southwest west of the Site.

The geology of the Site consists of mudstone, siltstone, and sandstone of the Pennine Lower Coal Measures Formation, with superficial deposits of quaternary Diamicton Till (BGS 2023). The soils are characterised as freely draining and of sandy texture (LandIS 2023).

1.3 Archaeological and Historical Background

1.3.1 Archaeological Assessment and Heritage Statement (Kathryn Sather & Associates, 2018; 2022)

The following archaeological and historical background has been summarised from an Archaeological Assessment and a Heritage Statement produced by Kathryn Sather & Associates to accompany the planning application for the Proposed Development.

Prehistoric

No evidence for prehistoric activity was recorded within the Site boundary or in a 1km Study Area.

The Archaeological Assessment suggested that the Site's topography and location were both deemed suitable to prehistoric hunting practices and thus there may be potential for below-ground archaeological remains, dating to the Mesolithic period (Kathryn Sather & Associates, 2018).

No Neolithic monuments are recorded in Rochdale, but there have been stray finds of stone axes dating to this period.

At Windmill Hill north of Heywood, a cairn with grave goods, is associated with the transitional period between the Neolithic and the Bronze Age, known as the Beaker Period.

The only find dating to the Iron Age from the Rochdale area is a chance find of a bronze torque found in Calderbrook, recovered in 1832.

Romano-British

No evidence for Romano-British activity was recorded within the Site boundary or 1km Study Area.

Within the district of Rochdale, single coins, coin hoards, pottery and tiles, a possible spearhead, and a silver arm from a statue have been found.

Early Medieval

No evidence for early medieval activity was recorded within the Site boundary or 1km Study Area.

The suffix *-ton* tends to indicate former Anglo-Saxon settlements, with 'Middleton' being one such example; suggesting the settlement may date to the early medieval period.

Medieval

The site of Langley Hall, which lies around 400m to the southeast of the Site, marks the former location of a medieval moated manor, first cited by documentary evidence in 1332. This is more suggestive of a later medieval presence in the area, with the local landscape likely having been characterised by agricultural activity during the period.

Post-Medieval & Modern

The Lower Whittle Farmhouse (NHLE 1068502), a Grade II timber-framed structure constructed during the 17th century, stands around 630m to the northwest of Site, and has been altered throughout the post-medieval period. Birch itself did not begin to develop at pace until the 19th century, during which time the construction of the Birch Mill took place, providing the village with an industrial centre. By the mid-19th century, the parish church of St Mary's was constructed, indicating the growing population in the village. In 1888, Edgar Wood, whose architecture came to characterise the area, produced a drinking fountain (NHLE 1245928), including horse and hounds drinking troughs, which stands less than 200m to the Site's northwest.

During a historic map regression carried out as part of a 2022 Heritage Statement, it was found that successive editions of Ordnance Survey maps from 1848 to 1992, show the Site as a largely static parcel of open field, likely predominantly used for horse pasture.

1.4 Geophysical Survey (AOC Archaeology, 2022)

A geophysical survey (magnetometry) was conducted across the Site in April 2022. The survey identified several unclear anomalies (Figure 1).

A thin magnetically enhanced linear trend (1) was identified in the centre of the Site, orientated approximately north to south. This was interpreted as a possible drainage feature, or possibly a feature which was natural in origin.

Two areas of magnetic disturbance (2) were identified to the west of the linear trend (1). No clear interpretation was made, though it was suggested the disturbance could have been caused by grazing, or perhaps some form of extraction activity.

To the west of the areas of magnetic disturbance (2), several faint linear trends were recorded. It was suggested that there could be some 'form' to these anomalies, perhaps representing some sort of enclosure, but equally they could relate to temporary horse pens, or underlying geology.

On the eastern boundary of the Site, several faint magnetic linear trends (4) were identified. These were considered most likely to be geological in nature, however an archaeological origin could not be ruled out.

No evidence of ridge and furrow cultivation was identified within the Site. Evidence of geological anomalies was recorded in the Site. A number of isolated dipolar anomalies (ferrous / iron spikes) were recorded throughout the Site which are likely modern in origin.

2 PROJECT AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The aims of the watching brief and trial trenching are:

- To undertake a watching brief which will determine and record the location, extent, date, character, condition, significance, and quality of any archaeological deposits located within the footprint of the proposed access which may be exposed during groundworks;
- To undertake a trial trench evaluation in order to evaluate geophysical anomalies, and 'blank' areas, in order to establish the presence or absence, extent, condition, character, quality, and date of any archaeological features or deposits;
- To establish the potential impacts of the Proposed Development (where archaeological features may occur) and to allow mitigation measures to be proposed, where appropriate; and
- To disseminate the results of the archaeological evaluation to the wider public in a manner appropriate to their significance.

Relevant research objectives will be derived from the North West Historic Environment Research Framework (Research Frameworks, 2023).

3 WORKING METHODS

3.1 General

CFA Archaeology is a Registered Organisation (RO) with the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CIfA). Work will be conducted with regard to the Institute's Standards documents (CIfA 2020a-c), relevant Historic England guidance documents (Historic

England 2011, 2015a, 2015b, 2015c and 2020), and this WSI. Recording of all elements will be done following established CFA procedures.

A visual inspection of the site will be undertaken in order to identify: any surface features of potential archaeological interest; areas of potentially significant disturbance; and any hazards or constraints which may impact the archaeological work on site.

3.2 Watching Brief

An archaeological watching brief will be conducted during the groundworks, required in advance of setting out the Site access (see Figure 1). This area is located in the north of the Site, adjacent to Langley Lane. Topsoil, subsoil and any other overburden will be removed with a toothless grading/ditching bucket under direct archaeological supervision. Excavation will be carried out to the depth of the natural substrate, or to the first significant archaeological horizon, whichever is reached first.

If archaeological deposits are encountered, then machining will cease in that area to allow the supervising archaeologist time to investigate the exposed deposits. Any further excavation required to fulfil the objectives of the watching brief will be carried out by hand (see Section 3.4), unless otherwise agreed with the GMAAS.

Once the watching brief has been completed, sign-off will be sought from GMAAS to allow the access construction to continue.

3.3 Trial Trenching

Five trenches, measuring 50m by 1.8m (entailing a c.3% sample of the Site), have been sited across the Site in order to evaluate geophysical anomalies and 'blank' areas.

The trenches will be machine excavated with a toothless ditching bucket under direct archaeological supervision. Excavation will be carried out to the depth of the natural substrate, or to the first significant archaeological horizon, whichever is reached first. Any further excavation required to fulfil the objectives of the evaluation will be carried out by hand (see Section 3.4), unless otherwise agreed with the GMAAS.

The trenches will be backfilled on completion of excavation and once sign-off has been received from GMAAS. The location of the trenches will be recorded using industry standard surveying equipment and tied to the National Grid. Vertical survey control will be tied to the Ordnance Survey Datum.

3.4 Recording

All excavation and on-site recording will be carried out according to standard CFA procedures, principally by drawing, by photography, and by completing standard CFA record forms. The stratification will be recorded even if no deposits of archaeological significance are discovered.

Samples of all features of archaeological interest will be excavated in order to establish their likely date, nature, extent and condition. All such excavation will be conducted by hand.

Sections will be recorded by means of a measured drawing at an appropriate scale. Sections will normally be drawn at 1:10. Cut features will be recorded in profile, planned at an appropriate scale, with their location accurately identified on the appropriate trench plan. The height of a datum on the drawing will be calculated and recorded. The locations of sections and plans will be recorded on the site plans, relative to the site grid.

Photographs will include an appropriate scale, and will be recorded on photographic registers which detail subject, location, and direction of shot. Photographs taken will adhere to Historic England's guidance '*Digital Image Capture and File Storage*' (Historic England 2015b). Photographs should be taken with a high-resolution digital SLR camera, with sensors exceeding 12 Mega pixels, at the highest quality setting. Digital images will be converted to uncompressed baseline v.6 TIFF for archiving.

Any human remains encountered will be reported to the appropriate authorities and left *in situ*. If removal is necessary, this will comply with the relevant license, regulations, and government guidance.

All artefacts, including faunal remains, will be retained for analysis. Post-excavation storage requirements will be assessed. Modern finds (20th century onward) will be recorded but not retained. Collection and post-excavation work on artefacts will follow current ClfA guidance (2020b).

CFA's palaeoenvironmental scientist will assess the environmental potential of the Site, and will advise on whether deposits offer potential for conducting palaeobotanical or other soils analyses, or to allow a sieving programme to be undertaken if appropriate. They will assess the potential for the preservation of faunal remains, and ensure that sampling is carried out in accordance with current guidelines (Historic England 2011).

4 ANALYSIS AND REPORTING

4.1 Post-excavation

All finds, where appropriate, will be retained, washed, and assessed in accordance with accepted professional standards.

For all categories of material recovered, including finds, palaeoenvironmental, industrial, and other specialist samples, an assessment by an appropriately experienced specialist will be undertaken. Samples will be processed and sorted, and any artefacts recovered will be provided to the appropriate specialist(s) to be considered alongside the hand-recovered material. Basic stratigraphic information will be supplied to the project specialists.

All finds are to be treated in accordance with current best practice guidance (Historic England 2011). Finds will be cleaned and quantified according to accepted principles and in line with appropriate period/material guidelines.

4.2 Reporting

The report will contain:

- A concise, non-technical summary of the project results;
- A front cover/frontispiece which includes the planning application number and the national grid reference of the site;
- The dates during which the work was undertaken;
- A description of the site location and geology;
- An explanation of any agreed variations from the WSI, including justification for any work not undertaken;
- A description of the methodology employed, work undertaken and the results obtained;
- Contexts and feature descriptions;
- Maps and other illustrations at an appropriate scale;
- A list of, and spot dates for, any finds recovered, and;
- A description of any environmental or other specialist work undertaken and an outline of the results obtained;
- A discussion of how the work contributed to the aims and objectives set out in the WSI; and
- Recommendations regarding the need for, and scope of, any further archaeological work;
- A bibliography.

4.3 Archiving

CFA Archaeology is ISO 9001 accredited, and all internal archiving and digital record systems are fully compliant with ClfA Standards and Guidance, specifically guidance on Planning and Data Management Plans for Archaeological Projects (ClfA 2023). The digital archive will be subject to a selection process, depending on the results of the works, and the resulting digital archive will be deposited with the Archaeological Data Service (ADS) in line with guidance from ADS (2023) and ClfA (2020c).

A draft copy of the report will be sent to the GMAAS for any comments prior to being finalised. One digital copy of the final report (PDF-A format) will be deposited with the Greater Manchester Historic Environment Record (HER) following completion of fieldwork.

An online OASIS form will be completed as part of the archaeological work.

The landowner will be encouraged to transfer the ownership of finds to the receiving archive, anticipated to be the Touchstones Rochdale, and the requirements of the museum will be adhered to.

5 RESOURCING AND PROGRAMMING

5.1 Key Personnel

Phil Mann (BA MCIfA) is a Project Manager for CFA Archaeology. Phil has project managed numerous archaeological projects of all periods throughout the country including those undertaken for large infrastructure projects.

Field Director for CFA will be selected from CFA's pool of Field Officers, depending on availability, all of whom have appropriate experience. The CV for the selected Field Officer can be forwarded prior to the start of the project.

Dr Shelley Werner (BSc MPhil PhD) is CFA's Graphics Manager, responsible for the organisation and management of all GIS, CAD, and Illustrative material. She is an experienced illustrator with specialist knowledge in GIS consultancy, archaeological fieldwork and standing building survey, and has worked on a variety of projects in Scotland and England.

Post-excavation and environmental coordination will be managed by CFA's post-excavation manager, **Christina Hills**; CVs for CFA's 'in house' specialists or external consultants can be supplied on request.

5.2 Health and Safety

All CFA staff have been inducted into CFA's Health and Safety Policy. All work for the project will be subject to Risk Assessment procedures.

5.3 Monitoring

Close contact will be maintained with the client and GMAAS for the purpose of monitoring the project. Important or unexpected discoveries will be communicated to GMAAS, and a monitoring visit will be arranged if appropriate. Contact numbers, and a notification of works commencing, will be forwarded a minimum of one week in advance of the work starting.

6 REFERENCES

Legislation, Policy and Guidance

Archaeological Data Service (ADS) 2023 'Guides to Good Practice'. <https://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/help-guidance/guides-to-good-practice/>.

Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CIfA) 2014 'Code of Conduct'. Reading: CIfA (revised October 2022).

CIfA 2020a 'Standard and Guidance for Field Evaluation'. Reading: CIfA .

CIfA 2020b 'Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Brief'. Reading: CIfA .

CIfA 2020c 'Standard and Guidance for the Creation, Compilation, Transfer and Deposition of Archaeological Archives' Reading: CIfA.

CIfA 2023 'Planning – Data Management Plan'. <https://www.archaeologists.net/digdigital/planning>.

Historic England 2011 'Environmental Archaeology; A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Methods, from Sampling and Recovery to Post-excavation'. Swindon: Historic England.

Historic England 2015a 'The Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment, (MoRPHE), Project Managers' Guide'. Swindon: Historic England .

Historic England 2015b 'Digital Image Capture and File Storage'. Swindon: Historic England .

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AOC Archaeology 2022 'Land off Langley Lane, Middleton, Lancashire: Archaeological Geophysical Survey'. Report No. 40373

Kathryn Sather & Associates 2018 'Langley Lane, Birch Village, Middleton: Archaeological Desk Based Assessment'.

Kathryn Sather & Associates 2022 'Langley Lane, Birch Village, Middleton: Heritage Statement'.

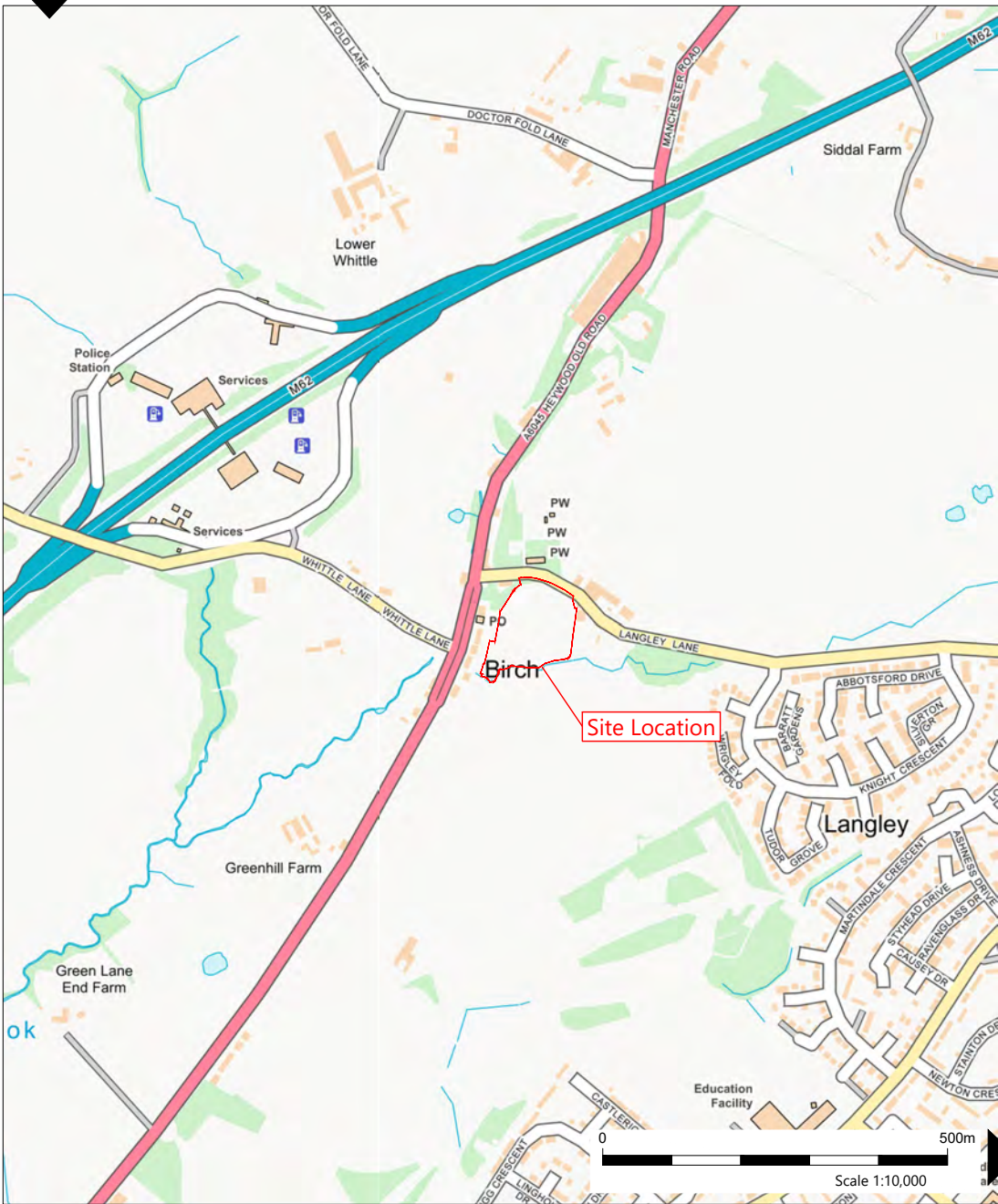
Online Resources

British Geological Survey 2023 'Geology of Britain (viewer)'. <https://mapapps.bgs.ac.uk/>. [Accessed 25/05/2023].

LandIS 2022 'Cranfield Soil and Agrifood Institute Soilscales'. <http://www.landis.org.uk/soilscales>. [Accessed 25/05/2023].

Research Frameworks 2022 'The North West England Regional Research Framework'. <https://researchframeworks.org/eoe/>. [Accessed 25/05/2023].

FIGURES



Key:

- Site Boundary
- Proposed Access
- Watching Brief Area
- Trial Trenches

Geophys Interpretation © AOC Archaeology

- Area of Disturbance (Unclear Origin)
- Geology/Natural
- Area of Disturbance (Modern)
- Ferrous / Iron Spike
- Linear Trend Field Drain

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Title: Site Location, Watching Brief and Trench Location		
Project: Land South of Langley Lane, Birch, Middleton		
Client: Hollins Strategic Land		
Scale at A3: Varies		
Drawn by: SB	Checked: JT	Date: 31/05/2023
Report No: WSI		Fig. No: 1



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