

# Archaeological evaluation on land off Blue Gates Farm, Colchester Main Road, Alresford, Essex, CO7 8DG

November 2017



**by Dr Elliott Hicks**

with contributions by Stephen Benfield  
figures by Ben Holloway and Sarah Carter

fieldwork by Ben Holloway with Nigel Rayner, Mark Baister and Elliott Hicks

**commissioned by Mr Ross Bain  
on behalf of Vaughan and Blyth**

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Planning ref.: 16/00305/OUT

CAT project ref.: 17/09n

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Colchester Museum accession code: COLEM 2017.129

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**CAT Report 1191**

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## 1 Summary

*An archaeological evaluation (seven trial-trenches) was carried out at land off Blue Gates Farm, Colchester Main Road, Alresford in advance of the construction of nine new dwellings. A ditch corresponding to a cropmark extending across the proposed development site, and a pit, both of uncertain date, were uncovered.*

## 2 Introduction (Fig 1)

This is the archive report for an archaeological evaluation by trial-trenching at land off Blue Gates Farm, Colchester Main Road, Alresford, Essex which was carried out on 2nd-3rd November 2017. The work was commissioned by Mr Ross Bain on behalf of Vaughan and Blyth in advance of the construction of nine new dwellings, and was undertaken by Colchester Archaeological Trust (CAT).

In response to consultation with Essex County Council Place Services (ECCPS), Historic Environment Advisor Teresa O'Connor advised that in order to establish the archaeological implications of this application, the applicant should be required to commission a scheme of archaeological investigation in accordance with the *National Planning Policy Framework* (DCLG 2012).

All archaeological work was carried out in accordance with a *Brief for archaeological evaluation*, detailing the required archaeological work, written by Teresa O'Connor (ECCPS 2017), and a written scheme of investigation (WSI) prepared by CAT in response to the brief and agreed with ECCPS (CAT 2017).

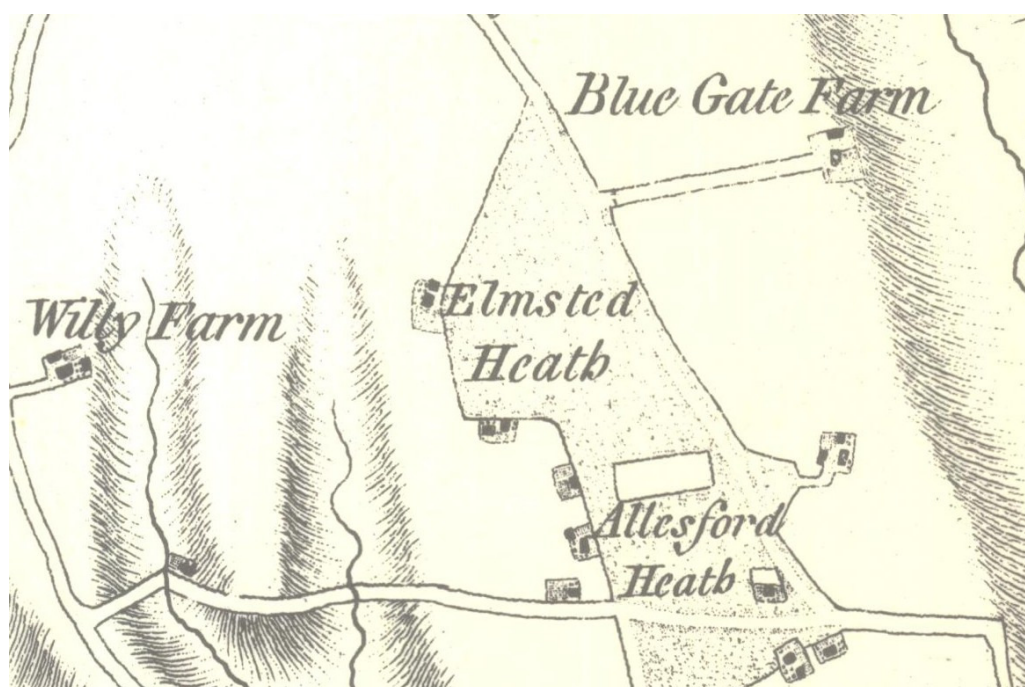
In addition to the brief and WSI, all fieldwork and reporting was done in accordance with English Heritage's *Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment (MoRPHE)* (English Heritage 2006), and with *Standards for field archaeology in the East of England* (EAA 14 and 24). This report mirrors standards and practices contained in the Institute for Archaeologists' *Standard and guidance for archaeological field evaluation* (ClfA 2014a) and *Standard and guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials* (ClfA 2014b).

## 3 Archaeological background

The following archaeological background draws on the Essex Historic Environment Record (EHER) held at Essex County Council, County Hall, Chelmsford, Essex.

The Historic Environment Record identifies a number of cropmark systems in the surrounding area which attest to the archaeological potential of the area of the proposed development. Immediately adjacent to the site are cropmark features potentially indicative of a trackway, linear features, and field boundaries recently removed. Further east lie probable pits and ring-ditches (EHER 2591). To the west comparable features are recorded (EHER 2590). To the north of the site is a concentration of cropmarks, including ring-ditches of probable Bronze Age date, enclosures and linear features (EHER 2614). None of the adjacent mapped cropmarks can be demonstrated to extend into the development area.

The Chapman and André maps of 1777 (Map 1) shows that the proposed site is located along the edge of the former heath. Elmstead heath was likely medieval in origin and would have been the focus for settlement during this period. The proposed development lies along the main road that ran through the heath.



**Map 1** Chapman and André map, 1777, showing Elmstead Heath and Blue Gates Farm

#### **4 Aims**

The aim of the archaeological evaluation was to investigate a cropmark projected to extend across the proposed development site, and to ascertain the extent of any surviving archaeological deposits that may exist on site more broadly, in order to determine whether further investigations were required.

#### **5 Results** (Figs 2-3)

Seven trial-trenches, all 20m long by 1.8m wide, were machine-excavated to natural under the supervision of a CAT archaeologist. For safety reasons, due to the presence of power lines, and with the approval of the ECC monitor, T7 was repositioned.

Two layers were recorded. Modern plough soil (L1, c 0.23-0.35m thick soft, moist, light/medium mottled grey/brown clayey-loam) sealed naturally-deposited sands and soils (L2, thick, soft, moist, light/dark mottled yellow/orange/brown sandy-clay). Sondages were excavated in T2 and T5 to ensure that the natural had been reached.

No significant archaeological remains were identified in T1-T5.

##### **Trench 6 (T6):**

Ditch F1 was aligned NNE-SSW and measured 1.08m in width and 0.2m in depth.

Undated possible pit F2 measured 0.31m in width and 0.04m in depth.

##### **Trench 7 (T7):**

Ditch F3 was aligned NNW-SSE and measured 1.26m in width and 0.23m in depth.



**Photograph 1** T6 trench shot – looking west south-west



**Photograph 2** T7 trench shot - looking east

## 6 Finds

by Stephen Benfield

Only a small quantity of finds was recovered, almost all of which came from the general topsoil layer (L1) with a few finds from a ditch (F3). Apart from two small flints that might be of prehistoric date, the most closely-datable finds are pottery of post-medieval and modern date. The finds from the ditch F3 consist of a damaged flint flake and a few pieces of animal bone and are not closely-dated. All of the finds are catalogued by trench and by finds number below. The pottery fabrics refer to the Colchester post-Roman fabric type series (CAR 7). The flints and animal bone were examined and commented upon by Adam Wightman.

### **Trench 1 L1 (finds no. 1)**

*Pottery:* Fabric 40B, single small sherd (1 g), abraded, dated c 17th-early 18th century; Fabric 48D, single small rim sherd from a plate or dish (2 g), abraded, dated 19th-early 20th century.

### **Trench 2 L1 (finds no. 2)**

*Pottery:* Fabric 48D, single small sherd from the rim area of a plate or dish (2 g), abraded, dated 19th-early 20th century.

### **Trench 5 L1 (finds no. 3)**

*Flint:* Small, thin flint flake (1 g), some cortex on one edge, appears to be snapped from a larger flake, dated as possibly prehistoric.

### **Trench 6 L1 (finds no. 4)**

*Glass:* Small piece of slightly curving pale green glass (2 g), surface abraded, dated post-medieval or modern.

*Ceramic building material:* peg-tile piece (20 g), abraded, dated medieval (c 1300+) -post-medieval or modern.

#### **Trench 7 Ditch F3 (finds no. 6)**

*Flint:* Thick, squat flake with large striking platform (4 g), natural flint surface on dorsal face, one side appears snapped away, some fine use wear or natural abrasive damage to edges, dated as possibly prehistoric.

*Animal bone:* Four pieces of bone, broken femoral head from medium-large mammal (70 g), almost all of cortical surface eroded away, moderate-poor condition.

## **7 Environmental assessment**

by Lisa Gray MSc MA ACIfA Archaeobotanist

### **Introduction – aims and objectives**

One sample was presented for assessment. It was taken from a ditch that contained a single piece of possibly prehistoric flint. The aims of this assessment are to determine the significance and potential of the plant macro-remains in the samples, consider their use in providing information about diet, craft, medicine, crop-husbandry, feature function and environment.

### **Sampling and processing methods**

A 40 litre sample was taken and completely processed by Colchester Archaeological Trust. It was processed using a Siraf-type flotation device. Flot was collected in a 300-micron mesh sieve then dried.

Once with the author the flot was scanned under a low powered stereo-microscope with a magnification range of 10 to 40x. The whole flots were examined. The abundance, diversity and state of preservation of eco- and artefacts in each sample were recorded. A magnet was passed across each flot to record the presence or absence of magnetised material or hammerscale.

Identifications were made using uncharred reference material (author's own and the Northern European Seed Reference Collection at the Institute of Archaeology, University College London) and reference manuals (such as Beijerinck 1947; Cappers *et al.* 2006; Charles 1984; Fuller 2007; Hillman 1976; Jacomet 2006). Nomenclature for plants is taken from Stace (Stace 2010). Latin names are given once and the common names used thereafter.

At this stage, to allow comparison between samples, numbers have also been estimated but where only a very low number of items are present they have been counted. Identifiable charred wood >4mm in diameter has been separated from charcoal flecks. Fragments this size are easier to break to reveal the cross-sections and diagnostic features necessary for identification and are less likely to be blown or unintentionally moved around the site (Asouti 2006 31; Smart and Hoffman, 1988, 178-179). Charcoal flecks <4mm diameter have been quantified but not recommended for further analysis unless twigs or roundwood fragments larger than 2mmØ were present.

## **Results**

### ***The plant remains***

Charred and dried waterlogged plant remains were present. Low numbers of charcoal fragments of identifiable size were recovered. Uncharred plant remains consisted of seeds of fat hen (*Chenopodium album* L.), orache (*Atriplex* sp.) and blackberry/raspberry (*Rubus fruticosus/idaeus*). Modern seeds of common fumitory (*Fumaria officinalis* L.) and lady's/hedge bedstraw (*Galium verum/mollugo*). These are all plants of waste and disturbed ground.

| Sample | Finds No. | Sample description             | Bulk sample volume (L) | Flot volume (ml) | Charcoal >4mmØ | Charcoal <4mmØ | Dried waterlogged Seeds |   |   | Modern root/rhizomes | Terrestrial mollusca | Earthworm cocoons |
|--------|-----------|--------------------------------|------------------------|------------------|----------------|----------------|-------------------------|---|---|----------------------|----------------------|-------------------|
|        |           |                                |                        |                  | a              | a              | a                       | d | p | a                    | a                    | a                 |
| 1      | 5         | F1, possible Prehistoric ditch | 40                     | 5                | 1              | 2              | 2                       | 1 | 3 | 2                    | 1                    | 1                 |

**Table 1** Environmental results

Key: a = abundance [1 = occasional 1-10; 2 = moderate 11-100; and 3 = abundant >100]

d = diversity [1 = low 1-4 taxa types; 2 = moderate 5-10; 3 = high]

p = preservation [1 = poor (family level only); 2 = moderate (genus), 3 = good (species identification possible)]

### Fauna

Low numbers of earthworm cocoons and terrestrial mollusca were present. Some of the mollusca were *Ceciliodes acicula* Müller.

### Artefactual remains

No artefactual remains were found.

### Recommendations

If the charcoal is a suitable type for radiocarbon dating then identification of fragments above >4mm Ø. may be useful. Aside from this, further work on this sample is not recommended. The uncharred seeds may be intrusive. The possibility of bioturbation is evident in the present of uncharred root/rhizome fragments, the subterranean snail *Ceciliodes acicula* and earthworm cocoons.

## 8 Conclusion

Archaeological evaluation was conducted at Blue Gates Farm, Alresford, Essex to investigate a cropmark projected to extend across the proposed development site. Two sections of ditch, F1 in T6 and F3 in T7, suggest that the cropmark ditch does continue into the development site where it curves slightly from a N-S alignment to a NNE-SSW direction. It is possible, however, that this ditch is in fact unrelated to the cropmark. A piece of possibly prehistoric flint retrieved from the ditch indicate that the feature might date to this period, but it could equally be a residual find.

## 9 Acknowledgements

CAT thanks Mr Ross Bain for commissioning and funding the work. The project was managed by C Lister. Fieldwork was carried out by B Holloway with N Rayner, M Baister and E Hicks. Figures are by B Holloway and E Holloway. The project was monitored for ECCPS by Teresa O'Connor.

## 10 References

Note: all CAT reports, except for DBAs, are available online in PDF format at

<http://cat.essex.ac.uk>

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|   |       |   |
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| CAT                                       | 2014  | <i>Health &amp; Safety Policy</i>   |
| CAT                                       | 2017  | <i>Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) for archaeological evaluation on land off Bluegate Farm, Colchester Main Road, Alresford, Essex, CO7 8DG</i>   |
| Charles, M                                | 1984  | 'Introductory remarks on the cereals.' <i>Bulletin on Sumerian Agriculture</i> <b>1</b> , 17-31.  |
| ClfA                                      | 2014a | <i>Standard and Guidance for archaeological evaluation</i>  |
| ClfA                                      | 2014b | <i>Standard and guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials</i>   |
| DCLG                                      | 2012  | <i>National Planning Policy Framework</i>   |
| ECCPS                                     | 2017  | <i>Brief for archaeological evaluation at Bluegates Farm, Colchester Main Road, Alresford</i>   |
| English Heritage                          | 2006  | <i>Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment (MoRPHE)</i>   |
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## 11 Abbreviations and glossary

|             |   |
|-------------|---|
| Bronze Age  | period from c 2500 – 700 BC   |
| CAT         | Colchester Archaeological Trust   |
| ClfA        | Chartered Institute for Archaeologists                                    |
| context     | specific location of finds on an archaeological site                      |
| ECC         | Essex County Council  |
| ECCHEA      | Essex County Council Historic Environment Advisor                         |
| ECCPS       | Essex County Council Place Services                                       |
| EH          | Essex Historic Environment Record   |
| feature (F) | an identifiable thing like a pit, a wall, a drain: can contain 'contexts' |
| layer (L)   | distinct or distinguishable deposit (layer) of material                   |
| medieval    | period from AD 1066 to c 1500   |
| modern      | period from c AD 1800 to the present                                      |
| natural     | geological deposit undisturbed by human activity                          |



|               |   |
|---------------|---|
| NGR           | National Grid Reference   |
| OASIS         | Online Access to the Index of Archaeological Investigations,<br><a href="http://oasis.ac.uk/pages/wiki/Main">http://oasis.ac.uk/pages/wiki/Main</a>               |
| peg-tile      | rectangular thin tile with peg-hole(s) used mainly for roofing, first appeared c AD1200 and continued in use to present day, but commonly post-medieval to modern |
| post-medieval | from c AD 1500 to c 1800  |
| prehistoric   | pre-Roman   |
| residual      | something out of its original context, eg a Roman coin in a modern pit  |
| Roman         | the period from AD 43 to c AD 410   |
| section       | (abbreviation sx or Sx) vertical slice through feature/s or layer/s   |
| wsi           | written scheme of investigation   |

## 12 Contents of archive

**Finds:** none retained

### **Paper and digital record**

One A4 document wallet containing:

The report (CAT Report 1191)

ECC evaluation brief, CAT written scheme of investigation

Original site record (feature and layer sheets, finds record, plans)

Site digital photos and log, architectural plans, attendance register, risk assessment

## 13 Archive deposition

The paper and digital archive is currently held by the Colchester Archaeological Trust at Roman Circus House, Roman Circus Walk, Colchester, Essex CO2 7GZ, but will be permanently deposited with Colchester Museum under accession code: COLEM 2017.129

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### **Distribution list:**

Mr Ross Bain, Vaughan and Blyth

ECC Place Services Historic Environment Advisor

Essex Historic Environment Record, Essex County Council



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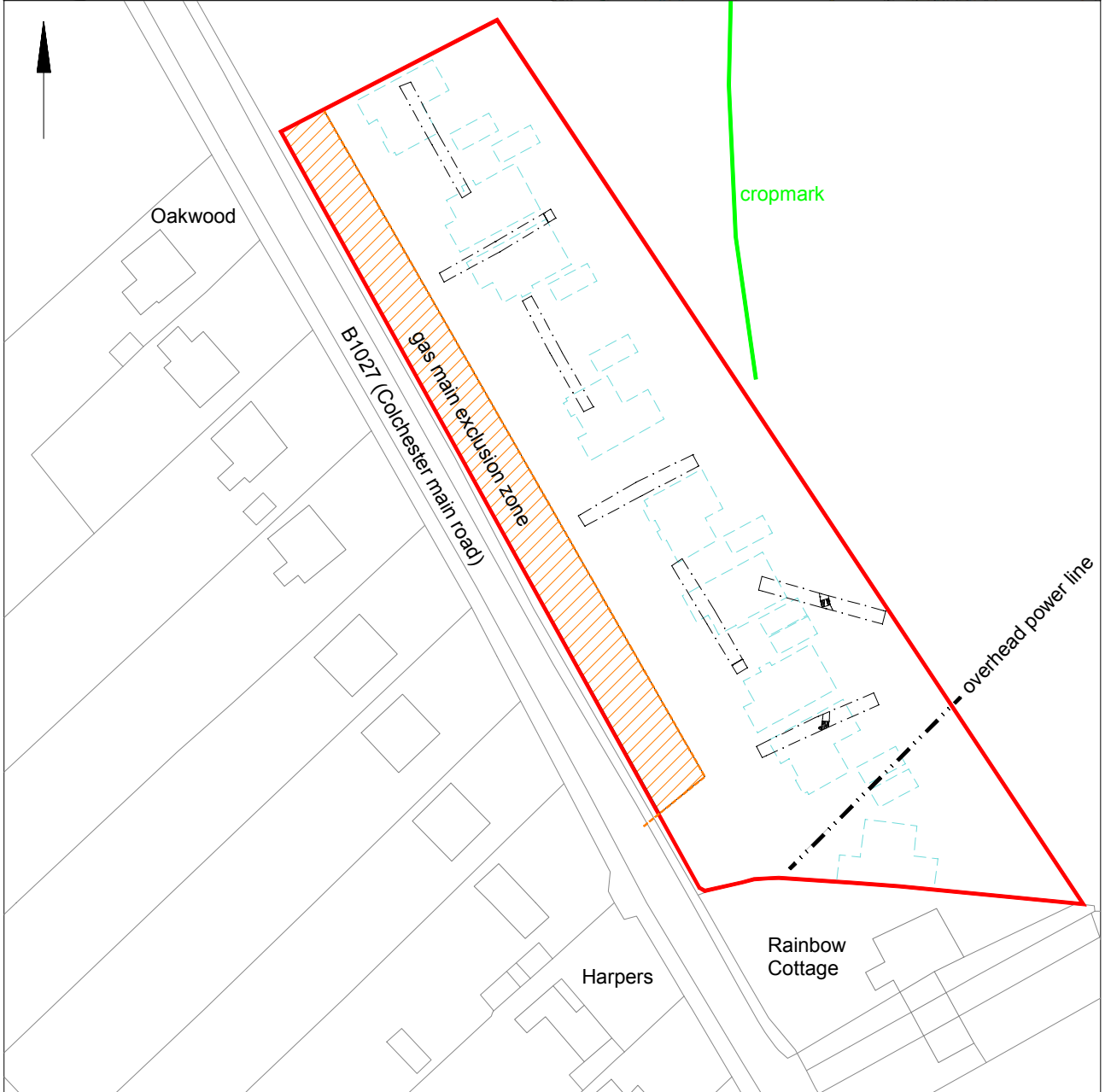
Checked by: Philip Crummy

Date: 15.11.2017

**Appendix 1 Context list**

| <b>Context number</b> | <b>Finds number</b> | <b>Context type</b> | <b>Description</b>   | <b>Date</b>  |
|-----------------------|---------------------|---------------------|--|--------------|
| F1                    | 5(S)                | Ditch               | Soft, moist, medium yellow/grey/brown sandy-silty-clay with rare charcoal fleck inclusions and rare stone piece inclusions | Undatable    |
| F2                    | -                   | ?Pit                | Soft, moist, light yellow/brown sandy-silt with rare charcoal fleck inclusions   | Undatable    |
| F3                    | 6                   | Ditch               | Firm, moist, medium grey/brown clayey-silt   | Undatable    |
| L1                    | 1, 2, 3, 4          | Plough soil         | Soft, moist, light/medium mottled grey/brown clayey-loam   | Modern       |
| L2                    | -                   | Natural             | Soft, moist, light/dark mottled yellow/orange/brown sandy-clay with occasional stone piece inclusions                      | Post-glacial |

(S) sample



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Fig 1 Site location in relation to the proposed development (dashed blue) and cropmark (green)



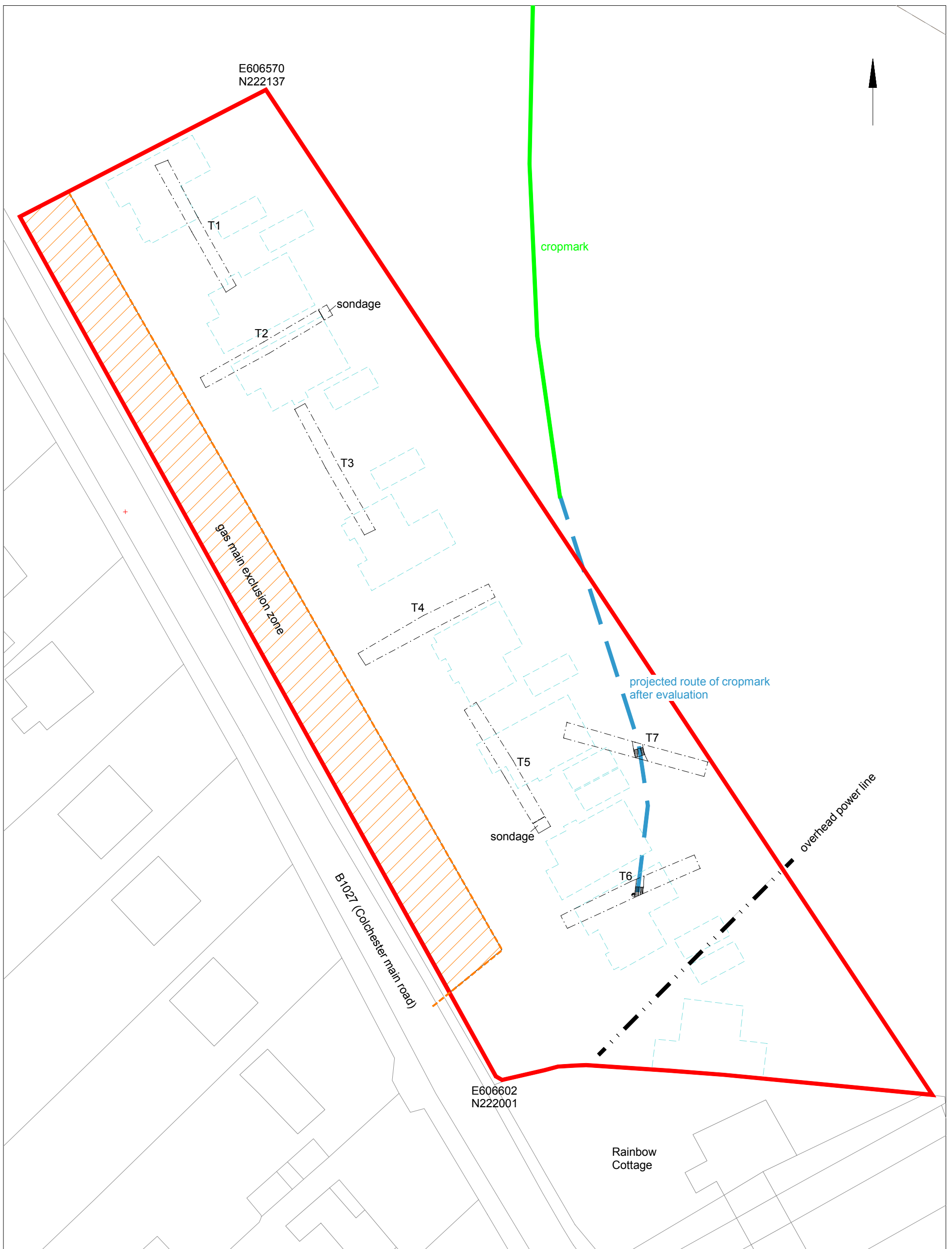
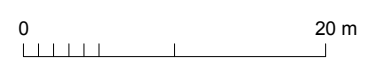
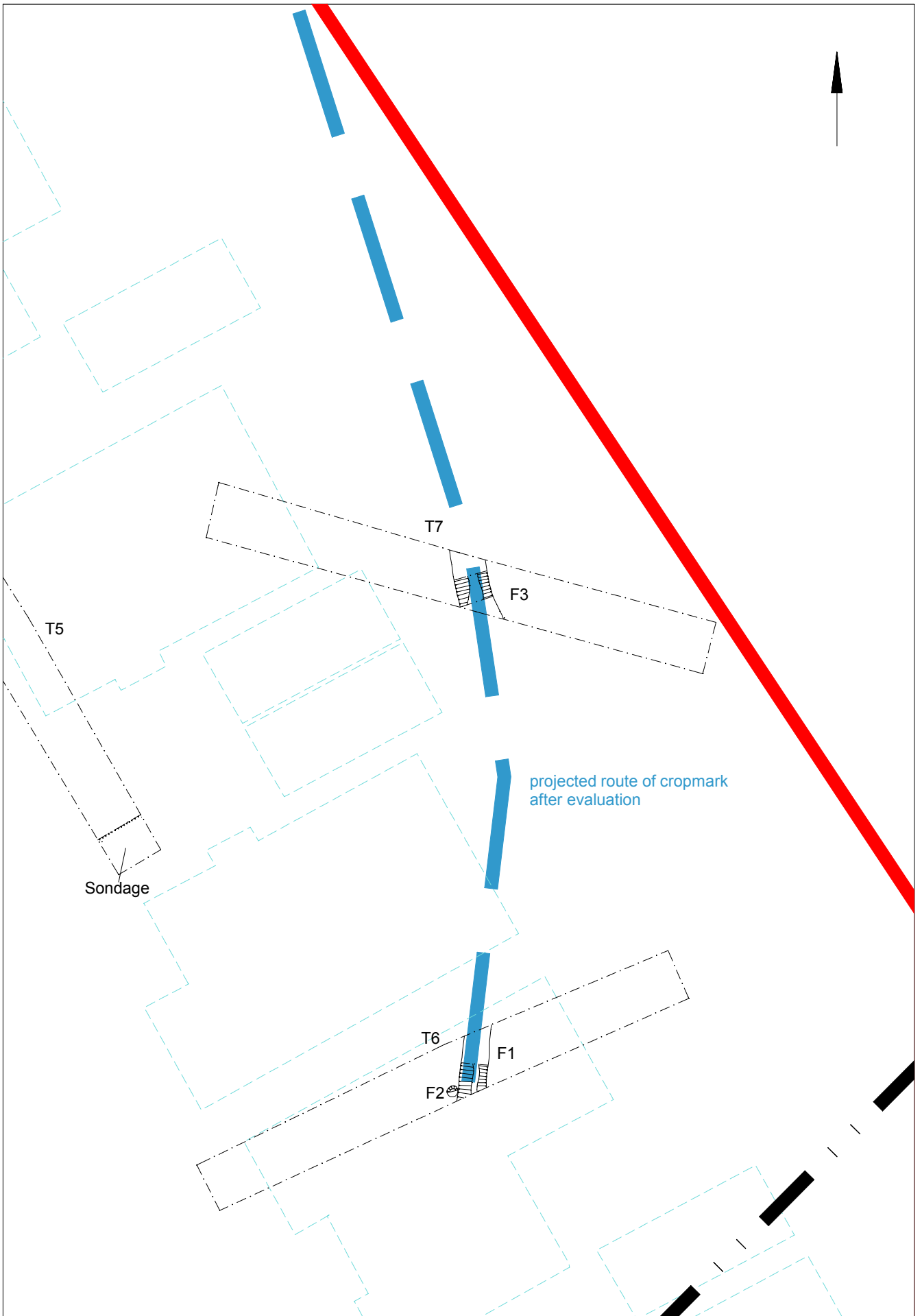


Fig 2 Results

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Fig 3 Close up of cropmark ditches F1 and F3

0 10 m

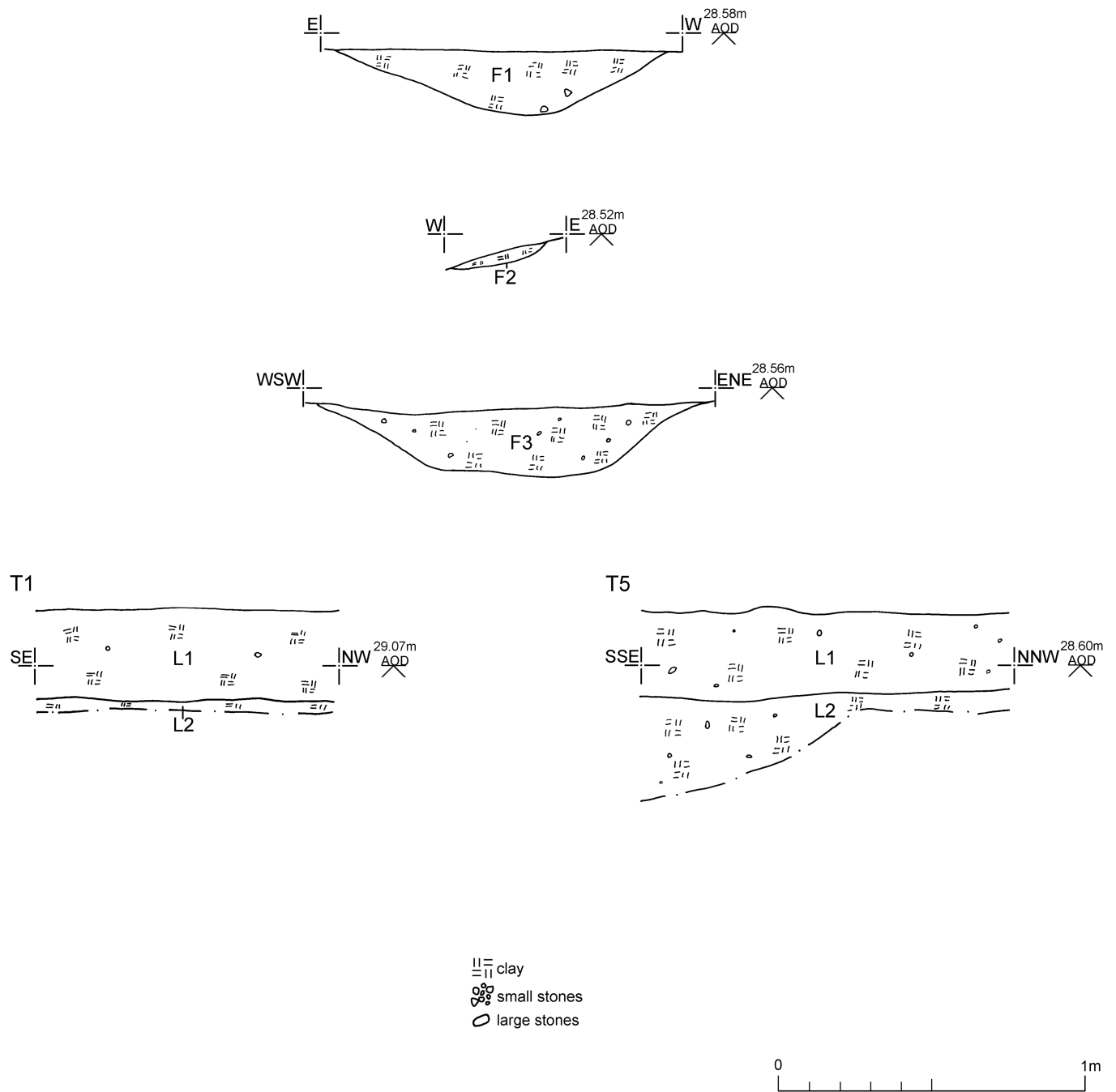


Fig 4 Feature and representative sections

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**OASIS ID: colchest3-296539**

## Project details

|  |   |
|--|---|
| Project name                           | Archaeological trial trench evaluation at Blue Gates Farm, Colchester Main Road, Alresford, CO7 8DE   |
| Short description of the project       | An archaeological evaluation (seven trial-trenches) was carried out at land off Blue Gates Farm, Colchester Main Road, Alresford in advance of the construction of nine new dwellings. A ditch corresponding to a cropmark extending across the proposed development site, and a pit, both of uncertain date, were uncovered. |
| Project dates                          | Start: 02-11-2017 End: 03-11-2017   |
| Previous/future work                   | No / Not known  |
| Any associated project reference codes | 17/09n - Contracting Unit No.   |
| Any associated project reference codes | 16/00305/OUT - Planning Application No.   |
| Any associated project reference codes | COLEM: 2017.129 - Museum accession ID   |
| Any associated project reference codes | ALBF17 - HER event no.  |
| Type of project                        | Field evaluation  |
| Site status                            | None  |
| Current Land use                       | Cultivated Land 4 - Character Undetermined  |
| Monument type                          | DITCH Uncertain   |
| Monument type                          | PIT Uncertain   |
| Significant Finds                      | POTTERY Post Medieval   |
| Significant Finds                      | POTTERY Modern  |
| Significant Finds                      | FLINT Early Prehistoric   |
| Significant Finds                      | FLINT Late Prehistoric  |
| Significant Finds                      | GLASS Post Medieval   |
| Significant Finds                      | GLASS Modern  |
| Significant Finds                      | CBM Medieval  |
| Significant Finds                      | CBM Post Medieval   |
| Significant Finds                      | CBM Modern  |
| Significant Finds                      | ANIMAL BONE Uncertain   |
| Methods & techniques                   | ""Sample Trenches""   |
| Development type                       | Urban residential (e.g. flats, houses, etc.)  |
| Prompt                                 | Planning condition  |
| Position in the planning process       | After outline determination (eg. As a reserved matter)  |

## Project location

|                   |  |
|-------------------|--|
| Country           | England  |
| Site location     | ESSEX TENDRING ALRESFORD Blue Gates Farm, Colchester Main Road             |
| Postcode          | CO7 8DG  |
| Study area        | 0.68 Hectares  |
| Site coordinates  | TM 06596 22040 51.858100652746 1.000531554762 51 51 29 N 001 00 01 E Point |
| Height OD / Depth | Min: 28.27m Max: 28.97m  |

## Project creators

|                           |                                 |
|---------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Name of Organisation      | Colchester Archaeological Trust |
| Project brief originator  | HEM Team Officer, ECC           |
| Project design originator | Adam Tuffey                     |
| Project director/manager  | Chris Lister                    |
| Project supervisor        | Ben Holloway                    |
| Type of                   | Developer                       |

sponsor/funding  
body

#### Project archives

Physical Archive Exists? No  
Digital Archive recipient Colchester Museum  
Digital Archive ID COLEM: 2017.129  
Digital Contents "Stratigraphic","Survey"  
Digital Media available "Images raster / digital photography","Survey"  
Paper Archive recipient Colchester Museum  
Paper Archive ID COLEM: 2017.129  
Paper Contents "Stratigraphic","Survey"  
Paper Media available "Context sheet","Drawing","Miscellaneous Material","Photograph","Plan","Report","Section"

#### Project bibliography 1

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