

Orion Heritage

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Land south of the M20, Church Lane, Aldington, Kent (known as East Stour Solar Farm)

Archaeology Statement of Significance

Application ref 22/00668/AS

Aims and Scope

- 1.1 This archaeology technical note summarises the findings of the archaeological work undertaken in relation to the East Stour planning application and provides a statement of significance on the archaeological remains recorded within the site.
- 1.2 The planning application for the installation of a solar farm with a generating capacity of up to 49.9MW comprising: ground mounted solar panels, access tracks, inverter/transformers, substation, storage, spare parts and welfare cabins, underground cables and conduits, perimeter fence, CCTV equipment, temporary construction compounds and associated infrastructure and planting scheme (the "Proposed Development") was refused permission and is now the subject of a planning appeal. Reason for refusal 2 relates to the purported lack of archaeological information provided. Ashford Borough Council have requested an assessment of the significance of the archaeological remains recorded within the Proposed Development. This document provides that assessment.

Archaeological assessment work undertaken to date

- 1.3 The planning application was submitted with a detailed Historic Environment Desk Based Assessment ("HEDBA") produced by Orion Heritage dated February 2022. This assessment was undertaken in accordance with the ClfA Standards and Guidance for Historic Environment Desk Based Assessments (2020). It included as Appendix 1, a geophysical survey of the red line area of the planning application which was undertaken by Orion Heritage's appointed sub-contractor, Magnitude Surveys, in accordance with the ClfA Standards and Guidance for Geophysical Survey (2020). The results of the geophysical survey resulted in an area of the Proposed Development site being excluded from having solar panels due to the nature of the archaeological remains in part of the red line area of the site adjacent to Area 2 of the geophysical survey so as to ensure that these remains were preserved in-situ.



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- 1.4 Kent County Council's consultation response dated 30th August 2022 stated that they considered that an archaeological evaluation was required to 'ground truth' the geophysical survey. Following receipt of this consultation response, archaeological evaluation trenching of the Site was undertaken by Orion Heritage's contractor, Pre-Construct Archaeology, in accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigation ("WSI") approved by Kent County Council on behalf of Ashford Borough Council. The evaluation was undertaken between 1st February and 31st March 2023 comprising the excavation of 117 30m x 2m trenches across all the proposed developable areas of the Site targeting geophysical survey anomalies recorded in the 2020 geophysical survey and the 'blank' areas of the Site. A Senior Archaeological Officer of Kent County Council archaeology department visited the Site once during the evaluation works. The evaluation report was submitted as part of the SEI in January 2024.

Results of the archaeological assessment

HEDBA & Geophysical Survey

- 1.5 The combined HEDBA and geophysical survey (the HEDBA included consideration of the geophysical survey results) established that there have been a number of archaeological interventions in Area 1 which have effectively recorded and removed potential archaeological deposits in the following areas (Figure 1 & 2):
- the location of a possible windmill mound (TRO3NE20) and residual prehistoric lithic material (TRO3NE242) from under the possible windmill mound in the centre-west of Area 1 (KHER EKE3720)
 - the south-west and south-east of Area 1 has been subject to archaeological investigation (EKE5094, EKE5097 and EKE12235).
 - It is also noted that the KHER records a medieval silver coin findspot (MKE55982) in the north of Area 1 that has been removed from the site.
 - Geophysical survey of the area has identified no evidence of associated features with either the find spot or the possible windmill mound.
- 1.6 The geophysical survey identified the following possible and undetermined areas of archaeological interest (Fig. 3):
- [MS2a] linear and curvilinear anomalies (probable archaeology) in the centre of Area 2;
 - [MS2b] linear and curvilinear anomalies (probable archaeology) in the centre of Area 2;
 - [MS2c] two strong parallel linear anomalies (undetermined) in the east of Area 2;
 - [MS5a] partial rectilinear enclosure measuring c. 100m wide with possible internal subdivision (probable archaeology) in the north-east of Area 5;
 - [MS5b] partial enclosures (probable archaeology) in the south of Area 5;
 - [MS5c] curvilinear anomaly which may represent a ring ditch (probable archaeology) in the south-east of Area 5;
 - [MS5d] linear and curvilinear (probable archaeology) in the centre-east of Area 5;
 - [MS5e] area of possible extraction (probable archaeology) in the centre-east of Area 5;

- The survey recorded the location of the mid-20th century radio mast foundation in the centre of Area 5 [MS5f].

1.7 Based on the form of the geophysical anomalies, the assessment concluded that there was high potential for prehistoric occupation evidence in the centre of Area 2 [MS2a and 2b] along with the potential for multi-phase occupation evidence in this area. The date and character of the linear anomalies of undetermined character [MS2c] in the west of Area 2 were unknown. The report concluded that these remains were likely to be of local to regional, rather than national heritage significance.

1.8 The assessment concluded that there was high potential for prehistoric – Romano-British occupation across Area 5, although it did also state that the enclosures could be medieval or later in date [MS5a and 5b]. These remains were considered likely to be of local to regional, rather than national heritage significance.

Evaluation Trenching

1.9 The evaluation has established that archaeological features were present in 43 of the trenches. Remains recorded include two possible Neolithic pits in Area 5 (Trench 124); Mid/Late Bronze Age features in Areas 1 (Trench 6) and 5 (Trench 123); a late Bronze Age/early Iron Age ditch and pit in Area 1 (Trench 13) and indications of contemporary activity in Area 5 (Trenches 90 and 123); focuses of Late Iron Age-early Romano British settlement activity in Areas 2 and 6 and Romano British activity in Areas 1 and 5 including two sunken feature buildings in Area 1. These findings are broadly in keeping with the results of the geophysical survey and HEDBA.

1.10 It is acknowledged that while a geophysical survey can provide a direct measurement of subsurface properties, it is not a map of the ground. It is further acknowledged that a zone of more enhanced material (Natural (spread)) was identified during the geophysical survey in the centre of the survey area, which may obscure archaeology within this zone (Area 5 as shown on the attached figure 3). A geophysical survey cannot in itself determine the age, depth or quality of buried archaeological remains. It is considered that the combination of geophysical survey and evaluation trenching has provided a robust evidence base for the site. The results of the two surveys support and build on one another and have allowed an informed view of the archaeological potential of the site. Based on currently available information, the remains identified are all considered to be of local to regional significance and are not design constraints.

1.11 In relation to the geophysical survey results, the trenching established the following:

- [MS2a] linear and curvilinear anomalies (probable archaeology) in the centre of Area 2. Excluded from the proposed developable area so not trenched as there will be no impact on these remains.
- [MS2b] linear and curvilinear anomalies (probable archaeology) in the centre of Area 2. Excluded from the proposed developable area so not trenched as there will be no impact on these remains.

- [MS2c] two strong parallel linear anomalies (undetermined) in the east of Area 2. Excluded from the proposed developable area so not trenched as there will be no impact on these remains.
- [MS5a] partial rectilinear enclosure measuring c. 100m wide with possible internal subdivision (probable archaeology) in the north-east of Area 5. The evaluation failed to identify archaeological remains associated with an enclosure in this area. A late Iron Age pit was recorded in Trench 44 but no evidence for enclosure ditches was recorded. Trenches 42 and 43 were targeted on the enclosure ditch but no archaeological features were recorded.
- [MS5b] partial enclosures (probable archaeology) in the south of Area 5. Trenches 82, 83, 90 and 91 were targeted on this feature. Trenches 82, 83 and 91 did not contain any archaeological features; trench 82 contained colluvium and one sherd of Late Iron Age/Early Romano-British pottery was found within it. Trench 90 also contained colluvium and revealed a large ditch and a smaller parallel ditch both of which were dated to the late Bronze Age/early Iron Age period.
- [MS5c] curvilinear anomaly which may represent a ring ditch (probable archaeology) in the south-east of Area 5. Trench 86 was targeted on this feature and failed to reveal any archaeological remains.
- [MS5d] linear and curvilinear (probable archaeology) and [MS5e] area of possible extraction (probable archaeology) in the centre-east of Area 5. Trenches 63 and 74 were targeted on these features. Trench 63 revealed a dumped deposit/possible midden of Romano-British date and trench 74 recorded a colluvium layer contained Romano-British pottery.

Statement of Significance

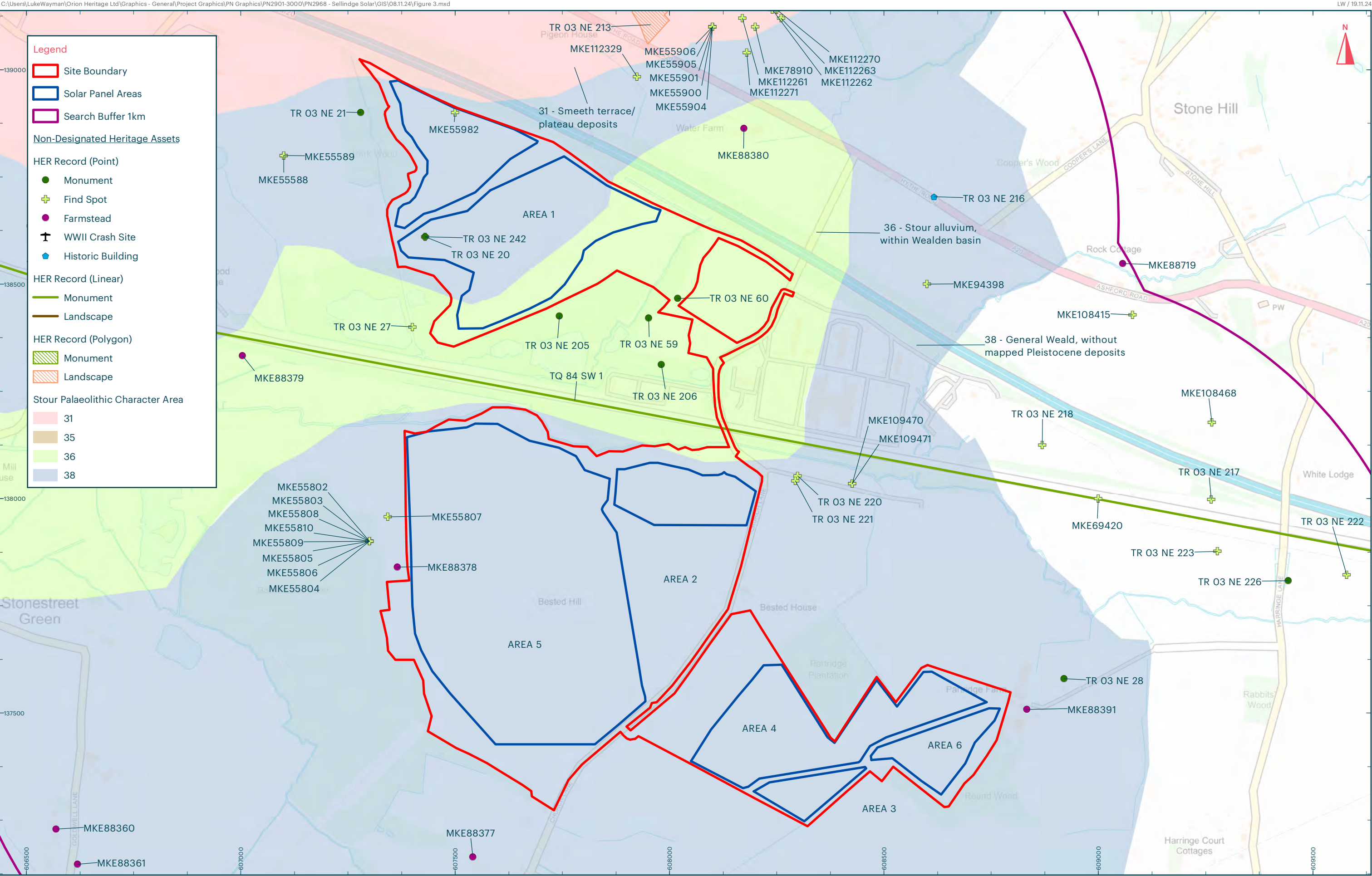
1.12 The significance of the identified remains, which are of archaeological interest, as detailed in Historic England's Advice Note 12 'Statements of Heritage Significance, Analysing Significance in Heritage Assets' (Figure 5) is considered to be as follows:

- Two possible Neolithic pits in Area 5 (Trench 124). These are isolated features and are considered to be of local significance. The Historic Environment Record (HER) data for a 1km buffer study area surrounding the site records a number of findspots of Neolithic artefacts (MKE78892 – flint core; TRO3NE66 – Neolithic finds indicative of transient activity; TRO3NE218 – possible Neolithic knife; TRO3NE222 – Neolithic arrowhead). The two isolated pits and artefactual findspots provide evidence indicative of transient temporary/seasonal activity across the wider landscape and are considered to be of local significance.
- Mid/Late Bronze Age features in Areas 1 and 5 (Trenches 6 & 123) comprising a pit and a posthole or small pit. These are considered to be of local significance as on the basis of the results of the evaluation, these are isolated features and are not indicative of domestic, ritual or funerary activity. The Historic Environment Record (HER) data for a 1km buffer study area surrounding the site records a Late Bronze Age settlement enclosure (TRO3NE61), part of a possible Middle Bronze Age field system (TRO3NE60), findspots of Late Bronze Age/Iron Age pottery (TRO3NE217), a Bronze Age arrowhead (TRO3NE210), a Bronze Age copper alloy axe head (MKE109084) and a Bronze Age copper-alloy knife blade (MKE109473).

- Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age features in Area 1 (Trench 13) and Areas 5 (Trenches 90 & 123) comprising ditches and pits. These features are considered to be of local significance. A Late Bronze Age settlement enclosure (TR03NE61) is recorded within the 1km buffer study area surrounding the site, as are various findspots of Bronze Age artefacts (see above).
- Focuses of Late Iron Age-early Romano British settlement activity in Areas 2 (Trenches 92, 93 & 94) and 6 (Trench 112, 117 & 119). These comprise gullies, ditches, ditch termini, pits and two undated postholes. Some of the features contained no dating evidence but were tentatively placed in this phase due to their proximity to other features that have been dated to this phase. These are considered to be of local significance.
- Romano British activity in Area 1 including two possible sunken feature buildings (Trenches 2, 4, 7, 11, 14, 15, 17, 18, 29, 24 & 25). The fills of the sunken feature buildings did not contain any dating evidence, however, they were placed in this phase due to their proximity to other dated Romano-British features and the fact that they are not uncommon on sites of this date. If the possible sunken feature buildings were to be of Romano-British date, they would be of local significance. There is the possibility that the possible sunken feature buildings are of Anglo-Saxon date, in which case they would potentially be of up to regional significance. It is noted that during excavations in 2000-2002, carried out as part of the CTRL, five early Anglo-Saxon sunken feature buildings were recorded in the vicinity of Northfleet Roman villa (TQ67SW1524).

1.13 As stated in the trial trenching evaluation report, based on the currently available information, the archaeological assemblage is considered to be of local significance. Information gained from further fieldwork and analyses may result in some of the archaeological remains being found to be of regional significance.

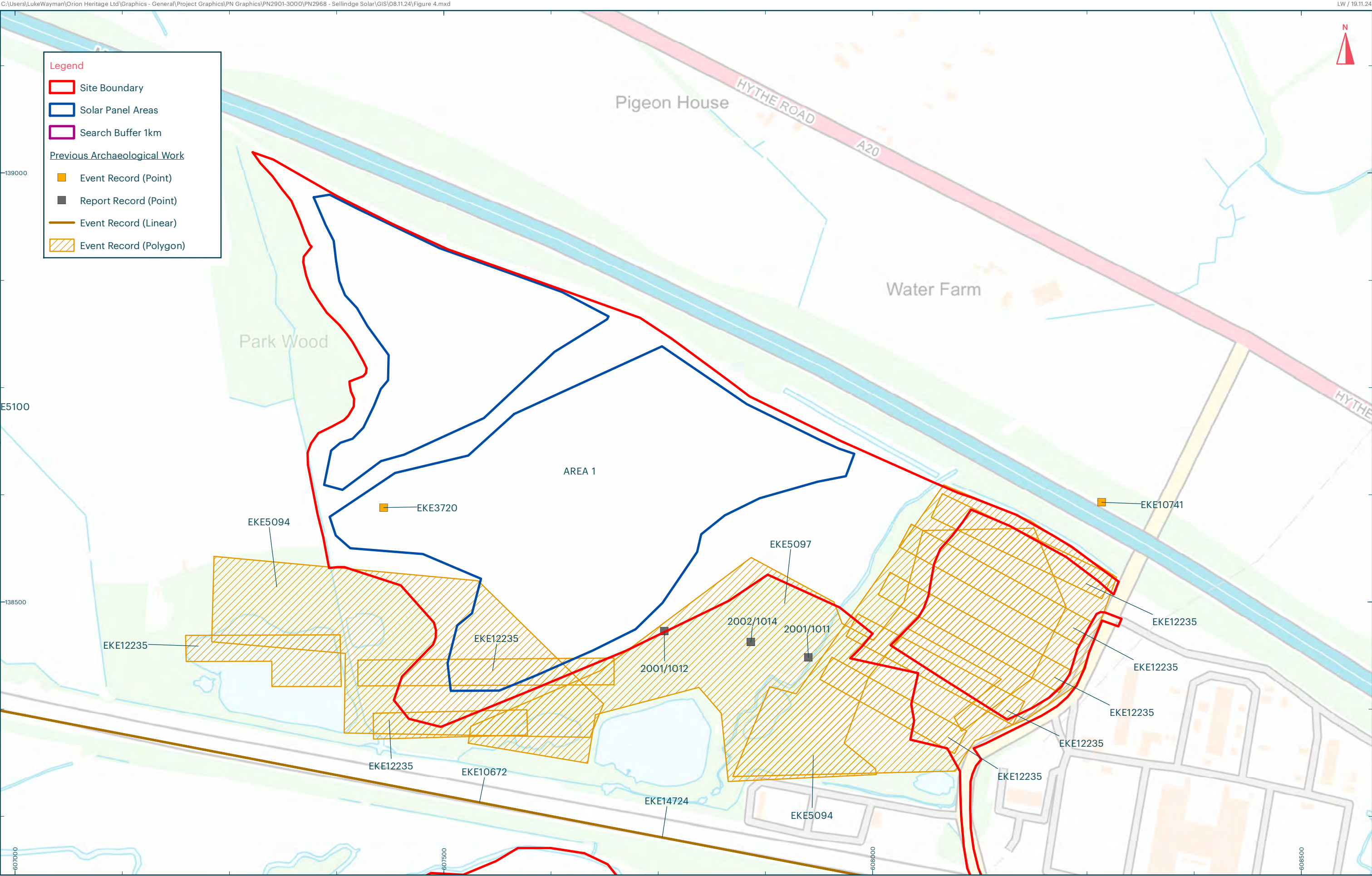
1.14 These remains were recorded during the assessment, survey and evaluation trenching that was undertaken to support the chapter 12 of the ES and the heritage element of the SEI. The conclusions on the significance of the assets are in line with the ES chapter but have been revised slightly in places where the evaluation trenching provided more detailed data on the geophysical survey results.



Title:
Figure 1: HER Records
Address:
East Stour Solar Farm

Scale at A3: 1:8,000
0 250m





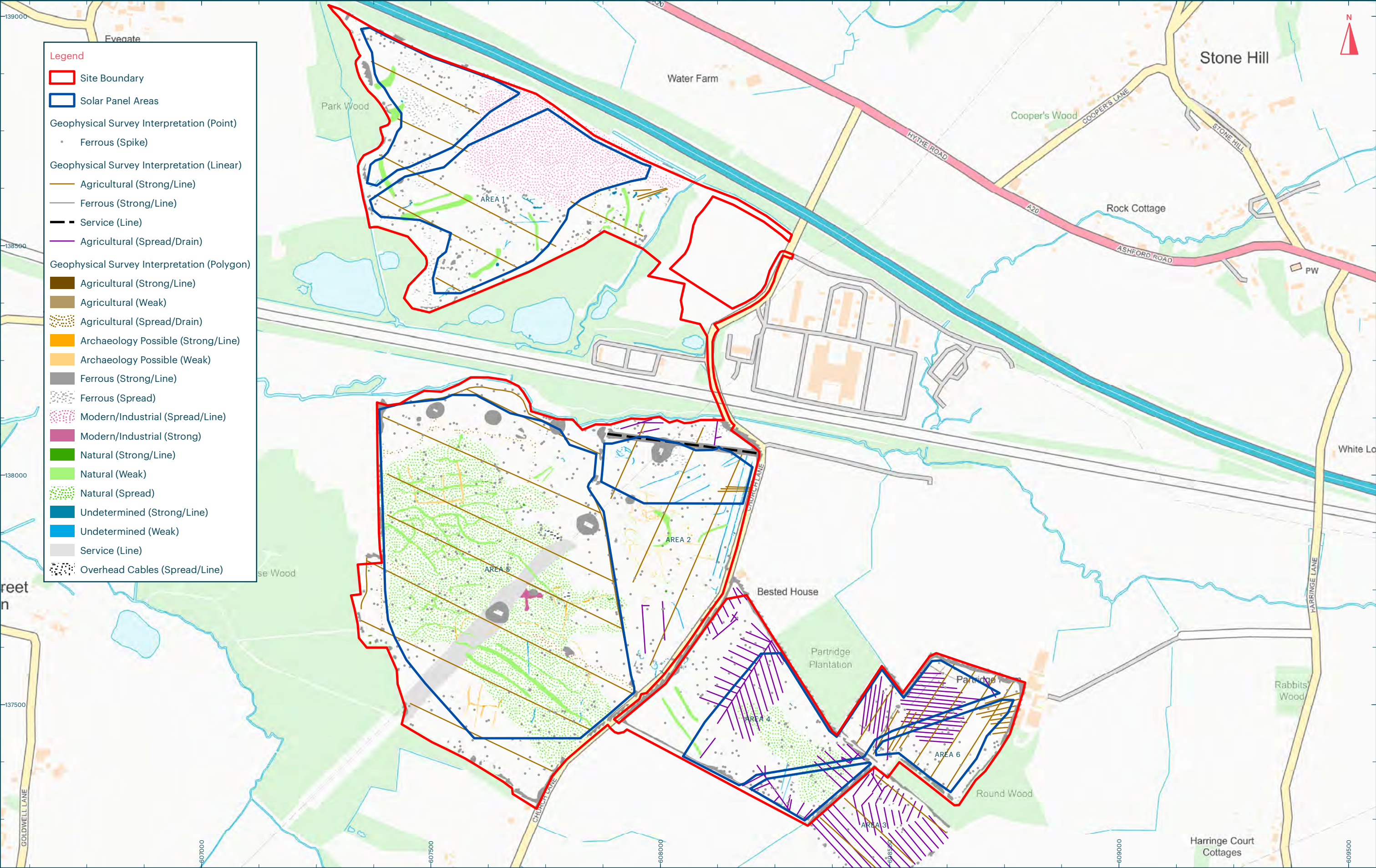
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Figure 2: Previous archaeological investigations

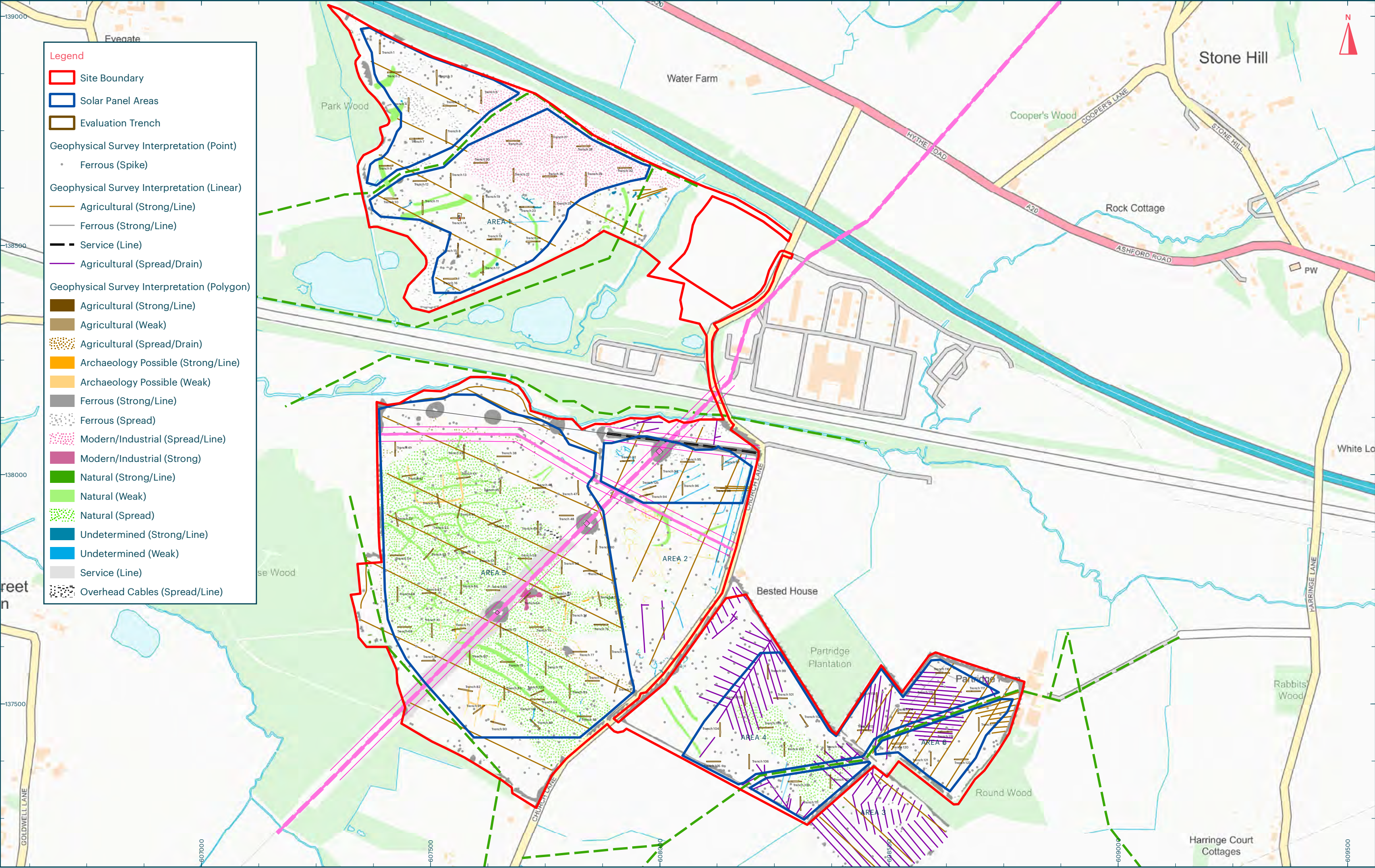
Address:
East Stour Solar Farm

Scale at A3: 1:4,000

0 100m







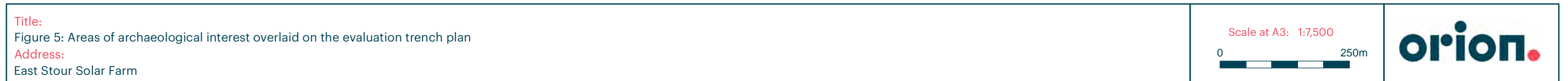
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Figure 4: Evaluation Trench Plan overlaid on the geophysical survey results

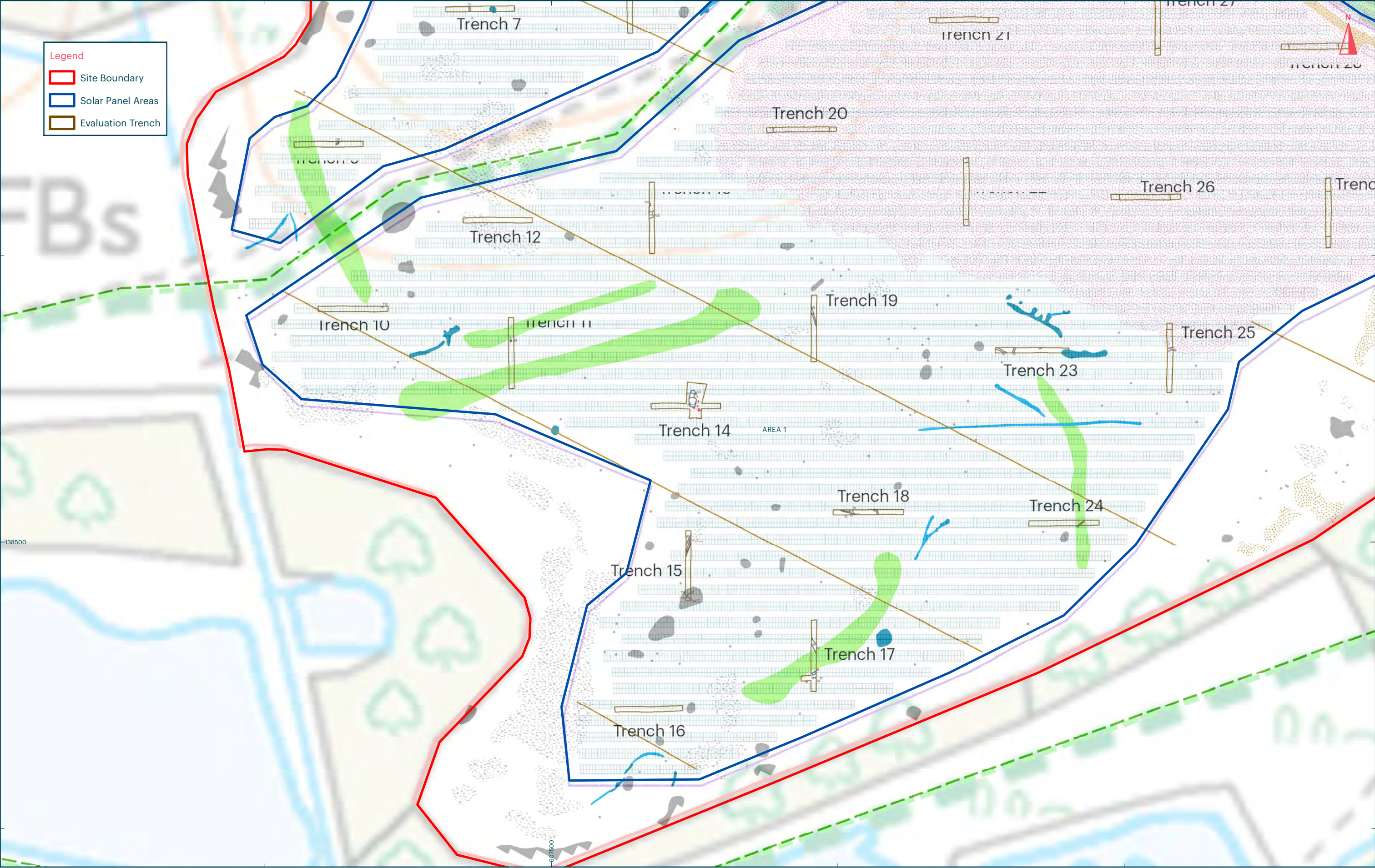
Address:
East Stour Solar Farm

Scale at A3: 1:7,500

0 250m







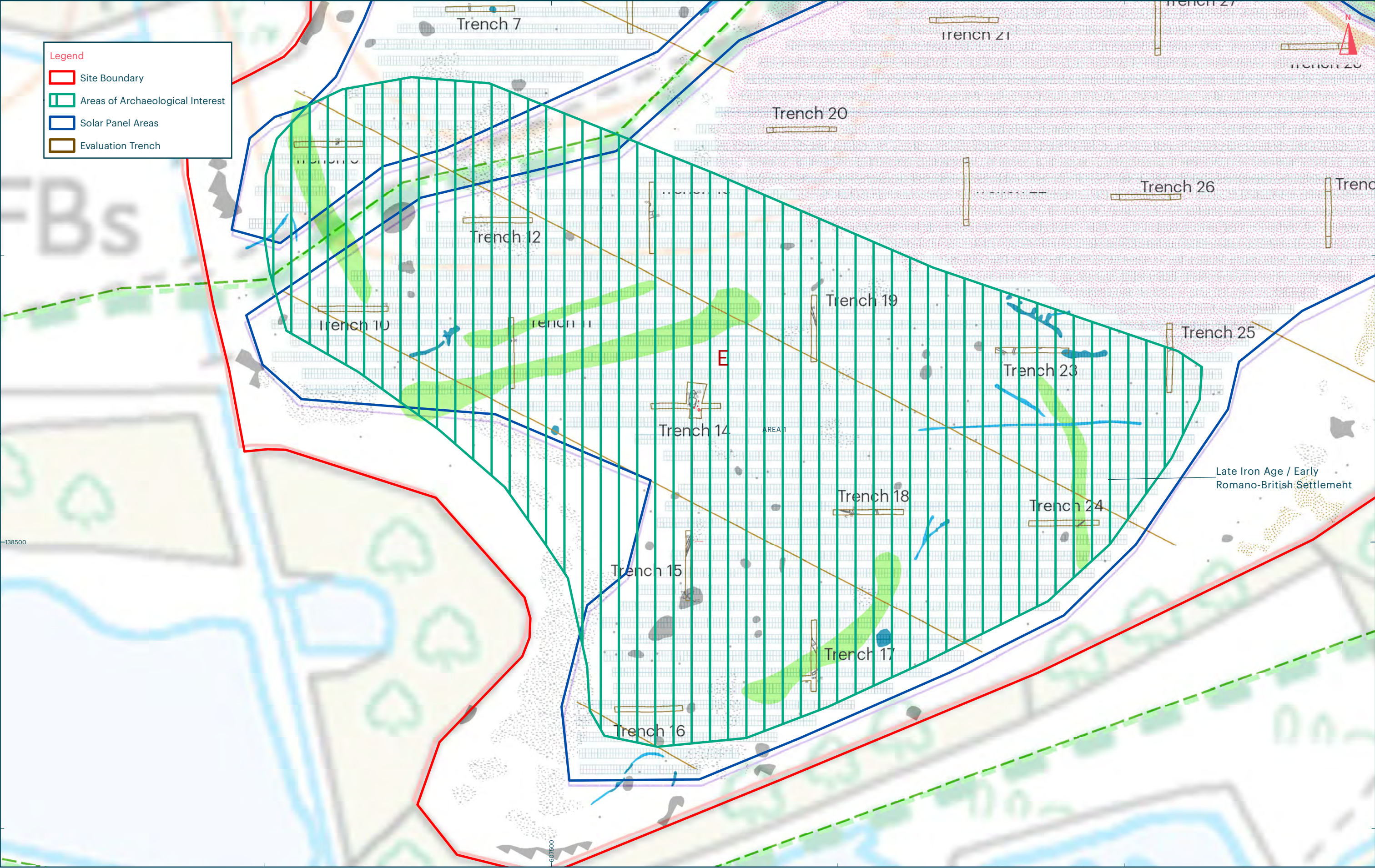
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Figure 6a: Areas of archaeological interest shown with the proposed development - Northern Area

Address:
East Stour Solar Farm

Scale at A3: 1:1,500

0 50m





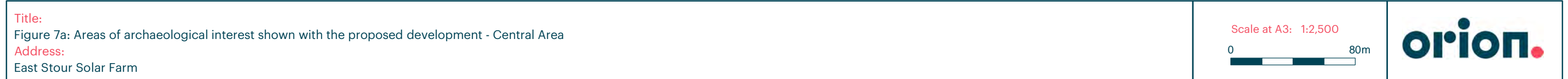
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Figure 6b: Areas of archaeological interest shown with the proposed development - Northern Area

Address:
East Stour Solar Farm

Scale at A3: 1:1,500

0 50m







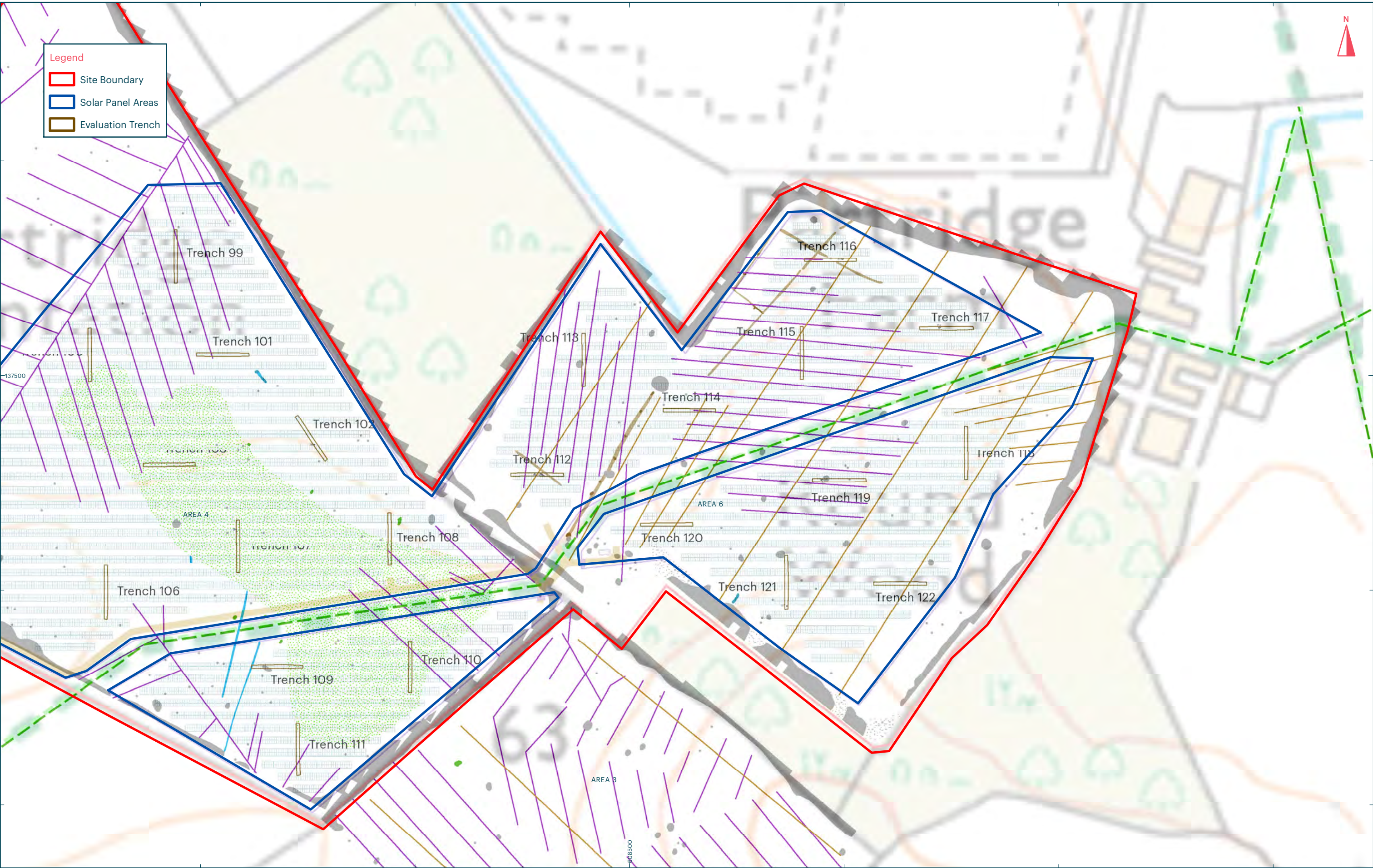
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Figure 7b: Areas of archaeological interest shown with the proposed development - Central Area

Address:
East Stour Solar Farm

Scale at A3: 1:2,500

0 80m





Title:
Figure 8a: Areas of archaeological interest shown with the proposed development - Eastern Area

Address:
East Stour Solar Farm

Scale at A3: 1:2,000

0 50m



