

# Archaeological Evaluation and Assessment of Land at St Nicholas Court Farm, St Nicholas at Wade, Kent



Date: 09/12/2013

NGR 625694 167011

Site Code: NICK-EV-13

(Planning Application F/TH/13/0587)

Report for  
St Nicholas Court Farms Ltd

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Fig. 1 Development site location with layout of trenches



Plate 1. Area of Investigation (in red)

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## **1. SUMMARY**

*1.1 Swale & Thames Survey Company (SWAT) carried out an archaeological evaluation and assessment of land at St Nicholas Court Farm in Kent. A planning application (F/TH/13/0587) for planning permission for anaerobic digester and ancillary tanks was submitted to Thanet Council whereby the Council requested that an Archaeological Evaluation and Assessment be undertaken in order to determine the possible impact of the development on any archaeological remains. The work was carried out in accordance with the requirements set out within an Archaeological Specification (KCC 2013) and in discussion with the Archaeological Heritage Officer, Kent County Council.*

*1.2 The Archaeological Evaluation consisted of 14 trenches which encountered some archaeological features. No evidence survived for the postulated WW2 pillbox thought to be in the vicinity. The Archaeological Evaluation has therefore been successful in fulfilling the primary aims and objectives of the Specification.*

## **2. INTRODUCTION**

2.1 Swale & Thames Survey Company (SWAT) was commissioned by St Nicholas Court Farms Ltd to carry out an archaeological evaluation and assessment at the above site. The work was carried out in accordance with the requirements set out within an Archaeological Specification (KCC 2013) and in discussion with the Archaeological Heritage Officer, Kent County Council. The evaluation was carried out from the 28<sup>th</sup> November to 5<sup>th</sup> December 2013.

## **3. SITE DESCRIPTION AND TOPOGRAPHY**

3.1 The proposed development site is located to the west of St Nicholas Court Farm and centered NGR 625694 167011. The site is on high ground overlooking the relict Wantsum Channel to the west and adjacent to a solar farm immediately to the east (SWAT Archaeology 20110). The proposed development area is open agricultural fields bounded to the north by the Thanet Way (A299), to the east by Potton Street, and to the south by the farm complex of St Nicholas Court Farm. According to the maps of the British Geological Survey, (1:50,000) the site has Bedrock Geology of Margate Chalk Member-Chalk with Superficial Deposits of Head 2, Clay and Silt (Brickearth). The site averages 17.00m-18.00mOD.

#### 4. PLANNING BACKGROUND

4.1 The Local Planning Authority placed the following condition on the planning consent:

- AR5 *No development shall take place until the applicant, or their agents or successors in title, has secured the implementation of*
- i archaeological field evaluation works in accordance with a specification and written timetable which has been submitted to and approved by the Local Planning Authority; and*
  - ii following on from the evaluation, any safeguarding measures to ensure preservation in situ of important archaeological remains and/or further archaeological investigation and recording in accordance with a specification and timetable which has been submitted to and approved by the Local Planning Authority*

Reason: To ensure appropriate assessment of the archaeological implications of any development proposals and the subsequent mitigation of adverse impacts through preservation *in situ* or by record.

4.2 Requirements for the archaeological evaluation comprised trial trenching targeting a representative 5% sample of the impact area with 14 trenches (Fig. 1) designed to establish whether there were any archaeological deposits at the site that may be affected by the proposed development. The results from this evaluation will be used to inform KCC of any further archaeological mitigation measures that may be necessary in connection with the development proposals.

#### 5. ARCHAEOLOGICAL and HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

5.1 The KCC HER archive shows that there are extensive cropmarks in the surrounding fields including several ring ditches (TR 26 NE 174, TR 26 NE 26 & 27). Archaeological work associated with the improvements to the A299 and the erection of agricultural buildings at the farm has revealed early Iron Age pottery, a Roman amphora (probably associated with a cremation burial), Roman pottery sherds, human skeletal remains and ditches and pits which may all suggest that a Romano-British settlement site existed in the vicinity.

A WWII pillbox once stood in the field to the west, part of a line to the west of St Nicholas. Trenching associated with this line could be in the field.

5.2 HER entries include:

TR 26 NE 27

Crop marks of several ring ditches have been reported near St. Nicholas Court Farm. They are possibly the remains of Bronze Age barrows.

TR 26 NE 68

Three ring ditch crop mark features and a linear feature have also been identified near to St Nicholas at Wade.

TR 26 NE 112

Cropmark of a ring ditch with an internal feature.

TR 26 NE 162

A Mid Iron Age occupation site and an early Roman wall were found during work in advance of road development.

TR 26 NE 202

The remains of a Romano – British settlement were found at St Nicholas Court Farm. The possible site of a Roman villa. (TSMR Site 0304-1).

TR26 NE 240

A World War 11 pillbox formally located near Potten Street.

Further information on the potential of this area is provided in the County Historic Environment Record held in the Heritage Conservation, Invicta House, County Hall, Maidstone, ME14 1XX (telephone 01622 221536)

5.3 In September 2011 SWAT Archaeology conducted an Archaeological Watching Brief on the adjacent field to the east in advance of the construction of a ‘solar farm’. In Trench 1 a cremation group of Roman pots had been disturbed by the machine which had been fitted with a toothed ditching bucket. Although the KCC Specification specifies a toothless ditching bucket for the work on the inverter housing there is no such requirement for the cable trench runs.

The cremation group had been so disturbed that one vessel and its contents (Cremation 2) were on the spoil heap and the other (Cremation 1) had about 70% of its pot truncated. The remains of the two pots were collected and excavation of the remainder of the surviving pot were photographed and drawn prior to removal. The handful of small pieces of burnt bone left for collection were not of a condition to allow meaningful work to be undertaken by a osteoarchaeologist.

The pottery was analysed by the pottery specialist and Cremation 1 is dated to between c.50-75 AD and Cremation 2 to between c.75-100 AD.

Subsequently 20 worked flints were retrieved from trench runs 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 in a reasonably tight distribution pattern. The lithic specialist reports that:

“This assemblage comprised twenty pieces of worked flint, with most contexts producing only a single example. One round ‘thumbnail’ scraper of likely Beaker Period/Early Bronze Age date was recovered from Trench 1. [101], but patination suggests it is likely to be residual in that context. Most of the other flintwork was unpatinated, as expected in areas of brickearth geology, but showed damage from the processes of natural abrasion, ploughing and perhaps trampling”.

This suggests that any finds not derived from modern ploughsoil contexts had seen a degree of exposure prior to incorporation within their context, or perhaps derived from former ploughsoil contexts. Thumbnail scraper aside, many of the other tools and flakes were simple, expedient or sometimes crude pieces which would not be out of place in broadly Bronze Age/Later Bronze Age (or later) assemblages. One small utilised flake from Trench 1 [102]

and a knife from Trench 5 [501] could be of Mesolithic/Earlier Neolithic or Neolithic date, but a later date cannot be discounted” (SWAT Archaeology 2011).

## **6. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES**

The purpose of the evaluation, as set out within the Archaeological Specification (2013) was:

- Establishing the degree of earlier prehistoric activity on the site given its topographic position and record of numerous ring ditches and barrows in the area;
- Establishing the degree of iron age and Romano-British activity on the site.
- Establishing the degree of medieval and post-medieval activity on the site;
- Clarifying the location, condition, quality and character of the pillbox (HER No: TR 26 NE 1136);
- Providing an assessment of archaeology located and providing a statement of significance on all heritage assets within development area;
- Assessing the likely archaeological impact of the proposed development

## **7.0 METHODOLOGY**

7.1 Trial trenching was carried out on 28<sup>th</sup> Nov-3<sup>rd</sup> Dec 2013 with the excavation of 14 trenches. Trench location was agreed prior to the excavation between KCC and SWAT. Excavation was carried out using a tracked 360° mechanical excavator fitted with a toothless ditching bucket, removing the overburden to the top of the first recognisable archaeological horizon, or natural, under the constant supervision of an experienced archaeologist. All trenches measured about 25m in length and 1.80m wide. The trenches were subsequently hand-cleaned. All archaeological work was carried out in accordance with the KCC specification. A single context recording system was used to record the deposits, and context recording numbers were assigned to all deposits for recording purposes. These are used in the report and shown in bold. All archaeological work was carried out in accordance with KCC and IFA standards and guidance.

## **8.0 MONITORING**

Curatorial advice was available during the course of the evaluation.

## **9.0 RESULTS**

The archaeological evaluation consisted of 14 trenches, 25m in length and 1.8m in width. They were located throughout the proposed development site. The trenches were situated either on arable land or grassland, and adjacent to the standing solar array to the east.

### **9.1 Trench 1 – 25m x 1.80m x <0.55m**

Trench 1 was aligned north-south and was located at the northwest corner of the development site. The trench was approximately 0.55m deep with topsoil (100) up to 0.30m thick and composed of a dark brown grey still sandy silty clay with occasional chalk flecks (marling) and carbon flecks, rare peg tile fragments and frequent small to large sub rounded and sub angular flints. Prehistoric struck flints were also found, most likely ploughed up from context (101) below. This layer (101) below the topsoil was up to 0.15m thick and consisted of a pale to mid brown friable sandy clay silt with rare chalk flecks and rare small to medium sub angular and sub rounded flints and rare struck flints. This deposit sealed the natural drift deposit of Head Brickearth (102) which was a mid orange brown friable sandy clay silt with areas of degraded chalk from the Chalk bedrock below erupting through the context. This context natural also contained occasional small to medium nodular flints, including possibly Bullhead flints used in flint tool production.

Context (101) may be a prehistoric ploughsoil or archaeological horizon. Machining ceased just into this context as a number of 'fresh' struck flints were found, and the layer was seen to be devoid of modern cultural material. This deposit was found in a number of trenches as (201), (301), (401), (601), (701), (801), (901), (1001), (1101), (1201), (1301) and (1401), and almost all contained struck flints and flint tools that suggest Bronze Age activity in the area.

### **Trench 2 – 25m x 1.80m x < 0.57m**

Trench 2 was aligned north-south, was up to 0.57m deep and was sited directly south of Trench 1. The topsoil (200) was up to 0.25m thick and sealed (201) which was equivalent to context (101) and in this trench was up to 0.32m thick. Rare struck flints and one small sherd of abraded prehistoric pottery was retrieved from this context. Context (201) sealed the natural Brickearth (202).

### **Trench 3 – 25m x 1.80m x <0.50m**

Trench 3 was aligned east-west, was machined to a depth of 0.57m and was located northeast of Trench 1. The topsoil (300) was up to 0.36m thick and sealed context (301) which was the same deposit found in the other trenches as (101) and (201) and was up to 0.12m thick in Trench 3, although no struck flints were observed in this context. The natural Brickearth (302) was covered by layer (301).

### **Trench 4 – 25m x 1.80m x <0.46m**

Trench 4 was aligned east-west and was directly south of Trench 3. The topsoil (400) was 0.36m thick and sealed layer (401) a context equivalent to (101), but in Trench 4 this context was only 0.10m thick. Struck flints were retrieved from this layer which sealed the natural Brickearth (402).



**Trench 5 – 25m x 1.80m x <0.40m**

Trench 5 did not contain the layer found in the other trenches that appeared to be an archaeological horizon of plough or subsoil. Topographically, this trench was sited at the highest point of the development site at roughly 18m aOD (above Ordnance Datum) and therefore the layer may have been lost to ploughing or soil creep.

Trench 5 was located immediately south of Trench 4 and was aligned east-west. The topsoil was up to 0.35m thick and sealed the natural Brickearth (501).

**Trench 6 – 25m x 1.80m x < 0.60m**

Trench 6 was located southeast of Trench 2, was machined to a depth of 0.60m and was aligned northwest-southeast. The topsoil measured 0.37m thick and overlay the possible prehistoric layer (601) visible in most of the trenches. This context was between 0.10m to 0.22m thick with the deposit thicker at the southeast end perhaps indicating soil creep or plough action as the site slopes down to the southeast. Layer (601) sealed the natural Brickearth (602) which had exposed areas of degraded chalk at the northwest end of the trench. No struck flints were found in this trench.

**Trench 7 – 25m x 1.80m x <0.60m**

Trench 7 was located at the northeast corner of the development and aligned northwest-southeast. The topsoil (700) was up to 0.37m thick and overlay context (701), the archaeological horizon. Within this layer, five small abraded sherds of pottery along with a small amount of struck flints were retrieved. A sondage was cut into layer (701) to a depth of 0.28m to expose the natural Brickearth (702) below.

**Trench 8 – 25m x 1.80m x <0.51m**

Trench 8 was located south of Trench 7 and was also aligned northwest-southeast. The topsoil (800) measured up to 0.37m thick and sealed layer (801), the prehistoric horizon which measured 0.14m thick within which struck flints were found and retained. This context sealed the natural Brickearth (802).

**Trench 9 – 25m x 1.80m x < 0.37m**

Trench 9 was located south of Trench 8 and was aligned north-south. The topsoil (900) was up to 0.30m thick and overlay the archaeological layer (901) which was up to 0.07m thick and sealed the natural Brickearth (902) which contained areas of degraded chalk where the upper layers of the solid geology had erupted through the drift geology. Two struck flints were retrieved from context (901).

**Trench 10 – 25m x 1.80m x <0.48m**

Trench 10 was located south of Trench 9 and ran east-west. The topsoil (1000) was up to 0.41m thick and sealed the thin layer of the archaeological horizon (1001) which was 0.07m thick and contained three struck flints. This horizon sealed the natural Brickearth (1002).

**Trench 11 – 25m x 1.80m x 0.75m**

Trench 11 was located east of Trench 6 and was aligned north-south. The topsoil (1100) was up to 0.35m thick and overlay a thick deposit (1101) that appears to be an early ploughsoil and/or archaeological horizon which contained a rare amount of struck flints. A sondage cut into this context at the north end of the trench recorded the depth of this deposit as 0.40m thick, and this trench appears to have the thickest concentration of this soil layer on the development site. Under deposit (1101) was the natural Brickearth (1102), and a number of nodular, possibly Bullhead flints was found within this context.

**Trench 12 – 25m x 1.80m x <0.64m**

Trench 12 was located directly south of Trench 10, west of Trench 11 and aligned north-south. The topsoil (1200) measured up to 0.34m thick. A sondage was hand dug at the southern end of the trench to test the depth of (1201) the deposit that appears to be the archaeological horizon and was up to 0.30m thick. Within this context were rare 'fresh' struck flints and rare small abraded sherds of prehistoric pottery. At the base of the sondage, at the interface between this context and the natural Brickearth (1202), a small flint tool, possibly late Mesolithic or early Neolithic, was retrieved.

**Trench 13 – 25m x 1.80m x < 0.66m**

Trench 13 was located south of Trench 11 and was aligned east-west. The topsoil (1300) was up to 0.40m thick and covered layer (1301) which has been interpreted as the archaeological horizon. A sondage through this context was hand dug at the eastern end of the trench, and the deposit was found to be up to 0.26m thick and contained a rare amount of struck flints. This context sealed the natural Brickearth (1302).

**Trench 14 – 25m x 1.80m x < 0.44m**

Trench 14 was located at the southeast edge of the development site and was aligned north-south. The topsoil (1400) was up to 0.32m thick and covered the archaeological deposit (1401) that was found throughout the site. This context was up to 0.12m thick and contained rare struck flints. It sealed the natural Brickearth (1402) which contained areas of degraded chalk from the lower solid geology.

**10.0 FINDS**

10.1 The worked flints will be the subject of a specialist report from Paul Hart who wrote up the lithic material from the adjacent solar array site. The prehistoric pottery has been looked at by Nigel MacPherson- Grant who is of the opinion the nine small well- abraded sherds date from the Early Bronze Age and again will be the subject of a specialist report.

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## **11.0 DISCUSSION**

11.1 A uniform stratigraphic sequence was identified throughout the site consisting of the natural drift geology of Head Brickearth with areas of degraded chalk erupting through from the solid Chalk geology below. The natural geology was sealed in all but one trench by a layer of what appears to be an early ploughsoil or subsoil and has been interpreted as the archaeological horizon.

11.2 No archaeological features were found cutting either this archaeological horizon of pale to mid grey brown and orange brown friable sandy clay silt or the natural Brickearth drift geology. A well distributed scattering of 'fresh' struck flints was found in most of the trenches within the archaeological horizon which was devoid of cultural material later than the prehistoric periods. Taking into account the archaeological features found during the Watching Brief of the solar array in 2011 immediately east of the development site and cropmarks seen in the 2007 Google Earth image and listed in the HER, this area was undoubtedly a site of funereal importance from at least the Bronze Age. The lack of domestic and industrial activity in the form of cut archaeological features such as field systems suggests the area may have been used for ritual purposes and not subjected to the plough in antiquity. Then again, if one considers the truncation from modern ploughing of upstanding features such as the barrows on the dip slope surrounding St Nicholas Court Farm which survive now as just ring ditches, shallow ancient field boundaries may have been ploughed out through successive centuries of agricultural production.

11.3 Despite the lack of identifiable cut archaeological features, this evaluation has been successful in revealing a stratigraphic sequence throughout the site, and archaeological activity in the form of flint working has been found within a uniform archaeological deposit forming an archaeological horizon across the development site.

11.4 The archaeological evaluation has been successful in fulfilling the primary aims and objectives of the Specification. Very limited archaeological activity was found during the evaluation which will inform the Archaeological Officer of the archaeological potential of site. It is unlikely that the 2<sup>nd</sup> stage condition will be required to be implemented as no important archaeological remains were found during the initial 1<sup>st</sup> stage investigation. The evaluation has, therefore, assessed the archaeological potential of land intended for development.

## **12.00 IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

The impact of the proposed development on areas of the site will be high with foundation excavations for the proposed anaerobic digester and ancillary tanks.

## **13.00 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

SWAT Archaeology would like to thank Jim Pace for commissioning this project. Thanks are also extended to Wendy Rogers, Archaeological Officer, Kent County Council for her advice and assistance.

Julie Martin supervised the fieldwork, assisted in the field by Paul Hart. Illustrations were

produced by Jonny Madden for *Digitise This*. The project was managed by Paul Wilkinson.

Dr Paul Wilkinson MifA 09/12/2013

## 14.00 REFERENCES

### Bibliography

Kent County Council (KCC), (2013) *Specification for an Archaeological Evaluation at St Nicholas Court Farm, St Nicholas at Wade, Kent.*

Wilkinson P. (Sept 2011) *Archaeological Watching Brief of Land at St Nicholas Court Farm, St Nicholas at Wade, Thanet, Kent.* Published document on [www.swatachaeology.co.uk](http://www.swatachaeology.co.uk) (2011).

Institute for Field Archaeologists (IfA), Rev (2011) *Standard and Guidance for archaeological field evaluation.*

### Maps

Ordnance Survey 4<sup>th</sup> Edition (1929-1952)

### Websites

Kent Landscape Information System <http://extranet7.kent.gov.uk/klis/home.htm>

Exploring Kent's Past <http://www.extranet7.krnt.gov.uk/ExploringKentsPast/>



**Plate 2. View of Trench 10 looking east, 1m scale**



**Plate 3. Trench 2 section looking east. 1m scale**



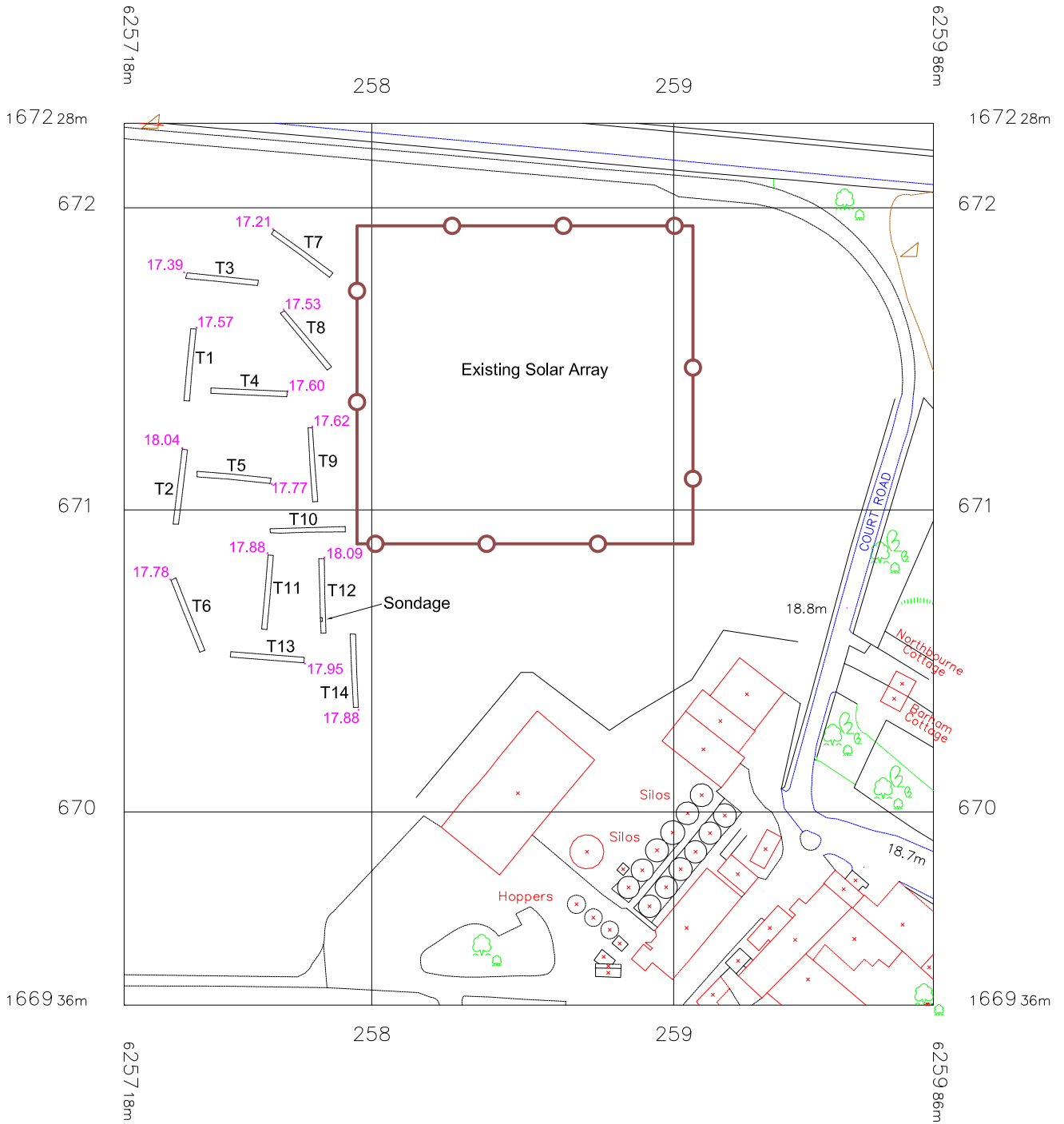
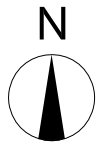


**Plate 4. Trench 14 looking north. 1m scale**

**APPENDIX 1 – Kent County Council HER Summary Form**

<b>Site Name:</b> <i>St Nicholas Court Farm St Nicholas at Wade, Kent</i>	
<b>SWAT Site Code:</b> <i>NICK/EV/13</i>	
<b>Site Address:</b> <i>As above</i>	
<b>Summary:</b> <i>Swale &amp; Thames Survey Company (SWAT) carried out an archaeological evaluation on land at St Nicholas Court Farm, Kent. A planning application (F/TH/13/0587) for the construction of anaerobic digester and ancillary tanks along with services at the above site was submitted to Thanet District Council (TDC) whereby Kent County Council Heritage and Conservation (KCCHC), on behalf of Thanet District Council requested that an Archaeological Evaluation be undertaken in order to determine the possible impact of the development on any archaeological remains. The work was carried out in accordance with the requirements set out within an Archaeological Specification (KCC 2013) and in discussion with the Archaeological Officer, Kent County Council.</i> <i>The Archaeological Evaluation consisted of fourteen trenches which encountered some archaeological features; nine sherds of prehistoric pottery and worked lithics were also retrieved.</i>	
<b>District/Unitary:</b> <i>Thanet</i>	<b>Parish:</b>
<b>Period(s):</b> <i>Prehistoric</i>	
<b>Tentative:</b>	
<b>NGR (centre of site : 8 figures):</b> <b>(NB if large or linear site give multiple NGRs):</b> <i>NGR 625694 167011</i>	
<b>Type of archaeological work (delete)</b> <i>Evaluation</i>	
<b>Date of Recording:</b> <i>Dec 2013</i>	
<b>Unit undertaking recording:</b> <i>Swale &amp; Thames Survey Company (SWAT)</i>	
<b>Geology:</b> <i>Head Brick earth</i>	
<b>Title and author of accompanying report:</b> <i>Wilkinson P. An Archaeological Evaluation at St Nicholas Court Farm, Kent</i>	
<b>Summary of fieldwork results (begin with earliest period first, add NGRs where appropriate)</b>  <i>As above</i> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>(cont. on attached sheet)</b></p>	
<b>Location of archive/finds:</b> <i>SWAT</i>	
<b>Contact at Unit:</b> <i>Paul Wilkinson</i>	<b>Date:</b> <i>09/10/2013</i>





1:2000@A4

0m

200m

Figure 1: Location of Site