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ARCHAEOLOGICAL DESK BASED ASSESSMENT:
LAND OFF
LITTLEWORTH DROVE
DEEPING ST NICHOLAS
LINCOLNSHIRE

Prepared For
STUDIO 11 ARCHITECTURE

Report Compiled by
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DRAFT

National Grid Reference: TF 2180 1657
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1. SUMMARY

A desk-based assessment was undertaken to determine the archaeological implications of a proposed housing development on land north of Littleworth drove, Deeping St Nicholas, Lincolnshire.

During the Bronze Age marine inundations are thought to have covered the Site in deep marine silts. In the Iron Age (800BC-AD43) and Roman Period (AD 43-410), settlement was confined to the tops of roddons (silted up channels which stood higher than surrounding peat). Cropmarks and field walking confirm the presence of settlement and enclosures of this period over the entirety of the large roddon that lies adjacent to the site, including probably salt production sites. However, the site is at a lower elevation and was probably peatland without any settlement or agriculture until the draining of the fens in the post-medieval period (AD 1540-1900).

A geophysical survey identified a complex series of sinuous marshland streams over the entirety of the site. One area contained slightly more regular features, but this is considered within the bounds of natural variation. A strong magnetic bipolar anomaly just outside the site boundary might be indicative of a saltern or a large metallic item.

A site visit did not identify any artefacts visible on the land surface or any archaeological features.

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2 INTRODUCTION

2.1 Definition of a Desk-Based Assessment

An archaeological desk-based assessment is defined as '*a programme of study of the historic environment within a specified area or site on land, in the inter-tidal zone or underwater that addresses agreed research and/or conservation objectives. It consists of an analysis of existing written, graphic, photographic and electronic information in order to identify the likely heritage assets, their interests and significance; the character of the study area, including appropriate consideration of the settings of heritage assets; and, in England, the nature, extent and quality of the known or potential archaeological, historic, architectural and artistic interest. Significance is to be judged in a local, regional, national or international context as appropriate*' (CIfA 2014).

2.2 Planning Background

Archaeological Project Services was commissioned by Studio 11 Architecture to undertake a desk-based assessment of land to the west of Littleworth Drove, Deeping St Nicholas, Lincolnshire. The assessment was requested in support of a proposed housing development (Planning no.: H03-0048-25).

2.3 Site Location

The Site is a field north of the junction of Littleworth Drove and Campain's Lane, at National Grid Reference TF 2180 1657 (Fig 1).

2.4 Geology and Topography

The Site is level at c.2m OD, sitting in the wide low-lying plain of former fenland. Elevation data indicates the site lay east of a majour roddon (a silted-up streams which stands higher than the surrounding landscape), with a small roddon visible on the Site itself (Plate 1). Roddons often offered higher, dry places to build settlements at certain points in history, whereas the land between was often seasonally submerged.

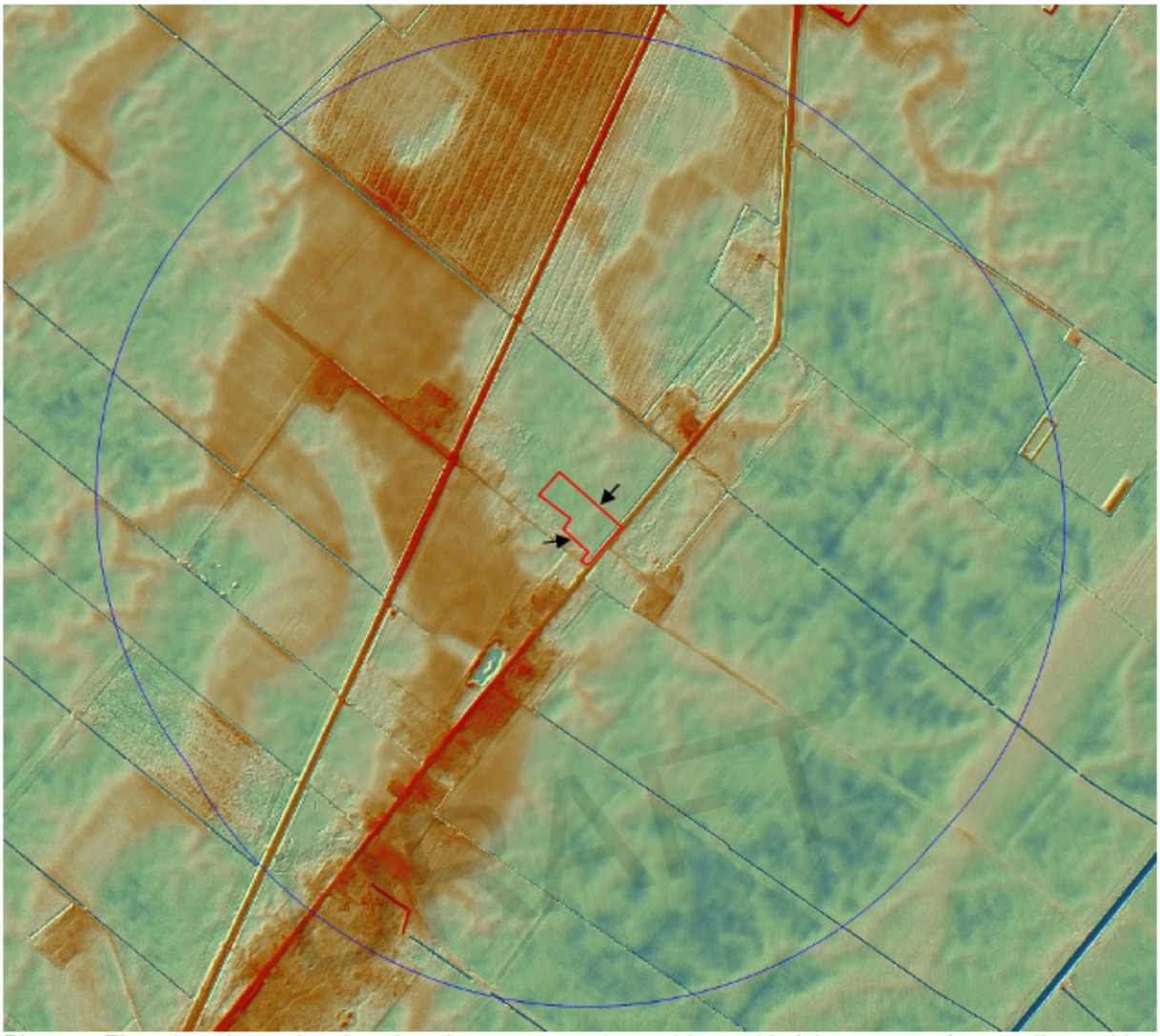


Plate 1. Elevation data, showing the site near a major roddon, with faint traces of a smaller roddon across the Site itself. The smaller roddon is indicated with black arrows. Blue is low (1m OD) and red is high (3.5m OD)

Local soils are of the Downholland 1 Association, typically clayey humic alluvial gley soils (Hodge et al. 1984, 166). These soils are formed on a superficial deposits of clay and silt Tidal Flat Deposits, which in turn sits on a bedrock of Oxford Clay Formation mudstone (BGS 2025).

3. AIMS

The purpose of the desk-based assessment is to obtain information about the known and potential archaeological resource of the assessment area. In addition to the above, statutory and advisory heritage constraints are identified.

4. METHODS

In the following text, the term *Site* refers to the limits of the application site and the *Assessment Area* comprises an area of 1km radius from the centre of the application site.

The research undertaken in the compilation of this archaeological desk-based assessment involved the examination of all available sources relevant to the Site and the immediate surrounding area. These sources consisted of:

- Historical documents, held in the Lincolnshire Archives.
- Enclosure and other maps and plans held in the Lincolnshire Archives.
- Recent and early edition Ordnance Survey (OS) maps.
- The Historic Environment Record, located at Lincolnshire County Council.
- Archaeological and historical books and journals.
- Aerial photographs
- Lidar data

A full list of the sources is contained within the bibliography.

This research was supplemented by a walkover survey of the Site, undertaken to assess the current ground conditions and land-use patterns and to ascertain the presence of any surface finds of an archaeological character, and of features that might indicate the presence of archaeological remains.

5. RESULTS

5.1 Historical Data

Deeping St. Nicholas is a relatively new village and came about as a result of post-medieval drainage of the fens. The earliest attempt to drain the Deeping Fen was by Thomas Lovell in 1603. A church was built here in 1846 and it became a parish in 1856 (Wheeler 1896, 331). Prior to this, the area was part of the Deepings, fenland which was used from medieval times as seasonal pasture.

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5.2 Cartographic Data

The earliest map available is Featherstone's 1763 Map of Deeping Fen (Plate 2). This shows the Site in a featureless field. Littleworth Drove already existed, but was called 'Horsegate.' The first edition Ordnance Survey map of Spalding, 1815, (Plate 3) shows the Site as an empty field (although the land boundaries on this series of maps are only indicative rather than accurately placed). Littleworth Drove and Campain's Lane are now present (although the latter is unnamed). Campain's Lane is not shown on the 1855 parish map, but this might have been an omission as the 1887 Ordnance Survey map shows it once again. Little had changed since 1763, except several farmsteads had been built in the area. This situation persisted on the 1905 and 1950 editions (Plate 5).



Plate 2. Featherstone's 1763 Map of Deeping Fen.



Plate 3. 1815 Ordnance Survey, Spalding 1"

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Plate 4. 1855 Parish Map of Deeping St Nicholas.

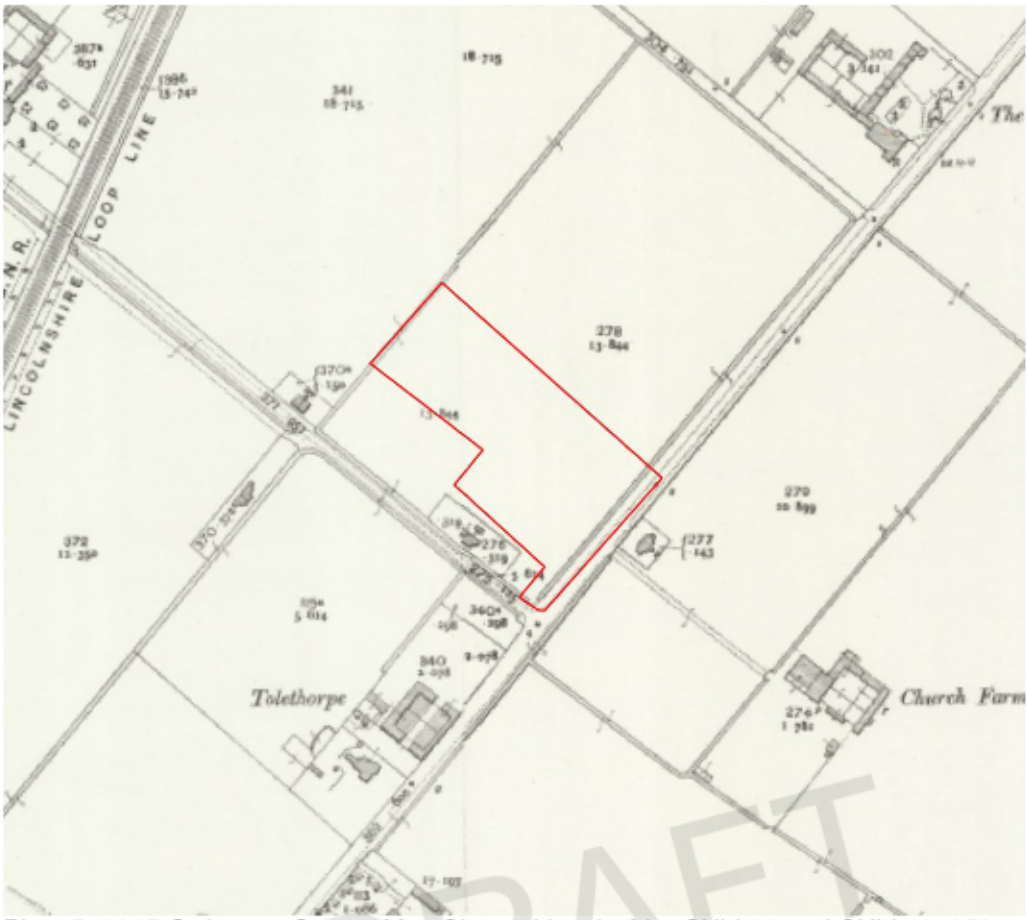


Plate 5. 1905 Ordnance Survey Map Sheets Lincolnshire CXLI.16 and CXLI.13, 25"

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5.3 Aerial photographic and lidar data

Aerial photographs obtained from Google Earth. Data from the National Mapping Programme does not cover the site and Historic England has not published any historical aerial images of the Site from their archive.

The lidar data only shows the slight ridge associated with a small roddon which was noted in the topographical data. This is approximately 20m across and crosses the middle of the site in a roughly northeast-southwest direction (Plate 6).

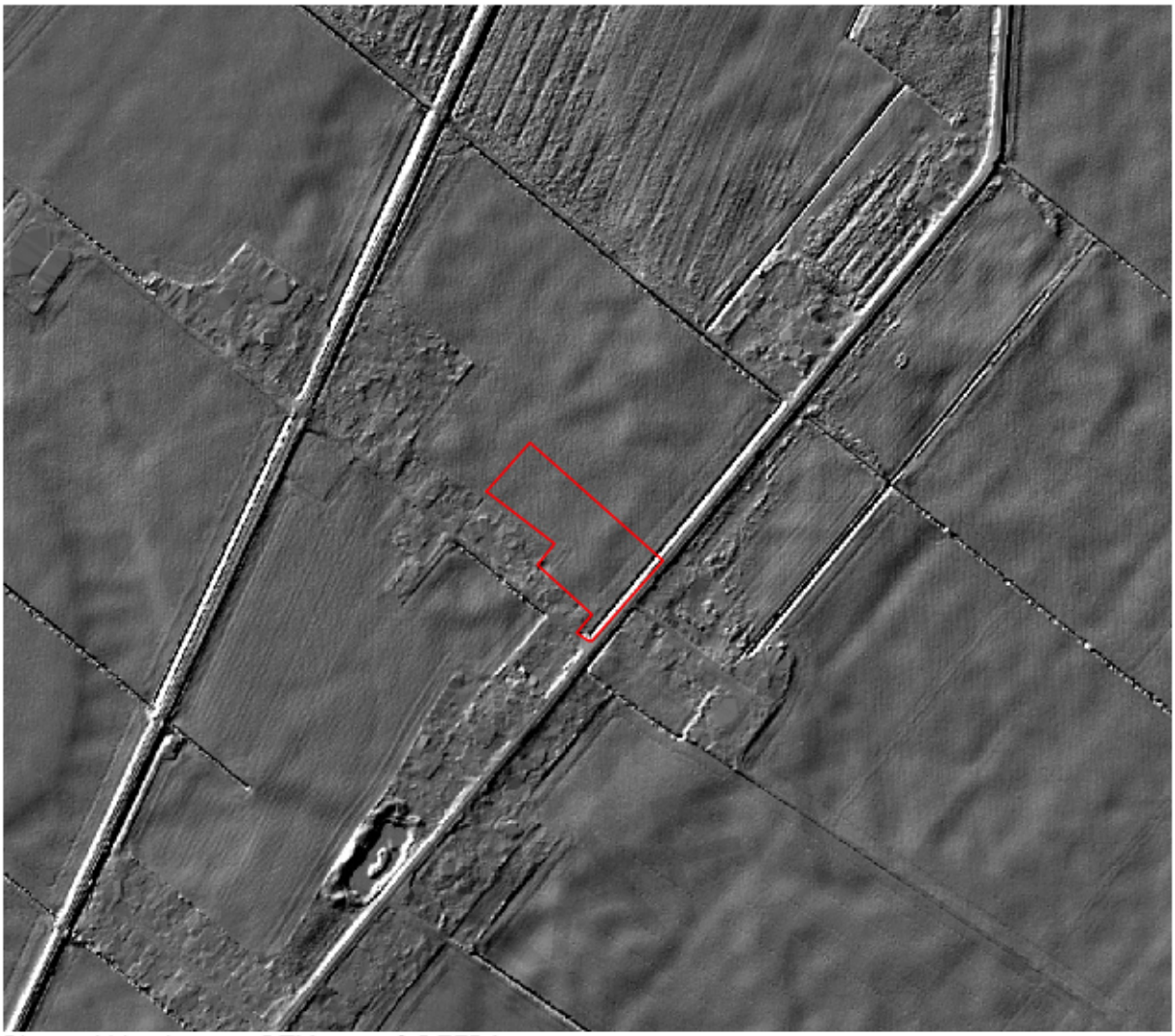


Plate 6. Lidar data. 1m DTM, 2022 © DEFRA

5.4 Archaeological Data

Records of archaeological sites and finds within the assessment area are held at the Lincolnshire Historic Environment Record (HER). Table 1 summarises the available records and Figure 2 shows the entries' locations.

Table 1: Archaeological sites and findspots within the assessment area

HER no.	Name	Period	National Grid Reference
MLI23234	Iron Age pottery	Iron Age	TF 2193 1743
MLI23258	Iron Age saltern	Iron Age	TF 2154 1623
MLI23231	Saltern and settlement	Roman	TF 2154 1623
MLI23235	Roman settlement	Roman	TF 2193 1743
MLI22064	Droves and enclosures (cropmarks B)	Roman	TF 2227 1732
MLI22074	Droves, enclosures and settlement (cropmarks D)	Roman	TF 2100 1684
MLI22075	Droves and enclosures (cropmarks A)	Roman	TF 2148 1638
MLI22076	Droves, enclosures and settlement (cropmarks C)	Roman	TF 2174 1762
MLI20298	Drove (cropmark)	Roman	TF 2100 1745
MLI20312	Brickyard (place-name)	Post Medieval	TF 2220 1710
MLI83819	St Nicholas House*	Post Medieval (1817)	TF 22036 16708
MLI22071	St Nicholas' Church*	Post Medieval	TF 21670

HER no.	Name	Period	National Grid Reference
		(1845)	16172
MLI125590; MLI125589	Two ditches (and two gullies)	Post Medieval and undated	TF 2116 1577
MLI116218	Deeping St Nicholas war memorial*	Modern	TF 21654 16178
N/A	Bipolar magnetic anomaly; possible saltern	Undated	TF 21804 16572
N/A	Positive magnetic anomalies; probable natural features	Undated	TF 21765 16568

N.B. In order to streamline presentation of the data, nine post-medieval entries have been excluded from the table and Figure 2. These were features known from historical maps which would not have any impact on the archaeological potential of the Site.

Prehistoric

The large roddon visible adjacent to the Site is thought to have been an active channel in the Bronze Age, following marine inundation into peatland. By 400BC all but the highest roddons had been covered by peat again (Hayes and Lane 1992, 170-171).

In the centre of the large roddon, 300m southwest of the Site, a cropmark indicates a potential saltern. Fieldwalking undertaken as part of the Fenland Survey (Hayes and Lane 1992) recorded briquetage and Iron Age pottery in the vicinity. The fenland Survey also recorded Iron Age pottery 815m north of the Site, on the edge of the roddon.

Roman

The probable Iron Age saltern was also surrounded by Roman pottery, suggesting the site continued in use into the Roman period. This is surrounded by cropmarks of droves and enclosures (A) also thought to be Roman in date.

North of this, the whole of the roddon within the assessment area contains droves, enclosures and meandering water courses. Settlement is expected throughout this area, but the HER implies the area labelled (D) is a particular focus.

Saxon

No Saxon entries are recorded for the assessment area.

Medieval

There are no medieval HER entries in the assessment area.

Post-medieval

There are four post-medieval entries which have been shown on Figures 2 and 4, and nine which have been dismissed as irrelevant, on the basis that their extent is fully known from historical maps and they do not intersect with the Site or have any foreseeable influence on the archaeology likely to be located on the site.

St Nicholas House (a former farmstead) and St Nicholas Church are both listed buildings dating to the first half of the 19th century. They will have no impact on the potential archaeology of the Site.

The placename 'Brickyard Cottages' recorded on Ordnance Survey maps suggest a brickyard existed roughly 615m northeast of the site, adjacent to Littleworth Drive. There is potential for unrecorded digging for brick-making clay elsewhere in the vicinity.

Archaeological trial trenches recorded two ditches 815m southwest of the Site. These contained post-medieval brick. Two undated gullies are also recorded, although it isn't clear if these are two different features, or the same ditches discovered in a sperate archaeological

intervention.

Modern

The only modern entry in the HER is the Deeping St Nicholas war memorial which sits near the church. This is a listed building, but will not have any impact on the archaeological potential of the Site.

Archaeological interventions

A geophysical survey was conducted as part of the site assessment (Smith 2025) and has been supplied with the planning application. This did not reveal any clear archaeological features on the Site. A complex network of intercutting sinuous streams was evident, as is typical for former marshes. Within this there were some areas where the magnetic anomalies appeared more regular and tentatively might suggest some human activity, but it was considered more likely that these were just variations within the natural background readings and were only highlighted for the sake of completeness. A strong bipolar anomaly just outside the Site boundary was considered a potential saltern, although a large metallic item as the source of the anomaly could not be dismissed. The surveyor did not notice any concentration of briquetage or pottery in the vicinity of the anomaly.

The Site (along with most of the parish) was fieldwalked as part of the Fenland Project (Hayes and Lane 1992). No artefacts were recorded.

Two previous episodes of archaeological monitoring have taken place adjacent to the Site (Herbert 1999; Bradley-Lovekin 2006). Both were negative for archaeology.

Trial trenches were dug to the far southwest of the assessment area, largely beyond the roddon. As mentioned above, these only yielded post-medieval and undated features.

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5.5 Walkover Survey

The site was visited on the 17th November 2025 in order to assess the ground conditions, to identify any potential archaeological features and to note any constraints to further work. The weather conditions mostly dry and clear.

Access to the site is via Campains Lane and there are no obvious barriers to machines accessing the field. The field was recently drilled cereal crop at the time of the visit and surface visibility was excellent. The field surface is gently undulating. No archaeological features or artefacts were observed. There was no intervisibility with designated heritage assets.



Plate 7. General view of Site. Looking south.

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6. CONSTRAINTS

6.1 Heritage Constraints

There are no Scheduled Monuments protected by the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act of 1979 (HMSO) present within the assessment area.

There are 3 Listed buildings lying within the assessment area. These are the Church of St Nicholas (1359260), Deeping St Nicholas war memorial (1433267) and St Nicholas House (1359259). All three are grade II Listed. None of these are visible from the Site due to intervening trees and buildings.

All other archaeological remains within the assessment area are protected through the implementation of the National Planning Policy Framework which identifies the historic environment as a non-renewable resource (MHCLG 2025). The historic environment's fragile and finite nature is a particularly important consideration in planning. The effect of an application on the significance of a heritage asset or its setting is a material consideration in determining the application.

6.2 Other Constraints

No specific checks were carried out to determine the presence of services (gas, water, electricity *etc.*) at the site, although none were observed.

7. ASSESSMENT OF IMPACT

Past impacts are largely restricted to agriculture. The Site has been ploughed during the 19th-21st century.

Although details for the proposed housing development are not finalised, an adverse effect on below ground archaeology is likely to be caused through the excavation of house footings, services and landscaping.

8. ASSESSMENT OF POTENTIAL AND SIGNIFICANCE

Information collated in the production of this document has allowed an assessment of the known and potential archaeological resource.

Iron Age and Roman settlement is known in the area, as evidenced by fieldwalking finds and cropmarks. This probably includes salt production sites. However, the activity is likely to be confined to higher roddons. The absence of cropmarks and finds, the tentative nature of geophysical anomalies identified, and the negative results from adjacent monitoring, suggests a low likelihood of encountering remains from these periods.

Saxon period and medieval remains are completely absent from the assessment area, and the Site was likely marsh, occasionally used as seasonal pasture. There is a very low chance of encountering remains of this period.

During the post-medieval period, the Site was drained and maps show at least one ditch pre-dating 1763 along the northwestern edge of the Site.

The walkover survey did not identify any archaeological remains or features.

There are no obvious ways the Site could contribute to the Regional Research Framework (Knight *et al*, 2012).

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9. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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The HER data used in the production of this report is copyright of Lincolnshire County Council.

10. BIBLIOGRAPHY

All of the following references were consulted in the research. However, as some of them duplicated evidence given in others, or proved not to be relevant to the assessment, not all of them have been specifically referred to in the text.

Primary Sources

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1855 Parish Map of Deeping St Nicholas, LAO HCC PLANS/450

1905 Ordnance Survey Map Sheets Lincolnshire CXLI.16 and CXLI.13, 25"

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MHCLG, 2024 *National Planning Policy Framework*

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11. ABBREVIATIONS

AOD	Above Ordnance Datum
APS	Archaeological Project Services
BGS	British Geological Survey
CIfA	Chartered Institute for Archaeologists
HER	Lincolnshire Historic Environment Record
HMSO	Her Majesty's Stationery Office
LAO	Lincolnshire Archive Office
MHCLG	Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government
OS	Ordnance Survey

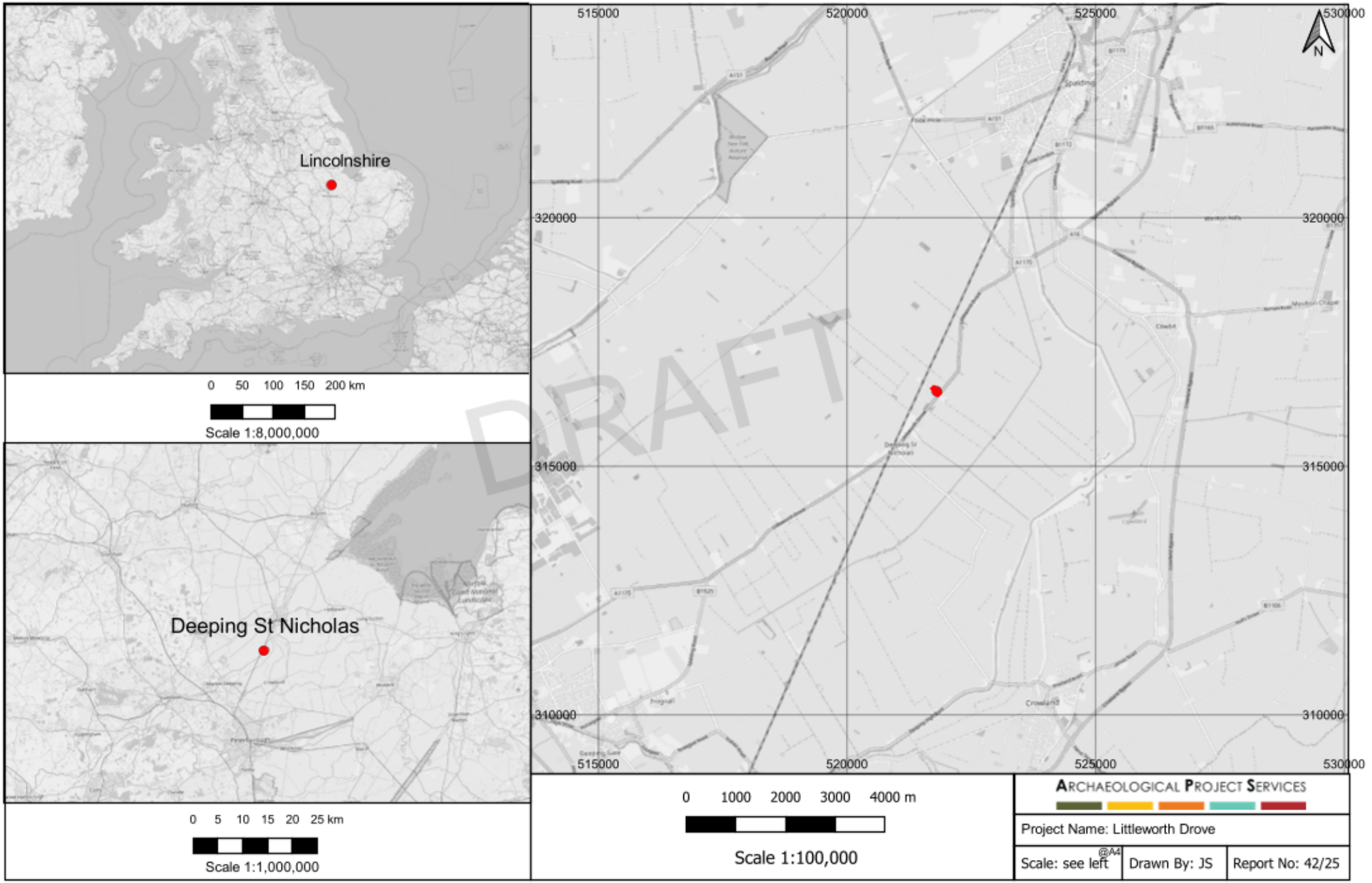


Figure 1 - Site Location

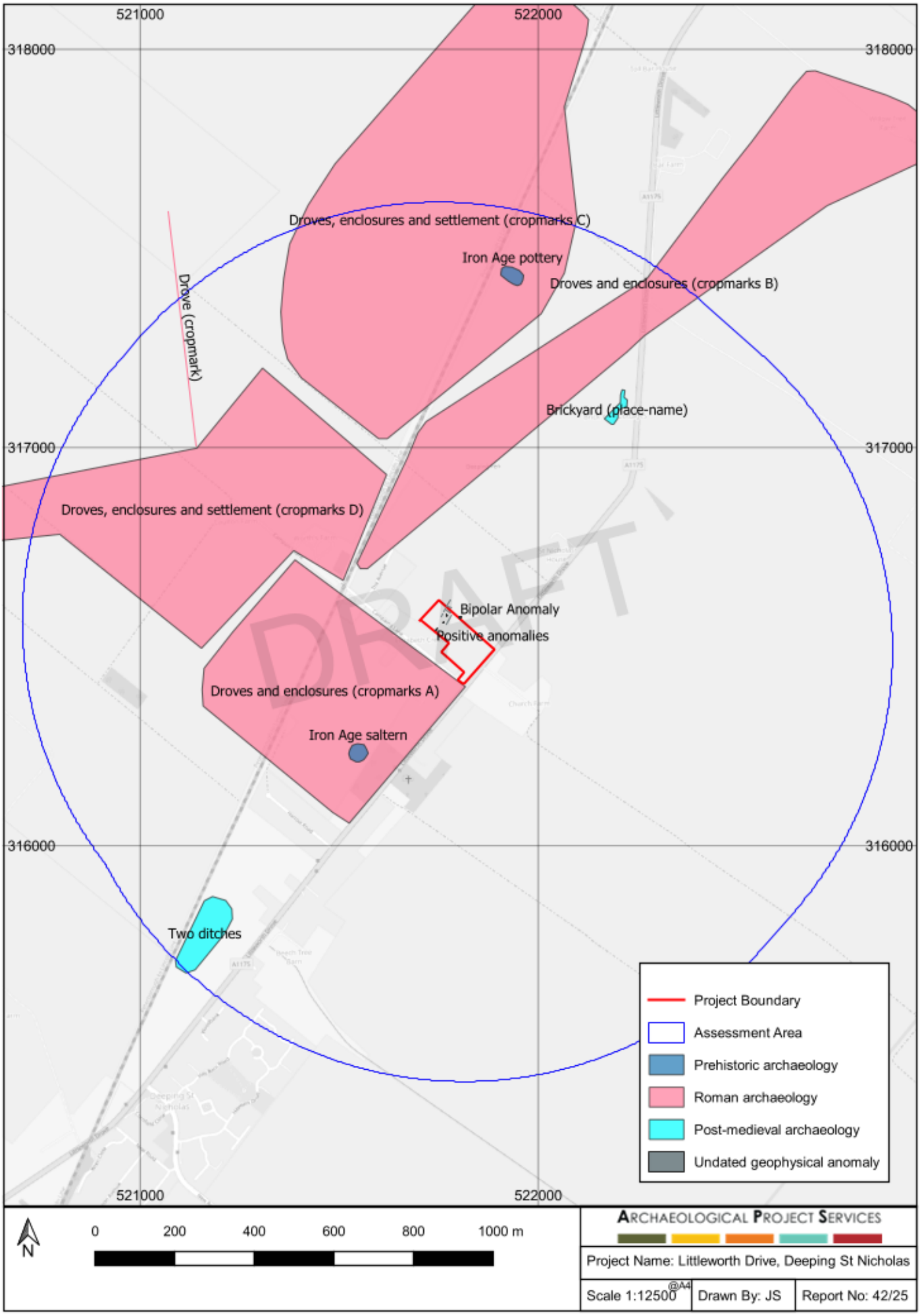


Figure 2 - Known archaeology

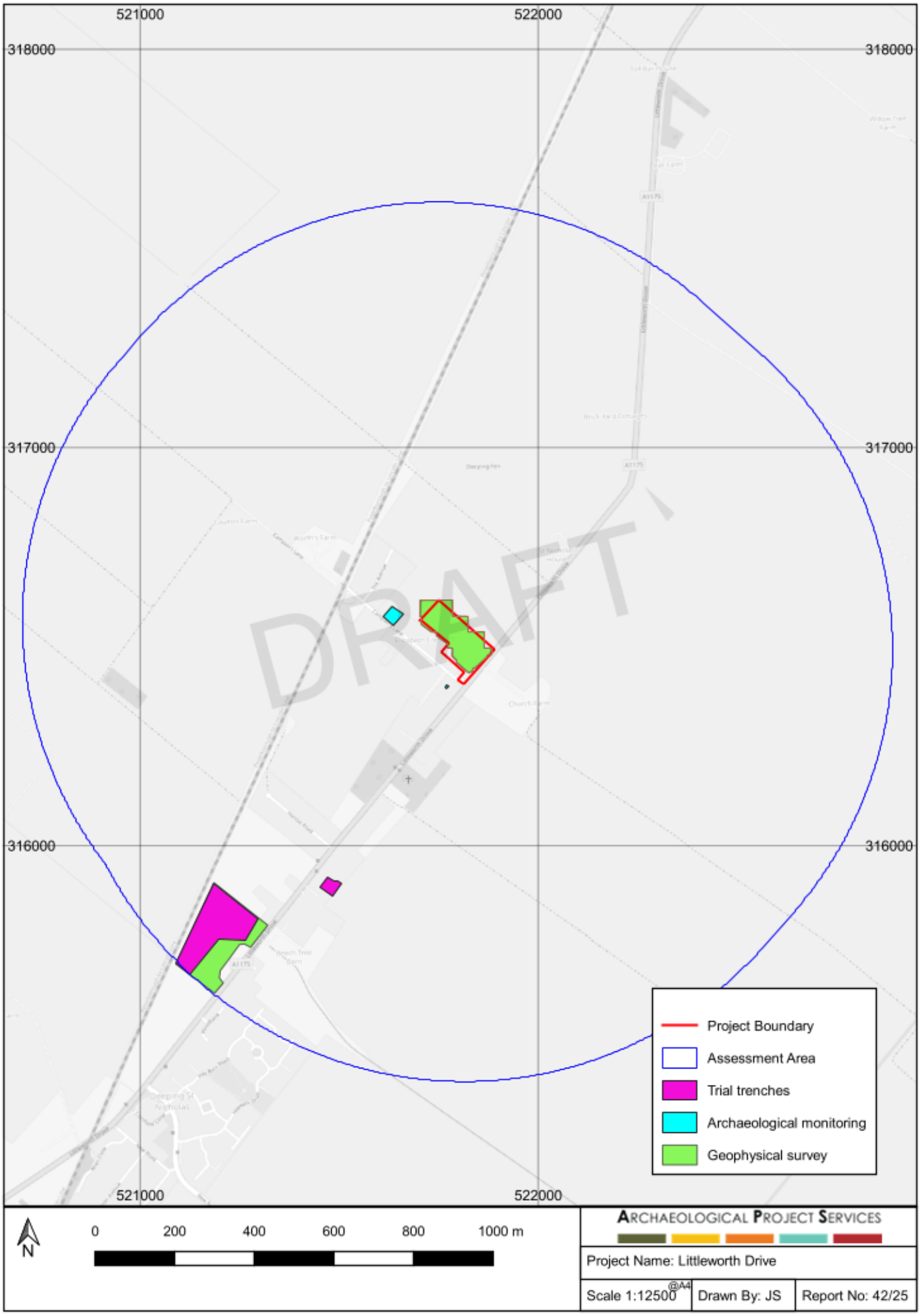


Figure 3 - Archaeological interventions

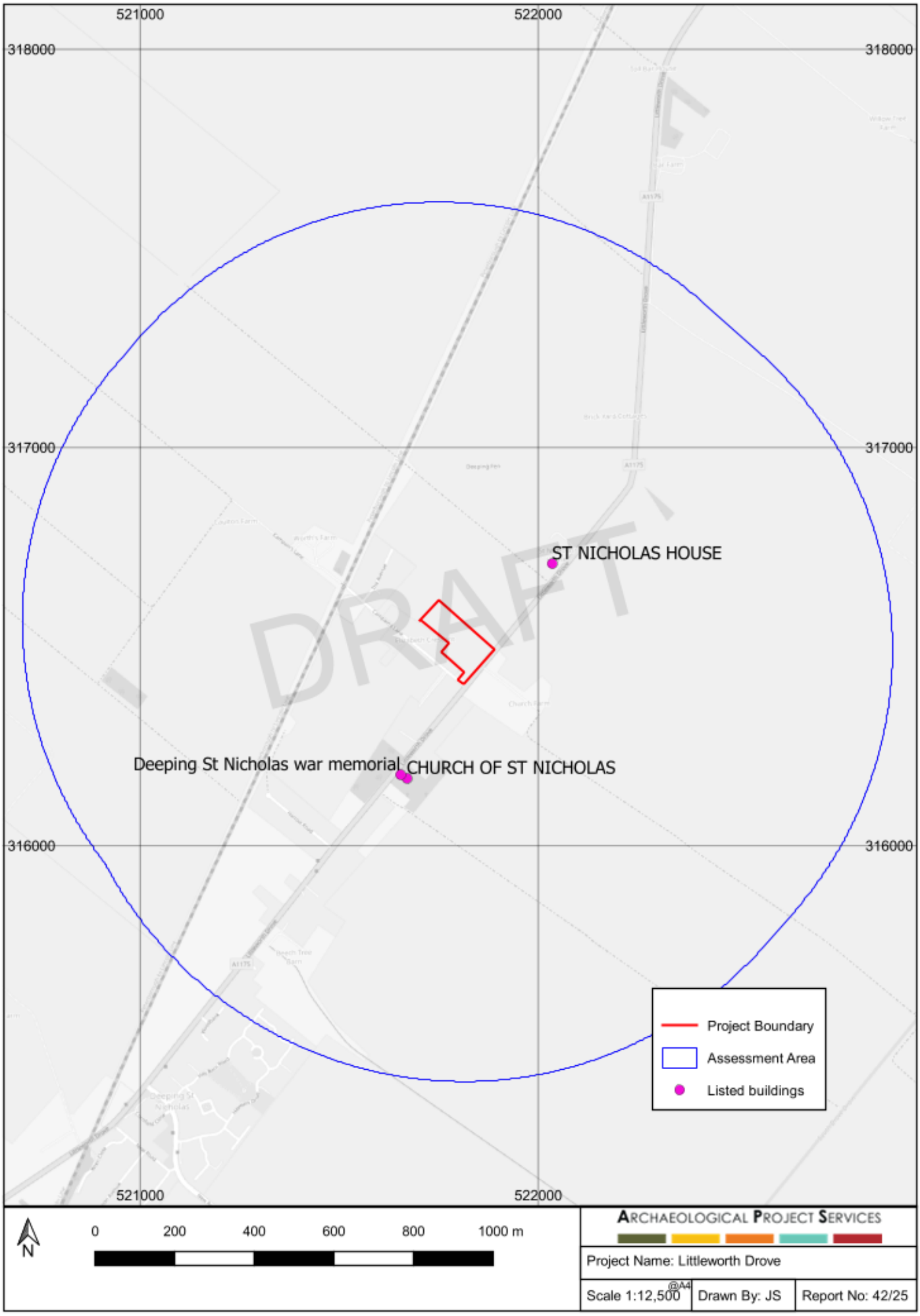


Figure 4 - Designated assets

Appendix

GLOSSARY

Alluvium	Deposits laid down by water. Marine alluvium is deposited by the sea, and fresh water alluvium is laid down by rivers and in lakes.
Bronze Age	A period characterised by the introduction of bronze into the country for tools, between 2400 and 800 BC.
Cropmark	A mark that is produced by the effect of underlying archaeological or geological features influencing the growth of a particular crop.
Domesday Survey	A survey of property ownership in England compiled on the instruction of William I for taxation purposes in 1086 AD.
Drift	Material that has been eroded, transported or deposited by glaciers (or their melt water). The term 'drift' is commonly used to describe any deposits of Quaternary age.
Geophysical Survey	Essentially non-invasive methods of examining below the ground surface by measuring deviations in the physical properties and characteristics of the earth. Techniques include magnetometry and resistivity survey.
Iron Age	A period characterised by the introduction of Iron into the country for tools, between 800 BC and AD 50.
Lidar	An aircraft-based method of survey using analysis of pulses of laser light reflected from the surfaces of the ground and buildings. It is cable of identifying subtle differences in topography.
Medieval	The Middle Ages, dating from approximately AD 1066-1500.
Modern	The current period, dating from around AD 1900 to the present time.
Natural	Undisturbed deposit(s) of soil or rock which have accumulated without the influence of human activity
Old English	The language used by the Saxon (*q.v.*) occupants of Britain.
Post-medieval	The period following the Middle Ages, dating from approximately AD 1500-1900.
Prehistoric	The period of human history prior to the introduction of writing. In Britain the prehistoric period lasts from the first evidence of human occupation about 500,000 BC, until the Roman invasion in the middle of the 1st century AD.
Roman	Pertaining to the period dating from AD 43-410 when the Romans occupied Britain.
Saxon	Pertaining to the period dating from AD 410-1066 when England was largely settled by tribes from northern Germany, Denmark and adjacent areas.

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