

Archaeological Statement of potential for land to the east of Poplar Hill, Stowmarket, Suffolk. Centred on Grid reference TM 04565 56929.

The site occupies c. 8.6 ha of elevated arable land within a gently sloping valley and bounds a small tributary stream that flows into Rattlesden River to the North. The superficial geology comprises of glacial deposits ascribed to the Lowestoft Formation.

On the bases of finds and sites recorded on the Country Historic Environment Record (HER) and upon the results from a number of recent archaeological investigations in the vicinity, the site is evidently located in an area of very high archaeological potential.

Located on rising ground overlooking a small channel, the site is likely to have been topographically favourable to occupation from an early date. Large scatters of worked flints dating as far back as the early Mesolithic were recorded in the field to the south-east on the opposite site of the channel (HER ref. MSF 21731). However the majority of the lithic evidence points to significant local activity during the Bronze Age and within the wider area a number of prehistoric finds and features have been recorded. A recent geophysical survey (OASIS Ref: magnitud1-323873) revealed a sub-circular magnetic anomaly along the western margin of the site which might relate to the surviving sub-surface remains of a prehistoric funerary monument, such as a burial mound.

Roman activity has been recorded in the adjacent field to the north-east in the form of a ditch containing a number of pottery sherds. Similar features along with coins dating from the 1st – 2nd Century have been found in the vicinity (e.g. HER refs, MSF 20503, 5394) indicating nearby settlement and the potential utilisation of the gentle south-easterly facing slope for arable production.

The site perhaps holds greatest archaeological potential in relation to the adjoining medieval settlement at Combs, which survives as a series of earthworks. A network of medieval boundary ditches was located in the adjoining field to the north-west, containing pottery dating from the 11th – 14th Centuries, while earthworks relating to medieval fish ponds are located along the eastern border of the site. Geophysical survey data (OASIS Ref: magnitud1-323873) indicates the sub-surface survival of a number of ditch type features concentrated along the eastern margins of the site along the edge of the bounding stream, which may well relate to agricultural activity during this period. The intensity of medieval settlement at Combs is evident from the 14th Century Grade 1 listed St Mary's church at the top of the valley and the 14th Century aisled hall discovered at Edgars Hall to the north of the site.

During the post-medieval period, the site formed part of the Combs Hall Estate, and was located in Mill Mount Field, Mill Field and Hop Yard field, according to the 1710 Estate map. Given the toponym, the sub-circular geophysical anomaly mentioned above could potentially relate to the surviving remains of a former mill mound upon the site. There are several examples of prehistoric mounds being utilised as sites for the erection of windmills in later periods.

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