

Land east of Pirton

North Herts District Council

HERITAGE STATEMENT | MAY 2025

On behalf of Gladman Developments Ltd



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LAND EAST OF PIRTON

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Section 1

Introduction.

Introduction

Overview

- 1.1 This Heritage Statement has been prepared on behalf of Gladman Developments Ltd ('the Applicant') to support a full planning application at Land East of Pirton ('the Site') within North Hertfordshire District Council. It provides an assessment of the anticipated heritage impacts of the proposed development.
- 1.2 The proposed development can be summarised as follows:

Outline application for the erection of up to 130 dwellings with public open space, landscaping and sustainable drainage system (SuDS), with all matters reserved save for access.
- 1.3 This report will:
 - Set out the relevant legislative and policy framework within which to understand the proposed development of the Site;
 - Provide a proportionate and robust analysis of the Site and surrounding area's historic development;
 - Describe the Site and identify relevant heritage assets, their significance and the contribution of their setting to significance;
 - Provide an assessment of the potential effects to the significance and setting of identified heritage assets resulting from the proposed development.
- 1.4 The methodology used in this assessment is set out in Appendix 1. The baseline was prepared using ongoing desk-based research and fieldwork undertaken in January 2025
- 1.5 The report is produced by Icen Projects. Specifically, it is authored by: Edward Wollaston BA(Hons) PGDip Senior Consultant and Lucy Nicholson LLB (Hons), MAUD, MRTPI IHBC Associate, with review by Laurie Handcock MA (Cantab) MSc IHBC, MCIfA, Director, of the Built Heritage and Townscape team.

Understanding of the Site

- 1.6 The Site measures 6.65 hectares (ha) and is located on the eastern edge of Pirton, 3 miles northwest of Hitchin. The Site comprises a single grassland field and is bound to the west by existing residential
- 1.7 The development proposed in this application is for up to 130 dwellings with associated infrastructure, all matters reserved save for access.
- 1.8 This application follows the dismissal of a scheme on this Site at appeal in 2019 (ref APP/ X1925/W/17/3184846). The appeal scheme sought consent for up to 99 homes on the Site. Whilst this appeal was dismissed on landscape and policy grounds, the Inspector did confirm that there would be no harm to the setting of significance of nearby heritage assets as a result of the scheme.
- 1.9 The Site comprises a flat, open field bordered by mature hedgerows of native vegetation and provide a degree of natural screening from surrounding areas. The field's topography is predominantly level, and the field is situated on the edge of the villages urban development.
- 1.10 Permission for the adjacent Comice Fields was secured in 2016. This gave consent for 78 homes and associated landscaping and road infrastructure.

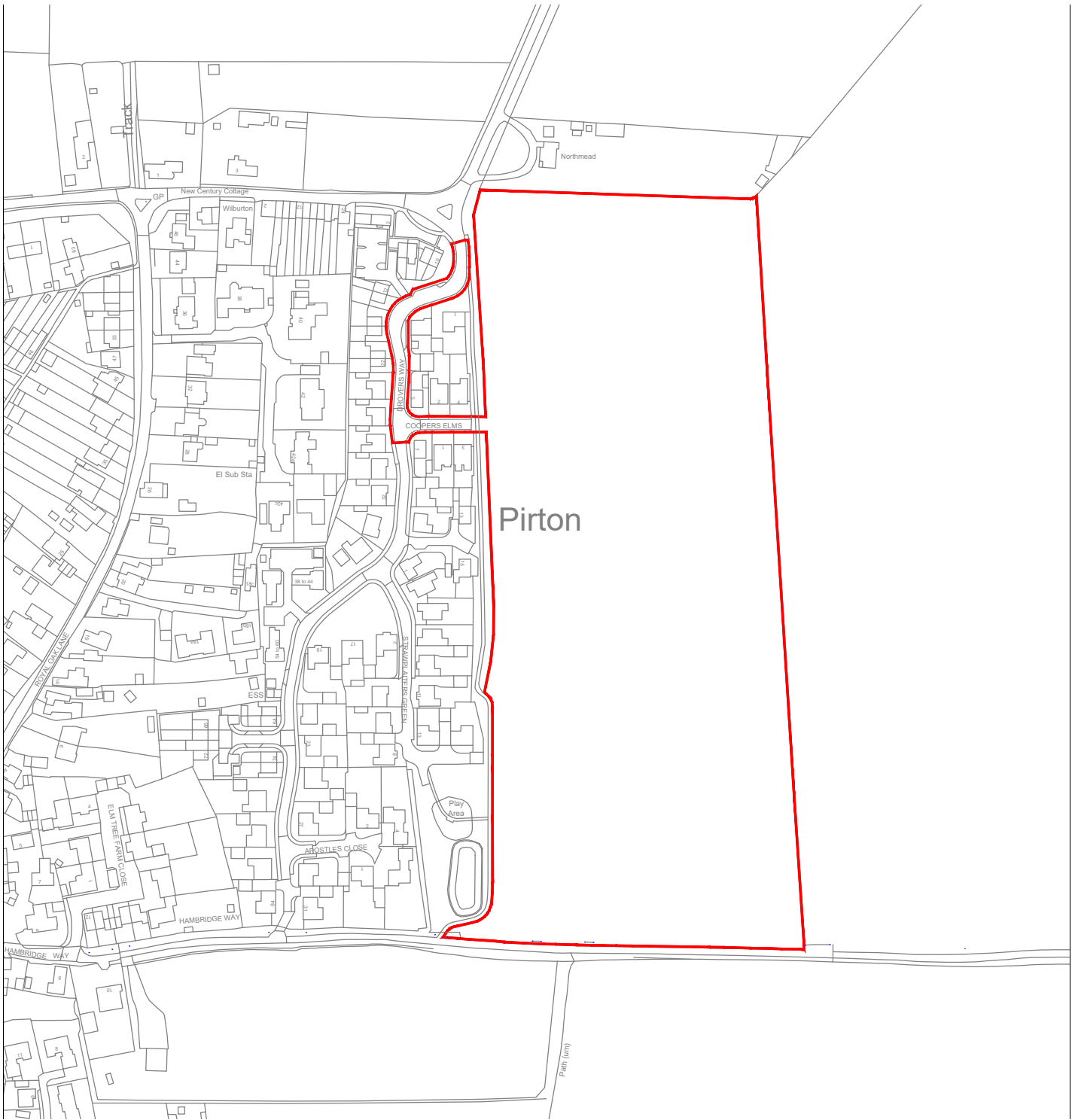


Figure 1.1 Site Location (approximate site boundary)

1 | Introduction

Identification of Heritage Assets

- 1.11 GIS software has been used to identify heritage assets within a 500m radius of the Site, alongside reviewing the National Heritage List for England ('NHLE'), Council's Conservation Area Mapping.
- 1.12 The scope of this assessment is considered to be proportionate to the significance of identified heritage assets and the nature of change proposed, in line with National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) paragraph 207.
- Pirton Conservation Area
 - Toot Hill motte and bailey castle and shrunken medieval village at Pirton (Scheduled Monument, List Entry Number: 1012325)
 - Church of St Mary (Grade I, List UID: 1347110)
 - Walnut Tree Farmhouse (Grade II, List UID: 1103161)
 - South-East Barn At Walnut Tree Farm (Grade II, List UID: 1103162)
 - Ivy Cottage (Grade II, List UID: 1103187)
 - South-East Barn At No 1 (Elm Tree Farm) (Grade II, List UID: 1103190)
 - Cromwell Cottage (Grade II, List UID: 1103192)
 - 20, High Street (Grade II, List UID: 1103193)
 - 19-21, Royal Oak Lane (Grade II, List UID: 1103194)
 - The Fox Inn (Grade II, List UID: 1175478)
 - 14, Royal Oak Lane (Grade II, List UID: 1175517)
 - 7, Walnut Tree Road (Grade II, List UID: 1175604)
 - Farmbuildings Fronting Road At Walnut Tree Farm (Grade II, List UID: 1175626)
 - 5, Crabtree Lane (Grade II, List UID: 1295337)
 - 1 And 3, Crabtree Lane (Grade II, List UID: 1295373)
 - 23-25, Walnut Tree Road (Grade II, List UID: 1308247)
 - Elm Tree Farmhouse (Grade II, List UID: 1308350)
 - 41-45, High Street (Grade II, List UID: 1347076)
 - Primrose Cottage (Grade II, List UID: 1347077)
 - 4-6, Walnut Tree Road (Grade II, List UID: 1347097)
 - Pirton War Memorial (Grade II, List UID: 1430264)



Figure 1.2 Heritage Asset Mapping



Figure 1.3 The Site (Jan, 2025)



Figure 1.4 The Site and its immediate context (Jan, 2025)



Figure 1.5 Comice Fields, adjacent the Site (Jan, 2025)



Figure 1.6 The Site and its immediate context (Jan, 2025)

Section 2

Relevant Planning Policy, Legislation & Guidance.

2 | Relevant Planning Policy, Legislation & Guidance

Planning Policy and Legislation

Introduction

- 2.1
- The Development Plan for North Hertfordshire consists of the Local Plan 2011-2031 and individual Neighbourhood Plans, relevant to this application is the Pirton Neighbourhood Development Plan (2018)
- 2.2
- Relevant guidance includes:
 - Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning Note 2 – Managing Significance in Decision Taking in the Historic Environment
 - Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning Note 3 – The Setting of Heritage Assets
- 2.3
- The National Planning Policy Framework (2024) ('NPPF') is a material consideration throughout this Heritage Statement.

Legislation

- 2.4
- Primary legislation under Section 66 (1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas Act) 1990 states that *'in considering whether to grant planning permission for development which affects a listed building or its setting, the Local Planning Authority or Secretary of State, as relevant, shall have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest that it possesses.'*
- 2.5
- Whilst the Site does not sit within a Conservation Area, Section 72(1) of the Act states that in relation to Conservation Areas, special attention shall be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of that area.

National Planning Policy Framework (December 2024)

- 2.6
- The NPPF affirms, in paragraph 135, the need for new design to function well and add to the quality of the surrounding area, establish a strong sense of place, and respond to local character and history, while not preventing or discouraging appropriate optimisation, innovation or change (such as increased densities).
- 2.7
- Paragraph 139 requires development that is not well-design to be refused, whilst significant weight should be given to development which reflects local design policies and/or is outstanding, innovative and helps raise the design standards in the area.
- 2.8
- Paragraph 207 states that local planning authorities should require applicants to describe the significance of heritage assets affected and any contribution made by their setting. The level of detail provided should be proportionate to the significance of the asset.
- 2.9
- Paragraph 210 emphasises that local planning authorities should take account of the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation.
- 2.10
- Paragraphs 212 - 215 address the balancing of harm against public benefits. If a balancing exercise is necessary (i.e. if there is any harm to the asset), great weight should be applied to the statutory duty where it arises, and any harm to significance should require a clear and convincing justification. Where substantial or less than substantial harm will arise as a result of a proposed development, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of a proposal, including for less than substantial harm, securing its optimum viable use (para.215). In the case of substantial harm, this must be necessary to achieve substantial public benefits, or a number of criteria set out in paragraph 214 apply.
- 2.11
- Paragraph 219 encourages opportunities for new development within, and within the setting of, Conservation Areas and World Heritage Sites, to enhance or better reveal their significance. Whereas paragraph 220 notes that loss of an element which makes a positive contribution to these should be assessed according to paragraphs 214 and 215, taking into account its contribution to the whole.

Statutory Development Plan		
Policy Document	Relevant Policy	Summary
North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011-2031	Strategic Objectives ENV2	Protect and enhance the historic character of North Hertfordshire’s towns, villages, hamlets and landscape by promoting good design that creates a distinctive sense of place.
	Strategic Objectives ENV3	Protect, maintain and enhance the District’s historic and natural environment, its cultural assets and network of open spaces, urban and rural landscapes.
	Policy SP1: Sustainable development in North Hertfordshire	This Plan supports the principles of sustainable development within North Hertfordshire.
	Policy SP9: Design and Sustainability	The Council considers good design to be a key aspect of sustainable development.
The Pirton Neighbourhood Development Plan (2018)	Policy SP13: Historic environment	The Council will balance the need for growth with the proper protection and enhancement of the historic environment. When considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight will be given to the asset’s conservation and the management of its setting.
	Policy PNP2 - Design and Character	Residential development proposals will be supported if they are in accordance with the guidance contained in the Pirton Character Assessment, and the principles within this policy relating to design and character.
	Policy PNP7 - Key Views and Vistas	The Plan seeks to protect and enhance the setting of Pirton village in relation to the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the surrounding rural landscape. The Site does not fall within any Key Views identified in the map Figure 2.2
	Policy PNP8 - Heritage Assets and Archaeological Heritage:	Proposals conserve or enhance the heritage assets of the Parish and their settings in a way that is appropriate to their significance. Heritage assets include designated heritage assets and non-designated heritage assets.

Table 2.1 Summary of Local Policy

2 | Relevant Planning Policy, Legislation & Guidance

Relevant Guidance

Planning Practice Guidance ('PPG')

Historic Environment (Last Updated Feb 2024)

- 2.12 Paragraph 002 states that conservation is an active process of maintenance and managing change that requires a flexible and thoughtful approach.
- 2.13 Paragraph 006 sets out how heritage significance can be understood in the planning context as archaeological, architectural, artistic or historic.
- 2.14 Paragraph 018 explains that, where potential harm to designated heritage assets is identified, it needs to be categorised as either less than substantial harm or substantial harm (which includes total loss) in order to identify which policies in the NPPF (paragraphs 207-208) apply. It goes on to state that whether a proposal causes substantial harm will be a judgment for the decision-maker, having regard to the circumstances of the case and the policy in the NPPF. In general terms, substantial harm is a high test, so it may not arise in many cases.
- 2.15 The PPG also provides clear guidance in paragraph 020 on the meaning of 'public benefits', particularly in relation to historic environment policy, including paragraphs 214 to 215 of the NPPF. The PPG makes clear that public benefits should be measured according to the delivery of the three key drivers of sustainable development: economic, social and environmental outcomes, all of which are reflected in the objectives of the planning system, as per Paragraph 8 of the NPPF.

Historic Environment Good Practice Advice

- 2.16 To support the national policies, four separate Good Practice Advice in Planning Notes ('GPA's') have been published by Historic England. The GPAs relevant to this report, GPA2 and GPA3, are summarised below. GPA 1 on Local Plans and GPA 4 on Enabling Developments have not been included as they are not considered to be relevant.

GPA 2: Managing Significance in Decision-Taking [2015]

- 2.17 This document provides advice on the ways in which decision-taking in the historic environment could be undertaken, emphasising that the first step for all applicants is to understand the significance of any affected heritage asset and the contribution of its setting to its significance.

- 2.18 In line with the NPPF and PPG, the document states that early engagement and expert advice in considering and assessing the significance of heritage assets is encouraged.
- 2.19 The advice reiterates that heritage assets may be affected by direct physical change or by change in their setting. Assessment of the nature, extent and importance of the significance of a heritage asset and the contribution of its setting at an early stage can assist the planning process in informed decision taking.

GPA 3: The Setting of Heritage Assets (2nd Edition) [2017]

- 2.20 This advice note addresses the management of change within a heritage asset's setting, emphasising that the information required for planning permission and listed building consent should be sufficient to make an informed decision, while remaining proportionate to the significance of the heritage assets and the impact of the proposed changes. It underscores the need for decision-makers to have enough information to understand the issues, particularly when considering the statutory obligation to preserve listed buildings and settings that contribute to the significance of heritage assets.
- 2.21 The note advises that for developments that are not likely to be prominent or intrusive, the assessment of effects on the setting may be limited to the immediate surroundings. An analysis should then determine whether the setting of a heritage asset contributes to its significance and to what extent, with additional consideration for how the setting and associated views allow for the appreciation of that significance.
- 2.22 At the proposal stage, the note suggests ways to maximise enhancement and minimise harm, such as removing or remodelling intrusive features, replacing detrimental elements with more harmonious ones, restoring lost historic features or views, or introducing new features or views that enhance public appreciation of the asset. Enhancements could also include improving public access to or interpretation of the asset and its setting.

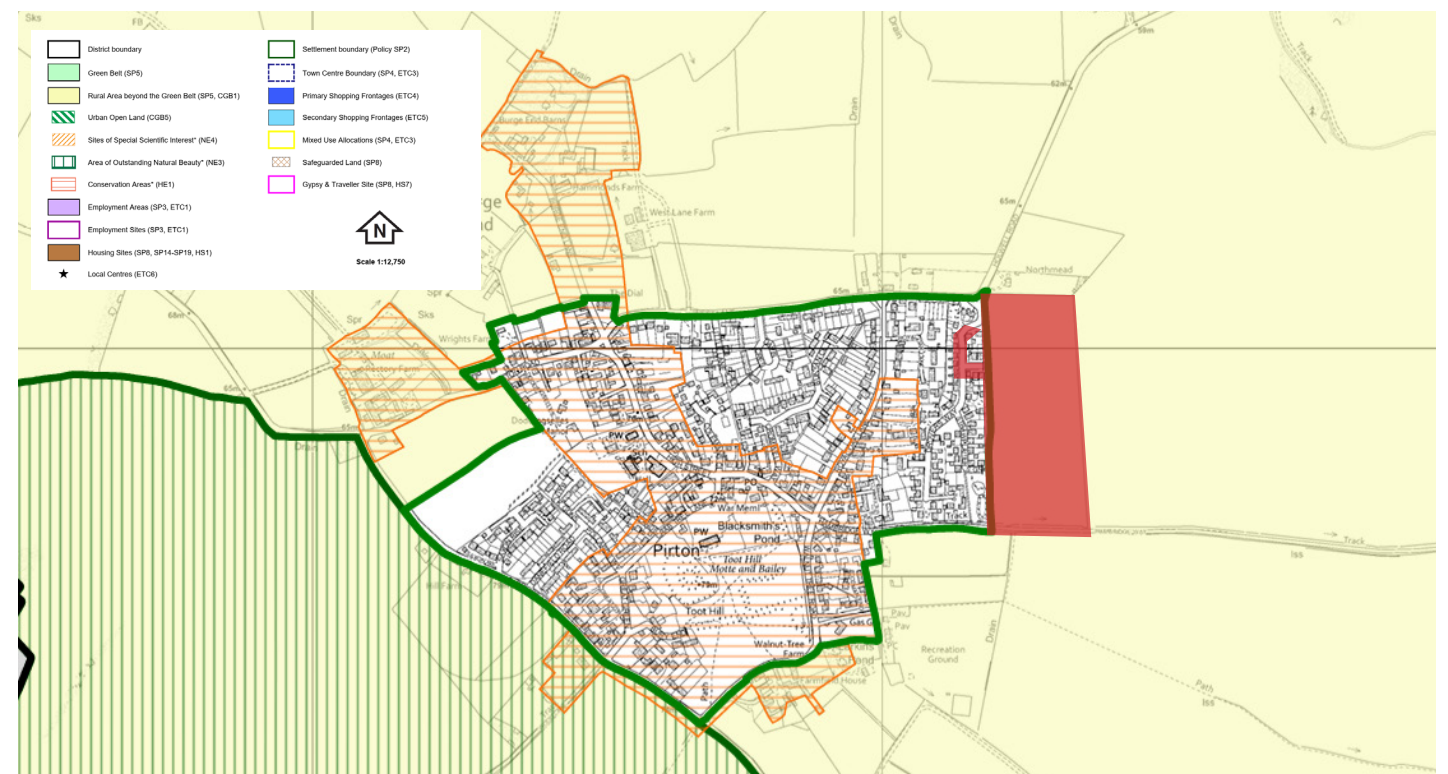


Figure 2.1 Extract of Planning Policy North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011-2031 Site outlined in Red



Figure 2.2 Extract of Pirton Neighbourhood Plan Key View Map, Local views numbered in red with arrows denoting orientation

Section 3

Historic Development of the Site & Surroundings.

3 | Historic Development of Site & Surroundings

LAND EAST OF PIRTON

Historic Development of the Area

- 3.1 Pirton is first recorded in the Domesday Book of 1086 as "Peritone," meaning "pear tree farm." The village lies on the ancient Icknield Way, a historic trade route, Pirton has evolved over the centuries, with its layout and character reflecting changes in its economy and population. Its current triangular plan is defined by roads such as Priors Hill, Hitchin Road, Walnut Tree Road, with development extending beyond these boundaries from the early 17th Century onwards.
- 3.2 The village's history spans thousands of years, from Neolithic and Bronze Age burial mounds to Roman and Saxon settlements. Archaeological discoveries, including an early Saxon cemetery on the parish boundary and a rare middle Saxon enclosed settlement east of Priors Hill, underscore Pirton's long-standing significance. This settlement, designated as a Scheduled Monument in 2016, likely dates to around 500 AD. Excavations have also revealed an early Christian timber church and associated graveyard from the 8th–9th centuries, predating the current St. Mary's Church, which likely dates to the 10th or 11th century. The motte-and-bailey castle at Toot Hill, constructed during the 12th-century civil war between King Stephen and Queen Matilda, remains a prominent earthwork alongside the adjacent Bury. During the medieval period, Pirton developed a nucleated layout that persisted through various cycles of prosperity and decline. By 1801 the population returned to around 500.
- 3.3 Pirton has experienced significant expansion and transformation over the 19th and 20th centuries, evolving from a traditionally dispersed rural settlement into a more structured and compact village. During the Victorian era, a distinctive architectural character emerged, with the introduction of terraces constructed using Arlesey white brick, a locally sourced material that became popular in the area of the period. These developments were complemented by the construction of larger and more prominent residences, such as Pirton Court and Pirton Hall, which reflected the growing affluence and social prominence of the village at the time.
- 3.4 In the post-war years, between 1920 and 1955, municipal housing estates began to take shape, marking a response to national housing demands. These developments reshaped the village's rural character by introducing more uniform architectural styles and planned residential layouts, further solidifying the village's structural evolution.

- 3.5 Later in the 20th century, modern housing developments such as Cromwell Way and Bunyan Close transformed former orchard lands into planned residential neighbourhoods. These developments introduced suburban-style housing forms that stood in contrast to the traditional village fabric, contributing to a more contemporary residential landscape. Infill projects, including Coleman's Close and Elm Tree Farm Close, further altered the historic layout of the village. While the village was formerly characterised by more dispersed housing clusters, Pirton has gradually adopted a more nucleated form as it has expanded.
- 3.6 The land immediately to the west was granted permission for the development known as Comice Fields and has now been developed with the construction of 78 houses.

Historic Development of Site

- 3.7 The Site has been a field in agricultural use since the earliest development of the village. The adjacent Enclosures Map (1818) shows a number of separate plots within the Site area in a variety of different ownerships.
- 3.8 Planning Permission for the redevelopment of the Site was submitted in June 2017 (Ref 17/01543/1) for the development of 99 homes and associated landscaping. This was refused and then subsequently dismissed at appeal (Appeal Decision APP/X1925/W/17/3184846). An amended scheme for 85 Dwellings was submitted in Oct 2017 and refused by NHDC.

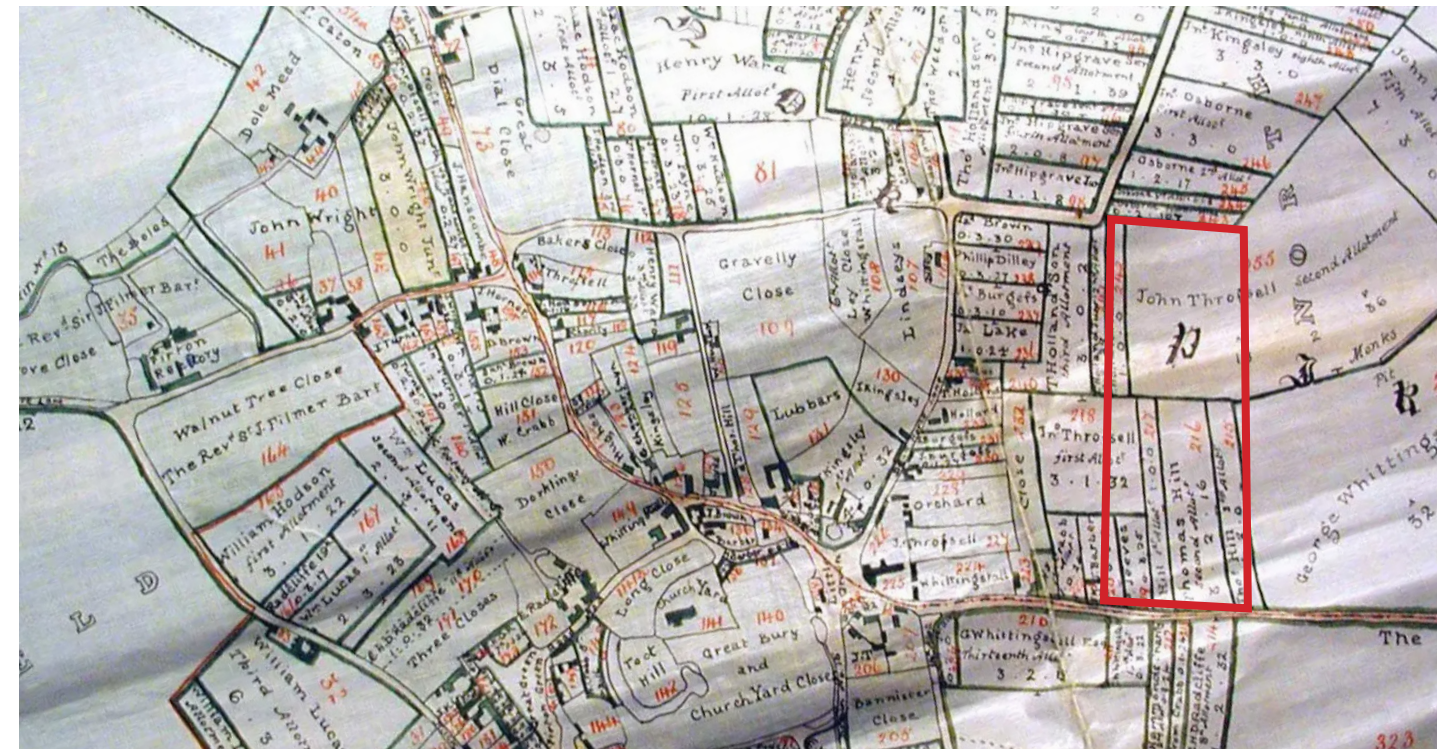


Figure 3.1 1818 Enclosures Map

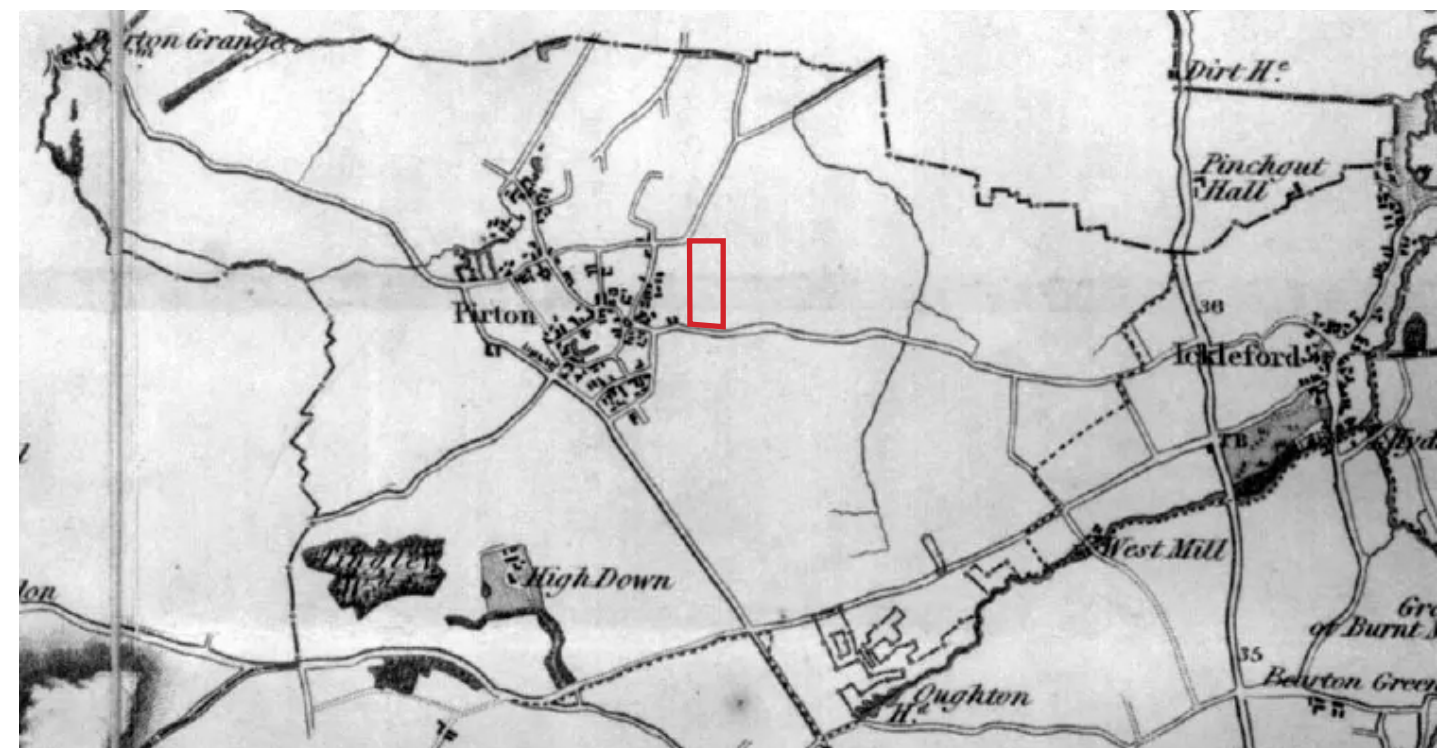


Figure 3.2 Andrew Bryant Map 1822

3 | Historic Development of Site & Surroundings

LAND EAST OF PIRTON

Historic Map Regression



Figure 3.3 OS Map 1880e

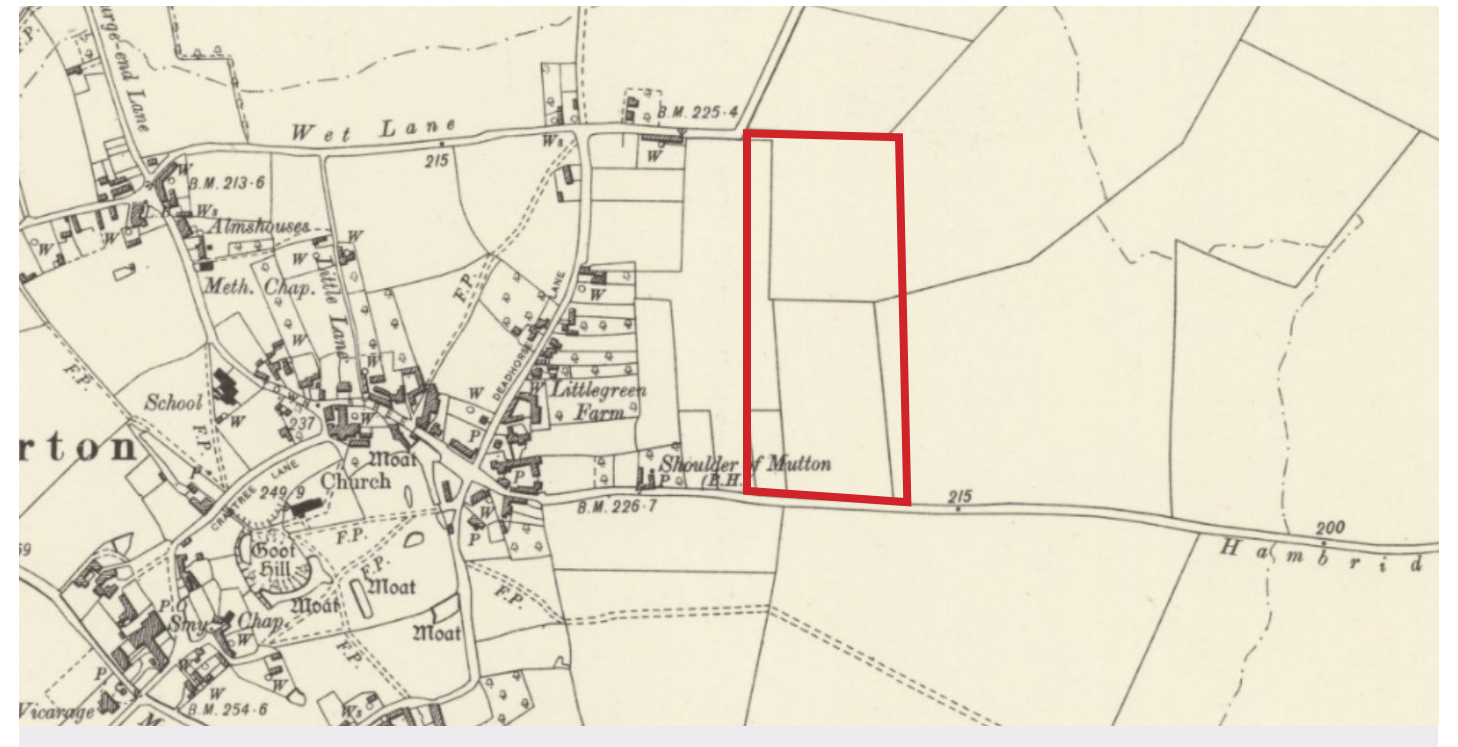


Figure 3.4 OS Map 1897

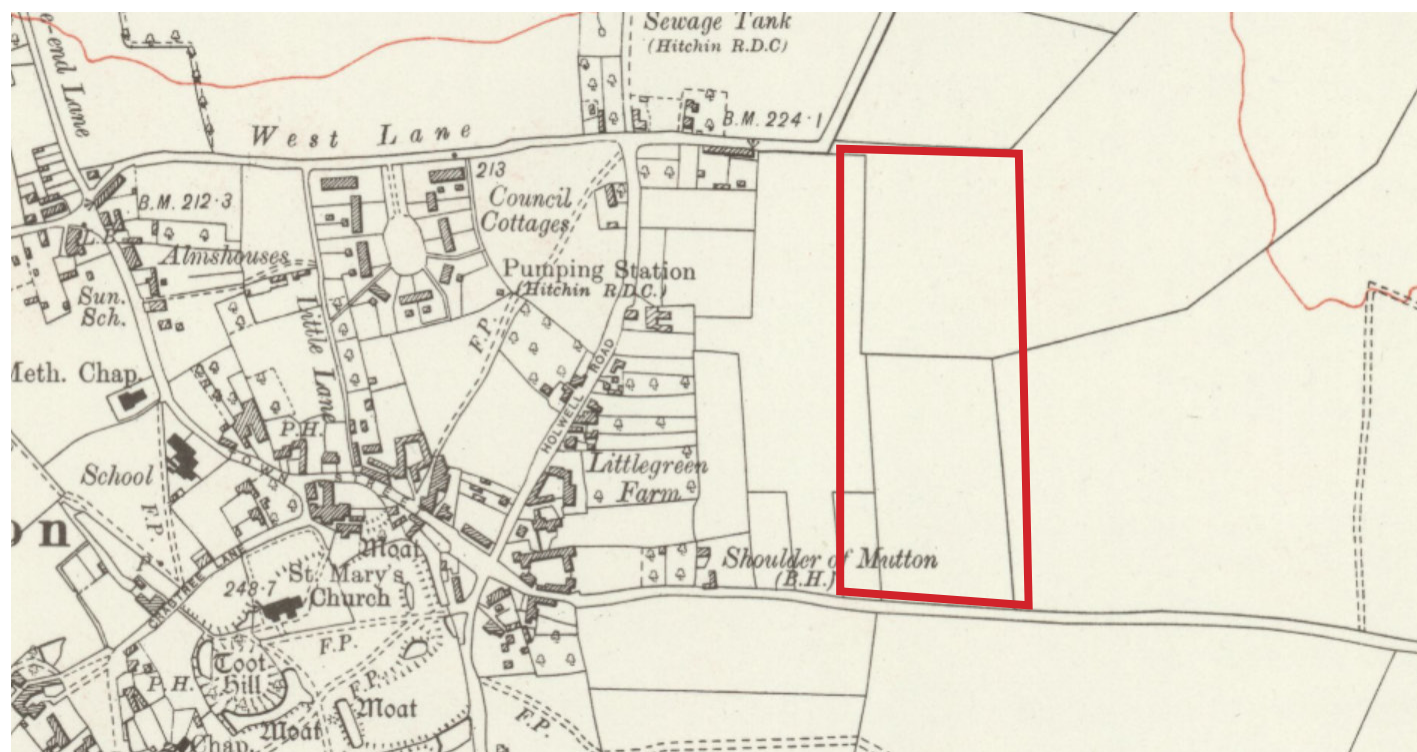


Figure 3.5 OS Map 1922

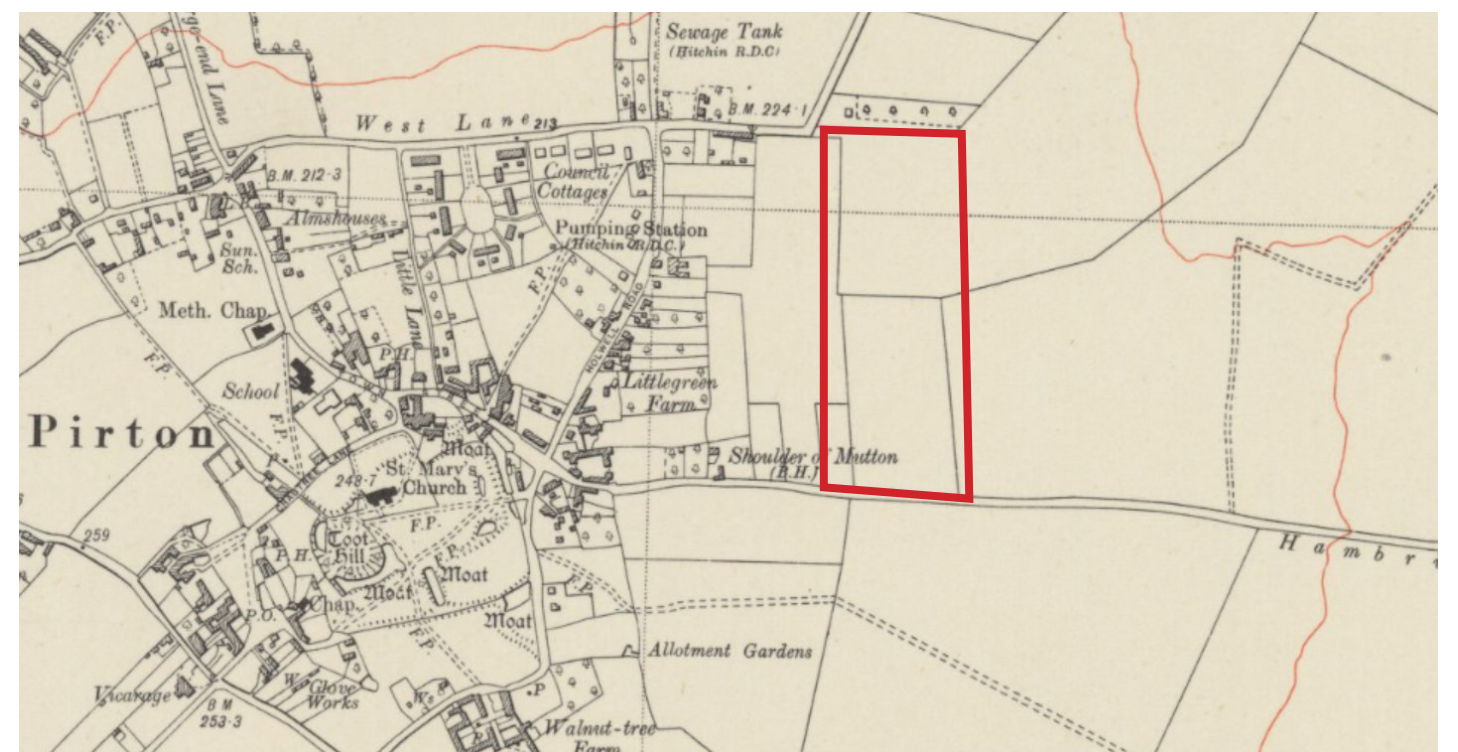


Figure 3.6 OS Map 1947

Section 4

Assessment of Significance.

4 | Assessment of Significance

Assessment of Significance

Pirton Conservation Area

- 4.1 Pirton Conservation Area encompasses the historic core of the village, a settlement which initially dates to pre-medieval period. It is surrounded by a predominantly agricultural landscape, the village features a compact, triangular layout focused around St Mary's Parish Church and the remains of a long-demolished motte and bailey castle, as well as the original medieval settlement.
- 4.2 The Conservation Area's character is derived from its varied archaeological, architectural, and historic elements and the Conservation Area boundary covers much of the village. Significant heritage assets include scheduled monuments and numerous listed buildings, including the Grade I Church of St Mary. Pirton's continuous occupation since medieval times has resulted in a relatively intact historic street plan and layout.
- 4.3 The Conservation Area Character Statement (2023) identified buildings which are considered to be positive contributors to the Conservation Area, these are considered as part of the assessment of the Conversation Area in this report.
- 4.4 Architecturally, Pirton exhibits a mix of styles, from Medieval timber-framed houses, Victorian terraces and former farmsteads and barn conversions scattered throughout the village core. Local materials, such as the local Arlesey brick are present on some houses within the village, as are other vernacular features including thatched and rendered buildings.
- 4.5 The rural character of the Conservation Area is derived from the village's natural features. Hedgerows, grass verges, and spacious garden plots create a verdant, rural atmosphere, linking the village to its agricultural surroundings.
- 4.6 The Conservation Area has been divided into three Character Areas, loosely defined as:
 - Character Area One: The Medieval Settlement (containing Toot Hill, St Mary's, Great Green and Walnut Tree Farm)
 - Character Area Two: Northern Farmsteads (north of West Lane)
 - Character Area Three: Post Medieval Residential

- Development (containing the High Street, Royal Oak Lane and Holwell Road)
- 4.7 The Site is located closet to Character Area Three: Post Medieval Residential Development (containing the High Street, Royal Oak Lane and Holwell Road)
- 4.8 This Character Area represents a later phase in the village's development, east of the medieval village and castle. Buildings here have a mixture of residential and amenity functions; village hall, school, a public house and a shop are all located in this part of the Conservation Area.
- 4.9 Most buildings within the Character Area date from the nineteenth century or later, meaning they are predominantly brick constructions, rather than timber framed and rendered. Good examples of Arlesey brick buildings are present here. Where they do feature, older buildings within in the Character Area typically date from the seventeenth century and would have once been outliers to the village core, such as Elm Tree Farm and 17 High Street. Buildings from the post-medieval period within the Character Area are almost all listed, due to their age and architectural interest. Sections of modern infill have expanded the village, encroaching upon the Conservation Area's boundary and infilling sections of land between the High Street and Royal Oak Lane, including Davis Crescent, within the Conservation Area boundary. Built in 1920, the crescent has a strong designed layout which references the appearance of Great Green, in Character Area One.

Setting

- 4.10 The setting of the Conservation Area is mixed, with some open fields and some areas of modern housing. To the north, the Conservation Area boundary extends and encompasses some of the fields of Burge End and the fields in the setting of this part of the Conservation Area contribute to the understanding of the CA as a rural area. This northern end is more rural, with development set in larger, informal plots. The southern part of the Conservation Area has a more varied setting, with the modern development along Pollards Way to the west and Comice Meadows to the east. These modern developments give a neutral contribution to the conservation area, the developments are residential in character and follow the vernacular form of the development seen within the conservation area.

Contribution of Site to Setting

- 4.11 The Site makes no direct contribution to the setting of the conservation area located as it is in the much wider setting of the Conservation Area.

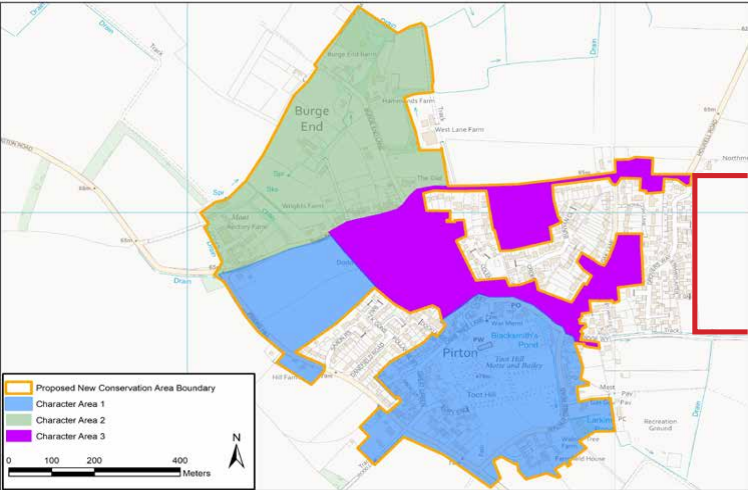


Figure 25: Map of Character Areas, Proposed Pirton Conservation Area

Figure 4.1 Extract from Pirton Conservation Area Appraisal - Character Areas Map

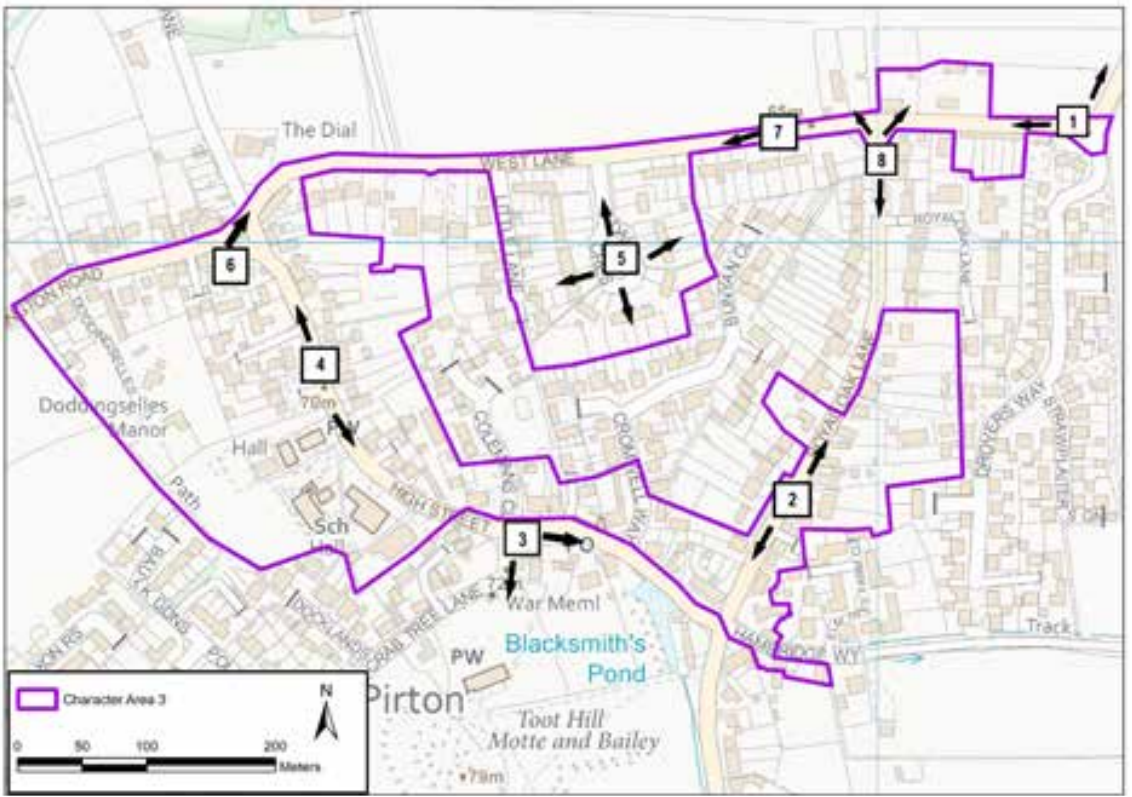


Figure 4.2 Extract from Pirton Conservation Area Appraisal - Character Area 3 Map 'Locations in the character area where important views can be gained'

Heritage Assets within Character Area 3

- 4.12

This grouping includes the Scheduled Monument at Toot Hill motte and bailey castle and shrunken medieval village at Pirton (Scheduled Monument, List Entry Number: 1012325) and the listed buildings at

 - Church of St Mary (Grade I, List UID: 1347110)
 - Walnut Tree Farmhouse (Grade II, List UID: 1103161)
 - South-East Barn At Walnut Tree Farm (Grade II, List UID: 1103162)
 - Ivy Cottage (Grade II, List UID: 1103187)
 - South-East Barn At No 1 (Elm Tree Farm) (Grade II, List UID: 1103190)
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 - 4-6, Walnut Tree Road (Grade II, List UID: 1347097)
 - Pirton War Memorial (Grade II, List UID: 1430264)
- 4.13

Toot Hill motte and bailey castle and shrunken medieval village at Pirton (Scheduled Monument, List Entry Number: 1012325) is an expansive area and is entirely below ground and forms the historic core of the village. This features the earthworks of a 12th-century motte and bailey castle, along with the remnants of the medieval village known as The Bury. The motte, an oval mound approximately 90m by 60m, is surrounded by a ditch and lies adjacent to the bailey, which contains visible earthworks marking former tracks, holloways, and building platforms. The southern edge of the bailey is defined by a 160m shallow ditch, while its northern boundary extends

- 4.14

The significance of the Church of St Mary (Grade I) is derived from its origins as a 12th century cruciform church with crossing towers (mostly destroyed by a tower collapse in the 13th century). The form of the church we see today predominantly dates to the 1800's when the church was restored in stages by John Loughborough Pearson. The repairs and alterations to this church throughout time has resulted in much of its significance being derived from its architectural interest.
- 4.15

The other assets within this group date from the 16th century onwards, each reflecting successive periods of alteration and change up to the present day while remaining illustrative of the village's historic development. They are primarily of architectural and historic interest, showcasing various vernacular features that are characteristic of both their location and period of construction. These buildings maintain a distinctive setting defined by their proximity to the village centre, typified by an urbanised village context.
- 4.16

The significance of the former farm buildings at Walnut Tree Farm and Elm Tree Farm are principally derived from their architectural and historic interest and group value with their ancillary buildings. The buildings within the village are often multiphased building developed from the 16th Century onwards, with later 17th and 18th Century extensions. The staged construction reflects the changing needs and status of its occupants. This is particularly the

- 4.17

The Grade II listed buildings within the study area all examples the village's architectural and historical evolution from the 16th century onwards. These showcase diverse styles and construction techniques reflective of changing social and practical needs. These structures are integral to the village's identity, illustrating both vernacular traditions and broader architectural trends over time. The listed buildings within Pirton are principally tied to the urban core, with their locations and architectural styles reflecting the village's historical development. These buildings form the heart of the village and are all included in the Conservation Area, contributing to the distinct character of the village's townscape.

Setting

- 4.18

The setting of these listed buildings is defined by the village itself, centred around its historic urban core. This area is rich in traditional architecture, with listed buildings and well-preserved structures that reflect the village's medieval and Victorian heritage. While the surrounding rural landscape, with agricultural fields and the nearby Chilterns National Landscape, offers a broader context, these assets are primarily experienced within an urbanised setting, characterised by development from multiple phases.

Contribution of the Site to Setting

- 4.19

As an open field, the Site makes no material contribution to the setting of nearby heritage assets within the village centre and conservation area, which are more closely tied to the urban core.
- 4.20

Depicted as agricultural land on the earliest maps and retaining a rectilinear form since the Enclosures Act of 1867, its has a long-standing agricultural character, though this does not make a material contribution to the setting of heritage assets and remains limited due to the physical separation and distance. Overall, the setting of these assets is defined by their relationship with each other and the mix of vernacular architectural styles that shape the village character, with the site falling into a broader, more distant setting with no direct visibility or connection to the assets themselves.