

Section 3

Historic Development of the Site & Surroundings.

3 | Historic Development of Site & Surroundings

LAND OFF ECHO HILL | ROYSTON

Historic Development of the Area

- 3.1 Royston, is situated in Hertfordshire near the Cambridgeshire border, has a history shaped by its strategic location at the intersection of two ancient routes: the Roman, Ermine Street and the prehistoric Icknield Way. Ermine Street was a key Roman road connecting London to York, while Icknield Way followed a route along the chalk ridge from Salisbury Plain to East Anglia. This crossroads make Royston an important point for trade and settlement.
- 3.2 The town's name is thought to derive from a wayside cross, known as Roisia's Cross, which may have been established during Saxon times or restored after the Norman Conquest. There is however no mention of Royston in the Domesday Book of 1086, with the first documented evidence of the town appearing in the Charter of Eustace de Merc, Lord of Newsells, regarding the foundation of the Monastery in 1184. By the early 14th century, the settlement around the cross had developed into a significant market town referred to as Roisia's Town, which was then later shortened to Royston.
- 3.3 Royston was formally established as a medieval "new town" in the late 12th century, following the founding of an Augustinian priory near the crossroads. The priory became a focal point for local religious and economic life. The town expanded with the establishment of markets under the reign of Richard I, fostering its development as a centre for trade. During the reign of King James I, Royston became a royal hunting destination. The king built a hunting lodge, now known as the Old Palace, in Kneesworth Street. The presence of the royal court attracted the construction of several large houses for nobles, shaping the architectural development of the town centre.
- 3.4 In addition to its religious and royal connections, Royston became a key stop for travellers moving between London and York. Inns and lodgings were built to accommodate the steady flow of visitors and merchants. The town maintained its market function for centuries, adapting over time to changing economic demands.

- 3.5 Royston's historical landscape, shaped by its medieval origins, religious institutions, and strategic position on ancient roads, continues to be reflected in its architectural features and street patterns today.
- 3.6 The opening of Hitchin, Royston and Cambridge Branch of the G.N. Railway in 1850 resulted in the decline of the town as a coaching stop on the route to London, but also served as a catalyst for the expansion of the town. Royston had largely stayed the same in layout with very few houses distant from the town centre up to the early 19th Century, this phase of development saw much infill within the medieval street pattern. Later development has largely occurred from the late 20th Century onwards with the gradual suburban expansion of the town's peripheral edges.

The Site

- 3.7 The Site is shown on the earliest OS Maps of the area as an open field adjacent to Briary Lane.
- 3.8 The land immediately to the north is shown in use as a Lime Kiln in the 19th Century and then later as a Chalk Pit.
- 3.9 The Tithe Map illustrates the Site covers the former ownership of three open connected fields in use as allotments small scale tenanted farmland; Plot 163 - Landowner: Daniel Phillips, Occupier: Simon Mortcock, Plot 164 - Landowner: Thomas Nash, Occupier: Thomas Nash, Plot 165 - Landowner: William Hollick Nash, Occupier: Owen Beale. The ownership of the fields changes numerous times in the 19th and 20th Century, they were amalgamated into a single field the mid 20th Century.
- 3.10 By the early 20th Century a small reservoir had been constructed in the south west of the fields, (beyond the Site boundary) shown in Figure 3.5. The late 20th Century has seen the urbanisation of the area to the north of the Site, the development of suburban estates within former field boundaries is legible in aerial views and forms a buffer area to the more historic town centre located to the north east.



Figure 3.1 Tithe Map 1838



Figure 3.2 EPW046727 March-1935

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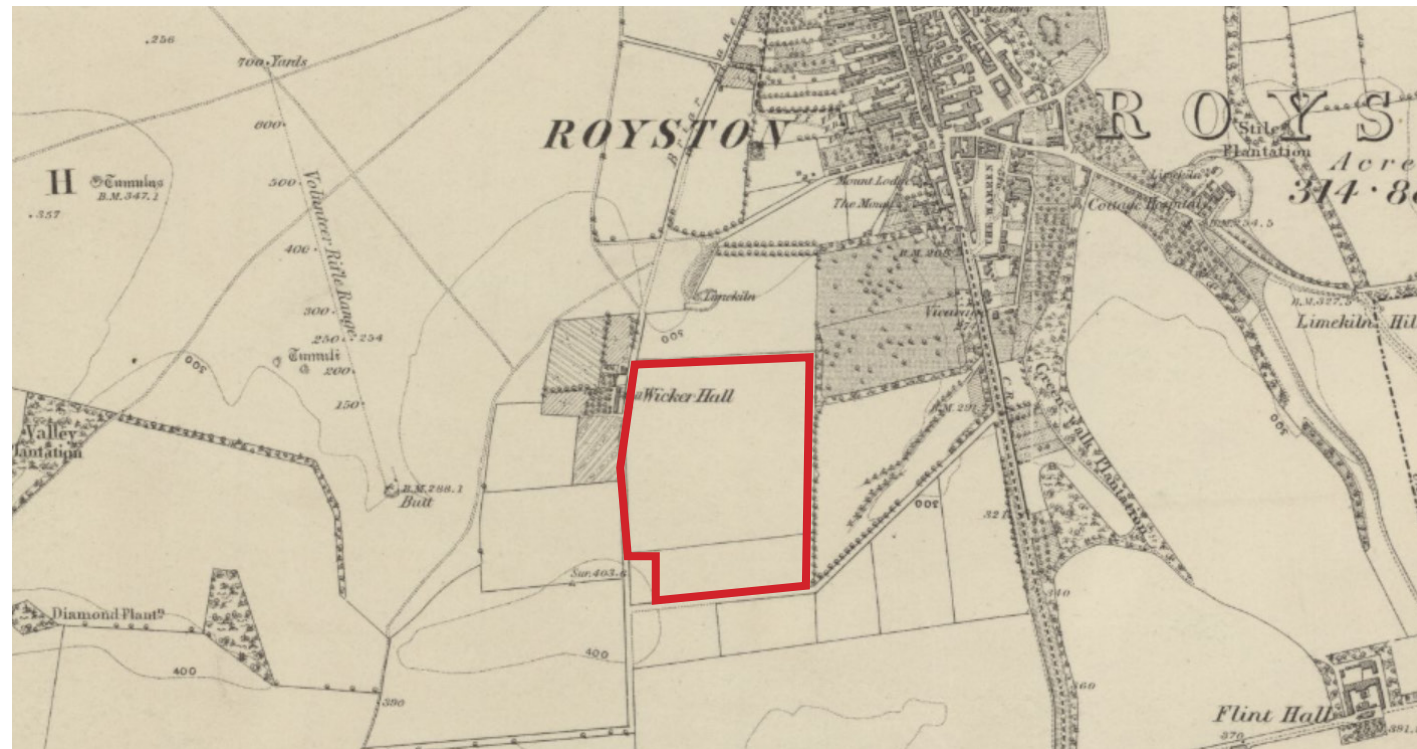


Figure 3.3 OS Map 1880

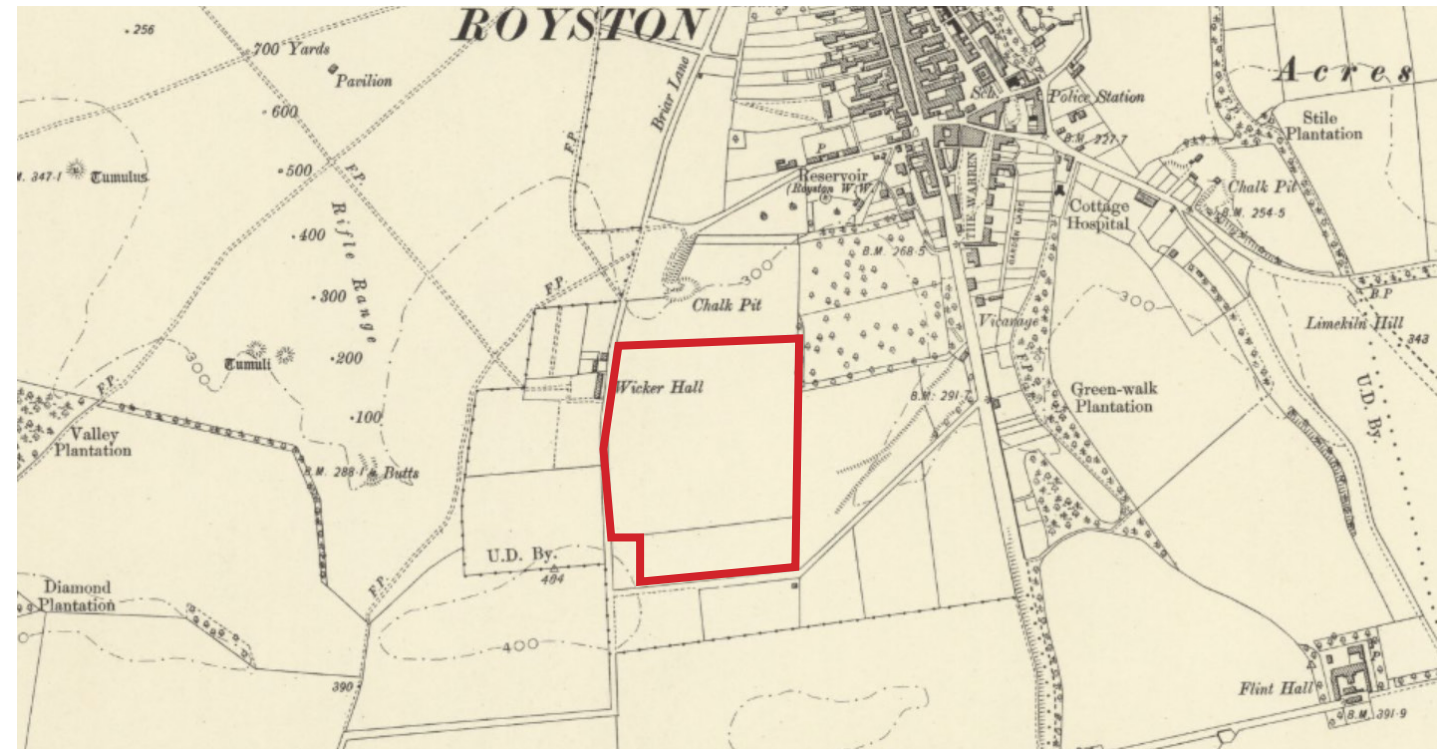


Figure 3.4 OS Map 1913

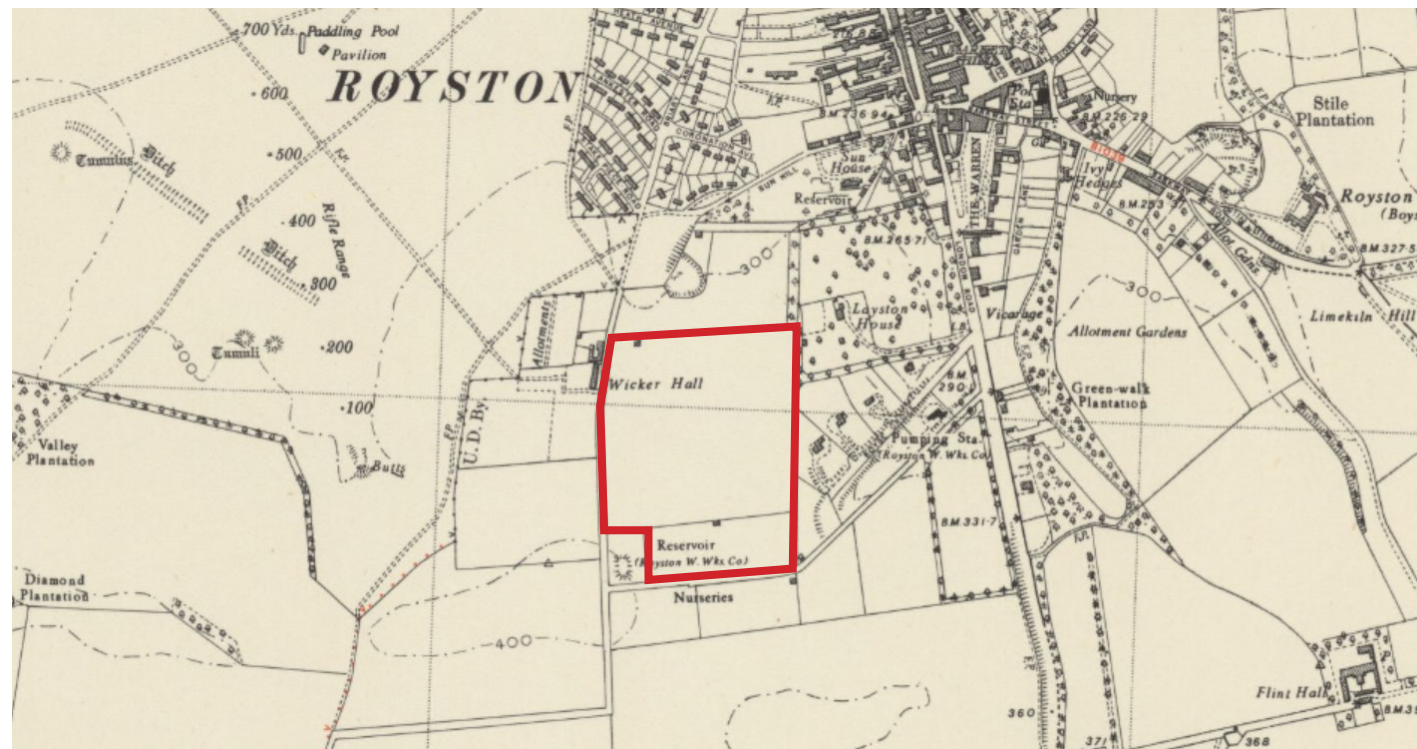


Figure 3.5 OS Map 1946



OS Map 1970

Section 4

Assessment of Significance.

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Assessment of Significance

Royston Conservation Area

- 4.1 The Royston Conservation Area was designated in 1969 and covers the historic core of the town. Most of the structures date from the 18th and early 19th centuries, reflecting Georgian and classical influences. The medieval layout remains clearly legible in Royston’s narrow plots, lanes, and passageways, many of which have retained their original form. Backland spaces and small courtyards are a distinctive part of this pattern, offering a quieter contrast to the main thoroughfares and once housing inns, workshops, and maltings. Royston’s longstanding role as a market town is evident in its street layout and shopfronts, especially along High Street and Kneesworth Street, where weekly markets continue to draw people in. The mix of shops, homes, and civic buildings helps to maintain the town’s lively, human scale.
- 4.2 Architectural interest is related to the number of listed buildings and locally listed buildings, many of which share common design elements such as classical doorcases, gabled roofs, and the use of local brick and clay tile, with typical features like Flemish bond brickwork, timber sash windows, and balanced, symmetrical façades. Traces of earlier periods still survive and add to the area’s varied architectural character.
- 4.3 Prominent public buildings like the Town Hall and former Court House stand out for their scale and formal detailing, while smaller houses—often fronted by gardens or lined with mature trees add variety to the streetscape and its historic character.
- 4.4 Green spaces like the Priory Memorial Gardens and The Warren provide visual relief within the built-up environment, enhancing the setting with mature trees and open views. These natural features help define the character of the conservation area and also support local biodiversity. In addition to its architectural and landscape value, the area holds archaeological interest due to its long history of occupation, and artistic interest through its depiction in various media over the years.

Setting

- 4.5 The setting of the Royston Conservation Area is defined by the contrast between its historic core and the more modern development on its periphery. Significant urban expansion since the 20th century has reshaped the town’s edges, with contemporary

housing developments creating a buffer between the conservation area’s historic core and the agricultural fields beyond.

- 4.6 These areas beyond the town are characterised by agricultural fields and heathland, with some mature hedgerows and belts of beech trees. Therfield Heath provides a large band of public open land to the south west.

Summary

- 4.7 In summary, the Royston Conservation Area holds value for its architectural interest derived from the medieval town layout, later periods of regency development and the quality of the listed buildings within its bounds. The area’s natural elements, green spaces, and historic buildings collectively contribute to its unique character. Modern housing developments occupy the immediate setting, with the railway line forming a notable boundary when approaching from the north. Despite these modern additions, the historic core of the conservation area remains distinct and well-preserved, offering a striking contrast between the historic core and the contemporary urban development beyond the conservation area at the town fringe.

Contribution of Site to Setting

- 4.8 The Site makes no material contribution to the setting of the Royston Conservation Area due to its physical separation from the village by surrounding urban development and the distance from the historic core. As such, the Site forms part of a wider rural landscape, with no direct visibility or strong connection to the conservation area. Overall, the field’s role in enhancing the setting of the Royston Conservation Area is none material, serving as one of many typical agricultural fields in the broader rural landscape.



Figure 4.1 Royston Conservation Area Map

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Listed Buildings

Royston Town Centre Asset Group

4.9 The listed buildings within 500m of the Site boundary have been grouped together for assessment purposes, these are all located within the Royston Conservation Area (excepting 44 And 46, London Road (Grade II, List UID: 1102047, which for the avoidance of doubt is also assessed in this grouping). The grouping includes the locally listed assets plotted on the heritage asset map as well as the following statutory listed assets at;

- 1, King Street (Grade II, List UID: 1347658)
- K6 Telephone Kiosk Adjacent To Number 29 and Opposite The Boar's Head Public House (Grade II, List UID: 1102017)
- 43 And 43a, King Street (Grade II, List UID: 1174582)
- 45, King Street (Grade II, List UID: 1102074)
- Number 47, Outbuildings At Rear Of Number 47 (Grade II, List UID: 1102029)
- 49-53, King Street (Grade II, List UID: 1347677)
- 55-59, King Street (Grade II, List UID: 1102030)
- 61, King Street (Grade II, List UID: 1102031)
- 63 And 65, King Street (Grade II, List UID: 1102032)
- 67, King Street (Grade II, List UID: 1102033)
- 77, King Street (Grade II, List UID: 1102034)
- Sun Hill House (Grade II, List UID: 1102035)
- 1 And 3, London Road (Grade II, List UID: 1174708)
- 5, London Road (Grade II, List UID: 1347645)
- 7, London Road (Grade II, List UID: 1102048)
- 12-16, London Road (Grade II, List UID: 1102046)
- 18 And 20, London Road (Grade II, List UID: 1347644)
- 22, London Road (Grade II, List UID: 1174702)
- 33 And 35, London Road (Grade II, List UID: 1174714)
- 44 And 46, London Road (Grade II, List UID: 1102047)
- 9 Market Hill (Grade II, List UID: 1347647)
- 25, Market Hill (Grade II, List UID: 1102051)
- 39, Market Hill (Grade II, List UID: 1347666)
- 4 George Lane (Grade II, List UID: 1102060)
- The Bull Hotel (Grade II, List UID: 1102065)
- 25, High Street (Grade II, List UID: 1102068)
- 29-39, High Street (Grade II, List UID: 1347655)

- 41, High Street (Grade II, List UID: 1174533)
- 43 And 45, High Street (Grade II, List UID: 1102069)
- 45a, 47 And 49, High Street (Grade II, List UID: 1347656)
- 51-55, High Street (Grade II, List UID: 1174541)
- 57, High Street (Grade II, List UID: 1102070)
- 59 And 61, High Street (Grade II*, List UID: 1174560)
- 63 And 65, High Street (Grade II*, List UID: 1102071)
- 67, High Street (Grade II, List UID: 1347657)
- 29, Market Hill (Grade II, List UID: 1174732)
- The Green Man Public House (Grade II, List UID: 1174739)
- The Boar's Head Public House (Grade II, List UID: 1102008)
- Sunhill Cottage (Grade II, List UID: 1295583)
- The Corn Exchange (Grade II, List UID: 1295632)
- The Chequers Public House (Grade II, List UID: 1347653)

4.10 These assets are all primarily of interest for their architectural and historic interest, and group value together which is illustrative of the town's historic development and prevailing vernacular character. Collectively these buildings provide a narrative of Royston's growth and development from its medieval origins through the Georgian and Victorian periods. Their group value is significant, as they reflect the prevailing vernacular character of the town and its transformation over several centuries.

4.11 Architecturally, these buildings display a range of styles, reflecting both local traditions and broader national trends. Many of the 18th- and 19th-century buildings along King Street, High Street, and London Road exhibit classical design features, such as symmetrical façades, vertical sash windows, and decorative stone or brick detailing. For example, buildings like 1, King Street (Grade II) and 59 and 61 High Street (Grade II) feature refined proportions, ornate door surrounds, and elegant cornices that represent the Georgian and Regency architectural preferences of the period. These elements reflect the national and vernacular trends of the time and remain legible as high quality examples of their type. Similarly, the Bull Hotel (Grade II), a key feature of Royston's social history, reflects the transition from the



Figure 4.2 Royston Conservation Area



Figure 4.3 Royston Conservation Area setting - surrounding urban development beyond the boundary

4 | Assessment of Significance

town's medieval structures to more refined Georgian forms, including timber framing and later classical brick facades.

- 4.12 The buildings on Market Hill and Melbourn Street retain well-preserved shopfronts with traditional detailing, reflecting Royston's commercial past. The Corn Exchange (Grade II), a mid-19th-century building, is a fine example of the town's expanding commercial role, with its large open space designed for trade and market activities. These buildings contribute to the continuity of the town's historic character and illustrate the evolution from an agricultural settlement to a vibrant commercial hub.
- 4.13 In addition to these classical elements, earlier buildings—such as the medieval Boar's Head and Green Man Public House (Grade II)—add historical depth and architectural variety. These pubs are significant for their role in the social fabric of the town, with their timber-framed construction reflecting the earlier vernacular traditions. The continued use of such buildings as public houses underscores their importance in Royston's history as a centre for social interaction and trade.
- 4.14 The use of local materials—red and gault brick, flint, clunch, and timber—contributes significantly to the town's distinctive visual character. These materials, along with slate and clay tile roofs, help to create a harmonious and varied townscape that adds interest to the streetscape. The buildings' forms and detailing vary according to their function, from the grander classical villas on Melbourn Street to the more utilitarian, former industrial buildings, such as the maltings and outbuildings on King Street. These reflect the town's diverse history, ranging from housing to industry.
- 4.15 A defining feature of the area is the preservation of traditional roof forms, including gabled and hipped roofs, and varied chimney stacks that punctuate the skyline. The boundary walls of flint and clunch, often topped with brick or stone, further contribute to the sense of enclosure and continuity within the village core and the setting of these listed buildings. These walls not only demarcate boundaries but also enhance the historic street patterns and the intimate character of many of Royston's streets and courtyards.
- 4.16 The continued use of buildings as both residential and commercial properties, such as The Green

Man Public House (Grade II) and The Bull Hotel (Grade II), reflects Royston's ongoing social and economic functions. Their individual architectural features—such as distinctive window detailing, historical signage, and period-specific shopfronts—offer insights into the town's prosperity during the Georgian and Victorian eras.

- 4.17 In summary, the listed buildings within this grouping are of significant architectural and historic interest due to their diverse styles, the use of traditional materials, and their ongoing relationship with the town's commercial, residential, and social historic development. The group value of these buildings lies in their ability to illustrate Royston's architectural and cultural evolution, from medieval times to the 19th century, ensuring the legibility of Royston's broader historical context.

Setting

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

Contribution of the Site

- 4.19 The Site comprises open, undeveloped land on the periphery of Royston and lies outside the core of the historic settlement. While located within proximity (within 500m) to a number of listed buildings, the Site makes no material contribution to their setting.
- 4.20 The setting of these assets is generally defined by the built-up context of the town centre, where streets such as King Street, High Street, Market Hill, and London Road form a coherent and historically layered streetscape. Many of these buildings sit in tight urban grain, with strong building lines and a sense of enclosure that contributes to their character. In contrast, the Site is physically and visually separated from this core by modern development and infrastructure, including roads and intervening buildings, which reduces any direct visual or spatial association. There are no direct visual links between the Site and key heritage assets within the historic core of the town.



Figure 4.4 Royston Conservation Area



Figure 4.5 High Street

Scheduled Monuments

- Two bowl barrows: part of the round barrow cemetery on Therfield Heath (Scheduled Monument, List UID: 1010432)
- 4.21

The monument includes two bowl barrows situated on Therfield Heath. The designation extends for 2 metres around the archaeological features to support preservation. These are two outliers to the round barrow cemetery slightly further west.
- 4.22

Barrows largely date from the Middle Neolithic to the Middle Bronze Age, with bowl barrows appearing before 3000 BC but most commonly constructed between 2400–1500 BC. These were built as earthen or rubble mounds, sometimes with ditches, covering single or multiple burials, and exhibiting regional variations in form and burial practices.
- 4.23

The two bowl barrows on Therfield Heath survive in good condition despite previous excavations. They form part of a wider cemetery of round barrows, providing significant archaeological insights into burial traditions and their connection to the broader funerary landscape. They are outliers to a larger round barrow cemetery and are located approximately 500m ESE of the largest Neolithic long barrow in Hertfordshire.

Setting

- 4.24

Long barrows contribute to the historic character of the landscape, often occupying prominent locations with wide visibility. Their positioning may reflect deliberate choices linked to topography, water sources, or trade routes. The setting of this asset is characterised by Therfield heath as an area of open amenity space and, heath is a common on which sheep are still regularly grazed. Most significant views of this asset are from within Therfield Heath itself and from Baldock Road to the north.

Contribution of Site to Setting

- 4.25

The Site lies within the wider landscape setting of the bowl barrows on Therfield Heath but makes no contribution to their significance. There are no views of the Site within the most prominent views of the Scheduled Monument from within Therfield Heath or along Baldock Road.
- 4.26

The barrows derive their primary heritage value from their archaeological interest and their prominent siting within an open chalk downland landscape, which provides visual and topographical context consistent with prehistoric funerary practices. The Site, which is visually and physically separated from the barrows by distance, modern development, and changes in land use, does not form part of the barrows’ immediate setting or intervisibility zone. The Site does not materially support the key attributes of the barrows’ significance, including their prominence, spatial relationship within the cemetery group, or their archaeological integrity.

Summary

- 4.27

The round barrow cemetery on Therfield Heath holds historic and archaeological interest as the part of a larger cemetery settlement, representing an important aspect of Bronze Age funerary traditions. Its longevity, with evidence of continued use into later periods, provides insights into evolving burial practices and social structures.
- 4.28

From an archaeological perspective, the cemetery is of high value, offering potential evidence of burial rites, grave goods, and environmental conditions. Excavations have already revealed cremation burials within wooden structures, and the surrounding ground is likely to contain further remains, including flat burials and possible settlement activity.

Section 5

The Proposed Development.