

Bourne Heritage

Heritage Statement

19 Walnut Tree Road, Pirton, Hertfordshire



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1. Introduction & Background

- 1.1 This heritage statement relates to a planning application for a small residential backland development at the rear of No. 19 Walnut Tree Road, Pirton in Hertfordshire (Figure 1). The local planning authority (LPA) determining the application is North Hertfordshire District Council (NHDC).

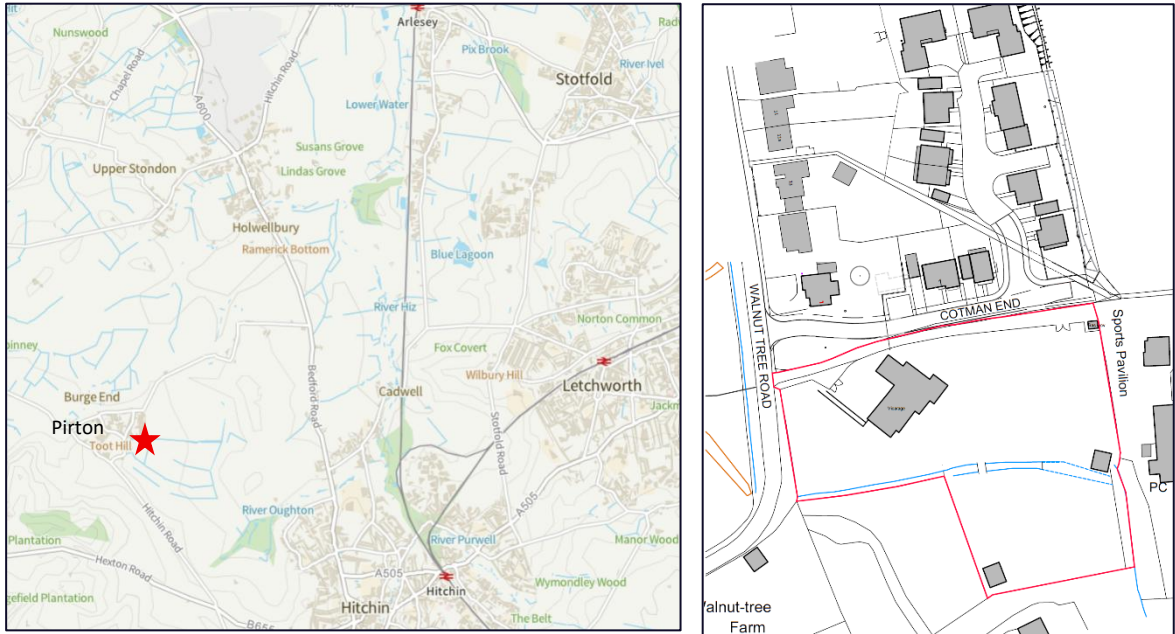


Figure 1: Site location showing No. 19 starred (left) and redlined (right)

Application Site

- 1.2 The application site is located in the village of Pirton, which is 1.5 miles northwest of Hitchin. It effectively conforms to the existing rear garden of 19 Walnut Tree Road (see Front Cover image & Plate 1). The garden, which is broadly flat, is predominantly laid to grass with flowerbeds around the edges. The remains of a stream bisect the garden from west to east and a historic pond (Larkins Pond) has been largely filled in and replaced by a garden building (See Section 3).
- 1.3 The application site is separated from Walnut Tree Road by No. 19, its forecourt and front garden. A neighbouring property bounds the site to the south and a sports ground and pavilion form its eastern boundary. The northern boundary of the site is formed by the

access road to the sports ground from Walnut Tree Road. On the northern side of this access road is a new modern housing development, Cotman End.

- 1.4 An aerial view of the application site and its immediate environs is shown in Plate 1 below:



Plate 1: Aerial view of the Site in October 2025, with the property boundary of No. 19 dotted in white; North is to the top

Relevant Heritage Assets (Figure 2)

- 1.5 No. 19 Walnut Tree Road (hereinafter referred to simply as No. 19) has no inherent heritage significance but is located just inside the eastern boundary of the Pirton Conservation Area, as identified in the Pirton Conservation Area Character Appraisal and Management Plan document adopted by North Herts District Council in March 2023 (hereinafter referred to simply as the 2023 Appraisal).
- 1.6 No. 19 is also situated on the other side of Walnut Tree Road from a scheduled monument (Toot Hill & The Bury). Both the conservation area and scheduled monument are designated heritage assets.

- 1.7 Figure 2 also shows several Grade II listed buildings along Walnut Tree Road (Nos 4, 6, 7 & the farmhouse, barn outbuildings, and other dwellings at Walnut Tree Farm), as well as the Grade I listed Church of St Mary, which occupies a prominent elevated position within the village. The only non-designated heritage asset located within the vicinity of the application site is No. 17 Walnut Tree Road.

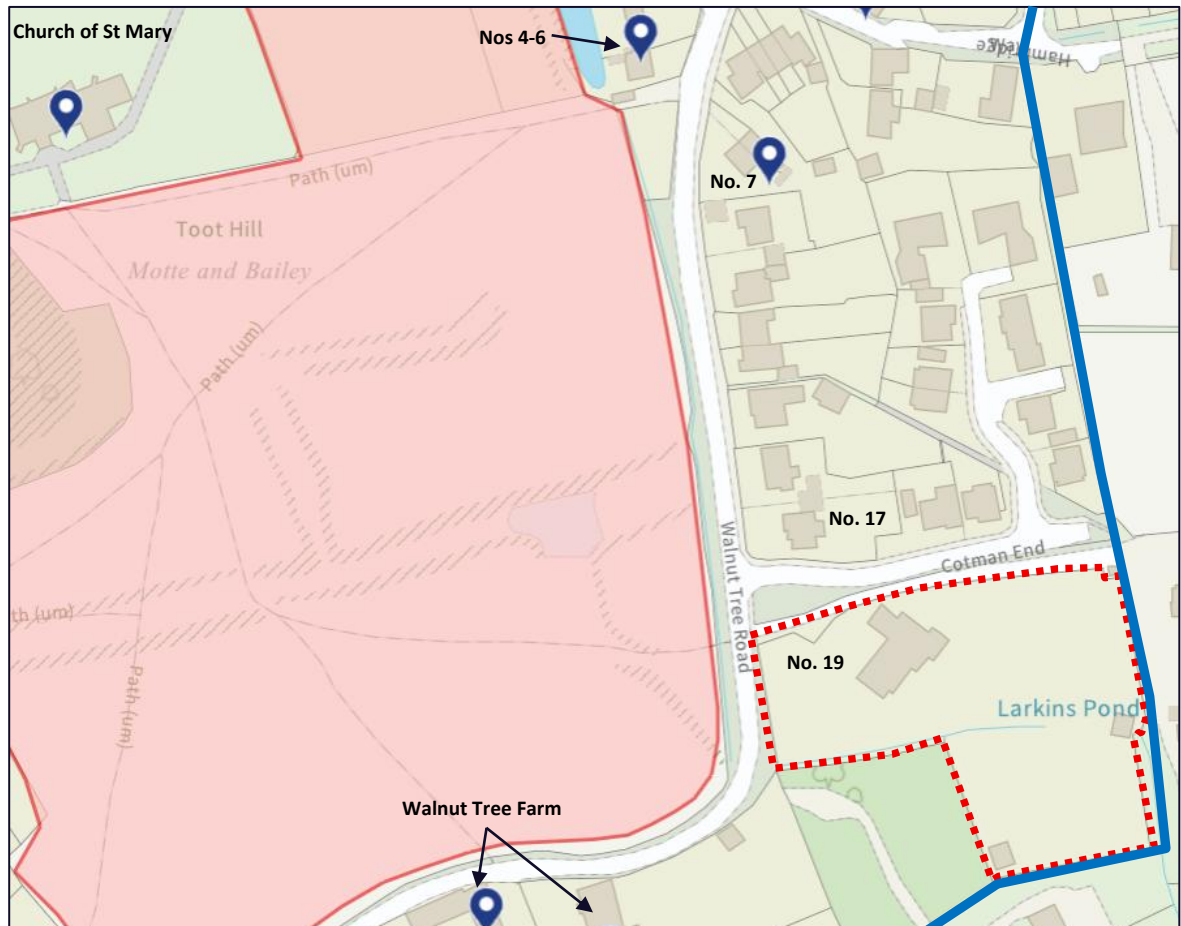


Figure 2: Map extract showing the property boundary of No. 19 dashed in red, the assumed conservation area boundary in blue (based on the extension proposals in the 2023 Appraisal), the Toot Hill & The Bury scheduled monument shaded pink and statutorily listed buildings denoted by blue and white markers

Planning History

- 1.8 The only planning history available for No. 19 available on the North Herts District Council website is the following application from 2006:

"06/02507/1HH|Part single storey, part two storey side extension to include double garage, following demolition of existing garage and utility room. Rear conservatory. Single storey side extension and two storey front extension with oriel window"

- 1.9 This application was clearly granted consent as the proposals have been implemented at the property.
- 1.10 The 2021 Cotman End residential development on the opposite side of the access road to the sports ground (NHDC ref: 20/01070/FP) is also of relevance to this application, as they both represent backland cul-de-sac developments. The Delegated File Note issued by the Council for the Cotman End application made the following heritage-related comments:

“4.3.12 Impact on the Pirton Conservation Area

The site is located in a back-land location and it is considered that the site currently makes a limited contribution to the character and appearance of the Pirton Conservation Area. The proposal to develop the site is considered to be appropriate and would therefore preserve the character and appearance of the conservation area.

4.3.13 Impact on the scheduled monument

The Toot Hill Scheduled Monument is located to the west of the application site on the other side of Walnut Tree Road. However, having discussed the matter with Historic England it is considered that, due to the development site being a backland site on the other side of the road, the proposal would have no impact on the setting of the Scheduled Monument”.

- 1.11 The only request made by the conservation officer at the time was to remove the house on the Walnut Tree Road frontage end of the development, which was incorporated into the final consented scheme design.
- 1.12 The following comments made in the File Note about “*Design and Appearance*” are also pertinent to this application in respect of heritage-related impacts:

“The layout will be that of a cul-de-sac which is inevitable given the position and shape of the application site. The site would be largely hidden from Walnut Tree Road by the existing houses although one imagines that some views will be possible into the site and particularly towards the semi-detached pair that would be located nearest to the access point. In any case, I do not have any fundamental issues relating to the design that is proposed and thus do not consider that the proposed development would have a significant impact on the wider character or appearance of the area”.

- 1.13 A 2017 appeal refusal for a garage at No. 6 Walnut Tree Road (PINS ref: APP/X1925/D/17/3169309) is also of relevance to the current application, as the appeal inspector made the following comments about the conservation area and the Toot Hill & The Bury scheduled monument in the Decision Notice:

“5. When travelling north along Walnut Tree Road alongside the appeal site entering the main built up part of Pirton, gaps in the boundary trees and hedging afford glimpses of the

SM to the west. Furthermore, upon approaching the village there are relatively long range views of Nos 4 to 6 an attractive white rendered slate roof dwelling adjoining a larger timber framed thatched roof dwelling. The buildings in the CA display a range of traditional architectural details, are finished in complementary materials and are mainly set back from the road with mature planting in front gardens.

6. In my view, the significance of the CA and the listed buildings within it is derived from the architectural interest of the buildings grouped together in a traditional street pattern within a verdant rural setting. The significance of the SM is derived from its history as a medieval fortification and the associated landscape features that remain”.

- 1.14 The appeal inspector’s observations were referenced in a Council response to an initial scheme design for the current application submitted to NHC for pre-application advice in September 2025 (NHDC ref: 25/01885/PRE). The Council made the following heritage-related comments about this design, which comprised a cul-de-sac development extending directly back from the Walnut Tree Road frontage, in its pre-application response:

“Impact on heritage assets including the Pirton Conservation Area

All of the site is within the Pirton Conservation Area (PCA) – as revised in 2023. Unlike the Cotman End development (which was set behind the Walnut Tree frontage and flanked by existing residential development on at least two sides) the redevelopment of No. 19 Walnut Tree Road is likely to have more of an impact on the Pirton Conservation Area and this may be a limiting factor on the quantum and type of development .

The site is arguably more open and prominent in views from both within and outside of

- *the PCA*
- *The access to the site is shared with that to the recreation ground running along the northern boundary of the site providing close up public views of the site*
- *A large part of the site is clearly visible from and runs alongside Walnut Tree Road*
- *The relocation of the recreation ground clubhouse (currently under construction) further north is likely to open up views of the site from the recreation ground*

A further constraint on development may be its impact on the setting of the Scheduled Ancient Monument immediately opposite where there is a public footpath leading from Walnut Tree Road into the SAM.

The Pirton Conservation Area Character Statement stipulates a key view immediately opposite the site looking towards the Church of St. Mary.

In assessing heritage matters and the impact on the SAM I am aware of an appeal decision at 6 Walnut Tree Road just to the north east of the site whereby an Inspector dismissed an appeal for a detached garage because of its location on previously open land, its prominent location and adverse impact on the setting of the CA and the setting and significance of the SAM. The LPA ref is 16/02209/1HH and appeal ref: APP/X1925/D/17/3169309. Whilst not of the same scale as this pre-application proposal there are similarities in terms of context and the setting of the CA and the SAM and therefore due regard should be had to the Inspectors conclusions”.

- 1.15 The Council pre-application response also confirms that the whole of the current application site is now incorporated within the conservation area, along with Cotman End, as proposed in the 2023 Appraisal.
- 1.16 An on-site meeting with a NHDC planning officer in October resulted in the alteration of the original pre-application scheme design to a backland residential development at the rear of No. 19, thereby retaining the existing house.

Purpose of this Report

- 1.17 This report assesses the significance of the designated heritage assets referred to above, with a particular focus on the contribution that their settings make to that significance (section 3). It then assesses the potential impacts of the proposed development on the setting and significance of these heritage assets (section 4). The assessments carried out in this report have been conducted in accordance with heritage policy and guidance outlined in Section 2, with a summary and conclusions provided in Section 5.
- 1.18 This report focuses on the potential impacts of the proposals on built heritage, and as such, does not assess how the proposals would affect any archaeological assets preserved within the application site. This is addressed in a separate archaeological desk-based assessment produced by Abrams Archaeology¹
- 1.19 Observations made during a visit made to the application site, combined with desk-based research, inform the findings of this report and the opinions expressed therein.

¹ Abrams Archaeology 2025. *Archaeological Desk Based Assessment. 19 Walnut Tree Road, Pirton, Hitchin, Hertfordshire, SG5 3PX. Project 00617*

2. Relevant Heritage Policy & Guidance

- 2.1 The decision maker is required by section 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving the character and appearance of a conservation area. The decision maker must also give considerable importance and weight to the desirability of preserving the character and appearance of the conservation area. There is a strong presumption against the grant of permission for development that would harm the special interest of the conservation area, though this may be capable of being mitigated and outweighed by public benefits.
- 2.2 The decision maker is required by section 66(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 to have special regard to the desirability of preserving a listed building. The decision maker must also give considerable importance and weight to the desirability of preserving the listed building and its setting. There is a strong presumption against the grant of permission for development that would harm the special interest of the listed building, though the presumption is capable of being lessened by mitigation and by public benefits in the planning balance.
- 2.3 Legislation affecting scheduled monuments is contained in the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979. The Act details the designation, care and management of scheduled monuments, as well as the procedures needed to obtain permission for works which would directly impact upon their preservation.
- 2.4 Harm is defined by Historic England as change which erodes the significance of a heritage asset.
- 2.5 The significance of a heritage asset is defined in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) as being made up of four main constituent elements: architectural interest, historical interest, archaeological interest and artistic interest. Setting can also contribute to heritage significance, and is described in the NPPF as follows:

“The surroundings in which a heritage asset is experienced. Its extent is not fixed and may change as the asset and its surroundings evolve. Elements of a setting may make a positive or negative contribution to the significance of an asset, may affect the ability to appreciate that significance or may be neutral”.
- 2.6 The NPPF requires the impact on the significance of a heritage asset to be considered in terms of either “substantial harm” or “less than substantial harm” as described within paragraphs 212 to 215 of that document. National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG)

makes it clear that substantial harm is a high test, which may not arise in most cases. Whether a proposal causes substantial harm will be a judgement for the decision maker.

- 2.7 Paragraph 212 of the NPPF states that great weight should be given to the conservation of a designated heritage asset when considering applications that affect its significance.
- 2.8 In response to recent appeal decisions and the increased weight given to the importance of setting as a contributing factor to heritage significance, the following table provides a useful guide to clarifying harm as espoused by the NPPF:

Scale of Harm	
Total Loss	Total removal of the significance of the designated heritage asset.
Substantial Harm (Paragraph 214 of the NPPF)	Serious harm that would drain away or vitiate the significance of the designated heritage asset
Less than Substantial Harm (Paragraph 215 of the NPPF)	A high degree of harm that has the potential to be serious but is not so serious as to vitiate or drain away the significance of the designated heritage asset.
	A medium degree of harm, which is not necessarily serious to the significance of the designated heritage asset, but enough to be described as significant, noticeable, or material.
	A low-level degree of harm that does not seriously affect the significance of the designated heritage asset.

- 2.9 Paragraph 216 of the NPPF states that in weighing applications that affect directly or indirectly non-designated heritage assets, such as locally listed buildings, a balanced judgement will be required having regard to the scale of any harm or loss and the significance of the heritage asset.
- 2.10 At a local authority level, The North Herts Local Plan 2011-2031 contains the following heritage policies which are applicable to the current application:

“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. We will pursue a positive strategy for the conservation and enjoyment of the historic environment through:

- a) Maintaining a strong presumption in favour of the retention, preservation and enhancement of heritage assets and their setting according to their significance;*
- b) Identifying sites on the national register of Heritage at Risk or on the Council's 'At Risk' register;*
- c) Periodic reviews of Conservation Areas and other locally designated assets; and*
- d) Publication of detailed guidance*

Policy HE1: Designated heritage assets.

Planning applications relating to Designated heritage Assets or their setting shall be accompanied by a Heritage Assessment/Justification Statement that:

- i. assess the significance of heritage assets, including their setting, impacted by the proposal;*
- ii. justify and detail the impacts of any proposal upon the significance of the designated heritage asset(s); and*
- iii. inform any necessary mitigation measures to minimise or mitigate against any identified harms; Planning permission for development proposals affecting Designated Heritage Assets or their setting will be granted where they (as applicable):*
 - a. enable the heritage asset to be used in a manner that secures its conservation and preserves its significance;*
 - b. incorporate a palette of materials that make a positive contribution to local character or distinctiveness, where it is appropriate and justified; and*
 - c. will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of the designated heritage asset, if the harm is outweighed by the public benefits of the development, including securing the asset's optimum viable use. Where substantial harm to, or loss of significance, of a designated heritage asset is proposed the Council shall refuse consent unless it can be demonstrated that the scheme is necessary to deliver considerable public benefits that outweigh the harm or loss".*

- 2.11 The Pirton Neighbourhood Development Plan 2011-2033 Plan contains the following heritage policy:

"Policy PNP 8 - Heritage Assets and Archaeological Heritage:

Development proposals will be supported where:

8.1. 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;

8.2. Development proposals on sites that include or have the potential to include heritage assets with archaeological interest and planning applications for development affecting the archaeology alert areas should be submitted with a desk top archaeological survey and where necessary a field valuation undertaken by an appropriately qualified specialist so that the impact of the proposed development on the significance of the heritage assets can be assessed. This may indicate that further pre-determination field evaluation excavation and or mitigation secured by condition are required. Mitigation may take the form of further excavation, an archaeological watching brief, or the preservation in situ of significant archaeological remains.

8.3. Proposals demonstrate that they have consulted and respected appropriate sources of information such as Hertfordshire County Council's Historic Environment Record. In addition to consultation with the archaeological planning advisory service and the Herts Historic Environment Record, specialists undertaking such surveys should consult with the Pirton Parish Council which holds local knowledge on these sites".

- 2.12 The advice of Historic England on the setting of heritage assets (Historic Environment Good Practice Advice Planning Note 3 [GPA3]), has been taken into account in this assessment, although GPA3 does not prescribe a single methodological approach for assessments relating to the setting of heritage assets.
- 2.13 This assessment is confined to the significance of the designated heritage assets. It does not address the planning balance in which public benefit is weighed against harm, although public benefits may be referenced in the concluding section of the report.

3. The Heritage Assets & their Significance

3.1 This section of the report draws upon the following:

- The Pirton Conservation Area Appraisal & Management Plan, adopted by North Hertfordshire Council in March 2023
- The Pirton Neighbourhood Development Plan, 2011-2033, adopted in 2018
- The Search the List portal on the Historic England website
- Historic maps and photographs sourced online

3.2 Any assessment of the heritage significance of the conservation area, scheduled monument and nearby listed buildings should be set within the context of the historical development of No. 19. This is charted from the early 19th century onwards in the following map and photograph progression.

3.3 The earliest map seen for this assessment is the 1818 Pirton Enclosure map, an extract from which is shown in Figure 3 below:



Figure 3: Extract from the 1818 Pirton Enclosure map with the boundary of No. 19 annotated in red

- 3.4 The 1818 map shows the property boundary of what was later to become No. 19 historically straddling two land parcels, separated by a road or track, with built form to either side. This thoroughfare connected Walnut Tree Road to what was effectively a medieval “back lane” delineating the eastern end of the village, thereby providing a similar function to the existing access road to the sports ground and pavilion.
- 3.5 The 1880s Ordnance Survey (OS) map extract in Figure 4 shows the later 19th century clearance of the road/track and buildings on the application site, although the latter still traversed two land parcels. Larkins Pond is also shown on the map.



Figure 4: 1880s OS map extract with the boundary of No. 19 annotated in in red

- 3.6 A 1950 OS map extract (Figure 5) shows little change to the 1880s map.

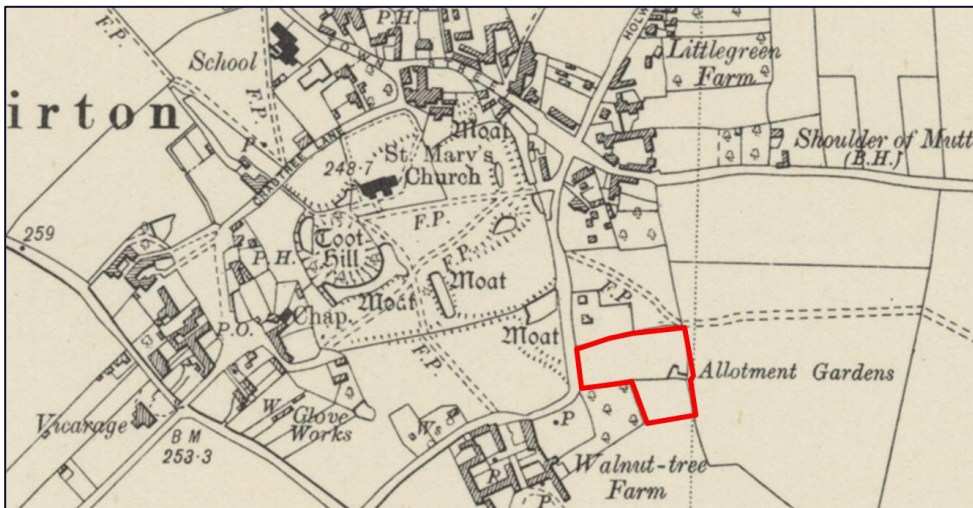


Figure 5: 1950 OS map extract, with the property boundary of No. 19 outlined in red

- 3.7 No. 19 Walnut Tree Road was built during the late 20th century and is shown in the aerial view in Plate 2 below, taken in 2000, without the additions and alterations consented six years later.



Plate 2: Aerial view of No, 19, outlined in red, taken in 2000

Pirton Conservation Area

- 3.8 The 2023 Appraisal summarises the conservation area as follows:

“Pirton Conservation Area encompasses the core of the Pirton village, a historic rural settlement with an extensive history. Located in North Hertfordshire, three miles northwest of Hitchin, Pirton is on the northern edge of the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and is surrounded by an agricultural landscape. The village has a compact, triangular layout, orientated around St Mary’s Parish Church and the remains of Pirton’s long demolished motte and bailey castle and original medieval settlement. Although long since lost, the site of the castle and original village remain an important area of green space designated as a scheduled monument at the heart of the Conservation Area.”

The village retains many important archaeological, architectural, and historic features which contribute to its character, leading to most of Pirton being included within the Conservation Area boundary. This includes three scheduled monuments, numerous listed buildings and non-designated heritage assets, both built and archaeological. Surviving buildings of merit and archaeological features vary widely in age, yet all contribute positively to the Conservation Area's significance as an area of special interest, providing a link to the history and heritage of Pirton and wider area".

3.9 The 2023 Appraisal assesses the significance of the conservation area as follows:

"Pirton Conservation Area is significant as an important, historic and continually occupied medieval settlement. For a small village, Pirton contains a wealth of historical features, evidenced by the high number of designations within the Conservation Area. The street plan and layout of the village is indicative of its phased development, providing an insight into Pirton's long running history. From the position of roads, buildings and greens, it is possible to determine how the village grew and declined, representing both local and national events.

Within the Conservation Area, built and archaeological features combine to create a pleasing, attractive example of a North Hertfordshire village. Architecturally, the Conservation Area exhibits a host of styles, although the overall appearance of Pirton is traditional and typical for the region. Timber framed medieval houses are nestled in between Victorian terraces, scattered with examples of former farmsteads and barn conversions in the village core. Local materials, such as Arlesey brick, dominate the street scenes, complemented by examples of thatch and rendered dwellings. Due to the geology of the area, stone is uncommon and features only on the most important of buildings, such as St Mary's Church. Hedgerow, grass verges and large garden plots give the Conservation Area a sylvan quality, interconnected with the surrounding agrarian landscape. Although much of the village's past remains underground and is not easily discernible to the modern eye, the archaeological potential for further discovery stresses the Conservation Area's position as an important, highly valuable resource from which much can be learnt about past cultures. Toot Hill and The Bury dominate the Conservation Area due to their large size, however the two other scheduled monuments within the Conservation Area are too highly significant as areas of discernible history, indicative of how people lived and worked within Pirton in the last 2000 years.

Despite featuring multiple focal points and greens, Pirton Conservation Area does not have a dispersed appearance, due to the strong sense of interconnection between the village's distinct residential and agricultural areas created by the high number of footpaths and alleys. Pedestrian only routes allow for the Conservation Area to be well appreciated on foot, as it has been for centuries. Alleyways and paths create a sense of confinement and arrival, replicated across the Conservation Area as sections of built form within the denser village centre open out into pockets of green space. This allows for the rural appearance of the village to be maintained, with the retained sections of green space offering preserving links to Pirton's historic rural setting".

- 3.10 The 2017 appeal inspector summarised the significance of the CA and, the listed buildings within it, is as being *“derived from the architectural interest of the buildings grouped together in a traditional street pattern within a verdant rural setting”*. The importance of the preserved agrarian setting of the conservation area is also cited in the 2023 Appraisal.
- 3.11 No. 19 falls within Character Area 1 of the conservation area, which the 2023 Appraisal describes as the *“medieval urban core of Pirton, featuring the earthworks of Toot Hill Motte and Bailey Castle and The Bury, St Mary’s Church and houses on Great Green”*.

Contribution made by Walnut Tree Road and its hinterland to the Conservation Area

- 3.12 Walnut Tree Road is described in the 2023 Appraisal as framing the scheduled monument and the properties along its length, including No. 19, broadly conform to the following description for Character Area 1:
- “Throughout the Character Area, front gardens are common, with buildings typically set back from the road... Many properties are detached, and almost all feature large rear gardens, due to the lack of infill and urbanisation of the village that has occurred”*.
- 3.13 Aside from a cluster of listed buildings at Walnut Tree Farm and Nos 4-6, 7 & 17, the (mostly) modern properties lining Walnut Tree Road, including No. 19, have not been identified as having any statutory or local heritage significance. The section of Walnut Tree Road extending north from No. 19 to the listed buildings close to the road junction with High Street and Hambridge Way can only be considered, therefore, to make a neutral contribution, at best, to the character and appearance of the conservation area.
- 3.14 The historically green open space between the Walnut Tree Road frontage and the eastern boundary of the village has largely been removed by the development of Cotman End, as is evidenced by the photographic comparison in Plates 3 & 4 below



Plate 3: No. 19 in 2000



Plate 4: No. 19 and Cotman End in 2025

- 3.15 The historic ribbon pattern development of Walnut Tree Road, with large rear gardens transitioning to agricultural land to the east, therefore, has been semi-urbanised by the backland cul-de-sac development of Cotman End.

Contribution made by No. 19 Walnut Tree Road to the Conservation Area

- 3.16 No. 19 is a large late 20th century (and subsequently extended) house, the angled alignment of which does not follow the historic building line of Walnut Tree Road. As such, it cannot be said to make a positive contribution to the conservation area.
- 3.17 The rear garden of No. 19, which effectively forms the current application site, has retained its historic character (from the later 19th century at least) as a green open space, although it is now soft landscaped rather than the undeveloped, presumably agrarian land shown on the 1880s and 1950 historic maps in Figures 4 & 5. It is comparable with the neighbouring open backland space developed as Cotman End, which was identified by the Council in 2021 as making only a limited contribution to the conservation area (para 1.10).

Assessment of Views

- 3.18 The following assessment of views should be cross-referenced against the diagram in Figure 6, which shows the viewpoints under discussion.
- 3.19 The September 2025 Council pre-application response for the original design scheme concluded that a large part of the application site at that time was visible from Walnut Tree Road and the access road to the sports ground. This was found not to be entirely the case during the site inspection undertaken for this assessment. It is also unlikely that seasonal variations in leaf cover would greatly affect these views, given the height and density of vegetation cover and use of tall fencing around part of the application site.



Figure 6: Key Viewpoints looking in and out of the conservation area

- 3.20 Both No. 19 and the application site are largely concealed from view when approaching from the west along Walnut Tree Road (Viewpoint 1; Plate 5). This is due to the recessed position and angled alignment of the house, as well as the dense tree cover in the intervening land parcel ringed in Plate 6 below:



Plate 5: View of No. 19 (ringed) approaching from the west along Walnut Tree Road



Plate 6: Aerial view looking west, with No. 19 centre right

- 3.21 When looking towards the application site from the junction of Walnut Tree Road with Cotman End and the sports ground access road (Viewpoint 2), the rear garden of No. 19 (application site) is largely concealed from view by the house and dense vegetation cover at the front of the property (Plate 7).



Plate 7: View of No. 19 (centre) from the front, with the application site to the right

- 3.22 A high fence, tall hedge and tree cover conceal the application site from the sports ground access road and Cotman End (Viewpoint 3; Plate 8).



Plate 8: View looking west along the sports ground access road, with the application site to the left behind the fence and Cotman End to the right

- 3.23 Viewpoint 4 (Plate 9) is a zoomed in view looking across the sports ground towards the application site from the eastern boundary of the conservation area. The upper part of the rear elevation of No. 19 is visible above the old sports pavilion in the centre of the image. The September 2025 Council pre-application advice commented that the removal of the old pavilion would open up views of the application site behind the house, but this is only partially true as the bulk of it would be concealed by the dense tree cover to the left. Moreover, this view is already dominated by the new, larger sports pavilion and No. 19, neither of which can be said to contribute positively to the conservation area. The only view of St Mary's Church is a glimpsed one of its tower from slightly further to the north of this viewpoint. There is certainly no view of the Toot Hill & The Bury scheduled monument from this location. All in all, this is a view which is certainly not critical to experience and appreciation of the character and appearance of the salient elements of Character Area 1 of the conservation area.



Plate 9: View looking west across the sports ground towards the application site; No. 19 (ringed) is visible in the centre above the old sports pavilion, with the largely tree-concealed application site to the left of it

- 3.24 Viewpoint 5 (Plate 10), which looks south along Walnut Tree Road from the historic core of the village is highlighted as a key view (No. 1) in the 2023 Appraisal. Neither No. 19 nor the application site are visible from this viewpoint.



Plate 10: View looking south along Walnut Tree Road towards No. 19

- 3.25 Viewpoint 6 (Plate 11), which looks east across the conservation area from the Toot Hill & The Bury scheduled monument, is another key view highlighted in the 2023 Appraisal (No. 2). No. 19 is visible from this viewpoint as part of the Walnut Tree Road frontage, but is visually distant. Given the overall relatively flat topography within this part of the conservation area, the backland to the rear of the road frontage, which includes both the application site and the Cotman End development, is effectively concealed from view.



Plate 11: View looking east from The Bury towards Walnut Tree Road; No. 19 is ringed

- 3.26 The Pirton Neighbourhood Development Plan also highlights a selection of key views looking in and out of Pirton. The only key view to clearly show Walnut Tree Road is the one highlighted in Figure 6 of this report as Viewpoint 7 (Plate 12) , which is described in the Development Plan document as “*The view from Highdown north to the Bury, the village and the Pirton Lowlands beyond*” (No. 1). It is difficult, however, to pick out the application site from this viewpoint over such a long distance, particularly as No. 19 is obscured by Walnut Tree Farm.



Plate 12: View 1 from the Pirton Neighbourhood Development Plan, taken in 2018, looking northeast towards St Mary's Church and the Toot Hill & The Bury scheduled monument, with Walnut Tree Road ringed;

Toot Hill & The Bury Scheduled Monument

- 3.27 This scheduled monument (List entry number 1012325), one of three in Pirton, was designated in 1981. It consists of the earthworks of the castle motte on Toot Hill, and the surrounding earthworks of the castle bailey. The site also includes the remains of the shrunken medieval village known as The Bury which lies to the south of the bailey.
- 3.28 The reasons for its designation, which effectively define the heritage significance of the scheduled monument, are described in the List entry as follows:

“The village, comprising a small group of houses, gardens, yards, streets, paddocks, often with a green, a manor and a church, and with a community primarily devoted to farming, was a significant component of the rural landscape in most areas of medieval England, much as it is today. Villages provided some services to the local community as well as acting as the focus of ecclesiastical, and often manorial, authority within each medieval parish. Although the sites of many of these villages have been occupied continuously down to the present day, many have declined considerably in size and are now occupied by farmsteads or hamlets. This decline may have taken place gradually throughout the lifetime of the village or more rapidly, particularly during the 14th and 15th centuries when many other villages were wholly deserted. The reasons for diminishing size were varied but often reflected declining economic viability or population fluctuations as a result of widespread epidemics such as the Black Death. As a consequence of their decline, the larger part of these villages are frequently undisturbed by later occupation and contain well-preserved archaeological deposits. Over 3000 shrunken medieval villages are recorded nationally. Because they are a common and long-lived monument type in most parts of England, they provide important information on the diversity of medieval settlement patterns and farming economy between the regions and through time.

Motte castles are medieval fortifications introduced into Britain by the Normans. They comprised a large conical mound of earth or rubble, the motte, surmounted by a palisade and a stone or timber tower. In a majority of examples an embanked enclosure containing additional buildings, the bailey, adjoined the motte. Motte castles and motte-and-bailey castles acted as garrison forts during offensive military operations, as strongholds, and, in many cases, as aristocratic residences and the centre of local or royal administration. Built in towns, villages and open countryside, motte castles generally occupied strategic positions dominating their immediate locality and, as a result, are the most visually impressive monuments of the early post-conquest period surviving in the modern landscape. Over 600 motte castles or motte-and-bailey castles are recorded nationally with examples known from most regions. As such, and as one of a restricted range of recognised early post-conquest monuments, they are particularly important for the study of Norman Britain and the development of the feudal system. Although many were occupied for only a short period of time, motte castles continued to be built and occupied from the 11th to the 13th centuries after which they were superseded by other types of castle. Pirton is one of

the most important historic sites in Hertfordshire with its well-preserved village and castle earthworks. It is made more unusual by the fact that it is an example of a 'planted' medieval village which was carefully aligned in relation to the earlier motte and bailey".

Contribution made by Setting to the Scheduled Monument (including the Application Site)

- 3.29 There is no assessment in the List description of the contribution made by the setting of the scheduled monument to its heritage significance. Neither does the 2017 appeal inspector cite setting as a contributing factor to the significance of the scheduled monument, stating that the latter *"is derived from its history as a medieval fortification and the associated landscape features that remain"*. However, it is self-evident that the later historic core of the conservation area (Character Area 1), centred upon the High Street, Blacksmith's Pond, Priors Hill and St Mary's Church forms the primary element of setting of the scheduled monument.
- 3.30 As stated previously, the historic highway of Walnut Tree Road, although partially re-aligned during the early 19th century, serves to delineate the eastern and southern boundaries of the scheduled monument and, therefore, serves as a positive element of setting. This is confirmed by the aerial image in Plate 13 below:



Plate 13: Aerial view showing the application site relative to the Toot Hill & The Bury scheduled monument

- 3.31 The historic backland between Walnut Tree Road and the eastern boundary of the village, although residentially developed in recent years, is also still discernible from high points such as Toot Hill and the Chilterns, with the preserved wider agricultural lowland surroundings of the village visible beyond.

- 3.32 As also stated previously, however, the houses and gardens lining Walnut Tree Road north of, and including No. 19, are of little or no heritage significance, which is presumably why the custodian of the scheduled monument, Historic England, considered the 2021 Cotman End development to have no impact on the setting of Toot Hill & The Bury (see para. 1.10). The current application site is also a backland site of similar character on the other side of Walnut Tree Road, so is considered to make the same contribution to the setting of the scheduled monument as the backland on which the Cotman End development was built.
- 3.33 In respect of views in and out of the scheduled monument, the 2023 appraisal states the following:
- “From within the monument itself, built form appears far removed and distant, partially shielded by green screening created by the presence of trees along the monument’s boundaries”.*
- 3.34 This is reflected in para 3.25 above, with the site visit carried out for this assessment also noting that the tree and vegetation cover along the boundary of the scheduled monument curtails experience and appreciation of its heritage significance from the southern end of Walnut Tree Road, particularly relative to No. 19. This was confirmed by the 2017 appeal inspector, who noted that gaps in the tree- and hedge-lined boundary of the scheduled monument only begin to appear at the northern end of Walnut Tree Road, close to the main built up area of Pirton (Para. 1.13).
- 3.35 The highest point of the scheduled monument is Toot Hill, but there is no visibility of No. 19 or the application site from this location, due to tree cover around the former motte (Plate 14).



Plate 14: View looking east from Toot Hill towards No. 19

St Mary's Church, statutorily listed Grade I

- 3.36 This is the oldest highest status statutorily listed building in Pirton. It has its origins in the 12th century, and although it postdates the original Norman castle, was clearly purposely located alongside the latter. The church was added to in the 14th century and extensively restored in the 19th century.

Contribution made by Setting to Heritage significance (including the Application Site)

- 3.37 Churches usually have one or more of the following elements of setting from which their heritage experience can be experienced:
- Graveyards, churchyards and cemeteries
 - Villages and immediate rural surroundings in which they are located
 - A wider hinterland in which towers and spires are visible at a distance
- 3.38 St Mary's Church has all three of these elements of setting but, despite occupying an elevated position above the Toot Hill & The Bury scheduled monument, it feels slightly detached from the village. It has defined entry points and dense coniferous tree cover both along the boundary of the churchyard and within its interior.
- 3.39 No. 19 forms only a peripheral, tangential element of the wider setting of the church (see Plate 11 and Para. 3.23), and there is no intervisibility between the latter and the application site.

Walnut Tree Farm, statutorily listed Grade II

- 3.40 This extensive, well-preserved 16th century (possibly earlier) farm complex is located in a prominent, isolated position on the southern outskirts of Pirton. It contains a number of Grade II listed buildings, including a farmhouse, barn, outbuildings and other dwellings,. This collection of buildings testifies to the well-preserved heritage significance of the post-medieval farmstead.

Contribution made by Setting to Heritage significance (including the Application Site)

- 3.41 The farm has the following principal elements of setting which make either a positive or neutral contribution to its heritage significance and from which that heritage significance can be experienced and appreciated:

- Immediate environs, including gardens
- Fields to the south and east of Walnut Tree Road
- The Toot Hill & The Bury scheduled monument
- Walnut Tree Road

3.42 The agrarian surroundings of the farm to the south and east of Walnut Tree Road and the Toot Hill & The Bury scheduled monument opposite are probably the most historically unchanged elements of its setting. The approaches to the farm from the south and west along Walnut Tree Road are also unaffected by modern development.

3.43 However, the view in Plate 15 below, taken from the scheduled monument, shows the farmstead relative to later, mostly modern, development along Walnut Tree Road, which makes, at best, a neutral contribution to its wider setting. That includes No. 19, which is the nearest building to Walnut Tree Farm along Walnut Tree Road.



Plate 15: View looking southeast from the Toot Hill & The Bury scheduled monument towards No. 19 (arrowed) and Walnut Tree Farm (ringed)

3.44 The site visit undertaken for this assessment confirmed that there are no views of No. 19 relative to Walnut Tree Farm looking along Walnut Tree Road due to the sharp change in direction of the latter from south to west at the southeastern corner of the scheduled monument.

No. 17 Walnut Tree Road

3.45 This 19th century house (Plate 16), which stands near to no. 19, is identified as a locally listed building in the Pirton Neighbourhood Development Plan, 2011-2033. However, the heritage significance of the building has been eroded by recent alterations and extensions and its historic garden setting to the rear has effectively been removed by the Cotman End residential development.



Plate 16: No. 17 Walnut Tree Road (far left) shown relative to No.19 (centre); there is very limited visibility of the rear garden of No. 19 (the application site) relative to No. 17 from this viewpoint

- 3.46 Any intervisibility between No. 17 and the application site is very limited due to dense vegetation cover at the front of No. 19.

Nos 4-6 Walnut Tree Road, statutorily listed Grade II

- 3.47 This semi-detached 18th/19th century building pair is located at the top end of Walnut Tree Road, close to the junction of Walnut Tree Road, High Street and Hambridge Way.
- 3.48 The front of No. 19 is visible relative to Nos 4 & 6 when looking north along Walnut Tree Road, but it is a visually distant, glimpsed view. There is no intervisibility between the application site and the listed building pair.

No. 7 Walnut Tree Road, statutorily listed Grade II

- 3.49 There is no obvious connection, in respect of setting, between the application site and No. 7 Walnut Tree Road.

4. Impacts on Heritage Significance

The Application Proposals

- 4.1 Four dwellings, serviced by a new access road from the road between Walnut Tree Road and the sports ground, are proposed for the existing rear garden of No. 19 (Figure 7).



Figure 7: Proposals for No. 19 Walnut Tree Road; North is to t

Impacts on the Pirton Conservation Area

4.2 The 2023 Appraisal states the following:

“Pirton is a historic settlement and has been subject to a considerable degree of infilling and building on larger gardens and backland sites. It is considered that further development in this way would most likely harm the character of the Conservation Area. The more substantial domestic properties within the outer section of the Conservation Area are enhanced by the setting provided by their reasonable and proportioned gardens...the creation of further development, such as cul-de-sacs or ribbon development, on the village fringes, would lessen its rural character and compromise how the surrounding landscape is experienced within the Conservation Area.”

4.3 On that basis, the current proposals could be perceived as being harmful to the character and appearance of the conservation area but the harm in question can only be less than substantial and towards the lower end of the spectrum (see para. 2.8).

4.4 The proposals seek to mitigate any perceived harm by means of the following measures:

- Retention of No. 19, thereby retaining the existing house & road frontage
- The right-angled shape of the property lends itself to cul-de-sac development, with the application site not only concealed behind the house but also by the tree-covered land parcel on Walnut Tree Road highlighted in Plate 6
- Retention, and enhancement where required, of existing boundary treatments at No. 19 in order to ensure as much concealment of the application site as possible
- Increased vegetation cover within the site to help screen the new builds
- A quantum of development commensurate with the size of the plot
- A new pond to be created to replicate Larkins Pond
- Retention of garden space covering c. 50% of the area of the site

The current proposals mirror those of the consented and implemented adjacent Cotman End, residential development, which the 2021 Delegated File Note described in the following manner:

“The site is located in a back-land location and it is considered that the site currently makes a limited contribution to the character and appearance of the Pirton Conservation Area. The proposal to develop the site is considered to be appropriate and would therefore preserve the character and appearance of the conservation area...The layout will be that of a cul-de-sac which is inevitable given the position and shape of the application site. The site would be largely hidden from Walnut Tree Road by the existing houses although one imagines that some views will be possible into the site.. In any case, I do not have any fundamental

issues relating to the design that is proposed and thus do not consider that the proposed development would have a significant impact on the wider character or appearance of the area”.

- 4.5 Those comments also largely apply to the current proposals, which would have much less impact than the Cotman End development given that they are smaller in scale and would be less visible from both Walnut Tree Road and the sports ground access road.
- 4.6 Following on from this, it should also be reiterated that the reduction in the size and scale of the development and its confinement to a backland location has been made in response to concerns raised in the Council pre-application advice and a recent planning team visit. These concerns were that the originally proposed much larger scheme, with a direct frontage onto Walnut Tree Road, would be overly prominent in views in and out of the conservation area. The revised and reduced scheme, for the reasons provided in the Assessment of Views section of this report, would be considerably less impactful visually than the pre-application scheme.
- 4.7 Another factor in support of the application is that there is historical precedence for built form and access on the site, as shown on the 1818 Pirton Enclosure map (Figure 3).
- 4.8 Any development proposals perceived as resulting in less than substantial harm are required by Para. 215 of the NPPF to be weighed in the planning balance with public benefits. In this case, the provision of new housing within the village and proposed improvement of the sports ground access road can be considered as public benefits.

Impacts on the Toot Hill & The Bury Scheduled Monument

- 4.9 The application site, like the land on which the Cotman End development was built, is a backland site on the other side of Walnut Tree Road from the scheduled monument. For those reasons Historic England, the custodian of the scheduled monument, considered that the proposals for Cotman End would have no impact on the setting of the Toot Hill & The Bury. The same, therefore, applies to the proposals for the current application site which as stated previously, are on a much smaller scale and would be even more concealed from view from the scheduled monument than the Cotman End development.

Impacts on St Mary's Church

- 4.10 No. 19 forms part of the wider setting of the church but is physically and visually distant from the listed building. It is unlikely, therefore, that the application proposals, confined to the garden at the rear of the house, would have any noticeable impact on the church.

Impacts on Walnut Tree Farm

- 4.11 As stated previously, No. 19 forms part of the wider setting of the statutorily listed buildings at Walnut Tree Farm, but this relationship can only really be experienced visually from within the Toot Hill & The Bury scheduled monument, and then only at distance (Plate 15). The land to the rear of No. 19 is not readily discernible from within the scheduled monument, so it is unlikely that the proposed development would have a noticeable impact on the setting of Walnut Tree Farm from the viewpoint shown in Plate 15.
- 4.12 The proposed development would erode the historically preserved green buffer zone around Walnut Tree Farm but not to a degree that would noticeably affect experience and appreciation of the heritage significance of the various listed buildings within the 16th century farmstead, as well as the relationship of the latter with its agrarian surroundings.

Impacts on No. 17 Walnut Tree Road

- 4.13 The alterations to, and extension, of the neighbouring building to No. 19 have diminished the heritage significance of this locally listed building. The Cotman End development has also removed its historic garden setting to the rear. Any impacts of the proposed development on No. 17 would, therefore, be little felt within this context.

Impacts on Nos 4-6 Walnut Tree Road

- 4.14 Given that only the front of No. 19 is visible relative to these listed buildings located at the top of Walnut Tree Road, the application proposals would not impact the heritage significance of Nos 4 & 6 through any change in their setting.

Impacts on No.7 Walnut Tree Road

- 4.15 The application proposals would have no material impact on the setting and heritage significance of this listed building.

5. Summary & Conclusions

- 5.1 The application proposals would place a small cul-de-sac residential development in the rear garden of No. 19 Walnut Tree Road, Pirton
- 5.2 No. 19, which was built in the late 20th century and has subsequently been extended, is of no heritage interest. The house and application site are, however, located within the Pirton Area Conservation Area and No. 19 stands opposite the scheduled monument of Toot Hill & The Bury. A locally listed building, No. 17 Walnut Tree Road stands nearby and there are statutorily listed buildings located at the southern and northern ends of Walnut Tree Road. No. 19 also forms part of the wider setting of St Mary's Church.
- 5.3 The application proposals mirror the recently built Cotman End development on the other side of the sports ground access road, but on a much smaller scale.
- 5.4 The 2023 Conservation Area Appraisal & Management Plan, which post-dates the Cotman End development, states that *"the creation of further development, such as cul-de-sacs or ribbon development, on the village fringes, would lessen its rural character and compromise how the surrounding landscape is experienced within the Conservation Area."* However, any perceived harm to the conservation area resulting from the current application proposals, which can only be less than substantial and towards the lower end of the spectrum, has been mitigated by the measures outlined in Section 4 of this report and can be weighed in the planning balance with public benefits such as new housing and improvements to the sports ground access road. Moreover, the present scheme is very much informed by Council pre-application and more recent advice to retain the existing street frontage of No. 19 and scale down the development to a smaller site largely concealed from view behind the present house.
- 5.5 Historic England saw no harm to the setting and significance of the Toot Hill & The Bury scheduled monument from the Cotman End development, as it was a backland site on the other side of Walnut Tree Road. The same reasoning, therefore, should, apply in respect of any potential impacts resulting from the current proposals.
- 5.6 It is also considered that the application proposals would not materially impact the settings and heritage significance of statutory and locally listed buildings located on Walnut Tree Road or the Grade I listed St Mary's Church.
- 5.7 The application proposals are considered to comply with heritage-related North Herts District Council planning policy and planning policies in the Pirton Neighbourhood Plan.