



Heritage Impact Assessment

Land at The Motte
and Bailey PH,
1 Great Green,
Pirton

August 2025 | Project Ref 10970



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Project Number: 10970

File Origin: <https://heritagecollectiveuk.sharepoint.com/sites/10501-11000/Shared Documents/10901-11000/10970 - Motte & Bailey, Pirton/HER/Reports/2025.08.26 - Pirton HIA.docx>

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1. Introduction

1.1 This Heritage Impact Assessment has been prepared by HCUK Group on the instructions of the Cordage Group. It relates to the proposed development of a dwelling on land within the garden of The Motte and Bailey public house, 1 Great Green, Pirton. The site is within Pirton Conservation Area and within the setting of a scheduled monument (SAM) known as Toot Hill, the earthwork remains of a motte and bailey castle and its associated village (Figures 1 to 5).

1.2 Pre-application advice was sought from North Hertfordshire District Council on a broadly similar proposal in 2018 (18/00889/PRE) accessed from Crab Tree Lane to the north. This resulted in what amounted to an objection in principle by officers. In March 2025 HCUK Group prepared a Statement of Significance which adduced new evidence about the application site, and which resulted in a change of position in a second pre-application submission (25/00727/PRE dated 27 May 2025). The principle of development is now supported on heritage grounds, and references to the council's pre-application comments are made at appropriate points in the following text. The council's overall summary on heritage was as follows:

"It is accepted however that there are other buildings (mostly dwellings) that back onto the SAM and that the proposals would be consistent with this pattern of residential development around the periphery of the site.

The Statement of Significance is also helpful in demonstrating that historically there were buildings on this site possibly connected with the pub that provides some justification for new development given its previously developed nature.

In terms of the impact on the Conservation Area the key consideration will be the design and appearance of the dwelling and the illustrative drawing is helpful in showing a dwelling of restrained scale and massing with appropriate traditional architectural features being considered for the site which I believe is the correct approach in this instance."

1.3 Archaeology, and the context of the scheduled monument, is addressed in a separate Archaeological Desk Based Assessment by HCUK Group.

- 1.4** The author of this assessment has more than forty years of continuous employment in the heritage sector, including ten years as a conservation officer advising local planning authorities on applications affecting heritage assets. A large number of those cases have involved development within conservation areas affecting the setting of heritage assets.

2. Relevant Planning Policy Framework

- 2.1** The council is required by section 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character and appearance of a conservation area when exercising planning functions relating to land within that area. The council must give considerable importance and weight to the desirability of preserving the significance of the conservation area, and there is a strong presumption against the grant of permission for development that would harm its heritage significance.¹
- 2.2** For the purposes of this assessment, preservation equates to an absence of harm.² Harm is defined in paragraph 84 of Historic England's Conservation Principles as change which erodes the significance of a heritage asset.³
- 2.3** The significance of a heritage asset is defined in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) as being made up of four main constituents: architectural interest, historical interest, archaeological interest and artistic interest. The assessments of heritage significance and impact are normally made with primary reference to the four main elements of significance identified in the NPPF.
- 2.4** The setting of a heritage asset can contribute to its significance. Setting is defined 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."*
- 2.5** Historic England has published guidance on development affecting the setting of heritage assets in *The Setting of Heritage Assets* (second edition, December 2017), better known as GPA3. The guidance proposes a stepped approach to assessment in which Step 1 involves the identification of the relevant heritage assets, Step 2 establishes their significance, and Step 3 describes how the change within the

¹ Barnwell Manor Wind Energy Limited v East Northamptonshire District Council and others [2014] EWCA Civ 137.

² South Lakeland v SSE [1992] 2 AC 141.

³ Conservation Principles, 2008, paragraph 84.

setting of the assets might affect their significance. In cases where there is a resultant loss in significance, amounting to harm, Step 4 is engaged, requiring the discussion of mitigation.

2.6 The NPPF requires the impact on the significance of a designated heritage asset⁴ to be considered in terms of either “substantial harm” or “less than substantial harm” as described within paragraphs 214 and 215 of that document. National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG) makes it clear that substantial harm is a high test, and case law describes substantial harm in terms of an effect that would vitiate or drain away much of the significance of a heritage asset.⁵ The Scale of Harm is tabulated at Appendix 1.

2.7 Paragraphs 214 and 215 of the NPPF refer to two different balancing exercises in which harm to significance, if any, is to be balanced with public benefit. Paragraph 18a-020-20190723 of National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG) online makes it clear that some heritage-specific benefits can be public benefits. Paragraph 18a-018-20190723 of the same NPPG makes it clear that it is important to be explicit about the category of harm (that is, whether paragraph 214 or 215 of the NPPF applies, if at all), and the extent of harm, when dealing with decisions affecting designated heritage assets, as follows:

“Within each category of harm (which category applies should be explicitly identified), the extent of the harm may vary and should be clearly articulated.”

2.8 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, irrespective of how substantial or otherwise that harm might be.

2.9 Local heritage policy has been taken into account in the preparation of this assessment, with particular regard to the council’s character appraisal of Pirton Conservation Area.

⁴ The seven categories of designated heritage assets are World Heritage Sites, Scheduled Monuments, Listed Buildings, Protected Wreck Sites, Registered Park and Gardens, Registered Battlefields and Conservation Areas, designated under the relevant legislation.

⁵ Bedford Borough Council v SSCLG and Nuon UK Limited [2013] EWHC 4344 (Admin).

3. Statement of Significance

Introduction

- 3.1** This chapter of the assessment establishes the significance of the relevant heritage assets in the terms set out in the NPPF, and it comments on the contribution of setting to significance. The identification of the heritage assets equates in part to Step 1 of GPA3, and the assessment of significance equates to Step 2 of GPA3. Steps 2 and 3 of GPA3 are closely connected, so this chapter should be read in conjunction with Chapter 4 (Heritage Impact Assessment) and with the tabular methodology at Appendix 2.

Pirton Conservation Area

- 3.2** The significance of Pirton Conservation Area is summarised on page 28 of the council's appraisal 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."

- 3.3** The application site is within Character Area One - The Medieval Settlement (containing Toot Hill, St Mary's, Great Green and Walnut Tree Farm).⁶ This character area is introduced in the council's appraisal as follows:

"Character Area One can loosely be described as the medieval urban core of Pirton, featuring the earthworks of Toot Hill Motte and Bailey Castle and The Bury, St Marys Church and houses on Great Green. Although buildings in other Character Areas may be contemporary in age, their position in relation to the castle suggests they would have been outliers to the village centre, therefore they are not included"

⁶ The character area is in two separate parts.

within Character Area One. The Character Area's irregular shape is due to the exclusion of twentieth and twenty first century housing on Saxon Rise, Danefield Road and Baulk Gardens from the Conservation Area.

The Character Area is dominated by Toot Hill and The Bury, which are maintained as an area of publicly accessible green space. Footpaths criss-cross through the scheduled monument, with the space acting as a frequently used pedestrian route through the village. 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.

Historic buildings within the Character Area are largely late to postmedieval in date and timber framed. Later nineteenth or twentieth century infill buildings, where present, are typically brick constructions. Walnut Tree Farm located immediately south of The Bury is sixteenth century in age and would have stood in conjunction with now lost buildings on The Bury. Priors Hill scheduled monument, in the northwestern section of the Character Area, although now seemingly an agricultural field, in fact contains important remains from the prehistoric and medieval period."

3.4 Crabtree Lane is described as follows in the appraisal:

"...Similar to Great Green, there are a cluster of timber framed listed buildings on Crabtree Lane, close to the High Street.^[7] Dating largely from the medieval period, their position in relation to the church is testament to their age."

3.5 The Motte and Bailey public house is described as follows in the appraisal:

"...Occupying a prominent location at the junction of Great Green and Crabtree Lane, the pub is an early twentieth century building."

3.6 It is self-evident that Pirton Conservation Area is a place of special architectural and historic interest, and of considerable heritage significance. It contains a number of historic buildings that are of intrinsic special interest, notably the Church of St Mary (listed grade I in 1968) which has a close physical and historical association with the earthwork remains of Toot Hill, described further below.

⁷ That is, at the eastern end of the lane, some distance from the application site.

Toot Hill scheduled monument

3.7 Designated on 9 October 1981, the official description of Toot Hill scheduled monument was amended on 12 November 1991 as follows:

"Reasons for Designation

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.

Details

The monument consists of the earthworks of the castle motte 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. The castle was established on an oval motte about 90m x 60m in the early 12th century alongside the church of St Mary and is surrounded by a ditch. Adjacent to the motte lies the remains of the ditched enclosure of the bailey in which earthworks still define the sites of holloways, tracks and building platforms. The southern edge of the bailey is defined by a shallow ditch 160m long running east from the south-west corner of Toot Hill; the northern edge is believed to cross part of the area around St. Mary's Church and north of the motte. To the south of the motte and bailey castle lies the remains of the part of the medieval village of Pirton, known as The Bury, and carefully planned in respect of the Castle. The centre of the modern village now lies further north. A deep well-defined roadway runs east to west across the site of the village and from this the remains of roads and tracks run north and south. Platforms indicate the location of houses and buildings of the village and some buildings survived here until earlier this century. Ditches and banks show the position of land boundaries, and drains and small ponds can be seen. All made up

roadways and pathways on the site are excluded from the scheduling but the ground below them is included.

The site of the monument [...] includes a 2 metre boundary around the archaeological features, considered to be essential for the monument's support and preservation."

3.8 Toot Hill is a well preserved example of a series of medieval earthworks associated with an abandoned part of the village. Its close association with the Church of St Mary, and the interaction between those parts of the village still in use and those parts that have been deserted, results in a powerful sense of place and time depth. Public access to the monument allows direct experience and appreciation of the significance of the whole. It is axiomatic that Toot Hill is a structure of considerable heritage significance.

3.9 The setting of Toot Hill extends in all directions, including the 20th century pub known as The Motte and Bailey, and its garden. It also includes the Church of St Mary (and *vice versa*). In fact, the abstract or contextual setting of the scheduled monument includes a large part of Pirton Conservation Area – certainly Character Area One, which consists of the medieval core. The medieval and early post-medieval buildings, in particular, contribute to the significance of the monument because of their closer contextual and historical connections with the broad period within which the earthworks were constructed and used.

The application site

3.10 The present public house is understood to have been built c.1901. Its predecessor, The White Horse, had origins in the 18th century or before.⁸ The layout of the earlier public house can be seen on the O.S. map of 1882 in Figure 1. There were several buildings in addition to the pub itself, probably including outbuildings – barns, sheds, stables, and possibly a brewhouse. Some of these buildings defined the northern perimeter in the curve of Crabtree Lane, and there were two structures on what was then the eastern boundary, next to Toot Hill.

⁸ It was probably long established when it was mentioned in the Northampton Mercury of 14 March 1812 in connection with an auction of household goods.

- 3.11** In the last two decades of the 19th century most of the outbuildings were cleared away, as can be seen in the extract from the O.S. map of 1898 in Figure 2. Then, when the pub was redeveloped, a new range of outbuildings was constructed to the north, again on the Crabtree Lane frontage (Figure 3). These outbuildings continued to be shown on O.S. maps into the post-war period, suggesting that they were demolished within living memory.
- 3.12** No particular heritage significance is attached to the present building known as The Motte and Bailey public house. It is a rendered and tiled building with three gables on the front (west facing) elevation, in a nondescript Edwardian style, loosely in the Domestic Revival tradition. The public house makes a weakly positive contribution to the character and appearance of the conservation area and to the setting of the scheduled monument, which is to say that it is a longstanding part of the street scene. Its car park and gardens make a neutral contribution to the significance of the heritage assets.

Statement of Significance

- 3.13** Pirton Conservation Area is a place of special architectural and historic interest, and of considerable heritage significance. It contains a number of historic buildings that are of intrinsic special interest, notably the Church of St Mary which has a close physical and historical association with the earthwork remains of Toot Hill, a well preserved and important example of a series of medieval earthworks associated with an abandoned part of the village. The setting of Toot Hill extends in all directions, including Character Area One of the conservation area which contains the medieval core.
- 3.14** The application site is likely to have potential for buried medieval archaeology, but it is not otherwise of intrinsic heritage significance. It makes a neutral contribution to the character and appearance of the conservation area and to the setting of the scheduled monument, but the presence of development here since the 18th century is now part and parcel of the morphology and grain of the area.

4. Heritage Impact Assessment

Introduction

- 4.1** This chapter of the assessment is a preliminary exploration of how the proposed development will affect the setting and significance of the heritage assets identified in the preceding chapter. It equates in part to Step 3 of GPA3. Steps 2 and 3 of GPA3 are closely connected, so this chapter should be read in conjunction with Chapter 3 (Statement of Significance) and with the tabular methodology at Appendix 2.

The proposed development

- 4.2** The proposed development consists of a new dwelling within the garden of the Motte and Bailey public house, accessed from Crabtree Lane (Figure 6).

Effect on the application site

- 4.3** Not being of intrinsic heritage significance, the part of the garden to be developed will not be affected except insofar as there will be effects on buried archaeology, for which see the Archaeological Desk Based Assessment by HCUK Group.

Effect on the scheduled monument

- 4.4** There will be a small change within a small part of the surroundings of the scheduled monument, discussed further in the GPA3 exercise in Appendix 2. It should be stressed that the application site is not the whole setting of the monument. Rather, it is small part of the setting, which extends in 360° around the whole monument – including, for example, land in Walnut Tree Road to the south-east. Overall, the effect of the proposal on the setting and significance of the scheduled monument will be neutral. There will be no harm to the significance of the monument.

Effect on the conservation area

- 4.5** The change to the conservation area will be small, and it should be seen in light of the fact that there were successive phases of previous development along the northern edge of the corner of Crabtree Lane (Figures 1 to 3) which were probably still standing within living memory. Overall, the effect on the conservation area will be neutral, preserving the character and appearance of the designation.

Pre-application advice (May 2025)

- 4.6** New evidence about previous development on the northern edge of the corner of Crabtree Lane has been taken into account by council officers in the pre-application advice date May 2025, and the unequivocal conclusion is that “In principle the erection of a 4-bed detached dwelling with associated access is supportable” (Conservation and Heritage memorandum, 3 June 2025). No part of the council’s formal response (27 May 2025) or the Heritage and Conservation Officer’s more detailed memorandum (3 June 2025) suggested that the proposal would cause harm to the significance of any heritage asset.

Conclusion as to effects

- 4.7** The proposed new dwelling will not harm the character, appearance or significance of Pirton Conservation Area, or the setting or significance of the scheduled monument. There will be no harm within the meaning in paragraphs 214 and 215 of the NPPF, and the effect will fall off the scale in Appendix 1. There will be no conflict with local heritage policy, and there will be preservation for the purpose of the council’s duty under section 72(1) of the Act.

5. Summary

- 5.1** Pirton Conservation Area is a place of special architectural and historic interest, and of considerable heritage significance. It contains a number of historic buildings that are of intrinsic special interest, notably the Church of St Mary which has a close physical and historical association with the earthwork remains of Toot Hill, a well preserved and important example of a series of medieval earthworks associated with an abandoned part of the village. The setting of Toot Hill extends in all directions, including Character Area One of the conservation area which contains the medieval core.
- 5.2** The application site is likely to have potential for buried medieval archaeology, but it is not otherwise of intrinsic heritage significance. It makes a neutral contribution to the character and appearance of the conservation area and to the setting of the scheduled monument, but the presence of development here since the 18th century is now part and parcel of the morphology and grain of the area.
- 5.3** The proposed development consists of a new dwelling within the garden of the Motte and Bailey public house, accessed from Crabtree Lane.
- 5.4** The proposed new dwelling will not harm the character, appearance or significance of Pirton Conservation Area, or the setting or significance of the scheduled monument.

Appendix 1

Scale of Harm

Scale of Harm	
Total Loss	Total removal of the significance of the designated heritage asset.
Substantial Harm	Serious harm that would drain away or vitiate the significance of the designated heritage asset
Less than Substantial Harm	High level harm that could be serious, but not so serious as to vitiate or drain away the significance of the designated heritage asset.
	Medium level harm, not necessarily serious to the significance of the designated heritage asset, but enough to be described as significant, noticeable, or material.
	Low level harm that does not seriously affect the significance of the designated heritage asset.

HCUK, 2019

Appendix 2

Preliminary GPA3 Assessment

In assessing the effect of the proposed development on the setting and significance of Toot Hill scheduled monument, it is relevant to consider how the following factors may or may not take effect, with particular reference to the considerations in Steps 2 and 3 of GPA3. The following analysis seeks to highlight the main relevant considerations.

Relevant Considerations

<i>Proximity of the development to the asset</i>	The proposed development is effectively adjacent to the western margin of the scheduled monument.
<i>Proximity in relation to topography and watercourses</i>	There are no particular watercourses to consider. The topography is partly man-made, consisting of undulating earthworks to the east of the application site in the vicinity of Toot Hill.
<i>Position of development in relation to key views</i>	No key views of Toot Hill scheduled monument will be affected, as is clear from the identification of views in the council's appraisal of the conservation area (Figure 4).
<i>Orientation of the development</i>	The new house will be set orthogonally in its plot, relative to Crabtree Lane.
<i>Prominence, dominance and conspicuousness</i>	The proposed development will not be prominent, dominant or conspicuous in relation to any heritage asset. It will be no more dominant than any other present or past development in Crabtree Lane (Figures 1 to 3 and 5).
<i>Competition with or distraction from the asset</i>	The proposed development will not compete with or distract from any heritage assets. It should be noted that there used to be development along the northern fringe of the public house, In Crabtree Lane (Figures 1 to 3).
<i>Dimensions, scale, massing, proportions</i>	The dimensions, scale, massing and proportions of the proposed development have been designed to as to minimise the effect on heritage assets.
<i>Visual permeability</i>	The proposed development will not be visually permeable.
<i>Materials and design</i>	Materials and design are for later consideration.

<i>Diurnal or seasonal change</i>	No issues are anticipated in respect of diurnal or seasonal change.
<i>Change to built surroundings and spaces</i>	The built surroundings and spaces around the monument will only be slightly changed.
<i>Change to skyline, silhouette</i>	There will be no changes to important skylines or silhouettes.
<i>Change to general character</i>	The general character of the surroundings of the monument will be preserved.

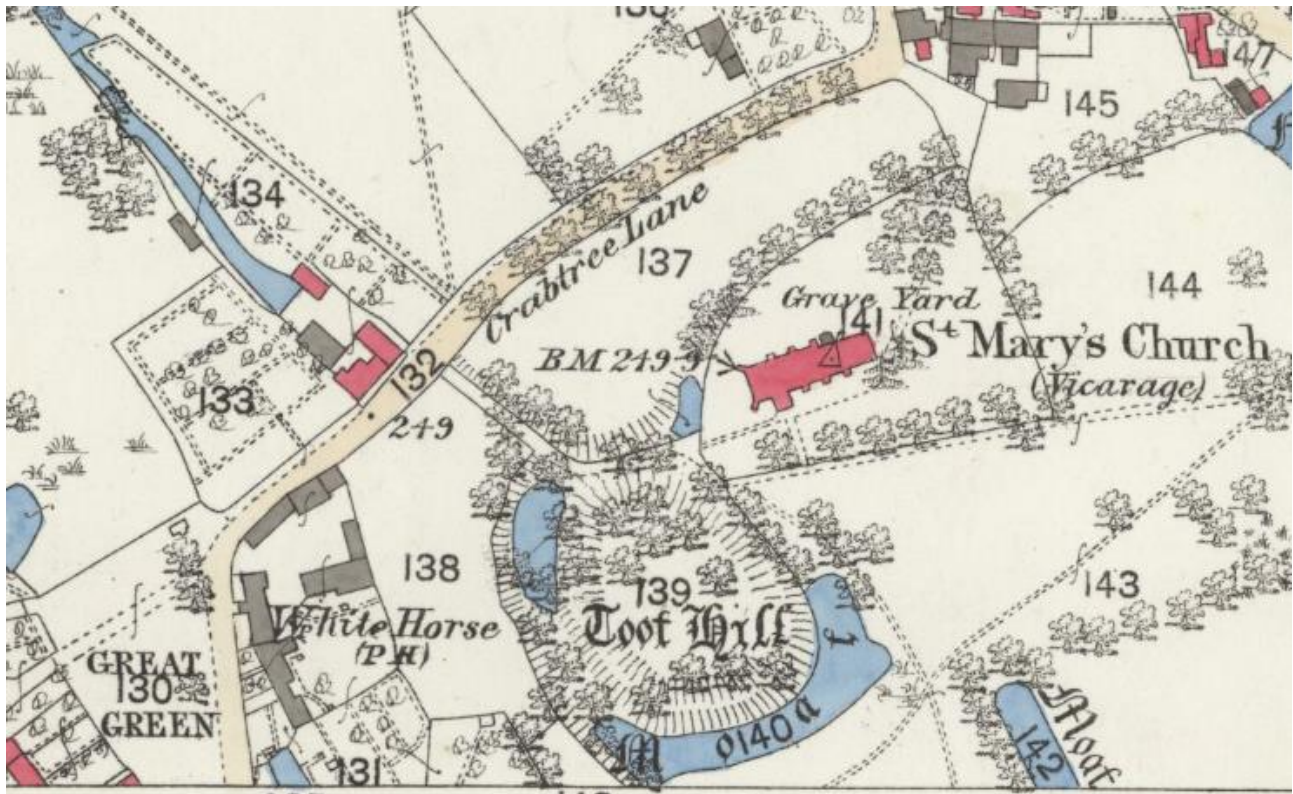


Figure 1 – Extract from the O.S. map of 1882, surveyed 1880-1881.

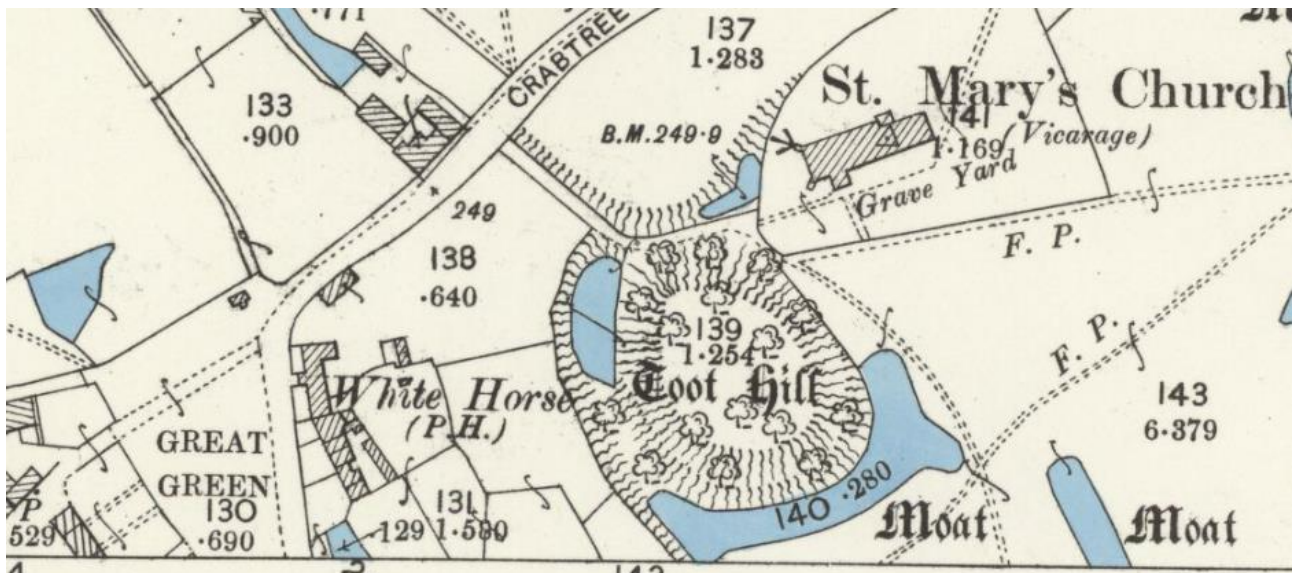


Figure 2 – Extract from the O.S. map of 1898, revised 1897.

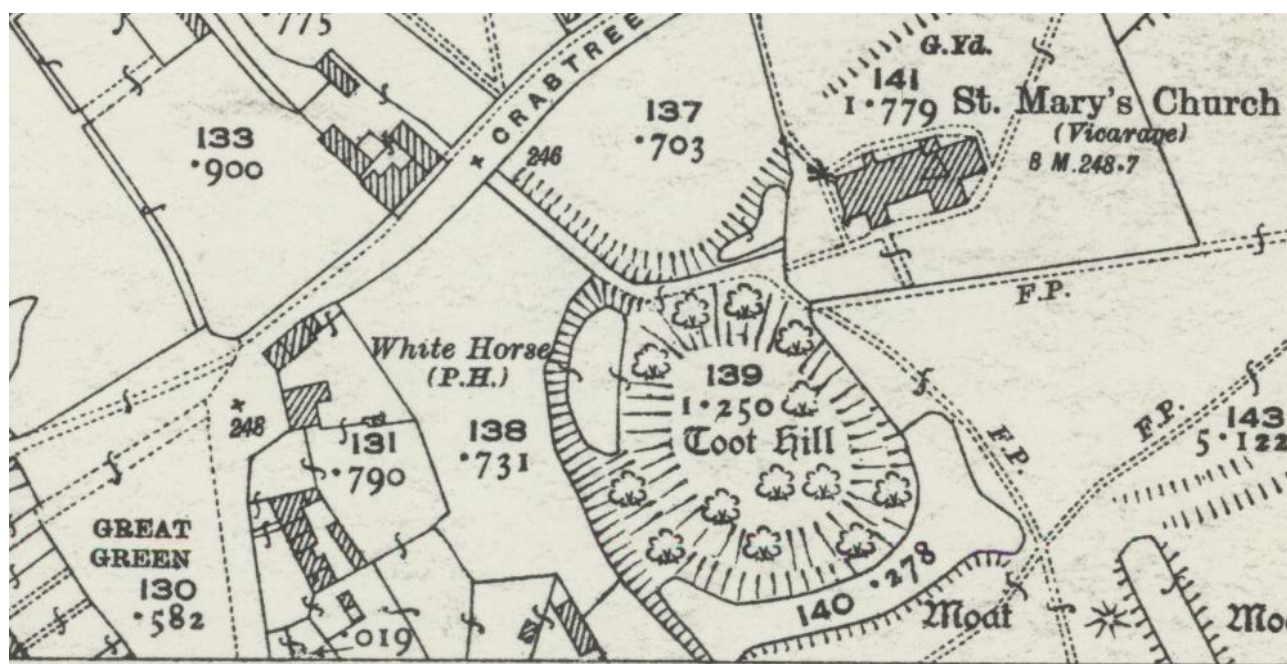


Figure 3 - Extract from the O.S. map of 1924, revised 1922.

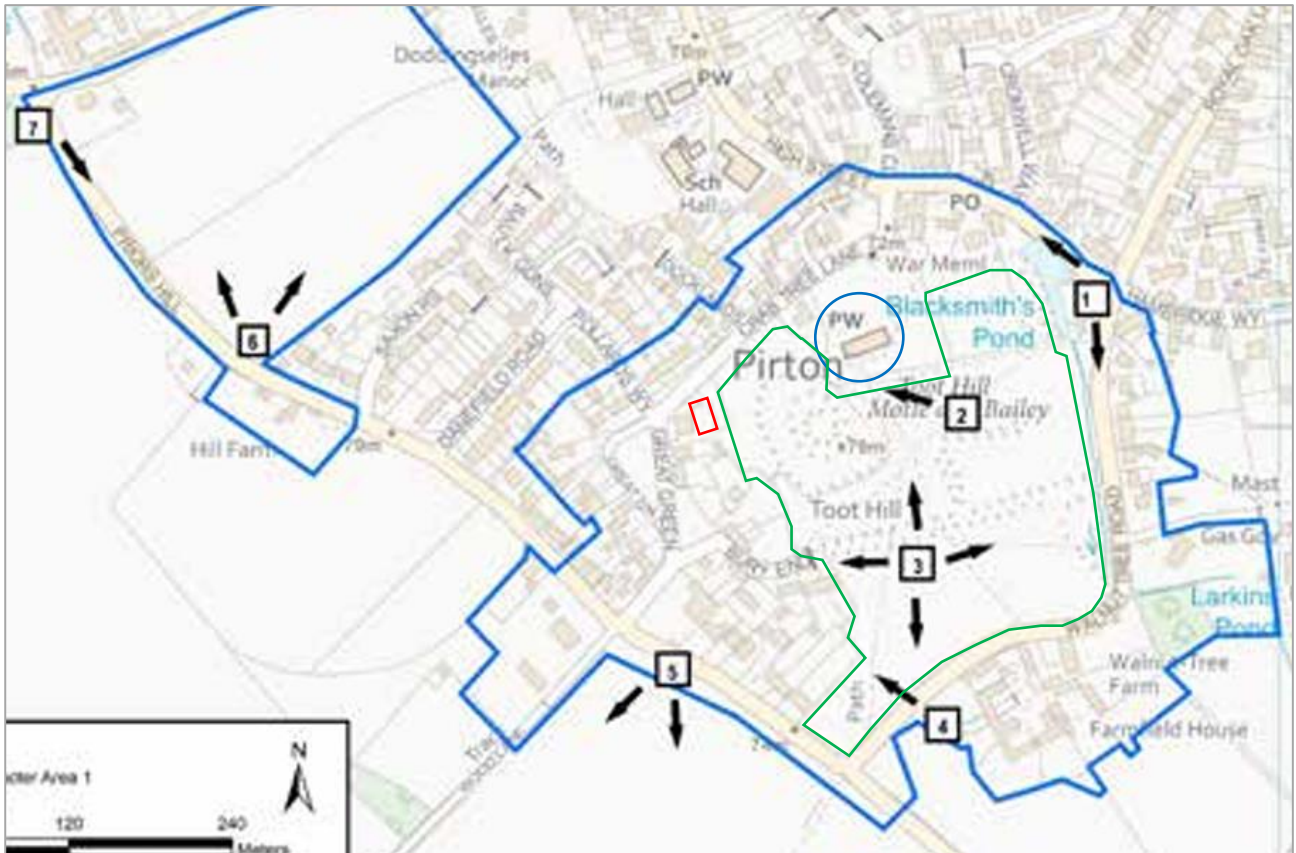


Figure 4 – Important views associated with Character Area One (from Figure 51 of the council's appraisal). Viewpoint 3 is illustrated below (from Figure 47 of the council's appraisal) in which St Mary's Church (circled blue) is seen behind the earthworks of Toot Hill. The approximate position of the application site is shown indicatively in red. The scheduled monument is shown with a green outline.





Figure 5 – Air photograph 2008 (Historic England 24888_026 flown 16 January 2008) looking north-west across Toot Hill. The copy below shows how the application site is surrounded on three sides by 20th century buildings (pecked white line).





Proposed Street Scene
Crab Tree Lane



Proposed
North Elevation

Figure 6 – Proposed front (north) elevation and streetscene.