

**Construction of a new vicarage and one new dwelling**  
**St Francis Vicarage, Arnison Avenue, High Wycombe,**  
**Buckinghamshire, HP13 5AB**

**Heritage Statement**

**Client: Oxford Diocesan Board of Finance**

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Bluestone Planning has been commissioned to prepare a Heritage Impact Statement on behalf of the Oxford Diocesan Board of Finance (the applicant), for a proposed development at St Francis Vicarage, Arnison Avenue, High Wycombe, HP13 5AB.
- 1.2 This Heritage Impact Statement is to be read in conjunction with the Planning, Design and Access Statement (Bluestone Planning – November 2021) in respect of a planning application submitted to Buckinghamshire Council for the construction of two four-bedroom dwellings, one of which will be a new vicarage.
- 1.3 The application site currently consists of the existing St Francis of Assisi vicarage and garden. The vicarage serves the adjacent St Francis of Assisi Church. The Grade II listed vicarage, its associated garden and gravel drive lies to the south of the proposed area for development. To the southeast lies the Grade II\* listed St. Francis of Assisi Church and gardens, to the northeast lies the church hall and a parking area. The vicarage was listed on 8th June 2020, for its group value which, along with the Grade II\* listed St. Francis of Assisi Church, were designed by architect Sir Giles Gilbert Scott around 1929-1930.
- 1.4 This assessment, along with guidance published by Historic England, provides the context on establishing the harm to the setting of the listed buildings.

## 2 THE HERITAGE ASSETS

- 2.1 The application site is located approximately 18 metres to the northwest of St Francis Vicarage and 25 metres west of St Francis of Assisi Church. The Vicarage is a designated Grade II Listed Building. The Church is a designated Grade II\* Listed Building.
- 2.2 Historic buildings are protected by law. The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 is the legislative basis for decision making on applications that relate to the historic environment. Section 66 of the Act imposes statutory duties upon local planning authorities which, with regard to listed buildings, require the planning authority to have '*special regard to the desirability of preserving the listed building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses*'.

- 2.3 In considering applications for planning permission, local authorities are also required to consider the policies on the historic environment set out in the National Planning Policy Framework 2021 (NPPF). At the heart of the NPPF is a *'presumption in favour of sustainable development'*, with specific policies relating to the historic environment. The NPPF states that heritage assets are an *'irreplaceable resource and should be conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance, so that they can be enjoyed for their contribution to the quality of life of existing and future generations'*. The Glossary of the NPPF defines a heritage asset as:

*'A building, monument, site, place, area or landscape identified as having a degree of significance meriting consideration in planning decisions, because of its heritage interest. It includes designated heritage assets and assets identified by the local planning authority (including local listing).'*

- 2.4 In determining planning applications, the NPPF states at paragraph 194, that local planning authorities should require an applicant to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution made by its setting. The level of detail should be proportionate to the assets importance and no more than is sufficient to understand the potential impact of the proposal on their significance.

- 2.5 Paragraphs 199-208 of the NPPF, set out how potential impacts should be considered. Paragraph 199 states:

*'When considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation (and the more important the asset, the greater the weight should be). This is irrespective of whether any potential harm amounts to substantial harm, total loss or less than substantial harm to its significance'*.

Paragraph 200 states:

*Any harm to, or loss of, the significance of a designated heritage asset (from its alteration or destruction, or from development within its setting), should require clear and convincing justification.*

- 2.6 The NPPF requires that local planning authorities categorise harm as either 'substantial' or 'less than substantial'. Paragraph 201 states:

*Where a proposed development will lead to substantial harm to (or total loss of significance of) a designated heritage asset, local planning authorities should refuse consent, unless it can be demonstrated that the substantial harm or total loss is necessary to achieve substantial public benefits that outweigh that harm or loss,*

Paragraph 202 states that:

*Where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal including, where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use.*

2.7 Historic England listing details describes the two buildings as follows:

Terriers, Church of Saint Francis

Date of listing: 28th June 1973      Designation: II\*

Dates of main phases: 1929-30.      Architect: Sir Giles Gilbert Scott



Figure 1: Exterior image of St Francis of Assisi, Terriers (2009 – Nigel Cox)

*“Materials: Flint-faced with the flint embedded in concrete, freestone dressings. Pantile roofs.  
Plan: Nave with four-bay lean-to passage aisles, W leant-to baptistry with projecting N and S porches, crossing tower with short N and S transepts, sanctuary built over the boiler room and vestries.*

*Exterior: The style of the church is freely-treated late Gothic. The design and its impact have much to do with the nature of the site which falls away markedly to the E, thus enabling a towering E end to the church. At the W end, however, the church is still tall with a blind W wall to the nave which rises up behind the baptistry which, in turn is flanked by a pair of projecting porches which are covered by hipped roofs behind minimalist battlementing. The baptistry has a pair of plain, three-light and square-headed windows while the porches each have W-facing doorways with ogee heads above the square lintels. In the low aisles there are almost continuous six-light square-headed windows with cusped lights. Above, the nave walls are blind having no clerestory. In the transepts there are very tall three-light windows with segmental arched heads and depressed reticulated tracery. The sanctuary windows have two lights and are cusped with unusual crocketed tracery. At the E end the sanctuary wall is blind apart from two two-light square-headed windows lighting the vestries. At the heart of the building the crossing tower has clasping pilaster buttresses, a shallow pyramidal roof and a NE rounded stair-turret with a vertical line of small windows. The belfry windows are of two lights and have scalloped arches with crocketed pinnacles, the lights being divided by a pilaster.”*

## St Francis Vicarage

Date of listing: 8<sup>th</sup> June 2020      Designation: II

A vicarage, designed by Giles Gilbert Scott around 1929-1930 to accompany the neighbouring Anglican Church of St Francis, High Wycombe.

*“Materials: buff brick laid in stretcher bond with ashlar dressings and a pantile roof.  
Plan: the plan is linear and extends from south-west to north-east. Reception rooms are placed on the south-east side of the ground floor, with the study having a bow window at the south-west end, as does the sitting room next to it. The kitchen is placed at the north-eastern end with a small external yard. The staircase and corridors run along the north-western side with the bathrooms, lavatories and storage.*

*Exterior: the building has a flush ashlar band at first-floor sill level. Door and window openings have bricks with a quadrant moulding to their inner edges and soldier courses to the sills and lintels. Metal-framed casement windows have been replaced with uPVC substitutes. The north-eastern entrance front has a projecting portion to the central five bays with a recessed arched porch and front door to the middle. Walling to either side is recessed, and the eaves have a pronounced overhang. Ridge chimney stacks to right and left help to promote the sense of symmetry. The south-western end is bowed and has three windows to each floor, symmetrically disposed, each with two casement lights.*





Figure 2: The vicarage northeast elevation



Figure 3: The vicarage southeast facing rear elevation



*The south-eastern front facing the garden has a similar arrangement to the entrance front with a projecting central portion of five bays. The five, two-light casements at first-floor level are evenly disposed. At ground-floor level the sitting room has a single-storey bow at left with a pitched, semi-circular roof of pantiles and the two dining room windows to its right have low sills. At right again and recessed is the kitchen with a three-light window and further to the right is a single bay with lean-to roof which marks the service end of the house and leads to the small, enclosed yard which is set at a lower level than the surrounding garden. Solar panels have been fixed above the roof at the centre of this front.'*

- 2.8 The Historic England listing entry also provide details of the interior features of both listed buildings. For this assessment which considers the impact of the proposal on the setting of the listed buildings the details of the interior are not set out.
- 2.9 The listed buildings were both constructed during 1929-1930. The frontage facade of the Church remains as constructed. The vicarage has undergone a few alterations including the replacement of the original metal frame windows with double glazed uPVC units and the installation of solar panels on the southeast facing roof (see images above).
- 2.10 Given the distance between the proposed development and the listed buildings (see figure 4 below), it is considered that the proposal could potentially affect the setting of the listed buildings.



Figure 4: Location Plan of the Church and Vicarage – taken from Historic England Maps

2.11 The impact of the proposal on the setting of the heritage assets is considered in section 4 below.

### 3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 The primary guiding document for assessing setting, is Historic England's Good Practice Advice 3, *The Setting of Heritage Assets: Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning Note 3 (Second Edition, 2017)*. The document notes a staged approach to proportionate decision-taking, with relevant NPPF paragraphs along with guidance contained in the National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG) for their implementation,

providing the framework for the consideration of changes affecting the setting of heritage assets which should be assessed proportionately and based on the nature, extent and level of the heritage asset's significance.

3.2 The Guidance recommends a five-step approach to the assessment of the effect of development on the setting of heritage assets as follows:

- **Step 1:** identify which heritage assets and their settings are affected.
- **Step 2:** assess whether, how and to what degree these settings make a contribution to the significance of the heritage asset(s).
- **Step 3:** assess the effects of the proposed development whether beneficial or harmful, on that significance.
- **Step 4:** explore ways of maximising enhancement and avoiding or minimising harm.
- **Step 5:** make and document the decision and monitor outcomes.

3.3 The detailed assessment is set out in the next section of this statement.

## 4 THE EFFECT OF THE PROPOSAL ON THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE HISTORIC ASSETS

4.1 The Church and Vicarage were both constructed between 1929 and 1930 and contained on the same plot with no subdivision or additional boundaries at least up to 1970, as can be seen from the OS images below. The OS images below also demonstrate that the setting of both the Church and Vicarage have been altered since 1946, with development at Gerald's Road in the late 1950's/early 1960's. The creation of Arnison Avenue, to the west in the late 1960's, also altered the previous more sylvian setting of both buildings. Further dense development approved in the early 1970's to the south and southeast of the Church at Gerald's Road and to the east at The Cloisters, have also detrimentally altered the setting of the Church. These latter developments were approved following the listing of the Church in 1973.

4.2 In 2019 planning permission was granted for the subdivision of the garden of the vicarage and erection of a new replacement vicarage and detached double garage

(19/06746/FUL). The subdivision of the plot included the erection of a new 1.8-metre-high timber fence between the original vicarage and the development site. This fence has been erected.

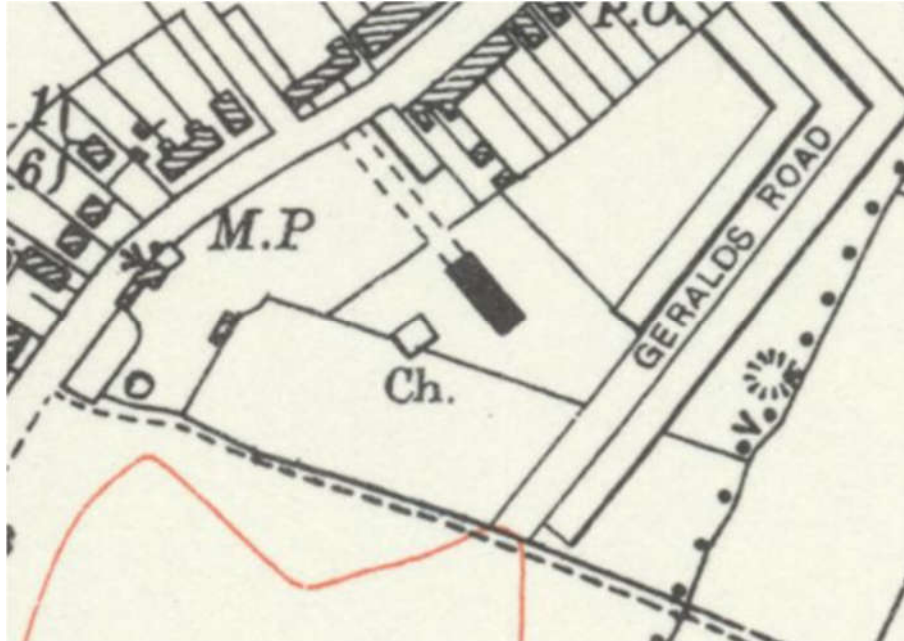


Figure 5: Extract from OS historic map published 1946

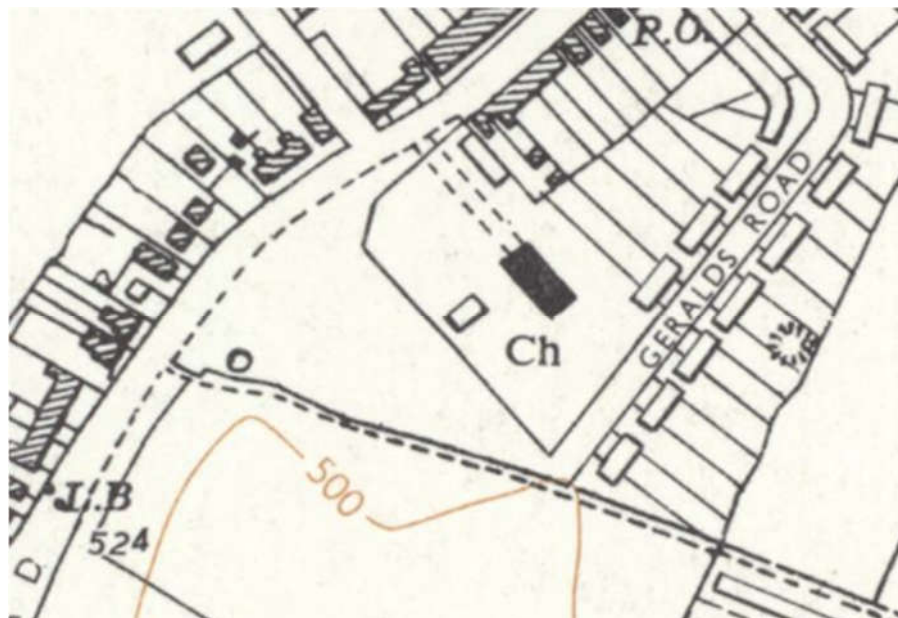


Figure 6: Extract from OS historic map published 1961





Figure 7: Extract from OS historic map published 1970

4.3 The following images taken from Google Earth (2003-2021), show the existing dense 1970's development close to the Church in Gerald's Road and The Cloisters. The images also show that the garden to the Vicarage along the boundary line with the Church is very well screened by mainly deciduous trees. The boundary includes a wall/fence which is clearly visible in the 2017 image. In the 2020 image the fence approved through the 2019 planning permission, forming the boundary between the development site and listed vicarage, is visible.



Figure 8: Image Summer 2003





Figure 9: Image Summer 2010



Figure 10: Image March 2017



Figure 11: Image May 2018



Figure 12: Image March 2020



Figure 13: Image June 2021

- 4.4 The main changes to the setting of both buildings occurred following the dense 1970's development to the south, southeast and east of the Church and vicarage at Gerald's Road and The Cloisters. These were all built after the Church was listed and have altered the setting of the Church and its significance.
- 4.5 The boundary between the church and vicarage currently comprises a brick wall/fence and well-established mature trees. This is shown in the photographic images above. There have been some changes to the hard surfacing to the church and vicarage during recent times. The most significant recent change in the setting of both buildings results from the granting of planning permission for the new vicarage in 2019. The planning permission for the new vicarage was granted before the vicarage was listed in 2020. The new boundary fence, clearly seen in the 2020 and 2021 aerial images, was approved (through the discharge of condition details) just before the vicarage was listed. The division of the plot, with the extant planning permission, including the fencing details would have been known and considered at the time of listing of the vicarage.
- 4.6 Whilst the approved new vicarage, garage and fence would have had an impact on the setting of both the listed buildings, they were clearly considered to be of such a distance away as to not adversely impact on the setting of the heritage assets.
- 4.7 The images above show that in fact the more dense development to the south and east of the Church and vicarage are much closer to the listed buildings, than the current proposal.



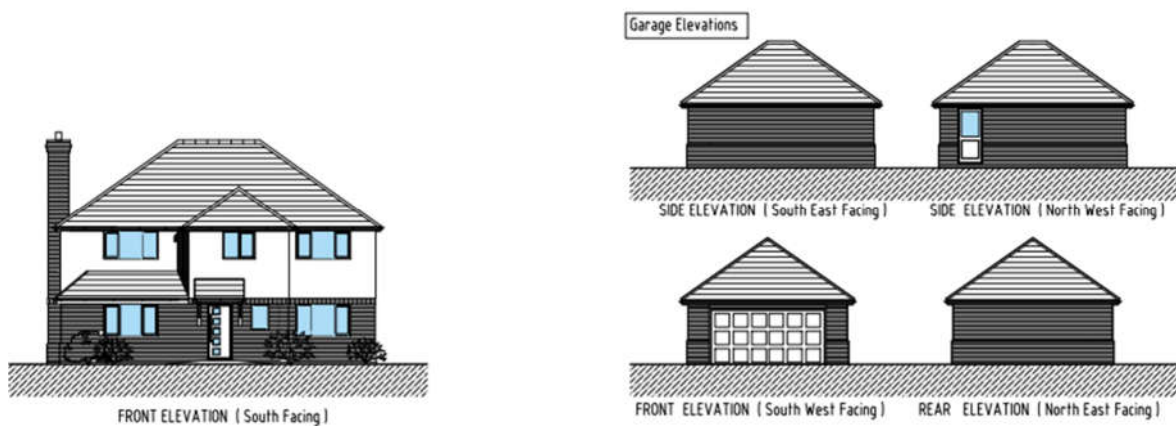


Figure 14: Elevations of approved dwelling and garage



Figure 15: Existing timber fence between the vicarage and development site

4.8 The application site is located to the west of the Church and northeast of the rear of the vicarage. The Church runs on a northwest southeast axis, with the main approach and view of the entrance from the north.

- 4.9 The proposed development will retain existing tree and shrubs, two trees of which are protected by a TPO, with the siting of the new structures similar to the previous extant planning permission (see figure 16 below – which shows the extant consent in black dashes). Thus, the impact on the setting of the listed church will be no greater than the previous planning permission.

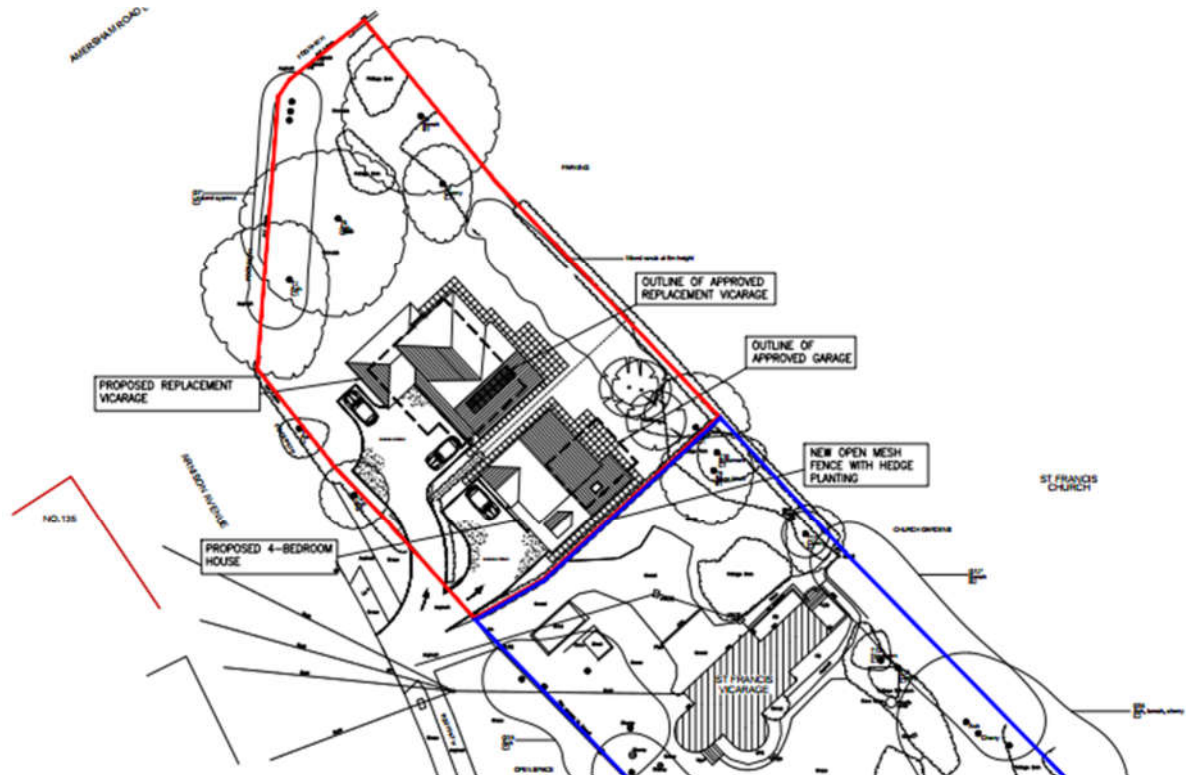
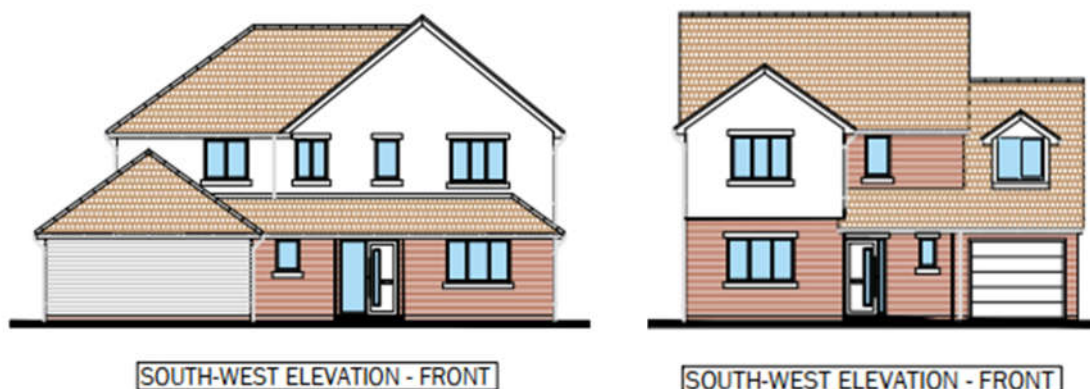


Figure 16: Proposed Siting of the Dwellings, with Existing Vicarage to southeast. Recently approved vicarage and garage shown in black dashes.

- 4.10 The existing vicarage is located at right angles to the Church, to the southwest (see figure 4 above), with a separation distance of approximately 23 metres. Access to the vicarage is from Arnison Avenue with an existing gravel driveway and parking area serving the property, between the listed building and the application site. The main windows of the vicarage are to the south of the building (see figures 2 and 3 above).
- 4.11 The proposed replacement vicarage will be in a similar position, to the previous approval. The scheme under consideration also proposes a two-storey dwelling with attached single storey garage in a similar position to the approved garage. This dwelling has been designed so that there is a single storey element closest to the boundary with the listed vicarage, thus reducing the impact of its massing on the listed building. The proposal

includes the replacement of the approved timber fence dividing the plot (see figure 15 above) with a metal mesh weld fence with native hedge planting, which will be more natural, permeable and less dense and harsh in appearance



*Figure 17: Front Elevations of the Proposed Dwellings*

- 4.12 The current development proposal, for the two dwellings will alter the relationship of the site with the listed vicarage. However, this impact on the setting of the listed vicarage must be considered in the context of the permitted scheme, for the new vicarage and double garage, which includes the, now erected, 1.8-metre-high timber fence subdividing the plot. This boundary is to the north of the listed building and away from the main south facing elevation. The proposed development will see the fence replaced with a more natural and sympathetic boundary treatment between the listed building and new dwelling. This will enhance the existing setting of the listed building.
- 4.13 The current proposal will also enable the use of funds raised by the sale of the open market dwelling and listed vicarage to be reinvested within the Diocese.
- 4.14 This proposal will enable the setting of the listed buildings to be enhanced, through the retention of existing boundary trees and shrubs and the removal of the approved timber boundary fence which divides the development plot from the retained listed vicarage and its gardens.



## 5 CONCLUSION

- 5.1 The proposal will have an impact on the setting of the Grade II\* listed Church of Saint Francis and the Grade II Listed Saint Francis Vicarage.
- 5.2 The existing setting of the listed buildings includes mature trees which form the boundary between the Church and vicarage, and mature trees (including an Ash and Beech, protected by a tree preservation order) to the north which all contribute to the significance of the heritage assets. These trees will be retained as part of the proposal.
- 5.3 The proposal for the erection of two detached dwellings, one of which will be a replacement vicarage are considered to be sympathetic and reasonable in the context of the setting of the listed buildings and the extant planning permission for the site. In addition, as demonstrated in section four above the setting of both buildings was significantly altered following the 1970's dense development at Gerald's Road and The Cloisters to the south and east.
- 5.4 The extant planning permission did not consider that the setting of the Grade II\* listed church would be adversely harmed. The vicarage was not listed on the date of the planning decision or the approval of the boundary details. However, the impact on the setting of both buildings would have been considered as part of the planning process.
- 5.5 The proposal will intensify the development on the application site but will ensure that the existing boundary trees with the church are retained and protected during construction. The proposal also provides the opportunity to replace an unsympathetic approved boundary treatment, between the development site and listed vicarage. The mesh weld fence and native hedge planting will enhance the setting of the listed vicarage. These details along with external materials will be secured through suitably worded planning conditions.
- 5.6 The proposed development will alter the setting of the existing listed buildings. However, the level of harm must be assessed in the context of how the setting has been altered through dense development in the 1970's (to the south and east), the extant 2019 planning permission and the now erected timber fence.
- 5.7 The proposed development would result in less than substantial harm to the setting of these heritage assets. The replacement of the timber fence and new and retained planting will enhance the setting of the listed vicarage. The replacement of the existing less well insulated vicarage, with a modern dwelling will be less expensive to run for the

incumbent and Diocese, which will be of benefit to the Diocese and wider public, and church community. Therefore, the wider public benefit of this proposal is clearly considered to outweigh the less than substantial harm which has been identified to result from this proposal.

- 5.8 This Heritage Statement has been prepared in accordance with the statutory requirements of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, advice contained within the NPPF, relevant policies contained within the Wycombe District Local Plan (August 2019) and Guidelines set out in the Historic England's Good Practice Advice 3, *The Setting of Heritage Assets: Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning Note 3 (Second Edition, 2017)*.