

Development proposal on land to the rear of Orchard Cottage

Orchard Cottage, Grendon Underwood, Aylesbury, HP18 0LS

October 2023

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PROJECT

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1. Introduction

- 1.1. This report has been prepared to accompany a full planning application for the development of a seven-unit residential estate on land to the south of Orchard Cottage on Main Road, Grendon Underwood, hereafter referred to as the 'Site'.
- 1.2. The proposals seek to increase the residential capacity of the village of Grendon Underwood, utilising previously undeveloped farm land as well as redeveloping the land currently occupied by Orchard Cottage and its garden areas.
- 1.3. The purpose of this report is to understand, assess the significance and analyse the impact of the proposed work to affected heritage assets in order to comply with paragraph 194 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).
- 1.4. This Heritage Impact Assessment (HIA) should be read in conjunction with the other supporting planning documents and drawings prepared by Berrys and other consultants.

2. Methodology

2.1. This report aims to establish the impacts of the proposals on the significance of identified heritage assets. It provides an overview of the history and character appraisal of the heritage assets. The appraisal provides a basis for a Statement of Significance in relation to affected heritage assets, concluding with an impact assessment on the significance of those assets.

2.2. The methodology in this report will be based upon the following best practice guidance:

Historic England's Good Practice Advice in Planning 2 – Managing Significance in Decision-Taking in the Historic Environment

Historic England Advice Note 1- Conservation Area Appraisal, Designation and Management

Oxford Character Appraisal Toolkit

Historic England Advice Note 12 – Statements of Heritage Significance

2.3. This report has primarily been produced through desktop research, using relevant secondary sources including:

Historic England National Heritage List (NHLE)

Historic Environment Records (HER)

Aylesbury Vale archives and local studies

UK Census Records (online resource)

National Library of Scotland (online resource)

2.4. A site visit was undertaken on 5th January 2023 to appraise the local character and to collect evidence to assess the significance and setting of the heritage asset/s identified. Conditions were overcast and slightly damp.

2.5. The assessment is primarily a desk-based study which has utilised secondary sources derived from a variety of published sources. The assumption has been made that this data is reasonably accurate. The records held by the HER and historic maps are not an infinite record of all heritage assets, but signposts to sources of information relating to the discovery of historic features.

3. Planning Policy Framework

3.1. Planning decisions should be taken in accordance with local plan policies unless material considerations indicate otherwise, Section 38(6) of the Planning & Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 refers. This assessment is written in the context of the following legislation, planning policy and guidance:

3.2. Legislation

Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act (1990)

- o Section 66(1) of the Act requires local planning authorities to “*have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses*” when determining applications which impact a listed building or its setting.
- o Section 72(1) of the Act, in reference to Conservation Areas, requires that “*special attention shall be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of that area*” by local planning authorities.

3.3. National Planning Policies

National Planning Policy Framework (2023) ‘*The Framework*’

National Planning Practice Guidance: *Historic Environment (2021)*

The National Planning Policy Framework provides two key chapters relevant to the proposal within this report:

Conserving and Enhancing the Historic Environment

3.4. Section 16 asserts 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.*”

3.5. Concerning proposals affecting heritage assets, paragraph 195 states that “*Local planning authorities should identify and assess the particular significance of any heritage asset that may be affected by a propo*

(including by development affecting the setting of a heritage asset) taking account of the available evidence and any necessary expertise. They should take this into account when considering the impact of a proposal on a heritage asset, to avoid or minimise any conflict between the heritage asset's conservation and any aspect of the proposal"

- 3.6. Concerning potential impacts to designated heritage assets *"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."*
- 3.7. Concerning potential impacts to non-designated heritage assets *"The effect of an application on the significance of a non-designated heritage asset should be taken into account in determining the application. In weighing applications that directly or indirectly affect non-designated heritage assets, a balanced judgement will be required having regard to the scale of any harm or loss and the significance of the heritage asset."*
- 3.8. Paragraph 202 of the NPPF confirms 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."*

Achieving Well-Designed Places

- 3.9. Section 12 asserts that *"the creation of high quality, beautiful and sustainable buildings and places is fundamental to what the planning and development process should achieve."*
- 3.10. It provides criteria for the achievement of well-designed developments in relation to the heritage and conservation:
 - o *"Are sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting.."*
- 3.11. National Planning Practice Guidance provides further detail on the determination of Public Benefits. Notably, public benefits do not need to be visible or accessible to the public. They may include:

sustaining or enhancing the significance of a heritage asset

reducing or removing risks to a heritage asset

securing the optimum viable use of a heritage asset

3.12. Heritage Planning Guidance

3.13. The following guidance documents support the management of the historic environment in planning in the UK and have informed the content of this report:

Historic England Conservation Principles: *Policies and Guidance for the Sustainable Management of the Historic Environment* (2008)

Historic England Good Practice Guide 2: *Managing Significance in Decision-Taking in the Historic Environment* (2015)

Historic England Good Practice Guide 3: *The Setting of Heritage Assets* (2017)

Historic England Advice Note 12: *Statements of Heritage Significance - Analysing Significance in Heritage Assets* (2019)

3.14. The following policies and supporting documentation from the local development framework are relevant to the proposal:

Vale of Aylesbury Local Plan 2013- 2033 (VALP) (adopted 2021)

- *BE1 Heritage Assets*
- *BE2 Design of New Development*
- *BE4 Density of New Development*

Grendon Underwood Conservation Area Appraisal (1989)

4. Identification of Heritage Assets

4.1. The NPPF (Annex 2 Glossary) 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. Heritage asset includes designated heritage assets and assets identified by the local planning authority (including local listing)”.

4.2. Grendon Underwood is a small village in the Vale of Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire, located approximately 6 miles east of Bicester and 8.5 miles from Aylesbury. Within its parish boundary are 16no. listed buildings and 1no. scheduled ancient monument. Parts of the village are designated as conservation areas under the collective title ‘Grendon Underwood Conservation Area’, comprising 5no. separated conservation sections (see figure 1).

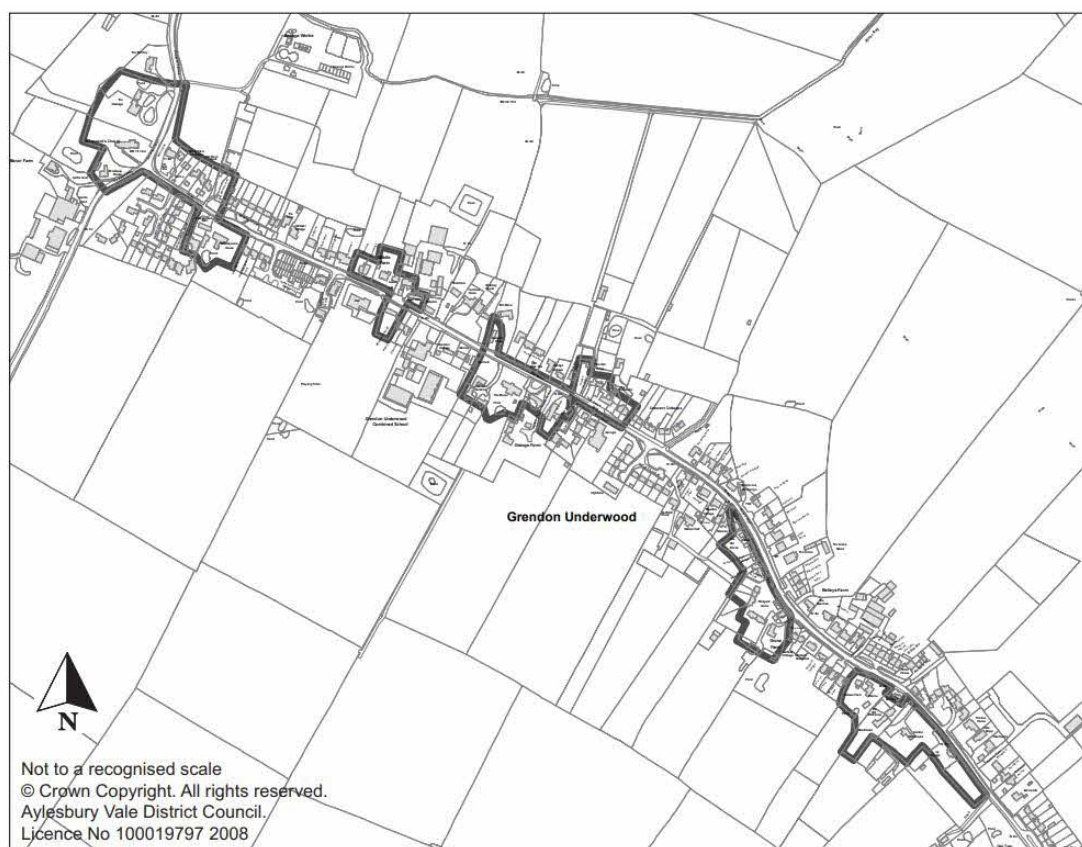


Figure 1. Grendon Underwood Conservation Area Appraisal map

4.3. The proposal area comprises Orchard Cottage and its associated gardens, and a parcel of land adjoined to the rear. The total application site is approximately 0.9 hectares. The Site is located in the southern portion of the

village in which there is an existing mix of residential, agricultural and school buildings. The plot is partially developed with Orchard Cottage (1970s) and associated garden, boundary treatment and driveway landscaping.

4.4. Figures 2 and 3 below summarise heritage assets within the site vicinity.

Figure 2. Heritage assets in the vicinity of the proposal site



Figure 3. Table of heritage assets identified in Figure 2

Name	Listing	Description
Grove Farmhouse	II (ID. 1158578)	An early 18 th century traditional timber-framed and thatched farmhouse, extended substantially to form present L shape in 19 th century.
Coombe Farmhouse	II (ID. 1332772)	An altered 17 th century farmhouse combining timber-frames with later brick built extensions and replacement tiled roof. Low level one story plus atti
Grendon Underwood		A small area of rural village character with some designed development to the south of Main Road,

Conservation Area (2)		tying two historic buildings and bounded by farmland to the south and west.
Grendon Underwood Conservation Area (1)		A small area of rural village character to the south of Main Road encompassing some of the village's more generous farmhouse plots bounded to the south and east by farmland.

- 4.5. Within the Site boundary there are no identified heritage assets. However, the Site falls within proximity of a Grade II listed property – Grove Farmhouse (list entry 1158578) - and the Grendon Underwood Conservation Area, with the Site's north-eastern boundary abutting CA section 2 (see figure 2), therefore the proposals have the potential to impact the setting of both heritage assets.

5. Historical Development and Appraisal

- 5.1. Grendon Underwood is located within an area purported to have late Saxon origins, being an established manor by the time of Domesday in 1086, whilst there are some suggestions of earlier settlement owing to limited archaeological finds within the parish.¹ The exact location of Saxon settlement is unknown.
- 5.2. From the 12th to 16th centuries Grendon remained a very minor wooded settlement within the hunting forest of Bernwood. The church of St Leonard, purportedly dating to the 12th century, is the earliest surviving building whilst a medieval moated site 320m to the west of the church (outside of current village) indicates the position of a former Norman residence.
- 5.3. Local documentary evidence provides insight into the types of activities and buildings which comprised the settlement during the middle ages; a windmill, two fishponds, an early cruck-built residence (15th century) and evidence of around three other buildings most likely small residences.² The settlement was clearly an informal arrangement likely reliant on foresting related trade and industry to support the small community.
- 5.4. With the gradual disafforesting of Bernwood throughout the 13th-16th centuries Grendon became more agriculturally focused with large tracts of open land being cleared around the small settlement. The manor of Grendon Underwood, encompassing forest and lands surrounding the village, appears to have been sold on multiple occasions throughout the 15th-19th centuries without much degree of subdivision.³
- 5.5. There is little documentary evidence of the evolution of the built environment of the village during the 18th-19th Centuries, however it is clear that the village spread eastwards along the sole thoroughfare from Waddesdon to Marsh Gibbon, after the manor was legally inclosed in 1769.⁴ Increases in farming activity here are evident owing in part to the region's productive clay loam substructure and the introduction of more productive farming technology, leading to the establishment of a corridor of farmsteads graduating

¹ Buckinghamshire Heritage Portal – Grendon Underwood

² Ibid

³ Victoria County History (1927), Vol.4, pp50-54

⁴ Ibid

eastwards from the traditional village centre cluster. Between 1798 and 1801 the village grew from 69 inhabitants and 285. However, even in 1901 the village had only grown to 323 inhabitants.

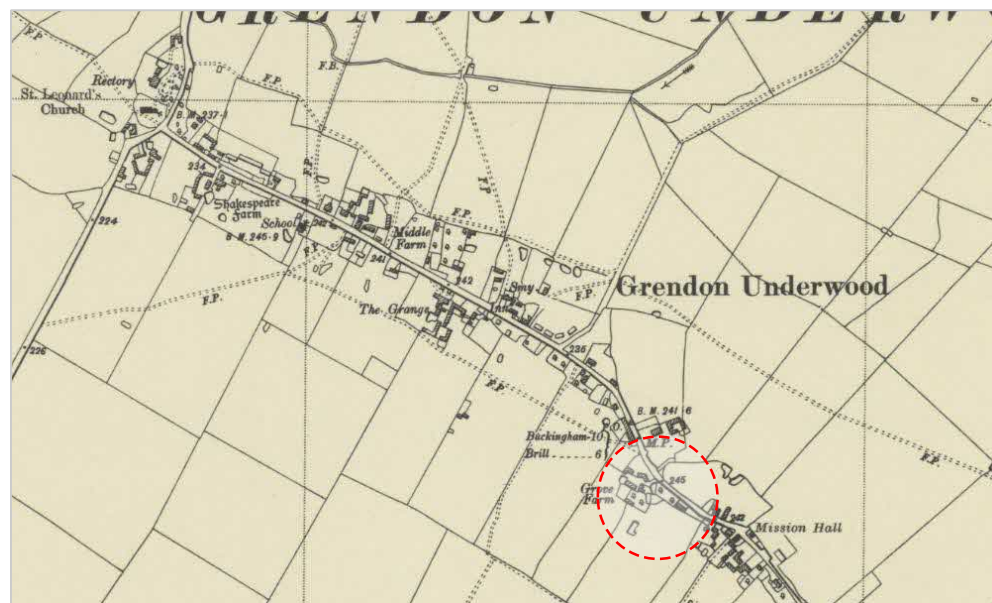
- 5.6. The elongated corridor of farmsteads has gradually become infilled with residential, commercial and institutional development throughout the 19th - 21st centuries, increasing the density of the built environment and establishing an evolution to a residentially led village aesthetic. The former sparseness of farming landmass has given way in the 20th – 21st centuries to necessary residential amenity. The progression of the village's development from the late 19th century to the present can be seen in Figure 4.



Ordnance Survey: Grendon Underwood: 1885



Aerial Photograph: Grendon Underwood: 1947



Ordnance Survey: Grendon Underwood: 1958



Google Maps: Grendon Underwood: 2021

Figure 4. Cartographic regression of Grendon Underwood 1885 - 2021

6. Establishing Significance and Setting

6.1. Significance is defined in the Framework 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...significance derives not only from a heritage asset's physical presence, but also from its setting...

6.2. Grove Farmhouse is one of the only thatched cottages in Grendon Underwood and is certainly the only thatched example within the section of the village corridor under assessment, giving the asset a rarity value and historic interest in contributing to the story of the village.

6.3. The farmhouse embodies the farming tradition of the area which characterises the village evolution from deforesting in 17th century up until the mid 20th century, and whilst this tradition is not of national significance it does remain important as a facet of local community value.

6.4. Architecturally the asset's historic style is legible despite later alterations changing the form of the building. The thatched roof, partially sloping timber-frame structure and whitewashed external elevations are evidence of historic construction techniques. The asset therefore has some architectural interest.

6.5. Within the conservation area sections there is a general undertone of historic character which is anchored upon a sparsity of heritage assets located along the Main Road corridor. The conservation area sections are not characterizable by any particular building style or degree of historic homogeneity, and instead encompass a diverse range of building types, ages, sizes and material compositions. Since the appraisal in 1989 the composition of the areas has changed substantially with the inclusion of developments such as the Rickyard Grove (north-west of the proposal Site). There is therefore a very low degree of surviving special interest and character within the conservation areas.

6.6. The conservation area section to the southern end of the village (north of the proposal site) is bounded by heavily sub-divided pastoral fields. Whilst not identified as a contributor to the general character of the conservation areas in the area appraisal, it does provide a contextual consistency within the CA

setting. The farmland setting therefore provides some contribution to the special interests of the CA.

- 6.7. To enable general growth of the village population, in manifold places along the village corridor the traditional farmland boundary has been altered over time with small residential developments stemming from the Main Road (e.g. Three Horseshoes Close, Rickyard Grove, Darley's Close), gently graduating the village form away from a solely road-facing built form. The positive contribution of such developments to a new village identity, with larger more diverse communities and greater activity should be considered in any new appraisals of the CA. The conservation areas have absorbed new developments appropriately to maintain the presence and legibility of the low number of heritage assets as viewed from the main road, however this has changed their overall identity and character to one of mixed development within a wider rural village setting.
- 6.8. The Main Road links all the heritage assets (including conservation areas) contributing substantially to our understanding of the village formation and in so doing is a major contributor to the importance of setting significance of all these assets.
- 6.9. Figure 5 below details the built character of the conservation area. There is a predominance of mid to late 20th century brick-built bungalows and modest two storey dwellings facing the main thoroughfare through the village. There is no vernacular trend or consistency of building style, size or material finish. Orientation of buildings along Main Road are predominantly street-facing but include examples of angled or transverse orientation. Grove Farmhouse remains the only building of character and significance within the vicinity of the proposal Site.

Figure 5. Summary of visual character of conservation area and immediate vicinity of Site



Conservation Area: Modern two storey road-facing, monolithic brick finish



Conservation Area: Modern bungalow mixed render and brick finishes



Conservation Area: Grove Farmhouse Grade II listed



Conservation Area: modern barn-style single dwelling



Setting: 1980s construction converted bungalows with dormers, brick façade finish



Conservation Area: early 2000s residential estate behind Grade II listed Grove Farmhouse. Monolithic brick and terracotta tile finishes



Setting: Two storey early 2000s detached house and unique bungalows, faux sandstone facings and brick detailing



Conservation Area: view of the development site as seen from the key road view (site situated behind Garfield house on the left)



Conservation Area: Contemporary semi-detached houses in landscaped grounds



Setting: late 20th century bungalow with extension, brick finishing.

6.10. Annex 2 of the Framework defines setting as:

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.

6.11. Setting is not fixed and will change over time; therefore, cumulative change should be taken into consideration. In this instance where the significance of an asset has been compromised *...consideration still needs to be given to whether additional change will further detract from, or can enhance, the significance of the asset.*

- 6.12. The setting of the grade II listed Grove Farmhouse incorporates open rural undeveloped fields to the south and east, and contemporary developments to the north and west. The farmhouse is not the tallest or most dominant building within its setting, being nestled into a lightly inclining landscape and set back from the road which is dominated by Garfield Cottage and the Rickyard development.
- 6.13. There is a greenscreen of tall hedgerows and smaller mature trees which runs parallel to the access road between the Grove Farmhouse boundary and the development site boundary. The overall composition of the setting as viewed from Main Road maintains a rural character but is also sufficiently developed to suggest new development may be achieved without compromising that rural character.
- 6.14. To the rear of Grove Farmhouse the experience is predominantly developed with delineated gardens bounded by border trees and hedging, partially enclosed with a property to the rear, and the access road to the property's front is enclosed by a green screen. There are also coppices of small trees to the west of the asset which further contribute to an enclosed setting. Beyond the immediate setting there are defined pastoral fields to the south-west, and Main Road proliferated with diverse building types and ages to the north.

7. Heritage Impact Assessment

- 7.1. In considering direct and indirect impacts, the development has no direct impact upon any heritage assets. The setting of the Grove Farmhouse and Grendon Underwood Conservation Area (GUCA) have been identified as requiring assessment for indirect impact.
- 7.2. Grove Farmhouse is largely experienced by traversing Main Street as either a transport user or pedestrian using the pavement. It is entirely visible when traversing east to west until a timber-clad barn unit obscures it (see Figure 5). The building is panoramically experienced in combination with Rickyard Grove and the residencies of Main Street. Despite the density and poor architectural quality of the surrounding built environment, Grove Farmhouse remains visually dominant and retains high legibility as a heritage asset. It is the only building retaining a thatched roof and traditional timber-frame bay end in the immediate landscape.
- 7.3. The closest unit is located 46 metres to the southeast behind the existing greenscreen to be retained (Figure 6). The position of these units has been purposefully pulled away from the Site boundary to ensure a neutral impact upon the setting of Grove Farmhouse and the GUCA. Owing to the position of those units obscured by the existing cottages to the north, the new units will not be intervisible with Grove Farmhouse as experienced from the key views of Main Street.



Figure 6. Arrangement of the Site and relationship with the boundary screening between Grove Farmhouse and the Site.

- 7.4. The site units are of 2-storeys with pitched roofs and twin rear/front facing gables. The designs are consistent with the diversity of building types within the conservation area and do not exceed the typical 2 storeys experienced throughout the GUCA. The designs therefore in terms of physical

characteristics, scale and context, preserve the character of the GUCA and contribute to the evolving local distinctiveness of the Grendon Underwood built environment.



Rear Elevation

Figure 7. Architect's visualisation of rear elevation of Site units

- 7.5. The formulaic arrangement of the units was raised as a point for further investigation at pre-application discussions. Our analysis suggests that the GUCA and surrounding built environment possesses a higher proportion of examples of uniform property arrangements, with irregular orientation (i.e. not road facing or at an approximate 90 degrees to the road or neighbouring properties) being a less frequent characteristic. Main Street is highly uniform in the position and orientation of buildings, whilst neighbouring estate including Rickyard Grove also have been designed with uniform orientation. It is our opinion therefore that the uniformity of orientation respects the physical characteristics of the surroundings. Additionally, the use of white render and cedar cladding across all units provides a neutral and naturalistic tone in keeping with the south-facing countryside and is respectful of the tonal qualities of Grove Farmhouse, mitigating against harm to the setting of both heritage assets.
- 7.6. The development has taken into account the need for retained ecological areas and the retention of mature hedgerows and boundary screening. The reduction in useable area of the plot has resulted in an equally spaced development of low overall density. The density is uniform across the plot

span and allows for sufficient residential amenity and access, without compromising the surrounding character of the GUCA which is comparable – if not higher - density.

- 7.7. There will be a loss of open farming landscape currently experienced by owners of the properties to the north of the Site along Main Street, and users of the retained footpath routes to the south of the village (figure 8). The mitigating factors for the loss of this section of green space are that the ecologically important pond section has been preserved, the land has been utilised as arable and herding farmland of limited natural aesthetic quality, and visual access to the area is quite restricted.



Figure 8. Location of nearby footpaths in relation to the Site. Source: Footpathmap.co.uk

- 7.8. At the time of writing access to the footpath was unavailable and potentially permanently removed owing to position of garden furniture and outbuildings to the southern access point on Main Street.

8. Conclusion

- 8.1. The proposals include a new development of seven two-storey detached units on land previously used as arable and herd farming, alongside the demolition of Orchard Cottage (1970s) and new landscaping for public access and amenity.
- 8.2. The proposals comply with policy *BE1 Heritage Assets* as the significance of the setting of the Grove Farmhouse and Grendon Underwood Conservation Area has been assessed in line with policy requirement, the results of which conclude that there will be no harmful impact to the significance of those affected designated heritage assets.
- 8.3. The characteristics of the GUCA have been heavily altered since its appraisal and designation in 1989, with a significant amount of new development now an integrated part of the built landscape comprising local character. The quality of the character and therefore the level of significance of the asset has thus been reduced; as such the depth of the content of the report has been discussed to a degree proportionate with that level of significance. The applicant has complied with the policy in commissioning an HIA to assess the potential harm their proposals may cause to affected heritage assets.
- 8.4. The proposals do not enhance local distinctiveness or the significance of the affected heritage assets, but neither do the proposals cause any harmful impacts. The experience of Grove Farmhouse and its setting is preserved as a consequence of retention of green spaces including mature green screen, the orientation and position of the proposed units far back from Main Street and obscured by cottages on Main Street.
- 8.5. Rarity value of Grove Farmhouse will not be impacted, and historic and architectural legibility will not be affected. The farmland setting of the GUCA will be affected, however the mitigation taken in preserving important ecological sections of the plot preserve important natural characteristics whilst optimising the less important arable farmland comprising the remainder of the plot.
- 8.6. The proposals have been reviewed with regard to pre-application advice: *Potential harm to heritage assets...have also been identified as matters*

which may attract negative weight in the overall planning balance (22/03378/PREMTG) and through the mitigation measures of retention of the mature greenscreen and pond arrangement, and neutral/natural tonal finishes, are considered to result in no harmful impact to the significance of affected heritage assets through change to their setting.