

THAMESFIELD RETIREMENT VILLAGE REMENHAM BERKSHIRE

BUILT HERITAGE STATEMENT



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Village, Wargrave Road,
Remenham, Berkshire
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THAMESFIELD RETIREMENT VILLAGE: BUILT HERITAGE STATEMENT

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This Built Heritage Statement has been researched and prepared by RPS Consulting UK Ltd, a Tetra Tech Company, on behalf of Retirement Villages Group Ltd. The report identifies the significance of relevant built heritage assets and assesses the likely impacts to their significance arising from the proposed development. The subject of the assessment is land at Thamesfield, Wargrave Road, Remenham, Berkshire (hereafter 'the Site'). The Site is located on the eastern bank of the River Thames opposite the town of Henley-on-Thames and is approximately centred on NGR SU 76572 82463 [Fig.1]. This report addresses built heritage matters only.
- 1.2 This report makes an assessment of updated development plans for the Site, prepared to respond to and incorporate feedback from Historic England, South Oxfordshire District Council, and the Built Heritage Officer for Wokingham Borough Council.
- 1.3 The Site comprises the buildings of a residential care village bounded by the River Thames to the west (with the waterfront of Henley-on-Thames on the opposite bank), Wargrave Road to the east, a densely treed residential plot to the north (with a red-brick boundary wall) and the grounds of a rowing club (across a more open boundary) to the south. The Site buildings incorporate part of a later nineteenth-century gentry house, with substantial later additions and alterations.
- 1.4 The Site includes no designated or non-designated built heritage assets recorded within the local Historic Environment Records (HER) or relevant local heritage list (as of the Wokingham Borough Council's [Topic Paper Historic Environment](#) 2024, and their current list of [Buildings of Traditional Local Character](#)). Nevertheless, during the later stages of the pre-application process for this application, the LPA's conservation officer has identified Thamesfield as a non-designated heritage asset. The Site is also wholly within the Remenham Henley Bridge Conservation Area and forms a part of the wider eastern setting of the Henley Conservation Area [Fig.1].
- 1.5 This Built Heritage Statement has therefore been prepared to support a full planning application for part demolition of the current buildings and development of a new three-storey block of apartments with extensive enhancements to the existing built form and associated landscaping. Full details of the proposed scheme are set out in the supporting materials provided with the updated application submissions.
- 1.6 This report makes appropriate reference to the relevant legislation, the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, and national and local planning policy. In addition, relevant Historic England guidance, notably GPA3: *The Setting of Heritage Assets* (Historic England 2017), has been consulted to inform the judgements made. Relevant entries in the Berkshire and the Oxfordshire HER and listing descriptions for relevant designated heritage assets on the National Heritage List for England (NHLE) has also been consulted. This Statement meets the requirements of paragraph 207 of the NPPF (2024) and is sufficient to inform any decision on the planning application with respect to built heritage matters.
- 1.7 The conclusions reached in this report are the result of historical research, walkover surveys of the Site and publicly accessible locations in the surrounding area (including a mid-Winter seasonal views survey), map studies and the application of professional judgement.
- 1.8 The findings of this report are based on the known conditions at the time of writing. All maps, plans and photographs are for illustrative purposes only.

Site Description

- 1.9 The Site [Fig.1] is situated on the eastern bank of the River Thames opposite the town of Henley-on-Thames. The Site comprises a near square parcel of residential land of c.1.23ha. with the buildings of a residential care village filling much of the northern, central and north-eastern portions of the Site (Plates 1 – 4). The rest of the Site is given over to well-treed, water-fronted lawns and

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gardens, a driveway, car parking, a lodge and a croquet lawn. The Site is bounded by the River Thames to the west (with the waterfront of Henley-on-Thames on the opposite bank), Wargrave Road to the east (with steep rising, densely treed hills to the east), a densely treed residential plot to the north (beyond a red-brick wall) and the grounds of a rowing club to the south. The original house was a later nineteenth-century gentry house which has been profoundly extended, altered and re-modelled over numerous phases through the twentieth century and into the twenty-first century.

- 1.10 The Site has largely level topography lying as it does besides the River Thames. Parts of the garden closer to the River and particularly the croquet lawn to the southwest are at a lower level compared to the areas of the buildings and carparking, which are set on terraces. The garden includes a lower density of mature trees. There is dense mature planting, including mature trees, immediately north of the Site and the eastern margin of the Site is well planted too.



Plate 1: West elevation of Thamesfield



Plate 2: South elevation of Thamesfield



Plate 3: Original nineteenth-century range



Plate 4: Rear part of Thamesfield

2.0 LEGISLATIVE CASE LAW PLANNING POLICY AND GUIDANCE FRAMEWORK

- 2.1 The current national legislative and planning policy system identifies, through the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), that applicants should consider the potential impact of development upon 'heritage assets'.
- 2.2 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'*. This term includes: designated heritage assets which possess a statutory designation (for example listed buildings and conservation areas); and non-designated heritage assets, typically identified by Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) and incorporated into a Local List and/or recorded on the Historic Environment Record.
- 2.3 As defined in the Glossary to the National Planning Policy Framework and by the Planning Policy Guidance (PPG), heritage interests include:
- **archaeological interest:** there will be archaeological interest in a heritage asset if it holds, or potentially holds, evidence of past human activity worthy of expert investigation at some point.
 - **architectural and artistic interest:** these are interests in the design and general aesthetics of a place. They can arise from conscious design or fortuitously from the way the heritage asset has evolved. More specifically, architectural interest is an interest in the art or science of the design, construction, craftsmanship and decoration of buildings and structures of all types. Artistic interest is an interest in other human creative skill, like sculpture.
 - **historic interest:** an interest in past lives and events (including pre-historic). Heritage assets can illustrate or be associated with them. Heritage assets with historic interest not only provide a material record of our nation's history, but can also provide meaning for communities derived from their collective experience of a place and can symbolise wider values such as faith and cultural identity.

Legislation

- 2.4 Where development subject to planning control may affect the significance of listed buildings and conservation areas, there is a legislative framework to ensure proposed works are developed and considered with due regard to the impact upon their significance. This extends from primary legislation under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (in particular Sections 16, 66, and 72). The Act requires that special regard, or special attention, be given to the preservation of listed buildings and their setting, or to preserving or enhancing the character and appearance of conservation areas. Section 72, relating to conservation areas, is only engaged in relation to development *within* such an area, it affords no statutory weighting to change within their setting.
- 2.5 The meaning and effect of these duties have been considered by the courts, including the Court of Appeal's decision in relation to Barnwell Manor Wind Energy Ltd v East Northamptonshire District Council [2014] EWCA Civ 137. The Court agreed with the High Court's judgement that Parliament's intention in enacting section 66(1) was that decision makers should give *'considerable importance and weight'* to the desirability of preserving (i.e. keeping from harm) the positive contributions made by any aspect of a listed building's setting to its significance.
- 2.6 Importantly, preservation does not mean that change is not possible; it specifically means no harm (to significance), as confirmed by the case of *South Lakeland DC v SSE & Carlisle Diocesan Parsonages Board*, [1992] 2 WLR 204, [1992] 2 AC 141. This is echoed in Historic England's *Managing Significance in Decision-Taking in the Historic Environment: Historic Environment Good*

Practice Advice in Planning 2 (2015), which states that ‘change to heritage assets is inevitable but it is only harmful when significance is damaged’.

- 2.7 Assessment of heritage impact is not limited to identifying harm, and it is incumbent that impacts which enable preservation, and those which enhance are also given great weight by the decision maker. The case of *Kenneth Kay v SSGCLF and Ribble Valley Borough Council*, [2020] EWHC2292 (Admin), 21 August 2020, makes clear that any heritage benefits should be expressly included and referred to as public benefits.

National Planning Policy

National Planning Policy Framework (Department for Levelling up Housing and Communities, December 2024)

- 2.8 NPPF Section 16: Conserving and Enhancing the Historic Environment relates to the conservation of heritage assets in the production of local plans and decision taking. It emphasises that heritage assets are ‘*an irreplaceable resource and should be conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance*’.
- 2.9 For proposals that have the potential to affect the significance of a heritage asset, paragraph 207 requires applicants to identify and describe the significance of any heritage assets that may be affected, including any contribution made by their setting. The level of detail provided should be proportionate to the significance of the heritage assets affected and no more than sufficient to understand the impact of the proposed development. This is supported by paragraph 208, which requires LPAs to take this assessment into account when considering applications.
- 2.10 Under ‘Considering potential impacts’ paragraph 212 states that ‘great weight’ should be given to the *conservation* of designated heritage assets, irrespective of whether any potential impact equates to total loss, substantial harm or less than substantial harm to the significance of the heritage assets. The NPPF defines ‘conservation’ in the context of heritage policy to mean: ‘*the process of maintaining and managing change to a heritage asset in a way that sustains and, where appropriate, enhances its significance*’.
- 2.11 Paragraph 214 states that where a development will result in substantial harm to, or total loss of, the significance of a designated heritage asset, permission should be refused, unless this harm is necessary to achieve substantial public benefits, or a number of criteria are met.
- 2.12 Where less than substantial harm is identified paragraph 215 requires this harm to be weighed against the public benefits of the proposed development, including, where appropriate, securing the heritage asset’s optimum viable use.
- 2.13 Paragraph 216 states that where an application will affect the significance of a non-designated heritage asset, a balanced judgement is required, having regard to the scale of harm or loss and the significance of the heritage asset.
- 2.14 Paragraph 219 notes that local planning authorities should look for opportunities for new development within Conservation Areas and World Heritage Sites and within the setting of heritage assets to enhance or better reveal their significance. It also states that proposals that preserve those elements of setting that make a positive contribution to, or better reveal the significance of, a heritage asset should be treated favourably.
- 2.15 Finally, paragraph 220 states that not all elements of a Conservation Area or World Heritage Site will necessarily contribute to its significance. When determining the impacts arising from the loss of a building or element that does positively contribute, consideration should be given to the relative significance of that building and the impact to the significance of the Conservation Area or World Heritage Site as a whole.

Planning Practice Guidance (DCLG)

- 2.16 The Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) has been adopted to aid the application of the NPPF. The recent High Court decision ('Mead') iterated that the PPG and the NPPF are to be read and applied as a whole, being mindful that one may modify the other (*Mead Realisations Ltd v Secretary of State for Housing Communities and Local Government and another* [2025] EWCA Civ 32). Both are statements of national policy issued by the Secretary of State, and there should be no legal distinction between them. In relation to heritage, PPG reiterates that conservation of heritage assets in a manner appropriate to their significance is a core planning principle.
- 2.17 Key elements of the guidance relate to assessing harm. It states that substantial harm is a high bar that may not arise in many cases. It also states that while the level of harm will be at the discretion of the decision maker, generally substantial harm is a high test that will only arise where a development seriously affects a key element of an asset's special interest. It is the degree of harm, rather than the scale of development, that is to be assessed.
- 2.18 Paragraph 18 of the PPG states that within each category of harm (which category applies should be explicitly identified – substantial or less than substantial harm), the extent of the harm may vary and **should be clearly articulated**. In common practice, harm is often articulated with reference to a spectrum (for example, 'at the lower end of the spectrum of less than substantial harm', 'at the highest end of less than substantial harm').

Overview: Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning

- 2.19 Historic England have published a series of documents which provide guidance on managing change within the historic environment. These include Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning (GPAs) documents and Historic England Advice Notes (HEANS). Such documents underpin conservation practice in England.
- 2.20 The most relevant to this assessment include:
- GPA2: *Managing Significance in Decision-Taking in the Historic Environment* (2015)
 - GPA3: *The Setting of Heritage Assets* (Second Edition; 2017)
 - HEAN7: *Local Heritage Listing: Identifying and Conserving Local Heritage* (Second Edition, 2021)
 - HEAN12: *Statements of Heritage Significance: Analysing Significance in Heritage Assets* (2019)

Local Planning Policy

- 2.21 In considering any planning application for development, the planning authority will be mindful of the framework set by government policy, in this instance the NPPF, by current Development Plan Policy and by other material considerations. In this instance, the local planning context is prescribed by Wokingham Borough Council, whose relevant policies and guidance is reproduced below.
- 2.22 The Wokingham Borough Development Plan document, adopted February 2014, sets out the following policies in relation to the built historic environment:

Policy TB24 Designated Heritage Assets (Listed Buildings, Historic Parks and Gardens, Scheduled Monuments and Conservation Areas)

- *The Borough Council will conserve and seek enhancement of designated heritage assets in the Borough and their settings by:*
 - a) *Requiring works to or affecting heritage assets or their setting to demonstrate that the proposals would at least conserve and, where possible enhance the important character*

and special architectural or historic interest of the building, Conservation Area, monument or park and garden including its setting and views.

- b) Supporting development proposals or other initiatives that will conserve and, where possible, enhance the local character, setting, management and historic significance of designated heritage assets, with particular support for initiatives that would improve any assets that are recognised as being in poor condition or at risk.*
- *Proposals or building works shall retain or incorporate existing features or details of historic or architectural significance or design quality into the scheme.*

Policy TB26: Buildings of Traditional Local Character and Areas of Special Character

- *Planning permission will only be granted for proposals to or affecting Buildings of Traditional Local Character and Areas of Special Character where they demonstrate that they retain and enhance the traditional, historical, local and special character of the building or area and its setting; and*
- *Proposals that involve the demolition of a Building of Traditional Local Character will require strong justification.*

3.0 HISTORIC BUILT ENVIRONMENT APPRAISAL

Introduction

- 3.1 This section summarises the historic development of the Site and identifies then assesses the significance of relevant built heritage assets potentially affected by the development proposal, including the contribution of setting to their significance. Section 4 assesses how the development proposals may have an impact, if any, on that significance.

Historical Development

- 3.2 For figures and greater detail, refer to the archaeological Desk-based Assessment submitted as part of the application (RPS 2023).
- 3.3 Thamesfield is first seen on historic mapping from 1875. It is formed only of the southern corner of the current building, with a detached glasshouse to the north-west. The Site is well planted with trees and is landscaped with pathways. A lodge can be seen, though the area of the current croquet lawn is in a separate plot of land to the south-east. The northern corner of the current Site is clearly in different use and is occupied by further glasshouses. There is a boat house in the Site's western corner.
- 3.4 Substantial rear extensions, that near double the plan of the house, are seen to Thamesfield by the end of the nineteenth century with further extensions added through the early decades of the twentieth century. By the mid twentieth century glass houses proliferate in the adjacent grounds to the north. By 1962 the grounds extend to the south to include the current grounds of the rowing club and by 1968 the house is labelled as a 'Youth Centre'.
- 3.5 By 1989 Thamesfield is noted as a 'Nursing Home' on mapping with associated extensions to the rear and of the frontage range to the north-west, as the Site now extends to its current northern corner – constructed between 1986 and 1989. By the same time the current rowing club to the south-east has been separated from Thamesfield's grounds. Further extensions to and remodelling of Thamesfield were carried out in 1994, 1996 and 2003.

Identification of Heritage Assets

The Site

- 3.6 There are no listed building or non-designated built heritage assets recorded within the Site on either the local HER or Wokingham's list of *Buildings of Traditional Local Character* (live document).
- 3.7 However, during the latter stages of the pre-application process for this application - in a meeting in later 2024 and a representation in February 2025, but not any earlier in the process, which commenced in 2023 - the LPA identified Thamesfield itself as a non-designated heritage asset.
- 3.8 Thamesfield has not subsequently been added to the Wokingham list of *Buildings of Traditional Local Character*; it should be noted that Historic England's guidance document *Local Heritage Listing: Identifying and Conservation Local Heritage* (2021) requires that, when heritage assets are identified during the planning process, that decisions are made '*in a way that is consistent with the identification of non-designated heritage assets for inclusion in a local heritage list, properly recorded, and made publicly available, for instance through an addition to a local heritage list...*' (op. cit. 7-8); this aligns with the guidance given within the PPG (Paragraph: 040 Reference ID: 18a-040-20190723).
- 3.9 Thamesfield will be assessed further below.

Conservation Areas

- 3.10 The Site forms a very small part of the southern extent of **Remenham Henley Bridge Conservation Area**.
- 3.11 The Site also forms a very small part of the wider setting to the **Henley Conservation Area** on the western side of the River Thames: there are some filtered views of Thamesfield's western elevation from Boathouse Reach on the south-eastern edge of the Conservation Area. The Conservation Area Character Appraisal notes views over the River Thames to the steep wooded slopes of the Chiltern Hills to the east [p.18]. There is no mention of any buildings in these views.
- 3.12 Both Conservation Areas will be assessed further below.

Listed Buildings

- 3.13 All listed buildings within the wider area can be discounted from further consideration [Fig.1]. That includes the Grade I **Church of St Mary the Virgin** (c.320m north-west of the Site); the Grade I **Henley Bridge** (c.240m north-west); the Grade II **Henley Royal Regatta Headquarters** (c.170 north-west); Grade II **Bird Place Cottage** (c.150m north-west); Grade II **Bird Place** (c.130m north-west); and the Grade II **Little Angel P.H.** (c.100m north). These assets, while relatively close to the Site, are wholly screened from it by dense planting and mature trees in the grounds to the north of the Site, with no evidence for meaningful or long-standing historical associations with the Site which might otherwise be affected by the proposed development.
- 3.14 This dense planting, together with the dense built form of Henley on the west bank of the River Thames also screens, in whole or part, most of the numerous historic buildings and elements of the Riverside Character Area of the Henley Conservation Area from the Site, including the Grade II Riverside Terrace and its associated boundary wall (180m west of the Site). The Grade II Obelisk to the south of the Henley Conservation Area [Fig.1] is also screened from the Site by the eyot to the south-west of the Site in the middle of the River. Again there is no evidence for any other meaningful historic functional, associative, or designed associations with the Site which might otherwise be affected by the proposed development.
- 3.15 At a greater distance from the Site to the east are a number of Grade II listed buildings set on the crown of the hill to the east of the River Thames. The nearer group of such assets are centred at Park Place (c.1.2km south-east) and wholly screened from the Site by the densely wooded slopes.

Registered Parks and Gardens

- 3.16 Park Place is one of the points of focus of the surrounding Park Place and Temple Combe Registered Park and Garden (Grade II*). This is a huge landscape feature extending over 268.7ha., ranging from immediately east of the Site, on the opposite side of the A321 Wargrave Road, some 2.4km to the south-east. None of the drives and associated lodges are close to the Site or hold any intervisibility with it. The designated area's pleasure grounds are described in the designation citation as *'surround[ing] the house to the west, south and east, with pleasure grounds leading away to the south towards the river'*. As such, none of the pleasure gardens hold intervisibility with the Site. Park Place was originally designed to hold views to the west over the River Thames, but these have been wholly screened after the eighteenth century. The primary elements of the RPG – buildings; pleasure gardens; structures; and designed landscape – are wholly screened from the Site (and vice versa). In addition, there is no evidence for any meaningful or longstanding associations between the RPG and the Site.
- 3.17 It is concluded, therefore, that the Site does not contribute to its setting as part of its wider setting; those parts of the Site closest to the RPG comprise its later 20th-century eastern ranges, which hold no significance and contribute nothing to an understanding of the development or significance of the RPG. The RPG is consequently not considered further in this statement.



Plate 5: View to Thamesfield from the west, at the north end of Boathouse Reach



Plate 6: Evolving view to Thamesfield, moving southeast along Boathouse Reach



Plate 7: Evolving view to Thamesfield, moving southeast along Boathouse Reach, from the southwest



Plate 8: Evolving view to Thamesfield, moving southeast along Boathouse Reach, from the south

Henley Conservation Area – Riverside Character Area (Area 5)

- 3.18 Henley Conservation Area is a designated heritage asset of high (national) significance, with this significance principally derived from the history and morphology of its townscape beside the River Thames, together with the architectural and historic special interest of the listed buildings therein. The Conservation Areas is divided into character areas, with that closest to the Site known as the Riverside Character Area (Area 5).

- 3.19 The Character Appraisal notes that the sub-area's character:

'...is defined by the riverside location and the various boating activities along the riverbank. Whilst all these activities are now all purely for pleasure or sport, evidence of the previous commercial nature of the area is seen in the many late nineteenth-century boathouses and warehouses. [...] [in the part of the Area opposite the Site], there are more Edwardian boathouses, similar to those on the northern fringes of this area, but are set back from the riverbank with a wide, pedestrian-only walkway. Modern development has been successfully provided, marrying in extremely well with the existing buildings'.

- 3.20 The Site and Thamesfield form a very small part of the Conservation Area's wider setting. The Site is largely visually separated (and holds no other meaningful historical association) with the core and majority of the built heritage assets in Henley on the west bank of the River Thames (largely those to the north of Riverside Terrace and set further west beyond the river frontage). These assets, while relatively close to the Site, are wholly screened from the Site by dense planting and mature trees in the grounds to the north of the Site up to the eastern approach to Henley Bridge and/or by the built form of Henley.
- 3.21 Thamesfield has not, as also concluded in this Statement, been identified by a plan-making body as a non-designated heritage asset. Thamesfield is also not referenced in the Henley Conservation Area Appraisal (only views '*over the river to the wooded hill beyond*' are noted). However, the general massing, scale, horizontal rhythms and particularly the white stucco of the river-facing (southern) façade of Thamesfield, with the surrounding trees and other planting in the grounds, provide a view into a very small part of its setting that is currently sympathetic to the Henley Conservation Area's character and appearance (Plates 5 – 8). Consequently, it can be concluded that the Site, as a very small part of the asset's setting, visible only from the predominantly twentieth-century landscape of Boathouse Reach, currently provides a positive contribution to the Conservation Area's character and appearance. Such contributions derive foremost from the nineteenth-century western elevation of Thamesfield (the southern corner of the building); its ancillary and later twentieth-century ranges comprise, at most, neutral elements of the Conservation Areas' setting.

Remenham Henley Bridge Conservation Area

- 3.22 There is no conservation area appraisal or management plan currently available for the Remenham Henley Bridge Conservation Area.
- 3.23 Remenham Henley Bridge Conservation Area is a designated heritage asset of moderate (regional) significance, with this significance principally derived from the landscape beside the River Thames in the setting of Henley-on-Thames, together with the architectural and historic special interest of the listed buildings therein.
- 3.24 Remenham Henley Bridge Conservation Area covers an area of flat land on the eastern bank of the River Thames opposite the Riverside Character Area of the Henley Conservation Area with a backdrop to the east of a continuous range of densely wooded hills. The Site is in the southern extent of the Conservation Area and is separated from the rest of the Area to the north by dense and tall planting. This separation is also reinforced along Wargrave Road by built form to the north of the Site (including the nineteenth-century Marsh Cottages) and the busy road of Remenham Hill.
- 3.25 The southern extent of the Conservation Area (including the Site and the rowing club to the south) is characterised by two well-treed, parkland-like plots (the latter historically also a part of the grounds to Thamesfield). The two plots contrast in that the rowing club has minimal, low-scale built form of no architectural value with informally managed grounds, while the Site includes the monumental, white-stuccoed Thamesfield with well-manicured lawns (including a croquet lawn to the south) and some planting beds around the driveway (Plate 9). The mass of the building is largely screened from Wargrave Road, excepting some of the later twentieth-century extensions, which conflict with the 'back-of-house' of earlier extensions (Plate 10).
- 3.26 The Site forms a small part of the Conservation Area. The Site is visually separated (and holds no other meaningful historical association) with the built heritage assets in the wider Conservation Area to the north. These assets, while relatively close to the Site, are wholly screened from the Site by dense planting and mature trees in the grounds to the north of the Site.
- 3.27 The general massing, scale, horizontal rhythms and the white stucco of the river-facing façade (and part of that of the south-facing façade), particularly of the historical nineteenth-century range, together with the well-treed nature of the grounds, provides a positive contribution to the character

and appearance of the Conservation Area. However, this character is almost only legible from directly across the River and within the Site, where these facades can be partly viewed in well-filtered views.

- 3.28 The remainder of the Site, the later extensions to the east and north, are not positive contributors to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area, although the Site's enclosed, discrete nature largely mitigates any such effects beyond the Site and the immediate section of Wargrave Road. Consequently, it can be concluded that the Site (as a whole), as a small part of the Conservation Area, currently largely provides a positive contribution to the Conservation Area's character and appearance, while the buildings forming Thamesfield, as an aggregate, provide a negligible/minor negative contribution to Area's character and appearance.



Plate 9: View to Thamesfield from the southeast



Plate 10: The Site from Wargrave Road, facing south

Non-designated Built Heritage Assets

- 3.29 The relevant plan-making bodies in this case, Wokingham Borough Council and South Oxfordshire District Council do not identify, against published criteria, any non-designated built heritage assets that could be affected by the Site's development.
- 3.30 While the southern end of the river-facing façade and the western end of the south-facing façade of Thamesfield retain a degree of architectural quality, due to the significant, insensitive and multi-phased extensions and remodelling, the building(s) do not retain sufficient heritage value to be considered to be a heritage asset. Additionally, internally Thamesfield has been heavily remodelled and, beyond the main entrance lobby, any enduring later nineteenth-century layout is not readily legible.
- 3.31 The conservation officer for Wokingham Borough Council has identified Thamesfield as a non-designated heritage asset (as they are advised in the PPG is their right to do so in the application determination process). However, they have provided no assessment against a measurable published criteria to justify their assertion. The conservation officer's representation of February 2025 notes and asserts that:

'Thamesfield is a Victorian riverside mansion, of c.1870, which was altered and enlarged in the late nineteenth century. The building was further altered and extended in the twentieth century including changing function from a single residential dwelling to first a youth centre and subsequently a nursing home and retirement complex, of which it stands today. Whilst the building is altered and the site developed, the original white stuccoed Victorian mansion is still very clearly read and is highly prominent on the Berkshire bank of the river with landmark quality'.

- 3.32 While the southern corner of the building originates in the later nineteenth-century, it is not ‘very clearly’ legible as such or ‘prominent’ as such in available views of Thamesfield’s western and southern façades from the Henley riverbank; rather, in many (though not all) views, the most prominent aspect of the building’s western elevation is that part dated to between 1986 and 1989 (the northern portion of the elevation). Many of the later nineteenth and the twentieth-century modifications and extensions largely maintain the architectural ratios and details of a Classical revivalism style, all finished in a white stucco. The result is such that the interplay between old and new is blurred and the 1870s core at the southern corner of Thamesfield cannot be readily discerned from the later ranges in views from beyond the Site.
- 3.33 That Thamesfield delivers a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area, does not, of itself, meet any criteria for identifying the building as a non-designated heritage asset (just as a new development might contribute positively to the character of an area). Similarly, just because a small element of the building dates to the 1870s does not automatically identify the building as a non-designated heritage asset. The surviving later nineteenth-century element is no longer readily legible and the numerous nineteenth-century and subsequent phases of alterations and extensions have significantly eroded any former architectural and historic interest that the Victorian building once held in the nineteenth century.
- 3.34 Thus, though Thamesfield has *some* significance, that significance is limited and it would not meet the high bar introduced by the 2019-updated National Planning Policy Guidance (PPG) for the identification of heritage assets:
- ‘A substantial majority of buildings have little or no heritage significance and thus do not constitute heritage assets. Only a minority have enough heritage significance to merit identification as non-designated heritage assets’.* (PPG Paragraph: 039 Reference ID: 18a-039-20190723)
- 3.35 Notwithstanding the above, the proposed development includes no demolition or other direct impact on the surviving form and any fabric, where present, of the original 1870s’ portion of Thamesfield.

4.0 PROPOSALS AND ASSESSMENT OF IMPACT

- 4.1 The proposal is described as:

‘Part demolition of the existing building and replacement with a three-storey extension to provide extra-care units (use class C2), with associated soft and hard landscaping works; provision of additional vehicle parking, bin stores and ancillary structures; and alterations to existing basement’.

- 4.2 The proposed development will wholly retain the current character, architectural detailing, horizontal rhythms, general massing, and scale of the existing building as perceived from the west and southwest, while looking to enhance (through the use of high-quality design, detailing and materials) the building’s current character. The proposed development includes no demolition or other direct impact on the surviving form and any fabric, where present, of the original 1870s’ building.
- 4.3 There will be no meaningful perception of the proposal from any other direction (other than the southern edge of the immediate property to the north); rather, views will be screened or filtered by intervening vegetation and built form. In terms of the new north-western element, the material finish has been developed to reference and sit comfortably with the existing character of the building; it incorporates redbrick, contrasting and subservient with the bright white of the principal western range, and true to the locality.
- 4.4 The current eaves levels will be maintained in the new extension, which will sit almost entirely behind the western range in views from the west. Though of three storeys, the roof design has been developed to mimic aspects of the form of the eastern extensions; alike in height and hipped profile when viewed from the west; it will be physically and visually recessive in these same views.
- 4.5 Proposed alterations to landscaping will introduce new pedestrian circulation, plantings, and recreational terraces to the west, north, and east of the principal range.

Assessment of Impact

Henley Conservation Area

- 4.6 It is anticipated that the proposed development of the Site will not negatively change the current character of Thamesfield where it can be currently viewed, in filtered views, from a limited portion of the Conservation Area (limited parts of the western bank). The scheme will maintain the building’s character within the Conservation Area’s setting. Consequently, with regard to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area as a whole, the proposed development will cause no harm to its significance; its special architectural and historic interest will be preserved.

Remenham Henley Bridge Conservation Area

- 4.7 The proposed development of the Site will not harm the character of Thamesfield where it can be currently viewed from a limited portion of the Conservation Area (largely from the west and southwest, within the Site’s grounds). Consequently, the proposed development will cause no harm to the character and appearance of the Remenham Henley Bridge Conservation Area. The scheme will maintain the character of those parts of the Site which contribute positively to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area, removing the neutral to negative 1990s range to the rear of Thamesfield, and introducing quality new landscaping and garden space.

Thamesfield

- 4.8 Wokingham Borough Council’s conservation officer has identified Thamesfield as a non-designated built heritage asset. Notwithstanding the conclusion of this built heritage statement that Thamesfield

THAMESFIELD RETIREMENT VILLAGE: BUILT HERITAGE STATEMENT

does not retain sufficient heritage value to qualify it as a non-designated heritage asset, the proposed development will nonetheless have no impact on any surviving form or fabric of the nineteenth-century part of Thamesfield (the remaining ranges being of late twentieth-century date); its significance will be preserved.

5.0 CONCLUSION

- 5.1 The Site includes no individual designated or non-designated built heritage assets.
- 5.2 The Site is wholly within the Remenham Henley Bridge Conservation Area and forms a small part of the wider eastern setting to the Riverside Character Area of the Henley Conservation Area [Fig.1]. The significance of both Conservation Areas is assessed in relation to the Site, and the impact of the proposed development is described; it is concluded that the proposed development would preserve both the character and appearance of the Remenham Henley Bridge Conservation Area and the significance of the Henley Conservation Area.
- 5.3 The Council's conservation officer has identified Thamesfield as a non-designated heritage asset. Though assessment within this report suggests that the significance of Thamesfield falls short of the high-bar set within the PPG for the identification of built non-designated heritage assets, the proposed development will nonetheless have no impact on any surviving form or fabric of the nineteenth-century part of Thamesfield (the remaining ranges being of late twentieth-century date); its significance will be preserved.
- 5.4 Consequently, the planning application, in terms of built heritage considerations, can be consented. Paragraph 219 of the NPPF requires that local planning authorities look for opportunities for new development within Conservation Areas, and within the setting of other heritage assets, to enhance or better reveal their significance. Proposals that preserve (or enhance) those elements of setting that make a positive contribution to a heritage asset should be treated favourably (in accordance with Paragraph 212 of the NPPF). Local plan policy TB24 states that the Borough Council will support development that will conserve the significance of designated heritage assets.

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FIGURES

