

Heritage Statement

Upper Culham Farm

Henley, RG10 8NR

Prepared by: Palmer Heritage Ltd

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 This Heritage Statement has been prepared to support a planning application in relation to the expansion of equestrian facilities and associated works at Upper Culham Farm. The proposed development site is within Wokingham Borough and a site layout plan is shown at Appendix 1 of this document.
- 1.2 Upper Culham Farm is within a locally designated Area of Special Character. There are two listed buildings set some way to the west of the site in Upper Culham, The Old Smithy (NHLE number 1319108) and The Cottage (NHLE number 1303527). Both of these building are largely screened from the area of development by intervening buildings, walls, hedgerows and trees, and therefore there is no potential for harm to their heritage value as a result of the proposals; however, they contribute to the value of the Area of Special Character and are treated as such in this assessment.
- 1.3 This document will set out the policy context, describe the site and any heritage assets that have the potential to be affected by the proposals, assess the impacts of the proposed works on those heritage assets, and provide a justification for the proposed works.
- 1.4 The document is intended to be read alongside the Planning Statement and relevant drawings, as well as the Archaeological Desk Based Assessment prepared by Archaeological Project Services which provides a full map and archival baseline of the site and surroundings, and which is not repeated here except where specifically relevant to the Area of Special Character.

2. HERITAGE POLICY CONTEXT

National Policy

Revised National Planning Policy Framework 2024

- 2.1 The revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was published in December 2024. Section 16 of the NPPF deals with the consideration of heritage assets and sets out the importance of being able to assess the impact of a development on the significance of heritage assets. Significance is defined as the value of an asset because of its heritage interest. The setting of an asset can contribute to this interest. The setting of a heritage asset is defined 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.
- 2.2 The NPPF recognises that a balance needs to be struck between the preservation of the significance of a heritage asset and delivering public benefit, and identifies harm to heritage assets as being either ‘substantial’ or ‘less than substantial’. In respect of non-designated assets, paragraph 216 requires a balanced judgement having regard to the scale of any harm or loss and the significance of the asset.
- 2.3 In accordance with the NPPF, this Heritage Impact Assessment sets out the significance of heritage assets likely to be affected by the proposed works utilising the most appropriate sources of information. The information provided in this assessment conforms to paragraph 207 of the NPPF, thus the level of detail provided is proportionate to the significance of the affected heritage assets and no more than is sufficient to understand the potential impact of the proposal on that significance.
- 2.4 Guidance on the application of heritage policy within the NPPF is provided within the Historic England ‘Good Practice Guides’ and the on-line National Planning Policy Guidance (NPPG) for the Historic Environment.

Wokingham Borough Council Policy

Wokingham Local Development Framework

- 2.5 The Local Plan was adopted in 2010, and contains policies intended to steer development in the borough over the period until 2026.

- 2.6 The forward of the core strategy, adopted in January 2010, states the aspiration to protect key features of the borough's landscape, ecology, heritage and environment. Core Policy CP3, at point C, notes that development should in principle have no detrimental impact on heritage.
- 2.7 The Managing Development Deliver Local Plan was adopted in February 2014. In the section on Heritage, policy TB26 relates to 'Buildings of Traditional Local Character and Areas of Special Character'. The policy notes that Areas of Special Character are shown on the policies map (though the online map available currently does not show Upper Culham Area of Special Character). The policy goes on to state that "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". Finally, the policy states that "Proposals that involve the demolition of a Building of Traditional Local Character will require strong justification".

Upper Culham Area of Special Character

- 2.8 The Local Development Framework describes Areas of Special Character as follows: "There are areas or groups of buildings where there is a consistent period or character reflecting the areas past but where a Conservation Area designation may not be justified. These are known as Areas of Special Character". A Topic Paper titled 'Historic Environment', published in September 2024 to support the emerging Draft Local Plan (not yet adopted), contains details of Areas of Special Character and the approach taken to their protection, including appeal examples where development within, or in the setting of Areas of Special Character, have been found to be harmful to their value as a non-designated heritage asset. The Paper also notes that some buildings within such areas may positively contribute to the character of the area and therefore be considered in the future as non-designated heritage assets.
- 2.9 Upper Culham Area of Special Character encompasses the hamlet of Upper Culham, in a linear form along Culham Lane which runs north-south. Details of the area are given in Appendix C of the Topic Paper. To either side of the lane are a variety of residential and agricultural buildings, set back behind strong lines of walling, hedging or tree boundaries; the boundary of the Area of Special Character broadly runs to the rear of the gardens of the properties included, though in some cases including Upper Culham Farm, only part of the land holding is included within the boundary. To the west of the boundary is a Grade II* Registered Park and Garden (Park Place and Temple Combe), and to the east are wooded areas and trees.

2.10 The associated mapping shows that the older buildings of Upper Culham Farm (the house in the north, and the outbuildings in the south) are included in the Area and are noted as contributing to the character of the Area as ‘undesigned assets’ – as opposed to ‘non-designated heritage assets’ which as defined as being those recognised in existing policy. The land and buildings to the south and east of Upper Culham Farm are not included within the boundary of the Area of Special Character, probably due to their relative modernity both of built form and field system type, and the land at Upper Culham Farm which is within the Area has green boundaries to these locations.

3. DESCRIPTION AND SIGNIFICANCE OF HERITAGE ASSETS

- 3.1 The proposed development site is not occupied by any designated heritage assets, but part of the site as defined by the red line is within the Upper Culham Area of Special Character. Photographs of the site and surroundings can be found at Appendix 1.

Heritage Assets

- 3.2 The red line boundary of the site is broadly triangular, with Culham Lane as the western boundary, the A4130 (Remenham Hill) as its northern boundary, and a farm track leading from the A4130 to Culham Lane as the eastern boundary; the site tapers to a point in the south.
- 3.3 To the west of the site is a house, Upper Culham Farm, set back from Culham Lane. To the south of this house is a range of agricultural and equestrian buildings, the northernmost being historic and the southernmost modern equestrian buildings and facilities serving the existing livery yard. To the east and north of the house are grassed paddocks with hedged boundaries and a grid of tracks; the outer boundaries of this area and the area of the equestrian facilities are tree lined. To the east, south and north of the tree-lined boundaries are modern open fields with minimal raised boundaries or tracks.
- 3.4 The part of Upper Culham Farm that lies within the Area of Special Character is broadly aligned with those parts which contain the house, older agricultural buildings and grassed paddocks, though the boundary of the Area cuts through the middle of the paddocks north-south and includes some parts of the modern equestrian buildings in the south.
- 3.5 A description of the Area of Special Character, its setting and the wider site context is given below.

Upper Culham Area of Special Character

- 3.6 The following summary description is taken from Appendix C of the Historic Environment Topic Paper published by Wokingham Borough Council:

The Upper Culham designated Area of Special Character is situated within a rural landscape and lies approximately 1.5km east of Henley-on-Thames and approximately 3.1km north of Wargrave. The AoSC is served by Culham Lane, a small country road bordered by well-manicured, high hedges and

mature trees. To the west of the AoSC lies Park Place and Temple Combe – a Grade II National Historic Park and Garden.*

3.7 Further text gives the following detail:

The Upper Culham Area of Special Character is located within the parish of Wargrave. The AoSC has a linear layout, with buildings addressing Culham Lane, a small country road bordered by well-manicured high hedges and mature trees. The AoSC comprises several large detached residential dwellings sited within large plots of land, including two Grade II Listed Buildings: The Old Smithy (17th Century) and The Cottage (16th Century with 17th Century additions).

The AoSC also comprises several commercial uses, including small businesses (at Upper Culham Farm) and a livery. Fields and wooded areas surround the AoSC, and the Grade II Listed National Historic Park and Garden Park Place and Temple Combe lies directly to the west.*

3.8 The worksheet provided within Appendix C of the topic paper is key to understanding the reasons for the designation and boundary of the Area of Special Character. Notes include descriptions of the various aspects of the area, including: “very rural – verges are very dominant feature – strong frontage enclosure marked by brick/flint walls. Barns adjoining farm [assumed to be those at Upper Culham Farm] have a good group arrangement and relates (sic) to ‘The Cottage’ in terms of style and materials”. The document notes that the two listed buildings within the Area – The Old Smithy and The Cottage – have been altered in the 20th century and have good quality outbuildings within their curtilage. The barns at Upper Culham Farm are mentioned for consideration as buildings of local interest, though they are noted to be in a poor state of repair. Notable materials in the Area are listed as flint, brick and clay tiles, with limited weatherboarding, and the character of the open space is described with verges noted as of great importance whilst mature trees provide the backdrop to the built environment of the area which might otherwise be exposed.

3.9 Also included is a hand-marked map alongside the worksheet. It should be noted that this map provides a different boundary to that marked on the initial mapping in Appendix C of the Topic Paper, drawing the line much more closely to the east of the house at Upper Culham Farm, and including all of the outbuildings to the south including the modern equestrian facilities. The mark-up of this map gives a strong sense of the enclosed and focused nature of this Area of Special Character in its tight boundaries and lack of noted views; there is one key view shown which appears to point from the land between Upper Culham barns and Kenton’s Corner Cottage to the south towards Upper Culham Farm

in the north. Otherwise, the notation is concentrated on the built form of the hamlet and buildings of interest including their material character, and the landscape character of verges, hedges and mature trees. The barns at Upper Culham Farm are described as good original buildings, especially the front barn (that closest to Culham Lane), with brick and flint elevations and clay tile roofs. The other outbuildings are described as weatherboarded with tiled roofs. The house at Upper Culham Farm is described as a High Victorian house of red brick with a large garden and a wide verge to the frontage. Not described but evident on the ground are the high walls and hedges between Upper Culham Farm and the verge to the lane, with the only significant visual break being at the gate to the house where it is possible to see part of the garden to the north of and behind the house, and the tree line beyond.

- 3.10 Given the focus of the descriptions contained in Appendix C of the Topic Paper, it is implied that the land surrounding the Area of Special Character makes a lesser contribution to the special interest of the Area. The Registered Park and Garden of Park Place and Temple Combe to the west of the Area boundary is not visible as part of the character of Upper Culham, again due to the high and strong boundaries to the lane and the mature trees to the rear of plots. Likewise, the modern fields to the west are not visible from Culham Lane or within views of the buildings of Upper Culham, and the boundaries of the garden and land immediately adjacent to Upper Culham Farm also shield views beyond the built form. It is therefore the case that although the surroundings of Upper Culham outside of its boundary ensure that it is experienced as a rural hamlet, especially from the lane, there is tolerance for change beyond the boundary that would not remove its traditional, local, historical and special character or that of the buildings within the area which contribute to its value.

Heritage Value Assessment

- 3.11 The heritage value of Upper Culham Area of Special Character is focused on the interest and appearance of the buildings within the Area, including the two listed buildings and other buildings which contribute to its character. The residential use alongside existing commercial uses, including equestrian use, is part of the interest of the Area. The landscape of Culham Lane and the surrounding boundaries including verges, hedges, walls and mature trees are also of great importance and serve to give a sense of enclosure to the Area and buildings. The Registered Park and Garden to the west, though not visible from within the Area, contributes through its mature planting, emphasising the enclosure of the area; the open fields to the east are also not visible and are in stark contrast to the character of the hamlet. Therefore, although their openness provides a rural backdrop spatially, they make a far lesser contribution to the character of the Area.

4. IMPACT ASSESSMENT AND JUSTIFICATION

Extent of the works

4.1 Full details of the proposals can be found in the submitted drawings and accompanying statements. In summary, the development can be described as follows:

- Proposed equestrian development, including change of use of arable land to equestrian use, construction of polo field, levelling of land for stick & ball and schooling fields, 3 x American barns, 2 x horse walkers, exercise track, irrigation pond, pump house, sand turnout corrals, horse rehabilitation pool, conversion of existing barn into staff day facilities, construction of pavilion, construction of estate tracks, creation of new main access with entrance gates, creation of open storage yard and associated works.

4.2 The proposals retain the existing built form on the site. In relation to layout, the development can be broken down into five broad elements over the site.

1. The majority of built form including three American barns and associated outbuildings will be adjacent to the existing modern built form, including the stabling and indoor arena of the current livery yard; this will be situated outside of the boundary of the Area of Special Character.
2. The washdown and rehabilitation area, consisting of a rehabilitation pool, two horsewalkers, and fenced sand corrals will be located within an existing grass paddock to the east of the garden of Upper Culham Farm house; this will be situated outside of the boundary of the Area of Special Character.
3. A railed exercise track and a reservoir with attenuation will be located to the southern part of the site; this will be outside of the boundary of the Area of Special Character within part of an existing modern open field.
4. A grass polo field and associated pavilion will be located to the east of the washdown and rehabilitation area; this will be outside of the boundary of the Area of Special Character within part of an existing modern open field.
5. Grass stick and ball and schooling fields will be located to the north of the polo field; they will be outside of the boundary of the Area of Special Character within part of an existing modern open field.

- 4.3 In addition, associated tracks within the land, served by a new entrance to the north on the A4130, parking areas and a storage yard and full landscaping are part of these proposals.

Design Justification

- 4.4 The proposed development has been designed to provide a high goal polo yard at Upper Culham Farm. As such, the proposals are for a range of good quality and modern facilities commensurate with that aim, in a location which has an established equestrian use. The development will entail the change of use of the large arable landholding of Upper Culham Farm estate to equestrian use, creating a more viable future for the estate as a whole.
- 4.5 The provision of private high goal polo facilities is rare and largely confined to the use of a polo team owner who owns the facility; therefore, the applicant wishes to create his own facility to enable his high goal polo aims. In addition, the proposals will create new direct and indirect employment in the area, contributing to the local economy and providing a financial benefit.
- 4.6 Foremost in the design is the consideration of equestrian and human safety and health. All of the facilities, including new access, buildings and landscaped areas, provide the highest quality and safest means of access and use. Materials reflect the use and function of the buildings and the appearance of the modern buildings to the south of Upper Culham Farm; no new building will be higher than the maximum height of those existing.
- 4.7 The design has also taken consideration the status of the Upper Culham Area of Special Character, and all of the proposed development is outside of the boundary of the Area. Where buildings and land are within the Area of Special Character they are retained and will continue to be used as part of the wider use of the site.

Impact Assessment

- 4.8 As discussed in section 3 above, the heritage interest Upper Culham Area of Special Character is focused on buildings and land within the Area boundary which include historic buildings of value, and landscape features which serve to enclose the Area and emphasise its rural and historic appearance. The proposed development will take place outside the eastern and southern boundaries of the Area of Special Character, where the current character of the setting is that of a modern open arable field system. As noted in section 3, these open fields create a rural feel on the approach to Upper Culham,

but are not visible from within the Area and do not contribute to the character of the Area as described within the Historic Environment Topic Paper Appendix C.

- 4.9 The majority of the proposed built form will lie adjacent to existing modern buildings including an existing indoor riding arena which is higher than the proposed heights of the American barns. The new buildings will be set away from Culham Lane behind existing buildings. They will be visible from the existing farmyard of Upper Culham, but by their nature are not out of character with the variety and form of the built environment in this location, serving instead as an appropriate expansion to existing facilities.
- 4.10 The washdown and rehabilitation area is predominately composed of low in height facilities including corrals and horse walkers, and a pool. These facilities are outside of the boundary of the Area of Special Character and will make a minor change to the grass paddock character of the setting in this location; however existing hedged boundaries will remove the visibility of these facilities from the house at Upper Culham Farm, and there will be no intervisibility with Culham Lane from which the Area of Special Character is chiefly experienced. The openness of the paddock will be maintained, and the area of garden and paddock which can currently be viewed from Culham Lane through the gate of Upper Culham Farm will not be changed.
- 4.11 The exercise track and reservoir/attenuation will not be visible behind existing high hedging along Culham Lane as it runs south and out of the Area of Special Character. Though a part of the existing open arable field will be changed by the presence of these elements, their appearance and the low-level nature of the facilities will ensure that the openness of the surroundings to the south of the Area is maintained.
- 4.12 The polo field, and the stick and ball and exercise fields, are located well to the east of the boundary of the Area of Special Character, and there will be no intervisibility between the two. All of these facilities, except for the associated pavilion which will be a single storey, are essentially low lying landscape features and grassed areas, which will involve a slight change from the existing arable field. The pavilion itself will be a circular building designed to be appropriate within the landscape, and will provide essential facilities for the users and staff of the polo yard.
- 4.13 Gravelled tracks through the new facility are proposed, alongside parking and yard areas; parking is to be formed of grasscrete to reduce urbanisation effects. A new entrance from the A4130 will reduce any potential impact of traffic through the Area of Special Character which could reduce its quiet rural

character and appearance. Finally, the whole of the area of the proposed development where it falls outside of the boundary of the Area of Special Character will be landscaped, predominantly with trees, which will serve to emphasise the enclosure and back drop of mature trees that is a stated part of the character of the Area. This is an improvement on the current situation and may be seen as a heritage benefit as the setting to the east will contribute strongly to the character of the Area, which at present is not the case.

Conclusions

- 4.14 In general, taking into account the improvements and benefits presented by the scheme, its considered design and the retention of all heritage assets within the boundary of the Upper Culham Area of Special Character, it is considered that the proposals will cause no harm to the stated heritage value, character, appearance, landscape or historic nature of the Area of Special Character.
- 4.15 Where the NPPF discusses harm, it is considered that in this case there is no harm to the heritage value of the Upper Culham Area of Special Character, or to the individual buildings within that area including listed buildings, and therefore the stipulations of the national policy are met. It is recognised that there will be a level of change to the setting of the Area to the east as a result of these proposals; this change to fields which make little contribution to the heritage asset will be mitigated by the improvement to the character of the landscape in this location which in turn will improve the setting of the heritage asset. In addition, there is a clear benefit in the wider of the site for its existing equestrian purpose, notwithstanding the minimal loss of arable fields. The modernity and quality of the proposed facilities will result in a top-class facility for polo, increased employment in the local area, is generally of planning benefit.
- 4.16 The design adheres to the Local Development Framework policy TB26, as the character and significance of the Area of Special Character will be retained and enhanced, and the traditional, historical, local and special character of the area and its setting will be maintained. No buildings of local heritage interest are to be demolished.
- 4.17 The proposed development has fully taken into account the contents of the Historic Environment Topic Paper produced by Wokingham Borough Council, and this assessment has been formed with the baseline set out there in mind.

- 4.18 The proposed works will allow the appropriate and sensitive development of the site with modern, appropriate and highly functional equestrian facilities for polo, whilst retaining the heritage value and architectural interest of the non-designated heritage asset and its setting.

APPENDIX 1: SITE PLAN

See following page



- Key**
- Site Boundary
 - Road
 - Grass Crete
 - Track

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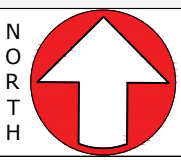
Proposed Development
Upper Culham Farm

Client	
Site	Upper Culham Farm Henley, RG10 8NR
Phone	

- All dimensions in millimeters. All dimensions and levels to be checked by contractor prior to commencing work.
- Assume drawings not to scale, use figured dimensions. Do not scale from drawings.
- Work done shall confirm to the issued drawings and specifications. No changes to be made unless by prior consultation with Deveson Design & Equus Works.
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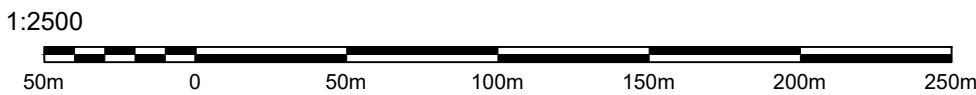
Client approved, no further changes
(sign)
(date)

Project No		
Drawing Title		Proposed Site Layout
Drawing No		
Pages		
Drawn	AD	April 2025
Review		
Leader		
Stage		
Scale	1:2500 (A1)	N O R T H 
Paper	A1	



Proposed Site Layout

Scale 1:2500 (when printed at A1)



Proposed Layout
Upper Culham Farm
Henley
RG10 8NR

APPENDIX 2: PHOTOGRAPHS



Photo 1: Upper Culham Farm from the east, taken from the paddock areas outside of the Area of Special Character.



Photo 2: Historic outbuildings of Upper Culham Farm, taken from the south-east within the modern equestrian yard.



Photo 3: Example of wall, hedging and wide verges within the Area of Special Character, along Culham Lane.



Photo 4: View towards Upper Culham Farm from north-west on Culham Lane, showing built form with backdrop of existing trees.