



North Hertfordshire District Council

# Heritage Assessments

## Heritage Assessment of Ashwell



June 2016

Amec Foster Wheeler Environment  
& Infrastructure UK Limited



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## Report for

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## Document revisions

No.	Details	Date
1	Final Heritage Assessment	31/05/2016
2	Client Comments	27/06/2016



# Executive summary

## Purpose of this report

This report has been produced for the purpose of providing North Hertfordshire District Council with an appraisal of the potential impacts of a proposed housing allocation site, upon the significance of both designated and undesignated heritage assets. The report makes recommendations as to the suitability and management of such allocations, as well as the compliance with national planning policy.

At Ashwell one site is proposed to be allocated for housing within the local plan period 2011-2031. This site is within views from the Scheduled Monument of Arbury Banks and appears in the foreground of views of St Mary's Church, Ashwell.

An area of the site has been recommended for redevelopment that would cause least harm to views of, and from, heritage assets. Development of this site potentially offers benefits through the introduction of additional planting around the site that would improve views from Arbury Banks scheduled monument.



# Contents

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<b>1.</b>	<b>Introduction</b>	<b>5</b>
1.1	Purpose of the Document	5
1.2	Planning Policy and methodology	5
1.3	Site AS1	6
<b>2.</b>	<b>Heritage assets affected by the proposal site</b>	<b>7</b>
2.1	Scheduled monuments	7
2.2	Registered Parks and Gardens	7
2.3	Listed buildings	7
2.4	Conservation areas	7
2.5	Archaeology	8
<b>3.</b>	<b>The site and heritage assets</b>	<b>9</b>
3.1	The contribution of the site to the significance of heritage assets	9
	Arbury Banks	9
	St Mary's Church	9
3.2	The impact of allocation to the significance of heritage assets	10
3.3	Mitigation and enhancement potential	10
<b>4.</b>	<b>Does the allocation meet the NPPF tests of soundness?</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>5.</b>	<b>Policy recommendations</b>	<b>12</b>
	Bibliography	13

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Appendix A	Photographic Gazetteer
Appendix B	Figures

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Purpose of the Document

North Hertfordshire District Council (NHDC) are currently preparing a new Local Plan to cover for the period 2011 – 2031. During this time, it is anticipated that NHDC will be planning for a minimum of 14,400 additional dwellings to meet its own objectively assessed housing needs. North Hertfordshire is currently unable to accommodate this level of growth on previously developed or brownfield sites. As a result, NHDC proposals have extended to, and are having to consider, large amounts of growth on greenfield sites, in sustainable locations and on the edges of our urban settlements and larger villages.

The focus of this report is an allocation located within the village of Ashwell, Hertfordshire. Ashwell is located 4 miles north, north east of Baldock.

NHDC is planning to submit its proposed Local Plan Submission Draft to its Executive in September 2016. In January 2015, NHDC undertook public consultation on its Local Plan Preferred Options. A number of representations were concerned with regards the impact of the proposed site allocations on the setting of both designated and undesignated heritage assets.

Of particular relevance is the representation submitted from Historic England (HE) with regard to specific sites. As a result, NHDC have commissioned Amec Foster Wheeler Environment & Infrastructure (Amec FW) to assess the potential impacts of housing allocation upon the significance of these heritage assets and make recommendations as to the suitability and management of such allocation.

## 1.2 Planning Policy and methodology

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF, 2012) provides an active legislative framework under which Heritage Assets are protected. Of particular relevance to the scheme are the following:

Paragraph 7 of the NPPF emphasises the role of heritage, and the positive enhancement of the historic environment as one of three dimensions to achieving sustainable development.

Paragraph 14 states that local authorities should positively seek opportunities to meet the development needs of their area. Proposals should also seek to conserve heritage assets in a manner appropriate to their significance.

Historic England<sup>1</sup> have produced a guidance document to enable the historic environment to play a positive role in identifying allocation sites which are suitable for development and providing advice on policies to ensure proposal sites protect and enhance the significance of heritage assets.

The NPPF<sup>2</sup> 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.”

Historic England define 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 the asset, may affect the ability to appreciate that significance or may be neutral.”

The purpose of this guidance document is to ensure that proposal sites comply with the requirements of paragraph 182 of the NPPF, in that sites are prepared, justified and consistent with national and local policy.

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<sup>1</sup> Historic England (2015) The Historic Environment and Site Allocations in Local Plans. Historic England Advice Note 3.

<sup>2</sup> National Planning Policy Framework (2012) Annex 2: Glossary.



This document provides a methodology for site selection and NHDC have made some specific requests for the study:

- ▶ Step one - Identify which heritage assets are affected by the potential site allocation;
- ▶ Step two - Understand what contribution the site (in its current form) makes to the significance of the heritage asset(s);
- ▶ Step three – Identify what impact the allocation might have on that significance, including the setting of heritage assets;
- ▶ Step four – Consider maximising enhancements and avoiding harm through design, layout or contributing to the significance of other heritage assets, mitigation measures;
- ▶ Step Five – Determine whether the proposed site allocation is appropriate in light of the NPPF's tests of soundness and the site can accommodate residential development without having an unacceptable impact upon nearby heritage assets; and
- ▶ Should the site be considered suitable recommend policy wording to ensure the appropriate protection of heritage assets for the specific sites.

In addition to these requirements Historic England<sup>3</sup> have provided comments about the proposed allocation. Historic England expressed concern regarding the potential impact upon the significance of Arbury Banks scheduled monument when viewed from the monument. The site drops to the west and the terrain undulates between the monument and the proposal site. The north part of the proposal site is well screened by the field boundary, which is absent to the south. Should the development work with the existing topography, and was modest in scale, it is likely it would be visible from the monument based upon the nature of the existing landscape. There are also prominent views of St Mary's Church from footpaths and byways approaching Ashwell from the south.

### 1.3 Site AS1

The proposal site is located to the west of housing fronting onto Claybush Road, and south of housing fronting on to Ashwell Street. Access to the site is from Ashwell Street, to the north. The location of the site in relation to heritage assets is shown in Figure 1, Appendix B.

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<sup>3</sup> Letter from Historic England to North Hertfordshire District Council dated 6 February 2015 reference HD/P 5255

## 2. Heritage assets affected by the proposal site

Figures 1, Appendix B shows the location of the proposal site and heritage assets.

### 2.1 Scheduled monuments

Historic England have identified Arbury Banks (list entry 1003893), a univallate hillfort as affected by the proposal site. The scheduled monument lies just over 600m south west of the proposal site, across open farmland. The proposal site is screened by planting and a hedgerow at present, and the footpath continuing south from Partridge Hill has a hedgerow to its east side and planting to its west side.

Univallate hillforts, as detailed in the schedule entry for Arbury Banks generally date from the late Bronze-Age to the early Iron-Age (8<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> Century BC). The sites are usually interpreted as stock enclosures, enclosed settlements, redistribution centres or places of refuge. The outer earthworks of the monument generally consist of a bank with external ditch. In the case of Arbury Banks the ditch survives as an archaeological feature, and has been interpreted from aerial photographs to be five metres in width. The internal bank survives to a width of 2.5m and, along the south west face of the hillfort to 1.2m in height. The centre of the monument is accessed by two causeways across the ditch at the north, north west and south, south east. Interpretation of aerial photographs indicates there rectangular and curvilinear enclosures, hut circles and pits within the site. An excavation in the 1850's found the external ditch to be 6m in width and 4.5m in depth. The site has been little excavated so is likely to preserve significant archaeological and environmental deposits.

### 2.2 Registered Parks and Gardens

No registered parks and gardens have been identified as being affected by the proposal site. The registered park and garden of Ashwell Bury (list entry 1175337) is located just under 600m north of the proposal site, but is separated from the proposal site by the village of Ashwell.

### 2.3 Listed buildings

Historic England have commented that the proposal site may impact upon wider views of the Church of St Mary (list entry 1073268). The church is a grade I listed building and stands in the centre of Ashwell. The upper two to three stages of the tower and leaded spire are visible as they rise above the village, tree line and topography where this feature dominates views of the village from the south. In particular there are a number of framed views of the church tower looking north across the village, from the southern approaches. The tower and spire also dominate wider panoramic views of Ashwell.

Other listed buildings are located within the Ashwell Conservation Area. The proposal site is located on and above the 70m contour line. Listed buildings within Ashwell are located on and around the 50m contour line. The proposal site is on land which rises towards the 80m contour line, but is separated from the village by modern housing on Ashwell Street, Bear Lane and Dixies Close. The topography and the presence of modern housing separating the proposal site from listed buildings means only St Mary's Church is considered to be affected by the proposal site.

### 2.4 Conservation areas

Ashwell Conservation Area, shown on Figure 1, Appendix B, is located around the historic core of the village. NHDC have not produced a conservation area assessment. The conservation area boundary ends at the junction of Bear Lane and Ashwell Street. This part of the conservation area includes trees and open space associated with a school. The conservation area is separated from the proposal site by housing to the south side of Ashwell Street. The most significant parts of the conservation area are based around the historic core of the village, focusing upon High Street, West End, Back Street and Silver Street. The extensive



conservation area stretches further to the north, including the registered park and garden of Ashwell Bury, and to the east continuing north of Ashwell Street, past its junction with Kingsland Way and in and around Lucas Lane.

Due to buildings separating the proposal site from the conservation area, the topography of the site, as detailed in section 2.3 and the obvious significance of the conservation area being based around the village centre, the proposal site is not considered to have an impact upon the conservation area.

## 2.5 Archaeology

The proposal site is not located within an archaeology area, but is 65m west of the Ashwell Village and Land to the SE Archaeology Area. The Historic Environment (Archaeology) team at Hertfordshire County Council should be consulted on archaeological implications for the proposal site.



## 3. The site and heritage assets

### 3.1 The contribution of the site to the significance of heritage assets

#### Arbury Banks

Views from the north east side of Arbury Banks look towards the proposal site and buildings presently occupying the west side of Claybush Road, as Plate 1, Appendix A shows. Due to its elevated location Arbury Banks has extensive, panoramic views north and around to the east across Ashwell. These views are dominated by the spire and, nearly three stages of the tower of St Mary's Church. In views towards the church the chimneys and a slate roof of a building on Partridge Hill break the tree line. The only other interruptions to this panoramic view across the landscape from Arbury Banks are houses on Claybush Road, where the unfortunate use of white render and/or painted brickwork, slate roofs, non-traditional roof forms and solar panels mean the housing is visible through vegetation, and, due to their location between the 70m and 80m contours rise well above the tree line. Plate 2, Appendix A, shows the impact of this housing on views. Other domestic properties on Partridge Hill are visible within this view, however, they lack the elevation, and broadly of red brick and slate roof construction and are considerably less visually intrusive.

In its present form the proposal site contributes an addition to the open land in views from the site towards the west. The planted boundary of the site aid the screening of the housing on Claybush Road and help preserve the wider agricultural setting of the scheduled monument. The hillfort, as a central place within the landscape, evidenced by the general find of pits, housing and enclosures within the defended area. When the 10m contours are plotted onto the map the hillfort appears to be located on a headland which stretches north, defined by the 80m contour; the hill continues to rise to the south of the fort where the peak is above the 90m contour. The hillfort therefore appears to have a visible relationship to the land to the north east, north, west and south, where the ground drops away from this headland, but rises immediately to the east above the 90m contour. The proposal site falls within this visible area due to its north east location and elevation between the 70m and 80m contour line.

Below the 70m contour line due to the density of tree cover and the steeper slope to the north dropping towards the centre of the village, other than the church tower rising above the trees, and one property location on Partridge Hill, is visible with chimneys, and part of a slate roof, and gable visible above a drop in the tree line. It may well be the case that planting has been managed in this area to maintain the view of the church from the hillfort.

#### St Mary's Church

The list description for St Mary's Church describes the tower as exceptionally large. The tower is visible on the approaches to Ashwell from the south. The tower is of four stages with clasping buttresses which rise for three stages and is surmounted by a decorative lead spike or narrow spire. Generally, the upper two and a half stages of the tower can be seen in views from the south. An exceptional framed view of the church tower can be seen from Claybush Lane, where the lane aligns directly upon the church tower, and at the end of the lane where it meets Ashwell Road, shown in Plate 3, Appendix A. Views north and south of where the 70m contour line crosses Claybush Lane place the church tower above the level of tree coverage within the village and the upper stage and spire can be seen against the sky behind.

At the top of Claybush Hill, on Claybush Lane, above the 90m contour line the upper two and a half stages of the tower and the lead spire can be seen across the proposal site, as shown in Plate 4, Appendix A. Due to the elevation of this view only the upper element of the spire is visible against the skyline; the lower parts of the spire and the tower are against a backdrop of trees to the rear of the church.

This approach from the south and the visibility of the church tower within the landscape, across open fields and within framed views between buildings and planting on Claybush Lane provides a dynamic, changing view on the approach to the village. The proposal site, as agricultural land, contributes to this view and the significance of the heritage asset by not introducing built forms within views of the church that enable the earlier of a series of views of the tower on the approach to Ashwell from the south.

### 3.2 The impact of allocation to the significance of heritage assets

The development of the allocation site will introduce a built form into the foreground of views of St Mary's Church from Claybush Hill. Building to the scale of those presently fronting onto Claybush Lane would remove the present views of vegetation and trees to the foreground of the church and introduce built forms. This would significantly change the setting of the church from this viewpoint and negatively impact upon the sequence of views of the church tower as Ashwell is approached from the south. Figure 2, Appendix B shows the proposal site in relation to views across the site from the south.

Developing the proposal site, to the same scale as buildings presently occupying the street frontage of Claybush Lane (that is, two stories plus pitched roof), will bring built forms fully into the view north east from the scheduled monument. Developing this site will bring buildings located on the 70-80m contour line closer to the hillfort. There will be a subsequent reduction in planting and screening between these buildings and the hillfort increasing their visibility. The built forms are likely to merge in the view with existing buildings fronting onto Claybush Road cumulatively increasing their impact and the impact of the existing buildings upon views of, and from designated heritage assets.

The proposal site would also involve construction outside the present village envelope, and in back land locations. It is unclear how the site will be accessed, except potentially from the north via Ashwell Street.

### 3.3 Mitigation and enhancement potential

Should the proposal site be developed to the same extent as the street frontage, there is little that can be achieved to mitigate the impacts of this site upon views from the hillfort. The improved screening of the site could only be achieved by introducing a considerable volume of sizable planting onto the west boundary of the site, and potentially the use of a more subtle pallet of materials for any buildings; using brick and clay tiles, rather than render, slate and solar panels might reduce the impact of any additional buildings and improve the screening of the existing buildings.

This introduces the second concern that development of any scale within the site, whether housing or extra planting, is likely to impact upon views north towards Ashwell Church tower from Claybush Hill across the site.

It is difficult to see how this site can be suitably developed, to that scale, without impacting upon views from the hillfort and views to the church.

At a more reduced scale of development, additional buildings to the north west of the site, and a height limit of 1 ½ stories some development may be possible, however it will require the introduction of extra planting to screen the new buildings. A considered pallet of materials would be necessary for any development, employing brick, clay tiles or timber, rather than render or slate. Further planting could be introduced to the east and west boundaries of the proposal site to aid the screening of buildings fronting on to Claybush Road from Arbury Banks. Potentially, with a considered landscape design that reinforces the screening offered by the west boundary of the site, sensitive use of building materials and the arrangement of buildings some development is possible within this site.

## 4. Does the allocation meet the NPPF tests of soundness?

Paragraph 182 provides details of the NPPF test of soundness. The local plan should comply with the following tests:

- ▶ **Positively prepared** – the plan should be prepared based on a strategy which seeks to meet objectively assessed development and infrastructure requirements, including unmet requirements from neighbouring authorities where it is reasonable to do so and consistent with achieving sustainable development;
- ▶ **Justified** – the plan should be the most appropriate strategy, when considered against the reasonable alternatives, based on proportionate evidence;
- ▶ **Effective** – the plan should be deliverable over its period and based on effective joint working on cross-boundary strategic priorities; and
- ▶ **Consistent with national policy** – the plan should enable the delivery of sustainable development in accordance with the policies in the Framework.

The proposal site examined here has the potential to make a small contribution to the objectively assessed housing needs of North Hertfordshire. Proposals presented here and policy suggestions indicate that some development within the proposal site is possible, subject to a reduced scale of buildings and significant additional planting to screen existing buildings within views from the Arbury Banks Scheduled Monument.

## 5. Policy recommendations

The following policy recommendations should help guide development of this proposal site:

- ▶ Development should be limited to the north west of the proposal site;
- ▶ Areas not developed within the proposal site should be secured as public open space through the planning permission or by legal agreement;
- ▶ The scale of proposed buildings should be restricted to 1 ½ stories to protect the long range views that contribute to the significance of the scheduled monument and the conservation area;
- ▶ Materials used on any proposed buildings should be softer, and natural, consideration should be made to the use of brick or timber cladding, clay tile roofs rather than slate;
- ▶ Solar panels should only be placed on roof slopes that are not visible from Arbury Banks;
- ▶ Additional planting should be secured on the east and west boundaries of the proposal site and between buildings. The landscape design should seek to improve views from Arbury Banks and screen properties on Claybush Road;
- ▶ North Hertfordshire District Council should review the boundaries of the Ashwell Conservation Area. The review should include an assessment of views into and out from the Conservation Area, including views from Arbury Banks;
- ▶ The council should consult upon and publish a conservation area assessment based upon the review of the conservation area boundary and consideration of views associated with the conservation area; and
- ▶ The Historic Environment Services Team at NHDC should be consulted on archaeological implications of the site allocation.



## Bibliography

Letter from Historic England to North Hertfordshire District Council dated 6 February 2015 reference HD/P 5255.

National Planning Policy Framework (2012) Annex 2: Glossary.

Historic England (2015) The Historic Environment and Site Allocations in Local Plans. Historic England Advice Note 3.



# Appendix A

## Photographic Gazetteer



Plate 1: North east facing photograph taken from the Arbury Banks SM and towards the allocation site. Photograph taken at normal zoom. Church of St Marys is visible to left hand side in distance and housing on Claybush Road visible above the tree line to the centre.



Plate 2: East north east facing photograph from Arbury Banks SM to housing on Claybush Road with the proposal site in the foreground. Photograph zoomed in.





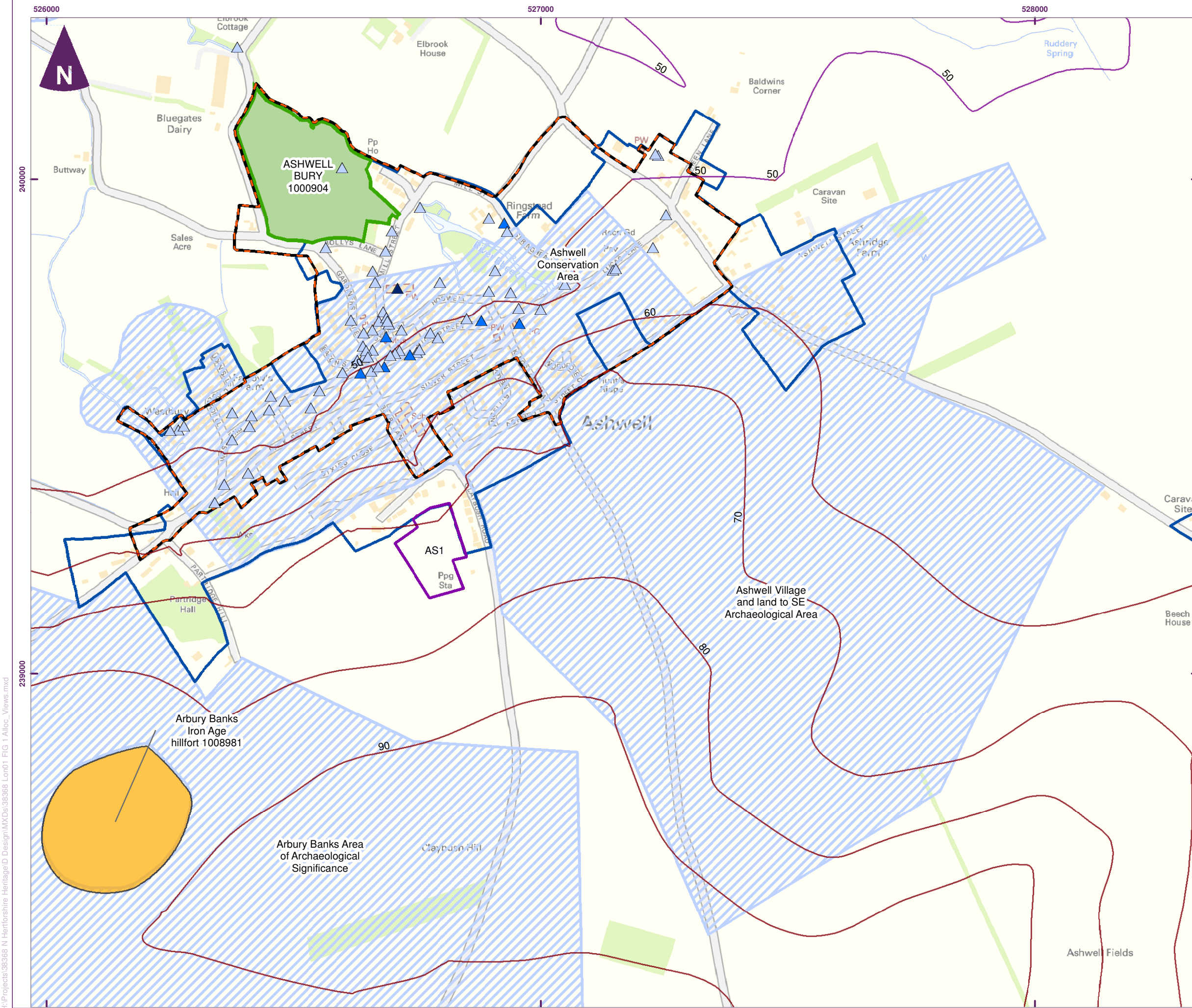
Plate 3: North facing photograph towards St Marys Church (Grade I listed), taken from Claybush Road. Photograph taken with normal zoom



Plate 4: North facing photograph taken from Claybush Hill across the allocated site, towards Grade I listed St Mary's Church



# Appendix B Figures



**Key**

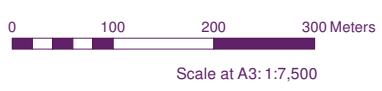
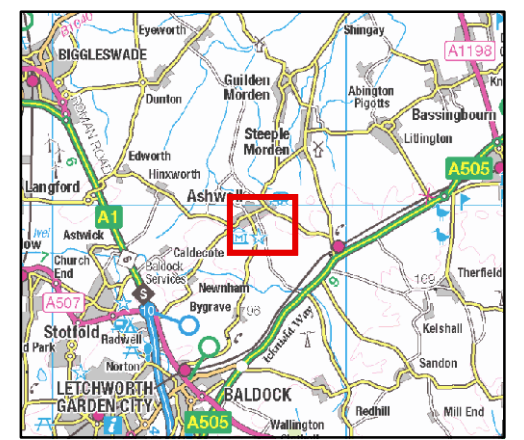
- Elevation
- Proposed allocation area
- Scheduled Monuments

**Listed Buildings**

**Grade**

- I
- II\*
- II

- Conservation Areas
- Registered Parks and Gardens
- Core of modern settlement
- Archaeological designations

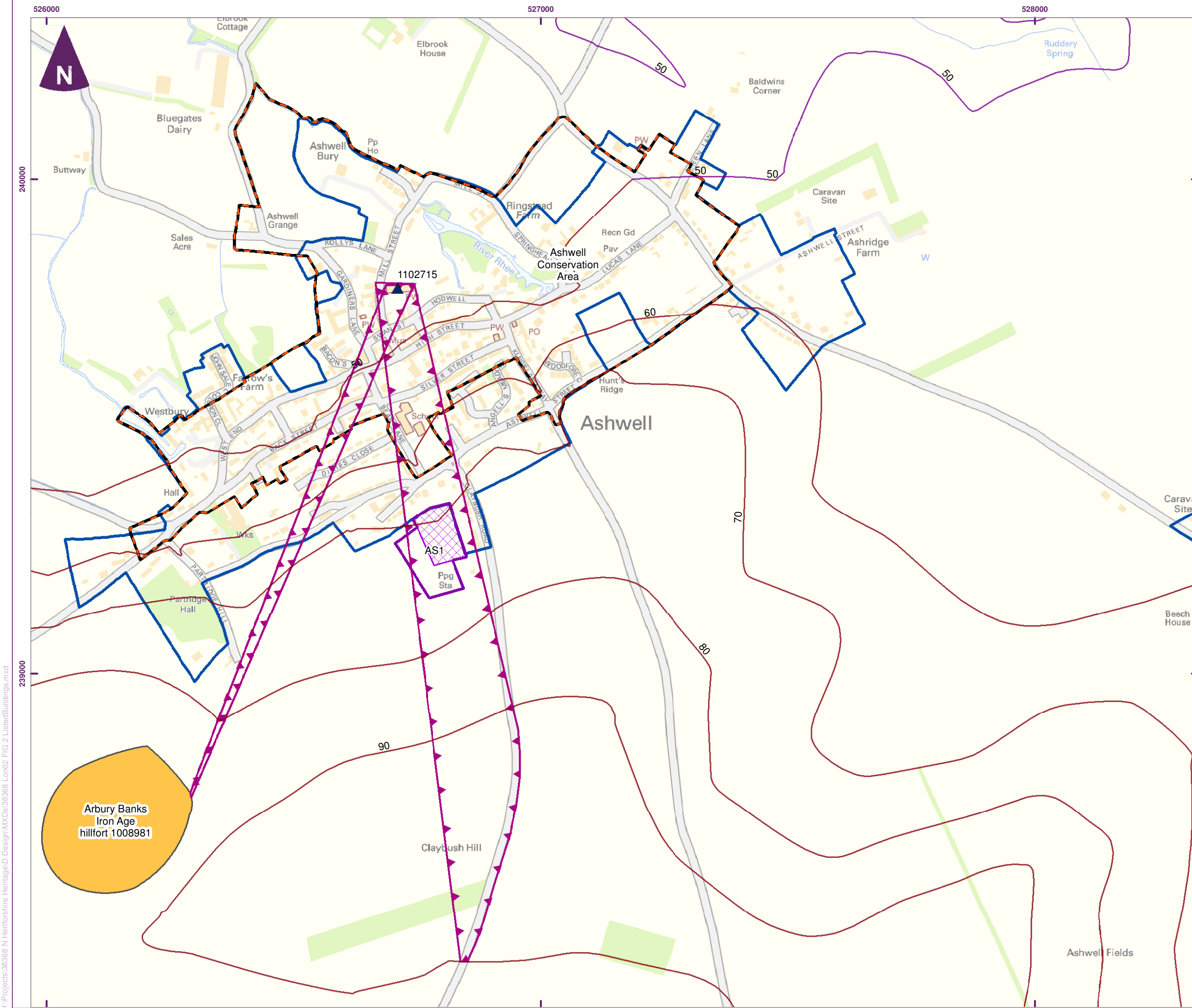


Client  
 North Hertfordshire District Council

North Hertfordshire proposed allocations  
 Heritage Asset constraints plans

**Figure 1; Ashwell proposed site**

file: H:\Projects\38368 N Hertfordshire Heritage\Design\MXDs\38368 Lon01 FIG 1 Alloc\_VIEWS.mxd



**Key**

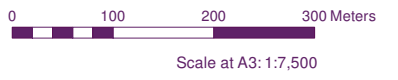
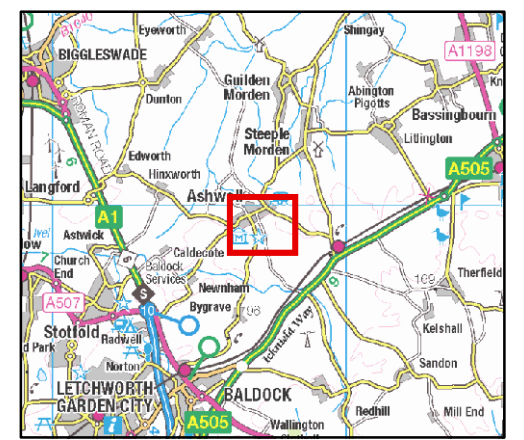
- Views
- Proposed allocation area
- Area of least harm to heritage assets
- Scheduled Monuments

**Listed Buildings**

**Grade**

- I
- II\*
- II

- Conservation Areas
- Core of modern settlement



Client  
 North Hertfordshire District Council

North Hertfordshire proposed allocations  
 Heritage Asset constraints plans

**Figure 2; Ashwell recommended site**

file: H:\Projects\38368 N Hertfordshire Heritage\Design\MXDs\38368\_Lon02\_FIG 2 ListedBuildings.mxd

