

Heritage Assessment relating to the emerging
Thaxted Neighbourhood Plan



On behalf of the Thaxted Neighbourhood Plan Steering
Group

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Contents

	Page
List of Plates	2
1.0 Introduction	4
2.0 Planning context	7
3.0 Heritage assets potentially affected	12
4.0 Heritage impact	20
5.0 Summary	43
Appendix A: Figures	45
Appendix B: Plates	47

List of Plates

No.	Description
1	The grade I listed Church of St John the Baptist
2	The grade II* listed John Webb's Windmill
3	Typical tight townscape within Thaxted that obscures views out of the town
4	Typical tight townscape within Thaxted that obscures views out of the town
5	Long distance view southwards from public footpath 49-13, adjacent to Walden Road
6	View towards the parish church from public footpath 49-97, to the west of Walden Road
7	View towards the parish church from Walden Road near to the Sampford Road junction
8	View northwards out of the conservation area along Newbiggin Street, towards modern housing
9	View southwards towards Thaxted along the narrow Watling Lane
10	Long distance view eastwards towards Thaxted from Debden Road
11	View eastwards along Bolford Street towards the parish church
12	View westwards out of the conservation area along Bolford Street towards rolling open countryside
13	View north-eastwards towards the parish church and the windmill from Broxted Road
14	The double-bend approach to the conservation area along Park Street
15	View out from the conservation area south-westwards along Park Street
16	View out from the conservation area on Park Street looking along the access to the Bowls Club
17	Long-distance north-westwards view towards Thaxted from Dunmow Road
18	Long-distance north-westwards view towards Thaxted from public footpath 49-100, to the east of Dunmow Road
19	View out of the conservation area along Dunmow Road showing the pink-coloured grade II listed Totman's to the right. The boundary of the conservation area is on the brow of the hill.
20	View westwards along Bardfield Road towards the conservation area, showing the spire and tower of the parish church beyond typical twentieth-century suburban housing
21	View eastwards along Copthall Lane from the edge of the conservation area showing a glimpse of open countryside beyond modern houses
22	View from Sampford Road across Site 04 towards the parish church with the Thatcher's Grange development to the right
23	The grade II listed Sorrell's Farmhouse seen from Sampford Road
24	The grade II listed Golden's Farmhouse seen from Sampford Road
25	The recently constructed public footpath across Site 17 linking the Thatcher's Grange development to the town
26	View from Site 17 towards the parish church
27	View from the open eastern part of Site 14 towards the silos and utilitarian farm structures on the western part of the site

28	The existing vehicular access to Site 14 from Bardfield Road.
29	The north façade of the grade II listed Claypits Farmhouse, seen from the existing private access drive
30	View from the open part of Site 14 towards the parish church with the rear side of frontage development to Bardfield Road to the right
31	View out from the edge of the conservation area over the rolling open countryside setting to the south, of which Site 15 forms part
32	View from public footpath 49-100 across Site 08 towards the grade II listed Priors Hall

1.0 Introduction

Document and authorship

- 1.1 This Heritage Assessment considers the impact on heritage assets of development on sites under consideration for allocation in the emerging Thaxted Neighbourhood Plan. The Heritage Assessment has been researched and prepared on behalf of the Thaxted Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group by Roy M Lewis BA (Hons), MA (Arch Cons), MRTPI, IHBC and reviewed by Philip Grover BA (Hons), BTP, Dip Arch. Cons., MRTPI, IHBC, of Grover Lewis Associates Limited. Photographs were taken by Roy Lewis.
- 1.2 Grover Lewis Associates is a planning consultancy that specialises in consideration of development proposals relating to the historic environment. The practice is a recognised Historic Environment Service Provider by the Institute of Historic Building Conservation (IHBC).
- 1.3 The Heritage Assessment identifies heritage assets that could be affected by the development of specific sites on the periphery of Thaxted by virtue of either direct physical impact or indirect impact on the settings of the heritage assets in question. The assessment considers the contribution such settings make to the significance of the heritage assets as a basis for assessment of potential impact. In particular, the assessment considers the importance of approaches into the town and the importance of views of its key landmark features on those routes.
- 1.4 The Heritage Assessment includes a summary of statutory requirements, national planning policies and guidance, and the relevant local policy context.
- 1.5 This assessment does not draw conclusions on the potential impact of development on buried archaeology.

Thaxted Neighbourhood Plan

- 1.6 Under the provisions of the Localism Act, 2011, a working group known as the Thaxted Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group made up of representatives of the local community, is preparing a Neighbourhood Plan for the parish.
- 1.7 The Thaxted Neighbourhood Plan is required to be in general conformity with the wider planning context and parameters set by the emerging Uttlesford Local Plan.
- 1.8 The Plan Area for the Thaxted Neighbourhood Plan was designated by Uttlesford District Council in December 2015. The Plan Area equates to the parish boundary. A plan indicating the Neighbourhood Plan Area is included at Figure 1.

Heritage Assessment

- 1.9 Heritage impact is one of a variety of issues being considered in the Neighbourhood Plan. It is however, a particularly important issue in Thaxted due to the high heritage value and high townscape quality of the town, recognised in the large number of listed buildings and the Thaxted Conservation Area, which embraces the whole of the historic part of the settlement.
- 1.10 The purpose of the Heritage Assessment is to provide a proper understanding of the setting of the historic town and the contribution that the rural setting makes to the significance of its heritage assets. The study will inform the development of policies and land allocations with regard to ensuring the proper protection of the heritage significance of the town and its setting.
- 1.11 The Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group has commissioned a separate Landscape Assessment, which is being prepared by Liz Lake Associates. The Landscape Assessment includes a comprehensive analysis of views towards Thaxted from the surrounding countryside. Reference is made in this Heritage Assessment to the series of key views contained in the Landscape Assessment.

Thaxted

- 1.12 Thaxted is a small town in North Essex, situated nine kilometres to the south-east of Saffron Walden, nine kilometres to the north of Great Dunmow, and eleven kilometres to the north-east of Stansted Mountfitchet. The parish of Thaxted falls within the administrative area of Uttlesford District Council.
- 1.13 The town developed on a ridge to the east of the River Chelmer. The Crispey Brook cuts a subsidiary valley as it runs south-westwards into the River Chelmer. Consequently, the town occupies elevated land with an undulating morphology.
- 1.14 Thaxted has Saxon origins and is referred to in the Domesday Book as *Tachesteda*, (meaning a place where thatch was got). In the medieval period, the town developed as a centre of cutlery manufacture and the wealth of the cutlers provided the town's fine fifteenth-century timber-framed Guildhall. Thaxted achieved Borough status in 1556, although the charter was extinguished in 1686 by James II. Despite its importance in the medieval period, the town has remained relatively small. Its medieval population of around 2,000 had risen to a total of only 2,845 residents by the time of the 2011 Census.
- 1.15 The large parish church of St John, built between 1340 and 1510, is renowned for its 181 feet tall spire (see Plate 1). The church, which is known as "*the Cathedral of Essex*", stands on an eminence and dominates the town. John Webb's fine windmill of 1804, which also takes advantage of the ridge upon which the town is sited, forms a second landmark feature (see Plate 2).
- 1.16 Thaxted's medieval street pattern has survived almost unchanged, although the town has expanded to the north and east since the 1950s. The compact, small country town is set in open countryside, which provides its rural setting. This open countryside setting affords a number of fine views towards the town, and towards the parish church and windmill in particular, from the road and public footpath approaches to Thaxted. These are discussed in detail in Section 3.0.

2.0 Planning context

Uttlesford Local Plan

- 2.1 Current planning policy is set out in the saved policies of the Uttlesford Local Plan, which was adopted on 20 January 2005. The inset map for Thaxted incorporates a tight development limit boundary for the town based on the extent of existing development. Urban expansion was not envisaged.
- 2.2 The District Council has started work on a new Local Plan that is intended to replace the 2005 Plan, following the withdrawal of an earlier draft replacement Local Plan in January 2015. The withdrawn plan had been criticised by a Government Inspector for its failure to provide a clear and transparent audit trail of rejected development options, as well as options taken forward into the plan.
- 2.3 In formulating a new development strategy, parishes within Uttlesford District have been encouraged to prepare Neighbourhood Development Plans. Such plans are required to adhere to the strategic elements of the district-wide Local Plan. Thaxted Neighbourhood Plan is one of seven such plans being prepared by local groups, as sub-components of the emerging Uttlesford Local Plan.
- 2.4 Uttlesford District Council made a call for sites in 2015. Potential development sites identified are being assessed through a Strategic Land Availability Assessment (SLAA) and Sustainability Appraisal. Uttlesford District Council has advised Town and Parish Councils which are considering preparing a Neighbourhood Plan that two-way communication is essential to avoid inconsistencies between the Local Plan and Neighbourhood Plans.
- 2.5 A draft Local Plan strategy is unlikely to be published by the District Council before autumn 2016. In the interim, Town and Parish Councils that are preparing Neighbourhood Plans are advised by the District Council to undertake initial evidence gathering and consultation on their emerging ideas. This Heritage Assessment is part of that process.

Statutory duties

- 2.6 Section 66 (1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 makes it a statutory duty for a local planning authority, in considering whether to grant planning permission for development which affects a listed building or its setting, to *“have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses”*.
- 2.7 Section 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 states that, in the exercise of planning functions (including plan-making), *“with respect to any buildings or other land in a conservation area ... special attention shall be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of that area”*.
- 2.8 The courts have held that *“preserving means doing no harm”* (South Lakeland District Council v Secretary of State for the Environment and another [1992] 1 ALL ER 573). In effect, this means that neutral development proposals (i.e. proposals that neither enhance nor detract from character and appearance) satisfy the statutory duty. The courts have also established that, where a proposal would cause some harm, the desirability of preserving listed buildings and their settings and the character and appearance of conservation areas, should not simply be given careful consideration, but should be given *“considerable importance and weight”* when the decision-maker carries out the planning balance (Barnwell Manor Wind Energy Ltd v. East Northamptonshire District Council, English Heritage, the National Trust and the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government [2014] EWCA Civ 137).

National planning policy

- 2.9 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF or Framework) published in March 2012 sets out twelve core planning principles, one of which is to *“conserve heritage assets in a manner appropriate to their significance, so that they can be enjoyed for their contribution to the quality of life of this and future generations”* (paragraph 17).
- 2.10 The Framework seeks to achieve *“sustainable development”*. Sustainable development is defined as having three dimensions: an economic role, a social role, and an environmental role. The latter involves protection and enhancement of the natural, built, and historic environment (paragraph 7).
- 2.11 The NPPF makes clear in paragraph 16 that neighbourhood plans have to support strategic development needs set out in Local Plans, which in turn have

to adhere to an over-riding presumption in favour of sustainable development. The latter requires Local Plans to meet objectively assessed development needs unless specific policies in the Framework (including policies for designated heritage assets) indicate that development should be restricted.

- 2.12 Policies relating to designated heritage assets are set out in section 12 of the Framework. The policies are predicated on the understanding of the significance of heritage assets and any contribution made to such significance by their setting.
- 2.13 The policies in paragraphs 132-134 of the NPPF set out criteria by which proposals that cause harm to significance should be judged. The criteria are not repeated here for brevity. However, paragraph 132 states when considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, as a result of alteration or destruction of the heritage asset or development within its setting, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation, and the more important the asset the greater the weight should be. The policies in paragraphs 132-134 require any potential harm to the significance of heritage assets caused by a development to be weighed against any public benefits that the development might bring.
- 2.14 Consequently, it is important that this Heritage Assessment identifies the significance and relative importance of any heritage assets that would be affected by potential development and the degree of any harm to significance that might be caused.

National planning guidance

- 2.15 The Government's online Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) includes a comprehensive section on Neighbourhood Planning (ID: 41, updated: 19 05 2016). The guidance does not give specific advice with regard to the historic environment and cross-refers to the guidance in chapter 12 of the NPPF.
- 2.16 The Good Practice Advice in Planning Note 1: The Historic Environment in Local Plans (GPA1) published 25 March 2015 by English Heritage (now Historic England) states that "*a full and proper understanding of the heritage of the local area is the most appropriate starting point for town and parish councils and neighbourhood forums to both propose boundaries of the neighbourhood plan area and develop policies that support and encourage the conservation and enhancement of the historic environment*" (para 28).

- 2.17 GPA1 goes on to advise that *“including heritage matters in a neighbourhood plan will help ensure that new development is integrated with what already exists and can demonstrate where standard design and construction may not be appropriate. This can encourage sensitive development of historic buildings and places that can invigorate an area”* (para 29).
- 2.18 The Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning Note 3: The Setting of Heritage Assets (GPA3) published 25 March 2015 by English Heritage (now Historic England) provides a framework for the assessment of proposed changes to the setting of a heritage asset. GPA3 provides clarity regarding the concept of the setting of a heritage asset and a thorough understanding of how development proposals might impact on the significance of a heritage asset as a result of change to its setting.
- 2.19 GPA3 sets out a five step assessment procedure for proposals that affect the setting of a heritage asset, namely:
- Step 1: Identify the heritage assets affected and their settings;
 - Step 2: Assess whether, how and to what degree these settings make a contribution to the significance of the heritage asset(s);
 - Step 3: Assess the effect of the proposed development;
 - Step 4: explore the way to maximise enhancement and avoid or minimise harm;
 - Step 5: make and document the decision and monitor outcomes.
- 2.20 The first four steps set out in GPA3 have been followed in preparing this heritage assessment.
- 2.21 The Historic England Advice Note 3: The Historic Environment and Site Allocations in Local Plans (HEAN3) published October 2015 states that the advice given regarding the site allocation process may also be of use in the preparation of Neighbourhood Plans where sites are being allocated. HEAN3 advises that *“development will be expected to avoid or minimise conflict between any heritage asset’s conservation and any aspect of the proposal, taking into account an assessment of its significance”* and that *“any proposals that would result in harm to heritage assets need to be fully justified and evidenced to ensure they are appropriate, including mitigation or compensation measures”*.
- 2.22 HEAN3 sets out a five stage site allocation procedure, as follows:

- STEP 1 Identify which heritage assets are affected by the potential site allocation;
- STEP 2 Understand what contribution the site (in its current form) makes to the significance of the heritage asset(s);
- STEP 3 Identify what impact the allocation might have on that significance;
- STEP 4 Consider maximising enhancements and avoiding harm;
- STEP 5 Determine whether the proposed site allocation is appropriate in light of the NPPF's tests of soundness

2.23 The advice in HEAN3 emphasises the need for the site allocation process to be informed by an up-to-date and robust historic environment evidence base, to provide baseline information at all stages in preparation of the plan.

2.24 The first four steps set out in HEAN3 have been followed in preparing this heritage assessment.

3.0 Heritage assets potentially affected

Listed buildings

- 3.1 Within the parish of Thaxted there are 215 individual listed buildings. Of these, 148 are located within the Thaxted Conservation Area. The remaining 67 are located in the rural area surrounding the town.
- 3.2 Of the 148 listed buildings within the conservation area, seven buildings are listed grade I. These are the Church of St John; The Guildhall; No.2 Stoney Lane; No.3 Stoney Lane; No.4 Stoney Lane; Clarence House; and the garden wall to Clarence House. Eight buildings are listed grade II* namely: The Windmill; The Recorder's House, No.17 Town Street (so named after the Recorder of the 1556 charter); The Manse, No.19 Town Street (the former residence of Gustav Holst); Town House, No.25 Town Street; The Priory, No.38 Town Street; Park Farmhouse, No.34 Park Street; No.1 Stoney Lane; and No.16 Watling Street.
- 3.3 For the purposes of this heritage assessment, it is not necessary to consider the impact of each potential development site on each listed building within the parish. The tight urban townscape of Thaxted results in there being very few views out of the town to the surrounding countryside and conversely, very few views of the listed buildings that line the town's historic streets, from the surrounding countryside (see Plates 3 and 4). Furthermore, the majority of the listed buildings within the parish that are located in the surrounding rural area are either too distant to have a visual relationship with the potential development sites on the edge of the town or are screened by intervening landform and/or planting.
- 3.4 Consequently, the assessment focuses on the following:
 - The two key landmark listed buildings within the conservation area that can be seen from the surrounding area: i.e. the Church of St John the Baptist (listed grade I) and John Webb's Windmill (listed grade II*)
 - Listed buildings within the conservation area that are located near to the periphery of the area and have a visual or functional relationship with one or more of the potential development sites
 - Listed buildings that are located beyond the conservation area in the surrounding countryside that have a visual or functional relationship with one or more of the potential development sites.

- 3.5 The two key landmark listed buildings are described below. Other listed buildings that have a visual or functional relationship with one or more of the potential development sites are described in the individual site assessments.

Church of St John the Baptist

- 3.6 The parish church, which is built of flint rubble walling with limestone and clunch dressings and lead, slate, and tile roofs, dates from the fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth centuries (see Plate 1). The building's fifteenth-century four-stage west tower is surmounted by a tall and elegant spire. The spire and part of the tower was re-built in the early nineteenth century. This large church with north and south transepts, contains much medieval masonry and carpentry, including a very fine early sixteenth-century five-light east window. The church's grade I listed status recognises the exceptionally high significance of the heritage asset.
- 3.7 The parish church is a high status building that occupies a prominent, elevated site. The building has a dominating presence on both the town and the surrounding area from where it can be seen. Its symbolic tower and spire form a conspicuous landmark feature both within the town and in views from the surrounding area. The parish church is inextricably linked, functionally, visually, and spiritually with both the small country town in which it stands and its surrounding countryside. The building constitutes a major character defining element of the townscape of Thaxted and features in most of the approaches to the town. Consequently, the surrounding countryside and the approaches to the town from which the church can be seen make an important contribution to its heritage significance.

John Webb's Windmill

- 3.8 The red brick tower mill, which stands in a commanding position approximately 200 metres to the south-south-west of the parish church, was built in 1804 for Mr John Webb (see Plate 2). The mill incorporates restored sails and machinery. The quality, rarity and more than special heritage significance of the building is reflected in its grade II* listed status.
- 3.9 Whilst the parish church was sited in an elevated position for symbolic reasons, the windmill was sited at a not dissimilar level, on an open edge on the west side of the town, for functional reasons. This traditional rural structure, which has formed a landmark feature for over two hundred years, has an inextricable functional link with the surrounding countryside which it served. The windmill is a prominent feature in a number of approaches to the town. Consequently, the surrounding countryside and the approaches to the town from which it can be seen, make an important contribution to its heritage significance.

Thaxted Conservation Area

- 3.10 The Thaxted Conservation Area was designated in 1968, shortly after the enabling legislation of 1967. The boundary of the conservation area embraces the whole of the historic town but excludes areas of modern residential development, which are principally located to the north and east of the historic town (see plan of the conservation area boundary at Figure 2). In 2012, Uttlesford District Council prepared a *Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan*.
- 3.11 The historic town is essentially linear, being primarily arranged along the north-south route between Saffron Walden and Great Dunmow. The road from Saffron Walden enters the town from the north as Newbiggin Street. An area of modern housing on the north side of the town is excluded from the conservation area, which commences about 200 metres after the built-up area is entered. Newbiggin Street, being on the top of a ridge, runs level along a gently curving alignment for around 250 metres before meeting Watling Lane which enters the town from the north-west, having climbed the valley side. The spine route, now Watling Street, passes around the north side of the parish church and descends down the ridge to the east of the church and enters the town's wide central street, known as Town Street. This 100 metre long space, which falls gently to the south-east, provides the town's historic market place. The spine route exits Town Street and rises in gradient to the south-east. After about 220 metres, Mill End turns southwards and becomes Dunmow Road, which continues southwards on a rising gradient to a ridge that forms the southern extent of the conservation area.
- 3.12 The conservation area includes the 230 metre built-up length of Bolford Street, which is a minor approach that rises steeply up to the town from the south-west, the 320 metre built-up length of Park Street that approaches from the south, on a shallower gradient along the subsidiary valley of the Crispey Brook, and a short length of Copthall Lane and The Tanyard which is a minor approach to the southern end of Town Street from the north-east direction. The conservation area also embraces back lanes to the west and east of Newbiggin Street, and to the north of Town Street and Mill End; Stoney Lane and Fishmarket Street to the south of the parish church and a protrusion to the south-west of Fishmarket Street to include John Webb's Windmill.
- 3.13 With the exception of the open churchyard around the church, the main spine route through the town is heavily built-up, with almost continuous frontage development. The secondary approaches to the town are also well built-up. Consequently, there are few views out of the town to the surrounding countryside.

- 3.14 Frontage development made up of traditional buildings at the back edge of the footway characterises all the streets in the conservation area. There are few buildings other than the Church of St John the Baptist, the United Reform Church on Bolford Street, and John Webb's windmill, that appear as free-standing elements.
- 3.15 Given the intensity and compactness of the built-form of the historic town, trees and green spaces do not make a major contribution to the character and appearance of the conservation area. The main green spaces and areas with trees are the churchyard of the Church of St John the Baptist, the paddocks to the north of John Webb's windmill, the grounds of the United Reform Church, a paddock on the north side of Cophall Lane, and the verdant open land on the east side of Dunmow Road.
- 3.16 There are very few negative features that detract from the character and appearance of the conservation area. The most intrusive negative elements are the Murco Petrol filling station on Mill End, with its garish signs and incongruous canopy, and the industrial Molecular Products site at the northern end of Dunmow Road.
- 3.17 The main spine route through the town constitutes the B184. The traffic flow along the B184, together with traffic on the secondary routes into the town, particularly along Park Street (B1051) which carries traffic from Stansted Airport, degrades the environmental quality of the conservation area.
- 3.18 The conservation area gains considerable significance from its surrounding countryside, due to the longstanding functional, visual, and spiritual link between the historic town and its rural setting. However, by the date of the designation of the conservation area in 1968, the town had expanded on its northern and eastern sides. These areas were excluded from the designated area. Consequently, the northern and eastern sides of the conservation area are separated from the surrounding countryside by a suburban buffer. In contrast, most of the conservation area continues to adjoin open countryside on its southern and western sides, which have remained little altered. Consequently, the contribution of the countryside setting is notably greater to the south and west of the town than the north and east, from where the only feature of the conservation area that can be seen is generally the tower and spire of the parish church.

Approaches to the conservation area, the parish church and the windmill from the surrounding countryside

Walden Road/Newbiggin Street approach

- 3.19 Thaxted is approached from the north along Walden Road (B184), which crosses the River Chelmer and rises up the valley-side to the town. From the winding hedge-lined road, little can be seen of the town from distance. However, there are some fine views of the tower and spire of the parish church from adjoining public footpaths (see Plates 5 and 6).
- 3.20 From Walden Road, the town reveals itself at the brow of the hill, at the point where Sampford Road joins from the east. From here, the spire of the parish church appears as a dominant feature and focal point along the route into the historic town (see Plate 7). However, the conservation area is not apparent from the Sampford Road junction, being separated by a recreation ground and a belt of twentieth-century suburban housing. Conversely, there are no outward views of the surrounding countryside from the northern extent of the conservation area along the tightly enclosed Newbiggin Street (see Plate 8). Consequently, there is no intervisibility between the conservation area and the open countryside to the north, along Walden Road/Newbiggin Street.

Watling Lane approach

- 3.21 The historic but now minor approach to the town from the north-west along Watling Lane is lined by trees and hedges (see Plate 9). This narrow local lane does not connect to the wider road system but links with footpath routes, and itself forms a part of the Harcamlow Way national trail. Watling Lane is lined by twentieth-century development for a considerable length before the conservation area is reached. Consequently, there is no intervisibility between the conservation area and the open countryside to the north-west along the Watling Lane approach.

Debden Road/Bolford Street approach

- 3.22 In contrast, the surrounding countryside is contiguous with the conservation area on the approach from the west along Debden Road/Bolford Street. There are fine, unimpeded serial views of the historic town and the two landmark features provided by the parish church and the windmill on the approach along Debden Road, which commence from positions over a kilometre away at Cutlers Green (see Plate 10). The grade II listed United Reformed Church is prominent in these views. From the edge of the conservation area, the parish church forms a powerful stop to the vista along Bolford Street (see Plate 11). Outward views along Bolford Street are of attractive, rolling countryside (see Plate 12). Consequently, there is a very high degree of intervisibility between

the conservation area and its countryside setting along Debden Road/Bolford Street.

Broxted Road/Park Street approach

- 3.23 There is a similarly close relationship between the surrounding countryside and the conservation area on the approach to Thaxted from the south west along Broxted Road/Park Street (B1051), which follows the line of the Crispey Brook. Consequently, viewpoints are from lower levels than the Debden Road approach and are principally of the spire of the parish church and the windmill, rather than the town as a whole. The two landmark features are seen in close juxtaposition from this direction (see Plate 13). Roadside planting alongside this winding approach limits the number of viewpoints.
- 3.24 The historic town only comes into view from positions relatively close and the conservation area is entered via a sharp double-bend (see Plate 14). The juxtaposition of the town and the adjoining rolling open countryside is highly apparent from public footpaths 49-35 and 49-96. The outward view along Park Street is of rising arable fields (see Plate 15). Additionally, there are glimpses of the surrounding countryside through gaps between buildings towards the southern end of Park Street (see Plate 16). Consequently, there is a high degree of intervisibility between the conservation area and its countryside setting along Broxted Road/Park Street.

Dunmow Road approach

- 3.25 Dunmow Road (B184) approaches Thaxted from the south, at an elevated level. The absence of roadside planting and large open fields facilitate a series of fine panoramic views across open countryside towards the historic town, with the parish church tower and spire at its core and the windmill to its left (see Plate 17). These views commence approximately one kilometre to the south of the conservation area and are almost continuous as the town is approached, apart from where the road dips. Consequently, there is a very high degree of intervisibility between the conservation area and its countryside setting, as experienced in the approach along Dunmow Road. There are similar fine views towards the church and windmill from public footpath 49-100 that follows a parallel alignment to the east of Dunmow Road (see Plate 18). In sharp contrast, southward views out from the conservation area along Dunmow Road, where the historic town extends southwards, are limited by the rising landform (see Plate 19). The open countryside beyond the conservation area only becomes apparent from the brow of the hill, which marks the extent of the designated area.

Bardfield Road approach

- 3.26 The approach from the east along Bardfield Road is less spectacular. The road, which is almost straight and falls gently into the town, passes through approximately 0.7 kilometres of ordinary twentieth-century suburban development before the conservation area is reached. Nevertheless, the spire and tower of the parish church has a powerful presence (see Plate 20). However, there are no significant outward views from the conservation area along Bardfield Road, nor any intervisibility between the conservation area and the surrounding countryside to the east.

Copthall Lane approach

- 3.27 Copthall Lane also approaches from the north east, along the valley of the Crispey Brook. This narrow local lane does not connect to the wider road system but links with footpath routes. Copthall Lane provides an attractive minor approach from the north-east, on foot. The long and narrow Walnut Tree Meadow between the lane and the Crispey Brook, edged with mature trees, is a particularly attractive adjoining landscape feature. However, there is a buffer of modern development between Walnut Tree Meadow and the conservation area. There are no significant views towards or from the conservation area along Copthall Lane, other than a glimpse of open countryside from the edge of the conservation area (see Plate 21) and only minimal intervisibility between the conservation area and the surrounding countryside to the east.

Sampford Road approach

- 3.28 Sampford Road (B105) approaches Thaxted from the north east, and as described above, meets Walden Road as a T-junction. Sampford Road runs along a plateau and is therefore relatively level. The town is seen from approximately 0.7 kilometres east of the Walden Road junction, from a point where a small wedge of well-established roadside planting ends allowing a series of unimpeded panoramic views towards the tower and spire of the parish church across large arable fields with no boundary hedges (see Plate 22). However, the rest of the historic town cannot be seen as it stands at lower level.
- 3.29 The recent Bellrope Meadow/Thatcher's Grange developments are prominent and intrusive in the approach to Thaxted along Sampford Road and obscure views of the church spire and tower from more westerly positions along the road (see Plate 22). The impact of the Thatcher's Grange scheme will change once the approved landscaping is established along its eastern margin. Other than the fine views of the spire and tower of the parish church, there is no intervisibility between the conservation area and the open countryside to the north of the town.

Scheduled monuments

- 3.30 There is one scheduled monument within Thaxted parish. This is a moated site at Terriers Farm, Sampford Road. The monument is located 1.72 km to the north-east of the parish church. It is trapezoidal in shape and measures 60 metres north west – south east by a maximum of 65 metres north-east – south west. The arms are water-filled and are five metres wide. The island is raised about half a metre above the level of the surrounding ground and is now occupied by a mid-Georgian house with Victorian additions (listed grade II).

Other heritage designations

- 3.31 There are no registered historic parks and gardens, registered battlefields or World Heritage Sites within the parish of Thaxted.

4.0 Heritage impact

Introduction

- 4.1 There is no universally accepted or standard methodology for carrying out heritage impact assessments. Most approaches involve methodical assessment, using professional judgement, of the scale or severity of any impacts or changes to heritage assets that might be caused by a proposal in relation to the sensitivity (i.e. the importance) of the assets in question.
- 4.2 This Heritage Assessment uses the following categories of sensitivity (i.e. the importance) of the assets:
- High sensitivity: grade I and grade II* listed buildings
 - Medium sensitivity: grade II listed buildings and conservation areas
 - Low sensitivity: locally listed / non-designated heritage assets
- 4.3 The Assessment uses the following categories of scale or severity of any impacts or changes:
- Major effect
 - Moderate effect
 - Minor effect
 - Negligible effect
 - Neutral effect

Such impacts can be either beneficial or adverse.

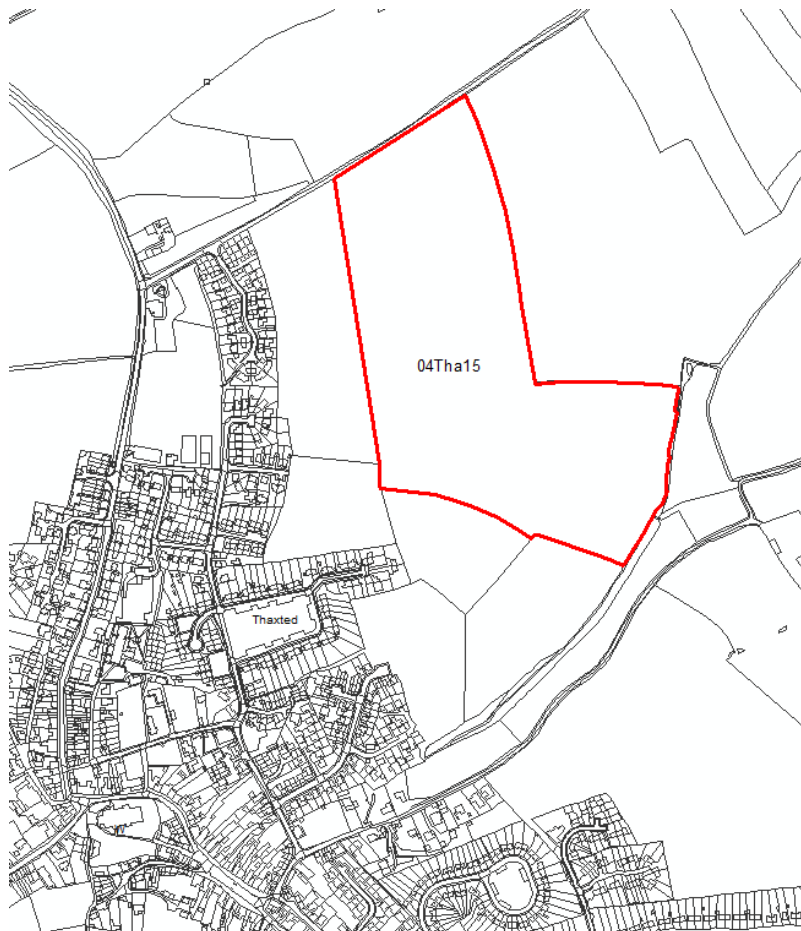
- 4.4 The Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group has specifically requested that the Heritage Assessment considers the potential impact of development of the following sites:
- Site 04: Land south of Sampford Road
 - Site 17: Land to the east of The Mead
 - Site 14: Land at Claypits Farm, south of Bardfield Road
 - Site 15: Land east of Park Street
 - Site 06: Enclosed pasture land, east of Dunmow Road, opposite Totmans Farm
 - Site 08: Land east of Dunmow Road, to the north of Priors Hall

- 4.5 The sites assessed are under consideration for potential development in principle. Consequently, there are no detailed designs. The Heritage Assessment is made on the assumption that the sites would be developed by low-rise, principally residential development. Assumptions are made regarding likely means of access for each particular site.

Site 04: Land south of Sampford Road

Location

- 4.6 Site 04 is located beyond the north-eastern edge of Thaxted, on the south side of the Sampford Road (B1051) approach to the town.



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Area / current use / morphology

- 4.7 The extensive 13.84 hectare site is a large L-shaped block of agricultural land that currently forms a portion of a larger field. The flat and featureless site is part of an open elevated ridge, which extends north-eastwards beyond the main built-up area of Thaxted.

Boundaries & character of adjacent land

- 4.8 The northern boundary of Site 04 to Sampford Road is completely open, which allows for unobstructed views across the land and for it to be seen together with its surroundings. The western boundary abuts a residual open margin of

the recently completed Thatcher's Grange development. It is intended to establish a landscaping scheme on this land which will form a substantial belt of trees around the eastern side of the Thatcher's Grange/Bellrope Meadow appendage to the town, which currently forms a very unnatural and incongruous northwards protrusion of built form, beyond the former development boundary. The Thatcher's Grange development is currently highly prominent in views from Sampford Road across Site 04 but will become less intrusive when the approved landscaping scheme is established.

- 4.9 On the eastern side, Site 04 abuts another large, flat arable field, which is similarly open along its northern boundary to Sampford Road. This openness provides for views across Site 04 from positions further east along Sampford Road.
- 4.10 To the south, the Site 04 abuts land adjacent to Wedow Road and Weaverhead Close that has planning permission for residential development.

Access

- 4.11 Vehicular access would have to be from Sampford Road (B1051). It may be possible to provide more convenient pedestrian/cycle access to the town centre from the southern end of the site.
- 4.12 There are no existing public footpaths across or adjacent to the site, although development of the site would be visible from a public footpath that approaches Thaxted from the north-east across open countryside.

Relationship to the Thaxted Conservation Area

- 4.13 The southern edge of Site 04 is approximately 360 metres from the closest part of the conservation area and around 550 metres from the spire of the parish church. There is a considerable amount of intervening suburban development.
- 4.14 In view of the distance and the nature of the intervening development, the site could not be said to form part of the immediate setting of the conservation area.

Relationship to listed buildings

- 4.15 There are no listed buildings in the intervening area between Site 04 and the conservation area. With the exception of the parish church, all listed buildings within the conservation area are shielded from Site 04 by the intervening suburban development, well-established tree belts and the landform.

- 4.16 The closest listed buildings in the surrounding countryside are the Goddard's Farm/Golden's Farm/Sorrell's Farm cluster to the north of Sampford Road, which are around 360 metres from the closest part of the site. The cluster comprises:
- Goddard's Farmhouse (listed grade II*)
 - Barn North West of Goddard's Farmhouse (listed grade II)
 - Golden's Farmhouse (listed grade II) (see Plate 24)
 - Stable to North of Golden's Farmhouse (listed grade II)
 - Sorrell's Farmhouse (listed grade II) (see Plate 23)
- 4.17 These listed farmhouses and associated farm buildings are located on the west-facing valley side of the ridge that falls down to the River Chelmer. There is a visual link between the site and the Golden's Farm and Sorrell's Farm listed buildings, due to nearness, lack of intervening obstructions, and as they stand at higher level than Goddard's Farm. There is also a functional link as Site 04 forms a significant part of the surrounding open agricultural fields in which the listed farm houses and farm buildings are located. However, the rurality of this setting has been debased by the Thatcher's Grange/Bellrope Meadow developments.
- 4.18 There is a further group of listed buildings (and a scheduled moated site) at Terrier's Farm, which is located further east on Sampford Road. Terrier's Farm is approximately 750 metres from the nearest part of Site 04. The greater distance and intervening screening results in there being no visual relationship between the two.
- 4.19 There are views from Sampford Road towards the spire and tower of the grade I listed Church of St John the Baptist. The completely open northern boundary of Site 04 to Sampford Road, together with the similar open nature of the adjoining field boundary to the east, provides for a series of panoramic views across Site 04 towards the spire of the parish church, as the town is approached along the B1051. These serial views of this grade I listed landmark feature help define the character of the town. The Thatcher's Grange/Bellrope Meadow developments intrude into these views and obscure views of the church spire and tower from more westerly positions along Sampford Road. The prominence of this development will be diminished when the approved landscape belt to the east is established.

Impact

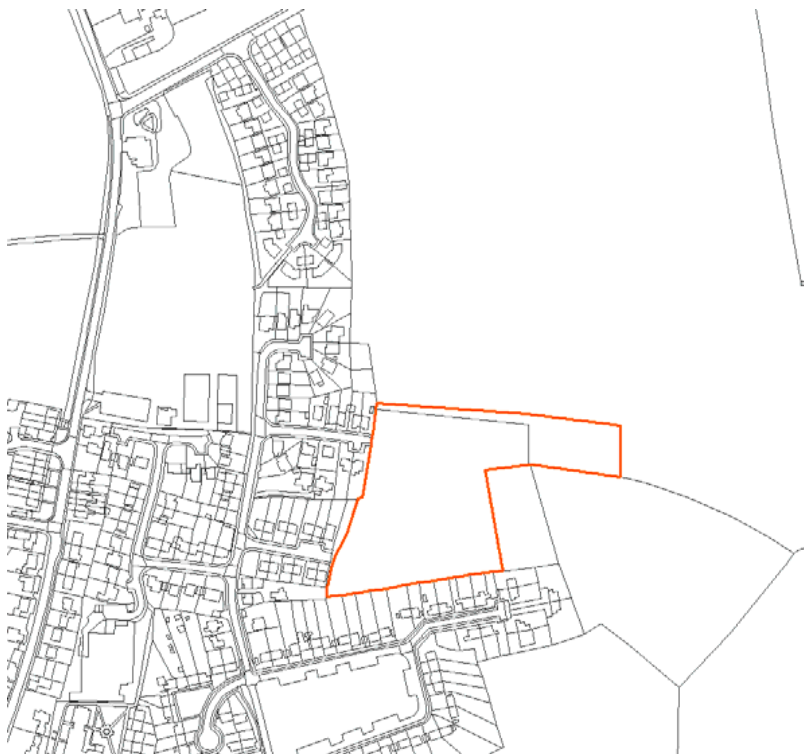
- 4.20 Development of Site 04 would result in a major change to the wider countryside setting of the historic town. Critically, this would obscure the series of fine views from Sampford Road of the tower and spire of the grade I listed parish

church, which is a highly sensitive heritage asset (see Plate 22). Given the serial nature of the views, the high sensitivity of the heritage asset, and the powerful relationship between the asset and the surrounding countryside, and taking into account the harmful impact already caused by the Thatcher's Grange/Bellrope Meadow developments, the potential impact on the grade I listed parish church is considered to be major/moderate adverse.

- 4.21 Liz Lake View 37 provides a typical view from Sampford Road across Site 04 looking towards the parish church and Bellrope Meadow. Liz Lake View 36 shows that development of Site 04 would also intrude into views of the parish church from the public footpath to the north-east.
- 4.22 Additionally, it is considered that development of Site 04 would have a minor adverse effect on the grade II listed buildings at Golden's Farm and Sorrell's Farm, due to the scale and nature of the change to their open countryside surroundings. These heritage assets are of medium sensitivity and the impact would be relatively low but reinforces the major/moderate adverse effect identified on the parish church.
- 4.23 It is noted that the Thaxted Historic Character Assessment (2009) states that *"development to the south of Sampford Road would have detrimental impacts on views of the church spire, the dominant landmark building in Thaxted thus diminishing the sense of place and local distinctiveness in this location."*

Site 17: Land to the east of The MeadLocation

- 4.24 Site 17 is located immediately adjacent to the north-eastern edge of the town. The site does not have a frontage to a public highway but is adjacent to the eastern ends of The Mead and Guelph's Lane. Site 17 is positioned to the immediate south of the recent Thatcher's Grange development and to the immediate south west of the much larger Site 04.



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Area / current use / morphology

- 4.25 The 1.7 hectare site is an L-shaped block of land that is currently unused. The land slopes gently to the south, being just over the ridge top location of the Thatcher's Grange development and Site 04.

Boundaries & character of adjacent land

- 4.26 The north, west and south boundaries of Site 17 are formed by overgrown hedges and bushes. The boundaries of the part of the site that protrudes to the east are undefined. To the south and west, Site 17 abuts areas of low density single-storey and two-storey suburban housing dating from the mid twentieth century. This adjoining housing area displays little architectural quality, character or respect for the traditional character of Thaxted. To the

north, the site abuts both the open southern end of the recently completed Thatcher's Grange development and part of Site 04, which extends further to the north east and is currently a large arable field. Open land to the east adjacent to Wedow Road and Weaverhead Close has planning permission for residential development. The development has not commenced.

- 4.27 Some boundary trees are subject to a preservation order.

Access

- 4.28 The site does not have a frontage to a public highway and access arrangements are not clear. Connection to the eastern ends of The Mead and Guelph's Lane would be the most obvious arrangement.
- 4.29 There are no existing public footpaths across or adjacent to the site, although permissive footpath access onto the land is allowed on an informal basis. A surfaced and lit public footpath has recently been constructed across the site to provide a footpath link between The Mead and the Thatcher's Grange development (see Plate 25).

Relationship to the Thaxted Conservation Area

- 4.30 The south-eastern corner of Site 17 is approximately 200 metres from the closest part of the conservation area and around 380 metres from the spire of the parish church.
- 4.31 In view of the distance and the nature of the intervening development, the site could not be said to form part of the immediate setting of the conservation area. It constitutes a small and rather inconspicuous part of the wider open countryside setting of the historic town.

Relationship to listed buildings

- 4.32 There are no listed buildings in the intervening area between Site 17 and the conservation area. The closest listed buildings in the surrounding countryside are the Goddard's Farm/Golden's Farm/Sorrell's Farm group to the north of Sampford Road, listed with regard to Site 04. These listed buildings are over 850 metres to the north of Site 17 and there is no visual relationship due to the intervening plateau. Nor is there any functional relationship as the land that comprises Site 17 is not in agricultural use.
- 4.33 There are views across the site, of the spire and tower of the parish church from Sampford Road. These are the same views that would be affected by development of Site 04 (see Plate 22). However, Site 17 is further away from

the viewpoints and the site is smaller in scale. The substantial hedge on the northern boundary of Site 17 is visible from Sampford Road and provides a natural green feature in the middle distance in front of the church.

- 4.34 Additionally, there are views of the spire of the parish church from Site 17 (see Plate 26).

Impact

- 4.35 Development of Site 17 would result in a more modest scale of change to the wider countryside setting of the historic town than the adjoining Site 04, due to its smaller size, disposition and character. In view of the distance of the site from the series of fine viewpoints on Sampford Road, the slightly lower level, and the well-established planting along the northern site boundary, low-rise development would be unlikely to intrude significantly into views of the tower and spire of the grade I listed parish church. The glimpsed roofscape of such development above the existing boundary hedge could sit uncomfortably in the foreground of this sensitive landmark feature in long distance views from Sampford Road. However, the approved landscaping scheme for the Thatcher's Grange development will provide additional screening. Development of Site 17 could be contrived to retain some public views of the spire of the parish church from within the development.
- 4.36 The serial nature of the views from Sampford Road, the high sensitivity of the heritage asset, and the powerful relationship between the asset and the surrounding countryside, are counter-balanced by the relatively modest scale of the site and the harmful impact already caused by the Bellrope Meadow and Thatcher's Grange developments. Taking this into account, together with the future screening effect of the approved landscaping scheme for the latter, the potential impact on the grade I listed parish church is considered to be minor adverse.
- 4.37 Liz Lake View 37 provides a typical view from Sampford Road across Site 17 looking towards the parish church and Bellrope Meadow. Liz Lake View 35 from the public footpath 49-29 to the north-east of Site 17 suggests that the roofscape of development of Site 17 could intrude into views of the top of the spire of the parish church, offset to the right. However, such views would be substantially screened by existing planting and the approved development of the open land to the east adjacent to Wedow Road and Weaverhead Close.

Site 14: Land at Claypits Farm, south of Bardfield RoadLocation

- 4.38 Site 14 is located on the eastern side of Thaxted, on the south side of Bardfield Road.



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Area / current use / morphology

- 4.39 The 1.07 hectare site is separated from Bardfield Road by a single-line of ribbon development. Site 14 has a complex shape in plan due to it embracing an access from Bardfield Road, a group of former agricultural buildings, and adjacent parcels of open farmland. The land slopes gently downwards from the south towards the backs of the dwellings on Bardfield Road.
- 4.40 The site tapers to the west, with a small appendage of open land that projects southwards.
- 4.41 Existing farm buildings within the site area are predominantly modern and utilitarian, and include a row of five steel silos that divide the site centrally between a main open area to the east and the former farm area to the west (see Plate 27).

Boundaries & character of adjacent land

- 4.42 Bardfield Road is mostly made up of twentieth-century suburban residential development interspersed with the occasional traditional building. The ribbon on the south side includes the flat-roofed Thaxted Fire Station. The Bardfield Road development stands at a slightly lower level.
- 4.43 The main open, eastern part of the site is enclosed by a hedge along the southern boundary and is open on the eastern side.
- 4.44 To the west, Site 14 immediately abuts the former Claypits Farmhouse. To the south and east, Site 14 is bordered by open arable farmland.

Access

- 4.45 The site is currently accessed via a bifurcated private drive from Bardfield Road that splits either side of a large sycamore tree (see Plate 28) and runs through the former farm complex. It is likely that this would be utilised. It may be possible/necessary to acquire intervening land between the site and Bardfield Road, in order to create a more direct access to the public highway.
- 4.46 Public footpath 49-95 falls down from the higher open land to the south-east, passes along the eastern margin of Site 14, and continues northwards to Bardfield Road. A second public footpath (49-90) runs along the southern margin of the site, connecting with the former. Both footpaths are part of a network of public rights of way that cross the open countryside to the south-east of Thaxted.

Relationship to the Thaxted Conservation Area

- 4.47 The smaller, western part of Site 14 abuts part of the eastern boundary of the conservation area, which embraces the grade II listed Claypits Farmhouse (see Plate 29). The bifurcated access to Bardfield Road is within the conservation area and the large sycamore tree forms an important feature of the conservation area (see Plate 28).
- 4.48 The open land that abuts the conservation area, together with the adjacent group of former farm buildings within Site 14 clearly constitutes part of the setting of the conservation area. However, the larger open area that forms the eastern part of Site 14 has a closer relationship to the modern ribbon development on Bardfield Road, so is unlikely to be considered part of the immediate setting of the conservation area.

Relationship to listed buildings

- 4.49 The grade II listed Claypits Farmhouse stands to the immediate west of Site 14 and shares the same access from Bardfield Road. This two-storey, timber-framed former hall-house with cross wings dates from the mid fifteenth-century or earlier. The former farmhouse clearly has an inextricable functional and physical link with the farm buildings and farmland that comprise Site 14.
- 4.50 The ribbon of development on the south side of Bardfield Road contains two listed buildings, Hillside Cottage and Coldhams Fee. Hillside Cottage is a thatched, timber-framed, single-storey cottage with attics, which stands to the immediate north of the open, eastern part of Site 14, with modern dwellings to either side. Coldhams Fee is a small thatched, timber-framed, single-storey cottage with attics, which stands set back from and end-on to the Bardfield Road, on a narrow plot. The listed building is located approximately thirty metres to the north-east of the site, alongside modern residential development.
- 4.51 There is a cluster of seven listed buildings in the vicinity of the junction of Mill End, Dunmow Road and Bardfield Road, all within the conservation area. Whilst the closest are not much more than 100 metres from the main body of Site 14, there is no intervisibility between the listed buildings and the site due to the self-screening effect of the tight urban townscape and the presence of a large block of intervening trees. There is however, a fine view of the parish church across the open eastern part of Site 14 from public footpath 49-95 (see Plate 30).

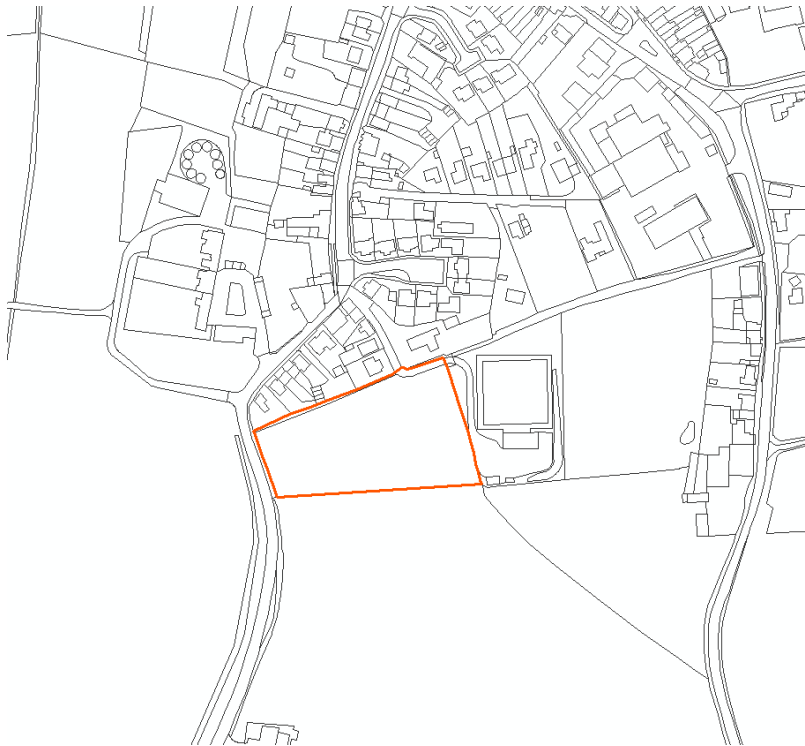
Impact

- 4.52 Assessment of the impact of development of Site 14 is complex due to its mixed character (see Plates 27, 28 and 29). On the one hand, replacement of the existing utilitarian farm buildings and structures with a sensitively designed new development could potentially enhance the setting of the grade II listed Claypits Farmhouse and the conservation area. Conversely, an ill-conceived or over-intensive development would almost certainly harm the setting of both the listed building and the conservation area. Substantial alteration of the existing bifurcated access to Bardfield Road to satisfy highway requirements could result in an intrusive feature just within the conservation area. Furthermore, works to enlarge the access could threaten the existing large sycamore tree that stands between the two arms of the existing access. Loss of this tree would damage the character and appearance of the conservation area. However, modest adaptation to the access should be sufficient to serve the number of dwellings that the site could accommodate and avoid harm to the tree.

- 4.53 Development of the open eastern part of the site would threaten to obscure the fine view of the tower and spire of the parish church from a well-used public footpath. However, it would be possible to allocate the site with a proviso that an open view of the parish church was maintained from public footpath 49-95 in the design of any proposed development. The view would of course be from an urban context rather than across an open field. The existing view is however, debased by modern development in the foreground and a telegraph pole. Relocation of the existing telegraph pole would enhance the view.
- 4.54 Development of Site 14 should not result in a harmful impact on the two listed buildings (Hillside Cottage and Coldhams Fee) that are intermingled with the existing ribbon of development fronting Bardfield Road as they already sit in an urban context.
- 4.55 On balance it is considered that a carefully conceived development of Site 14 would have a neutral impact on the setting of Claypits Farmhouse but a minor adverse impact on the setting of the grade I listed parish church (a heritage asset of high sensitivity) and the conservation area (a heritage asset of medium sensitivity).
- 4.56 Liz Lake View 30 provides a view that illustrates the existing ribbon of development to the immediate north of the open part of Site 14, seen from the public footpath that approaches Site 14 from the south.

Site 15: Land east of Park StreetLocation

- 4.57 Site 15 lies on the southern edge of the town on the east side of Park Street (B1051).



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Area / current use / morphology

- 4.58 The 0.75 hectare site is an approximately rectangular block of land that constitutes the northern portion of a much larger arable field. The land slopes gently upwards to the east and forms part of a wider gently rolling landform.

Boundaries & character of adjacent land

- 4.59 The narrower western end of the site abuts Park Street along the central part of a double-bend on the winding Park Street approach to Thaxted that forms a well-defined entry point into the conservation area (see Plate 14). The western boundary is predominantly open, which facilitates clear views across the arable land to the east.
- 4.60 The northern site boundary abuts the rear gardens of a row of largely modern houses that form a ribbon on the south side of Park Street. The rear side of these houses is equally prominent in views from Park Street, south of the town.

To the immediate east is the Bowls Club with a green and pavilion, contained by a boundary hedge on the west and south sides.

Access

- 4.61 Access would have to be direct to Park Street (B1051) on the west side of the site or via the narrow lane that leads from Park Street to the Bowls Club and passes adjacent to the north-eastern corner of the site.
- 4.62 Public footpaths 49-35 and 49-96 follow the northern and western margins of the site, respectively. These connect with further public rights of way to the west of Park Street and to the south.

Relationship to the Thaxted Conservation Area

- 4.63 Site 15 is located just beyond the conservation area. The north-eastern corner of the site is contiguous with the boundary of the conservation area as it crosses Park Street. There is a wedge shaped margin of garden land between the northern edge of Site 15 and houses along Park Street that are within the conservation area.
- 4.64 Site 15 clearly forms part of the open countryside setting of the conservation area (see Plate 31). The District Council's Historic Settlement Character Assessment for Thaxted (2009) states that the approach from Park Lane is characterised by undulating open countryside. The Character Assessment notes that *"there is a very clear distinctive break between open countryside and the edge of the settlement to the south east of Park Street"* and that the edge is skirted by a public footpath. The sharp contrast between the built-up area and the adjoining countryside is made highly apparent from the public footpath (49-35) that runs along the northern edge of Site 15 and from elevated positions further westwards on the footpath.
- 4.65 There is an important glimpse view of the surrounding countryside that forms Site 15 from the southern end of Park Street along the Bowls Club access drive (see Plate 16). There are also views from Park Street across Site 15 in the easterly direction towards the southern protuberance of the conservation area along Dunmow Road. The rear sides of traditional buildings in the conservation which are at higher level than Site 15 can be seen, although the modern Bowls Club pavilion in the middle ground is a rather incongruous feature.

Relationship to listed buildings

- 4.66 There is a group of five listed buildings on the west side of Park Street, to the north west of Site 15. These include:

- Park Farmhouse (listed grade II*)
 - Wall at Park Farm fronting road (listed grade II)
 - No.36 Park Street (listed grade II)
 - Cart Lodge to South West of Park Farmhouse (listed grade II)
 - Barn to South West of Cart Lodge South West of Park Farmhouse (listed grade II)
- 4.67 This group of listed buildings dominates the streetscene in this part of Park Street. However, notwithstanding their close proximity, the listed buildings are largely screened from Site 15 by the modern houses on the east side of Park Street, adjacent to the northern boundary of the site. Development on Site 15 would be visible in tandem with the listed barn, and also the spire of the grade I listed parish church beyond, in views from Park Street close to Site 15. These tandem views would include glimpses of the other listed buildings from a short stretch of Park Street.
- 4.68 The views of buildings along Dunmow Road from Park Street, referred to with regard to the conservation area, include views of the grade II listed Totmans, although Site 15 forms only a minor part of the wider countryside setting of this listed building.
- 4.69 There is a freestanding grade II listed building called Parkstile Cottage, on the west side of Park Street, some 365 metres to the south west of Site 15. There is no intervisibility between this single-storey cottage with attic rooms and Site 15 due to intervening roadside planting along the winding alignment of the B1051.

Impact

- 4.70 Site 15 is relatively small, low-lying, and its elongated shape would facilitate a linear development that could potentially be designed to create a new entrance feature to the village. However, development of Site 15 would result in a major change to the immediate countryside setting of the conservation area, at a point that marks a well-defined entrance into the built-up area. Road safety considerations with regard to a vehicular access to Park Street are likely to prove a constraint. In addition to being almost certainly hazardous to road users, a new access to Park Street would be harmful to the existing winding approach into the conservation area, from a heritage point of view. Use of the narrow access to the Bowls Club would threaten the low overhanging thatched roof of a traditional building that contributes to the character of the conservation area.

- 4.71 There are intermittent views of the church spire on the Park Street approach to Thaxted. Development on Site 15 would be seen in tandem with the church spire from a short length of Park Street close to the site. However, it would have to be set back due to the presence of the Crispey Brook and, if appropriately designed, development would merge with the existing modern development to the north.
- 4.72 In view of the major impact of loss of the open countryside setting to the conservation area and the associated harm to the existing approach into the conservation area, and taking into account the limited impact on the parish church and the group of listed buildings on the west side of Park Street, it is considered that development of Site 15 would be likely to result in a moderate adverse impact on heritage assets of medium sensitivity.
- 4.73 An insensitively designed scheme would of course result in a higher degree of harmful impact.

Site 06: Enclosed pasture land, east of Dunmow Road, opposite Totmans Farm

Location

- 4.74 Site 06 is located immediately adjacent to the most southerly part of Thaxted, on the east side of Dunmow Road (B184).



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Area / current use / morphology

- 4.75 The 0.87 hectare site is an approximately rectangular shaped block of land that rises southwards to the brow of the ridge that runs through Thaxted. The site comprises a paddock that is enclosed on all four sides by overgrown hedges.

Boundaries & character of adjacent land

- 4.76 The wider northern boundary abuts an arable field and an open area used for leisure purposes. The corresponding southern boundary abuts a larger arable field. The narrower western boundary abuts Dunmow Road and the eastern boundary abuts a much larger arable field.
- 4.77 The hedge that encloses the Dunmow Road site frontage has developed into a row of tall slender trees, which obscure views into the site from Dunmow Road. The overgrown southern boundary similarly obstructs views into the site on the approach to the town along Dunmow Road. Built development extends slightly further southwards on the west side of Dunmow Road.

Access

- 4.78 If the site were to be developed independently, the only possibility for vehicular access would be a connection to Dunmow Road (B184), to the west. If the site were to be developed together with the larger Site 08 to the immediate south, the combined sites could utilise a single vehicular access to Dunmow Road (B184).
- 4.79 A public footpath (49-90) runs eastwards from Dunmow Road immediately alongside the northern edge of Site 06. The footpath is bordered by tall hedges on either side. A second public footpath (49-100) runs along the eastern margin of the site, connecting with the former. Both footpaths are part of a network of public rights of way that cross the open countryside to the south-east of Thaxted.

Relationship to the Thaxted Conservation Area

- 4.80 Most of the western frontage to Dunmow Road is within the conservation area, although the designated area only covers a narrow margin of frontage land. The remainder of Site 06 is outwith the conservation area. Approximately fifty percent of the northern edge of the site abuts the southern boundary of the conservation area.
- 4.81 The small part of the site that is within the conservation area forms part of the southern entry into the town. The remainder constitutes part of the immediate setting of the conservation area. The character of the conservation area on the east side of Dunmow Road is predominantly open and verdant. Due to the dense nature of the enclosing trees and hedges, the contribution of Site 06 to the character of the conservation area is principally by way of addition to the verdant nature of the setting of the conservation area.

Relationship to listed buildings

- 4.82 On the opposite side of Dunmow Road, approximately fifteen metres from the north-west corner of Site 06, stands the grade II listed Totman's Farmhouse. This jettied, timber-framed, two-storey building, which dates from the early sixteenth century or earlier, stands close to the road. Totman's is the first historic house encountered when entering Thaxted from the south along Dunmow Road and its prominent forward siting near the brow of a hill results in it acting as a gateway feature to the town.
- 4.83 The next closest listed building is Claypits Farmhouse (described above with regard to Site 14), which stands approximately 150 metres to the north of the northern boundary of Site 06. There is no intervisibility between the two due to intervening hedges and trees.

- 4.84 There is no direct visual relationship between Site 06 and all the other listed buildings within the conservation area due to intervening townscape, the landform and screening by trees and hedges.

Impact

- 4.85 Development of Site 06 would result in a significant change to the character of the southern appendage of the town along Dunmow Road, particularly on the east side of the road which is characterised by open space, trees and greenery (see Plate 9). This change to openness and verdant character would also adversely impact on the setting of the grade II listed Totmans and the nature of the entrance into the conservation area from the south along Dunmow Road.
- 4.86 Development of Site 06 would be likely to result in a reduction in the height of the overgrown boundary hedges, making the new buildings more open to view. Given the prominent elevated position of the site and the close relationship between the conservation area the grade II listed Totmans (see Plate 19) and the immediately surrounding countryside (see Plate 18), the potential impact on these assets of medium sensitivity is considered to be major/moderate adverse. The impact caused by an access to Dunmow Road would be a direct impact on the conservation area.

Site 08: Land east of Dunmow Road, to the north of Priors HallLocation

- 4.87 Site 08 is located on the east side of Dunmow Road, to the south of the town, beyond the built-up area. The site stands to the immediate south of Site 06.



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Area / current use / morphology

- 4.88 The 2.98 hectare site is considerably larger than the adjoining Site 06 to the north. The approximately square parcel of land rises gently in the northwards direction up to the brow of the ridge that runs through Thaxted.

Boundaries & character of adjacent land

- 4.89 Site 08 is separated from Site 06 to the north, by a field hedge. Dunmow Road sweeps around the western side of the site. There is no hedge or other boundary treatment along the western edge of the site. This openness, in combination with the sloping topography, makes the land very prominent on the approach to Thaxted. There is a similar absence of enclosure along the eastern boundary, causing the field to visually merge with the arable land beyond in views from Dunmow Road.
- 4.90 Site 08 is part of a swathe of rolling open countryside that wraps around the southern side of the town. There are fine views of the grade I listed parish church along this approach.

Access

- 4.91 The only possibility for vehicular access would be a connection to Dunmow Road (B184), to the west.
- 4.92 A public footpath (49-100) runs along the eastern margin of the site. This connects with the footpath runs along the northern edge of Site 06 and a network of public rights of way that cross the open countryside to the south-east of Thaxted.

Relationship to the Thaxted Conservation Area

- 4.93 Site 08 is located a short distance to the south-east of the conservation area. The north-western corner is approximately 25 metres from the conservation area boundary on Dunmow Road.
- 4.94 The site forms part of the wider open countryside setting of the conservation area, which sweeps around the southern and western sides of Thaxted.

Relationship to listed buildings

- 4.95 As Site 08 is located to the immediate south of Site 06, the grade II listed Totman's is relatively close (approximately 55 metres to the north of the north-western corner of the site). However there is little visual relationship, due to the sloping nature of the site and intervening trees and hedges.
- 4.96 There is a much stronger visual relationship with the grade II listed Priors Hall and the adjacent grade II listed Priors Hall Cottages, which are located in a group on a ridge approximately 200 metres to the south, with no intervening visual barriers (see Plate 32). Priors Hall is a late fifteenth/mid sixteenth-century timber-framed house with a large cross-wing, which was externally faced with red brick cladding and imitation timber framing in 1898. Priors Hall Cottages are a pair of large timber-framed and plastered cottages formed out of sixteenth-century outbuildings. As the Priors Hall listed buildings are freestanding rural buildings, they have a close affinity to the surrounding countryside, which they overlook and can be seen from. Consequently, the surrounding countryside is an important part of their setting which contributes to their significance.

Impact

- 4.97 Development of Site 08 would result in a major change to the wider countryside setting of the conservation area on an approach from the south where there are very fine serial views of the grade I listed parish church and the grade II* listed John Webb's Windmill.

- 4.98 Development of this substantial rolling tract of open countryside would introduce an alien and incongruous urban feature that would seriously degrade the setting of these highly graded listed buildings and the conservation area.
- 4.99 Liz Lake View 26 provides a typical view on the Dunmow Road approach into which development of Site 08 would intrude.
- 4.100 Additionally, development of this open countryside would be harmful to the open agricultural setting of the two grade II listed buildings at Priors Hall.
- 4.101 The adverse impacts on the conservation area and the listed Prior's Hall would also be appreciated from public footpaths (see Plates 18 and 32).
- 4.102 Given the serial nature of the views, the high sensitivity of the parish church and the windmill, and the powerful relationship between these assets and the surrounding countryside, and taking into account the additional harmful impact that would be caused to the setting of the listed buildings at Priors Hall and the setting of the conservation area, the overall potential impact is considered to be major adverse.

5.0 Summary

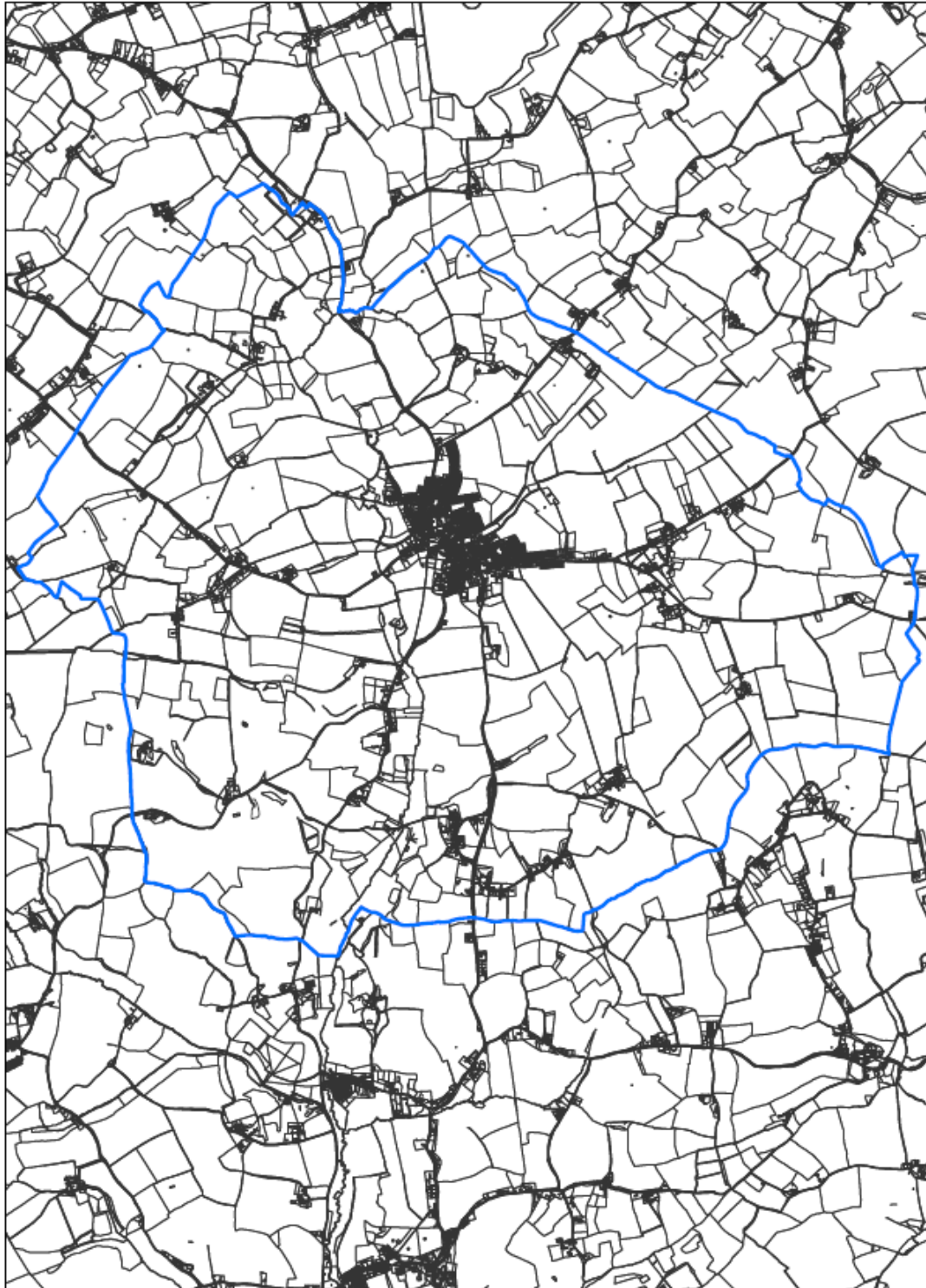
- 5.1 Thaxted is a very fine historic town that has retained its historic character and morphology. Its historic streets are lined by listed buildings and the historic town as an entity is well-defined by the Thaxted Conservation Area. The latter excludes modern residential suburban areas, principally located to the north and east of the town. Further listed buildings are located in the open countryside that surrounds Thaxted.
- 5.2 In the parlance of the National Planning Policy Framework, the listed buildings and conservation area constitute designated heritage assets and in accordance with the Framework, this assessment has considered the impact on the significance of the heritage assets, including the contribution made by their settings.
- 5.3 This Heritage Assessment has focused on six key potential development sites and has sought to establish the likely impact that would result from their development. The tight urban townscape of Thaxted, which results in there being very few views out of the town to the surrounding countryside and conversely, very few views of the listed buildings that line the town's historic streets, from the surrounding countryside, mitigates impact on a great many of the town's heritage assets. Furthermore, the majority of the listed buildings within the parish that are located in the surrounding rural area are either too distant to have a visual relationship with the potential development sites on the edge of the town or are screened by intervening landform and/or planting.
- 5.4 The Heritage Assessment has prioritised views from publicly accessible vantage points, including the well-developed network of public footpaths in the open countryside surrounding Thaxted.
- 5.5 The Heritage Assessment concludes that development of all six sites considered would result in adverse heritage impact and harm to the significance of heritage assets. In accordance with Government policy in the NPPF, those responsible for allocation of development sites must balance the degree of harm in each case against the wider public benefits that would flow from development of the sites.
- 5.6 The Heritage Assessment concludes that the greatest degree of harm would be caused by development of Site 08: Land east of Dunmow Road, to the north of Priors Hall, where a major adverse impact would be caused to heritage assets of high and medium sensitivity.

- 5.7 A similarly high but slightly lower degree of harm would be caused to Site 06: Enclosed pasture land, east of Dunmow Road, opposite Totmans Farm, where heritage assets of medium sensitivity would be subject to a major/moderate adverse impact and Site 04: Land south of Sampford Road, where a highly sensitive heritage asset would be subject to a major/moderate adverse impact.
- 5.8 The Assessment concludes that development of Site 15: Land east of Park Street would result in a moderate adverse impact on heritage assets of medium sensitivity.
- 5.9 The Assessment concludes that development of Site 17: Land to the east of The Mead would result in a minor adverse impact on a highly sensitive heritage asset.
- 5.10 Finally, the Heritage Assessment considers that development of Site 14: Land at Claypits Farm, south of Bardfield Road would cause a minor harmful impact on both medium and highly sensitive heritage assets.

Summary Table

Site	Heritage impact	Sensitivity of heritage assets affected
Site 08: Land east of Dunmow Road	major adverse impact	high and medium
Site 06: Enclosed pasture land, east of Dunmow Road, opposite Totmans Farm	major/moderate adverse impact	medium
Site 04: Land south of Sampford Road	major/moderate adverse impact	high
Site 15: Land east of Park Street	moderate adverse impact	medium
Site 17: Land to the east of The Mead	minor adverse impact	high
Site 14: Land at Claypits Farm, south of Bardfield Road	minor adverse impact	high and medium

Appendix A: Figures



Thaxted Parish Boundary

Thaxted Parish Council Ordnance Survey Licence no: 100057055

Figure 1: Neighbourhood Plan boundary



Thaxted Conservation Area

1:7,354

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Figure 2: Boundary of the Thaxted Conservation Area

Appendix B: Plates



Plate 1: The grade I listed Church of St John the Baptist



Plate 2: The grade II* listed John Webb's Windmill



Plate 3: Typical tight townscape within Thaxted that obscures views out of the town



Plate 4: Typical tight townscape within Thaxted that obscures views out of the town



Plate 5: Long distance view southwards from public footpath 49-13, adjacent to Walden Road



Plate 6: View towards the parish church from public footpath 49-97, to the west of Walden Road



Plate 7: View towards the parish church from Walden Road near to the Sampford Road junction



Plate 8: View northwards out of the conservation area along Newbiggin Street, towards modern housing



Plate 9: View southwards towards Thaxted along the narrow Watling Lane



Plate 10: Long distance view eastwards towards Thaxted from Debden Road



Plate 11: View eastwards along Bolford Street towards the parish church



Plate 12: View westwards out of the conservation area along Bolford Street towards rolling open countryside



Plate 13: View north-eastwards towards the parish church and the windmill from Broxted Road



Plate 14: The double-bend approach to the conservation area along Park Street



Plate 15: View out from the conservation area south-westwards along Park Street



Plate 16: View out from the conservation area on Park Street looking along the access to the Bowls Club



Plate 17: Long-distance north-westwards view towards Thaxted from Dunmow Road



Plate 18: Long-distance north-westwards view towards Thaxted from public footpath 49-100, to the east of Dunmow Road



Plate 19: View out of the conservation area along Dunmow Road showing the pink-coloured grade II listed Totman's to the right. The boundary of the conservation area is on the brow of the hill.



Plate 20: View westwards along Bardfield Road towards the conservation area, showing the spire and tower of the parish church beyond typical twentieth-century suburban housing



Plate 21: View eastwards along Cophthall Lane from the edge of the conservation area showing a glimpse of open countryside beyond modern houses



Plate 22: View from Sampford Road across Site 04 towards the parish church with the Thatcher's Grange development to the right



Plate 23: The grade II listed Sorrell's Farmhouse seen from Sampford Road



Plate 24: The grade II listed Golden's Farmhouse seen from Sampford Road



Plate 25: The recently constructed public footpath across Site 17 linking the Thatcher's Grange development to the town



Plate 26: View from Site 17 towards the parish church



Plate 27: View from the open eastern part of Site 14 towards the silos and utilitarian farm structures on the western part of the site



Plate 28: The existing vehicular access to Site 14 from Bardfield Road



Plate 29: The north façade of the grade II listed Claypits Farmhouse, seen from the existing private access drive



Plate 30: View from the open part of Site 14 towards the parish church with the rear side of frontage development to Bardfield Road to the right



Plate 31: View out from the edge of the conservation area over the rolling open countryside setting to the south, of which Site 15 forms part



Plate 32: View from public footpath 49-100 across Site 08 towards the grade II listed Priors Hall