

Middleton Stoney Junction Improvements

Note on Cultural Heritage

1. Introduction

- 1.1. AOC Archaeology Group produced the Archaeology and Cultural Heritage Environmental Statement (ES) Chapter for the Proposed Development at Bicester Golf Course and have subsequently been asked to provide a review with regard to the potential for any harmful impacts upon the setting of heritage assets resulting from the proposed junction improvement works at Middleton Stoney. AOC visited the area, including the Listed Buildings along the eastern boundary of Middleton Park RPG when undertaking assessment work for the ES.
- 1.2. This note has been produced by Victoria Oleksy BA (Hons), MA (Commendation) MCIfA. I have an MA in Historical Archaeology from the University of Bristol and have 16 years' experience as a heritage consultant and I am an Assistant Director at AOC Archaeology Group. Much of my work has focused on assessment of cultural and designed landscapes and I have given Expert Witness evidence at hearings, including during the hearing for the Called-In Planning Application for Hyndford Quarry Extension where cultural heritage issues focussed on the impacts on the setting of the New Lanark World Heritage Site and the Falls of Clyde Designed Landscape. I have provided assessment for designed landscapes at Lyveden, Northants; Watford Park and Ashby St Ledger's, East Midlands; Ashton Court, Somerset; Auchincruive, Ayrshire; Fasque, Aberdeenshire; and Newton House, Midlothian.
- 1.3. This note is provided in response to the claim made in Cherwell District Council's (CDC) Statement of Case that highway mitigation works and signage proposed at the junction of Bicester Road, Heyford Road and the B430 Ardley Road in Middleton Stoney could have:

'an urbanising effect that would be harmful visually to the character and appearance of the village of Middleton Stoney at its crossroad junction and the surrounding buildings, some of which are designated or non-designated heritage assets, such as the Grade II listed [sic] Registered Park & Garden at Middleton Park and its Grade II listed gatehouse.'
- 1.4. In line with the National Planning Policy Framework and Historic England (HE) guidance on assessing impacts upon setting (HE 2017), this note: identifies the heritage assets which could potentially be affected by any junction improvement works; identifies their setting, and the contribution that this makes to their significance; and identifies the potential for any impacts upon that setting and thus the significance of the assets.
- 1.5. In line with the NPPF and Planning Practice Guidance (MHCLG 2016, updated 2019) the assessment considers whether any harm were to occur to the assets, and if so whether this harm would be substantial or less than substantial in terms of the National Planning Policy Framework (MHCLG 2019).
- 1.6. It is understood that proposed improvements are permitted development and such do not require planning permission. It is also understood that junction improvements associated with the Middleton Stoney Junction have already been approved as part of the development at Heyford Park Phase 1. As such this note focuses on whether any additional changes required in conjunction with the Proposed Development would cause any additional or greater impact. The

impact assessment has been undertaken in line with the methodology set out in Chapter 10 of the ES. The improvements assessed here are shown on Drawing 1803047-17C, with details of the signage replacement given on 1803047-SK13, 1803047-S01 and 1803047-S02.

2. Heritage Assets

2.1. Designated heritage assets in the vicinity of the Middleton Stoney Junction which may have the theoretical potential to be affected include the following:

- The Grade II Registered Middleton Park (List Entry Number 1001405)
- The Grade II Listed Gate Lodge and Entrance Screen to Middleton Park (List Entry Number 1232998)

2.2. The Grade II Registered Middleton Park (ES Chapter 10 Site 61) comprises a country house with the remains of an early 18th Century pleasure grounds based on a medieval park. This is further surrounded by an 18th and early 19th Century landscape park (HE 2020). Historical features within the Park include a motte and bailey castle near Middleton Stoney (List Entry 1015164), medieval church and park and post-medieval and modern architectural features. The present house on site was constructed in the 1930s by Edwin and Robert Lutyens. A large part of the Park's significance relates to the legible evolution and use of the landscape and to the association of particular features with notable architects such as Thomas Cundy and Edwin and Robert Lutyens. The Park is largely enclosed by tree belts and woodlands and slopes away to the west and south. On its eastern side the Park is further enclosed by a boundary wall for some of its length, though quite overgrown in places. These boundary treatments serve to clearly demarcate the parkland from the wider landscape. The setting of Middleton Park, insofar as it contributes to its significance, is largely contained within the parkland itself and it is less sensitive to changes beyond the parkland boundaries.

2.3. The Grade II Listed Gate Lodge and Entrance Screen to Middleton Park (List Entry 1232998) is located with the Middleton Park RPG and marks the northeast and main entrance to the Park. The Lodge dates to 1805 and was built to a design by architect and landscape and architectural artist Edward Blore. The Entrance Screen was possibly added by Thomas Cundy when the mansion was altered. The Gate Lodge is set to the south of Middleton Stoney Junction, with its principal elevation fronting southeastwards and looking south down Oxford Road. The height of the Entrance Screen and the gate piers which mark the entrance to the parkland mean that views of the Gate Lodge itself are largely obscured from Oxford Road. The exception to this is when traveling north along the road where there is a gap in the vegetation and the wall is at a lower height before the Entrance Screen is reached. The Gate Lodge and Entrance Screens would have been designed to mark the entrance to Middleton Park and also restrict access and egress to the Park. The addition of the Entrance Screen clearly demonstrates the desire on behalf the designers and occupiers of the Park to screen the interior of the Park from the road and surrounding landscape. On this basis the main elements of setting which contribute to significance of the asset can be said to relate to its relationship with Middleton Park and with the road. It is judged to be of medium sensitivity to changes to its setting.

3. Potential impacts upon setting

- 3.1. The proposed Middleton Stoney Junction improvements, beyond those already approved as part of the Heyford Park Phase 1 development, include widening of the road within the existing Highway boundary. Further widening required as part of the junction improvement would be to the north of the Gate Lodge and Entrance Screen on the western side of Oxford Road. Widening would also occur on the eastern side of the road and this would extend from a point south of the Gate Lodge, north and around the corner onto Bicester Road (Drawing 1803047-17 C). It is understood and assumed for these purposes that replacement signage will also be required (Drawing 1803047-SK13).
- 3.2. With the exception of Gate Lodge and Entrance Screens and limited portions of the eastern boundary of the parkland, the proposed junction works would not be visible from Middleton Park. The junction works would have no impact upon the historical or architectural value of the Park. They would not intrude in any relationships between individual features within the parkland or affect the relationship of the parkland to the wider landscape. The ability to appreciate the treed and walled eastern boundary as marking the separation between the parkland and the wider landscape would be maintained. The proposed junction improvements would not diminish the ability to experience and appreciate the parkland and its significance, which as noted above is best understood from within its boundaries. There would thus be no impact upon Middleton Park. It is conceivable that one might be able to discern the road and consequential change from the northeastern boundary of the park, but this would not result any material effect on the setting of park. Even if the changes were perceptible from the northeastern boundary of the park, they would not affect the significance of the asset or an understanding or appreciation of it, as such no harm is predicted.
- 3.3. As already noted, the main area of junction improvements would be to the north of the Gate Lodge and Entrance Screen towards the junction itself. Given the orientation of Gate Lodge and the Entrance Screen these would largely not be visible from the heritage assets but rather perceptible before or beyond them when travelling south or north respectively.
- 3.4. The widening on the east side of Oxford Road would be perceptible from the Gate Lodge and Entrance Screen. However, the widening would not affect the ability to understand the Gate Lodge and Entrance Screen in their context as an access and egress point for Middleton Park and would not affect their significance. Further, while the road may be widened, there would be no material alteration to the relationship between Gate Lodge and Entrance Screen and the road itself. On this basis there are no material impacts resulting from the junction improvements proposed upon the setting of the asset or the asset itself and no harm is predicted.
- 3.5. The proposed new signage would replace the existing signage, with the current sign being removed and the new sign being erected on suitable posts in the same position. It is noted that as per Drawings 1803047-S01 and 1803047-S02 that the replacement signage would be larger than the existing signage. The current sign is 1711mm wide by 724mm high, while the proposed sign would be 3302mm wide by 2261mm high. The new sign will be larger, but it will be located in a suitable roadside context where signage already exists and is to be expected. It may have a slightly greater screening effect on the adjacent boundary wall of the RPG from a very few locations traveling north on the Oxford Road, however it will not affect the ability to understand or appreciate the RPG boundary or the entrance screen to the north and no material effect is expected upon the setting or significance of these assets.

References

Historic England 2017 Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning 3 (2nd Edition): The Setting of Heritage Assets. Available at: <https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/gpa3-setting-of-heritage-assets/>

Historic England 2020 List Entry for Middleton Park (List Entry No. 1001405). [Online] Accessed via <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1001405>

Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government 2016 (updated 2019) Planning Practice Guidance. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/planning-practice-guidance>

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