

Heritage Assessment

The Beeches,
Heyford Road,
Steeple Aston

August 2020 | Project Ref 04803



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1.0

1. Introduction

- 1.1** This heritage assessment has been prepared by the Heritage Collective for Adrian Shooter. It relates to an outline planning application for the erection of up to 10 dwellings in the domestic curtilage of The Beeches, Heyford Road, Steeple Aston (post code: OX25 4SN; Figure 1).



Figure 1 – Site location (in red). Rousham Conservation Area is on the opposite side of Heyford Road (east) with the boundary marked by the green line.

- 1.2** The site is located to the west of Heyford Road. It currently contains an early 20th century house, known as The Beeches, a miniature railway constructed between 2002 and 2004 and several outbuildings some associated with the railway. There are no listed heritage assets within site¹.
- 1.3** The site is on the west boundary of Rousham Conservation Area (includes Lower and Upper Heyford) but is not within it. However, it is within its setting and

¹ A Local Heritage Asset register and former Local List are mentioned on the Cherwell District Council website, but a link or copy of the documents cannot be found on their website.

therefore has the potential to affect the character and appearance of the conservation area. The boundary of the conservation area is along Heyford Road, with the area on the east side of the road being within it.

1.4 Steeple Aston Conservation Area is approximately 200 metres to the north of the site and due to the distance, topography of the area and trees, vegetation and buildings obstructing views the proposed development would not be visible from any views within the conservation area and does not have the potential to affect the character and appearance of the conservation area.

1.5 The nearest listed heritage assets to the site are the Cuttle Mill Complex, approximately 327 metres away to the east and consisting of grade II* Cuttle Mill (listed 8 December 1955), grade II Cuttle Mill Stables (listed 26 February 1988) and part of the grade I Rousham Park and Gardens (listed 01 June 1984). To the south, approximately 442 metres away is the grade II* Heyford Bridge, which is listed as two parts. One in Rousham Civil Parish (listed 27 August 1957) and the other in Lower Heyford Civil Parish (listed 26 November 1951). Slightly further to the south is the larger part of Rousham Park and Gardens. The contribution that the setting makes to the significance of these listed assets will not be affected by the proposals, primarily due to the fact that the site is not visible from the assets (see figures 2 and 3).

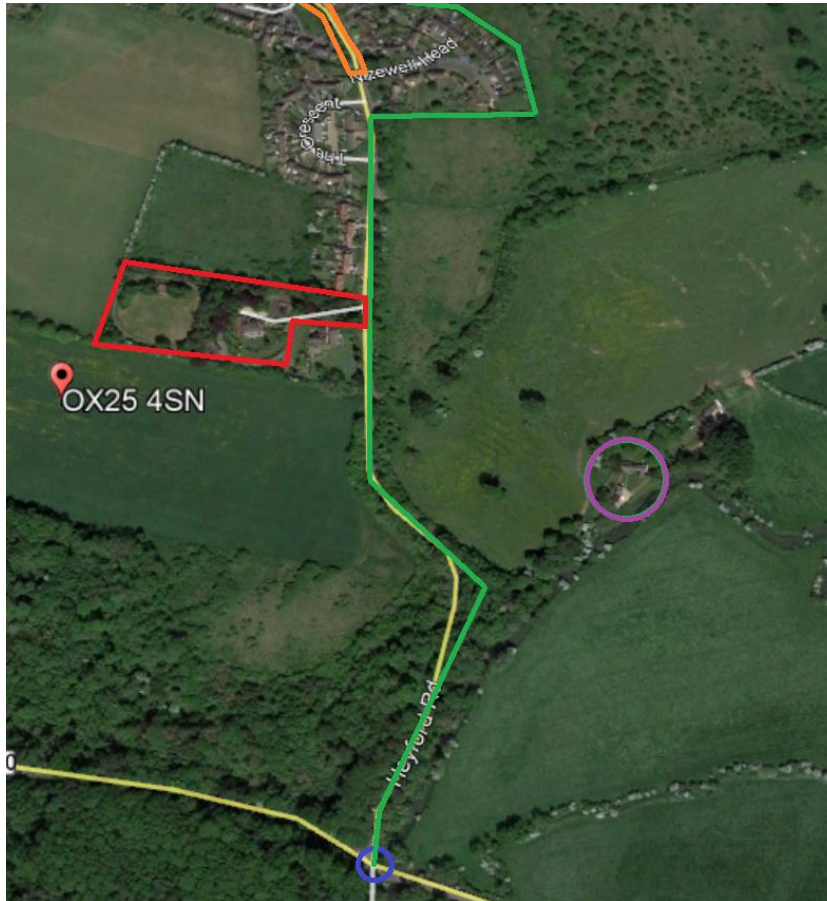


Figure 2 – Photo showing site location (red), Cuttle Mill Complex (purple), Heyford Bridge (blue), Rousham Conservation Area boundary (green) and Steeple Aston Conservation Area boundary (orange).

1.6

This assessment will assess the character and appearance of Rousham Conservation Area and to what degree the proposed site contributes to the setting of the conservation area. It will then discuss the effects of the proposal on the setting and the character and appearance of the conservation area.



Figure 3 – View from Heyford Bridge (left) and from footpath leading to Cuttle Mill² (right), looking north towards the proposed site, showing that the site is not visible.

- 1.7** A site visit was carried out on 05 February 2019. Observations and photographs from that site visit are incorporated into this report.

² It is not possible to access the mill site due to it being along a private road.



2.0

2. Relevant Heritage Policy and Guidance

- 2.1** The decision maker is required by sections 66(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 to have special regard to the desirability of preserving a listed building or its setting. The decision maker must also give considerable importance and weight to the desirability of preserving the listed building. There is a strong presumption against the grant of permission for development that would harm the special interest of the listed building, though the presumption can be overcome if the harm is mitigated or outweighed by public benefits, as is explained in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).
- 2.2** A broadly similar duty exists in respect of conservation areas under section 72(1) of the Act. However, in this case the proposal does not trigger section 72(1) as the site is outside the conservation area. Instead it has the potential to affect the setting of the conservation area.
- 2.3** For the purposes of this assessment “preserve” means to do no harm.³ Harm is defined by Historic England as change which erodes the significance of a heritage asset.⁴
- 2.4** The significance of a heritage asset is defined in the NPPF as being made up of four main constituents, architectural interest, historical interest, archaeological interest and artistic interest. The setting of the heritage asset can also contribute to its significance.
- 2.5** The assessments of heritage significance and impact are normally made with primary reference to the four main elements of significance identified in the NPPF.
- 2.6** The NPPF requires the impact on the significance of the heritage asset to be considered in terms of either “substantial harm” or “less than substantial harm” as

³ South Lakeland 1992.

⁴ Paragraph 84 of *Conservation Principles* 2008 and 2015.

described within paragraphs 193 to 196 of that document. National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG) makes it clear that substantial harm is a high test, and recent case law describes substantial harm in terms of an effect that would vitiate or drain away much of the significance of a heritage asset.

2.7

Paragraph 193 of the NPPF states that great weight should be given to the conservation of a designated heritage asset when considering applications that affect its significance.

2.8

The local policies of Cherwell District Council have been taken into account within this assessment. These include the The Cherwell Local Plan 2011-2031 Part 1 (July 2015), the Design and Conservation Strategy 2012-2015 and the Rousham Conservation Area Appraisal (June 2018).

2.9

This assessment is confined to the significance of heritage assets and the impact of change on that significance. It does not address the planning balance in which public benefit is weighed against the degree of harm, if any.



3.0

3. The Significance of the Heritage Assets

The development of Steeple Aston and The Beeches

- 3.1** Originally a medieval manor consisting of 5 hides, in 1501 the manor was quartered, and an 'open' policy developed accepting outsiders from the parish which led to an increase in population. Most occupations were linked to agricultural work which was to remain the case for the next three centuries.
- 3.2** From the 17th century onwards, and particularly from the 18th century, Steeple Aston and the area around it was closely linked with Rousham House and its gardens.
- 3.3** Rousham House is located approximately 1.5 kilometres from Steeple Aston and approximately 1.1 kilometres from The Beeches. Rousham House was originally constructed c.1635 on the behest of Sir Robert Dormer (1610-1643), who had acquired the manor of Rousham in 1630. Between 1737 and 1741 Sir Robert's great grandson, General James Dormer-Cottrell (1679-1741), employed William Kent, an eminent English architect, to develop the house and gardens. While the family themselves owned approximately 10 hectares of land around the house, Kent designed the landscape to take advantage of the natural landscape of the area up to 4 kilometres away, and he enlivened the land to the north of the park, with landscape and architectural features up to 2 kilometres away, including the 'Eyecatcher' (listed grade II* 08 December 1955) to the north-east of Steeple Aston.
- 3.4** William Kent (c. 1685 – 12 April 1748) was a famous English architect, landscape architect and furniture designer. He revolutionised landscape architecture in England in the 18th century by introducing the 'natural' style of gardening known as the English Landscape Gardens. As well as Rousham House, he is also known for Chiswick House in Middlesex and Stow House in Buckinghamshire.



Figure 4 – Extract of William Stanley's map of Bicester 1815. Approximate site location is marked in red.

3.5

Not only did Rousham House and the Cotterell-Dormer family have an affect on the surrounding landscape, they also had a wider effect on the economy of the Steeple Aston area. By 1841 the family were the principal land owners within the village. Tradesman and artisans began to settle in the area and agricultural employment began to decline. A large number of mansion houses were built in the area and these became a large source of employment, mainly due to their need for domestic servants. This did not mean that the area did not face poverty and unemployment, with many struggling to pay the high rents and the maintenance of the village declining. Things became so severe that in 1852 the vestry offered £3 each to eight young people who promised to emigrate.

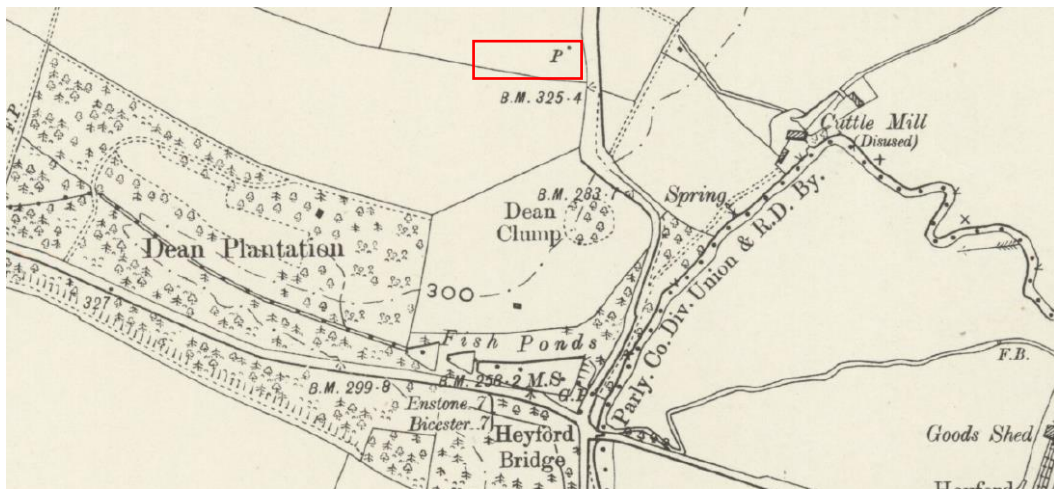


Figure 5 – Extract of O.S map 1898. Approximate site location is marked in red.

3.6 The area that the became The Beeches appears to have originally been agricultural fields, sited behind a wooded area known as the Dean Plantation (Figures 4 and 5). The area is not shown on the Tithe Map so the 19th century ownership of the fields is not known.

3.7 The house was constructed c.1908 in an Arts and Crafts style. It is shown on the O.S map of 1919 with outbuildings to the north-east (Figure 6). Since 1919 a dwelling was built on the eastern side of the plot and further outbuildings were constructed along with a small railway between 2002 and 2004. The house itself has a modern extension to its west side.

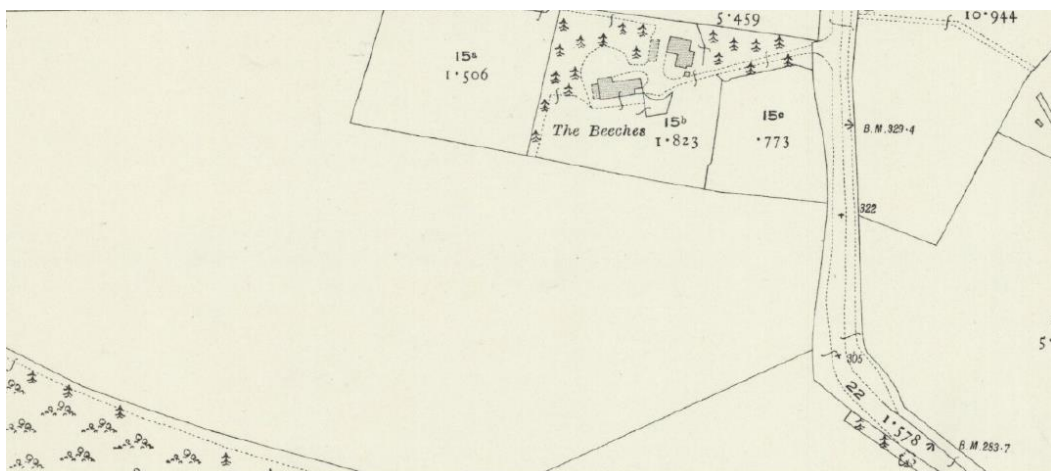


Figure 6 – Extract of O.S map 1919.

Character and Appearance of Rousham Conservation Area

3.8 Rousham Conservation Area covers a large area of land and encompasses Upper Heyford and Lower Heyford Conservation Areas within it. The appearance and the character of the landscape within the conservation area has been very much influenced by William Kent in the 17th century. While the actual house and garden isn't actually included within the conservation area, its influence plays a large role. As described within the Rousham Conservation Area Appraisal (June 2018) *'Rousham Conservation Area...lies within the Cherwell Valley, a wide rolling valley landscape and is located to the north and east of Rousham Park. The landscape appears unplanned, natural and informal, but was designed by William Kent in the Picturesque tradition, although the majority of it has never formed part of the CottrellDormer family ownership.'* The appearance of the designed landscape and the way that it compliments the natural features within the environment, such as the River Cherwell which runs north to south, is a very important aspect of the character and appearance of the area.

3.9 Much of the land within Rousham Conservation area consists of fields in agricultural use. There are two historic settlements that lie within the boundary, Upper and Lower Heyford, which were incorporated into Kent's designed landscape. Upper Heyford is located within the north-east part of the conservation area and Lower Heyford is located with the central part.



Figure 7 – View from south to north along Heyford Road. The boundary of Rousham Conservation Area is the road. An arrow points to the location of The Beeches.

3.10 The Beeches is located close to the west boundary of Rousham Conservation Area. This part of the conservation area is along Heyford Road and located on a hill. A large woodland is located on the south part of the hill, which has been in existence since at least the 19th century, when it was known as Dean Plantation (Figure 5). The woodland and trees that line Heyford Road mean that while the hill and woodland itself can be seen from long distances, smaller features and buildings like the roads and houses cannot be easily seen. Due to the trees, vegetation and the rising topography of the land views in this part of the conservation tend to be obstructed and only from short distances (Figure 7). Longer views of the valley are not possible from the footpath on the east side of the road (within the conservation area) due to the trees and vegetation (Figure 8), and it is only possible to get longer views of the valley if you are to walk through the vegetation and into the fields on the east side of the road.



Figure 8 – View from the east footpath by Heyford Road towards Rousham House and the Cherwell valley.

Contribution of the site to the setting of Rousham Conservation Area

3.11 As mentioned earlier the proposed site, known as The Beeches, is not within Rousham (or any other) Conservation Area, but it is close to the west boundary. Historically, the site has no more connection with the area than that of any other former agricultural field. The house (Figure 9) was constructed in the early 20th century, in an Arts and Craft style, and while it is not an unattractive house it does not hold any particular heritage interest. To the west of the house is small field which is enclosed by trees and vegetation on all sides, meaning that views in and out are very limited (Figure 10). The railway that runs around this field and the garden is unusual, but it was built in the 21st century and so has no heritage interest.



Figure 9 – The Beeches.

3.12

The Beeches is not visible from any of the important views that are mentioned within the Rousham Conservation Area Appraisal, including any of the views from view 6 (Riverside Walk), View 8 (The Causeway) or View 9 (Temple Mill), due to the site being situated higher up the hill and the view being completely obstructed by trees and vegetation. Views of The Beeches at a closer distance, from within the conservation area (Figure 11), are also heavily filtered. Parts of the house and some outbuildings can be glimpsed, but the field to west of the house, and the railway and buildings within the field, cannot be seen. This is the case during the winter and in the summer months even less of the buildings would be visible.



Figure 10 – View of the field to the west of the The Beeches House, looking east to west.



Figure 11 – View of The Beeches from within Rousham Conservation Area, looking east to west.



4.0

4. EFFECTS ON THE HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE

The application proposal

- 4.1** The proposal is for an outline planning application for the erection of up to 10 dwellings in the domestic curtilage of The Beeches, with all matters reserved except the means of access on to Heyford Road. Two of the proposed dwellings would replace the outbuildings to the north-east of the site and six would be located within the field to the west. Works include the widening of the existing driveway and the demolition of the outbuildings to the north-east of the site and the construction of a new garage for the current house. The indicative layout and location plan are attached.

Change within the setting of Rousham Conservation Area

- 4.2** The housing development would be to the west of Rousham Conservation Area, with the nearest dwelling currently indicated at approximately 60 metres away. It is proposed to retain and reinforce the current tree planting at the boundary of the site to reduce intervisibility, meaning that views from outside the site, from within the conservation area, would change little. It would only be possible to see glimpses of the most east dwelling from Heyford Road, meaning that these views would barely alter as this is the current location of an outbuilding. The proposed dwellings in the west field would not be visible from the conservation area, and only partially visible from a small number of locations.
- 4.3** No important or long views from within or outside Rousham Conservation Area would change due to the woodland trees and topography of the land meaning that the site is not visible from most locations.
- 4.4** The north-east outbuilding and miniature railway and its associated buildings will be demolished. These buildings have little to no heritage interest and their demolition would have a neutral effect on the setting of Rousham Conservation Area.

- 4.5** The widening of the driveway would be a small, neutral change to the setting of Rousham Conservation Area.
- 4.6** The proposed garage would not be visible from outside The Beeches plot.

Effect on the setting of Rousham Conservation Area

- 4.7** There would be a neutral effect on the setting of Rousham Conservation Area, which in turn would have a neutral effect on the character and appearance of the conservation area. Paragraphs 195 and 196 of the NPPF would not be engaged.



5.0

5. Conclusion

- 5.1** The proposed site, known as The Beeches, is located on the west boundary of Rousham Conservation Area, but is not within the conservation area and is therefore within its setting. There are no heritage assets within The Beeches site and the site is not close enough to any listed buildings, parks or gardens to have an effect on their setting.
- 5.2** The Beeches comprises of a house built c.1908, a number of outbuildings, a field to the west of the site and a miniature railway built between 2002 and 2004. The proposal is for the construction of eight residential properties. Two replacing the outbuildings to the north-east of the site and six within the field to the west.
- 5.3** The site itself contributes little to the setting of Rousham Conservation Area. Historically, it has no more connection with the area than any other agricultural field in the area, and the later house has no known associations with the wider landscape of Rousham than any other house in Steeple Aston. Visually, the site cannot be seen from long views due to the topography of the land and the heavy obstruction of trees and vegetation. Even at a short distance views of The Beeches are limited with only small parts of the buildings being visible, and the west field not visible at all, from within the conservation area. The site itself, while within the landscape around Rousham, was not a designed part of the landscape and has no particular association with Rousham House or gardens. Overall, the site makes a neutral contribution to the setting of Rousham Conservation Area.
- 5.4** It is intended that the boundary planting around the site will be retained and reinforced, meaning that any views of the proposed buildings will be very limited, if visible at all, from outside the plot itself. The proposed development would not have any effect on any important views and a negligible effect of any other views from within the conservation area.
- 5.5** The proposed development will not negatively affect the setting, and therefore the character and appearance of Rousham Conservation Area. Paragraphs 195 and 196 of the NPPF would not be engaged.