

Land at Vicarage Lane, (opposite St John the Baptist Church) Westfield

Initial Investigation (Heritage & Archaeology)

Introduction

The subject site is located southwest of Vicarage Lane, and opposite the (A) Grade I listed Parish Church of St John the Baptist. It is located close to the (B) Grade II listed Church Place Farmhouse. The site can be said to fall within the setting of both heritage assets, and its contribution to their setting requires further assessment.

Moreover, it is likely that outbuildings associated with the Church Place Farmhouse which have been in the same ownership and ancillary use, and date from before July 1948, will be considered as curtilage listed with the property; and for the purposes of assessment, will be treated as listed buildings.

The site is not located within any conservation area. The only other listed building in the wider context of the site is the Grade II listed Wheel Cottage, located some 300 metres to the northwest of the site proposed for development.

There are no other designated heritage assets in the vicinity of the site.

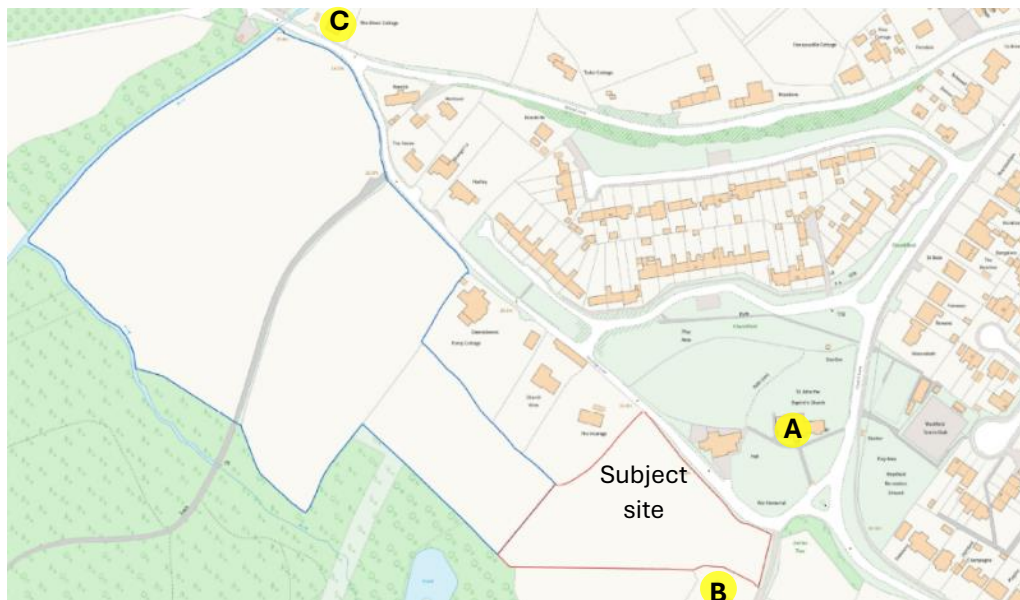


Figure 1 Designated Built Heritage Assets (marked A, B and C)

There are no designated archaeological heritage assets, such as Scheduled Monuments, Registered Parks and Gardens, Protected Wreck Sites, Registered Battlefields recorded within the Site, or within c.1km of the site.

The majority of the site is situated within two Archaeological Notification Areas (ANAs), which are defined locally by the East Sussex County Council (ESCC) Archaeology Team as areas of perceived or known archaeological potential:

- ANA No.1: Medieval and Post Medieval village settlement of Westfield
- ANA No.2: Projected route of the Hastings to Ashford Roman road and associated roadside settlement from later periods

These have been shown on the below map at Figure 2.

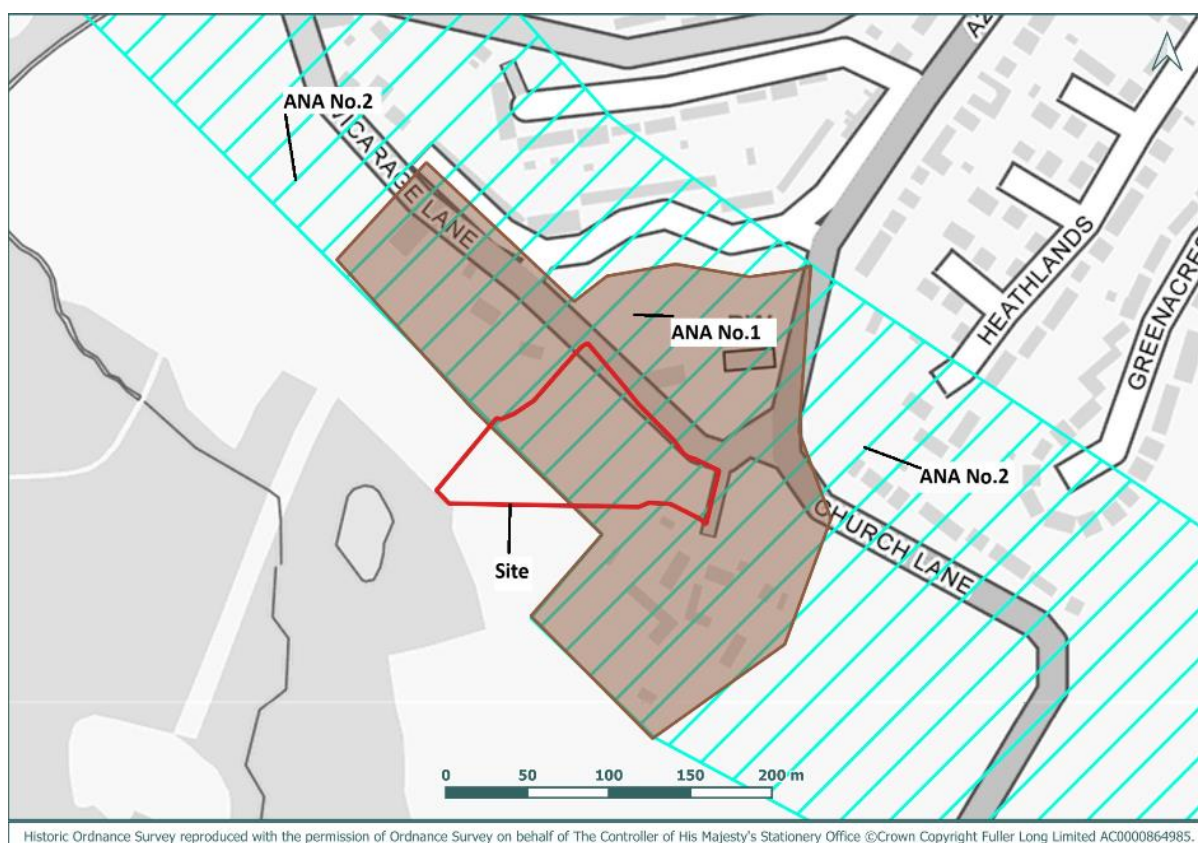


Figure 2 Archaeological Notification Areas

General Archaeological and Historic Background

No Prehistoric remains are known within the vicinity of the site.

The site is not situated within close proximity to any known Roman settlement, although the projected course of the Roman road between Hastings and Ashford runs on a north-west to south alignment through the site, forming a junction with the projected north-south aligned Roman road between Hastings and Rochford.

Westfield is recorded in the Domesday Book of AD 1086 under the ownership of Robert, Count of Eu, as a small settlement comprising eight households. The Parish Church of St John the Baptist, located a short distance north-east of the site, is of Norman date, though with 13th and 14th century remodelling. Historic settlement at Westfield during the Medieval period was likely focussed around this church in the vicinity of the site, as is also indicated by the site's position within an ANA for the Medieval and Post Medieval settlement here.

Historic mapping from the early 19th century shows the site to have been situated within an area of open land, on the south side of a road which follows the course of Vicarage Lane, to the immediate north-west of 'Place Farm' (present day Church Place Farmhouse). The main area of settlement at Westfield on this map appears to have been focussed to the east, in the current area of The Moor. The 1840 Westfield Parish Tithe Map shows the site to remain undeveloped as open land, described as 'meadow'. Similarly, 20th century mapping and aerial imagery from the 21st century up to the present day show the site to remain as open land.

Methodology:

A team site visit was undertaken on Wednesday 2nd July 2025, and this included a walkover survey to assess key views in which heritage assets are appreciated, as well as a high level assessment of the setting of identified heritage assets.

The walkover survey also included a visual appraisal of the topography (in relation to archaeology) and any above ground archaeological features or deposits (none were found).

Heritage matters

Any proposed development on the subject site will not result in physical impacts on the fabric of any listed buildings; as there are no listed buildings on the subject site. All heritage impacts will be in terms of change within the setting of heritage assets, and how this setting contributes to the asset's significance. Our initial thoughts are discussed below:

Parish Church of St John the Baptist

The subject site is located in close proximity to the Grade I listed Parish Church of St John the Baptist, which dates from the 12th Century (Norman, but with remodelling in the 13th and 14th C). It is located on the opposite side of the road (Vicarage Lane) from the church, and located at a slightly lower level than the church.

Views towards the church from the subject site are substantially screened by existing vegetation including the foliage of mature trees. The extent of screening is likely to change seasonally, with relatively greater visibility of the church from the site. Nevertheless, the church is of squat design and its tower is relatively short. It therefore does not act as a landmark building within its immediate landscape, and cannot be perceived in medium and long distance views.

Due to the landscaping and boundary treatment of the churchyard, as well as the presence of graves and other objects associated with the church, it can be argued that the setting of the church is restricted to the churchyard itself, and that the surrounding roads, Churchfield to the north, the A28 to the east, and Vicarage Lane to the south and west, fracture the church's setting from its wider context.

Additionally, this wider context of the church has been compromised by later development, especially to the east and north. Any historic (functional or ownership) association of the church with the Church Place Farmhouse or the Vicarage has been lost, and these buildings are no longer appreciated together.

Church Place Farmhouse

The listing description dates the Church Place Farmhouse to the last quarter of the 17th C, however it is possible that the building incorporates earlier building fabric on the site. Any direct historic association with the Parish Church of St John the Baptist is not definitively known, but there are no designed links (physical or visual) between the two buildings.

From a review of historic maps, it appears that there are other pre-1948 buildings (Church Place Barn) adjacent to the Church Place Farmhouse, and these could potentially be considered curtilage listed. If so, any impact on their significance as a result of change within their setting will also be a material consideration in the planning process.

The site of Church Place Farmhouse has seen modern additions, such as the Parlour (built form) and landscape features (tennis court, new boundary fencing, etc) and these have somewhat compromised the listed building's setting. As these modern buildings act as a visual buffer between the subject site and the listed building (since they are located northeast of the listed building), the subject site's contribution to the listed building's setting is minimal.



Figure 3: View of the Church Place Farmhouse from the subject site. Note the modern development (Parlour, Tennis court and outbuildings to the front). The roof of the Church Place Barn is seen to the left.



Figure 4: View towards the parish church with the village hall to the left. The parish church is entirely screened by foliage of mature trees when seen in July 2025.

Wheel Cottage

Wheel Cottage is a thatched cottage located approximately 300m northwest of the subject site, and is listed Grade II on the NHLE. The listing description identifies it as 16th C or earlier, and this dating would make it amongst the few surviving late medieval buildings in the area. It is however an isolated medieval building within a context of largely modern development.

The historic setting of Wheel Cottage has changed significantly since its conception, and it is now bounded to the north and west by the Westfield Business Park (formerly Wheel Farm Business Park), and to the southeast by modern development along Vicarage Lane.

Due to the subject site's physical separation and distance from Wheel Cottage, it does not contribute in any meaningful way to the listed building's setting.



Figure 5: Wheel Cottage within its setting. The Business Park buildings are seen to the left and rear of the listed building. The subject site is located approx. 200m rear of the viewpoint and physically separated by 3 (unlisted) dwellinghouses and their residential curtilage.

Archaeology Matters

An archaeological watching brief during the excavations of trenches for a new underground low and high voltage cable is recorded to have been undertaken within the northern boundaries of the site, at its far south-eastern corner, to the north-east along Vicarage Lane, and to the east and west. These investigations did not record any significant archaeological remains. No other previous archaeological investigation work is recorded to have taken place within the site, or its immediate vicinity.

The site is situated within the route of the projected course of the Roman road between Hastings and Ashford, as denoted by an ANA (Figure 2). This road forms a junction intersection c.550m to the south-east of the site, where it meets the projected course of another Roman road, between Hastings and Rochester on a north-south alignment. This Roman road is also classified as an ANA, which is recorded c.450m to the east of the site at its closest point. As highlighted further above, the site is recorded within the historic Medieval and Post Medieval settlement area of Westfield, and appears to have remained as an area of open rural land since at least the early 19th century.

Past ground disturbance at the site is therefore likely to have been limited to past ploughing activity, which would be generally widespread, as well as the installation of underground cabling, within localised areas in the far northern and south-eastern areas of the site.

Where archaeological remains may be present within the Site, it is likely that these would survive well as below-ground archaeological features cut into the natural geology. This would be primarily for remains relating to Medieval and Post Medieval settlement and hinterland activity in the area, as well as for evidence of the projected course of a Roman road.

Potential for development

From a heritage opportunities and constraints perspective, the site has potential for development. However any proposals for the site should aim to minimise impacts on the setting of the identified heritage assets.

The local authority are likely to insist that the scale, massing and heights of any new development is appropriate to the existing scale of built form in the wider area. If residential development is proposed, then the massing of individual houses should be appropriate to the scale of existing residential development in the area. In terms of height, two storeys may be acceptable, as this appears to be the general form and heights of buildings in the area.

The council is likely to favour a design based on traditional architectural principles and utilising a palette of vernacular materials found in the local area. Architectural devices such as dormers, lean-to roofs, single storey extensions, etc., can help break the massing into smaller, and potentially more appropriate forms.

A further assessment of key views for visual impact assessment should be undertaken prior to the pre-application stage, and high level renders/ CGIs or massing models from these viewpoints could be used.

In terms of archaeological considerations, the site is considered to have potential for development. On account of the site's position within two ANAs and the likely limited extent of past ground disturbance, the local planning authority will require an Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment (ADBA) to accompany any planning application for the proposed development at the site. It is likely that further archaeological mitigation measures, in the form of archaeological fieldwork, will also be required prior to the development of the site. The timing and scope of any fieldwork should be discussed with the County Archaeologist early on in the design process.

Strategy and next steps

We would recommend that early engagement with Rother District Authority in the form of a pre-application consultation will be beneficial. This will ensure that we have an in-principle agreement from the council in relation to the principle of development, and general comments on the number of units, scale, massing, etc. We can assist with this process, as well as advise on the information and level of detail required for the pre-application from a heritage and archaeology perspective.

Timescales

A first draft ADBA to accompany a planning application can normally be completed within c.20 working days. This will be dependent on how quickly we are able to receive the East Sussex Historic Environment Record (ESHER) data, which typically has a c.15 working days turnaround time.

The pre-application process generally takes 4 to 6 weeks; and it is likely that we will meet with the conservation officer (Rother District Authority).

The planning application has a statutory timescale of 8 weeks, but more often takes 10 weeks from submission. Engagement as part of the pre-application consultation should make this process more streamlined.