

Land to Rear of Burston Garden Centre, North Orbital Road, Chiswell Green, St Albans, Hertfordshire

The proposal site at Burston Garden Centre lies adjacent to Burston Manor House which was Grade II* listed in 1953. The C12 manor house has been altered and extended in the C15 and C17 and re-cased in the C19. The Manor is thought to be one of the oldest known surviving residential buildings within Hertfordshire¹. The manor house has a moat which wraps around the southern side and is a significant historical feature of the buildings setting. Separately there is a Grade II listed outbuilding built as a granary and dovecote in the C17 and altered in the C19 with a distinctive pyramid shaped roof.

As a Grade II* listed building, Burston Manor is a heritage asset of the highest significance as one of the top 7% of England's most significant designated heritage assets. Together with the moat and the separately listed dovecote, the complex

Historically, Burston Manor has been an important building, with gardens and wider agricultural lands, probably part of the former manorial seat. Whilst the moat around the Manor sets out its closest curtilage, but historically the surrounding agricultural land, including the application site, has been associated with the Manor. The wider setting of the Manor house, the surrounding agricultural land, and the experience of views towards the Manor from the surrounding land, and vice-versa are an important part of the buildings' significance.

The land around Burston Manor and the application site has changed during the course of the C20. The housing developments of How Wood and Chiswell Green were created in the mid-C20 and Burston Garden Centre had started to be developed by the 1960s, after Burston Manor was listed. These developments have encroached onto the setting of the Manor. However the land to the east and south, including the woodland and the application site remains open.

The site is partially located within the historic curtilage of the manor house as shown in the historic maps contained within the submitted heritage statement and is likely part of the former lands which formed the manorial seat.

Though the application site is not pristine, the low polytunnels allow long range views out towards How wood and Birch Wood. The land remains open and agricultural (horticultural) in nature and forms the last legible remnant of Burston Manor's historic landscape setting. The Manor has historically enjoyed long range views across both How Wood and Birch Wood which are still visible in the sites current form and use.

The main concern over the development is the effect the development will have on the setting of the designated heritage assets, including changes which occur diurnally and seasonally.

The proposal still causes a similar level of harm to the previous submission which was dismissed at appeal. Though the care home has been replaced with a grouping of houses, is

¹ The Buildings of England: Hertfordshire, 2019 J. Bettley, N. Pevsner, B. Cherry. 3rd ed. p203

welcomed, this has not diminished the level of harm caused to the significance of the listed buildings.

Compared to the existing low level horticultural structures the proposals would have a fundamental and irreversible impact in the setting of the designated heritage assets. The change to the Manors setting would turn from agricultural open land to one completely surrounded by development. The urbanisation of the application site would sever the last tangible link between the Manor groups and its historic landscape setting. This would cause harm to its significance.

The proposals include the creation of the houses along the southern boundary of the Manor group, with the 3 storey blocks visible beyond. The amount and scale of built form, would result in the complete reduction in Burston Manor's visual prominence in the surrounding land form the south and east. This would result in the complete loss of the perception that the Grade II* listed Manor house is a historic and important house, set in a wider agricultural setting.

Though it is noted that the applicant has created a gap in the development along the southern boundary, this does little to reduce the overall urbanisation of the site and the impact of the proposal. The other development would be visible, infilling the 'gap' and the space in between the proposed built form is a formally arranged landscape and urban in its design. The formality of the proposed landscaping would completely erode the designed juxtaposition between the gardens around the Manor Group and the farmland around the site.

The proposed screening in itself would be a harmful addition as this further blocks the long range views from and to the Manor group, in particular those between the Manor group and How Wood and Birch Wood. The proposed screening would fully visually contain the designated heritage assets and substantially reduce the appreciable link between the Manor group and the land which it is associated with.

Both the urbanisation and the visual containment is particularly evident in some of the views submitted as part of the VIA. It is noted that some of these views appear to be incorrect. For example appear to show more existing screening in View 5 than is present as site, and shown in the other views. There also appear to be views which are missing/not in the place previously agreed. It is also noted that the VIA notes that there would be moderate adverse harm, which contradicts the heritage statement assessment.

Though the applicant has now submitted a lighting scheme and levels this would not address the fundamental concerns and harm to the significance of the designated heritage assets in any meaningful way.