

# **Pyrton Neighbourhood Plan 2018 - 2033**

## **Landscape and Green Space Study**

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## 1. Introduction

1. This landscape and Green Spaces Study was prepared in support of the Pyrton Neighbourhood Plan (PNP). It seeks to outline the landscape character of Pyrton, identifying key characteristics and sensitivities, both in terms of character and views.
2. This study is not intended as a detailed Landscape Character Assessment. Instead it brings together information contained in a Conservation Area appraisal prepared by Asset Heritage Consulting and commissioned by Pyrton Parish Council in April 2017, and other wider landscape studies and published reports. The Conservation Area appraisal, which serves as a supporting document for the PNP, is currently under review by South Oxfordshire District Council. The other studies and reports are set out below in 'References and Data Sources'.
3. This study opens with an appraisal of the regional landscape setting. The general characteristics of the parish are then described before a more detailed appraisal of the village and its green areas are outlined.

## 2. References and Data Sources

1. In preparing this study, the published reports below have been reviewed and referred to:
  - a. Countryside Agency, 2002, Landscape Character Assessment Guidance for England and Scotland;
  - b. Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment, 2013, Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Assessment (3<sup>rd</sup> Edition);
  - c. Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG), March 2012, the National Planning Policy Framework;
  - d. South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2011 (adopted January 2006);
  - e. South Oxfordshire Core Strategy (adopted December 2012);
  - f. South Oxfordshire Local Plan Preferred Options Consultation Document (2017);
  - g. Natural England Character Areas Profiles, Internet Resource;
  - h. South Oxfordshire Landscape Character Assessment (online Resource);
  - i. Oxfordshire Wildlife and Landscape Character Assessment (online Resource);
  - j. The Chilterns AONB Management Plan (2014-2019).
2. Please note that figures 20, 23, 25-32 were taken from the Landscape and Visual Appraisal undertaken by Terence O'Rourke Ltd in October 2016 in respect of Land off Pyrton Lane, Watlington (WAT8), South Oxfordshire

### 3. The Origins of the Parish

1. The chalk and clay geology of Pyrton parish, like many others in the Chilterns, has encouraged an agricultural rather than an industrial economy, and this belt of rolling landscape has provided a favoured area for settlement since prehistoric times. The Icknield Way, a prehistoric thoroughfare which crosses the parish, followed the outcrop of dry permeable rocks between the wetland of the vale and the steep Chilterns escarpment, and the numerous pure springs that emerge along the scarp foot have attracted a long string of villages from Chinnor to Ewelme.
2. The main settlement in the parish, Pyrton village, and, in particular the Church of St. Mary, stands at the crossroads of the Lower Icknield Way (today's B4009), running with the natural grain of the land and Knightsbridge Lane (cnihta bricce), going transversely across it. This is typical of the whole countryside below the Chilterns, which is patterned by the intersection of transverse and parallel routes, visible in the existing lattice work of footpaths and bridleways.
3. Pyrton parish was established in Saxon times and the basic pattern of settlement has changed little since then. The Saxon period also accounts for other patterning in the landscape. The parish itself is of classic 'strip form (a long linear landholding, which runs up into the Chiltern Hills) with its boundaries following the line of early routeways that by Saxon times had become important thoroughfares. A major route for the transport of goods in Saxon times, for example, now forming part of the parish boundary, started from Henley, came up through Assendon and Hollandridge Lane to Christmas Common, and along Knightsbridge Lane to Standhill. From here the road linked with Islip and Oxford and led eventually to Worcester.
4. In a charter of 887 recording King Offa of Mercia's gift of land in the area to Worcester Cathedral the parish was named Readanora or "red slope" after either the autumnal colour of the beech trees or more likely the red sub-soil associated with the top of the Chilterns. Readanora began at present-day Standhill (Stan(ge)delf) in the north, it continued past Golder (Goldora) and Clare (Clayora), descended down to and across the valley floor, up the scarp slope of the hill to Christmas Common, then down to Stonor (Stanora) and Assendon (Assendene).
5. From the 12<sup>th</sup> until the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century the total area of the parish remained more or less constant at just over 4,800 acres, decreasing only during the 19<sup>th</sup> century when 1,500 acres were transferred to Pishill parish, eventually joining with Stonor in 1922. Ten years later the parish lost 211 acres to Watlington and so came to cover 3,292 acres.
6. Pyrton was chief of the Hundreds[1] (an ancient administrative unit) and comprised Watlington, Shirburn, Stoke, Wheatfield, South Weston and Pishill, being bounded by Ewelme and Lewknor Hundreds. It is one of the few Hundreds in Oxfordshire that is named in the Domesday Survey of 1086.
7. The name Readanora disappeared sometime between the 887 charter and that of 987, which calls the estate Pyrton, historically spelt Peritone and Pyriton (meaning 'Pear Tree Farm'). This is the first reference to the name Pyrton, the 987 charter also containing the first reference to Pyrton Manor [2]. It has been argued that the name Pyrton came into existence when the old Anglo- Saxon estate system was superseded by manorialisation.[3]

8. A moated manor house has existed at Pyrton since at least 1327 and originally, the manor estate coincided with the extent of the parish lands. By the 15th century portions had been sold off to sub-manors including Clare, Golder and Standhill. The present manor house, which stands in 50 acres of parkland, was constructed in Elizabethan times. The village's other principal building is St. Mary's Church, parts of which may be of Anglo-Saxon origin, although it has been altered and extended many times since, mostly being rebuilt in Victorian times. The village has an attractive core of historic buildings. Earlier buildings are timber framed with wattle and daub infill replaced by brick noggin. Brick and flint are widespread with some examples of the local soft 'clunch' or chalk stone used in association with brick dressings. Roofs are typically red tiles with the occasional thatch.
9. As is typically the case with such villages, the area immediately around Pyrton was farmed according to the open field strip system in the medieval period. These strips are shown on an estate map of 1738, which also depicts 21 dwellings besides the Manor House and Parsonage (now known as The White House).
10. By the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century, however, c. 2,000 acres between Pyrton and Golder were already enclosed, although the remaining lands to the south-east of the village survived as open fields until 1851. Enclosure brought an increase in the number of farmsteads in the parish and some of the earliest included Spier's Farm (later Franklin's and Cromwell's), Quartremain's Farm, Golder Farm (belonging to Magdalen College), together with the various village and hamlet home or manor farms.
11. By the middle of that century, most of the farms in the parish were divided into farms of between 100 and 600 acres and it is documented that most of the cottages in Pyrton village were occupied by farm labourers: "There are nearly sufficient cottages in the village for the accommodation of the laborers (sic) required on the property, but they are chiefly of the old thatched description, most if not all of them having a piece of garden attached..."[4].
12. During the 20th century farms increased in size and most of the farming that takes place in the parish today is arable. Present farms in the parish include Pyrton Hill Farm, Home Farm, Pyrton Field, Golder Manor Farm, Manor Farm Clare, Poppet's Farm and Standhill Farm. Some dairy and sheep farming takes place in Clare and Pyrton Hill Farm, and cattle farming at Pyrton Field.
13. By 1835 the main focus of settlement in the Pyrton village had moved from around the church to the axis of Knightsbridge Lane, probably due to the encroachment of the manor house and its park[5]. This remains the form of the village today.
14. This significant change was observed by Frank Emery in his 1974 book, *The Oxfordshire Landscape* in which, comparing the 1738 estate map referred to above with maps of a century later noted that by c.1835 "...the grouping of houses around the church was much less distinct. Instead the main focus of settlement...had shifted to the axis of Knightsbridge Lane. Due to encroachment by the manor house and its park (it was landscaped by 1792), the village had been thinned out at the park approaches, and deflected away in the direction of the Lane. By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and as we find it today, the village had shrunk overall but unequally so. Pyrton Church ceases to be

a centralising feature, the park dominates what was once half the village, and most of the houses range along the Lane”.

15. There was minimal building during the 20<sup>th</sup> century and it was noted in 1964 that ‘the secluded position of Pyrton village and single ownership has enabled it to preserve its ancient character’[6]. The special character of the village of Pyrton was further recognised when it was designated a Conservation area in 1984 (see fig.1) and, a detailed character appraisal, including a full review of the boundaries of the designated area was carried out in 2017 (See Pyrton’s Draft Conservation Area Appraisal included as a supporting document with the Neighbourhood Plan).



Fig.1 Pyrton and Shirburn’s Conservation Areas (Pyrton’s CA is the smaller area to the left)

[1] The Rev. H. Coxe, Pyrton Lectures, 1890, p.8

[2] see Pevsner, N, Sherwood, J , The Buildings of England: Oxfordshire, 1974, 732-733

[3] Oxoniensia, Volume LXIII, p.24, The Anglo Saxon Estate and Readnora and the Manor of Pyrton Oxfordshire by Madeleine Hammond, 1998

[4] Bodleian Library, University of Oxford DD Ducat-Hamersley

[5] This is based on Bodleian maps (E), C17:49 (66), (181), (182), (184).

[6] Lobel, M. (ed.), The Victoria History of the Counties of England – The County of Oxfordshire, Volume VIII, Lewknor and Pyrton Hundreds, 1964, Pyrton Hundred, p.157

## 4. Regional Landscape Character Context

### 4.1. Countryside Agency, Landscape Character Assessment Guidance for England and Scotland, 2002

1. According to this assessment, Pyrton parish lies within two character areas the Upper Thames Clay Vales (NCA108) and the Chilterns (NCA110).
2. The key characteristics of the Upper Thames Clay Vales are:
  - a. Broad belt of open, gently undulating lowland farmland on Upper Jurassic clays containing a variety of contrasting landscapes. Includes the enclosed pastures off the claylands and the wet valley bottoms and the more settled open arable lands of the gravel;
  - b. The valley bottoms, with open floodplain landscapes displaying gravel workings and flooded pits, a regular and well ordered field pattern, willow pollards and reedbeds along the water courses;
  - c. The Vales in Oxfordshire are dominated by 18<sup>th</sup> century enclosed landscapes of small woods and hawthorn/blackthorn hedges. Former and current gravel workings along the Thames floodplain also include open water features;
  - d. Brick built buildings within the Vales reflect the widespread use of the local clay as a building material.
3. The key characteristics of the Chilterns are:
  - a. The countryside of the Chilterns combines mixed agriculture with numerous woodlands and hedgerow boundaries that are often ancient. Steeper ground is often characterised by small fields, and there is a notable concentration of pre 18<sup>th</sup> century fields in the Oxfordshire parts of the NCA;
  - b. Meadows remain alongside watercourses;
  - c. Woodland cover is extensive, making the Chilterns one of the most wooded lowland landscapes in England. Large woods, dominated by beech are found on the plateau and as 'hanging' woods above the valleys, there are also small farm woodlands. Secondary woodland can be found on once open common land and downland, but elsewhere many woods are ancient;
  - d. The scarp and some dry valley slopes are characterised by fragmented areas of species rich chalk grassland with scrub;
  - e. Dispersed farmsteads and hamlets are found on the high plateau with nucleated towns and villages in valleys and at the foot of the scarp;
  - f. Many lower lying settles contain historic centres, often dating back to the medieval period;
  - g. Historic and some modern buildings use local, traditional materials including flint, brick, clay tiles and occasionally thatch;
  - h. Overall, the countryside has a predominately quiet and prosperous farming and estate character, and the scenic qualities in the half of the NCA furthest from London are recognized by their AONB designations.

## 4.2. South Oxfordshire Landscape Character Assessment (adopted July 2003)

1. The South Oxfordshire Landscape Character Assessment places the parish within the Eastern Vale Fringes (LCA5) which is described as “the eastern section of a distinctive belt of low, rounded hills, approximately 3 to 4 kms wide, which follow the base of the towering Chiltern escarpment and form a transitional zone between the chalk uplands and the low-lying clay vale”.
2. The Eastern Vale Fringes is characterised as a typically rural landscape dominated by large rectangular fields, predominantly in arable cultivation contained by a generally intact landscape structure. The backdrop of the Chilterns escarpment is a key characteristic, the edge of which is defined by a distinct linear distribution of springline villages where chalk meets clay.
3. This character area is divided into ‘Downs and Vale Fringe Landscapes’ and ‘Parkland and Estate Farmland’ and it is important to understand the characteristics of these landscape types and the respective conservation and enhancement strategies that have been assigned to each of these landscape types. In doing so, it will enable a clear appraisal of each site, the likely effects of proposed development on their characteristics and in turn the character of the wider area and the degree to which the management strategies can be adhered to or compromised.

### 4.2.1. Downs and Vale Fringe Landscapes

1. This is described as “the predominant landscape types within the area, forming a consistently rolling agricultural landscape of smooth, rounded landform and gentle valleys. The structure of hedgerows, trees and woodland belts, and the degree of visual enclosure, are the main factors which distinguish one area from another”. Two key characteristics of these landscapes are:
  - a. Open rolling downs
    - i. distinctively smooth rounded landform of low chalk or greensand hills;
    - ii. dominance of intensive arable cultivation with weak or absent hedgerow structure and large-scale field pattern;
    - iii. distinctively ‘grey’ and flinty soils;
    - iv. denuded and somewhat bleak and sterile character, with few features of landscape or wildlife value;
    - v. rural character with few detracting influences but large-scale farm buildings tend to be particularly prominent in this very open landscape;
    - vi. open landscape results in high intervisibility and extensive views.
  - b. Semi-enclosed rolling downs
    - i. distinctively smooth rounded landform of low chalk or greensand hills;
    - ii. dominance of intensive arable cultivation but some areas of permanent pasture or grassland;
    - iii. large-scale field pattern contained within a comparatively intact structure of hedges, with hedgerow trees and frequent linear belts or stands of planted woodland;

- iv. distinctively 'grey' and flinty soils;
- v. rural character with few detracting influences, although main roads create some localised intrusion;
- vi. semi-enclosed landscape with moderate intervisibility.

#### *4.2.2. Parkland and Estate Farmland*

1. The main area of parkland and estate farmland is concentrated around Shirburn Castle and Pyrton Manor and is categorised as:
  - a. well-managed parkland character with formal features, such as avenues and free-standing mature trees in pasture, or 'estate' landscapes dominated by woodland blocks and clumps of trees;
  - b. rural and unspoilt character;
  - c. generally enclosed character with strong landform, woodland and tree cover;
  - d. low intervisibility.

#### *4.2.3. Landscape Management Issues*

1. The few areas of parkland stand out within this area as being of particularly high landscape quality, where a strategy of conservation is most applicable. However, the eastern end of this area also has a typically attractive, rural and generally unspoilt character, which is strongly influenced by its rolling character, reasonably intact landscape structure and the dramatic and attractive backdrop of the Chilterns escarpment. These landscapes require only modest levels of intervention to repair areas which have been weakened by intensive farming or the impact of roads.

#### *4.2.4. Landscape Enhancement priorities*

1. retain important open views from the chalk and greensand hills but encourage some replacement of hedgerows and woodland planting within the 'open rolling downs' landscapes (to restore the former pattern of large-scale enclosures);
2. protect any remnant areas of chalk grassland and convert arable land to permanent pasture where possible;
3. maintain existing field boundaries and discourage further hedgerow removal and replacement by fencing;
4. maintain and restore typical landscape features of existing parklands at Shirburn Castle and Pyrton Manor and other smaller parks within the area;
5. mitigate the impacts of quarrying and landfill operations (including urbanising road treatments) and restore to a rural character in keeping with the surrounding landscape;
6. improve landscape structure and land management on the fringes of built areas and along main roads to mitigate adverse impacts on the surrounding countryside.

#### *4.2.5. Planning and development issues*

1. Large-scale development of any kind will be inappropriate within open countryside areas. The ability of the landscape to accommodate smaller-scale development will depend upon:
  - a. the potential impacts on distinctive landscape and settlement character;

- b. the potential impacts on intrinsic landscape quality and valued features and the overall sensitivity of the landscape to change;
  - c. the visual sensitivity of the receiving landscape.
2. Some specific conclusions are that:
- a. the high quality parkland landscapes within this area are particularly sensitive to change and least able to accommodate new development;
  - b. the semi-enclosed rolling downs landscapes benefit from a more intact landscape structure and the strong backdrop of the Chilterns escarpment, but their scenic quality (part AONB) and visual prominence makes them sensitive to development;
  - c. development within the open arable downs landscapes will be highly prominent unless closely associated with existing built form;
  - d. landscapes with strong landform and a mature structure of woods and hedgerows are less visually exposed and may be more able to absorb change but they are generally of higher landscape quality and therefore sensitive to development;
  - e. special attention should be paid to creating strong landscape 'edges' to settlements to reduce the urbanising influences of development on adjacent countryside and to prevent ribbon development and the coalescence of settlements

#### 4.3. Chilterns AONB Character Assessment and Management Plan

1. The area of the parish to the immediate south east of the B4009, is designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (see fig.2). Landscape guidance is included in the AONB Landscape Character Assessment & Management Plan 2014 – 2019: A Framework for Action, which was produced by the Chilterns Conservation Board following a review of the 2008 – 2013 Plan and wide public consultation. It contains a comprehensive summary of the key issues facing the AONB and the management policies and actions needed to conserve this special place. For further information please see [www.chilternsaonb.org/conservation-board/management-plan.html](http://www.chilternsaonb.org/conservation-board/management-plan.html).
2. Pyrton's AONB is largely contained within the Chilterns Escarpment Landscape Character Area (South Oxfordshire Landscape Character Assessment). The key defining characteristic of the Enclosed Escarpment sub-area, is described as "scarp face dominated by dense woodland cover or a mosaic of open grassland, scrub and woodland". Key enhancement priorities for the Chilterns Escarpment emphasise the need to preserve and manage the existing landscape resource. Consideration should be given to the impact of new development on the character of the AONB and its setting within Pyrton. Expansive views from the AONB towards the village of Pyrton and from the village towards the AONB are highly valued and should be preserved.
3. The landscape setting of the majority of the parish lies within Natural England's 'Chilterns Escarpment North Conservation Target Area'. Notably, their Statement SE01 records this Area as "important for its significant contribution to the following Higher Level Stewardship objectives: Biodiversity, Historic Environment, Landscape and Access. This area forms a line of chalk hills extending north-east from the River Thames at Goring in Oxfordshire, across Buckinghamshire and Bedfordshire, to Hitchin in

Herefordshire and is protected as The Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The prominent steep scarp slope on the northern edge gives way to a gentle dip slope which is incised by numerous dry valleys and chalk streams to the south. Within this target area a diverse mix of nationally important areas for biodiversity occurs including extensive beech woodlands. Important areas of chalk downland on the northern slopes and valley sides and lowland meadows are also present. These areas support important populations of rare butterflies such as the Duke of Burgundy, with adjacent arable land supporting nationally important areas for rare arable plants and arable birds including stone curlew. The landscape is rich in archaeological remains including Bronze Age Barrows, Iron Age hill forts, ancient green lanes and parklands”.

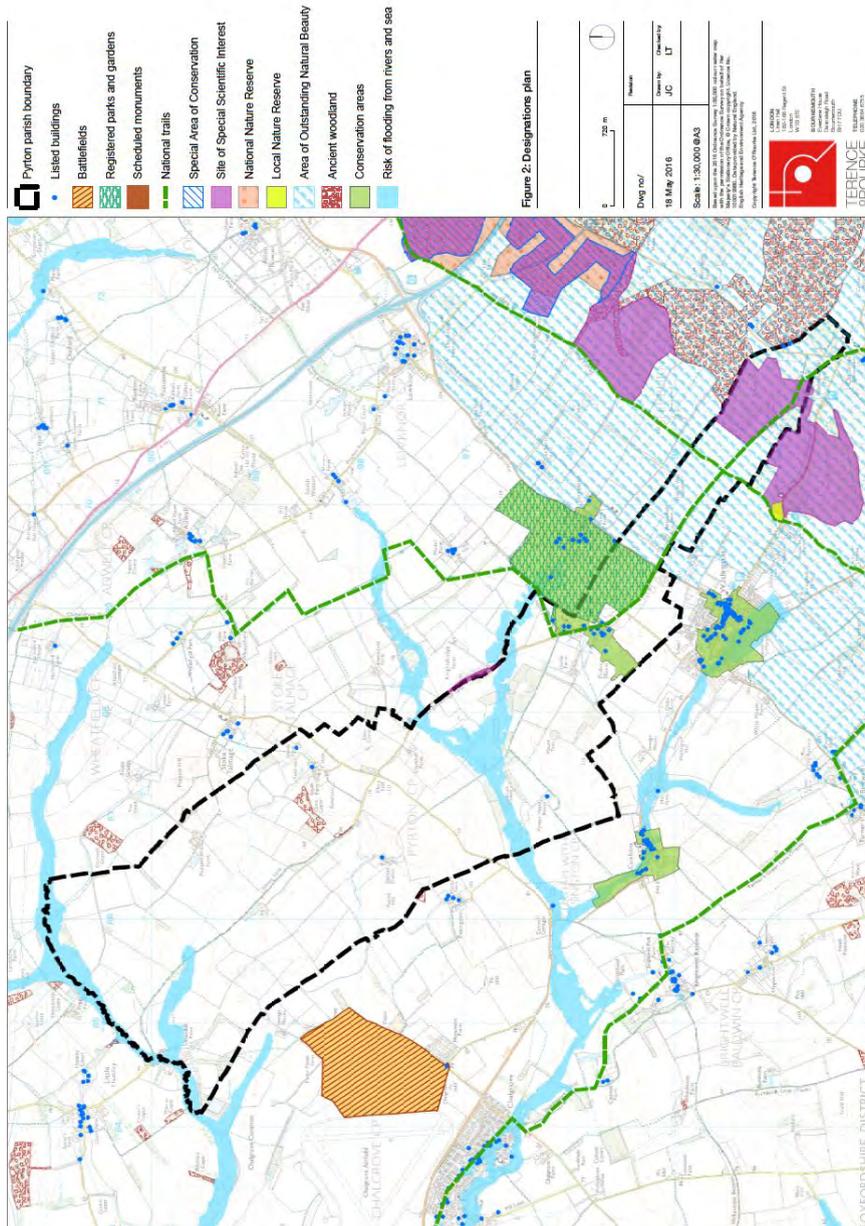
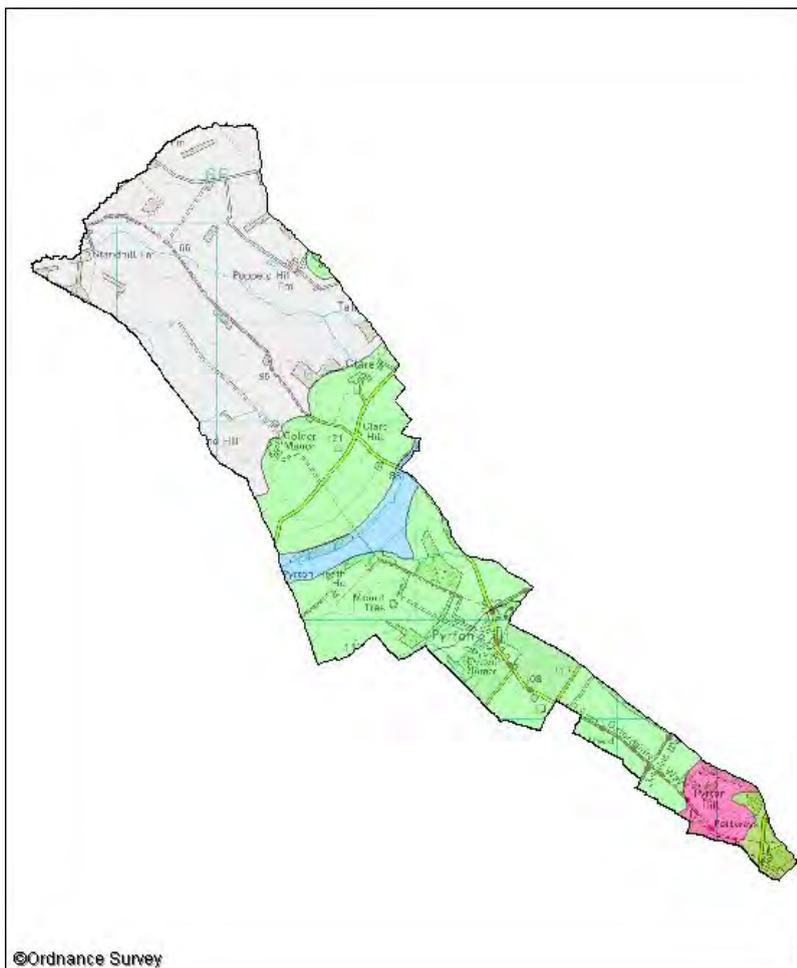


Fig 2: Designations plan

#### 4.4. Oxfordshire Wildlife and Landscape Study (OWLS)

Fig.3 Oxfordshire Wildlife and Landscape Study, Pyrton Parish



##### Landscape Types

	Clay Vale
	Estate Farmlands
	River Meadowlands
	Wooded Estate Slopes and Valley Sides
	Wooded Farmland

1. OWLS is the current landscape character assessment for Oxfordshire. This section lists the landscape character types found within Pyrton Parish with a more detailed description of each type and subsequent local character analysis.

#### 4.4.1. Clay Vale

1. This is a low-lying vale landscape associated with small pasture fields, many watercourses and hedgerow trees and well defined nucleated villages.
2. Key characteristics
  - a. A flat, low-lying landform.
  - b. Mixed land uses, dominated by pasture land, with small to medium-sized hedged fields.
  - c. Many mature oak, ash and willow hedgerow trees.
  - d. Dense, tree-lined streams and ditches dominated by pollarded willows and poplars.
  - e. Small to medium-sized nucleated villages.
3. Landscape Character for Chalgrove area
  - a. Small to large-sized fields with a mix of arable farming and pasture dominate the area. The larger arable fields are mainly concentrated around Chalgrove, Little Milton and Little Haseley.
  - b. The smaller grass fields are mostly found to the east, which is a rolling landform drained by small streams. The landscape is characterised by a large number of small and medium-sized poplar and willow plantations.
  - c. There are also some mixed oak, ash and conifer plantations. Dense corridors of pollarded willows and poplars bordering watercourses are a prominent visual feature. Fields are bounded by woods, riparian tree corridors, hawthorn and elm hedges and sparsely scattered trees of ash, oak, willow and dead elm.
  - d. The hedges are generally overgrown and gappy. Where arable farming dominates they are often absent or fragmented.
4. Biodiversity
  - a. This area supports a number of locally important habitats including deciduous woodland, plantations, semi-improved grassland, species-poor hedges with trees and tree-lined species-poor watercourses. It also includes a few isolated blocks of ancient semi-natural woodlands.



Fig.4 The low lying clay vale landscape in the far north of the parish can be viewed in the distance from the top of Clare Hill

#### 4.4.2. Estate Farmlands

1. This is a rolling agricultural landscape characterised by parklands and a well-ordered pattern of fields and estate plantations.
2. Key characteristics
  - a. Medium to large, regularly shaped, hedged fields;
  - b. Small, geometric plantations and belts of trees;
  - c. Large country houses set in ornamental parklands;
  - d. Small estate villages and dispersed farmsteads.
3. Landscape Character for Chinnor to Watlington area
  - a. This is a strongly undulating landscape characterised by large, geometric arable fields. Woodland cover is not prominent and is largely confined to small clumps around farmhouses and occasional small, geometric plantations.
  - b. The parklands at Pyrton and Shirburn are associated with larger blocks of secondary deciduous woodland. To the northeast of Watlington mature ash, oak and sycamore trees in hedges bordering roads are a notable feature.
  - c. The field pattern is generally weak and fragmented. This is particularly evident to the south of Ewelme, where many hedges have been completely removed, resulting in an open unenclosed landscape.
  - d. Species-rich hedges can be found along sections of the Icknield Way and bordering narrow sunken lanes.
4. Biodiversity
  - a. This area supports a range of locally important habitats including deciduous woodland, plantations, tree-lined watercourses, semi-improved grassland and species-poor hedges with trees.
  - b. Other important habitats include parkland, with its associated mature trees and lakes and ancient semi-natural woodland. There are also priority habitats such as calcareous grassland, and species-rich hedgerows with trees bordering green lanes.



Fig.5 The parkland at Shirburn viewed from the unnamed road into Pyrton leading from the B4009

#### 4.4.3. River Meadowlands

1. This is a linear riverine landscape with a flat, well defined alluvial floodplain. It has pastoral character with meadows, wet and semi-improved pasture.
2. Key characteristics
  - a. Flat, low-lying topography with seasonally flooded alluvial floodplains;
  - b. Meandering river channels;
  - c. Grazing meadows and small fields of permanent pasture;
  - d. Riparian character with a strong pattern of riverside willows and tree-lined ditches;
  - e. Sparsely settled with a few roads
3. Landscape Character for Upper River Thames area
  - a. The river corridor is characterised by small fields of improved and semi-improved grassland. There is some arable land to the south between Stadhampton and Chalgrove.
  - b. Fields are enclosed by hawthorn hedges with a few trees. They are mainly overgrown and gappy, and replaced by fences in some places.
  - c. The tree corridor along the length of the river is a prominent landscape feature. It consists mainly of poplars and pollarded willows. The latter are particularly noticeable between Cuddesdon Mill and Thame.
  - d. There are also deciduous plantations, including species such as poplar, willow and some oak and ash, bordering the river.
4. Biodiversity  
This part of the Thames has locally important habitats such as plantations, semi-improved grassland species-poor hedges and trees bordering the river.



Fig 6. View of ponds at Home Farm, Pyrton

## 5. Wildlife Habitat

- a. In relation to Pyrton parish, OWLS describes the following wildlife habitat within the 'River Meadowlands' regional character area:

*"A line of spring rise at this site which supports a variety of wetland habitats. These include small areas of fen which are found amongst taller wetland vegetation. Both habitats are national priorities for nature conservation. The fen areas are richest in wildflowers including fen bedstraw, yellow loosestrife and creeping jenny. Orchids have been seen here in the past. In the taller wetland vegetation willow herb has become increasingly dominant over the years, which is often a sign of drying out. In the south of the site there are more wetland species such as reeds and marsh marigold in open areas amongst willows which have established in this part of the site. A number of rare and uncommon invertebrates have been recorded here."*

### 4.4.4. Wooded Estate Slopes and Valley Sides

1. A wooded estate landscape characterised by arable farming and small villages with a strong vernacular character.
2. Key characteristics
  - a. Rolling topography with localised steep slopes;
  - b. Large blocks of ancient woodland and mixed plantations of variable sizes;
  - c. Large parklands and mansion houses;
  - d. A regularly shaped field pattern dominated by arable fields;
  - e. Small villages with strong vernacular character.



Fig 7. View from Hill Road, Watlington of Pyrton Hill SSSI

### 3. Landscape Character for Chilterns escarpment

- a. The Chilterns escarpment is dominated by extensive blocks of ancient beech and beech-yew woodland, particularly at its northern and southern ends.
- b. There are also occasional blocks of ancient oak woodland adjacent to more recent woods and beech plantations.
- c. Along parts of the escarpment there are significant areas of unimproved chalk grassland interspersed with hawthorn, buckthorn and gorse scrub. Sunken lanes are a characteristic feature and the hedgebanks often support species such as spindle, dogwood, wild privet, hazel and field maple.
- d. Generally speaking, the hedges tend to be tall and in good condition, particularly where they border roads and green lanes.

### 4. Biodiversity

- a. Locally important habitats include secondary beech woodland and plantations, semi-improved grassland, scrub and species-poor hedges with trees. However, it is particularly notable for the range of priority habitats found along the length of the escarpment.
- b. At the north-eastern end there is Aston Rowant National Nature Reserve and Special Area of Conservation, with its extensive areas of ancient beech-yew woodland, calcareous grassland and juniper scrub. The chalk faces exposed by the route of the M40 are also of geological interest.
- c. At the opposite end of the escarpment, south of Streatley, there is the Hartslock nature reserve and Special Area of Conservation which has a similar range of priority habitats.
- d. At Shirburn Hill there are also some surviving patches of chalk heath. These sites are relatively large, around 60-90 ha., but there are also many other smaller individual chalk grassland sites between 3-5 ha.
- e. A number of the chalk grassland sites are in favourable condition and management, but there are some places where scrub invasion is a problem through lack of grazing.
- f. Throughout the rest of the escarpment there is an extensive interlocking network of ancient semi-natural woodland and species-rich hedgerows.

#### 4.4.5. Wooded Farmland

1. This landscape type has a distinctively ancient, rural character typified by a mosaic of woodland, enclosed pasture, arable fields as well as scattered farms and settlements.
2. Key characteristics
  - a. Large blocks of ancient woodland and a large number of plantations.
  - b. A varied field pattern of arable land and pasture enclosed by woodland and hedges.
  - c. Species rich hedgerows with many hedgerow trees.
  - d. Dispersed settlement pattern with settlements and scattered farms.



Fig 8. Farmland at Christmas Common

3. Landscape Character for Chilterns Plateau
  - a. In most places, there is an irregular pattern of arable and grass fields surrounded by woodland and ancient, species-rich, hedges.
  - b. Arable farming is particularly dominant around Nuffield and Cookley Green, where the fields are larger and more regular in shape.
  - c. Semi-improved grassland occurs mainly around Sonning Common and Goring Heath. The area is dominated by large, interlocking blocks of secondary and ancient oak-ash and beech woodland, with hazel and holly as an understorey.
  - d. There is also a large number of surviving ancient semi-natural woodland as well as deciduous, mixed and coniferous plantations with beech as their main species.

- e. Old, densely-scattered trees of oak, ash, and some beech and holly are equally characteristic. They appear as very dense belts along lanes and parish boundaries.
- f. Hedges are generally well-maintained, consisting of hawthorn, blackthorn, field maple, hazel and holly. However, where they border arable land, they are frequently low, gappy or removed altogether.
- g. Pockets of acid grassland and heath survive on greens and commons, such as Russell's Water, Nettlebed, Catslip and Crowley Park.
- h. Wide, species-rich verges are typically associated with the winding lanes. In places they are mixed with bracken, particularly to the south of Sonning Common.

#### 4. Biodiversity

- a. Although there appears to be some significant variation in bio-scores and biobands across this local character area, most of it is either medium-high or very high.
- b. Those parts which have lower scores are generally small and unrepresentative of the area as a whole.
- c. The plateau supports a range of locally important habitats such as deciduous woodland, plantations, semi-improved grassland, scrub and species-poor hedges with trees. However, it is particularly important for its ancient beech and oak-ash-beech woodland, including a part of Aston Rowant Special Area of Conservation and other nationally important sites such as Harpsden and Bear, Oveys and Great Bottom Woods.
- d. There are also many other interlocking blocks of ancient semi-natural woodland. Surviving fragments of acid grassland and heath are associated with a number of the Chilterns Commons and Greens including Peppard, Nettlebed and Russell's Water.
- e. Some of these commons are no longer traditionally grazed and have subsequently been colonised by oak and birch woodland.
- f. The amount of actual heathland is relatively small, and the surviving heather is often over-mature and leggy. However, they are reasonably large sites ranging from 16-43 ha. and although many remain in unfavourable condition and management, there is great potential for restoring them to their former state.

## 5. Pyrton Landscape Types

### 5.1. The Pyrton Landscape

1. The overwhelming perception of the parish community is that Pyrton is a country parish and that it should strive to protect the rural and ancient character of the area, while promoting suitable development that enhances the latter.
2. Pyrton is described as a 'strip parish' due to its long and narrow form, and extends to approximately 1,327 hectares from the Haseley Brook to Christmas Common. It is made up of the village of Pyrton, the hamlets of Clare, Golder and Standhill in the north of the parish, and part of the hamlet of Christmas Common in the south. The rolling agricultural landscape of the parish with Pyrton Manor and village at its centre retains much of its ancient character.
3. The village of Pyrton lies immediately to the north-west of Watlington and is separated from Watlington by a stretch of agricultural land (PYR2) that is valued locally for preventing the erosion of the separate identities of Pyrton and Watlington and the coalescence of the two settlements. It is also appreciated for its vista of the Chiltern Hills AONB.
4. For the purposes of the NP, the parish has five distinctive local landscape types:
  - a. The Chiltern Escarpment and AONB;
  - b. The main settlement of Pyrton;
  - c. The estate parkland of Shirburn and Pyrton Manor;
  - d. Hillside farmsteads in the north of the parish (Clare and Golder);
  - e. The lower lying farmlands.

### 5.2. The Chiltern Escarpment and AONB

1. A mile south of Pyrton village the ground rises steeply to Pyrton Hill and Christmas Common (785 ft. / 239 m) and is classified as part of the Chilterns 'Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty' (AONB). This is a key landscape within the parish and can be viewed from the main settlement of Pyrton as well as from higher areas within the parish, such as Mount Tree (Home Farm), Knightsbridge Lane, and the Cuxham to Stoke Talmage Road. Most of the parish, including the main settlement of Pyrton, can also be viewed from the AONB.
2. The southernmost tip of the parish is characterised by a small settlement of a few houses at Christmas Common bordered on the northern side by dense ancient woodland. There is some scattered pasture land around Hill Farm enclosed by hedges.
3. The southern part of the parish falls within the Watlington and Pyrton Hills SSSI. Natural England defines an SSSI as "one of the country's very best wildlife and/or geological sites" and describes Pyrton Hill as follows: "This site supports a mosaic of chalk downland, chalk scrub, mixed broadleaved and yew woodland habitats, with areas of leached and more acid grassland and scrub on the upper slopes. The site supports

some of the most floristically diverse grassland in the Chilterns and is also notable for its lower plant flora and butterfly populations.

4. Watlington and Pyrton Hills consist of a section of the Chiltern Escarpment, with moderate to steep north and west-facing slopes. The hills of Middle and Upper Chalk have shallow, well-drained, calcareous soils of the Upton 1 series, giving way in part to a cap of clay-with-flints, supporting more clayey soils of the Batcombe series...



Fig 9. View of the Chilterns AONB from the top of Knightsbridge Lane in the North of the Parish

5. In pockets on Pyrton Hill, there are areas of woodland in which yew is the sole dominant. Pyrton Hill has a species composition dominated by sheep's fescue *Festuca ovina*, salad burnet *Sanguisorba minor* and glaucous sedge *Carex flacca*, together with common centaury *Centaurium erythraea*, lady's bedstraw *Galium verum* and ground ivy *Glechoma hederacea*. In the barer areas candytuft is again abundant.
6. A further sward type has developed on former arable land, which is now reverting to downland. The flora includes false oat-grass *Arrhenatherum elatius*, yellow oat-grass *Trisetum flavescens*, black medick *Medicago lupulina*, wild basil *Clinopodium vulgare*, wild strawberry *Fragaria vesca*, clustered bell-flower *Campanula glomerata*, field scabious *Knautia arvensis* and lady's bedstraw.
7. Heath has become established locally on the upper slopes, where clay-with-flints overlies the chalk, and leaching of minerals and nutrients has produced base-poor soils. The flora here includes heather *Calluna vulgaris*, tormentil *Potentilla erecta* and sheep's sorrel *Rumex acetosella* occurring amongst scrub consisting of hawthorn, blackthorn, gorse, silver birch and raspberry.

8. Watlington and Pyrton Hills are also notable for lower plants. There is an exceptional lichen flora associated with the calcareous soils. One area, the ancient dyke crossing the site from east to west, has one of the most diverse moss and liverwort floras in the Chilterns, with 50 species recorded including *Rhodobryum roseum*, *Scapania aspera*, *Weissia tortilis*, *Frullania tamarisci* and *Hypnum cuppressiforme* ssp. *Lacunosum*.
9. Watlington and Pyrton Hills have a notable butterfly fauna with twenty species recorded. Of particular note is the strong population of the silver-spotted skipper *Hesperia comma* which is a rare and declining species in Great Britain. Other butterflies occurring include chalkhill blue *Lysandra coridon*, small blue *Cupido minimus*, brown argus *Aricia agestis*, green hairstreak *Callophrys rubi* and dark green fritillary *Argynnis aglaja*.
10. The site is a refuge for birds in winter, when large numbers of thrushes, such as redwing and fieldfare, and finches such as linnets and yellowhammers, feed on the berries and seeds."

### 5.3. The Main Settlement of Pyrton

1. Pyrton's draft Conservation Area appraisal, submitted to SODC in October 2017, is part of the evidence base for the PNP and defines the special interest and character of the village's Conservation Area, including proposals for extending its boundaries to include the south-eastern approach to the village and the full extent of Pyrton Manor grounds. In Pyrton's Conservation Area appraisal four character areas are identified and discussed
  - a. Pyrton Manor;
  - b. Approach to the village from the south-east (NB- this area lies entirely within the main proposed extension to the conservation area);
  - c. Church and village core;
  - d. The 'open' northern end of the village.
2. This study will not, therefore, repeat the information contained in the appraisal except to point out the key influences that have shaped the distinctive character of Pyrton as a whole. These include the geography of the village, which is located within a mixture of flat agricultural land (currently mainly pasture) and the historic parkland associated with both Pyrton Manor and Shirburn Castle. The land ownership of Shirburn and its long-established Estate has protected both Shirburn and Pyrton from potential encroachment outward from the nearby M40, enabling both parishes and villages to retain their ancient layouts and character.
3. Pyrton is today a village of predominantly linear plan-form with houses and cottages ranged on each side of the main road (Knightsbridge Lane) running through it on a roughly north-south axis, with a large area of open paddocks on the east side of the road, some of which comes up to the road and the remainder of which lies behind the houses on this side.

4. The earliest part of the village and its original nucleus is situated around the medieval parish church of St.Mary's and original vicarage (now known as The White House), with Pyrton Manor, known to be in existence by c.1327, lying a little further to the west.



Fig.10 Pyrton Manor

5. A good number of 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century properties still survive in the village, built of local materials and in the traditional style. Lodge Cottage and Hampden Cottage, for example, are a pair of two estate cottages (Grade II listed, see fig.12) at the entrance to the driveway of Pyrton Manor. They are built of knapped flint rubble with brick dressings and thatched roofs. Other Grade II listed properties built of similar materials include The Old Smithy and the Old Smithy Granary (early-mid 18<sup>th</sup> century), the Plough (late 17<sup>th</sup> century, former inn) and Home Farm Cottage (17<sup>th</sup> century). Other buildings of historical and architectural interest are Old Shirburn Vicarage (1788), the Court House (early 16<sup>th</sup> century timber framed farmhouse, see fig.13), Pond House (c.1760), West Lodge (early 19<sup>th</sup> century), and The White House (the medieval building is encased in a largely 17<sup>th</sup> century house with 18<sup>th</sup> century additions).



Fig.11 St.Mary's Church, Pyrton

6. There is a key focal point at the northern end of the village just beyond The Old Plough, where a track (now part of The Oxfordshire Way) diverges from Knightsbridge Lane to lead north-eastwards out of the village past West Lodge, one of the former lodges to Shirburn Castle.
7. There was relatively little significant development in the village during the 20<sup>th</sup> century and this has continued into the first two decades of the 21<sup>st</sup>. What modern development there has been (notably the four detached houses on the east side of the main village road opposite Pond House and Hall Close immediately to the north of the Village Hall) is

by now mainly well screened by trees and other vegetation and has had no major visual impact on its character.

8. The green impression formed by trees, fields and gardens of the Pyrton Conservation Area and its proposed extension is also an important element of its character as an historic village in a rural setting and is described in detail in the draft appraisal.



Fig.12 Lodge Cottage and Hampden Cottage



Fig.13 The Court House

### 5.3.1. Views

1. Views play a key role in how local people relate and interact with their surrounding environment. These may be long 'big sky' views accessible from the network of footpaths on open farmland, the sweeping panoramas across the parish from the Chilterns AONB or those towards the AONB, particularly from the Stoke Talmage to Cuxham Road, Knightsbridge Lane and Clare. Or they may be shorter views within the village of Pyrton terminating on a particular green feature or building of historic interest such as St Mary's Church, Pyrton Manor, Shirburn Old Vicarage, The White House or The Court House.



2. Extensive views across Shirburn Park towards the Chiltern Hills are seen from many of the houses along Knightsbridge Lane. They can also be seen from the paddocks opposite the village hall, something which is greatly valued by residents. There are important views into and out of the village at both its northern and southern approaches, together with that along the bridleway section of the Oxfordshire Way at the northern end of the village.
3. More general views of the street scene also contribute to the character and appearance of the village, particularly where the form of the street or track, green verges, boundary features, such as walls and hedgerows, garden foliage, trees and buildings, combine to create a composition that expresses Pyrton's essential rural character.



Fig.14 Views of Pyrton parish from Watlington Hill AONB (with Mount Tree at Home Farm seen in the middle distance)

### 5.3.2. Green Spaces

1. Important open spaces within the village include the churchyard, the parkland of Pyrton Manor, and the large paddocks opposite the village hall. These paddocks (1.5 hectares) lie adjacent to Shirburn registered parkland on the east side of the main street and are greatly valued by local residents. They provide not only views of the Chiltern Hills, but also a sense of openness with potential for wildlife and flood storage capacity. They preserve the essential rural and open nature of the core village, while contributing to the setting of nearby listed buildings, such as The Smithy and The Plough.



Fig.15 The paddocks in the core part of the village viewed from the east side of Knightsbridge Lane (with views of the Chiltern Hills beyond)

#### 5.4. The Estate Parkland of Shirburn and Pyrton Manor

1. The 50 acres of parkland surrounding Pyrton Manor is well managed and preserved, and has an important collection of some 6,000 trees (both old and new). This collection positively contributes to the setting of Pyrton Manor as a Grade II \* listed building and to the role which the house and its grounds play in establishing what is significant about the character and appearance of the Pyrton Conservation Area (see Pyrton's Draft Conservation Area Appraisal).



Fig.16 View of Shirburn Castle across the parkland from the unnamed road leading from the B4009 into Pyrton

2. To the east of the village and still within the parish is part of the registered parkland of Shirburn Castle, now used as pasture land for grazing cattle, but providing important views of open green space and glimpses of the castle from many of the houses in the village along Knightsbridge Lane as well as from the small unnamed road running from the B4009 into the village. Walkers along the Ridgeway also benefit from extensive views across the parkland. This landscape is characterised by its 'well-managed parkland character with formal features such as avenues and free-standing mature trees in pasture' and its 'rural and unspoilt character, 'generally enclosed character' with 'low intervisibility' (Countryside Agency, 2002)



Fig.17 Pyrton Manor in its parkland setting

3. Bordering this ancient parkland on one side and running alongside the unnamed road into the village from the B4009 (and also, therefore, running alongside The Ridgeway) is a row of ancient and protected Holm Oaks.

## 5.5. Hillside farmsteads in the North of the Parish (Clare and Golder)

1. The north of the parish rises to a height of 121 metres (Clare Hill) and along this ridge of land, traversed by the Cuxham to Stoke Talmage Road, is the medieval hamlet of Clare. Clare (Clarora), its name meaning 'clay slope' was once Pyrton's largest hamlet of 37 households, but now consists of a single farmhouse and a handful of cottages. The surrounding landscape is characterised by small hedged fields of pasture land. There are banks near the Cuxham-Stoke Talmage road that perhaps indicate the sites of earlier buildings. Within Clare, there is a small area of protected ancient and semi-natural woodland, known as Clare Copse.
2. Golder, once a medieval township and a sub-manor of Pyrton, lies on the hillside to the north of Clare and now only consists of six cottages and the manor house. The present manor house stands on the site of a medieval moated homestead and it is approached by a sunken road where other medieval dwellings once lay. There appear to be clear indications on aerial photographs of abandoned sites. Surrounding the farmstead at Golder are mostly large hedged arable fields.
3. Priority Habitats: Clare Copse is protected as 'Ancient woodland' (see fig.2) and defined as a "wooded area that has been wooded continuously since at least 1600 AD." This area includes ancient semi-natural woodland, which is "mainly made up of trees and shrubs native to the site, usually arising from natural regeneration."



Fig.18 View of Golder

## 5.6. Lower Lying Farmland

1. The farmland within the most northern part of the parish around Poppet's Hill Farm and the lowland medieval hamlet of Standhill farm is characterised by small to medium sized pasture and arable fields. The fields are most edged by hawthorn, elder and blackthorn hedges. There are small geometric plantations and belts of mixed native broadleaf woodland.
2. The farmland on either side of Knightsbridge Lane, before it begins its ascent to Clare Hill, is low lying and fed by streams. It is pastoral in character with small fields of permanent pasture. The lower lying land at Home Farm is characterised by a network of streams and ditches lined by willows and other trees. Flooding to the surrounding fields has to be managed. There is also a densely planted belt of poplar trees (with small scallops recently re-planted with mixed native broadleaves), which can be viewed from the Cuxham to Stoke Talmage Road.
3. The landscape at Home Farm is characterised by medium-sized fields mostly hedged with blackthorn, hawthorn, dead elm or bordered by geometric plantations or belts of woodland. The woodlands at Home Farm make a major contribution to the landscape, although none of them is scheduled as ancient. They include pine, oak and ash, hornbeam and beech trees. Over the past few years a woodland management scheme has been put in place and the farm has benefited from a large programme of replanting. Although most fields at Home Farm are low lying and on clay soil, the land rises to a height of 117 metres with a chalk ridge at Mount Tree.



Fig 19. Poplar Trees at Home Farm (can be viewed in the public domain from the Cuxham to Stoke Talmage Road)

4. The arable fields between Watlington and Pyrton (the Pyrton charity field and adjoining field known as PYR2, bounded along their western boundaries by Pyrton Lane) are low-lying and absorb much of the run-off from the Chilterns, thereby protecting the village of Pyrton. They are themselves prone to flooding during the winter months.
5. Biodiversity
  - a. Locally important habitats include tree-lined watercourses and belts and geometric plantations and belts of deciduous woodland.
  - b. Sensitive farming has increased wildlife habitats as field boundaries have been widened and hedges allowed to grow.
  - c. It is noticeable at time of writing that many fields have been left as over winter stubble encouraging populations of arable birds such as partridge.
  - d. There are also ponds and water meadows (Home Farm) which are fed by streams and support an abundance of wildlife.
6. Priority habitats:
  - a. Knightsbridge Lane Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) (Home Farm side, see fig.2) supports one of the largest populations of the very rare plant species 'Green Hound's Tongue' (*Cynoglossum Germanicum*). This narrow lane is enclosed by species rich hedges, and hedgerow trees of oak, ash and sycamore.
  - b. Farmland within Natural England's Chilterns Conservation Target Area
    - i. Lower lying farmland within the parish includes plantations, some species-rich hedges and deciduous woodland. It is also worth noting here the particular importance that Natural England attaches to the landscape setting of Pyrton, much of which lies within their 'Chilterns Conservation Target Area'. Notably, their Statement SE01 records this Area as:  
*"important for its significant contribution to the following Higher Level Stewardship objectives: Biodiversity, Historic Environment, Landscape and Access. This area forms a line of chalk hills extending north-east from the River Thames at Goring in Oxfordshire, across Buckinghamshire and Bedfordshire, to Hitchin in Herefordshire and is protected as The Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The prominent steep scarp slope on the northern edge gives way to a gentle dip slope which is incised by numerous dry valleys and chalk streams to the south. Within this target area a diverse mix of nationally important areas for biodiversity occurs including extensive beech woodlands. Important areas of chalk downland on the northern slopes and valley sides and lowland meadows are also present. These areas support important populations of rare butterflies such as the Duke of Burgundy, with adjacent arable land supporting nationally important areas for rare arable plants and arable birds including stone curlew. The landscape is rich in archaeological remains including Bronze Age Barrows, Iron Age hill forts, ancient green lanes and parklands"*.

## 6. Maintaining a separate identity

### 6.1. Fields off Pyrton Lane (PYR2 and Pyrton Charity Field)

1. The fields between Watlington and Pyrton known as Pyrton charity field (1.507 hectares) and PYR2 (approx. 14.1 hectares) provide an essential green buffer between Pyrton and Watlington. Pyrton Charity Field comprises an undeveloped parcel of land that is currently laid fallow and PYR2 is in arable cultivation. Both lie within Natural England's 'Chiltern's Conservation Target Area'.

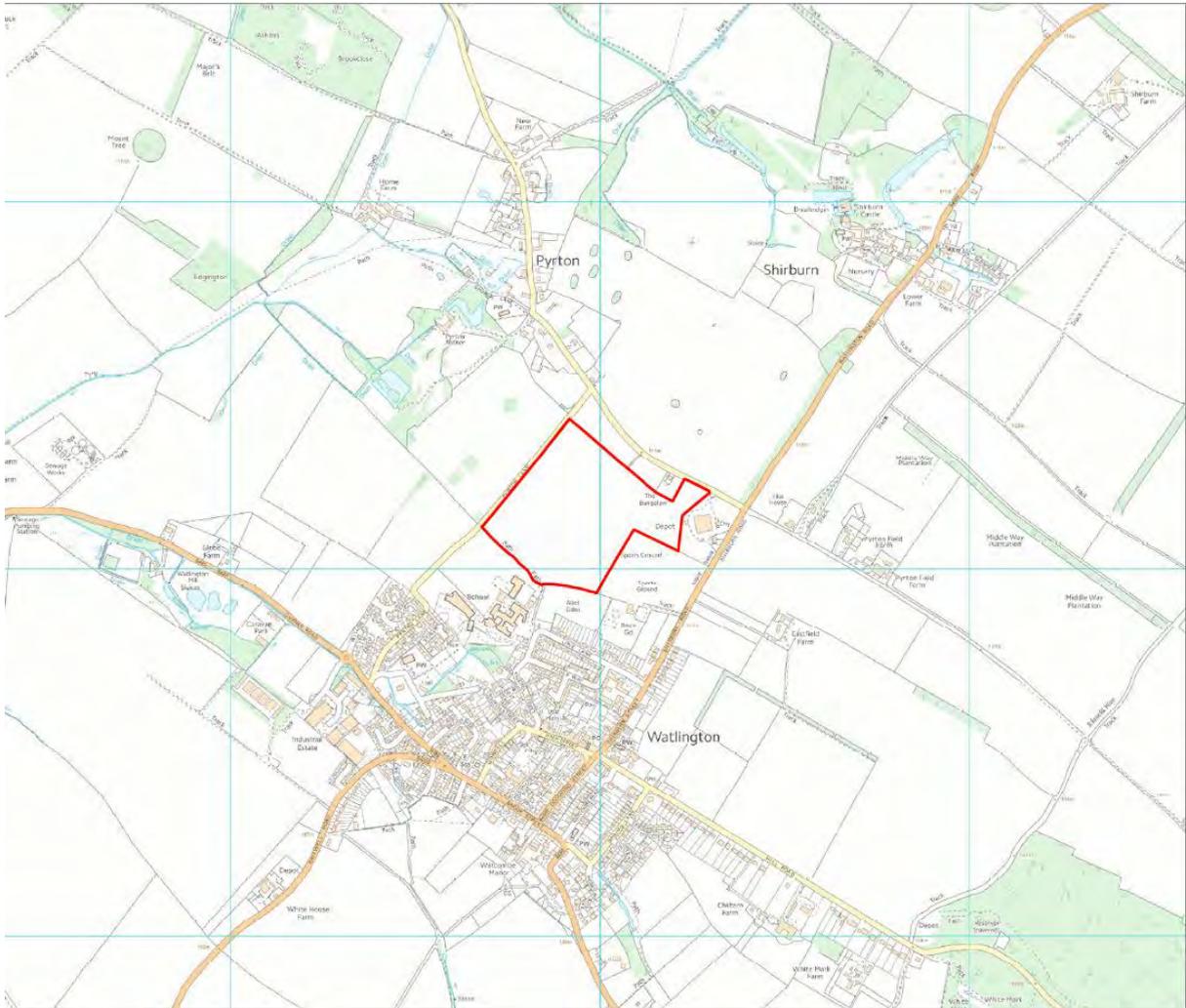


Fig 20. Map of land off Pyrton lane, (PYR2 highlighted in red)

2. Both fields are located within the parish of Pyrton and just north of the built-up area of Watlington. The two fields adjoin one another and are bounded to the west by Pyrton Lane, beyond which lie the grounds of Pyrton Manor (Grade II \*) and the Conservation Area of Pyrton village. PYR2 abuts Icknield Community College to the south, Watlington Recreation Ground to the east, and the former MoD warehouse site (PYR1) to the north-east. To the north of the fields beyond the unnamed road that runs into Pyrton from the B4009 lies Shirburn Castle registered park and garden and Conservation Area.





Fig.22 View from Pyrton Charity Field towards Shirburn Park (just beyond the line of Holm Oaks)

6. The charity field (see fig.22) and PYR2 also function as an open gap between Watlington and the Grade II \* listed Pyrton Manor and Shirburn registered park and garden, maintaining their rural and isolated settings. These adjacent landscapes are defined by the South Oxfordshire Landscape Character Assessment (adopted July 2003) as being of 'Parkland and Estate Parkland' type and characterised by 'well managed parkland character with formal features such as avenues and free standing mature trees in pasture' with its 'rural unspoilt character', 'generally enclosed character' and 'low intervisibility.'
7. According to South Oxfordshire Landscape Character these fields fall within Landscape Character Area 5 (LCA5): the Eastern Vale Fringes which notes in relation to the area: "Large-scale development of any kind will be inappropriate within open countryside areas. The ability of the landscape to accommodate smaller-scale development will depend upon: the potential impacts on distinctive landscape and settlement character; the potential impacts on intrinsic landscape quality and valued features and the overall sensitivity of the landscape to change; the visual sensitivity of the receiving landscape."
8. These fields lie within a sub area of the Eastern Vale Fringes defined as the Semi enclosed Rolling downs and adjacent to the Parkland and Estate Farmland type. The landscape features of the semi enclosed rolling downs are its "rural character with few detracting influences, although main roads create some localised intrusion.". Traffic on the B4009, Shirburn Road, is audible but not intrusive, and so broadly the landscape resources of the site are consistent with the more positive elements identified for the Eastern Vale Fringes and in particular its semi enclosure contained by "intact structure of hedges, with hedgerow trees and frequent linear belts of strands of planted woodland" that give rise to "moderate intervisibility".

9. The section of the LCA in relation to the Eastern Vale Fringes (LCA5) notes the following conclusions in relation to the potential suitability of development proposals within those Fringes:
- the high quality parkland landscapes within this area are particularly sensitive to change and least able to accommodate new development;
  - the semi-enclosed rolling downs landscapes benefit from a more intact landscape structure and the strong backdrop of the Chilterns escarpment, but their scenic quality (part AONB) and visual prominence makes them sensitive to development;
  - special attention should be paid to creating strong landscape 'edges' to settlements to reduce the urbanising influences of development on adjacent countryside and to prevent ribbon development and the coalescence of settlements.

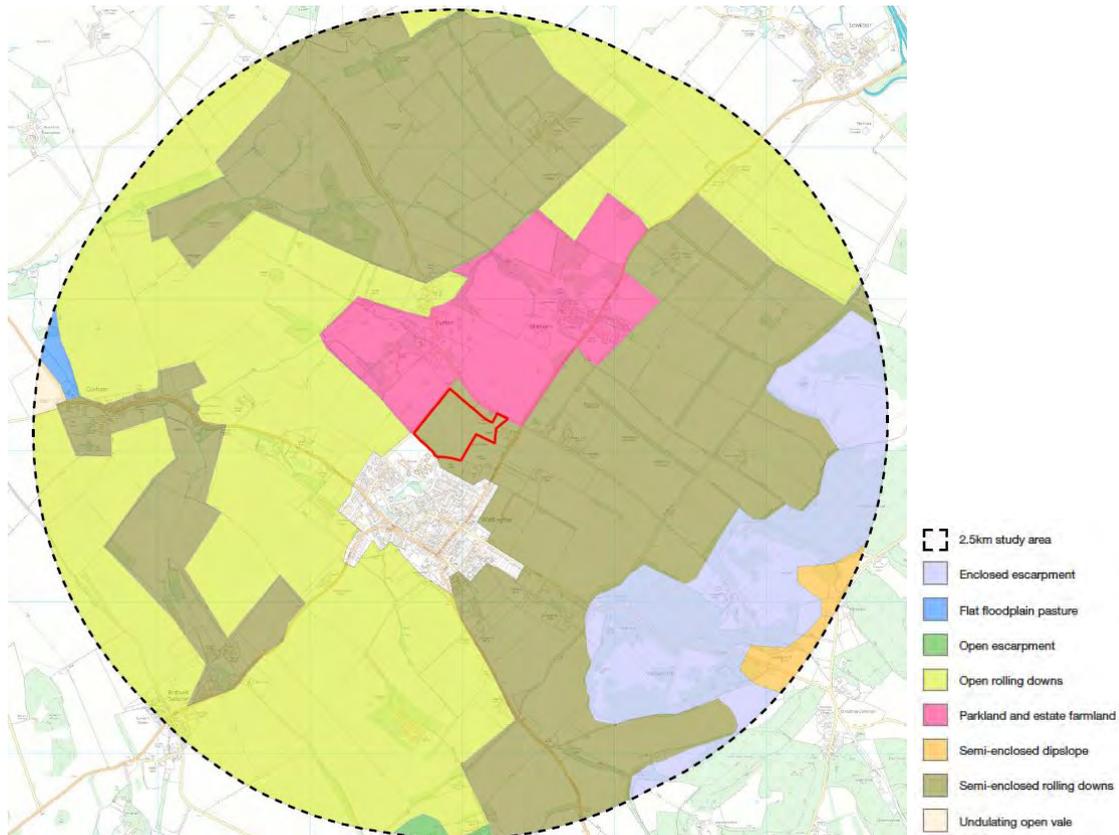


Fig.23 Landscape Character Areas (PYR2 highlighted in red)

10. The likely impact of any development on these fields on the character of the Chilterns AONB, which lies to the immediate south-east of the B4009 (see fig.24), must be assessed. While the physical resources of the Chilterns Escarpment will remain unaffected, the perceptual characteristics, such as the sense of tranquillity, containment and expansive views, will be directly impacted by any change in the surrounding landscapes. Key enhancement priorities for the Chilterns Escarpment emphasise the need to preserve and manage the existing landscape resource.



Fig.24 View of the Chiltern Hills from the footpath on the western boundary of PYR2

## 6.2. Visual Receptors likely to be affected by Development on PYR2

1. The location of PYR2 at the base of the Chilterns escarpment and its size (14.1 hectares) means it has a large zone of visual influence and this is shown in the diagrams below

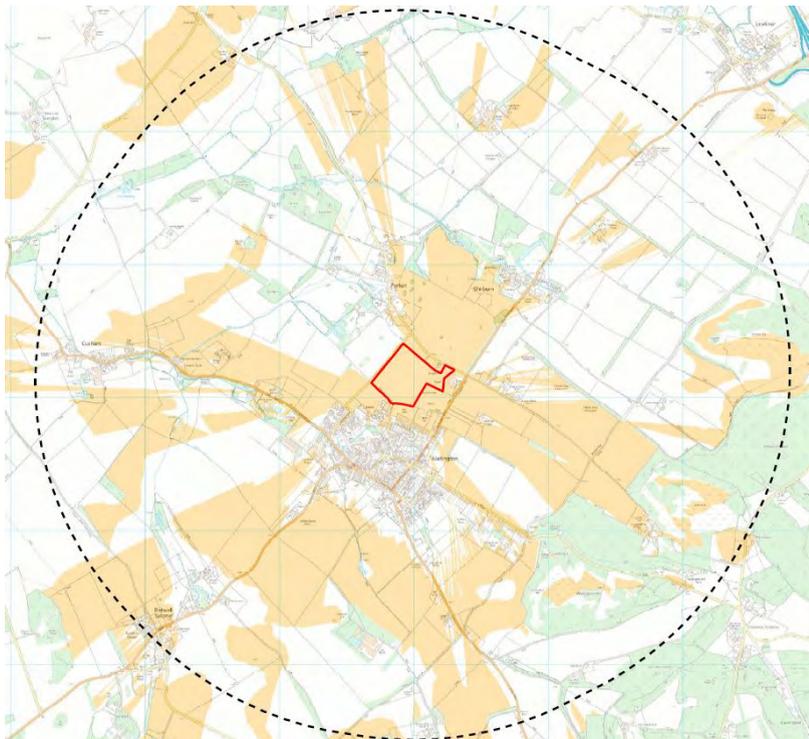


Fig 25. Map showing zone of visual influence (PYR2 marked in red and ZVI shown by brown shaded areas)

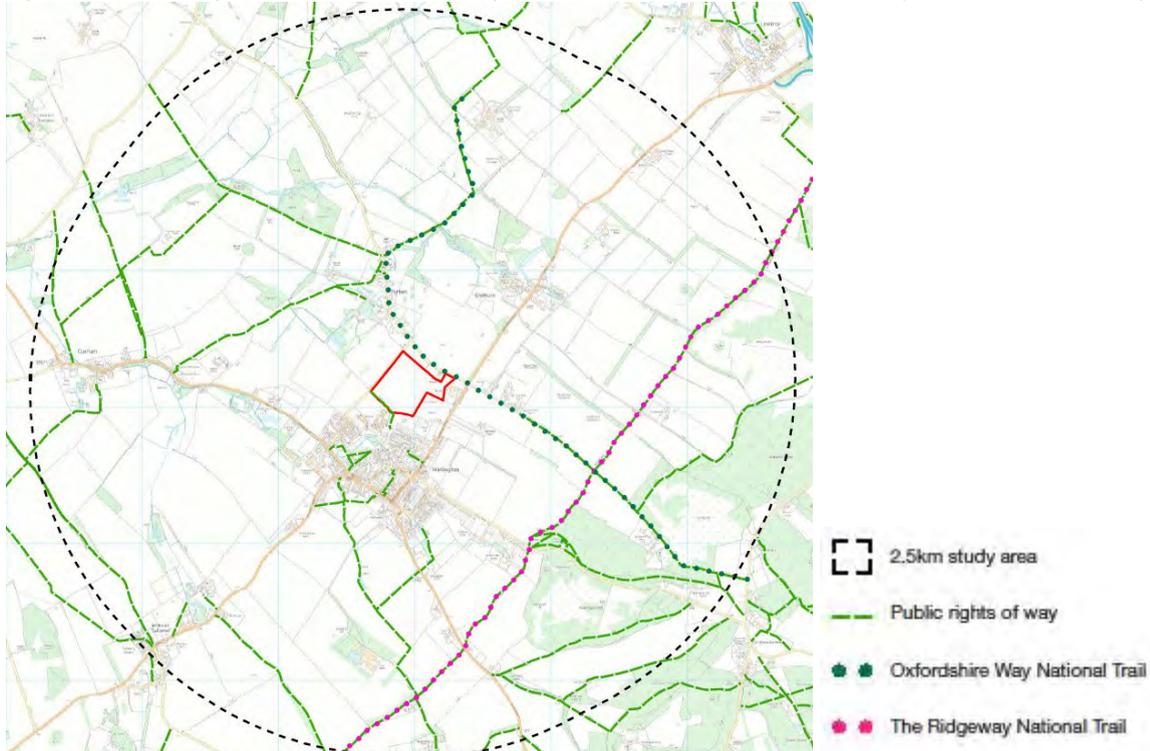


Fig. 26 Map showing public rights of way (PYR2 marked in red)

2. A detailed description of visual receptors likely to be affected by any development on PYR2 and described in the Landscape and Visual Appraisal undertaken by Terence O'Rourke Ltd in October 2016 in respect of Land off Pyrton Lane, Watlington (WAT8) is given below:

### 6.2.1. Recreation Users of Watlington Hill, National Trust inalienable land

1. Watlington Hill is located c 1.3km to the south-east of PYR2 and within the Chilterns AONB. A number of waymarked routes allow elevated and panoramic views over the lowland vales, a special quality and characteristic of the Chilterns AONB (Chilterns AONB Management Plan 2014-2019). PYR2 is clearly visible in the middle distance as areas of open land beyond the settlement boundary and partially screened by intervening vegetation on the fields south eastern boundaries. Receptors are recreation users, specifically walkers, and, given the importance of the AONB, this field has national significance.



Fig.27 View of land off Pyrton Lane (extent of PYR2 marked by blue dashed lines) from Watlington Hill, National Trust inalienable land approx. 1.9 km to the south east of the site looking north west

### 6.2.2. Users of a public right of way on Shirburn Hill, approximately 2.5km to the south east of the fields

1. Shirburn Hill and the public right of way are located within the Chilterns AONB and allow elevated, panoramic views over the lowland vales. Watlington is visible in the distance. PYR2 is largely screened, although perceptible, by intervening field boundary vegetation and tree belts. Receptors are recreation users, specifically walkers, and, given the importance of the AONB, the fields have national significance.

### 6.2.3. Users of the Ridgeway National Trail/Swans Way Long Distance Bridleroute

1. The trail is within the AONB and is of national significance. The long distance trail follows the lower elevations of the scarp slope and is bound by a narrow belt of vegetation, consisting largely of deciduous trees and shrubs, along much of its length within the study area. Vegetation visible in the immediate foreground is sufficiently dense to largely screen the fields and wider landscape to the west. However, during the winter months, vegetation is significantly more transparent and allows filtered views.



Fig.28 The Ridgeway National Trail/ Swans Way long distance bridleroute, approximately 1.2km from the south east of PYR2 (extent of the field marked by blue dashed lines) looking north west

#### 6.2.4. Users of the Oxfordshire Way National Trail/Station Road

- The Oxfordshire Way lies perpendicular to the ridgeline, following the unnamed road that leads from the village to the B4009, to the immediate north east of PYR2, and Station Road, to the east, rising steadily as it climbs the scarp slope to Pyrton Hill. The trail is partly within the AONB and is of national significance. Intervisibility with PYR2 varies along its length with proximity and elevation and according to the scale and distribution of intervening vegetation. Adjacent to PYR2's north-eastern boundary, views from Pyrton Road are filtered by a gappy hedgerow with more open views possible from two access points at The Bungalow and disused depot. Further north-east, beyond Church Lane, these fields are not visible from The Oxfordshire Way.



Fig. 29 Oxfordshire Way/Station Road, approximately 1.2km to the south east of PYR2 (extent of the field marked by blue dashed lines) looking west

- There is intervisibility between PYR2 and much of The Oxfordshire Way on Station Road. The intervening hedgerow, adjacent to Station Road, and trees on Watlington Road, filter middle distance views up to an elevation of approximately 130m AOD. Further up the western scarp slope, more elevated locations allow distance views of PYR2 above intervening vegetation.

**6.2.5. Users of Public Right of Way on the western boundary of PYR2, to the south of Pyrton Lane**

1. The public right of way to the immediate south west of PYR2 is unbounded and allows uninterrupted open views of most of this field.



Fig. 30 View from public right of way immediately adjacent to PYR2’s south west boundary looking north east

**6.2.6. Users of Watlington Recreation Ground**

1. Watlington Recreation Ground permits open views over the large majority of PYR2 to the immediate north-west. Limited screening of PYR2 is attributed to a largely gappy hedgerow.

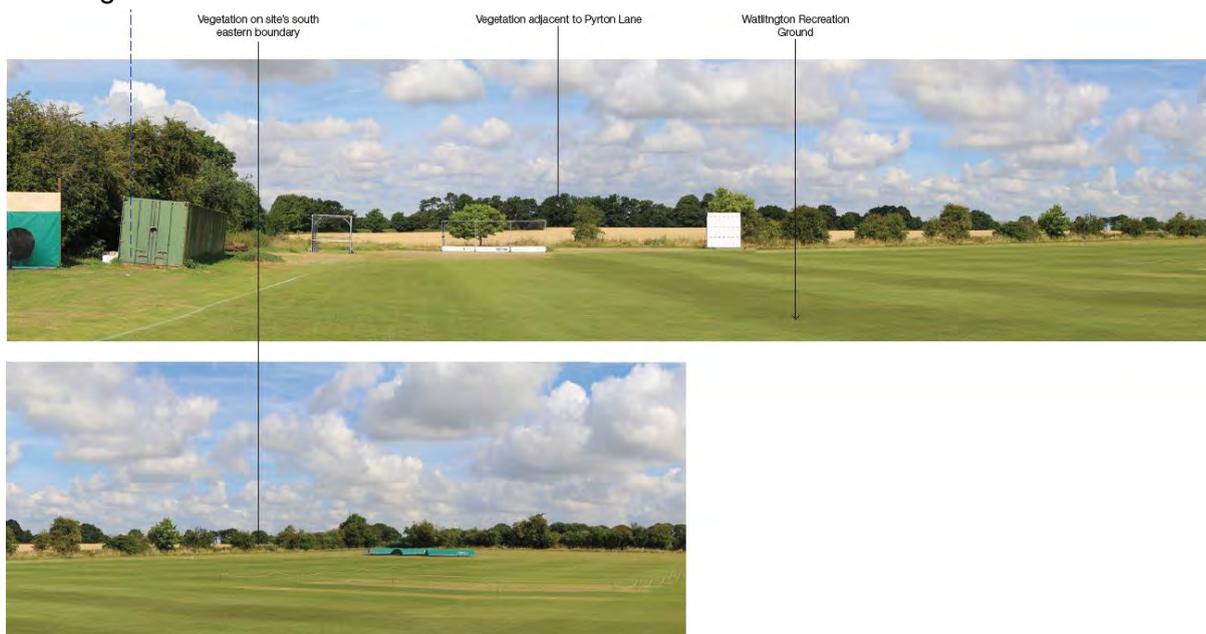


Fig. 31 View from Watlington Recreation Ground to the immediate south of PYR2 looking north

### 6.2.7. Users of Watlington Road/B4009 to the south-east of PYR2

- Views of PYR2 from Watlington Road are limited to an area between Station Road and entrance track to the Watlington Recreation Ground. Intervening vegetation, adjacent to the road edge, consists of mature deciduous trees and shrub/gappy hedgerow understorey, which largely obstructs views. During the winter months, vegetation is sparser and permits more open views of PYR2 beyond the Recreation Ground.



Fig. 32 Watlington Road, approximately 175 m to the south east of PYR2 looking west

### 6.2.8. Users of Pyrton Lane

- Views of PYR2 from Pyrton Lane adjacent to the north western boundary are largely screened by an intact and mixed, native hedgerow. Views are gained, however, through a field gate and during winter months when vegetation is less dense.

### 6.2.9. Users of Hill Road to the south

- Narrow glimpses of PYR2 are possible from Hill Road through gaps in the intervening hanger woodlands on the western scarp slope. These views are perceived during the winter months when the leaf cover is reduced.

### 6.2.10. Residents at The Bungalow on Pyrton Lane, immediately adjacent to the north-eastern boundary of PYR2

- Open views of PYR2 are seen from this house.

### 6.2.11. Residential Properties on Love Lane to the south of PYR2

- Glimpsed views are possible from the first floor of residential properties on Love Lane through the canopies of intervening vegetation on the sites south western boundary. As vegetation is largely deciduous, views are significantly more open during the winter months.

### 6.2.12. Students and Workers at Icknield Community College to the immediate south west of PYR2

1. The ground profile of PYR2 is not perceived from the adjacent school grounds due to a dense intervening hedgerow

## 7. Wildlife and Nature Conservation

1. As described in this study, the parish has a number of nationally important sites, rich with wildlife and affording special protection. These include the Chilterns AONB (most of the parish is within the AONB setting if not in the AONB itself), the Watlington and Pyrton Hills Site of Special Scientific Interest, Knightsbridge Lane Site of Special Scientific Interest, Shirburn registered park and garden of Special Historic Interest and Clare Copse ancient and semi-natural woodland.
2. The mature 50 acre parkland of Pyrton Manor, which directly abuts the village, provides a valuable habitat for wildlife. Of particular note is its collection of some 6,000 trees (both old and new), which is highly valuable, both in its own right and as a major and positive contributor to the setting of Pyrton Manor as a Grade II\* listed building, and the role which the house and its grounds play in establishing what is significant about the character and appearance of the Pyrton Conservation Area (see Pyrton Draft Conservation Area Appraisal). These trees and the water features within The Manor's grounds (notably the lake to its north-west) combine to form a series of diverse and important habitats for wildlife, including protected species such as water voles.



Fig.33 Parkland setting of The Manor, Pyrton

3. The private gardens of the village's houses and cottages, together with the long-established hedgerows to the fields or parkland which adjoin them and the generally wild (rather than overly manicured) grass verges that border the village roads and tracks all also provide significant habitats for native wildlife. Many garden songbirds have declined over the past decade, whereas other species have increased. The red kite is now a common, yet awe-inspiring site.
4. To the north-west of the village of Pyrton is a patchwork of fields, woods and pastureland. In the centre of the parish is a network of streams and ditches draining the land towards Cutmill in Cuxham. This environment, while predominantly agricultural, has been sensitively farmed: species rich hedgerows have been encouraged and around the margins of the fields strips have been left for wildlife. Over the past few years, under a woodland management scheme, over two thousand trees have been planted at Home Farm and important areas of woodland conserved.



Fig.34 The Lake at Pyrton Manor