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## **STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE & HERITAGE IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

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In respect of

**APPLICATION PROPOSALS FOR DEVELOPMENT ON TWO  
PARCELS OF LAND UNDER A NEIGHBOURHOOD  
DEVELOPMENT ORDER AT CLIFTON HAMPDEN, OXON**

On behalf of

**Thomas Homes & Clifton Hampden Parish Council**

**AHC REF: ND/9875**

**June 2022**

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## **1.0 INTRODUCTION AND SCOPE OF REPORT**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report, which has been prepared and written by Dr. Nicholas Doggett, FSA, MICfA, IHBC, Managing Director of Asset Heritage Consulting Ltd., on behalf of Thomas Homes and Clifton Hampden Parish Council, is two-fold.
- 1.2 The first is to provide an overview of the heritage significance of two adjoining parcels of land on the north and south sides of Abingdon Road (hereafter referred to as the 'Allotments' and Paddock sites respectively), which the Parish Council and Thomas Homes are collectively seeking to develop for housing under a Neighbourhood Development Order. Both sites are in the Clifton Hampden Conservation Area, with listed buildings situated close by.
- 1.3 The second purpose of the report is to consider how the application submission for these development proposals take account of the heritage significance of the two sites set out in this report, and how they can successfully and appropriately be developed without causing undue harm to the character and appearance of the conservation area or to the settings of the nearby listed buildings.
- 1.4 As such, this report complies with the requirements of paragraph 194 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and the onus it places on those planning changes to historic assets to include a clear description of the significance of the assets affected, albeit that the requirement in the NPPF is only such that *'The level of detail should be proportionate to the assets' importance and no more than is sufficient to understand the potential impact of the proposal on their significance'*.
- 1.5 The need to understand and evaluate 'significance' before moving on to assess the impact of potential change on that 'significance' has for some time been regarded as good conservation practice in the design and application process (see, for instance, English Heritage's 'Conservation Principles', 2008) and, following the introduction of the short-lived PPS5 in 2010 and then the original version of the NPPF in 2012, is now effectively a standard requirement for most applications affecting designated heritage assets.

- 1.6 Importantly, this approach also demonstrates to the District Council (or to any other decision maker) that the heritage significance of a site or building as it currently exists has been fully analysed and understood as an integral part of the formulation of application proposals.
- 1.7 Certainly, from my own knowledge of the area (including detailed site visits) and the desk-based research carried out for this report, it is clear to me that the application proposals constitute appropriate schemes of residential development that would not be unduly harmful to the significance of the heritage assets affected.
- 1.8 This report was originally written in June 2020 and this latest revision has been prepared to take account of the amendments made to the proposals following extensive public consultation in the village with residents and other relevant stakeholders, as well as the dialogue established with SODC officers.

## **2.0 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND, DESCRIPTION OF THE SITE AND SURROUNDING AREA AND ASSESSMENT OF HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE**

### Historical Background

- 2.1 As referred to in the *Victoria History for the County of Oxfordshire* (Vol.7, 1962. Pp.16-27), the parish of Clifton Hampden is a relatively modern one having only been established in 1819. The village, which is bounded by The Thames to the south, is however far older than that, with the main Dorchester to Abingdon road running through it from east to west.
- 2.2 This road originally ran through the lower part of the village, but its present straight course on the higher ground away from the river appears to be shown on Davis's county map of 1797 (the road was first turnpiked in 1736).
- 2.3 Clifton Hampden is one of the most picturesque villages in South Oxfordshire - in 1792 Lord Torrington described it in his diary as '*one of the prettiest and flemish-looking villages I ever saw*' - and many late 16th- and early 17th-century cottages remain today, particularly in the part of the village closest to the river.
- 2.4 The Victorian period has also left a notable mark on the character and appearance of the village, with the contribution of one of its most distinguished and prolific architects Sir George Gilbert (1811-78) evident in the bridge (1864), the manor house (originally built as a parsonage between 1843 and 1846), and his drastic restoration (practically a rebuilding) of the church in 1843-6 with further additions made in the 1860s.
- 2.5 Virtually all this Victorian work (several of the village's cottages were also extended or newly built at this time, as well as in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century) was paid for the Hucks Gibbs family, notably by Henry Huck Gibbs (1819-1907), a financier and antiquarian (created first Baron Aldenham in 1896), who was a significant benefactor to the village.
- 2.6 There is post-war ribbon development along the eastern side of Oxford Road, which is of a surprisingly attractive cottage-like character, while eight council houses (lying outside the conservation area) were also constructed on the northern side of Courtiers

Green during this period. Extensive infill development (mainly of the 1960s and 1970s) has taken place on the western side of Watery Lane (see the OS maps at **Appendix 1**).

- 2.7 Clifton Hampden was first designated a conservation area in December 1984 with amendments made to its boundaries in December 1989.

#### Description

- 2.8 For convenience, each site and its surroundings are described separately, beginning with the 'Allotments' site. This site, a large rectangular parcel of land bounded by Abingdon Road on its southern side has been at least in part used as allotments since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (being first marked as such on the 1:2500 OS map of 1910-12 – **Appendix 1**), with well-used public footpaths running along its other three sides (**plates 1-11**). The 1972 1:2500 OS map is the first to show the allotments confined only to the south-east part of the field, with the remainder used (as is currently the case) as agricultural land.
- 2.9 Immediately to the east of the village hall car park, which lies within the site, is the much altered and extended village hall (originally erected in 1896 under the patronage of Henry Huck Gibbs, it bears the Gibbs family motto 'TENAX PROPOSITI' – 'Firm of Purpose'), while directly to the east of the entrance to the footpath on the site's eastern boundary lies The Thatched House (also of 1896), one of several such cottages also erected at his expense, fronting onto Abingdon Road (**plates 12-15**).
- 2.10 The closest listed building to the 'Allotments' site is Courtiers, a fine early 18<sup>th</sup>-century house, first added to the statutory list in July 1963 (**Appendix 2**), immediately to the west of which is an attached range of attractive but unlisted cottages, including Cushion Cottage, Sundial Cottage and Pebble Cottage. The main (entrance) elevation of Courtiers with its pedimented front doorcase faces eastwards, but the rear elevation with a fenestration pattern reflecting that of the front elevation (albeit in five rather than seven bays) and its own centrally placed doorway is almost equally distinguished (**plates 16-21**).

- 2.11 All these buildings stand to the north-east of the site, from which they are separated by a dense hedge and other vegetation (**plates 22-24**), in which connection it should be noted that this is a well-established historic boundary shown on the first edition 1:2500 OS map of 1878-80, at which time there was also an orchard occupying the parcel of land to the west of the cottages referred to above (**Appendix 1**).
- 2.12 The hedge along the northern boundary of the site continues directly eastwards along the southern side of the lane leading from the footpaths around the site to Watery Lane. This hedge is punctuated by the brick-paved access driveways to the large 1960s bungalows of Trenoweth and Musbury Croft. These dwellings and the nature of their driveways are at odds with the otherwise strongly rural character of the lane (**plates 25-28**).
- 2.13 A further four 'standard' 1960s' and 1970s' infill houses, all set back from the road with large rear gardens running back to the hedge along the eastern boundary of the site occupy the western side of the northern part of Watery Lane before a series of historic cottages characteristically set directly onto the lane is reached. To the south again facing Abingdon Road is The Plough Inn, a Grade II listed building (**plates 29-34**).
- 2.14 Turning now to the 'Paddock' site, this lies on the southern side of Abingdon Road directly to the south-west of the 'Allotments' site. This site is irregularly shaped and bounded by the road on its northern side (it runs up to the former telephone exchange) and a public footpath on its eastern and much of its south-eastern sides.
- 2.15 The site is currently used as grazing land for horses with some scattered trees, but historically it was an orchard (see the 1:2500 OS maps at **Appendix 1**, that of as late as 1972 still showing it as such). Public views of the site from the road are limited owing to the dense deciduous hedge running all the way along this side, although this is doubtless more 'open' in winter (**plates 35-36**).
- 2.16 Even in summer however the site is visible from the public footpath running along its eastern edge over the low picket fence on the western side of the path; the taller close-boarded fence on the eastern side of the path prevents views to and from that direction (**plates 38-44**).



- 2.17 There are also views of the site from the area of concrete hard standing around the former telephone exchange, but these are hardly public views as such and are certainly little seen (**plates 45-47**).
- 2.18 Returning to the footpath along the eastern edge of the 'Paddock' site, the footpath makes an abrupt change of direction to the south-west approximately 100m from the road (**plate 48**). From this point the ground level of the footpath drops steadily in height, although not as dramatically as the land to the south-east which the footpath directly overlooks on its descent to High Street (**plates 49-51**).
- 2.19 This area of land includes two listed buildings fronting High Street – Vine Cottage, a mid-18<sup>th</sup>-century brick house under a plain tile roof immediately to the east of where the footpath meets High Street, and (on the other side of a pair of thatched but unlisted cottages), Clematis Cottage/Thames View, a 17<sup>th</sup>-century timber-framed building with a thatched roof (**plates 52-54**).
- 2.20 From the public footpath, it is of course the rear elevations of these buildings that are seen, along with the various additions to them and a variety of garden structures in their back gardens (**plates 55-61**).
- 2.21 The 'Paddock' site is however barely visible from this section of the footpath owing to the facts that it is on higher ground and that there is dense vegetation bounding the footpath on this side (**plates 62-66**). This, combined with the distance between the site and the listed buildings fronting High Street, means that it cannot be regarded as forming part of the settings of the listed buildings.

#### Assessment of Heritage Significance

- 2.22 The usual starting point for finding an objective assessment of the heritage significance of a building or area of land in a conservation area, and the reasons why it has been included in a conservation area in the first place, would be in a Conservation Area Character Appraisal prepared and published by the Council.

- 2.23 Unfortunately, however, despite the comparatively early designation of the Clifton Hampden Conservation Area in December 1984 and the amendments made to its boundaries in December 1989 there is as yet no such Appraisal of the designated area available.
- 2.24 This means that, without any 'baseline' information provided by the Council, the onus for identifying and defining significance as part of any development proposal within the Clifton Hampden Conservation Area falls entirely on applicants and their professional advisers.
- 2.25 In this particular case this lack of Appraisal provided by the Council does not pose a serious problem as it will be quite clear from the paragraphs above and the plates illustrating them that neither the 'Allotments' nor the 'Paddock' site, despite their attractive rural appearance, is of any specific heritage value.
- 2.26 That said, and although as referred to above the lack of any available explanation for the boundaries of the conservation area having been drawn where they are is frustrating, the boundaries are what they are and must have been placed where they are in order to provide an additional layer of protection to the core of the village.
- 2.27 Certainly, it is no part of this report to call into question the validity of or justification for the inclusion of the 'Allotments' and 'Paddock' sites in the conservation area. Rather I recognize that, although of no intrinsic heritage value in themselves, they make a contribution, albeit of a limited nature, to the character and appearance of the conservation area.
- 2.28 The ways in which this contribution may be preserved and the nature of any 'heritage harm' that may result from the proposed developments might be mitigated are discussed in the next section of this report.

### **3.0 THE HERITAGE ISSUES AND THE CASE FOR DEVELOPMENT**

- 3.1 As recognized in the 2015 Burcot & Clifton Hampden Village Plan, it has for some years been the ambition of Clifton Hampden Parish Council to provide support for an appropriate level of new housing within the village. This forms a key component of the emerging Neighbourhood Plan, and as part of this process the Parish Council has entered a partnership with Thomas Homes to deliver developments on the 'Allotments' and 'Paddock' sites under a Neighbourhood Development Order.
- 3.2 As in Section 2.0 of this report, the two sites are for convenience considered separately in this section of the report.
- 3.3 Beginning with the 'Allotments' site, it is now intended to provide 14 new homes, consisting of one-, two- and three-bed dwellings. A village square is proposed between the extended and improved village hall and the new purpose-built surgery, while another area of green open space is provided to the west. The square creates a convenient pedestrian route to and from the bus stop and a pedestrian access only, with provision for school drop-offs, facilitated by a kiss-and-drop arrangement.
- 3.4 To the west, a new main access is proposed off Abingdon Road, providing good visibility in both directions, while discreet, landscaped parking is provided for the new surgery and the allotments as well as overflow 'grasscrete' parking for parents of schoolchildren to use in the mornings and afternoons.
- 3.5 The details of the proposals shown on Drg. No. drawing no.19112.03 has evolved from the sketch scheme first prepared by Woodfield Brady Architects in June 2020 in response to the views of the local community expressed in the public consultation and also from a later version (prepared in July 2021), which included illustrative elevation drawings of the proposed houses and other buildings, as well as more detailing on the associated landscaping.
- 3.6 As such, the scheme now shows the proposed houses grouped around a village green or square to the north-east of the proposed surgery off a new access to the west of the existing one.

- 3.7 The original proposals for a lane running northwards off the northern end of the present village hall car park that would then have run parallel with the existing public footpath on the eastern boundary of the site have been abandoned, as a result of which the proposed dwellings are now confined to the southern part of the site.
- 3.8 The new, more compact layout on the southern part of the site has the significant heritage benefit that there is now no impact at all on the settings of the Grade II listed Courtiers or the attractive but unlisted cottages to its west.
- 3.9 Indeed, instead of largely being occupied by housing as originally proposed, the northern part of the site is now entirely made up of open space, comprising an area for allotments immediately to the north of the proposed housing with to the north of this an area of enhanced habitat landscape intended for the use and enjoyment of the whole Clifton Hampden community (see p.12 of the architects' Design & Access Statement).
- 3.10 Turning now to the suggested design of the proposed dwellings, the rationale for which is of course set out in full in the Design & Access Statement, the houses all adopt a rural feel and design, but with modern internal layouts and features such as larger doors and windows to provide maximum natural light.
- 3.11 Materials are a combination of red brick and render with limited elements of natural or dark-stained weatherboarding for ancillary buildings, all under clay tile roofs, which as such take their inspiration from the traditional palette of materials found throughout Clifton Hampden.
- 3.12 As far as the new L-shaped surgery building (the village surgery is currently located in a pair of converted cottages situated between Watery Lane and Oxford Road) is concerned, the design is of a more overtly modern idiom, with a mixture of brick and weatherboarded walls under a metal-seamed roof with boldly projecting eaves and gable ends, all intended to present a distinctive and worthy addition to the site's roadside frontage (see Drg. No. 19112.202).
- 3.13 Moving to the 'Paddock' site, the impact of the proposed scheme, accessed off Abingdon Road and which now comprises a large classical farmhouse-style building

and an adjoining but separate long barn-like structure providing two houses – all set in their own large gardens - is minimal in heritage terms.

- 3.14 As with the 'Allotments' site, the presence of the existing footpath on the eastern side of the site means that there are public views into the site from here (see paragraph 2.16 above), although as noted at paragraph 2.15 it is worth emphasizing that as late as 1972 these views would have been of an orchard rather than the open grazing land that exists today.
- 3.15 In any case, all the northern part of this site is to be retained as grazing land, while the character and appearance of the part directly adjoining the eastern footpath will be enhanced by its planting as a wildflower meadow. As shown on Woodfield Brady drawing no. 19112.03, all the important existing trees on the site itself will be retained.
- 3.16 Following the decision to move the proposed burial ground from the 'Allotments' to the 'Paddock' site, an appropriately landscaped 'grasscrete' car park is proposed alongside the burial ground in the north-west corner of the site.
- 3.17 As described at paragraphs 2.18 to 2.21 above, there are several listed and other buildings fronting High Street to the south and south-east of the site, but the dense vegetation bounding the footpath on this side (see **plates 62-66**), the marked fall in ground level from the site and the distance between the site and these buildings combine to mean that the 'Paddock' site simply cannot be regarded as forming part of the settings of any of these buildings.
- 3.18 This also applies to Little Place Cottage, a Grade II listed 17<sup>th</sup>-century thatched cottage, which is set back from the road in a well-screened garden just to the north-west of the point where the footpath meets High Street (**plate 67**).
- 3.19 It goes almost without saying that no change is proposed as part of the development scheme to the footpath or the vegetation alongside it.

#### Overall Assessment of Heritage Harm

- 3.20 It will be clear from the above that the revisions to the 'Allotments' scheme mean that there can now be no conceivable harm to the significance of the setting of Courtiers as a Grade II listed building.
- 3.21 Both sites are however located in the Clifton Hampden Conservation Area and, although both development schemes are appropriately and sensitively handled, it must also be acknowledged that in their present form neither site (notwithstanding some abandoned plots on the 'Allotments' site) can be said to detract from the character and appearance of the designated area.
- 3.22 As such, neither site needs development to enhance the visual contribution they presently make to the conservation area, and it is therefore conceivable that their proposed development may raise some concerns in terms of the effect this would have on the conservation area.
- 3.23 That said, it is nevertheless clear that the level of harm that might be caused to the conservation area falls very much at the lower end of 'less than substantial harm' as that term is defined and used in the NPPF and the accompanying PPG.
- 3.24 In that scenario, paragraph 202 of the NPPF comes into play and, while it is for others to set out where the 'public benefits' which would directly flow from the development schemes lie, it seems to me that this is a case where the decision maker might very fairly conclude that these benefits would outweigh the degree of 'heritage harm' caused.

## **4.0 CONCLUSION**

- 4.1 For all the reasons set out in the body of this report, it is clear both sites can accommodate appropriate schemes of residential development that would not be harmful to the significance of the settings of any nearby listed buildings.
- 4.2 It is however conceivable that, given both sites are currently free of any built development, concerns might be raised about the impact that the proposals would have on the character and appearance of the Clifton Hampden Conservation Area, albeit, in my opinion, the level of heritage harm that might be caused falls very much at the lower end of 'less than substantial harm' as that term is defined and used in the NPPF and the accompanying PPG.
- 4.3 In such a scenario, paragraph 202 of the NPPF comes into play and, while it is for others to set out where the 'public benefits' which would directly flow from the development schemes lie, it seems to me that this is a case where the decision maker might very fairly conclude that these benefits would outweigh the degree of 'heritage harm' caused.



**Plate 1: 'Allotments' site looking west from village hall car park**



**Plate 2: General view looking north across the village hall car park**





**Plate 3: Looking north-eastwards from northern end of the village hall car park**



**Plate 4: Public footpath on eastern side of site looking north**



**Plate 5: Public footpath on eastern side of site looking south**



**Plate 6: Looking north-westwards across the site from the footpath on its eastern boundary**



**Plate 7: Looking northwards along footpath near its northern end**



**Plate 8: Looking southwards along footpath from same position as in plate 7**



**Plate 9: Looking south-westwards near intersection of eastern and northern footpaths**



**Plate 10: Looking westwards along footpath on northern boundary of the site**



**Plate 11: Access to the footpath on the western boundary of the site viewed from Abingdon Road**



**Plate 12: Village hall, viewed from Abingdon Road**



**Plate 13: Village hall, viewed from car park**



**Plate 14: Entrance to eastern footpath, seen from Abingdon Road**



**Plate 15: The Thatched House, seen from Abingdon Road**



**Plate 16: Courtiers, front elevation seen from Watery Lane**



**Plate 17: Courtiers, rear elevation**



**Plate 18: Courtiers, rear elevation, detail of ground floor, showing entrance to Pebble Cottage**





**Plate 19: Cushion Cottage**



**Plate 20: Cushion Cottage**



**Plate 21: Sundial Cottage**



**Plate 22: Dense hedges/vegetation from the boundary along the northern and eastern boundaries of the site**



**Plate 23: Dense hedges/vegetation from the boundary along the northern and eastern boundaries of the site, Courtiers visible behind**



**Plate 24: Hedge along the northern boundary of the site, seen from the north**



**Plate 25: Trenoweth seen from its access driveway**



**Plate 26: Trenoweth viewed over the hedge on the eastern boundary of the site**



**Plate 27: Musbury Croft seen from its access driveway**



**Plate 28: Looking westwards along the lane past Courtiers**



**Plate 29: Looking southwards along Watery Lane from its 'junction' with the lane**



**Plate 30: Typical 1960s/70s infill development on the western side of Watery Lane**



**Plate 31: Typical 1960s/70s infill development on the western side of Watery Lane**



**Plate 32: Characteristic cottage development towards the southern end of Watery Lane**



**Plate 33: Characteristic cottage development towards the southern end of Watery Lane**



**Plate 34: Looking towards The Plough Inn from Abingdon Road**





**Plate 35: A dense hedge bounds the Abingdon Road side of the 'Paddock' site**



**Plate 36: The northern side of the road is bounded by a similar hedge**



**Plate 37: The entrance from Abingdon Road to the footpath on the eastern edge of the 'Paddock' site**



**Plate 38: The entrance from Abingdon Road to the footpath on the eastern edge of the 'Paddock' site**



**Plate 39: Looking towards the 'Paddock' site from the public footpath along its eastern edge**



**Plate 40: Looking towards the 'Paddock' site from the public footpath along its eastern edge**



**Plate 41: Looking towards the 'Paddock' site from the public footpath along its eastern edge**



**Plate 42: Looking towards the 'Paddock' site from the public footpath along its eastern edge**



**Plate 43: Close-boarded fence on eastern side of footpath to eastern edge of the 'Paddock' site, looking north**



**Plate 44: Close-boarded fence on eastern side of footpath to eastern edge of the 'Paddock' site, looking south**



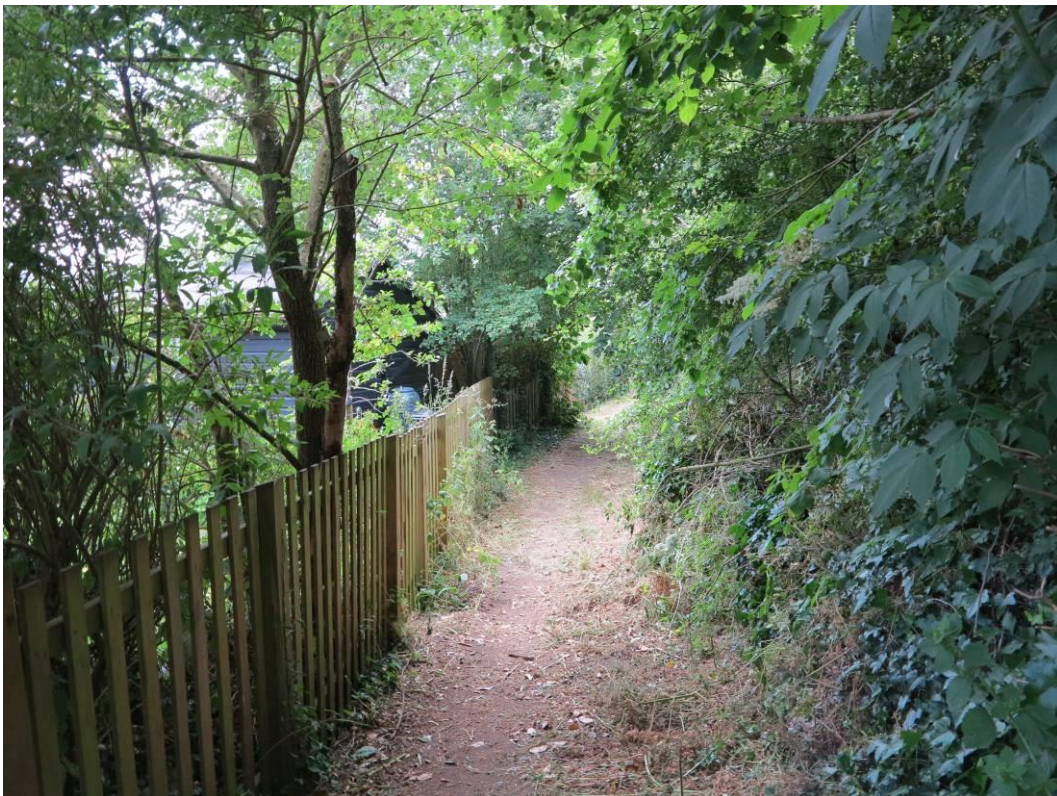
**Plate 45: The former telephone exchange on Abingdon Road**



**Plate 46: View from the area around the telephone exchange towards the 'Paddock' site**



**Plate 47: View from the area around the telephone exchange towards the 'Paddock' site**



**Plate 48: The point where the footpath turns sharply to the south-west**



**Plate 49: The footpath drops in height as it approaches High Street**



**Plate 50: The footpath drops in height as it approaches High Street**





**Plate 51: The 'junction' between the footpath and High Street**



**Plate 52: Vine Cottage, seen from High Street**



**Plate 53: Unlisted pair of thatched cottages situated between Vine Cottage and Clematis Cottage/Thames View**



**Plate 54: Clematis Cottage/Thames View**



**Plate 55: Looking from the footpath over the rear gardens of the houses fronting High Street between Vine Cottage and Clematis Cottage/Thames View**



**Plate 56: Looking from the footpath over the rear gardens of the houses fronting High Street between Vine Cottage and Clematis Cottage/Thames View**



**Plate 57: Looking from the footpath over the rear gardens of the houses fronting High Street between Vine Cottage and Clematis Cottage/Thames View**



**Plate 58: Looking from the footpath over the rear gardens of the houses fronting High Street between Vine Cottage and Clematis Cottage/Thames View**



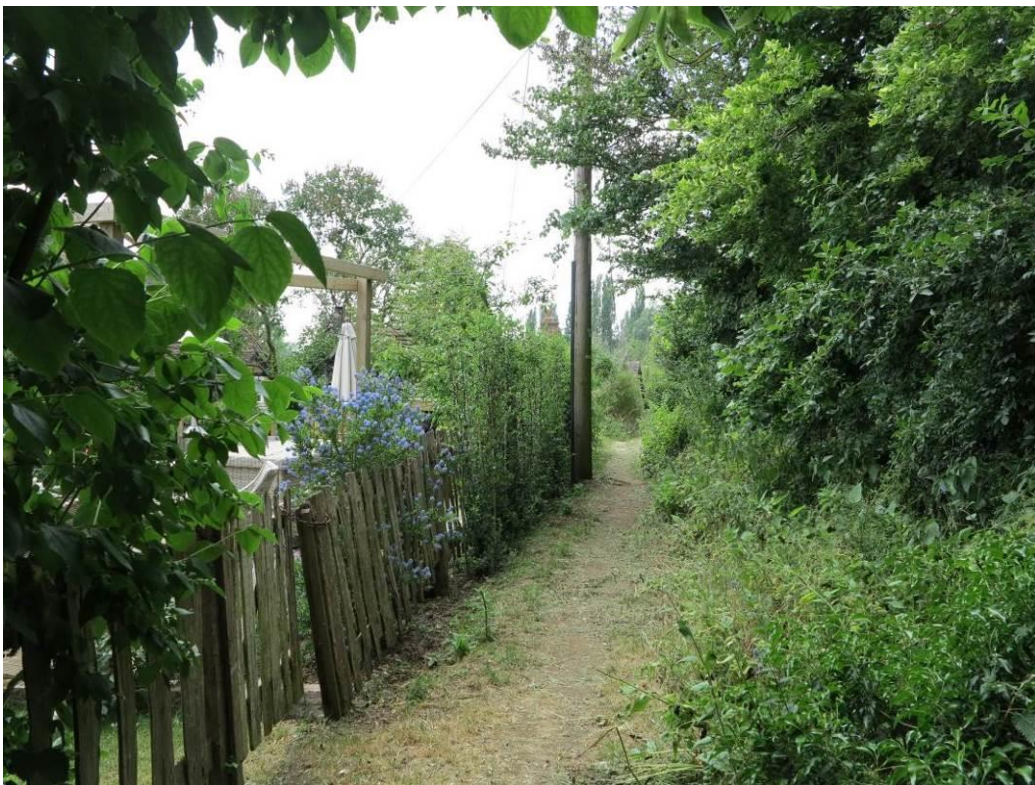
**Plate 59: Looking from the footpath over the rear gardens of the houses fronting High Street between Vine Cottage and Clematis Cottage/Thames View**



**Plate 60: Looking from the footpath over the rear gardens of the houses fronting High Street between Vine Cottage and Clematis Cottage/Thames View**



**Plate 61: Looking from the footpath over the rear gardens of the houses fronting High Street between Vine Cottage and Clematis Cottage/Thames View**



**Plate 62: Note the dense vegetation on the side of the footpath adjoining the 'Paddock' site**



**Plate 63: Note the dense vegetation on the side of the footpath adjoining the 'Paddock' site**



**Plate 64: Note the dense vegetation on the side of the footpath adjoining the 'Paddock' site**



**Plate 65: From the end of the footpath, the higher ground level of the 'Paddock' site and the trees and other vegetation around it is clearly discernible**



**Plate 66: From the end of the footpath, the higher ground level of the 'Paddock' site and the trees and other vegetation around it is clearly discernible**





**Plate 67: Little Place Cottage, seen from High Street**