

Heritage Constraints and Opportunities

North of Napsbury Hospital

5 March 2021

Introduction

1. This heritage advice note has been prepared by Heritage Collective, part of HCUK Group on behalf of Trans Link London Ltd. It is intended to provide heritage related advice to consider if, and to what extent, the proposed land North of Napsbury Hospital can be developed and identify any constraints or opportunities. The site is under consideration by St Albans City and District Council for inclusion as a strategic site for development in its Local Plan and this note will assist in providing initial heritage information to assist in their process. Further information and advice will be provided should any scheme for the site be developed in more detail.

Context

2. The proposed site is located to the north of Napsbury Hospital. The whole site is c.100ha and is bounded to the east and north by Shenley Lane, to the west partly by the main London to St Albans railway line and on the other sides by former agricultural land that formed part of the hospital site.
3. The site is within the Napsbury Hospital, a grade II Registered Park and Garden. It falls outside but immediately north of the Napsbury Conservation Area. There is no built form currently on the site, which historically formed an area of kitchen gardens and orchard. A modern housing development was built from c.2002 - 2008 to accommodate 550 new houses within the former hospital grounds and abuts the site to the south.

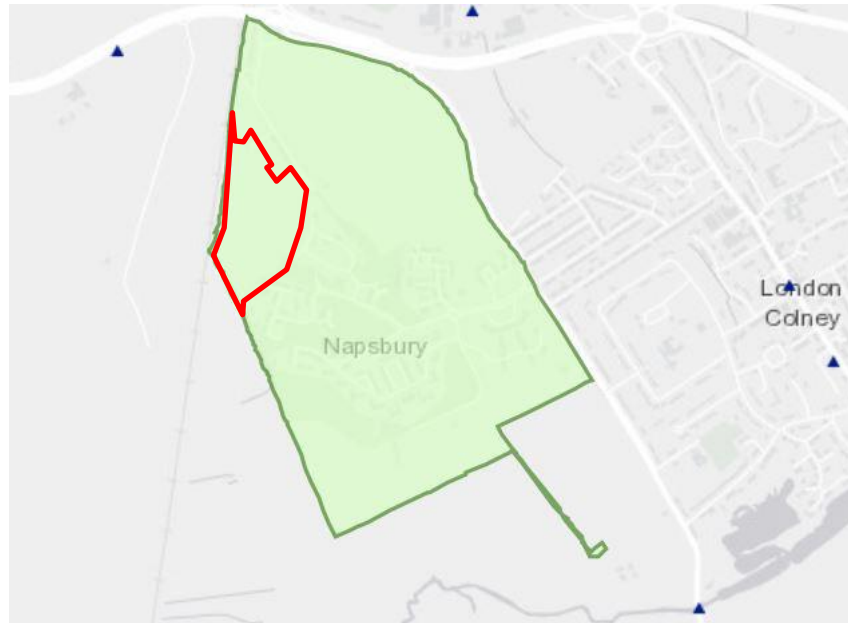


Figure 1: Napsbury hospital Registered Park and Garden outline, approximate site outline. (Historic England Statutory List: <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/map-search?clearresults=true>)

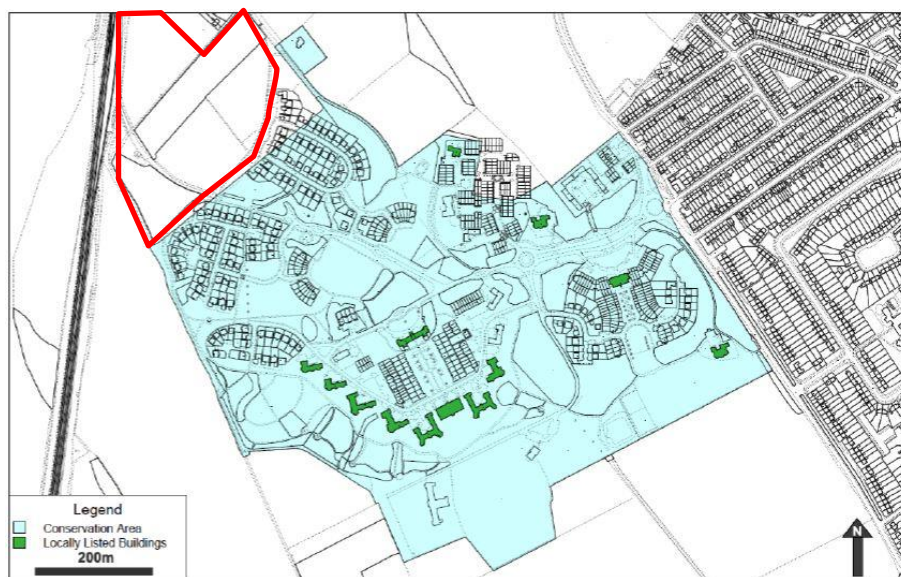


Figure 2: Napsbury Hospital Conservation Area, approximate site outline. (St Albans City and District Council)

Historic Context of the Site

4. The proposed site formed part of the Napsbury Hospital grounds. Napsbury Manor Farm was purchased in 1898 for the construction of a new asylum. It was designed by Rowland Plume (n.d) in 1900 to serve Middlesex. The design of the new hospital was based upon visits conducted by Plume to Scotland to consider a new

type of design for asylums which was inspired by the continental colony system.¹ This included the use of detached villas in addition to the more traditional echelon-plan main buildings. The original hospital was designed to house 1,152 patients.

5. Some of the farm buildings were repurposed for hospital use and the farm land was utilised to provide therapy for the inmates of the hospital.
6. An arrangement was made with the Midland Railway Company to provide a station on the Company's line. A new branch line was built to provide access to the main buildings and a siding included near to the boiler house to bring coal.²

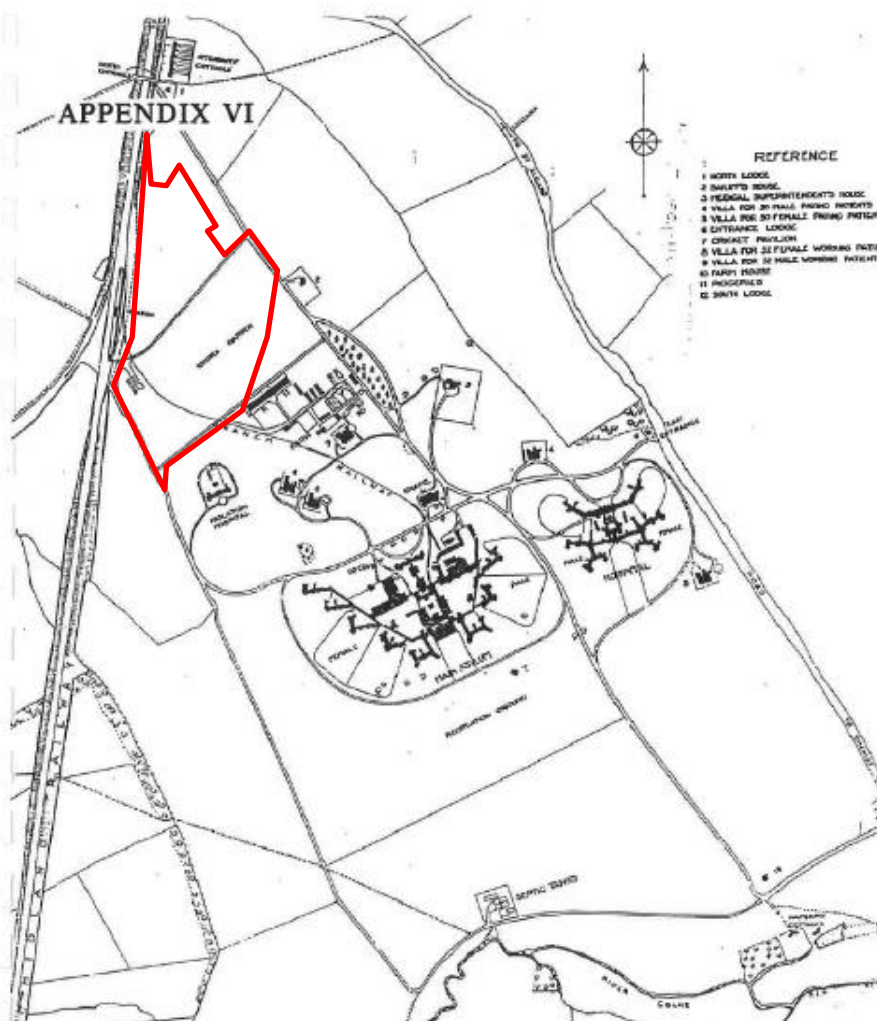


Figure 3: Layout of the Hospital buildings with the approximate site area indicated.

¹ H. Richardson, *Napsbury Park, formerly Middlesex County Asylum* via <https://historic-hospitals.com/2016/09/20/napsbury-park-formerly-middlesex-county-asylum/> [Accessed 24 February 2021]

² Ibid.

7. The grounds of the asylum were designed by William Goldring (1854-1919). These were laid out with consideration to guidance contained within the "Suggestions and Instructions of the Commissioners in Lunacy" (revised 1898). This suggested the inclusion of wide paths, garden shelters, lawns and orchards. The layout of informal paths can be seen on the Ordnance Survey (OS) Map of 1922-3 (Figure 2).
8. To the north of the hospital, the area of the proposed site is shown as two parcels of land (the northern a triangular shape, the southern more rectangular with a building on the east) divided by a broad strip with parallel rows of trees indicated. The railway station on the main line is clear with the sidings providing access for supplies to be delivered to the hospital gently curving across the site area towards the south and east. There is no longer any evidence of the sidings and station on the site. It is interesting to note that the map shades an area of land to the east of the approach road from the north with a map convention for 'parkland'. Contrast between the ostensibly open area of the site and the much more wooded areas around the hospital buildings are also striking.



Figure 4: 1922-1923 OS Map with approximate site outline (crossing two map sheets).

Site as Existing

9. Currently the site is an area of scrub with mature trees sporadically around it. There are views to the nearest housing built to the north of the asylum in 2002-2008 from within the southern part of the site, and views to the roofs from the more northerly region. There are views to the village of Napsbury from within the north of the site.
10. There is very limited evidence on the ground of the railway siding appreciable within the site. It is not raised up or otherwise visible on the ground, and no readily apparent evidence of the former use as a kitchen garden, though the generally

overgrown condition of the site may be screening features. The former orchard is largely gone, though a fence line appears to replicate its northern edge. The following photographs (figures 6-9) demonstrate the current character of the site. With a google earth image at Figure 10 indicating that in aerial view some features remain legible even where they are not apparent at ground level.

11. At present the site is undeveloped and open in nature. This contributes to the green, semi-rural character which was an important consideration of the new housing development to the south when it was built in 2002-2008. The site was originally intended to be used as a kitchen garden and to provide access for the railway to the main hospital. Its historic function was not one of specifically undeveloped land intended to provide a purely green backdrop to the asylum, it was not overtly open pasture or parkland; it had a more functional and practical use, including a railway line, which is no longer obvious.



Figure 5: Site location and viewpoints of following photographs



Figure 6: Proposed site facing west from outside of the site. Modern boundary fence reflecting the end of the housing development from 2002 -2008



Figure 7: View across the southern part of the site facing south-west. No appreciation of the historic sidings, fencing or orchard are appreciable in this view.



Figure 8: View from the northern portion of the site facing south-east. No discernible features in this view but the roof of the modern housing can just be seen beyond the existing mature vegetation (highlighted by arrow).



Figure 9: View from the north of the site facing south. In this view the modern housing is visible and demonstrates a lack of historic features currently appreciable.



Figure 10: Aerial view (Google Earth) with relic lines of former features indicated.

Significance of the Napsbury Conservation Area

12. St Albans City and District Council have produced a detailed Conservation Area Appraisal for Napsbury Park (February 2019). It summarises the significance of this asset as:
 - Its history as a hospital site with large buildings, formal layouts and extensive parkland;
 - Mature trees within the parkland which have been retained despite the recent housing development;
 - Mature landscape setting of the surroundings;
 - Relationship between the hospital buildings and the landscape;
 - The modern housing development has retained a sense of the original Victorian development in the materiality and layout; and
 - Views noted in the conservation area appraisal are to the south where there are long views to the countryside beyond.
13. In summary the character and appearance of the conservation area is dependent upon its relationship with the former hospital buildings and the mature landscape both within the conservation area and within its setting. The recent housing

development which dates to c.2002-2008 is an important element of the current built form which has respected the original character of the hospital buildings. Its design and layout has ensured the new buildings are grounded in the landscape with a strong green character, mature tree planting and a semi-rural appearance.

Napsbury Hospital RPG

14. Napsbury Hospital is a grade II registered park and garden, first designated on 26 August 1998. A summary of its significance is provided below:

- William Goldring designed the grounds in an informal style incorporating the existing mature trees into the design to create an established landscape. There is associative interest with him as a garden designer;
- The main building is the Echelon styled mental asylum, designed in 1900 by Roland Plume (n.d) and opened in 1905, surrounded by grounds in informal style designed c.1902 by William Goldring;
- One of only two known public landscapes designed by Goldring and his only surviving hospital landscape design giving it rarity value;
- Buildings within the site which contribute to its architectural and historic interest include the original hospital accommodation which includes the main building, central administrative and service block and the water; and
- Landscaped airing courts were principally to the south of the two main buildings and incorporated recommendations by the Commissioners in Lunacy including the use of gardens, orchards and lawns with shelters and wide paths.

15. The former kitchen gardens, orchard and glasshouses which were located to the north of the hospital buildings have since been largely lost or hidden beneath mature vegetation – evidential and illustrative values that these areas once had are heavily eroded today. They are identified within the list description as follows:

KITCHEN GARDEN/FARM The former kitchen garden and farm buildings lie along the west side of the north drive. The kitchen garden, surrounded by hedges and now derelict, lies 400m north of the main asylum, the southern section containing derelict glasshouses. An orchard runs along the north side

of the former kitchen garden, extending from the railway to the north drive, with an open field to the north.

Contribution of the Potential Site

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16. At present the site is overgrown and unmanaged with mature vegetation which appear to be an invasive species (scrub including hawthorn) of no overt historic merit. It is now difficult on the ground to gain any appreciation or experience of the kitchen gardens or railway sidings that used to be on the site as seen by the historic map (Figure 4). There is some mature tree planting, perhaps some being remnants of the former orchard, but means of understanding historic character and function on the ground is today heavily compromised and eroded.

Contribution to the RPG

17. Within registered park and garden, the proposed site has a notably different character from that described in historic sources and surviving areas of better preserved historic landscape elsewhere within the designated areas. It does not have a parkland aspect, there is no real means of appreciating or understanding the former railway sidings or station from the ground. Almost all legible evidence of the presence of the orchard and kitchen gardens have been lost.
18. The current site, although undeveloped and relatively open, is considered a neutral or very low contributor to the heritage values of the RPG. Its former function is no longer clearly legible and this has eroded any contribution to historic values. The only architectural features legible within this area or its immediate surroundings are later residential development to the north and south, not the designed hospital buildings. It does not facilitate or enable means of appreciating or experiencing either the historic built forms or the more formal surviving landscape attributes that survive to a greater degree to the south and offers very limited means of appreciating the historic character or function of this area.
19. The site today does not reflect the historic situation to any great degree and because of the loss of this past character, it now makes little or no contribution to the heritage values of either the registered park or the conservation area's setting. The evidence for the kitchen garden areas and the important transportation links to the railway are now best reflected in the historic maps and

other documentary evidence, or aerial views to a degree. The site's neglected character does not make a positive contribution to the overall character and appearance of the conservation area. Though westward views from Lovatt Road, which cross the southern part of the proposed site, are highlighted within the conservation area appraisal as being 'extensive', they are not particularly long or distant and the flat topography here and elevated line of the main railway line, combined with the poor quality of the land itself, make them markedly lower quality than the truly 'extensive' views afforded down the sloping topography of mature and well maintained parkland to the south of the hospital.

Contribution to the Conservation Area

20. The site makes up part of the setting of the conservation area but enables no 'experience' of the historic core of the hospital complex at all. Neither does it offer means of understanding the historic railway access or kitchen garden history. It has become separated from the legibility of the core part of the conservation area. The modern housing to the south, which although part of the conservation area, is partly visible and appreciable from the site but this is an experience of the latest element of the former hospital's history rather than its key historic elements. Similarly views of the rear of properties to the north suggest that the proposed site is not open or pristinely rural as other areas of the setting are (those areas to the south of the hospital for example). As an area that has historic links and functional association with the hospital the Site is of interest, but because of the low survival of these elements it offers limited means of understanding those links and associations. It does not currently better reveal or reinforce a sense of the historic character and appearance of the core of the conservation area. Nor does it conform to the character of the wider setting, identified as being a mature rural landscape. This area is ostensibly neglected, poorly maintained scrub with little sense of either long term agricultural use and no sense of the historic kitchen garden role reflected in documentary evidence.
21. The site today makes up a neutral element of the setting of the conservation area because of the known historic links and associations. If the documentary evidence were not in place to explain the links to the main hospital site, the current condition of the area alone might lead to it being viewed as a detracting element of setting.

Constraints and Opportunities

Constraints and Design Guidance

22. Given the parkland character and the importance of landscape setting to the hospital buildings, conservation area and registered park and garden, any new development on the site will need to respect the characteristics which contribute to their heritage interest. The following constraints will need to be considered for any future development:

- Openness – The conservation appraisal document notes the importance of openness within the conservation area and identifies the value of the semi-rural setting. The north western character area of the conservation area has 'outward views' for the houses on the perimeter, some of which are over the proposed site, and there are also substantial open landscaped areas within this corner of the development too. At present the site is overgrown and the views there are, are relatively poor. Any future development on the site will need to consider how a sense of openness can be maintained within the design, much as openness was built into the previous development to the north of the historic hospital.
- Quantity and Density – The quantum of development would need to be carefully considered to ensure that mature tree planting, landscaping and a sense of historic features were all preserved or even enhanced in the future proposals and that density and scale of housing or other development is appropriate within the historic context;
- Layout - The historic maps and current aerial views give evidence of historic features and land parcels within this area that are much less obvious today. Despite this erosion of historic character, respecting those landscape division constraints is likely to be more respectful of historic layout and better reveal its character.
- Design and material constraints – There is a commonality of materials and building heights in the conservation area and these would need to be respected for any future development. Buildings would need to relate to the predominant two storey-built form in red brick with private gardens, wide paths and sensitively arranged parking; and

- Trees – While evidence of the former orchard and kitchen garden character of the plot has largely been lost, there are mature hedgerows and trees which should be incorporated into any future design, the majority of these are protected by a tree preservation order and any future layout will need to respect these as they form an integral part of the character of the area.

Opportunities

23. The above constraints give a clear indicator of how to approach new development on this site in a positive way to reinforce the special characteristics that could secure a strong sense of place here, and to avoid issues that could further erode or harm the character of the Registered park or setting of the conservation area. The following points could be positive elements to reinforce and build upon with any proposed development for this area.

- Re-establishing the railway sidings in the site – the new housing to the south already incorporated the historic route of the railway siding as 'Sidings way'. Continuing this feature would not only re-establish and better reveal something of the historic layout of the site but also offers opportunities for new development to successfully blend with the existing creating a coherent and positive sense of place. Within the conservation area appraisal, it is noted that there is a lack of connectivity through the grounds in the north west character area. There is an opportunity at this site to assist with this;
- It is noted within the conservation area appraisal that the continued maintenance of the grounds is important for the upkeep of the area. The proposed site at present is overgrown with no maintenance. Any future development could help to ensure the maintenance of this area;
- There is the potential for higher quality open green spaces to be incorporated into any future design and to reinstate character or functional areas that reflect or reinstate elements of productive garden redolent of the former kitchen gardens or orchards that were located here; and
- An opportunity for presentation boards could be explored to help explain the history of the site and provide context to the site and wider

development. This would enable intellectual access to the historic past of the site and its relationship to the asylum.

Summary

24. In summary, although the conservation area appraisal considers the sense of openness on the Site to be important and a restriction on further development, the assessment of the specific qualities of this space contained within this note suggests that development could be acceptable. Further development may have an impact on openness, but this might not give rise to any specific further erosion of heritage values subject to the specific design proposed. The proposed site for new housing is currently not making a meaningful contribution to the character and appearance of the area and its development would allow for improvements to heritage character as well as securing maintenance of the area, permeability and connectivity and with careful design the retention and inclusion of the existing mature tree planting.
25. Public open green space could be provided to give a sense of the former kitchen gardens and footpaths/a road could demarcate the former railway siding. These would also allow a continued sense of openness.
26. There are opportunities for the enhancement of this piece of land and for its former historic function and relationship to the hospital site to be better revealed, understood and appreciated. The degraded nature of this part of the site means that, subject to the careful consideration of heritage matters identified above, this site could be developed to some degree without further erosion of heritage values.