

LAND WEST OF TRUANT HOUSE, CHURCH LANE, FROXFIELD, WILTSHIRE

Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment



FORUM
Heritage
Services

**LAND WEST OF TRUANT HOUSE,
CHURCH LANE, FROXFIELD,
WILTSHIRE**

Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment

Bob Edwards

BSc. (Hons.) PG Dip. IHBC MCIfA

August 2025

FORUM
Heritage
Services

© Forum Heritage Services Ltd 2025

Disclaimer:

This document has been prepared for the titled project or named part thereof and should not be relied upon or used for any other project without an independent check being carried out as to its suitability and prior written authority of Forum Heritage Services being obtained. Forum Heritage Services accepts no responsibility or liability for the consequences of this document being used for a purpose other than the purposes for which it was commissioned. Any person/party using or relying on the document for such other purposes agrees, and will by such use or reliance be taken to confirm their agreement to indemnify Forum Heritage Services for all loss or damage resulting therefrom. Forum Heritage Services accepts no responsibility or liability for this document to any party other than the person/party by whom it was commissioned.

LAND WEST OF TRUANT HOUSE, CHURCH LANE, FROXFIELD, WILTSHIRE

Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 An application for planning permission is being submitted to Wiltshire Council for a single detached dwelling, garage, and parking areas for both the new house and for visitors to the adjacent Church of All Saints (Grade II*) on a plot of land forming part of the grounds of Truant House, Froxfield, Wiltshire. This application follows a submission requesting pre-application advice for the development (ENQ/2024/01162). Whilst stating that the proposed development was acceptable in design terms, and it would have a neutral impact on the setting of the listed parish church to the north and not harm the character and appearance of the Froxfield Conservation Area, it was advised that an assessment of the archaeological potential of the site should be submitted with any future application.

1.2 Forum Heritage Services has been commissioned to undertake a Desk-Based Assessment (DBA) on the proposed development site to inform the planning application. Bob Edwards BSc (Hons) PG Dip IHBC MCIfA, Director of Forum Heritage Services visited the site in June 2025 and subsequently prepared this report.

1.3 The purpose of this DBA is to assess, as far as possible, evidence conveyed by archaeological records, historic maps and other sources, and also informed by a site visit, to develop an understanding of the historic environment in order to:

- Assess the potential for heritage assets to be encountered within the proposed development site.
- Assess the likely significance of any heritage assets identified within the site
- To identify and consider the importance of the setting of any heritage assets lying within the vicinity of the proposed development site
- Propose strategies for further evaluation to further understand the potential for, and the significance of any heritage assets on the site if required
- Propose, if appropriate, further archaeological investigations.

1.4

This report will present:

- Location and description of the site and its surroundings
- Methodology
- Policy and guidance background
- An archaeological and historic background to the proposed development site
- An assessment of the potential for archaeology to be encountered on the site
- An assessment of the setting of nearby listed buildings
- Conclusions
- Appendix I: Wiltshire Historic Environment Record data (table and plan)

2.0 LOCATION & SITE DESCRIPTION

- 2.1 Truant House lies on the south side of Church Lane which runs westwards from The Green towards the Church of All Saints which stands at the north-western edge of the village of Froxfield at NGR SU 2960, 6780 (Figure 1). When the lane approaches the church, it makes a sharp turn to the north-west.

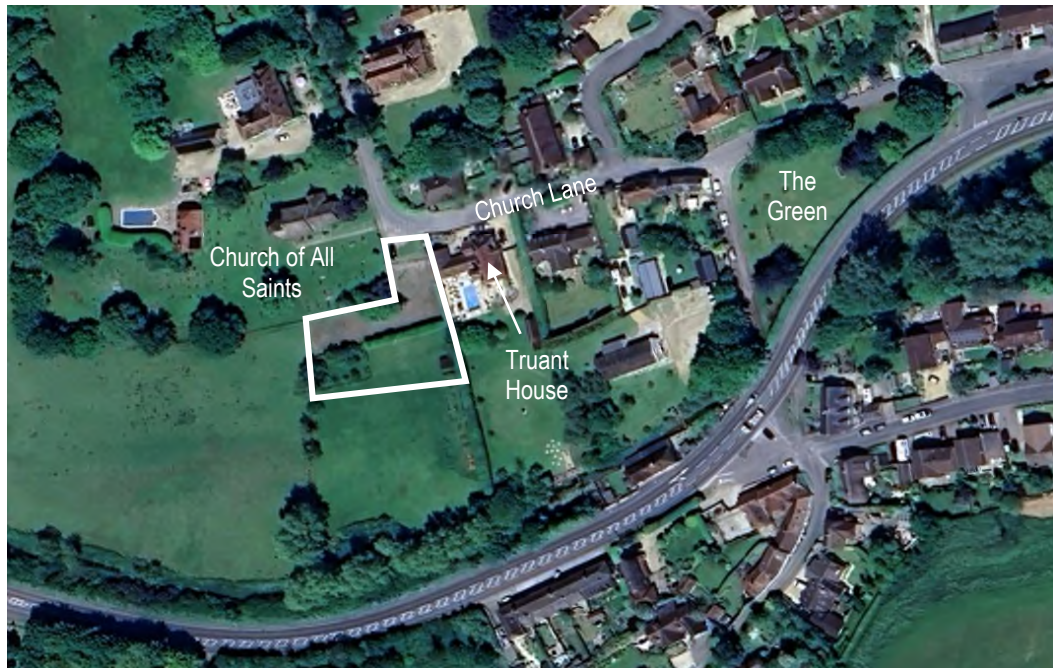


Figure 1 Site location plan.

- 2.2 Truant House is an unlisted former school building which stands close to the street frontage and has a large garden area to the rear which runs down to the stream. Also forming part of the property is a grassed area to the west of the rear garden that also extends as far south as the main road which is part of the proposed development site. To the north of this plot, separated by a tall hedge line, is a L-plan plot that wraps around the south-east corner of the churchyard, having a frontage to Church Lane west of Truant House.
- 2.3 The proposed development plot slopes gently from Church Lane (at approx. 112m OD) down into the valley of the Froxfield Stream, the ground flattening out in the southern part of the site (at approx. 109m OD) (Figures 2 – 4). The site is bounded by hedges to the east and south, by a post and rail fence and some planting to the west, and an iron post and rail fence separates the site from the churchyard to the north. To the west is a pasture field.



Figure 2 The northern part of the site looking south from Church Lane.



Figure 3 The northern part of the site adjacent to the southern edge of the churchyard, looking east showing the gentle slope down to the south.



Figure 4 The southern part of the proposed development site looking north.

- 2.4 The northern edge of the site has a gravel surface to allow for parking for the church. South of the post and rail fence, extending down to a tall hedge that screens the larger, southern part of the site, the surface of the L-shaped area has been stripped exposing the topsoil. South of the hedge the land is laid to grass, and continues to slope to the south with slight undulation along the northern part of the area near the hedge. This appears to be a natural undulation rather than a man-made earthwork. Further south, near the eastern boundary there is a slight bump which is understood to have been formed when repairs to drainage were recently undertaken.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

3.1 This archaeological desk-based assessment has been undertaken in accordance with:

- The Chartered Institute for Archaeologists' (CifA) Standard and guidance for historic environment desk-based assessments (CifA, December 2014).
- Planning Practice Guidance *Conserving and enhancing the historic environment* (Department for Communities and Local Government, March 2014).
- Historic England's Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning Notes (2015).

3.2 Baseline heritage constraints have been established through a review of recorded heritage assets within a 1km study area around the site and desk-based review of existing sources of publicly accessible sources of primary and synthesised information, comprising:

- The Wiltshire Historic Environment Record (HER) comprising a database of all recorded archaeological sites, find spots and archaeological events within the county.
- National heritage datasets including The National Heritage List for England (NHLE),
- Historic manuscripts and maps held at Wiltshire and Swindon History Centre
- Relevant primary and secondary sources

3.3 A walk-over survey of the site has also been undertaken including the examination of the northern part of the site where the topsoil has been exposed to search for archaeological material.

4.0 POLICY & GUIDANCE BACKGROUND

Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979

- 4.1 Scheduled Monuments and Areas of Archaeological Interest are afforded statutory protection under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979 (as Amended) and the consent of the Secretary of State (Department of Culture, Media and Sport), as advised by Historic England, is required for any works.

The Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990

- 4.2 The Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 sets out the statutory approach to the management of historic buildings and areas and requires special regard to be given to the desirability of preserving a listed building and any features of architectural or historic interest it possesses, and its setting, under Section 66 – a matter the Courts have held should be afforded considerable importance and weight. Section 72, relating to Conservation Areas requires that ‘special attention shall be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of that area’.

Local Plan

- 4.3 The statutory approach is reflected in Policy CP58 of the Wiltshire Core Strategy, adopted January 2015 (CS) and Policy 99 of the Draft Local Plan Review: Ensuring the conservation and enhancement of the historic environment which has ‘weight’ following submission to the Secretary of State in late October 2024.

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

- 4.4 Paragraph 207 of the National Planning Policy Framework 2024 (NPPF) states that:

‘In determining applications, local planning authorities should require an applicant to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution made by their setting. 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. As a minimum the relevant historic environment record should have been consulted and the heritage assets assessed using appropriate expertise where necessary. Where a site on which development is proposed includes, or has the potential to include, heritage assets with archaeological interest, local planning authorities should require developers to submit an appropriate desk-based assessment and, where necessary, a field evaluation.'

- 4.5 Paragraph 212 advises that when considering the impact of development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to its conservation whilst para. 208 states that local planning authorities should identify and assess the particular significance of any heritage asset that may be affected by a proposal (including by development affecting the setting of a heritage asset) taking account of the available evidence and any necessary expertise. They should take this assessment into account when considering the impact of a proposal on a heritage asset, to avoid or minimise conflict between the heritage asset's conservation and any aspect of the proposal.

- 4.6 The National Planning Policy Framework (Annexe 2 Glossary) defines the setting of a heritage asset as:

'The surroundings in which a heritage asset is experienced. Its extent is not fixed and may change as the asset and its surroundings evolve. Elements of a setting may make a positive or negative contribution to the significance of an asset, may affect the ability to appreciate that significance or may be neutral.'

Historic England Guidance

- 4.7 The Historic England Guidance *Managing Significance in Decision-Making in the Historic Environment* Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning: 2 (Historic England , 2015) states:

'Development proposals that affect the historic environment are much more likely to gain the necessary permissions and create successful places if they are designed with the knowledge and understanding of the significance of the heritage assets they may affect. The first step for all applicants is to understand the significance of any affected heritage

asset and, if relevant, the contribution of its setting to its significance. The significance of a heritage asset is the sum of its archaeological, architectural, historic, and artistic interest.'

- 4.8 The Historic England Guidance *The Setting of Heritage Assets* (2nd edition, December 2017) states that:

'Setting is not itself a heritage asset, nor a heritage designation, although land comprising a setting may itself be designated. Its importance lies in what it contributes to the significance of the heritage asset or the ability to appreciate that significance' (p.4)

- 4.9 The HE guidance sets out a staged approach to the assessment of understanding the significance of setting:

- 1 Identification of heritage assets and the extent of their settings
- 2 Assess whether, how and what degree the settings make a contribution to the significance of the heritage assets
- 3 Assess the effects of the proposed development, whether beneficial or harmful on the significance
- 4 Explore ways to maximise enhancement and avoid or minimise harm
- 5 Record the process

- 4.10 The guidance also states that views which particularly contribute to the significance of heritage assets include those where the relationship between the asset and other historic assets or places or designed views.

5.0 ARCHAEOLOGICAL & HISTORIC BACKGROUND

5.1 There are no records of archaeological sites or finds within the area of the proposed development held within the HER.

5.2 Within the study area (a 1km radius area from the proposed development site) there are records relating to the following periods (see also Appendix I – Plan and Table).

Prehistoric

5.3 Undated but possible prehistoric field systems have been identified from crop and soil marks to the north-west and north of the village (Sites 1 and 2).

5.4 Palaeolithic, Mesolithic and Neolithic stone tools have been found in the area (Sites 3, 8 and 9), the closest find-spot being 500m to the east (Site 9). Site 3 is c.875m to the west, but the description of this find-spot as being 'by River Kennet' which is almost 3km to the north raises the question as to whether this record is correctly geo-located or if the site name is mistaken.

5.5 North-east of Somerset Hospital an undated ringwork has been recorded, presumably marking the site of a ploughed-out Bronze Age burial mound (Site 10).

5.6 To the north-west of the village two pits dated to the Iron Age on the basis of a sherd of pottery were excavated in 1979 (Site 4).

Roman

5.7 Four Roman coins were found at The Vicarage c.50m north of the proposed development site (Site 5), but generally, there is little evidence for Romano-British period occupation in the immediate landscape around Froxfield. A Roman villa has been identified just over 2km to the north-west of the village at Rudge Coppice.

Saxon & Medieval

- 5.8 Froxfield is likely to be a settlement of at least Saxon origins as Byrthelm granted land at Froxfield to Ealhmund, Bishop of Winchester in the early 9th century. Froxfield is not recorded in the Domesday Book, the manor only appearing in documentary sources in the mid-13th century but the presence of herringbone work in the church might suggest an 11th century date. From the late 14th century the manor was held by Easton Priory, Wiltshire, until the dissolution of the monasteries. The Crown granted the lands of the priory to Sir Edward Seymour, Viscount Beauchamp, later Duke of Somerset.

Post-medieval

- 5.9 The village contains a typical mix of houses and farms of various dates from the 17th century onwards. Possibly the most notable site in the village is the Somerset Hospital at the eastern end of the village, a set of alms houses and chapel founded by Sarah, Duchess of Somerset in her will of 1696.
- 5.10 The earliest map of the village examined for this assessment is the Froxfield Tithe map of c.1840 (Figure 5). This shows the church standing at the north-western edge of the village, north of the road and stream with the rectory immediately to the north of the church. At this date there was little development on the south side of Church Lane except for a property adjacent to the west end of the triangle of roads, now The Green, but then the central area was occupied by a house and outbuildings. The area of the proposed development formed part of two fields running along the line of the valley, with narrow plots at the southern edge of the site lying parallel with the road. In the area of the proposed development these plots were vacant, but to the east similar plots were occupied by small cottages, seemingly reflecting encroachment onto roadside waste.
- 5.11 The Ordnance Survey 1st and 3rd edition maps of 1881 and 1911 show little change within this peripheral area of the village, the proposed development site continuing in agricultural use, presumably as pasture (Figures 6 and 7). Between 1911 and 1924 a school was built in the area immediately east of the proposed development plot, this school now being Truant House (Figure 8).



Figure 5 The Froxfield Tithe map of c.1840 with the approximate area of the proposed development site outlined.

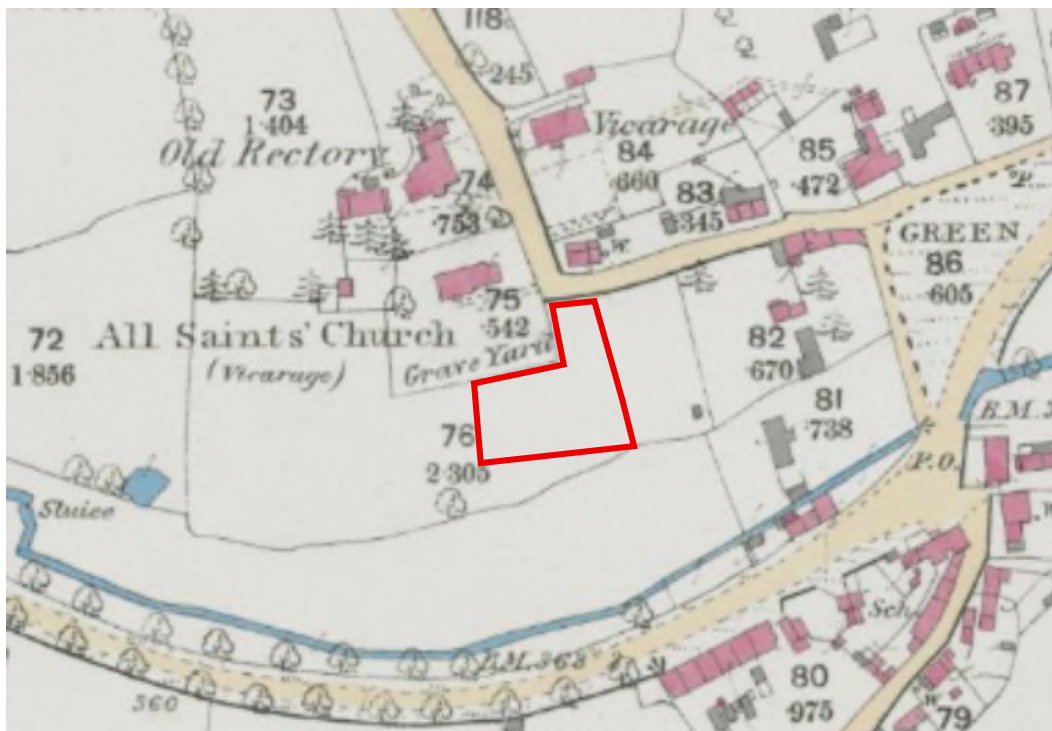


Figure 6 Ordnance Survey 1st edition 25" map, 1881.



Figure 7 Ordnance Survey 25" map, 1911 edition.

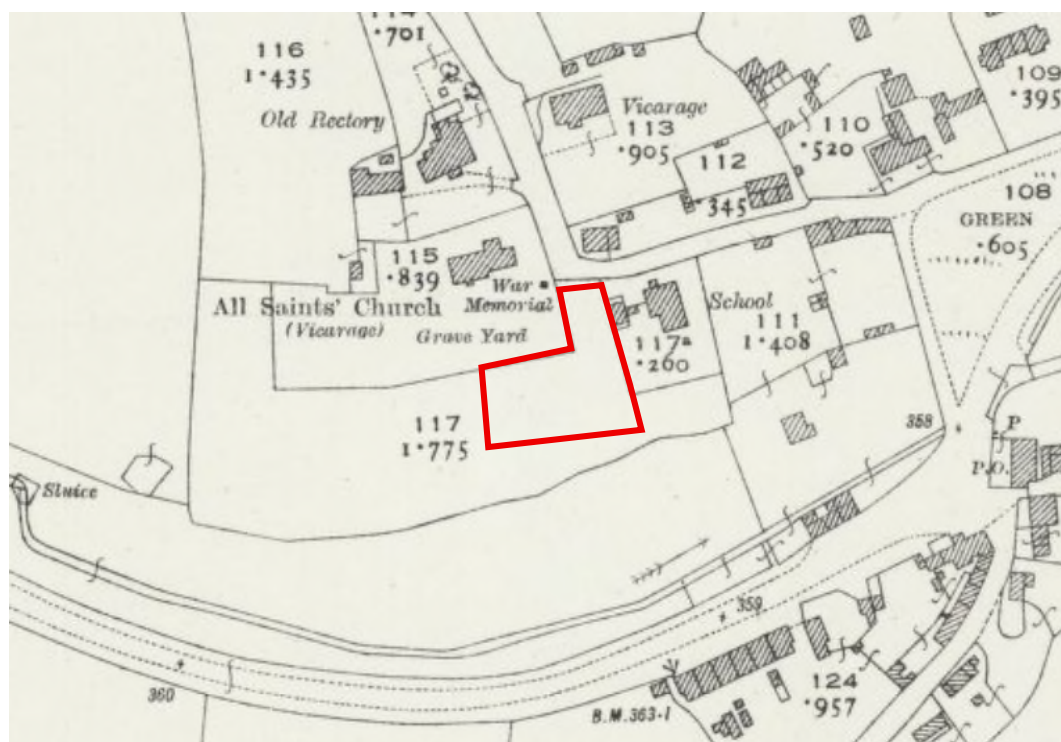


Figure 8 Ordnance Survey 1924 edition 25" map.

6.0 ASSESSMENT OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL POTENTIAL

6.1 There are no designated heritage assets, or other records relating to the historic environment (non-designated heritage assets) within the proposed development site.

6.2 There are no Scheduled Monuments within the wider study area.

6.3 There is one listed building of relevance to the proposed development within the study area:

- The Church of All Saints (Grade II*).

6.4 Based on the available evidence as represented by the heritage assets recorded within the Wiltshire HER and the site visit, an assessment of the archaeological potential of the proposed development suggests the following:

Prehistoric

6.5 There is evidence for Mesolithic to Bronze Age activity along the valley of the Froxfield Stream and the wider Kennet Valley as evidenced by chance finds of stone tools and the presence of a ring ditch which probably represents a Bronze Age burial mound, and which is a strong indication of nearby settlement. Given the relatively low number of records sites and finds of these periods, it is considered that, on the present evidence, the potential for archaeological remains being encountered on the proposed development site is low.

6.6 The landscape around the village includes evidence for undated field systems that may be of Iron Age or Roman date. These fields indicate the presence of farming communities but there is limited evidence for settlements dating from the Iron Age in the immediate area of Froxfield. The two pits excavated 500m to the north-west of the village (4) might relate to a small settlement, but there is no evidence to suggest settlement within the area of the village.

Roman

6.7 The four Roman coins found in 1968 at The Vicarage 50m north of the proposed development site (5) could indicate the presence of some form of settlement of the Roman

period within the area of the village. However, the context for the discovery of these coins is not known.

Saxon & Medieval

- 6.8 The village of Froxfield is thought to have Saxon origins and it has been suggested that the church may incorporate fabric of 11th century date. The church is set at the western edge of the settlement and at the west end of Church Lane, the line of which continues along the north side of The Green over-looking the main road along the valley but separated from the road by the Froxfield Stream before joining the main road. There is a second area of possible later settlement to the south of the Froxfield Stream.
- 6.9 The position of the church at the end of what may have originally been the main street of the village, might suggest that originally it was not quite so separate from the main core of the settlement. Whilst there are no earthworks to suggest the presence of buildings on the frontage part of the site, there appears to have been some light stripping of the surface of the northern part of the plot. This stripping of the surface has exposed the topsoil, allowing the opportunity to make a visual search of the northern area for archaeological material. This 'field-walking' exercise located two sherds of possible medieval pottery and a possible medieval/post-medieval tile fragment.
- 6.10 On the basis of the present evidence, there is no firm evidence for Saxon or medieval occupation on this site, but given the close proximity to the church, it is considered that there is some potential for archaeological remains of this period being encountered within the northern part of the site near the street frontage. The archaeological potential decreases towards the southern part of the site away from Church Lane.

Post-medieval

- 6.11 The visual examination of the stripped area to the northern part of the site recovered five small sherds of post-medieval glazed china but no evidence for structures or other archaeological features. An area of compacted flint and brick rubble in the north-west corner of the narrow northern part of the site leading up to Church Lane is understood to have been

the result of levelling undertaken by a former local farmer approximately 15 years ago. The rubble was from a demolished wall on his property (Green Farm) (Client, pers. comm).

7.0 ASSESSMENT OF THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE SETTING TO THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE LISTED BUILDINGS

7.1 This assessment will follow the approach as set out in the Historic England guidance *The Setting of Heritage Assets* to identify the importance of the setting of the listed buildings and to assess the potential impact of the proposed development on their significance.

Step 1: Identification of heritage assets

7.2 The heritage assets to be considered in relation to the proposed development within their settings are:

- Church of All Saints (Grade II*)

Step 2: Assessment of contribution of setting to the significance of the heritage assets

7.3 The immediate setting of the church is its churchyard containing the graves and memorials of generations of Froxfield residents. The churchyard also contains the war memorial (separately listed Grade II).

7.4 The wider setting of the church is the village of Froxfield – the community which was served by the church. Immediately north of the churchyard is The Old Rectory, with The Old Vicarage opposite. The church seen in the view along Church Lane looking the west although the church stands slightly to one side and this is clearly not a designed view in townscape terms (Figure 9).

7.5 Although the church stands on higher ground over-looking the valley to the south, due to the hedgerow along the north side of the main road, there are no significant views towards the church, although there is a glimpsed view from near No. 27 Bath Road in which only bell tower and roof can be seen, the body of the church being concealed by trees and hedges (Figure 10).



Figure 9 The view along Church Lane towards the church.



Figure 10 A glimpsed view towards the church from Bath Road near No. 27.

Step 3: Assess impact of the proposed development on significance

- 7.6 The proposed development is for a single 1½ storey detached house designed in an agricultural barn style, a garage and parking including a parking area for visitors to the church (Figure 11).

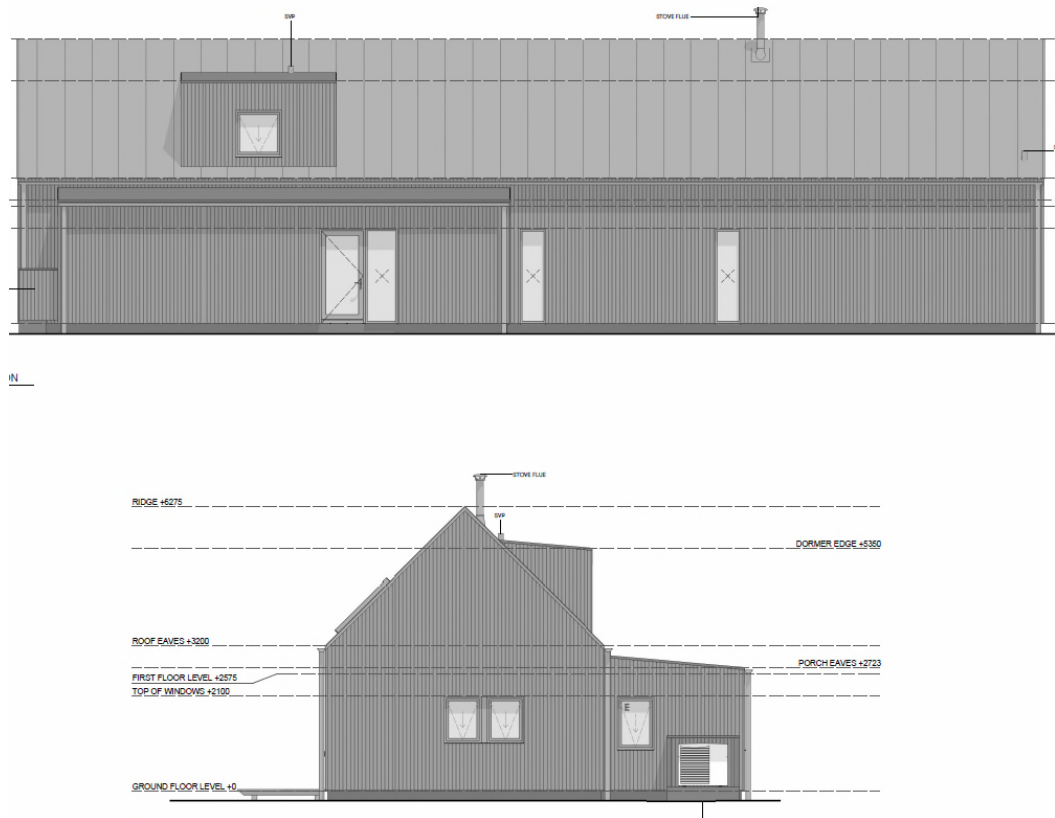


Figure 11 Proposed north and east elevations.

7.7 Taking the NPPF definition of setting as set out in 4.6, above, it follows that the test for whether a development within the setting of a heritage asset will affect significance must be based on the impact on the ability to:

- Experience the heritage asset or
- To appreciate or understand its significance.

Further potential aspects of potential impact on setting include:

- Whether the proposed development would be harmful aesthetically when seen in combination with or adjacent to a heritage asset
- Impact on tranquillity, appearance though light pollution or the experience of a heritage asset through the introduction of smells.

7.8 The Conservation response to the pre-application submission found that the proposed development would have a neutral effect on the setting of the listed church:

The submitted plans set out the intention to create a simple, single storey 'agricultural' style dwelling that appears as a rural building suited to the landscape. Design precedents have been submitted and the low mono pitched roof is welcome, particularly if this could be treated as a green roof. The subdued colour scheme is also welcome.

Due to the single storey nature of the proposals and the sloping topography, the proposals would not be prominent from the surrounding landscape nor detract from views of the church. Thus, combined with other existing hedges and trees, the new property would barely be visible from Church Lane. Overall, the scheme would have a neutral effect on, and would thereby cause no harm to, the significance of the Froxfield Conservation Area or the setting of the listed church.'

- 7.9 This opinion is agreed with and supported as the proposed development will have limited visibility from Church Lane due to the retention of the laurel hedge, and any glimpsed views will be to a building that conveys an agricultural character. Being set well back from the street frontage and the churchyard, and on lower ground, the proposed building will not impact on the experience of the church as seen from Church Lane, and is unlikely to be visible from Bath Road. Even if the roof of the proposed building is seen in longer views from the south, the building will remain below the visible elements of the church, and in a village context, the presence of a building in the foreground is not considered harmful in an incidental view.

Step 4: How to maximise enhancement or avoid or minimise harm

- 7.10 Given that it is considered that the proposed development will not result in harm to the significance of the listed church through change within its setting, there is no requirement enhance the scheme to avoid or minimise harm.

Step 5: Record the process

- 7.11 This report presents a record of the process of the assessment of the importance of the setting of the listed buildings and its contribution to their significance, together with the assessment of the potential impact of the proposals.

8.0 CONCLUSIONS

- 8.1 The evidence assessed in this archaeological assessment suggests that there is a low potential for archaeological features or finds of prehistoric date, although it is not possible to completely discount their presence.
- 8.2 The find of Roman coins in the grounds of The Vicarage 50m to the north could indicate the presence of some form of settlement in the area of the northern section of Church Lane, but there is no information on the context for this discovery, and there is no further indication of the form or scale of any settlement. The presence of Romano-British occupation on this site cannot be ruled out, but it is considered that the potential is low.
- 8.3 The site lies at the western edge of the settlement, and close to the parish church which is certainly of medieval date and may incorporate Saxon fabric. Therefore, although there is no cartographic evidence for settlement on this site, there is at least medium potential for archaeological remains from relating to the Saxon or medieval periods to survive within the northern part of the site near Church Lane. The potential for archaeological remains within the southern part of the site is reduced and is considered to be low.
- 8.4 On the basis of the archaeological and historical evidence collated for this assessment, it is concluded that there are no over-riding heritage constraints that would prevent the development of this site or justify further pre-determination archaeological survey or assessment.
- 8.5 Given the proximity of the northern part of the site to the parish church and its frontage to Church Lane, it is concluded that, should planning permission be granted for the proposed development, a condition requiring an archaeological watching brief to observe ground works relating to the garage and house to record any features of archaeological interest identified would be an appropriate approach mitigation strategy.
- 8.6 The proposed development will not impact on the ability to experience the Grade II* listed Church of All Saints through change within its setting, or the ability to understand or appreciate its significance. The design of the proposed building is considered to be appropriate aesthetically in this rural context, and will not harm the listed building or the character and appearance of the Froxfield Conservation Area.

- 8.7 The provision of car parking for visitors to the church with the creation of a gravelled surface using gravel grids will enhance the visual appearance of the area adjacent to the church gate and be a positive change for the community.

APPENDIX I

Historic Environment Record Data

TABLE I: SELECTED HISTORIC ENVIROMENT RECORDS IN THE AREA OF THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT SITE

Site No.	HER UID	DESCRIPTION	STATUS
1	MWI17942	Undated Field System, North-West of Froxfield	NDHA
2	MWI17943	Undated Field System, North of Froxfield	NDHA
3	MWI18662	Palaeolithic Hand Axes, West of Froxfield by River Kennet	NDHA
4	MWI18671	Iron Age Pits, North-West of Froxfield	NDHA
5	MWI18676	Roman Coins, Vicarage	NDHA
6	MWI18681	Froxfield, village of Saxon origins	NDHA
7	MWI18692	Undated Burial, North of Froxfield	NDHA
8	MWI20445	Mesolithic Flint Tool, Oak Hill	NDHA
9	MWI20447	Neolithic Flint Core, North of Somerset Hospital	NDHA
10	MWI20454	Undated Ring Ditch, North- East of Somerset Hospital	NDHA
11	MWI69992	Site of Farmstead in Froxfield	NDHA



PLAN I: SELECTED HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT RECORDS WITHIN 1KM OF THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT SITE