

# Land at Pleydells Farm, Okeford Fitzpaine, Dorset

**An appraisal of the land and its contribution  
to the setting of designated and undesignated heritage assets**



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## CONTENTS

- 1.0 Background
- 2.0 Introduction
- 3.0 Location and setting
- 4.0 Historic development
- 5.0 Architectural quality and built form
- 6.0 Open space, parks and gardens, and trees
- 7.0 Character zones
- 8.0 Positive contributors
- 9.0 Locally important buildings
- 10. Recommendations

### Appendices

- A. Location Plan
- B. Heritage Assets
- C. Okeford Fitzpaine Conservation Area Character Areas
- D. Historic Maps
- E. Figures

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## 1.0 Background

- 1.1 Forum Heritage Services have been commissioned to undertake a character appraisal of the site known as Pleydells Farm (see **Appendix A** – Location Plan) to include review of the comments made by the Local Planning Authority (North Dorset District Council) and assessment of the site in terms of its potential for development and how this may impact on designated and non-designated heritage assets.

## 2.0 Introduction

- 2.1 This report is intended as an overview of the site, audit of heritage assets related to the site and comment on the appropriateness for development of the site and the potential for impact on designated and non-designated heritage assets. The Heritage Impact Assessment Report 2011-2031 prepared by the Okeford Fitzpaine Neighbourhood Plan Working Group and ECA CIC Consultancy on behalf of the Okeford Fitzpaine Parish Council lists the following heritage assets within its heritage impact assessment as potentially being impacted upon and falling within the immediate and wider setting of the site. All of the following are Grade II listed:

- Netherway Farm House, 26 Lower St.
- 25 Lower Street
- 21 Lower St. (Easter Cott.)/22 Lower St
- 19 and 20 Lower Street
- Langstone Farm House
- Yeatmans
- Hill View Farm House

- 2.2 There will also be the effect of proposed development on the Okeford Fitzpaine Conservation Area and the setting of the conservation area. In addition, there are two buildings; the outbuilding to the entrance of the site on Lower Street and Stonyford Cottage, south side of Lower St next to Hill View Farmhouse which we consider could potentially be affected by the development and could be considered as buildings of local importance which may be considered to make a positive contribution towards the character and appearance of the conservation area and as such could be considered to be non-designated heritage assets.
- 2.3 The proposed development of the site will have to have regard to designated and also consider the impact on non-designated heritage assets (see also **Appendix B**).

## 3.0 Location and setting

- 3.1 The Parish is located at the south-eastern edge of the Blackmore Vale, to the north of Okeford Hill and Bell Hill which are part of the Wessex Ridgeway. The parish includes three settlements: Okeford Fitzpaine and Belchalwell are spring-line villages at the foot of the Chalk escarpment;



- Fiddleford stands by a ford over the Darknoll Brook. The southern part of the Parish is characterised by chalk downland and forms part of an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). The County Town, Dorchester, is approximately 18 miles south-west and Blandford Forum is the nearest large town, 7 miles to the south-east, with the smaller town of Sturminster Newton 3.5 miles to the north.
- 3.2 The parish covers just under 3,750 acres, extending from the chalk escarpment to the south at over 800 ft. above sea level, across Greensand, Gault and Kimmeridge Clays, between 200 ft. and 300 ft., to the Stour river terraces in the north at an altitude of 150 ft.
- 3.3 To this part of the County, the South Blackmore rolling vales, the settlement pattern is distinctive in that villages and hamlets are either at the foot of the escarpment on the spring lines such as Okeford Fitzpaine or on higher ground such as Mappowder. The landscape character is that of undulating and rolling farmland hills which form a transition zone between the Blackmore Vale and the chalk escarpment. The principally pastoral landscape is characterised by medium sized irregularly shaped fields sub-divided by thick but often trimmed hedgerows.
- 3.4 The site is located to the south side of Lower Street to the immediate east of the Grade II listed Yeatmans (No.24 Lower Street). Its access is set back from the roadside and between houses to the south side of the street. The access from Lower Street is within the Okeford Fitzpaine Conservation Area. The site itself is outside but adjacent to the conservation area boundary which runs down its eastern boundary (see **Appendices B and C**).
- 3.5 The site can be seen from a series of public footpaths which circuit the settlement and run parallel and through open fields (see **Figures 11 to 14 Appendix E**). The site is particularly apparent from the south-west where the present buildings and remnants of buildings form part of the skyline and are prominent not only as the edge of the present settlement at present but also as they are in strong contrast to the domestic scale, detailing and material use of the former factory site. The new development to the former factory site now forms a strong and developed backdrop to the sites setting (see **Figure 11 Appendix E**) and the most prominent edge of the conservation area in relation to these distant views.
- 3.6 The site can be seen from extended views from Okehill to the south and south-east (**Figure 9 Appendix E**). Views can be had from the road and public footpaths across the hillside. The site is seen within the setting of the village settlement in these extended views and is presently characterized by tree cover to its western edges and also partially obscured new development to the former factory site. The latter is dominant in views due to its strong material specification particularly for roof tiles which make a distinctive and easily identified group of buildings within the settlement. The church tower is also seen in the context of settlement wide views but due to its setting down and to one side it does not share view corridors with the site or form a particular focal point of the views although it is notable for its embattlements and use of stone. The views are more characterized by the grouping, distribution and diversity of roof profiles and materials rather than any individual building or building groups.

- 3.7 Views from the west, north and east are far shorter in focal length and there is no advantage of higher ground from which to observe either the settlement in its entirety or the site. The village is happened upon along winding lanes from these directions and even from the higher ground to the south, a sinking of the lane and heavy tree and hedge boundaries create a gateway sense of arrival from the direction.
- 3.8 On travelling to the site by car from either direction, the site is unlikely to be viewed until the entrance from Lower Street is reached on the south side of the street.

#### 4.0 Historic development

- 4.1 The history of the present parish is unusually complicated. As well as Okeford Fitzpaine with its open fields (36) the parish now includes the nucleus of the old parish of Belchalwell and four of its five separated parts; it also includes Banbury Common, which was formerly in Child Okeford, and the part of Fiddleford which lies E. of the Darknoll Brook.
- 4.2 By way of an overview the Domesday Book records Okeford Fitzpaine Adford. It comprised 40 households, 16 ploughlands, 21 acres (8.5 ha) of meadow and 1 mill. It fell within the Sturminster Newton Hundred and the tenant-in-chief is recorded as Glastonbury Abbey.
- 4.3 Consolidation of adjacent parishes has resulted in the present parish of Okeford Fitzpaine including a number of areas that historically fell within other parishes, areas for example Banbury Common (formerly in Child Okeford parish), the centre of the old parish of Belchalwell and areas of Fiddleford are now included within the Parish. Until 1966 much of the village formed part of the Pitt-Rivers estate. The village was sold at auction by his mistress Stella Lonsdale following the death in 1966 of George Pitt-Rivers.
- 4.4 The site (from first and second edition Ordnance Survey and 20<sup>th</sup> century mapping) (**Figures 2 and 3 Appendix D**) appears to have been orchards associated with houses to Lower Street set in long deep plots (possibly medieval in origin) right up to the mid to late part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.
- 4.5 The small outbuilding to the east side of the entrance to Pleydells Farm from Lower Street appears to be a surviving element of a building which extended to the roadside to the north. The brickwork has an inconsistent bond and it could post-date the second edition (1902) map and have been constructed after this date. The second edition (1902) map (**Figure 3 Appendix D**) and shows further buildings to the rear of this in a loose courtyard plan. But it is not clear this is a farm group. The collection of farm building seen presently to the site do not incorporate historic structures (with the exception of the building to Lower Street) and have from map evidence largely accrued on the site in the mid to late part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.
- 4.6 Historically the site was predominantly orchards sub-divided north-south into a series of long narrow plots probably associated with the houses to the north of the site fronting Lower Street.
- 4.7 It is notable that Pleydells Farmhouse is a Grade II listed building on High Street with an access to the rear of the site (also a public footpath) onto the southern edge of the site. The tithe map of

1839 shows the northern entrance to the site (to Lower Street) forming part of a group of buildings with the adjacent Yeatmans. The former buildings to the east of Yeatmans (of which the present building may form part) were outbuildings and not dwellings (coloured grey and not pink) on this map as were two buildings to the rear apparently gone or remodeled by the first edition map (1887). There does not historically appear to be any clear link between the farmhouse on High Street and the buildings fronting Lower Street.

- 4.8 The tithe map (**Figure 1 Appendix D**) and its apportionment as follows: Plot no. 40 – Mrs Mary Dowland [landowner]; John Phillips [occupier]; Homestead etc [land]; Plot no. 50 – Charles Marshalsea [landowner]; Himself [occupier]; Homestead etc [land]; Plot no. 51 – Lord Rivers [landowner]; William Yeatman, William Ridout [occupiers]; Homestead [land]; Plot no. 52 – Robert Vater [landowner]; Himself [occupier] Homestead etc [land] would suggest that at least from the early 19<sup>th</sup> century the site was in separate ownerships and split between what is now Pleydells Farm and Yeatmans, but owned in its entirety by Mr Charles Marshalsea. All of these plots are described as homesteads implying potentially a house with land used for cultivation or the grazing of cattle for the purposes of the household. These are generally considered to be on a small scale historically.

## 5.0 Architectural quality and built form

- 5.1 Buildings presently on the site comprise of four types; traditional built remnant survival from earlier homestead building groupings (**Figure 25 Appendix E**); 'Nissen' huts (probably post WWII) (**Figure 22 Appendix E**), barreled rectangular plan structures of profile metal; purpose built mid to late 20<sup>th</sup> century chicken houses/sheds (**Figure 21 Appendix E**) and modern open portal-framed farm buildings (without cladding) (**Figure 22 Appendix E**). None of the buildings on the site are of architectural significance and none with the possible exception of the small outbuilding to the entrance of the site on Lower Street (**Figure 25 Appendix E**) are of historic significance. The latter could be considered to make a neutral or possibly very slightly positive contribution to the character and appearance of the Okeford Fitzpaine Conservation Area although much change has eroded its original form, it is not used in its original capacity and it is in a poor state of repair.
- 5.2 The setting of the site when viewed from Lower Street includes a number of significant Grade II listed buildings (**Figures 16 to 19 Appendix E**). They are generally stone (and flint) or brick (painted and unpainted) built with traditional steep roof pitches with mix of tile, natural slate and thatch (generally multi-layered combed wheat reed). The thatch roofs, in particular, are a welcome and pleasing roof finish in this part of the village. The position of built form generally to the back of pavement with gables also hard to the roadside is a distinctive and attractive element of the street scape and gives a strong sense of enclosure to this part of the conservation area. These are important elements of the setting of the site and adjacent buildings to Lower Street.
- 5.3 Built form to the east of the Pleydells Farm site is far more modern-domestic in its character and reminiscent of modern urban extensions to historic villages. It is reflective of a standard response to its road layout which appears to be to strict highway standards set out by Dorset County Council.

- 5.4 There are no shared views of the Grade II\* listed church from Lower Street. There may be glimpsed views from the site of the church tower but these are going to be minimal given the topography of the site and recent built form between the site and the church.
- 5.5 There will be fine views from the site to open countryside and to the escarpment to the south and south-west. This rural setting and ability to access open countryside from the site very quickly is an important part of the character of the site and its relationship to the edge of an historic settlement. The role of the edge of the settlement is an important element in considering change to the setting of the conservation area. Building form, scale and materials will need to be very carefully considered in this role.

## 6.0 Open space, parks and gardens, and trees

- 6.1 There is a series of open spaces throughout the site (**Figure 24 Appendix E**). Some of these are characterized by fruit trees (possible survivals of their former orchard use) and others are functional spaces related to the farm processes which were formerly undertaken on the site.
- 6.2 Trees form an important part of the western boundary with adjacent property gardens (**Figure 20 Appendix E**). The trees are a mix of traditional hedge species and ornamental garden trees such as conifers. This boundary does form an important green edge to the western boundary of the site and plays some role in partially screening some buildings in views from the west and south-west.
- 6.3 Open space is an important part of the setting of the site and the western boundary of the conservation area on viewing from the west and south-west. This is characterized by low level agricultural uses and leisure uses such as paddocks for horses.

## 7.0 Character zones

- 7.1 Conservation Areas are designated for their special character, but within the area there will be zones which are varied but contribute to the whole. It is important to define these 'sub areas' and provide a clear understanding of the defining elements making up the character of a particular part of the conservation area when undertaking full conservation area appraisals.
- 7.2 Whilst acknowledging the sub-division of the conservation area it is important to note that in all cases the transitional areas between defined character areas are also important and are exactly this – areas which do not easily fit into the defined character areas but can often be important to both though not necessarily sharing the same characteristics as one or the other. It should be noted that whilst five sub-areas have been identified, it is also important to appreciate the cohesion to the whole conservation area, which should always be considered when addressing the character of Okeford Fitzpaine Conservation Area.
- 7.3 For identification of character areas see **Appendix C**.
- 7.4 The conservation area has been divided into five sub-areas (**Figures 1 to 5 Appendix E**). In addition, we have identified four key 'gateways' as the settlement has a very distinctive sense of arrival into its historic core from each direction. The character areas are as follows:

1. Lower Street
2. The Cross environs
3. Higher Street
4. The Church environs
5. Shillingstone Lane

- 7.5 The site falls within the Lower Street character zone. This can be summarized as two storey houses often fronting the highway of traditional form and scale with a wide variety of local materials used for walling and roofing to include; stone (and flint), red brick (in Flemish bond) with exposed timber-framing, painted stone and brick and tile, thatch and natural slate for roofs. This perhaps the broadest palette of local materials in the conservation area. This variety contributes to the positive character and appearance of the street scene.
- 7.6 There are gaps between houses but they are generally relatively narrow and give views into gardens or yards to the rear of houses. There are no long views out of the conservation area to open countryside from this part of the conservation area but a strong sense of enclosure broken by the present entrance to Pleydells Farm which weakens the townscape at this point but does allow views deep into the rising ground of the farm which is presently characterized by modern farm building and structures which give a sense of the rural character of the settlement to close to the centre of the settlement.
- 7.7 The view into the conservation area from the west is partially closed by Netherway Farm House (**Figure 3 Appendix E**). This views gives way to a series of funneled and enclosed views through the conservation area towards the centre of the village (The Cross).

## 8.0 Positive contributors

- 8.1 The brick-built building (**Figure 25 Appendix E**) fronting Lower Street appears to be a former stable. It is not entirely clear if this is a 'farm' building in the true sense of the definition or a former domestic outbuilding to Yeatmans. In principal it may be possible to retain this building and it could form part of the garaging or outbuildings of a new building on the site although access issues to and from the site may prove challenging if this building is retained. The retention of the building would need to be weighed against the public benefit of additional housing for the village.
- 8.2 The site was not a farm yard in the true sense of the definition. It is described in the tithe apportionment as homestead and from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards was predominantly orchards. Its present appearance and any sense of an agricultural legacy the site is almost completely mid to late 20<sup>th</sup> century. The site does however, given its most recent use provide a sense of the rural character of the wider setting of the conservation area coming right up to the western boundary of the conservation area. However, this is tempered somewhat by buildings presently on the site which due to their scale form and position are prominent and clearly seen in extended views

- 8.3 The site can be viewed from land with both public and private access, to include a network of footpaths one of which runs to the south and roughly parallel to Lower Street and then traverses fields to the south and north, the latter linking back into Lower Street. The footpaths are partially elevated in places which also accentuate and enhance views into the conservation area from the south-west.
- 8.4 There are further longer views to be had of the village from the south and south-east on climbing the adjacent Okeford Hill.
- 8.5 Development will be clearly seen in the context of views from the south and west. It will be less apparent in long views from the south and south-east mainly due to the prominence of recent development to the adjacent Old Dairy site with the strong orange palette of brick and roof finishes which are readily apparent in these views. This development is slightly higher than the site and more visually prominent. The present large sheds and open spans of the portal frame structure on the site can just be made out in these views.
- 8.6 Views from the south and west are an important part of the setting of the Okeford Fitzpaine Conservation Area and will need to be very carefully considered in any potential future development. This will be particularly important in terms of retaining elements of open character and a sense of the 'edge' of the village. Intensity of the site has the potential to erode the 'rural' setting of the conservation area. However, there may be some opportunities for carefully considered design to 'break-up' what is at present a strong sense of development to this edge of the conservation area presented by the former Old Dairy Site. A careful consideration of scale, siting, and grain is required for the site with particular emphasis on material choice.
- 8.7 The retention of some sense of the semi-open character of the present 20<sup>th</sup> century farm group of buildings and the minimizing of the urbanizing effect of residential development on this edge of the conservation area is a crucial element of the sites development.

## 9.0 Locally important buildings

- 9.1 As far as we could ascertain there are no buildings on the site with the possible exception of the building to the Lower Street entrance which would be considered as non-designated heritage assets. This building could be considered to make a neutral or possibly very slightly positive contribution to the character and appearance of the Okeford Fitzpaine Conservation Area although much change has eroded its original form, it is not used in its original capacity and it is in a poor state of repair.

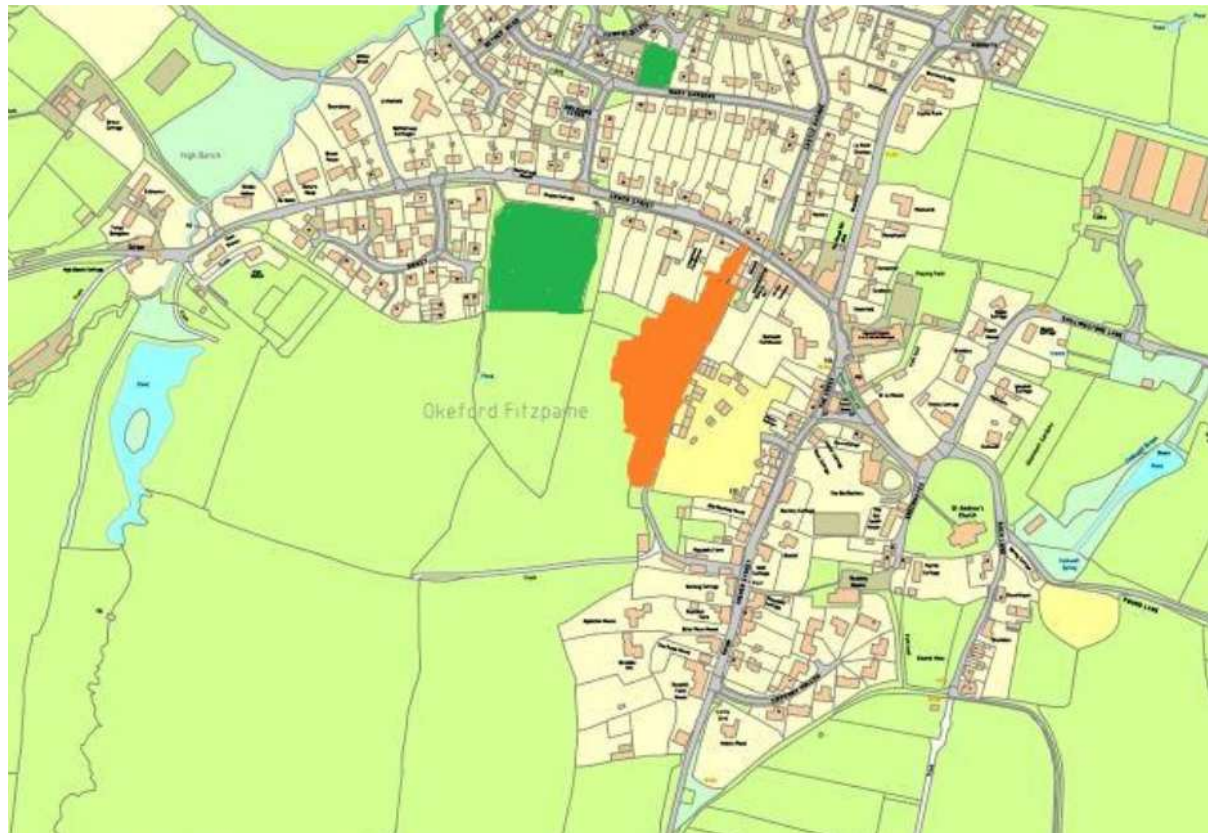
## 10.0 Recommendations

- Establishment (and agreement with the LPA) of a zone of visual influence where-in development on the site may have an impact and where it might diminish this impact or remove it altogether through careful siting, design and use of materials

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- Development should retain a sense of openness and semi-rural character reflective of the present 'edge' to the conservation area
  - Early engagement with County Highway Officer to discuss the potential for development to come forward to Lower Street and partially close what is a regrettable gap in the streetscene. The entrance to the site is going to be the most sensitive and challenging element of this scheme. This cannot be a standard engineered junction and must be both bespoke and carefully negotiated with the highway officers of the County Council.



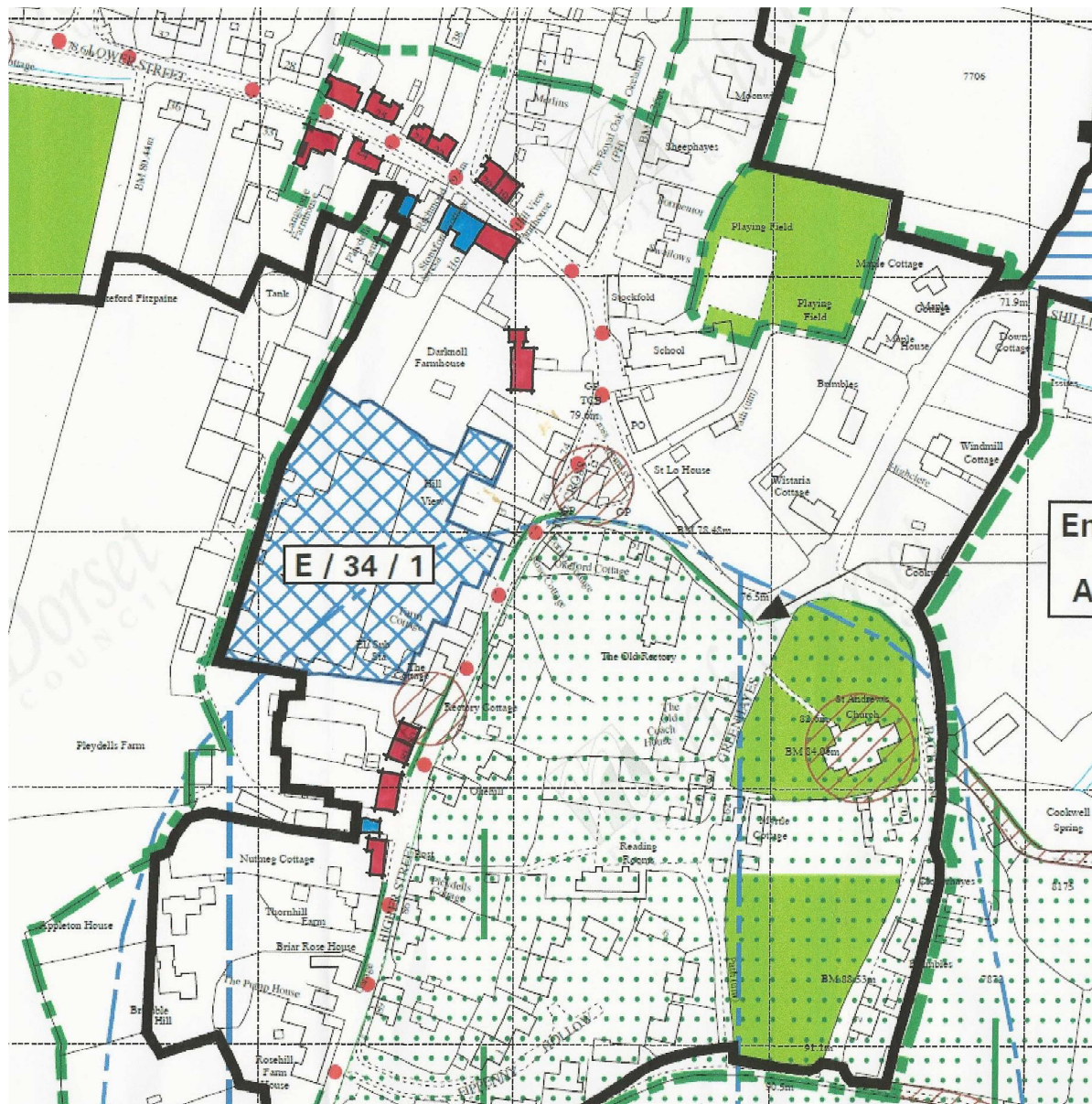
## Appendix A: Location Plan



Land at Pleydells Farm (filled out in orange), Okeford Fitzpaine



## Appendix B: Heritage Assets

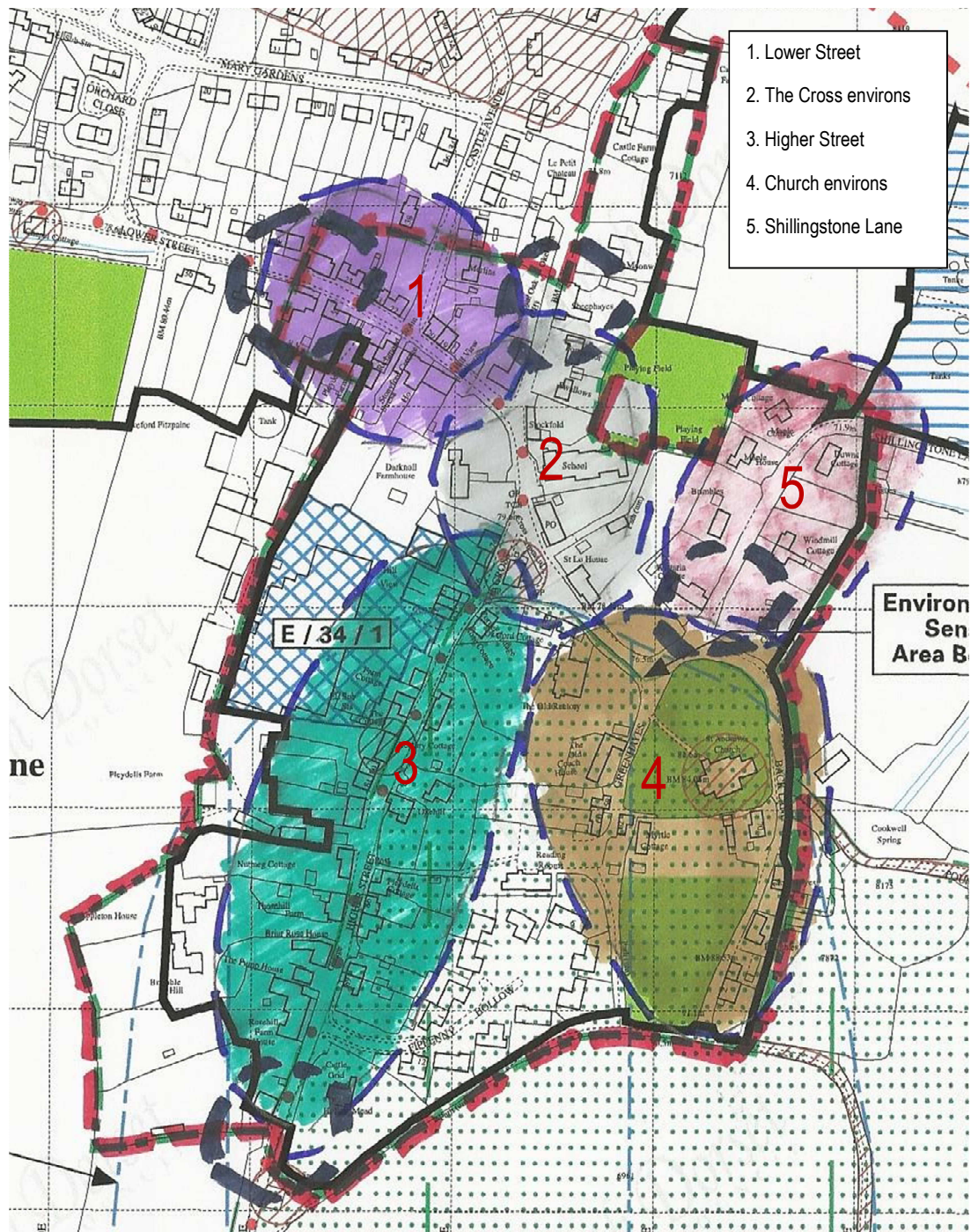


### KEY

- Listed Buildings
- Buildings of local importance



## Appendix C: Okeford Fitzpaine Conservation Area Character Areas

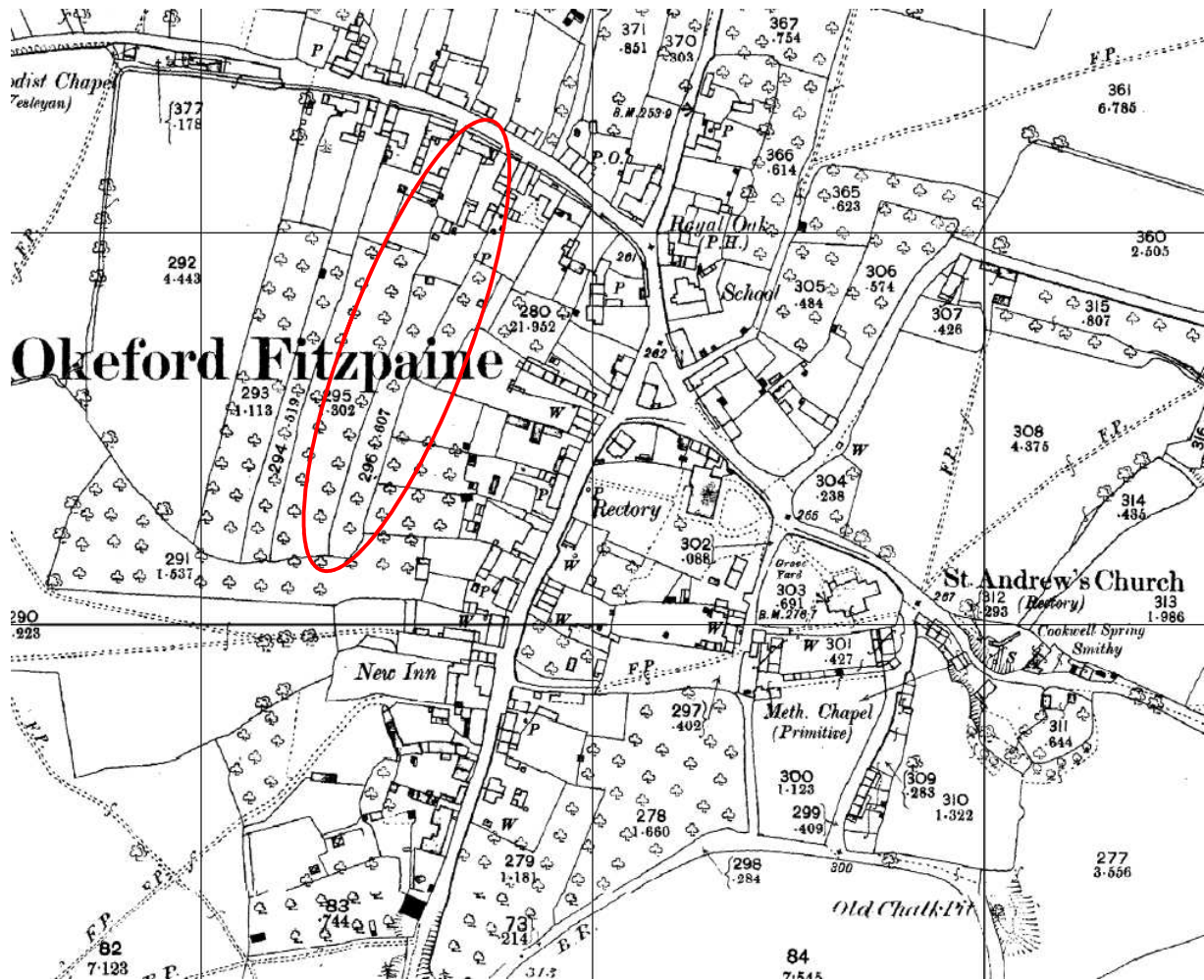


Important 'gateways' to the conservation area in townscape terms

**Appendix D:** Historic Maps

**Figure 1:** Okeford Fitzpaine tithe map 1839 (approximate location of the site shown in **red**)





**Figure 2:** Ordnance Survey 1 to 25 inch 1887 (approximate location of the site shown in red)

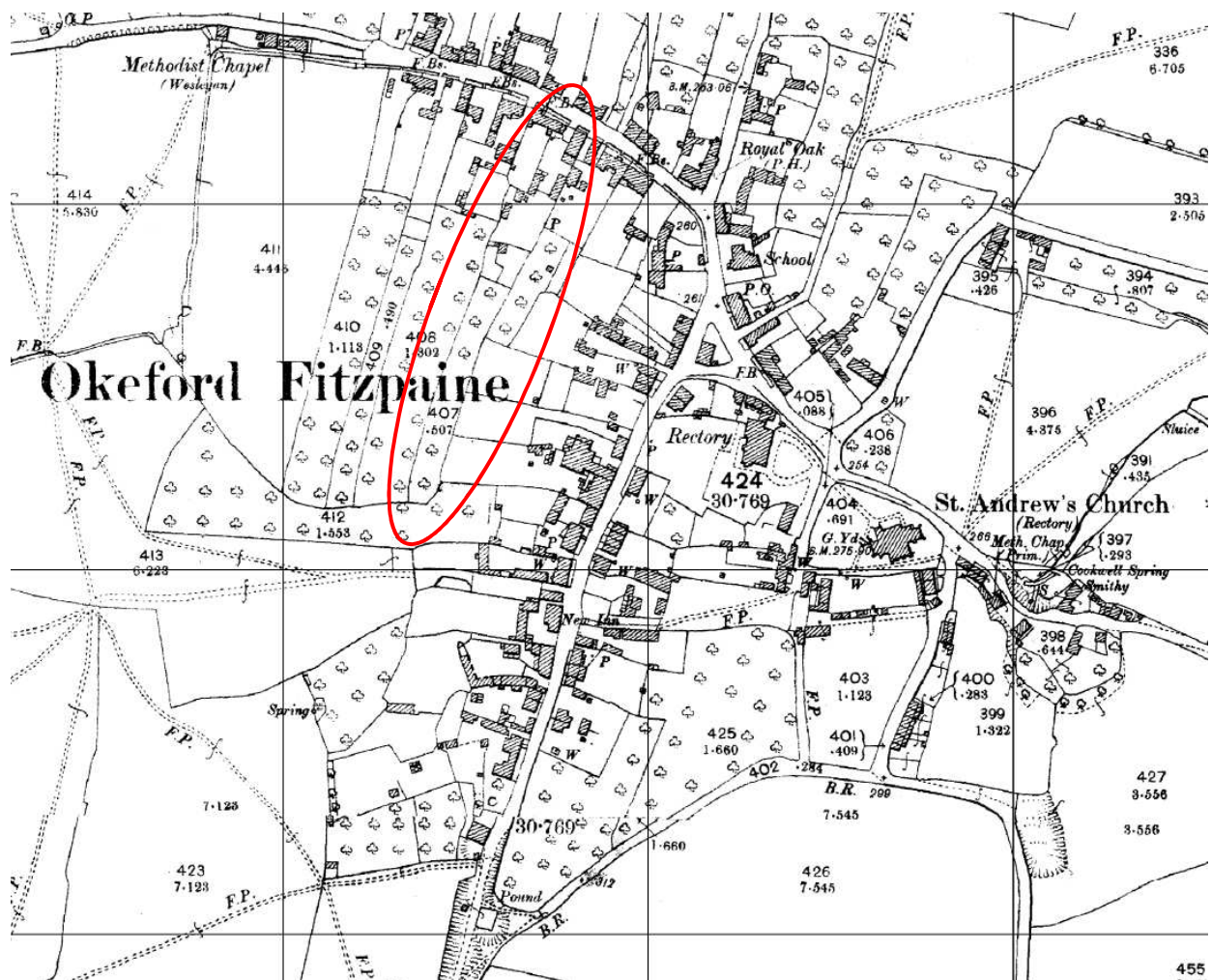


Figure 3: Ordnance Survey 1 to 25 inch 1902 (approximate location of the site shown in red)

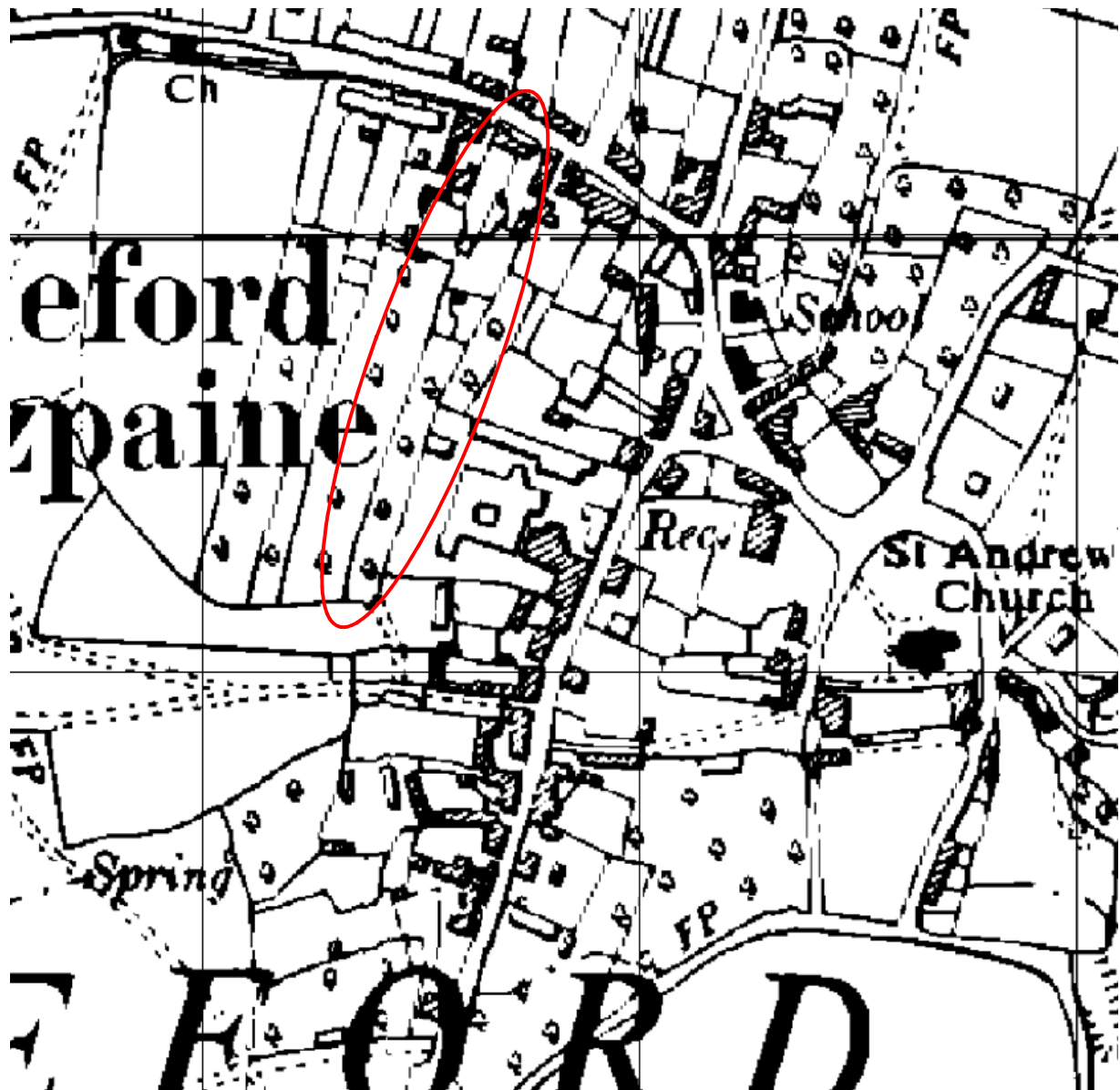


Figure 4: Ordnance Survey 1 to 10560 1962 (approximate location of the site shown in red)



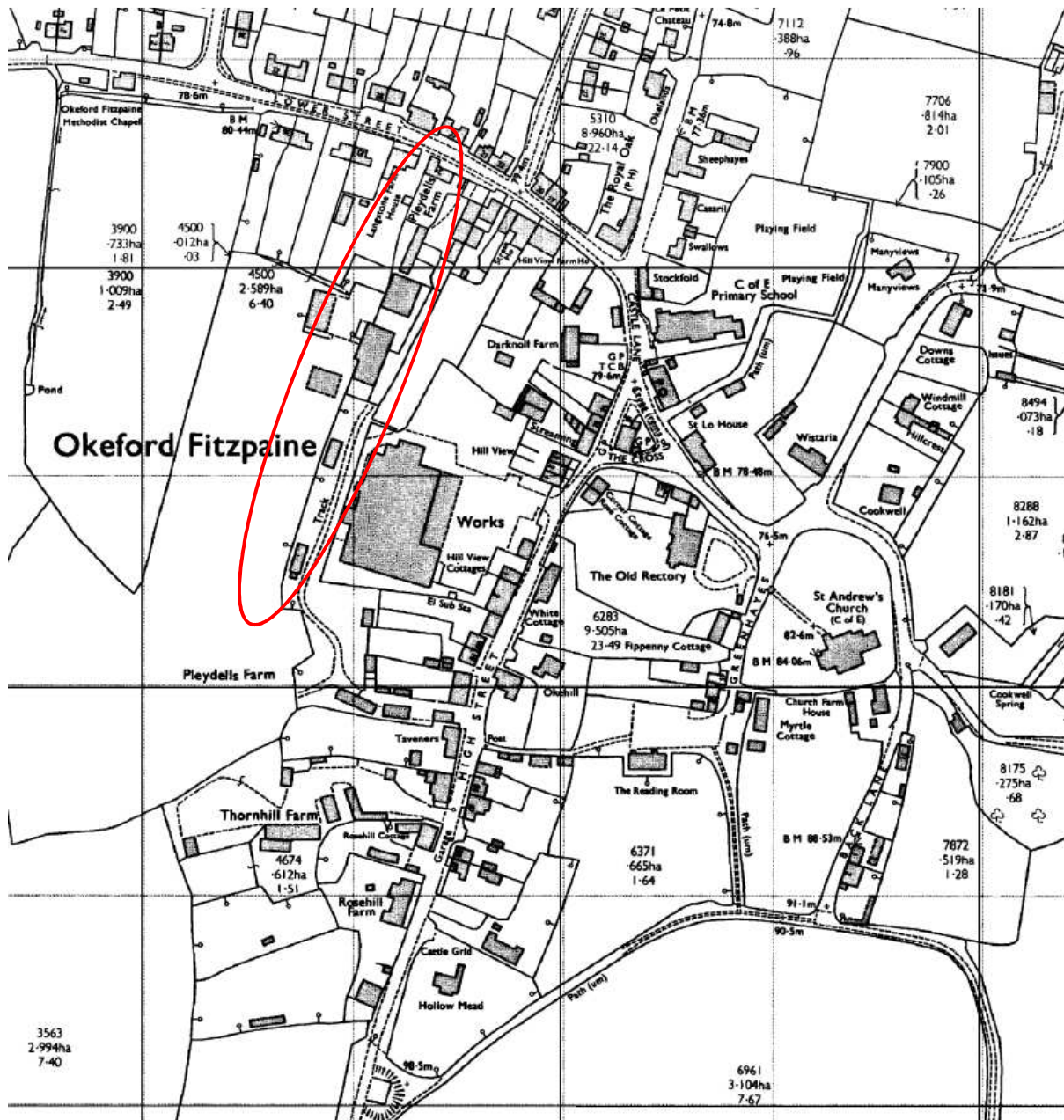


Figure 5: Ordnance Survey 1 to 25 inch 1981 (approximate location of the site shown in red)

## Appendix E: Figures



**Figure 1:** Church environs character area – view to church



**Figure 2:** Higher Street character area view looking north (Pleydells Farmhouse in foreground)





**Figure 3:** View looking into the conservation area from the west



**Figure 4:** View looking into the conservation area from the south (Higher Street)





**Figure 5:** View looking into The Cross towards the school



**Figure 6:** View to church from north-west (from The Cross)





**Figure 7:** Lower Street looking west (from Castle Lane junction)



**Figure 8:** Castle Lane - looking north out of the conservation area





**Figure 9:** View from Okehill looking north towards settlement



**Figure 10:** View from west looking east across the site (from public footpath)



**Figure 11:** View to the site from west-south-west (public footpath)



**Figure 12:** View to the site from south-west (public footpath across fields)





**Figure 13:** wider setting view of site in context of village development to date



**Figure 14:** View of site from south (pubic footpath)



**Figure 15:** Public footpath to south of Pleydells Farmhouse accessing area immediately south of the site





Figure 16: View west along Lower St. on approach to entrance to site (on left – beyond houses in foreground)



Figure 17: Stonyford Cottage (left hand side) and Richmond beyond and entrance to site





**Figure 18:** Houses to the east of the site entrance (and building adjacent to site entrance)



**Figure 19:** Site entrance from Lower Street (part of Yeatmans to west -right-hand side of the photo)





**Figure 20:** Site entrance and outbuilding adjacent to entrance



**Figure 21:** General view of the site





**Figure 22:** Nissen hut on the site



**Figure 23:** View of site from south looking north





**Figure 24:** View looking into the site from Lower Street entrance



**Figure 25:** Outbuilding to east side of Lower Street entrance to site

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