

Ms. JULIE WOOD: AD. 8539.
GA2. 27/3/18.

The area surrounding GA2 is steeped in history. It is probable that the original settlement of Stevenage was close to St Nicholas Church, Stevenage was granted by Edward the Confessor to Westminster Abbey in 1062 and Great Ashby lies in between this area and Weston Park.

The parish of Weston is also steeped in heritage. The earliest record of a deer park at Weston dates from 1231 (Cal Close 1227-1231 p.489). Its historic importance includes the fact that in 1532 Henry VIII granted the manor of Weston, including the park, to Anne Boleyn when she was made Marchioness of Pembroke and remained in her hands until her execution in 1536 after which it was assigned to Jane Seymour and subsequently to Katherine Parr. Much of the perimeter of the deer park is followed by old tracks and lanes and earthwork banks survive along the eastern and NW sections. The park and manor's detailed history can be found in Anne Rowe's Medieval Parks of Hertfordshire. Herds of deer and minkjack are still regularly seen in the surrounding fields at GA1, GA2 and Weston Park but urban sprawl has and will sadly continue to have an effect on their numbers.

Just outside the bounds of the ancient parish of Stevenage in the parish of Walkern was the settlement of Box Wood which lies to the East of GA2 and was held by three land owners (William of Eu, Bishop of Bayeux and Peter of Valognes) and its arable was assessed at eight ploughlands. The earthworks associated with this settlement are present within Box Wood and can still be seen. The Domesday Book includes the medieval settlement of Box. We don't know if all the 14 individuals mentioned in the Domesday Book inhabited the area of the Box earthworks. There are five, possibly six such 'tofts' in Box Wood though none have had any form of archaeological investigation, other than a survey by the Royal Commission.

The Heritage Impact Assessment written by Heritage Network and commissioned by Picture SRL states (figure 3 – yellow sticker) shows that there are 11 listed buildings & 16 HERS (historic environment records – details on page 25) all within a 1km radius of the centre of the GA2 site.

It states (page 26) that Tile Kiln farmhouse is a late medieval open hall house, with a 16th century north wing; one and a half storeys in a T plan on the west

side of the farmhouse. In the early 17th century the hall was floored over and the house altered. There are 17th century barns around the farmyard of timber frame on brick sills, weatherboarded with a chequered brick wall on the west side. → Alex. L.

HER 11272 – is a large quantity of post-medieval roof tile, found in fieldwalking, was concentrated in a field south east of Tilekiln Wood, though also to the south and south-east. The high density of post-medieval tile and the names Tilekiln Wood and Tilekiln Farm immediately to the north of the woodland, strongly suggest tile manufacturing in the area.

Under Assessment of Impacts – Setting (page 19) states: A number of listed buildings lie on the boundaries of the site, including the farmhouse and farm buildings at TKF, immediately adjacent to the north-western boundary, and the farmhouse and granary at Dane End Farm, close to the north-eastern tip of the study area. Listed buildings are considered to be designated heritage assets under the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and development of the site would have significant impact on their setting.

Further to this, the Heritage Impact Assessment (page 19) states: “existing hedge lines forming field boundaries which have been in existence from at least 1633 are largely proposed for retention and strengthening. Hedges are considered to be designated heritage assets under the Hedgerows Regulations 1997.” Nevertheless, development of the site would alter the agricultural landscape in which they stand, and have a significant impact on their setting. It summarises that, taken overall, the impacts of the proposed development on the setting of both designated and un-designated heritage assets and potential heritage assets, is considered to be high.

(Page 19) states: “the woodland on the site forms a mixture of designated and non-designated heritage assets under the NPPF which the development masterplan proposes for retention. Nevertheless, development of the site would alter the agricultural landscape in which they stand, and have a significant impact on their setting. The Natural England report stated: Part of our woodland is designated ancient woodland that is an irreplaceable biological and cultural asset.” The fact is that this has been impacted upon already by the development of Great Ashby and further development will see

further deterioration of this and important heritage rights of way such as the Hertfordshire Way.

Page 20 states that in regards to below ground archaeological remains, the risk increases to high for the medieval/post medieval periods. You will be aware that The Domesday Book includes the medieval settlement of Box which is to the East of GA2. I am aware that in other proposed sites within this plan, namely Baldock and NS1 that ground investigations have been carried out and question why these have not been completed within the GA2 area.

GA2 and its immediate area is particularly important to the communities of Great Ashby, St Nicholas, wider Stevenage and the surrounding villages and hamlets. It is not just green belt, there to stop urban development but is an area enjoyed for its nature and tranquillity by locals and visitors and is openly accessible by at least 8 different access points.

GA2 would appear not to be in-line with one of the council's own policies within the local plan. NE4 is about protecting publicly accessible places that serves a purpose. GA2 serves many purposes and to my knowledge, there are no alternative spaces so freely accessible to so many people. In the summary by Heritage Network (page) - it states that "2 groups of listed buildings would suffer indirect impacts through changes to the historic agricultural setting but these changes are considered to represent a less than substantial harm to the significance of these designated heritage assets that may be balanced by the perceived public benefits of the development proposal." Firstly I question how Heritage Network can judge the public benefit as this must be outside of their remit as this is a decision for you as the Inspector to make but wish to add that GA2 is a central hub where local people are able to walk from the area of Weston Park (the medieval deer park) through to Box Wood with its existing earthworks via Tile Kiln, along the numerous rights of way. This area is steeped in heritage, is openly accessible and should be protected for future generations. Rather than building on the green belt at GA2, NHDC should identify it for protection from development.

There is nowhere else to the immediate perimeter of Stevenage that ticks all of these boxes. Astonbury to the South East has only a few footpaths and is not

easily accessible due to its location and issues with parking; Knebworth has huge heritage value but is only accessible by vehicles for the many and there is an entrance fee. There are no other areas around Stevenage that has so much to offer and is so beneficial, both mentally in stimulating the senses and enabling residents to touch on heritage, nature, the environment as well as being physically beneficial through exercise.

I am aware that you will be carrying out site visits and would hope that the fly tipping you will observe in Brooches Wood and GA1 will not undermine your overall view of our appreciation of this beautiful area. Unfortunately it is an example of why urban development should not be built alongside ancient woodland and designated heritage assets.

Lastly, I would like to welcome all present (or representatives thereof) to internally visit Brooches Barn and that of my neighbours at Tile Kiln Farm to gain a greater insight of the fabric and structure of these properties and an understanding of why they should remain in the agricultural setting that they have stood for hundreds of years. A listed building in its historic setting is not just for the enjoyment of the home owner but also gives visual enjoyment to those who use the public footpath and Hertfordshire Way which runs along TKF and barns on two sides. To quote, Visit Herts: "Tourism brings considerable revenue to the Hertfordshire economy and Hertfordshire has a wealth of attractions that build on our cultural and historical heritage."
(www.visitherts.co.uk)

Thank you for your time and attention today.

+ Alex-

re 17th century tile kiln ... <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/herts/vol3/pp171-177>

<http://www.stevenage.gov.uk/about-stevenage/museum/47012/30115/30181/>