

North Hertfordshire District Council

**Preston**

Conservation Area Character  
Statement



## Report for

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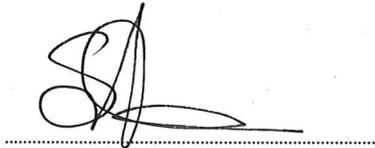
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# 1. Background

## 1.1 Introduction

1.1.1 Preston Conservation Area was designated by North Hertfordshire District Council in 1970, and its boundary was amended in 1984 and again in 1990. The boundary includes School Lane from Crunnells Green north, and parts of Chequers Lane, Hitchin Road and Preston Road, as well as, leading west off School Lane, parts of Church Lane and Crunnells Green. The village green is in the centre of the Conservation Area and its boundary extends east to take in part of the grounds of Princess Helena College, within the Temple Dinsley estate.

1.1.2 This report has been produced for the purpose of appraising the character of Preston Conservation Area. It includes a character assessment highlighting key features, a statement of special interest, a list of designated heritage assets, non-designated heritage assets and key views within the Conservation Area, and opportunities for improvement. It is accompanied by an annotated map of the Conservation Area which can be found in Appendix A. This report does not consider potential boundary changes in the Conservation Area.

## 1.2 Setting of the Conservation Area

1.2.1 The village is on high ground to the south of Hitchin, roughly equidistant between Luton and Stevenage to the west and east respectively. It is surrounded by agricultural fields with scattered woodland and notably, the north of the Conservation Area is adjacent to Wain Wood, a SSSI with a historic connection to John Bunyan.

## 1.3 Historical Development

1.3.1 The settlement of Preston appears to have developed due to its proximity to the Knights Templar preceptory at Temple Dinsley, which may have been founded in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, later being taken over by the Knights of St John in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. It is likely to have ceased to be a preceptory by the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century.

1.3.2 The village seems to have undergone a period of development and expansion in the early post-medieval period, with the earliest surviving brick buildings in Preston dating from the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Other key buildings such as The Red Lion public house and the manor house at Temple Dinsley date to the early 18<sup>th</sup> century. Much of the Temple Dinsley estate is parkland established in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Maps from the late 19<sup>th</sup> into the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century show Temple Dinsley as being oriented to face its associated parkland and accessed from the School Lane to the south of the house.

1.3.3 Preston saw a major phase of expansion and redesign in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century with James Barrington-White and Herbert Fenwick, successive owners of Temple Dinsley, leading the construction of a number of new buildings around the village that today make a major contribution to the village's character. These include the Church of St Martin which was built in 1900, just before Barrington-White (whose tomb sits behind the church) began his work, and Chequers Cottages, designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens, and added to Chequers Lane in 1913 (under Fenwick).

1.3.4 Sir Edwin Lutyens was an internationally renowned architect who left his mark on Preston by designing more than a dozen buildings in the vicinity and he was also involved in work at Temple Dinsley, including extending the main house and opening up an entrance to the estate opposite the village green, as well as designing the current main entranceway to the south off School Lane.

The gardens surrounding the house were redesigned from 1909 by Gertrude Jekyll. In 1935, Princess Helena College moved into Temple Dinsley and it was soon after this time that the central gateway entrance to the site was bricked up cutting Temple Dinsley off from its associated settlement again.

- 1.3.5 After 1950, a large, detached house was built on the north side of the junction of School Lane and Church Lane, replacing some older terraced structures. This building, in style and orientation, is in-keeping with earlier 20<sup>th</sup> century changes.

## 2. Character and Special Interest

### 2.1 Character

- 2.1.1 The village of Preston principally flanks the north and south sides of Church Lane, adjacent to the Temple Dinsley estate. The Conservation Area takes in the older part of the settlement, centring on the village green at the east end of Church Lane, with School Lane and Hitchin Road leading south and north from it respectively, forming the boundary of the Temple Dinsley estate. It also includes part of Chequers Lane, running west from Hitchin road, and Crunnells Green/Back Lane, running west from School Lane. The Conservation Area also includes that part of the Temple Dinsley estate consisting of the main buildings of Princess Helena College, its driveways and formal gardens. There is a particularly important view of the College when looking north-east from the entrance on School Lane.
- 2.1.2 Buildings in Preston are generally in brick and in a variety of different styles, although there is a clear phase of redevelopment in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that comes across as the predominant style today. Despite this, there are key earlier buildings such as The Red Lion Public House, the former chapel on Church Lane, and Chequers (Fig 2.1) and the buildings around it. These provide prominent examples of buildings in red brick with large windows, with the brick being matched by the long boundary wall of Temple Dinsley running along the east side of School Lane/Hitchin Road.
- 2.1.3 The more architecturally significant of the 20<sup>th</sup> century buildings in Preston have an Arts and Crafts feel, with brick at the ground floor level and tile hanging above. The use of linear, multi-paned windows in Lutyens' Chequers Cottages (Fig 2.2), and windows that continue around the outer corner at the extremes of the building contrast with the massive chimneys that characterise this group of buildings. The bell-cast roofs of this row and unified front gardens with little in the way of division between the properties present a strong architectural unity. Preston House has a high-quality decorative timber facing covering the whole building above ground floor level.
- 2.1.4 The Church of St Martin (Fig 2.3) is in brick, although the roughcast covering and limestone ashlar detailing suggests something heavier and gives it a visual continuity with the limestone ashlar mausoleum of James Barrington-White behind it in the churchyard.
- 2.1.5 The village green at the centre of the Conservation Area is edged with stone kerbs and east of it, on the other side of the road, is a wide grass verge that runs from the southern border of the Conservation Area north past the junction of Hitchin Road and Chequers Lane. By the time the road becomes Preston Road it has become a sloping verge and lost some of its depth. This grass verge is part of the boundary between the settlement of Preston and Temple Dinsley and is a key feature of the character of the Conservation Area. Wide grass verges also exist elsewhere, for instance along the west side of School Lane, in front of Preston House, and outside The Red Lion public house and Chequers Cottages, although in the latter two cases they have been employed more in the manner of front gardens. In front of Chequers Cottages, the verge/garden is edged with railway sleepers, part of the overall Arts and Crafts design of this period of development in the village. Elsewhere, there are brick walls and thick hedgerows to the road, as around The Chequers, while at the west side of the village green houses front directly onto the street.
- 2.1.6 The arrangement of the settlement is such that buildings either side of Church Lane face the road with gardens behind, leaving no other space behind houses. Boundaries here appear to be generally in the form of fences and planting. The exception, on the other side of the settlement, is the aforementioned long brick wall of Temple Dinsley (Fig 2.4) which is replaced by a fence after Hitchin Road turns away from Chequers Lane. This contrasts with the low wooden fences around

many of the properties facing the village green, and in front of The Chequers. These tend to be painted white and have a visual connection to the square-section timber bollards along the grass verge on Back Lane. Looking north-west from outside The Chequers, the rhythm of the chimney stacks at Chequers Cottages can be seen in the distance.

- 2.1.7 The village green and playing fields are significant open spaces within the village, and the churchyard of the church of St Martin plays a successful aesthetic role in that it is planned in a formal modern style and fronts onto Church Lane with only the raised ground as a boundary to pedestrian entry other than via the lych gate. The grounds of Temple Dinsley were redesigned at roughly the same time as much of the rest of the village. They include a large area of open parkland, which is outside the Conservation Area, and formal; gardens designed by Gertrude Jekyll between the Lutyens (re-)designed house and the boundary wall. The wall sits in front of a significant amount of mature tree planting, and a pond to the north-east and on the opposite side of the road to the Village Green complements the character of the village centre. There are other near-wooded areas along Crunnells Green and Back Lane, around the edge of the playing fields and around the churchyard.
- 2.1.8 The northern part of the Conservation Area with its cricket pitch and the southern part of the Conservation Area are undeveloped and have a semi-rural character which contrasts with the main built-up central part of the Conservation Area. With respect to the southern section, 3 Crunnells Green, Crunnells Green House, Crunnells Green Cottage (Grade II listed) and two other properties facing west onto Back Lane, make up a small group. The land immediately to the north of 3 Crunnells Green appears to be paddock land, beyond which is the school and associated playing fields.
- 2.1.9 Street furniture in Preston is limited to the village green, where there are benches on the green itself, and a shelter, noticeboard and listed telephone kiosk adjacent to it. The front garden of The Red Lion also fronts onto the green. There is a bus shelter on Hitchin Lane and signage is concentrated on the north side of the village green. There is no street lighting in the village.

## 2.2 Statement of Special Interest

- 2.2.1 Preston Conservation Area demonstrates well the development of a village of this size since the medieval period. Beginning as a medieval settlement adjacent to a Knights Templar foundation and centred on a village green, it expanded through the post-medieval period roughly along the main road that marks the western boundary of Temple Dinsley, before seeing a major period of renovation and reinvention in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century with significant design inputs from Sir Edwin Lutyens and Gertrude Jekyll.
- 2.2.2 Those broadly Arts and Crafts inspired developments dominate the character of the Conservation Area today, with buildings of the period placed in prominent positions throughout the village. Preston House appears to be a later addition to the village, but in a similar style and dominating the north side of the village green, suggesting that this particular style is not just an historical phase, but something that has been actively managed since.
- 2.2.3 Elsewhere, there are strong 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century influences, notably around The Chequers and The Red Lion public house, introducing a red brick, vernacular classical styling that complements and perhaps provided some inspiration for the 20<sup>th</sup> century designs, as suggested by the proximity of, for instance Chequers and Chequers Cottages, and the way that The Red Lion and Preston House face each other over the village green.
- 2.2.4 The character of the village is very green, with much mature planting, a dominating wide grass verge along the Temple Dinsley boundary, and a lack of pavements, except leading away from the village green to the north and south.

- 2.2.5 A large part of the Conservation Area is within the Registered Park and Garden of the Temple Dinsley grounds, currently in the ownership of Princess Helena College. Although this has rendered a significant part of the Conservation Area out of bounds to public access, the estate and its development has played a central role in that of Preston as a whole and it is part of a wider landscape design theme led by Sir Edwin Lutyens.

## 3. Key Assets and Views

### 3.1 Designated Heritage Assets

#### Listed Buildings

List Entry	Name	Grade	NGR
1102420	Mausoleum in North West Corner of Churchyard at Church of St Martin	II	TL 17831 24838
1102461	Lychgate to Churchyard of Church of St Martin	II	TL 17876 24757
1176631	Church of St Martin (Church of England)	II	TL 17852 24827
1102420	Mausoleum in North West Corner of Churchyard at Church of St Martin	II	TL 17831 24838
1102421	St Martins Place	II	TL 17964 24784
1102422	The Old Forge	II	TL 17930 24752
1102423	Crunnells Green Cottage	II	TL 18076 24422
1102425	The Red Lion Public House	II	TL 18037 24707
1102426	Fir Tree Cottage	II	TL 17981 24716
1102427	The Dower House, Princess Helena College	II	TL 18140 25114
1102428	Barn on Roadside Now Garage to Spindle Cottage	II	TL 18033 24897
1102432	Park Wall Facing School Lane and 2 Pairs of Gatepiers and Flanking Walls at Main Gate to Princess Helena College, Opposite Crunnell's Green	II	TL 18112 24666
1102461	Lychgate to Churchyard of Church of St Martin	II	TL 17876 24757
1103249	K6 Telephone Kiosk	II	TL 18003 24736
1176623	Chequers Cottages, Numbers 1 to 6 Inclusive and 3 Linked Rear Outhouses	II	TL 17933 24906
1176631	Church of St Martin (Church of England)	II	TL 17852 24827
1176692	Well, Wellhead Gear and Wellhouse	II	TL 18007 24739
1176712	Spindle Cottage	II	TL 18035 24910
1307766	Princess Helena College, Temple Dinsley, with Terraces, Steps, Walls, Railings, Gates, Pergolas, and Garden Buildings	II*	TL 18213 24826
1307773	The Chequers with Wall and Outhouses fronting Chequer Lane	II	TL 17994 24875

<b>1347463</b>	Sadleirs End	II	TL 17998 24896
<b>1347481</b>	Laburnam Lodge	II	TL 17994 24704
<b>1347482</b>	Vine Cottage	II	TL 17985 24729

Table 1 Listed buildings in Preston

## Registered Parks and Gardens

3.1.1 Temple Dinsley is nationally registered at Grade II\*, with the List Entry 1000919.

## 3.2 Non-designated Heritage Assets

### Buildings of Local Interest

3.2.1 Recommendations for buildings to be included on North Hertfordshire's Register of Buildings of Local Interest will be included in the Summary Report at the conclusion of the project.

### Buildings or Features that make a positive contribution to the character or appearance of the conservation area

3.2.2 The following non-designated buildings are considered to make a positive contribution to the character or appearance of Charlton Conservation Area. These buildings have been selected through the contribution they make to the townscape of the Conservation Area.

- 3 Crunnells Green
- Crunnells Green House
- Village Hall and attached cottages, School Lane
- Kenward Cottage, The Green
- Pryor Cottage (Pryor House), The Green
- Former chapel, Church Lane
- The Owl House, Chequers Lane
- Chequers End, Chequers Lane

## 3.3 Key Views

3.3.1 There are five significant views identified within Preston Conservation Area. These are:

- from south of the village green north towards The Chequers (KV1)
- from south of The Chequers north-west towards Chequers Cottages (KV2)
- from west of the village green east towards Princess Helena College (KV3)
- from the entrance to Princess Helena College on School Lane north-east towards Princess Helena College (KV4)
- from north of The Dower House south-west into the Conservation Area (KV5)

## 4. Opportunities for Improvement

4.1.1 There are a number of opportunities for improvement within Preston which have the potential to further preserve or enhance the special interest of the Conservation Area. These are:

- Better signage on the village green
- consideration for on-site parking in new development and addressing the loss of gardens to car parking
- some modern housing within Preston has large areas of hard landscaping rather than gardens, which is not in character with the rest of the Conservation Area

## 5. Bibliography

Online mapping from National Museum of Scotland <<https://maps.nls.uk/>>

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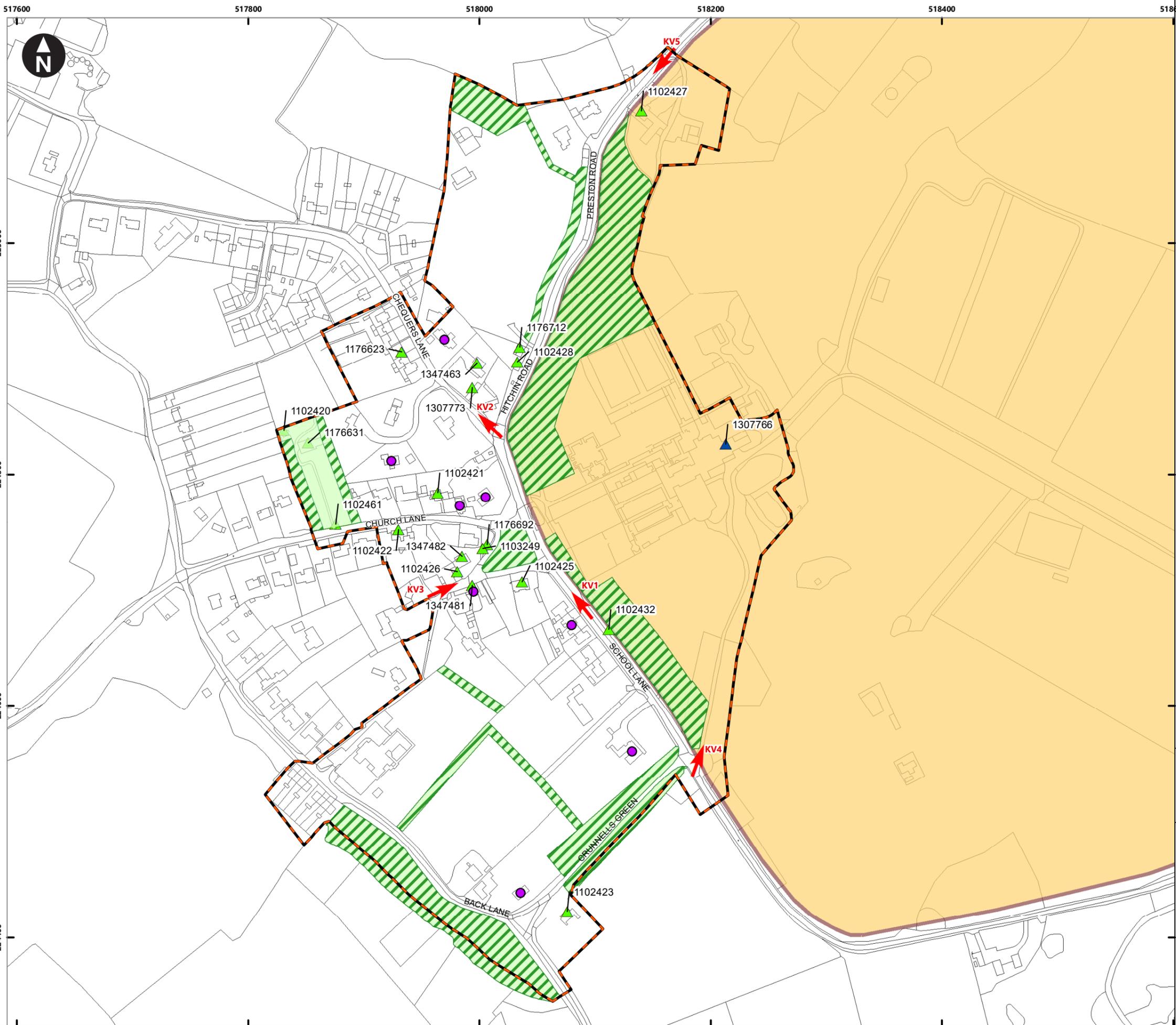


# Appendix A

## Conservation Area Map

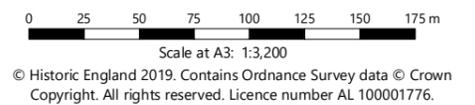


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- Conservation area
- Listed Buildings**
  - Grade I
  - Grade II\*
  - Grade II
- Scheduled monument
- Historic parks and gardens
- Heritage at risk
- Building or feature that contributes to the character of the Conservation area
- Significant view
- Significant areas of trees
- Significant tree
- Significant green space
- Significant blue space

Note:  
The Historic England GIS data contained in this material was obtained on 12/04/2019. The most publicly available up to date Historic England GIS Data can be obtained from <http://www.historicengland.org.uk>



Client  
**NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL**

North Hertfordshire District Council  
Conservation Area Character Statement

**Preston**

November 2019



# Appendix B Photographs

## B.1 Character Photographs



Fig 2.1 The Chequers, on the corner of Chequers Lane and Hitchin Road. An example of a mid 20<sup>th</sup> century building in red brick with large windows,



Fig 2.2 Chequers Cottages, on Chequers Lane. These are Grade II listed and were designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens.



Fig 2.3 Church of St Martin, looking north from Church Lane. The church was built in 1900 and is Grade II listed. The mausoleum of James Barrington-White is located behind the church, in the churchyard.

## B.2 Key Views



Key View KV1: View northwards along School Lane towards The Chequers past the village green on the left and Temple Dinsley on the right.



Key View KV2: From south of The Chequers north-west towards Chequers Cottages



Key View KV3: View eastwards across the village green towards School Lane and Princess Helena Collage.



Key View KV4: from the entrance to Princess Helena College on School Lane north-east towards Princess Helena College



Key View KV5: View along Preston Road, north-east past The Dower House

**wood.**

