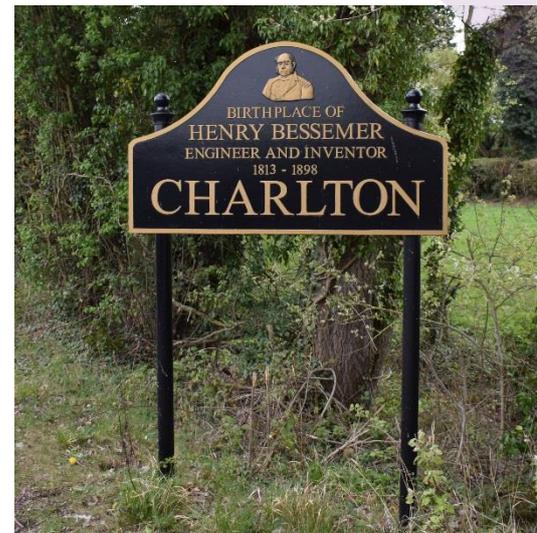


North Hertfordshire District Council

Charlton

Conservation Area Character Statement



Report for

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1. Background

1.1 Introduction

1.1.1 Charlton Conservation Area was designated by North Hertfordshire District Council in 1977 and its boundary has not been amended since. The Conservation Area boundary surrounds a mill landscape of probably Anglo-Saxon origin that was in use until the later 20th century.

1.1.2 This report has been produced for the purpose of appraising the character of Charlton 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 Conservation Area is surrounded by farmland and it sits in a valley between ridges to the east and west. To its north is Priory Park, part of the former grounds of Hitchin Priory on the outskirts of Hitchin. Charlton Road, which runs through the centre of the Conservation Area leads only to farm tracks and isolated farms and it is likely that historically the road was created to access the stream and mills. To the north the road leads into central Hitchin although its route has been altered with the creation of the A602 bypass.

1.3 Historical Background

1.3.1 Charlton is mentioned in the Domesday Book as a small settlement including a mill. It is thought to have later come into the possession of the Knights Templar (and their successors) as part of the manor of Temple Dinsley, when it is assumed that the mill was still in operation. Charlton Road runs into Temple Close, which suggests the extent of Templar owned land here. The manor is known to have been sold in 1582.

1.3.2 Buildings in Charlton date to the 17th century and later and are very few in number, which may account for the relative slow pace of change that can be observed in the village's past. The mill at the centre of the village remained prominent through the 19th and into the 20th century and was at one point operated by the family of inventor and engineer Henry Bessemer.

1.3.3 A small number of buildings date to the early-mid 20th century, notably at the north end of the Conservation Area.

2. Character and Special Interest

2.1 Character

- 2.1.1 The setting of the Conservation Area, within fields used for agricultural purposes, and the high number of trees within the area, contribute greatly to its rural character. The Conservation Area is based around the former working landscape of the mill in the centre of the village at Mill Farm which is located off Charlton Road and is presently out of use, however its overshot water wheel can be seen from the road behind hoardings. The Conservation Area is defined by the former working nature of the landscape that was engineered to provide power to the mill. It is presently made up of green space on either side of a mill stream that runs alongside Charlton Road from a spring immediately to the west of Wellhead Farm north towards Hitchin Priory. Purely residential buildings are concentrated to the north of the Conservation Area in two distinct groups; one north of Brick Kiln Lane and another west of the Mill Pond at the end of the Windmill Lane track. Other, older, buildings of a variety of uses including residential, farms, a former mill and a public house, are more spread out through the settlement, giving an idea of Charlton's more dispersed historic layout.
- 2.1.2 The core of the Conservation Area consists of the water management systems engineered to drive the mill. As these buildings are now no longer in use the streams, leats, ponds and springs are dominated by tree planting that presents a soft, rural character.
- 2.1.3 Historic domestic buildings within Charlton are generally in multi-coloured brick, dominated by soft red bricks of varying shades including mixes of blue and grey bricks randomly placed within the facades, including the two residential groups. These buildings have the scale and appearance of agricultural cottages. The historic buildings are generally of two stories in height with pitched roofs, in some cases the roofs have multiple forms.
- 2.1.4 The Grade II listed Charlton House (Fig 2.1), near to the junction between Charlton Road and Brick Kiln Lane, is in red brick with blue brick headers employed in a front wall of Flemish bond, something that is echoed in other red brick buildings to varying degrees of proficiency. Charlton House also has a brick dentil cornice and a variety of roof forms, together with a gothic-detailed orangery and window fronting onto Charlton Road. A number of the historic brick buildings in Charlton have been colour washed in white or cream.
- 2.1.5 Modern buildings are characterised by rendered upper stories over brick ground floors or are entirely rendered. In some instances, these buildings have expansive roofs, rising from ground floor level, including dormers and a second storey attic. There are some innovative modern buildings such as the 'U'-shaped single storey cottage with first floor mansard roof.
- 2.1.6 There are both historic and modern timber buildings in Charlton, the oldest being the Grade II listed 17th and 18th century granary and barns at Wellhead Farm (Fig 2.2), these with red brick sills below dark weatherboarding. This same general style has been used at Mill Farm Barns (Fig 2.3), where more modern barns, including one fronting directly onto Charlton Road, have black-painted weatherboarding and shorter brick sills with slate roofs.
- 2.1.7 Property boundaries within Charlton Conservation Area are generally a mixture of timber fencing and planting. There are trapezoidal concrete bollards along the verge outside Mill Farm Barns. Opposite this, running along the edge of the Mill Farm property on Charlton Road, is a red brick wall with radiused coping which ramps up as it approaches its southern corner.

- 2.1.8 Many of the historic buildings rise directly from what should be the kerb line of the road, for example Charlton House. Other historic buildings, including the labourer's cottages fronting on the east side of Charlton Road rise directly from the rear of the pavement. More recent, and larger scale buildings are located well back from the road within generous planted gardens.
- 2.1.9 The agricultural and rural character of the area comes from the use of hedged boundaries, in many cases containing hedgerow trees, and the density of tree cover to the line of the water management for the mill. At the south of the Conservation Area, Charlton Road has hedges on both sides with thin grass verges (Fig 2.4). The fields surrounding the spring adjacent to Wellhead Farm are also bounded by hedgerows near to Charlton Road and fenced as they approach the slope to the east of the Conservation Area. Maydencroft Lane is also lined with hedgerows containing occasional trees. Charlton Road remains hedge-lined on both sides until it reaches the second spring and the southern extent of the mill pond where, the west side of the road remains hedged while the eastern side is more open, still with planting and trees, but lower cut and less established, allowing a view over the ponds. While the hedgerow on the west side of Charlton Road continues, the east side is bounded by a modern wooden fence south of the residential buildings opposite Windmill Lane. To their north is a brick wall fronting directly onto the street which turns the corner towards the mill and forms part of the boundary of Mill Farm. That part of Charlton Road that runs east past Mill Farm is partly hedge-lined, but open in front of buildings and with a gate and corrugated iron hoardings over the mill stream. Mill Farm Barns and Charlton House provide a gap in the hedgerow on the west side of Charlton Road, the house fronting directly onto the road and the black painted fence of the farm sitting behind a grass verge with concrete kerbstones and painted concrete blocks. Opposite this, the east side of Charlton Road has a hedge that runs as far as The Windmill public house building. North of Charlton House, Charlton Road is edged by a low brick wall with fields beyond, while on the east side, north of Brick Kiln Lane, is a concrete-kerbed pavement in front of houses and a car park.
- 2.1.10 The majority of trees within the Conservation Area are along the mill stream, north of Brick Kiln Lane and south of the mill pond (Fig 2.5). Significant tree planting occurs elsewhere, such as at the spring west of Wellhead Farm, at the junction of Charlton Road and Maydencroft Lane, within the grounds of Wellenhevet, and within the Charlton House property.
- 2.1.11 There are noteworthy open green spaces around the spring at Wellhead Farm, between Maydencroft Lane and the mill pond, and between Mill Farm and The Windmill public house building, all of which serve to make visible the watercourse at the centre of the Conservation Area.
- 2.1.12 Charlton contains little in the way of street furniture. There is a small number of modern streetlamps and very occasional signage. There is a post on the south side of the car park which presumably used to hold the sign for The Windmill, but which also has the feel of a village sign. Adjacent to this sign is a poorly-maintained information board containing maps and images relating to the Hicca Way walking route.
- 2.1.13 On the southern boundary of the Conservation Area is a sign marking the entry to Charlton that bears the words 'Birthplace of / Henry Bessemer / Engineer and Inventor / 1813-1898' (there is also another at the far north of the village, near the junction with Willow Lane). Bessemer is also commemorated by a blue plaque on the Charlton Road elevation of Charlton House, his former residence (Fig 2.6).
- 2.1.14 The majority of uses within the Conservation Area relate to domestic housing or agricultural establishments. There is a prominently-located beer garden immediately east of The Windmill public house building.

2.2 Statement of Special Interest

- 2.2.1 Charlton Conservation Area includes a post-medieval milling landscape that is likely to have medieval origins. It centres on two linear features; Charlton Road, which runs roughly north to south, and the mill stream which runs from a spring west of Wellhead Farm north towards Hitchin Priory via (within the Conservation Area) a mill pond and over-shot mill wheel at Mill Farm.
- 2.2.2 Charlton has a strong connection to Henry Bessemer, the inventor of the Bessemer process, a method for the industrial-scale production of steel, who was born in the village and whose family operated Charlton's central milling operation for a time while they lived in Charlton House, which now bears a blue plaque commemorating Henry.
- 2.2.3 Key to the special interest of Charlton Conservation Area is the dominance within the settlement of the milling landscape, which has historically dictated the form of the village that occupies areas around the former water management system. The whole of the milling process can essentially be observed on foot, from the spring and its associated earthworks in the west via the mill pond and mill wheel (currently behind hoardings) to the continuation of the stream as it leaves Charlton. Later building has not diminished the visibility or significance of this aspect of the landscape and its preservation and enhancement should be central to management of the Conservation Area.
- 2.2.4 Architecturally, Charlton is of interest principally for its mixture of groups of historic red brick residential buildings and dispersed farm (and occasional other) buildings, which combine to preserve the rural feel of the settlement while making its historical development clearly readable. Charlton House, former home of the Bessemer family, is the most architecturally interesting single building in the village and has a strong historical and aesthetic value in demonstrating the nature of the village in the 18th and 19th century. There are relatively few buildings in Charlton as a whole and this has the effect of preserving the feel of a working landscape spread along the mill stream while also aiding the visibility of the individual parts of that landscape and their functional interconnection.

3. Key Assets and Views

3.1 Designated Heritage Assets

Listed Buildings

List Entry	Name	Grade	NGR
1102201	29 Charlton Road	II	TL 17754 27981
1102202	Ivy Cottage	II	TL 17925 28050
1102459	Granary and 2 adjoining Barns on roadside at Wellhead Farm	II	TL 17540 27626
1296268	36 Charlton Road (Charlton House)	II	TL 17832 28102
1296294	Peartree Cottage	II	TL 17762 27978
1307809	South West Barn at rear of yard at Wellhead Farm	II	TL 17524 27608
1347568	Mill Farmhouse	II	TL 17826 28005

Table 1 Listed buildings in Charlton

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.

- Brick wall along Charlton Road west of Mill Farm
- Units 4, 5 and 6, Mill Farm Barns
- 6-8 Charlton Road
- 5 Charlton Road
- 2 Charlton Road

3.3 Key Views

3.3.1 There are thought to be two significant views within Charlton Conservation Area. These are:

- from Temple Close looking east towards Maydencroft Lane across the spring and associated historic waterway (KV1)
- from the footbridge north-east of The Windmill public house looking south along the mill stream (KV2)

4. Opportunities for Improvement

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

- the over-shot mill wheel at Mill Farm could be renovated and opened up to further enhance the readability of the historic milling landscape through the settlement (Fig 4.1)
- the mill at Mill Farm appears to be at risk (Fig 4.1) and so there is an opportunity for works to stabilise or enhance this structure
- the stream would benefit from suitable enhancement to the area
- there is an opportunity for further historic interpretation through the village to better explain the intact historic milling landscape and its features to visitors.
- the Conservation Area could be provided with sensitively designed and located bin storage to better facilitate refuse collection
- the retention of The Windmill public house as a community facility

5. Bibliography

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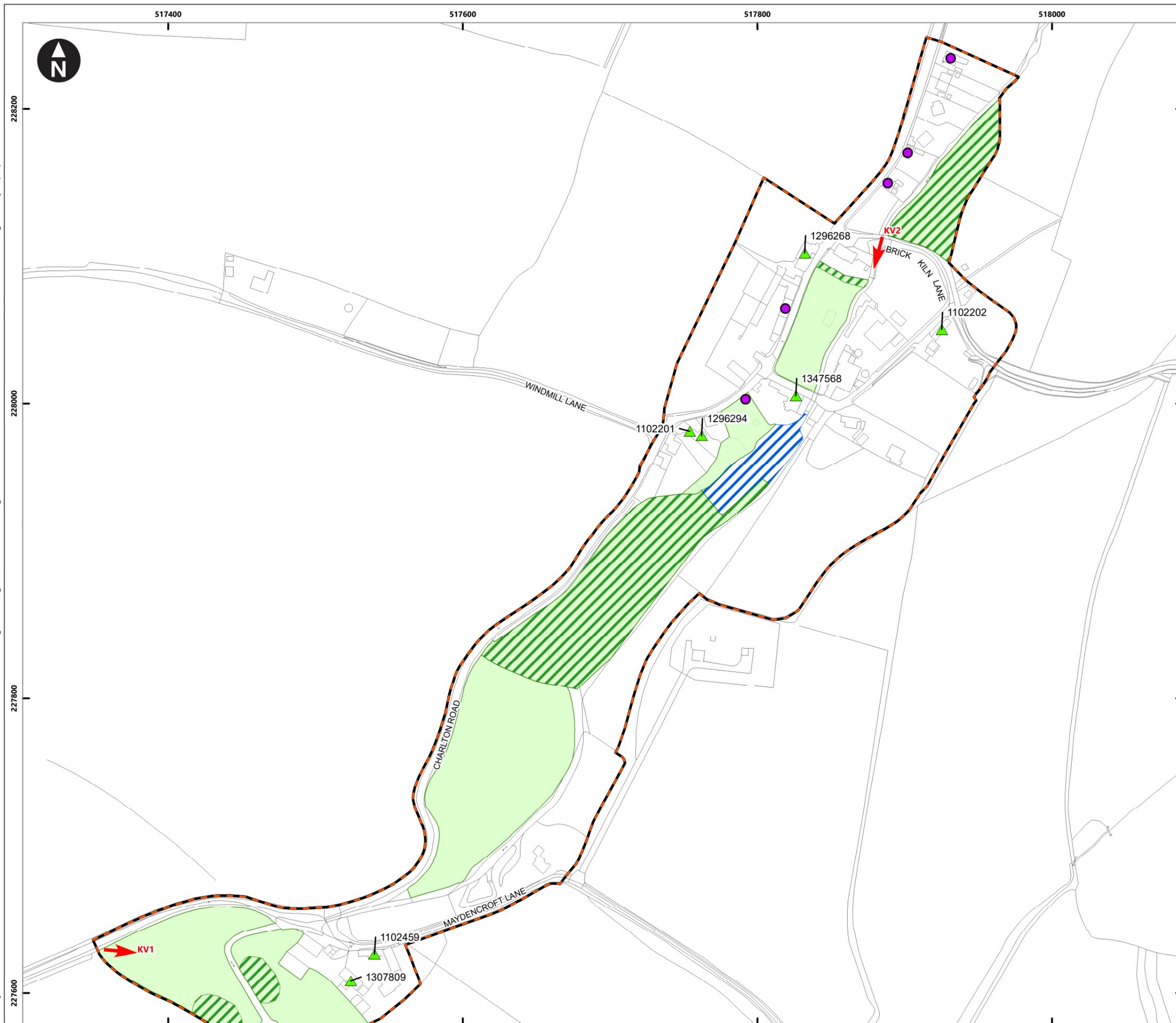


Appendix A

Conservation Area Map

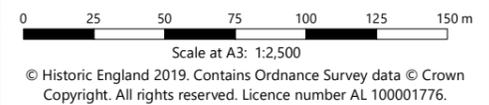


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- Key
- Conservation area
 - Listed Buildings**
 - Grade I
 - Grade II*
 - Grade II
 - Scheduled monument
 - Historic parks and gardens
 - Heritage at risk
 - Building or feature that contributes to the character of the Conservation area
 - Significant key 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

Charlton

July 2019



Appendix B Photographs

B.1 Character Photographs



Fig 2.1 Charlton House on Charlton Road, looking south toward Mill Farm Barns. Charlton House is a Grade II listed building and the Mill Farm Barns also make a positive contribution to the character of the Conservation Area.



Fig 2.2 Wellhead Farm and barns, looking north-west along Maydencroft Lane. The barns are Grade II listed buildings.



Fig 2.3 Mill Farm Barns, looking north along Charlton Road. Mill Farm Barns make a positive contribution to the character of the Conservation Area.



Fig 2.4 Hedged boundaries on Charlton Road, looking north. Hedged boundaries are a common feature of the Conservation Area, contributing to its agricultural and rural character.



Fig 2.5 Trees south of the mill pond off Charlton Road. The tree planting around the streams, leats, ponds and springs at the core of the Conservation Area present a soft, rural character.



Fig 2.6 Blue plaque to Henry Bessemer on Charlton House



B.2 Key Views



Key View KV1: View towards Wellhead Farm across field with spring and historic waterway



Key View KV2: Mill stream adjacent to The Windmill public house

B.3 Opportunities for Improvement



Fig 4.1 Overshot mill wheel at Mill Farm. The presence of a mill wheel contributes to the readability of the historic milling landscape, though there is an opportunity to renovate and open this up.

wood.

