

# Chapter 7

## Assessment of non-designated heritage assets with the potential to experience setting change

**7.1** This chapter assesses the potential impact to non-designated heritage assets that have been identified as potentially being sensitive to the development of the site through changes to their settings. The location of the assets assessed is shown on Figure 7.4 at the end of the chapter.

### Stinsford water meadows [DHER ref: MDO20538]

#### Summary

Significance of asset	Contribution of the site to significance	Risk of harm to asset	Level of effect
Medium	Low	Low	Low-medium
Regional importance	The site forms a marginally important part of the setting of the asset and this contribution to heritage significance may be affected by the development of the site.	The significance of the heritage asset may be harmed but that harm would be minor.	Asset is of medium significance and the magnitude of change is likely to be of such a minor scale that the significance of the asset will only be marginally affected.

#### Description

**7.2** Stinsford water meadows lie approximately 220m to the southeast of the site, to the east of the B3150 and Grey's Bridge [NHLE ref: 1119862] on the eastern side of Dorchester, or what was historically the separate settlement of Fordington. They are effectively a continuation of the Frome water meadows within the site [e.g. DHER ref: MDO21000 and MDO20527], although they may not be as old. The Tithe maps show that in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, those in Stinsford belonged to Stinsford Farm (now listed) and Kingston Farm (no longer extant); those in Fordington were primarily still owned on an open-field system, whereby the meadows were divided into small narrow strips that each belonged to different owners.

**7.3** Water meadows are areas of grassland (alongside a river or stream) that are irrigated with water. The calcium from the chalk geology of the local area and the leachings of arable land use were carried across the meadow and fertilised the soil therein, increasing hay yield or pasture. This meant that

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larger sheep flocks could be kept, more manure produced, and arable cultivation extended. Riverside water meadows, such as at Stinsford, were constructed as bedworks. These sophisticated water meadows are common in the chalkland areas of Dorset, Hampshire, and Wiltshire.

**7.4** Water meadows were used from the 17<sup>th</sup> century onwards, particularly in Dorset and the southwest and often reflect earlier field and drainage patterns. They fell out of use from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards, following the onset of agricultural recession and the inability to mechanise the process. Between 1918 and 1960 almost all water meadows were abandoned, and large numbers were subsequently levelled, making them a relatively rare monument type today.

**7.5** Water meadows are physically attested by an elaborate system of hatches, channels, and drains. Built structures such as bridges, roadways, culverts, and water mills are also common features of water meadows. Today a network of footpaths allow access to the water meadows around Stinsford and Dorchester, which can also be experienced from the B3150 and A35.

Figure 7.1: A surviving sluice in Stinsford water meadows



Figure 7.2: View across the water meadows towards Dorchester and the site



The towers of St George and St Peter can be seen alongside the spire of All Saints. Separating the water meadows from Dorchester and the site is the A35, which can be seen in the middle distance. The site is beyond the tree line on the other side of the A35.

Figure 7.3: View NNE east towards the site



View from the public footpath between Dorchester and Stinsford that crosses the meadows. The building in the centre is the old lodge and approach to Stinsford House, before it was dissected by the A35. It stands on the east side of the B3150, the trees behind it lining the road. The site is beyond those trees; the indicative masterplan suggests that this area will be open space.

## Significance

**7.6** The significance of the asset is **medium**. This derives from a combination of its archaeological and historical value, as surviving examples of a relatively rare monument type with the ability to inform our understanding of their regional development in Dorset and more locally around Fordington, Stinsford and Dorchester. In archaeological terms, they contain little complex stratigraphy, so their archaeological integrity is maintained largely by the retention of visible features. However, they have the potential for buried/waterlogged artefacts and palaeoecological remains.

**7.7** The water meadows are also of historical associative value as they are components of the cultural landscape associated with Thomas Hardy (see Chapter 3 for more information). The water meadows also have some fortuitous aesthetic and communal value as a result of their rural picturesque qualities and their present utilisation as recreational space for walking.

**7.8** In terms of setting, these water meadows have an important historical and functional relationship with the River Frome, which enabled their operation, and with the farms responsible for their construction and maintenance, although this is contextual rather than being a direct part of the experience of the water meadows. This water meadows also have group value with those that adjoin it to the west within the site and beyond, and others further east. This relationship is legible as you pass through the landscape from one collection of water meadows to another, however, as the necessarily flat topography of the meadows and intervening vegetation and field boundaries limit any visual connections.

#### Contribution of the site to significance

**7.9** The contribution of the site to the significance of the asset is **low**. The site includes the adjacent water meadows to the west of the B3150 and the agricultural land to the north of these. Intervisibility between the site and water meadows is limited to the water meadows west of the A35 (as those east of the A35 are screened by vegetation and limited by the flat terrain) and is interrupted by the trees along the B3150. The surrounding water meadows do provide some historical context but are only connected to the site by their shared historic function rather than as a continuation of the same system of management or by ownership (the water meadows at Stinsford being associated with Stinsford Farm to the north).

**7.10** Although the continuity and ability to walk through one set of water meadows to the next all across the area north of Dorchester is an important part of our experience of the landscape and conservation areas of Dorchester and Stinsford, in terms of the site's contribution to the significance of this neighbouring heritage asset, this contribution is low because it relates only from some limited intervisibility and contextual relationship.

#### Sensitivity and potential harm

**7.11** The risk of harm to the asset from the development of this site is **low**. Development in Housing East extends into the adjacent water meadows behind Open Space South and may be visible from this water meadow, affecting the legibility of the historical (illustrative) value of the water meadows along the Frome valley and detracting from its aesthetic qualities.

#### Level of effect

**7.12** Taking into account the significance of the asset (medium) and the risk of harm to its significance (low), the overall level of effect of the indicative masterplan proposals on this asset is **low-medium**.

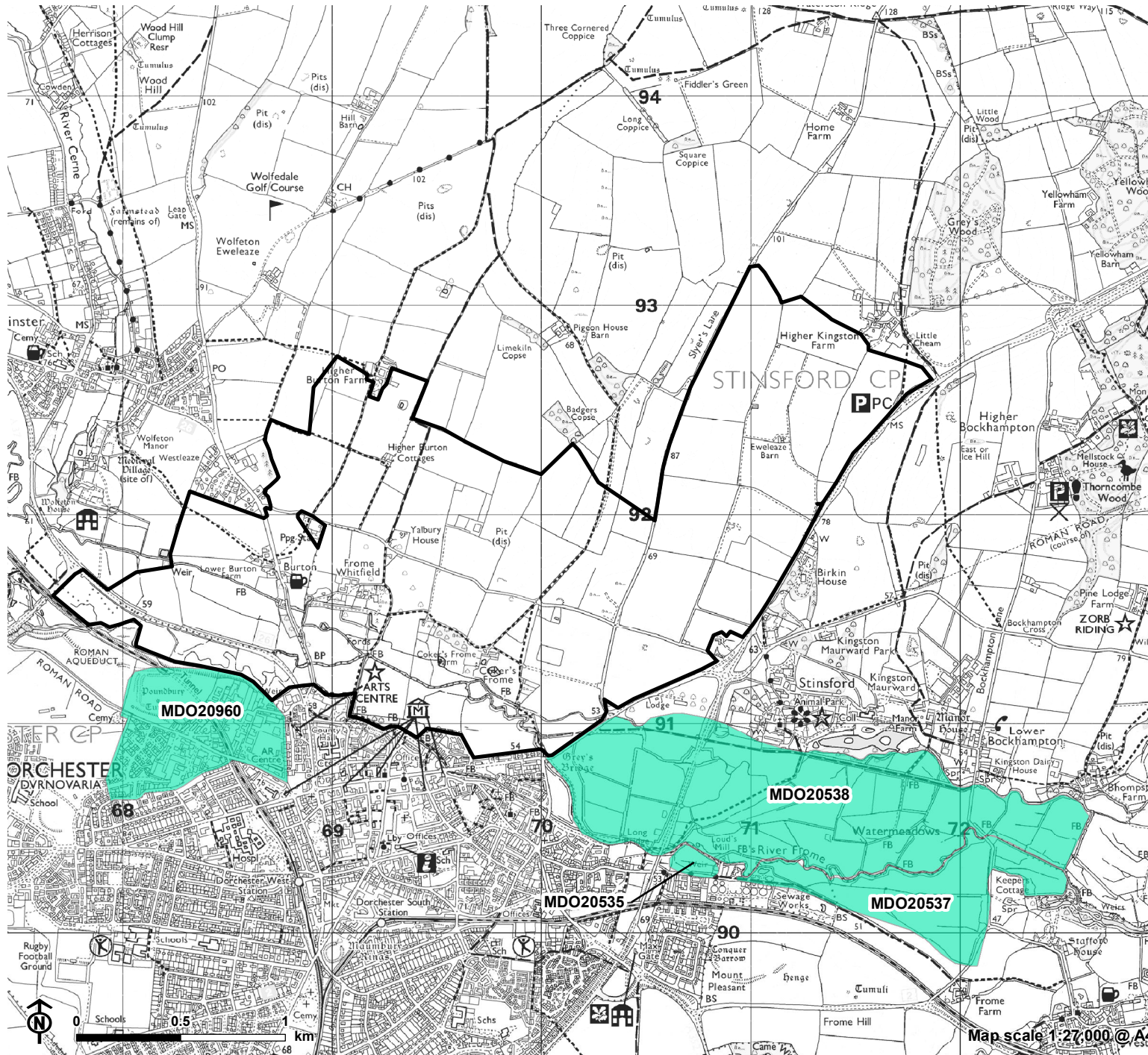
#### Options for sustainable development

**7.13** Harm to the asset could be minimised – or potentially avoided – by pulling the boundary of the housing back to the north of the Charminster to Stinsford road and by ensuring that any development on the site is not visible above the tree-lined western boundary of the asset, along the B3150. There is also potential for strengthening planting here to help screen the development, although this may also affect the visual relationship of the asset with the adjacent water meadows. Consequently, it is recommended that any proposed development in this area is reviewed and informed by verified views. This will help establish the extent of the impact of the development on views from the asset and how amendments to the boundary, development layout and / or restricted building heights might help avoid the harm identified.





Figure 7.4: Non-designated assets potentially sensitive to setting change



- Site boundary
- HER non-designated asset