1. **Introduction**

1.1 DE Landscape & Heritage Ltd. has been appointed by East Northamptonshire District Council to prepare supplementary information to refine an existing appraisal of the existing and proposed conservation areas associated with Ashton, Oundle, Northamptonshire. The conservation areas are Ashton, the village and its proposed extension, and the proposed conservation area of Ashton Wold, including the house and grounds, which form the core of the historic Ashton Estate.

1.2 This report builds on the draft Ashton Conservation Area Appraisal that was subject to public consultation in Spring 2016. Archive research and, notably, The Defined Area Survey, prepared by English Heritage in 2009, informed the draft appraisal. For the purposes of this current review additional targeted research has also taken place at the Northamptonshire Record Office.

1.3 The review is similarly supported by a new landscape survey of Ashton and Ashton Wold, which took place 2nd – 4th March 2017. During this survey the Ashton Estate granted access to Ashton Wold, and to its holdings in the village, although it was not possible to visit the kitchen garden. Other areas were surveyed from the public highway, public rights of way and from the village centre only. The private development behind Chapel Farm was not visited.

1.4 The purpose of the review is to confirm the historic and aesthetic contribution of the landscape within and outwith Ashton and Ashton Wold in relation to their respective significances and special interest. The review will briefly consider the ecological interest of the existing and proposed conservation areas in so far as it relates to landscape significance.

1.5 The findings of the review are intended to inform the future management of the existing and proposed conservation areas, in order to sustain and enhance their historic significance.

1.6 The report is set out as follows:

- Section Two: Definition and Summary of Special Interest;
- Section Three: Planning Policy;
- Section Four: Background Information; location, contextual information, current management and use;
- Section Five: A Summary History of the Landscape;
- Section Six: Spatial Analysis including key views and setting;
- Section Seven: Architectural Quality and Built Form;
- Section Eight: Planting;
- Section Nine: Ecology;
- Section Ten: Matters Arising;
- Section Eleven: Management Guidelines;
- Section Twelve: Conclusion.

1.7 A full list of references is provided at the end of the report.
2. **Definition and Summary of Special Interest**

2.1 The special architectural and historic interest of the existing and proposed conservation areas of Ashton and Ashton Wold (Figs. 1 & 2), ‘the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance’, can be defined and summarised as follows:

*Relationship of the conservation area to its settings and the effect of that setting on the area*

2.2 Ashton and Ashton Wold stand in elevated locations, which allow views and prospects to the north, west and south to be enjoyed from them. However, on account of topography and woodland cover, they are rarely the subjects of the view. Both the village and Ashton Wold are located in a predominantly rural landscape with large open fields contrasting with their tight linear plan form.

2.3 This contrast is an important component of the experience of their setting, as notwithstanding their close proximity to Oundle and major road corridors, which together with a noted lack of modern development within or close to them, creates a sense of detachment and otherworldliness.

*Evidence of historic development on plan form, character, architectural style, social/historic associations*

2.4 Ashton and Ashton Wold are unusually complete examples of a model estate c1900 executed in the same late Arts & Crafts style. While the village does retain some older buildings, and its related mill, the village core was completely rebuilt at that time around a new village green.

2.5 The associated landscape is older; the existing field boundaries, hedgerows, hedgerow trees, lanes and footpaths dating from at least the mid eighteenth century. Elements of the pre-enclosure common fields also survive in ridge and furrow near the village and in the woodlands of Ashton Wold.

2.6 Ashton and Ashton Wold are principally associated with the Rothschild banking family. Ashton Wold was developed as a sporting retreat, becoming a family home and, finally, a place of environmental scientific research. In rebuilding the village, the family exhibited similar intentions of improvement and community.

*How the places are experienced – private/public/seasonal*

2.7 Until c2005 Ashton and Ashton Wold were part of the same private estate. This imbued a sense of continuity to the buildings and landscape in form, appearance and function. That situation has now changed with several properties in the village having been sold and many farm buildings having been converted to residential or business use. New owners, and modern life, have brought with them a greater need for car parking, on-site storage and different forms of personal expression within the garden areas. A similar situation has arisen at Ashton Wold with the development of tenanted residences while the manor, once a busy family home, is relatively deserted.

2.8 Despite these changes, the overall experience of Ashton and Ashton Wold remains one of a privileged and private community. This appreciation is heightened by the enclosed,
cul-de-sac nature of the settlements, on account of the single narrow road access which becomes a private road at West Lodge.

2.9 The relatively restricted public access to the local landscape and woodland, and the highly ornamental nature of the individual buildings and their immediate surroundings, similarly contributes to this experience.

2.10 Ornamental planting (trees, shrubs, seasonal bulbs) found in the village in public and private areas, emphasise these ideas of communal amenity with a changing display through the seasons. At Ashton Wold most of the ornate planting of the formal gardens is lost but much of the wild flower community established c1971 in the gardens and hay meadows remains for seasonal appreciation. Similarly, despite natural regeneration, plantation woodland and specimen trees occur around the village and Ashton Wold lending a particular structure to the landscape. The woodland also helps locate the village and Ashton Wold in the wider local area. The woodland is predominantly broadleaf which transforms the wider experience of the landscape through the seasons by revealing and screening views.

Architectural quality and built form

2.11 The architecture at Ashton and Ashton Wold is of high-quality design and construction. It is primarily of a single phase, having been constructed around 1900 by the architect William Huckvale for the first Lord Rothschild. The design, which is centred on the Arts & Crafts style, provides a strong sense of uniformity throughout.

2.12 The buildings in the village have been laid out in a picturesque manner, constructed from rock-faced rubble under reed thatch roofs with mullioned windows in the Tudor style. Their design is reminiscent of the cottage ornée style of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, which was popularised by rustic cottage under thatch roofs. At Ashton Wold there survives a complete set of estate buildings from 1900, including Ashton Wold House, kitchen garden, model farm, stables, petrol store, and water tower among others. The majority of the buildings from 1900 survive with little alteration since their construction. The degree of intactness is remarkable.

2.13 There are some earlier buildings in existence in Ashton village which pre-date 1900. These include the high-status buildings such as the Manor House, Creed Chapel, Ashton Mill, as well as Chapel and Green Farms. These buildings all underwent a degree of alteration in 1990 but they retain much earlier fabric. The inclusion of these buildings provides interest to the overall architectural composition of the village.

Open spaces, green areas, gardens, trees

2.14 Ashton congregates around its village green. Further small but important green spaces are triangles of land at road junctions to the south of the chapel and north of Green Farm. These amenities are further enhanced by the green verges, which bound the village road and associated lanes, including the avenue at Ashton Wold. Cottage gardens within the village are characterised by small front and large rectangular rear gardens, the front tending to be more ornamental and the rear more utilitarian. The cottage plots are surrounded by low stonewalls. This permits generally unimpeded views into them, which makes an important contribution to the overall spatial quality and amenity of the village. Some of the gardens still retain the apple, flowering cherry and laburnum trees specified by the Rothschild’s as part of the original design.

2.15 Small garden trees and relic orchards dominate tree planting in the village. However, notable and unusual specimen trees such as London plane and cedar are also found which emphasise the ornamental character of the village. Ornamental evergreens such as Holm oak, yew, holly and laurel identify gardens of higher status residences such as The Cottage and Green Farm.
2.16 Tree planting at Ashton Wold is dominated by woodland plantation. Exotic planting is generally confined to a grove of cedar to the north of the house and overgrown formal yew hedges. Native trees, such as Wild cherry and Goat willow, were also planted in the garden to compliment ornamentals as part of a ‘wild garden’.

**Designated and other heritage assets**

2.17 Ashton and Ashton Wold are recognised by heritage and ecological designations, which identify their intrinsic importance and contribution to the wider significance of the existing and proposed conservation areas.

**Local distinctiveness and sense of place**

2.18 The location, plan-form, spatial layout, architectural design and landscape quality of Ashton and Ashton Wold convey an unusual unity and completeness when compared with other, perhaps more organic, local settlements such as Polebrook. The surviving field and woodland layout, pattern of lanes and footpaths, the arrangement of the cottages and estate buildings and relative lack of modern intrusions and development reflect a time depth consistent with the Rothschild’s ability to perpetuate such an ornamental estate well into the twenty-first century.

![Fig. 1 Existing and Proposed Conservation Area, Ashton (Source: ENDC, NTS)](image_url)
Fig. 2 Proposed Conservation Area, Ashton Wold (Source: ENDC, NTS)
3. Planning Policy

Legislative and Planning Policy Context

Legislative Context

3.1 The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas Act 1990 (The Act) defines Conservation Areas as "areas of architectural or historic interest the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance". Local Authorities are required by the Act to identify those parts of their area that should be designated as conservation areas and to formulate and publish proposals to preserve or enhance them. Local Authorities must submit proposals for the protection and enhancement of conservation areas for consideration at a public meeting within the relevant area. They must also have regard to any views expressed by people attending the meeting. Broadly, the effects of designation are that:

- Planning permission must be obtained from the local planning authority or Secretary of State prior to the substantial or total demolition of any building or structure within a conservation area, with some exceptions;
- The local planning authority must consider the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character and appearance of the conservation area when assessing applications for change in conservation areas;
- Permitted development rights are slightly different in conservation areas;
- Permission is required from the local planning authority to top or lop a tree over a certain size.

3.2 As well as receiving statutory protection, conservation areas are protected by national and local planning policies.

National Planning Policy Framework

3.3 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), published in March 2012, sets out current national planning policy objectives. It is supported by the National Planning Practice Guide (March 2014 and subsequent updates) which provides national guidance for the designation of conservation areas and for the determination of development proposals that may affect them.

3.4 NPPF section 12: ‘Conserving and enhancing the historic environment’ (paragraphs 126-141) sets out national policy criteria in respect of conservation areas. This applies the core national principle, to ‘conserve heritage assets in a manner appropriate to their significance, so that they can be enjoyed for their contribution of the quality of life of this and future generations.’ (NPPF paragraph 17).

Local Plan Part 1 – strategic policies

3.5 The North Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy (JCS) 2011-2031 (Local Plan Part 1), adopted July 2016, sets out the current strategic Local Plan policies for development and growth in the North Northamptonshire area. The JCS contains a range of development management policies for protecting and enhancing assets. The following policies are of particular relevance to the historic or built environment:

- Policy 2 – Historic Environment;
- Policy 3 – Landscape Character;
- Policy 7 – Community Services & Facilities;
• Policy 8 – North Northamptonshire Place Shaping Principles;
• Policy 20 – Nene and Ise Valleys.

3.6 The JCS also sets out the overall spatial development strategy for settlements, including Ashton, whereby:
'development in the rural area required to support a prosperous rural economy or to meet a locally arising need, which cannot be met more sustainably at a nearby larger settlement' (Policy 11 Criterion 2a).

3.7 Policy 11 also sets out the type of development that is appropriate:
'infill development will be permitted on suitable sites within Villages where this would not materially harm the character of the settlement and residential amenity or exceed the capacity of local infrastructure and services' (Policy 11 Criterion 2b) (2)(b)).

3.8 Development proposals within Ashton would need to take into account the relevant JCS policy criteria as a material consideration.

3.9 Policies 13 (Rural Exceptions) and 25 (Rural Economic Development and Diversification) provide more detailed policy direction for development proposals within the rural area.

Local Plan Part 2 – local policies.

3.10 The Rural North, Oundle and Thrapston Plan (RNOTP), adopted July 2011 (Local Plan Part 2) provides more detailed planning policies for the northern part of the District, in which Ashton is located. The following policies have particular relevance in respect of Ashton:
• Policy 4 – Green Infrastructure (4(1): Thrapston – Oundle – Peterborough green infrastructure corridor);
• Policy 9 – Buildings of Local Architectural or Historic Interest;
• Policy 23 – Rural Buildings – General approach – further local criteria for the adaptation or re-use of rural buildings.

3.11 All relevant policies must be taken into account when assessing development proposals which affect the conservation areas.
4. **Background Information**

**Location and Summary Description**

4.1 Ashton and Ashton Wold are located in northeast Northamptonshire to the east of Oundle on the east side of the River Nene (Fig. 3). Access to the village is from the Polebrook road with a single-track country lane connecting from the east end of the village to Ashton Wold. The lane becomes a private road at West Lodge, continuing to become a distinctive, raised tree-lined avenue at the Gatehouse, which exits the grounds of the Wold through security gates at East Lodge.

![Fig. 3 Location map](Source: ENDC, NTS)

**The approach to the village**  
**The Chequered Skipper public house at the east end of the village green**
4.2 Ashton is a model village c1900 with a mix of semi-detached and detached cottages executed in a distinct architectural style and congregated around a central village green. A public house, The Chequered Skipper, stands near the east end of the green while a chapel and reading room are found to its north. Two farms, Chapel Farm and Green Farm, are also located in the village to the north and southeast of the village centre respectively. Both of these farms have been developed for residential/business use. This has resulted in the establishment of a gated-development around the historic working buildings of Chapel Farm.

4.3 Some of the cottages pre date the c1900 improvements, particularly those on the approach to Green Farm, while a c1960 bungalow, executed in a similar style to the c1900 buildings, stands to the north of the village road at the east end of the village.

4.4 The historic Manor house stands to the southwest of the village core within its own grounds, while two large and detached properties, The Cottage and The Laundry, are found to the northwest, again within their own grounds.

4.5 Ashton Mill is an outrider to the village, standing between the river and the west side of the Polebrook Road. The millpond survives as does the mill cottages and later ancillary buildings.

4.6 The character and setting of Ashton is distinctly rural with large open fields, punctuated by small blocks of woodland and hedgerows, surrounding the village. Each cottage has a long rectangular rear garden and an enclosed small front garden separated from the roads by broad grassed verges and stonewalls. Some of the gardens contain washhouses executed in a similar architectural style to the main buildings. The gardens of the Manor house, The Cottage, The Laundry and Green Farm signify higher status dwellings, with ornamental/productive grounds with relic orchards, formal tree and shrub planting and, at The Cottage, two large but redundant Edwardian glasshouses.

4.7 In addition to the village green, the village contains other notable areas of green space: the chapel grounds, an historic allotment ground to the south of Chapel Farm and a ‘green’ traffic island to the north of Green Farm being among the largest.
4.8 This ornamental landscape character is continued along the c.2km lane to Ashton Wold with West Lodge contributing an additional formality at its west end. Relic hedgerows, regularly punctuated with historic oak and ash pollards, enclose the lane and verge enhancing a sense of separation from the surrounding farmland.

4.9 Ashton Wold is a reduced late Arts and Crafts house set in its own deteriorated but highly ornamental grounds to the south of the avenue. These grounds consist of a series of formal enclosures and terraces to the east and south of the house while a walled kitchen garden and associated service buildings are found to the west. Many of the service buildings have been converted to residential use with an associated increase in internal property boundaries. A cricket ground and cricket pavilion is found to the west of the house.

4.10 A model farm is found about ½ km east of the house to the south of the avenue and east of a cross avenue. The majority of this farm is contemporary with the house although at least one older building, a cart shed, survives within it. To the north of the farm is a derelict military establishment c1940\(^3\). There are two further dwellings to the east of the farm, Woodend Cottage and East Lodge, both of which stand to the south of the avenue. Two further cottages are also found at the south end of the cross avenue on the Lutton Road.

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\(^3\) The military establishment was the Dispersed RAF Accommodation Site associated with Polebrook Airfield which lies to the south of Ashton Wold.
4.11 The land between the buildings at Ashton Wold is characterised by a mix of planted and naturally regenerated secondary woodland. This screens many of the buildings from one another enhancing a sense of seclusion. However, it is apparent that views to the north and west were originally enjoyed from the avenue and from higher ground to the east of the Gatehouse at Ashton Wold.

4.12 Elements of historic tree planting survive at Ashton Wold such as the Horse chestnuts along the avenue and a high percentage of conifers and yews to the north and east of the house.

Topography, geology, hydrology, woodland cover, landscape character

4.13 Ashton and Ashton Wold occupy a broad plateau of land, which rises from the River Nene c20m AOD to a high point of c40m AOD near the village centre and c70m AOD close to the Gatehouse. From Ashton Wold the land extends north falling over gently sloping ground to the A605 as large flattish fields. In contrast, the land to the south falls as a series of rolling wolds towards the villages of Polebrook and Hemington.

4.14 The underlying rock is a combination of limestone and clay, the Oolitic limestone being a favoured building material within the existing and proposed conservation areas.

4.15 Water rises in the landscape to the west of Ashton in a series of field ponds, which drain towards the River Nene. Many of these features are historic with map evidence showing that they date from at least the early nineteenth century. However there is no village pond in Ashton itself. In contrast a large circular pond is found at the model farm at Ashton Wold with a second large rectangular pond to the north of the main house. Within the garden ornate water gardens survive to the east and southeast of the house, albeit presently dry, from where a stream continues southwest to reach two large ornamental pools which in turn drain into a stream flowing towards Polebrook.
4.16 Woodland cover within Ashton is limited to the relic pleasure grounds around The Laundry and to the north of Chapel Farm. These two woodland blocks remain predominately broadleaf with a few evergreens such as Scots pine, Holm oak and yew. Relic orchards also occur around the village notably on ground to the north of The Cottage and west of Green Farm. Within the village unusual amenity tree planting such as flowering cherry, laburnum, Horse chestnut and London plane stands out beside more recent garden additions.

4.17 At Ashton Wold tree planting is a key characteristic of the landscape with large areas of plantation being managed to the north and south of the avenue and east of the formal gardens. A few older field trees – pollard oak and ash – survive within the woodland while more are found along the lanes connecting to the village and along the woodland edges. A copse of Scots pine occurs at West Lodge together with a small woodland, Tile Yard Wood, to the south of the lane. A large area of regenerated hawthorn scrub is also found to the northeast the ornamental ponds, below the gardens, while a relic screen of pine and larch shelters those features from the north.

4.18 These landscape characteristics are reflected in the inclusion of Ashton and Ashton Wold in the following landscape assessments:

- National Character Area 89: Northamptonshire Vales;
- East Midlands Regional Landscape Character Assessment, 3 (Floodplain Valleys), 8a (Clay Wolds);
- Northamptonshire Landscape Character Assessment, 12c (Limestone Valley Slopes), 9b (Farmed Claylands);
- Northamptonshire Historic Landscape Character Assessment, Fragmented Parliamentary Enclosure.

Current management and use

Ownership

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4 National Character Area Profile; 89 Northamptonshire Vales (NE527)
http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/4871120062775296
East Midlands Regional Landscape Character Assessment 3, 8a
http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/5635681403535360
Northamptonshire Landscape Character Assessment 12c, 9b
http://www.mipenvironmentalcharacter.org.uk/data/4.1%20CLCA.pdf
Northamptonshire Historic Landscape Character Assessment
http://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/archives/view/northamptonshire_hlc_2015
Ashton

4.19 Ashton is today in multiple ownership having historically been in single ownership. The village is broadly split into the Ashton Estate\(^5\), The Creed Chapel Trust, Ashton Parish Council and private ownership (Fig. 4).

![Fig. 4 Land ownership, Ashton (Source: ENDC, NTS, Land Registry)](image)

Ashton Wold

4.20 Ashton Wold remains in the private ownership of the Ashton Estate with all associated residences being rented from the estate. Signage conveying this private ownership is found at West and East lodges and at the north entrance to a bridleway, close to Tansor Wold Farm to the north of the site.

4.21 Both the village and Ashton Wold are principally residential. Ashton Wold is actively developing a commercial offer with holiday lets including cottages and Shepard’s huts.

4.22 Farmland and woodland around the village and Ashton Wold is let and managed by agreement. Woodland at Ashton Wold is subject to a covenant agreed with the National Trust in 1945\(^6\) (Fig. 5) and has benefited from a Woodland Management Plan funded by a Higher Level Stewardship agreement\(^7\). The plan and the agreement seek to sustain the biodiversity and landscape character of Ashton Wold.

4.23 Deer are culled as part of the woodland management at Ashton Wold and the tenant farmer manages vermin, such as pigeon, but no field sports take place despite the origins of the manor as a sporting estate.

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\(^5\) For the purposes of this appraisal the Ashton Estate includes all property belonging to the descendants of Miriam Rothschild.

\(^6\) The covenant sought to conserve ‘the natural aspect or condition of the land’ and controls development (buildings, roads and quarrying), woodland management, the introduction of new animal or plant species and restrictions on game and vermin management and rearing but not to the detriment of ‘normal farming activities’.

\(^7\) Neither the Woodland Management Plan nor the Higher Level Stewardship Agreement has been reviewed as part of this appraisal.
Designations

4.24 The high quality of the historic and natural environment of Ashton and Ashton Wold is reflected by designation (Figs. 6-9).

Historic Environment

4.25 Ashton contains one building listed grade II* (Ashton Mill) and 30 listed grade II. Ashton Wold contains three buildings listed grade II* (Home Farm complex) and 18 listed grade II. The village of Ashton, including Ashton Mill, The Laundry and The Cottage, is a conservation area. The gardens and woodland of Ashton Wold are also registered grade II. Further details of the heritage designations can be found at Appendix 1.

4.26 The two areas include undesignated heritage assets such as ridge and furrow earthworks in the fields and woodland, World War II remains, Lutton Road Cottages, Chapel Farm and a boathouse at Ashton Wold. The lane which connects Ashton to Ashton Wold is also undesignated.

Natural Environment

4.27 The natural environment of Ashton and Ashton Wold is similarly recognised in the Ashton Wold SSSI, the Local Wildlife Sites of Ashton New Meadows, Garden Meadow and Ashton Water Dragonfly Sanctuary, Ashton Mill Fields and part of Ashton Old Water meadows. Potential Wildlife Sites have also been identified along the lane between the village and Ashton Wold at Tile Yard Wood and a dense area of scrub nearby. Section 9 of this review contains further discussion of the ecology of Ashton and Ashton Wold.

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* The existing conservation area was designated in 1970 and extended in 1996.
Fig. 6 Heritage designations, Ashton (Source: ENDC, NTS)

Fig. 7 Heritage designations, Ashton Wold (Source: ENDC, NTS)
Fig. 8 Wildlife designations, Ashton (Source: ENDC, NTS)

Fig. 9 Wildlife designations, Ashton Wold (Source: ENDC, NTS)
Heritage at Risk

4.28 Ashton Mill is included on the national Heritage at Risk register, as maintained by Historic England. The register entry for the building states that Historic England has granted aided urgent works to the structure but it unused and it is for that reason that it remains on the register.

Access

4.29 Ashton and Ashton Wold are peculiarly isolated within the busy local context of Oundle and the A605 to Thrapston and Peterborough. A narrow road off the local Polebrook Road reaches Ashton and Ashton Wold from the west. This approach road, the circulation around the village green, a spur lane to The Cottage and The Laundry and the lane which links to Ashton Wold are all essentially single-track roads, their restrictive dimensions having led to the creation of passing and parking places. Ashton Wold is effectively a dead end with egress via East Lodge dependent upon a security barrier.

4.30 The long distance footpath, The Nene Way, approaches the village from the northeast besides West Lodge, before continuing across the Polebrook road to Ashton Mill and the riverside. The section of path northeast of West Lodge follows the line of a Roman Road which continues southwest as a Byway (ME10) to the east of Green Farm.

4.31 The presence of the Nene Way evidences the historic relationship of the river to the village, its water once powering the historic mill. However, there is presently no official river access at Ashton Mill despite a well-established leisure offer of pleasure boats along the Nene at Oundle.

4.32 A Public Right of Way (ME2) extends west from the end of the lane to The Cottage, crossing a field to reach the Polebrook road. A second public footpath (ME1) runs northwest from the chapel to reach the A605. Both of these paths run between post and wire fences. Kissing gates painted in the distinct turquoise blue of the Ashton Estate identify where the footpaths are on estate land.

4.33 There are no public footpaths or permissive access at Ashton Wold but a bridleway follows the line of the cross avenue, entering from the north near Tansor Wold Farm and exiting besides the Lutton Road Cottages.
5. **A Summary History of the Landscape**

5.1 Archaeological evidence shows that the general area of Ashton and Ashton Wold has been occupied since at least Roman times\(^9\).

5.2 Ashton is recorded in the Domesday Book as *Ascetone* which may mean ‘farmstead where ash-trees grow’\(^10\).

5.3 By the eighteenth century Ashton was an established village with a free chapel, built in 1706\(^11\). The land to the east of the village was ‘recognised as a sporting estate with tenanted farms’. It is understood that the distinctive cruciform track/avenues at Ashton Wold date from this time, while the land to the north and south of the village remained split into six large medieval fields\(^12\). Traces of these fields survive today in ridge and furrow retained in the present fields and, more unusually, within woodland around Ashton Wold.

5.4 An Enclosure Survey, 1810, prepared for Dr William Walcott the then owner of the Ashton Estate, offers an instructive record of the landscape at that time (Figs. 10-11). This shows a linear arrangement, typical of this part of Northamptonshire, defining the village with the cottages standing alongside the road. The surviving approach road broadened out to the south of the chapel and at the approach to Green Farm (there was no village green) while the lane to buildings near the later site of The Cottage continued out into the fields. To the east of the village the existing Byway was clearly recorded as a ‘Road’ leading south to a crossroads west of Polebrook. The village plots were larger than today, but with fewer dwellings, with the enclosures from the common fields abutting the plots. The boundaries of many of these enclosure fields still survive although several have been infilled with woodland or later development. Of the surviving principal buildings parts (at least) of The Cottage, Ashton Mill, the Manor, the chapel, the public house and Green Farm, with its associated cottages, are all recorded on the survey. A pair of cottages is also shown opposite the Manor on the north side of the road.

5.5 In contrast the area of Ashton Wold, known as ‘The Wold’ in 1810, is shown remarkably open (Fig. 12) with the exception of the cruciform rides that ran north/south being marked as ‘Bridle Road’. The rides are shown lined with parallel plantings of distinct, large columnar trees with a circle of the same trees marking the intersection of the rides\(^13\). Small circular fenced coverts were also recorded in the west of The Wold with small fields to the north, south and in the far southeast of the holding. No buildings were recorded.

5.6 The land between The Wold and the village was recorded (Fig. 13) showing two of the medieval common fields, Upper Field to the north and Polebrook Field to the south. The lane, which connects the two areas today, ran along the historic boundary between these two fields.

5.7 An estate/enclosure map of 1811 (NRO: 3703) records similar detail to the survey of 1810 but with the addition of field boundaries across the common fields and around The Wold (Fig. 14). These boundaries are significant not only as a record of agricultural improvement but also for the regular arrangement of trees along the hedgerows. Many

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\(^9\) Ashton Conservation Area Appraisal, 2016 p. 11
\(^11\) Ibid, p. 13
\(^12\) Ibid and p. 13
\(^13\) The trees are understood to have been English elm. This is supported by a reference to an elm nursery at Ashton Wold in 1789 (Ashton Wold Defined Area Survey, English Heritage, 2009 p. 3 Fn 3) and the large number of suckering elms which survive on site today.
of these trees, oak and ash pollards, survive today and make an important contribution to local landscape character.

5.8 The 1811 survey is also important as it records the line of the lane between the village and The Wold, drawn in above the field boundary, which would make the surviving south boundary of the lane the boundary of Polebrook Field (Fig. 15)\(^\text{14}\).

5.9 In 1858 the Ashton estate was put up for sale\(^\text{15}\). A map accompanying the sale particulars recorded the landscape ahead of the improvements of the Rothschild family. The map is useful in recording some changes since 1811 (Figs 16-18) while the accompanying particulars noted the 1,760 acre estate was composed of ‘fine rich meadows, bounded by the River Nen, and close to the Town’. The good supply of farms and cottages was emphasised, as was the sporting interest (pheasant, hare and fox) and pasture to the east considered ‘capable of considerable improvement’.

\[\text{Fig. 10  Detail taken from a Photostat of A Map of the Lordship of Oundle with Ashton in the County of Northampton, 1810 (Source NRO: 2858)}\]

\(^{14}\) The accompanying written Act c1807 (NRO: CAM 29) notes that the survey recorded a general instruction for the route of lanes within the area to be widened to 40ft which, if the combined width of the road, verges, ditches and hedgerows is taken into account, is pretty much the existing width of many lanes in the immediate area of Ashton and Ashton Wold today.

\(^{15}\) NRO: ZB706/24
Fig. 11. Enlarged detail showing the village core, 1810 (Source NRO: 2858)

Fig. 12 Detail of a Photostat of the 1810 survey showing the area of Ashton Wold (Source NRO: 2858)
Fig. 13  Detail of the 1810 survey showing common fields between the village and The Wold (Source NRO: 2858)

Fig. 14  Detail of a Photostat of the survey, 1811 (Source: NRO. 3730)
5.10 In the village the map recorded long productive gardens behind the cottages, an allotment ground to the southeast of Chapel Farm, the addition of some new cottages, the expansion of Green Farm and the appearance of a circular farm pond in the road to its north. The Manor had also expanded to its east requiring the realignment of a field boundary. A footpath had been created to the east of The Cottage, running northwest through fields, while three blocks of woodland had been established to the north and south of The Cottage and north of Chapel Farm respectively. A range of substantial buildings had also been constructed opposite the mill in the pasture to the northeast\textsuperscript{16}.

\textsuperscript{16} The Sales Particulars noted the following named enclosures close to the village centre 63 – The Plantation, 62 – The Cottage, 59 – The Orchard, 51, Home Close (The manorhouse), 57 – Great Home Close (The manorhouse), 131 – New Close (Ashton Green Farm), 126 – Home Close (Ashton Green Farm), 118 – Home Close (Ashton Green Farm). The cottages are recorded together with their gardens and yards. This information corresponds with an earlier estate survey of April 1853 held by NRO (NRO:1728a) which is not included here.
5.11 The sales particulars also recorded developments at The Wold such as a significant increase in planting to the south of the rides and the creation of a farm and pond to the southeast of the intersection. Secondary rides/paths were also recorded to the southeast of the farm in the woodland, together with a series of smaller ponds and drains across the landscape, while the principal west/east ride had been extended southwest to meet the new lane.

5.12 The new lane between the village and The Wold was clearly recorded on the map, the land to the north and south still subdivided into the fields c1811. On the south side of the lane a Tile Yard is shown close to its west end with a new circular covert to the east while small ponds are also shown to the north.

Fig. 17 Detail showing The Wold taken from the Sales Particulars, 1858 (Source: NRO ZB706/24)
The Rothschilds

5.13 In 1860 Lionel Rothschild purchased the estate. A modest hunting lodge was built at The Wold to accommodate seasonal visits. This building is recorded as ‘Ashton Lodge’ on the First Edition Ordnance Survey, 1885 (Fig. 20).

5.14 His son, Charles Rothschild (1877 – 1923), banker and naturalist, took on the Ashton estate as a country home.

First Edition Ordnance Survey, c1885

5.15 The Ordnance Survey recorded few significant changes in the village since 1858 (Fig. 19). Among these was a reduction in the building to the east of Ashton Mill, the creation of orchards to the north of the later Cottage and west of Green Farm, the removal of the lane/path to the east of the later Cottage and its replacement with the existing footpaths north of the chapel and west of the later Cottage. In addition the farm pond had been removed and replaced with the existing triangular island while small structures, possibly pigsties, had appeared in the gardens behind the cottages on the north side of the village. This survey also recorded the land on the approach to the village as ‘Ashton Green’ for the first time.

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17 An estate map, 1860 (NRO: 5173) accompanied the sale but inspection shows that no significant changes had occurred since 1858 and so it is not reproduced here.

18 Charles Rothschild was a key figure in the modern nature conservation movement. In 1899 he purchased part of Wicken Fen, Cambridgeshire before donating it to the fledging National Trust in 1901. In 1912 he formed the Society for the Promotion of Nature Reserves (now Royal Society for Nature Conservation).
Fig. 19 First Edition Ordnance Survey, detail of Ashton (Source: ENDC, NTS)

Fig. 20 First Edition Ordnance Survey, detail of Ashton Wold (Source: ENDC, NTS)
5.16 At Ashton Wold the Ordnance Survey recorded a heavily wooded landscape to the south of the rides, represented as formal tree-lined avenues, with pasture to the north. The north cross ride was shown ending in a dogleg, which survives today, to the east of the plantation Stamford Corner before continuing north as an informal track (Fig. 20).

5.17 Ashton Lodge was set in a relatively open situation with a footpath to the southwest leading towards a small pond and Polebrook. A network of paths ran to the east of the lodge through woodland with a circular clearing ‘Greenhouse Corner’ suggesting an ornamental feature. However, no building was recorded here. To the south of the intersection a previous area of woodland had been cleared to create a paddock while the farm pond had been simplified to the southeast. A second woodland clearing, ‘Cabin Plain’ was shown to the southeast of the farm together with a small building.

5.18 Ornamental tree planting was recorded by the survey in the village, such as trees along the south and northwest side of the green, a group of five within the Green Farm triangle and trees along the verge to the south of the chapel. It is possible that these represent some of the surviving mature trees found in the village such as the London planes.

5.19 On his son’s behalf Lord Rothschild took on architect, William Huckvale, to redesign the house and create some new estate buildings and to rebuild the village. At Ashton Wold a water tower was constructed to pump water from the Nene and village wells up to the new house, which was completed in 1900.

*Third Edition Ordnance Survey, c1925*

5.20 The improvements to the village are recorded by this survey (Fig. 21) [they are not shown on the Second Edition c1900] and show the general surviving arrangement, which includes the addition of The Laundry, The Cottage and the distinctive shared washhouses in the gardens to the rear of the new cottages. The southern area of the village was rebuilt wholesale to allow for the creation of the village green, separated from the new cottages along its south side by a narrow lane. However, to the north the form of the older cottage gardens was generally retained, together with the allotment ground and area around Green Farm. Significantly the two cottages opposite the Manor, on the approach to the village, had been removed while three other cottages, dating from 1607, were retained close to Green Farm.

5.21 Although not recorded by the survey, the use of Ashton Mill had also changed by this date with the production of electricity taking precedent over flour.

5.22 Similarly it is this Ordnance Survey that records substantial changes at Ashton Wold (Fig. 22). The new house is shown enclosed within its formal gardens and increased woodland to the north and west. A serpentine drive approached the house from the avenue through the woodland. The large walled kitchen garden was also recorded to the west of the house together with its ancillary buildings. To the south of the house the pond had been increased in size and a second pond created in an area of rough heathy pasture with few trees. A boathouse was recorded on the west pond. To the east of the house the circular planting of Greenhouse Corner had been retained but was no longer identified. However the pond at the farm had either been restored much to its present form or was better recorded. Paths in woodland to the southeast of the farm had also survived from 1885 with Cabin Plain still identified. The woodland had been extended west into ‘Water Gap Field’. Lutton Road Cottages are recorded by the Survey for the first time at the south end of the cross ride, as were Wood Cottage and East Lodge to the east of the farm.

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19 Donoyou, R Draft: Ashton Conservation Area Appraisal, 2016, p. 18
20 The kitchen gardens contained a full range of Foster & Pearson glasshouses including a bespoke orchid and water lily house. Rothschild, M ‘The Rothschild Gardens, 1996, p. 87
Fig. 21 Third Edition Ordnance Survey, detail of Ashton (Source: ENDC, NTS)

Fig. 22 Third Edition Ordnance Survey, detail of Ashton Wold (Source: ENDC, NTS)
5.23 The grounds of Ashton Wold were also notable for a large area of gorse recorded to the north of the house on the north side of the avenue. An earlier covert, together with the large rectangular pool, was retained within the gorse. This area of landscape, together with other woodland, such as Stamford Corner, may represent the particular wildlife interests of Charles Rothschild, who is understood to have managed the grounds of Ashton Wold to favour invertebrates, specifically butterflies and moths.

5.24 The formal gardens of Ashton Wold, which are recorded by the Survey to the south and southeast of the house, were described c1904 'with waterfalls, lakes, miles of laid out gardens, and nearly full-grown fruit trees'. These gardens were composed of three tiered terraced gardens with bedding out and herbaceous borders to the south of the house and a rose garden, a rock garden with a thatched dovecote and a water garden to the southeast. Alpines and other rock plants were grown in the high retaining wall along the west side of these gardens. A 'wild garden' was also created leading to and around the ponds. A team of 14 gardeners was originally employed to care for the gardens. A photograph, held by the Northampton Record Office, records the house and garden in its early maturity (Fig. 23).

![Fig. 23 Photograph c1920 Ashton Wold, the water garden and house from the southeast (Source: NRO. LIB 34/2)](image)

5.25 The grounds of Ashton Wold began to decline following death of Charles’s wife in 1940 and the advent of war. His daughter, Miriam (1908 – 2005), inherited taking up residency following a proposed remodelling of the house by architect Claude Phillimore in 1948. She did not live permanently at Ashton Wold until 1971 following the reduction of the house c1967.

5.26 Like her father, Miriam Rothschild was a noted naturalist and managed the grounds of Ashton Wold to benefit wildlife and, to a lesser extent, for reasons of economy. She became a noted advocate for the reintroduction of wild flowers and encouraged a form of

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23 Due to its poor condition it is difficult to tell if some/all of the rock remaining is natural or an example of the fashionable ‘Pulhamite’ which appears in the Rothschild gardens at Gunnersbury Park, London and Waddesdon Manor, Bucks and is therefore worthy of further investigation.
25 This included the removal of the upper storey of the house. The stonework remains on site piled up to the north of the entrance court.
natural succession at Ashton Wold which saw trees seeding onto the terraces, the ponds reeding over and lawns, terraces and pasture allowed to re-wild but within a design aesthetic. She described herself as ‘a wild flower and grass gardener’ seeking to resurrect ‘John Clare’s countryside’ and to encourage a ‘new sympathy with wildlife’.

5.27 Since her death in 2005 the grounds of Ashton Wold, albeit remarkably intact, have entered a period of decline with deteriorating garden structures, overgrown hedges, self seeded trees in place of ornamentals and the reduction of ornamental planting except for naturalised bulbs and some overgrown flowering shrubs.

5.28 On her death her estate was left between her three children, who have similarly reduced their holdings by gradually selling off property and land within the village. This has led to the conversion of many of the farm buildings at Chapel and Green farms. Apart from this little change had occurred in the village since c1925, the most significant being the construction of the bungalow c1960, Walnut and Hazelnut cottages, and the rebuilding and extension of the pub following a fire c1995.

5.29 c2010 the estate attempted to mitigate the spatial limitations of some of the village houses by offering upmarket Shepard’s huts for use as home offices/leisure spaces. These huts were located in the rear gardens but many have since been removed to Ashton Wold, or to storage near the cricket pavilion, following the sale of these properties into private hands.

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27 This assessment is based only on a few site visits and the pictorial record. A longer-term survey would be needed to better understand the surviving planting at Ashton Wold.
6. **Spatial Analysis**

6.1 The location of Ashton and Ashton Wold, on an elevated plateau above the River Nene and A605 corridor, contributes to a sense of detachment from the local area. This key characteristic is accentuated by the predominately linear spatial quality of the existing and proposed conservation areas. The narrow lane rises to the village, tightly gathered around the village green, continuing as a narrow lane enclosed by hedgerows to the tree-lined avenues of Ashton Wold where the house, model farm and ancillary buildings are similarly arranged in their respective tight groups close to the avenue. This concentrated development contrasts with the large-scale openness of the surrounding farmland and woodland cover, which allows for panoramic views particularly to the north and south of Ashton Wold and to the south of Ashton.

6.2 The c1900 buildings are carefully located in the village, set back from the roads but within the front third of their comparatively generous gardens. The cottages are each positioned to be read individually and as a group from the green and village road. This spaciousness is emphasised by the lack of side extensions to the buildings, and the low stone boundary walls, which might detract from the ‘polite’ front elevations.

6.3 In contrast, other higher status properties such as the Manor, The Cottage, The Laundry, Chapel Farm (and its associated new development), Green Farm (and its associated cottages) and the chapel, are set back from the village green and the road. They are physically removed from the dominant experience of the green, pub and cottages but play an important role in extending the spatial experience of the village. Larger and more densely planted grounds are associated with these properties, which creates a sense of detachment. In the case of Chapel and Green farms modern security gates and barriers exacerbate this.

6.4 Despite their relative generosity, the rear gardens of the cottages can appear congested with a plethora of modern garden buildings and stores in addition to the historic washhouses. While these areas historically held a more utilitarian purpose, the varied number, scale and design of the new structures have affected their spatial quality.

6.5 This spatial quality is similarly affected by the limited access to Ashton and Ashton Wold, which has helped to perpetuate the experience of a privileged gentry estate.

6.6 This experience contrasts markedly with villages such as Polebrook, which are composed of a greater variety of built form and architectural styles, where the busy main road reduces the appreciation of the settlement to fleeting glimpses.

**Key Views (summarised on Fig. 24)**

**Ashton**

6.7 The visual experience of Ashton is dominated by the relationship of the cottages and pub to the village green. All of the c1900 buildings face the village green, intended to be observed from it, which creates a strong sense of intimacy and enclosure. Views are therefore kinetic, the cottages being revealed by movement across or around the green. There is no one point in the village from where the whole composition can be appreciated. Views towards the cottages along the north side of the village green are best experienced from the approach from the southwest and views towards the pub and southern cottages from junction of the spur road to The Cottage. The cottages set between the village and spur road conclude views to the west from the public house.
6.8 This arrangement conveys a visual hierarchy, which similarly reflects the higher social status of the older and detached village properties. They are effectively removed from the dominant experience of the village green, public house and cottages.

6.9 Views of the village are relatively limited on account of planting and topography. The rear of the Manor house and southern cottages can be seen from the Polebrook road to the southwest but this is more incidental than key. Similarly the view along the approach road is incidental. Only when the view opens out to the west of the village green does it contribute to the particular appreciation of the character of the village. This experience is effectively repeated when approaching the village from the east.
6.10  Views towards the village from the Byway can also be described as incidental although the experience of these views has recently been changed by the extensive ‘paddocking’ of land immediately to the east of Green Farm. Views from this Byway to the south, and to a lesser extent from the village road between the village and West Lodge, are similarly affected by the rigid polytunnels of the Polebrook garden centre, which is another noted modern addition in the view.

6.11  Footpaths running to the northwest and west of the village connect it to the wider landscape. They provide views of Oundle and St. Peter’s Church and the distant tower of Fotheringhay church to the north. The alignment of the west footpath also suggests that a view of both Ashton Mill and Oundle is possible from the west side of The Cottage.

6.12  A key view to the east of the village is of West Lodge, which stands between the approach to Ashton Wold and the old Roman Road. The ornamental character of the lodge, standing beneath its tall enclosing Scots pines, focuses and concludes the view.

Ashton Wold

6.13  Ashton Wold house faces southwest on the south side of the plateau looking towards Polebrook, although this village is not visible from the gardens. The presence of garden terraces on the south front illustrates the intention of the family to enjoy the panoramic views out over the surrounding countryside. Views from the house to the north are limited by mature woodland and the location of the house below the crest of the plateau.

These views are arguably eroded by the combination of tree growth along the Nene and the development of light industrial units on the southeast side of Oundle.
6.14 Views of the house can be appreciated from the Polebrook- Lutton road. The house is clearly visible because of its pale stonework set against the dark wooded backdrop and would have been even more visible before the reduction of the building c1970.

6.15 The tree-lined avenue of Ashton Wold affords glimpsed views to the north where it runs outside of woodland. This is particularly true of the area just to the east of the Gatehouse where, despite the subsequent and existing scrub woodland, the distant tower of Fotheringhay church and the village of Warmington are particularly notable. The location of the Gatehouse suggests that this, together with its associated features, would have been a prominent landmark on the horizon when looking from the north before the present trees established.
6.16 Other buildings at Ashton Wold such as the farm, Wood Cottage and East Lodge are enclosed by woodland with few if any external views; they were to be appreciated from the avenue. The only exceptions are the buildings and cricket field to the west of the kitchen garden from where general views to the southwest can be enjoyed. Like the house, some of these buildings can also be seen from the Polebrook-Lutton road.

6.17 A key view, which unites the village and Ashton Wold, is from the eastern end of the old lane where the elevated plateau affords a distant view of the spire of St. Peter’s Church above the intervening woodland.
View to the west from Ashton Wold. The spire of St. Peter’s, Oundle is visible above woodland in the left of the picture.

Fig. 24 Key views, summary drawing (Source: ENDC, NTS)

Setting

6.18 The appreciation of setting at Ashton and Ashton Wold is grounded in their origins as a small agricultural village and a gentleman’s sporting estate. The prospects enjoyed over the countryside to the north and south from the settlements, particularly from Ashton Wold, further contributes to a strong sense of historic continuity and privacy. Similarly

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29 Setting (of a heritage asset) is defined by the NPPF as ‘the surroundings in which a heritage asset is experienced. Its extent is not fixed and may change as the asset and its surroundings evolve. Elements of a setting may make a positive or negative contribution to the significance of an asset, may affect the ability to appreciate that significance or may be neutral.’
the identification of the sites within the local area by their distinctive woodland cover and field patterns contributes to an understanding of their setting.

6.19 The setting of Ashton and Ashton Wold is notable for its lack of modern interventions such as electricity pylons, wind turbines or telecommunication masts, which would interrupt the view or the general experience of this rural landscape. Twentieth century interventions are generally restricted to the west of the existing and proposed conservation areas and the busy transport corridor past Oundle. Where there are notable modern interventions, such as the large polytunnels at Polebrook garden centre or the extensive paddock fencing in land to the east of Green Farm, they are discordant with the predominantly rural character of the landscape.

6.20 The appreciation of the river corridor is presently excluded from the experience of Ashton and Ashton Wold, despite the strong historic connections, which make it part of their setting. This is because of the change of use of Ashton Mill to part residential use, the change in management of vegetation along the mill leats, which has led to denser tree and scrub planting that obscures the river and associated water channels, and the physical and audible impact of the busy Polebrook road. These changes have also eroded the appreciation of the relationship of the historic water meadows, which lie to the south of the mill, from the village for which they once offered important seasonal grazing and amenity.
6.21 The fields between the village and the Polebrook road now act as a landscape buffer to the busy road. The impact by the road upon the setting of the village is acknowledged by screen planting beside it along the west edge of the field to the west of The Cottage. This planting has emphasised the historic role of this field in separating the industrial associations of the mill (river and town) from the model estate village.

6.22 The fields around the village also convey greater historic associations by complimenting the simple rear gardens of the cottages, and continuing a theme of rural utility, while gently contrasting with the higher status grounds of the Manor, their original owner.
7. **Architectural Quality and Built Form**

**Architectural Quality (Buildings)**

7.1 The buildings at Ashton and Ashton Wold display high architectural quality through their design and craftsmanship. They are almost entirely from a single period, having been constructed c1900 by the architect William Huckvale for the first Lord Rothschild as part of the construction of the model estate and village. The Arts & Crafts movement, which advocated traditional construction and design, provided the overriding design ethos employed throughout.

**Ashton Village**

7.2 The detailed design of the buildings is expressed through reference to the vernacular. The cottages are of one-and-a-half storeys and have been designed as semi-detached and detached residences, laid out with front gardens in a picturesque manner, akin to the cottage ornee style of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. They are of local stone under reed thatch roofs with stone mullion windows in the Tudor style. Much of the stonework is rock-faced rubble laid in courses; however, some of the cottages display flush-faced stonework laid in a rather discordant manner. The joinery comprises simple plank doors and metal casement windows with leaded lights. The external doors are finished in the distinctive turquoise livery scheme of the Ashton Estate. To the rear of the cottages are freestanding washhouses, some of which are shared between properties. These structures have pyramidal thatched roofs and are in keeping with the overall design employed.

7.3 The traditional design employed belies the fact that the development incorporated a number of features that were considered state-of-the-art in 1900, such as electricity and running filtered water. In this regard, the work at Ashton is said to be the first of its kind in the country to incorporate these technological advancements on such a scale.

7.4 A number of buildings within the village pre-date the work of 1900. These tend to be the higher-status buildings such as the Manor house, the chapel, Ashton Mill, the Cottage and the two farmhouses and their associated buildings. There are also two earlier cottages that remain; these are located near to Green Farm. The chapel, which was constructed c1706, displays a Gothic appearance and stands well in the centre of the village, set back from the village green. The Manor house, which is set back on the approach to the village, incorporates fabric from the seventeenth century.

7.5 The above-mentioned buildings were all subject to a degree of alteration work to unify them with the buildings constructed in 1900, which in some cases was limited to the repainting of external joinery items. The presence of these buildings provides a sense of history to the village, as well as interest to the overall architectural composition.

**Ashton Wold**

7.6 At Ashton Wold there survives a complete set of estate buildings from 1900, including a model farm, stables, petrol store, dog hospital, water tower and kitchen gardens, among others. These buildings were designed by William Huckvale in a similar manner adopted in the village.

7.7 Ashton Wold house forms the principal building of the estate. It is a large residence built in the neo-Jacobean style on a U-shaped plan. The building displays prominent gables with large bays and mullion and transom windows. It is thought that the architectural approach here was influenced by the writings of county architect and architectural

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30 Information obtained from Historic England (2010) list descriptions
historian J A Gotch, who studied the great houses of the Elizabethan and Jacobean period\textsuperscript{31}. The architect Claude Phillimore prepared drawings to reduce the building by a storey in the mid twentieth century, work that was finally carried out c1967.

7.8 There are a number of structures surrounding Ashton Wold house which are contemporary with the building and display the same architectural quality and craftsmanship throughout. These include a Water Garden, Rock Garden and Rose Garden. There are also a number of service buildings that exist near to the house, including a kitchen garden with potting sheds and vestiges of a boiler house. Sadly, the glasshouses which existed within the garden no longer survive.

7.9 Home Farm comprises a group of model farm buildings located in a woodland clearing ½ km east of Ashton Wold house. The buildings, which have recently been converted to holiday lets, are arranged in a U-shaped plan and include a milking parlour, stabling, storage and dovecote. They are constructed in rock-faced rubble with thatched roof coverings. Situated adjacent to the courtyard complex is a dairy, cartshed and cottage. The list description for the collection of buildings describes it as a “showpiece ensemble - a fusion of ferme orne and model farm...”

**Built Form**

*Roads, car parking and paths*

**Roads**

7.10 The approach road to the village, the spur to The Cottage and the connecting lane to Ashton Wold retain the characteristics of unimproved rural roads. They are relatively narrow, c3m wide, and bound by broad grass verges on one or both sides which extend to enclosing walls, ditches and hedgerows. The road is often sunk into the ground, notably on the approach to and around the village green, on account of the rise in the surrounding ground level. The road is metalled, although the black top surfacing between the village and Ashton Wold (a private unadopted road) is deteriorating, and kerbs are generally absent\textsuperscript{32}.

![The road approaches the village as a sunk lane](image1.png)

![The lane between Ashton and Ashton Wold with its distinctive width, verges, ditches and hedgerows](image2.png)

7.11 At Ashton Wold the lane continues through the site as a single-track drive along an avenue composed of broad grass verges planted with Horse chestnut and lime trees. This avenue is enclosed in part along its north side by mature hawthorn hedges.

\textsuperscript{31} John Minnis (2009), Ashton Wold Defined Area Survey, Internal English heritage Report

\textsuperscript{32} A small length of kerb is found along the footpath near The Cottage
7.12 The width restrictions of the road has led to erosion along its edges, along the approach and in the village, caused by parking and the movement of larger service/delivery vehicles. Passing places have also been cut into the roadside bank along the connecting lane.

7.13 Secondary routes and drives found in the village and at Ashton Wold are of a similar character. They effectively retain the original and narrow dimensions of a carriage drive/cart track. In the village this is seen in the drives to The Cottage, The Laundry, the Manor and the farms and in the service drives to the west of the house at Ashton Wold. Few of these drives have any form of edging and they are surfaced by a variety of treatments.

7.14 The narrow lane along the south side of the village green is another secondary route. It is informal in character and lightly surfaced with gravel in keeping with its use as a private access to the southern cottages.

Car Parking

7.15 In Ashton a large rectangular area of parking has been established outside the public house on the east of the village green. This area is supplemented by a second car park to the south of the associated stables/village hall. Both areas are surfaced by crushed river gravel.

7.16 A line of single-bay parking spaces has also been culled out of the south side of the village green for the use of the adjacent cottages, while to the northwest of the chapel a
four bay parking bay has been cut out of the historic verge. An informal parking space has similarly been created within the approach to Chapel Farm.

![Cars parked along the road in Ashton](image1)
![Recent four bay parking area to the southwest of the chapel in Ashton Wold](image2)

7.17 Outside these designated parking areas cars are simply parked besides the road, which can be visually intrusive and physically disruptive.

7.18 At Ashton Wold, parking is generally accommodated within the curtilage of each residential dwelling or provided in the entrance courtyard of the house.

![Ad hoc parking at the Gatehouse, Ashton Wold](image3)
![New parking space opposite the bothies, Ashton Wold](image4)

**Footpaths**

7.19 In the village, a footpath runs along the north side of the road from The Cottage to the grassed island north of Green Farm. This footpath is in good condition and is separated from the road outside The Cottage by a stone kerb. A second footpath follows the south side of the road from the entrance to Green Farm to the public house. This path is raised above the level of the road to cross a large drain, which evidences continued flooding in the area of the historic farm pond.

7.20 No footpath runs besides the road between the village and Ashton Wold or from the Polebrook road into the village, although one does run along the west side of the Polebrook road itself.

7.21 At Ashton Wold, footpaths are confined to historic, beaten earth service paths, which connect the different areas of the property, with the drive being used as a main circulation between the house, farm and ancillary buildings.

**Boundaries**
Stone Walls

7.22 The most distinctive boundary found at Ashton and Ashton Wold is stone walls. Those in the village, particularly around the village green in front and to the rear of the cottages, are notable for their design and quality. They are all constructed of finely dressed rectangular stone blocks beneath an upright (cock and hen) coping, and for their relatively low height. The walls stand c.1m, which allows unimpeded views into the front gardens and creates a broader sense of openness across the village centre. The character of these walls makes an important contribution to the overall design composition of the village.

7.23 The stone walls along the approach to the village are also of note as they appear to reflect different periods of construction in their design and build. These are generally taller than those around the village green. These walls include the curving west end and irregular construction of the wall opposite the Manor, which evidences the historic cottage plots, while the recessed frontage in the Manor wall conveys its higher status.

7.24 The high stone wall around the south and east sides of the historic allotment ground at Chapel Farm are also notable in their contrast to the lower and later walls of the adjacent cottages.

7.25 The wall between the chapel and The Cottage is similarly notable for a pair of convex alcoves which each accommodates a mature London plane. These alcoves appear contemporary with the trees being a discrete design feature. A third alcove is found in
the wall to the south of the Manor but, interestingly, there is no mapped or physical evidence of any tree ever having been planted here.

7.26 Beyond the Gatehouse, farm and stable courts, stone walls at Ashton Wold are confined to the kitchen garden and landscaping of the formal gardens, as formal subdivision would not have been required within this single holding. The high stone and brick walls around the kitchen garden are typical of their period rising to at least 3m beneath flat stone coping. The wall on the north side of the kitchen garden is even higher having supported substantial lean-to glasshouses within the walls. 7.38 – 7.42 provides further information on the formal gardens.

Timber Fences

7.27 A variety of modern and predominantly timber fences are found within the area of the village such as:

- Standard agricultural post and wire fences, which serve both as property boundaries, footpath enclosures and field boundaries;
- Round top and ornamental picket fences between the cottages, as a gate at The Cottage and around West Lodge;
- Low post and wire fences, often reinforced by chicken wire, as property boundaries between the village cottages;
- Lattice screens, which have been added to increase the height of the cottage walls, to increase a sense of privacy and to contain pets and children;
- Closed-board fence to increase privacy and establish ownership between the cottages.

7.28 The use of modern agricultural post and wire fence along field or woodland boundaries associated with the village, such as the Mill Field, the water meadows or around The Laundry wood. This is in keeping with the dominant agricultural character of the landscape and does not detract from the rural setting of the village partly as such fencing tends to disappear in the view. However, the fencing-off of the public footpaths to the west and northwest of the village has created a new subdivision in the landscape where there was none historically. Similarly the use of this style of fencing along the new property boundaries at Chapel Farm conveys a temporal quality, which is confusing and detracts from the overall communality of the village.

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33 The First and Second Edition Ordnance Survey records internal property boundaries to the rear of the cottages. However, no evidence has been found regarding their form and material.
7.29 The use of many of the newer forms of timber fences, particularly those around the cottages, is problematic as they contradict the open character created by the low walls by breaking up the close relationship of the cottages to one another. This creates a discordant arrangement when viewed from the green or on approach from the village or spur roads. While historically tenants had no choice but to respect the design intent of the landowner, by sharing a sense of space with their neighbours, the modern desire for privacy between different owners is compromising the overall intended amenity of the village.

7.30 The most dramatic recent subdivision by fences has occurred to the east of Green Farm where several acres of pasture has been ‘paddocked’ creating a stud/ranch effect. The fencing is constructed of substantial timber, very different in appearance from standard post and wire fencing. This has completely changed the experience of approaching the village from the south, from the Byway and east from Ashton Wold. It imparts a pseudo industrial quality to the landscape through its concentration.

7.31 At Ashton Wold, the use of timber fences is predominantly agricultural. However, post and wire fences have been erected alongside a service drive to the northwest of the kitchen garden to establish new internal property divisions. Similar boundaries are found around Wood Cottage and East Lodge while extended sections of post and wire, serving as deer fence, has also been erected around the SSSI to control deer browsing.
7.32 A bamboo screen has also been erected around a private garden area to the rear of the Gatehouse to screen the area from the main drive/avenue.

7.33 These fences are arguably less intrusive than some found in the village as the hierarchy of the house remains intact, the subservient service area perhaps having a greater capacity for change.

Iron Fences

7.34 A few surviving uprights and sections of c1900 iron park rail survive immediately to the east and southeast of the formal gardens at Ashton Wold. That so little survives on site is notable as it is reasonable to expect its wider use across an estate reimagined c1900\textsuperscript{34}. Evidence of contemporary deer fencing, together with an ornamental gate, also survives in pasture to the southwest of the house near the ponds.

7.35 No evidence of park rail was found during the current site survey either along the connecting lane or around the village, where its use might be expected in association with properties such as The Cottage, The Laundry or Manor. However, new reproduction park rail has been installed along the west boundary of Green Farm, which imparts a previously unrealised gentry character to what was an orchard.

Gates, styles, kissing gates

7.36 Few historic examples of farm or pedestrian gates, stiles or kissing gates were noted during this survey in Ashton, having been replaced by modern agricultural versions.

\textsuperscript{34} It is possible that much of this ironwork was lost during the two World Wars but this would set Ashton Wold apart from many other landed estates in Northamptonshire where the survival of such features is commonplace.
However, the fine wrought iron gates of the chapel and its clair-voie facing The Cottage are particularly distinctive.

7.37 A notable pair of wrought iron entrance gates, complete with iron overthrown and pedestrian side gates, survives at Ashton Wold at the Gatehouse, while a smaller and more delicate pair survives at the formal entrance to the house. Ornamental iron gates are similarly found at the west and east entrances to the kitchen garden and within the formal gardens to the east of the house.

Hard Landscaping

Ashton Wold Formal Gardens

7.38 The most significant example of hard landscaping found at Ashton and Ashton Wold are the formal gardens of Ashton Wold house. These typify the late Arts & Crafts movement drawing on the enclosures and terracing of the Elizabethan/Jacobean garden in a reviverist form. This intricate and expensive garden was composed of terraces: the house terrace, a south and an east terrace, a lower tennis lawn below the south terrace and a series of three interconnected formal gardens descending the ground slope to the east of the house. These gardens were a Rose Garden, a Rock Garden and a Water Garden.

7.39 Each garden area was highly engineered with retaining walls, flights of steps, pools, rockwork, seating alcoves, pedestals, boundary walls and gateways and garden buildings all executed in fine but rustic dressed stone, with flat stone coping and crazy
paving. The irregular arrangement of the dressed stone blocks in the walls, which extended to over ‘400 yards’ \(^{35}\), is particularly distinctive.

7.40 Decorative ironwork such as a pergola or rose arch further ornament the stonework in addition to the gates described at 7.37.

7.41 The gardens also include four notable ornamental garden buildings. These are a stone dovecote in the Rock Garden, a circular timber summerhouse on the south terraces, and a circular timber ‘Observation Building’ and a stone boathouse by the ponds. All of these buildings are thatched like the washhouses and cottages in the village, the estate farm and the lodges.

7.42 While the hard landscaping and structures survive they are all in a poor state of repair. Areas of collapse, tree and root ingress and damage caused by burrowing animals are commonplace.

Street Furniture

7.43 Ashton is notable for its relative lack of ‘improvement’ when compared with other local villages such as Polebrook and Barnwell. There are few kerbs, relatively restrained signage and lighting. Timber seats and picnic benches are located on the village green.

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\(^{35}\) Rothschild M, The Rothschild Gardens, 1996, p. 86
8. Planting

8.1 Tree and shrub planting at Ashton and Ashton Wold is distinctive in its relative consistency in species and form, which emphasises the relationship between the two areas. However, while planting at Ashton Wold is recognisably high status, as illustrated by the presence of specimen trees, an extensive formal avenue planting and formal yew hedging, planting within the village is generally more domestic in scale and variety. The high survival of planting of at least c1900 is also notable and contributes to the special interest of the two areas although the condition of much of this planting is now in decline (Figs 25 and 26).

Trees

Woodland and Plantation

8.2 The plantation found at Ashton Wold is described in section 9.

8.3 Within Ashton, woodland and plantation are limited to the grounds of The Laundry and a piece of woodland to the north of Chapel Farm (which is outside the conservation area boundary but contributes to its setting). Both areas of woodland are mixed and contain specimen evergreens such as Scots pine, Holm oak, yew and holly, which contribute an ornamental character. Chapel Farm wood also contains a high percentage of shooting cover, such as snowberry, in its understory.

Orchard

8.4 Two main areas of relic orchard survive within the village, one to the west of Green Farm where large perry pears are found, and a much reduced apple orchard to the north of The Cottage which has been absorbed into its garden. A few single fruit trees c1900 also survive in the rear gardens of the village cottages, which are contemporary with the rebuilding of the village, together with some fruit trees in the field between The Cottage and the Manor.

Specimen Trees

8.5 The most distinctive planted feature of Ashton Wold is its drive lined by Horse chestnut pollards. A small number of lime trees c1900 infill the southern line of the avenue near East Lodge.

8.6 A short length of lime avenue is also found along the drive to The Cottage in Ashton.
8.7  Ashton is notable for the occurrence of unusual specimen trees within the village area such as fine, mature London plane on the approach to The Cottage, cedars, which help locate the Manor and Ashton Mill in the landscape, and the sycamore within the chapel grounds. Scots pine, Holm oak and beech also occur and Charles Rothschild directed the surviving ornamental planting in the front gardens of the cottages such as laburnum, lilacs and flowering cherry.\(^{36}\)

8.8  Yew trees are also found throughout the village, planted in association with the higher status dwellings such as Chapel Farm and The Laundry.

\(^{36}\) Rothschild, M The Rothschild Gardens, 1996 p. 84. Apparently some gardens also included Stumach (Stag’s Horn) although no examples were noted during the recent site survey.
8.9 The high status of Ashton Wold is reflected by the specimen tree planting, such as the mature grove of Cedar deodar which enclose the drives to the north of the house. These trees form a backdrop to the house when viewed from the south and help to identify its location in the wider landscape. The planting of wild cherry in a formal arrangement on the south terrace is a similarly notable, albeit eccentric, planting, as is a walk of walnut trees which links the gardens to the ponds.

8.10 Among the defining features of the landscape around Ashton and Ashton Wold are historic oak and ash pollards, which survive at regularly spaced intervals along the early nineteenth century hedgerows. These are the trees recorded on the survey of 1811.
‘Parkland’ Trees

8.11 New ‘parkland’ planting, such as cedar and beech, has been established in land to the south of the village spur road and in the field between The Laundry and Chapel Farm. While tree planting is recorded in these areas in 1885 the nature of that planting is unknown. However, given that the evidence suggests the majority of ornamental tree planting within the village is associated with the redevelopment c1900, it is suggested that this earlier planting is unlikely to have been specifically ornamental and therefore its present and future contribution is questioned.

Hedgerows

8.12 The principal hedgerows found in the landscape around Ashton and Ashton Wold is the relic enclosure hawthorn hedgerow dating from the early nineteenth century. These broad hedgerows are in variable condition with some now very gappy and reduced but others partly replanted. However their contribution to the local landscape character remains strong in creating subdivision, focussing views and establishing relationships between the village and the house.

8.13 Within the village, hedgerows are generally confined to the grounds of the higher status dwelling such as The Cottage, where hawthorn lines the lane leading to The Laundry and lonicera surrounds an old croquet or tennis lawn within the garden. Despite the presence of mature laurel shrubs in some of these gardens, its historic use as a hedge was not noted in the village, which makes the appearance of new laurel hedge, again in the vicinity of The Cottage, unusual. However, immature lengths of laurel hedge do
occur as boundaries in the rear cottage gardens, which may have been used as a precedent for this new planting.

8.14 A greater use of formal hedges is found at Ashton Wold. Overgrown formal yew hedging is particularly notable enclosing the east side of the formal garden, dividing the Rose and Rock gardens, screening the east wall of the kitchen garden and enclosing ground behind the cricket pavilion.

8.15 Privet and hawthorn hedging is also found at Ashton Wold but to the west of the house in the service area. By association this hedging is of lesser status to the evergreen yew, even though it is presently better managed. An historic box hedge also survives near the kitchen garden bothies, which contrasts in scale and condition, with a robust and recently planted laurel hedge planted to screen these buildings from the north.
Fig. 25  Planting summary drawing, Ashton (Source: ENDC, NTS)

Fig. 26  Planting summary drawing, Ashton Wold (Source: ENDC, NTS)
9. **Ecology**

9.1 The principal ecological interest of Ashton and Ashton Wold, in relation to the existing and proposed conservation areas, are the grounds and woodlands of Ashton Wold, which are partly protected by the combination of the National Trust covenant (Fig. 5), a SSSI and Local Wildlife Sites (Figs. 8 & 9).

9.2 The SSSI was designated in 1970 and revised in 1990 to its present boundaries. It covers c54ha of woodland to the south of the drive/avenue to the east of the house. The citation describes this land as part of ‘a large private nature reserve’.

9.3 The SSSI is significant for ancient secondary woodland developing into ‘natural’ woodland with a tree canopy dominated by large mature oaks, ash and birch. English elm was present but decimated by Dutch Elm disease in the post war period. The citation notes a dense shrub layer of ash saplings, elm suckers, hawthorn and Midland thorn (*Crataegus laevigata*), hazel, buckthorn above a sparse ground flora of male fern, herb Bennet, herb Robert, some Dog’s mercury, sanicle and some redcurrant (shooting cover). The woodland was noted for rare butterflies and moths, the combination of woodland and pasture also offering good breeding conditions for rarer birds such as woodcock and hawfinch. The citation also noted that the woodland is growing over ridge and furrow.

9.4 The Local Wildlife Sites were last surveyed in 2002. Miriam Rothschild informed the proposed management of these areas. She herself noted over 120 types of wild flowers growing in the lawns around the house and actively encouraged/planted native trees on the terraces of the formal gardens.

9.5 Outside the gardens, Rothschild also experimented with wild flowers, establishing hay meadows in pasture to the north of the avenue. By 1996 150 acres of such meadow were in cultivation containing 119 varieties of wild plants. The Ashton Estate, who cut the meadows at the end of July each year, continues this management under the terms of an existing Higher Level Stewardship agreement.

9.6 In c2002 the local wildlife trust undertook a desktop exercise to identify potential wildlife sites from aerial photographs. Two sites (Numbers 844 and 845) were identified along the lane between the village and Ashton Wold. These are the historic Tile Yard Wood and an area of scrub to the north of the lane. Neither site has been surveyed.

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37 [https://necmsi.esdm.co.uk/PDFsForWeb/Citation/1002588.pdf](https://necmsi.esdm.co.uk/PDFsForWeb/Citation/1002588.pdf)
39 Ibid p. 107
9.7 This present review has not included any re-survey of the ecology. However, the following observations were made during the February 2017 site surveys of Ashton and Ashton Wold, which affect the character and special interest of the landscape:

- Large numbers of deer, Roe and Muntjac, were noted in the woodlands and grounds at Ashton Wold. The deer are present both in and outside the SSSI despite deer fencing and their impact – a notable decline in ground flora and woodland shrub and damage to planting – was evident throughout;
- Large numbers of rabbits were also evident and resident in the formal gardens;
- The turf of the upper south garden terraces appears to be herb rich but the natural regeneration of trees and scrub in the gardens is reducing its area and quality;
- The lower south garden terrace is reverting to rank grassland with hawthorn and tree seedlings making it unlikely that the cowslips recorded here in 1996 now survive;
- Native spring flowering bulbs such as Wild Daffodil were present in the garden (although possibly planted);
- The high occurrence of ash in the woodlands has potential tree health issues for the site, notably the appearance of ash die back, Chalara;
- Notable veteran oak and ash within the woodland, and the historic pollards alongside the local roads, are being crowded by the younger regenerated woodland which will affect their vigour and longevity;
- The Horse chestnuts along the drive/avenue are potentially at risk from tree health issues such as leaf miner and bleeding canker, this also applies to Horse chestnuts within the village;
- The area of the ponds is reverting to wet woodland with reduced clear water, large reed beds and willow carr surrounded by rank grassland, with bramble and hawthorn colonising more open ground nearby;
- The water bodies are an important attraction for birds with herons and cormorants nesting. Red kite, buzzard, wigeon, mallard, moorhen, kingfisher, bullfinch and Mute swan were noted during the recent site surveys;
- Large flocks of winter migrants, such as Redwing and Fieldfare, were also noted in the fields around Ashton with a good number of common garden birds such as blackbird, robin, wren, chaffinch and Great tit being spotted in the village;
- Relic orchard trees, apple and pear, survive in land to the north of The Cottage and to the west of Green Farm which provide important habitat for invertebrates, lichens and plants such as mistletoe;
- The depressions of historic field ponds are evident to the west of the chapel and along the boundary of the Polebrook road to the east of the lane to the village, which suggest a potential for seasonal flooding. Other historic ponds such as those to the north of Ashton Wold, the farm pond and a pond west of the Manor, hold water and provide important habitats and linkage across the land for amphibians and invertebrates.

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10. Matters Arising

10.1 The following matters have been identified by this review as effecting, or having the potential to affect, the character and special interest of the existing and proposed conservation areas of Ashton and Ashton Wold. The potential to mitigate these effects, in a manner proportionate to the significance of the designation, and to actively enhance the areas, are set out in the following section.

10.2 The generic challenges facing Ashton and Ashton Wold are not unique and are common to many other historic estate villages and principal residences, the design of which was not intended to accommodate modern residential expectations and requirements.

Local distinctiveness

10.3 The character of Ashton and Ashton Wold is defined by the improvements and additions of c1900, which refined an historic agricultural settlement and simple sporting estate into a model estate. That the village and Ashton Wold remain generally unchanged since that time is central to their character and special interest. The following illustrate aspects of local distinctiveness:

- A sense of detachment through topography and historic single-ownership;
- Enclosing or extensive linear woodland which locates the village and Ashton Wold within the wider landscape;
- Relatively unimproved roads with associated raised grass verges and tree-planted hedgerows;
- Concentrated development around the village green in Ashton and to the south of the avenue at Ashton Wold;
- A hierarchy of green space within the village between the green, junction triangles and associated verges;
- Use of low but finely crafted stone walls as principal property boundaries in the village;
- A lack of new or notably tall structures within the different areas;
- A single design aesthetic c1900 enhanced by the presence of some older buildings;
- Higher status village residences set back from the road and village green in planted grounds;
- Evident quality in design and construction of the formal gardens at Ashton Wold;
- The absence of new buildings i.e. housing although historic agricultural and other service buildings have been converted to new use;
- Presence of unusual trees in the village contributing structure and ornament;
- Panoramic views from Ashton Wold and views to the west, north and south from the village, tying Ashton and Ashton Wold to the surrounding landscape and key settlements and structures within it.

Sustainable Development

10.4 The character and special interest of Ashton and Ashton Wold is highly sensitive and therefore its capacity for change in the form of new development is very limited.
Landscape setting

10.5 The fields surrounding Ashton, particularly those along the Polebrook road, make an important contribution to its character and special interest by contributing to its setting. The fields link the village to the mill, to the water meadows and to the wider rural landscape, emphasising its historic origins as an agricultural settlement. The continued agricultural use of the fields, and management of the associated woodland, by the Ashton estate and other owners maintains this historic association;

10.6 The elevated nature of the village and Ashton Wold enhances this appreciation by extending views across the local, and similar, rural landscape. These views contribute to the wider experience of the sites in association to other historic rural settlements such as Warmington, Fotheringhay, Polebrook and Oundle;

10.7 The scale and spatial openness of the historic fields around the village and Ashton Wold heighten an appreciation of their relative isolation, by contrasting strongly with their distinctive concentrated and linear plan form;

10.8 The local landscape also acts as a buffer between the areas and new development at Polebrook, Oundle and along the busy local roads and major transport corridors.

Detracting elements

10.9 Key issues that detract from the character and special interest of Ashton and Ashton Wold include:

- **The lack of secure private car and other vehicle parking** The majority of residents in Ashton rely on restricted on-street parking. This detracts from the character and appearance of the conservation area by lining the road with vehicles. They erode the grass verges, necessitating the installation of timber bollards to prevent access to green areas and visually and physically congest the village. Some parking provision has been created by culling out areas of the village green and its associated verges which, occupied or empty, also contribute to the erosion of the village character through the rectangular, surfaced intrusions;

- Parking at Ashton Wold is similarly challenging with vehicles standing outside residences now largely converted from their historic service use;

- The car park at the public house, and its associated function room, or cricket ground has the benefit of concentrating impact. However, this parking similarly detracts from an appreciation of the buildings and their relationship to the village. It is the cars rather than the public house, for example, that concludes the view across the village green from the west at busy times.

- **The perceived lack of storage in private grounds** In the village a variety of small buildings and shelters, to store the accruments of modern life, are found in the rear cottage gardens. Historically these areas were more utilitarian than the front gardens, evidenced by the shared washhouses and foundations of possible pigsties. However, the modern assemblage creates a discordant note by compromising the stylistic and spatial relationship between the washhouses and cottages and by eroding the visual dominance of the washhouses within the gardens;

- This situation is not as evident at Ashton Wold, although modern timber ‘garden sheds' are present in some new ‘gardens’ associated with the tenanted properties. However, the scale of the historic buildings, complimented by a small supply of historic stores, generally accommodate such additions.

- **New or additional boundary treatments** Historically the most distinctive property boundaries in the village were generally made of stone and low in height. These
boundaries survive but have been augmented by modern timber fencing and partitions in an attempt to increase privacy in what was a very communal residential arrangement. The segregation caused by this fencing, together with its associated wire and lattice, intrudes upon the visual amenity of the cottage gardens and the public footpaths in the village. It fragments the landscape and overall appreciation of the village character. At Ashton Wold, such fences are new, evidencing the recent change of use of many historic service buildings. These boundaries similarly erode the sense of unity between the house and its ancillary buildings by introducing new hard divisions into the landscape;

- New timber or post and wire fences also evidence the loss of historic boundary treatments (park rail or hedge) as seen at West and East lodges and Wood Cottage. In contrast, the addition of a modern ‘park rail’ at Green Farm detracts from its intrinsic character as a village and not a gentry farm;

- The new paddock fencing at Green Farm contrasts strongly with other fencing and boundary treatments within Ashton and Ashton Wold. The scale of the fencing, in detail and expanse, is unprecedented and fundamentally changes the setting of the village, the historic Byway and of Green Farm when viewed from the southeast.

- The recent use of laurel as a hedging material at The Cottage is similarly debatable. This hedging has little historic precedent in the village and, by forming a dense evergreen screen, will further obscure The Cottage and its grounds from view, compromising views towards it from the chapel and the village centre;

- Similarly the establishment of a mixed woodland screen along the field edge opposite Ashton Mill will fragment the conservation area by planting up historically open ground. As it matures, this planting will disrupt the relationship of The Laundry, The Cottage, the Manor and the mill and erode views west towards the river and Oundle.

- **Street Furniture** Ashton and Ashton Wold are required to display statutory Highways and other public information signs. However, these are intrusive and contrast with the sense of a private estate village. Other modern street furniture such as litter and dog-waste bins, secondary signage and furniture accentuate this impact. The contribution to the amenity of the village by such features needs to be weighed against their effect in style, colour and size; 

- Furniture (kissing gates, farm gates) in the wider landscape is generally functional; some painted in the distinctive turquoise livery of Ashton Estate, and makes an honest contribute to the overall character of the landscape. However, a large livestock-handling unit adjacent to footpath ME2 detracts both from its immediate enjoyment and from the setting of the village when approached from the northwest;

- Wheelie bins and other modern recycling equipment are particularly intrusive within the village and at Ashton Wold on account of their size, material and colour.

- **Natural Environment** Like many other rural settlements Ashton and Ashton Wold are subject to change within the natural environment, which may affect the character and special interest of a conservation area. These include:

  - **Aging tree stock** Many of the historic trees, which make a special contribution to the landscape, such as the oak and ash pollards along the field and wood boundaries, specimen cedars, limes, London planes, garden trees and orchards in the village and the Horse chestnut avenue and cedar grove at Ashton Wold are in decline and require succession planting;

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41 The ‘mower-proofing’ of the legs of the picnic tables and seats on the green is particularly intrusive.
Tree health and disease  Trees characteristic of Ashton and Ashton Wold such as ash, Horse chestnut and oak are at particular risk of disease, their potential loss having as devastating an impact upon the landscape as Dutch elm disease;

Historic hedgerows  The hawthorn enclosure hedgerows characteristic of the landscape around Ashton and Ashton Wold are similarly ageing and changes in their management has led to a gappy and exposed structure, which has eroded their contribution to landscape character. Similarly the overgrown yew hedging found at Ashton Wold is eroding the legibility and appreciation of the formal gardens;

Wild flowers  The gardens of Ashton Wold, and to a lesser degree those of The Cottage and The Laundry, host a great variety of wild flowers in favour of more traditional garden ornamentals. While this approach benefits native flora, the careful management of the garden areas necessary to conserve it is lacking, leading to the loss of wildflowers to rank grassland. This detracts both from the appreciation of these areas as ‘gardens’ and from the intentions of the family in promoting the use of wild flowers within them.

Silting water bodies  The historic water bodies of Ashton Wold, such as the ponds, garden pool, farm pond and field pond to the north of the house, and the mill leat and water meadows at Ashton, are silting up and reverting to reed bed and willow carr. While this natural succession may reflect the recent interests of the Rothschild family, and current environmental policy, it is fundamentally changing the appreciation of these important water bodies and meadows in the working and designed landscape;

Vermin management  A notable population of deer is found at Ashton Wold (and presumably in the fields around the village). The deer are actively destroying the woodland scrub layer and damaging newly planted trees, leading to an imbalance in the local ecology. The deer population may be an impediment to the potential replacement of modern fencing at Ashton Wold with hedging which would be more sympathetic to the historic landscape character.
11. Management Guidelines

11.1 The following management actions are proposed to assist the preservation and enhancement of the existing and proposed conservation areas of Ashton and Ashton Wold. These guidelines identify potential for improvement but they aim to be proportionate to the relative significance of the conservation area and reasonable within the context of current land ownership and use.

11.2 Responsibility for delivering the management guidelines will rely on collaboration and co-operation between East Northamptonshire Council, Ashton Parish Council the Ashton Estate and other private owners. The delivery of the individual management guidelines which follow have therefore not been assigned specific responsibility. The intention of this exercise is to encourage an appropriate balance of statutory regulation and best practice, within the context of planning policy and guidance, to sustain the significance and special interest of Ashton and Ashton Wold.

Protection of important views and vistas

- To be mindful of the views and setting identified by this review in the preparation and determination of applications for planning permission;
- To refrain from the erection of any new tall structures within the areas of Ashton or Ashton Wold that might detract from their characteristic spatial form as identified by this review;
- To manage existing and proposed tree planting to minimise the loss or erosion of views i.e. i) the view towards Oundle from Ashton Wold is gradually being eroded by the maturing woodland necessitating targeted thinning along the woodland edge, ii) the new ‘park land’ planting in the village will effect the views to the west and north, and the setting of the conservation area, if not removed or carefully managed;
- To refrain from fencing off public footpaths within fields at Ashton which diminish views from within the conservation area and the greater appreciation of the village landscape;
- To refrain from siting agricultural infrastructure, such as stock handling units, adjacent to public footpaths in or close to the conservation areas;
- To monitor local planning applications to identify future potential impacts upon views, such as the potential further expansion of the Polebrook garden centre or the erection of ‘paddock’ fencing within the immediate setting of the village.

Alterations and extensions to historic buildings

11.3 The architectural design and spatial layout of the cottages provides a challenging basis for new extensions. It is difficult to conceptualise a design solution that would be permissible given the character and scale of these buildings. Cutting into the low thatch roofs and interrupting the layout of the fenestration would be particularly harmful. It is considered that extensions to these buildings should be resisted.

11.4 Some internal adaption of the cottages is possible and it is understood that listed building consent has been granted for the alteration of the first-floor plan to some of the cottages to incorporate/relocate a bathroom.

11.5 It might be possible to allow for the sensitive conversion of the interior of the washhouses for ancillary domestic use such as a home office. It is noted the Listed Building descriptions include a description of the planked floors.
11.6 The joinery features are an important part of the individual interest of the buildings and the wider commonality of the estate; these include the plank doors and metal casement windows. These items should be retained and repaired on a like-for-like basis. Where necessary it would be best to use secondary glazing as a way of improving the thermal insulation of windows.

11.7 It is important to retain the distinctive turquoise livery scheme of the Ashton Estate, which has been used throughout Ashton and Ashton Wold.

**Heritage at Risk**

11.8 Consideration should be given to the sensitive redevelopment of Ashton Mill, which is currently on the national Heritage at Risk register.

11.9 The Ashton Estate should prepare a repair and management strategy for redundant and decaying buildings at Ashton Wold. This would include Ashton Wold House and its associated structures such as the formal gardens, boundary walls, water tower and the walled kitchen garden.

11.10 Consideration should be given to adding the registered park and garden of Ashton Wold to the Heritage at Risk register to better inform its conservation and to increase its eligibility for grant aid and advisory support.

**Development opportunities for sensitive developments within the conservation area**

11.11 Development opportunities within the existing and proposed conservation areas are limited on account of their prevailing architectural character and spatial form. Most of the historic stock of ancillary buildings within the village has already been converted. Similarly, development opportunities at Ashton Wold are limited.

11.12 Possible opportunities for sensitive development are:

11.13 The addition of a permanent simple, rectangular building (single storey, single pitch, timber construction) to create the sense of a more temporary structure in the rear garden of the cottages for the purposes of removing/reducing existing ad hoc shelters and structures. Such buildings would be in addition to the washhouses, drawing on the precedent of c1885 but as a conscious and controlled addition to development within the gardens. Any such building would be located close to the rear property boundary of the cottage to visually separate it from the washhouses. This proposal is particularly suitable to the properties which do not contain washhouses;

*An example of simple timber storage at The Cottage which might be an appropriate model, albeit at a reduced scale, for use elsewhere in the village*
11.14 The conversion of the potting sheds, including the footprint of the boiler house, at the kitchen garden at Ashton Wold as a property without, or with minimal, private grounds. The conversion of the area of the kitchen garden at Ashton Wold to contain one single or semi-detached residence in the area of the historic glasshouses, with the associated single or shared use of the garden area, within the walls but without any further internal subdivision. The building would be designed within the limitations of the wall heights. NB. It is understood that consent has previously been granted for a similar scheme.

11.15 Development would not be appropriate within the southern part of the walled kitchen garden since there is no historic precedent for structures in that location. Historic maps indicate that a glasshouse existed on the exterior south face of the walled garden but not within its confines. Similarly, it is unlikely that The Laundry of The Cottage, or their grounds, could accommodate further sensitive development on account of their plan form and the spatial arrangement of their grounds. However, the glasshouses at The Cottage do hold the potential for adaption into a different form of building, such as a garden room or office.

11.16 Vehicle parking in Ashton is a key challenge for which there is no historic precedent. Any accommodation will affect the historic character and special interest of the village.

11.17 Potential improvements for vehicle parking include:

- The creation of a new ‘back lane’ along the north boundary of the north cottages dependent on agreed land take from the gardens. The lane would connect to single uncovered parking spaces at the rear of the properties. This would be a fundamental change to the garden areas as experienced from c1810 but, by enhancing the appreciation of the cottages as seen from the village green and approach to the village, improve the immediate setting of the cottages and wider appreciation of the conservation area;

- The formalisation of the lane along the south side of the village green to create a surfaced access with integrated parking spaces. This will consolidate and rationalise the existing situation by clearly demarking parking and limit the further erosion to the path and village green;

- The replacement of the existing private parking bay to the southwest of the chapel by ground reinforcement seeded with grass. Properly installed this will create a stable but less visually intrusive green surface when not in use42;

- At Ashton Wold consideration should be given to developing additional vehicle parking, in association with the sensitive adaptation of historic buildings and structures, such as iron-clad sheds to the north of the kitchen garden, for such use. Vehicle parking at the main house should be restricted to the entrance court only;

- Vehicle parking at Ashton and Ashton Wold will continue to be challenging. The discrete use of highway prohibitions such as double-yellow lines and demountable bollards may need to be considered43.

Urban design strategy

11.18 The relatively unimproved character of the village road and its associated spurs will be retained. This applies to the width of the running surface, the lack of kerbs, the managed grass verges and associated ditches and hedgerows. It is recognised that

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42 This treatment is not proposed for the parking bays along the south side of the village green due to their greater use and associated wear.

43 Historic England’s ‘Streets for All’ guidance suggests that where yellow lines are required in conservation areas they should be 50mm wide and primrose or cream in colour (https://content.historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/streets-for-all-2-parking-restrictions-without-yellow-lines/parking-restrictions.pdf). The active encouragement of the public house for patrons to use the associated parking areas would also be appreciated.
this will approach will require the retention of passing places on the connecting lane between the village and Ashton Wold;

11.19 A uniform approach should be adopted for the main roads in terms of surfacing. A different, but robust and stylistically appropriate surfacing to establish a hierarchy of use, can further distinguish secondary routes, such as the lane along the south side of the village green.

11.20 The contribution made to the conservation areas by the hedgerows and hedgerow trees found along the village road, the lane to Ashton Wold and in the surrounding local area, needs to be recognised in a refreshed management approach to gap up, replant and lay the hedgerows and conserve and replant the hedgerow trees.

11.21 The contribution made to the conservation areas by stonewalls needs to be similarly respected by their retention and the existing form of construction and design perpetuated. Their regular maintenance should be informed by conservation repair which does not remove evidence of historic rebuild unless structurally unsafe (evidence of cottage plots etc.).

11.22 New fencing schemes, associated with residential boundaries within the village or at Ashton Wold, should be informed by historic research or based on surviving evidence such as the round-top picket fence at ‘The Cottage’ or park rail as found at Ashton Wold. Where necessary, such fencing can be reinforced against vermin by pig or chicken wire.

Enhancement schemes

11.23 The repair and conservation of the formal gardens at Ashton Wold will be encouraged. This will include the services, structures, buildings, ironwork and soft landscaping as part of a holistic, properly planned and funded exercise undertaken to the appropriate conservation standards. It is proposed that a feasibility study is undertaken ahead of any ad hoc repairs to better understand the priority of repair and outline costs.

11.24 Residents in Ashton will be encouraged to rationalise existing modern garden buildings and structures to benefit the greater amenity of the conservation area. The provision of alternative storage structures (11.13) will potentially offset any perceived inconvenience.

11.25 The function of the cottage garden walls in Ashton as defining the property boundaries will be respected. No additional extensions will be attached to them to raise their height. In the absence of historic evidence, a simple form of low post and wire fence may be used to demark or reinforce internal property boundaries where existing, which may be further augmented by the use of hawthorn or lonicera hedging.

Sympathetic landscape and planting including greenspace management and trees

11.26 The dominance of the village green and its associated greenspace (the road junction triangles, the grass verges, chapel grounds and allotment ground) will be respected and maintained accordingly.

11.27 Provision will be made for the succession planting of notable specimen trees within the conservation areas, such as London plane and cedar, and of the specific features that they contribute to, such as the Horse chestnut avenue at Ashton Wold and the short lime avenue at The Cottage.

11.28 The historic areas of orchard within the village will be restored to enhance the character of the conservation area.

11.29 The use of hawthorn, yew and privet hedging as evidenced historically, will be preferable to the use of laurel within the village or at Ashton Wold.
11.30 The general character of broadleaf woodland, with a small percentage of conifers, will be respected within the village woodlands, while the management of mixed plantation will continue at Ashton Wold.

11.31 The established management of hay meadows at Ashton Wold will be continued.

11.32 The intentions of Charles and Miriam Rothschild in managing the formal gardens at Ashton Wold will be reflected in a new holistic conservation strategy for the site. This will balance the ideas of wild gardening within the surviving ornamental framework.

11.33 There will be a preference to retain the historic allotment site within Ashton as a green space, ideally returning it to its original use.

11.34 Residents in Ashton will be encouraged to reflect the planting within the front cottage specified by the Rothschild's such as laburnum, lilac, flowering cherry and sumac.

11.35 The emerging wet woodland along the mill leat and River Nene at Ashton will be managed to balance biodiversity interests with landscape character to enhance the setting of the mill and the appreciation of the historic association of this land with the village and Ashton Wold.

**Highway signage and street furniture**

11.36 No column street lighting will be used in Ashton either within the village centre or on approach to the village.

11.37 No lighting will be used to illuminate the lane between Ashton and Ashton Wold.

11.38 The use of security lighting at Ashton Wold will be kept at a minimum.

11.39 The provision of additional vehicle parking spaces, and associated highway improvements, will seek the long-term removal of the existing timber bollards from around the village green and Green Farm triangle.

11.40 Signage, litter and dog-waste bins will be kept to a minimum and, where possible, will be executed in a similar design. Similarly furniture intended for public use will be of high quality and a shared design aesthetic to actively enhance the conservation areas.

11.41 Land remaining within the Ashton Estate will continue to be identified by the use of estate livery on kissing gates and stiles.
12. Conclusion

12.1 This review has sought to confirm the character and special interest of the landscape within the existing and proposed conservation areas of Ashton and Ashton Wold and how it contributes to their significance individually and in association with one another.

12.2 The review has shown that the village and Ashton Wold retain much of their historic character, dating from the late eighteenth century enclosures to the model village of Charles Rothschild c1900, and are relatively unchanged by development. This evidence includes subtle landscape features such as hedgerow patterns, hedgerow trees, the use of exotic trees within the village landscape and surviving ornamental planting in the front gardens of the village cottages and around Ashton Wold house. This all contributes to the experience of Ashton and Ashton Wold and to the appreciation of them in the wider local landscape.

12.3 The review has also illustrated the challenges confronting this once private estate in terms of modernisation, such as multiple ownership and current ideas about privacy and personal expression. People have chosen to live at Ashton or Ashton Wold because of their special qualities, the richness of their aesthetic design and planted form and the perception of living in a privileged, tranquil and detached, community. However, the residents understandably wish to live, as they want within their own space. This has led to a growing pressure, notably a wish for greater living space, storage and parking that is beginning to erode the special qualities which attracted them to Ashton and Ashton Wold.

12.4 By examining the history and current use of the landscape, this review has proposed management guidelines that are considered reasonable and achievable. These guidelines will help enhance and sustain the established special interest of the conservation area and help justify the designation of the conservation area extension in the village and that of a new conservation area at Ashton Wold.
13. References

Maps and Plans

- A Map of the Lordship of Oundle with Ashton in the County of Northampton, 1810, NRO: 2858;
- Estate/Enclosure Map Ashton, 1811, NRO: 3703;
- Estate Survey, 1853, NRO: 1728a;
- Estate Map, 1860, NRO: 5173;
- Ordnance Survey First Edition, 1885;
- Ordnance Survey Third Edition, 1925;

Planning documents

- Ashton Conservation Area Appraisal (Draft), 2016 R. Donoyou;
- Ashton Wold SSSI citation, http://www.natureonthemap.naturalengland.org.uk/
- National Character Area Profile: 89 Northamptonshire Vales (NE527) http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/4871120062775296;
- East Midlands Regional Landscape Character Assessment 3, 8a http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/5635681403535360
- Northamptonshire Landscape Character Assessment 12c, 9b http://www.rnrrepvironmentalphaclcharacter.org.uk/data/4.1%20CLCA.pdf
- Northamptonshire Historic Landscape Character Assessment http://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/archives/view/northamptonshire_hlc_2015

Archive material

- Enclosure Act, Ashton, c.1807, NRO: CAM 29;
- Sales Particulars, 1858 NRO: ZB706/24;
- Ashton Wold, photograph, c1920 NRO: LIB34/2;
- National Trust covenant, 1945 (private collection/NT)

Secondary sources

- The History & Antiquities of Northamptonshire, Vol II, 1716 p. 411 – 12, Bridges, J;
- The Rothschild Gardens, 1996, p.82-107, Rothschild, M;
• Ashton and Ashton Wold Defined Area Survey, English Heritage, 2007;
## 14. Appendix 1

### Designations

**Ashton**

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