
Addendum to : Heritage assessment of local plan site allocations for Rugby Borough Council

2025

Context

Node was appointed in November 2024 to support Rugby Borough Council in the review of a selection of sites nominated for allocation within the emerging local plan. The following provides an addendum to that assessment, fulfilling a request for analysis of an additional site with title 'Land north of Houlton' and reference number 130.

Land north of Houlton

Site reference: 130

Parish & Ward: Clifton upon Dunsmore, Newton and Churchover

Grid reference: 454668, 275832

Current use: Agricultural

Proposed use: Employment

Summary

The site lies in open countryside southeast of Clifton Upon Dunsmore, west of the A5, and north of the emerging Houlton housing development. It slopes steadily southeast, offering panoramic views from a ridge aligned roughly aligned with Linbourne Road. While there are no designated heritage assets within the site, it sits within the setting of a listed building, two conservation areas, a scheduled monument. Several non-designated heritage assets, historic landscape features and HER records are also located within, or close to the site.

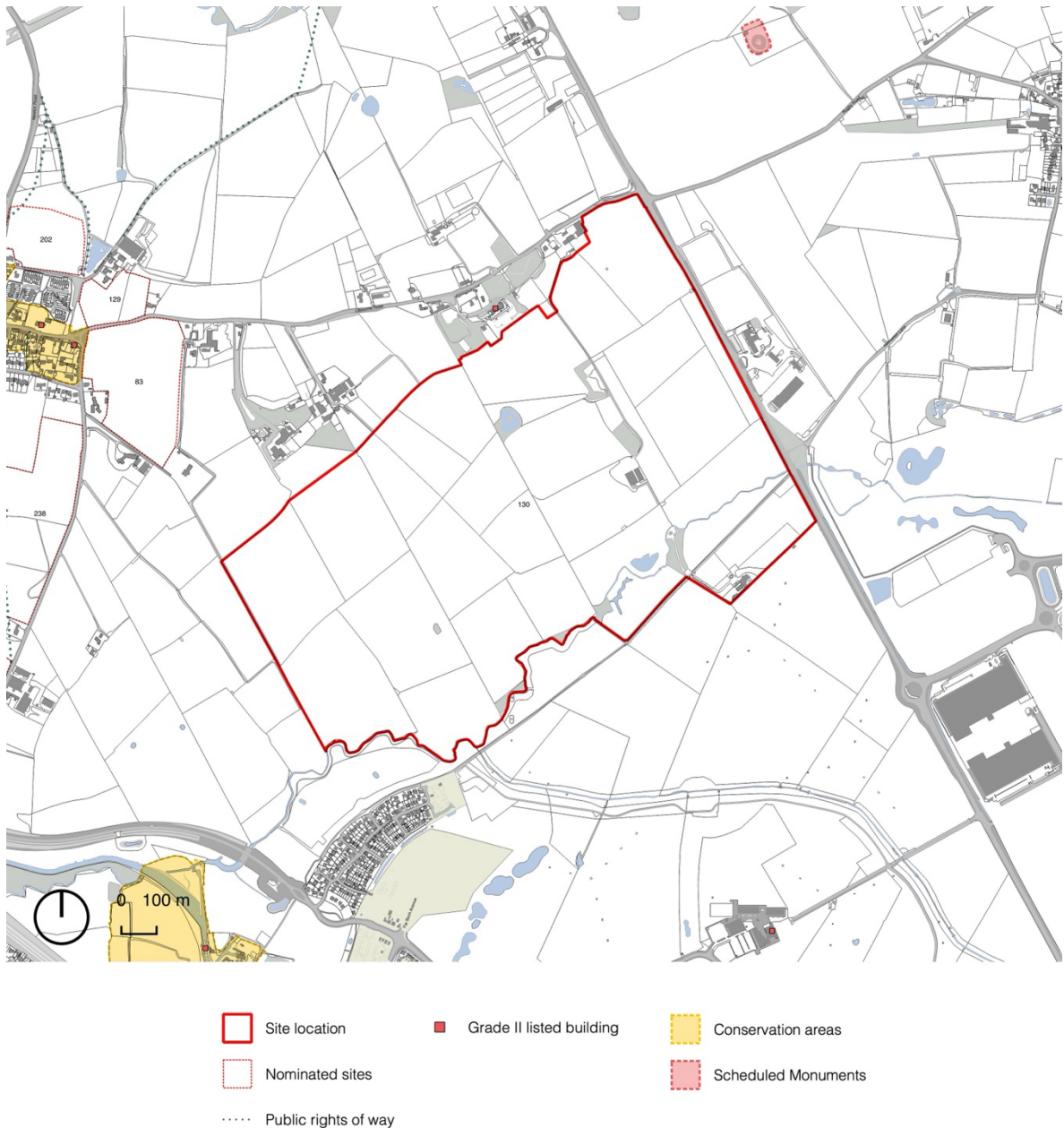
Dunsmore House, a Grade II listed late-19th century manor is among the most significant of the assets, and is perhaps the one most likely to be adversely affected. It forms an historic group with ancillary buildings such as the former Dunsmore Hall Farm. Its gardens terraces and landscape architecture appear to have been deliberately designed to frame panoramic views across an area of still tangible parkland to the southeast, and onto the wider rural landscape. The gardens, parkland, neighbouring fields, and the set-piece view all strongly contribute to the house's setting and significance. The parkland and fields are located within the site.

Further west, Clifton Court and Clifton Hall are attractive early 20th-century houses which, like Dunsmore House, took advantage of the topography to create designed views, from landscape gardens and parkland. The parkland at Clifton Court has been lost and its original garden heavily altered, and the view from Clifton Hall has been somewhat contained by modern planting, but the wider rural character still contributes to the setting of both assets.

A scheduled motte and bailey earthwork lies 500m northeast of the site, positioned to overlook the roman road of Watling Street (now the A5). Despite the influence of modern development, the asset's elevated location and the panoramic views remain key to understanding its historic role as a strategic focal point within the landscape. Elements of the site can be seen within these views.

Development of the site risks harm to the setting of Dunsmore House, through loss or erosion of its historic parkland, the key designed "set-piece" view, and/or the contributions of its wider rural setting. Views from and towards other non-designated heritage assets, including Dunsmore Hall Farm, Clifton Court, and Clifton Hall could be affected in a similar manner. Incongruous features could be introduced to views from the scheduled monument, creating further distractions to the panoramic viewpoint.

Mitigation could include exclusion of development from the most sensitive areas, especially in (and possible adjacent) the historic parkland associated to Dunsmore Hall. Robust screening at the edges of that exclusion zone (nb. not at the boundary of the site to the Dunsmore House terrace), and an evidence-led approach to development layout, form, and scale will be essential to minimising visual impact. Sufficient screening to/from the scheduled monument might be achievable with targeted planting of native woodland. Retention of historic landscape features within the site is also encouraged. However, given the site's topography and the likely scale of buildings associated to an employment use, we consider that it is unlikely that heritage harm could be wholly avoided, and possible that such harm could remain at a high-level despite mitigation. Robust technical assessment (e.g. verified views and ZTVs) will be essential to steering design and informing planning decisions.



Site location and designated heritage assets

Heritage context

The site forms part of a parcel of open countryside southeast of the historic settlement of Clifton Upon Dunsmore, west of the A5, and north of the emerging 'Houlton' housing development. Importantly (for heritage matters) the land falls steadily from northwest to southeast, granting panoramic views from a ridge loosely aligned to, and south of Linbourne Road.

There are no designated heritage assets within the site boundary, but it is within the setting of a listed building, two conservation areas, and a scheduled monument. Multiple HER records and non-designated heritage assets are also within, or near the site. We address these features in groups, for simplicity:

Houses and parkland gardens north of the site

A linear band of late-19th and early 20th century heritage assets runs north of the site's northern boundary, accessed off Linbourne Road and Hilmorton Lane. Each was built as large, high-status rural dwellings (or ancillary buildings associated to them) with associated designed landscapes and gardens, and each has both a physical and visual relationship with the site.

Dunsmore House and complex

Comfortably the most significant is the Dunsmore House complex. Dunsmore House is a substantial grade II listed manor house of 1881, built for the Muntz family in a Tudor-Gothic style with design by architect W.H. Ward. While close inspection was not possible (security restrictions) it is evident from available photographs, distant views, and aerial imagery that the mansion is of a high quality and has an excellent level of survival of historic features, both inside and out.

A collection of historic, ancillary buildings is associated with, and contemporary to the mansion including the converted courtyard farmstead 'Dunsmore Hall Farm', and surviving elements of the walled garden. All are now in residential use and have become functionally separated from the main house, but it remains possible to distinguish the buildings as an historic group.

The house's ornamental garden and parkland are components of its original design, and, in turn, are important elements of its significance (via setting). The house's close setting includes a woodland west of the house containing meandering paths, and a south-east facing series of garden terraces extending from the long, ornate elevation. The design of the terracing, gardens, and woodland indicates this area was specifically designed to embrace and frame the dramatic, panoramic views across the rural landscape to the southeast, gifted by the house's elevated position. This view is also experienced from within the house through large windows and from key living- and reception rooms. In our judgement these factors strongly suggest the creation, and framing of the view was a consciously designed element of Ward's original scheme – a "set piece" experience, and an important element of the listed building's significance, accordingly.

In the foreground of the view is an area remnant of a designed parkland for Dunsmore House, featuring a copse, ornamental pond (possibly adapted from an earlier agricultural feature), a clearly defined boundary, and scattering of surviving field trees. Such landscapes were typical of such developments: adopting the aesthetics of the English landscape tradition, albeit at a smaller scale, to further bolster the impression of wealth and status given by the house. While there has been some erosion of its features, primarily through a return to agricultural use, the parkland remains a tangible element of a designed landscape setting to the listed building. The local Historic Environment Record denotes this landscape (MWA12644); however, we note the HER's mapping is in error, by including only the northern half of the parkland and using boundaries not aligned to the historic mapping nor modern landscape evidence. Neighbouring the parkland and glimpsed from the set-piece view are a collection of rural fields. These provide further bucolic framing to the parkland area, and further amenity to the view.

Beyond the parkland and fields, the views encapsulate a wider landscape of greater diversity in character. Originally this would have been a long, rolling rural vista, and while rural characteristics

remain significant there has been intrusion from large modern infrastructure and industry. The large sheds adjacent the A5, and wind turbines to the backdrop are prominent. There is, therefore, something of a contrast between the strong, positive contributions of the fore- and middle ground of the view, and the less welcome aspects (for heritage) to their backdrop.

This Dunsmore House parkland and its neighbouring fields are entirely within the site boundary. Western elements of the site are less visible, due to the dense woodland immediately southwest of the house, which screens them from view.

A reciprocal view of the Dunsmore House is afforded from the publicly accessible track at the site's southern boundary. While the house is perhaps too distant to form a landmark, it is still an eye catching and intriguing feature of architectural interest perched atop the ridge.



Dunsmore House and its landscape parkland garden as illustrated in 1902 Ordnance Survey mapping, 1950s RAF aerial photography, and modern imagery (with site boundary annotated).



2016 photographs from Dunsmore House sales particulars (source: The Hinkley Times) illustrating its accomplished southeast elevation, the garden terrace with (partially visible) the panoramic view across neighbouring parkland and rural lands, and the influence of that view within southeast facing internal rooms and reception spaces.



Google Earth imagery, representing the character and extent of the key, “set piece” view (security restrictions prevented access to the premises). The parkland and neighbouring fields are visible to the foreground (all within the site), the former RAF airfield to the middle ground, and (not rendered) large sheds and wind turbines draw the eye in the once rural view to the background.



View of Dunsmore House (grade II listed) across the site from the public right of way

Clifton Court and Clifton Hall

Further west along the ridge are two further accomplished, turn-of-the-century houses. Like Dunsmore House, they are attractive, period properties and take great advantage of the local topography to create set-piece views across the local landscape, from their gardens.

First is 'Clifton Court', a large early 20th century house and landscape-garden estate. Again, historic mapping shows a designed terrace, orientated to take in views across an area of parkland (partly within the site), before a panoramic vista unfolds across the rural landscape (including large areas of the site). Unlike Dunsmore House, the parkland character has been wholly lost, however, through removal of all but one of the parkland trees to facilitate modern agriculture. The retained historic rural character of the wider site still contributes, however, before the more varied aesthetic of the background, and the influence of modern infrastructure and industry.

Second is Clifton Hall, another early 20th century house and garden of a more domestic scale. The villa appears to have been constructed as a replacement for the previous Clifton Hall (within the village) which then became 'Clifton Old Hall' on mapping (and is today listed at grade II). The house is again an attractive example of its date and type, and features a small terrace garden designed to embrace views across the rural landscape (including most of the site). Mapping indicates the view has been somewhat curtailed by modern boundary planting, however.

Motte and bailey castle south of Lilbourne Gorse

Approximately 500m northeast of the site is a scheduled monument that designates the archaeological remains of a motte and bailey fortification. Today the monument is encountered as an earthwork mound and surrounding ditch rising up from an agricultural field. The monument stands in an isolated position on the high ground, strategically overlooking Watling Street (today the A5) to the west. The setting is defined by a rural landscape but one altered by prominent modern road infrastructure and industry. Nonetheless the elevated siting, position relative to the historic route, and the panoramic views support visitors' understanding of the conscious positioning of such fortifications to assert control and status within the historical landscape.

The north-eastern most elements of the site can be glimpsed from the monument, forming part of the rural landscape beyond the A5.

Lilbourne (Rugby) Airfield and Radio Station

Southeast of the site is a large area once occupied by an airfield and radio station. This was a significant installation in both size and importance. The radio masts were once local landmarks but have been demolished, and much of the airfield is being steadily repurposed for the 'Houlton' housing development. The main station radio buildings survive (grade II listed) and have been integrated into the development for community purposes. The site rises above the former airfield, and is largely visible due to the rising topography. The listed station buildings are also, therefore, visible from within the site. While the site provides a pleasant rural setting to the airfield and its surviving assets, such agrarian land uses are not ones associated to the airfield's historic functionality. As such we do not consider the site directly contributes to heritage significance.

Conservation areas

The site forms part of the wider landscape setting of two conservation areas: Clifton upon Dunsmore Conservation Area, and the Hilmorton Locks Conservation Area. The site does not feature in either conservation area appraisal, is not prominently visible from any identified viewpoint (including important views identified in the appraisals), nor is it readily accessed through public rights of way leading from/to the designated areas. Some, distant glimpses of the site are available from the canal footpath, and in an area where countryside views are noted as a positive element of local character; however, the site is neither sufficiently prominent, nor its countryside character sufficiently tangible, for it to make any meaningful contribution to the conservation area's significance.

HER Records and other historic landscape features

There is a notable concentration of Historic Environment Record monuments within the site and its immediate setting associated to historic landscape features, and cropmarks denoting past settlement and land uses. The A5 follows the route of Watling Street, a significant Roman road. Together with the proximity to the motte & bailey, this indicates prolonged occupation of this landscape, and some degree of archaeological potential.

Lidar data and aerial photographs also illustrates the site contains areas of surviving ridge and furrow earthworks (legacies of past cultivation practices), and landscape features including hedgerows, woodland copses, and agricultural ponds.

Potential impacts

- Loss or erosion of the historic parkland associated to Dunsmore House, that forms an important element of its designed landscape setting and significance.
- Loss or erosion of the key “set piece” view from Dunsmore House’s garden terrace and southeast facing interiors, looking across its associated parkland and the neighbouring rural landscape. In turn, loss or erosion of the reciprocal views of the listed building from within the site and the publicly accessible track to its south.
- Loss or erosion of the panoramic rural views from the non-designated heritage assets, Clifton Court and Clifton Hall.
- Erosion of the view from the scheduled motte & bailey through introduction of development incongruous to, and/or distracting from its landscape setting, and the capacity for that setting to illustrate its historically strategic position within the local landscape.
- Erosion of the wider, historic rural landscape setting of these assets, and those further afield through transformation of its historic character for modern forms of development.

Avoiding harm & maximising enhancements

- Development should be avoided within the areas of highest heritage sensitivity: the extent of the historic parkland associated to Dunsmore House (nb. as defined by historic mapping and surviving landscape features, not the erroneous HER Record).
- Any development within neighbouring parcels (to the house and parkland) should be robustly screened through careful consideration of layout, building scale, re-landscaping, and a significant widening and reinforcing of woodland planting within the historic parkland's boundary. The objective should be for visibility of new development (including both buildings and associated infrastructure) to be kept to a minimum, or better entirely avoided, within the set-piece view.
- The screening of the view entirely (e.g. by substantial planting at the boundary of the site to Dunsmore House's garden terraces) should not be considered mitigation of heritage impact. This would still result in the loss of the key view and a high level of harm to an important element of significance.
- Development should be screened where it would be visible from the scheduled monument, using appropriately positioned, naturalistic features aligned to local historic landscape precedents (e.g. woodland of an appropriate, native mix).
- Appropriate mitigation measures should be deployed to lessen visual impact to the views from the identified non-designated heritage assets.
- Where possible historic landscape features (hedgerows, ponds, woodland etc.) should be retained and integrated into a development's green infrastructure and landscape strategy.

Additional comments/notes

- Development should be informed by high quality technical evidence and analysis from an early stage, including landscape, heritage, and visual impact assessments. At a minimum, analysis should include an iterative use of Zones of Visual Influence modelling, verified views, and photomontages to analyse, design, and test (and repeat). These should be used to inform a heritage-led design and mitigation strategy, which appropriately and proportionately responds to the relative sensitivities and significance of the effected assets.
- Given the proposed employment use, it may be challenging to wholly mitigate heritage impacts to those assets situated atop the ridge line, including Dunsmore House, should the form of development mirror similar sites within the locality (large commercial sheds). Such buildings may be difficult to fully screen from the sensitive viewpoints, on account of their visual profile, and the panoramic, downwards views across the site afforded by the assets' elevated positions.

- The site may be of archaeological potential due to its proximity to monuments of high significance (a motte and bailey, and roman road), and the presence of multiple cropmark features recorded on the local HER. An archaeological desk-based assessment should be undertaken at the earliest appropriate point to inform development potential and mitigation strategy.

Site photographs



General character of the site, as seen from the public right of way to the south looking north



Growing influence of large commercial sheds and renewable energy within the site's surroundings