



# Preston Crowmarsh Conservation Area Appraisal



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**Note**

This appraisal seeks to provide a comprehensive assessment of the character and special historic interest of the conservation area. However, the reader should not assume that details which contribute to the character of the area, but are not mentioned here specifically, can be dismissed by reason of their omission.

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# 1.0 Introduction

## What are conservation areas?

Areas of “special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance” – in other words, they exist to protect the features and the characteristics that make a historic place unique and distinctive.

Local Authorities have a statutory duty to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character and appearance of the conservation area. In addition to statutory controls, both National Policy and the Local Authority policies in the Local Plan help preserve the special character and appearance of conservation areas and their setting where it contributes to its significance.

## What is the purpose of a conservation area appraisal?

- Identify special architectural or historic interest and the changing needs of the conservation area;
- Define or redefine the conservation area boundaries;
- Increase public awareness and involvement in the preservation and enhancement of the area;
- Provide a framework for informed planning decisions;
- Guide controlled and positive management of change within the conservation area to minimise harm and encourage high quality, contextually responsive design.

## How might living in a conservation area affect you?

- Most demolition works require planning permission from the local authority;

- Restrictions on permitted development and advertising;
- If you intend to cut down, top or lop any but the smallest trees you must notify the council so potential harm can be assessed.

For further information on conservation areas, how they are managed and how this might affect you, please see the South Oxfordshire District Council’s [website](#) and Historic England’s advice on [living in conservation areas](#).

## Planning policy context

Preston Crowmarsh forms part of Benson Parish. It is included in the [Benson Neighbourhood Plan](#), first adopted in August 2018 and now formally revised and adopted in March 2023. The wider district development plan currently sits within the [South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2011-2035](#). Other material planning considerations include the [National Planning Policy Framework 2024 \(NPPF\)](#), [Planning Practice Guidance \(PPG\)](#), and the emerging Joint Local Plan 2041.

## Methodology and Consultation

This appraisal was produced with current best practice guidance published by Historic England and information collected using publicly available resources and thorough on-site analysis from the publicly accessible parts of the conservation area.

A draft of this appraisal will undergo public and stakeholder consultation with resulting feedback incorporated prior to its adoption as supplementary planning guidance.

## 2.0 Summary of Special Interest

This assessment of special interest or significance follows the framework set out in the NPPF (National Planning Policy Framework) 2024, Glossary and the values set out in English Heritage's Advice Note No 12: State-ments of Heritage Significance, 2019. The determination of significance is a key guiding factor, and all decisions should flow from an under-standing of the significance and values attached to the site. Significance is defined as 'the value of a heritage asset to this and future generations because of its heritage interest. Significance derives not just from its physical presence but also from its setting.' The determination of the significance of heritage assets is based on statutory designation and professional judgement against four broad values: archaeological, architectural, artistic, historical (illustrative, associative, communal). The values are given an assessment of High, Medium or Low and an overall rating of Significance of Local, Regional or National follows.

### Significance of Preston Crowmarsh Conservation Area

The primary significance of Preston Crowmarsh is as a small rural hamlet, distinct from the main settlement at Benson, being more closely associated with the River Thames, mill and ferry crossings. Crowmarsh Battle Farm and the mill, both described in the Domesday book, provided two separate points of focus around which the settlement formed. The hamlet is separated from the main village by intervening fields and the A4074.

The west part of the conservation area lies within the North Wessex Downs National Landscape and the Thames Corridor Floodplain.



Fig 1. Field within the conservation area opposite Nos 49, 51 Preston Crowmarsh

Key features include:

- Strong physical and visual connection with the River Thames and river attractions
- River crossings
- Tranquil rural setting
- Picturesque historic buildings, including farmhouses, farm buildings and cottages
- Planned medieval and Enclosure landscape
- Important trees and green spaces
- Proximity to and influence of the Thames Path National Trail for leisure and views, part of which enters the north tip of the conservation area and then continues in the setting of the conservation area along the west bank of the River Thames.
- Significant views outwards to the west across the National Landscape from within the conservation area, to Crowmarsh Battle Farm in the south and from the Thames Path eastwards inwards across the River Thames across the conservation area.





Fig 2. The Old Mill House

### **Archaeological - *medium***

There is medium archaeological value in the farmhouses and cottages listed at grade II. These have the potential to reveal evidence for building construction techniques and technologies which are not yet fully understood. In addition, dendrochronology can assist dating. The area around Crowmarsh Battle Farm (currently outside the conservation area) is a site of significant interest with archaeological potential. Below ground archaeology can detect now missing buildings and build up a picture of a vanished past- these aspects are outside the scope of the present report. The full archaeological potential of the conservation area and its setting has yet to be evaluated

### **Historical value - *medium***

Preston Crowmarsh has a separate identity to the main village at Benson, to which it is linked. It has medium historical value as a rural hamlet, which has grown up beside the River Thames with strong links to both the River and land. Crowmarsh Battle Farm (currently outside the conservation area boundary) has strong historical links in the establishment of the manorial land holding and with its owners and occupiers being key players in the events affecting the evolution of the hamlet from earliest times.

### **Aesthetic value - *medium to high***

Preston Crowmarsh has medium to high aesthetic value as a picturesque rural/riverine hamlet with the irregular forms of the vernacular architecture of cottages, farmhouses and mill predominating. Occasional more formal, 'polite,' consciously designed buildings such as Nos 1-4 Mill Cottages and Preston House appear in stark contrast. Various open spaces and views showing the juxtaposition of the River Thames, hamlet and its landscape setting make a significant contribution to the aesthetic appreciation of the conservation area.

### **Communal value - *low to medium***

Preston Crowmarsh has low to medium communal value. It has a distinct tight knit community separate from the main village at Benson but shares an appreciation of the aesthetic appeal and tranquillity of the rural environment and riverside setting of the hamlet. The wider communal value of Preston Crowmarsh is seen in the large numbers of residents and visitors from further afield who access the footpaths and lanes of the hamlet as well as the River and Thames Path for leisure activities. These include boating, angling, dog walking, jogging and walking. The Thames Path forms part of a national trail.





## 3.0 Assessment of Special Interest

### 3.1 Location and Geography

Preston Crowmarsh is a historic hamlet located within the parish of Benson. It is located on the east bank of the River Thames about 2.5 miles (4kms) northeast of Wallingford and approximately a mile (1.6 kms) south of Benson, separated from the main village by fields and the A4074 Benson bypass.

The terrain is flat, and like much of the rest of Benson Parish, the hamlet occupies open, low lying agricultural land on the Thames floodplain. The geology is gravel rising to clays and chalk to the east, with Preston Crowmarsh being sited on a gravel bank by the River Thames.

### 3.2 General Character and Plan Form

Preston Crowmarsh is a little off the beaten track, reached by a slip road off the A4074. The general character of Preston Crowmarsh is as a riverine and rural conservation area with strong historical and visual connections to the River Thames to the west and surrounding agrarian landscape to the east. The conservation area has a homogenous character largely due to the use of red brick with red clay tile roofs and in older vernacular cottages and farmhouses the use of local chalkstone, flint, brick dressings and thatch.

The existing boundary of the conservation area starts at the north end of the hamlet at the access to the footbridge over The Weir and crosses over a downstream fork of the River Thames onto an eyot. It then continues along the west bank of the island, then along the River Thames before turning inwards to the cluster of farm buildings and cottages around Lower Farm, including land parcels to the east and follows along



Fig 3. View towards Crowmarsh Mill from The Old Mill House

the west side of the bypass until reaching the public footpath, turns west and emerges to the north of The Old Swan on Crowmarsh Lane.

Together with Benson, the hamlet of Preston Crowmarsh has an elongated linear shape, deriving from a typical medieval layout found in parishes along the edge of the Chilterns. This shape allowed for access to river and meadow as well as woodland pasture on the scarp to the east. Strip farming and later large, enclosed fields characterise the land in between. From the medieval period to 20th century the area's economy has been based on agriculture- primarily arable based mixed farming with sheep, dairy and crops such as wheat, barley, oats and rye.

The hamlet's layout has possible medieval origins and was certainly established by 1638 with a cluster of houses towards the northern end, including the mill, former Old Swan public house and Old Mill House possibly occupying medieval sites.

The separation of Crowmarsh Battle Farm (in the proposed extension to the conservation area), the site of Battle Abbey's medieval manor house, from the lower status nucleus of the hamlet may have been intentional.

The hamlet has a strong linear form and is strung out along a single narrow lane, running approximately north/south, parallel to the River Thames. It extends from Benson Lock (outside the conservation area) in the north to Crowmarsh Battle Farm in the south. Benson Lock was associated with the mill at Preston Crowmarsh from medieval times. The curving line of Crowmarsh Lane formerly continued north eastwards towards Benson at Lower Farm but is believed to have been truncated during 17th century Enclosure leaving a sharp angle in the road.

Early Enclosure in the 1650s by the Verney family had the most marked impression on the landscape of Preston Crowmarsh. Six tenants signed away their rights of commonage and bought their own small holdings at Little Marsh and North Mead from the Verneys. This resulted in the contrasting landscapes of closes and hedged fields at Preston Crowmarsh.<sup>1</sup> This can be seen on Richard Davis's map of 1797 (see excerpt, Fig 4.).

Enclosure in 1863 saw the amalgamation of small fields into larger units and suppression of several field tracks and rerouting or straightening of others. The A4074 runs approximately northwest to southeast between the hamlet and village more or less along the line of a pre-existing trackway, effectively severing the existing field pattern to the east of the hamlet.<sup>2</sup> It is a 'false' boundary, the field parcels continue up to and beyond it as do footpaths and drainage ditches.

1. Tiller, *Benson a Village through its History*, 1999, p.78

2. Townley, *The Victoria County History, Oxfordshire*, (Ed.), Vol XVIII, 2016, pp 24

RAF Benson opened in 1939 and truncated the Bypass and Old London Road just outside the northeast boundary of Preston Crowmarsh. The presence of the A4074 and airfield have little audible or physical impact due to the buffering effect of tree/hedged boundaries and separation via green fields along the eastern side of the conservation area.

The lands of the hamlet are still farmed today, despite falling agricultural employment from the late 19th centuries.

Historic uses of buildings were mostly residential and those that were in business or commercial use have for the most part been converted to residential. The Swan Inn is now converted to a private dwelling, the Mill and Mill House are in separate private ownership, farm buildings at Lower Farm converted to residential use and the barns at Crowmarsh



Fig 4. Davis 1797, A New Map of the County of Oxford Sheet NO XV. POX0250915. With permission of [www.pictureoxon.org.uk](http://www.pictureoxon.org.uk)



Battle Farm (in the proposed extension to the conservation area) converted to commercial use. Preston Crowmarsh (along with Benson) is a popular residential area and has seen some infill development to the west of the lane south of Lower Farm and linear development along the northern edge outside the conservation area. As well as homeworking, employment is now found outside the conservation area aided by the ease of transportation via car and bus. The River Thames, Thames Path and tranquillity of Crowmarsh Lane attract local tourism and leisure enjoyment including boating, dog walking, jogging, fishing and cycling. The development of riverside tourism has been ongoing since the 1930s, with a marina, riverside facilities and cafe located to the north of the conservation area on the River Thames alongside the bypass. The popularity of the river and adjacent footpaths for leisure results in some traffic congestion at week-ends and peak holiday times with cars parking along Crowmarsh Lane.

The part of the conservation area between The Weir and Ferry Cottage and intervening fields is particularly liable to flood.



Fig 5. Looking towards Nos 49 and 51. Willows lining the banks of the River, seen from the Thames Path

## 4.0 Historic Development

Preston Crowmarsh developed close to the river on the northwest edge of the 'marsh (or common) frequented by crows' from which it and Crowmarsh Gifford are named<sup>3</sup>. An alternative derivation of the name Preston Crowmarsh is 'Crowmarsh Battle,' originating from the time when the estate was given by William the Conqueror to the monks of Battle Abbey, near Hastings. The name Preston Crowmarsh originated as Priest's Crowmarsh<sup>4</sup>. A settlement at Preston Crowmarsh probably existed before the Norman Conquest. It forms one of the outlying hamlets within the large parish of Benson, an important royal estate centre in the mid to late Saxon period. However, from finds and occupation evidence, this part of the Upper Thames Valley saw intensive activity even earlier, from the Palaeolithic onwards, through Bronze, Iron Age and Roman periods (see *Appendix B* for more detail)

The economy of the area has been based on agriculture from the Middle Ages onwards to present day, comprising arable with mixed farming. Sheep were important for wool and manuring and by the 16th century dairying gained importance. Crops grown included wheat, barley oats and rye. Mixed farming continued into the 20th century. In 1941-2 Mr FB Chamberlain of Crowmarsh Battle Farm, farmed 529 acres mostly arable with 17 cattle and 1042 poultry. By 1960 arable was back to 73 percent, Philip Chamberlain in 2007 farmed 3700 acres, chiefly wheat, oilseed rape beans, oats, barley, protein peas with a 60 hectare outdoor pig unit farmed separately.



Fig 6. Old farm equipment left out for display in the garden of No 49

The development activity of the area is reflected in the ownership of the manor as well as the remaining buildings in the conservation area. The fates of the manor, manor house and hamlet are inextricably linked. Early owners were non-resident and from the 16th to 19th centuries the manor house, demesne (land belonging to the manor) and later the whole estate were leased to prominent local farmers including the Freemans, Stamps, Symeses, Lovegroves and from c 1796 the Newtons. By the 20th century Crowmarsh Battle Farm and a lesser estate at Lower Farm came into the ownership of the Chamberlains. (see *Appendix C* for a timeline).

3. Townley, *The Victoria County History, Oxfordshire*, (Ed.), Vol XVIII, 2016, p 24

4. Bensington Society (<https://www.bensingtonhistory.org/preston-crowmarsh>)



One of the key historical events impacting the hamlet was Enclosure - the subsuming of smaller units of land tenanted by smaller farmers into larger holdings owned by large landowners. Early Enclosure had been achieved by agreement around Crowmarsh Battle Farm in the 1650s-1660s by Sir Ralph Verney. Following the Civil War, the Verneys actively enclosed their land in order to raise the value of their estates and then sold off peripheral properties, away from their main seat at Claydon in Buckinghamshire.<sup>5</sup>

In the 1830s further land reforms proposed by Thomas Newton of Crowmarsh Battle Farm caused extreme reactions locally including the smashing of threshing machines. It was not until 1863 that Parliamentary Enclosure was finally achieved in the parish. Comparison of the 1842 Tithe Map and OS 1876 Map show that there was little or no change to field patterns within Preston Crowmarsh; the disturbances must therefore have impacted lands worked by farmers and labourers in the wider parish. In the 18th century a period of building activity included a new farmhouse replacing the old farmhouse and farm buildings set back from the lane at Lower Farm and rebuilding or remodeling of older cottages in the hamlet.

Early maps such as Saxton 1579, Morden 1695, Jeffreys 1769 serve to show the existence of towns, villages and communicating road systems but are indicative only of built form and field systems, lacking detail. The 1797 map by Richard Davis, however, includes detail such as the closes and hedged fields at Preston Crowmarsh illustrating the contrasting small field in the hamlet compared to the large open fields around Benson (see, page 8). A larger scale map of 1788 also by Richard Davis shows much more detail including the old strips in the village

5. Tiller, *Benson a Village through its History*, 1999, p.78

open fields. This is reproduced in *The Ditmas History of Benson* by Edith Ditmas, an original is held at the Bodleian Library Oxford.

Historic map regression including comparison of the 1842 Tithe Map with OS maps from 1876 to 1900s shows comparatively little change in the layout of fields and built form of the hamlet from the early 19th century to the early 20th century.

The cluster of houses forming the historic core at the northern end may occupy medieval sites including the mill, Old Mill House and former Swan Inn (below, *Fig 7*). Nos 1-4 Mill Cottages and Preston House replaced former yards and malthouses. A few new houses appear in the first decade of the 20th century. Between 1900 and 1910 additions included Greenhay, an Edwardian villa, Nos 1-4 Mill Cottages (35-41 Preston Crowmarsh) and Preston House, (43 Preston Crowmarsh). These properties are located to the east of Crowmarsh Lane and to the south of The Mill House.



Fig 7. The Old Swan, formerly the Swan Inn and datestone of 1730, initials W J (heart) E.

By 1937 a small amount of infill development occurred with the construction of a few detached houses south of Lower Farm and to the west of Crowmarsh Lane at the right angle bend in the road. (In the proposed extension to the conservation area boundary). This wedge of rectangular shaped land was identified as orchard on OS maps from 1876 to 1910. These properties are set back from the road in spacious plots. Fields to the rear extend west to the river. No 72 Preston Crowmarsh of c. 1910-1937 is the most distinctive and substantial house of this group; its vernacular revival detail makes a positive contribution to the character of the area.

By the 1970s a 'Works' (the honey factory businesses of Manley Ratcliffe and Rowse's honey) occupied the central portion of the former orchard (outside current conservation area boundary) and a track led to the south of Old Orchards, to Longacre to the west. To the south of Crowmarsh Battle Barns a track is shown leading to private houses- the Paddock, The White House and Riverside.

A ferry crossing is known from the 1760s from south of Preston Crowmarsh Mill, with other ferry crossings in the 19th and 20th centuries by the lock and near the village. In the 1980s a footbridge across the weir replaced the lock ferry which had been discontinued in the 1960s. There was then no public way to cross the river until the Lock Bridge opened in the 1980s and the path became part of the nationally designated Thames Path in 1998.<sup>6</sup>

Land drains are a noticeable feature in the hamlet and are shown on the First Edition OS map onwards: the main drain running north/south is to the east of Lower Farm and along the east side of Crowmarsh Lane past

Crowmarsh Battle Farm. Other drains run east/west along field boundaries. Part of a moat and drains are shown to the west of Crowmarsh Battle Farm.

### **Archaeology**

There are no scheduled monuments in the conservation area or proposed extension to the conservation area.

Scattered finds of Iron Age and early Roman pottery and coins found in areas including Mill Lane, Benson and also to the east of Crowmarsh Battle Farm may indicate early settlement in the area. However, there is high probability of discovery of archaeological evidence within proximity to the River and of agricultural land use and some settlement throughout the wider area, particularly the major settlement at Benson. Earthwork evidence confirms the site of Crowmarsh Battle Farm as the site of the medieval grange for Battle Abbey, Sussex. The present farmhouse contains hints of medieval construction.<sup>7</sup> An extant pill box and former gun emplacement to the west of Nos 70 and 72 Crowmarsh Lane, respectively represent features associated with WW2 land defences as part of a line of defences designed in fear of an invasion from the southwest, advancing to London, crossing the Thames in the Benson area.<sup>8</sup> An area of Archaeological Constraint extends across the hamlet from north to south, washing over Crowmarsh Battle Farm on the south boundary.

Records relating to both above and below ground archaeology are held on the Historic Environment Record (HER) maintained by the County Council. They have produced a summary which can be found in Appendix B.

<sup>7</sup> D. Clark, *OBR Report 263*, 2015

<sup>8</sup> Tiller, *Benson a Village through its History*, 1999, p.151



## 5.0 Spatial Analysis

### Summary Key Features

- Tranquil atmosphere of rural, agricultural hamlet bordering the River Thames
- Predominantly linear street plan running north/south along Crowmarsh Lane
- Early core comprising mill, cottages, farmhouses of the hamlet at north end separated from Crowmarsh Battle Farm at south by intervening fields
- Enclosure landscape characterised by hedged paddocks and closes on west and east sides of Crowmarsh Lane and slightly larger fields running across to Benson and beyond.
- Drainage ditches characteristically lined with willows such as at Crowmarsh Battle Farm
- Narrowness of the lane with right angle bend at Lower Farm indicating junction with earlier road alignment
- Built form of farms and cottages predominantly on east side, relating to fields stretching towards Benson and Ewelme beyond
- Predominant open character to west of lane with fields running down to River Thames
- Key views up and down the River Thames and to the Mill from The Weir; from opposite The Old Mill House, Nos 49 and 51 and Lower Farmhouse across the flat open fields westwards to the River Thames and beyond; key views inwards from the Thames Path



Fig 8. View looking west opposite Lower Farm House

- Important areas of open space including to the west of Crowmarsh Lane, across the island including the area within the National Landscape; in front of The Old Mill House with groups of trees; from Ferry Cottage westwards to the River; the open field between Ferry Cottage and Monks Cottage (above, Fig 8); field/paddocks between the medieval site of the Abbey grange at Crowmarsh Battle Farm and the field boundary with No 74.



Fig 9. Entrance to Greenhay from Crowmarsh Lane

- Important trees: a group of TPO'd trees north of The Old Swan adjacent to the north boundary of the conservation area: a further TPO'd group north of Crowmarsh Battle Farm. A fine specimen horse chestnut tree located at a focal point at the south end of Crowmarsh Lane and the junction with the spur to the A4074
- Grass verges either side of Crowmarsh Lane
- Boundaries to land and properties include hedged boundaries, estate railings, post and rail fencing, cast-iron railings with ornamental finials, brick walls with flints
- Footpaths linking the hamlet to Benson; Thames Path linking over The Weir to the west

## 5.1 Street pattern and layout

The hamlet has one principal road running north/south parallel to the River Thames- Crowmarsh Lane. The narrow width, tree and hedged lined boundary and wide grass verges characterise the road as a rural village lane. From a slip road off the A4074 on the north it continues southwards with a right angle turn at Lower Farm onwards to Crowmarsh Battle Farm where it makes a further right angled turn and re-joins the A4074 on the east. Built form comprising historic farms, buildings and cottages is located predominantly on the east of the lane with an area of woodland and open fields of farmed agricultural land behind. Informal field access tracks or formal driveways (such as to Greenhay, left, Fig 9) lead off the lane to reach buildings or access land. On the west side of the lane the character is much more open with an aspect to the Thames. The few historic buildings on the west side of the lane, at the north end of the hamlet have a close relationship with the River Thames and include Ferry Cottage and the former mill buildings. The layout of the land either side of Crowmarsh Lane is now similar with small parcels of land comprising hedged paddocks, closes and fields stretching westwards to the river or eastwards towards Benson.

The layout of the main street, separation of Lower Farm and Crowmarsh Battle Farm by intervening fields from the historic core of buildings at the north end together with the alignment of tracks and footpaths reflects the historic street pattern of the hamlet established in early times.

On the north extremity of the conservation area boundary, The Thames Path leads off the lane to the west across a footbridge over the River Thames and across The Weir to the west bank, then continues both north and south along the west bank. There are key views from The Weir up and down the River and across the conservation area.



Opposite the mill and adjacent to The Old Swan the entrance to a key footpath leading eastward to Benson is adjacent to a group of TPO'd trees. A permissive footpath leads off the south end of Crowmarsh Lane by a mature horse chestnut tree.

Accesses vary from informal to formal- the informality of rear plots accessed via traditional five bar gates and field accesses bordered by post and rail fences contrasts with the more formal layout of the pea shingle track with avenue of trees on the approach to Greenhaye or the gate piers with ball finials and metal gates to Lower Farmhouse. Drives to modern properties are found below Nos 68a-c Crowmarsh Lane, as well as to No 74 and to properties to the south of Crowmarsh Battle Farm. (Currently outside the conservation area).

## 5.2 Views and vistas

These make a significant positive contribution to the character and appearance of the conservation area. Significant views from viewpoints in the public realm are listed below. Other incidental or glimpsed views are described and shown in some of the photographs in this document. Such views are distinctive in showing the juxtaposition of the hamlet and its riverside setting flanked by the wider landscape of the North Wessex Downs National Landscape to the west and agricultural fields to the east as well as the separation of the Abbey Grange site on the south and the core of the hamlet on the north. Significant views include:

1. Views from The Weir north and south up the River Thames towards Benson Lock and down river. These views include outwards across the National Landscape to the landscape beyond to the west and towards Preston Crow-marsh Mill and the north part of the hamlet (above right, *Fig 10* and cover image).



Fig 10. View across the weir

2. Views from The Old Mill House across open land towards the island and landscape beyond the River Thames (see, *Fig 3*).
3. Views west across the open fields towards the River Thames and AONB from Nos 49 and 51 Crowmarsh Lane (see, *Fig 1*).
4. Views from the corner of the field adjacent to Monks Cottage north westwards towards the River Thames (see, *Fig 8*).
5. Views up and down the north part of Crowmarsh Lane from The Old Mill taking in the green impression and earliest houses of the hamlet (see, *Fig 2*).



Fig 11. Views across paddock (proposed to be within new conservation area)

6. Views across the paddock north of Crowmarsh Battle Farm inwards SW towards the farmhouse and farm buildings (above Fig 11) (currently outside the conservation area).

8. Panorama from the stile on the footpath leading to Benson, on the east of the hamlet: towards Greenhaye; towards the cluster of farm buildings and cottages around Lower Farm Barns; across the paddocks with horses and open fields surrounding the hamlet towards the south-east and north eastwards along the footpath towards the A4074 and Benson Airfield.

9. There is a focal point at the south end of the village where a mature horse chestnut tree closes the view at the end of the lane by Crowmarsh Battle Farm barns at the junction of the right angle bend with the spur to the A4074 (see, Fig 12).

Other lesser views include:

- Various glimpsed views between buildings and across gardens to the fields to the east including between Nos 47 and 57 Preston Crowmarsh and across the River Thames to the landscape of the National Landscape to the west.
- Views from the Thames Path towards Crowmarsh Battle Farm moated site and barns.
- Views south and southeast over boggy land with willows and crops from the horse chestnut tree at the south end of Crowmarsh Lane adjacent to the CBF barns.
- Various glimpsed views from the Thames Path looking towards the hamlet through the branches of willow trees lining the bank of the River Thames.

### 5.3 Trees and green landscape

The green impression formed by trees, fields, gardens, green open spaces and verges is an important element of the character and appearance of the rural/riverine conservation area, proposed extension, and its setting. Trees, green landscape and open spaces make a significant positive contribution to the quality and distinctiveness of the character and appearance of the conservation area. Important open spaces are identified on the map on page 6.

Notable elements include:

- TPO'd groups of trees in a small plot adjacent to The Old Swan and public footpath and also in the garden of Crowmarsh Battle Farmhouse.
- Trees lining the lane opposite The Old Mill House (see, Fig 2).



- A focal point mature horse chestnut tree which closes the long view at the south end of Crowmarsh Lane adjacent to a footpath and Crowmarsh Battle Barns (right, *Fig 12*) (within the proposed extension).
- The large area of open space from The Weir on the north to the south boundary of Monk's Cottage, including the area of green paddock opposite The Old Mill house across which there are unimpeded views of the River Thames, willows on the banks and landscape of the National Landscape beyond (see, *Fig 3* and right, *Fig 13*).
- The open field behind Nos 47-57, east of Crowmarsh Lane (see, *Fig 6* and *Fig 19*).
- The field to the north of Crowmarsh Battle Farm, which is significant in maintaining the separation of the Battle Abbey farmstead site from the remainder of the hamlet (see, *Fig 11*). This is the last field of a former large wedge of land divided into different parcels, which was put down to orchard in the late 19th century and which maintains the visual and physical attributes of farmed land. Views across this land to the River Thames and inwards to the farm make a significant positive contribution to an appreciation of the riverine/rural character of the settlement.
- Long narrow plots to the rear of properties to the west of Crowmarsh Lane, which run down to the river, including to the west of Crowmarsh Battle Farm

These areas of important open/green space make a significant positive contribution to the character/appearance of the Preston Crowmarsh conservation area. Every effort should be made to preserve and enhance them and better reveal their significance.



Fig 12. Chestnut tree at the end of lane (within proposed extension)



Fig 13. Important green space near to Monk's Cottage



## 5.4 Biodiversity Value

The biodiversity value of Preston Crowmarsh benefits from the combination of both rural and riverine locations. The fields, hedges, land drains and trees in the hamlet together with the River Thames provide rich habitats for a diverse range of species of wildlife. Private gardens with established hedgerows contribute further areas for habitats and food sources. Grass snakes enjoy the open fields in front of Nos 49-51 Preston Crowmarsh. In the wider parish in general Tawny owls are noted as hooting in the evenings, red kites soaring overhead, pockets of green space supporting a diversity of butterflies and moths and farmland birds being abundant in fields.<sup>9</sup> Key biodiversity assets and important features in the wider landscape setting are identified in a summary audit, Appendix K, 'Conservation Plan for the Parish of Benson, Oxfordshire,' 2001, compiled by Benson Nature Group (formerly Benson Ecology Survey Team).

## 5.5 Public Realm

As a general rule street furniture is not common in rural areas and Preston Crowmarsh is no exception. Paving of roads and footpaths is generally in tar macadam. There are 'aprons' of granite blocks at the access to Greenacre and No 72 Preston Crowmarsh. Gravel rather than hard paved surfacing is the common material for driveways and parking areas to village houses, although there are areas of brick pavers in parking areas at The Old Mill House, Nos 1-4 Mill Cottages, in combination with red shingle. Public footpaths are of earth, apart from sections of the Thames Path at The Weir which are of tarmac. Street signage (apart from house names and numbering) is virtually absent except for footpath signs such as at the entrance to the footpath to The Weir. This helps to re-inforce the informal rural character of the conservation area.

9. Benson Neighbourhood Plan 2023, p. 120

There is a line of poles with electricity cabling along the side of Crowmarsh Lane which is very close to the canopies of a number of trees at the north end of the hamlet. At times of high wind there have been electricity outages due to the lines getting caught up in the trees. In the lower part of the conservation area streetlamps are combined on electricity poles, minimising street clutter. A post box is located on a wall to the south of The Old Mill House (see, *Fig 15*).

## 5.6 Boundary Treatments

Boundary treatments vary according to whether these are to properties or bounding fields and paddocks. There is a strong impression of hedged/treed boundaries along the lane, which create a softening affect and rural feel.



Fig 14. A variety of boundary treatments in Preston Crowmarsh





Fig 15. High wall between The Old Mill House and 1-4 Mill Cottages

Other boundaries are of brick, stone (or a combination of these with flint), various forms of railing and timber fencing, and include: a very high section of wall, approximately 15 feet high of squared coursed chalkstone and brick with a brick dentil course and on edge capping between The Old Mill House and 1-4 Mill Cottages (above, *Fig 15*). The section to the south has a chalkstone base. Various straight joints and repairs may indicate a former entrance which has been infilled.

The frontage to The Old Mill House and green opposite are bounded by a low post and link fences. Additionally, the road is bounded by a line of low posts to deter parking (see, *Fig 2*). A further section of low timber posts is located in the grass verge outside Nos 72 and 74 (currently outside the conservation area boundary). Other boundaries are of chalkstone walling with hedge planting (Monks Cottage), hedges and trees (lower section of the lane, around Lower Farm) and brick and flint walling (Crowmarsh Battle Farmhouse).



Fig 16. Railings with fleur de lis and club finials at Lower Farm House

The frontage of Lower Farm House has a section of metal railing on a brick plinth with fleurs de lis and an unusual spiked club post decoration (above, *Fig 16*). The adjoining brick gateposts have ball finials.

Fields and paddocks tend to be bounded by post and rail fencing particularly around Crowmarsh Battle Farm (see, *Fig 11*), or estate railing (see, *Fig 1*). Five bar gates are common and help to maintain the rural feel to parking areas, rear garden plots and fields. There are a few examples of picket fences including at the entrance to Greenhay and to the sides of Nos 49 and 51 Preston Crowmarsh (see, *Fig 6* and *Fig 9*). Where boundaries of close boarded fence have crept in these can look incongruous and out of keeping in the conservation area (see, *Fig 14*). The impact of the concrete posts and vertical fencing around the electricity sub-station has been mitigated to some extent by hedge planting either side.

## 6.0 Character Analysis

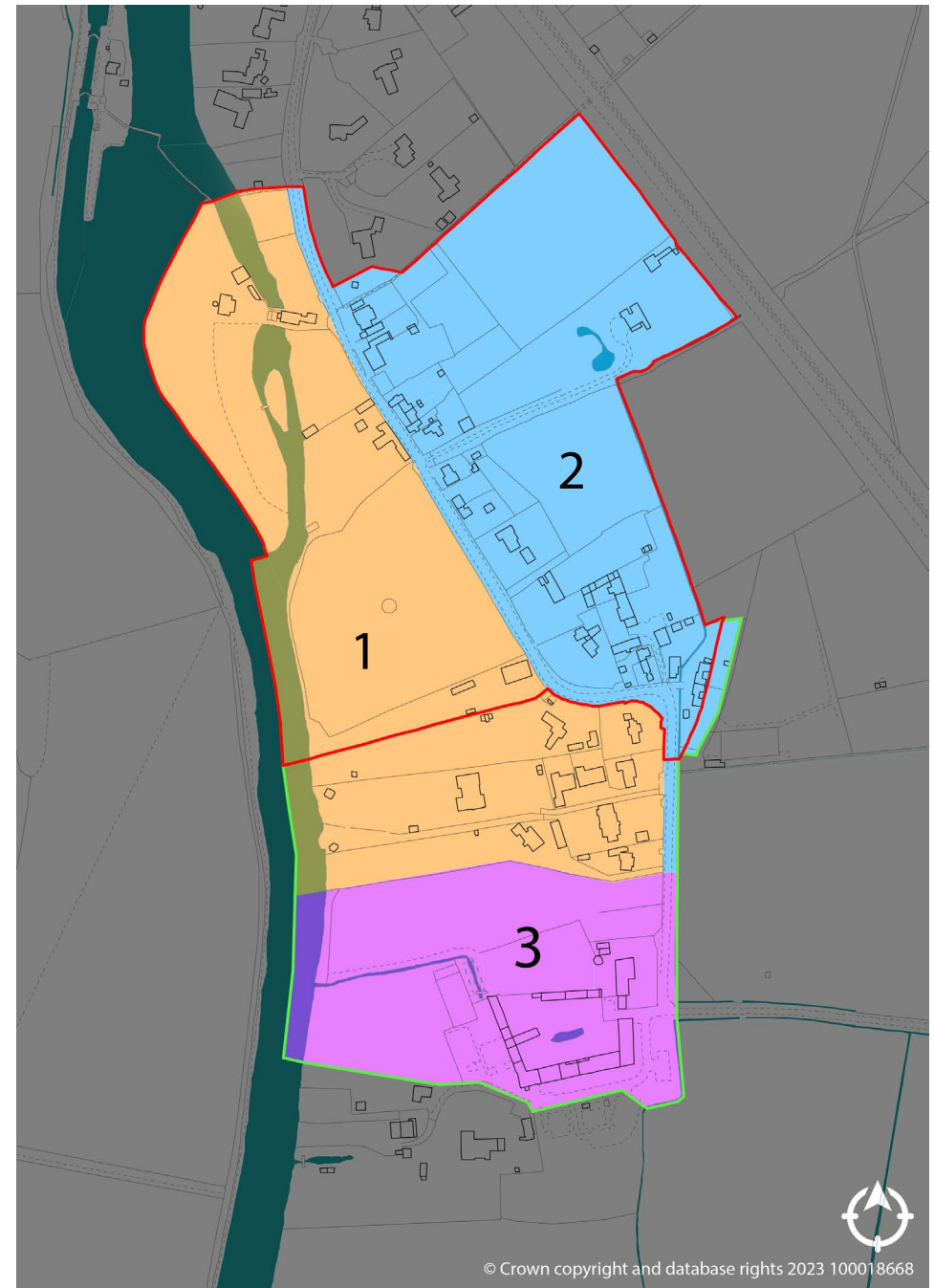
### 6.1 Definition of character areas

Preston Crowmarsh historically comprised working farms (Lower Farm and Crowmarsh Battle Farm) as well as buildings and areas associated with the river. This contributed to a dispersed settlement pattern with the original layout of the hamlet comprising the northern most buildings; mill, Mill House, Swan Inn separated by intervening fields from Lower Farm, in turn separated from Crowmarsh Battle Farm by intervening fields. Having taken historic patterns of development into account the following breakdown of character areas is considered appropriate and relevant:

There are three sub character areas proposed for Preston Crowmarsh Conservation Area (with a proposed boundary extension from south of Lower Farm to Crowmarsh Battle Farm). These are shown on the map, right.

1. Thameside
2. Rural Core
3. Abbey Grange

The character areas identify visually and physically distinct parts of the conservation area. Key influences in shaping the distinctive character of Preston Crowmarsh include the geography of the hamlet located on flat agricultural land with Crowmarsh Lane forming a central spine through the settlement dividing off the agricultural fields to the east from the Thameside flood meadows and closes to the west and with the principal residence and manor located at Abbey Grange to the south (in the proposed extension to the conservation area).





### **Character Area 1: Thameside**

This character area is influenced by water - the River Thames and drainage ditches. It includes the area of flood meadow between the River Thames and Crowmarsh Lane and lies partly within the existing conservation area boundary and partly in the proposed area to the south of Lower Farm. It has a west border with the River Thames and encapsulates the low flood meadows to the west of Crowmarsh Lane as well as the drainage ditches which cross this character area from east to west. Key buildings with a relationship to the river making a strong visual and physical contribution to the character and appearance of the area located within the current conservation area boundary include the mill, mill engine house, Ferry Cottage, as well as the stables to Ferry Cottage/ Preston House. To the south Monk's Cottage with its thatched roof, although mostly rebuilt is prominently located alongside the lane and makes a positive contribution. Part of the character area is in a proposed extension to the conservation area and includes a continuation southward of the flood meadows, with hedge demarcated narrow plots leading from Crowmarsh Lane to the River. Within the area, bordering the Thames are sited two WW2 structures of local interest and No 72, a house considered to be local interest of 1930s date. The WW2 structures include a surviving pill box and former gun emplacement which illustrate the association of the River Thames with war time defences seen as necessary to halt Hitler's advance to London along the Thames valley. Other houses of post war to more recent date, are not considered to meet the criteria for local listing but are considered to make a neutral contribution to the character and appearance of the conservation area. There are significant views across this character area to the River and National Landscape beyond to the west as well as south to Crowmarsh Battle Farm, the mill to the north and historic core of hamlet cottages and farm-houses to the east.

### **Character Area 2: Rural core**

The visually attractive cottages and farmhouses to the east of the spine of Crowmarsh Lane together with their rear garden plots and the fields beyond form the rural core of the hamlet. They illustrate the hamlet's agricultural past. The scale and status of buildings ranges from the 2 storey vernacular scale of The Old Swan and Nos 49-51 (agricultural workers cottages) to the imposing scale of the 2 ½ storey Old Mill House and 2 storey 1-4 Mill Cottages (below, *Fig 17*) and Preston House. Lower Farm and the cottages to the south on the bend are also of vernacular scale and form at 1 ½ to 2 storey height, Lower Farm aspiring to have a more formal front. Most of the buildings in this character area are either listed or are non-designated heritage assets (see, *Appendix D*). Others of more recent date are considered to make a neutral contribution. There are incidental views from the rear of the properties over agricultural land and a belt of woodland plantation on the northeast corner as well as wide reaching views over the open flood meadows to the river from property frontages.



Fig 17. 1-4 Mill Cottages (left) and Preston House (right)

### **Character Area 3: Abbey Grange**

This character area is in a proposed extension to the conservation area, formed around the high status manorial site of the former Grange to Battle Abbey- now known as Crowmarsh Battle Farm. It was separated historically from the rest of the hamlet by intervening field parcels. The listed 18th century farmhouse and large courtyard range of vast barns together with an octagonal dovecote and granary make a significant contribution to the character and appearance of the area and are prominent in views from Crowmarsh Lane. The site was occupied from medieval times and has part of a moat surviving. The impressive scale of the barns reflects the agricultural prosperity of the 1800s. There are strong visual links to the river and northwards to the hamlet core, with incidental views over the low lying open field parcels of marshy ground and cropped fields to the south and southeast.



Fig 18. Weatherboarded granary at the entrance to Crowmarsh Battle Farm

### **6.2 Activity and prevailing or former uses**

Preston Crowmarsh originated as two distinct parts; the manorial grange site of Battle Abbey to the south and the hamlet core to the north, separated by intervening fields. The location of the hamlet to the south of the village centre of Benson, away from any major communication route alongside the Thames, gives the hamlet a tranquil rural/riverine character and feel.

The Thames and surrounding agricultural landscape have provided employment and leisure facilities over the centuries. Crowmarsh Lane linked the Battle Abbey grange with Benson; the built form evolved along it with the cottages and farmhouses to the north on the eastside and buildings connected with the river (mill, Ferry Cottage) to the west. The influence of the manor and its owners/occupiers has been felt over the centuries and includes the Enclosures of the 1560s by Ralph Verney as well as those of the Newtons in the mid-19th century.

The vast barns at Crowmarsh Battle Farm are testament to the large scale grain production of the 1800s and the storage required. By the end of the 20th century the farm buildings were no longer suitable for agriculture and have since been converted to an award winning office park; retaining their character and appearance together. Crowmarsh Battle Farmhouse remains a residential property.

The River Thames provided employment with transport of goods such as timber, malt, iron ore and coal as well as a lock and ferries established at Benson and various points at Preston Crowmarsh below The Weir. The Swan Inn operated from 1786 to 1961 and served the river folk ('rough' bargees) whilst pubs and inns in Benson served the coaching trade. Barge traffic ceased in 1934 and the wharf site opposite Benson Church



became a boating (pleasure steamers, punts) and bathing station. The site is now the Benson Waterfront with boat hire, repair workshop, holiday lodges and café. Adjacent is Rivermead Recreation Ground.

The Thames continues to form part of the life of the wider parish and has become fashionable for various leisure pursuits such as coarse fishing (flourishing Fishing Club) and boating (for hire and holiday use). Fisheries were mentioned at Benson in the 1086 Domesday Survey and a meadow enclosed by water (probably 3-acre Mill Island), weir and sluice were recorded in a grant to Ralph Restwald in 1324. The Thames Path passes through the hamlet over the weir and together with local footpaths is popular with walkers, joggers and dog walkers.

Two mills were mentioned at Benson at the time of the Domesday Survey of 1086, including Crowmarsh Mill which was important for corn milling. It employed 8 to 10 men at the end of the 19th century under the Littleboy family who were followed by Mr Wigglesworth, a flock manufacturer. The mill closed in 1906 due to bad floods preventing the water wheel from working and the mill, Mill Island, an osier bed, Ferry Cottage and the Old Malt Houses were bought by Lord Wittenham. In 1922 the mill was used as an electricity generating station supplying electricity to Wallingford, Benson and Warborough and closed by 1930. In 1933 Mr EJ Williams converted the mill into a private house. Parts of the old stone walls of the complex were retained to show their former extent. Other parts of the island site developed into a wildlife sanctuary where swans, pheasants, partridge and even otters were once seen.

The hamlet remains an attractive place to live as well as work from home, support services such as shops and schools can be found readily nearby in Benson and other facilities in Wallingford and Abingdon.

### 6.3 Prevalent qualities of the built form



Fig 19. 49-51 Preston Crowmarsh

#### **Qualities of buildings**

There are 11 listed buildings in Preston Crowmarsh (in the conservation area and proposed extension) listed in Appendix A. A number of buildings identified as meeting the criteria for inclusion as buildings of local interest including workers cottages and WW2 structures are listed in Appendix C. Since Preston Crowmarsh is a small rural hamlet within the parish of Benson, the hamlet lacks buildings serving the wider community such as the parish church, chapels, schools, public houses and shops which are located in the main village. However, the hamlet contains good quality examples of vernacular architecture dating mainly from the 17th to 19th centuries, some possibly having earlier cores.

The hamlet comprises the self-contained farm buildings and farmhouse complex making up Crowmarsh Battle Farm (in the proposed extension to the conservation area) together with the cottages and farmhouses, former mill, The Old Mill House, and former public house The Old Swan further north along Crowmarsh Lane.

### **Siting**

The majority of buildings are distributed along the east side of Crowmarsh Lane. There is a lesser, more random dispersed distribution to the west, with buildings and structures tending to have an association with the river. More recent development is clustered in more compact form to the south of Lower Farm and down a couple of tracks leading west off the lane. Most buildings are sited parallel to the lane or slightly set back from it behind railings or short frontages. Greenhaye is an exception being reached down a long track with an avenue of trees. Lower Farm and Crowmarsh Battle Farm relate to their complexes of farm buildings, Lower Farm being of irregular small scale layout, whilst the latter is of significant size and of conscious design and layout indicative of the period of 'High Farming' of the 1800s to 1860s.



Fig 20. The Old Mill House

### **Size types and storey heights**

The tallest house is The Old Mill House at 2 full storeys plus attics (below left, Fig 20) with Crowmarsh Battle Farmhouse and Lower Farmhouse of 2 storeys height, respectively. Cottages such as Nos 49 and 51 and 75 and 77 are of 2 vernacular storeys in height (below, Fig 21), the cottages of 17th century date of lower height and proportion than Nos 1-4 Mill Cottages, constructed in the 19th century with formal symmetry. Other buildings such as the engine house to the mill and outbuildings such as stables are of 1 storey height. The barns and stables at Crowmarsh Battle Farm however are on a vast scale and of different proportions than the vernacular scale and form found in outbuildings elsewhere in the hamlet.

Older buildings tend to have narrow spans and half hipped roofs of clay tile or thatch, some having been extended with rear wings. 18th and 19th century examples tend to have shallower pitches with slate roofs.



Fig 21. 75 and 77 Preston Crowmarsh





Fig 22. 73 Preston Crowmarsh

### ***Building style and plan form***

Most of the buildings in the hamlet are simple vernacular farmhouses and cottages. Plan forms range from single bay extended to 2-bay with rear extensions (Nos 49 and 51), to 2- and 3- bay cottages (Nos 71, 71A, 73 (above, *Fig 22*), 75, 77, and The Old Swan) or larger houses (Ferry Cottage, Monks Cottage- rebuilt), and farmhouses (Lower Farm and Crowmarsh Battle Farm) of more organic irregular form.

The Old Mill House is a good example of 'polite' Georgian style with an imposing symmetrical frontage. Lower Farmhouse has a rendered front and aspiring symmetry belying an irregular plan form. Nos 1-4 Mill Cottages and Preston House (see, *Fig 17*) illustrate an idealised vernacular style with mansard roofs facing the street and were constructed as workers cottages and associated bailiff's house c. 1906-1912 by George Faber (later Lord Wittenham) of Howbery Court.

### **6.4 Local details**

This is an area of chalkstone, brick, thatch and red clay tile roofs. A distinctive characteristic is the use of brick in association with chalkstone or flint to achieve striking banding effects or chequer work patterns. Brick dressings are commonly used around windows and doors. Local details include:

- Walls, railings and gates: low stone/brick walls at Crowmarsh Battle Farm, 1-4 Mill Cottages, Monks Cottage in association with high hedges; estate railings at No 57, Lime Tree House (new house), No 74, to field opposite front of Nos 49 and 51; decorative railings with fleurs de lis finials at Crowmarsh Battle Farmhouse, Lower Farmhouse, Preston House; high brick/stone walls to the south of The Old Mill House; timber post and rail to field boundaries especially around Crowmarsh Battle Farm (see, *Section 5.6*).
- Windows and doors: cottages have flush fitting painted timber case-ments with small panes, 6 to 9 panes to each light and plank doors; Later replacements are of 2 panes to each light (The Old Swan). Larger, higher status properties have sash windows either 6/6 or 8/8 and 6 or 8 panelled doors as at The Old Mill House, Lower Farmhouse and Crowmarsh Battle Farmhouse and canted 2 storey bay windows. These details are also found at No 72 a property of c.1930 date constructed in traditional style (see, *Fig 27*). Leaded lights at Nos 1-4 Mill Cottages, No 43 and Ferry Cottage. Yorkshire (horizontal) sliding sashes at 49 and 51 Preston Crowmarsh.
- Semi-circular brick heads to windows and doors in cottages; rubbed segmental brick arches to window openings at The Old Mill House.



- Brick dentils at eaves and flat band at The Old Swan (see, *Fig 7*).
- Cylindrical terracotta chimney pots on Nos 1-4 Mill Cottages, The Old Mill House, The Old Swan, Crowmarsh battle Farm.
- Decorative use of flint, stone and brick in front walls of Nos 1-4 Mill Cottages, end gable and frontage of No 69, No 73, Nos 71 and 71a.
- Chequer work brickwork in gables to Nos 49, 51 (see, *Fig 19*), and 71.

### 6.6 Prevalent local building materials

- Local chalkstone in association with warm red brick and flint with red tile roofs predominate (right, *Fig 21*).
- Outbuildings such as the vast barns and granary at Crowmarsh Battle Farm (see, *Fig 18*) are constructed in weatherboard under clay tile roofs; weatherboard elsewhere at gable to stable to Ferry Cottage and modern garage outbuildings at Ferry Cottage.
- Combed wheat straw thatch is found on cottages such as Ferry Cottage, Nos 49 and 51, 71 and 71a and Nos 75 and 77 (right, *Fig 24*). Elsewhere, in developments of all periods, clay tile predominates (right, *Fig 26*).
- Flemish bond brickwork in houses and cottages from the 17th century onwards (see, *Fig 19*).
- Brick and Welsh slate roof in outbuildings (Stable to Ferry Cottage/ Preston House).



Fig 23. Nos 1-4 Mill Cottages



Fig 24. 75 and 77 Preston Crowmarsh



Fig 25. West boundary wall to The Old Swan



Fig 26. 60 Preston Crowmarsh



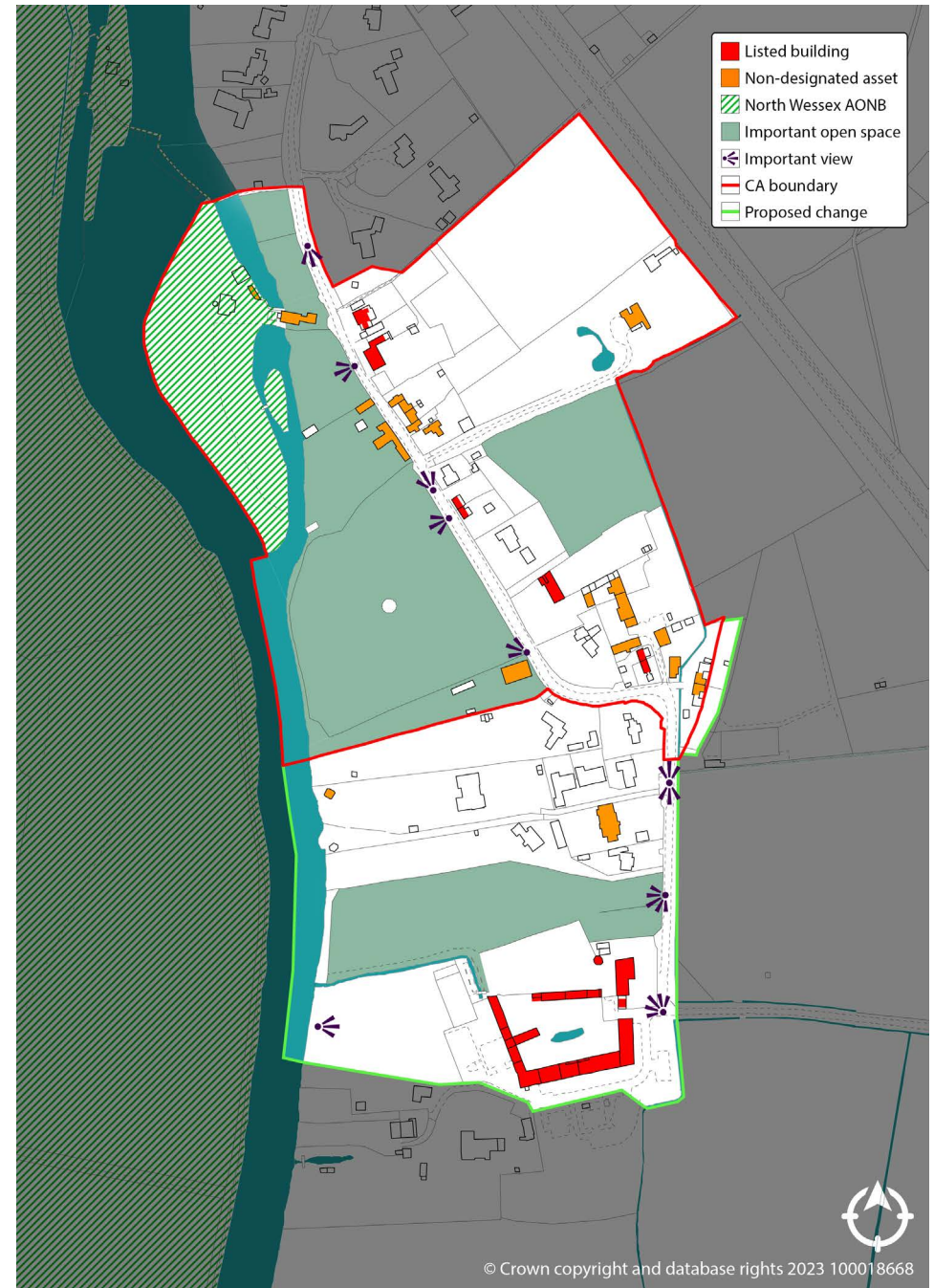
## 7.0 Boundary Review

Following a review of the conservation area boundary two boundary revisions are proposed. These are shown on the map, right.

1. Alteration to the conservation area boundary southwards to include the properties, plots, fields and land to the south of the current boundary up to the field boundary to the south of Crowmarsh Battle Farm.
2. A small boundary correction extending the boundary slightly to the east of Nos 75 and 77 Crowmarsh Lane to include the full extent of their curtilage.

The existing conservation area boundary is drawn tightly around the core of cottages and farmhouses in the north of the hamlet but omits the area to the south of the current boundary up to and including Crowmarsh Battle Farm. This area is considered to meet the criteria for inclusion as an 'area of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance.' It includes:

- Crowmarsh Battle Farm, a site of archaeological, architectural and historic interest.
- An open field/paddock forming an important pastoral setting to Crowmarsh Battle Farm and with significant connectivity and views back and forth to the River Thames. This field is an important area of open space acting as a buffer between Crowmarsh Battle Farm and modern infill development to the north.



- Small scale enclosure alongside the Thames.
- Houses of 20th to 21st century date which are representative examples of modern development making a neutral to positive contribution to the west of the lane and south of the current boundary.
- An extant pill box and former gun emplacement to the west of Nos 70 and 72 Crowmarsh Lane, respectively represent features associated with WW2 land defences as part of a line of defences designed in fear of an invasion by Hitler from the southwest, advancing to London, crossing the Thames in the Benson area.

Crowmarsh Battle Farm is located on the site of the medieval manorial manor house, associated with Battle Abbey in Sussex, various Kings of England and later prominent courtiers and men in the City of London. In the 14th century it included a hall, great chamber chapel, bakery, stables, oxhouse and pig sty. The premises accommodated abbey officers or bailiffs until 1362 when the buildings were presumably let with the demesne. The existing 2 storey farmhouse reflects successive remodelling's from the 17th to 19th centuries and contains remnants of medieval smoke blackened timbers and evidence of an open hall house.<sup>10</sup> Later the farm was associated with the Newton family, major landowners and improvers who also owned land in Fifield and elsewhere and pushed for the Enclosure of the open fields in the parish.

The area to the west of Crowmarsh Lane with infill development dating from approximately the 1930s to present day within the proposed boundary is considered to contain representative examples of more recent built form sited within historic plots with river frontages.

10. Townley, *The Victoria County History, Oxfordshire*, (Ed.), Vol XVIII, 2016, p 40



Fig 27. 72 Preston Crowmarsh

These 20th and 21st century properties are considered to contribute to the evolved character of the area, with a mixture of traditional and contemporary design and representative palettes of materials. No 72 for example is a distinguished Vernacular Revival style which includes gabled and hipped roofs, barge boards, finials, tile hanging and 2 storey bay windows (above, *Fig 27*). This property makes a positive contribution to the quality of the area. Other properties alongside generally respect the spaces within plots, are set back from road frontages, generally of 1 to 1.5 storeys and are constructed in materials sympathetic to the conservation area, including brick and local stone with tiled roofs and timber cladding (see, *Fig 26*). The pill box and former gun emplacement are considered to be features of local interest which contribute towards the history of modern warfare and illustrate the impacts of international and national events on a local parish and hamlet within it during WW2. These fields, spaces, features and structures are considered worthy of inclusion within the conservation area.

Should this amended boundary be adopted, it is recommended that the name of the conservation area is changed to Preston Crowmarsh and Crowmarsh Battle Conservation Area.



## 8.0 Management Plan

The council can initiate improvements and control development in the conservation area. However, the success of conservation area designation and its future management will depend upon the co-operation and enthusiasm of stakeholders including residents, statutory undertakers and business owners to collaborate with the council in achieving common aims and objectives. These are listed below:

### 8.1 General

The council will aim to:

- Promote awareness of the special value of the conservation area and encourage promotion of the special character and appearance through works of preservation or enhancement.
- Encourage statutory undertakers to retain, repair and re-instate historic street surfaces, grass verges and banks, street furniture, signage and lighting; reduce street clutter including wirescape and rationalise street furniture.
- Encourage high quality, energy efficient design which aims to: fit in with the established 'grain' of the conservation area and be sympathetic to it. Heritage Appraisals and Impact Assessments along with Design and Access Statements will assist this process.
- Encourage the regular maintenance and repair of buildings and walls in the conservation area with appropriate traditional materials and finishes including the removal of inappropriate and harmful cement renders and plasters.

- Seek to reinforce the special quality of historic buildings through the use of traditional materials and construction techniques, including the use of lime mortars, plasters and renders, combed wheat reed or long-straw thatch and painted timber windows and doors.

- Encourage regular tree/hedge management with re-planting where appropriate.
- Proposals for development should enhance or better reveal the significance of the conservation area, including responding to views both in, out and around the conservation area and in its wider setting.
- Encourage the retention of front gardens rather than their change to vehicle parking areas.

### 8.2 Specific

Stakeholders should jointly aim to:

- Preserve and enhance views in, out and around the conservation area, especially of the River Thames, flood meadows and landscape beyond by appropriate management of garden areas and sympathetic design of buildings
- Preserve and enhance open spaces, particularly the important open spaces as identified on the map page 6, including by appropriate management of garden areas.
- Preserve areas of grass verge and bank along Crowmarsh Lane, especially near Crowmarsh Mill, the footpath entrance to The Weir and at the right angle bend where there are wide grass verges in front of Nos 60 and 66.

- Encourage the softening of boundaries around new development with tree/hedge/shrub planting with species appropriate to the location and geology.
- Achieve effective tree management along the lane especially with regards to overhead wires and the electricity supply. Such management should apply to small groups of notable trees including those covered by tree protection orders along the footpath adjacent to The Old Swan, opposite The Old Mill House, in the frontage of Lower Farmhouse, within the garden of Crowmarsh Battle Farmhouse and the single horse chestnut which acts as a focal point at the south end of Crowmarsh Lane at the access to the permissive footpath leading south from the Crowmarsh battle Farmhouse car park.
- Keep boundaries including walls of brick/clunch stone, metal railings, gates and fencing (estate railings, picket fencing, timber gates, post and rail fencing) in good repair using traditional lime mortars and paints as appropriate.
- Keep streams and drainage ditches clear of debris, especially at times of flood risk.
- Ensure the appropriate maintenance of willows and other hedgerows.
- Ensure the appropriate use of traditional lime mortars and renders in the repair of houses, cottages and subsidiary structures such as out-buildings and walls.
- Encourage the retention and continued use of traditional painted timber windows and doors.

- Ensure the detailing of any new buildings or structures sympathises with the rural vernacular including scale, form, massing, height, detailing and materials of the hamlet.



Fig 28. Looking north along Crowmarsh Lane



## 9.0 Selected Bibliography and Further Reading

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Design Guide, 2022

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The Statutory List of Buildings of Special Architectural or Historic Interest via <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/>

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[www.buildingconservation.com](http://www.buildingconservation.com)

### **Legislation**

Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979

Enterprise and Regulatory Reform Act 2013

Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990

Town and Country Planning Act 1990

## Appendix A: Designated Assets

The Preston Crowmarsh conservation area does not contain any scheduled monuments, nor does it contain any Grade I or Grade II\* listed buildings.

### **Grade II**

No 25 (The Old Swan) Preston Crowmarsh

The Old Mill House

Nos 49 and 51 Preston Crowmarsh

Lower Farmhouse

71 Preston Crowmarsh

Within the proposed extension:

Dovecote approx. 10 m west of No 84 (Crowmarsh Battle Farm)

No 84 (Crowmarsh Battle Farm), Preston Crowmarsh

Granary approx. 2 m. S of No 84 (Crowmarsh Battle Farm)

Stables approx. 15m NW of No 84 (Crowmarsh Battle Farm)

Barn, shelter sheds and engine house approx. 15 m S of No 84 (Crowmarsh Battle Farm).



## Appendix B: Historic Environment Record Summary

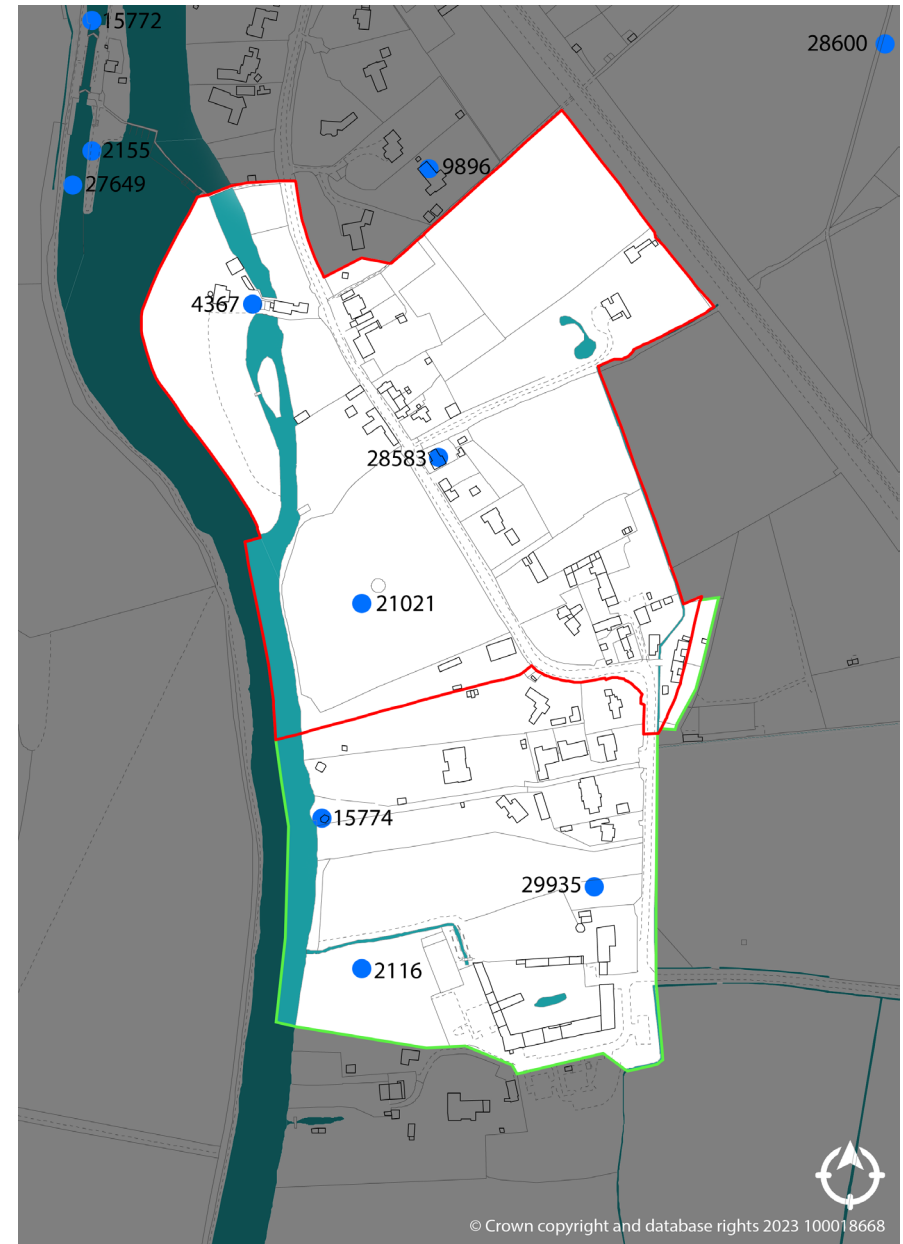
The following was produced on request by the Historic Environment Record (HER) team at Oxfordshire County Council to capture in greater detail the archaeological interest of the Preston Crowmarsh conservation area. Records in the text may be located using the map, right.

### Archaeological understanding

Preston Crowmarsh lies within an area of archaeological interest dating from the early prehistoric to modern period, evidenced through crop-marks and archaeological investigations within the conservation area itself and in the surrounding area.

### Prehistoric

While no prehistoric evidence has yet been identified within the conservation area itself, archaeological evidence indicates that prehistoric communities were active locally. An evaluation adjacent to the north-east identified a Mesolithic or neolithic curvilinear enclosure (PRN28600). Adjacent to the north, a large quantity of Iron Age pottery found during the construction of No. 11 in 1978 may indicate a settlement nearby (PRN 9896). Excavations in advance of housing at St Helen's Avenue c.300m further north (PRN16138) revealed multi-phased Neolithic occupation in the form of pits, postholes, gullies and round-houses, as well as Bronze Age to Iron Age features. Cropmark features have been recorded from aerial photographs at RAF Benson to the east, including a Neolithic cursus, Bronze Age ring ditches and prehistoric enclosures (PRN 15385); and findspots of flint tools, axes and pottery (PRN2119; PRN2124-5; PRN2130; PRN4449-50; PRN5215; PRN5238; PRN9878; PRN9884; PRN12882) indicate ephemeral activity outside of these activity foci.



### **Roman to Early Medieval**

The earliest recorded evidence in Preston Crowmarsh itself dates probably to the Roman period. Four burials found in the 19th century during gravel excavation were reported as Roman (PRN 2101) although it should be noted that no dating evidence was provided.

Roman activity is known from the surrounding area. A Roman settlement lies adjacent to the conservation area off St Helen's Avenue (PRN28600). Most of the excavated features were of early Roman date, with a focus of middle Roman activity on the east and of late Roman activity on the south of the site. Early Roman pits and ditches included fine-ware pottery suggesting that the site was of higher status than most rural settlements of the same date in Oxfordshire. Further north-east a single phase of early Roman settlement was evidenced by ditches, gullies and a posthole at Jubilee Villa (PRN16139); and the proposed line of the Roman road running from Dorchester to Henley (PRN28859) lies less than a kilometre away. Further west on St Helen's Avenue, Roman ditches and pottery were identified, along with Anglo-Saxon sunken feature buildings indicating continued occupation of the prehistoric settlement noted above (PRN16138). A mid-Saxon cemetery comprising at least 8 graves found at St Helen's Avenue (PRN28600) may be associated with this settlement. Finds of scramasaxes (PRN2155) and spearheads (PRN27649) at Benson Lock attest to further Saxon activity nearby. Preston Crowmarsh is a hamlet of Benson which is known to have been an important settlement during the early medieval period, possibly even a royal vill, due to its strategic location between the kingdoms of Mercia and Wessex.

### **Medieval to Post Medieval**

Earl Harold was lord in 1066 and by the time of the Domesday book

in 1086, Preston Crowmarsh was known as Land of Battle (St Martin), having been given by William the Conqueror to the monks of Battle Abbey, near Hastings. It had a recorded population of 13 households, denoting a relatively small medieval settlement. The land is recorded as exclusively ploughland, indicating a primarily agricultural economy.

A medieval moat (PRN2116) and parallel ditches (PRN29935) are recorded at Crowmarsh Battle, a grange of Battle Abbey. The present Crowmarsh Battle Farm buildings originated in the mid-18th-century. Medieval and Post Medieval pits were identified during excavations at no. 49, one of which may have been a watering hole (PRN28583). The mill may also have medieval origins, but this remains unconfirmed, although two phases of structural features, dating to the mid-19th century and early 20th century were identified during evaluation (PRN4367). Several of the present houses and buildings within the conservation area originated in the 17th-18th Centuries, most of which are designated, indicating an increase in settlement during this period, and documentary sources report that from the 1760s a ferry ran from just south of Preston Crowmarsh mill.

### **Modern**

The modern period has seen no major developments within the conservation area, although the historically rural character of the surrounding area has significantly changed. Residential development to the north has connected the hamlet with the village of Benson, while to the east the landscape character is defined by the military airfield, RAF Benson (PRN29144), constructed in 1937. Pillboxes to the north-west (PRN15772-3) and south (PRN15774) of the conservation area are surviving remnants of the Red-GHQ Stop Line second world war defences.



## Appendix C: Timeline of People and Events

### **Preston Crowmarsh Manor**

Before 1066 a 5 hide estate granted to Harold Godwinson.

William, I gave it to Battle Abbey, Sussex (with Benson manor). Retained until the abbey's dissolution in 1538, reverted to Crown.

1540 Crown sold to Sir Thomas Pope.

1590 Sold to William Spencer (d.1609) of Yarnton.

1617 Sold to Thomas Freeman, lessee of the manor house and farm.

1619 Sold to John Blacknall of Abingdon and descended with Fifield.

1650s to 1660s Sir Ralph Verney carried out early Enclosure of closes around Crowmarsh Battle Farm. Residual common rights were extinguished by agreement at a profit. 6 tenants bought their own small holdings.

1664 Sir Ralph Verney sold to Clerkenwell Brewer, Henry Knight or Brothers.

1696 bought by Thomas Cowslad of Newbury.

1742 William Cowslad sold to Southwark brewer Ralph Thrale (d.1758) with 5 houses a dovecote and 490 acres  
1796 Crowmarsh Battle Farm was occupied by Thomas Newton (1772-1842), whose family dominated Benson farming in the 19th century. Social conflict occurred locally in the 1830 Swing Riots when several hundred labourers gathered at

Thomas Newtons Crowmarsh Battle Farm and smashed threshing machines in opposition to Newton's Enclosure campaigns. Fellow farmers, clergy and labourers joined against him.

C18 and C19 Crowmarsh Battle Farm passed through successive generations and relatives of Ralph Thrale to the dowager marchioness of Lansdowne (d. 1895) and her son 5th marquis.

1909-1910 sold to farmer EP Chamberlain (tenant since 1894) family still farmed there in 2022.

### **Lower Farm, smaller estate**

1617 Anthony Phelps of Preston Crowmarsh purchased 62 acres. The Phelps family remained at Lower Farm until 1724.

1780s the estate was owned with Fifield and let to Philip Padbury.

c.1799 the estate was sold to the Newtons who ran it with Crowmarsh Battle Farm.

Early 20th century the land passed to the Chamberlains of Crowmarsh Battle Farm

1642-1646 Civil War. Area subject to frequent troop movements, disruption and requisitioning of manpower, crops and animals  
1863 Parliamentary Enclosure finally achieved by Ralph Newton of Crowmarsh Battle Farm.

## Appendix D: Non-designated heritage assets

This list of non-designated heritage assets (NDHA) has been compiled using the following criteria for selection as informed by [paragraph 216 of the NPPF \(2024\)](#) and [paragraph 40 of the Historic Environment government guidance \(2019\)](#), along with advice published by Historic England in [Advice Note 7 \(2nd Edition, 2021\)](#) on local heritage listing. The criteria are:

1. The decision to include a heritage asset on this list must be based on sound evidence of their significance. This significance may be defined by age, rarity, architectural and artistic interest, group value, archaeological interest, historic interest, or landmark status;
2. The heritage asset must make a positive contribution to the communities sustainability and economic vitality; and
3. The presence of a heritage asset on this list must not prevent them from being put to viable uses consistent with their conservation.

**Please note:** A building identified as an NDHA is a material planning consideration, however, permitted development rights for NDHA's are no different than those of other non-statutorily listed buildings inside or outside of a conservation area.

What follows is a photographic record of each identified NDHA within the conservation area along with captioned summaries of their significance and justification for their inclusion. These are marked **orange** on the map on page 6.



**1-4 Mill Cottages (above) and Preston House (below), 1906-1912**

Estate cottages built c.1906-1912 for Gerge Faber (Later Lord Wittenham) of Howbery Court. Idealised vernacular style. Mansard roofs. Chalkstone with decorative flintwork chequerwork panels, brick dressings, chimneys with arched panels, leaded light casements. Added for group value.







**Greenhay, early 20th century**

Edwardian villa, square plan, side verandah, red and grey brickwork. Hipped slate roof. Added for aesthetic and historic value.



**Nos 65-67 Preston Crowmarsh, late 18th century**

Former barn to Lower Farm, converted to 2 dwellings c.1976. Chalkstone with brick dressings. Hipped red tile roof. Curved principal trusses. Group value with Lower Farm and 71 & 71A.



**Barn at Lower Farm, late 18th century**

Chalkstone with brick dressings, old tile roof. Group value with Lower Farmhouse, farmbuildings and 71 and 71A.



**No 69 Preston Crowmarsh, late 18th century**

Former stable block to Lower Farm, converted to dwelling. Banding of chalkstone with flints and brick dressings. Group value with Lower Farm buildings and grade II cottages 71 and 71A.





**Former cartshed Lower Farm, 19th century**

Red brick, 4 open bays, 3 posts on brick bases, half hipped red tiled roof. Group value with Lower Farm buildings.



**73 Preston Crowmarsh, late 18th century**

Farm cottage occupied by the Bailiff in the 1840s. Distinctive banding of chalkstone with flint and brick dressings. Group value with 71 and 71a.



**Wing of Crowmarsh Mill, 1798**

Rubblestone/brick with tiled roof. Former corn mill, also used for flock production and electricity generation in 20th century. Converted to house in 1930s. Added for aesthetic and group value.



**Former engine house, Crowmarsh Mill, 19th century**

Rendered with hipped Welsh slate roof. Group value with wing of former mill complex. Scenic quality with mill and island. Added for aesthetic and group value.





**Ferry Cottage, 18th century**

Extended 20th century. Rendered with thatched roof and brick stacks. Home of the ferryman mid-C19. Added for aesthetic and group value.



**72 Preston Crowmarsh, 1930s**

Eclectic Gothic revival style. Distinctive detailing including chalkstone with brick dressings, 2 storey bay windows, tile hanging, barge boards, finials, timber casements. Added for aesthetic value.



**Pill Box adjacent to river in grounds of 70 Preston Crowmarsh, 1950s**

WW2 pill box. Concrete construction. Part of GHQ Stop Line (Red). Added for historic value.



**Monks Cottage, 17th/18th century**

Remnant of historic stone core survives. Reconstructed 1951 and rebuilt after fire c.1995. Thatch and vernacular form make a positive contribution. Added for aesthetic and group value.





**Former stable to Preston House & Ferry Cottage, 19th century**  
Brick under a Welsh slate roof. Weatherboarded gable to road. Added for group value.



**75-77 Preston Crowmarsh**  
19th century semi-detached pair. Unusual example of rural Victorian thatched roof cottages. Characterful thatch ridge ornaments. Late 20th century flank extensions. Added for historic and aesthetic value.

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