



Conservation Area

appraisal and management plan



St Michael's Abbey



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1. Introduction

- 1.1 This document should be read alongside the Council's [Conservation Areas Overview document](#) which sets out the context in which conservation areas in Rushmoor have been designated. This includes the legislative and planning policy framework, as well as the geographic and historic setting of the Borough.¹ The Overview document also explains what requires planning permission in a conservation area.
- 1.2 A conservation area is a place of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to conserve or enhance. Building groups, walls, trees and hedges, open spaces, views and historic settlement patterns all combine to create a sense of place. It is this character, which is required, rather than simply individual buildings, that the designation of conservation area status seeks to protect. The location of the boundary for a conservation area is a qualitative decision relating to character. It is essential for the protection of conservation areas that only areas which are heritage assets are designated so that 'the concept of conservation is not devalued'.²

Appraisal

- 1.3 This Appraisal document sets out the special architectural and historic interest of St Michael's Abbey conservation area, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance. The Appraisal identifies the features of the conservation area that make a positive or negative contribution to its significance and is accompanied by a Management Plan which sets out how change can be managed to conserve and enhance the area.
- 1.4 Conservation area appraisals and management plans provide a framework and guide to enable planning decisions to be made on a site-specific basis, within the context of national planning policy and the adopted Local Plan.
- 1.5 Every effort has been made to include or analyse elements that are key to the special character of the conservation area. However, where buildings, structures or features have not been specifically highlighted, it does not necessarily follow that they are of no visual or historic value.

¹ Available to view at <https://www.rushmoor.gov.uk/planning-and-building-control/conservation-and-heritage-assets/conservation-areas/>.

² National Planning Policy Framework (2021), para. 191.

2. Overview of St Michael's Abbey Conservation Area

Designation History

- 2.1 St Michael's Abbey conservation area was first designated in 1977 and has since been reviewed in 1989 and 2023. Following the 2023 review and the adoption of this document, a number of areas were removed, or de-designated, from the conservation area, as set out in the Appendix.

Location

- 2.2 St Michael's Abbey conservation area is located on the north-eastern periphery of Farnborough and is centred on St Michael's Abbey and its grounds. The northern boundary of the conservation area is formed by the South West Main Line railway line.

Area Development

- 2.3 The name Farnborough is thought to derive from the old English *Ferneberg* or *Ferneberga*, or 'hill of ferns', and refers to the extensive areas of undulating heathland that originally covered the area. With the opening of the main line Farnborough Station in 1838 and a second smaller station at Farnborough Street village in 1849, the area became readily accessible, and the number of houses and buildings in the area increased. The manorial estate included all of Farnborough, apart from the common, and was held by a succession of families until the late 19th century when it was broken up and sold for residential development, providing the basis for much of the modern housing in the area today.
- 2.4 Until the early 19th century, much of Windmill Hill, now Farnborough Hill, was still part of the common lands of Farnborough Manor. A separate house on the western flanks of the hill was originally recorded on maps during the mid-18th century. In 1860, the wealthy Victorian publisher Thomas Longman acquired the house at Farnborough Hill, including the now-substantial grounds. He demolished the old house and built a new mansion on the present hilltop site, where it became known as 'Farnborough Hill'.
- 2.5 On the death of Thomas Longman in 1879, the mansion and grounds were bought by Empress Eugénie, the widow of Emperor Napoleon III of France. The house then became her home in exile from 1880 to 1920. In addition to the Farnborough Hill estate, she acquired the wooded hillside beyond the railway line to the south of the existing parkland. Here, on the summit of the opposing mount, she constructed a permanent mausoleum for the bodies of her husband and son, the Prince Imperial, in a church that she could view from her private rooms. The mausoleum included a monastery building and lands for a permanent community of monks to serve the chapel. At first it was the Premonstratensian Order,

then later, as it is today, the Benedictine Order. The Priory was raised to Abbey status in 1903 and is held in trust as a Benedictine monastery.

Area Summary

2.6 St Michael's Abbey conservation area has four areas with distinct character:

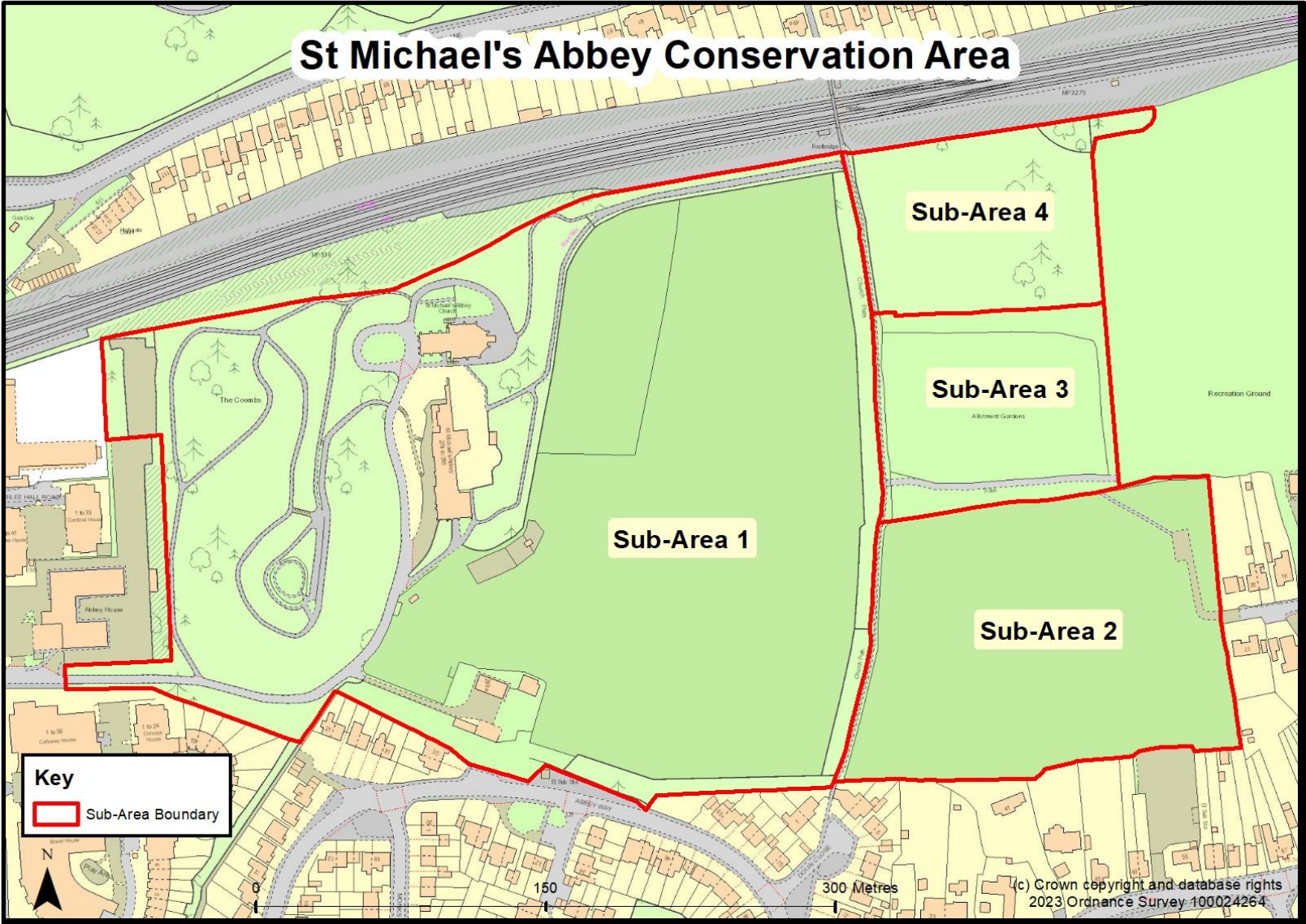
- Sub-Area 1: The Abbey and Monastery
- Sub-Area 2: The Laundry Field
- Sub-Area 3: The Allotments
- Sub-Area 4: Woodland

2.7 Together, these areas provide an insight into the shifting social and cultural development of the Abbey and surrounding landscape and contrast with the expansion of housing in the surrounding area.

2.8 A public footpath (the 'Church Path') runs through the grounds of the Abbey north to south and is predominantly tree lined. A security fence (palisade fencing) tracks the western boundary of the footpath, and a recessed viewing area halfway along the path provides views of the Abbey Church and Monastery.

2.9 The three fields to the east of the footpath did not originally belong to the Abbey. It is believed that the Abbey purchased the fields from Farnborough Manor in the early 20th century to extend its farm. These are:

- The North Field, which is publicly accessible, and where extensive tree-planting has taken place to create a new area of woodland (Sub-Area 4);
- The Central Field, where the Jubilee Allotment Gardens were established in 2012 (Sub-Area 3); and
- The larger Laundry Field, which remains open agricultural land (Sub-Area 2).



Sub-Area 1: The Abbey and Monastery

Area Summary

- 2.10 The Abbey and Monastery are situated on the brow of a hill, with dense tree coverage to the front of the buildings, which face west. This wooded area, 'The Coombs', tracks the railway line to the north, stretches along the sub-area's western boundary with modern flat and office developments on Farnborough Road, and follows the entrance track from the road up to the Abbey. There are also a number of paths that weave through the wooded area.

Views

- 2.11 The predominant views of the Abbey are of the upper storey, dome and cupola. A border of trees and shrubs screen the lower levels of the buildings. The area is well enclosed, with dense tree coverage on the northern boundary adjacent to the railway cutting and to the west of the buildings ('The Coombs').

Building Form and Details

- 2.12 There are two nationally listed buildings within the conservation area boundary:
- **Abbey Church of St Michael:** this Grade I listed building was built for Empress Eugénie as a memorial to her husband Emperor Napoleon III and their son the Prince Imperial. The crypt serves as a mausoleum and houses the remains of Napoleon III, the Prince Imperial and the Empress in granite sarcophagi. Of late French Gothic style, the building comprises a nave, short transepts and an apsidal east end, with the crossing surmounted by an octagonal tower, with a copper dome capped by a lead-covered domed turret.
 - **Monastic Buildings to Abbey Church of St Michael:** this Grade II listed building was also built for the Empress to enable the monks to act as custodians of the tombs. The central unit, of two storeys and dormers, is a red-brick domestic building, in plain Victorian style. On the north side is an extension of three storeys in stone, with painted small windows, bracketed eaves, bands and steep dormers. On the south side, there is a much larger stone extension in Norman style, with typical monastic architectural features presented in a complex irregular form.
- 2.13 The Abbey and Monastery have their own curtilage and wider setting which are protected by the statutory listings under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 and the National Planning Policy Framework.

Open Spaces, Gardens and Trees

- 2.14 The Abbey and associated monastic buildings are accessed via a gated drive from Farnborough Road, which winds uphill through overhanging tree canopies. The mature tree-planted boundaries and grounds buffer the site in all directions. The original entrance had a lodge and gates, now demolished, at the foot of the driveway.
- 2.15 The Abbey has a tree buffer to the north, between it and the railway. This section of dense planting reduces to the rear east-facing elevation of the Abbey. An avenue of trees runs along the land adjacent to the railway and joins up with the path boundary. The land to the east of the Abbey is predominately grassland on slightly undulating topography that slopes away from the Abbey on the hilltop. Much of the area is bounded by trees, shrubs and low-level planting. The main fencing around the land is metal post and wire, with some timber post and panel fencing.
- 2.16 The eastern boundary of the sub-area is a footpath, 'Church Path', which has a tree and shrub-lined walk and is a medieval right of way. The path provides views back up to the Abbey and access to the Laundry Field (Sub-Area 2), allotments (Sub-Area 3) and scrub woodland (Sub-Area 4) to the east, areas which are within the ownership of the Abbey.

Sub-Area 1: The Abbey and Monastery



Entrance to the Abbey



View towards the Abbey



View of St Michael's Abbey



View of the Abbey



View from the Abbey



View from the Abbey

Sub-Area 2: The Laundry Field

Area Summary

- 2.17 The Laundry Field is open scrubby grassland and is bounded by trees and shrubs to the north, south and west. Residential dwellings and gardens lie to the south and east. It is called Laundry Field because a laundry was previously located on the southern boundary. Access for vehicles is through the eastern boundary from Priory Street.

Views

- 2.18 The eastern side of the area has low-level screening. Views through to the Abbey and surrounding fields are to the west.

Sub-Area 2: The Laundry Field



North entrance to the Laundry Field



View of the Laundry Field



View of the Laundry Field

Sub-Area 3: The Allotments

Area Summary

- 2.19 The allotments comprise the Jubilee Allotment Gardens which were established in 2012. The area is accessed through the Laundry Field, off Priory Street.

Views

- 2.20 The area is bounded by trees and shrubs, with an access path to the south. There are limited views out to the Abbey because of the boundary hedging and soft landscaping, which provide clearer long-distance views in winter.

Sub-Area 3: The Allotments



View of Allotments



View of Allotments



Allotments

Sub-Area 4: Woodland

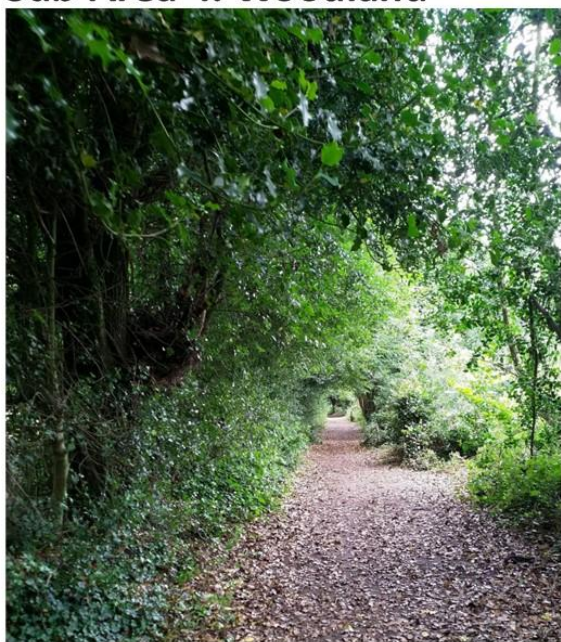
Area Summary

- 2.21 This is a wooded area, with dense tree coverage along the boundary with the railway to the north and with trees becoming less dense towards the centre of the area. Paths wind their way through the area, with the trees continuing into the adjacent Recreation Area to the east.

Views

- 2.22 There are limited views out to the Abbey because of the soft landscaping, shrubs and trees. Dense trees and planting cover much of the area but open out into clearings along paths and in various places. The clear views are from Church Path up to the Abbey.

Sub-Area 4: Woodland



View of path



View east from the path towards woodland



Woodland

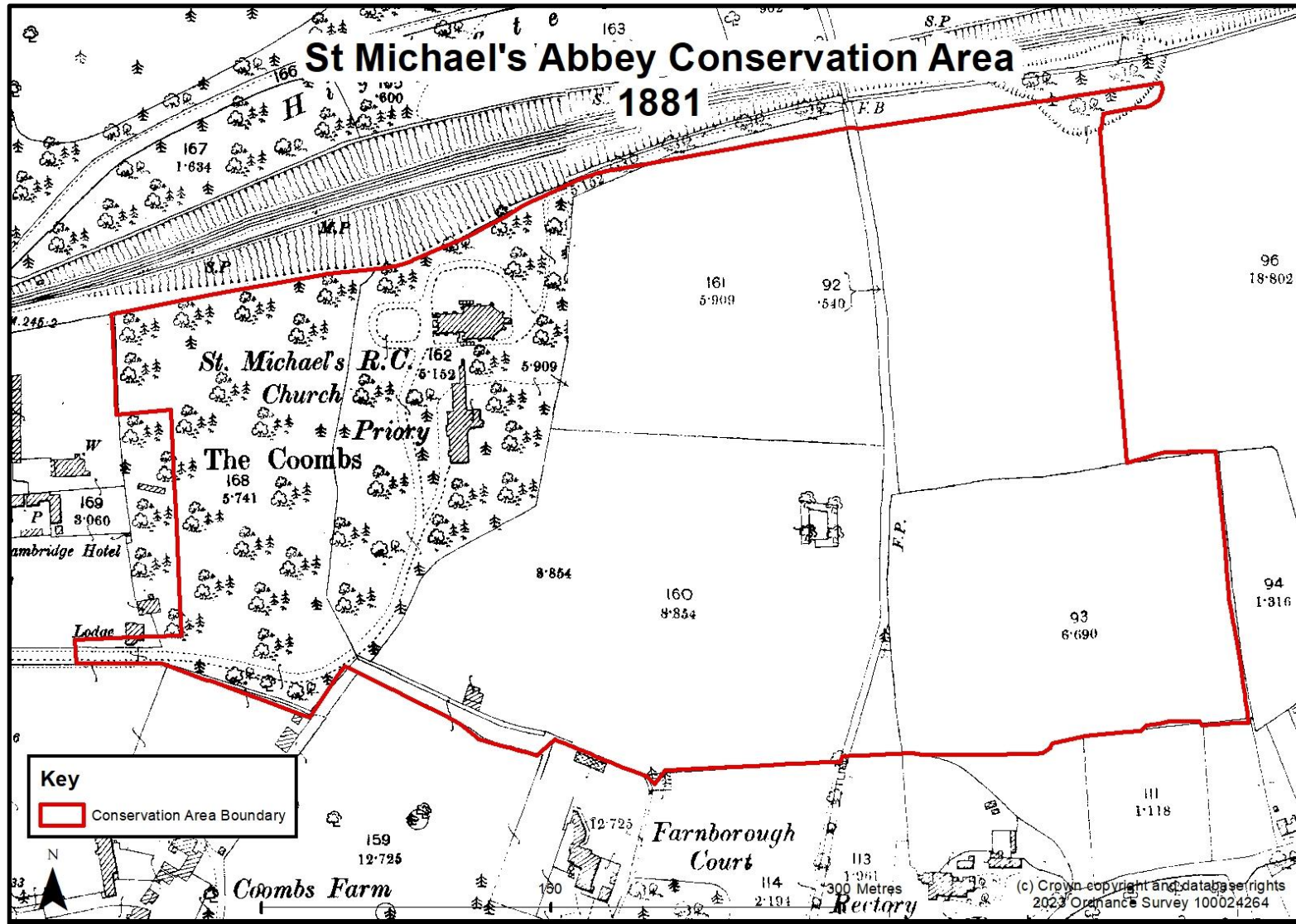


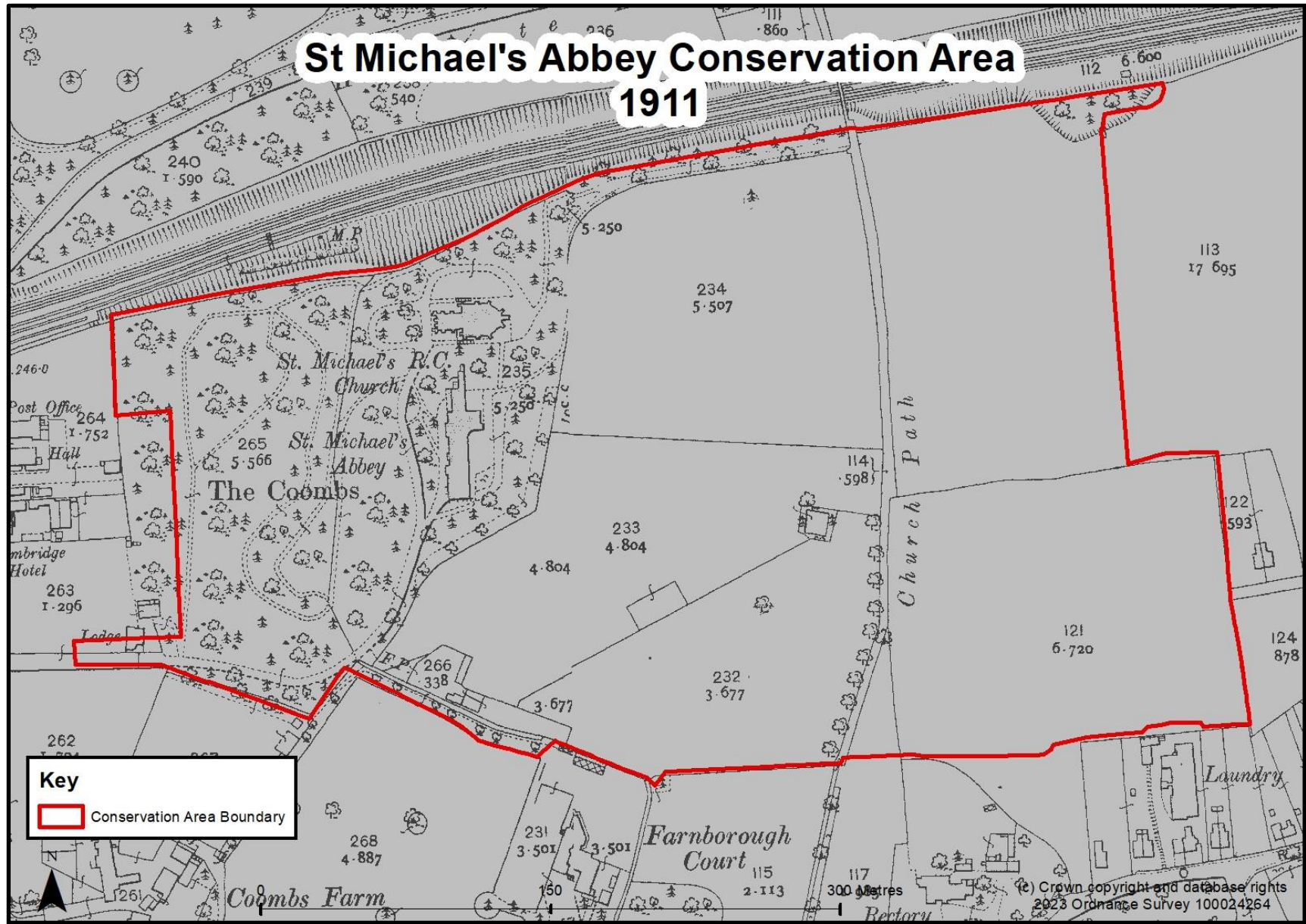
View of path

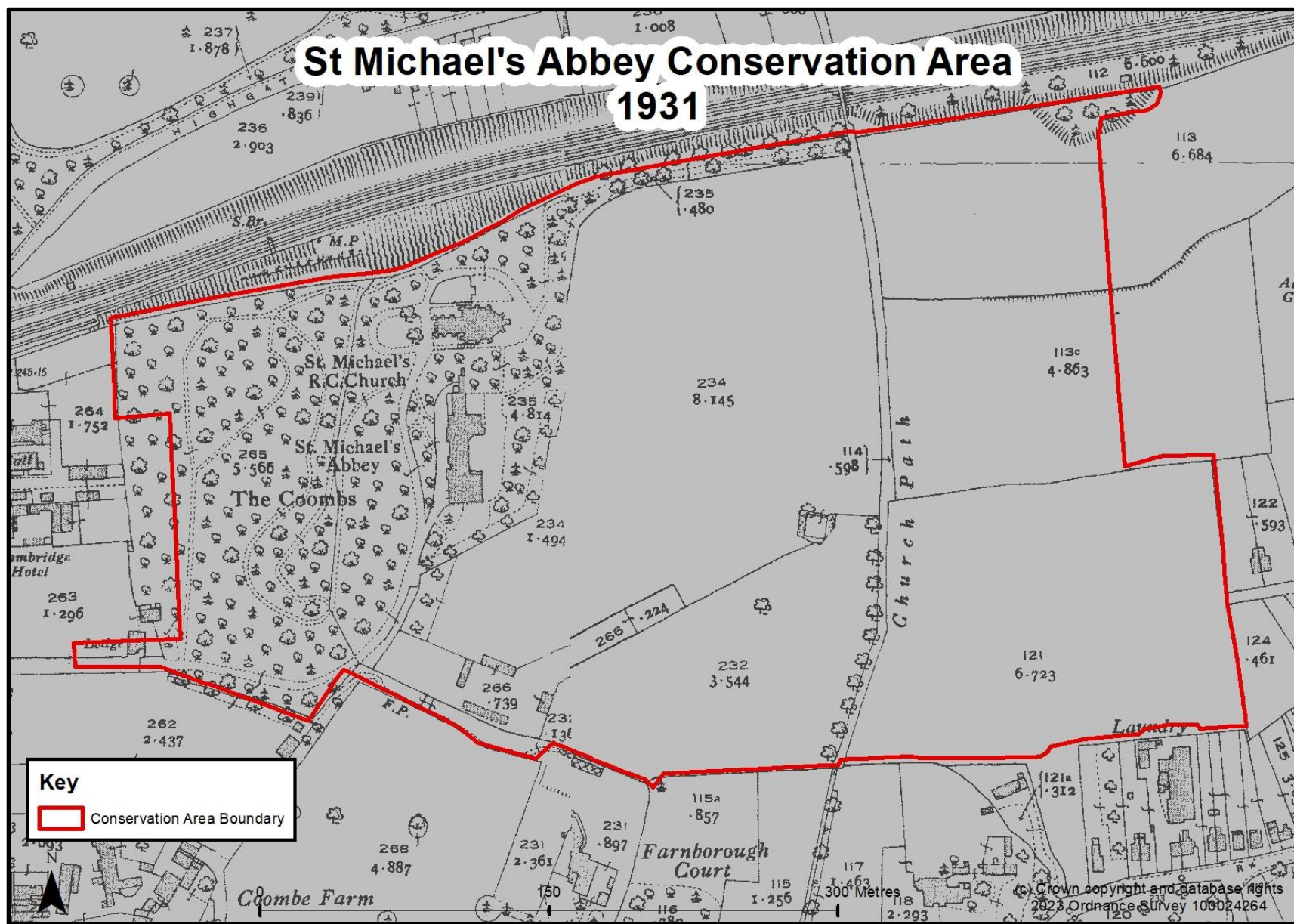


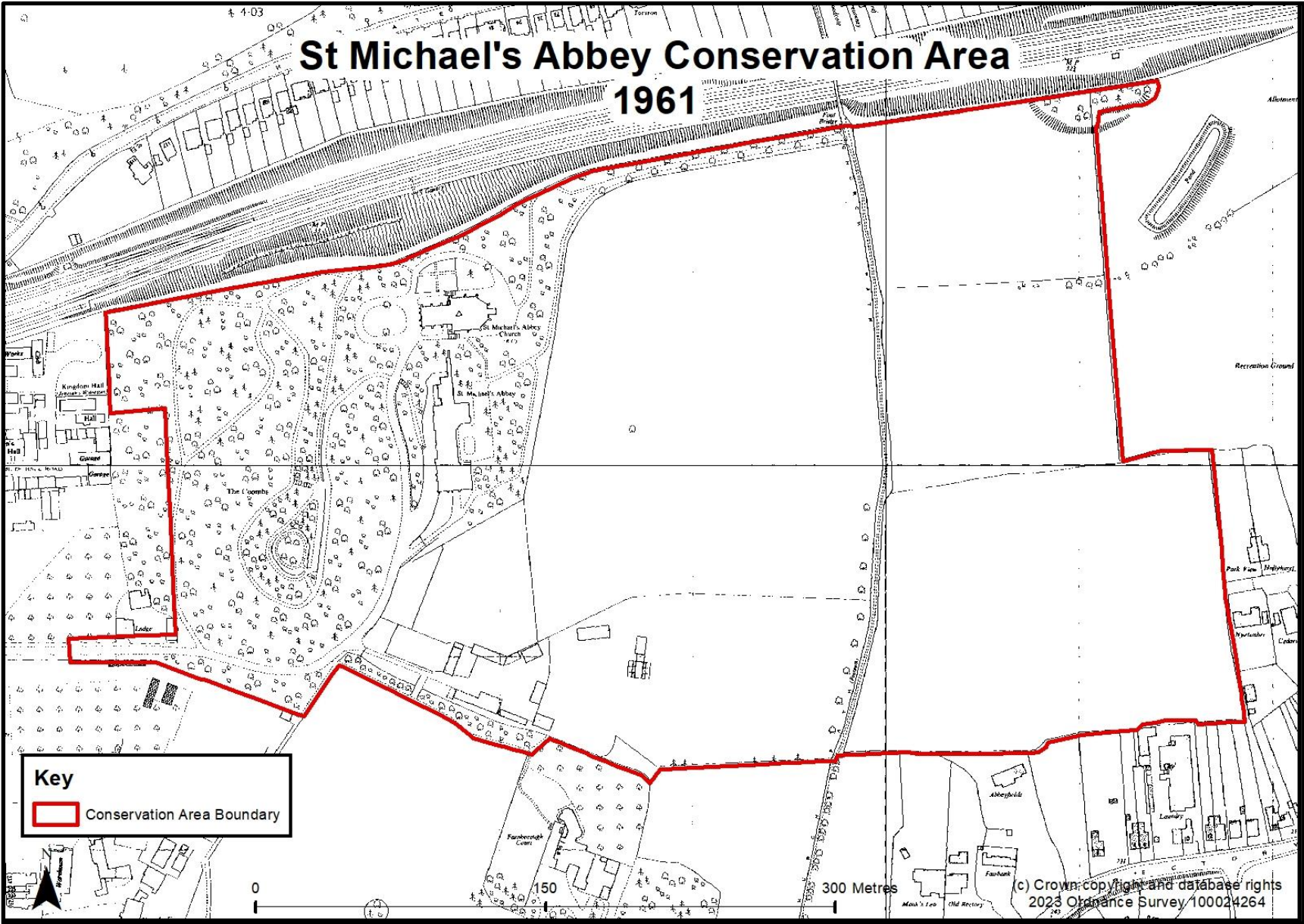
View of path

3. Historic Maps









4. Listed Buildings or Structures

| Name | Grade | Link to Historic England Website |
|--|-------|---|
| Abbey Church of St Michael | I | https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1155639 |
| Monastic Buildings to Abbey Church of St Michael | II | https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1092632 |

5. Management Plan

Introduction

- 5.1 The Management Plan outlines a positive strategy to deal with the threats and opportunities identified in the Conservation Area Appraisal.

Good Stewardship

- 5.2 Rushmoor Borough Council will work with St Michael's Abbey and other relevant partners to manage the land within the conservation area.

Development Management

- 5.3 New development within the setting of the conservation area (within, views into and out of) should be carefully managed because it has the potential to detract from the character and special interest of the conservation area.
- 5.4 Any change to the conservation area should seek to:
- Preserve its historic features;
 - Enhance, where possible, its special interest;
 - Contribute positively to its established character; and
 - Be of high quality.

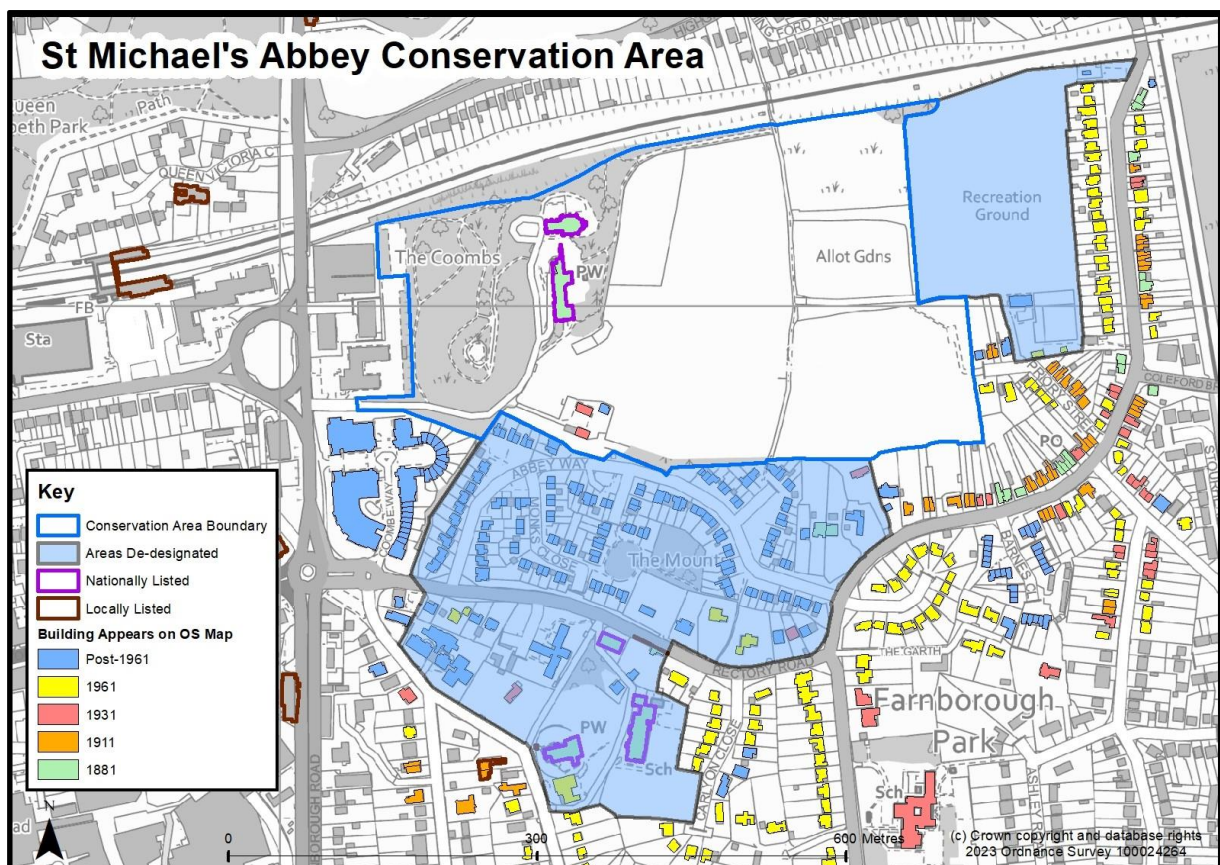
Implementation and Monitoring

- 5.5 Progress on the implementation of the Management Plan and the extent to which planning policies in the Local Plan are complied with or effective in delivering community aspirations for the conservation area will be monitored through the Council's annual Authority Monitoring Report.
- 5.6 Such assessments can be used to review and, if necessary, modify the planning policies as part of the five-year review of the Local Plan. The assessments can also be used to review and, if necessary, modify this Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan.

Appendix. Areas Removed from St Michael's Abbey Conservation Area

- A1 Conservation areas are intended to recognise areas of historic or architectural character. The location of the boundary for a conservation area is a qualitative decision relating to character. It is essential for the protection of conservation areas that only areas which are heritage assets are designated so that 'the concept of conservation is not devalued'.³
- A2 During the public consultation on the draft Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan undertaken in November and December 2021, it was proposed to remove the conservation area designation from a number of areas (see Figure 1).
- A3 Whilst objections to the removal of the conservation area designation were received, none provided sufficient evidence to justify the retention of these areas within the conservation area. The areas were subsequently removed, or de-designated, in 2023.

Figure 1: Areas Removed/De-designated from St Michael's Abbey Conservation Area in 2023



³ National Planning Policy Framework (2021), para. 191.

Rectory Road Recreation Area

- A4 The playing field provides important public amenity space and is protected by Local Plan Policy DE6 (Open Space, Sport and Recreation), which seeks to prevent the loss of existing open space and to focus on its enhancement, given the limited opportunity to create new open space in Rushmoor. In addition, the playing pitches are protected by Local Plan Policy DE7 (Playing Fields and Ancillary Facilities), which seeks to protect the existing provision of playing fields in the Borough to meet current and future demand.
- A5 This area is owned by Rushmoor Borough Council, the buildings and structures on Priory Street are modern, and the playing fields and recreation ground do not demonstrate architectural, archaeological or historic significance to warrant inclusion in a conservation area.



Pre-school entrance and modern building, car park and tennis courts on Priory Street

Abbey Way, Douai Close and Monks Close

- A6 This area is separated from St Michael's Abbey by a mature boundary of trees within the Abbey's grounds and by some mature trees within the rear gardens of properties on Douai Close and Abbey Way, the majority of which are protected by a Tree Preservation Order.
- A7 The buildings within the area are modern residential properties that have no architectural, archaeological or historic significance to warrant inclusion in a conservation area.



Modern housing along Abbey Way

Church Avenue, Rapallo Close, Rectory Road and Salisbury Road

- A8 St Peter's School and the Church of St Peter are Grade II listed buildings with curtilage-listed protection. The Lych Gate is locally listed, and St Michael's Mews is a Grade II listed building. The buildings, features and curtilages are all protected under the listings, as governed by the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 and the National Planning Policy Framework.



Church of St Peter and St Peter's School

- A9 Cooper Court on Salisbury Road is a modern development that has no architectural, archaeological or historic significance to warrant inclusion in a conservation area. The mature trees within the grounds are already protected by a Tree Preservation Order. To the east of Cooper Court is the Rectory on Church Avenue, constructed between 1911 and 1931. To the east of the Grade II listed Church of St Peter is the church hall, which is a modern building.
- A10 Along Rectory Road are several modern properties that are of no architectural, archaeological or historic significance to warrant inclusion in a conservation area. The development at Rapallo Close is a modern flatted development. The mature trees within the grounds of the Rapallo Close development are already protected by a Tree Preservation Order.
- A11 The sarsen stone wall by Fernhill Cottage, 30 Rectory Road is a locally listed structure which benefits from protection under national and local planning policy.
- A12 The northern side of Rectory Road (nos 11a-17) is well screened from the highway by vegetation and trees. The remaining houses along Rectory Road are predominantly modern, with some mature trees.

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