

Abbotsbury Historic Urban Character Area 1

Abbey Precinct

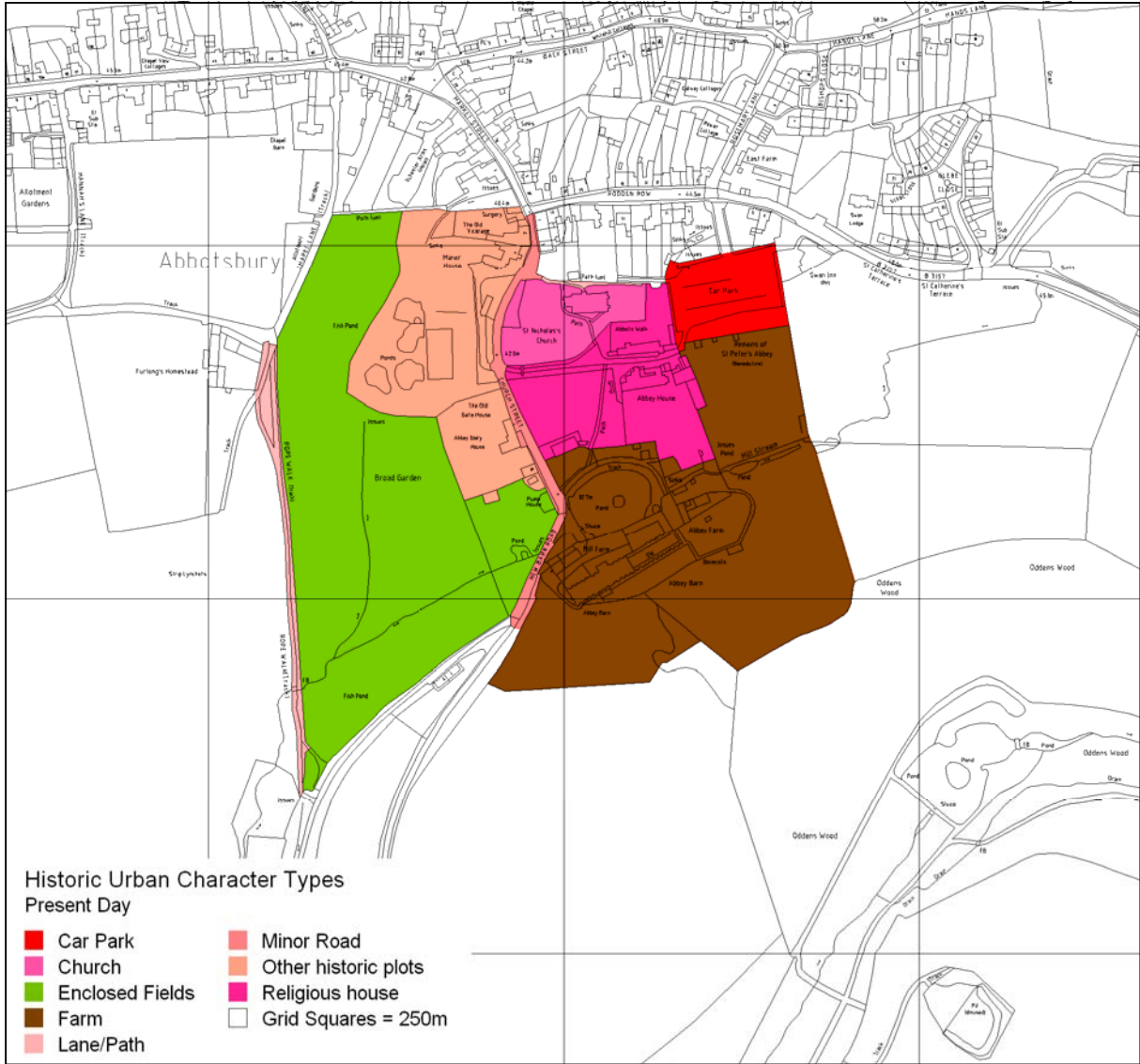


Figure 40: Map of Historic Urban Character Area 1, showing current historic urban character type.



Figure 41: View of the Abbey Precinct from Chapel Lane .



Figure 42: View north along Church Street .

Abbotsbury Historic Urban Character Area 1 Structure of Character Area

Overview

This is the area of the former precinct of Abbotsbury Abbey. It is defined primarily by its historic dimension, being the only part of Abbotsbury to contain a significant number of upstanding medieval structures and remains.

Topography and Geology

This area straddles the steeply sloping stream valley of the Mill Stream which runs WSW through the southern half, with a tributary flowing south along the west side of the character area. The geology of the area comprises Kimmeridge Clay in the north eastern corner, giving way southwards to a complex succession of Corallian deposits. There are also more recent drift deposits of gravelly alluvium along the stream bed.

Urban Structure

Although not strictly urban in nature, the area has a structure derived from the layout of the abbey precinct. This comprises an approximately square area with a single curving north-south route (Church Street/New Barn Road) running through it. There are a small number of houses along the west side of this road, either on the frontage or set well back. Most are set in large spacious grounds. The east side has the parish church, the ruins of the abbey, and the buildings of Abbey House and Abbey Farm. The farm buildings area arranged around a central pond in the south end of the character area. The open spaces incorporate earthworks of medieval fishponds and boundaries and are divided by stone walls.

Present Character

Figure 40 shows the present day historic urban character types. The area is bisected by a minor north-south road. To the east are the parish church and churchyard, with an adjacent car

park to the east. South of the church, are the remains of the abbey church and claustral buildings, with Abbey Farm, now a children's farm to the south. The area to the west of the road, contains historic plots with the open green spaces of Broad Garden behind. The character area is bounded by a lane on the west called Rope Walk.

Time Depth

This area represents the primary historic component of the town. The abbey was established by the late Saxon period on the south facing slope above the Mill Stream. The majority of monastic remains on the site date from the 14th century. The site also retains important buildings from the post-medieval period. The Manor House, at the north end of Church Street, dates from the late 16th century; Abbey House dates from the 17th century and the Old Vicarage dates from the early 19th century. Church Street is probably an early feature but New Barn Road, connecting Church Street with Frog Lane, was only built in the 19th century. Previously access to the south was via Rope Walk along the west side of the area.

Settlement Pattern and Streetscape

This area is only sparsely settled, with small dispersed groups of historic buildings separated by green spaces and stone walls. Three large private residences lie on the west side of Church Street, which forms the only public road through the character area. The remaining buildings serve a variety of functions from recreational (Abbotsbury Children's Farm); commercial (Abbey House restaurant and function room); and religious (St Nicholas Parish Church).



Figure 43: View of Abbotsbury Manor.



Figure 44: Children's Play Area, Abbey Farm.

Abbotsbury Historic Urban Character Area 1 Built Character

Building types

The area is characterised by a large number of late medieval monastic buildings and remains, and 18th century farm buildings. The most recent building in the character area is the former surgery at the junction of Church Street and Market Street which dates from the late 19th-early 20th century (Figure 45).

The medieval buildings include the remarkable Great Barn, one of the largest monastic barns in the country (Figure 46). This now lies at the heart of Abbey Farm and is surrounded by 18th century farm buildings including a dovecote, a piggery and other livestock buildings.

The parish church of St Nicholas is the only wholly intact medieval building in Abbotsbury. The structure essentially dates from the 14th century and it sits physically and spiritually between the monastic precinct and secular town. It was probably connected to the Abbey Church of St Peter via the north transept of the latter and the partially extant north aisle wall of the abbey church originally defined the boundary of the parish churchyard. Other remains of medieval monastic buildings include the pinion end, mill house, abbot's lodgings (Abbot's Walk), and outer and inner gates. The former survives only as partial ruins either side of Church Street and the latter has a substantial part of its structure preserved within the private residence of the Old Gatehouse.

Early post-medieval buildings of significance include the 16th century manor house and the 17th century Abbey House which was constructed as the farmhouse to Abbey Farm. An archway at the southern end of the current churchyard was probably erected as a gate to the Strangways Mansion house blown up during the Civil War.



Figure 45: The Old Surgery, Church Street.

Building Materials

The two local stone types are both Jurassic limestones; the pale golden oolitic limestone known as Abbotsbury Stone; and the fine grained pale grey Purbeck-Portland stone from Portesham. Both types of stone are used as ashlar, rubble and stone roof tiles. In general the late medieval buildings are largely built in Abbotsbury Stone with the Portesham stone used for detailing or repairs. The post-medieval farm and manor buildings have re-used medieval ashlar but are generally constructed in smaller Portesham stone blocks.

The majority of roofs in the area are in Welsh slate and some clay pantiles. However, all roofs were probably originally of local stone slates. The Abbey barn is now thatched.

Key Buildings

St Nicholas' Church.

Former monastic buildings: Great Barn, Abbot's Walk, Millhouse, Old Gatehouse, Pinion End, Outer Gate.

Abbey Farm buildings: Abbey House, Dovecote, Piggery, estate office, Great Barn

Domestic Buildings: Manor House, The Old Vicarage, The former Surgery.



Figure 46: View of The Great Barn from Church Street.

Abbotsbury Historic Urban Character Area 1 Archaeology

Archaeological Investigations

Eleven archaeological investigations have been undertaken in this character area (Appendix 3, Nos 1,3-6, 8, 10, 14-17). They have all concentrated on examining elements of the Abbey and have significantly contributed to our understanding of the medieval abbey layout.

Archaeological Character

The archaeological character of this area is primarily that associated with the Saxon and medieval abbey and its precinct. To date very little evidence for the 12th century abbey and none for the late Saxon abbey has been revealed. However, the previous archaeological investigations and upstanding ruins have enabled the principal components of the later medieval abbey layout to be identified and

these are depicted on Figure 47.

1. St Peter's Abbey Church has been excavated on a couple of occasions and part of the north aisle north wall remains visible in the current parish churchyard. Elements of the nave, choir, chancel and a chapel which opened from the northeast part of the nave have been recorded (Moule 1886; Green & Green 1970). The claustral range has not been excavated, but a sense of its dimensions is revealed in the position of the Pinion End, the surviving gable end of a structure projecting from the south east corner of the cloister.
2. The current Abbot's Walk building has a medieval structure as its core, possibly the Abbot's Lodgings. This was incorporated into the 17th century Abbotsbury manor buildings

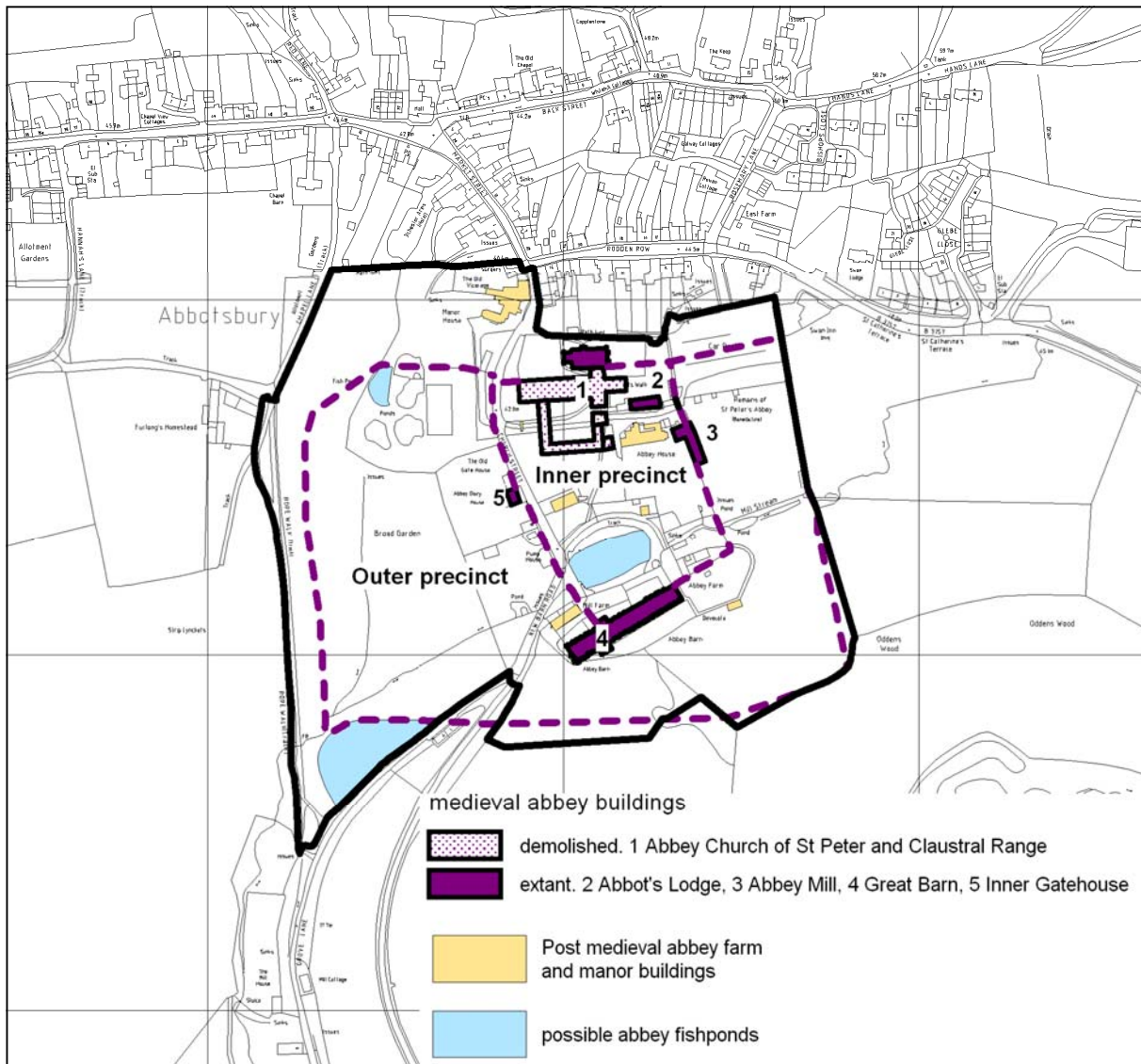


Figure 47: Archaeology of Historic Urban Character Area 1.

and witnessed the civil war siege during November 1644. Several E-W aligned cist burials have been recorded adjacent to Abbot's Walk (Keen, 1983, 152)

3. Remains of the Abbey Mill have been found in the old Malthouse (Graham, 1986). The standing building dates from the 14th century and contained two wheel pits inserted into an earlier larger pit backed by a pre-14th century ashlar wall. This is likely to represent the most substantial remains of the 12th century abbey recorded to date.

4. The 15th century Abbey Great Barn is one of the largest medieval barns in Britain. Survey work within the barn has revealed that parts of the original 15th century roof structure remains *in situ* (Heaton 2007). Three watching briefs in the immediate vicinity of the barn have not revealed any medieval deposits (McMahon, 1997; Heaton, 2004a and b). The barn has formed a majestic focus for the post-medieval Abbey Farm since the 17th century and is now surrounded by a range of good quality 18th century purpose built farm buildings.

5. The 14th century Inner Gatehouse survives as part of a residential property on Church Street. This building controlled access into the monks' secluded inner precinct from the more industrious outer precinct.

Evidence for the outer precinct boundary survives in the form of earthworks in Broad Garden and on the lower slopes of Oddens Hill to the south and east of the Great Barn. A section of wall survives and remains in use as a field boundary to the east of the Mill House. Evidence for the inner precinct is more ephemeral and the boundary shown on figure 49 has been surmised from the positions and aspects of the gates and buildings around the perimeter, as well as a number of extant walls potentially on the line of medieval precursors.

Evidence for the Abbey fishponds is also in the form of earthworks or extant features. However, the fishpond marked to the south of the precinct boundary on Figure 47 may represent nothing more than a hollow formed between the southern precinct boundary and Grove Lane. If this putative pond was fed by the Mill Stream, issuing from the abbey, it may have contained effluent rendering the water unsuitable for freshwater fish.

It is claimed that three Roman coins were found during the clearance of the former Abbey Mill House (Laurie 2008). No other Roman artefacts have been recovered from the character area.



Figure 48: View of the Abbey Farm estate office and Great Barn.



Figure 49: The Dovecote, Abbey Farm.



Figure 50: View of the Abbey Mill wheel pits.

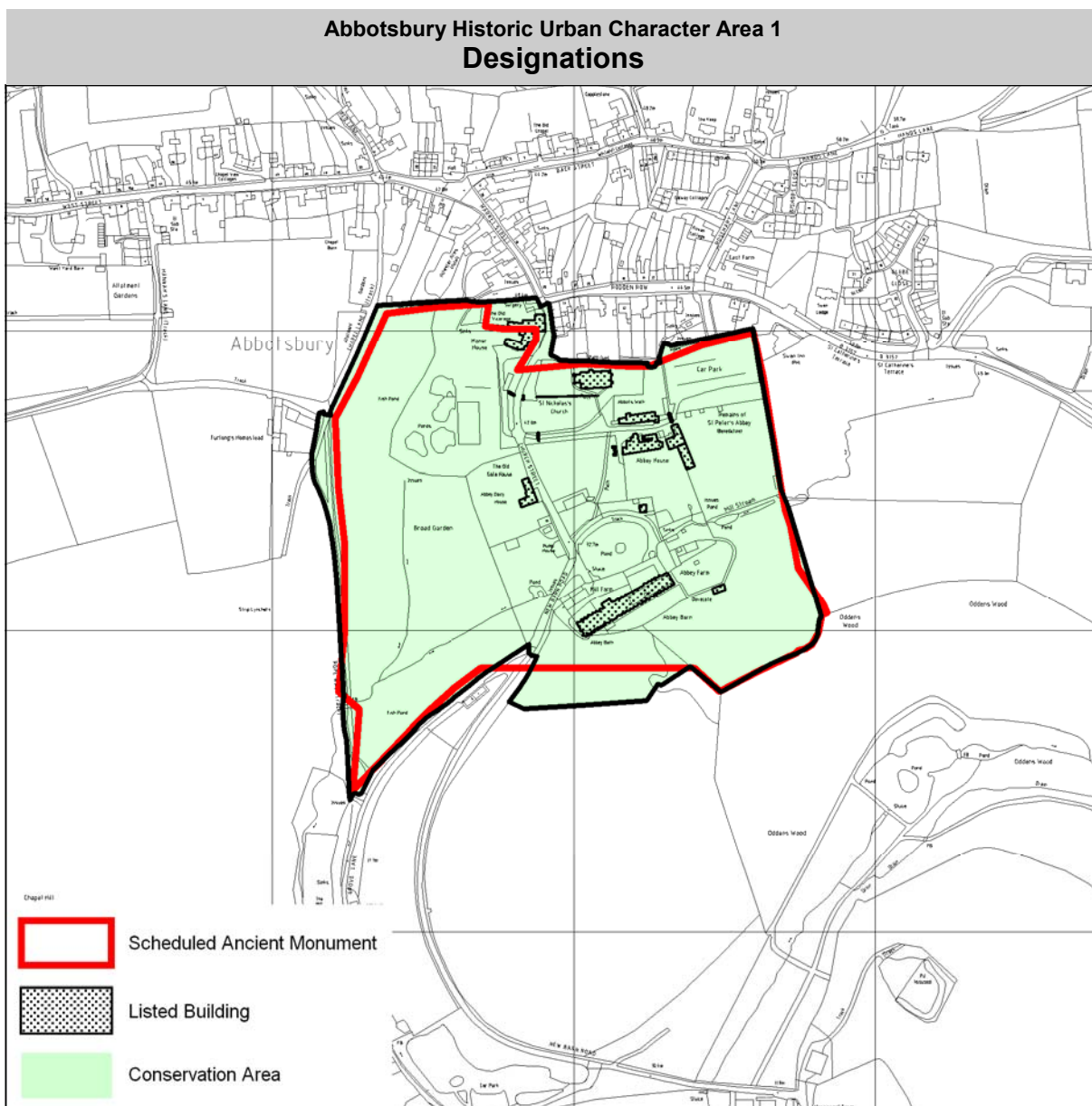


Figure 51: Listed Buildings and other designations in Historic Urban Character Area 1.

Listed Buildings

There are 15 Listed Buildings in the Character Area, five of which are Grade I (Abbey Dairy House, North wall of Abbey church, the old Millhouse, St Nicholas Church and the Abbey Barn). Five buildings are Grade II* (Abbots Walk, the Pinion End, the dovecote, the outer abbey gatehouse, and the Manor House). The remaining five buildings and structures are Grade II (the Old Vicarage, the granary, Abbey House, the post-medieval mansion gatehouse and the churchyard cross (Figure 51).

Conservation Areas

The whole of this Character Area lies within the Abbotsbury Conservation Area (Figure 39).

Registered Historic Parks and Gardens

There are no Registered Parks and Gardens within the Character Area.

Scheduled Monuments

There is one Scheduled Monument within the character area; St Peter’s Abbey (SM22961). The boundaries of this monument are almost exactly contiguous with those of this character area.

Abbotsbury Historic Urban Character Area 1 Evaluation

Strength of Historic Character

The strength of character of this area is judged to be **strong**. There are a large number of medieval and post-medieval historic buildings. Many of the buildings survive only as ruins, yet there is no modern intrusion into the area so that the ruins only add to the sense of time depth. The widespread use of local materials, together with large open spaces, creates a pleasing whole to the overall character. Furthermore, there is good survival of plot boundaries dating from the 18th century Abbey Farm, with the potential for some of them being ultimately derived from subdivisions within the medieval monastic precinct.

Sensitivity to Large Scale Development

The area has a **high** sensitivity to major change. There has been no significant development in the area since the late 19th century when the old surgery and New Barn Road were created. Any modern development would not only be out of place but risk damaging archaeological remains. A large part of the area's character rests in its continuing function as a religious, farming and manorial area; the layout of the site reflects all of these historic roles. A new development of any type would seriously compromise the nature and character of the area.

The character area is the focal point of the town and provides key aspects of the town from a number of vantage points within and just outside the town. Therefore, any large-scale development would be very visible.

Archaeological Potential

The archaeological potential of this area is judged to be **high**. It forms the primary settlement component of Abbotsbury and is adjacent to the historic core of the medieval and post-medieval secular town. The lack of modern development means that there is very high potential for important and informative remains of the late medieval abbey surviving intact. These have the potential to reveal details on the organisation, crafts, industries, economy and diet of the monks and monastery. Furthermore, little is known of the layout of the 12th century monastery, although tantalising glimpses can be observed in re-used masonry. There is a high potential for information relating to the organisation of this and the late Saxon abbey, about which even the exact location is unknown.

Many of the late medieval buildings and outbuildings have been modified in the post-medieval period and remain in use today. There is a high potential for detailed information on the survival of earlier structures hidden within later buildings.

There is also potential for recovering archaeological information on pre-urban activity in the area. For example, whether there is any evidence for prehistoric, Roman or post-Roman settlement within the character area. The medieval precinct is sited on a sheltered spur above a stream, a prime site for Roman and prehistoric settlement.

This area has the potential to provide information which would contribute to Research Questions 1- 6, 8, 9, 15, 17, (Part 7).

Key Characteristics

- Former Saxon and medieval monastic precinct
- Primary settlement component of historic Abbotsbury
- Post-medieval farm and manor
- Parish church situated between town and abbey
- Medieval monastic ruins
- High proportion of quality listed buildings
- Open spaces equating to former monastic gardens