

*Sturton le Steeple Parish Council*

*Deadline 4 Written Representation 2 – Christian Heritage*

*19<sup>th</sup> February 2026*

*AI has been used to summarise information from Cllr Clapperton, local historian Adrian Gray and Bassetlaw District Council to answer the Examiners question noted within ISH2 recording part 6 (approximately 26mins).*

ISH 2 - Sturton le Steeple Christian Heritage and The Pilgrim Trail

ExA read the submissions that we made and asked for us to explain ‘How the Christian Heritage contributes to the significance of the heritage assets in the area in our opinion’

### **How Christian Heritage Contributes to the Significance of Heritage Assets in and around Sturton le Steeple**

#### **1) Overview**

In our opinion, Christian heritage is a primary contributor to the significance of multiple heritage assets in and around Sturton le Steeple. Its contribution is not limited to the intrinsic architectural or archaeological interest of individual sites, but is fundamentally expressed through:

- Associative value (links to internationally significant figures and movements),
- Communal value (living tradition, identity and meaning for present communities and visitors),
- Setting and experiential value (the historic landscape through which narratives are understood and taught), and
- Economic and public value (an established and growing faith-related and roots/ancestry tourism offer).

This is the framework in which Christian heritage elevates the importance of assets such as Sturton le Steeple Church, associated churchyards (including Habbleshthorpe), the historic settlement pattern and lanes, and the broader network of sites on the Mayflower Pilgrim and Baptist trails.

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#### **2) Associative Value: Why the links matter**

Many assets in the area are internationally significant by association, even when their individual fabric may be modest. Sturton le Steeple and its landscape are integral to the story of John Robinson and John Smyth, pivotal figures in the Separatist/Pilgrim and Baptist movements respectively. This aligns the area with:

- The Mayflower story (with global recognition, especially in the USA), and
- The origins of Baptist traditions, with substantial academic, denominational and family-history interest.

In heritage terms, associational significance is recognised as a legitimate and powerful dimension of value: buildings and places acquire enhanced status because of who was there, what they did, and how those events shaped wider history. Just as Epworth Old Rectory is significant for its link to the Wesleys and global Methodism, the church at Sturton and the historic route between Sturton and Hablesthorpe take on augmented importance because they enable people to engage directly with the paths trodden by Smyth, Robinson and their communities. These associations are particular, evidenced, and widely interpreted to visitors (e.g., Mayflower 400 boards, guided tours, museum interpretation).

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### **3) Communal Value: Pilgrimage, identity and meaning**

For many visitors — including Mayflower descendants, Baptist congregations, US tour groups, and university parties — these places function as sites of reflection, memory, and identity. Their value is not purely aesthetic: it is experiential and affective.

Experience from guided tours confirms that walking and driving the routes, stopping at churches and churchyards, and absorbing the countryside are essential parts of the story (not simply the discrete monuments). The reaction of visitors — from students remarking “this is the real England” to scholars visibly moved at Hablesthorpe — demonstrates the continuing communal and spiritual relevance of the landscape as a lived heritage.

Communal value is recognised in planning and heritage practice as a significant component of an asset’s overall significance. In Sturton’s case, it is actively being strengthened by local initiatives, including the new Pilgrim Sculpture in the village park and the Parish Council’s early-stage efforts to develop and promote heritage tourism. These initiatives encourage dwell time and connect visitors with multiple sites on the trail.

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### **4) Setting and the Historic Landscape: How the landscape “does” heritage**

The setting of assets like Sturton church and Habbleshthorpe churchyard is not a neutral backdrop; it is the medium through which the story is interpreted. The pattern of fields, lanes, watercourses and wide Trent-valley vistas — shaped by historic enclosure and drainage — still conveys the look and feel of the landscape that the Separatists and early Baptists knew. Even though landscapes evolve (roads, railways, bridges), the coherence of the rural scene and long views remains fundamental to the intelligibility and authenticity of the story being told on the ground.

A large, industrial-scale solar array in this context would repattern the landscape, introduce extensive reflective/engineered surfaces, perimeter fencing and security infrastructure, and interrupt or truncate key views and the rural experience. That erodes the ability of the public to apprehend the heritage values in situ — particularly the relational experience of moving between related sites (e.g., Sturton ↔ Habbleshthorpe ↔ West Burton) as part of the Mayflower and Baptist narratives.

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## **5) Economic and Public Value: An established and growing tourism asset**

Within North Notts tourism, the Mayflower Pilgrim Trails are well-promoted, and Sturton le Steeple features strongly within that offer. Multiple tour operators and heritage organisations have run bespoke itineraries across the area for years (e.g., Pilgrims & Prophets, Reformation Tours, St Cecilia Tours, the General Society of Mayflower Descendants, Bassetlaw Museum guides). Crucially:

- Trails are not a single fixed itinerary. They are a network of linked sites and adaptable routes tailored to visitor interests (Mayflower/Separatist, Baptist, family history).
- The journeying between places — and the countryside itself — is part of the interpretive experience. There are walking elements (green lanes, Trent Valley Way sections) and driving links that are both valid and commonly used in UK heritage tourism (cf. many established “historic driving routes” elsewhere).

The Parish Council’s investment in the Pilgrim Sculpture and the early steps to grow local tourism demonstrate a credible trajectory of development. The proposed scheme would curtail that development by reducing the attractiveness, coherence and legibility of the heritage offer, damaging the viability of present tourism and the growth potential which is demonstrably emerging.

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## **6) Policy Alignment**

### **Sturton Ward Neighbourhood Plan Review:**

– Emphasises landscape character, rural openness, and historic environment

protection (including settings).

– Supports objections where development would harm long views, alter rural character, or diminish the setting of heritage assets.

- NPPF Section 16 (paras. 199–202):
    - Requires that great weight is given to the conservation of heritage assets, including their settings.
    - Any harm must be clearly justified and outweighed by public benefits.
    - In this case, the heritage disbenefits are broad (associative, communal, landscape/setting, and economic/public value) and would be enduring, whereas public benefits from the scheme must be considered in light of reasonable alternatives and site selection that avoid high-sensitivity historic landscapes.
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## **7) Specific Assets and Networks Enhanced by Christian Heritage**

- Sturton le Steeple Church: elevated in significance by links to Separatist/Baptist figures and as an interpretive anchor on multiple trails.
  - Hablesthorpe old churchyard and the bank/track to Sturton: a powerful experiential link where the narrative “lands” with visitors.
  - West Burton: part of the network of sites that contextualise the communities and movements.
  - Austerfield Manor House and Scrooby Manor: modest in fabric but major in associative value, illustrating why Sturton’s assets likewise carry heightened significance.
  - Worksop Priory Gatehouse (wider network): an example of newly recognised associations (e.g., Rhode Island founder link) showing the growing scholarly and public interest in the region’s dissenting/colonial connections.
  - Village-scale interventions (Pilgrim Sculpture, interpretation boards from Mayflower 400): these activate and amplify the heritage significance by helping the public understand and connect the story across the landscape.
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## **8) Conclusion**

Christian heritage is integral to the significance of heritage assets in and around Sturton le Steeple. It transforms individual buildings and places into a coherent historic landscape of international resonance, grounded in the lives and journeys of Separatists and early Baptists. That significance resides not only in the fabric of churches and

historic sites, but in the experience of moving through a largely rural landscape whose character still allows the story to be read.

The proposed scheme would materially diminish that significance: by repatterning the landscape, interrupting key views and routes, weakening the interpretive experience, and undermining an established and expanding tourism economy that relies on the authenticity and legibility of this Christian heritage landscape. As such, in our opinion, it would conflict with both the Neighbourhood Plan's heritage and landscape objectives and the NPPF's requirement to give great weight to the conservation of heritage assets and their settings.