

Castle Eaton Conservation Area Appraisal



Historic rural village
designated 1975 * re-designated 30th April 1990

This appraisal and the accompanying map has been prepared in collaboration with Castle Eaton Parish Council and was adopted by Swindon Borough Council as “a proper assessment of the special interest, character and appearance of Castle Eaton Conservation Area” on 8 April 2002.



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Contents

Introduction	1
Designation as conservation area	2
Location	2
Origins and history	3
Landscape setting and views	4
Boundaries of the conservation area	4
Present day	5
Summary of general character	6
Historic street pattern, layout and streetscape:	7
<i>The Street</i>	7
<i>St. Mary's Church and Manor Farm</i>	8
<i>Mill Lane and Castle Eaton Farm</i>	8
Open spaces	9
Architectural and historic character	9
Buildings of local interest	10
Local details and features	11
Trees	11
Negatives	11
Useful publications	12
Map of Castle Eaton Conservation Area	End

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Introduction

This document defines and records the special architectural or historic interest that warrants designation of Castle Eaton Conservation Area and identifies elements that contribute to its special character and appearance.

Development proposals which affect the conservation area will be judged for their effect on the area's character and appearance as identified in this conservation area appraisal.

A conservation area is "an area of special architectural or historic interest the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance" (Section 69 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990).

Conservation area status does not necessarily preclude further development or change within the area. However, when considering applications for development which affect a conservation area, "special attention shall be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of that area."¹

This appraisal, in defining the special interest, character and appearance of Castle Eaton Conservation Area, provides a sound basis for development control decisions. It will help planning officers, developers, designers and the public at large assess whether a proposed development affecting a conservation area would, or would not, preserve or enhance the character and appearance of that area.

This appraisal should be read in conjunction with policies contained in the current Swindon Borough Local Plan and with national planning policy guidance, especially Planning Policy Guidance 15: Planning and the Historic Environment.

The information contained in this appraisal was collected during the year 2001. To be concise and readable, it does not record all features. The omission of any feature from the text or accompanying map does not, therefore, mean that it must not be of interest or value.

¹(Section 72 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990).

Designation as a conservation area

Castle Eaton Conservation Area was designated by Wiltshire County Council on 24th January 1975 - one of the earliest conservation areas in Swindon Borough. It was re-designated with a revised boundary by Thamesdown Borough Council on 30th April 1990. The boundary was revised in order to protect the setting of the grade II listed barn south of Castle Eaton House and to include an open area between this barn and Mill Lane which is considered vital to the setting of the village.

Designation reflects the Council's commitment to preserving and, if possible, enhancing the character and appearance of this rural village whose historical ambience and environmental quality make an important contribution to the Borough's varied types and ages of conservation areas.

Location

Castle Eaton lies in completely rural surroundings beside a meander of the infant River Thames approximately 16 kilometres north of Swindon and 10 km south-east of Cirencester. It is one of a number of local villages (e.g. Kempsford, Marston Meysey and Down Ampney) which lie on the flat, low land beside the Upper Thames, interconnected by narrow country roads and footpaths. Castle Eaton is on The Thames Path, a 180 mile long distance 'National Trail' that follows the course of the Thames from London to the source of the Thames in Gloucestershire.

The village may be reached via one of three narrow lanes. From Fairford and the north the access is over one of only two bridges² over the Thames between Cricklade and Lechlade. The western approach is along a lane that, 3 miles to the west of the village, branches from the A419 Swindon to Cirencester road, a principal route linking the M4 and M5 motorways. From the eastern end of School Lane a narrow lane proceeds to Hannington and Highworth.

²The other is Hannington Bridge to the east.

Origins and history of the settlement

Aerial photographs point to evidence of prehistoric and Romano-British settlement and farming in the vicinity. The Domesday Book of 1086 refers to the settlement of 'Ettone', possibly deriving from an Old English term meaning 'farm by the water'. Evidence of the village's early origins may be found in the two Norman doorways at the Church of St Mary's, a grade I listed building, and the medieval cross in the churchyard, which is a Scheduled Ancient Monument³. There is documentary evidence of a 14th century fortified manor⁴ or 'castle'.

With the exception of the church, the village's characteristic historic buildings appear to date from the 17th and 18th centuries with 19th century additions. Nineteenth century maps of the village show a collection of buildings containing the elements of a typical rural English village: church and graveyard, rectory, farmhouse and farm buildings at either end of the settlement's main thoroughfare (Manor Farm and Castle Eaton), an inn, a smithy⁵, a bakery⁶, a mill⁷ and a collection of large and small dwellings dispersed around the roads known today as Long Row, The Street and Mill Lane. (School Lane existed as an old route along the backs of properties facing The Street but this lane has lost its historic character.)

In common with many English villages, there were few major changes within the village until the late 20th century when a number of one- and two-storey dwellings were constructed on either side of School Lane and limited infill added to The Street.

³Monument number 28950.

⁴See Audrey Tomlin's history and guide to the St Mary's Church.

⁵Marked opposite The Red lion on O.S. map of 1900.

⁶The Malt House has large bread ovens at the rear.

⁷As suggested by the name 'Mill Lane'.

Landscape setting and views

The village's setting beside the Thames in a flat pastoral landscape is an important part of the character of this rural conservation area. Views and glimpses of surrounding open countryside and the Thames contribute significantly to the special interest of the place.

For example, the space west of the Red Lion⁸ affords views of the Thames and, beyond, the fields north of the river, sufficiently to bring the countryside apparently into the heart of the village. There is a similar northward view from the path to St Mary's Church.

The River Thames⁹ is one of the defining features of the area and it is fortunate that the riverside is easily visible from public viewpoints from the road bridge, the garden of the Red Lion and the churchyard. The prominence of the river in certain views is one of the characteristics of the area that forms part of its charm.

Boundary of the conservation area

The boundary of the conservation area has been drawn to enclose the historic core of Castle Eaton and open space vital to its rural setting. The road bridge (constructed in 1893, strengthened in 2001) and the southern river bank are included in recognition of the unique contribution of the River Thames to the atmosphere of the village.

Late 20th century residential development beside School Lane on the south eastern edge of the village is omitted because it lacks the obvious architectural and historic qualities of the heart of the village.

The character and appearance of this quiet conservation area are particularly vulnerable to damage from unsuitable development because of the area's attractiveness and historic ambience.

⁸Subject of an appeal (dismissed) against refusal of permission for the erection of a house 1990.

⁹Policy SEV 55 of Swindon Local Plan 1999 aims to maintain the landscape setting of the Thames.

Present day

Although there are still two working farms in the area - one arable, one dairy - the village is almost exclusively residential¹⁰.

In common with the majority of Wiltshire villages, some post-War development has taken place (notably beside School Lane) but this has not detracted from the strong historic character of the village.

In recent times, the village had a shop/post office¹¹ and a village school¹² but these are now closed. St Mary's Church has an active congregation and The Red Lion is a public house. A new village hall and resource centre¹³ (replacing a 'reading room' constructed in 1901 on the same site) was completed in 2001.

Traffic is infrequent and there are few road markings. The lack of kerbed pavements adds to the area's rural character but can be dangerous for pedestrians. Lack of off-road parking (typical of streets created before the motor car) can lead to parking problems. There is a limited bus service to Swindon and Fairford. Roads are generally quiet, there is a 30 mph speed limit through the village and a low level of street lighting. The village has a tranquil and peaceful atmosphere.

¹⁰The listed stone barn in the SW corner of the village has planning permission for craft workshops.

¹¹Now 'the Old Post Office' opposite the Red Lion.

¹²Built in 1855 - now converted to a private dwelling.

¹³The hall has a part-time post office service and computer room.

Summary of general character

The special interest that justifies designation of Castle Eaton Conservation Area derives from a number of architectural, historic and environmental factors including:

- the historic layout and predominantly linear street pattern of the village;
- the setting of the village in a pastoral landscape with significant views to surrounding countryside;
- the architectural and historic interest of the village's buildings and other structures including 16 listed buildings and a Scheduled Ancient Monument;
- the presence of the River Thames;
- the prevalent use of local building materials, notably local Cotswold stone;
- the area's trees, hedges and other vegetation especially where these bound a road or footpath;
- local features and details, especially stone walls, that give the area its distinctive identity;
- the area's tranquil village atmosphere.

Historic street pattern, layout and streetscape

The village is arranged informally around a rectangle of roads which derive from the settlement's original street pattern - as indicated by the varying width and bend in The Street. With the exception of the two recent 'backland' developments (the Laurels and dwellings behind 'Appletrees'), buildings in the conservation relate directly to the roads of this historic street pattern. The conservation area contains three distinct areas: The Street which forms the linear historic spine of the village; St Mary's Church and the extensive Manor Farm complex in the north east; Mill Lane with Castle Eaton Farm buildings and open space abutting the village in the south west.

The Street

The Street is Castle Eaton's main thoroughfare on which sit nearly all of the area's historic buildings. It runs from the south western corner of the village to the church lych gate - the historic spine of the village. Some old buildings, such as Numbers 1 to 5, directly front the road, others are set back behind low stone walls and gardens. The Street comprises a mix of buildings in terms of height and scale and its south side is considerably more built up than the north. Trees are prominent along the eastern length which, together with the high roadside boundary wall of Glebe House, create an enclosed character in contrast to the open atmosphere in front of the Red Lion where buildings are set back from the road and there are glimpses over the Thames.

There are two recent cul-de-sac housing developments set back from the road on the south side of The Street - The Laurels and the dwellings behind 'Appletrees'. Vehicular access from The Street to these obviously modern dwellings is via openings which are narrow and unobtrusive openings and thereby help to preserve The Street's generally historic appearance.

Long Row is straight and uniform (tree lined grass verge to east, pavement to west) which at first impression gives a suburban feel. However, the open long front gardens behind a low stone wall provide a green setting for a picturesque

terrace of old cottages¹⁴ and a converted Victorian school with arched windows closes the southward view.

St Mary's Church and Manor Farm

St Mary's Church stands in a green graveyard on slightly elevated ground beside the Thames. The corbelled bell turret is a distinguishing feature. From the churchyard there are good views through the riverside willows to the north and eastward over flat fields towards Kempford. The walk from the lych gate to the church passes several features typical of this rural village: old stone walls (containing remnants of old gravestones), vernacular outbuildings, farm machinery, mature trees and glimpses of the Thames and beyond.

Manor Farm is set back from The Street, secluded from the village behind a low stone wall which permits glimpses of farming activity. Within its well defined curtilage are to be found an orchard and other trees, a walled garden and a grouping of old and new farm buildings typical of the locality.

Mill Lane and Castle Eaton Farm

Despite two pairs of post-war semi-detached houses, a strong historic tone is set by Numbers 1 to 5 The Street, a row of old stone cottages. Castle Eaton House, dating from the 18th century, and buildings at side and rear form a pleasant 'farmyard' grouping despite their residential use.

Opposite, modern cow sheds and other farm buildings signify the continuing connection between today's village and its agricultural origins. Between these farm buildings and the grade II listed barn at the western entrance to the village is an open field that brings the open countryside right up to the edge of the village - a crucial part of its rural setting. The unkerbed road passing between low stone walls contributes to this rural atmosphere.

¹⁴Unfortunately these have lost their original stone roof covering.

Open spaces

The area has a spacious feel characterised by buildings in uncrowded surroundings. The large private gardens of, for example, Glebe House, Manor Farm, Long Row and Castle Eaton House, and the publicly accessible grounds of St Mary's Church and the Red Lion form an integral part of each building's setting. These and other open spaces between The Street and School Lane and directly fronting the highway (e.g. in front of Greenaways and Long Row) contribute to the loose-knit pattern of the conservation area.

Architectural and historic character

Despite the presence of late 20th century housing, old buildings outnumber new and a historic character and appearance prevails, stemming from the building form, age and style of the properties which make up the conservation area - dating mainly from the period c.1650-1850.

The vernacular architecture is typified by the prevalent use of local limestone in walls and roofs and Castle Eaton may be described as a Cotswold village. Buildings in the village are predominantly two-storey with some 1 1/2 storey (Bridge Cottage, 1 & 2 The Street), being constructed with Cotswold limestone under roofs of stone tile, with some slate and clay tile.

Rubble stone is commonly used for humble cottages such as 1 & 2 The Street and the grade II listed barn at Manor Farm. The area's more prestigious buildings have facades of coursed and dressed stone with smooth ashlar stone quoins. Only Glebe House has a facade of ashlar with thin lime mortar joints.

Boundary walls of rough uncoursed rubble stone, with or without mortar, are a feature of the area. A typical example is the roadside wall of Glebe House and the walls beside the path to the church.

Despite the impressive red brick Georgian facade of The Red Lion, brick is not common except in chimneys and window surrounds. Steeply pitched stone tile roofs are dominant in The Street, some such as Nos 1 & 2 with front gables - a typical characteristic of the Cotswold vernacular.

Traditionally, two basic types of timber window design are found in Castle Eaton¹⁵; side opening casements beneath a timber lintel are common in the cottages (e.g. 1 to 5 The Street) and vertical sliding sashes are prominent in the front of the village's grander buildings¹⁶ (e.g. Bridge House, The Malt House, Manor Farm House). Gabled dormer windows, wholly within the roofslope are common.

The Malt House exemplifies a number of aspects of the local vernacular. The building has a front of coursed and dressed stone with ashlar quoins but the (less visible) sides and rear are constructed with rubble stone. With a similar gesture to presenting a good front to the street, the windows at the front are large well proportioned vertical sliding sash but the rear outhouse has smaller windows, casement and sash. Chimneys and rear window dressings are in red brick. The building is roofed in slate, indicating its 19th century origin (slate was comparatively rare in rural locations before this date).

Buildings of interest¹⁷

English Heritage advice¹⁸ is that, "most of the buildings in a conservation area will help to shape its character in one way or another" and in addition to the 16 grade II listed buildings there are a number of other buildings which make a strong contribution to the architectural and historic interest of the area. For example, the lych gate, the terrace of stone cottages in Long Row and the brick barn at Manor Farm. These, and other buildings of local interest, are identified on the accompanying map.

¹⁵Note that 1 & 2 The Street and the rear of Bridge House have C17 stone mullion windows.

¹⁶The windows of Glebe House have been much altered.

¹⁷See Swindon Borough Local Plan SPG: 'Buildings, Structures and Facades of Local Importance'.

¹⁸Conservation Area Appraisals, English Heritage, March 1997

Trees

Trees add significantly to the interest of the area and there are several specimen trees which act as a backdrop to the village or as a setting to the area's buildings, notably those beside St Mary's, in the garden of Glebe House and on the riverbank. Trees within conservation areas are covered by the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. Anyone proposing to carry out works to a tree that is in a conservation area must almost always give written notice of at least six weeks to the local planning authority.

Local details and features

Natural stone boundary walls are a distinctive feature of the conservation area and are essential to its predominantly stone appearance¹⁹. The village has a K6 red telephone box (listed grade II) and two Victorian cast iron pumps²⁰. The road sign in front of Bridge House is gaining historic interest. These add to the area's distinct identity and form part of the special interest of the area. It is highly desirable that these features are retained.

Negative factors

The house and bungalow on either side of the road leading over the Thames are out of character with the area. The loss of original natural stone roof tiles (as, for example, at Longcot and the cottages of Long Row) and inappropriate alteration of original timber windows has begun to erode the village's historic character. Poles and overhead wires and, for example, unsightly electricity equipment opposite Castle Eaton House detract from the area's historic appearance.

¹⁹There is an unusual boundary wall of upright stone slabs at Elm Cottage just outside the conservation area.

²⁰At either end of Long Row.

Useful publications

Guide to St Mary the Virgin Church

Audrey Tomlin (1992)

Victoria County History of Wiltshire

Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.

Swindon Borough Local Plan (1999).

Supplementary Planning Guidance: 'Good Design: House Extensions'
(Thamesdown Borough 1990).

Supplementary Planning Guidance: 'Buildings, Structures and Facades of Local Importance'. (Swindon Borough 1999).

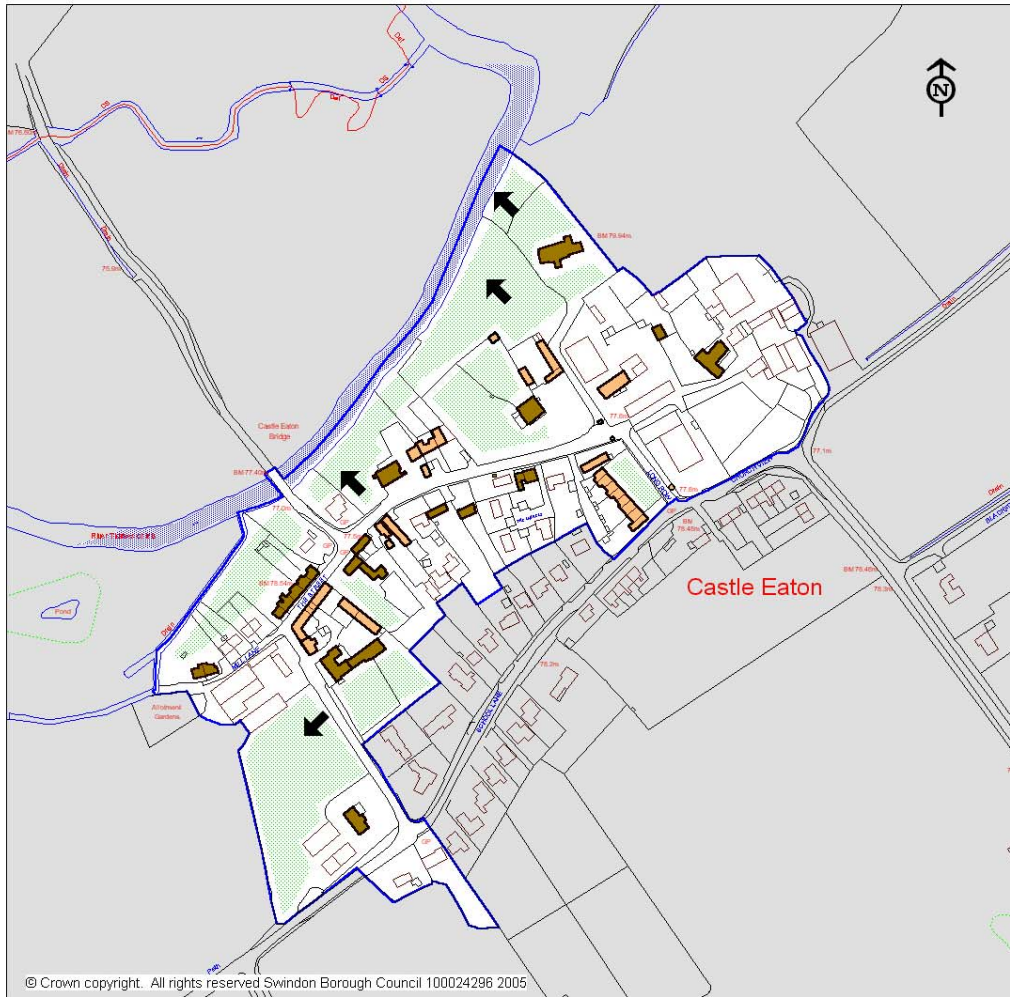
Conservation Areas (Swindon Borough Council 1997).


Planning Policy Guidance 15 - Planning and the Historic Environment.

Conservation Area Appraisals, English Heritage, June 1997.

Conservation Area Practice, English Heritage, October 1995.

Castle Eaton Conservation Area Map













 **Swindon**
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Castle Eaton Conservation Area

Key to map

Given the complexity of the area, the omission of any feature from this map should not be interpreted as evidence that it is not of interest or value.

-  Conservation area boundary
-  Listed building
-  Key building of interest
-  Significant tree or trees
-  Area of water
-  Important green space
-  Wooded area
-  Significant boundary or wall
-  Area with distinct identity
-  Important view