

# Swindon Old Town

## Devizes Road Conservation Area Appraisal



Devizes Road

This appraisal of Swindon Devizes Road Conservation Area was adopted by Swindon Borough Council as “a proper assessment of the special interest, character and appearance of [each] conservation area and approved as guidance for decision makers dealing with planning matters” on 29<sup>th</sup> April 2008



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## 1. Introduction

This appraisal of Swindon Old Town, conservation area was adopted by Swindon Borough Council as “a proper assessment of the special interest, character and appearance of each conservation area and approved as guidance for decision makers dealing with planning matters” on 29<sup>th</sup> April 2008

Devizes Road Conservation Area is historically part of the Old Town but its individual and separate designation in June 1990 requires that it be considered and assessed separately.

### 1.1 Purpose of the Appraisal

This appraisal defines the special interest, character and appearance of the 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.

### 1.2 Conservation Policy

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). 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.” (Section 72 Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990).

This appraisal should be read in conjunction with policies contained in the current Swindon Borough Local Plan 2011 and with national planning policy guidance, especially Planning Policy Guidance 15: Planning and the Historic Environment.

The information contained in this appraisal was originally collected during the year 2001 and revised in March 2008. To be concise and readable it does not record all features. The omission of any feature from the text or accompanying maps does not, therefore, mean that it must not be of interest or value.

## 2. Background

### 2.1 Designation

The Devizes Road Conservation Area, first designated on 16th July 1990, covers a relatively short length of Devizes Road in Swindon's Old Town.

### 2.2 Location and Boundary

Devizes Road is one of two thoroughfares entering Swindon from the south, directly from Wroughton and, further a field from Devizes. The northern end of the road, just before the junction with Wood Street, has little remaining historic character and is therefore not included in the conservation area. Devizes Road runs south from the Bath Road/Wood Street intersection and is geographically and historically part of the original market town.

The boundary has been drawn to include 19th century dwellings on both sides of the southern length of Devizes Road and other historic properties beside its junction with Newport Street and Lethbridge Road.

### 2.3 Historical Development

The Domesday Book of 1086 uses the name "Suindune" (possibly meaning swine down or open land) when describing land in the area. As a result of deliberate planning by ambitious families<sup>1</sup> Swindon later became a medieval market centre. The laying out of Newport Street, Wood Street, Devizes Road<sup>2</sup> and High Street appears to have taken place by the 13th century. Devizes Road was originally known as Short Hedge, there were apparently no buildings here in 1773 and none on the west side in 1811; by 1828 a few had been built on the east side and one or two on the west. There were 12 houses there in 1841<sup>3</sup>.

The area became more built-up after the arrival of the railway in the 1840's and is essentially part of the post-railway residential expansion of 'Old Swindon'. By 1900 the majority of the buildings seen today were here but The Church Hall and Bible Institute and Church were constructed later, (c.1920) and the small flat-roofed buildings (now shops) on the Wood Street corner replaced (c.1940) an earlier building.

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<sup>1</sup> See 'Off the Map of History' The Development of North East Wiltshire to 1600'.

<sup>2</sup> Devizes Road does not appear to have been built up at this period.

<sup>3</sup> See 'A History of Swindon to 1965' E.Crittall et al.

## 2.4 The Conservation Area Today

In recent times, the conversion of many former residences to offices has led to a major reduction in residential use. Today, the area has a mix of residential and business office use, plus a few shops, a guesthouse, a pub and two churches. Three groups of buildings and Clifton House, a large red brick Victorian house, stand on the four corners of this meeting of roads. On the northeast corner a small open space contains a birch tree, a brick raised planting bed and phone kiosk in front of a short row of shops. These shops and two pubs opposite including the Royal Oak (listed) add colour and activity to the conservation area.

On the east side is Britannia Place and Phillips Lane, which was once an entrance to the former Belmont Brewery (listed) and now leads to a number of workshops, one of which is vacant. Advertising signs for the workshops on the main road detract from the street scene.



Photograph 1

Phillips Lane is a typical alleyway entrance, giving access to workshops (formerly an access to the Belmont Brewery). The former brewery building can be seen behind. Modern signs in unsympathetic materials and design detract from the area.

Small trees and hedges are a feature of the west side of the road and help to give the area a suburban atmosphere despite the proximity of the shopping centre. They play a valuable role in the greening of this urban area. There is an Edward VII post box dating from the time of most residential development of the area, which adds interest to the street scene and should be retained as part of the historic character.

### 3. The Special Interest of Devizes Road Conservation Area.

#### 3.1 Street Pattern

The Devizes Road is part of the historic street pattern as mentioned above. The two lanes leading off on the east side are typical of the many back lanes remaining in Old Town; Britannia Place used to lead to some cottages (now demolished) and Phillips lane, to the former brewery.

#### 3.2 Architectural and Historic Character

The conservation area is characterised by two distinct phases of nineteenth century residential development and facilities such as the public houses and a church.

The earliest buildings in the area, dating from the first half of the 19th century, are on the east side and are typically of limestone, either cut and squared or even ashlar front elevations, with coarser stone being used at the rear. They have shallow pitched roofs of Welsh slate and timber sash windows. These buildings, of varying height, generally have a ridgeline that runs parallel to the road. Numbers 9 and 10 Devizes Road, on the corner of Britannia Place a pair of houses (listed) constructed in stone with a low pitched, hipped slate roof are set apart from neighbouring properties, and are a prominent asset in the street.



Photograph 2

The former houses (now offices) on the left are listed but demand for parking has led to a loss of the front gardens.

The old painted advertisement sign for the brewery is visible on the sidewall of the building beyond and a feature worth retaining.

In Philips Lane, although the industrial buildings are outside the conservation area they are remnants of the area's industrial past and are a part of the historic character. They are built of random rubble with signs of previous openings as well as having a first floor door with hoist.



Photograph 3

Vacant workshop buildings at the rear of Devizes Road are not in the conservation area but are part of the historic character of the wider area and close to the listed brewery building. Retention of these buildings have potential to preserve enhance the setting of the conservation area.

A local building of interest is the Belmont Brewery (listed), whose tall brick tower is a prominent local landmark. The Brewery has an interesting mix of materials including stone and red brick with blue brick decoration. It is also outside the Conservation Area but contributes to its character as a reminder of its former activity.



Photograph 4

The former brewery has a variety of materials, featuring local stone and red bricks with a decorative cornice and 'blind' arches. The chimney is highly visible in the area.

Buildings on the west side of Devizes Road are of a later date, after 1850, and mostly of brick and are larger and taller than those on the opposite side of the road. The properties here are in groups of terraces, typically single-bay with a third storey attic room within the roof space under pointed gables with a single window and decorative barge boards. Often these properties have a two-storey bay window. The stone-built terrace houses at 43-45 Devizes Road are a good example and retain their original sash windows.



Photograph 5  
Devizes Road (west side) has a marked rhythm of steeply pitched gables.

Some original details and features have been lost during the past 100 years eroding historic character of the area. However, some characteristic Victorian details remain and contribute to the area's special interest for example, decorative ridge tiles, ornate barge boards and glazed tiles and these should be preserved. In particular, original windows are important features, which should be retained.

The area is a good example of a type of development not common in Swindon, namely, prosperous late 19th century residences. These are quite different from the rows of modest brick terraces found elsewhere in Old Town and should be protected from uncharacteristic development.

### 3.3 Views and Vistas

Lethbridge Road presents an attractive vista westward past street-side trees to the red brick frontage of Lethbridge School (1891). There are views out of the area southwards towards the Downs. Within the area there are occasional glimpses of the Belmont Brewery tower and chimney. Views of prominent local landmarks such as Belmont Brewery should be protected.

### 3.4 Summary of the Special Interest of Devizes Road Conservation Area.

The special interest that justifies designation of Swindon Devizes Road Conservation Area includes:

- The area's archaeological interest, being in close proximity to the historic beginnings of the 'Old Town
- The historic layout and street pattern dating from the 13th century.
- The early Victorian residential and commercial expansion of the town and reminders of local industrial activity;
- The architectural and historic interest of the area's buildings (both its listed buildings and others which have local importance).
- The prevalent use of local materials, notably locally quarried stone and red brick;
- Local features, especially historic boundary walls, and other architectural details that give the area its distinctive identity

#### **4. Community involvement**

A public meeting was held at a Community Hall (Moose Hall, Tuesday 4 March 2008) at the centre of the four 'Old Town' conservation areas and was attended by over sixty members of the public, the majority being from the residential areas of Town Gardens and Prospect Place Conservation Areas but who also use the Old Town for shopping and its other facilities.

Residents were given an explanation of the purpose of the conservation area appraisals review and the special meaning and status of conservation areas, after which a number of planning and environmental issues were discussed in open forum as well there being an opportunity to affix specific comments to a large scale map of the area. Those concerns relating to other Council Services were noted and forwarded; where applicable they have been included in the management plan.

Concerns about the Old Town Area, including Devizes Road, mainly related to traffic and street furniture. However broader concern about the need for high quality standards of architecture and materials in new development were also expressed.

#### **5. Negative Features and Opportunities**

There is a major adverse impact from traffic. Some street furniture detracts from the area, particularly obsolete signage posts and rusted posts holding road directions. There are also a number of large and garish commercial signs.

#### **6. Management Plan**

The management plan detail how the conservation area could be enhanced or improved with the support of the local authority, residents and other agencies. It should be seen as a working document, that: -

- Encourages future planning applications to respect and promote what is special about the conservation area;
- Seeks to ameliorate or (is possible) remove negative elements;
- Encourage a degree of 'ownership' of the area by residents (and where applicable Parish Councils);
- Promote closer cooperation between all relevant parties including utilities, local authority departments and the local community.

In line with advice<sup>4</sup> it is proposed that this management strategy together with the conservation area appraisal be reviewed and updated regularly (5 years is recommended).

In order to achieve effective improvement to the character and appearance of the conservation area, consideration should be given to the formulation of a working group involving internal and external partners to inform and respond to enhancement

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<sup>4</sup> Guidance on the management of conservation areas - English Heritage and PAS (consultation draft 2006)

opportunities identified within the management plan. Feedback from such a group would be invaluable to the progression of such opportunities and be an active means of engaging public participation and community involvement.

On street posters advertised the meeting, which was also highlighted in the individual consultation letters sent to all properties within the conservation area.

Issues / opportunities	Possible actions	Agency	Time-scale
<b>General planning concerns:</b>			
Development Proposals need to reflect the local character of the area.	All applications to be considered according to Local Plan policies , for example reference to Chapter 3 – The Built Environment.	SBC Planning Development Control / Conservation	O
Loss of garden walls and local features details including traditional sash windows, chimney pots and ridge tiles; painting of brickwork.	Investigate possible implementation of Article 4 (2) Direction to control specific minor developments normally considered to be permitted development.	SBC Planning Development Control / Enforcement / Legal	O
Density of new development and resulting additional cars parking on-street.	Implementation of Council's parking standards.	SBC Planning Development Control / Highways	O
Advertisement proposals.	Careful consideration to design, materials and illumination levels so not to detract from character and appearance.	SBC Development Control / Conservation	O
<b>Traffic / highways Issues:</b>			
Maintenance. Materials. Street Furniture.	General maintenance and choice/use of appropriate materials/street furniture in the Conservation Area.	Liaise with SBC Planning / Highways / Street Scene	O

Key

S = Short-term (0-12 months), M = Medium-term (12-24 months), L = Long-term (24-26 months), O = On-going.

## Bibliography

- Canham, R and Phillips, B (1976) '*The Archaeology of Old Swindon Hill*' Swindon Archaeological Society Report No.1.
- Chandler, Digby and Marshman (1989) '*Off the Map of History*' The Development of North-East Wiltshire to 1600.
- Crittall, Rogers and Shrimpton (1983) '*A History of Swindon to 1965*' Reprinted from The Victoria County history of Wiltshire Volume IX Wiltshire Library & Museum Service
- Pevsner, N (1975) 'The Buildings of England' – Wiltshire Penguin Publishing
- Wiltshire County Council (February 2000) 'The Archaeology of Wiltshire's Towns – Swindon' Extensive Urban Survey (EUS)
- Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.
- DoE (1994) Planning Policy Guidance 15 'Planning and the Historic Environment'
- DoE (1990) Planning Policy Guidance 16 'Archaeology and Planning'
- English Heritage/PAS (2005) Guidance on Conservation Area Appraisals.
- English Heritage/PAS (2005) Guidance on the Management of Conservation Areas.

## Swindon Borough Council

(All documents are available on the Council's website <http://www.swindon.gov.uk/>)

- Swindon Borough Local Plan (2011)
- Buildings of Significant Local Interest - Supplementary Planning Guidance (December 2004)
- Good Design – House Extensions Supplementary Planning Guidance (December 2004)
- Swindon Design Guide SBC (December 2006)
- Shop Front Guide SBC (December 2006)
- Backland and Infill Development SBC Supplementary Planning Document (June 2007)

## Listed Building/Conservation Areas

The Statutory list and current appraisals are available on our Website, in addition they are available to view at Planning Office (Premier House and Central Library). <http://www.swindon.gov.uk/environment/planning/environment-planning-conservation.htm>

