

# Swindon Borough Council

## Conservation Area Appraisal

### Prospect Place



This appraisal of Prospect Place 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 30 July 2001.



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## **Introduction**

There are four Conservation Areas in Swindon Old Town one of which is Prospect Place, which is a sub-area of Old Town Conservation Area. However, its individual and separate designation in June 1990 requires that they be considered and assessed separately.

This document defines and records the special architectural or historic interest that warrants designation of Prospect Place Conservation Area.

## **Purpose of the 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).

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

This appraisal, in defining 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.

Development proposals that affect the Conservation Area will be judged for their effect on the area’s character and appearance as identified in this Conservation Area appraisal.

## **Conservation policy**

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 maps does not, therefore, mean that it must not be of interest or value.

## Prospect Place Conservation Area

The Prospect Place Conservation Area, designated on 25th June 1990, covers a mainly residential area in Swindon Old Town adjacent to the western end of the Old Town Conservation Area. The boundary has been drawn to include a number of streets that were built during the first half of the 19th century before the arrival of the Great Western Railway and the subsequent expansion of Old Town and the growth of Swindon 'New Town'. By 1841, the date of the foundation of the GWR works, there were already 21 houses in this locality that was formally known as 'Prospect'.

In the west of the Conservation Area, the existing bus depot is included in the Conservation Area. This occupies the site of a former engineering works and is a site where future development can be expected to have a major effect on the surrounding area. (Bow Court stands on the site of the old Police Station).

The post-railway history of the Prospect area has much in common with the overall story of Swindon's Old Town but, due to the area's pre-railway origins, it has a special interest and a distinct character and appearance clearly different from the red-brick terraces that, after c1850, became the norm for this type of urban housing. In historical terms the area is contemporary with the earliest buildings in Devizes Road, Bath Road and the top of Victoria Hill.

The Conservation Area is mainly residential but also contains a nursing home, school, two pubs, chapels, two shops and a public Pay-and-Display car park used by visitors to the shops and businesses of Old Town which are only a short walk away.

The Conservation Area is characterised by a mixture of Victorian stone and brick-built terraced houses built along narrow streets. The predominant form is two storeys with pitched roofs, traditionally of Welsh slate. Substantial brick chimney stacks are usual.

Prospect Place was begun by 1830. The area's earliest terraces, such as Nos. 44-49 Prospect Place or Nos. 7-13 North Street (built by the 1840s) are stone-built. These houses are generally larger than the standard brick, late 19th century terraces found throughout Swindon and have front elevations of squared, coursed rubble stone with the black mortar joints that were fashionable at the time. They contrast markedly with the local vernacular random rubble walling used in earlier and lower status buildings in the area, for example as used in South Street and the side and rear elevations of 14-20 Prospect Place. A later example of the distinction between the treatment of elevations can be seen in King William Street/Wesley Street where some of the side elevations are built in the structurally inferior Rat Trap brick bond. A slightly later terrace in Prospect Place, Nos. 21-27 is in a more conscious gothic style with distinctive tall stone chimney uppers.

With the exception of Prospect Place, the majority of the terraces are built with the street frontage right up to the footpath heightening the sense of enclosure of the already narrow streets. Prospect Place is slightly more spacious but many 'front gardens' have been paved to allow for car parking. The gardens of Nos. 21-27 are retained due to their slightly raised levels and here some planting softens the street scene.

The area is mainly urban in character and there are few trees. The exception is South Street where mature trees in front of the former chapel are notable. Here too, trees planted at the rear boundaries of Prospect Place properties can be seen. Narrow alleys and back streets are a feature of the block bounded by Prospect, Union Street and North Street.

In addition to the terraces, there are a number of individual buildings which contribute to the character of the area: The Prince of Wales and The Castle (which has some remaining ranges of ancillary buildings to the rear); Providence Chapel in South Street (1845), now a dwelling, and a Primitive Methodist Church in Prospect Place; Olive House (No.11 Prospect Place) is a substantial detached late 19th century villa set in a large garden - although unique in this Conservation Area, it is a type found frequently elsewhere in the suburban development of the Old Town; King William Street School (1871, enlarged in 1890) is typical of its period; a facade of the Wiltshire Royal Artillery Drill Hall remains - the site now occupied by Kingsmead Nursing Home.

Today's bus depot occupies the site of a former engineering works that produced agricultural implements. Remnants of the original works building can be seen in stone gables visible from King William Street. Also notable is the tall stone rubble wall which surrounds the site and to a large extent screens it from the remainder of the area.

## General architectural and historic character or the Old Town Area

The architecture of the Swindon Old Town Conservation Area including Devizes Road and Prospect Place Conservation Areas is characterised by a mixture of Victorian stone and brick-built buildings, together with some older buildings and limited 20th-century infill.

The period 1840-1910, after the coming of the railway, is particularly well represented and it is buildings from this period that chiefly define the architectural character of the area.

The Conservation Area's architecture is quite distinct from that of the former New Town containing, as it does, a collection of historic buildings and spaces which represent not only elements of a typical pre-industrial agricultural market town (high street, market place, coaching inn, public houses and church) but also commercial, social and residential buildings of the post-railway age, for example banks, town hall, handsome Victorian villas, public gardens<sup>1</sup>, nonconformist chapels, hotel and brewery.

High Street contains the oldest surviving buildings in the area - Number 16 is a 17th century former house, and there are several 18th century buildings. There is a fine early Georgian town house (1729) at 42 Cricklade Street and 18th century town houses in the Market Square and Wood Street (Numbers 31 and 32, on either side of the street's western end). There was some limited suburban growth (confined to the north west of the area) at the start of the 19th century, before the railway. Aspley House (now Swindon Museum) and, further west, 8-14 Bath Road dates from this period.

Overall, buildings of the second half of the 19th century outnumber earlier ones. In 1878 it was said that within a decade almost every place of business in the town had been rebuilt, enlarged or improved<sup>2</sup>. The area's public buildings date from this period (Christ Church (1851), Methodist Church (1880) and the Town Hall (1854) and commercial buildings such as the Kings Arms Hotel (c 1870), and banks at 2/4 Wood Street (1884) and 3 & 5, 7 High Street (1906).

In general, 20th century architecture has failed to preserve or enhance the area's historic character but Little London Court (1989) was awarded a local design award.

The most prevalent building materials are stone and brick. A stone quarry and a brick works were once to be found nearby and local materials are common but, as the town had good rail and canal links with the rest of the country, materials from further afield are also common - especially Welsh slate.

Coursed or random stone can be seen in the area's less prestigious buildings, for instance in Albert Street or Old Mill Lane. Buildings with architectural pretension such as Aspley House or The Town Hall have stonework (on the front elevation) of smooth ashlar stone with fine mortar joints.

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<sup>1</sup> Today's 'Town Gardens' - part of the Swindon Town Gardens Conservation Area.

<sup>2</sup> E. Crittall et al.

Bath and Cotswold stone are evident and a variety of red bricks. Many buildings are rendered either as part of the original design or at a later date to cover stone or brickwork. Welsh slate and stone roof tiles (Goddard Arms, Eastcott House) are present but many original roof coverings have been replaced with concrete tiles or reconstituted slates.

### **Unlisted buildings**

Many of this historic area's old buildings are of significant local interest and value, but have not been listed by the Government as being of national interest. Along with their 'listed' neighbours, these old buildings, which have qualities of age, style, materials and features which reflect those of a substantial number of buildings in the area, make an important contribution to the Conservation Area's distinctive character and appearance.

### **Trees**

Trees are sparse in the Old Town Area and those that are present are to be treasured. There are a number of outstanding isolated specimen trees and other valuable trees in the spaces behind the street frontage, most notably those east of High Street. Of particular note are the beech outside The Museum, the copper beech beside The Square, holm oak in The Planks and trees along The Avenue.

### **Open spaces**

The important public open spaces within the Old Town, Devizes Road and Prospect Place Conservation Areas are the Market Square, the environs of Christ Church and The Avenue leading to The Lawn. These have been described elsewhere. Almost all vacant open space is used as car parking. There is no public open green space within the Conservation Area but the Lawn and Town Gardens are close by.

### **Local features of interest**

There are a number of local details and features which add to the area's distinct identity and form part of the special interest of the area.

Original small details of architectural interest such as chimneys, parapets, porches and canopies contribute to the area's historic ambience. In particular, original windows which exist on buildings are important features which merit protection.

Iron railings were once more common and those that remain (for example, at 32 Wood Street and 42 Cricklade Street) should be retained.

Small details such as the fire insurance sign at 18 High Street, the plaque to Richard Jefferies in Victoria Road, bootscrapers and cast iron coal hole covers add to the character of the area.

The spire of Christ Church can be seen for miles around and The Town Hall tower is a more local landmark. Chimneys stacks and clay pots contribute to a lively roofscape. Old sarsen stone kerbs and setts remain, especially in the Albert Street area, but most have been replaced with concrete kerbstones.

## **Archaeological interest**

The County Sites and Monuments Record (SMR) records that, in addition to chance finds of prehistoric, Roman, medieval and post-medieval artefacts in Old Town, excavations in the 1970's on the east side of the High Street (SMR 403), at the Market Square (SMR 402) and to the rear of Marlborough Road (SMR 466) have revealed the extensive remains of substantial Roman structures, Saxon *Grubenhauser* and medieval buildings. Sufficient material has been found to suggest that part of the area may have been continuously occupied throughout the prehistoric and Roman periods.

## **Negatives affecting the broader Old Town Area**

High levels of through traffic spoil the environmental quality of Old Town. The need to manage traffic and balance the requirements of motorists and pedestrians has resulted in an obtrusive array of signs and street furniture.

Some modern development, especially of the 1960's and 1970's, does not harmonise with the townscape and general character of the area.

The potential of The Square as a civic open space is not fully realised and it is regrettable that The Town Hall is currently unoccupied.

## Useful publications

**'Off the Map of History'- The Development of North-East Wiltshire to 1600** Chandler, Digby and Marshman (1989)

**1A History of Swindon to 1965** Crittall, Rogers and Shrimpton (1983).

**The Buildings of England (Wiltshire).** N. Pevsner (Penguin 1975)

**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.

