

Urban Conservation Areas in Swindon



Rodbourne Cheney

These appraisals were adopted by Swindon Borough Council as “a proper assessment of the special interest, character and appearance of the Rodbourne Cheney, Conservation Area” on 8 April 2002.



Design, Conservation & Development Team
Environmental Services Directorate
Swindon Borough Council
Premier House, Station Road, Swindon, Wiltshire SN1 1TZ
Telephone 01793 4666325

Urban Conservation Areas in Swindon

This document defines and records the special architectural and historic interest of Rodbourne Cheney Conservation Area and identifies elements that contribute to their special character and appearance.

There are nine Conservation Areas within the urban area of Swindon town¹. Three of these urban Conservation Areas (Rodbourne Cheney, Stratton St. Margaret (Lower Stratton) and Stratton St. Margaret (Kingsdown)) are the historic parts of two former villages, Rodbourne Cheney and Stratton St. Margaret, that were formerly distinct from Swindon but lost their separate identity within the early 20th century expansion of the town².

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).

These appraisals provide a sound basis for development control decisions. They 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 which affect a Conservation Area will be judged for their effect on the area’s character and appearance as identified in the Conservation Area appraisal.

The appraisals should be read in conjunction with policies contained in the current Swindon Borough Local Plan and with national planning policy

¹In total, there are 28 Conservation Areas, rural and urban, within the Borough.

²There are four urban Conservation Areas in Old Town and a further two at the former GWR site.

guidance, especially Planning Policy Guidance 15: Planning and the Historic Environment.

Rodbourne Cheney Conservation Area

Introduction

The name 'Rodbourne' apparently derives from Old English 'hreed burna' meaning reedy bourn, referring to the brook just north of the manor house. In 1242 the manor belonged to a Ralph Chany, hence 'Cheney'.

St Mary's Church dates from the 13th century and there are two stones, probably of Saxon origin, set within its walls. It was much altered in 1848 to accommodate the increase in attenders resulting from the growth of the Great Western Railway works. Indeed, it was the arrival of the GWR which started Rodbourne Cheney's transition from a rural to an urban community. In 1928 the parish of Rodbourne Cheney was incorporated into the Borough of Swindon but even at that date the 'village' retained a rural setting. The biggest changes to the area came in the 1930's when a wave of typical semi's (e.g. Harvey Grove) brought Rodbourne Cheney within the urban area of Swindon.

As part of this development a new road, Vicarage Road, was constructed to 'by-pass' the old village. This has undoubtedly contributed to the peaceful backwater atmosphere of Rodbourne Green but whilst Rodbourne Green is 'off the beaten track', St Mary's Church stands beside a busy 20th century roundabout.

Character and appearance of Rodbourne Cheney Conservation Area

The Rodbourne Cheney Conservation Area was designated by Thamesdown Borough Council on 25th June 1990. The boundary has been drawn to enclose the core of the historic hamlet of Rodbourne Cheney including its church and manor house and the open space between them.

Though set within the 20th century expansion of Swindon, Rodbourne Cheney's historic origins are evident today - not least in the characteristic

medieval relationship between church and manor which Conservation Area status seeks to safeguard.

The Conservation Area is small and, with the exception of the church, meeting room and social club, exclusively residential. More than half the area is public open space, crossed by a small stream, used for dog walking and other recreation. Roadside stone walls and mature vegetation are features. The area's trees and greenery make an important contribution to the setting of both church and manor.

The Conservation Area is characterised by a mixture of Victorian houses, older listed buildings, limited 20th century infill, open space and some very fine groups of trees. In addition to six listed buildings³, there are a number of other buildings which make a strong contribution to the architectural and historic interest of the area notably Nos 228-234 Cheney Manor Road, a stone terrace with slate roof, and Nos 214 and 226, two Edwardian red brick dwellings with stone ground floor bay windows and a symmetrical facade.

Rodbourne Green, a triangular area of grassy open space in front of Manor House and Manor Cottage (formerly one dwelling but now in two ownerships), is the focus of the area south of the stream. The Green apparently once contained the village stocks and was a meeting place for the local hunt. Today it retains the character of a village green because of the lack of kerbs (on two sides), the presence of trees and its irregular shape. The Green is overlooked by a mixed collection of buildings the most notable of which is Manor House and Manor Cottage, which have 16th century origins. This remnant of a village green is a surprising find in a suburban setting - even local villages do not possess such a central space.

Proceeding northwards from the Green along Cheney Manor Road, the road bends and dips down to the stream. On the left stands a row of bungalows. Though uncharacteristic, they are small in scale and do not dominate. On the right, there is an attractive row of vernacular stone cottages typical of local North Wiltshire villages. There are some old sarsen stone roadside kerbs which contribute to the historic character of the area.

³Manor House and Manor Cottage, stables north of Manor House, St Mary's Church, Evans chest tomb, Wiltshire chest tomb and a group of five chest tombs (one entry).

The road forks at the stream. The right fork is the continuation of the old route through Rodbourne Cheney from manor house to church but today this road is abruptly blocked at a stone wall⁴ beside which stand a row of 19th century stone cottages (220-224 Cheney Manor Road). The left fork is a relatively recent narrow road which links Cheney Manor Road to Akers Way, a busy east-west thoroughfare that isolates St Mary's Church from the noticeable tranquillity found in Rodbourne Green.

St Mary's Church and its well stocked graveyard stand on the other (north) side of Akers Way in a slightly elevated position overlooking a busy roundabout. Surrounded by an old stone wall, the area has a distinctively historic appearance but the character of the area is marred by the sound of traffic.

⁴ A traffic roundabout has been constructed in its path.

.Useful publications

St Mary's Church, Rodbourne

Sheila Povey

Stratton St Margaret

Rev F W T Fuller

A History of Swindon to 1965 Crittall et al. (Wilts. Library Service 1983)

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.

Note

The information contained in the appraisals was collected during the autumn of 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.