

Conservation Areas

Adopted Supplementary Planning Guidance

Adopted Swindon Borough Local Plan, 1999
Swindon Borough Local Plan 2011 Revised Deposit Draft

January 2004

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Introduction

The guidance supports policy SEV 12 of the adopted Swindon Borough Local Plan and policy ENV 1 of the Revised Deposit Draft Swindon Borough Local Plan 2011.

The purpose of the SPG is to provide the background to the designation of the Borough's conservation areas and to list the architectural, historic and environmental elements that have formed the framework for the Council's 'conservation area appraisals'.

Adopted Swindon Borough Local Plan – Policy SEV 12:

“Development or works either within or which affect a conservation area shall preserve or enhance the character or appearance of that area and those which fail to do so will be refused.”

Revised Deposit Draft Swindon Borough Local Plan 2011 - Policy ENV 1:

“Planning permission shall not be granted for development that would fail to preserve or enhance the character, appearance or setting of a conservation area, or reduce its special interest.

In deciding whether to grant permission for development that would affect a conservation area, special attention shall be paid to the local planning authority's approved appraisal of the area's special interest. Development proposals shall be judged for their effect on the character and appearance of the area, as described in that appraisal.”

Conservation areas

Section 69 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 imposes a duty on local planning authorities to designate as conservation areas any 'areas of special architectural or historic interest the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance'. Swindon (formerly Thamesdown) Borough Council has designated 28 conservation areas. [See attached list and map].

Government advice on dealing with conservation areas in the planning system is found in *Planning Policy Guidance Note 15 [PPG15]*. Other advice is found in English Heritage guidance - '*Conservation Area Practice*' (1995)¹ and '*Conservation Area Appraisals*', (1997). Paragraphs 3.2.29 to 3.2.36 of the adopted Swindon Borough Local Plan and Section 3.3 of the Revised Deposit Draft Swindon Borough Local Plan 2011 deals with conservation areas.

Paragraph 4.5 of PPG 15 states that 'an authority's justification for designation, as reflected in its assessment of an area's special interest and its character and appearance, is a factor which the Secretary of State will take account in considering appeals against refusals of conservation area consent for demolition, and appeals against refusals of planning permission.'

Swindon Borough's written assessment of a particular conservation area's special interest and its character and appearance is known as a 'conservation area appraisal'.

Conservation Area Appraisals

Government advises local authorities² that the more clearly the special interest of conservation areas is defined, the sounder will be the basis for development plan policies and for decisions on planning applications in those areas. It is also in the interest of Human Rights that the justification for conservation area designation, in each particular case, is clearly spelled out.

Accordingly, Swindon Borough Council has prepared 'conservation area appraisals' to describe the particular special interest of each of Swindon Borough's 28 conservation areas. These appraisals have been subject to consultation in each area and the planning authority has adopted them as a proper assessment of the special interest, character and appearance of the Borough's conservation areas.

Each conservation area appraisal has been prepared in accordance with guidance set out in PPG 15 and English Heritage's guidance notes '*Conservation Area Practice*' (1995) and '*Conservation Area Appraisals*' (1977).

Each conservation area appraisal clearly defines and records the special architectural or historic interest that warranted designation of a particular

¹ Referred to in PPG15 [paragraph 4.4]

² PPG 15 Paragraph 4.4

conservation area and identifies those elements that contribute to its special interest, character and appearance. The appraisals are contained in Supplementary Planning Guidance to the adopted Swindon Borough Local Plan and the Revised Deposit Draft Swindon Borough Local Plan 2011 (*'Conservation Areas Appraisals'*).

To be concise and readable, the conservation area appraisals do not record all features and the omission of any feature from the text or accompanying map does not, therefore, mean that it must not be of interest or value.

The special interest, character and appearance of a conservation area.

The *special interest* of a conservation area derives from its architectural, historic or environmental qualities.

Appearance is a purely visual attribute that describes the way that something looks. The special interest and distinctiveness of a conservation area will derive from much more than its appearance but will draw on other senses and experiences, such as sounds, local environmental conditions or historical associations.

Character is a word to describe more than appearance. Character is set by all the detectable attributes or features that make up and distinguish a place; that make it distinctive or separate in nature from other places. It is the combination of distinctive traits and qualities that mark and often individualise a place. Character is the main or essential nature of a place, serving to distinguish it from other places. It may be set as much by the absence of something, as by its presence e.g. vegetation, noise, tall buildings.

Although the character of a conservation area may not be directly affected by the visual impact of built development, it could well be affected by a change of use of land or buildings, or by the environmental changes that accompany a development. For example, night-time activities associated with a bar, or increased traffic movements resulting from a new block of flats, could adversely affect an area's character by disturbing the distinctive tranquillity of an area.

Architectural, historic and environmental elements that contribute to the special interest, character and appearance of a conservation area.

The architectural, historic and environmental elements identified below have been adapted from a checklist given in the English Heritage publication '*Conservation Area Appraisals*' (1997) and from a list contained in PPG 15 paragraph 4.4.

The elements have formed the framework for the Council's conservation area appraisals and the Council will regard such elements as being important considerations in assessing the special interest, character and appearance of a conservation area and the impact of new development:

- the origins and development of the settlement;
- the prevailing and former uses within the area;
- the archaeological significance and potential of the area;
- the landscape setting of the conservation area;
- significant views into, out of, or within the area;
- the architectural or historic qualities of the area's buildings;
- the positive contribution made by key buildings;
- the character and relationship of spaces within the conservation area;
- distinctive local features or details which make a positive contribution to the area's special interest, character or appearance;
- the contribution made by important trees, groups of trees or other vegetation;
- negative factors and neutral areas.

The origins and development of the settlement;

Historic elements that have determined the form of the conservation area may shape its present-day character and appearance. These might include, for example, a medieval road pattern, watercourses, burgage plots and other significant boundaries, estate walls, formal layouts, and the relationship of buildings to open spaces.

The narrow burgage plots in Highworth Conservation Area, the pond and stream through Bishopstone Conservation Area and the planned rectilinear arrangement of streets in Swindon's Railway Village Conservation Area are examples of historic elements that have shaped the settlement and are essential to each conservation area's special interest.

Where historic elements of the area's origins and development remain and are part of the area's character, these should be preserved.

The prevailing or former uses within the area;

Prevailing or former uses within a conservation area often add to its distinctive character and may influence an area's layout and building types.

The Swindon Railway Works Conservation Area, which encloses the site of the former manufacturing works of the Great Western Railway, is a prime example of a conservation area shaped by a specific past use. Similarly, Stratton St Margaret (Kingsdown) Conservation Area contains the buildings of a Victorian brewery – still operational today.

Prevailing uses (e.g. residential, industrial or retail) can give a conservation area a distinct identity. Villages such as Liddington, Stanton Fitzwarren, Bishopstone, Hannington and Castle Eaton are almost exclusively residential; Swindon Old Town and Highworth are primarily characterised by shops and businesses.

Development or change of use which affects distinctive former or prevailing use of buildings or land may have a significantly adverse effect on character or lead to a reduction in the special interest of an area. Such development should not be permitted.

The archaeological significance and potential of the area;

Some conservation areas contain sites of archaeological interest. The conservation area's archaeological significance and potential will, in most cases, be part of its special interest and make a positive contribution to historic character and appearance.

In Sevenhampton Conservation Area, for example, there are well-preserved medieval settlement remains which contain evidence of the early development of the settlement and have influenced its present-day layout – their national importance is reflected in their designation as a Scheduled Ancient Monument. Though not of national importance, a probable Saxon settlement and ancient strip lynchets were

designated part of Liddington Conservation Area in 1995 in view of their archaeological interest and their contribution to the setting of the village.

The landscape setting of the conservation area;

The setting of a conservation area refers to its relationship with its immediate and wider surroundings and is often an important part of an area's character and appearance. The boundaries of rural village conservation areas, in particular, have been drawn to include surrounding land that contributes to the settlement's landscape setting.

It has not always been appropriate or realistic to enclose the full landscape setting of an area (e.g. a historic village) within the conservation area boundary. Government advice in PPG 15 is that, in the planning authorities handling of development proposals which are outside the conservation area but would affect its setting, or views into or out of the area, are a 'material consideration'³.

Two ways in which development may adversely affect the setting of a conservation area, first, through the intrusion of new buildings upon significant views into and out of the conservation area (see below) and, second, by violating the quality of the setting itself - whether or not the development is visually prominent in local views. For instance, the character of a historic rural village may suffer if it becomes isolated from its rural surroundings as a result of a new road, boundary wall or dwelling breaking the historic link between village and countryside.

Development on the edge of a conservation area, within or without its boundary, will be carefully considered for its effect on the area's landscape setting.

Significant views into, out of, or within the area;

Views into and out of a conservation area may be part of its special interest. English Heritage advice is that: "Ever-present views of surrounding hills or glimpses of landscape from urban streets can contribute significantly to the atmosphere of a place. Distant views of the settlement and those in the approach to it may contribute to lasting impression of its character."⁴

For example, views of downland from Bishopstone, or open countryside from Lower Blunsdon⁵ are an important aspect of each area's special interest. PPG 15⁶ identifies "vistas along streets and between buildings" as one of a number of contributing factors to our experience of a historic area. Such views - perhaps to a landmark (inside or outside of the conservation area), a key group of buildings or a distinctive local feature such as a prominent tree, open space or a picturesque local scene - add to the visual interest of an area. The partial or total blocking of characteristic views (the unusual spire and tower of St Andrew's Church in Upper Wanborough Conservation Area, for instance) can spoil an area's local distinctiveness.

³ PPG 15 Paragraph 4.14.

⁴ Conservation Area Appraisals (1977) English Heritage page 8

⁵ See Appeal Decision APP/U3935/A/02/1084739 re The Ferns and Carbis, Lower Blunsdon.

⁶ PPG 15 Paragraph 4.2

In considering proposed development within or outside⁷ conservation areas, consideration will be given to its effect on significant views into, out of, or within the area.

The architectural or historic qualities of the area's buildings;

In most, but not all, conservation areas it will be the architectural and historic qualities of a conservation area's buildings, including prevalent and traditional building materials or local constructional or joinery details, that make the most significant contribution to its special interest.

There is considerable diversity in the architectural and historic qualities of the Borough's 28 conservation areas. The core of Highworth Conservation Area is notable for its Georgian buildings dating from the town's pre-eminence in the 18th century; Swindon Town Gardens Conservation Area is characterised by late Victorian and Edwardian housing. Castle Eaton, on the edge of the Cotswolds, is a predominantly stone village whilst Bishopstone, on the edge of chalk downland is notable for buildings of chalk and thatch – both contain a number of old vernacular cottages.

In the interests of harmonising new development with its neighbours in the conservation area, special regard shall be had for such matters as scale, height, form, massing, respect for the traditional pattern of frontages, vertical and horizontal emphasis and detailed design (e.g. the scale and spacing of window openings, and the nature and quality of materials).

What is important is not that new buildings should directly imitate earlier styles but that they should be designed with respect for their context, as part of a larger whole which has a well-established character and appearance of its own.

The positive contribution made by key buildings;

English Heritage's advice is that "Most of the buildings in a conservation area will help to shape its character in one way or another. The extent to which their contribution is a positive one depends not just on their public face, but on their integrity as historic structures and the impact they have in three dimensions, perhaps in an interesting roofscape or skyline. Back elevations can be important, as can side views from alleys and yards."⁸

A key building is one that makes a particularly important contribution to the conservation area. Some of these are identified in the conservation area appraisals but omission of a building from the appraisal does not necessarily mean that it is of no interest or value.

A checklist to assist with an assessment of whether or not unlisted buildings make a positive contribution to the special architectural or historic interest forms the

⁷ PPG 15 Paragraph 4.14.

⁸ Conservation Area Appraisals (1977) English Heritage

Appendix to English Heritage's 'Conservation Area Appraisal' (1997). This checklist forms the basis of the Council's Supplementary Planning Guidance, "*Buildings of Significant Local Interest*", that identifies twelve criteria against which a judgement will be made as to whether or not a building possesses the qualities that give it significant local interest.

Policies SEV 22 and SEV 23 of the adopted Swindon Borough Local Plan relate to unlisted buildings of historical or architectural interest. Policy ENV3 of the First Deposit Draft Swindon Borough Local Plan 2011 states: "Planning permission shall not be granted for development that would fail to preserve a building of significant local interest."

The character and relationship of spaces within the conservation area;

Open spaces within a conservation area may give the whole area, or a particular locality, a unique and special character. The market place in Highworth, the 'green' in front of the Manor House in Rodbourne Cheney, and Faringdon Park adjacent to the Railway Village are examples of spaces that give an area a distinct identity.

Proposed development should take account of the relationship between different spaces, the qualities they offer (such as important views into and out of the conservation area), the way they are enclosed and the visual contribution they make to the townscape.

Distinctive local features or details which make a positive contribution to the area's special interest, character or appearance;

Red K6 telephone boxes, stone cobbles, old milestones, tall brick chimney stacks, window joinery details and stone boundary walls are examples of local features that add to a conservation area's distinct identity and form part of the special interest of the area. Local features that contribute to an area's identity may be small (such as the cast iron pumps in Castle Eaton) or large (for example, the mill pond in Bishopstone).

Alteration or removal of distinctive local features of interest would almost certainly fail to preserve or enhance a conservation area. It is highly desirable that distinctive local features are retained.

The contribution made by important trees, groups of trees or other vegetation;

Trees are valued features of our towns and countryside and make an important contribution to the character of the local environment.

Paragraph 4.39 of PPG 15 says: "In view of the contribution that trees can make to the character and appearance of a conservation area, the principal Act⁹ makes special provision for trees in conservation areas. Under Section 211 of the Act, subject to a range of exceptions... anyone proposing to cut down, top or lop a tree in a conservation area is required to give six weeks notice to the local planning

⁹ Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990

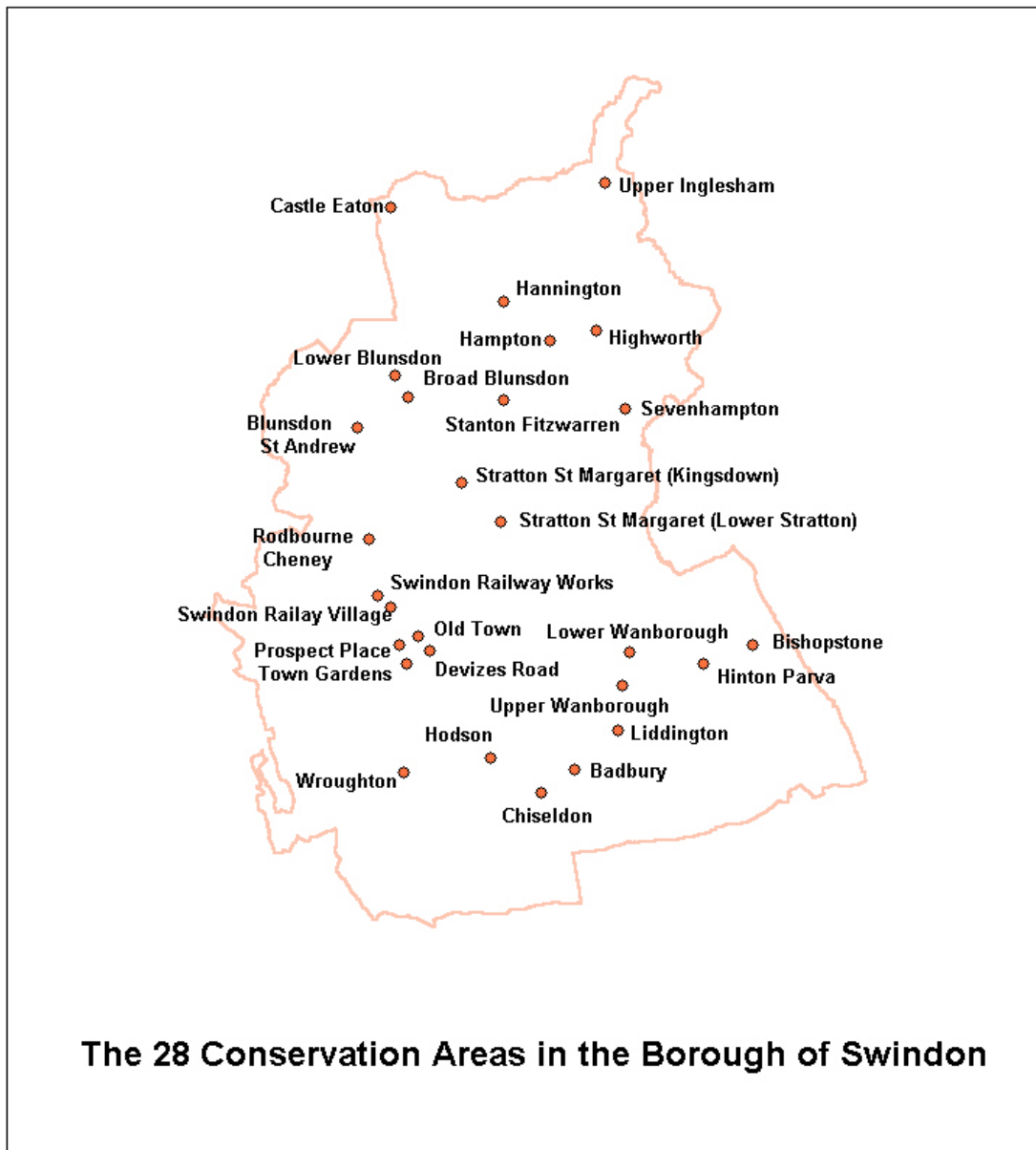
authority. The purpose of this requirement is to give the authority an opportunity to consider bringing the tree under their general control by making a tree preservation order in respect of it.”

PPG 15 paragraph 4.40 states that, “When considering whether to extend protection to trees in conservation areas, local planning authorities should always take into account the visual, historic and amenity contribution of trees.”

Negative factors and neutral areas;

Inevitably, in order to de-lineate a meaningful boundary on the ground, there may be small areas, buildings or other features located within a conservation area that do not conform to the overall character of that conservation area. These may be neutral (i.e. neither enhance nor detract from its character or appearance) or have a negative effect. Negative elements that detract from the special character of an area may include harmful pressures on an area, such as the consequences of heavy traffic, or uncharacteristic development constructed before, or despite, conservation area designation. Negative elements may offer the opportunity for change and enhancement.

Inappropriate forms of development that have been permitted in the past must not be used to justify yet more inappropriate development.



Conservation Areas in order of date of designation

	designated	redesignated	redesignated
Highworth	*unknown	1976	25/06/90
Swindon - Old Town	*18/03/69	1981	16/07/90
Bishopstone	*01/05/73	30/04/90	
Lower Wanborough	*01/05/73	30/04/90	
Upper Wanborough	*01/05/73	30/04/90	
Castle Eaton	*24/01/75	30/04/90	
Swindon - Railway Village	1975	30/04/87	
Stanton Fitzwarren	1978	30/04/90	
Hannington	1979	25/06/90	
Swindon - Railway Works	30/04/87		
Swindon - Town Gardens	07/03/89		
Badbury	30/04/90		
Hodson	30/04/90		
Inglesham	30/04/90		
Liddington	30/04/90	05/06/95	
Sevenhampton	30/04/90	11/12/00	
Wroughton	30/04/90		
Chiseldon	25/06/90		
Hampton	25/06/90		
Swindon - Prospect Place	25/06/90		
Swindon - Rodbourne Cheney	25/06/90		
Broad Blunsdon	16/07/90		
Blunsdon St Andrew	16/07/90		
Hinton Parva	16/07/90		
Swindon - Devizes Road	16/07/90		
Blunsdon - Lower Village	14/09/92		
Stratton St Margaret - Kingsdown	14/09/92		
Stratton St Margaret - L'r Stratton	14/09/92		

* Wiltshire County Council Designation

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