

Swindon Old Town

Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan



- Conservation area designated in 1969
- Appraisal and management plan adopted 29th April 2008

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 [the] conservation area and approved as guidance for decision makers dealing with planning matters” on 29th April 2008.



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1. Introduction

Old Town Conservation Area (first designated 1969) is one the four conservation areas in Old Swindon. It covers the extent¹ of the early 19th century agricultural market town of Swindon together with parts of the town's post-railway expansion. This document defines and records the special architectural or historic interest that warrants designation of Swindon Old Town Conservation Area.

Devizes Road and Prospect Place Conservation Areas are historically part of this area but their individual and separate designation in June 1990 requires that they be considered and assessed separately.

Town Gardens Conservation Area, first designated in 1989 is focused on a noted urban park and gardens and is a mainly residential area with a distinct late 19th/early 20th century identity that contrasts markedly with the adjoining historic core of the Old Town. It is also assessed in a separate document.

1.1 Purpose of the Appraisal

This appraisal defines the special interest, character and appearance of the conservation area, providing 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”². 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.”³

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, revisited and revised in March 2008. In order 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.

¹ Newport Street is also part of the original old town of Swindon but retains little of historic interest and is not within the Old Town Conservation Area.

² Section 69 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990

³ Section 72 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.

2. Background

2.1 Designation

Wiltshire County Council first designated Swindon Old Town as a Conservation Area in 1969. It was the first conservation area within the Borough of Swindon. It was re-designated with a revised boundary by Swindon Borough Council in January 1981. The revised boundary enlarged the conservation area by the addition of the eastern end of Bath Road and the east side of Victoria Road. In 1990 further minor boundary adjustments were made in the light of developments carried out since original designation in 1969. A revision has been made to the back of properties at 10-20 High Street to take account of recent development of the old town 'Core Area'.

2.2 Location

Old Swindon stands on a pronounced knoll on the eastern side of a hill about 1 km south of the New Town's modern commercial centre. Swindon Old Town Conservation Area covers the historic core of the early hill-top settlement of Swindon, most particularly the medieval market town and some of the more interesting parts of the town's post-railway expansion. To the immediate east of the Conservation Area lies an area of parkland, formerly the grounds of The Lawn⁴. To the west is Bath Road, lined either side with handsome Victorian villas and to the north, 19th and 20th century buildings descend towards the New Town along Victoria Road, and south along the Devizes and Marlborough Roads

The Geological Survey of Great Britain (OS, 1974) shows Swindon lying on deep Jurassic sands of the Portland Beds with a localised ring of Purbeck and Portland limestone, immediately south of the town.

2.3 Boundaries

The boundary of the Conservation Area has been drawn to relate not only to the historic settlement pattern of the pre-railway 'old town' but also to include Christ Church (1851) and other notable properties dating from the Victorian expansion which was stimulated primarily by the coming of the Great Western Railway in the 1840's.

Accordingly, the conservation area is based around two of Swindon's original streets⁵, Wood Street and High Street (and its northerly continuation, Cricklade Street), and short lengths of two of the area's 19th century streets, Bath Road and Victoria Road. In the south east of the conservation area, Market Square is included together with Dammas Lane, The Planks and Old Mill Lane, three of the old town's historic lanes.

⁴ The Lawn was a country house (now demolished) see 'Character Areas' –The Planks etc.

⁵ Newport Street and Devizes Road also form part of the area's early street pattern. The former has been extensively altered and is not included in the conservation area, whilst the latter is in a separate conservation area.

The conservation area boundary generally follows the rear boundary of properties fronting the above-mentioned historic roads. Within the redeveloped 'Core Area' the boundary has been readjusted to take account of recent developments.

North of Wood Street, the Conservation Area encloses the historic Little London quarter together with Union Row, Albert Street and Church Road, which form the later (19th century) development of what was once the poorer part of the town. Wesley Street, a short 19th century brick terrace and villa, is included to create a meaningful boundary north of Bath Road.

2.4 Archaeological Interest

Archaeological evidence shows that Swindon Hill was a favoured location for settlement from earliest times. Several Bronze Age finds have been made in the area and there appears to have been extensive settlement in the Old Town area in the Romano-British period.⁶ Sufficient material has been found to suggest that part of the area may have been continuously occupied throughout the prehistoric and Roman periods.

The County Sites and Monuments Record 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, at the Market Square and to the rear of Marlborough Road have revealed the extensive remains of substantial Roman structures and the location of a Saxon settlement⁷ with Grubenhauser⁸, along with remains of medieval buildings. The remains of Holy Rood, the former Parish church, are scheduled as an ancient monument.

2.5 Historical Development of Old Town

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 families⁹ Swindon became a medieval market centre. The laying out of Newport Street, Wood Street, Devizes Road¹⁰ and High Street appears to have taken place by the 13th century. The name Newport Street is first mentioned in 1346, Wood Street in 1599, and High Street in 1645. The market town appears to have been successful, despite being distant from a major road.

⁶ See The Archaeology of Wiltshires Towns An Extensive Urban Survey – Swindon Wiltshire County Archaeology Service Feb 2000

⁷ See 'Off the Map of History' The Development of North-East Wiltshire to 1600'.

⁸ A thatched house set down partly below ground level.

⁹ See 'Off the Map of History' The Development of North-East Wiltshire to 1600'.

¹⁰ Devizes Road does not appear to have been built up at this period.



Photograph 1
Newport Street at
the end of the
19th century

Quarrying had been the area's main industry from Roman times, the local stone being used for variety of building works. In the 17th century the discovery of a seam of Purbeck limestone that could be used for interior works lead to a huge expansion of the industry. The quarrying of 'Swindon stone' for local use continued to be important after this higher quality seam had been exhausted in the 18th century¹¹.

The main streets of the town were mostly built up by 1773¹². High Street contained the principal inns and prestigious houses with a small market square at its southern end. Wood Street was a busy street, inhabited by many of the lesser traders and merchants. Some early buildings remain in High Street but in both streets there has been much alteration and rebuilding over time. Newport Street seems always to have been of lesser importance.



Photograph 2
Wood Street
c1906

By 1801 Swindon's population was 1,198. The opening of the Wiltshire and Berkshire Canal in 1810 and the North Wiltshire Canal in 1819 generated further trade for the town, in addition to the variety of markets and fairs held regularly. The built up area remained closely centred on the three principal streets (High Street, Wood Street, Newport Street) and in the 1830's Swindon was a small but relatively prosperous, agricultural market town. At about this time there was some suburban growth, most notably some substantial properties along Bath Road, to accommodate the growing numbers of affluent, middle-class residents.

¹¹ See 'A History of Swindon to 1965' E.Crittall et al.

¹² Andrews and Drury map 1773.

The foundation of the GWR railway works and the ensuing growth of New Swindon also stimulated the growth of 'Old Swindon'.



Photograph 3
Impression of the
'new' Town Hall 1859
before the clock tower
was built.

The middle years of the 19th century were ones of considerable prosperity for the town and generated substantial development and improvements throughout the town, including most of the Old Town's public buildings. A railway line to Marlborough was opened in 1881 (closed to passengers in 1961)¹³ with a station south of Newport Street.

Old Swindon and New Swindon were incorporated into a single municipal borough in 1900 and Swindon is now the largest town in Wiltshire and a major regional centre.

2.6 Old Town Conservation Area Today

The Old Town Conservation Area is today characterised by a lively, though sensitively balanced, mix of land uses (primarily commercial and leisure, but with an increasing amount of residential use) and a concentration of many old buildings of historical and architectural interest, interspersed with 20th century infill.

An area of Old Town, including part of the Old Town Conservation Area, is identified in the Swindon Borough Local Plan (2011) as a 'District Shopping Centre', (Policy S2) where the loss of retail uses is resisted with a Core Area behind the Wood Street (south side) and High Street (west side) frontages (Policy S3), where there is a greater degree of flexibility. A comprehensive redevelopment of this 'Core area' (enclosed within Wood Street, Devizes Road, Newport Street and High Street and not within the conservation area) for shops, restaurants and residential use has now been completed and links through to the Old Town frontage.

Shops in Old Town face competition from Swindon's modern centre and changes in shopping habits. There is also pressure to change the use of shops to either financial/professional services or food/drink uses. It has been difficult to achieve the optimum balance between these competing uses and, in recent years, there has

¹³ Under the Beeching rationalisation of the country's railway system

been a significant loss of shops in the Old Town area, with a consequent change in its character.



Photograph 4
Bath Road has some traditional shops alongside bars and restaurants. Heavy traffic detracts from the shopping experience.

There are a proportionately large number of services such as estate agents, banks and building societies, a branch post office and medical and dental surgeries. Also, there are a number of fast food shops in the area (especially the south end of High Street), which can give rise to litter problems. There are offices in both purpose built modern buildings and in converted historic buildings. In addition to specialist shopping and office use throughout the day, the area is active at night, having several popular bars, clubs and restaurants. At present, this mix of fundamentally different day- and night-time activities is finely balanced.

Old Town has a distinct character within the wider town of Swindon and there is, for instance, a local summer festival and Christmas shopping event. The area lacks a sizeable, fully accessible meeting place. Local outdoor events take place in The Lawn or Town Gardens¹⁴ (outside this conservation area).



Photograph 5
The Methodist Church is a listed building and prominent local landmark in Bath Road

Christ Church and Bath Road Methodist Church are two of the Old Town's principal churches, whilst other public facilities in the area include Swindon's Museum with an Art Gallery as well as a small branch library. The Arts Centre is just outside the Conservation Area in Devizes Road.

¹⁴ See Town Gardens Conservation Area Appraisal

The area has high levels of through traffic and is a vital part of the Swindon bus network. There are a number of short-term and long-term car parks both within and immediately adjacent to the conservation area.

Some of Old Town's historic character has been eroded by demolition of a number of old buildings, changes in land use and late 20th century infill. High levels of through traffic detract from the environment. Despite this, the area's historic ambience and environmental quality help to maintain its attractiveness. A Planning Inspector (1997) described Old Town as "an attractive, distinct and special part of Swindon which has been changing slowly over many years as a result of changes in the pattern of shopping. The presence of the library, art gallery and museum, some specialist shops and the post office combine to produce something that is much more interesting and attractive than the normal 'district' shopping centre¹⁵."

3. The Special Interest of Old Town Conservation Area

3.1 Street Pattern

The historic street pattern of Swindon's Old Town has determined the form of the modern topography and is a part of the interest of the conservation area.

Market Square is part of the town's medieval layout (having a market cross here in 1662). The Planks, Old Mill Lane and Dammas Lane (so named in 1684) are old lanes associated with the former a medieval manor house, mill and parish church (Holy Rood).

The basic street pattern is medieval, based on a rectangle of streets formed by Newport Street, Wood Street, High Street and Devizes Road. Early 19th century prosperity led to expansion to the west along a road then known as The Sands (now known as Bath Road) and, later, along Victoria Road. As New Swindon expanded Victoria Road became the main route between the 'Old' and 'New' towns and was made up in 1888, being considerably built up by 1899.¹⁶

Cricklade Street, the continuation of the High Street and the principal road northwards out of Swindon Old Town, was turnpiked in 1755. Little London was a historic back-way containing several houses and cottages that led from the west end of Wood Street to Drove Road. It remains as a downhill route (its narrowness and curve indicates its historic origin) but retains only vestiges of its old buildings¹⁷.

¹⁵ See planning application reference S/97/408

¹⁶ See 'A History of Swindon to 1965' E.Crittall et al.

¹⁷ Apparently there was still a thatched cottage in Little London in the 1960's.



Photograph 6
Little London c1906
with thatched stone
cottages.

Union Row and Albert Street are part of the c.1850's post-railway expansion of Swindon. Church Road is a later development (c.1890) connecting Cricklade Street to Union Row.

3.2 Architectural and Historic Interest

The architecture of the Old Town Conservation Area is characterised by the wide variety of its buildings, some dating from the 18th century. 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 Old Town Conservation Area's architecture is quite distinct from that of New Town. It has 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 gardens¹⁸, nonconformist chapels, hotel and (former) brewery.

High Street contains the oldest surviving buildings in the area, some such as for example 16 High Street, a 17th century former house, are built on former medieval burgage plots.



Photograph 7
Late 18th century houses
10-14 High Street (listed).

¹⁸ Today's 'Town Gardens' - part of the Swindon Town Gardens Conservation Area.

There are several 18th century buildings, most particularly Villetts House, a fine early Georgian town house (1729) at 42 Cricklade Street, the Goddard Arms Hotel close by and 18th century town houses in the Market Square and Wood Street (Numbers 31 and 32). Villetts House is built of red brick (Flemish bond) with limestone quoins and stone dressings and decorative classical features and pediment front, the roof largely hidden behind a parapet; the Goddard Arms is a plainer building but with decorative diaper brickwork (hidden under creeper) which figures locally and has a portico porch; the mansard type roof with stone slates, can be seen elsewhere on early properties in the town.



Photograph 8
Villetts House (grade II* listed) is a particularly fine example of an early 18th century house.

Throughout the area there is a variety of materials from local sources, including local Swindon stone and limestone, which may be laid as un-coursed rubble or squared and coursed cut stone. Coursed or random local rubble-stone can be seen in the less prestigious buildings in the area, for instance in Albert Street or Old Mill Lane. Sometimes poorer stone or brick was rendered to give the appearance of ashlar¹⁹ stone or else lime-washed. Brick is also much in evidence, with a local orange/red brick often embellished with blue brick diaper decoration or stone stringcourses, quoins and cornices.

The early 19th century is represented by particularly fine properties (many listed) on Bath Road, including Aspley House (now Swindon Museum) of ashlar stone with portico and other original classical features. Numbers. 8-14 Bath Road, are plain but elegant, built of red brick with stone dressings and iron openwork porches; they have shallow pitch roofs, using Welsh slate and have unusual lunette attic windows.

The majority of buildings in the conservation area date from the second half of the 19th century and mostly reflect the Victorian gothic revival style²⁰. In 1878 it was said that within a decade almost every place of business in the town had been rebuilt, enlarged or improved²¹. 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).

¹⁹ High quality, smooth cut stone with very fine mortar joints

²⁰ Typified by pointed arches and ornate decoration alluding to medieval church architecture.

²¹ E. Crittall et al.



Photograph 9
High Street (east side) - late
19th century/early 19th
century (listed) bank
buildings.

The above-mentioned buildings are all listed as being of architectural or historic interest. In general, later 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 use of unsuitable materials to replace many original roof coverings (concrete tiles or reconstituted slates) and aluminium or plastic windows replacing wooden sash windows has detracted from some of the buildings in the conservation area.

3.3 Local Features

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, where they 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, boot-scrapers and cast iron coalhole covers add to the character of the area.
- The spire of Christ Church is a landmark both within the conservation area and viewed from the New Town; the Town Hall tower is another local landmark, which can be seen from Marlborough Road. Chimneys stacks and clay pots contribute to a lively roofscape; the former Belmont brewery in particular has an impressive, tall 'Italianate' brick chimney.
- Old sarsen stone kerbs and setts, where they remain, especially in the Albert Street area

3.4 Buildings of Local Significance

Many of this historic area's old buildings are of significant local interest and value but have not been listed as being of historic or architectural interest²². Along with the 'listed' buildings in the area, these buildings also have qualities of age, style, materials and features, which reflect those of a substantial number of buildings in the area, making an important contribution to the conservation area's distinctive character and appearance.

²² Listing is undertaken by English Heritage for Sec of State for Culture, Media and Sport

3.5 Open Spaces, Vistas and Views

The important open spaces within the conservation area are the Market Square²³. The environs of Christ Church churchyard provide a quiet haven away from the busy Cricklade Road. These will be described in the section 'character areas'. There is currently no large public open green space within the conservation area but the Lawn is immediately adjacent. The approach to the Lawns along The Avenue between the stone piers of the old gateway provides a long vista. It was replanted with an avenue of trees, following storm damage.

There are views out of the Conservation Area across Swindon to the north, most notably from Cricklade Street and southwards across to the Downs from Marlborough Road. Included in this view is Christ Church, the spire being a prominent landmark both within the Conservation Area and in the approach from the 'New Town'.

3.6 Trees

Trees are not plentiful in the most central part of the conservation area, so 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 east of High Street e.g. a Holm oak in The Planks. Trees in the churchyard merge visually with those beyond in the Lawn, giving an expansive leafy view. Bath Road benefits from street trees and of particular note is the large beech outside the Museum.

3.7 Character Areas

High Street

This part of the town, closest to the medieval church of Holy Rood, is most likely to be the earliest centre of settlement and it is known to have been fairly continuously built up by the late 18th century²⁴. There are several 17th and 18th century houses in the street but all have been altered in some way, particularly by the addition of shop fronts.

The street scene of **High Street** is dominated by the tall, stone bank buildings on its east side where, at the brow of the hill, the street narrows markedly at The Goddard Arms, giving added prominence to another Victorian bank building on the corner of Wood Street. The Goddard Arms is a late 18th century inn with a fine portico porch providing an eye-catching local landmark, particularly when seen from Wood Street.

Opening out of the east side of the High Street is the small **Market Square**, which is currently used for short-term parking. It is overlooked by 18th century buildings, formerly warehouses now houses, on the north side and on the south side by the former Town Hall and Corn Exchange. Here redevelopment is proposed to provide a

²³ Proposed to be revitalised as a public open space as part of the 'Locarno' development S/LBC/07/2806 and S/07/2805

²⁴ Andrew's & Drury Map 1773.

mix of uses, including a Registry Office and residential accommodation, whilst retaining the historic façade and creating a public open space in the former market place.

Also on the east side of High Street, a wide gap in the frontage gives access to **Charlotte Mews**, that leads to The Hermitage, a modern replacement of an earlier building, which uses the local red brick. Adjacent is the entrance to **The Avenue**, a broad tree-lined walk with a parkland character marked by early 19th century stone gate piers and recently replaced iron gates, leading to The Lawn. Tall trees fill the eastward view, whilst looking back, there is a pleasing view of the twin gabled 16 High Street, one of the area's oldest buildings. Redlands (Charlotte Mews), a mid 19th century red brick house, is a well-proportioned, quality building. On the left of the gates, a modern building reflects to proportions and mansard roof of its neighbours.



Photograph 10
Charlotte Mews a good example of local materials and a quality mid-19th century building (listed) overlooking the Avenue.

The rear of High Street north of The Avenue (towards Christ Church) is not as intensively developed as the corresponding area between The Avenue and Old Mill Lane. Open spaces and trees form a visual buffer between The Lawn and the backs of buildings fronting the main road. This is a valuable element in the character and appearance of this part of the conservation area, in that it prevents development on High Street from impinging on the tranquillity and rural character of The Lawn.

The west side has an almost continuous historic frontage (though some buildings are only historic facades), including a variety of roofs, building styles and materials from different periods. There are some traditional shop-fronts with timber windows, which are an important element of the historic character of this traditional High Street. The east side is less cohesive and has gaps in the frontage; a 20th century infill building detracts from the generally historic appearance of the street, as do modern shop signs and fascias.

High Street has a mix of retail and non-retail uses and some vacant premises (2008), which detract from the area. It also suffers from high levels of through traffic.

The Planks, Dammas Lane and Old Mill Lane.

This area is best understood in relation to an 18th century mansion known as '**The Lawn**', which occupied the site of the medieval manor house. From the middle ages until the mid 19th century, this area exhibited the typically feudal relationship of house, water mill and church (Holy Rood)²⁵ with the developing town immediately adjacent. The Lawn House was for six generations the home of the Goddard family but it was demolished in 1952 and the former landscaped ground, including a ha-ha and gazebo (listed) are now in a public park. The Lawn is not within the Conservation Area.

Dammas Lane is a cul-de-sac leading from Market Square to an 18th century (listed) stone house with a mansard roof. **The Planks** is the remnant of a raised causeway constructed for the convenience of churchgoers walking from Market Square to the medieval church of Holy Rood. On the south side of The Planks are the stables (listed), which formerly belonged to The Lawn and which will be retained as part of a new residential development. This narrow lane then joins **Old Mill Lane** on which stand a number of vernacular stone cottages (listed). There is a length of old iron railing and a good view of the remains of Holy Rood Church and the park and the general ambiance is remarkably rural. Approaching Marlborough Road it is evident that the area has undergone many changes in recent decades and modern housing development, such as the Paddocks²⁶ (former BT site) has eroded some of its character.



Photograph 11
The character of the old town lanes is preserved in the road width and high stonewalls.

Nonetheless the historic character of this area is evident in the narrow width of the lanes and high walls of local stone; as do buildings such as the small workshop situated outside the conservation area but on the corner of Old Mill Lane and Marlborough Road.

²⁵ See picture in Crittall et al.1983

²⁶ APP/U3935/A01/1072932

Cricklade Street

Cricklade Street continues the line of the High Street and reinforces the ‘market town’ character. Formerly known as Brock Hill, it was once much steeper. The short length of raised footpath on the east side indicates the original profile of the street and gives the buildings on this side of the street a greater presence in the street scene. Though narrow at the top of the hill, the street broadens as it descends to Drove Road, a predominantly residential part of Swindon. Here views over New Swindon’s rooftops reinforce the Old Town’s historic hilltop location.



Photograph 12
Cricklade St. A variety of building styles, rooflines, materials and textures add to the architectural diversity; the spire of Christ Church is visible behind.

The west side of the street has a distinctly modern appearance but the east side retains several old buildings including Villetts House at 42 Cricklade Street described by Pevsner²⁷ as “the best house in Swindon by far...” This building was refurbished in 2007 as part of a residential redevelopment.

Immediately north of Villetts House are a number of 19th century cottages, of varying architectural design at the end of which is the gable end of a row of (listed) stone Victorian almshouses (1877) overlooking the churchyard of **Christ Church** an important (listed) building designed by Sir George Gilbert Scott. The spire is a significant feature on Swindon’s skyline, visible from long distances. The Church stands in a churchyard, with stone tombs set amongst grass and trees, which extends to The Lawn, thus giving a sense of space to this part of the conservation area.

Victoria Road

Victoria Road, as its name implies, is a 19th century thoroughfare that today is the main route from Old Town to the modern town centre. Only the northern, older, part of the route lies within the Conservation Area. The southern end of the road is straight with a uniform width and a regular building line set back behind a wide

²⁷ Buildings of England - Wiltshire; N. Pevsner 1975

footway. The road narrows and falls sharply below Union Row. The east side of the street has an historic appearance owing to the prominent (grade II listed) mid-19th century printing works and offices of the Swindon Advertiser. Also, a row of stone houses and The Victoria public house which still retains its original windows.



Photograph 13
Victoria Road 19th
century shops, some
with traditional shop
fronts.

On the opposite (west) side of the street, buildings are generally 20th century infill with irregular eaves and roof heights. The architecture is unexceptional except for the tall 1930's brick neo-Georgian Post Office and the east elevation of the 1960's art gallery extension to The Museum, which are typical of their period.

This is a busy street very often filled with traffic and containing two controlled pedestrian crossings within its short length and at the southern end of the street is a busy traffic roundabout.

The street has a mix of uses including retail and commercial uses, public houses, newspaper offices, a post office and several restaurants. In 1995, a Planning Inspector said of Victoria Road, "the overwhelming impression is of a street of mixed uses, of which Class A3 uses²⁸ are significant in terms of the number of units."²⁹ Many of the buildings have modern shop fronts but where traditional shop fronts remain, they should be retained.

Bath Road

Included in Old Town Conservation Area is **Bath Road** as far as Eastcott Road³⁰. Nearly half of the properties along this eastern stretch of Bath Road³¹ are of historic and architectural interest. On the corner, numbers 1-15 Bath Road, comprise a three-storey 19th century terrace (listed) with some original shop fronts. Although there has been some recent infill (for example Chatsworth House and Epworth Court) the majority of buildings are dwellings dating from the 19th century suburban growth of the old town and the street retains a predominantly Victorian appearance with only minor alterations. However, high levels of traffic and modern street lighting, signs and road markings mar its historic character.

²⁸ Restaurants, pubs, cafes, wine bars etc

²⁹ Planning reference T/94/596. Planning Inspectorate decision letter dated 22 March 1995.

³⁰ Once a rural lane from the Old Town to the hamlet of Eastcott

³¹ These are Apsley House (Swindon Museum); Numbers 8-12; Tritton House (14); Granville (16); Methodist Church; 22; 1-15; 17; Gloucester Terrace (21-29); Kode House (43).



Photograph 14
The Museum (listed) Apsley House and 1960s art gallery extension. Road signs detract from this prominent corner.

Today, most of these former large residences have been converted to offices or services, including medical and dental surgeries, a veterinary practice as well as hostel accommodation. The Methodist Chapel (listed) dominates this part of Old Town and the huge beech outside the Museum is a notable landmark. This section of Bath Road is an important area of transition between the historic and the commercial core of Old Town and the Victorian suburban housing to the west. Commercial use of premises declines as Bath Road goes westwards.

Wood Street and Little London.

Wood Street lies in the heart of the Old Town Conservation Area, and is the busiest and most attractive focus of local shopping activity. It is perhaps the most cohesive historic entity within the conservation area. There are eight listed buildings and several other buildings of significant local architectural and historical interest. The buildings mostly date from the late Victorian development of Old Town giving a lively variety in the frontage above the ground floor shop fronts. .

An opening in the south side leads to a car park and recently redeveloped area of shops, restaurants and residential townhouse properties. Within this area (but not within the Conservation Area) there is the former Belmont Brewery (listed), now a nightclub. The rear elevations of the historic properties in High Street can be seen from here, contributing to the historic ambiance.



Photograph 15
Wood Street still retains a vibrant frontage with some traditional local shops.

There are a number of small, independent retailers and Wood Street still retains an intimate and thriving air, however the number of non-shop units in Wood Street is significant. Ground-floor frontages include estate agents, building societies, offices, a pub, wine-bar and hotel bar-restaurant. There are several empty premises, which detract from the shopping frontage and are prone to vandalism and fly-posting.

Wood Street is one-way (westwards) and some years ago the Council installed new paving, lighting, street-furniture and traffic-calming to improve safety and the pedestrian environment. However, the need to meet the differing requirements of traffic and pedestrians at the western end of Wood Street, has resulted in a prominent jumble of road signs, railings and road markings, which are not in keeping with area's historic character. Here, too, Queen Victoria House, a 1960s development, topped by an array of radio and phone masts, adds to the unattractive appearance of this pivotal location within the conservation area. Also, it is at this point that the adverse impact of heavy traffic is most keenly felt.



Photograph 16
Queen Victoria House
occupies an important pivotal
location at the centre of Old
Town.

The area of **Little London**, to the north, including Union Row, Albert Street and Church Road, has been much altered by redevelopment including Little London Court and Cricklade Court with associated car parking; however there remain several examples of vernacular buildings such as 1-4 Union Row and 8-14 Albert Street, which are typical early 19th century terraced housing constructed of local rubble-stone. A small vacant former chapel in Church Road is of local interest. Parts of the area, behind business and industrial premises have a neglected appearance.



Photograph 17
Albert St.- stone built cottages
date from the 19th century.

3.8 Summary of the Special Interest of Old Town Conservation Area

The special interest that justifies designation of Swindon Old Town Conservation Area derives from a number of architectural, historic and environmental factors including: -

- The area's archaeological interest - particularly from the prehistoric and Roman and Saxon period;
- The historic layout and street pattern dating from the 13th century;
- The early Victorian residential and commercial expansion of the town;
- The architectural and historic interest of the area's buildings, from the 17th century onwards (both its listed buildings and many others which have local importance);
- The prevalent use of local materials, notably locally quarried stone, red and blue brick;
- The proximity of the Lawn open space, with mature trees and historic monuments;
- The area's street trees;
- 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. Although the majority were residents of Town Gardens and Prospect Place Conservation Areas they used 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. There was 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 mainly related to traffic and street furniture. However broader concern about the loss of shops and need for high quality standards of architecture and materials in new development were also expressed.

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

5. Negative Features and Opportunities

The main detractions from the conservation area are:

- The amount of through traffic spoiling the environmental quality of Old Town.
- The need to manage traffic and balance the requirements of motorists and pedestrians, which has resulted in an obtrusive array of signs and street furniture
- Some modern development, especially but not exclusive to that dating from the 1960's and 1970's, which does not harmonise with the townscape and general character of the area.
- Unsympathetic repair and 'modernisation' of properties using inappropriate materials.

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 advice³² 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 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.

³² Guidance on the management of conservation areas - English Heritage and PAS (consultation draft 2006)

Issues / opportunities	Possible actions	Agency	Time Scale
General planning and development issues:			
Development needs to consider and reflect the local character of the area.	All applications to be considered according to Local Plan policies with specific reference to Chapter 3 – The Built Environment	SBC Planning Development Control / Conservation	O
Concerns about loss of retail premises in the Old Town	Implementation of SBC Local Plan policy on the District Centre and seek to retain retail uses.	SBC Planning Development Control	O
Appearance of shop fronts	Ensure that any new shop fronts comply with the SBC Shop Fronts Design Guide	SBC Planning Development Control / Conservation	O
Density of new development and resulting additional cars parking on-street	Implementation of Council's parking standards for new development.	SBC Planning Development Control	O
Traffic / highways issues:			
General maintenance and use of appropriate materials in the Conservation Area.	Liaise with Street Scene on a coordinated approach to street furniture and signage.	SBC Planning/ Highways/ Street Scene	M

Key

S = Short-term (0-12 months), M = Medium-term (12-24 months), L = Long-term (24-36 months), O = On-going.

Bibliography and further reading

- 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'
- Pevsner, N (1975) 'The Buildings of England –Wiltshire' Penguin (London)
- Wiltshire County Council (February 2000) 'The Archaeology of Wiltshire Towns – Swindon' Extensive Urban Survey
- 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 www.swindon.gov.uk)

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

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.

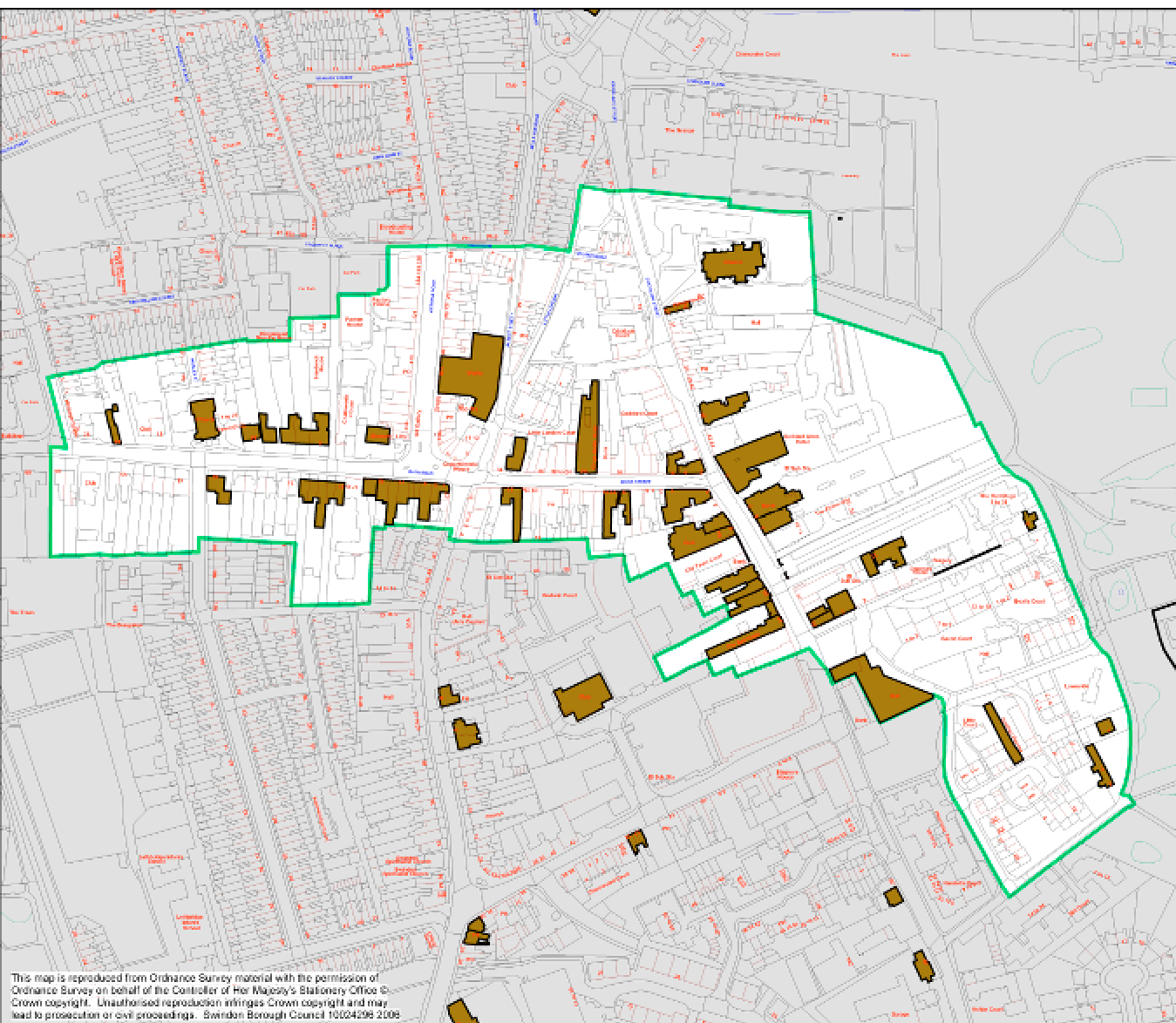
<http://www.swindon.gov.uk/environment/planning/environment-planning-conservation.htm>

Old Town 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.

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



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