

Highworth

Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan



- Conservation area designated on 8th October 1976
- Appraisal and management plan adopted 4th April 2006

This appraisal, management plan and the accompanying map has been prepared in collaboration with Highworth Parish Council. Swindon Borough Council's Planning Committee approved the document on 4th April 2006.

At the same time, the Committee authorised the Director of Planning and Transport to use the document for planning and development control purposes.

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Highworth Conservation Area Appraisal

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Introduction

Highworth Conservation Area was first designated by Wiltshire County Council on 8th October 1976. In June 1990 it was re-designated by Thamesdown Borough Council to take account of changes made to the alignment of the east end of Brewery Street in the 1980s and to reflect the current development pattern.

This document defines and records the special architectural or historic interest that warrants designation of Highworth Conservation Area and identifies elements that contribute to its special character and appearance.

Development proposals which affect the conservation area will be judged for their effect on the area's character and appearance as identified in this conservation area 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”¹

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.

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 2000. 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 Section 69 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990

Location

Highworth is situated in the north-eastern corner of Wiltshire about 9km north of Swindon. The principal route through the town is the A361 Swindon to Lechlade road. The A419 trunk road lies 6 km to the south-west of the town and provides a good connection to both M4 and M5 motorways. It can be reached via the A361 or the smaller B4019 to Blunsdon. The nearest railway station is at Swindon.

Origins and history

Archaeological and documentary evidence suggests that Highworth hill-top has seen almost continuous occupation for about 4,000 years².

In the Domesday Book Highworth is recorded as Wrde (Worth), reflecting a Saxon farmstead or enclosure. The epithet "High" was apparently not added until the town plan was laid out by charter of Edward II³ in the thirteenth century.

Highworth was a market town with agriculture being the main source of economic wealth and employment. By the middle of the 17th century Highworth's cattle market was the largest in Wiltshire and at the time of the first census in 1801, Highworth was the most important township in north-east Wiltshire with a population of over 2,000 - larger than either Swindon, Wootton Bassett or Cricklade. In common with the rest of England, the town's population continued to grow in the 19th century reaching a peak of 4,000 in 1841; thereafter it fell to about 2,000 in the early 1920s⁴.

The arrest of Highworth's growth can be attributed in part to the late 19th century expansion of Swindon. From the 1840s onwards, when the Great Western Railway works were established below the, then, small hill-top town of Swindon, Highworth's economy stood still, or actually declined and little new, or replacement, building took place in the town during the period 1840 -1920. The number of Victorian buildings in the town is therefore unusually small and the buildings of the town centre retain much of their pre-1840 Queen Anne and Georgian appearance.

² B.Lawton in A History of Highworth: Part 1 (Highworth Historical Society)

³ Wiltshire Towns: The Archaeological Potential - J. Haslam (1976)

⁴ A History of Highworth; Part I (Highworth Historical Society) p33-56

The town's economy improved in the early 1870s with the opening of the Oriental Fibre Mat and Matting Company in Brewery Street and, in 1883, with the arrival of a branch railway (closed 1953). Significant expansion, in the form of council housing outside the boundaries of the old town, did not begin again until the 1920s. As a result of a planned housing expansion from the 1960s onwards, the extent of the town has grown tenfold and its population has doubled since 1960.

References to more detailed histories of the town can be found in the attached bibliography.

Landscape setting and views from the conservation area

As its name implies Highworth, like old Swindon, is a hilltop town⁵. It is set in rural surroundings and occupies a pre-eminent position above the Upper Thames valley on a Corallian ridge that runs roughly east-west. The tower of St. Michael's Church is a local landmark from where there are extensive views stretching to the Wiltshire Downs, the Vale of White Horse in Oxfordshire and the Cotswolds in Gloucestershire.

From within the conservation area, the town's elevated position is not readily apparent because views to the wider landscape are restricted by recent housing estates on the west, north and east slopes of Highworth hill. There is open space to the south west of the conservation area - in recreational use as sports ground and golf course - but this is not visible from public places within the conservation area.

In the conservation area, the outlooks that best illustrate the old town's hill-top setting are the views to the north-east towards Coleshill and the Vale of White Horse, gained from the eastern end of Brewery Street by Parsonage Court and the corner of Cherry Orchard by the entrance to The Mews.

⁵ Standing 133 metres above sea level it is the highest town in Wiltshire.

Boundaries of the conservation area

The boundary of Highworth Conservation Area has been drawn to relate to the historic settlement pattern of the town. The conservation area covers the heart of the town before its post-war expansion - the 'old Highworth' described by John Betjeman in the 1950s as "one of the most charming and unassuming country towns in the west of England"⁶.

In addition to the medieval layout of parish church, market place and core streets (High Street, Sheep Street, Market Place, Vicarage Lane and Swindon Street), the conservation area includes the following three adjoining areas:

- ***Brewery Street and the medieval burgage plots to the south of the High Street.***

The land to the rear of the High Street, bounded by Swindon Street and Brewery Street, contains long, narrow strips of land that extend southwards from properties in the High Street. These strips of land are the remnants of medieval 'burgage plots' which originate from the time when the town was laid out in a regular pattern in the 13th century. These plots have been built on in various places but their predominant linear pattern is still very much evident⁷. The area has traditionally been the scene of local rural crafts and industries - initially small-scale but by the mid-19th century a substantial brewery (Sun Brewery) and a light engineering works (Hill's, then Bartrop's) were located in this area - both are now closed.⁸ A large new Co-op supermarket has now been built off Brewery Street that dominates this area. The building is single storey but is dominated by a large roof area that is not entirely in keeping with this area. The site is bounded by a number of rubble stone walls and these have been extended with new stone. The large tarmaced car park adjacent is an unfortunate consequence of our requirement for 'convenience' shopping.

⁶ 'Postscript from Highworth' in 'First and Last Loves', John Betjeman 1952

⁷ A recent application to develop a former burgage plot (for residential use) to the rear of the High Street has been approved (2005)

⁸ The former 'Vorda' factory site has now been demolished and is to be developed into low cost housing and sheltered housing. This area is just outside the boundary of the conservation area.

West of Swindon Street - The Elms, The Green, Cricklade Road and Westrop House.

The conservation area boundary encloses all properties in The Elms and The Green which is a distinctive area characterised by small 18th and 19th century cottages. A Planning Inspector has written: “the residential area of The Elms is a small enclave having the character and atmosphere of an earlier age and should, I consider, be protected for conservation reasons”.⁹ The listed Old School, in the angle of Swindon Road and Shrevenham Road is included in the conservation area because of its historic interest and visually important position at the lower end of Swindon Street.

Cricklade Road is the western approach to the town from Blunsdon and beyond. The conservation area’s western boundary is defined by an old stone wall that marked the former extent of the curtilage of Westrop House, a large dwelling built in the early 19th century for William Crowdy, a prominent local landowner. Westrop Cottage and its grounds, in which are to be found an ice house and garden chamber reached by curved underground vaulted passages, are fully included in the conservation area because of their architectural and landscape interest.¹⁰

- ***Eastrop, Parsonage Court, Cherry Orchard and the burgage plots north of Sheep Street.***

An east-west length of Cherry Orchard¹¹ forms the northern boundary of the conservation area beyond which begins the post-war expansion of the town. Land between Cherry Orchard and Sheep Street has the characteristics of burgage plots (see Brewery Street above) and the area contains a number of listed buildings and old stone walls.

Cherry Orchard forms part of the town’s historic street pattern but the road around Parsonage Court was constructed as part of a number of road alterations carried out in the 1980’s when Parsonage Farmhouse (grade II) and environs was redeveloped. Parsonage Court, comprising the listed farmhouse encircled by modern

⁹ Appeal statement re:28 Swindon Street; Ref: T/APP/X3920/A/92/199972/P8 June 1992

¹⁰ Open land to the East of Westrop House within a modern development in Oak Drive, is currently being proposed for development.

¹¹ Land to the North of Cherry Orchard, site of the former ‘Coopers’s Supermarket is to be developed into flats and apartments.

development and a high natural stone wall, relates to the old town rather than the modern housing estate to the north and is therefore included in the conservation area together with the green landscaped slope to the east that serves as a buffer between the old and the new.

Eastrop is included within the conservation area because, like the Elms and The Green, it is part of the historic development of the settlement and contains characteristic vernacular stone cottages. The boundary has been drawn to include roadside cottages and Eastrop Terrace (1892) - an example of late 19th century building in Highworth. To create a meaningful boundary, it has been necessary to include The Paddock - three modern bungalows which do not harmonise with their immediate surroundings.

Present day - facilities, activities, traffic.

As a result of a planned expansion of the town, Highworth has grown steadily over the last forty years with large housing estates to the north of the 'old town' on either side of the A361, an expansion not matched by equivalent growth in local employment. Today, Highworth is a thriving town with a population of approximately 8,000, many of whom work in Swindon and elsewhere.

Highworth town-centre is compact and focused on the High Street and Sheep Street. Here are to be found a wide range of shops and services - both those normally associated with a small town (e.g. bank, post office, chemist, newsagent, estate agent, local library) and a few specialist shops such as a saddlery, patisserie, garden and hardware and gift shops. There are a number of pubs, restaurants and fast food outlets, the latter are mainly to be found in Swindon Street. The town supports many community groups and activities, churches, four primary schools and a secondary school. There is a small industrial estate at Blackworth Road on the outskirts of the town.

Highworth sits beside a cross-roads where the north-south route through the town, the busy A 361 Swindon to Lechlade road (called Swindon Street as it passes through the town), crosses a lesser route, the B4109 between Faringdon and Blunsdon.

East-west traffic¹² is encouraged to avoid High Street and use Brewery Street, which was altered and upgraded c.1980 and is now classed as part of the B4109 Blunsdon to Faringdon road. A fifth road branches from the A 361 at a roundabout in the south of the town and heads towards Shrivenham.

There are regular bus services to Swindon and the town-centre can be reached by car in 20 minutes. The town actively promotes its historic and other attractions and is a good location as a touring base for the Upper Thames and Cotswolds - there are plenty of places to stay.

¹² The east-west route through the town, along the High Street, was once part of a coaching route between Oxford and Bath and from London to the west and - hence the coaching inns in the High Street.

General Character of Highworth Conservation Area.

Highworth town-centre has the character of a typical small English market town. Its bustling High Street contains a mix of shops and businesses facing each other across a roadway frequently lined with short-stay parked cars. The former market place is a generous central open space used for parking on weekdays and local market on Saturdays.

Since the High Street is not the main route through the town, the town's shopping centre does not suffer from the high levels of noise and air pollution faced by towns whose commercial core sits astride a main road. It is a relatively quiet and pleasant place to shop. However, the A361 has 'dissected' the town. This main road leads to larger towns in the Thames Valley such as Burford and Oxford to the North East. There is a noticeable lack of bustle in the High Street and retail activity in this area as a whole is more subdued than some of its neighbours such as Cricklade (of a similar size).

In contrast, Swindon Street, which is part of the A 361, suffers from constant daytime through traffic and has a less historic ambience except for the fine group of Georgian buildings on the cross-roads beside the Jesmond House Hotel. The street is mainly residential but contains a hotel, two pubs and a bed-and-breakfast and is also the location for a number of take-away food outlets. The street is unusually wide and can be difficult to cross. A controlled pedestrian crossing has recently been installed at the cross-roads.¹³

The conservation area as a whole is characterised by a mixture of old buildings, diverse in size, form and materials, and limited 20th century infill. Roadside stone walls and some very fine trees testify to the town's rural location. Away from the central area, the conservation area has a tranquil 'back-street' atmosphere.

Post 1960s housing estates on the outskirts of the town do not impinge on the appearance of the conservation area and the ensuing increase in population has brought trade to the town without spoiling the old town's distinctive character.

¹³ The conversion of the former Co-Op building on the corner of Swindon Street and the High Street has recently been applied for.

General Character of Highworth Conservation Area (continued)

In summary, the special interest that justifies designation of Highworth Conservation Area derives from a number of architectural, historic and environmental factors including -

- the town's historic layout and street pattern which dates from the 13th century;
- the architectural and historic interest of the area's buildings, 84 of which are listed;
- the prevalent use of local materials, notably local stone and red brick;
- the area's trees;
- stone boundary walls;
- local features and details that give the area its distinctive identity

Architectural and historic character.¹⁴

Highworth is an example of a medieval planned town, with market place, main street and a church behind, laid out in a regular pattern. The property boundaries of the original burgage plots are still clearly fossilised in the modern property boundaries behind High Street and Sheep Street.

Though the town's origins and basic layout are medieval, and many 16th and 17th century features survive, the town is most notable for its Queen Anne and Georgian buildings dating from the town's pre-eminence in the 18th century.

In 1952 John Betjeman wrote, "Highworth is extraordinary because it has more beautiful buildings than ugly ones".¹⁵ Today, there are no fewer than 84 listed buildings in the conservation area and the historic core remains remarkably unspoilt. Almost every building in the High Street, Market Place and Sheep Street area is listed. Most buildings date from the 18th century but many are based on earlier structures.

The medieval period is best represented by parts of St. Michael's Church and 16th century work can be found in The Old Manor¹⁶, dated 1656 but thought to incorporate a 15th century hall house. The King and Queen Inn and Chantry Cottage (Lechlade Road) contain 17th century features but it is Highworth's 18th century buildings which give the town its distinctive architectural character.

In Highworth, as in other growing market towns, the 18th century marked a movement away from traditional vernacular building to a more consciously designed 'polite' form of architecture. Many High Street facades are 18th century re-modellings of earlier buildings influenced by a classical sense of proportion and using, for example, recently introduced sliding sash windows and ornate eaves detail. Outbuildings and extensions to the rear of properties facing High Street and Sheep Street often look, and are, older than their frontage. The contrast between polite and vernacular architecture can be illustrated by comparing the High Street with The Elms and The Green.

¹⁴ See also 'A Hill-Top Town of Distinction' in *Country Life*, September 1971

¹⁵ 'Postscript from Highworth' in 'First and Last Loves' - John Betjeman (1952)

¹⁶ during recent renovations a fire place was discovered and dated to 1485 – Wiltshire Buildings Record.

High Street and Sheep Street contain the cream of the area's 18th century buildings but there is an outstanding Georgian group at the north end of Swindon Street (best viewed from High Street) which includes the Jesmond House Hotel and Highworth House. Inigo House in the High Street, is described by the noted architectural historian Nikolaus Pevsner as "the finest house of Highworth".¹⁷ These, and other less ambitious 18th century buildings, give Highworth a particular architectural distinction not found elsewhere in the Borough.

There is little Victorian, and later, building. Eastrop Terrace (1892) and Westhill Villas (Cricklade Road) are typical of their type and period, using imported slate and brick. Camrose House is built with local stone and red brick dressings but in a 'Victorian villa' style. Late 19th century building in the High Street (e.g. Market Place House and 8 High Street) retains the scale and character of earlier neighbouring building and blends well with the street scene.

Early 20th century council housing lies just outside the conservation area south of Brewery Street¹⁸. Post-war commercial development that marred many historic town-centres did not occur in Highworth. The conservation area contains some unexceptional 20th century building that, in most cases, has failed to preserve the historic character of the area. The Mews (Cherry Orchard) and Copper Beeches are an exception, built in natural stone and red brick with elements of vernacular detailing.

¹⁷ N.Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: Wiltshire*, Penguin, 1963

¹⁸ Park Avenue (1925); Kings Avenue (1936)

Building materials and local details.

Throughout old Highworth, houses, cottages and outbuildings are built from locally available stone and John Betjeman described the town in 1952 as “mostly a Cotswold-coloured place of pale grey stone”. The dominant local stone, quarried from sites in Eastrop and Westrop, is a shelly corallian ragstone which is visually and texturally quite distinct from the oolitic limestone usually associated with the Cotswolds.

Since John Betjeman’s description, the prevalence of stone in the street scene has been somewhat eroded by the use of render and exterior paint. There is little trace of traditional limewash. The town’s stone appearance is now most noticeable at the back of the High Street and Sheep Street.

Coursed or random rubble stone is commonly used for humble cottages, walls and outbuildings but buildings with greater architectural pretension, such as Gloucester House (6 High Street), Westrop House and the United Reformed Church, have facades of smooth ashlar with thin lime mortar joints. Throughout the area boundary and retaining walls of rough un-coursed rubble stone are common, an obvious use for low quality quarried stone. A good example, at Blandford Alley, is listed grade II.

Brick was manufactured nearby (one of the brickworks was on what is now Quarry Crescent) and Inigo House, Jesmond House Hotel and the Saracen’s Head exemplify 18th century brickwork at its best, using colour, texture and bonding to great decorative effect. As well as a walling material, local red brick is commonly used for chimneys, and for dressings and quoins where rubble stone was unsuitable for straight-edged details at corners, arches, window and door openings. This combination of stone and red brick is very evident in the cottages of Eastrop, The Elms and The Green.

Historically, roofs were covered with stone tiles or thatch. Today, only one building in the conservation area (Number 8 Brewery Street) retains a thatched roof. The legacy of the once extensive thatched roofs can still be seen in the characteristic rooflines with extended chimneys which are a feature of the town. Stone tiled roofs are still common, making a vital contribution to the distinctive stone coloured appearance of the area. From the nineteenth century onwards, as bulk transport

improved throughout the area, Welsh slate was imported and used on new buildings such as Eastrop Terrace or as a replacement for stone tiles, for example the roof of Church House in Sheep Street (1765) or The Old Manor (1652). Today, unfortunately, the ubiquitous and characterless concrete roof-tile is beginning to take a hold. Gabled roofs predominate.

Many different window designs are found in Highworth, but the two basic types are side-opening casements and vertical sliding sashes. Gabled dormer windows, wholly within the roof slope, are common throughout the area, especially in the High Street. Almost all dormers have a casement window made up of two lights (one fixed, one opening) with small panes of glass. Horizontal sliding windows known as Yorkshire sashes are present, for example in Burford House and Vorda House in Swindon Street. Red brick chimneys are common, adding to a lively roofscape of gables, variety of eaves levels and a mix of roofing materials.

Many houses once had railed enclosures to the front but these were removed during World War II. Some have now been replaced as at Inigo House and the United Reformed Church.

Key buildings of interest.¹⁹

English Heritage advice is that "most of the buildings in a conservation area will help to shape its character in one way or another".²⁰ In addition to the area's listed buildings, there are a number of other buildings which make a strong contribution to the architectural and historic interest of the area.

There are several good examples of local vernacular stone cottages: for example, Elm Cottage and Forge Cottage in the Elms, Numbers 8, 10, 11 The Green, The Laurels in Eastrop and Halfway Cottage (16 Cricklade Road) display typical features such as small timber casement windows, stone tiles and red-brick chimney stacks. Woodbine Cottage in Cherry Orchard is a typical stone and red brick construction but with unusual curved brickwork at the corners.

From the 19th century, Camrose House in Sheep Street is a large dwelling in stone and brick with ornate barge boards and tall brick chimney stacks. Westhill Villas

¹⁹See Swindon Borough Local Plan SPG: 'Buildings, Structures and Facades of Local Importance'.

²⁰'Conservation Area Appraisals' - English Heritage June 1997. Paragraph 2.2.

(Cricklade Road), Eastrop Terrace and Market Place House are typical red brick Victorian buildings. Number 28 Swindon Street is an Edwardian building with stone bay window and tiled entrance porch. Nearby, Number 13 The Elms is from the same period and has interesting diaper patterned brickwork

These, and other key buildings of historic and local interest, are identified on the attached map.

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Townscape - A Tour of the Conservation Area.

- ***The heart of Highworth: High Street, Sheep Street and The Market Place.***

The High Street slopes noticeably from west to east, narrowing from a width of 16 metres at its west end to less than 8 metres outside The Old Manor²¹. From midway along the street the view westwards is to the facade of the Jesmond House Hotel and looking east the view through the pinchpoint at The Old Manor is closed by trees in front of Parsonage Court. The heart of the conservation area appears fully enclosed - there are no views to a distant landscape and no sight of new building except for modern ground floor shopfronts.

The visual impression is one of historic buildings, mostly domestic in scale and strongly unified by age and a harmonious use of local building materials - stone, red brick and timber.

Buildings on the south side of High Street contain a mix of age, style and material. Most are two storey but numbers 6 (Gloucester House), 7, 17 and 24 (Inigo House) reach a full three storeys. Apart from these tall buildings most roof levels are low and ridges run parallel to the road, occasionally broken with a gable. Frontages generally occupy two bays but The Saracen's Head and The King and Queen Inn are wider and, curiously, 17 High Street is only one bay wide. Though buildings originated as dwellings, most now have shopfronts to the ground floor. Bay windows are common.

The north side of the High Street, from Swindon Street to Market Place, is a similar but less visually interesting frontage broken only by a single arched opening through which the south porch of St. Michael's church can be seen. The projecting porch of Number 35 (the former Cross Keys Inn) adds a significant feature to the eastward view along the High Street. From the other side of the street, the top of the church tower can be seen above the rooftops.

Number 40 High Street stands on a prominent corner site facing both High Street and Market Place. Opposite, across the market place, stands Number 46 High Street, a complex building with a mid 19th century front to a building of 17th century origins. The location of this block, which reduces the width of High Street and

Sheep Street and appears to intrude into the market place, suggests that the buildings may have been a late 'encroachment' into a once larger medieval market place.

The dark brown stone walling (with black mortar joints) and stone tiled roof of Number 46, seen in the same view as the lighter coloured stone of 2/3 Sheep Street, help to make stone the prevailing characteristic of this end of the town-centre - in contrast to the brick, painted stone and render that distinguishes the western end of High Street.

The openness of the market place enables relatively distant views of the old buildings that overlook the space, giving them a greater presence in the street scene and emphasising the visual interest of the roofscape - the red brick chimneys and stone tiled dormers of Number 46 (and buildings to rear) are a lively composition.

Turning to face Sheep Street, there are no gables to the street and less diversity of eave and ridge height than found in High Street. Buildings have a domestic scale, two storey with dormers. Numbers 2/3 Sheep Street and 9 Sheep Street (Church House) are typical mid 18th century stone town houses with well proportioned sash windows but lacking the overall classical design present in Inigo House and Jesmond House which date from the same period. They act as a pair of 'bookends' to the street in between which stand less distinguished buildings with a rendered or painted finish.

- ***Swindon Street.***

Swindon Street is unusually wide - its origins lie as a cattle drove road between Exmoor and the Midlands and apparently there was once a row of cottages built down the centre²². The generous width gives the street a spacious character and helps to soften the impact of heavy traffic on the local environment. From the south, one notes a slight westerly curve and, just before the sudden narrowing of the road below the brow of the hill, the flat topped bulk of Highworth House dominates the northward view. Looking southwards the view is closed by the bellcote and high slate roof of The Old School.

²¹ The Old Manor has been converted to a number of residential dwellings in 2004

²² See 'Reminiscence of Highworth' in History of Highworth: Part 1 (Highworth Historical Society)

The east side has a continuous frontage, broken only by one narrow opening leading to the rear. Buildings, mostly dwellings, are generally two or two-and-a-half storey, dating from the 18th and 19th century - numbers 4 to 10 are listed grade II. Though some buildings have been substantially altered the eastern side of Swindon Street retains a cohesive historic character. The Fox Inn occupies a prominent position at the southern gateway to the town.

On the western side of the Swindon Street significant gaps in the frontage and incongruous single storey buildings give the frontage a discordant appearance with a less historic character than the other (east) side of the street. At the northern end of the street is a redevelopment of a farmstead that once stood in the angle of Cricklade Road and Swindon Street. Maroubra (a former threshing barn) and Number 33 Swindon Street were farm buildings that retain much of their historic interest but Greyweathers, a 1970s dwelling which occupies the site of an ancient farmhouse (hence its awkward relationship to the street), is quite out of character with its neighbours.

A well kept row of old houses (28-32 Swindon Street) and two lime trees in the 'garden' enhance the appearance of the street.

- ***St. Michael's Church and Vicarage Lane.***

St. Michael's Church is enclosed on three sides and stands in a well stocked grassy graveyard amongst ancient yews and numerous headstones and table tombs from the 17th to the 19th century.

The best full view of the church is from St. Michael's Avenue but its tall perpendicular west tower can be glimpsed over rooftops from a number of spots; along Sheep Street, from the corner of Cherry Orchard, at the top of Cricklade Road, the south side of the High Street, Blandford Alley. Views of the church add to the special interest of the area.

Adjoining the parish church and secluded by high stone walls is The Old Rectory, a grade II listed building. There are several mature trees within its grounds and there are lime trees growing in the carriageway of Vicarage Lane adjacent to the stone wall, which is also listed grade II. Vicarage Lane is narrow and tortuous with restricted vehicular access and no footway. The residential properties either abut or are positioned very closely to the carriageway.

- ***Brewery Street and medieval burgage plots to the south of the High Street.***

The burgage area south of High Street is characterised by a medieval burgage plot pattern, defined by stone walls, narrow lanes and archways linking the area to the High Street. Much of the area has taken on an air of neglect with redundant buildings, unused or under-used land and some uses no longer appropriate in such a central location.

Almost all buildings on the south side of the High Street have gabled stone extensions and outbuildings squeezed into the narrow burgage plots close to the host building. Buildings are on, and in many instances actually form, the boundaries of the plots. As one moves away from the High Street development of the plots becomes less dense.

To the west, there is an open area of lawn and neglected tennis court.²³ East of this, beside Blandford Alley, a number of modern brick-fronted houses sit uneasily amidst old and predominantly stone outbuildings. On the other side of Blandford Alley lies the unkempt site of the former Sun Brewery. This site, and the adjacent former Bartrop's engineering premises, await sensitive redevelopment²⁴. Further east, behind the Saracen's Head and The Old Manor, the area again becomes more open but a modern bungalow (Penbury) intrudes into the burgage pattern.

- ***The Elms, The Green, Cricklade Road and Westrop House.***

On Cricklade Road the conservation area begins at the entrance to Copper Beeches, a development of six modern stone houses in a dell on the site of the stables of Westrop House. Opposite this a line of mature beech trees form part of a well tree'd entrance to the town and a little further along two modern (1970s) 'chalet bungalows' have been built - though out of harmony with their surroundings, their visual impact on the area is lessened by their location set back beyond a low roadside stone wall.

Before the junction with Swindon Street, a characterful red brick terrace of three full storeys overlooks the crossroads. From here, one can see the tower of St. Michael's Church.

²³ Recent application granted for residential redevelopment.

Opposite Westrop House a narrow street, The Elms, leads to a small but distinctive area of vernacular town cottages in a haphazard layout beside two short, narrow lanes that link Swindon Street and The Elms. The Green consists of a row of similar cottages facing a short L-shaped street that once led into the lower end of Swindon Street but is now a cul-de-sac. Throughout the area, buildings are generally two storey with small window openings often with dormers and brick chimneys. Buildings have been renovated and altered but the area retains a rustic character in marked contrast to the Georgian elegance of the High Street.

- ***Eastrop, Parsonage Ct, Cherry Orchard and burgage plots of Sheep Street.***

On leaving the eastern end of the High Street one emerges into a spacious but characterless area: on the left the high stone wall surrounding Parsonage Court, on the right an area of land²⁵ occupied by a brick public convenience and a car park. The harshness of this scene is alleviated by a row of tall sycamores overlooking the car park behind which can be glimpsed a row of old stone cottages, one of which (Borreass Cottage, Number 2) is a listed building. Given the likely impermanence of the public convenience, this is an area where significant enhancements can be made in the future. The over abundance of poorly maintained tarmac and gravel surfaces significantly reduces the impact of this part of the conservation area.

After the mini-roundabout, one passes The Laurels, a historic stone building with stone tiled roof and unusually tall brick chimney stacks, then a row of roadside cottages in stone with brick dressings. The last buildings in the conservation area are Eastrop Terrace, a short, slightly elevated terrace end-on to the western side of the road, and Shamba, an old cottage, altered and extended.

On the corner of Sheep Street and Cherry Orchard, Camrose House, set behind a stone wall and three beech trees, breaks the strong back-of-pavement building line of Sheep Street. This is one of only two sites in the town where the street frontage of the burgage plots has been altered²⁶.

Within the Sheep Street burgage plots (which have much in common with the Brewery Street plots - see above), stone walls divide narrow strips of land that

²⁴ This site is now the new Co-op Supermarket

²⁵ This area, bisected by the 1980s extension to Brewery Street, was once occupied by a large tythe barn which was demolished c.1911. Stone from the barn was used for the foundations of the war memorial.

²⁶ See also the United Reformed Church, High Street.

extend to Cherry Orchard - to the west the plots have an open character but sites to the east are “quite intensively developed in depth, both by older traditional buildings and some recent infill housing at the corner of the street block”.²⁷

This recent infill housing is The Mews, a small housing development built on the land once occupied by stone outbuildings to the rear of Camrose House²⁸. Some of the houses are conversions of former buildings, others are constructed from reclaimed stone and brick.

Trees.

Highworth Conservation Area, being primarily urban, does not contain many trees but those trees that are present, mostly specimen trees in the gardens of the area's larger properties, make a significant and positive contribution to the character and appearance of the area.

Of particular note are the trees behind the Brewery Street car park, the pollarded limes and the yews in the churchyard, the three beeches at Camrose House, the two limes in The Garden (Swindon Street) and individual specimens at Westrop House. The plane tree on the podium occupies a prominent position but is still young and relatively small.

Those trees, and groups of trees, which are particularly prominent and make a positive contribution to the conservation area are identified on the attached map. It has not been possible to identify every notable tree and lack of a specific reference should does not imply that it must not be of value.

All trees within conservation areas are covered by the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. In most cases, anyone proposing to do work on a tree in a conservation area (which is not already protected by a Tree Preservation Order) must give the Council six weeks notice, unless it can be shown that immediate danger threatens.

²⁷ Planning Inspector re appeal on proposal for land to the rear of 35 Cherry Orchard (T//U3935/A/97/289539/P5)

²⁸ This area was the site of a progressive 1920s milk processing factory.

Local details and 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. It is highly desirable that these features are retained.

- **Local stone:** Throughout the conservation area, the use of local stone helps to give the area its distinct identity. Boundary and retaining walls of natural stone, particularly those which divide the burgage plots behind the High Street and Sheep Street, have special interest. Highly visible lengths of stone wall facing Brewery Street are also notable.
- **Floorscape:** The floorscape of the conservation area is generally a black tarmac surface to both road and footway but there are areas where an earlier cobbled paving surface remains, for example at 2 and 3 Sheep Street, The King and Queen Inn and along Vicarage Lane. Kerbs of Sarsen stone, a local stone noted for its durability, are common throughout the area. Stone setts and stone kerbs complement the natural stone used in buildings and walls and add to the character of the area. It is important to ensure that these traditional kerb stones are retained during Highway improvement works. This is especially true where dropped kerbs are introduced. The insertion of 'foreign' materials such as coloured concrete tactile paving can impact on the floorscape within a conservation area. Efforts must be made to ensure that more appropriate materials and methods are used.
- **Roofscape:** The conservation area has a distinctive and lively roofscape. Tall brick chimney stacks with clay pots, gabled dormers, variety in ridge and eaves height and detailing, decorative Georgian parapets and a range of colour, texture and pattern of roof coverings, including the characteristic diminishing courses of stone slates, contribute to an interesting spectacle - the roofscape of the Jesmond House group viewed from Swindon Street is a good example. It is important therefore to ensure that where roof slopes are being repaired that traditional materials are used in keeping with this area. Cheaper and alien roofing materials will often clash against the more traditional materials.
- **Views within the conservation area:** St Michael's church tower is a prominent local landmark within the town as well as from afar. Glimpses of the tower from, for

example, Cricklade Road, Sheep Street, Cherry Orchard and the south side of High Street enhance the special interest of the area. Similarly, the view of the Jesmond House Hotel grouping is a characteristic view of Highworth that should be preserved.

- The 'podium': A raised area in the market place is known as 'the podium'. It marks the base of The Rifleman's Arms public house which was demolished in 1950 after a fire²⁹.
- The 'garden' at the south end of Swindon Street was originally associated with the manse for the chapel in The Elms. It was given to the Borough Council for use as a public garden and provides a unique area of public open space in the conservation area.
- Archways: Arched former cart entrances to the back of properties on High Street and Sheep Street are a particular feature of the conservation area. Some have been blocked, as at The Saracen's Head and The King and Queen Inn, but the archway leading to the church at Number 34 High Street and another at 2/3 Sheep Street remain in use. Pedestrian access is through small openings, not much bigger than a door, as at Gilbert's Alley and Blandford Alley.
- Shopfronts: A few old shopfronts survive, incorporating traditional elements of stall-riser, pilaster and fascia in a classical design, for example Numbers 17 and 23 High Street. No 23 has undergone recent repairs to the external fabric and elevations.
- Other: A pumphead at The King and Queen Inn have local interest. (The pumphead in Gilbert's Alley was placed here some 20 years ago).³⁰

²⁹ See cover photograph and figure 54 in 'A History of Highworth: Part 2' (Highworth Historical Society) .

³⁰ An ancient boundary stone at the junction of Gilbert's Alley and Brewery Street was removed during the development of the Co-Op supermarket.

Negative elements

The conservation area contains a small amount of late 20th century housing infill which, being small in scale, has a limited visual impact on the area but Greyweathers, Swindon Street and 11/11a Cricklade Road are noticeably uncharacteristic. At the rear of No. 8 Sheep Street, a two storey 1970s building, apparently occupying the site of former brewery buildings, intrudes upon the burgage plots and is constructed with inappropriate buff brick. . A new development on the site of the former Vorda works is to be built in the near future. This site is just outside the conservation boundary but the impact of this development will be seen in the vicinity of Brewery Street.

The levels of traffic on Swindon Road are increasingly making this area very congested with the obvious knock on effects of noise and pollution. This road links Lechlade to Swindon. Brewery Street has been upgraded to reduce to levels of traffic going through the main High Street.

The former site of the Co-op shop on the corner of High Street and Swindon Street has still yet to be developed.³¹ This very visible site on the corner of High Street and Swindon Street is a key landmark building in this area and could be vastly improved. The property at the moment is boarded up and detracts from this area.

The car parks to the east of the High Street either side of Brewery Street provide a useful source of custom for the shops within the High Street area. However both these areas remain very visible from the road and little effort has been made to reduce their impact on the conservation area. The recycling facility (whilst important and necessary) adds to the rather run down look of this area. Given the importance of ensuring the long term viability of the High Street it is vital to balance the commercial needs of the area against the needs of the historic environment.

Scope for enhancement

Overhead power and telephone lines, intrusive road markings, redundant signage and inappropriate street furniture all detract from the visual amenity of the conservation area. An environmental audit, followed by removal of gratuitous clutter

³¹ Development of site is likely to go ahead following a successful appeal by the applicant.

and an agreed co-ordinated approach to new proposals, would significantly enhance the area.

In Brewery Street the old road alignment is preserved and marked by an old stone wall. An electricity substation stands in the small area of land formed between the old and new road. The appearance the area could be improved by landscaping and screening of the substation.

Useful publications

Wiltshire Towns: The Archaeological Potential. J. Haslam (1976)

Around Highworth in old photos. G.Tanner (1991) Highworth. G.Tanner (1993)

A Hill-Top Town of Distinction. B. Little, Country Life, 1971

The Archaeology of Wiltshire's Towns, An Extensive Urban Survey: Highworth Wilts County Archaeological Service (2000)

A history of Highworth; Parts 1,2 and 3. Highworth Historical Society

The villages and Highworth . P.J.Archer (1978)

Highworth and round about. P.J.Archer (1973)

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.

HIGHWORTH TOWN CONSERVATION AREA MANAGEMENT PLAN

MANAGEMENT ISSUES	POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS	ACTIONS REQUIRED
<i>Planning & Design</i>		
<p><i>Existing Modern Development</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some existing properties -Swindon Street, Greyweathers - 11 & 11a Cricklade Rd -Property to rear of 8 Sheep Street <p>are uncharacteristic of area.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Possible future enhancement of properties when/if planning permission is applied for. • Ensure future development proposals are strictly controlled in terms of design and materials 	<p>Consultation with:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning & conservation department
<p><i>Future Development</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Burgage plot to rear of 23 & 24 High Street • Former Vorda Factory Site. • Former Co-Op' store on Swindon Street. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consent granted for development of existing redundant buildings on site for domestic use. • Consent granted for sheltered accommodation scheme. • Site proposed for redevelopment for residential use. Site still vacant and boarded up. Negative impact on street scene environment. An appeal has allowed redevelopment of the site 	<p>Consultation with:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning & conservation department <p>Consultation with:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning & conservation department <p>Consultation with:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning & conservation department

MANAGEMENT ISSUES	POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS	ACTIONS REQUIRED
<i>Public Realm & Amenity</i>		
Signage & street furniture		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Street directional signs around conservation area are damaged and dirty • Inappropriate colour for waste bins, especially within sensitive High Street.. • Pavements and tarmac surfaces poorly detailed and laid in places • Inappropriate, insensitive signage over fast food outlets on Swindon Street. • Inappropriate street lighting units along High Street. Insensitively detailed to Listed front elevations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Replacement and or cleaning of existing road signs. Clearer directional signs required to direct pedestrians and car users to High Street. • Remove unsightly waste bins and provide more sensitive units. • Enhancement scheme implemented to improve ‘floorscape” to pavement areas. • Clearer advice and consultation in relation to advertising consents. • Removal of obsolete street signage where appropriate. • Liaise with Highways department to ascertain viability of more permanent solution to street lighting. Cellar areas under pavements present stability issue. 	<p>Consultation with:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning & conservation department <p>&</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Liaison and co-operation with SBC traffic management & highways

MANAGEMENT ISSUES	POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS	ACTIONS REQUIRED
Public Realm & Amenity		
<i>Shops & Retail</i>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Highworth has numerous independent shops. Some units are vacant. Co-op supermarket retains a presence in Brewery Street A number of shops in the High Street do require immediate repairs to external fabric (Former Dillons newsagents) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continued monitoring of listed and historic buildings in need of repair. Ascertain ownership of affected buildings Consider street enhancement scheme to encourage better patronage of area 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continued dialogue with building owners to encourage maintenance. Consider possible enforcement action where necessary through SBC
<i>Parking</i>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Controlled parking along High Street remains under SBC management Parking within Market Square is regulated by Town Council. Free parking is maintained to carparks at junction of Eastrop and Brewery Street Increased levels of parking within the High Street area leads to periodic congestion during busy hours. Existing parking regulations allow no return within 1 hour. 	<p>Existing parking arrangements appears to work satisfactorily. Amenity and environment to free parking areas is poor. Recycling facility is well maintained and used. Trees adjacent staining containers, Environment to car park on former library site also impacts negatively on conservation area</p> <p>Clearer parking restrictions should be in place combined with robust parking enforcement</p>	<p>Liaison and co-operation with SBC traffic management & highways safety.</p> <p>Proposals need to be put forward and considered by Town Council and SBC to improve these areas and retain car parking provision.</p>
<i>Continued...</i>		

Traffic

- Most traffic by-passes retail area via Swindon Street & Brewery Street.
- High Street has lower amounts of traffic. This has knock on effect of lower 'foot fall' to some shops and units
- Traffic within High Street area can get congested, especially within bottleneck at east end of High Street

Existing traffic scheme works well to deflect traffic away from sensitive historic areas. Better signage and information should be provided to encourage use of High Street area. Removal/replacement of damaged street and road signage.

Assess traffic flows and movements, and existing parking enforcement. Review delivery times for larger vehicles. Assess if 'one-way' traffic flow would impact positively on High Street

Liaison and co-operation with SBC traffic management & highways safety.