

SWINDON'S RAILWAY CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL AND MANAGEMENT PLAN

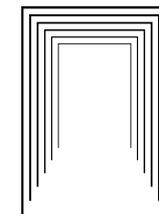
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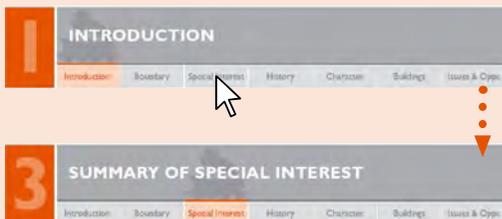
HOW TO USE THIS DOCUMENT



Navigation

For ease of use this document has been produced to be read on-screen. It contains a series of features that make it easier to use and navigate between the different parts.

To go to a different section of the document, simply use your mouse to click on the name of the section you would like to look at. The document will automatically navigate you to the correct page.



Within the text, anything highlighted in blue is a hyperlink. Click on it with your mouse to navigate to the desired destination.

see the ['Further Information and Sources'](#) section



Abbreviations

The abbreviations are used within this document are listed below:

- CAAMP** Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan
- CMP** Conservation Management Plan
- DCMS** Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport
- GWR** Great Western Railway
- HAZ** Heritage Action Zone
- HER** Historic Environment Record
- NHLE** National Heritage List for England
- QR Code** Quick Response Code
- TA** Territorial Army
- UTC** Swindon University Technical College



NHLE List Entry Numbers

The List Entry numbers for listed buildings within Swindon's Railway Conservation Area are referenced in brackets where the building is first named in the document. Details of where to find the relevant list entries can be found in ['Further Information and Sources'](#).



FAQs: General Questions

What is a Conservation Area?
See [Section 1.1](#)

How do I find out if a building is statutorily listed?
See [Plan 9](#)

What are the boundaries of Swindon's Railway Conservation Area?
See [Section 2](#), [Plan 2](#)

What is a Conservation Area Appraisal & Management Plan?
See [Section 1.4](#)

How do I find out which character area a building is in?
See [Plan 8](#)

How do I find out if a building is a non-designated heritage asset (i.e. positive building)?
See [Plan 9](#)

What are the problems facing the Conservation Area?
See [Section 7](#)

Where can I find more sources of information about the Conservation Area?
See [Section 9](#)

What is the overall special interest of Swindon's Railway Conservation Area?
See [Section 3](#)

How does the conservation area designation affect changes that can be made to buildings?
See [Section 8.2](#)

Where can I find advice and guidance about making alterations or extension to a building?
See [Section 8.3](#)

How do I find out if a building is within the Conservation Area?
See [Plan 2](#)

Where are there opportunities to enhance the Conservation Area's special interest?
See [Section 7](#)

What characteristics contribute to the special interest of the Conservation Area?
See [Section 5](#)

PREFACE



Swindon is undergoing a period of exciting regeneration and has strong potential for growth and economic success. In recent decades the town has transformed itself from one dominated by the railway industry, to one with a prosperous mix of industries. However, Swindon would not be the town it is today without the railway works. Its railway heritage continues to be a vital part of the town's identity and a source of pride for many. The legacy of Swindon's railway heritage is a valuable asset on which to anchor the towns future development and is deservedly protected by its designation as Swindon's Railway Conservation Area.

This review of Swindon's Railway Conservation Area has been undertaken as part of a wider project, the Swindon Heritage Action Zone (HAZ), which is aimed at aiding understanding and raising awareness of Swindon's railway heritage. This project, funded by Historic England, will use the unique special interest of Swindon's railway heritage as a catalyst to unlock and boost economic growth which will, in turn, have a positive effect on the wellbeing of residents and visitors.

Swindon's Railway Conservation Area encompasses the highly significant former Great Western Railway (GWR) works, Swindon Railway Station as well as the internationally important railway village and associated development along Faringdon Road.

The GWR company's decision to locate their railway works at Swindon was fundamental to the success and growth of the town historically and continues to be important today.

The former GWR works are part of one of the most significant surviving historic railway establishments in the world. Founded in 1842, the works were in operation for nearly 150 years.

Fig. 1: The Long Shop in the former railway works presents an impressive 200m elevation to the railway line and is a landmark along the journey into Swindon by rail

PREFACE



Fig. 2: The railway village comprises vernacular workers cottages such as these in Taunton Street

The Railway Works were designated as a conservation area in 1987 in recognition of the national and international importance of what has been called “one of Britain’s finest monuments to the early days of the railway age.”⁰¹

Swindon’s railway village, built by the GWR company to satisfy the needs of its workforce, is one of the most significant industrial housing estates of its period and has been described as “an almost complete planned railway settlement of the 1840s and early 1850s, unrivalled in its state of preservation by Crewe, Wolverton and Derby, England’s other surviving railway company settlements.”⁰² The village was designated as a conservation area in 1975.

These two areas, village and works, are intrinsically linked in their origins, purpose and significance and have therefore been re-designated as a single conservation area in recognition of this. The Conservation Area has also been extended to incorporate further areas closely associated with the railway works and village, which strengthen the special interest of the Conservation Area.

In addition to supporting the Swindon HAZ objectives, this Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan (CAAMP) will assist the Council in undertaking its statutory duty of preserving and enhancing the special interest of the area and will be a tool to assist residents and developers.

This conservation area appraisal and management plan was adopted on 13th April 2021.

⁰¹ John Cattell & Keith Falconer, *Swindon: the Legacy of a Railway Town* (Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England, 1995)

⁰² Ibid

1.1 WHAT IS A CONSERVATION AREA?

A conservation area is defined as an “area of special architectural or historic interest the character or appearance of which is it desirable to preserve or enhance.”⁰¹

⁰¹ Section 69 (1), *Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990*

1.1.1 Designation of a conservation area recognises the unique quality of that area as a whole. This quality comes not only from individual buildings and monuments but also other features, including (but not limited to) topography, materials, thoroughfares, street furniture, open spaces and landscaping. These all contribute to the character and appearance of an area, resulting in a distinctive local identity and sense of place.

1.1.2 The extent to which a building, or group of buildings / structures, positively shape the character of a conservation area is derived from their exteriors, principally those elevations which are street-facing but also side and rear elevations, integrity of their historic fabric, overall scale and massing, detailing and materials. Open spaces can be public or private, green or hard-landscaped and still contribute to the special interest of an area. Furthermore, the spaces between buildings, such as alleys, streets and paths all contribute to appearance and character.

1.1.3 Swindon’s Railway Conservation Area was designated in 2020, having previously been two separate conservation areas designated in 1975 and 1987, respectively. See [Section 2.0](#) for the location and boundaries of the Conservation Area.

1.2 WHAT DOES CONSERVATION AREA DESIGNATION MEAN?

1.2.1 To protect and enhance conservation areas, any changes that take place must conserve, respect or contribute to the character and appearance which makes the conservation area of special interest. In order to ensure this, Development Rights exist within conservation areas. In practice, this means that Planning Permission is needed for works which materially affect the external appearance of a building or feature.⁰² The restrictions include those relating to demolition, new openings and some types of extension. In addition works to trees are also controlled. Further details can be found in the Management Plan ([Section 8.0](#)) of this document.

1.3 PLANNING LEGISLATION, POLICY AND GUIDANCE

1.3.1 Planning legislation, policy and guidance is utilised when considering development or other changes within Swindon’s Railway Conservation Area. This is to ensure that proposals seek to preserve or enhance the area’s character and appearance, including its setting.

1.3.2 The primary legislation governing conservation areas is the *Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990*. The Act defines what a conservation area is and is the legislative mechanism for ensuring their preservation and enhancement.

1.3.3 *The National Planning Policy Framework (2019)* sets out the overarching requirement for local planning authorities to identify and protect areas of special interest (paragraph 185). Government guidance on the historic environment is found within the relevant section of the *National Planning Practice Guidance*.

⁰² Permitted Development Rights, as defined by *The Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015*, are works which can be undertaken without the need to gain Planning Permission.

1.3.4 The *Swindon Borough Local Plan (2015)* sets out the Council's own policies which guide development within the Borough, including policies and guidance for protecting and enhancing the historic environment including conservation areas (Policy EN10).⁰³

1.3.5 In addition to these legislative and policy requirements, this CAAMP has been prepared in line with the following best practice guidance published by Historic England, the public body who manage the care and protection of the historic environment:

- *Conservation Area Appraisal, Designation and Management: Historic England Advice Note 1 (Second Edition)* (February 2019)
- *Conservation Principles, Policies and Guidance* (April 2008)
- *The Setting of Heritage Assets Good Practice Advice in Planning Note 3 (Second Edition)* (December 2017)
- *Statements of Heritage Significance: Analysing Significance in Heritage Assets Historic England Advice Note 12* (October 2019)

1.3.6 Historic England have additional information in regard to the historic environment, including caring for and making sensitive changes to historic buildings see the '[Further Information and Sources](#)' section of this document for more information.

1.3.7 The Council also have further guidance documents relating to specific topics such as archaeology and shopfronts which provide detailed advice. See '[Further Information and Sources](#)' for details.

1.4 PURPOSE AND SCOPE OF THIS CAAMP

1.4.1 Understanding the character and significance of conservation areas is essential for managing change within them. It is therefore a requirement under the *Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990* that all local planning authorities "*formulate and publish proposals for the preservation and enhancement*" of conservation areas within their jurisdiction, and that these proposals are periodically reviewed.⁰⁴

1.4.2 The proposals are normally presented in the form of a CAAMP, which defines and records the special interest of a conservation area, as well as setting out a plan of action for its on-going protection and enhancement.

1.4.3 Conservation areas may be affected by direct physical change, by changes to their setting or in the uses of buildings or areas within them. A clear definition of those elements which contribute to the special architectural or historic interest of a place will enable the development of a robust policy framework for the future management of that area, against which development applications can be considered.

1.4.4 Over time, conservation areas evolve and the characteristics which underpin their special interest may decrease in their integrity because of gradual alteration. It is therefore important to review and take stock of the character of a conservation area at intervals to ensure designation is still suitable and that the proper management of change is in place. Furthermore, our understanding or appreciation of what is special about an area can change over time, meaning that it is important to review the boundaries of conservation areas and include / exclude buildings and spaces which do / do not contribute to and reinforce the conservation area designation.

⁰³ The *Swindon Borough Local Plan* is currently under review (2020)

⁰⁴ Section 71 (1), *Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990*

1.4.5 Although this CAAMP is intended to be comprehensive, the scale and complexity of the Conservation Area means that specific mention cannot be made of every building or feature. The omission of any building, structure, feature or space does not imply that the element is not significant or does not positively contribute to the character and special interest of the Conservation Area. The protocols and guidance provided in the Management Plan ([Section 8.0](#)) are applicable in every instance.

1.4.6 The assessments which provide the baseline information for this CAAMP have been carried out utilising publicly available resources and thorough on-site analysis from the publicly accessible parts of the Conservation Area.

1.5 CONSULTATION AND ENGAGEMENT

1.5.1 It is a statutory requirement under the *Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990* for conservation area guidance produced by or on behalf of the Council to be subject to public consultation, including a public meeting, and for the local authority to have regard of the views expressed by consultees.⁰⁵

1.5.2 During the early preparations of this CAAMP, consultation was undertaken with local residents and other stakeholders through a series of interactive workshops and a questionnaire. Six-week consultation followed (ending November 2020) and revisions made to the document were subsequently made. The results of this consultation have informed the preparation of this document.

⁰⁵ Section 71 (1), *Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990*



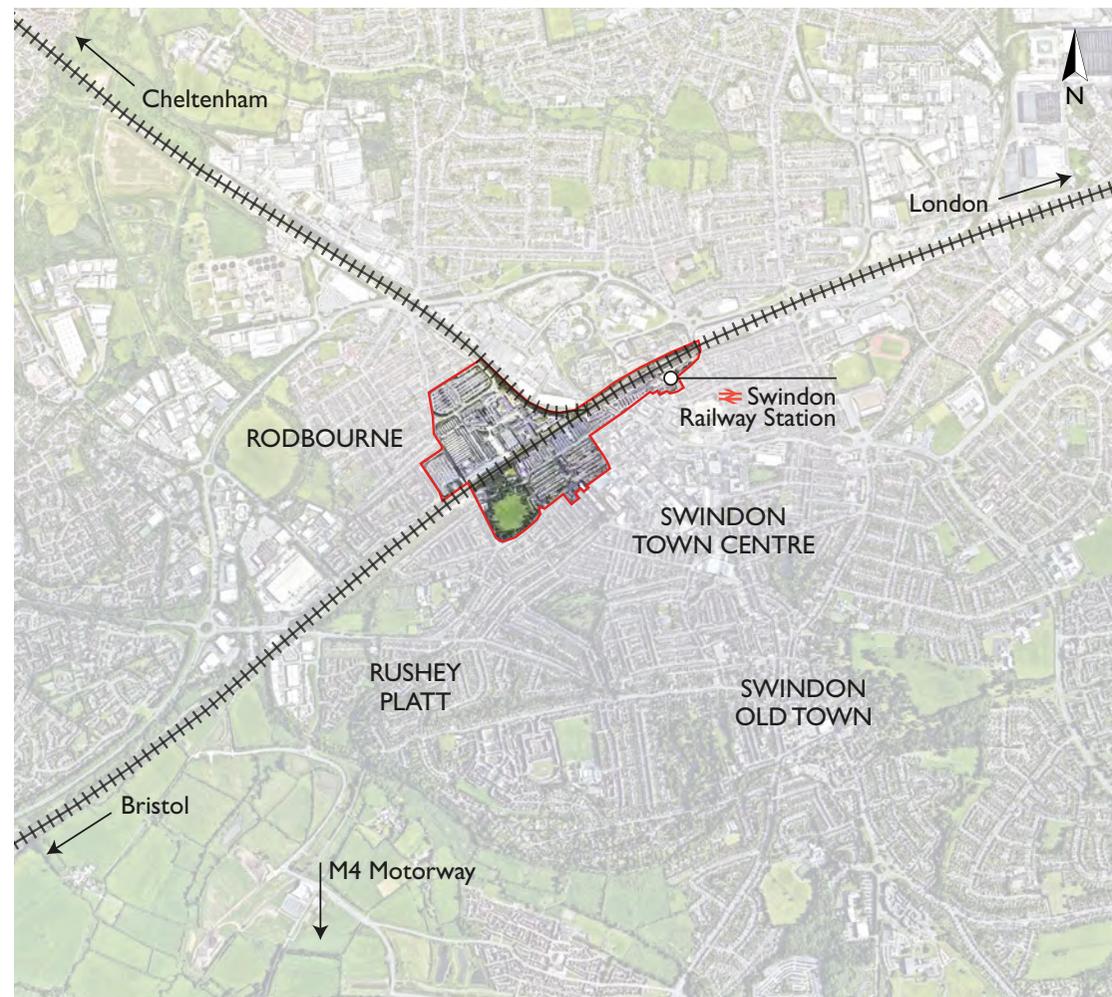
Fig. 3: Public engagement workshop with local residents and interest groups

2.1 LOCATION OF SWINDON'S RAILWAY CONSERVATION AREA

2.1.1 Swindon is the largest settlement in Wiltshire, located at the north-east corner of the county, roughly equidistant from Reading to the east and Bristol to the west. The town is located close to the M4 motorway and has excellent transport links by both road and rail while retaining a rural setting. Of considerable relevance is the London to Bristol railway line which bisects the town, and at a local level, bisects Swindon's Railway Conservation Area.

Growing from a small market town in the mid-19th century, the arrival and success of the railway industry has seen the town of Swindon grow to a current population of around 190,000 people.

2.1.2 Swindon's Railway Conservation Area is an urban conservation area located between the town centre of Swindon to the south-east and the residential suburbs of the town, including Rodbourne to the north-west. The Bristol to London railway line, all important to the area's special interest, divides the conservation area in two, separating the village to the south and former railway works to the north. **Plan 1** shows the location of the Conservation Area within its wider context.



Plan 1: Location of Swindon's Railway Conservation Area.

Image © 2020 Getmapping plc.

Key

- Swindon Railway Conservation Area Boundary
- +- Railway Line

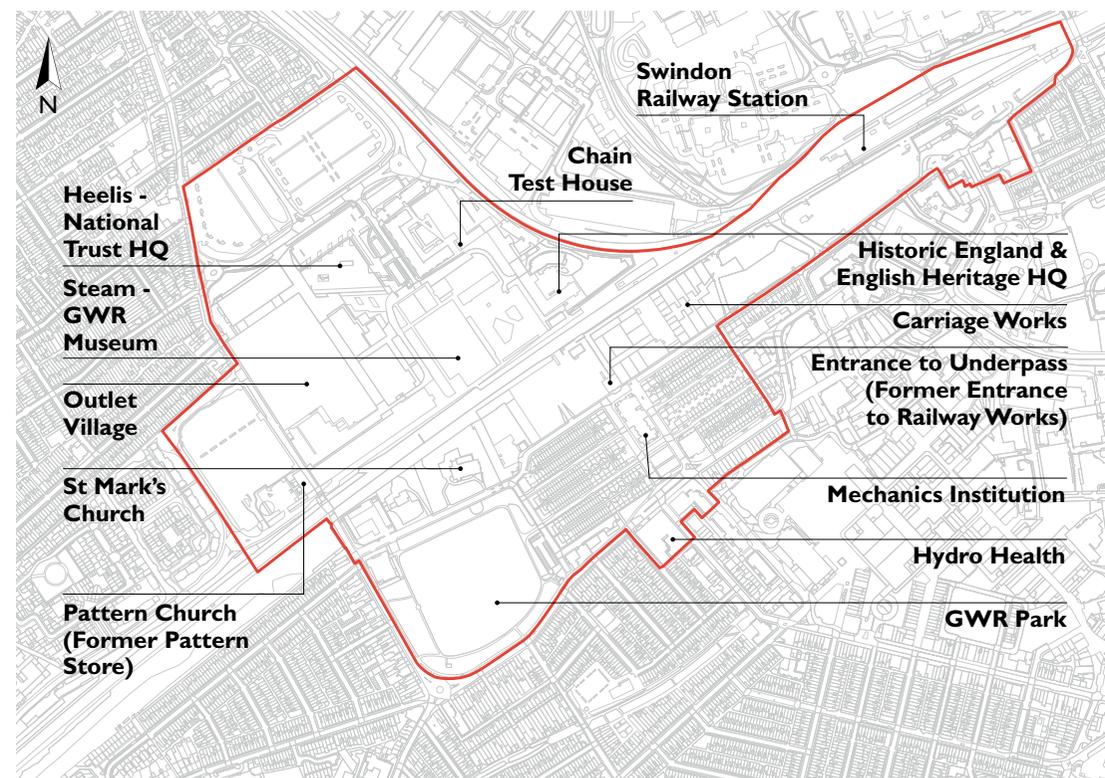
2.2 CONSERVATION AREA BOUNDARY

2.2.1 Swindon's railway heritage was originally designated as two separate conservation areas, one encompassing the former railway works and the other the railway village. Both entities are intrinsically connected in terms of their origins, history and evolution. Both exist because of the GWR company's decision to locate their works at Swindon and the necessity of developing a self-contained village for their workers. The village would not exist without the works and the works would not have been sustainable had the village not been built. There is therefore considerable overlap in the historic development and significance of the two areas.

Treating the railway village and former railway works as a collective strengthens the special interest of the area as one that is internationally important for its railway and social heritage.

2.2.2 As a result, the two original conservation areas have been redesignated as a single conservation area designation - **Swindon's Railway Conservation Area**.

2.2.3 **Plan 2** shows the boundary of the Conservation Area with key buildings and spaces identified for orientation. The key areas included within the designation are described overleaf.



Plan 2: Boundary of Swindon's Railway Conservation Area © Crown copyright and Database Rights 100024296 2020



THE FORMER GWR RAILWAY WORKS

At their peak, the railway works extended over 100 acres and employed over 14,000 people making them one of the largest in the world.

2.2.4 The works produced many well-known locomotives including the King and Castle Classes and Britain's last steam locomotive, Evening Star. The Conservation Area designation covers the historic core of the works roughly rectangular in shape and bound by two railway lines, the busy Rodbourne Road and its historic northern boundary wall (NHLE: 1382136). The physical separation of the former works even today gives the impression of there being an 'inside', familiar to many Swindon residents. The historic buildings which survive are simply designed, large and fairly austere workshops and sheds, and those which have been built since the closure of the works in the late 1980s follow a similar pattern of scale and appearance. Since the closure, this part of the Conservation Area has undergone considerable regeneration with the historic buildings sensitively converted to viable new uses including retail and offices and new buildings and landscaping have been sympathetically integrated.

2.2.5 A period of further growth between 1895 and 1920 led to the former railway works expanding as far west as Rodbourne Road. In this area several historic remnants can be found, such as a section of boundary wall (NHLE: 1382144); the turntable (NHLE: 1023521); and visually prominent Pattern Store building (NHLE: 1355885). These structures and those within the main railway works area are important physical and visual reminders of Swindon's railway industry at its peak and therefore contribute to the principal special interest of the area as a internationally important site.

THE RAILWAY VILLAGE

2.2.6 The railway village is located adjacent to the south of the railway line which bisects the Conservation Area and separates the village from the railway works. The village extends beyond just the picturesque, parallel streets of terraced cottages (listed under several entries) to include all the essential elements important to the welfare and well-being of the GWR company's workers. These include the Mechanics' Institution (NHLE: 1198947), built in the 1850s, St Mark's Church (NHLE: 1355898), consecrated in 1845 and GWR Park. The railway village is bounded by the railway line to the north, Park Lane to the west, East Street to the east and Faringdon Road to the south.

2.2.7 Some elements of the railway village, such as the Territorial Army (TA) Centre and Workshops, although not within historic buildings still make a contribution to the Conservation Area due to their historic associations and continuity of use. The TA Centre has its origins as a Drill Hall for the local Rifle Corps and the TA Workshops are on the site of St Mark's Parochial Hall, which would have been central to the communal and spiritual life of the GWR workers who resided in the railway village.

2.2.8 Although no longer directly associated with the railway works across the railway line, the village has changed little, both in terms of its appearance and its use. It remains a residential enclave, although now surrounded by urban Swindon rather than fields, and retains the range of amenities enjoyed by previous generations. The village is an early and important example of a planned industrial village of the 1840s, associated with the then new railway industry. The key community buildings and spaces funded by the GWR company and residents themselves were pioneering and have contributed to, amongst other things, the formation of the National Health Service and the inception of public lending libraries. The village remains an important physical and visual reminder of what the railway brought to Swindon and in turn what Swindon gave the world.



Introduction

Boundary

Special Interest

History

Character

Buildings

Issues & Opps

Management

Further Info

BUILDINGS ON THE SOUTH SIDE OF FARINGDON ROAD

2.2.9 This area principally contains a terraced row with retail units at ground floor that were developed in the later 19th century as a result of the greater need for retail amenities as the success and expansion of the railway works led to a larger residential population in the railway village and the immediate surrounding area. It also includes the Health Hydro (NHLE: 1382135), funded by the railway workers through their Medical Friendly Society and originally containing a dispensary and other medical facilities as well as washing facilities and Turkish baths. The Turkish Baths are the oldest continually in use in the country and the swimming pool is also one of the oldest. The building's importance is demonstrated through its Grade II* listing.

2.2.10 The inclusion of these buildings supplements the special interest of the area as a holistic community containing the employment, homes and all necessary amenities for railway workers and their families. There are opportunities to further enhance the special interest of the Conservation Area, particularly through the sensitive replacement or alteration of Bridge House and restoring historic features missing from the retail terrace and the Health Hydro.

STATION ROAD AND SWINDON RAILWAY STATION

2.2.11 The decision by Isambard Kingdom Brunel, GWR's chief engineer, to include a railway station at Swindon likely influenced the subsequent decision to locate the railway works there too. In turn, the growth of Swindon town as a result of the railway works brought more industry and trade via the railway station. Today, only part of the historic railway station survives, the stone building on central platforms (NHLE: 1409181) as well as the Queens Tap (NHLE: 1023524), Great Western Hotel (NHLE: 1283238) and the former Aylesbury Dairy (NHLE: 1355881) which were all established and positioned to take advantage of the railway line. Inclusion of these buildings in the conservation area designation provides insight into the origins and opportunities the railway brought Swindon.

2.2.12 This area also contains several structures which are more directly connected to the former railway works, namely the boundary walls of the works (NHLE: 1382140 and 1023464) and the carriage works (NHLE: 1023506 and 1283531). There are also likely to be industrial archaeological remains of the former works buildings below the station car parks. As with other former works structures, these are important physical reminders of the railway works at its peak and therefore contribute to the principal special interest of the area as an internationally important railway works.



AREAS NOT INCLUDED IN THE CONSERVATION AREA

2.2.13 During the preparation of this CAAMP, several areas were considered for inclusion but ultimately, following assessment and public consultation, not taken forward for inclusion in the conservation area designation. These include the residential enclave of Cambria Place, the houses on the west side of Park Lane and a section of the town centre around Fleet Street and Bridge Street.

2.2.14 It is important to note that these areas form the immediate setting of Swindon's Railway Conservation Area and therefore any development within them has the potential to affect the special interest of the Conservation Area. As such due consideration of impact on the special interest of the Conservation Area is required by those planning works.

CAMBRIA PLACE

2.2.15 This enclave of terraced cottages were constructed for the Welsh workers of the railway works, who were originally housed within the Barracks on Faringdon Road (NHLE: 1023496) and therefore they do have a connection with the works and the GWR more generally. However, the buildings have undergone more significant change than those within the original railway village and are not of the same architectural quality than of those the terraces. They were not part of the original planned concept of the village and therefore inclusion in the Conservation Area would dilute its special interest.

PARK LANE

2.2.16 These buildings were completed between 1883 and 1899 and were constructed as part of the wider growth of Swindon resulting from the success of the railway works but were not part of the GWR railway village itself. The semi-detached and short rows of terraces do not possess the same architectural style or characteristics as the railway village cottages and have no direct association with the GWR company. These buildings are not of the same aesthetic or historic value, therefore inclusion could dilute the special interest of the area.

FLEET STREET

2.2.17 The street layout and buildings forming the junction of Fleet Street and Bridge Street dates to the early 20th century or inter-war period and created an important commercial area. The buildings around the junction, which feature distinctive curved frontages, are of some aesthetic and historic value. The buildings would be considered of local significance⁰¹ and would likely be eligible for inclusion on any emerging Local List. However, the area has undergone considerable change with many other historic buildings being replaced with modern buildings of low architectural quality. The historic buildings which do survive have also undergone change. Inclusion of this area, which does not directly relate to the railway village or works could dilute the special interest of the Conservation Area, particularly as it would include buildings of neutral or detracting value.

⁰¹ See 'Buildings of Significant Local Interest Supplementary Planning Guidance'

SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS

- Association with the GWR company and distinguished Victorian engineers.
- At its height the railway works were the largest of their type in the world.
- The pride and sense of community that the railway legacy has instilled in residents.
- The industrial buildings are exemplary of their period.
- The railway village is one of the earliest examples of a model railway estate.
- The historic appearance and character of the area survives and is clearly legible.



Fig. 4: GWR workers outside Rodbourne Road entrance, Swindon, 1910 (Collection of P.A. Williams, copyright owner of the William Hooper Archives)



Introduction	Boundary	Special Interest	History	Character	Buildings	Issues & Opps	Management	Further Info
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3.1 The special interest of the Swindon's Railway Conservation Area is derived from both its architectural interest and its historic interest, which are manifested through its appearance and character.

3.2 The legacy of Swindon's railway heritage influences many aspects of life today in Swindon, not least because just a few short decades have passed since Swindon was the epitome of a living, working railway town. The special interest of Swindon's Railway Conservation Area has many facets, from the historic importance of the railway works and the social advances that took place in the railway village to the architectural and historic interest of the area's buildings.

It is important to preserve and enhance the special interest of the area so that current and future generations can appreciate and enjoy the legacy of Swindon's railway heritage.

3.3 The small hilltop town grew to the large and vibrant town it is today because of the GWR company. The decision by distinguished Victorian engineers Gooch and Brunel to locate Great Western's railway repair works at Swindon in the late 1830s, changed the fortunes and future of the town forever and for the next 150 years the railway works were at the heart of the community and local economy.

3.4 From small beginnings, the railway works grew to be the largest in the world for the repair and manufacture of locomotives, carriages and wagons. It was home to cutting edge technology pioneered by the GWR company, one of the most well-known railway companies of the Victorian and Edwardian eras. There remains a strong sense of pride amongst residents of all that was achieved at the works. For generations, Swindon's children aspired to work 'inside' the railway works as their fathers and grandfathers had done, have a job for life and become part of a family who looked after each other through good and bad times. The works continue to have significance for the local community, many of whom had relatives employed there.

Although the railways works have now closed, the legacy of the railway lives on both in the town's sense of community and in the physical buildings and appearance of the area. Swindon's Railway Conservation Area contains the surviving and significant elements of this railway heritage.



Introduction	Boundary	Special Interest	History	Character	Buildings	Issues & Opps	Management	Further Info
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3.5 The surviving industrial and administrative buildings of the former works display innovative construction techniques which respond to the topography and geology of the area as well as the requirements of their use. They exemplify the style of industrial buildings typical of the period (c.1840–1920), recognised in the listed status of many, but also have a local character through the use of Swindon stone. Throughout the lifetime of the works it was necessary to adapt and change the buildings and structures, sometimes through demolition. Loss has also been a necessary part of the regeneration of the works since their closure in 1986; remains of this industrial archaeology present opportunities to further understanding of the works.

The regeneration of the works is an exemplary example of sensitive and viable reuse of a historic site. With all the redundant historic buildings now converted to a diverse range of new uses and high-quality, sympathetic new buildings constructed, the area is growing into an exciting and vibrant public urban quarter, rooted in the railway heritage.

3.6 Swindon's residents are, rightly, perhaps even more proud of their achievements outside the railway works. The community, under the paternalistic watch of the GWR company, developed a pioneering healthcare system as well as the country's first lending library. The community raised money to build themselves a church, St Mark's, and later a hospital and public baths, still in use as the Health Hydro. This community spirit and collective effort is a defining feature of Swindon.

3.7 The railway village itself is one of the earliest examples of a model estate built by a railway company, for its employees and their families, at a time when few models existed. The cottage housing, recreational space, shops and pubs all built by, or for, the GWR company during a compressed period of time (c.1840–1880), provide a unique example of Victorian planning and architecture. The planned layout and architectural cohesion of the railway village and its supporting amenities is of considerable interest and the relationship between the different elements, housing, church, park and workplace is undisturbed and clearly legible today. Many of the communal buildings as well as GWR Park remain landmarks in the area.

The Park continues to provide a welcome respite from the urban surroundings with historically important events such as the Children's Fete being revived by the local community.

3.8 The railway village and the railway works are intrinsically connected in terms of their origins, history and evolution. The village would not exist without the works and the works would not have been sustainable had the village not been built. Although weakened through the closure of the works, the village and works continue to have a strong and positive relationship. The railway line, which separates the two principal parts of the Conservation Area, is also of considerable importance to the special interest of the area, as without it neither would exist. The imposing barrier of the railway line with but a few crossing points, is historically important as it served as a physical and emotive divide between the works and the village, and consequently the growing town of Swindon.

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This section provides a brief summary of the historic development of the railway works and village. It identifies the key events, features and associations which make Swindon's Railway Conservation Area what it is today. The necessary brevity of the section cannot do justice to the area's complete history and comprehensive histories have been prepared by others. The reader is directed to the '[Further Information and Sources](#)' section of this document which identifies the key works.

4.1 SWINDON'S EARLY HISTORY

- Before the 19th century, there was no settlement on the site of the future railway village and works; the area was characterised by a rural landscape made up of common land, grassland and arable fields as shown on the Andrews and Dury map (Fig. 5).
- However, Swindon had been settled since the Saxon period with the historic hilltop settlement, known as 'Swindon Old Town', located just over a mile to the south-east of the present railway line. Without the arrival of the railway, Swindon would likely have remained a rural backwater.
- From the late 17th century, a trade in quarrying was established in Swindon with local stone later being used for the construction of buildings in both the railway works and village.

4.2 ORIGINS OF NEW SWINDON

- The Wilts and Berks Canal was cut through the open fields in 1810 and a branch, the North Wilts Canal, added in 1819. The proximity to the canal was one of the reasons the railway works came to be built at Swindon.
- In 1833, Isambard Kingdom Brunel, now legendary Victorian engineer, was appointed to advise the course of a new railway between London and Bristol; he recommended a route via Swindon which would run parallel with the canal.

- The Great Western Railway was completed in 1841 and Swindon Railway Station opened in 1842. A branch line to Cheltenham and Gloucester was also constructed, diverging at Swindon.

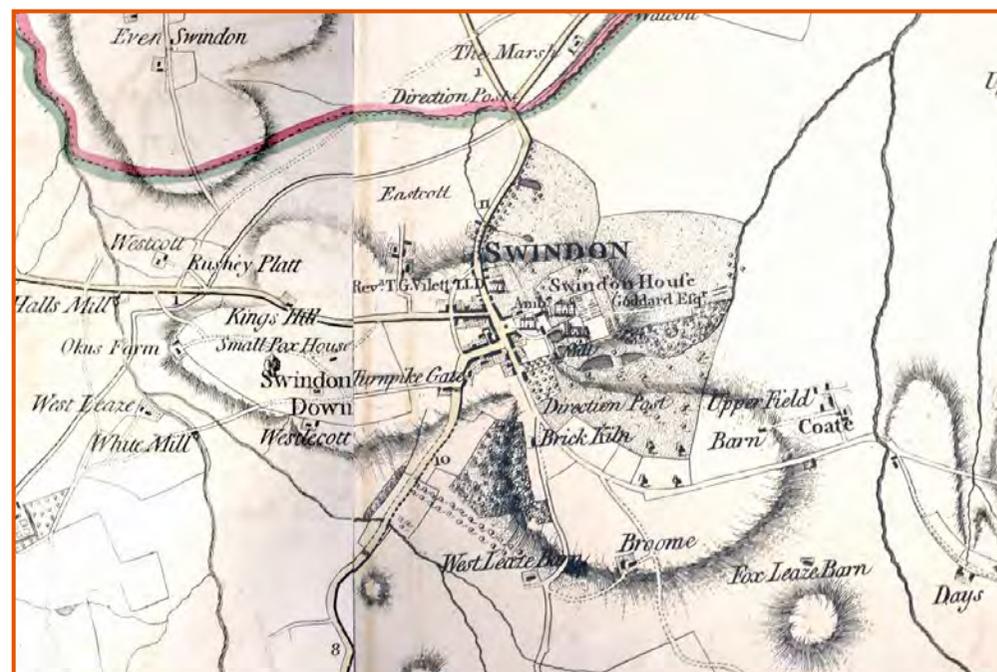


Fig. 5: Andrews and Dury map of 1810 shows Swindon in the early 19th century, before the arrival of the railway or canals, a time when it was a peaceful pastoral landscape (Local Studies – Swindon Libraries: AAA912 642493)

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4.3 CONSTRUCTION OF THE RAILWAY WORKS

- Upon the advice of Brunel and Daniel Gooch (superintendent of locomotive engines), the GWR company board decided to establish works at Swindon for the repair of their locomotives, an auspicious decision for the future of the town. Swindon was chosen for its level topography and its proximity to the canal and the branch line to Cheltenham. The works were constructed between 1841 and 1842 and opened in 1843.
- Most of these early buildings were built in stone from local quarries in Old Swindon, the main industry at the time, and from Bath and Corsham.
- Although initially conceived as a works for the maintenance and repair of locomotives, soon the GWR company board decided to also manufacture locomotives at the site, this at a time the country was gripped by 'railway mania'.

A mark of the early success of the works was that they doubled in size by 1847, less than five years after they originally opened.

4.4 CONSTRUCTION OF THE RAILWAY VILLAGE

- Due to the rural position of the GWR works, housing and amenities for the company's workers were needed. Shortly after the works were built, a planned village of terraced cottages, designed by Brunel, was built opposite the works on the southern side of the railway line.
- This 'model village' was designed to function as a self-contained community and became known as New Swindon. The village comprised of about 280 two-storey cottages, each with a front garden and rear yard, built in locally quarried 'Swindon' stone and Bath limestone (Fig. 6). Construction began in 1842 and was completed in 1847.

- Brunel was able to look to 18th century workers' housing in the industrialised North; however, when the works were established at Swindon, the railway age was still young meaning there was little precedent for railway housing specifically to draw upon.⁰¹
- The east–west orientated streets were named after towns and cities connected by the railway line (to the west: Bristol, Bath, Exeter, Taunton, to the east: London, Oxford and Reading).
- Shops were provided along with additional cottages for company officers and foremen in blocks at either side of High Street (now Emlyn Square), which was then an open square at the heart of the village. The three-storey height of these buildings emphasised the role of this central open space as the civic core of the village. A covered market was held on the square.

Fig. 6: Bristol Street in the Railway Village, 1995 (© Crown copyright. Historic England Archive: BB95/12086)



⁰¹ John Cattell and Keith Falconer, Swindon: the legacy of a railway town, p.12.

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- Large detached villas in generous gardens were built between Bristol Street and the railway line, for the works manager and station superintendent. Although these were demolished for the construction of the carriage works in the 1870s, these are visible on Snell's panorama reproduced below (**Fig. 7**).
- Along with the village, a church, vicarage (NHLE: 1198485) and school (NHLE: 1283807) were constructed to the west, built using funds subscribed by shareholders of the GWR company. The vicarage and school were completed in 1844, the church was consecrated in 1845 and a parochial hall was constructed on what is now the TA Workshop's site.
- The GWR company bought the land for a cricket ground to the west of the village in 1844, which became a formal park in 1871.
- In 1860, the company employees formed themselves into Volunteer Rifle Corps in response to feared French Invasion during the Napoleonic Wars. The volunteers originally drilled on the open space of Emlyn Square until an armoury and drill hall was constructed at the southern end in 1862.
- Overcrowding was a constant problem within the railway village, with demand for housing outstripping supply. A barracks was constructed for single male workers in 1849–1852. It subsequently housed Welsh workers until the Cambria Place enclave was developed south of GWR Park from 1863.

Fig. 7:
A detail of
Edward Snell's
1849 panoramic
view showing the
railway village and
its still rural setting
(STEAM Museum
of the GWR)



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4.5 THE MEDICAL FUND

- Workers and their families were constantly fending off ill-health with diseases such as typhus prevalent due to the over-crowding, poor drainage and an inadequate water supply within the village.⁰² A 'sick fund' had been established by the GWR company upon the opening of the works and in 1847 the Medical Fund was established which paid for a permanent company doctor.
- The Fund established a cottage hospital in 1872 in the former armoury (NHLE: 1199753) (**Fig. 8**), the Rifle Corps having moved to a new drill hall on the present TA Centre site, and a house and surgery for the company's chief medical officer was built in 1876 (Park House – NHLE: 1355897).
- The Medical Fund provided an inclusive healthcare service which ultimately inspired Nye Bevan, father of the NHS, when he visited Swindon in the 1940s.

4.6 PROVISION OF THE MECHANICS' INSTITUTION

- The GWR Mechanics' Institution was formed in January 1844 in order to disseminate useful knowledge and provide amusement for GWR company employees. It included a library, lecture programme, concerts and other social events. The Institution was originally located within the railway works, which was far from ideal for the workers and their families.
- A purpose-built Mechanics' Institution was constructed from 1854 to 1855, at the heart of the railway village on what is today Emlyn Square, see photograph of the building in the 1880s (**Fig. 9**).



Fig. 8: Former Medical Fund cottage hospital (now Central Community Centre), Faringdon Road, c.1930 (STEAM Museum of the GWR)



Fig. 9: The Mechanics Institution was constructed on Emlyn Square in the 1850s, this photograph shows the building, which was at heart of railway village life, in the 1880s (STEAM Museum of the GWR)

⁰² Grinsell, L. V., Wells, H. B., Tallamy, H. S., Betjeman, John, Studies in the History of Swindon, p.102.

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- The library formed a component part of the Institution, expanded through the purchase of books from member subscriptions. The building also contained a theatre, public baths and an octagonal covered market.
- From 1866, the Mechanics' Institution held the annual Children's Fete at the park (**Fig. 10**).



Fig. 10: The Children's Fete in GWR Park, c.1910 (Local Studies - Swindon Libraries: MID01c)

4.7 THE HIGHS AND LOWS OF THE RAILWAY WORKS

- The railway works had doubled in size between opening in 1843 and 1847 when a financial crisis affecting the whole country meant that expansion of the works ceased.
- In 1850, when the economy recovered, the broad-gauge track system, which the GWR had used from the outset, was being adopted by new railways across the South West and Midlands. This, and the general wave of 'railway mania' across the country, led to increased demand for new broad-gauge rolling stock, manufactured and repaired at Swindon. Below is a photograph of one of these early broad-gauge locomotives, the Lord of the Isles (**Fig. 11**).



Fig. 11: An early photograph of the broad-gauge Lord of the Isles locomotive built at Swindon in 1851, with St Mark's church in the background (STEAM Museum of the GWR)

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- However, further company cutbacks were made in 1857 and by the early to mid-1860s the company was close to bankruptcy.
- In 1868, the GWR company decided to build their new carriage works in Swindon, rather than Oxford, bringing a new period of growth and employment. The carriage works were built south of the railway between the railway village and the mainline railway.
- A major phase of expansion and modernisation followed, see plan of 1880 (**Fig. 12**). A Chain Test House (NHLE: 1355879) was built in 1873, and an enormous new locomotive and tender building factory was constructed to the west of the works (NHLE: 1199356) in 1874. This building phase was the first to be constructed in brick and iron framing for the internal construction. However, aware of the distinctive quality of their early stone buildings, the buildings fronting the GWR lines were always given masonry façades.⁰³
- Another period of economic depression swept across Britain in the second half of the 1870s, felt at the works from 1880. This coincided with the demise of broad-gauge tracks as lines were converted to standard gauge, including the GWR lines, draining the company's finances.

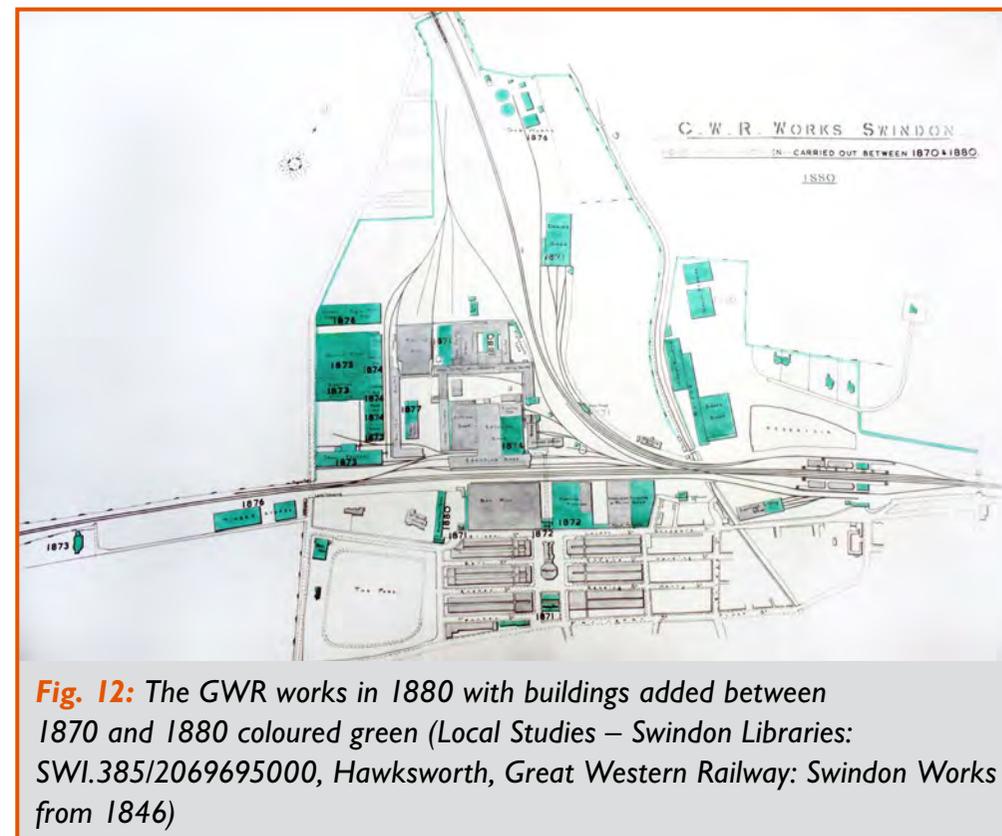


Fig. 12: The GWR works in 1880 with buildings added between 1870 and 1880 coloured green (Local Studies – Swindon Libraries: SWI.385/2069695000, Hawksworth, Great Western Railway: Swindon Works from 1846)

⁰³ Cattell and Falconer, p.94.

4.8 FURTHER EXPANSION

- Due to the growing importance of Swindon as a railway town and a local commercial centre, development began to fill the formerly open land between the works and Old Swindon during the second half of the 19th century. This began to change the railway village from a rural settlement to the much more urban one it is today.
- The Mechanics' Institution underwent major extension in 1891 with the replacement of the covered market with a new reading room and lecture, smoking and games rooms.
- The following year, 1892, the Medical Fund Baths and Dispensary (now the Health Hydro) was constructed, funded by public subscription, opposite the cottage hospital and provided better amenities for the workers and their families. See photograph of the baths in 1907 (*Fig. 13*).
- Changes to local administration around the turn of the 19th century saw Old and New Swindon, which had previously been under separate local authorities, become united and incorporated as the Borough of Swindon.
- The size of the works almost doubled between 1895 and 1920, see OS map of 1923 (*Fig. 14*). The growth comprised alteration and extension of existing buildings on the main site as well as major expansion to the north of the Cheltenham branch line and west of Rodbourne Road, including the large, four-storey fireproof Pattern Store, built in 1897 and the turntable, installed in 1902, which is the only one from the works to survive.



Fig. 13: Health Hydro, Milton Road, 1907 (Local Studies - Swindon Libraries: MID01b)



Fig. 14: This map of 1923 shows considerable expansion of the works through the late 19th and early 20th century, a period when it almost doubled in size (Landmark Historical Map – Promap)

4.9 POST WORLD WAR II

- When the railways were nationalised in 1948, British Rail took ownership of the railway works and village.

By 1948, the works estate stretched for over 1.5 miles, covered over 100 acres and employed more than 14,000 people.⁰⁴

⁰⁴ Cattell and Falconer, p.128.

- Britain's last ever steam locomotive, Evening Star, was manufactured at Swindon in 1960 (Fig. 15). A plan showing the works at this time is reproduced on the following page (Fig. 16). With the demise of steam-powered engines, production continued on diesel hydraulic engines only (the separate carriage and wagon works were closed in 1962) with the works completely reorganised for work on diesel engines and carriages in 1965.



Fig. 15:
Evening
Star steam
locomotive,
1960 (Local
Studies -
Swindon
Libraries:
P50403)

- In 1966, Swindon Borough Council bought the majority of the railway village from British Rail and was planning to demolish the densely-packed cottages. Following a campaign by poet laureate and champion of Victorian architecture, John Betjeman, the village was saved from demolition and, in the 1970s, a comprehensive refurbishment scheme was launched by the Council to preserve the area's traditional character whilst upgrading and modernising the buildings.
- Some demolition was required, specifically the terrace of seven houses adjacent to the north of the cottage hospital, which itself was converted into a community centre.
- The refurbishment included: repairs to slate roofs; cleaning of stone façades; the replacement of individual gardens with one long strip of grass; the burial of external wiring; the removal of extensions in the rear yards and replacement with a single lean-to running the length of the terrace containing new kitchens; and improvements to the public realm and landscaping.
- The cottages were statutorily listed in 1970, worthy recognition for those campaigning against their demolition, and the village was designated as a conservation area in 1975.

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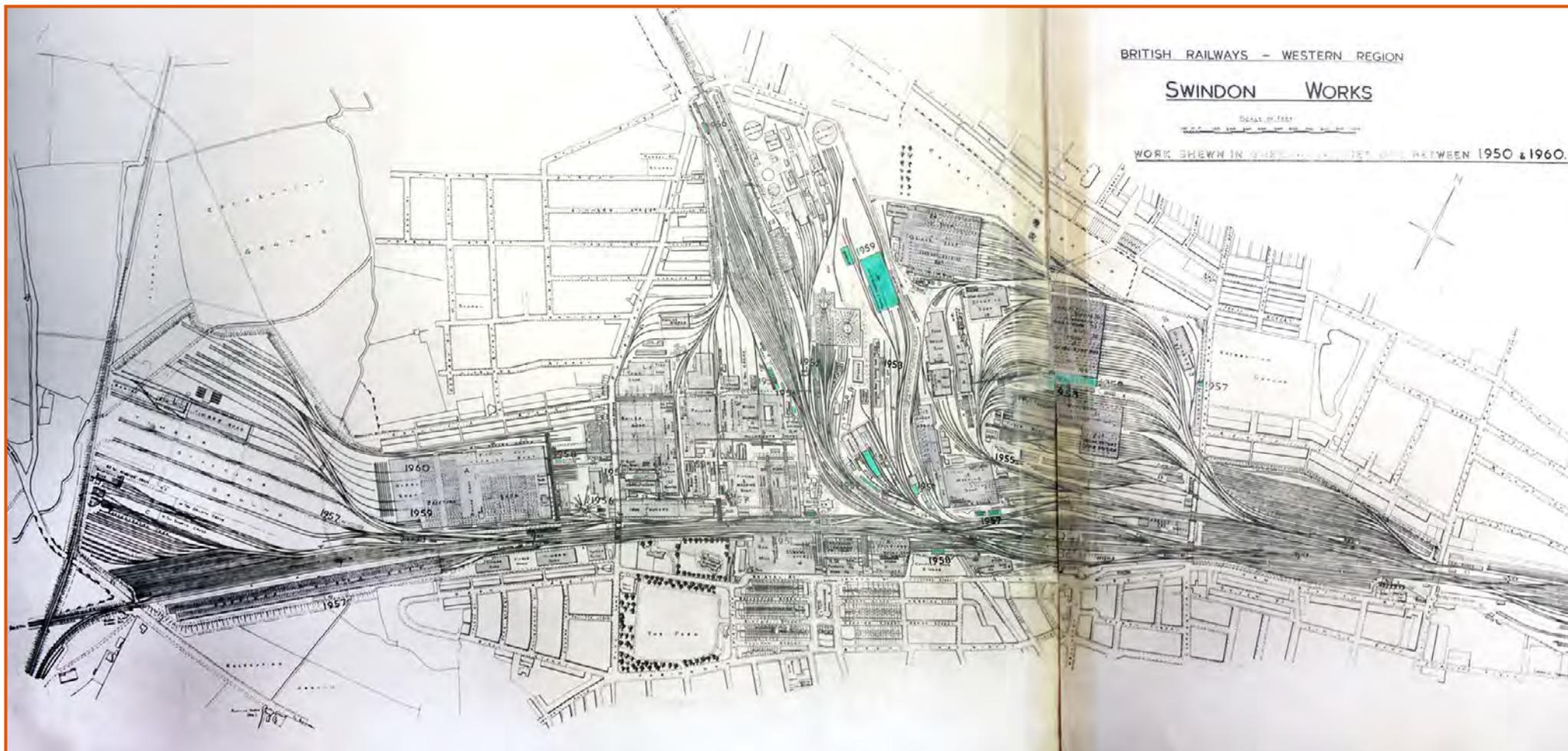


Fig. 16: The vast extent of the GWR works in 1960 can be seen on this plan. This was the year the last steam locomotive was manufactured at Swindon (Local Studies – Swindon Libraries: SWI.385/2069695000, Hawksworth, Great Western Railway: Swindon Works from 1846)

4.10 LATE TWENTIETH CENTURY

- The latter half of the 20th century saw considerable change to Swindon's town centre with the terraced streets, which formerly formed the eastern setting of the railway village, redeveloped with large commercial buildings, including the David Murray John Tower and the Brunel and Parade shopping centres.
- In recognition of their historic and architectural significance, many of the railway works' buildings were listed in 1984 before the works were finally closed in 1986, just short of the 150th anniversary of their opening. The works were also designated as a conservation area in 1987, at which time the area was in a derelict state, see photograph of workshop 12 (*Fig. 17*).
- Since this time the works have undergone considerable regeneration with many of the historic workshops being sensitively converted to viable new uses and many other historic structures saved and refurbished, such as the Water Tower (NHLE: 1198186).
- The traditional manufacturing use of the site has been replaced by a variety of uses including office, retail, leisure and, most recently, residential; the works are once again bustling with activity.



Fig. 17: View of workshop 12 in 1994, prior to conversion into Great Western Designer Outlet (© Crown copyright. Historic England Archive: BB94/16317)

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- Workshops 9, 13 and 15 (NHLE: 1241674, 1199356, 1023520 and 1283270), which used to build locomotives, were converted into the Great Western Designer Outlet Village. The General Offices (NHLE: 1199355) were converted into the National Monuments Record Centre and offices for English Heritage, now serving both Historic England and English Heritage (**Fig. 18**). Workshops 19 and 20 (NHLE: 1023522 and 1355878), some of the oldest parts of the works, were converted into STEAM, the museum of GWR.
- The modern buildings of the works, including all the workshops west of Rodbourne Road and along Station Road and Sheppard Street, were demolished to make way for new development or to be used for car parking.
- Within the historic core of the works new development included Heelis, a new, state-of-the-art headquarters for the National Trust, which was built in 2005, and the first residential buildings within the works, recently completed by Thomas Homes.

The conversion of the Chain Test House, one of the last historic works buildings to be reused, which led to its removal from the Heritage at Risk register.



Fig. 18: The railway works today: Historic buildings have been given new uses and sensitive and high quality new development has reinvigorated the area. Here is shown the General Offices, converted for use by English Heritage and part of the recent Thomas Homes development with the open space of Heritage Plaza between

This section provides analysis and assessment of the character and appearance of the Conservation Area and the way in which this contributes to its special interest. The following sections look at the Conservation Area as a whole, covering different elements of character including street and plot patterns, material and architectural details, public realm, important views and setting. Then follows a section which identifies and assesses the different character areas within the Conservation Area.

5.1 TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY

TOPOGRAPHY

5.1.1 Swindon was in part chosen by Gooch and Brunel as the location of their locomotive works because of its favourable topography. Swindon is near the point on the GWR line from London to Bristol where the gradient of the line changes from relatively flat (towards London) to steeper (towards Bristol). Originally it was anticipated that there would be a need for trains to change locomotives at this point on journeys to one more powerful to deal with the increased gradient and therefore Swindon was also a suitable location to make repairs to waiting locomotives.

5.1.2 The land remains relatively level at Swindon, evidenced by the pre-existing canals, however the natural topography has been adapted to ensure the works were truly level to ease the movement of heavy locomotives and carriages around the works and on and off the railway line. Although Snell's panoramic view of New Swindon (see [Section 4.0](#)) appears to show

the railway village at the same level as the works, this cannot have been the case as today there is some 5–10m height difference between the two. The adaption of the ground level is particularly evident in the raised level of the carriage works and car parks adjacent to the south of the railway line, which were part of the works and are therefore at the same level as the line and main core of the railway works to the north.

5.1.3 The dramatic change in ground level serves to emphasise the authority of the works, making the boundary walls even more imposing and giving the impression of the works overlooking the village from some viewpoints. Along with the railway line, the change in level also serves to bisect and divide the Conservation Area into north, historically one of employment and industry and south, one of residential, health and leisure.



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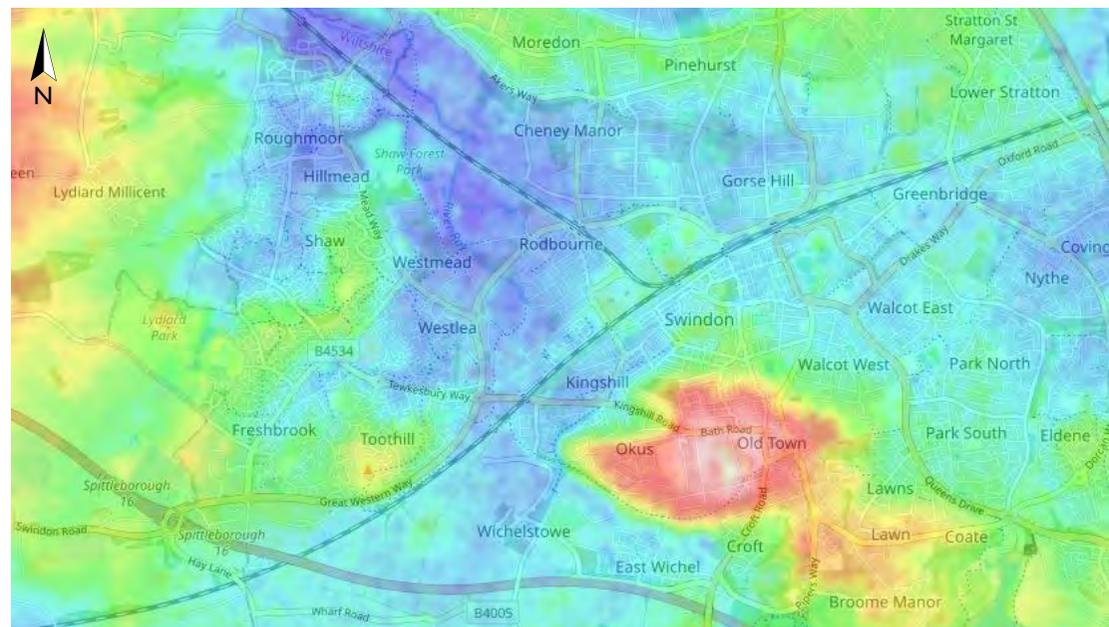
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5.1.4 The geology of Swindon has shaped the appearance of the Conservation Area in two principal ways. Firstly, the potential instability of the clay bedrock of the area was of concern to Gooch and Brunel and one they aimed to counteract through the unique design of the early workshops of the railway works. They used inverted brick arches in the structure of the buildings at foundation level, visible at the base of the buildings, to provide longitudinal stability on the uncertain ground. Secondly, prior to the arrival of the railways, one of Swindon's primary industries was quarrying the local Purbeck stone (a type of limestone), present within the hilly outcrop of Old Swindon. This local stone was the primary building material of the first phase of railway works buildings, the cottages and other buildings in the railway village and the railway-facing 'public' elevations of later works buildings. Swindon also had a local brick-making industry meaning it was able to meet demand for the rapid expansion of the railway works.



Plan 3: Topography of Swindon's Railway Conservation Area and its surroundings (© OpenStreetMap contributors)

Low Ground

High Ground



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5.2 ARCHAEOLOGY

5.2.1 Although not always a visible part of the Conservation Area, archaeological remains can contribute considerably to our understanding of how the area has developed. There is also potential for archaeological remains, both those that are known and those not yet uncovered, to reveal more about the evolution and function of Swindon's Railway legacy.

5.2.2 Old Swindon has its origins in the Saxon period, however records within the Wiltshire and Swindon Historic Environment Record (HER) database show that, outside the Conservation Area, there have been a small number of archaeological finds dating to the Roman period including coins and pottery. These represent the earliest occupation of the area.

5.2.3 Before the arrival of the railway at Swindon, the landscape was essentially rural, dominated by agricultural fields surrounding the small hilltop settlement of Old Swindon, itself a designated conservation area, and the still smaller settlement of Even Swindon, which was to the north of the present day railway line. There were also known to have been several manor houses in the area, including Westcott, near to the present-day Park Lane and remembered in the name of Westcott Place. However, due to the expansion of the town through the 19th and 20th centuries, physical remains of the pre-railway period in and around the Conservation Area are relatively limited.

5.2.4 The exception to this are the remains of both the Wilts and Berks Canal and the North Wilts Canal, which date to the early 19th century. The cutting of the canals was a significant intervention within the rural landscape and their existence at Swindon was an important part of the reason for the railway works being established there. Unfortunately, the arrival of the railway also signaled the demise of the canals with both closing by 1910. However, there are upstanding and buried remains of both canals and their routes remain visible in the layout of the area. The visible remains include the cuttings and bridges which are within the Conservation Area to the west of the carriage works where the North Wilts Canal cutting now forms a pedestrian and cycle route under the mainline (NHLE: 1382142) (*Fig. 19*).



Fig. 19: The route of the North Wilts Canal remains legible within the townscape of Swindon, where it passed under the railway line is now a cycle and pedestrian path



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5.2.5 Upon the arrival of the railway the fields were developed for the works and the village. Within these areas no earlier features or deposits have been discovered; all finds have been directly associated with the railway. Upstanding remains include surviving buildings and structures constructed in various phases during the 19th century into the mid-20th century, including the 1950s traversing table, which, although curtailed, survives as a feature within a public open space (**Fig. 20**). Many buildings and features have been demolished following the works closure in 1986. Previous archaeological investigations have found evidence of demolished structures and buildings, and there is considerable potential for additional below-ground archaeology, in particular: floors; drains; pipes; footings; and internal inspection pits used to access the underneath of locomotives for maintenance and repair.

5.2.6 Within the railway village, several cottages and a former bathhouse were demolished as part of the 1970s refurbishment works. A wall of the former cottages survives separating Taunton Street and Faringdon Road and there is also potential for further archaeological remains of these lost buildings to be present in the area.

5.2.7 Further information on the archaeological resource can be found via the Wiltshire and Swindon HER and the Wiltshire and Swindon Historic Landscape Characterisation Project also contains information about the changes in land use of the area. See '[Further Information and Sources](#)' for more details.



Fig. 20: The 1950s traversing table is an example of the visible, archaeological remains from railway works



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5.3 HISTORIC AND CURRENT LAND USE

HISTORIC LAND USE

5.3.1 Swindon's Railway Conservation Area has a very distinct historic use as a railway works and a village for its workers which has strongly shaped the appearance of the area and has directly contributed to the importance of the area as an innovative, purpose-built railway settlement.

5.3.2 Prior to the closure of the works in 1986, land uses in different parts of the Conservation Area were clearly defined and were separated from each other which has helped maintain the character of the area today. To the north of the railway line the land was in use as GWR railway works maintaining, repairing and manufacturing locomotives and carriages. This use extended south of the railway line to include the north side of Bristol Street, London Street, Sheppard Street and Station Road. To the south of the railway line were the residential and amenity uses of the railway village including the recreational spaces of GWR Park and the Mechanics' Institution.

CURRENT LAND USE

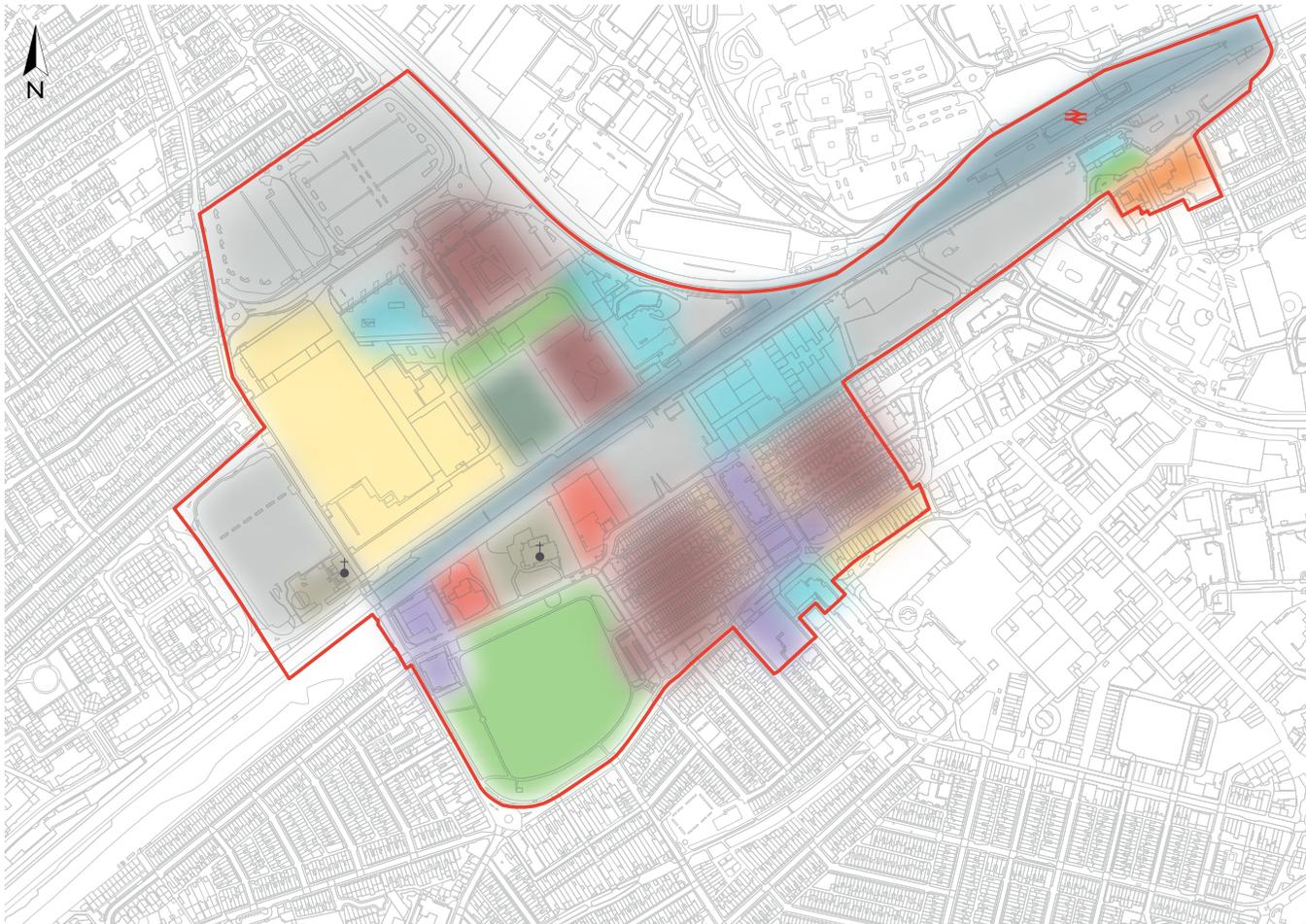
5.3.3 Since the closure of the railway works, there has been a need to diversify the uses within the Conservation Area to ensure the regeneration of the defunct railway buildings and some of the community and amenity buildings within the railway village. Viable new uses, retail, museum and office, have been found for all the surviving historic buildings in the railway works and have been accommodated whilst preserving their historic appearance, therefore continuing to make their historic use as workshops, engine sheds and offices clear. New buildings have continued the diversification of use with the introduction of residential uses previously not present north of the railway line. South of the railway line, within the railway village and around the railway station, current land uses remain similar to the historic uses. Pubs and hotels remain around the transport hub of Swindon Railway Station and the railway village remains principally in residential and recreational use with some retail. Some of the former works buildings have been demolished adjacent to the south side of the railway line and are currently in use as surface car parking, which presents an opportunity to improve the appearance of the Conservation Area. **Plan 4** overleaf shows the current distribution of different uses across the Conservation Area.

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CHARACTER IDENTIFICATION, ASSESSMENT AND ANALYSIS



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Key

- Hotel and Hospitality
- Religious
- Educational
- Museum
- Public Open Space
- Residential
- Surface Car Parking
- Retail
- Commercial
- Recreational / Amenity Use
- Railway Line & Station

Plan 4: Plan showing the distribution of current uses across the conservation areas (© Crown copyright and Database Rights 100024296 2020)



5.4 STREET AND PLOT PATTERN

5.4.1 The street and plot pattern of Swindon's Railway Conservation Area are informed by the historic function and uses of the area. Although there were pre-existing routes, such as the canals and Faringdon Road, the railway lines, so important to the historic function of the area, are also the feature about which the layout the rest of the area is primarily orientated.

5.4.2 The northern half of the conservation area, the former railway works, has a broad grain with large plots, some linear, some rectangular with large open spaces and avenues connecting them. The area is broadly laid out on a grid, as can be seen from the First Edition OS map (Fig. 21), with the access routes and plots orientated parallel with, or perpendicular to, the main railway line and formed on its eastern side by the branch line to Cheltenham. The layout of the area serves as a reminder of its former use manufacturing and maneuvering large locomotives.

5.4.3 South of the railway line, the grain is much finer and the layout of streets and open spaces more ordered. The parallel streets of terraced cottages are orientated around the central Emlyn Square demonstrating the importance and hierarchy of this space within the railway village. The relatively dense residential grain of the village, as seen in the photograph adjacent (Fig. 22), is relieved to the west by the large, open GWR Park and the series of plots forming St Mark's Church and the former vicarage, adjacent to the railway line. Faringdon Road, which forms the southern boundary of the railway village and GWR Park, is a historic route, which pre-dates the arrival of the railways and serves to enclose the historic core of the railway village. The other important route south of the railway line is Sheppard Street and Station Road which is a continuation of London Street and follows the historic boundary of the railway works to the railway station.



Fig. 21: This First Edition Ordnance Survey map of 1886 shows the early growth of the railway works, this historic core is roughly the area of the works covered by the conservation area designation today, and shows the gridded arrangement of the buildings (Landmark Historical Map - Promap)



Fig. 22: The terraced cottages of the railway village are on fine-grained, narrow fronted plots on street parallel with the railway line



5.5 BUILDING HEIGHT, SCALE AND MASSING

5.5.1 The scale and mass of buildings in Swindon's Railway Conservation Area are derived from the historic function of the area. This means that there are some distinct differences in scale and massing across the Conservation Area, but these differences are important for demonstrating the different historic uses which contribute to the legacy of the railway heritage.

5.5.2 Within the railway works, the buildings are industrial scale with tall storey heights and either large, rectangular or long and linear footprints, see adjacent photograph of Workshop 12 (**Fig. 23**). Despite this, buildings are frequently single storey due to their use for manufacture, although some are two-storeys. Stores and office buildings were not restricted and rise to four-storeys. Despite being taller these buildings, because of their overall mass and their heavy-looking pitched slate roofs, have a grounded feeling, keeping in character with the area's industrial former workshops. Buildings like this would have once also extended along much of the north side of Bristol Street, London Street, Sheppard Street and London Road, however all but the carriage works have been lost leaving large areas of surface car parking. Recent buildings in the railway works have maintained the historic scale and massing with a mix of heights between two and four-storeys and both long and linear or larger footprints.



Fig. 23: The former locomotive building workshop (Workshop 12), a large single-storey building characteristic of the railway works



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5.5.3 The railway village has overall a much more human scale, in keeping with its use, consisting of streets of two-storey cottages with slightly taller, three-storey buildings around Emlyn Square (Fig. 24). Community and religious buildings are larger, such as the Mechanics' Institution, the Platform (former barracks building) (Fig. 25) and St Mark's Church, which being more important for the community needed to have more prominence in the street scene. Around the railway station, the scale remains relatively domestic compared with the surrounding commercial buildings outside the Conservation Area boundary. However, Signal Point, positioned above the entrance to the railway station, is a 12-storey slab-block, the tallest structure in the Conservation Area and out of scale to everything else within in.



Fig. 24: The diminutive cottages of Bristol Street in the railway village with taller properties around Emlyn Square and the more prominent Mechanics' Institution



Fig. 25: The Platform was constructed as a barracks before being converted to a Wesleyan Chapel, this use, along with its position on Emlyn Square mean the building is taller and more prominent than the surrounding cottages of the railway village.



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5.6 BUILDING MATERIALS

5.6.1 The dominance of stone buildings is a defining feature of the Conservation Area and stems from the presence and availability of local stone quarried at Kingsmill near Old Swindon (some stone from Bath and Corsham was also used). The shared palette of local materials provided the different building types, styles and uses some homogeneity, indicating an almost familial bond across the railway works and village, which despite the closure of the works and the re-use of many buildings, remains today.

5.6.2 Most of the original buildings within the former railway works are stone, with red brick used only for strengthening inverted arches, entrance arches and some window heads. The roofs are generally slate. The stonework of these buildings is often roughly hewn and comprising a mix of different size stones; this robust materiality is significant in demonstrating the former utilitarian nature of the works. Later works buildings feature more brick, which was cheaper than stone. All buildings facing the railway line, the public face of the works, were given masonry façades, which is a valuable representation of the vital importance of the railway line. This significance is further indicated by the historic boundary walls to the works, which were built of imposing stone to the town centre side, facing the railway village and along Station Road but in brick or a mixture of brick and stone to the less prominent 'back' of the works.

5.6.3 The cottages in the railway village also adopt local Swindon stone, as well as some Bath limestone as do its religious and community buildings including the Mechanics' Institution and St Mark's Church. The cottages employ coursed stone blocks of a roughly hewn, rustic appearance demonstrative of their vernacular character. As within the railway works, the outward facing cottages, along Bristol and London Street, have a more polite appearance of smooth ashlar blocks.

5.6.4 Outside of the former railway works and railway village, buildings are built in brick including the retail terrace and Health Hydro along the east end of Faringdon Street. The recent residential buildings in the works are also in brick and other contemporary materials, in colour tones complementary to their historic neighbours. This use of contrasting materials to the dominant use of stone is useful in demonstrating the phasing of buildings across the works.

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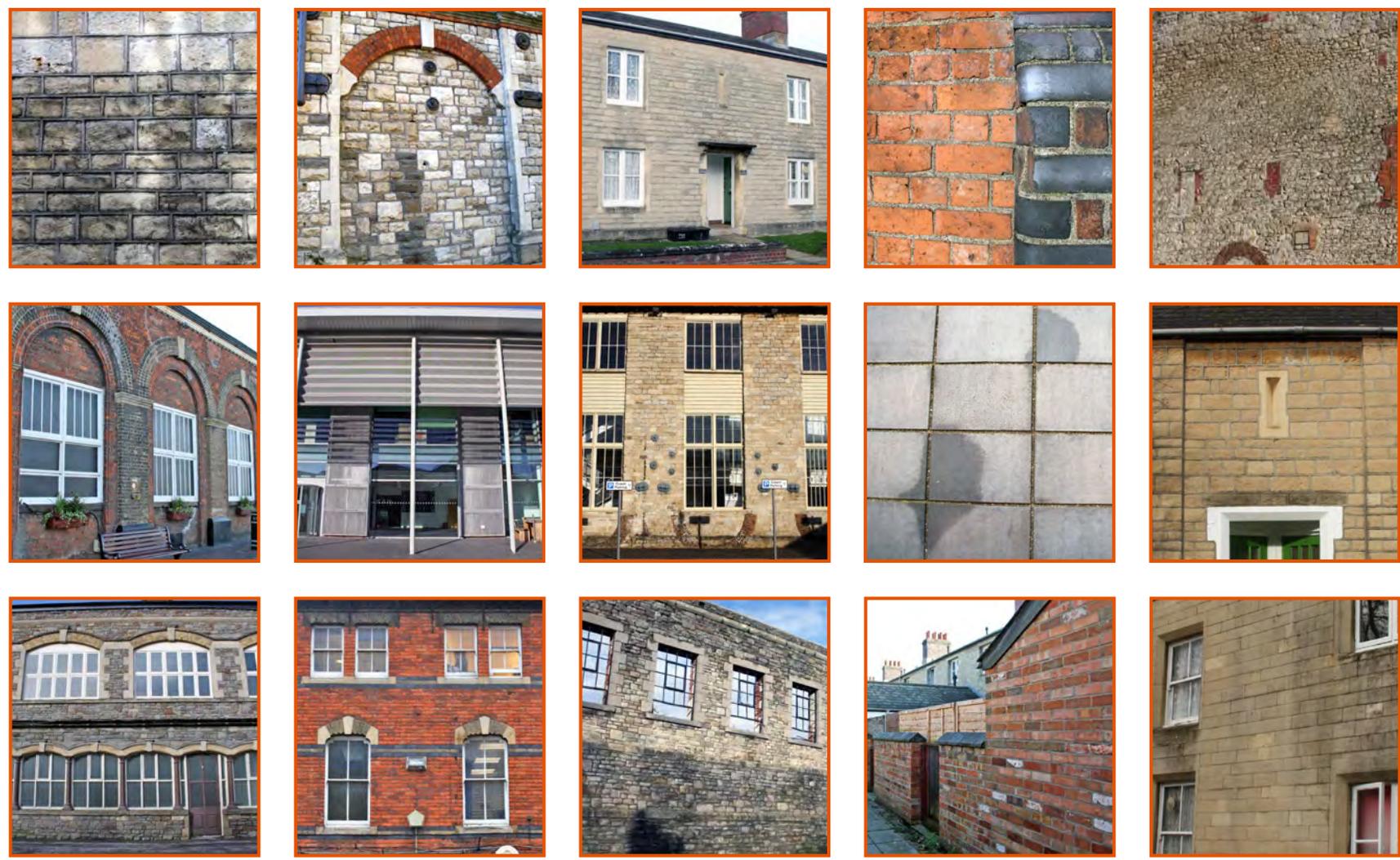


Fig. 26: Palette of materials used within the Conservation Area



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5.7 ARCHITECTURAL DETAILING

5.7.1 Swindon's Railway Conservation Area displays a range of architectural features and styles. Architectural detail forms a valuable visual identification of the use of the different buildings in the Conservation Area, many of which are no longer in their original use.

5.7.2 The former railway works buildings are of an unpretentious, industrial style, indicative of their working function. Pier and panel construction, which comprises tall squared piers articulating relatively plain panels between, is a unifying feature amongst the earlier buildings, and lends a faintly classical air. There are some decorative flourishes include quoining, brick or stone window heads and surrounds and roundels in gable ends. The few non-workshop buildings, those designed as offices, are distinguished by tall chimneys. The later works buildings, contrastingly in brick, feature greater decorative detail including polychromatic brickwork, recessed brick arches, string coursing and cornices. These later 19th century departures are indicative of the evolving Victorian style and distinguish the later buildings from the original phase of works buildings. Recent buildings are relatively neutral in design and style but draw upon historic characteristics from the workshop building style with gable roof lines and pier and panel articulation.

5.7.3 By contrast in the railway village, the architectural detailing assists in creating the domestic and even picturesque character. The outward, railway-facing cottages are more decorative than those not visible from the railway line, demonstrating the importance of public appearances to the GWR company. These cottages feature Elizabethan and Jacobean motifs such as gable ends, quoins, slit openings, chamfered mullion windows and tall chimneys. Inward-facing cottages and those facing the town, originally open countryside, are much plainer with a more vernacular character.

5.7.4 Later Victorian terraces, specifically those along Faringdon Road, have their own architectural language including historic shopfronts and, at upper levels, polychromatic brickwork and barge-boarded gables. Their architectural features distinguish them in date and function from the adjacent railway village; built later in the 19th century.

5.7.5 Larger, public and religious buildings such as St Mark's Church, the Mechanics' Institution, the Platform (originally barracks and then used as a Wesleyan Chapel) are in a lively Gothic Revival style and are more highly decorated featuring crenellated towers, crocketed spires, pointed gables and pointed arch windows. These buildings contrast with the domestic and works buildings and indicate their social and communal importance.

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Fig. 27: Palette of architectural features used within the Conservation Area



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5.8 BOUNDARY TREATMENTS

5.8.1 The use and type of boundary treatments is significant for distinguishing between the public and private spaces within Swindon's Railway Conservation Area, as well as between the working and domestic areas.

5.8.2 Within the former railway works, the buildings are positioned hard against the open spaces and avenues that separate the buildings. Before the closure of the works there were a lot more buildings and structures all of which were part of the same complex meaning that boundaries between them were not needed. The works are collectively surrounded by a imposing and impressive boundary wall (**Fig. 28**), which served as a clear and impressive division between 'inside' and 'outside'. It continues to be significant both historically and socially contributing to the areas special character and appearance.

5.8.3 The terraced cottages in the railway village are set back from the pavement behind a combined front garden, extending the length of each street. Bounded by a modern, low wall, this arrangement was installed as part of the 1970s refurbishment works but historically a low wall was the boundary treatment here. Individual boundary divisions between the cottages were lost in the 1970s but this street boundary remains important for defining the private residential amenity space. To the rear of the cottages, small private yards are enclosed by brick boundary walls creating narrow back alleys. Between Reading and Oxford Streets, the brick walls have been removed and there is now a more open, less private character to the backalley.

5.8.4 Other civic and religious buildings within the railway village and on Faringdon Road have traditional metal railings. These have been lost at the Health Hydro. GWR Park also has railings forming its boundary, allowing important visual permeability into this green open space. The terraced row of shops on Faringdon Road are positioned hard against the pavement as is indicative of urban retail frontages.



Fig. 28: This image shows the imposing boundary wall of the works juxtaposed with the residential scale of the village cottages



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5.9 MOVEMENT AND ACTIVITY

5.9.1 The type of movement activity taking place within the Conservation Area has changed over time, particularly since the closure and subsequent regeneration of the railway works. There would once have been a bustle of workers streaming in and out of the railway works, which themselves would have been closed to all but those who worked 'inside' (see front cover image). Today, the former railway works are publicly accessible and the railway village is now subject to greater vehicular movement, particularly buses. **Plan 5** overleaf identifies the principal routes through the area today for pedestrians, public transport (buses and trains), other vehicles and cyclists. Different types of movement affect the character of an area through the ambience they create and due to the physical appearance of the modes of movement.

5.9.2 The London to Bristol railway line (now electrified), which bisects the Conservation Area, is perhaps the most important and physically dominant means of transport through the area. The railway works and associated village and amenities would not have been developed if it were not for this railway line and therefore contributes considerably to the special interest of the area. However, the railway also forms a barrier to movement across the area. Whilst historically this was desirable, as the railway line also formed or reinforced the boundary between the works and the town, today it causes challenges for ease of vehicular and pedestrian movement between the two sides of the line. There are just three points within the Conservation Area where there is access across the railway line.

The most important of these historically was the pedestrian underpass opposite the Mechanics' Institution as this was the principal entrance for workers to the railway works and provides an evocative reminder of the journey 'inside'.

5.9.3 Within the former railway works, movement and activity is generally pedestrian with vehicles limited to defined services routes, separate from the main pedestrian routes. The activity in this part of the Conservation Area has changed the most since the closure of the works, as there would have been no public access historically and activity would have been limited to the operating hours of the works. Today, it is developing into a vibrant new urban quarter with activity across the day thanks to the mix of residential, commercial and retail uses.

5.9.4 The inner railway village streets have a relatively tranquil character with little pedestrian or vehicular activity other than by residents. Being at the heart of the village and containing some of its important amenities, Emlyn Square is rightly more bustling and has the potential to be more so with the restoration of the Mechanics' Institution. Unfortunately, many of the town's bus routes pass along Church Place, Bristol Street and Emlyn Square, which disrupts the residential atmosphere and also hinders the movement of pedestrians and cyclists. Outside the bounds of the railway village, activity is more characteristic of an urban town with Rodbourne Road and Faringdon Road both busy vehicular routes.

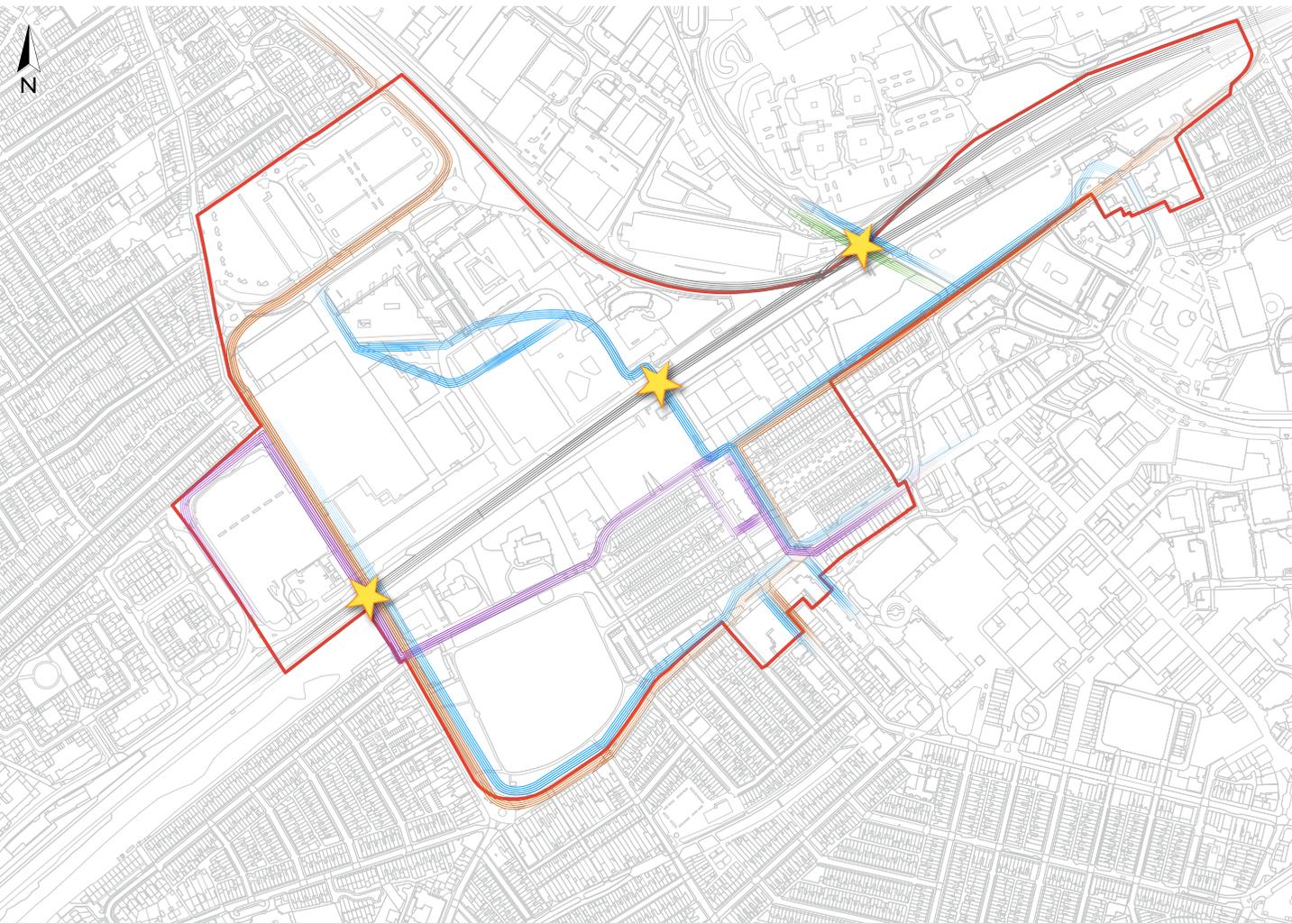
5.9.5 GWR Park, considered in more detail in the following section, is one of the most important amenity spaces in the Conservation Area. It is well frequented by a variety of different user groups throughout the day and year. The park is accessed from one of four entrances, one on each side of the park, although those on Park Lane and Faringdon Road are the most used. As these are both busy roads with limited pedestrian crossings, there are challenges with connectivity, particularly from the south side of Faringdon Road. As the park is open all the time, there are sometimes issues with anti-social behaviour at night time. Activity in the park could be increased with the provision of better amenities, such as public conveniences, or by hosting events within it.

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- Key**
- Principal pedestrian routes
 - Route of buses through conservation areas
 - Railway lines
 - Principal vehicular routes
 - Cycle path
 - ★ Access points across the railway lines

Plan 5: Plan showing important pedestrian, vehicular and bus routes through the conservation areas, where there is the greatest amount of movement and activity (© Crown copyright and Database Rights 100024296 2020)



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5.10 PUBLIC REALM, OPEN SPACES AND TREES

5.10.1 The nature and extent of the public realm within the Conservation Area has changed over time, originally it would have been restricted to south of the railway line with the railway works a private industrial complex. Today there are important public spaces on both sides of the line with the largest and most historically significant being GWR Park (**Fig. 29**). The land was purchased as a cricket pitch by the GWR company for its workers in the 1840s and has been an important amenity ever since. Turned into a formal park in the 1870s, many historic features survive including avenues of mature trees, the encircling paths and some boundary railings. The park was central to community life of the railway village, hosting events such as the Children's Fete, which has recently been reestablished. St Mark's churchyard, opposite the park on Church Place, is also of historic and amenity value. It contains memorials to Joseph Armstrong, second superintendent of the works, and members of the Gooch family (NHLE: 1023481 and 1283831). The churchyard also contains many mature trees, which along with those in the vicarage gardens adjacent and GWR Park, give a verdant character to this part of the conservation area.



Fig. 29: GWR Park retains some of its historic features, such as part of its formal planting, and remains the most important amenity space in the Conservation Area



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5.10.2 Within the former railway works, the programme of regeneration has included the creation of a series of new public spaces interspersed with areas of car and coach parking. These spaces have been introduced following the demolition of non-historic workshop buildings but retain an industrial character. The most successful space is that in front of the Designer Outlet Village which uses traditional surface treatments and durable, sympathetic street furniture (*Fig. 30*). Other spaces are less evolved and there are unsympathetic barriers which hinder movement and detract from the appearance of the area. Some trees and other soft landscaping has been introduced, of particular note is the planting to south elevation of Heelis. A recent and successful area of public realm has been introduced in front of Swindon Railway Station forming a welcoming entrance to the town.

5.10.3 The surface treatments within public spaces and streets varies across the Conservation Area. Some traditional and historic materials exist such as stone and brick sets; where they survive, historic surfaces should be retained. However, there is also extensive use of modern materials including tarmac and concrete pavers, sometimes in poor condition, which detract from the areas special interest. There are historic items of street furniture across the Conservation Area, in particular bollards, and traditional lampposts were introduced into the railway village as part of the 1970s refurbishment scheme. However, there is a lot of unsympathetic street furniture across the Conservation Area.

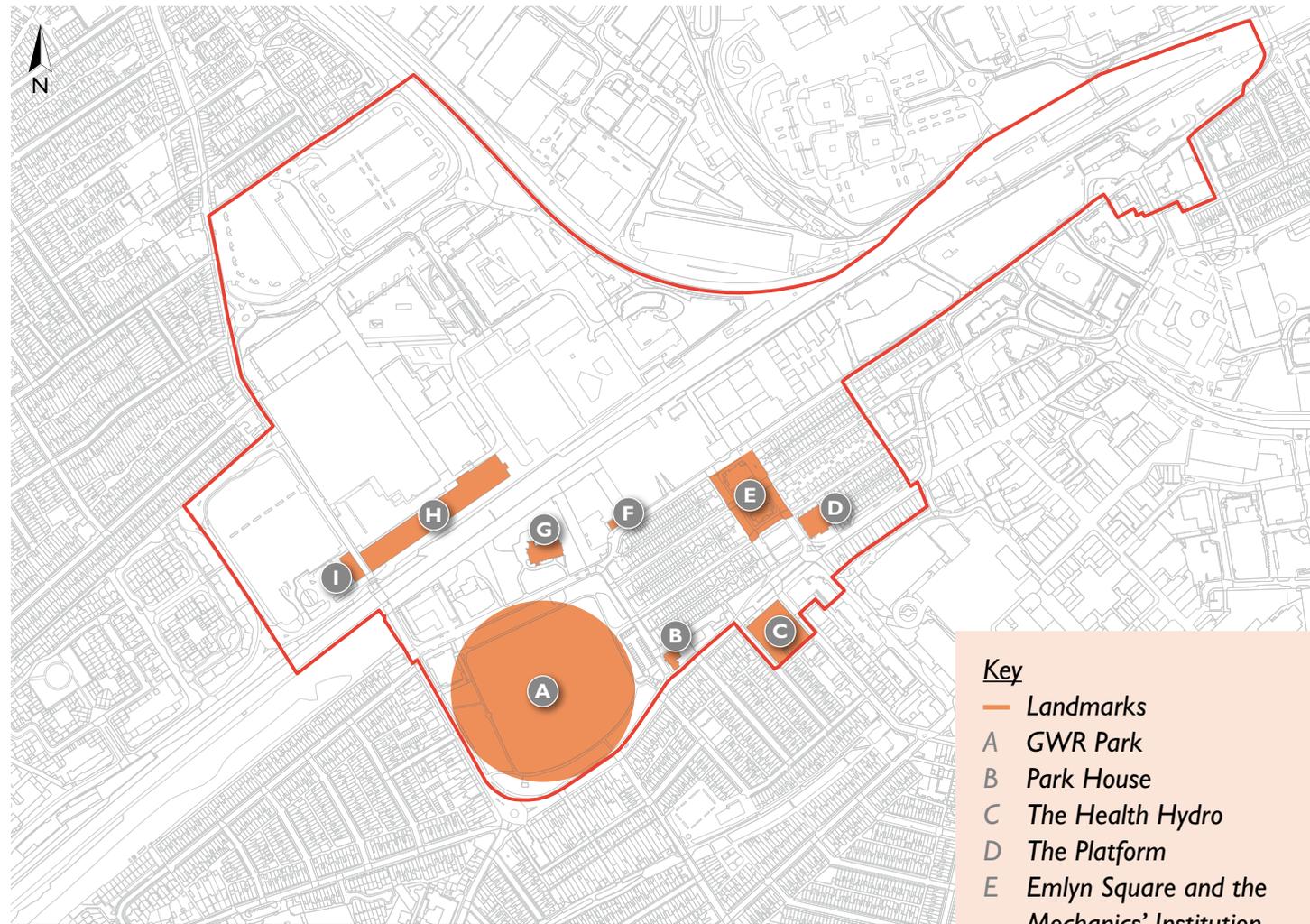


Fig. 30: The public space at the entrance to the Designer Outlet Village is sympathetic to its historic surroundings and uses durable, traditional materials



5.II POSITIVE LANDMARKS IN THE CONSERVATION AREA

5.II.1 Nearly all the buildings and spaces in the Swindon's Railway Conservation Area contribute to its special interest. However, there are individual buildings, groups of buildings and spaces which play a more important role in establishing the character of the area. These are considered landmarks and are identified on **Plan 6** and described on the following pages. The landmarks are so defined due to their use, their height, contribution to the layout of the area or their role in wayfinding. There are also buildings which are very visually prominent but detract from the appearance of the Conservation Area; Signal Point marks the location of Swindon Railway Station but the building itself is out of scale and unsympathetic in appearance and therefore is not included within the landmarks.



Plan 6: Plan identifying the landmark buildings and features within the Conservation Area (© Crown copyright and Database Rights 100024296 2020)

Key

- Landmarks
- A GWR Park
- B Park House
- C The Health Hydro
- D The Platform
- E Emlyn Square and the Mechanics' Institution
- F The Water Tower
- G St Mark's Church
- H The Long Shop
- I Pattern Church
(The Pattern Store)



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A. GWR Park

5.11.2 GWR Park is the largest green and public space in the Conservation Area and is an important amenity and destination for those living in the railway village and the wider town. The Park was an early and essential feature of the railway village, the land being purchased by the GWR company as a cricket ground for its workers in 1844. It has continued to play a central role in community life hosting events and providing much needed open space as the town grew around it.



B. Park House

5.11.3 This grand house presides over the GWR Park and railway village. It was the residence and surgery for the GWR's chief medical officer and its physically dominant appearance when compared to the railway cottages, assists in demonstrating the authority of the GWR company but also the welfare provisions it made for its employees. Its brick material also demonstrates its grander status contrasting with the stone built cottages of the railway village.



C. The Health Hydro

5.11.4 The Health Hydro's broad and decorative frontage and use of distinctive red brick ensure it is visually distinctive from the other community buildings in the railway village opposite. It provides a connection between the town centre and the village and, being built by public subscription, is an important reminder of the communal effort to improve the lives of those working and living in the area. The building contains the country's oldest Turkish Baths with these and the swimming pool still open to the public.



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D. The Platform

5.11.5 The Platform is prominent due to its scale from both within Emlyn Square, where its corner towers are visible and Faringdon Road, from within which its twin octagonal turrets are important features. The building is interesting for having been adapted for different uses, starting life as a barracks for single GWR railway workers before swiftly being converted into a Wesleyan chapel and then a museum. The architecture of the building demonstrates this adaptation with features surviving from all three phases. Today, the building is a music centre and community space.



E. Emlyn Square and the Mechanics' Institution

5.11.6 Emlyn Square, originally called High Street, was the heart of the railway village, both physically and socially. Despite the closure of some of the buildings in the Square, it remains an important part of the layout of the village and in connecting the town centre with the former railway works (via the underpass). The square has considerable potential to increase its landmark contribution to the Conservation Area, in particular with the repair and reuse of the Mechanics' Institution. This building is one of the most important and visually prominent within the railway village. Its central position, larger scale and massing demonstrate the building's importance to the railway workers as the cultural and educational centre for the community.



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F. The Water Tower

5.11.7 Being taller than most of the surrounding buildings, the water tower is a local landmark visible from across the railway lines, from GWR Park, as well as from within the railway village itself. It is an important visual reminder of the many different aspects of the railway works and one of the few elements on the south side of the railway line.



G. St Mark's Church

5.11.8 St Mark's Church was part of the original railway village, being consecrated in 1845. Designed by a young Sir George Gilbert Scott, the spire is built in an unusual position on the north side, intended to produce an impressive view from the railway line on the approach to Swindon railway station; the GWR company took great care over the public-facing appearance of their buildings. The church spire is visible from both sides of the railway and provides an important visual connection with the village from the works on the north side.



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H. The Long Shop

5.11.9 As with St Mark's Church, the Long Shop is an example of the effort GWR made to provide an imposing view of its buildings for those travelling on the railway. The impressive masonry façade, nearly 200m long, was designed to match earlier GWR buildings at a time when brick was the cheaper material of choice for lesser buildings within the works.

I. Pattern Church (The Pattern Store)

5.11.10 This building is prominent along Rodbourne Road and provides an important visual connection from the village side of the railway line to the former works to the north. The building is also prominent from the railway lines itself on the approach to Swindon railway station. It is an important visual reminder of the many different aspects of the railway works.



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5.12 VIEWS AND SETTING

VIEWS WITHIN THE CONSERVATION AREA

5.12.1 The way in which the Conservation Area is experienced is primarily visual, that is through the experience of the appearance of the area. Views may be static or dynamic, long or short, channelled or panoramic, designed or incidental.

5.12.2 It is important to note that other, less tangible factors also contribute to the experience of the Conservation Area such as smells, noises and vibrations in the case of Swindon's Railway Conservation Area for example the frequent noise and vibrations of passing trains contribute considerably to the experience of the area even though the trains themselves are not always visible.

5.12.3 Views within Swindon's Railway Conservation Area contribute to our understanding and therefore appreciation of why it is special. Whilst there are a small number of specific views which particularly assist in revealing the character and special interest of the Conservation Area, in general the Conservation Area is experienced through incidental views, which are not individually of significance. This is particularly the case within the terraced streets of the railway village and moving around the historic remnants of the railway works. These are described on the following pages. All views which take in the historic buildings, listed or not, and general historic environment of the area are important and contribute to the understanding and experience of the area.

Terraced streets in the railway village

5.12.4 The terraced workers cottages have a strongly unified character and harmonious appearance which is best experienced in the channelled views along the linear streets. Views from the inner streets have a strong residential character whilst those along the outer streets are more varied with views of the imposing railway works boundary wall or the edges of the town centre along Faringdon Road. The views along the streets are often terminated with glimpses of GWR Park or the Mechanics' Institution in Emlyn Square. In addition to the linear views along the terraced streets views along the sides of Emlyn Square, Church Street and East Street, which form the gridded layout of the railway village, also contribute to the understanding of the area, in particular the permeability and connectivity through the village to the railway works and town centre.



Fig. 31: The view along Bathampton Street lined with terraced cottages and terminating with the Mechanics' Institution



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Rear alleys in the railway village

5.12.5 The rear alleys separating the rows of terraced cottages are particularly atmospheric and indicative of the historic character and appearance of the railway village. The alleys are enclosed by the brick boundary walls of the cottage yards and each has a strongly unified character the same as the street elevations. However, each alley has its own slightly unique character due to the different phases of construction of the streets. All the alleys present a more industrial character than the street elevations and there is an impression of the continuing sense of community within the railway village.



Fig. 32: The view along the rear alley between Bathampton Street and Exeter Street

Railway works

5.12.6 Although the railway works have undergone substantial change since their closure including the demolition of buildings and the construction of new development, there remains a strong sense of its industrial character. All the historic buildings which survive have been converted to new uses that have had little change to their external appearance and several of the historic open spaces, such as Heritage Plaza which formerly contained the traversing table, survive and can be experienced.



Fig. 33: The view across Heritage Plaza, a historic open space within the works with the Chain Test House and former General Offices around it, along with the recent Thomas Homes development



Railway Works Boundary Wall

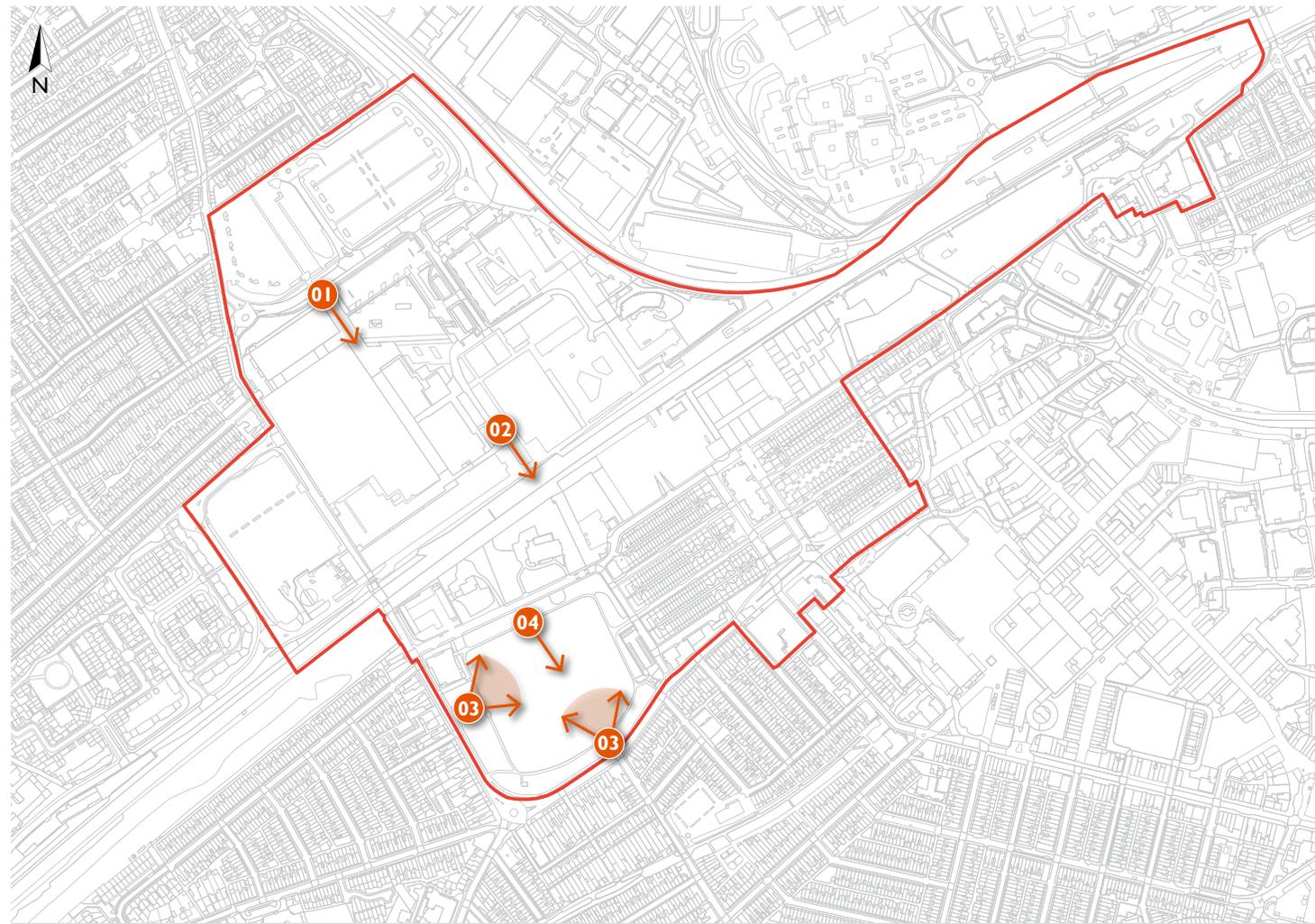
5.12.7 One of the best ways of understanding the historic relationship between the railway works and village is through the experience and views of the works boundary wall. The wall, which is Grade II listed, is at its tallest and most imposing along the southern frontage of the works, adjacent to the railway village and town centre. The wall provides a strong sense of enclosure to views along London Road and Station Road in particular.



Fig. 34: The view looking west along Station Road with the listed boundary wall of the railway works along its length

Defined Views

5.12.8 There are several defined views, identified on **Plan 7** and described overleaf, which make a specific contribution to the special interest of the Conservation Area. Although, these views are not designed and like other views of the Conservation Area are incidental, they reveal specific important characteristics about the Conservation Area and therefore deserve specific identification and consideration.



Plan 7: The small number of defined views of the Conservation Area, which make a particular contribution to its special interest (© Crown copyright and Database Rights 100024296 2020)

Key

→ Defined view of importance



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View 1 *Channelled view towards the entrance to Designer Outlet Village*

5.12.9 This view is of recent origin but not only showcases the historic buildings of the railway works but also the sensitively designed new buildings. The composition of new public realm and buildings is best seen from this position. It demonstrates the positive regeneration which has taken place since the closure of the works and the vibrant future of this new urban quarter.

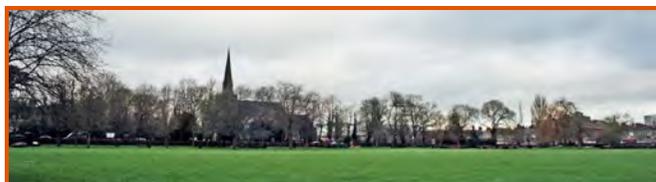
View 2 *View across railway line from former railway works to railway village*

5.12.10 This view is one of the few where the railway village is visible from the former railway works and therefore shows the connection between these two integral parts of the Conservation Area. It contains two important landmarks south of the railway line which help provide orientation; the water tower and St Mark's Church. This view is incidental and has only come into existence as part of the regeneration of the works. Now that it exists, it contributes to the understanding of the railway heritage of the area and should be protected, or indeed enhanced as this part of the railway works is used for parking and servicing at present.



View 3 *Views towards St Mark's Church and Railway Village across GWR Park*

5.12.11 Panoramic views across GWR Park, particularly from its southern and eastern entrances, give the best comprehensive impression of the railway village as they capture the streets of terraced cottages and some of the village's amenities many of which were provided by the GWR company, including the park itself. The most prominent feature from this important landmark is St Mark's Church, the spire of which rises above the trees which characterise this part of the Conservation Area. Views from the open space of the park also take in the setting of the Conservation Area, considered in the following section.



View 4 *Views from GWR Park to Radnor Street Cemetery*

5.12.12 The openness of GWR Park allows for views south towards Radnor Street cemetery which was used as the graveyard for St Mark's after its own churchyard became full. The cemetery therefore has an important connection to the conservation area and its history and special interest.



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THE SETTING OF THE CONSERVATION AREA

5.12.13 The experience of a conservation area is not limited to what is within its boundaries, the setting of a conservation area can also contribute to the understanding and enjoyment of its special interest. Setting is defined as “*the surroundings in which a heritage asset is experienced*”.⁰¹ This is both the experience of that setting from within a conservation area and also its surroundings from which a conservation area can be experienced. Different elements of setting may make different contributions and may be positive, negative or neutral. The extent of the setting of a conservation area is not fixed and may change over time as its surroundings evolve. The ways in which setting contributes to the special interest of the conservation area are often expressed in terms of views, however, like within the conservation area other less tangible factors also contribute. These include but are not limited to; the pattern and appearance of the surrounding townscape, the noise, ambience and use of the surrounding area, the historic relationship and present connectivity between the area with its surroundings.

5.12.14 The following analysis of the setting of Swindon’s Railway Conservation Area is not exhaustive but highlights some of the important components of the area’s setting which assist in the understanding, legibility and appreciation of what is special about the Conservation Area. It includes references, where relevant, to views out of the Conservation Area and also views from the setting into the Conservation Area.

5.12.15 Large parts of the immediate and wider setting of Swindon’s Railway Conservation Area is terraced streets of Victorian housing, in particular to the south and west of the railway village and GWR Park, including edging the park itself. These areas demonstrate the growth of Swindon following the establishment and initial success of the railway works and therefore contribute to the understanding of how important the railway works were to the growth of Swindon into the town it is today. Although the terraces are standard Victorian red brick urban housing, their layout is defined by local features such as the route of the canal, land ownership and the topography of the area as it rises towards Old Swindon.

5.12.16 Cambria Place makes a particular contribution to the setting of the Conservation Area. This enclave of terraced houses and former Baptist Chapel was built to house GWR’s Welsh railway workers and they bear similarities in appearance to the cottages within the railway village, see photograph on the following page (**Fig.35**).

5.12.17 More widely the residential areas to the north and west of the former railway works, which developed slightly later in the Edwardian and inter-war periods, further demonstrate the on-going success of the railway works and the contribution they made to the continued expansion of the town.

5.12.18 The openness of GWR Park means it is one of the best spaces in the Conservation Area that the wider town can be experienced. Views south-east from the park take in the Victorian residential development on the slopes up to Old Swindon and Radnor Street cemetery (**View 4 on Plan 7**). The cemetery which has an important connection with the railway village for being the extension of St Mark’s graveyard; the visual connection is therefore of considerable importance to the special interest of the Conservation Area.

⁰¹ MHCLG, *National Planning Policy Framework* (2019), p.71



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Fig. 35: Terrace of cottages which are part of the Cambria Place enclave which were originally built to house Welsh railway workers

5.12.19 The closest residential streets, including Park Lane and Faringdon Road, which form the Conservation Area boundary, and Wescott Place, the Conservation Area can be directly experienced through the green and treed GWR Park and glimpses of St Mark's Church and railway village. Along Park Lane, the former railway works can also be directly experienced with views of the Pattern Store building.

5.12.20 At its peak, the railway works extended considerably further than the historic core which survives today. The vast former extent of the works is interpreted through the use of street names within new developments that have associations with destinations (as in the railway village), trains and people of the GWR. This serves to increase the understanding of the former works and reinforces the sense of place.

5.12.21 Swindon's town centre, located adjacent to the east of the Conservation Area, has changed considerably in the post-war period and as such the street layout and character of buildings bears little resemblance to how this area would have been historically. Prior to the establishment of the railway works, the small settlement of Swindon was about a mile to the south-east. The success and importance of the railway works have seen the town's centre shift towards the railway works and village, which were originally in open countryside. This knowledge increases the importance of the town centre, despite the change which has taken place. There are some fragmentary remains of the pre-war street plan around Bridge Street and Fleet Street and some early 20th century buildings. Due to their proximity to the Conservation Area this area makes an additional contribution by alluding to how the town centre setting of the railway village would have been historically.



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5.12.22 There are however some parts of this town centre area which are negative such as the rear of the Sir Daniel Arms on Holbrook Way, which immediately edges the Conservation Area and uninviting backstreet Henry Street. The large commercial office buildings along the south side of Station Road also make a negative contribution to the setting of the Conservation Area due in particular to their large massing and position in relation to the street frontage.

5.12.23 The busy roads which surround the Conservation Area are an expected part of the setting of an urban conservation area. However, they have a negative impact on its setting due to the noise and the way they cut the Conservation Area off from its surroundings, particularly with the town centre to the east. Modern transport needs mean that the historic connectivity which would have existed between the town and railway village has been reduced, which has been harmful to the special interest of the Conservation Area. The railway works, on the other hand, have always been separated from their surroundings by a tall boundary wall. Breaches in the wall for new roads have been necessary as part of the successful regeneration of the works but in general the separation with the surrounding residential areas which form the setting of the former works remains and contributes to the understanding and special interest of the area.

5.12.24 Swindon is a growing town and since the post-war period taller and larger buildings have become part of the town centre, visible from the Conservation Area and often close to its eastern edge. Signal Point is one such building which is within the Conservation Area boundary but makes a negative contribution due to its height and appearance. One of the most prominent tall buildings in the setting of the Conservation Area is the David Murray John Tower which is visually dominant from many parts of the area, particularly from the open space of GWR Park (**Fig.36**). Whilst the tower is well-known locally and may have some architectural merit in its own right, it has a negative impact on the special interest of the Conservation Area due to its dominance, height and appearance. Other large and tall buildings are also beginning to be added to Swindon's skyline and are becoming a more visible part of the setting of the Conservation Area. The historic character of the Conservation Area is strong, and the visibility of modern buildings need not detract from its special interest if their design is sensitive to the historic character and special interest of the Conservation Area.

5.12.25 When proposals are being developed within the setting of the Conservation Area, specific analysis should be undertaken to understand the contribution a specific site or building makes to the special interest of the Conservation Area and how the proposals may impact upon this contribution and the special interest of the Conservation Area as a whole. Further guidance can be found within Historic England's 'Tall Buildings: Historic England Advice Note 4' and 'The Setting of Heritage Assets Good Practice Advice in Planning Note 3', see '[Further Information and Sources](#)' for details.



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5.13 CHARACTER AREAS

Character Area 5: Former Railway Works

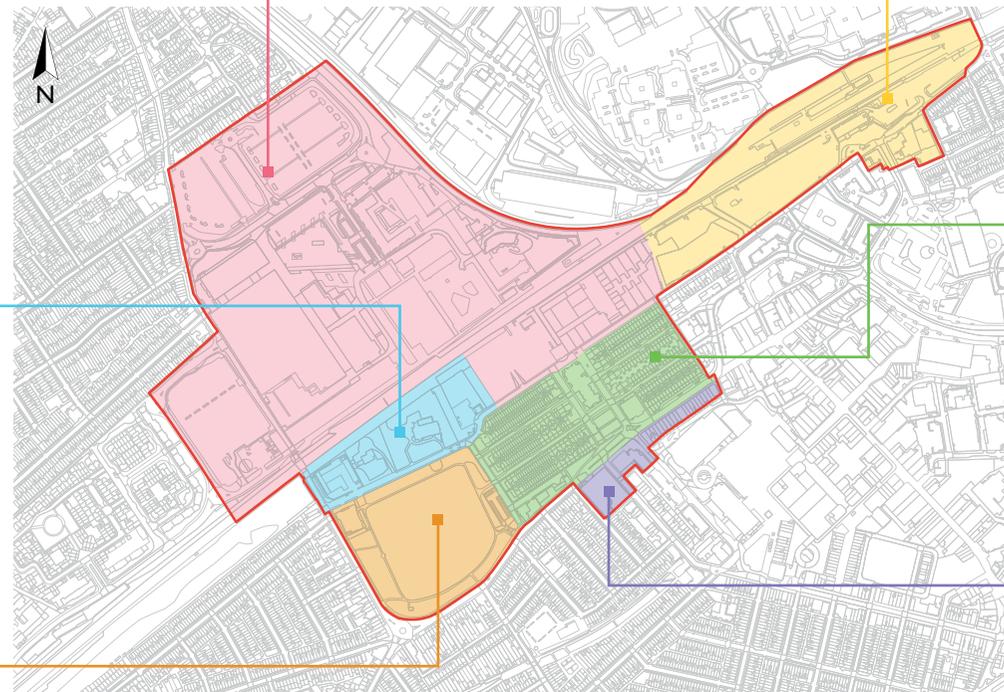
The place of work for many generations of Swindon residents before its closure, today regenerated into a new public urban quarter.

Character Area 4: Church Place

Containing further buildings which supported the railway village community, Church, vicarage and school.

Character Area 3: GWR Park

The original and most important public green space within the Conservation Area.



Plan 8: Plan showing the different character areas within the Conservation Area (© Crown copyright and Database Rights 100024296 2020)

Character Area 6: Sheppard Street and Station Road

Containing the railway station and associated hotels and public houses as well as parts of the former railway works.

Character Area 1: Railway Village Core

The terraced streets of workers cottages and the important community and amenity buildings in Emlyn Square.

Character Area 2: South side of Faringdon Road

Victorian retail buildings and the Health Hydro, separated from the railway village by Faringdon Road.



CHARACTER AREA I: RAILWAY VILLAGE CORE



Character Area Summary

- Strong unified character of the terraced streets.
- Grander buildings in Emlyn Square demonstrative of this being the communal heart of the village.
- Unity in architectural details and materials.
- Historic residential and community uses remain.

5.13.1 This character area contains some of the most significant and character-defining elements of the Conservation Area, namely, the parallel rows of terraced workers cottages, named for destinations on the GWR line, and the central community and amenity buildings of Emlyn Square. Laid out between 1842 and 1847, the cottages were designed by the GWR company to house their workers. The properties are now largely owned and managed by the Council. The area retains its ordered layout of rows of streets flanking a central square, originally an open space but quickly infilled with the impressive, Gothic Revival style Mechanics' Institution (1855, enlarged 1893). Although in a derelict and vacant state, this building remains a focal point and landmark within the character area, positioned opposite the workers entrance to the railway works.

5.13.2 The fine-grained, two-storey cottages are an exemplary example of early railway workers housing. Those on the northern side, facing the railway line, have more decoration, using Elizabethan and Jacobean features than the inward and south-facing streets, which have a plain, more vernacular style. The buildings fronting Emlyn Square also feature these decorative motifs and are a grander three-storeys, or four in the case of the Platform (the former Barracks). The Mechanics' Institution and the Platform have octagonal turrets and crenulations which would be considered to contribute to their landmark quality. The grander appearance of the buildings in Emlyn Square is demonstrative of the physical and communal heart of the village and its amenity function remains in the Glue Pot pub and community café in the former bakery. The former Medical Fund Hospital, at the southern end of the square is now a community centre and the Platform is also partly in community use.

Fig. 37: View of the terraced cottages of the railway village



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CHARACTER AREA I: RAILWAY VILLAGE CORE (CONT.)

5.13.3 The majority of buildings in the character area are mainly local Swindon stone with Bath stone for some architectural details. This consistent use of materials gives a familial relationship between all the buildings of the character area despite the differences in their style and decoration. Park House, which was built after the initial 1840s phase, is in brick, as are the extensions, outbuildings and boundary walls of the cottages. It should be noted that Park House is not built in local brick, which is usually red / orange in colour. The cottages all have timber vertical sliding sash or casement windows with lintels or hood mouldings. Porches are often recessed, others projecting with moulded brackets.

5.13.4 Despite their density, the residential streets have a spacious feel due to their green front gardens and low boundary treatments. Although the historic boundaries and divisions between the cottages were lost as part of the 1970s refurbishment scheme, the overarching historic character remains. The rear alleys between the rows of cottages have a more urban character indicative of later Victorian workers housing with outbuildings and walls enclosing small yards. In addition to the private front gardens, there is a small grassed area separating Taunton Street from Faringdon Road, which formerly contained further cottages, demolished in the 1970s and the wall of which survives. The space now contains several mature trees serving as a buffer between the village and the busy road. There is also a row of trees to the rear of the community centre softening

the otherwise urban Emlyn Square. There are other smaller trees within the private front gardens and a small number in the alleys.

5.13.5 The residential character of the area means that the terraced streets are quiet, mainly used by local residents and has little vehicular movement. However, Bristol Street and London Street do suffer from through traffic and bus services which detracts from their residential character. Emlyn Square, at the centre of the village, is more bustling, as it is a more major thoroughfare for people moving between the town centre and the former railway works. However, the Square also has heavy bus traffic which makes safe pedestrian movement challenging and has a negative impact on residents (noise and pollution).

5.13.6 Surface treatments within the public realm are a mix of tarmac, concrete pavers and some more traditional finishes such as textured engineering brick pavers in the rear alleys. There are also some instances of historic paving in the form of the sarsen stone setts marking the parking bays in some of the residential streets. There are also some manhole covers in London Street and the alleys have GWR lettering. Traditional, short lampposts, installed as part of the 1970s scheme, are in keeping with the residential scale and historic character. Those historic elements of the public realm are valuable to the special interest of the area.





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CHARACTER AREA 2: SOUTH SIDE OF FARINGDON ROAD



Character Area Summary

- Developed after the railway village, this area is a transitional zone with the town centre.
- It contains amenities (shops and the Health Hydro) for residents of the village.
- The buildings are predominantly brick, contrasting with the stone used in the railway village.
- The busy Faringdon Road separates this area from the rest of the Conservation Area.

5.13.7 This area is beyond the original GWR company's model village and was developed during the second half of the 19th century as a result of the growth of New Swindon beyond the railway village. Faringdon Road forms the southern boundary of the Conservation Area. The area acts as a transitional zone from the intimate community of the railway village to the retail core of the town centre.

5.13.8 The area includes the Health Hydro (1891), Bridge House and a row of terraced shops with residential uses above. The Health Hydro and Bridge House occupy the full width of their urban blocks and are set back from the pavement, whereas the terrace is much more fine-grained with narrow frontages set hard against the pavement.

5.13.9 The Health Hydro was built by public subscription as the GWR Medical Fund Baths and Dispensary and was an important welfare and amenity facility for railway workers and their families; the building remains a public swimming baths and is a landmark within the area. The shops within the terrace form the edge of the retail town centre, which has been much altered in the post-war period. Although greatly altered, there are many traditional shopfront features surviving particularly decorative corbelled pilasters. A few full historic shopfronts also survive with traditional signage and lighting. Bridge House is a post-war commercial building, converted to residential use, which detracts from the Conservation Area due to its unsympathetic appearance and out-of-scale massing.

Fig. 38: Terrace of shops on the south side of Faringdon Road



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CHARACTER AREA 2: SOUTH SIDE OF FARINGDON ROAD (CONT.)

5.13.10 The buildings in this character area are predominantly brick including the historic terrace and Health Hydro in red brick, which serves to contrast and visually separate them from the stone buildings of the railway village. These historic buildings possess architectural decoration. The two-storey, Queen Anne-style Health Hydro has gables, tall chimneys and classical stone doorcases but has unfortunately lost its boundary railings. The terrace, which is slightly taller at three-storeys, has contrasting brick banding and window heads, dentilled eaves and bargeboards. Some have unfortunately been rendered or painted, reducing the consistent appearance of the whole row, or have had their timber sash windows replaced with plastic units and, as previously indicated, some have inappropriate modern shop frontages.

5.13.11 Faringdon Road is a busy vehicular route and part of the town centre one-way system. It is also a popular pedestrian route connecting the town centre with the Health Hydro and GWR Park. However, there are challenges in the connectivity across Faringdon Road as there are limited and often confusing pedestrian crossing points. This affects the connectivity between the railway village and the Health Hydro. Although the pavements are generous, the public realm has a definite urban character; hard landscaping with very few trees or greenery.





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CHARACTER AREA 3: GWR PARK



Character Area Summary

- Part of the original planned village, the park remains the most important green open space in the Conservation Area.
- Historic landscape features such as the pathways, avenues of trees and elements of formal planting survive, but other features have been lost.
- It contains some neutral and detracting buildings.

5.13.12 GWR Park is an integral and highly significant part of the Conservation Area. It is the largest green public space in the Conservation Area and as such is an important amenity for residents of the railway village and residents further afield. As well as the park, the character area contains the garages of the railway village and the TA Centre, which are within the historic boundaries of the open space.

5.13.13 The land for the park was purchased by the GWR company as a cricket ground for its workers in 1844, while the village was still under construction. It became a formal park in 1871 with some areas of formal planting, and alignment of pathways and entrances, surviving. Other features such as the cricket pavilion, green houses and drinking fountains have been lost. Also in the 1870s, the local Rifle Corps moved to a new drill hall on the site of the TA Centre in the corner of the park, its use very similar to today. Although this building is modern, it is not out of scale and it contributes to the special interest of the area through the historic associations of its use. The garages were added in the post-war period on the part of the park which once contained a glass house and entrance lodge. These buildings detract from the appearance of the area through their inconsistent use and the poor quality of their appearance.

Fig. 39: View from the entrance to GWR Park from the railway village



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CHARACTER AREA 3: GWR PARK (CONT.)

5.13.14 The park today is a large grassed area with a surrounding path and edged by avenues of trees and boundary walls and railings, some of which are historic. It also contains a children's play area, seating, memorials and the remains of formal planting along the eastern side. It is a destination for many different types of users, but the closed public conveniences detract from its accessibility. Although to the east, the relatively tranquil residential character pervades, the south and western boundaries of the park are formed by busy roads, which reduces the tranquillity of the open space.

5.13.15 As well as being an important recreation facility for GWR workers, the park was a central community and social feature of railway village life, hosting fetes and other events. This continues today with the recent re-inauguration of the Children's Fete.

5.13.16 The openness of the park allows some of the best views in the Conservation Area, taking in St Mark's Church, the water tower, and Park House as landmarks with the terraced cottages of the railway village between. There are also views south to Radnor Street Cemetery on the hillside, another important green space in the town which was used once the graveyard of St Mark's had been filled. The visibility of the modern town centre gives this character area a broader sense of the surroundings of the Conservation Area and the growth and success of the town resulting from the railway industry.





CHARACTER AREA 4: CHURCH PLACE



Character Area Summary

- Green leafy area with generous plots.
- Retains its historic religious, educational and community uses.
- The spire of St Mark's Church is a landmark across the Conservation Area and from the railway line.
- The use of stone provides a visual connection to the railway village.

5.13.17 This character area historically contained important amenities for the railway village community; St Mark's Church, the vicarage and parochial hall, and later the village schools. Many of these uses continue with the church; a nursery within the former vicarage; and Swindon University Technical College (UTC) housed in the workshops and former infant school buildings to the east of the area.

5.13.18 Church Place is a pleasant avenue but for the frequent buses which pass along it on route to the town centre. The street has an open and leafy character with the park to the south and spacious plots to the north. Trees within the park (Character Area 3) and within the churchyard and former vicarage gardens, add to the verdant character but do restrict the visibility of the buildings. The area is bounded to the north by the mainline railway but is separated from it by a dense bank of trees so is not generally visible, but is perceived through the noise of the trains.

5.13.19 The parochial hall has been replaced by single-storey workshops associated with the TA Centre opposite, which makes a neutral contribution to the area.⁰² This building is bounded by metal railings, however, in general, boundaries within this area are stone walls. These are low level to the former vicarage and church but a much taller wall, more characterful of the railway works, surrounds the UTC.

⁰² This site is subject to an approved Planning Permission to replace the existing building (Ref. No: S/17/0768)

Fig. 40: The landmark spire of St Mark's Church



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CHARACTER AREA 4: CHURCH PLACE (CONT.)

5.13.20 All the historic buildings in the character area, except for the metal water tower, are constructed in stone, mainly local Swindon stone, which gives them a familial relationship with the core of the railway village.

5.13.21 The former vicarage is a two-storey detached house in an Elizabethan style similar to that used in the railway village with tall gables and chimneys and quatrefoil windows. It was designed by Sir George Gilbert Scott, working with William Bonython. The pair also designed St Mark's Church. The Church is in a decorated Gothic style with elaborate architectural detail. The building is a landmark, not only within the character area but within the wider Conservation Area. Its tower and spire is unusually positioned on the north side to be visible from the railway line and was designed to showcase Swindon for those arriving by train.

5.13.22 To the east of the Church used to be the Bristol Street School, demolished, except for the Infant's School, in 1881 and replaced with the present long single-storey buildings used to store the GWR company's horse-drawn wagons. Recently refurbished and a sympathetic new infill building constructed, the area has returned to its original educational use. At the eastern edge of this character area, and signaling the transition to the industrial railway works area, is the recently refurbished water tower dating from 1870. Its height and intricate white metal framing give this building landmark quality, particularly as seen from GWR Park, along Bristol Street and from the railway works.

5.13.23 Also on the north side of Church Place is the churchyard of St Mark's which provides a further green space. The church itself remains an operational religious building and the adjacent vicarage is now in educational use as a children's nursery, reinforcing the historic and continuing educational use in this part of the Conservation Area.





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CHARACTER AREA 5: FORMER RAILWAY WORKS



Character Area Summary

- Retains its industrial character through the impressive scale and appearance of the buildings.
- Phasing of the building evident through the changes in materials.
- Use of stone for all elevations facing the railway line demonstrative of this being the public face of the works.
- Sensitively designed new buildings and conversions including Thomas Homes and Heelis.

5.13.24 The former railway works is the part of the Conservation Area which has changed most substantially, both during its working life and since its closure in the 1980s. However, this area is also one of the most evocative and demonstrates most clearly the impressive scale and importance of the railway works, once the largest in the world.

5.13.25 Historically, the works were used for the manufacture and repair of locomotives, carriages and wagons first for the GWR company and later for British Rail. Left derelict after closure, the complex has been transformed into a vibrant new urban quarter with retail, office, cultural and residential uses. Existing historic workshops have been sensitively converted to new uses and other buildings demolished to allow for high-quality, sympathetic new development. This process is ongoing, with the carriage works, south of the railway line, currently being converted into commercial and educational workspaces. Sites to east and west of the carriage works are currently used as surface car parks.

5.13.26 The core of the former works is bounded by Rodbourne Road and Kemble Drive, with railway lines to the south and east. There are no through roads passing through the area itself. The buildings occupy large plots demonstrating their former workshop function and are loosely laid out on a grid with avenues and public spaces between. The buildings are much coarser grained than other parts of the Conservation Area and feature large rectangular or long and linear footprints and tall storey heights.

5.13.27 The former workshops are single-storey due to their distinctive use for manufacture and repair of locomotives and carriages, which could not be done

Fig. 41: The National Monuments Record Centre, housed within the former General Offices of the railway works



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CHARACTER AREA 5: FORMER RAILWAY WORKS (CONT.)

over multiple levels, though the two early steam driven turning shops are two-storeys (NHLE: 1023529). Stores, such as the pattern store, the Locomotive Manager's Office (Churchward House – NHLE: 1023519) and the former General Offices (now offices for English Heritage and Historic England) are multi-storey, the latter having storeys added as the railway works expanded. Recent buildings in the railway works have maintained the historic scale and massing with a mix of heights between two and four-storeys, and both long and linear or larger footprints.

5.13.28 The original phase of buildings within the railway works was in local Swindon stone, with brick used only for strengthening and also limited architectural detail to windows and entrances. The stone was roughhewn, contributing to the heavy, industrial character. Pier and panel construction was used, allowing for future adaptability. Later Victorian buildings within the works were constructed largely in brick, which was cheaper than stone. However, stone continued to be used on elevations facing the railway line, which was the principal public face of the works, and demonstrates the GWR company's concern for appearances. One such example is the southern elevation of Workshop 9, now part of the Designer Outlet Village, which, with its long repetitive elevation, makes it a landmark for those arriving by train. The later buildings also have greater decoration, including polychromatic brickwork, recessed brick arches, string coursing and cornices, although they retain an industrial, utilitarian style. Roofs are often pitched and gabled ends are common. The original office buildings have tall chimneys. Windows are generally large and square-headed with timber frames. Recent buildings, added as part

of the regeneration of the area, draw on some of these historic characteristics. The Thomas Homes development, for example, uses brick and have ordered façades sympathetic to the articulation of pier and panel construction. Heelis is perhaps the most distinctive of the recent additions but even this building, which appears as a large modern workshop, uses brick, gabled rooflines and simple detailing to remain in keeping with the character of the area.

5.13.29 Another distinctive feature of this character area is the high and imposing boundary wall, parts of which are within Character Area 6. This wall is the feature which most clearly demonstrates the closed nature of the works to the outside world; workers called it 'inside'. As with the buildings, the parts of the wall which face the railway village and town to the south, are constructed in stone, whereas the 'back' of the works, facing north, are in cheaper brick. The change in level between the works and the railway village means the southern stretch of wall is also a retaining wall and ensures that it appears even more imposing.

5.13.30 Although busy roads and railway lines surround the character area, movement through it is largely pedestrian with vehicular and service routes well separated from the main pedestrian flow. Movement is diagonally across the area through a series of new public spaces, going from the Designer Outlet Village to the underpass, leading on to the railway village and town centre. A successful area of public realm is at the entrance to the Designer Outlet Village, which uses traditional surface treatments of brick sets and durable, sympathetic street furniture.



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CHARACTER AREA 6: SHEPPARD STREET AND STATION ROAD



Character Area Summary

- The listed boundary wall of the railway works is a dominant and imposing feature.
- Enclave of inns and manufacturing building opposite the railway station built to capitalise on the commercial opportunities.
- Remnants of the North Wilts Canal, which pre-dates the railway, survive as a cycle path.

5.13.31 This area largely comprises the mainline railway and Swindon railway station. South of the railway line is, historically part railway works, part Victorian townscape, now almost entirely surface car parking. It also contains an enclave of historic buildings associated with the railway station, an inn, a hotel and a former dairy, which were built to capitalise on the trade and commercial opportunities of the railway.

5.13.32 The railway line is the dominant feature of the area with Sheppard Street and Station Road parallel to the south. Between are large, hard-landscaped car parks. Those which were formerly occupied by the railway works are raised to the same level as the railway line and bounded to the street by the imposing, listed stone boundary wall of the works. The car park to the western end of the character area is on the same level as the railway village and town centre and formerly contained non-railway related manufacturing works and residential terraces.

5.13.33 The buildings opposite the station are two to three-storeys in height, finished in brick and render and in a range of architectural styles. The grandest and most ornate being the Great Western Hotel in a Gothic Revival style. Adjacent is the Queens Tap, a mid-19th century inn and on the other side is the former Aylesbury dairy, also once the Swindon Steam Laundry, which is being converted into a hotel, continuing to show the advantage of proximity to the railway station. Marking the station itself is Signal Point; a 12-storey, post-war slab block, currently vacant. Visibility of the historic station building, on the central platform is limited, except from within the station itself. It dates to 1842 and is in a strong classical styling with characterful Swindon stone.

Fig. 42: The imposing stone boundary wall of the railway works forming the boundary to Station Road



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CHARACTER AREA 6: SHEPPARD STREET AND STATION ROAD (CONT.)

5.13.34 Station Road and Sheppard Street form the principal route from the railway station to the rest of the Conservation Area. The route is busy with traffic as it is part of the town centre one-way system. The road is flanked on the south side, outside the Conservation Area, by large scale commercial buildings which distract from its historic character. The listed boundary wall is important for its sense of enclosure and imposing character but, due to the nature of the road and narrow pavements, appreciation of it is restricted. Beyond the railway station, a solid, stone boundary wall continues forming the edge of the railway embankment. This wall is known as Milk Bank, for its association with the former

Aylesbury Dairy opposite. The cycle and pedestrian passage under the railway line, which is on the alignment of the North Wilts Canal, is unassuming and suffers from anti-social behaviour but is a well-used route during the day (see [Fig. 19](#) on [page 30](#)). Just outside the Conservation Area boundary to the east is a vehicular route which passes below the railway line, the next route to vehicles to the west is Rodbourne Road. The only area of public realm within the area is the recently re-landscaped station forecourt. Providing a welcoming arrival to Swindon, its surface treatments guide pedestrians towards the town centre. It would be beneficial if a similar approach could be taken for the route into the rest of the Conservation Area.





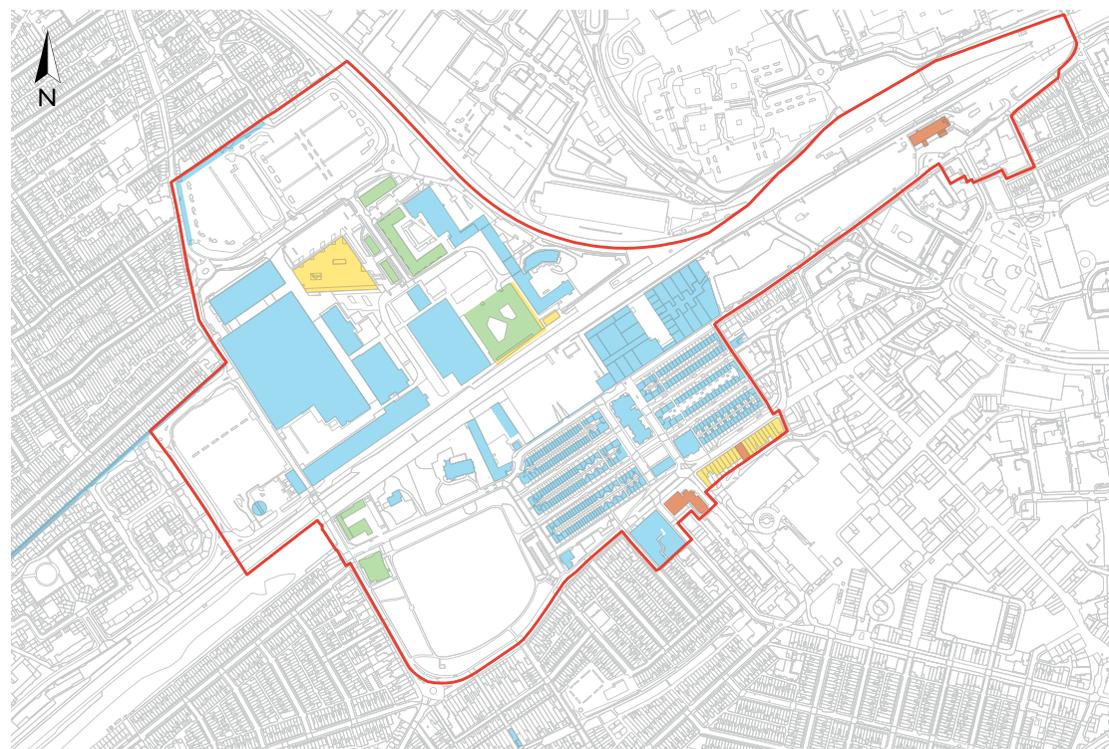
6.1 INTRODUCTION

6.1.1 Swindon's Railway Conservation Area is significant in its own right, it also contains many individually significant buildings which contribute to the overall character and special interest. This includes many statutorily listed buildings and undesignated heritage assets which make a positive contribution to the area. However, there are also buildings and structures that make no specific contribution or indeed detract from the character of the Conservation Area.

6.1.2 **Plan 9** considers all the buildings and substantial structures in the Conservation Area dividing them into the following categories:

- Listed Buildings
- Positive Buildings (those that are not designated but add value to the Conservation Area)
- Neutral Buildings
- Detracting Buildings

6.1.3 With regard to positive, neutral and detracting buildings, judgement of these buildings and structures has been made by means of visual examination from public thoroughfares only. There will be aspects of buildings and structures, both positive and negative, which do not relate solely to their appearance, such as their use or past associations. The intention is to identify which buildings have additional designation or contribute to the area and those which present opportunities for enhancing the special interest of the area. It is not intended to provide a fully comprehensive and detailed assessment of each building individually. It should not be assumed that the omission of any information is intended as an indication that a feature or building is not important. A detailed assessment of significance specific to a building or site within the Conservation Area should always be carried out prior to proposing any change. Specific opportunities for enhancement are identified in the '[Issues and Opportunities](#)' section of this document.



Plan 9: Plan identifying the value and contribution made of different buildings across the Conservation Area (© Crown copyright and Database Rights 100024296 2020)

Please note: Not all Listed Buildings are identified on this plan, for example those which are outside the boundary of the Conservation Area are not shown and those structures which are small in size, such as the tombs in St Mark's churchyard are not depicted. The NHLE should be used as the definitive list of statutorily listed buildings and structures, see '[Further Information and Sources](#)' for more information.

Key

- Listed Buildings
- Positive Building
- Neutral Building
- Detracting Building



6.2 LISTED BUILDINGS

6.2.1 Listed buildings are protected under the *Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990* and are designated for their architectural or historic interest. The criteria for listing is defined by DCMS (see '[Further Information and Sources](#)' for more details). Listing ranges from Grade I (the highest level of protection) through to Grade II* and II (the most common level). Grade I and II* listed buildings together comprise around 7% of listed buildings nationally, with the remainder being Grade II.

6.2.2 Statutory listing does not equate to a preservation order intended to prevent change. However, alterations, additions or demolitions to listed buildings do require Listed Building Consent, which allows local planning authorities to make decisions that have been informed by an understanding of the building or the site's significance.

6.2.3 Outbuildings and subsidiary structures associated with listed buildings are likely to be within their 'curtilage'. That is, a building or structure which is associated with a listed building and has been so since before July 1948. This could be, for example, a wall attached to a listed building, or a building in a rear yard of a listed building such as those within the railway village. In the case of curtilage listing, the curtilage listed structure has the same level of protection as the main listed building and will be subject to the same Listed Building Consent procedures.

6.2.4 Furthermore, national and local planning policies also recognise that changes to other buildings or sites in the setting of a listed building can affect its special interest. Preserving or enhancing the setting of a listed building is a material consideration in planning decisions.

The considerable national importance of Swindon's railway heritage means a high proportion of the buildings within the Conservation Area are listed.

6.2.5 The significance of these buildings varies in nature. Some buildings, such as the Health Hydro ([Fig. 43](#)) and the Mechanics' Institution (both Grade II* listed), have strong communal value for their historic and current social and amenity use. Whereas the surviving workshops and sheds of the railway works (ranging from Grade II to II*) are significant for their innovative design and technological value ([Fig. 44](#)).

6.2.6 Despite their listed status, some of the listed buildings in the Conservation Area have been subject to unsympathetic alterations and repairs. There is potential to enhance the significance of these buildings, and improve the contribution they make to the Conservation Area, through the sensitive reversal or replacement of poorly considered interventions. Some of these opportunities are identified in Theme 6 of the '[Issues and Opportunities](#)' section of this document.

6.2.7 The location of all the listed buildings in the Conservation Area is shown on the plan at the beginning of this section and further details can be found at <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/>.



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Fig. 43: The Health Hydro was funded by GWR employees and built as a public baths and dispensary. It is Grade II* listed and remains in use as a public swimming and Turkish baths.



Fig. 44: Former engineering shops 19 and 20 (now home to STEAM) are original works buildings and a Grade II listed.



6.3 POSITIVE BUILDINGS

6.3.1 Buildings and structures which do not meet the criteria for statutory listing but that still make a positive contribution to the overall character and appearance of the conservation area are categorised as positive buildings. The extent to which a building will positively contribute will largely depend on the integrity of its historic form and is not restricted to its principal elevation; for example, roofscapes and side / rear elevations can all make a positive contribution.

6.3.2 Criteria for identifying positive contributors include:

- Position and presence within the streetscape;
- Use of characteristic materials, architectural motifs or detailing;
- Scale and massing;
- Relationship with neighbouring buildings, both physical and historical;
- Associations with notable architects or other historic figures or events important within the local area; and
- Historic uses associated with the wider conservation area.

6.3.3 As the majority of buildings within the conservation area are statutorily listed there are only a few positive buildings in Swindon's Railway Conservation Area. These include the row of shops on the south side of Faringdon Road (**Fig. 45**) and the retained façades of B-Shop in the former railway works. The row of shops forms an appropriate historic frontage to Faringdon Road and the buildings have architectural features of merit. The retained façade of B-Shop is important for continuing the historic stone frontage of the railway works when viewed from the railway line, alongside its listed neighbours.

6.3.4 As with the listed buildings in the conservation area, there is potential for some of the identified positive buildings to improve the character of the conservation area further still through the sensitive replacement of poorly considered modern interventions. Some of these opportunities are identified in Theme 6 of the 'Issues and Opportunities' section of this document.

6.3.5 There are no additional planning controls associated with positive buildings, beyond those resulting from the buildings being within a designated conservation area, details of which can be found in the Management Plan section of this document.

6.3.6 The location of the positive buildings in the conservation area is shown on **Plan 9** at the beginning of this section.



Fig. 45: Nos.25–45 Faringdon Road are part of a longer terraced row of shops which make a positive contribution to the Conservation Area



6.4 NEUTRAL AND DETRACTING BUILDINGS

6.4.1 The buildings which do not make a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area fall into two categories, either being neutral buildings or detracting buildings.

6.4.2 Neutral buildings are those which neither make a positive contribution nor unduly detract from the character of the Conservation Area. These include the TA Centre buildings on Church Street (**Fig. 46**), which although they have a notable connection to the area due to their use, the buildings themselves do not contribute. Should proposals for the replacement of these buildings come forward, this could offer an opportunity to enhance the appearance of the Conservation Area through high-quality, sensitively-designed replacement.

6.4.3 The neutral building category also includes very recent buildings which, although sensitively-designed to suit their setting, it is too soon to formulate a definite judgement on their contribution to the Conservation Area. These include the residential buildings on the north side of the railway line (**Fig. 47**).

6.4.4 Detracting buildings are those which are considered to make a negative contribution to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area. This may be due to their scale and massing, design, materials, condition or use, or a combination of the above. Detracting buildings offer great potential for enhancement of the Conservation Area either through their refurbishment, demolition and / or replacement as part of any proposals that come forward, with a sensitive new design. Within Swindon's Railway Conservation Area detracting buildings include Bridge House on Faringdon Road and Signal Point over Swindon Railway Station whose appearance is at odds with the historic character of the Conservation Area.



Fig. 46: The TA Centre contributes to the historic interest of the Conservation Area, as it is on of the railway village's Rifle Corps Drill Hall, however the building itself is of no value and is considered to be a neutral building in the Conservation Area



Fig. 47: The residential development north of the railway line are recent buildings which have been sensitively-designed but about which it is too soon to formulate a value judgment, and therefore are currently identified as neutral buildings in the Conservation Area



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This part of the document provides analysis of the current issues and opportunities facing Swindon's Railway Conservation Area following both detailed site surveys and public consultation. These have been divided into the following, often inter-related, themes. Recommendations for each theme are identified within the [Management Plan](#).

Theme 1: Connectivity

The railway line, so integral to the special interest of the Conservation Area, presents issues in connecting the former railway works part of the area to the town centre.

Theme 2: Thoroughfares and Experience

The way people experience and move through the Conservation Area is an important part of their appreciation and interaction with the railway heritage and improving this experience will enhance its special interest.

Theme 3: Public Spaces in the Former Railway Works

The railway works contains an importance series of public spaces, improvement to the appearance and connectivity of which would enliven this new urban quarter and enhance the Conservation Area.

Theme 4: GWR Park

Exploring how this important community resource could better contribute to the special interest of the Conservation Area and how user experience could be improved.

Theme 5: Vacant, Underused and Detracting Sites

Although considerable work has been done to transform the Conservation Area over the past 30 years, there remain opportunities to improve some buildings and sites, including within the area's setting.

Theme 6: Unsympathetic Alterations

Small features of individual buildings, such as windows, doors and shopfronts, all contribute to the overall appearance of the Conservation Area. It is these features which have been altered and improvements would enhance the character of the area.

Theme 7: Engagement with Swindon's Railway Heritage

Considering the initiatives for encouraging public involvement and enjoyment of all the Conservation Area has to offer.



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Theme 1: Connectivity

7.1 The central, urban location of the Conservation Area means that Swindon's railway heritage has the potential to be accessed by all. The Conservation Area contains, or is close to, major transport links, including the railway station, M4 motorway and local bus routes and has good car parking provision, which means it is attractive to visitors. However, many visitors and locals only visit parts of the Conservation Area, mainly the retail and cultural offerings in the former railway works. Likewise, there are challenges in encouraging users of the town centre to visit the Conservation Area. It would be mutually beneficial if there were increased pedestrian and cycle movements in both directions between the town centre and former railway works as this would lead to a greater number of people interacting with Swindon's railway heritage.

7.2 The principal barrier to movement across the Conservation Area is the railway line, which historically served as the divide between 'inside' and 'outside' the railway works. The railway line separated the distinct uses of

the area; employment and industry to the north and residential and amenity to the south. The railway line has only three crossing points within the Conservation Area; Rodbourne Road, the former canal (now cycle path) and the former workers entrance underpass, the latter being the main connecting route (see front cover image). Each of these routes has issues relating to accessibility, safety and opening hours, and opportunities to improve them should be taken. Improving the main underpass is a priority. This theme aligns closely with Theme 2 overleaf.

7.3 Introducing new routes across the railway line could improve connectivity in both directions between the town centre and the former railway works but also presents potential conflict with the special interest and historic character of the area. The importance of the physical divide formed by the railway line should be considered as part of any proposals for new crossings.

Existing buildings and features close to the existing crossing points, such as the Mechanics' Institution and GWR Park, could be utilised to encourage increased movement from either side of the railway line.

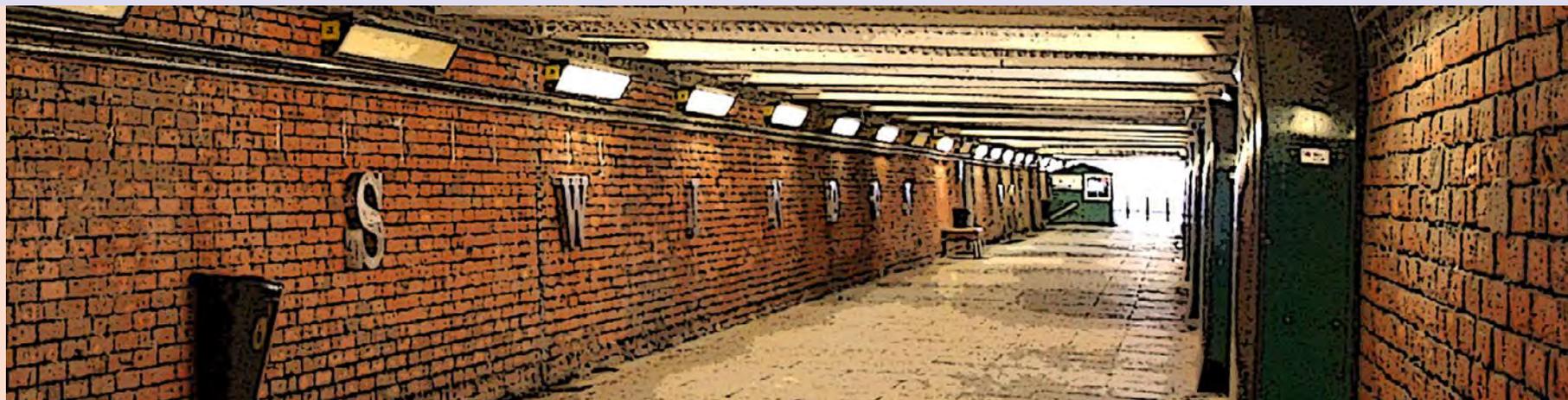


Fig. 48: The pedestrian underpass below the railway line, which was once the main entrance for employees into the railway works from the village



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Theme 2: Thoroughfares and Experience



7.4 Connected to the previous theme, there are considerable opportunities both at smaller and larger scales to improve the public thoroughfares of the Conservation Area and the experience of those using them. This theme includes opportunities to improve the public realm at a macro level with changes to vehicular movement and at a micro level considering surface treatments and street furniture. Public spaces and squares, within the former railway line are considered within Theme 3.

7.5 The urban nature of the Conservation Area means that it attracts a range of different users; pedestrians, cyclists, drivers and passengers on public transport. As with any town centre there can be tensions between these different groups. The characteristics of the various modes and physical interventions within the townscape, to safely segregate them and enable movement, can cause issues for pedestrian movement in particular and are often uncharacteristic features in the streetscape.

7.6 There are several busy roads within and at the edges of the Conservation Area, including Faringdon Road, Station Road and Rodbourne Road. These are unpleasant for pedestrian users and a lack of adequate crossing points mean they are barriers to movement into and through the Conservation Area. In addition, many of the town centre bus routes pass through the heart of the Conservation Area, along Church Place and Bristol Street and through Emlyn Square. The junctions of

Emlyn Square with Bristol Street and Faringdon Road (opposite the Health Hydro) are particularly confusing and inhibitive to pedestrian movement. Given the importance of this area in providing connection with the former railway works (see Theme 1), it would benefit from rationalisation and improved accessibility for pedestrians. Similarly, the junction of Fleet Street with Faringdon Road, which although just outside the Conservation Area forms an important entrance into it from the town centre, is busy with traffic and is restrictive to pedestrian movement.

It is recommended that a transport and accessibility audit be undertaken with the aim of an overarching movement strategy being developed for the Conservation Area and its immediate setting.

7.7 This audit should include a review of bus routes and consideration given to reducing or removing them from the central parts of the Conservation Area. It would also be desirable to improve the pedestrian experience and accentuate the natural desire lines of movement through the area. This could include: traffic calming measures; improved crossings; widening pavements; shared surfaces; reducing obstructions such as bollards; improved lighting and installation of public art; and enhanced signage. Improving the legibility and orientation would assist in encouraging movement between the town centre and former railway works, supporting Theme 1. However, it is important to enhance the tranquillity of the residential streets in the railway village. Opportunities should also be taken to accentuate historic features important to the character of the area, such as the imposing boundary wall of the railway works along Station Road.



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Theme 2: Thoroughfares and Experience (cont.)

7.8 At a more micro level, there are some issues with the condition of surface treatments, both pedestrian pavements and road surfaces. Aging, environmental damage and physical impacts by vehicles have caused deterioration, particularly within the residential streets of the railway village and around Emlyn Square, the latter largely due to bus traffic. As well as detracting from the appearance of the Conservation Area, uneven surfaces are potential hazards for pedestrians, particularly those with mobility challenges.

Undertaking repairs or resurfacing where the condition is poor would be beneficial with sympathetic traditional materials used where appropriate and where these already exist.

7.9 There are some items of historic street furniture within the Conservation Area, and others which have a traditional style, particularly lampposts in the railway village, signage in GWR Park and bollards. However, there are also numerous other examples of street furniture which are not sympathetic and sometimes hinder pedestrian movement. These include litter bins, benches and road traffic signage. In the long-term, it would be desirable for non-historic and unsympathetic items of street furniture to be replaced with durable, high-quality versions, which are sensitive to their specific context within the Conservation Area. 'Studies in the History of Swindon' contains some useful insight as to what would be historically appropriate, see '[Further Information and Sources](#)' for details of this publication. Any schemes for improving pedestrian movement at a macro level, should include sensitive consideration of surface treatment and new street furniture.





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Fig. 49: The entrance to the Designer Outlet Village from its northern car park

Theme 3: Public Spaces in the former railway works

7.10 The regeneration of the former railway works has included the creation of a series of inter-connected public spaces as part of this new urban quarter. Now that works to the buildings are largely completed, there is an opportunity to review the way the public spaces are currently used and consider potential changes and enhancements. Whilst the public space at the entrance to the Designer Outlet Village is very successful and is an obvious thoroughfare and dwell space others are comparatively underused, such as the public square at Heritage Plaza (Thomas Homes). In others, there are physical barriers and landscaping which inhibit pedestrian movement into and through them, particularly between Heelis and STEAM. In general there are issues with legibility as well as physical obstacles within these public spaces which exacerbate the connectivity issues identified in Theme 1.

7.11 Enhancing the public spaces would improve the user experience, encourage movement and further increase vitality to this new urban quarter.

There is an opportunity to develop an overarching approach to these spaces, giving its own identity whilst ensuring harmony.

7.12 A rationalisation of planting and street furniture, and removal of obstacles which restrict movement, such as railings and barriers would also be beneficial. There are also opportunities to make more of the views across the railway line to the village and park, strengthening the relationship between two of the important elements of the Conservation Area's significance. Improving orientation and interpretation is also important and is considered in Theme 7.

Preparation of an interpretation strategy would be beneficial as it would also assist with connectivity, pedestrian experience and engagement with Swindon's railway heritage.

7.13 Commissioning of new public art and sculpture which draw upon the railway heritage, could also be used to enliven key nodes and act as a wayfinding, improve legibility and provide interpretation as part of an overall strategy. Bringing new uses to some of the spaces, through food markets, entertainments or other pop-up activities, would also be desirable to widen their appeal.



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Fig. 50: Historic photograph of the cricket pavilion in GWR Park c.1910 (STEAM Museum of the GWR)

It is recommended that a Conservation Management Plan (CMP) is developed for the park which can consider in detail its significance and the opportunities.



Fig. 51: Historic photograph of the ornamental planting along the eastern edge of the Park in c.1900 (STEAM Museum of the GWR)

Theme 4: GWR Park

7.14 GWR Park has always been an important amenity for residents of the railway village and wider urban population of Swindon. It is the largest green public space in the Conservation Area and is a destination for a wide range of people including families, young people, dog walkers and joggers. The park has evolved from an open field used for cricket matches to the more planned space it is today. However, it has also lost many of its historic features, such as its ornamental planting and bandstand. There are relatively few facilities within the park; the public conveniences are closed and no refreshment offering. There are children's play facilities. Furthermore, parts of the park are suffering from erosion and waterlogging and there are concerns about anti-social behaviour, particularly at night.

7.15 The park has the potential to play a more central role in raising awareness and increasing both residents and visitor's enjoyment of Swindon's railway legacy. This could be through new interpretative signage and reinstating or reinterpreting some of the lost historic features, such as formal planting or a new pavilion. A café or refreshment kiosk and new public conveniences would improve the experience of those using the park and encourage new users, whilst also bringing in revenue. Building on the reinstatement of the Children's Fete, there is also the opportunity to host external events (such as food/music festivals, fireworks etc.) within the park, capitalising on its central location and proximity to public transport and car parks. Should this be considered, it will need to be developed in tandem with improving wayfinding and pedestrian connectivity.

7.16 The CMP could also consider the maintenance and accessibility issues facing the park, including the potential for new and improved entrances and strategies for reducing anti-social behaviour. It would be beneficial for the TA Centre and the garages of the railway village to be included to ensure a holistic approach to improving this part of the Conservation Area.



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Theme 5: Vacant, Underused and Detracting Sites

7.17 Since the closure of the railway works in the late 1980s, regeneration of the redundant and derelict former railway buildings has taken place. This is a considerable achievement and today all the surviving historic works buildings have been transformed for new uses, or, in the case of the carriage works, are in the process of being converted. Sensitively-designed new buildings have also filled many of the vacant plots, restoring structure and coherence to the townscape.

7.18 However, one of the most significant historic buildings within the Conservation Area remains vacant and in a dilapidated condition; the Mechanics' Institution. This Grade II* listed building was central to community life within the railway village for over 100 years and its continued dereliction is harming the appearance of the Conservation Area and gives the railway village an air of neglect. Depending on the new use of the building, it has the potential to encourage movement between the town centre and former railway works by creating a destination in this central location.

Repair and reuse, ideally in a community or public use, of the Mechanics' Institution would bring this landmark building back to its former glory, significantly enhancing the Conservation Area.



Fig. 52: The vacant and derelict Mechanics' Institution



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Theme 5: Vacant, Underused and Detracting Sites (cont.)

7.19 There also remain a number of large open plots, which formerly contained railway works buildings or structures, that are now in use as surface car parks. These sites have development potential. As with all development proposals the historic character and appearance of the Conservation Area and other impacts upon historic environment, should be a primary consideration. Like the other recent developments in the Conservation Area, schemes need to be of the highest quality and offer an acceptable design response. The sites may need to retain an element of car parking.

7.20 The urban setting of Swindon's Railway Conservation Area is demonstrative of the success of the railway industry, contributing to the towns growth. From the initial growth in the Victorian period, the town

centre underwent significant change in the post-war period and whilst not all buildings of this period detract, including sensitive refurbishment could be considered of those that do as the opportunity arises.

Any proposed new tall buildings should be informed by the impact it may have on the Conservation Area and its setting.

7.21 Elements of the historic town centre do survive and, although just outside the Conservation Area, are important to its setting. There are a number of vacant buildings and others suffering from neglect, particularly around the junction of Bridge Street and Fleet Street. Revitalising this part of the town centre closest to the Conservation Area would not only improve its setting, but also encourage movement and connectivity between the town centre and Conservation Area.



Fig. 53: The surface car park adjacent to the Carriage Works



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Theme 6: Unsympathetic Alterations

7.22 The conservation area designation brings about increased control as to what changes can be made to buildings in the area. Most buildings are also statutorily listed and therefore subject to stricter planning controls. This has generally prevented insensitive and inappropriate alterations across much of the Conservation Area, preserving its historic appearance and integrity. However, there are opportunities to preserve and enhance the Conservation Area by managing changes, and mitigating inappropriate interventions.

7.23 For example, some elements of the 1970s conservation scheme for the railway village would not be considered best practice today and these are harming both the physical fabric of the cottages and the special interest of the Conservation Area. This includes the use of hard, cement pointing, plastic rainwater goods and the brick planters. Whilst some elements are being rectified, namely the gradual reinstatement of historically appropriate front doors to the cottages, there is opportunity for a broader scheme of work which returns the railway village closer to its historic appearance. This could also include reinstating historic boundary treatments as well as boundary divisions between the cottages.

7.24 There are also some localised issues with modern features such as TV aerials, satellite dishes, domestic wheelie bins and recycling boxes visible within the street scene, which detract from its historic appearance. Whilst bins in

particular are generally stored within the rear alleys, there are opportunities to make improvements by removing these features from view.

7.25 The new areas added to the Conservation Area enable consideration of development to preserve or enhance its character and appearance. This would include consideration of the shops along Faringdon Road where there has been a loss of historic shopfront features, and in some cases entirely modern frontages have been inserted. Many of the shops also feature signage which is of inappropriate design in this historic context.

Opportunities to replace the modern shopfronts and signage with traditional designs should be seized, drawing inspiration from the historic versions which do survive utilising the Council's Shop Fronts Coding Guidance.

7.26 The residential storeys above have also been subject to changes which have not all responded positively to the buildings character. This includes replacement of historic timber windows with uPVC units and the painting or rendering of façades. The appearance of this part of the Conservation Area could be considerably enhanced if these changes could be reversed and managed. The use of additional planning controls (e.g. Article 4 direction) should be investigated as appropriate to manage such changes (see '[Management Plan](#)').



Fig. 54: Selection of the small-scale detracting features within the conservation area



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Theme 7: Engagement with Swindon's Railway Heritage

7.27 Many residents of Swindon are proud of the town's railway heritage. This is often through direct connections, such as living in the railway village or having had relatives once employed at the works. The cultural and retail uses within the former railway works and the important institutions headquartered there are also contributing to increasing the engagement of residents and visitors with Swindon's railway legacy.

7.28 However, there are opportunities to build upon what has already been achieved. Improving orientation at key points within the Conservation Area would assist in increasing movement into and across the area. Enhanced signage, including mapping, would demonstrate the attractions in other parts of the Conservation Area and how close they are. Locations could include: the entrances to the former railway works from the Designer Outlet Village car parks; at both ends of the central underpass opposite the Mechanics' Institution; outside the railway station; and on Faringdon Road at its junctions with Emlyn Square and Fleet Street. Developing an overarching strategy for interpretation would also be useful, which could include heritage trails, QR codes and other digital material and innovative physical installations.

7.29 It is important that dialogue is maintained with existing local interest groups and stakeholders associated with the Conservation Area. Developing partnerships with local schools, colleges and the Royal Agricultural University would draw in a new generation of stakeholders of Swindon's railway legacy beyond those who have direct connections with the works when they were in use. These direct connections are nonetheless important and a programme of gathering and sharing people's memories of the railway works and village could be considered to capture this social heritage for prosperity.



Fig. 55: Public engagement workshops undertaken as part of the preparation of this CAAMP

7.30 Engaging generally with the community would also be valuable as this can increase civic pride, assist in sharing the story of Swindon's heritage to younger generations and, importantly, increasing capacity to look after Swindon's railway. The Conservation Area benefits from a mixed community of residents, businesspeople and visitors. However, there are issues with anti-social behaviour in some parts of the Conservation Area, including the railway village, which can negatively impact the experience of other users. There may be opportunities to improve perceptions of the area through engagement with the community using the heritage as a starting point for other well-being initiatives.

7.31 Dialogue and engagement across the spectrum of Council departments including Highways and Housing is important along with other statutory bodies such as Wiltshire Council.

The Swindon HAZ project, funded by Historic England, presents an opportunity to enact some of these initiatives and increase public engagement with, and enjoyment of, Swindon's railway heritage.



8.1 WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE MANAGEMENT PLAN

8.1.1 The Management Plan sets out the vision for the future of Swindon's Railway Conservation Area and a framework to guide change. The overarching ambition for the Conservation Area is to preserve and enhance what is special about the Conservation Area, and it is the statutory duty of the Council to ensure this happens. Preserving and enhancing the special interest of the Conservation Area is achieved by ensuring that change and development take place in a considered and sympathetic way and through the understanding that we all have a shared responsibility for looking after Swindon's railway legacy and the Conservation Area as a whole.

8.1.2 This aligns with the aims and objectives of the Swindon HAZ and the policies set out within the Local Plan, which should be used alongside this document. The Council also has a suite of specific guidance documents to assist in developing proposals including regarding shopfront design and archaeology.

8.1.3 The long-term objectives are to ensure new development is of high quality and responds to the special character of the Conservation Area as well as phase out past ill-considered change and additions. This ranges from very small changes such as reinstating lost historic features to much larger proposals for new buildings both within the Conservation Area and within its setting. It also includes improvements to the public realm of the Conservation Area and increasing accessibility to the railway heritage through interpretation and way-finding. The CAAMP is not in itself a plan for improving movement, but is a tool for the areas management.

8.1.4 In addition, regular maintenance of buildings is a vital part of ensuring the special interest is preserved as well as that of the physical fabric of individual buildings. Repairs are often necessary; ensuring that these are done in the most sensitive and least impactful ways possible is an important part of

looking after historic buildings and the Conservation Area as a whole.

8.1.5 Advice on best practice maintenance and repair techniques can be found from Historic England, see '[Further Information and Sources](#)'.

8.1.6 The following sections set out how and why change within the Conservation Area is controlled, guidance on alterations, extension and new development, and recommendations responding to the themes within '[Issues and Opportunities](#)'.



Fig. 56: Workshop with consultees for the preparation of the CAAMP, we have a shared responsibility for Swindon's railway heritage



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8.2 CONTROLS

8.2.1 The purpose of applying planning controls within conservation areas is to ensure that any changes that take place conserve, respect or contribute to the character and appearance which makes the Conservation Area of special interest. The overarching aim is to preserve and enhance the special architectural and historic interest of the Conservation Area.

8.2.2 Undertaking work to any building often requires Planning Permission. When a building is in a Conservation Area the types of work which require Planning Permission may be different, for example permission may be needed for demolition or extension of a structure. In addition other types of permission may also be required such as Listed Building Consent to undertake work to listed buildings and Advertisement Consent may be needed for commercial advertising and signage. Works to trees within the Conservation Area also often require permission.

8.2.3 For further information and advice about when different consents and permissions are required within the Conservation Area, see the guidance on the Government's Planning Portal, Swindon Borough Council Policy or contact the Council's Planning and Regeneration Department, see '[Further Information and Sources](#)' for details.

ARTICLE 4 DIRECTIONS

8.2.4 Whilst many types of change and development within the Conservation Area are controlled by existing planning controls, the Council is able to develop bespoke controls to ensure that specific elements of a Conservation Area are protected from harmful change. This is done through the application of an Article 4 Direction. These provide additional control by specifically revoking certain permitted development rights meaning that Planning Permission needs to be sought before work can be undertaken.

8.2.5 There is a current Article 4 Direction in place within Swindon's Railway Conservation Area covering the residential streets in the railway village as well as Church Place. The Direction means that work such as painting the exterior of a building, any extension or alteration, erection of garden structures and the creation of vehicle cross-overs all require permission. The Direction was adopted in 1980 and since this time some of the works it covers now require Planning Permission as standard under current legislation. There are also now few buildings covered by the Direction which are not statutorily listed and therefore not subject to the tighter planning controls this designation imposes. Furthermore, several of the buildings recently added to the Conservation Area designation are neither listed nor covered by the Article 4 Direction and are at risk of inappropriate change. For these reasons, it is recommended that the current Article 4 Direction be reviewed.



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8.3 GUIDANCE

ALTERATION, EXTENSION AND DEMOLITION

8.3.1 The appearance and character of Swindon's Railway Conservation Area is the result of a distinct and compressed phase of development in the mid-19th century by the GWR company and the subsequent evolution of the area as a result of the growth and success of the railway works. The current appearance reflects this evolution and it is not the purpose of conservation area designation to prevent future change, which is necessary for the enduring sustainability of the heritage asset. Instead, the purpose of designation is to ensure change is carried out in a manner that not only does not cause harm but also, where appropriate, enhances the Conservation Area. The appropriateness of any demolition, alteration or extension should be considered on a case-by-case basis, as what is appropriate in one location will not necessarily be acceptable in another.

8.3.2 **Demolition** of buildings or removal of features that detract from the Conservation Area may be beneficial. Demolition of detracting buildings and structures will only be permitted where a suitable new development is proposed, as gap and vacant sites detract from the Conservation Area.

8.3.3 **Alterations** should preserve or enhance the character of the Conservation Area. This means that changes should be respectful of the prevailing architectural and visual character of the Conservation Area and the specific character area in which it is located. Alterations should also use appropriate materials, whether these are the same as those typically found in the Conservation Area or whether they are new materials that are complementary. Enhancement could be achieved through removing a detracting feature and replacing with something more 'in keeping' or with something that draws inspiration from the character of the Conservation Area.

8.3.4 **Extensions** should be subordinate to the existing buildings in their scale, massing and design. Extension to the side and front of buildings is unlikely to be appropriate as this would change the visual appearance of the streetscape, whereas extension to the rear is likely to be more acceptable. All extensions should be of high-quality design and construction. Whilst the design may use materials and finishes which are characteristic to the Conservation Area, including local stone and brick, there may be scope for use of a wider, less traditional material palette only where these are part of a high-quality sensitively designed extension that complements or enhances the appearance of the original building.



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NEW DEVELOPMENT

8.3.5 There are opportunities for new development within the Conservation Area such as on the surface car parking plots adjacent to the railway and the replacement of buildings which detract from the special interest of the area. There may also be opportunities to redevelop buildings which make a neutral contribution. In addition, there are also many opportunities for new development in the setting of the Conservation Area.

8.3.6 Any new and replacement development needs to take account of, and be sensitive to, the following:

- the significance of any building proposed to be removed;
- the significance of any relationship between any building to be removed and any adjacent structures and spaces;
- the potential to draw inspiration from the historic use and character of a site;
- the potential impact of the new design on known or potential archaeological remains;
- the potential impact of the new design on the setting of any neighbouring listed buildings or positive buildings;
- the materials and architectural detailing characteristic of the area should inform the choice of materials and detailing of the new design;
- the scale and grain of the surrounding area, including historic plot boundaries;
- the potential impact on important views; and
- the impact of development on the setting of the Conservation Area

8.3.7 This list is not exhaustive; each location will present its own unique requirements for a sensitive and appropriate new design. In all cases, new development must be of the highest quality of design, construction and detailing. The principal aim of new development should be to preserve and enhance the character of their setting and the Conservation Area as a whole. The height of new development will also be a consideration in assessing its acceptability. Where proposed buildings would be substantially taller than their surroundings or have the potential to affect important views or the dominance of landmarks due to their height, proposals will need to demonstrate that they preserve or enhance the special interest of the Conservation Area. Historic England's guidance documents '*Tall Buildings: Historic England Advice Note 4*' and '*The Setting of Heritage Assets Good Practice Advice in Planning Note 3*' along with the National Design Guide provide advice on the sensitive design of taller buildings, see '[Further Information and Sources](#)' for details.



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WINDOWS, DOORS AND RAINWATER GOODS

8.3.8 The majority of buildings in the Conservation Area contain traditional timber sash or casement windows, see photograph of cottages in the railway village (**Fig. 57**). There are also a number of buildings, mainly within the former railway works, which are of recent construction and therefore, appropriately, use modern metal and plastic materials for these features.

8.3.9 The majority of buildings within the Conservation Area are statutorily listed and are therefore subject to tighter controls relating to changes to windows, doors and rainwater goods. However, there are some historic buildings where there has been unfortunate replacement with uPVC units. Replacement of historic windows, doors and rainwater goods is strongly discouraged, unless they are damaged beyond repair, and where replacement is necessary this should be in timber and the appropriate historic style for the individual building in order to maintain authenticity of appearance. Where inappropriate replacement has already been undertaken, returning these features back to their traditional appearance is encouraged.

8.3.10 Rainwater goods would have historically been painted cast iron or lead; however other metals may be appropriate subject to their detailed design. White-painted timber is likely to be the most appropriate material for windows; the proportions and type of window are dependant on the age and style of individual buildings. For doors, painted timber is also likely to be the most appropriate material, although a greater range of colours is appropriate.



Fig. 57: The cottages in the railway village have their original timber windows and the doors are being systematically replaced with historically appropriate timber units



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TELECOMS EQUIPMENT

8.3.11 The installation of telecommunications antenna, i.e. television aerials and satellite dishes, on chimneys and the front and sides of elevations and roofs of buildings in the Conservation Area will be resisted and requires Planning Permission and, where necessary, Listed Building Consent. Such features are not in keeping with the historic character and appearance of the Conservation Area. The removal of existing visible aerials and dishes is encouraged, as this will enhance the appearance of the Conservation Area.

TREES

8.3.12 There are many historic, mature trees within the Conservation Area with those in GWR Park and forming the verdant character of Church Place, particularly important. There have also been trees planted in recent decades, as part of the railway village refurbishment scheme and the regeneration of the former railway works. There will be a presumption in favour of retaining existing mature trees with works to those with a diameter of 75mm or greater (measured at 1.5m from soil level) requiring permission from the local authority. New trees may be considered, as part of succession planting or new public realm landscaping.

SHOPFRONTS AND ADVERTISING

8.3.13 Retail uses are an important part of the Conservation Area today. Historic shopfronts or those which retain historic features remain, whilst others have been replaced with inappropriate designs and materials. Council guidance document 'Swindon Shop Fronts Coding Guidance' contains detailed advice on the appropriate design of shopfronts and signage within the Conservation Area. Details can be found in '[Further Information and Sources](#)'.



8.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

8.4.1 The following recommendations have been developed in response to the issues and opportunities identified and the guidance provided over the previous pages. These recommendations are designed to ensure the preservation and enhancement of the special interest of Swindon's Railway Conservation Area.

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Heritage Impact Assessment of proposed alterations, demolition and development should be undertaken by applicants to analyse and describe the effects of the proposal upon significance to ensure the special interest of the Conservation Area is preserved or enhanced.**
- **Proposals for extension, alteration and new development will only be approved where they would preserve or enhance the special interest of the Conservation Area, or where the public benefits would outweigh any harm.**
- **Due consideration should be given to archaeological potential and protection of remains wherever below ground intervention is proposed.**
- **The design, construction and materials of any new development, extension, alteration or repair should be of the highest quality.**
- **The condition of the Conservation Area should be monitored and reviewed periodically.**
- **The Article 4 Directions adopted for the Conservation Area be reviewed.**



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RECOMMENDATIONS BY THEME

Theme 1: Connectivity**Short to Medium-Term**

- Look for opportunities to encourage pedestrian and cycle movement through the Conservation Area, in particular between the town centre and former railway works.
- Review the accessibility of the routes crossing the railway line.
- Plan and carry out improvements to the existing routes crossing the railway line, including improving their safety for users.

Long-Term

- Consider introducing a new access across the railway line, with the special interest of the Conservation Area the key factor in the decision-taking process.

Theme 2: Thoroughfares and Experience**Short to Medium-Term**

- Undertake a transport and accessibility audit and develop a movement strategy improving the experience of those using the Conservation Area as well as enhancing its appearance.
- Make changes to existing pedestrian and cycle crossings so that they are safer and make moving through the Conservation Area easier and more legible.
- Make repairs to damaged and uneven surface treatments.
- Maintain the historic elements of the public realm and consider removing and, if necessary, replacing non-historic and insensitive elements including bins and road signage.

Long-Term

- Consider introducing additional crossing points, traffic-calming measures and public realm improvements to improve the pedestrian experience and accentuate the natural desire lines of movement through the area, whilst being sensitive to the special interest of the Conservation Area.
- Consider changes to the bus routes which pass through the centre of the railway village.

Theme 3: Public Spaces in the Former Railway Works**Short to Medium-Term**

- Prepare an overarching strategy for the public spaces and realm within the former railway area so there is harmony across the whole area but allowing for individual identities.
- Develop proposals for the public spaces encouraging movement, removing barriers and rationalising planting.
- Consider new uses and features for the public spaces to increase activity and improve way-finding.
- Develop an interpretation strategy, which could include the commissioning of new public art.

Long-Term

- Look for opportunities for strengthening the relationship with the railway village through exploiting and enhancing views across the railway line (see View 2 in [Section 5.12](#)).



RECOMMENDATIONS BY THEME (CONT.)

Theme 4: GWR Park

Short to Medium-Term

- Commission a CMP for the park and develop proposals in line with its findings.
- Improve the amenities within the park (public conveniences and refreshment offer).
- Look for opportunities to host external events in the park.

Long-Term

- Consider the reinstatement or reinterpretation of lost historic features.

Theme 5: Vacant, Underused and Detracting Sites

Short to Medium-Term

- Secure a viable and appropriate new use for the Mechanics' Institution and ensure that the necessary repairs and refurbishment are undertaken.
- Critically assess any proposals which come forward for new development on the underused or detracting sites within the Conservation Area to ensure that they are sympathetic, contribute to the character of the area and are of the highest quality.
- Critically assess proposals within the setting of the Conservation Area to ensure they are sympathetic to its special interest and do not cause harm.

Theme 6: Unsympathetic Alterations

Short to Medium-Term

- Look for opportunities to enhance the Conservation Area by encouraging and making changes to the small and localised inappropriate interventions of the past, including TV aerials and satellite dishes.
- Encourage the replacement of inappropriate alterations to shopfronts and signage with suitably designed, traditional alternatives.

Long-Term

- Consider reinstating the historic boundary treatments and divisions within the railway village.
- Review Article 4 Directions

Theme 7: Engagement with Swindon's Railway Heritage

Short to Medium-Term

- Develop an overarching strategy for interpretation and engagement in relation to the railway heritage and Conservation Area.
- Introduce enhanced signage and orientation to encourage movement across the Conservation Area.
- Continue engagement and partnership with existing stakeholders including local interest groups.
- Develop partnerships with new local stakeholders such as schools and colleges.



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LEGISLATION AND POLICY

NATIONAL PLANNING LEGISLATION, POLICY AND GUIDANCE

Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1990/19/contents>

National Planning Policy Framework (2019): https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/740441/National_Planning_Policy_Framework_web_accessible_version.pdf

Planning Practice Guidance: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/planning-practice-guidance>

Planning Portal: <https://www.planningportal.co.uk>

National Design Guide (2019): https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/843468/National_Design_Guide.pdf

LOCAL PLANNING POLICY AND GUIDANCE

Swindon Local Plan (2015)⁰¹: https://www.swindon.gov.uk/downloads/file/3988/swindon_borough_local_plan_2026

Swindon Planning Policy Guidance: https://www.swindon.gov.uk/info/20113/local_plan_and_planning_policy/651/planning_policy_guidance

Swindon Shop Fronts Coding Guidance: https://www.swindon.gov.uk/downloads/file/5196/swindon_shop_fronts_coding_guidance

Guidance on protected trees: https://www.swindon.gov.uk/info/20059/land_and_premises/375/find_out_about_protected_trees

HISTORIC ENGLAND GUIDANCE

Historic England's website contains a range of advice and guidance on conservation best practice, such as *Conservation Principles, Policies and Guidance* and guides on understanding heritage value, setting and views, to specific guides on types of repairs or types of buildings. This information can largely be found in the advice area of their website: <https://historicengland.org.uk/advice/>

Links to the most relevant guidance and that used in the preparation of the CAAMP are overleaf.

⁰¹ Swindon Borough Council are currently (2020) undertaking a review of the Local Plan for the period to 2036.



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Conservation Area Designation, Appraisal and Management Historic England Advice Note 1 (Second Edition): <https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/conservation-area-appraisal-designation-management-advice-note-1/heag-268-conservation-area-appraisal-designation-management/>

Conservation Principles, Policies and Guidance (April 2008): <https://content.historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/conservation-principles-sustainable-management-historicenvironment/conservationprinciplespoliciesguidanceapr08web.pdf>

The Setting of Heritage Assets Good Practice Advice in Planning Note 3 (Second Edition) (December 2017): <https://content.historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/gpa3-setting-of-heritage-assets/heag180-gpa3-settingheritage-assets.pdf>

Statements of Heritage Significance: Analysing Significance in Heritage Assets Historic England Advice Note 12 (October 2019): <https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/statements-heritage-significance-advice-note-12/heag279-statements-heritage-significance/>

Tall Buildings: Historic England Advice Note 4 (December 2015): <https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/tall-buildings-advice-note-4/heag037-tall-buildings/>

National Heritage List for England (NHLE): <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/>

KEY LITERARY WORKS ON THE RAILWAY HERITAGE OF SWINDON

John Cattell and Keith Falconer, *Swindon: the legacy of a railway town* (English Heritage, 2000)

Peck, Alan, S., *The Great Western Railway Works at Swindon* (Oxford Publishing Company, 1983)

Silto, William, *Of Stone and Steam: the story of Swindon Railway Village* (Barracuda, 1989)

Grinsell, L. V., Wells, H. B., Tallamy, H. S., Betjeman, John, *Studies in the History of Swindon* (Swindon Borough Council, 1950)

FURTHER SOURCES OF INFORMATION

For further study, the following archives hold material that may be of relevance to the history and significance of Swindon's railway works and village:

- Wiltshire and Swindon Archives
- Wiltshire Buildings Record
- Swindon Museum and Art Gallery
- STEAM: Museum of the GWR



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Other sources include:

- The Wiltshire and Swindon Historic Landscape Characterisation Project: https://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/archiveDS/archiveDownload?t=arch-2730-1/dissemination/pdf/Wilts_HLC_Report.pdf
- The Wiltshire and Swindon HER, which includes information on the archaeological resource of the area: <http://www.wiltshire.gov.uk/museums-history-heritage-archaeology-historic-environment-record>

For further information about the selection of listed buildings, refer to:

- DDCMS, Principles of Selection for Listed Buildings (November 2018): https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/757054/Revised_Principles_of_Selection_2018.pdf
- Historic England's Listed Selection Guides, specifically Industrial Buildings (<https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/dlsg-industrial/heag134-industrial-buildings-lsg/>) and Infrastructure: Transport (<https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/dlsg-transport-buildings/heag120-infrastructure-transport-lsg/>)

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southwest@HistoricEngland.org.uk

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- ACG-771: Album of photographic views of the Great Western Railway Locomotive & Carriage Works, Swindon (c.1886)
- AAA912 642493: Andrews and Dury, *A topographical map of the County of Wilts, surveyed originally 1773* (1810)
- Box DL I: Marlborough drawings (Swindon)
- GWR Swindon Choral and Orchestral Union Programmes, 1888-1931
- MID01a: Photograph of Entrance to the GWR Works on south side of the railway showing London Street and the Mechanics Institute
- MID01b: Photograph of Health Hydro, Milton Road, 1907
- MID01c: Photograph of the Children's Fete in the GWR Park, c.1910
- SWI.385/2069695000: Hawksworth, *Great Western Railway: Swindon Works from 1846*
- P50403: Evening Star steam locomotive, 1960

THE HISTORIC ENGLAND ARCHIVE

- BF110313: St Mark's Church, file, 1850-1994
- BF081508: St Mark's Vicarage, file, 1880-1996
- BF097256: Mechanics Institute, file, 1854-2007
- BF100341: Central Community Centre (formerly Great Western Medical Fund Hospital), file, 1895-1994
- BF110308: Former Great Western Railway Museum, file, 1994-2003
- BF110310: The Railway Village, file, 1840-1998
- BF110317: The Park, file, 1895-1915
- BF110322: Great Western Railway Washing and Turkish Baths, file, 1868-1877
- BF097788: Health Hydro, file, 1855-1998
- PC07019: General view, GWR Park, photograph, 1900-1930
- PC07020: General view, GWR Park, photograph, 1903-1908
- PC11062: General view, GWR Park, photograph, 1900-1905
- GOM01/01/2033: A view looking north along Bristol Street showing the Saw Mill and Carriage Body Shop of the Great Western Railway Works, photograph, 1957
- GOM01/01/2034: A view looking east along Taunton Street showing the terrace on the south side of the street, photograph, 1957

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THE HISTORIC ENGLAND ARCHIVE (CONT.)

GOM01/01/2035: A view looking north-east along Bathampton Street showing houses on the north side of the street and the Mechanics' Institute in the distance, photograph, 1957

BB94/04692: Early view showing the 'Lord of the Isles' locomotive on the railway line in front of St Mark's Church, Church Place, Swindon

BB94/04789: Cricket Pavilion in Great Western Railway Park, Swindon c.1910

BB94/04815: Postcard of east side of Great Western Railway Park, Swindon c.1900

BB95/12086: Bristol Street in the Railway Village, 1995

STEAM: MUSEUM OF THE GWR

Edward Snell's 1849 panoramic view showing the railway village and its rural setting

Former G.W.R. Hospital (now Central Community Centre), Faringdon Road, c.1930

The Mechanics Institution, 1880s

The broad-gauge Lord of the Isles locomotive built at Swindon in 1851

Cricket pavilion in GWR Park, c.1910

Ornamental planting along the eastern edge of the Park, c.1900

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Open Domesday for information about Swindon in the Domesday book, available from: <https://opendomesday.org/place/SUI583/swindon/>

National Library of Scotland for Historic Ordnance Survey mapping, available from: <https://maps.nls.uk>

G.W.R. workers outside Rodbourne Road entrance, Swindon, 1910 (Collection of P.A. Williams, copyright owner of the William Hooper Archives)

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