

4.0 CIRENCESTER TOWN CENTRE CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL SUMMARY

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The following summary should not be read in isolation but in the context of the full Town Centre Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan.

4.2 Summary of Special Interest of the Conservation Area

This Character Appraisal concludes that the special interest of the proposed Town Centre Conservation Area derives from the following key characteristics:

Context:

1. Located in the centre of Cirencester, it contains the majority of the oldest parts of the town and has a complex evolution and character;

Uses:

2. A vibrant, balanced and sustainable mix of uses, including residential properties and most of the town's small- to medium-sized retail and office premises, together with local institutions, local government organisations and community and religious facilities;

Spatial Character:

3. Spatially complex and diverse:
 - a. Contains two Important Open Spaces:
 - i. Market Place forms the principle urban space having acted as the focus for social, religious and community activities since the early Medieval period; it retains its pre-eminence as the most important community space to a significant degree albeit that through traffic and car parking diminishes its value in this respect;
 - ii. Abbey Grounds – a large open landscaped expanse, wedged-in between the built form, and providing a green lung and informal recreational space within a very short distance of the heart of town;
 - b. Curvilinear narrow medieval streets radiating from Market Place;
 - c. The parish churchyard, providing a remarkably tranquil, almost secretive and contained green oasis, in very close proximity to the town's commercial core;
 - d. Other memorable and important communal spaces within the town core include West Market Place and Brewery Yard;
 - e. Smaller, more contained spaces including several public mews courtyards such as Swan Yard and The Woolmarket;
4. Very strong permeability:
 - a. a great many routes provide the pedestrian with varied options to get from one part of the town centre to another and to areas beyond;

- b. these routes are also vital in helping to ensure access to facilities and parts of the town which might otherwise be inaccessible and consequently less commercially viable;
- 5. The Parish church, with its decorated tall tower and ornate south porch, forms the major landmark and dominates views:
 - a. The most important view of the church beyond its immediate environs is the view north from the southern end of South Way, originating in CA4 at St Michael's Park;
 - b. Other important views of the church include:
 - i. From Abbey Grounds
 - ii. From each of the roads radiating from the church, namely:
 - 1. Black Jack Street,
 - 2. Dollar Street,
 - 3. Castle Street,
 - iii. From the Forum car park, and
 - iv. From the Tetbury Road marking the western entrance to the town;
 - c. The only other significant landmark is formed by the twin chimneys of the former Malthouse in Cricklade Street;
 - d. Focal points throughout the area, most notably at junctions and corners, provide numerous shorter views;
 - e. Short views into numerous corridor mews, both private and public;

Architectural Character:

- 6. Architecturally and historically very rich, containing a very high proportion of Listed Buildings and Positive Buildings:
 - i. Includes two buildings listed for their "exceptional interest", namely The Parish Church and the Norman Arch, Abbey Grounds, both listed Grade I;
 - ii. Includes nine "particularly important" Listed Buildings designated Grade II*; and
 - iii. 168 Grade II Listed Buildings;

Materials:

- 7. The unity created by the dominant use of limestone for frontages, flank walls and garden walls and for the numerous chimney stacks that provide interest and punctuation to the varying heights and pitches of the rooflines;
- 8. Use of brick for chimney stacks, high garden boundary walls, the flank and rear walls of some stone buildings as well as whole buildings dating from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries
- 9. Use of decorative cast and wrought iron for ornamental gates and railings etc;

Distinctive Details:

- 10. The distinctive and memorable identity of the area is enhanced by the presence of:
 - a. Traditional shopfronts, in a wide variety of designs often with a range of decorative features such as ornate console brackets, fluted pilasters, turned glazing bars, iron ventilation grilles, with some of

- the best examples having subtle signage often simply painted on timber fascias;
 - b. Imaginative and colourful hanging signs to shops and public houses;
 - c. Architectural detail including highly modulated facades, inscribed date stones, enamel road signs, symbolic ornamentation, classical elements including pedimented doorcases with fanlights, and Georgian-glazed windows;
 - d. Some elements of public art and a handful of public memorials;
11. Glimpses into private gardens at the rear of enclosed blocks, enclosed by high, mostly limestone walls;

Public Realm:

12. Good quality public realm to parts of the conservation area, most notably:
- a. Silver Street, Park Lane & Castle Street
 - b. Former church precinct to West Market Place and immediately to west of south porch;
 - c. Retained small block pavements and setts, most often to small courtyard and corridor mews;
 - d. Elements of historic floorscape including light wells, basement access points and boot-scrappers;
 - e. Small areas of mosaic;
 - f. Subtle signage including truncated standard lamps attached to buildings at high level and painted in neutral colours;
13. Boundary walls, of varying heights, mostly of limestone rubble to roadside elevations, often in combination with stone pillars and gated features, and frequently high red brick boundary walls between properties;

Trees & Biodiversity Value:

14. The importance of trees:
- a. The large number and variety of native and exotic species within Abbey Grounds representing a significant arboricultural heritage;
 - b. Occasional individual specimen trees within the built form making a dramatic statement and/or providing a focal point;
 - c. Trees within small private gardens and overhanging limestone boundary walls and/or visible through gaps in the street scene, and softening the built form whilst denoting areas of informal recreation;
 - d. Trees helping diminish large areas of car parking and/or recycling facilities;
 - e. Trees marking the edge of the town and/or enclosing the built form, for example within the Mead private housing estate; and
15. A range of aquatic and terrestrial habitats, most notably within Abbey Grounds through which a section of the River Churn passes.

4.3 Summary of the Issues facing the Conservation Area

The issues affecting the Conservation Area can be summarised as follows:

Spaces, Routes & Views:

1. Spaces with inadequate enclosure and visible rear utilitarian service areas;
2. Poor legibility with potentially unsafe and/or visually-disappointing pathways between spaces;
3. Lack of active frontage and disrupted building lines;
4. Unsafe / chaotic pedestrian routes;
5. Lost context / setting of important listed buildings including the former Railway Station, Sheep Street;
6. Loss of boundary features often to facilitate provision of off-street car parking;
7. Views within the town, most notably of the parish church, are at risk through development of gap sites;

Negative Buildings:

8. Negative buildings, most notably poorly-proportioned late twentieth-century commercial buildings with horizontal emphasis, asymmetric fenestration and inadequate modelling;
9. Use of reconstituted stone and other alien artificial materials;
10. No buildings of Townscape Merit;

Vitality & Viability:

11. Lack of activity in the town centre outside office hours;
12. Inadequate interpretation of the town's extensive archaeology, architecture and history;
13. Vandalism to existing interpretation panels and historic structures in Abbey Grounds;
14. Lack of general maintenance to individual buildings both commercial and domestic, with vegetation growing in the gutters and rainwater goods in poor condition;

Public Realm:

15. Poor floorscape utilising non-contextual artificial materials;
16. Damage to paving caused by vehicles mounting footpaths;
17. Visual clutter caused by a jumble of uncoordinated street furniture and poorly-designed traffic-related signage and road markings;
18. Rubbish storage and collection particularly associated with commercial uses in the town core;

Traffic Management:

19. Traffic & car parking dominating the town centre's major public spaces and streets putting pedestrians / cyclists in danger and degrading the quality of the built environment;
20. Through-traffic causing traffic congestion and pollution;

Commercial Signage:

21. Poorly-designed shopfronts and commercial signage, including use of plastic-moulded projecting box signs, fascias extending over more than one building diminishing vertical emphasis, intrusive illumination of signage and excessive numbers of A-boards;

Local Distinctiveness:

22. Opportunities for public art;
23. Opportunities for added local distinctiveness in design of all elements of the built environment of the town including elements of the public realm;
24. Loss of and replacement of architectural detail with inappropriate designs and materials including plastic windows and doors, and artificial stone products that weather unsympathetically;
25. Loss of lime render / limewash to historic buildings;

Heritage Protection:

26. Some unlisted structures which might qualify for listed status;
27. Risk to archaeological deposits lying immediately below the ground;

Trees:

28. Many of the trees within the Town Centre Conservation Area are old and may be nearing the end of their healthy lives.