

CA3: Cirencester Town Centre Character Appraisal and Management Plan



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PART 1: APPRAISAL

1.0 Conservation Areas

A conservation area is defined as “an area of special architectural or historic interest the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance.” Conservation Areas are designated under the provisions of Section 69 of the Planning [Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas] Act 1990.

Section 71 of the same Act requires a local planning authority to formulate and publish proposals for the preservation and enhancement of its conservation areas. Section 72 states that, in making a decision on an application for development within a conservation area, special attention must be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of that area.

Conservation area designation introduces a general control over the demolition of unlisted buildings and the lopping or felling of trees above a certain size. However, it does not control all forms of development. Some changes to residential properties do not normally require planning permission. For example, planning permission is not normally required for minor alterations such as the replacement of windows and doors, or the alteration of boundary walls. Where such changes would erode the special character and appearance of the conservation area, the Council can introduce special controls, known as Article 4[2] Directions. The result is that planning permission is required for such works.

1.1 Purpose of a Conservation Area Appraisal & Management Plan

In response to the statutory requirements, this Appraisal and Management Plan defines and records the special architectural and historic interest of the Cirencester Town Centre Conservation Area and identifies opportunities for enhancement.

English Heritage is the government's advisor on heritage protection. The latest guidance from English Heritage is set out in *Guidance on Conservation Area Appraisals* [August 2005] and *Guidance on the Management of Conservation Areas* [August 2005]. This Conservation Area and Management Plan conforms to that guidance.

Additional government guidance regarding the management of historic buildings and conservation areas is set out in *Planning Policy Guidance Note 15: Planning and the Historic Environment* [PPG15]. Government advice on archaeology is set out in *Planning Policy Guidance Note 16: Archaeology* [PPG16].

This Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan therefore seeks to:

- Define the special architectural and historic interest of the conservation area and identify those issues which have the potential to threaten its special qualities [in the form of Part 1: The Character Appraisal]; and
- Provide guidelines to minimise those potential threats and to positively manage change [in the form of Part 2: The Management Plan]

1.2 Wider Planning Policy Context

This Appraisal and Management Plan provides a firm basis upon which applications for development within the Conservation Area can be assessed. It should be read in conjunction with Government guidance and the wider development plan policy framework which comprise a number of documents, including:

- *Cotswold District Local Plan 2001-2011* [CDC] 2006
- Cotswold District's emerging Local Development Framework Development Plan Documents:
 - *Core Strategy*
 - *Cirencester Town Centre Supplementary Planning Document*
- *Planning Policy Guidance Note 15: Planning and the Historic Environment, 1994*
- *Planning Policy Guidance Note 16: Archaeology, 1990*
- *Draft South West Regional Spatial Strategy 2006* [SWRA]
- *Gloucestershire Structure Plan Second Review 1999* [GCC]

1.3 Local Generic Guidance

In addition to this document, Cotswold District Council provides a wide range of design and conservation advice for owners, occupiers and their agents. Such guidance currently includes:

- *Conservation Areas – A Guide for Owners and Occupiers* [1999]
- *Listed Buildings - A Guide for Owners and Occupiers* [1999]
- *The Cotswold Design Guide* [2000]
- *Cotswold Stone Slate Roofing: Technical Guidance for Owners and Occupiers* [2000]
- *Porches - A Guide for Home Owners and Occupiers* [2001]
- *Traditional Casement Windows Design Guide* [1999]
- *Traditional Chimneys Design Guide* [1999]
- *Traditional Dormer Windows Design Guide* [1999]
- *A Guide to the Conversion of Historic Farm Buildings to Employment Use* [1998]

All of the above guides are available on the Council's website at www.cotswold.gov.uk. It should be noted that additional guidance, both national and local, is likely to be issued during the lifespan of this Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan; for the avoidance of doubt, further reference should be made to Cotswold District Council.



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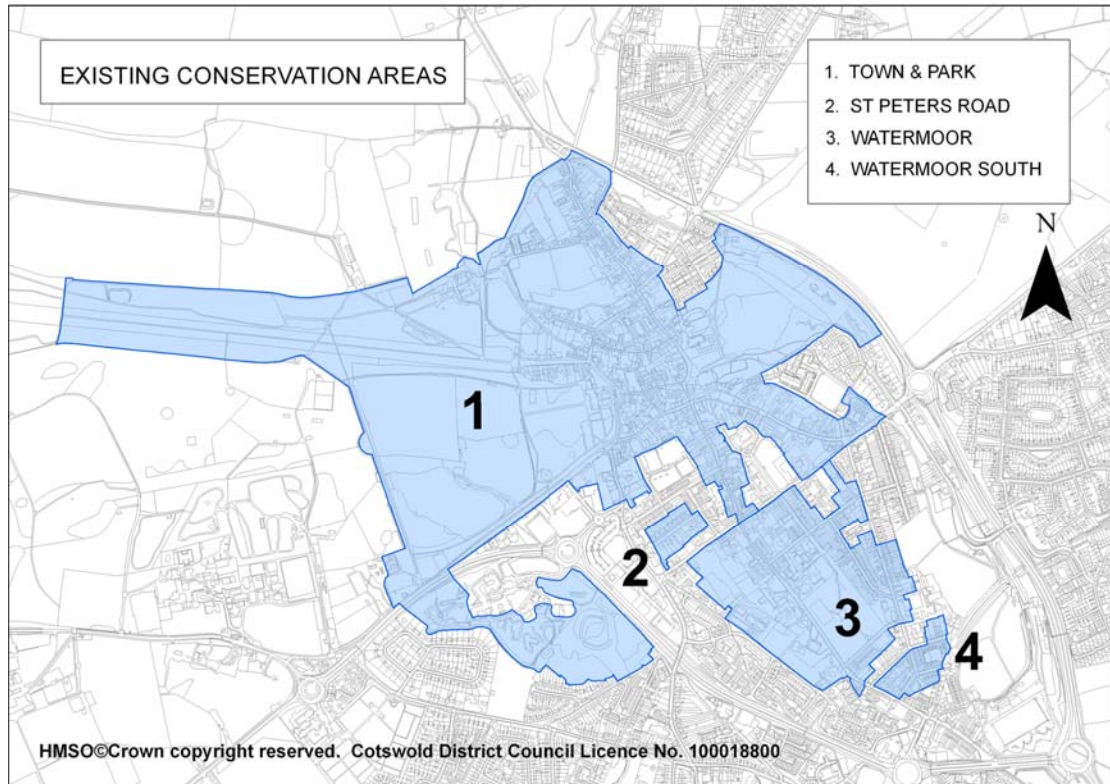
1.4 Current and Proposed Conservation Areas in Cirencester

There are 144 conservation areas within Cotswold District, testament to the very distinctive and historic character for which it is internationally famed. As the “Capital of the Cotswolds” Cirencester’s Conservation Areas are under the greatest development pressure within the district.

There are currently four designated Conservation Areas in Cirencester.

Name	Date of Designation	Date of Review[s]
1 Town and Park [Formerly Cirencester Conservation Area]	1968	1980, 1991
2 St Peter’s Road	1991	-
3 Watermoor	1984	1991
4 Watermoor South	1991	-

Recognition of the rich historic and architectural character of Cirencester is also reflected in early designation of conservation areas. The first conservation area in the town was designated in January 1968, less than a year after the Civic Amenities Act introduced the mechanism.

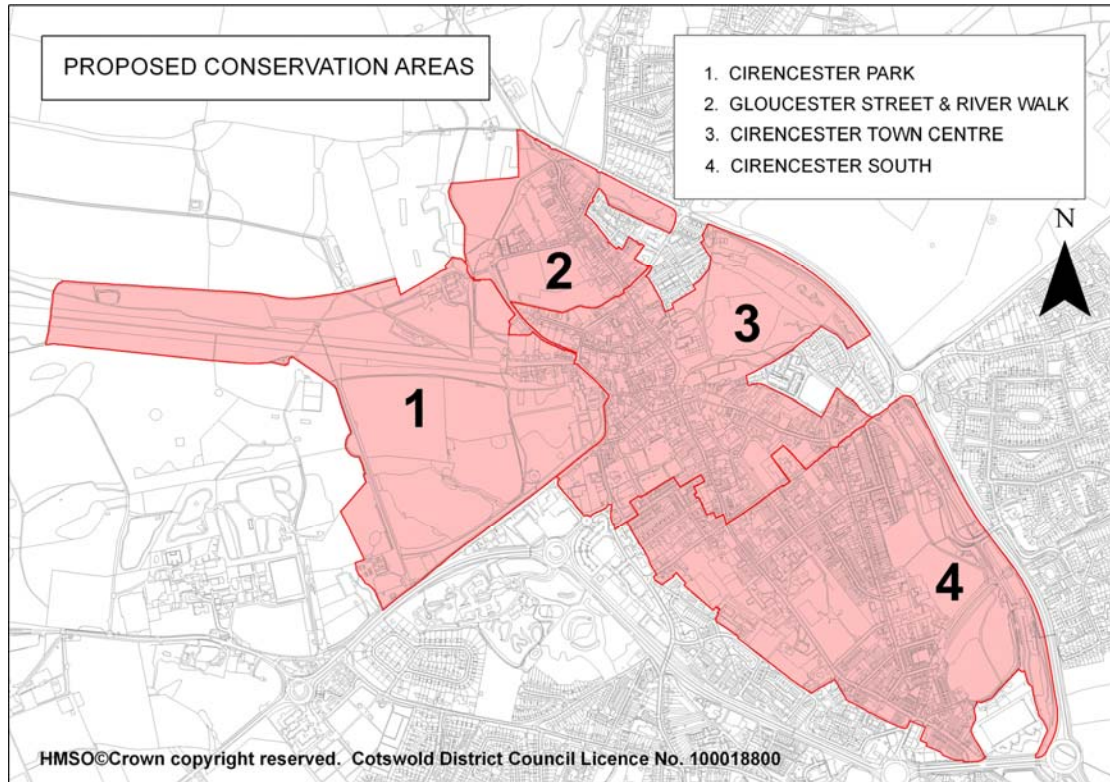


Map A

Nationwide, our appreciation of areas of “architectural and historic merit” has expanded over the last four decades and conservation areas are now increasingly of diverse historic and architectural character. In common with other towns, Victorian development in particular was largely ignored by the existing designation. It is now proposed to include these areas with surviving historic character and/or architectural interest in the revised conservation area boundaries.

In addition, it is now proposed to exclude the Roman amphitheatre from the designation. This should not be interpreted as any reduction in the level of heritage protection. This is a scheduled monument and, by definition, of national importance. The setting and site of the amphitheatre is already afforded a higher level of statutory protection than that provided by the conservation area designation. Furthermore, this site is now divorced from the remainder of the designation by the bypass. It is considered that the scheduled status of the site alone offers clarity and an appropriate level of protection for this area.

At the heart of the town are sites developed in the last century for car parking and allied uses. These sites are in need of enhancement and may contain an important archaeological resource. Where relevant and in recognition of their contextual importance it is proposed to include these areas in the designated area.



Map B

Summary of Proposed Conservation Areas:

Name	Date of Proposed Designation
1 Cirencester Park	2008
2 Gloucester Street & River Walk	2008
3 Cirencester Town Centre	2008
4 Cirencester South	2008

1.5 Designation Definitions

The primary interest of a Conservation Area is in the character and appearance of the area, and the inter-relationship of spaces and buildings, rather than the individual buildings themselves. Nevertheless, conservation areas contain a variety of buildings, and structures such as walls and monuments, and these “heritage assets” invariably form a very important element of any conservation area.

In assessing the special character and appearance of a conservation area, it is important to understand the role that such buildings and structures play whether they are individual buildings or groups. The buildings in Cirencester’s proposed conservation areas have been identified as belonging to one of the following categories:

- Listed Buildings
- Positive Unlisted Buildings
- Buildings of Townscape Merit
- Neutral Buildings
- Negative Buildings

Listed Buildings:

A listed building is a building or structure of special architectural or historic interest recognised by the Government as being worthy of legal protection. Consent is required from Cotswold District Council before any works of alteration, extension or demolition can be carried out.

There are three grades of listed building:

- Grade I buildings are of “exceptional interest”
- Grade II* buildings are “particularly important”
- Grade II buildings are of “special interest”

Nationally, Grade I buildings represent just 2% of the total number of listed buildings, Grade II* about 4%, and the vast majority are listed Grade II [94%].

Positive Unlisted Buildings:

Most conservation areas contain historic buildings and structures which are not listed but which nevertheless contribute in a positive way to the special architectural and historic importance of the conservation area. These buildings can be considered as Positive Unlisted Buildings, and some may be considered worthy of listing on further inspection by English Heritage in due course.

Government Guidance in PPG15 encourages the identification of Positive Unlisted Buildings. There is a general presumption in favour of retaining buildings which make a positive contribution to the character or appearance of the Conservation Area.

Buildings of Townscape Merit:

Some buildings located within conservation areas have a positive impact on the townscape but cannot be identified as Positive Unlisted Buildings since they are of insufficient age to justify being considered of “historic” interest; they are therefore identified as Buildings of Townscape Merit.

Neutral Buildings:

Some buildings are considered Neutral Buildings in that they neither unduly detract nor make a positive contribution to the character and appearance of a conservation area; they are essentially neutral and their loss or replacement could offer opportunity for enhancement of the conservation area. This is especially the case when one or more Neutral Buildings are located together.

Negative Buildings:

As the name implies, Negative Buildings are those considered to have a negative impact on the special character and appearance of the conservation area. Such buildings can appear negative as a result of their bulk and

massing, design, materials, condition or use but invariably they combine several of these characteristics. Negative Buildings are those which offer the greatest potential for enhancement through refurbishment, demolition and/or replacement.

Important Open Spaces:

Conservation areas are not simply concerned with preserving built heritage, but rather about preserving or enhancing places. Any place is the complex product of the unique interplay of people and the natural environment over time.

In many cases, the spaces between buildings, and/or undeveloped land surrounding the area can make a very significant contribution towards the special character of the area. Such areas of undeveloped land, whether in public or private ownership, can therefore be categorised as Important Open Spaces. Whilst there is some overlap between the two, there are essentially two types of Important Open Space – urban and green - both types of which are to be found in Cirencester.

In both cases, designation as an Important Open Spaces, whether urban or green, recognises those spaces as areas where building development would fundamentally harm the special character that the conservation area designation seeks to preserve. In essence, Important Open Spaces are areas that should be safeguarded from development.

- **Important Open Spaces [Urban]:**

These largely undeveloped areas are often a civic or private space which is significant in terms of urban morphology, or as a historically significant undeveloped space. The most notable example of an Important Urban Open Space in Cirencester is Market Place.

- **Important Open Spaces [Green]:**

These undeveloped areas provide green oases in the otherwise built urban form. They may also be important landscape spaces on the edge of a settlement that is critical to the setting of a settlement or alternatively an area of designed or natural landscape that is intrinsic to the special character of that place. Examples found in Cirencester include Abbey Grounds and Cirencester Park.

1.6 Document Preparation & Community Involvement

The process of consultation is designed to bring public understanding of the character of the Conservation Area and encourage public debate in a discussion about the issues facing it and how these issues might be addressed. This process is compliant with the Council's *Statement of Community Involvement, 2006*.

The process of producing the Appraisal and Management Plan therefore involved the following consultation element:

Evidence Gathering	Preparation of evidence base including documentary and on-site analysis
Preparation of Draft	Preparation of the draft documents and illustrations
Public Consultation	6-week public consultation including: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Presentation of draft documents• Public exhibition• Council website publication• Media publicity
Representations	Preparation of a Report summarising the main issues that have been raised through public consultation and how these have been addressed
Adoption	The Council adopted the Appraisal and Management Plan as Council policy.

In order to provide all key stakeholders and relevant audiences with the opportunity to be consulted on issues that affect them in an appropriate manner, the following bodies were consulted directly on the Cirencester Town Centre Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan.

Adjoining Planning Authorities
Adjoining Town and Parish Councils
Bathurst Estate
Cirencester Archaeological and Historical Society
Cirencester Civic Society
Commission for Architecture & the Built Environment
Cirencester Town Council
English Heritage
English Historic Towns Forum
Environment Agency
Gloucestershire County Council
Gloucestershire Gardens and Landscape Trust