

4.0 PARK CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL SUMMARY

4.1 INTRODUCTION

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

4.2 Summary of Special Interest of the Conservation Area

This Character Appraisal of the Cirencester Park Conservation Area concludes that the special interest of the area derives from the following key characteristics:

Context:

1. Forms part of Cirencester Park, a nationally important early eighteenth-century designed landscape and a Registered Grade I Park, in recognition of it being one of the finest surviving example of its kind in England;
2. The Park was designed by the first Earl Bathurst and later generations of the Bathurst family which has been inexorably linked with the town ever since;
3. The first Earl was assisted in his designs primarily by the great English poet Alexander Pope who was also a key figure associated with eighteenth-century Enlightenment; both Bathurst and Pope were members of the Kit-Cat Club, a secret political association whose most prominent member was the English architect Sir John Vanbrugh [c1664 – 1726] and who is perhaps best known as the designer of Blenheim Palace in Woodstock, Oxfordshire [1705-1722];

Uses:

4. The Park provides a major informal recreation facility on the edge of the historic town centre for residents and visitors;
5. The Park is also home to more formal sporting activities including use of the former Archery House;
6. The unusual location of the “country” Mansion so close to the town; historically most landed gentry [Whigs] went to great pains to isolate their country seats whereas the Tory Earl Bathurst wanted to maintain the connection with the town community on which he prided himself as being a member, albeit an aristocratic one;
7. Grand residential premises flanking Cecily Hill;
8. Minor commercial uses within the Park include the estate yard and the Kennels;

Form and Spatial Character:

9. The unique Broad Ride, boasts the longest avenue of trees in the country with extensive views towards Sapperton;
10. The importance of the Parish Church in providing a visual focus and a major landmark viewed from the Park Conservation Area;

11. The Mansion House grounds incorporating the pleasure grounds including the tree-lined lake [c.5 hectares] of c.1736, one of the earliest irregular pieces of water in the history of English gardening, and the early eighteenth-century Horse Temple and the eighteenth-century Ice House [also known as Grismond's Tower];
12. The contrast formed by the combination of the wide open spaces of the Park with its gently undulating landform and the more contained urban space of Cecily Hill with its gentle incline, the two being drawn together by the ornate iron screen and gates at the top of the hill;
13. Striking long views within the Park terminating in set-piece architectural focal points including the Mansion, the Hexagon, the 50 foot high Queen Anne Monument, and most impressive of all, the Perpendicular tower of the Parish Church, the tallest in Gloucestershire;
14. Shorter views aimed at drawing the eye to buildings and architectural features including the former Museum of Roman Antiquities [old Tetbury Road] and the tall rusticated classical gates with ball finials at the T-junction of Park Lane, Park Street and Silver Street;
15. Views out of the conservation area to the landscaped park beyond;

Architectural Character:

16. Grand and imposing residences interspersed with less formal buildings of typical Cotswold vernacular, combining with the wide funnel shape of Cecily Hill to provide a suitably imposing public entrance into Cirencester Park;
17. The very large proportion of buildings and structures within the Conservation Area which are listed as being of architectural and historic interest and which contribute significantly to it;
18. The historic Barton farm complex comprising farmhouse, cartshed, granary, cottage, stable range, and picturesque dovecot set within an historic orchard;
19. The distinctive former hunt kennels and nearby gate lodges marking the entrance to the Park from the old Tetbury Road with their limestone walls and chimneys, and clay tiled roofs and ball finials;

Materials:

20. The unity created by the extensive, yet varied, use of Cotswold limestone for nearly all built structures; including frontages, flank walls and garden walls, complimented by occasional use of brick for chimneys and one prominent gable, and the use of clay tiles for roofs in the Kennels character area, and the occasional slate roof;
21. The use of traditional timber for doors and windows and the lack of alien modern materials such as uPVC;
22. Considerable use of cast and wrought iron for railings and gates;

Distinctive Features:

23. The relatively high proportion of buildings in Cecily Hill with a classical pedimented frontage and classical proportions;
24. The striking and varied roofline of buildings in Cecily Hill with their multiple chimneys framing the view from the Park towards the Church, and the varied roofline of the former Mansion stable block backing onto

- Park Street with its chimney stacks, lead-covered cupola and moulded finials;
25. Other details including the decorative weather vane to 7 Cecily Hill, the carved oriel window to 38 Cecily Hill, ball finials to the kennel lodges and the dog statue that adorns the kennels;

Public Realm:

26. The distinctive ornate iron screen and gates at the top of Cecily Hill;
27. High quality public realm improvements around the eastern end of the Park Conservation Area employing natural materials of limited palette;
28. The tall rusticated gated entrance and the uniquely tall semi-circular yew hedge shielding the Mansion from public view whilst providing a distinctive focal point;
29. The high limestone rubble wall which runs from the rusticated gated entrance of the Mansion to the lodges at the old Tetbury Road entrance to the Park providing a strong sense of place and enclosure for the private grounds within;
30. The raised pathway flanked in part by green verges which facilitates pedestrian safety and a visual break with the ringroad;
31. Numerous and varied limestone boundary walls;

Trees and Biodiversity:

32. Extensive structural tree planting in the form of mature trees in the Park and defining spaces within it;
33. The famous yew hedge and the generous, well-maintained and colourful planting to gardens and hedge boundaries particularly on the south side of Cecily Hill and the property facing Thomas Street;
34. A range of aquatic and terrestrial habitats most notably within the Park and including the lake and streams.

4.3 Summary of the Issues facing the Conservation Area

Such is the very high quality of the built form and landscape of the Park Conservation Area that most of the issues affecting it are small scale and / or relate to the public realm. The issues affecting the Park Conservation Area can be summarised as follows:

Public Realm:

1. The poor quality floorscape in the Park Conservation Area, and in Cecily Hill in particular, characterised by patchy tarmac and utilitarian features of mediocre design such as the galvanised railings and ramp to the raised walk along the old Tetbury Road and the vandalised electricity cabinet adjacent the former Museum of Roman Antiquities
2. The proliferation of free-standing parking signs [16 in total] in Cecily Hill which creates unnecessary visual clutter;
3. The relatively small number of bench seats within Park;
4. A lack of any signage within the Park to assist visitors in navigating their way around;

5. Telegraph poles with overhead wires adding an intrusive and distracting element to the street scene in Cecily Hill;

Traffic Management:

6. The dominance of vehicles and traffic congestion at the top of Cecily Hill, worsened by a lack of a turning point and a high number of parking spaces which detracts from the visual appeal of the gates and the view down the Broad Walk as well as creating pedestrian safety issues;

Loss of Visual Amenity / Inappropriate Development:

7. The view from the top of Cecily Hill northwards towards the car park to the former barracks / Castle focuses on the location of the skip and refuse store; this, and the car park itself would benefit from enhancement;
8. A few unattractive features including the stopping-up of the drive behind the Barton, an unappealing view towards the rear of the open air pool along River Walk, utilitarian ancillary buildings within the estate yard adjacent the Broad Ride, and graffiti on the inside of the Hexagon;
9. The unfortunate garage-style door to one of two otherwise matching pedimented buildings on the north side of Cecily Hill which disrupts the design of this classically-inspired elevation;
10. The disabled access ramp at the entrance to the former barracks / Castle which is functional but unsympathetic in design terms;
11. The former Archery House has undergone some utilitarian alterations of uninspiring design; the whole would benefit from enhancement;
12. A few buildings detract from the traditional character of the conservation area, for example the commercial shed adjacent the hunt kennels;

Loss of Rendered and Limewashed Surfaces:

13. Loss of rendered finishes particularly to classical buildings such as Cecily House;

Lack of Maintenance / Under-use:

14. A few buildings in poor condition and / or underused, most noticeably the ancillary buildings to The Barton farmhouse;
15. Maintenance of key features including attractive park gates and railings adjacent the former Archery House;

Landscape and Trees:

16. Many of the trees within the Park Conservation Area are old and may be nearing the end of their healthy lives;
17. Overgrown vegetation is currently obscuring one of the listed rusticated pillars marking the west end of the Park Conservation Area which could become damaged as a result;

Unlisted Buildings:

18. Some unlisted structures which might qualify for listed status including Fulham Bridge and the ha-ha along Windsor Walk, park railings and stone piers within the Park, a Victorian iron bench along Tetbury Road,

and the brick forge inside the estate yard believed to be eighteenth-century in origin;

Public Access:

19. There is a lack of public access at any time to the listed Mansion House, the pleasure grounds, the early eighteenth-century Horse Temple, the eighteenth-century Ice House [Grismond's Tower] or the lake.