



WEST OXFORDSHIRE  
DISTRICT COUNCIL

## Conservation Area Character Appraisal

# Swerford

### What are Conservation Areas?

Conservation Areas are places of special architectural or historic interest, which have a particular character or appearance worthy of preservation or enhancement. Groups of buildings, walls, trees and hedges, open spaces, views, and the historic settlement patterns all combine to create an individual sense of place. It is this character, rather than individual buildings, that Conservation Area status seeks to protect. The first Conservation Areas in the District were identified in the late 1960s. Since then, there has been a rolling programme of designations. Recent Conservation Areas are designated under the provisions of Section 69 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. Swerford Conservation Area was designated in 1988, following a process of public consultation.

### The purpose of this document

This Conservation Area Character Appraisal describes the main aspects of character or appearance which contribute to the special interest and quality of the area. This document is intended to complement the approved policies for Conservation Areas contained in the West Oxfordshire Local Plan. In Conservation Areas there are controls over the demolition and minor alterations of unlisted buildings, and on works to trees. Full details can be obtained from the Planning Service. The Preservation and Enhancement document for Swerford accompanies this Character Appraisal and describes strategies for the future maintenance and improvement of Swerford, as well as providing development advice, and guidance on conversions, extensions and the design of new buildings within the Conservation Area.



## Location and setting

The small village of Swerford lies against the northern edge of the District, five miles north-east of Chipping Norton, and 20 miles north-west of Oxford. The settlement is reached via narrow lanes, one of which connects it to the main Chipping Norton to Banbury road half a mile to the south. Despite its close proximity to this road Swerford retains an atmosphere of tranquility and seclusion, the intimacy of the setting enhanced by the siting of many of the village buildings back from the road and behind trees, walls and hedges.

The two distinct parts of the village – Church End and East End – lie on the shallow north-facing slope of a small semi-enclosed valley of the river Swere (a tributary of the Cherwell). In between lies an area of open farmland interspersed with large trees. This space, which has the feel of mature parkland, makes an attractive counterpoint to the enclosed portions of village on either side, and is a significant factor in the overall character of the village.

The wider landscape comprises a mixture of small- to medium-sized fields. These tend to increase in size at the top of the slope to the south of the village. The fields are bordered by a reasonably intact pattern of unmanaged hedgerows, which intermittently broaden out into pockets of woodland or dense vegetation.

Swerford is underlain by a mixed geology of iron-bearing rocks and clays, with the southern edge of the village marking the change to an area in which limestone predominates. This underlying geology is reflected in the use of an iron-tinted lias stone – or ‘marlstone’ – throughout the village.



## Historical development

Swerford appears in the Domesday Book of 1086 as ‘Surford’, when it was held by local Norman magnate Robert D’Oily, who was probably responsible for the building of Swerford’s motte and bailey castle. Robert D’Oily’s two sons – both lepers – were not permitted to inherit, so the land passed instead to his nephew, also called Robert. In 1229, he founded the Abbey of Osney near Oxford. This endowment almost certainly included land at Swerford, on which the abbey later erected the church of St. Mary.

Swerford – like the nearby settlements of Great Tew and Sandford St. Martin – is a prime example of a ‘closed’ village: from the earliest times the area was strictly controlled by one estate. Intermittently, throughout the Middle Ages, control passed from one family to another. The manor was held for a time by John de Plesssets - a favourite of Henry III and later made Baron of Hook Norton.

During the 17th and 18th centuries, Swerford took on the form we see today, with the local marlstone used extensively in the building of new properties and the replacement of existing timber structures. Three-quarters of Swerford’s Listed structures were erected in the 18th century.

Swerford has always been a modest, agricultural community. Prior to Enclosure the land adjacent to the village was farmed by the open field system. From 1802, the common land was consolidated into blocks. These were then hedged and reallocated to the farmers who had held strips under the earlier system. Mechanisation and the resulting drop in farm labour saw the village population reduced by two-thirds between 1852 and the present day.

## Settlement pattern

A variety of factors may have attracted early settlers to Swerford, including the area's sheltered location and forgiving contours; its suitability for agriculture, and its ready water supply.

In overall form the village offers a good example of a polyfocal settlement - that is a village comprising at least two separate and distinct built portions. Swerford comprises two main parts or *ends*: Church End and East End, separated from one another by an attractive sloping area of open land of parkland character.

Church End took shape around the military, religious and feudal focal points of the castle, church and nearby manor house respectively. East End on the other hand, with a clutch of farms at its heart, was the focal point for Swerford's agricultural development.

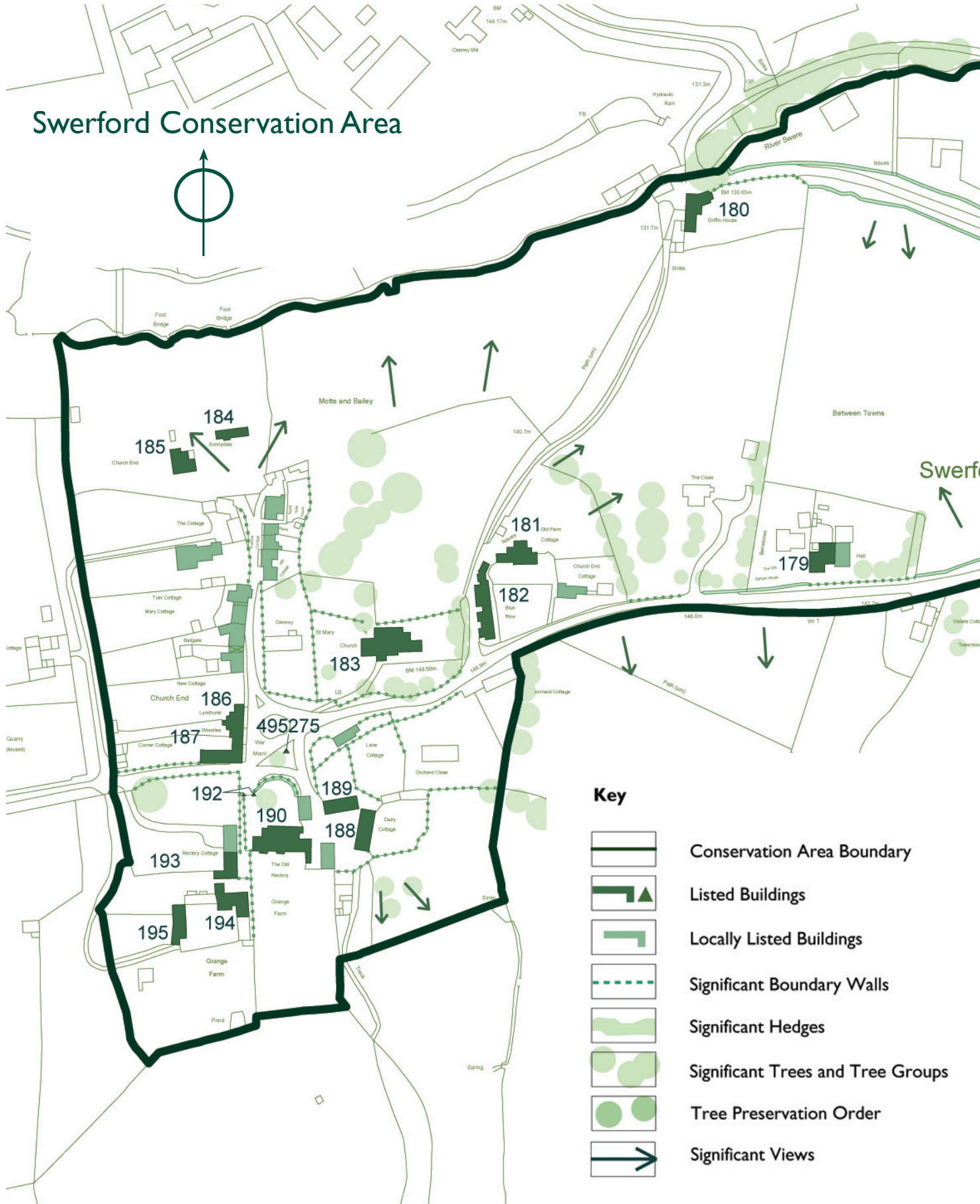
Church End features a variety of houses and cottages located mainly to the south and west of St. Mary's church and the adjacent motte and bailey castle. Development in Church End is linear along St. Mary's Lane, but more scattered elsewhere, with a number of buildings set back from the road or partially hidden from view. Aside from the church, The Old Rectory, with its elevated position south of the green, is the most prominent building in Church End.

East End, which is comparable in size to Church End, has a more pronounced linear settlement pattern. Here, the siting of buildings follows the course of the road: loosely and with houses set well-back from the road in the case of Chapel Hill, and with greater definition and with houses fronting onto the road at the bottom of the hill where the road bears west.









Two Listed buildings stand apart from these principal concentrations: Church House and Griffin House. Both are located midway between Church End and East End. Griffin House is the more isolated of the two and stands next to the river Swere at the bottom of the valley. It is worth noting that the farms of Swerford (of which two survive today) have always remained within the village boundaries. In the case of nearby villages (such as Hook Norton) new farms were often built in outlying areas.



# Swerford Conservation Area



### Key

-  Conservation Area Boundary
-  Listed Buildings
-  Locally Listed Buildings
-  Significant Boundary Walls
-  Significant Hedges
-  Significant Trees and Tree Groups
-  Tree Preservation Order
-  Significant Views



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## Listed Buildings

There are 34 Listed structures of architectural or historic interest in the Conservation Area. Listed Buildings are classified in grades of relative importance.

### Grade II\* – Particularly special and important buildings (4% of Listed Buildings)

- 9/183 CHURCH END Church of St. Mary
- 9/190 CHURCH END Old Rectory

### Grade II – Buildings of special interest

- 9/179 BETWEEN TOWNS Church House
- 9/180 BETWEEN TOWNS Griffin House and stable
- 9/181 CHURCH END Old Farm Cottage and attached stable
- 9/182 CHURCH END Nos. 1,2,3 and 4 Blue Row
- 9/184 CHURCH END Sunnydale and attached outbuilding
- 9/185 CHURCH END Church End
- 9/186 CHURCH END Lyndhurst
- 9/187 CHURCH END Woodlea and Corner Cottage
- 9/188 CHURCH END Stables approx. 40m. to E of The Old Rectory
- 9/189 CHURCH END Barn approx. 20m. to NE of The Old Rectory
- 9/191 CHURCH END Eastern of pair of gatepiers approx. 20m. NW of Old Rectory
- 9/192 CHURCH END Western of pair of gatepiers approx. 20m. NW of Old Rectory
- 9/193 CHURCH END Rectory Cottage
- 9/194 (2/194) CHURCH END Grange Farmhouse
- 9/195 (2/195) CHURCH END Barn range approx. 30m. W of Grange Farmhouse
- 495275 CHURCH END War Memorial
- 9/196 EAST END Leys Farmhouse
- 9/197 EAST END Old Clock Cottage
- 9/198 EAST END Foxhills Farmhouse
- 9/199 EAST END Stable range approx. 10m. to NE of Foxhills Farmhouse
- 9/200 EAST END Bylands
- 9/201 EAST END Lands Farmhouse
- 9/202 EAST END Shambles (Lands Cottage)
- 9/203 EAST END The Old Cottage
- 9/204 EAST END Cranemoor
- 9/205 EAST END Draycott Cottage
- 9/206 EAST END Glebe Cottage
- 9/207 EAST END Old Post Office
- 9/208 EAST END Brookfields
- 9/209 EAST END Ash Hill Farmhouse and attached stable
- 9/210 EAST END Farmbuildings approx. 50m. NE of Ash Hill Farmhouse
- 9/211 CHAPEL HILL (East side) K6 Telephone Kiosk

*Note: The numbers indicate the unique identification number by which Listed Buildings are referenced*

## Architectural character and quality of buildings

Swerford's iron-rich geology is reflected in the almost exclusive use of an orangey-brown marlstone as the main building material; a factor which gives the village a strong sense of visual harmony. Specifically, this material is used as squared or rubble stone, sometimes in courses, sometimes not; and is occasionally supplemented with ashlar dressings or limestone rubble. With few exceptions the village buildings are small in scale and vernacular in form, detailing and materials. A variety of rectilinear plan forms exist. Roofs are predominantly of Stonesfield or Welsh slate, or tile, and tend to be pitched and gabled. Windows tend to be of casement type with leaded glazing, though sash windows also exist.

Aside from the castle mound (believed to date from the first half of the 12th century) the oldest surviving structure in the village is the church, founded in the early 13th century by the Abbey of Osney. The current building dates from c. 1300 when the tower was erected. This is a three-stage ashlar structure topped with a broach spire. The rest of the church comprises a Decorated nave, Perpendicular chancel, and later south porch and north-east vestry. The church was restored and enlarged by H. J. Underwood, who added the north aisle in 1846.

The Old Rectory, also in Church End, is an attractive three bay, two-and-a-half storey house dating from the early 17th century and intermittently remodelled and added to in later years. The symmetrical front features a central doorway with triangular pediment on consoles obscuring a blocked overlight; a moulded plinth and a first-floor string course. The windows are eighteen-pane, flat-arched sashes. The vaulted cellars are the oldest parts of the house, and probably date from the 16th century.

The most prominent building in East End is arguably Land's Farmhouse - a neat 18th-century house with a symmetrical three-bay, three-storey front with tall flat-arched casements featuring projecting keyblocks at ground and first floor level.

## Boundary treatments

Chapel Hill – part of East End – is characterised by very deep mown grass verges (giving the appearance of a common bisected by the road), and low drystone walls. The main part of East End has a more structured feel, with houses fronting directly onto the road, or – in the case of The Yews – hidden behind a tall drystone wall of coursed dressed stone. Church End displays a mixture of treatments: mown verges and banks, along with drystone walls of varying height. Here, particularly just below the church, the road is noticeably incised, indicating that the route may be of some antiquity.

## Landscape, trees and views

Swerford is located in an area of gently undulating, wooded countryside. This is a landscape of shallow, hidden valleys; of fields bordered by tall and unruly hedgerows; of mature and semi-mature trees, copses and intermittent patches of dense vegetation. Within this landscape, settlements lie always half hidden from view. From the high ground to the south, Swerford is all but invisible and views of other settlements – such as Wigginton to the north-east – are only ever incomplete. A distant view of Swerford is possible from the opposite side of the valley, to the north. Scanning the wider countryside gives tantalising glimpses of other settlements scattered throughout the landscape.

Within Swerford itself, there is very low intervisibility. Tall hedgerows, large numbers of trees, and the village buildings themselves, all contribute to the sense of intimacy and seclusion, with only occasional views being possible through to the surrounding landscape.



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General planning enquiries and application forms  
List entries and grant enquiries  
Trees and landscape enquiries  
Architectural and technical enquiries

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