



WEST OXFORDSHIRE
DISTRICT COUNCIL

Proposals for Preservation & Enhancement

Swerford

Swerford lies at the northern edge of the District, five miles north-east of Chipping Norton and 20 miles north-west of Oxford. 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. 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 of limestone. This underlying geology is reflected in the use of the iron-tinted lias stone – or ‘marlstone’ – which can be seen throughout the village.

Introduction

Swerford Conservation Area was designated in 1988, following a process of public consultation. Conservation Areas are places of special architectural or historic interest, which have a particular character or appearance worthy of preservation or enhancement. It is this character, rather than the individual buildings, that Conservation Area status seeks to protect. A separate document, the Conservation Area Character Appraisal for Swerford, describes the main features of the area which contribute to its special interest.

The purpose of this document

West Oxfordshire District Council has a duty under section 71 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, to formulate and publish proposals for the preservation and enhancement of Conservation Areas after consideration at a Public Meeting. This Preservation & Enhancement Document has been prepared following public consultation. Changes to the character or appearance of Swerford Conservation Area, including opportunities for new development, are expected to be limited in future years.



Development Advice

The primary source of reference for development control advice is the West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2011 (adopted June 2006). Copies of the Plan can be inspected at: www.westoxon.gov.uk, or by visiting the Council's offices at: Elmfield, New Yatt Road, Witney.

The Local Plan contains specific policies for development in Conservation Areas, but other policies are also relevant to Swerford. In relation to housing provision, Swerford is a small village covered by policy H4, which allows new housing (new build or conversion) only if there is a genuine essential agricultural or other operational need for a full-time worker on the site.

Other conversions of existing buildings worthy of retention in Swerford will generally be limited to ancillary domestic use, non-residential uses or holiday accommodation only.

Within the Swerford Conservation Area the existing buildings, land uses, historic settlement patterns and open spaces should remain largely undisturbed. Where development is allowed, the following guidance is offered in order to preserve and enhance the appearance and character of the Conservation Area.

Any new buildings, and extensions to existing buildings, must be well designed in themselves, and must be sympathetic to the established character of the area. They should respect the form, setting and scale of the adjoining and surrounding buildings.

Special care must be taken to ensure that views into and out of the Conservation Area, as well as views within the Conservation Area, are not harmed. New development must incorporate existing features of historic, visual or natural importance, such as trees, hedgerows, ponds, stone walls, paths and tracks.

Materials for new building works should be sympathetic to those prevailing in the area. In particularly prominent or sensitive sites natural stone will usually be the most appropriate material. The conversion of redundant historic buildings should respect the original character of the building and its setting, and any historical features of interest should be retained.

Large extensions or an accumulation of extensions can easily obscure the simple form of traditional buildings, and should be avoided. Important groups of buildings often have a special value and historic character which can be harmed by new development (however well designed). It should be recognised that in these instances extensions may not be acceptable.

Trees and hedgerows which make a contribution to the Conservation Area should not normally be removed unless dying or dangerous. Anyone wishing to prune or remove a tree must first notify the Planning Service. When planting new trees, local character should be considered, and species selected to suit their context and the wider landscape character. For example, beech, field maple, ash and hawthorn are generally appropriate to the surrounding area.

West Oxfordshire Design Guide

The West Oxfordshire Design Guide provides additional guidance on: local characteristics; new development; sustainable building design; Conservation Areas and Listed Buildings; alterations, extensions, conversions and repairs to traditional buildings; the District landscape context; and a range of other design related issues.

Detailed design advice, with lists of practitioners, is contained in the appendices and includes material on: stonework, thatching, paintwork, joinery, and barn conversions;

The Design Guide is available online at: www.westoxon.gov.uk/planning/DesignGuide.cfm. Copies can also be purchased from Planning Services on: 01993 861420.



Architectural character and quality of buildings

The houses and cottages of Swerford are generally small in scale and vernacular in form, detailing and materials (though both Church End and East End are punctuated by noticeably larger-scale houses). A range of simple plan forms exist; roofs are predominantly of Stonesfield or Welsh slate, tile or thatch, sometimes with coped gables. Windows tend to be of casement type with leaded glazing; or of sash type.

The iron-rich geology underlying Swerford is reflected in the almost universal use of the distinctive orangey-brown lias stone – or ‘marlstone’ – as the main building material. Specifically, this stone is deployed in coursed, squared form; or uncoursed, rubble form, sometimes supplemented with ashlar dressings or limestone rubble. Higher status architectural features are only intermittently met with, but include the occasional pediment, moulding or string course (on, for example, the Old Rectory).

Characteristic building materials in Swerford:

Roofs

- Stone slate;
- Welsh slate;
- Thatch, long straw or combed wheat reed, with a plain flush wrapover ridge with spar work at the ridges, eaves and verges.

Walls

- Warm, ginger-brown lias limestone used in squared and coursed or uncoursed rubble form, and in a variety of bed sizes;
- Lias ashlar dressings, label mouldings and chimneys;
- Oolitic field and boundary walling, laid in very narrow beds;
- Red ‘Oxford’ brick used for chimneys, dressings and some outbuildings.



Alterations and extensions

Traditional but often unlisted buildings are vital components of the character of Conservation Areas. Seemingly small but inappropriate alterations to these buildings can easily damage the appearance of the wider area.

Buildings may need altering or enlarging from time to time to meet the evolving needs of successive owners. However, many existing buildings in Swerford have a scale and character worthy of retention. Whilst the Council recognises that many buildings have the potential to provide additional space, this should not involve damage to the special character of the Conservation Area.

Listed Building Consent is required for any work that will affect the character or appearance of a Listed Building or structure, either externally or internally, regardless of that building's grade. Demolition, extensions, and internal or external alterations all require Listed Building Consent. The administration of Listed Building Consent is the responsibility of the District Council, and applications for Listed Building Consent should be made on forms available from the Planning Service.

Apart from general planning and highway considerations, it is expected that in all cases the basic size of the existing property will be respected and that alterations and extensions will take into account the scale and character of the original form.

Within the Conservation Area extensions will not be allowed to fill private gardens or create sub-standard living conditions. Similarly, extensions which lead to a loss of daylight to neighbouring dwellings or create problems of loss of privacy will not be supported.

All development activity should be sustainable, with the aim of preserving energy and resources and reducing pollution. Factors such as building orientation, re-use of materials, insulation, solar shading, water conservation and innovative heating and power generation systems can all help to further these aims.



Repairs to traditional buildings

The repair of traditional windows and doors is often a better and cheaper alternative to wholesale replacement. Draughty and ill-fitting windows and doors often only need stripping of old paint layers. For reducing noise and draughts, secondary glazing and draught proofing are very effective alternatives to sealed unit double glazing.

Traditional window designs are fundamental to the character of local buildings. When replacement windows are installed these should match the original designs. Modern top hung night vents and large sheets of fixed glazing are rarely appropriate. Timber windows and doors are generally appropriate.

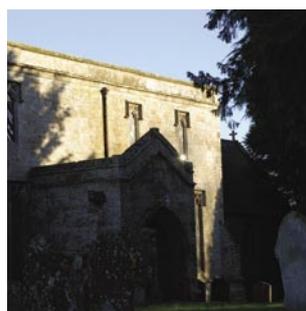
Modern substitutes such as PVCu and aluminium do not look the same, and generally have poor environmental consequences. Modern Georgian style doors with integral fanlights have no historical basis and should be avoided.

Paint is the traditional finish for external joinery. European hardwoods such as oak and elm were usually left unfinished to weather naturally. Timber stains and varnishes are modern introductions, and need to be chosen with care to avoid inappropriate colours.

The repointing of stone walling and brickwork should always be undertaken with great care, as the visual character of a building or boundary wall can be destroyed by ill-advised work. Hard cement-rich mortars and raised ribbon pointing should be avoided. Bagged mortar joints are the traditional finish in the District.

Roughcast render on stone buildings is a traditional finish, and should be retained where existing. Removal of stucco or render finishes can expose poor quality porous stone to unacceptable weathering. External finishes of this kind were often an essential part of the original architectural concept, and they should be retained or restored wherever possible.

Stone or brick walling should not be painted as this can lead to damage of the walling materials, as well as resulting in dramatic visual alteration.



Boundary treatments

Swerford shows a variety of boundary treatments. Chapel Hill (East End) features drystone walls and deep, soft verges, lending it the character of a common bisected by the road. Towards the bottom of the hill the settlement has a more structured feel, with houses tending to front the road, sometimes in short terraces.

The same boundary treatments are found in Church End, and yet its character differs from that of East End. Here, verges of varying depth and drystone walls of varying height can be found. The houses and cottages are orientated around the hub formed by a small green with a tree at its centre; and along St. Mary's Lane, which drops away to the north. The Old Rectory, meanwhile, stands back behind a garden and driveway bounded by a semicircle of formal walling and hedge. Elsewhere, the lane down to Griffin House is bounded by tall, unruly hedgerows.

Highways and public spaces

The County Highways Authority, District Council, Statutory Undertakers and Swerford Parish Council will be encouraged to exercise particular care to ensure that where work does take place within the Highway or public spaces, that the design of materials and details positively preserves and enhances the visual character of Swerford.

All proposals for new or replacement poles, masts, streetlights, overhead cables, utility boxes, traffic signage and traffic calming measures should be subject to consultation with the Parish Council and Local Planning Authority. The use of standard fittings or components is unlikely to preserve or enhance the character of the Conservation Area.

All new work should be fitted sensitively into the existing context. Physical measures should involve minimal visual interference with the established villagescape. The installation of any new overhead cables will not be supported.

The landscape context of Swerford Conservation Area

The West Oxfordshire Landscape Assessment provides an analysis of the landscape which surrounds Swerford Conservation Area. Swerford lies within the Ironstone Valleys and Ridges landscape character area.

Principal factors threatening the landscape setting of the Conservation Area:

- Agricultural intensification, particularly the conversion of grassland to arable;
- Removal of natural vegetation cover;
- Poor maintenance and loss of field boundaries;
- Expansion and 'suburbanisation' of rural settlements and roads;
- Poor maintenance of some traditional stone buildings and historic parkland landscapes.

Enhancement priorities for the landscape setting of the Conservation Area:

- Rebuild and maintain drystone walls;
- Retain and replant hedgerows and introduce more hedgerow trees, using native species typical of the limestone (e.g. ash, field maple etc.);
- Plant large blocks and belts of native broadleaved woodland, to link with existing woodlands and restore a mosaic of woodland and farmland;
- Where possible, retain areas of existing permanent pasture, encourage conversion of arable land to pasture and discourage further field enlargement;
- Encourage less intensive farming practices, the introduction of 'natural' vegetation cover in field headlands and margins, improve appearance and wildlife value of 'set-aside' land;
- Repair and maintain traditional stone buildings in the landscape.

Landscape, trees and views

For any development activity, the existing landscape, vegetation and wildlife context must be carefully considered. Established plant and animal communities must be conserved during and after construction, and provision must be made for such assets into the future. Biodiversity enhancements may be possible through the creation or restoration of habitats, which support rare or protected species. Planting schemes should reflect not only the broad landscape character, but also the specific local context as described in the West Oxfordshire Landscape Assessment and elsewhere.

As well as being important natural components in their own right, trees and hedgerows form vital habitats for wildlife, and can provide important corridors between isolated habitats. Some hedgerows and trees are protected by law, so if your application involves the removal of a part or the whole of a hedge or tree, you should first contact the District Landscape and Forestry Officer. If the application involves planting, careful attention should be paid to the species used. Whilst the planting of local, native species (including traditional fruit tree varieties) will be encouraged, non-indigenous ornamental species may sometimes be appropriate (though ornamental conifers are generally not appropriate within Conservation Areas).



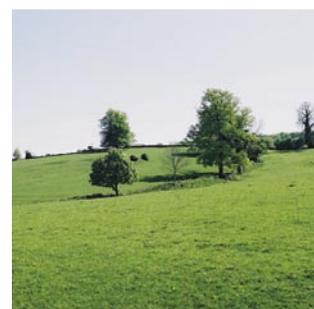
Typical indigenous species for Swerford (Wolds):

Key species

Beech	<i>Fagus sylvatica</i>
Field Maple	<i>Acer campestre</i>
Ash	<i>Fraxinus excelsior</i>
Hawthorn	<i>Crataegus monogyna</i>

Significant species

Oak	<i>Quercus robur</i>
Sycamore	<i>Acer pseudoplatanus</i>
Lime	<i>Tilia spp.</i>



West Oxfordshire District Council - Planning Service
Elmfield, New Yatt Road, Witney, Oxfordshire, OX28 1PB

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

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