



Steeple Aston Conservation Area Appraisal

April 2014

Development Management

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Summary

What is a conservation area?

An area of special architectural and historic interest; the purpose of conservation area designation is not to prevent change. The designation can be used to enable the management of change in a way that ensures any potential development does not harm the special character and appearance of the area.

Key Characteristics

Steeple Aston is a rural village set away from main roads but well-connected to both Oxford and Banbury via the nearby A4260. The predominant character and interest of the village is derived from the quartering of the manor in the 16th century, the subsequent development of a number of substantial manors, the village's valley location and its development around four sides of an open square of land. The contrasts in building scale and style are complemented by the wide range of building materials. The conservation area is unified by the numerous connecting stone walls, paddocks, orchards, gardens and tree belts.

Summary of issues and opportunities

The future preservation and enhancement of the special character of the conservation area will owe much to the positive management of the area by homeowners, landowners, highways, and service providers. In addition to existing national statutory legislation and local planning control, the following opportunities for enhancement have been identified:

- Add to the register of Local Heritage Assets, including buildings, structures and areas, and establish policies for their protection
- Encourage the protection of historic detail and the reinstatement of missing architectural details
- Consider how an Article 4 direction to remove selected permitted development rights may enable the restoration of character to areas of the conservation area which require enhancement and/or protection
- Ensure that all new development is sustainable, high quality, and responds to its historic environment
- Promote the sympathetic management of the public realm, including working with the highway authorities to encourage more traditional materials for kerbing and footpaths.

Conservation Area Boundary

The conservation area was first designated in 1988 and reviewed in May 1996. Much of the village has been identified as a site of archaeological interest. This is the first full appraisal that has been completed for the area and complements the last review.

1. Introduction and Planning Policy Context

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- 1.1 Section 69 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires local planning authorities to identify areas of special architectural or historic interest the character and appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance through an appraisal process and to designate them as Conservation Areas. Since 1967 some 9600 Conservation Areas have been designated in England, including 60 in Cherwell District.
- 1.2 The purpose of this Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan is:
 - To provide a clear definition of an area's special architectural or historic interest
 - To identify ways in which the unique characteristics can be preserved and enhanced
 - To strengthen justification for designation of the conservation area
 - To create a clear context for future development in accordance with conservation area policies in the Local Plan
 - And to provide a vehicle for engagement and awareness raising.
- 1.3 This assessment and management plan aims to promote and support developments that are in keeping with, or enhance, the character of the Steeple Aston Conservation Area. It is not an attempt to stifle change. The aim is to strike a balance so that the interests of conservation are given their full weight against the needs for change and development. This document is concerned with the reasons for designation, defining the qualities that make up its special interest, character and appearance. The omission of any reference to a particular building, feature or space should not be taken to imply that it is of no interest.
- 1.4 The identified significant heritage assets for Steeple Aston are shown in figure 2. These include designated heritage assets, the conservation area boundary, and tree preservation orders.
- 1.5 Identification of heritage assets of local significance is advocated by the NPPF and the support document Historic Environment Planning Practice Guide in relation to the contribution such assets make to the character of the historic environment. Buildings and structures which make a positive contribution to the conservation area are identified in Appendix 3 and will be considered in line with the council's criteria for inclusion on the district-wide 'register of local heritage assets'.
- 1.6 This document should be read in conjunction with the Proposed Submission Draft Cherwell Local Plan (January 2014), national planning guidance (the NPPF), and the Design and Conservation Strategy.
- 1.7 This appraisal was the subject of public consultation. Since its adoption by the council on 29th April 2014, it is a material consideration in the determination of planning applications within the Conservation Area and its setting.

2. Location



Figure 1. 2009 aerial view of the Conservation Area (highlighted in red) in its landscape context

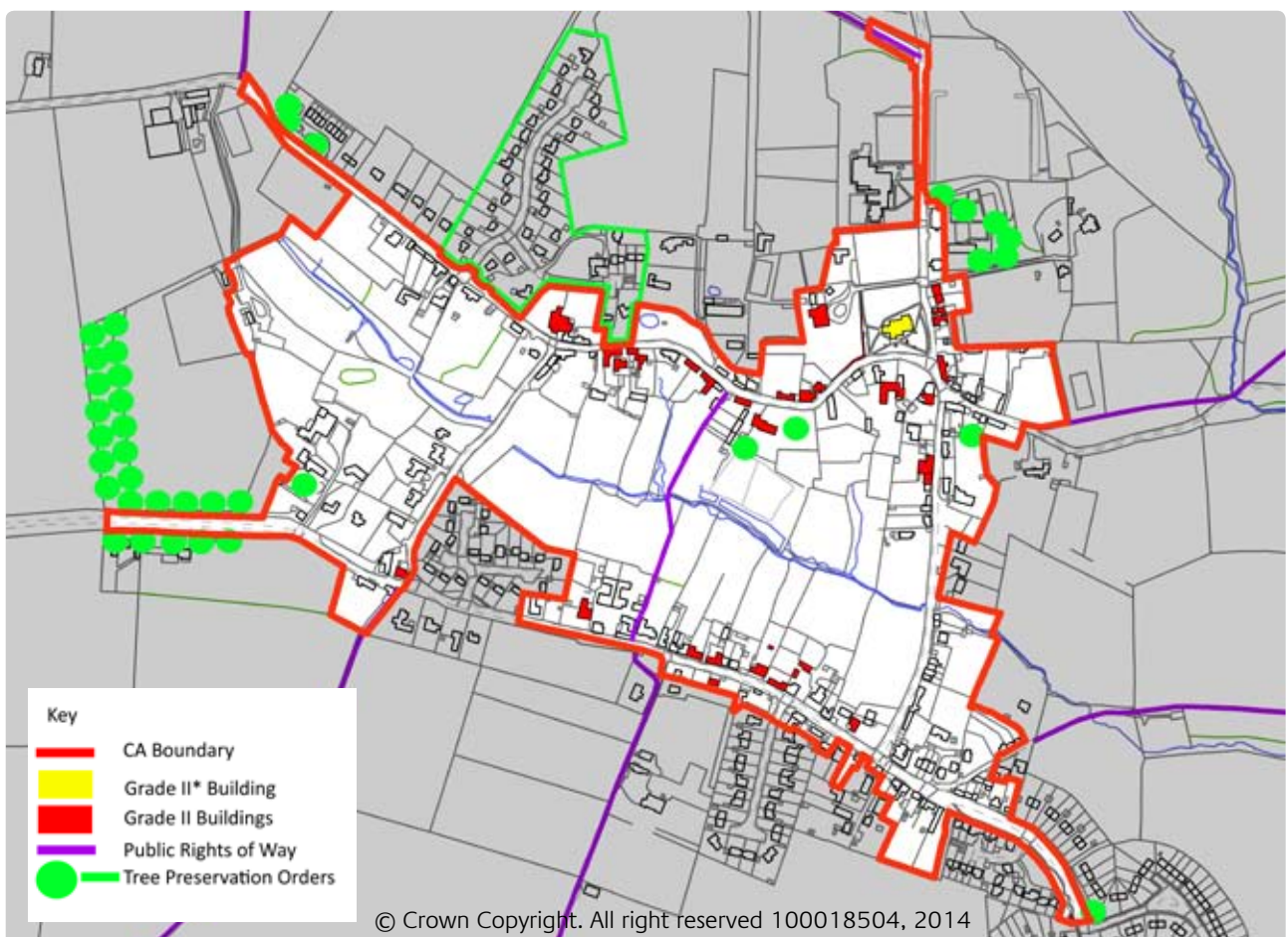


Figure 2. Area designations

2. Geology and Topography

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- 2.1 Steeple Aston is situated either side of a small steep valley formed by a tributary of the River Cherwell, 13 miles north of Oxford on high ground between the Banbury/Oxford Road and the River Cherwell. The area is identified as being within the Cherwell Valley character area; a tightly enclosed section running north to south as a thread through the middle of the district (Cobham Resource Consultant, 1995).
- 2.2 The village is laid out around a rectangle of steeply sloping meadowland, through which a stream runs; this area was historically used for paddocks, orchards and gardens. Around the village lies historic estate farmland and large-scale arable farmland enclosed by woodland belts. The low-lying pastoral landscape can be seen as the valley drops away to the southeast of the village.
- 2.3 The geology is a branch of Great Oolite Limestone edged with Northampton Sand. Combined with Lias Clay below the village, the village has a good natural water supply, which probably attracted early settlers. The central valley is the result of a geological fault, resulting in marlstone to the north and limestone to the south. This underlying geology is reflected in the building materials used around the village.

Figure 3. Topology of the conservation areas from 80-150m

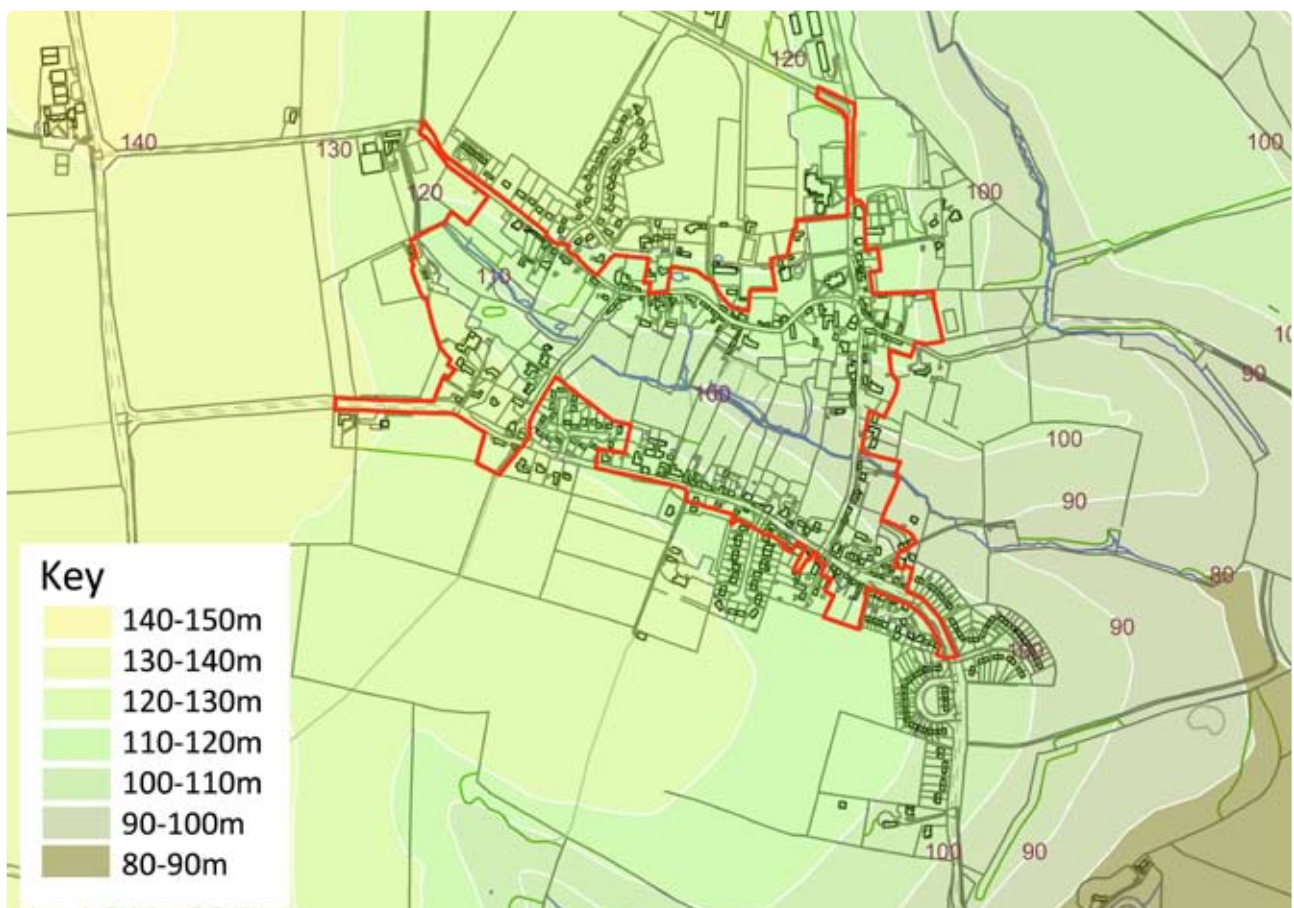
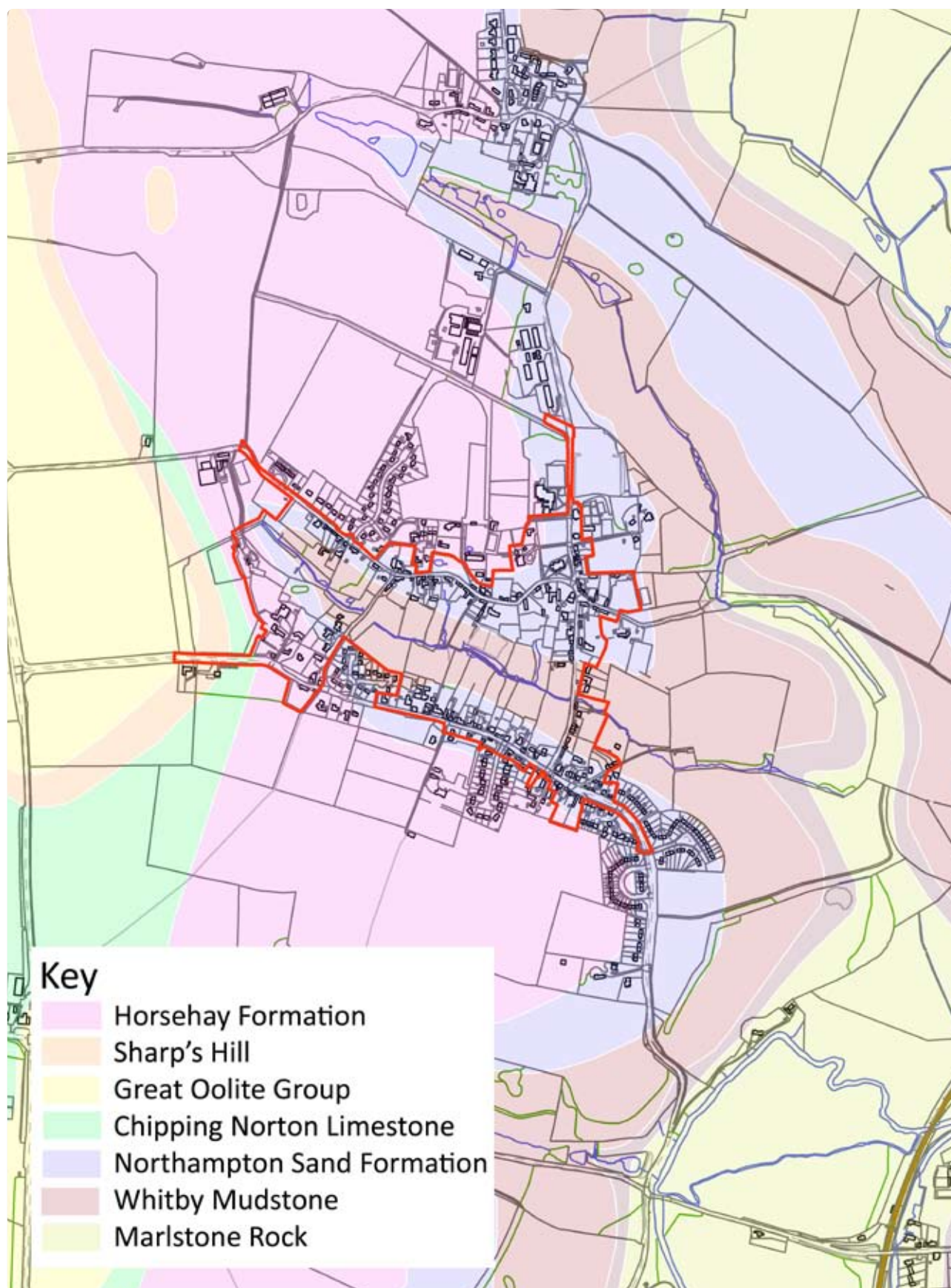


Figure 4. Geology with conservation area boundary imposed



3. Archaeology and Early Origins

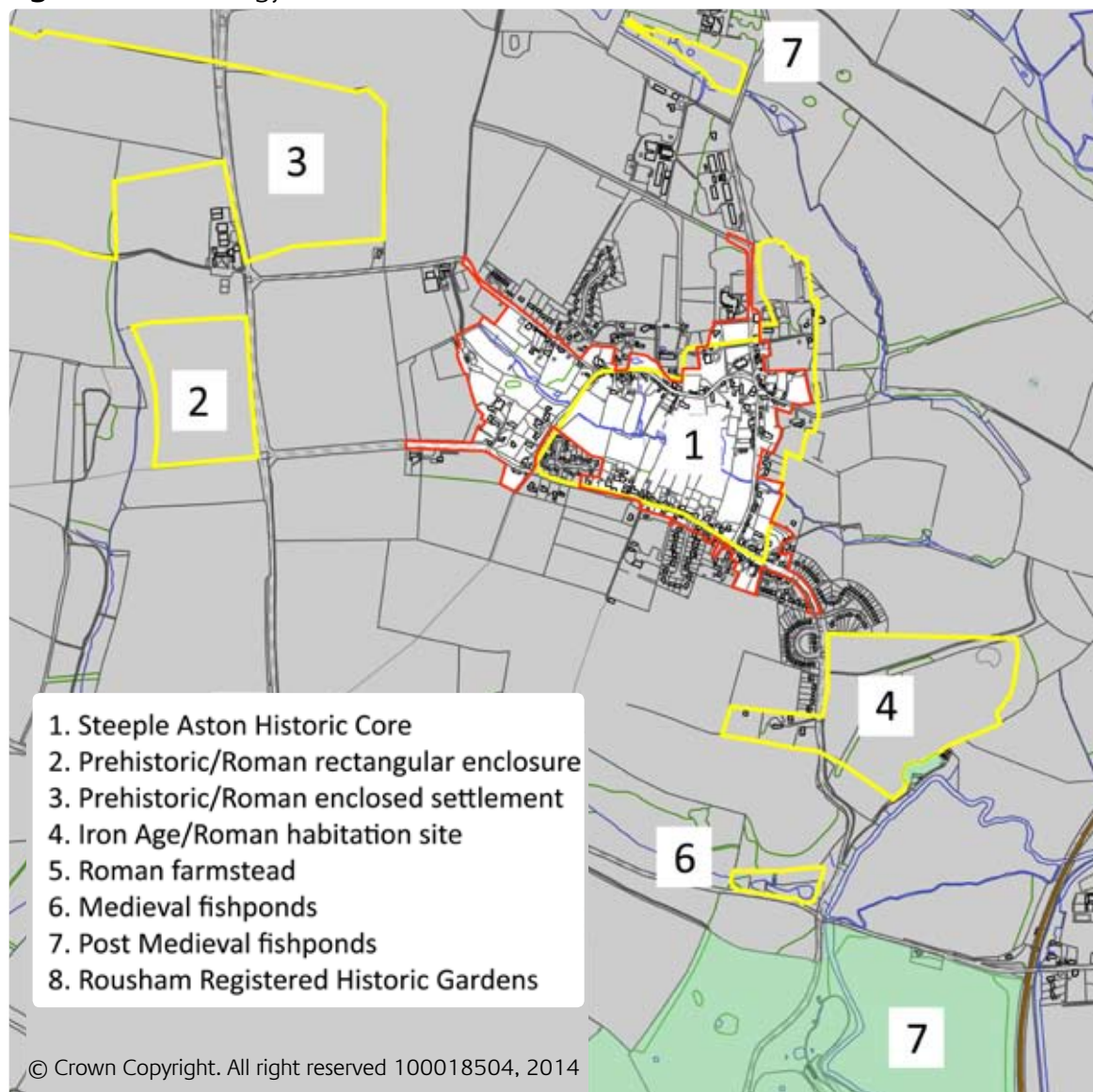
3. Archaeology and Early Origins

3.1 A number of archaeological finds have been made in the parish. The earliest evidence of occupation is marked by an Iron Age burial site in the west of the parish, close to the line of the prehistoric trackway which formed parts of the Cotswolds Ridgeway (the present day A41 follows a similar route). Other evidence includes Roman occupation of a site close to the church, and post-medieval fishponds south of Cedar Lodge,

North Side. In recent years, four Roman burials have been found, indicating that occupation may have been longer term than first thought.

3.2 At the time of the Norman Conquest the village was known as Aston - East 'Tun' or village - and formed part of a large estate with Middle Aston, Nethercote and North Aston. By the Domesday Survey in 1086 the estate had been divided, and Steeple Aston consisted of a manor of five hides and twenty inhabitants. Population records indicate a rise in the medieval period with the poll tax of 1277 recording fifty-two adults.

Figure 5. Archaeology within and around the conservation area

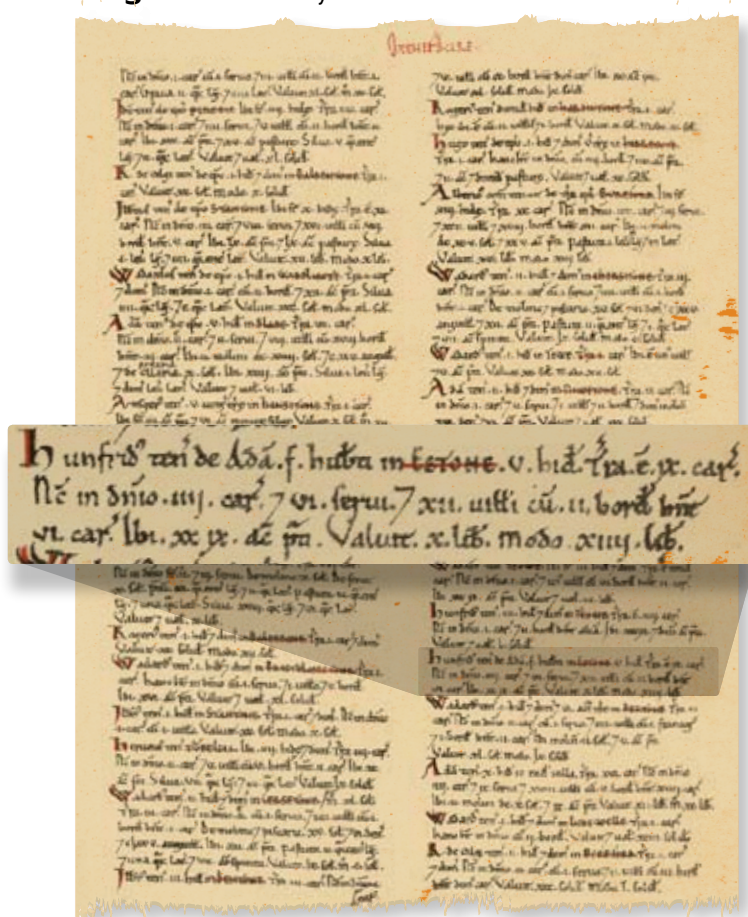


4. History and Development

4. History and Development

It is not the purpose of a conservation area appraisal to be the definitive history of an area. There are several extremely good publications relating to the history of the village, together with an excellent archive held by SAVA (Steeple Aston Archive Group). Therefore, a very brief overview of the village's development is given here, with the recommendation to contact SAVA or local libraries for further information.

Fig. 6: Domesday Book



12th - 16th Centuries

- 4.1 A church was established in Steeple Aston by 1180 when reference was made to the rector, Henry of Aston, brother to the lord of the Manor. Prior to the addition

of the prefix 'Steeple' in 1220 (probably refers to the addition of a tower to the church), the village was known as Estone or east tun, likely to be in reference to its location east of the Cherwell river. Following the dissolution in 1507, both the Manor and church severed their connection with Cold Norton Priory and reverted to the Crown. The church was given to Brasenose College, Oxford in 1513, beginning the village's long association with the College.

16th - 18th Centuries

- 4.2.1 The quartering of the Manor occurred in 1501, encouraging the emergence of yeoman estates. An 'open' policy developed, accepting settlers from outside the parish, which quickly raised the population. The settlers mainly came from the nearby 'closed' villages; Middle Aston being one. The main core of trades and occupations associated with agriculture were found there from the 16th century, and these continued to be important means of employment for the next three centuries.

- 4.2.2 The association with Brasenose College resulted in the endowment of the Samuel Radcliffe School and two almshouses on North Side. Other Fellows through the 17th century were benefactors of the church and school, and also improved the village's water supply.

- 4.2.3 At the time of Inclosure in 1767, Steeple Aston already had 22 small closes in and around the village, and there was an increase in the number of professional and service families. As a result, the village expanded, particularly in the area of Paines Hill. Properties were built mainly along the eastern side, avoiding the older closes on the west side.

- 4.2.4 There is a strong historical and visual connection to Rousham House and its designed gardens. In the early 18th century, the landscape north of the park was 'enlivened' by William Kent, creating the sham ruin, or 'eyecatcher' to the east of the parish. This eyecatcher is Grade II* listed and can clearly be seen from several vantage points within the village.

19th Century

- 4.3.1 The Cottrell-Dormer family of Rousham House had been steadily increasing their holdings in Steeple Aston since Inclosure, and by 1841 were the principal landowners in the village. Steeple Aston in the 19th century was a more diverse community than would otherwise have been expected. The importance of the agricultural community began to decline, as tradesmen and artisans frequently combined their businesses with smallholdings. By the early 19th century Steeple Aston was less of a purely agricultural community with unusually large numbers of tradesmen and artisans. The several 'mansions' provided an important source of employment for domestic servants and a small brickyard was in operation on the east side of Paines Street by 1861 and still in use in 1889.
- 4.3.2 Despite this, the village suffered with unemployment and poverty. The village suffered from a lack of maintenance as people struggled to make ends meet due to high rents and a lack of owner-occupier properties. In 1852, the problem was so severe that the vestry offered £3 each to eight young people prepared to emigrate. In 1875 a national infants' school was founded by public subscription. A technical school was built in 1894 next to the infants' school in Fir Lane from a surplus of Radcliffe's original endowment.

20th Century

- 4.4 The technical school was extended in 1920 before the new school was erected on the opposite side of Fir Lane in the late 1950s. Radcliffe's original school in North Side is now a house, the national school is occupied by the playgroup and the technical school building serves as a village hall. Some infill and peripheral development has occurred and for the main, this has been buildings which reflect their time of construction.

5. Historic Maps and Photographs

Figure 7: C.1881 OS map

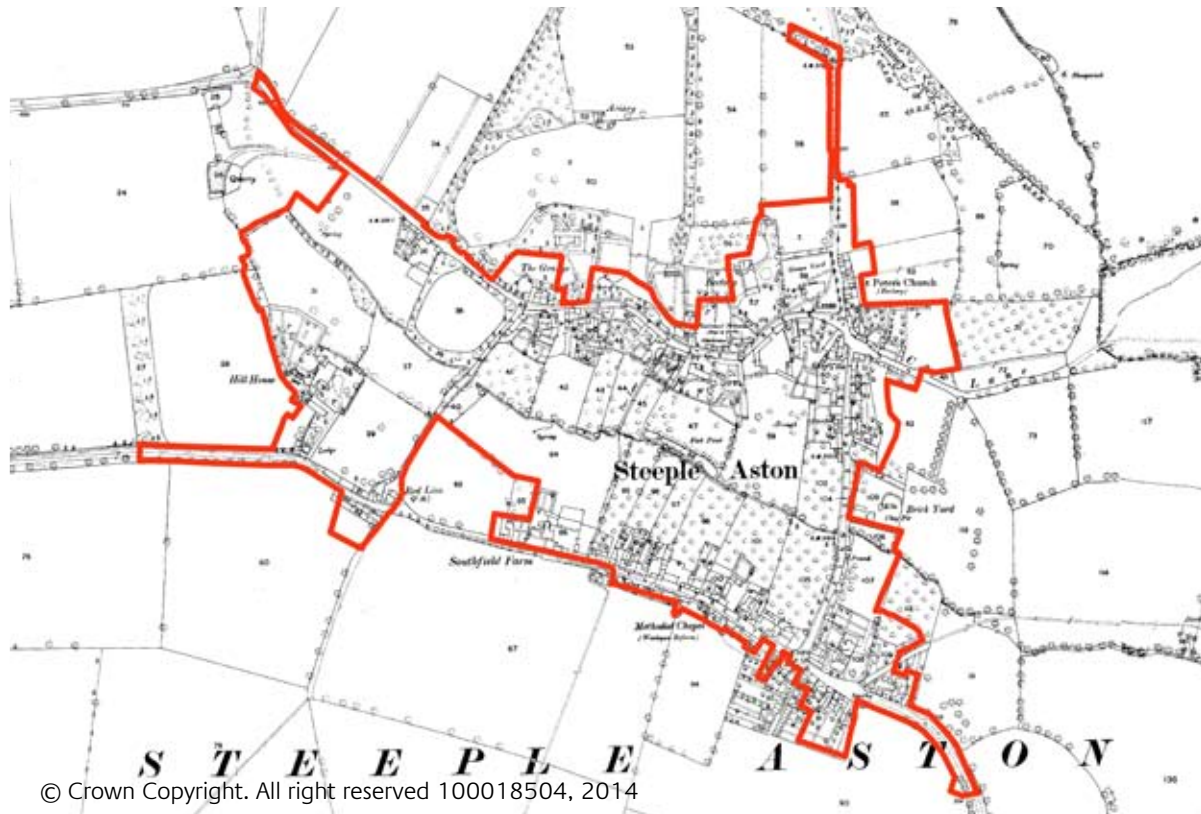


Figure 8. 1900 OS map.

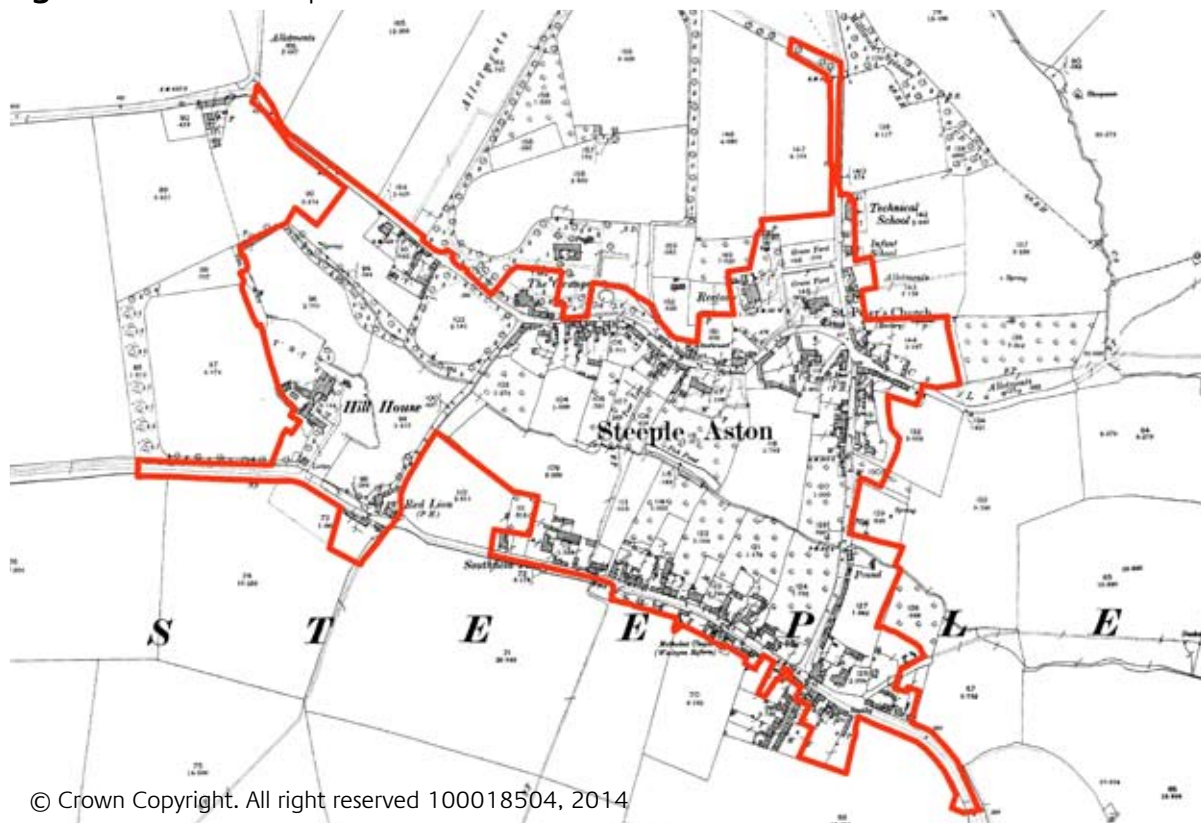
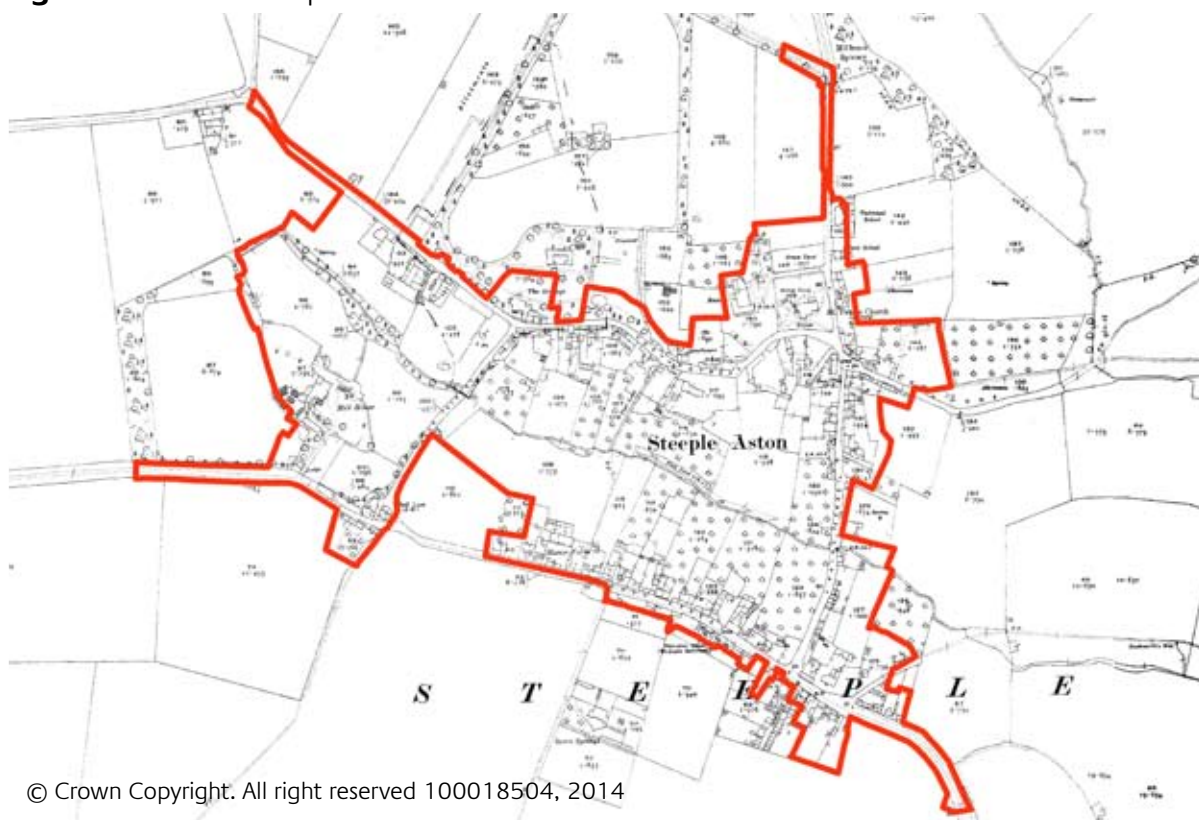


Figure 9. 1923 OS map.



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Figure 10. 1955 OS map.



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Figure 11. 1970s OS map.

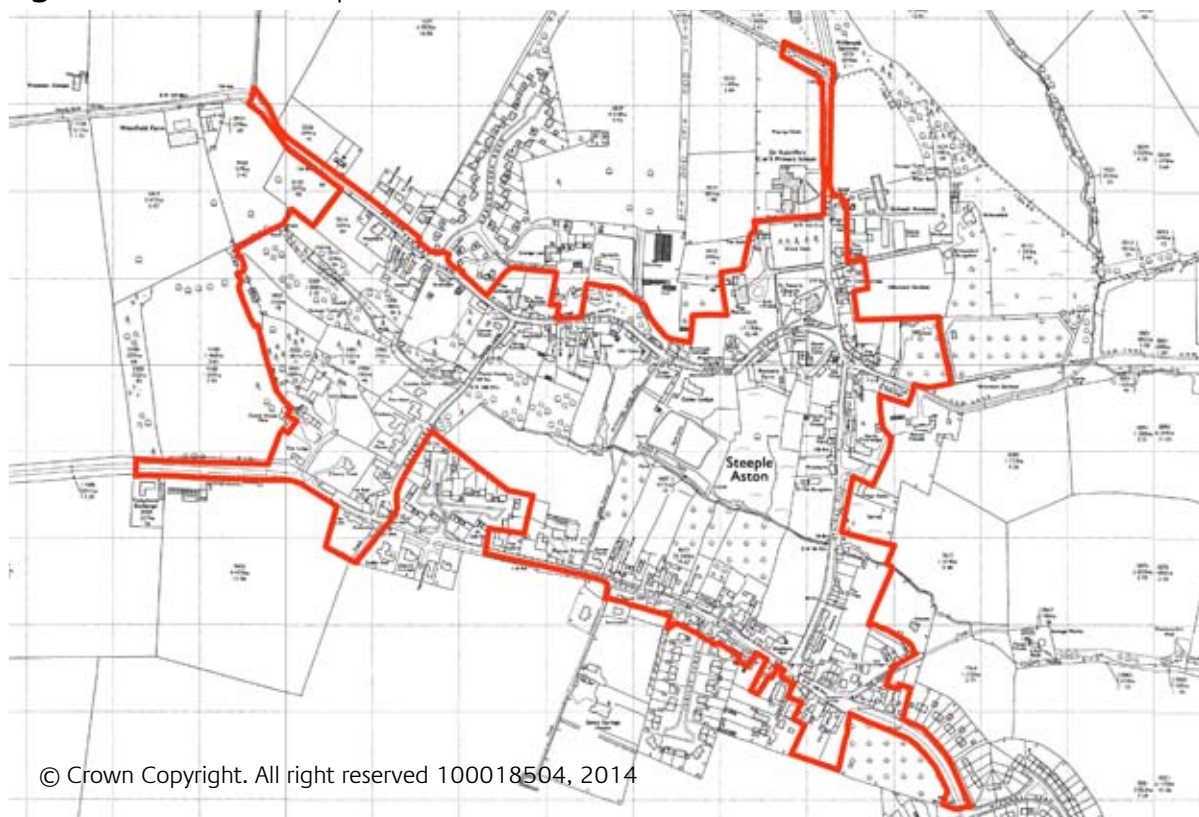


Figure 12. 2014 OS map.





2. Church Cottage, Cow Lane 1920-30



3. South Side 1920-30



4. & 5. Village Shop (Harris Stores) 1920-30 and the same view today



6. Paines Hill 1920-30



7. The Folly viewed from The Dickredge 1920-30

6. Summary of Special Character

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6.1 The special character of Steeple Aston is derived from its early origins as an agricultural village, centred on the church and manor. The village has developed around an open square containing paddocks, orchards and gardens. The plots within the square are a legacy of the pre-Inclosures closes, possibly from the reduction of the manor in the 16th century. These areas of land played a major role in forming the structure of the settlement and in controlling further development. Many boundaries remain intact from this period.



8. Church of St Peter and St Paul

The Church of St Peter and St Paul

6.2 The church is situated in a commanding position at the north east corner of the village. It is probably the earliest surviving building in the village and dates from the 13th century with later additions. More recent restorations were undertaken in the mid-19th century by John Plowman and in 1873 by Charles Buckeridge. Reflecting the mixed geology in the area, it is constructed of both limestone and marlstone.

Historic Road Layout and Materials

6.3 The layout of the village has been determined by the boundaries of ancient plots and closes which run down the hillsides either side of the valley, using the stream as a rear boundary. Early development was probably located around the church and manor at the east end of North Street, with subsequent development spreading along the main street. North Street contains the largest concentration of older properties, with several dwellings dating from the 18th century or before.



9. Historic raised pavement outside The Grange

There are only occasional examples of historic paving within the public areas of the village. A short stretch of stone paving lies outside The Grange and West and East Spring in North Side. The pavement is raised at this point and gives access to the spring below. Stone kerbing is found in a number of areas, predominantly South Side, Paines Hill and Water Lane. Both entrances to the churchyard have stone steps, and there is a small area of stone paving adjacent to the church itself. There are some examples of blue brick paving, most notably in the courtyard at Paines Hill House, and clay block paving at The Old School House.

Local Building Materials and Features

- 6.4 One of the defining features of Steeple Aston is its diversity of building materials, in comparison with other rural villages in the district. Traditionally the local limestone and marlstone were used for buildings, including the church, manor houses, cottages and walls. In some cases both stones have been used in the same building either randomly or deliberately to form a pattern or to emphasise architectural details.



10. Architectural detailing picked out in limestone along South Side

From the 19th century brick became a more common material and replaced stone for the building of many cottages. One of the earliest surviving brick buildings is Chestnut House in Paines Hill, which dates from the 18th century. Bricks may have been imported from further afield via the Oxford Canal and the wharf at Lower Heyford, but it is also possible that some may have been produced at the 19th century brickworks on Paines Hill. It is common to see all three materials used together, such as at Acadia Cottage in The Dickredge. Kempsford Cottage on South Side is an example of an older stone cottage which has been re-fronted in brick.

- 6.5 Roofing materials are also varied, with Stonesfield slate dominant on the older properties, and isolated thatch retention. Welsh slate has been used in

the re-roofing of earlier properties and is dominant on 19th century properties - a likely link to the growing use of the nearby canal. The majority of late 20th century properties are roofed in concrete tiles.

- 6.6 Chimneys on older properties are mainly brick with earlier stone bases, although some grander properties have entirely stone stacks. Later properties have brick stacks. They are a distinctive feature of both grand and humble buildings, and as such are an important part of the character of the village.



11. Chimneys can completely change the character of a building and should be retained on older buildings

- 6.7 In older properties windows are predominantly wooden side-hung casements with wooden lintels. There are several examples of stone mullions including Radcliffe School and Grange Cottage. Metal casements with leaded lights can also be seen at the almshouses and at Cedar Cottage in North Side. Sash windows are seen on a number of properties, particularly those of a larger scale and with classical features. Accompanying them are often architectural details such as flat stone heads to windows and doors, banding and quoins.

There are several examples of both gabled and hipped dormers within the village, although these are mostly 20th century in origin and are not a dominant feature.

6.8 There are a variety of doors within the conservation area. Wooden plank doors are seen on a number of cottages including the almshouses in North Side. Examples of panelled doors are found mainly on the larger properties and where historical refurbishments have been made. A number of examples of stone surrounds to doors can also be seen, including a blocked doorway at Rectory Farmhouse.



12. The Grade II listed almshouses, showing the difference between traditional and late 20th century windows

6.9 Means of enclosure

Stone walls are the traditional and most common boundary treatment, although there are a few areas of railings. Where they enclose the larger properties, the walls can be over 2 metres high, for example at Cedar Lodge and The Grange. A few brick walls exist on the outskirts of the village, such as outside the Red Lion Public House. Wall cappings vary with a dominance of the stone-on-edge capping most commonly seen in the Cotswolds. Mortar caps can also be seen. The wall to Cedar Lodge has a tile and stone slate cap and there are a few small sections of squared stone copings outside The Old School House on North Side.

6.10 Vegetation and trees

While the village is generally very open in character there are a number of important trees and tree belts contained within the conservation area or immediately abutting it. The churchyard

contains a number of mature trees including some very large and prominent specimens. These add to the character of the conservation area at this point as do the extensive tree belts contained in the grounds of Canterbury House and those which screen the school in Fir Lane.



13. The trees in the central valley form a soft backdrop for the area of open grazing land



14. Walls are a characteristic feature in the village and are worthy of protection

7. Character Areas

7. Character Areas

The Conservation Area can be sub-divided into three distinct areas of character as now described below:

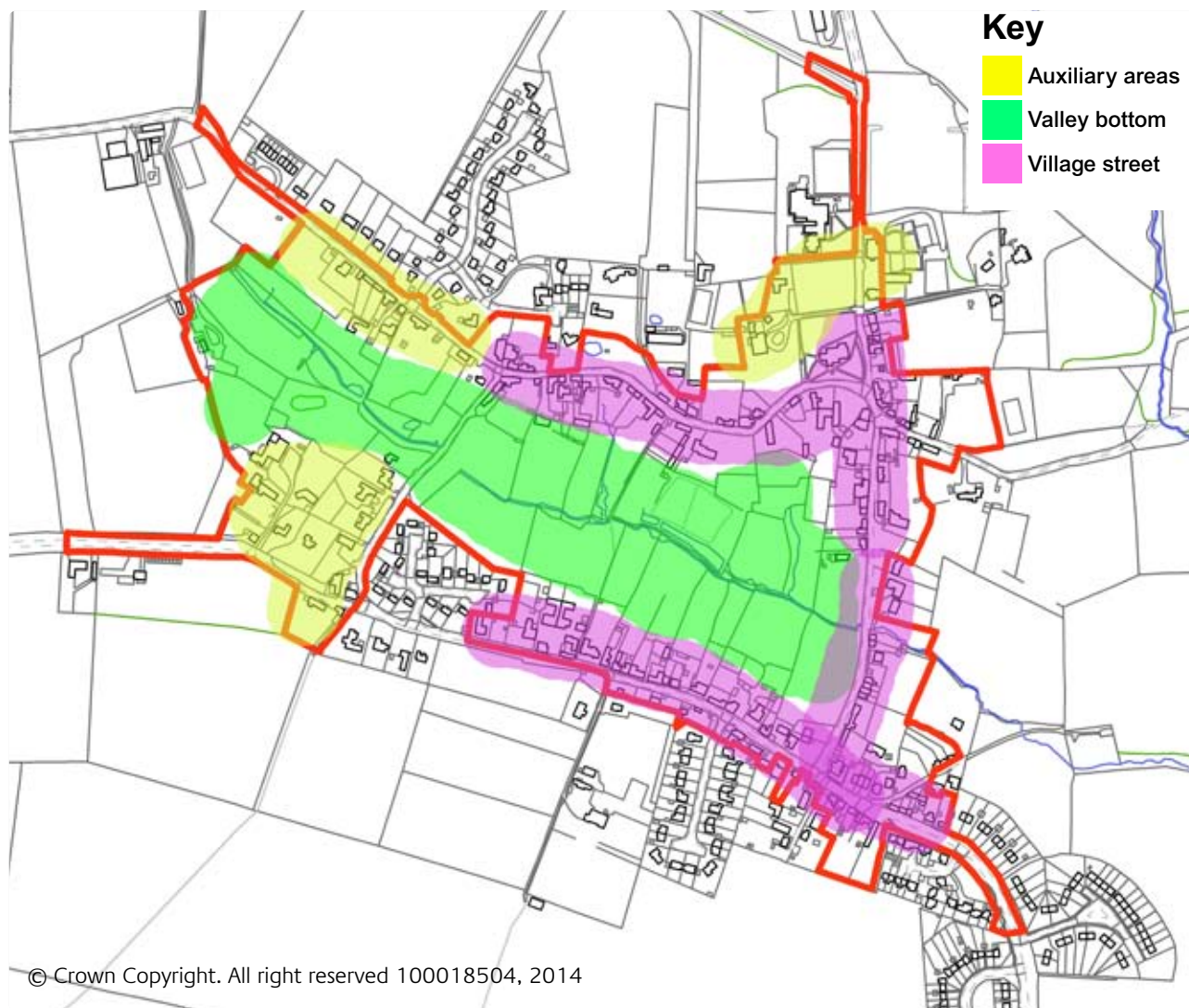
7.1 Village Streets (purple)

7.1.1 North Side, South Side and Paines Hill form three sides of the central valley area. For the main in these areas, the properties are parallel to the road and set forward, providing a clearly defined highway which was common of

traditional settlements. There is a mixture of property sizes, showing the influx of labourers in the 19th century. Both brick and stone examples of the smaller labourers' cottages of the 19th century can be found along Paines Hill.

7.1.2 North Side The most enclosed area of the village, North Side contains the majority of older and listed properties. Manor Court has early 15th century origins (although this is thought by some to incorporate an earlier 13th century hall house), and the almshouses and Radcliffe school date from the 17th

Figure 13. Character Areas within the Conservation Area



century. The street twists and turns, and is narrow in places. The sense of enclosure is emphasised by high stone walls and dense planting, which can be found in larger domestic gardens.

- 7.1.3 Paines Hill Open in character and mainly developed on its eastern side, Paines Hill forms the eastern boundary to the central valley. Views up the valley into the village's central open square are a dominant feature, with glimpses eastwards through the broken frontage to the river beyond. The three-storey Paines Hill House is the most prominent building at the northern end of the street, with a classical ashlar frontage.



15. The view north up Paines hill towards the prominent Paines Hill House

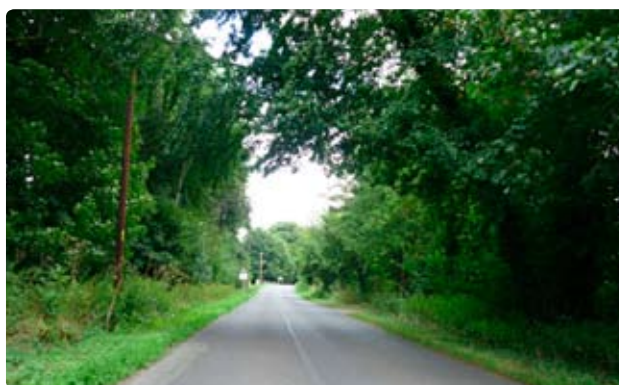
The smaller houses and cottages along the road are located on the road frontage or behind small gardens. The series of small terraces creates a more compact atmosphere in this part of the village. The area contains the former village shop (now known as Old Manor House), a striking property on the junction of Paines Hill and South Side. The building has a stone hood over the doorway, and a hipped roof. It is joined to the Post Office, constructed in the same style but of brick rather than marlstone, and then to a further simpler marlstone building at the end which now houses the village shop. This structure was formerly a 19th century chapel.

- 7.1.4 South Side The properties along South Side are not overly large, but are often

of high quality. Simple and elegant proportions are the most striking factor along this road, with a mixture of detached houses and small runs of terraced cottages. The road has an open character with most buildings concentrated on its north side. This is emphasised by the generous sloping grass verge on the southern side, punctuated by only the occasional tree. South Side has excellent views eastwards across the valley and towards Rousham's eyecatcher.

7.2 Peripheral areas (yellow)

- 7.2.1 As the name suggests, these areas are set at the extreme edges of the historic core and have a less formal feel to them when compared with the traditional streets. Despite being separated, these entrances to the village are similar in their low-key rural approaches to the historic areas.



16. The tunnel-like vegetated entrance to the village

Approaching the village from the northwest the visitor tracks their way along a narrow country lane (Fenway) with open fields to either side, before entering a tunnel of trees which eventually opens up into the conservation area, marked by the stone walls bounding the highway. The road is almost straight, leading the eye directly towards Randolphs, at the junction with Water Lane. There is no direct access to the road from any of the houses. These are either set back slightly and visually separated by the boundary wall and vegetation, or have driveways with access from the rear.



17. The classically elegant Appleton House on South Side

Leading out of the village west again, the tree cover creates a tunnel effect when viewed from the junction with Water Lane. This tunnel of trees is replicated on both Fir Lane and South Side, together with green verges and a lack of dwellings fronting the highway.

7.2.2 The raised pavement outside The Grange is an interesting feature, highlighting the changing topography which falls away south towards the central valley. Supporting this rural adaptation, the pavement along Fenway is restricted to the northern side and is edged with granite setts, reducing the potential urban impact.



18. Fenway retains its rural atmosphere by restricting the urban pavement to the north side

7.2.3 South Side is notable for the substantial trees along the northern side which open out to reveal The Lodge and the parking area for The Red Lion inn.

7.2.4 The impact of highway improvements

to accompany the primary school on Fir Lane could be seen as a visual intrusion into the rural character of the village, but as the school provides a vital community service, this counteracts the small amount of urbanisation. The Rectory and Canterbury House are hidden from public view along a narrow driveway which splits the graveyard in two.

7.3 Central Valley (green)

7.3.1 The square of paddocks, orchards and gardens forms the centre of the conservation area, split in two by the stream and crossed north to south by a footpath known as 'The Tchure'. The area is free of development, and respects the pre-Inclosure closes. This openness is a major part of the central character of the village. It visually supports the trees and vegetation throughout the remainder of the settlement.



19. The undulating and well-vegetated Water Lane bisects the central valley



20. The view north towards The Grange and Randolphs

7.3.2 Water Lane cuts through the valley, forming the western edge of the square of open land at the centre of the village. The majority of properties there date from the 20th century, although there are earlier properties at either end which graze the Village Streets Character Area. Views at either end are of the prominent buildings, The Grange and Red Lion Corner, but within the main area, views are terminated by the undulations of the road, the characteristic stone boundary walls and overhanging tree cover. Glimpses of open fields to north and south can be seen through the mature trees and over the manicured gardens. West of Water Lane, Hill House stands in extensive woodland grounds, adding to the vegetated atmosphere at the heart of the village.

7.3.3 Paines Hill affords excellent views of the grazing and smallholding which still continues on the central land. Looking over the boundary wall to the field, a strong line of deciduous trees blocks views of the remainder of the valley, while the development to either side is visible. This includes an attractive view north to the church.

8. Summary of Negative Features

8. Summary of Negative Features

A number of features have been identified as causing detriment to the visual quality and character of the area.

8.1 New Development: modern development has been restricted in the main to areas outside the historic core. The mid-late 20th century developments are very suburban in character and appearance and do not reflect the linear layout of the rural village. However, later smaller schemes such as Shepherd's Hill, have tried to replicate the historic form and materials found in the village. Although they have busy front elevations, the effect is more sympathetic to the surroundings than some of the mid-20th century developments, which are testament to the planning and construction methods of the time.

8.2 Loss of original features: the removal and replacement of original or traditionally detailed timber windows and doors with poorly detailed new joinery or uPVC alternatives is slowly eroding the character of the area. As well as being less environmentally-friendly than traditional materials, the plastic windows have larger frames and glazing bars, resulting in a more awkward elevation which detracts from the simple architecture in the village.



21. The heavier plastic windows to the left contrast with the slimmer and traditional timber sashes on the right

8.3 Replacement of boundary features: A number of stone walls are in a poor state of repair around the village. Due to the rising cost of maintenance, it is tempting to replace these with more modern or easier to maintain alternatives, such as those used at Fennimore Cottage on Paines Hill where the materials were changed several years ago. Walls are such a prominent feature in the village that they should be protected and repaired sympathetically to ensure their retention.



22. A quieter moment in The Dickredge but parking still prohibits larger vehicles accessing the properties

8.4 Parking: as with all rural villages, few houses were designed with the ability to have off-street parking. Fortunately the roads are often wide enough to allow on-street parking with at least a generous amount of the carriageway free for traffic. However, there are several areas, such as the northern end of Paines Hill and along The Dickredge, where this is difficult and causes problems. Although the village is largely bypassed by through-traffic, the large school buses frequently have problems due to the winding and varied widths of the roads. The problem of parking within the district's villages is not an easy issue to solve, and is likely to be part of a much wider issue surrounding access to rural villages.

8.5 **Overhead wiring:** This is not as prevalent as in other conservation areas, but where it exists it has a significantly negative impact upon the appearance of the area, such as at the junction of North Side and Water Lane.



23. Wiring cuts through the view of the historic properties at the junction

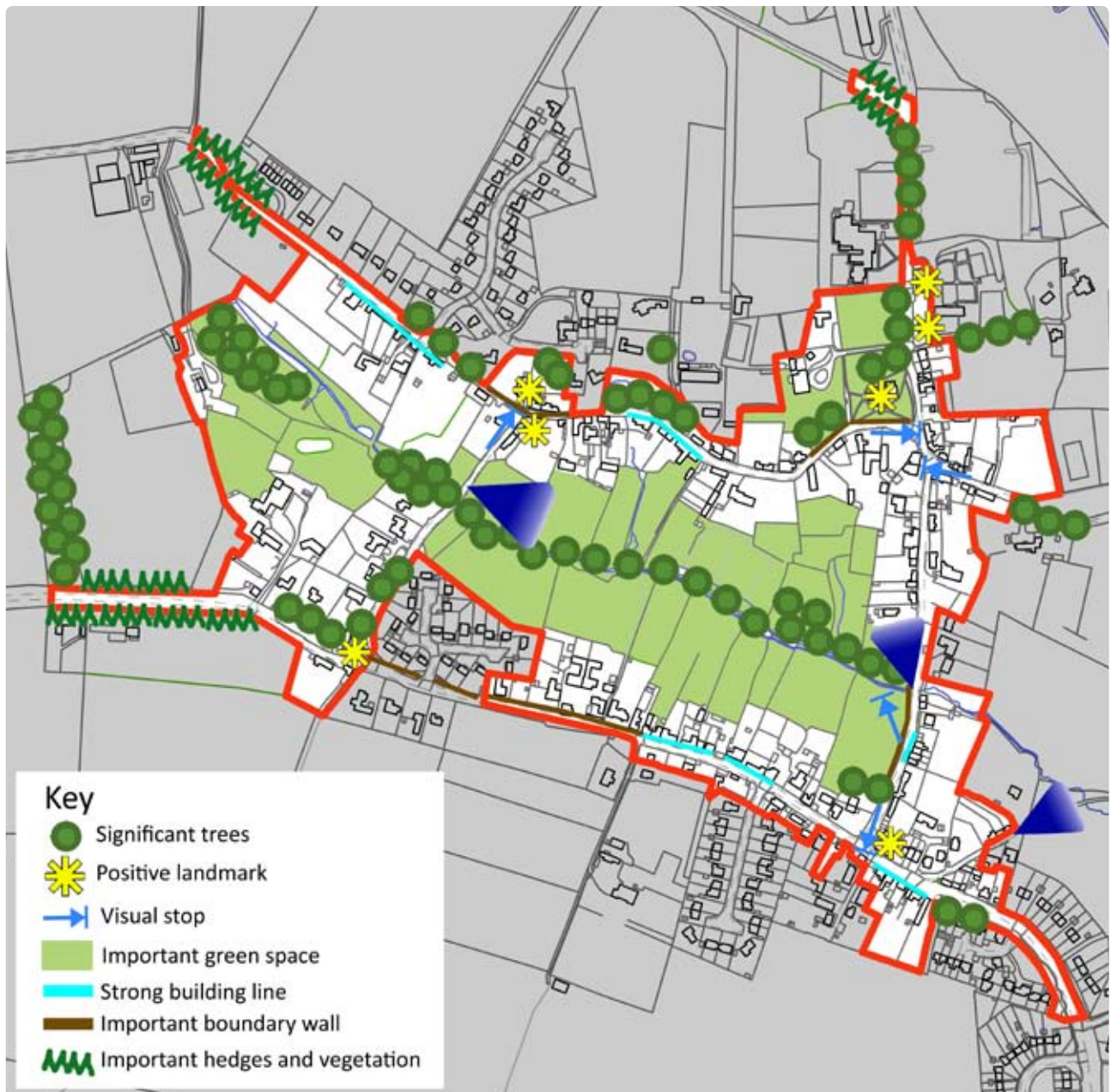
8.6 **Sporadic Maintenance**

Maintaining a property rather than conducting large-scale repairs or replacement is cheaper, more efficient, and ensures the building retains its appearance. There are several walls, outbuildings and rear projections throughout the village which could profit from more regular maintenance, to prevent inappropriate repairs from being made at a later stage.

9. Visual Analysis

9. Visual Analysis

Fig. 14: Visual Analysis



10. Village Plan

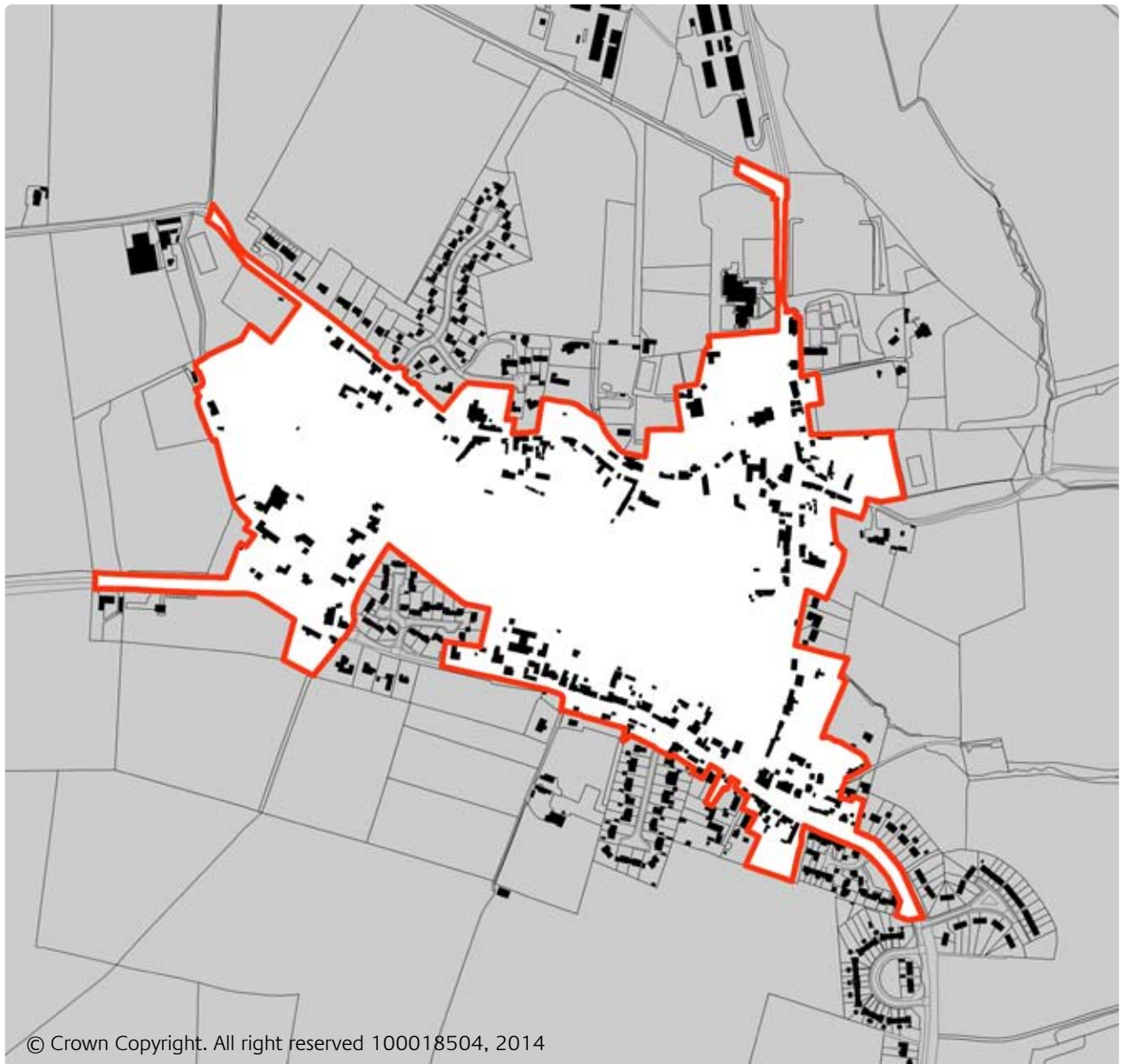
10. Village Plan

By highlighting just the buildings within the conservation area, it can be seen that Steeple Aston follows an organic street pattern; the main buildings appear to directly abut the highway, creating a very strong building line and sense of enclosure along the streets. Perpendicular buildings can be seen stretching

back from these, showing the traditional form of development. This can be compared with the more modern buildings and layouts in the areas outside the conservation area.

In addition, the large central area without any development shows clearly. It is important that this area is retained as open and unspoiled as it is a highly characteristic feature of the village.

Fig. 15: Figure Ground Plan showing buildings within the conservation area



11. Management Plan

General Proposals for Preservation and Enhancement	
Boundary Treatments	As specific character features of the Conservation Area, total demolition of traditional boundary features will be resisted. The use of traditional methods of construction and materials including the use of lime mortar or the planting of indigenous species of hedgerow is encouraged in all scheme of repair, reinstatement or new work.
Important Views	Views into, out of and within the Conservation Area, in particular those of the church and eyecatcher, are essential to the special quality of the place. Their protection and enhancement will be an important consideration in the determination of any proposed development.
Building Maintenance	Sensitive repair and regular maintenance will be encouraged through distribution of guidance notes and general advice through the Development Control process. It is of the utmost importance that traditional techniques and materials are used to retain the special historic character and appearance of the area. In particular, this includes the use of lime mortar and like-for-like repairs.
Archaeology	Varying levels of archaeological mitigation may be required in response to development proposals within the historic core. Early consultation with Oxfordshire County Council's Archaeology Department in relation to any proposed new works involving foundation excavation or ground levelling is encouraged at the outset to prevent delay at the application submission stage.
New Development	As a Category A village (Cherwell Local Plan 2006-2031: Submission [January 2014]), the village is not considered suitable for large new development schemes, but may allow some minor development, infilling and conversions of non-residential buildings. This is no different from the adopted Local Plan 1996. Any proposed development or extensions must respect the scale, design, proportions and materials of the surrounding architecture to strengthen the cohesion of the street scene. It is crucial that the scale and diversity of the surrounding architecture is respected and that an imaginative and high quality design is employed.
Reinstatement of lost features	Traditional architectural details and local materials are important and should be retained, repaired or reinstated where lost. An Article 4 Direction could ensure that existing original and traditional details are protected and where necessary sensitively replaced in the future.

12. Conservation Area Boundary

12. Conservation Area Boundary

12.1 A conservation area is “an area of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance”. It would be inappropriate for the whole village to be included within the designated area. Different planning controls apply in Conservation Areas and therefore it is vital that only areas which are demonstrably of special architectural or historic interest be included.

12.2 Steeple Aston Conservation Area was designated in 1988 and further reviewed in May 1996. The original boundary was drawn to include the buildings of architectural or historical interest and following the review, a minor amendment was made to include the highway and verges of Heyford Road to the entrance of Nizewell Head, including the war memorial opposite. A further extension to the north was formed by the front boundaries of properties facing the road and in the south by the field hedge.

12.3 The conservation area appraisal has been a successful planning tool, aiding in the preservation and enhancement of the conservation area. The boundary drawn in 1988 included all areas of historic construction, leaving only modern development outside. This development is not worthy of inclusion due to its current lack of special architectural or historic interest, and there has been little development inside the current boundary. Having reviewed the boundary during this appraisal, some alterations were made to strengthen the justification for the structures and spaces within it:

- The northern boundary: pulled back to align with the hedge along either side

of the road. The previous boundary cut through part of the school playing field, and this is therefore rectified to include the trees and hedge along the road, but not part of the playing field or eastern field along Fir Lane.

- The south-western boundary: extended to include part of ‘Sixty-Foot’ for its historic merit and entrance into the village.
- The southern boundary: rectified to include the curtilage of Whitsun House, which was previously cut in two by the boundary.

12.4 For the avoidance of doubt the proposed boundary of the Conservation Area can be described as follows:

12.5 The western boundary of the conservation area begins opposite the Telephone Exchange on South Side and crossed northwards to include the beech and Scots Pine woodland north of the road. From here, it hugs the grounds of Hill House, including within the designation the woods and paddocks to the north of the mansion following field hedges to a point of Fenway opposite number 29. The boundary turns westwards to include the hedges, verges and trees which provide a setting for this part of the village to a point where the road turns at a junction with a farm track. The boundary turns northwards and then eastwards back along Fenway, taking in the hedge, verge and trees on the north side of the road, and the boundary walls to 1 and 38 Grange Park, until it abuts the western boundary of South, East and West Granges. The 20th century properties on the north side of Fenway including Grange Park are excluded.

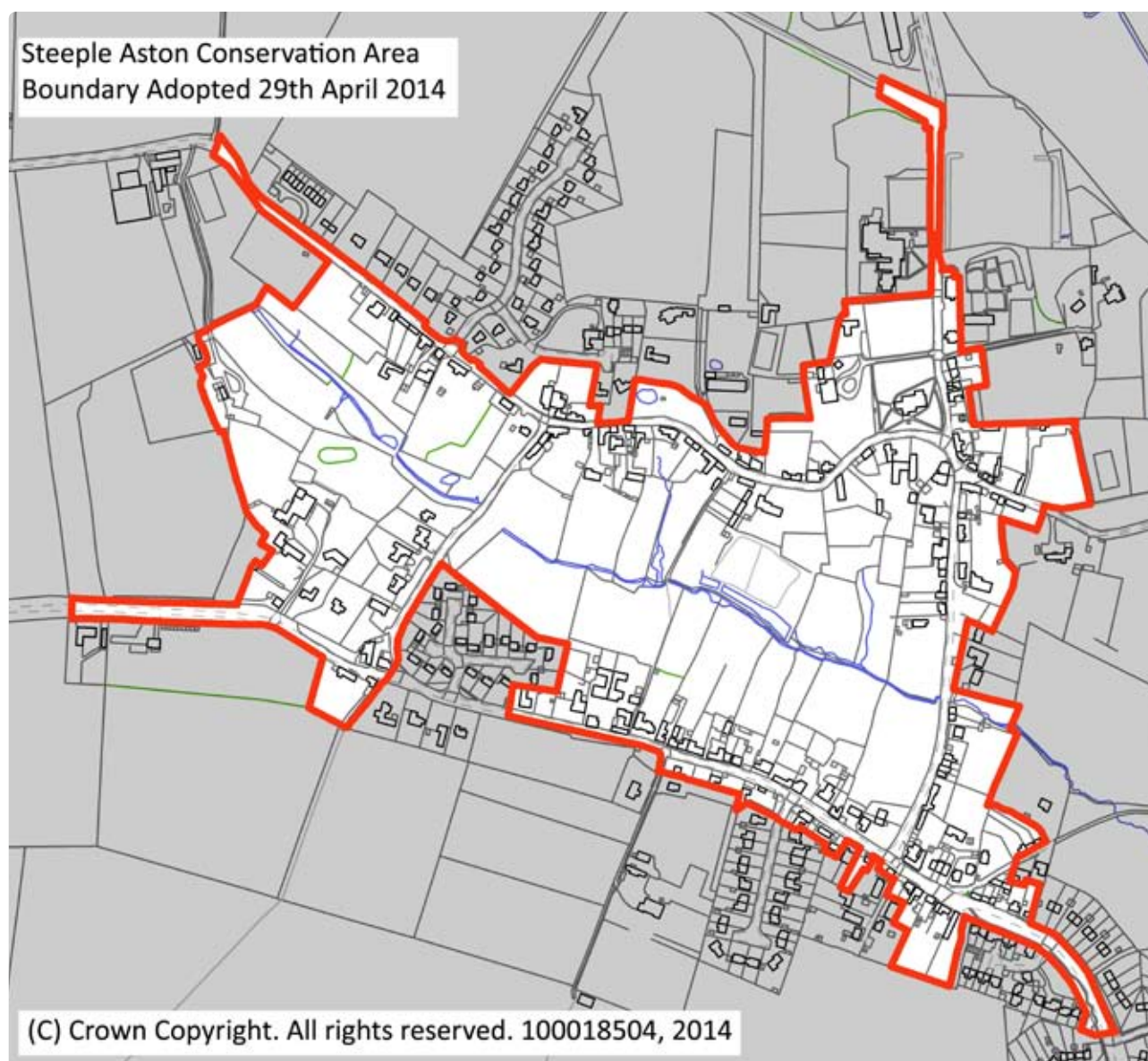
12.6 The boundary continues to hug the rear boundaries of South, East and West Granges before turning southwards to

follow the boundary of East Spring. East of this property the wall fronting North Side becomes the boundary before it again turns northwards to include the garden area in front of Fairacre. The boundary continues eastwards following the rear boundaries of properties fronting North Side before taking a stepped route northwards to include Canterbury House, the present Vicarage, and the graveyard and tree belt north of the church. The boundary loops northwards to include Fir Lane, and the trees and verges either side of this road, before turning south westwards to include the village hall, the playgroup building, and properties on the east side of the lane. The boundary turns eastwards to include Wincote and its extensive grounds before turning westwards north of Cow Lane.

- 12.7 South of Cow Lane, the boundary follows the plot boundary between Aston House and North Dickredge excluding the 20th century property to the east. From this point the boundary zigzags to the east of Paines Hill, excluding 20th century properties, while including all front boundaries, the stream and older properties at the southern end of the street. The boundary turns eastwards to include the older properties in The Dickredge, again excluding the 20th century properties further down the lane. The eastern boundary of the lane becomes the conservation area boundary from opposite The Cottage to Dingers Cottage. The boundary turns eastwards again to include the older properties on Heyford Road, being drawn across this road to follow the southern edge of the highway westwards back towards the centre of the village. Heyford Road is marked at this point by wide verges and on its southern side a mature hedge. The road also leads to the listed war memorial located opposite Nizewell Head.

- 12.8 The established boundary of the conservation area takes a staggered route following the rear boundaries of properties fronting South Side, only returning to the road boundary for a short distance east of Yew Tree Cottage. West of the lane adjacent to the property South Side, on South Side, the boundary follows the wall which marks the field boundary. The boundary loops north and then westwards to exclude the 20th century properties in Bradshaw Close, hugging the rear boundaries of these properties. The wall adjacent to Water Lane is included within the conservation area which takes a route southwards to include the lane beside Shadyside before turning westwards to follow the rear boundary of the cottages on the south side of the street. West of The Croft the boundary returns to the road to follow the field boundary to a point west of the Telephone Exchange, before crossing the road to join the western boundary as described above.

Fig. 15: Conservation Area Boundary



13. Effects of Conservation Area Designation

13. Effects of Conservation Area Designation

Special Controls

13.1 In order to protect the special environment, stricter controls exist within the Conservation Areas, restricting the kinds of alterations to domestic properties that may be carried out without specific planning permissions. These are not intended as a hindrance to change, but as positive management to safeguard the character of the area as a whole. These include:

- A two storey rear extension of any dimensions
- A single storey side extension of any dimension
- A building, enclosure, pool or container at the side of a dwelling
- Cladding in any material
- Any alteration or extension to the roof
- A satellite dish on any chimney, wall or roof slope that faces onto or is visible from a highway
- A flue, chimney, soil or vent pipe on a wall or roof slope that fronts a highway or can be seen from a highway and forms the principal or side elevation of the house.

With all proposals for development and the display of advertisements in a Conservation Area, greater care is necessary to ensure that schemes enhance and preserve the area's special character. Design and choice of materials are of particular importance in this respect.

Listed Buildings

13.2 A Listed Building is a building that is considered to be of 'special architectural or historic interest' and as such requires special protection. Once listed, a building is protected under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. The Listing protects the entire building both externally and internally irrespective of the reason for listing as well as any object or structure fixed to it or any object or structure within the 'curtilage' of the building, which has existed since before 1st July 1948. This is to ensure that the special character of both the building and its setting are protected.

13.3 Where works are proposed to a Listed Building, it is always advisable to check with the council's Design and Conservation Team whether Listed Building Consent is required. In any works proposed, special regard must be given to the desirability of preserving the building, its setting and special features of interest.

13.4 In considering any works to a listed building the principle objective must be to retain all original features and fabric of the building wherever possible. Listed Building Consent is required for the demolition of a listed building or for alteration, which would affect the building's character, integrity or special interest. This could include changing windows and doors, changing roofing materials, painting brickwork, moving or replacing internal walls, fireplaces or staircases.

13.5 Like-for-like repairs may not need consent but it is always advisable to check prior to undertaking any works as the carrying out of works without the necessary consent is a criminal offence with significant penalties for those involved following a successful prosecution.

14. Design and Repair Guidance

14. Design and Repair Guidance

14.1 The following design guidance seeks to ensure that the character of the Conservation Area is enhanced, through imaginative and high quality design. The following aspects are particularly important:

Scale

14.2 Restoration and re-development must respect traditional plot widths and avoid repetitive and unrelieved facades which typify so many modern designs. Steeple Aston has variations of plot size, but those relating to pre-Inclosure closes should be retained as a priority.



24. Window proportions reveal former uses as shops, together with indicating higher status properties

Proportion

14.3 In most buildings within the Conservation Areas, the relationship between windows, doors, floor heights and the relationship of solid to void in the design of elevations is crucial. Traditional proportions should be emulated in new development. It is of particular importance that traditional proportions are respected in concern with any extensions to existing properties;

in most instances they will need to be subservient to the existing properties.

Building Line

14.4 Frontage development must conform to the historic street pattern. The historic layout of the village is linear with the buildings facing onto the road with their rooflines parallel to it.

Roofs

14.5 The roof line is a dominant feature of a building and retention of the original height, shape, pitch, verge and eaves detail and ornamentation is essential. Flat roofs are alien to local tradition and should be resisted where possible. Chimneys are important features of the roofscape and should be retained even if no longer required. Where roofing materials are to be replaced the new materials should match the colour, size and texture of those being replaced if those were traditional and historically appropriate. If ventilation is required, this should be achieved by inconspicuous means (e.g. under-eaves ventilation); visible roof vents would be discouraged.



25. Simple windows, boundary walls and chimneys are essential to retaining the traditional appearance of the village



26. The mixture of materials mean that variety is a feature, but traditional methods should be used to maintain them

External Walls

14.6 Any alteration or repair to external walls must respect the existing building materials and match them in texture, quality and colour. Every effort should be made to retain or re-use facing stonework which should not be rendered, pebble-dashed or painted. Re-pointing should be carried out with a mortar to match the existing in colour, type and texture; historically would have consisted of lime and sand. Hard, modern cement mortars are inappropriate as they prevent the evaporation of moisture through the joints, which is instead drawn through the next softest material, the masonry itself, thereby damaging both the appearance and structure of the building. Original render should not be stripped off to expose rubble stone or brick walls, which were not intended to be exposed. Traditionally, render finishes were lime-based. More modern, hard cement renders prevent the evaporation of moisture, which can accumulate between the wall and the render causing damp internally. When appropriate, hard cement renders should be replaced with a lime alternative.

Rainwater goods

14.7 Rainwater goods (guttering, downpipes, hoppers) should be repaired if original or reinstated in original materials. Plastic guttering is not appropriate for listed buildings or buildings in conservation areas as it is not historically correct and does not enhance a building's character.

Windows

14.8 Windows should be correctly proportioned, well related to each other and neighbouring buildings, and should respect any existing openings. Retention and repair of original buildings is the preferred option, but any replacement should match the original. This not only includes the structural elements of the window (e.g. frame, lintel) but also historic glass and window furniture. Particularly important is the method of opening, the set back within the reveal and the sections of glazing bars. The thickness and moulding of glazing bars, the size and arrangement of panes are vital elements in determining appropriate replacement windows, which respect the age of a building. Replacement of timber or metal windows in a uPVC alternative, no matter what the pattern or design, is unacceptable. Dormers are not a traditional feature for this area, although there are some later examples of them in the village. Rooflights to the rear would be preferable where possible. Where inappropriate windows are proposed to be replaced, historically correct fenestration will be required.

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15. Bibliography

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Appendix 1: Policies

Main Legislation	National Policy Guidance	Local Policy
Town and Country Planning Act 1990	NPPF (National Planning Policy Framework) 2012	Adopted Cherwell Local Plan 1996
Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990	NPPG (National Planning Policy Guidance) 2014	Cherwell Non-Statutory Local Plan 2011
		Cherwell Local Plan 2006-2031: Submission Document (January 2014)

Adopted Cherwell Local Plan 1996

H5: Affordable housing to meet local needs will be negotiated in substantial new residential development schemes.

H12: New housing in rural areas will need to be in accordance with H13, H14 and H15.

H13: Residential development will be restricted to infilling, minor developments within the built-up area, and conversion of non-residential buildings in accordance with policy H21.

H19: Proposed conversions will need to retain existing appearance and not cause harm to historic assets or wider countryside.

H21: Residential conversion favoured unless it would harm the character or interest of a building of historic interest.

C18: Extensions/alterations to a listed building should be minor and sympathetic.

C23: Presumption in favour of retaining positive features within a conservation area.

C27: Proposals should respect the historic settlement pattern

C30: Design control to ensure compatibility with existing street scene and vicinity

Non-statutory Cherwell Local Plan 2011

EN34: Conserve and enhance the character and appearance of the landscape

EN35: Retain features important to the character or appearance of the local landscape

EN39: Preserve listed buildings and preserve and enhance the character and appearance of designated conservation areas.

EN40: Design control within a conservation area.

EN42: Consideration for change of use of a listed building

EN43: Demolition of a listed building will need clear and convincing evidence

EN45: Likely impact of proposals will need to be assessed before determining listed building consent applications

EN45A: Local listing will be a material consideration

EN47: Conserve, protect and enhance archaeological heritage, including its interpretation and presentation to the public.

EN48: Refuse development which would harm a designated landscape and/or battlefield

EN51: Adverts in conservation area will need to pay special attention to preserving and enhancing the character and appearance of the area.


Cherwell Local Plan 2006-203 Submission Document January 2014

EDS1: Mitigating and adapting to climate change

ESD5: Renewable energy

ESD10: Protection and enhancement of biodiversity and the natural environment

ESD13: Local landscape protection and enhancement



ESD16: The character of the built environment

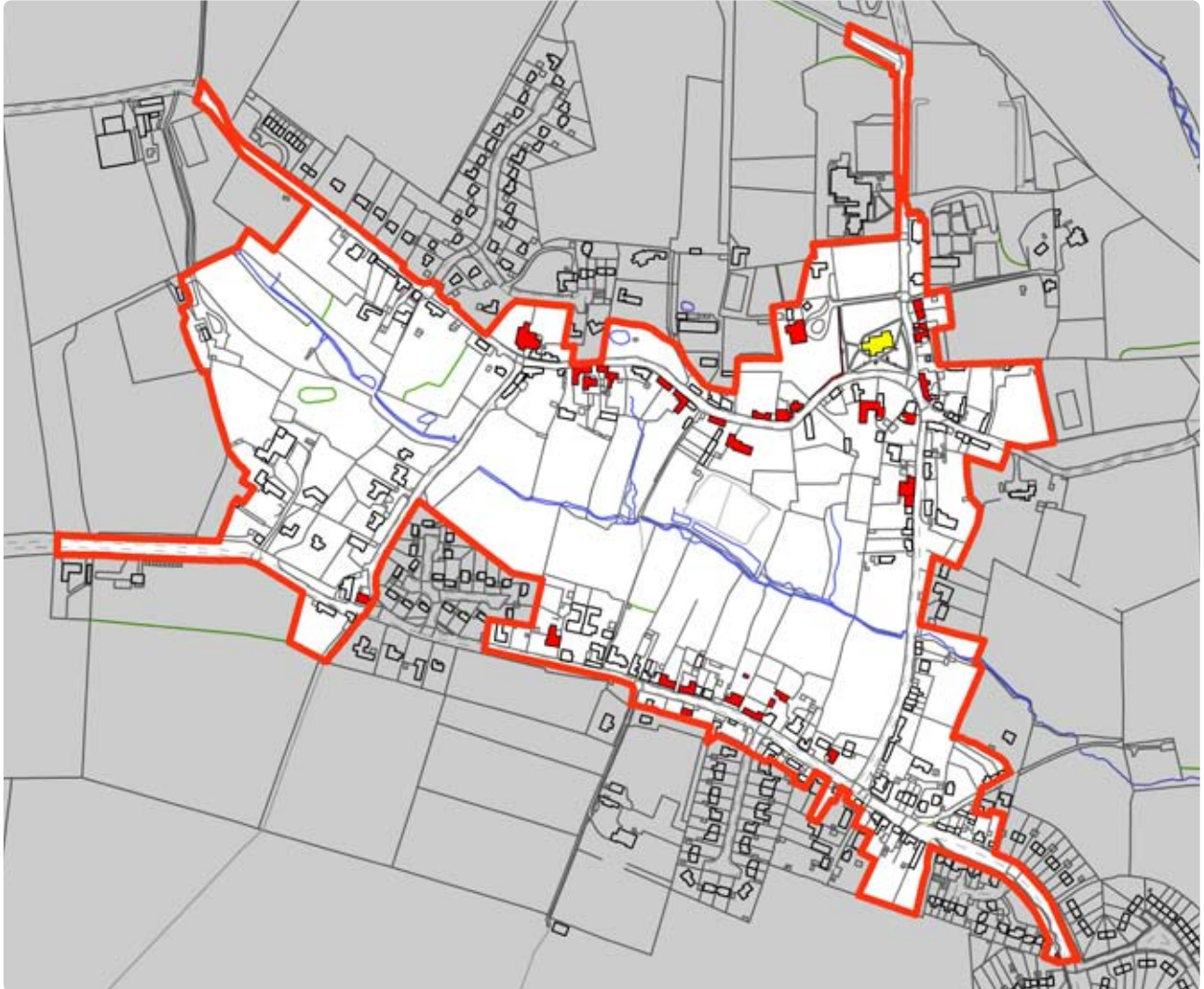
Policy Villages 1: village categorisation: the village will be Category A and therefore development will be restricted to minor development, infilling and conversions

Policy Village 2: distributing growth: the village will share a proposed 96 houses with 16 other villages

Policy Villages 3: rural exception sites: rural exception sites will only be considered where there is an identified and demonstrable need which has the support of the local community

Appendix II: Listed Buildings within the Conservation Area

Fig. 17: Listed Buildings



Map number	List Entry	Name	Grade	List Date
1	1357162	Church of St Peter and St Paul, North Side	II*	08.12.1955
2	1066025	Canterbury House, Fir Lane	II	26.02.1988
3	1066595	Fir Cottage, Fir Lane	II	26.02.1988
4	1066596	Fir Lane Cottage, Fir Lane	II	26.02.1988
5	1357160	Chancel Cottage, Fir Lane	II	26.02.1988
6	1066554	Merlins, Fir Lane	II	08.09.1970
7	1066544	Church Cottage, 1 Cow Lane	II	08.09.1970
8	1266125	Hill House, Paines Hill	II	29.11.1972
9	1266124	Payne's Hill House, Paines Hill	II	08.12.1955
10	1225943	Chestnut House, Paines Hill	II	26.02.1988
11	1065959	Manor Court Cottage, North Side	II	08.12.1955

Map number	List Entry	Name	Grade	List Date
12	1065959	Rectory Farmhouse, North Side	II	08.12.1955
13	1065957	Old School House, North Side	II	26.02.1988
14	1065958	Old School, North Side	II	08.12.1955
15	1357429	1 Almshouses, North Side	II	08.12.1955
16	1357429	2 Almshouses, North Side	II	08.12.1955
17	1225927	Cedar Lodge, North Side	II	26.02.1988
18	1357430	Cedar Cottage, North Side	II	26.02.1988
19	1225936	Old Toms, North Side	II	16.06.1987
20	1065960	Barn Cottage, North Side	II	26.02.1988
21	1357431	Sunny Bank, North Side	II	26.02.1988
22	1225941	Holly Cottage, North Side	II	26.02.1988
23	1225942	Wadhams Cottage, 3 The Gap, North Side	II	26.02.1988
24	1266123	Tangley Cottage, The Gap, North Side	II	26.02.1988
25	1066556	East Grange—South Grange—West Grange, Grange Park, North Side	II	26.02.1988
26	1245345	Red Lion Corner, South Side	II	24.06.1997
27	1226005	Manor Farmhouse, South Side	II	08.12.1955
28	1226004	Grange Cottage, South Side	II	08.12.1955
29	1226003	Staithe Cottage, South Side	II	26.02.1988
30	1266076	Brunstone, South Side	II	26.02.1988
31	1225951	Orchard Lea House, South Side	II	08.12.1955
32	1226000	Summerhouse, 40m North of Orchard Lea House, South Side	II	08.12.1955
33	1266072	Acacia Cottage, South Side	II	08.12.1955
34	1225948	Bladebone House, South Side	II	26.02.1988
35	1391093	War Memorial	II	20.09.2004
36	1065956	Walls to South and East of the garden of Canterbury House, Fir Lane	II	26.02.1988
37	1065952	Churchyard Cross, 8m South of Church of St Peter and St Paul	II	26.02.1988
38	1065955	Kin Memorial, 4m South West of Porch of Church of St Peter and St Paul	II	26.02.1988
39	1066016	Grave cover slab, 4m East of Chancel of Church of St Peter and St Paul	II	26.02.1988
40	1066017	Hix Memorial, 8m South of Chancel of Church of St Peter and St Paul	II	26.02.1988
41	1066018	Group of 4 Headstone, 7-11m South of Chancel of Church of St Peter and St Paul	II	26.02.1988

Appendix III: Assets Making a Positive Contribution to the Conservation Area

Not all structures within a conservation area make a distinctly positive contribution to its particular character. However, there are sometimes landmark buildings, structures and areas which add to the character and enhance the setting of the other buildings and open spaces. This contribution may be in one or more of the following ways:

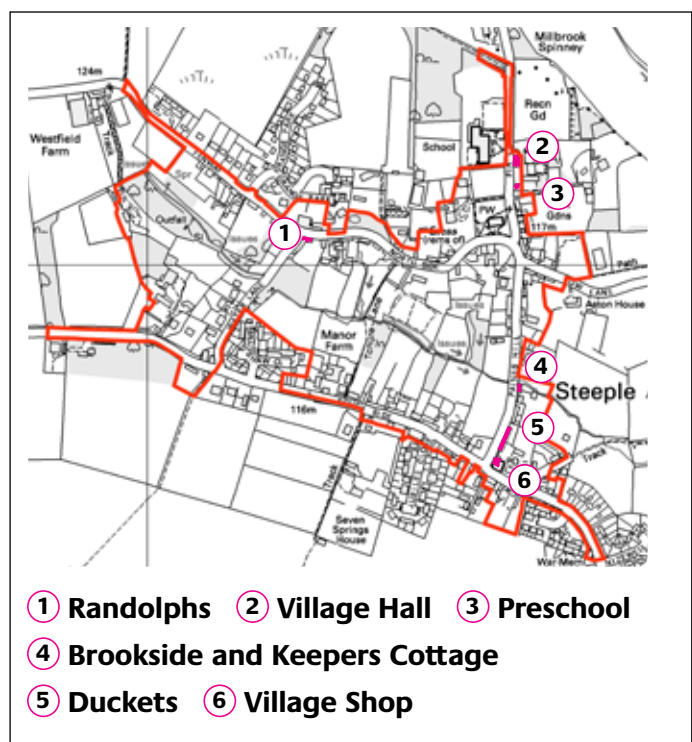
- Buildings which provide evidence of the area's history and development
- Buildings of architectural merit
- Buildings with local historical associations
- Buildings which exemplify local building techniques and architectural styles
- Groups of buildings which together make a positive contribution of the street scene.

The Register of Local Heritage Assets is intended to recognise buildings, landscapes and monuments of architectural and historical importance that contribute significantly to the unique character of the District. Whilst not statutorily listed, these features are of historic significance and/or of importance to the local community. A clear criterion for the designation of such assets is set out in the **council's guidance**.

Unlike Listed buildings, buildings on the register do not enjoy statutory protection and are subject to normal planning controls. However, the NPPF emphasises the importance of understanding the significance of heritage assets and the impact that changes will have on them, before decisions are made about new proposals. Inclusion on the Local heritage Asset register means that the council will take into account the building's significance when considering planning applications. Applications that affect the character, setting or significance of a local heritage asset will be carefully considered, and additional information may be required to justify the proposed works. For more details, see the **council's published guidance**.

It may be that the structures listed below are worthy of inclusion on the Register of Local Heritage assets, and in the future it is hoped that they will be checked against the council's criteria. There should be a presumption in favour of their retention in all but exceptional circumstances. All make a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the conservation area and are significant features in their own right.

Steeple Aston is fortunate enough to have many fine examples of vernacular and grand houses in the local stone and brick. As such, it is difficult not to class all the older buildings as having a positive impact on the conservation area. In this instance, what could be argued as the most prominent examples have been described, but this is by no means an exhaustive list. Lack of inclusion in this document does not mean that a building or feature is not considered to be important to the character and appearance of the conservation area, nor that it would not be assessed as such under the Local Register guidance.





27. Pre-School, Fir Lane

Steeple Aston Pre-School Formerly the National Infants School, the pre-school was built in 1875. It is a building of coursed limestone with bands of marlstone and ashlar dressings. Although a common style for the time, it is a striking addition to the village and retains a stone plaque on the front elevation: “Feed my Lambs”. The boundary is of note, as it retains its historic railings with a blunted top. The building has been sympathetically extended in recent years, showing how new extensions can enhance a property if they are designed to suit the property.



28. Village Hall, Fir Lane

Steeple Aston Village Hall Forming a group with the pre-school, the village hall is an important building within the village, and not just for its current social value. Built in 1894, the hall was formerly the technical school.

The squared-stone built structure has stone mullioned windows and a steeply pitched red tile roof, allowing for a generous space within. There are a number of ashlar features including lintels and buttresses. The front boundary is partly marked by a hairpin railing, accompanied by a stone wall.

Together, these two properties show the wider changes in education which were taking effect in the late 19th century. They are also an indication of the village’s prosperous past and a connection to their philanthropic former residents.



29. Brookside and Keepers Cottage, Paines Hill

Brookside and Keepers Cottage, Paines Hill A pair of good quality, typical 19th century semi-detached cottages of coursed squared ironstone with ashlar dressings and a gabled Welsh slate roof. There are a number of hexagonal brick stacks to the rear of the building. Brookside has a “Farmers Fire and Life” insurance plaque.



30. Duckets, Paines Hill

Duckets, Paines Hill Rising up the south slope of Paines Hill, Duckets is of squared stone construction with ashlar quoins, bands and flat arches. Of particular note is its attached outbuilding, which has large wooden garage doors and is topped by a hexagonal roof lantern. Duckets also features a fire insurance plaque.



31. Randolphins, North Side

Randolphins, North Side Another prominently located property, the stone building with a Welsh slate roof hugs the corner opposite The Grange. The corner is marked by rounded ashlar quoins and a former gas lantern. The building is notable for a number of classical details including a panelled front door with a former gas lantern set in a stone surround with a hood mould terminating with two heads.



32. Village Shop, Paines Hill

Village Shop, Paines Hill The junction of Paines Hill, South Side and Heyford Road is marked by the village shop and post office, which is located inside a converted 19th century chapel. Until recently, it also included the adjacent Harris Manor. The post office is a fine example of the combination of brick and ashlar detailing, together with the rougher coursed ironstone of the earlier village shop. As well as being a prominent building, the shop also serves an important local function.

Appendix IV: Public Consultation

Public Consultation

The emerging draft document was sent to the Parish Council for comment. Consultation commenced on Monday 14th October 2013 and closed on Friday 15th November.

The **draft** document was available on the council's website, in Banbury Library, Deddington Library, and the North Area Mobile Library. Copies were given to the Parish council and further copies were distributed at the public exhibition and public meeting.

Publicity included:

- Posters were erected by the Parish Council advertising the date and time of the meeting.
- An announcement was made in the parish newsletter giving the date and time of the meeting.
- An announcement, including the date and time of the meeting, was made in the previous quarter's edition of Cherwell Link, which was distributed to every household in the district.

Questionnaires were available at the public meeting, seeking comments on:

- The draft appraisal and proposed boundary changes
- The buildings highlighted as making a positive contribution
- Additional protection for street scenes through Article 4 Directions
- Priorities for the preservation and enhancement of the conservation area

A **public exhibition** was held in the Steeple Aston Village Hall on the afternoon of Wednesday 23rd October 2013 and was attended by at least 25 residents, including the local ward member.

This was followed by a **public meeting**, which was chaired by the Lead Member for Planning,

Cllr Michael Gibbard, and was attended by members of the Parish Council and SAVA, several officers of CDC and approximately 20 residents.

A question-and-answer session was held in which questions were wide-ranging in their subject matter. Topics covered included:

- Justification for the removal of the entrances to the villages
- The effect of Article 4 directions and how inappropriate alterations could otherwise be prevented
- What level of protection trees would have if removed from the area

Consultation Responses

Seven written consultation responses were received, including from the Parish Council and SAVA, and raised the following points for consideration:

- The approaches to the villages should be extended to preserve the rural environment, including the pine avenue along South Side (also known locally as Sixty Foot). The entrances form a frame to the village and define its edges.
- The agricultural buildings along Fenway (part of Westfield Farm) should be included as they are of historical importance in view of their connection to historical events and the key figure in Steeple Aston's history, William Wing.
- The former stables to The Grange (known as Grangelea) should be included in the conservation area, as should the walls to Bradshaw Close.
- Protection given to more trees within the area.
- Doors and windows are a priority for consideration for additional protection.

Alterations to the Boundary

Some alterations were made in line with the comments received:

- The entrances to the village were not removed, but amended slightly to include an additional entrance on South Side (Sixty Foot)
- The boundary along Fir Lane was reduced slightly to remove it from the school playing field.

Points Raised but Not Taken Forward

- The decision was taken not to include Grangelea in the conservation area. The area was designated and reviewed in the late 20th century, and at neither time was Grangelea found to be worthy of inclusion. Although the site itself and the relationship between it and The Grange are historic, the argument could not be made that the property was of the same architectural and historic merit as the surrounding areas within the designated area
- The decision was taken not to include the buildings at Westfield Farm within the conservation area. There is no visual or physical relationship between the buildings at Westfield Farm and the village of Steeple Aston, due to the great distances between them. While the buildings are acknowledged as historic, the link between the conservation area and the buildings would be difficult to make and maintain with regard to the character and appearance of the area
- The decision was taken not to extend the boundary further than this, as other areas were not found to be of special architectural or historic interest in their own right, and were in any case protected as part of the setting of the conservation area.

The revised appraisal

The appraisal was presented to the Lead Member for Planning on **28th March 2014**, together with a report which set out the consultation responses in full, the recommended changes to the appraisal, and the recommended revised conservation area boundary. The recommendation to alter the boundary was approved with immediate effect on **29th April 2014**.

A letter explaining the implications of designation was sent to households affected by changes to the designated area, and also to other households within the area, reminding them of the implications of designation.

Acknowledgments

This document has been produced as part of the District Council's continuing programme of conservation area appraisals.

Images used are sourced from the Victoria County History Vol. 9, and the Oxfordshire Studies Library unless otherwise accredited. Photographs were obtained on site by the author.

Historic photographs courtesy of Oxfordshire County Council.

Input was requested and received from Steeple Aston Parish Council and SAVA, with thanks.

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Document title	Executive date
Steeple Aston Conservation Area Appraisal	N/A
Recommendation of the Executive	
Delegate authority to Lead member for Planning	
Further recommended changes to the document	
No changes undertaken	
Amended document approved by	Date approved
	April 2014
Lead member for Planning	

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