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# Conservation Area Character Survey

# WEST WYCOMBE

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## **What is a conservation area?**

Conservation areas are areas of special architectural or historic interest, which are considered worthy of preservation or enhancement. They are designated under the provisions of Section 69 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.

Within conservation areas there are special controls on some alterations to buildings and their demolition or partial demolition and on works to trees. The Council's Heritage Guidance note on Conservation Areas gives further details of the specific controls that apply, while an information sheet sets out common questions and answers about conservation areas.

Designation of a conservation area does not preclude the possibility of new development, but such development must be designed positively to enhance the appearance and special character of the area.

## **The purpose of this survey**

The designation of a conservation area imposes specific duties on Local Authorities to formulate and publish proposals to ensure that the special characteristics of the area are preserved and enhanced. This conservation area character survey describes the main features of special architectural and historic interest which justify the designation of West Wycombe as a conservation

area.

This survey is in accordance with Section 71 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 and PPG15 (Planning and the Historic Environment), complies with the requirements of PPG12 (Development Plans), and contributes to the Council's Strategic Aim 4 The Environment. As a Supplementary Planning Document it is intended to complement the approved policies for Conservation Areas in the Council's Adopted Wycombe District Local Plan to 2011 and is consistent with paragraphs 11.36-11.38 therein. It is a material consideration in deciding planning, listed building and conservation area applications.

This survey was the subject of public consultation prior to adoption as a Supplementary Planning Document. The views of the consultees were taken into account and in some cases changes were made. A copy of all representations made to the Council during public consultation and the Council's response to those representations is available from the District Council Offices.



## Context

West Wycombe lies some four kilometres west of the centre of High Wycombe, at the confluence of four Chiltern valleys. To the east is the 20th-century urban sprawl of High Wycombe, which now meets the conservation area boundaries. To the north and west the sylvan and rolling countryside of the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty provides a rural backdrop to West Wycombe Park. West Wycombe conservation area encompasses the Palladian West Wycombe Park and grounds, the medieval village, and the Church within the Iron Age Hillfort ramparts on West Wycombe Hill. The village nestles in the Wye valley bottom along the A40 London to Oxford road, whilst above it on West Wycombe Hill the Church and Mausoleum create an eye catcher from the main road out of High Wycombe. South of the village lies West Wycombe Park, including the Palladian mansion and registered landscape (Grade I). The house and park, village, hillfort, Church and Mausoleum form an exceedingly attractive and architecturally important conservation area which has been little altered due to the care of the Dashwood Estate and the National Trust.

The Bucks Landscape Plan identifies the conservation area as lying within the category of landscape known as “River Valleys”. The Wye runs through West Wycombe Park

and is incorporated into various lakes and water features. The river valley classification refers to the characteristic landform of steep sided valleys with protruding spurs and a strong convex profile to the upper slopes. The valley bottoms are often gently sloping with little floodplain. The Bucks Landscape Plan also makes reference to the historic park, one of four in the County listed at Grade I.

## The National Trust

During the 1920's the Royal Society for the Arts, Manufacturing and Commerce mounted a campaign for the preservation of ancient cottages. It was supported by the then Prime Minister, Stanley Baldwin, by Thomas Hardy and by many other prominent men of the day. The major achievement of the campaign was the purchase in 1929 of West Wycombe village, which though picturesque, was then in a very poor and neglected condition and about to be put up for sale in sixty lots. In the course of a few years the village was put into good order and in February 1934 the Royal Society formally handed it over to the National Trust for permanent preservation. A plaque commemorating the Society's role is displayed in the village

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The hill was given to the National Trust in 1935 by Sir John Dashwood, 10th Baronet, and the house and grounds in 1943.

The National Trust owns properties in West Wycombe Village and Park in perpetuity under The National Trust Act of 1907. This confers upon the National Trust the unique power to declare land and buildings in its ownership “inalienable” meaning they cannot be sold or mortgaged. The National Trust, as landowner, can thus exert a powerful measure of control. In addition there are areas that The National Trust does not own, but where it enjoys the benefits of restrictive covenants that are designed to counter the threat of inappropriate development. These covenants cover the Old Chapel, parts of the primary school, Aston House, The Pavilion, Hillside and The Limes.

### History

West Wycombe has a long and complex history which cannot be fully covered by this document. Some references detailed at the end of this document can provide additional information:

**Prehistory:** Archaeological remains in the locality indicate some settlement or movement through the valleys in the Mesolithic and Neolithic period.

The earliest settlement at West Wycombe survives in the form of an Iron Age ditch and rampart contour camp on Church Hill, dating from the 4th/5th century BC. The hillfort landform commands the junction of the Wye and Saunderton valleys at the southern end of the ridge. This feature has been utilised for the construction of the Church, possibly in an attempt to Christianise the site. The south eastern side of the rampart system was destroyed during the construction of the Dashwood Mausoleum which now dominates the hill summit, and the interior of the hillfort has been extensively remodelled as a result of the construction of the 13th-century Church and its attendant graveyard. There are traces of possible prehistoric field systems on West Wycombe Hill and in the Park.

**Roman:** There has also been suggestion of the existence or a Romano-British settlement at West Wycombe, a claim first made in 1934, and which may be substantiated by recent discoveries, including a small 4th-century cemetery some 700 metres to the east of the village centre. It has been suggested that a Roman Road (Portway) came up the valley from the direction of High

Wycombe, along Chorley Road and through Bennett End. In places earthwork ditches remain that could demark its course.

**Medieval:** The name West Wycombe is first recorded in 944-6 AD. West Wycombe Manor was coterminous with the parish and was held by Stigand under Edward the Confessor. After Domesday the Bishops of Winchester held the manor throughout the Middle Ages. The estate was surrendered to the Crown in 1551 and in the same year Edward VI granted it to Sir Henry Seymour, but the Dormer family, who had been tenants, continued to live there. The Tudor Princess Elizabeth stayed in the house for a night in 1554 en route to Woodstock, where she was held in semi-confinement. By 1602 the Dormers had the freehold of the estate, and their family fortunes were rising – Robert Dormer was created Earl of Caernarvon in 1628. The manor house, described by Langley in 1797 as being “built of brick, of no great extent” was not the Dormers main residence – that was the grander Ascott House near Wing. In 1670 the 2nd Earl sold West Wycombe estate to Thomas Lewis, a merchant and Alderman. The site of the original manor house is not known, although it is likely to have been close to the existing village centre. The village shows all the



Church of St Lawrence

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characteristics of a typical regular row planned settlement, and it may have been created to increase revenue to the estate, although this is purely conjecture. It is also possible that the early settlement was originally more closely associated with the hillfort, but relocated to a more favourable location. The village was substantially rebuilt in the 16th century and the 18th century, but remnants of 14th and 15th-century buildings remain. The manor also had smaller hamlets and outlying settlements – the names Chorley Farm and Fillendon Wood perpetuate these.



*West Wycombe Park - North Front*

The manor had three mills and an eel fishery. The medieval Bishops maintained hunting parkland in the south of the parish, now marked by the site of Widdington Park Wood.

The Church of St. Lawrence is medieval – although greatly altered. Separate from the village that it now serves it is referred to in early documentation as “Havingdune” and the Church may have served a village of that name which has now disappeared. Parts of the original 13th-century chancel remain as does the 14th-century tower. The rest of the medieval form however was completely transformed by the 18th-century remodelling carried out by Sir Francis Dashwood, Baron Despencer.

18th century onwards: Historically it is the ownership of the Dashwoods that was fundamental to the creation of the estate, parkland and conservation area that exists today. Alderman Lewis settled the property on his two brothers-in-law, Sir Samuel and Sir Francis Dashwood in 1698. Sir Francis bought out his brother’s share of the estate in 1706. The original manor house was abandoned at this time in favour of a new building, further to the south and more secluded from the village.

The new house was constructed by the first Sir Francis, and is believed to have been a five-bay red brick house with a hipped roof and stone dressings which may have already been extended by side wings prior to 1724 when the 2nd Sir Francis inherited. It is this more infamous Sir Francis, Lord Despencer, bon-viveur, politician, grand tourist and amateur architect, who was responsible for the house and park as the complete landscape that we see today, and he worked on the house over a period

of 45 years, from 1735 until his death in 1781. A full description of the works undertaken to the house can be found in the National Trust’s guidebook to the house, and in Pevsner (see references), together with interesting accounts of Sir Francis’ life.

Lord Despencer left no legitimate heirs, and West Wycombe passed to his half brother Sir John Dashwood-King. His son, Sir John Dashwood inherited in 1793. He was MP for Wycombe, and divided his time between estates in Lincolnshire and at West Wycombe. Humphrey Repton made some minor amendments to the grounds in the 1790s. The fifth Baronet, George Dashwood, succeeded in 1848, and represented Buckingham and Wycombe in parliament. The 10th Baronet, Sir John, gave the House and grounds to the National Trust in 1943. The 11th Baronet, Sir Francis, was responsible for a thorough restoration for the house, and for running the West Wycombe estate. The estate has recently passed to his son, Sir Edward.

### **Village history:**

Many of the villagers were tenants and would have worked for the estate, or paid rental to it. The village was on the main route to Oxford and was an important coaching stop, thus the proliferation of inns and alehouses – a 1767 map shows no fewer than seven. There were two malhouses in the village – one at either end, and the inns would have brewed their own beer. Excess malt was exported. Public houses were also the interchange point for the chairmaking industry, and chair yards and workshops were found at several.

The chairmaking industry was hugely important in West Wycombe, as it was in neighbouring High Wycombe. It started as a cottage industry, with turning or “bodging”

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occurring in the beech woodlands, assembly and polishing taking place in the village. Some 18 chair-makers were recorded in West Wycombe in 1798; by 1900 chair factories in the village were employing several hundred men, as furniture became hand mass-produced for a growing market. The largest of these was North's, which had a three storey building courtyard on the south of the High Street (where the village hall is now located). Women in the village were employed for caning and rushwork. One factory on Church Lane remains in use today, and there is a cane and rushworks on the High Street, in part of the former Black Boy Inn.

### **Archaeological interest**

Church Camp on West Wycombe Hill is a Scheduled Ancient Monument. Most of the rest of the conservation area and its immediate environs are of archaeological interest as indicated by information held in the County Sites and Monuments Record. In addition to the prehistoric settlement on Church Hill there is evidence of pre-historic field systems, extensive Roman occupation and continuity of occupation into the Saxon Period. The Village of West Wycombe most probably originated as a planned settlement in the medieval period and will contain related archaeological deposits. Its buildings are also of archaeological interest. An archaeological survey has been undertaken by English Heritage highlighting the contribution such study can make to understanding the designed landscape of West Wycombe Park, and also documenting the survival of earlier landscape features. Accordingly the Council will apply the principles set out in Planning Policy Guidance Note 16 (Archaeology and Planning) to ensure adequate assessment and evaluation of the archaeological implications of proposed development, and where appropriate, to secure necessary mitigation through recording of both above and below ground archaeology.

### **Essential characteristics**

West Wycombe is one of the most important conservation areas and historic landscapes in the county, and indeed in England. It is a perfectly preserved microcosm of a traditional English rural idyll, albeit carefully planned and designed by the landed gentry. The historic parkland is Grade I, recognised as being of exceptional historic interest. The House, Church and Mausoleum are also Grade I, and there are many Grade II\* and Grade II garden structures and vernacular village buildings. The area holds great historic, landscape and cultural resonance, creating a gateway to the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty from the urban area of High Wycombe, and vice versa. As a planned landscape a perfect neoclassical park is imposed upon natural and prehistoric landscape features, and architecturally the conservation area includes a wide range and style of building types and ages, from humble medieval vernacular cottages, to the grandeur of the Palladian house and the sheer flamboyant egotism of the Mausoleum and Church complex atop West Wycombe Hill.

### **Architectural character and quality of buildings**

#### **House and pleasure grounds**

West Wycombe Park house is, naturally, the centrepiece of the conservation area, although the village, Church and Mausoleum are more visibly in the public realm. Much has been written about the architecture, notable sources are the National Trust's new handbook by Tim Knox, (and earlier edition by Gervase Jackson Stopps) and Pevsner (Buckinghamshire).

In brief, the house was extensively remodelled by the 2nd Sir Francis, based on architecture he had seen during travels in the Mediterranean. He added a new north front, east portico, and south front to the modest mansion



*The South Front*

of his father. The executive architect appears to have been John Donowell, although Revett was also employed after 1767 to remodel the west side.

The result is a long and rectangular building in plan form, long sides to the north and south, each side designed to be seen separately within the landscape. It is of stone and yellow stucco, and Grade I listed.

The house is approached from the west, although until 1770 this was the back of the house. The west front has an Ionic portico modelled by Revett on the Temple of Bacchus at Teos: it was dedicated with a bacchanalia in 1771.

The north front dates from between 1748 and 1751 and is pure Palladian in style with a projecting central pediment on 4 engaged Roman Ionic columns. Emphasis to the central and end bays is through rustication.

The east portico, Tuscan, dates from 1754-5, and is very similar to those at Mereworth in Kent.

The south front, technically the back of the house as it is set against rising ground, has been far more sumptuously modelled than the rest and is perhaps the most recognisable elevation. A double colonnade fills the eleven bays between the side wings, giving the elevation a classical monumentality. Tuscan columns below, Corinthian above, it does not follow the strict standards set out by Palladio, but was perhaps inspired by his designs for palaces and public buildings, most notably Palazzo Chiericati, or by Giovanni Servandoni's St. Sulpice, Paris.

The classical theme extends throughout the grand interiors of the house, (described in detail in the guidebook) and includes ceilings painted by the Borgnis. West Wycombe Park is of key importance in English architectural history and the



*Temple of the Four Winds*

development of stylistic themes in interior decoration, particularly the Palmyrene decor and the frescos and painted ceilings of the Italian Borgnis brothers.

The whole was intended as a showcase for Sir Francis and the objets from his travels.

### **Garden buildings in the pleasure grounds**

Jackson-Stoppa describes the park as "one of the most perfect expressions in England of the natural landscape school of gardening", and Pevsner describes the landscaping as

"exquisite"; the grounds and the various garden buildings within seem to have been continuously developed by the 2nd Sir Francis from the time of his return to England in 1735 until his death in 1781. There are elements of the Rococo, perhaps by Jolivet in 1752, by which time the great lake and the Broad Walk had been laid out; of the Natural, directed by Revett and Thomas Cook, in the period 1770-81, in line with the stricter Neoclassical phase of building; and finally some minor alterations by Humphrey Repton for Sir John Dashwood-King.

There is a cluster of garden buildings close to the House. The Temple of Apollo: a triumphal arch of stone and flintwork next to the south front, was executed by Donowell in 1761, and screened Revett's stables and offices of 1767 (Grade II\* and Grade I). The Temple is stylistically close to the east portico and the Mausoleum with Roman Doric columns (Grade II\*). Through the arch a rusticated flint niche in Revett's stable wall (the Exedra – Grade II\*) with a copy of the Apollo Belvedere statue. By the west portico a Temple of Diana: stucco on a stone

base, pediment on Roman Doric pilasters, round headed arch to alcove with statue, steps and lead sphinxes flanking (Grade II\*). The Round Temple, (Grade II\*) a circular dovecot with a pyramidal roof and colonnade around part, by



*The Music Temple*



*Kitty's Lodge*

Revet, dating circa 1775, completes the cluster of garden buildings adjacent to the stable block. Taking a line along the ha-ha which delineates the southern boundary of the gardens, the Temple of the Four Winds (Grade II\*) is by Donowell, one of the earliest attempts in England to reproduce a monument from antiquity. It is a three storey octagonal tower, of flint, brick and stucco, on a flint screen of arches and obelisks.

The lake was formed by damming the Wye, with serpentine streams and paths through the woodland on either side. In the lake are three islands, the central one is occupied by the Music Temple – the focus of the entire landscape. This Grade II\* listed structure is by Revett 1778-80, a rectangular “cella” with a semicircular end and Doric colonnade along three sides. Key views are from the south east over the Grade II listed cascade (possibly modified by Thomas Cook) with nymph-topped flint piers towards the Temple and the Church on the hillside beyond. The Music Temple is shown in Hannan’s pictures of the estate from the 1750s, and in Daniell’s view of the lake. There is a listed flint foot bridge connecting the mainland with the southern most island. To the west of the lake is a wide clearing known as the Broad Walk, a major feature of the early Jolivet layout, and it has been suggested by English Heritage that at the western end of this feature, ground disturbance could indicate the site of the earlier Dormer house.

To the south of the Broad Walk is the southern canal, crossed by two listed flint footbridges, to the north lies woodland and the northern canal, again with footbridges, and other water features. Within the woodland lies the Mound and Temple of Venus. The original feature dates from 1749 – the Mound and its oval cave,



*St Crispins*



*West Lodge*

formerly containing the Icehouse, are all that remain of this and are listed Grade II. The Temple itself is a replica by Quinlan Terry in 1982.

Daphne’s Temple and Kitty’s Lodge, both Grade II\* are on the northern boundary of the park. They are attributed to Donowell, 1750 – these are also important visually from the West Wycombe road, as this pair of buildings flanked the original entrance to the grounds. Of stucco, Kitty’s is a lodge house, whilst the Temple echoes the design on the road side, but has an open portico facing the park.

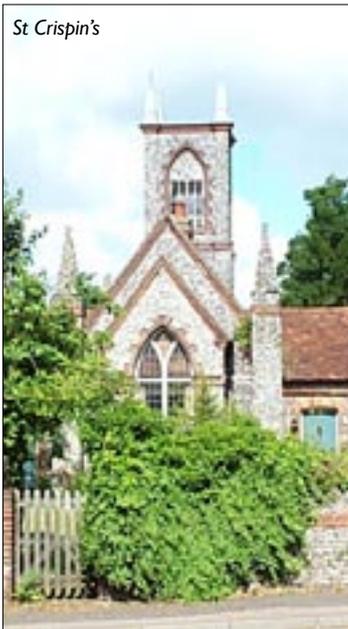
The West Lodge, provenance unknown, is likely to be in date close to Kitty’s Lodge, and the building materials utilised are similar. The stuccoed lodge is Grade II\*, the main elevation faces east, the rest is behind brick walling. The gates are set back from the road, decorative stone pineapples atop brick piers. These were commissioned by the 11th Baronet in 1966. This is now the main approach to the house.

### **The wider parkland**

The pleasure grounds form only part of the much wider private parkland, which extends from Chapel Lane in the west to the Toweridge Common Road to the east. Within the wider parkland are more ornamental structures and buildings which have been carefully placed at points in the landscape.

Sawmill House is a late 18th century Grade II\* building, flint with brick dressings, three storied. It was one of the first industrial buildings to be designed in a classical

St Crispin's



manner. The west front, most prominent in the landscape, has a 2 bay arched motif, and flanking 3 storey pavilions linked by low arcades. The central building and pavilions have tiled hipped roofs. The building is designed to be viewed from either the east, with a backdrop of the rolling Chilterns, or from the pleasure grounds. Both principle elevations have water in front of them; the lake to the west has a small cascade.

pavilions, designed by Revett. Square flint towers with raised quoins and cornices flank a bridge faced of flint and brick (the original bridge structure was replaced in the 1930s).

St. Crispin's and associated cottages are set back from Chapel Lane. Designed as an eye-catcher from the park, this miniature Gothic Church originally had a spire, removed by Repton during his remodelling of the landscape. It creates a pretty backdrop to the lake on the parkside. Between St. Crispin's and the bridge, hidden by vegetation, a gothic alcove, ruinous, also possibly by Revett.



Church Tower and Golden Ball

Park Farm dated 1770 is Grade II and by Revett, and is a highly elaborate farmhouse south of the Sawmill. The building is of two storeys with two three-storey polygonal towers, of flint, with brick dressings. Originally known as "Don Quixote's castle" it used to have battlements and a central archway, but has been altered since its original construction.

The Round House, Grade II, is of rusticated flint work with a parapet; the building has a curved eastern quadrant, so appears round when viewed from the lane. Picturesque, as are the listed 18th century entrance gates to the parkland which incorporate red brick bands on flint rubble.

At the eastern entrance where the park joins Chapel Lane a pretty unlisted brick and flint cottage, No. 60, faces the lane. Further along Chapel Lane, which forms the boundary of the conservation area, lies the Pepper Boxes bridge, an Italianate structure similar to the Sawmill

The parkland extends to the south, where in the far south-western corner near Toweridge Common, the Druids Hutt dates from the 1730s. From 1880 onwards it was used as a shooting lodge for the Estate. The Thatch (previously The Hermitage) is another listed building which lies just outside the conservation area boundary to the west of Druids Hutt, and is linked by association to the park.

The northern boundary of the conservation area also encompasses Flint Hall Farmhouse, and associated barns, a grouping somewhat remote from the rest of the built up area of the village.

Dashwood Mausoleum



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## Church and Mausoleum

“A temple built aloft in air

That serves for show and not for prayer”

(Charles Churchill)

The Grade I listed Church of St. Lawrence has been dated to the 13th century and the tower is 14th century, both so altered as to be hard to discern as medieval. The spectacular 18th-century remodelling of the Church was completed by the mid 1760's, to drawings by John Donowell. The tower was raised to make it an eyecatcher from the house and from the High Wycombe road. Its crowning wooden finial of a great golden ball was possibly inspired by the Dogana, Venice, and was reputed to be a meeting place for the Hellfire Club – it could seat 10, and was described by the author John Wilkes as “the best globe tavern I was ever in”.

The interior of the Church is equally as spectacular. The nave has the appearance of a “very superb Egyptian hall”, inspired by that at Mereworth Church, and is said to have been derived from Robert Wood's prints of the ancient Temple of the Sun, Palmyra. It has five arched windows of timber on each side, and is lined with engaged Corinthian columns under a continuous entablature. The painted ceiling is by Giovanni Borgnis, and there is much light-hearted Rococo plasterwork, on the ceiling, frieze and on the walls.

To the east of the Church on the brink of the hill, cutting through the hillfort ramparts lies the Grade I listed Mausoleum. Possibly the largest to be built in Europe since antiquity, it has no classical precedent. Money for the building was left to Lord Despencer by his friend and principal member of the Hellfire Club, George Bubb Doddington of Melcombe Regis. The structure was built by John Bastard the Younger (also responsible for the rebuilding of Blandford Forum in 1731). A hexagonal structure, open to the sky, the eastern sides have open arches. Of flint rubble with ashlar dressings, it has attached Roman Doric stucco columns under a Doric entablature and panelled parapet. The interior has inscriptions to Lord Despencer, Doddington and the 7th Earl of Westmoreland, wall monuments, and a large figure

monument that was originally in the Church to the two wives of the first Sir Francis. A central monument of an urn on a pedestal under a Roman Ionic stone canopy is to Lady Despenser.



Church Lane

The Church and Mausoleum form an architectural group and play a pivotal role in the wider landscape both from within the park and beyond.

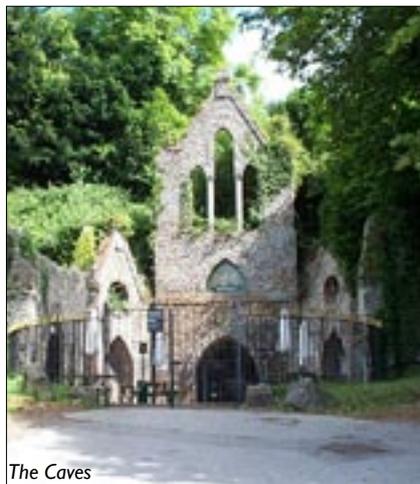
Caves. Halfway down the hillside a picturesque Gothic structure can be found. This is the entrance to the caves excavated to provide spoil for the newly turnpiked road between Wycombe and the village, an undertaking that provided employment to the men of the village during 1750-2, and allegedly provided Sir Francis with yet another meeting place for The Hellfire Club. The structure is Grade II listed. It has U-plan retaining walls. The central part has a triptych façade, the side walls have gables and pinnacles, and round and pointed arched niches. The whole is enclosed by cast iron railings.

## Village buildings

Pevsner describes the village as one in “which nothing is visibly wrong”, making the exception the 1894 Methodist Church on the High Street. It is utterly picturesque, the scene spoiled only by the constant flow of traffic from the A40 which bottlenecks here.

## High Street:

*North side:* set back from the High Street is the 1875 St. Paul's, a simple gothic plain brick Church, unadorned by Victorian frippery. To the west is the Dower House, built by Dashwood as the vicarage in 1763. This Grade II\* building has a handsome Greek Ionic portico with pediment, and is of flint with raised rusticated flint quoins, with single bay wings. The building has applied Rococo plasterwork above the portico. Beyond this the Rectory, a modern house.



The Caves

Facing directly onto the pavement in front of the Dower House is a row of cottages. There are in total some 26 buildings on the north side, a mixture of medieval and Georgian buildings, all of historic



58A High Street (north)



3,4 High Street (south)



Steps House

interest. The list of buildings of architectural and historic interest gives further details of individual buildings, space precludes a full discussion here.

Church Loft is one of the oldest buildings in the village, having been dated to the early 15th century. The building is timber framed, with later brick infill, and the upper floor oversails both front and rear on moulded bressumer beams, and is an open hall. The lower floor seems to have been small medieval shop units, although later records suggest they were used as tenements during the 19th century. The left hand bay is open as a carriageway to Church Lane and contains the Village lock-up and whipping post. The right hand bay may also once have been open. The upper floor of the building has an open queen post roof. The Church Loft has a bell turret, and a particularly fine clock (dated 1668) overhanging the street. The clock mechanism remains within the Church Loft.

The buildings to either side are also timber framed, No 37 has an oversailing jetty to the street. Further along the road, Steps House (formerly the Manor House), an early Georgian five bay building with unusual architectural detailing. Of contrasting yellow and red brick on the upper floor, colourwashed on the lower, it has a coved ground floor cornice breaking up the façade. This imposing building dominates the street scene on this side of the road, towering over the more humble vernacular cottages to either side.

Further along the street, after some 18th-century cottages, is one of the many inns that lined the High Street, an important staging post on the London to Oxford route. The Plough dates from 1735 at the front. At No. 54 a passageway leads up to Band House, the former Congregational Chapel, dated 1808, set into the hillside. Pretty cottages of flint and brick at the rear of No. 53 line the pathway.

The Apple Orchard was formerly a public house, the White Hart Inn, 16th century timber-framed with a massive decorated 17th century chimney.

The pattern of development becomes looser after the Methodist Church of 1894 (CE Moxham and Son), the scale of which is somewhat at odds with the neighbouring cottages. Pathways wind through spaces in the buildings up towards the school. Aston House (formerly White House) is an early 18th-century building on a grander scale than the surrounding cottages and outbuildings and was previously used in part as the estate office for West Wycombe Park. The cluster of cottages to the west of it – Ness Cottage, Rose Cottage, Lacemakers and Pound Cottage are again traditional vernacular, and form a loose-knit and attractive group within cottage gardens, linked by low flint walling.

Development to the rear of this group is set on rising land. This includes the school, prominent in views of the village from Chorley Road, a Gothic creation by F.W. Burnham dating 1874-5, which has been extended over a former orchard. Beyond the school lies a very loose-knit development of 19th century houses, scattered along the road.

*South side:* The south side of the High Street is equally picturesque. Every building, with the exception of the village hall, is listed on this side of the road. Plots here back onto the grounds of West Wycombe Park. At the western end of the High Street lie the Lodge and gates to West Wycombe Park (described under garden buildings).

The built up part of the village on the south side is slightly more open than the north – there are in places gaps between buildings, and a wide range of building types, ranging from the low slung Malt House, with its drying chimney still visible on the roof (prior to residential conversion this building was also the Estate Yard) at the western end of the street, to a large number of Inns and associated courtyards. The building line is not as straightforward, particularly between the Malt House and the Swan, buildings are set back from the main pavement, creating interest along the frontage. The Swan Inn occupies such a gap, with a newer range of buildings at the rear facing onto an open lane. The butchers shop



Crown Court



The Apple Orchard



37 and The Church Loft

(early 17th century) and village library (late 17th century – former Smithy) create a frontage opposite.

The former Black Boy public house (also identified as the Unicorn on some maps), a substantial late 17th century building, has now been subdivided, but retains a unified front. A central carriageway leads to the yard and rear range buildings. The front elevation is almost symmetrical on the upper floor, with four sash windows to either side of the central carriageway – the two halves linked by a continuous dentil course at eaves level. Large shop windows at ground floor level, to the right a Cane and Rush restoration works, an echo of earlier industry in the village. Further along, is another massive coaching inn, the George and Dragon, the front elevation dated to 1720. This building is decorated with classical references on the three storey front range, with irregular window placement, yet conceals an earlier timber frame, visible in carriageway, and on two wings to the rear, one of which oversails at the upper floor. Immediately adjacent, and in contrast, is the small Old Post Office, a timber framed building with visually attractive catslide-roofed weatherboarded extensions to the side and rear. (This building was indeed the original post office).

On the site of a former chair factory is the modern village hall, constructed in 1960 (Col. L Watson) with funds raised by the villagers. It is unashamedly modern.

Beyond this lies another range of cottages, cream washed, facing the road, with a brick filled gable at No. 26 breaking up the roofline. The last houses on this side of the street surround a pretty, private courtyard – Crown Court, a jewel of tiny brick and flint cottages accessed by a carriageway in the front range. The front cottage, No. 35, retains timber framing at the upper level and would have once been jettied.

### Church Lane

One of the most

attractive bits of streetscape in the district, the buildings on Church Lane sit hard on the western edge road side, rising up the hill. Views both up and down the hill are particularly good, and there is a range of buildings in this small area, including the rear of the 15th-century Church Loft, which forms the entrance to the road. A Grade II\* chair factory, still in use, of weatherboard and brick, lies immediately behind the Church loft, it dates from 1887, and replaced much older buildings similar to the Church loft. Across the lane from it is the flint Christadelphian Chapel dated 1815. Formerly a Methodist Chapel it was reputed to have been the first such Church built in the Wycombe Area. Its red brick arched windows and quoins contrast with the coursed flint rubble walls. Beyond lie cottages, all listed, with gaily painted windows, either two and three storeys, some with grand entrances, others more vernacular. Also up Church Lane, the Old Vicarage, set back from the roadside, a 16th-century Grade II listed building with a front garden enclosed by a flint wall. Although there are later alterations this was once a hall house with cross passage. Eleven attractive cottages form the western side of Church Lane, with very few gaps. The hilly ground creates a pleasant street scene. All are listed, generally of two storeys, and are mostly 18th century, and of brick. Of particular note is No. 43, with a date stone of 1722; this has an attic and basement as well, and steps to the front door. The door surround itself is rather grand, with cherub mask under the hood. It is thought that the Borgnis who decorated the Church and House interiors may have lived here whilst undertaking the works.

The eastern side of the road comprises the boundary walls of The Old Vicarage, the Rectory and the Dower House.

Cherub, 43 Church Lane



Church Lane joins the road leading up West Wycombe Hill (soon to be renamed Church Lane) at the top as it sweeps round the base of Church Hill.



Cave Cottage is the oldest house on this stretch, late 17th century and set below the road level.

**Materials**

The full range of traditional Chilterns materials is exhibited in the West Wycombe conservation area.

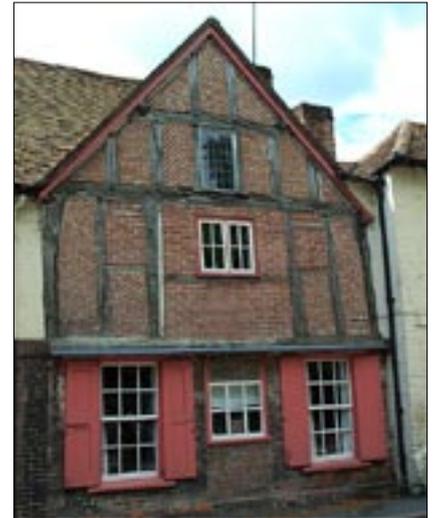
On the grand buildings stucco is widely used – the main house is in fact brick, but stuccoed yellow, with stone columns and porticos. The lodges associated with the estate are also of a similar yellow stucco and indicate the entrances to the park and visually to the village itself. Some of the garden pavilions also use stucco for architectural detailing.

Rendered buildings are also found in the village, often concealing earlier timber-framed structures, although more commonly a sand lime render is employed rather than stucco, usually limewashed.

Stone is used for architectural detailing on West Wycombe Park, the Church, Mausoleum, and on the garden buildings. It is also utilised for structures such as The Pedestal, which stands at the junction of the Oxford and Bradenham roads.

Flint plays an important role in West Wycombe, particularly when used for decoration on the grander buildings. Although by the mid 17th century it was beginning to be used on domestic buildings, cut and knapped, and dressed with brick, at West Wycombe there was a tendency to use rough unknapped flint to give a distinctive “rustic” appearance, particularly on the garden temples and, on a massive scale, the Mausoleum. The Dower House, similarly, is of knapped flint with unknapped flint dressings, a most subtle yet effective combination. Many of the decorative buildings in the park are of flint – the Pepper Pot bridge, the Round House, and Sawmill House all display flint used in a variety of architectural patterns including recessed and expressed panels which create interesting visual details. Flint also plays a more humble role in the village part of the conservation area – it is used for plinths on the older vernacular buildings, and for walling – the Malt House has flint walls, Crown Court Cottages, Ness Cottage, Band House and the range to the rear of No. 53 also use it extensively for construction purposes. Flint

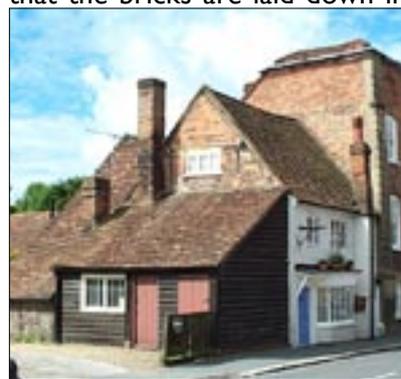
is also commonly found used for retaining and garden walls, particularly the expanse of kitchen garden wall around West Wycombe Nursery (now Plant and Harvest) where it is accented with decorative brick detailing. West Wycombe provides many fine examples of the versatility of this common Chiltern building material both for vernacular and grand architecture.



26 High Street (south side)

The most common building material in the village buildings is brick. The local Bucks brick is utilised – a gentle orange-red-brown. However many of the buildings are colour-washed with lime, with the resulting colour palette encompassing whites, creams and yellows as well. The brick is employed either as a facing material, or as infill for timber framing, which survived the Georgian gentrification of the buildings. The Church Loft exhibits a range of bricks of different thicknesses and colours. Steps House employs yellow stocks on the upper storey adding contrast to the red gauged brick of the window surrounds. No. 26 has patterned brick nogging in the gable end which faces the road – herringbone, zigzag and other patterns in very ancient brick. Brick architectural detailing is also common – dentil courses, string courses, raised quoins and window surrounds – the latter particularly married with flint on the vernacular buildings. The George and Dragon has segmental brick window arches, and carriageway arch. No. 50a has finely gauged rubbed red-brick window arches.

Further decoration with brick can be seen in the patterns that the bricks are laid down in – this tends to be the case in the “newer” buildings as opposed to the humbler former tenants cottages. Thus the frontages of some buildings display patterned brickwork – an example of Flemish bond with vitreous header chequer work can be seen on No. 57



The Old Post Office

and 58, and the use of vitreous header bond as detailing in Church Lane.

Another key feature of the village conservation area is timber framing. This forms the base structure for many of the village buildings, although in many cases it is hidden behind later refacings, particularly after gentrification during the 18th and 19th centuries. It remains exposed on a fair number of buildings, sometimes only on upper floor level, or at the rear. Some of the surviving timber-framing that has not been refaced still retains the over-sailing jetties, seen at the Church Loft, the Apple Orchard, and the gable ended No. 37. Elsewhere timber framing remains visible on the upper storey, but the lower floor has been brought forward and underbuilt in brick.

Weatherboarding: many of the outbuildings, rear service buildings and lean-tos are clad in black stained weatherboarding, such as at the Old Post Office and the chair factory on Church Lane. This was a basic material utilised for functional buildings, so is not found on the front elevations.

**Roofscape:** The roofscape of the village is particularly important, and predominant in views from the hillside above the village. The variety of form and pattern of roofs, the type of roofing materials utilised and the location of chimneys all add to the richness and variety of roofing form. Roofing material in the village is predominately clay tile, with the exception of the Methodist Chapel, the Lodge House and the Dower House, which are of slate. It is also utilised on the roofs of the garden buildings and temples, and Sawmill House. The different pitches and irregular heights of the roofline along the village streets, as well as the forms that the roofs take – mostly pitched, but a sprinkling of hipped, and pyramidal roofs – ensure that the predominance of the material does not create uniformity. A prime example of the variety can be seen upon entering the village from the west – the low slung deep pitch of the Malt House terminating in the 2 ½ storey gable ends of No. 2 and 3. The variety of dormer windows also helps to break up the roof pattern. Chimneys are also fundamental to the roofline, and



window details



there are some particularly fine 17th century examples in the village – on the Apple Orchard, and on No. 21.

**Streetscape** – West Wycombe village exhibits a varied and interesting streetscape. The interest is created by the patterns of gables and ranges, courtyards, dormers, and layout of buildings on the street edge – some thrusting forward, others set slightly back. Additional variety of building form is enhanced by vistas, glimpses into courtyards, through archways, and along passages.

**Doors and windows:** Due to the protection of the National Trust and listed building status many of the key details which play an important role in the appearance of an individual building have been retained, or sympathetically replaced. On village buildings doors are wooden, painted in traditional colours, both the simple plank doors on the humbler buildings and the more decorative panelled doors and ornate surrounds of the later period. Some of particular note include No. 43 Church Lane, and Steps House. The doors of the gate lodges have elaborate frames and pediments. Other door types include traditional glazed doors – these are rarer. Even the Rectory's garden wall has an attractive timber door with a dowelled heavy frame.

A wide variety of window styles is seen, from the grand fenestration of West Wycombe Park, the arched windows of Sawmill House and the Round House, and in Church Lane the Christadelphian Chapel. On village buildings, not architect designed, the windows tend more to the vernacular – wooden casements and sliding sashes mainly. A fine example of Yorkshire sliding sashes is seen



window details



*View from Chapel Lane*

on No. 40 Church Lane and 17 High Street, and many of the former shops and inns have oriels and bays. The type of casement windows within the village varies: 2-light, 3-light, or more, wooden or metal casements, metal opening lights. Dormer windows also play an important role, and again the fenestration pattern of these differs.

Shutters feature extensively in the village, and are painted to match the doors and windows surrounds. Blind windows also exist in places. That on Steps House has been painted to resemble the sashes to either side.

Paint. The Main House, stuccoed garden buildings and lodge houses are washed in a muted yellow ochre that ties the buildings together in the landscape, the colour identifying Dashwood's classical buildings as clearly as any architectural theme. This enlivening paint colour was the creation of Sir Francis Dashwood, 11th Baronet, and provides a strong contrast with the stonework on the buildings. The use of colour in the village is altogether more frivolous, yet retains a strong traditional feel. Many of the brick buildings have been coated with limewash, a traditional wall treatment which allows the building behind to "breathe". The result is a pale palette of creams and whites, through which the texture of the bricks beneath can be seen. The buildings on the south side of the village between the Malt House and the George and Dragon are particularly nice examples of limewashed bricks along the front elevation, with a variety of hue and tone. The effect is heightened by the judicious use of

coloured paint for architectural accents.

Fundamental to the picturesque appearance of the cottages in the village is the colour of the detailing – doors, windows and shutters. This joinery paint is based on an 18th-century colour book, and has been introduced over a number of years by the National Trust in conjunction with the late Sir Francis. The colours are vibrant without being too vivid and consist of a blue, apple green, yellow and a deep pink. They do not overwhelm the architecture, simply enhance it.

Other tiny details add to the charm of the village - fire plaques on the walls of many buildings, and sundry historic signs, date stones and masons marks. A number of the cottages retain their outside privies, and the village pump remains in Chapel Lane.

*Church Lane garden*



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## Trees and vegetation

Trees play a fundamental role in the character of this conservation area, particularly in the park. Details of the various plantings and the development of the landscape are given in many of the sources listed below. The variety of tree species and planting layouts, from avenues to wooded areas with open glades greatly enhances the buildings within the park.

Outside the main parkland and pleasure grounds trees play the significant role of providing a backdrop to the vernacular architecture of the village. Coming from the east there is a fine Avenue of trees leading into the village – this more defined on the north side of the road which has open fields behind. To the south of the road the planting merges with wooded parkland boundary.

Trees also play a role in shrouding parts of the hillside and churchyard. Older trees surround the churchyard, and care needs to be taken to ensure that they do not block views of the built features. Up the side of Church Hill scrub growth has meant that these are now more wooded than in previous times. The National Trust is pursuing a policy of scrub clearance to reduce the encroachment on the hill and to establish if possible a grazing regime in line with downland management aims. This would create a more historically accurate open feeling to the hill. Some of the existing planting is spurious and interferes with the planned views across the landscape looking out from West Wycombe Park.

## Open space

Key to the conservation area and the setting of West Wycombe Park, open space includes all private and semi private space that contributes to the character of the area. The parkland has been carefully planned, and includes swathes of open grass, avenues and walks, interspersed with water features and woodland groves. The whole is an Arcadian pleasure ground, with echoes of antiquity

*Flint Bridge*



provided by the carefully placed garden temples. The landscape is more fully discussed by Gervase Jackson-Stoppa in two Country Life articles in 1974. Suffice it to say the grounds at West Wycombe are among the most important examples of the picturesque movement in landscape gardening.

West Wycombe Hill also provides open space, both on the sides, some of which is being invaded by scrub, and on the open hilltop, used for parking. The churchyard is open and lies over the crest of the hill. At the foot of the hill, between the Chorley Road and Church Lane, open land has been used by the villagers for many years as an informal space.

Within the built up area of the village there are small areas of open space, mostly incidental. They serve to break up the frontages and create gaps which enliven the street scene.

Cottage gardens provide private spaces between the buildings, particularly up Church Lane, and close to the Estate Office. Crown Court encircles a small area of private open space.

## Settings and views

This is a landscape that has been specifically designed to be seen, particularly in conjunction with the prominent buildings within it. It is pure theatre, a stage set for the second Sir Francis. Views of the House, the garden temples, across the parkland, and up to the eyecatcher of the Church and Mausoleum complex are well documented. Other views are also important - along the High Street, up Church Lane, and across the parkland from Chapel Lane.

There are some very important views within the conservation area and out of it, only some of which have been shown on the map.

## Historic landscape characterisation

The County Council are undertaking a Historic Landscape Characterisation project which aims to understand the historic development of the landscape. This uses map based evidence and new digital technology to create a map which identifies character, taking into account the pattern of surrounding woodland, fields and downland. It will help define the changes between the planned landscape and historic landscape.

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## Groupings

The key groupings in the conservation area lie at the top of Church Hill - the juxtaposition of rampart, Church and Mausoleum - and along the High Street. The buildings here are either contiguous or closely linked. Of particular note is the grouping around Crown Court, and that of Church Loft, furniture factory and Christadelphian Chapel - three very different styles and ages of buildings.

## DEVELOPMENT CONTROL ADVICE

The policies and proposals of the Wycombe District Local Plan are the primary source of reference for development control advice. In addition the Council's approved Heritage Action Plan is seen as a supporting document to the Plan. This character survey has been adopted as a Supplementary Planning Document for the consideration of development within the West Wycombe Conservation Area. Below is a brief checklist taking account of the above text.

To safeguard, preserve and enhance the appearance and special character of the West Wycombe Conservation Area:-

- In the conservation area higher standards of design are required, as it is the function of the planning authority to consider all applications as to whether they preserve or enhance the special character as identified in this appraisal.

- Given the landscape and historic designations, and the land ownership patterns in the conservation area, it is unlikely that any sites for new development will come forward. These guidelines therefore relate to extensions and alterations to the existing buildings.

- Any new building works such as extensions must be designed not as a separate entity, but should be sympathetic in form and scale with the existing buildings and the conservation area as a whole. Respecting the existing scale of the buildings in the conservation area is of particular importance as the cumulative effect of development can over time erode the character.

- Listed and other significant buildings are identified on the survey maps. Any new development must not harm their quality or visual identity and it should be recognised that new development may not always be acceptable. The setting of listed buildings and their special architectural or historic features should also be protected.

- Materials for any new building works or surfacing must be sympathetic to those prevalent in the area. Traditional local building materials will often be the most appropriate choice - good quality traditional brick and sand-faced clay roof tiles, flint, stucco and limewash, and occasional use of slate are the predominant materials in the village. In particular the use of an appropriate lime mortar can enhance the visual appearance of buildings. The Chilterns Buildings Design Guide gives general advice on Chiltern building types; specific advice will depend on the immediate locality.

*Venus's Temple and Mound (with icehouse)*



- Applications for development adjoining but beyond the conservation area boundary will be assessed for their effect upon its character, appearance and setting, and may be refused permission if considered adverse.

- Surfacing within domestic curtilages for driveways and the like should be in keeping with the traditional nature of the conservation area. Large areas of regular paving can look discordant, and may not be appropriate. Where traditional materials, including setts, survive, they should be retained. Historically paths to front doors were surfaced

with brick or clay tiles and this is a tradition that could be encouraged.

- Inappropriate replacement windows and doors can damage the character of the conservation area. Traditional natural materials should be used in order to safeguard the special character of the conservation area. Painted timber windows and doors are appropriate, and modern substitute materials such as uPVC and aluminium are not. In West Wycombe village the use of coloured paint is a particular feature, and additional controls are

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applied by the National Trust.

- Areas of open space, and gaps between buildings will be carefully considered for protection from development or enclosure in order to protect the character of the conservation area, the setting of listed buildings, and any important views.

- As a boundary treatment brick and flint walls, hedging, and in some cases traditional iron railings will generally be preferred to timber panel fencing.

- All trees in conservation areas are protected, and special consideration should be given to their retention. New development should recognise this and not present a risk to their continued future growth and habit. Trees in the historic planned landscape of the gardens and park are managed by the Estate.

- Some agricultural hedges are protected by the 1997 Hedgerow Regulations. Hedgerows are an important element of the areas character and should be retained and where possible enhanced.

- Special care must be taken to ensure the views looking into and out of the conservation area are not spoilt. Those of particular importance are marked on the survey map.

### **Further information and guidance**

The following references were used when researching this document, in addition to information held at the County Record Office:

Dashwood, Sir Francis: *The Dashwoods of West Wycombe*, 1987.

English Heritage: *West Wycombe Park, Buckinghamshire, Part I and II*, 2001.

The National Trust: *West Wycombe Park*; 1987, 2001 (new edition)

Pevsner, N. and Williamson, E: *The Buildings of England: Buckinghamshire* 2nd ed. 1994.

RCHME: *An Inventory of the Historic Monuments of Buckinghamshire* 1912.

The Victoria County History of Buckinghamshire 1925.

H Harman: *Notes on West Wycombe* 1934.

Herbert Green: *Village Life in the Eighteenth Century* 1976.

Wycombe District Council's Planning and Major Projects Service has a number of publications which offer further guidance. Ask the Conservation Officer for information on which Heritage Guidance Notes are currently available and appropriate.

The Chilterns Conservation Board published the *Chilterns Building Design Guide* in 1999. More recently it has published a *Supplementary Technical Note* concerned with the use of flint. A draft technical note on brick has recently been published, and this will be followed by one on tile. These documents all provide guidance aimed at conserving the outstanding qualities which make the Chilterns a landscape of national importance. Copies are available directly from the Chilterns Conservation Board or can be inspected at the District Council Offices. They are adopted by the Council as *Supplementary Planning Documents* and are used to assess all development within the AONB.

The Conservation Officer and the Heritage Officer are always pleased to give advice on all heritage matters and can be contacted on 01494 421578/421527 or seen by appointment in the Council offices or on site.





Development Control matters within the West Wycombe conservation area are the responsibility of the West Team who can be contacted on 01494 421 531.

Planning Policy matters are the responsibility of the Policy Unit who can be contacted on 01494 421545.

With many thanks to the following who provided additional information: Sir Edward Dashwood, The National Trust, West Wycombe Parish Council, the late Mike Gerrard.

**Listed Buildings:**

*Grade I - Buildings of National Importance:*

- West Wycombe Park
- Church of St Lawrence
- Dashwood Mausoleum

*Grade II\*- particularly special and important buildings (some 4% of all listed buildings)*

- The Caves
- The Dower House
- Sawmill House
- Flora's Temple
- The Round Temple
- Temple of the Four Winds
- The Music Temple
- Kitty's Lodge
- Daphne's Temple
- North West Lodge and gatepiers
- Triumphal Arch
- The Exedra
- Temple of Bacchus
- Workshop(Furniture Factory)
- Church Loft
- Steps House

*Grade II Buildings of Special interest*

- General: Druids Hutt, Band House, Flint Hall Farmhouse, Barns at Flint Hall Farm, Pedestal, Cave Cottage

- In Park: Farm Buildings at Park Farm, Round House, Gate Piers to Park Farm, Garden Wall to Flora's Temple, Flint Bridge, Upper Bridge, North Bridge, South Bridge, The Cascade, The Mound

(Icehouse)

- Chapel Lane: St Crispins and cottages to the south, Gothic Alcove, Pepperboxes and Bridge.

- Rear of High Street: Pound Cottage, Lacemakers, Bird World Cottage

- Church Lane: The Old Vicarage, Farthing Cottage, Fern Cottage, No 39 (Hill Cottage) and 40A, 40 and 41, 41A (Lowford Cottage), 42, 42A and 43A, 43, 44, Christadelphian Chapel,

- Crown Court: 27 and 28, 29 and 30, 32 and 33

- High Street (South): The Malt House, 2, 3, 4 and 5, 7, 8 and 9, The Swan Public House, County Library, 10, 11, 12 and 13, 15 (Black Boy Public House), Black Boy Cottage, 16 and 17, The George and Dragon Inn, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22 and 23, 24, 25, 26 and 34, 35.

- High Street (North): 36, 37, 45-47, 48 and 49, 50A, The Plough Inn, 50 (The Post Office), 51, 52, 53 and 54 and 56, 57 and 58, 58A, The Apple Orchard, 59, The Old Studio, Aston House, Rose Cottage, Ness Cottage