

CHARLBURY PARISH CHARACTER ASSESSMENT



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and the residents of Charlbury
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Character assessment of Charlbury Parish

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Summary

The parish of Charlbury lies in the Evenlode valley within the Cotswold Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). It comprises the small market town of Charlbury, the historic hamlet of Walcot and the surrounding attractive countryside of rolling hills. The historic market town is constructed largely of local building materials and fits comfortably into its landscape context. It has a strong vernacular character clearly expressing its history and functions. The historic core is compact and clearly defined. Major expansion in the latter part of the twentieth century is mainly to the north east and south and is, on the whole, discreetly accommodated so that the impact on the outstanding landscape is minimal. There are strong links to the surrounding countryside via a network of ancient paths and tracks.

Attractive views are a key characteristic of the parish as a whole. There are stunning views of the town from the surrounding countryside and spectacular sweeping views from the town looking out, particularly along the Evenlode valley. Closed views within the town feature the attractive vernacular buildings and public open spaces whilst some feature enticing paths leading out into open countryside.

Much of the twentieth-century housing development has sought to reflect its setting through the use of local or artificial stone although other locally distinctive features have not generally been followed. Some exceptions stand out as reminders of how sensitive the landscape is to interventions.

1. Introduction

This parish character assessment has been commissioned by Charlbury Town Council to provide an evidence base for the development of the neighbourhood plan. It has been put together by a conservation professional, drawing on survey work by groups of residents of the parish using a variety of sources .

In order to accommodate change within the parish in a sensitive way that enhances the character of the area, it is essential to articulate that character and understand its significance. This character assessment describes the general context of the parish, its historical development and then gives a summary of broad character areas within the parish, based on the results of the surveys carried out by local residents. Key aspects of heritage significance are discussed and positive and negative features identified. The detailed survey work which underpins the assessment is contained in an appendix. . The two should be read together, bearing in mind the raw survey work provides important evidence for the character assessment but does not form part of it. The surveys were based on the Oxford Character Assessment Toolkit but this was modified as appropriate to respond to the particular characteristics of the parish. For the purposes of the survey, the parish was divided into five sub-areas.

In order to facilitate compliance of the neighbourhood plan with the NPPF the heritage significance of each character area is articulated so that policies may be developed which conserve or enhance this significance. This is defined in the NPPF as:

The value of a heritage asset to this and future generations because of its heritage interest. That interest may be archaeological, architectural, artistic or historic. Significance derives not only from a heritage asset's physical presence, but also from its setting.

The articulation of this interest is informed by Historic England's *Conservation Principles* 2008 and the draft revised *Conservation Principles*, 2017

An account of the historical development of the parish has been based on published sources and maps in the Bodleian Library and maps and documentary material in the Oxfordshire History Centre.

This report has been written by Dr Kathryn Davies based on the above research and using the survey material produced by local groups in the appendix. Local residents who have participated include: Selina Thomas, David Thomas, Tony Merry, Christine Elliott, Linda Mowat, Rhona Walker, Judy Dod, Linda Monckton, Nikki Rycroft, Dawn Colvin, Nicolette Lethbridge, Reg James, Barbara Allison, Vic Allison, Nigel King, Catherine Goyder, Jodie O'Reilly, Richard Nicolay, Helene Provstgaard, Graham Terry, Peter Kenrick, Rod Evans, Claire Wilding, Jeff West, Juliet West.

Dr Davies, BA, MA, DPhil (Oxon), Dip TP, FSA, MRTPI, IHBC, is a heritage consultant who has been a Chartered Town Planner and qualified in conservation for over 30 years. She is a founder member of the Institute of Historic Building Conservation and is currently its Vice-Chair. She has extensive experience working in planning and conservation in local authorities and for Historic England (formerly English Heritage) as a Historic Buildings Inspector, Team Leader and as the Principal Historic Places Adviser in the South East. She is currently an independent consultant. She is a member of the BOB-MK design review panel and has been appointed by CABE as a Built Environment Expert to sit on design review panels.

2. Location, layout and context

Charlbury is a small market town roughly 7 miles equidistant from Chipping Norton to the north-west, Witney to the south and Woodstock to the south-east. It is situated on a bluff above the River Evenlode within the rolling hills of the Cotswold AONB. The river lies to the west and generally the land slopes, quite steeply in places, from the higher land in the east down to the river in the west. The land is cut through by several tributaries in steep-sided valleys, resulting in a varied, predominantly hilly topography. Spectacular views of the surrounding rolling countryside are afforded from many parts of the parish. Equally interesting views are found within the town as the built form rises up and down the hilly topography in an organic, somewhat haphazard fashion.

The town is fairly compact, especially its historic centre, with later development to the north, east and south forming a clear edge to the settlement. The western limit of the town is strongly defined by the Evenlode valley. The main roads from Burford, Chipping Norton, Eystone, Woodstock and Witney all meet in the centre of the town. The railway lies in the valley close to the south west boundary of the parish with the station just west of the town centre on the road out towards Burford. This provides links to the principal centres of Worcester and Hereford to the north west and Oxford and London to the south east, as well as connecting to the smaller settlements on the way.

Cornbury Park, a Grade II* registered park, lies immediately to the west of Charlbury, see figure 1, and makes a distinctive contribution to its character. It was at the heart of the medieval Wychwood Forest and much of the ornamental deer park was laid out in the

seventeenth century. Today, the character of the valley in the western part of the parish is largely determined by this designed landscape and the house, its lodges, drives and deer park are visible from many parts of the parish. The eastern boundary of the parish adjoins Ditchley Park, another Grade II* registered park, dating from the eighteenth century. The lie of the land here means that this does not have the same visual relationship with the town as Cornbury Park. Both estates had a considerable influence on the development of the town as successive lords of the manor owned much of the land and property within the parish.



Figure 1 View from Grammar School Hill towards Cornbury Park

The south east, south and west are characterised by relict forest landscape with former open fields to the north and east. The overall character is that of extraordinarily attractive countryside surrounding a small working town. Despite its elevated position, it lies discreetly within the landscape, as it is much screened by trees, see figure 2. Even at night its presence is modest, as street lighting is low level and there is very little light spillage into the surrounding countryside, the exception being the station area.



Figure 2 View of Charlbury from near Walcot

The population recorded in the 2011 census was just under 3,000. There are limited employment opportunities in the town, mostly in the service sector, with many people commuting to nearby towns or London. There are several shops, pubs, and principal facilities to service the local population including churches, a school, library, playing fields and community centre.

3. Historical development

The whole of the parish has considerable heritage interest. Whilst there is some evidence of Roman settlement in the wider area and Grim's Ditch dating from a similar period survives in parts of the parish, the town was probably founded around the middle of the seventh century as a fortified monastic site. The roughly circular centre, bounded by Church Street, Market Street, Dyer's Hill and Church Lane is likely to denote the precinct of the minster church. The present parish church can be found here, with the earliest surviving houses -, the Priory and The Old Manor House, close by.

In the Middle Ages, Charlbury's economy was based on agriculture. It first emerges as a small town in the thirteenth century when a market charter was granted and burgage plots were laid out leading to development along Market Street and Sheep Street. Its central street pattern was probably established by 1300.

The market initially occupied Church Street which had the typical widening at its eastern end. This was partially infilled, probably by the early eighteenth century, see figure 3. The fortunes of the town fluctuated, declining after the Black Death in the fifteenth century when its market function diminished, followed by a revival in the later seventeenth century.



Figure 3 Eighteenth-century infilling of the market place built in local limestone

The historical development of the town is best illustrated through a series of maps, which are included as an appendix. The 1761 estate map (Map 1), commissioned by the Duke of Marlborough, shows the built up form of the town, plot boundaries throughout the parish and the name of each tenant. This is a remarkable source of primary information. Map 2 is the 1849 tithe map showing the built form of the town at that date, plot boundaries and principal routes through the parish. Land ownership, use and occupation can be identified by reference to the accompanying tithe apportionment¹. As these large maps are difficult to read, extracts of the town centre are picked out for the purposes of comparison. The first large scale Ordnance Survey map was published in 1880 showing in great detail all the features within the town and surrounding fields. Maps 3-5 show the principal changes in the parish from 1880 to the present day. The consistency in the layout of the parish, its field and plot boundaries can be seen by comparing all these maps. Of note is the loss of the last large area of woodland, around Lees Rest, in the third quarter of the nineteenth century.

Focusing on the town centre, details of some of the changes can be clearly seen in Maps 6-10. Perhaps more remarkable is the consistency of the built form rather than its change from 1761 to the present day. One feature not mentioned in published histories of the town is the extent of orchards in the late nineteenth century, shown on the 1880 map.

Lee Place, listed grade II*, was built just outside the town in the mid-seventeenth century, possibly as a dower house for Ditchley Park, though its origins are not known for certain. It was extensively remodelled in the 1720s possibly by James Gibbs². The building originally fronted onto the road running south from the town centre. This was diverted to create the gardens for the house, see figure 4. The original route, a continuation of Watts Lake shown on map below, and its diversion along what is now Grammar School Hill can be clearly seen. It has been suggested that Hixet Wood developed nearby to house those employed in servicing this high status house.



Figure 4 Extract from Pride's 1761 map showing the diversion of the road around Lee Place

¹ Oxfordshire History Centre

² Historic England *Heritage List*, online

The map series in the appendix shows that extent of development of the town remained substantially the same from the late eighteenth century until the second half of the twentieth century.

Despite its early origins, much of the historic town centre appears to date from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, although a number of substantially seventeenth century buildings do survive, such as Armada Cottage and The Old Talbot. Others are known to contain earlier fabric and further investigation could reveal more. It was during this period that the town, which had been in decline, was revived by the development of the glove industry. Growth during the nineteenth century was largely confined within the existing built up area and included chapels, school, brewery, town hall and glove factories. Gloving was a principal economic activity in the town until twentieth century, with the last glove manufacturer closing in 1968. In addition to new building there was much remodelling of existing housing to accommodate the changing fortunes of the town. Many of these buildings are statutorily listed.

Some new houses were built outside the town centre, such as Blenheim farmhouse, Wellington Cottage (now Five Ways House) and cottages to the south; two substantial mid-century villas at the top of the Enstone Road; a couple of isolated villas in the Slade and some semi-detached villas in Crawborough towards the end of the nineteenth century. In addition, some modest cottages were built on Ditchley Road, possibly for quarrymen or agricultural workers.

Although there is some evidence of timber framing, the earlier historic buildings are predominantly of local stone with Stonesfield slate roofs; one example only of thatch survives (on The Slade). With the opening of the railway in 1853 came the importation of buildings materials from much further afield, notably brick and Welsh slate. A brickworks was briefly in use at Fawler (then in the parish) in the late nineteenth century. Some of their bricks are stamped 'Charlbury'. Their use, however, is limited. Much of the development in the nineteenth century favoured traditional materials.

The twentieth century saw considerable expansion of the town beginning in 1920 with new council houses ('homes fit for heroes') in the Enstone Road. Further council housing constructed of brick and render with tiled roofs and in a traditional form was started in Sturt and Woodstock Roads before the Second World War. This was followed in the second half of the twentieth century by substantial developments to the north, east and south of the historic town centre to accommodate the increase in demand for housing within the area as the town developed as a commuter centre.

Outside the built-up area of the town, the main changes in the landscape related to enclosure and the clearing of wooded areas. The open fields were enclosed by agreement from the sixteenth through to the nineteenth century resulting in the small irregular field pattern typically associated with early enclosure. Many of the field boundaries shown on Pride's map of 1761 are still discernible today. A large area around Lees Rest was still wooded in the eighteenth century. This was cleared in the nineteenth century. Today only small areas of woodland survive in the parish.

4. Character areas

Given the ancient origins of the town, the diverse topography of the parish as a whole and its changing fortunes over the centuries, it is not surprising to find that there is no homogenous character to the parish. In attempting to assess this character, therefore, some generalisations are necessary. To do this, the parish has been divided into three broad categories of character area: the historic core of the town; suburbs which are predominantly post-war development, and open countryside. Within each of these there is much variation but they have enough common characteristics to make some generalisations meaningful and a discussion of character manageable.

The architectural, historic, archaeological and artistic interest of each sub-area is identified and its significance articulated.

i. Historic Town Centre

The original Anglo-Saxon settlement developed around the church and then spread up Church St to what may have been an existing route along Market St and Sheep St³ when the market charter was granted in the thirteenth century. This is expressed in the continuous built up frontage, with long narrow plots along Church St and particularly Sheep Street and Market Street, see figure 5. The consistent plot sizes in Market Street may suggest a planned layout of burgage plots around the time that the market was established.

Development then followed along the roads leading from the central crossroads, becoming less dense further away from the centre. Hixet Wood where development was probably associated with Lee Place became a secondary historic centre for the town. By the end of the eighteenth century, the layout of historic centre was much the same as it is today. It was strongly nucleated, with farms and farm buildings, some still identifiable, located within the town rather than in the surrounding countryside. Nineteenth-century development was generally limited to redevelopment or infilling within the existing town layout. This pattern of accommodating new development on infill plots has continued to the present day and some distinctive modern developments can be found within, or close to, the historic core. Streets generally are narrow, the principal exception being Church Street, which is wide and funnel-shaped, illustrating its function as the site of the original market.

³ See the account of Sheep St in the appendix



Figure 5 Junction of Sheep Street and Church Street showing dense development right up to the footway edge and typical vernacular buildings

To the west, there is a hard edge to the town defined by the River Evenlode, with open countryside immediately adjacent to the town centre and very accessible. This reflects the strategic positioning of the original settlement on a bluff above the river. In other directions it straggles a bit, but there is still quite a clear distinction between the historic centre and twentieth century development which is mostly to the east of the centre.

The buildings in the historic centre have a wide variety of dates, styles and sizes, yet consistency in building materials lends some uniformity. Almost all are built of coursed limestone rubble with Stonesfield slate roofs and many have brick chimney stacks. Externally the majority of buildings appear to date from the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries, although it is known that many, perhaps most, contain earlier fabric. Alterations generally express changes in building technology and in the fortunes of the town. Notable examples are the insertion of chimney stacks, the introduction of sash windows and adaptations to accommodate glove manufacturing. Extra storeys were added to accommodate the growth in population and, in some cases such as at Grantchester House and Sycamore House, where buildings were used as schools. The absence of stone mullions, the use of timber lintels, rounded corners on buildings and brick chimney stacks reflect the lack of local dimension stone, as does the rarity of ashlar and the predominant use of rubble walling, much of it originally rendered. Flat-roofed porches, straight eaves without gables and dormers are also characteristic features in the town. The fine railings that survive on some boundaries make a positive contribution to the character of the street. Stone boundary walls are found throughout the town, the most prominent of which is that enclosing Lee Place. This is the town's grandest building, an early eighteenth century remodelling of a seventeenth century house. Its symmetrically designed lodges on Grammar School Hill, characterful ancient boundary yews, tall surrounding trees and stable turret clock are prominent within the town.

The centre is notable for the survival of original detailing such as windows, doors and shop fronts, even though many of the latter are no longer in commercial properties, see figure 5.

The buildings are mostly vernacular, with only a few examples of polite architecture apart from the church, including Lee Place, the former Vicarage (now Queen Anne House and The

Old Rectory) and The Priory (now The Priory and Ivy House). This could be the result of a number of factors including the presence of the more modest, less showy Quakers as influential residents in the town and less wealth in the town compared with other nearby centres such as Burford or Woodstock.

Whilst the street frontages are continuously built-up in the centre, the rear plots have more open space, especially to the south of Church Street. Here the fairly dramatic topography around Sandford Slade⁴ provides attractive and much-valued green space, separating the primary space around the church and the secondary one around Lee Place, see figure 6. The trees in the grounds of Lee Place and around Sandford Mount form an important backdrop to most of the views south from the town centre. The Playing Close is an unusual historic space within the town. There is a documentary reference to it in 1448 when it was made available to the town's people for archery practice. It remains as a rectangular open space surrounded by fine trees and with buildings now fronting on to it. With the memorial fountain of 1897 at its northern end and a low railing demarcating it, it has a distinctive air of an ancient place, see figure 7. The other key green space in the town centre is the churchyard. The footpath through the churchyard leading on to Church Lane follows a line that is thought to be the Anglo-Saxon settlement boundary. This peaceful walk surrounded by tall limes and fine specimen trees is a major pedestrian route between the town and the station.



Figure 6 View towards Hixet Wood with Sandford Slade in the middle ground

⁴ Sandford Slade is the local name for the minor valley that crosses the town from east to west.



Figure 7 Playing Close, dating from the fifteenth century with the memorial fountain of 1897

Few houses in the centre have front gardens. Where they do, this probably reflects encroachments or changes to the old street pattern which presented the opportunity for additional land in front of buildings, for example in Church Street and on Grammar School Hill. Mature trees and greenery within these gardens provide a welcome and attractive contribution to the otherwise hard urban streetscape. In Church Street, Park Street, Priory Lane, Sheep Street and at either end of Market Street (Crinan House and The Corner House) modest front gardens are characteristically fenced with wrought iron railings, a feature continued in the modern sheltered housing west of The Playing Close.

Apart from the main streets, the historic town centre has a network of lanes and paths linking it to the surrounding countryside, former open fields and neighbouring settlements. The informal surfacing of these and boundary vegetation provides more green space and gives a sense of the town's immediate rural setting.



Figure 8 View from Park Street to open countryside

This is further reinforced by the spectacular views of surrounding rolling countryside which can be seen from many parts of the town, see figure 8. In places, these views are just glimpsed in the gaps between buildings and all the more dramatic for the contrast they provide from the short views within the narrow streets in the centre of the town. In places, channelled views along the streets terminate in key buildings with open countryside rising behind them. The town centre has a low level of street lighting, which allows it to sit quietly within the surrounding countryside. The historic core is lit by attractive replica lanterns which enhance its traditional character.

The overall character is that of an attractive, largely unspoilt, working town that clearly expresses its history through the layout of its streets and the form and detailing of its buildings.

Significance

There is evidence of Roman settlement in the wider Charlbury area and sections of Grim's ditch survive in the parish. There may well be some archaeological potential in the town, particularly around the Anglo-Saxon settlement.⁵ Church Street has the potential to reveal more about the medieval market and Market Street and Sheep Street may yield information on the medieval development in the town. Several houses are known to have medieval origins and there are likely to be others which contain early fabric.

Historic interest lies in the layout of the streets in the town reflecting first the boundary of the Anglo-Saxon settlement, followed by the granting of the market charter, the layout of burgage plots and the possible line of the early route along Thames Street/Market Street/Sheep Street and Hixet Wood. The footpath network illustrates extensive links to the surrounding countryside of former open fields. Developments in building technology can be read in the buildings where alterations are clearly expressed. Some evidence of historic farms survives within the historic core. Multiphase buildings illustrate the changing fortunes

⁵ John Blair, lecture on the archaeology of the Wychwood Forest, OAHS, January 23rd 2018.

of the town. Of particular note are the former glove factories and the raised roofs of a number of properties. The strong, early Quaker presence in the town is illustrated by the eighteenth century Meeting House and prominent Quakers are associated with a number of buildings in the town.

Architectural interest lies in the buildings both individually and collectively. Whilst Lee Place is the predominant polite building, several vernacular buildings have individual displays of contemporary fashion and status, such as Crinan House and the Corner House. However, the prime architectural interest lies in the truly vernacular character of the town, being built almost exclusively of local Cotswold limestone, often with Stonesfield slate, in a variety of traditional forms and plans to meet the changing needs of the town.

In view of the predominant plain working character of the town, artistic interest is unsurprisingly limited. The late Victorian drinking fountain on Playing Close is the notable exception.

Opportunities for enhancement

- On-street car parking on narrow roads causes some problems and diminishes the aesthetic value of these streets
- A significant number of former shops are neglected, especially on Sheep Street
- Broken road surfaces are very unsightly, particularly on Sheep Street
- The lack of off-street storage for wheelie bins results in visual clutter on the streets
- Removal of redundant cables by service providers
- Use of traditional street lighting instead of modern lamp standards when any changes in street lighting are being considered

ii. Suburban development

The edge of the historic town is less clearly defined to the north, east and south, as the density of building gradually opens out and more modern development marks the transition to open countryside. The dramatic topography creates a variety of different characters. Nevertheless, there are some common elements which characterise these areas.

Here development dates mostly but not entirely from the second half of the twentieth century and is primarily residential. It encompasses buildings, principally nineteenth-century although some are earlier, which developed outside the historic core. The area is characterised by development interspersed with large open spaces, mostly public with Nine Acres and Wychwood Paddocks continuing the precedent of the Playing Close in the historic town centre. Density is much lower than in the historic town centre, decreasing further closer to open countryside. Most houses have both front and back gardens.

Two mid-nineteenth century villas, Hazeldene House and Wychwood House, both built by the Quaker Albright family, are found at the top of the Enstone Road, a principal historic route into the town. The later Victorian Sandford Mount occupies a prominent site on the Slade. These large detached houses are set in generous landscaped grounds with mature vegetation. This greenery helps the transition from open countryside to the historic town centre. The houses and plots get smaller nearer to the town centre. The late nineteenth-century development of Crawborough includes semi-detached and terraced houses. Other pre-twentieth century buildings of note are the former toll house on Enstone Road; the seventeenth/eighteenth century Blenheim Farmhouse and thatched cottage on the Slade;

the former glove factory of 1894 and an eighteenth century or earlier group of cottages on Dancers' Hill (formerly Knaves' Knoll) .

Historic field boundaries have determined the overall shape of individual developments, presumably as landowners sold off separate plots of land, and the old field names often appear in the name of the development, for example Ticknell Piece and Sturt Close. The modern estates vary in date, character and design quality. Some such as Woodfield Drive (1969) and Sandford Park (1960s) make a considerable positive contribution to the character and appearance of the conservation area. Those of lesser design quality are generally not prominently sited so that their visual impact on the town is fairly discreet. Ticknell Piece (see figure 9) is an example of an estate where the layout appears to have been carefully thought through to create a streetscape with something of the character of a traditional town. Many developments have attractive areas of public open space built into the design. Some areas of undeveloped land survive, such as parts of Sandford Slade and The Pound Hill triangle, to evoke a sense of the historic past. A modern school, shops and Fire Station serve the expanded population of the town.

Whilst houses are in styles familiar in many modern estate developments, local stone or artificial stone prevails with slate roofs and some stone-coloured render.



Figure 9 Twentieth century housing on Ticknell Piece

Where brick has been used, it is usually a pale brick of a similar tone to local stone. These houses fit in more successfully with their surroundings than nineteenth-century examples (see figure 10) employing strong red bricks which first appeared in the town after the opening of the railway. But even pale brick does not fit in as comfortably as stone. While local distinctiveness is lacking, an effort has been made to adopt a style of modern housing using a generic form of 'traditional' detailing that sits reasonably happily with the town and its surroundings.



Figure 10 Villas in Crowborough

Existing mature trees and stone boundary walls have been incorporated into housing schemes in several cases which helps to integrate old and new. The stone boundary walls are a very strong feature of the town as a whole and help to unify its disparate parts. The highways generally are under-engineered, as befits the rural setting of the town, although the pedestrian crossing and barriers near the shops on Sturt Road and road markings near the school are intrusive. Throughout the town street lighting is low level. Whilst the lack of hard urban engineering defining footways and highways is to be welcomed, the drawback to this is that many of the roads and lanes have only very narrow footways or only the grass verge for pedestrians and in some cases, not even that.

Where sites are elevated or exposed, building heights have been kept low and generally key views within and into the town have been preserved, see figure 11. Views are particularly important within the suburbs. There are many sweeping views out into open countryside, much valued by local residents, for example from Hundley Way out over Banbury Hill and those over the Evenlode Valley. Some key views are marked by benches allowing people to enjoy specific viewing points, see figure 12. Other views are channelled, some down roads terminating in open countryside and others along wooded paths or lanes. A particularly significant view within the town is that from Dancer's Hill looking over to the church and the open countryside beyond. Here the church is a dominant feature, reflecting its historic role in the lives of the town's inhabitants.



Figure 11 Twentieth-century housing at Sandford Rise



Figure 12 Viewing point on Hundley Way

In contrast to the historic centre, there is a feeling of openness and space. The semi-rural character is reinforced by the many enticing lanes leading out into open countryside which is never far away.

Significance

The archaeological potential of this area is similar to that in the historic town centre in that there is known to be settlement in the area dating back to the Roman period and there have been earlier finds in the wider area.

Its historic interest lies in the former quarries source of local building material; evidence of the modest development of the town following the expansion of the glove industry and the arrival of the railway and in the considerable increase in housing in the town in the latter part of the twentieth century. The houses of prominent Quakers provide associative value. Other buildings expressing historical aspects of the town include the toll house on Enstone Road and workers housing. The layout of primary roads, lanes and tracks illustrates the medieval origins of this part of the parish. Plot boundaries pre-dating the enclosure of the open fields can still be discerned in the boundaries of some residential development.

Architectural interest lies in the predominantly vernacular nature of the pre-1900 buildings and also in the high quality and high status Victorian houses of Hazeldene, Wychwood House and Sandford Mount, in their designed settings. The use of brick and Welsh slate in some nineteenth century buildings signalled the arrival of the railway. The Woodfield Drive development by the Oxford Architects Partnership in 1969 merited inclusion in Pevsner's *Oxfordshire* volume, 1974.

Artistic interest is represented by the dry stone walls and inscribed megaliths that provide a gateway to Hughes Close/Sturt Close Home Zone and form a memorial to a child killed crossing The Slade.

Opportunities for enhancement

- Improving pedestrian safety where there are no footways, in an appropriate and sympathetic manner

iii. Open countryside

The built-up area of the town has a clear edge except along the Ditchley and Woodstock Roads and gives way quite sharply to open countryside. This is characterised by a gently rolling upland plateau to the east stepping down quite steeply to the Evenlode valley in the west and cut through by a number of streams. This results in a characterful topography offering dramatic views into and out of the town. North of the town, the valley broadens out, its sides sloping more gently to a wide river floodplain. Small and medium-sized fields, both arable and pasture are typically bounded by hedges and mature trees and interspersed with areas of woodland. Some areas of unimproved grassland survive providing a rich natural habitat. Population is sparse and the town is linked to the surrounding fields, isolated farms and to the early settlement of Walcot by ancient tracks and roads. The important relationship with Wychwood Forest, which originally surrounded the town to the south-east, south and west, is still strong, and can be appreciated from a number of viewpoints within the town, such as the view down Church Street and when approaching the town from Chipping Norton or down Banbury Hill.



Figure 13 View across the Evenlode Valley to Fiveways junction

The Evenlode Valley is perhaps the most important element in the surrounding countryside, because of its stunning landscape and historic significance. It is highlighted as such in the West Oxfordshire Landscape Assessment (1998). There are important views across and along the valley in both directions, see figure 13. Many views from the town take in the designed landscape of Cornbury Park and, to a lesser extent, Lee Place. Within the parish, the valley becomes part of this designed landscape, defined by the belts of pines around Lee Place, Five Ways and along Forest Road. The eighteenth-century bridge over the Evenlode has been attributed to William Talman. To the north lies Walcot, a medieval manor with surviving fishponds and seventeenth century garden earthworks, giving evidence of important early settlement here.

The railway, opened in 1853, runs along the valley bottom mainly in a cutting and is generally screened from views even when a train is passing. The station, designed by IK Brunel and listed grade II, was built where Forest Road crosses over the railway. This road is the main road into Charlbury from the west, crossing the river by an eighteenth-century bridge of medieval origin. It was turnpiked around 1800 when it was also straightened; evidence of the earlier line can be found in the adjacent field to the south. The toll house, converted to a pill box in the Second World War, survives at the bottom of Dyer's Hill. The route is now well-used by commuters for whom a large car park has been constructed. This car park and associated lighting form an intrusive element here as do the modern overbridge and ramps, see figure 14. However, other development which has taken place around the site of the old gas works is fairly well screened.



Figure 14 View along Forest Road towards the station

The principal roads into the town are discreet within the landscape, being bounded usually by walls of local stone or mature hedges and unlit. These do not stand out in views over the countryside. They are all B roads - there are no primary routes through the parish - so although some are fairly densely trafficked at certain times during the day, heavy traffic is rarely an issue.

The valley bottom is predominantly meadowland with some paddocks for horses. It is well used for recreation by local residents and includes the cricket ground with its prominently-sited cricket pavilion.

Above the flood plain the patchwork of fields, irregular in size and shape, indicates early enclosure, which was completed during the nineteenth century, see figure 15. Evidence of open fields can be seen in the ridge and furrow surviving between Banbury Hill and Pound Hill. The field boundaries shown on Pride's map of 1761 can still be seen and remain as a historic record of land holding. Some mature trees within the ancient hedgerows may also date from this time. Many old trees survive lining the historic tracks and roads. These enclosed tree-lined lanes form part of the extensive network of footpaths which cross the parish, mostly radiating out from the town centre. Several of these would have led out to the open fields and been in daily use by local residents. Others led out to the old Salt Way, a track running from Droitwich to Princes Risborough which forms the eastern boundary of the parish. This ancient track will have been a major communication route before the turnpike roads. These lanes and tracks now provide attractive and enticing footpaths out into open countryside.



Figure 15 1 Aerial view showing patchwork of fields (Google Earth)

Buildings are few and generally constructed in local materials, helping them blend into the landscape. There are some isolated farms or former farms, mainly of nineteenth century origin apart from Lees Rest, which can be an important source of information about farm sizes and practices in the past. Some of the modern farm buildings are more intrusive.

Views are an extremely important aspect of the character of the whole parish. Part of the distinctiveness of Charlbury is its location above the Evenlode 'gorge' and the panoramic views west and north-west over the valley, encompassing the landscape of Cornbury Park and Wychwood Forest, that it enjoys. There are stunning views both within the town looking out and from open countryside showing the town in its wider setting. Inclusion within the AONB is well deserved. There are views into the historic town centre with the church dominating; sweeping views of open countryside in all directions; dramatic views across Clarke's Bottom; intimate closed views down tree-lined lanes and many more detailed in the appendix. In some views modern development creates a visually intrusive element, emphasising the need to take seriously the visual impact of any interventions in this outstanding landscape.

The overall character is of a quintessential unspoilt Cotswold landscape. There are very few detracting elements. Some individual buildings stand out, but as they form only a small element in sweeping views, their negative impact is largely mitigated. The level of lighting in the town is low, so light spillage into open countryside is minimal. The exception is around the station which is over-lit compared to the rest of the town and prominent at night in the otherwise dark countryside.

Significance

There is archaeological interest in whole surrounding countryside. Apart from the sections of Grim's Ditch, it provides evidence of settlement from the Roman period, and there could be potential for more archaeology in the countryside around the town. The medieval

settlement at Walcot might reveal more about the early manor and the important seventeenth century house and its gardens.

Historical interest lies in the survival of elements of the medieval landscape here. The field boundaries shown on the 1761 Pride map survive in many places. Some ancient hedgerows survive as well as stone boundary walls.

The network of paths and tracks illustrates important historic communication routes. This includes the links between the town and its former open fields to the north, east and south east. The ancient salt way running along the eastern boundary of the parish illustrates wider historic trade links running through the area.

Although the Town Quarry is twentieth century, the evidence of former quarrying north-east of the town is of considerable historic interest as the source of much of the local building stone.

As there are few buildings in this area of open countryside, architectural interest is limited to the vernacular character of the traditional buildings, expressing the nature and extent of farming in the area. The exception to this is the station, designed by IK Brunel, which has retained its original form and character despite its much altered setting.

The countryside to the north and east of the town has long been a working landscape of open fields and paddocks, while to the south-east arable fields replaced the former hunting forest of Lees Wood in the nineteenth century. To the west, the Evenlode valley forms part of the designed landscape connecting Cornbury and Lee Place. It provides some of Charlbury's most memorable views and its landscape represents the principal artistic contribution to the significance of the countryside surrounding the town.

Opportunities for enhancement

- Improved provision for pedestrians where principal footpaths run alongside roads.
- Keeping the historic footpaths open, passable and rural in character
- Rationalising lighting around the station

5. Summary of significance

Like all settlements with origins as early as the seventh century, and with evidence of earlier Roman occupation, the town and the surrounding countryside will have considerable archaeological potential.

What makes Charlbury distinctive is its compact urban form, apparently largely unchanged for the last 700 years. This comprises an early core settlement around the church, a typical funnel-shaped market (Church Street) and an early routeway along Thames Street, Market Street and Sheep Street, with a built-up street frontage lined with buildings of an urban character. There are some secondary settlements within the parish boundary, notably at Walcote and Hixet Wood. Hixet Wood developed around Lee Place, the only secular building in Charlbury to match the significance of the church, and in the town's topography it forms an important counterpoint to the primary settlement, divided from it by the green lung of Sandford Slade.

Charlbury's historic buildings have a generally unpretentious architectural character, being largely built of random limestone rubble, often faced with self-coloured render. Windows

have timber lintels, and (in the few cases where they have escaped sashing) timber mullions and transoms. Chimney stacks are typically in brick. Ashlar is rare to non-existent before the nineteenth century, and a remarkable number of buildings have curved rather than quoined corners. This is probably due to lack of local dimension stone, although the comparative poverty of the town and the influence of local Quaker families and their lack of pretension may also be contributory factors. Twentieth-century developments have generally been unobtrusive, using a palette of materials and colours sympathetic to the local tradition, while some – notably Woodfield Drive and Sandford Park – are of considerable architectural and townscape distinction and are significant in their own right.

The town's relationship to its setting is critical, and is rightly reflected in its designation as part of the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. It lies at the point where the upland plateau west of Enstone is cut through by the river Evenlode, which turns south through a comparatively narrow defile having flowed through a wide floodplain valley between Shipton and Spelsbury. The primary settlement lies on a low bluff above the river, dominating the valley but sitting well below the high ground to the east. For over a millennium much of the land around the town, principally to the west and south-east, formed part of the royal forest of Wychwood; within the parish Lee Place, Walcot and Lees Rest all probably originated as hunting lodges. As a result, views both of and from the town that place it in its landscape context are of great significance. These include the view of the town from Banbury Hill, where it is seen against its forest backdrop; the view of the church from Dancers Hill; the focussed views down Church Street, Park Street and Sheep Street; and above all the view of the Evenlode valley and the registered landscape of Cornbury Park from the "promenade" along Grammar School Hill. This is the town's finest and most distinctive feature, and of the highest significance.

6. References

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Appendix of Historic Maps



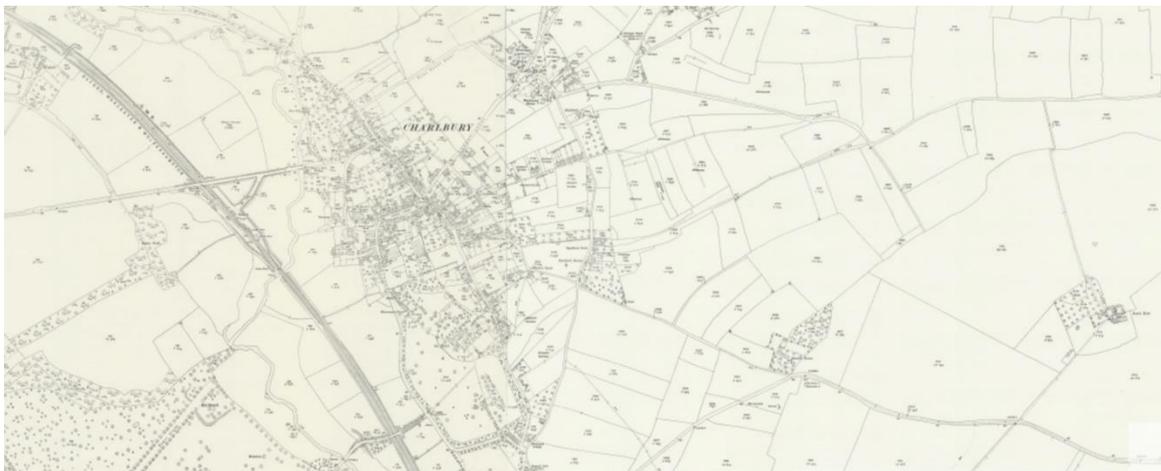
Map 1 Estate Map of 1761 by Thomas Pride for the Duke of Marlborough (Bodleian Library)



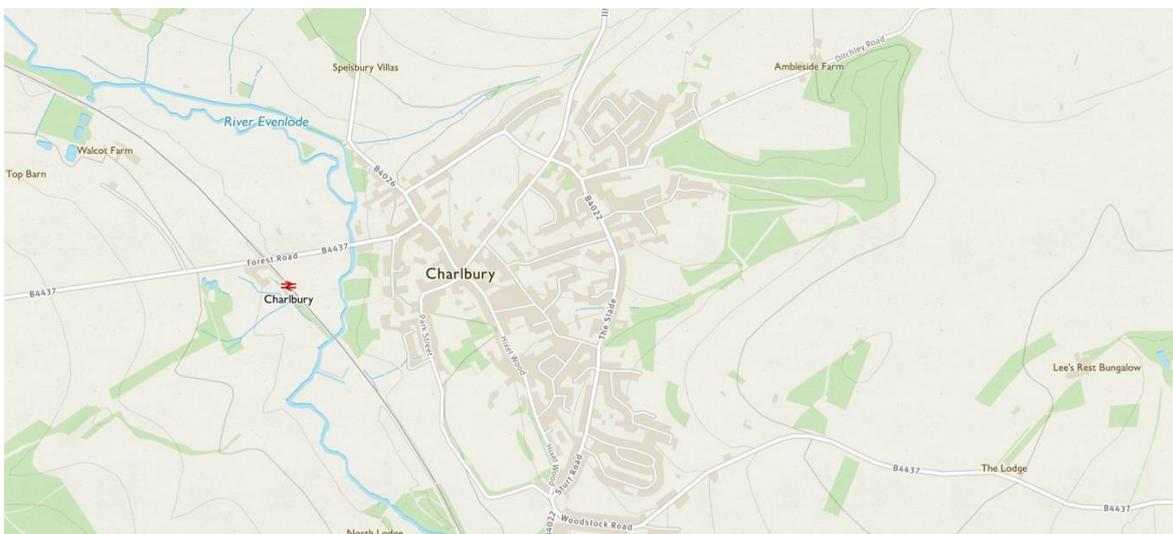
Map 2 Tithe map of 1850 (Oxfordshire History Centre – Tithe 84/M)



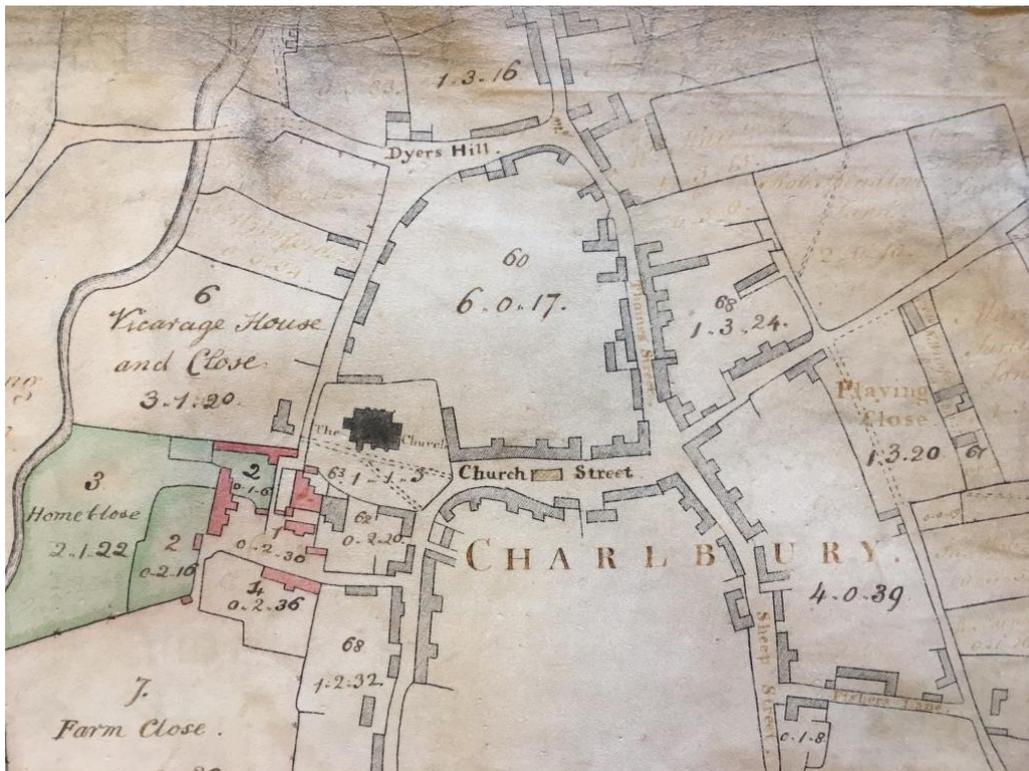
Map 3 Extract of 1850 Tithe Map (Oxfordshire History Centre – Tithe 84/M)



Map 4 1880 Ordnance Survey map (National Library of Scotland online)



Map 5 2018 Ordnance Survey (Ordnance Survey online)



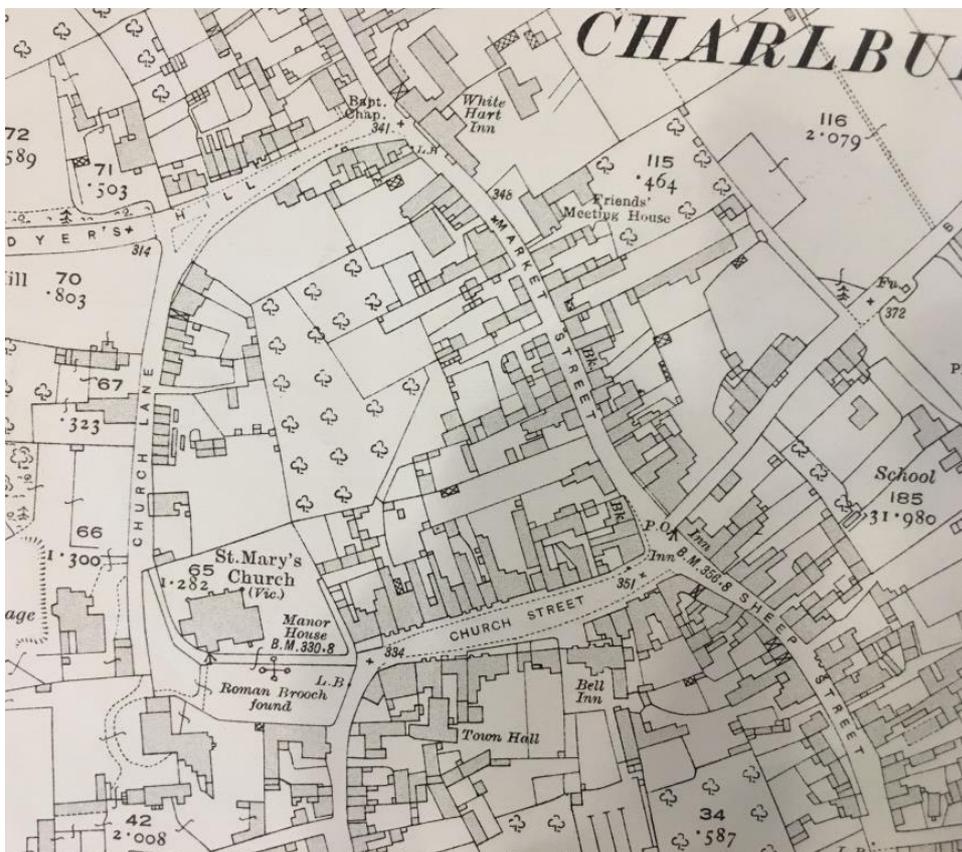
Map 6 Charlbury town centre 1761 Estate Map by Thomas Pride (Bodleian Library)



Map 7 Charlbury town centre 1850 Tithe Map (Oxfordshire History Centre, Tithe 84/M)



Map 8 Charlbury town centre 1880 OS map (Bodleian Library)



Map 9 Charlbury town centre 1922 OS map (Bodleian library)



Map 10 Charlbury town centre 2018 OS map (Ordnance Survey online)