

## **Charlbury Character Assessment Part 2: Area 4, West**

### **Contents:**

West Area General Points

Sheep Street

Fishers Lane

Hixet Wood

Hixet Wood rear of Lee Place to Grammar School Hill

Grammar School Hill and Park Street (including Priory Lane)

St Marys churchyard

Church Street (South Side)

Land from Forest Road to Fawler Road

## **Charlbury Character Assessment: West Group**

Please find enclosed our character assessment sheets of the West area, covering:

- Church and churchyard
- Church Street, South Side
- Sheep Street (including Bayliss Yard)
- Fishers Lane
- Hixet Wood (to Lee Place back entrance)
- Roads and land around Lee Place (from back entrance on Hixet Wood to main entrance on Grammar School Hill, including Wellington Cottages)
- Grammar School Hill (including Shilson Lane)
- Park Street (including Priory Lane)
- Land between Forest Road and Fawler Road

The group discussed scoring of the character areas but felt it was difficult for a number of reasons, therefore we instead decided to provide a summary of what we see as the key character elements in our area.

### **Key character elements of the West area:**

- Outstanding landscape of the Evenlode Valley. “strong landscape structure and attractive pastoral character on valley sides” (1998 West Oxfordshire Landscape Assessment). This attractive character is not entirely accidental, around Lee Place and Cornbury there has been a conscious effort of landscape design.
- Coherent and largely unspoilt character of buildings in the historic centre. Some very beautiful buildings here much cherished by local people.
- Spaciousness of the town within the built-up area. Significant number and extent of green spaces, both public and private.
- Sandford Slade, the “green lane” running through town from East to West (which may be designated as a “green corridor” in the NDP). Covered in our Hixet Wood assessment, but relevant to many areas of the town.

- Views out towards fields, forest and distant trees. These are visible from many points within the town, creating the sense of a rural setting and of the ancient woodland that once surrounded the town.

The following points we also felt were worth highlighting, these are not necessarily specific to our subarea but we thought were important features of Charlbury:

- Notable lack of 18<sup>th</sup> century grand houses (with e.g. carved stonework). This is probably due to a combination of factors, including lack of dimension stone in the local quarry; the more modest Quaker outlook of some of Charlbury's wealthiest occupants at the time; and less wealth in the town compared to e.g. Burford or Woodstock. This has contributed to a more restrained and egalitarian style of architecture in Charlbury. It is a vernacular rather than polite architectural style.
- Significant number of round corners in the vernacular buildings, probably due to lack of dimension stone.
- Narrow front gardens in the historic centre enclosed with wrought iron palings
- Significant number of former shops and some neglect of these buildings (especially on Sheep Street)

Rod Evans, Nicolette Lethbridge, Helene Provstgaard, Jeff West, Claire Wilding

### **West Group**

# DRAFT CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

**Jeff West**

**Sheep Street**

SPACES

Narrow, gently curving town-centre street that slowly opens up to reveal a dramatic view downhill and across the valley to Hixet Wood.



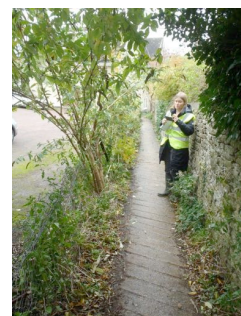
Broken-up road surface disfigured by yellow lines. One-way traffic, but the narrow pavements are frequently blocked by wheelie bins, parked cars and delivery vans, making the pavements impassable for buggies, walking frames and mobility scooters.



As a result, the road is in practice treated as shared space (making it dangerous when cyclists ignore the one-way rule).



The public footpath off Sheep Street that leads up to the Playing Close and Crawborough is partly well-maintained but partly very neglected and overgrown, which matters because it provides an important safe alternative to the narrow but very busy with traffic Browns Lane as a route for carers and children going to and from the primary school in and the pre-school nurseries in the town centre.



Bayliss Yard, originally a farmyard, retains something of its rural character with its surface of local limestone hoggin, and contains a characterful mix of historic buildings and playful modern architecture inspired by the vernacular tradition.



## BUILDINGS

Generally C19 or earlier, stone-built, with some retaining (original) self-coloured render. Typically of 2½ storeys with the roof ridge parallel to the street. Evidence that some (Newington House, the former News and Things and No.11) were raised to three storeys in the C19. The name suggests that a sheep market was originally held here, while surviving shopfronts indicate that in the C19 and for much of the C20 this was still an active town-centre trading street.



Particular contributions are made by the former Charlbury Deli, gable-fronted to the street and possibly medieval in origin, with the rounded corner characteristic of the Charlbury vernacular; and Lindsell House opposite, which (unusually for Charlbury) is built of rough ashlar rather than coursed rubble and has moulded timber lintels, suggesting an early and possibly high-status origin.



From the former News and Things to No 11, the buildings on the east side of the street appear to have been built on curving one- or (more usually) two-pole-wide plots, suggesting that they were built on the strips of an earlier open field.



Nos 2-4 Bayliss Yard make another important contribution, with some of the oldest surviving windows in the town (early C18 cross-mullioned leaded casements) and another of Charlbury's rounded corners, in this case containing a stair turret.



## VIEWS

Perambulation south along Sheep Street gives one of the most attractive sequences of views in the town, with the gentle curve of the street gently unfolding to reveal the road ahead winding three-dimensionally down across the valley to the historic settlement of Hixet Wood and the wooded grounds of Lee Place on the hill opposite.

Unfortunately, although the view is potentially very attractive, in practice its quality is marred by the number of parked cars and the damaged road surfaces.



## GREENERY AND LANDSCAPE

At the northern end, where the street is narrowest, climbing plants make an important contribution.



Beyond Bayliss Yard, where the street widens, the houses on the west side have attractive front gardens with the wrought-iron railings typical of Charlbury.



## LIGHT/DARK

The area is very dark at night, with few street lights, and this gives the view of the road winding down and across the valley to Hixet Wood even greater dramatic intensity.

Discreet background lighting from one of the new buildings helps to prevent “nuisance” in Bayliss Yard. There is only one powerful security light in use on a movement detector, and negligible light pollution (unusually for a town centre location, the milky way is always visible on a clear night).

## SPIRIT OF PLACE

Given that several of the building plots on the east side of Market Street and Sheep Street appear to follow the curved plan typical of ridge-and-furrow ploughlands, it is possible that the road pre-dates the development of Charlbury as a market town, and forms part of an early routeway along the Evenlode valley. Today Thames Street, Market Street, Sheep Street and Hixet Wood form part of the Oxfordshire Way, which is itself part of the E2 European long-distance footpath which runs from Stranraer to the Mediterranean via Antwerp, Luxembourg and Switzerland. (Whether this will survive Brexit as a waymarked route is uncertain; it has already been broken by the withdrawal of the ferry service from Dover to Ostend.)

Despite the inherent quality of Sheep Street, with its spaces and views, its historic buildings and the modern architecture in Bayliss Yard, which makes it potentially one of the most attractive streets in the area, its overall character is seriously marred by the sense of neglect caused by empty shopfronts, the poor quality of the public realm (the broken road surface, weeds growing out of the pavement) and the problems caused by parking and wheelie bins.



# OXFORD CHARACTER ASSESSMENT TOOLKIT (SHORTHAND)

IN ADDITION TO COMMENTS, SCORE EACH CATEGORY FROM - 5 TO + 5. ASSESSOR SHOULD BE FAMILIAR WITH TOOLKIT GUIDANCE NOTES PRIOR TO SURVEY. THIS TECHNIQUE IS IMPROVED IF USED IN CONJUNCTION WITH A STREET PLAN ON WHICH TO ANNOTATE KEY FEATURES

<b>SPACES:</b> GAPS BETWEEN BUILT ELEMENTS – STREETS, GARDENS, ETC.	
Hints: Formal, building plots (size, building position, etc), means of enclosure, gaps, open, narrow, winding, straight, type of use, paving/surface materials, street furniture, usability, impact of traffic.	
<p><b>Area: Fisher's Lane</b></p>  <p>Walking up from the Hixet Wood junction, Fisher's Lane stretches out ahead up a slight hill and then along a longer more level path with closely built cottages lining the lane on both the right and the left; the very pleasing view is of the entire lane to the very end, where Chimney Cottage stands on Poole's Lane (photo below).</p>  <p>The road is a narrow, single lane with a one-way traffic rule, and of a slightly uneven (small bumps and cracks) tarmac surface. The whole lane and the land on either sides slope gently downwards into the valley on the right towards the stream at bottom.</p> <p>There are few gaps on the left side of the road, which has several sets of terraced cottages with only very small gaps in between. On the right, several bigger gaps between the buildings</p>	<p><b>SCORE:</b></p>



are letting the sun into the lane and add a sense of space and air to the area.



Plots seem to vary in size, buildings are mainly residential but of note, two of the buildings are for religious worship – the Catholic church at the beginning of the lane and the Methodist Church towards the end, making this a lively area on Sundays in particular. In addition, the central location of the lane makes this a very important and much used route for pedestrians from the centre towards the East of the town.

Cars go down this lane but only occasionally (roughly one every other minute on this Monday morning).

The closeness of the buildings and the narrowness of the lane give the area a cosy and enclosed feel, which contribute to the sense of peace this area has.

### **BUILDINGS:**

Hints: Contribution of buildings to the space, size, scale, form (terraced, etc), frontage onto street, materials, windows, doors, condition, use, visible alterations.



**SCORE:**



The cottages in Fisher's Lane are all made of Cotswold stone, are two storeys high and have high-pitched roofs with stone or slate tiles and two stone or brick chimneys. There are several rows of terraced cottages and a few detached.

The buildings on the left side are set further back at the beginning of the lane (as can be seen from the picture and google map above) with pretty front gardens but come gradually closer to the road as the lane progresses until at the end the cottages are set straight onto the road. On the left, cottages are set behind old stone walls, roughly waist height, or wrought iron gates and fences. The roofs are of different heights even when terraced, adding to the irregular but charming impression of the area.

On the right side of the lane, there is a mix of old and new cottages. The new cottages have been built largely in keeping with the area, e.g. the first set of three terraced cottages (built in the 1980s or 90s) using Cotswold stone and wooden lintels. The old Candle factory on the right is a very old and historical building along with the three terraced cottages opposite, down the little lane on the right. The cottages were originally used as an abattoir but later used for candle making along with the Candle Factory. The end gable of the row of cottages, which faces Fisher's Lane, bear evidence of an old large window which has been filled in at some point (perhaps when the building was converted from business to residential use).



The jumbled and irregular beauty and history of the buildings in Fisher's lane contribute significantly to the character of the area. They are buildings which have been looked after and maintained by their residents over the years and are much loved by the whole population of Charbury.

Due to the two chapels in Fisher's Lane, the name of the lane was at one point changed to Chapel Lane, but was changed back to Fisher's Lane again later on.



The Methodist Church.



The Catholic Church at the beginning of Fisher's Lane.

**VIEWS:**

Hints: Within the space (long, short, intimate, glimpsed, channelled, wide), focal points, streetscape (how buildings and streets work together), roofscape, views out of the space (long/short distance, high level).

**SCORE:**



On the right, several gaps between the buildings offer views of the valley behind the buildings and of the grassy bank on the other side. There is much greenery to be seen in these gaps, trees, shrubs and grass.

The lane itself has a few focal points. One is the Old Candle Cottage, which juts out from the other buildings set further back on the right, with its characteristic row of holes in the back wall which seems to be the ends of the floor beams showing in a horizontal line, and some unusual tile cladding making it different from the other cottages.



Another is the electric/telephone pole on the left of the road which connects many of the cottages with a web of cables; this appears quite dominating when you notice it, but has its own charm.

### GREENERY & LANDSCAPE FEATURES:

Hints: Contribution of trees and plants (colours, shade), hard/urban, private or public, water, changing levels

A green verge sits beneath several of the stone walls and buildings in the lane, including wild flowers growing in the walls themselves. The residential gardens are small but add greenery with Rosemary bushes, roses, lavender, fuchsia etc. Overall the greenery looks natural and not overly neat or well kempt, adding to the rustic and informal feel of the space.

**SCORE:**



The larger spaces between buildings on the right side of the road give views to the valley behind the buildings, with much visible greenery, bushes, plants and trees and the green field on the other side of the valley, which all adds to the tranquillity of the atmosphere in Fisher's Lane. In particular the undeveloped field at the opposite of Sandford Slade valley provides a green lung within the town, creating a pastoral setting to Fishers Lane.

**LIGHT/DARK: SHADING, TIME OF DAY/NIGHT**

The closely built area means roughly half the lane sits in shade for much if not all of the day, however, the open gaps to the right mean that sun is let in plenty in areas, which creates a strong and pleasant contrast between light and dark.



**SCORE:**

**NOISE & SMELL: MAN MADE OR NATURAL**

Despite the occasional car, this is a very quiet and peaceful lane. Sounds heard were birds (which were also very active and visible), and an occasional plane flying over. In fact the quietness and peaceful atmosphere in this lane could be said to be the most significant and special characteristic of this area.

**SCORE:**

**SPIRIT OF PLACE:**

**Overall the atmosphere in Fisher's Lane is quiet and peaceful. The beauty and history of the buildings gives a feeling of history being very 'present' in the now, creating an almost meditative atmosphere.**

**It is much used by pedestrians - residents, church goers and other Charlbury**

**TOTAL:**

<b>citizens alike – and is a respected and loved space by all.</b>	
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## Character Assessment: Hixet Wood: from Sheep Street up to back entrance to Lee Place

Claire Wilding

### Narrative Assessment

This assessment begins at the point that Sheep Street becomes Hixet Wood, dipping down into the valley of Sandford Slade and across the stream, and then follows Hixet Wood up hill in a southerly direction up to the back entrance of Lee Place.

Sandford Slade is an important feature of the town in landscape, ecological and historical terms. Charlbury is thought to have developed around two historical centres, the first being the church and surrounding area and the second being Lee Place and its associated buildings. Sandford Slade would have separated these two settlements, and although they have now merged together, this valley still provides a natural demarcation. As you leave Sheep Street walking towards Hixet Wood, there is a sense that you are leaving the historic centre of the town.

Today, the valley section of Hixet Wood has an open feel compared to the immediately surrounding streets. There is a mixture of housing, some of it modern (presumably infilling of gardens/land). Here the houses are more set back from the street with front gardens/drives, but moving up hill the character quickly changes with houses directly bordering the road with little or no frontage, and no pavement.

Travelling up hill from the stream, the houses are almost all period properties, although there is a mixture of styles and orientations. Some are small terraces facing the road; others are small terraces perpendicular to the road with gardens stretching along the road, providing a sense of greenery and space; and others are individual cottages. This mixture of housing reflects the history of this character area. The earliest properties (shown on the 1761 map on what was "Hicks Wood") would have been outside the town centre. It was only in the nineteenth century that the town grew to encompass Hixet Wood, with many of the existing houses added at that time, including small terraces of workers' cottages such as Lee Place Cottages and the terrace including The Malt House.

The overall character is of small, closely-built, period properties that are non-uniform and which have grown up over a long period of time to create a higgledy-piggledy/unplanned effect. Green space and gardens make an important contribution to the character of this area, giving a sense of rural cottages – in contrast to the more uniform worker's cottages of Park Street.

From elsewhere in the town, the view of Hixet Wood rising up and winding with its characterful buildings is an important part of the character of the town.

## SPACES

In the valley, there is a more open and spacious feel to this road. Worth noting slabs of Cotswold stone paving outside Melody Cottage.



Travelling south, starts to become narrower and more enclosed as the road travels steeply up hill.

The main open space here is immediately south of Lee Place Cottages, the garden(s) to which run alongside the road at a level higher than the road – a stone retaining wall separating the gardens from the road (see photo). Behind these gardens is the field behind Lee Place Cottages (a potential candidate Local Green Space), this cannot be clearly seen from the road but trees growing on this land can be seen and the absence of development in this stretch of Hixet Wood creates a feeling of space in an otherwise enclosed part of the road.



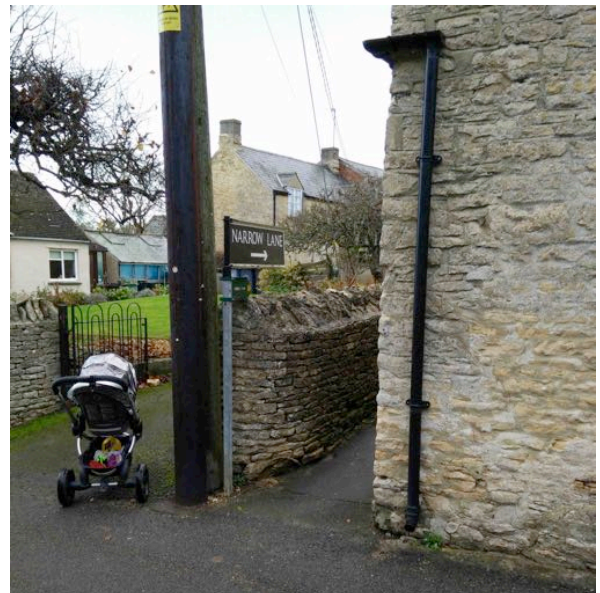


Further up the hill, a much more enclosed feel. Terraced housing and walls with little or no frontage and no pavement. The housing is not uniform and there are many gaps, with some larger spaces created by gardens running alongside the road.



The housing is quite mixed, most houses face directly on to the road with little or no frontage, but there are also a few small terraces of cottages that run perpendicular to the road (e.g. Lee Place Cottages). Some of the older properties would seem from their age and location (and name in the case of Lee Place Cottages) to have been built for workers on the Lee Place Estate.

Narrow Lane (see photo) is a characterful feature, this is a narrow footpath giving access to cottages that previously would have had no other access.



## BUILDINGS

A comparison with the 1761 Thomas Pride map of Charlbury shows that some of the properties were already present at that time (or if not they have been rebuilt in a similar location and to a similar shape), e.g. Ivy Cottage and Hillside Cottage. Lee Place Cottages and The Malt House were probably added in the nineteenth century as the town expanded.

There is no particular “dominant” building, with all the houses adding to the slightly higgledy piggledy sense of this road in their own way. Some buildings worth noting are:

Melody Cottage: imposing building of fine Cotswold stone blocks at the north end of the road.

Lee Place Cottages: very characterful terrace of Cotswold stone workers cottages presumably for workers on the estate, running perpendicular to the road. Windows have unfortunately been replaced with UPVC.

Ivy Cottage (photo): very charming, narrow cottage. Position and type suggests this could also have been part of Lee Place Estate, although it could also be linked to Ivy House (the former Manor House next to the church). Many typical features – Cotswold stone, wood lintels, red brick chimney. Neighbouring buildings are of a similar style (Hillside Cottage).

The Malt House: Name suggests this could have once been a brewery (and one is recorded on Hixet Wood). Example of self-coloured render (see photo – render has been removed from final cottage in terrace)

Crantock: pebble dashed building towards top of Hixet Wood on North side, somewhat at odds with other buildings.

At the Southern end, the back wall of Lee Place and its stable buildings create an imposing feature. This is historically relevant as it reminds us that this part of the settlement grew up around Lee Place.



## VIEWS

Looking back from Hixet Wood towards the town gives interesting views. Nice roovescape looking on to Fishers Lane, giving impression of characterful cottages.

At the top of Hixet Wood looking South, the distinctive bell tower on Lee Place stables can be glimpsed (photo).

The modern garage behind Hixet Wood is well concealed and not visible from most of the road.

When viewed from Sheep Street or elsewhere, the view of Hixet Wood winding up hill with cottages on each side creates an important view which is typical of Charlbury.



## GREENERY AND LANDSCAPE

The valley, gardens and green space make an important contribution to the feel of this area, Main green features are:

The stream and surrounding green land at the north end of Hixet Wood (see photo).



Gardens behind Lee Place Cottages and the field behind, create a feeling of space and greenery in an otherwise enclosed road (see photo).

Gardens here and there (front and back) break up the buildings.



Prickly evergreen plant growing up outside of a number of houses (like Pyracantha?). Provides some green in stretches that otherwise would have none due to no front gardens.



Scots Pines and other trees, presumably all within grounds of Lee Place, are visible behind the houses looking South West – see photo below.



#### LIGHT/DARK

This area was visited during the morning on an overcast day.

#### NOISE AND SMELL

Occasional passing vehicles. No particular smells noted.

#### SPIRIT OF PLACE

**A charming, characterful road with a mix of housing, but the dominant type is old workers cottage in typical Cotswold style. An unplanned feel, an abundance of interesting quirks and features.**

## From Hixet Wood (rear of Lee Place) to Grammar School Hill

### Rod Evans

Moving south from the shadow of the slightly forbidding blank walls of outbuildings to Lee Place, the pattern of the buildings to the east continues, with traditional houses of mostly modest size set close to the road frontage. Opposite however, views of the roofs of the Lee Place complex become possible, including the stable clock tower. There is then a wide belt of trees behind the traditional stone wall along the boundary to the grounds around Park Cottage which runs almost to the end of the road.



The older buildings on the western side of the road give way to Woodfield Drive, a modern brick built housing development, obviously different in style but of a size, scale and position that reflects the more traditional housing on Hixet Wood. A retaining wall on the turning into Rochester Row fits in well, imitating similar walls elsewhere in the town, marred by an unsightly row of garages just beyond the junction with Hixet Wood.





Continuing southwards, there is another short cul de sac of more modern houses, followed by a number of bungalows and/or smaller houses set back from the road and often screened from it by hedges and/or gates. Views become more rural on the approach from Hixet Wood to the open and at times busy Five Ways junction, but with post WW2 housing on Woodstock Road and the well screened light industrial site on the corner with Fawler Road (formerly the site of a glove factory). The overriding character of the immediate area however is one of ‘edge of rural settlement’ with expansive views across allotments to parkland and open countryside to the west.



This ‘edge of settlement’ character is reinforced by the setting of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century Fiveways House, which faces the junction, the terrace known as Wellington Cottages, also early nineteenth century, with the allotments opposite and the park-like grounds around Park Cottage, a single detached house to the north. Wellington Cottages probably have origins as estate workers’ dwellings. Their narrow front gardens with iron palings reflect a pattern seen elsewhere in the town (eg Park Street) but unusually they are brick fronted, with only the gable ends built or at least faced in stone. Grammar School Hill here turns first west, with tall trees either side creating an avenue effect, then north, with long distance views opening up in both directions along the Evenlode Valley.



The open land between the river and the road is shown historically as meadows, divided and numbered on the 1850 and later Tithe Maps. This pattern remains discernible today, with the meadows now as open grassland and in use for the keeping of horses and some livestock. They form part of the countryside along the Evenlode Valley and make an important contribution to the open setting of both Cornbury Park and Lee Place and to the town. Though now in separate ownership, and physically separated from Cornbury Park by the railway line, it is likely that they were intended to be read as part of the lands over which the owner of Cornbury had dominion.



The road itself is narrow in places, as is the single pavement on the Lee Place side. The metalled surface (at time of writing) is in poor condition. Such built form as there is (other than Lee Place and Park Cottage!) consists of the 2 small

Lodge buildings at the entrance to Lee Place, now more than matched at least in size by the later buildings at the principal entrance to Cornbury on the opposite side of the valley. The boundary to Lee Place is marked by a traditional stone wall, topped by hedges and/or trees. Opposite the fields are mostly bounded by a low stone wall and/or open fencing with a now disused well close to the entrance to Cornbury.

Although the railway line runs along the valley, it is partly in a cutting so is often barely visible and creates only occasional disturbance to what otherwise is a tranquil rural setting, if apart from the landform itself – and sometimes even that - one entirely designed and created by humans. The fact that the line forms the boundary to the Conservation Area clearly reflects the importance of the open setting of the town to its overall character.



# DRAFT CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

## JEFF WEST

### Park Street (including Priory Lane)

#### SPACES

Gently winding lane of varying width that slopes downhill from the (probable) primary settlement around the church. Urban character (buildings directly front the street or with a very narrow fenced area). Subsidiary to the main market streets (mainly two or two-and-a-half storey terraced cottages; façade of former factory gives it a modest industrial feel; little or no evidence of any former shops). In practice, a single lane road informally restricted by parking (which has a useful traffic calming effect); black tar surface on both road and pavements; granite kerb.



Priory Lane shares much in common with the north end of Park Street, and despite being in the centre of the town still retains a rural, agricultural character. It too benefits from having modest front gardens enclosed by iron palings.

#### BUILDINGS

C19 or earlier. Almost entirely built of local stone; mainly stone slate roofs. Windows either late C19 or later sashes or C20 wooden casements. Hardly any uPVC. Important contributions are made by Corner Cottage (which dominates the view northwards towards the churchyard, with its attractive old windows, a hipped stone-slate roof and – an important characteristic of the Charlbury vernacular – its curved corner) and Sessions Cottage (possibly part of a larger late C17 or early C18 house).



Narrow pavements - outside Corner Cottage is perhaps the narrowest strip of pavement in Charlbury (see photo).

Iron railings and small but very attractive front gardens make a major contribution (see below).



## VIEWS

Attractive channelled views southwards, away from the town centre, with glimpses of open countryside; and northwards, towards the churchyard, with the rising ground giving a promise of the town centre beyond.



## GREENERY AND LANDSCAPE

Small front gardens and climbing plants on house frontages make a significant contribution.



## Grammar School Hill (including Shilson Lane)

### SPACES

To the north of the Old Grammar School, the valley to the east is occupied with a half-a-dozen modern (mid to late C20) detached houses, some of them very large but set well back from the road. The former Marlborough Arms (now St Diama's House – first photo) probably contains earlier work, but was refronted in a rather utilitarian style in the late C19 or early C20; its general form has been replicated in the late C20 detached house to the south.



Just south is the turning into Shilson Lane, an access road on the former site of Wesley Barrell (furniture makers) which was converted to housing in recent years. For about 90% of its right hand side, Shilson Lane is bounded by the sides and backs of assorted modern buildings and has no access to them.



Further south, Grammar School Hill bends to the west to skirt the grounds of Lee Place (an early example of such a diversion, probably dating from the late C17 or early C18). This has created an attractive open green in front of the Old Grammar School, backed by the tall stone wall of Lee Place (second and third photos).



South of Shilson Lane the road is open to the west, and the views over the Evenlode valley, Cornbury Park and Wychwood Forest (see below) and its role as part of a waymarked circular walk give it the character of a promenade along the edge of the town.



Boundaries are marked by typical Cotswold stone walls and wooden fences.

The unfortunate placing of stabling in such a prominent position was probably a perverse consequence of the permitted development rights for agricultural buildings requiring them to be built at a distance from public roads.



### BUILDINGS

The modern houses in Shilson Lane and Clarendon Court are successfully contained within the slope of the valley and the envelope of the town and are almost invisible from outside.



The buildings within the parish boundary that make the most significant contribution to the character of the area are probably the two C18 lodges to Lee Place, the nearby rustic well shelter and the late C17 bridge to Cornbury, believed to be by William Talman.



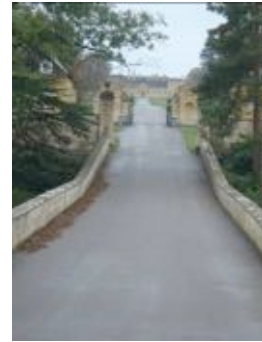
## VIEWS

As I have suggested above, the views from Grammar School Hill over the Evenlode Valley, Cornbury Park and Wychwood Forest are of great significance, and must rank as some of the most important in the Cotswolds AONB. Charlbury is sited at the point where the Evenlode passes from the wide valley upstream to the west, and turns south through the narrow Charlbury gorge or defile. The church (presumably at the centre of the primary settlement) is on a prominent bluff overlooking the river, facing an answering defensive earthwork on the rising ground on the other side of the river within Cornbury Park. This topography is probably significant historically as well as in landscape terms (as the reason why Charlbury is where it is), and Grammar School Hill is one of the few places from which this can be appreciated.



The valley between Lee Place and Cornbury is also

significant as part of a wider designed landscape. The main avenue within Cornbury (which extends both east and west of the house) is aligned on Lee Place, and both Cornbury house and Lee Place are aligned with it so that they directly face one another. Both houses probably have their origin as hunting lodges within the royal forest of Wychwood; the avenue may have its origin in a deer chase that could be viewed from the lodges. Although it is difficult to establish which came first, and whether the avenue was aligned to connect the lodges, or the lodges were built to view the avenue, it is clear that their relationship is significant. The entrance drives to both houses were presumably diverted to the south in the C18 so that the new lodges to Lee Place would not interrupt this view. (The yew topiary in Lee Place has now grown up in the line of this view, as has some of the tree planting near the bridge, but it may still be visible from a higher vantage point.)



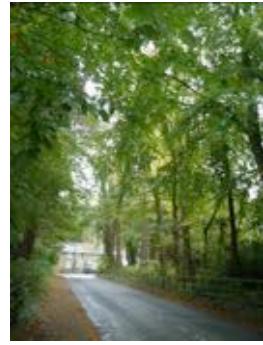
The coming of the railway in the 1850s has not affected these views, since at the critical points it is hidden in a cutting. The modern station lighting and the associated car park lighting have however meant the loss of what had been a memorable view of the summer sunset.

Probably in the late C19 scotch pines have been planted along Grammar School hill, probably to close the view from Cornbury Park and appropriate both sides of the valley into the Cornbury landscape. This can now be appreciated from outside the parish by anyone using the waymarked circular walk and concessionary cycle track.

## GREENERY AND LANDSCAPE

The southern bank of the stream is enclosed to the east by attractive tree planting to the north of Lee Place. The characterful yew topiary in front of Lee Place is referred to above, and has now been emulated by new planting in front of Lee Cottage. The avenue of scotch pines leading from Wellington Cottages to Grammar School Hill forms a very characterful introduction to the Evenlode valley and the promenade along the urban edge that forms such an important part of the town's character.





# OXFORD CHARACTER ASSESSMENT TOOLKIT (SHORTHAND)

IN ADDITION TO COMMENTS, SCORE EACH CATEGORY FROM - 5 TO + 5. ASSESSOR SHOULD BE FAMILIAR WITH TOOLKIT GUIDANCE NOTES PRIOR TO SURVEY. THIS TECHNIQUE IS IMPROVED IF USED IN CONJUNCTION WITH A STREET PLAN ON WHICH TO ANNOTATE KEY FEATURES

**SPACES:** GAPS BETWEEN BUILT ELEMENTS – STREETS, GARDENS, ETC.

Hints: Formal, building plots (size, building position, etc), means of enclosure, gaps, open, narrow, winding, straight, type of use, paving/surface materials, street furniture, usability, impact of traffic.

<p><b>Area: St Mary’s Churchyard</b></p> <p>St Mary’s Church is surrounded by a spacious churchyard, now closed to all burials except ashes, and has a wide path going through it joining Church Street with Church Lane. The path is gated at both ends and lit by a very ugly modern light. Two sides of the churchyard have rows of limes and the other two sides are formed by the sides of houses and the main entrance to Ivy House (the former manor farm).</p>	<p><b>SCORE:</b></p>
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**BUILDINGS:**

Hints: Contribution of buildings to the space, size, scale, form (terraced, etc), frontage onto street, materials, windows, doors, condition, use, visible alterations.

<p>St Mary’s church is the main, and by far the oldest, church in Charlbury and is situated at the bottom of Church Street where the latter turns left into Park Street. The churchyard has many interesting tombstones.</p> <p>Significant buildings enclosing the churchyard on the south-west include the Priory, one of Charlbury’s most important historic buildings, but one that is almost entirely hidden from view except from its own grounds, and Queen Anne House, formerly the vicarage, which includes a faux-Anglo-Saxon tower built (no doubt on the understanding that it was on an Anglo-Saxon site) by Thomas Silver, the Rawlinson Professor of Anglo-Saxon at Oxford, when he was Vicar of Charlbury from 1828-53 (photo below).</p>	
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<b>VIEWS:</b>	
Hints: Within the space (long, short, intimate, glimpsed, channelled, wide), focal points, streetscape (how buildings and streets work together), roofscape, views out of the space (long/short distance, high level).	
	<b>SCORE:</b>
<b>GREENERY &amp; LANDSCAPE FEATURES:</b>	
Hints: Contribution of trees and plants (colours, shade), hard/urban, private or public, water, changing levels	
Fine large trees, yew and conifer, as well as other smaller trees. There is a particularly magnificent tree (Thuja) this is the dominant feature of the churchyard.	<b>SCORE:</b>
<b>LIGHT/DARK: SHADING, TIME OF DAY/NIGHT</b>	
Interesting variation of dark and light cause by trees and shadows of surrounding buildings.	<b>SCORE:</b>
<b>NOISE &amp; SMELL: MAN MADE OR NATURAL</b>	
	<b>SCORE:</b>
<b>SPIRIT OF PLACE:</b>	<b>TOTAL:</b>



# DRAFT CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

Nicolette Lethbridge/Jeff West

## Church Street (South Side)

Church Street is the most important road in Charlbury, where the covered market stood for centuries until it was demolished.



## SPACES

A wide, funnel-shaped, medieval market place that runs from the central crossroads down to St Mary's Church and the churchyard. The width and grandeur of this street is in contrast to the surrounding streets (Sheep St, Market St etc) which would have been the entry points to the market.



It is wide and bordered by wide pavements surfaced in Victorian brick and asphalt covered with golden grit to match the Cotswold stone buildings down each side.

It rises from the primary (7th-century?) nucleus around the church to meet a possible early routeway along the Evenlode Valley forming what is now Market Street and Sheep Street.

At the upper, eastern, end there is what appears to be a block of early market infill – properties without rear plots, which probably began as the site of temporary market stalls.

## BUILDINGS

Generally C19 or earlier, stone-built, and (like much of the centre of the town) generally of 2½ storeys, with the roof ridge parallel to the street. The main exception is the three-storey Gothic House, with its 19th-century gable-fronted cross wing. Buildings mainly in terrace form though there are some fine detached ones. In the past most of them were shops.



Other significant buildings on the south side of the street include the Cottage, whose low eaves height and timber-mullioned first-floor casements suggest an early date, and

the Bell Inn.

Inns to accommodate visitors are a necessary characteristic of markets, and the Bell is believed to be much older in origin than its 1700 date stone suggests. That it continues to perform its historic function as a place of hospitality is an important part of its significance, and the contribution it makes to the character of Church Street as a whole. The Bell was named after the bell that summoned the fire brigade.

The Royal Oak with its bow-fronted windows used to be the temperance tavern.

Several of the houses have front gardens, many fenced in with iron railings. The exception to this is The Old Drapery at the bottom of the hill which is a fine house with large windows but its façade is cream stucco.



## VIEWS

The view westwards is dominated by the trees in the churchyard, and there are tantalising glimpses of the forest beyond, on the rising ground to the west of the Evenlode. These glimpses place the town firmly in its landscape context.



## GREENERY AND LANDSCAPE

Although the dominant green element in Church Street is undoubtedly the churchyard, there are a number of well-designed and maintained gardens, those on the south side enjoying the cast-iron railings characteristic of the centre of Charlbury (see also Sheep Street and Park Street).



Large areas of gardens behind the Bell Hotel and “Long Meadow” behind the Stone House and Gothic House run down to and protect part of the “green road” formed by a stream and its damp sides which runs east to west through the built up part of Charlbury and is known as Sandford Slade. With its scrubby sides and many trees forms a road for wildlife, joining the countryside east and west of the town. Already the nightingales willows have been destroyed. This is a special part of Charlbury.



## LIGHT/DARK

Church Street is one of the few streets in Charlbury to be lit at night by reproduction Victorian lanterns (on anachronistically tall posts).

## SPIRIT OF PLACE

Church Street is, despite its name, the topographical centre of the town and must originally have been its principal market place. The survival of no fewer than two inns and a popular public house, together with the presence of a nursery school, the town's main bus stop and the Corner House, means that it is still one of the town's most important community centres. This comes into its own at the annual Street Fair in September, when it is closed to traffic and is full of stalls, visitors, children, musicians and morris dancers (see photo, with kind permission of David Murphy).

It is remarkable that despite being demolished well over 100 years ago, Charlbury's most iconic building remains the market hall that stood at the top of Church Street, and which still serves as the logo of the Town Council and the badge of the Primary School.



## **DRAFT CHARACTER ASSESSMENT**

**Jeff West/Rod Evans/Nicolette Lethbridge**

### **Land extending from Forest Road to Fawler Road**

[See also description of valley and why Charlbury is where it is from Grammar School Hill sheet]

Forest Road and Fawler Road provide 2 of the principal approaches to the town, one from the west the other from the south. As traffic routes, they meet at the Five Ways junction, one continuing eastwards to Woodstock, the other northwards towards Enstone. What unites them is the beautiful Evenlode Valley, which is extremely significant to the character of this area due both to its stunning landscape and historic significance.

Approaching the town from the west, Forest Road has wide, hedge lined verges – and fast moving traffic making it an uncomfortable prospect at best for pedestrians. Open fields lie on both sides, with varied woodland belts visible to the south. A stretch of such woodland, including a row or plantation of mature poplars, stretches along the western edge of the field known as Rushy Bank. The latter is bordered on its western side by a small lane serving the well screened sewage works next to the railway line.

On the other side of that lane is a small range of undistinguished mostly modern buildings. This is also the site of the former town gasworks and no doubt other activities associated with the railway.

The station is described below.

Both the road and the railway line are here embanked, so enclosing the flood plain field or paddock between the station and the river (known locally as the 'horse field' for reasons that happily make themselves known to anyone walking past!).

Forest Road crosses the Evenlode and the watermeadows over two bridges to enter the built up part of the town at Dyers Hill.

Beyond the railway bridge over the river to the south lie the sewage farm and open fields leading up to Cornbury Park on one side of the river, with gardens and/or fields on the other side before the beginnings of the built up area a little further up the valley side.

Various comments have been made about the quality of this part of the valley in documents such as the 1998 West Oxfordshire Landscape Assessment and in later assessments by WODC. The WOLA described the Evenlode valley as forming 'a strong landscape edge to Charlbury' and referred to the 'attractive valley side and valley floor with strong landscape structure' with 'very few detracting influences' and 'important views across and along the valley in both directions'. It found there was a 'need to maintain strong landscape structure and attractive pastoral character on valley sides and to maintain quality of the approach on the B4437 (Forest Road)

from the west’.

The treatment of the valley sides changes as it passes between Cornbury Park and Lee Place but the essential landscape characteristics remain and become more obvious again to the south along Fawler Road. As with Forest Road, the land drops away more sharply towards the river but the slopes are more undulating. Once south of the Five Ways junction, the land is mostly hedge lined open fields, with Baywell Cottage the only dwelling on the western side of the road within the parish. There is also a reasonably well-screened electricity substation, with the rows of solar panels at South Hill visible in some views to the south. The road in places has little in the way of verges, making it an even more hazardous prospect for pedestrians than Forest Road.

The parish boundary follows the river for a good distance on this side of the town, where its banks are often lined with trees and other vegetation. Between the road and railway is an earthwork known as Grim’s Ditch, said to date from the time of the Roman conquest but now hard to discern from any public viewpoint. Overall the predominant character of this area is of a traditional pastoral – and rolling – landscape on the valley sides.

## SPACES

The land within the parish boundary to the south of Forest Road falls into five distinct areas: the floodplain between the river and the station; the station, station car park and station approach; the site of the former gas works; Rushy Bank; and the farmland beyond Rushy Bank.

The floodplain between the Evenlode and the railway is now, like much of the valley close to the town, given over to equestrianism. It comes at the point where the Evenlode valley narrows significantly, and the church stands prominently on a brow of land overlooking the river, occupying what must have been an important defensive position. This can be appreciated from both Forest Road and the station approach. The old line of the road, which pre-dates the construction of the toll road on its causeway in the early C19, can be seen crossing the floodplain obliquely to the south.



The station, station car park and station approach have at their centre the listed station building designed by I K Brunel in the 1850s and the separately listed station nameboards. The station itself is well kept, but the surrounding area suffers from being over-engineered but under-maintained.



The former gas works site has been given over to a number of uses, but has been sympathetically developed and a number of modern buildings have been unobtrusively added.



The irregular ground surface of Rushy Bank, like its name, betrays its significance as the site of a spring line and a place of some geological instability.



The farmland to the west of Rushy Bank is bordered on the south by Cornbury Park and to the west, along the parish boundary, by the edge of Wychwood Forest.



## BUILDINGS

Unquestionably the most important building in this quarter of the parish (well outside the town limits) is Brunel's station, now repainted in the colours of the Oxford, Worcester and Wolverhampton Railway.



The bridge is first recorded in 1419, although no medieval fabric is now discernible.

Views of the station itself, and the listed station building, suffer from the modern utilitarian not to say brutalist ramp and footbridge, but are mitigated to some extent by the obvious care given to garden planting on both platforms. Despite also the extensive parking – and unnecessarily tall lighting – the station manages to retain some of its character as a Victorian country station, like many set outside the town itself. At the time of writing proposals are under discussion for a major increase in the amount of parking at the station but no application has yet been made for planning permission.

On the site of the old gas works is a small range of undistinguished mostly modern buildings in a variety of commercial uses including a storage warehouse and a childrens' nursery. One of them however is the former station master's house though that is hard to discern from its present appearance.

The cricket pavilion is on the opposite side to the station [NB not within our area but worth mentioning]. The pavilion has been rebuilt following flowing of the original cricket pavilion. The new pavilion is on slightly higher ground and clad in wood panelling and kept as low as possible this was built to "disappear" into the scenery.

## VIEWS

There are two important views, one across the floodplain, with the church to the east, the river in its narrow defile, and wood pasture of Cornbury to the south and west.



The other, more westerly view, is dominated by the line of trees that forms the western boundary of Rushy Bank, rising above the station and the site of the gas works and introducing the forest landscape that lies to the west.



Entering town from Forest Road, the town can be seen to make its way up the valley side, the buildings being softened by mature landscaped gardens. Visible straight ahead is the former toll house hard by the river bridge, with houses on Church Lane set above it. Unfortunately this view into the town is detracted from by a combination of road signage, tall street lamps at the entrance to the station and one building on the old gas works site placed very close to the road edge.

## GREENERY AND LANDSCAPE

The extremely significant and valued landscape of the Evenlode Valley, and its importance for the wider area, is described in the narrative section above.

An important – and surely not accidental – feature of this part of the parish is the avenue of scots pines, now sadly



depleted, along Forest Road. This cannot pre-date the realignment of the toll road in the early C19, and so cannot have been planted (as a local tradition suggests) to commemorate the Jacobite rebellion in 1745. It echoes the scots pines planted to the south of Lee Place, and suggests a coherent C19 plan to frame the valley between the town and Cornbury.



The station approach has suffered both from unmanaged scrub being allowed to grow up, and from some (arguably inappropriate) planting.



## LIGHT/DARK

The station is inevitably a major source of light pollution. The need for security lighting at and around the station is understood – but the height of many of the lights makes them a serious cause of light pollution in a setting that otherwise would be largely light free at night. Realistically, they are not likely to be changed for that reason alone but it remains a legitimate aspiration to hope that some less obtrusive form of lighting can be found if and when the present posts are replaced.

## SPIRIT OF PLACE

The topography of Charlbury produces some interesting effects, with the church, when seen from the river, appearing to dominate it from the highest local vantage point; but when seen from Sandford Mount or the high ground to the east, seeming to lie at the very lowest point of the valley. In other words, the river and the high ground to the east are not intervisible, while the church (and the primary settlement of which it presumably forms part) commands a view of both.

This has had the happy consequence of allowing the railway, the station and the associated gas works to be remarkably unobtrusive in the landscape, seriously visible only when descending Dyers Hill. As a result, the town has managed to retain a sharp urban edge along the river cliff, an important part of its character which neither the extension of the cricket club nor the construction of the station car park, both of which are in the valley bottom, have seriously impaired.