



WEST OXFORDSHIRE  
DISTRICT COUNCIL

## Conservation Area Character Appraisal

# Chastleton

### What are Conservation Areas?

Conservation Areas are places of special architectural or historic interest, which have a particular character or appearance worthy of preservation or enhancement. Groups of buildings, walls, trees and hedges, open spaces, views, and the historic settlement patterns all combine to create an individual sense of place. It is this character, rather than individual buildings, that Conservation Area status seeks to protect. The first Conservation Areas in the District were identified in the late 1960s. Since then, there has been a rolling programme of designations. Recent Conservation Areas are designated under the provisions of Section 69 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. Chastleton Conservation Area was designated in 1995, following a process of public consultation.

### The purpose of this document

This Conservation Area Character Appraisal describes the main aspects of character or appearance which contribute to the special interest and quality of the area. This document is intended to complement the approved policies for Conservation Areas contained in the West Oxfordshire Local Plan. In Conservation Areas there are controls over the demolition and minor alterations of unlisted buildings, and on works to trees. Full details can be obtained from the Planning Service. The Preservation and Enhancement document for Chastleton accompanies this Character Appraisal and describes strategies for the future maintenance and improvement of Chastleton, as well as providing development advice and guidance on conversions, extensions and the design of new buildings within the Conservation Area.



## Location and setting

The small village of Chastleton lies in the far north-west of the District, close to the county borders of Oxfordshire, Gloucestershire and Warwickshire, and five miles west of Chipping Norton. It is served by a network of narrow lanes that link it to the nearby settlements of Little Compton, Evenlode and Cornwell. Chastleton is located within the Cotswolds AONB on a small incised escarpment overlooking the broad valley of the River Evenlode to the west.

Chastleton was characterised in the 19th century as, *'houses formed into a pendant curved street, lined with trees irregularly planted, that it may be (not improperly) called a village in a wood'*. These characteristics hold true and the village remains remarkably unspoilt and secluded, its sloping landscape rich in mature oaks, limes, chestnuts and sycamores; its lanes lined by woody hedgerows. Chastleton House dominates the high ground, overlooking the village to the north and west, and the parkland to the south.

The underlying geology of the Conservation Area is reflected in the distinctive built character of the settlement. It comprises lower lias rocks (including ironstone) to the north and cornbrash limestone to the south, in a wider landscape otherwise dominated by oolitic limestone.



## Historical development

The recorded history of Chastleton manor dates back to 777AD, when Offa, King of Mercia, made a gift of land at Chastleton to the Benedictine abbey of Eynsham in Worcestershire. The name Chastleton is Saxon in origin, the prefix possibly deriving from the Saxon word *ceastel*, which may refer to a cairn or boundary marker.

The suffix 'ton' derives from *tun* or *town*. The village appears in the Domesday Book of 1086 as 'Cestitone', when the landowners included Odo, Bishop of Bayeux, Winchcombe Abbey, Henry de Ferrers and Urse D'Abitot. During the Middle Ages, Chastleton was owned and administered by, amongst others, Robert d'Oily (the probable builder of Oxford Castle) and Thomas Chaucer (son of the poet).

Chastleton itself became firmly established as a farming community in the early Middle Ages, and the present church dates from about 1100. In 1602, Robert Catsby, one of the Gunpowder conspirators, sold Chastleton for £4,000 to Walter Jones, perhaps to fund his purchase of a large quantity of gunpowder.

The original Catsby House stood in a parkland setting opposite the church. Walter Jones, a Welsh wool stapler based in Witney, built the present house probably between 1607 and 1612. The Jones – subsequently Whitmore-Jones – family remained in possession of Chastleton until 1955.

From 1610 onwards the Chastleton estate was considerably enlarged, reaching its greatest extent under the ownership of John Henry Whitmore Jones in the 1830s.

Subsequent to this, the economic depression and the reduction in agricultural prices led to a gradual sell-off of the estate, culminating in the sale of the house itself in 1991 to the National Heritage Memorial Fund.

Ownership of the house then passed to the National Trust, who began a programme of research and cautious repair to the building, prior to opening the house to the public in 1996.

## Settlement pattern

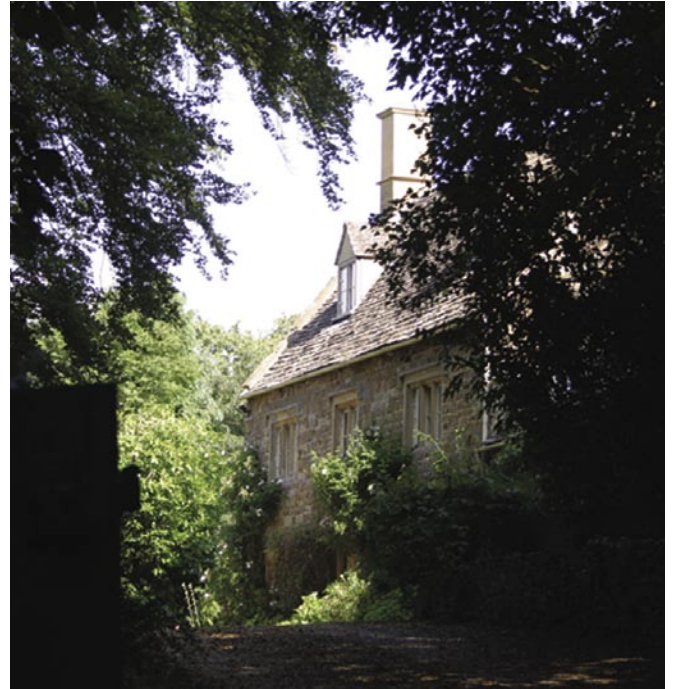
Evidence for early occupation of the area exists in the form of Chastleton Barrow – a Bronze Age hill fort on the crown of Adlestrop Hill in the south of the Parish. For later settlers Chastleton offered a number of significant attractions. As well as having sheltered, sloping topography the area was wooded, thus providing timber for settlers and foraging for livestock. Several springs break close by, providing both with sources of fresh water.

Chastleton also lies adjacent to a number of significant early routes, including the ancient trackway that runs from Stow-on-the-Wold past the Rollright Stones then on towards Northampton; and the Roman Fosse Way on the other side of the Evenlode to the west.

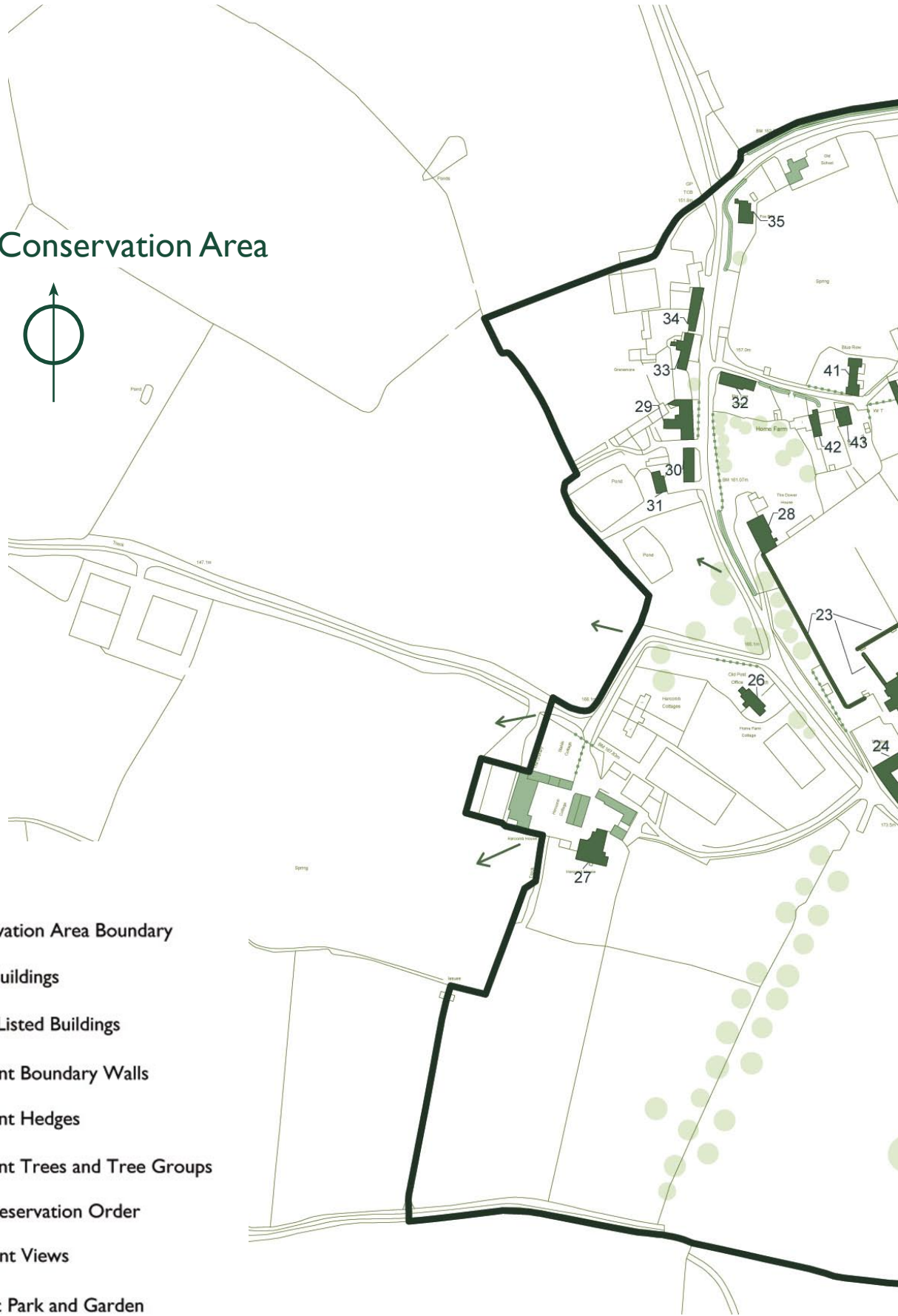
The historic buildings of Chastleton form three distinct groupings. The centres of religious and manorial control – the church and manor house respectively – lie to the south-east of the present settlement and formed the early core of the village (excavations have revealed traces of an earlier structure close to the present house). This cluster also includes structures ancillary to Chastleton House, including stables, a brew house and bakery.

To the north-west, stepping down the hillside, lies the village itself. The houses and cottages are arranged in a sporadic linear fashion fronting directly onto Village Road, and tailing down to Fox End and the Old School. Similar development lines The Lane, which is terminated by Splatts Farm. A smaller cluster of farm buildings exists around Harcombe House to the south-west of the settlement.










The houses and cottages of Chastleton back onto extensive gardens, orchards and fields. These open green spaces form visual components vital to the appearance of the village, providing a dominant landscape setting into which the buildings fit.



# Chastleton Conservation Area



## Key

-  Conservation Area Boundary
-  Listed Buildings
-  Locally Listed Buildings
-  Significant Boundary Walls
-  Significant Hedges
-  Significant Trees and Tree Groups
-  Tree Preservation Order
-  Significant Views
-  Historic Park and Garden



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## Listed Buildings

There are 25 Listed structures within the Conservation Area. Listed Buildings are classified in grades of relative importance.

### Grade I – Buildings of national importance and exceptional interest (2% of Listed Buildings)

11/21 Chastleton House

### Grade II\* - Particularly special and important buildings (4% of Listed Buildings)

11/22 Gateway, attached garden walls and coach house to S of main front of Chastleton House  
 11/24 Stables and brew house approx. 12m SW of Chastleton House (Formerly listed as Stable block at Chastleton House)  
 3/25 Dovecote approx 130m SE of Chastleton House (Formerly listed as Dovecote at Chastleton House)  
 11/15 Church of St. Mary

### Grade II – Buildings of special interest

11/16 Churchyard cross remains approx. 10m S of chancel of Church of St. Mary  
 11/17 Grave slab approx. 3m N of N transept of Church of St. Mary  
 11/18 Davis memorial and railed enclosure approx. 7m S of chancel of Church of St. Mary  
 11/19 Green memorial approx. 1m S of SE corner of S aisle of Church of St. Mary  
 11/20 Vade memorial approx. 4m E of chancel of Church of St. Mary  
 11/23 Garden wall, gate piers and steps to N and E of Chastleton House  
 11/26 Old Post Office and Home Farm Cottage (Formerly listed as Post Office)  
 11/27 (3/27) Harcombe House  
 11/28 The Dower House (Formerly listed as White Gates)  
 11/29 Home Farmhouse and attached railings  
 11/30 Barn and attached stables approx. 5m S of Home Farmhouse  
 11/31 Cart shelter approx. 25m SW of Home Farmhouse  
 11/32 Elmtree Cottage and attached outbuilding (formerly incorrectly listed as School House)  
 11/33 Grenemore  
 11/34 Barn, cowhouse and outbuilding attached to N end of Grenemore  
 11/35 Fox End (Formerly listed as Cottage approx. 80yds N of Home Farmhouse)  
 11/41 THE LANE (North side) Nos. 1-4  
 11/42 THE LANE (South side) No 2 (Formerly listed as part of Row of 7 cottages including “Poultmoor” to W of Splatts Farmhouse)  
 11/43 THE LANE (South side) White Horse Cottage (Formerly listed as part of Row of 7 cottages including “Poultmoor” to W of Splatts Farmhouse)  
 11/44 THE LANE (South side) Splatts Farmhouse and attached outbuildings

*Note: The numbers indicate the unique identification number by which Listed Buildings are referenced*

## Architectural character and quality of buildings

The village buildings of Chastleton are generally small in scale and vernacular in form, materials and detailing. Several date from the early 17th century and most (like Chastleton House itself) have survived largely unaltered. Simple gabled roofs with stone slates laid to graduated courses predominate. Less abundant are the rounded forms of long straw thatched roofs. Unusually, Chastleton House is roofed in Westmorland slates.

Although generally of humble vernacular character, Chastleton's buildings are lifted by the quality of their construction and detailing - the latter enriched by elements drawn from a more formal and refined architectural vocabulary. Stone mullion windows with leaded lights and moulded dripstones; segmental arches; ashlar quoins; coped verges and ashlar stacks with moulded cappings, can all be found.

Chastleton's walling stone reflects the settlement's location astride the boundary between the red-brown lias (ironstone) and the grey oolitic limestone. These stones are often indiscriminately mixed in the same building or, more unusually, deployed in an ordered pattern (as at Harcombe House or Chastleton House stables, where courses of oolite alternate with lias). Chastleton House itself uses the softer lias stone for the main walling areas, with the harder oolitic limestone reserved for dressings and quoins. Elsewhere, although random stone walling exists, dressed coursed stone is generally dominant, especially on important elevations to village buildings.

The humble character of the village buildings finds its antithesis in Chastleton House, which forms a dramatic centrepiece to the surrounding ancillary buildings, church and parkland. It was built by the lawyer and parliamentarian Walter Jones in 1607-1612, possibly to the designs of Robert Smythson (cf. Hardwick, Wollaton and Burton Agnes). The highly articulated elevations, crowned by a pinnacled and gabled roof line, give the house a pronounced vertical emphasis; while the multifaceted character of the leaded light windows gives great play and delicacy to the façade.

The interiors, too, remain caught in time, the rooms and their contents largely untroubled by shifts in fashion or modernising hands. The lavish Great Chamber is memorably described in Pevsner as '*blatantly nouveau riche, even barbaric, uninhibited by any consideration of insipid good taste*'.

Stables, a brew house and bakery accompany the house, as does the 12th-century church of St. Mary, which is small in scale and dominated by a two-stage tower whose crenellations echo those of Chastleton House. Marooned in the park opposite is an 18th-century dovecote - a surviving feature from a now demolished house owned by the Greenwood family. Near the junction of Village Road and The Lane are the remains of the Village Oven. This is a rare survival of an early 19th-century communal oven built to overcome problems of fire in combustible cottages.

## Boundary treatments

Throughout the village soft verges predominate, frequently consisting of rough grass covered banks, usually backed by clipped hedges or drystone walls. These give the narrow lanes a strong sense of enclosure and protection. On the edge of the settlement, native hedgerows and trees line the approach roads and contribute much to the rural and un-manicured character of the village.

## Landscape, trees and views

In contrast to the leafy, contained setting of the village centre, the parkland has a more spacious and open character, and is included in the Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest (Grade-II\*). This area was an early formal garden and landscaped park dating from about 1700, and traces of these elements survive, with later additions. To the south of the house the parkland also includes fields known in the 19th Century as 'Harcomb' and 'Wyton Harcomb'; and, to the north-east, 'Ladies Ground' and 'Hillocky Splats'. Despite the substantial tree cover and hedgerows, Chastleton's position on an escarpment offers good views out from the village to the countryside beyond.

*“I invited the neighbourhood to a dance which really was a very gay and pretty thing; all those blue and pink gossamer looking girls moving about in this beautiful well lit Hall was well worth seeing and so thought our guests, who expressed a wish that there might be an annual marriage at Chastleton”.*

**Dorothy Whitmore-Jones, 1855.**

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General planning enquiries and application forms  
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