

3.7 Public Realm

The very high quality built form within the Town Centre Conservation Area is not, on the whole, mirrored by good quality public realm.

There are good and distinctive examples of street furniture to be found as well as small elements of historic paving, several examples of good modern paving schemes using natural materials, and some subtle and effective lighting and signage. Nevertheless, on the whole, the quality of the various elements of the public realm combined with vehicular movements and car parking, where pedestrian movements are especially high in the town centre, produces a chaotic environment, both visually and in physical terms. The public realm within the conservation area offers significant opportunities for enhancement and interpretation of the town's rich architectural and historic past.

Recent public realm improvements at the west end of the town, specifically Park Lane, Silver Street and Castle Street, serve to demonstrate the considerable benefits of past investment in the public realm [263-64].



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Floorscape in the Town Centre Conservation Area consists predominantly of plain black tarmac to most public highways but in combination with a wide range of materials to pathways. Many mews corridors retain historic paving, mostly of small blocks, some engineering brick and in some cases,

Staffordshire Blue paviments and / or limestone paving in small- to medium-sized blocks [265-270].



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Some of the more medieval areas of the north-west quadrant retain limestone paving in combination with Pennant edging setts, and occasional domestic areas of small square granite setts [270]. This subtle combination works well together, and in the context of the predominant limestone of building elevations; however, in places, maintenance is lacking, repairs poor when new service elements are inserted, and the use of excessive quantities of mortar between the joints, often cementitious in nature, limit otherwise successful paving schemes. Pathways to Coxwell Street demonstrate this well [271-273].



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Much of the area immediately surrounding the parish church was paved in the late twentieth century, and whilst the scheme is now in need of some maintenance, its use of natural local paving materials mixed with a simple legible design and good quality seating and bollards, responds well to the needs of its users, and the capabilities of the space [83, 90-91, 274-275].



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Several other areas of modern paving respond well to their setting and enhance the public realm; they include the pedestrian entrance to the newly refurbished Cirencester Parish Centre off Gosditch Street [276] and paving adjacent an extension to the Baptist Chapel, Coxwell Street [277].



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These commendable schemes contrast with other similar spaces in the town where loss of planting, and/or a lack of maintenance, and/or poor materials and workmanship, detract from the special architectural and historic interest of the conservation area [278-280].



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Other surviving historic elements of floorscape include light-wells and basement access points, albeit that several of these have been filled and/or are in poor condition [281-3]. The hare mosaic, a replica of one in the

Corinium Museum and emblematic of the town, forms a distinctive focus in Brewery Yard [284] and a long narrow mosaic in the pavement advertising commercial premises in Dyer Street adds visual interest at this point [283]. Given the Roman origins and relevance of mosaics to the town, it would seem appropriate that mosaics could be used to further enliven the public realm, and to reinforce local distinctiveness.



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Several important public spaces within the conservation area suffer from poor floorscape.

Concrete pavements are used in Market Place [285-286] where large vehicles cause damage thus creating potential hazards to pedestrians.

The Brewery car park, Brewery Yard and large parts of Cricklade Street, together with many pavements in the Town Centre Conservation Area have been paved using concrete pavements, some of the “dog-biscuit” variety. These unsympathetic materials have a poor overall appearance and detract from the special character and appearance of the three-dimensional spaces of which they form an integral part [287-289].



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On the whole, lighting in the Town Centre Conservation Area is unobtrusive in nature. It is mostly provided by modern lighting columns; the full height lighting columns in Market Place, however, appear over-scaled. Truncated versions of various standard modern lighting columns, affixed to buildings, are useful in helping to minimise physical obstruction to narrow pavements [290].



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The Jubilee style lamp standard, with its distinctive appearance and functional design, can be found in several locations around the town, most notably in Abbey Grounds [294]. A unique example can be found in Catalpa Square which was erected by the people of Cirencester to commemorate the Silver Jubilee of King George V in 1935 [293].

Elsewhere, individual buildings have their own lights designed to co-ordinate with the design of the building; these quite rare and attractive elements add interest and variety to the street scene [291-92]; other less successful examples are often sourced from standardised “heritage” catalogues which are out of tune with local buildings, dilute local distinctiveness, and often appear intrusive [295].



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Benches of various designs can be found throughout the conservation area; these are mostly unobtrusive and simple in design [297 & 299] although in places perhaps too few in number; others are in need of maintenance and / or repair [296, 299 & 300].

There is a need for a balance between consistency of design, especially in relation to other elements of street furniture, and appropriateness in terms of setting; using similar or the same materials but altering the design to suit the setting is one way of ensuring such balance.



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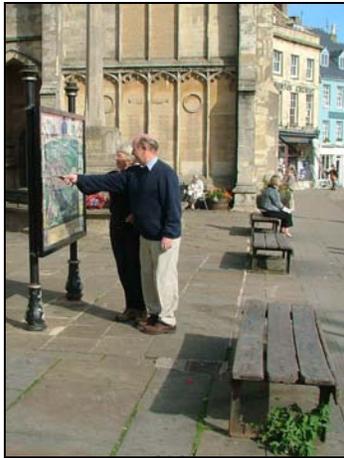
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The use of standardised “heritage” designs is rarely appropriate, compromises the genuine heritage environment in which they sit [298] and often looks incongruous adjacent modern buildings [309 & 310]. Historic examples of street furniture including seating which have stood the test of time can provide a library for design solutions in both historic and more contemporary settings [301].

The same can be said for other elements of street furniture such as bollards, lighting, litter bins, directional signs, telephone boxes and electricity cabinets. Consistency of design, perhaps based on a relevant theme such as the Arts & Crafts Movement, would create a welcome additional layer of local distinctiveness. Cycle stands are rare and increasingly necessary [305].



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Storage and disposal of rubbish, within the commercial areas in particular, requires consideration if the town is to maintain its reputation as a clean and healthy environment in which to live, work and visit. Skips, recycle bins and rubbish bags are frequently on show, marring otherwise attractive locations such as seating areas and corridor mews [306-308].



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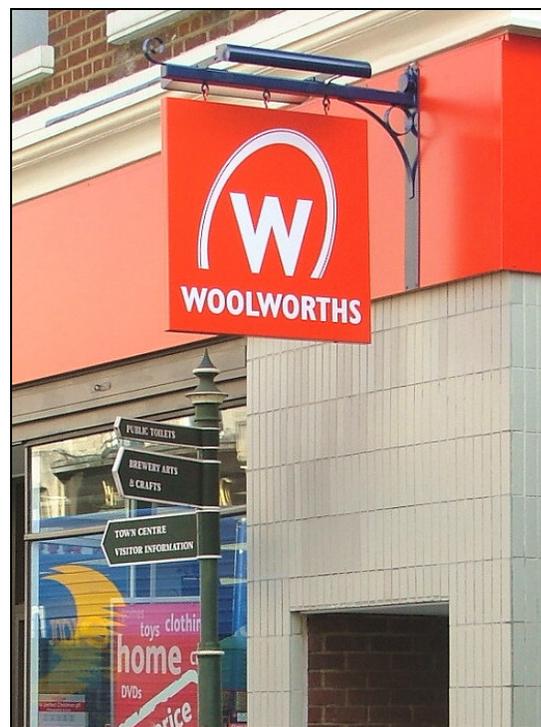
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Parts of the town centre suffer from a clutter of traffic-related street furniture and road markings, as well as security measures such as CCTV cameras. This is especially noticeable in Market Place [81 & 311] where the needs of the pedestrian are subservient to the needs of the driver, and the vehicle is dominant. Here and elsewhere in the town, traffic signs are sometimes too large in size [312] and too great in number, having an unduly dominant impact on the special historic and architectural character of the town [313-15].



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Road name signage, in various forms, creates an attractive feature in the town centre [316-318] although some are barely legible [319-20]. Individual property names [320] and small informative plaques also make a positive contribution, yet interpretation of the town's rich architectural and historical past is rare, and where it does exist, is often ill-considered and poorly maintained [482 & 84].



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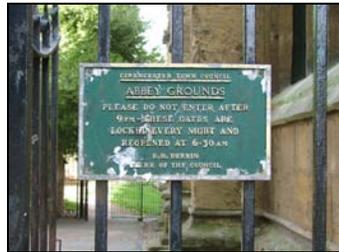
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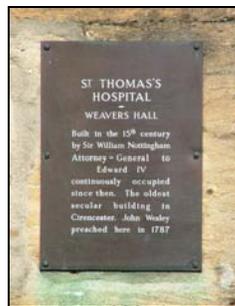
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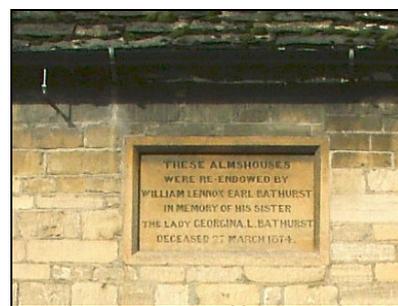
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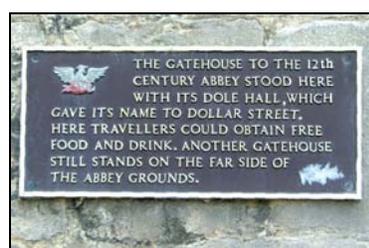
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Good recent examples include the map at the entrance to The Woolmarket off Dyer Street [327]; the stone bollards marking the western gateway into the town [328] and the Roman column-base outside Hooper's Court [325] are other recent examples, but both these are perhaps too subtle to be noticed.

Commercial signage is a growing problem within the Town Centre Conservation Area, and particularly noticeable in Cricklade Street where each premises competes for attention, resulting in visual chaos. Overly large box fascias which project from the front elevation, garish colours, inappropriate materials, unnecessary illumination, and ever more numbers of signs, combine to significantly detract from the character of this part of the town [331]. An increasing number of free-standing signs [332] create a safety hazard to pedestrians, users of wheelchairs and child buggies, and the visually-impaired.



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Evidence of a more sympathetic approach is found in Black Jack Street where, on the whole, signage is vibrant yet better suited to the historic built form [333].



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3.8 Trees and Biodiversity Value

The Cirencester Town Centre Conservation Area supports a diversity of aquatic and terrestrial habitats. The aquatic habitats are of particular significance and the River Churn Key Wildlife Site passes through the Conservation Area, for example the stretch of the River Churn within the Abbey Grounds [334-35].



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These habitats are likely to support a number of protected and priority species [i.e. species within the UK Biodiversity Action Plan], for example bats and water voles. Habitat management works could enhance the value of the conservation area for biodiversity.

The Abbey Grounds and the adjacent Churchyard contain the greatest number of trees within the Town Centre Conservation Area. Together they retain a significant arboricultural heritage, containing a large number of parkland trees, both native and exotic species including oak, beech, and chestnut [336-339].



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The bank of trees along the north-eastern edge of the Abbey grounds is especially important in blocking noise and pollution from the dual carriageway.



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Much of the town centre appears notable for its lack of trees and yet there are a significant number set amidst the built form which have an important softening effect, and/or provide focal points and denote areas of informal recreation, both public and private. In particular, significant trees include:

- Those within the Brewery public car park [343], and those surrounding the Forum [350] and Abbey Grounds car parks and their immediate environs, where they form an important role in diminishing the impact of the parked cars and recycling bins etc;
- Several secluded green spaces, including private gardens, where trees overhang boundary walls and/or can be glimpsed from between buildings, for example, the Parish Centre graveyard off Gosditch Street [340];
- Trees marking the boundary to the Mead private estate [342] help to give this residential development an intimate and enclosed, private character;

- Trees within the grounds of Oakley House, off Tetbury Road, which form part of an important view towards the church tower both for drivers entering the town and pedestrians using the high level walkway adjacent Cirencester Park, and also serve to cushion the expanse of car park adjacent the former Railway Station [352-53].

Some trees are important as they terminate views and/or indicate the edge of the town, for example those trees within the view west from Castle Street towards Cirencester Park [346]. Within the built up areas, occasional mature specimen trees make a dramatic statement; for example:

- the large cedar tree at the junction of Gosditch Street, Black Jack Street and West Market Place [90-91] behind the parish church;
- two large copper beech trees, one at the widest part of Thomas Street [345] and another adjacent the river off the London Road [348];
- an impressive cedar tree to the south of the Memorial Hospital off Sheep Street [351], and
- mature trees to the rear of properties, east side of Dollar Street [344].



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Trees to the rear of properties on Dyer Street are especially helpful in softening the built form where rear gardens have been converted into car parking and several boundary walls have been lost [347].

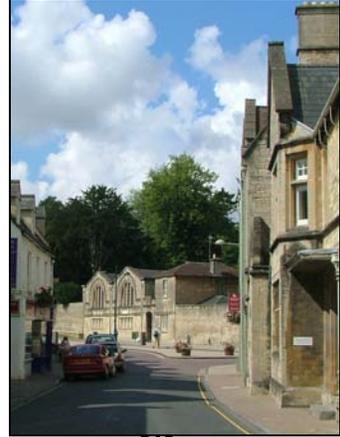
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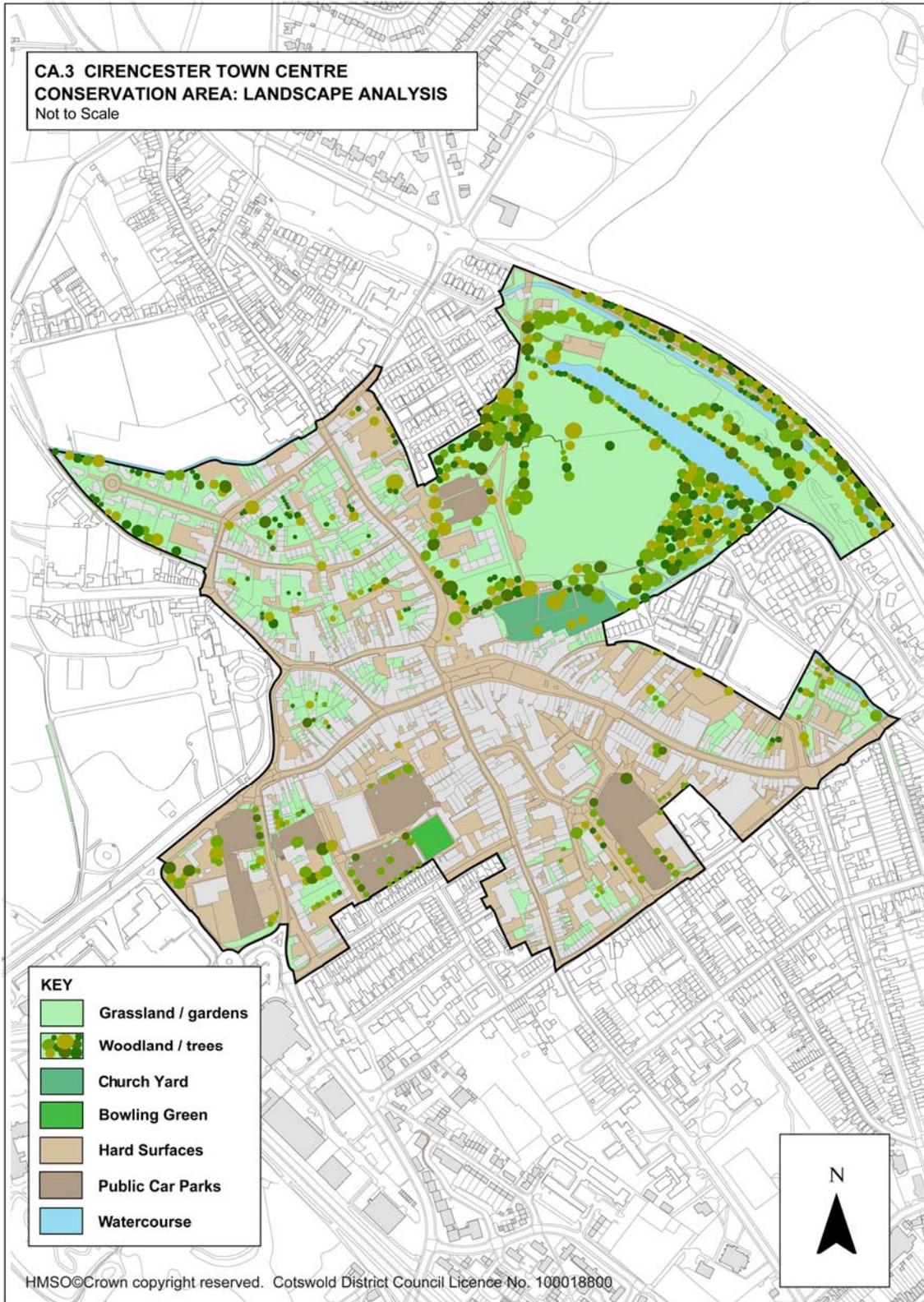
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Map Q