The built environment derives its character as much from the nature of the spaces between and around the buildings as it does from the buildings itself.

The Industrial Heritage Study Area is an area of enormous contrast and variety, ranging from sparsely populated agricultural land, to steep, narrow hillside paths bounded by dry stone walls and densely grouped cottages, to the strong linear spaces of road, river and canal. It is important to recognise the particular character of open spaces within (or sometimes adjacent to) the conservation area, the way that they are enclosed and the visual contribution that they make to the character of the place.

THE SPACES

TYPICAL AND CHARACTERISTIC OPEN SPACES AND ENCLOSURE WITHIN THE STUDY AREA

8.1 The built environment derives its character as much from the nature of the spaces between and around buildings as it does from the buildings itself.

8.2 Any building can have its attractiveness, significance or impact reduced by becoming isolated from its historic context – for example when its surroundings are changed by road widening (perhaps involving the demolition of neighbouring buildings or boundary walls) or by new development.

8.3 It is important to recognise the particular characteristics of open spaces within (or sometimes immediately adjacent to) the conservation area, the way that they are enclosed and the visual contribution that they make to the character of the place.

8.4 An understanding of these characteristics and an evaluation of them is essential in order to assess how proposals for development or demolition will affect surrounding character.

8.5 Fundamental to the consideration of the spaces in a conservation area are the questions: -

- What is it about the space that gives it its particular character?
- How does this contribute to the character or appearance of the wider conservation area?
- Why is this space and the contribution it makes important?

8.6 It is impossible here to summarise the characteristics and significance of every space or every type of space within the Study Area. But by pointing to some of the most common or most character-defining types of spaces that do feature, and the sorts of questions that must be asked about them, this document should provide the tools to enable considered evaluation of particular spaces and to highlight the importance of their distinctive qualities and characteristics in terms of the contribution they make to the character or appearance of the conservation area and our understanding of its historic context.

7.7 The distinct differences in the topography of the Severn vale and the Stroud valleys has, to a large extent, led to a broad division between the types and characteristics of the open spaces in the study area:

- The **rural vale:** the more undeveloped parts of the Frome corridor on the Vale (west of Stroud)
- The **built-up vale:** the more urban areas of the Frome corridor on the Vale (west of Stroud)
- The **rural Stroud Valleys:** the more undeveloped parts of the upper Frome valley (east of Stroud) and the Nailsworth stream valley (south of Stroud).
- The **built-up Stroud Valleys:** the more urban areas of the upper Frome valley (east of Stroud) and the Nailsworth stream valley (south of Stroud).

7.8 The first two areas correspond broadly with the western 'leg' of the Study Area, while the last two correspond with the eastern and southern legs. However, it must be remembered that there is a great deal of overlap between these four geographical areas: in the rural extremities of the vale and valleys, dense clusters of buildings do occur, with tight, constrained, 'urban' spaces associated with them; conversely, open, pastoral, 'rural' spaces do occur within the more urban areas.

More information about the character of spaces in particular parts of the conservation area can be found in the CHARACTER PARTS SHEETS, which make up VOLUME 2 of this Conservation Area Statement.

8.9 The Industrial Heritage study area is an area of enormous contrast and variety.

8.10 Some spaces were specifically designed as a setting for a particular building or group of buildings. But it must be remembered that reasons for such designed spaces can be quite diverse: some may have been motivated by a conscious aesthetic vision (parkland surrounding large country houses; formal gardens; terraced housing with small, uniform front yards); while others were planned along strictly functional lines.

8.11 Equally, many spaces in the study area have evolved over a period of time – sometimes centuries. What we see today may be happy (or unhappy) accident, the result of successive buildings, re-buildings, encroachments or demolitions; the result of buildings being sited as and where they could be squeezed in, with orientation, density and form being dictated by necessity or constraints.

8.12 The Industrial Heritage Conservation Area is almost unique amongst conservation areas in England in that it includes significant areas of open land. These areas are mainly agricultural land and include fields, woodland and orchards, although open spaces associated with the industry of the valleys also occur. Following the decision in 1987 to link together the eight conservation areas named on page 7, it was inevitable that the open spaces would be considerable, in order to appreciate the context of the industry within the valleys.

8.13 It is also important to remember that the linear nature of the Conservation Area means that rural and built-up sections happily co-exist side by side. It is not simply a matter of rural spaces declining near to more built-up areas in a conventional manner; fingers of green spaces extend alongside more heavily built-up land and often occur intermittently, like little oases, punctuating the gaps between settlements or industrial clusters. For instance, when seen from the Westward Road, the Ebley area has all the appearance of densely developed urban fabric. Yet travel just a short distance south and the watermeadows and cows spread east and west almost as far as the eye can see.

8.14 Moreover, some 'built-up' areas will have a strongly urban or industrial character, while others are much more pastoral and rural – this can be dependent on things like the ground surfaces, the types of boundary treatments, the level of enclosure or openness, and the amount of vegetation. The distinct qualities of 'urban' and 'rural' spaces are important to the character and appearance of the Study Area – but they are highly vulnerable to subtle change.

Below:
A fairly typical urban industrial space, comprising very simply of the gaps between the between the buildings. This space lacks any other features which might break it up (pavements, kerbs, grass verges, boundary walls or fences) and the ground is wall-to-wall hard surfaced (probably originally paved with brick or stone setts). There is a high degree of enclosure, with continuous building frontage and the space being no wider than the height of the buildings.

Left:
Another built-up area, but with quite a different character. Individual or paired buildings sit towards the front of large, well spaced plots, but set a little back from the road edge behind hedges, boundary walls and low fences. The road is bordered by grassy verges, and a narrow pavement with stone kerb. There is much more vegetation. All factors which have created a much more rural, domestic character.

Enclosing spaces:
Walls, railings, fences and greenery

The way that spaces are enclosed can have an enormous effect on the character of an area. Walls, gates, fences and hedges all help to define and make a transition between public and private spaces. The choice of boundary treatment often relates closely to the material, type, style and date of the building that it encloses.
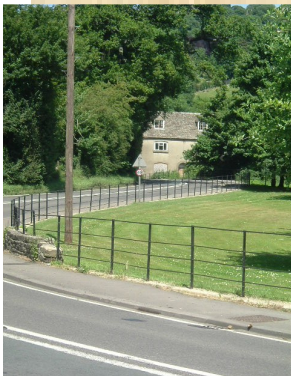
A modern steel fence, with a traditional, utilitarian feel. Provides a simple, informal and unpretentious enclosure to a grassy area surrounding an industrial site on a busy main road. This style of fence is evocative of iron parkland railings, also commonly used to enclose farmland, mills or cottage gardens…

Dry stone walls are typical of the Cotswold area. They can be used formally or informally, for tiny or towering walls. Most commonly found in areas where older vernacular buildings survive or once would have dominated.

Some boundaries are created as a 'set piece' with the building, such as the low brick walls that often enclose terraces of 19th and 20th century roadside houses. Such walls often create a strong relationship between the building and the road, which can be disrupted by attempts to add extra height to the wall to create privacy, particularly through the use of modern timber fences.

Simple iron railings or green hedges of native species have traditionally been used to top low brick or stone walls, creating an added sense of enclosure to front garden areas, without appearing like an impermeable barricade.

Many industrial sites feature tall brick or stone walls, especially bordering roads and the canals. Access points are often marked by stone, brick, iron or timber gatepiers. This produces a strong sense of enclosure and definition to each site.

The height and solidity of boundary treatments has a huge effect on the character of a place – permitting or prohibiting views; allowing a sense of expansiveness or providing extreme enclosure – qualities which can be transformed by boundary changes

A range of traditional, locally distinctive ground surfaces survive in the Study Area. Stone setts and black or red brick are consistently used as paving materials, red brick being most often used for guttering. Crushed local limestone or gravel is a cheap and complimentary surface in many contexts, especially surrounding stone built or older buildings, and in semi-rural situations. Modern concrete block paving, if carefully chosen for its profile and colour, can be appropriate, providing a traditional laying pattern is used - however large expanses can appear sharp and sterile. Tarmac remains a simple and utilitarian surface, which often gives a more understated impression, although standard light coloured concrete kerbs can create a stark contrast and seem rather 'tamed' and municipal for an historic context. Stone kerbs or setts used as pavement edging is a subtler alternative, and the importance of un-edged grassy verges should not be dismissed. Hefty stone blocks are also used for canalside edging and coping at historic wharfs, locks and bridges – but the canals are predominantly rural in character, with grassy, reeded banks and a towpath of crushed stone or compacted earth.

Ground surfaces and paving

Traditional ground surfaces, using locally characteristic materials, can do much to complement the buildings in an historic area and have a role to play in settling new development into the surrounding context. Conversely, inappropriate, cheap modern materials can often dramatically erode the character of an area.