



- SECTION II: CHARACTER APPRAISAL -

- ◆ *History*
- ◆ *Landscape & setting*
- ◆ *The built environment (the Buildings and the Spaces)*
- ◆ *Character Summary*
- ◆ *Character Parts in the Study Area*

The aim of character appraisal in a Conservation Area Statement is to define what makes up the special interest or 'character' of the study area, in order that this may be preserved or enhanced. This section summarises the impact of the topics listed above on the character and appearance of the Study Area. Volume 2 of the Conservation Area Statement, the 'Character Parts', provides further character analysis.

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THE ANALYSIS OF CHARACTER

2.0 The aim of the 'Character Appraisal' section of a Conservation Area Statement is to define what makes up the special interest or *character* of the study area, in order that this may be preserved or enhanced. Although the character of an area may be very obvious in visual terms, it is about much more than just appearance. History, geography, use and appearance are usually intricately and inextricably linked in the evolution of any settlement, and in the creation of its character.

- ◆ The origins of a settlement and what has happened to it in the past are often still evident in its current state. Its **history** can tell us more than simply the date of its buildings: The changing economic fortunes of an area, important historical events and individual patrons or developers may have played a role in shaping tastes and styles, as well as influencing the extent of expansion.
- ◆ Current or former **uses** often have implications for the shapes, sizes and types of buildings that are created, and their massing and relationships to each other. Uses can also create distinctive sounds or smells, adding 'life' to the built form.
- ◆ The origins and evolution of a settlement may frequently be dependent on its **setting and location**: these may have suggested a particular industrial, defensive or cultural role, for example. Furthermore, the location almost always dictates the types of materials and building traditions that prevail.
- ◆ The **visual appearance** of an area is often the cumulative effect of many influences. The appearance is frequently the aspect that most people relate to in terms of defining what is of special interest and worth preserving or enhancing. The appearance may be made up of locally typical buildings, or structures of great architectural importance.

CHARACTER AND ‘SPECIAL INTEREST’

- 2.1 The Industrial Heritage Conservation Area review is based upon analysis of the Study Area’s character and appearance, and an appraisal of its special architectural and historic interest. This appraisal work is presented in **VOLUMES 1 and 2**, which make up **Part 1** of the Conservation Area Statement (see Introduction, paragraphs 1.21-8).
- 2.2 The character appraisal is intended to provide owners and developers with the tools to assess what it is that gives their building or site its particular character, and how it contributes to the wider interest of the Conservation Area. The summary in volume 1 identifies broad themes in the IHCA’s special interest; but while this may be sufficient for many users, further research will inevitably be required in support of contentious proposals, proposals on sites which are sensitive or where major development is proposed. Some greater detail is provided in **VOLUME 2 (Character Parts)**, but there is a great deal of easily accessible information available (see further reference section at the end of this document).
- 2.3 **Part 2** of the Conservation Area Statement (The **IHCA MANAGEMENT PROPOSALS SPD**, supported by the **IHCA DESIGN GUIDE**), contains the policy tools to ensure the preservation or enhancement of the conservation area’s character or appearance, as defined in the character appraisal.
- 2.4 The IHCA Study Area ranges in character from sparsely populated, idyllic, rural extremities to functional, unpretentious industrial areas - with an enormous amount of juxtaposition and variety in between. Over all, the canal itself has a distinctly rural character – even when passing adjacent to intensely built-up areas. Due to the diversity and richness of the built environment, a ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach to design policy and guidance is not appropriate. The policy guidelines and the Design Guide, like the character appraisal, will operate on the basis of identifying and recognising the distinct characteristics of different parts of the IHCA and canal corridor. Approaches to development and particular design solutions can then be tailored to suit the particular context and circumstances.
- 2.5 It is always worth bearing in mind that the conservation area’s special architectural and historic interest is something much deeper than just its appearance. Even a grotty looking, run-down building can be *significant*. Try to approach each proposal for development with one question in your mind: *how is this building/ site/ structure/ space significant?* In other words, how does it contribute to the conservation area and to our understanding of our built and cultural heritage? And then think – *how can I preserve or enhance this contribution?*

Preceding page:

A painting housed in Stroud’s Museum in the Park shows Wallbridge in 1785. Note the ‘Stroudwater Reds’, a type of cloth for which the locality was renowned, spread out to dry on the slopes of Rodborough. Black-wrapped bales of cloth sit on the Wharf at Upper Lock, waiting to be loaded onto the canal trows.

The little industrial hamlet is depicted prior to the building of the Cainscross Road (1825) or the arrival of the Midland Railway branch, whose goods yard came to occupy the land opposite the wharf at Upper Lock and whose viaduct now slices through the Wallbridge Mill site. Here, Merrywalks is no more than a path alongside the Slad Brook (sometimes known as Badbrook), just visible at the bottom left of the painting.

2.6 Amongst the key themes of the IHCA's special interest are the following; these are explored further throughout the two Character Appraisal volumes of the Conservation Area Statement:

- ◆ The **harnessing of waterpower and the exploitation of local natural resources** – from wool for cloth production, to building materials for houses and mills. These local resources have influenced the siting of buildings, what they were used for, and what they look like; the steep valley sides have been colonised with terraces of dry stone, and water has been manipulated, with mill ponds and leets which changed the shape of the landscape.
- ◆ The way that **evolving transport infrastructure** has influenced the distribution of buildings, their orientation, date and appearance; the expansion of settlements or mill groups; and how the various phases of infrastructure have layered over each other – pack horse tracks, river navigation, canals, turnpike roads, railways...
- ◆ The differences in character between the western 'leg' of the Study Area ("**the Vale**") and the eastern and southern legs ("**the Valleys**") – notably in terms of the appearance of buildings, typical materials and the shape of the landscape.
- ◆ The **juxtaposition of industry with agriculture and the natural environment**, which has resulted in a very attractive and richly varied character in this part of the District
- ◆ The **historic diversification of industry**: although the cloth industry has a long history, mills were continually changing ownership and adapting to other uses, from low key flour milling to high-tech iron manufacture and engineering; these often left physical legacies by way of new buildings or alterations.
- ◆ **Evolving industrial processes** – from cottage industry, to the factory system – and how each development has impacted on our built environment: providing new structures, altering old ones or even abandoning them to other uses.