

- CONSERVATION AREA STATEMENT -

CONSERVATION AREA NO. 1

WOTTON UNDER EDGE



Wotton-under-Edge is an attractive and historic small market town, with little set-piece architecture, but a fine heritage of vernacular buildings of the 16th to 19th centuries.



STROUD DISTRICT COUNCIL
www.stroud.gov.uk

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PART I: INTRODUCTION



Photo 1 - Looking across the town in a north westerly direction from the Wortley Road towards Jubilee Clump, Wotton Hill on the skyline. This view clearly shows how the town centre steps gently up the hillside.

Wotton-under-Edge was first designated as a Conservation Area in August 1972, and this was extended in 1988.

WHAT IS A CONSERVATION AREA?

The legal definition of a Conservation Area is set out in Section 69 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (hereinafter called the Act), as being:

“an area of special architectural or historic interest the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance.”

Conservation Areas are primarily concerned with the built environment. They are not appropriate as a means of protecting landscape features except where they form an integral part of the historic built environment.

This statement has been prepared by the Conservation Section of the Directorate of Development and Leisure, Stroud District Council, in close collaboration with Wotton-under-Edge Town Council. A draft was circulated at a public meeting held in the town on 24 August 1999, and relevant comments and suggestions have been taken into account in this final published version. The statement was adopted by Stroud District Council as supplementary planning guidance on 16 November 1999.

This statement should be read in conjunction with the most recent versions of the Stroud District Local Plan, the Gloucestershire County Structure Plan, and national planning policy guidance, especially Planning Policy Guidance Note 15 “Planning and the Historic Environment”.

PURPOSE OF THIS DOCUMENT

The Act requires Planning Authorities to review their Conservation Areas from time to time. This is the main function of this document. Within Stroud District there are 42 Conservation Areas, some of which were first designated 27 years ago, and the approach to designating Conservation Areas has changed greatly in this time.

Firstly, Planning Authorities are now required, in carrying out their planning functions to, “pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of the Conservation Area” (Section 72 of the Act).

Secondly, Planning Authorities should publish proposals for the preservation and enhancement of their Conservation Areas (Section 71 of the Act).

In this review we will look at the existing Conservation Area and the land immediately adjacent to it to see if it is appropriate to amend the boundaries of the Conservation Area.

We then aim to identify what makes up the “special interest” of the area and to analyse and define its “character and appearance”. This will

provide a firm basis for planning decisions within the Conservation Area, based on Development Plan policies.

It also provides the groundwork for the preparation of policies and proposals intended for the preservation or enhancement of the area, such policies being aimed at specific sites within the Conservation Area, or more general guidance relevant to the whole Conservation Area, such as the use of appropriate materials.

Normally some minor changes to houses do not need planning permission (this is known as “permitted development”). Some of these minor changes could harm the special character of the Area. Local Authorities have the ability to remove certain permitted development rights from properties, where it can be shown that such changes might harm the Conservation Area. This is known as an Article 4 Direction. Such a Direction was made in the Wotton-under-Edge Conservation Area in April 1993, and it remains in force today. It applies to certain small scale development on selected buildings. The details of this Direction are included in Part III, and the affected properties are shown on Map 6.

PART II: ANALYSIS

HISTORY OF WOTTON-UNDER-EDGE

There is evidence of a settlement at Wotton-under-Edge as far back as the Roman period. This involved finds in Tyley Bottom, where a spoon has been recovered, and near Symonds Hall where pieces of a mosaic have been found. An important Roman Villa has been excavated at Wortley - it is also widely thought that the Old London Road is Roman in its foundation.

The first recorded appearance of the town is in AD 940 in the form of a Saxon Royal Charter in which King Edmund of Wessex leases to Edrick four hides of land in Wudetun. The name Wudetun meaning, the enclosure, homestead or village (tun) in or near the wood (wude). It is also known that Wudetun had a church at this time.

The next recorded entry follows the Norman invasion. The hamlet of Wotton is named in the Domesday Book of 1086 being called Vutune, one of the 24 dependencies of the Royal Manor of Berkeley, ruled by the Earls of Berkeley.

The Berkeleys continued to rule the manor throughout the Mediaeval period and by 1243 Thomas Berkeley had built a manor house near the church. The gatehouse stood at the entrance to the road now known as Manor Lane. His widow Jone de Somery secured confirmation of the manor as part of her dower and she subsequently became one of the most important people in influencing the development of the town.

In 1252 Jone obtained a Royal Licence from King Henry III for herself, her son Maurice and his heirs to have a market in Wotton every Friday and an annual fair on the Eve, Day and Morrow of the Feast of Exaltation of the Holy Cross (11th September). With the profits of the market and fair, the market house and place were founded.

In 1253 Jone granted a charter which resulted in a borough being set up beside the old settlement around the Church. A small borough was

already in existence having been established in the reign of King John, and Jone continued and extended on this.

The establishment of the borough meant that its inhabitants were able to earn their living in industry or commerce, free from the obligation of working on the Lords's estate. Instead they paid rent for a burgage plot on which their homes and industries were erected.

Each of Jone's burgage plots were of approximately one third of an acre "to hold according to the customs and usages of Tetbury" which in turn were based on the Norman town of Breteuil. Each burgess paid an annual rent of 12 pence and had a right to pasture a horse and a cow on one of the three fields of the manor after Michelmas Day, by which time the crops had been harvested.

The Berkeleys retained control of the area of Synwell, Church and Manor House and limited the grant of land to undeveloped areas. As a result Wotton expanded beyond Old Town with new streets being built to the south. The new town was built on an early grid iron pattern with a High Street running east to west, dropping gently eastward down to the Tiley Stream or Dyers Brook. Parallel to this is the Old Town connected to the High Street by two cross streets. Four cross streets leave the High Street southward, one leading to The Chipping. The better houses were constructed in the High Street with smaller buildings lining the side streets. The streets at this time were lined by timber framed houses with either thatch or Cotswold stone tile roofs. Though these buildings still largely exist most have been gentrified, especially in the Georgian period, and now display significantly altered facades.

The rise of Wotton from a small hamlet to a borough in the 13th century was largely as a result of Jone de Somery and her creation of the burgages which attracted merchant families from Bristol and Gloucester, and to the growth of the

wool trade. Weaving and cloth making were the main occupations of the inhabitants of Wotton from the 13th century onwards, with the work being carried out in the cottage homes. By the 17th century half of the population were employed in the cloth trade.

The appearance of Wotton today is essentially a creation of the 18th century. Change came to the Tudor town as an expanding woollen industry brought wealth. In 1763 the Earl of Berkeley was still the proprietor of 151 plots, and 112 were owned by individuals. The Tolsey and 31 other properties in the Market Square and the Green Chipping belonged to the town on a perpetual lease granted by Lord Berkeley in 1659. The Church Glebe consisted of 12 plots, which was established by Katharine Lady Berkeley in 1384, 26 belonged to the Grammar School and 7 belonged to the Crown.

The 1763 Borough and Terrier map of Wotton-under-Edge shows a town of some 60 acres containing the High Street, Sow Lane, The Chepping or Market Place, Chepinge Lane, Bradley Street, Haw Street, Church Lane, Sym Lane and other undeveloped land. It does not include the Green Chipping.

Sow Lane no longer exists but was probably in the area of open land in Old Town accessed by Church Street. An 1871 reference to the 'Pig Park' near Church Street suggests that the communal sties were in this area.

Good communications were severely lacking before the advent of the turnpike roads. In 1726 a House of Commons Committee recorded that the roads were so narrow that two horsemen could not pass. A subsequent Act of Parliament gave power to create toll roads between Bristol and Gloucester - the Roman highway - and the same Act authorised turnpikes linking Wotton to Bristol, Gloucester, Tetbury and Bath. By 1763 these had been built.

Photo 2 – The Hugh Perry Almshouses in Church Street, date from 1638. The stone dressings to the windows stand proud of the wall face, suggesting that this was originally a rendered building.

However, most of the transport was still by packhorse. In Haw Street the Pack Horse Inn stood on the corner of the entrance to Stokes Bakery, formerly called Packhorse Lane. The 1763 map shows extensive buildings, probably stables, behind the Inn.

In 1826 the road from Haw Street to Bushford Bridge and Charfield was constructed with a toll gate at the junction to Howley Road. The branch road to Kingswood was also constructed at this time.

In 1840 a new road was constructed up Rushmire Hill leading out of Old Town, and past the Church. Where it linked with the Old London Road a tollhouse was erected. The road to Wortley and Alderley was improved and a turnpike constructed at Tor Hill. However, Lisleway was never turnpiked, being too rough and steep.

Notable benefactors to the town, other than Katharine Lady Berkeley, include Hugh Perry, a merchant and Alderman of the City of London who bequeathed £300 for the building of the Church Street Almshouses in the early 17th century. The Hugh Perry Almshouses complete with their own chapel in the courtyard, were subsequently constructed in 1638 and extended around 1720.



Further almshouses were constructed in 1837 by Miss Ann Bearpacker and in 1887 in memory of Rowland Hill of Tabernacle Pitch. The Reverend Rowland Hill was responsible for the religious revival in the 18th century when he established the Tabernacle Church.

The cloth industry eventually became a factory or mill based enterprise with the onset of the industrial revolution. New Mill, owned by the Austin family, employed 195 people in 1801, yet by 1825, competition from abroad and Yorkshire led to the decline and eventual closure of many Gloucestershire Mills. Between 1831 and 1841 the population of the town fell by 780 people as a direct consequence of the decline in the industry.

During the 19th century industries were developed which took over from the cloth trade. Many survive today and still employ large numbers of the local population.

These industries include Engineering, Printing and many commercial and retail enterprises. A notable resident of this period was Sir Isaac Pitman who, in 1834 invented shorthand (known as phonography). His former residence can be found in Orchard Street, and is still called Pitman House.

Today the overriding character of a working town still exists although many commuters also reside in the town due to its close proximity to Bristol, Gloucester and the Nuclear Power Station sites along the Severn Estuary.



Photo 3 – Pitman House in Orchard Street, the home of Sir Isaac Pitman, the inventor of shorthand. A good example of an early C19 modest town house.

WOTTON-UNDER-EDGE IN THE LANDSCAPE

The town of Wotton-under-Edge is, as its name suggests, a settlement under the edge of the Cotswold Hills. Valleys and coombes cut into the western facing scarp slope of the Cotswold Hills, and the town sits partly in a coombe, and partly on a shelf on the lower scarp overlooking the Severn Vale.

The plateau on which most of the historic central part of the town sits, rises gently from east to west from around 65 metres to 120 metres. The Dyers Brook or Tyley Stream, rises in the hills to the north west of the town, flowing south westwards through Coombe and Holywell, turning roughly north – south through the Dyers Brook part of the town, before turning south westwards towards Kingswood.

The western scarp edge of the hills closely surrounds the town on its northern and eastern sides, sheltering the town from the colder winter winds. Conversely, the plateau area is open to the south and west allowing rain bearing winds

that track up the Severn Vale an unobstructed access to the town.

On many of the main upland approach roads, especially from the north, the town is well hidden behind and below the scarp edge. Glimpses of the town only occur at quite close quarters, such as from the bottom of Lisleway Hill and from the viewpoint on the Old London Road. From the North Nibley Road, (B4060), the houses start on the right hand side only, giving the appearance of a village street, and it is not until the road turns round the southern end of Wotton Hill at the end of London Road, that a panorama over much of the town opens up. Coming into the town from the Rushmire direction along the B4058 there are again glimpses of the sporadic settlement in the Coombe Valley and this continues with houses dotted amongst the green fields. It is not until Adeys Lane is reached that a more urban feel starts with buildings continuously on both sides of the road.

Photo 4 – The Tabernacle Chapel, Tabernacle Pitch dates from 1850. This former Congregational Chapel, now an Auction Rooms, is a key “landmark” building featuring prominently in views across the town



The approaches on the southern side continue to create the impression of a secret town, out of sight. Only the road from Hillesley offers more panoramic distant views of the town. From the very edge of the town, Wotton Hill with its clump of pine trees is conspicuous to the left, with the old chapel at Tabernacle Pitch prominent above the surrounding buildings. A little nearer to the town, there is a glimpse of the Church tower, and the development spreading up the Coombe Valley with its encircling ring of wooded hills.

The roads from Charfield and Kingswood combine just outside the town and from here, the only impression of a settlement is the fire tower. Only when the brow of the hill is reached does the town appear, but even from here, the view is quite tightly constrained along the length of Haw Street. Again the Chapel at Tabernacle Pitch and the wooded hills form a backdrop to this view. From the Kingswood Road, the entrance to the Katharine Lady Berkeley School offers good views, with the houses of Merlin Haven dotted along the edge of the hill and Wotton Hill on the skyline. A low hill obscures much of the town centre although the newer housing off the Wortley Road is visible to the east, where the gentler slopes just above the stream have been built on.



Photo 5 – Looking north along Church Street with the hills rising to the Old London Road in the background



Photo 6 – Looking east from the Rowland Hill Almshouses on Tabernacle Pitch