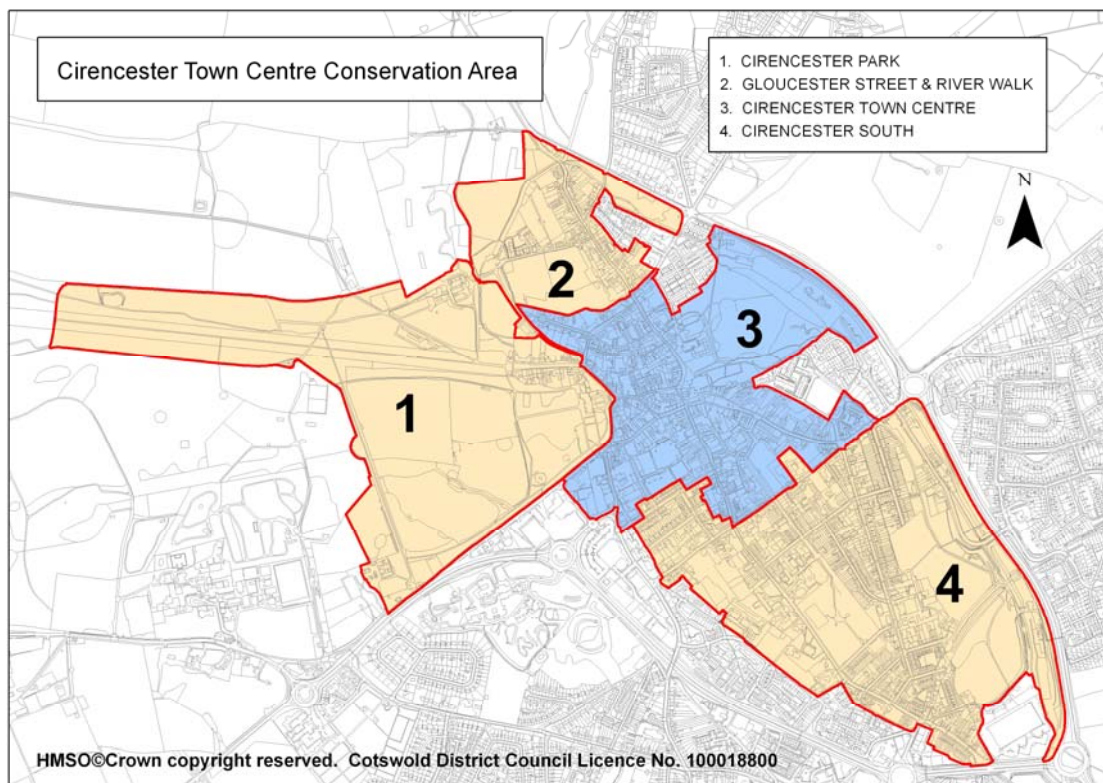


3.0 CIRENCESTER TOWN CENTRE CONSERVATION AREA

3.1 Location & Setting

As the name suggests, the Cirencester Town Centre Conservation Area is the most central of the four new Conservation Areas in the town. It borders the CA1 Cirencester Park Conservation Area to the west, CA2, the Gloucester Street & River Walk Conservation Area adjoining to the north. The southern boundary abuts the Cirencester South Conservation Area [CA4].

The whole of the Conservation Area lies on fairly flat land with only very slight changes in level perceptible.



Map I

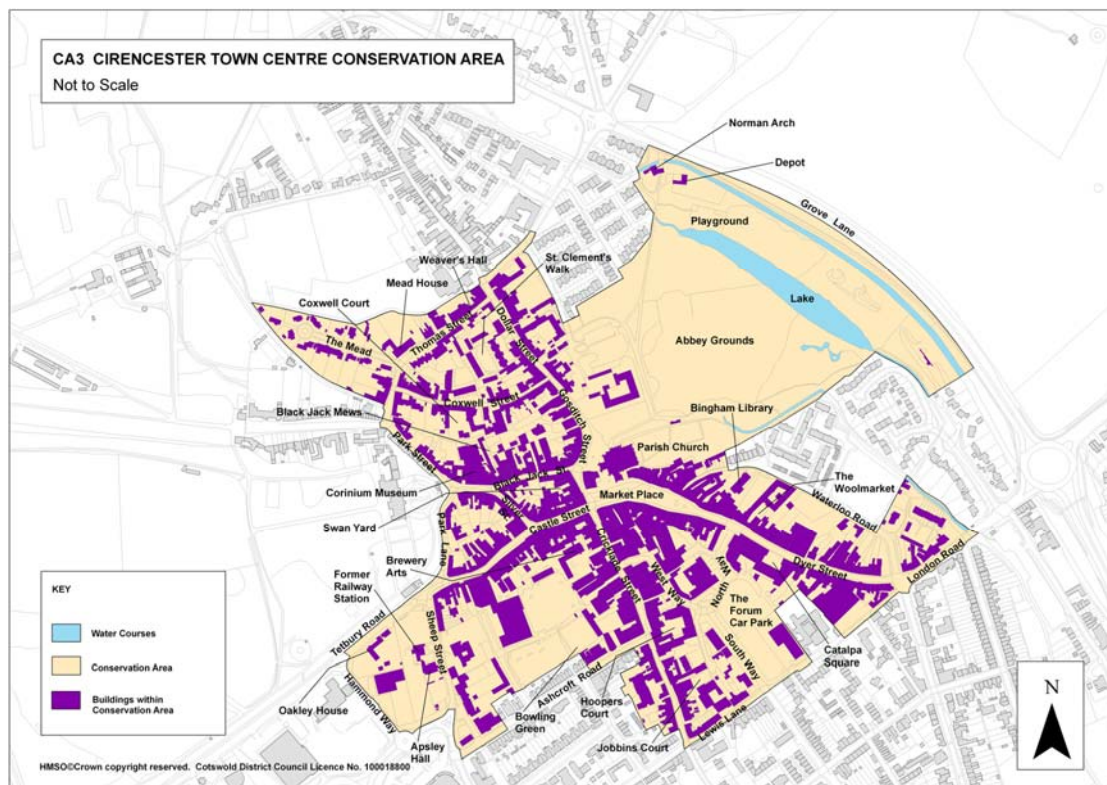
3.2 Boundaries of the Cirencester Town Centre Conservation Area

The Cirencester Town Centre Conservation Area includes the majority of the medieval town, specifically Market Place, the Abbey Grounds, and the principle streets in the historic core of the town including Dyer Street, Cricklade Street, Castle Street, Black Jack Street, the western side of Park Lane and Park Street, Thomas Street, the estate known as The Mead, and Dollar and Gosditch Streets.

The most northerly point of the Conservation Area is at the Norman Arch of the Abbey Grounds from where it follows the grass verge adjoining the dual-carriageway of the ring-road [Grove Lane], as far as the northern boundary of

the estate known as Corinium Gate and, taking in the section of Roman wall and a small part of the stream south of the lake, it then backs westwards to take in the high limestone wall along the southern side of the grounds. The Parish churchyard is contained within the boundary which then cuts across the western end of Waterloo Road before following the northern edge of the pavement, in a south-easterly direction, taking in premises at the rear of Dyer Street. From there it moves northwards, taking in the high limestone wall forming the eastern edge of The Waterloo car park before meeting the northern edge of The Churn, which it follows eastwards, until it meets London Road.

The southern boundary of the Town Centre Conservation Area follows the southern edge of London Road and Lewis Lane, except for the section which omits The Old School before joining Cricklade Street at its junction with Querns Lane and Watermoor Road. At the southern end of Cricklade Street, the boundary follows the rear gardens of historic properties on the west side of the road, taking in Homeberry House at the rear of the former malthouse before returning to Cricklade Street and then taking a westerly route along a short section of Ashcroft Road.



Map J

At the eastern edge of the terraced housing, the boundary follows the rear gardens on the north side of Ashcroft Road until it reaches the late twentieth-century building [33 Sheep Street] marking the corner with Sheep Street. From here it takes in the small island containing the veterinary practice before heading, at first west, and then north, taking in what is sometimes referred to as the Island Site containing Oakley House and the former railway station. The boundary takes in the eastern end of the old Tetbury Road and then

follows the winding path surrounding the Mansion House along Park Lane and Park Street.

At the junction with Cecily Hill, the boundary diverts along the eastern side of the River Walk, to take in the private residential estate known as The Mead, before continuing along the southern edge of the stream which marks the rear boundaries of properties along Thomas Street. From here, it crosses the road, taking in the west end of Spitalgate Lane, before heading south along Dugdale Road towards the Abbey Grounds car park. The boundary then follows the northern edge of the Abbey Grounds adjacent the modern housing estate before meeting up at its northern corner returning to its beginning at the Norman Arch.

3.3 Historical Development of the Cirencester Town Centre Conservation Area

The historical development of the Cirencester Town Centre Conservation Area is in large part the history of the development of the town as set out in Section 2.3 above. For reasons of brevity the following section adds only such further information as relates to changes to the physical structure of the conservation area itself.



77

From its medieval origins, significant structural changes to the area occurred from the eighteenth century onwards and most extensively during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

J Kip's drawing [77] of Cirencester, published by Sir Robert Atkyns in 1712, is a useful starting point. This early eighteenth century image of the town, viewed from the east, shows the dominance of the parish church and depicts the large U-shaped Elizabethan Mansion just beyond, prior to its redevelopment by the first Earl Bathurst in the following few years.

Whilst a certain amount of inaccuracy is inevitable in an image of this age [the fifteenth century south porch of the parish church appears to have been omitted] the cruciform road pattern of the town is very apparent; Cricklade Street can be seen on the left with Gloucester Street curving off to the right, whilst in the foreground is Dyer Street which merges with Market Place, the whole lined with stone built houses and shops built up off the back edge of the pavement, much as they are today.



78

Gardens feature strongly; whilst most would appear to be for use as vegetable plots, orchards or paddocks, there are a handful of ornate parterre gardens designed to impress, most noticeably in the bottom left hand corner – perhaps the garden of Gloucester House [60, Dyer Street], the early eighteenth century home of Mrs Rebecca Powell, and to the right of the parish church serving the Abbey House, shown in greater detail above. This view of Abbey

House [78], taken from Dollar Street / Gosditch Street, shows the high boundary wall, with its projecting coping and the pedestrian gate, left of centre, that still survive today. Also shown is the north side of the parish church, whilst the house itself and the gardens depicted have long since been redeveloped.

Richard Hall's Map of the town [Map K below], dating from 1795, shows the outline of the new Bathurst Mansion and reveals the extent of development along winding medieval streets - Shoe Lane, Butter Row and Botcher Row - together with the jumble of buildings at the west end of Market Place. Also shown are buildings located at West Market Place and the extension of Abbey House.

The route of several open watercourses through the town is shown in green and includes a small section of the Thames and Severn Canal and Cirencester Wharf at the top left hand corner of the map. At the junction of Park Street and Thomas Street the Gunstool Brook passed under the road, then Gunstool Bridge, and followed the boundary at the rear of gardens on Coxwell Street and under Dollar Street until it reached the Abbey Grounds. Public health concerns resulted in the culverting of this stretch of the stream from the bridge at the bottom of Cecily Hill. The stream running south of the River Walk flowed under a bridge at the southern end of Gloucester Street before continuing down Spitalgate Lane at this time; it was culverted some time later.



Map K [1795]

John Wood's Plan of Cirencester [Map L below], of 1835, shows a denser and slightly extended development pattern, but overall, the town centre's structure

appears little altered. Clearance from Market Place of medieval structures and narrow alleyways has occurred by this date but properties to the north of the parish church remain. The lock-up located roughly between what is now the open space between Rackham's and the King's Head, has also been demolished together with a house to the east of the south porch, presumably to provide public pedestrian access to the churchyard behind. The result of all this was the recreation of a much larger and usable public space for markets, trade and community events.



Map L [1835]

Whilst many properties were redeveloped during the nineteenth century, it was perhaps two road widening schemes which would have had the most

dramatic impact on the structure and character of the town centre in this period. In 1897 Castle Street was widened by half its width from its junction with Market Place to Silver Street; Castle Street had previously been no wider than Coxwell Street. This scheme saw the redevelopment of The Ram Inn, which was once a famous coaching inn with an entrance at the west end of Market Place. Made increasingly obsolete by the arrival of the railways, it was replaced with the Neo-Tudor block [1896-7], designed by John Birch for Lord Bathurst [79].

Medieval Cricklade Street was typical in being only twelve feet wide in places but in the nineteenth century it became one of the main routes to both railway stations [located at Sheep Street and Watermoor] with a consequent increase in two-way traffic causing congestion and a danger to pedestrians. As a result its “dog-leg” was removed and the section from Market Place to the junction with the newly-created Ashcroft Road was widened in 1892 [80].

The Victorian period was one of substantial change for Cirencester; economic, social, educational, religious, cultural and political changes all occurred in considerable measure during this period, but it was the twentieth century which was to see the most major change to the structure, and consequently, the character of the town centre.



79



80

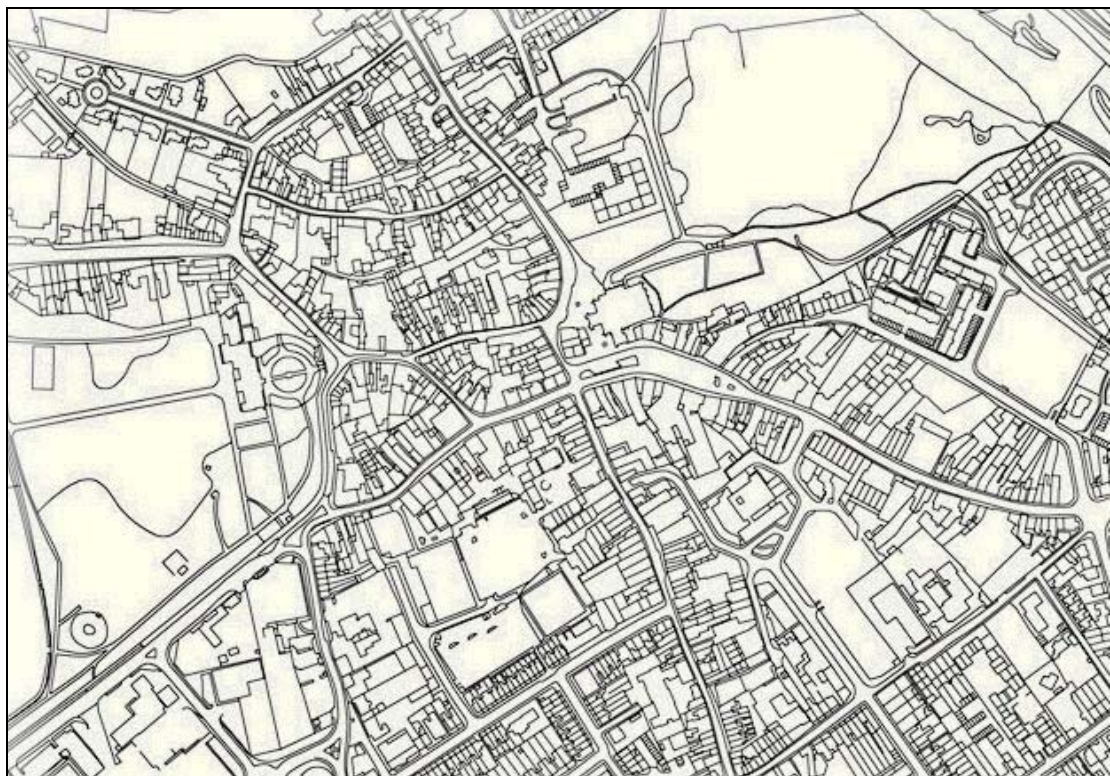
The growing requirement for larger retail premises in the twentieth century often resulted in the unfortunate loss of traditional narrow shopfronts and/or the amalgamation of two or more, as well as some exceptionally large retail units, the most notable example being the Tesco supermarket [389] at Brewery Court.

Also regrettable was the demolition, in the 1960s, of Abbey House, once such an important feature of the town, and its replacement with modern flats [66]. Similarly, the Congregational Chapel in Dyer Street - itself a substitute for the chapel in Sheep Street [built 1839] when it became the Cirencester Memorial Hospital – was demolished along with several eighteenth century houses in Dyer Street to make way for modern shops and flats. Nearby Dyer Court and

the buildings behind were demolished to make way for Forum Car Park. A new Police Station [64] was built in 1964 and Lewis Lane connected with Dyer Street by the newly formed North and South Way. These were substantial physical changes and the area now forms the largest urban space within the town centre, offering significant enhancement opportunities [See Section 3.4 Spatial Analysis].

But the 1960s and 1970s also witnessed many properties in the town being rehabilitated and the Council won a Civic Trust award for part of The Triangle development, now called St Clement's Walk [67]. In the final decades of the twentieth century several sheltered housing schemes, designed specifically for the elderly, were provided within the town centre; a notable scheme incorporated part of the former Malt House in Cricklade Street thereby retaining two of the prominent chimneys that act as an important local landmark [489-90].

Despite all these changes, the principle medieval streets within the area covered by the Town Centre Conservation Area remained much the same in structure albeit with many buildings refurbished and/or redeveloped. Railings and grassed areas surrounding the parish church were removed [c.1975] to create paved urban spaces for a greater concentration and circulation of pedestrians but otherwise the Market Place, so important to the character of the town, also remained largely unchanged [Map M].



Map M [2006]