

## **3.4 Spatial Analysis of the Town Centre Conservation Area**

### **Plan Form & Layout**

The Cirencester Town Centre Conservation Area is the most spatially complex and diverse of all of the Cirencester conservation areas; it contains the majority of the oldest parts of the town having evolved over many centuries to suit its inhabitants. The resultant variety of spaces and the connections between them help to make it a pleasant and user-friendly town.

Market Place forms the principle space having acted as the focus for social, religious and community activities since the early Medieval period; it retains its pre-eminence as the most important community space to a significant degree albeit that through traffic and car parking diminishes its value in this respect.

For the most part, medieval streets of narrow width radiate in winding form from Market Place. The contained linear spaces found here and the vibrancy of the commercial and retail activity is in marked contrast to the relaxing open expanse of the Abbey Grounds, forming a green lung, within a very short distance of the heart of town.

Not unlike other historic towns, some of the town centre has been altered, particularly in the last century, to form spaces which are not as attractive as they might once have been, or could become. Combining a lack of an appropriate and reassuring sense of enclosure with buildings devoid of human scale, refinement or detail, such spaces within the town now offer considerable opportunities for enhancement in the context of the more architecturally-rewarding and visually-stimulating enclosed spaces which still dominate.

### **Character & Interrelationship of Spaces**

The Cirencester Town Centre Conservation Area is in part characterised by the type and variety of spaces, the ways in which they interrelate and the connections between.

The main public spaces within the Town Centre Conservation Area and the links between them are set out below; more detailed spatial analysis can be found in sections on individual character areas, where relevant.

#### **Market Place**

- When approached from the north via Gosditch Street, or from the east via Dyer Street, Market Place opens out to reveal the cathedral-sized parish church flanked by predominantly three-storey Georgian facades on the north side and mostly more robust 4-storey Victorian elevations on the south side, and terminated by similar but more narrow-fronted properties to the west [82];
- Market Place is a broad funnel-shaped thoroughfare narrowing at its east end where it meets with Dyer Street [81];
- Its relative scale in combination with the church with its large three-storey ornate south porch, soaring tall tower and buttresses, and the scale,

nature and variety of buildings which enclose it creates a space which declares its importance as a primary location in which major events and considerable daily activity take place [81 & 82];



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- To the southwest of the church an L-shaped paved space, once a grassed garden surrounded by railings, is enclosed by the west side of the south porch, the southern side of the tower and the remaining small group of buildings to the west of the church; now housing a war memorial, it provides an important and much-used seating area where people meet away from the car parking in the centre of Market Place [83];



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- Corridor pathways around the base of the church help to facilitate pedestrian movement, for example the paved route from Market Place to the west [85 & 86], incorporating the historic Market Cross, allows access to West Market Place from where views of Gosditch Street and Black Jack Street invite further movement;
- Although less inviting, the small space to the east of the porch enables pedestrian access to the churchyard;



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- Other pedestrian routes off Market Place help to ensure good permeability, allowing access to facilities and parts of the town which might otherwise be inaccessible and consequently less commercially viable; an example is the narrow access lane off the north side, underneath premises occupied by Rackhams, leading to the Bingham Library and Waterloo car park [87].



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### Parish churchyard

- A remarkably tranquil and almost secretive, enclosed, green, rectilinear space contained by the tall rear elevations of premises fronting Market Place and a high limestone rubble wall marking the boundary with the Abbey Grounds [88];
- The churchyard is distinguished and further contained on the west side by the splendid and least-known elevation of the parish church, the east featuring the tower and seven gables [89];
- Mature trees within Abbey Grounds and others within the churchyard help to create shelter and privacy whilst the regular and straight pathways contrast with the curving route around the east side of the church which leads to West Market Place.



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### West Market Place

- This roughly triangular space was opened up following the demolition of several properties backing onto the north of the church and facing Black Jack and Gosditch Streets in the early nineteenth century. The result is an enclosed pedestrian space partly filled by an impressive mature Cedar tree with an elegant timber seat encircling its base [91 & 90] and punctuated by the historic Market Cross;



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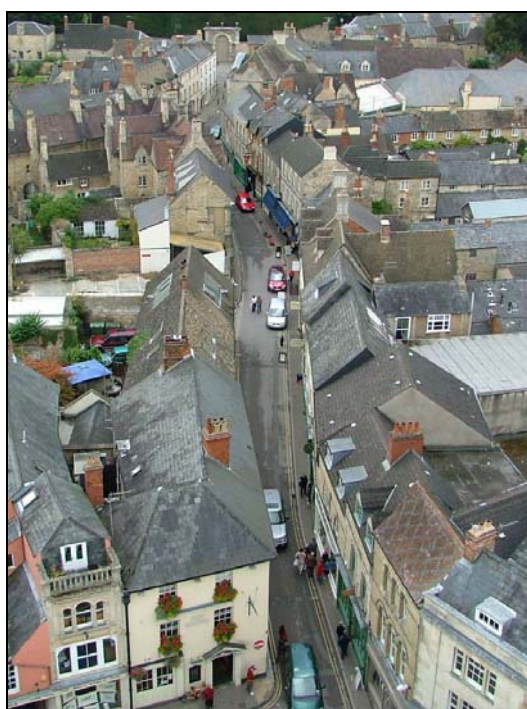


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- The elegant curve of buildings to the west of Gosditch Street is mirrored by the shape of the road and contrasts with the hard linear edge of the high wall bordering the Abbey Grounds and the highly modulated elevations of the church [91 & 93];
- The space is contained at its northern end where Gosditch Street narrows as it merges with Dollar Street, and creating a focal point of the picturesque premises on the east side [91 & 93];
- Mature trees in Abbey Grounds hang over into this space softening the built form and adding to the sense of enclosure.

**Predominantly medieval streets to west and north of Market Place:**

- Several irregular-shaped blocks divided by narrow winding streets radiating from Market Place form the predominant character of the north-west quadrant of the town centre;



- Park Street [94], Coxwell Street and Black Jack Street [92] typify this character created by a strong sense of containment resulting from the continuity of densely-developed narrow-fronted two and three-storey properties, invariably built off the back edge of a narrow pavement, with development extending at right angles from the road;
- Many properties retain side entrances and corridor “mews” known as “places” offering access to premises developed in long narrow plots; such intimate and enclosed spaces create visual interest whilst some provide access to small shopping and café facilities including, for example, Swan Yard off West Market Place [95];
- Park Street and Park Lane are further distinguished by the high wall and famously high Mansion yew hedge and by the high wall and decorated roofscape of the Mansion stables [94 & 97];



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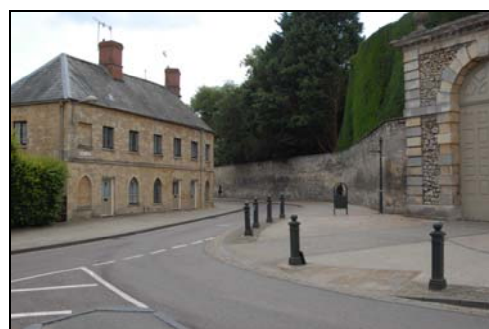


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- At the junction of Castle Street, Park Street and Sheep Street is an important nodal space which now marks the western vehicular entrance into the town from the Tetbury Road; enclosed by the high wall surrounding Cirencester Mansion on the northwest side, this space is now characterised by high quality low level public realm improvements with a good balance between the needs of the pedestrian and the driver, and visual focus provided by the former police station and magistrates court [96];



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- A similarly important but smaller nodal space is found at the junction of Park Street and Park Lane in front of the Mansion gates; it is marked by the yew hedge and gated entrance which forms one of several focal points to create an enclosed and memorable triangular space, again marked by quality public realm improvements and improved pedestrian safety [97];
- Thomas Street and Dollar Street are a little wider and incorporate some larger buildings sitting in generous plots and occasional narrow front gardens bordered by railings, the whole creating a contained but grander and less tunnel-like character than, for example, Black Jack Street and Coxwell Street [98 & 99];
- Elsewhere in the north-west quadrant private gardens at the rear of medieval blocks occasionally reach the roadside but are predominantly visible only as a result of mature trees overhanging walls or glimpsed through minor breaks in the street scene, or between rooftop gables;
- These streets contrast strongly with the arrow-like straightness of The Mead housing estate, with its spacious wide plots, where a sense of enclosure is achieved through low roadside boundary walls in combination with the very mature planting within gardens and bordering the estate on both sides;



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- The 1970s development known as St Clements, once referred to as The Triangle site and marked by Coxwell Street, Thomas Street and Dollar Street, is wedged-in between mostly medieval and Georgian properties and represents a further marked contrast;
- Although it dilutes the area's historic character and sense of containment, it also creates a further spatial dimension of low-rise terracing, set at angles and subdivided by areas of open grassed lawns, with connections maintained by a network of pedestrian routes through the development linking it with surrounding medieval streets [100 & 101].



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### Castle Street

- Castle Street follows a medieval alignment at its west end but redevelopment at its northern side where it meets Market Place in the mid-nineteenth century has resulted in a wider road albeit maintaining a continuous frontage built off the back-edge of the pavement;
- A mixture of plot widths, some variation in building heights, varied roofline and the occasional stepping back of buildings to create a wider footpath all contribute to give this gently-winding street a varied spatial character [102 & 103];





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- Narrow, enclosed, side arched entrances and corridor mews, occasionally opening up into courtyards, give variety and richness to the spatial character of Castle Street [104 & 105];



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- Two public pedestrian routes on the southern side of Castle Street, through to the public space known as Brewery Yard, and towards the Brewery car park - the arched entrance under Castle Buildings opposite premises occupied by Lloyd Bank and a further arched entrance under premises occupied by a Tesco supermarket - are important in maintaining permeability by encouraging pedestrian movement [106 & 107];



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### Abbey Grounds:

- A large open wedge-shaped expanse of urban parkland punctuated and enclosed by mature trees, the Abbey Grounds are accessed from the town centre via a discreet gateway at the rear [north] of the parish church [84 & 108];
- Sandwiched between two twentieth-century housing developments to northwest and southeast and separated from further open land to the northeast by a tree belt and the curve of the dual-carriageway ringroad, the Abbey Grounds is an Important Open Space [green] located within a very short distance of the town centre.



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### Cricklade Street:

- Cricklade Street retains a linear character with a strong sense of enclosure and can be divided into two parts:
  - The northern section: Market Place to Ashcroft Road**
  - Widened by redevelopment, some buildings are set back from the old pavement edge on the east side; this section has a slightly more open character towards the southern part facilitating opportunities for alfresco dining on wide pavements;
  - Plots vary in size and shape; long narrow historic plots dominate the west side with frontages mainly onto Cricklade Street, the east side is more varied and includes larger plots facilitating more extensive modern commercial premises, especially those that extend back as far as West Way;

- Several pedestrian links from this linear space provide access to east and west making this street one of the most permeable areas for shoppers and visitors [110 & 111];



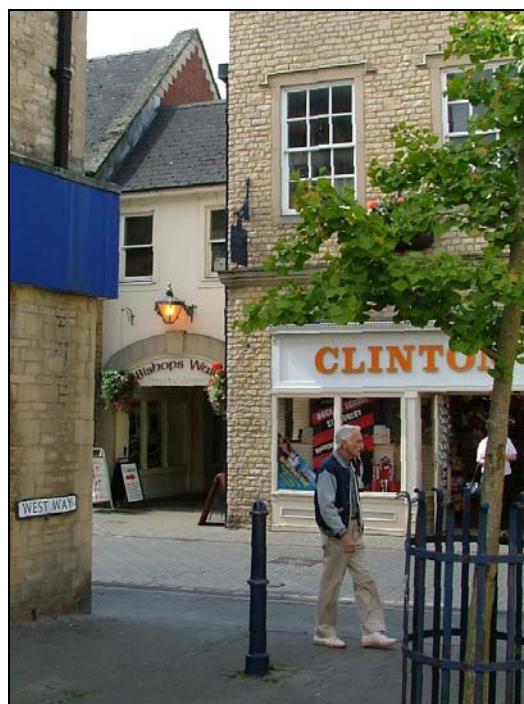
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- Of three pedestrian links from Cricklade Street to Brewery Yard and car park two are internal, one formal through the modern arcade known as Bishop's Walk [112], the other informal through premises currently occupied by Waterstones – these provide additional pedestrian routes, particularly in inclement weather, and increase footfall thereby helping to sustain commercial viability in the town;

- The west end of West Way, where it meets Cricklade Street, provides additional pedestrian access and the rear facilitates commercial deliveries; this utilitarian space offers significant potential for enhancement;

**The southern section: Ashcroft Road to Lewis Lane / Querns Lane**

- For the most part narrower, the southern section of Cricklade Street is more varied as a result of sequences of historic narrow plots followed by several larger plots, the whole having a more varied roofline made up of two- and three-storey building heights and a more tightly-contained character with buildings built off the back edge of predominantly very narrow pavements [113];



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- Half way down, it widens on the north-east side as a result of buildings constructed in the twentieth century and set further back from the building line to provide wider pavements before narrowing, once again, at the junction with Lewis Lane;

- Redevelopment behind the former malthouse, half-way down on the southwest side, has provided a small gap in the street with views to a rare green enclosed courtyard;
- Retaining good permeability, there are two narrow pedestrian routes to Jobbins Court [118] at the rear of premises on the east side, and a further one to the newly developed Hooper's Court [116] linking Ashcroft Road and Cricklade Street with the Forum car park;



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- A further pedestrian route exists through the courtyard garden of The Wheatsheaf public house [117];
- Several corridor mews give access to private residential [115] and in some cases, commercial premises, such as Mews Courtyard [114];



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- Jobbins Court itself is, however, a very disappointing space; having been redeveloped in the 1970s, it is dominated by car parking and traffic bollards achieving a sense of containment only by the rear

service elevations of buildings of mediocre character, the whole offering significant opportunity for enhancement [119].



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### Brewery Yard & Car Park:

- Brewery Yard provides an important partially-enclosed social space and through-route between the Brewery public car park and Cricklade Street, albeit that some enhancement would be beneficial in order to enable it to reach its potential [120];
- Brewery Car Park and adjacent areas at the rear of Castle Street are inevitably dominated by the car and whilst minor tree planting assists in making these spaces less visually unacceptable, there is a real need for enhancement to the pedestrian experience which for the most part is chaotic and potentially unsafe [121];
- The space is defined on its northern side by the rear service elevations of commercial properties facing Castle Street and on its west side by the uncompromisingly dead frontage of the Tesco supermarket [122] with active frontage existing only on the east side [123];



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- However, pedestrian routes from here are numerous making the space very permeable but, whilst allowing access to Castle Street, Brewery Yard [120], Cricklade Street, Ashcroft Road and Sheep Street, these routes generally present a less than pleasant pedestrian environment;

- The Bowling Green, located at the south east corner of the car park, whilst a fully enclosed pleasant space for its users, is essentially a private space contributing little to the public experience of the town.



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### Dyer Street:

- Sequences of long narrow medieval plots with development extending lengthways to the rear, interspersed with buildings of grander proportions and architectural character, predominantly of two and three storeys with a very varied roofline, give the gently-curving Dyer Street a mixed spatial character [124];



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- Most historic buildings follow the same alignment and are all built off the back edge of the pavement with the occasional narrow front garden bordered by walls and railings [125];
- Redevelopment in the 1970s of a large section between North Way and approximately half way along Dyer Street, has created a very different spatial character which has had various impacts:
  - Buildings provide good levels of containment to Dyer Street and retained pedestrian routes provide permeability on both sides, yet these are generally less appealing than their historic counterparts, leading to and from rear service areas, utilitarian building extensions

and large areas of car parking; as a result they can appear both oppressive and intimidating [9 & 10], particularly at night;

- Open arcades supported by reinforced concrete pillars allow pedestrians more shelter from the weather [126]; and
- Catalpa Square offers a contained space for pedestrian movement and al fresco dining [128], yet the form and layout of this development has clearly diluted the historic character and close grain of the street;



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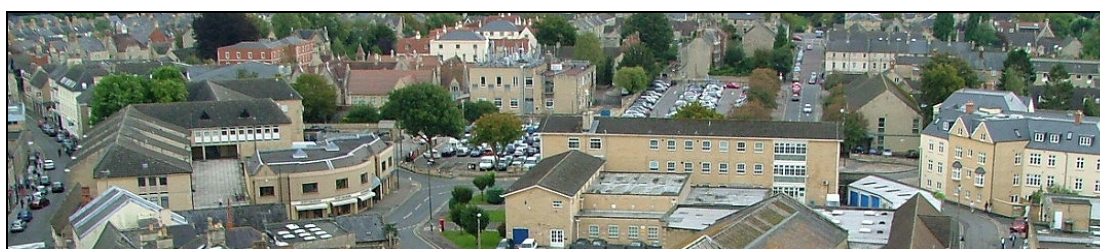


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- The Woolmarket, on the north side of Dyer Street, provides a pleasant enclosed courtyard for shopping being surrounded on all sides by modest two-storey retail outlets and providing pedestrian access to Waterloo Road and the large public car park [127].

#### The Forum:

- The Forum is a large open urban expanse with minimal levels of enclosure, provided for the most part by buildings of mediocre quality and character, the whole currently dominated by a large public car park accessed by a wide through-route from Lewis Lane to Dyer Street [129];



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- Permeability is its principal strength with numerous well-used pedestrian and vehicular routes passing across it, albeit currently in a haphazard and potentially unsafe manner;
- Sited between two historic commercial streets, namely Cricklade Street and Dyer Street, and contained by Lewis Lane to the south and the Police Station to the north, it offers considerable enhancement potential;



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- Softened in part by trees and a public realm scheme incorporating stone benches and pebbled verges, dating from the 1960s / 1970s, it currently lacks active street frontage and is made more utilitarian by the extent of rear service areas, particularly where it meets West Way, and which form part of its perimeter [129-133].



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### Sheep Street:

- Now part of the main route for vehicular traffic into the town towards the Brewery Car Park, Sheep Street retains some sense of enclosure at its northern end by a terrace of two-storey buildings on its east side, built off the back edge of the narrow pavement, and the raised tree-lined embankment on its west side, forming the boundary with the Sheep Street public car park [134];
- It then opens out with large detached buildings set back from the road frontage and within their own larger plots [136];
- The triangular section at its southern end is open in character and would benefit from enhancement through the provision of a physical and visual barrier between it and the roundabout in order to create a sense of

containment, to aid pedestrian safety, and to create a pedestrian-dominated space [135];



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- The Sheep Street public car park surrounds the former railway station on three sides and is contained by a high limestone wall the full length of the west and southern sides of the car park; mature trees overhanging from within the grounds of Oakley House and a smaller tree belt on its west side are important in ensuring some degree of enclosure to this large open space [137].



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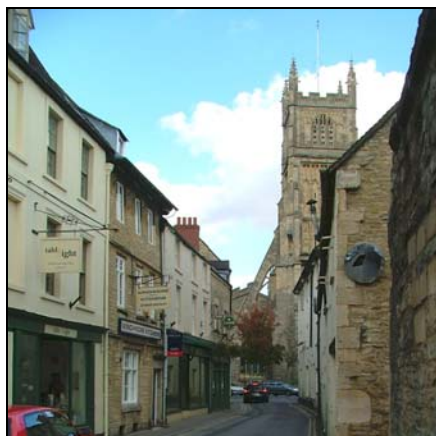
### Key Views, Landmarks and Focal Points

The parish church, and in particular its impressive tower, forms the major landmark within the whole of the town and is especially important within the Town Centre Conservation Area where there are few directions from which a view of the church tower is not possible. There are also several other important views; the principal views and focal points are shown on the Views Analysis Map N on page 69.

#### Principal Views of the Parish Church:

- Of particular significance is the long view from St Michael's Park [CA.4] aligned with Tower Street and South Way to the church tower, a route which happens to follow a principal road of the Roman grid, and passes the west end of the Roman Basilica and the crossroads of the Fosse Way and Ermin Street; it is considered that the mid-twentieth century police station, with its horizontal emphasis, currently adds a visually unsettling element to this important view [140];

- From Black Jack Street, views east are dominated by the heavily buttressed tower of the church [138], and at the west by the gates and yew hedge of Cirencester Mansion;
- Views across the open Abbey Grounds are especially important in helping to orientate the pedestrian [139];



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**Views of local focal points within and outside the conservation area:**

- The two remaining chimneys of the former malthouse in Cricklade Street form an important focal point, helping to orientate the pedestrian in particular, and can be viewed from a surprising number of places in the town centre [143];
- Several buildings provide focal points within the Town Centre Conservation Area, some located at crossroads; they include:
  - the former Victorian Police Station and Magistrates Court at the east end of Tetbury Road [96];
  - Dunstall House at the junction of Park Street and Park Lane;
  - Lloyds Bank, corner of Castle Street and Silver Street [41];
  - 137-141 Cricklade Street, marking the northeast corner of the crossroads with Lewis Lane, Querns Lane and Watermoor Road;



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- 3 Dyer Street at the north end of North Way [144],
- 19 West Market Place [Café Rocco] viewed from Cricklade Street [146];
- HSBC Bank, corner of Cricklade Street and Market Place [147].
- Apsley Hall when viewed from the pedestrian walk to the south which links Sheep Street with Querns Lane;
- Abberley House, Park Street at the north end of Silver Street viewed from Castle Street [145].



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**Smaller glimpsed views:**

- Numerous narrow corridor views into semi-public mews or “places” along several streets and through pedestrian paths and corridors in the town centre, for example Black Jack Mews [148] and The Woolmarket [150];



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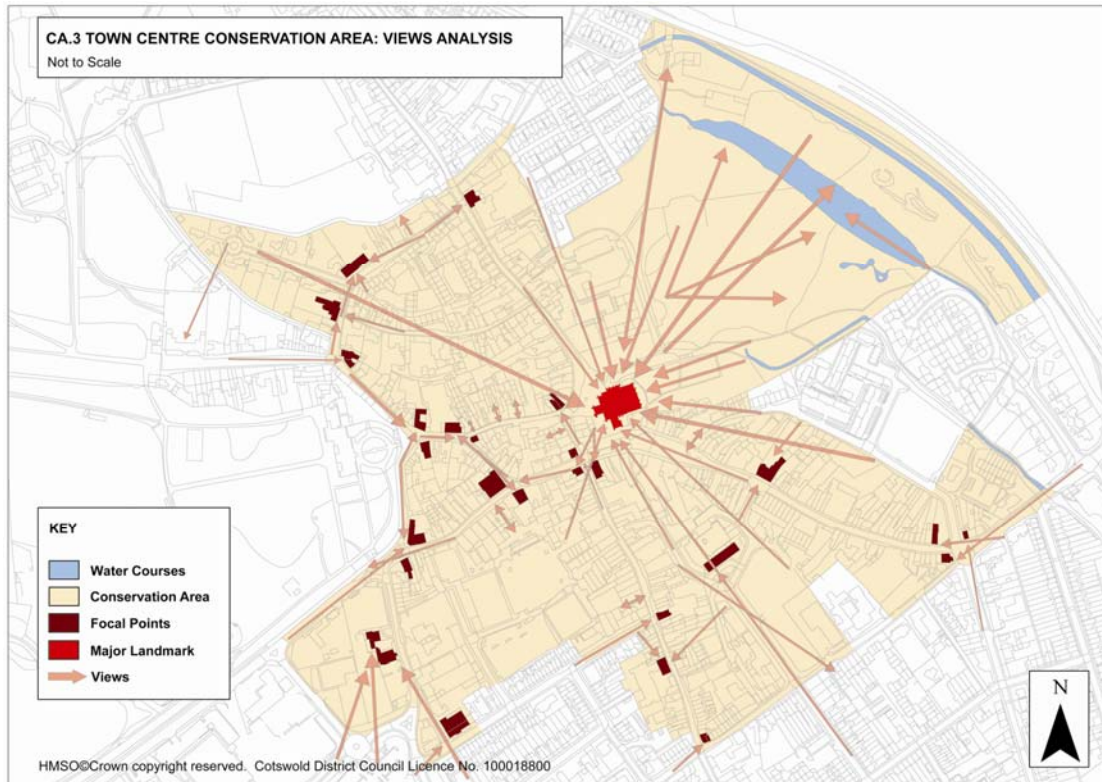


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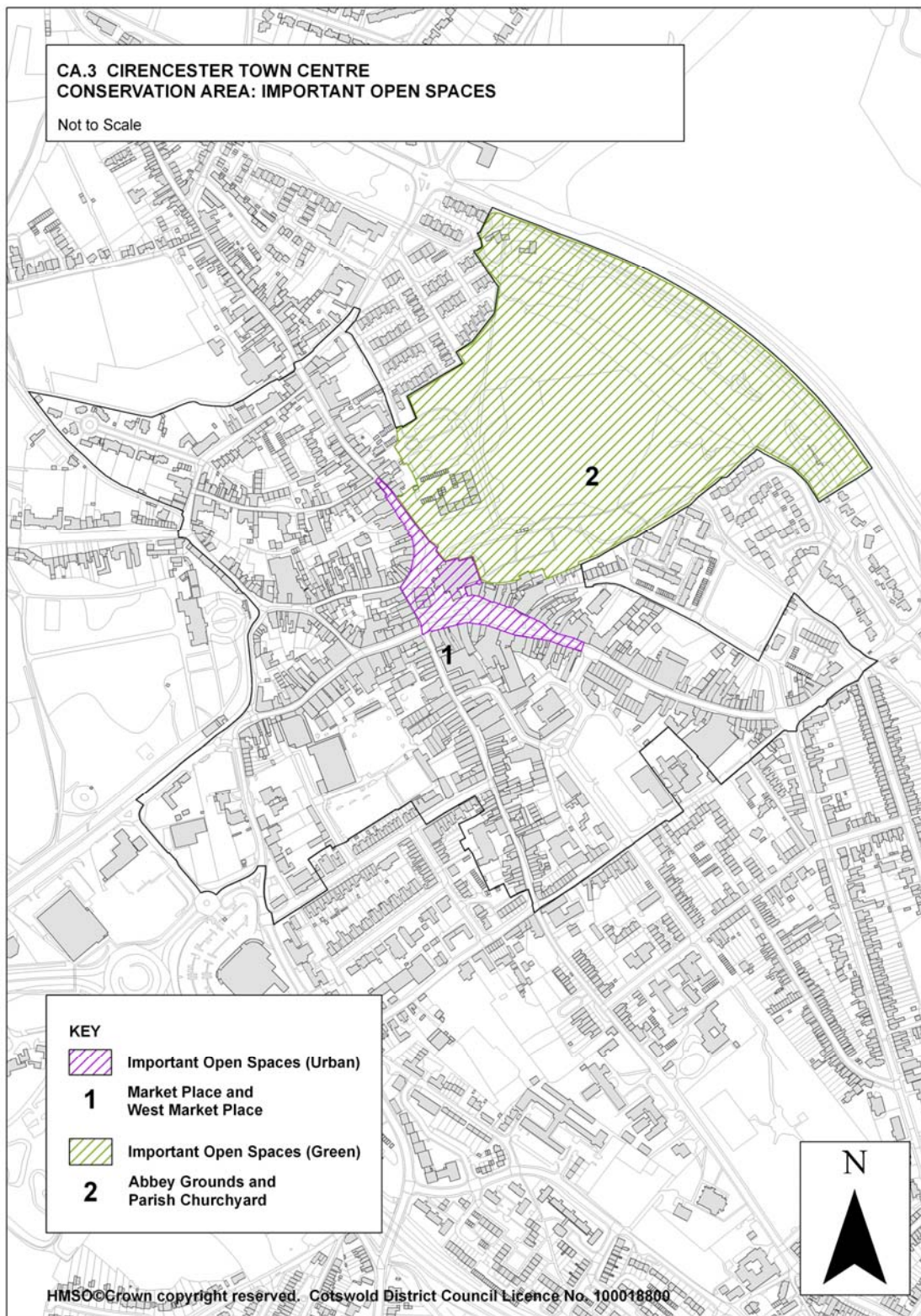
- Glimpses into the private rear gardens of the medieval blocks of the northwest quadrant in particular, are rare as a result of the continuity of the building line, hgf but glimpses do occur where there are gaps in the street scene [151].



Map N

**Important Open Spaces:**

There are two Important Open Spaces within the Town Centre Conservation Area. These are shown on Map O overleaf.



**Map O**

### 3.5 Activity & Prevailing Uses

The Town Centre Conservation Area lies at the commercial core of Cirencester and contains the vast majority of the town's small to medium-sized retail and office premises such as shops, banks, estate agents, insurance companies, law firms, dental practices and opticians, hairdressers and florists, together with hotels and bars. Local institutions such as the Bingham Library [156] and the Corinium Museum [155], and local government organisations such as the Town Council, together with many community [168] and religious facilities, are also to be found in the town centre.

Market Place has formed the hub of community and social events for some considerable time and is still home to regular weekly markets albeit that the annual Mop Fair has been moved to the Forum car park.



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Market Place and Cricklade Street combined [152 & 157] form the main “high street” locations, and together with Castle Street and Dyer Street, create the principal retail area housing a mixture of local stores and the majority of the major retailers such as Woolworth's, Boots The Chemist and clothing retailers such as Dorothy Perkins. There are also a good number of more specialist stores such as Costa Coffee, Specsavers Opticians and Waterstones the book sellers. Market Place is perhaps the most prestigious retail location housing banks and a number of jewellers as well as home-ware, clothing and gift shops [158].

Rackhams on the north side of Market Place is the only premises that might be considered a department store whilst Gardner's premises at the east end of Dyer Street supplies a large range of goods for the home and garden.





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Beyond the main areas, several streets retain predominantly local and specialist boutique-type stores, often combining retail and café facilities. Black Jack Street [160] and Silver Street [167] typify these areas, selling everything from trinkets and gifts to clothing, home-made sausages and cheeses, plants and cut flowers.

Small cafés and bars interspersed within Black Jack Street, some with al fresco dining facilities located at the rear of long medieval plots or within courtyard mews, add to the overall ambience and facilitate a more relaxed shopping and/or dining experience.

The town is also host to a number of small arcades including Bishop's Walk, constructed in 1990, providing a covered link from the Brewery Car Park to Cricklade Street, adding further retail variety. Other examples include The Woolmarket [159] which links Dyer Street with the Waterloo Car Park, Warrens Gorse Mews [161] on the east side of Cricklade towards Ashcroft Road, and the Swan Yard, off West Market Place [162]. There are also several art and antique shops, and a small number of restaurants, predominantly in Market Place and Castle Street.

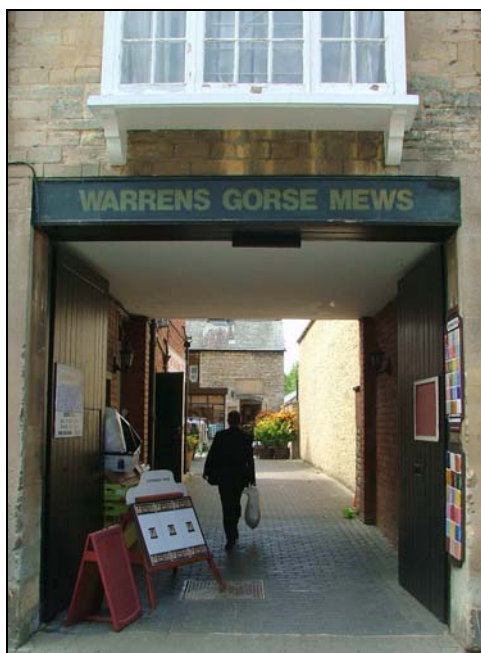


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Whilst the town offers a wide range of goods, it increasingly does so in the context of the growing popularity of out-of-town shopping malls and the lure of larger retail centres in nearby Cheltenham and Gloucester. The overall mix in the town is nevertheless currently still good and new retailers to the town find a steady trade; a handful of new clothing retailers have recently acquired premises in the town and a Marks and Spencer Food Store opened in 2006, taking over premises formerly occupied by Iceland frozen food shop in Dyer Street, ideally located between the Forum and Waterloo public car parks. Tesco, the largest supermarket in the town, is located between Castle Street and Cricklade Street, and is also well served by the public car parks.



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Café culture within the town appears to be growing with small al fresco dining areas proving increasingly popular; such facilities can currently be found at Catalpa Square, Brewery Court, Swan Yard, Cricklade Street and the Woolmarket, to name just a few. The nature of the built form within the town suggests that further facilities of this nature could be provided, particularly if elements of the public realm were enhanced to provide more congenial pedestrian-dominated spaces, perhaps with provision of dedicated facilities for children, and the introduction of some locally-distinctive public art.

The Town Centre Conservation Area is also home to a number of residential properties serving a range of needs; several former residential and commercial premises have in recent years been converted to flats. For example, part of the former Malthouse along Cricklade Street was converted and extended to form retirement flats, whilst several properties in Coxwell Street have now been subdivided to provide smaller units. Individual houses can still be found in the town centre and particularly in the northwest quadrant; The Mead private housing estate is entirely residential, and streets such as Coxwell Street, Thomas Street, Dollar Street and Sheep Street contain a good mix of residential properties in a variety of tenures [163-166].



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There are a small number of restaurants within the town as well as a selection of public houses [169]; Bishop's Walk is also home on the first floor, to The Rock, Cirencester's only nightclub. Activity within the town is vibrant for six days a week and an increasing number of retailers are now choosing to open their premises on a Sunday. However, limited provision of facilities for residents and visitors to enjoy in the evenings gives Cirencester town centre a

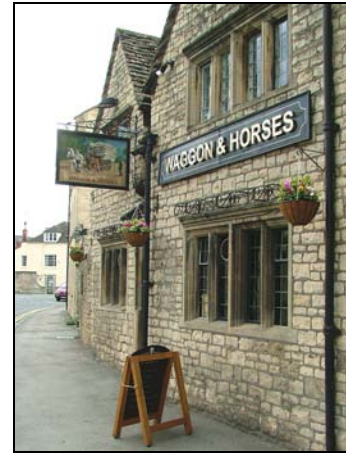
less than vibrant character outside office hours. Further provision of facilities such as a cinema and/or theatre, could help to address this issue and encourage further provision. Such provision also has the potential to reduce crime and/or the fear of crime in the evenings albeit that actual crime is not generally thought to be a major problem at present.



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A special feature of the town is the location of informal recreational facilities, mainly in the form of Abbey Grounds [170-171]. A place to relax, play outdoor games, admire the landscape, eat a sandwich or listen to music from the bandstand in the summer months, and so close to the town centre is rare, and a valued element of the town's character.



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For the most part, the town is a vibrant yet comfortable and pleasant place to be, largely free from major traffic noise, which is taken by the ringroad around the periphery and barely perceptible from within the town, largely as a result of mature planting.

Traffic and car parking still dominate the town's most important public spaces and impact on visual perceptions and pedestrian safety.