Fairford Neighbourhood Plan
Character and Design Assessment for Fairford and Horcott

Milton End

Borough

East End North

East End South   Horcott

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AppendixNon-Designated Heritage Assets

River Coln, Bull Island

1.1   Introduction

1.1.1   This Character Assessment is intended to inform an understanding of the distinct features of Fairford and Horcott, and how they combine to create their unique character. The work has been carried out by a sub-group of the Fairford Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group with co-opted members from the

local community. It was decided to divide the town of Fairford using the tithing divisions first referenced in 1779: Milton End, west of the river; Borough, the centre of the town; and East End, east of Borough, a large area which was subdivided into two (north and south of the A417) for manageability. Horcott, a separate settlement with its own distinct history, became the fifth area for analysis.

1.1.2   Initially a proforma (Oxford City Council, Character Assessment Toolkit) was used to identify significant features of each of the areas, supported by large numbers of photographs, and the analysis has been done using the Higham Ferrers example. Inevitably in each area there are buildings which are atypical (eg. Newcroft Cottage, an early1970s house in The Croft, surrounded by Victorian and Georgian buildings) and these have either been discounted or, if it was felt that their distinctiveness was intrinsic to the overall character of the area, this has been recorded. In the Conservation Area, on-site fieldwork has been supported by the historical record and evidence from the Historic England, Listed Buildings database. However, it was felt that the Listed Buildings themselves (over 100 in the parish) should not be specifically featured except insofar as they contribute to the character of each area as a whole.

1.1.3   All this work has been carried out by local residents who do not have specific architectural or planning backgrounds. This Character and Design Assessment will enable developers, planners, designers and local residents of the future to produce high quality designs of houses, landscape and other buildings all of which should enhance the local character of the parish.

1.2   Historical Development of Fairford and Horcott[1]

1.2.1   Fairford Town

Fairford is a unique rural settlement area dating from the late Mesolithic/Neolithic period[2]. There is physical evidence of continuous settlement from that time, about 4000 BCE, through to the present day including Iron Age, Roman, Anglo-Saxon and Norman structures and artefacts. The existing settlement dates largely from the Tudor period.

1.2.2   The ancient roots of the town can clearly be seen in the layout of the roads and buildings. Fairford is distinctively set within a web of important tracks which have developed over the centuries from Iron Age, Roman, Anglo-Saxon and medieval drove roads and salt routes. These tracks, mostly now roads, are on the routes from Wales and the west, to Lechlade, the highest navigable point of the River Thames, and London.

1.2.3   'The Gloucestershire Historic Towns Survey: Cotswold District archaeological assessment: Fairford', by GCC Archaeology Dept., 1998 and updated in 2007 gives a very complete record of this history of the town with maps of the town's development. Since this 2007 report, excavations for the pre-quarrying survey at Horcott in 2007-9, and pre-building archaeological investigations along Cirencester Road in June and July 2015, have produced even more evidence of Neolithic, Roman and Anglo-Saxon settlement.

1.2.4   The earliest written record of Fairford is in 850 and the town also appears in the 1086 Domesday Book (VCH: Vol 7 p78 Ref 18). Fairford Mill is mentioned and reference is made to a priest living among the inhabitants of the settlement, which would suggest the existence of a pre-Conquest church. It was a Royal Borough for about 500 years (mostly in the female line) since William the Conqueror granted it to his wife.

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[1] Much of this material can also be found at Fairford Neighbourhood Plan, 'Introduction and Background'. It is repeated here as it is hoped that this will be a stand-alone reference document.
[2] Archaeological Evaluation at land off Horcott Road, Fairford; Worcestershire County Council p. 21

1.2.5   By the 12th century the town was recorded as having ancient borough status and had a market charter (VCH: Vol 7 p69). The town bridge had been built by the late 12th century and by 1540, when seen by Leland (VCH: Vol 7 p71 Ref 57) it had four stone arches. An alternative route into the town was provided by Mill Lane, which crossed the river with a substantial bridge. (VCH: Vol 7 p71 Ref 62).). It was, however, in the early 14th century that the town, positioned in an area of sheep farming, began to prosper. The late 15th century saw a revival of its economic fortunes on the back of the wool trade, leading to a period of considerable growth.

1.2.6   Originally the main road from the west (now the A417) crossed the town bridge and continued north-eastwards in a straight line and straight on to The Croft with a large triangular market place to the south bounded by the street now known as London Street running ESE; the High Street, ran north from the Market Place to the church. In 1307 there were 68 burgages[3]. The infilling of the western edge of the Market Place may have occurred when Fairford became more prosperous and expanded due to the wool trade in the 15th century. Today's road layout through the centre of Fairford was the legacy of a wealthy wool merchant named John Tame who was rebuilding the older, possibly pre-conquest Church at this time (completed in 1497). A little later the main road was diverted and the present London Street became the main road. This is the origin of the road layout we see today, which remains the same as it was then.

1.2.7   John Tame's wealth was inherited by his son Edmund (1487-1534) who completed the work on the parish church. Most of the present fabric of the church is 15th century, but there is some 13th and 14th century work in the respond of the north arcade and the lower part of the tower. John Tame's splendid tomb still survives in the chancel of the church he had rebuilt and it was later endowed with a wonderful set of late medieval stained glass windows, the only complete set still existing in any parish church in England. King Henry VIII visited Fairford in 1520 and it is likely that he worshipped at the new church. Fairford Church and its windows attract an average of ten thousand visitors every year to the town, from all over the world[4].

1.2.8   Fairford Manor and lands passed through the hands of several families until 1650 when Andrew Barker bought it after the sequestration of Robert Tracy at the end of the Civil Wars, Tracy having supported the Royalist cause. 1668 saw the further granting of a charter for a weekly market, which is still in existence, as well as twice-yearly fairs, which were held in May and November, the last of these fairs being held in 1908.

1.2.9   The building of Fairford Park was begun by Andrew Barker in 1661, the house being some 410 metres to the north of the town centre. The Park was further landscaped in the 1780s and a few features still remain of that landscaping: the Votive Column (the Obelisk) which was a landscaping feature near the northern edge of Barker land, the Cascades, the picturesque bridge to the north of the Mill Pond.

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[3] A burgage was a town (borough) rental property (to use modern terms), owned by a king or lord. The property (burgage tenement) usually, and distinctly, consisted of a house on a long and narrow plot of land with a narrow street frontage (a burgage plot).

[4] Figures from Parochial Church Council Annual Report 2015

1.2.10 Fairford farmworkers were deeply involved in the Swing Riots of 1830, after the introduction of new threshing machines and the loss of gleaning rights – thus bringing a greater threat of winter starvation.[5] Several men from Fairford were sentenced to transportation to Australia in punishment.

1.2.11 The estate remained in the hands of the Barker family until 1945. The family had left Fairford in 1897/98 and the house was leased to Colonel Albert Palmer until his death in 1940.

1.2.12 Fairford Park was requisitioned during World War 2 for use as an American military hospital and the house fell into a state of disrepair. It was demolished in the late 1950s to make way for Farmor's School which moved from the town centre building (now Fairford Community Centre) where it had been since 1738. The site now also contains Fairford Primary School, the Pre-School and the Leisure Centre. After WW2 the grounds of Fairford Park contained the largest Polish Hostel in Gloucestershire until 1957.

1.2.13 After the Second World War, Fairford Park Estate was purchased by Ernest Cook and in 1952 it was formed into part of the Ernest Cook Trust, an educational charity with extensive landholdings to the north of Fairford and elsewhere in the country. The Trust still manages the Estate and protects the landscapes to the north of the town. It also has an influence over changes to some buildings on which it has restrictive covenants.

1.2.14 The East Gloucestershire Railway came to Fairford in 1873 from Witney. This brought considerable benefit to the local agricultural community with easier marketing of products. A quiet line for the first 70 years it became busy during WW2, bringing construction materials, munitions and servicemen to the new RAF base as well as materials to Fairford Park House which was a USAF military hospital at this time. The railway closed in 1962, before the Beeching cuts.

1.2.15 RAF Fairford was established to the south of the town in 1943-44 and played a role in the airborne landings in Normandy. After the war the airfield saw the testing flights of Concorde before becoming an important American air base, still used by the United States Air Force. It is also the venue for the annual Royal International Air Tattoo. This event is very important to the town as a tourist attraction since many personnel are needed to run the event; visitors come for the whole duration and stay in local hotels, homes and camping sites.

1.2.16 In the mid/late C20th various new phases of building were undertaken largely to the north east of the town between Leafield Road, London Road and Hatherop Lane; the century ended with smaller developments in Groves Place (2000) Coln Gardens (1995/6) Fayre Gardens (2000).

1.2.17 The presence of the Special Landscape Area to the north and RAF Fairford to the south have had a significant effect on the development of the town limiting development in these directions, resulting in over-expansion to the east / west. Fairford Gate (north and south), Stoneleigh and Keble Fields, all undertaken since 2012, represent the largest and quickest growth the town has ever seen. This rapid increase in building has had a detrimental effect on the richly historic, rural character of the town,

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[5] 'on Friday at a small town called Fairford, about seven miles from Cirencester, a large body of people had assembled, and had destroyed all the thrashing machines, and them that were put down, and many other Farming Implements and that the gentlemen and Farmers of the place, had not been able to persuade their servants to assist in defending them.' Letter from Duke of Beaufort to Lord Melbourne. Jill Chambers: Gloucestershire Machine Breakers, The story of the 1830 riots. Vol. 1: The Riots, Trials and Appendices, 2012, p. 32.

exacerbated by the fact that infrastructure improvements to support the increase in population and traffic have not been undertaken.

1.2.18 Horcott

The hamlet of Horcott was in the parish of Kempsford, to the south, for centuries until the construction of RAF Fairford cut it off from the rest of the parish and closer links with Fairford developed. In 1987 it became part of the parish of Fairford, retaining its own distinct town councillors on Fairford Town Council until 2015. It is worth noting that the RAF base was not named RAF Whelford (as would have been usual since this was the nearby settlement) since there was a pre-existing RAF Welford in Berkshire.

1.2.19 The first record of Horcott, meaning 'dwelling in a muddy place', is from the 12th century. At this time there was a mill on the River Coln at what now is Horcott Farm – the old flume channel still exists. The mill probably marked a minor river crossing point and this remains the best place to wade across the river on foot. A small farming hamlet of about 7 houses grew up over the centuries and a 17th century cottage survives. Various buildings, now listed, from the 18th century settlement confirm that this remained a small agricultural community. A row of labourers' cottages, the Roman Catholic Church of St Thomas of Canterbury, a presbytery and school (long closed) were built in the 19th century. The main growth of the hamlet occurred during the middle of the 20th century when private and council housing was built to the southwest. (VCH: Vol 7 p97). A footbridge (Dilly's Bridge) linking Horcott and Fairford was only installed, by charitable gift, in 1990.

1.2.20 In order to carry out this Character Assessment the town has been divided into 5 geographical areas as shown on the plan with Horcott considered individually as a separate settlement. The main geographical areas are as follows.

1 Milton End: from Town Bridge westwards to edge of Fairford town, west of the river (Section 2)

2 Borough: the centre of Fairford town, from Town Bridge eastwards (Section 3)

3 East End North: the town east of Borough, north of A417, to the edge of town, east and north of A417 (Section 4)

4 East End South: the town east and south of Borough, south of A417, to the edge of town, east and south of A417 (Section 5)
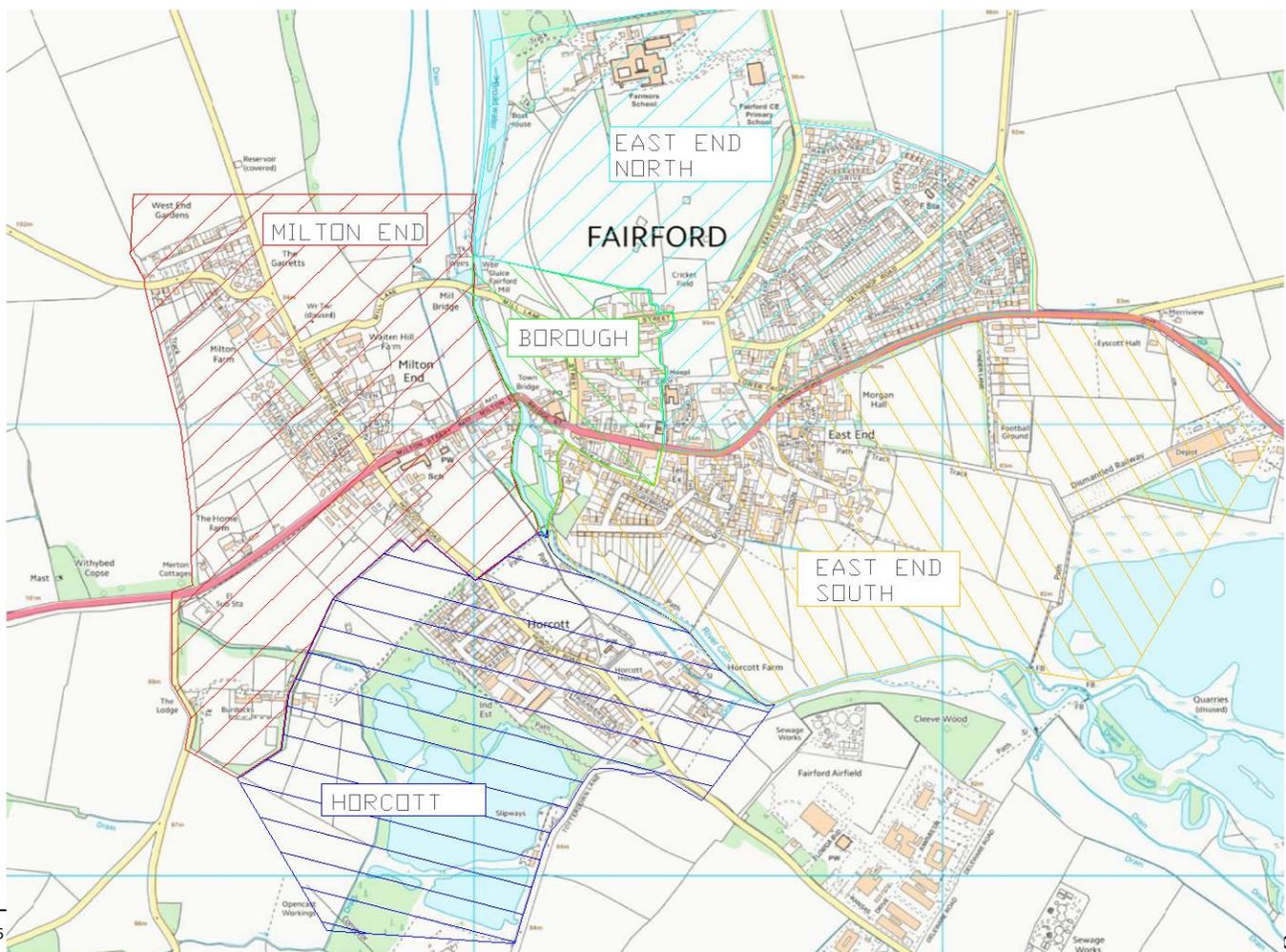
5 Horcott (Section 6)

1.3   General Features

There are some features which are common, particularly in the Conservation Area which extend into all areas except Horcott. In order to save repetition these are listed here. Illustrative images can be found in Section 8, 'Gallery of Fairford and Horcott Building Features'.

- Cotswold stone probably defines the character of the pre-C20th buildings – either rubble stone or ashlar. Elsewhere, in more modern building, a variety of other materials include render, wood, brick, concrete and reconstituted stone; the latter two attempt to replicate the colour and texture

of the natural stone, with varying degrees of success. The colour of Cotswold stone in this area is generally the white/cream stone, not the yellower stone of the north Cotswolds. (FNP14 Nos.3, 9[6])
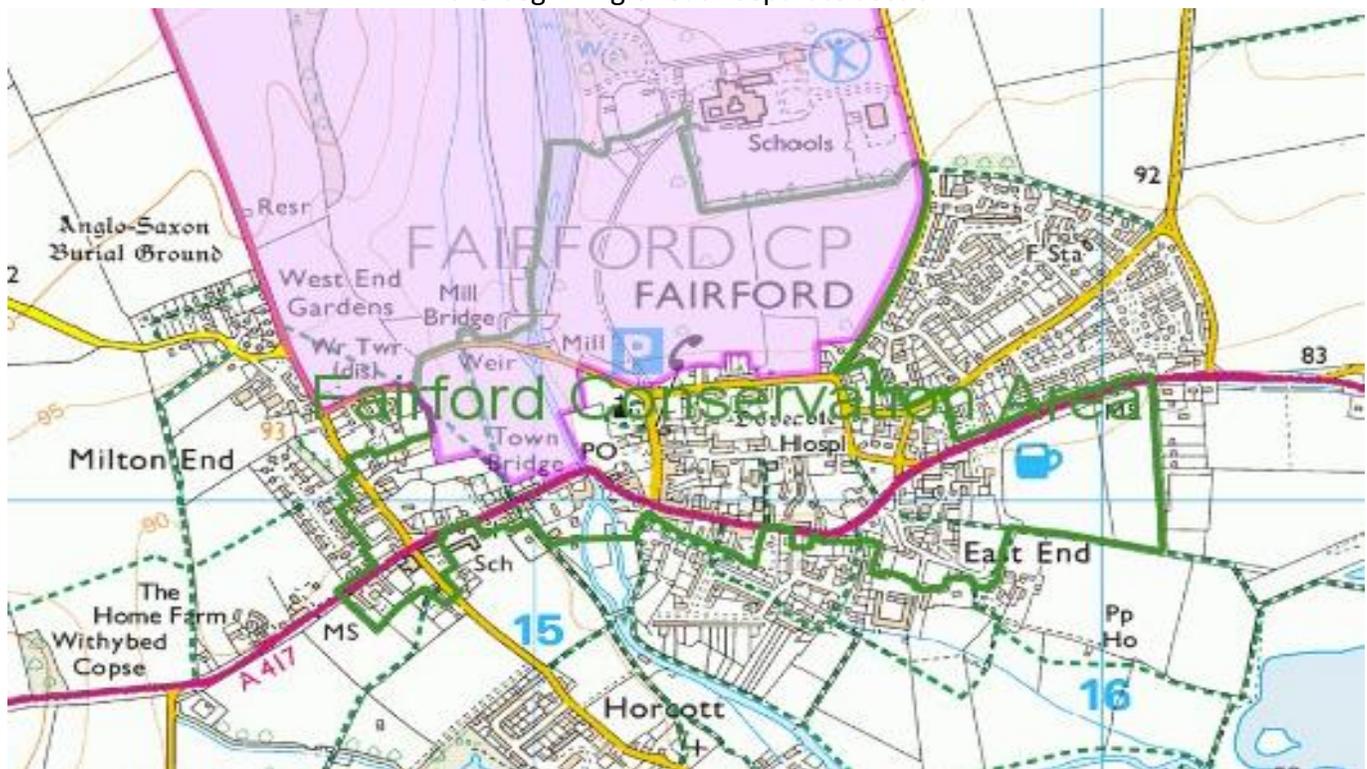
- Steep roof pitch (no less than 45º, no more than 55º) is typical of traditional buildings in the Cotswold District generally, although there are significant variations from this in the local area, most notably taller C18th buildings in the High Street/Market Place, Park Street and Milton Street, large farm houses (including Milton and Park Farm houses) and older cottage type buildings on the edges of the old town. Stone tiles are a traditional and historic roof covering – and have guided the pitch of the roofs. Some houses in the Cotswolds were originally thatched and the steep pitch was required to allow water to be shed efficiently and to prevent wind blowing up beneath stone tiles. This pitch was carried through with slate and then clay tiles. It is this steep pitch (and thus the relatively narrow width of the building beneath) which can easily be overlooked and result in unbalanced or disproportionate buildings (FNP14 No.4).
- Dormer windows –pitched-roof and low-level catslide dormers. (FNP14 No.7)
- Chimneys – tall, stone and functional. The use of fake (often fibre-glass) chimneys in developments of the past few years is to be regretted, especially since flues are often still needed. (FNP14 No.7)
- Simple pitched-roof porches generally with solid wooden doors in the older properties.
- Windows – stone and wood mullions, lintels and rebates. More recently, both iron and PVC have been used.
- Decorative features – stone carvings, rosettes, moulded and shaped render, dentils, balls, staddle stones.

of this document. The numbers coming after this reference refer to specific items on the list of principles. Thus FNP14 No.9 refers to the colour of Cotswold stone which should be used in Fairford.

1.4 Location of Character Areas, Conservation Area and Special Landscape Area

1.4.1 Map showing the location of each character area described. Explanations of the boundaries of each area are to be found at
the beginning of each separate section.

1.4.2 Green line marks boundary of Fairford Conservation Area, mauve the Special Landscape Area

1.4.3[7] St Mary's Church, High Street