



WEST OXFORDSHIRE  
DISTRICT COUNCIL

# Conservation Area Character Appraisal

## Spelsbury, Taston & Dean

### What are Conservation Areas?

Conservation Areas are places of special architectural or historic interest, which have a particular character or appearance worthy of preservation or enhancement. Groups of buildings, walls, trees and hedges, open spaces, views, and the historic settlement patterns all combine to create an individual sense of place. It is this character, rather than individual buildings, that Conservation Area status seeks to protect. The first Conservation Areas in the District were identified in the late 1960s. Since then, there has been a rolling programme of designations. Recent Conservation Areas are designated under the provisions of Section 69 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. Spelsbury, Taston & Dean Conservation Area was designated in 1991, following a process of public consultation.

### The purpose of this document

This Conservation Area Character Appraisal describes the main aspects of character or appearance which contribute to the special interest and quality of the area. This document is intended to complement the approved policies for Conservation Areas contained in the West Oxfordshire Local Plan. In Conservation Areas there are controls over the demolition and minor alterations of unlisted buildings, and on works to trees. Full details can be obtained from the Planning Service. The Preservation and Enhancement document for Spelsbury, Taston & Dean accompanies this Character Appraisal and describes strategies for their future maintenance and improvement, as well as providing development advice, and guidance on conversions, extensions and the design of new buildings within the Conservation Area.



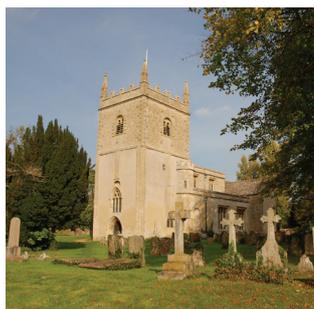
## Location and setting

Spelsbury lies in the north of the District, two miles north-west of Charlbury and five miles south-east of Chipping Norton. The smaller outlying settlements of Taston and Dean lie to the east and north-west respectively. While much of Spelsbury occupies a relatively open wolds setting, parts of Taston and Dean occupy minor valley sites (the seclusion of Taston in particular giving it a more intimate character).

Of the three settlements, Spelsbury is the most compact, with short cottage terraces lining the lanes and clustering at junctions, and a small amount of 20th-century council housing at its northern end. Dean has a more strung-out feel, with houses and cottages appearing intermittently beside a lane that winds along the contours of the hillside. Taston has a disjointed linear form, closer-knit at the top, then straggling as the lane dips into the minor valley to the west.

The settlements occupy a transitional landscape zone in which the expansive limestone wolds to the north give way to a more folded landform north of the river Evenlode. The scattered nature of Spelsbury, Taston and Dean, their generally loose-knit form and the undulating topography of their setting, give to the settlements an unspoilt and isolated rural character.

The geology underlying the parish is also transitional in nature, with the great swathe of oolitic limestone to the north giving way to lias limestone, and finally to alluvium and river gravels along the Evenlode valley to the south of the settlements.



## Historical development

The richness of the early history of the area is attested to by a number of Scheduled Ancient Monuments. The Thor Stone (from which Taston gets its name) is a wedge-shaped monolith of ritual or ceremonial origin; while the Hawk Stone, which stands north of Dean, may be a remnant of a portal dolmen burial chamber. Both date from between the Late Neolithic and the Bronze Ages. The Romano-British period is evidenced to the east by stretches of the North Oxfordshire Grim's Ditch: a boundary earthwork that gave its name to neighbouring Ditchley, and whose construction was probably motivated by political and economic, rather than military, concerns.

At Ditchley there was an important Roman villa, and there may have been a Roman camp at Spelsbury. Saxon remains include several cemeteries and a number of finds dating from the 7th and 8th centuries. The name 'Spelsbury' may derive from 'Speolsbury' (a sheltered or fortified place belonging to Speol). The earliest record of the parish dates from a charter of 840AD from the King of Mercia, granting Spelsbury to the Bishop of Worcester, *'for the ransom of my soul and his pleasing money, land enough for ten households in the place the countrymen call Wychwood'*.

At the time of Domesday (1086) the Manor of Spelsbury consisted of Spelsbury itself, Taston, Chadlington East End, Fulwell and Ditchley. Neighbouring Dean formed a separate manor with Chalford. The contrast between the descent of the two manors could not be more marked, for whereas that of Spelsbury passed through the hands of only three families between 1086 and 1934, that of Dean is highly complex and passed through numerous families (including some 26 between 1504 and 1962).

For much of their histories, the manors of Spelsbury and Dean were held by absentee lords (something that was not uncommon). At Domesday, Urse D'Abitot held Spelsbury and Henry de Ferriers Dean. Both had many manors elsewhere, and it is unlikely that either spent much time in the area. At this time rural areas were often surprisingly populous, and Dean had about 80 households at the end of the 11th century.

The economic history of the parish is dominated by agriculture. When Charlbury was granted a weekly market by Henry III in 1256 the parish had a ready outlet for its produce. Much of the land had been reclaimed from Wychwood forest, and the topography and soils were found to suit livestock, rather than arable farming (there was also a general pattern of conversion from arable to sheep pasture locally after the Black Death in the 14th century). Prior to Enclosure much of the farmland was organised in open fields divided up annually into strips. Some of these smaller enclosures are recalled in early field names, including *Pyman's Piece*, *Briar's Furlong* and *Pedlar's Close*. Enclosure for Dean was granted in 1779; while that for Spelsbury was granted in 1802.

During the 17th and 18th centuries, Spelsbury, Taston and Dean took on the built character recognisable today. The population of the parish seems to have peaked early in the 19th century, with Spelsbury having a population of 610 people in 1811 (this had more than halved by 1961). The first school in Spelsbury was built in the mid-19th century. Visually, the parish altered little during the 20th century, with only Spelsbury gaining modest council schemes on the Chadlington Road and in the form of Quickset Close at the village's northern end. New dwellings have also been created with the conversion of agricultural buildings.



## Settlement pattern

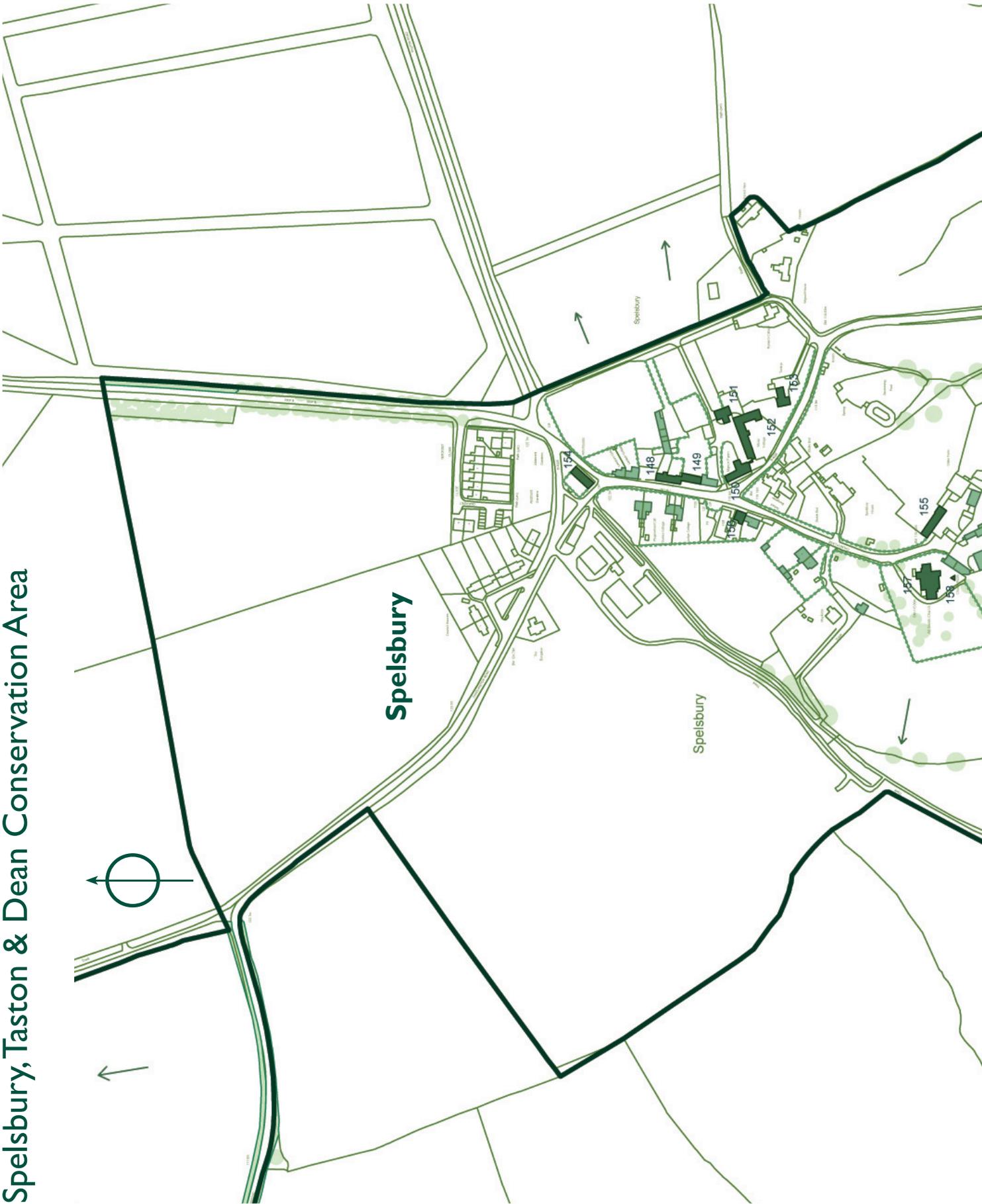
Archaeological evidence suggests a pattern of occupation in the area from the Neolithic era (c. 4000-2000 BC). Wychwood forest once covered much of the area (as late as 1522 Spelsbury was still being counted as *within* the forest) and remnants of the forest can still be seen to the east of the parish. Like several other West Oxfordshire villages (such as Ramsden and Finstock) the earliest settlement may have resulted from the localised clearance of the forest. The dispersed nature of Dean in particular is typical of settlements established within the forest. Spelsbury lies close to the easternmost extent of the territories of the Romano-British *Hwicca* people, marked by hill forts at Chastleton and Idbury (the name 'Wychwood' derives from '*Hwicca Wudu*').

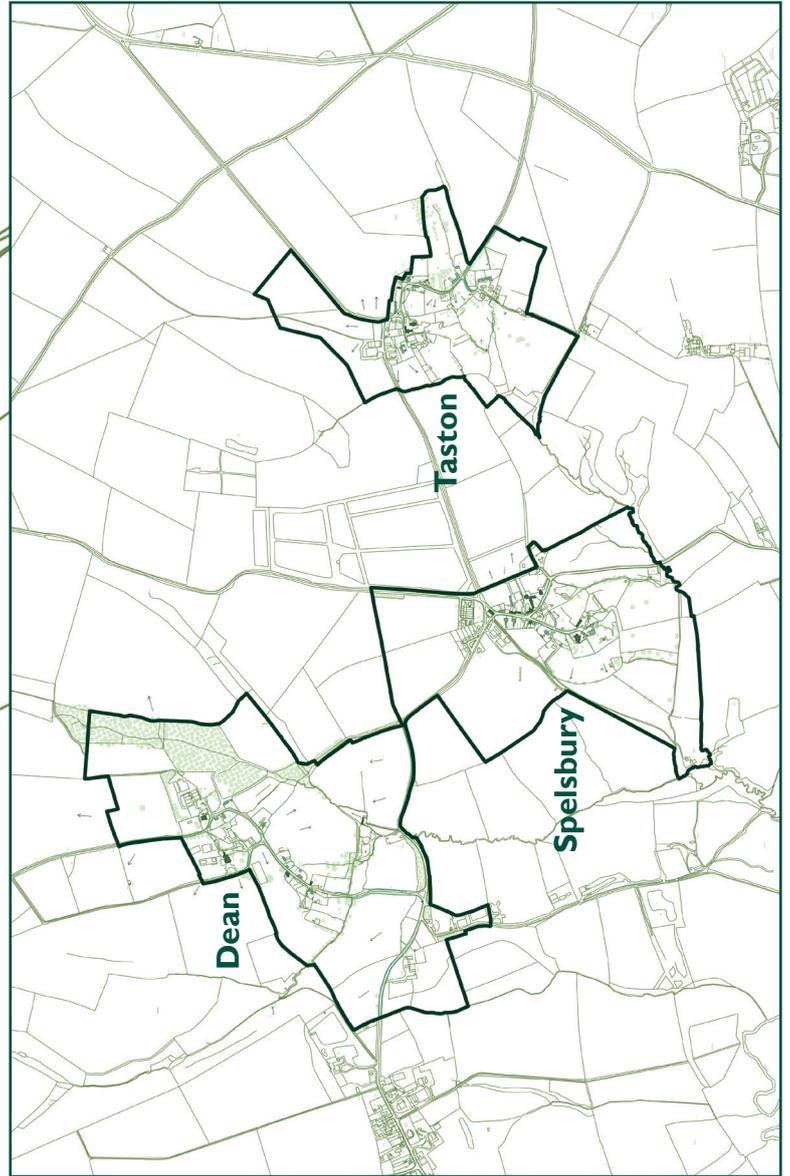
The area possessed a number of attractions for settlers. The forest provided protection, meat, wood, and foraging for pigs; the landform is elevated yet sheltered (thus Dean, from 'dene' or hollow); fresh water could be drawn from the various springs and streams (including the Coldron and Taston brooks); and the area is served by at least one early trackway. The survival and growth of the settlements later on – especially during the Middle Ages – was at least partly dependent upon ready access to the nearby market towns of Charlbury and Chipping Norton.

The establishment from an early date of a church at Spelsbury ensured the village's pre-eminence among the three settlements. Later development has been of ribbon form, concentrating along the lane-sides north of the church and Glebe Farm (which now occupy a marginal site at the end of a no-through road).

Dean originated further down its valley than is presently the case. Later development, comprising dispersed farms and cottages, strung out alongside the lane that snakes northwards from the Chadlington Road. Unlike Dean, much of Taston has remained cupped in its folded valley, with only its western limb emerging into the relative exposure of a more open setting next to the Taston Road.

# Spelsbury, Taston & Dean Conservation Area

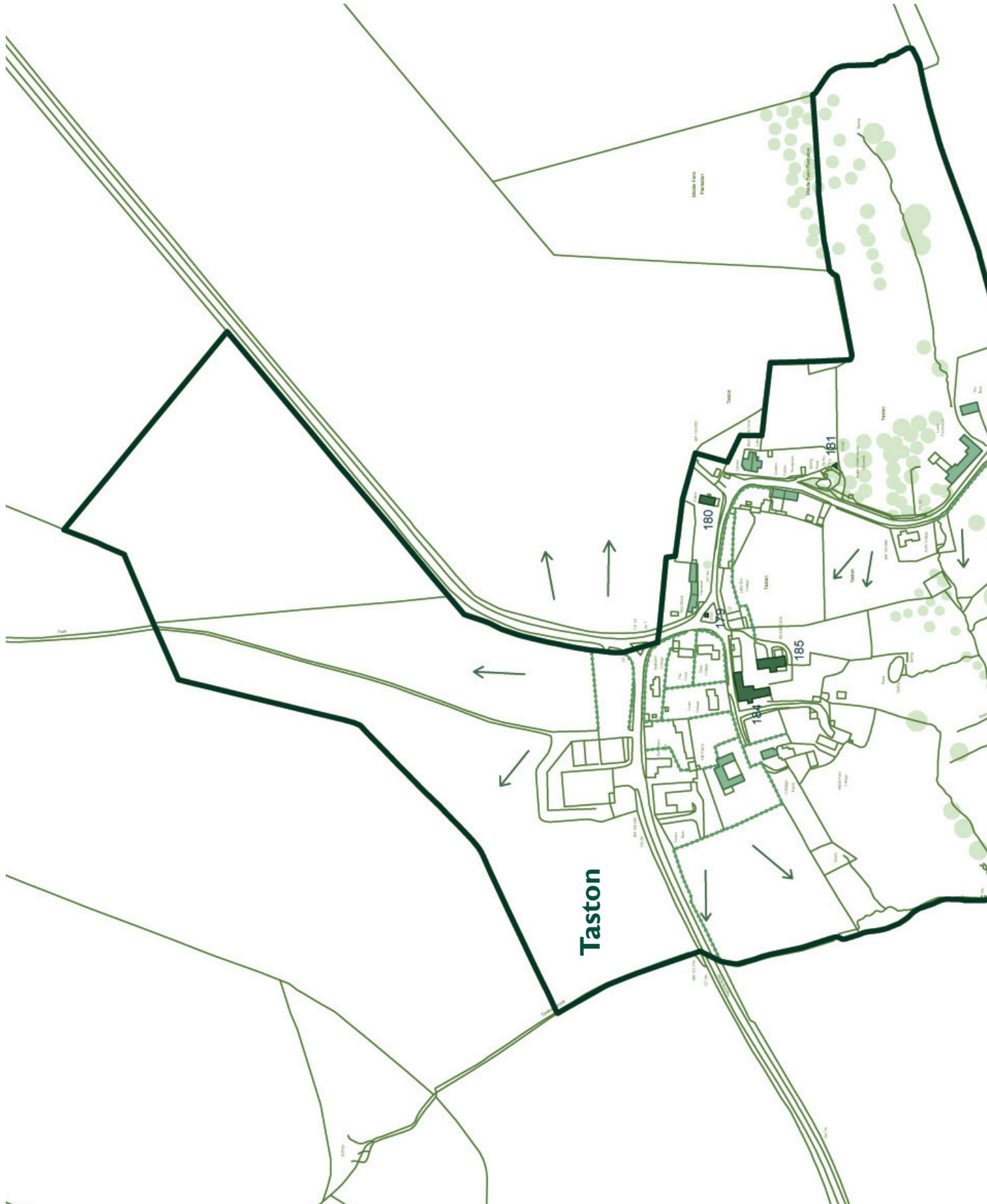




**Key**

-  Conservation Area Boundary
-  Listed Buildings
-  Locally Listed Buildings
-  Significant Boundary Walls
-  Significant Hedges
-  Significant Trees and Tree Groups
-  Tree Preservation Order
-  Significant Views

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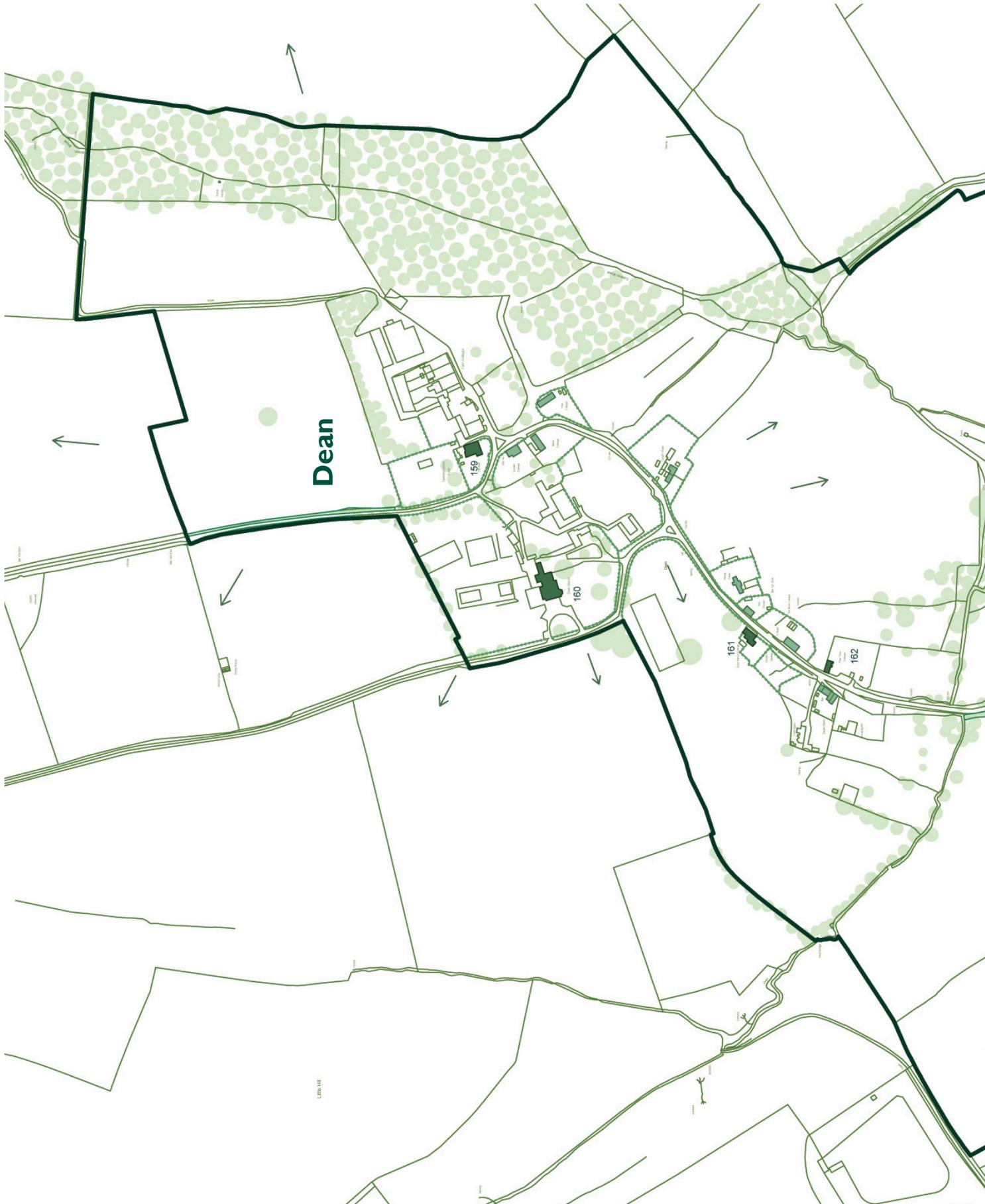




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## Listed Buildings

There are 22 Listed structures of architectural or historic interest in the Conservation Areas. Listed Buildings are classified in grades of relative importance.

### Grade II\* – Particularly special and important buildings (4% of Listed Buildings)

16/157 **Spelsbury** CHURCH LANE (West side) Church of All Saints

8/179 **Taston** Taston Cross

### Grade II – Buildings of special interest

#### Spelsbury

16/148 (17/148) B4026 (East side) Nos. 1 and 2 The Old Bakehouse

16/149 (17/149) B4026 (East side) Barn approx. 20m N of Manor Farmhouse (Formerly listed as Barns to NW and barn adjacent to Manor Farmhouse)

16/150 (17/150) B4026 (East side) Manor Farmhouse

17/151 B4026 (East side) Barn approx. 50m E of Manor Farmhouse (Formerly listed as Barns to NW and barn adjacent to Manor Farmhouse)

17/152 B4026 (East side) Manor Farm Cottage (Formerly listed as Cottage adjoining Manor Farmhouse)

17/153 B4026 (East side) Tooley's Cottage

16/154 (17/154) B4026 (West side) Nos. 1, 2, 3 and 4 Almshouses and attached front garden walls (Formerly listed as Almshouses)

16/155 CHURCH LANE (East side) Barn and stable approx. 40m E of Church of All Saints

16/156 CHURCH LANE (West side) The Cottage

16/158 CHURCH LANE (West side) Group of 2 tombs approx. 12m S of Church of All Saints

#### Taston

8/180 The Firkins

8/181 Memorial Fountain

8/184 Middle Farmhouse

8/185 Barn approx. 15m SE of Middle Farmhouse

#### Dean

7/159 Spelsburydown

7/160 Manor House

7/161 Dean Manor Cottage

7/162 Pear Tree Cottage

7/163 Dean Mill

16/164 Wayside cross base approx. 300m SW of Dean Mill

*Note: The numbers indicate the unique identification number by which Listed Buildings are referenced*

## Architectural character and quality of buildings

Buildings and drystone walls alike employ the local pale oolitic limestone in coursed rubble form. Stone slate is the dominant roofing material, with some thatch and Welsh slate. The houses and cottages are generally small in scale and vernacular in type and detailing, with a number forming short terraces. Simple plan forms, two- and three-bay ranges and timber casement or sash windows predominate.

Most of the older properties belong to the 18th century, and a number of early farm buildings survive, affirming the historical importance of agriculture to the parish. Elements from a more formal architectural vocabulary are largely absent. However, the Manor House in Dean is an exception. The five-window entrance front of this large and well-sited 18th-century house features a chamfered plinth (with stone mullion cellar windows), rusticated quoins and ashlar flat arches. The house may have been built for, and occupied by, Thomas Rowney (MP for Oxford from 1695-1722).

The generally high level of building activity in the area during the 18th century is also reflected in the church of All Saints, portions of which were rebuilt in 1706, 1740 and 1774. Despite these interventions the lower parts of the broad four-square tower retain fabric possibly surviving from a pre-Conquest building. The tower may have stood at the centre of a cruciform church with narrower arms, or even formed a tower-nave. Inside, there is a notable collection of monuments, mainly to the Earls of Lichfield.

In Spelsbury, a fine terrace of four almshouses survives from 1688. The symmetrical four-gabled front has leaded, stone mullion windows to ground and first floor, and each cottage has a chamfered stone doorway. A re-set stone sundial probably belongs to the same date. The remains of a medieval village cross survive in Taston. Its tapering shaft rises from a square base on a large square three step plinth. The base of a medieval wayside cross also survives to the south-west of Dean.

## Boundary treatments

The loose-knit character of all three settlements means that none possesses a strongly-defined edge (Taston and Dean in particular seem to break up and merge into the landscape they occupy). Spelsbury is the most coherent, with houses and terraced cottages arranged in relatively tight building lines. Only a handful of properties in the parish front directly onto the road (though most are aligned with it). Drystone walls of varying height together with verges of varying depth are common to all three; the verges occasionally betraying the incised nature of some of the lanes (and thus the fact that they follow the route of a stream and are probably of some antiquity). Other boundary treatments can also be found, such as tall, buttressed and coped walling, post-and-rail fencing, and Victorian railings (all in Dean). Spelsbury is alone in having significant stretches of roadside paths.

## Landscape, trees and views

Although the landscape to the north is open and exposed, allowing for distant panoramas over the surrounding countryside, the topography of the three settlements is generally folded, only occasionally admitting long views to the south. In a feature characteristic of many West Oxfordshire villages, small parcels of open land within each settlement form valuable components of the character area, allowing for a variety of attractive and distinctive cross-views. Sizable remnants of Wychwood forest can still be seen (for example to the east of Taston). The expansive landscape to the north comprises large fields lined with low, crumbling drystone walls and hedges of alder and hawthorn.



## Mrs. Bolton's List of Wild Flowers Found at Spelsbury

Agrimony	Cherry	Fleabane	Loosestrife (purple)	Shepherd's Needle
Anemone	Cingqefoil	Fools Parsley	Mallow	Shepherd's Purse
Arum	Chickweed	Fragrant Orchis	Maple	Sherardia
Autumnal Hawkbit	Chicory	Fumitory	Marjoram	Silver-weed
Bartsia (red)	Cover	Garlic Mustard	Marsh Marigold	Sorrel
Bedstraw (yellow)	Corn Cockle	Goats Beard	Marsh Thistle	Spindle Tree
Bee Orchis	Coltsfoot	Goldilocks	Meadow Saffron	Spotted Orchis
Bellflower	Comfrey	Goosefoot (white)	Meadow Saxifrage	Stitchwort
Betony	Common Avens	Goosegrass	Meadowsweet	Stoncrop
Bindweed	Common Cotton Grass	Green Hellebore	Meadow Vetchling	Stork's Bill
Birds-eye	Common Orchis	Groundsel	Mignonette	Strawberry
Blackberry	Convulvulus	Guelder Rose	Milkwort	Succory
Black Bryony	Corn Crowfoot	Hairy St. John's Wort	Moneywort	Teasel
Black Morehound	Corn Mint	Harebell	Mullein	Thistle (various)
Black Medick	Cow Chervil	Hawthorn	Nettle	Thyme
Blackthorn	Cowslip	Heartsease	Nightshade (woody)	Toadflax
Bladder Campion	Crab Apple	Hedge Calamint	Nipplewort	Travellers Joy
Bluebell	Cranesbill	Hedge Mustard	Ox-eye-daisy	Trefoil (various)
Broad-leaved Garlic	Creeping Yellow Cross	Hedge Stachys	Oxlip	Tufted Vetch
Broad-leaved Plantain	Crosswort	Hemlock	Palm	Twayblade
Brooklime	Daisy	Henbit	Parsnip	Upwight Meadow Crowfoot
Broom Rap	Dandelion	Herb Robert	Pearlwort	Valerian
Bryony (red berried)	Dead Nettle	Hogweed	Pink Persicaria	Vetch
Bugle	Devil's Bit Scabious	Holly	Pimpernel	Violet
Buttercup	Dewberry	Honeysuckle	Poppy	Watercress
Butterfly Orchis	Dock	Hop	Primrose	Willow-herb
Burdock	Dog's Mercury	Horse Mint	Privet	Wood Sanicle
Bush Vetch	Dog Violet	House Leek	Ragged Robin	Wood Spurge
Buxbaum's Speedwell	Dogwood	Ivy	Ragwort	Wood Vetch
Catstail	Dwarf Mallow	Ivy-leaved Toadsflax	Rest Harrow	Yarrow
Campion (white)	Dyers Greenwood	Kidney Vetch	Rock Rose	Yellow Iris
Carrot	Elder	Knapweed	Rosebay	Yellow Rattle
Celandine	Eyebright	Knotgrass	Rush	
Centaury	Field Rose	Lady's Mantle	Sainfoin	
Chanomile	Field Scabious	Lady's Smock	Salad Burnet	
Charlock	Figwort (water)	Lamb's Tongue	Scorpion Grass (field)	

## West Oxfordshire District Council - Planning Service

Elmfield, New Yatt Road, Witney, Oxfordshire, OX28 1PB

General planning enquiries and application forms

List entries and grant enquiries

Trees and landscape enquiries

Architectural and technical enquiries

**01993 861683**

**01993 861666**

**01993 861662**

**01993 861659**

