



WEST OXFORDSHIRE
DISTRICT COUNCIL

Conservation Area Character Appraisal

Finstock

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. Finstock 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 Finstock accompanies this Character Appraisal and describes strategies for the future maintenance and improvement of Finstock, as well as providing development advice and guidance on conversions, extensions and the design of new buildings within the Conservation Area.



Location and setting

Finstock is a small hillside parish located in the centre of the District, three miles south of Charlbury and 14 miles north-west of Oxford. It is situated in a landscape of semi-enclosed limestone wolds, on an elevated plateau between the valleys of the rivers Evenlode and Windrush. The surrounding countryside is striking for its unspoilt, rolling character. North of Finstock is a large area of estate parkland associated with Cornbury Park, which lies further to the north.

Finstock itself has an attractive and dispersed asymmetric form (with some linear characteristics). Settlement is primarily scattered along one side of a dry valley above the river Evenlode. The hilly topography of the parish, which includes a memorable bowl-shaped hollow ('The Bottom') is arguably the most striking and distinctive feature of the character area. This factor, allied to significant open spaces and the dispersed nature of the settlement pattern, makes for a villagescape of conspicuous richness and variety. The long, tapering High Street is particularly memorable. It runs on an east-west axis for almost a mile, from the Witney Road to Webb's Farm at its eastern end. This street has an obvious counterpart in the form of the High Street at nearby Ramsden.



Historical development

Finstock originated as a late Anglo-Saxon settlement on the fringes of Wychwood forest. Like nearby Ramsden much of the land on which it developed was reclaimed from the forest. The name 'Finstock', which means 'the place frequented by woodpeckers', survives as a reminder of this aspect of the settlement's history.

Finstock was, until the 19th century, part of the ancient parish of Charlbury, and its development has been closely linked to that of the nearby market town (land in the hamlet was held in common with land in Charlbury). Eynsham Abbey held the estate from the 11th century until the Reformation in the 16th century, and thereafter it passed to St. John's College, Oxford and its lessees. Historically, the majority of Finstock's occupants were tenant farmers and labourers, and agriculture formed the economic mainstay of the community from the late Saxon era through until recent times.

The 18th century, as well as witnessing the building of new houses and cottages, saw the first field Enclosure awards (in 1767) and the turnpiking of the Witney to Charlbury road. This dramatically altered patterns of land management and ownership, and improved transport links into and out of the hamlet.

In the 19th century, Finstock became a parish in its own right and a church and vicarage were built beside the Witney to Charlbury road. Besides agriculture, a small-scale glove-making industry developed. It operated out of the prefabricated village hall at the southern end of School Road, and closed down in c.1938. The 19th century also witnessed the construction of the National School (in 1860) and the Wesleyan chapel (in 1840). The Wesleyan school was completed in 1902.

Housing developments of variable merit were the most noticeable addition to the village during the 20th century. In spite of these, however, Finstock retains an attractive and pronounced rural character.

Settlement pattern

Finstock's dispersed settlement pattern probably derives in part from the piecemeal nature of the initial forest clearances during the late-Saxon era. Later settlement seems to have been influenced and shaped by the presence of the main Witney to Charlbury route. Although there is no evidence that this is of any great antiquity, the arterial nature of this route almost certainly contributed to the later establishment and growth of the community.

Finstock's early houses and cottages are concentrated in four clusters within and along the perimeter of a large triangle formed by the Witney to Charlbury road, School road, and the High street. One group of buildings lies on the Witney to Charlbury road around the church; one to the north-east where this road is met by School road; one group south of this around 'The Bottom'; and a fourth to the western end of the high street. Subsequent infill has blurred the distinction between these once-separate clusters.

Following the familiar pattern, the 17th and 18th centuries saw many of the village's earlier structures replaced with cottages and small houses built of stone, and topped with stone slate - or occasionally thatched - roofs. The addition of the church in the 19th century gave the community a new focal point, and may have been one factor attracting later housing to the northern end of the village along the Witney road.

The hamlet of Tapwell once lay within the township of Finstock, but its precise location remains unclear. In 1306, only five men were assessed for tax there, so it was undoubtedly a small settlement. Two houses appear to have existed on the site of the hamlet as late as the 16th century.

In size and character, Finstock did not alter significantly until the 20th century, when a great deal of new housing was added. This included a large estate on the west side of School Road, and numerous houses and bungalows at the southern end of Church Road and the western end of the lane to Gadding Well.



Finstock 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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Listed Buildings

There are 25 Listed structures within the Conservation Area. Listed Buildings are classified in grades of relative importance. They are all of architectural or historic interest.

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

17/53 WITNEY ROAD (North-west side) Finstock Manor House (Formerly listed as Manor Farm House)

Grade II – Buildings of special interest

- 17/32 CHARLBURY ROAD (north-west side) Barn approx. 100m NE of Finstock Manor House
- 17/33 HIGH STREET (North side) Webb's Farmhouse
- 16/34 HIGH STREET (North side) No. 30 (Strange's Farmhouse)
- 16/35 HIGH STREET (North side) Barn approx. 30m to NE of No. 30 (Strange's Farmhouse)
- 16/36 HIGH STREET (North side) Hopcroft Cottage
- 17/37 HIGH STREET (South side) The Plough Inn
- 17/38 HIGH STREET (South side) No. 7 (Sunnyside)
- 17/39 HIGH STREET (South side) No. 9 (Cedar Cottage) and No. 11 (Home Farmhouse)
- 17/40 HIGH STREET (South side) No. 17 (Dore's Cottage)
- 17/41 HIGH STREET (South side) No. 19 (Pratly's Cottage)
- 16/42 HIGH STREET (South side) No. 39
- 16/43 PATCH RIDING (North-east side) Cottage at SP 3590 1657
- 16/44 PATCH RIDING (North-east side) Cottage at SP 3589 1658
- 17/45 SCHOOL ROAD (East side) No. 42 (Stonehaven) and no. 44 (Barnsfield Cottage)
- 17/46 SCHOOL ROAD (East side) Barn approx. 10m N of No. 42 (Stonehaven)
- 17/47 SCHOOL ROAD (West side) No. 1 (Home Farmhouse)
- 17/48 SCHOOL ROAD (West side) Former stable and granary approx. 15m to SW of No. 1 (Home Farmhouse)
- 16/49 WITNEY ROAD (South-east side) The Old Vicarage
- 16/50 WITNEY ROAD (South-east side) Church of the Holy Trinity
- 16/51 WITNEY ROAD (North-west side) No. 5/6
- 16/52 WITNEY ROAD (North-west side) No. 7
- 17/54 WITNEY ROAD (North-west side) Stable block and service wing adjoining Manor House to W
- 17/55 WITNEY ROAD (North-west side) Cartshed approx. 15m NW of Finstock Manor House
- 17/56 WITNEY ROAD (North-west side) Former stable approx. 15m NNW of Finstock Manor House

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

Architectural character and quality of buildings

The period structures in Finstock generally conform to a humble, vernacular style, wholly consistent with the village's agricultural past. Small houses, cottages, and a range of farm buildings (including barns and stable blocks) predominate. The majority of these period structures belong to the 18th century, they are constructed from coursed limestone rubble, and are topped by stone slate (or occasionally thatched) roofs.

The most significant building in the village is the Manor House, dated 1660. This imposing farmhouse and its associated agricultural buildings, form an attractive grouping at the north-eastern entrance to the village. The house itself has a symmetrical front of three gabled bays, and is characterised by a formal but engaging architectural vocabulary. Of particular note is the decorative string course, formed by linking the hoods over the mullion windows. This is a feature not generally seen until later in the 17th century. The distinctive and highly unusual oval stone windows at attic level are also noteworthy.

Other village buildings of note include Strange's Farmhouse: a mid-18th-century house built in the familiar, classically-derived style of the period; and two 19th-century buildings. The first of these, Holy Trinity church, has an aisleless mid-19th-century nave of four bays lit by tall lancet windows. The chancel was added later and is of a Decorated (i.e. 14th-century) Gothic style. Adjacent to the church is the Vicarage, built by William White in 1864. This too is Gothic Revival in style, but of a more robust, domestic type.

During the 1960s, significant building programmes added noticeably to the size of the village. Much of this development was unsympathetic both to the forms and materials of existing structures. More recent developments have sought to reflect local vernacular traditions more closely, generally resulting in housing that sits more comfortably in the context of the village's early buildings.

Boundary treatments

Although the boundary treatments of Finstock do not comprise an especially distinctive feature of the parish, their lack of uniformity is entirely in keeping with the varied nature of the character area. The village's houses and cottages typically front directly onto the roadside or stand back from it behind verges of varying depth. Later developments tend to be situated still further back from the road, behind deeper verges or in small closes. Hedges are more conspicuous than walls (which, when they appear, are often low), and both features add to the semi-rural, informal character of the village. Along certain stretches of road through the village, where the housing is particularly dispersed, unkempt hedgerows intermittently punctuated by trees are a feature. Tarmac roadside paths are also visible throughout the village.

Landscape, trees and views

Despite the partial erosion of Finstock's polyfocal character by recent infill, the village still features important areas of open space. These gaps are a fundamental and enriching feature of the villagescape, and contribute significantly to Finstock's rural character. This open land is crisscrossed by footpaths linking the widely-spaced village cores.

With its valley side setting, Finstock boasts numerous varied and attractive views out over the surrounding landscape, particularly to the north of the Witney Road. Meanwhile, the dispersed nature of the settlement pattern lends to the village itself a wide variety of pleasing internal views.

Views into the village are restricted by the tall field hedges that bound the lanes along the ridge. The village and its setting can be appreciated from the opposite slope of the valley, and from the other side of the Evenlode. Mature trees in loose clusters and pockets of unkempt vegetation are also features of the parish.

“We like Finstock very much and the people have been very friendly. It is not a beautiful village but so near all those lovely places like Minster Lovell, Burford, Swinbrook (grave of Unity Mitford in the churchyard), Westwell, etc., etc. Our house (cottage) is in the olde bit and was originally a 17th century barn, converted about six years ago. We have beams in every room, but modern comforts too. . . . The church is not very high (Series 2) but there is quite an enthusiastic congregation of people who have come fairly recently to the neighborhood. Hilary and I are a bit jaded and cynical about things like bazaars but try not to show it”.

Barbara Pym in a letter to Philip Larkin, 24 October, 1972.

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General planning enquiries and application forms
List entries and grant enquiries
Trees and landscape enquiries
Architectural and technical enquiries

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01993 861662
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