

Garsington Neighbourhood Plan

Annex G – Garsington Conservation Area - A Character Study (SODC 23/05/2001)

Garsington was designated as a conservation area in 1989. The conservation area boundary encompasses the historic core of the village from 53 Oxford Road in the north to Home Farm Cottages, 52, Southend Street at its southern end. The boundary follows the line of the principal roads that run through the village; Oxford Road, The Hill, The Green, Pettiwell and Southend. It encompasses not only the buildings of historic interest located along these vehicular arteries, but also the land in which the buildings are situated, and other areas of important open space, which help to preserve the setting of the village. These roads radiate from The Green at the centre of Garsington to the neighbouring villages of Denton, Wheatley and Littlemore and connect with the main Oxford Watlington Road, which runs through the western part of parish.

At the highest point of the village is The Green. During medieval times it formed the nucleus of the village and today still remains its focal point. At the north end of The Green is the base and shaft of a medieval cross and at the southern end is the school and schoolhouse. Built during the 1840s of locally quarried stone in Tudor style, this building is perhaps the most notable 19th century addition to the village. The insertion of the school and schoolhouse must have significantly altered the appearance of The Green, which would have previously served as a public open space used for sport and entertainment. When the school was constructed, Dr. Ingram, a leading figure in the village remarked that it now occupied much of the space that had long been “a temptation to the lovers of bull baiting and Sunday cricket.” Not only did the dominant presence of the school curtail public sport and focus the mind on the importance of education, but the development of this previously open site also created a more tight knit feel to the built topography, than is felt elsewhere in the village.

The majority of the historic development around The Green is concentrated on its western side where the land is level and the contours of the hill less pronounced. In this area of the village, historic development varies in terms of scale and density, ranging from the larger detached buildings such as The Three Horseshoes, 14, 18 and 22 The Green, to the smaller and higher density terraces such as 2a to 4 and 5 to 7 the Green. With the exception of the Three Horseshoes, the historic buildings in this area are set slightly back from the road behind grass verges and low stone boundary walls and are orientated to face either directly on to, or gable on to, The Green. Buildings vary in date and include the early 17th century Hill Farmhouse, the late 17th century to early 18th century 2 to 4 The Green, and the 19th century school. The variance in the date of construction of these buildings and their eclectic designs add to the visual interest of this area of the village. More recently inappropriate infill development and poorly conceived extensions and garaging facilities, have had a significant impact upon the visual character of this attractive and prominent streetscape.

Trees and vegetation play an important role in establishing the character of the central area of the village. The areas to the north and east of The Green remain relatively open, but to the south, along the boundary of Manor Farmhouse, there is small but significant areas of reasonably dense woodland, while a mixture of broadleaf trees and tall overgrown hedgerows surround the site of the school. Trees are a fundamental part of views into and out of the conservation area providing focal points to street scenes and visual foregrounds or backdrops to historic buildings. The presence of trees, hedgerows and soft verges provides contrast and relief to the built elements within Garsington and contributes to the rural setting of the village.

The intimate nature of the built topography around the Green contrasts quite markedly with the historic development along the Oxford Road at the northern end of the conservation area. Despite the spread of modern development towards Oxford, which has had a significant

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impact upon the northern end of Garsington, this part of the conservation area retains the feeling of being at the periphery of the historic

village. Approaching from the direction of Oxford, the road rises steeply and views towards the centre of Garsington are obscured by the summit of the hill. At this point, the road is bordered on both side by steep grassy banks topped by tall overgrown hedgerow. A slight bend in the road partially obscures the later modern development further down the hill and spectacular and expansive views of Oxford can be gained on approaching its crest. The historic buildings located in this part of the conservation area tend to be quite large and situated close to the road, within substantial grounds. Owing to the steep contours of the hill the buildings, particularly on the eastern side, are elevated above the level of the road. However, in this part of the conservation area, the trees and hedgerows rather than buildings play a more dominant role in the streetscape.

As the Oxford Road reaches the summit of the hill and descends down towards the road junction by the village hall, development becomes much more tightly knit. Significant views westward across the Thames Valley can be glimpsed between buildings and on elevated ground ahead tall trees, which partially obscure the roof of the buildings surrounding the Green, help direct the eye towards the centre of the village. In this part of Garsington, and in particular in the area of land between Oxford Road and the Hill, modern infill development has had the most intrusive impact upon the character of the village. Much of the modern development here does not respect the traditional forms, materials and relationship of buildings to one another or to the Hill road, Oxford Road or the partially pedestrianised route that snakes between.

The area to the south of The Green, which includes the Church of St. Mary, forms another distinct part of the conservation area. Interestingly, the church is located away from The Green and slightly dislocated from the rest of the village, which may suggest that it is of early origin. It is situated on a level and more open area of land, to the west of Southend with commanding views across the Thames Valley. The dramatic setting of the church is best appreciated when approaching the village from the directions of Oxford, Chiselhampton or the Baldons. From these vantage points the church is visible in its entirety. Its elevated and isolated position which are only partially visible through the tree cover or are hidden completely by one another and the contours of the land reinforces its importance and contrasts dramatically with the setting of the rest of the buildings of the village.

The Church of St. Mary comprises a chancel, clerestoried nave, aisles, western tower, and south porch. The tower, which forms the earliest surviving part of the building, dates from the end of the 12th century. The only other survivals from the original building are fragments of the 12th century chancel and marks visible on the tower, which indicate the steep pitch of the original nave roof. Research undertaken on the building suggests that this Norman church had no aisles and that the present chancel was rebuilt in the 13th century. Inappropriate restoration work undertaken on the building in 1849 means that it is no longer possible to state with any certainty the exact date of phases of development in the building's history, but it is thought possible that the north aisle was also added in the 13th century and the south aisle a century later. During the late 14th century it appears that the walls and roof of the nave were raised and the clerestory inserted. The porch over the south door is also thought to date from the late 14th century. During the 16th century, buttresses were added to the north doorway to strengthen the sidewalls and a stone at the east end of the aisle inscribed LBFF 1668 commemorates this work. The roof was also strengthened and the east clerestory

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window on the north side was replaced by a large square window, which is believed to have been the gift of Dr. Ralph Bathhurst, President of Trinity College, Oxford (1664-1704).

The restoration works carried out on St. Mary's Church during the 19th century quite markedly altered the appearance and character of the building. Rather than simply consolidating the structure, the chancel arch was rebuilt in keeping with the style of the north aisle, the two arcades and their clerestories were remodelled, the Bathhurst window in the north side was destroyed and the whole church was re-roofed in Westmoreland slate.

A plaster ceiling which had concealed the timbered roof, was removed, several windows were restored and reset, flooring was renewed and the ancient pews were replaced with modern ones. The 15th century rood screen, originally positioned between the chancel and nave, was relocated to the tower arch which resulted in the removal of an 18th century gallery addition, which had formerly occupied this position. During the course of this work, traces of a wall painting representing the history of Jonah were found under the whitewash of the clerestory and the original stone altar that was found under the floor was reinstated in the chancel.

At the south end of The Green, Southend begins its gentle descent towards the lower portions of the village. The road is narrow and beyond the entrance to the church, high banks of overgrown vegetation and trees on either side of the road enhance the sense of enclosure. On the eastern side is a narrow raised and stone walled footpath, which allows pedestrians to ascend and descend the hill in safety. At the top section of this path, virtually opposite the church lych gate, is an interesting and historic carved stone doorway with a flat-headed Tudor arch. This is approached via a flight of stone steps cut in to the raised footpath. On the other side of the road at the bend is a small pond, one of the many natural sources of water found in the parish.

This area is very attractive and retains an unspoilt and pleasant rural character. Vegetation grows around the edges of the water and a stone wall contains in on three sides. Tall trees and hedgerow provide shade and the sound of running water contributes to the tranquil atmosphere. As the road straightens to follow briefly the contours of the hill before dropping again towards the junction with the B480, it passes Garsington Manor, which is perhaps the most outstanding building in the village. The present building dates partly from the 16th century but was remodelled and enlarged by William Wickham during the 17th century. The Manor is an impressive two and a half-storey house built in grey coursed limestone rubble, with dressed quoins and window surrounds. The north front, which faces the road, displays three large and distinctive rendered timber framed gables in the attic, each enclosing a three light casement window. Stone chimneys with brick shafts of 17th century date flank the tiled roof. Inside the building a number of interesting features survive, including an original inglenook fireplace, oak panelling and a Jacobean staircase. The house stands back from the road behind an impressive late 17th or early 18th century gateway formed by a pair of stone gate piers crowned by ball finials. To each side of the gateway are low flanking stone walls and 19th century iron railings. To the east and west, tall yew hedges, approximately 20 feet high and, said to be unrivalled in England, enclose the Manor forecourt.

To the south of the Manor, away from public view, is a terraced Italianate garden that was created during the 1920s for Philip and Lady Ottoline Morrell. At its focal point is a large rectangular pool with a central rectangular stone paved island and at its southern end a small wooden summerhouse known as The Temple. The pool is surrounded by eight life-size statues of classical figures and enclosed by yew hedges. The garden is included as Grade II* on the English Heritage Register of Parks and Gardens. To the west of the Manor is a late

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16th century brew house/bake house containing two open fireplaces and baking ovens. To the east is a 17th century square stone dovecote with a hipped tiled roof capped by a small lantern. This is one of two such buildings found in the village; the other, which was constructed in 1762 is situated in the grounds of Manor Farmhouse on the west side of Southend. Small utilitarian buildings such as the dovecotes, the brew house/bake house and the late 17th or early 18th century timber and brick granary, resting on staddle-stones at the easterly corner of Home Close, form an important aspect of the village's character and interest. These buildings are not only visual reminders of the importance of local agriculture to the survival of the historic communities of Garsington, but are also curious and interesting landmarks within the village streetscapes worthy of retention in themselves.

Continuing eastwards along Southend past Garsington Manor, the landscape to the north of the road begins to open up to reveal glimpses of Home Close behind a stately row of tall lime trees. This early 18th century limestone rubble building is situated in an elevated position, at some distance back from the road. The soft grassy verge, stone walls and impressive trees in front of Home Close, contrast with the hard edges created by the large stone outbuildings and high stone walls that form the boundary to The Manor on the opposite side of the street. These outbuildings form a prominent element within the streetscape and are currently in a poor state of repair; the tiled roofs are failing and a number of handmade clay tiles need to be replaced. As Southend continues its descent to the most easterly extremity of the conservation area, it reaches another gentle bend in the road. This point marks the change from the larger dwellings situated in substantial grounds in the upper section of Southend, to smaller, single and terraced cottages, situated close to and following the line of the road, in the lower part of the village. However, the most visually prominent buildings within this part of the streetscape are those associated with Home Farm. This traditional farm complex, which forms part of Garsington Manor, dominates the western side of the road and the large blank elevations of its simple utilitarian outbuildings provide an interesting and attractive contrast to the small, domestic elevations of the cottages opposite.

The changes in the pattern of built topography from the upper area of the village, concentrated around The Green, to the historic linear development along the lower half of Southend, reinforce the theory that at one time Northend and Southend were two distinct hamlets. This historic separateness is visually emphasised not only by the abrupt break in development between the two areas, as Southend descends from The Green down the hill side, but also by the contrast between the tree cover in the upper area of the village and the much more exposed open farmland which characterises its lower section. Distant views clearly reveal the buildings of Southend marching along the line of the road towards the junction with the B480, while above, the buildings concentrated around The Green are partially hidden by a swathe of trees and vegetation.

Pettiwell like Southend has a very rural character. The narrow winding road begins its steep descent of the hill from the southwest corner of the Green by the Plough Public House and eventually joins the B480 a few hundred yards north of the junction with Southend. It is bordered on each side by high banks of overgrown vegetation and trees that help create a strong feeling of enclosure. There is a pronounced bend at the top section of the road, which obscures views of the cluster of historic buildings located further down the hill. These buildings, which vary in age and style are situated on either side of Pettiwell and orientated to face either directly or gable on to the street. As elsewhere in the village, the strong linear relationship between historic buildings and roads is clearly evident.

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The predominant building material in the village is locally quarried limestone. This consistency in the use of local materials results in a distinctive unity in the colour and texture of the majority of the village's historic buildings. However, the treatment of the stonework tends to reflect the status of the individual buildings. Many of the simple domestic cottages such as Stone House, 2a-4 The Green, and utilitarian buildings such as the bake house/ brew house at Garsington Manor, are constructed of unadorned, coursed rubble limestone. However, higher status buildings such as the Manor House, The Old Kennels (which is of limestone ashlar banded with coursed limestone), Home Close, Hill Farmhouse and 18 The Green, all display ashlar dressings and detailing which emphasise their importance. Other types of building material found within the village include timber framing, the most notable examples of which are, 15 Pettiwell, 2 Southend (Barn House), and the granary south west of Home Close. Another material occasionally used in the historic buildings of the village is brick. Local bricks were produced at Kiln Farm, but while brick was used extensively for 19th and 20th century development in the village, few examples of its use are found in buildings prior to this date. One of the most interesting buildings demonstrating the use of brick in the village is the mid 18th century Plough Public House. Here bricks are used as quoins and dressings around door and window openings.

The roofs of the historic buildings in the village are mostly clad in thatch or tile. The steep pitches of many of the historic roofs indicate that they were originally thatched and have subsequently been re-roofed in tile or slate. Traditionally long straw or combed wheat reed would have been used as the material for thatched roofs. However, the increased use of imported water reed and the fashion for alien decorative block ridges, found on several cottages in the village, rather than the simple flush ridges typical of this area, have significantly altered the character of many cottages. A particularly good and attractive example of a traditional style of thatched roof and flush ridge is 36 The Hill. The traditional tile of the area is a handmade plain tile, which has a red-orange colour to the clay, and is seen on roofs throughout the village.

The majority of historic buildings in the village are one and a half or two storeys in height, although the grander houses such as The Manor, 4 Southend (Manor Farmhouse), The Old Kennels, The Plough, and Home Close are two and a half stories. Many buildings have simple traditional dormer windows inserted into the roof in order to make habitable use of the roof space, and a mixture of eyebrow dormers in thatched roofs, and small gable or catslide dormers in tiled roofs, can be found throughout the village. Traditional window types vary from the concave chamfered mullions on The Manor, to the various styles of simple wooden casements found on the majority of historic buildings in the village. The Manor, Home Close, Rectory Cottage and 4 The Hill all retain examples of leaded light windows, but generally the form and design of a number of the windows of the cottages have changed over time. However, while UPVC does make inappropriate appearances on some historic properties, its use happily tends to be confined to more modern parts of buildings such as rear extensions.

There are numerous fine examples of chimneys on historic buildings in the village. Most notable are the elegant stone stacks of The Manor, the four octagonal stone shafts on the School House, and the clustered brick ridge stack and gable-stack on the Old Kennels. The chimneys throughout the village add to the character and interest of the streetscape and skyline and contribute greatly to the character of the conservation area as a whole.

Boundary walls are also extremely important and run at varying heights to the front or to the sides of properties, often set back behind a grassy verge. Walls, such as the impressive boundary to Garsington Manor, help to emphasise the sense of enclosure and the narrowness

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of the roads in some areas of the village. The contrast of hard and soft edges and the continuity of materials used in the construction of these walls also greatly add to its character and appearance.

Trees form an essential element of the character and appearance of the village. Historically, the parish of Garsington was never thickly wooded and even up until the 18th century no woodland of any significant size appears on historic maps. Many of the trees that make such an important contribution to the character of the village today owe their existence to college lease agreements which prevent their felling or topping and also to provisions for their planting in the first place. When viewed from a distance, the historic core of Garsington is enveloped in mature trees and within the village they form focal points to views, help to define boundaries and emphasise the narrowness and enclosure of steep and winding roads. The impact of trees on the character and appearance of the village changes with the seasons. During the summer months their lush canopies increase the shadiness and narrowness of the lanes and reinforces the feeling that the rural landscape is encroaching into the village. During the winter months, when the vegetation dies back, previously hidden views of buildings are revealed between their skeletal branches. In general the trees in the village are an interesting mixture of native broadleaf species and their impact, along with the areas of open space, grassy banks and verges, contributes to the rural and organic appearance of the streetscape. The spectacular positioning and location of the village of Garsington means that views into and out of the conservation area are fundamental aspects of its character and interest. Especially impressive are views of the village from the direction of Chiselhampton, Oxford and the Baldons with the prominent landmark of St. Mary's Church standing out against the hillside and a backdrop of trees. Within Garsington, views across the Thames Valley towards the Chilterns from vantage points on the western side of the village such as, the churchyard and the car park of the Plough Public House are particularly expansive. Throughout the village brief glimpses between buildings are important and less far ranging views within the settlement itself also add to its character.

There are a number of historic buildings within the village, which are not included on the statutory list of buildings of historic or architectural interest but are of local note and contribute to the character and interest of the conservation area. These buildings include The Three Horseshoes Public House on The Green, which is a visually prominent building at the centre of the village and also a focal point within the community. Nos. 24, 26, 30 and 34 The Hill are small and attractive semi-detached late 19th century brick cottages, which despite alterations to windows have retained much of their original character. Other buildings highlighted as being of local note include 23, and 43 Oxford Road and 37, Oxford Road, which is an attractive 18th century rendered building, situated hard up to the edge of the road with prominent gabled dormers and an attractive open porch. The Red Lion Pub immediately adjacent to 37, Oxford Road is also an attractive and distinctive historic building. The large Victorian Rectory opposite Stone House and 41 and 43 Southend are also considered to be of local interest. Nos. 41 to 43 are simple domestic stone cottages situated directly opposite Home Farm. The utilitarian form and unbroken elevations of Home Farm bams, which are situated immediately adjacent to the street, make a strong visual contribution to the character of the street and are also highlighted as being of local note. No. 11 Pettiwell is an interesting 17th century stone cottage with raking eaves dormers and slightly further down the hill 12 Pettiwell is another 17th century building with a taller Victorian stock brick addition onto the road distinguished by its narrow slit windows. Other structures within the conservation area that are of local note include the church lych gate, the war memorial opposite the Green, the

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small pump on the road edge by 15 Pettiwell and the area of stone paving that forms part of the footpath which runs along the boundary of Lanesra Cottage towards the church.

Possible Areas of Enhancement.

Garsington is a visually attractive village. Its unique location and many buildings of historic note contribute to its character and interest. The steep contours of the land on which Garsington is situated have helped to both shape and contain its development. Historically, buildings were constructed along the main roads through the village, and this essentially linear quality is an important element of its character. The position of buildings within their plots, the spaces between them and the relationship of buildings to the landscape and roads all contribute to the complex and important historical topography of the village. Although Garsington is generally well maintained, it has suffered in recent years from a gradual erosion of its character with the encroachment of modern development which pays little heed to the historic topography or traditional building styles and materials that make the village distinctive. The impact of modern developments such as 12, The Green, the garages by the village school, 1,3 and 5 Southend, Saddlers Croft, Fox Close and the buildings adjacent to the Plough Public, have introduced a universal style of modern architecture into the village. While the boundary of the conservation area has been drawn to exclude many of these infill developments, in reality their prominent position within the village means that they have a considerable visual impact upon the appearance of the conservation area. A more appropriate approach to development would be individual site-specific designs, which respond to the historic forms, textures, and idiosyncrasies that make up the character of the village.

The use of traditional building materials in repairs to historic buildings and for the construction of new buildings or extensions can make a positive contribution to the character of the conservation area. The use of modern alternatives such as UPVC windows or guttering and concrete blocks or tiles, can considerably alter the appearance of individual buildings and of the conservation area as a whole. Where maintenance on a historic property is necessary, it should be carried out on a like for like basis using sympathetic traditional materials such as natural local stone, handmade clay tiles and bricks, softwood single glazed windows and cast iron. Where properties are thatched and in need of repair, this should be carried out using long straw or combed wheat reed, which are traditional to the South Oxfordshire area, rather than imported water reeds. Similarly ridges should be of a simple flush design, rather than alien decorative block ridges. Many of the historic buildings in Garsington have distinctive tiled roofs, which contribute to the character and interest of the street scenes. The historic tiles found in Garsington are handmade clay tiles and have a particular colour, texture and concave form that helps create the distinctive and attractive undulating roof forms. Modern concrete tiles are lifeless in comparison, differing in size, colour and texture from their historic predecessors.

The many stone boundary walls in Garsington form an essential part of the village's character and they should be protected and maintained. These walls are vulnerable to the effects of ivy growth and disturbance from the roots of trees growing nearby, as seen in several places, notably close to the war memorial. Regular maintenance is essential to ensure their proper preservation. The historic walls in Garsington were traditionally built of local limestone, capped in stone and occasionally brick and pointed in lime mortar. Unfortunately unsympathetic modern repairs have been undertaken on walls throughout the village using hard cement mortar, which can obscure the edges of the stone, hasten weathering and destroy the visual character of the wall. In other areas, particularly along the Oxford Road, historic walls have been demolished and replaced with alien materials such as concrete block or

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close-boarded wooden fences. This completely alters the character of boundaries within the village, which form a distinctive element of Garsington's historic streetscapes.

There are many agricultural buildings dotted around Garsington that form an important visual reminder of the pivotal role agriculture has played in the history of the village. Many of these buildings are no longer used for agricultural or related purposes and have been converted, sympathetically, or otherwise to a domestic use. Conversion of utilitarian buildings that form an important aspect of the eclectic quality of a historic streetscape can often result in unsympathetic alterations and loss of character and sadly no working farms now remain within the conservation area. It is therefore all the more important that the one remaining complex of traditional farm buildings - at Home Farm - is spared from residential conversion. While no longer a working farm, the buildings here remain largely unaltered externally, directly as a result of their use in association with Garsington Opera.

Indeed, the extent to which the Opera has the ability to support the maintenance of the many traditional buildings at The Manor, as the fine formal gardens, is its chief benefit in conservation terms. It is also true to say that while a certain amount of disruption (and visual intrusion) is inevitably caused to the conservation area each year by the opera, all traces of the event are removed completely at the end of each season, leaving no visual damage to the character and appearance of the village.

Grass verges, open spaces and historic surface treatments all make a contribution to the character of the village. The use of tarmac on pavement and road surfaces is important for maintaining acceptable highway standards, but has also undoubtedly altered the appearance of the village street scene and emphasised the importance of retaining and maintaining historic surfaces, open areas and gaps between buildings. Grass verges play a particularly important role in Garsington's conservation area, forming banks and soft edges to streets and emphasising the rural character of the village. It is important that these areas are carefully maintained and not allowed to deteriorate, becoming tatty and unsightly through constant trampling, or through use as vehicular parking areas. Another small but significant improvement would be the painting in an appropriate colour of the steel safety rail added to the raised footpath in Southend by the County Council some years ago: this would help to soften its current rather unsympathetic and utilitarian appearance.

Potential for a much more significant enhancement lies right at the heart of the conservation area. Here, the triangular area of land to the north of the former school, on which various proposals to build have been successfully resisted by the District Council, currently lies overgrown and neglected. If, however, a programme of sympathetic management were introduced, including thinning of the mainly scrub vegetation and repair of the enclosing boundary walls, the area's overall appearance could be considerably improved, enabling it to become once more the visual focal point it deserves to be. This is perhaps more likely to occur if the land could be transferred to the Parish Council or another organisation keen to see the land used as a village green or some other form of communal area.

The positioning of street lighting in Garsington is reasonably unobtrusive which helps to maintain the rural atmosphere and reduces street clutter. However the lighting of individual buildings can affect the character of an area, particularly in a village such as Garsington, where the elevated position of buildings may result in the visually polluting effects of lighting having an impact over a considerable area. Telephone pylons are particularly intrusive, especially around The Green, and the laying underground of these cables would significantly improve the visual character of this part of the village.

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Trees and hedgerows also make an important contribution and landowners need to manage their trees sensitively. Trees contribute to long distant views of Garsington as well as views within and looking out of the village. Destroying hedgerows and insensitive lopping and felling of trees, particularly around the centre of the settlement, could have a significant adverse impact upon its character. Similarly, thoughtless planting, particularly of dense and fast growing species such as leylandii can alter and block important long views into and out of the conservation area.

There may be some instances where small amounts of financial assistance are made available by the District Council to assist with the cost of repair and renovation work to historic buildings within the conservation area. Grants may also be available for appropriate schemes of environmental improvement.