

# EYNHAM VILLAGE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT – COMMON THEMES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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## Introduction

This Village Character Assessment (VCA) has used the Eynsham Housing map (2012) as its main point of analysis

[https://eynsham.org.uk/variable/organisation/29/attachments/housing\\_map.pdf](https://eynsham.org.uk/variable/organisation/29/attachments/housing_map.pdf)

plus this list of recent developments referred to in the section on 1980 – present day

<https://eynsham.org.uk/org.aspx?n=Eynsham-Village&id=39#Housing%20histories>

This work has been undertaken by a group of 8 Eynsham residents that includes a Parish Councillor. It concluded the village doesn't have a single 'character' but several, based on

(a) the streetscape, housing and built environment of the various neighbourhoods, reflecting the style at the time they were developed

(b) their green and other open spaces;

(c) their commercial, recreational and social facilities and

(d) their vehicular and pedestrian access routes.

The group has therefore used 'housing era' as the focus of its assessment of character. But the key points based on this analysis can be easily transcribed to an alternative focus based on 'area' (NE, NW, W, SE, S).

The housing eras – as can be seen in the map (link above) – are:

- Pre 1914
- 1914- 1960
- 1960 -1980
- 1980 – present day

A **Character Assessment template** has been drawn up for each of them. This VCA aims to identify the features of neighbourhood layout and housing design seem to work best in a growing village that retains much of its defining character from the medieval period but where more recent developments also have much to offer.

Due to the large number of small developments built in all parts of the village since 1980, there is one overarching template for this period identifying the main learning points.

Photos are provided for all 4 templates, usually in hyperlinks or zipped files. Photos illustrating traffic problems are located at the end of this document.

## Design guides for placemaking

Much of what we recommend in connection with street scape and layout is set out in detail in Oxfordshire County Council's Street Design Guide (2023), found via this link <https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/sites/default/files/file/roads-and-transport-policies-and-plans/DesignGuidePublication.pdf>

Oxfordshire County Council is responsible for ensuring that new streets meet certain design standards. These standards help to ensure that new streets function in a practical and safe manner and help deliver the aspirations of the county. This new document brings together guidelines previously dispersed between several documents and complements the District Council Design Guide which include the wider aspects of master planning.

The aim of this County Council guide is to ensure new developments are planned and delivered to the highest design standards. It does this by describing 'what good looks like' and illustrating these principles of good design with photos of real places. This is an important resource for master planning, designing and then building new developments.

So this Village Character Assessment endorses the design guidance in Oxfordshire County Council and West Oxfordshire District Councils' Design Guides but provides an Eynsham-specific overlay.

## Common themes

In this section on themes common to the whole village, we set out the risks to character from both future development and infilling / redevelopment of single houses.

### 1.Design and layout of the built environment

This refers to street scene, landscaping, and access. It focuses on a sense of place rather than individual houses.

The key questions are: first, *what* are the most valued features of the village to date that we would like to encourage in future planning applications? Second, *how* can the urban grain of the historical core and successful features of subsequent developments inform future development? The group thought the following were important:

- One of the aims of the Neighbourhood Plan and therefore future development is to protect and enhance Eynsham as a special place and enable new residents to feel they are part of the village.
- New neighbourhoods should therefore be designed so they are 'close', meaning a pedestrian scale of layout that reflects a village ambience. They should not be oversized, sprawling and suburban. There is good practice not only in Eynsham's historic centre but also in some more recent developments.

- There should be pedestrian walkways and cycle tracks from all sections of the village to local retail areas and to the centre. This is already an attractive feature of village character and should be continued. Residential areas should be well connected to each other.
- Vehicular traffic should be routed whenever possible onto the main peripheral roads.
- New development should include diversity of housing design and building materials; and avoid regimented lines of similar housing. **Acre End Street** (the past) and **Hazledene** (the present) are good examples.
- Landscaping - especially trees - are crucial to the streetscape and overall 'feel' of developments. Tree planting should be included in the plans of all new developments.
- New developments should be enhanced by encouraging mini retail areas, social facilities and play areas, building on the concept of the 15-minute neighbourhood. Indeed, there should be several such focal points in the village.
- Parking in new developments needs to be considered carefully given the increase in size and number of cars per household over recent years.
- Sustainability and energy efficiency measures should be embedded within plans and designs for new neighbourhoods. This issue is discussed fully in the Neighbourhood Plan.

**Recommendation 1: Maintain a rural village character** The group recommends that new developments should reflect the design principles listed above in order to maintain Eynsham's rural village character. There is recent good practice in the village on which to draw. But some modern developments – especially those outside the Conservation Area – have been less successful because their design was less sensitive to village character and followed a more suburban layout. Indeed, there is a feeling that design standards are seen as less important for developments outside the conservation area.

**Recommendation 2: Create a Design Review Panel** The group concluded that there is already a good deal of guidance on design of new developments in urban and rural settings – at the national, county, district levels and -soon- Parish levels. The problem seems to be in the lack of developer compliance and Planning Authority enforcement.

For example, in the case of **Hazledene** on the eastern edge of the village, there was substantial engagement by district councillors, the Parish Council and the community which led to an intervention by Taylor Wimpey's senior management. As a result, the developer replaced an 'anywhere' design with a development that was much more sensitive to the character of the village.

It is a successful recent development. It has a variety of housing types, a blended mix of social and private housing, a pedestrian link to the village, vehicle access only onto the ring road, and wasn't a 'bog standard' development. Although only of modest size, there is no reason why larger development areas – the Strategic Development Area (SDA) in the West and Garden Village in the north – could not be composed of several small village-scale designs exemplified by this one (see photos at end of the 1980-present day template).

This level of involvement by the community was not taken forward in other recent developments. In most cases, there was much less engagement at an early enough stage to influence the design of the streetscapes.

**Please note** that these remarks are **not** intended to be critical of the quality of the homes in these neighbourhoods. Rather, we are suggesting that overall streetscapes mostly do not reflect the character of the Oxfordshire rural village of which they are a part. They could be anywhere.

The group therefore felt that the Parish Council and the community should engage with developers at an early stage to ensure their design plans for streetscape and housing reflect the character of the village and complies with published guidance. The group recommends that a '**Design Review Panel**' should be set up by Eynsham Parish Council. Its main purpose would be to engage with developers and district planners and test emerging designs against the design guides and policies in the Neighbourhood Plan.

This would complement the current good communication links with District Council Planners. A similar level of communication with County Council transport planners would be welcome.

Note: the village is becoming spatially 'eccentric' as it grows to the west and the north. When these developments are completed, the historic 'centre' will be in the far south east.

## **2. Traffic**

Traffic is a major problem that threatens the character of the village and its liveability. The 20-mph speed limit introduced by the Parish Council supports a pedestrian scale of settlement that is re-inforced by the recommendations on streetscape and building design in the section above.

Traffic in the village is set to increase significantly as the substantial developments planned in the north (c3,000 new homes) and west (c1,200 new homes) come into being. This growth will result in a doubling of the village population. In addition, through traffic will also increase because of a similar scale of housing growth west along the A40 corridor (in Carterton and Witney).

**Traffic problems** already include:

- Congestion during the rush hours and the start and end of the school day.
- Concerns that it is not safe for children to walk or cycle to school.
- Older people and those with disabilities feeling unsafe as they navigate their way across the village.
- A noticeable increase in pollution in some parts of the village during peak periods.
- Actual physical damage to buildings i.e. the Jolly Sportsman Public House (a listed building).
- Frequent speeding and vehicle noise on the main entrance / exit / through roads.
- Occasional anti-social driving; in some areas this is becoming reasonably frequent.

Some of these problems are illustrated in the photos in a separate document. Limited, modest adjustments are unlikely to be an effective solution. More radical measures are required, especially in the **historic centre of the village**.

**Options to address traffic problems** include considering:

- A one-way traffic system.
- Residents' Parking (ensuring parking is mainly temporary and not daylong).
- Creating a shared space in the centre by the Square with priority for pedestrians and access for vehicles.
- Requiring those planning new developments to arrange vehicular access via main peripheral roads, not village roads, including construction traffic.
- Physical changes to road layout on main access routes to reduce traffic speed.
- A review of the Toll Bridge and weight limit reimposed.
- Assessing the best route for buses through the village.
- Abandoning traffic lights at Witney Road/ A 40 (except buses).
- Erecting bollards at Coop/ Jolly Sportsman to prevent turns out of Mill St. by HGVs).
- Signs at entrances to village warning of narrow roads ahead.
- Preventing HGV deliveries to central shops; consulting on the best way to route deliveries to central shops/businesses and church events.

**Recommendation 3. Commission a traffic study** This is a complex issue. We recommend commissioning a professional report on as soon as possible. This will provide sound evidence on traffic flow predictions and identify the sort of management options that might work best for most residents. Schemes to tackle traffic problems are often controversial so its recommendations should be subject to discussion and consultation. The study should include:

- use of B4449 and the Toll Bridge by Heavy Good Vehicles.
- the impact on local roads of the Garden Village and of gravel extraction off the Cassington Road (if this goes ahead)
- access to the area east of B4449, an important location for recreation: walking, cricket / croquet grounds, Thames River / Eynsham Lock, allotments and the employment of residents (Oakfield Industrial Estate).

### 3. Heritage

It is the duty of local government, supported by community organisations, to protect and preserve the valuable 1000-year heritage of this village. The Conservation Area exerts a powerful effect on village character and to a large extent, its heritage sets the overall context for this Character Assessment. New development should take account of this.

Historic features include:

- The Bartholomew Rooms and the cross outside in the Square.
- The 62 Listed buildings in the Conservation Area + outside (eg Bartholomew School).
- Newland Forge and contents.
- Medieval lanes such as Conduit, Pug, and Wastie.
- The Malting Chimney at the Jolly Sportsman.
- Pons Hugonis on Chilbridge.
- The Abbey Fishponds area.
- Lord's Farm threshing barn.
- Prehistoric sites.

In fact, many of these are included on the map of [Listed Buildings](#). But it's difficult to see how we might 'protect' buildings without some **formal criteria and a funding pot**. Oxford Preservation Trust's [commercial plan for Lords Farm](#) bore far more weight than village hopes / plans for use as a museum.

**Recommendation 4. Reflect village heritage in the design of new development.** Where possible, new development should draw on and align with the character of the village streetscapes and building diversity endorsed in this report. Traffic is the greatest threat to the enjoyment of village heritage (and sometimes its fabric). Hence the importance of better traffic management and sensitive traffic management in new development.

**Recommendation 5. Reflect heritage in new signage.** There are several simple, practical measures that can help enhance character such as ensuring street names reflect village history and people; and installing plaques and info boards, as has already been done. This can be applied to new developments.

### 4. Landscaping

**Tree planting** can soften the effect of the built environment and enhance the streetscape and character of most areas significantly. This should be a feature of all new developments in the future. In some of the streets developed between 1914-1960, as well as in the older parts of the village, this has been done to great effect. It is not difficult to identify areas in the village where new tree planting would add significantly to character and streetscape. If funding can be found to do this, residents should be consulted so they have a say in whether they'd welcome trees in their street and to address questions of maintenance.

**Recommendation 5.** Tree planting should be included in all new developments at the start, even when there is no existing tree scape to draw on. This makes a great difference to the

character of a new development. Where possible, it should also be taken forward in those parts of the village that would benefit from it and want it. The Eynsham Society has offered to contribute to the planting of modern, disease-resistant Elm trees which contributed so much to the character of the village in the past.

There are also opportunities to use **roundabouts** to improve the access to the village - with low planting or even artwork to create a sense of identity.

**Highway surfacing** (to include footways) is relevant here: it could have a double bonus in terms of traffic calming.

## **5. Priorities for the existing village**

**Historic times to 1910** - Manage the traffic (as set out in the traffic section above) to maintain historical ambience. Improve surfaces of pedestrian routes (pavements and lanes).

**1910 - 1960** – Tree planting where there is little to soften effect of built environment. Improve pedestrian footways.

**1960 - 1980** – Improve and remodel the retail area around the Spar supermarket so it is an attractive focus for the north of the village. Try and ensure streetscapes are maintained as intended in their original design with limited further extensions / modifications in front of building lines.

**1980 - present day** – Apply existing design policies and guidance to new developments. They are too often not followed by developers or enforced by District Council planners. This means discussing plans with developers at an early stage.