

**CHANCEL COTTAGE  
STEEPLE ASTON**



**HERITAGE  
ASSESSMENT**

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## Introduction

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The intelligent management of change is a key principle necessary to sustain the historic environment for present and future generations to enjoy. English Heritage and successive governments have published policy and advice that extend our understanding of the historic environment and develop our competency in making decisions about how to manage it.

Paragraph 17 of the English Heritage PPS5 Historic Environment Practice Guide explains that applications (for planning permission and listed building consent) have a greater likelihood of success and better decisions will be made when applicants and local planning authorities assess and understand:

- (i) the particular nature of the significance of an asset,
- (ii) the extent of the asset's fabric to which the significance relates and
- (iii) the level of importance of that significance.

Similarly the National Planning Policy Framework, which replaced PPS5 but not the Practice Guide, in March 2012, provides a very similar message in paragraphs 128 and 129 expecting both applicant and local planning authority to take responsibility for understanding the significance of a heritage asset and the impact of a development proposal, seeking to avoid unacceptable conflict between the asset's conservation and any aspect of the proposal.

A planning and listed building consent application have been submitted which propose alterations and extension to the cottage, but in assessing the applications Council officers have expressed concerns about the impact of the proposals on the listed building and conservation area. In the absence of any thorough analysis and explanation of the heritage significance the site holds this report has been prepared to provide a level of understanding that will allow informed decisions to be made about the future of the property.

The evidence produced here shows that the village exhibits phases of development and redevelopment reflecting its changing fortunes. The settings of buildings are not static but have changed as new buildings are added to continuing story of the village's development. Similarly, the cottage exhibits phases of change from its origins in the C18th with extensions and alterations internally and externally, some of which have eroded the building's historic integrity.

The cottage has the potential for further change that would add to the history of the place. It has never been the intention of government to prevent change or freeze frame local communities and current policy and good practice suggests that change, if managed intelligently, would not be harmful.

This report is set out to provide a brief history of the village and Chancel Cottage, assessing their key characteristics and how these contribute to the significance of the cottage and its setting. Using this evidence it then examines the Council's advice assessing the potential impacts that have caused concern within the context of current policy and advice.

## Steeple Aston: A brief Social History

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The parish of Steeple Aston, lying along the western banks of the river Cherwell, comprises of the civil parishes of Steeple Aston and Middle Aston which had, until the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century, formed a single parish farmed communally under the medieval two field system usual in the region.

The etymology of the name appears to be the East town (*tun*) with a steeple or tower. “The parish is likely to have be named East from its situation in the eastern part of the ancient Hundred of Levecanole, one of the divisions of the County named in the Domesday Survey; or it may have been in reference to its lying east of Steeple Barton, a place of some importance in very early times.”<sup>1</sup>

Evidence of the earliest settlement in the area is provided by an Iron Age burial site near Hopcroft’s Holt. “The remains of a tessellated pavement of the later Roman period in the same area were uncovered by the plough in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, and in the 19<sup>th</sup>, coins, pottery and a burial site were found near the church and on the site of the infant school.”<sup>2</sup>The only tangible evidence of the proceeding Anglo Saxon settlement is found in Middle Aston house where three clay loom weights were found.

The two parishes developed agriculturally along similar though separate lines. While both communities had absentee landlords, their socio-economic development was markedly different. Whereas the quartering of Steeple Aston manor in 1501 for instance led to an active land market and the emergence of yeoman estates, Middle Aston was gradually transformed into a single large estate.

This inclosure of Middle Aston was achieved following an exchange of lands and tithes with the rector in 1756 resulting in Francis Page as the sole landowner in the parish. By 1763, Middle Aston had been formed into three farms; Great House Farm; Grange Farm and Town Farm. Tenant farmers were, for the most part, part able and wealth men – owning land elsewhere such as in Steeple Barton.

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<sup>1</sup> Wing W 1875. Annals of Steeple Aston and Middle Aston in the County of Oxford. p. 3

<sup>2</sup> Victory History of the Counties. ‘Steeple Aston’ Vol XI. P. 22

The lack of manorial supervision in Steeple Aston on the other hand, meant that available land was often taken up by outsiders, “usually neighbouring gentry’ families...in search of smaller estates, probably for younger sons. Often such families leased their land to tenants, some of whom managed to purchase their leases.”<sup>3</sup>

Steeple Aston was eventually inclosed a decade later 1767, under an act of 1766. “There were already 22 small closes in and around the village amounting to 28a., but few closes in the fields. By far the largest award was that made to the rector, whose glebe had been much enlarged by the recent exchange with Francis Page.”<sup>4</sup> However, the decision to allot most “of the northern part of Steeple Aston to the rectory farm involved some inconvenience for others with farmhouses in North Street.”<sup>5</sup> The labouring population are also reckoned to have suffered – at least temporarily – from the inclosure and the poor rate increased sharply after 1767.

Poverty continued to be a point of concern into 19<sup>th</sup> century with the vestry recommending in 1840 that 29 households, more than a quarter of those in the township, be exempted from poor rates. Unemployment continued to characterise much of village life in this century to the extent that, in 1846, a petition was sent out to the Home Office complaining about the movement into Steeple Aston of poor labourers forced out of neighbouring parishes that were in the hands of single proprietors. Such was the depth of the problem that the vestry began promoting emigration to manufacturing districts in England or abroad, offering (in 1852) £3 each up to 8 young people who would be prepared to emigrate.<sup>6</sup>

It is this issue that perhaps owes much to the sudden decline in population during the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early part 20<sup>th</sup> century. From a mere 20 inhabitants as recorded in the Domesday Survey of 1086, Steeple and Middle Aston’s populations had experienced a steady increase over the centuries. By 1279 the figure had grown to 31 and 39 respectively and although the population appears to have declined by the time of the poll tax of 1377, the Protestation Returns of 1642 and Compton

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<sup>3</sup> Victory History of the Counties. ‘Steeple Aston’ Vol XI. 34

<sup>4</sup> Ibid: 36

<sup>5</sup> Ibid:23

<sup>6</sup> Ibid: 37

Census of 1676 suggest that numbers had began rising in 17<sup>th</sup> century to the point that – as suggested by the hearth tax in 1662 – Steeple Aston had by now outgrown Middle Aston in population size. Reaching its peak of 749 in 1871, the trend was markedly reversed in this latter half of the century, bringing down the numbers to 551 by 1911.

Changes in population size also saw a concomitant change in the types of occupations undertaken in the parish. Between the 16<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, when Steeple Aston had been a primarily agricultural community, labourers along with a few other trades-people associated with an agricultural community such as blacksmiths, weavers, maltsters, and bakers had made up a substantial part of the village's population. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century the parish also included a tailor, a milliner and a corwainer. Tradesmen and artisans frequently combined their businesses with small holdings and in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, as Steeple Aston became less of a purely agricultural community, the population was distinguished by its unusually large number of tradesmen and artisans. By the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, there were 41 people engaged in domestic service in Steeple Aston in comparison to only 4 in Middle Aston. These trades however, as they did elsewhere, began to disappear from Steeple Aston from the 20<sup>th</sup> century onwards.

In 1902, it was noted that an increasing number of young people were leaving the village to pursue work in other towns. The population remained at approximately 500 until the 1950s when an increasing number of commuters moved into the village driving the population up to 628 in 1961 and 795 a decade later in 1971. It was during this latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that the village began to expand in response to these commuters.

## Brief History of Development

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“Steeple Aston village is built on both sides of a small, steep valley through which runs a shallow tributary of the river Cherwell.”<sup>7</sup> The earliest housing development in the area is thought to have been on the high ground around church and manor house on the east end of North Street.

One of the first written records about village comes from the Domesday Survey where it is referred to as Estone. The entry, translated from the abbreviated Latin, describes the village as the Land of the Bishop of Bayeux Humphrey; holding five hides in Estone from Adam FitzHubert and 29 acres of meadow land; now in lordship four ploughs; six slaves; and inhabited by twelve villagers with two smallholdings.<sup>8</sup>

Over the course of the ensuing centuries, it expanded in conventional fashion, growing along its main street on the north end at first. It was only probably after the quartering of the manor in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and the subsequent arrival of gentry families from outside the parish that the demand for good quality housing finally led to the development of South Street. Paine’s Hill, possible named after John Paine, Butcher and auctioneer...and a leading figure in the 18<sup>th</sup> century life of the village, was developed in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, mostly along the east side since the west was occupied by ancient closes.<sup>9</sup>

“The control exercised by successive owners of Middle Aston over the development of the village was in sharp contrast to the unrestrained growth of Steeple Aston for much of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Whereas all the dwellings in Middle Aston were, in 1861, in the hands of a single man (Charles Cotrell-Dormer), in Steeple Aston, more than 55 landlords owned the 156 dwellings there. More than a third of these landlords who collectively owned a third of the housing stock, were non-residents. No cottage in the entire parish was owner occupied.

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid:23

<sup>8</sup> Steeple Aston Village Archive (SAVA) 2009. *The Development of Steeple Aston and Middle Aston: Understanding our houses through five centuries*. P.2

<sup>9</sup> Victory History of the Counties. ‘Steeple Aston’ Vol XI. P. 23

However, despite the willingness of speculators to provide accommodation “Steeple Aston lacked the industrial base to grow further. It was a frequent complaint of the better off that the township was a dumping ground for the unwanted labour of neighbouring closed parishes, and it was perhaps because Steeple Aston could offer them little beyond accommodation that there was a rapid turnover of population among labourers; between 1861 and 1871 almost half the cottages in Steeple Aston acquired new occupiers.”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid: 23



## Character and Materiality of the Built Environment

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The western half of the parish lies on Great Oolite limestone edged with Northampton sand to which much of built landscape of Steeple and Middle Marston owes its character. Many of the older houses in the village are built of this local limestone and ironstone rubble. A few retain thatched roofs but most have been given Stonesfield slate or Welsh slate roofs.

Early period: “Steeple Aston in the 11<sup>th</sup> century probably followed the pattern of other villages across England at the time. Most of the houses were single-storey, no more than sixteen feet from front to back and just one room in depth. Many would have been made of cob with thatched roofs.”<sup>11</sup> Wattle-and-daub walls were developed later though none survive as examples in the village today.

While there isn't a strong timber frame tradition in the area – with limestone and ironstone being the key material characterising much of the architecture in the village, it is thought that timber-framed houses were indeed constructed here from early times.

In his History of Steeple Aston and Middle Aston, Brookes refers to several ‘houses of interest’ including Manor house; Hill House; The Grange; The Rectory; Payne’s Hill House and Orchard Lea. Of the other properties in the village he states: *“as far as one knows there is nothing of very special interest connected with the other houses here. Some of the cottages have old ingle-nooks; while one in North Street belonging to Mr. George Stevens, bearing the date 1729, has a good oak mantelpiece, arched, with a moulding which might date it somewhere about 1600. It is said to have come from Middle Aston, or possibly from the manor-house which*

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<sup>11</sup> Steeple Aston Village Archive (SAVA) 2009. *The Development of Steeple Aston and Middle Aston: Understanding our houses through five centuries*. P.2

*was pulled down.” He concludes nevertheless that “Anyhow it is far older than the building.”<sup>12</sup>*

The 17<sup>th</sup> century: Most of the earliest surviving buildings in Steeple Aston do in fact date from the 1600s. Apart from the church and Manor Court, these buildings can be found close to the church on the north and south side. They include Cedar Cottage. A thatched cottage – originally symmetrical with a central door and room on either side but that was later extended with a third bay in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and a rear thatched extension much later in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Jasmine Cottage - behind the later extension towards Fir Lane – a single storey building, which is one of three remaining thatched cottages in the village and a remarkable survival of an unusually small cottage.<sup>13</sup>

The 18<sup>th</sup> Century: marked a time of growth, fashion and change in the villages. This Georgian era, with its classical architecture, finds many forms around the village. C18<sup>th</sup> century Steeple Aston was a time of significant building activity. The Enclosure map of 1767 shows at least 24 houses thought to have been constructed in the first half of this century, with a further 12 that appearing between 1767 and 1800. In addition to these new Georgian buildings, there was some remodelling of some dwellings of earlier origins, which were altered to incorporate the classical style, particularly on their frontages.<sup>14</sup> Examples include Hill House – a building with a symmetrical 18<sup>th</sup> century façade but with a rebuilt central chimney suggesting earlier origins.

The symmetrical plan had begun to be adopted across the country from the 17<sup>th</sup> century onwards with the typical house being a single pile plan, one room deep with a central door and rooms of equal size on either side. By the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century, this pattern was replaced by the double pile plan, two rooms in depth. Though these developments are marked in Steeple Aston, a decline in the region’s prosperity (discussed elsewhere above), led to earlier dwellings now merely being extended by

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<sup>12</sup> Brookes C.C 1929. “ Mainly Folk and Houses” *A History of Steeple Aston and Middle Aston Oxfordshire*. The Kings Stone Press. Long Compton, Shiston-On-Stour

<sup>13</sup> Steeple Aston Village Archive (SAVA) 2009. *The Development of Steeple Aston and Middle Aston: Understanding our houses through five centuries*. P.6

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*. P. 12

the addition of rooms projecting rearwards to create an L-shaped plan rather than building anew.

*Chancel Cottage* is such an example of this 18<sup>th</sup> century architecture of the village, displaying many of the common features including a central front door with symmetrical windows either side; upper windows arranged symmetrically as with the ground floor; chimney stacks positioned on both gable ends and an L-shaped plan to the rear.

Windows in small houses where ceilings were low were often short and square with wrought iron casements. These continued to be in vogue well into the late 18<sup>th</sup> century when the influence of the Renaissance brought with it tall sash windows. The latter consisted of three main types; pre 1709 – frame flush with wall face heavy glazing bars; 1709-1774 – frame set back from the wall face with slightly more slender glazing bars; 1774 onwards – the frames were set back from the wall face and recessed behind reveals with very slender glazing bars.<sup>15</sup>

Roof around this area in the 18<sup>th</sup> century would have been thatched or covered in stonessfield slate. These materials required a steep pitch to throw off rain. However, the adoption of the double pile plan caused problems with roof construction because of the steep roof required by these traditional materials. This first led to the development of the valley gutter roof. However, a solution was eventually found when welsh slate became widely available – thanks to improved canal and rail links. Slate-covered roofs were lighter in weight than stone or thatch and could be constructed at a lower pitch because the material was easier to render watertight.<sup>16</sup>

The 19<sup>th</sup> century: saw a huge growth in the population of Steeple Aston. The 1871 census records indicate that the village had double in size since 1801 and was now home to 749 residents. However, although the village had, by all accounts become overcrowded, there appears to have been relatively little built development at this time.

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid P. 15

<sup>16</sup> Ibid P. 15

The development that did happen included Fir cottage in Fir Lane which was built in a simple design - with doors on one side and smaller windows fitted with casements rather than sashes - by the blacksmith Thomas Roger in 1813. Other buildings included the new rectory - built in 1832 in a style that strongly emphasised balance and symmetry – and the New Manor - built by Charles Harris in similar taste on the south-eastern side of the village. Harris however was to go bankrupt shortly after, leading to a minor building boom on his former lands between the 1840 and 50. .

As demand grew with the rising population, buildings eventually began to spring up around the village with new houses and cottages being constructed on the approach roads and in older parts of the village such as Cow Lane. Many of these houses were still being built with 18<sup>th</sup> century echoes though by the end of the century new building styles had begun to appear in the village. In the 1860/70s for instance, the new owners of Hill house had begun building a new range overlooking their garden in a thoroughly Victorian style. Victorian architecture featured elsewhere in the public architecture of the village as evidenced in the Infant School in Fir Lane opened in 1875. The latter was designed by William Wing Jr- son of the local historian.

“As Steeple Aston’s population continued to grow, the building boom that began in the 1840s continued with an outbreak of speculative building, much of which has since disappeared.” An example of this included a street known as The Lane – later referred to as Harrisville – set out on land formerly belonging to Charles Harris. Work began in the 180s with 14 houses and by 1890 these had grown to 23 – though some houses may have been subdivided.

By the 20<sup>th</sup> century the number of dwelling in Steeple Aston had grown nearly threefold with the arrival of council housing estates and further developments on both estates and individual houses on privately owned land.

## The Church of St Peter and St Paul's

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Built in both limestone and ironstone and comprising a chancel with north chapel, nave of three bays, north and south aisle, south porch, and west tower, all battlemented,<sup>17</sup> the Church of St Peter and St Paul occupies a commanding position on high ground at the north-east end of Steeple Aston village.

The 1767 Enclosure map highlights that, along with the two architectural follies – William Kent's 'Eye catcher' which was designed to be viewed from Rousham House and Cuttle Mill, which incorporated Kent's fanciful gothic thus transforming it into a passable imitation of a temple – the church featured significantly in the views of the village.

However, though remaining the key feature in the village, views across it have been altered over the decades following subsequent development around the village. Most notably perhaps being the housing developments of the 20<sup>th</sup> century particularly those at the junction of South Street and Water Lane - "a site that formerly commanded an impressive view across the valley to the church."<sup>18</sup>

The exact age and origin of the Steeple Aston church are unknown although the local historian, William Wing, speculated the present church was probably founded by Peter De La Mara whose family had been traditional owners of Steeple Aston. Parishes were believed to have been originally the single estate of the owner who built or procured to be built the church for the convenience of his estate.<sup>19</sup>

The first record of the church is of the rector, Henry de Estone, brother of the Lord of the manor in 1180. However, while it is clear that the church definitely existed by c.1180 when we find Alan son of Geoffrey of Aston being promised the advowson of Eynsham abbey, there is no suggestion that the church was then newly built. Hayter suggests that there must have been a 12th century church, probably the size of the

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<sup>17</sup> Victory History of the Counties. 'Steeple Aston' Vol XI. P. 41

<sup>18</sup> Ibid: 23

<sup>19</sup> Wing, W1845. The Antiquities and History of Steeple Aston

present nave without its aisles and with a smaller chancel as is evidenced by the building's Norman frontage (which was probably recut after the Restoration of Charles II.)<sup>20</sup> It most likely had a tower – not the present one - by 1219 when the village first appears under the version of its modern name *steeplestone* since few buildings at the time would have provided a steeple.

The church grew by successive alterations and additions throughout the proceeding centuries. It was considerably expanded in the course of the 13<sup>th</sup> century in the Early English style. An aisle was added on the south side of the church around 1230 with a similar one being added in the north side of the nave a few years later. The chancel also appears to have been built in the same century and further extended eastwards. In the first half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, a large chapel was added on the north side of the chancel in the 'Decorated' style. It was made wider than the existing aisle and roofed with a separate gable. The north and south aisles were also widened shortly after. In the last decade of the 14<sup>th</sup> century the tower was rebuilt in a 'Perpendicular' style but maintaining a distinctly Decorated flavour. The 15<sup>th</sup> century saw the addition of the south porch and the embattlement of the south side to match it. A three light window was also added on the north wall of the north aisle, probably to light the alter that once stood there.

With the 16<sup>th</sup> century being the only period where no alterations took place, the latter part of the 17<sup>th</sup> century saw the rebuilding of the upper portion of the south and east wall of the chancel in a style still retaining the gothic tradition.<sup>21</sup> The north chapel, which had fallen into some state of ruin, was also significantly rebuilt in at this time and later ceiled by Judge Page in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

A drastic restoration of the church was undertaken in the 19<sup>th</sup> century when much of its fabric was rebuilt. The north aisle was rebuilt from the foundations; all windows of the south side were renewed and the walling considerably rebuilt; the front and buttress of the porch were also rebuilt to an extent.

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<sup>20</sup> Hayter C M. An Account of the Steeple Aston Church

<sup>21</sup> Howard F.E. *The Church of St. Peter and St. Paul Steeple Aston Oxfordshire* P. 285

Its churchyard, containing some charming headstones, many of which the work of the Barrett family, local stonemasons, was extended in 1865 and later in 1891. It is however, the sycamore and scotch-firs that are the feature of the space.<sup>22</sup> The latter firs, which gave Fir Lane its name, had been introduced in 1749 by Rector Eton who had Jacobite sympathies.

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid: 293

## Fir Lane and Chancel Cottage

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The upper North Eastern section of the 1767 Enclosure map showing the area including the church and Fir Lane indicates that much of the land in this spot was owned by Francis Page of Middle Aston. On the right side of this section is the road that leads to Middle Aston running north besides Steeple Aston Church known as Fir Lane.<sup>23</sup>

Though it is a direct route between the two villages, the road (formerly known as East Street) was blocked at the time of Enclosure. It formed " a bridleway which stopped at the boundary with Middle Aston where a gate barred entry to the grounds of Middle Aston house. Only after the demolition of the house in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century was the road continued through."<sup>24</sup>

There were few houses along here where northwards, beyond the church, the road appears to have opened out into a wide funnel space. Evidence from the enclosure map shows that there were only two structures in Fir Lane at the time; Fir Cottage – indicated as a long building level with the north eastern boundary of the churchyard and a longish building on the site now occupied by Church Cottages on the south eastern corner of the churchyard.

Chancel Cottage a Grade II listed (C18th) property, faces west onto Fir Lane directly opposite the east end of Steeple Aston church - hence its name. It stands in a row of four dwellings of varying ages and styles – starting from the north we have Fir Lane Cottage (C18th) and Fir Cottage (C19th) – a terraced pair of houses set back from the road with similar, but not identical, Georgian facades – Jasmine Cottage, a small thatched cottage also set back from the road but with a modern extension at the front, and then Chancel Cottage, with another Georgian-style façade, which stands close to the roadway. Then there is an open space before the row of cottages now

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<sup>23</sup> Steeple Aston Village Archive (SAVA). Steeple Aston Enclosure Map 1767

<sup>24</sup> Victoria History of the Counties. 'Steeple Aston' Volume 11. P22



amalgamated into two dwellings, Merlins and Church Cottage - referred to here as the Church Cottages.

The Steeple Aston Rate book for 1892 clearly shows that all five dwellings located in Fir Lane, and four more in Cow Lane were at that time the property of Mrs John Rogers. The Rogers were an old village family of blacksmiths who were already well established in Fir Lane (East Street) in 1841, when Robert Rogers was trading here. The early maps do not show the location of the Rogers' home and smithy, but there are several indications that it was the northernmost house in Fir Lane – i.e. Fir Cottage:

The listing description of Chancel Cottage notes that it is a C18th building constructed of coursed and squared limestone with ashlar dressing and limestone rubble with wooden lintels. The roof is of stonesfield slate and concrete plain tiles with rebuilt brick gable stacks. The front section is described as being symmetrical with 2 windows and a central 4-panel door below a flat stone canopy, the windows being renewed beneath stone lintels. The rear wing is described as being converted from a stable.

Closer inspection of the cottage suggests that it was originally a two bay unit with attached stable range to the rear, subsequently extended to the rear with a further two-storey bay, perhaps in the late C19th. The ground floor contains ironmongery/door furniture details that would confirm a mid to late C18th date, but a building that has also been subsequently altered internally, when the stable range was brought into main domestic use, and through subsequent phases of modernisation and upgrading. The gazetteer in the Appendix comments on the main internal features.

Comparison between the photographs overleaf suggest that the detailing of the eaves and first floor windows may have been altered at some point in the C20th. Certainly the lintels over the first floor windows are unusually long and the stone coursing above the lintels differs from the remainder of the elevation, which would suggest that there has been some modification.



Early C20th photograph showing Chancel Cottage, with a large detached outbuilding in front of it.



Note the difference in eaves detail from the photo above and also the loss of the outbuilding replaced with a flat roofed garage.

## Character analysis of the area

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North Side and South side are narrow lanes running parallel with the valley sides, connected across the valley by Paines Hill and Water Lane to form a rectangle with 'landmark' buildings on each corner and views across the valley.

The Parish Church of St Peter's forms one of these landmarks with its tower rising above the trees and surrounding development to break the skyline. The views towards the church from the South Side of Paines Hill illustrate this.



View up Paines Hill towards the church

This is a long view where the foreground and middle ground is composed of cottages and houses stepping up the valley side, with the rear wings and roofscape give interest and variety to the built form with mature trees and greenery enfolding the buildings, softening and framing the views of the buildings. The skyline is composed of trees the church tower and the taller buildings higher up the valley sides. Chancel cottage lies over the rise and is not visible in the view.

The churchyard sits above the adjoin lanes, enclosed by a stone boundary wall and with footpaths leading up to the church doors. The churchyard imparts a sense of openness and greenery to that part of the village, its setting define by the houses and cottages that enclose the space on the opposite sides of the lanes



The Parish Church of St Peter's, enclosed by a high stone wall



From within the churchyard there are views out across to the house that illustrates this relationship.



Chancel Cottage is one of the cottages that help to enclose the space.

There are also some views that may hold greater significance than others. For example the view of the church's south entrance, because of the roles it plays in ceremony's and the church's function.



In this view the front elevation of Chancel Cottage forms a visual stop and gives emphasis to the main entrance of the church porch. This, of course, will not change with these proposals.

However, the views out are not 'timeless'; as explained above the village exhibits evidence of constant change, reflecting the settlement's changing needs and fortunes. Thus there are views from the churchyard that capture more recent changes and are part of the continuing history of change.



It is worth noting also, as illustrated here, that it is the shape of the buildings and their composition within their settings that affects our experience of them, more so than the materials employed, which generally are 'of their time' – timber, stone, brick, stone tile, clay tile and slate. As recognised in the Council's conservation area appraisal, there is a variety of materials in the village.

Most views are not static, but are dynamic, unfolding and disappearing as one progresses up or down the lanes. Movement up and down the lane allows appreciation of the glimpse views between buildings and gives a series of changing experiences. For example progression down and up Paines Hill presents a series of long views which then close down with a sense of intimacy provided by the buildings enclosing the narrow lane, where one's attention is then drawn to the smaller spaces between buildings.

This opportunity to see behind the frontage buildings is not untypical of many historic settlements and often reveals, back yards, outbuildings or a glimpse of a mature landscaped garden.







The Council's conservation area appraisal, which was published in April 2014, sets out the history of development of the village and identifies the key characteristics of the village. It is worth noting some of the comments made:

### **Positive features**

- *The contrasts in building scale and style are complemented by the wide range of building materials.*
- *One of the defining features of Steeple Aston is its diversity of building materials, in comparison with other rural villages in the district.*
- *The sense of enclosure is emphasised by high stone walls and dense planting, which can be found in larger domestic gardens.*

## Negative features

- *The mid-late 20th century developments are very suburban in character and appearance and do not reflect the linear layout of the rural village.*
- **Overhead wiring:** *This is not as prevalent as in other conservation areas, but where it exists it has a significantly negative impact upon the appearance of the area*

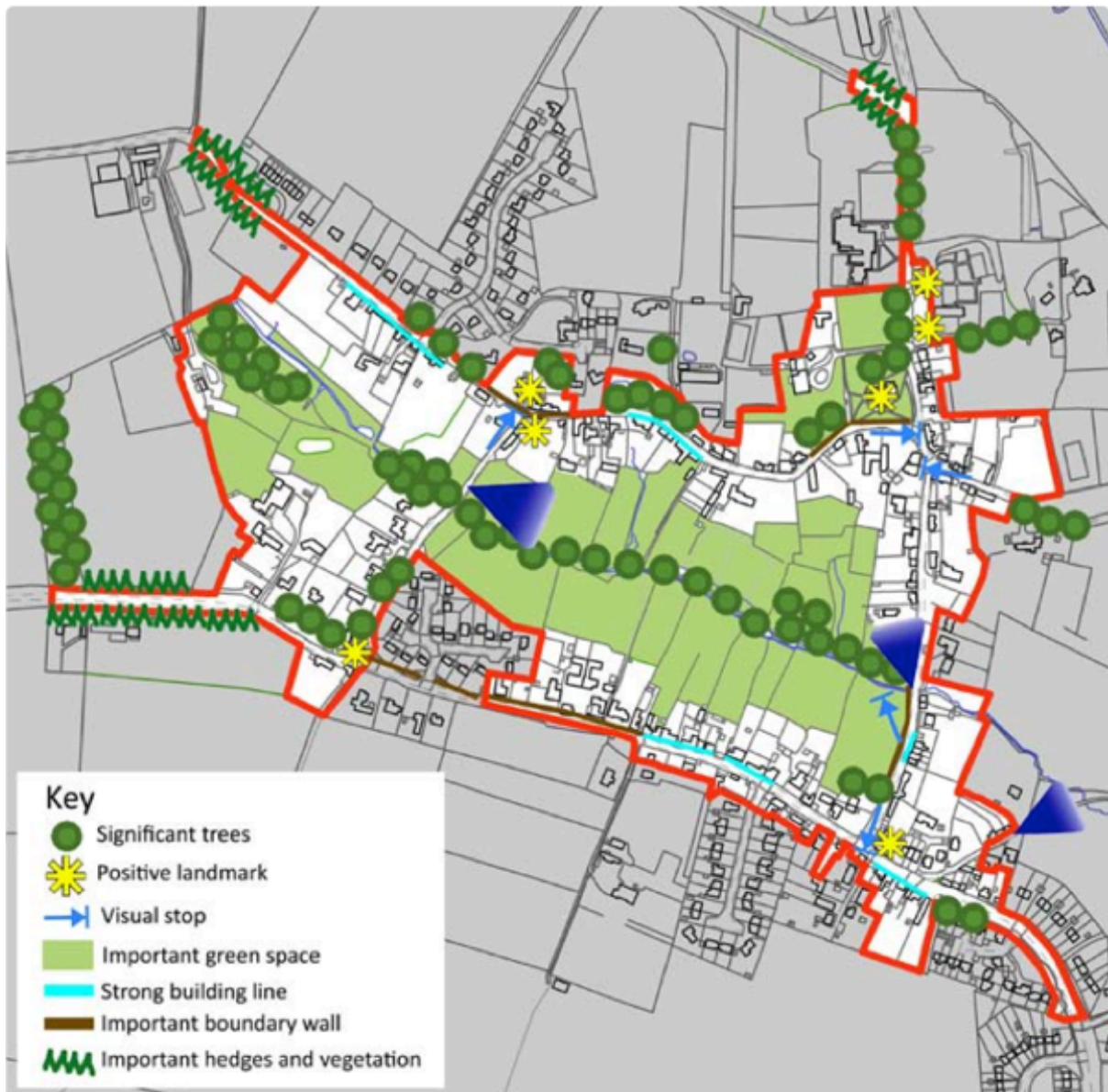


The visual intrusion of overhead wires is particularly noticeable in this view across the churchyard where a double pole and transformer behind Chancel Cottage is clearly in the view.

## Summary of Heritage significance of Chancel Cottage

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- Physical evidence of the development of the village during the C18th and the subsequent adaptation of the building to meet the needs of contemporary society,
- The formality of its façade illustrates architectural fashions of the period, as interpreted by rural craftsman. The simplicity of its form and absence of elaborate decoration helps understanding of the status of original occupants,
- The plan form and earlier function of the various rooms can be interpreted from surviving evidence (internal and external) and helps to explain how the household operated,
- The house, along with others in the street provide a sense of enclosure to the street, framing the green space of the churchyard,
- The openness of the churchyard allows views across it where the cottages in the lane provide a backdrop or visual stop,
- The use of natural, vernacular materials, simply employed has aesthetic value, the patina and texture of the materials, along with the variety of other materials in the village, adding interest and texture to the informal compositions and helping to reinforce local distinctiveness,
- The cottage has lost internal features through phases of modernisation and upgrading through the latter part of the C20th.



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Extract from the Council's conservation area appraisal showing key features of the village

### Summary of key characteristics of the conservation area:

- Variety of materials,
- Variety in scale of buildings, reflecting status and function,
- Enclosure to main streets,
- Long views across the valley and channelled views along streets,
- Outbuildings and yards to the rear of frontage buildings,
- Rear extensions, stepping down in scale,
- Trees and greenery provide characterise open spaces, soften and frame views of buildings.

## National Planning Policy Framework

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Conservation principles, policy and practice seek to preserve and enhance the value of heritage assets. With the issuing of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) in March 2012 the Government has re-affirmed its aim that the historic environment and its heritage assets should be conserved and enjoyed for the quality of life they bring to this and future generations.

The Government sets out a presumption in favour of sustainable development and explains that the purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of this. The NPPF sets out twelve core planning principles that should underpin decision making (paragraph 17.). Amongst those are:

- *not simply be about scrutiny, but instead be a creative exercise in finding ways to enhance and improve the places in which people live their lives;*
- *proactively drive and support sustainable economic development to deliver the homes, business and industrial units, infrastructure and thriving local places that the country needs;*
- *conserve heritage assets in a manner appropriate to their significance, so that they can be enjoyed for their contribution to the quality of life of this and future generation.*

For development to be sustainable it must, amongst other things, perform an environmental role contributing to protecting and enhancing our natural, built and historic environment; and, as part of this, helping to improve biodiversity, use natural resources prudently, minimise waste and pollution, and mitigate and adapt to climate change, including moving to a low carbon economy.

The NPPF is supported by the English Heritage Practice Guide, which gives advice on the application of the historic environment policies.

Paragraph 78 of the guide explains the expected outcomes:

*There are a number of potential heritage benefits that could weigh in favour of a proposed scheme:*

- 1) It sustains or enhances the significance of a heritage asset and the contribution of its setting.*
- 2) It reduces or removes risks to a heritage asset.*
- 3) It secures the optimum viable use of a heritage asset in support of its long-term conservation.*
- 4) It makes a positive contribution to economic vitality and sustainable communities.*
- 5) It is an appropriate design for its context and makes a positive contribution to the appearance, character, quality and local distinctiveness of the historic environment.*
- 6) It better reveals the significance of a heritage asset and therefore enhances our enjoyment of it and the sense of place.*

Chancel Cottage is listed and lies within a conservation area and is thus defined as a designated heritage asset. In relation to development affecting a designated heritage asset the NPPF states that:

*When considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation. The more important the asset, the greater the weight should be. Significance can be harmed or lost through alteration or destruction of the heritage asset or development within its setting. As heritage assets are irreplaceable, any harm or loss should require clear and convincing justification.*

The NPPF goes on to explain the differences between 'substantial' harm and 'less than substantial' harm, advising that any harm should be justified by the public benefit of a proposal. An important part of the assessment is to understand what the significance of the designated heritage asset is (derived from the sum of the archaeological, architectural, artistic or historic values a place holds). Paragraph 129 of the NPPF states

*Local planning authorities should identify and assess the particular significance of any heritage asset that may be affected by a proposal (including by development affecting the setting of a heritage asset) taking account of the available evidence and any necessary expertise. They should take this assessment into account when considering the impact of a proposal on a heritage asset, to avoid or minimise conflict between the heritage asset's conservation and any aspect of the proposal.*

Assessment is necessary to understand the nature of any impacts and necessarily involves consideration of any special qualities the asset originally possessed and how those special qualities survive today. This is a complex assessment that considers all of the heritage value that a building holds. It does not solely rest on an existing state or relationship and is not about preserving everything that currently exists. Change is often an important element of significance. Thus:

*The evidence of change, important in any building type, has particular value in those that have adapted incrementally over hundreds of years. (English Heritage Listing Selection Guide, Domestic 1: Vernacular Houses, 2011, page 11)*

What is clear in this national advice is that change needs to be managed with an understanding of a site's history and significance. It is described as the intelligent management of change:

*People also want the historic environment to be a living and integral part of their local scene. That requires proactive and intelligent management of heritage assets. Sometimes change will be desirable to facilitate viable uses that can provide for their long term conservation. (Paragraph 6 English Heritage PPS5 Practice Guide)*

The concept of preservation is equated with the absence of harm rather than a prohibition on change:

*The court is not here concerned with enhancement, but the ordinary meaning of 'preserve' as a transitive verb is 'to keep safe from harm or injury; to keep in safety, save, take care of, guard': Oxford English Dictionary, 2nd ed. (1989), vol. XII, p. 404. In my judgment character or appearance can be said to be preserved where they are not harmed. (Mann L.J. [1991] 1 W.L.R. 1322, 1326-1327)*

There is no presumption that change should not take place. The advice is that change can happen and that if appropriately considered and justified the impacts on significance can be accepted. It explains what may be considered harmful impacts, but does not conclude that this means they could not be accepted.

The Ministerial Forward sets out the Government's vision, explaining that intelligently managed change (sustainable development) should be embraced as a positive measure to protect and enhance our historic environment. Greg Clarke states:

*Sustainable development is about change for the better, and not only in our built environment.....Our historic environment – buildings, landscapes, towns and villages – can better be cherished if their spirit of place thrives, rather than withers.*



## The proposals

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The proposal involves the refurbishment and extension of the cottage to provide a new kitchen on the ground floor, reordering the first floor to provide three bedrooms and a bathroom.

The Council Officers in assessing the proposals have expressed concerns about the impact the proposals would have on the special interest of the listed building, the setting of the church and the appearance of the conservation area. The items of concern are:

- a) forming the doorway through part of the fireplace in the old stables
- b) provision of a bathroom on the first floor
- c) proposed rear dormers
- d) the length of the proposed kitchen extension and its consequent visibility
- e) the use of timber boarding

a) **Forming a new doorway.** This would appear to involve removing the right hand section of a fireplace (the left hand part being occupied by the bread oven. It is unlikely to have been an 'inglenook'. This was not part of the main living part of the house, described in the list description as part of the old stables, and at most may have been the wash house/store. The main cooking area would have been what is now the 'lounge'. The width of the fireplace would suggest that it would have been very difficult to have had a cooking range/open fire and access the bread oven, their being insufficient space for both. This would mean that either the fireplace was once wider and has already been compromised by the existing doorway, or more likely that it was a much more modest C19th fireplace, perhaps incorporating a copper next to the bread oven. The 'cupboard door' formed across the front of the fireplace has involved the removal of what was probably a brick segmental arch over the opening, which has certainly confused the evidence. In its present state it has limited aesthetic appeal and has lost much of its historic integrity. As there is scope

for securing access through the existing opening, there is the opportunity to reserve the final detail of this element of the scheme, (as a condition on any consent) to allow further investigation of what survives of any fireplace once opening up works commence.

b) **Bathroom on first floor.** As encouraged in the NPPF and English Heritage Practice Guide it is important that historic buildings can be adapted to meet the needs of a modern society, if they are to remain viable. Objecting to the location of the bathroom because of concerns about the adverse impact of obscure glazing on the special interest of the listed building would be unsustainable at appeal. The applicant would not need listed building consent to install net curtains, venetian blind or other curtains, which would have the same effect and is extremely doubtful if consent would be needed to replace the existing modern glass in the existing modern window with obscure glazing, if indeed that was what was being proposed. There is no indication on the proposed plans or elevations that this is proposed. Mechanical ventilation can be achieved discreetly in a manner that would not harm the special interest of the listed building. There is the option of a ventilation tile, which is very discreet (it does not need to be a vent pipe), or the extract could be route through the gable rather than the front elevation. If there was no alternative then the use of a small cast iron grille, would be a sensitive solution that reflects historic precedents. These are matters of detail that can easily be resolved.

c) **Rear dormers.** The applicant accepts that design of the dormers should be changed and rooflights is an alternative option. Small dormers are a typical characteristic of cottages and one on the rear roof slope, of appropriate design, with a rooflight alongside would introduce some interest to this part of the building, which is not in full view from the street and, importantly would add interest to the quality of the internal space.



d) **Length of proposed extension.** National advice and guidance make clear that change in itself is not harmful, if it is managed intelligently and with sensitivity to the context. The fact that a new development would be seen is not sufficient reason to object to it. The officer's advice does not articulate what the nature and extent of the impact would be and why it would be harmful. This is disappointing, as it would have helped the applicant to know the basis of the concerns in order to know how to address them.




As acknowledged in the Council's own character appraisal the nature of the building forms in the street are such that they form a sense of enclosure to the street, channelling views and providing visual stops. The view of Chancel Cottage is not one that the Council has singled out as being special and it would be reasonable to conclude that it is part of a wider group of buildings that line the streets. As illustrated earlier in this report there are views between buildings of back yards, rear extension and outbuildings. It is part of this characteristic from which the design and scale of the proposed extension is derived. It would be an entirely familiar part of the current context. The fact that it projects beyond the gable end of the house would not in itself be an issue and would not be experienced in that two-dimensional juxtaposition illustrated in the elevational drawings. There is an existing parking area to the side of the cottage and in front of the proposed extension. In its conservation area appraisal the comment is made that parked cars are particularly ugly elements of the street scene. This proposal as a whole provides the opportunity for improved landscaping of the front garden and the creation of a courtyard quality to the space (with the new extension) that would serve to soften the impact of parked cars.

The Council, in its conservation area appraisal, comments that overhead lines have a 'significantly negative impact' on the character and appearance of the conservation area. This proposal, to replace the existing small rear extension with one that has the scale of a traditional outbuilding would serve to screen views of the existing telegraph posts and cables behind the cottage. This would be an enhancement.


e) **The use of timber boarding.** Cart sheds, coach houses and outbuildings may often have wide timber doors across the openings. Indeed the Council in its conservation area appraisal comments on the characteristic of planked timber doors being notable. This is a modern interpretation of that historic precedent, proposing timber (on the front and gable elevation, the rear elevation being proposed in stonework) because its use has a long history, its 'natural', organic, and sustainable and develops a patina that will help the building assimilate with its rural surroundings. The conservation area appraisal notes several times the wide variety of materials that have been used in the village; this is one that will not be out of place, or strident. The use of timber for the courtyard elevation will help to distinguish the extension as 'an outbuilding', functionally subservient to the main house and in its simplicity visually unobtrusive. The approach being adopted is entirely consistent with the Council's submission stage Local Plan policy supporting proposals that adopt a 'contemporary design response' and that 'reinterpret local distinctiveness'.

## APPENDIX

<p>Front Elevation</p>	<p>A balanced front elevation, but not quite symmetrical</p>	 A photograph showing the front elevation of a two-story stone house. The house has a gabled roof with two chimneys. There are four windows: two on the upper floor and two on the lower floor. A white door is centered on the ground floor. The house is surrounded by a green hedge and utility poles are visible in the background.
<p>North Elevation</p>	<p>Showing the extended rear elevation, the vertical joint in the stonework marking the later addition</p>	 A photograph showing the north elevation of the stone house. It features a long, narrow wall made of stone. A vertical joint in the stonework is visible, indicating a later addition. A window is visible on the left side of the wall. In the background, a church with a Gothic-style window is visible.

<p>East Elevation</p>	<p>The timber lintel in the rear wall of the cottage suggesting that the stable range was a later addition. This is confirmed by an internal inspection of the roof structure, which is of C19th origin.</p>	 A close-up photograph of a stone wall and roofline. The wall is made of light-colored, irregular stones. A dark, horizontal timber lintel is visible above a window opening. The roof is covered in dark, weathered tiles. A black downspout is attached to the roofline.
<p>South Elevation</p>	<p>Showing the small courtyard and the extended and altered elevation of the old stable block</p>	 A photograph of a stone cottage with a white door and two windows. The building is made of light-colored stone. A small courtyard is visible in front of the building. The sky is blue with some clouds.
<p>Kitchen</p>	<p>A surviving C19th wrought iron window</p>	 A photograph of a window with a wrought iron frame. The window is divided into two panes. The left pane is covered with a textured, possibly frosted or leaded glass. The right pane is clear, showing a view of the outdoors. A black chair is visible in the foreground on the right.

Kitchen	The back door has hand wrought strap hinges	
Kitchen	The bread oven set on the left hand side of the old fireplace. The head of the fireplace has been raised to form the existing opening and possibly the right hand pier has been altered to allow the door opening to be formed	
Lounge	Originally the main living area. The fireplace has been rebuilt and the bressumer replaced	

<p>Study</p>	<p>This room has slightly higher status with built in panelled cupboards that have L shaped hinges – suggesting a C18th origin</p>	
<p>Attic</p>	<p>The roof structure has in line butt purlins with slip tenons, a flawed design detail as it results in a weak joint.</p>	