

6.0 Conclusions

6.1 The Methodology

The basic objectives of the Castor Built Environment Audit were to devise a methodology which allowed local people to compile accurate quantitative and qualitative assessments of their local built environment, which can then be used as an agreed and authoritative basis for a Castor Village Design Statement.

As this report illustrates, the task of assembling a comprehensive and authoritative built environment benchmark has been accomplished. However, it is also of importance to note the main problems and difficulties, which are inevitable with the involvement of many people in a complex project.

6.1.1 Community Involvement

The two villages of Castor and Ailsworth are very close together. While they retain their individual character and Parish Councils, they are as one for community purposes.

Ailsworth prepared a proposal for an Audit at the same time as Castor and both villages obtained Local Heritage Initiative funding for their respective Audits. A Built Audit Group, drawn from both villages led the project and co-ordinated community involvement.

Organisations and individuals involved in the preparation of this Audit, a total of seventy six people, included:

Castor Parish Council, Ailsworth Parish Council, the Guides and Brownies led by Mandy Ireland and their parents, the Tennis Club, the Women's Institute and St Kyneburgha's Church, Castor and Ailsworth Society of Arts (CASA), who jointly produced the illustrations for the Boards. Castor, Ailsworth and District Gardeners' Society was also involved and Vincent and Rosalind Brierley provided a photocopying service.

Given the wide variety of age groups and backgrounds, it was felt advisable to carry out sample accuracy checks on the information collected; once all the supporting information was available, surveys were found to be generally consistent and accurate.

6.1.2 The Surveys

Whilst the concept of each individual survey seemed straightforward, it quickly became clear that supporting information was needed to enable community surveyors to make accurate records. Subject areas which caused problems included dating buildings, distinguishing between old (pre-twentieth century) and modern building materials and identifying native and non-native trees and hedgerow shrubs.

These difficulties were resolved by compiling illustrated colour guides using published tree identification charts and building material photographs provided by Peterborough City Council's Planning Department.

Building dates were sourced by reference to the Statutory List, the Royal Commission of Historic Monuments Record of Peterborough, Pevsner and professional guidance.

As data collection progressed, it became clear that consistency and selectivity were required if the information gathered was to be manageable and usable. Therefore, the principal buildings on each site only, were recorded. In most instances, this was the main dwelling house, with garages, sheds, greenhouses etc., omitted.

It also became clear that not all information related to a single property, for example, the stone walls or hedges spanned several property boundaries; in these cases the existence of a wall or hedge was recorded for each property.

Finally, individual trees within groups of trees behind garden fences or walls could not always be individually distinguished and identified. On the house-based surveys, a best estimate was made of species and numbers, surveyed from public vantage points. On the townscape assessment, collections of trees were, where necessary, noted as groups on the basis that it was their collective contribution, which made the strongest townscape impact.

The townscape assessment methodology was designed to provide a basis to consistently record the qualitative aspects of the built environment's visual impact. In practice, the data collected by two groups of community surveyors was compared to a survey independently conducted by PECT's professional support. When the databases were compared there was an 80% consistency between the three, with the major differences relating to the perception in the views/vistas category. It can, therefore, be concluded that the townscape assessment forms a consistent benchmarking database and, provided subsequent assessments strictly adhere to the methodology, changes over time in built environment quality can be accurately measured and monitored.

6.1.3 Data Capture

When the surveys were underway, large amounts of data in a variety of paper formats were quickly assembled. It soon became clear that the volume of information gathered and the need for consistency and accuracy in transferring paper records to the Access Database could not reasonably be undertaken on a volunteer basis. Furthermore, due to widely varying computing abilities, electronic sharing of this task was not practical. Therefore, data capture from hand written survey records to computerised format was undertaken by a PECT member of staff.

6.2 Key Findings

Castor is regarded as a historic conservation village. However, in numerical terms it is very different. Most buildings, 75% date from the twentieth century and 60% of all buildings have been built in the last fifty years. Most buildings are two storey, detached and built of modern bricks and tiles. The largest single property group is made up of twentieth century, two storey, semi-detached houses with modern brick walls and concrete roof tiles.

Most twentieth century buildings have repetitive plan forms, and are set back from the highway and uniformly spaced along estate roads and cul-de-sacs. In contrast, buildings dating from before 1900 have a wide variety of footprint shapes and sizes.

Almost all buildings are sited with a façade or gable directly onto or very close to the pavement edge, with a few larger buildings set well back behind stone walls in grounds planted with forest trees, now mature and reaching 30m-40m in height. Buildings from all periods appear in sound structural condition.

Nearly 25% of all properties have stone walls, just over a quarter (26%) have hedge boundaries and 16% have fences. Whilst the vast majority of walls, hedges and fences are 1m-2m high, the numerically few enclosures over 3m high are invariably long and make a big visual impact.

Castor has five hundred and thirty six trees with 56% of native species and half the total population between 3m and 8m in height. However, visually, the most significant part of the tree population are the 30% mature forest trees, which were mainly planted in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It is not known if modern plantings, currently 3m high, will eventually grow to replace currently mature trees or if naturally small species have been chosen.

Visually, twentieth century development makes almost no contribution to the character and appearance of Castor. In contrast, in the old street areas, the stone buildings, stone walls, hedges, mature trees and changes in level, all combine to enclose the streets. Together, they form sequences of varied human scale spaces, which make a built environment of outstanding quality. The townscape map graphically illustrates firstly, the fundamental difference between modern and historic forms of development and secondly, how the various townscape components combine to create a visually strong and cohesive streetscape.

6.2.1 Planning Policies

Planning policies, reinforced by grant schemes appear to have been successful in conserving the historic environment that existed in 1974, when conservation became a key part of town and country planning legislation. However, the great majority of twentieth century buildings within the village envelope and the conservation area, are built in modern brick and concrete tiles. In addition, most are medium to large in size, so provision of affordable dwellings to meet local needs can only partially account for the choice of materials.

Post 1975, stronger conservation policies may have resulted in greater use of stone and artificial stone, (nineteen properties), but modern brick has remained the primary building material, used on sixty properties over the same period.

The pressures for change, as demonstrated by the numbers of planning applications, increase year on year.

The number of applications for listed building consent, demonstrates a powerful trend to make changes over increasingly short time periods, to buildings which have remained largely unaltered for two to three hundred years or more. Careful management of the listed building stock is clearly required to avoid loss of the historic fabric through alterations and modernisation.

6.2.2 Green Spaces

The paddock south of The Old Rectory, the pastures either side of Peterborough Road at the western edge of the village and churchyard/school field, contrast with and contribute to the setting of the strongly urban village form. The green wedge immediately west of Village Farm, provides a natural break in the built environment, affording valuable rural views from Peterborough Road and Allotment Lane, whilst the combination of walls, green space and mature trees form an outstanding setting for St Kyneburgha's Church on its elevated platform site.

The reinforcement of existing and the creation of new grass verges with the post by-pass traffic calming scheme is also a profound visual influence. Whilst any one verge does not have sufficient individual significance to be recorded as outstanding in the townscape survey, the aggregation of all the verges make a very significant contribution to Castor's character and appearance.

6.3 Recommendations

Recommendations are considered within the following priorities:

Conservation

Enhancement

Improvements

The Future Built Environment.

6.3.1 Conservation

Retaining the fabric, which underpins the character and appearance of Castor's built environment is the fundamental first priority. It may be considered within the framework of the townscape survey as follows.

6.3.2 Spaces

This Audit identifies the key spaces, which form the character of Castor. These spaces need to be retained and reinforced. Gradual erosion by, for example, allowing part demolition of walls to accommodate a new dwelling, driveway or highway "improvements", which straighten roads and introduce standardised pavements and concrete kerbs, should be strongly resisted.

The townscape survey graphically demonstrates that the dog-legs and kinks in the historic street patterns create combinations of well defined and interesting static and dynamic spaces. The contrast between these and the dull, uniform and lifeless modern estate roads could not be more marked.

6.3.3 Enclosing Elements

Buildings are the key enclosing elements but walls, mature trees and hedges are also important. To maintain townscape, the pre-twentieth century buildings, which are the foundation stones of the built environment, must be retained without exception, maintained using the original natural building materials and unsympathetic extensions and alterations resisted.

Similarly, the village's stone walls need to be retained, kept in good repair and further breaches to create new access drives etc. strongly opposed. No new stone walls appear to have been built in the twentieth century. There are situations where new walls would enhance spatial enclosure or improve townscape by replacing wooden fences, which are less positive in the street scene.

Mature forest trees planted in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, close to pavements or footpaths, are now an outstanding feature of Castor's environment. It may be that twentieth century planting is not conceived on such a grand scale and does not include forest trees which will reach more than 30m high on maturity and, for good reasons, should be kept well away from walls and buildings.

However, it would make sense to plan and act now to firstly, replace trees which are now at maturity and to consider areas of less positive townscape where space exists, to accommodate ambitious forest tree planting schemes. Sylvester Road and Thorolds Way may present such opportunities.

Hedges, which contribute to Castor's townscape, are generally short in length and planted within the last hundred years. There is no need for additional hedge planting to further enclose space within the historic village. However, hedge planting in the twentieth century estates, especially in Sylvester Road, (in combination with local tree planting), would significantly improve spatial organisation and visual appearance.

6.3.4 Details

The application of planning powers combined with financial incentives have been influential in retaining buildings and walls and so maintaining the fabric of the built environment. The availability of grants for the repair of walls and buildings from Peterborough City Council was curtailed in 2000. This Audit presents compelling evidence to conclude that the grants system was influential in maintaining built fabric on a long term basis. There is, therefore, a strong argument for the re-introduction of grants for historic building and stone wall repair.

The Audit reveals a number of significant townscape details, which enliven the built environment and give Castor its unique sense of place. These include the stone piers and gates to major houses, the floorscape at the church entrance, hanging signs and cast iron railings. Details that detract, include the decaying bus shelter in Peterborough Road and street lights and concrete bollards in Sylvester Road.

Until 2000, a system of grants was available to assist with the costs of periodic repair of most of the details, which are important in the public street scene. Many of the negative details are the responsibility of the public authorities, the Sylvester Road street lights being the responsibility of Peterborough City Council and the bus shelter, Castor Parish Council.

6.3.5 Enhancements

Townscape enhancement is the process of maintaining and adding to features which are already positive. The analysis of planning applications shows that almost every opportunity within the village envelope for infill development has either been exploited or planning consent given. Further intensification of development would result in a loss of environmental quality.

However, trees are less permanent than buildings and there is evidence to conclude that the group of trees which is most influential in environmental terms, the mature forest specimens, may have the shortest potential lifespan. There is, therefore, a case to make plans now to begin planting a new generation of large forest trees. These should be set in positions which will have a real townscape impact in forming spaces and maintain the strong sense of enclosure formed by existing trees.

It is likely that the costs of drawing up and implementing such a far sighted tree planting programme would attract grant and sponsorship assistance from lottery and other sources.

6.3.6 Improvements

The townscape assessment identified a number of areas and features where relatively simple and inexpensive improvements would have a significant visual effect. Many could be partly achieved through community effort and exploiting opportunities through initiatives such as National Tree Week.

Area/feature	Proposed improvement	Ownership/ responsibility	Approximate order of costs and possible funding sources
Sylvester Road - spatial organisation	plant hedge (beech/holly) at back edge of footpath incorporating trees at turning head and St Kyneburgha Close junction	Peterborough City Council/ Castor Parish Council	£3.5 from grants and sponsorships
lamp posts and bollards	repaint rusting light columns in gloss black and replace concrete bollards with black cast iron	Peterborough City Council	£1.5 - I.a. maintenance budgets
Peterborough Road bus shelter	replace	Castor Parish Council	£2.5k-25k depending on design, construction and materials
Stocks Hill School fences	plant hedges with trees behind fences to form ready made replacement enclosure when fence rots and enhance views to Church Hill	School Governors	£2.5 - grants, sponsorships, community effort
Thorolds Way	plant hedge to rear gardens east side	not known	£5k – grants, sponsorships, community effort

6.3.7 The Future Built Environment

Castor is designated as a Limited Rural Growth Settlement in the *Peterborough Local Plan (First Replacement) 2002*, and a site of 1.67 hectares has been allocated for housing off Clay Lane. Development can be expected to introduce an additional nineteen houses plus garages etc. into the village, adding a further 8% to the building stock. Road access is likely to be off Clay Lane, so additional traffic will be generated in the historic streets of Clay Lane, The Green and possibly Manor Farm Lane.

It is important that the new development does not result in proposals for "highway improvements" resulting in modern alignments, kerbs and materials being superimposed to undermine spatial organisation and detailing in these historic streets.

Regarding the form of the housing itself, a key decision needs to be made to determine if the development will continue the huge divergence between twentieth century and historic Castor. Will it reject past forms of modern development in favour of buildings and layouts, which are more akin to that which evolved to form the village up until the nineteenth century?

If the latter is the case, new development will need to:

- i Vary the width and alignment of road carriageways incorporating sharp turns and avoiding regular and standardised T-junctions, kerb radii etc.
- ii Create sequences of human scale dynamic and static spaces by
 - siting combinations of building façades, gables and freestanding stone walls at the back edge of pavements, with a few set further back
 - reinforcing the spatial organisation by exploiting (or introducing) changes in level by, for example, raising banks and creating vertical enclosure by planting large forest trees close to the pavement edge
 - incorporating alleys and cuts, strongly enclosed by walls, hedges and trees and opening out into larger spaces at either end, physically linking the new

development with the existing village

- incorporating green space as an *integral part of spatial organisation*.
- iii Include some buildings of varying sizes and heights in addition to the three to four bedroom, two storey norm. **Buildings** should include subtle variations in plan forms, verge and ridge heights etc., and
 - be constructed in local coursed stone (or a good quality, coursed stone replica with Collyweston replica, clay pantile or Welsh slate roofs
 - be **visually** and **physically** linked with hedge planting and stone walls
 - incorporate some instances of architectural detailing, which create a positive psychological response, a sense of place and association with the historic Castor.

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