

Stonehouse Town Character Assessment, 2016



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1. Definition and purpose

A character assessment describes an area, its landscape and streetscape, roads and routes, open spaces and natural features, landmarks, buildings and land uses. It is a way of analysing and recording what makes a place distinctive: the local character.

This character assessment has been done to form part of the evidence base for Stonehouse Neighbourhood Plan. Public consultation for the plan revealed strong support for features of the town such as the beautiful views of the Cotswold hills and surrounding countryside, well used open spaces such as Doverow Hill, the canal area and Oldends and Laburnum recreation grounds. There was also support for new design being in keeping with the area. This character assessment describes features of the town to support robust, evidence based policies on protection of views and open space and design.

In addition, this character assessment identifies opportunities to conserve, enhance and add to Stonehouse. In some cases these opportunities can be supported by Neighbourhood Plan policies, others may be taken on by Stonehouse Town Council as future projects or aims.

The character assessment has been carried out by volunteers at a level of detail sufficient to meet the purposes of contributing to the Neighbourhood Plan evidence base and identifying opportunities for the town. It therefore does not aim to provide detailed description or analysis of the diverse natural and manmade features of the town.

2. Method

The character assessment work was carried out by members of the Stonehouse Neighbourhood Plan working group using guidance and pro formas from primarily, Bath and North East Somerset District Council (BNESDC) ("Snapshot" Character Assessment Toolkit, Bath and North East Somerset District Council and Place Studio) and also from Planning Aid England.

Firstly, the parish was divided into 6 main zones,
(see [Map to show Stonehouse Town Character Assessment Zones](#)):

- Character Area Summary 1: Town and retail centre
- Character Area Summary 2: West of High Street
- Character Area Summary 3: East of High Street
- Character Area Summary 4: Industrial Zone
- Character Area Summary 5: Doverow Zone
- Character Area Summary 6: Canal Zone

Volunteers completed BNESDC Settlement and Landscape Assessment Pro formas for each zone or part of a zone and took supporting photographs. All the assessments were completed in 2016.

The assessments (see Appendix 1) have been summarised to form sections on each character zone.

3. Overview of Stonehouse

Stonehouse is a small town with a population of around 7,700 in the flat Severn Vale but close to the Cotswold escarpment. It is the second largest town in the Stroud District, after Stroud which is around 3.4 miles away. It is 9 miles south of Gloucester, 30 miles north of Bristol and the M5 motorway runs past the west of the town; Junction 13 is 2 miles away, Junction 12, 3.5 miles away. The busy A419 runs to the South of the town connecting it with Stroud, Cirencester and Swindon to the South East and the M5 to the North West. The other main road is the B4008 which runs through the town centre out to Standish and Gloucester and also meets the motorway. The Bristol to Midland railway line runs through the Western edge of the town, with no station; Stonehouse's station serves the Cheltenham to London line which runs through the East side of the town.

The residential and industrial areas of Stonehouse are built on the flat land typical of the Severn Vale. Doverow Hill, part of the Cotswold Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, forms a backdrop to the East; the Cotswold Way passes through the Eastern edge of the town. There are views of the Cotswold escarpment from Selsley to Uley and beyond from many points in the town, including the High Street. The river Frome and canal run to the South and the landscape here, much of which is within the Industrial Heritage Conservation Area, takes much of its character from its watery surroundings. It includes some of the older industrial areas and small mills.

Stonehouse is mentioned in the Domesday Book of 1086 under its Old English name "Stanhus", probably because the Manor House was built of stone rather than the usual wattle and daub. Stonehouse originally centred around the agricultural needs of the Manor House. Stonehouse Court now stands at the Manor House site next to St Cyr's Church by the Stroudwater Canal and the River Frome. The village grew with the rise of the woollen industry in the 17th and 18th Centuries when small mills supported work at home, then work moved to factories. These mills continue today as commercial centres. As the textiles industry declined, Stonehouse remained a thriving place as smaller businesses of all types took over.

The coming of the canal and railway attracted trade and wealth; Stonehouse was an educated and prosperous place in the 19th century, with money donated by residents to build one of the first national schools in the country in 1830. Wycliffe School, which still occupies a significant area, was founded in 1882 when Stonehouse's three railway stations made it an attractive location for a private school. The Stonehouse Brick and Tile Company was established in 1890, gradually slicing away one side of Doverow Hill, and remained an important employer for some 70 years. The Second World War brought the engineering companies, Hoffmann's and Sperry Gyroscope, which heralded a new modern industrial

estate, based at the western edge of the town, now near the M5 motorway. New homes were built for the workers and the population rose from 2,300 in 1923 to 4,200 in 1952 then to 5,400 in 1971.

Despite the growth of industry, Stonehouse remains an attractive rural town close to beautiful countryside. Its wide High Street contains a number of historic buildings from old coaching inns to the Post Office built of local brick in 1933. It is easy to reach the waterways, woods and hills from the footpaths in and around the town. Stone, water, agriculture, wool, brick, education, industry, the canal and railway form a thread of influences which have all helped to mould Stonehouse's character up to the present day.

4. Character Area Summaries

[Town and Retail Centre, Character Area Summary 1](#)

[West of High Street, Character Area Summary 2](#)

[East of High Street, Character Area Summary 3](#)

[Industrial Zone, Character Area Summary 4](#)

[Doverow Zone, Character Area Summary 5](#)

[Canal Zone, Character Area Summary 6](#)

[Stonehouse Town Character Assessment, 2016, Summary of conclusions](#)

5. Acknowledgements

Character assessments were carried out and photographs taken by the following members of Stonehouse Neighbourhood Plan Group:

Chris Cowcher
John Jeynes
Carol Kambites
Gary Powell
Vicki Redding
Rachel Russell
Alastair Shankland
Clare Sheridan

Appendix 1

Character Assessments

The Character Area summaries were based on the following character assessments carried out by volunteers from Stonehouse Neighbourhood Plan Group in 2016.

Character Area 1: Town and retail centre

[Character Assessment Town and Retail Centre](#)

Character Area 2: West of High Street

[Character Assessment North West](#)

[Character Assessment Little Australia](#)

[Character Assessment Elm Road and Laburnum Area](#)

[Character Assessment Park Estate](#)

[Character Assessment South West](#)

Character Area 3: East of High Street

[Character Assessment North East](#)

[Character Assessment North East Middle](#)

[Character Assessment South East](#)

[Character Assessment Pearcroft Area](#)

[Character Assessment Ebley Road](#)

Character Area 4: Industrial Zone

[Character Assessment North West](#)

[Character Assessment South West](#)

Character Area 5: Doverow Zone

[Character Assessment Doverow](#)

Character Area 6: Canal Zone

[Character Assessment Canal Zone](#)