

SWANSTON CONSERVATION AREA CHARACTER APPRAISAL

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Conservation Areas

Section 61 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) (Scotland) Act 1997, describes conservation areas as “...areas of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance”. The Act makes provision for the designation of conservation areas as distinct from individual buildings, and planning authorities are required to determine which parts of their areas merit conservation area status

- 1.2 There are currently 38 conservation areas in Edinburgh, including city centre areas, Victorian suburbs and former villages. Each conservation area has its own unique character and appearance.

Character Appraisals

- 1.3 The protection of an area does not end with conservation area designation; rather designation demonstrates a commitment to positive action for the safeguarding and enhancement of character and appearance. The planning authority and the *Scottish Ministers* are obliged to protect conservation areas from development that would adversely affect their special character. It is, therefore, important that both the authorities and other groups who have an interest in conservation areas, and residents are aware of those elements that must be preserved or enhanced.
- 1.4 A character appraisal is seen as the best method of defining the key elements, which contribute to the special historic and architectural character of an area.
- 1.5 It is intended that character appraisals will guide the local planning authority in making planning decisions and, where opportunities arise, preparing enhancement proposals. The character appraisal will be a material consideration when considering applications for development within the conservation area and applications for significant new developments should be accompanied by a contextual analysis that demonstrates how the proposals take account of the essential character of the area as identified in this document.
- 1.6 NPPG 18: Planning and the Historic Environment states that Conservation Area Character Appraisals should be prepared when reconsidering existing conservation area designations, promoting further designations or formulating enhancement schemes. The NPPG also specifies that Article 4 Direction Orders will not be confirmed unless a character appraisal is in place.

Designation

The original Swanston Conservation Area was designated on 20 February 1975. It was extended on 19 November 1993 to include land to the north to take account of the city bypass. The conservation area is classed as outstanding by the Historic Buildings Council for grant purposes. It has been covered by an Article 4 Direction Order since 21 December 1993. The classes covered under the Order are 1, 3, 6, 7, 18, 39, 40, and 67.

Location and Boundary

Swanston Conservation Area is situated to the south, 7 miles from Edinburgh city centre. It is close to the city boundary, on the south side of the city bypass, at the base of Caerketton Hill and is about 600ft above sea level. It is one of Edinburgh's most picturesque villages, and has remained largely unaffected by the spread of suburban development. It is surrounded by small wooded areas and open farmland. The low ground between Swanston and the high ground at Oxgangs Road is the result of glacial erosion and forms a distinctive feature in the landscape.

The boundary of Swanston Conservation Area extends to the north, to the city bypass, to the east, along a line running south from the bypass, to the disused quarry, and then southwest across the Lothianburn Golf Course taking in the T-woods at Whitehill. The southern boundary runs from the southern tip of the woods, northwest across the headwaters of the Swanston Burn to Stotfold Crags. The boundary then runs north east across Swanston Golf Course to, and including, Swanston Cottage, and then north to the city bypass.

Swanston Conservation Area lies within the Colinton (No.43) and Fairmilehead (No.52) Wards. A population estimate indicates that there are approximately 75 people resident within the conservation area.

2.0 HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

Origins and Development

Swanston is first recorded in AD 1214 when it formed part of the Barony of Redhall. The name, however derives from the Norse/Anglican for Sveinn's Farm indicating a possible earlier 9th-11th century foundation for the farming estate. The historic medieval estate of Swanston stretched from Oxgangs Road to the Pentland Hills and from Bowbridge to the Long Plantation at Dreghorn.

The name Swanston is then mentioned in the 14th century in charters granted during the reign of David II. It formed part of the Temple lands of the knights of St. John, and Swanston Farm was once a monk's grange. In a Charter by James VI, in which all the Templer's possessions in Scotland were listed, a reference to 'terras templaris de Swainstoun possess' is included.

Swanston village is reached by Swanston Road, which runs south from Oxfangs Road, near Hunters Tryst. The old Swanston Road, originally a cart track, formed the boundary between what was Easter and Wester Swanston. Easter Swanston belonged to the Ross family from the fifteenth century and passed to Henry Trotter of Mortonhall in 1749. Wester Swanston belonged to Sir John Cockburn in 1462, the Foulis family held the land from 1538, and finally the Trotters of Mortonhall took ownership in 1670. John Trotter of Berwickshire purchased Mortonhall Estate in 1641 and the Temple lands were merged with the Mortonhall Estate during the 18th, possibly 17th century. The estate remains in the hands of the Trotter family and a Trotter planted the T-wood in 1766, as a memorial to a descendant of the house who fell in battle. It is a Greek cross in plan but a 'T'-shape as seen from a distance from the north.

There is much history connected to the original settlement. Robert Louis Stevenson has accounts of the Covenanters partaking of hospitality in the farmhouse when a night conventicle was being held in the Pentlands, and also of some of Prince Charlie's Highlanders in the '45 rebellion raiding Swanston Farm during a foraging expedition.

Although there are no records of the origins and growth of the village it can be assumed that Swanston Burn, providing a reliable water supply, was an important factor in establishing this settlement. The thatched cottages are the earliest buildings, sited on either side of Swanston Burn forming two sides of a square with the village green in the centre. One detached cottage is separated from the main group and lies further south but is also close to the burn. At the end of the Second World War, the cottages were very basic with earth floors and no water and electricity. A particularly bad winter in 1947 left forty villagers virtually cut off by huge snowdrifts. By 1954, these cottages had fallen into a bad state of disrepair, and many of, which were habitable, were used only as holiday cottages. In 1956, the City Architect produced an ambitious scheme, originally estimated at £17,000 to convert nine cottages into seven renovated dwellings. Most of them have Tay reed thatch and concrete ridges dating from J. Wilson's Paterson's restoration of 1964. However, in recent years, various individual properties have been partly or fully re-thatched.

Swanston Cottage was built by the Town Council, in connection with the waterworks in 1761 and the springs at Swanston were piped to augment Edinburgh's first water supply from Comiston. Originally the pipes were wooden but were replaced by iron ones in 1790. The water house situated to the east dates from that time also. Swanston Cottage was altered in 1820 when a second floor was added and in 1867, when bow windows were completed. It was altered by Sir Robert Lorimer for Lord Guthrie in 1908. This was Robert Louis Stevenson's family's summer residence from 1867 to 1880.

Swanston Farm Steading was constructed during the period of Agricultural Improvement of the late 18th/early 19th centuries. The farmhouse to the south, and the former Schoolhouse are eighteenth century. Children travelled from as far a field as Bowbridge, Lothianburn, Comiston House, Fordel and Dreghorn A range of mid-nineteenth century farmworkers' cottages were built to the north-east, forming three sides of a square, in the style of a typical Scottish farming town of the period. Water was first installed in these cottages in 1934 and electricity in 1949.

Later developments include Swanston Clubhouse built for Swanston golf club, a bungalow called Rathillet constructed in 1948 for the Greenkeeper of Swanston Golf Course and some single storey lock-up garages built by the Council in the 1960's for the use of residents.

3.0 ANALYSIS AND ESSENTIAL CHARACTER

Context

Swanston village lies at the southern extremity of existing suburban developments, separated from them by half a mile of agricultural land and the city by-pass. Situated on the lower slope of the Pentland Hills, parts of it are screened from view on all sides by high trees. The village is approached from the north from Oxgangs Road via Swanston Road, which passes over the city by-pass. The access route makes the settlement seem remote, nestling at the foot of the Pentlands, although prior to the development of the By-pass and the most recent housing, the access was by a narrow country road flanked by grass banks and low beech hedges which would have reinforced an even greater sense of remoteness.

Swanston sits at the foot of the Pentland Hills and is about 600 ft above sea level. The hills behind it, Caerketton and Allermuir are 1568ft and 1618ft, respectively. No other developments are above or adjoin the village. The low ground between Swanston and Oxgangs Road is crossed by two high tension 275 kW electricity lines carried on towers. The valley between Swanston and the high ground at Oxgangs Road is the result of glacial erosion and forms a distinctive feature in the landscape.

The wider context of Swanston Conservation Area is the Pentland Hills Regional Park. The village nestles at the foot and is embraced by the hills and the countryside setting. The hills rise up behind emphasising the sense of remoteness to the south.

Approach

Even today, Swanston Village is one of Edinburgh's best kept secrets, the small sign on the access from Oxgangs Road directing people to the Golf Course and not the village. From a distance the approach is dominated by Caerketton and Allermuir, the highest hills at the eastern end of the Pentlands. When seen looking south into a winter sun their north side in shadow accentuates the apparent size of the Hills and the scree revealed through overgrazing combines to give a forbidding air making this an improbable place to locate a village.

The access road uses the former farm track route, which while now metalled still has no pavements and only grass, and hedges at the verge. Coming down from the ridge of Oxgangs Road through recent suburban development the road now has to pass over the city bypass. The southern edge of the bypass marks the Green Belt boundary and the end of urban development. The prospect is still one dominated by the Hills but now the tree belts and grass on the lower slopes are apparent and help to soften it. The road runs past a group of farm buildings and towards a group of trees, and even with most of the leaves now gone, only part of a gable of the old Farmhouse is just visible. Despite being close by there still is no obvious sign of the village just beyond.

The access road now splits and to one side runs round the eastern field boundary and edge of the trees up to cottages built later in the 19th century, to the other it runs into the driveway for the Farmhouse. Between these it also though splits into three pathways which come together where the access point to the former school meets the footpath coming in from the east. Nowadays a more recreational footpath giving a panorama of the city as it traverses Lothianburn Golf Course, which at one time, have been used by pupils coming from further afield.

Spatial Structure

While structure and early geological history, has influenced the general form of the physical landscape of the Hills, which now dominate the Lothian plains, at one time it was covered by an ice sheet and most of the detailed features are a result of glacial and post glacial processes. Much of the Conservation Area and the main components of the village are located within a small flat plateau above the valley floor which appears to have been carved out of the two hills around it by the movement of the glacier. The glacier has also carved out a 'horseshoe valley' feature near the summit of Caerketton, which forms a collection point for drainage of the Hill and the starting point for the Swanston Burn. The burn has formed a ravine through the edge of the hill and it has in its turn, eroded a lower curved plain, almost like an ox bow, as it passes through this plateau forming an area for settlement. The path of the burn is also marked by increased vegetation but whether this is due to the water supply or control on the two golf courses on either side at the upper levels is unclear.

Where the ravine widens out to form a shelf it also supports an extensive number of mature trees. The single storey cottages and former two storey farmhouse and School are set down at the lower ground levels, which together with the surrounding trees provide shelter from the prevailing west and cold east winds, the potential of their impact evident in past years when residents have been snowed in for extended periods. The main farm buildings, the former steadings, the remaining barns and stables are located at edge of the valley floor close to the prime agricultural quality land which they serve. The cottage groupings, school and farm are the main elements of the Conservation Area, and such settlements were once known as 'fermetouns'. Possibly better known though is Swanston (Water) Cottage and its associations with R. L. Stevenson. This is located to the west of the farm buildings close to the spring that became Edinburgh's first water supply. Originally a small cottage, it was extended into a two-storey house of some size. It is built right into a long ridge or gradually reducing tail of rock left by glaciation so that it faces south, it is protected from the north winds (and bypass noise) and is hidden from view on the approach.

The principle organising features for the farm and village are proximity to the access road, and, a sheltered location on the extended banks eroded by the burn. The thatched cottages and former schoolhouse that form the original part of the village seem to cascade down the banks in increasing intensity. This is emphasised by their north - south orientation parallel to the burn with their grouping, density and stepping toward the water increasing as the burn descends. One of the last cottages has a small entrance block set at right angles masking off a small drying green, a semi formal space marked mainly by house walls but also by white washed boundary walls.

The stepped south facing gables offer further small informal spaces with benches set against them to catch the sun. The longer terrace of cottages on the east side provides a longer and widening space as the path rises to the hills. Before the cottages were amalgamated as part of the renovations their garden plots to the rear must have resembled the appearance of lang riggs.

As the burn approaches the widest area of eroded banks, the former farm house takes advantage of this increased space on the west side both to provide a much larger house and also a garden that while not of the scale of other estates would have been large when compared to those of the cottages (though both are occupied mainly by trees for shelter). It may be that the garden grounds would have originally covered both sides of the burn. The house and grounds terminate what essentially is a linear settlement descending the 'valley'. Whilst paths to either side do form the access ways it is a settlement centred more on the burn rather than more traditionally on a road.

Back up the burn on the more generous east bank just below the long terrace of cottages are located eight farm workers cottages of matching design laid out towards the end of the 19th century in a formal pattern on three sides of a square. This seems to follow on in the traditions of the planned agricultural and domestic improvements started in the previous century. The open side of the square, on the north side, is also the route of the pathway leading east from the school house, to the north of the path is a residents car park, green and small allotment. This group of cottages in terms of planned formal arrangement seem really only matched by the steadings. These are 'L' shaped in plan but again they have a symmetry of expressed gateways leading to series of stalls and barns inside.

TOWNSCAPE

The rural character of the village makes it difficult to view its townscape from the more typical forms of urban design analysis for a number of reasons.

Firstly part of its unique quality is that it is almost completely invisible from its surroundings due to a humility, and a practicality, in face of climatic adversity. This demonstrates a respect for nature and a fit with the landscape. It is unfortunate, that the same cannot be said of so much repetitive suburban development just the other side of the bypass and which now so dominates the foreground in the views from the hills behind.

Secondly, the size of the settlement and the lack of institutions and services more usually found in a village, except for the former Schoolhouse which is now completely in residential use, make the outdoor spaces between houses more private than public realm. The main public access to the hills and Regional Park passes between cottages in a way, which feels like an intrusion, certainly for the visitor, and also one suspects for the residents. At least when the former School and Farmhouses were such, visitors from surrounding settlements would have been known and recognised. There maybe a lack of public buildings but the School and Farmhouses are the only two storey structures that provide a landmark quality within the small scale of the village.

Thirdly, and certainly amongst the original cottages, there is an unfortunate contrast between the intrusion of the present day with parked cars and the traditional vernacular construction of white washed random rubble walls and thatched roofs, the small gardens carefully planted and the gently burbling burn. This may be the perception of a visitor and not a resident, and indeed the notices in the area reminding car owners of car crime are a reflection of a wider problem. Below the village, the pressure of visitor parking is very evident at weekends. Further away noise from the city bypass is continuously intrusive as visually so are the electricity pylons and power lines.

These issues need to be seen though both in proportion and in relation to the actual character of the village itself, which has much to offer and which attracts so many people.

The summit of the hills are not in the Conservation Area but from many parts of the city their contribution as a backdrop, skyline and location for panoramic views has long been recognised. The secretiveness of the village is partially exposed in autumn with brilliant low angled sunshine picking out the white of angular forms of gables and stone coloured chimneys through the russet of the remaining leaves on the surrounding beech trees. From some angles the former Farmhouse does stand out but appears wrapped around by trees.

The original cottages with their ridge and eaves lines sloping, rather than horizontal and stepping, reflect the falls in the ground and stepping down to the water almost hurry the visitor down the burn towards the farm. This organic layout is reinforced by the random rubble mass of the cottage walls, their solidity emphasised by the small size of the little windows punched through them, by the thatch on the roofs and the winding path of the burn.

This is very much in contrast with the formal layout of the later cottages, in turn reinforced by their coursed, dressed stone walling, symmetrical and matching elevations, standardised features like rear dormers, carved lintol details, colour schemes and slate roofs. The landscaping to the front is also more formal with a simple path access surrounding a grassed court edged in stone without the opportunity for personalisation offered by the sloping banks around the earlier cottages.

The Former Schoolhouse marks a transition in scale from the cottages to the Farmhouse, its channelling of the burn into a garden pond offering a quiet stopping point on the route through the village. Old photographs show the former Farmhouse less obscured by trees from the approach, revealing an appearance akin to a tower house. The steadings, much of which to the rear remain in their original state (with examples of early milling machinery), present still a designed frontage along the approach road and help to obscure the more recent wide span functional barns behind. The embryonic screen planting on the Golf Course boundary past these barns needs to be strengthened.

From the hills above stone walls appear like sculpture running over and around the exposed rock and 'wine red' soil, as possibly Swanston Cottage's most famous resident R. L. Stevenson called it, left by the glacial tail against which the Cottage and its garden grounds are set. Protected by the walls, the white painted house stands out from its own wooded

setting, surrounded by gardens and hedged wind breaks, the original city water supply ponds, timber fenced paddocks and horses and gate lodge cottage.

A tree house perched precariously over a corner in the boundary wall looking up the farm track, a timber door close by in the wall, the bell located on the front wall of the house, the increasing smell of wood smoke could all be woven together as part of a literary inspiration the Cottage and surroundings still convey.

The Pentland Hills Regional Park Study points out that the hills have been settled since early times where “features of settlement, agriculture, war and politics remain” and evidence is thought to exist for features of mediaeval landscape before the introduction through the agricultural improvements of the 18th and 19th century of shelterbelts, field boundaries, dykes, farm steadings and houses. In a rural Conservation Area such as this, these at first less familiar features extend the character appraisal in a different way in the understanding of time, space and structure.

At a practical level, the importance of the area to the city’s first water supply has been raised and can be seen in the form of ponds and circular control houses set intriguingly in the middle of fields. The prehistoric Caerketton Hill Fort and Cairn are located close by. The ‘T’ shaped shelterbelt as it appears from below, above the village has been thought to represent the surname of the Trotter family, one time owners of the land. In plan form though it more nearly represents the shape of the Maltese, or Greek cross, the significance of which, and connection with the Knights Templar is explained previously.

These aspects give an idea of a different set of relationships and priorities, more personal than public, more natural than built. It is hard to imagine now but Swanston, small and hidden from view as it is, and its surroundings offer alternatives to our predominantly urban ways of thinking. Its surroundings may more visibly be an area for present day recreational pursuits, but also offer a source for making historical and literary connections, sometimes with very distant places and peoples. The village itself has an incredible charm and sense of place. This derives from the close knit relationships between the houses, between the houses and the landscape, the mainly pedestrian access, and the human scale which these features establish. In some part, no doubt, in a world increasingly dominated by technology and rational method, it is also due to a sense of time having stood still and to the portrayal of a rural idyll, which the village appears to offer.

ARCHITECTURAL CHARACTER

The architectural form and character of Swanston village is very much of the local vernacular. The thatched properties are the oldest dating from the 18th century. Other buildings which date from that period are Swanston Old Farm dating from the early 18th century, Swanston Cottage and Swanston Water House both dating from the later half of the 18th century. The stone built cottages built around a ‘village green’ date from 1850 and were extended in 1933.

Key buildings of note are:

108 Swanston Road, Swanston Cottage: Dating from the later 18th century, Swanston Cottage is a two storey house with single storey additions, natural slate with white finished harling and stone margins. It was much altered in the 1830's and also the late 19th century and has internal alterations dating from the 20th century by Robert Lorimer. This was the holiday home of Robert Louis Stevenson's family who had it extended to the west in 1867 to include a drawing room, a bedroom for Robert Louis and a spare room. The cottage was originally built by the city of Edinburgh magistrates for their own use when inspecting the water springs that were established here in 1760/61. *It is listed category B.*

120, 122 and 124 Swanston Road: Swanston Old Farm: Originally an L-plan farmhouse with crow-stepped gables, dating from the early 18th century, it now has later alterations and was divided into 3 separate dwellings and extended in the late 20th century. *It is listed category B.*

Swanston Road Water House: Single storey, single-bay rectangular, stone-built water house with stone flagged roof, category B listed, dated 1761. The water house built around a water gauge which was used to supply water to the city from Swanston. The gauge was used for measuring and regulating the flow of water from Hare Burn and the water was conveyed in wooden pipes and linked to the supply at Comiston.

Nos. 9-15 Swanston Village: These are an intact and picturesque group of single storey reed thatched cottages, dating from the 18th century with later alterations and additions. They were restored by J Wilson Paterson for Edinburgh Corporation, 1959-62. The later rear extensions to the rear were possibly original privies. These terraced cottages are sited in a grouping on either side of the gravel path which leads onto the Pentland Hills and an isolated cottage (two cottages joined to form one) sited at the southwest in a secluded setting. The cottages are listed category B and have an A listing for group value.

Nos. 1-8 Swanston Village: Single storey stone built terrace of cottages, circa 1850, with alterations/extensions dating from 1933. They are symmetrically grouped around a central green. They are listed category C (S), B group, and make up a largely intact group of mid 19th century farm estate workers' cottages.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE

In addition to the historic settlement at Swanston, the Conservation Area contains the remains, identified as cropmarks from aerial photography, of two prehistoric sites which lie to northeast of Swanston steading and represent variations upon the single-ditched circular enclosure, a type of monument found throughout Lowland Scotland and dating to the 2nd and 1st millennia B. These sites can be located at NMRS REF NT26NW 29, Grid Ref NT243 676 and NMRS REF NT26NW 33, Grid Ref NT242 676.

Both Swanston village and the two prehistoric settlements to the east of the steading are regarded as being of regional archaeological and cultural significance, with Swanston village in particular a rare surviving example of a relatively intact, late post-medieval farming community within Edinburgh and the Lothians.

There has been no archaeological investigation to determine the condition and extent of any surviving archaeological remains within the conservation area at Swanston. In addition to the possible archaeological remains associated with the present 18th century village, it is also likely that the village may contain further archaeological remains associated with the possible earlier medieval/post-medieval occupation of the village. Such remains could provide important information not only on the medieval origins and development of Swanston, but also regarding the development of the Scottish medieval and post-medieval rural economy. Given the problems in clearly defining cropmarked sites, there is still potential for further archaeological sites to be found within the conservation area, dating from the prehistoric period. Therefore, the conservation area is identified as an area of archaeological significance.

Essential Character

- *Rare surviving example of a relatively intact, late post-medieval farming community within Edinburgh and the Lothians*
- **Strong sense of enclosure with shelterbelt planting surrounding the village**
- **Distinctive vernacular architecture with the only thatched properties remaining within the Edinburgh City boundary**
- **Settlement development and use clearly expressed in the buildings i.e. early farm workers thatched cottages, 18th century water house, post-improvement farm steading, stone-built workers housing, field boundaries, dykes, golf courses and clubhouses**
- **Contrast between the earlier more organic nature and form of the thatched properties and the planned stone built cottages with slate roofs**
- **Predominance of traditional materials i.e. stone, slate, thatch, harl**
- **Swanston Cottage and its associations with Robert Louis Stevenson and the architect, Sir Robert Lorimer**
- **The setting of the village within an agricultural landscape is an important visual element**
- *Evidence of two prehistoric single-ditched circular enclosures, a type of monument found throughout Lowland Scotland and dating to the 2nd and 1st millennia BC.*
- *Both Swanston village and the two prehistoric sites are of regional archaeological and cultural significance*
- **Intimate relationship between the buildings and the landscape**
- **The immediate surrounding land uses are predominantly agricultural, open space and recreational**

- **The wider setting of the Pentland Hills which envelope the village**
- **The wooded areas around the village are important elements of the character of the village and its setting**
- *Spectacular panoramic views out over the village to landmarks such as Arthur's Seat, Forth and islands, Dunbar, Bass Rock, Traprain and Berwick Law.*

4.0 OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENHANCEMENT

Enhancements / Issues

1. Car Parks and Parking Areas

The use and condition of the existing car parks and parking areas should be looked at with a view to carrying out improvements and enhancement if required.

2. Footpaths and Access/Visitor Management/Signage

The existing network of footpaths and public access could possibly be improved, e.g.: the feeder path to the lower car park directs people through the village onto the hill. It may be more appropriate to direct the access around the village on the east side. The footpaths also exhibit areas of erosion and the possibility of carrying out remedial measures should be explored. *The issue of signage should be looked at, particularly in relation to dog control and respect for residents and their properties, with a view to carrying out improvements if necessary.*

3. Tree Planting/Hedges

Tree planting could be reinforced where management seems to be haphazard and in other places, woodland planting could further enhance the village setting. There are some dead trees alongside the burn, which should be removed. Further hedge and standard tree planting along the road edges would improve the setting.

Planting alongside by-pass to screen middle ground views of traffic would greatly benefit amenity of the conservation area both visually and in terms of noise nuisance. *This would also assist in the appreciation of wider views from above the Swanston Village.* There may be other areas of the village which could benefit from screening i.e. planting to screen the large barns on Swanston Farm Steading.

There is an area of ground to the east of village which reads visually as part of village and should have different ground treatment to area on east side of path i.e. tree planting to further envelope village.

Hedges are an important element in the area and some improvements and replanting have taken place with native species. Their maintenance could be improved to ensure their establishment. Further hedge and tree planting along road edges could also improve amenity.

4. Stone Boundary Walls

There are several stone field boundary walls in the area, which have become neglected and are in a poor state of disrepair. A survey should be carried out to record these walls and proposals for consolidation and rebuilding explored, where appropriate.

5. Conservation Area Boundaries

The Conservation Area boundaries should be reviewed and suggestions proposed for any changes. In particular, there may be scope for including more of the wider landscape setting such as Caerketton summit, which includes the hill fort and, also, the boundary to the east, which includes a ravine line. The original Swanston Conservation Area boundary was drawn up to provide a minimum area of landscape where any new form of development is likely to detract from the character of Swanston. The boundary was not intended to be definitive because of the nature of the setting of Swanston village and care must be taken to ensure that developments beyond this area do not detract from the character of Swanston and its setting.

6. Maintenance of Built Fabric

It is important that the existing historic fabric in the village is maintained properly and that best practice is employed. In particular, it may be possible to access funds for re-thatching, where appropriate and this should be explored.

7. Swanston Burn

Drainage and effluent concerns have been identified by the residents of Swanston village. Relevant agencies should be contacted to examine the possibility of improvements in these areas.

8. Disused Pumphouse

The suitability of the disused pumphouse in the fields to the north of the village, for repair and consolidated should be examined. The building may also be worthy of inclusion in the Buildings at Risk Register. It should also be recorded by The Royal Commission on The Ancient and Historical Monuments for Scotland.

9. Improvements to Lock-up Garages

The lock-up garages to the east of the thatched cottages appear run down. The possibility of improving them should be explored (ie repairing the harl finish, painting timberwork).

10. Cellular Phone Masts

The adverse impact of cellular phone masts on the landscape is widely recognised, but difficulties in camouflaging such large structures in conspicuous locations. The Council should seek to achieve the minimum impact on the landscape in discussion with the operators.

5.0 GENERAL INFORMATION

Statutory Policies Relating to Swanston

- 5.1 The South West Edinburgh Local Plan, Written Statement, October 1983 identifies the original boundaries of Swanston Conservation Area designated in May 1975.
- 5.2 The South West Edinburgh Local Plan, Written Statement, adopted on 11 March 1993, identifies the original boundaries of Swanston Conservation Area designated in May 1975 and the proposed extension to the north. This replaced the draft Plan that was approved and published for consultation purposes in October 1983.
- 5.3 The entire Conservation Area is situated within the Greenbelt, is an Area of Nature Conservation Interest, an Area of Great Landscape Value and has areas of woodland covered by Tree Preservation Orders.
- 5.4 The original designation of the Edinburgh Green Belt was in 1957, with the following objectives:
 - To limit the further expansion of the City
 - To prevent the merging of built up areas
 - To preserve and enhance the landscape setting of the Capital, and
 - To prevent the loss of agricultural land to development
- 5.5 The designation, 'Area of Nature Conservation Interest' is an area identified as being particularly important for wildlife and represent the largest areas of important wildlife habitat with the greatest diversity of habitat types and also include aquatic habitats.
- 5.6 Tree Preservation Orders are used to protect selected trees and woodlands whose removal would have significant impact on the public amenity of an area. They form a legal constraint attached to the land on which the trees are located. The Order consists of a map showing the protected trees or woodland and a written statement, detailing the species and groupings. It also identifies the extent of the Tree Preservation Order, originally designated in 1962, which covers the T wood (or Whitehill plantation lying on both sides of Swanston burn, west of Whitehill wood, and two belts of woodland around the village.

The T wood (or Whitehill plantation) is in private ownership but is covered by a Management Agreement between the owner and the former Lothian Regional Council (now taken over by the Recreation Department. It is an original wood dating from 1766, with most of the trees being over 200 years old. It is a major landscape feature on the North facing slopes of The Pentlands, as it is the only wood between Dreghorn and Hillhead . It forms an interesting landmark when seen from the tops. The other areas of land which are covered by Tree Preservation Orders are land lying on both sides of Swanston Burn, west of Whitehill wood and the belts and group of trees immediately surrounding the village. The land next to the Burn is an area of open grown trees, most of which are over mature and is used as sheep pasture. Some replanting has been carried out here with limited success. The trees around the village provide an attractive setting for the built form and provide much needed shelter for the settlement.

- 5.7 The designation, 'Area of Great Landscape Value' has no statutory significance, but local authorities were encouraged to designate them by the Scottish office, to highlight the need for careful planning in the vicinity. Within these areas there are landscape qualities which should be safeguarded and recreational and wildlife interests promoted.
- 5.8 The Council is in the process of amalgamating the two local plan areas, South West and North West and is envisaged that there will be one local plan covering the western sector of Edinburgh City Council's boundary.
- 5.9 Swanston Conservation Area also lies within the area covered by the Pentland Hills Subject Local Plan (1995-2000). This document is a review of the first Subject Plan, which was adopted in October 1989 to run for five years until 1994. The Subject Plan sets out the policies and development control guidance for the Pentland Hills area which was designated as a Regional Park in these policies provide for conservation of landscape, wildlife and heritage; management of natural beauty and resources and encouragement of controlled public access consistent with essential economic activities (principally agriculture).
- 5.10 *The Memorandum of Guidance on Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas 1998 is the document to which all planning authorities are directed by the Scottish Office Development Department Circular No.13/1998 in their consideration of conservation area and listed building consent matters. The Memorandum gives detailed guidance on many issues, which are relevant to the Swanston Conservation Area, for example, thatch and vernacular buildings.*
- 5.11 *It is fundamental that, because of the cultural and historic significance of Swanston, that National Planning Policy Guideline 18: Planning and the Historic Environment, National Planning Policy 5: Planning and Archeaology and PAN 42: Archeaology be consulted when determining any planning applications within the conservation area. Any potential adverse impact on the conservation area, historic buildings and any archaeological remain should be assessed in relation to these documents. It is also essential that the advice of the City Archaeologist be sought when dealing with any proposed development or alterations at Swanston in order that any potential archaeological implications may be addressed.*

Implications Of Conservation Area Status

5.12 Designation as a conservation area has the following implications:

- Permitted development rights under the General Development Order are restricted. Planning permission is, therefore, required for stonecleaning, external painting, roof alterations and the formation of hard surfaces. The area of extensions to dwelling houses, which may be erected without consent, is also restricted to 16m² and there is additional control over satellite dishes.
- Under Article 4 of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (Scotland) Order 1992, the planning authority can seek approval of the *Scottish Ministers* for Directions that restrict permitted development rights. The Directions effectively control the proliferation of relatively minor alterations to buildings in conservation areas that can cumulatively lead to erosion of character and appearance. Development is not precluded, but such alterations will require planning permission and special attention will be paid to the potential effect of proposals. Swanston Conservation Area is currently covered by one, for the following range of permitted development classes:
 - 1 enlargement, improvement or other alteration of a dwelling house**
 - 3 provision or alteration of buildings or enclosures within the curtilage of a dwelling house**
 - 6 installation, alteration or replacement of satellite antennae**
 - 7 erection, construction, maintenance, improvement or alteration of a gate, fence, wall or other means of enclosure**
 - 18 erection, extension, or alteration in connection with agricultural buildings and operations**
 - 38 water undertakings**
 - 39 development by gas suppliers**
 - 40 development by electricity undertakers**
 - 67 development by telecommunications code systems operators**
- Special attention must be paid to the character and appearance of the conservation area when planning controls are being exercised. Most applications for planning permission for alterations will, therefore, be advertised for public comment and any views expressed must be taken into account when making a decision on the application.

- Buildings, which are not statutorily listed, can normally be demolished without approval under the Planning Legislation. However, if a building is of historic interest, it may be worthy of protection and through the listing process. Within conservation areas the demolition of unlisted buildings requires conservation area consent.
- Proposals for work on trees must be notified in writing to the Council, six weeks in advance of commencing works.
- Alterations to windows are controlled in terms of the Council's policy.
- Grants may be available towards the repair or restoration of historic building

Supplementary Guidelines

- 5.13 The Council also produces supplementary planning guidance on a range of development control issues. These are contained within the Development Quality Handbook.

Protection of Trees

- 5.14 Trees within conservation areas are covered by the Town and Country (Scotland) Act 1972, as amended by the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997. The Act applies to the uprooting, felling or lopping of a tree having a diameter exceeding 75mm at a point 1.5m above ground level, and concerns the lopping of trees as much as removal. The planning authority must be given six week's notice of the intention to uproot, fell or lop trees. Failure to give notice render the person liable to the same penalties as for contravention of a Tree Preservation Order.

Grants for Conservation

- 5.15 The Council also runs a Conservation Grant Scheme. Such grants are normally dependent on comprehensive repair and restoration of original features and priority is given to tenemental housing and prominent listed buildings.
- 5.16 Competition for grants is very strong and applications are assessed in terms of the merit of the building and its wider setting, the nature and urgency of works proposed, and the real need for assistance from public funding.
- 5.17 Historic Scotland run a Maintenance Grant Scheme for thatched properties and as the thatched cottages at Swanston are listed category A, it may be possible to obtain funding for maintenance and/or repair.

The Role of the Public

- 5.18 It is essential that property owners accept their maintenance responsibilities. The emphasis should be on the repair rather than replacement of original features, as these contribute to the Conservation Area character as a whole. Alterations or additions if acceptable, should be sympathetic to the original style and of an appropriate scale.

REFERENCES

‘Swanston Conservation Study’, Edinburgh District Council, Town Planning Department, February 1973.

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‘The Essential Character of The Hills’- Descriptive Survey of The Landscape, Wildlife and Recreational Character of The Regional Park’, Lothian Regional Council, Department of Planning, October 1995.

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