

1 What makes housing attractive?

New housing is too often seen by the public as automatically a bad thing. However, housing does not have to be a blot on the landscape. Indeed, a large proportion of the reknown of the Cotswolds is due to the character of its settlements, which both enhances and is itself enhanced by the natural landscape setting.

There is general agreement that traditional unspoilt villages/towns are attractive, and houses in such areas in the Stroud District are in great demand. By looking more closely at one such town, Painswick, it is possible to analyse what it is that makes this such an attractive place. This understanding can then be applied to the design of new housing - not with the intention of creating exact copies, but rather to ensure that the new housing successfully interprets certain principles of good design.

Looking at an area of the town in plan (below right), it is immediately apparent, even without seeing the detail of the building facades, that this is not a new housing estate. There is a sense of a place that has evolved over time in a natural, unplanned way.

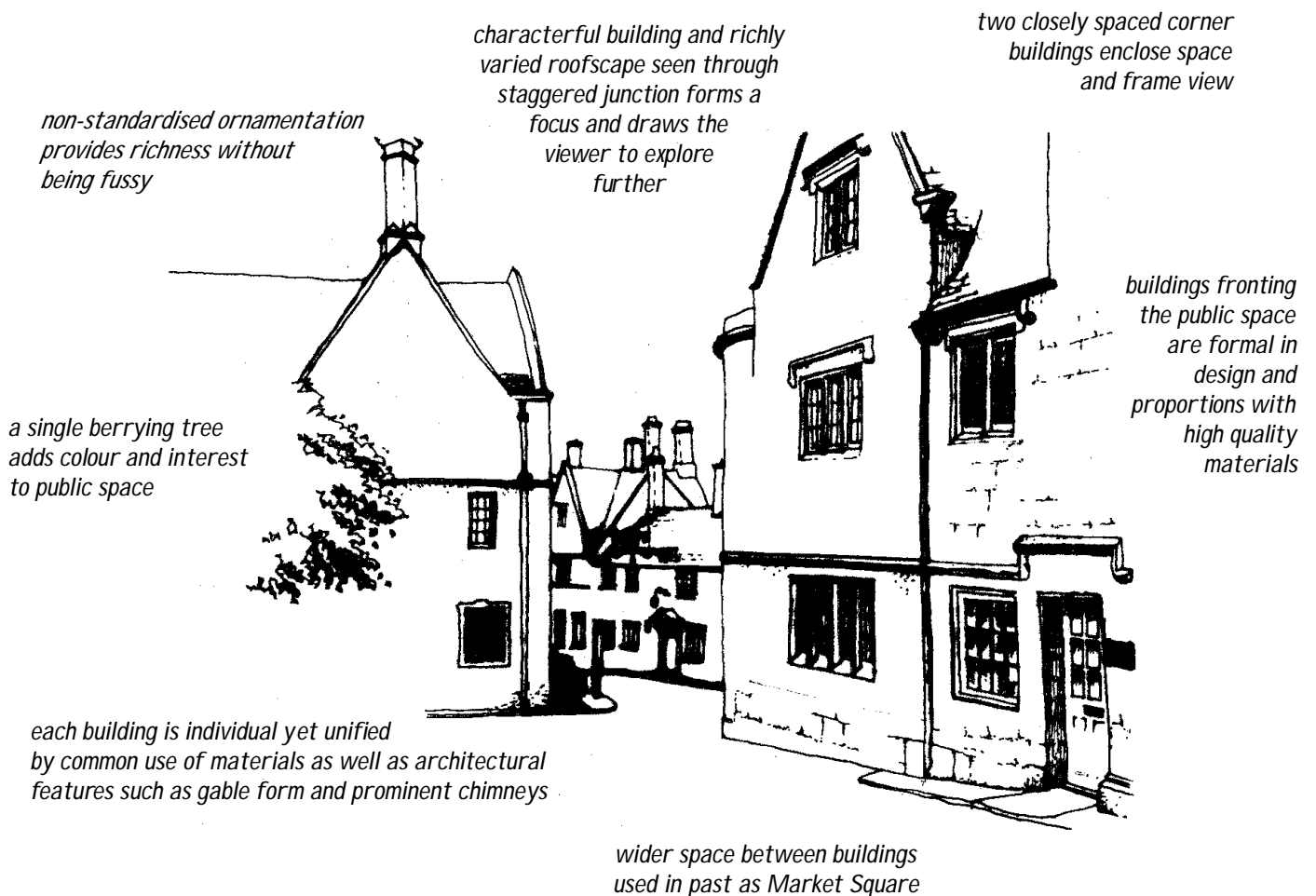
Specific aspects which help to make this a distinctive and attractive place include:

- *varied road widths, some as narrow as 3.5 to 4m between building frontages*
- *mix of building size*
- *very densely grouped buildings forming almost continuous edge to public space*
- *irregular pattern of building layout creating a variety of public spaces*
- *buildings generally positioned on the back of the pavement or directly fronting the road*
- *occasional buildings set back with garden or courtyard next to road*
- *hierarchy of spaces: market squares, courtyards, private gardens, alleys, through routes etc*
- *use of walls forming links where breaks occur in the building line*



These aspects combine to create a townscape which is rich and diverse, appropriately scaled for human activities. The buildings and layout reflect the historical development of the town, adding a further layer of interest.

Looking at the street scene in more detail one is immediately aware of the almost universal use of pale cream-grey local Cotswold stone. The use of a single building material throughout the old parts of the town gives a strong character which unifies the diverse building shapes, sizes and styles.



*chimneys and gable windows
add interest to skyline*

*gable of house enlivened
by traditional windows
and climbing plant*

*narrow gap between buildings
creates gateway and sense
of a succession of
spaces - also
slows traffic*

*seen close up the
grander buildings
are richly
detailed*

*clipped yew helps to
enclose space and
contributes to
local character*



*contrast between
grand, richly ornamented
houses on New St and smaller simpler houses
further downhill reflects historical development of town*

*buildings front directly
onto road creating strongly
defined edge to public space*

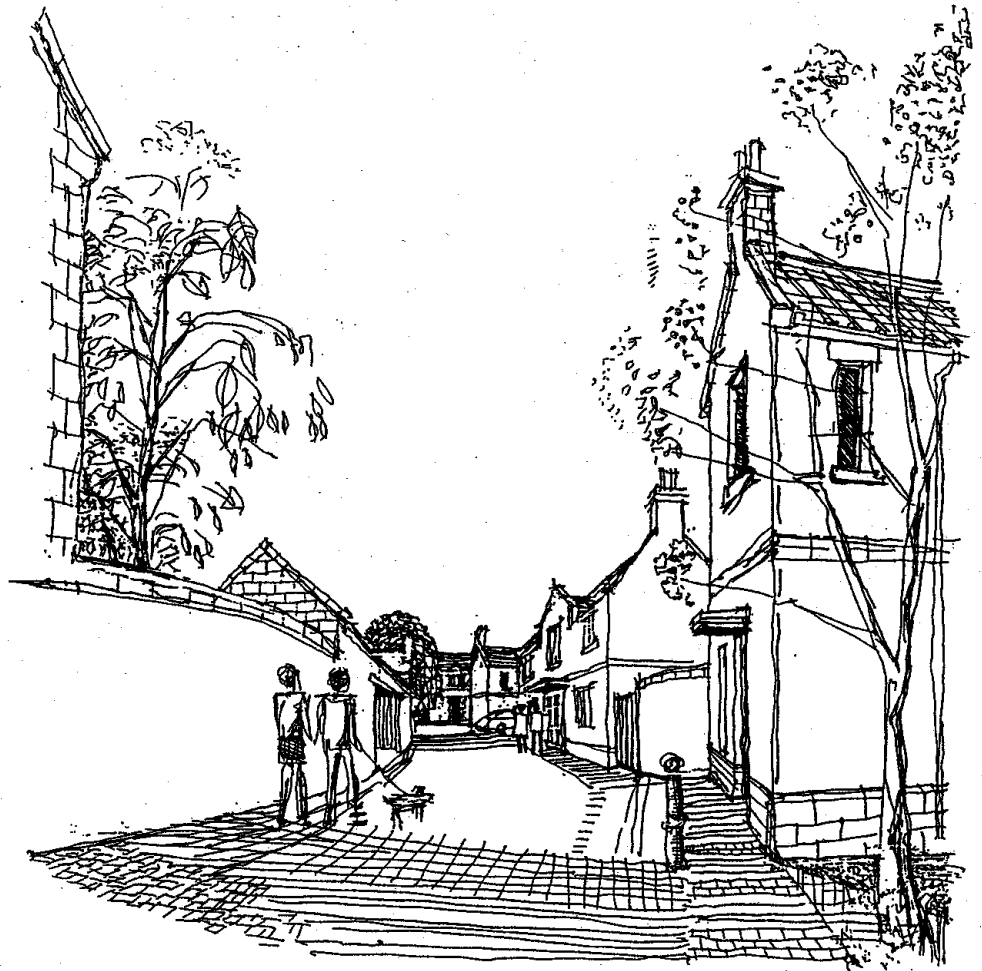
*the gable end
of this building punctuates
the space next to the Churchyard*

Aspects which lift this environment above the blandness and anonymity which characterise many of our recent townscapes include:

- *Articulations in building line creating changing vistas. Buildings frame, constrict, direct;*
- *Building frontages enclose series of spaces;*
- *Contrast between highly enclosed and more open spaces;*
- *Variety of focal points, landmark buildings;*
- *High quality buildings enliven the public space;*
- *Intricacy and complexity creating human scale and interest;*
- *Built form not uniform but linked by common materials and architectural details;*
- *Easily understood spaces: dimensions and character consistent with function;*
- *Spaces shaped by buildings rather than dominated by vehicle circulation requirements;*
- *Use of subtly textured materials which are appropriate to the area, and which mellow over time.*

Overall, the town has a strong sense of place, it is unique, though readily identifiable as a Cotswold town. It sits comfortably in the landscape with few if any discordant elements, the distinctive church spire serving as an historic landmark visible from a distance. Nothing is standardised; the road layouts and the relationship of the buildings to the roads show how the town functioned and evolved over past centuries.

The following chapters consider how to apply these principles to new housing in Stroud District in order to ensure the creation of attractive characterful places to live in that integrate easily into the existing fabric of the District, enhancing rather than despoiling it.



Artist's impression of new development in Dorset