

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



The Conservation Management Plan for Merton Priory and Merton Abbey Mills is intended as a long-term strategy for conserving the remains of the monastic and industrial buildings and the artefacts associated with them, whilst at the same time preserving the sense of place that derives from its past associations with religion, learning, industrial technology, and the history of art and design.

The Plan is structured in two parts. Part One is the Conservation Plan, which contains a *description* of the Chapter House and its context, and an assessment of its *significance*. Part Two is the Management Plan, containing a review of the *risks* and *issues* that confront the Priory and the related archaeology, and a set of *policies* for the proper management and development of the entire cultural heritage asset.

The Priory was first established on the site in 1117AD and continued in use until the Dissolution of the Monasteries in 1538. At this time most of the monastic buildings were demolished and the site was adapted for a range of water-based and water-powered industries, which were predominantly associated with fabric printing, and were latterly associated with significant designers and manufacturers such as Edmund Littler, William Morris founder of the Arts and Crafts Movement, and Liberty & Co who continued to operate on the site into the 1970s.

The remains of the Priory are in part a Scheduled Ancient Monument and in part Grade II Listed buildings. Two of the former industrial buildings are also Listed and part of the site is a Designated Conservation Area.

The Conservation Plan establishes that Merton Priory and Merton Abbey Mills are of outstanding significance :

- as containing the remains of the Merton Priory which are a Scheduled Ancient Monument and Grade II Listed buildings;
- as a place which was frequently visited by the kings of England;
- as including the remains of the chapter house of Merton Priory, unusual in its size and form, which was the location for some nationally-important meetings and where the first comprehensive statute since the Great Charter (Magna Carta) -a landmark in English law-making, was agreed in 1236;
- as a centre of religion and learning where Thomas Becket and Walter of Merton were educated;
- as having played a leading role in the creation of the Arts and Craft Movement, developed by William Morris, and pursued locally by Edmund Littler and Arthur Liberty;
- as being close to the home of Admiral Lord Nelson immediately prior to his death at the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805.

- as containing the remains of the Roman road known as *Stane Street*;
- as an early example of water-powered industrial development, particularly fabric printing;
- as containing a number of significant industrial buildings, two of which are Grade II Listed buildings, and all of which are contained within a Designated Conservation Area;
- as a resource for research into a wide range of subjects, including medieval history and archaeology, industrial technology, and the history of art and design;
- as being a significant wildlife corridor;
- as a source for education of people of all ages on a very broad range of subjects;
- as a resource for tourism; and
- as a resource for inspiration, particularly art and design.

The Management Plan proposes a series of policies which, if implemented, will protect the long-term significance of the site and guide immediate management proposals.