



Brancaster

Conservation Area

Character Statement



BRANCASTER. Here was a large Roman Station called Branodunum, and garrisoned with the Dalmation Cavalry, under a General, who was designated, from the nature of his appointment, Count of the Saxon Shore.

WILLIAM WHITE 1845

Introduction	2
Origins and Historical Development	2
Setting and Location	4
Character Overview	5
Spaces and Buildings	5
Listed Buildings	9
Important Unlisted Buildings	9
Post War Development	10
Traditional Materials	10
Archaeological Interest	10
Detractors	11
Conservation Objectives	12

Introduction

A Conservation Area - “An area of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance”.

The conservation of the historic environment is part of our quality of life, helping to foster economic prosperity and providing an attractive environment in which to live or work. The Borough Council is committed to the protection and enhancement of West Norfolk's historic built environment and significant parts of it are designated as conservation areas.

Conservation areas were introduced by the 1967 Civic Amenities Act. Local Authorities were required to identify areas of special architectural or historic interest, whose character or appearance it is desirable to preserve or enhance, and to designate them as conservation areas. This duty is now part of the 1990 Planning (Listed Buildings & Conservation Areas) Act which also requires the review of existing conservation areas and, where appropriate, the designation of new ones. The quality and interest of a conservation area depends upon a combination of factors including the relationship and architectural quality of buildings, materials, spaces, trees and other landscape features, together with views into and out of the area.

The Brancaster Conservation Area was designated in 1990. This document highlights the special qualities which underpin the character of the conservation area, justifying its designation. It also seeks to increase awareness of those qualities so that where changes to the environment occur, they do so in a sympathetic way without harm to the

essential character of the area. This type of assessment has been encouraged by Government Advice (PPG15) and has been adopted as supplementary planning guidance.

This character statement does not address enhancement proposals. Community led enhancement schemes will be considered as part of a separate process.

Origins and Historical Development

Brancaster is a large village situated at the end of Mow Creek, a tidal inlet which crossed the marshes from Brancaster Bay. It once had a staithe or quay which has now moved to a separate settlement to the east.

Interpretations of the name vary slightly but all link to “Branodunum”, the name of the Roman fort once sited on the eastern edge of the existing village and the Old English “Broncestra” became Brancaster. “Bran-“, taken from Branodunum, is thought by some to mean water although this is unsubstantiated but “caster” is from the Latin “Castra”, a fort, thus Brancaster means a Roman fort.

Brancaster probably began as a small Iron Age settlement most likely based around farming and fishing. Following the Iceni revolt in AD 60, the whole area came under Roman rule and Brancaster became a Roman settlement. The combination of good farm land, fishing and both longshore and foreign trade from the sea, would have made Brancaster a desirable place to settle. It would also have benefited from its proximity to Peddars Way, a principal Roman Road, running to the west of the village. Peddars Way was one of three roads, probably of

military origin, which formed the basis of a very comprehensive road network linking major towns and villages. However, along with the rest of the Norfolk coast Brancaster was vulnerable to raiding from across the North Sea and in the 3rd Century the Romans constructed a string of forts around the eastern coastline to stop raids by the Saxons.

The fort and entrenchment of Branodunum occupied an oblong area of about 2.4 hectares (6 acres) above the marsh to the east of the present village. It was one of the five principal stations in Norfolk and was garrisoned with Dalmatian Cavalry until the Romans withdrew in 410 AD as Angles and Saxons came in from the north and Brancaster again became a small settlement for fishermen and herdsman.

During Medieval times Brancaster was again a small coastal port, much less important than King's Lynn or Yarmouth, but shipping corn from its hinterland supplemented by wool and cloth. By the end of the 16th Century sheep and corn were being shipped out and coal was being brought in. In 1593 Robert Smith founded almshouses for four poor parishioners and a free school for the poor children of Brancaster and adjacent parishes. The Old School House still stands just south of the church.

The village grew during the 1700s as did the quay or staithe to the east. Brancaster remained a farming community with the common salt marshes providing summer grazing for sheep. In 1789 the Lord of the Manor was Mr Simms Reeve JP who lived at Brancaster Hall. Although not built until 1905, the present village hall is named in his honour. The walls and foundation stones of the Roman fort were cleared and used in the

erection of a malt-house at Brancaster Staithe said to be the largest in England although this had closed by 1845.

The population almost doubled during the first half of the 19th Century. Bryant's Map (1826) and the Tithe Map (1841) both show a large settlement with development around the church and the junction with Docking Road, running east/west along the line of the A149 and north on London Street towards the marshes. There is also some development along the edge of the marshes off Cross Lane.

In 1892 the Royal West Norfolk Golf Club was built under the patronage of the Prince of Wales who had a home at nearby Sandringham. The golf club rapidly became popular and indeed remains so. The carstone and red brick clubhouse is a prominent land mark beyond the marshes on the shore line to the north of the village.



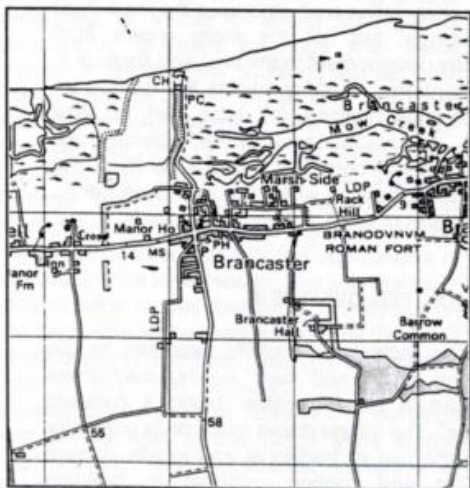
In 1893 Holkham Ingleby MA.JP, a wealthy farmer and Freeman of Borough of King's Lynn, built Dormy House on Broad Lane to be used as a club within the village. It is similar in style and construction to the golf clubhouse and is a key feature of the conservation area.

Much of the early Edwardian development is probably associated with the growth in popularity of the Royal West Norfolk Golf Course but the recent growth of the village is more attributable to the popularity of Brancaster's coastal setting.



Setting and Location

Brancaster is one of a number of attractive villages situated along the A149 coastal road between Hunstanton, 11 kilometres (7 miles) to the west, and Wells-Next-the-Sea 14.5 kilometres (9 miles) to the east. Mill Road, (B1153), the principal lane which runs into the south of the village, links Brancaster to Docketing, some 8 kilometres (5 miles) inland.



The village is mainly located running east-west at the toe of the north-facing, gently sloping scarp slope of the high chalk area of West Norfolk. The site of the main part of the village slopes from west to east and south to north, where it borders the north Norfolk coastal plain – an area renowned for its natural beauty and nature conservation interest. Access to the beach, golf course and coastal creeks and saltmarsh is gained by using Broad Lane. The road across the marshes can be flooded during very high tides.

Looking towards the village from the higher ground inland, Brancaster appears as a line of red roofs amongst mixed woodland trees with distant and often hazy views of the saltmarsh and sea beyond. The church is prominent but not on the skyline. In contrast, when looking towards the village from the coast the majority of it is well hidden by the extensive mature landscaping and boundary planting set on the back edge of the coastal saltmarsh.



One, often unnoticed characteristic of Brancaster and other north coast villages are the dark night skies. Lack of light pollution allows spectacular views, particularly of the Milky Way, which are rare in more build up areas.

The conservation area embraces the majority of the village, but not the more recent 20th Century development to east and south of it. The northern boundary adjoins the Brancaster saltmarshes flanking the tidal inlet of Mow Creek, an area managed by the National Trust. The southern boundary extends south of the main road, beyond which the land rises gently, in the form of large, rolling, arable fields.

Character Overview

Climatic factors, particularly exposure to the bracing north and east winds, may have resulted in old Brancaster being a compact village. The village draws much of its character from the use of traditional and locally derived walling and roofing material in building construction. The palette of colours of these materials is very pleasing to the eye - the sun highlighting the texture of cobbled flint walls, painted render the contrast between the whites and greys of the chalk clunch and cobbled flint and the soft, warm red/orange clay bricks and pantiles. This character is often enhanced by the use of interesting architectural detailing.



Brancaster is also a village of contrasts. Along the A149 road, the village appears to have a linear form with traditional development either side of the road, but actually, it has considerable depth towards the coast. Consequently, the small scale, dense, Norfolk vernacular buildings contrast with the large houses in generous grounds built from around 1900 between the village centre and the coast. Then, while the village is a lively place, with focal points of activity such as the village shop, the Ship Inn, and the village hall, the level of activity can fluctuate as a high proportion of the dwellings are holiday/second homes. Finally there is the contrast between the residential village of Brancaster and its seaside/holiday/tourism role. The A149, the main coastal road, runs east-west through the village. It can be very busy, particularly in the summer, and is intrusive in terms of the noise, speed and smell which go with relatively heavy traffic.

Spaces and Buildings

The spaces and buildings of Brancaster are best described by referring to the three different character areas within the village: the traditional village core, the marsh-side and coastal fringe, and more recent areas of low density 'villas'.

The traditional core of the village is based around the **A149 and London Street**. This is a very compact area, in plan form being very similar to the mid 19th Century village found on the 1841 Tithe Map.

The A149 weaves through the village to create a series of well enclosed spaces. The western approach has a rural feel with wide grass verges and the traditionally designed roofs and walls of the Manor Farm barn range. A small group of houses and a workshop on the south side, with dates

stones reading JSG 1806 and GAG 1905 , are followed on the north side by the imposing wall around Manor Farm and then imposing church tower and the Church of St Mary's is set within the informal landscaping of the Churchyard.



This contrasts with the harder 'village scape' on the south side of the road where buildings are set close to the back edge of the verge or pavement. The sense of enclosure is weaker around the busy junction of the A149, **Mill Road and Broad Lane**. The small area with the village sign has been landscaped and, although this adds to the soft, rural character of the street scene, it is still a very open area with the sea of tarmac at the junction detracting from the character of the village and the setting of the church.



However, the high density terraced groups of cottages and outbuildings around **Choseley Road**, which runs uphill from **Mill Road**, twisting to the right, create a very good contrast, achieving a strong sense of enclosure and the outbuildings have a series of attractive gables to Mill Road. This tight cluster of low buildings and their roofs is visually very important. When looking back to the village these cottages frame a fine view of the church.



The 'Old Schoolhouse' (1593), opposite the church, is a very interesting building in which details of the early windows and openings may be clearly discerned. This is linked to the Old School Room which is set back from the street and appears 'chapel-like' in style.



The sense of enclosure is weaker around 'The Ship' car park, however this is compensated for by the detail of the gable-end wall of the public house and the model ship on the wall - a local feature of Brancaster. 'The Ship' forms part of a substantial range of buildings of mixed styles which are imposing on the street scene, being set opposite the high wall and mature landscaping of St Mary's House.



The middle part of Brancaster is a mix of strong frontages of terraced or grouped buildings relieved by buildings set back from the road or at right angles to it. The south side of the road retains a rural feel with the domination of Town Farm and the adjacent farm buildings (converted but mainly hidden by the front wall) and the long range of Stubborn Cottage and the Shooting Lodge. This is strengthened by the absence of a footway to the east of **Market Lane** and by the odd glimpse of the countryside to the south. The importance of long building ranges and barns is reflected on the north side of the road, particularly the detail of the doorway to the barn and on the fine gable end of the 'Old Bakery'. The heavily landscaped frontage of Tower Farm buildings and the landscaped frontages of Market Lane contrast with this enclosed feel. Across the road, the old petrol station has been

replaced with new two storey houses with dormers with good quality materials and detailing. The rendered Sutherland House, with its decorative ironwork features, adds visual interest to this part of the village. The Simms Reeve Institute (1905) which houses the Parish Hall, social club and post office, is a fine example of the type of detail used when designing community buildings at the turn of the century. The adjoining playing field offers good views out to the north of the village.



The eastern end of the village contains attractive groupings of cottages (especially on the north side), with some development in-depth. This is set around the road which gently rises from west to east. Enclosure falls away with gardens of the new development on the southern side, but boundary walling, set on the back edge of the pavement, maintains continuity on the north side. Looking back to the village, there are long views of the Church tower.

London Street slopes down gently from its wide junction with the main road to the marshside and curves away to the west to create a good sense of enclosure. Some of the finest 'village scape' in West Norfolk is found here, created through colour, continuity of materials and interesting details.

A mix of cottages, terraces and larger houses, mostly on the pavement edge, with mature trees in some front gardens which break the continuity of a tightly enclosed street scene. In the north, the Street ends with the more rural character at 'The Farm', a group of mature trees, and the unmade **Butchers Drove**, leading out to the marsh and public footpaths.

The architectural character of the traditional village core draws its cohesiveness from a number of simple principles. The buildings are generally two storeys with pitched roofs and many dormers, are set on or close to the back edge of the pavement or verge, have chimneys and many buildings are linked by boundary walls. The elevations appear 'solid' because the window and door openings take up a relatively small proportion of the facades. The construction materials are drawn from a limited range, most of which are derived locally.



In contrast to the tight, enclosed character of the village core, the rest of the village has a rural feel. At the marshside and coastal fringe, the long distance Norfolk Coastal Path runs along the northern boundary of the conservation area and there are entry points to and from the village at **Broad Lane**, **London Street**, **Marsh Lane** and to the east

of Marsh Farm House. There is a strong environmental feel to this coastal edge. Mow Creek and the saltmarsh are partly screened from view by extensive reed beds. The character is one of peace and tranquillity: the rustling of the wind through the reeds, the calls of seabirds soaring overhead, and of the birds in the reeds, the huge open skies, and long views to the coastal dunes, the golf clubhouse and Brancaster Staithe. The footpath winds along a sleepered boardwalk and isolated cottages and marshside buildings, nestled in the extensive mature landscaping of the large gardens fronting the marsh edge, providing considerable visual interest and give this area a timeless feel.



Linked to the marshside is an open area of two paddocks which run right back into the village. A well used footpath from which there are fine, elevated views to the coast divides these. There are also good views of the village to the north with the Church standing above the backs of buildings, and of the barns of 'The Farm' on London Street. A view of the sewage pumping station detracts from the rural scene.

The area around **Broad Lane and Cross Lane** has a character which is quite distinctive to Brancaster. This consists of over twenty large properties set out in a low density format laid out to the principles of 'informal arcadia' – a conscious attempt to create the illusion of a rural environment in a residential area. The villas are designed as surprise features in the landscape. As many of these properties were laid out in the early 20th Century, their heavily landscaped gardens have now reached maturity and the strong boundary planting creates quiet lanes along which the sound of garden birds is quite noticeable. The planting also includes some impressive specimen mature trees. In Cross Lane some dwellings have been demolished to be replaced by new houses or drastically extended, so that few of the original dwellings remain along the edge of the marsh.



Listed Buildings

There are 5 listed buildings in the conservation area. The Statutory List was revised in March 1985.

Grade 1 buildings:

- **Church of St. Mary.** Mainly 14th and 15th Century, built of pebbled flint with

stone dressings and rendered east tower. The Preachers Dial in the church is reputed to be one of only 4 in the country and is designed to ensure that the preacher kept to time.

Grade 2 buildings:

- **Old School House.** Date stone 1593 but included primarily for group interest with the church which stands opposite.
- **Tower Farm House.** Mid to late 17th Century brick and clunch farm house.
- **St Mary's House.** London Street. Early 19th Century. Former Rectory House now in residential use.
- **AA box, A149.** 1956. Wooden, with an ashfelt roof and a gable to either face. Square plan.

Important Unlisted Buildings

Brancaster's four listed buildings may seem modest in number but they underpin a wealth of unlisted, but locally important historic buildings. 130 buildings are considered to contribute to the traditional character of the village, representing about 63 per cent of the total number of buildings in the conservation area.

These unlisted buildings have been identified because of their prominent position, use of traditional materials, their character is substantially intact, and because they often relate to other historic buildings close by.



Post War Development

Within the conservation area Brancaster has witnessed an increase in modern development on the east side of Broad Lane. There has also been the subdivision of some of the larger private gardens, replacement dwellings and large extensions, particularly along Cross Lane.

Traditional Materials

The character of Brancaster Conservation Area owes a great deal to the use of local traditional materials in the construction of its historic buildings. The traditional parts of

Brancaster have the strong character of a chalk and flint village, always coursed, even when rubble is used.



Soft Norfolk red/orange bricks are used for architectural detailing and for some prominent boundary walling. Decorative red brickwork is seen at the Simm's Reeve Institute. The village also exhibits a considerable amount of rendering and colourwashed exterior surfaces. Roofs are mainly covered in red/orange clay pantiles or plain tiles. There is little use of slate. Flint pebbles are used on the exterior of some 18th and 19th Century cottages (e.g. "The Cottage" and "Merama", London Street). The influence of the Edwardian period of the early 20th Century is seen in the use of decorative red clay tile hanging above first floor level on some of the larger properties such as Dormy House and Dormy Cottage.

Archaeological Interest

There are no Scheduled Ancient Monuments in the conservation area but Brancaster is well known as the site of a Roman military outpost and associated civilian settlement called Branodunum immediately to the east of the conservation area. Some

archaeological finds have been recorded as part of the Norfolk Sites and Monuments Record.

Detractors

The special quality of conservation areas can easily be eroded by seemingly minor alterations such as unsuitable replacement windows and doors, inappropriate materials or unsympathetic paintwork, removal of walls, railings, trees and hedges.

Within the Brancaster Conservation Area, there are few features which detract significantly from its intrinsic character.

The most serious detractor is the overhead wires, poles and other equipment. Other detractors include:

- heavy traffic on the A149 especially in the summer
- the rutted and rough surface of Market Lane from the primary school to the A149
- the large expanse of tarmac on the A149/Broad Lane/Mill Lane junction
- the incongruous design of the lean-to bus shelter

- the visual intrusion of the sewage pumping station
- the open nature of the car park and service area to the side of the village hall



Conservation Objectives

Statement 1

The overall conservation objective is to protect and reinforce the established special character of Conservation Areas and their setting.

This will be achieved by:

- Encouraging the retention and maintenance of buildings which contribute to the overall character of each conservation area
- Ensuring that new development is sympathetic to the special qualities and character of each conservation area
- Protecting the setting of the conservation area from development which adversely affects views into or out of the area
- The retention, maintenance and locally appropriate new planting of trees
- Maintaining and enhancing local features and details which contribute towards an area's local distinctiveness
- Working with the community to prepare schemes of enhancement
- Encouraging the removal of detractors to the special character of each conservation area

Contacts and advice

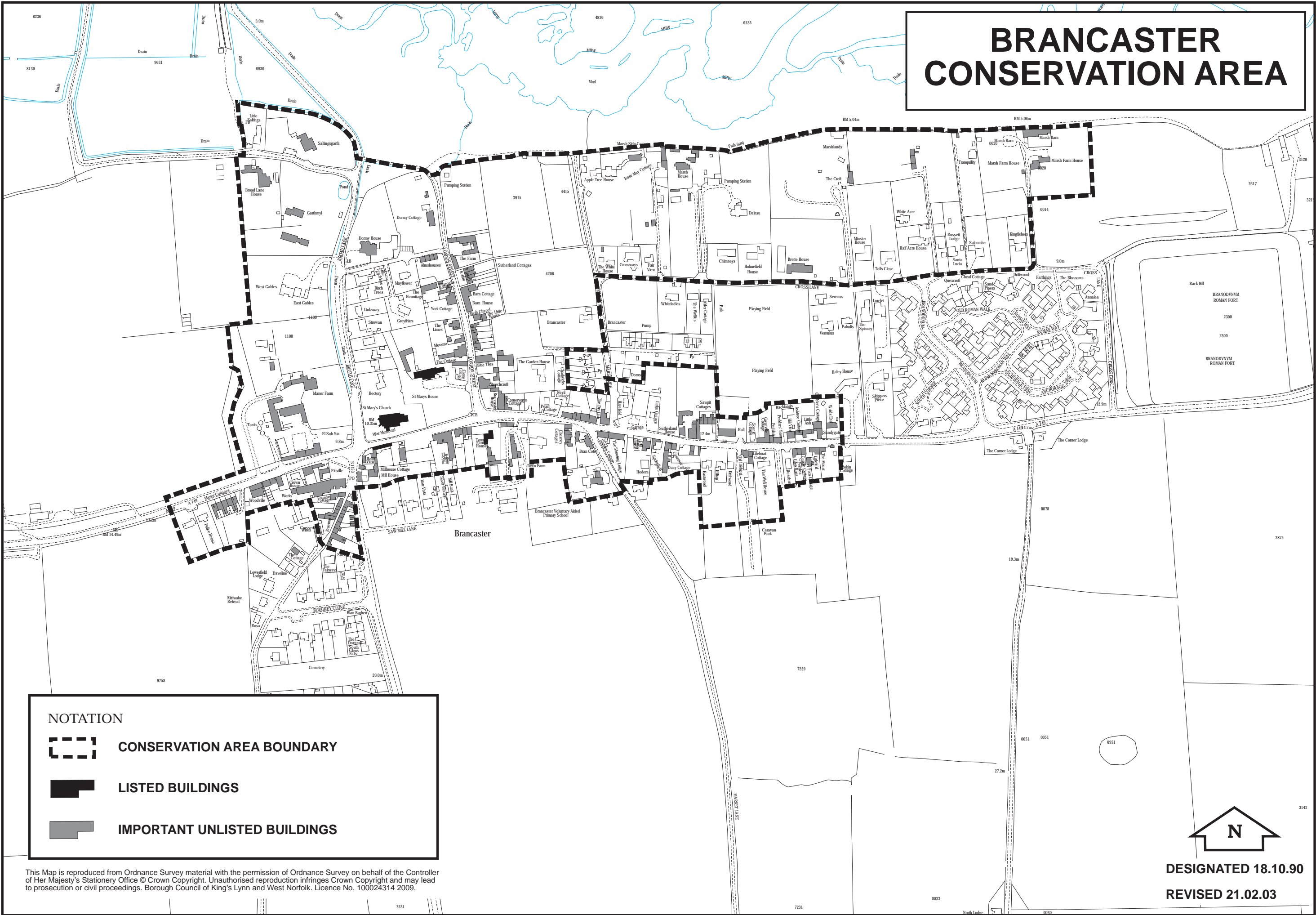
Within conservation areas, a number of special controls apply and it is advisable that anyone proposing to carry out new development, alteration, extensions, installations or demolition should seek advice from Development Services at an early stage. Special controls also apply to the trees and some may be subject to Tree Preservation Orders. Anyone wishing to carry out work to trees within a Conservation Area should therefore seek advice from Development Services.

Borough Council of
**King's Lynn &
West Norfolk**






**King's Court
Chapel Street
King's Lynn
Norfolk PE30 1EX
Tel: (01553) 692722
Fax: (01553) 691663
DX 57825 KING'S LYNN**

BRANCASTER CONSERVATION AREA



NOTATION

-  CONSERVATION AREA BOUNDARY
-  LISTED BUILDINGS
-  IMPORTANT UNLISTED BUILDINGS

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