

DOWNHAM MARKET

CONSERVATION AREA DRAFT CHARACTER STATEMENT



DOWNHAM MARKET is a neat and clean market town, consisting principally of two long and well built streets, pleasantly seated on the eastern acclivity of the vale of the Great Ouse, overlooking the marshes and fens and distant more than half a mile from the river; 11½ miles S. of Lynn, 13½ miles W. by S. of Swaffham, 13 miles E.S.E. of Wisbech and 84 miles N. by E. of London.

WILLIAM WHITE 1845

DESIGNATED: OCTOBER 1975



**PLANNING &
ENVIRONMENT**

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 Downham Market Conservation Area was designated in 1975. 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 recent Government Advice (PPG15) and it will eventually form supplementary planning guidance to those policies in the King's Lynn & West Norfolk Local Plan aimed at protecting the overall character of conservation areas. In particular, the guidance will supplement the Local Plan policies which deal with demolition and new development within the conservation area and new development on land adjoining the conservation area which might affect its setting or the views in or out of the area.

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

There are several intriguing mysteries surrounding the origins and historical development of Downham Market. The first relates to its origins. Downham is sited close to the large Roman village of Denver, linked via the Fens Causeway to sheep rearing and salt producing Imperial estate in the Fens. However, despite being located on the route of a possible Roman road, the origin of the settlement is probably early Anglo Saxon, the name being derived from "Don" meaning hill, and "Ham" meaning town - literally a town on a hill. The early Saxon 'ham' settlements (formed after the collapse of the Roman rule in Britain in AD 410) were often located on high ground, close to rivers, with burial grounds nearby. Downham, Wimbotsham and Crimplasham are located on high land on the eastern edge of the fen basin whereas nearby Fordham and West Dereham were more closely related to the fen itself.

The site of Downham commands long and extensive views over the fens to the west, affording advantages for access and defence. The site would have been even more advantageous if bordered by a navigable river. The first mystery concerns the status of any river which passed the early Downham settlement. It is accepted that much of the flow of the Wellestream, the ancient course of today's River Ouse which had its outfall to the Wash near Wisbech, was diverted to the estuary at King's Lynn by the late 13th Century. However, the date of the cut from Littleport to Stowbridge, which also diverted the River Ouse to King's Lynn, can only be the subject of speculation. Similarly it is not known whether the River Little Ouse flowed past Downham on its way to the Wash in the early Saxon period.

While little is known about the site during the Middle Saxon period, the trading advantages of the location were recognised by the early grant of market status. During the second half of the 10th Century, King Edgar granted the principal Manor of Downham to Oswald, the founder of Ramsey Abbey. A charter of 1053, granted by Edward the Confessor, confirms the right to a market and also entry to the town by land and water.

Following the Norman Conquest, William the Conqueror gave an estate in Downham to the powerful William de Warenne as thanks for his loyal support. Other land in Downham is believed to have been seized by Hermerus de Ferrer of Wormegay Castle. The settlement

then began slowly to establish itself. St Edmund's Church dates from the early 12th Century. In 1205, King John granted the Abbot of Ramsey the right to hold a fair at Downham and subsequently, Henry III granted the privilege to hang malefactors at a gallows in the town. The de Warenne line had ended in 1347 but the Abbey of Ramsey held the Manor until the dissolution of the monasteries, when it reverted to the Crown. It eventually passed to the Hare family of Stow Bardolph.



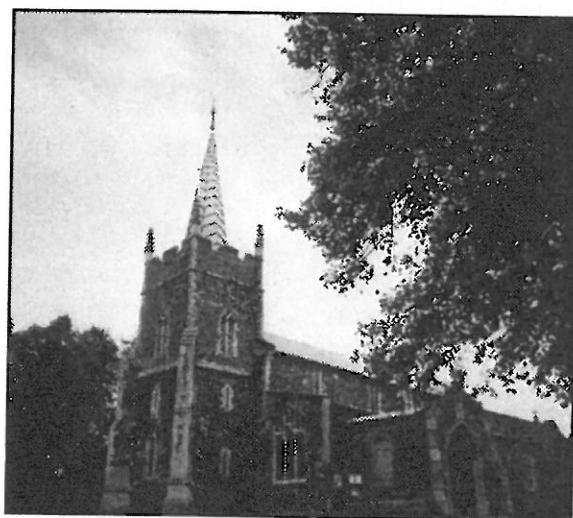
The 15th Century saw a growth of market towns in general and, although late, this may be the time that a planned extension was added to the original Saxon settlement of Downham. The layout of High Street, Bridge Street and the two back lanes which are now Paradise Road and Priory Road, suggests a medieval planned extension. To the east there may also be a deliberate pattern, with Bexwell Road and Howdale each serving a mill and enclosing the common. This is the second mystery. Although this street pattern appears planned, the reason for the layout and the period of its implementation would both benefit from further study.

The 15th Century may also have heralded improved communications for, in 1422, the Commission of Sewers ordered the construction of the new defence bank or Podike from Salters Lode along the Well Creek and this probably improved links with the western parishes of the Clackclose Hundred in the fens. In 1454 a large wooden bridge was leased by the Lord of the Manor of Stow Bridge to Bridge Reeves who kept it in good repair and took the tolls from everyone except tenants of the manor who were exempt. The Toll house was at the western end of the bridge and a large public house at the other, both belonging to the Reeves who also had the rights to several acres of land.

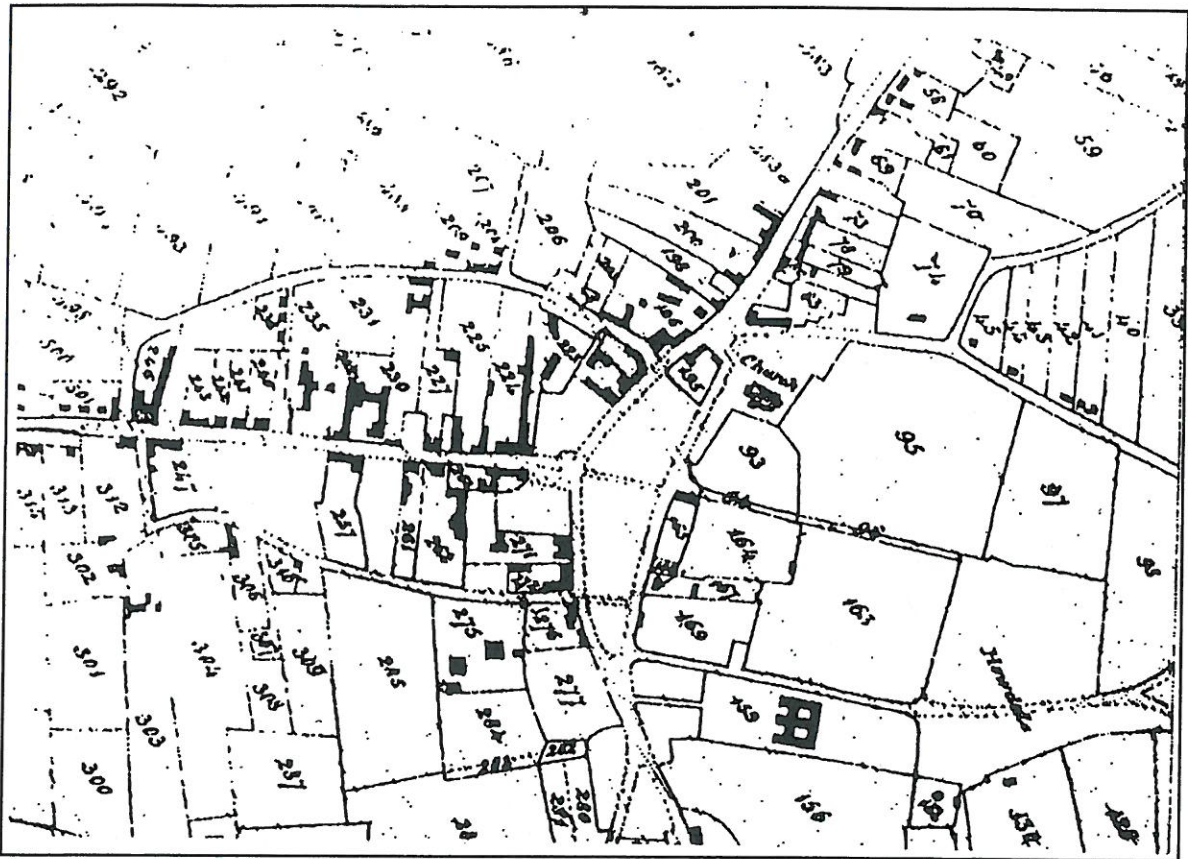
The town benefited from more improved communications to the south with the draining of the Middle Level of the fens by the "Bedford Adventurers" (1630-1653). The town continued to grow as evidenced by the fact that plain tiles from the substantial tile yards in Ely were brought for use on newly constructed buildings. Hill House Cottage bears the date 1655 and a public house, on the site now occupied by The Swan, is reputed to have played host to King Charles I in 1646 en-route from the Battle of Naseby.

The 18th Century gave Downham some of its finest buildings and these testify to the importance of the town which now had the benefit of good communications by both road and water. The Crown public house dates from 1700 and was a former coaching inn. Towards the end of the 18th Century the new Lynn-Ely Turnpike (Act of 1765) and the Wisbech-Fincham Turnpike (1772) further improved the ability to travel. In 1793, Downham is recorded as being a stopping point for the mail coach on the Lynn Turnpike.

By the mid 19th Century Downham remained one of only a dozen or so markets left in Norfolk. William White, in his 1845 Directory, notes that the markets "have greatly declined during the present century, owing to the increase of those at Lynn, Wisbech and Swaffham". He also noted that the town had doubled in population from 1,512 people in 1801 to 2,953 in 1841.



The 1841 Tithe Map of Downham Market is contemporary with White's 1845 Directory. It poses a third mystery. The heart of the town centre, as we know it today, appears open. There is hardly any building on the eastern side of the High Street or on the steeply sloping land



to the west of Church Road. By today's standards the town is small, and laid out loosely about the extremely spacious 'T' junction of the "two, long and well built streets" described by William White (these appear to be Bridge Street/Railway Road and Broomhill/Church Road/London Road). Was this large open area the site for the markets - linked to the Howdale open space to the east? Many of the Norfolk market places were well enclosed by tightly packed development by the mid 19th Century and their original areas had often been reduced by encroachments. Faden's Map of 1797 shows some buildings on the north side and east side of the Market Place and what is now the High Street, although this must be treated with some caution.

If the 1841 Tithe Map is an accurate representation of the position of the buildings and spaces, the centre of Downham, as we know it today, is very much a Victorian creation. The central part of the Market Place had been occupied by a row of buildings comprising cottages, a slaughter house and shops. Following an Act of Parliament in 1835, Improvement Commissioners were appointed with powers to clear the area in the interests of paving, lightwatching and improving the town. It would appear that a huge effort was made to develop and enclose the centre of the town and that other sites in the town were also

developed. Poor Law Unions centred on market towns for the joint financing of workhouses and one had been built on the Howdale Road in the 1830's. The National School was built in 1841 and in the same year the savings bank opened.

The railway came to Downham in 1847 and a new industrial area of mills and maltings, which still exist, grew up around the station, together with associated terraced cottages for the industrial workers. The existing timber bridge over the River Great Ouse was replaced by an iron bridge in 1879, providing a better road link from the Fens to the station and the town. As a result of increasing trade, dwellings and small shops were developed close to the station.

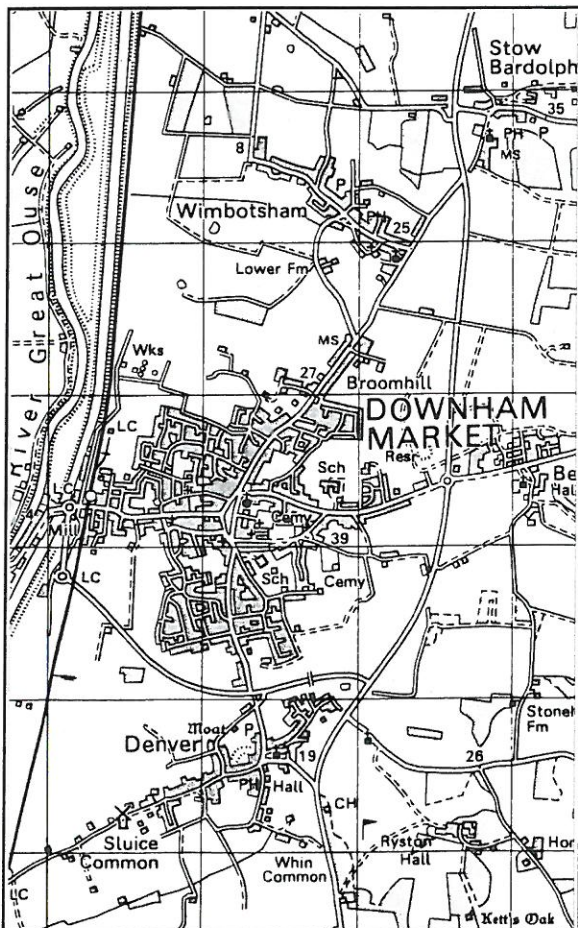
It is interesting to note the size and importance of Downham's historic markets and fairs. White's Directory of 1845 records three large fairs for cattle and horses. The first, he says, was held on March 3rd St Winwoloe's Day, and this had relocated to Downham from the Manor of Winwall in Wereham. The others were held on May 8th and November 13th. Hirings for servants were held on the Saturday a fortnight before, and the Saturday after, Old Michaelmas Day. At The Green (Railway Road), cattle were tethered when being brought to market or when the grazing pastures by the river were flooded. The River Great Ouse had quays for the grain

and brewery trade. Butter was sold at the market held every Monday near the bridge, and then sent on by river again to Cambridge and then to London, where it was sold as Cambridge butter. However, by 1809 Swaffham had become the main butter market making the one held in Downham obsolete. The butter market and St Winnold's Fair are both commemorated on the Town Sign.

By the late 19th Century, Downham had achieved urban district status. This was reflected in buildings such as the imposing Town Hall (1887) on the western side of the Market Place which was used amongst other things as a Corn Exchange. The new centre had the visual focus of the fine Clock Tower, presented by Mr James Scott in 1878.

SETTING AND LOCATION

The market town of Downham Market is situated 21 kilometres (13 miles) south of King's Lynn, 21 kilometres (13 miles) south-east of Wisbech and 24 kilometres (15 miles) south-west of Swaffham near the junction of the A10 King's Lynn to London trunk road and the A1122 Wisbech to Swaffham road.



There are long views of Downham Market when approaching the town from the fens in the west, but the feeling of entering a town begins after crossing the Flood Relief Channel and the railway line. Similarly, the historic core of the

town cannot be grasped when approaching it along the pleasant roads from the north or south. From the east, Bexwell Road sets the scene for the historic core, being lined with impressive Victorian and Edwardian villas. Development of the same period on the Broomhill and Denver road stretches for only some 300 metres. The conservation area contains the heart of the town - the historical core of Downham Market, the approaches of Railway Road and Bexwell Road, and the Howdale - a key open space in the town.

The site of Downham Market slopes down from an elevated ridge in the east to flat and level fens in the west. The elevated position of the churchyard affords sweeping views across the open fenland to the west and the sloping site creates the basis for the attractive and lively shopping centre.

CHARACTER OVERVIEW

Downham Market has the distinctive sense of place so typical of Norfolk market towns - a character that immediately sets it apart from the surrounding villages. This character derives from the historical importance of the market town, the advantages of its siting, the design and layout of its streets and buildings and the use of traditional building materials coupled with a wealth of interesting architectural detailing.

Individual parts of the town have developed contrasting identities - each being strong and consistent in their own right. The historic core has a distinctive 'T' plan form which is now focused on the Market Place. This contrasts

with the palatial character of the large Victorian/Edwardian decorative villas - especially along Bexwell Road and west of the Howdale.



Then there is the 'village green or common' feel of the Howdale - a similar character can be experienced in The Green on Railway Road. Finally, and in total contrast, there is the bygone, "industrial feel" of Railway Road with the impact of the mill buildings and the station.

There are also many individual themes that contribute to the character of the Downham Market Conservation Area. These include the:

- Traditional shopfronts and signs in the main commercial centre.
- Interesting focal features - the stone obelisk from the former town pump (Howdale), the Victorian Clock Tower (Market Place), and the War Memorial.



- Importance of interesting architectural detailing - dutch, hipped and gabled roofs, dormer attics, large, chimney stacks with pots, vertical sliding sash windows, friezes, mouldings under the eaves, decorative glazed panels in windows and doors, gargoyles, doorcases, metalwork - verandahs, porches, railings, brackets, bands of contrasting brick, brick bays, some parapets.
- Networks of narrow alleys/passageways and footpaths running between buildings and their yards.
- Traditional carstone boundary walls with brick buttresses/turrets, often topped with tar.



Downham Market has the lively, commercial feel of a small market town serving a large part of the rural area of West Norfolk. It is a very busy town especially on Fridays and Saturdays when the market adds to its vitality. It is a service centre with a good range of professional services and offices. It is also a centre for social, community and health services, and for leisure and sporting activities.

The appearance of most buildings and spaces suggest that Downham Market is well cared for and that there is pride in the appearance and performance of the town centre. Both the Town Council and the Downham Market & District Amenity Society have championed the need to conserve the architectural and historic importance of the town while wishing to sustain the vitality and viability of the lively centre. Effective partnerships are planning to deliver the regeneration and revitalisation of the town centre.

SPACES AND BUILDINGS

The historic core

In general terms, the established character of the historic core is created by the interaction of five basic elements: two and three storey buildings, pitched roofs, buildings set mainly along the back edge of the pavement, a well designed relationship between building walls and spaces including their windows, and the use of a limited range of materials. The historic core is best studied by referring to its key spaces and describing the buildings and other elements that form them.

These are:

- The Market Place
- High Street (north and south)
- Bridge Street
- Paradise Road and Priory Road
- Cannon Square and Church Road
- The alleys and yards of the historic core

The **Market Place** is the visual focal point of the historic core of Downham Market. This focus is strengthened by the siting of the ornate Victorian Clock Tower which catches the eye when approaching the Square from either end of High Street or Bridge Street. The principal street façades are detailed to emphasise the importance of this Square to the Town. Although the majority of the buildings are two storey - set on the back edge of the pavement, there is a good sense of enclosure. This is helped by curves in the streets leading into the square with the added interest of buildings which deflect the eye to the space beyond. The strong sense of enclosure is also helped by the sheer bulk of the impressive Victorian Town Hall which dominates the western end of the Square.



On Fridays and Saturdays, when the market is set out in the Square, this is the liveliest part of the Town. During other days the Square is used for car parking and it has been enhanced to reduce the impact of this. Although the Square itself is offset, the rhythm and continuity of the space can be disrupted by the flow of traffic coming up Bridge Street and turning into one of the arms of the High Street. This is particularly the case with large, heavy goods vehicles which intimidate pedestrians using the Square, obscuring the townscape and allowing little time to appreciate the qualities of the area.

High Street (North) has the character of a typical Norfolk market town shopping street which, while creating a commercial vitality, demonstrates that care has been taken to keep the harmony and continuity of the traditional shopfronts. This street curves gently away from the Market Place. The Castle Hotel with its three storey back-drop, provides a firm end stop to the initial space which is tightly enclosed, helped by the height and scale of the former cinema (now the Antiques Centre).



The use of colourwash on the buildings lightens the streetscape and the battlemented parapet is an interesting feature. The impact of traffic is noticeable in this street and the mini-roundabout has resulted in some signage clutter. There is an unfortunate gap in the western frontage which is used for car parking. This creates a loss of enclosure. Beyond the Castle Hotel the street opens out into Cannon Square.

High Street (South). Again, lively shopfronts are set along a very narrow street which has a good sense of enclosure. The different heights of the buildings create an irregular roofscape and the high dutch gables and imposing façade of the Marchant's building contributes to the

interest of the street. Some congestion can occur as traffic tries to pass the on-street parking. At the southern end of the street, part of Priory House is seen and provides strong deflection towards the war memorial square.



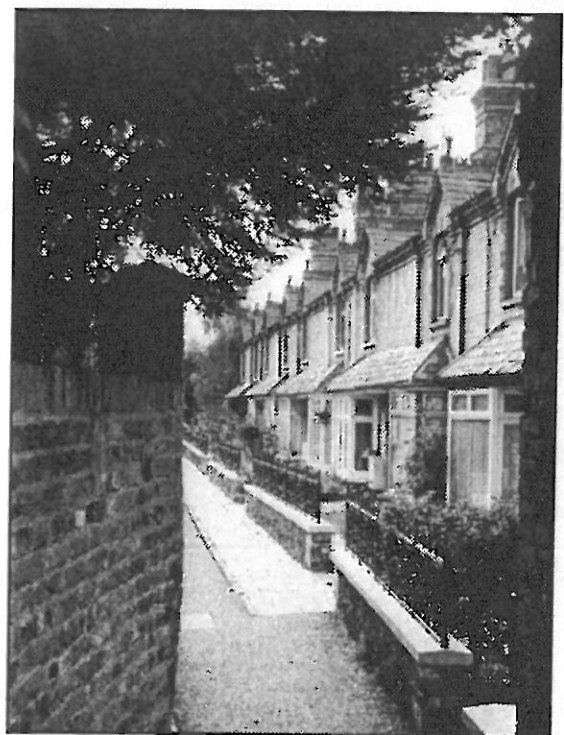
Bridge Street sweeps majestically downhill from the Market Place towards the fens. It twists and then curves away a little to the north west, enclosing the street. The view back to the Market Place is also well enclosed, the tall buildings creating a "canyon" effect. At the eastern end, the Town Hall dominates the scene. Other tall and prominent buildings include the large frontage of the furniture store on the south side. The car park by the Town Hall is visually intrusive creating a loss of enclosure on the street frontage. The same effect is found along the southern frontage of the Hollies car park although a landscaping and enhancement scheme has been carried out to mitigate against this.



At the western end, towards the bottom of the hill, where the street is lined with two-storey development, the curve of the road creates interest and enclosure in both directions. The overhead wires are noticeable, while to the west, the townscape appears to be softer with landscaping more predominant. The use of colourwash on the buildings helps to lighten the street scene. The red and white traffic barrier is incongruous and the presence of through traffic and on-street car parking detracts from the quality of this part of the street.

Paradise Road and Priory Road are both narrow back lanes which now play an important role in circulating traffic around the town centre. Aspects of the townscape of these streets are good, particularly the eastern section of Paradise Road as it rises up to meet the High Street with a view of the Church spire, or the 17th Century Priory House at the junction of Priory Road/London Road, and the courtyard/green effect of the modern bungalows set opposite the fine terrace of carstone cottages on Priory Road.

Nevertheless, there is always the sense of being at the back or on the edge of the centre. This feeling is compounded by the alleys and yards leading to Bridge Street and the dominance of the backs or servicing arrangements of the Bridge Street shops - Wales' Court, Harry Reeds, The Hollies Car Park serving the huge Somerfield Store, and the back entrance to the Crown Inn. However, Priory Terrace, off Priory Road, shows a fine unity and good architectural detailing. Overall,



the townscape of these roads lacks a strong theme and is consequently somewhat disjointed.

Cannon Square and Church Road. Cannon Square should provide an important visual gateway when approaching the town centre from the north or east; certainly the western side of the Square contains some fine townscape with two, long terraces of buildings of varying styles. However, the Square lost its entire eastern sides in a 1960's junction improvement. Now this is a large traffic junction dominated by signs, poles and traffic lights with an expanse of tarmac bordered by hard islands and verges. St Edmund's Church, set within the mature tree planting of the churchyard, rises above the Square in the east, but the harsh, alien presence of the concrete retaining wall along Church Road completely dominates the scene. Some of the best views in Downham Market are gained looking westwards from the churchyard, over the rooftops of the shops and houses to the fens beyond. Church Road rises up over the hill slope and has a somewhat disjointed character - the 1960's road widened with the Church and wall on the east and the backs of buildings and yards of the High Street on the west. The landscaped verges help to enhance the scene by making it more cohesive. The War Memorial square, at the junction of London Road, Church Road and Howdale Road, is well enclosed and laid out. This space, with its carefully sited seating, allows for peaceful contemplation, despite the proximity of passing traffic.

The Alleys and Yards of the Historic Core are an essential part of the character of Downham Market and a vital link with its medieval past. Some have the advantage of sloping sites providing considerable interest and a sense of possible adventure - particularly when they link to the main streets by archways. Unfortunately the appearance of some of the alleyways is one of untidiness and neglect.

Railway Road

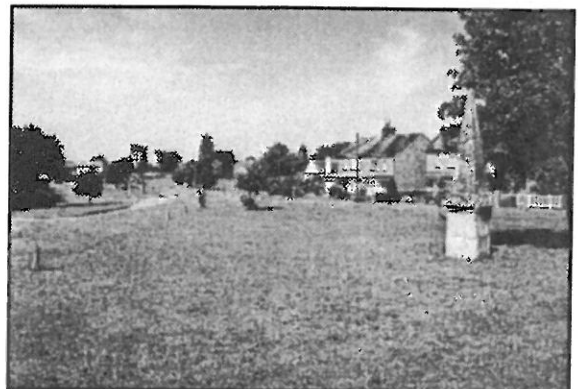
Railway Road curves gently away from the centre to the railway station to form two distinct enclosed spaces. From Bridge Street, the first space is dominated by the rural character of the Green, the interesting Dial House and the complex range of 18th Century buildings. The Green is a comparatively wide space with a line of pollarded mature trees. The south side has some interesting buildings including two single storey cottages with mansard, pantiled roofs. To the west, the road curves out of view to

create a solid end stop to this space. As Railway Road snakes into the second space, this soon assumes the character of Victorian industrial Downham Market. While there is a good quality of townscape and enclosure here, this part of Downham Market has a busy, functional feel, which is given emphasis by the presence of the railway and the flour mill (set just outside the Conservation Area).



The Howdale

The Howdale provides a complete contrast to the high density, tightly enclosed streets found elsewhere within the Conservation Area. This large, spacious open area is bisected by Howdale Road and has a gentle, rolling character reminiscent of a village green or common. The semi-mature planting will eventually give it the area more of a "parkland" feel. The size of the space tends to dominate the development set about it although the bungalows on the raised southern edge detract from the overall appearance of the area. The unmade access tracks add much to the informality of its character. At the western end of the Howdale, the listed 18th Century long carstone wall with its distinctive round piers adds to the amenity of this green space. The stone obelisk located in the east is part of the old town pump, relocated here from the Market Place in 1935.



Bexwell Road

Bexwell Road is a residential area forming part of the main east-west route through Downham Market and, as such, is subject to moderate traffic flows. Although there are modern houses, the older properties are mostly Edwardian with decorative detailing. Low front boundary walls, some incorporating brick gate piers, are a consistent feature along Bexwell Road. At the eastern end of the conservation area, large detached "villas" arc behind a lay-by, and the street appears wider as a consequence. The gradient of the road drops as it curves downhill towards Cannon Square and the character changes as properties become smaller and tighter with the canopies of mature trees dominating the general street scene.



London Road and Ryston End

London Road is the main road into the centre of Downham Market from the south. Large detached properties set back behind front gardens with low boundary walls and mature trees, characterise the entry to the conservation area. The interesting detail of the Old Court House, with its sculptured royal arms, provides strong deflection towards the centre of the town. The area close to the war memorial has the feel of being dominated by road junctions. Changes in gradient are also evident here as Church Road forks uphill and London Road continues downhill towards the High Street. The mature tree in front of the row of carstone properties facing Court Gardens and sited end-on to London Road, is significant in the street scene. Salamanca House, one of the older properties in Downham and with interesting window panel arches and general symmetry, is prominently located at the junction of Ryston Road and London Road. Ryston Road/End is narrow with no footpaths and enclosed by buildings at its northern end. The Masonic Hall and former Headmaster's House are distinct buildings. The

character changes beyond the terraced properties. Modern bungalows are set well back behind wide verges and hedges and are hardly seen as the avenue of trees and long, tar topped boundary wall of the school playing fields are the dominant characteristics of this leafy lane.



LISTED BUILDINGS

There are 172 listed buildings in the conservation area which are included in a revised Statutory List of 1972. St Edmund's Church is the only grade I listing and it dates from the 13th Century with development in the 14th and 15th Centuries. There are no grade II* listings.

There are too many listed buildings to identify and describe individually in this statement but there are a number of significant features which contribute to the townscape quality of Downham Market:

- The greatest number of listed buildings are 18th or early 19th Century with a fairly solid appearance, vertical sliding sash windows, and modest but attractive doors and doorcases.



- There are several terraces of small houses listed. They are generally built of local materials, particularly dark brown carstone with buff brick dressings under slate or pantiled roofs.
- The largest concentration of listed buildings is in the town centre. Many were originally houses which have become shops and other commercial premises. Many have colourwashed render or painted brick exteriors.
- There are a number of boundary walls listed. These vary in height and length but tend to be of carstone construction with buff brick quoins.

Distribution of listed buildings by road:

Bennett Street: 15

Bexwell Road: Outbuildings to W. of 1, North Boundary wall to 1, Nos 3 and 5.

Bridge Street: 10, Crown Inn, 14, 16, 16B + wall, 20, 24A, 28, 34 & 34A, 38, 40, 42, 44, 60, 64, 82, 84, Town Hall, 15, 17, 23, 25, 27, 47, 49, 51, 53, 55, 57, 59, 61, Former Methodist Chapel, library + wall, 71,

Cannon Square: The Square Garage, wall to north of St Edmund's Church

Church Road: 15 to 19

High Street: 1A, 1B, 1C, 3, 5, 13 & 13A, 15, 17, 19, 33, 35, 37, 39, 45, 47, 53, 55, 57 (Cannon House), 2, 4, 8, 10, 12, 26, 28, 30, 32, 34, 36, 38, 48, 50, Castle Hotel, 52, 54, 56

The Howdale: Obelisk, east wall of grounds of The Towers

Howdale Road: 10,

London Road: Former Methodist Church, 5, 7, 17 - 23(odd), 25, pair of lodge buildings, magistrates' court, 31, 33, masonic hall, 4, 6 + wall to west

Lynn Road: 19 - 25(odd), 27, 29 - 33(odd)

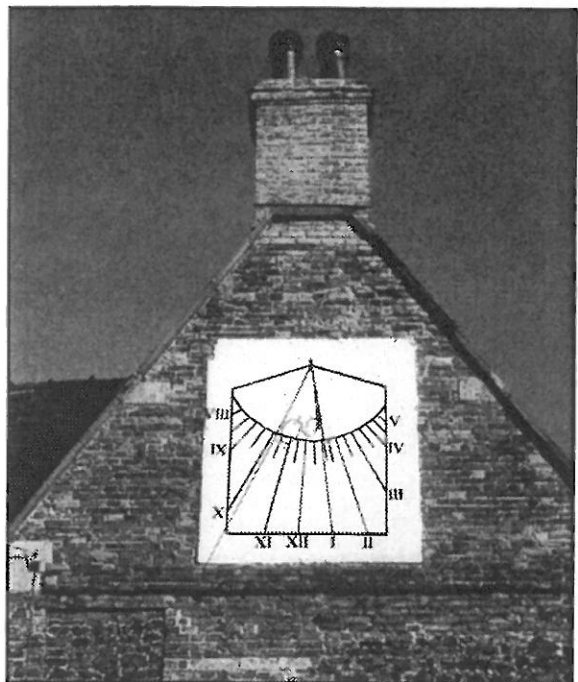
Market Place: 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, clock tower, 11, 12, 13

Paradise Road: 17, front wall to ex-service men's club, 21, workshop to 21, 32 - 38(even), 52, 54

Priory Road: Front garden wall to Priory House, 39, 41, 49, 44 - 56(even)

Railway Road: 12 (Dial House & barn) + boundary wall, former maltings attached to Dial House, 42 (Laburnham House) + boundary wall, railway station, 7, 9, 11, 35 - 39(odd), 43, 45, 61 - 73(odd), 75, 77 - 87(odd)

Ryston Road: Former Head Master's House



There are a number of significant individual grade II listed buildings and these are:

- **The Crown Inn, Bridge Street** - 17th Century in brick and flint with a tiled/slatted roof
- **The Town Hall, Bridge Street** - Imposing Victorian municipal architecture of 1887
- **Bank House, Bridge Street** - 18th Century, 3 storey town house with Doric porch
- **Nelson House, Bridge Street** - 18th Century house with an impressive 19th Century shop front
- **Former Methodist Church, Bridge Street** - 1859, a substantial townscape element
- **The National Westminster Bank, High Street** - 18th Century pedimented frontage but much altered
- **No. 57 High Street** - a tall early 18th Century town house in local materials, with a delightful Edwardian conservatory visible from Cannon Square
- **Marchants, 8 - 12 High Street** - Flamboyant 17th Century stuccoed building with two Dutch gables
- **Lloyds Bank, High Street** - 18th-19th Century a dramatic bank frontage with a

corner segmental open pedimented main doorway opening into the Market Place

- **The Castle Hotel, High Street** - 18th Century with an earlier core. Aggressive whitewashed frontage in "vermiculate rustications".
- **Former Magistrates' Court, London Road** - 1861, buff brick construction with stuccoed dressings and slate roofs. Attached police house at rear.



- **The Priory, London Road** - 17th Century with later additions. Brick and carstone building in a prominent corner location. 17th Century boundary wall to side and rear also listed.
- **Clock Tower, Market Place** - 1878 by William Cunliffe of London. Cast iron in Gothic style comprising an octagonal base and shaft with ornamental panels. A brightly coloured focal point to the town, much used as a "town logo".
- **Dial House and Maltings, Railway Road** - 18th Century complex of a former maltings with owner's house attached - now in separate ownership. Picturesque in the street scene.
- **Railway Station, Railway Road** - 1846, single storey Dutch gabled principal building in "slip" carstone with buff brick dressings under red plain tiled roof.

IMPORTANT UNLISTED BUILDINGS

Of the unlisted historic buildings, 332 make a particularly positive contribution towards the character of the conservation area. This represents about 67 per cent of the total number of buildings in the conservation area. The important 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

Downham Market has continued to grow during the 20th Century, and in particular, the Relief Channel was cut between 1955-60, the southern bypass in 1984 and the eastern bypass in 1972.

Pockets of modern development are interspersed throughout the conservation area in terms of housing and commercial premises. The developments with the greatest visual impact are Wales Court shopping precinct, the bus station, and the Somerfield supermarket complex with its large, open car park.



Although the new Tesco supermarket and library court development on Priory Road is outside the conservation area it will have a significant visual impact on the townscape of the centre. It will also change the pedestrian circulation pattern through the town.

TRADITIONAL MATERIALS

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

These materials include :

- Dark brown carstone (sandstone with a high percentage of oxidised iron) laid randomly in lumps, coursed (with or without "galletting" ie small pieces pressed into the mortar joints) and slithers of layered carstone known as "slip" work which is back-mortared (ie - no mortar showing on the face)
- Pudding stone - an ironstone conglomerate, seen particularly at St Edmund's Church
- Yellow London Stock brick

- Pink/buff brick, manufactured from the local Gault clay beds (no longer in production), often used as detailing courses to carstone walling.
- Norfolk orange/red pantiles
- Clay pegtiles
- Welsh slate



ARCHEOLOGICAL INTEREST

There are no Scheduled Ancient Monuments in Downham Market conservation area, but there are 19 sites where archeological 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. The services as a town as a rural market centre has brought some environmental problems which impact on the conservation area. Heavy lorries still move right through the heart of the centre and there are seas of parked cars when the town is busy.



Features which detract significantly from its intrinsic character include:

- Unsympathetic modern shopfronts and signs.
- Some loss of enclosure caused by gaps in the street elevation, resulting in some weaknesses in the definition of the street scene - spatial "voids" - demolition gaps in the town fabric. Essentially car parking areas and forecourts.
- Some of the major post war developments detract from the local distinctiveness of the town as seen in the conservation area by virtue of their inappropriate scale, massing, and elements of design.
- The materials used for the retaining wall along the Church Street detract from the setting of this important building and this part of town.
- Poor quality of important spaces such as Cannon Square.
- The clutter of the street scene caused by traffic signs.
- The intrusion caused by the proliferation of overhead wires, both telephone and electricity supply.



CONSERVATION OBJECTIVES

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, whether listed or not
- 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

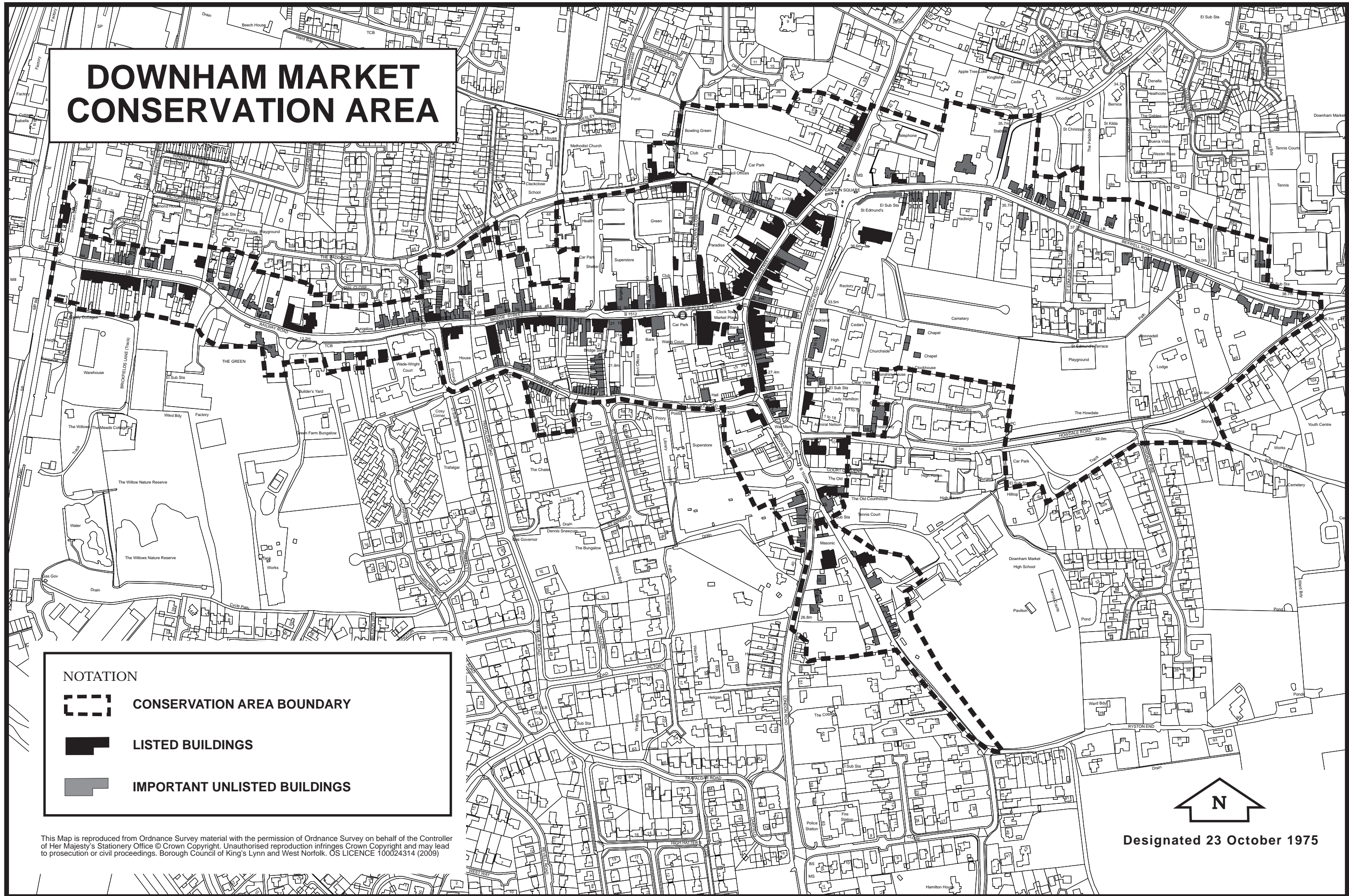
Within conservation areas, a number of special controls apply and it is advisable that anyone proposing to carry out new development, alterations, extensions, installations or demolition should seek advice from the Planning Department at an early stage. Special controls also apply to the trees and some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






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DOWNHAM MARKET CONSERVATION AREA



NOTATION

-  CONSERVATION AREA BOUNDARY
-  LISTED BUILDINGS
-  IMPORTANT UNLISTED BUILDINGS

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