



# Burnham Norton

## Conservation Area

### Character Statement

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*BURNHAM NORTON, 1 mile N. of Burnham Market, is a parish, with a small humble village in a gentle ascent above the marshes. The church is above half a mile south of the village, on the western acclivity of a fertile valley.*

**WILLIAM WHITE 1845**

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## 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 Burnham Norton Conservation Area was first designated in 1977. This document highlights the special qualities that 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 includes 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 type of assessment has been encouraged by Government Advice and the character statement has been adopted by the Borough Council as policy.

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

## Setting and Location



The hamlet of Burnham Norton, 18km east of Hunstanton, 10km west of Wells-next-the-Sea and 18km north of Fakenham, lies within the North Norfolk Coast AONB. The settlement is strung out along a minor road known as The Street that runs north from the A149 main coast road. It is situated on a spur of slightly higher ground above the grazing marshes of the Burn valley to the east. At its northern end

The Street slopes gently down to the marshes, turns abruptly westwards in the shape of Marsh Lane and curves round to rejoin the A149.



The best position to appreciate Burnham Norton's exposed and isolated position is from St Margaret's churchyard a mile to the south. From here there are commanding views in all directions with the warm orange pantile roofscape of the village spread out below along The Street with the marshes beyond.



The best approach along the A149 is from the east where, from Burnham Overy windmill, the land falls away and across the meadows the full extent of Burnham Norton

is clearly visible with Marsh Farm an outlier of habitation at the most northerly point. Further along on the causeway beyond the watermill, the irregular roofline comes more clearly into focus across reed fringed water meadows, broken only by groups of mature trees in the grounds of the few larger houses such as Norton Hall Farm.

## Origins and Historical Development

Recent archaeological finds within the parish have added significantly to our knowledge of the origins and changing pattern of settlement in Burnham Norton. The proximity of Branodunum to the west and the Romano British fort in the marshes at Holkham led to increasing activity along the intervening stretch of coast road. At the foot of the hill, north of St Margaret's Church, a wide scatter of Romano British pottery was discovered in the early 1980's near the road, together with a concentration of flint rubble that suggested the site of a single building.



Today Burnham Norton church stands isolated on a ridge of higher ground between the Burn valley to the east and its tributary,

Goose Beck, to the south, but marks the site of the original village. Burnham Norton was not mentioned separately in the Domesday Book but was probably one of the outlying hamlets of Breccles Manor. The Manor's exact whereabouts is not known but it owned a salt pan on Norton marshes and most of the parish. St Margaret's round tower with its round headed windows survives from the original building and suggests a foundation in the late 11th century but the doorway into the nave could well be Anglo Saxon, the nearest parallel being at Burnham Deepdale.

Recent archaeological finds from the field opposite the church on the east side of Bellamy's Lane provide evidence of a remarkable sequence of activity from prehistoric flints through to the medieval period with a preponderance of pottery and bronze fittings from the pagan Saxon period. The claim for this area to represent the site of the first village is strengthened by the site of the Carmelite Friary a few hundred metres further east on the edge of the water meadows. The area between the Friary and the church, linked by an ancient trackway, has proved rich in Saxon and medieval finds - buckles, brooches, strap and book fittings, coins and finger rings, as well as pottery sherds that provide a glimpse of life in the Middle Ages.

Founded in 1241 by Sir William de Calthorpe, the original monastic site of the White Friars was at Bradmere (Broad mere or shallow lake) on the edge of the marshes near the parish boundary with Burnham Deepdale. By 1253 it was granted a licence to enlarge but chose to forsake what must have been a most inhospitable location for a more accessible site by the river Burn. The discovery of a spring or Holy well nearby may also have made the move more attractive.

The abandonment of the settlement on the hill and the move north to its present position happened gradually over several centuries but had probably begun by the 14th century. The initial impetus may have been the silting up of the river Burn, once navigable as far as Burnham Thorpe, the growth of Burnham Market nearby and the effects of Tudor sheep farming. The centre of economic activity shifted downstream to Burnham Overy Staithe and a smaller staithe on the edge of Norton marshes.



A petition in 1646 from the poor fishermen of the Burnhams claimed that the enclosure of the salt marshes had deprived them of their common rights, had impounded their cattle and stopped up their havens so that their boats could not reach home. This is clear evidence that the marshes were being drained by the 17th century and the earliest buildings along The Street - Norton Hall Farmhouse and several cottages - date from this period.

This process gathered pace during the early 19th century with the help of Thomas Telford, the canal builder. Faden's map of 1793 shows the network of creeks draining Norton marshes and a short length of embankment but 33 years later Bryant's map shows the

great sweep of raised bank from Burnham Deepdale to Burnham Overy mill that survives today, with fresh marshes on the landward side and salt marshes beyond. The village grew with this new agricultural prosperity; Norton Hall Farm became the main employer and its workforce lived in labourer's cottages. In this way the shape and character of the village was established by c1850.

## Character Overview



Tucked away off the busy coast road, the character of Burnham Norton is that of a quiet rural hamlet with a loose knit plan form strung out along a country lane.

The buildings are predominantly 19th century farm labourers' cottages and agricultural buildings constructed of clunch, flint and clay pantiles and linked by low roadside walls.



Today there are a small number of new build properties and the stock of traditional architecture has largely been converted into weekend and retirement cottages, often quite tastefully, but the decline in agricultural employment and associated trades has left Burnham Norton rather deserted during the winter months.

## Spaces and Buildings



Approaching the village from the south off the A149 the cluster of cottages in the angle between the two roads is a prelude to the main body of Burnham Norton. Separated from it by the grounds of Norton Hall Farm, this domestic group establishes the form and character of the Conservation Area. The

mixture of red brick, clunch and flint rubble walls is knit together by a single roof material - orange clay tiles.



The spaces are defined by cottages either in pairs or short terraces. Some are set alongside the road, others running at right angles to it. These are separated by small front gardens bordered by neat privet hedges and low, coped brick walls. The overall effect is attractive and small scale, spoilt only by some badly proportioned replacement windows.

Immediately beyond, the road curves gently, lined on the western side by a tall thorn hedge and on the other, by a hedge and low wall beyond which the meadow slopes down gently to the ditch, marking the edge of the grazing marsh.



The views are extensive across the wide mouth of the Burn valley to the low hills beyond and the outline of Burnham Overy windmill. Ahead the view into the village is framed by mature horse chestnuts and holm oak overhanging a roadside wall in brick and chalk rubble; this strong linear feature defines the entrance to Norton Hall Farm.



In the absence of a rectory or small country house, Norton Hall farmhouse is the one building of real distinction. Set back with its view framed by large trees including one huge holm oak, its 17th century origins are evident in a steeply pitched roof and range of leaded cross casements. The sashes, delicate portico and black glazed pantiles



which in North Norfolk were only ever used on larger houses, are all part of its 18th century gentrification.

The Norton Hall complex of farm buildings is arranged around a courtyard north of the house. Its main contribution to the street scene is in the form of long low red brick and clunch rubble buildings flanking the road with their ubiquitous pantile roofs.



A little further along the road on the eastern side, the first visible group of farm buildings runs downhill towards the marsh. Gable end to the road, the most notable is a weather boarded granary/cartshed and smaller single storey agricultural buildings beyond.



Next on the east side stands a 17th century flint cottage, the roof of which was raised in the early 19th century. Because of another slight realignment of the road, it juts out and catches the eye, helped by the red K6 telephone box tucked into its gable end. The interest here is still very much on the east side of the road with more views out across gardens between cottages to the marshes.



Rooflights and chimney stacks are clear evidence of barns discreetly converted. With simply detailed openings they sit attractively downslope, each in its own open paddock. Further along The Street on the east side, the same pattern of gable end cottages emerging from a line of telegraph poles and intervening garden trees is repeated with subtle variations.



Prince of Wales House is another 17th century survival in clunch with coped gables and most rear windows bricked up against the infamous north wind. The use of brown stained joinery does little to highlight the traditional pattern of sash windows. The next terrace is early 19th century in warm red brick, its long roofline broken by coped parapet gables and chimneys; the overall effect spoilt by small pane 'neo Georgian' replacements for the original casements.

Moving northwards from Hall Farm Buildings, the character of the western side of the road changes with Creek Cottage followed by two pairs of Local Authority housing set back from the road, although the low brick walls to the front gives a sense of continuity.



Next along The Street, 'The Step' is an interesting modern re-work. This is followed by undistinguished, modern houses set back from the road, before 'The Dunlins', much restored in brick and clunch, sits hard onto the road and brings some definition to the lane again.



Opposite the Local Authority housing on the eastern side is an open square, framed by a modern terrace of chalk and brick cottages. No.7 opposite has a coursed cobble gable which is a trademark of 17th century work. Its raised parapet, flint garden wall and catslide dormers are an attractive combination of traditional details set against a backcloth of beech, scots pine and holm oak in the grounds of Norton Lodge. To the south, the square is closed by a single modern house in traditional materials which takes its proportion and detail from the cottages.



Interest finally switches back to the west side of the lane as it makes one last realignment. The blank brick gable of Marshgate asserts itself briefly but hidden behind tall sculptured hedges, this white-washed cottage and its neighbour, Norton Cottage, further up the driveway, are more private.



On the east side is Norton Lodge. A tile-hung, 1930's house, it is important for its mature grounds rather than its architectural contribution. Most notable is the row of pollarded lime trees alongside the road, a strong linear feature that defines the view ahead as The Street curves and drops down to a sudden view of the open marsh.



The view here is expansive across a wide area of flat grazing marshes with Marsh Farm, an isolated and attractive group of buildings including one 3 stead clunch barn at the end of a track lined by thorn bushes. To the right (east) is a short unmade up road leading to 'The Stable Flat', now a separate dwelling, and the paths across the marsh.

Marsh Lane running east-west alongside the meadows is lined on the landward side by a mixture of detached houses with mature planting including some very tall conifers.



Only at the far end is some greater definition achieved by brick and clunch cottages hard by the road, before it curves back between fields to rejoin the A149.



This last section of the Conservation Area is memorable for one outstanding neo-vernacular house, recently completed. St Anthony's Cottage, a sizeable L shaped house in flint and red brick with dormers, has an impressive wing with a cruciform pattern of square chalk blocks, tumbled brickwork and large bull's-eye window. The bold design and strongly defined details make a significant contribution to this part of the Conservation Area.

## Listed Buildings

There are 2 listed buildings in the Conservation Area. The statutory list was revised in 1985 and there have been no further additions.

### Grade 2 Buildings

**Norton Hall Farmhouse, The Street.** 17c with later alterations. Flint and clunch with brick dressings, black glazed pantiles. Sashes and cross casements with lead glazing bars. 2 ranges late Georgian wooden portico, 6 panel door and semi-circular fanlight.



**Prince of Wales House, The Street.** 17c house. Clunch with brick dressings, red pantile roof. C1900 plate glass sashes, steeply pitched roof with coped gables. Blocked 17c rear windows.

## Important Unlisted Buildings



Because there are very few listed buildings in Burnham Norton Conservation Area, the form and character of the settlement is largely dependent on the vernacular style of its many unlisted traditional buildings. Although none are distinctive enough to single out, all are of local importance and have been identified either because of their prominence or their relatively unspoilt character and their relationship to other historic buildings in the street scene.

## Traditional Materials



The unified character of Burnham Norton Conservation Area is determined largely by the predominance of a few traditional materials and the way they have been used in combination to create subtle variations in colour, pattern and texture. They include:

- Orange clay pantiles
- Clunch (coursed, squared and random)
- Red brick
- Cobble (coursed and random)
- Colourwash

## Archaeological Interest

There are no Scheduled Ancient Monuments in the Conservation Area and no sites recorded on the County Sites and Monuments Record. This may simply reflect the concentration of investigative activity elsewhere in the parish between the Church and remains of the Friary.

## 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 Burnham Norton Conservation Area there are a few features which detract significantly from its intrinsic character. They include:



- The large asbestos barn at Norton Hall Farm, clearly visible from the A149.
- Unsuitable replacement windows to many cottages
- Exotic conifers in some gardens
- Overhead wires

## 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**

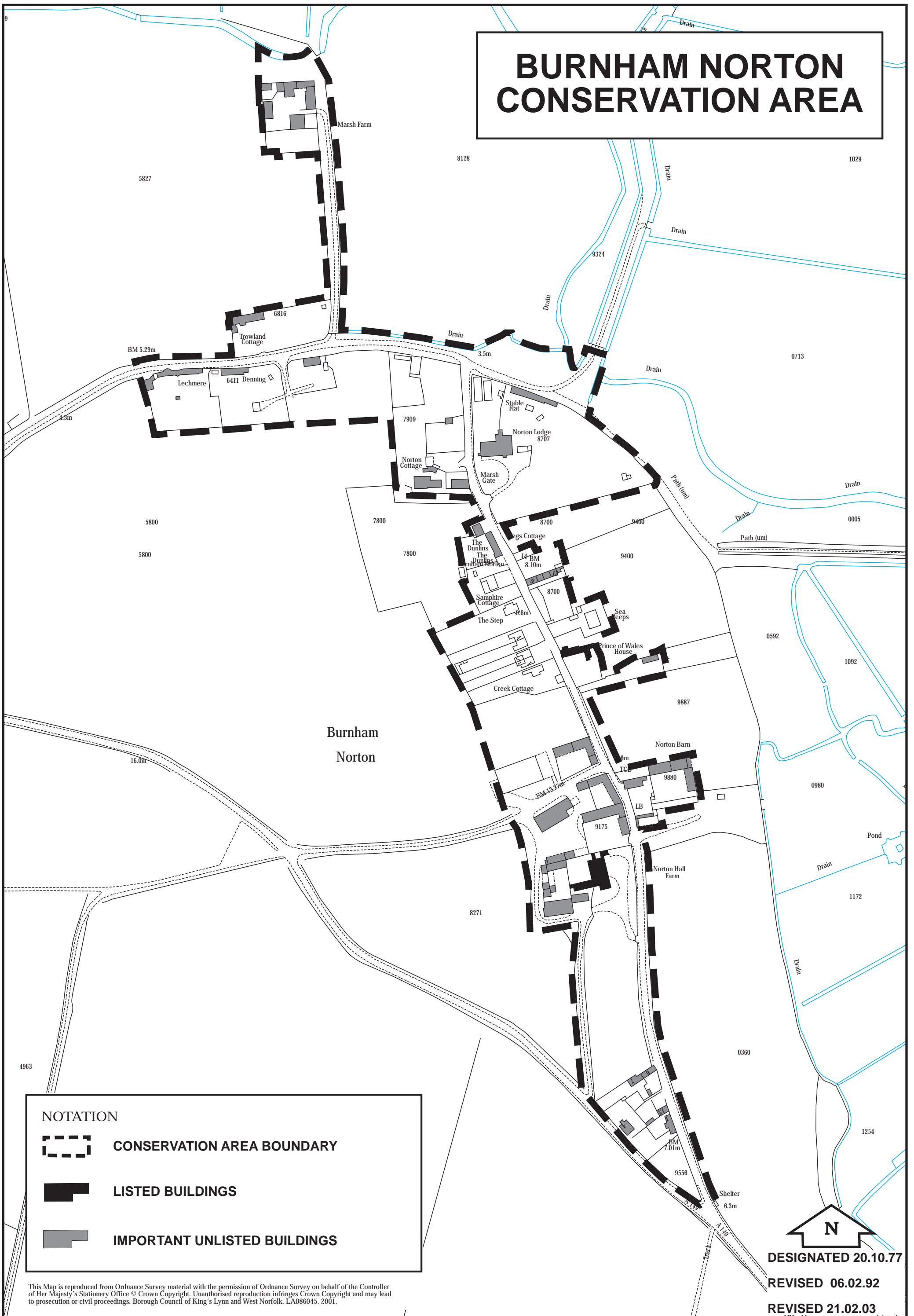
**Within conservation areas, a number of special controls apply and it is advisable that anyone proposing to carry out new development, alteration, extensions, installations or demolition should seek advice from Development Services at an early stage. Special controls also apply to the trees and some 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.**

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# BURNHAM NORTON CONSERVATION AREA



## NOTATION

-  CONSERVATION AREA BOUNDARY
-  LISTED BUILDINGS
-  IMPORTANT UNLISTED BUILDINGS



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