



# Nordelph Area Conservation Area Character Statement

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*Near Well Creek, almost 4 miles S.W. of Downham, is the fen hamlet of North Delph, extending into this (Downham Market), and the parishes of Denver, Upwell and Stow Bardolph and having near it a handsome stone bridge over Tongs Drain built in 1835.*

**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 Nordelph Conservation Area was designated in 1978. 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 it 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

Very little is known about Nordelph until the beginning of the of the 17th Century. It is likely that the name came in part from the Old English “delf” or “gedelp” meaning mine, quarry or ditch so Nordelph therefore meant “the north boundary ditch of Upwell Parish” of which it was once part. There was likely to have been a small settlement here in Roman times when the Fens were protected by the Fen Causeway to the south. However, the land flooded again and the Well Creek became a major defence barrier holding back fresh water flooding from the Fens to the south.

Attempts to drain the land met with varying degrees of success so the area had remained largely unpopulated until the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century.

At this time the financial potential of draining and farming the Fens came to the attention of those with money. In 1605 London Lode from the south west was constructed by London merchants reclaiming 3,000 acres of land which was known as Londoner's Fen. Soon after Popham's Eau, cut from the Old River Nene to the Well Creek, was financed by the Lord Chief Justice and others. However, it was the Earl of Bedford and his

engineer Vermuyden who achieved the most. Between 1630 and 1653, existing rivers were straightened and new cuts made including Tongs Drain joining Well Creek to the River Ouse in the north. London Lode, Pophams Eau and Tongs Drain all met Well Creek at Nordelph and it is possible that the settlement grew as a consequence of the Dutch immigrant workers employed on the various projects in the area.

Faden's map of 1797 shows a small settlement at the junction of these and other lesser drains. The village, built into the toe of the bank for stability, grew by the 1820s to a settlement not much different from the size it is today. A bridge crossing the Creek was built by the Bedford Level Commissioners in 1835 and remained the main crossing point until the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century when a new bridge was built in a slightly different location.



Well Creek was also a principal navigation and transport route and the A1122 Wisbech to Downham Market road still runs parallel to the Creek in places. A horse drawn barge or "Fen Lighter" used to transport cargo is shown on the village sign and the former Chequers pub may well have had it's origins as a stopping off point for thirsty Lighter Men.

Drainage of the Fens caused the peat to dry out and the level of the land fell, necessitating the construction of windmills to pump water from the field dykes into the main drains. One still remains at the eastern end of the conservation area and a second can be seen out in the fen to the south of the village on the line of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century Cocks Fen drain.

Nordelph was also the meeting point of 5 parishes, Denver, Stow, Downham Market, Upwell and Outwell. It fell under Upwell parish and in 1865 Trinity Church was built by the Rev. William Gaye-Townley M.A. as a chapel of ease to Upwell. There were already United Methodist and Wesleyan Methodist Chapels so for a small settlement Nordelph was well served by religious establishments. The settlement became an ecclesiastical parish in 1909.

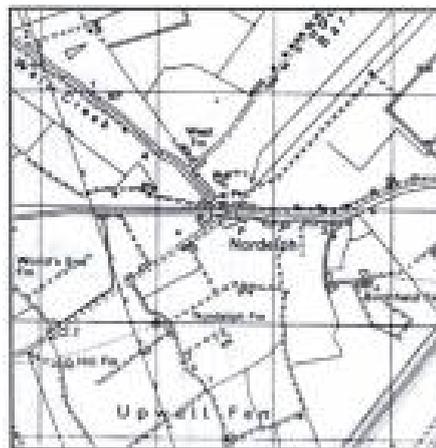
Into the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, Nordelph was largely a small farming community with a good range of village facilities including three pubs, a school, a blacksmiths, a Post Office, a bakery and various other shops. Though the village now has few facilities, it still attracts people and several new houses have been built.

## Setting and Location



Nordelph is a small marshland settlement at the convergence of watercourses and road junctions. It lies either side of Well Creek and the busy A1122 road; 6 kilometres (4 miles) west of Downham Market, 22½ kilometres (14 miles) south of King's Lynn and 14½ kilometres (9 miles) south east of Wisbech. The setting of Nordelph has a typical Fens feel with water, wet and damp conditions, a vast landscape and huge skies. Colourful in summer it can be bleak in winter with strong prevailing winds. The buildings are tight up to the creek on defence banks so when approached from the south the village appears on higher ground than the surrounding panorama of fenland. Indeed, the village is only really seen from this approach; from other directions the main part of the village tends to be hidden from view by trees, banks and curves in the road, although the top of the mill can be glimpsed from the Downham Market road. The slightly elevated position of Nordelph enables long

views to be gained towards Downham Market in the east and across the Fens to the south.



## Character

The special character of the Nordelph Conservation Area relates to its position beside water - focusing on Well Creek and its waterside vegetation. Mature trees, with branches that overhang the Creek, together with natural riverbanks, some with reeds, and the presence of swans and ducks all contribute towards the area's tranquil qualities. Willow trees, typical of water environments, are prominent features. The Creek itself links navigation on the Ely Ouse to the Nene and the Grand Union Canal. It is well-used by small boats and colourful barges which moor along its banks. This peaceful character contrasts with the noise

from traffic on the busy roads which run alongside the Creek; much used by large lorries.



Confined along the silt banks, development of the village is restricted to road frontages. Trees to the rear of properties provide a backdrop to the buildings and help contain the depth of the village. Although development is contained, glimpses to the immediate surrounding fields or longer more extensive views out to the wider countryside of the Fens may be gained. The buildings are not always 'square', a characteristic of a village built on the edge of peat along side banks.



Community pride is evident by the village sign and abundance of well-kept hanging baskets in summer. These, together with

the Well Creek Trust information board, war memorial and GR letter box are locally distinctive features.



At the western end of the conservation area, White House Farm house is visible at the junction of the Well Creek and Popham's Eau water courses. It is linked to the rest of the village by one of Nordelph's bridges. At this crossing point, the A1122 Wisbech Road bends to the east. Here, properties on the northern side of the road are set below the level of the road with a backdrop of mature trees. The bank on the right drops down to the water level of the Creek but mature trees on the opposite bank restrict views to the south. The turret on the roof of Holy Trinity Church (now disused) breaches this confinement and is clearly seen amongst the tree canopies. The area around Nordelph Bridge marks a change in the road gradient which drops slightly. Detached properties of varying form are now at the same height as the road. The Chequers, a former public house, is prominent. Further east, the

enclosure created by buildings and trees gives way to extensive views across the Fens towards Downham Market.



Centrally located, Nordelph Bridge provides the important link between the northern part of the village and the south. It is also a busy crossing point for through traffic as the B1094 extends from the A1122 in the north, across the bridge and out to the south west across the open fen. Seen from the bridge, the combination of mature trees which confine views, grass banks with reeds, and the gently flowing water reinforces the importance of Well Creek to the overall character of the conservation area. It is unfortunate that the intrusion of the traffic crossing the bridge detracts from this otherwise very peaceful location.



To the south of the bridge, stands the Victoria Chapel (former Wesleyan Methodist Chapel of 1861), now converted to residential use and framed by a mature willow beside the Creek. The prominence of this building is emphasised by its position at the road junction of the B1094 and the High Street. The clock, bell arch, name and date plaque, set within the brickwork of the gable, are features of interest which contribute towards its significance as one of Nordelph's distinctive buildings.

The conservation area extends away from the Creek, past residential properties on both sides of the B1094 and ends just after a group of low outbuildings, which incorporate a tarred wall and barrel roof of corrugated iron, on the western side of the road. Beyond this point, extensive southern views are gained across the fens and one of the old pump mills is visible in the distance.



At Nordelph Bridge, the High Street runs parallel to Well Creek along its southern bank. It is a narrow, dark, residential street enclosed to the south by north-facing terraced properties which overlook the Creek. A pair of cottages incorporate a traditional shop window, and a bricked up doorway suggests this was once a terraced row. Further to the east, the terraced

cottages have an irregular form and the mixture of materials emphasises the individualism of properties, a character which is distinct from the uniformity normally associated with terraces. A GR post box is in the wall of one of the properties and the telephone box stands in an open area across the High Street beside the Creek. Small plots of land have been fenced off between the road and the Creek. Holy Trinity Church (which is sadly closed and neglected) and the Old School House create further enclosure and mark a change in character. Beyond this point the character is again dominated by Well Creek, its steep banks and simple rail fence. Respecting this focus of character, the conservation area boundary is tightly drawn along the side of the road, close to the banks of the Creek. There are long views across the Fens to the north whilst to the south, and just outside the conservation area, is a development of large detached properties set lower than the road but maintaining the linear form of development typical of Nordelph's character.



Further along the road, separate from the centre of the village and less disrupted by traffic, is an area which provides a focus for community activity, as well as quiet reflection. The stone war memorial, separated from the road by a small area of grass and set within its own square, is

chained off from the parking area in front of the village hall. The hall, once a large detached house, is set well back from the road and is constructed of buff brick with a hipped slate roof. The cemetery is sited to the east. Next to the cemetery and marking the eastern end of the conservation area is one of the old pump mills, now sensitively converted to a house.



## Archaeological Interest

There are no Scheduled Ancient Monuments in Nordelph. However, some archaeological finds have been recorded in the Norfolk Sites and Monuments Record.

## Listed Buildings

There are no listed buildings in the conservation area.

## Important Unlisted Buildings

Although there are no buildings worthy of inclusion on the Statutory List in Nordelph, the village's built form and character is dependent on the vernacular style of unlisted historic buildings such as White House Farm, the former Methodist Chapel, Holy Trinity Church and the pump mill. There are 29 buildings of local significance, about 58 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 substantially intact character and because they often relate to other historic buildings close by.

## Traditional Materials

The character of Nordelph Conservation Area is influenced by the mixed use of traditional materials in the construction of its historic buildings.

These materials include:

1. Buff brick
2. Brown brick
3. Colourwash
4. Pantiles
5. Slate

## 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 Nordelph Conservation Area, there are few features which detract significantly from its intrinsic character. The most serious detractor is the overhead wires and poles.

Other detractors are:

1. Noise from the A1122 on the northern side of the Creek
2. Heavy goods traffic
3. Size and amount of the road signage
4. Loss of architectural detailing and over personalisation of some terraced buildings



## 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
- 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**

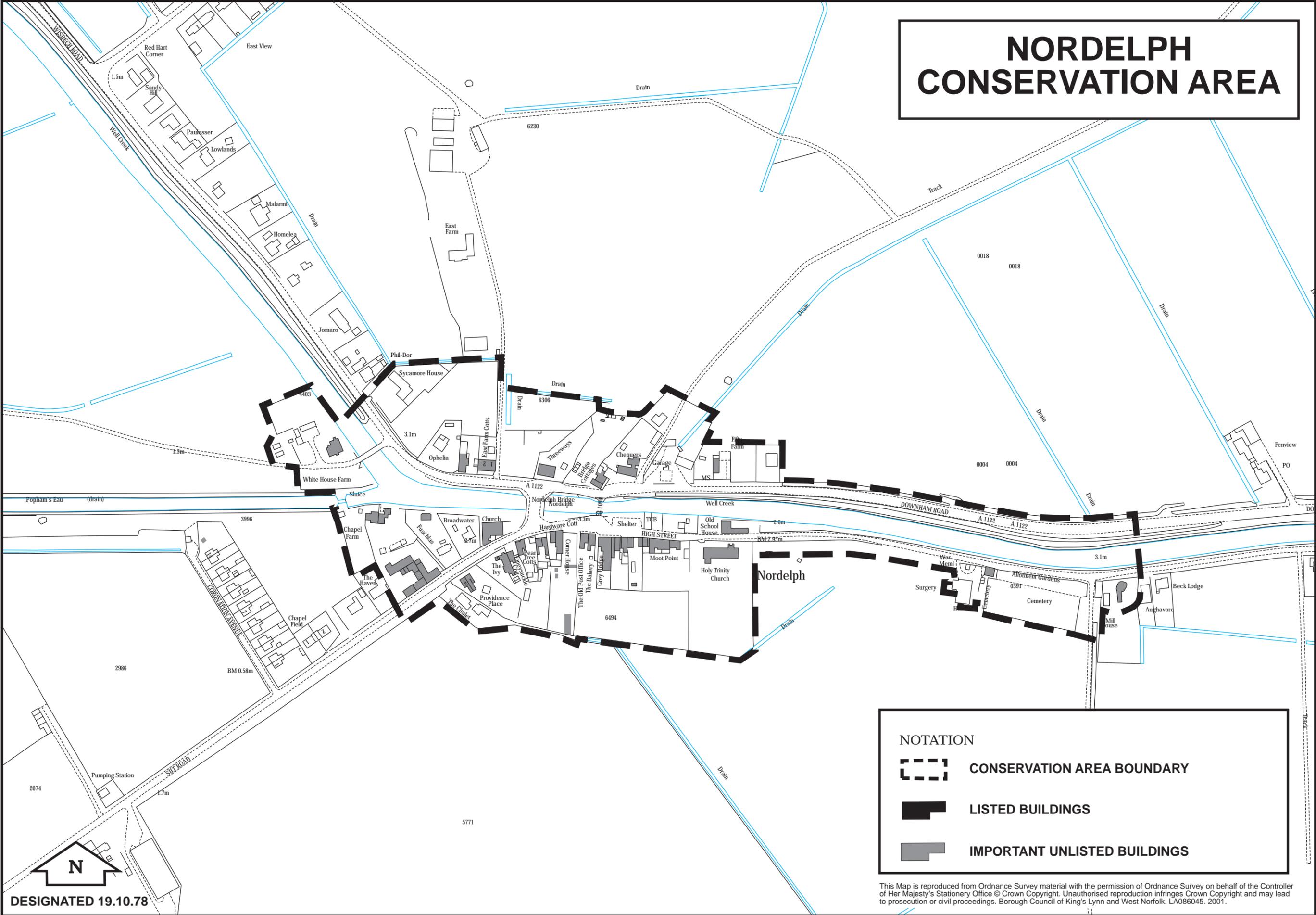
**Within conservation areas, a number of special controls apply and it is advisable that anyone proposing to carry out new development, alteration, extensions, installations or demolition should seek advice from Development Services at an early stage. Special controls also apply to the trees and some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



**NOTATION**

-  CONSERVATION AREA BOUNDARY
-  LISTED BUILDINGS
-  IMPORTANT UNLISTED BUILDINGS

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