

NORTHWOLD

CONSERVATION AREA

DRAFT CHARACTER STATEMENT



NORTHWOLD is a long village, with a few neat houses, and the shaft of an ancient cross, on the Thetford turnpike, near Wissey, 3 miles S.E. by E. of Stoke Ferry, and 7 miles N. by W. of Brandon. Its parish has 5234 acres. An Allotment of 118A., is appropriated to the occupiers of the ancient cottages, who cut turf upon it, under the direction of the fenreeves.

William White 1845

DESIGNATED: March 1974
REVISED: February 1992



INTRODUCTION

A Conservation Area – “An area of special architectural or historic interest, the character of 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.

Northwold Conservation Area was first designated in March 1974 by Norfolk County Council. The boundary was revised in 1992 by King's Lynn & West Norfolk Borough Council. This statement was prepared in May 2001. 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

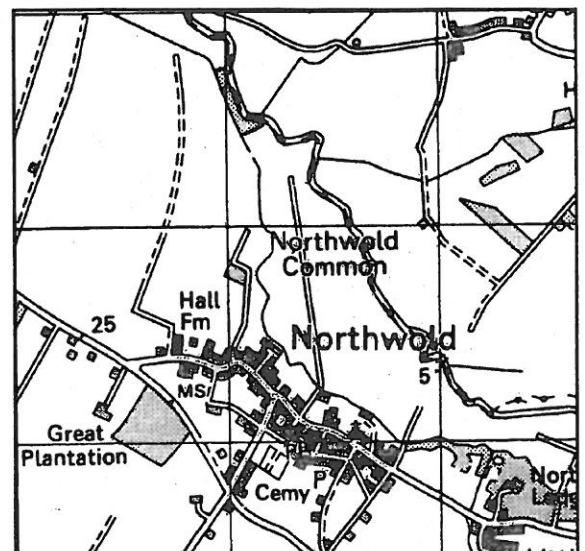
King's Lynn & West Norfolk Local Plan aimed at protecting the overall character of conservation areas. In particular, the guidance will supplement the Local Plan policies which deal with demolition and new development within the conservation area and new development on land adjoining the conservation 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.

SETTING AND LOCATION

Northwold is a rural community located north of the main A134 road to the south and the River Wissey to the north, both of which act as important barrier 'edges' to the settlement.

The main orientation of the village is approximately east/west, its exact profile responding to the route of the tributary of the River Wissey – which itself lies some 345 metres (400 yards) further north. The A134 road is a major connector route between King's Lynn 27 kilometers (17 miles) to the north, and Thetford 39 kilometers (24 miles) to the south-east. Bury St. Edmunds is 38 kilometers (24 miles) distant and Downham Market lies 18 kilometers (11 miles) to the north-west. These are the closest major settlements. The important village of Stoke Ferry is 7 kilometers (4½ miles) to the north-west,



Weeting is 9 kilometers (5½ miles) south east, Foulden 3 kilometers (2 miles) to the north, and Methwold 3 kilometers (2 miles) to the south.

The settlement is located in an interesting topographical position. The presence of water in the form of river/tributary to the north and the Great Ouse "Cut channel" lying to the south near Mundford is all part of the larger Great Ouse/Fenland drainage system, which typifies this part of East Anglia and contributes so much to its character. Northwold occupies a site on the eastern boundary of this area. However, it is also on the north-western edge of the Thetford Forest and the reference to woodland 'in the Wold' of Northwold is indicative of its earlier character. The ingredients of the setting are, therefore, a water edge settlement near forest/woodland. Typically, the area is punctuated by a series of access tracks, footpaths and minor roads, which serve to link adjoining villages, hamlets and farmsteads.

The core of the settlement was probably originally located around the church, but the form of it is now very much 'linear' with several sub-nodes or cores located at certain key strategic points. These will be described later.

Topographically, the surrounding countryside falls gently to the river valley, although a steeper gradient is experienced to the west end of the village as the road rises up to meet the A134. The settlement was probably located on the nearest dry, flood free land south of the river. In soil classification terms, Northwold lies on the western edge of the 'Breckland' area, the most distinctive landscape in East Anglia. It is a long, low plateau with long, gentle slopes leading to flat bottomlands. Soils are developed in 'cover sand' over 'chalk sand drift'. Further west is the top northern edge of the 'Black Fen' area and further north is the west Norfolk lowland. Elements of all these landscapes are noticeable in Northwold and its location as an 'edge' settlement.

The village itself stands on a bed of cretaceous chalk and the particular

character of the settlement derives mainly from the use of this stone for building, (known as clunch) which when combined with the other local vernacular materials, flint, brick, and pantile, gives a most delightful appearance to the buildings and connecting walls.



ORIGIN AND HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

Northwold, or "North Woodland" ('wold' – old English for woodland, high forest land or open upland), is a village of some 30 hectares (75 acres) and a population of 985, located just to the north of the main A134(T) road and was from its earliest origins, a settlement based on agriculture.

It is an historic village set in rolling agricultural land, but inextricably linked to a water's edge settlement located as it is just south of the River Wissey and its tributary streams.

There is evidence of pre Saxon settlement (from Neolithic times) in the area and even before the Conquest it was the subject of an exchange of land between the bishop of Winchester and the Monastery of Ely, indicating the importance of early ecclesiastic land ownership. The Domesday Book records that it had a considerable force of men and plough teams working large acreages in the area, clearly an indication of an agricultural based feudal community, centred around the manorial system.

The original manor house once stood close to Hovell's Lane where the village playing field is now, and was owned by the de Havelle ('Hovell') family.

A settlement would therefore probably have

been on the site before the Norman Conquest based upon one or two farmsteads. The pattern of settlement has since taken a fairly typical route since those origins as its importance has ebbed and flowed over the years in response to developments in the country's economy and society. In 1801, for example, the population was only 767 compared to the 1400 recorded in 1851, reflecting the country's upsurge in prosperity through the Victorian years. In those days the village supported five blacksmiths, five general stores, four tailors and numerous other trades and professions and was at its height of activity as an agricultural village of some importance. In 1881 population fell to just over 1,000. In 1971 it was 795 and is now just under 1,000, which indicates that Northwold is as ever, an attractive place to live despite the demise of local village based agriculture.

Modern times have seen dramatic changes in the pattern of employment in the area with few people dependent directly on the locality for a living. Reliance on the motor car is essential for the patterns of living in 21st Century village life and these patterns have been reflected in the changes to



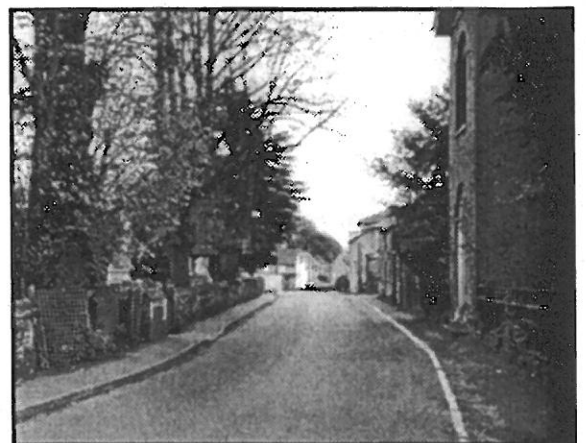
buildings, their adaptation and how new ones have been inserted into the original historic fabric. A vibrant community still survives however, and the size of the population sustains a certain degree of background village infrastructure. The village is to this day one full of architectural character, largely generated by the layers of buildings resulting from its historical

development over time.

In summary, Northwold is an important historic settlement which contains all the classical ingredients of such communities. The historic core, centred around the magnificent Parish Church is only one element of the settlement however, which through economic prosperity based on agriculture became a linear settlement along the east/west road running parallel with and south of the river thus creating several 'sub-nodes'. The presence, necessity and exploitation of water was in its earliest days probably the direct attraction for the location of the settlement coupled with fertile land for farming and associated woodland for hunting. Until the late 20th Century this was a farming based community.

CHARACTER OVERVIEW

Northwold Conservation Area encompasses the whole linear settlement of the historic 'core' described above. In essence this means the 'built environment' either side of the main village thoroughfare, the spaces and landscape between and behind these buildings and other significant areas which contribute to the quality and character of the conservation area.



The conservation area is therefore quite long, stretching from the junction of the High Street and Little London Road in the east to the junction with the A134 in the north/west. The northern boundary is framed by the physical barrier of the tributary to the River Wissey and its

associated Fenland. To the south the boundary follows the line of School Lane in the east and then the line of curtilages to the properties fronting the High Street and West End.

Northwold has an extremely strong sense of unity of architectural character through repeated use of local vernacular materials, and has an important setting in its landscape. In addition, the subtle twists and turns of the main village road, following approximately the line of the stream to the north, generate vistas in all directions of great interest and variety in the classic 'townscape' fashion.



There are, in addition, several major architectural elements such as the Church, Manor House, Waterloo House, Manor Farmhouse, and the Grange. It is the general grouping of historical buildings however in the mature landscape, a unique relationship created over centuries, which generates Northwold's particular character.

Although sometimes forgotten, this settlement pattern is tied up with the range, disposition and variety of building plots, all in turn related to patterns of ownership over time which has contributed another important element to the attractive character of the conservation area. Just as important are the enclosing and



connecting screen walls and outbuildings, which again add interest to the built fabric and its character, and were a key factor in the early designation of Northwold as a conservation area.

Inextricably linked to the built fabric is the mature historic landscape of trees, grass verges, rough tracks, hedgerows and paddocks which are located between, around and behind the buildings. The association of buildings and landscape both within the village and also when seen from outside which gives Northwold Conservation Area its essential quality.

Views out of the conservation area are delightful and give glimpses of farmland and water meadows to the north and surrounding agriculture to the southeast and west. The series of narrow roads and tracks which feed into the main village east/west artery also add interest, variety and unexpected views outwards. They very often are the reasons behind the creation of the series of 'sub-nodes' alluded to above.



Finally, there are also attractive views of the conservation area from the access roads to the south from the main A134 road, the high ground to the north west at the top of West End from the Little London Road to the east, and from the farm tracks to the north.

In summary, this is an extremely attractive village with many architectural jewels in its crown, and one which is clearly greatly cherished by its residents.

SPACES AND BUILDINGS

The established character of the

conservation area is created by the interaction of the following basic elements:

- two and sometimes three storey buildings with walls and outbuildings located in an interesting jigsaw puzzle of building plots



- the buildings themselves sometimes located on the street or setback
- several grand architectural gems, the most important being the Church
- a unity of architectural character through the repeated use of a few vernacular materials
- several 'nodes' created by the subtle twists of the roads and tracks
- a mature historic landscape which is woven into the built environment in a particularly attractive way
- several quite different spaces created by land use and natural topography.

Beginning with the spaces in the conservation area itself, it is true to say the village has no focal point, although the area around the church is perhaps the most important. This is due mainly to the majestic scale and presence of the church itself and the churchyard with its mature trees, the Grange beyond (although visually hidden in



its own site) and the Manor House located opposite the church. The latter building is currently in a sad state of repair and is a building very much 'at risk'.

The view northwards from **Church Lane** is dramatic when approaching this nodal point. There is a modern development of bungalows to the east, the alignment of which has created a small village 'green' containing seats and grass. The attractive 18th Century building opposite (now a bed and breakfast and antique pine shop) is very distinctive and adds greatly to the character of this area.

A further focal point lies further to the east along the High Street where Hovell's Lane, the High Street, Riverside and Little London Road join.

This eastern node, whilst not being quite such an important space as that around the Church, is also very attractive. To the southwest is Waterloo House a delightful



'listed' building with gabled walls to Hovells Lane. To the south-west is a converted cottage building; to the north east is mature 'treed' landscape which provides a definite visual 'stop' to the conservation area; to the north west are the pleasant new buildings of Riverside and The Shrubbery further westwards along the High Street. 'Riverside' itself is a rough track and public footpath which leads northwards to the stream and the water meadows of the River Wissey beyond. It forms an important 'edge' to this part of the conservation area. Hovells Lane stretches southwards towards the A134 main road and contains several modern housing insertions with a further range of historic cottages at the junction of Cross Lane. The older modern housing is

quite bland but of reasonable scale. The newer housing has made a much better attempt to respond to the local scale and character of the conservation area. Enclosure could be improved, however, along the front boundaries.

Hovells Lane becomes a more rural route as the built up area of the village dissipates. The site of the original manor house is located on the adjacent village playing field.

Moving back to the **High Street** the next focal point is the one further westward from the church where Hall Lane meets the High Street. Again, there is a delightful assembly of buildings both north and south of the High Street and on both sides of Hall Lane, including four listed buildings.



Continuing westwards the next focal point is located around the junction of Methwold Road and the High Street. The former is yet another north/south connector road and leads directly to the A134. The intensity and quality of character is not quite so heightened here as the sense of enclosure and scale is diminished, despite the presence of the old Methodist Chapel, now the Northwold Tile Centre. The insertion of modern housing has been quite prolific in this area and also further south along Methwold Road itself. An important street frontage site west of the Chapel is at present under development.

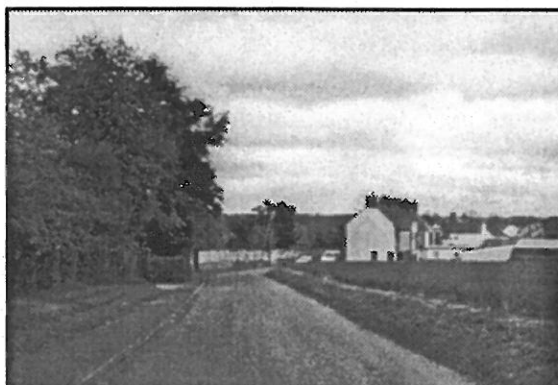
The next 'node' is that around the listed Village Cross marking a dramatic change of direction in the High Street, which becomes 'West End' at this point. This area was clearly an important one containing the Bakery (now, the Old Bakery) and one of the blacksmiths. To the east lies The Farmhouse, yet another listed

building. In general this area contains a very interesting grouping of historic buildings, set at picturesque angles to the street and around a further track leading northwards to the river and agricultural fen and beyond. It is unfortunately spoilt by very prominent wirescape.

The road, now 'West End', then starts to rise westwards towards the junction with the A134, the final 'node' in the sequence. The Street is lined with historic building on each side punctuated with Vine Farm, Hall Farm, and Rectory Farm. Hall Farm occupies the high ground to the north. The sequence of farms on both sides of The Street gives a good indication of how this part of the early settlement evolved.

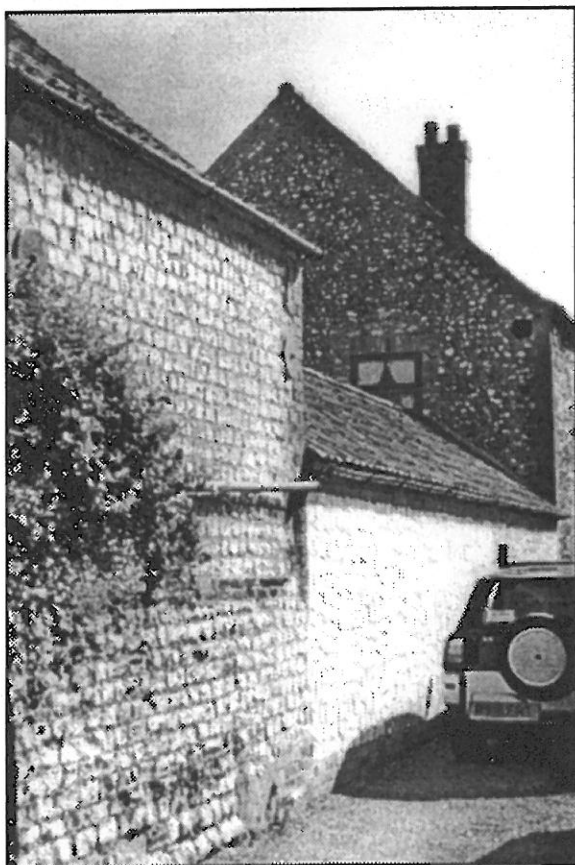


The final 'node' at Hall Farm is important as a gateway to the village. It contained a chalk pit (known as Chalk Pit Hill) which then became a rubbish tip. The area is



dominated by the mature landscape around the filled pit and the dense copse to the south of the entrance road. There are attractive views of the village stretching eastwards from this high point and also southwards to the rolling landscape beyond the A134 road.

These 'nodes' are only one aspect of conservation area however. They are linked with building after building of historic importance and interspersed with delightful views outwards to distant landscape or intimate gardens. The linking components of outbuildings, screen walls and mature landscape itself complete the assembly to create a most attractive village townscape.



There are several pockets of new infill housing amongst the historic buildings and, whilst the quality is mediocre in architectural design terms, the scale of the village has been respected. More intense modern development has taken place south of the conservation area along **School Lane, Cross Lane and Methwold Road** which unfortunately has all the attributes of piecemeal ribbon/estate type development.

Mention has been made above of the plethora of outbuildings and barns which played a vital part in the historic importance of the village containing the 'industrial' infrastructure of a thriving agricultural community. These are included in the catalogue of buildings having historical importance, but which are not listed.

The southern boundary of the Conservation Area contains the important Victorian buildings to the north of School Lane including the Village Hall, a range of almshouses and two ranges of cottages. The latter are linked to the buildings of Church Lane by the lovely, but dilapidated south screen wall to the Manor House.

The northern boundary of the conservation area contains some beautifully mature landscape components, and is accessible at the three points as mentioned above, one of which is the ancient village's public access to the Common. These access tracks leading northwards from the main village street are important linking elements to the agricultural landscape further to the north. Views of the village back from these tracks are dramatic and extremely attractive.

In summary Northwold Conservation Area is a delightfully attractive series of buildings, spaces between the buildings and associated landscape around and beyond the buildings. The range of different vistas and views created, both out of and into the settlement, is enormous ranging from the intimate to the extensive. However continued effort will be required to cherish the character of the area and yet accommodate further change.

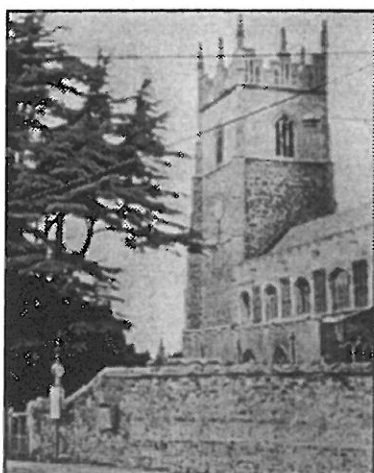
LISTED BUILDINGS

There are 24 listed buildings and structures in the conservation area. The statutory list was revised in 1985 and there have been no further additions.

Grade 1 Buildings

- **Church of St. Andrew.** 13th Century nave and aisles, 14th Century chancel

partly rebuilt 1840, enlarged 1840. Late 15th Century west tower. Flint, rendered to nave and aisles with ashlar dressings. Copper sheet roofs.



Grade 2 Buildings

- **Churchyard of St Andrew.** 12 listed headstones
- **No. 96 High Street.** Now Waterloo House. 1736 with earlier core. Whitewashed brick and flint and pantiled roof. 2 stories. Portico porch with 4 fluted columns. Gabled roof tumbling into next gable. Walls to right and left enclose forecourt closed to street by railings and gates.
- **The Manor House, High Street.** House early 18th Century with additions of late 18th Century bricks with plain tiled roof. North front in 3 parts. Central panelled door with 6 vane fanlight and semi-circular hood. Gabled roof with 2 flat dormers. Gabled roof. Coach building to east.
- **The Grange, High Street.** Rectory, now a private house. Late 17th Century, altered late 18th Century with 19th Century additions. Clunch, flint and plastered brick. Pantiled and slate roofs. L-Plan.
- **48 The High Street.** (Linden Cottage) House, early 19th Century. Brick and flint with carstone galleting and slate roof. Originally 2 properties. 2 storeys, 5 bays.
- **44 High Street.** House dated 1745, and later. Brick rendered to west front. Pantile roofs, 2 storeys in 3 wide bays. Side bays with hipped roofs.

- **43 High Street.** Mid 18th Century brick with pantiled roofs. Façade of 3 storeys in 5 bays. Central panelled door in Doric surround. Gable roof.
- **47 High Street.** House of complex plan. Mid 18th Century. Rendered and colour washed brick and clunch. Pantiled roofs. One storey and dormer attic in form of long north range with 2 gabled cross wings.
- **49 High Street.** House of complex plan. Mid 18th Century rendered and colour washed brick and clunch. Pantiled roofs. One storey and dormer attic.
- **51 High Street.** As above
- **Manor Farmhouse, West End.** Built 1635. Rendered and colour washed except south gable of 17th Century wing. T-Plan. West wing 17th Century.
- **Village Cross, West End.** Built in 14th Century. Stone ashlar with partly rendered 19th brick pedestal. Scheduled Ancient Monument.

IMPORTANT UNLISTED BUILDINGS

There are many important unlisted buildings and walls in the Conservation Area which contribute to the character of the conservation area. They have been identified on the map together with outbuildings which are felt to have importance also. In addition important screen walls are identified. These are an equally vital factor in contributing to the character of the conservation area.

POST WAR DEVELOPMENT

Post war development in Northwold Conservation Area has firstly involved the insertion of pockets of infill housing either in single units or small cul de sacs of housing in available sites north and south of the main east-west village street. The character of the early modern housing is very bland but reflects the then trend in housing design in the post war years. There was little thought of needing to respond to the existing vernacular architecture and villages such as Northwold

all contain the legacy of this design philosophy epitomised by lack of appropriate materials, with poor enclosure or response to context. Thankfully the scale of new buildings has been 'domestic' and the impact of this building programme has not marred the overall character of the conservation area.



Secondly, all the historic buildings have to a greater or lesser extent been altered extended or adapted to new modes of living. In general terms, this adaptation has been sensitively done and, although some structures have been lost or marred by new work, the unity of character has generally been retained. Many outbuildings which were used for commercial or agricultural related trades have been successfully adapted and re-

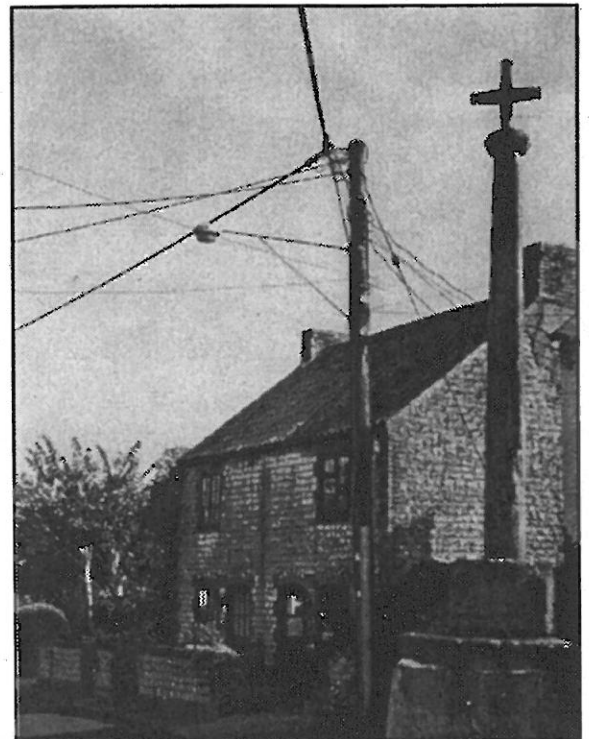


used as these uses diminished. Whilst it is sad to see the remnants of what must have once been a thriving commercial community, these structural changes in society have been national and each agricultural based village such as Northwold has had to adapt in its own unique way.

In basic terms it is still a very attractive

village to live in and the amount of building along the village roads and leading into the village core reflects this fact, as does the general rise in the population. Unfortunately most of the building has been as ribbon development and adds little to the character of these approach roads leading to the village core.

The 20th Century has also seen the insertion of mains services. The most dramatic visual impact has been a plethora of wirescape above ground and Northwold, like many other conservation areas, suffers from this.



In summary, modern development has been fitted into the conservation area reasonably well. Recent schemes are particularly successful in terms of 'designing for the context'. Enough village infrastructure - such as shop, post office, public house, church, village Hall, school, builders merchants - and many small businesses survive to generate a much needed degree of vitality in this car-oriented age.

TRADITIONAL MATERIALS

The character of Northwold 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 laid randomly in lumps, coursed (with or without galleting)
- Pink/buff and cream brick manufactured from the local Gault clay beds.
- Norfolk red brick.
- Norfolk orange/red pantiles; blue/black pantiles.
- Clay pegtiles.
- Welsh slate.
- Colourwashed render or brick/flint/carstone.
- Flint, generally in the form of random rubble, but also occasionally knapped.



Most importantly, a large amount of Chalk (clunch) for façades of buildings and screen walls can be seen, often used with random brick and flintwork, - a most distinctive and delightful feature of the village fabric.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL INTEREST

There is one Scheduled Ancient Monument in Northwold Conservation Area – the village cross, West End (Monument No. 55).

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 paintwork, removal of walls, railings, trees and hedges. Northwold Conservation Area has suffered from all these detractors. Other detractors are listed as follows:-

- Obtrusive wirescape, especially in 'West End'.
- Buildings at risk especially:-
The Manor House, its outbuildings and screen walls.



The Beeches.

Cooksons Builders Merchants Premises (both sides of the road).

- Poor enclosure – inappropriate materials and inadequate in scale or simply untidy.
- Inappropriate infill development – thankfully most related to early post war housing.
- Popularity of evergreen planting, rather than using more indigenous species.

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

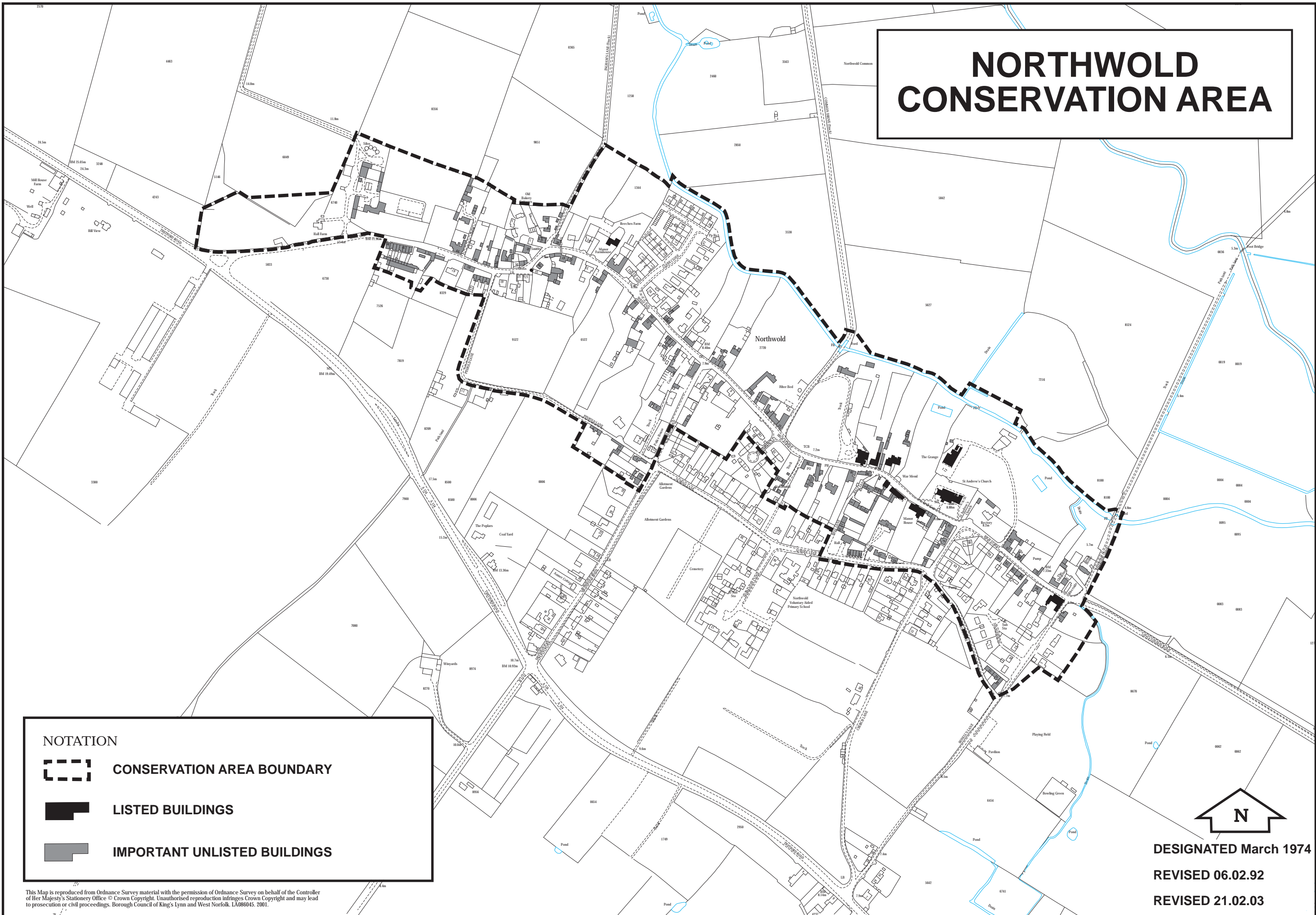
Within conservation areas, a number of special controls apply and it is advisable that anyone proposing to carry out new development, alterations, extensions, installations, demolition or work to trees should seek advice from the Planning Department at an early stage. A leaflet summarising these issues and including general information on conservation areas can be obtained from the Planning Department free of charge.






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NORTHWOLD CONSERVATION AREA



NOTATION

-  CONSERVATION AREA BOUNDARY
-  LISTED BUILDINGS
-  IMPORTANT UNLISTED BUILDINGS



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