

HEACHAM

CONSERVATION AREA

DRAFT CHARACTER STATEMENT



HEACHAM, 14 miles N.N.E. of Lynn, is a large and scattered village, on the sea-coast, sheltered behind by a bold acclivity, at the foot of which a small rivulet flows across the salt-marsh to the flat beach, where there is no harbour for shipping.

WILLIAM WHITE 1845

DESIGNATED: February 1988

**PLANNING
POLICY**

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.

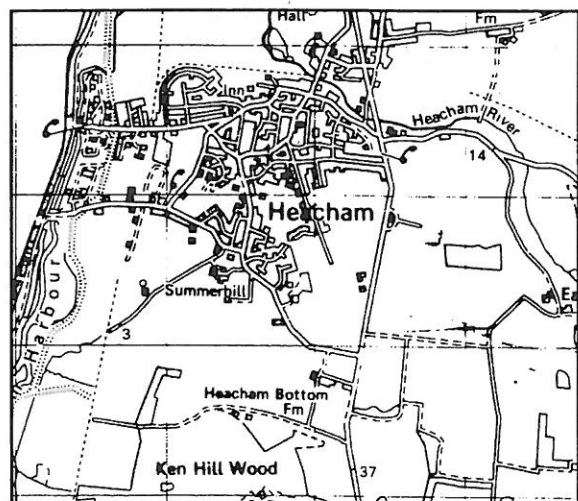
The Heacham Conservation Area was designated in February 1988 by the Borough Council. This document highlights the special qualities which underpin the character of the conservation area, justifying its designation. It also seeks to increase awareness of those qualities so that where changes to the environment 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

The village of Heacham lies to the west of the main A149 north to south road, connecting Kings Lynn in the south 30 kilometres (13 miles) and Hunstanton in the north 4³/₄ kilometres (3 miles). To the south are the villages of Snettisham, Ingoldisthorpe and Dersingham, all of which are similar settlements to Heacham in their coastal location. Only Heacham however occupies the strip of land between the A149 and the Wash. This is because of a slight outcrop in the soil landscape known as the West Norfolk Lowlands.



In topographical terms Heacham village core is located on higher ground to the north of the Heacham River. The latter is a major feature of the landscape and flows in an irregular line towards the Wash, where it is connected to the complicated waterway of Heacham Harbour. The whole coastline is characterised by 'common marsh' with commons dotted between the above mentioned village settlements.



The connection of the settlement with the coast has been mentioned above and although the built form of the village has spread southwards and westwards to the coast in modern times, the juxtaposition of these two components was very important for the economy and prosperity of the settlement itself.

Heacham was subject to an early by-pass scheme (1956) which thankfully removed much of the heavy north to south traffic from its central village core. Minor communication routes connect the village with the coast and to the surrounding villages such as Ringstead (in the north-east), Sedgeford (in the east).

In landscape terms Heacham is located adjacent to the south-western edge of the area of outstanding natural beauty which contains the North Norfolk coast region. Landscape plays a prominent and essential part in contributing the overall character of the conservation area.

ORIGINS AND HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

'Heacham' or 'Hecham' possibly refers to a homestead with a hedge, or it may be a homestead with 'a grating to catch fish'. The second element of the word is Old English 'ham' (homestead). The first element is either Old English 'Hecg' (hedge) or again Old English 'Haecc' (a sluice). It is perhaps more realistic to assume that the latter definition, ie. one related to water is more appropriate, as the village of Heacham is very much a riverside community, but also one which is strongly connected to the coast. The Wash is only about 2 kilometres (1¼ miles) from the

Church and the settlement was clearly an important one based on both river and coastal trade.

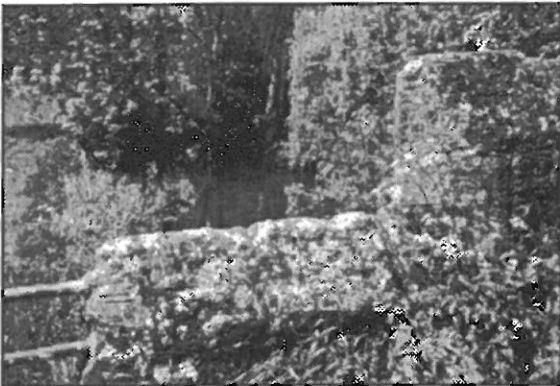


The early settlement probably occupied the higher ground to the north of the Heacham river in the area of the existing Church. Here the earliest settlement would have taken up a high ground position, both to avoid the problem of flooding and as a defensive point which gave good views of the surrounding landscape.

The settlement was also clearly generated by its location astride the main north to south route connecting Kings Lynn in the south and Hunstanton in the north, and in this respect it is similar to the other coastal villages of this area, for example Snettisham and Dersingham, both of which are located further to the south. In a similar way there was an important east/west route connecting the settlement with other villages further eastwards, namely Sedgeford and Docking, both of which are located on this route.

This area of Norfolk was subject to almost continuous settlement from Palaeolithic times (approximately half a million years ago) through the late glacial and Mesolithic periods. Evidence has been found in the area of all such settlements and then even heavier degree of settlement including Neolithic period, the bronze age, the iron age, and the Roman period. The Snettisham 'hoard' is a nationally known treasure from the iron age which was found south of Heacham around the village of Snettisham.

Studies of place names have confirmed that they are not randomly scattered across Norfolk. Most have a highly structured distribution. 'Ham' (village or estate) suffixes are related to the better drained soils and the main river valleys. Most large and administratively important 'villes' recorded in Domesday were 'hams' and represent the foci of large early estates or territories. Heacham was therefore a reasonably important settlement even in those pre-conquest times, and its proximity to the Peddars Way, the main north to south Roman Road in this area would have generated considerable influence in Roman times. A historical map of the Roman period provides evidence of this through the cluster of early settlements with substantial buildings and also minor settlements in this area of the county.



In late Saxon times this eastern coastline of the Wash was a heavily populated area and there was clearly buoyant trade generated by its coastal location. As always with villages such as Heacham it is the ownership, purchase, and disposal of land which has a profound influence on the built form of the settlement. Important landowners in the Heacham area were the Church itself, the Le Strange family, who later occupied Hunstanton Hall to the north, but who owned large areas of West Norfolk, the Rolfe family who gave much to the local community and in later times the Torrey family.

However, the most important family is easily that of the Rolfes and it was John Rolfe who married the Indian Princess Pocohontas in the 17th Century, a fact which has given Heacham much fame, especially in recent years.

The local economy clearly prospered due to the proximity to the coast, the reasonably wide Heacham River and the agricultural hinterland, both to the east and west, which included extensive forest and associated hunting. The employment and commerce created by coastal trade and agriculture would have generated much of the historic built form of Heacham which is still visible today. The important buildings of 'Homestead', Heacham Hall and Loo Water all indicate powerful landowners, who would have carried out farming on the associated land and who controlled the sale, disposal and purchase of land within the settlement.

Gradually over time the settlement spread southwards with important buildings occupying land south of the river, and a more tightly packed, dense urban development south of Station Road. The latter is largely a Victorian phenomenon and indicates the heyday of Heacham's prosperity.

In Victorian times and generated by the presence of the railway the settlement grew even more rapidly in this southern area and this was, perhaps, the most buoyant time for the local economy. The presence of road, rail, coastal transport, together with the fertile agricultural land generated a bustling economy with many associated commercial and industrial uses being carried on there. As is so typical of these settlements, the 20th century has seen a gradual and, at the end, dramatic decline in this commercial activity, although in Heacham's case the village became a very attractive place to live, both from being located as it was near to major urban areas and as a pleasant retirement location on the coast. All major later settlement has taken place to the south of the original historic core as parcels of land were gradually sold and developed for pre and post war housing schemes.

CHARACTER OVERVIEW

Heacham Conservation Area is an irregular shaped form which encompasses the original historic core of the settlement

around the Church and Heacham Hall, a thin strip of land in the middle which contains the important historic fabric on each side of the Hunstanton Road, together with the associated landscape and curtilages, and then the elongated southern section which contains the important historic buildings to the south of the Heacham River (both sides of the Hunstanton Road) and extends eastwards to contain Little Mill House and its eastern boundary with the main A149 road, near the important Caley Mill site (now Norfolk Lavender).

There are therefore several distinct areas to the Conservation Area, but in essential terms the character is provided by the unity of the historic buildings, the spaces they create, their disposition on their building plots and the important landscape elements round, between and behind the built fabric.

Whilst the buildings are of great interest and important architecturally, it is however the combination of spaces and landscape around the buildings which also contribute greatly to the Area's character. To a greater or lesser extent all the historic buildings identified use a relatively limited palette of local vernacular materials common to this area of West Norfolk and which help to give the Conservation Area its own unique character.

SPACES AND BUILDINGS

The Church of St Mary the Virgin is a magnificent landmark building and with its combination of mature landscape in the Churchyard and its fine surrounding screen walls, it is perhaps the 'jewel in the crown' of the Conservation Area itself. There are important spaces all around the Church on both the north, south, east and west sides and the location of this building on higher ground than the surrounding connecting roads only serves to heighten its scale and importance. To the west the Churchyard fronts directly onto the Old Hunstanton Road, which passes in a north/south direction before bending eastwards towards Hunstanton. A very attractive car park has been formed to the north of the Church with



a beautiful mature treed landscape and gravelled surfacing. This area provides much needed additional car parking space for Church services, functions, etc. The choice of surface is however a rather unfortunate one for wheelchair users and it is hoped that this could be improved in future years, either through a new material or through the identification of disabled car parking bays and stone flags, etc. The space to the north-east of the Churchyard is occupied by overflow graveyard area and acts as a very important buffer between the conservation area and the busy A149 main road further to the east.

To the south, the land falls away from the Church towards Church Lane which connects with the main A149 road to the east and the Old Hunstanton Road to the west. There are several important historic buildings along this road, particularly on the corner of the two road junctions (Church House) and to the south-east the two ranges of alms houses, one of which is listed (the Rolfe family were patrons). The boundary of the conservation area encompasses these buildings on its eastern boundary, but does not include the modern bungalows which have been built as infill development towards and the A149 road.

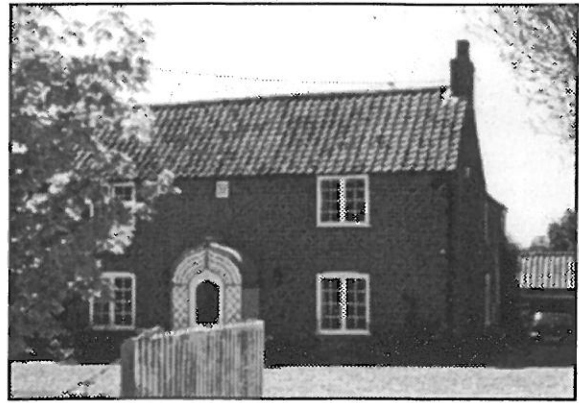
The area to the west of the Church is known as the Green and is a triangular grass space, another highlight of the conservation area. The Green is surrounded on three sides by listed buildings and their associated outbuildings, together with significant screen walls and the landscape features, which in this case is simply the grass and the dotted trees on



the Green. It was once the site of the village fairs. This is an immensely important space in the village and access is given to the other historically important buildings in this complex via an archway under the listed cottage buildings. The archway serves to define the public from the private space and the access track proceeds northwards towards Heacham Hall itself and westwards towards the other historically important buildings, two of which are listed. Again, the backdrop of mature landscape with many mature trees within the park of Heacham Hall provides an important component for the unique character of this area. Pleasant views are obtained in all directions in this area of the conservation area and the complexity of location of the historic buildings on their plots merely adds to the picturesque quality.

Moving southwards, the Conservation Area boundary takes the form of a 'waist' before bellying out again further southwards around the river. This so called 'waist' encompasses the historic buildings to the east of the Hunstanton Road and their associated outbuildings and landscape and a very attractive mature tree landscape to the south of Homestead House. The land continues to fall from north to south and important views are given in both directions. There are also occasional important views to the east between the built fabric and these give glimpses of the mature 'treed' water meadow type landscape lying to the north of the river itself. A fishery and its associated car park have been located in the south-west corner of this area and it is felt that both are discreetly positioned, so reducing dramatically their impact on the conservation area.

A natural dividing line between the conservation area is formed by the route of



the old railway (east to west) and the bridge over the Heacham River just to the south of the latter.

The southern area of the Conservation Area is also irregular in form as it encompasses the historic buildings to the west and the mature landscape belt north of the river. To the east the conservation area boundary encompasses the Little Mill House and the important bridges over the river, one of which is listed. The eastern boundary is formed on the line of a rural road which connects the Old Lynn Road with the A149.

The southern boundary of the Conservation Area is formed along the line of Station Road to contain all the historic fabric lying south of the river itself, together with the important landscape, connecting screen walls and hedges.



Beginning at the south-west corner of this part of the Conservation Area, the boundary encompasses the important (non-listed) historic buildings to the west of the junction with the Hunstanton Road which include ranges of cottage buildings, converted farm buildings, and a nice screen wall with several prominent trees. To the east of the Hunstanton Road are two major listed

landmark buildings and attractive linking screen walls (parts are Listed) with mature landscape to the north and in between. Loo Water is now a residential home and has a major, well designed extension to the north-west, set back behind the listed building. Three new executive style houses have been inserted between the two listed buildings, again successful in the fact they have minimal impact on the historic fabric, inserted as they have been with the existing mature landscape.

Moving further eastwards, the sense of enclosure dissipates at the eastern edge of the 'Loo Water' garden. Pleasant views northwards are afforded however across an attractive meadow with Little Mill House to the north-east. This is an immensely important site which could be soon under pressure for development.

There are pleasant views east and west along Station Road, heightened by the subtle twists and turns of the road creating several interesting vistas.

The eastern boundary of the Conservation Area at present follows the line of a rural north-south connecting track which gives access to Little Mill House, but was once presumably the major road before the A149 By Pass. It is a pleasant road with mature hedgerows each side and the listed bridge over the river mentioned above. Attractive views are given back westwards to the village and northwards to the Church. The full importance of the 'paddock site' is also revealed from this road.



LISTED BUILDINGS

Heacham Conservation Area contains 25 listed buildings and structures. The statutory list was revised in 1984 and there were two additions in 1988 and one addition in 1993.

Listed Grade I

● **The Church of St. Mary the Virgin,** Church Lane North and Hunstanton Road East. Parish Church. Late 13th Century, cruciform plan with 15th Century later alterations. Flint and slated nave, aisles, south porch, clerestory, crossing tower. Flint, carstone and lead roofed chancel.

Listed Grade II

● **Mill Bridge Nursing Home, Lynn Road.** House. 17th Century with additions of circa 1900 to north and north-east. Squared, coursed and rubble carstone, red brick dressings, red pantile roofs.

● **Gates and Gate Piers for Mill Bridge Nursing Home, Lynn Road.** Gates and gate piers mid 18th Century cast iron gates.



● **Holly Lodge, Lynn Road.** House of two or more builds. Front pile of 17th Century to east, 18th century to west. Formally rendered, now exposed. 17th Century part coursed clunch with brick dressings and some carstone at base and as heightening courses. 18th century part – brick. Slated roofs.

● **1, 3, 5, 7, 9 and 11 Hunstanton Road.** Terrace of six cottages, mid 19th Century. Squared and coursed carstone, brick dressings, red pantile roof.

● **Chestnut House**, Hunstanton Road. House. Date stone JRM 1829 west gable. Red brick facade, squared and coursed carstone returns, black glazed pantiled roof.

● **Turret House**, Hunstanton Road. House. Circa 1830 and late 19th Century. Early house red brick, black glazed pantiles, late 19th Century addition, rubble carstone, flint, brick and cut stone dressings.

● **Church House**, Hunstanton Road. House. Early to mid 17th Century. Formerly a barn, reused as rectory house with Gothic detail 1857. Carstone, brick dressings, late 20th Century concrete pantiled roof.

● **The Homestead and Garden Wall**, Hunstanton Road. House. 18th century. Yellow washed carstone with brick dressings, red pantiled roof. Garden wall, attached to the south of the Homestead. 18th century. Coursed and squared carstone and clunch, some brick infill and dressings.

● **30 Hunstanton Road**. Cottage. Early 19th Century. Carstone with brick dressings and red pantiled roof.

● **Brier Cottage**, 48 Hunstanton Road. Cottage. Circa 1700. Clunch with brick dressings, red pantile roof.

● **Archway Cottage, 42, 44 and 46 Church Green**, Hunstanton Road. Terrace of cottages with carriage arch at west known as Temple Bar, formerly south entrance to Heacham Hall Park. Early 18th century. Carstone with brick dressings, red pantile roofs.

● **34 Hunstanton Road**. Former School House, now house. Built in 1837 for Mr. Strickland Neville-Rolfe. Coursed iron stone rubble with brick dressings. Pantile roof with 2 brick gable stacks. Brick quoins.

● **Kingdom Hall of Jehovahs Witnesses**, Hunstanton Road. Former school, built 1837. Coursed iron stone rubble with brick dressings. Hipped pantile roof. Brick quoins.

● **Churchyard Wall Including War Memorial, Church of St. Mary**, Church Lane and Hunstanton Road. Churchyard wall to south along Church Lane and west along Hunstanton Road. 18th century. Rubble, squared and coursed carstone and

clunch. Brick stitching infill and dressings.

● **16, 18, 20, 22, 24, 26 (Alms Houses)** Church Lane. Alms Houses. Dated 1763, but materials and details largely of 1913. Carstone plinth, squared clunch, red brick dressings and red pantiled roof.

● **Bridge Over Loo Water (On Line of Former Heacham – Hunstanton Road) Bridge**. Early 19th century. Carstone squared, coursed and dressed. Single stilted arched, humped back bridge with parapet wall. Gothic style.

IMPORTANT UNLISTED BUILDINGS

In addition to the historic listed buildings and structures described above there are several important unlisted buildings which have been identified as having significant townscape value. These are identified on the map and have been chosen because of their prominent location, use of traditional materials, their character is substantially intact and because they often relate to other historic buildings close by.

POST WAR DEVELOPMENT

Heacham has enjoyed a massive post war development as its attraction as a place to live near the coast grew. The result has been a plethora of housing estates, mostly to the south of the conservation area, together with a gradual spreading of the original settlement westwards towards the coast.

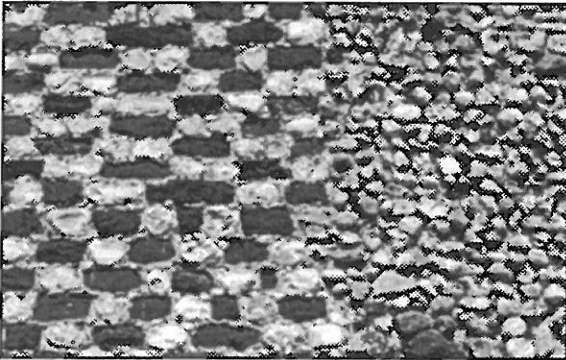
The community is vibrant and clearly cherishes the historic basis of the settlement and the conservation area as a whole. Thankfully, the essential character of the conservation area has been retained and the insertion of modern buildings, generally housing, has had a relatively small scale impact on the historic fabric.

Immediately adjacent to the conservation area, beyond the A149, is Norfolk Lavender, based at Caley Mill (Listed Grade 2.) This has developed into an extremely successful enterprise and is a major source of tourism and attraction to West Norfolk as a whole.

TRADITIONAL MATERIALS

The character of Heacham Conservation Area owes a great deal to the use of local materials in the construction of its historic buildings. These materials include:

- Dark brown carstone and carstone used generally in all its forms. Sometimes coursed, sometimes with galletting and sometimes of random rubble form. Finally it is also used in a layered way known as 'slipwork' which is back mortared (i.e. no mortar showing on the face).
- Red Norfolk brickwork.
- Clunch (sometimes random rubble, sometimes coursed).
- Norfolk orange/red pantiles.
- Welsh slate.
- Clay peg tiles.
- Norfolk blue/black glazed pantiles.



- Flintwork – generally uncoursed rubble walling although some instances of knapped flint.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL INTEREST

There are no scheduled ancient monuments in Heacham Conservation Area. However, as an ancient settlement there is a need for a monitoring brief to be applied to any future development which might take place, whether in the form of new build or adaptation or alteration to the existing historic fabric.

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.

Examples of all these detractors are seen in Heacham Conservation Area, although in general terms the overall character has remained intact. The detractors include:

- Heavy traffic, particularly along Station Road to the south, but also in a north/south direction.

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

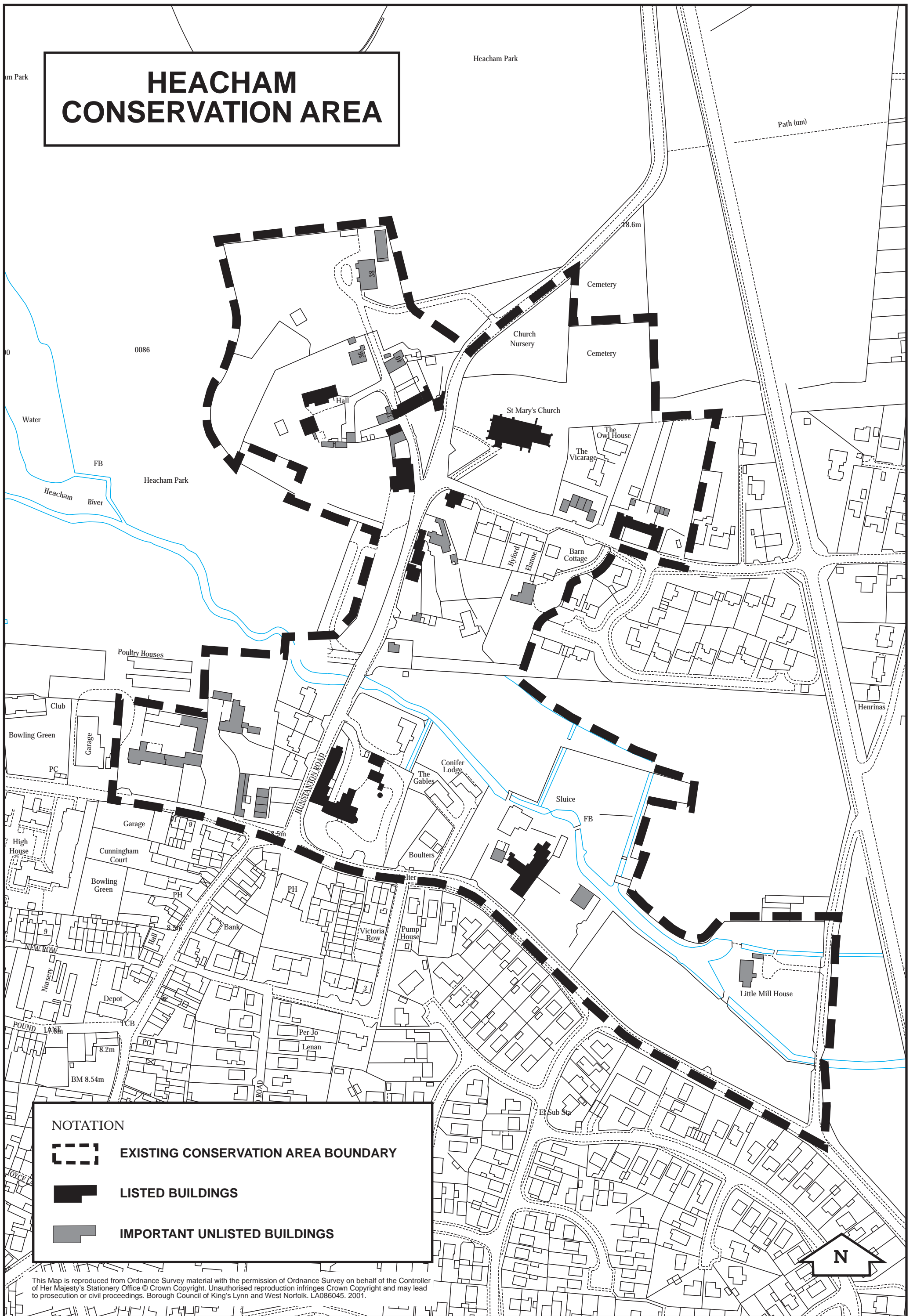
Within conservation areas, a number of special controls apply and it is advisable that anyone proposing to carry out new development, alterations, extensions, installations, demolition or work to trees should seek advice from the Planning Policy at an early stage. A leaflet summarising these issues and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



PLANNING POLICY

*King's Court
Chapel Street
King's Lynn
Norfolk PE30 1EX
Tel: (01553) 616200
Minicom: (01553) 616705
Fax: (01553) 616652
DX 57825 KING'S LYNN
Email: planreview@west-norfolk.gov.uk*

HEACHAM CONSERVATION AREA



NOTATION

- EXISTING CONSERVATION AREA BOUNDARY**
- LISTED BUILDINGS**
- IMPORTANT UNLISTED BUILDINGS**

This Map is reproduced from Ordnance Survey material with the permission of Ordnance Survey on behalf of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office © Crown Copyright. Unauthorised reproduction infringes Crown Copyright and may lead to prosecution or civil proceedings. Borough Council of King's Lynn and West Norfolk. LA086045. 2001.