

# WIMBOTSHAM

## CONSERVATION AREA

### DRAFT CHARACTER STATEMENT



*WIMBOTSHAM, a parish and village, 1 mile N.N.E. of Downham. In Sept. 1835, Mr Green, the aeronaut, descended here, after a flight in his balloon from Vauxhall-gardens, London. After breakfasting with Mr Pike, he ascended again into the aerial regions.*

William White 1845

**DESIGNATED: March 1979**  
**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.

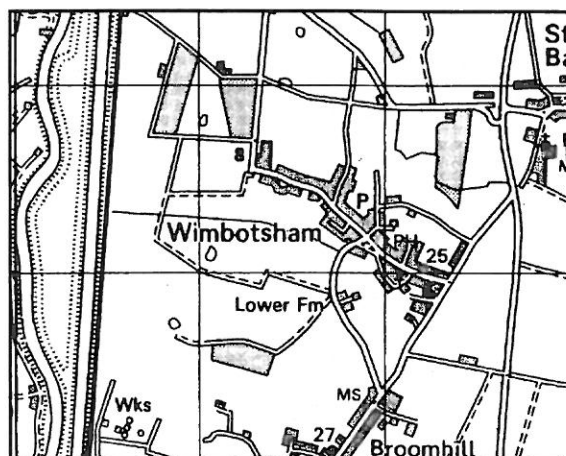
**Wimbotsham Conservation Area was first designated in March 1979 and has not been revised since that date. This Statement was prepared in April 2001. This document highlights the special qualities which underpin the character of the Conservation Area, justifying its designation.** It also seeks to increase 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

Wimbotsham is a relatively large village of approximately 16.5 hectares (41 acres) with a population of over 600. It is located 1½ kilometres (1 mile) to the north-east of Downham Market and ¾ kilometre (½ mile) west of the main A10 road connecting King's Lynn and Ely. King's Lynn lies approximately 14½ kilometres (9 miles) to the north and Ely 32 kilometres (20 miles) to the south. The Great Ouse River lies 4 kilometres (2½ miles) to the west and with its associated drains it constitutes an area of 'marshland fen' which stretches northwards to the Wash.



The village occupies land which falls quite steeply towards the Ouse (east to west) and the marshland plain to the north. The outer suburbs of Downham Market have spread towards the south-western corner of the village and the settlements are now only separated by a few hundred metres (yards). The land also falls north to south and this topography has created the natural location for the village.

Drainage ditches to both the north and south of the settlement again follow the natural fall of the land from south-east to north-west, and have been a determining factor in the profile of the village form.

The settlement is surrounded by a matrix of smaller villages and hamlets. Stow Bardolph, approximately a kilometre ( $\frac{2}{3}$  mile) to the east, is now physically separated from Wimbotsham by the busy A10 road. Stowbridge lies 3 kilometres (2 miles) to the north-west and is located directly on the Ouse. Runcton Holme and Thorpland lie almost directly north around 5 kilometres (3 miles) from the village, and the historic market town of Downham is to the south-west.

## ORIGIN AND HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

Wimbotsham, translated as "Winebald's Homestead", began as a settlement before the Norman Conquest. Reference to the settlement is known to have been made around 930AD and so it is reasonable to assume even earlier origins in the Saxon period.

The earliest settlement was probably on the higher ground to the south-east affording a commanding prospect of the land to the south, which is practically flat as it unravels towards the Wash. This early settlement was presumably centred around farmsteads and later a manor house, evidence for the location of which is still being analysed. The presence of water and drainage is clearly a factor of great importance in determining the settlement pattern of these 'marshland fen' areas. The western, and lower, part of the village could have been uninhabitable in these early years and the presence of drainage ditches to both north and south of the main settlement probably had a large impact on its location.

St Mary's Church, essentially Norman, is located at the southern end of the village and, ground, and with the nearby Church Farm probably formed the nucleus of early

settlement which occupied high land between the drainage ditches, a natural location governed by topographical features.

The growth of the settlement since has followed a typical pattern. Cottages of various sizes were built each side of Church Road, the main route through the village, with the earliest being at the eastern end nearest to the main Lynn to Downham Market road, also an important factor in that it formed a manmade eastern boundary to the settlement.



Gradually over time pressure on 'infill' plots has resulted in piecemeal development, largely post war, with significant areas of new housing in Chapel Lane (Council built) to the south and Turners Close to the north.

Interestingly, a second 'nucleus' emerged lower down Church Road to the west, presumably because of the convergence of several tracks and connecting roads at this point. The result, culminating in Victorian times, has been the generation of a traditional Village Green surrounded by housing, (ranges of terraced cottages and the odd 'grander' dwelling) a pub and the Victorian county primary school.

Transportation routes, as always, are an important factor influencing the historic development of the settlement. As mentioned above, the old Downham Market to Lynn road forms a definite eastern 'edge' to the village with no built development further eastwards, presumably due to the ownership of agricultural land beyond.

The presence of this road did generate the location of another 'set piece' building in the village, Hill House, an early coaching inn

(now a Grade II listed building) dating from 1700.



Further settlement to the north, west and south was determined by the presence of adjacent agricultural use and the gradual parcelling of land for workers' cottages along both Tinkers Lane and Millers Lane. The latter originally contained a windmill until Victorian times. The odd modern house has been inserted into this area also.

The presence of the Victorian Methodist Chapel to the south of Church Road and west of the Church itself stimulated further growth along another connecting track, Chapel Lane. The Chapel is still in use and land further along to the west of it has been developed as Council housing.

Modern development has already been mentioned and has undoubtedly been influenced by the close proximity of the King's Lynn urban area to the north and even closer proximity of Downham Market to the south. Development has taken place along all the roads and tracks through the settlement including the 'ribbon' type development north of Hill House along Lynn Road, and westwards along 'Westway'.

The attraction of Wimbotsham as a place to live has generated continued vitality for the settlement although it has at the same time induced great pressure on the still available infill sites in and around the existing built fabric. Careful control of this will be needed over future years to preserve the essential character of the area, particularly related to the impact of the car.

In summary, the village of Wimbotsham is an old settlement based essentially on agriculture, located along important connecting routes to Downham Market,

Lynn and Ely. The important farms remain, Church and Low Farm, which help to retain the agricultural nature of the area although the dramatic changes in the industry in the 20th Century have resulted in a community all too dependant on the motorcar.

## CHARACTER OVERVIEW

Wimbotsham Conservation Area has an irregular form.

The eastern boundary, and 'defined edge', is the Lynn Road, which leads to Downham Market just a few hundred metres (yards) to the south-east. The area to the west of this road contains the important early settlement area of the village, and it is here that the principal buildings of Church, Hill House, and Church Farm are located.

The main route through the village (Church Road) connects this early settlement with what is perhaps now the main nucleus, the Village Green with pub, county primary school, village shop/post office and Village Hall all surrounding or near to it.

A smaller 'Green' lies further to the north and leads to the connecting farm tracks of Millers Lane and Tinkers Lane, their associated buildings and allotment gardens beyond.

The south-western boundaries of the conservation area encompass Church Farm, the Methodist Chapel and the dwellings south of Church Road. The western boundary encompasses the older dwellings on the north side of 'Westway', a road running out of the conservation area, which connects the settlement to the agricultural land and villages to the north-west.



The north-eastern conservation area

boundary contains the rear gardens of the properties to the north of Church Road and, somewhat arbitrarily, cuts north/south across the paddock type land lying to the south of Millers Lane.

Several factors combine to provide the essential character of the conservation area. The architectural 'set piece' buildings, the unity of character and the visual interest of Church Road, the important nucleus of the Village Green and its surrounding



buildings and the more intimate rural atmosphere of Tinkers Lane and Millers Lane. Of equal importance are the mature landscape containing many important trees, grass verges, hedgerows, and an almost water meadow quality to the land between Millers Lane and the properties of Church Road.

This combination of components, containing built fabric and landscape, has over many years created a special character which justifies its designation of conservation area status. There are important and dramatic views out of the conservation area, especially towards the marshland fen plain further westwards. Views up and down Church Road, containing an assembly of varying building forms with changes of level and subtle changes in direction are charming in the classic 'townscape' tradition.

The area around Millers Lane and Tinkers Lane is again subtly different in character



being more dominated by the presence of field, hedgerows, trees, tracks and footpaths. Good views back towards the village are afforded.

There are also excellent views of the village and conservation from the south (on Lynn Road) and when approaching from the west (along Westway), the latter albeit through very nondescript post war development.

Generally speaking, modern developments, whilst all too typically fairly bland and undistinguished in their response to context, have all been at a sympathetic scale and have not destroyed the essential character of the whole.

## SPACES AND BUILDINGS

The form of Wimbotsham Conservation Area is complex but can be summarised as one resulting from 'road linear' and 'village green' settlement.

There are, however, a variety of spaces created by:

- the random nature of building plots and the form of the buildings on them,
- topography in the form of natural falls and subtle twists to roads, tracks and footpaths, and,
- landscape features of equal importance to the built form – mature trees, hedgerows, grass verges spilling onto roads, the Green itself, and views outwards of distant agricultural swathes.

These components combine to give the conservation area its special array of views, vistas and visual interest.

Starting at the east, Wimbotsham lies to the side **Lynn Road**. The village is announced architecturally by Hill House, the listed building on the south corner of Lynn Road and Church Road, a very important architectural statement, with its equally important screen wall and railings. Running along Lynn Road to the south, the linear 'edge' of the conservation area is defined by a more modern screen wall, an

attractive paling fence to Church Farm and the belt of mature trees fronting the modern infill houses south of Hill House and Church Farm. This tree belt is a vitally important element in the character of the conservation area and affords attractive views from the Lynn Road when travelling northwards. The outbuildings between Church Farm and the new houses are more visible and have been sensitively converted for residential use

A public footpath, running east-west along the church yard wall, divides the Church Farm complex from the Church which is set on high ground to the north. The footpath is in a cut and is crossed by a small pathway which provides a direct link between the church and the farm. The church yard,



bounded on three sides by attractive lichen covered carstone rubble walls, falls quite markedly to the west and the view to the flat countryside beyond is dramatic, but is marred by the lack of enclosure to the modern bungalows inserted along the western boundary.

Returning to **Church Road**, the Victorian cottages on the northern corner have been extensively extended. Poor enclosure reveals the clutter of the garden to public view and this could be improved. The conservation area boundary to the north encompasses the gardens to these cottages (now one property).

The upper part of Church Road is characterised by ranges of historic cottages, particularly to the north, which step forward and backwards on their plots, some having good screen walls, which all contribute to visual interest.

The buildings to the south are generally more modern although there are three pairs of Victorian cottages. All buildings on this side of the road are approximately 2m (6 feet) higher than the road itself, again



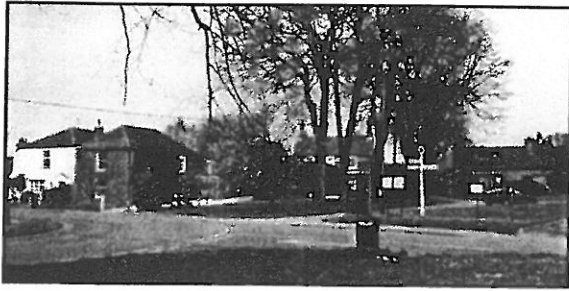
adding to visual interest. All the historic buildings have been extended and 'improved', unfortunately in most cases with plastic windows and inappropriate materials. Visual interest is provided by the complex assembly of built form, the higher land to the south of Church Road and the changes in direction of the road.

The southern 'edge' to the road contains the rough track leading to St Mary's Church, churchyard, and modern vicarage. It also contains **Chapel Lane**, located further to the west, a rough track leading to the Methodist Chapel and thence to the southern edge of the Village Green. The footpath to the south of the churchyard also runs into it and an attractive pair of Victorian cottages (now one property) marks the junction.

The western end of Church Road contains more historic cottage ranges repeating the random pattern of built form mentioned above. A post war development, Turners Close lies to the north.

There are attractive views in both directions along Church Road and outwards to open countryside on the north. However, the best views are undoubtedly looking back up Church Road to where the hilltop location of the early settlement is particularly noticeable. Most of the 'infill' sites along this part of Church Road have now been developed and almost all the historic fabric has been refurbished and extended.

**The Village Green**, the other major feature of the conservation area, lies to the west of



Church Road and is a natural 'node' to adjacent tracks and roads. **Low Road**, which connects to Lynn Road, enters the Green at its west corner and connects the village to Low Farm. Chapel Lane enters from the south. Church Road itself continues to form the northern edge of the Green and becomes 'Westway' beyond. Millers Lane and Tinkers Lane join at a sort of 'sub-node' to the north of the main Green itself.

The southern boundary of the Green is formed mainly by the county primary school, a recently extended Victorian building with a good screen wall to the north. A pair of much altered cottages lie further west and a modern house has been built on an infill site at the junction with Low Road.



To the north lie attractive ranges of cottage buildings which include the village pub. These ranges again step forward and back to create a real sense of enclosure, visual interest and intimacy. The eastern edge of the Green is marked by slightly grander Victorian dwellings to the north with Nos. 29 & 31, a pair of 'villas', being particularly attractive. Again, most of the historic buildings have been altered but the range containing the pub thankfully remains relatively intact.

The smaller 'sub' Green is another attractive space and is surrounded by good historic buildings, all of which have been

extensively altered and extended with varying degrees of success and appropriateness.

Special mention should be made of the mature trees on the Green and 'sub' Green. These are a vitally important element of the conservation area's character and should



be carefully managed. Unfortunately, the usual clutter of townscape elements are present, particularly to the south of the sub green.

To the west, the aptly named **Westway** provides the major route out of Wimbotsham to the villages and agricultural land beyond. Following Council housing on the south side, it has been subject to intense building on 'infill' sites during the post war years and is largely outside the conservation area. However, the range of historic buildings immediately to the north, up to the modern shop and post office, are included in the conservation area. They have all been extended, altered and refurbished again with varying degrees of success. All nevertheless retain historic fabric and still contribute to the character of the conservation area.

The final defined space of the conservation area is the area to the north of the Green and Church Road centred around **Tinkers Lane and Millers Lane**. This is something of a "backlands" area with it's own special character. The ground slopes from north to south to create an almost water meadow type quality south of the drainage dyke. There are relatively few houses although both Millers Lane and Tinkers Lane have one or two ranges of cottages and modern infill buildings. The area has a pleasant rural feel and affords superb views of the

village lying to the south and west; this rural character should be cherished.



## LISTED BUILDINGS

There are only two listed buildings included in the Wimbotsham Conservation Area. The statutory list was revised in 1984 and there have been no additions.

### Listed Grade II\*

- **Church of St. Mary, Church Road.** Built in the 12th Century with some late 13th Century work. The whole church was restored in Victorian times (1853-54). Carstone with ashlar quoins and slate roofs, and corrugated tiles to the south nave. Three stage west tower, early 16th Century. Important 12th Century south and north doors.

### Listed Grade II

- **Hill House, 28 Lynn Road.** Built around 1700. Brick and carstone with slate roofs. L plan. East front of 3 bays in two storeys. Central gabled, classical porch. String courses at eaves and first floor. 'Tumbling in' to south and north gables. Attic windows.

## IMPORTANT UNLISTED BUILDINGS

There are 48 buildings which are considered to be 'important' in the sense that they all contribute to a greater or lesser extent to the unity of character of the conservation area. In several cases these buildings have been marred severely by modern insertions, either constituting 'over development' of a site by extension or simply through inappropriate specification of components such as plastic windows.

## POST WAR DEVELOPMENTS

Post war development has been relatively intense, creating pressures which still exist today.

Wimbotsham has both suffered and benefited from its close proximity to Downham Market. In a positive way it has nurtured a thriving and vital community but in a negative way it has encouraged the ingredients of a dormitory suburb to a larger area.

Single infill buildings and new pockets of housing, particularly to the west of Church Road, tend to be "anywhere" housing and, in design terms, lack a sense of place. More recent developments show some signs of a reversal of this trend, which is encouraging.

Again, on a positive note it is gratifying to see the thriving primary school of 70 pupils, an adjacent playing field with changing rooms and football pitch, a busy shop and post office, and an attractive village pub adjacent to the Village Green. These components together with village hall, church, and converted barns to Church Farm and Low Farm all contribute to the vitality of the community. This infrastructure, so essential for a flourishing settlement is to be cherished and encouraged.



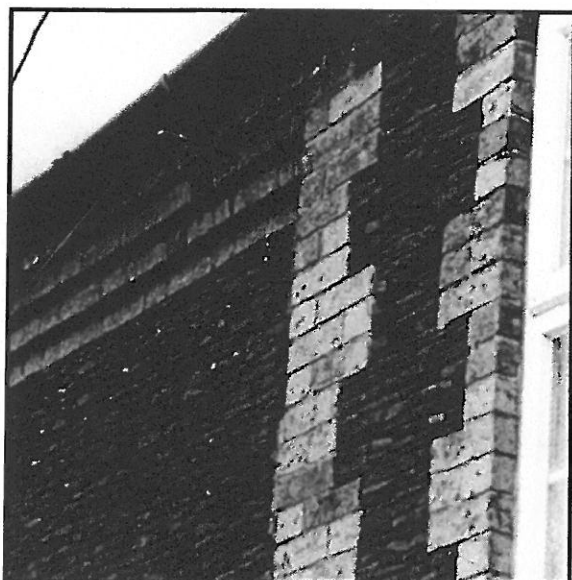
Recent developments have included the insertion of 'services' into the fabric, which has unfortunately led to problems created by visually obtrusive 'wirescape'. More recent mains sewage insertion led to important archaeological finds which might help to pinpoint the location of the 'original' manor.



## TRADITIONAL MATERIALS

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

- Extensive use of carstone in all its forms, i.e. rubble walling, random block walling, galletted mortar joints, and 'tiling' (thin slips)
- Red, buff and cream Norfolk brickwork



- Natural clay pantiles
- Welsh slate
- Flint (generally random rubble walling)

## ARCHAEOLOGICAL INTEREST

There are no Scheduled Ancient Monuments in Wimbotsham Conservation Area. The recent insertion of mains sewage generated some interesting historical evidence of the original manor house.

## DETRACTORS

The special character of conservation areas can easily be eroded by seemingly minor alterations such as unsuitable replacement windows and doors, inappropriate materials, unsympathetic paintwork, removal of walls, railings, trees and hedges. Unfortunately Wimbotsham Conservation Area exhibits many of these.



Overhead wires are visually intrusive in some parts of the conservation area.

## 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

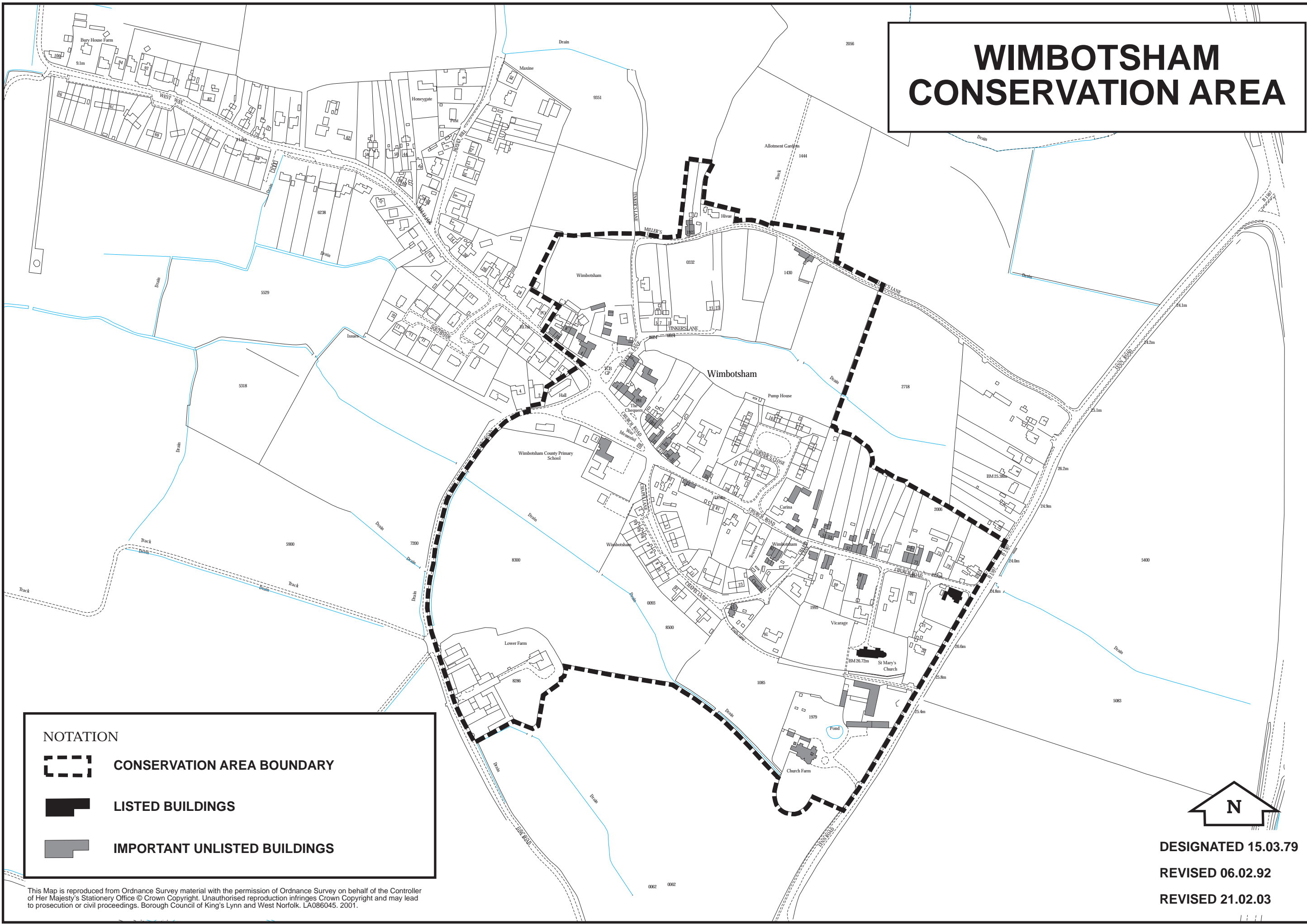
**Within conservation areas, a number of special controls apply and it is advisable that anyone proposing to carry out new development, alterations, extensions, installations, demolition or work to trees should seek advice from the Planning Department at an early stage. A leaflet summarising these issues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






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# WIMBOTSHAM CONSERVATION AREA



**NOTATION**

-  CONSERVATION AREA BOUNDARY
-  LISTED BUILDINGS
-  IMPORTANT UNLISTED BUILDINGS



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