

# BURNHAM OVERY TOWN

## CONSERVATION AREA DRAFT CHARACTER STATEMENT



*BURNHAM OVERY TOWN. Burnham Overy parish includes the large village of Burnham Overy Staith. The church stands on a bold eminence, a mile S. of the Staith, near the Wells road, and the remains of an ancient cross; 1 mile N.E. of Burnham Market.*

WILLIAM WHITE 1845

DESIGNATED: March 1977  
REVISED: February 1992



POLICY &  
ENVIRONMENT

## INTRODUCTION

***A Conservation Area - "An area of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance".***

The conservation of the historic environment is part of our quality of life, helping to foster economic prosperity and providing an attractive environment in which to live or work. The Borough Council is committed to the protection and enhancement of West Norfolk's historic built environment and significant parts of it are designated as conservation areas.

Conservation areas were introduced by the 1967 Civic Amenities Act. Local Authorities were required to identify areas of special architectural or historic interest, whose character or appearance it is desirable to preserve or enhance, and to designate them as conservation areas. This duty is now part of the 1990 Planning (Listed Buildings & Conservation Areas) Act which also requires the review of existing conservation areas and, where appropriate, the designation of new ones. The quality and interest of a conservation area depends upon a combination of factors including the relationship and architectural quality of buildings, materials, spaces, trees and other landscape features, together with views into and out of the area.

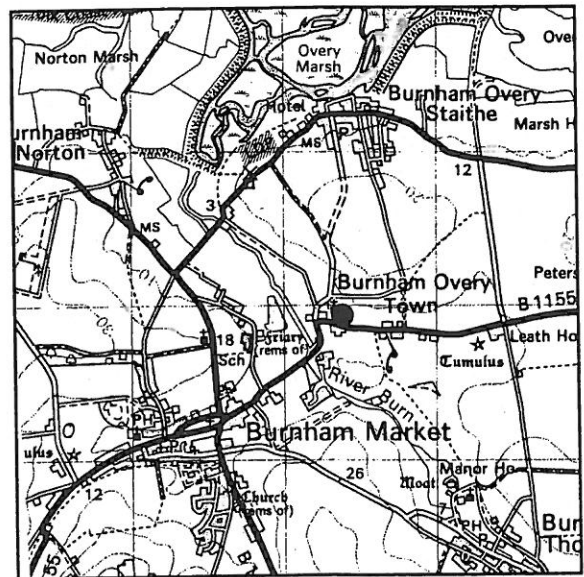
**The Burnham Overy Town Conservation Area was first designated in 1977. This document highlights the special qualities that underpin the character of the conservation area, justifying its designation.** It also seeks to increase awareness of those qualities so that where changes to the environment occur, they do so in a sympathetic way without harm to the essential character of the area. This 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

Burnham Overy Town is situated in open, gently undulated countryside in the North Norfolk Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. It has grown up on the east bank of the river Burn with St Clement's Church on a low but quite dramatic bluff of higher ground and the separate group of mill buildings to the south astride the river.

The village is strategically placed at a point where the road from Burnham Market (the B1155) crosses the river and continues eastwards to meet the main coast road (the A149). It occupies a central position in the Burnhams with Overy Staithe 1.3 kilometres ( $\frac{3}{4}$  mile) to the north, Burnham Thorpe 2 kilometres ( $1\frac{1}{4}$  miles) to the south east and Burnham Market 1.5 kilometres (1 mile) to the south west. More generally it is 7.5 kilometres ( $4\frac{1}{2}$  miles) west of Wells-next-the-Sea, 17 kilometres ( $10\frac{1}{2}$  miles) east of Hunstanton and 15 kilometres (9 miles) north of Fakenham.



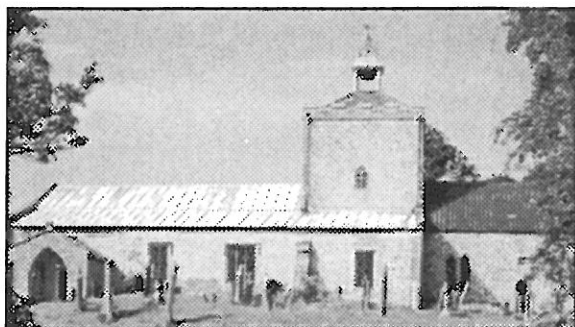
The best position from which to appreciate Burnham Overy Town's landscape setting is on the opposite side of the valley from the Friary ruins at Burnham Norton. Here across open meadows the squat church tower is clearly visible above a cluster of red pantile roofs. This is the view again emerging from Burnham Market before the black tarred tower mill asserts itself to the right of the road. From the other direction, approached across flat arable fields, the east end of St Clement's Church and its truncated central tower complete with delicate cupola is again the most striking feature on the eastern edge of the village. From the north, along Mill Road, as the land falls away the view is more expansive with the white onion dome of the windmill first visible against a dense

plantation of poplars in the valley bottom before St Clement's cupola emerges above trees to the left.

## ORIGIN AND HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

The name Burnham is derived from the Old English "Bruneham", recorded in Domesday Book, meaning a settlement on a stream, the stream being the Burn. By the 13th Century several of the Burnhams are distinguished by their geographic appendages (e.g. Norton, Sutton and Westgate), which all point to Burnham Ulph, at the eastern end of Burnham Market, as the original Saxon settlement from which the others developed as secondary hamlets. There was no Burnham Easton but Overy, or "over the water" is an early medieval reference to the settlement that grew up on the east bank of the Burn when the river was tidal as far inland as Burnham Thorpe.

Early growth around the church and along the road to Burnham Market was largely the result of river trade and was reflected in the architectural alterations to the building itself which was originally a Norman cruciform church with a central tower that survives today without



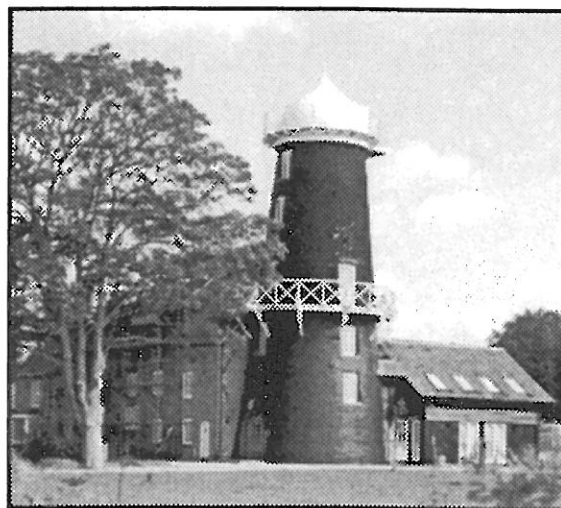
its top stage. Side aisles were added as early as c.1200 and by the 13th Century the community could afford a further remodelling with tall lancet windows and a south aisle to the chancel. The south porch is 15th Century but no other significant alterations occurred until the Earl of Orford's restoration of 1835, by which time the plan form had already begun to contract with the loss of the north aisle.

The stone cross base on the green that reputedly gave its name to Brothercross Hundred, is another reminder of the village's medieval prosperity. The brothers in question would have been the monks of the small Carmelite Friary on the opposite bank of the river. Founded in 1241 at Bradmere on the edge of the marshes at the western end of Burnham Norton parish, its relocation here just

a few years later, may have been influenced by the proximity to river trade and the collection of tolls for crossing the Burn.

There is also strong archaeological evidence for the existence of some kind of linear settlement between Burnham Overy and Burnham Ulph from the remarkably rich sequence of finds from the Roman period onwards but especially the wealth of Saxon and Medieval metalwork found on both sides of the B1155 since the 1980's. The river crossing then must have been via a low causeway and, in the absence of excavation, the finds point either to a considerable and lengthy movement of people and goods or, more likely, a roadside suburb. Although the precise site of St Andrew's Church is not known, skeletons have been unearthed by roadworks on the B1155 approx. 200 metres (218 yards) east of Burnham Ulph church. St Andrews was abandoned in 1421 and the living united with Burnham Overy Church, a clear indication that the medieval settlement pattern, had already begun to shrink.

The gradual silting up of the Burn led to a shift of activity downstream to the staithe at the mouth of the river from the 17th Century onwards. This enabled a succession of watermills to be built astride the river including the mill here, a two-storey structure dated 1737 together with Thomas Beeston's mill house and the mill bridge (1753). The capital outlay on buildings and machinery would have been considerable but North West Norfolk was a highly prosperous and progressive agricultural area in the 18th century and the business flourished despite Edward Savory's rural venture just a kilometre downstream established in 1790. Beeston decided to strengthen his business further in 1814 with the construction of a 5 storey windmill. This was





just part of a more general expansion which included the addition of a third storey to the watermill in the same year, a large new stable block and sizeable extension to the mill house.

The addition of a windmill was a not uncommon arrangement in the early 19th Century among the more ambitious operators for whom a secondary source of power gave their business greater capacity, especially during long, dry spells. Again Savory, following his rival's every move, had built his own windmill on the coast road six years later. What is uncommon is the survival of both types of power mill not just here but downstream in the same parish together within Beeston's somewhat unusual decision to replace his own windmill on higher ground to the north east (shown on Faden's map of 1793) with a new tower mill down in the shallow valley bottom where the operation advantages outweighed any reduction in wind power. Here it continued to grind corn until a disastrous fire in 1935 brought production to an end.

## CHARACTER OVERVIEW

The Conservation Area consists of two quite separate groups of buildings, each with its own distinct character. The church, surrounded by cottages and Church Hill Farm is situated at the junction of Mill Road with the B1155. A few fields to the south along the Broad stands the mill house and its two former corn mills set back from the road and forming a well defined group.

Situated at the western end of the range, the focal point of the whole mill complex is the tapered black tower of the windmill. Complete with gallery and onion cap but missing its sails and fantail it stands out from the two storey brick extension that connects it to the water mill and is clearly visible across the grass. The water mill too is impressive but less dramatic, rising 3 storeys above the mill bridge, with regular rows of small pane casements and the familiar weatherboarded sack hoist. All the joinery here and on the windmill is picked out in white gloss paint.

This remarkable sequence of buildings, arranged on a west/east axis, is completed by the early Georgian mill house. Contemporary with the water mill and attached to it, the house has been extended eastwards and with its two columned porches looks more like a terrace of some distinction. The Doric columns, pedimented dormers and fine staircase all confirm the wealth and status of its original owner, Thomas Beeston, whose impressive

ledger slab lies in the chancel of St Clement's church.

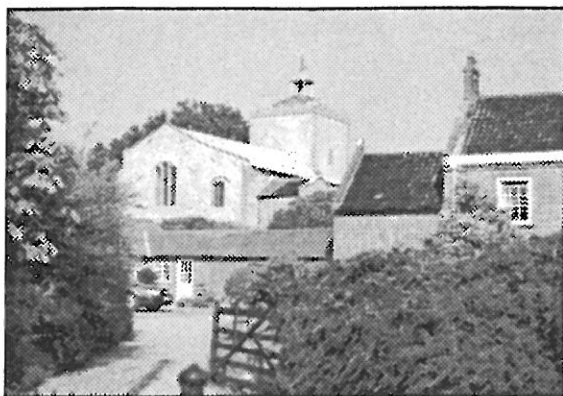
The long stable range (1812) to the rear displays a mixture of more elaborate and expensive wall materials, including pebble and squared knapped flint, but is not visible from the road. The range of farm buildings alongside the



driveway in flint and chalk with hipped pantile roofs is more typical; a tight knit group that, like the two mill buildings, has recently been discreetly converted into holiday homes after years of neglect.

From here to Veldings Corner is a short distance and as the road crosses the river Burn, canalised north of the mill bridge, and curves to the left, more converted farm buildings to the rear of Church Hill Farm break the skyline at the top of a sloping meadow. Further round the squat tower of St. Clement's peers above the roof tops and then the view ahead, framed by one large sycamore in the garden of Pomfrets, is terminated by an attractive row of early 19th century houses. Ostrich House in red brick with coped flint gables and sashes is a modest late Georgian house on the corner with Mill Lane, upstaged by an eccentric display of classical figure heads arranged around the entrance to the adjoining cottage. This and the remaining cottages are otherwise plain vernacular buildings in chalk block and orange pantiles. The cross base, heavily patched up with cement stands rather forlornly on a small grass traffic island surrounded by directional signs and rose beds.

The road then bends sharply to the right past a tall chalk and brick rubble wall on the inside with Church House, another good late Georgian house at right angles to the road, framing the view up to the church. From here it is a short distance uphill past Church Hill farmhouse, a larger 18th Century house with central columned porch only really visible from the churchyard. Rather more prominent is the impressive 3 stead threshing barn beyond.



Flanked by single storey outbuildings beside the road, the workmanship is of the highest quality with finely jointed chalk blocks, brick dressings and ventilation slits and unusual projecting cart entrance under a catslide roof. The whole group has been repaired and successfully converted to residential use and the barn now forms the centrepiece of an attractive range and a well defined edge to the Conservation Area.



The most rewarding approach to the church is along Mill Road lined with a mixture of 19th century outbuildings beside the road and cottages set slightly back with glimpses of the church between. Beyond this informal grouping the church is more clearly visible on rising ground (Gravel Hill) across a rough paddock, the top edge of which is defined by a long red brick terrace facing out across the river valley. A footpath running along the rear of this terrace approaches the church, visible beyond a ragged ash tree growing out from a set of cast iron railings.

Rounding the west end of the church, views across the orange pantile roofs, chalk gables and flint walls of cottages gathered below are surprisingly expansive to the low wooded hills beyond. Further on along the pathway the full extent of the church becomes visible for the first time. Before the top stage of the tower was replaced with early 19th century brick battlements and cupola St Clements would have been a more impressive landmark. Now

a long, low building with leaded nave and south aisle roofs, central tower and pantiled chancel it sits comfortable astride its hill.



## LISTED BUILDINGS

There are 7 listed buildings in the Conservation Area. The statutory listed was revised in 1985 and there have been no further additions.

### Listed grade I

**Church of St Clement:** 12<sup>th</sup> Century Saxon Norman origins represented by axial tower, made cruciform c1200 with transepts, presumably rebuilt nave with additional side aisles, chancel largely rebuilt in 13c. Later 15c fenestration, 18c and 1835 restorations. Flint with stone dressings, lead nave and south aisle roofs. Tiled tower with early 19c brick parapet. Cupola to hipped roof.

### Listed Grade II

- **Mill House:** Mid 18th Century with early 19th Century addition. Red brick with black glazed and smut pantile roofs. 2 storeys and attic. Sashes. 2 late 18th Century porches with Doric columns. 3 pedimented dormers. Fine mid 18th Century staircase.
- **Watermill:** 1737 with tower mill attached. Red brick, red pantile roof with weatherboarded additions, 2 storeys with third added perhaps 1814 when tower mill built. Mill bridge datestone 1753. Weatherboarded hoist. Machinery includes undershot waterwheel.
- **Tower Windmill:** Dated 1814 attached to watermill. Black tarred 5 storey brick mill. 2 light casements. Cap and sails removed, no machinery surviving.
- **Stable Block to Mill House:** Dated TB 1812. Pebble flint with brick dressings. Some squared and knapped flint and clunch. Red pantiles. 2 storey. 7 bays. Casements. Loft over with slatted windows. Sundial on south gable.

- **Church Hill Farmhouse:** Mid/late 18th Century. Red brick, black smut pantiles. Sashes. Porch with columns, 6 panel front door. Clunch gables.
- **Wayside Cross, Veldings Corner:** 14th Century stone base and shaft. Supposedly gave its name to Brothecross Hundred.
- **Ostrich House, Veldings Corner:** Early 19th Century. Red brick, red pantile roof. Sashes. Gabled porch with carved ostrich.



### IMPORTANT UNLISTED BUILDINGS

Burnham Overy Town's form and character is largely dependent on the vernacular style of its unlisted buildings such as Church House and the recently converted threshing barn at Church Hill Farm. Together these buildings of local significance form the great majority of buildings in the Conservation Area.

They 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 Burnham Overy Town Conservation Area owes a great deal to the use of local materials in the construction of its historic buildings.

These materials include:

- Chalk (coursed/squared blocks and random)
- Cobbles (coursed and random)
- Pebbles
- Red brick

- Colourwash
- Orange pantiles
- Black glazed pantiles
- Smut pantiles

Most of the smaller vernacular buildings - cottages and outbuildings - are built in chalk (square blocks to the front, random chalk to the sides and rear) with orange pantiles. Larger houses and the two mills are distinguished by red brick with black glazed or smut pantiles.

### ARCHAEOLOGICAL INTEREST

The cross base on the green is the only Scheduled Ancient Monument in Burnham Overy Town Conservation Area. Apart from this the church and the two mill buildings, there are no other sites recorded in the Norfolk Sites and Monuments Record.

### 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 and stained joinery, removal of walls, railings, trees and hedges.

Within Burnham Overy Town Conservation Area there are few features which detract significantly from its intrinsic character. They include:

- The field between the B1155 and the river (OS2177) being used as a dump, is an eyesore on this main approach to the village.
- The clutter of excessive signs and poles on the green is an eyesore in the centre of the Conservation Area and significantly detracts from the immediate setting of the cross base and row of attractive cottages opposite.



## 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 or demolition should seek advice from the Planning Department 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 the Planning Department.



### **BOROUGH PLANNING**

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