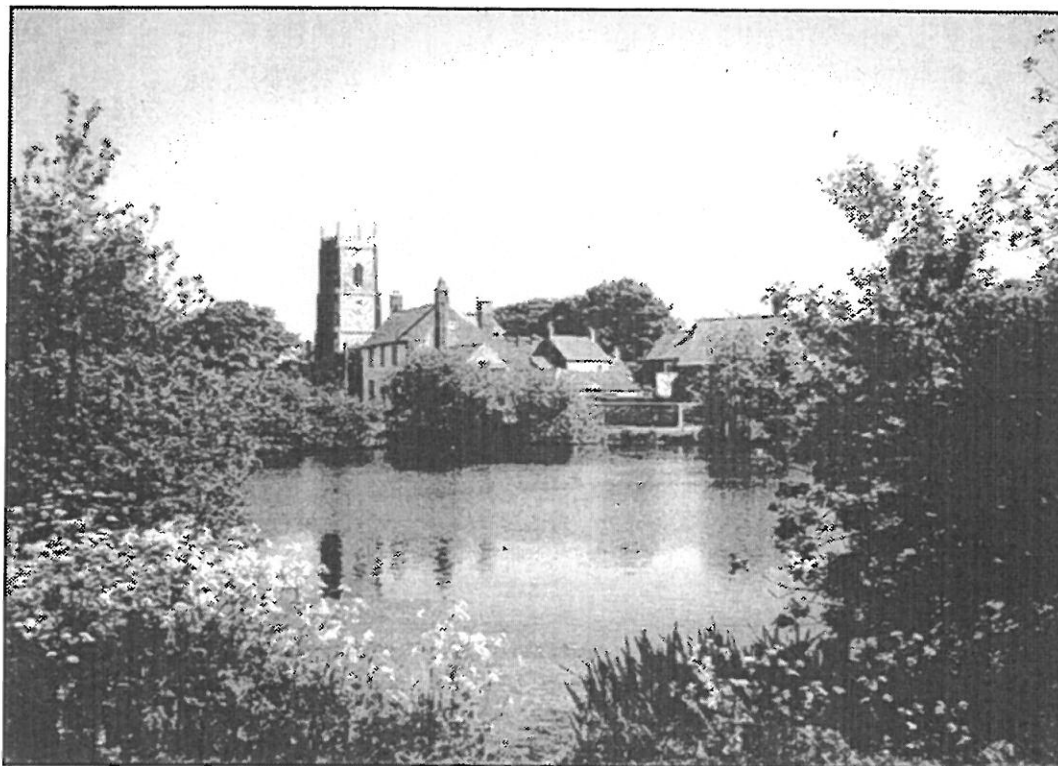


# GREAT MASSINGHAM

## CONSERVATION AREA DRAFT CHARACTER STATEMENT



*"MASSINGHAM (GREAT) is a considerable village, 10 miles N. of Swaffham; 12 miles E. of Lynn; and 3 miles N.W. of Rougham. The chief part of the village, with the church, is on a pleasant acclivity; rising gradually from the common towards Little Massingham.*

WILLIAM WHITE 1845

DESIGNATED: JANUARY 1973  
BOUNDARY REVISION: FEBRUARY 1992



PLANNING &  
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 important for society's 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, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to enhance, and designate them as conservation areas. This duty is now part of the 1990 Planning (Listed Buildings & Conservation Area) 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 Great Massingham Conservation Area was designated in 1973. **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.

## ORIGINS AND HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

Great Massingham lies in a slight valley on the eastern edge of the chalk ridge, running from Hunstanton through into northern Essex. The origin of the village is revealed in the meaning of the name; "the homestead of the family or followers of a man called Maessa", an Anglo-Saxon. The site Maessa chose must have been quite marshy at the time but it clearly had advantages over a position on the more exposed Peddars Way Roman Road, only a mile to the west.



Over time, the L-shaped valley bottom was transformed into an extensive common, the water being drained into a series of ponds. Today, the ponds are important features, giving the village much of its local distinctiveness. It is now difficult to appreciate that the original common stretched from Walcups Lane to Leicester Farm; for in antiquity, a number of properties were allowed to encroach on the area, particularly in front of the school.

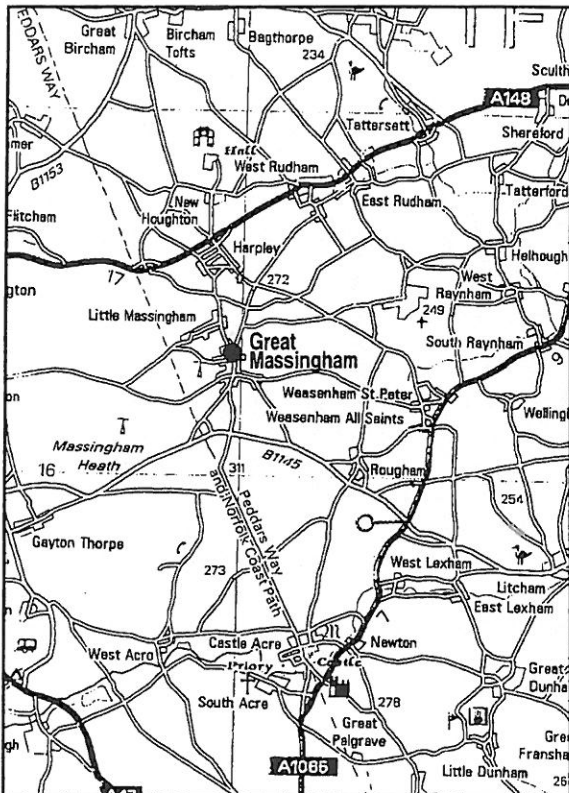
Until the middle of this century, the village would have looked much as it had for centuries - a sequence of dispersed farmsteads set around the common edge, punctuated by more imposing buildings such as the church and the Priory. What change there was occurred gradually; changes in architectural style, more cottages and, of course, successive generations of villagers, in fact the typical story of rural England.

There were, of course, some significant periods in the development of the village. Before 1260, Nicholas le Syre founded a small priory here as a cell to that at Castle Acre. At the Dissolution, this religious house was granted to Sir Thomas Gresham and some remains of it may still be seen in the house and outbuildings of the Abbey Farm. Edward III granted a market to Massingham in 1335 and also a Fair, lasting three days, "the eve, day and morrow of St.'s Simon and Jude". It was during this period of relative prosperity that most of the church as we know it today was built. It is this building which most links the past with the quality historic environment and community of the present.

## SETTING AND LOCATION

Great Massingham is set within a rolling landscape comprising mainly arable fields bounded by hedges and trees. King's Lynn lies 13 miles to the west and Fakenham 10 miles to the east.

The historic core of the village itself straddles three roads - Station Road from the north, Weasenham Road from the east and Castle Acre Road from the south. The centre of the village is dominated by a very large elongated green.



## CHARACTER OVERVIEW

Great Massingham has all the qualities of everyone's ideal village. The conservation area has a well-treed, tranquil environment with traditional buildings of warm red brick and flint arranged around village greens, ponds and ducks. The tall stone tower of the church dominates views in and around the conservation area.

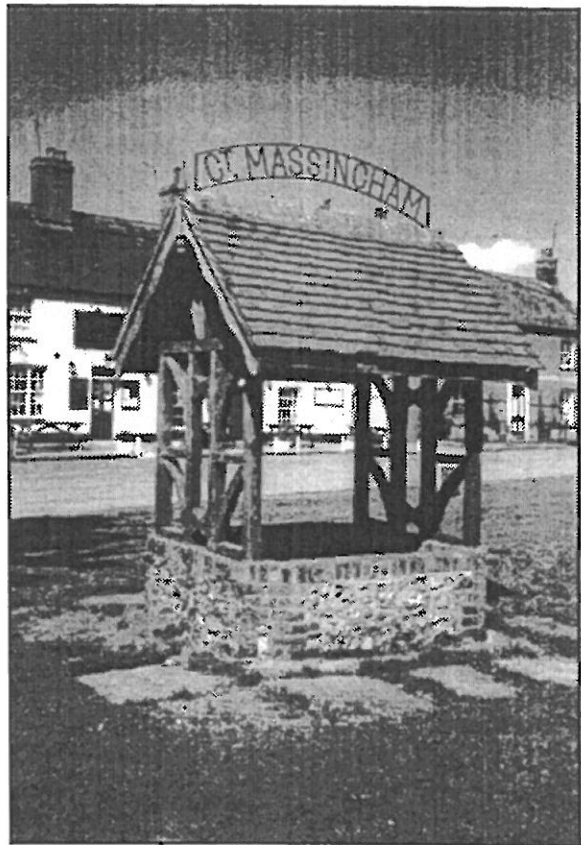
The first impression of the village is that it is cherished by the local community. In particular, the buildings and associated private and public open spaces are well kept. Community pride is also expressed by the colourful village sign and a well-head with the name of the village above it. Both are situated prominently on the green.

Traffic does not appear to have an overbearing impact on the village although car parking on the fringes of the green sometimes detracts.

The village has a primary school, general store and a public house. These facilities help to maintain the sense of community and contribute towards the vitality of the general scene.

## SPACES AND BUILDINGS

Following the form of the valley, the village comprises an 'L' shaped sequence of green spaces containing ponds of varying sizes, enclosed by buildings and mature trees. Pinch points occur where the roadside properties tighten the street scene. This has the effect of dividing the sequence of greens and ponds into four more localised environments within the conservation area. The result is the classic townscape arrangement whereby closed views suddenly give way to openness.





Despite being predominantly a "green village" some parts of Massingham have a strong urban form, characterised by properties set close to, or on the edge of, the road frontage. Where this occurs on both sides of the street, the narrow enclosure of the buildings channels views forwards.

At the junction of Castle Acre Road and Weasenham Road, a classic view of Great Massingham opens out where an irregular roofscape, the church tower and mature trees provide an interesting backdrop to one of the village ponds (illustrated on the front cover).

Elsewhere, the buildings do not form such a hard edge. Roadside grass verges, trees, hedges, fences and front gardens help to soften the margins of the open spaces.



The architectural character of the conservation area draws its cohesiveness from a number of simple principles. The buildings are generally of two storey with pitched roofs, are set on or close to the back of the pavement and have chimneys. The elevations appear 'solid' because the windows and door openings take up a relatively small proportion of the facades. The construction materials are drawn from a limited range, many of which are local. Any one character building might not display all these features but they will have the majority of them.



At Weasenham Road, the road dominates, with the orientation of the cottages defining spaces and the field patterns running up to the hedgelines along the road edges as one travels out from the village core.

The character of the area centred on Castle Acre Road is much more open with less vegetation. Here buildings dominate and contrast with the open countryside beyond.

Generally speaking, the village looks in on itself with only the occasional glimpse out to the rolling countryside beyond.

## LISTED BUILDINGS

There are 13 listed buildings in the conservation area. The Statutory List was revised in 1987.

**St. Mary's Church**, listed grade 1, is largely 15th century and mainly in the Perpendicular style. It is built of grey knapped flint with dressed limestone detailing. The four storey west tower is a prominent feature.





The principal, grade 2, farmhouses of **Abbey Farm**, **Kennel Farm**, and **Parsley's Farm** (now called Parsonage House) are mainly of the 17th and 18th centuries. Abbey Farm incorporates stonework of the priory which once occupied the site.

**The Old Rectory** of c1840 (grade 2) stands isolated from the main village and has stucco elevations under slate roofs,

Other 18th and early 19th century grade 2 vernacular buildings are:

- **The Swan PH** and **Osterville** (now residential), School Road
- **No. 2 Lynn Road**
- **The Old Post Office** (with railings), Weasenham Road
- **South View** (with railings), Weasenham Road
- **Primrose Cottage** and **Fantasia** (with railings), Weasenham Road
- **The Malthouse** (with railings), Weasenham Road
- **K6 telephone kiosk**, Station Road, is listed grade 2
- **The Old Reading Room** of the 1830's was a former school and was added to the Statutory List in 1992. It is of red brick and slate.

## POST-WAR DEVELOPMENT

The southern edge of the 1970's **Summerwood Estate** helps to define the northern limit of the conservation area with warm red brick and tiled roofs.

**John Morton Crescent**, Castle Acre Road, introduces timber clad houses in the Swedish style from 1955.

Residential conversion of the three main farm complexes has helped to develop the community whilst maintaining the traditional village scene.

## TRADITIONAL MATERIALS

The character of Great Massingham Conservation Area owes a great deal to the use of local traditional materials in the construction of its historic buildings.

These materials include :

- soft Norfolk red brick
- brown field flint nodules
- chalk lump
- angular black and white flints from local chalk pits
- lime based mortars and render
- limestone for dressed stonework (probably from Barnack, Lincs)
- red clay Norfolk pantiles
- Welsh grey slate

Materials are often used in combination. Brick and stone are to be seen as quoins and as dressings for openings when the main material is the less regular flint or chalk.

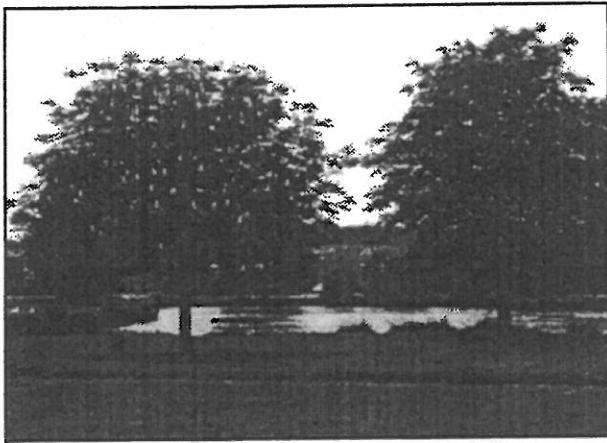
Brickwork is generally laid in Flemish bond in a lime mortar. Most flint and chalk walls are of random lump but there are examples of coursed lump and knapped grey flintwork on the church and Brookland Villa, immediately to the north.



## ARCHAEOLOGICAL INTEREST

There are no Scheduled Ancient Monuments in Great Massingham Conservation Area. However, the southern end of Abbey Farmhouse exhibits medieval archways and stonework which are the remains of the small Augustinian priory, established in 1260.

The Rose & Crown pub has medieval stonework incorporated into the south gable wall, presumably taken from the priory ruins following its dissolution.



## LANDSCAPE FEATURES

A major characteristic of Great Massingham is the relationship between spaces, buildings and greenery.

The large, central elongated green with its ponds and wildlife provides the perfect setting for the buildings which make up the village core. The feeling of openness and the long vistas around the village generate a unique 'sense of place'.

Trees are an essential part of the character of the conservation area. In particular, tall, mature trees act as a backdrop to a number of vistas within the village, especially when viewed across the greens and ponds.

Groups of trees within property boundaries help to create interesting private spaces. However, they also provide strong visual elements within the wider context of the conservation area.

Individual specimen trees create focal points of interest.

As deciduous trees and shrubs play such an important part in defining the character of Great Massingham, it follows that the appearance of the village will change with the seasons in terms of

colour and texture. In winter, buildings are the main feature. However, in summer, the trees dominate the conservation area, softening its appearance and contributing significantly to its local distinctiveness.

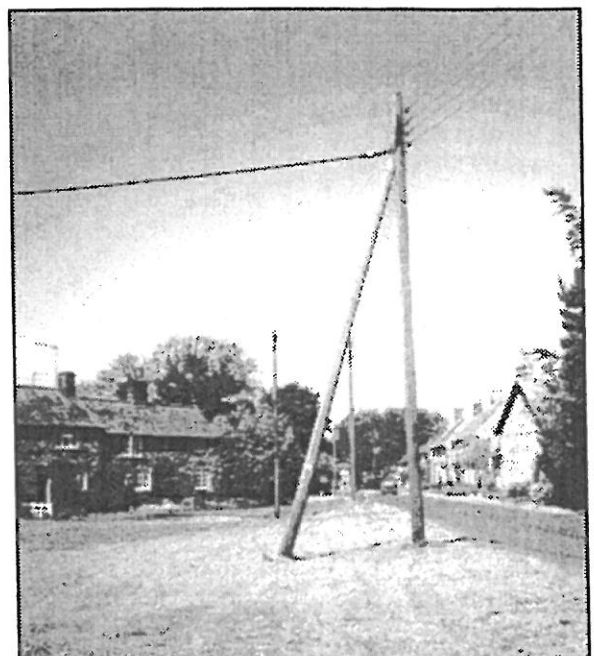
## DETRACTORS

The special quality of conservation areas can easily be eroded by seemingly minor alterations such as unsuitable replacement windows and doors, inappropriate materials or unsympathetic paintwork, removal of walls, railings, trees and hedges.

Within the Great Massingham Conservation Area, there are few features which detract significantly from its intrinsic character. The most serious detractors are the overhead wires, poles and other equipment.

The fencing and general clutter at the tennis courts on Station Road is unattractive, and, while outside the conservation area, the site is prominently located. The harmful elements not only affect the setting of the conservation area but also detract from the quality of the conservation area itself, particularly when viewed from Walcups Lane.

Red tiles and slate are characteristic roofing materials in the conservation area. The occasional modern concrete tiled roof is, therefore, particularly noticeable.



## CONSERVATION OBJECTIVES

The overall conservation objective is to protect and reinforce the established special character of the Great Massingham Conservation Area and its setting.

This will be achieved by:

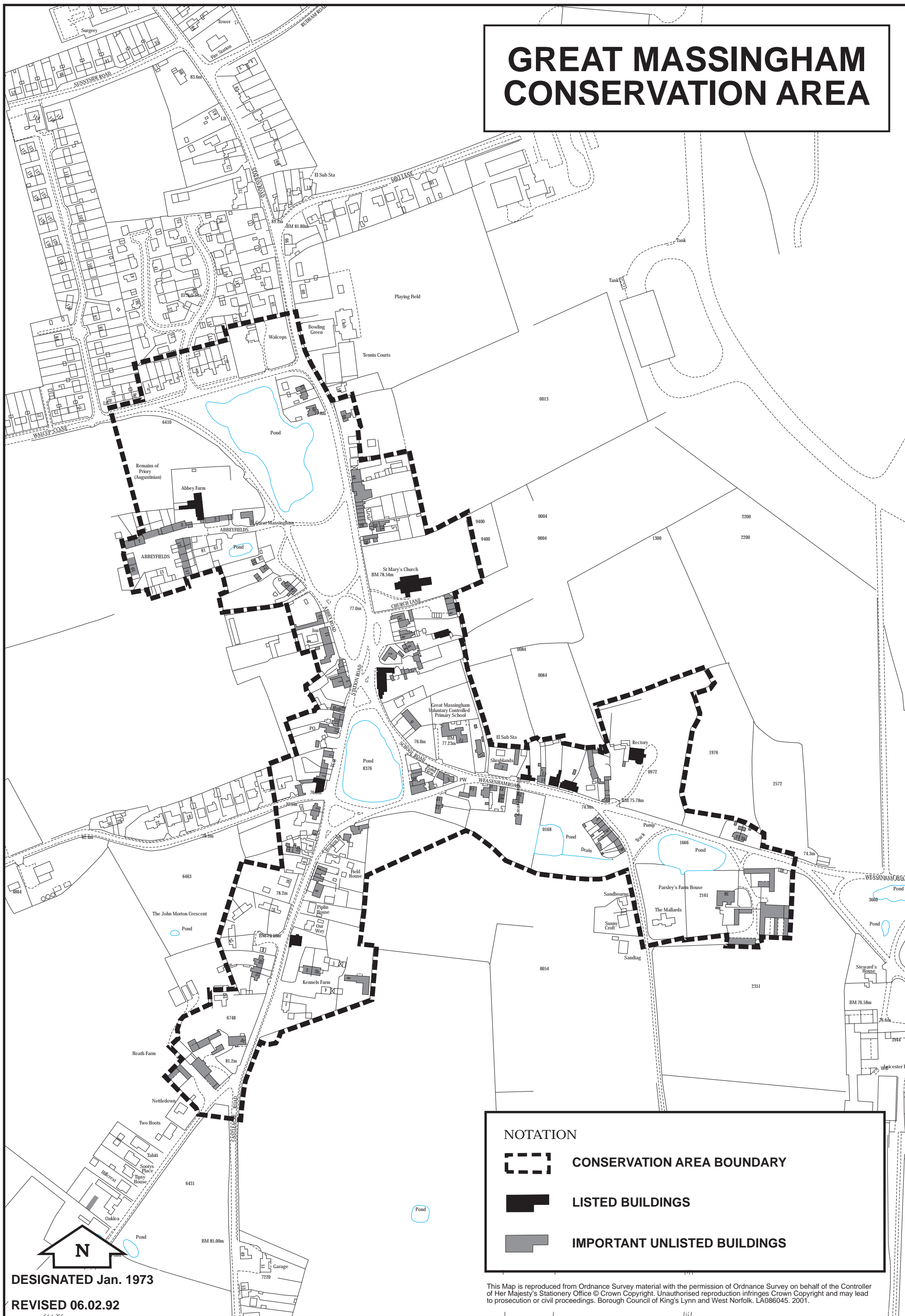
- ensuring that buildings which contribute to the overall character of the conservation area, whether listed or not, are retained and maintained
- ensuring that new development is sympathetic to the special qualities and character of the conservation area
- protecting the setting of the conservation area from development which adversely affects views into or out of the area
- the retention, maintenance and appropriate new planting of trees
- maintaining and enhancing local features and details which contribute towards the area's local distinctiveness
- the preparation of schemes of enhancement
- encouraging the removal of detractors to the special character of the conservation area



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# GREAT MASSINGHAM CONSERVATION AREA



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