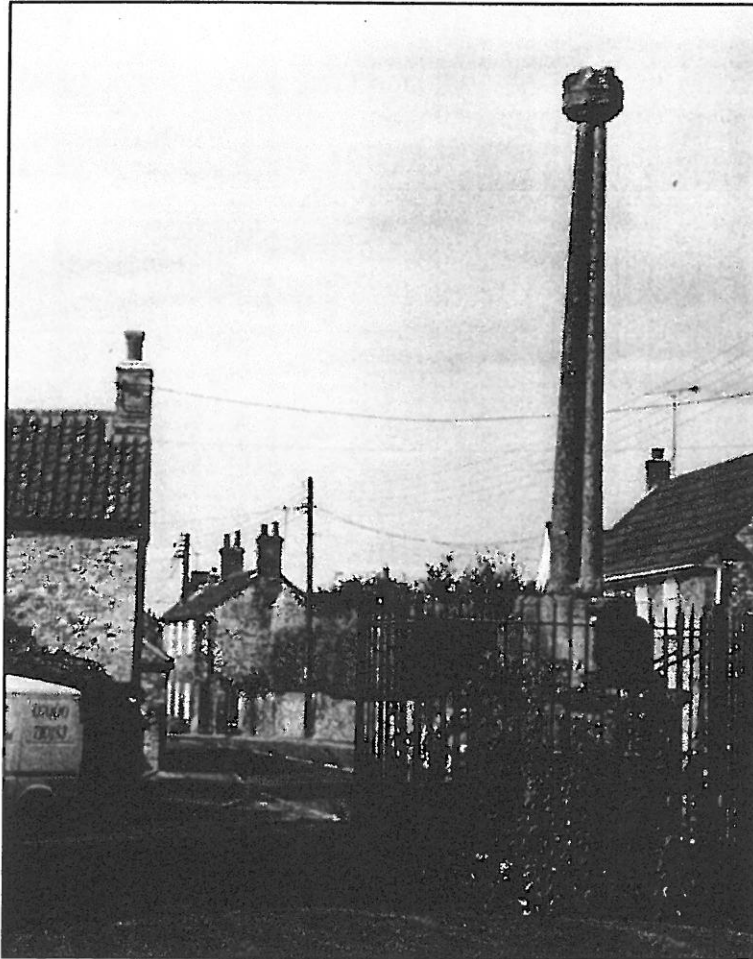


HOCKWOLD CUM WILTON

CONSERVATION AREA DRAFT CHARACTER STATEMENT



Hockwold-with-Wilton are adjoining villages, on the North side of the vale of the Little Ouse river, from 4 to 5 miles W. of Brandon, and 8 miles S. by W. of Stoke Ferry. they form one parish, over which a new road was made, with a suspension bridge across the river to suffolk, in 1829.

William White 1845

DESIGNATED: December 1979



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 Hockwold-cum-Wilton Conservation Area was designated in December 1979 by the Borough Council. This current 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

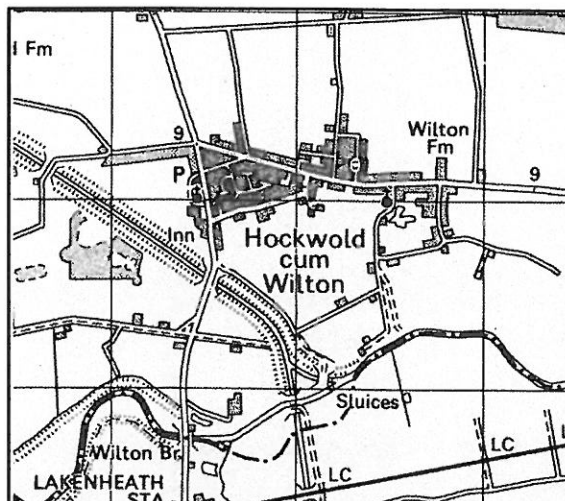
character of conservation areas. In particular, the guidance will supplement the Local Plan policies which deal with demolition and new development within the conservation area and new development on land adjoining the conservation area which might affect its setting or the views in or out of the area.

This character statement does not address enhancement proposals. Community led enhancement schemes will be considered as part of a separate process.

SETTING AND LOCATION

Hockwold-cum-Wilton, the result of the merging of two hamlets, lies in rolling countryside, predominantly agricultural, north of the Little Ouse River, a major determining factor in its historical development. The village is also just west of the Thetford Forest Park and again this topographical feature was an important factor in the settlement's early days. The land falls gently north to south as part of the north side of the river valley. It is now a village of around 40 acres and has a population of around 1,145.

The village is located just to the east of the north/south connecting road (B1112) which links Lakenheath 6½ kilometres (4 miles) to the south and Feltwell 2½ kilometres (1½ miles), Mildenhall (9 miles), and Methwold (6 miles) to the north. Downham Market is approximately 27 kilometres (17 miles) to the north/east and Brandon approximately 8 kilometres (5 miles) to the south/east.



Thetford is approximately 16 kilometres (10 miles) to the south/east also. Significantly, Grimes Graves lies around 3 kilometres (2 miles) away and indicates that human settlement in this area was initiated very early.

The approaches to the village are 'non-direct' in that it is not located on a major connecting route, although it is clearly quite a popular 'short cut' route between the other villages of this area and the major towns, particularly Brandon and Thetford. The Main Street continues as a relatively straight road through the Forest Park to Weeting and the B1106 to Brandon and thence to Thetford.

Both approaches to the conservation area are attractive, however, as the 'core' of the settlement centred around pub, green and church is gradually revealed. There are also good views of the settlements from the north/south tracks, which reveal the rear of the historic properties lining the Main Street.



In soil landscape terms, the village lies on the boundary between the 'Breckland' landscape to the east and 'Black Fens' to the west. The former is the most distinctive landscape in East Anglia being a low plateau with long, gentle slopes leading to flat bottomlands. The Black Fens are characterised by peaty soils in hollows between exhumed sandy, clayey or marly substrata. The Hockwold/Feltwell/Methwold Fen area is characterised by one of the few locations of deep peats.

Hockwold lies at the southern edge of Norfolk and is only a mile or so from the

Suffolk boundary, and the whole area is dominated by the river valleys of the Ouse, the Little Ouse and the associated drainage/flood control components. In Hockwold's case the Little Ouse cut off channel is a major north/south water way in its own right. It connects with the Little Ouse just south of the village centre, the River Wissey at Stoke Ferry and the Great Ouse at Denver.

In summary, Hockwold's location and setting is fascinating being on the 'edge' between two distinct landscapes, i.e. Breckland to the east and the Fens to the west.

ORIGIN AND HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

Hockwold-cum-Wilton is an ancient settlement based on agriculture and by a location just north of an important river the Little Ouse 1 kilometre (1/2 mile to the south of the village core). Evidence of Saxon settlement exists in the area, the name Hockwold referring to the Old English translation 'wood or wasteland where hocks grow' (OE – hocc = hock; wold - woodland or later waste ground that had been cleared of trees). However, there is also evidence of much earlier settlement on this attractive riverside location. Artefacts found on the open lands, or perhaps dug up in the course of tilling have proved Stone Age occupation, although historical analysis maps show evidence of settlement from the Palaeolithic period (1/2 million years ago) onwards.

The original pre-Roman settlement would have been a hamlet based around one or two farmsteads with workers' hovels clustered nearby. A source of water reasonably close by would have been an important settlement generating factor, together with fertile land for cultivation and woodland/forest for hunting and grazing.

The actual location of the village is probably due to it being the safest non-floodable dry point north of the Little Ouse river valley.

Gradually over time as the economy grew

the settlement would have expanded and become less defensively orientated. The natural form of this expansion was along the main east/west communication route now known as Main Street, and parallel to the river to the south.

There is further evidence to suggest settlement right the way through from the Stone Age, Iron Age, to the Roman period when Hockwold was a large village. North/south linking tracks would gradually have been formed to give access to water (to the south) and the outlying agricultural land surrounding the settlement. These communication routes, together with the main north/south connecting route (B1112) formed the matrix around which the built settlement evolved and continues to evolve to this day.

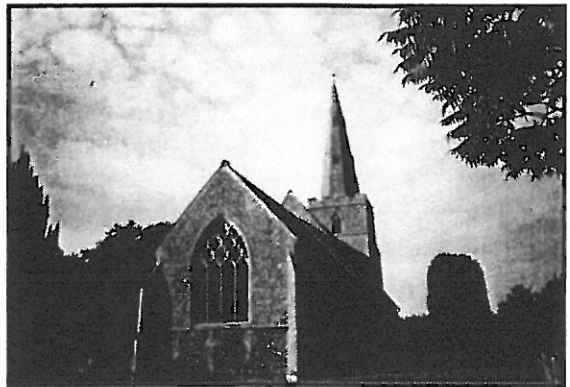
As its name implies Hockwold-cum-Wilton is actually two hamlets, a fact which explains the presence of two churches. Hockwold was the hamlet lying to the west, adjacent to the north/south connecting route. Where Hockwold ends and Wilton starts is indicated by a ram's head, engraved in a screen wall west of the conservation area, with the two horns pointing opposite ways towards each half of the village.

After the Norman Conquest, the village is connected to Hereward the Wake and Earl Warenne who was given vast quantities of land known as The Thetford Isles and which included Hockwold and Wilton. The village is also mentioned in the Domesday Book 1085-6.

The presence of the river encouraged commerce as river barges used to ply their trade right up until the period between the two world wars. The waterway is now used for pleasure craft. The river supplied the village with all it needed, a small tributary ran north from the river towards the village known as The Lode. Lighters would load and unload, making it easy for carts to collect the goods such as timber, coal, cement and grain, and small goods such as groceries and crockery. Travel was almost unlimited via Ely – Cambridge – Bedford and from the Midlands to Kings Lynn and

the North Sea.

The presence of two churches reflects the great local prosperity of post Conquest England. The Church in the conservation area, St. James' (Wilton), has many early 14th Century features, together with memorials to the important Wetherall family (all around the early 17th Century). The village cross on the Green is also 14th Century and is thought to have been an important gathering point.



As always, land ownership has been a powerful force in the evolving form of the settlement. Hockwold Hall (outside the conservation area) was recorded in the Domesday Book and from the 18th Century became a hunting lodge, visited by Queen Victoria.

Gradually over time the two hamlets merged, although the biggest single expansion came in the 1970's when more than 80 new bungalows were built on old cornfields between the two settlements.

In recent years there has been further development as traditional agriculture and brickmaking has declined and the associated local industries became untenable. Infill plots have been built on for housing in single units or in groups and the historic fabric has been adapted, converted and extended for further residential use to meet the demands of 20th and 21st Century living. Indeed there is now little visual link between modern Hockwold and its historic settlement based essentially on agriculture and its river trade. The Old Roman Port of Camboritum ending up as Methwold Hythe (or harbour) lies to the north of the village and the road from it met

the low road around the fens at Hockwold and could be one of the oldest main streets in Europe. The Little Ouse used to be known as the 'Brandon River' which entered the then Fenland Sea at Hockwold. In more recent times the river has been used to transport sugar beet by barge to Ely Sugar Beet Factory.

In transportation terms the early tracks across the adjacent heathland gave access to Feltwell, Methwold, Weeting and Brandon. These remain 'rights of way'.

A ferry run by the old Ferry Boat Pulic House was the only means of getting across the river, and greatly improved communications generally. All transport is now based on the motor car and lorry, with tractor/trailers moving agricultural produce. Sadly, public transport is non-existent. An all too familiar picture for 21st Century rural communities. This ran until the railway line was opened in 184 and had a station about 2½ kilometres (1½ miles) south of the village centre.

After the glorious prosperity of Victorian times, when the area was perhaps at its peak of economic and commercial activity, the 20th Century has seen a gradual decline in these aspects of the settlement. In the 2nd world war the area was ideal for airfield location and became well known for its bases, such as Lakenheath, Mildenhall, Methwold and Feltwell. The impact of aircraft related activity is still felt in the village today (a large number of children from American Serviceman's families attend the Primary School).

For this reason and the fact that Hockwold is located near major urban areas or routes to them, Hockwold is still an attractive place to live, its population having actually risen during the latter part of the 20th Century.

CHARACTER OVERVIEW

Hockwold-cum-Wilton Conservation Area takes its character from the architectural unity of the historic buildings, the linear village settlement along Main Street and



Nursery Lane, and the strong nucleus of the Village Green. These elements are described in detail later but it is the interaction of these qualities, together with the accompanying spaces created by building plots and the way buildings are located on them, the mature landscape in between, behind and beyond which all create the essential character of the conservation area.

An historic settlement such as Hockwold will have developed over centuries and will have evolved through changing patterns of living, economic prosperity, land ownership, purchase and sale, topography and fashion. All these factors have and are still exerting an influence on the evolution of the built fabric and spaces between it. In Hockwold's case the conservation area evolved from an original village core, which was essentially based around agriculture and the river trade described in the earlier sections above. There are relatively few major architectural buildings which could be described as 'landmarks' apart from the Church of St. James, whose spire is seen from afar and reflects the prosperity of the settlement in mediaeval times.



There are however several important non-listed buildings which make a great contribution to architectural quality and character of the conservation area.

SPACES AND BUILDINGS

Hockwold-cum-Wilton Conservation Area is the eastern part of the village, which is essentially an east/west orientated settlement lying either side of the village street, 'Main Street'.

The conservation area represents the eastern 'edge' of the village settlement which has been generally subject to a great deal of post war housing development. The latter housing generates a rather urban/estate atmosphere to the approach from the west. There is no real distinction between the two original settlements of Hockwold and Wilton, the merger happening as far back as Mediaeval times.

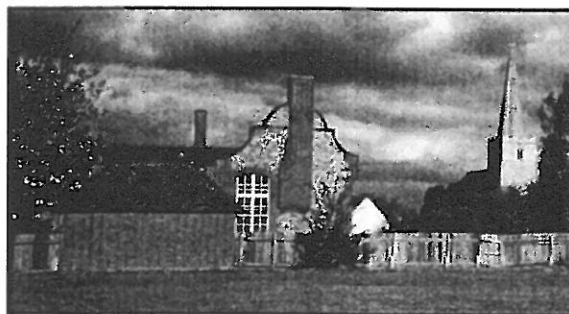
The conservation area boundary is basically linear in form and encompasses the historic fabric either side of Main Street together with important open spaces to the south. The northern boundary is at present irregular in shape with 'outcrops' to include Wilton Farm to the north-east and the pocket of green space behind Mill Cross and St. James House, which in turn are opposite the village green.



To the south the boundary is more irregular and encompasses the churchyard, the important paddock-like space to the south-west, the lakes to the south of the old engineering works and the historic properties either side of Nursery Lane, including Old Manor Farmhouse and Manor

Farmhouse. Modern housing lies further south of Nursery Lane, which essentially becomes a farm access with tracks to the east and west. The western leg connects with the access track which runs to the south-east of the churchyard. This area also contains some of the few remaining commercial enterprises in the village core (a fishery and garage workshop).

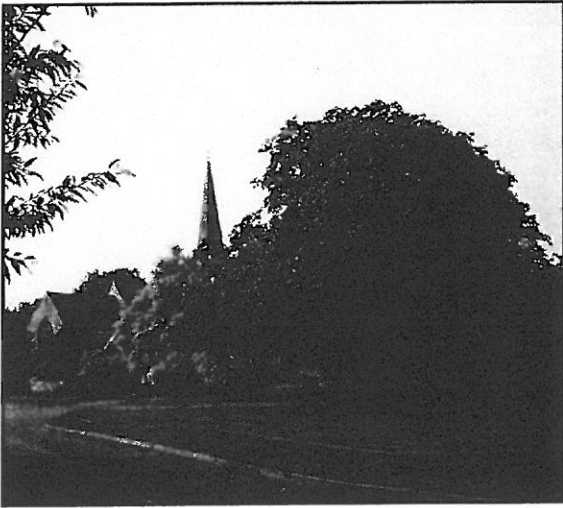
The eastern conservation area boundary is defined by the junction of Main Street and another farm track which leads northwards towards Chalkhill Farm. This track in turn connects with a further east/west minor access road lying parallel to Main Street approximately 1 kilometer (1/2 mile) away and was the location for a mill in previous years.



The western conservation area boundary is irregular in profile to encompass Manor House, north of Main Street, Hockwold County Primary School south of it and the boundary of the 'paddock' space to the south.

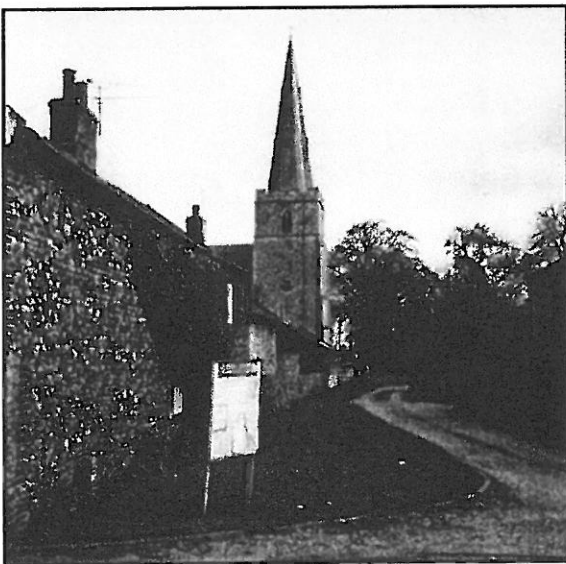
Mention has been made earlier to the topographical background to the conservation area. The land falls fairly gently but markedly from north to south following the drainage pattern associated with a 'river' valley location. The settlement occupies the 'higher ground' away from the adjacent drainage cuts, streams, and the Little Ouse tributary system.

The 'nucleus space' or 'core' of the conservation area is the parcel of land occupied by the village green, St. James Church, its churchyard and the surrounding historic buildings. These components generate a delightful sequence of views and vistas quintessential to English townscape, summarised by the village pub



and green with views of the church, the mature churchyard landscape, as a backdrop, and the more intimate surrounding screen walls with vegetation spilling over them, giving a sense of enclosure.

The architectural 'gem' of the conservation area is undoubtedly the church itself and the space around it. There are two other access points, one direct but discreet track from Main Street between ranges of buildings and one from Church Lane. Both



are delightful. There are some important 'listed' headstones in the Churchyard, which has itself been extended to include the parcel of land immediately to the south of the primary school. A previous but apparently no longer used footpath connects the Church to the Rectory on the eastern conservation area boundary.

Moving southwards along **Church Lane** the vistas change pleasantly with the subtle twists in the road and the character quickly becomes more rural as the surrounding agricultural land comes right up to the conservation area boundary. This area is effectively river bottom land, the river itself lying only 1 kilometre (1/2 mile) further south.

The presence of three lakes (remnants of previous gravel workings) to the east is not really noticed, as they lie hidden behind the mature hedgerow and trees which line Church Lane. The churchyard itself lies to the west of the lane and is some several feet higher than the road. The churchyard wall therefore performs a 'retaining' function and is an attractive townscape component in its own right.

The curious 'paddock' site to the west contains a drainage filter bed and is bounded to the south by a mature hedgerow. There is a strong landscape 'edge' to the north of this space created by mature trees along the line of the old east/west path connecting Rectory (to the west) and church mentioned above.

Returning to **Main Street**, the ranges of buildings on both north and south sides produce interesting vistas as the built fabric steps forwards and backwards on the individual plots. Distant views east/west however are not quite as picturesque as in some cases as the main road rather dominates the scene and is a bit too straight to provide real intimacy. When viewed individually, however, practically each building contributes greatly to the architectural 'whole'. There are some delightful properties which with their outbuildings indicate what was once clearly a bustling agricultural community, for example, Mill House (north side) which is 'L' shaped creating a courtyard with interesting commercial building end-on to the street.

There are also some dramatic views between the buildings, especially to the north, giving vistas of the agricultural landscape beyond.

To the east, the denseness of the village fabric quickly dissipates towards Wilton Farm. The screen wall to the north of Main Street (west of the Farm) is rather untidy but is an important 'edge' to the street. It is good to see working farms in these communities and interesting that several were grouped here at the east end of the settlement.



Another track, **Nursery Lane**, heads southwards from Main Street and Old Manor Farmhouse. The latter has a picturesque range of outbuildings to the west of the lane, the roof line of which steps down the hill. The east side of the lane contains several ranges of historic cottage buildings with modern infill housing in between. The historic fabric and character quickly dissipates southwards of Hartley Place due to early modern 'ribbon' housing development to the west, there is a fine hedgerow, grass verge and drainage ditch and further south the outbuildings to Manor Farm mentioned above.

It is sad to see the demise of Greenacres Farm on the south/east corner of Main Street. The quality of enclosure here is very poor at present and it is hoped the new development being proposed for this site will include improvements in this direction.



The site on the opposite corner to the east of 'Falkners' has a prominent screen wall which turns the corner into Nursery Lane and provides attractive enclosure.

It is also discouraging to see the end of the engineering works to the east of Church Lane, now a development of 'executive style houses' in a cul de sac. Unfortunately, the demise of such non-residential use is all too common in such villages and is often accompanied by the diminution of local agriculture. The fact is however that as a car borne society, work has to be sought outside such settlements much to the detriment of the life, richness and vitality of the settlement itself. In such circumstances it is even more important that the infrastructure generated by pub, school, surgery, and the working farms is not lost. This infrastructure adds greatly to the vitality of village life which, in Hockwold's case, is still vibrant and energetic despite the obvious loss of its economic base.



In summary then the conservation area is an interesting combination of historic architecture, the spaces created by this architecture and the landscape interspersed between, behind and beyond it. There are few architectural 'set piece' buildings but many structures of modest scale, constructed in a modest range of beautiful vernacular materials contribute to the special character of the spaces. Modern development has been relatively benign and has maintained the scale of conservation area. The quality of recent development has particularly been more successful in promoting 'context related' design.

LISTED BUILDINGS

There are 7 listed buildings and structures within the conservation area. The statutory list was revised in 1986 and there have been no further additions:

Listed Grade I

- **Church of St. James, Church Lane.** Parish Church. Early 14th Century, west steeple and chancel. Restored 1843. Flint with ashlar dressings and slate roofs.

Listed Grade II

- **Village Cross, Village Green.** 14th Century in ashlar stone upon octagonal brick pedestal.

Listed Grade II

- **Five monuments/headstones located in St. James Churchyard.** 2 memorials to members of the Wetherall family and 3 illegible ones. All in ashlar stonework.

IMPORTANT UNLISTED BUILDINGS

The character of Hockwold-cum-Wilton Conservation Area benefits from a wealth of historic unlisted buildings which contribute a great deal to the overall unity of the townscape. These buildings are identified on the accompanying map. The outbuildings, in particular, sometimes contained past commercial use and represent important historic fabric of this once thriving agricultural community.

The identification of these unlisted structures has been on the basis of their prominent position, use of traditional materials, reasonably intact character, and because of their contribution to other historic buildings close by.

POST WAR DEVELOPMENT

Most post war development in the conservation area consists of infill housing either in single units or in groups, as on the site of the old engineering works south of Main Street. This development has, in the early post war years, been rather bland

and lacking in any real response to context. Unfortunately most of the post war development of the village right up to the 1980s typifies this design philosophy. In the last two decades of the 20th Century a growing awareness of conservation issues and a changing philosophy of design has resulted in development which is more 'site specific' and is associated with a return to the use of more traditional materials. It is hoped this trend will continue in future years.

In addition to the new infill housing, the buildings of the historic core have all been subject to repair, refurbishment, alteration and extension with varying degrees of success. Again, the recent trend is for a heightened awareness and sympathy for the historic fabric which can so easily be lost by unthinking 'improvement', even down to the wrong choice of mortar.

The changes to the built fabric have been in response to dramatic changes in our society and the accompanying changing work, employment and leisure patterns. Traditional agriculture has changed beyond all recognition and no longer relies on local labour or 'servant' industries. Residents of such villages as Hockwold-cum-Wilton now rely heavily on the use of the motor car for work and leisure activities. All these patterns have affected the built fabric of the conservation area and will continue to do so as long as Hockwold remains an attractive place to live.

It is encouraging to see some essential village infrastructure still intact such as school, pub, cricket ground, church and farming. Shops and post office are located in Wilton to the west, but it is hoped that over time, other village based commerce will return to regenerate the richness and vitality of life typical of earlier years.

The proximity of the Thetford Forest Park to the east is an 'environmentally sensitive area', but one which provided valuable employment for Hockwold people in the 20th Century as the Forestry Commission

promoted afforestation. The need for such labour has now diminished however.

TRADITIONAL MATERIALS

The unity of character of Hockwold-cum-Wilton Conservation Area owes a great deal to the use of local traditional materials in the construction of the historic fabric. These materials include:-

- Chalk (clunch).
- Random and coursed field flint nodules and rubble walling.
- Knapped flint.
- Norfolk red / pink/buff brick from local clay beds.
- Welsh slate.
- Colourwashed brick, flint and render.
- Clay pantiles – both natural red/orange and black glazed.



Hockwold had its own brick kiln in the 1800s in a wooded area 2½ kilometres (1½ miles) east of the village centre. It produced the 'Wilton Brick' a pale yellow tinted colour (2" x 9" and very durable), and the 'Red Wilton' brick, an attractive dark red colour, but of a softer texture which was not so durable as the former. The kiln was closed in the 1920s.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL INTEREST

There are no scheduled ancient monuments in the conservation area.

DETRACTORS

The special quality of conservation area 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.

In Hockwold-cum-Wilton all the above detractors have affected the fabric in past years. Other detractors are listed as follows:-

- Overhead wires - not as bad as some cases, but every opportunity should be taken to reduce impact.
- Poor enclosure - particularly at the corner of Nursery Lane but more especially to modern infill plots.
- Landscaping - too much reliance on evergreens – 'the curse of the leylandii' and not enough indigenous hedgerow species. Inappropriate windows - many historic buildings have been marred by these



- Cars and roads - Main Street, being relatively straight, encourages speed

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

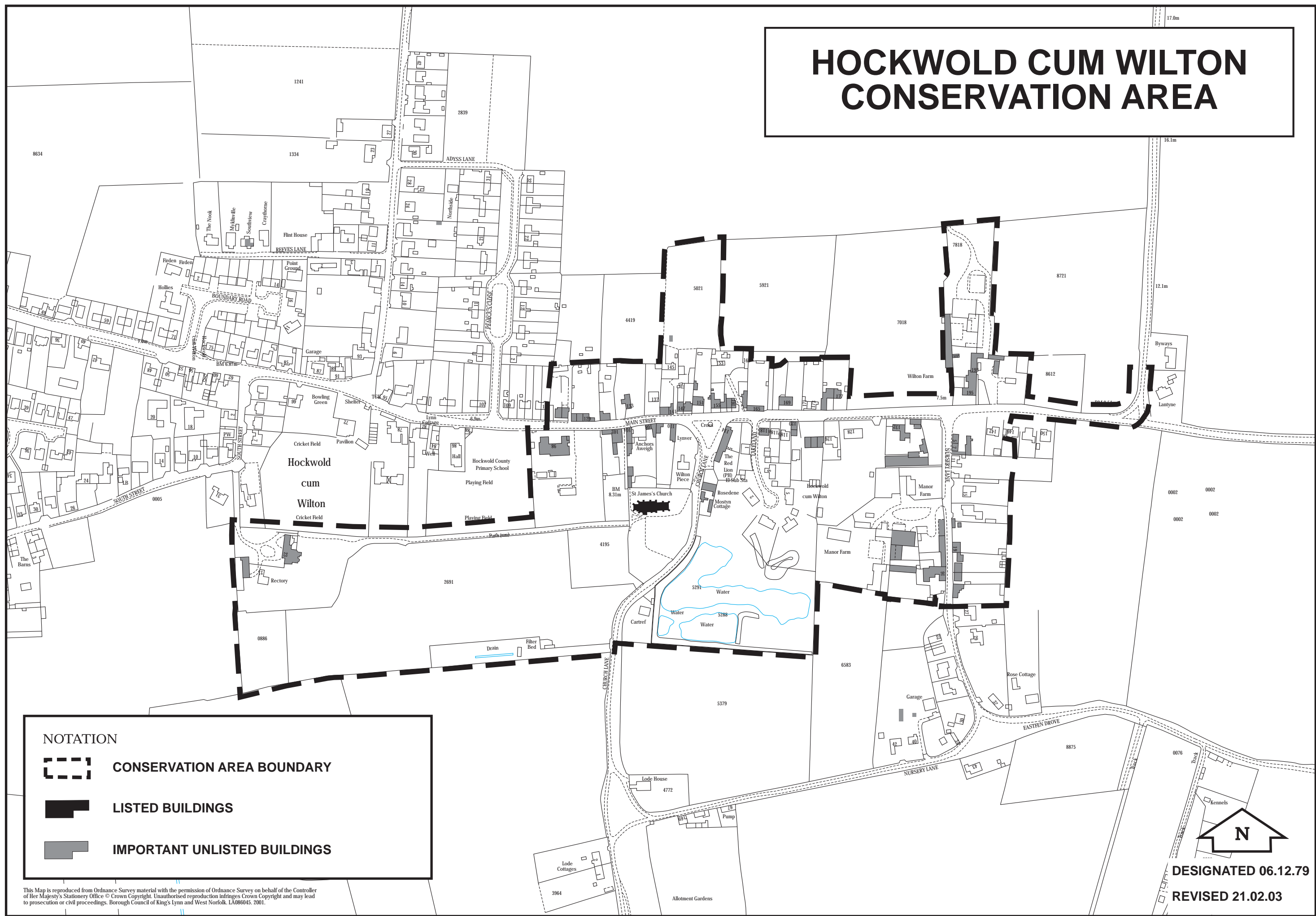
Within conservation areas, a number of special controls apply and it is advisable that anyone proposing to carry out new development, alterations, extensions, installations, demolition or work to trees should seek advice from the Planning Department at an early stage. A leaflet summarising these issues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






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HOCKWOLD CUM WILTON CONSERVATION AREA



NOTATION

-  CONSERVATION AREA BOUNDARY
-  LISTED BUILDINGS
-  IMPORTANT UNLISTED BUILDINGS

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