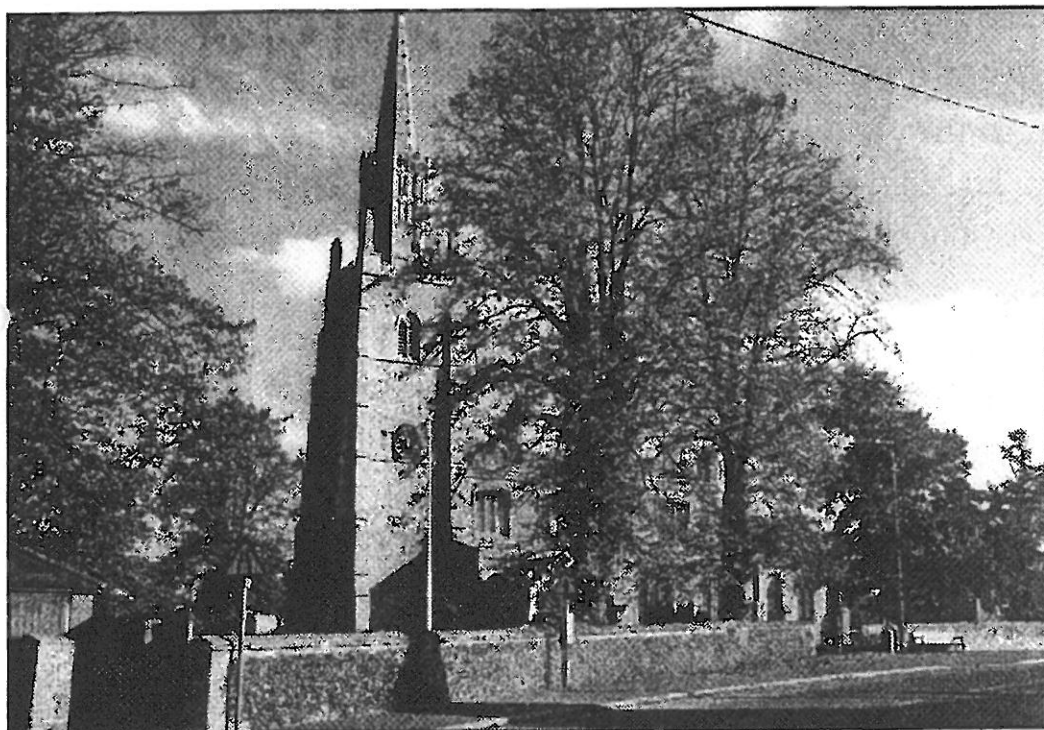


# METHWOLD

## CONSERVATION AREA

### DRAFT CHARACTER STATEMENT



*METHWOLD, vulgarly called Muel, is a large village, with several neat houses, 6 miles N.N.W. of Brandon, and 4 miles S.S.E. of Stoke Ferry. A small Fair for horses, cattle etc is held here on April 23rd, and a Hiring Session on the Tuesday before Old Michaelmas.*

WILLIAM WHITE 1845

DESIGNATED: APRIL 1988



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 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 Methwold Conservation Area was designated in 1988. 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.

## ORIGINS AND HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

There is some evidence of Methwold having its origins in the Bronze Age in that there are records of remains, dating from around 2000BC being found in Methwold itself and the adjacent Fens. The settlement appears to have begun beside a river or stream on the lower edge of sloping chalkland, overlooking the Fen.

The settlement was populated by the Romans and later the Anglo Saxons from whom it gets its name "Methelwald" because it is the "wold" or high land situated in the middle, between Hockwold and Northwold.

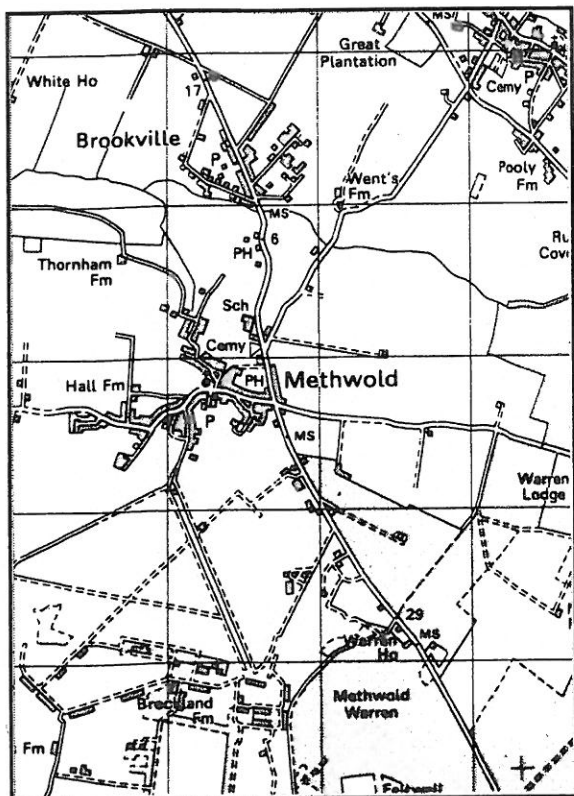
The lower part of the settlement was known as "Bunting" and Bunting's Lane still exists today. Indeed, this area seems to have been the centre of the original settlement. Elden's Lane leads now to Hall Farm, in Saxon times the site of The Ealdorman's house. Remains of an early Saxon church have been found on the site of the later tithe barn belonging to the Augustinian Priory of Brumwell (Broomhill).

At the time of the Norman Conquest, Stigand, Archbishop of Canterbury was Lord of the Manor, but after 1070 William the Conqueror gave huge estates including Methwold (and Snettisham and Castle Acre) to William de Warenne as thanks for his loyal support. Because of its excellent location, the settlement was the site of one of the three fortified houses built on the edge of the Fens in 1070 as part of the campaign against Hereward the Wake which finally ended Saxon rule. William de Warenne chose a site on the high ground slightly away from the then village centre and just to the north west of the present church. The house later fell into disuse and some of the plundered flint and stone can be found in the walls of the church and the later three storey Jacobean mansion, situated near the north gate of the church. This property, with its gable in chequer work of red brick and flint was formerly the residence of the Peck family of Stamford Hall, Essex, and their Coat of Arms is carved in stone near the top of the gable.

The settlement grew and in medieval times a market was held on Market Hill where the market cross still stands within the churchyard.

## SETTING AND LOCATION

Methwold village has been sited carefully to take advantage of a location which is near the edge of both the fens and the brecks. The village is situated on a sloping site on the edge of the chalkland which rises out of the surrounding lowland fens of the South Level. The landscape to the east of the village, where the Thetford Forest begins, is totally different to the wide panorama of fenland to the west.



The village lies at the crossroads of the B1112 and B1106, 29 kilometres (18 miles) south east of King's Lynn, 18 kilometres (11 miles) east of Downham Market, 19 kilometres (12 miles) south west of Swaffham and 18 kilometres (11 miles) west of Thetford.

The village is set in a huge parish of some 4,900 hectares (12,108 acres) in area and includes the village of Methwold Hythe and comparatively new village of Brookville which are also situated nearby.

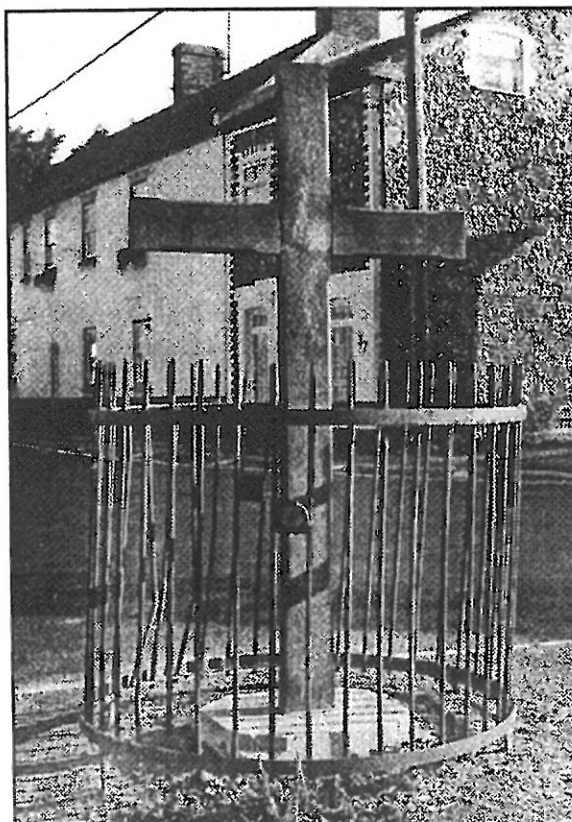
Because of the elevated position of the Church of St George with its dramatic tower and steeple, the village can be seen for miles across the fens. The views out across surrounding countryside from the village are also an

important aspect of its setting. Around the perimeter of the conservation area, environmental quality varies. The eastern entrance along the B1112 provides a rather poor visual gateway to the conservation area. Entry to the conservation area from the west along the B1112 is dominated by the Clough Farm residential development behind the listed chalk boundary wall.

## CHARACTER OVERVIEW

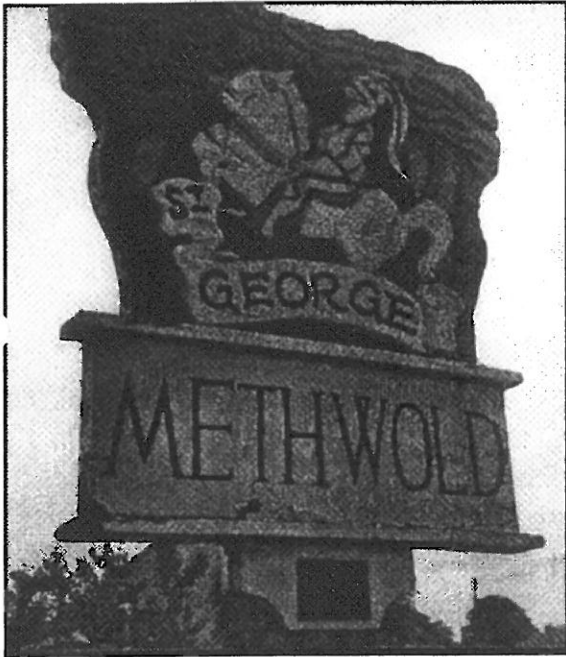
Clearly, Methwold has been a village of substance in the past, and retains many imposing buildings such as St George's Church, the Old Vicarage (15th Century), and Lancaster Park - a lovely late 18th Century house and associated 19th Century agricultural complex with a parkland setting. In a sense, the village still retains the flavour of "ages-gone-by".

It does not suffer from the impact of high levels of through traffic and has not been dominated by 20th Century development. It is a village which still retains strong links with agriculture and its streets and most of its buildings have not been unsympathetically "over beautified". Many of these buildings and spaces contain a wealth of interesting architectural detailing including the timber cross at the junction of Old Feltwell Road and Crown Street.



The cluster of cottages behind the church mark the first site of "squatters rights" built when the fair became a regular event and the fair people chose not to move on.

The present church of St George was constructed in the 14th and 15th Centuries and firmly established the new centre of the growing settlement on the high ground.



The de Warenne line ended by 1347 and the Manor of Methwold passed to Thomas Earl of Lancaster and ultimately, through the Lancaster line, to the Crown. The Queen is still Lord of the Manor by virtue of the Duchy of Lancaster although some land within the parish belongs to Christ's College, Cambridge.

Maps from the 16th Century show a huge warren of 1500 acres on the sandy soil to the south east of the village; Methwold became famous for the abundance and excellence of its rabbits which were sold by poulterers as "Muel Rabbits". A meal of Muel Rabbits was reputed to have pleased Charles I to such an extent that he granted the village a charter for a market to be held every Tuesday.

The settlement had become a Market Town but the parish lands changed again in the 1630s as a result of Vermuyden's comprehensive plan for draining the many thousands of acres of fen. The cut from Earith to Denver to take flood

water more directly to the Ouse estuary, bypassing the winding course of the Old River Ouse, and the Old Bedford River was completed in 1631. At much the same time, another drain known as Sams Cut, was cut across the Methwold and Feltwell Fens running north westwards and taking the water from Feltwell direct to the Great Ouse. As a result of the cuts, large new allotments (Severals') were granted to the Crown and to private individuals from the former common fens.

After the civil war further cuts were made (including the New Bedford River) and large blocks of fenland were allocated to investors. Some traces of the ownership at that time can still be seen in names such as King's Land and Queen's Ground in Methwold, and in the ladder pattern of drains and fields, in the middle of Methwold Fen.

Although Bryant's Map of 1826 shows a settlement in much the same basic form as it is today, the make up of Methwold changed rapidly through the second half of the 19th Century. The market, which was obsolete by 1809, returned and in 1879 is recorded as being held on Mondays for the sale of cattle and corn. Records also show that a fair for horses and cattle was held on each 23 April, and a Hiring session on Tuesday before old Michaelmas. The school was built in 1858, six Almshouses in 1880 and St George's Hall in 1893.

Between 1879 and 1891 a new road called Poplotts Road was constructed from Southery to Feltwell, and in 1883 a branch railway line was built running from Denver to Stoke Ferry. The two transport routes opened up Methwold Fen to agriculture and by 1900 the village had a sub branch of Gurneys Bank (now Barclays) of Thetford which opened on Mondays.

In 1889 Robert Goodritch founded his farming model, a co-operative called the Methwold Fruit Farm Colony, just outside the village. Despite the much improved transport links the colony failed but its form remains today in the hamlet of Brookville.

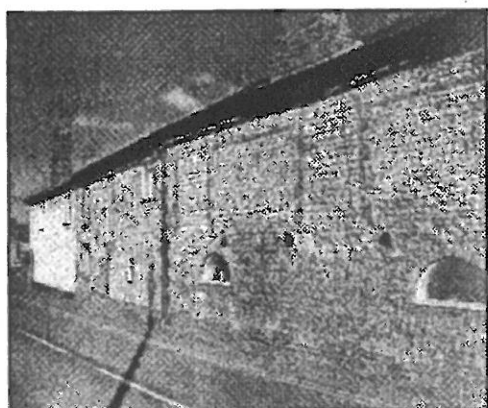
Just before the Second World War, an airfield was built to the south of the village to be a short term satellite to the existing airfield at Feltwell. The steeple of St George's Church, standing on high ground in the village centre, provided a marker for many returning RAF and USAF aircraft for the duration of the war.



The size and importance of the Market Place indicates that the village has traditionally been a focal point for social and economic activities for the surrounding agricultural community. This continues today with a whole range of facilities and services including: a car park, village hall (with social club and Age Concern Day Centre), active Methodist Chapel with regular coffee mornings, a coal merchant, village stores, butcher and delicatessen, public house, and undertaker. An auction yard in the centre of the village is a particularly lively attraction on Mondays. Methwold also serves as an important centre for education for the local area with a primary school in the conservation area, and a secondary school on the outskirts of the village.



Overall, the wealth of interest that exists in the village buildings is well looked after by local residents which reflects pride in both the present and the past. The local geology has provided the opportunity to obtain locally many of the building materials used to construct the traditional village scene. Local chalk blocks (clunch) and flint are widely used in the construction of walls, linked to the buff-coloured bricks manufactured from the local Gault clay seam. These materials often give the buildings a hard, solid feel - especially when decorative knapped flint is used as a walling material.



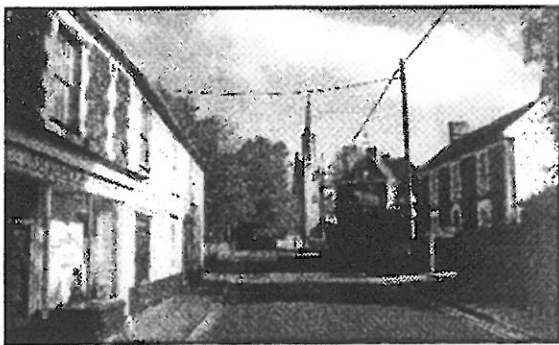
## SPACES AND BUILDINGS

The buildings and spaces of Methwold link well together to form a cohesive whole. Hythe Road and Crown Street wind from the lower to higher ground forming a series of well defined individual spaces with a good sense of enclosure. In the east, Millgate and White Road hug the perimeter of the large village chalk pit, creating a feature which draws the eye onwards round the curve and the buildings have the effect of deflecting views, creating additional visual interest. The centre and north of the village consist mainly of buildings from the 18th and 19th Centuries formally laid out around the Market Place and the wide space of Globe Street. The built up area of the conservation area has a fine rural setting to both its east and west prospects.



Crown Street represents the highest villagescape quality in Methwold with the dramatic architectural extremes of the timber-framed Old Vicarage, with its superb brick-detailed gable end and ornate chimney stack, and the imposing Georgian symmetry of New Hall. Private front and side walled gardens are important to the setting of buildings here.

St George's Church is the most dominant building in the conservation area. The tower, with its graceful steeple is a prominent feature on the skyline from the west, above the canopy of mature trees along the western boundary of the churchyard, beautifully maintained behind its chalk and flint wall. The remains of a stone cross can be found in the churchyard which contains many, fine, mature trees. There are two excellent, well framed views of the Church from within the conservation area: looking north eastwards along Crown Street and looking southwards from the Market Place.



The other prominent public space is the Market Place, now a triangular village green with a well developed sense of enclosure created by strong building lines and a glimpse of the farm complex at Lancaster Park. The size of the original Market Place appears to have been reduced by development within its original confines. The character of the other principal road leading off the market place, Globe Street, is in sharp contrast. Here the road is wide and the architecture more subdued with smaller houses and some alteration to the original detailing. Generally elevations appear "solid" because the window and door openings take a relatively small proportion of the facades of the buildings.

Barns and farm buildings are very important to the character of the village streets. These retain a rural character to parts of Hythe Road, Old Feltwell Road, High Street and Globe



Street although some are in need of restoration. Terraces of cottages set at right angles to the main street (High Street and Chapel Lane) add considerably to the visual interest of parts of the village and within the village core. There are also a number of alleyways, small lanes and

narrow streets without footways which offer closed views and an air of mystery, e.g. between Globe Street and Crown Street.

The chalk pit off Millgate Street (an historic source of building material for the village) has good tree cover and is an important wildlife habitat, but can be subject to fly-tipping. This area would make a good "Pit Park" for the village.

The rural setting of the village reaches into the conservation area and is quite outstanding. The open aspect of pasture and countryside to the west sweeps into the village via the fields of Hall Farm, and this is complemented by the soft



landscaping of the recreation ground. There is a fine view from Elden's Lane across the pasture to the village from which the church appears, surrounded by mature trees. The eastern part of the village is dominated by the formal landscaped setting of Lancaster Park. The mature tree cover in the Park allows for glimpses of the house to the west. The residents of Methwold are able to enjoy this rural setting by using the local network of public footpaths.

## LISTED BUILDINGS

There are 14 listed buildings in the conservation area, and the Statutory List was revised in 1986.

### Listed Grade I

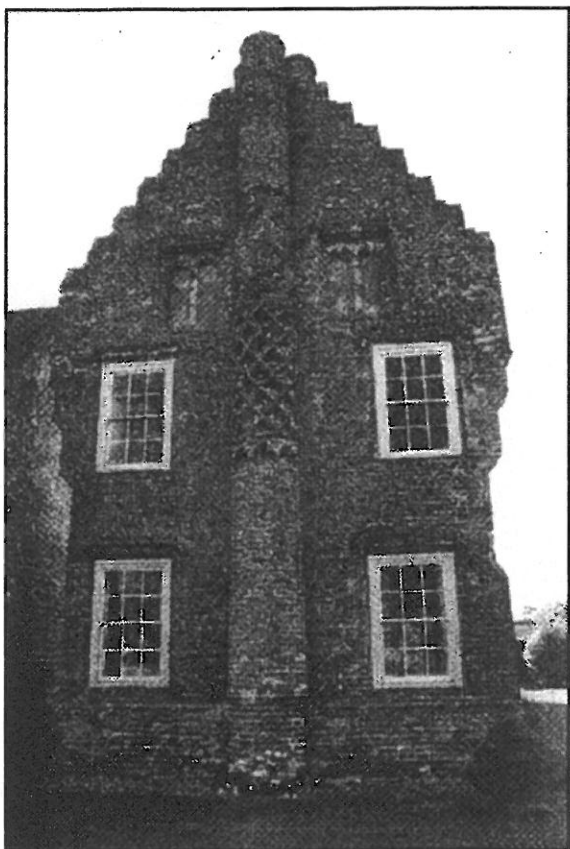
**Church of St. George**, Crown Street. 14th & 15th Century. Flint and clunch with ashlar dressings. Clock face to south side inscribed "Man Know Thyself." Internal - brass to Sir Adam de Clifton 1367 a full length figure in chequered armour.

### Listed Grade II

**Lancaster Park**, 33 Stoke Road. Late 18th Century house with extensive parkland.

**Granary & Cart shed, N. of Lancaster Park.** Early 19th Century. Flint, brick dressings, slate mansard roof with ridge stack.

**Cross in Church Yard.** Crown Street. Remains of 14th Century ashlar cross set in 19th Century plinth.



**The Old Vicarage**, 11 Crown Street. 15th Century, timber framed N. range, 18th Century clunch S. range. Decorative chimney. Many internal features.

**New Hall**, 19 Crown Street. 17th Century flint with brick dressing.

**Hall Farmhouse**, Elden's Lane. Later 17th Century flint and brick, part rendered.

**Cart shed at Hall Farm.** Date on south gable 1876, gault brick & coursed clunch. Central wall running the whole length, 6 arches on each face.

**Barn to N. of Hall Farm.** Threshing barn of coursed clunch.

**Barn to N.W. of Hall Farm.** Mid 18th Century, coursed clunch, king post roof.

**Clough Farm**, 7 Hythe Road. Early 19th Century, brick. Slate roof.

**Barn W. of Clough Farm.** Mid 18th Century threshing barn. Threshing floors survive.

**Outbuilding W. of Clough Farm.** Included for group value with house and barn.

**Boundary Wall to Clough Farm Complex**, Hythe Road. Clunch, brick and breeze block with semi-circular coping bricks. Various dates, included for group value.

### IMPORTANT UNLISTED BUILDINGS

Much of Methwold's character rests on the vernacular styles of its historic but unlisted buildings. 135 of these buildings have been identified, representing 67 per cent of the total number of buildings in the conservation area.

These important unlisted buildings have been identified because of their prominent position, use of traditional materials, their character is substantially intact, and because they often relate to other historic buildings close by.

### POST-WAR DEVELOPMENT

The Clough Farm residential development provides an interesting mix of barn conversions and new housing. Most modern development in the conservation area comprises infill housing. The conservation area was designated relatively recently (1988) and, unfortunately, some of the modern houses do not reinforce the traditional characteristics of the village.



### TRADITIONAL MATERIALS

The character of Methwold Conservation Area owes a great deal to the use of local traditional

materials in the construction of its historic buildings.

These materials include :

- Chalk: rough blockwork (coursed and random)
- Flint: field nodules (coursed and random); also knapped flint
- Buff Gault clay bricks
- Red brick
- Colourwash especially in south western part of the conservation area
- Normal red and black glazed pantiles
- Welsh slate

Methwold is dominated by chalk and flint walling with buff brick dressings. On a number of traditional houses these brick dressings have been painted to create even greater contrast with the flint panels. Chalk boundary walling is a feature of the village, often with tarred copings.

### ARCHAEOLOGICAL INTEREST

There are no Scheduled Ancient Monuments in Methwold conservation area but there are 14 sites where archaeological finds have been recorded as part of the Norfolk Sites and Monuments Record.

### DETRACTORS

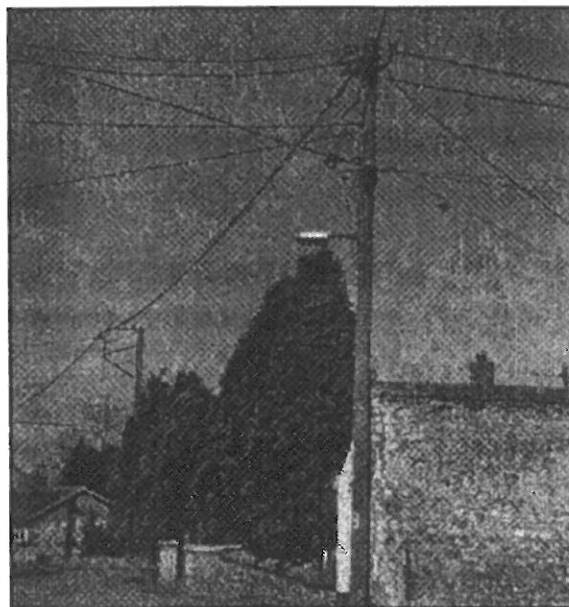
The special quality of conservation areas can easily be eroded by seemingly minor alterations such as unsuitable replacement windows and doors, inappropriate materials or unsympathetic paintwork, removal of walls, railings, trees and hedges.

Within the Methwold Conservation Area, there are few features which detract significantly from its intrinsic character.

The most serious detractor is the overhead wires, poles and other equipment.

Other areas of concern are:

- Wide expanse of road and pavement around the junctions of Hythe Road/Old Feltwell Road and High Street/Millgate Street and the entrance to the Market Place.
- Visual clutter caused by excess signs and information.
- Overgrown paths, verges, driveways
- The open nature of the car park at the rear of the George Public House.
- The clutter and neglect associated with the abandoned development site adjacent to, and including the chalk pit.
- The ruinous barn opposite the Clough Farm development on Crown Street.
- Derelict site adjacent to 35 Crown Street.
- Modernisation of properties in Globe Street which has had a detrimental impact on the traditional character of the street scene.





## 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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# METHWOLD CONSERVATION AREA

## NOTATION

-  CONSERVATION AREA BOUNDARY
-  LISTED BUILDINGS
-  IMPORTANT UNLISTED BUILDINGS

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DESIGNATED 14.04.88

REVISED 21.02.03