

# TOTTENHILL ROW

## CONSERVATION AREA DRAFT CHARACTER STATEMENT



*TOTTENHILL, has in its parish 426 souls, and 1,463 acres of land. The Poor's Land, 16A.8p., let for £34, was awarded at the enclosure in 1780, in lieu of common right and other land which had belonged to the poor. At the same time, Allotments, containing 30A., were awarded to the poor for fuel and the pasture of geese, &c.*

William White 1845

**DESIGNATED: December 1979**



**POLICY &  
ENVIRONMENT**

## 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.

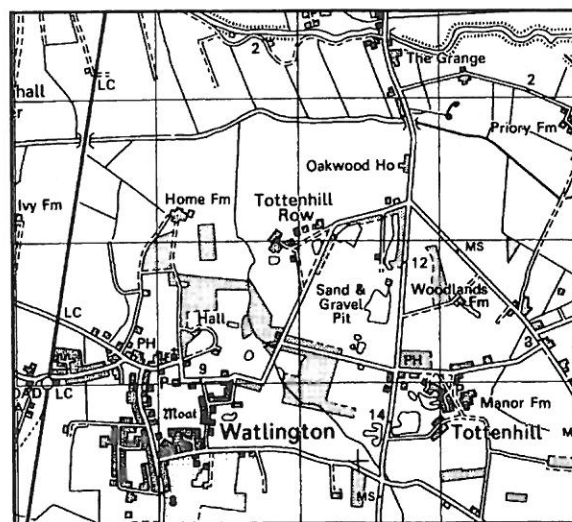
**Tottenhill Row Conservation Area was designated in December 1979 and this Statement was prepared in April 2001. This document highlights the special qualities which underpin the character of the conservation area, justifying its designation.** It also seeks to increase awareness of those qualities 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

Tottenhill Row is located to the east of the main A10 which connects Cambridge, Ely, Downham Market and King's Lynn, a major north/south transportation route. The settlement is approximately halfway between King's Lynn to the north and Downham Market to the south, and within a matrix of small country roads which connect villages such as Setchey to the north, Watlington further south west and Runcton Holme to the south.



Tottenhill Row is contained within the Tottenhill Parish although it is separate from Tottenhill Village which is some distance away on the other side of the A10.

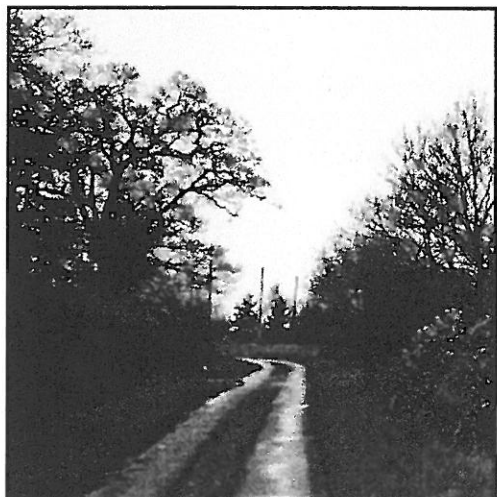
The conservation area itself lies to the west of Watlington Road which links the main A10 road to the north with Watlington Village to the south. Access tracks are located to the south and north of the Common, the southern one being “adopted” up to the extremity of the boundary to the “Laundry”.

The Great Ouse river lies approximately 4 - 5 kilometres (2½ miles) to the west and the river Nar approximately 1½ kilometres (1 mile) to the north. As a consequence, the area is particularly prone, to severe flooding and the hilltop location is clearly an important one historically.

The setting is an agricultural one surrounded by significant tree belts on three sides, to the east, west and south. These tree belts contribute to the intimacy of the area, which is generally one of openness and large fields. In this context the landscape quality of the "Common" is particularly interesting and important. The buildings to the north form an important "edge" to the conservation area dividing the settlement from the open countryside.



The settlement is an essentially "private" one, tucked away as it is from the main transportation routes of the surrounding locality. The Row, or ranges of buildings in the conservation area, are located along its northern boundary, but permit occasional views to the open agricultural land further to the north. Similar views are acquired through the gaps in the natural landscape to the south and west.



The 'hidden' nature of the settlement is particularly noticeable when approaching from the south. A long access track, approximately 275 metres (300 yards) long gives no hint of the special character of the settlement beyond.

## ORIGIN AND HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

Tottenhill Row was a small settlement for agriculture, which is believed to have originated in the 15th Century, although some basic form of settlement might have been in existence before that date. The settlement probably centred around one or two farmsteads.

The place name "Tottenhill" refers to "Tottas hill". "Row" simply refers to the fact that the built fabric takes the form of a line of dwellings incorporating two farms. The 'hill' relates to the fact that the settlement sits on top of a gravel outcrop which falls away to both the north and the south. Such outcrops, often associated with water, attracted early human settlement.

Presumably the original cottages of the "Row" were once occupied by agricultural workers related to the farms. But, over time land was acquired into a single ownership and the two farms became tenanted as part of a larger estate.

Typically, over the years the ranges of buildings have become owner occupied, although one or two cottages still belong to the adjoining land owner along with the outbuildings related to Dairy Farm, pockets of land which infill between the ranges of buildings, and the "Laundry" to the south. Owner occupation has meant the upgrading, refurbishment and adaptation of the existing dwellings.

The other important component of the conservation area is the presence of the common land which lies to the south of the 'Row'. This area is known as "Tottenhill Row Common" which resulted from the enclosure acts in the 18th Century. Cattle were grazed on this common up until around forty years ago and the proximity of

"Dairy Farm" to it was no accident.

The Common is an interesting and important natural landscape and has recently been designated a "County Wildlife Site". The special character generating such designation is a "grassy heathland with ponds or "meres" containing a unique blend of flora and fauna". The site is gradually being brought back to full beauty. It was apparently used for tank practice during the second World War and has until recently been inundated with bracken but careful conservation management over the last few years has succeeded in redressing this situation.



In terms of infrastructure however, the settlement has long existed without shop, pub, post office, school or church. The inhabitants consequently rely heavily on vehicular transport to maintain their lives. They are also widely varied in their employment but the main railway line connecting King's Lynn and Cambridge is located just to the west with a station at Watlington, thus providing an alternative means of transport.

The current population of The Row is less than forty, including children but there is a great sense of community within the settlement, and a general desire to maintain the fragile balance between human occupation and landscape beauty. This philosophy is fortunately shared by the adjoining land owner, who has gone to great lengths to enhance and protect the conservation value of this setting.

The conservation area occupies an approximate area of 9.5 hectares (23.4

acres). It is roughly arrowhead in shape although the northern boundary is quite irregular to encompass the extremity of the building plots which probably reflect the pattern of settlement and changing ownership over time. There are no listed buildings within the conservation area, although several buildings have an intrinsic traditional character which reinforces the special interest of the conservation area.

In summary, this settlement was historically one based on agriculture and the proximity of water indicates that it might even have been a shoreline hamlet at one time. In any event drainage and the management of water would have been a determining factor in its development. The debate over drainage is ongoing and is crucially important to the wider topographical context of the area. Drainage management, particularly that relating to the River Nar and its drainage cuts, is the subject of current discussion. This river flooded in recent times to the danger of the settlement itself.

## CHARACTER OVERVIEW

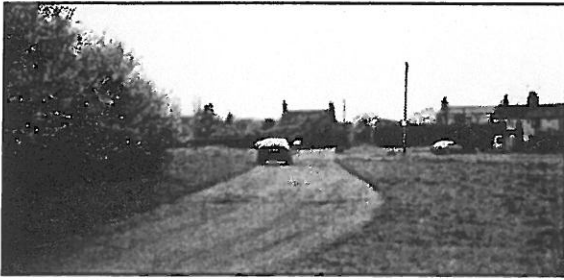
Tottenham Row is a small settlement linked inextricably with the important landscape features mentioned above, ie. the Common which consists of large areas of grass, heathland, ponds, tree belts with "agricultural views" beyond. The Common is a County Wildlife Site and is maintained directly by the residents in conjunction with the Norfolk County Council, English Nature and The Norfolk Wildlife Trust.

The settlement is essentially a linear one, hence the name 'Row' although the buildings which occupy the northern boundary of the area step back north and south to provide interesting and varied vistas. The land itself slopes gently from the north to west and forms part of the Great Ouse river valley topography.

The linear nature of the settlement however is unusual in that the access tracks which link the buildings are in effect "dead ends", with only the eastern one and southern one connected to main roads. It is this factor



which gives the settlement its private nature and the sense of intrusion when visited by outsiders.



The buildings are all of small domestic scale and even the two farmhouses are modest in size. Buildings are generally connected by hedgerows and occasionally a wall or fence. The buildings all face the Common and there is an attractive sense of informality at the junction of the two with the grass heath taken right up to the building plot. The general absence of garage forecourts and hardstanding should be maintained.

All the buildings have been altered and refurbished in recent years, sometimes without sympathy, particularly in relation to modern windows and doors, etc. The overall character of the conservation area is however still maintained. Most of the extension/refurbishment alteration has been of sympathetic scale with extensions generally located to the rear of the original buildings, thus minimizing impact on the original fabric as well as their appearance.



The main landscape components have been mentioned above and can be summarised as large areas of grass, rough access tracks with no kerbs, a definite "edge" between grass and heathland, and the heathland itself with its delightful ponds and trees.

There is no 'core' to the settlement as such

but each element of the landscape and the built environment contributes to the overall whole. Fortunately for the character of the conservation area, decisions taken by the residents over the years have helped to conserve and enhance quality. Indeed there still appears to be a loose, controlling agreement to maintain the fragile balance of quality in an area where it could easily be lost through insensitive built development and unthinking use of areas in front of buildings themselves.

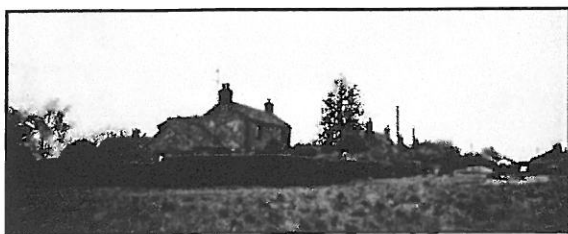
There is a great sense of care being exercised by the residents, not only for their own buildings but for the important landscape features which they help to conserve and maintain. The importance of the landscape attracts many visitors, particularly parties of school children but fears of "over use" have thankfully not been realised. The area is still relatively "unknown" and should remain so to prevent it being overwhelmed.

## SPACES AND BUILDINGS

**Tottenham Row** Conservation Area is relatively small and occupies only 9 hectares (23 acres). As such it is really a small hamlet generated to house agricultural workers living adjacent to the two farms on the Row. In this sense it could be regarded as a settlement created by landowners, i.e. an "estate hamlet", all the property being tenanted up to quite recent times with buildings under ownership of one or two landlords.

At the same time this rural settlement was probably always associated with the important "natural central feature" i.e. water and grazing land, in this case the series of ponds or meres which are typical of this fen fringe/Breckland type landscape. The direct presence and nearness of water are quintessential to the character of this locality.

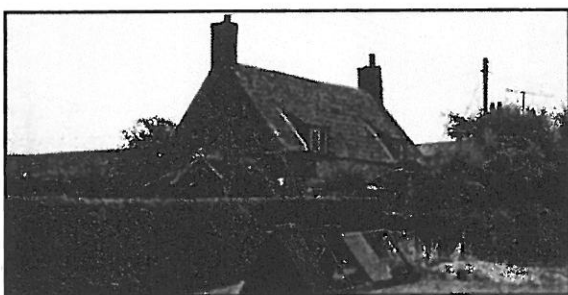
In basic terms then the character of this conservation area is generated by a combination of linear estate settlement, village green and "central" landscape features, the most important of which are



trees/hedges, grass, common, and ponds.

Looking at the built form first, there are some fifteen dwellings with associated outbuildings. These buildings (apart from the "Laundry") are all located along the northern conservation area boundary, which runs for approximately 500 metres in an east/west direction. This range of buildings provides an important and attractive edge to the conservation area which is heightened by the way the buildings themselves are set forward and back, a characteristic probably due to the gradual division of the land into building plots. The buildings of this linear 'edge' are linked together with more formal landscape features such as hedges, shrubs, trees and occasionally a wall or fence.

In almost all cases the major garden space associated with these buildings is located to the rear and the front (south) façades face directly onto **Common** which dramatically reinforces the "village green" quality of the conservation area.



In architectural terms, there are no 'gems' and the modest scale of the buildings has been retained over the recent decades when most have been updated. Buildings are either 1½ or 2 storey, and even the biggest, **Dairy Farm**, is of relatively modest scale. The farm buildings are "side-on" to the common, again probably due to the division of land and ownership patterns.

The one building outside the Row is the "**Laundry**", a 19th Century detached

building in its own plot constructed as an Estate dwelling by the owner of Watlington Hall. It is a tenanted building to this day and has all the character of a "designed" structure.



Ongoing demands imposed upon these buildings in response to owner/occupation and changing living patterns have thankfully only resulted in minor blemishes (unsympathetic detailing/specification of doors, windows and roofing materials) and all major additions have been sensitively located.

Turning to the major landscape components of the conservation area, the first observation is that they are sandwiched between the line of buildings to the north and Watlington Road to the south. The landscape components which contribute to the special quality of the Area are as follows:-

- A belt of mature trees adjacent to the road which effectively acts as a buffer to the conservation area.
- Two very attractive ponds at the east and west ends of the conservation area.
- Heathland which surrounds the ponds and consists of gorse, bracken (now thankfully controlled) and trees in clumps and in isolation with a series of rough footpaths interspersed.
- Swathes of grass common which lie between the heath and buildings, interspersed with rough vehicular access tracks, footpaths and the odd

isolated tree.

- The more formal manmade landscape features associated with the buildings as mentioned above i.e. hedges, garden trees etc.
- The large belts of trees to the south, east and west which are not in the conservation area itself but which perform the role of an important visual backdrop to the area and heighten the sense of a "Secret Garden".



All these components contribute to the special atmosphere and quality of the conservation area. The term "village green" is however a misnomer. The lack of village infrastructure such as pub, shop or post office, and the absence of a "through" route means that visitors are aware of being intruders. This is seen as an advantage, bearing in mind the fragility of such an environment. The wildlife site is in effect "self policed" and maintained by the community who follow their own unwritten code of conduct and do what is necessary to cherish and maintain the character and atmosphere described above.

There are two main access tracks running through the conservation area, one from the south and one from the east. The former is a country lane with central grass strip but asphalted and "adopted". The latter is a rough hoggin track with many pot holes but which heightens the special rural character of the locality. This track is



maintained on an ad hoc "repair as necessary" basis by the community and should remain so. Neither track has kerbs or edging which again is an important factor in contributing to character.

As already mentioned, the ponds and surrounding landscape have been designated a County Wildlife Site because of an the unique combination of wildlife and nature. A very positive relationship exists between the community, the adjoining landowner and the designating bodies which have succeeded in enhancing the quality of the natural environment particularly that of the western pond which was until recently choked. Much effort is still being injected into the carrying out of a conservation plan drawn up by the above.

Fishing in the main pond is encouraged although licensed for a nominal fee. The pond has been stocked with tench, a species which will naturally aid the self cleansing process of the water.



The area is also a great attraction for local children who visit on a regular basis. There is always a potential danger in promoting over use and the tendency to add unwanted urban townscape features such as seats and waste bins. Again, the self policing role of the community will undoubtedly prevent this happening.

### **LISTED BUILDINGS**

There are no listed buildings within the Tottenhill Row Conservation Area.

### **IMPORTANT UNLISTED BUILDINGS**

Of the fifteen dwellings, all bar one (the

modern dwelling being converted for the adjoining land owners' farm manager) contribute to the traditional character of the conservation area.

## POST WAR DEVELOPMENT

The settlement has changed dramatically in modern times largely due to the pattern of ownership which has resulted in almost 100% owner/occupation. This has gone hand in hand with dramatic changes in agriculture and the inevitable reduction of agricultural workers. The buildings have been adapted to these changes and in general terms the result is still one of cohesive character.

The other dramatic late 20th Century change has been the cessation of grazing cattle on the Common, the last such use being within living memory, approximately 40 years ago.

Finally, the late 20th Century has seen a change in attitude. Not only towards the built environment and the need to conserve and preserve the special character of such settlements, but also in the need to recognise the beauty and fragility of a natural landscape provided by such areas as Tottenhill Common. Much effort has to be put into maintaining the ecological balance of such an area and it is gratifying to see the results of this at Tottenhill Row.



There are pressures however. The conservation area sits over high quality gravel deposits and the major aggregate companies have made strong overtures to adjacent landowners with the view to working this material as they have adjacent sites. The local community has resisted such pressure to date but the situation

needs to be carefully monitored in the future.

## TRADITIONAL MATERIALS

The character of the Tottenhill Row Conservation Area owes a great deal in terms of the buildings to the use of local materials in their construction.

These materials include:-

- Red Norfolk brickwork.
- Carstone.
- Natural clay pantiles.
- Welsh slate (Dairy Farm).
- Gault clay bricks.

## ARCHAEOLOGICAL INTEREST

There are no Scheduled Ancient Monuments in Tottenhill Row.

## 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 the properties in Tottenhill Row exhibit many of these detractors.



## 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

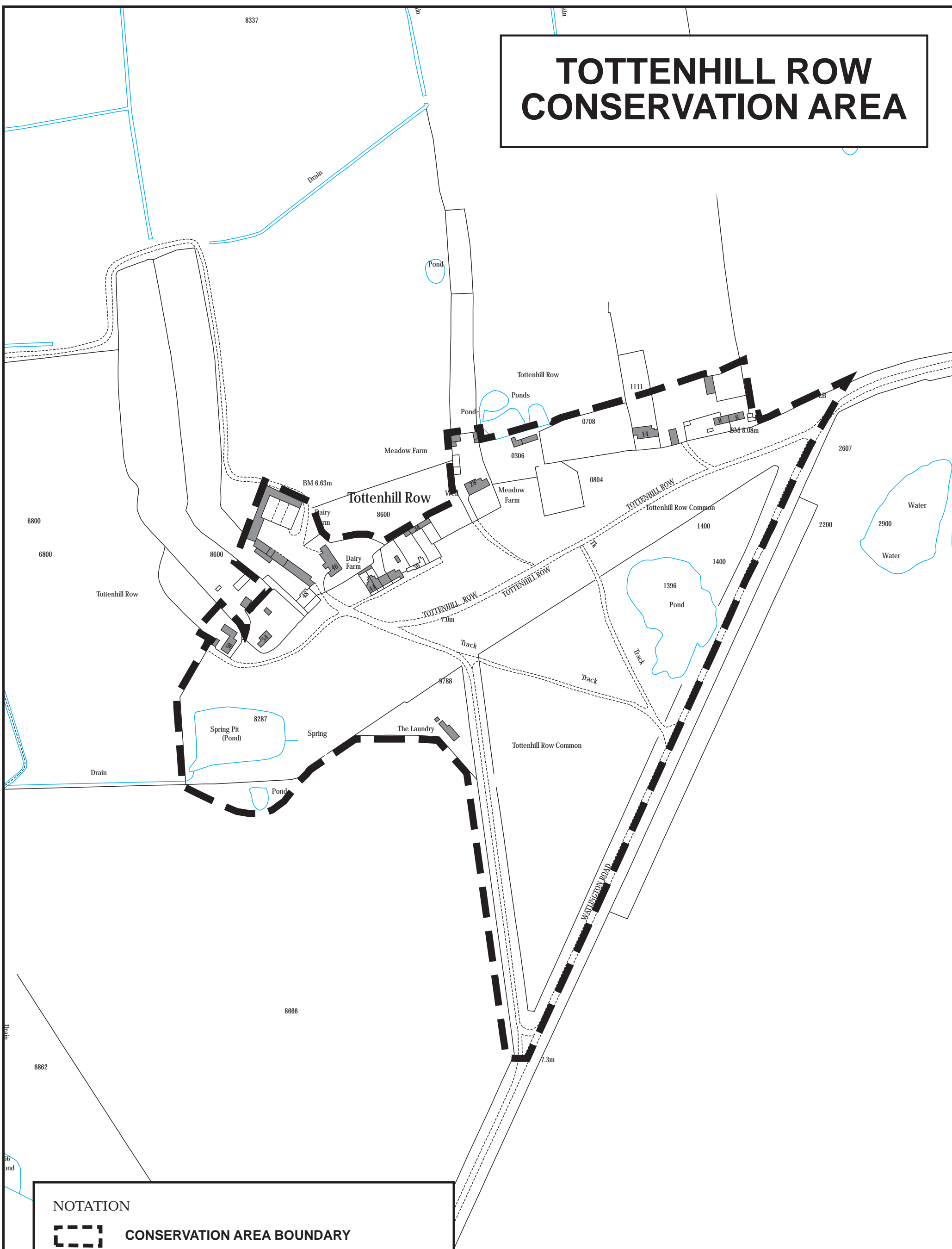
Within conservation areas, a number of special controls apply and it is advisable that anyone proposing to carry out new development, alterations, extensions, installations, demolition or work to trees should seek advice from the Planning Department at an early stage. A leaflet summarising these issues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



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# TOTTENHILL ROW CONSERVATION AREA



## NOTATION



CONSERVATION AREA BOUNDARY



LISTED BUILDINGS



IMPORTANT UNLISTED BUILDINGS



DESIGNATED 06.12.79

REVISED 21.02.03

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