



# Watlington Neighbourhood Plan Evidence Base

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## Key Issues

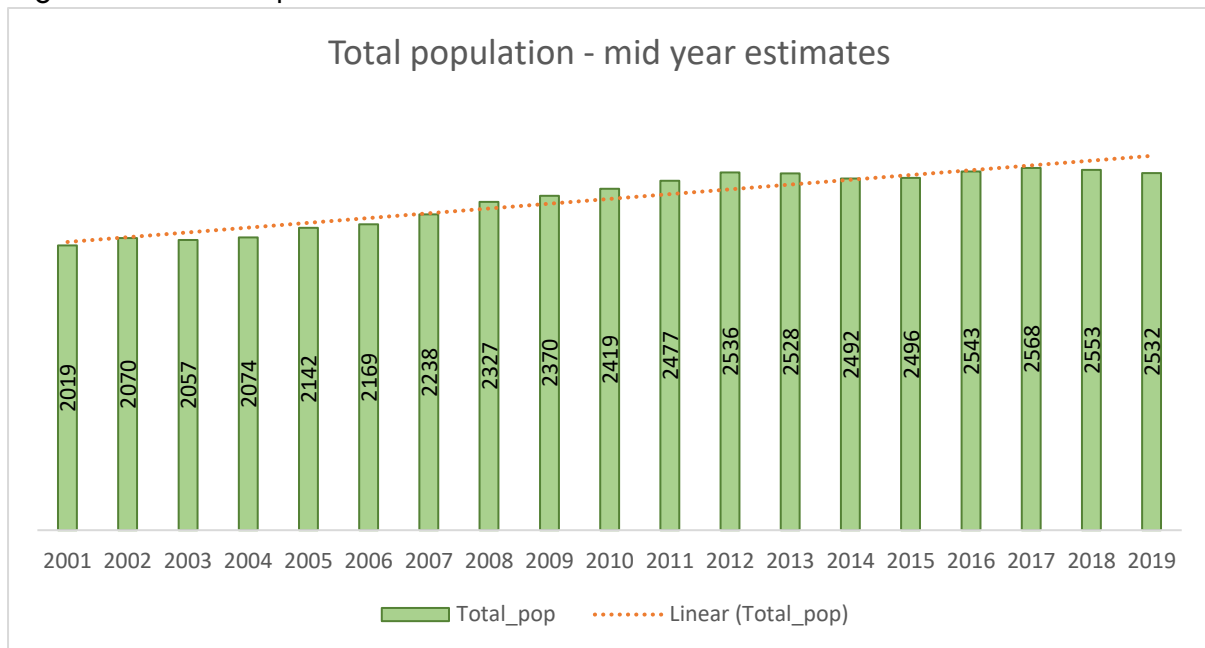
Theme	Issues
Population characteristics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is an ageing population which may indicate a need for more smaller unit housing within the parish, to cater for people wanting to downsize.</li> <li>• There may also be a need for specialist housing for older people.</li> </ul>
Housing growth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Watlington is designated a Key Rural Service Centre by the King's Lynn and West Norfolk District Council's Core Strategy.</li> <li>• The King's Lynn and West Norfolk Local Plan allocates 1.8 hectares of land in Watlington for development of at least 32 residential dwellings</li> <li>• Over the last five years permission has been granted for 41 new dwellings, with a large development of 22 homes permitted in the last year. These permissions represent windfall development, outside of any planned growth in the Local Plan. Other windfall development could happen on sites that have special value to the community but which have no protection at the moment.</li> </ul>
Availability of local services and accessibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Watlington is a fairly sustainable location, with a good range of local services and facilities, including rail station</li> <li>• The rail station is accessible by walking and bike for much of the village settlement and provides routes for commuting / leisure to nearby towns and to stations to London</li> <li>• Modest additional housing could support the ongoing viability of some local services, such as local shops and pub as could tourism</li> <li>• Access into the countryside and open spaces for recreational reasons is reasonable, though could be improved.</li> </ul>
Natural Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There are three county wildlife sites within the plan area, which have been identified for their wildlife value. These will be considered in the planning process, but will not receive the same level of protection as national or internationally designated sites.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There are areas of priority habitat in the parish; there is potential for these to be affected by development and they do not have the same level of protection as designated sites.</li> <li>• Flooding from rivers is an issue in areas to the west of the neighbourhood plan area and will be a constraint on growth.</li> <li>• Surface water flooding is an issue in parts of the parish and it will be important to ensure this is not worsened through new development.</li> </ul>
Local Landscape	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The pressure to expand villages like Watlington along the mainline rail corridor may be at odds with the current peaceful and largely undeveloped nature of the local area</li> <li>• Further development should seek to conserve or enhance the history and character of the area</li> </ul>
Historic Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There are a number of listed buildings in Watlington reflecting the long rich history of the village. These will be protected through existing legislation, though there may be other assets of heritage value that could usefully be identified and protected as part of the neighbourhood plan.</li> </ul>

## Population Characteristics

According to population data from the Census 2021 (ONS), Watlington has a current population of 2795. Figure 2 shows how the population has shown an upward trend since 2001 to 2019.

Figure 2: Total Population



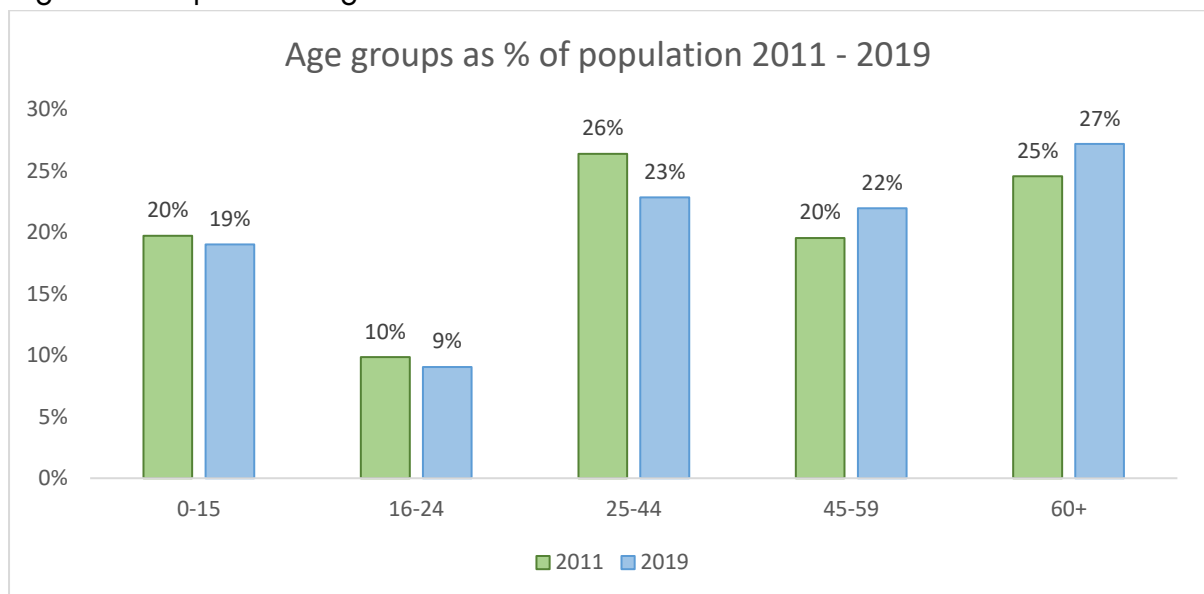
Source: ONS, Mid-Year Population Estimates at Parish Level

The age structure in 2011 compared to the mid-2019 population estimates is provided in Figure 3. The population has aged over this time with the proportion of people in the Watlington population aged 60 and above increasing from 25% to 27% between 2011 and 2019. There has been a similar increase in the 45-59 age group. There is a slightly higher proportion of older females than males, with the over 60 population in Watlington in 2019 split 54%/46% female to male. This difference has increased since 2011 when the split was 52%/48% female to male. The data indicates there has been a decline in all of the younger age groups (45 and below). People aged 25-44 made up 26% of the Watlington population in 2011 but dropped to 23% in 2019.

According to the Census 2021 data, the number of households within Watlington is 1216 households which is an increase of 195 from 2011 when the number of households was 1021<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> [Number of Households - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](https://www.ons.gov.uk)

Figure 3: Population age structure



Source: ONS, mid-year population estimates

Issues:

- There is an ageing population which may indicate a need for more smaller unit housing within the parish, to cater for people wanting to downsize.
- There may also be a need for specialist housing for older people.

## Housing Growth

Watlington is designated a Key Rural Service Centre by the King's Lynn and West Norfolk District Council's Core Strategy due to the good range of services and facilities available to serve the existing community. On a population pro-rotta basis, the Council's preferred distribution of development Watlington is to receive an allocation of 32 new dwellings<sup>2</sup>. This site will roll forward to the emerging Local Plan as it yet to be built out. See figure 4 below for map.

Policy G112.1 in the KLWN Local Plan (Watlington – land south of Thieves Bridge Road) allocates land of around 1.8 hectares for residential development of at least 32 dwellings. The Local Plan sets out that this development is subject to compliance with all of the following criteria:

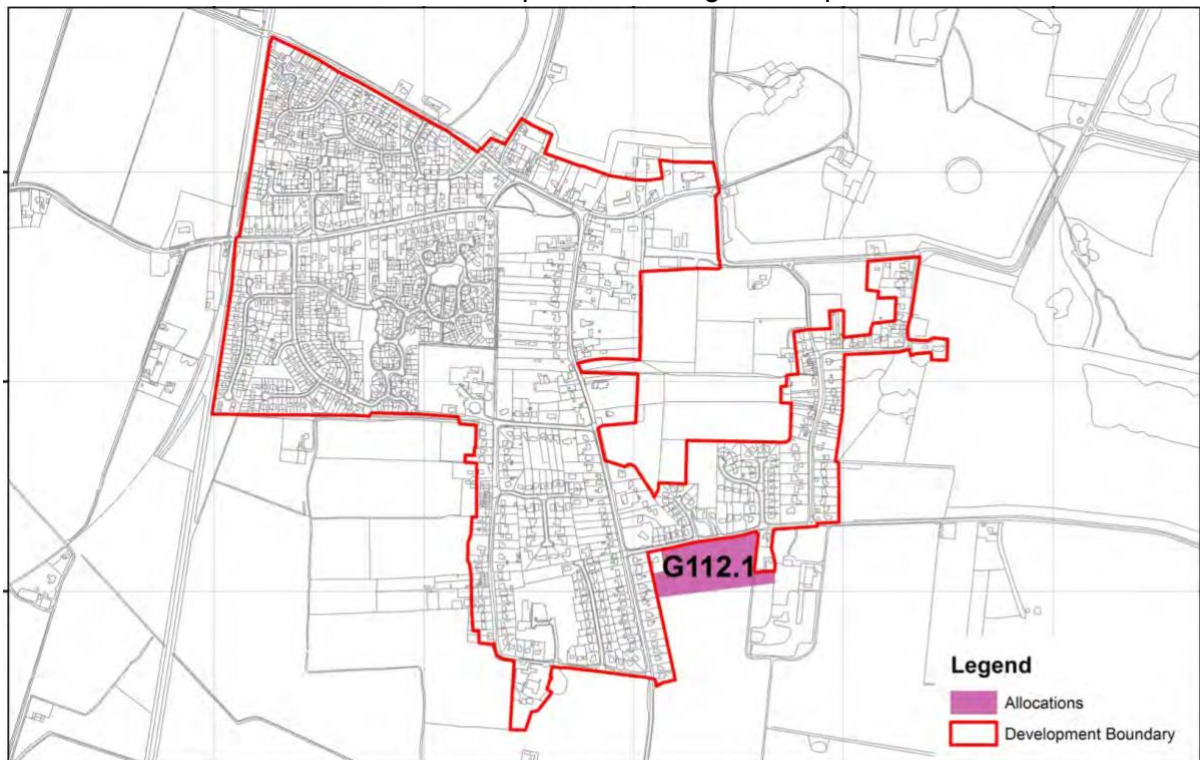
1. Submission of an Environmental Statement that satisfies Norfolk County Council that:
  - I. The applicant has carried out investigations to identify whether the resource is viable for mineral extraction and if the mineral resource is viable, that:
  - II. The applicant has considered whether it could be extracted economically prior to development taking place; and if the mineral resource can be extracted economically, whether (or not):
  - III. There are opportunities to use the onsite resource during the construction phases of the development;
2. Development is subject to the demonstration of safe highway access that meets the satisfaction of the Highway Authority;
3. Provision of affordable housing in line with the current standards.

The KLWN Local Plan explains that this allocated site lies in the southern part of Watlington in a relatively built-up area (see figure 4 below). It is situated south of Thieves Bridge Road and opposite established residential development in the form of bungalows and large detached houses. To the east of the site is further residential development in the form of bungalows along Downham Road, and to the west are two large detached properties with substantial gardens, one has associated farm buildings and ponds/water storage. The site comprises of Grade 2 agricultural land and has defined boundaries in the form of hedgerows and trees. Watlington comprises mostly higher-grade agricultural land, limiting the ability to choose lower grade land.

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<sup>2</sup> King's Lynn and West Norfolk Local Plan – adopted 2016 [Adopted plan](#) | [Adopted plan](#) | [Borough Council of King's Lynn & West Norfolk \(west-norfolk.gov.uk\)](#)

Figure 4: site allocation for Watlington taken from the Kings Lynn and West Norfolk site allocations and development management plan



The KLWN Local Plan describes the site as ideally located for residential development since it would represent a natural continuation of housing along Thieves Bridge Road, without significantly extending the village into countryside. It is considered that development in this location would not be intrusive in the landscape but would rather fill the gap between existing housing. When viewed from the wider landscape, development would be seen in the context of the existing village.

The Local Plan describes the site as well located to local services found within the village and has good pedestrian/vehicular links. Safe access and egress is obtainable from Thieves Bridge Road as supported by Norfolk County Council as the local highway authority, who identify the site as a preferable site in terms of highway matters.

KLWN Council considers that the site is of a sufficient scale to accommodate the 32 dwellings sought in the settlement at a density consistent with its surroundings and without detriment to the form and character of the locality. This site is being rolled forward to the emerging Local Plan as it yet to be built out. In December 2021 a planning application was submitted for 40 new homes (Ref. No: 21/02421/FM); 37 of these are affordable homes to rent or which provide routes to home ownership. However, in April 2022, the decision was changed for the site to be fully affordable



(rent and ownership) and given consent in January 2023. Whilst this site does not meet market housing needs other permissions which have come forward from windfall development are ultimately focused on market housing tenure, so this need is being met elsewhere.

Over the last 5 years permission for 41 new dwellings, or conversions, have been granted in Watlington, see figure 5. These permissions are considered windfall development, outside of the planned growth in the Local Plan.

Figure 5: Permissions Granted for Residential Development in the last five years

Description	Location	Number of new dwellings	Date
Storage barn to 1bed annexe	Downham Road	1	June 2021
Outline Application for 22 dwellings	Downham Road	22	November 2020
Annexe to holiday let	Mill Road	1	July 2020
Annexe	Station Road	1	January 2020
Barn conversion	Rivendale	1	July 2019
9 dwellings, cart lodges, B1 units, bin and cycle storage and car parking	Watlington Station, Station road	9	January 2019
Outline application 1 dwelling	Fairfield Lane	1	October 2018
New dwelling following demolition of existing	Plough Lane	1	July 2018
Barn conversion	Fen Road	1	July 2018
2 residential dwellings	School Road	2	December 2016
Detached dwelling and double garage	Theives Bridge Road	1	August 2016
	TOTAL	41	

Issues:

- Watlington is designated a Key Rural Service Centre by the King's Lynn and West Norfolk District Council's Core Strategy.

- The King's Lynn and West Norfolk Local Plan allocates 1.8 hectares of land in Watlington for development of at least 32 residential dwellings – yet to be built out
- Over the last five years permission has been granted for 41 new dwellings, with a large development of 22 homes permitted in the last year. These permissions represent windfall development, outside of any planned growth in the Local Plan. Other windfall development could happen on sites that have special value to the community, but which have no protection at the moment.

## Availability of Local Services and accessibility

Watlington is situated around six miles south of King's Lynn. The village is served by Watlington railway station (on the Fen Line between London Kings Cross- Cambridge and King's Lynn) which is less than a mile from the centre of the village. The village has a range of services and facilities including a GP surgery, school, bus route, railway station, Post Office, pub and other retail uses. Watlington provides a local employment base which has developed from its role in serving the local agricultural community<sup>3</sup>.



Watlington has a range of local businesses and services including a Post Office/shop, pub, village hall, parish church, food, and retail. Watlington is a thriving community with many organised social/sports clubs and leisure activities on offer to residents. These include: Watlington Luncheon Club, bellringers, knitters and stitchers, handbell ringers, football, badminton, school of dance, Wednesday club, Watlington WI, short mat bowls, Watlington Players, and a local history group to name a few. There is a quarterly village magazine, The Watlington Gossip, distributed to all homes in the village free of charge.

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<sup>3</sup> King's Lynn and West Norfolk Local Plan – adopted 2016 [Adopted plan](#) | [Adopted plan](#) | [Borough Council of King's Lynn & West Norfolk \(west-norfolk.gov.uk\)](#)

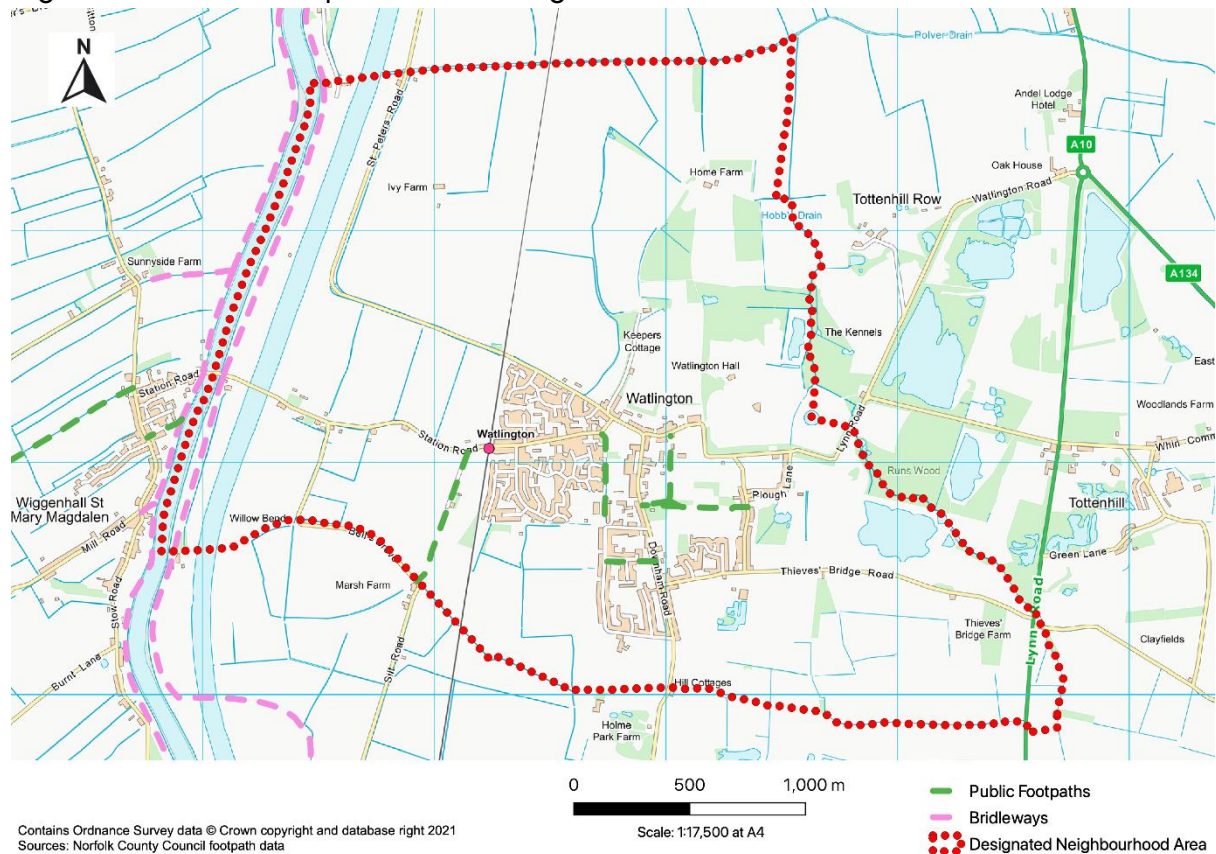
Watlington has a range of clubs and services for children and young people including a primary school, pre-school, under-fives, youth club, Beavers/Cubs/Scouts, Guides/Brownies, youth football and Watlington Young Players. The village has a Multi-Use Games Area (MUGA) and football pitch at the recreation ground as well as two other play areas with equipment located at Warren Close and Stone Close.



Watlington Sports and Social Club, which is opposite the village hall, is a family members club offering sports and social activities to all ages. Activities include food/drink, big screen sports games, pool, darts, football, bowls, and cribbage.

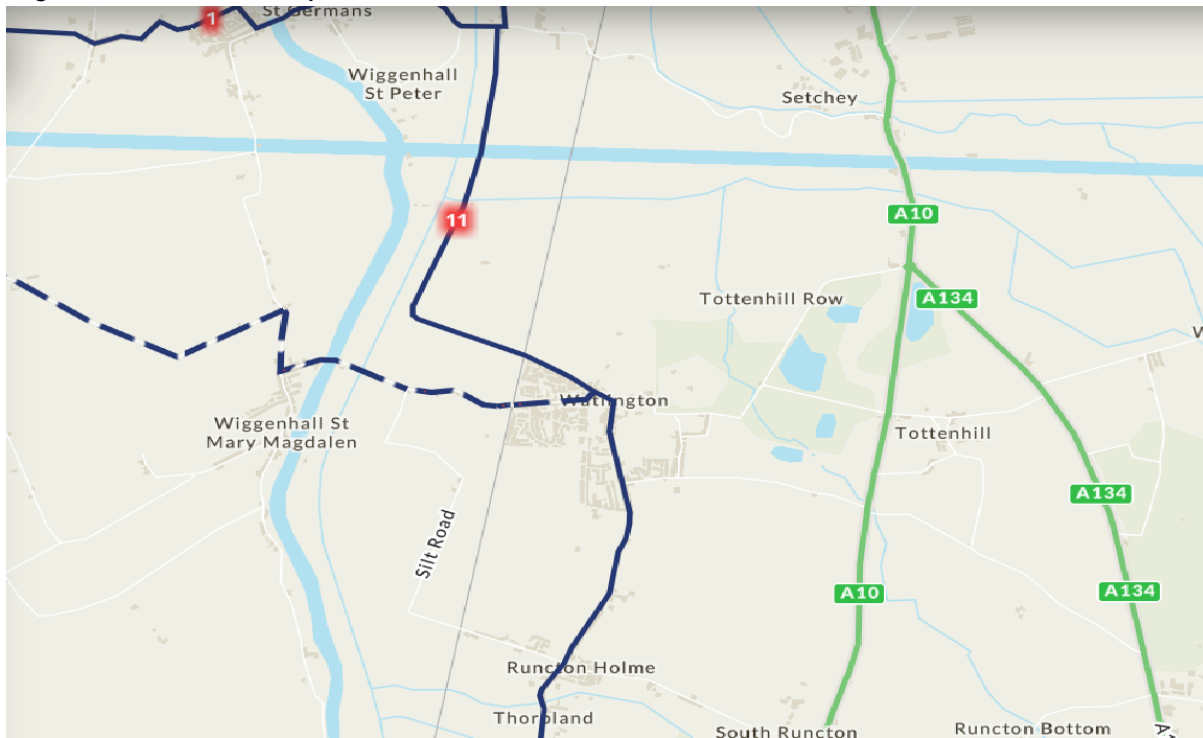
Local services and facilities are within walking distance for residents. However local people need to travel to larger towns for some services. Watlington is on bus and train routes. Regarding this point looking at the Census 2021, in Watlington there was 110 households who had no car or van availability. 507 households owned 1 car or van, 420 households owned 2 cars or vans and 179 households had 3+ cars or vans. This showed that owning a private vehicle was a popular option amongst

Figure 6: Public Footpaths in Watlington



There are footways for people to use to get to local services and so that they don't have to walk in the road. There are public footpaths and a bridleway within the neighbourhood plan area giving access to open green spaces (see figure 6 below) and the wider countryside, however these are somewhat fragmented.

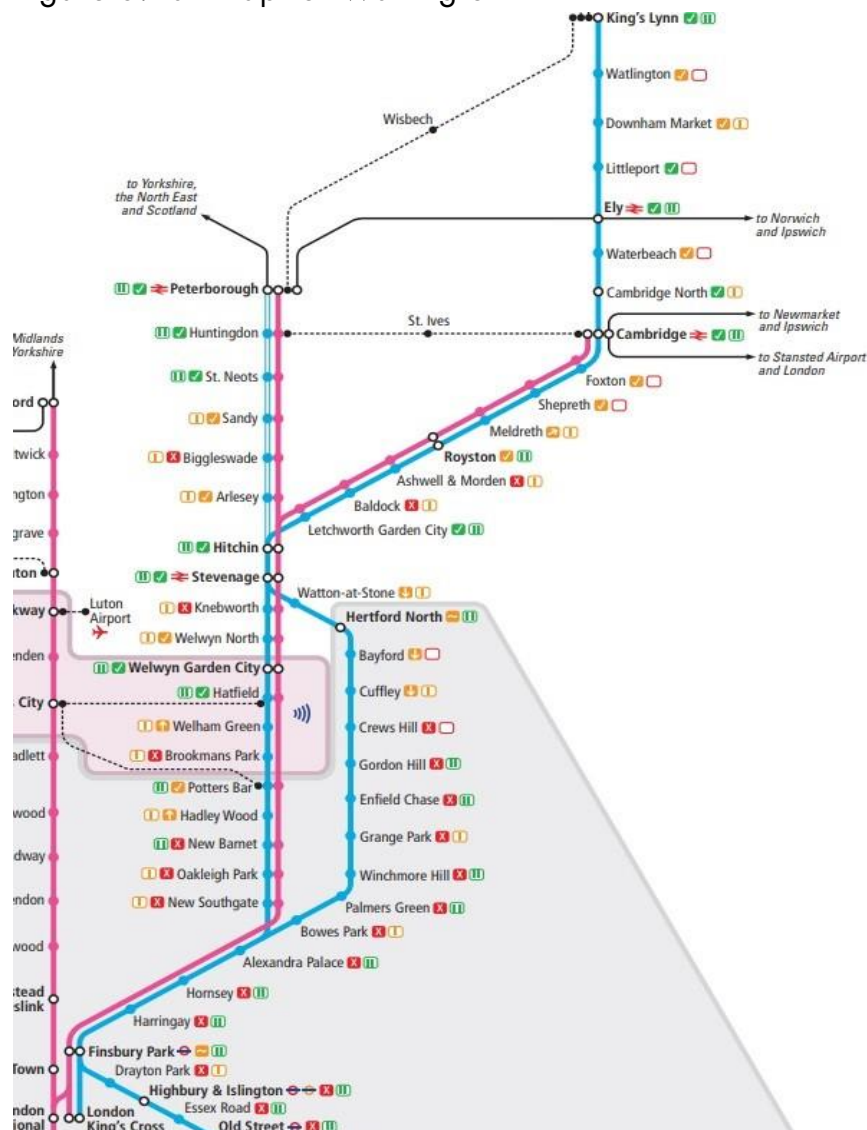
Figure 7: National Cycle Route 11



National Route 11 of the National Cycle Network links Harlow in Essex with Wigenhall St Germans, South of King's Lynn. Route 11 runs through Watlington providing a road cycling route

Watlington is on the King's Lynn - London King's Cross train line (Great Northern) with approximately one service per hour to destinations on these routes stopping in Watlington (see figure 8 below).

Figure 8: rail map for Watlington



Watlington railway station has a long history – opened in 1846 by the Lynn and Ely Rail Company. Between 1875 and 1968 the station was called Magdalen Road and the station was closed in 1968 under the Dr Beeching rail closures. The actions of a group of Watlington villagers who lobbied for the station to be reopened resulted in success 7 years later in 1975 when the station reopened. In 1989 the name reverted back to the original Watlington. Historically the station provided local employment for station masters, porters, crossing gate keepers and signal men, however today the station is not staffed. Detailed local history of the railway station can be found on the village website<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.watlingtonnorfolk.co.uk/railway-local-history.html> - accessed 01/10/2021

Picture of the entrance into Watlington Railway Station



### Issues

- Watlington is a fairly sustainable location, with a good range of local services and facilities, including rail station
- The rail station is accessible by walking and bike for much of the village settlement and provides routes for commuting / leisure to nearby towns and to stations to London
- Modest additional housing could support the ongoing viability of some local services, such as local shops and pub as could tourism
- Access into the countryside and open spaces for recreational reasons is reasonable, though could be improved.

## Natural Environment

There are no Natural England statutory designated sites in Watlington. There are however three non-statutory wildlife designations within the Neighbourhood Plan area, Watlington Railway Sidings County Wildlife Site (CWS), Runs Wood Meadow CWS and Thieves Bridge Meadow CWS. County Wildlife Sites are areas of land rich in wildlife outside of nationally protected areas such as National Nature Reserves and Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). County Wildlife Sites do not receive statutory protection but are given some protection through the planning system. Norfolk Wildlife Trust in advises planning authorities, developers and landowners on the protection and management of the sites<sup>5</sup>.

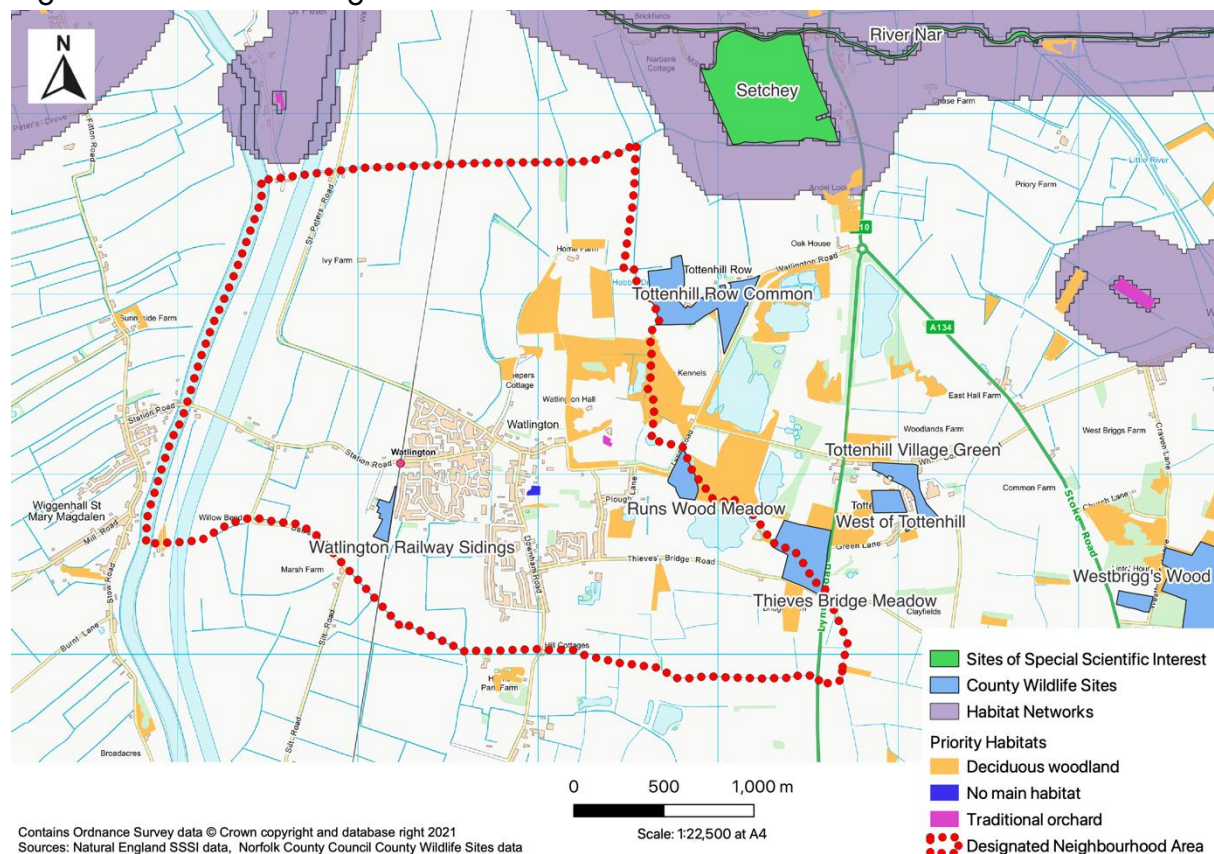
Parts of Watlington contain Priority Habitat, meaning they have been identified as being the most threatened and requiring conservation under UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP). There are two priority habitat areas – one 'traditional orchard' and one 'no main habitat' (see figure 13). Local authorities have a duty to consider the conservation of these habitats, and development that would adversely affect these would not normally be acceptable. There are also priority habitats adjacent to the neighbourhood plan area including habitat networks, and traditional orchards. Approximately 4.5km outside of the neighbourhood plan area is the SSSI at Setchey which was designated because of its importance for studies of Flandrian sea-level change as part of a network of Fenland sites.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.norfolkwildlifetrust.org.uk/wildlife-in-norfolk/county-wildlife-sites> - accessed 01/10/2021



Figure 9: Wildlife designations and habitat



Adjacent to the neighbourhood plan area and on the outskirts of Watlington is the Watatunga nature reserve. Comprised of 170 acres of woodland, grassland and lakes the reserve provides a unique environment for ungulate and rare bird species to roam free. The reserve has breeding programmes for species including the Malayan sambar, hog deer, barasingha and great bustard. Access to the reserve is via guided tour only. Watatunga also offers tourism opportunities with luxury self-catering accommodation and private safari trailer tours available.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> [Watatunga Wildlife Tours and Accommodation in Norfolk](#) – accessed 06/10/2021

Picture of Watatunga Nature Reserve Source: Watatunga website (2021)



Environment Agency future flood risk modelling shows that whilst the whole plan area is at a relatively low risk from surface water flooding there are pockets of medium risk in the built up area of Watlington, and some individual roads/properties are at higher risk (see figures 10 and 11). Of note are small areas on Fendley Close, John Davis Way, Stone Close, Lake Close, Britton Close, Langridge Circle, and Downham Road (figure 11). Environment Agency modelling does not account for blocked drains or very heavy rainfall, so sites in a low risk flood zone may still experience flooding.

Figure 10: surface water flooding risk

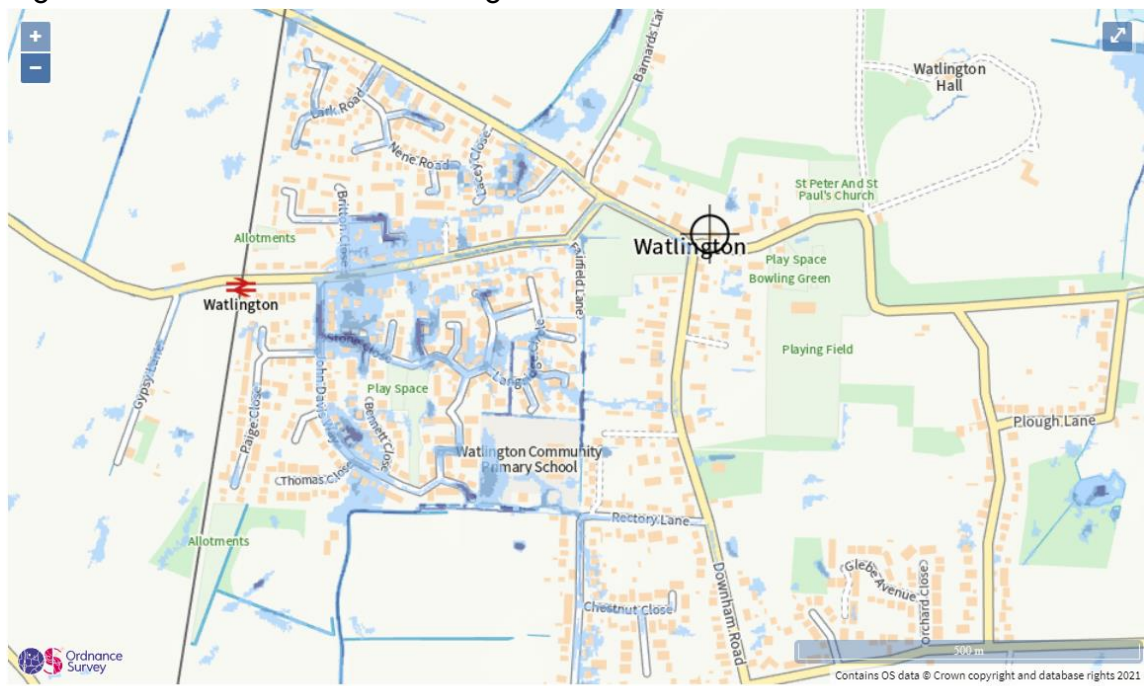
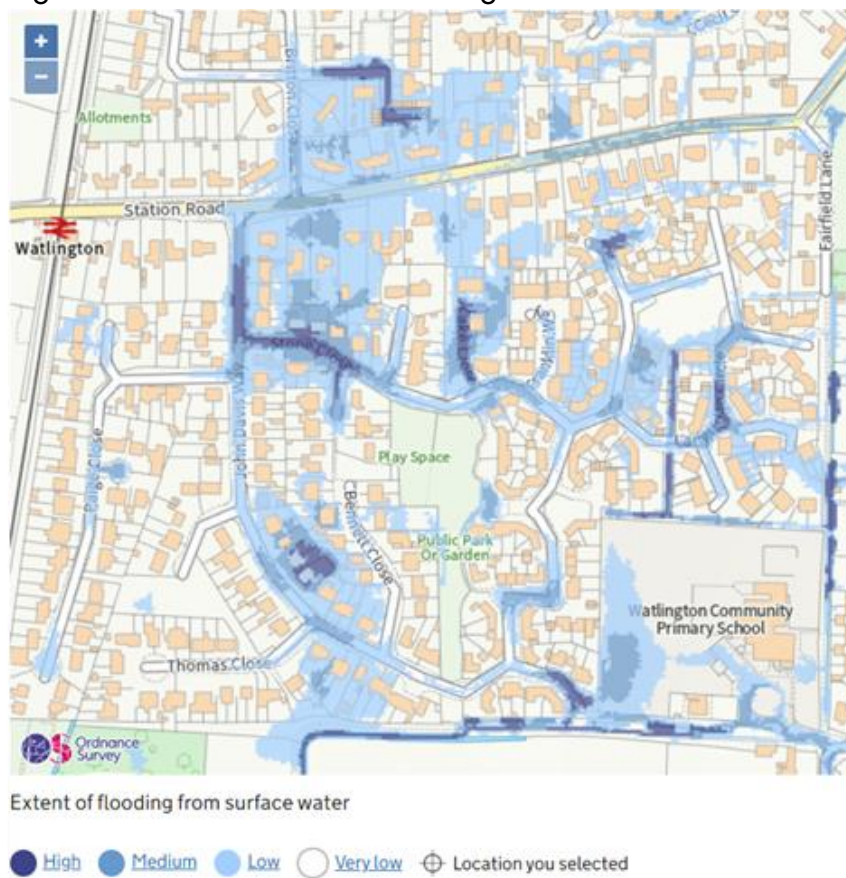
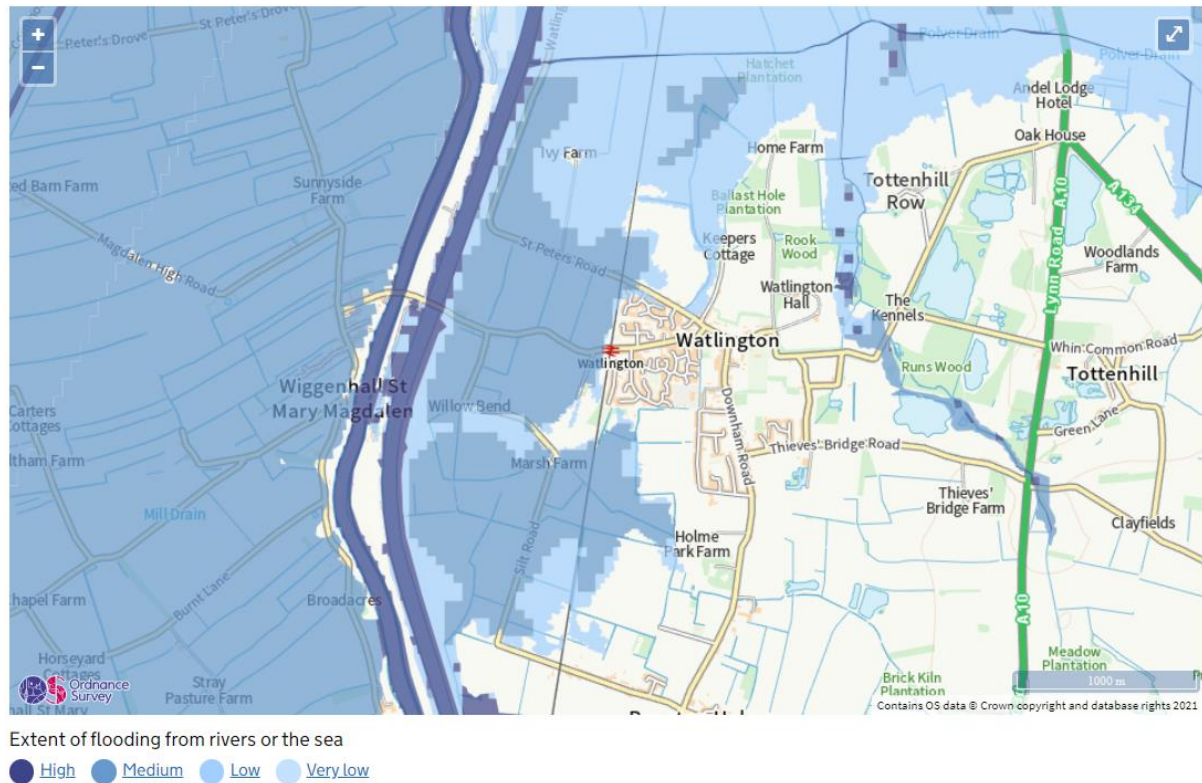


Figure 11: surface water flooding risk



The Environment Agency modelling shows that there is a slightly higher risk of flooding from rivers in Watlington – with an area of medium risk to the west of the neighbourhood plan area (see figure 12).

Figure 12: rivers and sea flooding risk



National policy is to locate development in areas least likely to flood. Based on current mapping, flooding from rivers or sea will be a constraint on development to the west of the town.

#### Issues:

- There are three county wildlife sites within the plan area, which have been identified for their wildlife value. These will be considered in the planning process, but will not receive the same level of protection as national or internationally designated sites.
- There are areas of priority habitat in the parish; there is potential for these to be affected by development and they do not have the same level of protection as designated sites.
- Flooding from rivers is an issue in areas to the west of the neighbourhood plan area and will be a constraint on growth.
- Surface water flooding is an issue in parts of the parish and it will be important to ensure this is not worsened through new development.

## Local Landscape

The West Norfolk Landscape Character Assessment<sup>7</sup> identifies that the plan area falls within the 'Settled farmland with plantations' character area. The landscape is described as forming the transition between the low-lying flat landscape of The Fens – Open Inland Marshes and the more elevated, variable landform of The Brecks – Heathland with Plantations. The character area is further described as having intact mature landscape structure including mature parkland and trees, intact hedgerows, and woodland plantations. There is also a patchwork of grazed parkland, with views to historic halls and a moderate to strong sense of tranquillity throughout the area. A number of main routes cut through the landscape whilst away from these main routes the landscape is, for the most part, peaceful. In addition to the main roads, a network of rural lanes connects scattered farms, small hamlets and villages that make up the majority of settlements in the area. One of the key forces for changes noted for the area is the pressure for expansion of Watlington associated with the mainline railway corridor.

The planning guidelines include the following specific management objectives:

- Seek to conserve and manage large areas of plantations as striking landscape features and wildlife areas.
- Seek to enhance the management, presentation, interpretation, and accessibility of the area for its historic value.
- Seek to restore hedgerows, where gappy, to enhance existing landscape pattern and improve their function as wildlife corridors throughout the type.
- Seek to establish arable field margins as potential nest sites for ground nesting birds and habitats for small mammals
- Seek to conserve and enhance chalk river corridors as wildlife corridors and landscape features.
- Seek opportunities for the creation of floodplain grazing marsh along river corridors throughout the type.
- Seek to conserve the setting of historic houses (mature parkland) where they occur throughout the Landscape Character Type.
- Seek to conserve, enhance and link patches of wet woodland throughout the type.
- Seek to conserve and enhance rows of poplars (at field boundaries) as striking landscape features, which contribute to over landscape pattern and function as wildlife corridors.

## Issues

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<sup>7</sup> [Landscape Character Assessment | Borough Council of King's Lynn & West Norfolk \(west-norfolk.gov.uk\)](#) – accessed 01/10/2021

- The pressure to expand villages like Watlington along the mainline rail corridor may be at odds with the current peaceful and largely undeveloped nature of the local area
- Further development should seek to conserve or enhance the history and character of the area

## Historic Environment

The parish has a long history, having first appeared in records in 1166 but with evidence of human activity dating back to Mesolithic and Neolithic times (Stone Age). Norfolk Heritage Service's Heritage Explorer described Watlington's name as coming from the Old English for "settlement of wacol people" with wacol meaning watchful.<sup>8</sup> The church, St Peter and St Paul's is the oldest surviving building in the parish; a medieval church with Norman origins, built almost entirely from carstone. Only the base of the Norman tower remains. The church was rebuilt around 1300 and the chancel added around 1340. The building was further altered in the 15<sup>th</sup> century including a new west window in the tower and a small spire (now gone). The Victorians restored the church between 1900-1902 with much of the medieval interior surviving. The tower has six bells: two date back to 1450 and the others to 1910. All were restored in the 1990s. The clock in the tower is from 1920 and was given in thanks for the return of soldiers after World War One.

Picture of St Peter Church



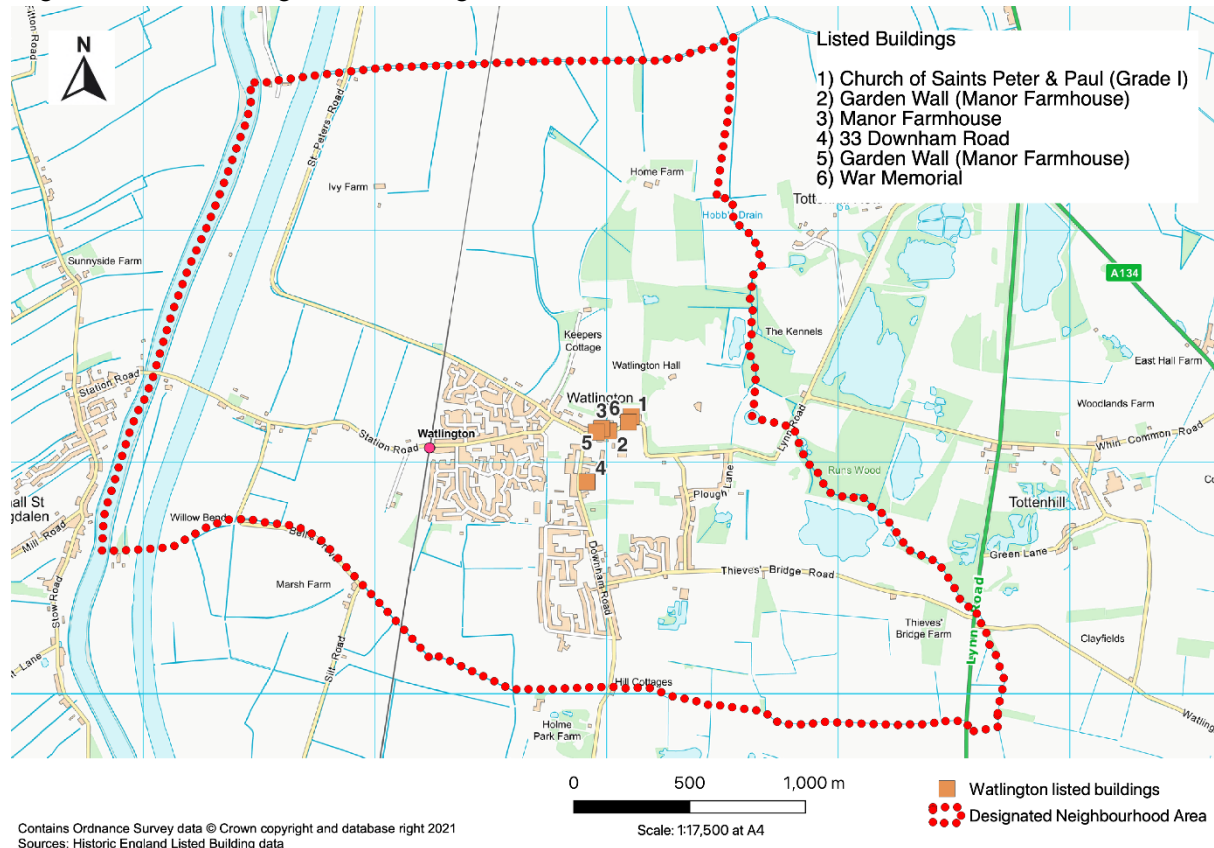
Other medieval buildings have not survived but traces of former moats remain in places. Of the post-medieval buildings to survive in the village, the earliest is Church Farmhouse (also known as The Old Manor House) on Lynn Road from the mid 17<sup>th</sup> century. Watlington Hall Park is a late 18<sup>th</sup> century historic parkland which is shown in records from 1839 as being a pleasure grounds with stables and a kitchen garden. Plantations were established around the parkland by 1869 and lodges built at the ends of the east and west drives by

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<sup>8</sup> [Parish-Summary-Watlington-\(Parish-Summary\) - Norfolk Heritage Explorer](#) – accessed 06/10/2021

1885.<sup>9</sup> The most historically recent entry in the Norfolk Heritage Explorer records for Watlington is a World War Two pillbox south of Church Road. Ariel photographs from 1946 show the earthworks of an anti-aircraft or searchlight battery in the same place.<sup>10</sup>

Figure 13: buildings in Watlington with listed status:



The neighbourhood plan area does not contain any conservation areas.

### Issues

- There are a number of listed buildings in Watlington reflecting the long rich history of the village. These will be protected through existing legislation, though there may be other assets of heritage value that could usefully be identified and protected as part of the neighbourhood plan.

<sup>9</sup> [MNF31972 - Norfolk Heritage Explorer](#) – accessed 06/10/2021

<sup>10</sup> [MNF40107 - Norfolk Heritage Explorer](#) – accessed 06/10/2021