

WEST DEVON BOROUGH COUNCIL

NORTH TAWTON CONSERVATION AREA

CHARACTER APPRAISAL



(DRAFT DOCUMENT)

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NORTH TAWTON CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

Section 71 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 places a duty on local planning authorities to formulate and publish proposals for designated conservation areas. This requirement is expanded upon in Planning Policy Guidance Note 15 section 4.

The statutory definition of a conservation area is "an area of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance."

This is further emphasised in an English Heritage Conservation Area Practice note published in June 1993 which states that "Local Authorities should...define that special architectural or historic character which warrants designation by means of a published detail character analysis". Part of the purpose of such a document is to "incorporate policies in the statutory local plan... - the most important (of which) will be a presumption against the loss of elements which have been identified as making a positive contribution to that special interest which warranted designation."

Within a conservation area there is likely to be pressure for new development or changes to existing buildings and features. There should also be scope for restoration or repair of features which contribute to character, or enhancement involving the removal or replacement of unsightly features. In this context, the following document sets out to assess as clearly as possible the architectural, historic and natural components of the conservation area which are considered especially important and contribute most to its character.

To summarise, the principal aims of the appraisal are intended to define:

- what is there and most worth keeping
- what has suffered damage or loss and may need reinstating
- what should be considered in guiding future changes
- what visual or archaeological features particularly need safeguarding
- what existing or potential resources may be available to maintain character and assist in enhancement.

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1888 Ordnance Survey First Edition 1:2500 Plan

1906 Ordnance Survey Second Edition 1: 2500 Plan

Listed Buildings

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Building Materials - Walls

Townscape Features

Other Important features

Proposals for Extension to Conservation Area

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Historic Background

A Roman Road running west from Exeter (ISCA), believed to be built as a route for transporting tin, had a crossing point of the River Taw at Barton which still survives almost a mile south of North Tawton. Here a military fort known as NEMETSTATIO was built, and the name survives locally as Nymet.

At the time of Domesday (1084) the town is recorded as "Tawetona", reputedly with a population of 600. By 1158 it was "Tauton" and by 1270 "Cheping Tawton" implying it already had a market although the first known Charter was incorporated in 1374.

A fatal incident at the town in 1549 sparked off what came to be known as The Prayer Book Rebellion, which had its origins in neighbouring Sampford Courtenay as a result of King Edward VI replacing the Latin with an English version. This led to a significant battle just east of North Tawton on 17th August, at what is still known as Battishill Lane where the Royal Army captured this outpost and went on to finally defeat the rebels in Sampford Courtenay.

North Tawton suffered diasastrous fires in 1676, 1834 and 1891. The most severe in 1834 destroyed almost 60 dwellings and several barns and stables. Only the top of the church spire caught alight, the rest saved by the diligence of the inhabitants. It has remained truncated ever since.

John Wesley visited North Tawton in 1765 but was not well received and soon departed. His Journal records "Finding that there was no prospect of a quiet hearing, I..withdrew to my lodging". The Parish Church, including the tower, dates from the 13th century and is Early English with Perpendicular additions. The timber broach spire is later.

It is reported that a Roman cross shaft set up by the belfry door in 1887 was previously in the Square and used as a lamp-post until replaced by the Jubilee Clock Tower. The fine cobbled path to the church is reputedly the work of French Prisoners of War held here in barracks at the top end of High Street during the Napoleonic Campaigns early in the 1800's. A daily curfew was rung from the church until stopped in 1940 by war-time restrictions.

The population of North Tawton has fluctuated considerably with a long decline from a total of 2,081 in 1870 to just 1,098 in 1961. Since then quite extensive new residential development to the south and west of the town centre has raised the population to a total of 1,451 in 1991. There is an intertesting comparison between a very similar population of 1,436 in 1801 contained in 275 dwellings. The equivalent total in 1991 was 591 dwellings.

Setting and Form

North Tawton is situated in a slight hollow with the centre about half a mile east of the River Taw. From the southern edge of the town, particularly the War Memorial Park, there are extensive views towards Dartmoor, but most of the town has fairly

enclosed views mainly of the tree clad skyline above the small northern enclave of Bouchers Hill.

The surrounding countryside is mainly undulating and pastoral with several noteworthy and ancient farmsteads, some of medieval origin.

Within the parish, and on the periphery of the conservation area are a number of historic buildings some having close links with the town which it is considered important to mention. There are no less than six Grade II* listed buildings which include the **former church of St. Martin** largely unaltered Early English and serving the ancient parish of Broad Nymet of just 42 acres which was later absorbed into North Tawton. There are four farmhouses; **Cottles Barton** dating from 1567 and probably a small former Manor House has some fine interior plasterwork; **Greenslade Farmhouse**, believed to have a medieval core, and maintaining a very traditional exterior is mainly 17th-18th century; **Upcott Farmhouse**, dating from around the late 15th century has 17th century alterations (there is a 1609 date-stone) and an 18th century extension; and **Westacott Barton** also dating from the 15th century. Here, two fine plaster ceilings date from the latter part of the 16th century. There is also a Grade II* listed well-head building here which is described¹ as a particularly good early secular example.

Within the parish are a further six or more listed farms, most dating from the sixteenth or seventeenth centuries. Other listed buildings include **Nichols Nymet**

¹ Statutory List of Buildings of Architectural and Historic Importance for North Tawton issued by Department of National Heritage

House & Gazebo dating from 1816.

Newland Mill and Mill House where the A3072 crosses the River Taw, is thought to date mainly from 1814, and is currently in a dilapidated condition. **The former Railway Station** which included the Stationmaster's House is a mile south of the town and dates from 1865. It is sturdily constructed of coursed irregular stone blocks.

Within the built-up area of North Tawton but still outside the Conservation Area, are two important buildings linked to its history as a West Country wool town. Parts of the former **Woollen Mill** at the western end of Fore Street have recently been listed (1993) "forming a rare and substantially intact reminder of the former importance of the woollen industry in Devon"² It was established in about 1750 by John Fulford of Crediton, then passed to Gilbert Vicary who constructed many of the surviving buildings between 1845 and 1890. It was later sold to Messrs Shore of Halifax who closed it in the 1930's. Most of the former mill buildings and an associated row of cottages still remain but the former is vacant and quite dilapidated.

Finally, of unusual origin, is **Burton Hall** in a lofty situation at Bouchers Hill, which is mainly of timber construction, and was transported complete from Norway in 1870 by the Fulford family.

Archaeological Considerations

The County Sites and Monuments Register shows several entries for the parish as a whole. These mainly refer to old enclosures indicated by crop marks, and sites where historic objects have been found.

² *ibid*



HIGH STREET

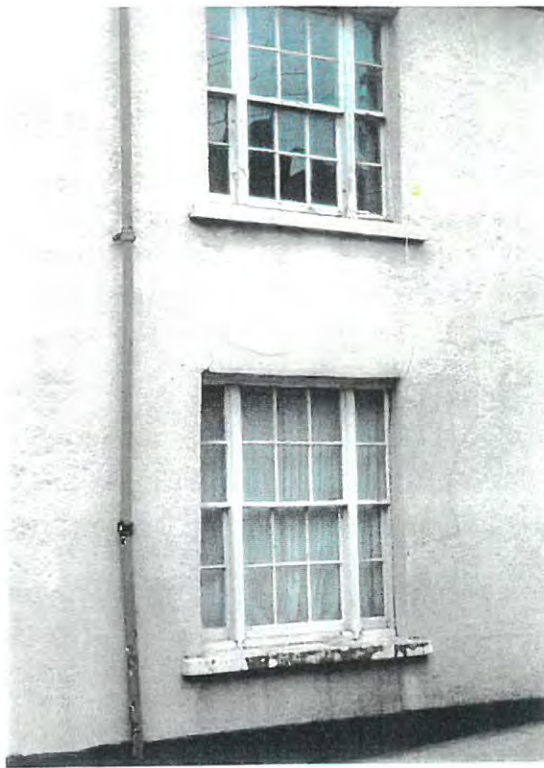
(Top & bottom left) Characteristic earlier (how double fronted) and later (2storey bay) 19th century frontages, completely unaltered. Again, unpainted render adds contrast.

(Top right) Entry to the town from the north is dramatic and sudden over the brow of a hill.

(Centre right) Two views of the pleasing and little altered frontages on the east side. Note porches, bracketed eaves and Cornish "fish-scale" slate hanging.

(Bottom right) View from corner of Barton Street towards The Square which will be enhanced by removal of power lines and would further benefit from discreet wall-mounted street lighting. Note glimpses of open countryside above rooftops.





FORE STREET

(Top right) General view; this is one of the few points in the town where distant views beyond are obtainable. The slope allows some interesting changes in level between adjacent buildings and boundaries.

(Top left) A tri-partite sash window, probably 19th century needing some attention. Such windows do not necessarily have statutory protection, although in this case the building is listed. Replacement of authentic detail readily detracts from a historic building's character whether listed or not.

(Upper right and lower left) Nos 15-19; examples on the south side of unlisted buildings, retaining mostly authentic detail e.g. panelled doors and sash windows. Note how the pattern in metal railings is echoed in first floor window top vents. Steps add interest to changes of level.

(Lower right) Nos 38-40; adjacent early 19c listed buildings with original hooded and moulded doorcases and panelled doors.

(Bottom) Nos 66-68; a listed pair, not at present in the conservation area, date from the late 17th century.



Those entries of importance in the town include the ancient sundial on the Parish Church, the church itself, the earthwork at Castle Mound, which does not have public access, and the late 15th century Broadhall in the Square.

The shaft of an ancient cross by the belfry door of the church known as the "Town Post" stood on the site of the present Clock Tower until 1887. Walter Mortimer³ claims that this was part of a Roman cross shaft, but in the statutory list it is referred to as medieval.

The town still displays clear evidence of long rear burgage plots, especially to the north of Fore Street and North Street. Since these date back to medieval times, it is fairly certain that the site of many dwellings fronting the main streets, also date from this time. It is also possible that some medieval fragments survive behind much later frontages. Only painstaking research would reveal this.

The Built Environment

Architectural Features

As has been demonstrated North Tawton is an ancient settlement clustering around the church and Castle Mound. Although many buildings are superficially plain and reflect in abundance the local vernacular style of stone or cob roofed in slate or thatch, with deeply recessed doors and windows, there are many subtle variations reflecting both period style and detailing which can be broadly grouped into the following categories:

(a) the larger buildings, mainly public or related to the town's former woollen industry - although the latter are mainly outside the conservation area. These include the Parish Church, Broadhall, The Town Hall, Devonshire House (between 1895 and the 1930's known as the Devon Serge Warehouse), the former Primary School, (including its gate piers, railings and retaining wall), the Congregational Chapel and former Methodist Chapel. Most of these are substantially built of local stone, and often exhibit considerable craftsmanship. Although some have lost their original social function, and several later 19th buildings are not listed - (e.g. the two chapels and Devonshire House), almost all are visually distinctive and add considerable character to the townscape.

(b) the principal town centre domestic and commercial buildings, mainly with early to late 19th century detailing, but possibly having earlier origins in some instances. Most of these buildings which front directly on to the main streets are essentially town houses with distinctive period features or substantial inns; e.g. The Ring of Bells and The Fountain Inn - the latter with archway access to its rear yard. It is somewhat surprising that neither are listed.

Several of the shops and houses extend to three storeys and have elegant proportions with particularly fine corner shopfront detail in several instances. Most are painted render, but some are left unpainted which although somewhat dull in appearance, is such a typical feature of several towns and villages in this part of Devon, that any change should not be encouraged.

³ The History of North Tawton by Walter Mortimer. Published by the author, 1969

(c) other larger, domestic buildings, mainly of the 18th or 19th century, usually built of stone, but partially or completely rendered. Most are detached or semi-detached such as Essington House (believed to be the former Rectory), Slade Park, and No.5 Essington Road and also Nos.19 and 66,68 Fore Street. Again, not all are listed even though they have significant period features.

(d) plainer domestic buildings in the local vernacular style and forming a largely continuous frontage along the main streets. The large majority are two storey and probably mainly of cob on stone footings with rendered frontages and plain but often deeply recessed frontages. Occasionally stone with brick dressings and more obvious later 19th century features such as bay windows and open porches supported on timber posts or brackets are encountered.

Townscape Character

Most of North Tawton has a very close-knit and enclosed street pattern, with only Fore Street offering any substantial glimpses beyond the town. There are several sharp contrasts. Large imposing town houses of three storeys in the centre give way to plain cottages of much lower elevations on the main approaches. However, rendered walls predominate throughout the town, and only the more important, mainly community buildings are stone-built, apart from a scattering of cottages and short 19th century terraces. The eastern half of the conservation area, where the St. Peter's Church is the dominant feature has an altogether different character, being much more open with scattered building groups, and some other larger buildings within walled

gardens. It also contains the historic remains of Castle Mound. Still further east, beyond a short and well-preserved mid 19th century terrace is Essington, a detached rural hamlet separated by a small stretch of open countryside and linked by lanes with typical Devon hedgerow banks

Building Materials

North Tawton has a mix of building materials which reflects the local geology, 19th century transport, and traditional building methods used over the centuries.

Walls

Cob and stone are the dominant materials, with brick scarcely used except as dressings to window and door openings in buildings otherwise of stone. The large majority of dwellings in the conservation area are of low elevation with colourwash render, mainly white, over cob or stone and with the traditional black tar band at the base. This gives the town a visual cohesiveness which is so characteristic of this part of Devon. Unfortunately the tendency towards modern plastic based coverings - as against traditional limewash, which would once have been the favoured material - and the use of UPVC double-glazed windows instead of timber joinery is leading to some loss of character, although the impact of such modern materials is not yet overwhelming.

Roofs

Apart from a handful of thatched buildings within the continuously built-up frontages, almost all roofs are of slate or slate substitutes. There are a few good examples of Cornish slate and also some Welsh slate, probably dating from the late 19th



TOWN CENTRE

(Top left) The Square and Jubilee Clock Tower.

(Left centre) Barton Street. Note granite kerbs and steps, decorative wall ties and modern casement windows.

(Left centre) North Street. Former Ring of Bells Inn (background) creates important visual stop.

(Bottom left) Imposing houses at corner of High Street and Barton Street. Plain render provides contrast. Mixture of sash and casement windows.

(Top right) Ring of Bells. Some pleasant detail - tile hanging, sash windows with glazing bars.

(Bottom right) Market Street view towards The Square. Early 20c buildings to left - mock Tudor with decorative tile hanging to eaves and good original shopfront.



EXETER STREET

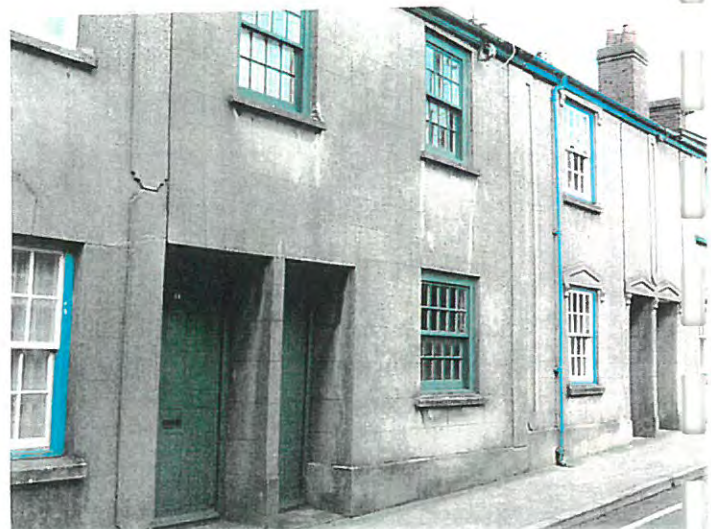
(Top & bottom left) Where the street bend sharply is this delightful corner includi probably 19th century shopfront. Note cobbles to left and utilitarian concrete block paving which could be relieved by a least some natural stone surfacing.

(Centre left) Junction with High Street. Neat corner treatment. Cast iron street nameplate it is important to retain.

(Centre top & bottom right) Two views of the east side of the street showing painted and unpainted render, the latter with decorative detail and some good original doors & windows.

(Top right) One of several carriage archways with some natural stone surfacing.

(Centre right) Section of wall and gate pier at the former Primary School in need of repair. Finding suitable replacement stone may prove difficult.





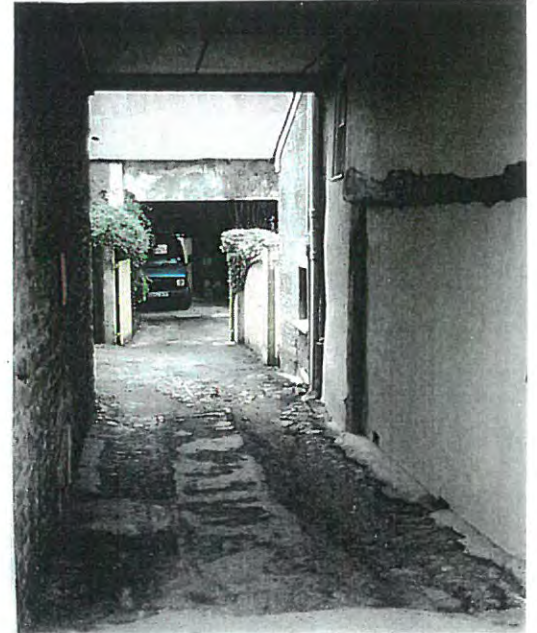
FEATURES

(Top left) A pair of cottages off Barton Street, not currently in the conservation area. They reflect the local vernacular style but were probably once thatched.

(Top right) Exeter Street: slate and render gabled porch, stone boundary walls, brick or render chimney stacks are all typical features.

(Centre and bottom right) Broad Park Terrace, carriage archway off The Square and footpath access off North Street all demonstrate the intricacy of the townscape in different locations. Thatch, slate-hanging, tile-capped walling are further typical features. There are remains of traditional ground surfaces: all the examples shown are in need of suitable restoration.

(Bottom left) North Street showing Nos 7-19; the first having a 1711 datestone. Note the tiny porch roof and outward sloping wall by the entrance door; an almost sure sign of a cob wall.





ORNAMENT

(Top left) A section of cobbled path in the churchyard

(Lower left) An earth bank dry stone wall in Barton Street forming the boundary to the Memorial Park

(Top right) Detail of the projecting wing of Broadhall with moulded stone mullioned window. Note large square granite blocks used in the construction of this important secular building.

(Upper right) Iron railings at No 1 Exeter Street. Repointing of stone would lessen risk of frost damage.

(Lower right) Entrance gates and gate piers to Memorial Park. Repair of the truncated pier and moulded capstone would be a specialised project, probably only achievable through grant aid.

(Bottom Right) Frontage detail of the Town Hall (mid 19c) showing high quality of sandstone ashlar masonry with very fine mortar joints. The narrow glazing bars and iron railings are also distinctive features. Removal of the unsightly concrete blockwork from the side elevation of this listed building is desirable, but again, only likely to be achievable as a result of substantial grant aid.

century, and because of their age often patched or strapped, particularly where more fragile material was originally used. The majority of roofs are now covered with artificial substitutes, some of which appear to have lasted a considerable time. There is little evidence of "Turnerising" (i.e. bitumen covering of slates), which may be accounted for by the relatively sheltered and clustered situation of most dwellings. Some outbuildings are of corrugated iron or asbestos. Plain tiles and Bridgwater red pantiles are uncommon, although there are just a few examples. Away from the town centre, thatch is more common, especially in the tiny hamlet of Essington.

Boundaries

Because many dwellings front the pavement in the conservation area there is little scope for visible boundary treatment to the front of dwellings, although there are some excellent examples of metal railings even where space is minimal. Away from the close knit frontages there is an immediate and sharp contrast, best appreciated at the break between Market Street and Essington Road, and also along the south side of Exeter Street and North Street. Here substantial stone boundary or retaining walls are dominant. Towards the edge of the conservation area at Essington and Barton Street towards Barton Hill, earth banks or dry stone walls topped with earth and turf form a softer boundary.

Pavements

A first impression is that North Tawton lacks the amount of natural stone paving and kerbing that typifies some Devon towns. However, what remains is

impressive, but somewhat localised. There is widespread survival of natural stone kerbstones and also some gutters, chiefly of granite, throughout the main streets, and a good stretch of granite paving slabs on the east side of The Square up to the junction with Exeter Street. The old carriage entrances some limited natural surfacing material, but this is often badly patched or worn. The intriguing footpath only access to Broad Park Terrace appears to have been formerly paved in cobbles of local stone but is currently in a sorry state, as is the narrow lane linking North Street and Market Street, where surface improvement is much needed.

Nevertheless there are some delightful examples of stone paved or cobbled surfaces. Most notable by far are the extensive churchyard paths of which Mortimer⁴ states "...the exceptionally fine cobble-stone paving ..is said to have been done by the French prisoners of war who were kept in North Tawton at the beginning of the nineteenth century". At the time of this survey it was noted that although the condition of the paving remains generally good, some areas are becoming uneven and stones beginning to work loose. A further extent of cobbled paving in Exeter Street between Nos 5 and 7 is in much poorer condition and more urgently needs attention. The former Lord Portsmouth stone cottages (nos 4-6 Essington Road) have a narrow surround of cobbles, somewhat rough in texture and not really for pedestrian use, but adding to their rustic character.

The coloured encaustic tile entrance to a shop on the south side of Fore Street is unusual and should be retained and restored as necessary.

⁴ *ibid*

Building Form

As has been noted, the main streets of North Tawton have largely continuous frontages, although there are many subtle variations. Among the most pleasing are the increasing grandeur of buildings in and around The Square, where several are three storey with traditional shopfronts or with grander entrance detail including archway access to rear courtyards.

Elsewhere advantage is taken of the natural slope to step buildings up or down, sometimes placing them above street level and providing retaining walls with steps inserted. Examples can be seen in Exeter Street, Fore Street and Essington Road. Advantage is also taken of the natural curve or angle of the street to provide focal points or corner treatment that forms one of the main townscape features of North Tawton.

Finally, in several locations, the continuous street frontage is interrupted at a number of points by small gaps, by frontages set at slightly varying angles to each other, and most importantly by occasional buildings projecting forward of the main building line to form narrower "pinch points" which can provide a pleasing sense of enclosure. Notable examples are at the top end of The Square, and towards the south end of High Street. Exeter Street and Fore Street also have examples.

With regard to building profile; many instances of deeply recessed doors and windows have already been referred to, especially in cob buildings where wall thicknesses are greater. Stacks are normally axial and on or close to the ridge, being of brick and often rendered. A

pleasant feature in several locations are moulded timber brackets under wide eaves. These are seen to best effect in numbers 37 to 49 High Street.

Condition of Buildings

Buildings are generally moderately well-maintained. Many substitute roof coverings are visually unsatisfactory, and would benefit from replacement, particularly where roofs are prominent, as for example in the descent of Fore Street. This could only be achieved by some form of financial incentive for owners who will in any case be reluctant to carry out improvements until roofs have obviously become defective. Some thatch roofs also appear to be due for replacement. Where these are in the town centre, the narrow confines of the street are like to cause practical difficulties. Nevertheless it is expected that most thatched roofs would survive since almost all are Grade II listed.

The extensive stone walls in the town are in generally good condition owing to the durability of the sandstone and skill of the masons who built them. Some local attention is necessary where pointing has eroded, and a relatively soft lime mortar mix is most desirable, particularly where the softer sandstones have been used with somewhat narrow jointing (e.g. Essington House wall in Essington Road). One of the gatepiers and adjoining wall at the former Primary School needs quite urgent attention before further deterioration occurs. Since this wall is listed, a Repairs Notice could be issued if necessary.

The unfortunate treatment to the side wall of the Town Hall where concrete blockwork has been inserted, although

cosmetic rather than structural, is something of an eyesore, and would greatly benefit from appropriate restoration using matching local stone. Considering that several shops are empty, the standard of upkeep and retention of original frontage detail is commendable. More serious is the lack of maintenance of period joinery, noted in several locations, much of which is distinctive and well-crafted. Several window frames and sills are in a neglected state. Whilst there is an understandable wish to use convenient and maintenance free materials in place of traditional joinery, this is invariably visually inferior, and often unacceptable, especially in the case of listed buildings. There is a need for information to be provided concerning what is acceptable, guidance about suitable repair methods, and a list of firms, preferably local, with the ability and skills to ensure that traditional joinery can be appropriately maintained, replaced or restored.

Landscape Considerations

The main landscape elements of significance to the character of the conservation area are as follows:

(i) the contrast between built and natural environment, especially to the south where entry to the town from open countryside is particularly abrupt and to the east where there is a gradual entry characterised by walls, occasional buildings, much green space, and many trees.

(ii) the backdrop of mature trees to buildings, especially in the eastern half of the conservation area with the churchyard lime trees among the most prominent (iii) the extensive views to the south, seen mainly from the War Memorial Park

(iv) the enclosed green spaces within the town, mostly private gardens - but also including the churchyard - which are behind boundary or retaining walls. Where there are trees, they are often seen overhanging walls or are glimpsed between buildings. This is the essential green character of the conservation area which should be maintained in any future development.

The Churchyard and Memorial Park are the two main open spaces within the town to which the public have access. The former is a delightful space with close views of the rear of The Square, Market Street and Exeter Street, more distant views towards Essington House and the skyline at Bouchers Hill, and is considerably used by pedestrians. There are a few unsightly features, for example clear plastic roofing in the northwest corner where some landscape screening would be an advantage. The Memorial Park has a slightly neglected air, with the entrance gates from Barton Street in need of some repair. Whilst its open character is in pleasant contrast to the enclosed character of much of the town, it would benefit from some further shelter planting, and a few more native specimen trees which when mature could form a pleasant backdrop to buildings when viewed from within the town.

Key Buildings

North Tawton has several individual or groups of key buildings whose dominance have special importance in terms of the town's history and architectural character. Some have been already mentioned and are expanded upon here. Others are worthy of mention for the contribution they make to

the street scene or which act as important visual stops.

Most significant is the 13th to 16th century **Parish Church of St Peter** (grade I) its extensive churchyard and the 19th century **Lychgate** (not included in listing details). Opposite is **Essington House**, (c.1830-40) its associated **Coach House** with a corbelled stone stack, and also the **Garden Wall and Gate Piers** (champfered ashlar sandstone with moulded and weathered octagonal caps). All are all grade II listed, and together form an important integrated group immediately to the east of the town centre. A little further to the east, again on opposite sides of the road and set far back, are **Slade Park** (grade II) probably a former 17th century farmhouse with part gabled and part hipped thatch roof, and **Devonshire House** (not listed) a large late 19th century building mainly of stone appearing somewhat isolated behind a high stone wall to the north and west. Between this part of Essington Road and Essington itself are several delightful domestic buildings, most with almost complete original detail. None are yet listed, but would seem to merit some form of statutory protection. **Nos 27,29 Essington** are an early 16th century former farmhouse with 17th century alterations which was probably divided into two cottages in the 19th century. These and the attached thatched barn are grade II listed, as are **Larksworthy Cottages** a group of four thatched cottages dating from the 17th century or earlier and which may also have once been a single house.

Returning to the town centre the majority of important buildings are grouped around **The Square** with the somewhat incongruous brick and tiled **Jubilee Clock Tower** of 1887 (grade II) at the centre. By

far the most important building in this space, emphasised by its projection forward of the building line, is **Broadhall** (grade II) dating from the late 15th to early 16th century and extensively remodelled in the 19th century. The ornate 8-light square bay window is unusual and may be original. Mortimer⁵ describes it as one of only two pre-Reformation houses in Devon and that it dates from about 1467. There are several two to three-storey listed houses, some incorporating shops and mostly dating from the mid 18th to early 19th century. **Nos 10-12 and 16-17 The Square** are the best examples. As earlier mentioned **The Town Hall**, (grade II) built of local sandstone and dated 1849 is a disappointment due to some particularly insensitive alterations, along the Market Street elevations.

One of the best cottage groups in the town is in **North Street**. **Nos 7-19** (grade II) appear to be early 18th century (one is inscribed "John Loveday Durent 1711") and have pleasantly understated porches with slate above. Immediately beyond, **Nos 21,23 and Cob Cottage** (grade II) are again thought to have once been a single house dating from the 16th century with 17th century additions and subdivided, probably in the 19th century. Tucked away from the main street is **The Congregational Church** (unlisted) which was built around 1833. It appears largely authentic and original, probably stone built and obscured with plain render. Almost opposite, of local sandstone, and now a private house is **the former Police Station** (unlisted). **The Ring of Bells Inn** (unlisted) is currently vacant, and is understood to have been purchased with a view to conversion into flats. This building

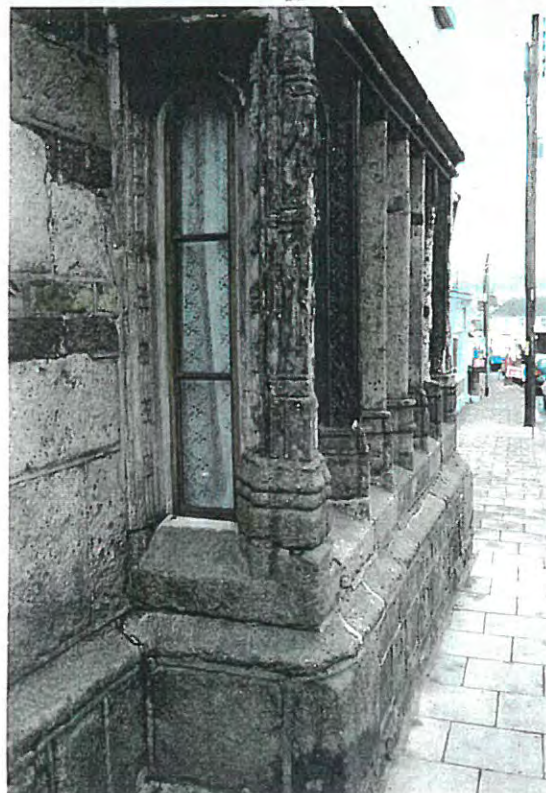
⁵ *ibid*

FRONTAGES

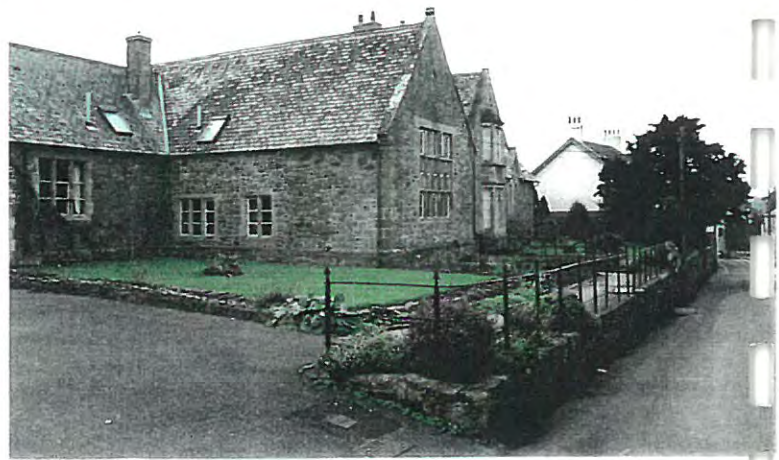
(Top left) Original early 20c shop-front in Market Street. An excellent example.

(Top right) North corner of Exeter Street looking towards The Square. One of the best views in the town. Fine corner treatment.

(Centre) Two views north of Broadhall with several nice shopfronts; one former two-storey. Excellent refurbishment awaiting suitable use.



(Bottom) Broadhall frontage. Historic decorative frontage dating from 15c. Nearby original shopfront detail spoilt by bold corporate image.



SOME KEY BUILDINGS

(Top left and lower right) The massive 13c tower of the Parish Church, the Lychgate, avenue of limes, and extensive cobbled pathways make this a delightful corner of the town.

(Top right) The former Primary School is an impressive stone and slate building of almost Manor House proportions.

(Centre top) The Congregational Church enclosed by stone rubble walls contrasting with plain, unpainted render is an attractive building and remarkably unaltered. Some modest ground surface improvements to the surroundings would enhance its setting.

(Bottom left) The former Methodist Church; again complete and unaltered, apparently of greenish Hurdwick stone with brick dressings. Here as elsewhere in the town the ironwork is distinctive.

(Bottom right) Broadhall in its setting; the forward projecting wing adds character to the street scene.



forms an important visual stop in North Street and will require careful modification in order to maintain its special contribution to the townscape.

Fore Street also contains several good town houses. **No 1** (grade II) adjoining The Square is early 17th century and remains thatched. Further west are a scattering of mainly 18th to early 19th century houses, among which are **Nos 23-27** (grade II) on the south side, and **Nos 38, 40, 60 and 62** (grade II) on the north side with period features which include some tripartite sash windows, pilastered doorcase and contemporary six-panel door. **Nos 66-68** (grade II) and thatched are presently outside the conservation area. Of late 17th-early 18th century origin with distinctive fenestration, they have substantial early 20th century alterations when decorative plasterwork in a floral motif was added.

Both **Exeter Street** and **Barton Street** have corner houses that are impressive. **No 1 Exeter Street** (grade II) has a good later 19th century shopfront and bold 3 storey elevations with low iron railings adjoining. The original doorcase with moulded cornice and panelled reveals as well as 12-pane sashes all survive. Further along Exeter Street are several plain cottages with unpainted render in patterned relief around openings. These are located beyond **No 7** (unlisted) which together with **The Fountain Inn** and **No 5** (both unlisted) form an attractive arrangement at a bend in the road with glimpses into the adjoining churchyard entrance. The largely unaltered former shopfront at **No 7**, makes this an altogether delightful corner. Higher up Exeter Street is the **former Primary School** (grade II) built of local sandstone c.1860 and including the schoolmaster's

house. The gable copings and stone mullion windows carry a hint of Victorian Gothic Revival. Finally is the unexpected surprise of **Broad Park Terrace**, (grade II) - a row of 4 early 19th century houses fronting a footpath. There is a Regency feel with reeded pilasters between each house, and shallow elliptical arches below the eaves.

High Street and **Barton Street** have few obviously early buildings apart from a small group of cottages in local vernacular style near Barton Hill, overlooking the Memorial Park, and currently outside the conservation area. **The former Methodist Church** (unlisted) is a typical symmetrical late 19th century chapel (1891 Bible Christian) of stone with brick dressings original fenestration, metal railings and gate surviving. It is understood to be awaiting conversion to community use. It is hoped the present frontage detail will be retained intact. **High Street** has just three listed buildings **Nos 26, 28 and 40**, all on the west side. Each is thatched and date from the early 18th century; two have good 19th century 4-pannelled doors. Elsewhere in High Street, mostly on the east side, there is some good, mainly 19th century detailing which includes eaves bracketing, glazed or decoratively bracketed porches, and slate-hanging to first floor bay windows. **Nos 37 - 49** (unlisted) as well as the eaves bracketing previously mentioned, also have some surviving and distinctive original 19th century fenestration with marginal glazing bars.

Detractions and Vulnerability

The conservation area roughly accords with the town's extent towards the end of the 19th century, although does not include the former Woollen Mill and Park House

Cottages to the east, or Bouchers Hill and Burton Hall to the north. Although these areas are of historic interest in terms of the development of the town, they have lost their visual integration and are compromised by later development, or in the case of the Mill by long-term neglect and virtual dereliction. Within the conservation area itself several factors tend to detract from the features that contribute to its character.

- The abundance of overhead power lines is a major detraction, although some are currently being removed. Any new or replacement streetlighting should ideally be wall mounted, rather than free-standing.
- New brick paving is not the best solution for resurfacing. It is considered important that some natural materials, locally obtained if possible, should be used, and interspersed with tarmacadam. Untidy surfaces (e.g. footpath access to Broad Park Terrace), urgently need attention. Here and elsewhere, excavation may reveal an earlier surface of cobbles or setts which could possibly be re-used when re-surfacing takes place, although ideally should be left in situ and restored.
- Extensive loss of natural slate and replacement with artificial types should be arrested and reversed if possible, with consideration given to grant aiding roof repairs using natural materials
- The gradual loss of traditional forms of fenestration and of porches and front entrance doors is a matter of increasing concern. Standard “off-the-

shelf” replacement front doors and UPVC double-glazed units, tend to remove important original detail which was once part of the building’s integrity. Other means of avoiding heat loss, and information on firms specialising in improving the insulating properties of historic windows and doors should be made more widely available.

- The clutter and confusion of signs could be audited to see if any are surplus to need, and where re-siting might lessen their impact without diminishing their function.
- A relatively large number of buildings from the mid 19th century have escaped insensitive modification and have period features which may merit Grade II listing. An inventory of such buildings should be drawn up and submitted to the Department of National Heritage for assessment as potential listed buildings.
- The K6 telephone kiosk on the north side of The Square may also be at risk of replacement if not listed

Areas of Opportunity and Policy Considerations

Opportunities for enhancement of the conservation area should include encouragement of principles of good conservation practice. There are a number of specific considerations which can be divided into several categories.



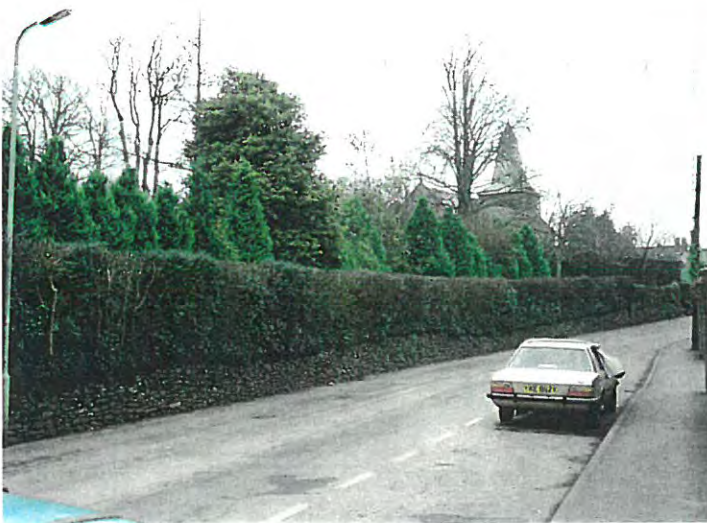
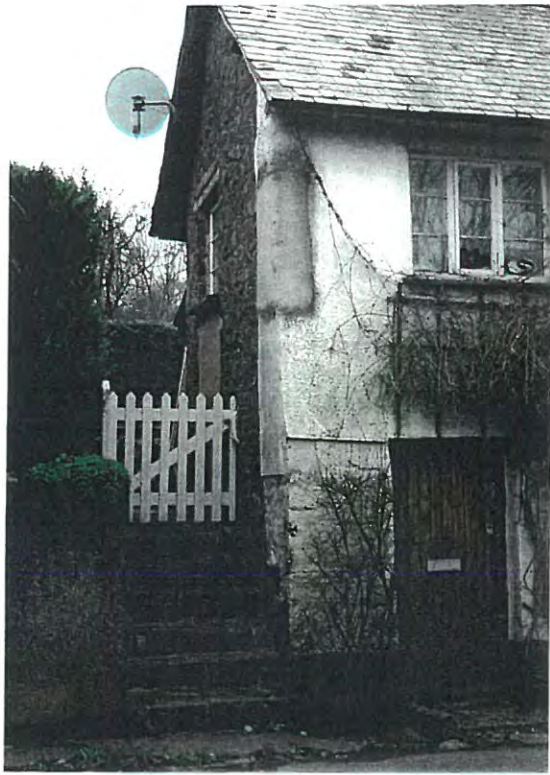
ESSINGTON

(Top and upper left) Nos 27, 29 Essington are part of an early 16c former farmhouse with adjoining barn.

(Top right) Larkworthy; a well executed barn conversion. Note exposed cob wall in background.

(Lower right) Larkworthy cottages. Thatch and uneven cob walls show typical vernacular.

(Lower & bottom left) Nos 15-25 Essington; pleasant mid 19c cottages with good surviving boundary features.



ESSINGTON ROAD

(Top left & right) 19th century cottages built by Lord Portsmouth (the "P" motif can be seen under the eaves above the porch). Changes in level, cobbled paving and steps add interest. Location of prominent satellite dish could be controlled by Article 4 Direction.

(Upper right & lower left) views in opposite directions showing the much more open character of this part of the conservation area. The parish church and churchyard lines are prominent. The young cypresses could quickly become over-dominant and raises the question of whether some tree species detract from the character of the conservation area.

(Lower right & bottom right) A substantial mid 19th century house, possibly with earlier origins. Sash windows, porch with trellis work, pyramid capped stone gate piers, iron railings, smooth render (stucco) are all important period features. Below, this house is shown in its setting. The entry to Devonshire House is on the left.



(i) Historic Buildings

- Retain and where possible reintroduce traditional materials and techniques such as external limewash or lime plaster instead of hard modern finishes which sometimes fail to bond satisfactorily to cob walls
- Encourage correct repointing of historic stonework using lime based mortars, particularly for local sandstones, where hard cement mortar may accelerate weathering
- When renewing roof coverings use natural slate wherever possible (Because of the considerable cost differential, grant aid would be necessary to reverse the widespread use of artificial substitutes)
- Encourage the retention or re-introduction of plain flush ridges on thatch roofs which should preferably be wheat reed rather than water reed

(ii) Townscape

- Have regard to the existing arrangement and grouping of buildings where proposals for new development or demolition or redevelopment are involved, bearing in mind that stricter safeguards against any form of demolition in conservation areas have recently been introduced
- As above, ensure that existing building lines are maintained, especially where these are an inherent feature of the traditional street layout. Existing features of quality should be retained and echoed wherever possible

- Safeguard the extensive stone boundary and retaining walls and the dry stone earth banks enclosing the Memorial Park which form a pleasing visual extension or link between different parts of the conservation area

Ensure retention of cast iron street name plates (e.g. junction of North Street and Market Street). As part of an overall enhancement scheme, new signs replicating these could be placed elsewhere in the conservation area

(iii) Features

- Encourage the retention (and where necessary ensure statutory protection) of iron railings, including measures for their appropriate conservation when maintenance is required
- Ensure necessary protection of all natural stone kerbstones and gulleys, and of paved or cobbled areas, including sympathetic restoration of surfaces beneath carriage archways and footway accesses. There should ideally be an ongoing programme of repair and enhancement, grant-aided if possible
- Encourage retention of the character of existing entrances, gate piers and period timber or metal gates
- Consider introduction of an Article 4(2) Direction, to effect greater control over the introduction of UPVC windows and doors and inappropriate roof materials, external cladding or use of exposed blockwork in front walls. Such a measure could also maintain the use of cast iron rainwater goods instead of plastic, and preserve existing

boundary features such as stone or earth bank walls.

(iv) Landscape and Setting

- Protect the historic and largely unspoilt edges of the historic town plan, especially the relatively undisturbed approaches from the south and the east including the small and still very rural hamlet of Essington
- Before any demolition or redevelopment takes place, consideration should be given to the survival of ancient boundaries, especially those forming the remains of burgage plots, particularly to the north of Fore Street and North Street. Consideration should also be given to the present significance and historic use of the many unlisted outbuildings to the rear of the main street frontages, before any significant demolition or redevelopment takes place.
- Existing trees which are an important feature of the town's setting, particularly the lime trees within the churchyard, should be especially safeguarded. Where these are considered to be over-mature and have further limited life, measures will need to be taken to plant young trees which would gradually replace older specimens, especially any already succumbing to disease. Some further planting is recommended in the Memorial Park as previously suggested. Any further widespread planting of introduced conifers, such as Lawson's Cypress should be resisted, in favour of native or less ubiquitous species.

(v) Suitability and Availability of Traditional Building Materials

One of the major problems of protecting the historic environment is to ensure an adequate infrastructure and supply of natural materials and to be able to employ practitioners skilled in their use. The following guidelines are intended to encourage best conservation practice whenever possible.

- Whenever possible, use natural building materials, including cob, and employ traditional methods of construction or repair. This would include in part or in full:
 - new buildings
 - extensions or alterations to existing buildings, especially listed buildings
 - existing or proposed boundary and/or retaining walls
 - paved or cobbled surfaces
 - roof repair or replacement
- Where slate (including artificial slate) requires replacement, use natural slate, preferably of local origin such as Cornish slate from Delabole. Where cost limitations are imperative, for example when grant aid is not available, imported natural slate of similar colour and texture to that of local origin might be considered acceptable. Even some forms of artificial slate reconstituted from natural material and riven in appearance may also be suitable, other than on listed buildings where traditional building materials should always be used..

- There are sufficient historic buildings in the conservation area to merit a checklist of suppliers of natural building materials, for example sources of wheat reed thatch, sources of natural stone and slate, preferably of local origin, practitioners of cob construction and repair. Such a list could be compiled and circulated by the local authority for the benefit of owners, developers and building contractors.
- It is further recommended that design guidance and practical advice is provided by the local authority to all owners of historic buildings in the conservation area, to encourage the repair, or if need be, to enforce the replacement of timber casement or double-hung sash windows, including glazing bars, with as far as possible, like for like. Similarly for timber doors, to ensure that they maintain and respect the local vernacular tradition of panelled doors, moulded doorcases, fanlights etc. including the local style of timber porches, and to ensure that similar guidelines are followed in respect of proposals for new development within the conservation area.

Suggested Extensions to the Existing Conservation Area

It is considered that the conservation area should be slightly extended in three different locations to rationalise the present boundary.

- (a) a small eastward extension on the north side of Fore Street to include Nos 66-68 which are listed.
- (b) a further small eastward extension beyond the War Memorial Park to include the earth bank and small cottage group immediately south of the Fire Station.
- (c) a northward extension either side of North Street to include the Bowling Green and boundary wall fronting the carriageway and the wall east of Devonshire House. Also further west, the 19th century terrace (Nos 27-33) and adjoining vacant site. These suggestions are shown in the Map Section.

Summary

North Tawton is a surprisingly compact and bustling small town, in spite of its relative isolation from any major through routes or larger centres of population. Although perhaps not perceived as a tourist destination, on close acquaintance the town retains much inherent charm, and has a long and important history with many good buildings, and a high quality of townscape..

Improvements to visual detractors, including removal of overhead lines (already being implemented), a lessening of the impact of on-street car parking, a reduction in the impact of some road signs, and sympathetic repairs to several areas of poor surfaces. Also needed is an injection of outside funds to encourage owners to adequately repair and maintain some of the fine period detail found in considerable measure throughout the whole of the conservation area but in places in bad condition, would greatly enhance the inherently fine quality of past workmanship, which requires careful restoration.

The level of unsuitable replacement doors and windows and poor quality artificial roof materials is reaching critical proportions in some of the main streets, and urgently needs some form of constraint if the historic element of townscape is to be adequately maintained. The fine corner and building frontage treatment of several street junctions and other prominent visual stops, not to mention a number of well-preserved shopfronts gives the town a special, almost timeless urban quality and this aspect of character should be preserved at all costs.

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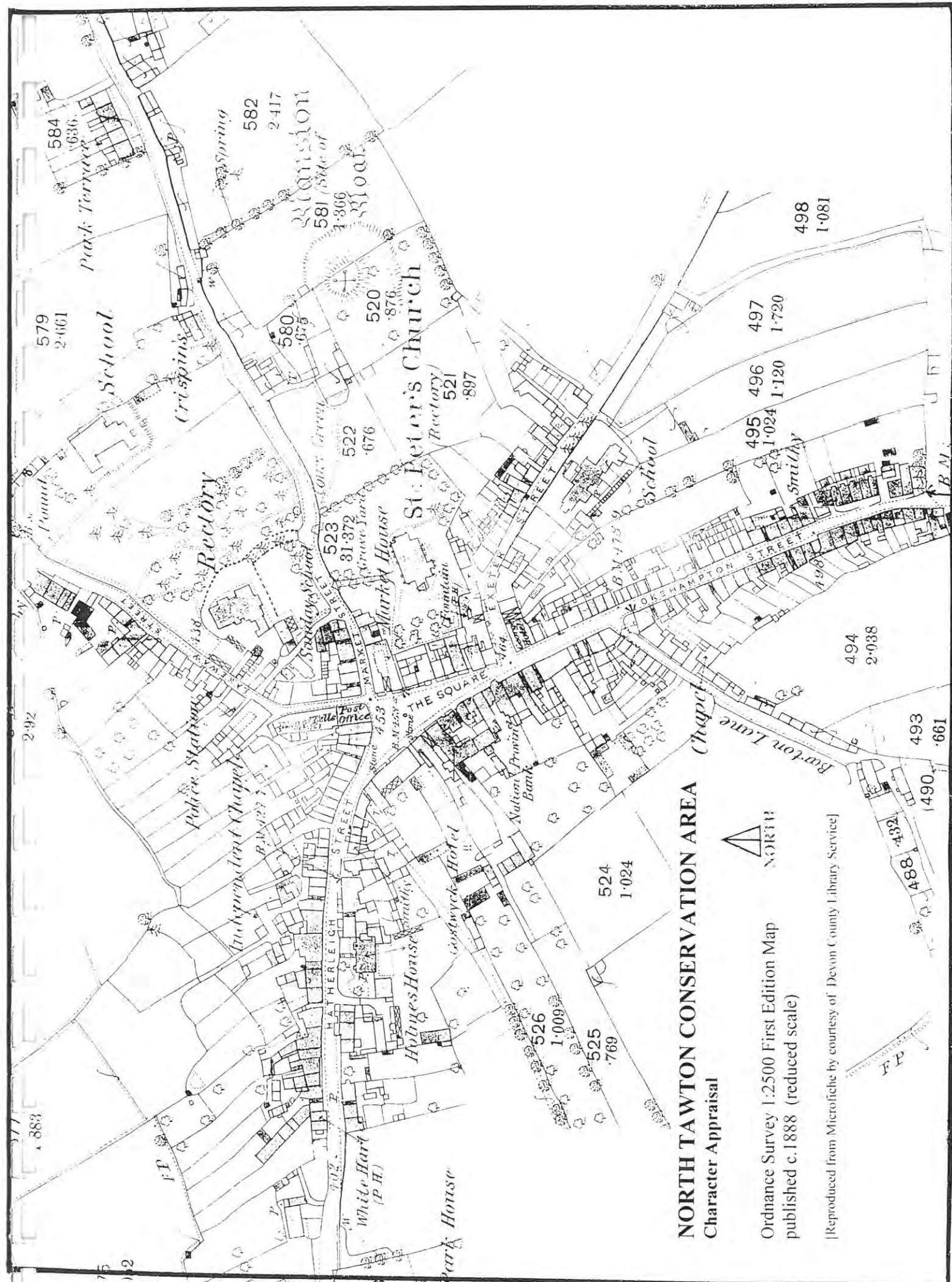
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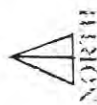
Penguin Books London 1989 (2nd edition)

MAPS

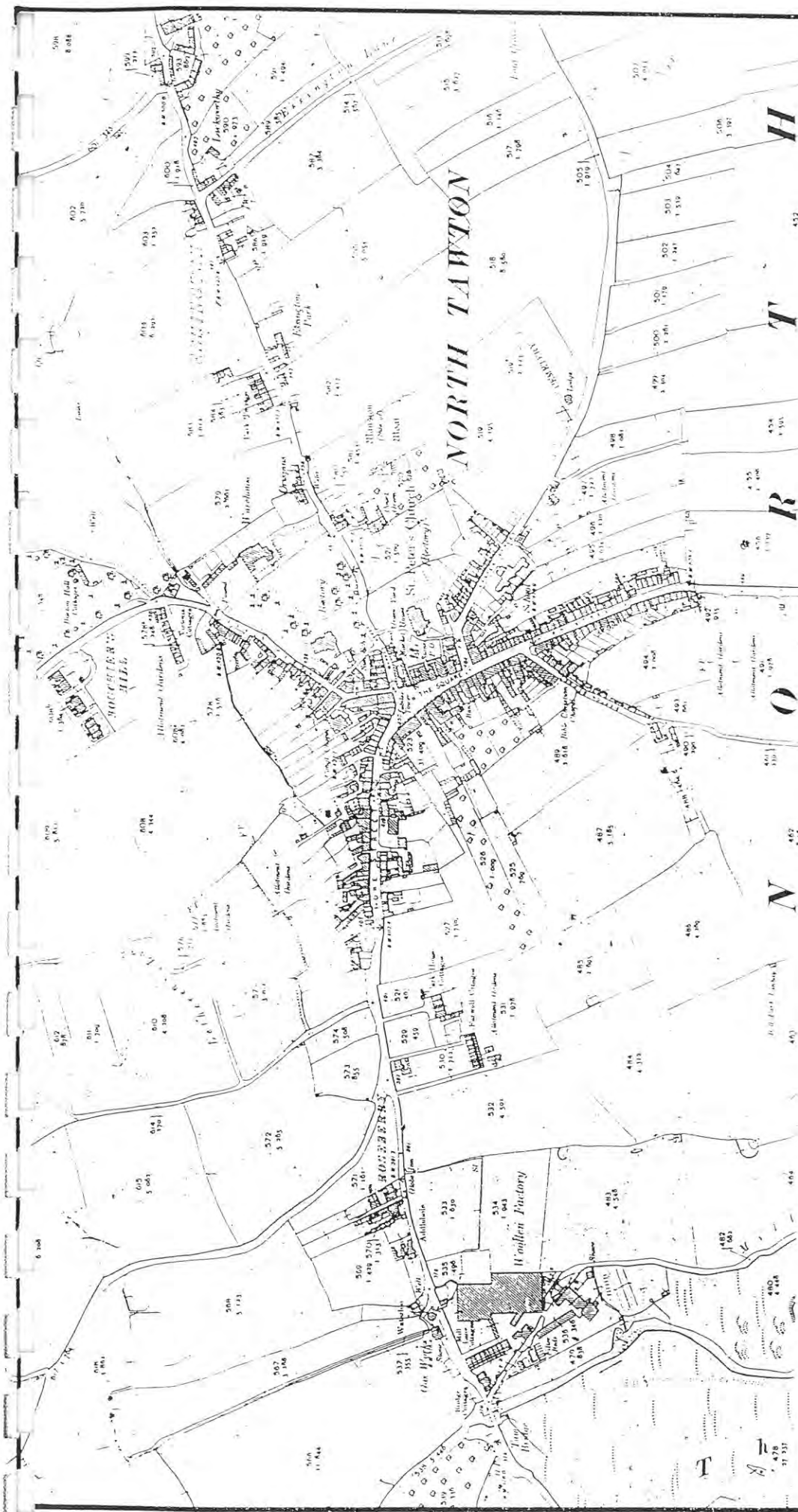


NORTH TAWTON CONSERVATION AREA **Character Appraisal**

Ordnance Survey 1:2500 First Edition Map
published c.1888 (reduced scale)



[Reproduced from Microfiche by courtesy of Devon County Library Service]

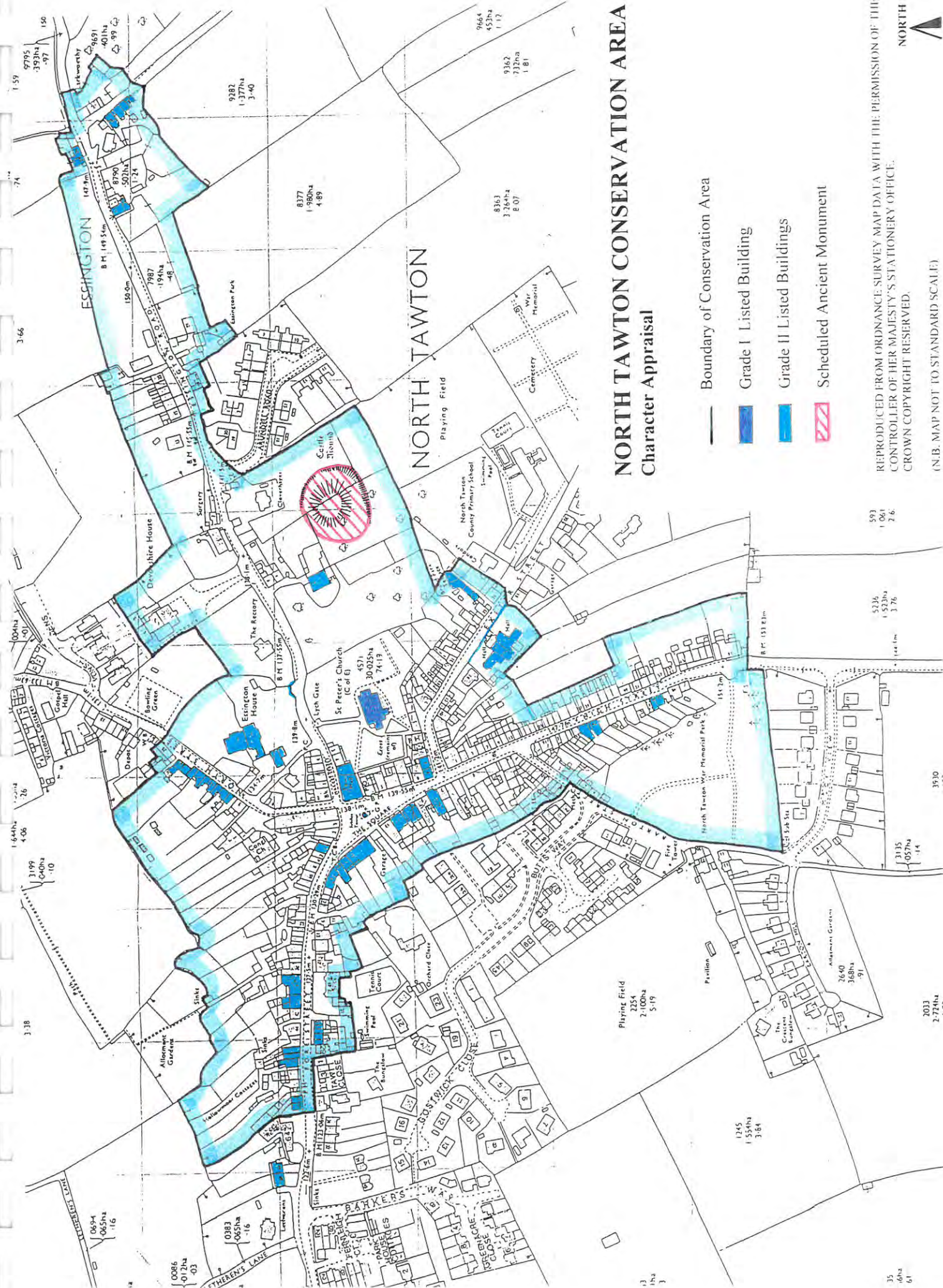


NORTH TAWTON CONSERVATION AREA **Character Appraisal**



Ordnance Survey 1:2500 Second Edition Map
 published c.1906 (reduced scale)

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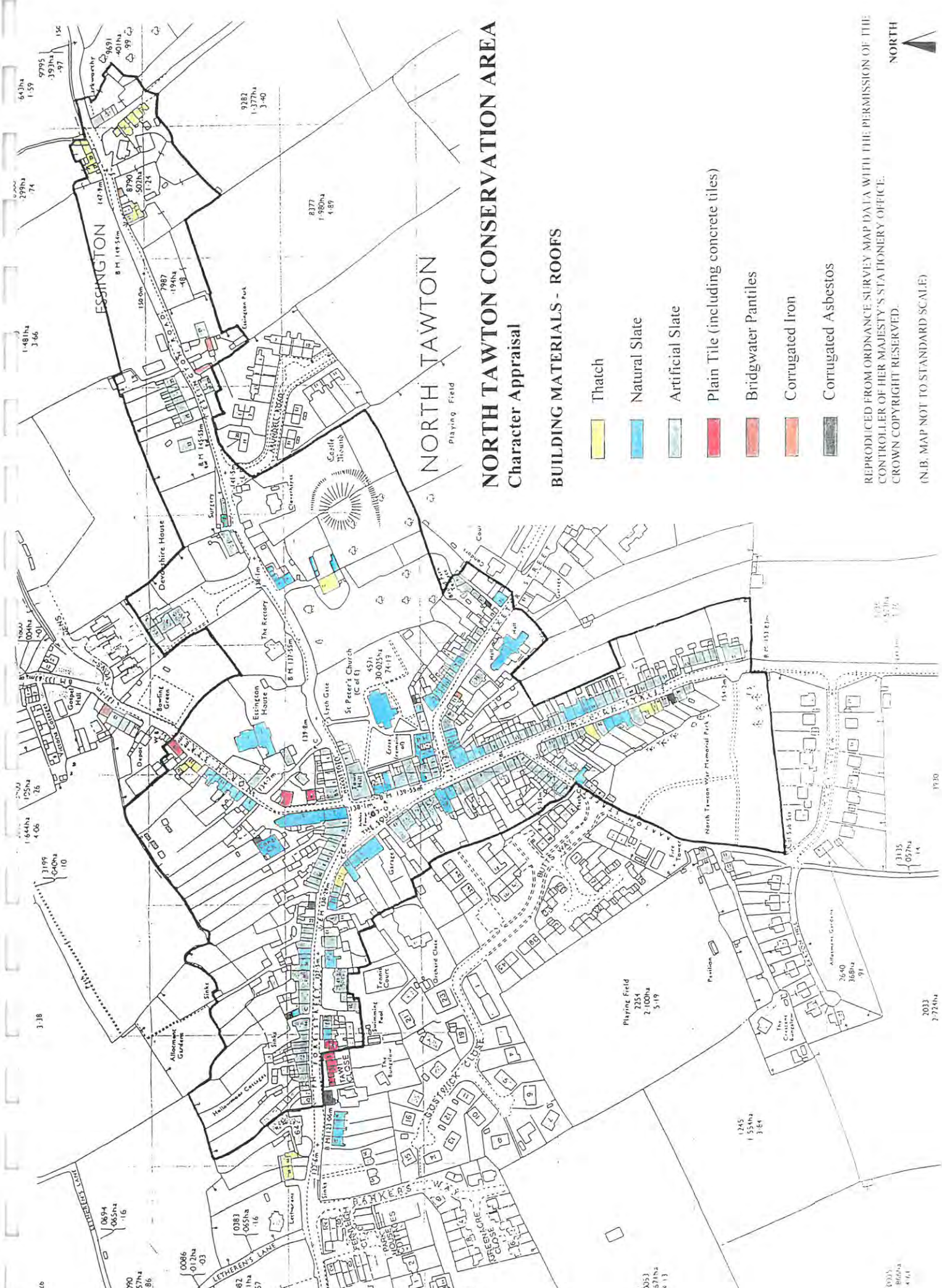


NORTH TAWTON CONSERVATION AREA **Character Appraisal**

- Boundary of Conservation Area
- Grade I Listed Building
- Grade II Listed Buildings
- Scheduled Ancient Monument



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NORTH TAWTON CONSERVATION AREA

Character Appraisal

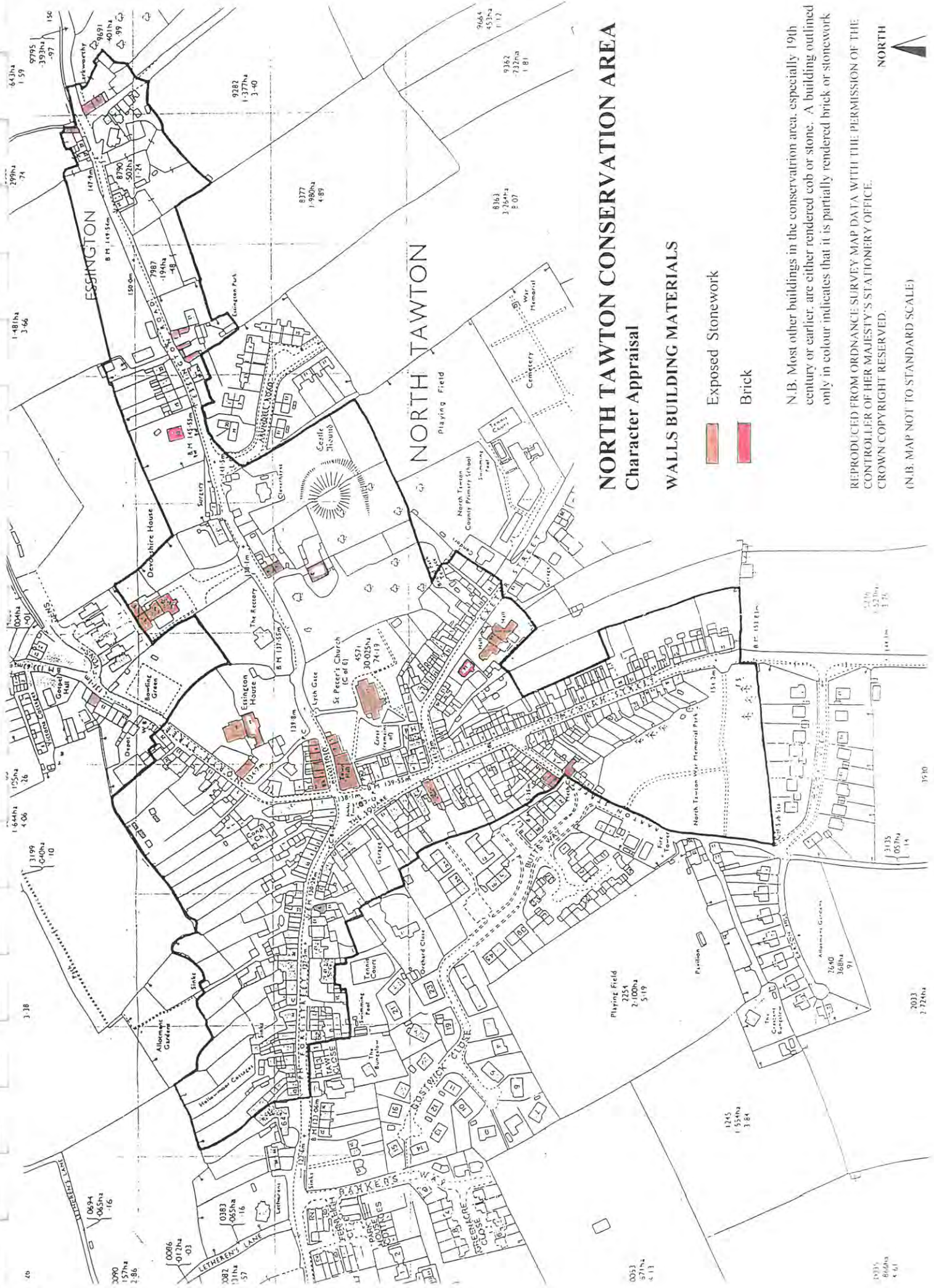
BUILDING MATERIALS - ROOFS

- Thatch
- Natural Slate
- Artificial Slate
- Plain Tile (including concrete tiles)
- Bridgwater Pantiles
- Corrugated Iron
- Corrugated Asbestos

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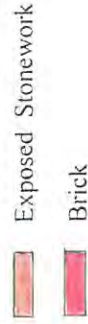
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NORTH TAWTON CONSERVATION AREA **Character Appraisal**

WALLS BUILDING MATERIALS



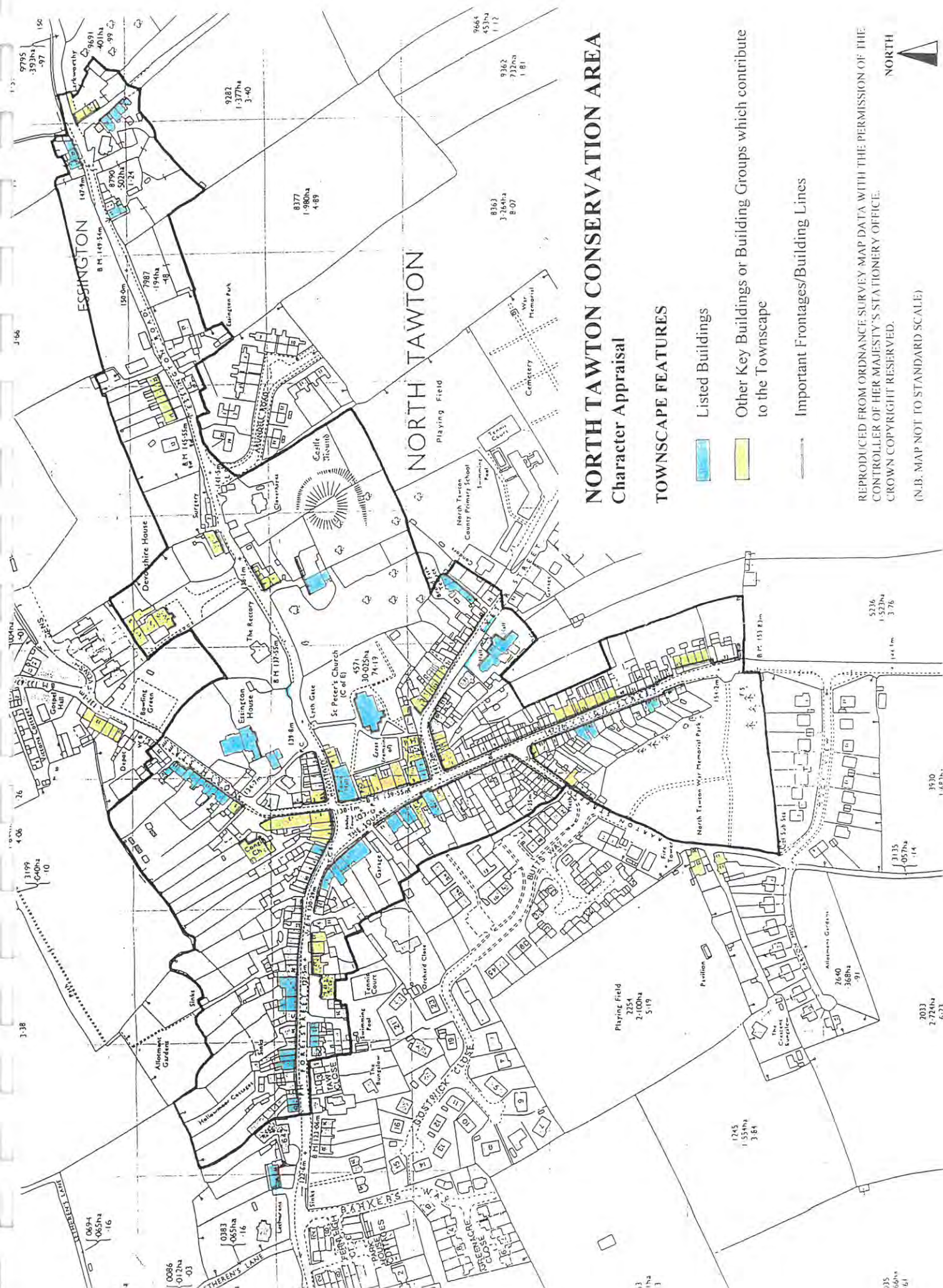
N.B. Most other buildings in the conservation area, especially 19th century or earlier, are either rendered cob or stone. A building outlined only in colour indicates that it is partially rendered brick or stonework

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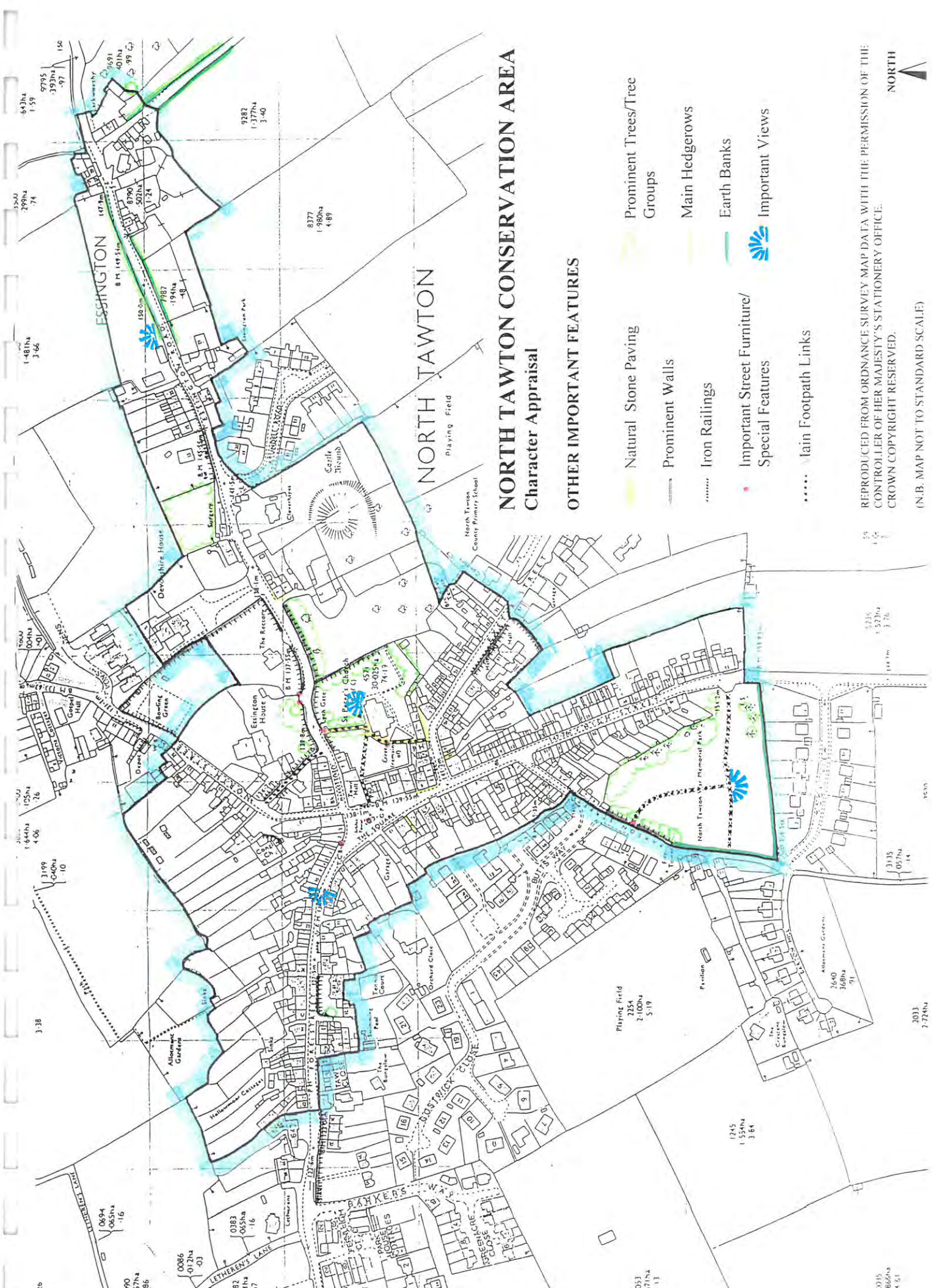
TOWNSCAPE FEATURES

- Listed Buildings
- Other Key Buildings or Building Groups which contribute to the Townscape
- Important Frontages/Building Lines

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Character Appraisal

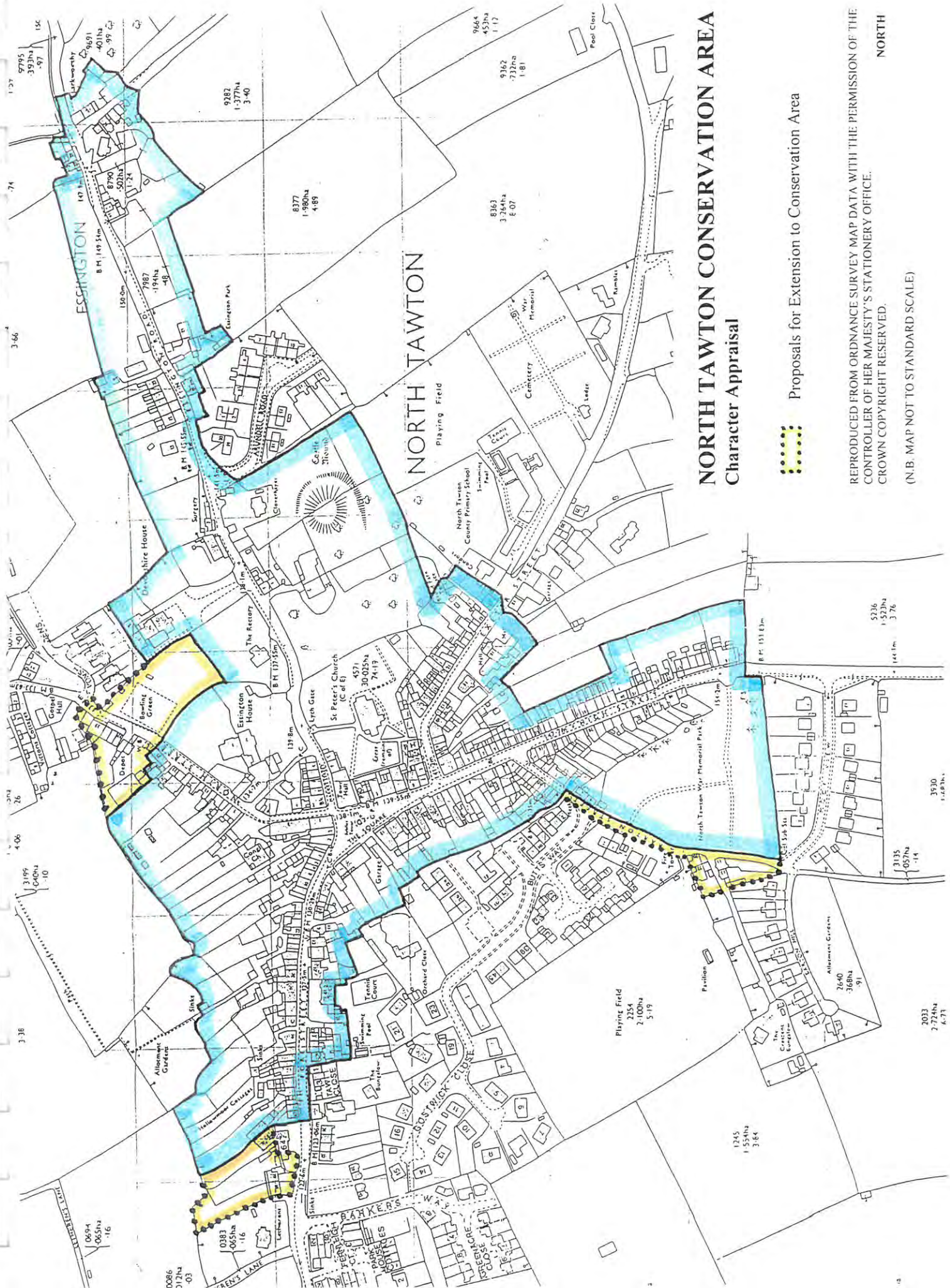
OTHER IMPORTANT FEATURES

- Natural Stone Paving
- Prominent Walls
- Iron Railings
- Important Street Furniture/Special Features
- Main Footpath Links
- Prominent Trees/Tree Groups
- Main Hedgerows
- Earth Banks
- Important Views

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NORTH TAWTON CONSERVATION AREA **Character Appraisal**

Proposals for Extension to Conservation Area

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