

OTTERTON

Prepared for East Devon District Council by John Fisher BA, MA, MRTPI
with contributions from Town and Parish Councils and Amenity Societies in East Devon

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Contents

1	HISTORIC AND TOPOGRAPHIC BACKGROUND	3
2	SETTING OF THE CONSERVATION AREA	4
3	BUILT ENVIRONMENT	6
4	LANDSCAPE AND TREES	7
5	HARD SURFACES	7
6	BUILDING MATERIALS AND ORNAMENT	7
7	STREET FURNITURE AND SPECIAL FEATURES	8
8	SYNOPSIS OF HISTORIC BUILDINGS	9
9	FEATURES OF SPECIAL IMPORTANCE	12
10	LOSS OF CHARACTER AND INTRUSION	13
11	SUMMARY	13
	HISTORIC PHOTOGRAPHS & MAPS	14
	APPRAISAL MAPS	18

OTTERTON



Otterton Bridge at the west approach to the village.

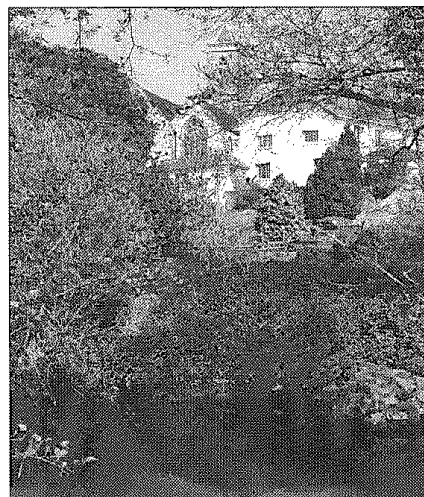
1 HISTORIC AND TOPOGRAPHIC BACKGROUND

1.1 At the time of the Norman Conquest, Otterton was given to the Benedictine monks of Mont St Michel, who it is said assisted William, not only with their prayers but in the supplying of several ships for the invasion force. It was as a cell to the monastery of Mont St Michel that King John founded the Priory here. The only remaining relic is the font.

1.2 The much altered tower of St Michael's Parish Church, now a prominent landmark from the south and west, is largely 14th century. The church is surprisingly hidden away from the long main street accompanied by a stream, (which ceases to flow during drought) and is first on the left and then on the right of the carriageway on the gentle descent towards the River Otter which forms the western boundary of the conservation area. Otterton is the embodiment of a long established village which developed in a natural hollow. Within the village are many surviving mainly 16th to 18th century thatched cottages, farmhouses and their outbuildings fronting the long main street with a wide variety of later infill, most notably 19th century Rolle estate cottages.

1.3 The Priory (now 1-4 St Michael's Close) immediately adjoining the church is a former 15th century Manor House, built by Richard Duke when he bought the Manor in 1539. Duke was Clerk to the Court of Augmentations, a body Henry VIII authorised to handle the disposal of monastic property at

the time of the Dissolution which had caused him to prosper. The Manor was built on the site of some of the original monastic buildings, and it is very likely that much of the masonry used came from the earlier buildings. Under the present building are the original monastic kitchens linked by underground passages to the cellars of Church Cottage. These have been partially blocked up for safety reasons, but there is much written about them.



Parish Church and Barton House from the Otter showing their elevated situation above the river

2 SETTING OF THE CONSERVATION AREA

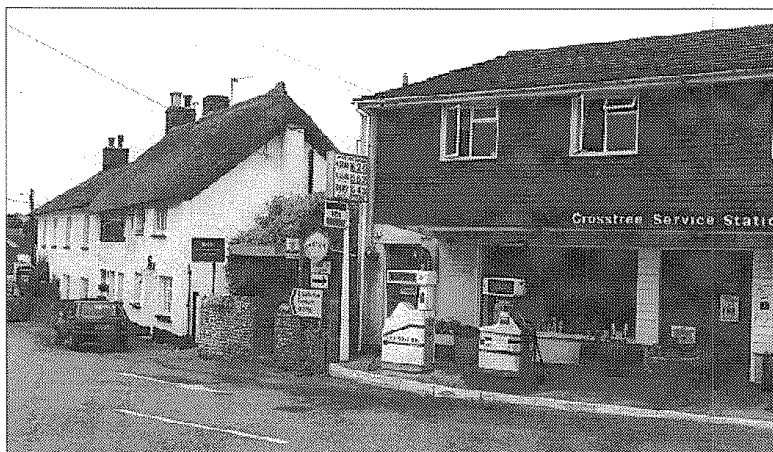
2.1 Otterton Conservation Area comprises the whole of the early part of the village apart from the **former Vicarage** (1840) off Roper's Lane; **Conway** a small 18th century house at Higher Maunders Hill; **Thatched Cottage**, in Bell Street which is known to be pre 1742 and **North Star Cottage** in Otterton Road which is dated 1689. The last two mentioned are constructed of cob on stone rubble footings.

2.2 The special character of the village led to designation of the conservation area in 1972 and it was extended in 1993. Within the existing conservation area are 55 individually listed buildings giving 45 separate list entries, with a separate listing of 22 headstones and chest tombs in the churchyard. Within the conservation area are three Grade II* entries; the **Parish Church**, **Mill** and **Basclose**, a 16th century cottage in Fore Street.

2.3 Approaching the village from the west the River Otter is crossed by a stone bridge of three arches built in 1827. Immediately beyond is the 18th century Mill, much rebuilt in the mid 19th century. This is now a craft centre but contains much of the original machinery. It is probably on the site of one of three mills referred to as a cornmill in the Domesday survey.

2.4 On entering the village with the large village green on the left and framing one side, are a row of eight whitewashed cob and thatch cottages with traditional black tar band. Otterton gives the impression of a village of considerable size and essential Devonian character.

2.5 There is a similarity of scale throughout the length of the village providing cohesion in spite of separately enclosed vistas as the main street bends sharply at a cross-roads. A group of four substantial dwellings at the northern end of the village, some of which are former farmhouses, and have forward projecting lateral chimney-stacks are evidence of mainly late 16th or 17th century origin.



The Service Station (left) is intrusive, but new housing off Ottery Street (below) is well-proportioned. Ottery Street has several good 16th-17th century cottages and farmhouses with typical projecting lateral stacks (opposite). At the north end are a further pair of Rolle cottages in flint and brick.





3 BUILT ENVIRONMENT

3.1 The conservation area displays characteristics which can be broken down into separate areas. These are briefly described below and indicated on map 1.

3.2 (1) The Church and Mill

Historically, containing the earliest known origins of the settlement, this part of the village, apart from the Mill which is a considerable tourist attraction, contains an informal group of buildings in a peaceful setting dominated by the Parish Church within its large churchyard. Adjoining the River Otter and the Mill Leat are significant changes in level and many trees creating a particularly attractive setting. Also in this part of the village are some significant cob and brick walls including the listed garden walls to Mill House of local hand-made red bricks and thought to date from 1691. It was partly destroyed and rebuilt after a flood in 1967.

3.3 (2) Fore Street

As previously described, the focal point of the village originally consisting of farms and further cottages of cob, local red sandstone and flint walls with thatch or Welsh slate roofs forming an attractive and varied street frontage. Rolle Estate cottages enclose the village green to the north and are also to be found on the main street frontage with 20th century infill starting with the Isaack Trust cottages of 1907, some 1930's semis, one containing a former shopfront and complete original colour-patterned glass.

3.4 (3) Cross Tree and Bell Street

An area of somewhat indeterminate character and more adverse visual intrusions than elsewhere, partly for understandable reasons e.g the village garage and petrol filling station, prominent road direction signs, and dwellings especially close to the road frontage where installation of double glazing aids noise reduction. On the north side of Bell Street is an especially important break in the built frontages giving open countryside views. There is a good example of a typical pair of brick built Rolle Estate cottages (1874) with characteristic decorative lintels and crested ridge tiles.

3.5 (4) Ottery Street

This part of the village is an almost separate entity, and contains several of the earliest domestic buildings with projecting stacks. Overhead power lines are particularly intrusive in this part of the village. A further pair of Rolle cottages built in 1875 of flint with brick dressings are approached by footbridges over the stream. Their decorative flint walls and piers make a particularly attractive feature at the northern entrance to the village and are considered to be of listable quality.

3.6 (5) Associated Landscape

Although classified as being outside of the boundary of the built-up area, this part of the conservation area contains no buildings but is an important component of the historic enclosure pattern with long rear gardens, farm paddocks, former orchards and many hedgerow trees. The public footpath which coincides with much of the northern boundary gives important views over the village and emphasises its narrow valley setting.



The Green is an attractive open space at the west end of Fore Street with groups of 17th century to 20th century cottages informally grouped around it

4 LANDSCAPE AND TREES

4.1 There is relatively little formal landscaping, which is confined to the planting of young, mainly deciduous, trees on the village green, in addition to earlier mature trees including a fine horse chestnut. There are also shrubs and some floral displays in front of the Parish Church and several rows of Yew trees in the churchyard, some of considerable antiquity. A line of three remaining old trees running north-south indicates an earlier eastern limit. A row of cypresses partially encloses a relatively new cemetery south of the existing churchyard.

4.2 All other trees appear to be largely naturalised, and there are few particularly prominent specimens, apart from a row of Ilex along the west side of Church Hill. Trees fronting or near the River Otter are particularly important in their setting and form a virtually complete visual break from the village in summer. Elsewhere trees are largely incidental to buildings, although there is a fairly continuous deciduous belt on higher ground along or close to the northern boundary of the conservation area, which includes a number of elms, now well established after their recovery from Dutch Elm disease. These tree groups form an important backdrop to buildings when viewed from Fore Street and Ottery Street. Trees along the western boundary of the conservation area, and in some cases just beyond, are also important in the context of its setting.

5 HARD SURFACES

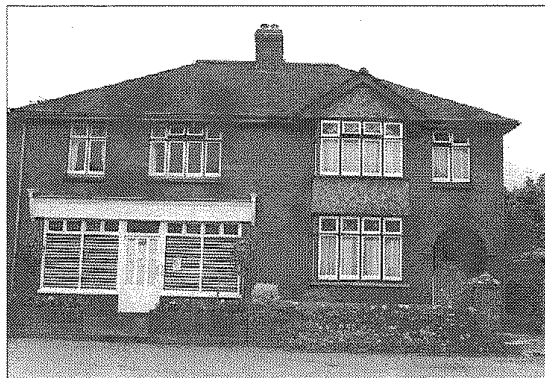
5.1 The quantity and quality of hard surfaces laid in natural materials is disappointing and the only significant example noted in the village is a large cobbled yard at the entrance to Houstern Farm in Fore Street which the owner appears to cherish. Elsewhere surfaces are almost entirely of recent origin (largely concrete kerb stones and asphalt). There are known to be cobbles underneath the asphalt fronting the cottages on "The Green".

5.2 The natural stone retaining walls to the stream have residual character, but the bed of the stream is concreted throughout its course through the village, and is quite unattractive when the flow ceases. Dukes Close, where the carriageway has been edged in apparently riven natural stone kerbs and a grassed "pavement" abutting a newly constructed flint wall has been sensitively handled.

6 BUILDING MATERIALS AND ORNAMENT

6.1 Otterton is a pleasing mixture of building materials. Thatch and rendered, painted, cob, mostly on rubblestone footings with tar bands predominates, but there are also houses in stucco and slate, e.g. Otterton Barton, local conglomerate sandstone, e.g. The Mill; flint, particularly boundary walls, but also mainly 19th century buildings; and brick, mainly red, but in lighter decorative bands, especially in the estate cottages.

6.2 The Victorian rebuilding of the church incorporates much natural stone widely available at the time including Torquay limestone with Hamstone detail and internally, much use of Beer Stone and marble; some of the latter probably of



Individual buildings in Otterton vary greatly. Houstern Farm may date from the 15th century (top); nearby is a somewhat incongruous 1930's semi which retains much original detail (centre); improved houses at Cross Tree have unsuitable frontages contrasting with a Rolle Estate cottage retaining all its detail (above); and another at The Green, (previous page) both with characteristic patterned brickwork.



Close-up of a sandstone wall at The Mill, showing signs of deterioration, accelerated by hard mortar

West Country origin. The roof is in red tiles with fishscale bands. Plain red tiles are found quite widely elsewhere in the village in buildings of the mid 19th century onwards, as are several of the Bridgwater pantile patterns, especially on outbuildings.

6.3 Patterns used for windows and doors are fairly plain, and mostly timber casements, but with a few early metal framed examples. 19th century and earlier doors are mainly planked with little glazing incorporated. Modern replacement doors and windows are making considerable inroads in buildings not statutorily listed, although not to date in most if not all estate cottages.

7 STREET FURNITURE AND SPECIAL FEATURES

7.1 There appears to be a complete lack of any authentic street furniture, deliberately retained rather than replaced, apart from a "K6" style public call box, which does not yet appear to be statutorily protected. Several small footbridges over the stream are attractively varied both in form and use of materials. The carved wooden village sign is a recent addition using traditional materials and craftsmanship.

7.2 The extent and height of cob, brick, sandstone and flint walls in various parts of the village are a definite characteristic. The church lychgate of 1854 is rather hidden away at the rear of the churchyard and with its heavy iron gates is a strong feature in this part of the village. A curious large bird-like figure forming a kind of finial on one of the large stone barns at Otterton Barton is a distinctive and unusual feature on an unlisted building.



Farm buildings south of Barton House, partially empty.

8 SYNOPSIS OF LISTED BUILDINGS

Distribution

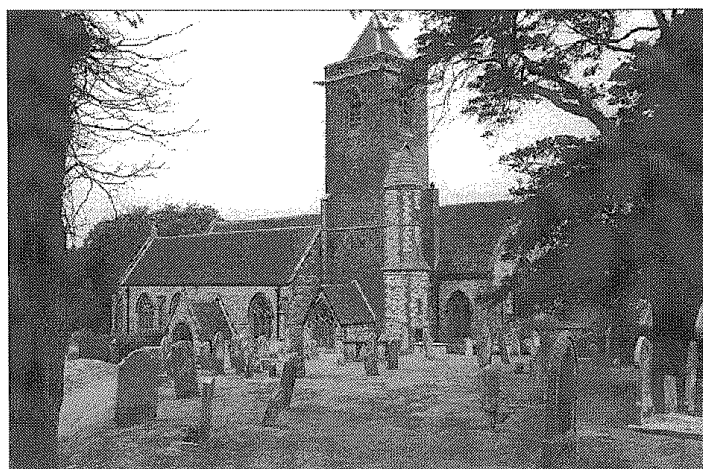
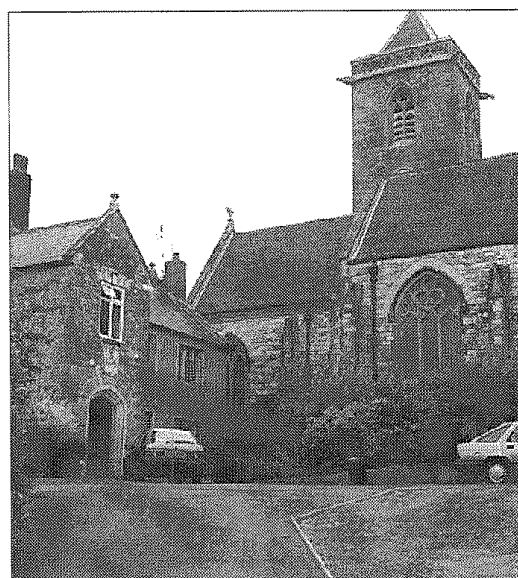
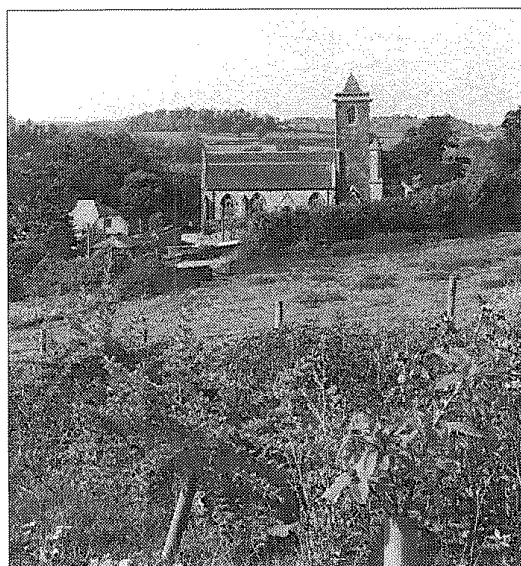
8.1 With the exception of the Parish Church, Mill and Otterton Barton and their proximity to the River Otter, the large majority of listed buildings have a direct frontage to the main route through the village formed of The Green, Fore Street and Ottery Road.

8.2 The original mainly Early English **Parish Church of St Michael (II*)** with a tower rebuilt in the 15th century was virtually completely reconstructed in 1871 by Benjamin Ferrey with much typical late Victorian ornament. This led Pevsner to describe it as "insensitive"² and Hoskins "a suburban edifice"³. It is nevertheless coming to be recognised as a significant church building with some surviving relics, including two early 17th century brasses to the Duke family.

8.3 **Otterton Mill (II*)** is an important working water mill with two breast shot waterwheels, very little altered since they were installed in the mid 19th century. Partly because of this the Mill has become an excellent museum and interpretation centre. "It is also visually an important building in...Otterton, and close to other buildings with which it is historically connected"⁴

8.4 One of the most attractive and typical houses in Otterton is **Basclose (II*)**, probably 16th century with late 16th to early 17th century improvements, one dated 1627. Built mainly of plastered cob on rubblestone footings, but the hall stack is of coursed local brown conglomerate with Beer stone quoins.

8.5 **Nos 1-4 St. Michael's Close** is historically important as this originally formed part of the Priory, rebuilt as the Manor (1.3). The present building is a largely late 19th century refurbishment with further extensive alterations c.1970. The gabled porch has a richly moulded Beer stone four-centred outer arch, above which is a Beer stone plaque inscribed with the arms of William Duke, mayor of Exeter in 1460. This early Duke family relic appears to have somehow been incorporated in the rebuilding after dissolution of the monastic foundation.



The setting of the massive Parish Church is striking from most viewpoints; looking northwest across the churchyard (left); across surrounding countryside from the south; towards the Almshouses (formerly the Manor House) and site of the former Priory outbuildings (above).

² Nicolaus Pevsner "The Buildings of England : Devon"

³ W.G.Hoskins "Devon"

⁴ extract from the statutory list description



Fore Street; the Mill on the right and 17th century walled garden at Mill House (below). The row of nine cottages overlooking The Green can be seen in the background.

8.6 Nos 1-9 **The Green** is an especially attractive row of late 18th to early 19th century cottages of plastered cob on rubblestone footings. The otherwise plain vernacular frontages are embellished with several examples of "polite" detail to the doorways and some windows.

8.7 In Ottery Road **The Barn** (probably of 16th century origin) **No 30 and The Bank** (possibly pre 17th century) **Rydon Farmhouse** (probably 16th and 17th century) and **Anchoring Farmhouse** (late 15th to early 16th century) all with projecting lateral chimney stacks form an outstanding group, the last mentioned having also a listed cider house and stables. This group rivals **The Green** and the group between **The Gardens** and **Brooklyn Cottages** on the north side of Fore Street as good vernacular architecture in a village with many excellent examples.

8.8 **Housterne Farmhouse** on the south side of Fore Street is attractively proportioned with good internal features including early carpentry, an original fireplace, and smoke-blackened roof timber indicating its origins as an open hall house.

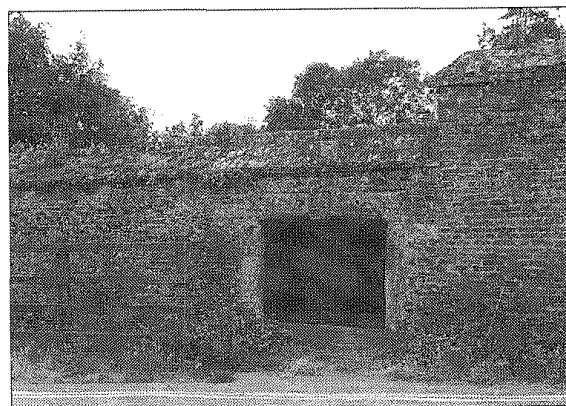
Buildings at Risk

8.9 At the time of the survey (July 1995) no buildings within the conservation area appeared to be substantially at risk. Several farm buildings at Otterton Barton were vacant or only partially in use. Stone deterioration is evident in places (e.g. the Lychgate), but is a relatively long term problem not requiring immediate action, although some boundary walls need more urgent attention.

Important Buildings outside the Conservation Area

8.10 Apart from the buildings in the village already referred to (2.1), there are several important listed farms within the parish, mostly to be found along Ottery Road, which are as follows:

Burnthouse Farmhouse (probably late 17c), **Garden Walls**, (mainly 19c flint) **Cottage**, (probably 18c) **Linhay** (early-mid 19c, exposed cob) and **Barn** (18c). All are plastered cob on rubblestone footings with thatched roofs, apart from the Linhay which has had thatch replaced by corrugated iron.



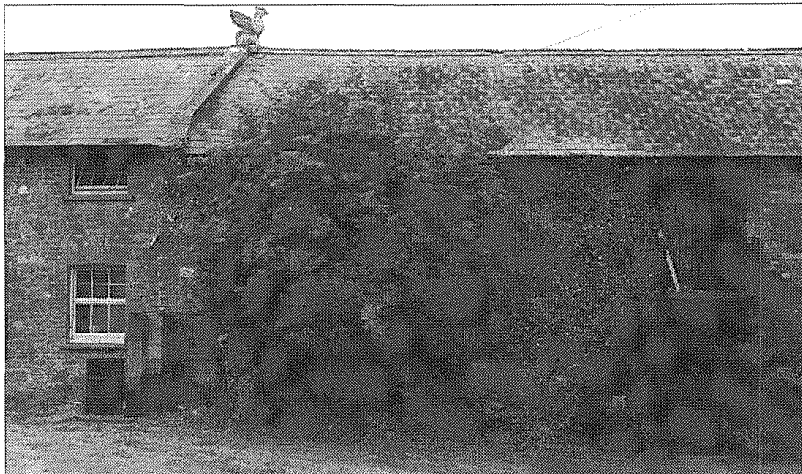
Passaford Farmhouse (II*) (late 16c-early 17c); three room and passage plan, plastered cob on rubblestone with an especially good interior.

Pavers Farmhouse and garden walls to the south and east (II*) (late 15c-early 16c with major 16c and 17c improvements. Rebuilt c.1980). Situated very close to Passaford on the opposite side of the lane. Three room and cross-passage with projecting 17c stair turret to the rear. An attractive and well-preserved multi-phase Devon farmhouse.

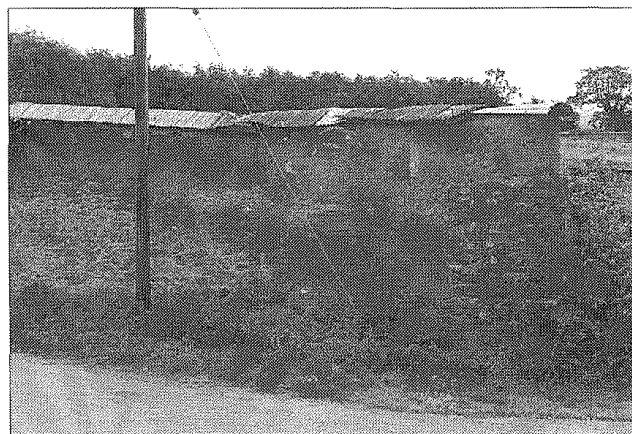
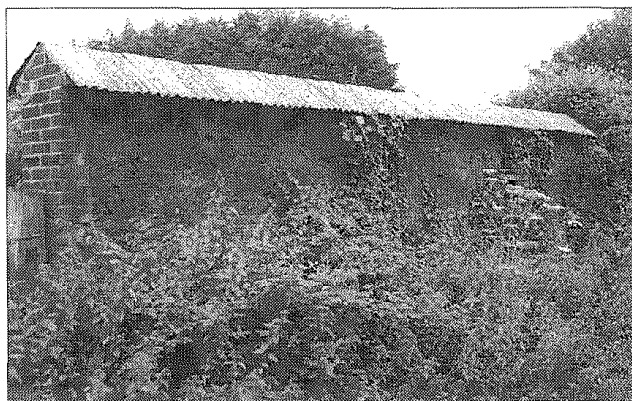
Houghton Farmhouse and cob walls adjoining north and south (probably 17c, plastered cob on stone rubble, extended and refurbished in 1870, brick and slate. Roof of possible jointed cruck construction.

Ashtree Farmhouse and garden walls to south (probably 16c and refurbished 17c according to 1685 date plaque; modernised and enlarged late 19c). **Barn** (18c, refurbished late 19c) Both are plastered cob on stone rubble footings with stone rubble stacks, patched and topped in brick.

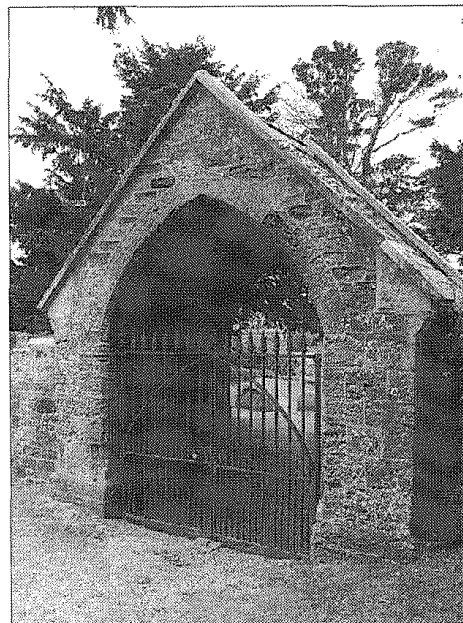
Pitson Farmhouse (late 15c-early 16c origins) refurbished and enlarged early 17c but retaining medieval plan form. Plastered cob on rubble stone footings, rubble stacks including one early 17c part ashlar.



Farm buildings south of Barton House, partially empty



Cob and cob on stone base walls between Church Hill and Maunder's Hill



19th century Parish Church lychgate with stone and ironwork both showing some signs of decay

9 FEATURES OF SPECIAL IMPORTANCE

The elements in Otterton conservation area which may be considered as most worthy of retention in terms of their character are as follows:

- the exceptional visual and historic interest of the western portion of the village comprising church, working water mill, former priory and manor house, row of cottages fronting the village green, River Otter and associated mill leat the route of which is thought to be pre-Conquest
- a noteworthy range of vernacular buildings, mainly of cob and thatch and apparently not yet fully researched
- several groups or pairs of mostly 19c Rolle Estate Cottages mainly in brick or render with tile or slate roofs, providing a pleasant contrast and with little altered frontages
- extensive boundary walls, varying greatly in use of materials (cob, brick and at least types of local stone) and in height (up to 4 metres)
- the natural stone cobbled entrance and much of the yard at Houstern Farm
- the surviving "K6" telephone kiosk
- crossing points on the stream following Ottery Road, Fore Street and The Green
- important street vistas focussing on the groups of mainly 16th to 18th century cottages and farmhouses fronting Fore Street, Ottery Road and The Green
- the vicinity of the River Otter and its close topographical but visually separate relationship from much of the built-up part of the village

- important trees and tree groups, including those adjoining the river, within the church yard, on the village green, and where forming a backdrop to buildings, especially those to the north and east of the village centre



The stream is an attractive feature when flowing but has lost its natural bed which is starkly apparent in times of drought. The mix of cob and rendered brick or stonework with thatch and slate fronted by small gardens in a long main street gives the village much of its character.



10 LOSS OF CHARACTER AND INTRUSION

The main elements within the conservation area which are considered to be resulting in a compromising of the character are as follows:

- loss of traditional carpentry detailing and finishes from building frontages, and replacement with UPVC double glazing or dark-stained hardwood doors and windowframes. This loss is especially evident in the area around Cross Tree where it's acknowledged proximity to the carriageway may make soundproofing more of a necessity.
- intrusion from overhead power lines, especially at Cross Tree and in Ottery Road, and to a lesser extent in the vicinity of the church and village green.
- intrusion from tall TV aerials, especially prominent when viewed from Fore Street looking west.
- poor condition and treatment of surfaces in places; (e.g the concrete base of the stream; and failing tarmacadam close to the War Memorial
- the concrete and blockwork bus shelter attached to the gable wall of No 1 The Green
- visual intrusion from street parked cars, partly resulting from the lack of few obvious sites for off-street parking within curtilages. Nos 1-9 The Green suffer particularly from this problem.
- poor condition of boundary walls in places, particularly cob
- deteriorating condition of stonework (mainly local conglomerate sandstone), for example church lychgate and the Mill
- poorly sited (in overall visual context) standard size/format road direction signs
- it is worthy of note, taking account of earlier maps, that the village has lost most, if not all, of formerly extensive orchards within the small enclosed fields and paddocks included within the conservation area.

11 SUMMARY

11.1 Otterton is a village that has the feel of a settled and long established community, with considerable levels of activity heightened by an influx of visitors to the Mill, an important tourist attraction, which contributes to the atmosphere of historic interest and continuity.

11.2 There are many traditional buildings of quality which have been generally sensitively handled when being upgraded. Several barn and outbuilding conversions mostly involving former redundant agricultural buildings set well back from the main frontage have largely avoided compromising character to an unacceptable extent. Some early to mid 20th century infill development is often more intrusive, but has generally managed to retain original frontage detail.

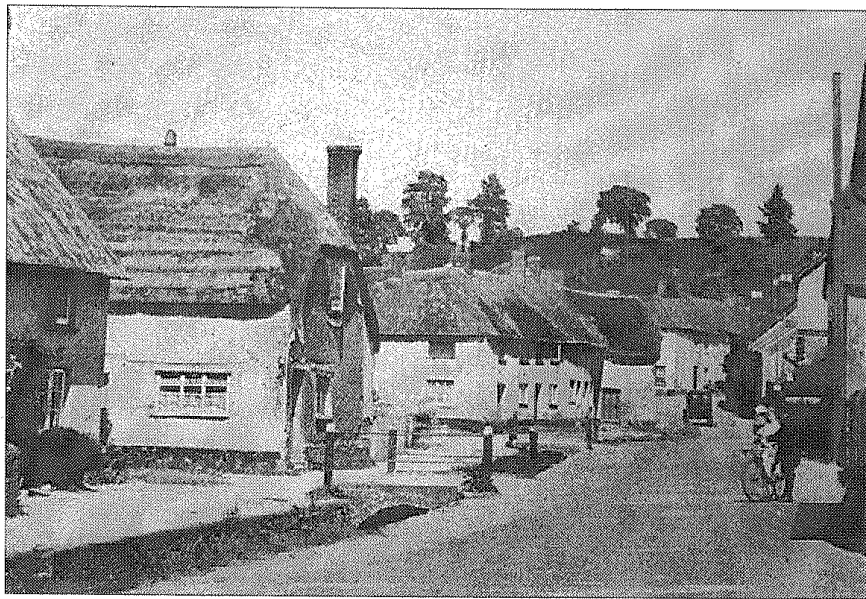
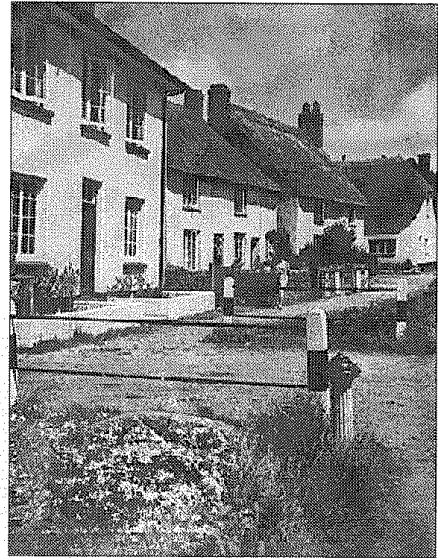


A useful but unattractive bus shelter at the junction of Maunder's Hill and Fore Street

11.3 The river and church settings provide areas of easily accessible tranquility which are enhanced by well-wooded or consciously landscaped surroundings. Overhead power lines are however a detraction here and especially at the eastern end of the village where some of the best domestic buildings are situated. Some loss of character around Cross Tree where several intrusive elements co-incide, together with a different orientation has tended to divide the essential visual quality of the conservation area into two separate entities and provide quite contrasting settings between Ottery Street and Fore Street in particular.

11.4 The overall cohesiveness of Otterton undoubtedly derives from its wealth of early domestic buildings and the extensive use of traditional materials, mainly plastered cob and thatch with stone embellishments, and the fact that subsequent development, although often in contrasting materials, does not unduly dominate except in a very few cases. Extensive boundary walls, and quite widespread use of flint - surely one of the westernmost settlements in England where this is the case - adds to the distinctive character.

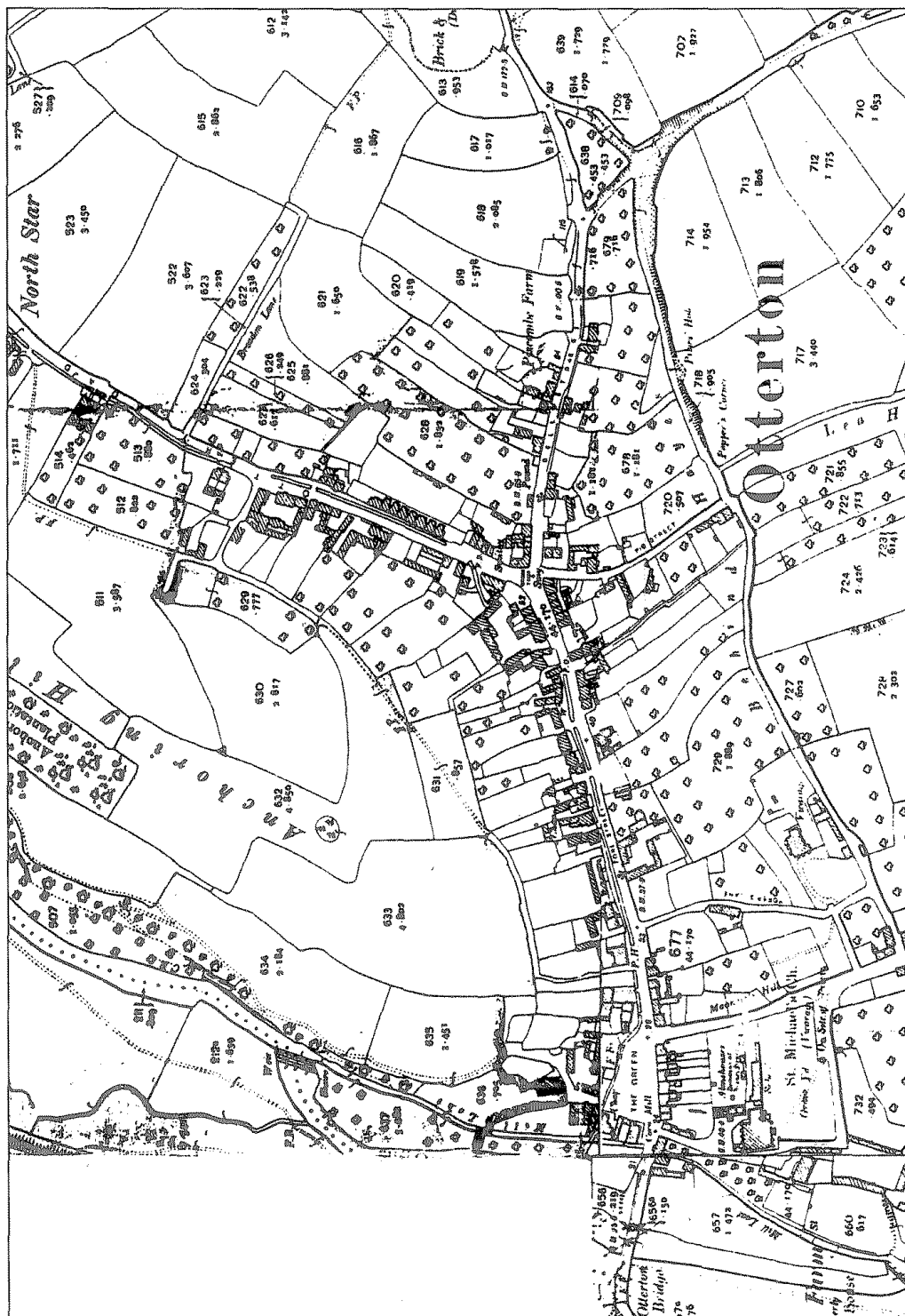
HISTORIC PHOTOGRAPHS



HISTORIC MAPS









1805 Devon County Survey: Scale: originally 3 inches to the mile (scale may be altered for the purpose of the report)

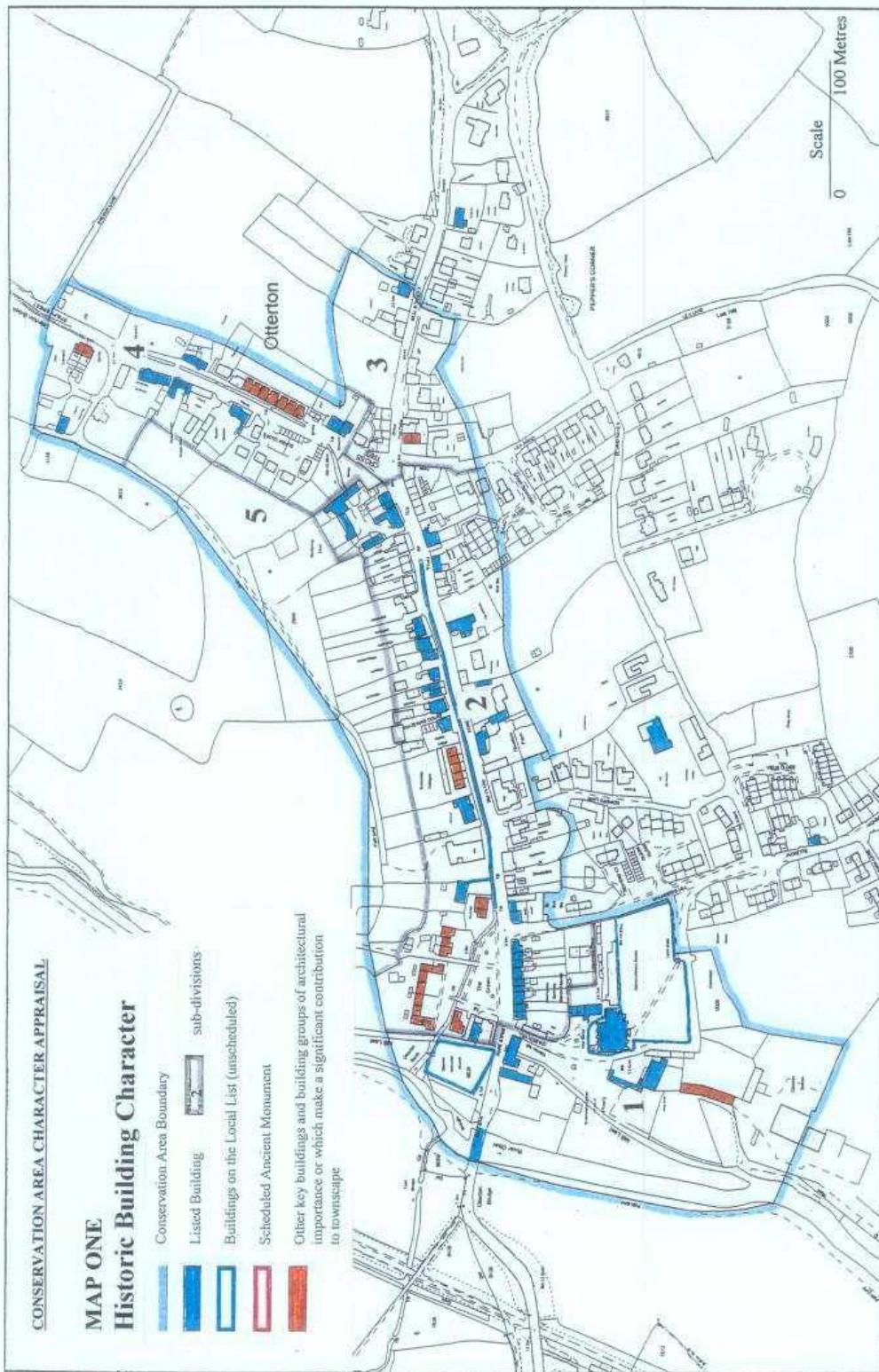


c.1905 Ordnance Survey Second Edition. Scale originally 25 inches to the mile (scale may be altered for the purpose of fitting the report)

CONSERVATION AREA CHARACTER APPRAISAL

MAP ONE
Historic Building Character

-  Conservation Area Boundary
-  Listed Building
-  sub-divisions
-  Buildings on the Local List (unscheduled)
-  Scheduled Ancient Monument
-  Other key buildings and building groups of architectural importance or which make a significant contribution to townscape

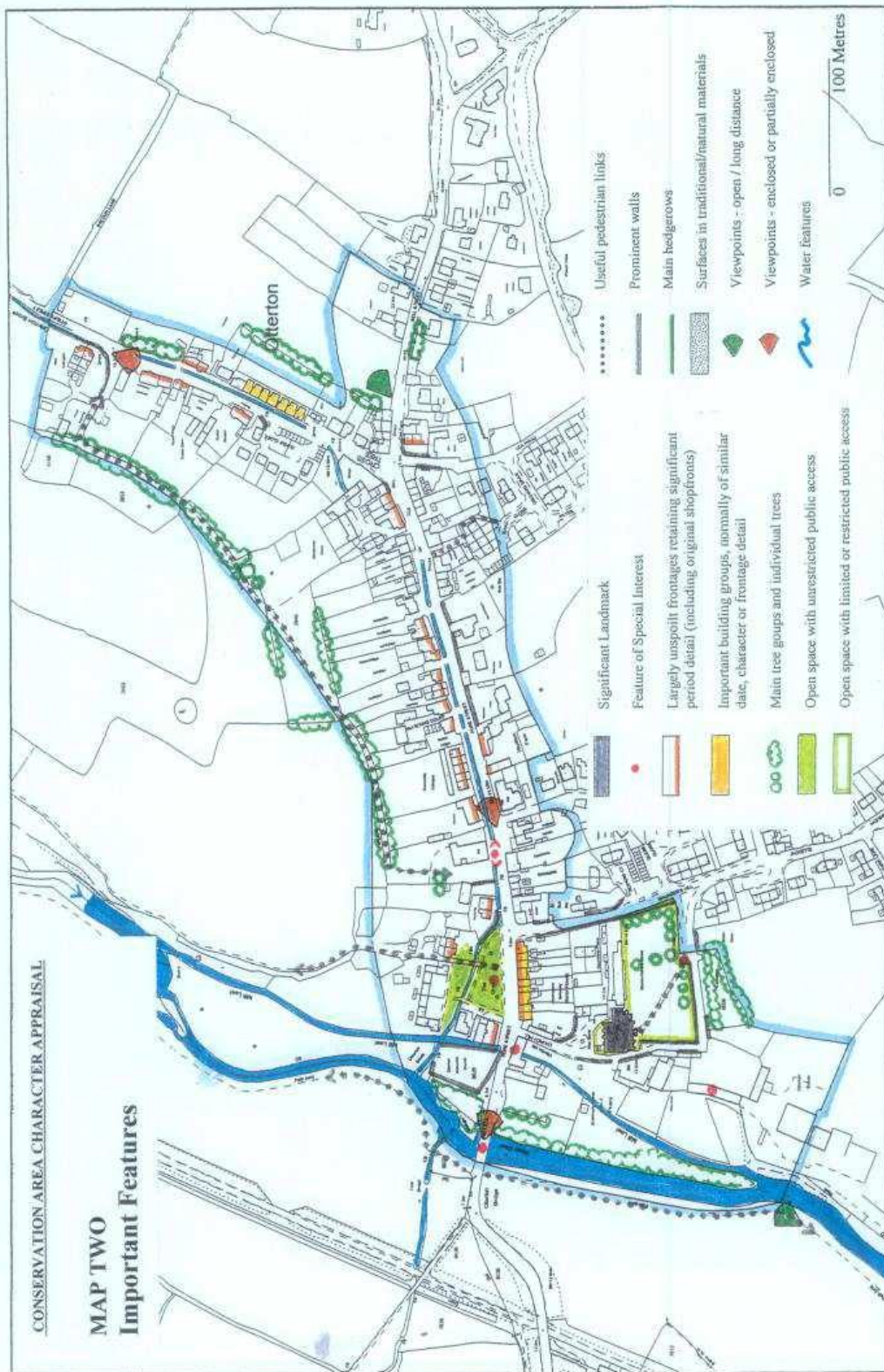


Otterton Conservation Area
East Devon District Council

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CONSERVATION AREA CHARACTER APPRAISAL

MAP TWO
Important Features



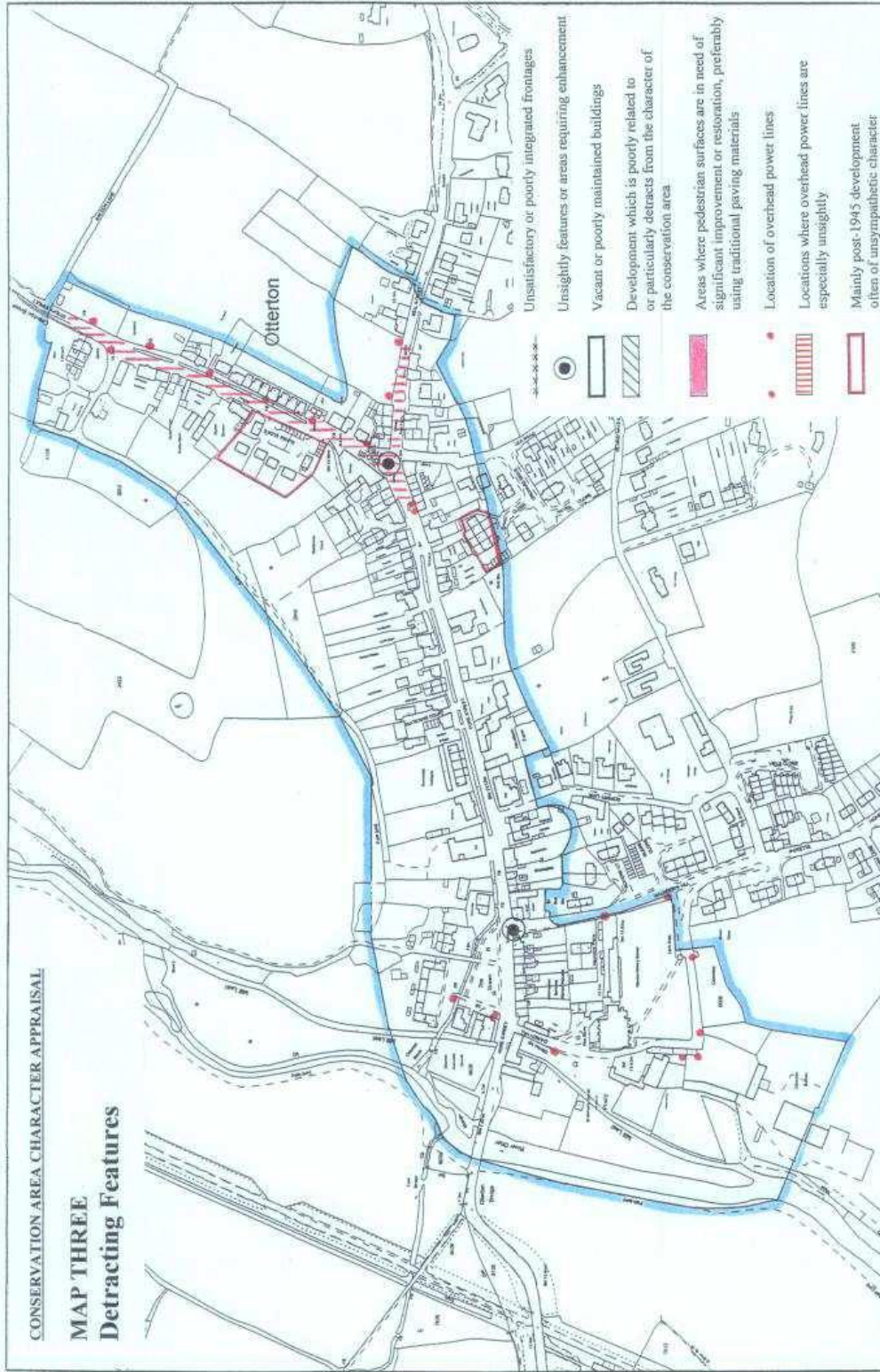
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CONSERVATION AREA CHARACTER APPRAISAL

MAP THREE
Detracting Features



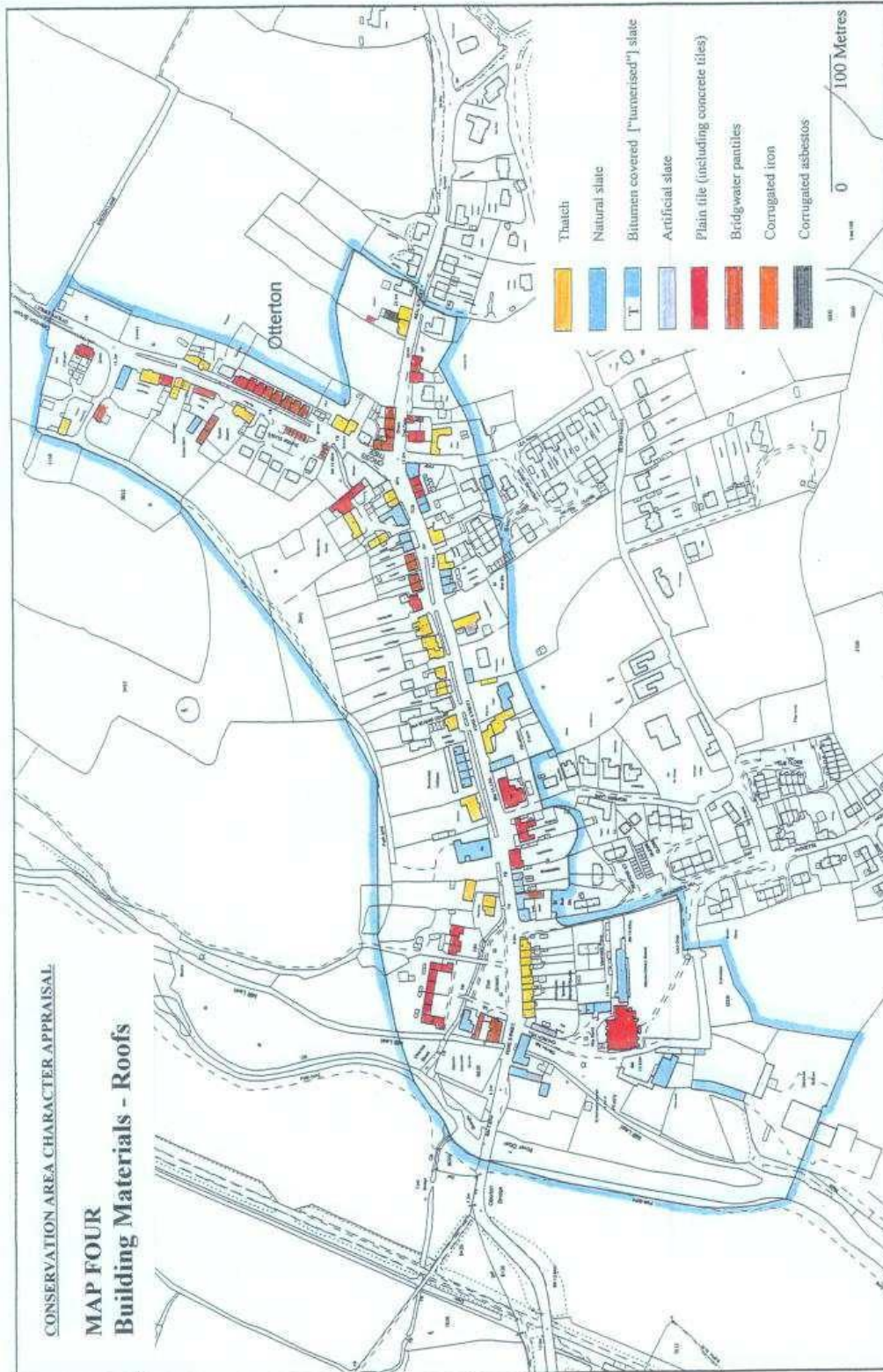
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CONSERVATION AREA CHARACTER APPRAISAL

MAP FOUR
Building Materials - Roofs

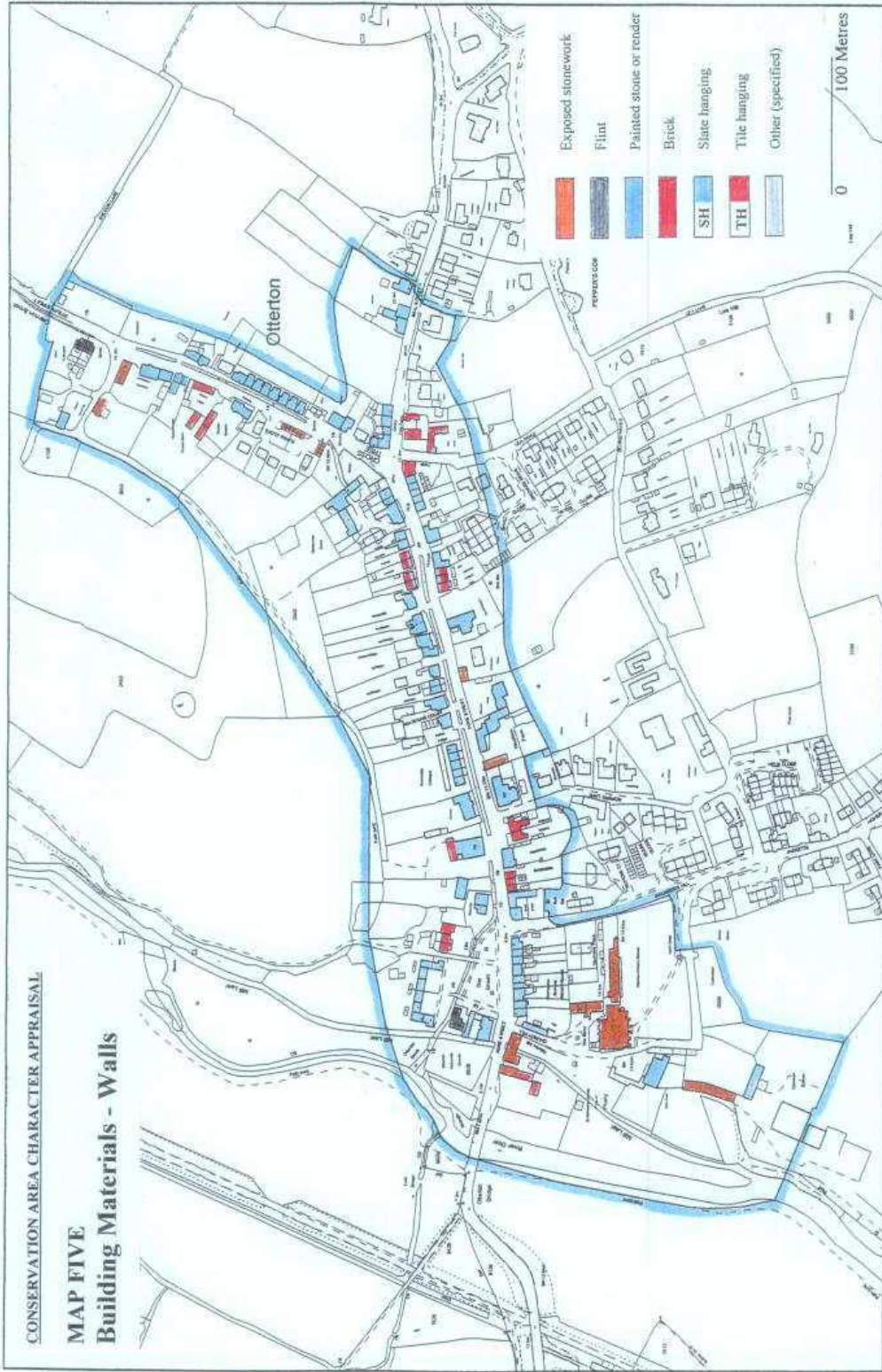


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CONSERVATION AREA CHARACTER APPRAISAL

MAP FIVE
Building Materials - Walls



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Otterton Interim Conservation Area Review

Purpose of the Review

There is a requirement under Section 71 of the Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 of all local authorities to review their conservation areas and publish proposals for their preservation and enhancement. Reviews must be carried out every five years as the character and appearance of a conservation area can change over even small periods of time. The purpose of this interim review is to identify the principal changes since the publication of the Conservation Area Appraisal and to outline potential changes to the conservation area boundary which will form part of a full consultation exercise when the draft Management Plan is produced.

Key recent changes in Otterton Conservation Area.

- Conversion of Rolle Barton, a former complex of Rolle Estate agricultural buildings into residential units. This range is identified in the appraisal as a key building group and while the result is over-domestic in terms of building alterations and landscaping the development is partially successful. The loss of the formerly cobbled areas of farmyard is unfortunate.



Rolle Barton, now converted to residential dwellings centred around a parking courtyard.

- Increase in road traffic and on-road parking in Fore Street. This is perhaps inevitable with the increase in car ownership and the decline of rural public transport.
- Increase in the installation of inappropriate replacement windows. These have appeared in several unlisted historic buildings throughout the conservation area. While such alterations are on the whole permitted development the impact of PVCu replacement windows are always detrimental to the character and appearance of the area.
- The Crosstree Service Station is no longer in operation although the 1970's building remains and is considered incoherent with the character of the street scene.



Potential review of conservation area boundary.

The existing conservation area boundary covers the entire historic core of the settlement. Development outside the boundary is on the whole modern and does not meet the criteria for inclusion within the conservation area. There are no undeveloped areas within the Built-up Area Boundary which would benefit from conservation area designation and therefore there appears to be no scope to extend the conservation area or to omit existing areas due to eroded character. This aspect of conservation area review will be fully considered during the consultation process.

Principle reasons for erosion or changes to conservation area character.

- The changes to the conservation area in Otterton are relatively minor but cumulative alterations to windows in particular can have a damaging impact. The consultation exercise will therefore seek a view on whether an Article 4 direction giving control over replacement windows would be supported.
- The most noticeable aspect of the main thoroughfare is the increasing amount of parked cars. There have been several approvals for conversion of farm buildings within the village over recent years and where parking provision is often required for new dwellings this rarely accounts for multiple car ownership and visitor parking; therefore an increase in on-road parking is inevitable. It is clear that parking in such an attractive and dense historic settlement needs to be managed in a more positive way with the encouragement of parking to the rear of buildings where planning applications can offer the appropriate controls.



Cars are parked virtually the entire length of Fore Street. The impact appears to be worsening.