

Sowton 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 Sowton Conservation Area.

- There have been very few changes in Sowton Conservation Area since the previous appraisal and this small village retains its modest rural character in a secluded location close to the M5 motorway and the edge of Exeter. The area still includes open countryside within its boundary which is integral to the immediate setting of the buildings, but there has been some unfortunate adhoc development in terms of stabling, sheds and other fairly ramshackle outbuildings.
- Venn's Farm includes a number of redundant farm buildings which comprise an important group adjacent to Sowton Lane. Whilst no agreement has been reached over their future longterm use this will be crucial to their continued maintenance and repair. Sowton Barton, at the opposite end of the village, is still a working farm and displays a mix of historic and modern farm buildings, some in need of repair.



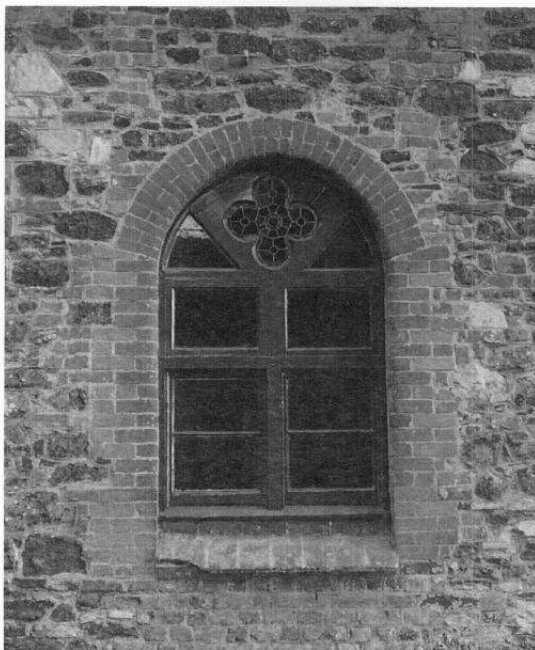
- Several sections of boundary wall are in poor or deteriorating condition, some in need of re-pointing using an appropriate traditional mortar to the stone type. Some brick walls also require repair again with appropriate re-pointing.
- There has been a considerable increase in the number of properties with PVCu replacement windows throughout the conservation area, including the insertion of inappropriate windows in both prominent key buildings and listed buildings. The latter will need to be followed up through Enforcement.

Potential review of conservation area boundary.

The existing conservation area boundary covers the entire historic area of the village, including the adjoining fields and paddocks, some of which were formerly orchards. The village does not benefit from a Built up Area Boundary and this has been upheld with no new development outside the existing settlement. The conservation area already covers a larger area than the individual properties and therefore there appears to be no reason 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.

- Sowton has undergone very little change within the past few years. There has been little new development within its boundary being limited to some small scale extensions to individual properties.
- Minor incremental changes can have a significant impact upon the conservation area where the character is very distinctive. Lack of maintenance of both brick and stone walls and indeed inappropriate repairs with cement mortar can have a damaging impact. Prominent walls include the boundary wall to St Michael's Church and the wall opposite Venn's Farm. There are still some prominent overhead power lines within the heart of the village.
- Whilst there is no statutory control over replacement windows in many unlisted buildings the pressure to replace traditional timber windows with PVCu alternatives remains. The removal of traditional windows is the single most apparent change in the conservation area in recent years. There is a greater awareness of the environmental impact of PVCu production and waste and whilst it is hoped that timber replacement windows are seen as the more sustainable option the marketing drives of the major PVCu window companies continue. It might be that that a proposal to serve an Article 4 Direction to control replacement windows would form part of a future public consultation exercise.



SOWTON

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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SOWTON



Approach to the village from the northwest showing its well concealed setting. This will be closed to through traffic when the A30 improvements are completed.

1 HISTORIC AND TOPOGRAPHIC BACKGROUND

1.1 In spite of being uncomfortably close to the M5 motorway and the edge of Exeter, this small village retains a modest rural atmosphere in a secluded location. The Shell Guide to Devon¹ describes Sowton as "workaday and unself-conscious".

1.2 The parish was selected as the basis for a pioneering study of Devon's local building traditions by Alcock in 1962, and later by Laithwaite.

2 SETTING OF THE CONSERVATION AREA

2.1 The conservation area includes the entire village and adjoining home fields and paddocks, some of which were formerly orchards (see 1905 O.S.Map) The former Mill Leat running off the River Clyst for almost a mile in length forms much of the eastern boundary.

2.2 The special character of Sowton was acknowledged when the village was designated a conservation area by East Devon District Council in June 1976.

2.3 Within the conservation area are some 25 individually listed buildings giving 15 separate list entries. Their location is shown on Map 1.

3 BUILT ENVIRONMENT

3.1 Sowton, in spite of its proximity to Exeter retains its atmosphere as a working agricultural village, as much as a commuter settlement. The secluded location of the village is emphasised by its location in extensive surrounding countryside with long distance views to the south and east.

3.2 For a small village there are a significant number of large houses, now mostly sub-divided. There are several good examples of relatively early vernacular buildings, mainly in the northern half of the conservation area.

3.3 The extent of post 1945 infill is significant but has not yet overwhelmed the character of the conservation area.

3.4 After the completion of the new A30 improvements, the only vehicular access to the village will be from the north east along Sowton Lane East. Sowton will become the only inland village community in Devon, and possibly England, served by a cul-de-sac three quarters of a mile in length.

¹Shell Guide to Devon by Anne Jellicoe & Roger Mayne published Faber & Faber 1975



Cottages at the north end of the village form an isolated but attractive group with typical slate/brick or thatch/stone combinations.

4 LANDSCAPE AND TREES

4.1 The extent of tree cover within the village, especially near the centre, is considerable, and best appreciated on the approach into the village from the northwest. Here a scattering of buildings is glimpsed through a tunnel of trees, and elsewhere near the T-junction trees either dominate or partially obscure buildings.

4.2 The remains of an avenue of trees, now somewhat fragmented, extends southeast from Court Lodge, well beyond the conservation area boundary and forms the approach to Bishops Court.

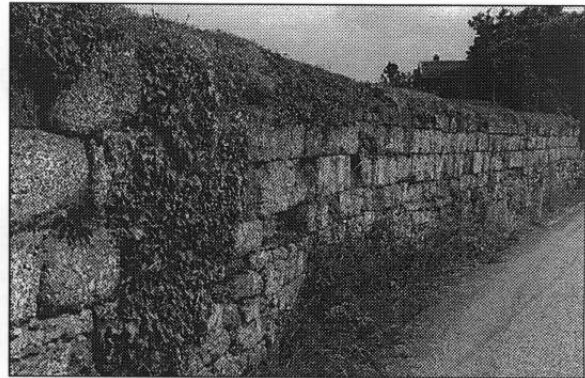
4.3 Elsewhere in the village trees are much more scattered, mainly in small rows or groups as deciduous hedgerow species.

5 HARD SURFACES

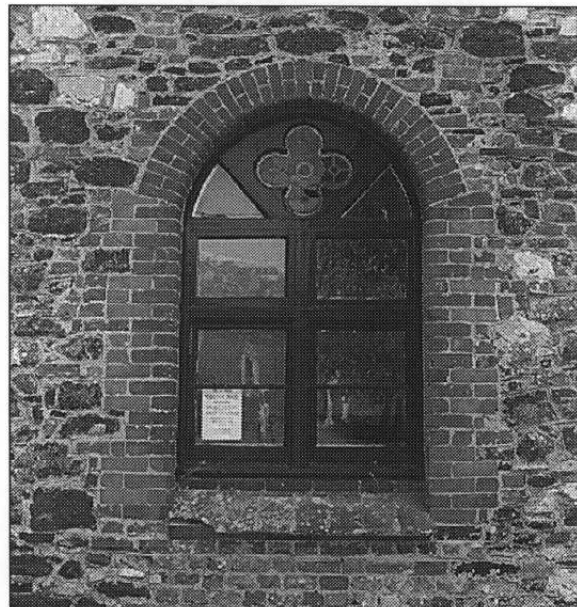
5.1 No preserved natural stone paving/surfacing was noted during the course of the survey. The combination of grass verges and stone walls partially covered in vegetation are characteristic features. There was formerly a hard surfaced footway running alongside the southeast wall of the Old Rectory. This is currently overgrown with nettles and not an attractive feature. Its improvement could form part of a programme of future enhancement.

6 BUILDING MATERIALS AND ORNAMENT

6.1 As with most East Devon villages there is a rich mixture of building materials, with red brick probably most widespread. Of natural materials, plastered cob alternates with the local red sandstone, which can be seen both in the soft gritty red-brown form, and a harder gritty purple-brown. Brick dressings have also sometimes been added. Roofs are mainly of Welsh slate, although thatch, plain tile and Bridgwater tiles also occur; the last usually found on barns and outbuildings. There is a good example of polychromatic brickwork at December Lodge.



Stone walls, mainly of sandstone conglomerates from local quarries (e.g. Heavitree) are found in several locations. Condition is varied but some sections are in definite need of low key maintenance/repair using the right kind of replacement stone and minimal amounts of soft mortar, preferably using lime.



An elevation of the old school showing a typical combination of brickwork and local stone. The windows apparently are set in a partially blocked entrance; probably the result of converting an original barn to a school.

6.2 The Salcombe Regis stone slabs on the Lych Gate and variegated fishscale slates on the church roof are important features and are a tangible indication of the time (19th century) when the infrastructure supplying natural materials and the craftsmanship available in applying their use were much more highly developed.

7 STREET FURNITURE AND SPECIAL FEATURES

7.1 Sowton retains a K6 red phone kiosk prominently located, which forms an important feature of the street scene in this part of the village.



A typical large late 18th century house, now subdivided. The K6 telephone kiosk is prominent. Although overhead power lines are not unduly evident in summer owing to the profusion of foliage, their presence means that trees have to be drastically pruned periodically.

8 SYNOPSIS OF LISTED AND OTHER IMPORTANT BUILDINGS

8.1 **St. Michael's Church** was completely rebuilt in 1844-45 at the expense of John Garratt, a High Church patron, and owner of Bishop's Court. The architect was John Hayward, then in the forefront of the ecclesiastical revival. It is a rare, complete survival of an early Victorian Tractarian village church with original fittings. Of red sandstone with Bath stone dressings, it has a fine west tower; late 14th century in style with large corner pinnacles. There are wagon roofs to the nave and aisle, a complete set of 19th century stained glass, and fine carvings on the capitals. The **Lychgate** is a memorial to Sarah Garratt (died 1852). There are other memorials to the Garratt family, mostly mid 19th century.

8.2 **The Old Rectory** has a brick front of five bays, and is one room deep. A rain water head is dated 1722.

Important Buildings outside the Conservation Area

8.3 **Bishop's Court** (0.5 miles south-east) was formerly a palace of the Bishops of Exeter. Bishop Bronescombe, one of the builders of Exeter Cathedral, bought the estate and had erected a palace and chapel here before 1276. Some medieval work remains, including a chapel (c.1270) and 15th century barns and stables, but the house itself was much altered c.1863 to an eccle-



Sowton Barton has an early 20th century farmhouse. The 1889 Ordnance Survey 1:2500 plan indicates that this has replaced an earlier one. The farmworkers cottages to the south appear to have been part of a former dairy.

siastical Gothic by William White, an intrepid restorer of churches and great-nephew of the Rev. Gilbert White, naturalist, of Selborne.

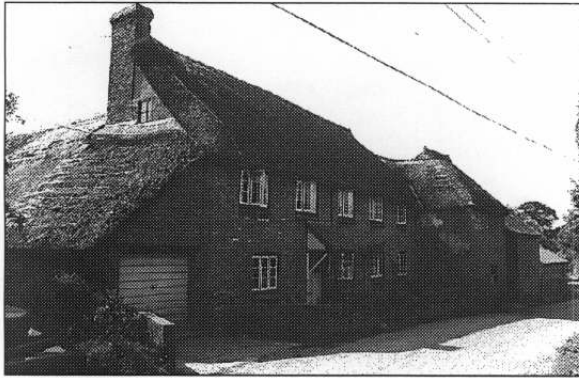
Dymonds Farm (0.5 miles east) is late 17th century having a four room plan without cross-passage. There are two good rooms at the west end and kitchen and service room to the east. Windows are ovolo moulded; there is plasterwork to the hall and outside above the main door; the latter dated 1676 and initialled "R.B" - probably Richard Bevis, son of the then owner of Bishop's Court.

Ivington Farm was the Home Farm of Bishop's Court and built by the Garratts in 1846. It is three bay, of brick with a hipped roof, and a central open prediment on one side of a planned yard, which is well preserved. South-west of the house is a tall bank barn with two openings. The ground floor has three elliptical arches. In the centre of the group is a detached brick granary with circular upper windows.

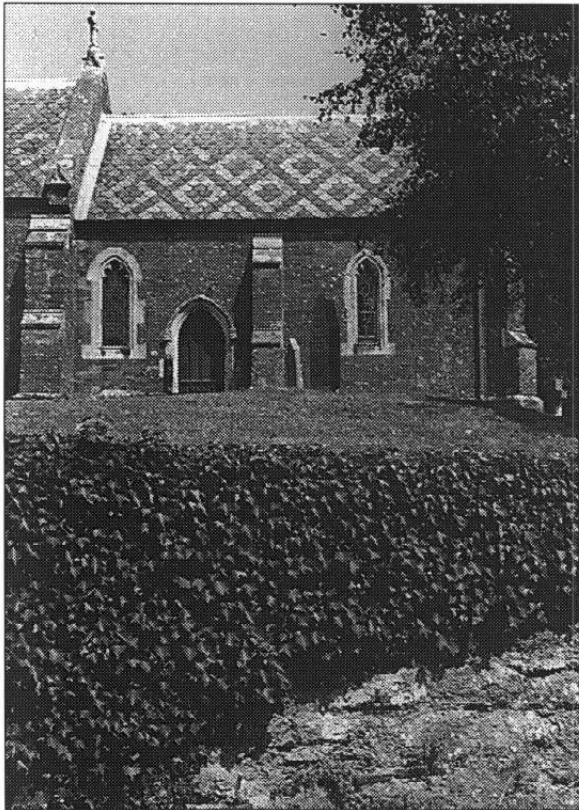
9 FEATURES OF SPECIAL IMPORTANCE

9.1 The main elements of the conservation area considered to be most worthy of retention are as follows:

- an attractive sense of rural seclusion and spaciousness with important gaps between buildings, although very close to the edge of the built-up area of Exeter
- an impressive landscape setting with several good rows of trees, including a tunnel effect on approach to the village, and an avenue on the approach towards Bishop's Court indicating conscious screening or formal landscaping
- cottages and farmhouses, some thatched, that are well-cared for but not over-restored thus maintaining a timeless feel. Mainly plain 3 or 4 light casement windows predominate; little unsuitable replacement has occurred.
- a wide mixture of building materials, varying from local sandstone to patterned "fishscale" slate (probably late 19th century) on the church roof
- a K6 red telephone kiosk



Venn Farm; a good example of a vernacular building where farmhouse and farm buildings form a virtual entity.



Detail of the parish church; much restored and added to in the mid 19th century. The fishscale slates appear to be two contrasting Cornish types. Various forms of 19th century ornament using natural materials are becoming increasingly cherished. The infrastructure of building stone quarries which produced such a rich variety of materials and textures has become much reduced, making suitable replacement when required, more difficult.

10 LOSS OF CHARACTER AND INTRUSION

The main elements in the conservation area that are leading to loss of character or intrusion are as follows:

- a considerable amount of post 1945 housing infill which whilst not unduly obtrusive could easily become so if more were allowed
- prominent overhead power lines
- several sections of boundary wall in a poor or deteriorating condition, some in need of repointing using soft mortar appropriate to the stone type. Some brick walls also need patching and repointing
- although slight at present some loss of original fenestration and doors is starting to occur

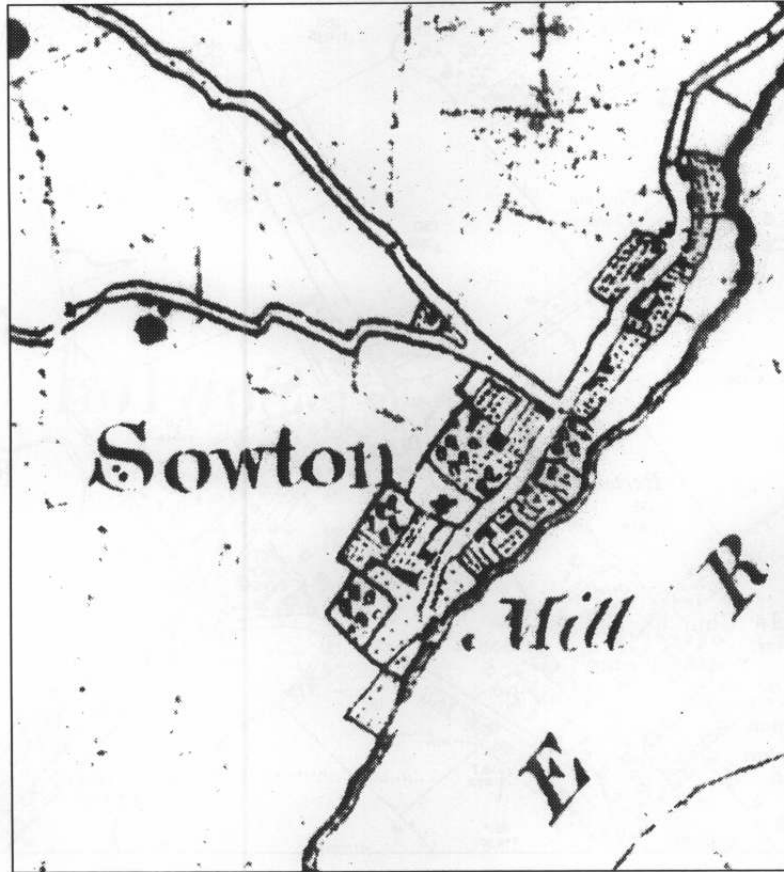
11 SUMMARY

11.1 Sowton is a small secluded village with several good examples of vernacular building within the village and complemented by others in the parish which have been considered worthy of research. The conservation area in this instance includes open countryside which is integral to the immediate setting of buildings.

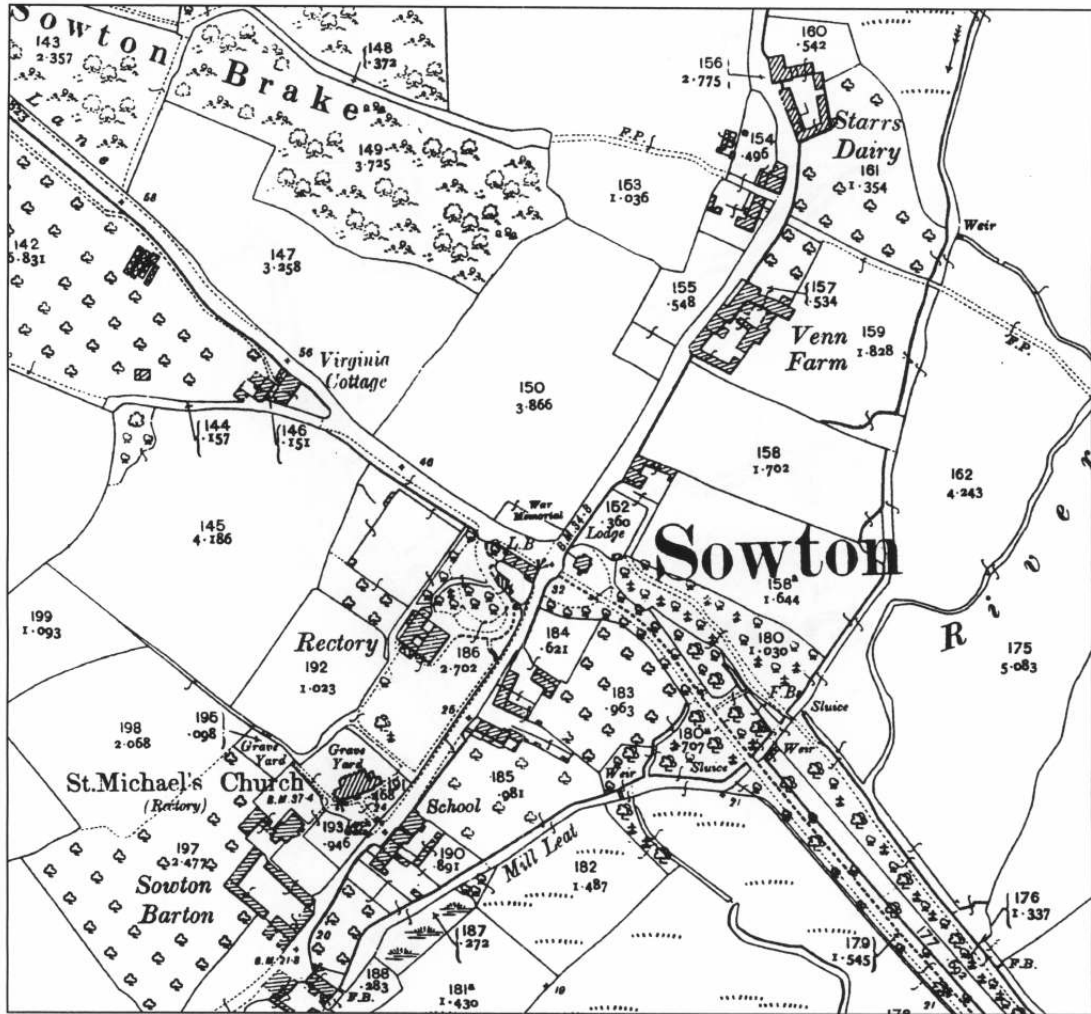
11.2 Within the context of current planning policies, and having regard to post 1945 building that has already occurred, it would seem unlikely that further infilling can be easily justified either within or outside the present conservation area boundary. Such development would all too readily have an adverse affect on the existing character of the conservation area and its setting which is already finely balanced.

11.3 Some practical conservation measures (e.g. repair of walls, and encouraging owners to retain historic features of buildings) is likely to become necessary to avoid any further loss of character. Securing the removal of overhead power lines, together with tidying and recovery of some neglected small areas (see 5.1), would be further steps towards enhancement.

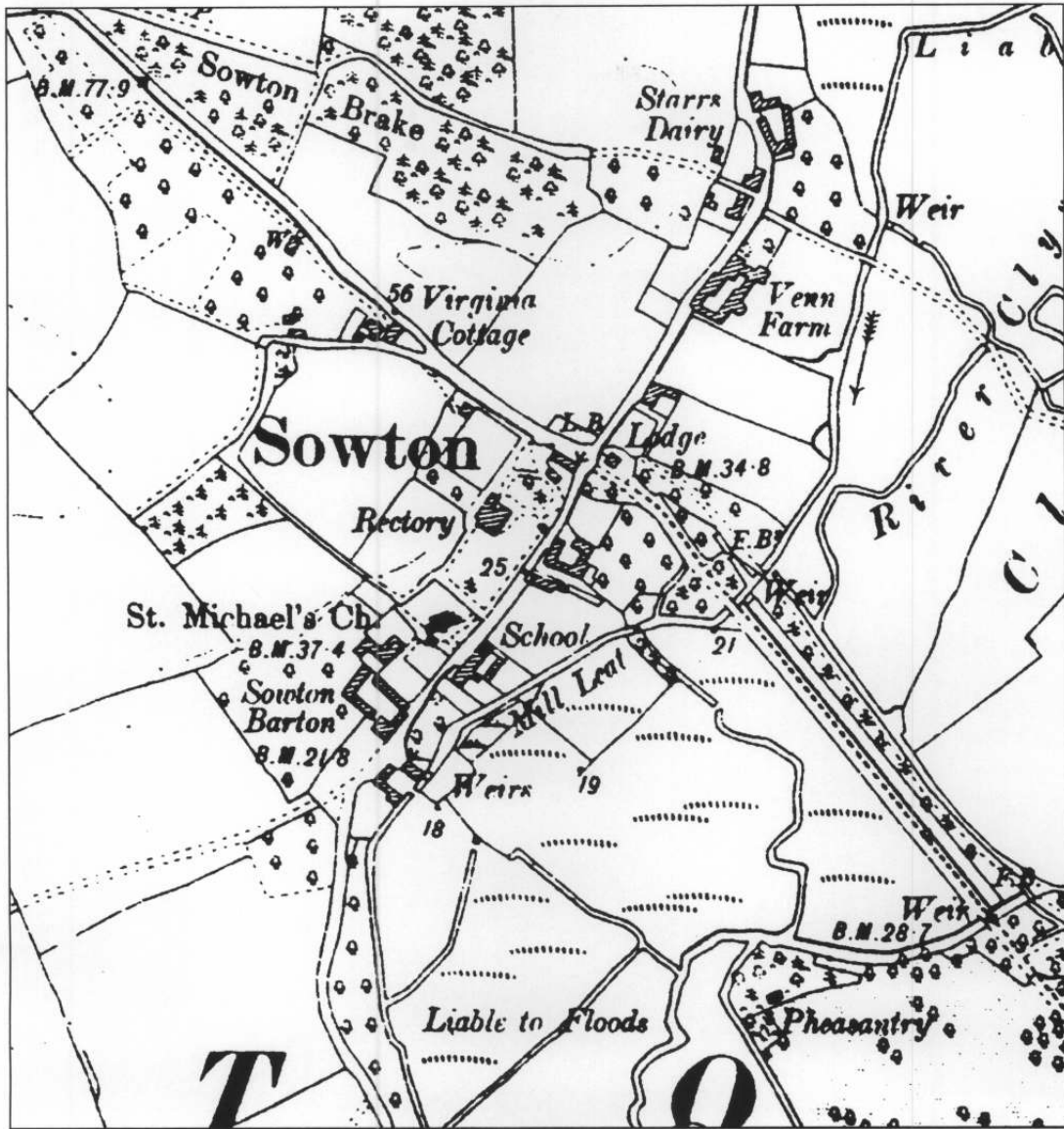
HISTORIC MAPS



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



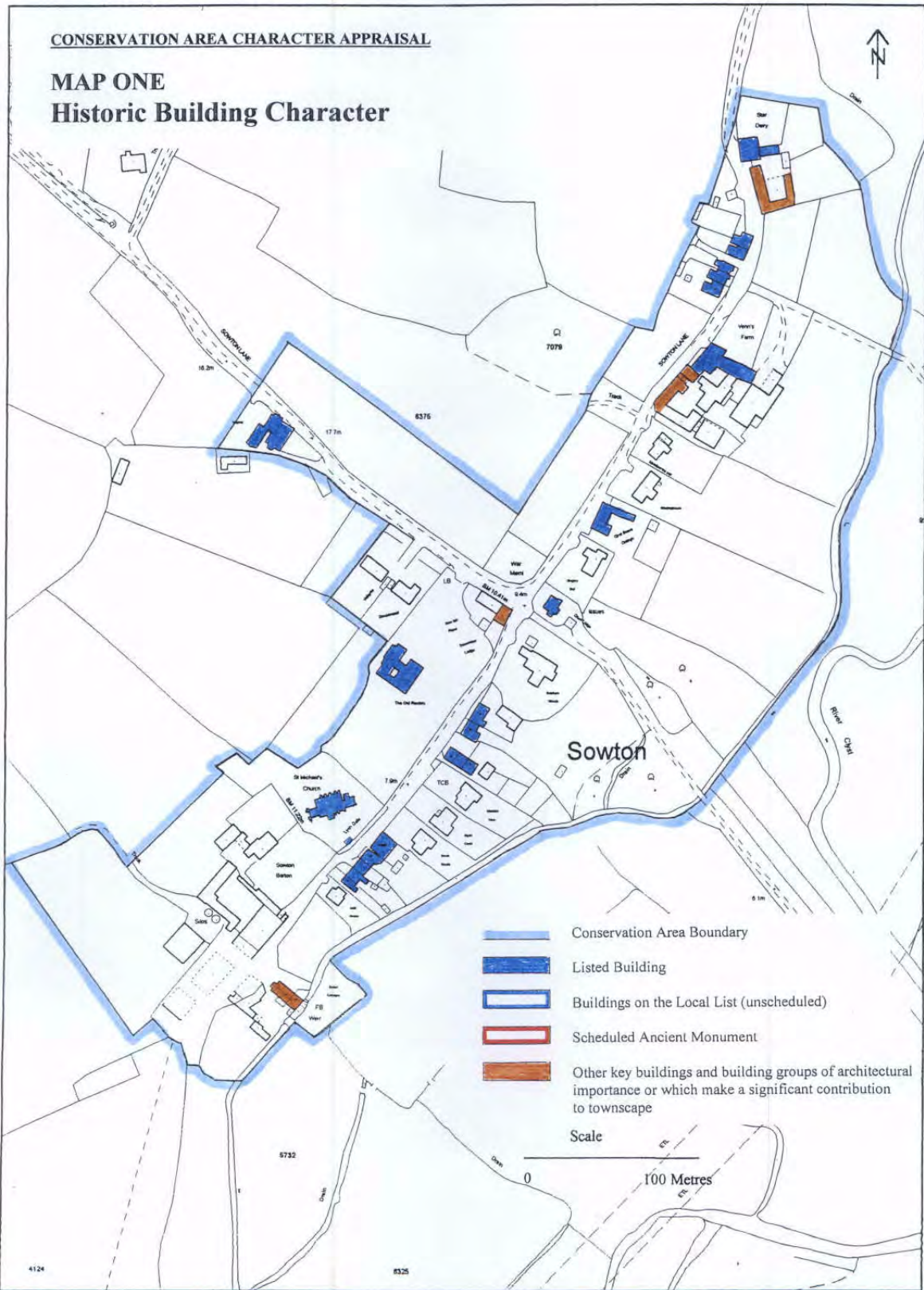
c.1905 Ordnance Survey Second Edition. Scale originally 25 inches to the mile (scale may be altered for the purpose of fitting the report)



*Early 20th Century Ordnance Survey Second Edition or Provisional Edition.
 Scale originally 6 inches to the mile (scale may be altered for the purpose of fitting the report)*

CONSERVATION AREA CHARACTER APPRAISAL

MAP ONE
Historic Building Character



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8325

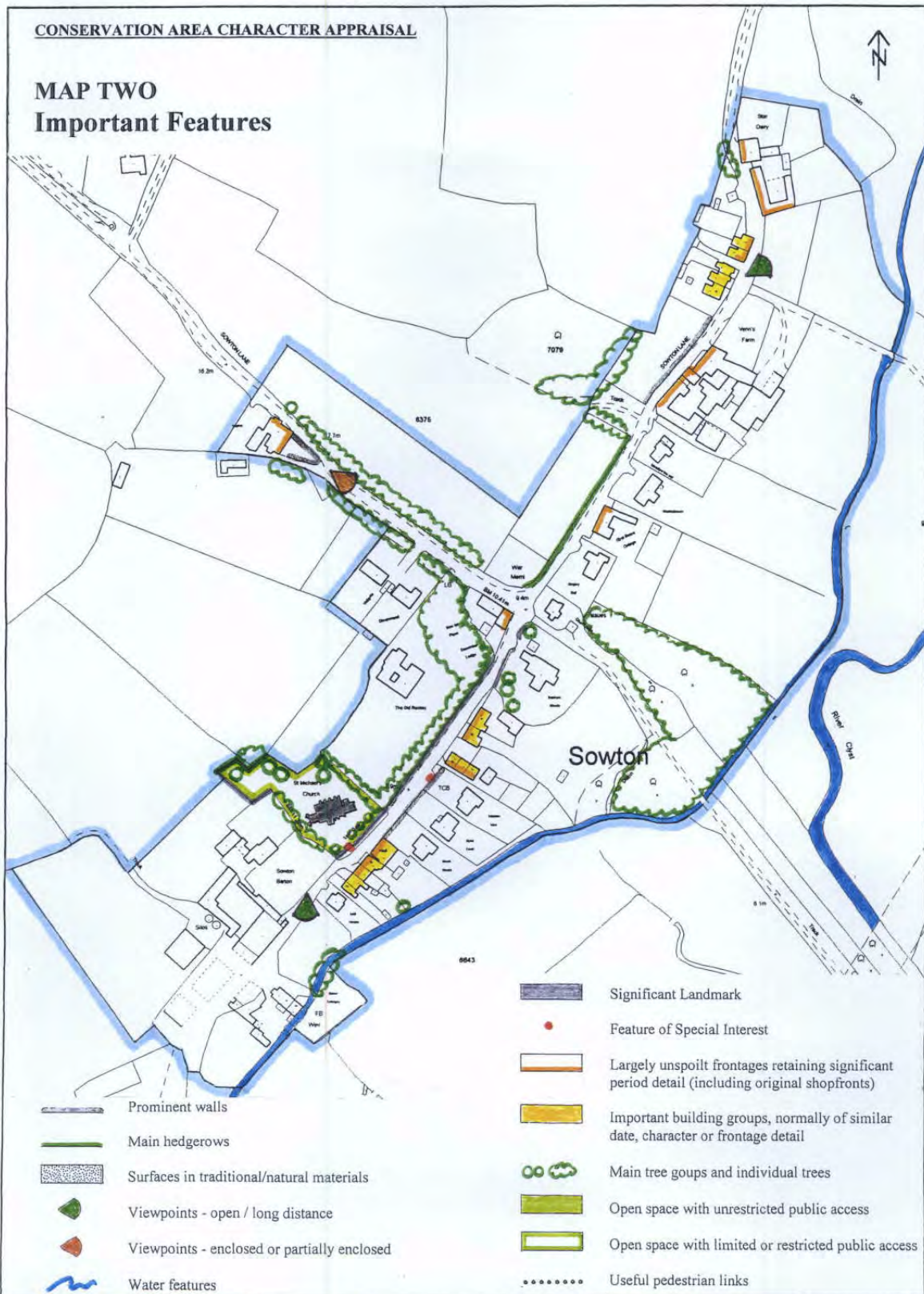


Sowton Conservation Area
East Devon District Council

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CONSERVATION AREA CHARACTER APPRAISAL

MAP TWO
Important Features



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