Bourn
Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan

Draft for Consultation

September 2025

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1. Introduction

1.1 Conservation Areas are defined as ‘areas of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance’.

1.2 This document sets out the special architectural and historic interest of Bourn Conservation Area and aims to fulfil the District Council’s duty to ‘draw up and publish proposals for the preservation and enhancement’ of its conservation areas as required by the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.

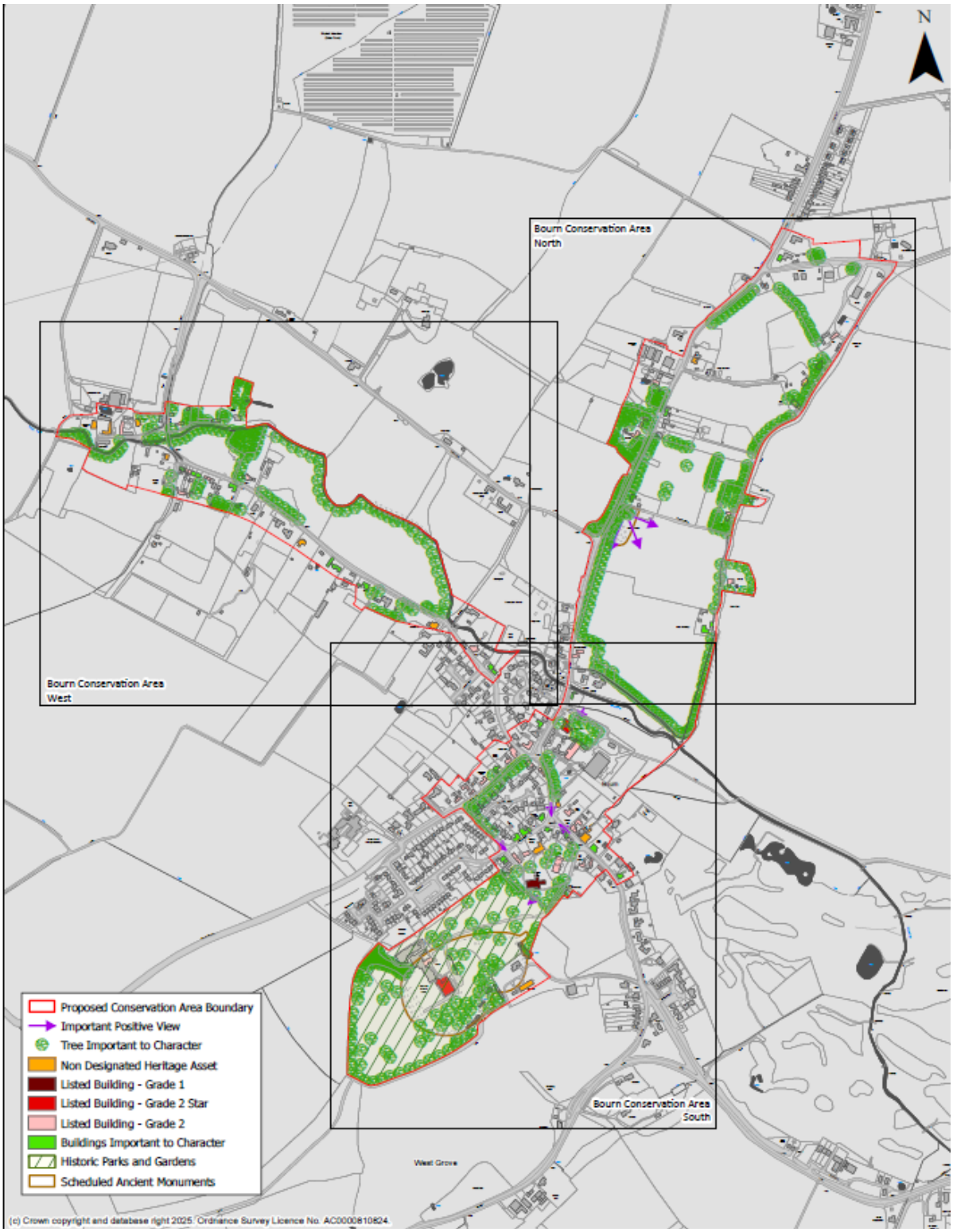
1.3 This document covers all the aspects set out by Historic England on conservation area appraisals and management plans, including an analysis of the special character of the conservation area and recommended actions for the management of the area in order to preserve and enhance its character.

1.4 Bourn Conservation Area was designated on 4th December 1974 and extended on 8th May 1997. The area does not have an appraisal or management plan.

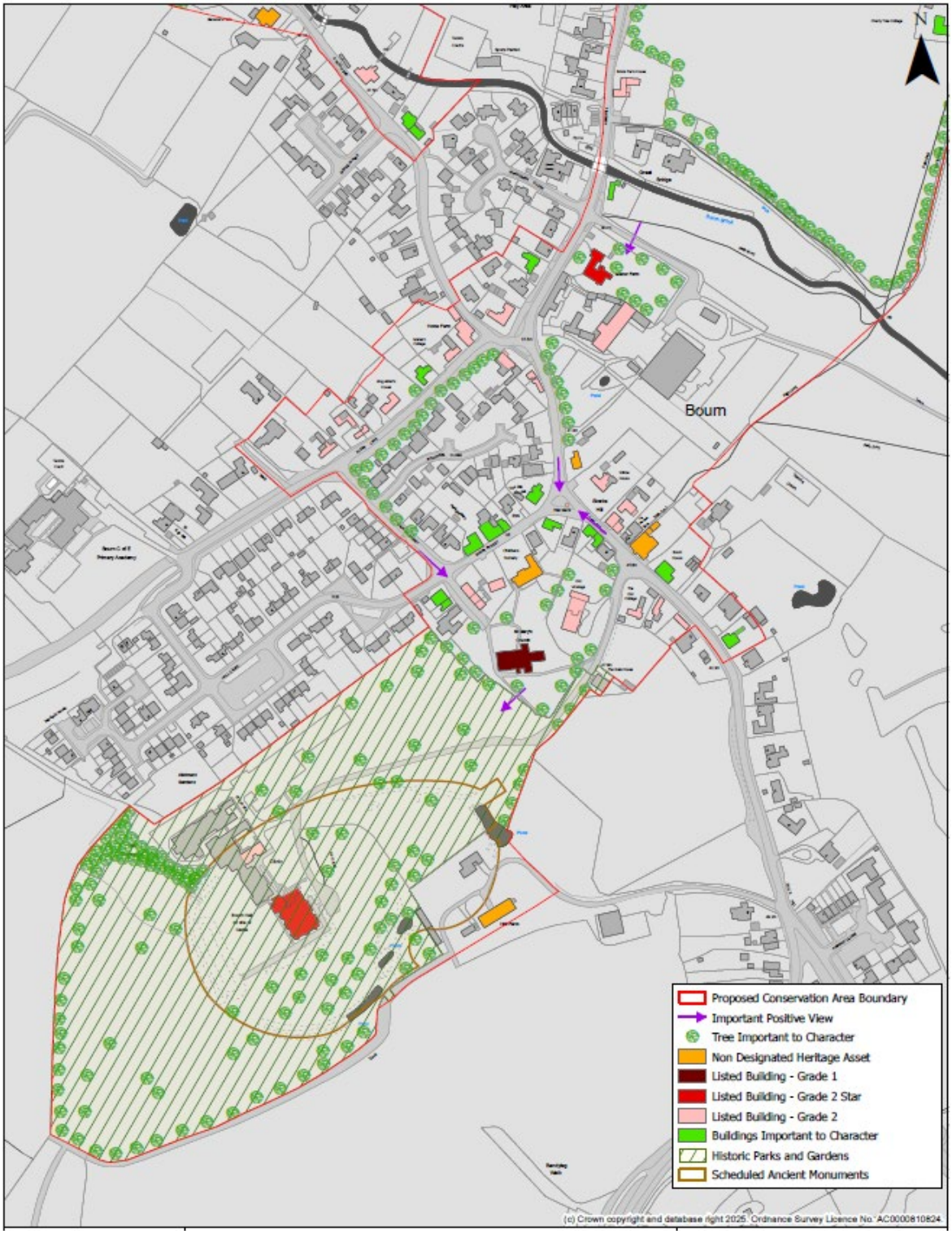
2. Statement of Community Involvement

The Statement of Community Involvement section will be completed after any comments from the community have been considered and a final version of this draft appraisal is put forward for adoption.

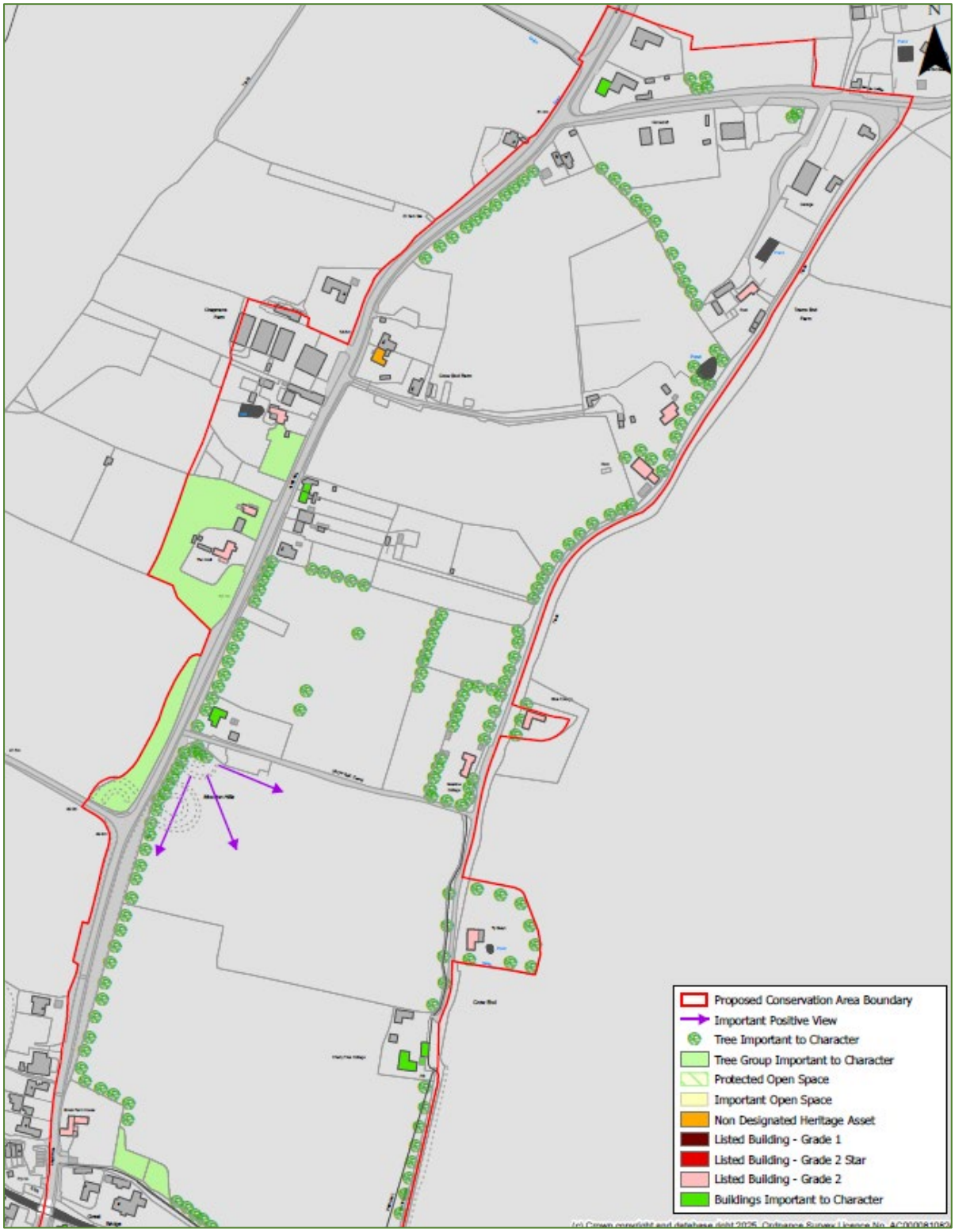
Below: Bourn Conservation Area map – key



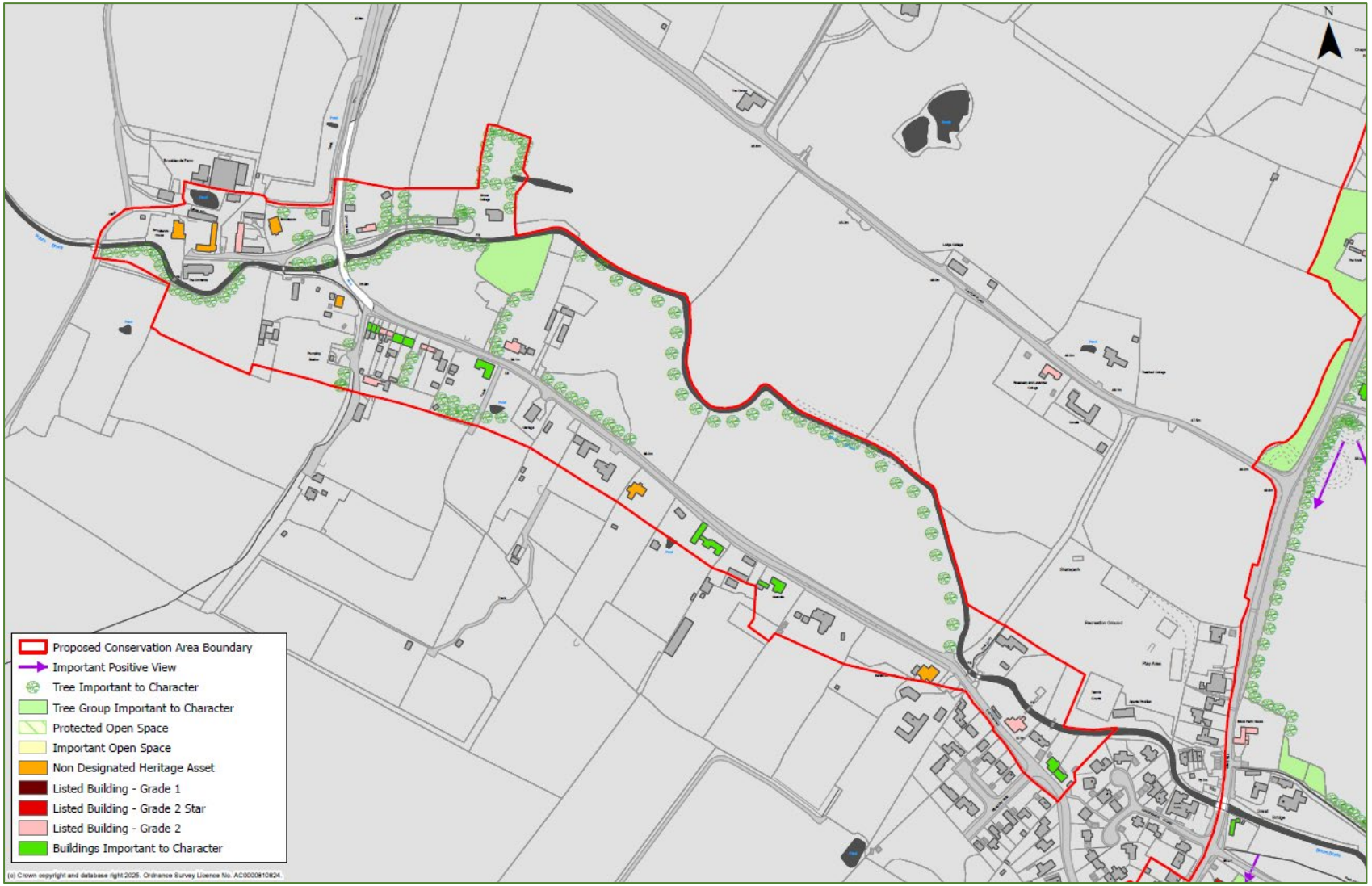
Below: Bourn Conservation Area map – southern section



Below: Bourn Conservation Area northern section



Below: Bourn Conservation Area Caxton End section



3. History and development

3.1 Location and setting

3.1.1 Bourn is situated some 8 miles south-west of Cambridge, close to the junctions of Ermine Street and the Cambridge to St Neots Road. The settlement lies on the slopes of the valley beside the Bourn brook. The name *Brunnr* is Old Norse for spring or stream in allusion to the Bourn Brook or perhaps to a mineral spring, no longer traceable on the ground, located some 500 yds. N. of the church.

3.1.2 Bourn is characterised by notable landscape elements like the stream, the sloping terrain, expansive meadows and historic woodlands. The Conservation Area covers the village settlement, concentrated along High Street, Caxton End, Crow End and Riddy Lane; the historic landscaped grounds around Bourn Hall; and the open fields along Bourn Brook, to the north of Manor Farm and to the west along Caxton End.

Above: 1808 map (reproduced from British Library online)

3.2 Historic development

3.2.2 The settlement of Bourn is situated on the slopes of the valley along Bourn Brook, spreading along the lanes to the north and south. The historically significant north-south route of Ermine Street, now Old North Road, lies immediately to the west. Established by the Romans, the road was a key route between important medieval settlements and country estates such as Wimpole Hall to the south.

3.2.3 The conservation area is characterized by the integration between the built heritage and the historic landscape, represented in the Bourn Brook valley but also by the man-made pleasure grounds around Bourn Hall. The interrelationship between the landscape and the village is an important feature and is reflected in some significant open views from the village to the undulating, open surrounding agricultural landscape. The main architectural and historic part of the village settlement is concentrated to the village core and Bourn Hall.

3.2.4 Bourn was especially thriving during the Norman conquest and became the headquarters of the barony of Picot of Cambridge, sheriff of the county of Cambridgeshire. The remains of his castle, a ringwork and the bailey castle, both scheduled monuments of national interest, are to the southwest of the church.

3.2.5 Medieval activity in the village is most prominently demonstrated today by Manor Farmhouse which has 13th century origins as an aisled hall. The property was given by Payne Peverell to Barnwell Abbey and following the Dissolution it passed to the ownership of Christ's College in 1552. Today the substantial house stands with its former farm buildings which include the impressive late-medieval tithe barn

3.2.6 From the 13th century, the area experienced decline. During the post-medieval times and the 17th century there was a modest revival of activity as a result of increased traffic between Cambridge and Caxton.

3.2.7 At Bourn Hall are remains of the formal 17th century gardens, which together with the 17th Century Bourn Windmill (outside the CA), the oldest post mill of its kind in the country, and Moulton Hills tumuli are scheduled monuments of national interest.

3.2.8 Bourn Hall is today found on the site of the former Bourn Castle. Its main elements are the manor house, stables and the 17th century and a landscape laid out in 1817-1819 by the celebrated landscape designer Humphrey Repton (1752-1818), who strongly influenced the 19th Century garden design concept in England.

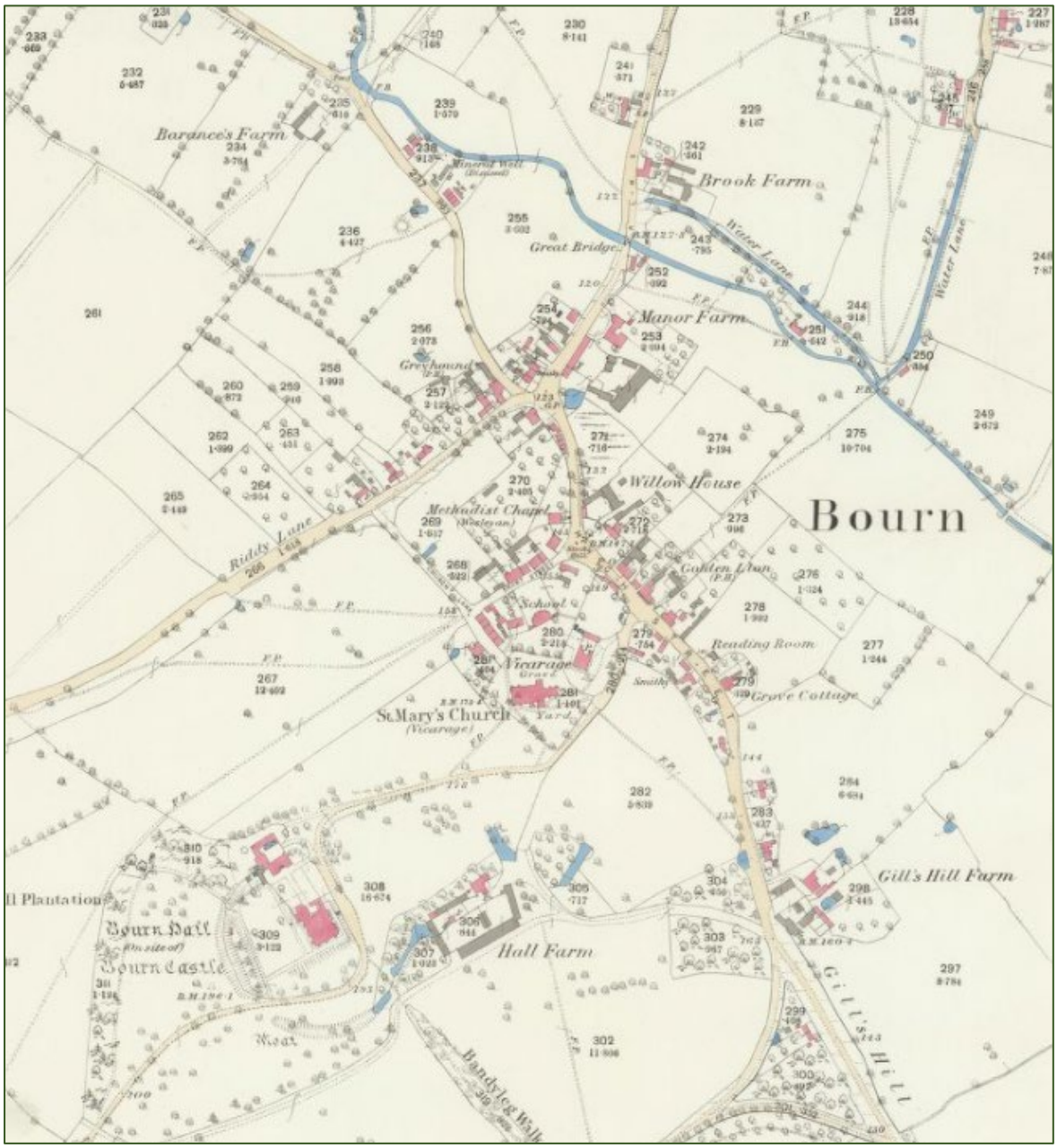
Above: Church and former rectory

3.2.9 Bourn is one of Cambridgeshire's larger parishes. The extent, the location and the relatively large and beautiful church indicate the status of a 'mother parish'.

3.2.10 The landscape around Bourn can be described as a western clay plateau, bisected by the Bourn Brook valley, where the Bourn Brook runs at the bottom. The waterway enabled people to conquer the plain, which was covered by glacial deposits and a thick forest cover. Archaeological evidence shows that the area was inhabited as early as the Roman period, and later by Saxon settlers. In contrast to other parts of South Cambridgeshire, the landscape around Bourn was altered by human intervention as early as in the 11th Century.

3.2.11 The open fields and commons were enclosed in 1809 and 1820. In the nineteenth century most of the village was located on rising ground south of the brook, along the High Street, close to the Church and Bourn Hall. Development later took place north-west of the High Street to Caxton End. The village has grown since the mid-20th century, with new residential development tending to be sited between the four main roads leading out from the centre to provide a fairly compact village structure. An exception to this prevailing character is the ribbon development southwards on Gill's Hill.

3.2.12 Residential development in the 20th and 21st centuries has expanded the village in areas including Hall Close, Kingfisher Close and Meadow Rise, although the designation of the conservation area in 1974 preserving the historic centre. The later extension added further protection from the mid 1990s. Development at Bourn Hall in the 1980s and 90s followed its pioneering work as a fertility clinic from 1980, and included substantial extensions towards the former stable block.



Above: Ordnance Survey Six-inch Series 1886
(Reproduced from the National Library of Scotland)

4. Character

4.1 Summary description

4.1.1 Bourn's historical importance is demonstrated by the age and variety of its historic buildings, with landmarks and focal points at the castle, church and Manor Farm, but also in the preserved cottages and farmhouses spreading out to the north and south.

4.1.2 The conservation area's varied topography and rural landscape setting contribute strongly to its significance, helping to preserve its village character and identity despite the proximity of Cambourne. It retains a pre-industrial residential character, yet with many layers of townscape of the Victorian and later periods.

4.2 Key characteristics

- The rural setting of the Bourn valley, the Bourn Brook and the undulating agricultural landscape which provides impressive views of the village and its setting.
- the historic street pattern of four curved meeting roads, deep cut and surrounded by lush vegetation.
- Streets and views with an intimate and enclosed character near the centre of the village, contrasting with elevated broad landscape views towards the edges
- the strong historic and visual connection between the village, farm buildings and the surrounding landscape.
- the character of the built heritage, with notable groups of 16th and 17th Century farmhouses and small-scale vernacular cottages alongside grand landmark buildings such as the Hall and church.
- the use of traditional local building materials and techniques.
- the pronounced greenness of the conservation area arising from historic native hedgerows and mature trees at field boundaries and in the churchyard, Bourn Hall and private gardens.
- Bourn Hall including the remains of the ringwork, the bailey and the 17th Century formal garden

Above: thatched and rendered cottages

Above: Manor Farm and Great Barn

Above: 19th-century brick houses

4.3 Architectural characteristics

Scale and form - Most buildings are modestly scaled and of 1.5 or 2 storeys tall with traditional dormers to some. Outbuildings, garages and occasional cottages or bungalows of 1 storey.

Walls - Most houses are Cambridgeshire gault brick or render in pale, neutral shades. Horizontal timber cladding to outbuildings and barns. Good but atypical examples of red brick or exposed timber framing. Flint to the church.

Roofs - Traditional natural materials, predominantly clay tiles or grey Welsh slate. Numerous historic cottages in long straw thatch. Gabled or hipped roofs with brick chimneys. Traditional dormers with pitched tile roofs in some locations.

Windows - Timber sash windows with small Georgian or larger Victorian panes. Side-hung casements. The majority of windows are in timber, painted white.

Boundary treatments - Traditional boundaries include clipped hedges, post and rail fences to rural locations, low brick walls, some picket fences, iron estate railings to Bourn Hall landscape.

4.4 Spatial characteristics

4.4.1 At the historic heart of the village, historic and more recent houses cluster around two junctions on the High Street, one with the war memorial as an important focal point. Houses vary in scale and character, from compact cottages to substantial detached properties, but most have a presence on the street behind a front garden. As with most parts of the conservation area, the topography and irregularity of the street pattern adds considerable interest. Due to the relative density of development and presence of mature trees and boundaries, views beyond the High Street exist only along the roads.

4.4.2 Moving south, the pattern of development becomes looser, with the elevated and open landscape of Bourn Hall bordered by more recent housing outside the conservation area boundary. As the High Street continues along Fox Road, the rural and agricultural elements of the area become more noticeable, with views across to the remaining barn of Bourn Hall Home Farm being a prominent marker.

4.4.3 The church spire is often glimpsed but never highly visible in its entirety until within the church yard due to the surrounding mature trees and housing. It can however be appreciated from higher viewpoints including the Moulton Hills area, near the junction of Crow End and Alms Hill. The Bourn Hall designed landscape includes avenues and projections to the south and west far beyond the conservation area boundary but providing views in and out.

4.4.4 The conservation area retains a strongly rural setting in all directions, particularly to the north on Alms Hill and towards Crow End where historic farmhouses, barns and cottages are generously spaced in a rolling agricultural landscape of meadows edged by mature trees and hedgerows.

4.4.5 Heading north on the High Street along Alms Hill, the road becomes generously broad with Manor Farm and associated historic outbuildings and grounds accounting for a large portion of the area before reaching the Bourn Brook. Cottages, farm houses and other properties are very widely spaced on the upper part of Alms Hill and over to Crow End, with many difficult to see from the public realm.

4.4.6 Further up Alms Hill, the deeply cut road with dense green verges and hedgerows provides a deeply rural experience. Immediately adjacent, substantial amount of open agricultural land lies between Alms Hill and Crow End. From these fields, which are an essential aspect of the conservation area’s significance, there are exceptional elevated views across open countryside with the church spire as a focal point. The fields have high archaeological significance as well as landscape value, with the scheduled Roman barrow site a notable feature on the east of Alms Hill.

4.4.7 Caxton End, which is contained within a separate section of the conservation area boundary, feels quite different from the village centre and has more the character of a rural valley. The road follows the undulating course of the Bourn Brook with development largely on the southern side. Dispersed former farmhouses, barns and other larger modern houses sit back from the road on mostly elevated plots. The spacing of houses is important and development is by no means continuous in any location. The presence of water and the brook are most keenly felt as the road crosses the Bourn ford. During periods of wet weather, this part of the conservation area can experience surface flooding.

4.5 Key views and landmarks

4.5.1 There are a number of important landmark buildings within the conservation area, including the church, Bourn Hall and war memorial. These appear in a variety of informal views and often appear as part of wider views, for example elevated panoramic views. Views to landmarks often include other historic buildings, trees, and landscape features, with the distinctive church spire visible from a variety of locations near and far.

4.5.2 Key views and landmark buildings are identified on the conservation area map, and examples are illustrated below.

Above: view towards the village and church from Moulton Hills area

Above: View to the War Memorial at the junction of High Street and Short Street

Bourn Hall, a landmark building

4.6 Landscape and open spaces

4.6.1 Open spaces, trees and hedges make an essential contribution the conservation area's character and appearance.

4.6.2 The village has an attractive rural setting, with extensive open space at the edges, included within the conservation area boundary and adding significantly to its character.

4.6.3 The churchyard is a publicly accessible green space with a dense concentration of trees and greenery. There are smaller yet also important green spaces set amidst the village, such as wide grass verges on Riddy Lane.

4.6.4 Trees are an essential characteristic of the conservation area, both within the village and at its edges. Many have the additional protection of Tree Preservation Orders, both within the conservation area boundary and beyond. The general location of valuable trees and tree groups are marked on the map in order to provide a general impression rather than a detailed inventory. These do not all correspond to the TPO points. Important woodland belts, plantation areas, smaller groups and individual trees are recognised as of particular importance, including:

- Street trees throughout the conservation area.
- Trees along the line of the Bourn Brook.
- Trees and hedges beside Alms Hill, Caxton End, Riddy Lane and at field boundaries.
- Trees in private gardens with wider amenity value, particularly in larger plots such as the Old Vicarage.
- Woodland belts and specimen trees around Bourn Hall, many of which form an element of the designed landscape.
- Mature hedges defining property boundaries throughout the conservation area.

4.6.5 In addition to the larger open spaces and tree groups summarised above, the conservation area's private gardens and trees within them contribute greatly to its character. Furthermore, many boundary hedges contribute positively to the sense of enclosure and greenery where they are an appropriate species and sensibly maintained. Native species and less-formal gardening approaches contribute to the village's rural character as well as having wider ecological benefits.

4.7 Archaeology

4.7.1 The archaeological potential of the area is indicated by the presence of nationally significant Roman and Medieval features Moulton Hills an Bourn Hall, the presence of the church and an ancient manor, and the proximity to Ermine Street. The Cambridgeshire Historic Environment Record can be consulted online or through the Cambridgeshire County Council archaeology team, and holds records of all recorded archaeological finds in the area to date.

Above: examples of trees and greenery on Alms Hill, towards Crow End and within Bourn Hall landscape

5. Management, enhancement, and new development

5.1 General advice to protect and enhance the character of the conservation area

5.1.1 Guidance to promote enhancement of the conservation area is provided in the Council's District Design Guide SPD and in the Development in Conservation Areas SPD. These two documents were adopted by the Council to support previously adopted Development Plan Documents that have now been superseded by the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2018. The two documents are still material considerations when making planning decisions, with the weight in decision making to be determined on a case by case basis having regard to consistency with national planning guidance and the adopted South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2018.Bearing in mind this proviso, new development should have due regard to the two SPD documents, which are available on the Council's website.

5.1.2 Sustaining the character of the conservation area into the future will depend on proper management of the existing heritage assets, on care in the design of new development, including alterations and additions to existing buildings, and on taking opportunities for enhancement.

5.2 New development

5.2.1 Beyond domestic extensions, proposals for new development in the conservation area are likely to be either for the subdivision of existing large plots, or for the replacement of existing houses by new ones. Any such new development should:

- Follow existing building lines, plot layouts and spaces between buildings where these are an important local characteristic.
- Adhere to the scale of existing development, which is generally only one and a half or two storeys.
- Contribute to the strongly green and rural quality of parts of the conservation area, by retaining open spaces, existing trees and hedgerows and planting new large trees and hedgerows.
- Replicate the characteristic street frontages of the conservation area, retaining planted front gardens and using walls, traditional low timber fences (picket or post and rail), or hedges.

- Avoid designs and layouts which erode the visual character found in each distinct part of the conservation area.
- Ensure renewable technologies such as solar panels, air source heat pumps or EV car chargers are integrated sensitively.

5.2.3 Detailed design and materials selection in new development should take the opportunity to enhance the character of the area. There is no clear template for new development in terms of materials or massing, but the scale, proportions, positioning, orientation, boundary treatments and landscaping of the existing buildings provide pointers which will help to avoid harm. Restrained material palettes for new buildings and the use of high-quality materials and high-level craft in their application will also help to enhance the character of the conservation area.

5.3 Trees

5.3.1 Long-term management of trees is essential to the character of the conservation area. Such management needs to both ensure the continued welfare of the existing trees and plan for enhancement and replenishment. The replacement of existing forest-scale trees by smaller species should be resisted, and appropriate new planting of larger tree species and hedges in new development, on existing plots, and on highway land should be encouraged.

5.4 Enhancement

5.4.1 The text below sets out detracting elements and opportunities for enhancement in the conservation area.

Hardstanding

Gardens, enclosed by traditional boundary treatments, in front of houses are an important characteristic of the conservation area. Further extensive paving of the present front garden areas could erode the village character of the conservation area.

Management proposal: New hard-surfaced car parking in front of and alongside buildings facing the street should be carefully designed. Schemes which include new trees, appropriate hedging, or other traditional boundaries along the street frontage are positive, and should be encouraged, but even behind such a screen, large unsoftened areas of paved car parking space should be discouraged.

Highway engineering

Outside the central part of the village, highway engineering is minimal and appropriate to the rural character. Green verges are an important feature.

Management proposal: Encourage the retention of this engineering approach, especially if new footway crossings are created. Discourage further urbanisation of the street surfaces.

Boundary treatments

Boundary treatments, especially on the street frontage, are especially important to the conservation area. Hedges are particularly important, but there are brick walls and simple timber railed fences which also contribute positively.

Management proposal: Resist planning applications for inappropriate boundary treatments such as close-boarded fences or unduly ornate railings, or the removal of existing positive boundaries. Where permission is not required for removals, encourage retention by informal communication.

Trees

Trees are of immense importance to the character of the conservation area. The trees are located in both public and private spaces.

Management proposal: Ensure conservation area controls over tree works are used to protect existing trees, and encourage succession planting.

Windows

There has been widespread replacement of older windows in the conservation area, and few instances of such change significantly harming the character of the area. Nonetheless, the traditional, and in some cases intricate glazing patterns are a positive feature of the conservation area.

Management proposal: Promote guidance on traditional windows, outlining their positive contribution to the character of a conservation area. When planning permission is required, the loss of traditional windows should be resisted, and the

use of suitable modern windows supported where appropriate. Historic England guidance on windows is extensive.

Extensions and alterations

Many buildings in the conservation area have been extended. Further proposals of this sort can be expected. The installation of solar panels, heat pumps and other renewable technology is commonplace.

Management proposal: Alterations to buildings in the conservation area, whether those buildings are identified as making a positive contribution or not, should respond carefully both to the original character of the existing building and that of the conservation area as a whole. Alterations which sensitively improve the energy performance of buildings, enhance poor design, or restore elements of original character to buildings should be encouraged.

6. Heritage assets and positive structures

6.1 Designated heritage assets

6.1.1 At the time of publication there are around 40 listed buildings in the conservation area, ranging from the grade I listed parish church, grade II* church and Manor Farm, and a large number of grade II listed houses from different periods. There are also two scheduled ancient monuments and a grade II registered park and garden.

6.1.2 Each designated asset is identified on the Conservation Area map, and full details of their listing can be found on the Historic England website at www.historicengland.org.uk/listing

6.2 Non designated heritage assets

6.2.1 Several buildings or structures in the conservation area have also been identified which, although not nationally listed or designated, are of local importance. This could be due to their architectural and/ or historic interest, their landmark status, communal function, association to locally important individuals or families or a combination of these.

6.2.2 These properties have been identified on the conservation area maps (in orange) for information purposes and to ensure that they are given due regard in any related planning applications. These will be formally assessed as non-designated heritage assets by the council and considered for inclusion on the Cambridgeshire Local Heritage List (see https://local-heritage-list.org.uk/cambridgeshire)

6.3 Positive buildings and structures

6.3.1 In addition to the above, there are also a number of buildings or structures which are not nationally designated and are unlikely to meet the criteria for consideration as a non-designated heritage asset, but nonetheless do contribute positively to the character and appearance of the conservation areas.

6.3.2 These buildings or structures make a valuable contribution and should be viewed as key elements of the overall character and significance of the relevant conservation area. Alterations to, or the loss of, these assets can have a lasting impact on the special character of the area in which they lie.

These structures have been identified as positive buildings on the conservation area maps (in green).

Below left: Grade II listed timber framed house on the High Street.

Below right: Grade II listed house with generous green verge, hedge and trees opposite on Riddy Lane

7. Proposed boundary changes

7.1 The conservation area boundary originally designated in 1974 and was last revised and extended in 1997. Based on the current assessment, it is felt that the existing boundary includes the areas of the village with sufficient historic and architectural value, and therefore there are no proposals to amend the boundary at this time.

7.2 The boundary has a number of minor discrepancies at the edge of property boundaries which it is proposed to tidy up as part of this review. This would not involve adding or removing any properties from the conservation area which would be the usual trigger for consultation with individual property owners.

8. References

South Cambridgeshire District Council South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2018
South Cambridgeshire District Council District Design Guide SPD 2010
South Cambridgeshire District Council Development Affecting Conservation Areas SPD 2009

History of Bourn - Bourn Parish Council

Parishes: Bourn | British History Online (british-history.ac.uk)

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For further information please contact:

Built and Natural
Environment Team

Tel: 01954 713310

Email: historicenvironment@greatercambridgeplanning.org

South Cambridgeshire
District Council South
Cambridgeshire Hall
Cambourne Business
Park Cambridge

CB23 6EA