



# ASHTON

Community Design  
Statement 2015

# FOREWORD AND SUMMARY

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Our parish of Ashton is a small community that lies in the Teign Valley to the east of the river and along the western slopes of the Haldon Ridge. We have a population of around 200 people and we who live and work here greatly value its special qualities and wish to retain and ideally enhance those qualities.

Although small in population, the Parish covers some 2,200 acres with its two main parts of Higher Ashton and Lower Ashton, each with its own special features and characteristics, which are covered in more detail in the following pages.

Despite being geographically widespread, there is nevertheless a strong sense of community within the Parish and its future is very much a key issue for everyone who lives and works within its very peaceful and rural setting.

New development or landscape changes can affect the character of our Parish for better or worse and we see this Community Design Statement as a key way for us, along with our Councillors and planners at Teignbridge District Council, to ensure that any changes are for the better.

The work to produce this Statement has been led by the Ashton Parish Meeting together with a high level of input from a large number of local people some of whom have put in considerable effort. Consultants, Place Studio were engaged to guide and support the local production of the Statement. It has been circulated widely and we feel confident in saying

that it has strong community support. In charting the fascinating historical development of Ashton and setting this within the context of the key issues we are facing now and in the near future, we recognise how important this Statement is for representing local views about how we intend to manage and consider all proposed changes in terms of both land use and development within the Parish.

The task now for us (and Councillors and planners) is to ensure that it reaches all those proposing changes to our area and that it does so early enough to help to create appropriate proposals.

We will do all we can to help anybody wishing to develop here and genuinely trying in their proposals to understand and respond to the key characteristics outlined in this Statement.

This Design Statement will be a material consideration to help guide planning applications being prepared and decisions made on these.

Formally adopted by  
**Ashton Parish Meeting**  
21 May 2015



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# 1. INTRODUCTION

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## 1.1 What is a Community Design Statement?

1.1.1 A Community Design Statement (CDS) is a document produced by the community which describes the distinctive character of a parish or village. It identifies the landscape setting, the shape of the settlements and the nature of the buildings. It also draws together design guidance based on that distinctive local character and sense of place.

1.1.2 A CDS establishes the context in which to help manage how changes in terms of land use and development can work, ensuring that any such changes should reflect and ideally enhance the distinct community character. It does not focus on whether or where developments should happen; rather it is about shaping the layout and design of any future development.

## 1.2 Why produce a Community Design Statement for Ashton?

1.2.1 The original intention had been to produce a fully statutory Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP). This would have covered aspects other than design. However, planning policy already provided some comfort, or these aspects could not anyway have been addressed through an NDP.

1.2.2 Although we are small in terms of population and limited in terms of current built development, change is inevitable so the character of the landscape and the two settlements – 'design' – emerged as the key issue. For example, just one or two poorly located and poorly designed new houses could have a significant negative effect on local character. Changes in agricultural practice could also have a negative effect, as could their knock-on effects in terms of changes to agricultural buildings and farm

buildings converted for other uses.

1.2.3 The objectives of our CDS are therefore to:

- draw up design guidelines that will guide future change and development to ensure that local character is preserved and enhanced
- encourage early pre-application involvement of our community by prospective developers
- ensure that this Statement is used effectively in Teignbridge District Council.

## 1.3 How has it been produced?

1.3.1 The process has been very much community-led. Advice and guidance has come from Place Studio and help has also come from Teignbridge District Council. The main stages were as follows.

- Work on the CDS was launched at a 'Design Day' on 10th November 2012, attended by almost one third of the Parish population
- This involved people going out to undertake extensive survey work which generated a large amount of material
- Photographs from the Design Day featured prominently as part of a quiz night held in February 2013 to both test and confirm



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local knowledge about some of its special and unique architectural and historic features.

- The efforts of three small teams took the outputs from the survey work and refined it into the basic content of a draft CDS

## 1.4 Consultation

1.4.1 In line with guidelines for formal consultation, the Draft Statement was circulated to all in the parish and to statutory consultees for their comments. All suggested amendments, including those of the District Council, were reviewed by the CDS team. Most were agreed and the document modified accordingly to this current version.

## 1.5 How will it be used?

1.5.1 The CDS is a tool for the Parish to articulate guidance against which any planning or other applications can be considered. It is for Parish residents, businesses and landowners who may wish to improve or add to their home and garden, business premise, fields or farm. It is also for designers, developers and planning professionals involved with new build developments.

1.5.2 This CDS alone cannot ensure the best quality design. That can only come through meeting and talking with those proposing changes or developments, and doing this early enough to have a constructive influence.

**Anybody considering a change or a development is strongly encouraged to contact the Parish Meeting to discuss their proposals. Section 2 covers this more fully. The key contact is the Parish Clerk.**

1.5.3 The end aim is that any planning or other application is submitted with a report

(currently a 'Design and Access Statement'), stating how the proposals respond to what is in this CDS and ideally how discussions via the Parish Meeting have helped with that.

## 1.6 What does it cover?

1.6.1 The CDS cannot determine what type of development might or should happen where. That remains the responsibility of the members and planning officers of Teignbridge District Council. Its focus is design in its broadest possible sense, covering everything from broad landscape patterns to road signs, from significant long distance views to choice of materials.





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1.6.2 Although Planning has only limited powers over agricultural practice and agricultural buildings, these are critical to the character of Ashton so those aspects are covered in the hope that appropriate decisions are made that help to retain and enhance the character.

1.6.3 The community scene is set in Section 3 and highlights other important characteristics and issues of Ashton today; issues that cannot be addressed directly by a CDS but which need to be understood by anybody proposing changes.

1.6.4 The core of the Statement is a description and analysis of what we believe to be the important and locally distinctive features of Ashton Parish as a whole and the settlements of both Higher and Lower Ashton. This also divides into two, with Section 4 covering the Wider Landscape context of Ashton Parish as a whole and Section 5

covering Buildings in their Setting.

1.6.5 Policy on landscape and building design are addressed at both national and District Council level. It is important that this CDS accords with key aspects of that policy, even if it adds to them with specifically local material. Key points about the policy context are covered in Appendix 1. A summary of the historical development of Ashton is provided in Appendix 2.



## 2. DELIVERING HIGH QUALITY DESIGN

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### 2.1 Design Guidelines

2.1.1 The overall strategy for Ashton Parish is conservation and enhancement:

- **New development should conserve the landscape pattern of small-scale pastoral fields, mature woodland, hedge banks and narrow lanes and reflect the small-scale, scattered settlement pattern and vernacular character of local buildings.**
- **Opportunities to conserve and enhance footpaths, hedgerows, woodlands and historic features should also be considered.**

2.1.2 All aspects of any proposed building development should show how the design is based on a genuine understanding of the description, analysis and policy set out in this document and how, where relevant, it has responded to these. As a summary only, some key points are:

- **The landscape 'bowl' that surrounds the settlements and hamlets and the open valley sides and hills**
- **The importance to the local character of the river Teign, Spara Bridge and other historic features**
- **The importance to the local character of the tightly edged lanes**
- **The overall strong sense of tranquillity and dark night skies uninterrupted by intrusive lighting**
- **The 'channelled' views across the landscape**
- **The small-scale, scattered and clearly separated settlement pattern of Lower and Higher Ashton, the hamlets and farmsteads**
- **The existing trees and hedges within the settlements**
- **The relationship between buildings and lanes and the glimpses between them to the surrounding hills**
- **The existing vernacular materials of**

**thatch, cob and stone used not just in the buildings but also in garden walls etc**

- **The general sense of quiet, peace and seclusion**
- **The limited capacity of existing lanes to accommodate traffic and parking**
- **The importance of visual impact on the approaches to Ashton, i.e. over Spara Bridge into Lower Ashton and down from Haldon into Higher Ashton.**

2.1.3 In terms of broader land management the following are important:

- **Conserving the mature hedgerow network, particularly ancient boundaries, and encouraging traditional hedgerow management practices**
- **Conserving and managing broadleaved and hedgerow trees**
- **Conserving and managing habitats, both individually and as part of a wider, green infrastructure, network beyond the Parish.**

2.1.4 Through whatever means, be that new development, action by local residents, landowners, public agencies, the local authorities or others, it would be valuable to address the following, all of which could enhance local character and distinctiveness:

- **Removing intrusive telegraph and power wires and poles**
- **Ensuring that artificial lighting is not obtrusive**
- **Conserving the old railway track way with a long-term ambition of creating a public footpath along this riverside route**
- **Seeking opportunities for permissive paths to enable greater public access to all parts of the Parish**
- **Seeking opportunities to manage the disused Ryecroft quarry as a nature reserve with public access**
- **Conserving and enhancing the archaeological site of the old deer park**

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**and historic features**

- **Encouraging measures to reduce carbon dioxide emissions such as water power generation, solar panels, wind turbines and solar farms where these can be accommodated with no harm to the settlement and the landscape, and where they have the support of the Parish**
- **Promoting the incorporation of features into any new build or 'retro fitted' buildings which are beneficial to wildlife.**

2.1.5 The Parish is currently categorised as an 'Area of Great Landscape Value'. There have been discussions about enhancing this to the status of 'Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty' and this change should be encouraged to provide greater protection to the landscape of the Parish.

2.1.6 Most importantly, the guidelines above can only be general because of the diversity and distinctiveness of the Parish and each of its settlements, hamlets and farmsteads. For any future development, consideration must be given to the specific site and the specific type of development proposed; no 'tick-box' approach is appropriate and no standard rules are possible.

## **2.2 Pre-Application Involvement**

2.2.1 Given the last point above about the need to consider each proposed development in its specific context, very early contact between a potential applicant and the Parish Meeting is absolutely crucial.

2.2.2 This approach is completely consistent with the statement in the National Planning Policy Framework (in Appendix 1, paragraph 1.3) encouraging applicants "to work closely with those directly affected by their proposals to evolve designs that take account of the views of the community" and, if done, this will

mean that any proposals "should be looked on more favourably".

2.2.3 Members of the Parish Meeting and, we feel sure, most in the community, are very happy to "work closely" with potential applicants and we assume that planning officers at Teignbridge District Council and our local councillors will support us in this.

2.2.4 Based on good practice elsewhere, we can offer reassurance about how this will be handled equitably for all by using the following guidelines:

We expect that the Applicant will:

- contact the Parish Meeting clerk at <ashtonparishclerk@outlook.com>
- lead and fund the consultation
- show that they have made use of this Community Design Statement
- produce a report on the consultation to be submitted with any planning application.

The Parish Meeting itself will:

- provide any potential applicant with a single point of contact
- agree an approach to community involvement that is appropriate to the type, scale and location of the proposed development
- agree who needs to be consulted and provide help in contacting them
- make available support such as access to the Village Hall
- provide any further background information to this CDS relevant to a particular site
- agree the applicant's report, if the process has been followed to their satisfaction.

We hope that Teignbridge District Council will:

- provide any supplementary information,



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reference to key policies etc. that apply to the proposed project and site

- comment on and agree the approach to be taken
- ensure that any application following this procedure is “looked on more favourably”.

2.2.5 It is important to note that any use of these guidelines is entirely without prejudice to our eventual judgement as a Parish Meeting on the merits of any resulting application.

2.2.6 Many agricultural buildings, and especially changes to farming practice, are not controllable through the planning system. The Parish Meeting fully appreciates the commercial realities of modern farming and the pressures this brings, and we are also aware that local farmers are themselves as appreciative of the special qualities of Ashton as anybody else. We would therefore encourage any farmer or landowner considering changes to also make early contact with the Parish Meeting. We will do all possible to find ways forward that ensure viability while also respecting our shared and valued local environment.

## **2.3 Strategic Background and Local Policy**

2.3.1 Apart from references made to national strategic policy, there is very little else at national level that addresses design. There are however, three publications from Teignbridge District Council that need to be mentioned because they set a context for this section.

2.3.2 Each of the Conservation Areas in Lower and Higher Ashton has been the subject of a formal ‘Character Appraisal’ by Teignbridge District Council. Both were approved in 2010 (Higher in January, Lower in March) and were adopted by

the Development Plan Steering Group as documents to support strategic plans. They are therefore both material considerations in determining planning applications that affect the areas directly or which affect their setting. There is much valuable detail within both documents which should be read alongside what follows below from the work of our community. The appraisals can be accessed on the District Council's website: [www.teignbridge.gov.uk/index.aspx?articleid=1712](http://www.teignbridge.gov.uk/index.aspx?articleid=1712)

2.3.3 The District Council has produced, in draft form, last amended in July 2013, ‘Planning Advice Note 6: Residential Development: Design Principles’. Though targeted mainly at developments in the larger towns and villages, much of its content needs to be taken into account for any developments in Ashton as outlined in one of the opening statements:

“The Council is committed to delivery of well designed developments and will, in accordance with advice set out in National and Local Planning Policy, not accept designs that fail to take the opportunities available to improve the character and quality of the area and encourage those that make a positive contribution.”

2.3.4 The District Council has also produced ‘Planning Advice Note 1: Landscape Design’, last amended in September 2013. Although entitled ‘landscape’ this is included in this section because it covers landscaping in and around new developments.

## 3. ASHTON TODAY

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### 3.1 The Parish

3.1.1 The Parish of Ashton covers 883 hectares (2182 acres) and is located on the western slopes of the Haldon Ridge. The Parish is roughly pentagonal in shape, with each edge adjoining a neighbouring parish. The boundaries are formed in the west (Christow) by the River Teign and to the east (Chudleigh) in part by Bramble Brook, with the remaining boundaries located predominantly along high ground including Haldon Forest in the north east (Kenn), a long ridge in the north west (Doddiscombeleigh) and a ridge over Rydon to the south (Trusham).

### 3.2 Community

3.2.1 Ashton had a population of 174 at the time of the 2001 census. Although the 2011 census figures for Ashton are not yet available, it was estimated at the time of the Diamond Jubilee celebrations in 2012 that the population was approximately 196, including over 20 children. There are also now several former homes that are being run as holiday lets.

3.2.2 The public activities in Ashton include those organised through the church, the Manor Inn pub, the Great Barn, Embercombe and the Village Hall. As part of the wider Teign Valley Community, people also take part in activities outside Ashton, including clubs and the use of facilities at the Teign Valley Community Hall in nearby Christow. There are also many informal activities taking place through friendship and social groups.

3.2.3 As a small village, democracy is discharged through a Parish Meeting where decisions are made by the elected Chairman, guided by the views of the meeting and a voluntary Steering Committee. This normally meets three times a year, although extra meetings are organised if required, for

example to consider significant planning applications.

### 3.3 Facilities

3.3.1 Ashton has several facilities which provide valued services but also represent important social glue for the Parish.

3.3.2 The Church is part of a United Benefice of six parishes. Although Ashton's congregation is often small, the church is frequently filled for the Valley Services, which rotate around the parishes. The "big days" at Christmas, Easter, and Harvest are also well attended from Ashton. Like many parishes Ashton is both blessed and burdened by having a wonderful (Grade 1 listed) church in need of constant repairs.

3.3.3 The Manor Inn is popular and well attended from within Ashton and further afield. It holds occasional 'village events' e.g. a Lower Ashton versus Higher Ashton cricket match.

3.3.4 The Post Office fulfils its stated and much valued role and also stocks other useful goods. Arguably, at least as important, it also acts as a valuable source of information and is a key part of the connections that help to make Ashton a community.

3.3.5 The Village Hall is booked regularly by many groups (including a weekly vet, dog training classes etc). Well-attended events organised in recent years include quizzes and wine tastings.

3.3.6 The Great Barn is privately owned and provides wonderful facilities for major events, particularly weddings. The owners also generously provide the facilities for occasional other activities such as charitable events.

3.3.7 The Cricket Field is well hidden at the

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lower end of Lower Ashton and provides a beautiful venue for Teign Valley Cricket Club. They are an enthusiastic club with a long established full fixture list against both local and touring teams and, in their own words, are "a friendly and social side that play for the love of the game".

3.3.8 Embercombe is a charity and social enterprise. Based in 50 acres of beautiful countryside in Higher Ashton, the charity provides residential land-based courses for a wide range of people. The Linhay, which is currently under construction using traditional building materials and techniques, is enabling learning during its construction and will provide enhanced facilities when complete. Embercombe offers a number of public activities.

3.3.9 Education serves to link Ashton with its neighbours. Its own school closed in 1950 and the children were transferred to Doddyscombsleigh Primary School. Now most secondary school students from Ashton go to Teign School in Kingsteignton.



## 3.4 Economy

3.4.1 The farms in the Parish are now entirely pastoral. There are four larger holdings of between 100 and 200 acres with either sheep or suckler cows or both. Three smaller farms of between 50 and 100 acres are still in livestock production, but an increasing acreage within the Parish is now given over to horses and amenity use. To a greater or lesser extent all these farms rely on other enterprises, such as agricultural contracting, intensive calf rearing and fattening, direct sales to the public and holiday accommodation – or from outside employment and other sources of income. Some half dozen small holdings have developed, with a variety of enterprises: Goats' cheese making, bee keeping, poultry, small woodland management, a plant nursery and orchards.

3.4.2 The Pub and Post Office Stores provide a living for their owners and in their different ways assist the economy of the Parish – the pub providing a useful venue for informal business meetings and the Post Office providing the facilities of post and banking; in each case these are important for those with businesses run from home. Each also purchases goods from local suppliers and employs staff from the village or nearby.

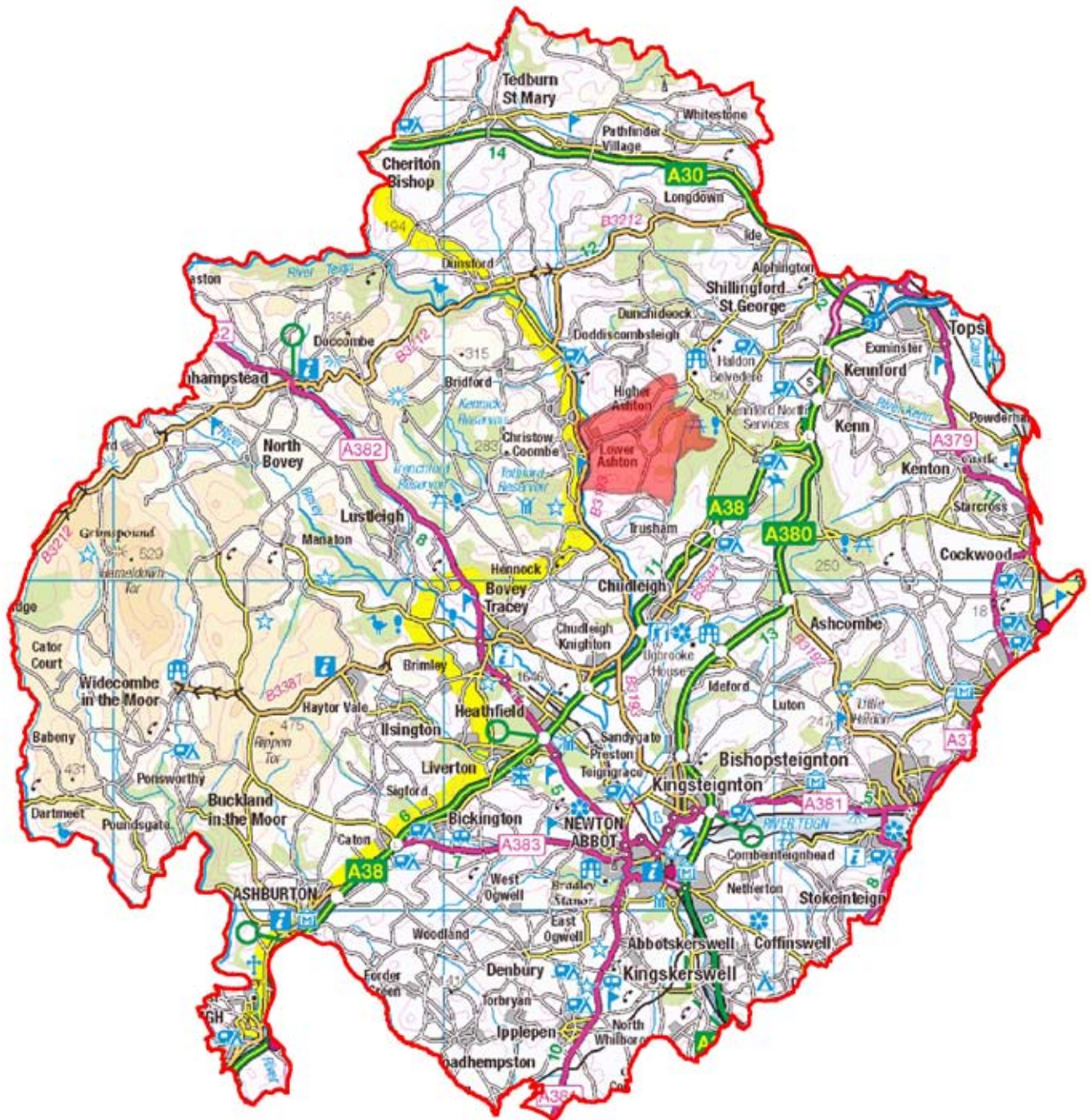
3.4.3 The Great Barn manages a large number of major events (e.g. a wedding most weekends) and provides part-time employment as well as purchasing goods from local trades people and suppliers. Visitors to the Great Barn also often use other facilities in Ashton, such as the pub, post office and B&Bs.

3.4.4 A number of residents work from home either entirely or as a major component of their employment activities elsewhere. This is likely to be a growing area and will be aided



# TEIGNBRIDGE DISTRICT MAP

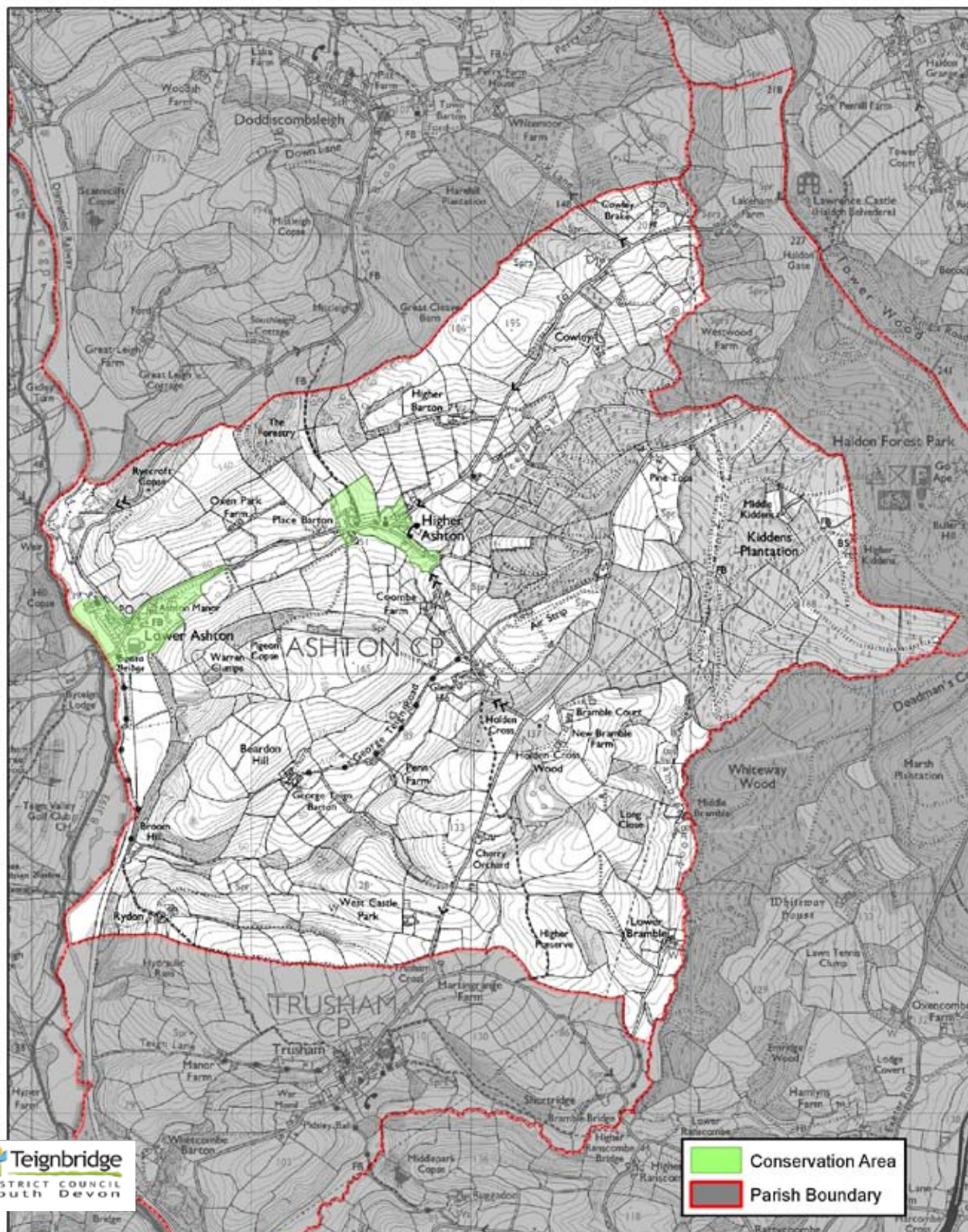
(Note: Not To Scale)





# ASHTON PARISH MAP

(Note: Not To Scale)



**Teignbridge**  
DISTRICT COUNCIL  
South Devon



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by improved broadband which is being rolled out to all local villages with completion in 2017.

3.4.5 Embercombe provides employment for the staff who work and in some cases live there. The charity purchases from local suppliers and their work also brings visitors into Ashton who use the Pub and Post Office.

3.4.6 Ashton is served by the Cheriton Bishop and Teign Valley medical practice, with a regular surgery in the neighbouring village of Christow. Two Ashton residents currently help drive the minibus for the Acorn Trust, a valuable voluntary support system for the Practice.

3.4.7 Tourism currently makes a small contribution to Ashton's economy, drawing in visitors who use facilities, notably the Pub and Post Office. There are a few holiday cottages, and pitches for caravans and tents by the river.

are often interconnected and may have both positive and negative impacts. Whilst some of these are outside the scope of this CDS, they are listed here to support a separate exercise to be conducted by the Parish Meeting. These are likely to include, in no particular order:

- Proposals for development of infill sites
- Affordable homes
- Agricultural viability
- Encouraging tourism
- Holiday homes
- Increased traffic
- Retaining the pub and shop
- Broadband
- Climate change
- Public transport
- Local education
- Ageing population
- Dwindling rural skills
- Employment
- Young People

### 3.5 Issues Now and For the Future

3.5.1 There are a number of issues that will affect Ashton in the future and on which planning decisions may be needed. The issues





## 4. THE WIDER LANDSCAPE

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*"The harmony of the small number of dwellings in this beautiful landscape is an important part of the character of the village."* Quote from Design Day

### 4.1 Strategic Background and Local Policy

4.1.1 The Parish sits on the edge of the 'National Landscape Character Area 150, Dartmoor'. Natural England cites the following as being some of the key characteristics of this area:

- Strong contrasts between open, windswept moors with wide views and sheltered landscapes of valleys and fringes
- Central high moorland with a wild landscape of tors, clitters, bogs, grassland, heather and bracken
- Around the moorland core is a gentler landscape of small, irregular pasture fields with dry stone walls and banks, cut by large, terraced, wooded valleys which shelter farmsteads and hamlets. The valleys

have steep-sided, fast-flowing streams and a network of sunken lanes.

4.1.2 At a county level, the 'Devon Historic Landscape Characterisation' provides information on the components of the historic landscape and their significance. The landscape of Ashton is historically rich with enclosure dating from the middle ages with curving hedge banks, together with the straight field boundaries of the 18th and 19th century.

4.1.3 A Landscape Character Assessment' (LCA) for Devon County was carried out in 2002 and a series of 'Draft Devon Landscape Character Types' (LCTs) and their key characteristics were identified from these local studies to provide a basis for a consistent characterisation of LCTs across Devon. A reference for this is in the Appendix.

4.1.4 The 'Teignbridge District Landscape Character Assessment' (2009) provides an analysis and classification of the landscape, identifying distinct 'Landscape Character



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Areas' with a particular sense of place. The assessment gives an informed basis for the understanding and management of landscape change and forms part of the evidence base for the emerging Local Plan.

4.1.5 The Parish of Ashton sits mostly in the Landscape Character Area 'Teign Valley and Slopes' and partly in the 'Haldon Ridge' Character Area (see the District LCA map covering the Ashton area in the appendices). Key characteristics of this landscape are as follows:

- "Steep-sided, narrow river valley, tributary valleys and undulating slopes
- Intimate river corridor highlighted by sinuous belts of woodland
- Frequent broadleaved woodland on steep slopes and extensive mixed woodland fringing the Haldon Ridge
- Small-scale, irregular field pattern with pasture and a mature and intact network of hedge banks
- Settlement pattern of scattered farmsteads, hamlets and small villages, frequently nestled along valley slopes
- Vernacular settlement character, with buildings of thatch, lime washed cob/stone and slate
- Strong contrast between the flat-

bottomed, narrow valley floor, marked by tree-lined course of the river and adjacent, steeper, rougher textured valley sides

- Historic stone bridges, small disused quarries and occasional historic mills
- Network of winding, enclosed, narrow lanes and minor roads
- Very strong sense of tranquillity, except at the southern edge
- Channelled views along Teign Valley and views west to Dartmoor and east to the Haldon Ridge from upper slopes and hills
- Dark night skies predominate throughout much of the area."

*"This is a complex landscape of high scenic quality, combining a strong landform with frequent woodland, strong pattern pasture fields with hedge banks, narrow winding lanes and vernacular buildings."* Teignbridge District Landscape Character Assessment

4.1.6 The Parish sits within a locally designated Area of Great Landscape Value. Appendix 1 covers this and other local policies.

4.1.7 The District Council has also produced Planning Advice Notes that should be taken into account for any developments in Ashton. 'Planning Advice Note 1.1 Native



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Hedgerows and Devon Banks' (2012) states that any development should conserve and enhance the hedgerow network, retaining and enhancing existing features wherever possible, particularly hedgerows which qualify as 'Important' under the Hedgerow Regulations definition. 'Planning Advice Note 7 Biodiversity' (2008) should also be consulted.

## **4.2 Character Description**

4.2.1 The Parish covers an area made up mainly of open pastureland, deciduous woodlands and forestry conifer plantation in a network of steep-sided valleys. These are the location of three main brooks (France, Bramble and an unnamed stream in the George Teign valley) and their tributaries, which drain from the Haldon ridge down to the narrow floodplain of the River Teign.

4.2.2 The River Teign is an important feature both within the Parish and for its links north and south. There are trout and otters (a Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) Priority Species) in the river and it is possible to see Kingfishers and Dippers (both also BAP Priority Species).

4.2.3 The border of the Dartmoor National Park lies along the River Teign and the border of the Parish.

4.2.4 The relatively new plantation of Haldon Forest (planted from the 1920s) covers approximately 20% of the Parish on the higher ground to the east. In 1992 Haldon was the first man-made forest to be designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) in its own right, rather than because of the value the site had before it was planted as a forest. The designation was made because of the nationally important breeding population of nightjars, the range of butterfly and moth species, and the array of bird of prey species. The Haldon Forest is also designated as an Important Bird Area.

4.2.5 This wildlife haven complements the peace and tranquillity that pervades the Parish as a whole. The Parish is rich in a wide variety of flora and fauna, with many species of birds and mammals including the nationally protected dormouse. There are a number of important habitats in the Parish including two traditional orchards that are identified as having great biodiversity value and are BAP Priority Habitats, together with two County Wildlife Sites and Ancient Woodland (Ryecroft Copse).

4.2.6 There are many species-rich hedge banks, denoting ancient boundaries and the remnants of Ashton deer park behind Place Barton with a still evident ditch and high bank along the boundary with Doddiscombeleigh Parish. Two prominent Scots Pine clumps, at Rydon and George Teign Barton, are attractive and historic features (originally planted by Lord Exmouth in the 1830s).

4.2.7 Narrow lanes through the Parish are often steep and winding with high hedge banks; there are also three public footpaths, valued locally as attractive - from Place Barton towards Doddiscombeleigh: through the woods to the right of the road up past Embercombe and continuing towards the road near Trusham; and from Rydon down and along the river (Skiddoe Lane) to Lower Ashton. The forestry area within the Parish is open access land and has a number of forest roads that provide good routes for the public into this part. However many other parts of the parish have no public access and remain unknown to most residents.

4.2.8 The dwellings nestled in this landscape are a collection of historic and more modern homesteads. There is a sense of harmony in the way the buildings sit into the landscape scene, with small groupings of Lower and Higher Ashton and individual buildings



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scattered through the Parish.

*"Dwellings comprise many traditional thatched properties with few modern additions helping to maintain this scenic and timeless landscape."* Design Day Quote

### 4.3 Scenic Qualities and Sense of Place

4.3.1 The tranquil landscape of Ashton is mainly hidden from view from within the Parish and the narrow lanes leading through the hamlets give no hint to the extent of the Parish. Indeed it is only from high ground on the opposite (Christow) side of the Teign Valley that a view into the Parish can be gained. Even then, much is hidden by the undulating slopes, with few prominent buildings evident in the green and wooded landscape.

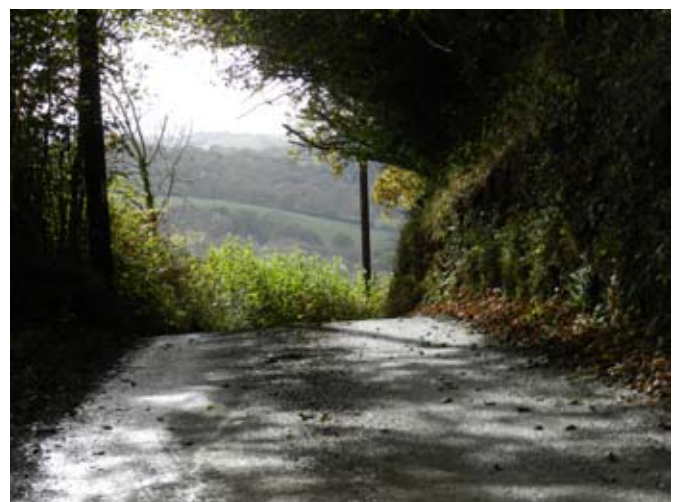
4.3.2 At night, the dark skies and clear view of stars, including the Milky Way, contribute significantly to the sense of place and tranquillity and offer a very special and distinctly rural quality to Ashton (see the CPRE Tranquillity map in the appendices in which Dartmoor National Park can be seen as a high tranquillity area).

4.3.3 Many facets make up the scenic character of the area; several working farms,

irregular fields with hedge banks, ancient woodland, clusters of attractive thatched properties, isolated dwellings and narrow winding lanes bordered by high hedges. There is a strong sense of history in the Parish with the local landmark 17th century stone Spara Bridge, which is Grade 2\* listed, together with remnants of historic industries, notably the disused quarry at Ryecroft and the old railway track along the Teign valley floor. There are SSSIs in, or immediately adjacent to the Parish, at Ryecroft Quarry, and alongside the Teign river (Spara Bridge SSSI).

4.3.4 The relatively poor soil lends itself to an almost entirely pastoral habitat, i.e. not cultivated for other crops. The exception would be the occasional fodder crops, such as kale or stubble turnips for use on the farm for livestock. So, what we see is the early spring grass growth in March on the south facing slopes, the many coloured cows and calves from the five or so suckler herds turned out to graze and a similar number of flocks of sheep.

4.3.5 Since 1970, all the milking herds have gone. During the summer the main field operations are hay and silage making, weed topping and dung spreading. A number of



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hedgerows and banks have recently been restored. With its thin steep soil and lying in the rain shadow of Dartmoor, Ashton does not lend itself to high input intensive grass production. Although an increasing amount of land is given over to horses and recreational use, livestock farming remains crucial to maintaining the current landscape.

4.3.6 It is the changing seasons, and farming practice, particularly grazing sheep and cattle which provides some of Ashton's unique quality. In Spring, the variety of shades of green in the trees, the grass fields, and the developing wild flowers is really remarkable. Into Summer, as the splashes of colour provided by daffodils are overtaken by the masses of bluebells, the shades of green change, too. Silage is cut whilst the grass is still bright green, leaving an almost white stubble, soon to green over again. Hay comes later. Acres of buttercups eventually fade and other species start to set seed. Fields become darker and blow every which way before harvesting. In some years, Autumn can offer spectacular leaf colours, and, when the deciduous trees shed their leaves, views not seen since last year, suddenly reappear.



## 4.4 Current and Future Landscape Issues and Opportunities

4.4.1 It is worth noting that the landscape we see today has not always looked the way it does and will undoubtedly continue to change in the future. Changes over recent years include the extensive planting of the Forestry Commission land from the 1920s onwards, disappearance of orchards, generally greater vegetation as land including woods and hedgerows has been less strictly managed, and the increase of gardening as a leisure activity at many homes.

4.4.2 Drawing on the District LCA, the key issues on the landscape of the Parish are listed below:

- Potential agricultural intensification, change of crops (e.g. miscanthus) or land use (e.g. wind turbines, solar farms), which may lead to a loss of traditional field boundaries and a change to existing landscape patterns
- Clearing of mature conifer forestry plantations leading to changed land appearance (possibly returning to pre-forestry appearance)
- Construction of new, large-scale agricultural buildings which would be out





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of context with existing traditional, smaller-scale buildings

- Construction of large extensions and/or installation of photovoltaic panels to existing houses and buildings, in high visibility locations such as valley sides, resulting in visual intrusion and erosion of characteristic vernacular built form
- Conversion of traditional agricultural buildings and attached land for domestic and leisure use, which can lead to unsympathetic boundary and surfacing treatments
- Construction of new houses which detract from the sense of harmony described in this and other character assessments
- Widening and new access points to narrow lanes, eroding their rural character
- Incremental widening through erosion by increasingly wide vehicles
- Potential for new leisure and recreational development (e.g. quad biking, floodlighting, car rallies) affecting the rural character and sense of tranquillity
- Climate change leading to periods of flooding or drought and affecting the Parish ecology
- Negative impact of National Grid pylons to the north of the Parish boundary.
- Increasing number of deer becoming a nuisance.

4.4.3 Key opportunities that could be explored in the future include:

- Conservation and enhancement of rich archaeological heritage
- Opportunity to reduce the environmental impact and carbon footprint of buildings through creative, appropriate and sensitive solutions
- Promotion of the incorporation of features into any new build or 'retro fitted' buildings which are beneficial to wildlife
- Potential to enhance existing habitats and unique natural areas in the Parish
- Protection and enhancement of the habitats as a network of green infrastructure, together with public rights of way, hedgebanks, verges, trees, waterways etc
- Creation of north-south links along railway track adjacent to the river, including a foot / cycle path
- Following recent endorsement by Teignbridge DC for the area to be a candidate for Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) status, explore the potential with Natural England.







*"Chequered fields and a contoured landscape conceal the villages."*  
Design Day Quote



## 5. BUILDINGS IN THEIR SETTING

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### 5.1 Settlement Patterns

5.1.1 For a 'Memory Map' exercise at the Design Day, local people were asked to draw whatever they wished in whatever way they wished of Ashton. One or two 'maps' covered the whole Parish although all others covered either both Lower and Higher Ashton or just one of Lower or Higher. An analysis of those maps and comments showing the built settlements suggests what people in our community consider to be the key features or landmarks of Higher and Lower Ashton.

5.1.2 Several of these landmarks are also important facilities, much appreciated by the community and essential to retain, notably the Post Office, the Church, the Manor Inn, the Village Hall and the Cricket Field. The bridge is also a key landmark, marking a gateway to Lower Ashton.

5.1.3 Ashton is a widespread village with settlements formed of small clusters of houses. The spread-out nature of the village means that there are distinct mini communities, some of which remain quite hidden to the public gaze. The two main settlements, Lower and Higher Ashton, are geographically separate. Despite this, people in our community value the fact that we all live or work in one overall 'place' – Ashton, the Parish.

5.1.4 The properties served by the road from Haldon Gate to Holden Cross and on towards neighbouring Trusham Parish form a relatively disparate group.

5.1.5 Apart from the Teign Valley road (B3193), the roads into and around Ashton are narrow and sometimes very steep, with Devon banks, high hedges and beautiful trees. This strengthens the individuality of the different settlements and the strong feeling of peaceful seclusion. One can live among a group of neighbours yet enjoy an undisturbed outlook.

5.1.6 There are many more cars than even 10 years ago, there has been a notable recent increase in delivery vans and the agricultural machinery is much larger. The narrow roads are suffering as a result. The winter roads in particular are often streaming with surface water and debris and the Highway Authority is hard pushed to mend potholes and maintain drainage ditches.

5.1.7 In most cases buildings form a linear strip alongside the through roads in both Lower and Higher Ashton. The exception in Lower Ashton is the road and buildings along the lane that ends at The Mill. In Higher Ashton the exception is the 'yard' that leads to The Ridgeway.

5.1.8 In some cases the buildings are right on the road frontage, in almost all other cases they are hidden behind significant hedgerows or walls and are quite discreet in the landscape; there are few front gardens. Only Premier Barton (formerly Higher Barton) and Rydon can be easily seen from outside the village environs.

5.1.9 For the casual visitor there would seem to be no public 'green', but further exploration reveals an informal public space around the entry to the church in the churchyard and there is also a Parish field adjacent to the Village Hall.

*"Mature copper beech and ancient wall outside Place Barton."*

5.1.10 It is very difficult to find views into either Higher or Lower Ashton on the approach roads. There are glimpses of some buildings, mainly because of the many white walls but very rarely can one see a whole building or a group. The most significant view, from several directions, is of the church tower.

5.1.11 Within the settlement, views along



*"Two distinct parts –  
a commercial end  
(Lower) a spiritual end  
(Higher)."*



Above: Memory map from the Design Day

roads are limited by the bends and the slopes and by the often high roadside hedges and banks which all create a feeling of containment. Passing along these roads there are, however, occasional glimpses to one side or the other through gates or by the sides of houses, showing the strong backcloth of the surrounding hills. A casual visitor would probably miss many features which are hidden away.

*"Dwellings comprise many traditional thatched properties with few modern additions helping to maintain this scenic and timeless landscape"*

Quote from the Design Day

5.1.12 Most of the wider area is agricultural with farms in the 50–150 acre range and all with a variety of old, recent and occasionally very recent buildings. Blatchford Farm in Lower Ashton is the only traditional working farm close to other properties; all the others are quite detached or no longer primarily in agricultural use.

5.1.13 At Embercombe there has been a change of use from a private airfield to a community centre with occasional attendance by large numbers for specific events.

5.1.14 In Higher Ashton the Conservation Area consists of all the built up area around the church and the adjoining settlement at France Brook. It also includes Place Barton.

5.1.15 Taking the Exeter road by the church and leaving the Conservation Area we pass Premier Barton (formerly Higher Barton), Cowley and other smaller farms and come to Lakeham on the Parish border. The houses at Lakeham are in Kenn Parish but some of their land is in Ashton and those who live there look to Ashton as their community.

5.1.16 Leaving the church along the Trusham road, there is a settlement at Coombe before coming to the George Teign area. George Teign Road leading to George Teign Barton passes two other farms. On the other side of the Trusham road is Embercombe, a 50 acre site (see 5.2.11). Beyond Embercombe, we come to Holden Cross, an area in the forest which perhaps looks more to Trusham rather than Ashton.

5.1.17 All of the settlement of Lower Ashton is included in its Conservation Area. Other than The Mill, it contains no outlying sub-settlements as does Higher Ashton, although the Conservation Area extends a considerable way up the road which leads to



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the church.

5.1.18 Leaving the church past Place Barton we have a small settlement (which could be called Middle Ashton) before coming to the start of the Conservation Area which starts some way before Ashton Manor.

5.1.19 Outside the Conservation Area, Lower Ashton is largely agricultural but there is a small settlement at Rydon, at the south west boundary.

## 5.2 Building Development

5.2.1 The mid 19th century was a period of agricultural prosperity and several houses were constructed, some by the Canonteign Estate, the landlord at the time, e.g. Premier Barton, Cowley and the Manor Inn. A station (now a house) was built by the railway company in the late 19th century and, although closed in 1958, the recognisable building and the route of the line are attractive features. Ashton Manor was built in 1898 and has a quite different style to anything else.

5.2.2 During the 20th century several bungalows were built to house agricultural and forestry workers, e.g. Ferndown and

Harvest Down. There were probably 10 in total built for such uses and some remain restricted to specific occupancy, although often much altered and extended.

5.2.3 At first sight, there appears to have been little major physical change in recent years. However six homes have been built or had alterations recently; one contributory factor to the increase in traffic.

5.2.4 Large new agricultural barns have been constructed at Premier Barton and Beardon Farm and there has been unregulated construction of several smaller barns on fragmented land holdings, sometimes with residential caravans attached.

## 5.3 Architectural Features

5.3.1 It is difficult to categorise the buildings in Ashton other than to say that virtually every house is constructed in the vernacular style of its period. There are some notable period properties with the characteristic cross-passages found on the edge of Dartmoor. These include Coombe, Manor Cottage, George Teign, Deer Leap, The Bakehouse, Ridgeway, Rydon and Pitmans Cottage. Place Barton, Lower Bramble and George



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Teign are ancient buildings which were large farms in medieval times. These have fine architectural features.

5.3.2 The Grade 1 listed Church of St John the Baptist in Higher Ashton dominates the immediate area partly due to its site on an abrupt bluff. This means it can be seen from some distance but only where the deeply incised topography allows. A particularly attractive collection of old cottages is adjacent to the church with quirky shapes, thatched roofs, thick rounded walls and small windows as notable characteristics. In total there are 26 listed buildings in Ashton.

5.3.3 Virtually every house and garden is enclosed by hedges and walls and most cars are parked off the roads, with the notable and rather unfortunate exception on the hill north of the village church. It is hard to think of a property without a rear and/or side garden. The two Character Appraisals for the conservation areas add far more detail to this description than is possible to include here although, from our perspective, their emphasis on the buildings misses the importance to the overall village character of the enclosing walls and hedges, the gates, the few cobbled paths and the spaces between the buildings generally with their views out (see 5.1.11)

some of which lead to paths into the wider countryside.

5.3.4 Overall the village has lots of space, it is quiet and there are many private places. There are charming local views and fortunately there is little street furniture, although the rather obvious telegraph poles near the church detract, as do the National Grid pylons to the north of the Parish boundary and also rubbish bins. There are many often quite small but important features that make a significant contribution to the distinctive character of Ashton, some illustrated in the adjoining photographs.











## PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

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The Ashton Community Design Statement has been prepared to be in compliance with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2012 and to supplement the policies of the emerging Teignbridge Core Strategy/ Local Plan. Details of more specific area designations, listed buildings and so forth have already been covered in Sections 4 and 5.

### 1 National Policy

1.1 In its National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) the Government attaches great importance to the design of the built environment, recognising that good design is a key aspect of sustainable development, is indivisible from good planning and should contribute positively to making places better for people. In particular, the NPPF makes clear the importance of response to 'local character' in the design of new development (or the refurbishment of existing buildings or places):

*"Developments should respond to local character and history, and reflect the identity of local surroundings and materials, while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation." (Paragraph 58)*

1.2 It also stresses that design policies should avoid unnecessary prescription to detail but concentrate on guiding the overall scale, density, height, landscape, layout, materials and access of any new development in relation to neighbouring buildings and the local area.

1.3 The NPPF also seeks to empower local people to shape their surroundings as part of a process to secure high quality design. Under the main heading of "Requiring Good Design", the NPPF states the following:

*"Applicants will be expected to work closely with those directly affected by their proposals*

*to evolve designs that take account of the views of the community. Proposals that can demonstrate this in developing the design of the new development should be looked on more favourably." (Paragraph 66)*

### 2 Local Policy: The Teignbridge Local Plan 2013 to 2033

*"We benefit from being in a beautiful part of the country, and we will be protecting and managing this really important asset for future generations."*

2.1 The Teignbridge Local Plan sets out a proposed set of policies, proposals and actions to meet the environmental, social and economic challenges facing the area over the next 20 years. Key extracts from the most relevant policies are highlighted here.

2.2 Amongst the policies on sustainable development, Policy S1: Sustainable Development Criteria states that "proposals will be required to perform well against the following criteria" which include:

*"g) maintenance or enhancement of the character, appearance and historic interest of affected landscapes, settlements, street scenes, buildings, open spaces, trees and other environmental assets (and) h) impact on biodiversity and geodiversity".*

2.3 Policy S2 Quality Development, requires that new development:

*".... will be of high quality design, which will support the creation of attractive, vibrant places. Designs will be specific to the place, based on a clear process which analyses and responds to the characteristics of the site, its wider context and the surrounding area, creating a place with a distinctive character."*

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2.4 This is reinforced by Policy S22: Countryside which makes clear that Ashton is in *“open countryside” and any developments must show how they relate to “the distinctive characteristics and qualities of the Landscape Character Area”*.

2.5 Other policies from the Local Plan are also directly applicable to Ashton including EN2A Landscape Protection and Enhancement which seeks to:

*“ .... protect and enhance the area’s landscape, development will be sympathetic to and help to conserve and enhance the natural and cultural landscape character of Teignbridge, in particular in Areas of Great Landscape Value.”*

It should also be noted here that Parish borders on the Dartmoor National Park.

2.6 Under policy EN2A ‘Areas of Great Landscape Value’ (AGLV) are identified as areas of high landscape quality having strong and distinctive characteristics which make them particularly sensitive to new development. Although it does not afford the landscape the same level of protection as a national designation, e.g. AONB, it does provide a local level of protection and management for valued landscapes.

2.7 In terms of the built form of Ashton, Policy EN5: Heritage Assets, states the following:

*“To protect and enhance the area’s heritage, consideration of development proposals will take account of the significance, character, setting and local distinctiveness of any affected heritage asset, including ..... Conservation Areas.”*

2.8 Policy EN9 Important Habitats and Features, protects and enhances existing

areas of biodiversity and geodiversity. This applies to designated sites and linking features for wildlife movement. In Ashton this includes:

- Nationally important Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)
- Locally important County Wildlife Sites, Ancient Woodland and other priority habitats
- Linking features such as the River Teign

*“Specific sites are identified at international, national and local level for their biodiversity and geodiversity importance. Their protection will be pursued through the planning system, taking account of their relative importance.”*



## HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF ASHTON

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### 1 Ashton in the Domesday Book

1.1 The Manor of Ashton appears in the Domesday Book, although the origin of the Parish and its boundaries is uncertain. Often Parishes began as the missionary territory of a Minster, in Ashton's case Exminster. We know that Aelmer, a Saxon, held Ashton as a distinct estate before the Norman Conquest and that it was surrendered afterwards to Emma, the widow of Herveise de Helion from Normandy. The two other Domesday manors of George Teign and Lower Bramble were then under separate ownership.

### 2 The Chudleigh Family

2.1 The Manor of Ashton soon passed by marriage to the Chudleigh family, thus beginning a period of 700 years when Ashton was the principal place of residence of one of the great Devonshire families. Having a resident Lord of the Manor set Ashton apart and did much to shape the life of the community.

2.2 The building of Place Barton by the Chudleighs began in the 13th century and was followed by the early 15th century church of St John the Baptist. These buildings were the centres for the political and spiritual administration of the Parish. At an early date George Teign was acquired and subsumed into this grouping.

2.3 Trade and transport links had, from early times, led to a hamlet springing up next to the River Teign a mile away (Lower Ashton). This may have been "the land of two thegns" described in the Domesday Book and attached to the Ashton Estate at the time of the Conquest. Here the Mill played a vital role in the manorial economy. The best meadows bordered the river; simple tracks led to the markets at Chudleigh and Newton Abbot. Ashton developed naturally into two

linked hamlets with the ten or so tenanted farms widely dispersed within the Parish. The steep and difficult terrain did not lend itself to the pattern of a nuclear settlement with farmsteads within the village and their fields radiating outwards.

2.4 In the early 17th century William Honeywill, yeoman farmer, wrote in his diary about the farming seasons, the state of the wool trade and the markets. He dealt in livestock, gambled a little and played bowls at Place Barton. Honeywill's brass memorial is in the floor of the Church. Mary Chudleigh was a noted poet and is claimed today as an early feminist. A touching memorial in the Church to her son Richard, who died in childhood, is probably written by her.

2.5 In 1830, the last Chudleigh descendant died and the Manor of Ashton was bought by the First Lord Exmouth, whose family held it until 1867. A treasure trove of documents relating to this period records the old and redrawn leases of every property in Ashton. These are now held in the Devon Heritage Centre. As late as the 18th century some rents were still being paid through labour services on the estate. The Exmouths continued as responsible and improving landlords, rebuilding the farmsteads at Blatchford, Coombe, Cowley and Higher Barton.

### 3 Ashton in the 19th & 20th Centuries

3.1 At this time in the mid 19th century Ashton reached its highest recorded population of 360, doubled from 50 years earlier. Farming was prospering and new employment came from the stone quarries and the lead/silver and manganese mines on either side of the river.

3.2 In the 1840s a turnpike road was built on the line of the present Teign Valley road.

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The Teign Valley Railway through Ashton opened in 1882, initially from Heathfield to Christow and was extended in 1903 to Exeter. It served mainly the mineral mines in the valley but also offered a passenger service.

3.3 With the coming of the Great Agricultural Depression of the late 1870s, Ashton's prosperity receded. The census return of 1901 recorded a population of just 150. This was in spite of the arrival of the railway and the major construction work involved for a grand new Manor House in Lower Ashton. When the Exmouths sold the Estate in 1867 it remained intact in the hands of Theophilus Treby, who built the new mansion, before it passed to General Sir Richard Harrison. After the First World War the Estate was finally split up by offering freeholds to the sitting tenants.

3.4 The social and economic changes that transformed Britain over the next century hastened the passing of the self-sufficient working rural communities that had existed. In Ashton, evidence of this past is all around: its historical landscape, the ancient field names, the water meadows, the manorial leat and water mill, the medieval deer park - and a treasury of vernacular buildings with one of Devon's finest churches and manorial barns. These things have remained, but the present way of life of most of Ashton's inhabitants would have been unrecognisable to our forbears.

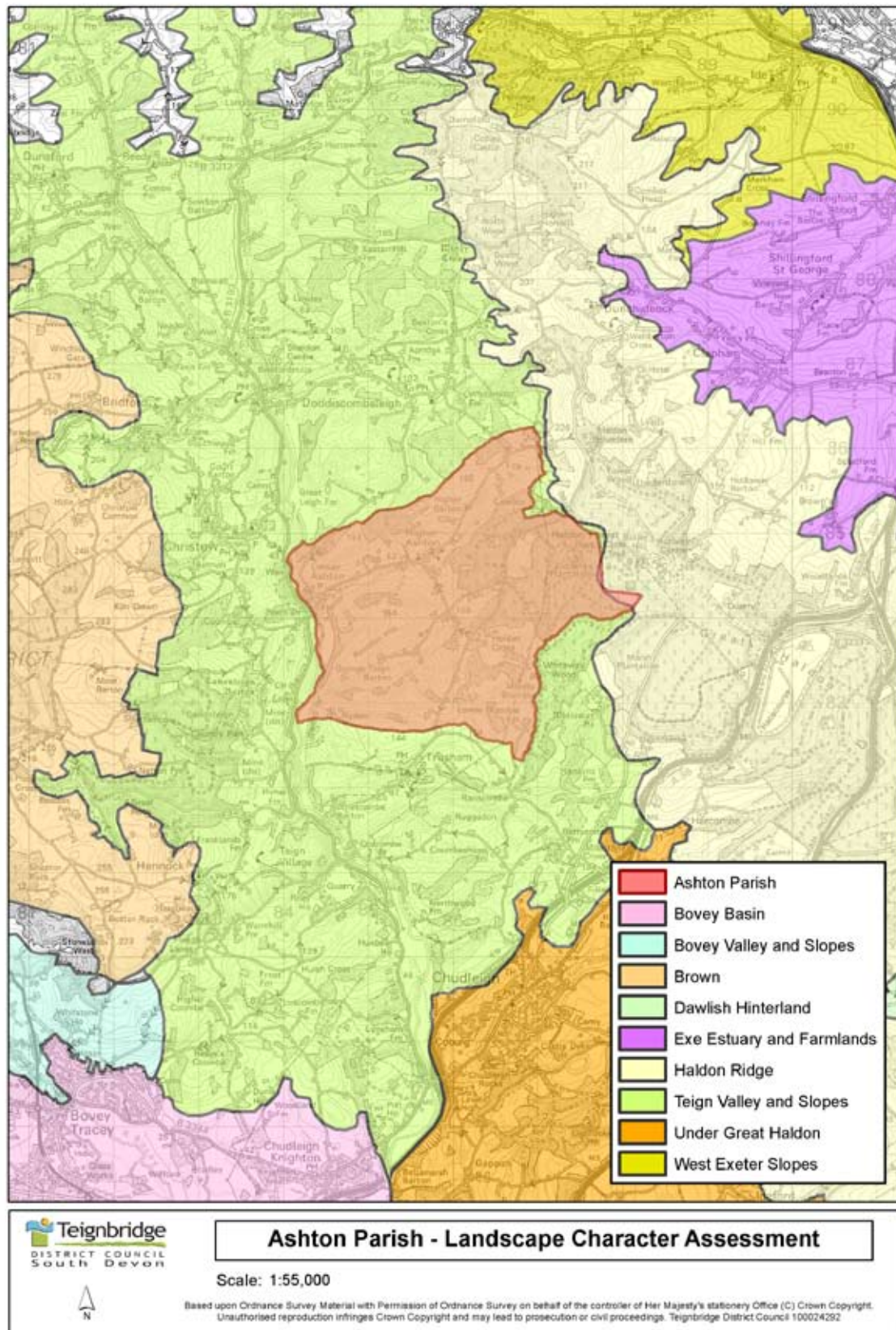
3.5 The catalogue of change in the 20th century is familiar. The Local Government Act of 1894 established the present system of County and District Councils. Parish Councils were created with a strict set of rules and the requirement to keep Minutes. Ashton is a rare survival of the Parish Meeting with similar rules of conduct, a Chairman but no elected Councillors. In the 1970s there was a recommendation that Ashton should join together with two neighbouring Parishes to

form a single Parish Council, but ancient loyalties precluded this.

3.6 Following decline in railway use, passenger trains were withdrawn in 1958. Flooding in 1961 caused the line to be closed between Trusham and Exeter, following which the gradual withdrawal of freight saw the remaining line finally close in 1968. Within Ashton the former railway station survives, now a private house, as does much of the trackbed.

3.7 Until very recently, Ashton and parts of the Teign Valley were designated an agricultural LFA (Less Favoured Area) in recognition of the steep and difficult terrain and often poor soil. This attracted financial help to encourage continued livestock farming. Ashton was also part of the Dartmoor ESA (Environmentally Sensitive Area) because of its exceptional landscape bordering the National Park. Much of the recent remaking of hedge banks, tree planting and fencing was assisted by ESA grants. These two schemes have now been closed.

# TEIGNBRIDGE DISTRICT LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT MAP



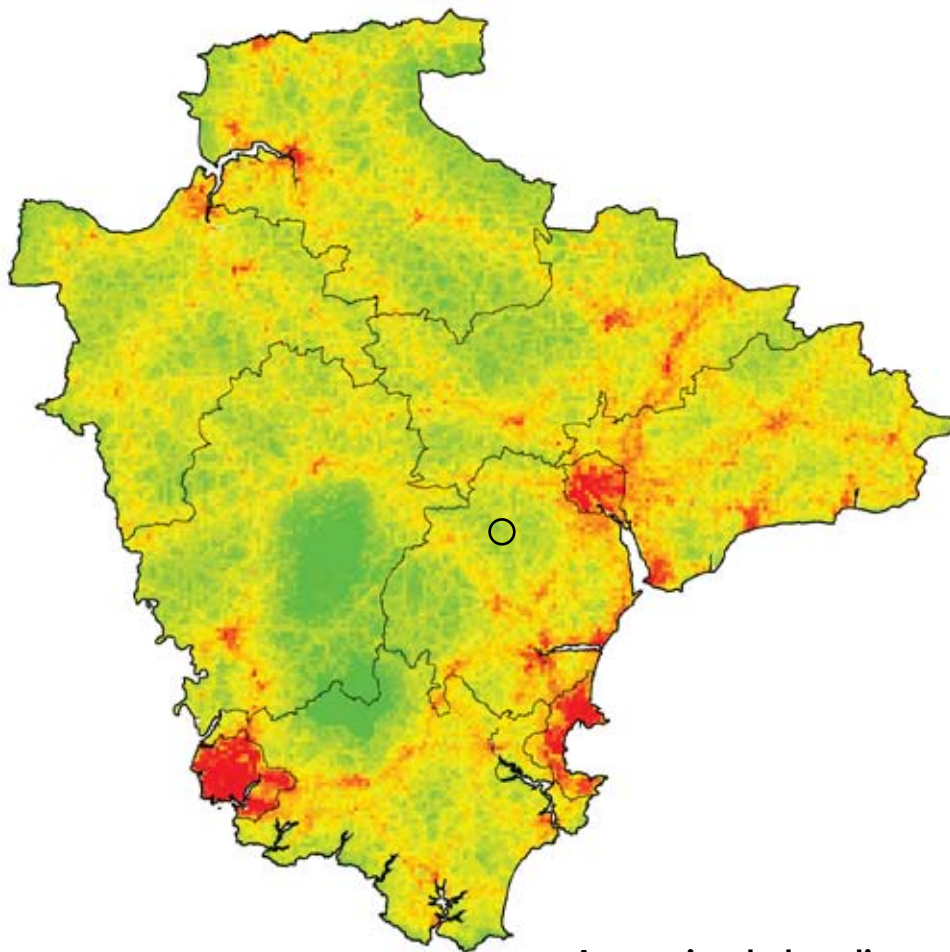


## CPRE TRANQUILITY MAP



Campaign to Protect  
Rural England

Devon



Approximate location  
of Ashton marked by ○

Reproduced courtesy of the  
Campaign to Protect Rural England.  
Revised edition 2007.



0 3.5 7 14 21 28 35 Kilometres

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### USEFUL LINKS

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**Teignbridge District Council Planning:**  
[www.teignbridge.gov.uk/index.aspx?articleid=818](http://www.teignbridge.gov.uk/index.aspx?articleid=818)

**Teignbridge Biodiversity Action Plan (adopted in 2006, containing policies and actions to help the Council conserve and enhance biodiversity)**  
[www.teignbridge.gov.uk/index.aspx?articleid=12537](http://www.teignbridge.gov.uk/index.aspx?articleid=12537)

**Dartmoor National Park:**  
[www.dartmoor-npa.gov.uk/](http://www.dartmoor-npa.gov.uk/)

**Devon Historic Landscape Characterisation:**  
[www.devon.gov.uk/index/environment/historic\\_environment/landscapes/landscape-characterisation.htm](http://www.devon.gov.uk/index/environment/historic_environment/landscapes/landscape-characterisation.htm)

**English Heritage:**  
[www.english-heritage.org.uk](http://www.english-heritage.org.uk)

**Natural England:**  
[www.naturalengland.org.uk/](http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/)

**DEFRA Mapping Website:**  
[magic.defra.gov.uk/home.htm](http://magic.defra.gov.uk/home.htm)

**National Planning Policy Framework:**  
[www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/6077/2116950.pdf](http://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/6077/2116950.pdf)