

Teignbridge District Conservation Area Character Appraisals

Higher Ashton



The conservation area boundary as indicated here is for illustrative purposes only, and is not intended to be a true representation of the conservation area as formally adopted. The accurate and definitive conservation area maps can instead be inspected at the main reception area of Teignbridge District Council offices, during normal office hours.

Not all important features of this conservation area are necessarily highlighted here, therefore no omissions that may have been made as part of this appraisal are intended to imply that omitted features that are found to be of interest from future reviews of the document are not of significance in their own right.

Acknowledgements

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Archive information and historic maps were obtained from the Westcountry Studies Library and Devon Records Office in Exeter. The archaeological analysis was informed by the Sites and Monuments Register, maintained by Devon County Council.

Consultations

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1:0 INTRODUCTION

The Conservation Area Character Statement for Higher Ashton was endorsed by the Planning Committee on 18 December 2000. Since that time it has been the subject of public consultation, with copies being distributed to the Parish Clerk and many individuals. It has also been available for download from the Teignbridge website - a facility that has proved very popular. The document was discussed at a public meeting in the village in December 2001.

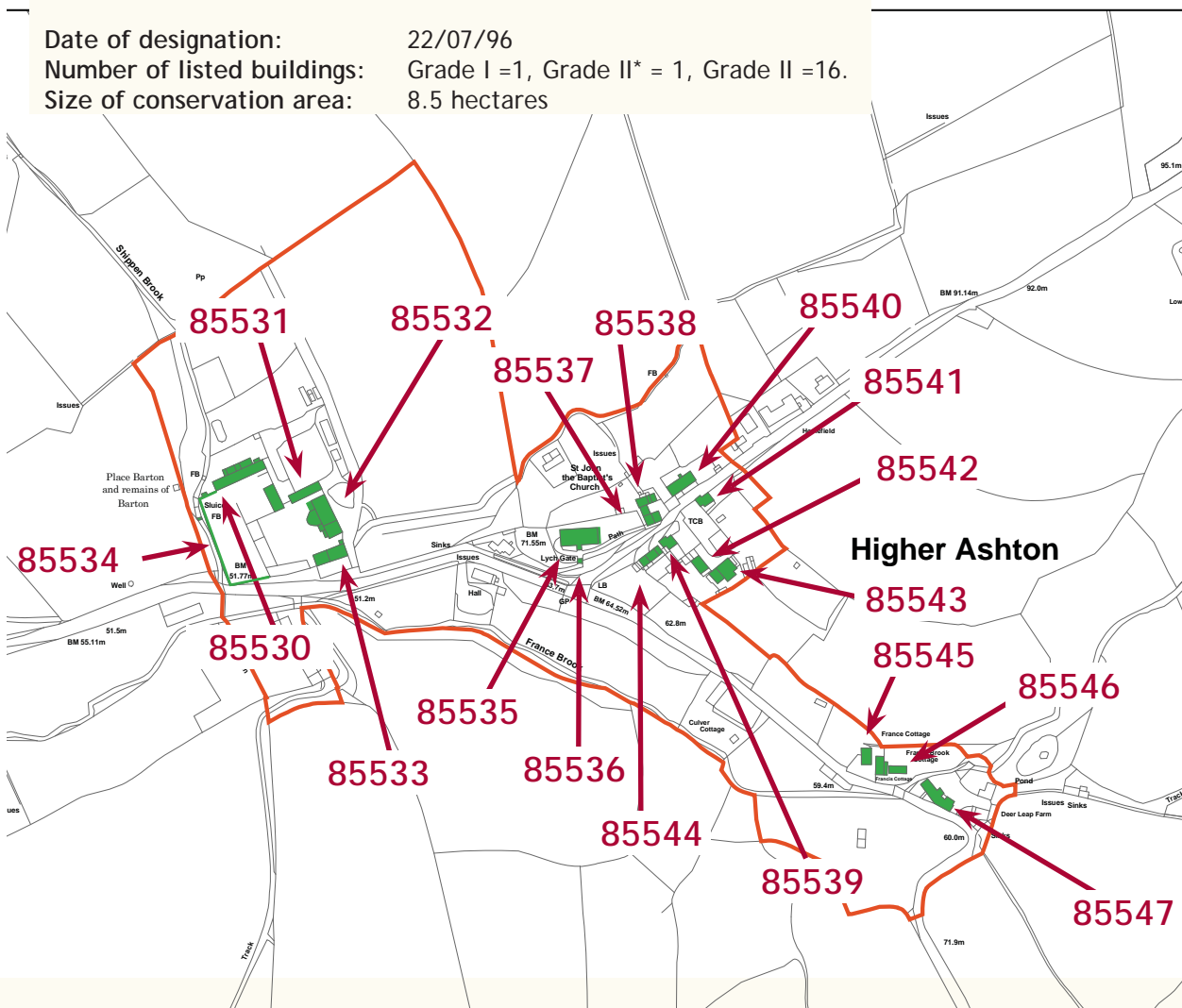
The feedback from the public and other interested bodies has been fully considered and a number of amendments have been made as a result.

This completed Character Appraisal has been adopted in May 2004 via the Development Plan Steering Group as a document to support current and future development plans. Consequently its contents are now a material consideration for any planning application which affects the conservation area or its setting. It will be distributed to the utility companies, Devon County Council and other interested parties such as English Heritage. Printed copies will be available for public viewing at Forde House and it may be downloaded from www.teignbridge.gov.uk as well.

A full review of this Character Appraisal was undertaken in August 2009, when its effectiveness was considered and necessary amendments made. Minor changes may be made with the agreement of the Parish meeting and the Ward member. The most up to date version will always be available on the website. The revised Appraisal was approved on 4th January 2010.

2:0 FACTS AND FIGURES

Date of designation: 22/07/96
Number of listed buildings: Grade I =1, Grade II* = 1, Grade II =16.
Size of conservation area: 8.5 hectares



The green coloured areas of this map represent listed buildings that lie within the Higher Ashton conservation area. A summary of these listings may be found in Appendix four.

3.0 LOCATION & GEOLOGY

Higher Ashton is a small scattered village with a strong agricultural emphasis. It lies on steeply sloping ground on the north side of a tributary stream of the River Teign, which it joins 1km to the south west.

Two farm settlements are outliers, a short distance to east and west of the main settlement, at Place Barton and Bridgeland. These are included in the Conservation Area.

The village is accessed by narrow winding lanes from three directions. The steep valley sides with woods and fields give Higher Ashton a distinctive character.

Carboniferous slates, shales and gritstones of the Culm Measures underlie Higher Ashton. Hard dark stone is apparent in many of the buildings, from localised outcrops of basalt, dolerite and spilitic lavas. The village's proximity to Dartmoor means that granite has been imported for use as gateposts and high status door and window frames in the past.

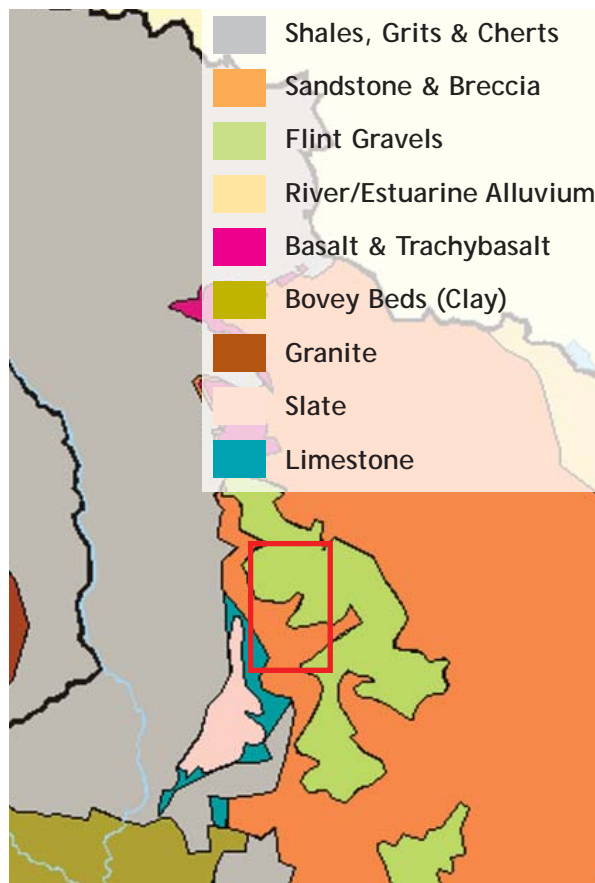


Cobbles reflect the geological variety of the Ashton area



Location

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Geology

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4:0 VILLAGE MORPHOLOGY & ARCHAEOLOGY

Higher Ashton is essentially a group of farmsteads, one of which, the manor house at Place Barton, has grown very large. The manor was mentioned in the Domesday Book and was given by William the Conqueror to Sir Hervius de Helion. The family who had most influence on the village were the Chudleighs who were lords of the manor from 1320-1745. They developed Place Barton as a mock-fortified courtyard mansion with a large deer park to the north of about 300 acres. Extensive remains survive of peripheral features, such as two large fishponds and an early 17th century formal garden between the house and the church.

Higher Ashton Church is dedicated to St. John the Baptist. This, coupled with its position on a rock outcrop, may indicate the site of a pre-Norman church. Parts of the graveyard have curved sides, suggesting that this is a fragment of a Dark Age ovoid ecclesiastical enclosure. A similar one is known locally at Lustleigh, where memorial stones of the 5th-6th century AD exist.

The centre of the village, east of the church, appears to be partly planned, with former farmhouses in wide rectangular plots running back from the road. Planned settlements of this type have been observed at Combeinteignhead and Holcombe, near Teignmouth and may date between the 12th and 14th centuries. The rather haphazard layout of the plots at Higher Ashton, best displayed on the 1889 OS map (Appendix 3), is unusual and may indicate more piecemeal, though intentional planning, over a period of time.

Most of these farmsteads have 15th-17th century houses. Some are unusual, as at France Cottages, in the south east corner of the conservation area. Here, a 15th century 3 room cross passage house has a square cob building to its east. This may be a detached kitchen, a very unusual survival, possibly of 15th-16th century date.

Pitman's Cottages beside the church, has a complex U plan of many phases. It may have been the medieval parsonage house, as these commonly enclosed a courtyard, close to the church. Rainbow Cottages to the east were almshouses in the 18th century, although they probably originated in the 16th or 17th century as a cross passage house.

- The historic plan of Higher Ashton is an intrinsic part of the settlement's charm. This character



An ancient and unspoilt village, Higher Ashton has a character defined by limewashed and thatched vernacular buildings. It's three distinct settlement groups are complemented by the agricultural spaces between them.

should not be eroded by backland or infill development, as gardens and fields between the settlement areas were integral to the historic plan. Development potential within and around the village is negligible.

- Archaeological remains in Higher Ashton are particularly important. An Area of Archaeological Potential (see map below) has been identified, taking account of its origins and development and the importance of the surroundings of Place Barton. Any planning applications involving significant excavation within the identified area must be informed by an archaeological investigation.
- The historical development of Higher Ashton will be better understood if it is studied. Further archeological investigation can only reveal more valuable evidence and is to be encouraged.



Area of Archaeological Potential

5:0 ARCHITECTURE

Higher Ashton's architecture is essentially vernacular, with many thatched or formerly thatched properties in cob and stone. Several houses have jointed cruck roof trusses of 15th or 16th century date, such as The Bakehouse, south east of the church, which has smoke blackened thatch, wattle & daub and plank & muntin screens and an internal jetty. Many other houses in the village have similar survivals, including moulded doorframes and dressed granite fireplaces, eg: Nos 2 & 3 Ridgeway.

Place Barton, once a very extensive courtyard mansion, has three surviving residential ranges, the outer of which incorporates a gatehouse with remains of a granite arch. This has stables and servants' lodgings of the early 16th century with a jointed cruck roof and granite framed windows. The main house has gone, but a rear kitchen and lodgings range was of very high status with a hall and two rear chamber wings, each with a late 15th century arch-braced roof. It may have developed from a pair of 14th century service buildings, one of which, a kitchen, retains its massive fireplace. This outstanding house was besieged in the Civil War, which may account for the loss of parts of the gatehouse range, the mock-fortified outer courtyard and the main house, although parts of this 14th century building were still standing in the 1790s, when visited by Rev. Swete.

The Chudleigh family gave much money to the Parish Church, whose late 15th century stained glass and rood screens are among the most lavish in the county. The fine Beer stone arcades and window frames, imported from east Devon, coupled with extensive medieval wall paintings, mark this out as a very special church. It contained the chapel and mausoleum of the Chudleigh family.

The older buildings of Higher Ashton are built of rubble stone and cob with a protective coating of render and limewash. Only the church and Place Barton have exposed stonework, although dolerite and slate rubble are common materials in boundary walls, with occasional cob walls, such as that beside the lane between Place Barton and the church. This may be early 17th century, relating to the formal gardens in the field above.

Prior to the 19th century, thatch must have been ubiquitous. A few formerly thatched properties in prominent locations, such as Balls Cottages, and Ridgeway Cottages and Culver Cottage would benefit from its revival. Since publication of the initial 'character statement', Culver Cottage had been thatched - a great positive step.

Natural slate and tiles are a relatively recent arrival. Impetus for their use probably came with the railway. Higher grade buildings, such as Place Barton and the church may have used locally imported slate in the medieval period.

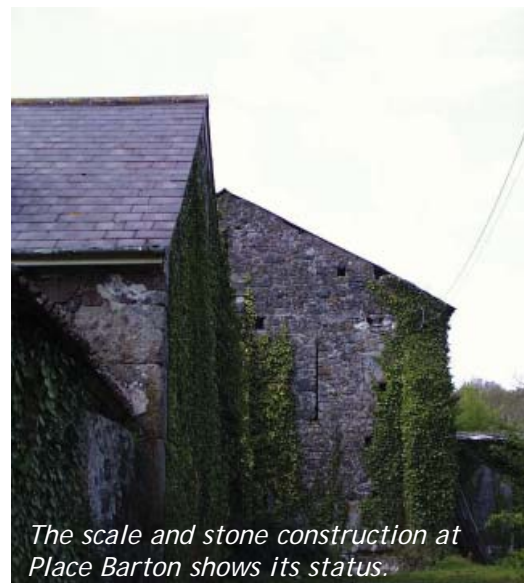
The buildings themselves provide enclosure to the



Most buildings in Higher Ashton are whitewashed and have thatched roofs.



Culver Cottage - now with a thatched roof



The scale and stone construction at Place Barton shows its status.



This contemporary extension replaced an unattractive concrete block kitchen.

streetscene in part. Elsewhere, slate or dolerite rubble stone laid in lime mortar with a coarse textured aggregate is a feature. Older stone and cob walls are rendered with lime mortar and capped with clay tiles or natural roofing slates. Boundaries to the rear of, and between properties are mostly Devon hedgebanks.

- Any building which is allowed within, or affecting the setting of, the conservation area (including garages and other service buildings), must be of a demonstrably high design standard incorporating quality materials. Applicants must show how their proposal will contribute positively to the character of the area and the setting of nearby buildings.
- The results of an Architectural Character Survey are illustrated on the map, along with a brief summary of the criteria used, in Appendix two.



6:0 BUILDING MATERIALS

Local igneous stone is primarily used in construction, with limestone, granite and other stones. Quoin stones used on the church are large and well-tooled, but the brittle quality of the stone means that most buildings were constructed of rubble and rendered. The traditional thatched cottages retain their render and white walls, although few are genuine limewash. The gradual reintroduction of limewash would benefit the buildings technically and aesthetically. The almost exclusive use of white is a traditional characteristic that ought to be continued.

Apart from the church and manor house, which may have always been slated, straw thatch was the traditional roof covering in Higher Ashton. Where a building was originally thatched and there are real townscape benefits to be gained by its re-instatement, this should be encouraged. The use of thatch on new buildings in prominent locations would help them fit in with the prevailing character.

Timber windows of various ages are found within the village and there is a notable profusion of leaded lights. The use of modern materials or finishes strikes a discordant note in this unspoilt village. Where windows have been replaced in the past, it is most desirable that suitably designed units are reinstated.

For the most part, stone or cob walls form enclosure. A few traditional hedgebanks are also found. In the village, the walls are of coursed or random rubble, tightly laid in lime mortar with a coarse aggregate. The few traditional Devon hedgebanks are constructed of earth with a stone core and planted with deciduous trees. Where these have survived, they are commonly overgrown.

New hedges and walls must follow this lead. Introduced stone or brick would harm the existing character. Single-species hedgerows of any kind are uncharacteristic in the extreme, especially those of a coniferous variety.

- The characteristic architectural features and building materials of Higher Ashton are summarized in Appendix one.



Thatch, rendered walls and large chimneys epitomise the character of Higher Ashton



Without repair this cob wall may soon be lost

7:0 POSITIVE CHARACTER FEATURES

The special character of Higher Ashton Conservation Area is not derived solely from the buildings. Some other features are summarized below:-

7:1 SURFACING: Some surviving remnants of historic surfacing illustrate the types of treatments used in the past. Waterworn Haldon chert and dolerite cobbles survive on the church paths and the stream beside the lane past Place Barton has exposed a cobbled surface. It is likely that other parts of the village were treated in a similar way in the past. Elsewhere crushed aggregate of varied size and geology is a common surface.

7:2 TREES: Specimen trees add considerably to the appearance of certain parts of the village, notably the churchyard. The former deer park and its approaches, north of Place Barton are planted with many varieties of tree, both deciduous and coniferous. The old maps, especially that of 1810, show avenues and shelter-belts in this park. Occasional wild areas, such as the vicinity of Bridgeland and along the stream, have many naturally seeded mature trees and scrub. Hedgerows around the edges of the settlement have survived and are extensively overgrown with many mature trees.

7:3 ORCHARDS: The old maps show the extent of orchards in the past. Their relevance to the cultural history of the village cannot be overstated, nor can their vulnerability. The remaining isolated trees must be retained and new ones should be planted. This could be achieved as part of a community project. The Countryside Management section at Teignbridge may be able to offer free orchard trees and advice on planting etc.



Orchards are under threat from neglect and agricultural decline

7:6 VIEWS: Entering the village from the north east, views into the valley to the west are possible. The churchyard also affords views of Place Barton and its surrounding fields. An attractive backdrop of small fields with overgrown hedges in this steep-sided valley, is visible on all sides of the conservation area. The impact of developments such as farm buildings must be considered with relation to the conservation area, even if they are some distance away.

7:4 GARDENS: Of many gardens shown on the 1889 OS map, several still survive, with their ancient plot boundaries. These must be jealously preserved as a link with the past.

7:5 WATER: Where the stream passes down the valley alongside Place Barton, it is restricted in a narrow channel between rubble stone walls, one of which preserves the line of the early 16th century mock-defensive outer courtyard wall. A charming stone arch over the smaller stream beside the lane opposite Place Barton is made of carved Beer stone, re-used from the house. The sights and sounds of water in the village are very attractive.



The sight and sound of water is always appealing

7:7 PLACE BARTON: This important medieval mansion still retains an agricultural air, even though it no longer functions as a farm. It is important that this connection is not broken. The large threshing barn on the east side of the buildings is 15th-16th century, representing an agricultural heritage which has remained unbroken for half a millenium at least. Residential development and subdivision of these buildings would be very likely to harm the character of this ancient site.

7:8 HISTORIC GARDENS: In the field between Place Barton and the church are a number of terraces, representing the earthworks of a formal garden, probably of early 17th century date. The cob wall alongside the road is probably also related to them. This rare survival needs archaeological recording, a project which could be tackled by local history groups, the Devon Archaeological Society, or a university archaeology department.

7:9 DARKNESS: The absence of street lighting means light pollution at night is minimal. Residents must also be considerate when installing garden or security lighting.



Maturing hedgerow trees make the area appear more heavily wooded that it really is. The pylon beyond the church shows how structures outside of the conservation area can impact on important views.

8:0 NEGATIVE CHARACTER FEATURES

8:1 OVERHEAD CABLES: A number of attractive views are spoiled by the presence of intrusive power and telephone lines. The undergrounding of the worst examples would be very beneficial.

8:2 POOR ENCLOSURE: The introduction of suburban fencing is unfortunate and detracts from the rural character of Higher Ashton.



9:0 ACTION POINTS

9:1 PARTNERSHIP PROJECTS:

- Maintain orchards and hedges. Replant where appropriate.
- Undergrounding of cables.

9:2 RESIDENTS:

- Remove masonry paint and cement renders from old buildings, (to let them breathe), and replace with lime renders and limewash. Avoid introducing bright colours such as yellow, pink or blue. White will preserve harmony.
- Avoid suburban fencing and planting.

APPENDIX ONE

CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES OF BUILDINGS IN HIGHER ASHTON

BASICS

- Steeply pitched thatch or slate roofs. Corrugated iron, painted in subdued colours (eg: matt green or black) is traditional for sheds, garages etc., depending on location and design.
- Thatch roofs: flush or straight block-cut ridges. Slate roofs: clay tile ridges in subdued orange-brown or glazed black with mitred hips.
- White limewashed walls in granite, dolerite or other rubble stone and/or cob. The latter construction is often tapered from base to eaves, with corners rounded off.
- Chimneys with tapered tops and rough slate drips, often rendered. Some use of granite.
- Pre-19th century houses have small windows set in deep reveals with a dominance of solid over void. 19th and early 20th century windows are of similar proportions, but larger.
- Traditional side-hung casements and some vertical sliding sashes, with and without horns, in painted timber. Small panes, often leaded.
- Most buildings within the conservation area are conventional two-storey structures. Dormers are generally absent, especially on prominent roof slopes.
- Some cottages are built tight to the street frontage, others have front gardens enclosed by low stone walls



PALETTE OF MATERIALS

ROOFING: Thatch, occasionally slate and plain (or black/dark green painted) corrugated iron.

RAINWATER GOODS: Half-round or ogee gutters in cast iron.

WALLS: Render, often roughcast, but sometimes smooth (normally lime mortar on old stone/cob buildings) and natural stone, either of which are mostly limewashed. Natural or black/grey stained timber weatherboarding may have limited uses on outbuildings and former farm buildings.

WINDOWS & DOORS: Painted softwood, (opaque stains are occasionally suitable for new build). Natural timber may occasionally be used, but only if it is oak.

ENCLOSURE: Local rubble stone walls, occasionally cob; bare, rendered and/or limewashed. Devon hedgebanks, (hazel, field maple, holly, beech, etc).

SURFACING: Waterworn cobbles of Haldon flint/chert and dolerite, hoggin or blacktop (if used judiciously).



MATERIALS TO BE AVOIDED

ROOFING: Artificial slate, tiles (especially concrete) and man-made ridge/hip tiles. Industrial-type corrugated sheeting.

RAINWATER GOODS: Plastic, especially box-profile guttering in grey, white or brown.

WALLS: Brick, imported stone, reconstituted stone and textured renders (apart from roughcast). Stained timber or plastic weatherboarding.

WINDOWS AND DOORS: PVCu, stained timber and powder-coated metal frames are all incongruous.

ENCLOSURE: Reconstituted stone, brick or block walls, even if rendered, are not acceptable. Larch-lap or close-boarded and 'ranch-style' fencing are incongruous. Evergreen hedges, especially conifers are an unwelcome import.

SURFACING: Large areas of blacktop, concrete or chippings should be avoided. Brick pavements have no place in a conservation area with the character of Higher Ashton.



Modern fencing treatments are alien in Higher Ashton.

APPENDIX TWO

ARCHITECTURAL CHARACTER SURVEY

The purpose of this survey is to identify which buildings within the conservation area contribute positively or negatively to townscape character. Three characters bands are used (see map 1) and the criteria for each are summarised below.

In assessing individual buildings, it is their form, design and architectural potential which is most important. Ephemeral considerations like plastic windows or slight disrepair will not usually result in buildings being categorised lower. This does not imply that, for example, plastic windows in a building making a positive contribution to the area are in themselves a positive feature. They may, however, have prevented it from being classed as 'outstanding'. In addition, a quite modest but attractive building in a very prominent location may be rated as 'outstanding', even though it might only be judged as 'positive' if it were tucked away among other buildings.

Category 1 : Outstanding

These buildings may be of any age, but are most likely to be either ancient and unspoiled vernacular buildings or distinctive examples of a particular architectural style.

Buildings identified as outstanding are the highlights of any conservation area. Planning applications and other proposals which may effect their character, or that of their setting, should only be considered if they offer an enhancement. Harmful proposals must be rejected and demolition is very unlikely to be accepted under any circumstances.

Category 2 : Positive

Buildings in this category are the backbone of every conservation area. They will usually be unpretentious but attractive buildings of their type that do not necessarily demand individual attention, but possess considerable group value. Some may have been altered or extended in uncomplimentary ways, but the true character of these buildings could be restored.

The majority of structures in most conservation areas are likely to fall into this category. Alterations should only be made to positive items if they result in an enhancement of the building and the contribution it makes to the character or appearance of the conservation area. Demolition must only be considered in exceptional circumstances where significant aesthetic enhancement and/or community benefits would be realised.

- **Proposals which would detract from the special character of these buildings will be resisted.**

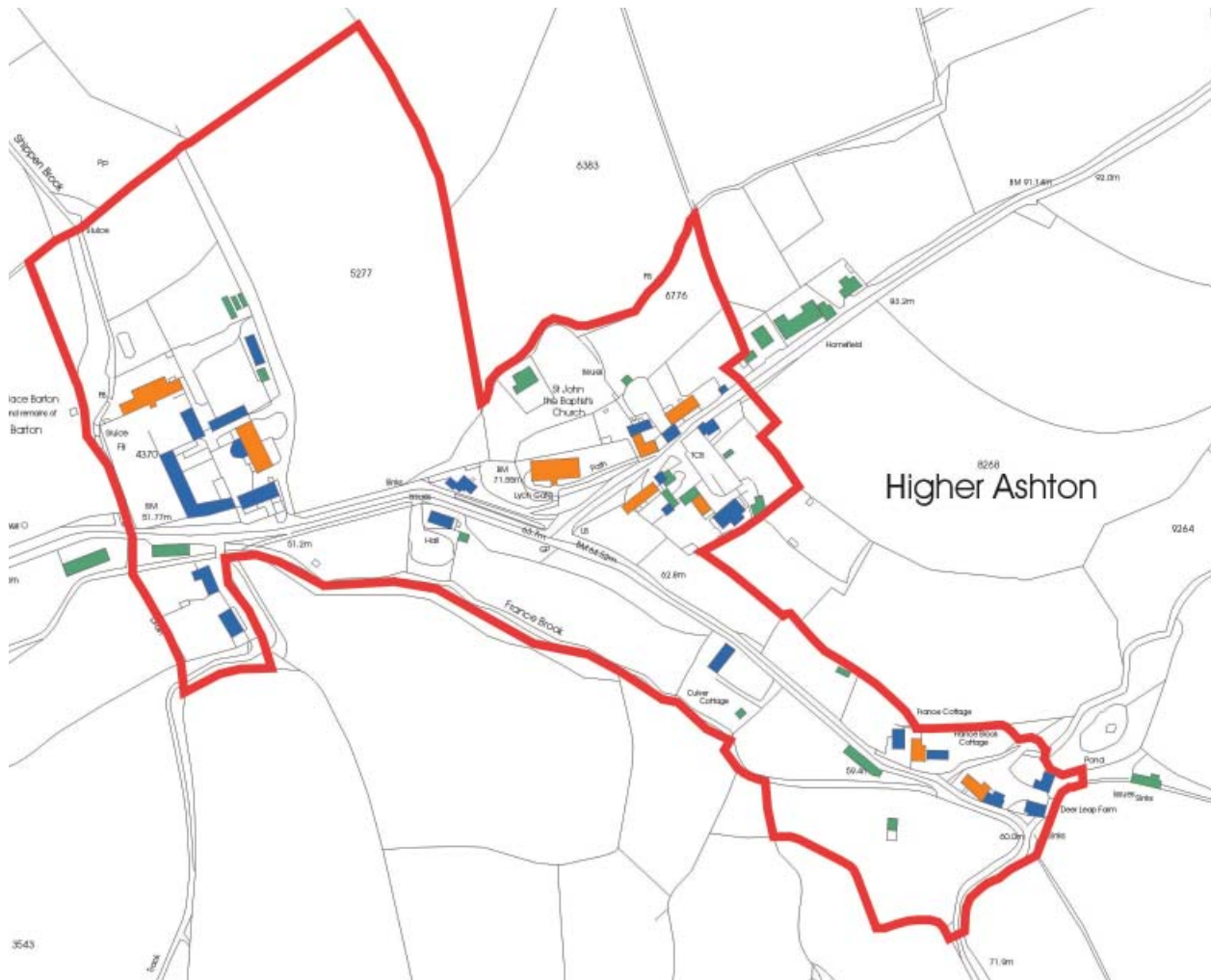
Category 3 : Neutral or Negative

Most conservation areas have buildings that are neither positive nor negative in their contribution to overall character. These will often be twentieth century buildings which may be inoffensive in scale and location, but which lack quality in terms of detailing, materials and design. It must also be accepted that there are usually some buildings in conservation areas which cause actual harm to the character and appearance of that area. These will most commonly be twentieth century buildings which, by a combination of scale, form, location, materials or design, are harmful to the character of the area.

Judgements on these matters will always be open to criticism that they are subjective. Consequently the 'neutral' and 'negative' categories, (which featured in the draft Character Statement), have been combined in this Character Appraisal.

Planning applications for alteration, extension or replacement of buildings in this category will be expected to offer a significant enhancement of the conservation area. Where a building is clearly detrimental due to design, scale or location, its replacement will be encouraged. The use of planting, or other landscaping, to reduce the visual impact of less attractive buildings, may achieve considerable aesthetic benefits at relatively little cost.

- **Proposals to enhance the conservation area by either re-modelling buildings, or re-developing sites in this category will be welcomed. Re-development will be expected to demonstrate a very high standard of contextual design and a thorough understanding of prevailing character.**

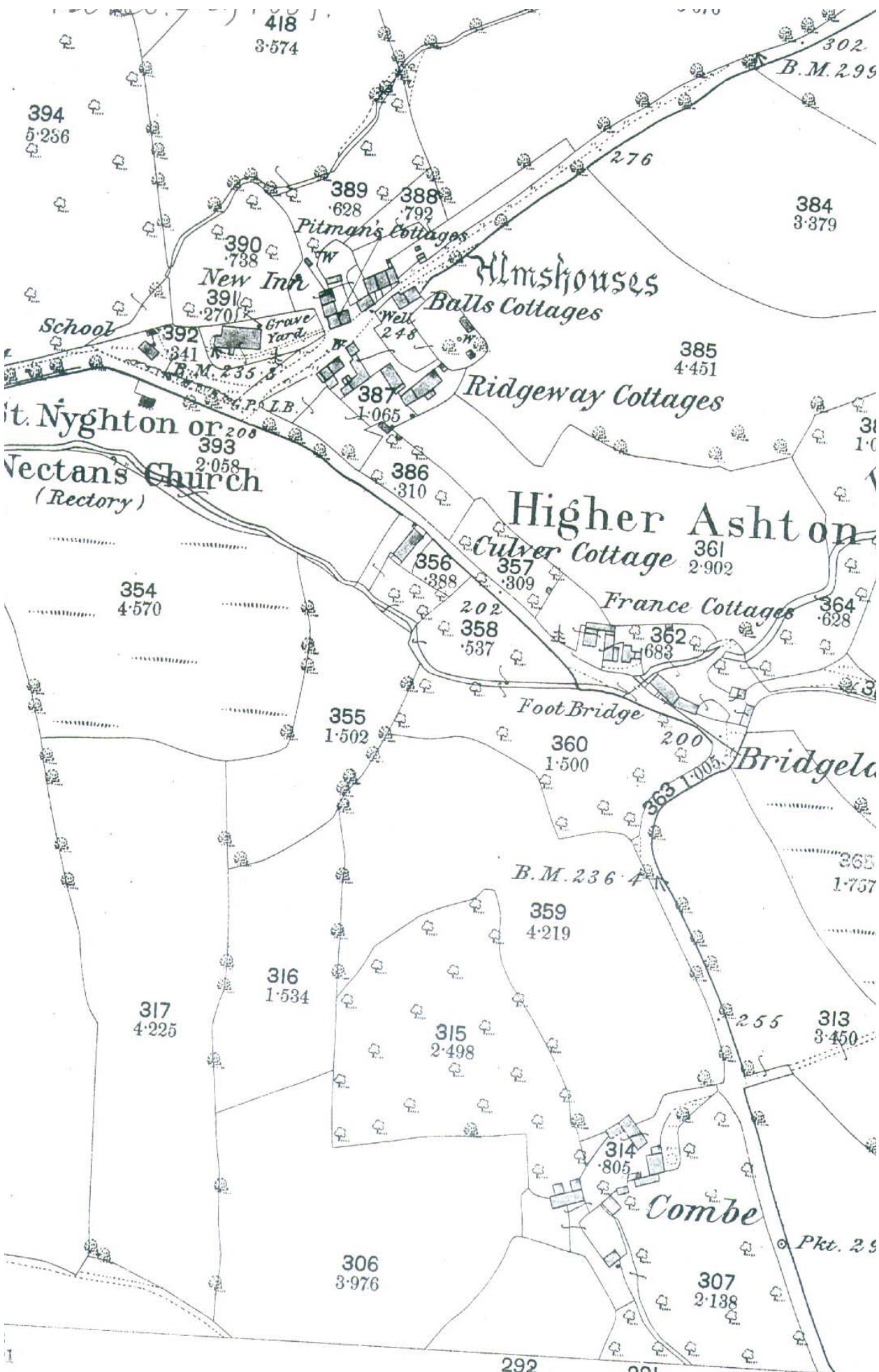


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Key to Character Survey Map

- Category 1: Outstanding
- Category 2: Positive
- Category 3: Neutral/Negative





PARISH SUMMARY LIST OF BUILDINGS OF SPECIAL ARCHITECTURAL OR HISTORICAL INTEREST FOR:
HIGHER ASHTON CONSERVATION AREA

Ref. No.	Grade	Date of Listing	Item
85530	II*	1952	Place Barton
85531	II	1988	Linhay about 30m south east of Place Barton
85532	II	1988	Barn about 40m south east of Place Barton
85533	II	1988	Yard Cottage and adjoining farmbuilding
85534	II	1988	Garden and farmyard walls to the south west of Place Barton including footbridge over Shippen Brook and thatched building to the west of Barton Place
85535	I	1961	Church of St John the Baptist
85536	II	1988	Lychgate to the Church of St John the Baptist including Granite Steps
85537	II	1952	Pitmans
85538	II	1952	Beggars Roost
85539	II	1988	Former Wheelwright's shop south east of Beggars Roost
85540	II	1952	Rainbow Cottage and Rainbow End
85541	II	1961	Briar Cottage
85542	II	1988	No.1 Ridgeway
85543	II	1988	Nos. 2 and 3 Ridgeway
85544	II	1961	The Bakehouse
85545	II	1988	France Cottage
85546	II	1986	Francis Cottage and France Brook Cottage
85547	II	1988	Deep Leap Farmhouse

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Beer stone: Creamy limestone from quarries at Beer in East Devon. Much used in medieval times.

Chert: Flint-like stone found in profusion in the Haldon area and in watercouses around the higher ground.

Cob: Cob is made up of a mixture of mud, straw, dung, and sometimes horse hair.

Cruck: Early (medieval) roof structure which rises from a basal point within the wall. May be a single piece of timber, or two or more jointed together.

Hoggin: Compressed aggregate of varied size and composition used as a surfacing material.

Intrusive igneous rock: Stone formed by underground volcanic activity, eg granite and dolerite.

Lime: Binding agent in traditional mortar.

Limewash: Protective/decorative surface coating made using lime putty.

Ogee: Traditional decorative moulding profile, commonly used for guttering.

Plank & muntin: Timber partition screen made of posts with thinner planks set into grooves.

Quoin stones: Large stones, dressed and squared to form the corners of a building.

Smoke blackened thatch: Soot covering to underside of thatch and roof structure which indicates that the building was once an open hall, without a chimney or an upper floor.

Spilitic lavas: Extrusive igneous rock similar to basalt, laid under water.

Permian: Geological period approximately 250 million years before present.

Vernacular: The traditional architecture of a particular region or locality, which is functional and uses locally available materials.

Wattle and daub: Vernacular building method, commonly used for partitions, where thin strips of timber are woven through a series of fixed vertical members (wattle) before mud is applied.



Teignbridge District Conservation Area Character Appraisal