



Totnes Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan

Consultation draft

Frequently Asked Questions

Do I live within the conservation area?

You can find out if you live within the conservation area using our [online maps](#).

How does living in a conservation area affect me?

Conservation areas are subject to different planning controls and considerations. These exist to protect the area. They vary in sizes and are focused on a specific area with special architectural and historic interest that illustrate the way building traditions and settlement patterns have changed through time. There is also evidence that being located in a conservation area attracts premium property prices.

Permitted Development Rights: The usual permitted development rights, the things you can do to your property without planning permission, are slightly different in conservation areas. This means that you may need to make planning applications for some forms of development that would not require permission outside a conservation area. These largely relate to external changes that could affect the character or appearance of the building and therefore impact the wider conservation area.

Demolition: 'Relevant' demolition within a conservation area requires planning permission. Contact us to clarify what constitutes 'relevant'.

Trees: Trees within a conservation area are protected if their main stem (trunk) is 75mm+ in diameter when measured at 1.5 metres from ground level (about the width of a tin can). You must notify the local planning authority six weeks before any works to cut, lop, top, uproot or destroy these trees. This is to enable the local planning authority to consider the contribution the tree makes to the area and assess whether the tree fits the criteria for protection by a Tree Preservation Order (TPO). Once six weeks have

For further information, you can contact the Local Planning Authority through a [planning/heritage duty slot](#) to discuss if/what type of application may be required, or a [pre-application](#) for specific advice.

passed from receipt of the validation letter, if a Tree Preservation Order is not served, you may proceed with the works as applied for. Unauthorised tree works can lead to hefty fines and criminal prosecution.

What types of changes require planning permission?

As a general rule of thumb, it is *changes* to the external appearance that require permission. Typically, you would require planning permission for:

- Roof, side and rear (over one storey) extensions.
- External cladding, rendering and decorations.
- Satellite dishes and radio antennae visible from the highway.
- Demolition.
- Tree works.
- Advertisements.

Contact us for specific advice.

What is a Conservation Area Appraisal?

The appraisal provides detailed contextual information about the town's history, development, architecture, and guidance on how that character can be preserved when changes are put forward. This document is a material planning consideration that provides guidance for residents, planners, and interested parties in managing development appropriately. The associated management plan sets out a framework for future actions to secure the area and address the challenges identified.

What is new in this document?

This document is a new updated appraisal that provides an updated assessment of the conservation area, amends the conservation area boundary, and sets out further guidance.

How does this sit alongside other documents?

The Plymouth and South West Devon Joint Local Plan (JLP) is the primary statutory document that forms the local development plan. The Totnes Neighbourhood Plan (NP) also forms part of the local plan. Relevant policies include:

- Policy En3 Historic and Built Character
- Policy En4 Landscape Setting of Totnes

This appraisal document is a material planning consideration in making decisions. Failure to adhere to the guidance set out in this document will weigh against proposals in the planning balance.

Can I change my interior?

Interiors of unlisted buildings in conservation areas are not protected and do not require consent provided the extent of works does not constitute relevant demolition or a change in use. You may wish to consider how the loss of original features affect the future saleability of the property. Please note, it is a legal requirement and responsibility of a homeowner and builder to achieve compliance with Building Regulations. For more information, please contact the [Devon Building Control Partnership](#).

Do I need permission to change my windows or doors?

Changes to the appearance of external windows and doors may require permission. Any changes to flats and listed buildings will require consent. Contact us before starting works.

Does advertising require permission?

You will need to apply for advertisement consent to display an advertisement bigger than 0.3 square metres (or any size if illuminated) on the front of, or outside, your property. Changes to

advertisement on listed buildings will also require listed building consent.

'A' Boards sited on the pavement outside premises to attract customers represent a hazard within the pavement for those who require more space or are partially sighted. 'A' Boards positioned within a pavement or that cause a hazard can be removed by the County Highways Authority. You can report suspected breaches through [their website](#).

I am still confused; how do I find out if I need planning permission?

Our 'duty service' offers advice on whether or what type of permission or other consent is required. Our 'pre-application' service offers specific advice on the acceptability of a scheme. Contact us before starting works.

What should I do if I suspect a planning breach?

Our Enforcement Team can investigate unauthorised development, works to protected trees, and planning breaches. You can report suspected breaches through [our website](#). All complaints are kept confidential and will not be disclosed without your knowledge and agreement unless we are legally required to.

Heritage Crime

Theft, criminal damage, arson, anti-social behaviour, illegal metal detecting, and unlawful salvage can harm our irreplaceable assets and undermine the public's enjoyment of England's heritage. Devon and Cornwall Police have a dedicated Heritage Crime team. If you think an offence has been committed, or is going to be committed, please contact them. If you're not sure whether it's a crime, they would rather hear from you and determine that themselves.

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Introduction

Background

Conservation areas were first adopted following the Civic Amenities Act of 1967 and are defined by the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 as “an area of special architectural or historic interest the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance”. At the time of publication, South Hams District Council has 37 conservation areas of varying sizes. Their designation serves to recognise and protect a specific area with special architectural and historic interest that illustrate the way building traditions and settlement patterns have changed through time. The purpose of designation is not to prevent future change, but, to ensure that development is carefully managed to be sympathetic to the character and appearance of the area. This ensures that the area can be preserved and, where possible, enhanced, for both our enjoyment and that of generations to come.

Totnes Conservation Area was one of the first areas designated by Devon County Council in 1969. The boundary was further extended in 1985, 1992, and 2007 to incorporate designations of further listed buildings. South Hams District Council are conscious of their duty to review their conservation areas ‘from time to time’ resulting in this review and would like to thank everyone who has contributed to this process.

Planning Policy Context

This review has been completed in accordance with the requirements of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, National Policy Planning Framework (NPPF), Planning Practice Guidance (PPG), the Plymouth and South West Devon Joint Local Plan (JLP) (adopted March 2019), and Historic England’s Advice Note 1: Conservation Area Appraisal, Designation and Management (HEAN1). In this regard, paragraph 204 of the NPPF advises that when considering the designation of conservation areas, local planning authorities should ensure that an area justifies such status because of its special architectural or historic interest, and that the concept of conservation is not devalued through the designation of areas that lack special interest.

The PPG further advises that a good appraisal will consider what features make a positive or negative contribution to the significance of the conservation area, thereby identifying opportunities for beneficial change or the need for planning protection. The

HEAN1 published by Historic England, the government’s advisors on the historic environment, provides best practice guidance to help inform and structure a conservation area appraisal and management plan which has been incorporated.

Aims

In accordance with HEAN 1, the principal aims of this review are:

- To reconfirm the special interest of the conservation area.
- To assess the conservation area boundary as required and establish whether any further changes may be desirable.
- To provide updated guidance for future development.
- To revise the management plan.

As such, this conservation area appraisal provides a comprehensive assessment of the development and distinctive features of the historic built environment based on archival research, fieldwork, and public consultation. This serves to guide development and help inform decisions made by the relevant planning and conservation bodies. However, no appraisal can ever be entirely comprehensive and the omission of any particular building, feature or space, should not imply that it is of no interest.

Relevant Links



Plymouth and South West Devon Joint Local Plan 2014-2034 (JLP), adopted March 2019. *Currently under review.*



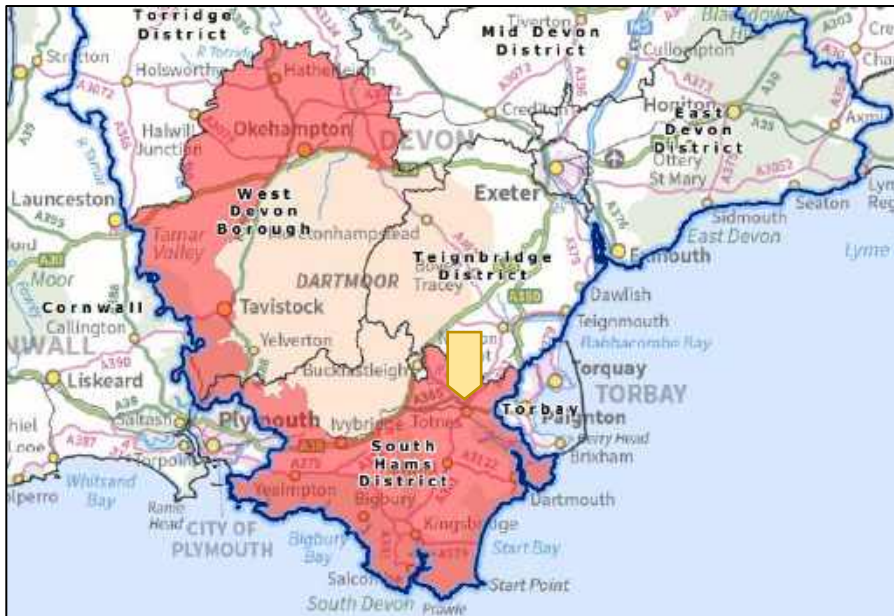
Historic England Advice Note 1 (HEAN1), published February 2019.



Totnes Neighbourhood Plan, made July 2023.

Totnes

Totnes sits at the head of the River Dart valley, approximately 8.4 miles south of Newton Abbot and 23 miles northeast of Plymouth. The market town is the administrative centre of the District with a population of approximately 9,100, representing 10% of the total population of South Hams. The town is sited in a strategic location at the lowest crossing place of the river Dart, first by ford then by bridge, just within the tidal limit of its navigable estuary ten 'meandering' miles from the sea. Around Totnes, the valley sides enclose the town with a natural backdrop of rolling hills.



Map of indicating the location of Totnes within the South Hams (Devon Landscape Character Assessment).

The settlement was founded as a Saxon burh by King Edward in 907 part of a ring of fortified settlements erected around Devon to consolidate control and defend the southern kingdoms against the invading Danes. As the Viking threat subsided, the town quickly expanded as a trading port and market centre. Following the Norman Conquest, the area was bestowed on feudal baron Judhael who controlled the settlement, constructing the first castle until he rebelled and lost his lands. Seeking to pull the town back from decline, the townspeople elected their own officials and was granted a royal charter in 1206. By the 15th century, the town had become the second richest town in Devon as a leader in the cloth trade and major exporter of tin mining. As

a popular and cosmopolitan trading port, the town's fortunes peaked around the 16th and early 17th centuries awash with wealthy merchants who transformed their homes triggering an '*great age of rebuilding*'. As the cloth trade declined, Totnes shifted to a genteel market town re-fronted with classical facades that reflected Georgian architectural ideals. The town and its population were greatly expanded in the 1800s with the development of Bridgetown and the opening of the South Devon Railway Company becoming an accessible and popular place to live and visit.

Today Totnes is a thriving market town, recognised for its distinctive local identity and alternative culture. It hosts a wide spectrum of local events and boasts an unusually high range of independent shops, cafes, and markets. There is high demand to live in Totnes, creating pressure for development and need for affordable housing, as well as traffic congestion issues as the lowest crossing over the Dart. Yet the town is resilient with strong community commitment to securing a sustainable future.

Statement of Special Interest

The special interest of the Totnes Conservation Area can be reconfirmed as the:

- Attractive countryside landscape setting within the valley of the River Dart.
- Well-preserved ancient Saxon town plan with identifiable oval enclosures surviving in the street layout and recognisable burgage plots.
- Prominence of the 'Motte and bailey' castle.
- Remains of an ancient bridge crossing the River Dart with its current Georgian replacement.
- Significant 16-17th century rebuilding of merchant housing with distinctive courtyard plan, hipped roofs, and ornamental features.
- Later 18th century Georgian re-fronting reflecting contemporary architectural ideals of balance, symmetry, and classical detailing.
- Visible rapid 19th century expansion reflecting improved railway connection with extensive areas of similar planned terraces.
- Blend of historic buildings with high-quality 20th century architecture.
- Lively chatter of community hubs and bustling markets, wafting smells from small food venues, set against vibrant artistic displays, all embodying alternative culture and creativity.



High Street looking towards the Castle.



Castle Street (entrance to the left) and Northgate Arch.



Entrance to Heath Gardens.



High Street looking towards the Butterwalk.



Visitors enjoying the range of shops and cafes in the Butterwalk.



Eastgate looking down to Fore Street.



Primary shopping area of Fore Street.



Open space at the Rotherfold.



Bridge over the lowest crossing of the River Dart from Vire Island.

Boundary Review

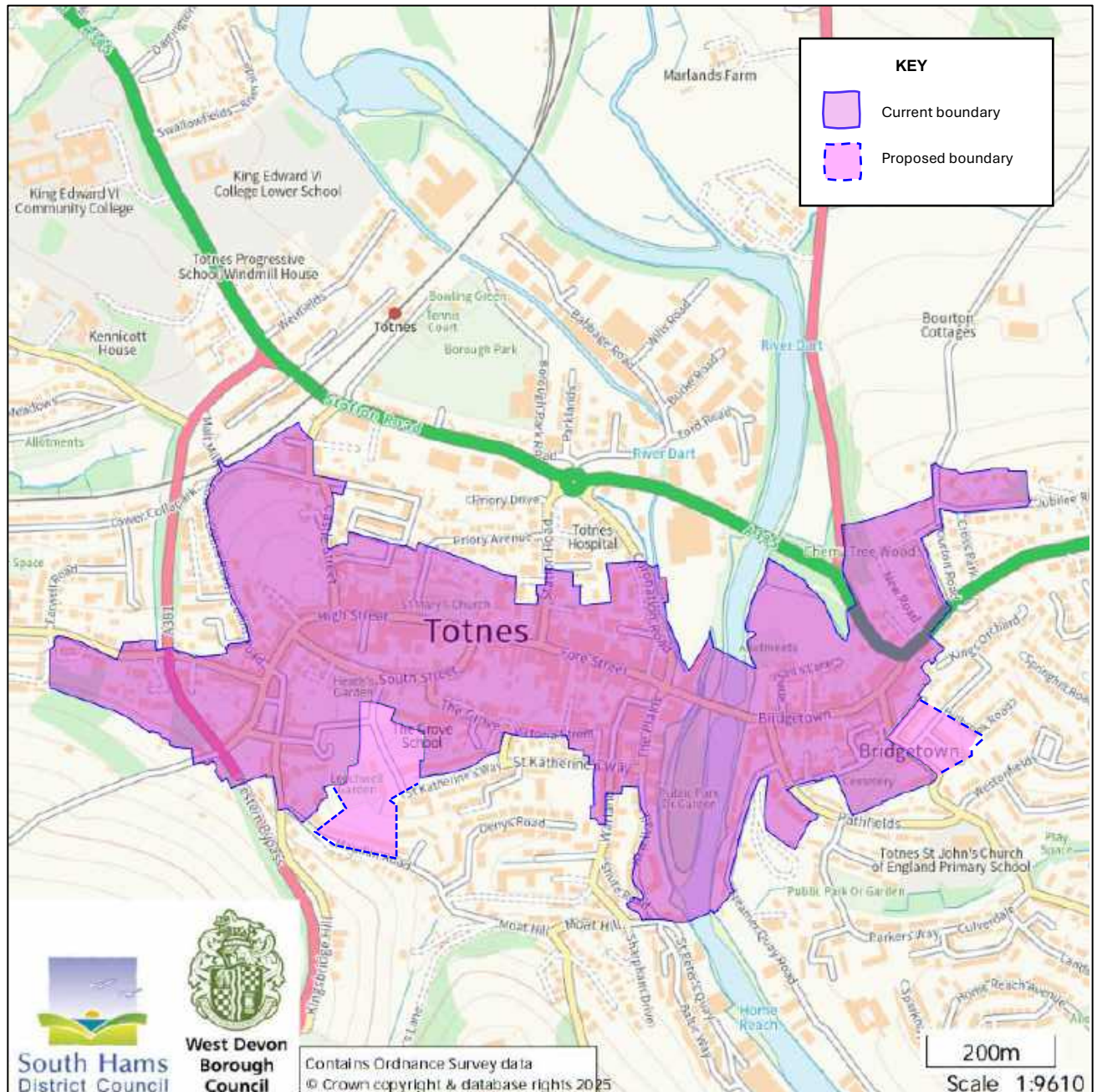
Current Boundary

The current conservation area boundary, as amended in 2007, encompasses the historic core of the town centre, extending from the castle at the top of the town into Bridgetown, encompassing the River Dart bridge.

The Council has a responsibility to ensure that the designated area justifies designation and that the concept of conservation areas is not devalued through inclusion of sites that lack special interest or the inclusion of sites that are covered by other more relevant legal protections.

Whilst the current boundary is comprehensive, potential changes have been identified through reviewing the previous appraisals and suggestions that have been put forward. The implications of designation are explained in the introduction section of this document.

Development within the setting of the conservation area¹ must be sensitive with particular consideration of appropriate scale, general consistency with the surrounding area and local distinctiveness, cumulative change, and the protection of key views.



¹ Setting is defined as the surroundings in which a heritage asset is experienced, it is not a fixed entity and can change over time.

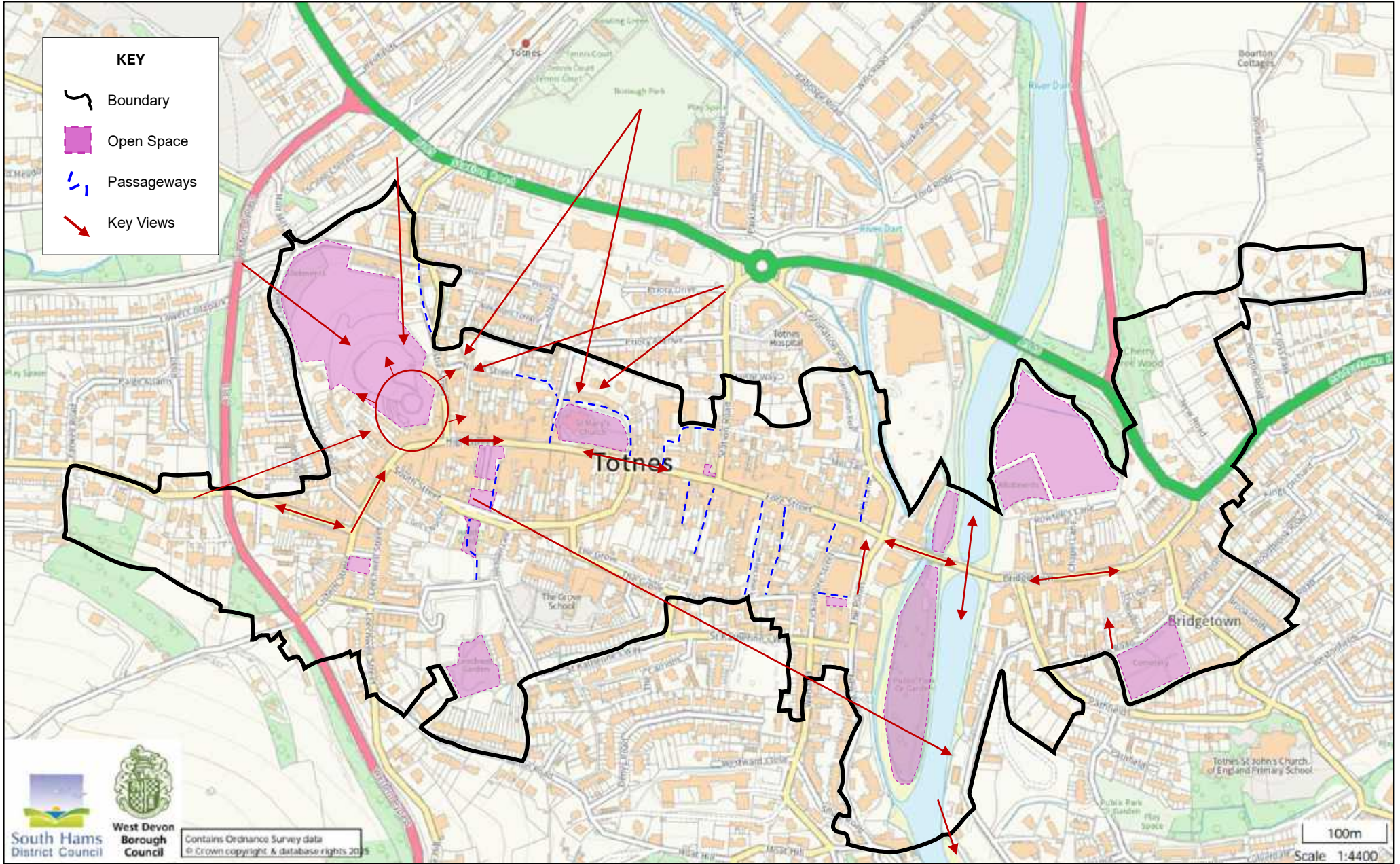
Potential Extensions

	Recommendation	Outcome
<p>Suggested Extension 1: Leechwell Garden. Managed by the Leechwell Garden Association as a community green space with seating to appreciate the sensory garden, play area, art installations, and community events. Proposed by Totnes Town Council.</p>	<p>On the site of an ancient orchard associated with the historic Leechwell, a medieval holy well reputed for its healing properties and Victorian immersion pool. This is a rare surviving area of open space as much of the orchard has been lost to car parking. Inclusion would recognise the multi-layered history of the town and how that has changed through time.</p> <p>This includes a well-designed modern housing development on the junction of Heath Way and St Katherine's Way reflecting the desire to encourage well designed schemes that use good quality materials to sit comfortably within the local context.</p>	Proposed
<p>Suggested Extension 2: Maudlin Road. Maudlin Road, comprised of four short terraces (Shaftsbury Place, Albert Place, Eiffel Place, and Garfield Place) constructed on the site of the former Maudlin Hospital. Proposed by Totnes Town Council.</p>	<p>Constructed by 1904, these are four terraces of local stone that share a repeated form with decorative brick detailing and intricate barge boards, some retain historic windows. They reflect underrepresented early twentieth century building stock when little other development was taking place. Inclusion would incorporate a greater period of the town's development. It also highlights the site of the 12th century Maudlin Leper hospital.</p>	Proposed
<p>Suggested Extension 3: Somerset Place and Brooklands. Somerset Place is comprised of three short terraces whilst Brooklands is lined by terraces, in almost pairs, rising with the street topography. Proposed by Totnes Town Council.</p>	<p>Constructed in 1904, they are relatively modest terraces of local stone that share a similar form and distinctive decorative brick banding. Again, they reflect underrepresented early twentieth century building stock. Inclusion would reflect the ongoing emphasis of high-quality construction regardless of status.</p>	Proposed

Outcome

Following public consultation, this section will be updated.

Conservation Area Map



Map of the updated conservation area boundary.

Context

Topography

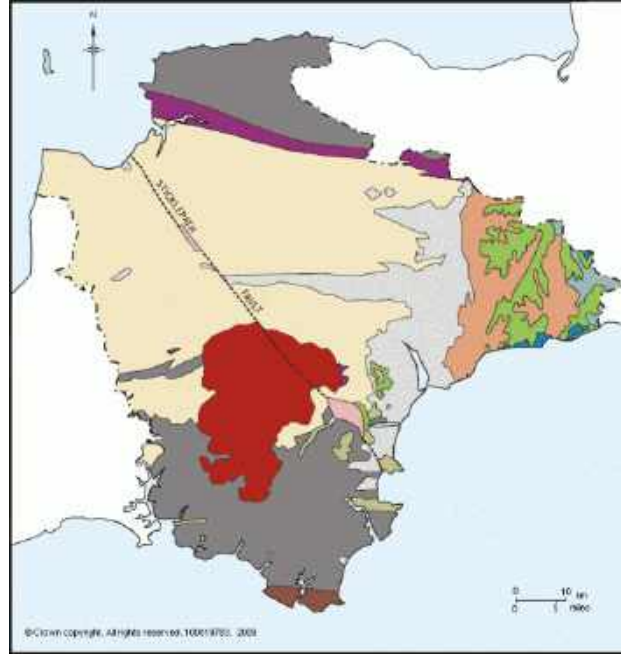
Totnes sits at the head of the River Dart valley which extends from Dartmoor to Dartmouth, dramatically cutting through the rolling hills of the surrounding countryside. The town is in a strategic location at the lowest crossing place of the meandering river Dart, first crossed by ford then by bridge, just within the tidal limit of its navigable estuary ten miles from the sea. Around Totnes, the steep valley sides enclose the town with rolling hills that provides a green natural backdrop to the settlement and makes the town feel 'small' in comparison.



Looking down the valley back to Totnes.

The topography increases rapidly with narrow winding streets follow ancient trackways climbing steeply from the riverbanks to the elevated High Street and the Castle which sits at the top of the hill, approximately 66 metres above sea level. As the town expanded, residential development spread across the ridges and gentler slopes, with flatter land near the river utilised for industry and transport infrastructure. The surrounding hills limit long distance views, providing a sense of seclusion.

Geology



	Dartmoor Granite		Teritary Deposits
	Carboniferous Sandstones and Shales		Triassic Pebble Beds, Sandstones and Mudstones
	Devonian Slates, Sandstones and Volcanics		Upper Greensand and Gault
	Devonian Limestones		Chalk
	Transition Group (Devonian to Carboniferous boundary)		Lower Jurassic Mudstones and Limestones
	Permian Breccias, Sandstones and Volcanics		Lower Devonian Schists
			Lundy Granite

Summary map of the geology of Devon (DCC)

The settlement lies in a geologically diverse area near the boundary between metamorphic and sedimentary rocks of the Devonian period formed 350 million years ago. Once under a tropical sea with volcanic islands, the deep marine environment compressed and created deposits of Upper Devonian slates and volcanic rocks which were uplifted during later tectonic events. This provides a mix of coloured volcanic and metamorphic stone locally quarried for building materials and boundaries.



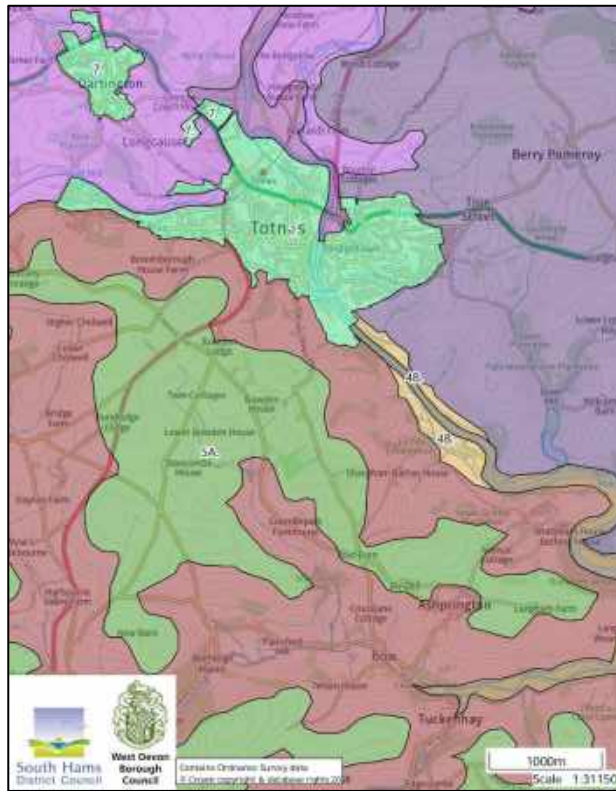
Local building stone.

Red Devonian sandstone was extensively quarried as its fine grain and relatively soft quality when quarried made it easily workable for masonry and decorative embellishments but hardens over time and weathers well, ideal for construction. Devonian limestone was also widely quarried for its durability and resistance to weathering, as well as being processed for calcium-rich mortar and plaster. This is often contrasted with a smooth limestone for window dressings. Beer Stone (pale chalk limestone), Bath Stone (honey coloured limestone), or Doulting Stone (pale brown limestone).

Grey-blue Devonian slates were extensively quarried for roofing and wall coverings due to their ease of splitting for manufacture and durability. Whilst local

Dartmoor granite (distinctive grey stone characterised by hard interlocking crystals) was sometimes used for paving, steps, and pillars due to its hard-wearing qualities. Ashburton marble (black with white veining) is also common for steps and fireplaces.

Landscape



7	Main towns/villages	3B	Lower rolling farmed and settled valley slopes
3C	Sparsely settled farmed valley floors	3A	Upper farmed and wooded valley slopes
3G	River valley slopes and combes	5A	Inland elevated undulating land
4B	Marine levels and coastal plains	4A	Estuaries

Map of the Devon landscape character areas

Devon's Landscape Character Assessment (DLCA) 2018 identifies that Totnes sits between the steep wooded valley slopes that cut through the surrounding hills and create a natural corridor leading to the coast, with lower lying ground of tidal creeks, saltmarsh and mudflats gradually drained and reclaimed as meadow pasture, arable enclosure and orchards. The outstanding landscape quality is recognised by the designations of the South Devon National Landscape (formerly known as an AONB) which provides an attractive natural setting to the town.



Walk along the River Dart.

The surrounding landscape is quintessentially Devonian with patchworks of small irregular fields, ancient hedgerows, and wooded valleys shaped by mixed arable and pastoral agriculture with narrow winding lanes.

Layout

The town is located on a rising hill beside the River Dart. The oldest parts of Totnes are sited on a ridge that projects out into the Dart valley, with a castle on the highest point overlooking the town and its approaches below with an ancient trackway descending down to the river crossing point, avoiding the tidal marshes.

Modern day Bridgetown Hill, Fore Street, High Street, Cistern Street, Harper's Hill probably follow these trackways and across to the Saxon burh near Halwell, that Totnes replaced. The distinctive Saxon oval 'ditch and rampart' defences can still be seen in modern day North Street, Rampart Walk, South Street and the Grove. The associated residential burgage plots, narrow tenements divided along their length with domestic uses at the front and subsistence behind are well preserved and remain visible, identifiable from narrow 18-19th century frontages and boundary walls.

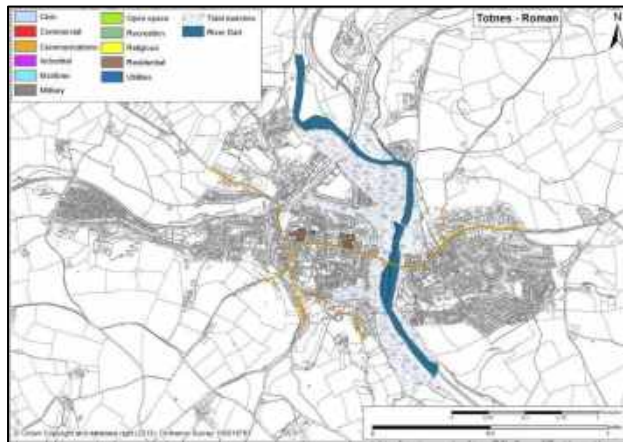


Distinctive Saxon oval shape.

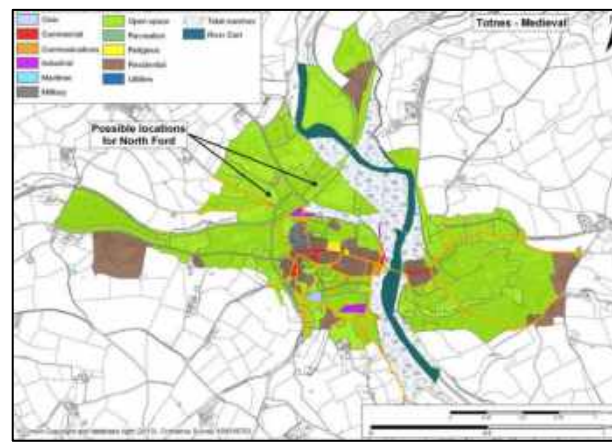
As the population expanded in the early 1800s, the town was improved with upgraded roads and a new Georgian bridge with designed direct approaches. The approaches and river were the focus of 'new-build' activity, a combination of new buildings and refaced existing buildings which transformed the appearance of Bridgetown and The Plains. The top end of town around Plymouth Road was transformed with the nineteenth century development of typical Victorian town houses and villas, creating distinct suburban areas.

Evolution

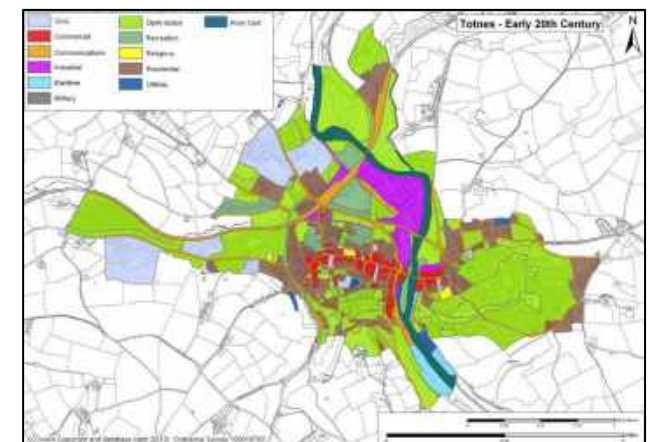
The changing land use and development of the settlement through time².



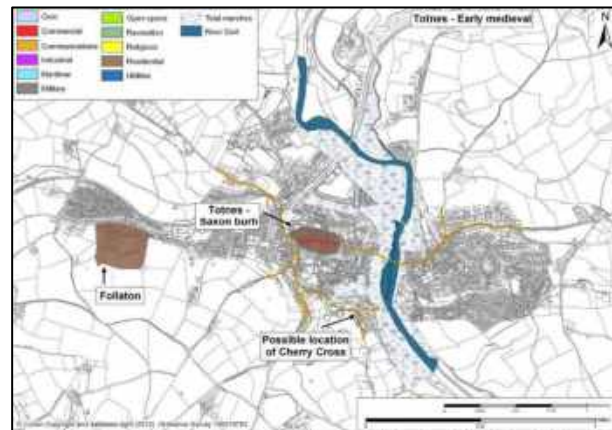
Map of the Roman settlement.



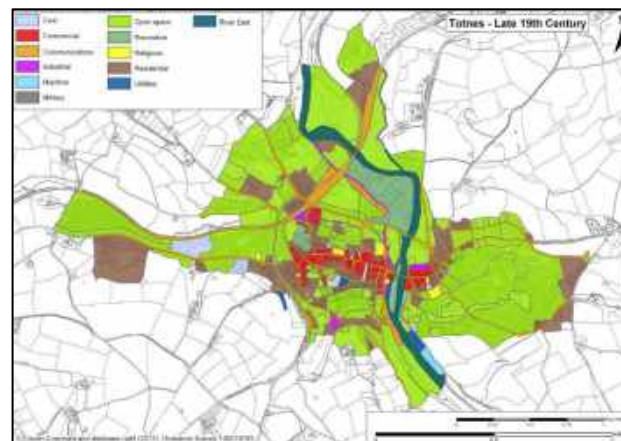
Map of the medieval settlement.



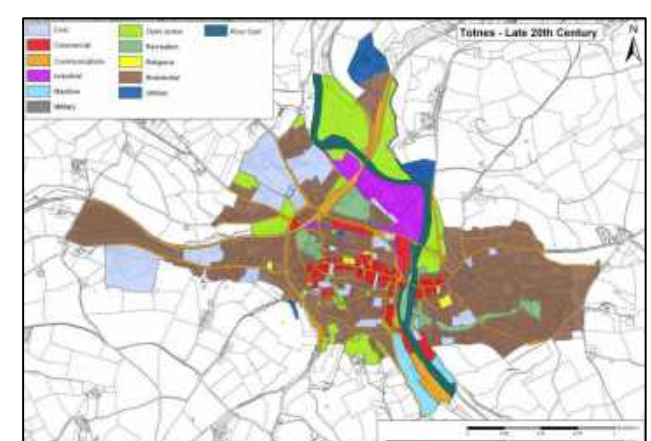
Map of the early 20th century settlement, 1900.



Map of the early medieval settlement.



Map of the late 19th century settlement.



Map of the late 20th century settlement.

² For further information, please refer to Devon Historic Coastal and Market Towns Survey, [available online](#).

History

Archaeology

The earliest indication of activity in the vicinity of present-day Totnes are various small collections of residual pre-historic flint, several finds of neolithic and Bronze Age axes, and cropmarks indicating prehistoric enclosures suggesting a settled farming landscape. The next significant find was the discovery of the Totnes Hoard, a hoard of silver coins, which indicated that Roman occupation extended beyond Exeter and triggered significant archaeological excavations. In addition to the previous discoveries of pottery fragments and coins, this identified the presence of further coins, a Roman road, potential burial plots, and remnants of ships demonstrating trade from France. This suggests local native Britons engaged with Romanised lifestyle and culture there might have been a small scale rural settlement in the vicinity of Totnes.



Brutus Stone, Fore Street.

According to local legend and documented chronicler Geoffrey of Monmouth in the 1136 *Historia Regum Britanniae*, Brutus of Troy, the mythical founder of Britain first landed on the River Dart, placing his foot on a large granite boulder declaring '*Here I stand and here I rest. And this town shall be called Totnes*'. The so

called 'Brutus Stone' is set into the pavement in Fore Street, although it is notably located above the highest tides and was not documented until 1697.

Saxon Burh

The modern-day settlement was founded by King Edward in 907 as a Saxon burh, a fortified settlement, to replace one nearby at Halwell and take advantage of the strategic location that was more easily defensible. This was part of a ring of four burhs erected around Devon to consolidate control and defend the southern kingdoms against the invading Danes who controlled much of northern Britain.



Saxon oval shape remains visible in the town's layout.

The settlement comprised a distinctive Saxon oval enclosure of 'ditch and rampart' defences topped with timber palisades that can still be seen with modern day North Street, Rampart Walk, and South Street. The town was organised with narrow tenements divided along their length with domestic uses at the front and

subsistence behind. The houses were constructed of wood under thatched straw roof with a singular rectangular space using a hearth for cooking, heating and lighting.

As the Viking threat subsided, the town quickly expanded as a trading port and market centre given its position on one of the main roads in the southwest with easy access to its hinterland and easy navigation along the River Dart. By the time of the Norman Conquest, Totnes had become an important market town for the exchange of agricultural produce, wool, hides, salt, fish and wine, hosting weekly markets and annual fairs attracting traders from further afield, popular with merchants as an increasingly cosmopolitan trading point.

Norman



Illustration of the Norman castle (Historic England).

Following the Norman Conquest, Totnes and extensive surrounding manors were bestowed on a favoured Breton nobleman and soldier Judhael as a feudal baron

who constructed the first motte and bailey castle, located on the highest point of the Saxon burh. Positioned to overlook and dominate the town, it was further raised with one of the largest artificial mounds in the country, surrounded by a series of inner and outer baileys and horse-shoe-shaped enclosures. The castle would have caused local disruption, reinforcing the power of the new Norman lord and protecting him from the townsfolk. He also founded a Benedictine priory in 1088, a small monastic community with 5 acres of surrounding land from the Abbey of Saint Sergius and Bacchus from Angers in France, reflecting the wider Norman policy of connecting English religious houses with powerful continental abbeys.

Medieval Prosperity

Judhael rebelled against William the Conqueror and lost his lands as the town fell into decline. The townspeople set about electing their own officials who developed the cloth trade. There were weekly fairs, permanent stalls, and multiple town mills. By 1206 the town had become so prosperous that King John granted it royal charter, only the second town to receive such an honour, meaning it could make its own laws.

The merchants also obtained the right to set up their own guild which meant they had monopoly rights over the trade. Only members of the guild could legally make or sell goods for that trade. This controlled quality standards, maintaining the reputation of the town's products, stabilising prices, and preventing external competition. They could collect fees and fines, own property, and construct guildhalls. This helped the town become more independent from feudal lord and marked it as a prosperous town, elevating its regional status.



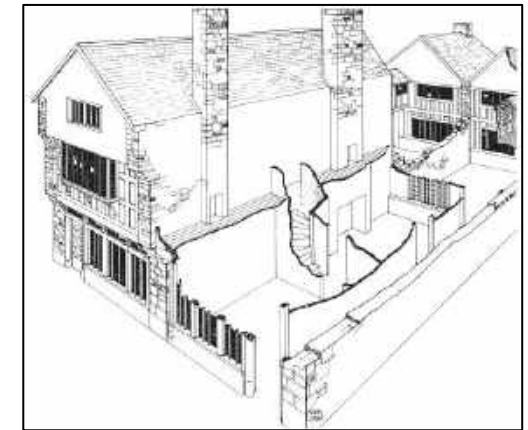
Illustration of the 14th century reconstruction (Historic England).

The town's defences were partially rebuilt in stone with three main gates controlling access and the town began to expand beyond the town walls, particularly to the east along Fore Street. A bridge was built over the Dart and a dam-raised road was constructed at Warland, beginning a gradual reclamation of the tidal marshes south of the town increasing the usable land around the river and enabling the creation of new quays improving transport infrastructure.

By the 15th century, the town had become the second richest town in Devon as a leader in the cloth trade and major exporter of tin mining that was enjoying a boom across the region. The town's fortunes peaked around the 16th and early 17th centuries when its population was 'top heavy', popular with wealthy merchants who transformed their homes triggering a '*great age of rebuilding*', competing with each other and transforming the appearance of the town.

These were often comprised of a principal narrow three storey timber framed building facing the street which was usually two rooms thick with the ground floor set

aside for trade and a passage entrance leading to a rear courtyard with a second block containing the kitchen and a long strip of land with further buildings including stores, workshops, stables, and pigsties. Internally they were decorated with high quality chimney pieces, wall panelling and the finest collections of plasterwork ceilings, a layout probably influenced from northern France. A number of these survive to make Totnes one of the most complete and finest Elizabethan-Jacobean towns in England.



Example section of a medieval building with side passage.

The town was also improved with wooden pipes replacing the previously open gutters. A new market hall, cloth hall, sheep market, butter and poultry walks, alms-houses, and grammar school were built and the guildhall was rebuilt. Soldiers were billeted in the town during the civil war and it became a hub of political and military activity visited by Royalist and Parliamentary troops, as well as Oliver Cromwell.

Georgian Revival

As cloth trade began to decline, Totnes shifted to a genteel market town for the rich agricultural district. In

1720 Daniel Defoe observed that it was a ‘*very good town with more gentlemen than traders*’, indicating that middle class families were moving there from other parts of the country. They occupied and re-fronted the town’s high status buildings with new facades that reflected 18-19th century architectural ideals of symmetry, balance, and classical detailing. The previously exposed timber framing was rendered or covered with vertical hung slate tiles, gables altered to hipped roofs, and leaded mullions replaced with vertical sliding sashes.



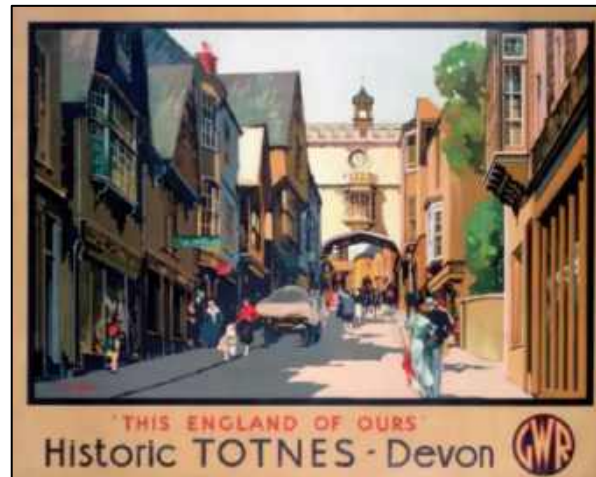
Illustration of the Butterwalk, C19.

By 1800, the population was rapidly growing. The Duke of Somerset embanked Long Marsh and constructed Steamer Quay, erecting warehouses along the river. As well as building the Church of St James (now St John), the Seymour Hotel, residential housing in Bridgetown, and opening Vire Island as a pleasure park. The top end of the town around Plymouth Road was also developed with the creation of new town houses and villas, creating a distinct suburban area. The roads were improved, making coach travel more comfortable. The bridge over the Dart was also replaced, charging a toll until 1882.



Bridge over the River Dart 1825.

The South Devon Railway Company opened in 1847 placing Totnes on the mainline between Exeter and Plymouth creating a regional hub for passengers and freight. This significantly improved access to the town, becoming more accessible to visitors and more attractive as a place to live for those seeking rural beauty with urban amenities. It also benefitted local trade with goods being able to be moved more efficiently.



Poster produced by Great Western Railway to promote travel, 1923.

Industrialisation

By the early 1900s the town was again in danger of decline suffering from wider agricultural downturn brought on by industrialisation as traditional industries waned and younger generations moved to cities for work. It was rescued by the opening of a bacon factory, dairy, and timber yard which created hundreds of jobs. The Second World War also triggered renewed industrial activity with shipbuilding, demonstrating the town’s ongoing resilience and ability to adapt to changing economic conditions.



Fore Street 1890.

Dartington Experiment

The town experienced a cultural shift in the early 20th century influenced by its proximity to the Dartington estate, bought by Dorothy and Leonard Elmhirst in 1925 for the famous Dartington experiment. The estate was refocused on sustainable agriculture and the 12th century Dartington Hall became a magnet for forward thinking artists, architects, writers, philosophers and musicians from around the world that sparked a cultural revival in progressive education and arts. The town developed a bohemian reputation with a high proportion of independent shops, cafes, and

alternative therapies, attracting alternative lifestyles and artistic communities.



Dartington performances 1920s.

The Elmhirst's founded the Dartington Hall school in 1926 as a progressive co-educational boarding school that favoured liberal educational philosophies, creativity and outdoor activities, over traditional academic discipline. This later expanded with adult education. As the estate expanded, they commissioned talented architects to design new buildings across the estate. This includes one of the finest examples of modernist architecture, High Cross House designed by William Lescaze for the school's headmaster.



Dartington performances 1920s.



Representation of Totnes 1960 (Ben Setter).

Since 2007

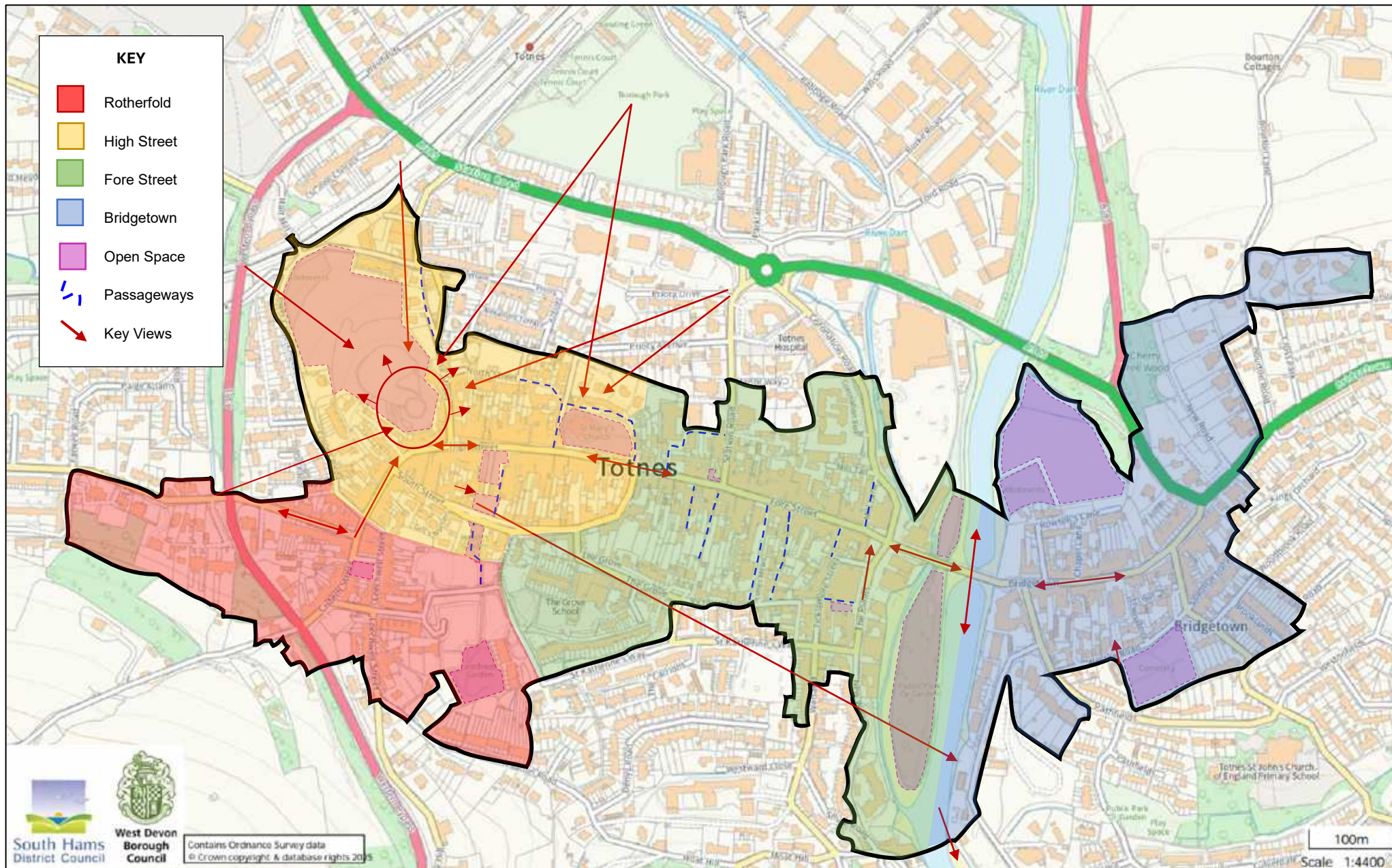
Following the previous appraisal, the town introduced the 'Totnes Pound', the first local alternative currency to encourage spending within the local economy accepted by 120 businesses until its end in 2019, and began the Transition Town movement, aiming to enhance community resilience in the face of climate change and economic challenge.



Fore Street 2025.

Totnes is a popular and attractive place to live and visit. The town's population noticeably swells with tourists and visitors during the summer months. With such popularity and high property values, there is significant pressure for residential development and concerns for the sustainability of independent retail businesses. As the town continues to grow, it will be supported in a way that serves to retain its unique and progressive local identity.

Character Areas



Map of the character areas within the conservation area.

1 Rotherfold and Plymouth Road

This area is significant as two of the medieval suburbs outside the town's West Gate.

Historical development

Sit on the curving ridge that projects from the steep valley sides, this area developed as development extended beyond the Saxon enclosures. Historically sizable areas have been demolished to facilitate improvements to the markets. The focus and use of the Rotherfold, former site of cattle market, is now significantly reduced and offers opportunities for public realm improvements. This demolition leaves exposed gable ends at disharmony with the street scene, sometimes requiring large buttresses which detract from the area. Alongside Plymouth Road and the Western by-pass are attractive grouping of 19th and early 20th century suburban villas.

Street Characteristics

This part of the conservation area is particularly residential and lower density reflecting more 'organic town growth'. Predominantly late 18th and 19th century domestic buildings in classical style, mix of two and three storey building heights, changes in road levels, and spacing around buildings. Hybrid appearances that combine 16th or 17th century form with 18th or 19th finishes and detailing. Frequent side passage entrances evidencing the 17th century merchant 'gallery-with-back-block' plan. Largely smooth rendered with plainer appearances. Some examples of eave cornices, string bands, ashlar lining, and rusticated quoins. Few examples of vertical hanging slate tiles, where they existing these are attractive and ornamental. Exposed stonework is rare.



Greenery to Western Bypass



Harper's Hill



Cistern Street



Cistern Street



The Lamb



Cistern Street



The Rotherfold



Rotherfold



Leechwell Street



Leechwell Street



Leechwell Street



Leechwell Street



Plymouth Road



Plymouth Road



Plymouth Road



Plymouth Road

Key Features

- Sizeable chimney stacks proportionate to the host dwelling
- Decorative use of quoins or alternative coloured stone or brick for detailing



Endstack



Endstack



Endstack



Render



Roughcast render



Painted hanging tiles



Parapet



Quoins



Brick detailing



Casement window



4 over 4 sash window



2 over 2 sash window



Fanlight 4 panel door



Fanlight 6 panel door



6 panel door



4 panel door with glazing



Gate pillars



Boundary wall

Positive Features

- Prominence of the Rotherfold
- Colourful character
- Retention of historic features
- Increased greenery and connection to countryside beyond

Key Issues

- Dominance of motor vehicles
- Protecting views towards the castle

2 High Street

This area is significant as the heart of the original Saxon town where the first Totnesians lived within the smaller of two oval-shape enclosures of 'ditch and rampart' defences that encircled the fortified settlement.

Historical Development

The principal focus of the original Saxon settlement overlooked by the Norman construction of a castle on the highest ridge point on an artificial mound (motte). Transformed in the 16th century and early 17th century by wealthy merchants who transformed their homes in a '*great age of rebuilding*' with three storey timber framed buildings, internally decorated with high quality chimney pieces, wall panelling and the finest collections of plasterwork ceilings. A number of these survive to make Totnes one of the most complete and finest Elizabethan-Jacobean towns in England. Shifted in the 18th century with 'classical' re-frontings. Also contains the distinctive under-cover Butterwalk, projecting upper stories carried over the pavement on columns with loggias beneath, and iconic East Gate with castellated appearance adds drama to the street scene, restored 1990 following fire.

Street Characteristics

Narrow, linear layout with tight urban density with buildings following the Saxon oval enclosures and medieval burgage plots. Predominantly 16th and 17th century merchant houses with hipped roofs, ordered bays of vertical sliding sashes, and heavy use of vertical hanging slate tiles. Interestingly earlier re-frontings retain gabled roofs with heavy cornices where the eaves of a new hipped roof would sit creating a triangular pediment.



Looking down to the High Street



High Street



High Street



South Street



High Street



The Butterwalk



Market Square



23 High Street



38 High Street



High Street



To Guildhall Yard



St Mary's Church



The Guildhall



Castle Street



Castle Street



Totnes Castle



North Gate

Key Features

- Vertical hanging slate tiles
- Dentils and decorative barge boards
- Prominent windows above ground



Endstack and dentils



Timber framing



Bargeboards



Hanging slate tiles



Rustication



Roughcast render



Doric columns



Decorative pilasters



Rustication and quoins



Venetian window



2 over 2 sash window



6 over 6 sash window



Jetty



Bay window



Triangular pediment



Date stone



Medieval door



Medieval door

Positive Features

- Identifiable Saxon oval enclosure and narrow streets
- Preserved medieval burgage plot boundaries
- Retention of historic features
- Vibrancy with popular high street

Key Issues

- Dominance of motor vehicles and parking
- Narrow streets shared by pedestrians and cars
- Protecting the dominance of the church and castle

3 Fore Street and The Plains

This area is significant as the inner enclosure of the Saxon burh with early tenements along the highway leading from the main gate down to the river.

Historical development

Fore Street originated as a key route from the Saxon settlement to the River Dart, flanked by long, narrow burgage plots. The north-side boundary is disjointed and indistinct suggesting this side of the street developed piecemeal, whilst the south side boundary survives in the alignment of The Grove and Victoria Street suggesting it was a significant feature. Reclamation of the river marshes began in the 13th century with the building of a dam-come-road along Warland ('Weirland') providing a more direct link between St Peter's Quay and the town, creating new land for a new 'suburb', hospital, and later warehouses. A new quay was built in the 15th century next to the old bridge to unload stone for the new tower of St Mary's, moving the west bank of the Dart to where it is today.

Street Characteristics

Narrow, linear layout that descends steeply toward the river with tight urban density with buildings set directly at the street edge and along the narrow alleyways. Predominantly 16th and 17th century merchant houses with hipped roofs, largely rendered to create the appearance of dressed stone, many ashlar effect (lines into the render to imitate coursed stonework), with projecting bow, bay, and oriel windows, finished with an ornamental cornice and parapet providing height and dominance. Some visible rubble-stone construction, particularly to side elevations, and 20th century reintroductions of timber-framed fronts.



Looking down to Fore Street



The Museum looking up to Northgate



Tree by Shady Garden



Atherton Lane



Junction to Station Road



Fore Street



The Gothic House



Fore Street



To Ticklemore Street



Victoria Street



Victoria Street



The Plains



The Plains



Seven Stars



Warland



Bridge looking from Bridgetown

Key Features:

- Mixture of front facing gables and parapets
- Largely obscured chimney stacks due to the topography and intervening development
- Prominent windows above ground floor level



End stack



Overhang



Hanging slate tiles



Render with parapet



Brick with parapet



Roughcast render



Timber framing



Jetty



Decorative pilasters



Banding



Decorative pilasters



Rustication & Oriel



2 over 2 sash



Tripartite window



6 pane door with fanlight



Passage door



Railings



Side panels

Positive Features

- Contrast of wide streets to narrow passageways
- Preserved medieval burgage plot boundaries
- Retention of historic features and traditional shopfronts
- Vibrancy with popular high street

Key Issues

- Dominance of motor vehicles
- Appropriate advertising
- Commercial and residential bins (usually flats) stored in the public realm

4 Bridgetown

This area is significant for its 19th century redevelopment.

Historical development

Created between 1232 and 1247 to rival Totnes. Redeveloped as a 19th century suburb heralded by the construction of the new Georgian bridge, incorporated into the borough in 1834. Expanded a great deal during the 20th century.

Street Characteristics

Linear form as a key route to Berry Pomeroy, Paignton, and Newton Abbot. Predominately 19th century with rows or terraces of three storey domestic buildings staggered following the topography in restrained classical style. Variety of interpretations resulting in broken building lines, changing building widths and heights, with array of features. Earlier buildings edge of pavement, possibly asymmetrical, whilst new desirable villas set back to create a forecourt or designed with vertical emphasis and balanced proportions. Largely rendered, some with ashlar effect. Few surviving redundant shop fronts.



Bridgetown



Seymour Road



Steamer Quay



Seymour Place



Bridgetown



Bridgetown



Bridgetown



Bridgetown



Bridgetown



Rear of St John's



Brooklands



Somerset Place



Weston Road



Weston Road



Looking up Bridgetown Hill

Key Features:

- Modest chimney stacks proportionate to the host dwelling
- Local stone or rendering
- Some front facing gables
- Bay windows
- Low boundary walls and railings



Fascia board



Axial stack



Parapet



Ashlar effect



Stone



Stone



Jetty



Rustication



Bay window



6 over 6 sash



??



6 panelled door



Fanlight 6 panelled door



Brick detailing



Boundary wall



Boundary wall



Boundary wall

Positive Features

- Fairly consistent C19 redevelopment with wider street pattern and architectural style
- Retention of historic features
- Access to amenity space and riverside walk

Key Issues

- Dominance of motor vehicles connecting to the A385
- Protecting views of the church

Built Environment

Materials and Features

Gabled fronts were largely lost to classical re-fronting during the 18th century, now predominantly hipped roofs often obscured by parapets which provide greater height and dominance. This variety speaks to the gentrification of streetscene.

Natural slate is the dominant roof material, mostly grey-blue coloured tiles. Roofscapes are largely uninterrupted and dormer windows are rare. Chimney stacks are a prominent feature, usually brick in an end stack position with terracotta pots.

Along the main street, most buildings are smooth rendered, refaced to be polite and classical, reflective of 'socially ambitious' occupants. There is some use of slate hanging tiles ranging from being painted over to skilful decorative patterns. Exposed stone is limited to grand public buildings or non-domestic buildings. Brick is rare but elevated with fine tuck pointing. There are some modern attempts at reintroducing timber framing, although unconvincing. The surrounding residential areas are dominated by more 'rustic' painted stone and pebbledash, with exposed stone being used again for early twentieth century terraces in Bridgetown.

There are many examples of restrained classical detailing. The main street is dominated by decorative eaves, triangular pediments, string bands, and columns. There is also frequent use of an ashlar effect to give the impression of more expensive stone and rusticated quoins.



Decorative eaves



Slate hanging



Endstack chimney



Endstack chimney



Endstack chimney



Shared chimney



Local stone



Brick banding



Rustication



Rustication



Ashlar effect



Roughcast render



Decorative slate pattern



Brick



Timber framing



Timber framing



Jetty



Parapet



Gabled front



Overhang



Triangular pediment



Classical detailing



Column



Doric Column

The floor levels generally match the neighbouring properties and the fenestration pattern is ordered to create symmetry.

Largely 6-panelled timber doors, often with fanlight above. Colours vary but are generally of a traditional colour palette.

Particularly distinctive are side passage entrances reflect the 'gallery-with-back-block' plan, identifiable with subservient, almost recessive, 6-panelled solid timber doors.

Windows are predominately vertical-sliding traditional timber sashes, mainly in 6 over 6 glazing arrangement, painted white. There are examples of paired sashes and tripartite sashes, sometimes separated by solid 'mullions'. There are limited examples of surviving historic glass which do offer potential for historic graffiti. Window sills are painted. Decorative architraves are unusual.

The residential areas are dominated by low solid boundary walls. Railings are rare, usually surviving where the house is set above the highway, leaving low stone plinths they were fixed into, often spearhead design.



Gabled front and jetty



Gabled front



Quoins



Tripartite window



With mullion and architrave



Venetian window



Victorian 1 over 1 sash



Arched sash with keystone



2 over 2 sash



6 over 6 sash



6 over 6 sash



Architrave



Medieval door



6 panelled door



Fanlight



Fanlight



Fanlight



Side passage



Pillars



Railings



Railings



Boundary wall



Boundary wall



Passageway

Building Conservation Advice

Maintenance

Regular maintenance is critical to ensure that building fabric is performing efficiently, avoids water ingress and dampness, slows the rate of wear, and lessens the need for large-scale costly work further down the line. The Institute for Historic Building Conservation (IHBC) guidance note 'A Stitch in Time' explains how maintaining your property makes good sense and saves money³. This includes regular small-scale maintenance through gutter cleaning, checking for slipped slates, repainting, repointing. The Society for the Protection of Ancient Building provides a maintenance calendar schedule with to help organise homeowners with advice⁴.

Repairs

Historic building fabric will require repair at some point. Whilst it may feel desirable to remove it for modern materials, historic building fabric has survived where modern replacements become obsolete and can require replacement after 5-20 years. Traditional buildings (usually defined as pre-1919) operate differently from modern buildings and require traditional solutions⁵. They were built using 'breathable' or 'vapor permeable' materials, such as lime mortar and stone, designed to allow a level of moisture (from breathing, cooking, showering, condensation) to be absorbed and released. Moisture is present in all buildings, it does not necessarily make a building damp nor is it always damaging.

For further information, you can contact us through a [planning/heritage duty slot](#) to discuss if/what type of application may be required, or a [pre-application](#) for specific advice.

Chemical injection systems are not suitable for traditional buildings and mask the issue, creating greater problems longer term. Modern materials such as cement mortars and renders, paints, insulation, which are not breathable, stop the evaporation of moisture from the building fabric. This needs to escape somewhere, resulting in dampness trapped within the wall, mould, premature deterioration of paint finishes, dry rot, and accelerated erosion of fabric which can lead to fabric failure and structural defects. The causes should be identified and resolved, such as a leaking pipe or blocked gutters causing overflow.

Windows

Windows are generally timber sashes. Surviving historic details, such as the traditional joinery detail, slim profile of glazing bars, natural deflections and patination, are identified as primary contributors to the special interest of the conservation area. Their retention and refurbishment is supported. Most traditional windows can be repaired and returned to good working order through removing excess paint to open or slide again and splicing rot to timber windows with matching materials of similar species and finish. Draught-proofing (self-adhesive strips, grooving, or mechanical door closers) and using curtains, interior shutters or blinds, (especially with an insulated liner) are low impact and provide low cost solutions that provides the biggest energy saving. Installing internal

secondary glazing (fixed, magnetic, or velcro) is relatively low impact and low cost that can reduce heat loss by over 60%, as effective as double glazing, but is better than double glazing at reducing noise.

Rainwater Goods

Functioning rainwater systems are essential to prevent deterioration caused by water penetration. It is important to undertake regular inspections, clearing gutters and maintaining down pipes. Where access is available maybe from doing other repairs, the opportunity should be taken to remove weeds. If the rainwater system is failing, in the first instance increase the scheduled regime of maintenance and repair. This is not enough, alterations and upgrades may be necessary. Simple and honest interventions are preferred.

Funding

The District Council offers loans to eligible homeowners and landlords for home improvements and renewable energy through Lendology CIC, a 'not for profit' organisation, with loans ranging from £500 to £20,000. Rather than credit scores, loans are assessed based on individual needs and are not means tested. There are many options depending on your own financial circumstances. You are free to choose your own contractor, and the money will be released when the invoices are submitted⁶.

³ A Stitch in Time. Further guidance available [online](#).

⁴ Maintenance Matters. Further guidance available [online](#).

⁵ Historic England's free Course Handbook for the Level 3 Award in Energy Efficiency Measures for Older and Traditional Buildings is available [online](#).

⁶ Lendology CIC. Further information available [online](#) and through [Lendology](#).

Climate Emergency

In 2019, the District Council declared a climate emergency committing to halve 2005 levels of carbon emissions by 2034 accepting that the climate emergency is too important an issue for the entirety of humanity to continue with development that only serves to exacerbate the problem and leave significant retrofit costs for the future. Given 20% of UK carbon emissions are from buildings which emit carbon dioxide throughout their whole lifecycle, mitigating climate change and conserving historic buildings are important yet compatible goals. Historic buildings can be a key part of the solution for lower carbon emissions through sensitive adaptation and retrofitting.

Demolition

There is a presumption against the loss of buildings which are identified as making a positive contribution to the character of the conservation area. The embodied carbon released from demolition, as well as any replacement construction, makes it very difficult for a replacement building to generate a net carbon reduction which is a material planning consideration and necessary to meet binding legislative carbon reduction targets as explained in the District Council's Climate Emergency Planning Statement⁷. Demolition of neutral buildings and proposed replacement schemes will be expected to provide enhancement to the area. Where permission is granted, it will be conditioned so that historic building fabric is reused and the subsequent development is secured in a timely manner to avoid poorly maintained gap sites⁸.

For further information, you can contact us through a [planning/heritage duty slot](#) to discuss if/what type of application may be required, or a [pre-application](#) for specific advice.

Retrofit of Traditional Buildings

Whole House Approach

In the broader context, it is important to recognise that historic buildings are, by definition, inherently sustainable on account of their embodied energy, the low 'product miles' of local building materials, their adaptability and their high thermal mass. Energy Performance Certificates (EPCs) provide information on a property's typical energy use and costs, but do not assess the building's performance as a whole. In line with Historic England, the authority advocates a 'whole house' approach. Please refer to the previous page in relation to windows, draught-proofing and secondary glazing.

Maladaptation

Retrofit for modern construction is not appropriate for historic buildings. Traditional buildings were constructed to allow air and moisture movement, it is important that adequate ventilation is maintained to allow the evaporation of moisture from building fabric. Established tried and tested repairs and improvements are preferable as the impacts of some modern technologies are not yet fully understood and often have much shorter lifespan than traditional materials. Historic England guidance⁹ and the Sustainable Traditional Buildings Alliance's Guidance Wheel explains various retrofit interventions¹⁰.

of the whole or part of a heritage asset without taking all reasonable steps to ensure the new development will proceed after the loss has occurred". Available [online](#).

Climate Resilience

Given the changing climate, climate adaptations will increasingly be required. Rainwater goods may need to be supplemented and weathering details improved. Simple and honest interventions are preferred.

Modern Technologies

Solar Panels

The authority supports the installation of renewable energies based on an informed understanding of the built fabric, its significance, and the impact of installation. Ground mounting and installation on secondary or modern buildings is preferred. Panels should be located away from principal elevations or key views and integrated to the roofscape. Consider the additional impact of wiring, pipework and batteries and maintenance access to remain efficient. Grade I Listed St Mary's is a prime example of sensitive retrofit.

Air and Ground Source Heat Pumps (ASHP)

ASHPs can work in traditional buildings provided they are utilised effectively. Associated infrastructure should be located away from principal elevations and key views.

Electric Vehicle Charging

These should be located away from principal elevations and key views, avoiding visually prominent bulky infrastructure and excessive artificial light.

⁹ Historic England advice. Available [online](#).

¹⁰ Sustainable Traditional Buildings Alliance Guidance Wheel. Available [online](#).

⁷ Climate Emergency Planning Statement. Available [online](#).

⁸ National Planning Policy Framework, as updated December 2024, paragraph 217 "Local planning authorities should not permit the loss

New Development

Proposals for new development that requires planning permission will be considered on a case-by-case basis by the Local Planning Authority. The following table sets out general principles.

For further information, you can contact us through a [planning/heritage duty slot](#) to discuss if/what type of application may be required, or a [pre-application](#) for specific advice.

	Must have	Should have	Avoid
Siting and Scale	Footprint and amenity space proportionate to the density of development in the locality. Scale and roofline to match the street scene.	Demonstrate a positive relationship with neighbouring buildings.	Obscuring key views and dominating neighbouring buildings.
Elevation	Integrity in design reflecting the street scene.	Direct contemporary additions to less prominent elevations.	Using alien or poor quality materials or introducing features where they are not authentic.
Roof	Slate tiles are the dominant local roof material, usually blue-grey colour natural slate.	To non-prominent elevations and single storey extensions, there is more flexibility for alternative high quality materials.	Using alien or poor quality materials.
Rooflights and Dormers	Represent a subservient feature of the roofscape.	For domestic properties, these will be discreet conservation style rooflights. For non-domestic buildings, an alternative more utilitarian solution may be more appropriate such as patent glazing.	A series of multiple rooflights or overly large boxy dormers that dominate the roofscape.
Fenestration	Balanced fenestration pattern with joinery details appropriate to the character of the building.	Demonstrate a positive relationship with the street scene.	Externally visible trickle vents.
Rainwater Goods	High quality metal.	Take account of climate adaptations and increasing projected rainfall.	Unsympathetic location in relation to the wider façade.
Boundaries	Appropriate material and height to respond to the topography and the street scene.	Provide storage for bikes and waste bins within the site.	High timber fencing is uncharacteristic in a historic setting and likely to detract from street scene views.

Public Realm

Fundamental to the way people experience an area, all changes in the public realm must accord with Historic England's 'Streets for All'¹¹ manual.

Principles for Managing Change

- Consider the impact on the wider streetscape and the character and appearance of the area.
- Embrace opportunities to provide betterment.
- Create streets and spaces that balance the needs of pedestrians with motor vehicles.
- Retain historic and authentic materials, to be replaced on a like-for-like basis when necessary, particularly where they were installed or maintained with public or grant funding.
- Utilise existing paving materials to maintain consistent ground surfaces.
- Ensure there is an identified need in that location prior to installation of further street furniture.
- Use traditional inspired street furniture that sit comfortably in the surrounding area. These can be well-designed to speak to the town's history.
- Reduce street clutter and carry out reviews to remove unnecessary and duplicate signage.
- Restrict unnecessary artificial light.
- Utilise level changes and local materials to differentiate between areas prior to the installation of physical barriers.
- Be mindful of emerging technologies and alternative less impactful solutions. Avoid installation of intrusive and soon obsolete street furniture.

Retain traditional shopfronts without modern materials that will not patinate and artificial light	Avoid pavement obstructions	Utilise simple and traditional inspired street furniture	Undertake regular maintenance, particularly rainwater goods	Maintain the traditional colour palette
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High Street

Avoid obtrusive wirescape and utilities	Protect the natural environment	Group street furniture	Maintain kerb lines	Avoid A-boards and attach new signage to buildings, boundary walls and railings to reduce street clutter
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Fore Street

¹¹ Historic England 'Streets for All'. Available [online](#).

Street Furniture

Surviving historic features and street furniture contribute are fundamental to the historic character of an area, often with local manufacturer markings. New traditional inspired additions can complement this but must be sensitively sited and grouped to avoid visual clutter. Where modern utilitarian additions are required, such as highways signage, parking meters, and bins, these will be sensitively sited and grouped to avoid visual clutter. It is preferred that utility boxes are coloured dark green.

Waste Bins

Waste bins can be obtrusive and detract from the public realm and key views. These must not be located on the public highway or block Totnes' distinctive passageways. New developments will proactively make provision for bins and not leave it to future occupiers to resolve.

Paving

Historic and high quality paving are fundamental to the historic character of an area. They must be maintained to remain safe as long as possible, to be replaced on a like-for-like basis with sensitive solutions when necessary, particularly where they were installed or maintained with public or grant funding.

Signage

New signage will be sited where there is a demonstrable need in that location. These will have a traditional and recessive appearance, avoiding man-made materials and artificial light.



Bench



Post box



Telephone box



Granite bollard



Granite bollard



Traditional style bollard



Grouped furniture



Arrow sign



Arrow sign



Information board



Information board



Animal sculpture



Stableblock paving



Granite paving



Yorkstone Paving



Modern paving



Granite kerbstone



Cobbles



White metal sign



Blue sign



Replica sign



Directing sign



Highways sign



Highways sign

Passageways

Also distinctive are the narrow streets and network of passageways around the town travelled through by generations of Totnesians. These reflect the Saxon town layout and the Medieval building pattern of a subservient passage entrance leading from the main block to the rear courtyard and outbuildings beyond, now converted providing further dwellings with later infill development. The passageways are characterised by their narrowness and sense of enclosure, flanked high stone boundary walls. Their entrances are often fairly discreet, appearing as service entrances or subservient side doors. Erosion of their character through introducing waste bins or incremental removals will be resisted to retain their historic character, sense of enclosure, solidity and strong presence.



The Grove



Leechwell Street



Church Close



To Ticklemore Street



Fore Street



Victoria Street



Guildhall Yard



Guildhall Yard



Guildhall Yard



To North Street



To North Street



To North Street



Atherton Lane



Atherton Lane



Bank Lane



Bank Lane



Bank Lane



Bank Lane



Side passages



Side passages



Side passages



Side passages



Butterwalk



Butterwalk

Shopfront Guidance

Most historic shopfronts are 19th century or later and follow a classical style constructed in timber with simple decorative pilasters creating vertical emphasis and giving visual support to the entablature above with fascia sign board and projecting cornice. The shop windows are carried on stallrisers and are often divided by mullions. These add to the liveliness of the street frontages and make a major contribution to the special interest of the conservation area.

Alterations to shopfronts must retain a traditional character and offer betterment. Primarily traditional painted sign writing on the fascia board. Where there is no fascia, fixing of individual letters may be acceptable on a case-by-case basis provided the scale and materials are suitable. Hanging signs are traditional drop hung signs fixed on simple brackets. These shall stick to a muted traditional heritage colour palette.

Modern forms, man-made materials, bulky profiles, internal illumination, and trough lighting that are alien in the historic environment will not be permitted as these fail the statutory duty to preserve or enhance the character and appearance of the area.

'A' Boards sited on the pavement outside premises to attract customers that cause a hazard within the pavement can be reported to the County Highways Authority and may be removed. You can report suspected breaches through [their website](#).



Fore Street



Fore Street



High Street



High Street



High Street



High Street



High Street







High Street

Street Assessment

This helps assess the condition of a conservation area at a point in time to break down and identify the most prevalent issues to inform the conservation area review.

	Cistern Street	Rotherfold and Leechwell Street	Maudlin Road	Plymouth Road	Collins Road	High Street	South Street	Blueball Hill to Victoria Street	Castle Street and North Street	Fore Street	The Plains	Warland	Bridgetown	Somerset Place and Brooklands
Historic Environment														
Loss of historic features	Some concern	Moderate concern	Some concern	Minimal concern	Moderate concern	Some concern	Some concern	Some concern	Some concern	Some concern	Some concern	Some concern	Some concern	Minimal concern
Loss of boundary treatments	Minimal concern	Minimal concern	Minimal concern	Minimal concern	Minimal concern	Minimal concern	Minimal concern	Minimal concern	Minimal concern	Minimal concern	Minimal concern	Minimal concern	Minimal concern	Minimal concern
Loss of traditional shopfronts	Minimal concern	Minimal concern	Minimal concern	Minimal concern	Minimal concern	Minimal concern	Minimal concern	Minimal concern	Minimal concern	Some concern	Minimal concern	Minimal concern	Minimal concern	Minimal concern
Built Environment														
Inappropriate alterations and extensions	Minimal concern	Some concern	Some concern	Minimal concern	Minimal concern	Minimal concern	Minimal concern	Moderate concern	Some concern	Minimal concern	Minimal concern	Minimal concern	Minimal concern	Some concern
Use of unsympathetic materials	Minimal concern	Moderate concern	Some concern	Minimal concern	Moderate concern	Minimal concern	Minimal concern	Moderate concern	Some concern	Some concern	Some concern	Some concern	Some concern	Some concern
Unsympathetic infill development	Minimal concern	Minimal concern	Minimal concern	Minimal concern	Minimal concern	Minimal concern	Minimal concern	Significant concern	Some concern	Minimal concern	Minimal concern	Minimal concern	Minimal concern	Minimal concern
Lack of general maintenance	Minimal concern	Minimal concern	Minimal concern	Minimal concern	Minimal concern	Some concern	Some concern	Some concern	Minimal concern	Minimal concern	Minimal concern	Minimal concern	Minimal concern	Minimal concern
Public Realm														
Dominance of vehicles	Significant concern	Significant concern	Moderate concern	Significant concern	Some concern	Significant concern	Some concern	Some concern	Significant concern	Significant concern	Significant concern	Moderate concern	Significant concern	Some concern
Inappropriate paving surfaces	Some concern	Some concern	Minimal concern	Moderate concern	Minimal concern	Some concern	Minimal concern	Minimal concern	Some concern	Some concern	Moderate concern	Some concern	Moderate concern	Minimal concern
Obtrusive wirescape	Minimal concern	Minimal concern	Minimal concern	Minimal concern	Minimal concern	Minimal concern	Minimal concern	Minimal concern	Minimal concern	Minimal concern	Minimal concern	Some concern	Minimal concern	Minimal concern
Poor signage or advertisement	Minimal concern	Some concern	Minimal concern	Some concern	Minimal concern	Some concern	Minimal concern	Some concern	Some concern	Moderate concern	Moderate concern	Minimal concern	Minimal concern	Minimal concern

KEY	
	Significant concern
	Moderate concern
	Some concern
	Minimal concern

Conservation Area Review

Successes

The high quality building fabric of Totnes is locally recognised and appreciated with substantial retention of historic buildings, features, and materials. Generally buildings are well maintained with high civic pride. The high street demonstrates strong economic vitality with vacant shops quickly refilled, usually by independent shops that bring variety to the town's commercial offering and attracts visitors.



Building works undertaken Warland.

The town benefits from an energised and interested Town Council and local heritage groups. The Town Council maintain and run the Grade I Listed Guildhall and support heritage initiatives in the local area. Since the previous appraisal, Totnes Heritage Trust was also formed to manage the restoration of Grade I Listed St Mary's church in the heart of Totnes in partnership with St Mary's Church. This project has successfully enabled £4 million pounds of retrofit and repair works as well as improvements to create a more accessible space. It offers an example case study of how traditional buildings can be sensitively retrofitted and adapted to respond to modern needs. They recently hosted the first Totnes Heritage Festival bringing

together different heritage related groups and are seeking a new project.

Challenges

Pressures of motor vehicles and traffic management remains at odds with the historic context. This is of particular concern where the narrow streets mean it is not possible to provide separate pedestrian pathways. Dominance of vehicles creates conflict between users that could be reviewed with a view to reducing vehicle pressure.



Cars on the High Street.

Incremental loss of irreplaceable historic building fabric erodes a building's special interest and provide a tangible link to the historic environment and past occupiers who lived in in the very same walls, looking through the same windows, entering through the same doors. They provide a direct portal to the past. Removal of sections of boundary walls, particularly those lining the network of passageways that are part of the uniqueness of Totnes, will be resisted to avoid incremental deterioration. Historic windows are

unique, well-built using hardwood, and most can be repaired and returned to good working order. UPVC windows and doors are incompatible with the historic environment due to the appearance of the material and lack of finesse in replicating joinery details. It is also not a sustainable material nor durable one when compared with good quality timber. Visible external trickle vents will not be permitted.

Totnes is generally dominated by attractive advertising, colourful and unique using traditional signwriting that sit comfortably in the historic environment inviting visitors to take time to admire the products on offer. Unfortunately, there are some examples of inappropriate advertising with alien forms and materials that will not patinated and are incongruous in this context.



Sympathetic advertising in Fore Street.

Introduction of inappropriate modern materials is alien in a historic context. This can stand out and be easily identified. This has a negative cumulative impact on the quality of an area and can encourage other similar poor interventions. The character of the conservation

area can also be slowly eroded by the accumulation of ugly fixtures to buildings. Care needs to be taken in finding sympathetic, well-concealed locations for flues, air conditioning units, air source heat pumps, electric vehicle chargers, and other machinery.



Maintenance required on the High Street.

Totnes has a higher proportion of flats when compared with the rest of the South Hams, representative of the urban character and designation as a 'Main Town'. Many of these are rented or leaseholds, sometimes with absentee freeholders or landlords. This can create confusion in relation to ongoing maintenance. Neglected buildings can degrade the town's character and erode civic pride. As previously explained, regular maintenance is also critical for the building fabric. The density of development and high number of commercial and subdivided buildings, compounded by mixed ownerships, can also create issues in storing waste bins. These are often stored in the public realm, permanently visible and undermining the experience of the area.

Overflowing bins, bins left out too long, or bins permanently stored in the public realm including the town's network of passageways detracts from the historic environment and enjoyment of the

conservation area. Development proposals must be proactive in seeking waste storage rather than leaving it to future occupiers to find provision for bin storage.



Bins stored on the High Street.

Future Concerns

Pressure for housing has significantly increased. The town has continued expanded with numerous applications of varying quality for residential development in response to the housing crisis. Care should be taken to respect the character, appearance, and density of development in the locality. Introduction of oversized buildings can dominate neighbouring buildings and change the character of a particular area.

Parking meters and electric vehicle charging points can be alien in historic contexts. Given the increased use of parking apps and QR codes, signage can be limited with well-considered solutions by way of siting, form, materials, and lighting. The introduction of digital or illuminated signs, by way of introducing such bulk and form, man-made materials that would not patinate, and accompanying illumination, are alien in the historic environment. This would spoil the consistent street scene of traditional buildings, forms, and materials and distract from the historic buildings and

important views. This fails the statutory duty to preserve or enhance the character and appearance of the area and is inappropriate in this sensitive historic context and will not be permitted.

Future Opportunities

When properties change hands, there is an opportunity to address unauthorised works through repair or reintroduction of traditional features or materials with reference to historic photographs. With ever evolving technology, the removal of obsolete satellite dishes is welcomed.



High Street looking down along Fore Street.

Management Plan

This review has taken stock of the current state of the conservation area and identified challenges that threaten its character, appearance and integrity, as well as highlighting opportunities for improvement. It is clear that conservation areas are not necessarily ‘preservation’ areas, set in one moment of time. Change is an inevitable facet of modern life and the challenge is to manage development and change in a manner that does not lose sight of the special qualities of a conservation area. It is important that Dartmouth retains its distinctive character to remain an attractive and vibrant historic town.

This management plan uses these findings to set out a framework for future actions to secure the, manage change and seek resolutions to address the challenges that have been identified moving forwards. However, it must be emphasised that it is not a substitute for policy-making that is properly associated with the local plan. The Management Plan can only be effective if it is implemented. The actions set out in the management plan are primarily the responsibility of the District Council, although their successful implementation will also depend on the co-operation and enthusiasm of the other stakeholders including the Town Council, Devon County Council, businesses, amenity groups, and the residents of Totnes.

Timeline

These actions have been set out on a 10 year timeline with annual (yearly), short term (0 – 2 years), medium term (2 – 6 years), and longer term (6 – 10 years) goals to coincide with the next conservation area appraisal review cycle.

Task	Reason	Timeline	Monitoring
The council will review the conservation area through updating the conservation area appraisal and management plan.	In accordance with the statutory duty. A 5 year review cycle is considered to be best practice, however, this is dependent on resources. A 10 year period is more realistic.	Long term	Completion of an updated conservation area appraisal and management plan.
The local planning authority will pursue appropriate enforcement actions.	Over time poor additions have encroached, adding clutter and undermining the visual quality of the conservation area.	Ongoing	Appropriate enforcement action will be taken. Anyone can report suspected breaches through our website .
The council will seek to monitor and enhance the public realm.	The public realm is central to how residents and visitors experience the public realm.	Medium term Long term	Audit of street furniture to ensure best practice set out in ‘Streets for All’ is being applied, could be undertaken by community groups. Develop a management strategy for maintenance and replacement works of furniture and ground surfaces.
The council will support the compilation and review of a Buildings at Risk Register.	The council recognises that it would be beneficial to have an authority wide Buildings at Risk Register.	Annually Medium term	Continue to contribute to Historic England’s Heritage at Risk register. Compile of a Buildings at Risk register, published at relevant intervals.
The council will consider creating a local list register.	The council recognises that the draft NPPF seeks for local communities to identify non-designated heritage assets.	Medium term	Compile a local list register published at relevant intervals, drawing from Neighbourhood Plans. Where sites are omitted, the matrix can be used for effective assessment based on real time threats and priorities.

Future Projects

As part of the appraisal process, various project ideas have been suggested if the time and resources were to become available.

Advertisements

A Boards positioned within a pavement or that cause a hazard can be removed by the County Highways Authority. Anyone can report suspected breaches through [their website](#).

Conservation Advisory Panel

Totnes benefits from educated and interested local heritage representatives who could form a panel to review and advise on significant applications that come forward.

Conservation Area Leaflet

A readily available handy guide to living within a conservation area would be helpful for residents and could be sent to welcome new residents.

Enhancement Sites

There are some specific sites identified as their enhancement would benefit the wider conservation area:

- Warehouses on Lower Collins Road

Heritage Open Days

We welcome schemes that enable heritage assets, particularly those in private ownership, to be enjoyed by a wider audience.

Important Local Trees

Anyone can identify local trees of importance through the Woodland Trust's [Ancient Tree Inventory](#).

Interpretation Panels

As further research is undertaken, the installation of new or updated interpretation panels to disseminate findings to a wider audience and better understand the area is welcome.

Recreation and Wellbeing

Proposals to introduce or improve access to green spaces would be welcomed. Research indicates that access to green environments benefits overall health, aids recovery from illness, improves mental health, provides a space for calmness and helps to foster social connections that builds a more cohesive society.

Public Realm Audit

An audit could be carried out of street furniture to ensure best practice set out in 'Streets for All' is being applied and identify opportunities for betterment. We also would welcome opportunities for sensitive and conveniently sited cycle parking.

Retrofit

Totnes benefits from a collection of climate forward groups. In relation to historic buildings, in line with Historic England, the authority advocates a 'whole house' approach. Advice on retrofit of traditional buildings is given on a case-by-case basis through the [pre-application](#) process.

Appendix

Designated Heritage Assets

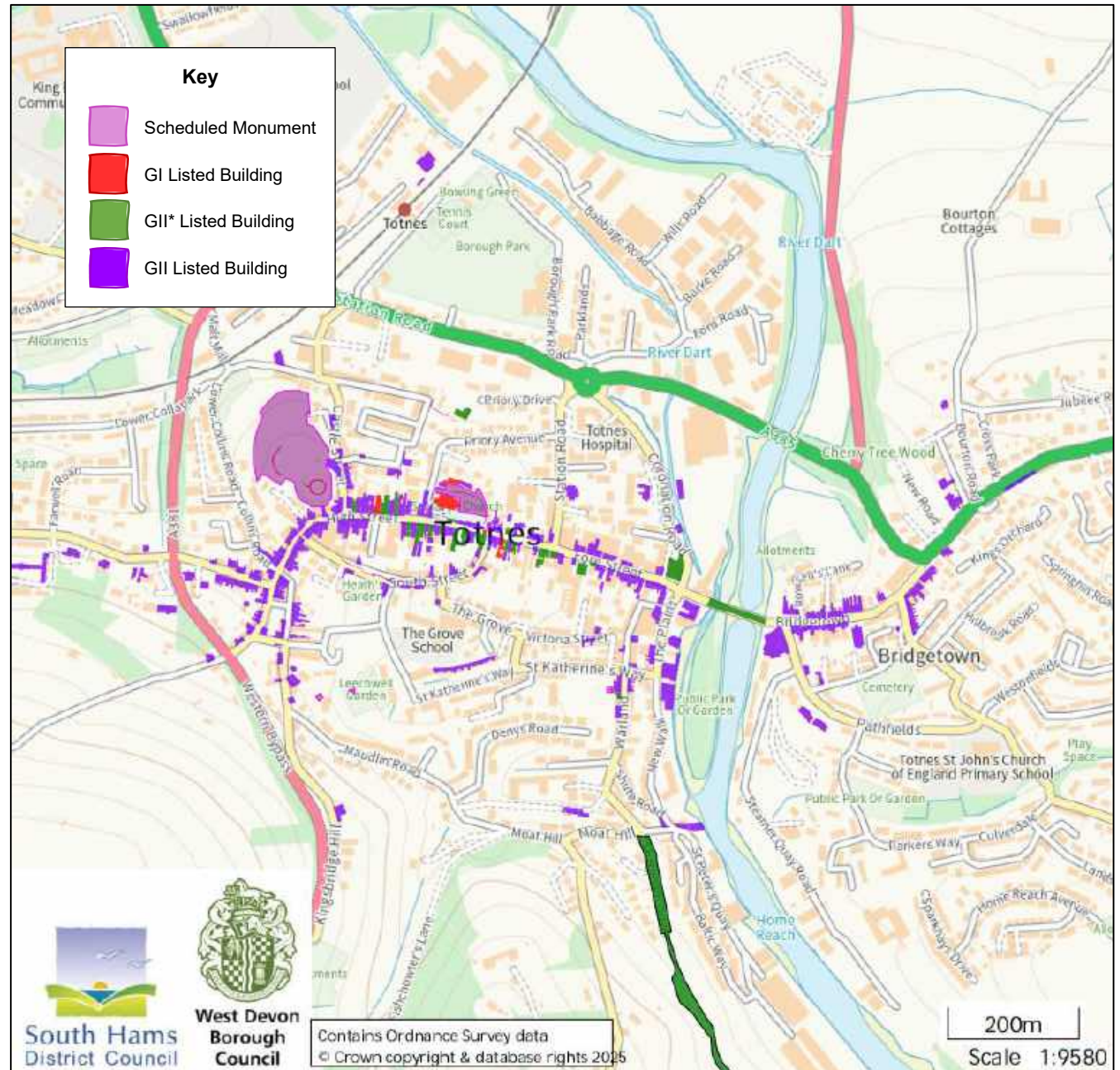
A World Heritage Site, scheduled monument, listed building, protected wreck site, registered park and garden, registered battlefield, or conservation area designated under the relevant legislation.

Scheduled Monuments

There are four scheduled monuments located within the conservation area. These are designated at a national level by Historic England, the government's advisors on the historic environment, on behalf of the Secretary of State. These are designated heritage assets in their own right, protected in law. Scheduled Monument Consent must be obtained before undertaking any works.

Listed Buildings

There are approximately 321 listed buildings located within the conservation area. Listed buildings are also designated at a national level by [Historic England](#). Any proposals that could alter their special interest requires Listed Building Consent from the local planning authority, even minor alterations. Listing descriptions help find a site, the 'listing' covers all of the external and internal built fabric (not just the front elevation) or within its curtilage (i.e. boundary walls). Carrying out unauthorised works to a listed building is a criminal offence. When acquiring a designated property, a prospective purchaser should establish that all works have been consented or they may be liable for a fine and the cost of reinstatement. For further information, you can contact us through a [planning/heritage duty slot](#) to discuss if/what type of application may be required, or a [pre-application](#) for specific advice.



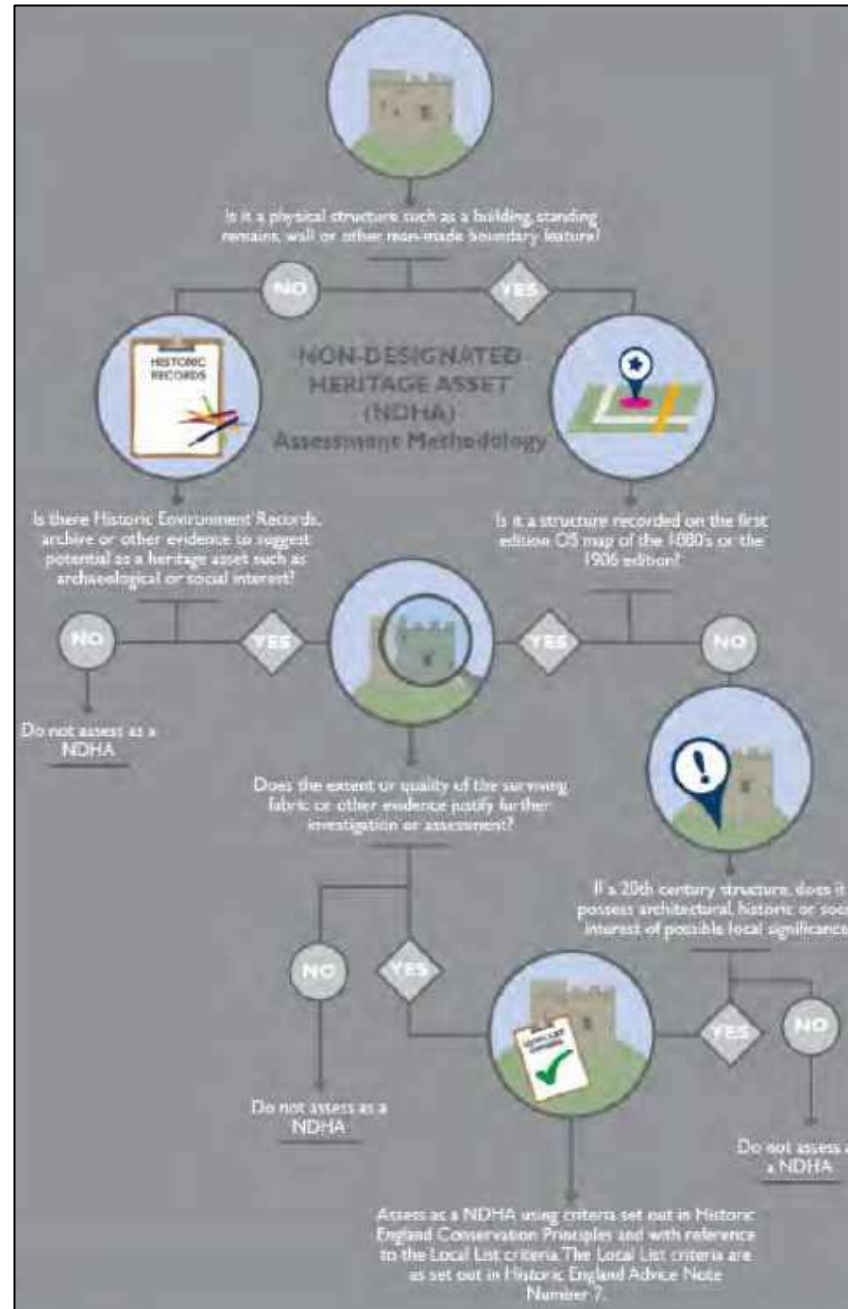
Non-Designated Heritage Assets

These are locally identified buildings, monuments, sites, places, areas or landscapes identified as having a degree of heritage significance meriting consideration in planning decisions but which do not meet the criteria for designated heritage assets (PPG). Buildings identified as being positive will vary, but commonly they will be good examples of relatively unaltered historic buildings where their style, detailing and building materials provides the streetscape with interest and variety, or modern buildings that have been well designed to reflect local distinctiveness.

The Local Planning Authority has adopted a criteria-based approach within the decision-making process to identify non-designated heritage assets set out in a matrix that asks a series of questions about the extent of built form and age. This allows for the effective consideration of buildings, structures and other features to be made based on real time threats and priorities. The matrix determines whether the site is worthy of consideration. If so, the site requires assessment using Historic England's Conservation Principles assessing the site's heritage values.

At time of publication, the Totnes Neighbourhood Plan also identifies 3 non-designated heritage asset structures within the conservation area boundary:

- Stone trough outside the Guildhall in Guildhall Yard
- Date in the cobbles Guildhall Yard
- Jubilee Fountain Outside the Dartmouth Inn



Heritage Values

Evidential value derives from the potential of a place to yield evidence about past human activity. For example: archaeological remains and deposits.

Historical value derives from the ways in which past people, events and aspects of life can be connected through a place to the present. For example: association with important local figures or events

Aesthetic value derives from the ways in which people draw sensory and intellectual stimulation from a place. For example: particular architectural styles, building typologies, or purpose built assets.

Communal value derives from the meanings of a place for the people who relate to it, or for whom it figures in their collective experience or memory. For example: public buildings.

Glossary

Architrave

A moulded frame around a door or window.

Ashlar

Dressed stone work of any type of stone. Ashlar blocks are highly finished, precisely cut blocks of stone. When laid with others in even courses (rows) it creates a uniform face with fine joints. Most often used as a facing on the visible exterior of a building, especially as a veneer for the facade. Also called dressed stone. Often used in classical buildings.

Almshouse

A place offering accommodation to the poor, sick or elderly of a parish. They are usually paid for and supported by charitable donations.

Butterwalk

A row of timber-framed buildings where the upper floors project over the pavement, supported by stone or granite columns. The covered walkway beneath was used to shelter market stalls, especially for selling butter and other dairy products.

Climate Change Adaption

Adjustment to actual or expected climate and its effects to moderate or avoid harm or exploit beneficial opportunities.

Column

A tall upright post, usually round, that can be plain or decorated. Inspired by classical architecture.

Designated Heritage Asset

A World Heritage Site, scheduled monument, listed building, protected wreck site, registered park and garden, registered battlefield, or conservation area designated under the relevant legislation.

Eaves

The lower edges of a roof that usually project beyond the walls of a building. They can be plain or decorated with brackets or mouldings.

Embodied Carbon

The carbon emitted over the whole lifecycle of a building, including during construction, maintenance, refurbishment and demolition. It considers carbon emissions released throughout the supply chain including extraction of materials from the ground, transport, refining, processing and assembly, and end of life.

Fine tuck pointing

A decorative brickwork technique where thin, white lines of mortar are applied over base mortar joints matching the bricks to give the appearance of very fine, neat brickwork.

Gable

The triangular upper part of a wall between the sloping ends of a pitched roof or where a wall continues up above the roof line to form a triangle.

Georgian

Style of architecture based on classical architecture, 1714-1830. It is characterised by proportion, balance and symmetry with a regular pattern of windows and often centrally placed door.

Hipped

A hipped roof has sloped ends. Instead of flat gable ends (the triangular upper part of a wall between the sloping ends of a pitched roof).

Jetty

Projection of an upper storey beyond the storey below.

Mullion

A vertical bar or stone that divides the panes of a window, often made of stone or wood. They help support the structure of the window and can be decorative as well as functional.

Parapet

Effectively a low wall along the edge of a roof, often used to hide the roof and provide greater visual dominance. They can be plain or decorative.

Retrofit

The addition of new technologies or features to an existing building to change the way it performs or functions.

Setting of a Heritage Asset

The surroundings in which a heritage asset is understood, appreciated and experienced. Its extent is not fixed and may change as the asset and its surroundings evolve.

String band

A horizontal band, often made of stone or brick, that runs along the outside of a building. It can be decorative or used to mark different floors or levels.

Sympathetic

Designed in a sensitive or appropriate way. In a heritage context, this includes consideration of an asset's heritage values, setting, fabric and performance.

Tenement

A large building divided up into many dwellings and often lived in by poorer families who pay rent for them. A tenement can also be a shop within a building.

Triangular pediment

A triangular shape found above doors, windows, or the front of a building. Inspired by classical architecture, popular in Georgian and Victorian styles.

Quoin

Masonry blocks at the corner of a wall, can be structural or for decoration.

Vernacular

Refers to buildings built using local materials in traditional ways. They are usually designed without the intervention of professional architects. Different regions have different types of buildings depending on the natural resources that were available, such as stone or wood.

Ventilation

The movement and exchange of air.

Victorian

Period of diverse and eclectic architectural styles in Britain, 1837–1901, It is characterised ornate details, revival of historic styles, and bold eclectic designs influenced by the Industrial Revolution.

Whole Building Approach

Considers a building's context to find balanced solutions that save energy, sustain heritage significance, and maintain a comfortable and healthy indoor environment. It also considers wider environmental, cultural, community and economic issues, including energy supply. It can help to manage the risks of maladaptation.

Relevant Links



Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990



National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), regularly amended



Planning Practice Guidance (PPG), regularly amended



Plymouth and South West Devon Joint Local Plan 2014-2034 (JLP), adopted March 2019 (under review).



Plymouth and South West Devon Supplementary Planning Document (SPD), adopted July 2020



Totnes Neighbourhood Plan, made July 2023.



Totnes Open Space Sport Recreation and Wellbeing, adopted September 2024



Conservation Areas in South Hams



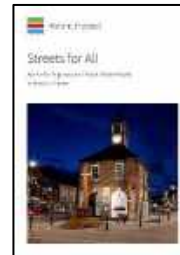
South Hams Enforcement Report a breach



Devon Historic Coastal and Market Towns Survey: Totnes



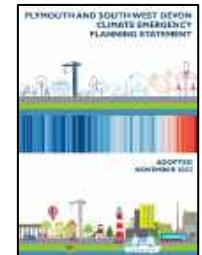
Devon Landscape Character Assessment



Historic England, Streets for All, published May 2018



Lendology CIC Home Improvement Loans



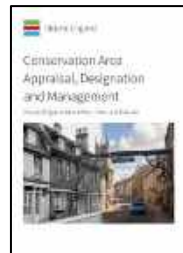
Climate Emergency Planning Statement



Historic England Advice



Historic England Energy Efficiency Measures for Older and Traditional Buildings



Historic England Advice Note 1 (HEAN1), published February 2019



Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings Maintenance Matters



Institute of Historic Building Conservation A Stitch in Time



Adapting Historic Buildings for Energy and Carbon Efficiency



Contact us to arrange a duty call or a pre-application.



South Hams
District Council