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1 Introduction

1.1 Conservation Areas are designated by Local Planning Authorities under the Planning Acts. Section 69 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 defines a Conservation Area as :

‘an area of special architectural or historic interest the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance’.

1.2 North Devon Council, as the local planning authority, has a duty to designate parts of the District it sees appropriate as Conservation Areas. There are currently 41 Conservation Areas in this District (excluding those within Exmoor National Park).

1.3 Carrying out a Conservation Area Character Appraisal is an important method for identifying the qualities and characteristics that such an area possesses and to provide a basic summary of the elements, which collectively contribute towards the special character and appearance of the conservation area. A clear and comprehensive appraisal of the Bishops Tawton Conservation Area provides a sound basis for development control decision-making, and assists the Council in defending such decisions that are subject to appeal. Generally the character and appearance of the Conservation Area will be preserved or enhanced through:

- Providing controls and regulating development through the planning system.
- Applying the extra controls that designation provides over demolition, minor development and the protection of trees.
- Environmental enhancement schemes and possibly providing financial assistance for the repair and restoration of specific buildings.
- Encouraging public bodies such as the local highways authority or utility companies to take opportunities to improve the street scene through the appropriate design and sensitive siting of street furniture (and retention of historic features of interest), or the removal of eyesores and street features that have a negative impact such as overhead wires.

1.4 The purpose of this character appraisal is to:

- Analyse the character of the designated area and identify the components and features of its special interest.
- Outline the planning policies and controls that apply to the Conservation Area.
- Identify opportunities for the future enhancement of the Conservation Area.

1.5 It should be noted that the omission of any particular building, structure, tree, wall or any other feature from being highlighted within this character appraisal does not imply that it is not of special interest, nor is there an implication in such an omission that it does not make a positive contribution, or conversely a negative contribution, to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area. Also the map is unable to identify accurately every tree of significance and value to the Conservation Area.

2 Background

2.1 The Bishops Tawton Conservation Area was first designated in August 1989 and has not been subject to review since that first designation; now almost 24 years ago.

2.2 This appraisal of the area, including investigations into the appropriateness of the current boundary of the area, was initiated in March 2013.

2.3 The process results in the production of this Draft Appraisal for public consultation which seeks to identify and define the special historic character and appearance of the Conservation Area which the designation seeks to protect.

3 Facts & Figures

3.1 The Bishops Tawton Conservation Area was first designated in 1989, and covers an area of 13 hectares (32.1 acres) along the east side of the River Taw; increased from 12.5 hectares (30.9 acres) prior to the 2013 boundary changes.

3.2 The conservation area contains within its boundaries 14 buildings of special historic or architectural interest ("Listed Buildings"), of which 1 (the Parish Church of St John The Baptist) is grade I listed, with the remaining 13 being grade II listed.

3.3 There are no scheduled ancient monuments within, or immediately adjoining, the conservation area although one is visible from the conservation area 1.4 kilometres (0.87 miles) away to the south-east atop Codden Hill, being a Bronze Age bowl barrow (a funerary monument).

A list of the 14 entries on the List of Buildings of Special Historic or Architectural Interest (Listed Buildings) is given in Appendix 1.

A map showing the locations of these buildings, together with the present conservation area boundary (as amended 2013) is given in Appendix 3(II)

4 Historic Development

Court Farm incorporates parts of the 15th century Bishop's Palace.



4.2 Throughout the medieval period Bishops Tawton was one of the most valuable holdings of the Bishops of Exeter and there was a Bishop's Palace built here beside the parish church. Parts of this palace survive incorporated in the 15th century Court Farmhouse, although the building has been significantly adapted over the years, including the addition of the corner turrets and battlements in around 1800. It was the presence of the Bishops Palace and the fact that the manor was held directly by the Bishops of Exeter, from before 1066 until 1550, which gives Bishops Tawton its 'Bishops' prefix.

4.3 The church itself has almost certainly been a site of religious activity since the Saxon period (pre-1066). The present church appears to date in its earliest parts to the early 14th century, however the presence of a Norman (1066 - 1154) stone font within the church suggests the present building is a rebuilding or a heavy remodelling of a building dating to no later than the Norman period.

4.1 Bishops Tawton is a long established village. It is mentioned in Domesday Book (1086), and is reputed to have been the see of the Diocese of Devon (prior to the church re-centring on Crediton by the second Bishop of the Devon and Cornwall Diocese) in 909AD. However, there is limited evidence to support this view beyond the fact that there is a long traditional belief that the see had its origins in Bishops Tawton.

The parish church is the oldest structure in the village today.



4.4 New Bridge across the River Taw was in existence prior to 1326 when Bishop Stapeldon left 60 shillings to pay for its repair. As the crossing was known as 'New Bridge' even in 1326 it presumably replaced an even older bridge in the vicinity making the crossing here quite ancient.

4.5 The manor of Bishops Tawton passed out of the hands of the church in 1550 when Bishop Veysey conveyed the manor to Lord John Russell (later the Earl of Bedford) at the request of King Edward VI. The King also required Bishop Veysey to transfer other manors held by the Diocese to Lord Russell and there is no evidence that Lord Russell ever had, or used, a residence in Bishops Tawton, indeed the Bishops Palace was soon being leased and was in use as a Farmhouse long before 1800.

4.6 The wealth of the parish can be seen in the number of residences described (WG Hoskins 'Devon' 1954) as 'mansions', many of which had their own private family chapels. Examples of these include Little Pill (chapel licenced in 1400), Acton, Hall (old Hall, replaced by the 'new' mansion at Hall built by Robert Chichester) and Halmeston House.

4.7 The rail line linking Barnstaple to Exeter was opened in 1851 and runs in a straight line to the west of the village between Bishops Tawton Road and the River Taw. There was never a station built at Bishops Tawton, almost certainly due to the close proximity of the last station on the line at Barnstaple Junction. The nearest stations today (and at any time) are at Barnstaple (2.5km north) and Chapelton (4.3km south and on the opposite side of the River Taw). The absence of a station in the village almost certainly limited its growth during the 19th and 20th centuries which otherwise could have been more substantial.

4.8 The village was the home of the well known figure of the women's suffrage movement, Clara Clodd, who was born in Pill House in Rumsam in October 1877.

4.9 Bishops Tawton has expanded significantly in the 20th century, with some changes to its layout as a result of realignment of the main route through the village. South of the junction with Village Street the A377 is called New Road, this section was created between 1902 and 1938 so as to avoid sending traffic down the narrow Village Street which was previously the main route through the village. Although the village has expanded there has been little clearance and redevelopment within the historic core of the village which has enabled it to retain much of its traditional character.

4.10 The 20th century has seen further expansion of Bishops Tawton, mostly to the north along relatively flat ground and up the valley sides of the River Taw in the direction of Barnstaple.

5 Landscape and Geology

5.1 Bishops Tawton is centred on relatively flat low lying ground to the east of the course of the River Taw along the route of a tributary of that river - the Venn Stream. The Venn valley narrows considerably, and only a short distance to the east its slopes become steep.

5.2 The settlement has grown onto sloping, sometimes steeply sloping, land to the south and the north. To the south the land rises upwards to the summit of Codden Hill, at an elevation above sea level of over 180 metres, less than a mile from the edge of the village. To the north the edges of the settlement are now above the 50 metre contour line (Mount Pleasant as an example).

5.3 The geology of the area is mixed, as the village sits on a narrow band of geology from the Lower Carboniferous era (a mix of slates, shales, and primitive limestones) which separates larger areas of Upper Carboniferous (to the south; mainly sandstones and slates) and Devonian era geology (to the north, mainly limestones and shale/slate).

5.4 This mixed geology has been exploited in the past and the parish contains several old and redundant quarries as well as Venn Quarries which ceased extraction of gritstone aggregates only in recent years.

5.5 The tidal limit of the River Taw is just a short distance to the south of the village, north of New Bridge, meaning that the character of the river beside the village is still estuarine.

5.6 There is also a designated County Geological Site just outside of the conservation area to the south where the disused workings of Codden Hill Quarry allow the strata of rocks making up the western slopes of Codden Hill easily visible.

Views along the Venn Stream towards the Taw showing the flat land upon which the early village grew.



6 Key Views

One of the impressive views across the Taw to Tawstock Court.



6.1 Perhaps the most immediately striking views from Bishops Tawton are those across the Taw Valley to Tawstock parish church and Tawstock Court (both within the nearby Tawstock Conservation Area). From the main road to the north of the church this view is particularly striking, becoming so again to the south of Court Farm.

6.2 On foot from within the churchyard the best example of this view is possible along the east wall of the church, with the church of the

neighbouring parish and its manor house visible just beside the south porch of Bishops Tawton Parish Church.

6.3 There is a clear visual relationship between the two settlements, although much of the village of Tawstock is not visible from Bishops Tawton as most of its houses are just over the brow of a ridge. This has the effect of making Tawstock Court and the church appear as if they are standing alone within open countryside.

6.4 Views back to Bishops Tawton from Tawstock are also possible. The best views are, unfortunately, from the private land of Tawstock Court and therefore not available to the public. However, the road down to Tawstock Church does allow for some reasonable views across the river, with Bishops Tawton Parish Church being the most noticeable feature.

6.5 Some distance to the north of Tawstock Court it is also possible to see Tawstock Tower, a folly constructed in the 1880's as a landscape feature for the parkland setting of Tawstock Court. The tower can be seen reaching above the horizon and as such can be seen as an eye catching landmark. Although its small size at this distance makes it readily overlooked, it is visible from any part of the conservation area with views of the north-western horizon.

Tawstock tower can be seen on the horizon to the northwest.



6.6 From the more elevated areas of the Conservation Area more general views of the wider landscape to the west and south are possible, and in turn these elevated areas are highly visible from the surrounding landscape. Views to the east and north are more restricted by topography, but still feature the undeveloped upper slopes of nearby hills. Perhaps the best opportunity for a view to the east is along the Venn Stream from the bridge at Easter Street where the bottom of the usually narrow valley is widened by now tranquil early industrial mill ponds as part of a former corn mill.

6.7 There are also several highly visible buildings within the Bishops Tawton Conservation Area which form a key view from wherever they can be seen. These include the distinctive multiple Flemish gables of The Old Vicarage which are most clearly visible from the churchyard and looking north from New Road, but are also visible past Saw Mills from Sanders Lane.

The view along Policeman's Hill from the east.



6.8 The tower and spire of the parish church are another example of such a structure, visible along the A377 from the north as well as in glimpses from School Road, on Easter Street near Yew Cottage, along Sanders Lane, from beside Fern Cottage on Easter Street and from the north end of Village Street.

6.9 Some of the steeply sloping streets at the northern end of the conservation area allow for impressive views over the rooftops of buildings, making the roofscape of these areas particularly prominent and important to the character of the area, with Sanders Lane and Easter Street being particularly good examples.

6.10 In the centre of the village some of the very narrow lanes such as Policeman's Hill create very attractive views along their length, bounded by modest traditional cottages close up on each side. In contrast to these tight spaces characterised by their

secluded nature there are also wider streets and spaces, most striking of which is the widening at the junction of Village Street and Sentry Lane.

7 Architectural Character

7.1 Bishops Tawton is dominated by a handfull of materials, mostly rendered stone or cob for the older properties and Georgian buildings, while Marland brick and red brick appear on some of the Victorian and Edwardian properties and exposed stone on some of the more agricultural or industrial properties. Natural and artificial slate is most prominent for roofs, although several thatched properties remain and (particularly to the north of the area) red clay tile roofs account for a greater proportion of roofs than in other local villages.

7.2 The architectural character of Bishops Tawton is varied and can be split into 3 distinct zones.

The map at Appendix 3(V) shows the approximate boundaries of the 3 character zones within the conservation area.

The Historic Core

7.3 The first of these is the area south of the Venn Stream and Tawton House which is the historic core of the village. Here, centred on Village Street and East Street, is where some of the earliest buildings still standing in the village today can be found.

7.4 The Parish Church is the oldest of these, with identifiable fragments dating to the 14th century and almost certainly having older masonry concealed within the existing structure. The church sits not at the highest point in the village, but at the highest point to the west of the main road with its churchyard accessed via steps and clearly elevated above neighbouring properties. The parking area in front of the churchyard, separated from the road by a low stone wall appears as if it was once a more formal approach to the church, although in reality it is a recent creation associated with the widening of the A377 and creation of New Road. The road immediately north of here was narrow and land was taken from the east (Coach House, formerly the village post office) to widen the carriageway. This left the area beside the church much wider and the wall was constructed to delineate a more regular width carriageway.

7.5 The church is of similar style to that at nearby Tawstock, although its tower sits over the north side of the building rather than centrally over the crossing as at Tawstock. The tower is also topped by an octagonal stone spire which is a unique feature in the county and was probably intended to be a display of the wealth and power of the diocese.

7.6 The churchyard provides an open space setting for the church itself, as well as providing an elevated viewpoint for views across the river and back towards the vicarage.

7.7 Immediately next to the church is a Gothic style building dating to 1841 and originally constructed as a 'National School' but now in use as the village hall. The building is of exposed stone with its gable, and a small stone porch, facing towards the road. The overall impact is of a building of similar style to the church.

7.8 South of this is Court Farm, labelled on maps as 'Remains of Episcopal Palace'. Parts of the main house date back to the 15th century and are fragments of the Bishop's Palace which stood on the site at that time. Over the years the building has been altered and added to, with features such as the decorative corner turrets dating to the very start of the 19th century, with other features such as dormer windows and forward facing gables with decorative barge boards dating from a slightly later period. As such the appearance of the building, particularly from the roadside, fails to adequately convey its true age or origins upon a casual inspection.

7.9 Away south of Court Farm is a series of agricultural buildings ranging from modern pole barns and agri-industrial style sheds, through mid 20th century rendered concrete buildings with metal windows, to earlier brick built 18th and 19th century long barns. Perhaps the most significant of these in terms of their contribution to the character of the area is the pair of long barns which run along the roadside a short way south of Court Farm.

The Old Vicarage with its decorative gables stands opposite the church.



7.10 The operation of a farm on this scale within a village is an unusual survival, with the majority of similar farms having proven un-viable due to their typically small scale nature. The continued presence and activity of the farm does in itself add to the character of the village and has long been an established feature.

7.11 Opposite the church we find its former vicarage (now 3 houses), an 1841 late Tudor style building by John Hayward (who also designed St. Andrew Exwick, Tipton St. John, Bicton new Church and St. James at Ilfracombe) who was a student of

Charles Barry (Houses of Parliament, Manchester Art Gallery, Highclere Castle). The roofline is highly decorative, with multiple Flemish Gables, some incorporating windows and others incorporating three flue chimney stacks of marland brick. Windows are small arrangements of paired (top floor), triplet (1st floor) or quad (ground floor) 2 over 2 sashes separated by heavy stone mullions. The windows sit in large expanses of wall giving the building an appearance of solidity and strength. The upper floor is mostly contained within the mansard style roof.

7.12 The Coach House just to the north was originally the coach house for the vicarage but has now been converted to a dwelling and is no longer within the same ownership. The original plan was of a courtyard enclosed on 3 sides and open to the roadside, however its westernmost ranges were demolished when the road was widened, leaving the south range absent and the north range reduced to a stub. The central projecting gable was a carriage arch when in use as a coach house but has subsequently been infilled.

7.13 Away from this more formal grouping the historic core area continues up Village Street. Upon turning up Village Street the first properties encountered are a row of 7 terraced cottages (numbers 1-4 grade II listed) called Rose Cottages. Numbers 1-4 are thatched and date to the early 18th century. The cottages were built to be single room, although most now have rear additions of varying sizes. 3 of the cottages also have thatched projecting porches and number 1 (at the bottom of the slope) has two large buttresses along its frontage. Windows are typical for the period being paired side hung casements, 3 panes per light on the ground floor and 6 panes per light on the upper floor.

7.14 The next 3 properties (numbers 5-7) are of a later period, roofed in red clay tiles. It would appear all originally had projecting porches, although 1 (number 7) has been replaced with an enclosed porch and another (number 5) has the space under the projecting roof infilled to create an enclosed porch. The glazing pattern on these later properties is of 6 over 6 sliding sashes, with a central blank recess between numbers 5 and 6. Unlike the older properties these later examples also have their small private frontages enclosed behind low brick walls, with those at number 5 being least altered and retaining historic, probably original, cast iron railings.

7.15 Opposite these modest cottages are a number of larger and later terraced properties from the late Victorian period exploiting different coloured building materials (red and cream marland bricks) for decorative effect. The properties have enclosed front gardens and are elevated above the road accessed via steps. The frontages are dominated by a number of full height bay windows topped by bracketed hood gables. This juxtaposition of examples of high quality buildings from different periods is repeated many times throughout the conservation area, usually with positive effect.

7.16 The next building on this side of the street is in a similar style, although detached and of an even later date (inscribed stone reads - Osborne House 1908). The use of contrasting colours of materials continues and there is another bay window, although

1-4 Rose Cottages mark the entrance to Village Street.



ground floor only. The property is enclosed behind a low rendered brick wall with an ornate cast iron gate giving access, any matching railings which may have existed have long since been removed.

7.17 Opposite is another small terrace of 3 properties, probably of similar or slightly later date (1900-20), again having ground floor bays, although sheltered under a continual projecting roof across the entire frontage. The roof here is of red plain tiles as is the projecting roof of the bays. The windows are 6 over 2 sashes, of odd proportions on the upper floor where the openings are significantly shorter but the same width as those below. These properties are mostly rendered, although red brick detailing around windows and doorways has been left exposed, as have the red brick plinth walls at the foot of the bay windows. This approach is less striking but of a similar style to the 'structural' polychromy achieved through use of different colours of brick on nearby properties.

7.18 Attached to the end of this short terrace is an older property, probably from the late 18th century, on a much wider footprint. The house has an artificial slate roof and has had its windows altered in the Victorian period for more fashionable marginal light sashes. The dimensions of the openings have, however, not been changed and it would appear that the windows were previously 2 light side hung casements with the exception of that on the upper floor above the door which may have been a single fixed light.

7.19 At this point the street widens out into 'The Square' which acts as an area of 'static space' with a wedge of green and trees in the centre. The enclosure and attractiveness of this piece of space is somewhat undermined by the open space along its southern edge in use as the car-parks for the Chichester Arms and the Gospel Hall. Both of these areas are bland tarmaced spaces with limited screening from the street.

The Chichester Arms dates to the 17th century but had to be extensively repaired after a fire.



7.20 Other buildings looking into this space include the Gospel Hall itself, which was built in 1925 and is of the predictably modest inter-war style. Detailing including windows and barge boards have been replaced with modern materials leaving a building, which although not unpleasant, has no particular outstanding features of note.

7.21 The Chichester Arms is on the corner between Village Street and East Street and is a large early-to-mid 17th century building. The building has an axial chimney stack on its rear elevation, now mostly enclosed within a 20th century rear extension, and this is a tell-tale feature of 17th century buildings in this part of Devon. The building was extensively altered during the 19th and 20th centuries, including having its internal layout changed to produce a near symmetrical arrangement of rooms which is certainly not original. The building also suffered a major fire in 2005 following which it has been repaired and re-opened. Externally there is little obvious sign of this catastrophic event.

The view along Springfield Terrace with its stepped roofline and Tawstock Court in the background.



7.22 Further south and opposite the Chichester Arms is Springfield Terrace, another short terrace of 4 houses which run at right angles to the street and accessed via a narrow pedestrian lane at the front of the properties. The terrace is stepped in the middle as it is built on sloping land. This does make the roofs of the properties very visible, with their red clay ridges and artificial slate roof coverings. It would appear that original windows were twin light 8 pane-per-light side hung casements as survive on numbers 3 and 4, with replacements of varying sensitivity on numbers 1 and 2. Unfortunately the property closest to Village Street (and most visible from the public realm) is also the most significantly, and least sensitively, altered. These changes include uPVC windows with mock lead effect and top hung transom lights. The stone sills have also been replaced with uPVC window sills, the new windows fitted near flush with the walls resulting in the loss of deep window reveals seen on other houses in the row. The window openings have been made wider, the open porch replaced with a wider enclosed porch and an additional front facing extension added to the side of the porch. Beyond the first property in the row the remaining 3 hang together well as a group and viewed together with their modest front gardens create a pleasing view off of Village Street. A view straight along the front of this row also happens to line up with a view across the river to Tawstock Court and Tawstock Parish Church.

'The Stores' with its large glass display windows is out of character with other buildings within the village.



7.23 To the south of this terrace is "The Stores" now in use as offices. The heavy-handed and expansive 1970's display windows do not lend themselves to a view of an office and indeed produce an appearance greatly out of character with any other building within the village. This being said it is also the only commercial property within the village and its different function would necessitate a different character. Besides the large expanse of glass the building is rendered beneath a pitched slate roof, just like many other buildings within the village.

7.24 Next door to the south are a pair of cottages, 1 and 2 Homelea Cottages, which are the oldest buildings in the village excluding the Church, The Chichester Arms and Court Farm. These cottages date to the early 17th century as indicated by the axial chimney stack on the frontage of number 1. Both have been altered, principally through the introduction of large sash windows in the Georgian period which have subsequently been replaced with uPVC sliding sash units. It is also likely that both properties were originally thatched, although the roof slope is inadequate so if these were originally thatched cottages then the roof structures must have been replaced in the past.

1 Homelea Cottages with its forward facing axial stack chimney.



7.25 Opposite stands Burton House. This property is set some way back from the side of the street and also well separated from its neighbours. Several other properties have already been mentioned which have small front gardens but this is the first that has a significant frontage, albeit elevated some way above the street and approached via steps and a slope. The property is of the materials typical for the area, apparently local stone or brick rendered with a natural slate roof. The house has Georgian proportions and it is most likely that the existing twin light uPVC casement windows replaced timber sliding sashes.

7.26 Beside Burton House is the narrow lane of 'Policeman's Hill' which runs up the hillside to East Street. From the lower end of the lane the view is dominated by the largely blank side walls of Burton House and 'Post Office' which give the lane a dark and enclosed character. The only features punctuating the lane itself are the bins belonging to the properties along the lane.

7.27 Opposite Policeman's Hill is a pair of properties, The Old Post Office and The Three Pigeons (public house), dating to the mid 17th century. The Three Pigeons in particular retains interesting features including a single original 17th century roof truss, a simple Tuscan style doorcase over the front door and a large bay window to the rear overlooking the river. Externally the usual pattern prevails, with rendered walls and side hung casement windows; it is possible that an axial chimney stack may have stood just to the left of the front door although this has long since been removed. The steeply sloped slate roof indicates that this property was originally thatched.

7.28 To the south are Post Office, Chapel Side and Chapel House. The three are a short row of non-matching properties, each of 2 to 3 bays wide. Post Office has marginal light sliding sashes, 2 upstairs and 1 to the left of the near central doorway downstairs; the window to the right was probably originally a sash but has been enlarged into a mullioned display window when the house was used as the village post office. Chapel Side has been altered, having modern wood effect uPVC casements with mock leading, the plinth wall and door quoining having been highlighted in stone cladding. The stone is a colourful sedimentary ironstone with some pieces predominantly blue-grey shale and other pieces an orange-brown from iron staining. The effect is nothing like that given by local stones from North Devon and although an exposed stone plinth might be seen on a property of this style, an exposed door quoining of this type would not be expected traditionally. The render of the remaining parts of the wall is artificially textured and gives the look of a crude or 'rustic' finish which has no historic precedent. The hard cement render used also shows significant cracking as it is unable to accommodate any movement within the underlying structure. Chapel House has a set of late 19th century sashes, 6 panes over 2, and cast iron rainwater goods and a crisp rendered finish.

7.29 Opposite again we have a number of agricultural and industrial buildings from the 19th century. The Loft House is a converted former grain store, which still has features such as an upper floor loading door above the front door. The large window range to the left of the front door was probably an opening for parking wagons, possibly with grain chutes to allow direct loading of vehicles with stored grain from the loft above. With the exception of these features the building has been much altered to accommodate its new use as a home, including rooflights in the natural slate roof. Although now rendered to match many other houses in the street it may originally have been of exposed stone or brick.

The agricultural engineering works of Walter A Wood are a lone example of rural industry within the village.



The former reading room associated with the adjacent engineering works.



7.30 Next door is the old engineering works of Walter A. Wood, manufacturer of agricultural equipment and 'harvesting machines'. The engineering workshops are a red brick building with large arched window openings and a highly glazed timber clad outshut to the south side to provide extra floorspace and to provide light. The building features sliding timber doors for easy access for large equipment, an old faded advertising sign for the company on the roadside gable, also featuring a further pair of arched windows below a large first floor loading door.

7.31 This building is separated across a courtyard from another, more ornate, building in red brick and marland brick, almost in the style of a Victorian chapel with polychrome decoration, and decorative dogtooth courses of brickwork. The building was formerly a reading room, funded by Walter Wood's company for the benefit of his workers and the wider community. The building is connected to the workshops via a large 'I' section steel beam running overhead which would have held lifting and loading equipment. The buildings are sadly disused although they make a significant contribution to the character of the street and have great value as examples of the small scale engineering industry that existed at one time across the country and the wealth and philanthropy which went along with it.

Elmsleigh House at the southern end of the village.



7.32 Further south along this side of the road is a series of poor quality 20th century garages, and although these might do great work relieving the streets of what may otherwise be intrusive on-road parking, the garages and their general condition actively detract from the character and appearance of this section of the conservation area, particularly being the view with which one is confronted when exiting East Street.

7.33 Elmsleigh House is a large Georgian mansion now accessed off East Street, although it is largely hidden from public view, particularly its main facade which faces south. The building is lavishly decorated, with lion's head decorations on the cast iron gutters, incised Greek Key decorations on the plain pilaster mouldings, and large projecting full height bow windows on the south elevation. The building is clearly designed to dominate views from its southern approach and also to take advantage of views and natural light. The limited opportunities to view the property from the public realm mean that it is only usually experienced as glimpses suggesting at its grandeur, with its western service range actually being easier for the public to view.

7.34 The remainder of the southern end of East Street has a very enclosed character, shaded by buildings and walls on both sides. Thorncliffe House is hard up to the edge of the lane on its west side with its roof and red brick chimneys particularly visible as the ground rises up the the north. The next buildings are a pair of unremarkable split level properties or bungalows which appear to have been converted out of old ancillary buildings. The first building on the east side is High Cross, an aptly named building standing high above the roadside. The house has been modernised with uPVC windows and a functional, if not particularly aesthetically pleasing, central lean-to porch on an exposed stone plinth which is at odds with the scale and appearance of the rendered house.

One of few exposed stone buildings, Burton Cottage.



7.35 High Cross stands almost opposite the east end of Policeman's Hill. Hidden from view half way down the hill on the left side is a little thatched cottage called The Retreat, set back from the lane, with a small enclosed porch with clay tiled roof. Other houses fronting the lane are modest Georgian cottages with slate roofs; particularly good examples are 1 and 2 Retreat Cottages which form a near mirrored pair. One has a blank upper floor window above its door and the south-east corner is chamfered to provide relief at the junction. Both have replacement windows and

illustrate well how replacing windows can result in loss of information about the building's past. Number 2 has uPVC windows which suggest previous twin light casements (8 panes per light) whilst number 1 has timber windows which suggest 8 over 8 sashes. It is difficult to be sure now which was the case, it would appear likely that casements would be more reasonable but there is little certainty. The cottages are double fronted, but the view from the 'back' doesn't help as both properties have marginal light sashes above and 2 light (8 pane per light) casements on the ground floor. The view of the cottages from the north is of properties less altered and more traditional in their character, although from here the two properties have not been treated to a matching colour scheme as they have on their south side.

7.36 Burton Cottage is one of the few exposed stone houses in this part of the conservation area, with gabled half dormers on the first floor and a seemingly original porch on an exposed stone plinth which blends well with the construction of the main property.

7.37 At the north-east end of East Street is an interesting group of properties, short terraces of 2 or 3 properties set back from the road interspersed with gabled projecting properties which stick out from the row to the edge of the street. It is difficult to untangle how these buildings have been built and in which order they were constructed. It would appear in some cases that the rows at the rear were built first as their ridges are continual, where as the properties projecting from the row have ridges which join the roof slope of the row behind. However at number 5 the projecting section has a window hard up against the front wall of number 4 (Takoza) which would appear an unusual thing to do if number 5 was built or extended later. The effect is to create two small courtyards in front of numbers 2,3 and 4 and 5, 6 and Kyrie Cottage which creates a very different spatial character to that which would exist with a single long and flat fronted terrace.

7.38 At the north end of East Street views to the north are closed by the frontages of three cottages (1 to 3 The Square). These rendered cottages are stepped up the slope of the street emphasising the steep local topography. Numbers 2 and 3 have artificial slate roofs, and number 1 a recently natural slate roof. Number 3 has replacement uPVC windows of completely different style to the marginal light sliding sashes still present on numbers 1 and 2. Number 1 twists around the corner towards Easter Street and its angled frontage adds to the interest of the group as well as providing a more interesting treatment to this corner plot.

7.39 To the east a short section of Sentry Lane is included within the conservation area. On the right hand side of this lane is a stone wall and a long whitewashed stone building. This was probably formerly agricultural storage but is now in use as garages. The building has been repaired over the years, with a modern corrugated metal roof adding to the agricultural character of the structure, but is in poor cosmetic condition which could be seen to detract from the character of the immediate area. The narrowness of the lane means that most views are along the lane and the frontages of buildings rather than square on to properties.



7.40 Those properties along the north side of the street are 4 cottages, the ones at either end being larger than the two in the middle of the row. The houses all have front stone boundary walls, with some exposed stone and others heavily whitewashed, while the cottages themselves are all rendered. The front boundary walls are tall enough, together with the outbuildings at the roadside opposite, to create a sense of enclosure and narrowness for the lane itself. The wide central lean-to porch across the middle two properties is a little out of proportion, but at least its central position does not off-balance the row and from views from the west the garden wall effectively hides the porch quite well. The porch at number 1 (Barley House) is much more in keeping with the proportions and orientation of the property and is similar in style to many of the projecting porches elsewhere in the village.

Open Space & Industry

7.41 The second zone is a band of open space, scattered with relatively recent buildings, and at its eastern end a grouping of former mill buildings and workers cottages along with the remnants of the landscape engineered to keep the mill supplied with a controlled flow of water.

7.42 To the south of the Venn Stream are a number of bungalows built in a row extending east-west and accessed via a single lane. Cherrybank, Deerhays and Thornborough are all of modern design, their scale and proportions out of character with the historic environment which provides their setting. To either side of Thornborough we have good examples of the workers housing found at this end of the village in the form of Valley Cottages and Fern Cottage.

7.43 Fern Cottage is a large detached cottage, still displaying an original natural slate roof, projecting open hood porch also in natural slate, cast iron rainwater goods and a slate roof protecting the gate to the garden. Some features detract from the historic character of the building. The wooden picket fencing, for example, which may have replaced low stone walls, railings or a completely open frontage. Although dating to perhaps the late 18th to early 19th centuries the building retains features typically seen on older properties, such as a projecting externalised bread oven on the north side of the house. The L shaped plan of the building is produced by a later two storey extension on the west side.

7.44 Valley Cottages date to around the same period, the mid 19th century, and are a semi-detached pair of more modest scale, yet still reasonably spacious. Again there have been modern alterations, such as one of the elaborately detailed million and transom windows with 3 opening transom lights replaced with a very plain and simple 1970's magnet style casement window, the roof has also been replaced with an interlocking concrete tile roof covering. At first glance the building is less altered than Fern Cottage and retains a greater sense of its historic character, but that impression does not survive any significant inspection.

1 and 2 Mill Cottages are one of the surviving buildings of the former flour mill complex.



7.45 Opposite stands Glebe Cottage, probably late 19th century again with natural slate roofs and a projecting open hood porch, the extension on the west side with its hipped projecting gable results in many very small roof slopes which attract significant attention. Due to the local topography and hedges at the road edge views of the principal facade (north) are limited. On the east side of Easter Street south of the Venn Stream this is the only old building, others such as Venn Vale, Fair Winds and Spring Stones are much more recent, dating to the second half of the 21st century. The buildings appear functional and aesthetically bland by comparison with the

wide variety of traditional buildings found around the village and are as such excluded from the conservation area.

7.46 To the north east, just outside of the current conservation area boundary, is an area of open space, however this space is far from undeveloped. The area contains large ponds and the remnants of leat channels which were all part of the water management system of the corn mill which once stood near the bridge. The mill associated with these engineered landscape features is no longer present, but there is Easter Mill, a former flour barn, and 1 and 2 Mill cottages, former mill workers cottages. This part of the conservation area has some of the most picturesque views, from the bridge looking west along the meandering Venn Stream where the clear shallow water can be seen flowing over the stone rubble of the stream-bed and disappearing down the valley. To the east from the bridge the view is largely undeveloped fields and paddocks with hedges and occasional trees as field boundaries. The bridge is also a good place to appreciate the steepness of the Venn Valley as buildings can be seen dotted up the sides of the valley slopes on either side. The bridge itself is a modest construction of bare stone a narrow single span arch with low parapet walls on either side.

7.47 Further west along this green band we find the Stanley Verney Memorial Playing Field, the plaque at the west gate to the field tells us that the playing field is dedicated to the memory of those men who did not return from the Second World War, amongst the names of the fallen is Flight Officer Stanley Verney for whom the field is named. In the fester corner of the open playing field there is now an equipped children's play area enclosed with basic chain link fencing. The south edge of the field is bounded by a tall hedge of conifers.

7.48 A path runs on the other side of this hedge linking the area near the bridge to School Lane, while the south side of the path is a large area of open space now associated with the domestic use of Saw Mills at the southern end of School Lane. Across this domestic garden a glimpse of the east side of the Old Vicarage is possible through the trees.

7.49 The open space, the river and the industrial activity and workers housing associated with it forms the defining characteristics of this second zone.

Northern Area, Late Development Farms and Housing

7.50 The final zone is the northernmost part of the conservation area and has some of the most modern buildings within the conservation area.

Cross Farm has lost most of its agricultural setting and outbuildings, now sitting on the edge of a small modern estate.

7.51 Cross Farm now stands at the edge of a residential development from the early 90's, Cross Farm Court. The old farmhouse is instantly identifiable at the east end of the site, with an enclosed front porch and an irregular arrangement of windows at the west end. Other than these features the building has been tyrellyne rendered, had its windows and roof covering replaced and has these features in common with the modern buildings which make up the rest of the court. These modern buildings, although of the same style and materials, are simply too crisp and regular to sit well beside the farmhouse and their modernity is apparent on inspection.



Stone walls along Easter Street with red brick dressings around blocked openings.

7.52 Opposite on the other side of Sanders Lane is The Stables, this building, at least in its northeast section was the former stables to Court Farm but has now been converted to residential use. Parts of the building have been residential for much longer and it may be that the building always incorporated housing for a coachman or stablemaster. On the west side a large bay window looks out towards the parish church and the views afforded by this feature must be spectacular as they look out across the valley. The building is finished to reflect its uses, the west elevation is rendered and the side walls of the western end are whitewashed. This part of the building has been altered over time, including an infilled large arched doorway now replaced with 2 small windows. Further to the east the building continues in exposed stone with brick dressings. The building has a clay tile roof, reflective of its former status as an agricultural outbuilding. Red clay tiles appear regularly in this part of the conservation area. The way in which the building is built into the



hillside means that the old loading door which gives access to the former hayloft is almost redundant, at the extreme north end of the building a set of double doors on the corner give access directly into the hay loft from ground level.

7.53 Around the corner into Easter Street a series of exposed stone walls with red brick dressings show where former window and door openings have been blocked up where other old outbuildings have been subsequently demolished. It is also possible to see the rear elevations of Fair View, the buildings are also of exposed stone with red brick dressings around the sash windows, most of which have been replaced with uPVC double glazed marginal light sprung sashes. From the distances at which the building is likely to be seen the windows are reasonably convincing attempts to replicate the appearance of timber sashes, although it is not certain that they replicate the glazing pattern that was previously present. The roof has also been replaced with very bulky concrete roof tiles.

7.54 Fair View Cottages are a disappointing grouping. It is difficult to tell which side of these properties was ever intended to be the front as both sides are now almost completely enclosed with varying ages and styles of extensions with pitched roofs, flat roofs and felt or slate tiles. The clay tile roof is original and adds to the overall character in this area, and it is assumed that the river frontage was the front of the houses when built and this side has only single storey extensions. The lack of consistency of replacement windows and extensions means that the roof is probably the only unifying element of this terrace which still remains.

7.55 Yew Cottage and Town Tennament were almost certainly once a single large Georgian house, extended eastwards before being split in two. The house perhaps belonged to the owner of the corn mill which at that time would have been the only thing in this part of the village except Cross Farm. The buildings are Grade II listed and retain original windows, roof coverings and cast iron rainwater goods. Buried within the 17th Century Georgian house are the remains of an earlier hall house, possibly as early as 15th century, which retains evidence of smoke blackening to its roof timbers.

7.56 Wissom Cottages may well have been homes for farm labourers at Court Farm, although they are perhaps a little grand for this to be the case they are certainly of the right age, dating to the first half of the 18th century. Large buttresses support the property at the roadside and the hipped roof suggests this building was originally thatched.

7.57 School Lane contains almost exclusively modern housing on its northern side. The school itself, in its oldest part, would be the oldest building within the street from the late 19th century. The Firs, Wisson House, Aris and Damars Folly are a mix of bungalows and 2 storey houses of modern style, while those on the north side of the street typically have significant concrete blockwork retaining walls and flat roofed concrete block garages. The streetscape here has its most modern appearance within this part of the conservation area. By contrast the southern side allows views over low

stone walls across the rear gardens to the backs of Westacott Cottages. These are high Victorian artisans cottages, a row of 4 in exposed stone with red brick dressings and a hipped natural slate roof with decorative red clay ridges. The cottages also retain their original rear ranges, the centre two touching back to back and the outer two cottages with their rear ranges at the outer edges.

7.58 A range of carriage or cart houses stand at the rear of Limewood and Brentwood, some have been completely rebuilt showing a modern approach to masonry which is less appealing than where the walls have not been rebuilt. Although the areas which have not been rebuilt have had openings filled in with concrete block which has disfigured these parts of the buildings.

7.59 The Law Memorial Alms Houses must once have been set a little apart from the village to its north when they were built in 1885, although they are now surrounded by housing development. The almshouses were built in memory of Thomas and William Law by their mother and are still administered by a charitable trust today. The buildings are Grade II listed and are highly elaborate. The building has paired forward facing gables separated by covered porches with a pair of front doors. The whole building is built of well dressed local stone, with decorative imported stone dressings (probably guiting). The gables each have million and transom windows with simple hood mouldings over them on the first floor with triplet round headed windows on the ground floor. The overall effect is of a late Tudor manorial frontage, a character reinforced by the multiple chimney stacks which punctuate the roofline.

7.60 This last zone is characterised by farming buildings, outbuildings and later housing including the elaborate and grand alms houses. The area also includes a large quantity of modern housing which is not making a positive contribution to the character of the area.

The Law Memorial Almshouses form a landmark at the northern edge of the historic village.



8 Boundary Changes Adopted 2013

8.1 This character appraisal identified several places where the boundary could be altered to better reflect the history and character of the village.

8.2 The majority of the changes removed or added small areas of land to ensure that the boundary follows features on the ground. An example of this is at the south end of the village where the boundary previously included the gardens of Dairy Cottages, but also a section of a large field which is otherwise outside of the conservation area. As the field has no historic or architectural interest the boundary was altered to exclude this section of field and clarify that the entire field is outside of the conservation area.

8.3 More significant changes were made at the north of the conservation area. The fields to the east of the bridge over Venn Stream which contain mill ponds and the remains of other engineering works associated with water control for the former mill are now included within the boundary of the conservation area as a result of a major boundary extension.

8.4 Reductions include to the north of the church to remove the modern bungalow Chestnut House, which respects neither the scale nor the materials of neighbouring historic properties.

8.5 A large area was also removed from the conservation area, including modern housing developed since the 1970's. Buildings within this reduction of the boundary include; all the modern properties at Cross Farm Court (but not Cross Farmhouse itself), Damars Folly, The Firs, Wisson House and Aris. These buildings are not historic and have no historic interest, they also have no particular architectural merits which would warrant their inclusion within a conservation area.

Details of these boundary changes can be seen on a map shown in Appendix 3(IV).

9 Development Pressures

9.1 Perhaps the biggest development threat facing conservation areas nation-wide is that of alterations carried out to dwelling houses which do not need planning permission. Such alterations may have only a minor impact on the character of the wider conservation area when viewed in isolation. However they can have a cumulative effect which can lead to major degradation of the historic character of the conservation area. Traditionally the largest such threat has come from the removal of timber sashes and casements in favour of the installation of uPVC windows.

9.2 As of 6th April 2008 the provision of some sources of renewable energy can be, under certain circumstances, a permitted development, which does not require planning permission or conservation area consent. The rules covering when the installation of, for example, solar panels is a permitted development is dependent on the location of the panels, their size and height, as well as the area they cover. As such advice should be sought from the planning office, as not all installations will be considered to be permitted without planning permission. The problem caused by this is that there will be no immediate control over such alterations within conservation areas, and as such there is potential for unsympathetic alterations to damage the character of the area instead of less damaging siting and designs being agreed.

9.3 Flooding is a major issue in Bishops Tawton with the potential to affect the village's historic character, as has been demonstrated in the recent past. Areas most at risk are the western edge of the village along the valley floor, particularly near the church, but also along the route of the Venn Stream. The steep slopes and local geology also creates an issue with surface water flooding within Bishops Tawton.

9.4 There are several areas with potential for development in Bishops Tawton. Higher ground which remains undeveloped to the east of the existing settlement is highly visible from the surrounding landscape and development here would need to be highly sensitive to its landscape impact.

9.5 Land to the west of the A377 is mostly at risk of flooding and is therefore unsuitable for development for housing. There are some small areas which are not at risk of flooding that could be developed for new housing, whilst the remaining areas could potentially serve less vulnerable uses, such as car-parking or community facilities. There are also views of significant interest out to the west of the conservation area and development in any form to the west of the A377 must be sensitive to these.

10 The Future

10.1 The aim of this character assessment has been to identify what buildings, open spaces, and features from Bishops Tawton's past and present survive to contribute towards its special character.

10.2 The character appraisal has also aimed to identify potential development pressures the area is likely to face in the near future and to identify areas within the designation which may be suitable for enhancement.

10.3 What this document does not aim to achieve is to propose the means and methods by which the identified character is to be safeguarded, or enhanced, for the future. This will be the subject of a subsequent management plan for the conservation area. The aim of such a document will be to propose the ways in which the characteristics identified within this character appraisal can be protected from unsympathetic alterations and future developments, or enhanced by positive and well planned schemes. This will also ensure that all future planning decisions that affect the conservation area and its setting are treated in a consistent manner.

1 Appendix 1 - Listed Buildings Within The Bishops Tawton Conservation Area

Bishops Tawton Road

Building Address	Listing Grade
Law Memorial Almshouses	II

Easter Street

Building Address	Listing Grade
Town Tenement & Yew Cottage	II
The Elms	II

New Road

Building Address	Listing Grade
Court Farmhouse.	II
Farm Store approximately 2 metres northwest of Court Farmhouse.	II
Village Hall at Churchyard Boundary approximately 30 metres southeast of Parish Church.	II
Church of St John the Baptist	I
The Old Vicarage and Numbers 1 and 2 Codden Hill	II
Cross Base in Churchyard approximately 15 metres south of Chancel of Parish Church	II

Policemans Hill

Building Address	Listing Grade
The Retreat	II

Village Street

Building Address	Listing Grade
1-4 Rose Cottages	II
The Three Pigeons	II
The Old Post Office	II
The Chichester Arms	II

2 Appendix 2 - Historic Mapping

3 Appendix 3 - Conservation Area Mapping

I - Key

II - Existing Conservation Area Boundary & Listed Buildings

III - Proposed Boundary Changes

IV - Key Views, Landmarks & Open Space

V - Character Study







