



Princetown

Conservation Area Appraisal



Conservation Areas were introduced through the *Civic Amenities Act 1967*. Section 69 (1) (a) of the Act gives the definition of a Conservation Area as:

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

There are now over 9,000 Conservation Areas nation-wide. Local Planning Authorities are required to designate Conservation Areas, keep them under review, and if appropriate, designate further areas (Section 69 (2)). There are currently 21 Conservation Areas within Dartmoor National Park.

Designation brings certain duties to local planning authorities:

- ◆ to formulate and publish from time to time proposals for the preservation and enhancement of Conservation Areas and submit them for consideration to a public meeting in the area to which they relate (Section 71)
- ◆ in exercising their planning powers, to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of the Conservation Areas (Section 72).

Conservation Area Appraisals aim to define and analyse the special interest which constitutes the character and appearance of a place. It is these qualities which warrant the designation of a Conservation Area.

An appraisal will provide a sound basis, defensible on appeal, for Development Plan policies and development control decisions. It can also form the groundwork for a subsequent **Conservation Area study**, which will contain defined issues, proposals and policies for the conservation and enhancement of the area. The study may form supplementary planning guidance to the local Development Plan. It is also intended that the document will be helpful to those involved in drawing up Enhancement Projects and Village Design Statements within the National Park area.

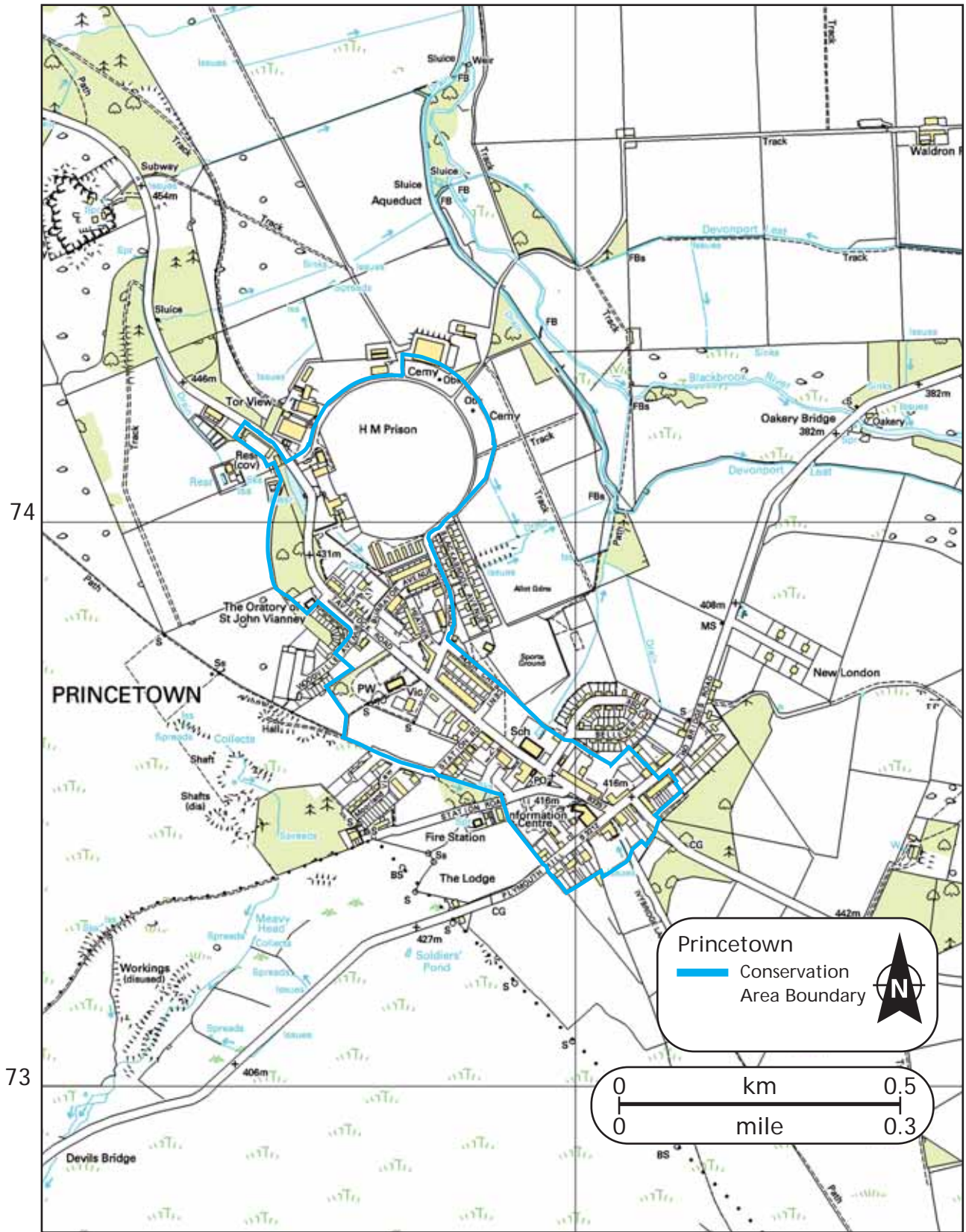
The main function of the Conservation Area Appraisal is to enable Dartmoor National Park Authority and the community to relate planning proposals to the Conservation Area.

Defining the character of an area is not a straightforward exercise and it is impossible to reach a truly objective view. The statement of character and appearance in this appraisal is based on various detailed methods of analysis recommended by English Heritage. Various different qualities are looked at including: historical development, building materials, and relationships between built and open spaces. However, appraisals are not intended to be fully comprehensive and any omission does not imply that something is of no interest.

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Map 1 Conservation Area Location



Introduction

Princetown is situated about 8 miles (13 kms) due east of Tavistock in the heart of the high moorland area of the Dartmoor National Park. Originally a small group of farmworkers cottages for nearby Tor Royal Farm it has grown into a unique isolated settlement within an exceptional rural context. Apart from some poor post war housing development, most of the town lies within the Conservation Area boundary. Approach to the town is via three main moorland routes; those from Tavistock and Plymouth being especially significant in relation to the development of Princetown itself, and the other historically important route was from the eastern area of the moor via Two Bridges. The town has a population of about 1000 and was designated a Conservation Area in 1993. Refer to [map1 page 4](#) for location.

1 Village History

Princetown has a unique history. In 1795, Thomas Tyrwhitt, Secretary to the Council of the Prince of Wales, commenced 'his operations in the Forest' to tame and cultivate the moorland wilderness. Tor Royal Farm was completed as the first stage of his mission by 1798. It is believed that the origins of Princetown lay in the cottages built for labourers employed on the farm, which were located near the junction of the Yelverton to Two Bridges track (later turnpiked) and the access track to Tor Royal. The Plume of Feathers, a purpose built inn of the late 18th to early 19th century, was one of the early additions to the hamlet. Princetown lies in the civil parish of Dartmoor Forest, although originally it lay within the parish of Lydford.

The growth of the settlement was due to Tyrwhitt's entrepreneurial activity, its most significant development taking place in 1806 when the foundation stone was laid for a Prison to relieve the hulks at Plymouth. French prisoners were soon joined by Americans following declaration of war in 1812. The tithe map of 1841 ([map 2 page 9](#)) shows the enormous scale of the prison complex in relation to the hamlet about 700 metres to the south east. The prison consisted of cell blocks within a circular enclosure, an octagonal barracks, a chapel and a few houses. The chapel of St Michael and All Angels together with a rectory were established in about 1814. Repatriation of prisoners in 1815 saw the closure of the prison complex and its buildings falling into decay.

In the meantime however, Royal Assent was granted in 1821 for the construction of a tramroad from Plymouth to Foggintor Quarries, in response to an increased demand for building following the end of the wars. The tramway was extended in 1827 to a depot behind the Devil's Elbow (then the Railway Inn). This seems to have done little to revitalise the settlement. A market and fair were also granted at the same time, but again, Princetown was described in 1828 as 'half a dozen miserable hovels and two good inns'. This position may have remained, but for conversion of the prison into a convict prison in 1850. The history of the prison is particularly well recorded and documented.



Figure 1 Duchy Square, Princetown

c1910

The second half of the 19th century saw prosperity return to Princetown with the expansion of the prison farmland, the construction of housing for prison staff and the opening of hotels, shops and inns. The old tramroad was converted into a steam railway in 1879, which opened up the town and its surrounding moorland to travellers and visitors.

Overall, the late 19th to early 20th century period appears to have been a prosperous time for Princetown with steady growth in the number of villa and terraced properties contributing to its expansion.

However, with the closing of the railway in 1956 and the relaxation of residency regulations for prison staff, the second half of the 20th century once again saw Princetown in a state of decline and looking for its *raison d'être*. The Duchy of Cornwall as the major property owner in the town has taken various initiatives to stimulate regeneration. In 1993 the opening of the National Park's High Moorland Visitor Centre in the former Duchy Hotel has brought further tourism to Princetown but limited prosperity.

Pockets of post war Cornish Unit housing development have contributed to the steady growth of the town, and more recently new housing to the north west has brought change and contrast to what at times can be a rather austere historic environment. A new brewery planned for a site adjacent to Duchy Yard continues a particular commercial tradition for the town.



Figure 2 Duchy Hotel, Princetown

c1910



Figure 3 Gateway entrance to Dartmoor Prison, Princetown

c1910