



Maidencombe

Conservation Area

Character Appraisal



MAIDENCOMBE

CONSERVATION AREA

CHARACTER APPRAISAL

Revised

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TORBAY COUNCIL

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EARLY EDITION ORDNANCE SURVEY:

Ordnance Survey First Edition 1:10560 scale 1864

1: 2500 scale maps (not to scale)

- Ordnance Survey County Series First Edition surveyed 1862-87
- Ordnance Survey County Series Second Edition surveyed 1904
- Ordnance Survey County Series Third Edition surveyed 1933

APPRAISAL MAPS

- Map One: Historic Buildings
- Map Two: Age of Buildings
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1 LOCATION AND ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS

- 1.1 The conservation area is located about 4½ km north of Torquay town centre and includes two distinct areas of earlier development. The original settlement and historic hamlet, is mostly grouped around Rock House Lane and Steep Hill. West of the historic centre, near the hilltop, and close by the A 379 (the Torquay-Teignmouth Road) are a scattering of 19th century villas in landscaped grounds. One villa, Applegarth, has been demolished and replaced by the 8 ‘executive homes’ of Orestone Drive; their grounds are contained exactly within the grounds of the former villa and its boundary walls. Access to Maidencombe is relatively obscure, possibly deliberately so; from the main road, two narrow lanes, Brim Hill and Steep Hill diverge, the latter part of a one-way traffic system. Both are steeply winding and link into Rock House Lane which runs from Teignmouth Road, south of Sladnor Park.
- 1.2 As late as 1932 Maidencombe was described in a guidebook as ‘a sequestered *farmy* place’. In spite of the addition of a public car park, a public house – much frequented by summer visitors – and considerable mid-to-late 20th century housing infill, the village still manages to retain something of a feeling of remoteness. This is enhanced by the natural beauty of the exceptional coastline here – the South West Peninsula Coast Footpath crosses the eastern edge of the conservation area. The shore is accessible only on foot from a public car park: a field track, then a woodland path, terminates in a flight of steps beside a small cascade which leads down to a sandy beach dominated by dramatic cliffs with fine views across Lyme Bay.

2 HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT, ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT

- 2.1 Maidencombe probably has its origins in the Saxon settlement of Devon from the 8th century onwards, though it may have prehistoric antecedents as do St Marychurch and Ilsham to the south. The manorial system was well established by the time of the Conquest: Maidencombe was one of the 11 manors which was located in the detached portion of Wonford Hundred extending the length of the Teign estuary – almost all of Torbay is otherwise in Haytor Hundred. Domesday records the very small manor of *Medenecombe*, which in 1086 recorded only 4 men, indicating a settlement unlikely to be greater than 16-20 persons in total. It was held by Baldwin, Sherrif of Exeter (who had married the Conqueror’s niece) with three other manors of the Wonford group, which may all formerly been part of a large Saxon multiple estate.
- 2.2 The parochial system was probably firmly established in the 12th century when Maidencombe became part of Stokenteignhead parish. In the 20th century re-organisation of the civil administration the Stokenteignhead strip extending up to Shaldon was transferred to Torquay in 1935; though in 1967 just prior to the establishment of the Borough of Torbay the area north of Maidencombe was returned to Stokenteignhead, hence the village finds itself in the unitary authority today and not in the district council of Teignbridge.

- 2.3 The manor although small was divided sometime in the 13th century into two half-fees. One subsequent owner Ralph Tregoz was granted a licence by Bishop Grandisson of Exeter in 1330 for an oratory at his property (*Mansum*); this is the earliest evidence for a high-status residence within the manor, but the site cannot conclusively be identified within the present historic settlement. Poor rate books survive for Stokenteignhead from 1619-1668, these name the Maidencombe taxpayers who vary between 7 and 14 in number. However in 1641 the unusually high sum of 40s was paid by Robert Hall who was concurrently Archdeacon of Cornwall, Treasurer of Exeter Cathedral and Rector of Stokenteignhead. The only high-status residence presumed at this time is the Courthouse.
- 2.4 The Reverend Richard Polwhele in his *History of Devonshire* (1793-1806) records that Maidencombe consisted of 5 farmhouses, although not all can be identified. The 1842-3 Tithe survey and apportionment indicates that three of the farms were worked from the Courthouse; the others were Home Farm (now Maidencombe Farm), and the longhouse known as Card's, or Cade's, which was demolished by 1933 and now lies beneath the footprint of Suite Dreams.
- 2.5 The bridge across the Teign was completed in 1827; the new turnpike road linking Teignmouth to Torquay via Watcombe followed shortly afterwards. The area of about 90 acres east of the new road had been the common land of the manor, this had been conveniently enclosed around 1810. The road, now the B3199, skirted Maidencombe on the west and facilitated the building of villas in the enclosed fields, which were sold off piecemeal by the landowners exploiting the growing popularity of Torquay as a fashionable resort. The many orchards which characterise all 19th-century maps of the village begin their decline from this date. Remnants do however survive, especially to the east of the Courthouse, and the local residents' association have is restoring a historic cider apple orchard as a community project.
- 2.6 Elsewhere the fields represent a mixed character of small enclosures and a pattern inherited from medieval times of irregular strips and perimeters; many field boundaries and walls survive from early times. South-east of the village centre medieval strip lynchets can be observed in a long narrow field east of Rock House Lane. In Sladnor Park to the south of the conservation area a castellated folly, unfortunately now ruinous, lies beside Teignmouth Road. On the eastern edge of the conservation area close to the beach and the public car park, the site of a Second World War pillbox has been reported but has not been located.

3 PLAN FORM AND BUILDING TYPES

- 3.1 The shape of the historic settlement is entirely organic; the buildings clustered around the Steep Hill-Rock House Lane junction, where the lanes meet, mostly date from the 18th to early-19th century, albeit over earlier antecedents.

- 3.2 The earliest extant building in Maidencombe is the Court House, which is presumed to contain the remains of an earlier Manor House, parts of which may date back to the 14th century – ?Ralph Tregosz’s *Mansum* – although the formal listing description does not hazard a date earlier than the late 16th century. The ancient Judas Tree (*Cercis siliquastrum*) near the entrance is an early example and is thought to have been brought back from the Lebanon as a sapling in the mid-16th century.
- 3.3 The two remaining detached Victorian villas, built to take advantage of the commanding sea views are recorded as Osborne and Brimhill Villas on the First Edition Ordnance Survey County Series map (published in 1890 but surveyed 1862-1887); both are set within well landscaped grounds. A number of mainly mid-20th century bungalows and houses, mostly off Rock House Lane, have lessened the sense of isolation of the old settlement of cottages and farmhouses, which are of stone or cob under thatch. Nevertheless, the loose knit informal grouping of buildings with generally low walls, banks and hedgerows, gives the feel of a traditional Devon village, which is now largely surrounded by protected farmland.

4 ARCHITECTURAL AND HISTORIC QUALITIES

4.1 LISTED & OTHER KEY BUILDINGS

- 4.1.1 Within the conservation area, there are five separate listings, all grade II and here denoted in bold. The early post-medieval **Court House** stands in relative isolation and has a roughly L-shaped plan, It is built of stone-rubble with plastered cob; the bizarre late 20th century artificial thatch has recently been replaced with water-reed thatching. The parlour has a richly-moulded intersecting-beamed ceiling. The house and outbuildings are now partly converted to holiday flats; a 1950s extension on the south side detracts from the principal elevations. The Courthouse’s former farm outbuildings: ‘Grooms’ Quarters’ and ‘The Linhay’ have been converted, the former for holiday use; the three all form an attractive group. Grooms’ Quarters is of stone and slate, set well back, and probably dates from the mid-late 19th century; The Linhay abutting Rock House Lane, is thatch and cob on a red sandstone base and may be considerably older. Almost immediately opposite is the remains of a stone walled linhay with granite posts, partly obscured by a dilapidated timber lean-to with corrugated iron roof.
- 4.1.2 The wall of a former barn fronting Rock House Lane, is a feature of the lane, enhancing its sense of enclosure between high walls or banks. Early maps and photographs indicate the loss of at least four earlier buildings south of the Court House; one apparently a whitewashed house built of stone and cob with a hipped slate roof, and famous for its giant geranium.
- 4.1.3 To the north **Maidencombe Farmhouse** is located at the northwest corner of the junction of Rock House Lane and Steep Hill. In its present form, of roughcast cob under a thatched roof, it may be dated to the late-18th century; unnamed in the 1842-3 tithe

survey it had acquired the name Home Farm by 1887. The house has a symmetrical three-bay front, typical of the period, with a central four-panel door and three-pane fanlight, and a complete set of 12-pane sash windows. The outbuildings of Maidencombe Farm have, for the most part become dilapidated but applications were made in 2003 to restore/rebuild them.

- 4.1.4 **Little Thatch** is a cottage in the local vernacular style with casement windows; it also is of probable 18th-century date, and built of plastered stone and cob with a hipped thatched roof. **The Thatched Tavern** does not appear to have a long history as a public house, having been formerly an 18th century or earlier cottage of plastered cob and stone. It has been much altered and extended in the 20th century.
- 4.1.5 Of the two mid-19th century villas high above the historic settlement, only **Brimhill** is listed. This dates from the 1830s and is plastered under a hipped slate roof. The listing describes it as ‘very complete externally ... [it] appears to be a rare example of an undivided Torquay villa’. There is some excellent pattern-book detail which includes a projecting porch with a moulded string course below a deep projecting cornice with ball finials; a symmetrical three-window garden front with full-length 12-pane sash windows with moulded architraves on the ground floor, and a central first-floor French window giving onto the balcony over the ground floor verandah.
- 4.1.6 The former Osborne Villa, now Bowden Close, is of mid-19th century origin and has been converted to flats. Viewed from the east, it largely retains its 19th-century proportions of plain stucco under a hipped slate roof which rises impressively above Brim Hill Lane. Its height is further emphasised by its tall rendered stacks and cream terra-cotta chimney pots. Several plain double-hung sash windows also survive.
- 4.1.7 Some 400m to the south of the existing conservation area, adjoining Rock House Lane (and 300m east of Watcombe conservation area) is the 1850s crenellated villa **Rock House** with Edwardian alterations; it is cement-rendered with a slate roof (in poor condition in early 2005) behind the castellated parapet and contains distinctive features of each period both internally and externally. This was the home of Rudyard Kipling in 1896-7. The entrance **gate piers** of c.1850, have features which complement the villa. Within the grounds, to the east of the house is a **Gazebo** of similar date, built of local red sandstone but unfortunately patched with cement. The general state of repair of the property, a key link between the two conservation areas, is one of concern.

4.2 BUILDING FORM, ORNAMENT & USE OF MATERIALS

- 4.2.1 The two separate concentrations of development are in complete contrast: on the hill the scatter of large stuccoed villas, probably stone-built and roofed in slate; Brimhill Villa the best of the group retaining a wealth of period features. The original hamlet towards the foot of the hill is a loose group of two former farms and a few cottages with cob on stone footings and thatched, or in the case of the outbuildings built predominantly of

stone with slate roofs. There are several lengths of wall constructed of local reddish stone-rubble, mostly of the local sandstone, and shale.

4.3 CONDITION OF BUILDINGS

- 4.3.1 While all occupied buildings are in good condition, several of the farm outbuildings are partly or completely dilapidated, and at Maidencombe Farm there has been some partial demolition. The large square outbuilding on the east side of Rock House Lane with its corrugated roof is however both unduly prominent and unsightly. Nevertheless there is a need to ensure that outbuildings that are worthy of conservation are retained in any redevelopment plans.

5. CHARACTER AND RELATIONSHIP OF SPACES

- 5.1 Maidencombe derives its distinctive local character from the historic setting of the original hamlet nestling in a sheltered hollow, amidst dramatic coastal scenery, and a characteristic Devon landscape of small fields mainly enclosed by hedgerows. Although later phases of development in the 20th century, especially those bordering Brim Hill Lane and off Steep Hill Lane are somewhat intrusive, much of the original settlement still conveys a sense of isolation where the local vernacular style of building and the variety of materials is still sufficiently in evidence to maintain the historic character. It is, however, a fine balance that could easily be destroyed.
- 5.2 The other distinctive element, the few 19th-century villas, is a reminder of the proximity of Torquay, Maidencombe representing the outer limit of its style of villa-building that was typically more extravagant than that found in neighbouring resorts. This is entirely due to the fashionable associations attached to much of the Torquay area during the mid-late 19th century when there was, for a few decades, great prosperity among the wealthier middle-class. The villas were concentrated along the hill ridge or built into the slope just below it, often behind walls or banks; most were also furnished with well-sited driveways which passed through gate piers and curved through landscaped grounds to an imposing frontage. This type of development extends well to the south and west of the conservation area to link up with similar developments at Watcombe Park, the closest conservation area 550m to the south.

6 GREEN LANDSCAPE AND TREES

- 6.1 The close-knit pattern of stone walls, earth banks, and hedgerows with standard trees that typify the historic landscape of many parts of the Devon are much in evidence here. The steeply sloping wooded hillsides create an imposing skyline which encloses the village, especially to the south and west. This includes the large expanse of Sladnor Park (immediately to the west but outside the conservation area) which was laid out in the mid-19th century. Within the conservation area hedgerow and woodland trees are in the

main indigenous deciduous species. There are also several good specimen trees, both deciduous and evergreen, within the grounds of the 19th-century villas.

- 6.2 The protection of the historic landscape and its archaeology, has been much aided by the fact that most of the coastal farmland and woodland around Maidencombe was purchased by the then Torquay Corporation in 1935. Whilst still within the freehold of Torbay Council today, its management was handed over to the Torbay Coast and Countryside Trust (a registered charity founded in 2000), which has entered into a conservation partnership and rural development initiatives with DEFRA. This will ensure sympathetic management, and safeguard the historic pattern of small fields, thick hedgerows, and permanent pasture, extending the conservation of the area beyond the built environment into the historic natural environment.

7 THE SETTING AND FEATURES OF SPECIAL IMPORTANCE

- 7.1 The combe in which the conservation area lies is perhaps the quietest and least discovered of the several along this stretch of coastline. It has a most distinctive character, being largely encircled by higher and steeper ground, much of it wooded, whilst the historic heart nestles in a sheltered location on almost level ground in a hollow some 40 metres above sea level, with the beach little more than 300 metres away. The locality draws in naturalists as it represents one of the best protected breeding sites and strongholds of the Cirl Bunting; only 300 breeding pairs survive here and elsewhere along the South Devon coast.
- 7.2 The buildings within the conservation area are, for the most part, incidental to the landscape. The only real focus of development is close to the centre of the hamlet north of the Thatched Tavern. Even here, the emphasis is upon scattered buildings within a relatively open landscape with mainly outward views.
- 7.3 The character of much of the conservation area hinges upon its ability to retain the strong sense of geographical isolation and historic continuity in a setting of great natural beauty. Maidencombe is surrounded by a highly prized landscape of considerable importance to natural historians. Vehicular access is relatively difficult, along steep and narrow lanes with no through routes; the shore is accessible only by a field track with the South West Coast Path crossing the eastern tip of the conservation area. There is an active local community who are involved in a number of projects: the provision of attractive street lighting similar to the Cockington type; the orchard restoration project; and a proposed village statement.

8 EXTENT OF LOSS, DAMAGE AND INTRUSION

- 8.1 As with many former agricultural communities there has been some loss of authentic character, due to the profound changes in rural life and farming practices during the

latter half of the 20th century, coupled with the pressure for housing in the countryside. At Maidencombe this has led to the loss of extensive cider orchards for which the immediate surroundings were formerly renowned; additionally there has been some close encroachment of housing, mostly dating from the 1920s onwards, to the north and west of the hamlet. There are also examples of intrusive infill within the conservation area itself, although relatively confined and well screened.

- 8.2 It is also evident that several farm outbuildings have become dilapidated since they are no longer functional, while those that have been converted to alternative use have inevitably lost some detail. However Grooms Quarters, and The Linhay, both within the curtilage of the Courthouse have been converted into holiday and residential use, show that such changes can be successfully handled.

9 SUMMARY

- 9.1 Maidencombe is a very small conservation area in terms of the number of historic buildings represented. Its main quality derives from these combined with the dramatic setting, steep topography, the complex network of lanes and tracks with banks, walls, field boundaries, tree-covered hollows and woodland, be it the 19th-century formal layout, or the earlier landscaping. The earlier settlement still manages to represent the feel of a traditional Devon rural village in spite of the relatively close incursion of modern bungalows and houses. The semi-remote and inaccessible surroundings tend only to attract the more adventurous visitor, and the locality remains predominantly agricultural and residential within an important and carefully managed coastal landscape.

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Torbay Local Plan 1995-2011 Adopted Version Torbay Council April 2004

PHOTOGRAPHS

1. The eastern façade of the Courthouse as it faces the sea; the main body is 17th century in date, the 1950s extension lies to the south on the left side of the picture. The late-20th century replacement windows in PVCu are clearly inappropriate wherever they have been inserted in the building.
2. The Courthouse outbuildings: Grooms Quarters and The Linhay lie north of the main block, both have been converted to residential use. The Courthouse complex well displays the use of red sandstone with painted render over cob or stone - originally this would have been limewash.
3. The Thatched Tavern sits at a prominent position at the only road junction within the historic hamlet. The main building is probably of 18th-century date, but the single storey thatched extension to the left and rear bungalow are mid-20th century.
4. Little Thatch, east of the Thatched Tavern, is clearly a higher status structure; it is typical of the 18th-century form of thatched building within the historic village.



1.



2.



3.



4.

- 5 The former Victorian Osborne Villa, now with extensions on three sides and re-named Bowden Close, sits at the highest point of the conservation area at the apex of Teignmouth Road and Brimhill. It overlooks the historic settlement with wide sea views.
- 6, 7 Brimhill an early-Victorian villa displays a thoroughly Classical pedigree (6); situated below Osborne Villa it enjoys equally fine sea views (7).
- 8, 9 The lane at Brimhill (8), and the seaview from here over the historic hamlet (9).



5.



6.



7.



8.



9.

- 10 The driveway into Brimhill; the sandstone rubble walls, capped gate-piers, and the planting emphasise the landscaping and the sense of privacy that was an essential part of the Victorian villa development.

- 11, 12 The South West Coast Footpath (National Trail) contours the eastern side of the conservation area. Footpath improvements with stiles in natural materials and additional treeplanting are a feature of its maintenance (11). The streetlamps are similar to those in use in Cockington with distinctive lanterns on fluted oak columns (12).

- 13 The Judas Tree is popularly believed to be as old as the Courthouse. The plaques celebrate the importance of the tree and the presence of Maidencombe in Domesday in 1086.



10.



12.



11.



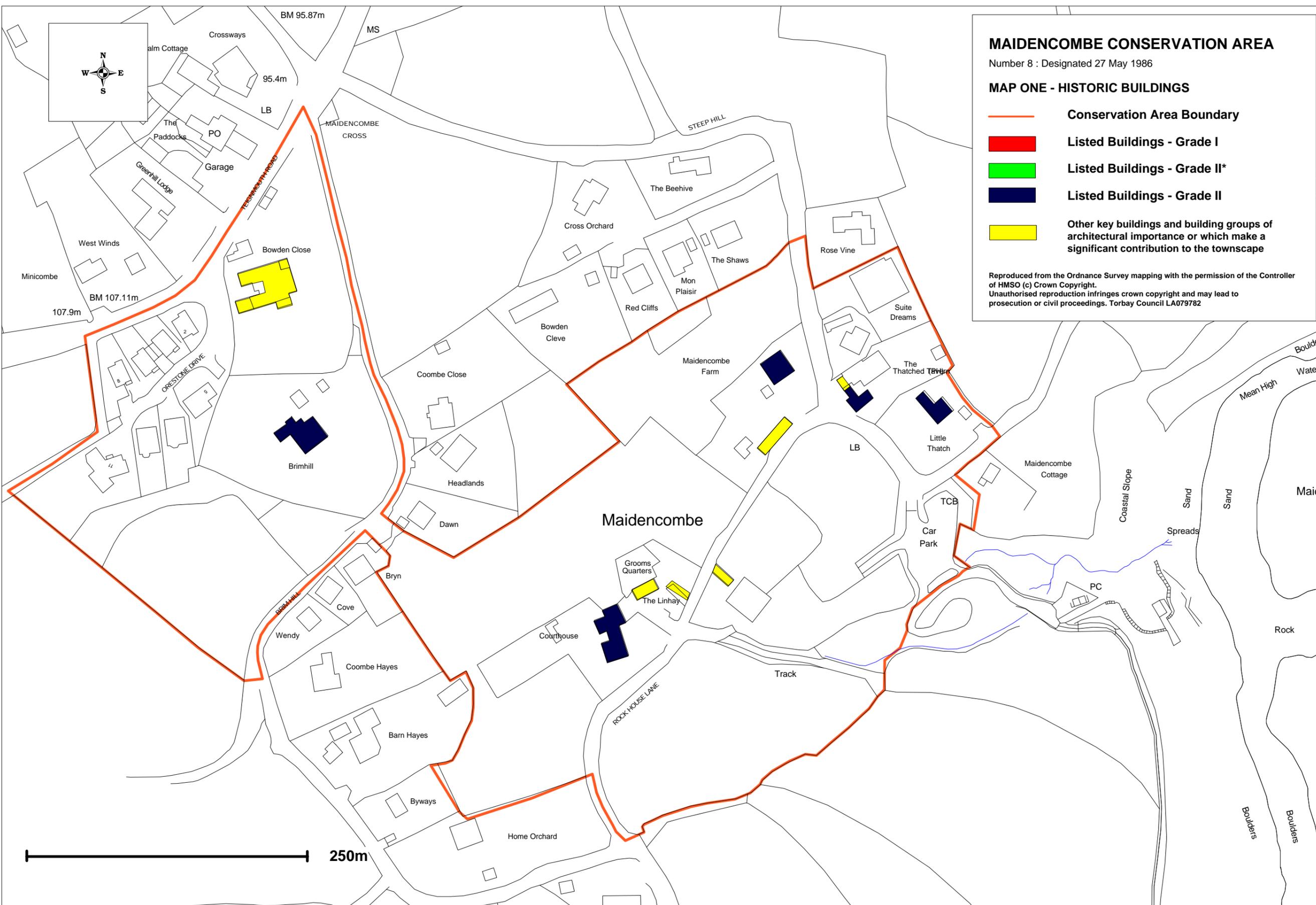
13.

MAIDENCOMBE CONSERVATION AREA
 Number 8 : Designated 27 May 1986

MAP ONE - HISTORIC BUILDINGS

-  Conservation Area Boundary
-  Listed Buildings - Grade I
-  Listed Buildings - Grade II*
-  Listed Buildings - Grade II
-  Other key buildings and building groups of architectural importance or which make a significant contribution to the townscape

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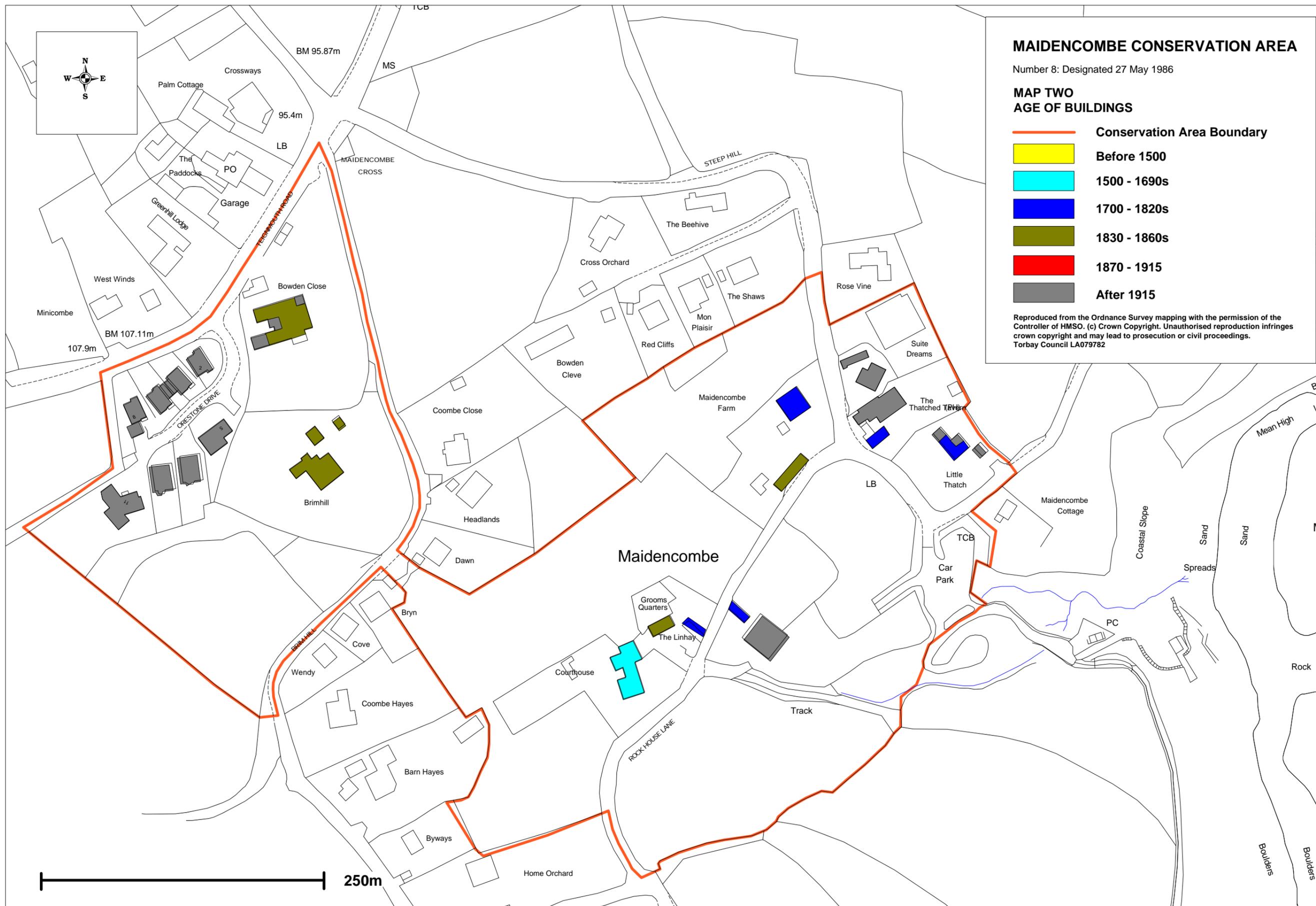
MAIDENCOMBE CONSERVATION AREA

Number 8: Designated 27 May 1986

MAP TWO AGE OF BUILDINGS

-  Conservation Area Boundary
-  Before 1500
-  1500 - 1690s
-  1700 - 1820s
-  1830 - 1860s
-  1870 - 1915
-  After 1915

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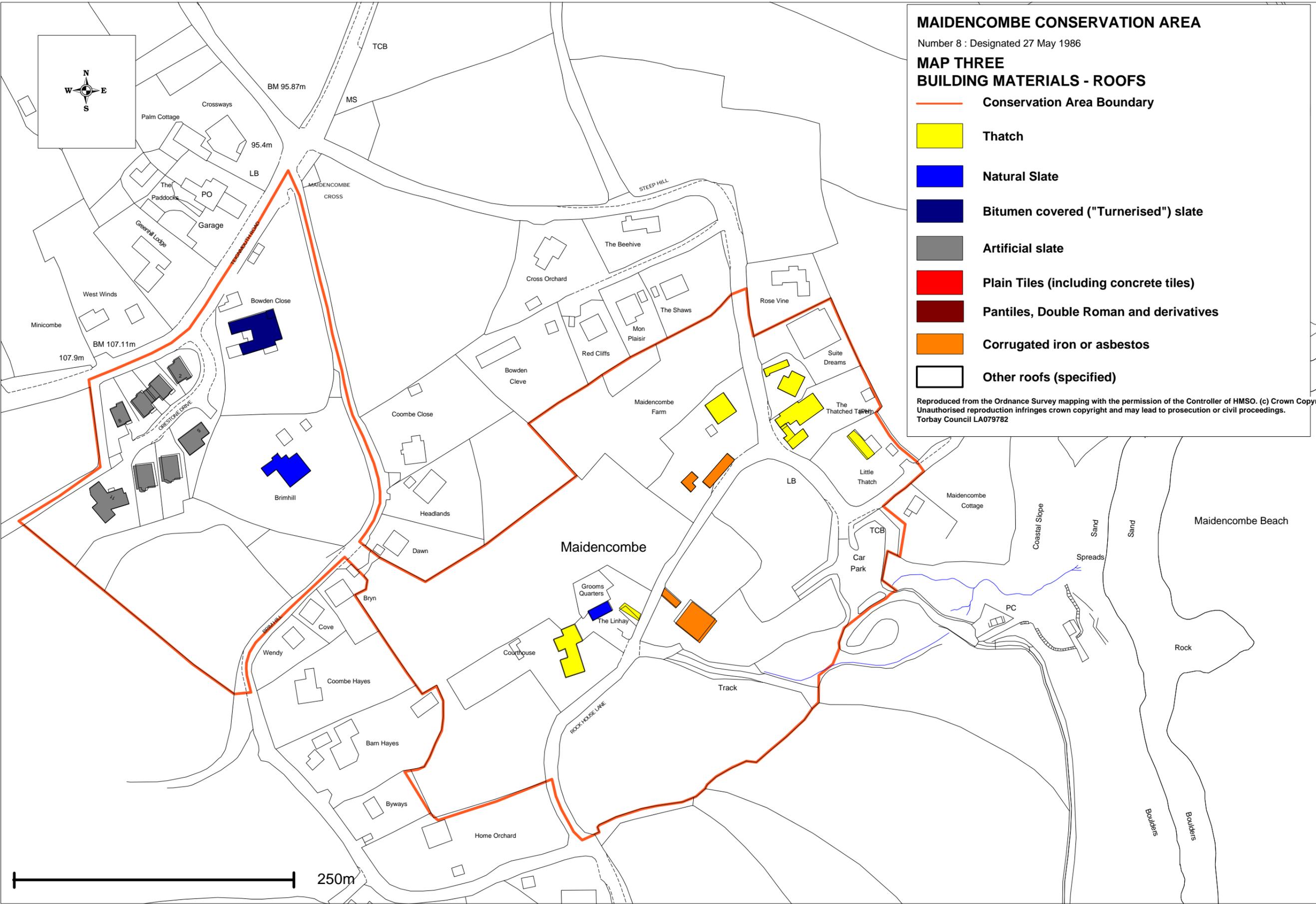
MAIDENCOMBE CONSERVATION AREA

Number 8 : Designated 27 May 1986

**MAP THREE
BUILDING MATERIALS - ROOFS**

-  Conservation Area Boundary
-  Thatch
-  Natural Slate
-  Bitumen covered ("Turnerised") slate
-  Artificial slate
-  Plain Tiles (including concrete tiles)
-  Pantiles, Double Roman and derivatives
-  Corrugated iron or asbestos
-  Other roofs (specified)

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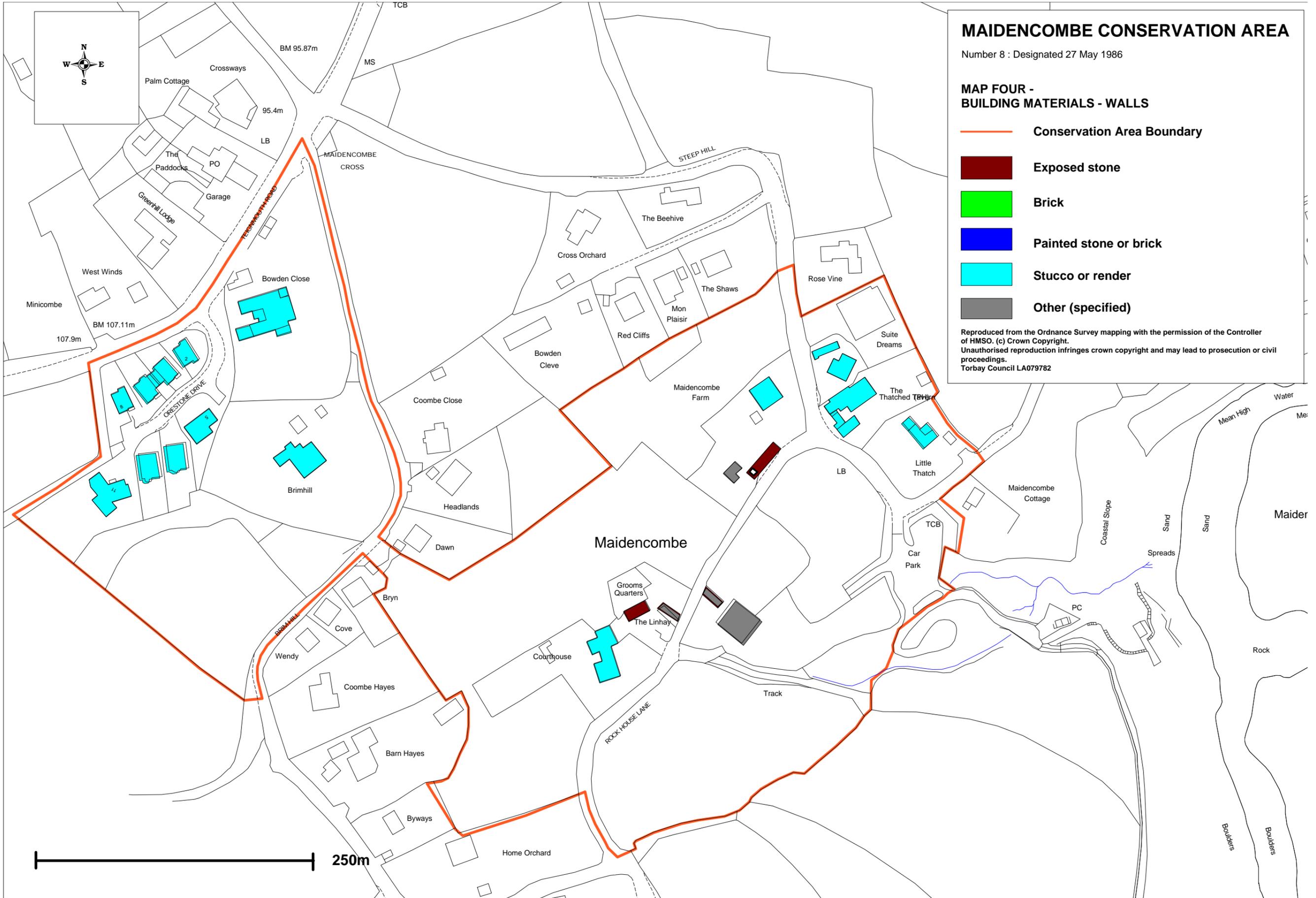
MAIDENCOMBE CONSERVATION AREA

Number 8 : Designated 27 May 1986

MAP FOUR - BUILDING MATERIALS - WALLS

-  Conservation Area Boundary
-  Exposed stone
-  Brick
-  Painted stone or brick
-  Stucco or render
-  Other (specified)

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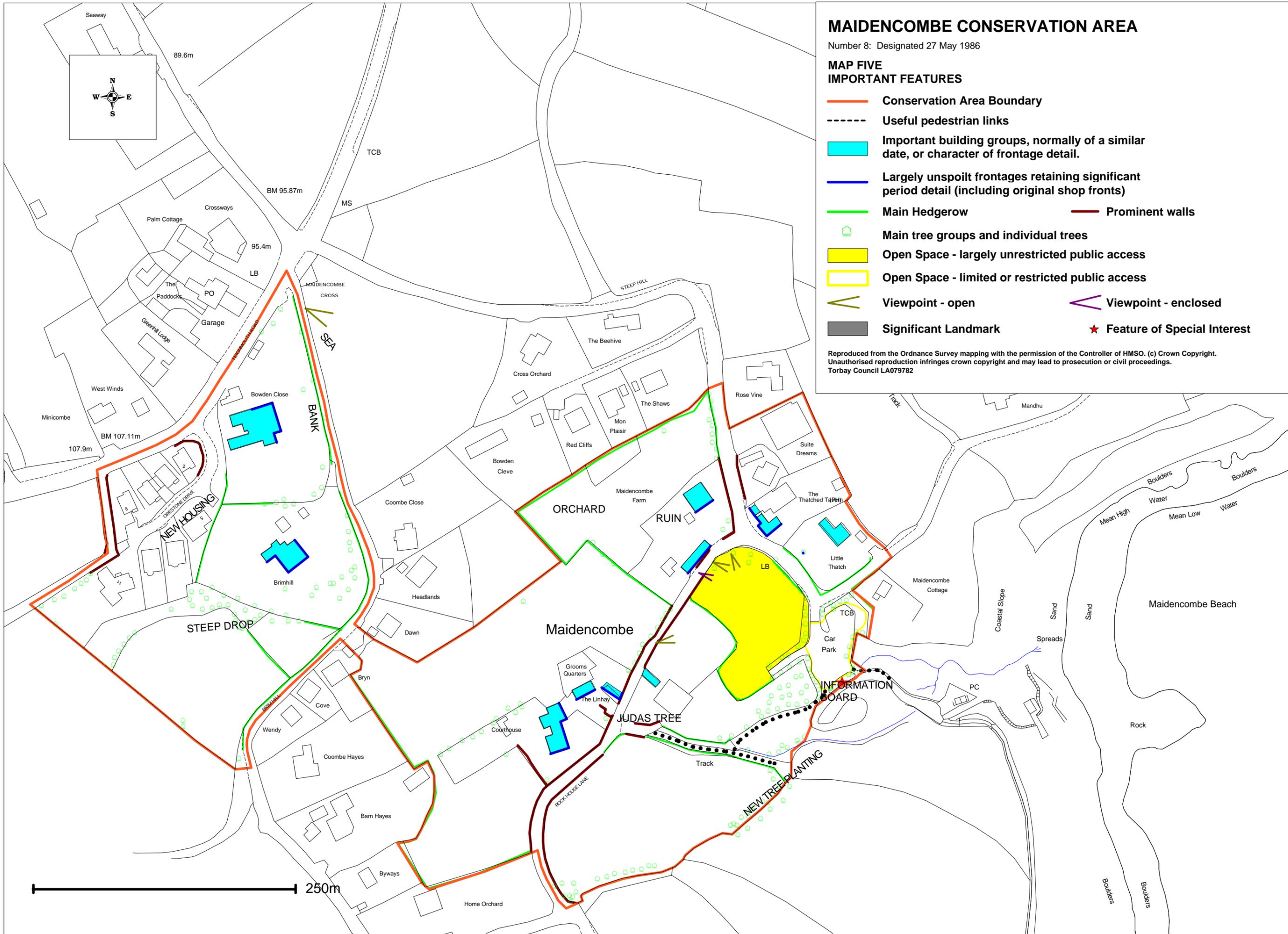
MAIDENCOMBE CONSERVATION AREA

Number 8: Designated 27 May 1986

MAP FIVE IMPORTANT FEATURES

-  Conservation Area Boundary
-  Useful pedestrian links
-  Important building groups, normally of a similar date, or character of frontage detail.
-  Largely unspoilt frontages retaining significant period detail (including original shop fronts)
-  Main Hedgerow
-  Prominent walls
-  Main tree groups and individual trees
-  Open Space - largely unrestricted public access
-  Open Space - limited or restricted public access
-  Viewpoint - open
-  Viewpoint - enclosed
-  Significant Landmark
-  Feature of Special Interest

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250m