EAST RIDING
OF YORKSHIRE COUNCIL

CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL

SUNK ISLAND

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INTRODUCTION

The Conservation Area at Sunk Island was designated in January 1993 by Holderness Borough Council.

The Town and Country Planning 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"**. For the designation of conservation areas to be effective, it is important that rational and consistent judgements are made in determining their special qualities and local distinctiveness, as well as their value to the local community. Such judgements should be based on a thorough understanding of the area in its wider context, reached through a detailed of its character.

The 2006 re-survey has been undertaken in accordance with Guidance on Conservation Area Appraisals, issued by English Heritage in August 2005, in order to meet the aim of National Government that Conservation Areas should be re-viewed every five years.

DEFINITION OF SUNK ISLAND'S SPECIAL INTEREST

Sunk Island is an unusual form of man-made landscape unique in the East Riding. It is a structured agricultural landscape created by the reclamation of land from the 17th Century onwards and developed by the Crown as a series of large farms.

It is notable for its groups of farm buildings and isolated cottages spread throughout the landscape.

Its character is defined by the isolation of each building group and their carefully considered details in both design and materials. Tree cover is sparse but is very important in punctuating the landscape where it exists.

THE CHARACTER AND APPEARANCE OF THE CONSERVATION AREA AT SUNK ISLAND

Sunk Island is neither sunken nor an island but is a flat, open area. It is a large expanse of flat agricultural landscape created by both natural accretion and human activity in the River Humber. It is now a Dutch style landscape of rich agricultural land. It is dotted with houses and farms and is centred around a crossroads with a red brick church.

The land that which is known as Sunk Island is crown owned, having risen from the riverbed. Sunk Island is a product of embanking and reclamation carried out between the 17th century and 19th century which expanded the area linked the original island to the bank of the Humber.

a) TOPOGRAPHY AND ITS RELEVANCE

The Sunk Island Conservation Area lies in the 'Sunk Island' Landscape Character Area, as identified in the East Riding of Yorkshire Landscape Character

Assessment (ERYC, 2005). The Landscape Character Assessment describes this area as an example of direct land reclamation, a process which linked the original island with the mainland by constructing levees to prevent flooding, then enclosing and artificially draining the land in between. The gradual land reclamation since the late 17th century has created a landscape of historic importance and character which is regarded to be unique within the East Riding of Yorkshire. The area is a flat, open landscape with scattered brick built farmsteads. Tree cover is sparse, although a notable landscape feature is the avenue of trees on the Sunk Island to Ottringham Road. Most of the land apart from a few individual properties remains the property of the Crown. The brick church was closed in the 1980s and is now used as a heritage centre.

One of the Early 20th century colony cottages

Agricultural land adjacent to the Humber Estuary would have at one time consisted of wet pasture, although much of this has now been drained. This area is at direct risk from flooding and is protected by the clay embankment adjacent to the Humber Estuary.

Several stretches of canal, brackish pools, marshes and damp grassland are present in this Character Area and whilst these are generally small, they remain important for species such as brackish water-crowfoot, fennel pondweed, beaked tasselweed, parsley water-dropwort, water mint, southern marsh orchid, divided sedge and long-bracted sedge.

There are few parishes whose topography has been more relevant to their development than Sunk Island's. Initially formed by natural accretion from the river Humber, reclamation began in the late 17th Century, and similar works were still in progress in the late 1960's.

Access to the island originally was first by boat, thereafter from Stone Creek, Salthaugh Grange (until the 1830's). Ottringham and Patrington Haven (from c. 1840). With the exception of its embankments, the island is uninterruptedly flat.

b) DISPOSITION AND DEVELOPMENT

Because of the continuing reclamation, the earlier properties are at the west end of the island - there being six by 1797, which increased to 18 early in the 19th Century. The major building programme was undertaken in the 1850's and 60's by the Crown - more than 30 houses and cottages, many of them bearing the dates between 1855 and 1857.

The nature of the farming operations on Sunk Island made for a disparate location of properties, each based around the appropriate farmstead. A chapel near the centre of the enlarged island became the parish church in 1830 and was demolished when the new church was built by the Crown on its original but enlarged site in 1876 - 7. Nearby were the school and non-conformist chapel, the latter being demolished in the 1960's. In 1917, 40 scattered cottages were built for ex-servicemen.

The population information provided by Poulson in his History of Holderness published in 1841, makes interesting reading. Within the "Township" there were 26 inhabited and no uninhabited properties, housing 26 families, of which 24 were chiefly involved in agriculture with a further 2 in trades, manufactures and handicrafts, making a population of

242 people in all. (By comparison current figures for the Parish indicate a population 280 and 117 houses.)

c) RELEVANCE AND IMPORTANCE OF OPEN SPACES

In seeking to define and describe the character and appearance of Sunk Island, the importance of its open spaces can hardly be overstated, since it is the far-flung disposition of its properties which provide the special quality of the area. Because of its flatness and relative lack of tree cover, there are a few obstructions to the eye, which can usually pick out the location of the individual farmsteads at a considerable distance.

d) THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

Sunk Island is an important haven for bird-life which has resulted in an observation hide being created at Fisherman's Channel. Particularly significant amongst the fauna are a species of deer, which have adapted to use the dry ditches as a source of shelter within the otherwise exposed landscape.

The heaviest incidence of afforestation is, perhaps, the plantation adjacent to the Battery near South Farm. Elsewhere sycamores and poplars predominate, with the most mature groupings usually having been planted for shelter around the farmsteads. Less prolific, but important to the variety of trees, are horse chestnuts and ash. There is generally a lack of coniferous trees, the absence of which is a feature worthy of note.

There is also a marked absence of hedgerows over most of the Island and their creation, where farming practises permit, would enhance protection to flora and fauna alike.

There are two locally designated Sites of Nature Conservation Importance within the Sunk Island Conservation Area. The first and most prominent is the above mentioned Fisherman's Channel. Fisherman's Channel is designated for its marsh wetland and scrub habitat, with a particular interest in its associated bird and plant communities. The second SNCI lies along the western boundary of the Conservation Area. Ottringham Drain is designated for its wetland habitat and bird life.

White House Farm Cottages

The Conservation Area has National and International Nature Conservation designations along the southern boundary with the Humber Estuary. The designations, which overlap into intertidal zone of the Conservation Area are as follows; Site of Special Scientific Interest, Important Bird Area, RAMSAR site and Special Protection Area.

e) TREE PRESERVATION ORDERS

There are no Tree Preservation Orders in Sunk Island Conservation Area. Notwithstanding this, trees in the Conservation Area are protected by the designation and anyone wishing to prune or remove a tree must give the Council six weeks' notice of their intention. The Council then have the opportunity to make a Tree Preservation Order to give the tree or trees longer term protection.

f) ARCHAEOLOGY

There are a number of sites within the Conservation Area which are of archaeological interest. The majority of these are post-medieval in date, relating to

settlement of the area from the late 17th century onwards, although there are indications that the low flats now known as Sunk Island were above the estuary in the medieval period and possibly earlier.

There are documentary references to two villages. Tharlesthorpe and East Somerte, which are now lost, but thought to have been located in the Sunk Island area. The village of 'Toruelestorp' was mentioned in Domesday Book in 1086, though in the late 13th and mid 14th centuries the settlement suffered inundations from the Humber and was abandoned around 1400.

The first chapel on the island stood near to the site of The Old Hall in the 18th century. This was replaced around 1800 by another, which later became Holy Trinity Church. To the south of The Old Hall is a moat, a feature more commonly associated with the medieval period, though this example is thought to be a decorative, post-medieval feature.

Holy Trinity Church

North of Willow Tree Farm is the site of a former rabbit warren, first recorded in 1711 and probably out of use by the mid 19th century.

Two military sites of the 20th century are also of note, the site of Sunk Island Battery operational during the first and second World Wars and the Stone Creek Heavy Anti-Aircraft Battery constructed during the second World War.

Further details of these sites are held in the Sites and Monuments Record which is held by The Humber Archaeology Partnership.

g) HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE AND ASSOCIATIONS

Leaving aside for the time being the architectural dimension, the historic significance is in the reclamation of a total of nearly 3000 hectares (over 7,300 acres) of land from the estuary, of which 84% is within the proposed Conservation Area and predates 1850.

The history of the development of Sunk Island is well-documented, and the estate appears to have come to the attention of Prince Albert, the Prince Consort, who is reputed to have introduced the important Victorian architect S. S. Teulon to provide designs for the farmsteads. It is perhaps significant that the plaques bearing the date and royal insignia are denoted VR and AP rather than the more usual VR.

In 1914 Sunk Island saw the beginnings of construction of a battery, later amended, for the purposes of strengthening the Humber defences. The site at South Farm was selected as others further east were too far from the navigation channel and would not control the shipping lanes effectively.

In the inter-war years the guns were removed and the battery abandoned. Guns were reinstalled 1941 - 43 but then finally withdrawn and the site abandoned.

h) BUILDING, STYLE, AGE AND MATERIALS

Predominantly these are of dark red brick below slate roofs, using patterns created by the interplay of different coloured brick, often having asymmetrical design (in contrast to the balanced facades of the Georgian era), and diminutive hipped roofs crowning conventional gables. Sunk Island is also significant for its use (on

farm buildings) of metal window frames, some, as at Stonecreek Weighbridge, with Gothic tracery. At West Farm there are also important examples of terra-cotta decorative tile panels bearing agricultural insignia (though not be Teulon), and plaques bearing the Royal Insignia (referred to in (g) above).

The Teulon Farm Houses seem to be divided into 2 distinct styles the more classical - West Farm, Shrubbery Farm and Ivy House, the rest Gothic.

There are also important ecological features, including underground brick lined water tanks to store roof water at most of the Victorian properties, since there were no other natural water sources and no mains supplies.

Almost every building reflects an attention to detail seldom seen either before or since.

i) BUILDINGS OF SPECIAL INTEREST

Sunk Island has 20 Listed Buildings, all grade II:

Bleak House Farm Cottages, Brick Road
Ivy House Farmhouse, Brick Road
Winestead Farmhouse, Brick Road
Channel Farmhouse, Channel Road
Church of The Holy Trinity, East Bank Road
The Old Vicarage, East Bank Road
Middle Farmhouse, East Bank Road
East Bank Farmhouse, East Bank Road
K6 Telephone Kiosk, East Bank Road
White House Farmhouse, Old Hall Road
Corner House, South End Road
South Farmhouse, South Farm Road
Weighbridge House, Stone Creek Church Farmhouse, Sunk Island Road
Barn/cart-shed/granary range, 50m north of Church Farmhouse, Sunk Island Road
Cow-shed range 50m north-east of Church Farmhouse, Sunk Island Road
Stable/granary range 30m north-west of Church Farmhouse, Sunk Island Road
Old Schoolhouse, Sunk Island Road
The Old School, Sunk Island Road
South Farm Cottages, Village Road

The Listed K6 Telephone Box

Unlisted Buildings of Particular Significance:-

The two farmhouses which represent the 1800 reclamation of land have not been listed - Wood Farm and Stone Creek Farm.

There is an important 18th Century brick built barn at South Farm, though this has been the subject of alterations to the fenestration.

Also of significance to the history of the Island as a group are the 1917 Crown

Colony buildings, a development which included the leasing of five farms to the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries for the resettlement of soldiers and, in connection with this, 46 new cottages were to be built.

Offering a complete contrast, but of importance to Sunk Island's military associations is the 1915 combined Signal Tower and Fire Command Post

Very little development of any kind has been carried out in Sunk Island since the last appraisal in 1993. A new detached double garage, of neutral quality, has been built adjacent to the dwelling on the corner of East Bank road and Channel Road and some of the cottages have been altered and extended.

j) ASPECTS CONSIDERED INAPPROPRIATE IN THE CONSERVATION AREA

One of the undoubted benefits of Sunk Island's history is the way in which predominantly it has remained under the control of one owner, the Crown Estate. This has ensured that such developments as have taken place have been uniformly implemented, and a preference for the use of traditional materials has not been compromised.

Recent changes of ownership through sales of cottages and houses, surplus to the agricultural requirements, have, however, resulted in the introduction of uPVC windows and alterations to the sizes of window apertures, with effects severely detrimental to the properties' original character.

Of less visual impact, but nevertheless important, is the loss of stone ridges to many of the farmsteads, these having been replaced with half round ridge-tiles which give the buildings a far more bulky outline.

There are also examples of the use of vivid coloured paintwork which detract from the architectural detailing of the buildings and create a discordant note.

POLICY STATEMENT FOR THE SUNK ISLAND CONSERVATION AREA

1. LANDSCAPE AND STREETSCAPE

The unique quality of the landscape of Sunk Island makes an important contribution to its character and appearance. The very flatness of the terrain provides a fitting contrast for the fluffy cumulus clouds which scud across its skies for much of the year, its vastness denying any significant vertical feature with the possible exceptions of the former parish church and the Signal Tower. Notwithstanding the above, domestic chimney stacks are an important feature at close-range. In general lacking in tree cover, this dearth contributes towards the feeling of emptiness.

The eye is led in specific directions either by the roads, often straight visually uninterrupted stretches, or by the network of drains and ditches which reflect the various stages of the Island's development.

Sunk Island Parish is essentially a number of individual dwellings and clusters of buildings spread over approx. 3059.61ha of arable farmland. Each dwelling is accessed by a network of minor roads and tracks with little in the way of streetscape. The only public right of way within the entire parish is a 1km bridle way, which runs north-east/south-west from Channel Road, near Channel Farm to East Bank Road, near Wood Farm

The public bridle way from East Bank

2. BUILDINGS WHICH CREATE A FOCAL POINT

The hub of Sunk Island incorporating the Church of The Holy Trinity (closed in 1983, now a heritage centre), the Old Vicarage, School House, Parish Hall, War Memorial and K6 Telephone Box are located in the middle-centre of the Parish. This collection of buildings and structures form the primary focal point within the Conservation Area. In addition there is the crossroads for, Sunk Island Road, East Bank Road, Old Hall Road and Stone Creek Road.

A secondary focal point might be seen to be Channel Farm, which has the parish notice board, the Fisherman's Channel wildlife hide and the public bridle way all nearby.

3. THE SCALE OF FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS

It would seem unlikely that the future development of the Conservation Area would be anything other than agricultural, (unless the meteorological benefits of this uninterrupted landscape requires to be utilised), and it is hard to believe that such would not complement the existing infrastructure. Developers should be urged, however, to ensure that new development is located around the existing farmsteads in order, as far as possible, to leave undisturbed the wide open spaces which epitomise this Conservation Area. The area has an established intensive livestock base in existing pig units and there is no presumption against agricultural developments. These are likely to be in modern materials of steel framed buildings and cement fibre sheeting. New buildings should be sympathetically sited in relation to domestic and traditional farm buildings to preserve the scale of and not to dominate the older buildings.

4. RECOMMENDED MATERIALS

Domestic developments will be encouraged to respect the style of existing architecture, predominantly brown brick with either slate or clay pan-tile roofs. The use of patterned brick-work and architectural devices which reflect the features of the mid Victorian period buildings would be considered particularly appropriate.

Wooden window frames (but not to replace original metal ones) with sliding sashes (vertical and horizontal) and painted (not varnished) close-boarded wooden doors are usually appropriate. Rainwater goods should be of cast-iron.

With regard to contemporary agricultural buildings, white cement fibre sheeting may be suitable for low units, e.g. piggeries, but coloured side and/or roof sheeting will normally be required for other buildings.

5. RECOMMENDED FEATURES

The very nature of the way in which Sunk Island was developed in the 19th and early 20th centuries, has ensured that the style of houses reflected the social status of their occupants.

The small Victorian Cottages have distinctive vertical-boarded doors, often beneath segmented heads, the Colony Cottages have high glazed panels beneath canopies and the farmsteads often have recessed half-glazed doors. The innovative use of patterns in brickwork and diminutive hipped roofs crowning conventional gables should be supportable, in principle.

Sunk Island architecture is of an individual style of which details have already been given under paragraph (h), and applications for development should reflect this.

MANAGEMENT PROPOSALS AND STRATEGY

Where schemes for environmental enhancement are eligible for grant assistance these should respect the character of the Conservation Area

Where traditional farm buildings are redundant in agricultural terms their retention will be encouraged if the buildings are deemed to be of historical, architectural or locational importance to the landscape.

The Council will pay particular attention to encourage the drafting of appropriate proposals to preserve and enhance the Conservation Area because of its unique character in the context of Holderness. This will include consideration of additional protection to stem the erosion of traditional features and in particular to encourage the replacement of unsympathetic window styles and doors.

AN HISTORICAL FOOTNOTE

Following the publicity given to the former Holderness Borough Council's decision to designate the majority of Sunk Island as a Conservation Area in 1993, a resident of Hedon contacted the Council and produced a brass plaque, some 16cm x 8cm, which he had found several years ago attached to a broken brick on Sunk Island, when he had been wild-fowling.

Engraved on the plaque is the following inscription:-

"In Remembrance of this Brick Being the first laid for a House on Sunk Island by Mr. Jas Hopkinson in June 1800 when in June 1857 the House was taken down he took up again this same Brick after being laid 57 years."

Additionally, one of Sunk Island's few claims to fame is that it was immortalised by Winifred Holtby in her novel South Riding, where it took on the name of Cold Harbour Colony. She evokes in her book the strange sight of large ships and ferries, coming up the Humber, appearing to be travelling along in the next field because of the high banking. This is still seen today and appears no less strange now.

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

This Appraisal has been the subject of public consultation with the Sunk Island Parish Council and members of the public. The comments received through this consultation process have been taken into account in this the final published version of this document.

PLANNING POLICY FRAMEWORK

The principal legislation covering Conservation Areas is the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 which provides the framework for designation, review and appraisal of Conservation Areas. There are also provisions within the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. Government policy and guidance is set out in Planning Policy Guidance Note 15 (PPG15) "Planning and the Historic Environment".

The planning policy affecting Conservation Areas within the East Riding is set at the Regional, Sub-regional and Local level. The Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) for Yorkshire and the Humber (adopted December 2004) deals with the historic environment in Policy N2. This is developed at a sub-regional level by the Joint Structure Plan (JSP) for Kingston Upon Hull and the East Riding of Yorkshire (adopted June 2005) in Policy ENV6. At a local level policies relevant to Sunk Island Conservation Area are contained currently in the Holderness District Wide Local Plan (HDWLP) (adopted April 1999), Policies Env24 through to Env26. Other policies in this Plan can also affect the Conservation Area, including those dealing with new residential and commercial development, Listed Buildings and Archaeology.

The RSS will be reviewed soon and the JSP will be incorporated into the Local Development Framework, which this will supersede the current Local Plans in due course.

LOCAL GENERIC GUIDANCE

Holderness Borough Wide Local Plan policy Env 24 - Env 26.

Leaflet by East Riding of Yorkshire Council "What are Conservation Areas?"

www.eastriding.gov.uk/planning/index.html

USEFUL INFORMATION AND CONTACT DETAILS

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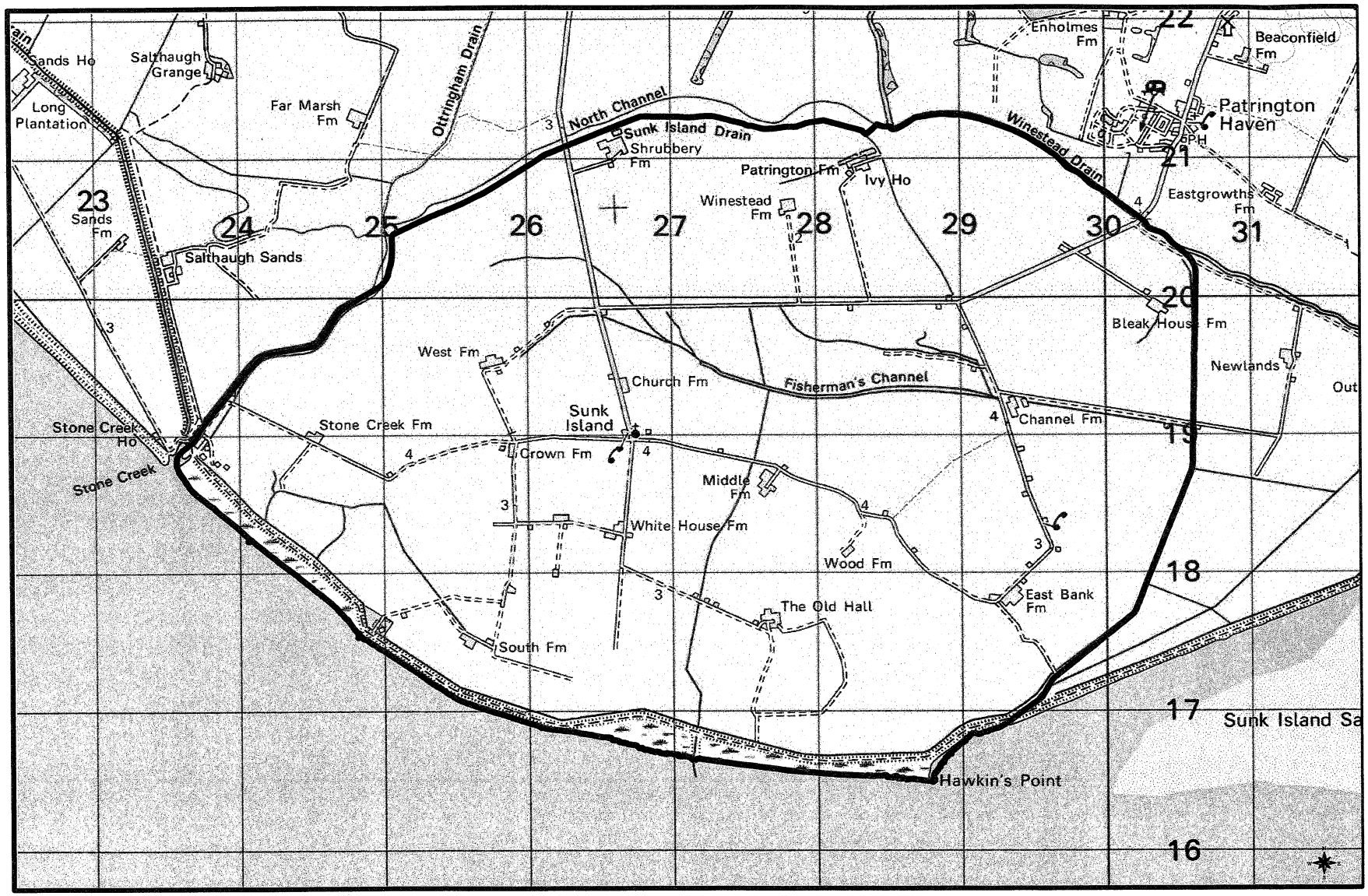

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