

# The Parish of Bidborough

## HISTORIC LANDSCAPE CHARACTERISATION

### REVISION OF KENT HLC (2000)



January 2017

**THE REVISION OF THE KENT HLC**

**FOR**

**THE BOROUGH**  
**OF**  
**ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS**

**Summary Report**  
**Parish of Bidborough**

**Dr Nicola R. Bannister ACIFA**  
*Landscape History & Conservation*

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**The parish summary should be read in conjunction with the Tunbridge Wells Borough Historic Landscape characterisation Report (Section I User Guide and Interpretation; Section II The Gazetteer of HLC Types and Section III the Maps). June 2017.**

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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The views expressed in this report are entirely the author's own and do not reflect the policies of neither Tunbridge Wells Borough Council, Kent County Council nor the High Weald AONB.

## PERIOD TABLE

Description	Archaeological Period	From	To
Hunting societies	Upper Palaeolithic	30,000	10,000 BC
Hunter-gather societies	Mesolithic	10,000-8,000	4,000-3,500 BC
The first agriculturalists	Neolithic	3,500	2,100 BC
Beginning of metal working in bronze	Bronze Age	2,100	600 BC
Beginning of metal working in iron	Iron Age	600 BC	AD 43
	Romano-British	AD 43	AD 410
	Anglo-Saxons [or Early Medieval]	AD 410	1066
	Medieval	1066	1540
	Post-medieval	1540	Present

### *The Archaeological and Historical Periods used in the Sussex HLC & Revised Kent HLC*

Key to HLC-Prev	Description	Date	Combined
P1	Late 20th century	AD1945 – present	Post 1900
P2	Early 20th century	AD 1914 – AD 1945	
P3	Early Modern	AD 1800 – AD 1913	19th century
P4	Late Post-medieval	AD 1600 – AD 1799	Post-medieval
P5	Early Post-medieval	AD 1500 – AD 1599	
P6	Medieval	AD 1066 – AD 1499	Medieval
P7	Early-medieval	AD 410 – AD 1065	
P8	Roman	AD 43 – AD 409	
P9	Prehistoric	500,000 BC – AD42	

**Summary Assessment of the Historic Landscape Characterisation  
for the parish of Bidborough  
Borough of Royal Tunbridge Wells**

**1. Introduction**

**Historic Landscape Characterisation [HLC]** is a process by which the landscape of an area is interpreted and mapped by selected historic attributes which contribute to the local historic character. The dominant historic attributes are that of enclosure and settlement. The pattern of fields, the nature of the boundaries, the form and distribution of historic settlement shape the local character and distinctiveness of a given area. The term ‘historic landscapes’ means in this context all landscapes which have been shaped by human interaction. HLC maps character not land use though with finer grained HLCs for some of the historic types reflect the use of the land. It can be likened to a fine water-colour painting which despite using OSMM as its base does result in some ‘blurred’ boundaries between character types at the very detailed field by field level. HLC is a starting point when investigating the historic landscape for any given area, however it is not a substitute for detailed desk-based assessments and field observations.

The Historic Landscape Characterisation for Bidborough forms part of a district wide revision of the Kent HLC (2000). Four parishes in the east of the district have been completed on behalf of the High Weald AONB (Goudhurst, Hawkhurst, Cranbrook & Benenden) and the remaining parishes are being undertaken as part of a rolling programme of phased characterisation for Tunbridge Wells Borough Council. As each parish is completed a short analysis is presented. The parishes will then be grouped up to form the district-wide HLC. The sequence of characterisation has been prioritised to provide firstly information on those parishes close to the town of Royal Tunbridge Wells, and secondly to complete the wider countryside of the borough. The centre of the built-up area of the town has been omitted as the priority is to characterise the historic landscape of the rural parts of the borough.

This report sets out a summary of the some of the results for the civil parish of Bidborough. A Methods Report [Draft] together with a Gazetteer of Typologies and attributes has been prepared for the end of the first phase of this revision (end of September 2016). Phase 2 (Frittenden, Capel, Horsmonden and Brenchley) was completed at the end of December 2016. The third phase for the remaining parishes (Bidborough, Lamberhurst, Paddock Wood and Sandhurst) commenced in January 2017 for completion at the end of March 2017. At the end a summary report for the Tunbridge Wells Borough HLC will be prepared.

**2. Historic context of parish of Bidborough**

Bidborough is a very small remote parish at the far western edge of the borough adjacent to Southborough and Speldhurst. To the north lie the parishes of Leigh and Penshurst in the Borough of Tonbridge and Malling. Bidborough lies on the edge of the High Weald overlooking the valley of the River Medway. Historically the historic Lowy of Tonbridge, the territory of land assigned to Tonbridge Castle, laid claim over part of the area. In the C13 the le Chaun family held the manor and lands of Bidborough.

The civil parish of Bidborough coincides with the historic ecclesiastical parish boundary and a part of it also lay within the parish of Tonbridge. A small part of the ecclesiastical parish of Leigh also extended into Bidborough.

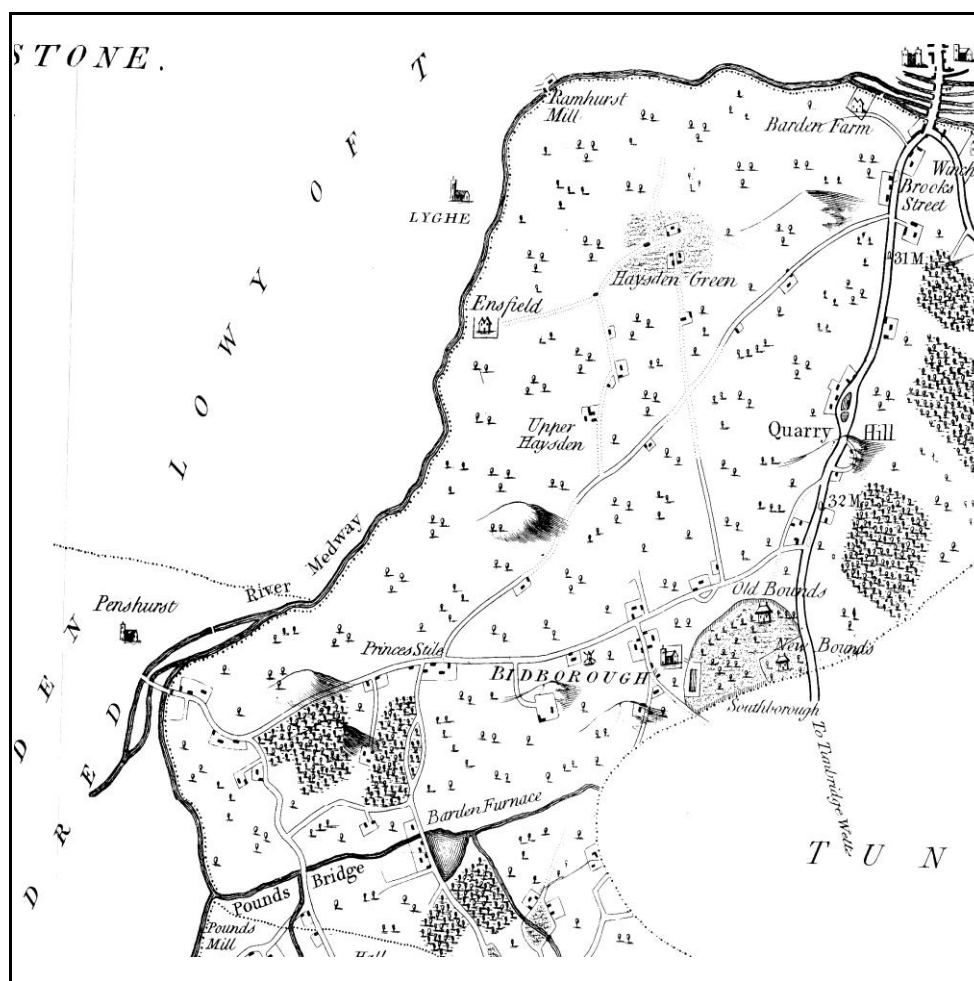
Hasted (1797) describes Bidborough as being a pleasant and healthy parish but small in extent, encircled on three sides by the parish of Tonbridge and on the fourth by the parish of Speldhurst. The soil he describes as being a sandy loam over quarry rock but with unfertile clays along the stream by Barden Furnace to Pound Bridge (Hasted 1797 V, 272). Bounds alias Boons was the main seat in the parish was occupied by the Countess Dowger of Darnley in the 18th century.

After AD 450 with the coming and settling in Kent of the Saxons the Weald was divided into large 'commons' attached to large agricultural estates in north and east Kent. Kent was carved up to utilise large swathes of the landscape. These estates became the lathes the territories of which spread into the Weald to lay claim to the woodland and grazing pastures. These commons were used for seasonal grazing but were gradually broken up into dens or swine pastures attached to the evolving manors located in the north and east on the demesne and farmed land. Eventually temporary settlements in the dens became permanent farmsteads taking their names from the 'dens' and the settlers enclosed land and laid out fields from the swine pastures in order to cultivate crops and keep stock.

Bidborough lay within the Saxon Lathe of Sutton-at-Hone and the Hundred of Wachlingstone, and formed part of the Manor of Farningham which belonged to the Archbishop's knights. It is identified by Witney as one of two knight's fees which included Bounds in Bidborough extending as far as Bidborough Hall and the site of a den called Marden (the mark or boundary den) (Witney 1976, 227).

The Lowy of Tonbridge was formed post 1086 from a fragmented grouping of scattered lands and granted by William I to Richard of Tonbridge, which had formerly been held by the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Bishop of Rochester and other secular owners. During the following 200 years the various Archbishops were in litigation with the Crown and the Clare family trying to regain their lands. The Clares ordered several Perambulations of the Lowy in order to fix the furthest extent of the territory and attempt to consolidate it. The Norman Lowy divided the Saxon hundred of Wachingstone in two. The circular shape of the 1258 and 1279 perambulations coincides with some of the parish boundaries which it is suggested that these are later than the Lowy boundary (see Cole 2014, 88).

The western end of Bidborough comprises Wadhurst Clay with Ashdown Beds outcropping along the northern edge of the parish from Swaylands to Hawks Wood in the east. The eastern part of the parish comprises Lower Tunbridge Wells Sandstone and is where most of the settlement is concentrated. The parish is essentially rural with fields intermixed with ancient woodland. Settlement is strung along the main east west ridge top route from Tonbridge to Penshurst. Historic farmsteads are scattered along the southern slopes and towards the tributaries of the Medway. The parkland of Bounds lay to the east and is now in part in the parish of Southborough.



Extract from Hasted 1797 Vol V. *The Hundred of Wachlingstone*

### 3. Results of the revised HLC for the parish of Bidborough

Some examples of the digitising of Bidborough parish as part of the wider revised HLC for the borough of Tunbridge Wells are presented in the map extracts on the following pages. The first and second phases of this project have been completed (December 2016). Bidborough is the first of phase 3 to be completed (Paddock Wood, Lamberhurst and Sandhurst remaining). Only a brief analysis of the HLC attributes is presented here. The HLC has been split into its main period and type component attributes, but by applying the different style sheets it is possible to show the various attributes for the present day HLC, as well as a conjectured image of what the historic character of the late medieval and early-post-medieval landscape might have looked like.

#### 3.1 The Phase 1 Kent HLC

Map 1 shows the broad HLC type for the Kent Phase 1 for the civil parish of Bidborough. The Kent was one of the earliest HLCs to be undertaken in England and was produced using a very broad-brush approach to characterisation. The broad character areas of Bidborough can clearly be seen. Its rural character is shown by the extensive area of Field patterns with settlement centred on the ridge top village. Long gill woodlands extend north and south either side of the east west ridge top route.

### **3.2 The Revised Kent HLC for Tunbridge Wells Borough – Bidborough**

Map 2 shows the broad HLC type for the revised Kent HLC for Tunbridge Wells Borough. The finer-grained approach to the data capture can clearly be seen for example with the scattered settlements across the parish. Designed landscapes are closely associated with the main village and scattered settlements occur to the north east of the parish. Its wooded character is also shown.

### **3.3. The HLC Types for present day landscape of Bidborough**

Map 3 shows the HLC types for Bidborough. Settlement has concentrated along the ridge top and the southern slopes. Bidborough Hall and Swaylands are areas of gentrification with parkland and larger landscaped gardens. In between area field patterns typical of the High Weald – assarts or clearances from woodland inter-mixed with ancient gills and assart woods. Significant groups of fields have under-gone boundary loss, creating much larger enclosures. These occur where farming systems have under-gone considerable change from mixed livestock farming to a more arable based enterprise. The large area of wood pasture at Ashour Wood is an example of modern woodland clearance, leaving the standards as field trees.

Settlement expansion at Bidborough has taken place to the south of the main east-west route. There is no historic village core – the church originated in the early-medieval period as a chapel serving the scattered farmsteads.

### **3.4 The Time-depth and antiquity of the present landscape of Bidborough**

Map 4 shows the projected period of origin for each historic character type in the present landscape of Bidborough based on the historic map evidence and understanding of the Kent landscape. Essentially the eastern and southern parts of Bidborough are dominated by the Medieval and Early-medieval character types of field patterns, historic settlement and woodlands, the structure of which under-pin the Modern character types of settlement expansion, designed landscapes and modern field amalgamation.

Despite the extensive boundary loss and field reorganisation in the modern period in areas of the parish it retains its rural character of medieval fields, woods and settlement. Elements of that past historic landscape character still may survive within the present landscape, for example some of the field boundaries for the older field systems in the areas of modern field amalgamation. These boundaries are also the remnants of the older parish boundaries, manorial boundaries, and farmstead boundaries.

### **3.5 Analysis of different character types**

Map 5 shows only the HLC broad type for Enclosures by HLC type for Bidborough. This is an example of how the HLC can be queried in order to assess the different historic character types. The rural landscape is dominated by the patterns of enclosures and it can be seen that Bidborough retains a mix of both modern field amalgamation and older assart-type fields. The modern fields are the result of agricultural improvements and changes in cropping regimes in the modern era, associated with both larger estates and smaller farmsteads. The medieval field pattern is retained in the eastern and southern parts of the parish, where the medieval aggregate assarts are closely associated with the ancient gill



woodlands. Irregular informal fields tend to occur in the valleys. These medieval fields retain a wooded character.

Map 6 gives an indication of woodland character of the landscape where the same field pattern polygons have been illustrated by the Boundary type attribute. Wooded hedges and shaws tend to occur across the higher ground and valley sides indicating both a woodland origin for the boundaries and also a relaxation in boundary management leading to them becoming overgrown. Where there has been significant boundary removal the fields are divided by grass balks. These fields occur in the far west and north west along the valley of the River Medway. Fences are associated with the small areas of paddocks.

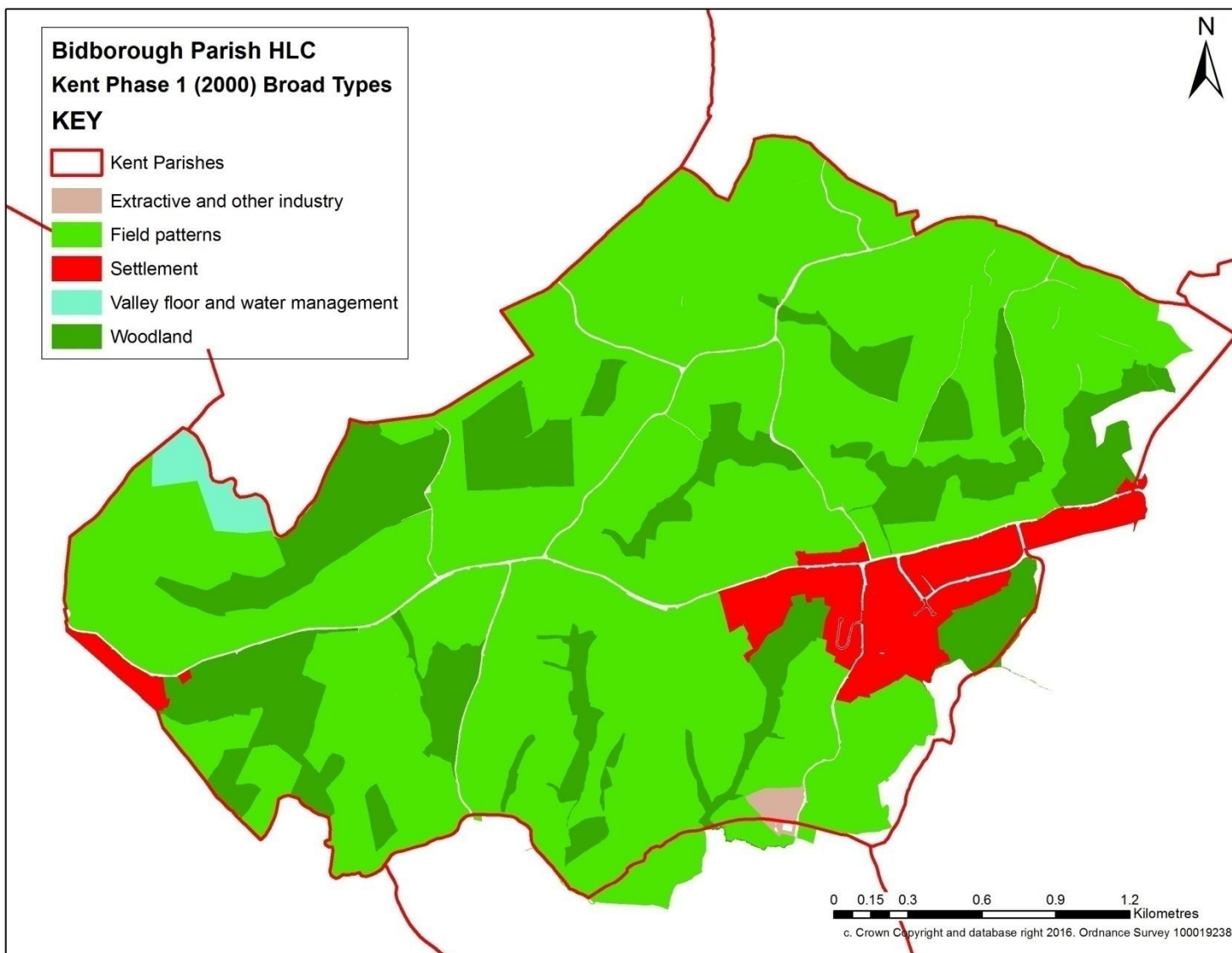
### **3.6. The conjectured medieval and early post-medieval landscape of Bidborough**

Map 7 is a composite map of the present HLC overlain with those polygons where the previous historic character can be identified from the historic mapping. Each time there is a character change as shown by the historic maps (up to 4 changes recorded in the GIS attribute table as Prev1 to Prev 4) this has been captured in the data base. The result is that this map gives an indication of what the landscape may have appeared like c.1500-1600, when much the medieval features would still have been intact.

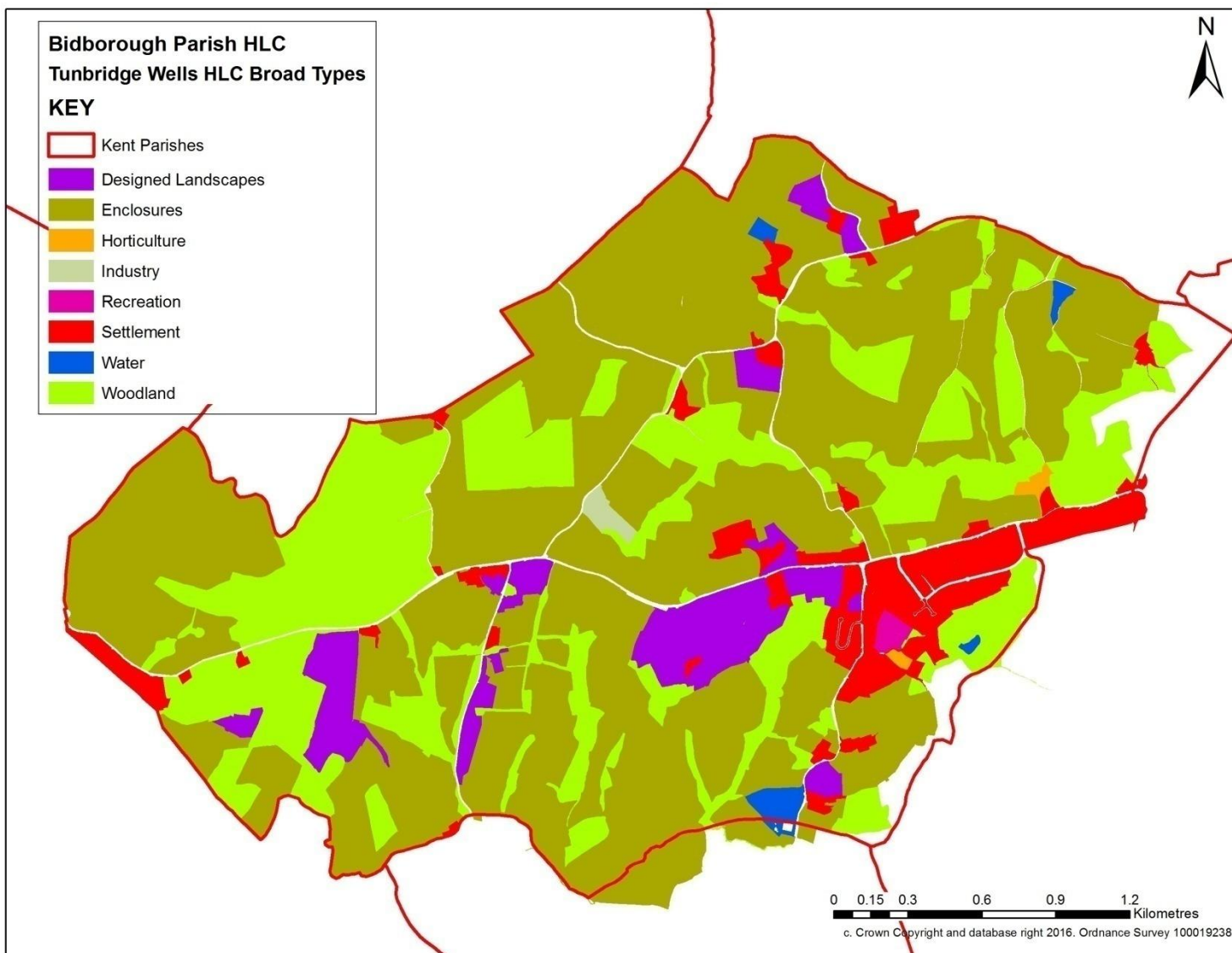
This is the landscape that Hasted describes as being healthy and pleasant. The extent of woodland identified from the historic mapping can be seen in the west of the parish around Ashour and Swaylands. The parkland of Bounds can be seen on the ridge top road in the eastern edge of the parish, with scattered historic farmsteads occurring through the middle of the parish. The lands to the north lie close to the valley of the Tributaries of the Medway and the fertile soils here may have been cleared of woodland early in the Saxon period with subsequent reorganisation taking place in the succeeding centuries.

The origins and antiquity of the regular informal fields is difficult to assess, but these fields could date from the early post-medieval due to field re-organisation or may even be medieval in date. As a field pattern it occurs in the north and west of the parish on the lower ground, with pockets close to some ridge-top settlements.

BOROUGH OF ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS  
REVISED KENT HLC (2000)  
PARISH OF BIDBOROUGH

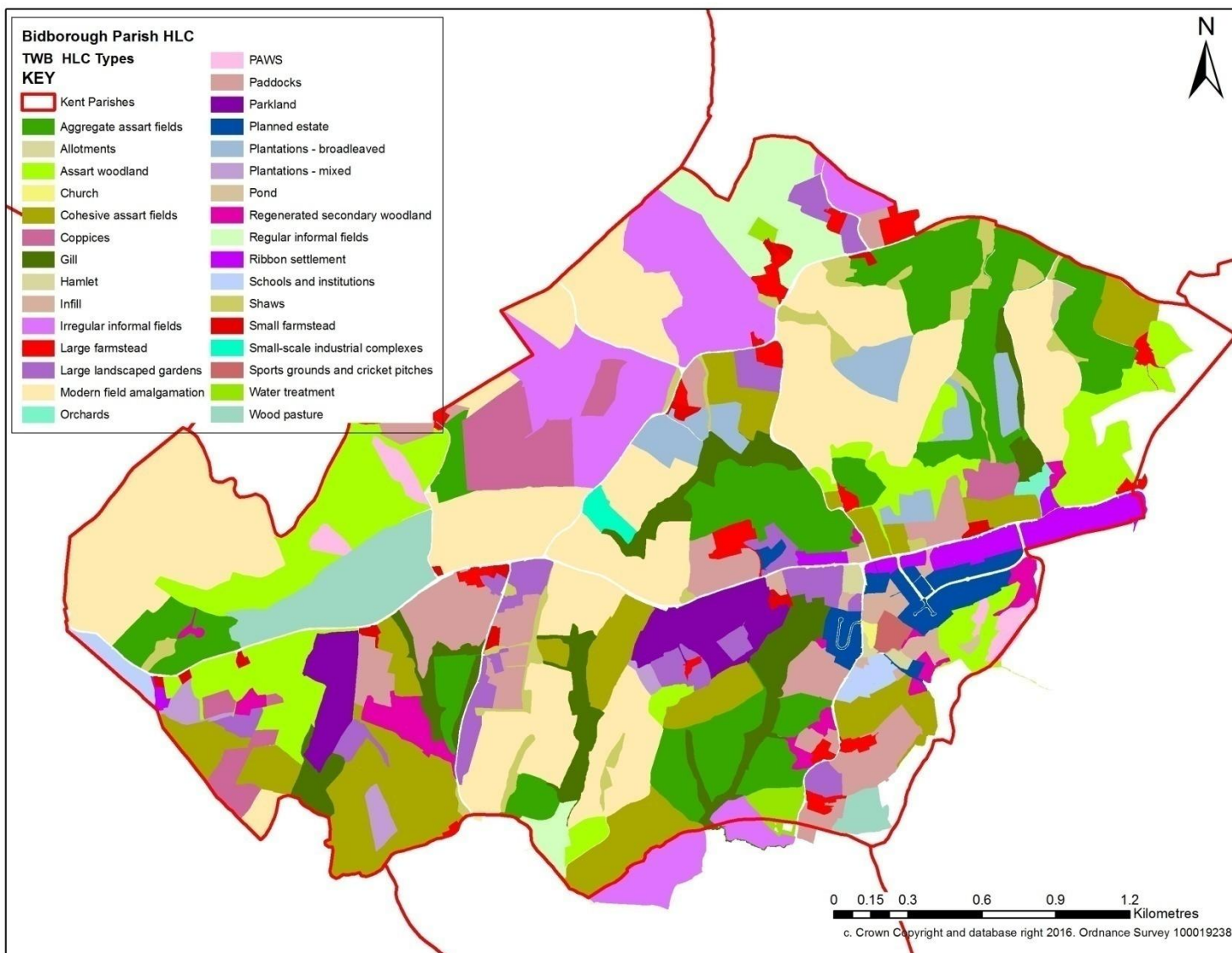


BOROUGH OF ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS  
REVISED KENT HLC (2000)  
PARISH OF BIDBOROUGH



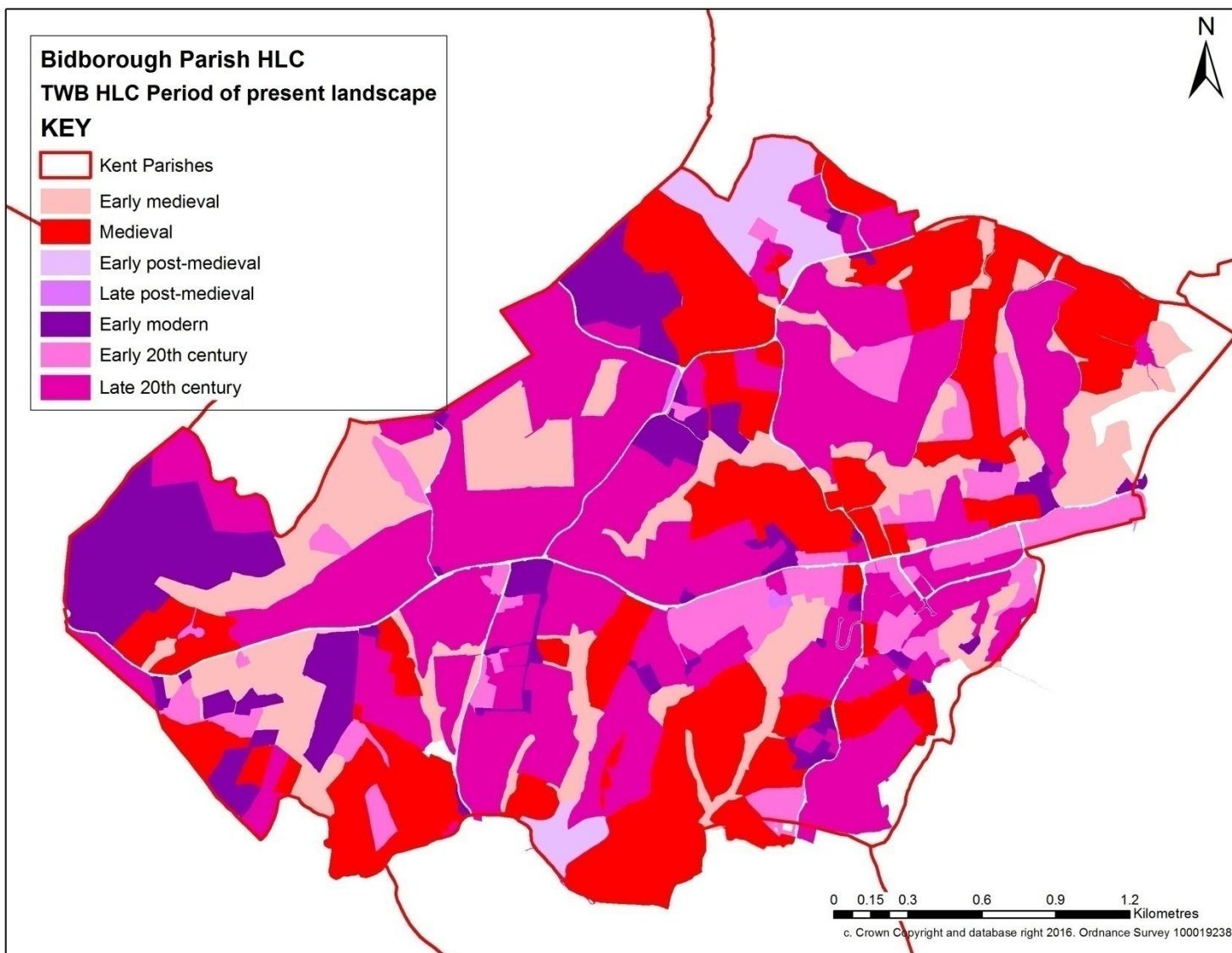
MAP 2

**BOROUGH OF ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS  
REVISED KENT HLC (2000)  
PARISH OF BIDBOROUGH**

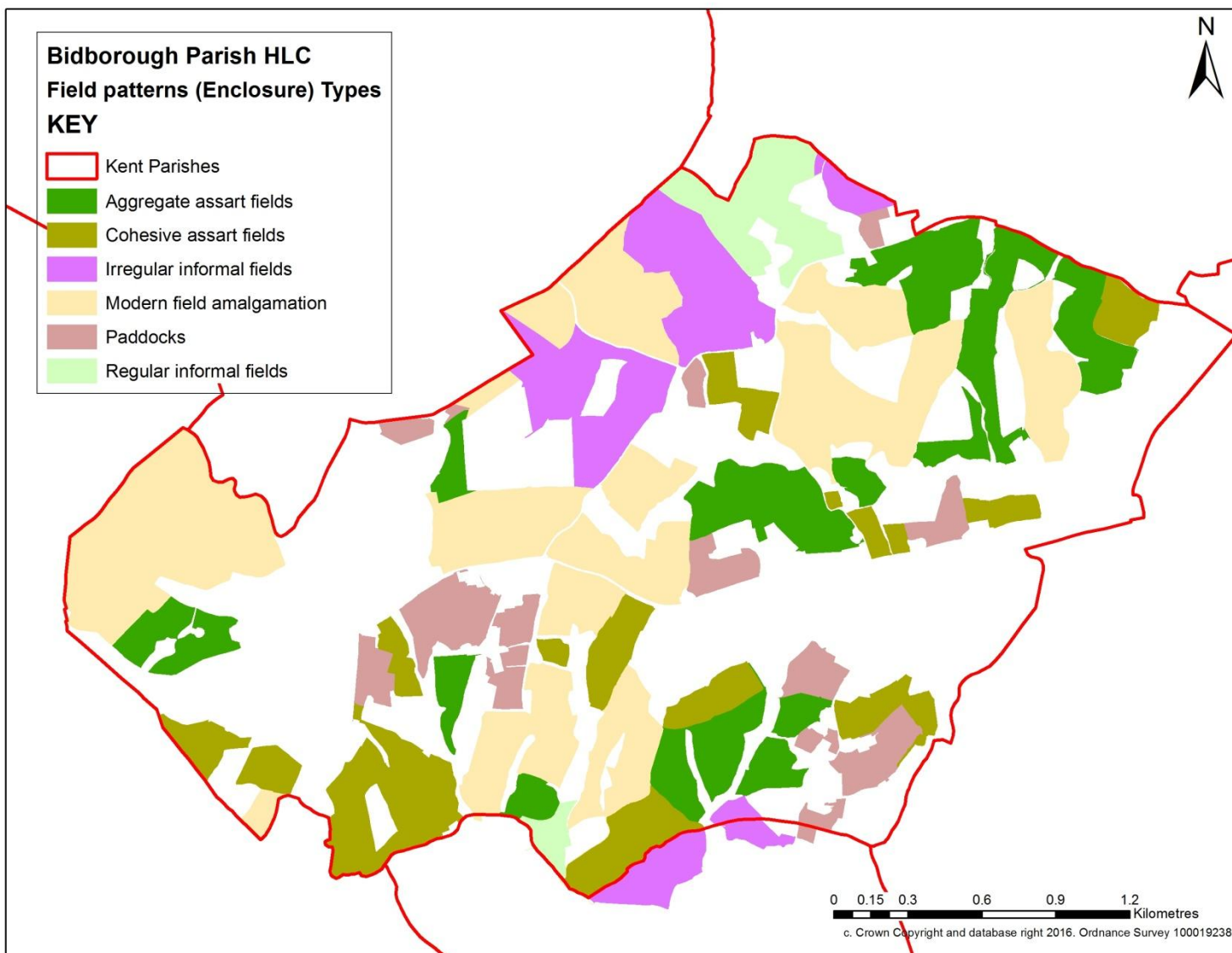


Map 3

BOROUGH OF ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS  
REVISED KENT HLC (2000)  
PARISH OF BIDBOROUGH

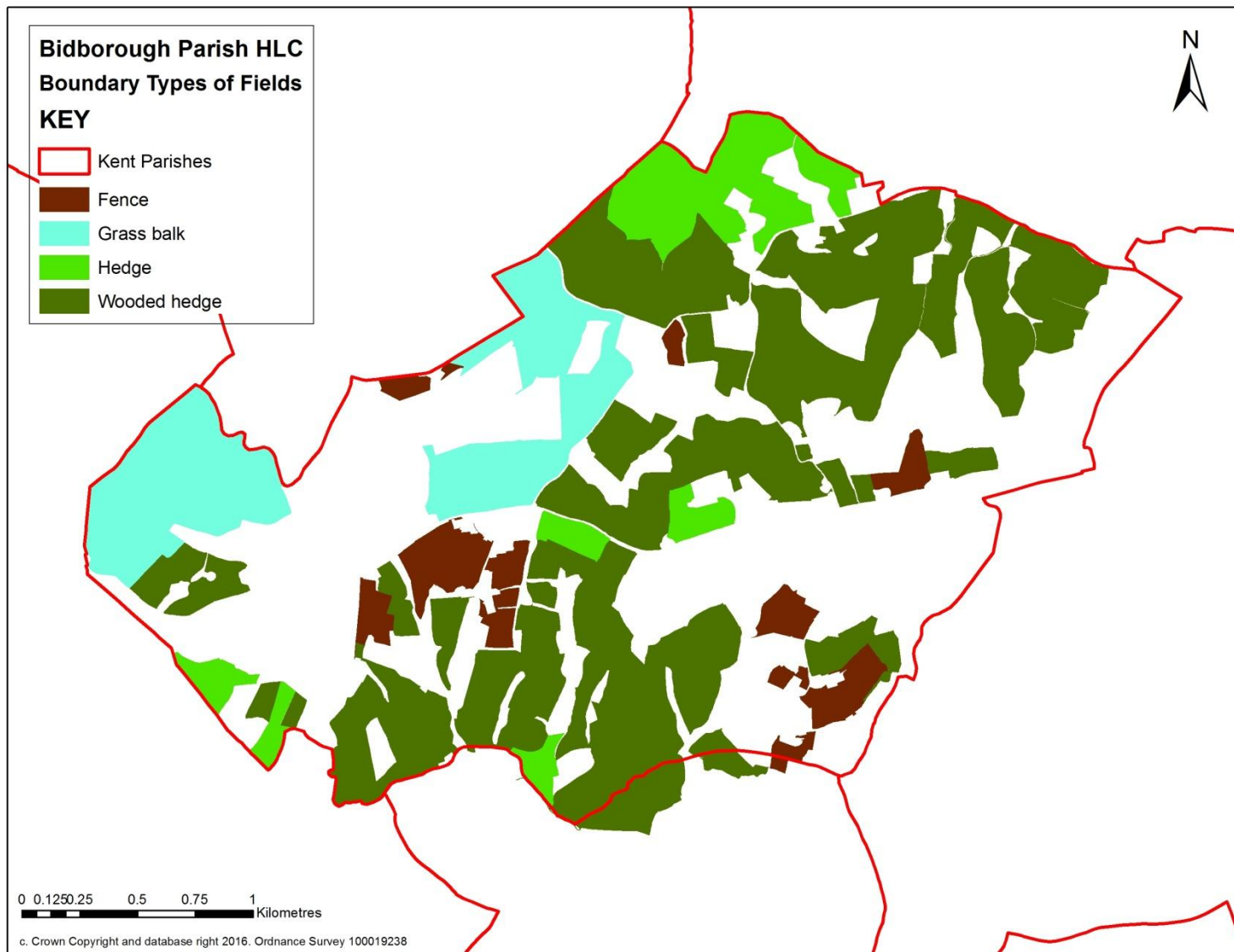


BOROUGH OF ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS  
REVISED KENT HLC (2000)  
PARISH OF BIDBOROUGH



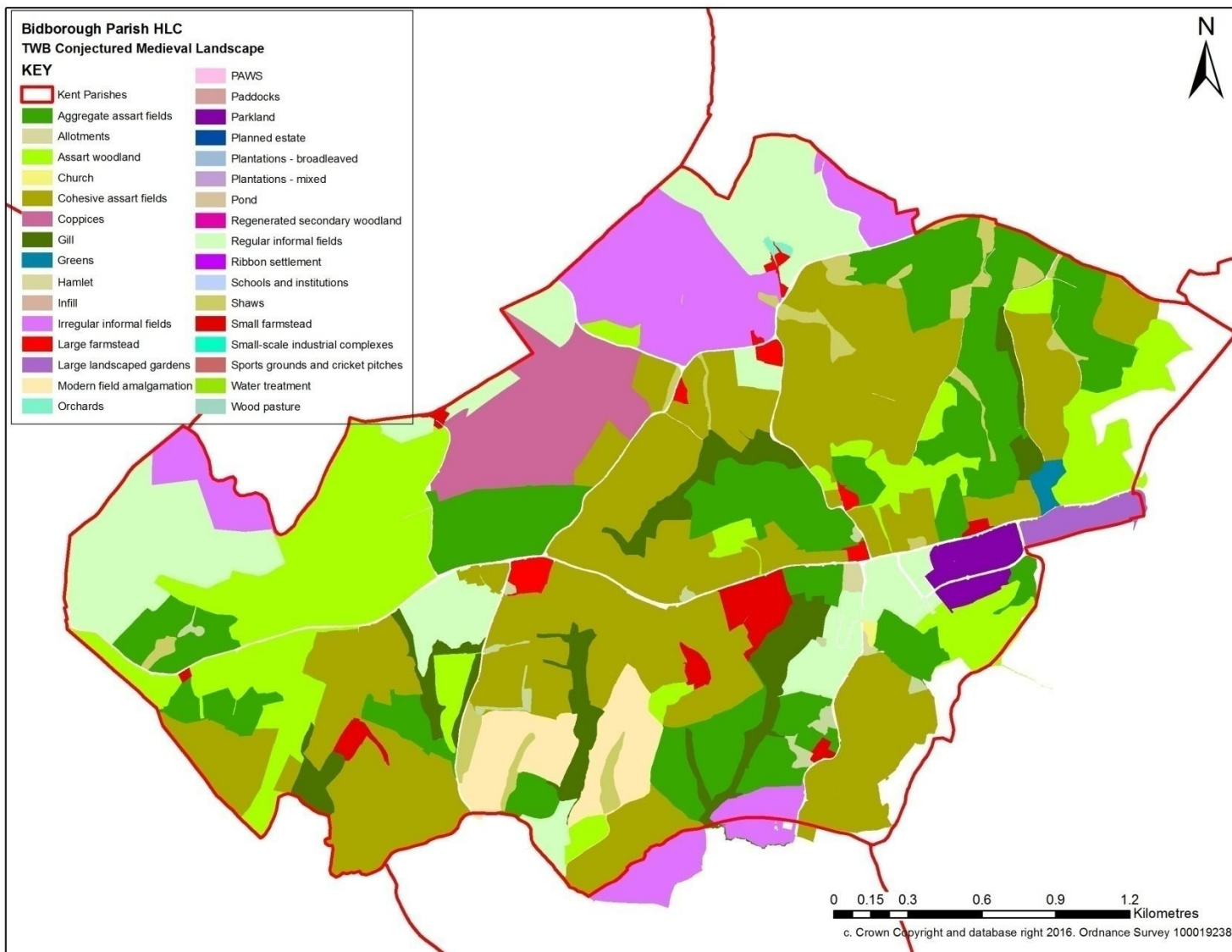
MAP 5

BOROUGH OF ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS  
REVISED KENT HLC (2000)  
PARISH OF BIDBOROUGH



e4dr

**BOROUGH OF ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS  
REVISED KENT HLC (2000)  
PARISH OF BIDBOROUGH**



**MAP 7**



#### **4. Initial Conclusions**

This analysis only touches on the potential of HLC to understand the historic character of the landscape and provides the starting point for research for any given area. The HLC reveals that the landscape of Bidborough is essentially of a medieval character and of intact field patterns, ancient woods and scattered historic farmsteads. The ridge-top hamlet has been extended in the post-medieval and modern periods, with significant areas of gentrification. The historic character of Bidborough reflects both the ancient landscapes (antiquity) and the modern landscapes (time-depth). The development of the historic landscape character of Bidborough is intimately linked with that of the modern parish of Southborough and the influence of the Lowy of Tonbridge.

Far more research is needed to understand the different process of enclosure in the Weald of Kent, especially in the understanding the medieval settlement and expansion. Further research is needed on the division of land with their farmsteads into yokes, yardlands, sulungs, virgates etc. and interpreting medieval manorial surveys with the actual territories in the landscape.

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