

# THE BOROUGH OF ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS

## HISTORIC LANDSCAPE CHARACTERISATION REVISION OF KENT HLC (2000)



AUGUST 2016

# Summary of the parish of **SOUTHBOROUGH**

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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

The revised Historic Landscape Characterisation for the Borough of Tunbridge Wells could not have been undertaken without the dedicated support of David Scully, Landscape and Biodiversity Officer at Tunbridge Wells Borough Council and also Lis Dyson County Archaeologists at Kent County Council. The Tunbridge Wells Borough Historic Landscape Characterisation builds on the project begun by the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty [AONB] Partnership. This work could not have been undertaken without the help of Paul Cuming Kent Historic Environment Records Manager and Richard Dadd GIS Technician at Kent County Council. A 'Thank you' is extended to all. Appreciation and thanks also goes to the team at the High Weald AONB Partnership especially Sally Marsh, Co-Director, Charles Winchester Landscape Researcher and Matt Pitts Land Manager Adviser.

My colleague Phil Sansum kindly undertook the processing of the missing Tithe maps for the Borough for which I am very grateful.

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 Southborough  
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 Southborough forms part of a district wide revision of the Kent HLC (2000). Four parishes in the east of the district have been completed (Goudhurst, Hawkhurst, Cranbrook & Benenden) and the remaining parishes are being undertaken as part of a rolling programme of phased characterisation. 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 Southborough. A Methods Report together with a Gazetteer of Typologies and attributes is being prepared for the end of the first phase of this revision (end of September 2016).

**2. Historic context of parish of Southborough**

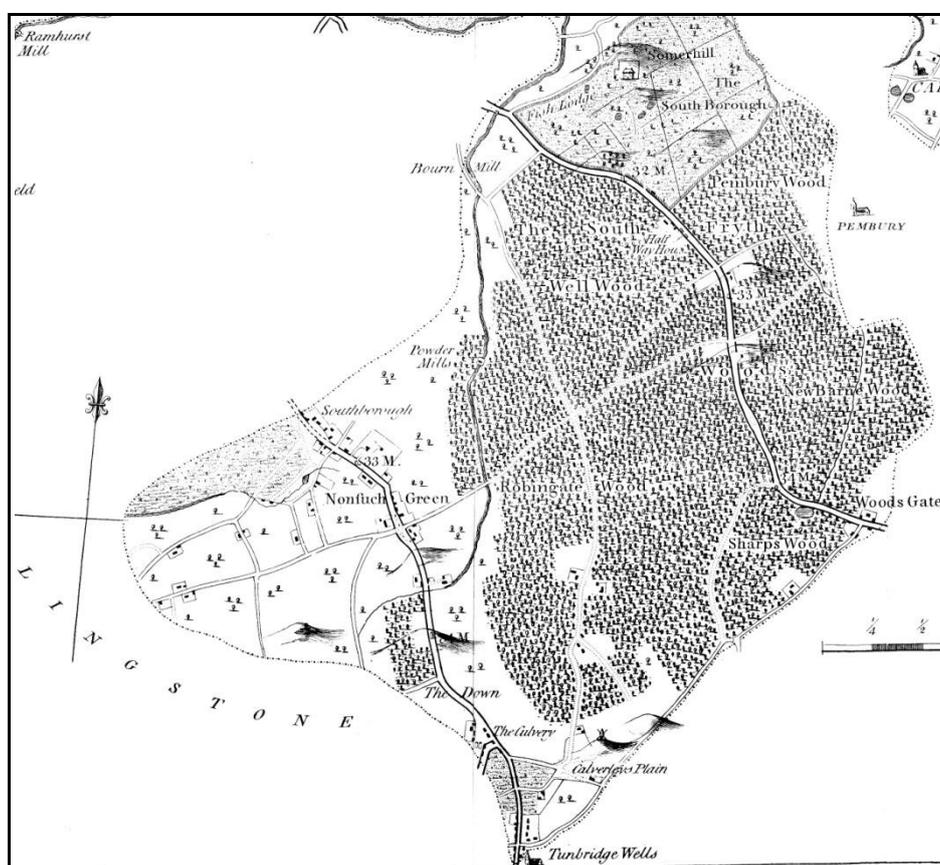
For the majority of Southborough the underlying geology comprises Tunbridge Wells Sandstone, with Wadhurst Clay in the valley at Old Forge Farm. Ashdown Beds outcrop in the north east corner around Nightingale Farm. The topography comprises a high ground cut by smaller incised valleys running north, north east and south west. The highest points being at High Brooms and north west of Southborough Common.

The civil parish of Southborough lies within the ecclesiastical parish of Tonbridge with a small part of the north-west edge at Bentham and Gobles lying within the ecclesiastical parish of Bidborough. The majority of the parish of Southborough lay within the historic Lowy of Tonbridge and so named being the southern part of the Lowy (i.e. south of the Medway). The boundary is thought to have passed through or to the north west side of Southborough Common as shown on Hasted’s map of c. 1797 (see below). A lowy is an area of land or

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**REVISED KENT HLC (2000)**  
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territory granted to a fortified settlement such as a castle. The land provided income so support the castle and its functions at a strategic crossing point on the River Medway. So when William I decided to fortify the crossing on the river at Tonbridge, the castle and the lands were seized from the Saxon owners (and which included a proportion of the Archbishop of Canterbury's property) and granted to ? and then to the powerful Clare family. Most of this land comprised the swine pastures and dens belonging to the large Kent manors of Otford and Wrotham in the Lathe of Aylesford. Succeeding archbishops fought legal battles to restore their lands. This resulted in two perambulations of the boundary of the Lowy dates and refs here. The southern part of the lowy comprised the manor and lands of Southborough together with a district named the South-frith, which gave its name to a manor centred at Somerhill. This was a hunting chase which formed part of the demesne lands of the Clares as part of Tonbridge. For further background on the early medieval history of this area see Witney (1976), Cole (2014, 80, 88), and Hasted (1797).



*Extract from Edward Hasted's Map of the Lowy of Tonbridge - Southfrith*

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. The area of Speldhurst and the western end of the district of Tunbridge Wells lay in the large and powerful lathes of Aylesford and Dartford, dominated by the manors such as Offord and Wrotham claiming extensive grazing pastures across this area of higher ground bounded by the River Medway.

Medieval farmsteads occupy the higher ground and several have become gentrified in the C19 to country estates and parkland such as The Park and David Salomon's House. At the northern end of the parish the landscape comprises hillside and ridge-top farmsteads surrounded by fields with ancient gill woodland in the narrow steep-sided stream valleys.

The southern part of the parish is dominated by the urban development spreading from the suburbs of Tunbridge Wells. Southborough Common provides a valuable area of countryside dividing the housing estates of Southborough from those of Bidborough to the north.

Brokes Wood is an important area of Ancient Semi-natural Woodland, a modified remnant of the South Well Wood and Robins Gate Wood, survivors the former chase of South Frith belonging to Tonbridge Castle. Prehistoric activity including settlement and industry is evident from surface finds recorded across the higher ground particularly around Brokes Wood, with the iron stone providing important resource for iron making from the late Bronze Age into the post-medieval period.

The iron rich springs which lined the edge of the high sandstone outcrops became the focus as watering places. Tunbridge Wells was born and with relatively easy access to London, it rapidly became established. The town of Royal Tunbridge Wells expanded in the C18 and C19 westwards into Speldhurst and northwards into Nonsuch Green and Southborough

### **3. Results of the revised HLC for the parish of Southborough**

Some examples of the digitising of Southborough 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 phase of this project will be presented in a GIS project for the parishes of Speldhurst, Southborough, Royal Tunbridge Wells and Pembury. Only a brief analysis of the HLC attributes is presented here. It 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. This was one of the earliest HLCs to be undertaken in England and was produced using a very broad-brush approach.

Note the large blocks of woodland and absence of smaller woods and also the lack of scattered settlement and farmsteads.

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

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 in the north and west of the parish, the areas of parkland and the higher incidence of woodland. Parkland and designed landscapes of all types, are a strong historic landscape feature of the countryside around Tunbridge Wells. As well as the larger parkland occupying the high ridge tops there is a concentration of designed landscapes within Southborough itself. This is the influence during the Late post-medieval and Early modern periods of Tunbridge Wells as a place for leisure, recreation and its gentrification.

### **3.3 The HLC Types for present day landscape of Southborough**

Map 3 shows the HLC types for Southborough. Immediately it can be seen that the northern part of the parish where the deeply incised valleys occur is characterised by aggregate assart fields intermixed with small areas of ancient woodland. These fields are thought to be the results of the last period of assarting and woodland clearance in the C13. Many of the fields on the higher ground have undergone modern field amalgamation, through boundary removal, but where the topography is more undulating the older field systems survive relatively intact, for example north of Brokes Wood.

The areas of parkland tend to occur also on the ridge tops whilst the smaller landscaped gardens occur within the areas of urban settlement. Many of these are smaller landscaped gardens around larger houses. The dispersed nature of the settlement can be seen from the at the northern end of the parish where modern settlement expansion has not reached. The settlement at Southborough is strongly characterised by planned estates of varying sizes and ages from the early modern to the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. Southborough Common is almost surrounded by settlement except on its north west edge where the older field pattern still survives. The Common is an ancient feature which dates from at least the medieval period and probably is much older. The close association with the common of the enclosed coppice wood of Whortleberry Wood is a typical feature of common land with grazing and other land use rights. The woodland would have provided under wood and other woodland resources for the commoners.

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

Map 4 shows the projected period of origin for each character type in Southborough based on the historic map evidence and understanding of the Kent landscape. The northern and eastern parts of Southborough retain the most historic landscape antiquity with character types originating in the medieval period surviving into the present day. By contrast the areas to the west and south show a landscape of the post-medieval and modern origin. The common due to lack of grazing management has become covered by secondary woodland hence its early modern date. This landscape to the south time-depth due to the land use change which has occurred. Elements of that past historic landscape character still may survive within the present landscape. For example some of the planned estates laid out at Southborough respect the former field boundaries and field pattern, when the modern map is overlain with the mid C19 historic mapping; garden boundaries, road ways and estate edges may follow these older alignments, when then extend into the wider countryside.

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

Map 5 shows only the HLC broad type for Enclosures by HLC type for Southborough. 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 Southborough has little or no evidence of an enclosure pattern, the result of post-medieval parkland, landscape gentrification and settlement expansion. The assart fields occur through the middle of the parish from the east towards the north west, following a historic alignment along the edge of the South Frith. The areas of modern field amalgamation occur on the higher ground where the soils and topography enabled changes and improvements in cultivation techniques to take place.

Map 6 gives an indication of this where the same polygons have been illustrated by the Boundary type attribute. The boundaries are dominated by wooded hedges which accentuates the woodland character of the north and eastern parts of Southborough. Wooded hedges are either outgrown hedges (due to lack of management) or wider wooded shaws. The fences are evidence of paddocks, laid out in an older field system. A small number of ditches occur near the old site of the mill by Forge Farm. This area is of historic significance due to the industrial activity that has taken place here including the evidence for water management for power.

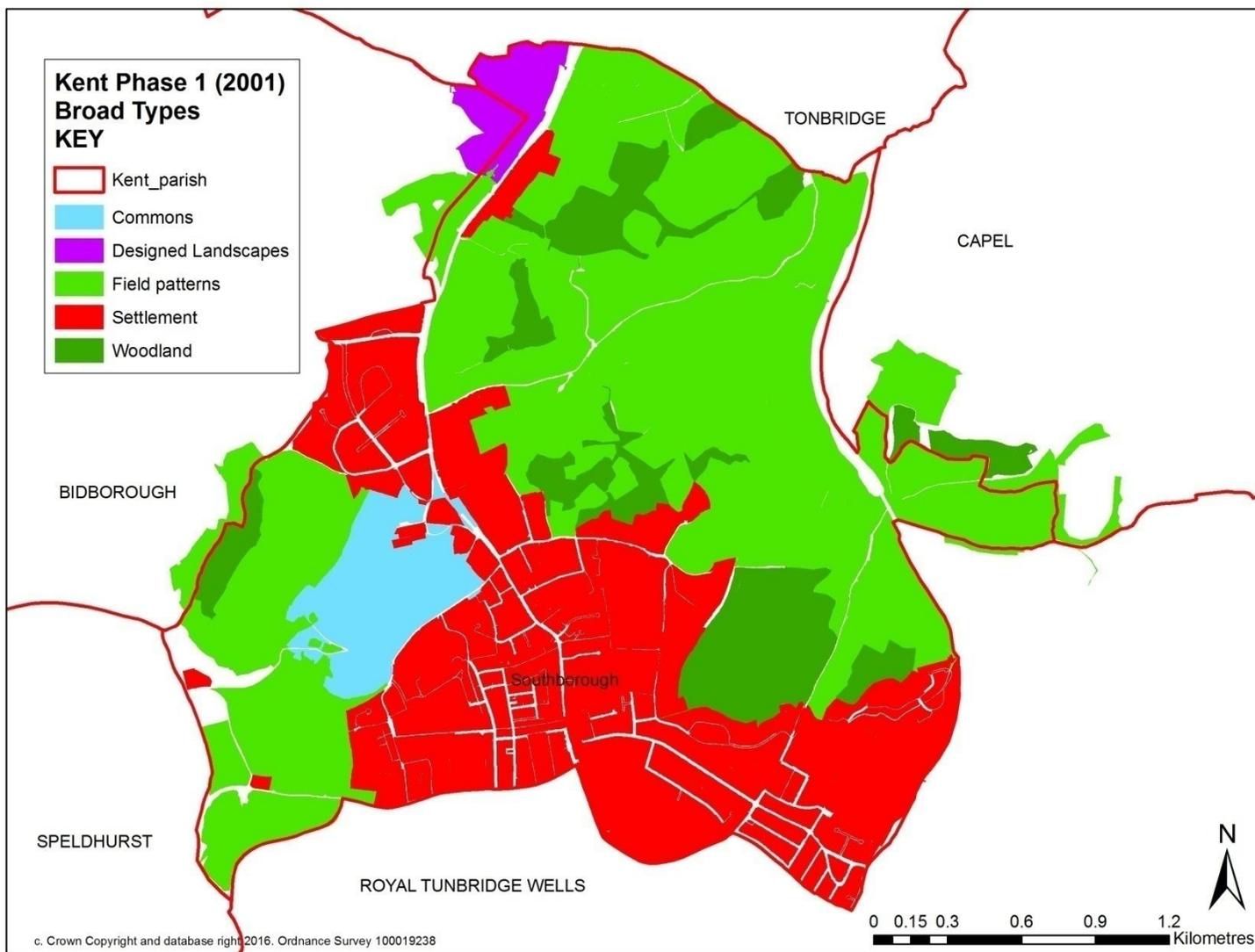
### **3.6. The conjectured medieval and early post-medieval landscape of Southborough**

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. 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.

The south east corner is dominated by the woods of South Frith, whilst to the north are the mix of assart fields showing the gradually enclosures and settlement around the edge of the Frith within the Lowy. Southborough Common is shown as wood pasture and with areas of common-edge settlement. In the south west corner is a fragment of formal planned fields extending from Speldhurst which may be evidence of formal organised enclosure of former commons.

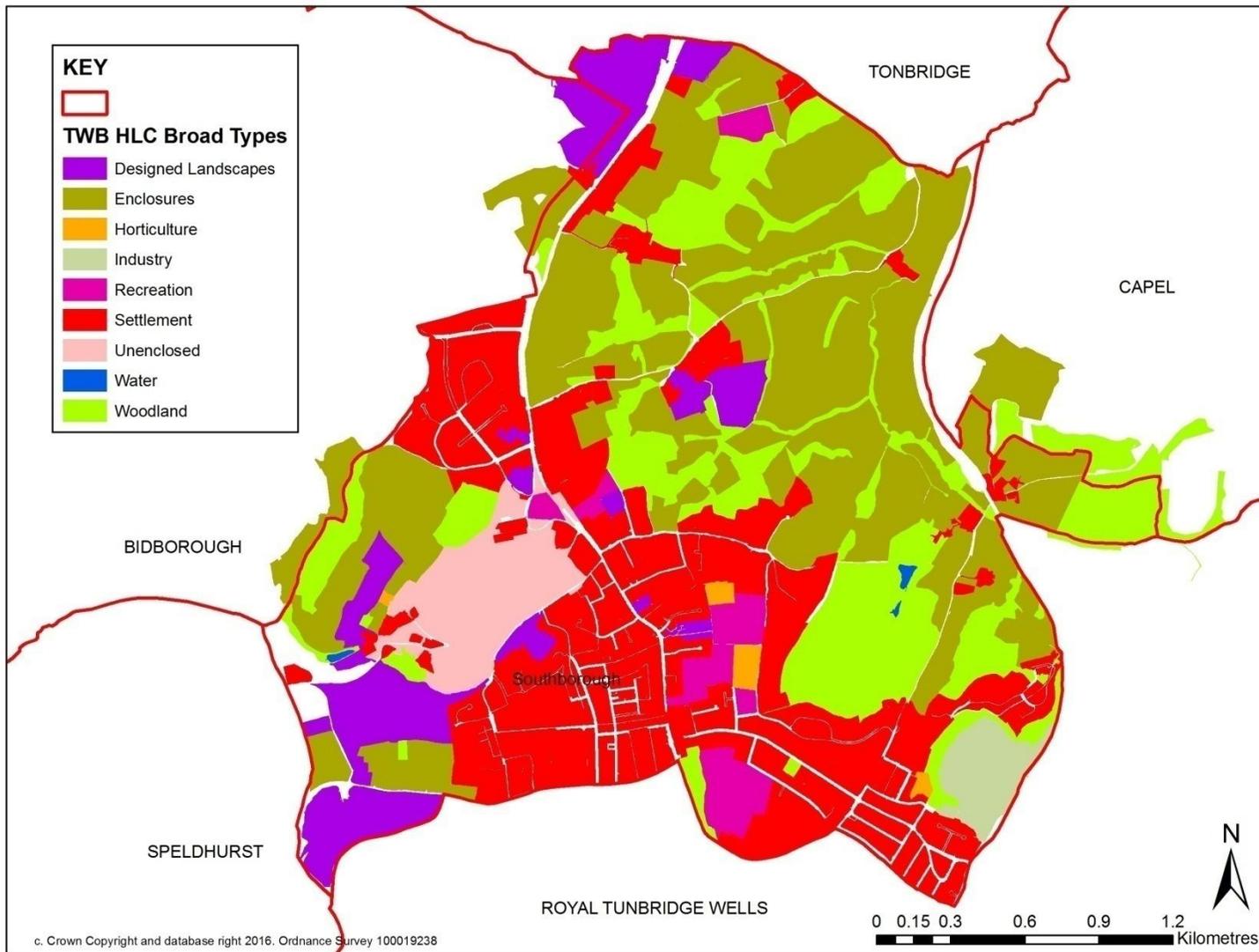
The origins and antiquity of the regular informal fields is difficult to assess, but these fields could date from the early post-medieval due to field re-organisation or may even be medieval in date.

BOROUGH OF ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS  
REVISED KENT HLC (2000)  
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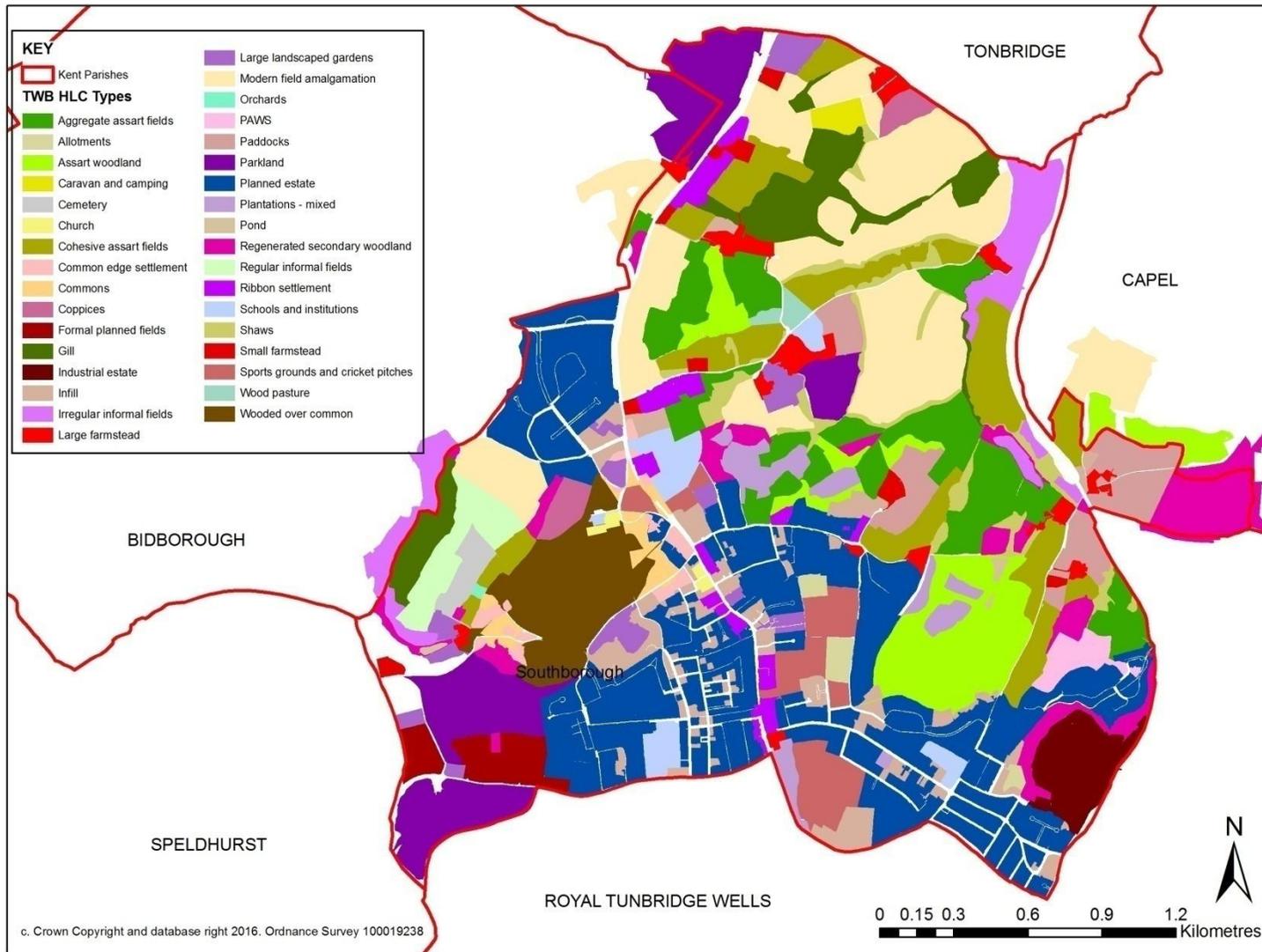
MAP 1

BOROUGH OF ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS  
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PARISH OF SOUTHBOROUGH



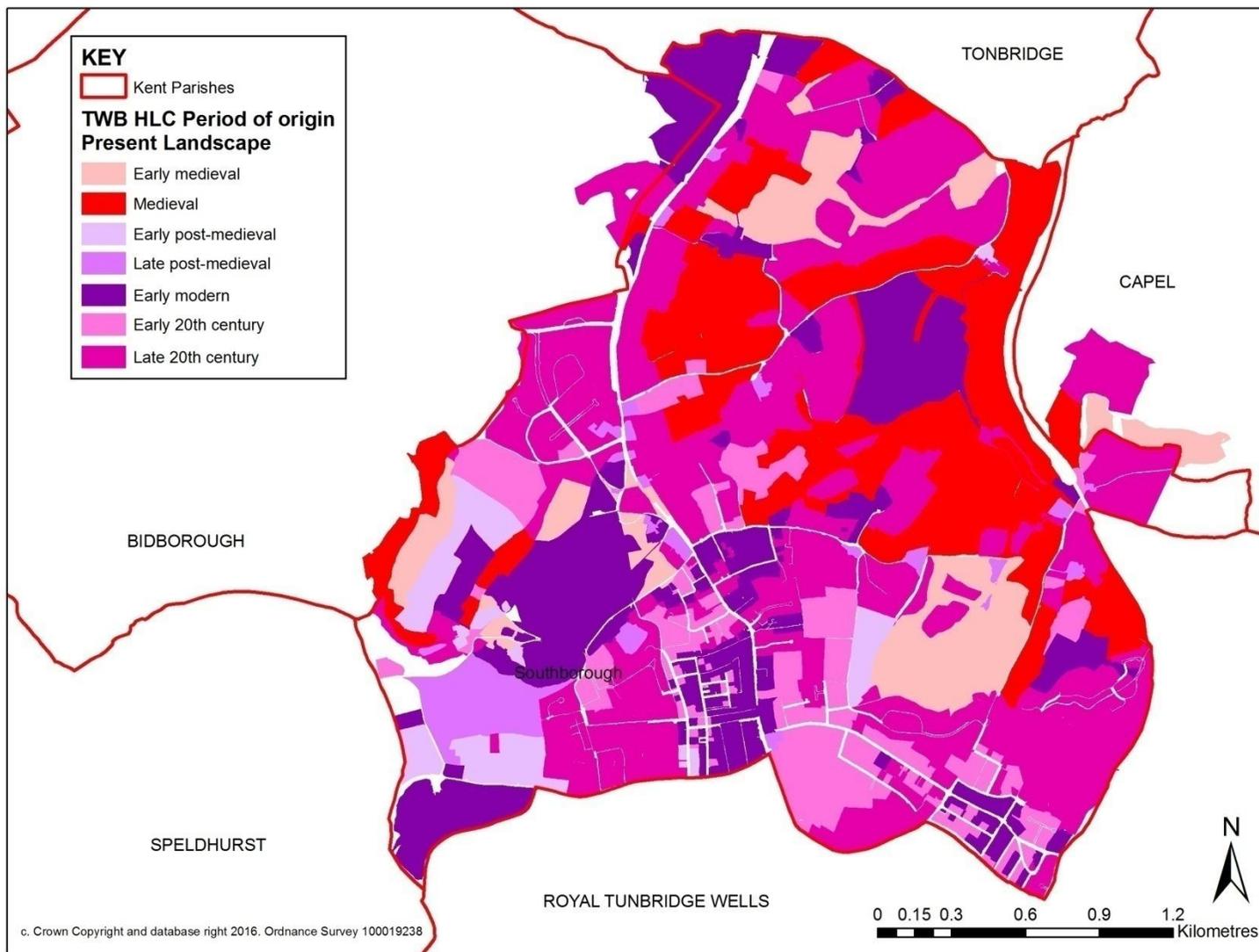
MAP 2

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



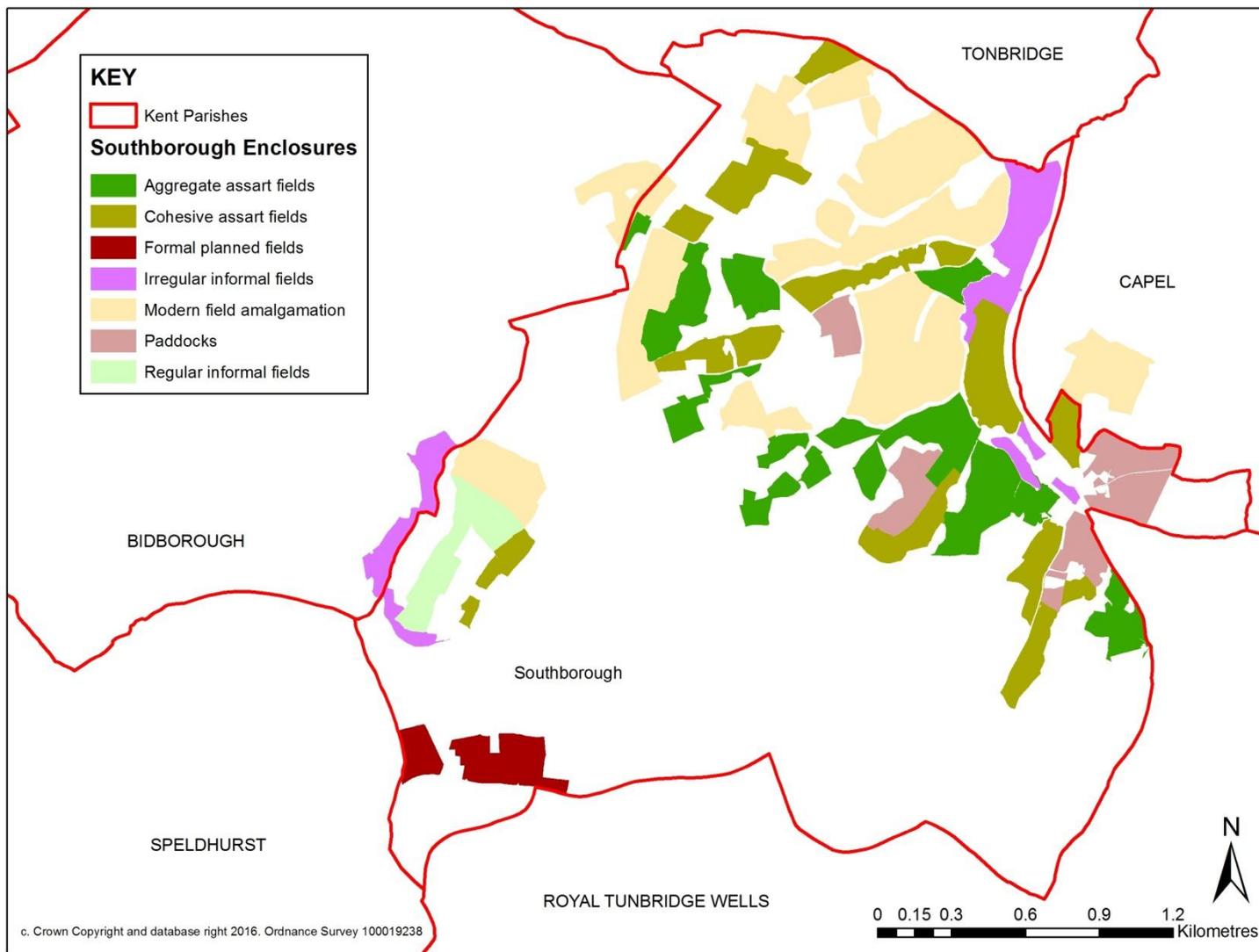
Map 3

BOROUGH OF ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS  
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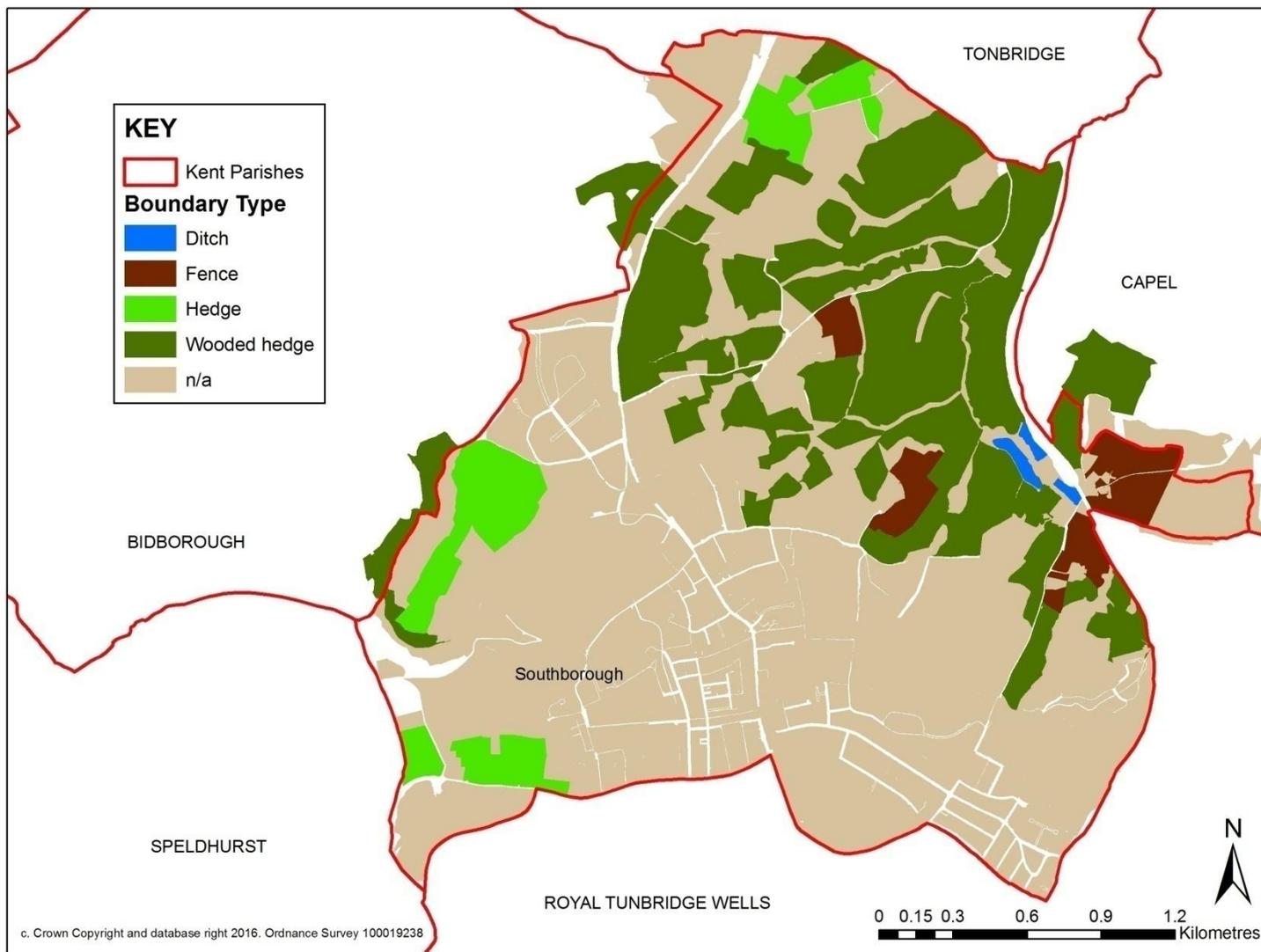
MAP 4

BOROUGH OF ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS  
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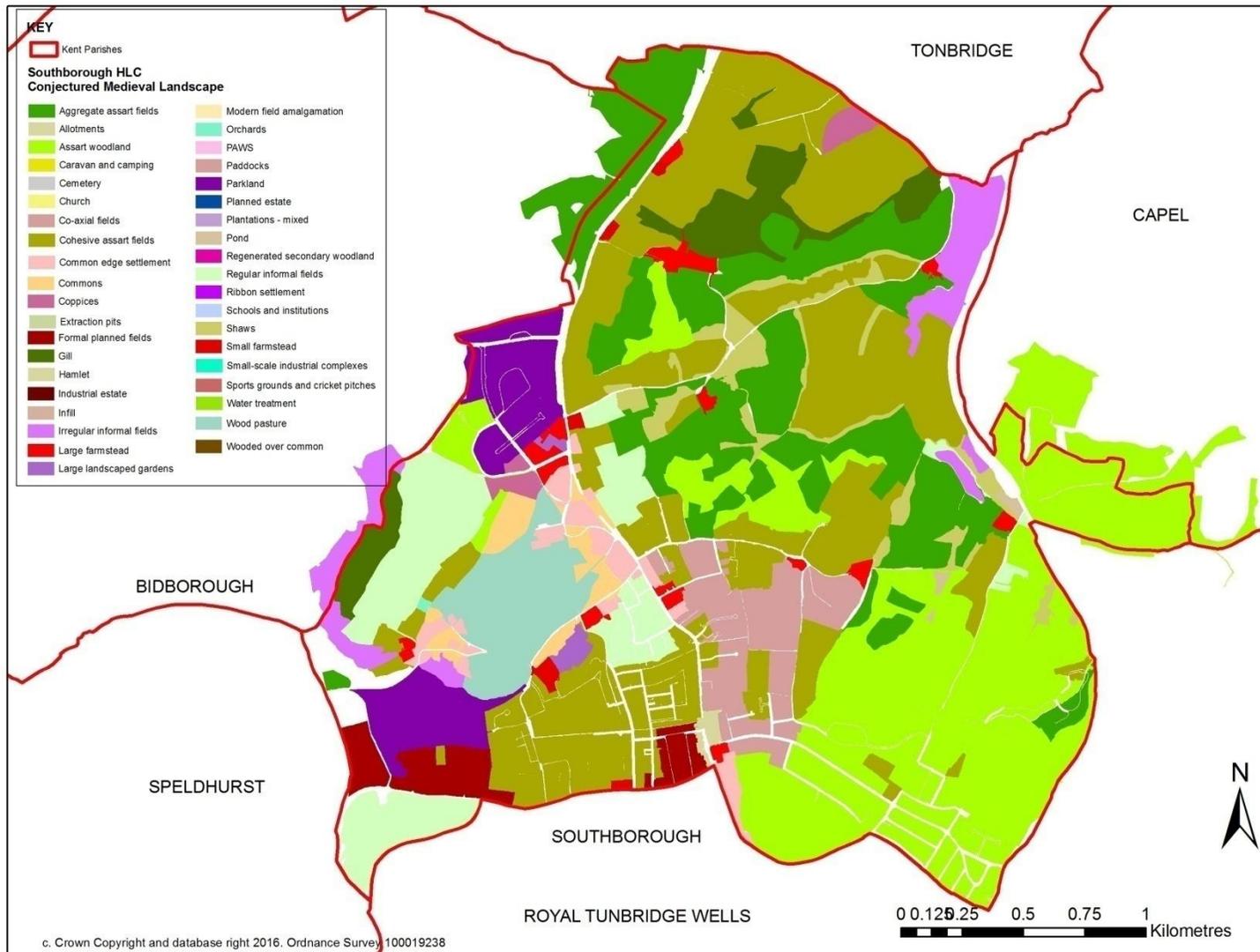
MAP 5

BOROUGH OF ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS  
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MAP 6

**BOROUGH OF ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS  
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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 Southborough is a sharp contrast of Early modern and C20 settlement to the south with remnants of the older medieval farmed landscape to the north. Southborough Common and Brokes Wood are modified areas of the early medieval landscape and abut this modern settlement. The wider context of the HLC of Southborough will become apparent once all the adjacent parishes have been characterised.

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. For example the division of land with their farmsteads into yardlands, sulungs, virgates etc. and interpreting medieval manorial surveys with the actual territories in the landscape.

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