

Tunbridge Wells Borough Local Development Framework



Sissinghurst Conservation Area Appraisal

Supplementary Planning Document

Adopted October 2012

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Preface

This document has been prepared by Tunbridge Wells Borough Council in partnership with the Cranbrook Conservation Area Advisory Committee (CCAAC), with particular thanks to Peter Mellor.

The initial draft was prepared by the Conservation Studio

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Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Sissinghurst is a small settlement near to Cranbrook and shares much of the same history. The Conservation Area itself coincides with the historic core fronting onto The Street, the main ridgetop thoroughfare through the village, but excluding later post-war housing to the north west.

1.2 The Sissinghurst Conservation Area was originally designated in October 1971 and is within the purview of the Cranbrook Conservation Area Advisory Committee (CCAAC), set up to give local advice to the Local Planning Authority on development issues. This Appraisal, prepared in close association with the CCAAC, generally corresponds with the principles published by English Heritage in 2006.

1.3 The area is also associated with Sissinghurst Castle, lying a mile north east of the village, which is the world-famous garden created by Vita Sackville-West and Harold Nicolson between 1930 and the early 1960s. The Grade 1 Listed castle ruins and gardens are at the centre of the Sissinghurst Castle Estate, the whole of which was donated to the National Trust in 1967 by their son Nigel, who lived there until his death in 2004. The property welcomes around 165,000 visitors a year to the castle, gardens and estate walks.

The Definition and Purpose of Conservation Areas

1.4 The first conservation areas were designated in England under the Civic Amenities Act 1967 and more than 8,000 now exist. Under Section 69 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, local planning authorities have a duty to designate as conservation areas any *"areas of special architectural or historic interest the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance."*

1.5 Conservation areas are diverse in size and character, but in general it is the quality and interest of the area that is of importance, rather than the individual buildings within it. Such designation gives the authority greater control over demolition, minor development, works to trees and advertisements in the conservation area. However, it also brings certain responsibilities. Under the terms of the 1990 Act, local authorities have a duty to review the extent of designation from time to time, to designate further areas if appropriate, to bring forward proposals for the preservation and enhancement of conservation areas (with public consultation) and to pay special attention to the character or appearance of conservation areas in exercising their planning powers.

1.6 It is not just the local planning authority that has a role in protecting and enhancing conservation areas. The principal guardians are the residents and business people who live and work in the conservation area who are responsible for maintaining the individual properties, which together contribute to the character of the conservation area.

1.7 Designation also raises awareness of an area's special attributes and can foster pride in the locality. Government planning guidance stresses that our built and natural heritage should be valued and protected for its own sake as a central part of our cultural heritage and that the responsibility for environmental stewardship is shared by everyone.

1.8 New development and change can take place in conservation areas, but designation should ensure that such proposals will not have an adverse effect on the character or appearance of the area.

The Purpose and Status of this Appraisal

1.9 The principal purpose of this Appraisal is to provide a firm basis upon which proposals for development within the Sissinghurst Conservation Area can be assessed, through defining those key elements that contribute to the special historic and architectural character and which should be preserved. It supplements and provides clarity to policies contained in the Tunbridge Wells Borough Local Plan

2006 and Core Strategy 2010; primarily those relating to demolition and development within conservation areas and should be read in conjunction with these Plans. It will therefore be a key document in maintaining character and promoting appropriate, sensitive proposals in the Conservation Area.

1.10 Other purposes include undertaking a review of the boundary in accordance with section 69(2) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, which requires local planning authorities *“from time to time to determine whether any further parts of the area should be designated.”* The Appraisal also highlights particular issues and some of the elements that detract from the appearance or character of the Conservation Area. These provide the basis for potential future actions for improvement.

1.11 In turn, in order to provide a firm basis against which to assess proposals for development, the following key objectives for conservation areas have been established:

- To review the boundaries of the conservation area
- To define the key characteristics and features that contribute to its special character or appearance which should be preserved or enhanced, providing a basis for making sustainable decisions about its future through planning decisions
- To record those principal elements that detract from the character or appearance of the conservation area and to identify opportunities for enhancement, potentially to be delivered through management plans or other initiatives
- To inform key agencies, residents etc., whose activities impact on the conservation area and to maximise the investment by all such stakeholders in the preservation and enhancement of the conservation area to the benefit of their social and economic quality of life
- To promote the public's understanding and enjoyment of the historic environment
- To protect and maintain biodiversity

1.12 This Supplementary Planning Document forms part of the Borough Council's Local Development Framework. In terms of the consultation process, this document followed the Statement of Community Involvement and its preparation has been subject to the involvement of key stakeholders, as well as a public consultation. This is set out more fully in Chapter 11 of this document.

1.13 This document has been approved by Tunbridge Wells Borough Council for development control purposes and will help guide the Council when making decisions about applications for development within, or on the edges of, the Sissinghurst Conservation Area. The Appraisal will also inform other agencies and individuals whose activities impact on the fabric of the Sissinghurst Conservation Area, such as the County and Borough Councils, Cranbrook & Sissinghurst Parish Council, Cranbrook Conservation Area Advisory Committee and local businesses and householders.

Chapter 2 The Planning Policy Context

National Guidance

2.1 Government advice on the control of conservation areas and historic buildings is set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2012, together with an accompanying [English Heritage Practice Guide](#) 2010. Further advice about conservation area control, including the production of management proposals, was produced by English Heritage in 2006.

Tunbridge Wells Borough Local Plan and Core Strategy DPD

2.2 There are two development management policies in the Tunbridge Wells Borough Local Plan 2006 which relate to conservation areas in general: Policies EN4 and EN5. Further policies about the control of development within Sissinghurst can also be found in the adopted Local Plan 2006, principally Policy EN1.

2.3 Policy EN4 seeks to control the demolition of buildings within conservation areas.

Policy EN4

Development involving proposals for the total or partial demolition of unlisted buildings which contribute positively to the character of a conservation area will not be permitted unless an overriding case can be made out against all of the following criteria:

- 1. The condition of the building, and the cost of repairing and maintaining it in relation to its importance and the value derived from its continued use;**
- 2. The adequacy of efforts made to retain the building in use, including efforts to find compatible alternative uses;**
- 3. The merits of alternative proposals for the site, and whether there are acceptable and detailed plans for any redevelopment; and**
- 4. Whether redevelopment will produce substantial planning benefits for the community, including economic regeneration or environmental enhancement.**

2.4 Policy EN5 sets out criteria for determining whether a development is appropriate within a conservation area.

Policy EN5

Proposals for development within, or affecting the character of, a conservation area will only be permitted if all of the following criteria are satisfied:

1. **The proposal would preserve or enhance the buildings, related spaces and vegetation which combine to form the character and appearance of the area;**
2. **The siting of the development would be similar to adjoining building frontage lines where this is important to the character of the conservation area;**
3. **The layout and arrangement of the building(s) would follow the pattern of existing development and spacing of adjoining plot widths where this is important to the character of the conservation area;**
4. **The scale, massing, use of materials, detailing, boundary treatment and landscaping would preserve or enhance the character of that part of the conservation area in which the proposal would be situated;**
5. **The use, or intensity of use, would be in sympathy with the character and appearance of that part of the conservation area in which the proposal would be situated;**
6. **The proposal would not result in the loss of trees, shrubs, hedges or other features important to the character of that part of the conservation area in which the proposal would be situated; and**
7. **In meeting the parking and access requirements, the character and amenity of the area would not be adversely affected.**

2.5 The adopted [Core Strategy](#) Development Plan Document, at Core Policy 4, sets out environment policy for the Borough.

Policy 1**Core Policy 4**

"The Borough's heritage assets, including Listed Buildings, Conservation Areas, Scheduled Ancient Monuments, archaeological sites and Historic Parks and Gardens will be conserved and enhanced and positive regard will be had to their settings".

2.6 The detailed character appraisal contained in this document will assist in the interpretation of these policies.

Other Local Plan Policies

2.7 There are a number of other general and specific policies in the Local Plan which are relevant to the Sissinghurst Conservation Area. Specific policy designations are set out in detail in the Tunbridge Wells Borough Local Plan 2006 and the Proposals Map. They can be accessed via the Local Plan link on the Borough Council's website at <http://www.tunbridgewells.gov.uk/localplan>. They can be summarised as follows:

- EN1 Design and other Development Control Criteria
- EN6 Shopfronts
- EN8 Outdoor Lighting
- EN10 Sites of Archaeological Interest
- EN11 Historic Parks and Gardens
- EN13 Tree Preservation Orders

- EN21 Areas of Important Open Space
- EN22 Areas of Landscape Importance
- EN25 Rural Landscape Protection

Chapter 3 Summary of Conservation Area's Special Interest

3.1 The distinctive features of the Sissinghurst Conservation Area include the following:

- A roadside village with a dense pattern of development made up of cottages and larger houses lining a historic ridgetop route
- Several buildings relating to the medieval and slightly later cloth-making industry
- A number of other medieval buildings relating to the earlier settlement of Mylkehouse Street survive
- The Conservation Area includes a large number of 16th century buildings, reflecting a period of economic prosperity and investment
- An area of 19th century buildings in the east is set back from the road and represents a later period of regeneration and the 'gentrification' of the settlement
- The use of a limited range of materials and the widespread application of cladding in the 18th and 19th centuries gives the buildings a unified appearance despite their construction over several hundred years
- The buildings represent good examples of local vernacular styles, as well as mid-19th century buildings displaying more varied forms
- Occasional views out to rolling, open countryside
- Oast houses and other rural buildings relating to past agricultural activities survive
- Historically, the village provided a mix of residential development and commercial premises, including inns, which provided for local needs and exploited passing trade. The present village continues this tradition

Chapter 4 Location and Landscape Setting



Sissinghurst

4.1 Sissinghurst is located approximately 1.5 miles north east of Cranbrook, 15 miles to the east of Tunbridge Wells and 15 miles to the south of Maidstone, with Ashford lying 15 miles to the east and Hastings 19 miles to the south. Although Cranbrook was historically the cloth-weaving centre, elements of this also extended outwards to Sissinghurst. The surrounding area contains a large amount of woodland, including Sissinghurst Park Wood, approximately 0.8 kilometres to the north east of the Conservation Area, which has been designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) in recognition of the wide variety of wild plant species found there. Other significant areas of woodland are found to the south of the Conservation Area and a large area of water is

located at Lake Chad.

4.2 The busy A262 between Lamberhurst and Biddenden runs through the settlement and Conservation Area and therefore a high volume of traffic passes through the settlement.



View to the north

4.3 Sissinghurst lies within the area of Lower Cretaceous geological deposits, which form the Hastings Beds and comprise sedimentary sand and clay deposits. The sands and clays have supported a strong tradition of brick and tile manufacturing, which makes an important contribution to the character of buildings in the locality, including their deep red and earth toned colourings. The use of sandstone appears to be limited to The Vicarage, Camden House and Holy Trinity Church, where it is used for both the building and its boundary wall, which

continues to the front of the former school. Additionally, there is a strong tradition of timber-framed building construction, as well as other uses of wood, including weatherboarding.



View along street

4.4 The village of Sissinghurst lies along a ridge of high ground overlooking the Crane Valley to the south and the valley of the Hammer Stream to the north east. This creates long views through the village along the main street, which are closed off by the gentle bend in the road at the eastern end. Where the building line breaks down, it also provides good views across the valley to the north, which includes orchards and some hop gardens. The views to the north are mostly blocked by the rise of the ridge and the building line, although Chapel Lane on the south side, breaks through this, providing views out to the south east.



View to the south

4.5 In places the Conservation Area adjoins the open countryside.



Common Road north

4.6 The fall of the ground to the north allows views out over the countryside. To the south, the views take in orchards. The lanes leading off The Street to the north (Common Road) and south (Chapel Lane) provide access to the surrounding countryside, while a metalled track and footpath lead through the fields to Sissinghurst Castle and its historic gardens to the north east. Chapel Lane descends the hillside through a steep-sided sunken lane, which opens out to provide views to the south east. The flat-lying course of Common Road is flanked by late 20th century houses, which eventually give way to open fields and orchards several hundred metres to the north west of the Conservation Area boundary.

4.7 The large area of open space of the Jubilee Fields Recreation Ground, at the western entrance to the Conservation Area, provides a rural-feeling approach to the Conservation Area to the south side of the road, although the north side has been built up for modern housing. This is built back from the road, with an intervening space for access and parking defined by white picket fencing and a wide grass verge, which helps to reduce the impact of the new development on the appearance of the Conservation Area. Beyond are the more sporadic individual properties on the western approach. These include the listed Sissinghurst Court and the Gatehouse with nearby



Jubilee Field Recreation Ground

oasthouse. At the eastern end of the Conservation Area, where The Street becomes Biddenden Road, open fields extend up to the Conservation Area on the northern side of the road. Fields on the south side, with low, managed hedgerows, give way to taller hedgerows, which provide the boundaries to small houses and the former farm buildings that have been converted to residential uses.

4.8 The buildings within the Conservation Area are screened from views from the south by the rise of the ridge to the south, although the Conservation Area is open to views from the north. Thick tree growth along the roadside and in gardens to the east and west screen the village from the approaches along the roads.

4.9 All of the approaches provide a soft transition into the built up centre, allowing Sissinghurst to sit comfortably within its landscape setting, although the northern approach along Common Road has been diminished by more recent developments.

Chapter 5 Historic Development and Archaeology

Before the 14th century

5.1 Sissinghurst lies within the ancient Weald, or forest, which stretched some 120 miles from East Kent to today's Hampshire. The name is Old English, referring to its wild and heavily forested character. The area is dominated by acidic clay and sandy soils, which have been poor for agriculture but supported economically valuable sources of timber for both building and fuel, as well as deposits of iron ore.

5.2 The Ordnance Survey records the alignment of a Roman road running into Sissinghurst from the south east in the vicinity of Church House. Ivan Margary recorded that the actual course of this road is uncertain, although it seems likely that it does exist, if not in the precise location recorded. Sissinghurst's position on a ridgeline on the course of a Roman road would make it a likely place for at least some Roman activity. Evidence of iron smelting during the Roman period is recorded within the local area and includes a Roman metal working site at Little Farningham Wood, approximately one mile to the south west. This has been designated as a Scheduled Monument.

5.3 Earlier records of the area refer to the Denes of Cadaca or Karkeregge in the Dene of Chart, which were purchased by the Archbishop of Canterbury in AD 843. Denes, or Dens, were areas of woodland that were specially managed to provide pannage for pigs, a prestigious food source in Anglo Saxon England. The origin of Cadaca is unclear, although it is probably a personal name, while Karkeregge appears to combine the abbreviated Cadaca and the topographic term 'regge' or ridge. This area of the Weald is traversed by many former droveways, which may have originated in the medieval period to provide routes between these specialist woodland pastures and their manorial centres on the lower lying land. It is probable that The Street represents one of these ancient droveways.

5.4 The place name Sissinghurst is first recorded in AD 1200 as the name of a manor, which was probably located on, or near, the site of Sissinghurst Castle. It appears to be of Old English origin, derived from Saxenhurst or Saxing-hurst. A family of that name is recorded as owning the settlement in the early 13th century. The 'Sissing' element incorporates the Old English -ingas suffix, which refers to the territory or principal settlement of a tribal group. The -hurst element refers to an area of woodland in an upland area. This suggests that the area was dominated by woodland attached to an estate elsewhere.

Post 14th century

5.5 Another settlement, known as Milkhouse Street, is recorded in the local area from the early 14th century. Edward I is recorded as staying at Mylkhush in July 1305. This name probably derives from Mickle House, meaning 'Great' House, and may represent an alternative name for the manor at Sissinghurst. However, Christopher Saxon's map of Kent, produced in 1575, shows Sissinghurst as a large enclosure surrounded by a pale or fence and therefore probably representing an imparked estate, with Mylkehouse as a separate settlement at some distance to the south west. The settlement is also recorded as Mylkehouse Street, which may relate to a visible remainder of a Roman road, or the development of a larger settlement aligned on the road now named The Street. It does, however, suggest the presence of a larger settlement on the site of the present Conservation Area.



The Old Post Office

5.6 In 1331, Edward III invited Flemish weavers to settle in the area of Cranbrook. This saw the establishment of a cloth manufacturing industry in the area, which persisted until the early 17th century. While Cranbrook is seen as the centre for the industry, cloth halls, the houses built to house both rich weaving families and the large looms used for making broadcloth, were built in many rural locations surrounding the town. The Sissinghurst Post Office/Bell Cottage, nos. 1-4 Reed's Cottages and Collin's Place are all examples of cloth halls built during the 15th and 16th centuries. The locally produced Milkhouse Street Thread was a stiff waxed twine used for the sewing of hop pockets. Charled Bridgland was the last weaver in the parish and lived at Virginia Cottage.

5.7 A chapel of the Holy Trinity is recorded at Mylkehouse in a grant by the Archbishop of Canterbury from 1401. A chapel would have been used for the celebration of divine service, but would not have been licensed for burials, marriages or baptisms, which would have taken place at a larger church, reflecting the lower status of the settlement in which it was located. As a chapel of ease, or easement, it was constructed to remove the pressure of a large population on the main church of the Parish in Cranbrook. A 15th century priest's house is located near the centre of the Conservation Area at the junction of The Street and Chapel Lane and is apparently near to the site of the chapel itself. The chapel was suppressed with other chantry chapels in 1548. In 1840, ruins of the chapel were recorded as standing in the grounds of Walnut Trees, The Street, but were subsequently demolished.

5.8 King's Head House, The Street, is also of 15th century construction, perhaps indicating the extent of the settlement at this date. A large house, Plummers, was located at Sissinghurst Place in 1490, but this has entirely disappeared. A large number of buildings were constructed in Sissinghurst in the 16th century, perhaps reflecting reinvestment in the area during the economic growth that followed the dissolution of the monasteries and growth of mercantile commerce. Nine listed buildings in the Conservation Area have their origins in this century. Sissinghurst Manor (known as Sissinghurst Castle since it was used to house French Prisoners of War during the Seven Years War, 1756-1763) also grew in importance in the 16th century, hosting a royal visit by Elizabeth I in 1573.

5.9 By contrast, only two buildings of 17th century construction survive, although the original part of Sissinghurst Court, outside the Conservation Area, was built in the 17th century. The weaving industry declined to the point of ceasing in the South of England by the mid-17th century and it appears that the area suffered an economic decline at this time. The 17th century buildings include a cottage and a row of cottages, construction of which may reflect attempts to increase income from existing property through rental.



Since 1850

17th century cottages



King's Head House

5.10 19th century accounts of Sissinghurst, or Milkehouse Street, record that the village had a bad reputation throughout the previous century and was known as a dangerous location, perhaps reflecting continuing economic depression. King's Head House, which was a public house or inn from the 17th century onwards, maintained a doss house for vagrants during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Only one listed building of 18th century construction, a cottage, is recorded in the Conservation Area, although several earlier buildings were enlarged or refaced at this time.

5.11 The mid 19th century witnessed a rapid period of genteel development in the eastern part of the village. According to a 19th century newspaper account, the name of Milkehouse Street was changed to Sissinghurst in the mid-19th century to shed the stigma of its recent history of violence and poverty. This was apparently instigated by Lady Louisa De Spaen. In 1842, she

purchased Plummer's Place, a 16th century house on the south east side of the village and had it demolished to make way for the building which is now known as Sissinghurst Place. This was partly destroyed by fire in 1948. She had also built Camden Lodge, just to the west of Sissinghurst, in 1840, although it appears that she never lived there. The Church of the Holy Trinity was built in 1837-1838 and the adjacent former school was erected in 1841. The Old Vicarage on the north side of The Street was built in 1843. A small Wesleyan Methodist Chapel was built in the centre of the village in 1869.

5.12 Jubilee Field was bought for the use of the village in 1887 (Queen Victoria's Jubilee) and the adjacent St. George's Institute was erected between 1908 and 1912. Both are central to the social life of the village throughout the 20th and the early part of the 21st centuries.

5.13 Sissinghurst had a number of public houses, both big and small, as well as several craftsmen's premises and shops, up until the 20th century. Several of these have now been converted for residential use. However, the village does retain some shops and small businesses, as well as one large public house and a restaurant, which add to its vitality and interest.



Former Primary School

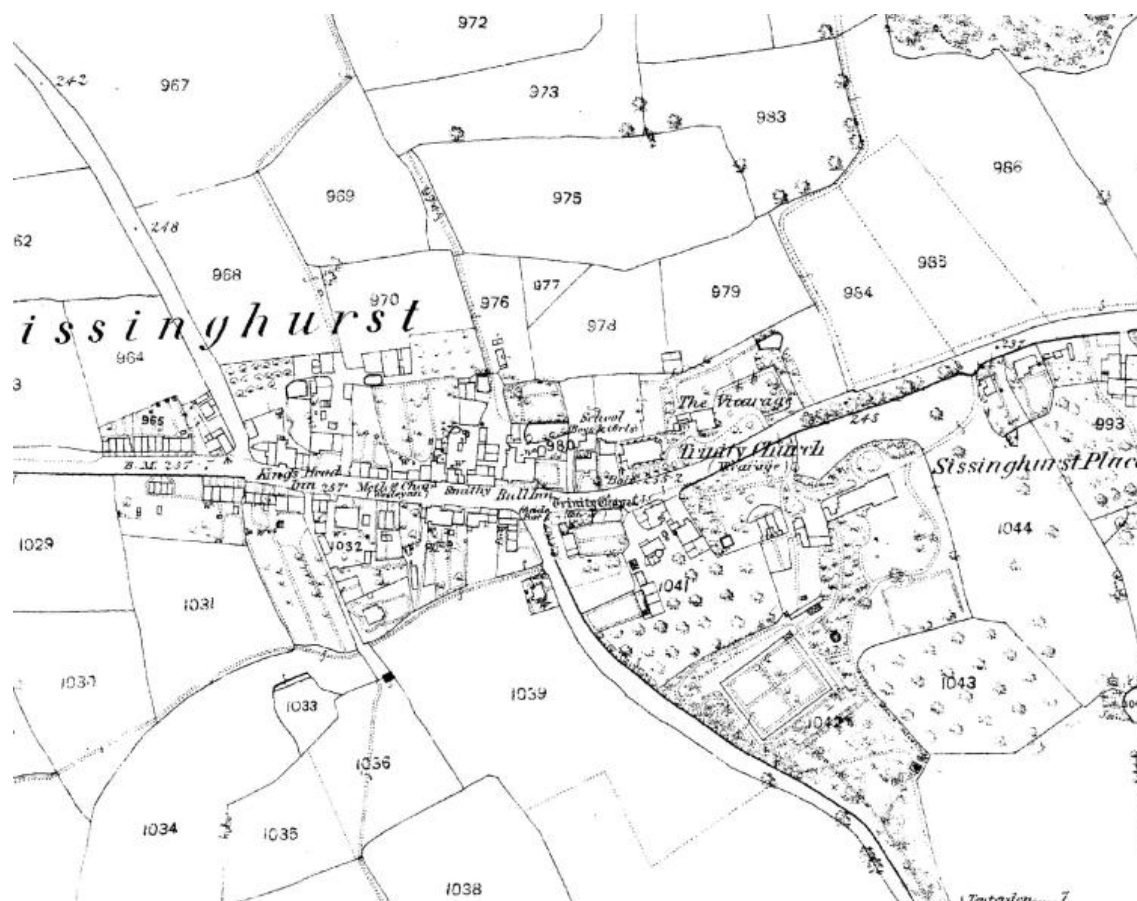


Figure 1 1870 map of Sissinghurst

Archaeology

5.14 Archaeology, which includes standing remains and built structures, as well as buried deposits, can add another layer of understanding to the evolution and present day significance of the settlement. Every building in the Conservation Area potentially contains information about how the building came to its present form, although this might be hidden beneath layers of later alterations and additions. Any activity that disturbs these layers may therefore provide an opportunity for new information, research, interpretation and education. Before granting permission for further changes, however, and as

recommended in PPS5, the Borough Council may ask an applicant to provide an 'Archaeological Evaluation' of the building or proposed development site, to help the Council reach an informed decision about the proposals.

5.15 The consistent presence of the building line and roads, which form the central part of the village, will have suppressed the build up of sub-surface archaeological deposits over the past three to four centuries. However, to the rear of these, where there has not been a significant impact from subsequent development, there is good potential for the presence of the sub-surface remains of ancillary buildings and structures relating to the main buildings and dating from the medieval and post-medieval periods. These would be of interest in illuminating the economic history of the village by providing evidence of the agricultural and craft activities undertaken.

5.16 The local Historic Environment Record (HER) is held by Kent County Council and includes records of finds and past archaeological investigations. For Sissinghurst, this includes records of many of the historic buildings recorded within the Conservation Area. Records of sub-surface archaeological remains located within the Conservation Area, or its immediate vicinity, are limited to the location of the medieval Chapel of the Holy Trinity, which was demolished in 1840. This is located in the garden of Walnut Trees, on the corner of Chapel Lane.

5.17 In addition to the Historic Environment Record (HER) records, the proposed course of the Roman road, recorded by the Ordnance Survey, represents the second potential sub-surface archaeological feature of interest and is believed to run up the slope from the south to cross The Street at the junction with Chapel Lane. Ivan Margary argued that the line of the road might continue, roughly on the line of Common Road, before heading north towards Knoxbridge (1948).

5.18 The gardens of Sissinghurst Place also represent the site of the 16th century house of Plummer's Place, which is believed to have been a large home. While no above ground remains of this house are evident, evidence from sub-surface remains would be of interest in identifying the nature and status of this house and its role in the development of Sissinghurst.

Chapter 6 Spatial Analysis

Townscape



View along street

6.1 The form of Sissinghurst can be best described as a simple linear row plan running east-west, with lanes to the north and south. Later 20th century expansion around the northern limb.

6.2 Sissinghurst's origin as a roadside settlement is embodied through the continued relationship of the buildings of the village with the central thoroughfare of The Street. The Conservation Area contains buildings with frontages facing The Street, with gardens or yards largely concealed behind them. It also includes a few properties to the rear of the main building line, which are accessed by tracks leading off The Street. In the western part of the Conservation Area the buildings are closely spaced,

presenting a seemingly continuous frontage, despite the many breaks between buildings. This creates a strong sense of enclosure within The Street.

6.3 In the east, the boundary of the Conservation Area takes in a very large area to the south of The Street, in order to include the large gardens and setting to Sissinghurst Place. This property, as well as several surrounding buildings which were previously ancillary structures such as stables, is set back from the road behind thick shrubbery. This breaks the roadside focus of the settlement, creating a more private, secluded atmosphere. Other buildings in the east of the Conservation Area exhibit a similar character, including The Old Vicarage, Church House, Church House Oast and Walnut Trees. These are set back from the road and are separated from the public thoroughfare by high hedgerows and mature trees, or substantial garden walls. Plummer's Farmhouse, near the eastern limit of the Conservation Area, is more closely positioned to the road, forms a gateway role and with an open aspect that is a reminder of the character further to the west.



Sissinghurst Place ancillary building



Church House Church House Oast

6.4 The two side roads leading off The Street (Chapel Lane and Common Road) have rather different characters. Common Road is relatively wide, with pavements on both sides. It is entered between two historic buildings, with the impressive focal chimney stack of the former King's Head Inn on the right and provides a long vista to the north west, but is flanked by modern housing development after leaving the Conservation Area. Chapel Lane, by contrast, runs steeply downhill through a sunken lane and then emerges into a very rural setting with glimpses across the lower lying land to the south east and south west.

6.5 The modern housing development to the north west of the Conservation Area includes some new development that is accessed from, and relates to, The Street and forms a clear extension of the settlement. The older, post-war development to the north of this, including Broad View, Milk House Cottages, Hovendens and Cleavers, does not relate to the village as strongly and is largely hidden away behind the building line and areas of tall trees to the west.

Spaces, Trees and Landscape

6.6 Green spaces within the Conservation Area are limited to the churchyard and private gardens, although there are further green spaces proposed for inclusion in the revised Conservation Area, such as Jubilee Field, the cemetery and land around it to the north of the village. Many of the gardens are large and include significant trees, which provide an attractive background to the buildings in the Conservation Area and integrate the village into its countryside location. The importance of this is recognised with Sissinghurst Place being included on the Kent list of Historic Parks and Gardens as well as Sissinghurst Court, which is just outside the conservation area to the west, which is on the English Heritage Register. Descriptions of these are set out in the detailed survey reports. The churchyard to the south and east of Trinity Church provides some publicly accessible open space. A wide grassy verge on the north side of The Street, just to the west of the Conservation Area, provides an area of amenity grass.



Hop Pocket Close



View West

6.7 The eastern part of the Conservation Area has an abundance of well grown mature trees that line the roadside, screening the buildings from the road and creating a strong sense of enclosure. The western part of the Conservation Area is less well treed, providing greater transparency between the buildings and roadside. Trees form an important pinchpoint on Chapel Lane at the entrance to the village, between the gardens of Mylkehouse and Walnut Trees.

6.8 As a result of the enclosure created by the closely spaced buildings and tall tree lines, the Conservation Area has only a limited relationship with the surrounding landscape. Glimpses into the farmland and gardens beyond the building line on The Street are possible through the occasional gaps between the buildings, as well as through wider breaks, such as the car park at The Bull Inn. The long lines of fruit planting on the opposite side of the valley, to the north, provide particular interest. Other notable views look across the cemetery and surrounding land to the north of the village.



Trees form a pinchpoint

6.9 The Jubilee Field provides a green edge to the area of the historic village, although the well maintained grass and children's play equipment gives the area a more urban feel. It is bounded by mature trees that screen the landscape beyond, although this generally continues as large gardens with arable land beyond (formerly parkland). To the south of the Conservation Area, a number of small properties with gardens form a buffer between the Conservation Area and the larger fields of the surrounding countryside. Glimpses along the tracks and driveways between houses on the south side of The Street terminate with these properties and large trees beyond them. Further to the east, the large area of gardens at Sissinghurst Place form another barrier between the public areas of the Conservation Area and the countryside to the south, although it is accessed along Chapel Lane. At the eastern limit of the Conservation Area, views to the north of the road from Plummer's Farmhouse and the surrounding properties provide its best connection with the countryside, looking out across open fields and the valley beyond towards Sissinghurst Castle. The increased height of the hedgerows over the years has regrettably reduced this rural vista. The recent farm buildings at Whitegate Yard, whilst providing rural employment, are a serious visual detractor on the approach to the Conservation Area from the Biddenden direction. They may mellow in time, particularly if combined with tree and hedge planting.

Focal Points, Views and Vistas

6.10 Although basically linear, there are subtle bends in the layout of The Street and this provides a sequence of unfolding views punctuated by buildings, giving an intimacy to the centre.

6.11 The character within the Conservation Area is strongly related to the main street running through it and the roads that branch off. The strong enclosure created by the buildings and boundaries lining the street, and the lines of trees along it, draw the eye along The Street to prominent locations and features. Most noteworthy of these are:

North side of The Street:

- A group of buildings lining the north side of The Street from no. 1 Reed Cottage to At Last, itself an important focal building as a result of its distinctive 'stripy', black and white painted weatherboarding
- Another group formed by King's Head House, Forge Cottage and the junction of The Street and Common Road. King's Head House is a particularly important focal building as a result of its large scale and heavy massing, which is accentuated by the large Tudor chimney stack on its western facade and the tall gable ends presented to the road either side of the recessed central section
- The Bull Inn gives definition to the above space from the north side of The Street and has its own value in its own right as a focal building, with its scale and massing accentuated by the open space of the car park and gardens surrounding it and terminating the view on the southern approach up Chapel Lane
- Holy Trinity Church also acts as a focal point, seen from the west, with its tower standing out at the west end of the building

South side of The Street:

- Oak Cottage, nos. 1 and 2 Chapel Lane, Sunnyside and Mylkehouse all contribute to a focal group at the junction of The Street and Chapel Lane
- The building occupied by Rankins Restaurant, on the south side of The Street, stands forward from the general building line and has greater mass than the surrounding structures and, as such, is considered to be a focal building
- Plummer's Farmhouse represents a focal building at the eastern approach to the Conservation Area. This building has particular presence as a result of its long elevation facing the road and the very consistent use of white-painted weatherboarding and joinery across this frontage. The simplicity of the building is accentuated by the unadorned grass verge that leads up to it from the road and the lack of any boundary treatment between it and the road, while surrounding buildings are more secluded

Chapter 7 Identity Areas and Significant Buildings

7.1 The Conservation Area's everyday vitality and special features have been outlined in Chapter 3 and its historic and archaeological elements described in Chapter 5. These can be found throughout the Conservation Area, but to place each in its specific context this Appraisal has identified two 'Identity Areas' with different townscape character:

- **Area A:** The tight knit cottages/ commercial centre, which lies to the west of the junction of Chapel Lane and The Street
- **Area B:** The lower density, residential area to the east of the junction of Chapel Lane and The Street

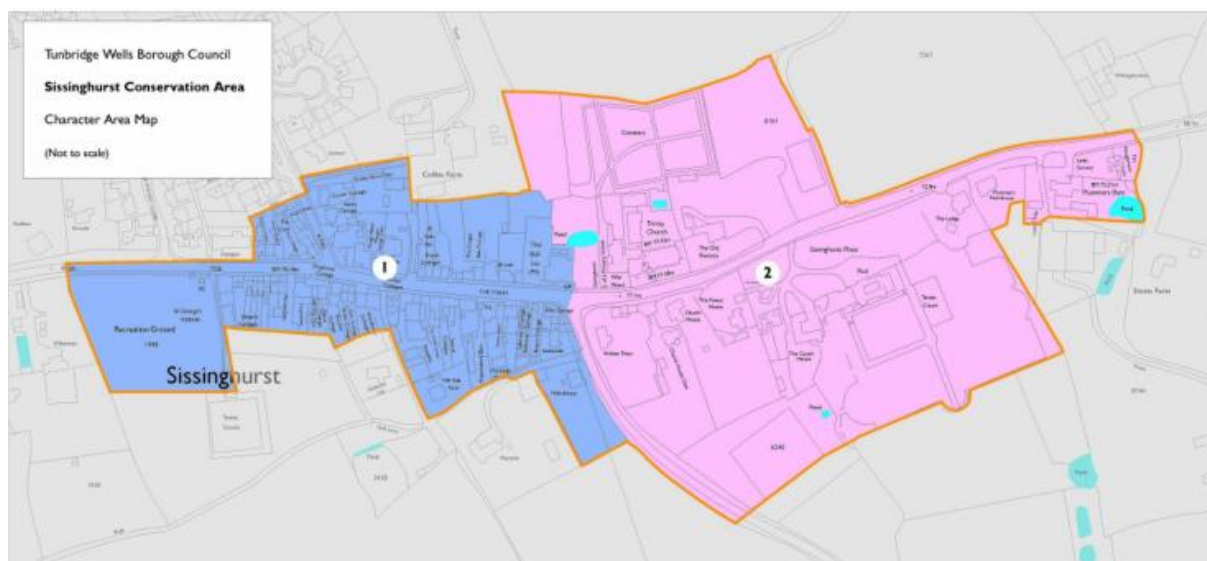


Figure 2 Character Area Map

Building Types



Shopfront converted

7.2 The Conservation Area contains a range of buildings that might be considered typical of a successful and vigorous small rural community in the heartland of Kent. The majority of the buildings are in residential use and include modestly-sized cottages, as well as larger, more prestigious family homes. Several of these have been reconverted back from commercial use into homes, although the village retains a range of useful shops and businesses. These include The Bull Inn, a takeaway and a restaurant, all of which serve local needs, as well as providing facilities for people passing through the village. A general stores incorporating a post office can be found on the south side of The Street. Some residential buildings retain elements of agricultural structures, including Church

House Oast, which includes a converted oast kiln. The Church of the Holy Trinity and adjacent former Sissinghurst Primary School represent buildings with public functions inside the Conservation Area. The former Methodist chapel standing within the row of cottages on the north side of The Street has been converted to residential use. It is clear, however, that the trend towards residential use of buildings is gradually reducing the number of commercial properties in the Conservation Area, which may result in some loss of its vitality. This reduction has occurred gradually over the past 50 years.

Listed Buildings

7.3 The Conservation Area contains a total of 18 listed buildings, of which two are listed Grade II* and 16 are listed Grade II. Along the north side of The Street, these listed buildings form an almost continuous group, while on the south side they are more dispersed between mainly 19th century buildings which, although unlisted, have been assessed as making a 'positive' contribution to the Conservation Area (see **Positive Buildings**). Listed and positive buildings make up the majority of the structures within the Conservation Area, with very few (10) further buildings being judged as being neutral in their impact. This high concentration of good quality, historic buildings demonstrates why Sissinghurst is a Conservation Area.

7.4 10 of the Grade II listed buildings are of 16th century origin and include two farmhouses (Plummer's Farmhouse and April Cottage/The Cottage/Corner House), two further cloth halls (Collins Place and nos. 1-4 Reed's Cottages), two hall houses (Lilac Cottage/Hazelhurst and The Bull Inn) and three further houses (Virginia House, At Last and Church House).

Positive Buildings

7.5 In addition to the listed buildings, a further number (34) of unlisted buildings have been identified as being buildings of 'townscape merit'. Buildings identified as having townscape merit will vary, but commonly they will be good examples of relatively unaltered historic buildings where their style, detailing and building materials provide the streetscape with interest and variety. Most importantly, they make a positive contribution to the special interest of the Conservation Area. Where a building has been heavily altered, and restoration would be impractical, they are excluded.

7.6 Government guidance in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2012, advises that a general presumption exists in favour of retaining those buildings which make a positive contribution to the character or appearance of a Conservation Area. The guidance note states that proposals to demolish such buildings should be assessed against the same broad criteria as proposals to demolish listed buildings.



Chapel



1&2 School Cottages

7.7 Buildings that are considered to make a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the Sissinghurst Conservation Area, or that have a particular relevance to its special historical or architectural interest, are marked on the Townscape Analysis Map (see Figure 3).

7.8 Most of the positive buildings identified are cottages, or rows of cottages, that reflect the low status development of the village in the 18th and 19th centuries. These include good examples of late 19th century cottages, such as Verdun Cottages, which use red and blue brick chequer work to add an element of decorative detail to otherwise simple buildings. They also have group value with the more detailed listed

buildings.

Identity Area A: The Western, Tight-knit Commercial Centre

This area also includes the Common Road and The Street to the west of the junction with Chapel Lane.

- A densely built up village centre largely formed of historic cottage rows with a scatter of larger properties
- The village centre has a strong sense of enclosure with glimpsed views between buildings to gardens and rural landscape beyond
- The buildings have a strong relationship with the former drovers' road (The Street), which runs along the top of a ridge of higher land
- Where gardens do divide properties from the roadside pavement, they are narrow cottage gardens and connection is maintained through use of transparent boundary treatments, including black-painted iron railings and white picket fences



Character Area A

- Visible cottage gardens give the otherwise densely developed area a rural character
- A number of shops, a restaurant and businesses maintain the vibrancy of the community
- Restrained use of street lighting and traffic signage prevents visual intrusions
- Use of a restricted range of materials unites the buildings despite their construction over a considerable period of time
- Buildings related to the medieval and slightly later cloth-making industry survive
- Shopfronts were inserted into buildings in the 19th and early 20th centuries and have been retained, despite the conversion of some of these buildings back to residential use
- Although the local vernacular styles predominate, the later 19th century buildings use more universal styles, which are adapted through use of local materials
- Large areas of publicly accessible green space beyond the dense village centre

7.9 The Grade II* listed buildings are King's Head House and The Old Post Office/Bell Cottage. King's Head House is a 15th century hall house with projecting wings, which were added during the 16th century. The building occupies a prominent street corner at the junction of The Street and Common Road, making it very conspicuous. The timber frame is largely hidden by the 18th century cladding of red and blue brick at ground floor level and tile hanging to the first floor. The roof of the main block is hipped and covered with handmade clay tiles, while the projecting wings have exposed gables with bargeboards jettied out over the first floor. The gable to the right leans forward slightly and is shown in a historic photograph of 1910 supporting a hanging sign advertising the King's Head Public House. A previous shopfront with narrow glazing bars no longer exists. The large chimney stack on the western elevation is particularly noteworthy, rising in several chamfered stages. A small area to the west of the house is fenced off as garden. The adjoining Forge Cottage to the east (which is a Grade II listed building) contributes to its setting.



King's Head House



Bell Cottage and the Old Post Office

7.10 The Old Post Office, with the built-in post box, and Bell Cottage stand further to the east, also on the north side of The Street. The building is a former cloth hall, now a cottage and shop, built in the 15th century with 16th century alterations and 18th century cladding. It is timber framed on a rendered plinth with weatherboard cladding and rendered ground floor to the right, with a large, double shopfront to the centre. The continuous ridge-line of the clay tile roof unites the structure, despite the divided ground floor frontage and irregular fenestration. The joinery of the casement windows has been painted white to the right (The Old Post Office) but black to the left (Bell Cottage), accentuating the division of the building. The black-painted guttering of Bell Cottage further articulates the division of the

building. The shopfront has two large shop windows, each of three vertical rectangular lights either side of the door, which is part glazed. The shopfront is painted green, which contrasts well with the white of the surrounding weatherboarding. The building has significant architectural detail to the rear, although

this is not appreciated from the public realm. The building's setting is made up of the adjoining structures, which include the former Methodist Chapel and the Grade II listed At Last, as well as the surrounding public realm.



The Bull Inn

7.11 The Bull Inn is particularly prominent within the Conservation Area. It is a large hall house of 16th century construction, now used as a public house. It has a timber frame on a red brick plinth, but was extensively altered in the late 19th or early 20th century because of its commercial use. The frontage on The Street is therefore not particularly remarkable, being rendered with a cornice band between the ground and first floor level. The roof is attractively covered with handmade clay tiles and is hipped with a number of rendered chimney stacks. The sides of the building, including the later extensions to the rear, are covered with tile hanging. The ground floor windows are

large mullioned casements and remain as they were shown on a postcard dated 1910, as does the curious 'Tudor' arched porch, which is offset to the left. The building makes an important contribution to the roadside environment, although the rather bleak forecourt and its adjacent car park has a negative impact on its appearance. This was made worse in the 1960s when the barn adjacent to At Last was truncated by half.

7.12 At Last, which stands to the west of The Bull Inn, is also a 16th century house covered with weatherboarding and with a steeply pitched clay tile roof. The building is highly distinctive on account of its 'stripy' elevations, made up of alternately black- and white-painted weatherboarding, which has a very eye catching effect.



At Last

7.13 Virginia House and Lilac Cottage/Hazelhurst Cottage have both been modified to include shopfronts. Lilac Cottage/Hazelhurst Cottage includes a 19th century shop window and an early 20th century butcher's shop window. The later 20th century shop window at Virginia House is a large extension extending into the house to the right. Both buildings have red brick at ground floor level with white weatherboarding above and clay tiled hipped roofs, although Virginia House appears to have been truncated and has an exposed gable to the left.

7.14 Two 17th century buildings are located in the Conservation Area, including Nelson Cottage/The Old Bakery at the western limit of the Conservation Area and Forge Cottage, which is adjoined to King's Head House. The Old Bakery is apparently a 17th century cottage with a gabled 18th century extension to the front. The attached structures of no.6 The Street and Nelson Cottage are the two remaining buildings of a pretty cottage row that used to extend considerably further to the west, but was partially demolished in 1954. Forge Cottage was built as a 17th century extension to King's Head House.

7.15 Listed buildings in the Conservation Area built during the 18th century include no. 5 Reed's Cottages, which is attached to the adjacent Methodist Chapel, as well as Alpine Cottage/Old Star Cottage/Thorntons, which was built as a cottage row in c.1700, with alterations in the 20th century, including the insertion of a shopfront at the western end. Old Star Cottage was used as a small public house, The Star, in the 19th century.

Identity Area B: The Eastern, Low-density Residential Area

7.16 This area includes Chapel Lane and the land to the east.

- This is an area of secluded residential properties, set back from the road behind tall tree lines and hedgerows in peaceful garden surroundings
- It includes a few buildings of medieval or 16th century origin, although the majority date from the mid-19th century and represent a phase of regeneration of the village as a more genteel settlement
- There is a greater use of national styles and materials, including ashlar and slate roof tiles
- Public buildings, including the Church of the Holy Trinity and the former Sissinghurst Primary School, reflect popular philanthropic and religious concerns of the mid-19th century
- Wide views out to the surrounding countryside are available along lanes and over rural hedgerows
- The road is lined with tall trees, which arch over it, giving the area a rural feeling, but creating a strong sense of enclosure



Character Area B

7.17 The 15th century priest's house, which is incorporated within the 18th century house at Walnut Trees, represents the third listed medieval building in the Conservation Area. This is a timber framed structure with red brick cladding at ground floor level and tile cladding to the first floor, with a plain tiled roof over. The listing description does not distinguish between the medieval and 18th century elements of the building, which is largely hidden from the public road by the tall hedges that surround it.

7.18 Plummer's Farmhouse, which is located on the eastern fringe of the village, is a 16th century, two-storey farmhouse with 19th century white-painted weatherboard cladding. It has an early baffle entrance plan and a steeply pitched hipped clay tile roof, dominated by a very large and tall chimney stack. At the western end of the village, April Cottage/The Cottage/Corner House is another 16th century farmhouse with a large 18th century wing projecting to the right. The ground floor is of red and blue brick with tile hanging to the first floor. It has a half-hipped roof of red tiles with a large chimney stack to the front. The 19th century extension has a hipped roof.



Plummer's Farmhouse



Church of the Holy Trinity

7.19 The adjacent and associated buildings of the Church of the Holy Trinity and The Old Vicarage are both listed 19th century buildings. The church is built of a soft yellow sandstone, which appears to have suffered from erosion. The tower at the west end is of two stages and is prominent in the village, although it does not project very far above the peak of the church roof. The church clock was manufactured by Dent, makers of the mechanism of Big Ben. The church roof is slate tiled, which is unusual in the more visible parts of the village. The Old Vicarage is of grey ashlar and the shallow hipped roofs are covered in slate, defining it as higher status in comparison to the more vernacular buildings in The Street, which all have clay tiled roofs.

7.20 The buildings of Sissinghurst Place include a number of ancillary buildings that were formerly associated with the main house until this was partially destroyed by fire. These include Gardener's Cottage, The Coach House and The Lodge. Although they have been converted to residential use, or extended to provide larger properties than originally envisaged,



Gardener's Cottage

they have group value relating to the history of the village and its mid-19th century development, which might be seen to extend to the buildings of Holy Trinity Church, The Old Vicarage and former Sissinghurst Primary School just to the north east.

7.21 Historic buildings that reflect the agricultural past of the village, which have been converted to residential use, include Church House Oast. Oast houses are highly characteristic of the wider Wealden area, reflecting the rapid development of the hop growing industry during the late 18th and 19th centuries, which related to the demand for beer in the rapidly growing urban markets. The conical roof and white wooden cowl of the oast kiln adds interest to the village's roofscape. Collins Farm Oast has a similar value, although it is more hidden from public view than Church House Oast. The former barn to Plummer's Farmhouse has retained an agricultural feel despite its conversion to a residential property.

7.22 A number of buildings currently outside the Conservation Area contribute positively to its special character and appearance. These include Plummer's Barn, Little Sumner and The Ploughman's Cottage to the east and the St George's Institute to the west.

Key Negative Features for both Areas A and B

- Heavy traffic passes along the A262 through the village from Tunbridge Wells to Biddenden
- There is considerable pressure for car parking spaces along The Street
- Metal telegraph poles and overhead wires are intrusive
- Windows and some doors and weatherboarding, on both listed and positive buildings, have been replaced with unsympathetic uPVC units
- Some modern shop signage is intrusive and has an adverse effect on the character of the Conservation Area
- A number of structures, including listed buildings, are in need of repair and maintenance
- Some buildings and spaces outside the current Conservation Area boundary make a positive contribution to it and its setting, but are not currently protected
- The large and unattractive car park for the Bull Inn
- Use of inappropriate, modern tiles on the bus shelter and public lavatories. A more traditional clay tile would be visually more sympathetic.
- The modern BT telephone box

Chapter 8 Building Materials, Textures and Colours

Building Styles, Materials and Colours

8.1 In the west of the Conservation Area the buildings represent a group of largely vernacular buildings constructed using local materials over a period of approximately 600 years. As such, they have markedly different forms, although the use of common materials and the nearly universal application of 18th and 19th century cladding provide a degree of consistency throughout. To the east, the mid-19th century buildings of former Sissinghurst Place, The Old Vicarage, Sissinghurst Primary School and the Church of the Holy Trinity make use of more universal mid-19th century styles and popular materials.

8.2 Most of the buildings within the Conservation Area are two storeys high, often with attics which are clearly in use. The buildings in the west of the Conservation Area are mostly timber framed and employ a limited range of cladding materials, which include red and blue brick, tile hanging and weatherboarding, painted white or black. Commonly, the cladding material changes between the first and second floors, usually with brick below timber, as a result of fashion or deterioration to the load bearing timber structure. Some localised use of mathematical tiles (painted) at Alpine Cottage and Thorntons.



Building materials - white weatherboard

8.3 Some notable examples of blue and red brick chequer work are found throughout the cottages, including Gardener's Cottage at Sissinghurst Place, School Cottages, Verdun Cottages and Oliver's Cottages, all of which are mid- to late-19th century structures.

8.4 The roofs make use of a mixture of hipped, half-hipped and full gables, often using more than one form in a building, particularly where they have been extended or truncated. Handmade clay peg tiles form the most common roofing material, although slate roofs can be found throughout the Conservation Area, particularly on the south side of the street. These later 19th century buildings tend to have shallower pitched roofs as a result of the use of slate, while the buildings with clay roof tiles, which are generally of 18th century or earlier origin, have steeply pitched roofs. Many have tall, distinctive brick chimney stacks, which are placed on the ridge to the side or at the back. Eaves are generally simply boxed in without cornicing or other decoration.

8.5 The buildings in the Conservation Area use a mixture of traditional casement and sash windows, although unfortunate replacements with plastic framed units is evident in several buildings, particularly the unlisted buildings on the south side of The Street and even in some listed buildings. A number of buildings retain historic shopfronts, including examples where the buildings have been converted (or restored) to residential use. Scott's Gallery (Wyndham Cottages), Thornton's and The Old Post Office all have inserted 19th or early 20th century shopfronts incorporating two large shop windows either side of a door.

8.6 Vertically sliding sashes are common on the south side of the street, where they have been used in the later 19th century buildings in relatively organised schemes of fenestration and have even been used in the modern buildings of Tydeman's Cottage, Gascoyne's Cottage and Bolero Cottage, where they help to blend the new buildings with the older buildings surrounding them. They are generally without horns and are usually of 12 or 16 panes, although some have irregularly paned sections (e.g. six below and three above), as at Plummer's Farmhouse. Buildings on the south side of The Street make greater use of casements, which suit their more vernacular form. These are more in keeping where they do not include top opening lights – an inappropriate modern variation. Some buildings also have dormer and semi-dormer windows inserted to light attic spaces, although fortunately few of these are visible from The Street, ensuring that the historic appearance of the roof lines has been well preserved.

8.7 The use of red brick and clay tile throughout the Conservation Area gives the buildings a characteristic warm red and orange colour scheme, which contrasts well with the white-painted weatherboarding and joinery around windows, doors and shopfronts. Black-painted weatherboarding and joinery adds some drama to groups of buildings, particularly between Bell Cottage and The Bull Inn, The Street. The buff sandstone of the Church of the Holy Trinity makes this building stand out from other structures of the Conservation Area, while the grey ashlar of Sissinghurst Place, The Lodge and The Old Vicarage adds some grandeur to these buildings.



Boundaries



White picket fence

8.8 In the west of the Conservation Area, on the north side of The Street, most of the buildings are built directly to the back edge of the pavement and therefore have no boundaries dividing them from the street. Their rear gardens or yards are hidden from view. The properties that do have sufficient land to the front of the property to merit boundaries have used a mixture of picket or post and rail fencing and clipped hedges. The white-painted picket fences outside no. 6 The Street, Nelson Cottage, April Cottage, Corner House and King's Head House all have a pleasingly rural appearance, appropriate to the countryside setting of the Conservation Area. The use of picket fencing continues along Common Road to the north and gives this area

Building materials - red brick and clay tile

of the Conservation Area a more united feel, despite the modern buildings on the east side of Common Road. The recently reduced height of the hedge to the front of Collin's Place on this side of The Street, has revealed views of the listed building. It is often important to achieve a balance of providing an appropriate enclosed feeling of the street, the desirability of perceived security/privacy, against the desirability of not obscuring the roofline and chimneys of significant buildings.

8.9 Along the southern side of the western end of The Street, the properties have narrow areas of garden to the front, which are most often defined with black-painted railings. This is occasionally combined with hedges or replaced by picket fencing. The gardens are sufficiently narrow that the buildings still add to the general sense of enclosure along The Street. Where hedges are used, these are currently low and well maintained, although some planting in the front gardens has a tendency to grow tall and intrude into views of the buildings.



Shop forecourt

8.10 Some properties, particularly where there are shops, have no formal division from the pavement. Sissinghurst Soft Furnishings makes particularly good use of the public realm and the surrounding garden planting to frame the building's traditional shop frontage.

Collins Place

8.11 To the east of the junction of The Street and Chapel Lane, the character of the Conservation Area changes considerably, with buildings set back from the road in larger plots hidden away behind mature trees and tall hedgerows.

8.12 On the south side of The Street, a simple post and rail fencing has been used to strengthen the impression of a boundary along the tree line to the front of Sissinghurst Place, the associated Gardener's Cottage and The Coach House. Similar fencing is used on the north side of the road to the front of The Old Vicarage. The trees provide a strong sense of enclosure, arching over the road. Nearer to the junction of Chapel Lane and The Street, the hedgerow is more closely controlled, with a well clipped but tall hedge to the front of Church House, which allows appreciation of the roofline and first floor of the northern elevation of Church House. The mixed deciduous and evergreen hedge around Walnut Trees is higher, particularly along Chapel Lane, largely hiding the property.



Post and Rail Fencing



Sandstone wall at Holy Trinity Church

8.13 On the north side of The Street, the sandstone wall in front of the former Sissinghurst Primary School and Holy Trinity Church is unusual in the Conservation Area and sections are currently in need of fairly urgent repairs.

8.14 At the eastern end of The Street, where it becomes Biddenden Road, the farmland hedge on the north side of the road, which is agricultural in character, is complemented by a similar hedgerow on the south side, which is backed up by a tall tree line. The tall cypress hedge to the east of Plummer's Farmhouse would be considered as incongruous and out of keeping with the rural location, although its dark tone does

help to emphasise the crisp, white frontage of the farmhouse.

8.15 The field hedgerow to the west of Chapel Lane also helps to provide a rural accent to the approach to the Conservation Area from the south.

Public Realm

8.16 A large part of the Conservation Area has been paved with modern brick paviors, adding to the existing historic brick paving which probably dates to the late 19th century. Together, they provide a strongly unified and well maintained look, which will improve through mellowing of the newer paviors over time. This new paving extends along both sides of The Street, from the western boundary of the Conservation Area as far as the former Sissinghurst Primary School on the north side and Oak Cottage on the south side. The pavement in front of Sissinghurst Primary School and the Church of the Holy Trinity is paved with stone flags, while other areas have simple black tarmac paving with concrete kerbstones.

8.17 In places the kerb is further emphasised by black painted metal bollards and reflectors on the brick kerbing for safety reasons. The bollards are relatively simple and the reflectors are small and unobtrusive.



Brick paving

8.18 There is very little street lighting within the Conservation Area, with relatively inconspicuous, black-painted lighting columns used where it has been introduced on the south side of The Street, although the ones installed in the vicinity of Hop Pocket Close are less sympathetic in design and colouring. Traffic signage has also been kept relatively restrained. Some columns supporting traffic signs have been painted, which helps to reduce their visual intrusion.

8.19 Most of the telegraph poles are wooden and inconspicuous, although one unpainted steel pole located on the south side of The Street, outside School Cottages, stands out. The overhead wires do have a negative impact on views along The Street, particularly looking westwards from Chapel Lane.

8.20 The tarmacadam road and its traffic tends to dominate the streetscene, although the narrowness of the carriageway resulting from parked cars on both sides does have a calming influence.

Chapter 9 Conservation Area Boundary Review

9.1 As part of this Appraisal, the boundaries of the Conservation Area have been critically reviewed. It was concluded that, for the most part, the current boundary still adequately reflects the area of special architectural and historic interest.

9.2 Three minor changes are proposed to the boundary to the north, east and west of the Conservation Area: to the east to include Plummer's Barn, Little Sumner and Ploughmans Cottage; to the west to include the Jubilee Field and the St George's Institute; and to the north to include an area of private garden, the cemetery, and a field used by the former Sissinghurst Primary School.

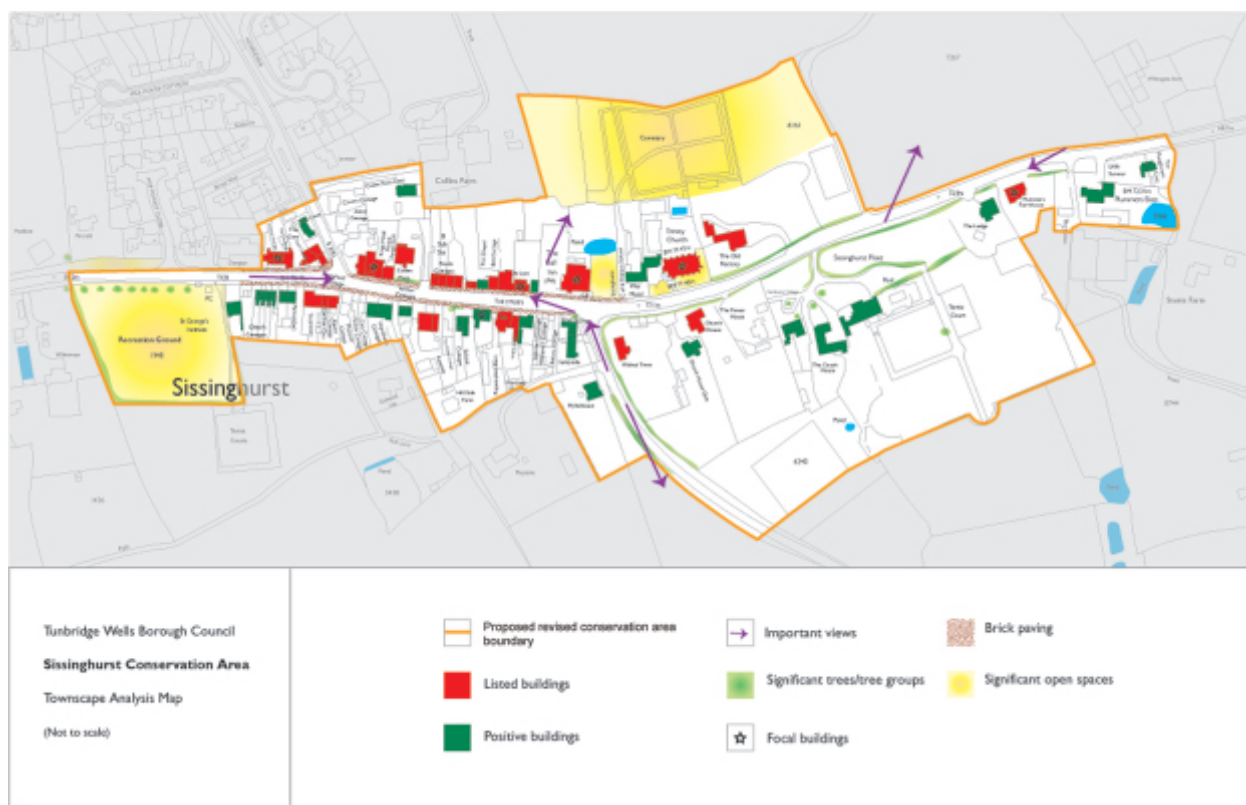


Figure 3 Adopted Conservation Area boundary (see Appendix 1 for previous boundary)

Chapter 10 Issues

10.1 A number of detractors and issues have been identified in the Appraisal, none of which is trivial, but it is suggested that the following represent the more significant matters, warranting immediate consideration:

Traffic: Traffic passing through the village has a variety of direct and indirect impacts on the character and appearance of the Conservation Area. The flow of traffic through the settlement makes it difficult and dangerous at times to cross the road, although it is slowed down by the narrowness of the road and with the removal of road markings apart from parking spaces, has improved traffic flow and achieved a degree of traffic calming. The traffic also generates impacts from noise, the visual intrusion of vehicles travelling through the Conservation Area, vibration and dust. A pedestrian crossing would ruin the appearance of The Street by urbanising it and remove much needed parking spaces. Mini-roundabouts at the junction of Common Road and Chapel Lane with The Street would be similarly undesirable and would require 24-hour lighting.

Car parking: As a result of the village's historic roadside development, few properties have dedicated car parking and therefore there is considerable demand for the existing on-street car parking spaces along The Street, as well as for occasional off-street parking in the surrounding front gardens. The possible loss of gardens, boundaries and planting would have an adverse effect on the setting of the existing buildings and the sense of enclosure within the Conservation Area and as such would be detrimental to the area's special interest. Car parking along The Street has always been encouraged as an effective traffic calming technique.

Metal telegraph poles and overhead wires: Unpainted metal telegraph poles and overhead wires are visually intrusive into views of historic buildings and detract slightly from the appearance of the Conservation Area.

Replacement of windows: Although many of the buildings in the Conservation Area have retained their traditional timber framed windows, it is noted that replacement windows, some doors and weatherboarding with plastic uPVC units has affected the appearance of several listed and positive buildings, mainly along the south side of The Street. This has resulted in an erosion of the historic character of these buildings and the wider Conservation Area. Several commercial buildings that have been converted to residential use retain their traditional shop windows and these make an important contribution to the character of the Conservation Area, which should be maintained.

Shop signage: Although the continued presence of a vibrant shopping area along The Street is important to the character of the Conservation Area, the gaudy colours used in the signage in the window of the Spar Shop on the south side of The Street detracts from the overall appearance of this building, which includes the listed building at Virginia House.

Structures in need of maintenance and repair: A number of buildings require repair or maintenance works in order to prevent any loss of their contribution to the appearance of the Conservation Area or to their historic fabric. Particular examples include uPVC at Oliver's Cottages and the buildings at Lilac Cottage (external redecoration and lowering of front hedgerow), Hazelhurst Cottage (lowering of front hedgerow and trees), Cats Cottage (porch removal and correct fenestration), Alpine Cottage (replacement of uPVC windows and porch removal), Tandoori (correct fenestration).

The Jubilee Field: This recreational field for the village (purchased for that purpose at the time of Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee in 1887) is visually attractive when entering the Conservation Area from the west, particularly when viewed over the low hedgerow and through the line of Acer trees. However, detractors are the out-of-keeping large scaled, mechanical tiled roofs of the well-used public lavatories and bus shelter, and the adjacent modern replacement BT telephone kiosk.

Positive buildings outside the Conservation Area: A number of buildings that lie outside the current Conservation Area are considered to make a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the settlement and relate to the special historic and architectural interest identified within the Conservation Area. These include:

- The St George's Institute, The Street
- Plummer's Barn, Biddenden Road
- Little Sumner and The Ploughman's Cottage, Biddenden Road

Public open spaces that also make a positive contribution to the Conservation Area's character and appearance include the Jubilee Recreation Ground to the west of the Conservation Area and the field, cemetery and back garden to The Old Rectory, all to the north. It is proposed that these buildings and adjacent areas are included within the Conservation Area.

Change of use of buildings: The number of shops located along The Street has steadily declined over the past 50 years, resulting in a loss of the character of The Street.

Key frontages and boundary treatments: Growth of hedgerows and plantings has resulted in the partial loss of views of several key frontages, with a consequent significant loss of character for the Conservation Area.

Possible loss of positive buildings: The new village Primary School off Common Road has made the existing Victorian primary school redundant. The future retention of this village asset should be seriously considered and its re-use and redevelopment will need to be carefully considered. The loss of the kindergarten school from the St George's Institute will result in a large reduction of rental income. Although the building has some charm and historic interest and adds character to the street scene, it is now not fit for purpose. It occupies a key position particularly when viewed on the western approach and its replacement therefore will need to be both sympathetic and of a high design quality.

Resolving the Issues for the Conservation Area:

10.2 Realistically, no easy solution presents itself to some of the issues, whether listed above or identified on earlier pages. Listed below, however, are proposals which represent practicable attempts to deal with some of them:

- Consider pinch-points on the A262 at each end of the village at the 30mph restriction signs (sited outside the Conservation Area)
- At the eastern approach to the Conservation Area, the modern functional buildings at Whitegate Farmyard need adequate landscaping with indigenous species of trees and shrubs
- Negotiate some off-street parking at the far end of the Bull Inn car park
- Seek to prevent close-boarded fencing, high gates and very tall hedges which obstruct historic or rural views
- Introduce firmer controls that would make it necessary for owners of all buildings within the Conservation Area to use traditional materials when replacing windows and external doors
- Encourage the owners of commercial premises to maintain the traditional appearance of their premises and avoid gaudy colours
- Encourage owners to maintain their properties, particularly the buildings facing The Street
- Promote adherence to the Local Planning Authority's guidance on the installation of satellite dishes, solar panels and wind turbines
- Seek ways to ensure the viability and maintenance of the St George's Institute
- Seek to retain The Street facade of the old Primary School building

Specific action that would enhance the Conservation Area

- Paint the bright metal telegraph pole black and in the longer term press BT for the overhead cables to be put underground

- When replacement is needed, replace the artificial roof material of the public lavatories and bus shelter with traditional clay tiles
- The 'WC' sign on the lamp-post by the Jubilee Field is unnecessary and should be removed
- Replace the modern BT telephone box with a traditional Gilbert-Scott red telephone box
- Remove unnecessary street clutter and signage.
- The large 30mph restriction and village sign approaching the Conservation Area from the west on the A.262 is clumsy and needs reworking
- The close-boarded fencing adjacent to the pavement at Whiteways needs setting back with hedge planting along the frontage to maintain the green 'arcade' when approaching the village
- Future owners should be encouraged to remove the porches at Alpine Cottage and Cats Cottage, and the galvanised gates and fittings at the two garages adjacent to Oliver Cottages
- The traditional cast-iron signpost in the front garden of Phoenix Cottage needs maintaining
- The owners of Lilac Cottage should be encouraged to repair and renovate the exterior
- The non-traditional pattern of field gate on the south west corner of Moss Field facing The Street should be replaced with a traditional 'Kent' pattern

Chapter 11 Consultations

Introduction

11.1 This document has been prepared in accordance with the previous guidance set out in [Planning Policy Statement 12](#) (PPS12) regarding preparation and consultation on Supplementary Planning Documents; also the recent National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2012, at para 155.

11.2 The most relevant Local Plan Policies are set out in this document at Chapter 2. The Supplementary Planning Document is intended to support these policies.

Consultation Process

11.3 A working group made up of officers from the Borough Council and representatives from Cranbrook Conservation Area Advisory Committee, the Parish Council and other key organisations was set up to discuss the principal issues facing the Conservation Area. Following a walkabout and workshops, the draft document was prepared, including various proposed alterations to the Conservation Area boundary.

11.4 In order to follow English Heritage guidance, the original appraisal document was drafted in 2007. The resultant informal initial draft Appraisal was then subject to scrutiny and input from Council officers and local community. As a result a number of significant changes were made.

11.5 The draft document was reported to the Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Planning and Transportation, who approved the draft Appraisal and boundary changes on 18 April 2012, as the basis for public consultation.

11.6 The document was subject to public consultation for a period of six weeks between 30 April 2012 and 10 June 2012.

11.7 Documents available comprised: the draft Sissinghurst Conservation Area Appraisal SPD; Executive Summary; Statement of SPD Matters; Statement of Consultation; and map of the Conservation Area. These were available on the Borough Council's website and at the Gateway, Royal Tunbridge Wells, the Weald Information Centre, Cranbrook and all libraries in the Borough.

11.8 Organisations and individuals were notified in accordance with the Councils adopted Statement of Community Involvement 2006. Copies of the draft Appraisal and associated documents were sent to key local organisations, including the three Regulation 17 bodies.

Response to Consultation

11.9 The responses to the consultation were reported to the Planning and Transportation Cabinet Advisory Board on 24 September 2012, and to Cabinet on 18 October 2012 (Item CAB 88/12) where it was adopted as Supplementary Planning Document as part of the Local Plan.

11.10 The report details the responses received and outlines the proposed changes to the document, where appropriate. The report and minutes of the meeting can be viewed on the Council's website at www.tunbridgewells.gov.uk.

11.11 The Appraisal was ratified at Full Council on 12 December 2012 as Supplementary Planning Document.

Notices

11.12 A notice of public participation was placed in a local paper advertising the formal consultation period and where the documents were available.

11.13 On adoption, relevant notices were placed in the London Gazette on 22 November 2012 and a local newspaper, in accordance with S.70 of the Town & Country Planning (Listed Buildings & Conservation Areas) Act 1990.

Appendix 1: Previous Conservation Area Boundary

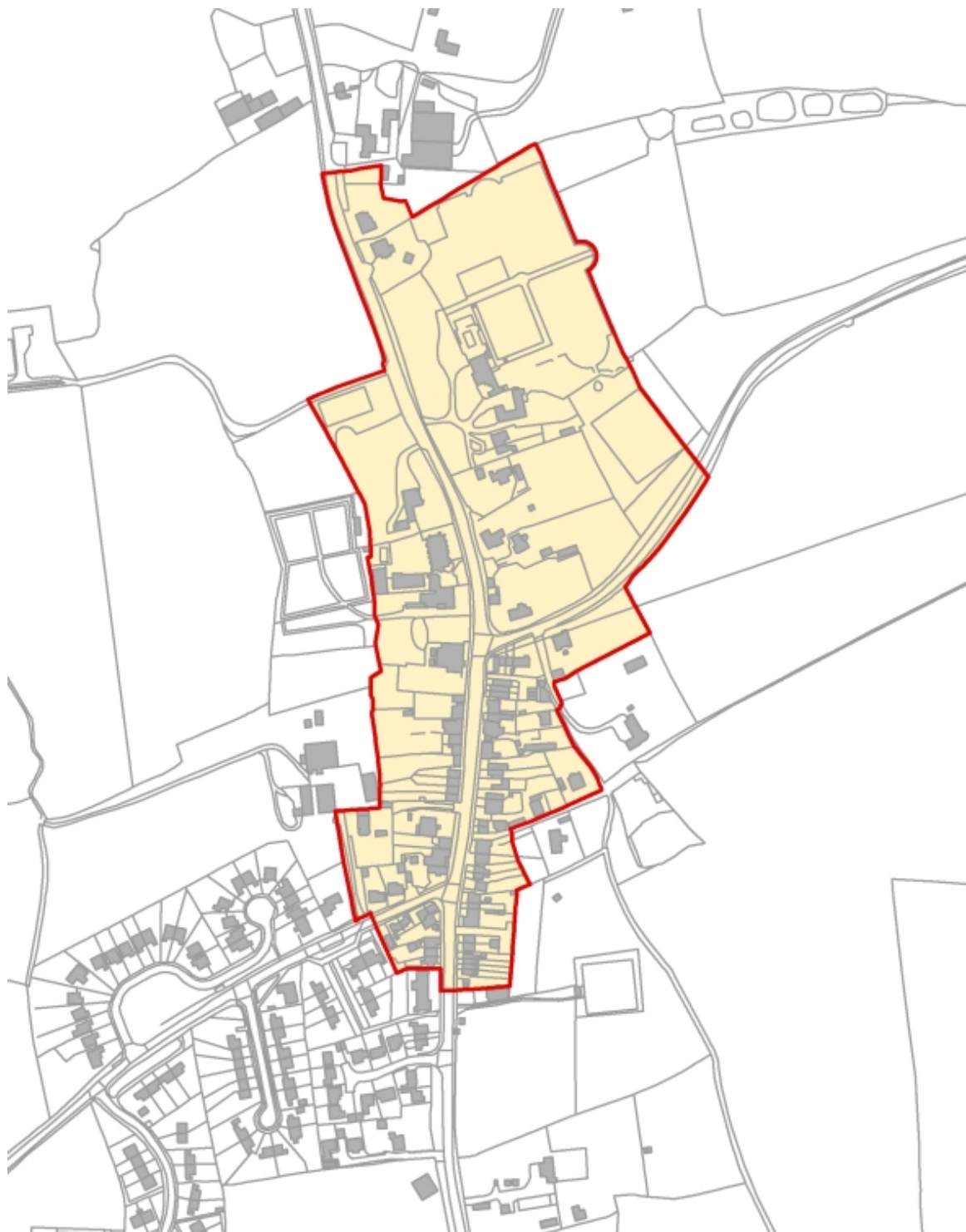


Figure 4 Previous Conservation Area Boundary

If you require this document in another format, please contact:

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