

Leigh

Conservation Area Appraisal



SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING GUIDANCE



March 2001

Leigh

Conservation Area Appraisal

The historic environment is a social asset of immense value and one of the keys to the continuing prosperity of Sevenoaks District. Conservation Area Appraisals are part of the process of ensuring that we make the best use of our historic environment. They are tools for the positive management of change, not a means of preventing development. Conservation is focused on the entire historic environment, not just listed buildings. Trees, open spaces, buildings, uses, roads and streets all contribute to the character and local distinctiveness of the District's conservation areas.

The man-made environment of our conservation areas has used energy and materials moulded by people both past and present. The District Council will creatively manage the fabric of these areas in a sustainable way as a legacy for future generations.

It is intended that this appraisal will inform the activities of the Council, the public and other bodies where these impact on the conservation area. The Appraisal was approved by the District Council in March 2001 and adopted as Supplementary Planning Guidance.

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1.00 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Definition and Purpose of Conservation Areas

Conservation Areas first came into being as a result of the Civic Amenities Act of 1967 and are intended to identify any valuable visual or historic characteristics in a locality that may warrant special measures in order to protect and preserve them.

The Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act of 1990 recognises that there are particular areas of 'architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance' and charges planning authorities with a duty to designate any such locations within their jurisdiction as Conservation Areas. This designation then empowers the local authority to pay particular attention to planning considerations and development within them and gives greater control over such matters as demolitions, landscaping and trees, and the display of advertisements.

Designation also raises the awareness of local residents and businesses to the quality of their surroundings and is intended to encourage an active interest in the care and maintenance of their properties and surrounding land, thereby fostering a sense of communal pride.

It has been recognised that designation, because of the responsibilities and obligations it places on both owners and the local authority, should only be imposed on areas that are demonstrably suitable. Where the criteria have been met, the area should then benefit from the additional control and protection that designation confers, and from official recognition of the special architectural and historic character of the locality.

The management of our national cultural and historic inheritance is of paramount importance and Conservation Areas are a vital 'grass roots' starting point from which to safeguard the continuing care of our environment.

1.2 Purpose of Appraisals

As their number grows, it has become even more important for local authorities to include a well defined and considered policy for their designated Conservation Areas in their Local Plans.

Planning pressures are such that any designation is likely to be subjected to detailed scrutiny and must be readily and demonstrably defensible against adverse criticism. The criteria for designation should be kept as uniform as possible and the public should be kept fully aware of the reasons for any proposed changes in their area.

The 1990 Act charges local authorities with the responsibility of undertaking a review of their Conservation Areas from time to time, both to consider the possibility of revising their extent, and to identify any past changes or future pressures which may affect the original reasons for their designation.

English Heritage published an advisory leaflet on the subject in March 1997, which outlines the preferred approach to these appraisals and gives examples of the type of content that it would be useful to include.

The appraisals should define the key elements that together give the area its character, and objectively analyse how they interact to enhance their individual impact.

They can then provide suggestions for future policies and improvements based on a clear understanding of the special architectural and historic qualities that highlight the area and give it its local distinctiveness.

These appraisals can also be used as a valuable means by which the impact of planning policies and the implementation of enhancement measures can be assessed.

1.3 Local Conservation Area Policies

The Sevenoaks District Local Plan (Adopted March 2000) lists the following policies which relate to conservation areas:

EN21 In the designation and review of conservation areas the Local Planning Authority will assess all the following matters:

- 1) **The special architectural or historic interest of the area.**
- 2) **The cohesive character and integrity of the area including spaces round buildings their settings and trees.**
- 3) **The desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of the area.**
- 4) **The pressures for change which may encourage piecemeal development which would threaten the character of the area.**
- 5) **The need to promote economic prosperity, through schemes of environmental enhancement, to overcome vacancy, neglect, decay or dereliction.**

EN22 Proposals to demolish buildings which contribute to the character or appearance of a Conservation Area will not be permitted in the absence of overriding justification. Preference will be given to conversion and/or refurbishment as opposed to outright demolition of a building. Proposals to demolish extensions to original buildings or outbuildings will be judged on their contribution to the overall character of the area.

EN23 Proposals for development or redevelopment within or affecting Conservation Areas should be of positive architectural benefit by paying special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of the area and of its setting. The design of new buildings and alterations to existing buildings should respect local character, whilst the treatment of external spaces including hard and soft landscaping, boundary walls, street furniture and signs should be compatible with and enhance the appearance of the area.

Buildings which make a positive contribution to the character or appearance of the conservation area are identified on the character appraisal plan at the end of this document . English Heritage national guidance on conservation areas sets out the criteria used to identify these buildings.

The Sevenoaks District Local Plan also states that the local planning authority will undertake detailed assessments of designated Conservation Areas and will prepare proposals for their preservations. Development proposals will be judged against their overall contribution to the enhancement of the character and appearance of the area as set out in any scheme which may have been prepared.

This assessment and the detailed analysis of the area contained in the report is intended to fulfil this commitment and provide the background for enhancement schemes.

1.4 Other Local Plan Policies

The Local Plan also identifies specific policies designed to protect the natural environment and historic buildings.

Policy EN6 places restrictions on development within the Kent Downs and High Weald Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and EN7 gives priority to the enhancement of natural beauty, landscape, open space, geographical features and wildlife over other planning considerations within the North Downs and Greensand Ridge Special Landscape Areas. Other Areas of Local Landscape Importance where development may be restricted are noted in policy EN8.

Landscape features and wildlife habitats beyond the confines of the urban areas, towns and villages are also protected by policy EN11.

Important areas of green space within the built confines are safeguarded under policy EN9 and EN10 protects important areas of urban fringe.

Listed building policy is defined in sections EN18 and EN19 and the re-use rather than the demolition of unlisted buildings of local interest is promoted by policy EN20.

Trees over a certain size are automatically protected within Conservation Areas, with any proposed work to them having to be notified to the local authority in writing six weeks in advance.

Transport strategy for the District is summarised by the following section.

T1 A co-ordinated transport strategy will be implemented including:

- 1) Encouragement of the provision of appropriate public transport services and facilities.**
- 2) Use of traffic management to achieve a safer and more efficient use of existing roads.**
- 3) An integrated car parking strategy involving residents' parking, local enforcement and consideration of the need for park and ride facilities.**
- 4) New highway construction and improvements to the existing network.**
- 5) Encouragement of walking and cycling.**

2.00 DESCRIPTION OF CONSERVATION AREA

2.1 General Description

Leigh Conservation Area covers some 14 ha and contains about 35 listed buildings. It was designated in 1972 and extended in 1986.

The focal point of the Conservation Area is the Green, but the boundaries are drawn around the historic heart of the village which also includes the adjacent medieval buildings and the church. The area also covers the later building carried out by the architects working under instruction from the owners of Hall Place in the latter half of the 19th Century.

Hall Place and its park lie outside the Conservation Area boundary to the north and west, as do the modern residential estates that now extend from the railway line to the south of the High Street and the Green.

The village is surrounded by land designated as Green Belt and a section of the High Weald. Special Landscape Area lies to the east. The extreme western corner of the Conservation Area lies within the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, which covers much of the southern part of the Sevenoaks District area.

The Green is earmarked as an important area of green space within the built confines of the village, as are the playing fields that lie just beyond the south eastern boundary of the Conservation Area.

The Park to Hall Place is noted as being of historic interest as are those buildings, both medieval and Victorian, that have been included in the statutory listings.

Leigh Conservation Area was designated in recognition of the survival of many medieval buildings around the Green, and for the interest and continuity of the Victorian Gothic cottage development that was undertaken by the owners of Hall Place.

Although Leigh is now essentially a satellite village to the larger conurbation of Tonbridge, the Conservation Area still retains its individual character and atmosphere and the surrounding agricultural land continues to play an important role in the economic life of the community.

2.2 Location and Geographical Context

Leigh is a small village with a population of 1516 (1991 census) situated on the outskirts of Tonbridge on the B2027 to Edenbridge (see Map 1, next page). It lies north of the Tonbridge/Redhill railway line and is approximately one mile west of the A21 Sevenoaks to Tonbridge Road.

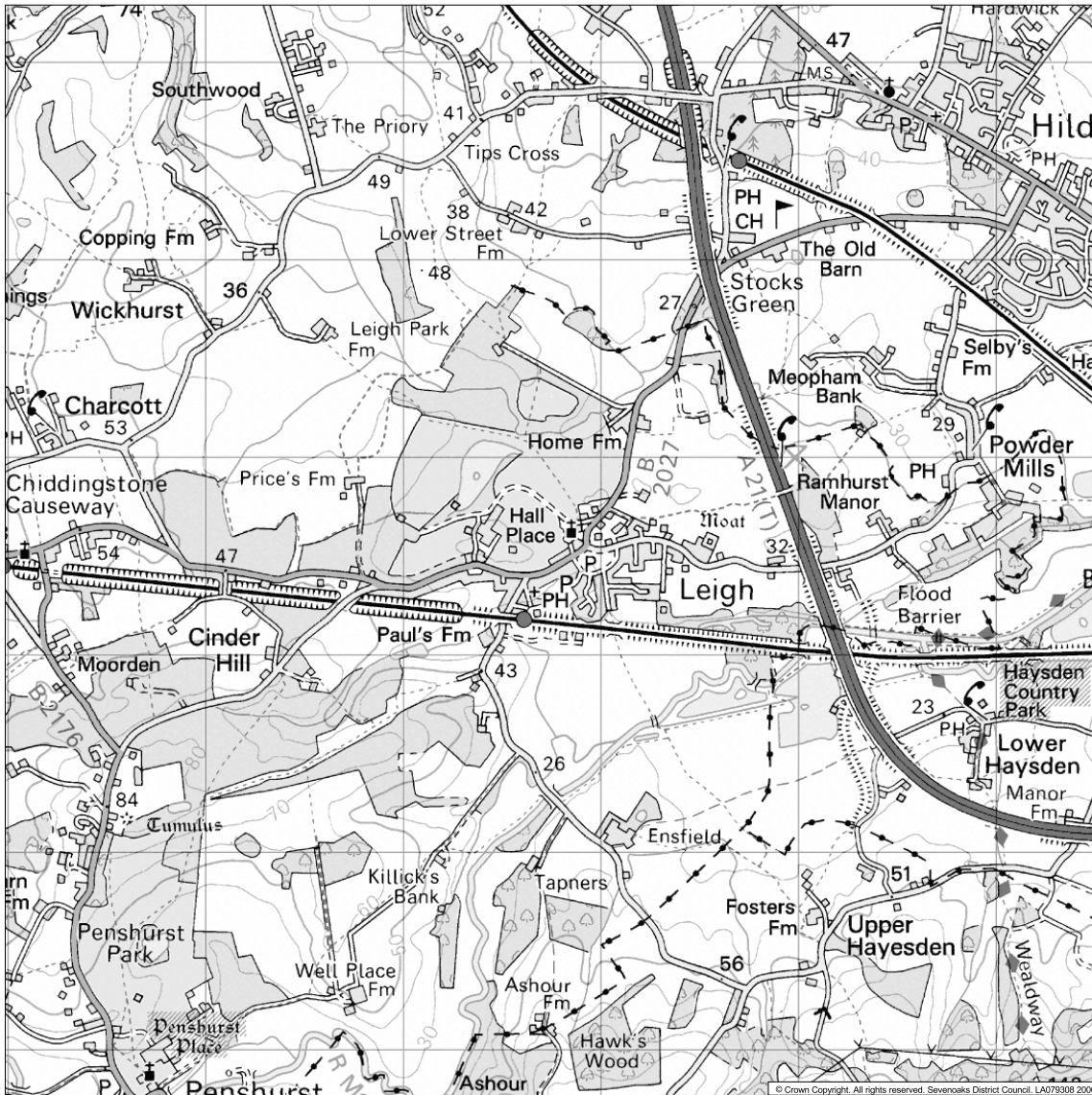
It is a low-lying land to the north of the river Medway and is about one mile from the Haysden lakes and flood barrier.

The surrounding land is mainly agricultural although traditional farms are decreasing in number and their agricultural buildings are steadily being converted to residential use.

There is a railway station that is served by the Tonbridge to Redhill route and a bus service to Tonbridge.

The village has a school, church and two village halls, two public houses and a village store-cum-post office.

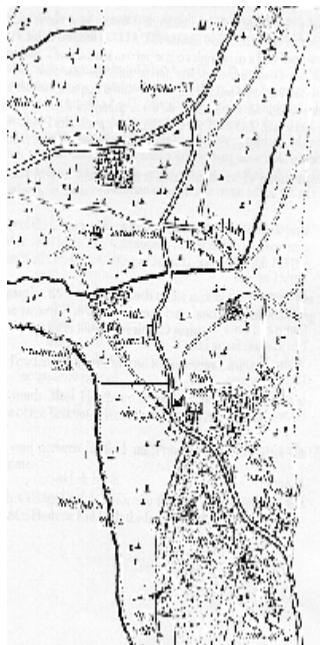
Although Leigh is close to large towns such as Tonbridge and Tunbridge Wells, it has retained a particular charm with the presence of Hall Place, a large estate at the heart of the village, and the surrounding open countryside is protected as Green Belt and is within an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.



Map 1: Geographical Location

2.3 Historical Development

Until the middle of the 18th Century Leigh was an unremarkable small village serving an agricultural community of tenant farmers, working land that was owned by landlords who lived elsewhere. In 1533 the Sidney family were granted substantial estates in Leigh and neighbouring Peshurst, and together with the Children family, became the major landowners in the village.



Map 2 Leigh from the Hasted map of the Lowy of Tonbridge

What is now the main estate, Hall Place, had its residence rebuilt in 1780 by the Burges family but at that time was of minor significance compared to the holdings of the Sidney and Children families.

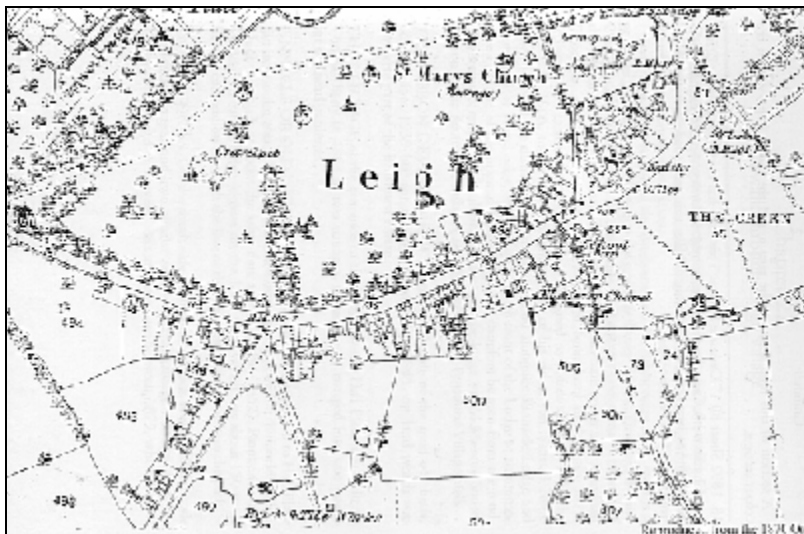


Fig. 1 Hall Place in 1790

The village serviced the family community and provided labourers for the tenant farmers. Stone was quarried locally, there were two corn mills and the village had at least one public house - The Porcupine.

It was not until the early 19th Century that changes, both in land ownership and industrial activity, began to affect the way of life that had continued in a similar pattern for many centuries.

The industrial revolution brought developments to local industry and a brick works, powder mills and a cricket bat and ball factory were built in and around Leigh. The brickyard was operating by 1841 and the powder mills served by a canal system, was in use until as late as 1931.



Map 3 Leigh as shown on the 1870 O.S. Map

This new activity and increased prosperity resulted in more of the estates being inhabited by owner-occupiers, and in particular, Hall Place. Its owners came to play a particularly important role in the development of the village. Successive owners rebuilt the church, constructed lodges and cottages and provided a school and village hall.



Fig. 2 Hall Place before 1870

The Bailey family acquired Hall Place in 1822 and Thomas Bailey brought in his cousin George, an architect, to oversee the first phase of building work. When George Bailey took a public appointment he was succeeded by George Devey, who had already carried out several projects in Penshurst.

When the MP, Samuel Morley, bought Hall Place in 1871, Devey was immediately employed to rebuild the main house, which was completed by 1876. Devey also designed the village hall and extended the school.

Morley continued the rebuilding of significant parts of the village, putting a road around the green and filling in the pond in front of what is now Elizabeth Cottage. He employed the well known architects George and Peto to build Forge Square and later the cottages in The Square. Devey had also continued his work in the area, building South View adjacent to the site of Forge Square.



Fig. 3 Restoration work to Leigh Church

The church was re-roofed in 1861 and underwent a substantial re-ordering in 1862, with both George Bailey and George Devey involved in the work.

For many years the main transportation route was the cartway to Penshurst and Cowden. However the advent of the powder mills meant that the canal system from Tonbridge, which lay at the head of the Medway navigation system, was rounded to Leigh, which allowed the gunpowder to be transported by water directly to the naval dockyards at Chatham.

The coming of the railway did not immediately affect the village. The line from Redhill to Tonbridge was opened in 1842 but although the route ran close to Leigh, it was not until 1917 that a small station was opened there.



Fig. 4 The Square in 1925 © J. Salmon Ltd.

Some further development took place during the middle of this century, with the occasional modern insertion, but in general the village is still very much as conceived by the Victorian landowners who had such an influence on its character and building stock.

2.4 Architectural Description

At first sight Leigh is primarily notable for the exuberant and stylish Victorian Gothic buildings that are scattered along the High Street and surround the boundaries of Hall Place. The lodge buildings in particular are unusual for a Kentish village with their use of diaper brickwork, carved stonework and bold detailing.



Fig 5 The Old or Pinnacle Lodge on the boundary wall of Hall Place



Fig. 6 Porcupine House

The neo-Tudor style favoured by George and Peto in Forge Square and The Square (which was reputedly detailed by Herbert Baker whilst working for the practice) is repeated in the majority of individual buildings dating from the second half of the nineteenth century and features steeply pitched tiled roofs, exposed timber framing above brick ground floors, leaded light windows, jettied first floors and ornate brick chimneys. Ornamental tile hanging and cedar shingles are used on gables and decorative carved timber is much in evidence.



Fig. 7 Buildings in Forge Square by George & Peto



Fig 8 The Square

Stonework is used for quins and mullions on the Fleur de Lis Public House and adjacent cottages, and Forge Square has a section of coursed local stone on the ground floor.



Fig. 9 The Fleur de Lis Public House

In contrast, the older buildings around the Green are less robustly detailed and simpler in form than their Victorian counterparts. White painted weatherboarding on Old Wood Cottage and Oak Cottage contrast with the close studded timber framing with plaster infill on Old Chimneys.



Fig. 10 Old Wood Cottage and Oak Cottage



Fig 11 Old Chimneys

In the High Street, Chilling House with its low slate roof, red brickwork and sash windows is in a classic Georgian style and Orchard House has the somewhat haphazard planning of a much adapted timber framed building.



Fig. 12 Chilling House

An unusual feature is the mosaic type stonework and intricate leaded lights of the Reading Room and Institute – a departure from the red and blue diaper brickwork employed on the neighbouring former British Legion Hall (now contains the Large and Small Village Halls) and old Waterworks to the rear.



Fig. 13 The Reading Room and Institute Cottage



Fig. 14 The Large Village Hall

Some modern infill such as Charlotte Cottages, use designs and materials which are not in sympathy with the surrounding buildings and appear out of place as a result.



Fig. 15 Charlotte Cottages



Fig. 16 Cherry Tree Cottages

By contrast Cherry Tree Cottages are a simple but appropriate example of mid 19th Century rural vernacular housing. The cottages use local red bricks with blue headers, plain clay tiles on the roof and still retain some of the original cast iron windows.

3.0 CHARACTER APPRAISAL

3.1 Setting of the Area and Spatial Relationships

When approaching Leigh by road, from either east or west, the sense of entering a country village is immediately apparent.



Fig. 17 View south from the church yard

To reach the outskirts of the Conservation Area, the route leads through farmland or wooded parkland and the road to the west is lined with mature trees. From either direction, the first buildings of historical note that the visitor sees are the lodges at the gates to Hall Place Park.



Fig. 18 The Lodge at the end of the main drive to Hall Place



Fig.19 The East Lodge from the Churchyard

The style and detail of these will already have been seen by the visitor coming from Tonbridge or Edenbridge, as there are similar examples of George Devey's work on the road at Home Farm and Penshurst Lodge.

The approach from both east and west curves into the village, before opening out to the vista across the green in the east and narrowing into the narrow High Street in the west. From both approaches the village character and scale is evident and the impression is of a compact, tight knit development, and one is unaware of the expanse of modern development that now exists to the south of the village.



Fig. 20 The approach to the village centre from the west

The Conservation Area consists of two distinct zones; that around the Green and church, centering on Forge Square, and the length of the High Street from The Square to the Old Lodge, bounded by the wall to Hall Place in the north.



Fig. 21 The Church from Forge Square



Fig. 22 The Church from the Lych Gate

The narrowness of the High Street allows the vista to develop gradually as one travels east, and the picturesque buildings that line the south side of the road form an attractive progression. The close proximity of the buildings to each other contrasts with the open parkland on the north side of the wall.



Fig. 23 View across the Green to the east

The Green opens out beyond Orchard House and the School, and its flat expanse contrast with the cluster of houses on the rising ground topped by the Church. To the north east of the Green, mature trees, closely spaced, afford privacy to a number of large detached houses of varying ages.



Fig. 24 Old Kennards

Around the South and East of the Green are some of the older village properties whose scale tends to be smaller than that of the later development.



Fig. 25 Elizabeth Cottage by the Green

Tucked behind the High Street is a triangular section of the Conservation Area that contains the Leigh Club, the old Waterworks and several important mature trees. Recent development here, including the residential conversion of the Waterworks, has increased the density of the built environment.



Fig. 26 The Old Waterworks, now a residential property

On the north east corner of the Conservation Area, Park House stands on higher ground bordering the open farmland beyond. Leaving the village in the west the buildings are less distinguished than in the rest of the Conservation Area, but their setting amongst the trees forms a pleasant group before the ribbon development of the middle of the century. This is by no means true of all the buildings to the west of Lower Green some of which are listed.



Fig. 27 Oak Cottage and the Firs on the western edge of the Conservation Area

3.2 The Impact of Individual Elements/Feature/Groups of Buildings

Leigh is fortunate in having a number of architectural set pieces that are consciously intended to improve the picturesque visual character of the village setting. South View by Devey, Forge Square behind the older Church Hill House, White House and the adjacent properties are all set against the backdrop of the Church, Lych Gate and East Lodge; when viewed from the Green they form one of Leigh's most important and recognisable views.



Fig. 28 South View and Forge Square



Fig. 29 The Green looking north

The buildings around the Fleur-de-Lis are another example of mid-Victorian development in the rustic vernacular tradition juxtaposed with older buildings to create a picturesque group.



Fig. 30 High Street south side

Between these two areas lies the Square, again a late 19th Century arrangement of cottages laid out in an almshouse style and detailed using a variety of materials. On the east edge of the Green a cluster of early timber framed cottages are examples of the traditional style that Devey and George were emulating so many years later.



Fig. 31 Park House



Fig. 32 Greenways and The Gales near the Green

In the centre of the High Street, Park View Cottage, West Cottage, The Well House and Pump Cottage are in a distinctly different style to the heavier brickwork and fanciful detailing of their 19th Century neighbours and form a pleasant foil to these buildings.



Fig. 33 The Pump House

Amongst all this conscious charm the plain and uninteresting infill that is Charlotte Cottages is unfortunate in scale and materials. It is an example of insufficient attention to detail and detracts from the street scene as a result. Opposite here, Chilling House and Orchard House provide welcome relief.



Fig. 34 Orchard House

In Crandalls, on the west side of the Green, the profiled metal of the Iron Room roof is in a poor state of repair and detracts further from what is not at best, an attractive building.



Fig. 35 The Iron Room [now demolished]



Fig. 36 The cricket pavilion

The pavilion, in a prominent position on the south of the Green, has made use of white weatherboarding on its first floor but this is the only concession to traditional detailing. In all other ways the form, massing and fenestration is firmly in the Sixties and might be felt to be an inappropriate insertion in this highly visible and historic location.

Another modern construction, the Scout Hall in Lower Green, is set in close proximity to the listed and now converted water works and is an extremely unfortunate development adversely affecting the setting of the listed building. The two new houses squeezed in to the rear of the water works have poor detailing. Although trying to emulate Devey's surrounding buildings, the design has missed the mark and neither respects traditional vernacular style nor makes a modern statement.



Fig. 37 New Development behind the High Street

4.00 FUTURE TRENDS

4.1 Current and Future Pressures on the Area

The immediate environs of the historic village centre have already been subject to modern development in the area between the road and the railway. From the map of the area it can be seen that the area bounded by the railway, Penshurst Road, the High Street and Powder Mill Lane would be under further pressure for housing development without the Green Belt protection.

At a time when village shops are under such strong economic pressure from out of town shopping developments and large supermarkets, Leigh is lucky to retain a small general store. This is the only retail outlet apart from a hairdresser, however, as Leigh does not have the plethora of antique or craft shops that are often found in picturesque Kent villages.

In some ways this must be an advantage when considering the congestion caused by on street parking in the High Street. Any parking reduces the width of the road to a single carriageway and it is often difficult for large vehicles to pass. The effect however is to slow the traffic down to within the speed limit, for which no doubt, residents are often grateful.

As farming methods are less labour intensive than in previous times, many agricultural buildings and farm workers cottages are given over to residential use. On the outskirts of Leigh, the buildings of Home Farm have recently been converted, and there are many other examples in the vicinity. It is always difficult for the Local Planning Authority to strike a balance between the desire to find an alternative viable use for them, whilst still preserving the evidence of their original form and function.

4.2 Potential for Enhancement

Some buildings that are at present detracting from the Conservation Area have already been mentioned.

When the cricket pavilion comes to the end of its useful life, any replacement should be of a design that is more in keeping with its prominent position on the Green.

The Iron Room needs maintenance but otherwise the private properties in the Conservation Area are well cared for and the gardens form an attractive setting for them.



Fig. 38 The netting surrounding the playground

The wire netting surrounding the School playground, whilst performing an essential safety function, is unattractive and out of keeping with the open feeling of the Green. It might be possible to lessen the impact of the netting by providing a more substantial boundary wall to the perimeter of the playground, thereby reducing the amount of netting required.

The impact of telegraph poles and street signs can often be minimised by careful consideration of their location and grouping without detracting from their successful functioning.

4.3 Considerations for Future Policy Recommendations

It seems rather unusual that the Hall Place Estate has been excluded from the Conservation Area, when it has such close links with the development of the village in the 19th Century. In nearby Penshurst, the Park and Penshurst Place fall within the Conservation Area and although the house there has surviving fabric that far pre-dates that at Hall Place, the principle of the manor house and its dependent settlement are similar. Although it is recognised that the inclusion of the Estate would add considerably to the number of applications relating to tree work within the Conservation Area, the proposal should be given serious consideration.



Fig. 39 Hall Place from the south west



Fig. 40 Hall Place from the north west front

The section of land between the west side of Lower Green and the allotments at present falls outside the Conservation Area and the Green Belt, there are some interesting older properties on this site and it could be worthy of inclusion.

The land to the rear of Chilling House is at present excluded from the Area and as it is a site for potential 'back land' development should perhaps be included.

The area boundary runs at present through the front gardens of the three new properties to the West of the footpath that runs north from Powder Mill Lane, taking in the mature trees that were no doubt once located in the grounds of Old Kennards. It might be sensible to re-draw the boundary further to include these properties, or exclude the section of garden and adjacent road and protect the trees separately with tree preservation orders. Similarly the whole of the curtilage of East Lodge and Porcupine House should be included within the boundary.

Acknowledgements:

The draft document was prepared by Donald Insall Associates Ltd.

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MAP 4 Leigh Conservation Area

Designations

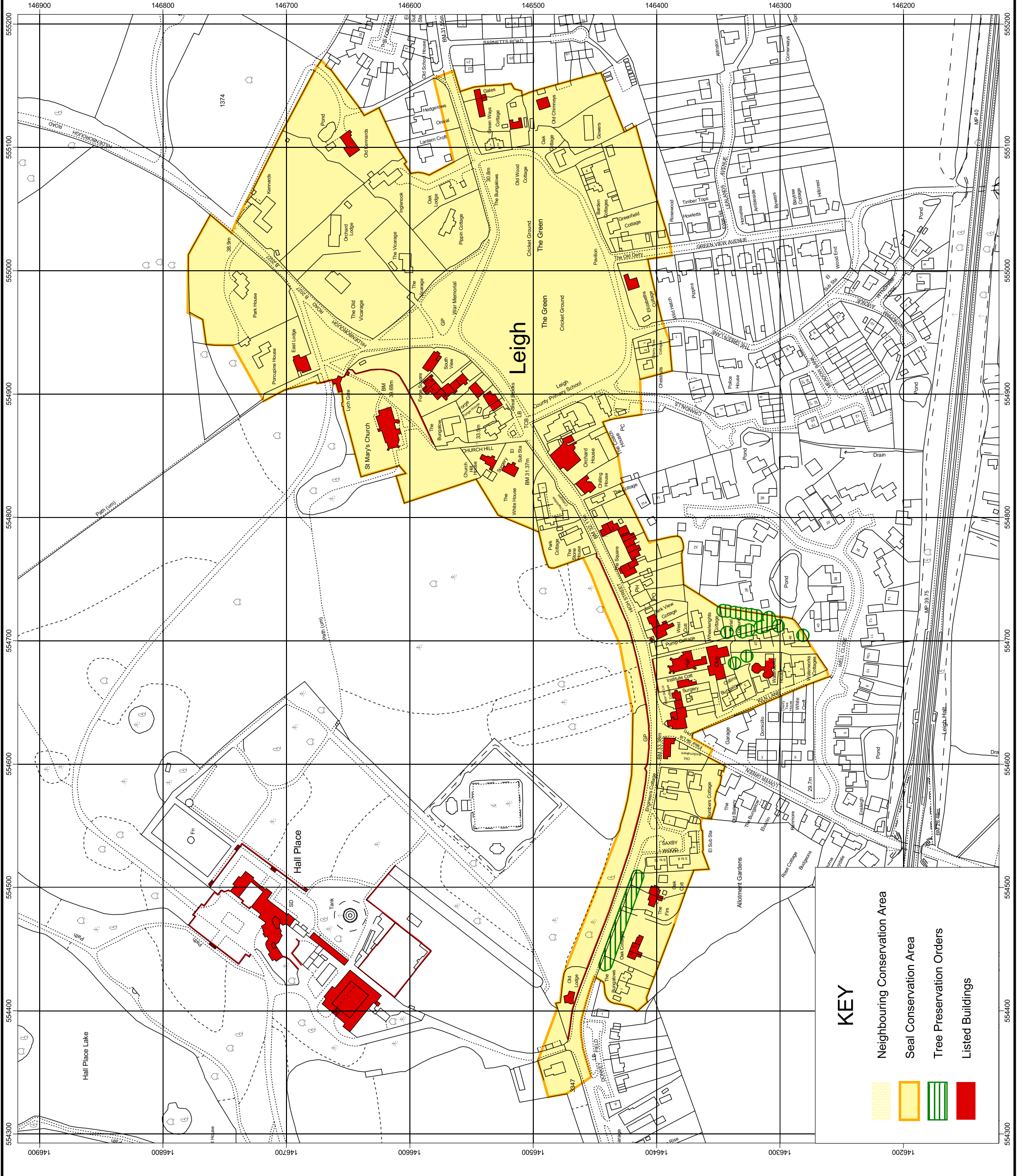
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Date July 1999



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KEY

- Neighbouring Conservation Area
- Seal Conservation Area
- Tree Preservation Orders
- Listed Buildings



MAP 5
Leigh
Conservation Area
Character Appraisal

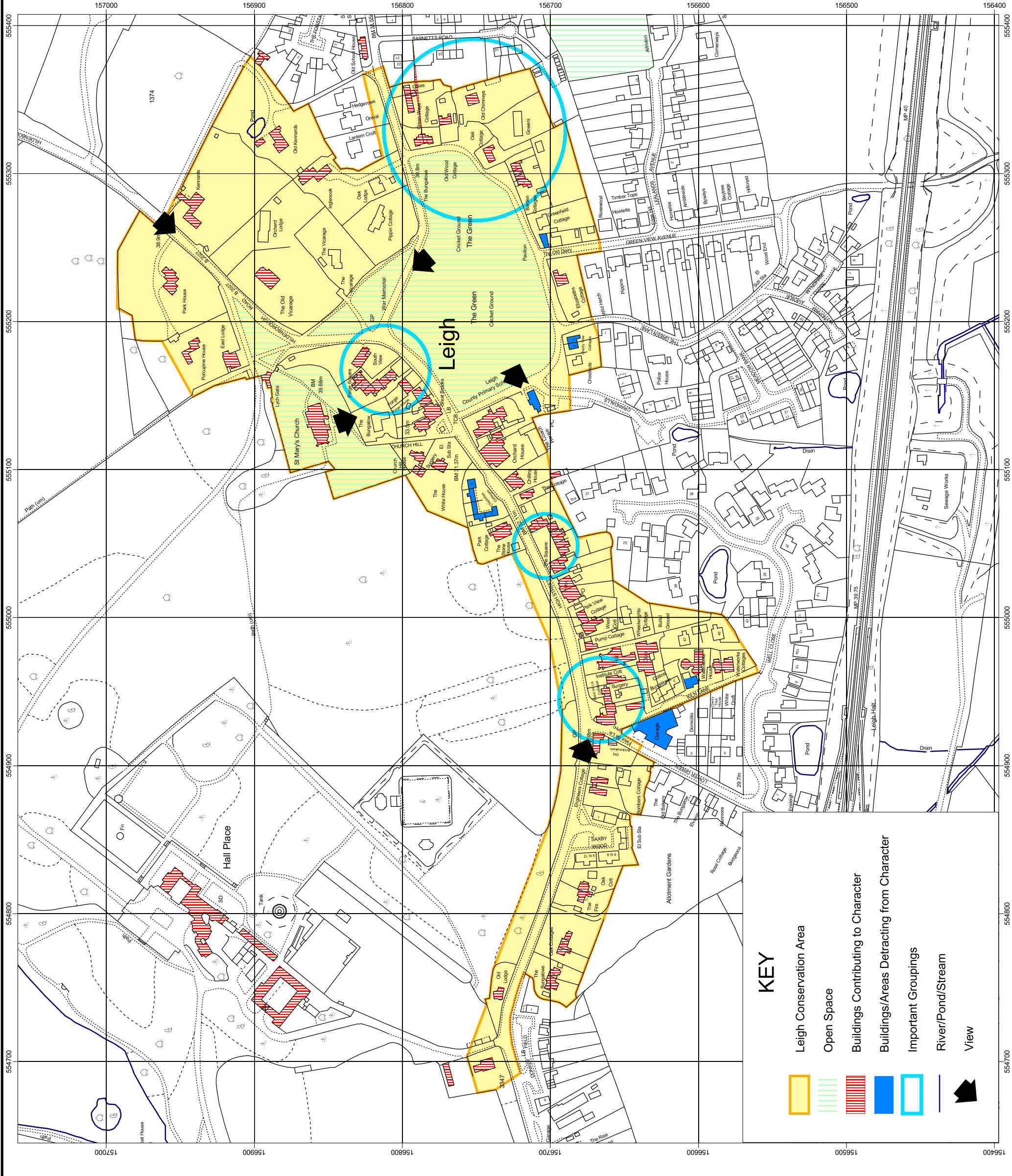
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KEY

- Leigh Conservation Area (Yellow box)
- Open Space (Green hatched box)
- Buildings Contributing to Character (Red hatched box)
- Buildings/Areas Detracting from Character (Blue hatched box)
- Important Groupings (Blue outline box)
- River/Pond/Stream (Blue line)
- View (Black arrow)

