

SWANLEY VILLAGE

Conservation Area Appraisal



SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING GUIDANCE



December 2003

Swanley Village

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. This document was approved by the District Council in December 2003 and adopted as Supplementary Planning Guidance.

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Published by Sevenoaks District Council
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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 states that the Local Planning Authority will undertake detailed assessments of designated Conservation Areas and will prepare proposals for their preservation. 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 are 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 greenspace 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 reuse 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

Swanley Village Conservation Area covers about 10 hectares and contains 12 listed buildings. It was first designated in 1984 and was substantially extended in 1997.

The original designation was limited to the heart of the original village, from School Lane to the Old Place, but was then extended to include the open land to the north and north east, up to St Paul's Church and Old Vicarage. Highlands Farm to the west was included, as were the Priory and Coldharbour Farm to the east.

The Conservation Area now covers most of the village, with a few exceptions made for new development or buildings of lesser historic interest. The area is roughly triangular with linear extensions to the east and west along Swanley Village Road and Highlands Hill.

The countryside around and including the village is designated as Green Belt.

The village is set in agricultural land amongst a variety of farms, and has a school, church and public house. In recent years the building of thirty new houses on the former industrial site in School Lane has radically increased the proportion of residential properties in the village.

2.2 Location and Geographical Context

Swanley village is a small hamlet that lies on a crossroads of two minor country roads to the north east of Swanley town and to the west of the B258.

The M25 motorway runs in close proximity to the eastern boundary of the village and the London/Swanley/Ashford railway line runs to the south.

The village is very close to the town of Swanley to the south west which grew around the rail junction and which became a main commercial centre rather than the original village. To the north west lies Hextable, another village, albeit larger but which also has historic origins.



Map 1 Geographical Location of Swanley Village

2.3 Historical Development

The origins of Swanley were probably as a clearing in the dense woodland, needed for grazing swine in Saxon times. In the 6th and 7th Centuries there were probably two homesteads connected to the settlement at Highlands and Gilden Hill. After the Norman Conquest, these parcels of land were turned into manors, which were then often distributed among the monks at Ghent Abbey and Bermondsey.

Some of the land at Gilden Hill remained in the possession of the Church until the reformation but the remainder, and that of Highlands, was then sold into private ownership.

Tenants farmed the lands for centuries and, in the case of Highlands, it was not until the middle of the 20th Century that the owner became the farmer as well.

The first map of Swanley dates from about 1790, when the village lay between the turnpike road between Sevenoaks and Dartford and between Maidstone and London. The routes into the village were via Button Street from the south and from Birchwood Corner via Highlands Hill from the west.

The village was once more densely populated than it is today and supported no less than six drinking houses. The Red Lion was the only one that had a licence to sell spirits.

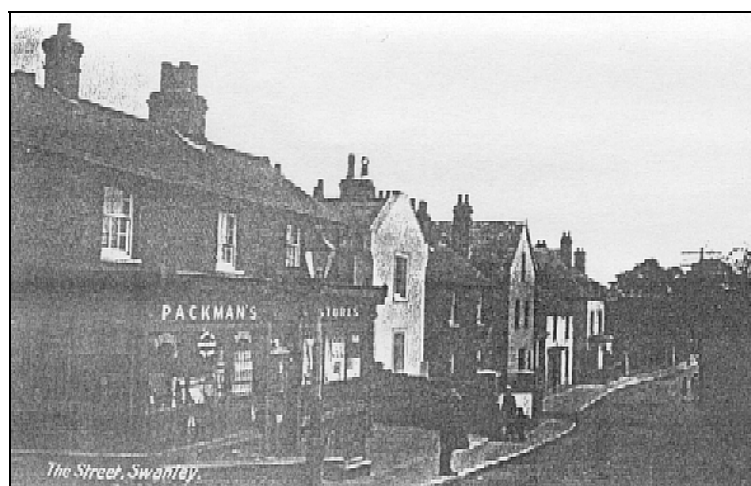


Figure 1 An early postcard of The Street in Swanley Village

St Paul's Church and the railway were built in swift succession – the railway arrived in 1860 and the church the year after. There was no station at this time, the nearest being Farningham Road and St. Mary Cray on the Victoria/Canterbury line. The church was designed by Ewan Christian and extended in 1891. The building of the church also meant that an attached school was opened in 1862.

Apart from the new housing estate, little has changed in the centre of the village since the end of the 19th Century. There have been some individual new houses and the alteration and demolition of others but an inhabitant from past centuries would no doubt recognise the village of today.

2.4 Architectural Description

Swanley Village has examples of many of the usual Kentish vernacular architectural features. There are tile-hung cottages with mellow brickwork, larger properties with painted stucco, much white painted weatherboarding and plain clay tiled or slated roofs. There is a great variety in a small area and no single building can be said to be typical.



Figure 2 Timber weatherboarding and mellow brickwork on Old College

The residential properties vary in size from large detached Victorian villas to tiny 16th Century attached cottages, with the majority being medium-sized semi-detached or detached homes set in good sized plots. There are terraced properties at the top of Highlands Hill, in the centre of Swanley Village and by the Lamb.



Figure 3 Cherry Tree Cottage

The Old Vicarage, is a late 19th Century house by Ewan Christian, who also designed the Church. It has tall chimneys, a steeply pitched roof and decorative blue diaper patterned brickwork.



Figure 4 The Old Vicarage

The Old Place is another 19th Century building, although earlier than the vicarage. It is built of yellow brick and has a hipped slate roof to the main elevation, and a strange tower extension with a flat roof on the elevation that fronts the road.



Figure 5 The Old Place

The Priory dates from the same era as the Old Place and has painted stucco, again beneath a tiled roof. Highlands Farm has walls of painted render and a tiled roof.



Figure 6 The Priory



Figure 7 Highlands Farm

White weatherboarding is a popular cladding material and is found on Highlands, Old College Cottage and White Cottages, amongst many other properties, whilst on Highlands Hill painted brickwork is found on the walls of Vancouver Cottage.



Figure 8 Highlands Cottage



Figure 9 Vancouver Cottage

Older timber-framed properties such as Downs Cottages have painted external render below timber-tiled roofs and typical small casement windows. Elizabethan Cottage of a similar age has first floor decorative tile hanging below a steep roof with a central chimney stack.



Figure 10 Elizabethan Cottage



Figure 11 Beechenlea House

Newer buildings use the same materials in varying styles. There are some Victorian villas at the junction of Swanley Village Road and Beechenlea Lane that have ground floor bay windows, stuccoed elevations and slate roofs, whilst Edwardian houses in Beechenlea Lane have very steep tiled roofs, tile hanging and decorative bargeboards. Redstacks has a front gable with decorative tile slips set between timber framing.



Figure 12 Villas in Swanley Village Road



Figure 13 Redstacks

The church is one of the few examples of ragstone in the village, and has a shingled spire and apsidal chancel typical of Ewan Christian's designs.



Figure 14 St. Paul's Church

There are one or two 20th Century inserts into the village scene that have a distinct architectural style and Galleons Lap is a brick house with detailing reminiscent of Eric Lyon's early work at New Ash Green. Standalane, just outside the Conservation Area, has the massing that recalls the huge agricultural barns and oasts so often found in Kent.



Figure 15 Galleons Lap



Figure 16 Standalane

3.00 CHARACTER APPRAISAL

3.1 Setting of the Area and Spatial Relationships

Swanley Village Conservation Area makes a valuable contribution to the rural environment because of its unspoilt character, open aspects and areas of mature woodland and fields. It is a typical Kentish settlement that has not expanded beyond the confines of the original development, despite the pressures of the encroaching urban sprawl of Swanley town to the south west.



Figure 17 The cross roads at the village centre

The Conservation Area breaks down into several distinct sections. There are the outlying farms of Highlands and Coldharbour to the east and west, which are both estates that date back many centuries. The land at Highlands Farm provides a variety of crops but Coldharbour has not been farmed in recent years and the farmhouse site has permission for redevelopment



Figure 18 Coldharbour Farm

The heart of the village centres on the Red Lion and extends to the junctions of Swanley Village Road and Highlands Hill and Beechenlea Lane. Within this are a number of listed buildings, new houses and open space given over to allotments. There are plenty of mature trees that soften the building lines and reinforce the rural nature of the setting.



Figure 19 View down Swanley Village Road.



Figure 20 The Red Lion

To the south, the development along Beechenlea Lane contains some larger individual houses of varying ages that are set in large mature gardens.



Figure 21 The Lamb Inn

Another cluster of development is centred around the Lamb Inn to the east. This is slightly separated from the rest of the village by agricultural land and the grounds of The Orchard. There are four listed buildings, Old College, Old College Cottage, the Priory and Priory Cottage, and a number of Victorian cottages close to the public house.



Figure 22 Church Cottage in the open area to the east

To the north of the village centre the Glebe and Swanley Village Green contains the Church and Old Vicarage together with the recreation ground and some individual houses set amongst the

trees. Approaching the village from the west, the road climbs up past Highlands Farm and Highlands Cottage to the triangle where the three roads meet.

The main street winds eastwards and invites exploration past the cottages that front the road, down towards the Old Place and Elizabethan Cottage, which are again set amidst mature trees. The trees also soften the impact of the new houses at the junction with Beechenlea Lane.



Figure 23 Swanley Village Road, looking west

All the roads in and out of the village are narrow leafy lanes and there are many footpaths and tracks traversing into the woodland around St Paul's Church. These lead to the houses hidden amongst the trees – Church Cottage, The Orchard and Orchard and Briar Cottages. The enclosure of the village within this network of lanes gives it a timeless quality, which is particularly valuable in an area so close to major transport infrastructure, and the outskirts of Greater London.



Figure 24 Orchard Cottage



Figure 25 Footpath through the land around the Church

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

It is probably the individual groupings of listed buildings that have the biggest impact on the Conservation Area. The Old Place, together with its associated outbuildings and Elizabethan Cottage on the opposite side of the road form a picturesque group that also includes Orchard Lodge and the Cottage.



Figure 26 Orchard Lodge

In the centre of the village, the Red Lion, the pair of 1 and 2 White Cottages, together with Hillbrow and Downs Cottages is another distinctive group that forms a focal point in the winding village street.



Figure 27 Downs Cottage

Unfortunately the single storey former butchers shop extension to Hillbrow detracts from the historic character of the 16th Century timber framed building behind.



Figure 28 Hillbrow

The grouping at the Swanley Village Road, Beechenlea Lane junction features the Victorian Villas, Cherry Tree Cottage, which dates from the 18th Century and the contemporary homes built in the past few decades – an eclectic mix but an interesting combination.



Figure 29 Cottages at the junction of Beechenlea Lane

The setting of the School, Church and Old Vicarage in the north of the village reminds us that these are relative newcomers on the scene and stand a little divorced from the historic centre. The land around them forms a link between the buildings of the settlement and the open farmland beyond.

The Priory and its grounds is an attractive feature at the eastern end of the village as is the little group around the Lamb Public House.



Figure 30 The Priory

The insensitive detailing of the single storey front extension has spoilt the former Wesleyan Chapel.



Figure 31 The Wesleyan Chapel

Highlands Farmhouse is an important reminder of the farming tradition of the area and, together with Highlands and Vancouver Cottage, forms an historic group at the entrance to the village.

Particularly prominent and interesting individual houses in the village include The Old Vicarage, Beechenlea House, Alice Dene and The Orchard.



Figure 32 Alice Dene

4.00 FUTURE TRENDS

4.1 Current and Future Pressures on the Area

Small country settlements like Swanley Village are in danger of becoming cut off from the larger towns as public transport gives way to the motor car. Although there are frequent pledges to support rural buses, in practice it is difficult for these routes to be economically viable, and residents in such places have to rely on their own transport. This has led to the demise of the local shop as people use larger establishments outside the area and in turn, the sense of community can sometimes disappear as well. Swanley Village is lucky to retain its school, church and public houses, but car ownership is virtually a prerequisite for living in such an area. New development brings an increase in traffic using the often narrow and twisting country lanes that lead to the village.

Swanley Village Road is a local rat run and the narrow village lanes together with limited off street parking and footpaths can create conflicts between pedestrians and vehicles. Granite sett rumble strips and a less formal gravel surface to the road were used as part of an environmental improvement scheme in 1995. The change in surface material gives visual emphasis to the rural character of the conservation area and was partly intended to change driver perceptions. It is important that this character is retained in any future highway works.

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 Swanley Village there are buildings that have been converted and others that may convert in the future. It is always difficult for the Local Planning Authority to strike a balance between the desire to find an alternative viable use for old farm buildings, whilst still preserving some evidence of their original form and function.

Housing in the village is expensive and this has led to increased demand for extensions and new outbuildings which can conflict with conservation and Green Belt policies. Changes of use can lead to conflict between residents and the agricultural/commercial uses in the village. These changes require careful management to maintain the character and appearance of the conservation area.

In Swanley Village space between buildings, the variety of plot widths, the scale and height of housing and the use of local materials all contribute to the distinctive character of the area. In addition to the diverse range of buildings, mature trees and hedgerows make a significant visual contribution to the conservation area. Mature garden planting also has a positive impact particularly when seen from public spaces. All these aspects need careful consideration when development proposals are assessed.

4.2 Future Policy Recommendations

Lower Daltons, at the eastern extremity of the conservation area, is a much altered older property with some historic interest. It is identified in Horace J Balls history of Swanley Village and has historic structure in the basement. Although probably not worthy of listing, it could be included within the boundaries of the conservation area. Coldharbour on Button Street is an

imposing house which makes a positive contribution to the character of the conservation area and could be included.

The allotments to the south of Red House and the buildings of Old Place Farm are a part of the village environment and the setting of the conservation area and could be included within the area.

Standalane, although modern, has a contribution to make to the area and the building and its grounds may be a positive addition to the Conservation Area.

Acknowledgements:

The draft document was prepared by Donald Insall Associates Ltd.

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MAP 2 Swanley Village Conservation Area

Designations

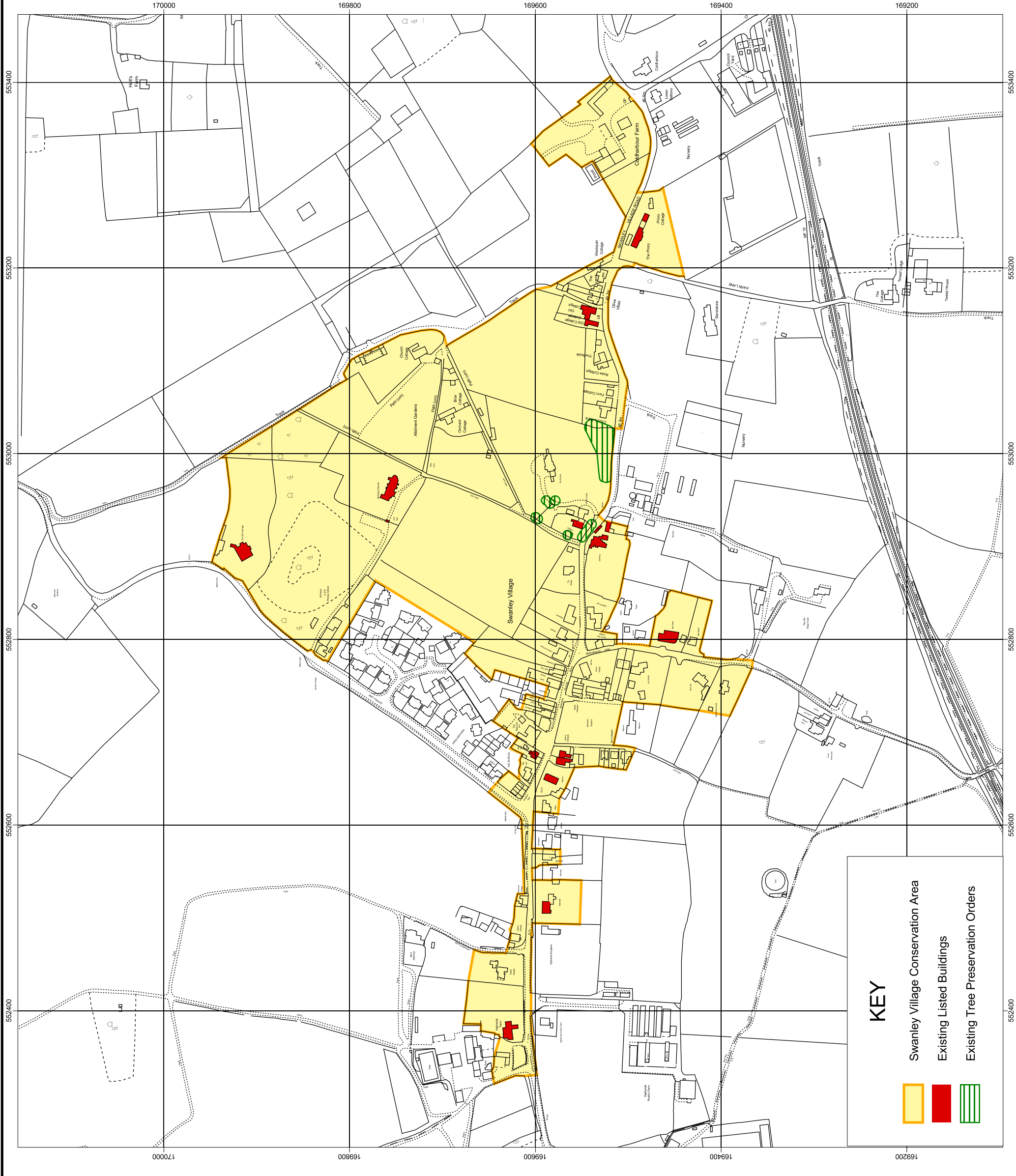
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KEY

-  Swanley Village Conservation Area
-  Existing Listed Buildings
-  Existing Tree Preservation Orders



MAP 4
Swanley Village
Conservation Area
Recommendations for
Future Policy Changes

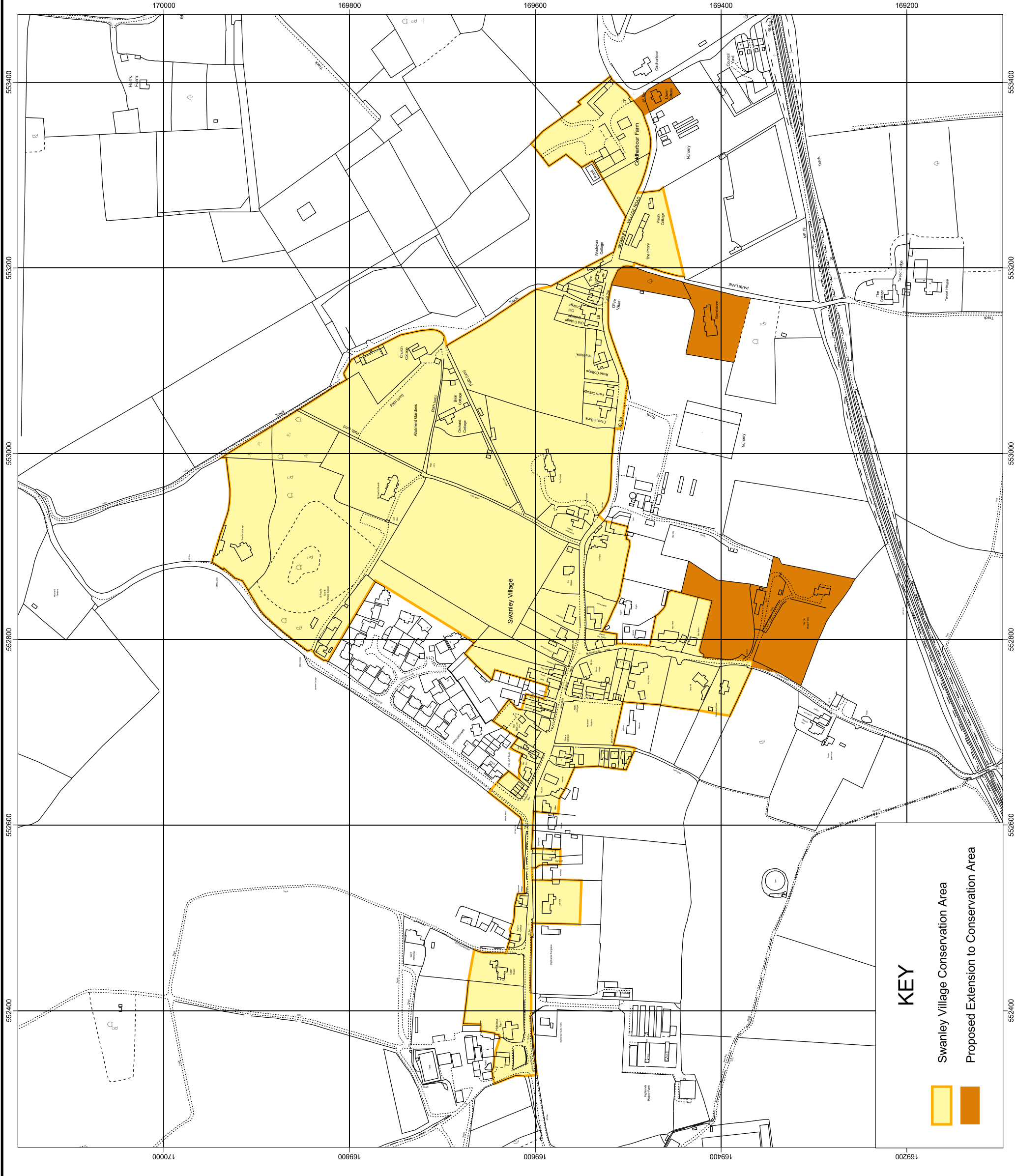
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KEY

Swanley Village Conservation Area

Proposed Extension to Conservation Area

