

Bessels Green

Conservation Area Appraisal



SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING GUIDANCE



December 2003

Bessels Green

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

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Published by Sevenoaks District Council
Strategic Services Department
Policy & Regeneration Section
Council Offices
Argyle Road
Sevenoaks
Kent TN13 1HG

Tel: 01732 227000

Fax: 01732 451332

Website: www.sevenoaks.gov.uk

Email: policy.environment@sevenoaks.gov.uk

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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 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 this 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 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.**

2.0 DESCRIPTION OF CONSERVATION AREA

2.1 General Description

Bessels Green Conservation Area covers some 3.5 hectares and contains 24 listed buildings. It was designated in 1971.

The Conservation Area centres on the triangular green that is bounded by the Westerham Road (A25), Bessels Green Road and Park Place. The Green has some visually significant mature trees; the enclosing buildings that surround it vary greatly in size and character but all contribute to the character of the conservation area.

On the east side are a range of terraced cottages and a large 17th and 18th Century house; at the apex of the triangle is the Baptist Church and Bessels House and on the west side are a series of larger residential properties and the King's Head Public House.

On the north side of Westerham Road a series of detached residential properties are set in the former grounds of Chipstead Place. Part of their gardens are included in the Conservation Area.

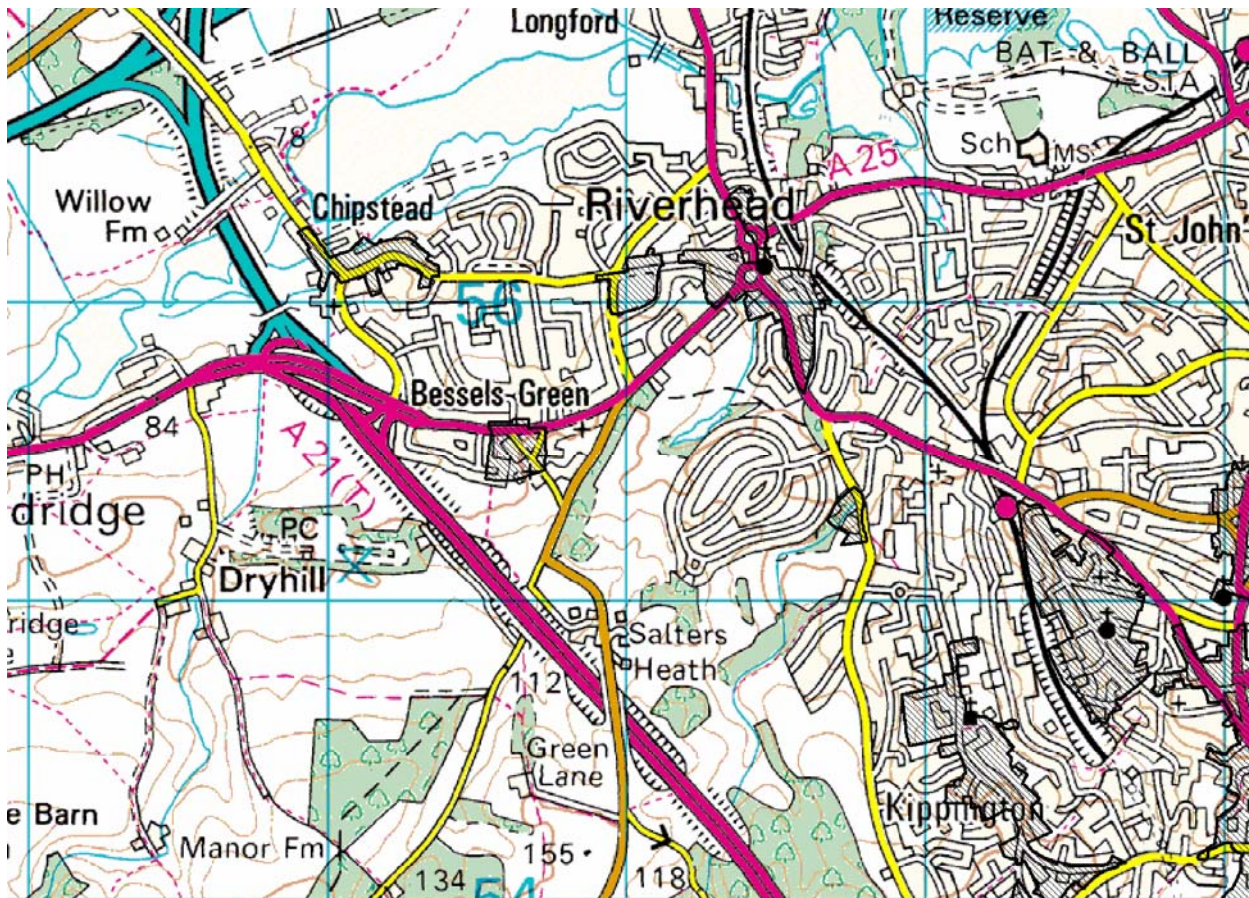
To the south west, part of the residential cul-de-sac Bessels Meadow is included, which contains four detached houses dating from the 1970's

2.2 Location and Geographical Context

Bessels Green is a hamlet situated on the A25 close to the junction with the A21 and M25. It lies south of Chipstead and to the west of the former Montreal Park, from which it is separated by the B2042.

The land to the south of the Conservation Area is open farmland and is included in the Green Belt, an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and Special Landscape Area.

Bessels Green lies close to the villages of Chipstead and Riverhead and there is no distinct boundary between them. It is the open space of the Green that differentiates the area from that of its surroundings and is therefore an important feature of the conservation area.



Map 1 Geographical Location

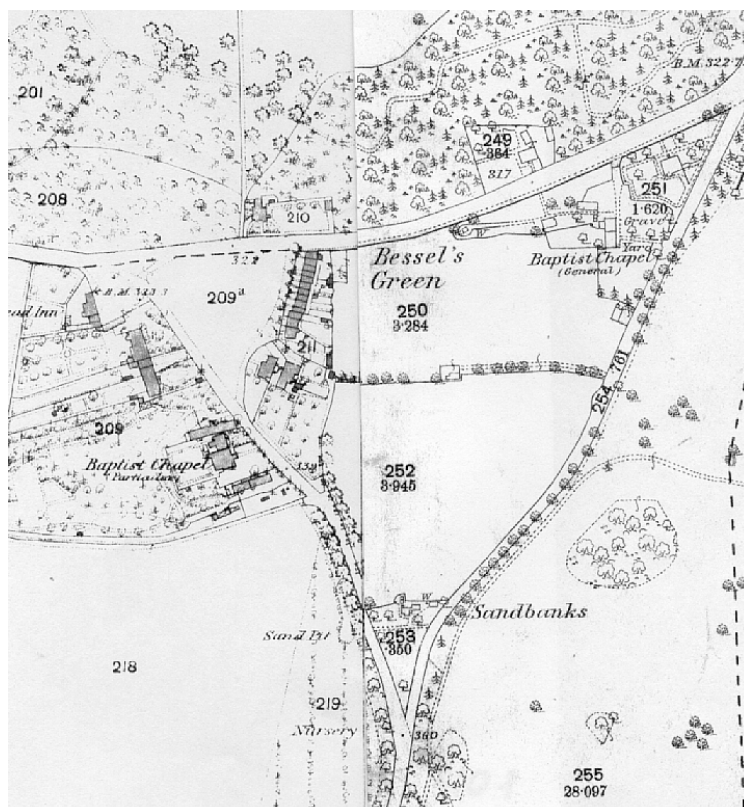
2.3 Historical Development

Bessels Green forms a small part of a larger settlement grouped around minor road junctions. Whilst there was a turnpike running east-west on the north side of the Green this was predated by several centuries by Rye road which was used by trains of packhorses carrying fish from Rye to London as well as by many other travellers. Bessels Green Road on the west side of the Green is the route of the old Rye road and led to the opening of the Kings Head and what was the Red Lion, now called Southdown House.



Fig 1 An early postcard of the public house

The Chapel in Bessels Green Road was built in 1770 following the 1689 Toleration Act, which extended freedom of worship to non-conformists. Bessels House was built in 1819. The Old Meeting House east of the conservation area was built in 1716 as soon as the law allowed and is the first nonconformist chapel in the District



Map 2 Bessels Green in 1869

To the north of Bessels Green stood Chipstead Place which was demolished in 1932 and was the closest major property in the area. One of the lodges to the Park still stands on the north side of the A25.

The Ordnance Survey map of 1869 shows that the Conservation Area has changed little since that date, although it is now surrounded on three sides by other development.



Figure 2 The west side of the Green, on an early postcard

2.4 Architectural Description

The Conservation Area contains good examples of some of the most common of the vernacular features that are typically found in traditional Kentish buildings. Roofs are either slated, with lead hip and ridge rolls, or covered with clay tiles hung on pegs or nibs. Dormer windows are often inserted into the roof slopes, giving light to attic spaces, which can then be utilised for additional accommodation. The pitches of tiled roofs tend to be steep, whilst those that are slated are shallower, and the contrasting heights of the ridge lines lend variety and interest to the streetscene.



Figure 3 Heath Cottage built between 1711 and 1733.

Brick is the most popular building material and is often painted or rendered. The use of local ragstone is found only in boundary walls and on the ground floor of a pair of older cottages. There are isolated examples of roughcast render and weatherboarding.



Figure 4 Vessels , built by William & John Couchman in 1814

Windows are generally sliding sashes although casements are found on the older cottages.



Figure 5 A view across the Green, to the south east



Figure 6 The rear elevation of Bessels House

The front elevation of Bessels House is of classic Regency proportions with a slate mansard roof, although the depth of the house is surprisingly narrow for such an imposing frontage.



Figure 7 Southdown House



Figure 8 Southdown Cottage

Southdown House is probably earlier than the stuccoed front elevation with tall sash windows would suggest. The steep tiled roof behind the front parapet suggests an earlier timber framed construction that has been “modernised”. Attached to it is Southdown Cottage, which was the brew house when Southdown House was the Red Lion, and this has painted brick elevations, tiled roof and gable ends and some coursed stonework either side of the 19th Century entrance porch.



Figure 9 Park Place from the west

Park Place is a row of two storey 19th Century terraced cottages that face westwards onto the Green. They have white painted stuccoed walls beneath slate roofs but their joinery is painted in a variety of bright colours which, although not particularly authentic, is cheerful and attractive.

At the southern end of the terrace, Glencot, Yew Tree Cottage and Tanners Cottage are slightly larger than those of Park Place, and Yew Tree and Tanners have tiled roofs and tile hanging to the first floor.



Figure 10 The Baptist Church

The Baptist Church and attached Manse are an unusual juxtaposition of plain painted brick and single arched fenestration with gothic details to the porches.

3.0 CHARACTER APPRAISAL

3.1 Setting of the Area and Spatial Relationships

Bessels Green Conservation Area retains much of the historic feel of a settlement that has grown up round the Green and which has not changed much over time.



Figure 11 The Green with Park Place beyond

The expanse of grass and mature trees is a pleasant visual surprise as one rounds the corner by Park Place from the east, or approaches up the slight slope past the 20th Century residential development from the west. Although the Green is set adjacent to the busy main road, the eye is led away from the centre of the area toward Bessels House and, from there, up Bessels Green Road to the more rural area beyond.



Figure 12 The Green and Southdown House

Although the properties around the Green are varied in age and size, the two groups facing the Green are well balanced and complement each other. The trees and shrubs play an important part in linking them visually.



Figure 13 The wall in front of Southdown House

The brick and coursed stone rubble wall that extends from the garden of Yew Tree Cottage around the boundary of Southdown House forms a cohesive link between the two groups of buildings.

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

Buildings in the conservation area date mainly from the 18th and 19th Centuries, although Southdown House and Heath Cottage have earlier origins. The contrast in style and size between the various properties is great and contributes to the charm and character of the conservation area.



Figure 14 Bessels House

Southdown House and Bessels House are the largest private properties around the Green.

The group of attached houses on the west side of the Green vary considerably in their detailing. The roofs have both slate and tiling and vary in height. There are elevations of painted brick, roughcast and tile hanging. There is a certain uniformity in the size of the window panes, but the general variety adds to the distinctive character of the group.



Figure 15 Dormers and Dormers Cottage

From east and west the King's Head public house and Park Place provide visual stops at the corners of the triangle formed by the green and surrounding roads. Although the traffic along the main road is heavy, the large open expanse of green provides a buffer between the road and the group of listed buildings that are concentrated in the area.



Figure 16 The Kings Head

The King's Head Inn, on the junction with the main road has evolved from the original 17th Century historic core and has a number of contrasting styles of fenestration, which presents an attractive and interesting elevation to the street.

Four 20th Century houses in Bessels Meadow are included because they are in the former grounds of Bessels House. They do not significantly contribute to the character of the area but are hidden from the Green.



Figure 17 House in Bessels Meadow

4.0 FUTURE TRENDS

4.1 Current and Future Pressures on the Area

With the exception of surrounding newer development, there has been little change in this conservation area for a long period, apart from additional traffic and parking. As well as some cars that belong to the residents of Park Place, who have no space for off street parking, there is an element of longstay parking by people from outside the area and an occasional overspill from the pub, and casual visitors enjoying the open space of the Green.

Recent development in the conservation area has been restricted to the four new houses in Bessels Meadow. It is unlikely that there is potential for further new buildings within the conservation area. The only plot of any size with relatively straightforward access is the garden of Southdown House.

4.2 Potential for Enhancement and Future Policy Recommendations

The former Lodge to Chipstead Place is on the north eastern extremity of the conservation area. It is not listed, but is a handsome building with distinctive decorative bargeboards that is of interest because of its link with Chipstead Place, historically the main house in the area. It is recommended that consideration be given to its inclusion in the conservation area.



Figure 18 Park Lodge from the Green



Figure 19 Park Lodge

At the south east tip of the area, a part of the listed wall to Southdown House falls outside the boundary. It would seem sensible to modify the boundary slightly to include the wall.

Acknowledgements

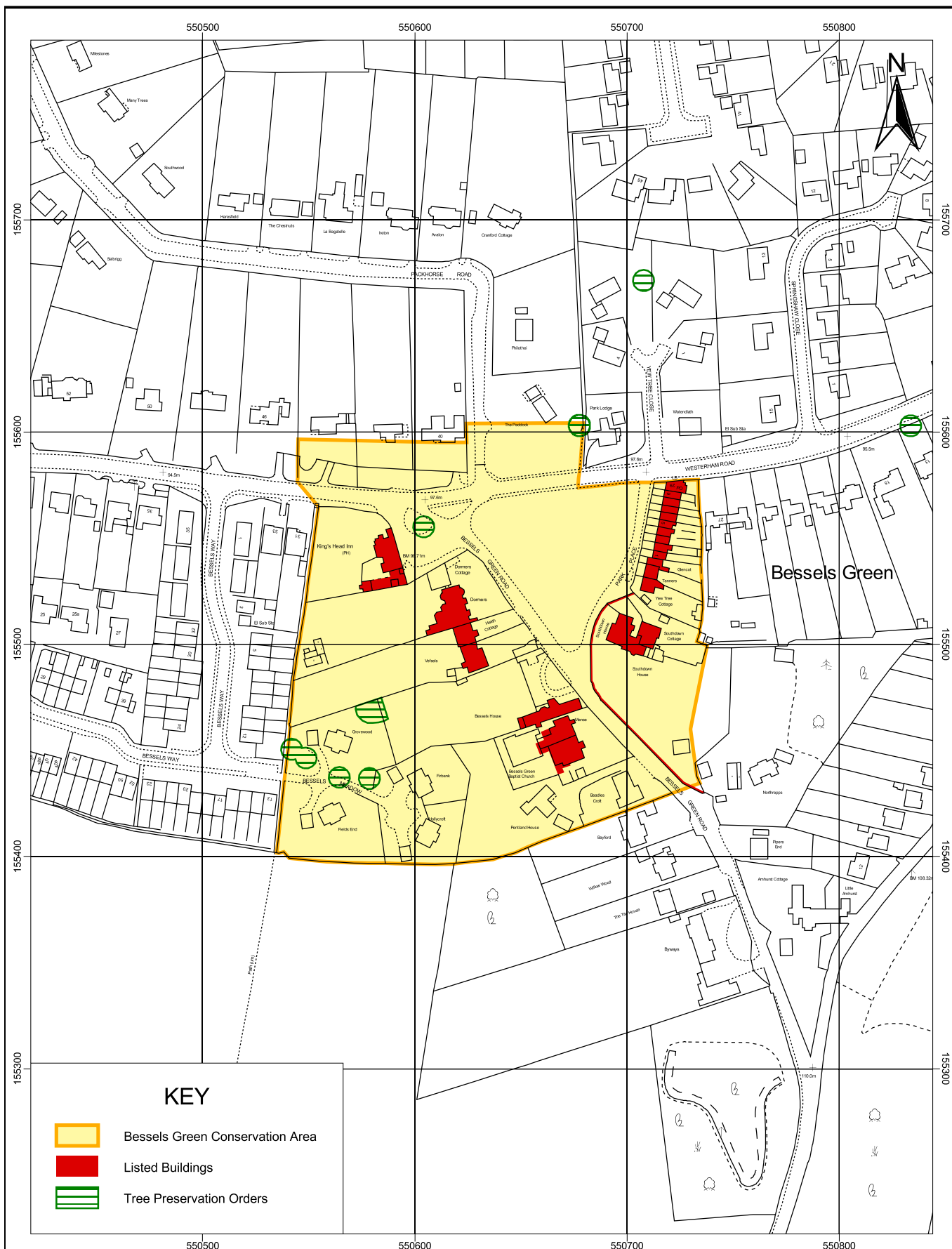
The draft document was prepared by Donald Insall Associates Ltd

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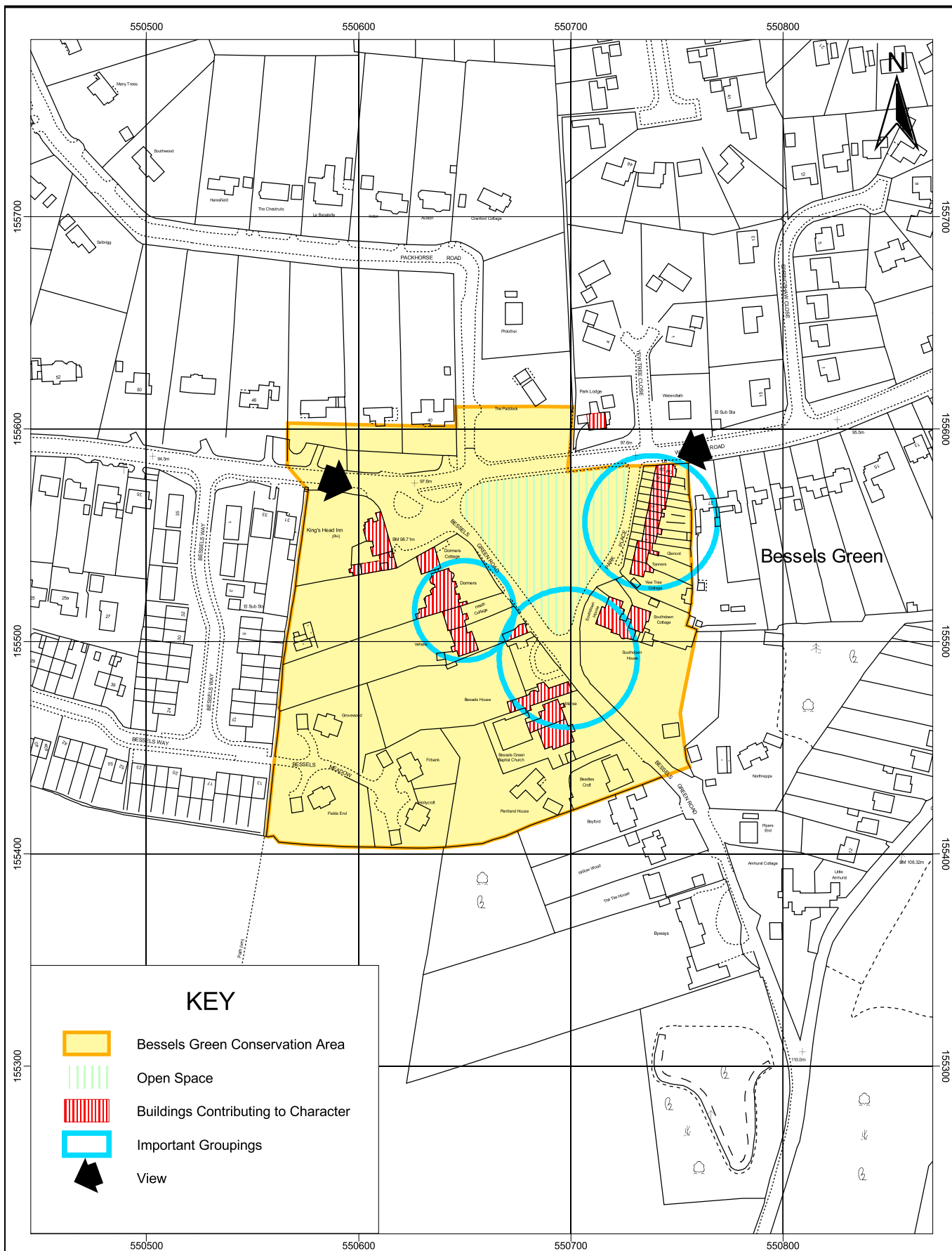
MAP 3 Bessels Green Conservation Area Designations

Scale 1:2500

Date March 2003

Drawn By SNM

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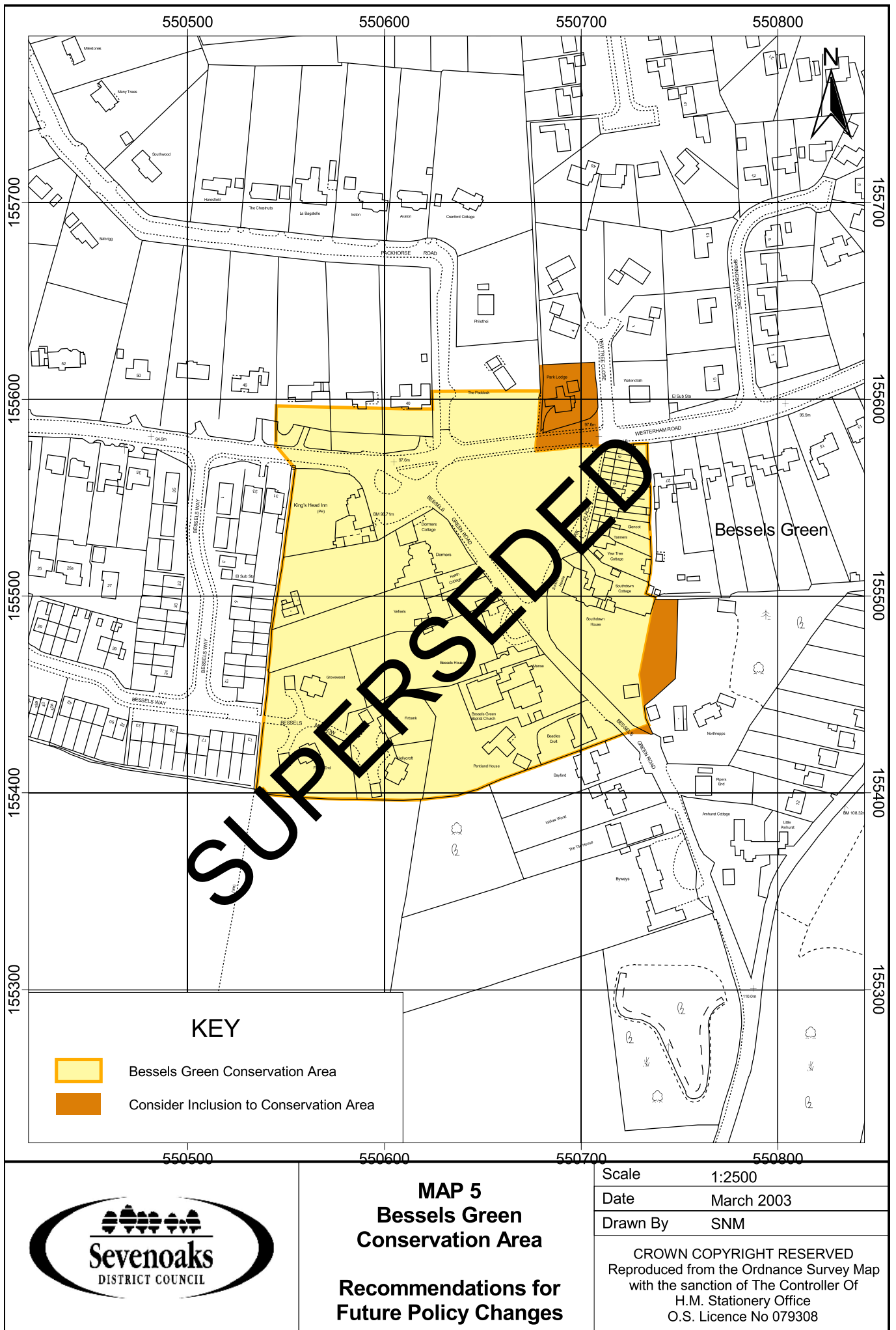
KEY

- Bessels Green Conservation Area
- Open Space
- Buildings Contributing to Character
- Important Groupings
- View



MAP 4
Bessels Green
Conservation Area
Character Appraisal

Scale	1:2500
Date	March 2003
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Map superseded. Please refer to Bessels Green Appraisal map, PDF dated June 2019