

Sevenoaks District Conservation Areas

An introduction to appraisals



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1.0 What is this document?

This document is an overarching introduction to five conservation area appraisals which were revised in 2019 as part of Sevenoaks District Council's conservation area review programme.

The affected conservation areas are:

- Brasted High Street;
- Leigh;
- Seal;
- Shoreham (previously Shoreham High Street and Church Street, and Shoreham Mill Lane);
- Swanley Village.

Each revised conservation area appraisal consists of three parts:

Sevenoaks District Conservation Area Appraisals

- Part 1: An Introduction to Conservation Area Appraisals revised in 2019
- Part 2: The appraisal
- Part 3: Conservation Area Design Guidance

The appraisals can be downloaded from the Sevenoaks District Council website.

This document will be updated as the Council progresses with its conservation area review programme.

The location of conservation areas which have new appraisals is shown on the map opposite.



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2.0 Purpose of conservation area appraisals

Conservation area appraisals help Sevenoaks District Council and local communities to preserve the special character of conservation areas.

They do this by providing homeowners, developers, Council officers and other interested parties with a framework against which future development proposals in the conservation area can be assessed and determined.

A conservation area appraisal outlines the history of an area and explains what makes it special. It identifies the elements that make up the character and special interest of the area, and those that detract from it, and provides recommendations for the area's future management. This may include recommendation for the changes to its boundaries, where appropriate.

In doing so, appraisals support the District Council's legal duty (under section 71 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990) to prepare proposals for the preservation and enhancement of conservation areas and to consult the public about those proposals.

3.0 Owning a building in a conservation area

3.1 What are conservation areas?

Conservation areas are areas of 'special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance' – in other words, they exist to protect the features and the characteristics that make a historic place unique and distinctive.

They were introduced by the Civic Amenities Act 1967. They need to have a definite architectural quality or historic interest to merit designation.

They are normally designated by the local planning authority, in this case Sevenoaks District Council.

3.2 Effects of conservation area designation

The Council has a duty, in exercising its planning powers, to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of the area.

Designation introduces some extra planning controls and considerations, which exist to protect the historical and architectural elements which make the areas special places. Historic England has a helpful website that explains these planning controls and considerations, including those on;

- Trees in conservation areas;
- Demolition of a building or structure in a conservation area;
- Permitted development.

See: <https://historicengland.org.uk/advice/your-home/owning-historic-property/conservation-area/>

Whilst conservation area designation brings with it additional responsibilities for owners and occupiers, these are often outweighed by the benefits of living in an area of architectural integrity and traditional character. People tend to value these areas for their distinctiveness, and this value is often reflected in higher property values. See the Historic England research report on the financial benefit of conservation areas: <https://historicengland.org.uk/content/docs/research/assessment-ca-valuepdf/>

Policy background

Government planning policies in relation to conservation areas and other types of designated heritage assets are set out in Chapter 16 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-planning-policy-framework--2>

Local policies for alterations and development in conservation areas are contained in the Sevenoaks Council's Core Strategy (adopted 2011), Policy SP1 Design of New Development and Conservation, and in the Allocations and Development Management Plan (adopted 2015), Policy EN3 (Demolition in Conservation Areas) and EN4 (Heritage Assets). [https://www.sevenoaks.gov.uk/info/20069129/current_local_plan/249/core_strategy_development_plan_4.0 Appraising conservation areas and defining significance](https://www.sevenoaks.gov.uk/info/20069129/current_local_plan/249/core_strategy_development_plan_4.0/Appraising_conservation_areas_and_defining_significance)

4.0 Appraising conservation areas and defining significance

4.1 Best practice

Two Historic England publications provided relevant and widely-recognised advice for this project, which informed the methodology employed to prepare the draft appraisals:

- **Conservation Area Designation, Appraisal and Management; Historic England Advice Note 1** (Second edition), Historic England (2018)
- **The Setting of Heritage Assets: Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning Note 3** (Second Edition) Historic England (2017)

Other guidance and advice documents that were consulted are listed in the Sources in Section 7.0.

4.2 Methodology

The appraisal of each conservation area involved the following steps:

- A re-survey of the area and its boundaries;
- A review of the condition of the area since the last appraisal was undertaken to identify changes and trends;
- Identification of views which contribute to appreciation of the character of the conservation area;
- A description of the character of the area and the key elements that contribute to it;
- Where appropriate, the identification of character zones where differences in spatial patterns and townscape are notable that have derived from the way the area developed, its architecture, social make-up, historical associations and past and present uses;
- Assessment of the contribution made by open space within and around the conservation area;
- Identification of heritage assets, other positive contributors and, where applicable, detractors;
- Making recommendations for future management of the conservation area.

4.3 Heritage Assets

The appraisals identify buildings, listed or unlisted, which are of townscape merit or which contribute in other ways to the special architectural and historic interest of the area.

Statutory listed buildings are buildings and structures that have, individually or as groups, been recognised as being of national importance for their special architectural and historic interest. The high number of nationally listed buildings plays an important part in the heritage significance of many of the district's conservation areas. Listed buildings are referred to as designated heritage assets.

There are many unlisted buildings that help to shape the character of an area. The Historic England advice note on conservation area designation, appraisal and management includes a set of criteria that can be used to identify positive contributors in a conservation area.

Positive contributors identified during the re-survey tend to meet at least one or more of the criteria shown below. They can include buildings that may have suffered from unsympathetic alterations but have retained their historic form and could be restored to their original appearance relatively easily.

Positive contributors in conservation areas constitute non-designated heritage assets.

Checklist for identifying positive contributors in a conservation area:

- Is it the work of a particular architect or designer of local or regional note?
- Does it have landmark quality?
- Does it reflect a substantial number of other element in the conservation area, in age, style, materials, form or other characteristics?
- Does it relate to adjacent designated heritage assets in age, materials or in any other historically significant way?
- Does it contribute to the quality of recognisable spaces including exterior or open spaces within a complex of public buildings?
- Is it associated with a designed landscape, e.g. a significant wall, terracing or a garden building?
- Does it individually, or as part of a group, illustrate the development of the settlement in which it stands?
- Does it have significant historic associations with features such as the historic road layout, burgage plots, a town park or a landscape feature?
- Does it have historic associations with local people or past events?
- Does it reflect the traditional functional character or former use in the area?
- Does its use contribute to the character or appearance of the area?

Source: **Conservation Area Designation, Appraisal and Management**, Historic England 2018, Table 1, p. 16.

4.4 Detractors

Not every aspect of a conservation area will contribute to the characteristics that make it special.

This may be by virtue of the scaling and detailing of structures and their impact on the streetscape or townscape, the type and extent of alterations to houses, the way buildings relate to neighbouring properties, street clutter, or poor quality of features such as shopfronts, advertisements, street furniture or hard landscaping.

4.5 Views analysis

Significant views have been identified both because they contribute to the understanding and appreciation of the special character of the conservation areas (and in some cases the contribution of their landscape setting), and because they are a consideration in assessing the impact of new development and other change within the area or its setting.

The methodology applies best practice from Historic England's advice document **The Setting of Heritage Assets: Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning Note 3** (Second Edition) 2017.

At the heart of the methodology is the analysis of the 'significance' of each view in terms of its historical, architectural, townscape, aesthetic and community interest, and of the key landmarks or heritage assets visible within it.

The purpose is to identify views that capture and express the special and unique character of each conservation area, although the list in each appraisal does not claim to be exhaustive.

Views are categorised as:

- **Townscape views:** views within the conservation area which are short in range and enclosed by buildings or trees;
- **Contextual views:** longer range views from within the conservation area into the surrounding landscape;
- **Scenic views:** views from outside the conservation area which allow it to be understood and appreciated in its landscape setting.

4.6 Open space assessment

The character of a conservation area can be affected not just by the buildings in it, but also by open space inside and outside its boundaries. The appraisals therefore include an assessment of the value of such spaces to the character and appearance of the conservation area.

Definition

Open space is defined as common land, farmland, countryside and recreational spaces (including school grounds, churchyards and cemeteries). Private gardens and private car parks are excluded.

Analysis

The analysis considered open space inside and immediately outside the conservation areas. Fieldwork to assess the open space was carried out in March and April 2018; seasonal variations, particularly leaf growth on trees may make a difference to the contribution of open space at different times of year.

Fieldwork was combined with an analysis of historic mapping and other secondary sources. From this, the following factors were taken into account in assessing the contribution of open space to the character and appearance of each conservation area:

Open spaces were mapped and graded into three different categories: 'strong contribution', 'some contribution' and 'no or negligible contribution'.

1. the historical relationship and function of open space;
2. its contribution to the form and structure of historical settlements;
3. how open space is experienced and viewed from within the conservation area;
4. how the pattern of historic settlements and their relationship to the wider landscape can be understood when looking in from outside.

Open spaces were mapped and graded into three different categories: 'strong contribution', 'some contribution' and 'no or negligible contribution'.

5.0 Public consultation

In preparing each draft conservation appraisal (Stages 1 and 2 as set out in Sevenoaks District Council's Statement of Community Involvement in Planning) a walk-about and on site discussion was undertaken with representatives of the community of each conservation area. This was of assistance in gathering evidence on the history of the conservation areas and understanding its condition and the issues affecting its future management. Those attending included District and Parish Councillors, local amenity, and civic and historical societies.

Wider public consultation on the draft appraisals (Stage 3) was carried out for a period of six weeks from mid-October to the end of November 2018.

Copies of the appraisals and accompanying documents were posted on the Sevenoaks District Council website, where they could be read and/or downloaded. Paper copies were made available locally and at the Council offices in Sevenoaks.

'Drop-in' sessions were held in each of the five villages affected, where Council staff and the external consultants who prepared the draft appraisals were available to answer questions and explain how the assessments had been made.

Written comments could be submitted online, by email, or on printed feedback forms available at the local consultation events.

The public consultation events were attended by a total of 97 people. A total of 60 responses were received.

A full report on the public consultation is available on the Council's website.

6.0 How to use the document

6.1 Software

- Documents created as part of this project have been designed to be viewed digitally. They will work best on Adobe Reader or Adobe Acrobat Pro versions X or later on a PC or laptop.
- Please be aware that some interactive features such as layered maps and navigation buttons do not currently work on many other pdf readers, or on the version of Adobe Reader which is used on many mobile devices such as Ipads and mobile phones.
- Because the layered maps are an integral part of the appraisals, we recommend using Adobe on a desktop PC or laptop only.

6.2 Navigation

- To navigate through an appraisal, click on the relevant title on the contents page.
- Hyperlinks - identified by blue text - are quick links within the appraisals to other sections of the report.
- A series of buttons at the bottom of each page allow you to:
 - ☰ return to the contents page
 - 🗺 access the layered map
 - ↶ return to the previous page
 - ↔ go back one page or forward one page

Layered maps

- Using the 🗺 button at the foot of the page you can access the layered conservation area map.
- This has a series of layers, each displaying a different piece of information. For example, heritage assets, historic Ordnance Survey maps, the conservation area boundary, etc.
- These layers can be hidden and revealed in any combination.
- This is achieved by switching layers on and off using the 'layers panel', which can be revealed by clicking the button on the left hand side of the screen (although it should display automatically).
- On this panel click the small box alongside the layer name to hide or reveal it.

7.0 Sources and Acknowledgements

7.1 Sources

7.1.1 Legislation and policy

National Planning Policy Framework, MHCLG (2018)

Sevenoaks District Local Plan (2011)

7.1.2 Guidance

Conservation Area Designation, Appraisal and Management; Historic England Advice Note 1 (Second edition), Historic England (2018)

Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning Note 3: The Setting of Heritage Assets (Second edition), Historic England (2017)

7.1.3 Reference

National Heritage List for England, Historic England (online)

Kent Historic Buildings Index: Sevenoaks Section, Kent Historic Buildings Committee (1998)

Ordnance Survey mapping

7.1.4 Secondary sources

'Influences shaping the human landscape of the Sevenoaks area since c.1600', Archaeologia Cantiana Vol 130, David Killingray (2010)

Buildings of England, Kent: West and the Weald, John Newman (2012)

English Domestic Architecture: Kent Houses, Anthony Quiney (1993)

8.0 Annex 1: Notes on the history and character of Sevenoaks District

These notes provide context to the conservation appraisals. More information on these subjects can be found amongst the sources listed in section 7.0.

8.1 Geology

The geology of Kent runs in strata from Surrey and Greater London east towards the Straits of Dover.

In Sevenoaks, this creates clear bands, running east-west. From the north, these are:

- Chalk, forming the North Downs;
- A narrow lowland belt – the Vale of Holmeddale – made of Gault clay and Upper Greensand stone;
- Then the escarpment of the Lower Greensand (on which Sevenoaks town sits);
- The Lower Greensand includes beds of building stone such as the famous Kentish ragstone (in the Hythe Formation);
- The clay of the Low Weald;
- The ‘Hastings Beds’ of the High Weald, which include fine yellow sandstones which have been widely quarried.

8.2 Landscape and agriculture

The stratified geology creates matching landscape zones, instantly recognizable to those who live in Kent:

- The North Downs is a region of rolling chalk uplands, which rises gently to the south, heavily wooded. This is an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty;
- The soils of chalk overlaid with clay and flint are poor and very hard to plough. Traditionally, these soils and the altitude made for limited settlement and where woodland was cleared farms concentrated on sheep and corn;

- The southern edge of the Downs is an escarpment, at the foot of which is the narrow Vale of Holmsedale. This is drained by the River Darent before it turns north through gap in the North Downs, towards Dartford. The soils here are fertile, and have supported settlements for thousands of years;
- The Charlton is the area south of the Vale of Holmsedale, no more than 3 or 4 miles wide around Sevenoaks and rising steadily to a ridge overlooking the Weald (the highest point is Toy’s Hill at 245m). Historically this was wooded country: ‘chart’ means poor or infertile soil);
- The famous Kent Weald is an large heavily wooded rolling landscape, running south to the South Downs. The heavy clay soils were difficult to plough, which meant that historically the Weald was a pasture economy. The clay was once described as ‘cement in summer and soup in winter’, and made access relatively difficult until the railways.

8.3 History

Neolithic

The first farmers are believed to have arrived in Kent, perhaps as immigrants from the Continent, c.4000BC.

Bronze and Iron Ages

The evidence of barrows (burial mounds) suggest a sizeable population living in Kent from the early Bronze Age. These were overwhelmingly agrarian communities.

By the Iron Age homesteads were thickly studded across the county. Ironworking in the Weald became increasingly common, exploiting the iron deposits there.

There is an iron age hillfort at Otford, at a crossing point on the River Darent.

Romans

Kent was the arrival point for the Romans and the closest location to the rest of the Empire. The impact of the Romans was therefore particularly marked.

Sevenoaks District is off the main Roman road network (which passed to the north)

and there were no major settlements. However, the fertile soils of the Darent valley were the location of many villas.

Middle Ages

Settlement patterns continued little altered after the Romans left. Cattle were driven between the Chartland and the Weald, where they rooted for food in the forests.

Sevenoaks town may pre-date the Norman Conquest, and begun as a market or wayside shrine on one of the drovers roads.

Rural industries of cloth working and iron smelting (in the Weald) brought exceptional prosperity in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, reflected in the fine churches and timber-framed houses that survive.

Seventeenth and eighteenth centuries

The proximity of the district to Kent increasingly affected its character, for example by successful lawyers and merchants investing in estates and building fine houses.

Arrival of the railways

Railways transformed Kent by revolutionizing access to markets and materials. The town of Sevenoaks is a good example of the way in which the railway (which first arrived in the 1840s) caused rapid and extensive expansion, with a considerable change of character as well as form.

It became possible to commute to London from west Kent, and villas and terraces for commuters began to emerge in villages and towns with good rail services.

Twentieth century

This process continued through the twentieth century as the economy has shifted away from agriculture towards services.

Since the middle of the twentieth century, the beauty of the Kent landscape and its towns and villages has been recognized and protected through designations such as the Green Belt, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and listed buildings and conservation areas.

9.0 Annex 2: Glossary

Designated heritage asset – A World Heritage Site, Scheduled Monument, Listed Building, Protected Wreck Site, Registered Park and Garden, Registered Battlefield or Conservation Area designated under the relevant legislation.

Edwardian – Correctly refers to the period from 1901 to 1910, the reign of King Edward VII, but often used in a more general way to refer to the whole period from 1900 to 1914.

Flemish bond brickwork – an arrangement of bricks in which headers and stretchers alternate in each course; the predominant form of brick bond throughout the Georgian period.

Flint – widely available in Kent as a building material, generally used close to its source because it was too heavy to transport. Used either in its natural rounded form, or ‘knapped’ (cut and shaped).

Georgian – Dating to between 1714 and 1830, i.e. during the reign of one of the four Georges: King George I to King George IV.

Half-timbering – non-structural, decorative use of timberwork, as distinct from structural timber framing. Popularly used in the nineteenth century and associated with Old English and vernacular revival styles of architecture.

Hipped roof – a pitched roof with four slopes of equal pitch.

Kent peg tiles – the traditional form of clay roof tile used in Kent, traditionally hung on roof battens with a peg.

Kentish ragstone – a hard grey sandy limestone found in East and West Kent, not suitable for fine stonework or carving and typically used as rubble for walls.

Locally listed building – a building which is of local architectural and historic interest or makes a significant contribution to the character and appearance of the District, but which is not designated at the national level, i.e. as a listed building. Structures and open spaces can also be locally listed.

Mathematical tiles – thin fired clay tiles attached to a timber frame, giving the outward appearance of fine brickwork; a response to brick tax levied between 1784 and 1850.

M-shaped roof – a form of pitched roof consisting of two parallel pitched roofs meeting in a central valley.

Neo-Tudor – A nineteenth-century architectural style involving revival of elements of Tudor architecture. Typically used for schools, workhouses, gate lodges and model cottages.

Non-designated heritage asset – A building, monument, site, place, area or landscape identified as having a degree of significance meriting consideration in planning decisions, because of its local historic and architectural interest, but which does not have the degree of special interest that would merit designation at the national level, e.g. statutory listing. Buildings, structures and open spaces on the Local List for Sevenoaks are considered non-designated heritage assets.

‘Old English’ style – an architectural style of the late nineteenth century involving revival of vernacular elements from the Weald of Kent and Sussex, such as tile-hung walls and timber-framing, casement windows with leaded lights and decorative bargeboards, in picturesque compositions evoking a bygone England.

Pitched roof – a roof with sloping sides meeting at a ridge. Include m-shaped roofs, hipped roofs and semi-hipped.

Rat-trap brickwork – a variant of Flemish bond using bricks laid on their side, with the effect that they appear larger.

Roughcast – outer covering to a wall consisting of plaster mixed with gravel or other aggregate, giving a rough texture. Associated with vernacular revival styles of architecture.

Rubble stone – irregular blocks of stone used in masonry construction.

Tile-hanging – use of clay tiles, hung vertically to clad a wall. Used predominantly on upper storeys only. Nineteenth-century tile-hanging often features tiles with curved or pointed ends.

Vernacular – traditional forms of building using local materials. In Kent this typically features timber framed construction, clay tile roofs, casement windows, weatherboarding, tile-hanging and flintwork.

Vernacular revival – use of features of vernacular buildings in architecture of the mid-to-late nineteenth century.

Victorian - dating to between 1837 and 1901, i.e. during the reign of Queen Victoria.

Weatherboarding – wall cladding formed of horizontal wooden boards, traditionally painted white. A characteristic feature of vernacular buildings in Kent.

Sources

James Stevens Curl and Susan Wilson **Oxford Dictionary of Architecture** (2016 edition)

John Newman **The Buildings of England, Kent: West and the Weald** (2012)

National Planning Policy Framework Annex 2: Glossary (2018)

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