

# Chipstead Common

## Conservation Area Appraisal



**SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING GUIDANCE**



**March 1999**

# Chipstead Common

## 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 March 1999 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 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 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 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

Chipstead Common was designated as a Conservation Area in 1992 in recognition of the importance of the historic open space with its far-reaching views to the North Downs. The Area covers 2.6 hectares, the majority of which is the grassed land of the Common.

There is a range of older buildings on the northern boundary, mostly built in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, two of which, nos. 85 and 87 Chipstead Lane, are listed Grade II. Rock House, formerly an inn was formerly locally listed Grade II.



Map 1 Extent of Conservation Area



The Common is otherwise surrounded by residential roads along which an assortment of pre and post war houses have been built. There is a timber pavilion sited on the Common itself and a garage set into the rising ground on the north east corner adjacent Chipstead Lane.

The former Lodge to Chipstead Place stands opposite the Common on the junction of Witches Lane and Chipstead Lane and serves as a reminder of the now demolished great house of the locality.

## 2.2 Location and Geographical Context

The Conservation Area is bounded by three residential roads and lies to the north of the A25 between Bessels Green and Riverhead. Although the roads are minor, Witches Lane is a cut through between the A25 and the A224 at Riverhead and can become busy if traffic is heavy on the main roads.



**Map 2 Geographical Location of Chipstead Common**

The Common rises from Barnfield Road on the south and east boundaries towards Chipstead Lane in the north, and has trees planted along the Barnfield Road perimeter.

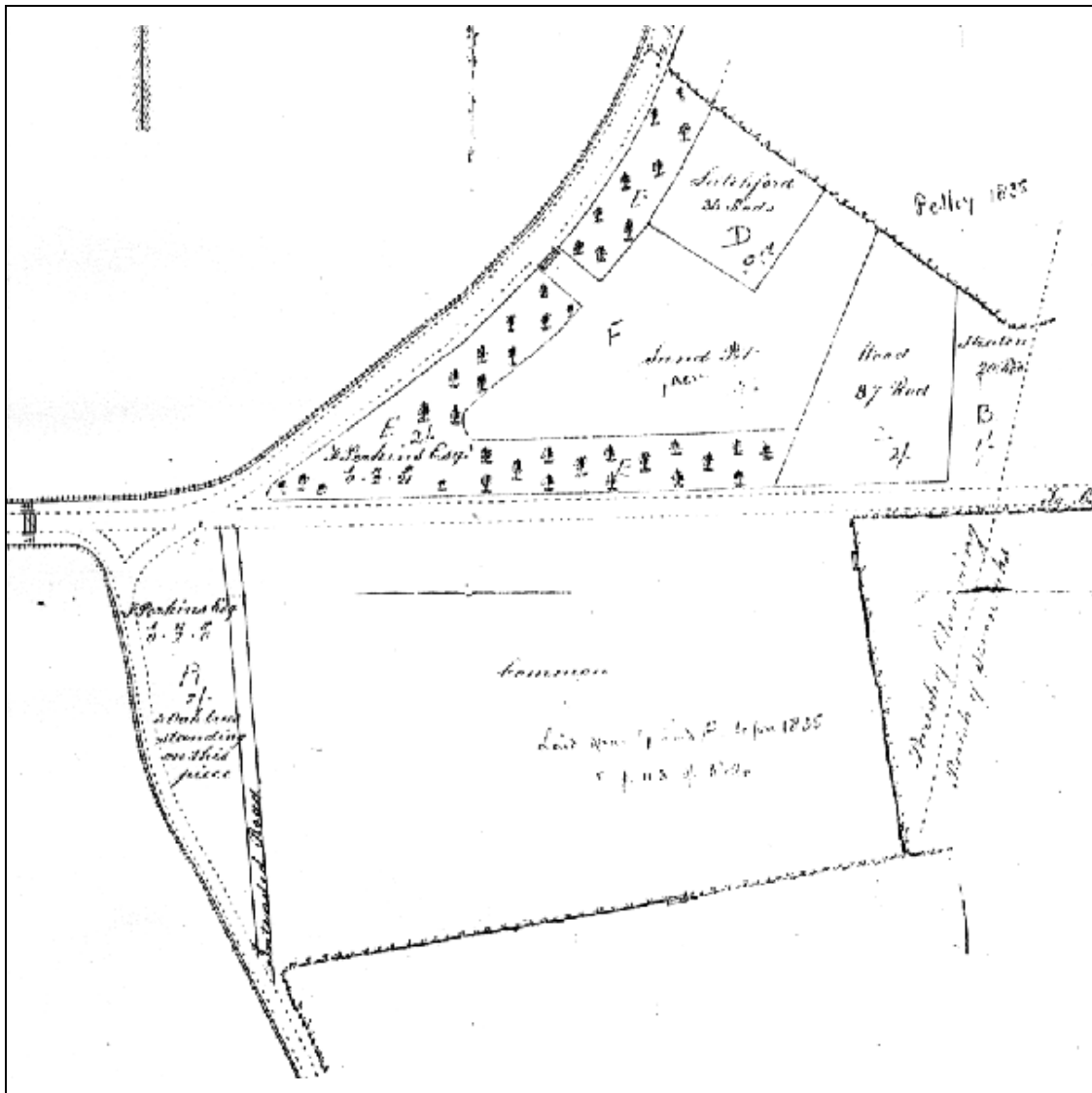
The central area of Common is marked out for a football pitch, and seems also to be popular with local dog owners exercising their pets.

The Conservation Area is divided from that at Riverhead by half a dozen properties along Chipstead Lane and this is a valuable distinction, which keeps the Common a separate entity.

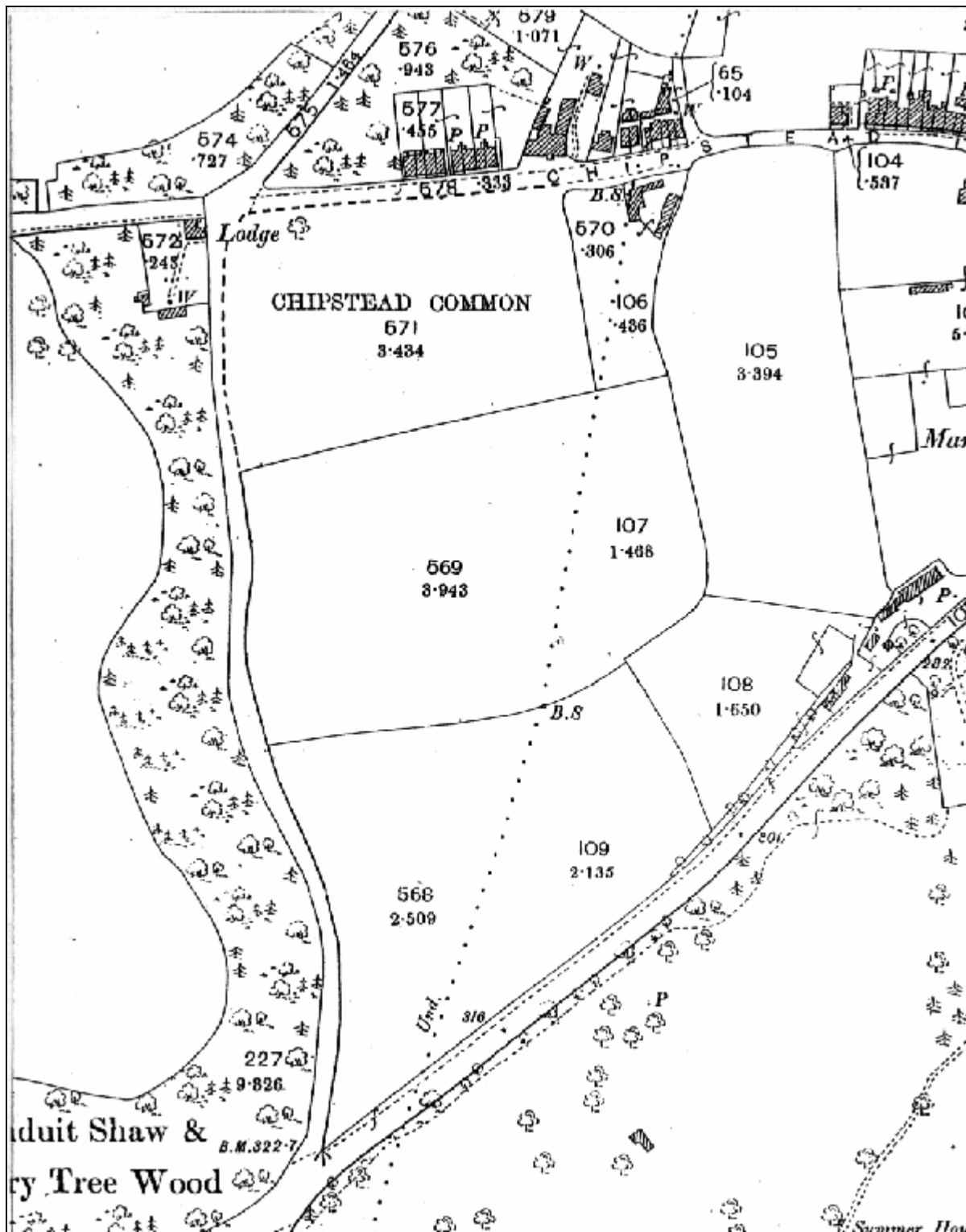
### 2.3 Historical Development

A local map dated 1835 shows no built development around the Common whatsoever, although the Lodge to Chipstead Place is reputed to have been built in 1834. There is a sandpit to the north, fields to the south and east and the start of the road on the west boundary to the route now taken by Witches Lane. The boundary between the parishes of Chevening and Sevenoaks ran along the south west/north east limit of the Common. By 1869, the Rock Inn and the houses to the east had been built, and the Lodge is shown.

On a map dated 1896 the terrace to the west of Rock Inn has appeared, as have some buildings, now demolished, on the north-eastern most tip of the Common itself.



Map 3 Chipstead Common 1835



Map 4 Chipstead Common in 1886

## 2.4 Architectural Description

The only building actually included within the Conservation Area are those in the north side of Chipstead Lane where it bounds the Common, from the first row of terraced cottages down to no. 80, where the road narrows and becomes a one-way street, and the former lodge to the north-east.



Fig. 1 Chipstead Common north side

The terraced cottages are simple brick built slate roofed constructions with contrasting brick quoins to windows, doors and return corners. Two of them have been painted white, which spoils the symmetry but adds a touch of contrast. Between the terraces and Rock House there is a contemporary dwelling that also uses contrasting brick colours for decorative effect although the gable end to the roof is facing the Common in opposition to other adjacent buildings.



Fig. 2 Rock House

Rock House is built in ragstone with brick quoins and a columned portico and has a distinctly different character to its neighbours, particularly the little slated roofed chalet style bungalow next door.

The cottages then continue down the hill with the listed white weatherboarded pair providing a charming stop to the view as one rounds the corner from Barnfield road at the east side of the Common.



**Fig. 3** View down Chipstead Lane

The Lodge is a pretty little building with decorative bargeboards framing a steeply pitched tiled roof, tall brick chimney and arch led light windows, some of which project as bays. The brickwork was originally undecorated but has now been painted white.



**Fig 4.** The Lodge

### 3.00 CHARACTER APPRAISAL

#### 3.1 Setting of the Area and Spatial Relationships

The Common provides a welcome area of open space in the centre of a suburban sprawl of residential development. The elevation of the ground above the roads to the north and east provides some splendid views of Downs and the relatively unspoilt group of buildings on Chipstead Lane sit comfortably on the edge of the Common.



**Fig. 5 View looking north east**

Although there is nothing remarkable about the architecture of most of the houses fronting the Common, their impact on the open space is diminished when viewed from the heart of the area by virtue of their distance. Their gardens however are well kept and planted with a pleasant variety of trees and shrubs.



**Fig. 6 View looking south west**

Chipstead Lane drops behind the Common towards Riverhead and the raised level of the Common at this point closes down into a more intimate atmosphere than is found on the broad tracts of the Common itself.

Two mature trees on the north-west corner of the Common are outlined against the skyline, while on the south-eastern fringe relatively new planting of a number of specimen trees should provide a continuing display in years to come.

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

The buildings on the north side of the Common are modest in scale with only one of any dominant size being Rock House whose classically styled stone facade adds a touch of grandeur to the street scene. However, their grouping and situation are important factors contributing to the ambience of the area.

Already through, the addition of modifications such as satellite dishes, replacement doors and other features are beginning to alter the original character.



The timber hut on the Common is not a particularly attractive building, although it no doubt serves a useful function. At the moment it stands somewhat starkly on the highest part of the ground and is visible from all directions.

Fig. 7 Alterations to the Terrace



Fig. 8 The Games Hut



## 4.00 FUTURE TRENDS

### 4.1 Current and Future Pressures on the Area

Car parking around the Common does not appear to be a problem that one might expect. The residential properties generally have ample off street parking and only owners of properties in Chipstead Lane have to leave their cars on the road. The designation of this road as a one way street lower down towards Riverhead, and the narrowness of it at this point, discourage its use as a through road.

However, traffic using Witches Lane has increased and traffic-calming measures are being installed here, and in Bullfinch Lane, presumably to reduce the use of this route as a cut through.

Virtually all of the land around the common has been taken up with residential development and there are no obvious sites which might come under pressure for further expansion. All the properties have sizeable gardens, but restricted in general to the width of property and with no back access to them.

### 4.2 Potential for Enhancement

When the time comes to replace the hut it might be possible to provide something that is a little less like a shed, and enhances the area rather than detracting from it. The siting of this facility could be given some careful thought, and as an immediate improvement, some planting provided to soften the outline.



The tarmac of Barnfield Road is scruffy and has an untidy edge with the grass of the Common. Relaying of this, perhaps with a different surface finish would enhance the south border and serve to lessen the suburban feel of the surroundings.

**Fig. 9 Barnfield Road**

### 4.3 Considerations for Future Policy Recommendations

The Lodge is an important link with the historic development of Chipstead and Chipstead Common. It may well be worthy of listing and consideration should be given to this.



**Fig. 10 The North West Corner of the Common**

The Rock House is also an important local landmark, and was previously locally Listed Grade III. It could well benefit from being upgraded to the statutory list.

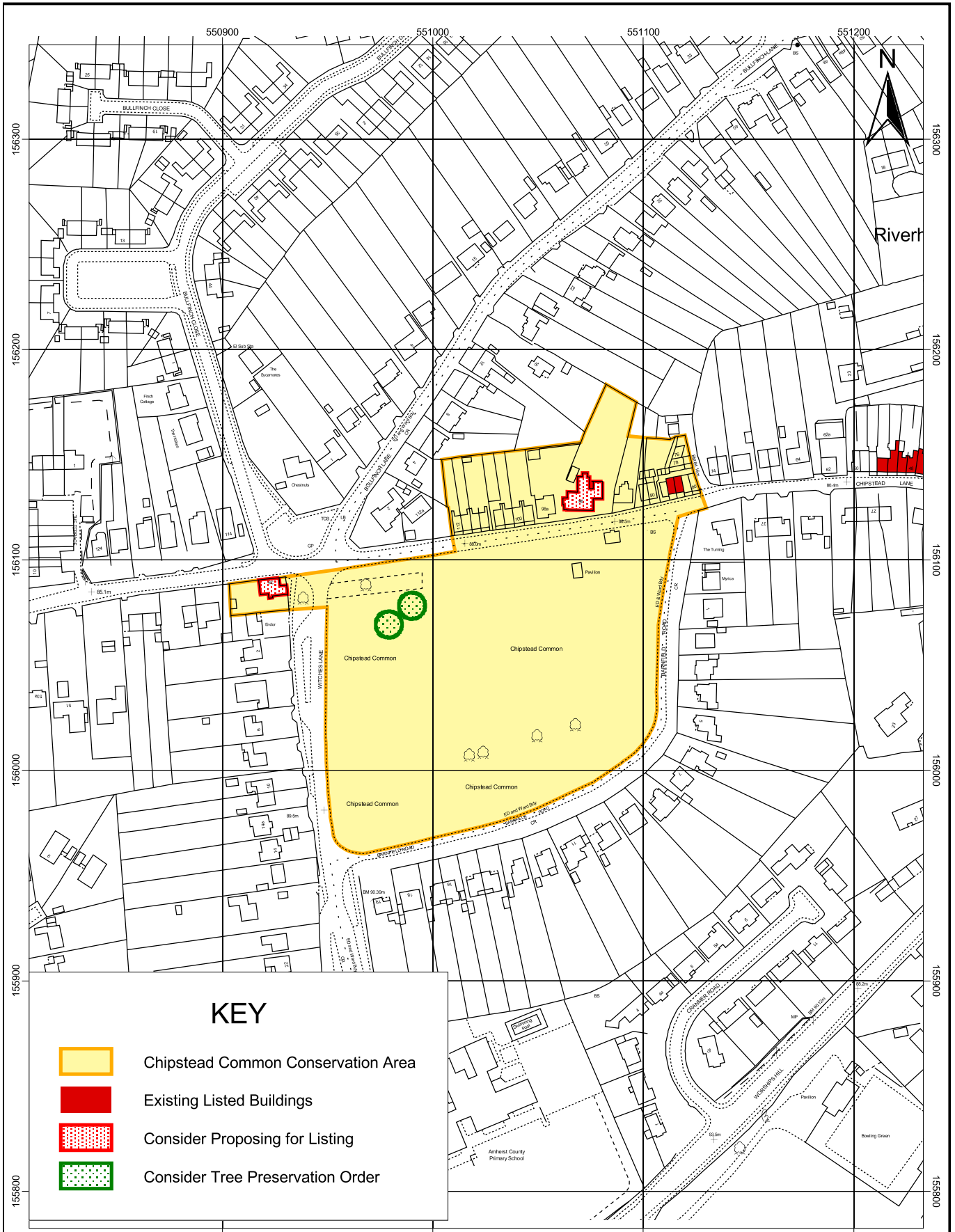
The two trees on the north-west corner are not protected individually by tree preservation orders although it is unlikely that they would be threatened with felling as they stand on common land.

**Acknowledgements:**

The draft document was prepared by Donald Insalls Associates Ltd.

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**MAP 5**  
**Chipstead Common Conservation Area**  
**Recommended Future Policy Changes**

Scale	1:2500
Date	February 2000
Drawn By	SNM

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