

# COWDEN

## Conservation Area Appraisal



### SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING GUIDANCE



December 2003

# Cowden

## Conservation Area Appraisal

**The historic environment is a social asset of immense value and one of the keys to the continuing prosperity of Sevenoaks District. Conservation Area Appraisals are part of the process of ensuring that we make the best use of our historic environment. They are tools for the positive management of change, not a means of preventing development.**

**Conservation is focused on the entire historic environment, not just listed buildings. Trees, open spaces, buildings, uses, roads and streets all contribute to the character and local distinctiveness of the District's conservation areas.**

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

**It is intended that this appraisal will inform the activities of the Council, the public and other bodies where these impact on the conservation area. The appraisal was approved by the Council in December 2003 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 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 care 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 stewardship 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 analyze 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 also states that the local planning authority will undertake detailed assessments of designated Conservation Areas and will prepare proposals for their preservations. Development proposals will be judged against their overall contribution to the enhancement of the character and appearance of the area as set out in any scheme which may have been prepared.

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

## **1.4 Other Local Plan Policies**

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

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

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

Important areas of 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 summarized 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**

Cowden Conservation Area covers 4.1 ha and contains 16 listed buildings. It was designated in 1972 and has not been revised since then. It includes the church of St Mary Magdelene, the Square, most of the High Street, the Rectory and the extended graveyard.

The Conservation Area lies within land designated as Metropolitan Green Belt and is an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and a Special Landscape Area.

The majority of properties in the Conservation Area are residential, the few exceptions being the Church and Public House. There are no shops and the only local industry is agriculture.

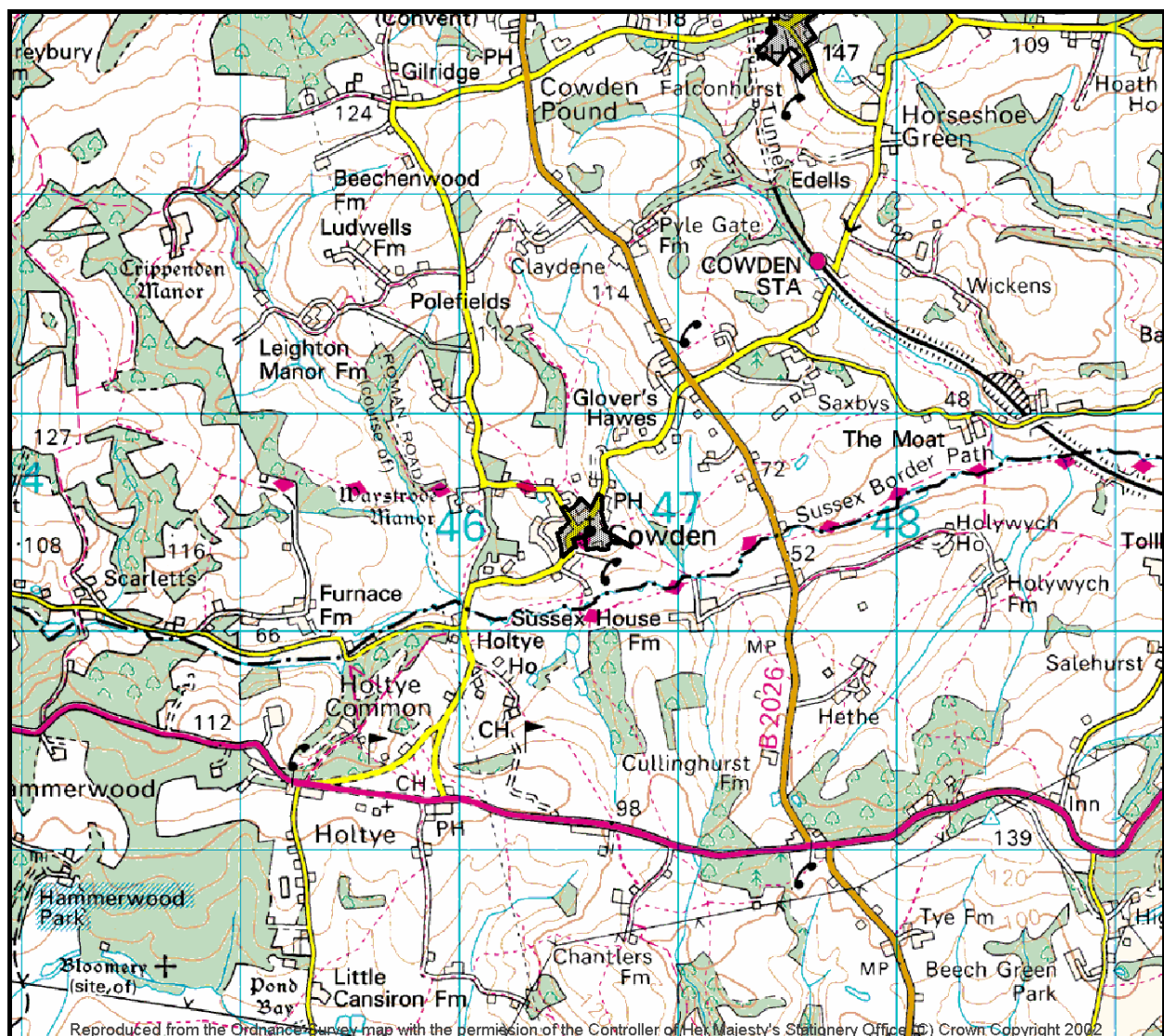


## 2.2 Location and Geographical Context

Cowden is a small village lying in the Weald on an unclassified road north of the A264, the main road that runs between East Grinstead and Tunbridge Wells. It is situated just to the north of the Kent/Sussex border on ground that falls away to the south before rising again to the hills of the High Weald.

There is a station a little way outside the village on the line from Uckfield to London via Edenbridge and Oxted.

Sussex Border Path runs through the village and there are various local footpaths in the area. The nearest towns are Tunbridge Wells and Edenbridge.

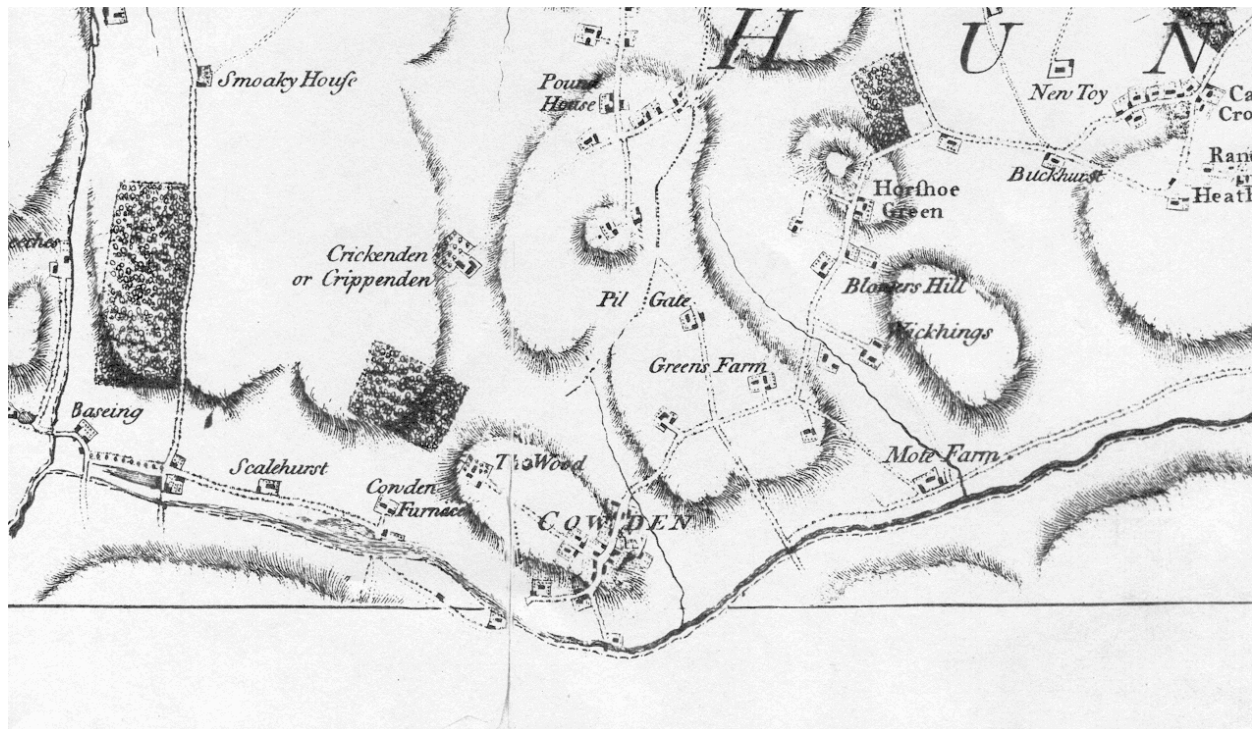


Map 1 Geographical Location

### 2.3 Historical Development

The original settlement of Cowden was little more than a clearing in the forest that the earliest settlers in Jutish times would have used as a pasture for their swine. The parish was first recorded in the Textus Roffensis between 1115 – 1125 and the church probably dates from about 1300. The parish was originally divided between four or five manors.

The main factor that influenced the historic growth of the village was the development of the Wealden iron industry in the early 16<sup>th</sup> Century. By the 17<sup>th</sup> Century there were two blast furnaces in the Kent Water area to the south of the village



Map 2 Cowden in 1869

There was a serious fire in the 17<sup>th</sup> century that destroyed several of the properties in the High Street and they were subsequently rebuilt.

The 19<sup>th</sup> century buildings opposite the church are built in an unusual ‘rat trap’ brick bond.

## 2.4 Architectural Description

The conservation area is a good example of a typical Kentish village, containing most of the vernacular features that are usually found in traditional Kent buildings .



**Figure 1 4-10 High Street**

Roofs are covered with plain clay tiles hung on pegs or nibs. The use of full or half hips to one side of the roof with a gable end on the other is common. Gables may have deep decoratively carved bargeboards.



**Figure 2 Chandler House and Cottage**

Dormer windows are often inserted into the roof slopes, giving light to attic spaces which can then be utilised as additional accommodation. The pitches of tiled roofs tend to be steep and the varying heights of the ridge lines lend interest to the street scene.



**Figure 3 The High Street looking west**

Cat slide roofs, which sweep down from the ridge to ground floor ceiling level have long been a popular way of covering a single storey extension to the side or rear of a building.



**Figure 4 The Priors**

Many timber framed buildings survive from the era before brickwork became a popular and affordable alternative construction material, although they may now be clad in brick, completely hiding the external evidence of their original construction.



**Figure 5 Rose Cottage**

In some cases the first floor timber frame remains exposed, with plastered panels between the structural members; in others the frame is clad with vertical tile hanging or painted weatherboarding.



**Figure 6 1 - 4 The Square**

Brick is the other most popular building material and the local red stock bricks can be seen in many buildings. There is also a preponderance of white painted masonry, which together with the white weatherboard gives the area a light and clean appearance.





**Figure 7 Parris House**

Local sandstone is used for the church but , perhaps surprisingly, other examples are rare.



**Figure 8 St Mary Magdelene's Church**

Windows are either timber casements or sliding sashes. Leaded lights can be found in buildings of many ages, and the old rectory has decorative arch headed windows with diagonal glazing bars forming diamond patterns.



**Figure 9 Southdown House**



**Figure10 Cottages on the south side of the High Street**

Some cottages on the High Street have square bay windows with arched heads and front doors often have small porches enclosing or above them.

### 3.00 CHARACTER APPRAISAL

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

Cowden Conservation Area is focussed on the centre of the village and the church. It is a compact area, containing many listed buildings. The scale is domestic, apart from the church and public house, and is characterised by the winding High Street, narrow for the most part but opening out into the Square.



**Figure 11 Church Street looking north**

The road also rises from the south-west to the north-east and the changes of level and tight visual enclosure add interest and variety to the streetscape.



**Figure 12 The High Street looking south**



**Figure 13 High Street from North Street**

The church stands at a focal point in the village, which clusters around it. In many Kent villages the church is to be found on the outskirts of the settlement, but in Cowden the tall shingled spire marks the pivotal point of the settlement.

The conservation area also contains a number of substantial mature trees that soften the built environment and add drama and interest to the scene.

The buildings in the centre of the village are tightly grouped and stand close to the road. The pavements are narrow, creating a sense of enclosure and intimacy but there are glimpses of wider views from the perimeter of the village to the open countryside beyond.



**Figure 14 Parris House and old mounting block**

The Churchyard provides an open green space in the centre of the village. There is also an additional triangular section in the south-east of the area which links the built environment with outlying fields.



**Figure 15 The square from the Churchyard**



**Figure 16 Burial Ground looking south-east**

The more modern development in Cowden is on the west side of the Conservation Area and to the east is open farmland. There are a variety of house types and sizes from terraced cottages to large detached premises standing in generous grounds.



**Figure 17 The new Rectory**

The former Rectory has been sub-divided and a new Rectory built in the gardens to the west of the earlier building.



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

It is the Church and the Square that form perhaps the most important grouping in the Conservation Area. There is a combination of tightly clustered buildings contrasting with the open aspect of the Churchyard and the height of the shingled Spire, which can be seen from many parts of the village.



**Figure 18 7 - 11 High Street**

The junction of the High Street and Church Street is bounded by a number of attractive buildings, and those on the west side of Church Street, although unlisted, make a valuable contribution to the setting.



**Figure 19 Houses in Church Street**

On opposite sides of the Square, the former Crown Inn, Gainsford House and nos 1 - 4 form a striking and attractive group.



**Figure 20 Crown House - the former Inn**



The road junction between North Street and High Street is a focal point from which views up and down the High Street take in groups of listed buildings standing on either side. To the west the view is enclosed on the road bend by a row of cottages (nos 20 – 24) with some unfortunate replacement windows; in the other direction the mature trees on the skyline provide a more significant vista.



**Figure 21 20 -24 High Street close the view to the west**

In North Street there are a series of simple but attractive older terraced cottages that are typical of the area.



**Figure 22 Cottages in North Street**



**Figure 23 Listed property at 26 High Street**

From the bend in the High Street, travelling south, the road dips down the hill to the Fountain Inn, and there are views beyond the mid-20th Century semi-detached houses to the open countryside beyond. On the west of the High Street, towards the brow of the hill but set back there is a listed cottage at number 26 which has recently been restored.



**Figure 24 The Fountain Inn**

Rose Cottage, adjacent to the Fountain, is another interesting timber-framed building, but with a visually prominent garage.



**Figure 25 Garage to Rose Cottage**

Beyond here, just outside the Conservation Area boundary, is a new development of small houses, in the vernacular style and very closely spaced.

Also on the fringes of the area are the converted School buildings, with good views beyond.



**Figure 26 Old School Cottage**



**Figure 27 Views out to the south east**

The Conservation Area is marred somewhat by the garage extension adjacent to The Priors, the single storey brick outbuilding adjacent to the footpath to the north-east of the Church and the telegraph pole north-west of the Churchyard.



**Figure 28** Garage adjacent to The Priors



**Figure 29** Outbuildings and telegraph pole in The Square

## **4.00 FUTURE TRENDS**

### **4.1 Current and Future Pressures on the Area**

One pressure on the Cowden Conservation Area is that exerted by the search for suitable sites for new residential development. The need to find residential development sites in this popular region within easy reach of London puts any village under pressure particularly one as picturesque as Cowden. Whilst new development within a conservation area is not necessarily unwelcome, the impact this can have on the established form and character of the village must be carefully considered before permission is granted.

Tight planning policies, the Green Belt status of the village and the designation of surrounding countryside as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty all help protect the character of Cowden and the surrounding area.

Cowden has lost its local shops, one pub and the school, and the High Street is visually dominated by parked cars in the evenings. Although social change has altered the character of Cowden it still retains a timeless visual quality due to the high number of historic vernacular buildings.

### **4.2 Potential for Enhancement**

There are some garages and outbuildings in prominent positions in the conservation area that detract from the character of the street scene. The design of any future alterations or replacements should be carefully considered.

Telegraph poles can mar views across the conservation area, and service providers should be encouraged to run cables underground in the future.



**Figure 30 Telephone pole and wires by the Church**

### 4.3 Future Policy Recommendations

The boundaries of the conservation area could be extended to include buildings and open space that contribute to the character and setting of the area and enhance its appearance. Old School Cottage and School House in the south-west of the village are attractive and interesting properties backing onto open countryside and with far reaching views. Their inclusion would be desirable.

In the north-west, Priors Croft is a listed timber framed property that is outside the existing conservation area. If it, and the open field adjacent to the former Crown Inn were included, then this would form a natural boundary to this side of Cowden.



**Figure 31 Priors Croft**

Similarly, the new area of Churchyard to the South East of Priory Cottage could be brought into the area, with the remainder of the land that relates to the Church.



**Figure 32 The new Burial Ground**

Although many properties in the village are listed and thereby afforded protection against having replacement plastic windows inserted, there are still a significant number of cottages that are vulnerable to this type of alteration. An Article 4 direction on this subject, to cover the properties within the conservation area, might prove a valuable safeguard.

**Acknowledgements:**

The draft document was prepared by Donald Insall Associates Ltd.

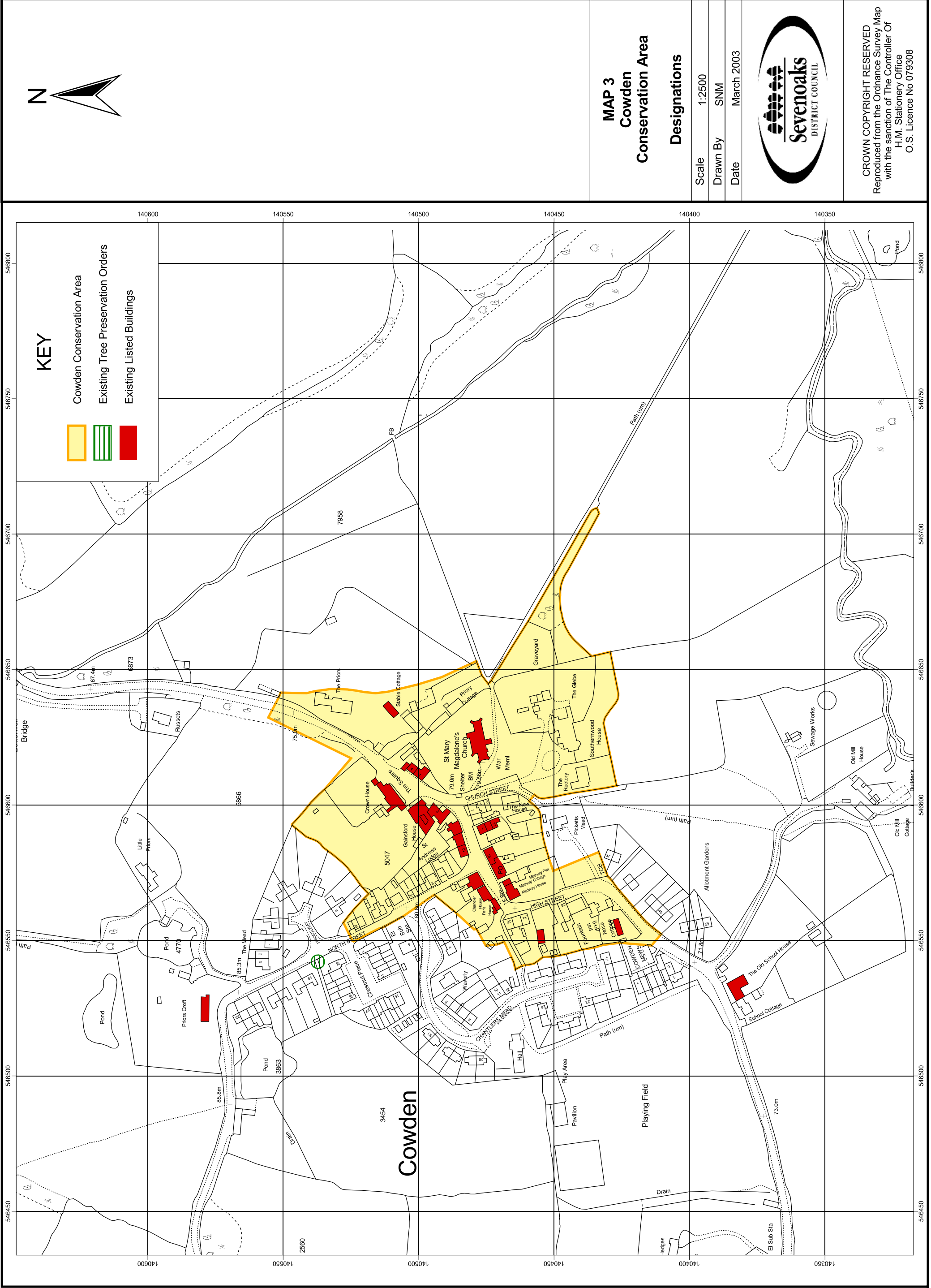
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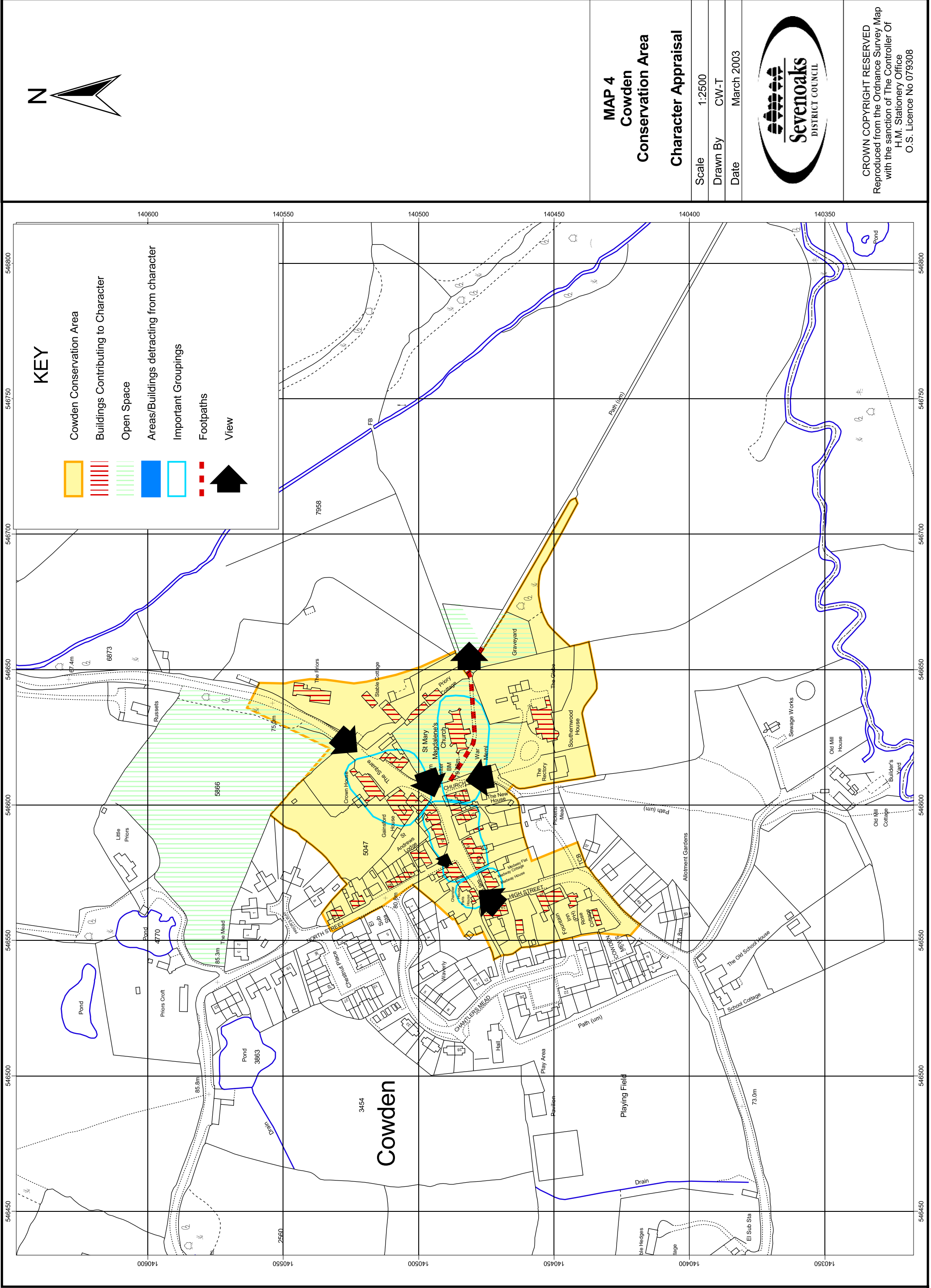
- Cowden Conservation Area
- Existing Tree Preservation Orders
- Existing Listed Buildings

## MAP 3 Cowden Conservation Area Designations

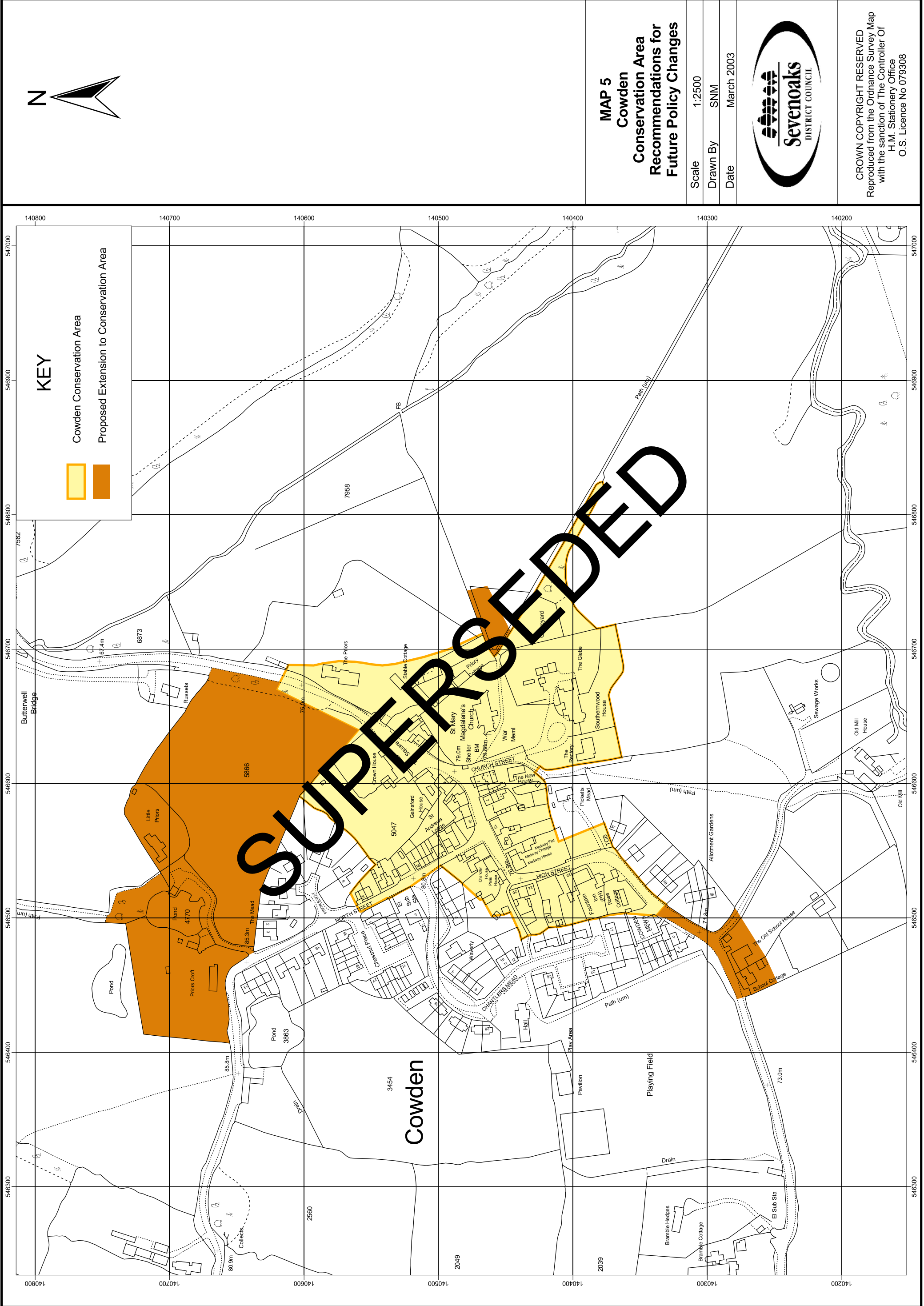
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Map superseded. Please refer to Cowden Appraisal map, PDF dated June 2019