

FORDCOMBE

Conservation Area Appraisal



SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING GUIDANCE



December 2003

Fordcombe

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 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 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 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 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

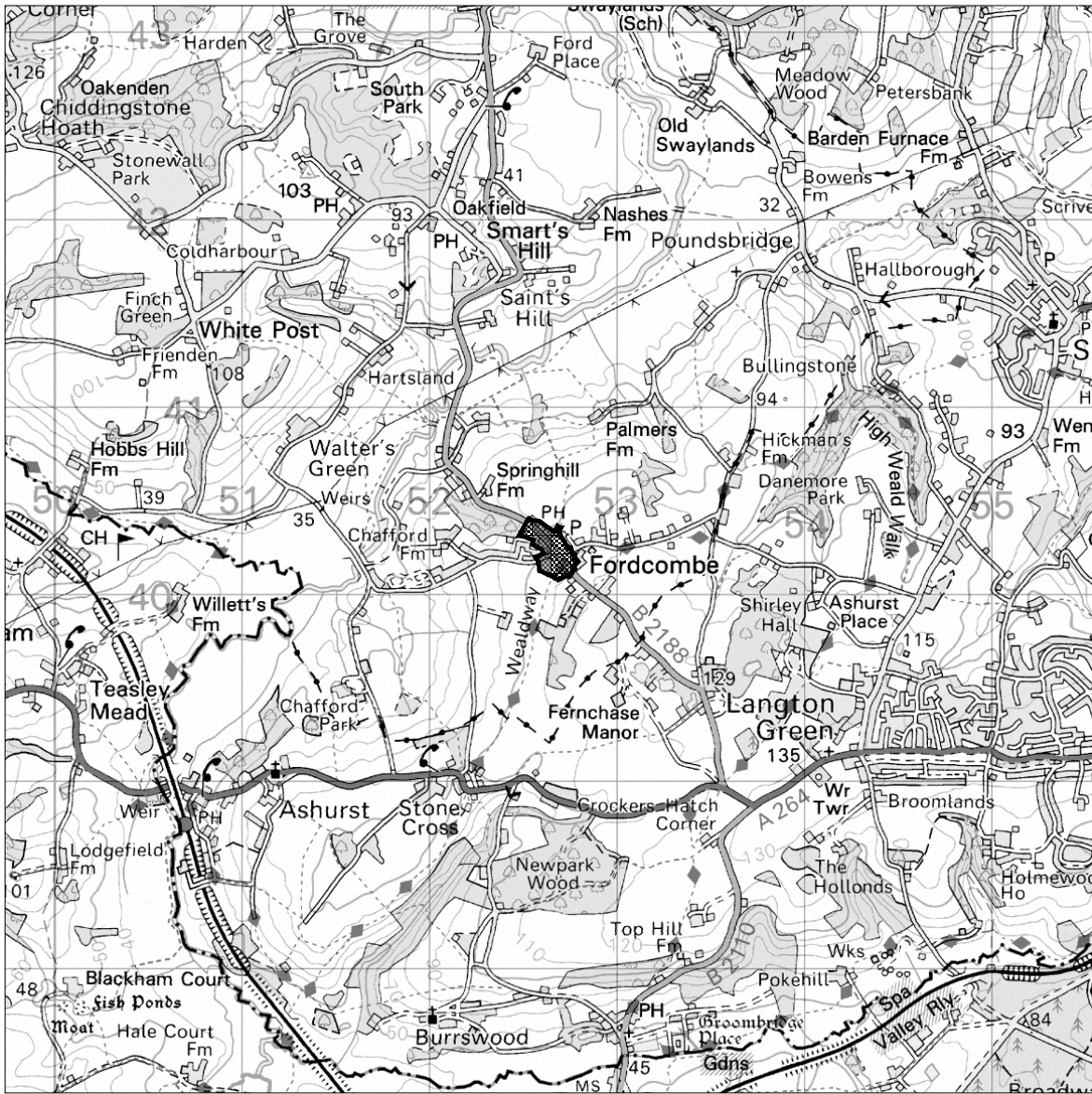
Fordcombe Conservation Area covers some 5.1 hectares and contains 11 listed buildings. It was designated in 1978 and has not been extended since then. It includes St Peter's Church, the primary school and playing field, the cricket pavilion and pitch, the Green, the Chafford Arms public house and the residential properties in the centre of the village.

The Conservation Area lies entirely within the Green Belt, the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and a Special Landscape Area.

The hamlet is surrounded by agricultural land, some woodland, and to the north east is Chafford House, which was once the principal house in the area.

2.2 Location and Geographical Context

Fordcombe lies on high ground to the east of the Medway valley on the road between Penshurst and Langton Green, on the outskirts of Tunbridge Wells. It is in the south easternmost corner of the Sevenoaks District area and is close to the East Sussex border. The nearest station is at Ashurst and the closest main trunk road is the A264 from Tunbridge Wells to East Grinstead. Tunbridge Wells is the closest large town.



Map 1 Geographical Location of Fordcombe

2.3 Historical Development

Fordcombe had long been considered a smaller satellite of Penshurst which had the advantage of a large estate to lend prosperity and influence to the village.

In 1847, Lord Hardinge - a contemporary of Lord Wellington and the former Governor General of India instigated the building of a separate Church at Fordcombe. His seat was at South Park, Penshurst, but he paid for most of the construction of the Church and vicarage and is himself buried in St. Peter's.

George Devey, a well-known architect who carried out much work in Penshurst, is credited with designing the Chafford Arms Public House, and it is interesting to note the arms of Barclay Field, a prominent local landowner who lived near Kemsing, on the old School House.

Most development in Fordcombe dates from the mid-19th Century when Lord Hardinge's patronage allowed the former hamlet to expand and assume its own identity.

2.4 Architectural Description

The Conservation Area generally comprises a selection of small residential vernacular properties dating mainly from the 19th Century, but with occasional earlier examples, and some instances of later 20th Century development.



Figure 1 The primary school and village green

Roofs are either slated or covered with clay tiles hung on pegs or nibs. The pitches of tiled roofs tend to be steep, whilst those that are slated are shallower, and gable ends often have deep decoratively carved bargeboards.



Figure 2 1-3 Hill Corner

There is an example of an early timber-framed building with painted rendered infill at Tender Meads and of an Edwardian interpretation of the same style at Gables. Both have a part to play in the character of the area. In other properties the frame is clad with vertical tile hanging or painted weather-boarding.



Figure 3 Tender Meads

Brick and local sandstone are the most popular building materials, often used together for decorative effect adding colour and texture to the built environment.



Figure 4 Stone Row

Windows are generally timber casements and leaded lights can be found in buildings of all ages. Unfortunately plastic windows have been inserted as replacements in some older buildings where they are uncharacteristic and inappropriate.



Figure 5 Replacement windows in Mead View

3.00 CHARACTER APPRAISAL

3.1 Setting of the Area and Spatial Relationships

The first glimpse of the conservation area from the north west is of the Church and the white weatherboard of Church Cottage on the left, dominating the road which lies between banks as it rises up the hill towards the centre of the village.



Figure 6 Church Cottage

The vista opens out by the Chafford Arms and the Green giving views to the playing fields.



Figure 7 The Chafford Arms

There is a cluster of properties on the north east side of the road which contrast with the open spaces opposite. Past the pavilion the road leads out of the village into the countryside beyond.



Figure 8 The Village Hall and recreation ground

Looking north west from the south east limit of the conservation area, there are views across the hills, past the mature trees of the churchyard and the playing fields.



Figure 9 View south west across the recreation ground

The heart of the village is very compact and, although there has been some modern development to the east and west of the area, the nucleus is largely unspoilt. Open countryside surrounds the village and accentuates the setting of the conservation area. The proliferation of mature trees is a positive visual asset to the village reinforcing its setting and rural character.

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

The centre of the conservation area is characterised by the group around the Green. Stone Cottages are the most distinctive buildings, but are somewhat spoilt by the front shop extension to the former Post Office. This has been empty for some time but renovation is now in progress and will include some improvement to the detail of the old shop front.



Figure 10 The front extension to Stone Row

1-3 Hill Corner is a group of timber-framed listed cottages set a little way back from the road, but the modern properties behind detract somewhat from the setting. Thatched Cottages, opposite the Green, are no longer thatched but still make a positive contribution to the conservation area. Unfortunately the Village Hall, in a prominent position on the recreation ground, has been reclad in plastic boarding.



Figure 11 Thatched Cottages

Gables, on the opposite side of the Green, is an imposing house that is balanced in form and style by the Old School House on the other side of the Primary School. The School itself is a pleasant listed building, although the car parking and tarmac area in front of it detract from the setting.



Figure 12 The Old School House

From Fordcombe Lane to the boundary of the Conservation Area in the south east, some modern development has been infilled between older brick and stone pairs of cottages (dated 1845). These have both had replacement windows inserted which are unfortunate modifications to otherwise attractive properties.

Tender Meads, adjacent to the recreation ground on the southern edge of the conservation area, is a listed 16th Century timber-framed building with outbuildings in character with the house and a backdrop of mature trees.

Church Cottage, the Chafford Arms and the Church form a group at the north west end of the village, that defines this end of the conservation area.

4.00 FUTURE TRENDS

4.1 Current and Future Pressures

As in many areas of the South East the main pressure on the Fordcombe Conservation Area is that exerted by the search for suitable sites for new development. The need to find such sites in this popular region within easy reach of London puts any village in the spotlight in the search for suitable building land, particularly one as picturesque as Fordcombe. Whilst new development within a conservation area is not necessarily unwelcome, the impact that this can have on the traditional form of the village has to be carefully considered before planning permission is granted.

The individuality and character of villages such as Fordcombe often suffer when local shops and services no longer prove viable and are lost. Fordcombe still has a church, school and public house, although the Post Office has closed.

Damage to the character and appearance of older buildings can be caused by inappropriate replacement windows and this can be seen in several properties in Fordcombe. Some restrictions on this practice would prove beneficial to those that are as yet unchanged. This also applies to the use of plastic weatherboarding.

4.2 Potential for Enhancement

An improvement to the village scene could be achieved by the sympathetic refurbishment of the old Post Office, which is a prominent building on the Green.

4.3 Future Policy Recommendations

Wayside, adjacent to Church Cottage, is the last house at the north end of the village and is set on high ground above the road. The trees in the front garden are included in the conservation area, and it might be worthwhile including the building itself, as it adds character to the street scene at this point, despite its relative modernity.



Figure 13 Wayside

Similarly, the whole of the gardens of Holly Cottage and Farthings could be brought into the conservation area, so that the boundary follows the logical lines of property ownership.



Figure 14 The Old Vicarage

The Old Vicarage, behind Hurst House, has had its grounds sold on and developed and has itself been extended. However, the house is an interesting property with some fine details and should be considered for inclusion in the conservation area.



Figure 15 Kings Meadows

At the south eastern end of the village, King’s Meadows and its gardens, and the ponds and trees behind Tender Meads could be considered for inclusion as areas of interest which contribute positively to the character of the area.



Figure 16 Replacement windows in Bakery Cottage

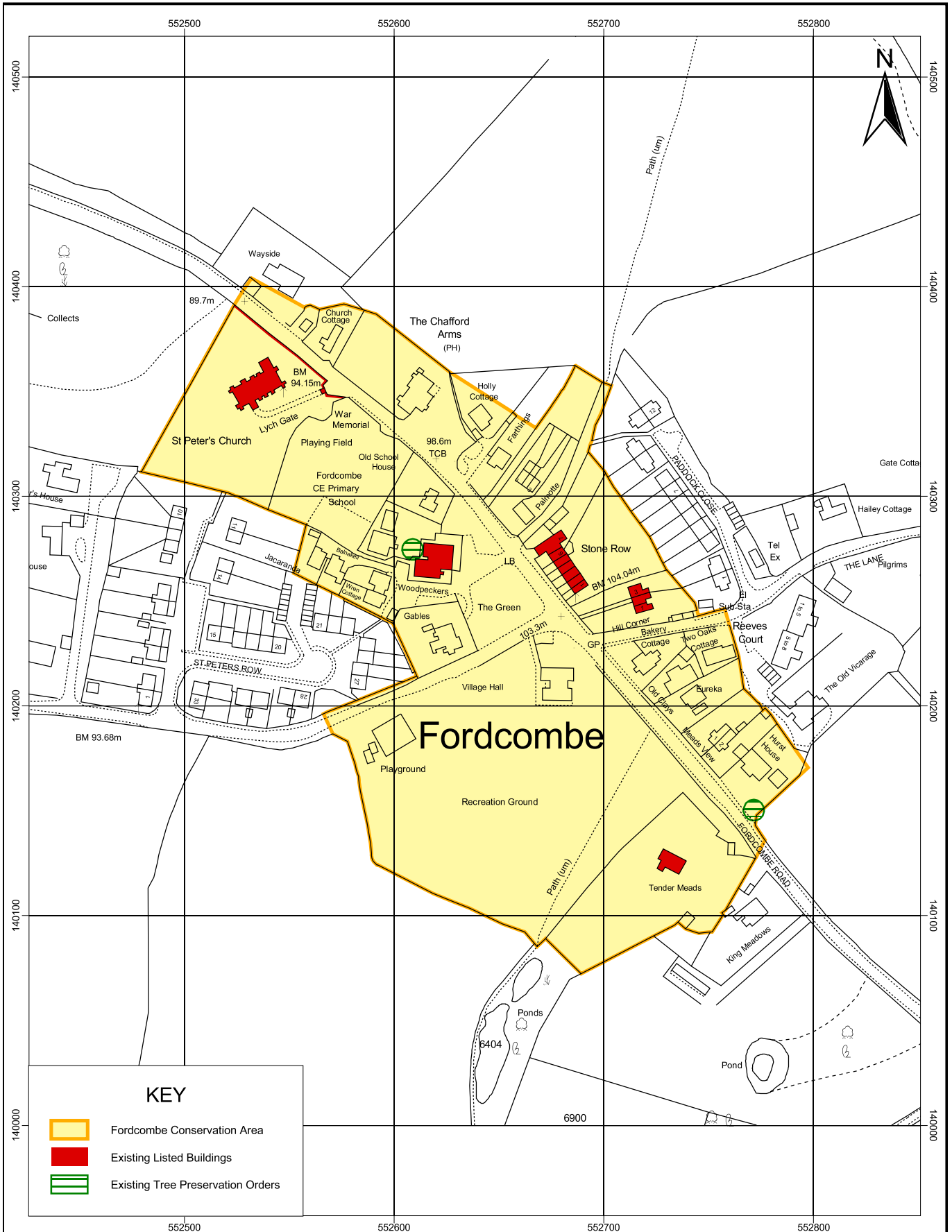
Buildings that have had replacement windows and other insensitive alterations have already been noted. The insertion of such inappropriate modifications in older unlisted buildings is a frequent occurrence and restriction of this practice by an Article 4 Direction might be appropriate.

Acknowledgements:

The draft document was prepared by Donald Insall Associates Ltd.

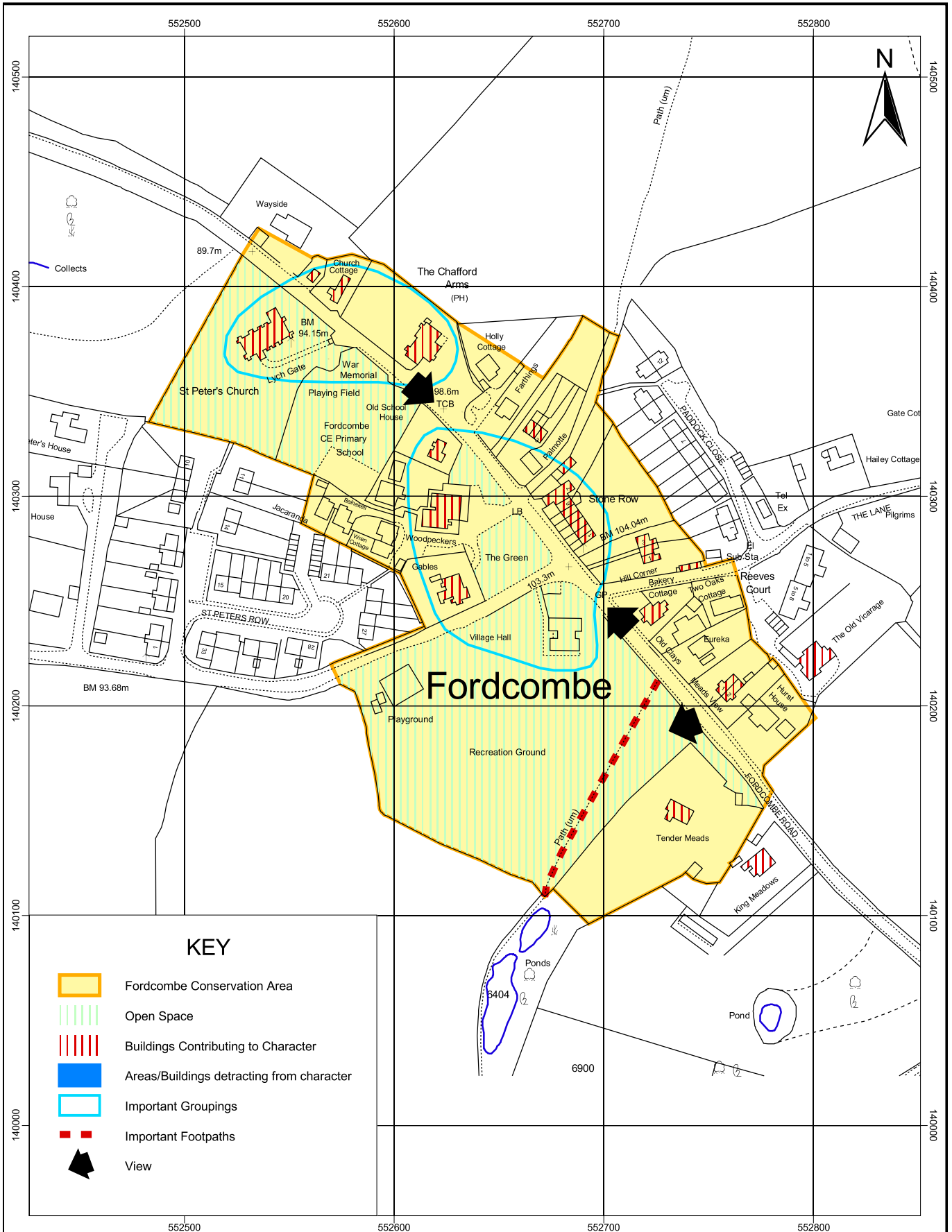
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**MAP 2
Fordcombe
Conservation Area
Designations**

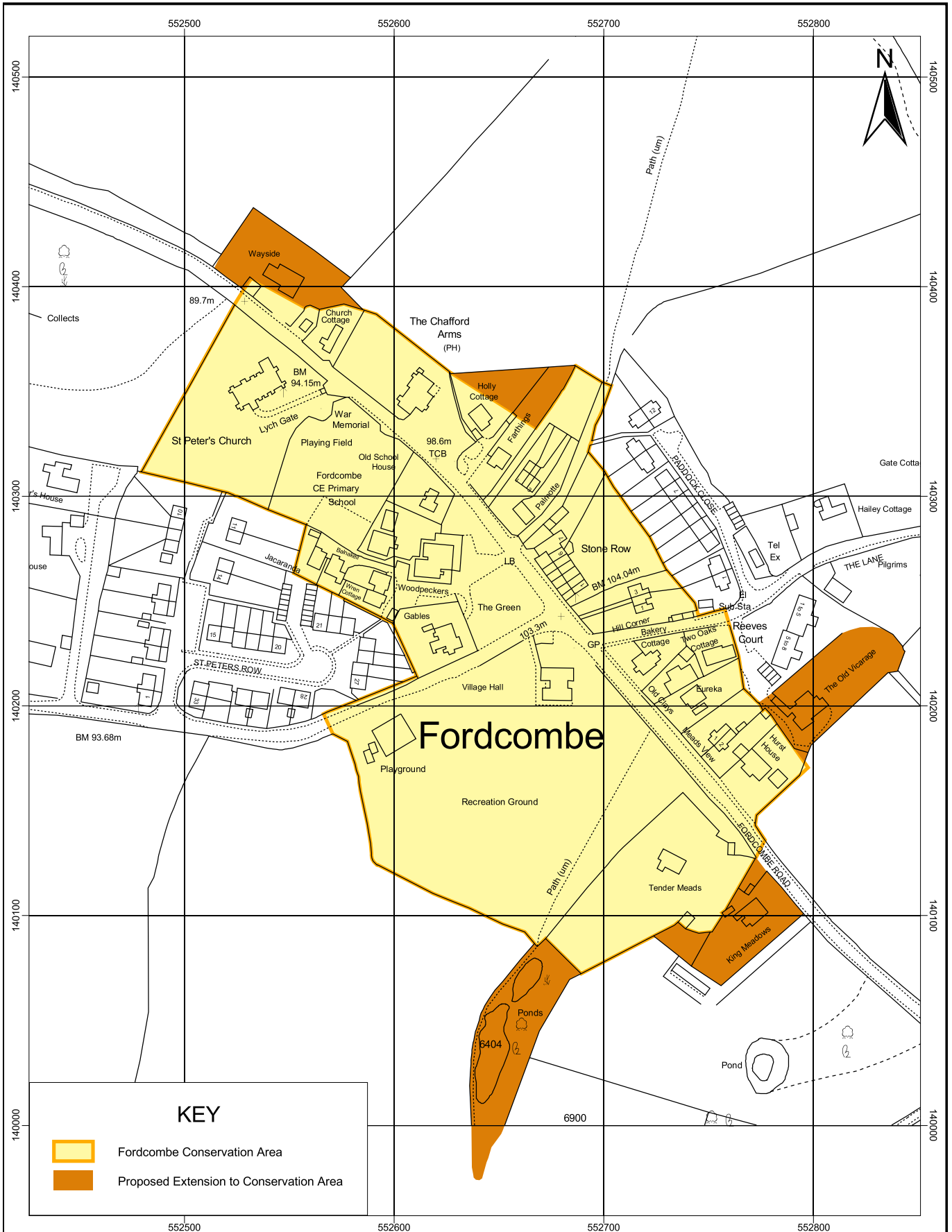
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MAP 3
Fordcombe
Conservation Area
Character Appraisal

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KEY

- Fordcombe Conservation Area
- Proposed Extension to Conservation Area



MAP 4
Fordcombe
Conservation Area
Recommendations for
Future Policy Changes

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