

Kemsing Conservation Area Appraisal

July 2023

This appraisal for Kemsing Conservation Area supports the duty of Sevenoaks District Council under section 71 of the planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act of 1990 to prepare proposals for the preservation and enhancement of conservation areas and to consult the public about those proposals.

For details of the methodology employed in assessing the Conservation Area and preparing the appraisal, as well as a glossary of common technical terms used in this report, see the publication *Sevenoaks District Conservation Areas: An Introduction to Appraisals* which is available on the Council website.

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1.0 Overview of Kemsing Conservation Area

Kemsing is an historic village in west Kent with a population of 4,218 (2011 census). It is around three miles north of Sevenoaks and 20 miles from central London. The village is situated on the southern scarp face of the North Downs, with the M26 motorway passing by its southern border. Kemsing is connected to London and Maidstone by the railway which first opened in 1874. It lies within the Metropolitan Green Belt, and the area east of St Edith's Road and north of Pilgrim's Way is part of the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. There are also areas of Ancient Woodland to the south-east of the village.

Conservation Area boundary

Kemsing Conservation Area encompasses the whole of the historic village as well as a number of twentieth-century houses on its historic approaches. Further twentieth-century housing development that has expanded the village extensively to the west, and also to the south, is excluded from the Conservation Area.

Designation history

Kemsing Conservation Area was first designated in 1972 and subsequently extended in 1990 and 2006 following reviews by the District Council.

Topography and geology

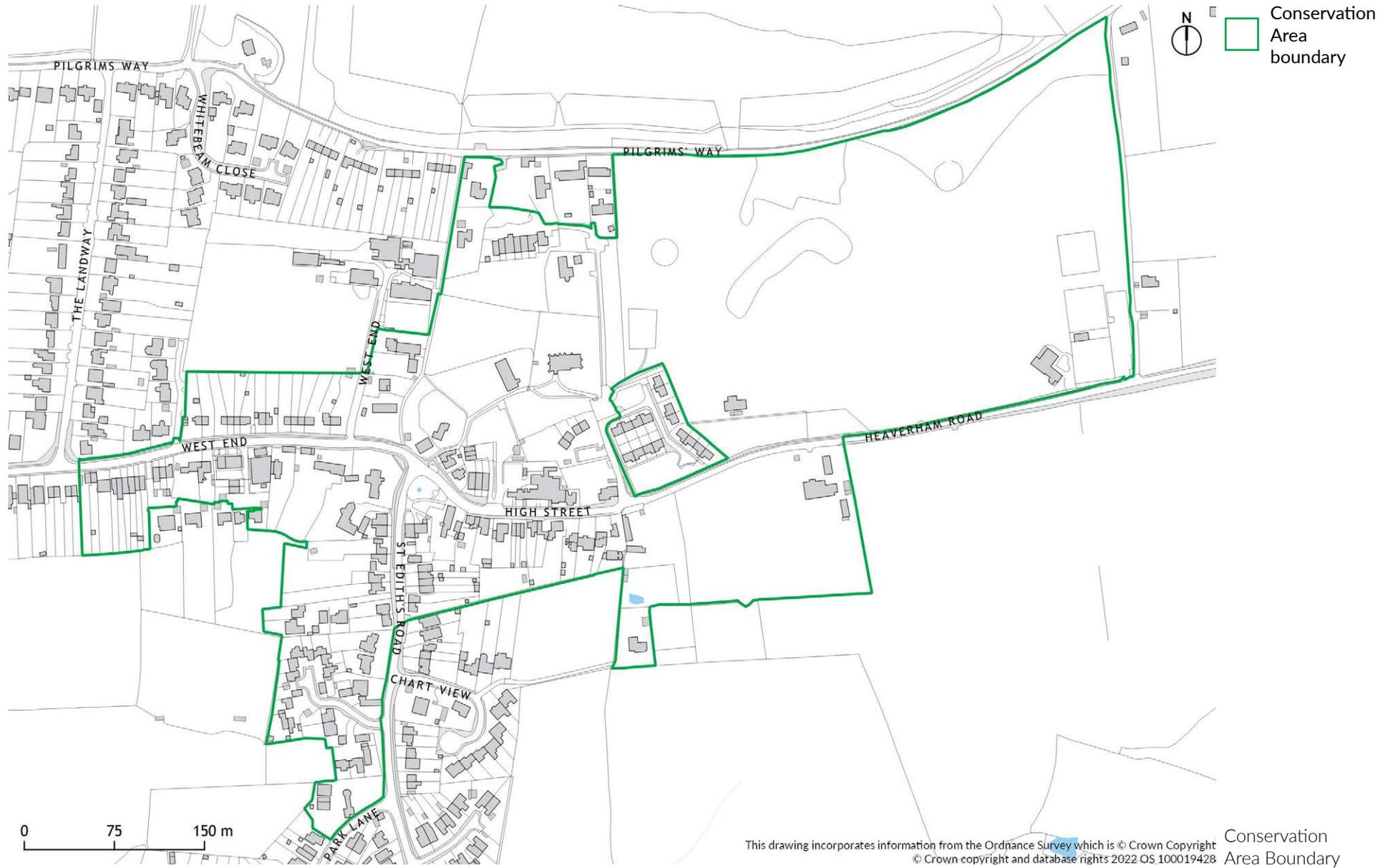
Kemsing is a spring line settlement (located where clean spring water emerges at the foot of chalk downland), shaped by the North Downs which rise north of the High Street. The historic village spreads from the High Street east along the spring line, south and down along St Edith's Road and north up towards the church and the Downs. Views of the surrounding hills are part of Kemsing's sense of place and its special character.

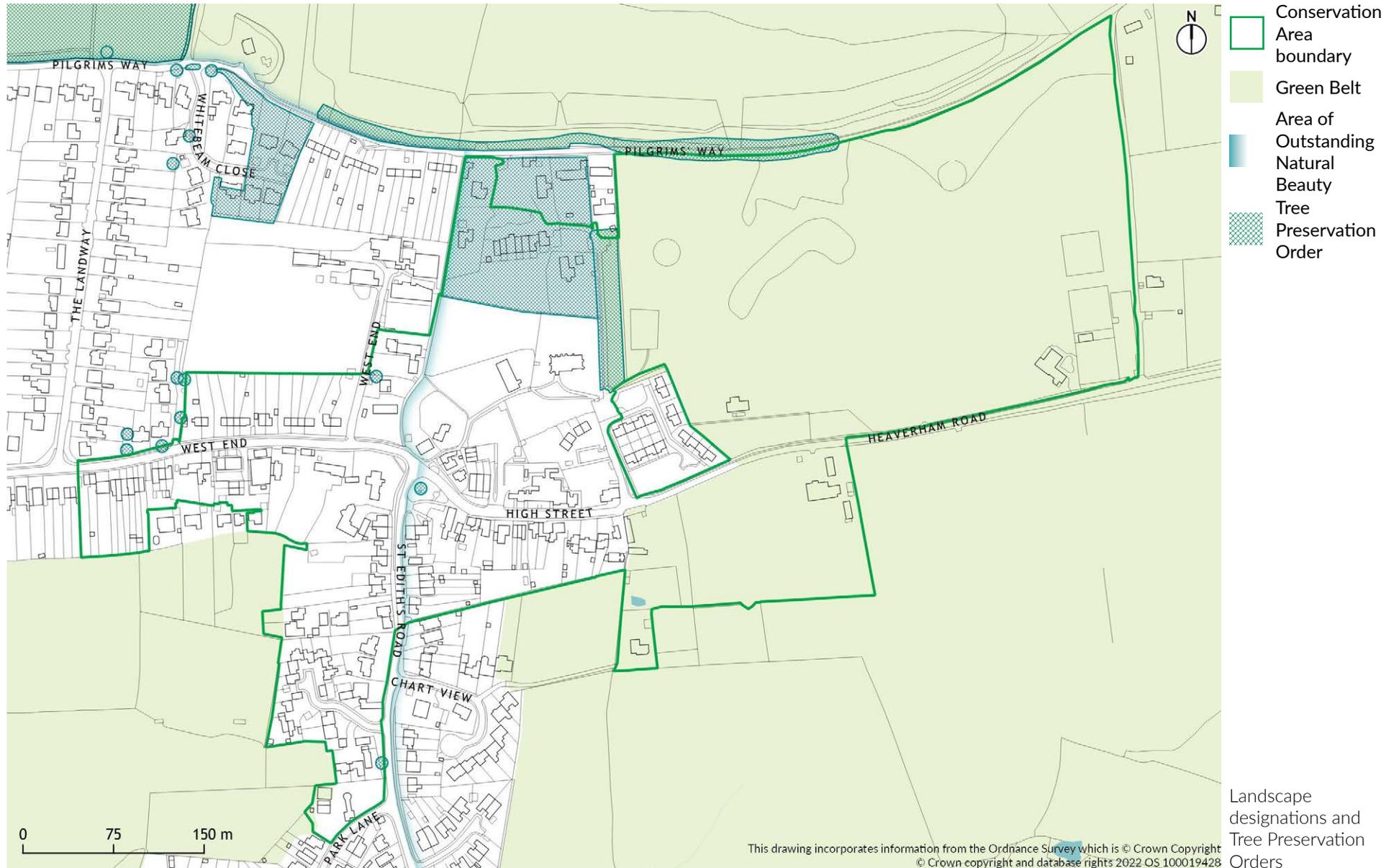
The village sits on the band of chalk that follows the North Downs, with mudstone south of the village. As a result, there is little good building stone, though both mudstone and flint are used. Roof tiles and bricks made from local clay deposits are more common.

Summary of special interest

Kemsing Conservation Area is an attractive spring line village, at the foot of the North Downs scarp. The main features of the special historic and architectural interest of the Conservation Area are:

- The ancient well of St Edith, the adjacent War Memorial and some of Kemsing's oldest houses clustered around them, forming the highly picturesque central nucleus of the village;
- A coherent village core, despite modern development outside the centre;
- A strong visual connection with the landscape of the North Downs, with hills forming part of the background of many views looking north;
- A large number of historic buildings comprising of late medieval timber-framed houses, a medieval flint-faced church, a number of Victorian and Edwardian houses and the ornate Arts and Crafts St Edith's Hall;
- A well-defined eastern boundary, where the historic border of the village and its relationship to the landscape is still visibly discerned; and,
- Traditional craftsmanship embodied in original building materials and architectural features.





2.0 Historical development

Beginnings

The earliest record of Kemsing dates to 822 AD, with the settlement likely formed due to the presence of natural chalk springs. The foundation of the Saxon church soon followed.

Kemsing was the birthplace of Saint Edith of Wilton (c.963), one of King Edgar I's daughters. The well at the centre of the village is dedicated to her, due to the local legend that her saintly presence gave the water healing properties. Because Edith took holy orders, she refused the crown. She only lived to 23 but in recognition of her life of devotion was canonised in 987.

1066 to 1800

Kemsing was a popular resting place along the Pilgrims' Way to Beckett's shrine at Canterbury Cathedral. The Earl of Pembroke was granted the Manor of Kemsing by King John, who later reclaimed it. The Earl later regained it from Henry II and married Henry's sister Eleanor, who herself established a market in the village.

The oldest surviving houses in the village date to the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. These include Rose Cottage, The Box House, Castle Bank and The Well Cottage. Subsequent alterations and new additions such as Yew Tree House and Foster House are evidence of periods when the rural economy was healthy.

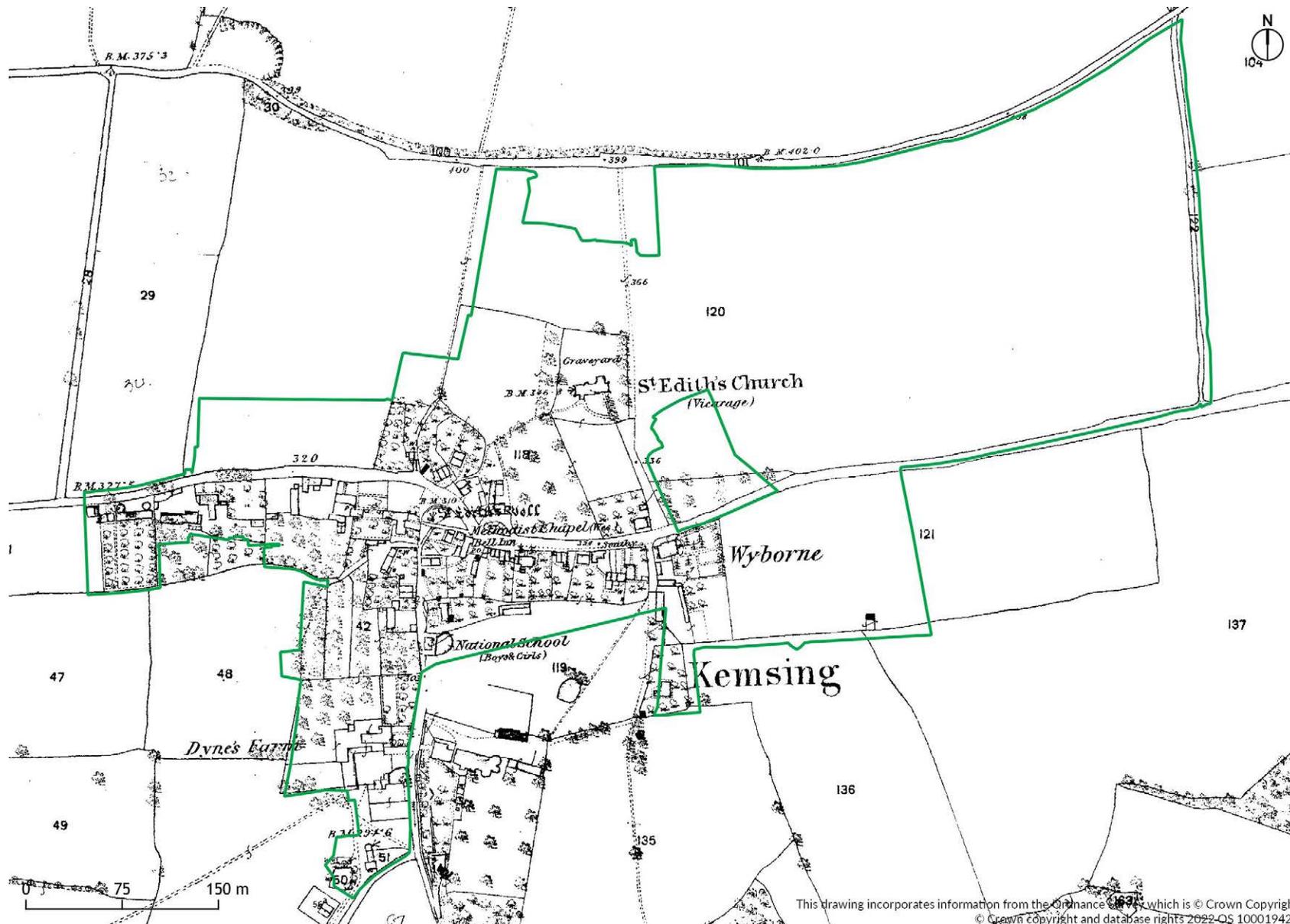
Nineteenth and twentieth centuries

The railway arrived at Kemsing in 1874, leading to a number of new houses on the western end of the High Street. Then, at the beginning of the twentieth century, the impressive St Edith's Hall was constructed (1911), designed by Godfrey Pinkerton, who also later designed the War Memorial at the centre of the village.

Following the First World War, Kemsing began expanding substantially, with houses built along St Edith's Road, West End, The Landway and Pilgrim's Way. The extent of post-1945 development has effectively merged the village with Otford to the west. The most significant late-twentieth century development was the construction of the M26 motorway 600m south of the village, which opened in 1980.



St Edith's Well in the 1880s or 1890s



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104
Conservation Area boundary

First edition OS, surveyed 1867-8, published 1872
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3.0 Architectural and built character

Spatial character

Kemsing is a good example of a small spring line village, which has developed gradually over centuries. It can be summarised as follows:

- The village developed around the main spring, known as St Edith's Well, which rises in a small triangular green at the central crossroads of the settlement;
- Development spread linearly along the roads leading east, west and south, and clusters around the church up the slope to the north of the High Street; some more recent infill behind the historic streets;
- Due to its position on the escarpment of the North Downs, views of higher and lower ground are visible across the village;
- The roads meander and rise and fall, revealing and closing attractive townscape views;
- Buildings are small and detached or sit in pairs with their neighbours, except one terrace on the western end of the Conservation Area;
- Some houses face the street, others are gable on; the variety of ways in which buildings meet the street contribute to the texture of the townscape;
- Many houses are set back from the street line behind front gardens with stone, flint or brick boundary walls, painted wooden fences and hedges;
- Well-kept front gardens enhance the character and appearance of the streetscapes, as do mature garden trees; and,
- There is a clearly defined historic boundary on the eastern side of the village, with mature trees flanking the approach; by contrast on the western side, the historic settlement merges with a larger twentieth-century suburb.



Houses set back from the street



Clearly defined historic village boundary on the eastern side of the village

Building forms and details

The historic buildings within the Conservation Area generally have a traditional character. They can be summarised as follows:

- A simple rectangular plan form, mostly two rooms deep;
- Generally two storeys;
- Domestic in character and small in scale;
- Most buildings are detached, although a number are in pairs and there is one small terrace;
- Traditional pitched roof forms, gabled, hipped and catslide;
- Brick chimneys, many tall and prominent;
- Timber-framed sash and casement windows; and,
- A small number of older houses have metal casements with leaded lights.



Domestic houses with a rectangular plan form



Small scale domestic houses



Detached houses



Pitched roofs



Tall brick chimneys



Terraced houses with timber-framed sash windows

Architectural styles

- Vernacular: a style characterised by the use of locally available materials that reflect local custom and building tradition. Characteristic features within Kemsing include exposed timber framing with rendered infill panels, and timber framing concealed behind lime render (finished in white or painted colours), brick, flint detailing, tile hanging and (predominantly) steeply pitched roofs with handmade clay plain tiles (including Kent peg tiles);
- Unlike most vernacular buildings, Georgian and Victorian house design is normally underpinned by the principles of classical architecture - for example, in the proportion of windows and the use of classical detailing. They normally have sash windows and are built of brick laid in Flemish bond, often incorporating dark headers. In addition to detached and semi-detached houses, terraces began to appear. Slate roofs begin appearing in the nineteenth century; and,
- Some late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century vernacular buildings reintroduced some of the materials, forms and detailing of older vernacular buildings.



Vernacular



Vernacular



Georgian cottages



Victorian domestic



Vernacular revival



Vernacular revival

Traditional building materials

The use of traditional materials makes a large contribution to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area. The traditional building materials that are most characteristic are:

Pre-1800s vernacular

- Timber frames, sometimes later re-faced by tile hanging or brick elevations;
- Clay tile hanging on upper storeys, using handmade clay plain tiles;
- Some use of local mudstone and knapped flint, for example in boundary walls;
- Roofs of handmade clay plain tiles; and,
- Local red brick, usually laid in Flemish bond often incorporating dark headers.



Timber framed buildings



Clay tile hanging



Knapped flint



Roofs of Kent peg tiles



Local red brick



Kentish Rag

Nineteenth century

- Yellow or red brick, laid in Flemish bond;
- Timber sash windows;
- Welsh slate roofs; and,
- Kentish ragstone or mudstone on some buildings.



Red brick in flemish bond-



Kentish ragstone



Welsh slate roofs



Lime render

- Late-nineteenth to early-twentieth century vernacular
- Clay tile hanging on upper storeys, using handmade clay plain tiles;
- Red brick laid in Flemish bond;
- Flint or stone detailing;
- Timber casement windows; and,
- Roofs of handmade clay plain tiles.



Clay tile hanging



Clay tile roofs



Half timbering



Timber casement windows with leaded lights

Boundaries and street materials

Boundary treatments and front gardens make an important contribution to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area. These are generally low-rise boundary treatments such as wooden palings, low brick or stone walls and hedges. Alongside this, most houses in Kemsing are set back from the street behind front gardens or drives.

The most typical historic materials used for boundary treatments are:

- Hedges;
- Low brick or mudstone walls; and,
- Wooden palings.

Alongside this, there are also several less commonly used boundary treatments such as, high brick walls and wooden fencing (found at the eastern end of the High Street) and crinkle crankle walls (found at the southern border of the churchyard and along Park Lane). The frequency of front gardens contributes to the village character. However, the conversion of some into driveways, with demolition of boundary walls or fences, is harmful to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area.

The Conservation Area only has road makings on the western half of the High Street and St Edith's Road, including broken white lines and a 'School Keep Clear' sign. There is also street furniture on the western half of the High Street, such as road signs, bus stops, modern bollards, bins and a guard rail. Such modern highways infrastructure is not in keeping with the character and appearance of the Conservation Area.

All road surfaces in the Conservation Area are tarmac. This is also true for most pavements, bar the section of characterful York stone paving outside St Edith's Hall. Another characterful feature of Kemsing is the prevalence of grass verges between either the street and the pavements or, where there are no pavements, the street and the houses.



Hedges



Mudstone wall



Wooden palings



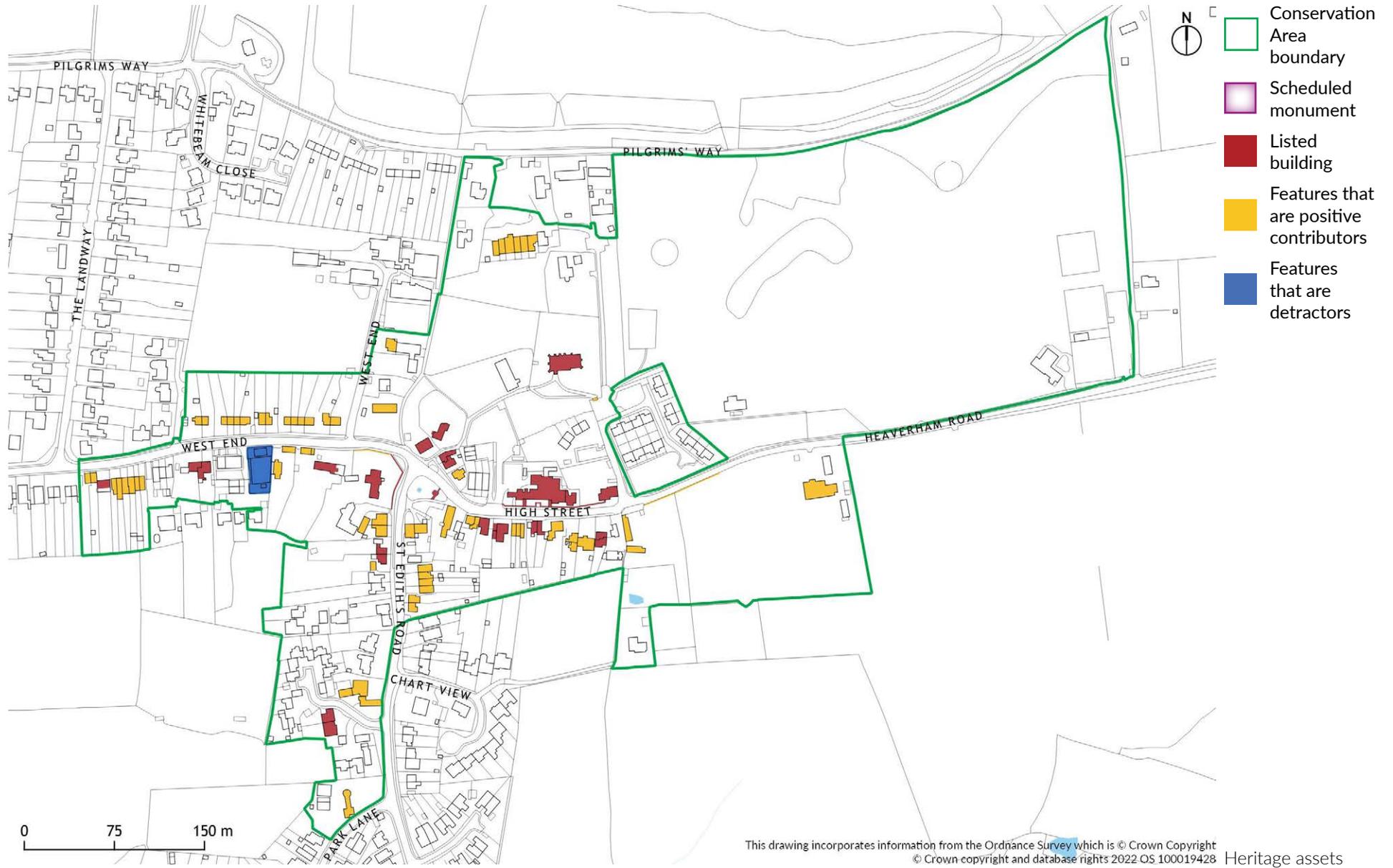
Knapped flint walls



Crinkle crankle wall



High brick walls



Heritage assets, positive contributors and detractors

The buildings and structures of the Conservation Area contribute in different ways to its overall character and appearance, some positively (positive contributors including listed buildings), others negatively (detractors). The contributions of individual elements are shown on the map on [page 13](#).

Positive contributors

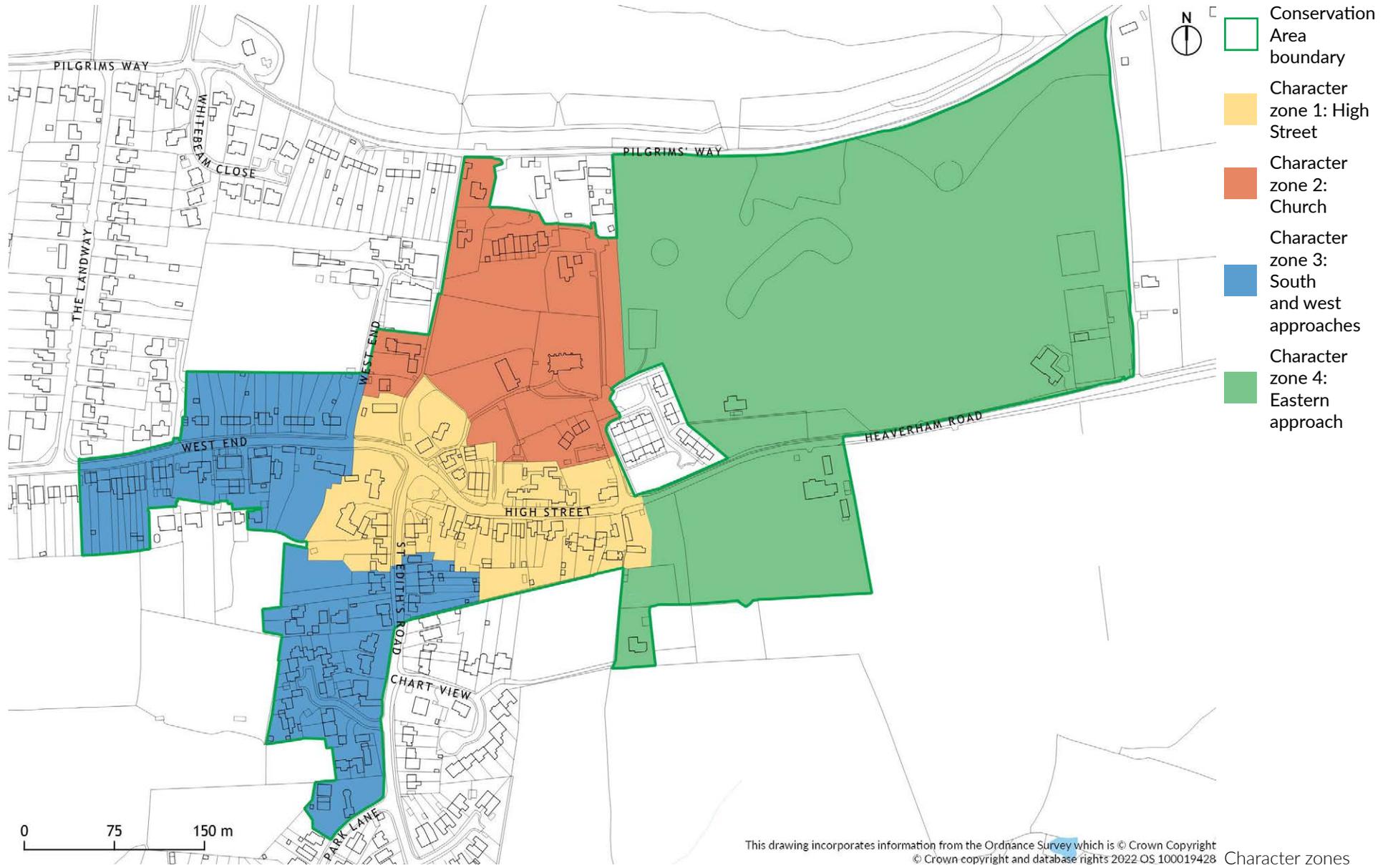
The Conservation Area contains a large number of heritage assets, both designated and non-designated, all of which contribute to its architectural and historic interest. The extent of a building's contribution to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area is not limited to its street elevations but also depends on its integrity as an historic structure and the impact it has in three dimensions. Rear elevations can be important to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area, as can side views from alleys and yards.

- *Listed buildings (designated heritage assets)*. Buildings or structures that have been designated by national government as having special historic or architectural interest at a national level. For further details, see Historic England's webpage 'What is Listing?' at: [What is Listing? | Historic England](#)
- *Positive contributors (non-designated heritage assets)*. These are unlisted buildings that positively shape the character and appearance of the Conservation Area. Some buildings may have suffered from unsympathetic alteration but could be restored to their original appearance relatively easily. A checklist for identifying positive contributors in a conservation area is given in the Historic England advice note *Conservation Area Designation, Appraisal and Management* (2019), available at: [Conservation Area Designation, Appraisal and Management](#).

Detractors

Some elements of a conservation area may be out of character due to, for example, their scale, use of materials or the way they relate to neighbouring buildings. These are identified as detractors.





Character zones

Character Zones

Character Zone 1: High Street and Green

- This is the centre of the original settlement, where the oldest buildings can be found;
- St Edith's Well, the green space around and the War Memorial, form the focal component of Kemsing's townscape;
- A particularly important grouping of historic houses - The Keep, Castle Bank, Rose Cottage and Well Cottage - form the highly picturesque backdrop to St Edith's Well. Moreover, the vernacular architecture of these houses influenced late-nineteenth and twentieth-century developments in the village;
- The High Street is more enclosed than other streets in the village, with the building line on the south side closer to the roadway and with fewer gaps between buildings; and,
- On the north side, St Edith's Hall is a dominant feature in views east and west along the High Street.



Character Zone 2: Church

- The Church of St Mary is set behind the High Street on rising higher ground. It is the oldest building in the village, with some herringbone masonry of late Saxon-early Norman date. The charming bellcote and spire, clad in wooden shingles, may be sixteenth-century and contribute greatly to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area as a landmark from many viewpoints;
- The churchyard and surrounding gardens make this zone much more open and greener than other parts of the Conservation Area, with relatively few buildings;
- Other than the church, the buildings in this zone are largely mid to late-twentieth century housing; and,
- There are no through roads, but footpaths and alleyways are characteristic.



Character Zone 3: south and west approaches (St Edith's Road/West End)

- These historic roads were largely undeveloped until the nineteenth century. They are now defined by what survives from before then (the farmhouse and barn west of St Edith's Road, the few large houses on West End) and modern infill;
- These roads contain much of the street furniture, street signs and road markings that are out of character with the Conservation Area;
- Buildings are generally parallel to the street and are set back behind front gardens; grass verges often separate the street from the pavement; and,
- Modern brick-built infill is common, with a number of new developments behind older houses west of St Edith's Road.



Character Zone 4: eastern approach

- There has been almost no recent development in this area so the historic relationship between the village and its associated farmland in the surrounding countryside can still be readily understood;
- Strong landscape character, with hedges, mature trees and fields, with the primary example of the latter being the Common Field;
- Heaverham Road winds down as a hollow way between banks and green trees, creating an attractive, unfolding approach to the High Street;
- The few, detached houses are set back behind hedges and gardens.



4.0 Views

Views make an important contribution to our ability to appreciate the character and appearance of the Conservation Area.

Three types of view have been identified, along with examples of each type. These are shown on the map on [page 21](#). In complex historic townscapes such as that found in Kemsing, such a list of views cannot be definitive, but the list does illustrate the nature of views that are important in Kemsing Conservation Area.

Static views primarily centre around St Edith's Well, the Church and St Edith's Hall. There are also views along the streets that are experienced dynamically, in that movement along the road reveals the changing streetscape. In views looking north, the North Downs form a rural backdrop and the steeple of St Mary's church identifies the historic centre of the village. Together, the combination of the position of the church against the Downs emphasise Kemsing's origins as a spring line settlement at the foot of the hills.



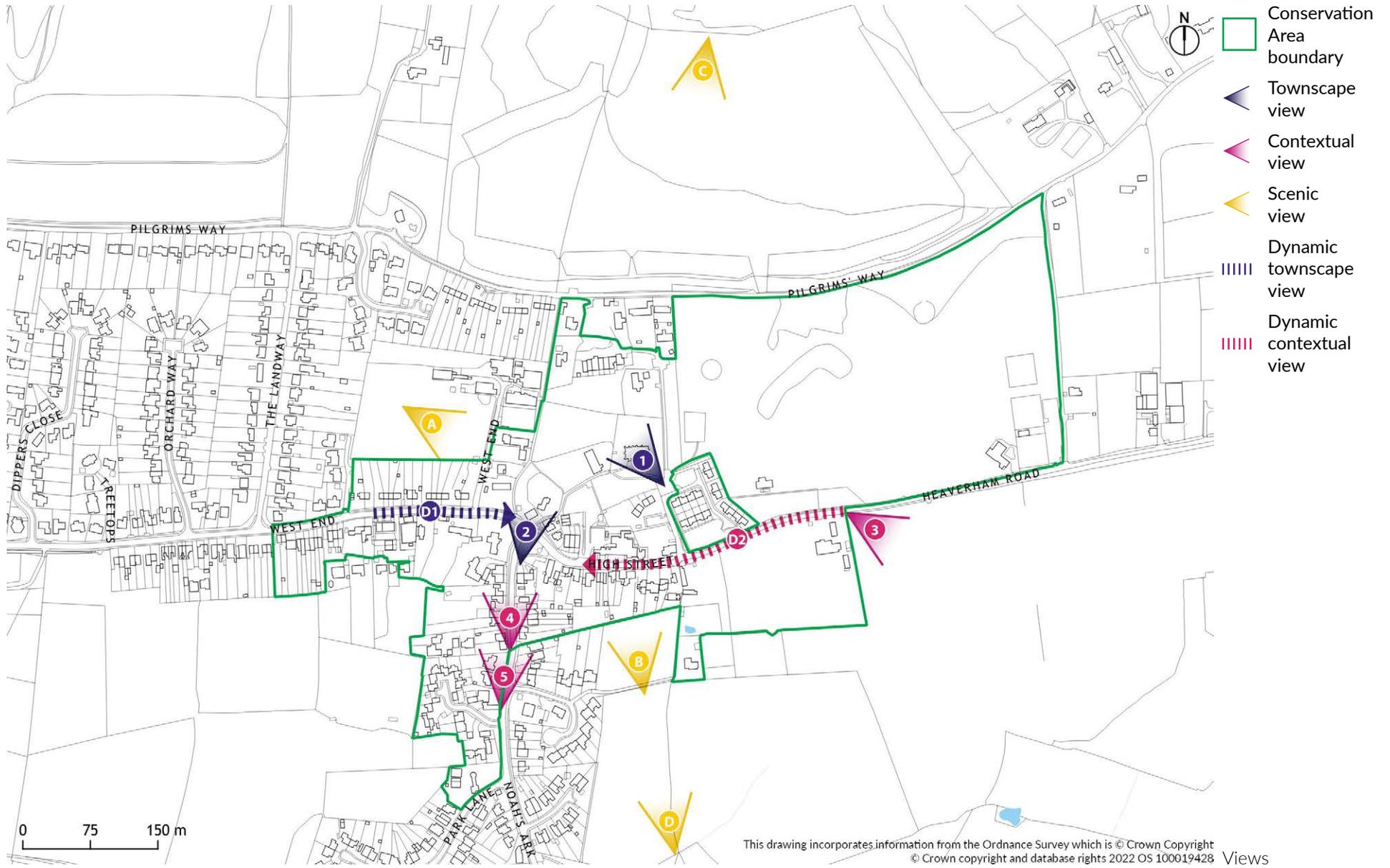
Townscape views within the Conservation Area illustrate the mix of building types, forms and materials and give a sense of the spatial character and architectural quality of the village. Trees and other greenery play an important part in these views.



Contextual views which look out to the landscape beyond the Conservation Area and give an understanding of its topography and rural setting, including the North Downs.



Scenic views from outside the Conservation Area, which take in the village as a whole, together with its surrounding landscape and help to appreciate its rural setting and well-defined eastern boundary.



5.0 Open space assessment

Large amounts of open space within and around the Conservation Area make a strong contribution to its character and appearance. The topography of the North Downs is central to the character of the Conservation Area. Open space enables an understanding and appreciation of the topography. To the east, open space preserves the historic relationship between the village and the surrounding landscape, to which it was intimately connected through land management and agriculture.

The extent of the contribution of individual parcels of open space depends on the way they are experienced. Hence, those which are visible in views from the main streets of the Conservation Area, or from the footpaths around the village, make the greatest contribution.

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

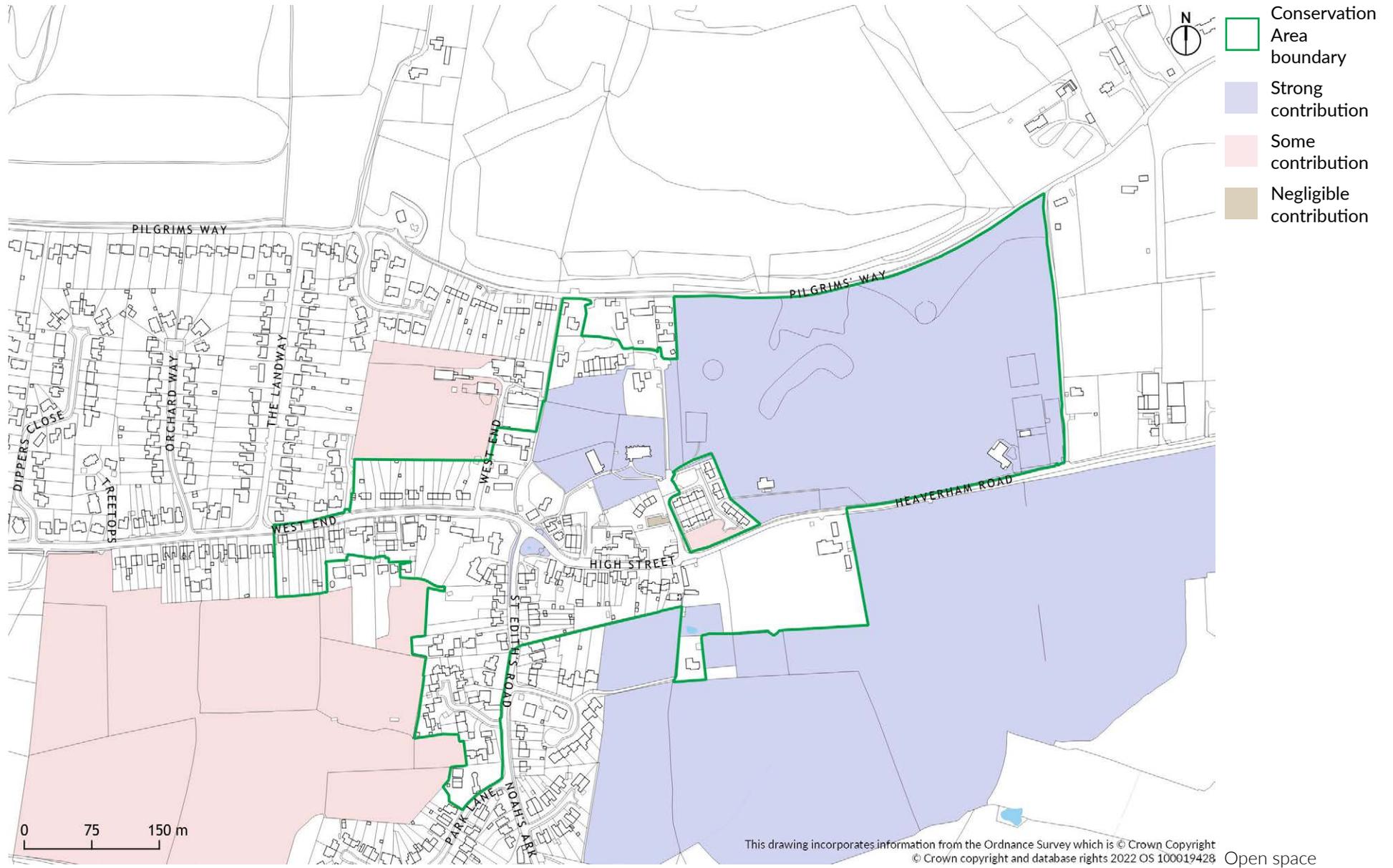
The contributions of individual parcels of land are shown on [page 23](#).

Open space inside the Conservation Area

- The green around St Edith's Well is the focal point of the village, and of considerable historical, townscape and communal importance;
- The churchyard is the largest and probably the oldest public greenspace in the village, and characterised by mature yew trees;
- The trees alongside Heaverham Road preserve the historic rural character of the approach to the Conservation Area, and;
- The Common Field is the village's recreational green space and has strong communal value. It has been publicly accessible for almost a century, given to the parish in 1924 by notable local resident, Sir Mark Collet.

Open space outside the Conservation Area

- The farmland to the east preserves the historic relationship between the village and the countryside that the community cultivated and managed;
- The North Downs form the landscape backdrop to views of and out of the Conservation Area; the geology and topography of the Downs is the reason for the location and form of the village; and,
- Open fields and woods to the south east are not visible from the Conservation Area .



6.0 Condition and issues

The character and appearance of the Conservation Area are generally well-preserved. There are, however, some issues which affect it and should be addressed in its ongoing management:

- Some loss of front gardens for parking and the loss of front boundary walls, fences etc.;
- Parking on the street and in front of houses is visually intrusive and detracts from the historic character and appearance of the streets;
- The extent of highways signage, road markings, bus stops etc. are visually intrusive and detract from the character of some parts of the Conservation Area;
- Because the houses are generally small, there is considerable pressure for extensions, which would detract if they were not of appropriate scale and materials; and,
- Plastic windows and doors, which are alien and unsympathetic materials for historic buildings and therefore detract from their character.



7.0 Management recommendations

Sevenoaks District Council has a statutory duty to review the management of conservation areas from time to time. The following recommendations have emerged from the assessment of the Conservation Area in Kemsing made in the preparation of this appraisal.

Guide for owners and residents on the effects of conservation area designation

Recommendation

Sevenoaks District Council will keep up to date its guidance about what it means to own a building in a conservation area and to encourage stakeholders to take an active part in the preservation and enhancement of these areas.

Conservation area designation brings with it additional responsibilities for owners and occupiers because of increased planning controls and particular requirements for materials and detailing in undertaking works to buildings. These are often outweighed by the benefits of living in an area of architectural integrity and traditional character, which people appreciate and which is often reflected in higher property values.

Design of new buildings and alterations to existing buildings

Recommendation

When determining applications for planning permission, Sevenoaks District Council will take account of the 'Conservation Area Design Guidance.' The guidance is being reviewed periodically to maximise its effectiveness.

New buildings and alterations to existing buildings have an effect on the Conservation Area and Sevenoaks District Council will exercise its powers through the planning system to ensure that such changes preserve or enhance the character and appearance of the Conservation Area. The design guidance has been drafted to help applicants in putting together their proposals. It is reviewed periodically to assess its effectiveness and revised if necessary.

Development in the setting of the Conservation Area

Recommendation

Applications for permission to develop in the setting of the Conservation Area should be determined with reference to the open space assessment in this appraisal.

The village's historic boundaries are still well-defined on the eastern side especially and as a result the Conservation Area has a well-preserved rural setting which contributes strongly to its character and appearance. Its position at the foot of the North Downs means that open space on the escarpment plays an important part in the way the Conservation Area is experienced. Development in its setting could therefore potentially have a harmful impact if it erodes the village boundary where that is still well-defined or harms important views. As identified in this appraisal, different areas of open space around the Conservation Area make a different contribution to the character and appearance (see [section 5.0 on page 22](#)).

Guidance

- Development on areas of existing open space which make a strong contribution to the character of the Conservation Area is likely to have a harmful impact; and,
- Development in areas which make some contribution may be possible without causing harm, subject to design, siting, scale, density, choice of materials and retention of hedgerows and mature trees.

To help determine whether the impact of proposed development is harmful to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area, applicants should undertake an assessment of the likely impact of their proposals on the built character of the area, on important views and on open space. Historic England's *Historic Environment Good Practice Advice Note 3* (2nd edition 2017), available at [Historic Environment Good Practice Advice Note 3](#), provides advice on assessing impacts of development on the setting of heritage assets.

Enforcement

Recommendation

In implementing its Planning Enforcement Plan, Sevenoaks District Council should pay special attention to preserving or enhancing the special qualities of Kemsing Conservation Area.

The effective operation of the planning system depends on the ability to ensure that development is carried out in accordance with planning permission and to enforce against development carried out without planning permission. Sevenoaks District Council has adopted a Planning Enforcement Plan which sets out how it will respond to planning enforcement complaints. It can be downloaded from the planning pages of the Council's website: [Planning enforcement | Sevenoaks District Council](#)

Article 4 directions

Recommendation

Article 4 directions should be made to protect boundary treatments and front gardens that contribute to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area.

Article 4 (1) of the GDPO the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015 allows for restrictions to be applied to permitted development rights, but the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) requires that the purpose and extent of any restriction should be clear and justifiable.

As set out in this appraisal, an important part of the character of the Conservation Area is the way that many buildings are set back behind small front gardens, enclosed by low boundary fences, walls or hedges. Piecemeal loss or erosion of either or both boundary treatments and front gardens would weaken the enclosure to the street and have an urbanising effect. This would be harmful to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area.

In order to exercise control over such changes and protect the special interest and character of the Conservation Area, it is recommended that within the Conservation Area, planning permission should be required for development consisting of:

- The provision within the curtilage of a dwellinghouse of a hard surface for any purpose incidental to the enjoyment of the dwellinghouse as such (Class F); and,
- The erection, construction, maintenance, improvement or alteration of a gate, fence, wall or other means of enclosure (Class A).

Public realm

Recommendation

Streets and public open spaces should be managed in a way that sustains their character and contribution to the Conservation Area.

In some parts of the Conservation Area the extent and appearance of traffic signage, road markings and other forms of visual clutter associated with highways and road traffic cause harm to the character of the Conservation Area. Management of this is the responsibility of public bodies. Kent County Council, Sevenoaks District Council and Kemsing Parish Council should refer to Historic England's guidance in *Streets for All* (latest edition 2018) in any public realm works they propose or carry out. For more information go to: [Streets for All | Historic England](#).

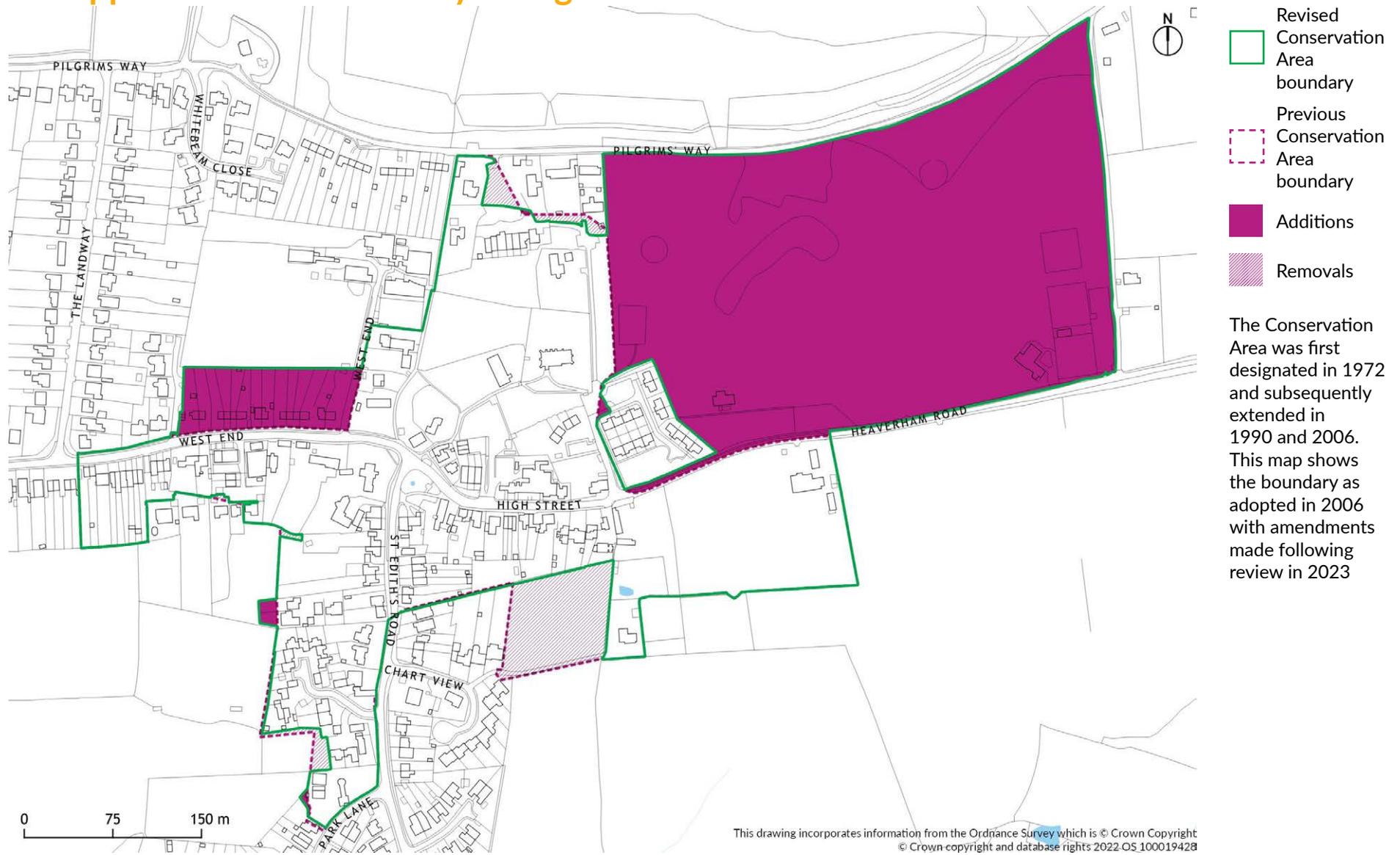
Parking

Recommendation

Ways of encouraging use of public transport and possibilities for the provision of parking outside the boundaries of the Conservation Area should be explored.

Few houses have off street parking, so there is a lot of parking on the street – and pavement. This is visually intrusive and detracts from historic character of the streets and their picturesque appeal. The importance of front gardens and boundaries to the character of the Conservation Area means that their loss to provide off street parking would be even more harmful. Ways of encouraging use of public transport and possibilities for the provision of parking outside the boundaries of the Conservation Area should therefore be explored.

8.0 Appendix: 2023 boundary changes



Alan Baxter

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Reviewed by Gemma Fowlie

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Consultation Draft issued January 2023

Final Appraisal issued July 2023

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