

Sevenoaks High Street

Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan



PLANNING GUIDANCE - 2008



Sevenoaks High Street

Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan

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 a process which helps us 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 and streets all contribute to the character and local distinctiveness of the District's conservation areas.

The built 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 and management plan will inform the activities of the Council, the public and other bodies where these affect the conservation area. This Appraisal was approved by the District Council in August 2008 and adopted as Informal Planning Guidance.

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Character Areas & Designations

Character Appraisal

1.00 INTRODUCTION

This document replaces the Sevenoaks High Street Conservation Area Appraisal which was produced in March 2001 by Sevenoaks District Council in partnership with Sevenoaks Town Council and local amenity groups. Local authorities are required by law to preserve or enhance their conservation areas and part of that process is to regularly review their conservation areas and produce Conservation Area Appraisals and Management Plans. These explain what is important about the area and what improvements are needed.

This Appraisal and Management Plan follows the broad format suggested by English Heritage in the 2006 document Guidance on Conservation Area Appraisals and Management Plans. The Appraisal draws heavily on the original document, but the conservation area has recently been completely re-surveyed and the boundary revised. During this process, photographs were taken and both positive and negative elements recorded. However, the omission of any particular feature or building does not imply that it is of no significance.

1.1 Conservation Area Boundary Review

A thorough review of the existing boundary was undertaken as part of the preliminary survey work associated with this Appraisal. The boundary, which was last reviewed in 1992, accurately reflected the overall extent of the area of special architectural or historic interest but a number of small changes were made in January 2008 to reflect recent developments in Sevenoaks.

1.2 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 demolition, 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 vital grass roots starting points from which to safeguard the continuing care of our environment.

1.3 The Benefits of Being in a Conservation Area

The historic environment is of particular economic importance for tourism and leisure. In addition, maintaining the appearance of a conservation area and the character of the groups of buildings and the public areas within it will sustain or enhance the value of individual properties. Conservation can also play a key part in promoting economic prosperity by ensuring that an area offers attractive living and working conditions which encourage further investment.

The principles of conservation management planning, that managing any historic place should be based on understanding it and assessing its significance and values, are now accepted as applying to historic areas as much as to historic buildings.

1.4 Purpose of Appraisals and Management Plans

As their number grows, it has become even more important for local authorities to include a well-defined and considered policy for designated conservation areas in their development plans. Development 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 appraisals in 1997 and more detailed guidance on both appraisals and management plans in 2006. This guidance outlines the preferred approach to these plans and gives examples of the type of content that it would be useful to include.

The principal purpose of this Appraisal is to provide a firm basis upon which proposals for development within the High Street Conservation Area can be assessed. It defines those key elements in the area that contribute to the special historic and architectural character and which should be conserved or enhanced. It supplements and provides clarity to policies contained in the Development Plan, primarily those relating to demolition and development within conservation areas, and should be read in conjunction with the Plan. It will therefore be a key document in maintaining character and promoting appropriate, sensitive proposals in the Conservation Area.

The appraisal and management plan defines the key elements that together give the area its character and objectively analyses how they interact to enhance their individual impact. The plan provides suggestions for future policies and improvements based on a clear understanding of the special architectural and historic qualities that give the area its local distinctiveness. The plan can also be used to assess the impact of planning policies and the implementation of enhancement measures.

The plan will help the District Council, development professions (planners, architects, landscape architects, highway engineers etc) and the local community engage in the conservation and enhancement of the local historic environment and help secure the long term viability of the Conservation Area as an important heritage asset. This new Appraisal and Management Plan is a review of the Sevenoaks High Street Conservation Area Appraisal 2001. The new plan sets objectives for the protection and enhancement of the conservation area, addresses areas identified in the first appraisal and brings forward opportunities to enhance the area.

1.5 The key purpose of this Plan is to:

- Review the boundaries of the conservation area and define the key characteristics and features which contribute to its special character or appearance and should be preserved or enhanced.
- Provide a basis for making sustainable community based planning decisions about the future of the conservation area.
- Raise awareness of the importance and value of the local heritage.
- Identify distinctive built form character within the conservation area.
- Record those principal elements that detract from the character or appearance of the conservation area.
- Identify opportunities for enhancement to be delivered through management plans or other initiatives.
- Inform key agencies, societies and residents whose activities impact on the conservation area.
- Maximise investment in the quality of the conservation area to the benefit of the social and economic aspects of life in Sevenoaks.
- Provide guidance and set out objectives to preserve and enhance the buildings, structures and features.
- Identify distinctive public realm character within the conservation area, provide guidance, and establish key actions to preserve and enhance the public realm.
- Outline the key statutory requirements in respect of development within the conservation area; provide guidance and set out actions to secure the proper and effective application of these requirements.
- Propose the implementation of management procedures to co-ordinate the delivery of new works and maintenance works within the public realm.

As an adopted Conservation Area Appraisal , the plan will be a material consideration in the determination of development proposals.

2.00 GUIDANCE AND POLICIES

2.1 National and Regional Guidance

Government advice on the control of conservation areas and historic buildings is set out in Planning Policy Guidance Note 15, Planning and the Historic Environment. Further advice about conservation areas including the production of management proposals, was produced by English Heritage in 2006. The Regional Spatial Strategy and Kent & Medway Structure Plan policies also provide the general strategic policy context.

2.2 The Development Plan

The government has introduced a new type of development plan known as the Local Development Framework (LDF). The LDF will set out the strategy, policies and proposals for the future shape of Sevenoaks and will be produced over the next 2-3 years. In the meantime the adopted Local Plan of March 2000 and the Kent and Medway Structure Plan 2006 (until it is superseded by the South East Plan) will retain development plan status until parts of the new system are adopted. As an adopted planning document this Appraisal and Management Plan will be a key material consideration in the determination of development proposals during the transitional period.

2.3 Local Policies

The Kent and Medway Structure Plan includes a number of policies, which are particularly important in conservation areas. Policy QL 1 indicates that all development should be well designed and of high quality and should respond positively to the scale, layout, pattern and character of local surroundings. Policy QL6 states that the primary planning policy in conservation areas is to preserve or enhance their special character or appearance and QL8 says that listed buildings will be preserved and their architectural and historic integrity and the character of their settings will be protected and enhanced.

The Sevenoaks District Local Plan (adopted March 2000) lists the following policy relating to conservation areas:

- **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 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.**

2.4 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. Important areas of green space within the built confines are safeguarded under policy EN9.

2.5 Buildings Contributing to Character

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.

2.6 Conservation and Enhancement

The Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act, 1990 and Planning Policy Guidance Note 15 state that the Local Planning Authority should undertake detailed assessments of conservation areas and prepare proposals for their preservation and enhancement. 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 plan which may have been prepared. This assessment and the detailed analysis of the area contained in the report are intended to fulfil this requirement and provide the background for development and enhancement schemes.

Sevenoaks has a rich townscape and an environment of high quality. This appraisal aims to ensure that this rich context is respected so that only high quality design is introduced, allowing the town to maintain its character and status as one of the most desirable places in the south east.

There is a richness, variety, quality and history of townscape within Sevenoaks that makes the town special. Within individual character areas there is a need to maintain and enhance the best of these townscape qualities to maintain the towns vitality. Context sensitive quality design is vitally important in reinforcing the character of Sevenoaks and this character must not be lost through undue pressure for poorly designed infill development or redevelopment.

2.7 Special Controls in the Conservation Area

Designation of a conservation area does not mean that changes cannot occur, but rather that any change should preserve or enhance the features which make up its special character. Controls are imposed which are additional to normal planning restrictions, in order to maintain the character and appearance of the area. The benefits of this and the maintenance of a high quality environment are perceived by most people who live and work in conservation areas as being worth the additional restrictions.

Additional controls within conservation areas are outlined here for information. However, other planning controls may still apply and are not altered by conservation area status.

Houses and their alteration

The size of an extension that may be built without the need to apply for planning permission is more restricted within a conservation area. Any proposals should always be discussed with the Council at an early stage. Planning permission is likely to be required for the erection of any building or structure within the garden of the house, for example, a workshop, pavilion, greenhouse and so on (where these are larger than 10m³).

Cladding of the exterior of a residential property with stone, artificial stone, timber, plastic or tiles will require submission of a planning application. Any enlargement of a house by way of alteration or additions to the roof, e.g. a dormer window, will require a planning application to be made. A planning application is needed for a satellite antenna where it is to be installed on a chimney; or on a building over 15m in height; or on a wall or roof slope which fronts a highway.

Industrial buildings and warehouses

There are greater restrictions on how an industrial building or warehouse may be extended within a conservation area. Any proposals for development should be checked with the relevant development control team.

Other commercial premises and flats

Any extension or alteration to other commercial premises or residential flats, which materially affects the external appearance of the building, will require a planning application to be made. This is particularly important within conservation areas, where even small alterations can materially affect the character and appearance of the area. For instance, such alterations can include rendering, brickwork, replacement of slates with concrete tiles, and replacement windows. The advice of the relevant development control team should be sought before carrying out any changes.

Demolition

Conservation Area Consent is required for the demolition of any building within a conservation area, except the following:

- any building with a total cubic content not exceeding 115m³ or any part of such building.
- any wall or fence less than 1m high fronting onto the street or less than 2m high elsewhere.
- any building subject to a formal order requiring demolition.

Planning officers are happy to give advice on whether planning permission is required for work within a conservation area. Please contact the Council's relevant development control area team.

Trees

6 weeks notice must be given to the Council of intent to cut down, prune, uproot or destroy any tree within a conservation area. The Council will then advise if it wishes to raise an objection. If a response is not received from the Council within 6 weeks of the notice being given, work may go ahead. This requirement does not apply to trees which have a diameter less than 75mm (3") when measured at a height of 1.5m (4'11") above the ground. Works to trees already covered by a Tree Preservation Order will also require consent.

Unauthorised Works and development

Sometimes, landowners and others carry out works without first obtaining any necessary consent from the District Council. The Council does have certain legal powers to deal with such situations, but can only take enforcement action once it is aware of any alleged unauthorised works and after detailed investigation.

Maintenance and Repairs

The Council has a duty to pay special attention to the character or appearance of conservation areas, in exercising its planning powers. However, these powers are limited. The principal guardians of the character and appearance of the area are the residents and business people who live and work in the conservation area and who are responsible for maintaining their individual properties.

The character of conservation areas can be altered or lost through the use of inappropriate materials, not only on the buildings themselves but also on the ground, including paving, roads, and along boundaries. The introduction of features, such as street furniture, signs, shopfronts, lights, and hard surfacing, can also result in changes to the area which eventually result in the loss of its special character. In the conservation area few of the buildings are isolated. Even if they are detached they are part of a wider street scene, often of buildings of similar style and size. Altering the appearance, form or size of any one building can affect not only that building, but the whole street. Unsympathetic replacement windows (particularly where the size of the openings are changed or inappropriate materials used) can alter the appearance of a building considerably. Where a number of different designs are used along a street, the rhythm and unity of its original appearance can be spoilt.

Painting or rendering over original brickwork is another alteration which can dramatically change a property's appearance and irreparably damage the street scene. As well as covering up attractive brickwork, it can obscure original architectural and brick detailing and requires regular redecoration to maintain an attractive appearance. In older buildings paint or render can also trap moisture which may cause damage to walls. Many alterations to older properties using modern materials can upset the balance within these properties and can cause more costly problems, such as cracks, damp, or rot. Care should be taken with any alteration to an older building.

Boundary treatments

Boundary treatment, especially to the street, is an essential feature of any property. Original boundaries, whether a brick or ragstone wall, railings, fencing or hedges, should be retained wherever possible and every effort made to reinstate missing boundary treatments with a sympathetic replacement. The particular design and the materials used should take account of the character of the property and the surrounding area.

Listed Buildings

Many historic buildings are listed by the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport because of their architectural and historic interest. The main purpose of listing a building is to ensure that care will be taken over decisions affecting its future, that alterations respect the particular character and interest of the building, and that the case for its preservation is taken fully into account in considering the merits of any development proposals.

If you live in or occupy a listed building, further guidance on the controls that apply is available from the relevant development control team. When a building is listed, this covers the building both internally and externally and also any object or structure fixed to it. In addition any object or structure within the grounds or garden of the building which was there before 1948 is also listed. Listed Building Consent is required for the demolition, extension or alteration of listed buildings in any way that affects its character as a building of special architectural or historic interest, internally as well as externally. You must get this consent from the District Council before any work is started. You may also require planning permission for the proposed works. The Development Control Area Team will be able to advise you on this.

New gates, fences, walls, railings or other means of enclosure surrounding a listed building will require planning permission. Similarly most sheds, garages and greenhouses and other outbuildings will also require planning permission. The design of these should harmonise with the existing building and its setting.



Almshouses

3.00 CONTEXT AND DEVELOPMENT

3.1 General Description

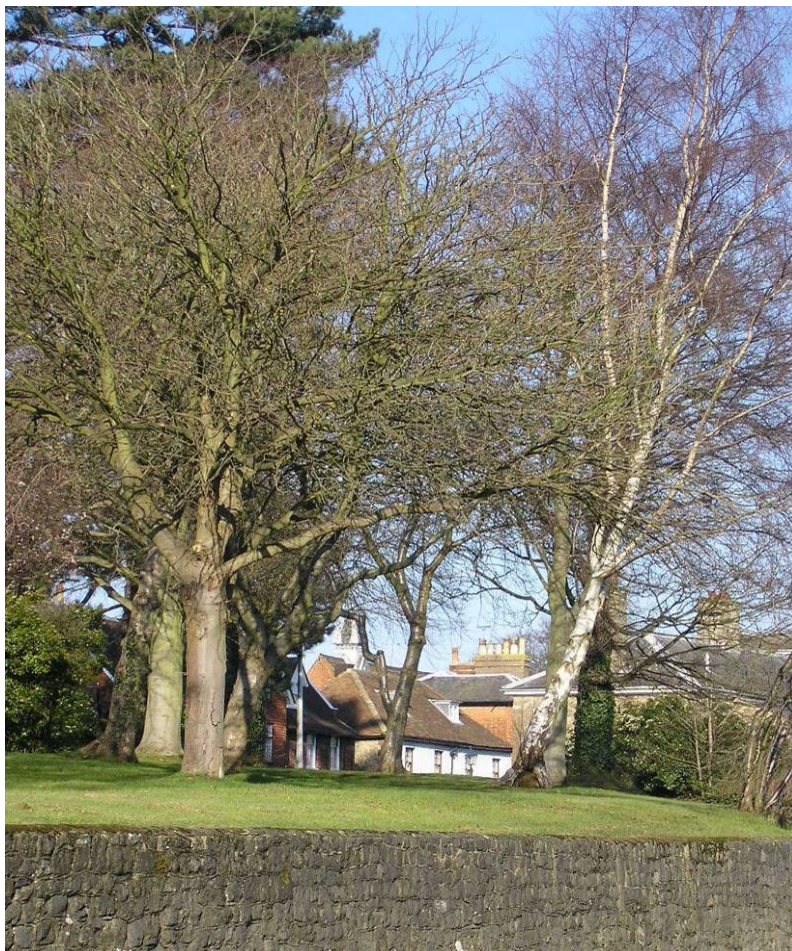
Sevenoaks High Street Conservation Area includes the historic focus of the town, pivoting on the central fountain and runs south along the upper High Street, north west towards London and north to incorporate the High Street. It contains the parish church of St. Nicholas, most of the original buildings belonging to Sevenoaks School and borders the historic estate of Knole. The High Street Conservation Area also includes the majority of the southern end of London Road and the series of narrow pedestrian links through the Shambles to the High Street.



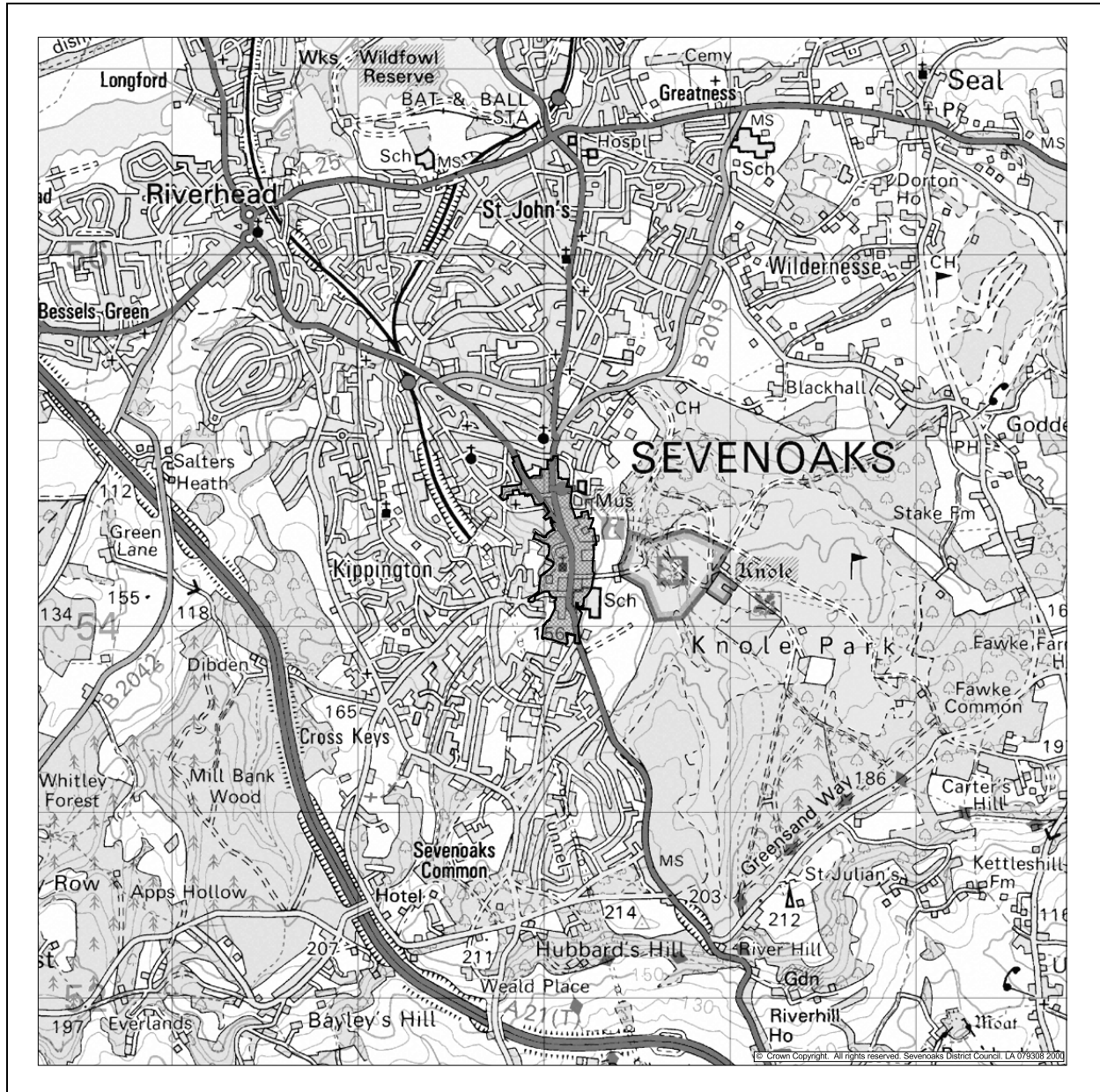
Map 1 Extent of High Street Conservation Area

The area was first designated in 1971 and reviewed in 1992 and 2008. It contains over one hundred listed buildings located in 20 hectares. Most of the properties that front the High Street and London Road are commercial premises but there are a significant number of residential properties beyond the shops and offices, particularly at the southern end of the area and in Lime Tree Walk to the west of London Road.

To the east the area is bounded by Green Belt and to the south east there is an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Blighs Meadow is on the northern boundary and some areas behind the western side of the High Street fall within it. The town centre was designated a Conservation Area because of the historic importance of so many of its buildings, the sense of enclosure generated by the High Street and London Road, together with the attractive sense of human scale of the area and the visual and historic importance of the southern approach to Sevenoaks. This approach leads from the countryside into the early historic heart of the town and in contrast to the more heavily trafficked northern approach, gives an immediate perception of the historic scale and sense of place within the town centre. With views over Knole Park to the east the southern approach leads directly into the earliest market place, Burlington's dramatic almshouses and the Sevenoaks School group of buildings.



The Southern Approach



Map 2 Geographical Location

3.2 Location and Geographical Context

Sevenoaks is a prosperous market town of approximately 19,000 people, situated on the north slope of the Greensand ridge to the south of the North Downs from which it is separated by the Vale of Holmesdale. It is served by good road and rail links to London and the west, and has an easy connection to the A21, which bypasses the town and runs to the south coast. The town lies to the south of the M26 motorway and there is a single direction westbound interchange, which gives access to the M25.

The A21 bypass continues northwards round the west of the town and interconnects with the M25 to the Dartford crossing and with the A20 and A2 westbound to central London and east to the channel ports. Sevenoaks has easy access to major road transport routes without having the inconvenience of a major artery running through the town.

It is the rail network however, with its frequent services to London, that has allowed the growth of Sevenoaks and its surrounding villages as a commuter town and at present some 2 million passenger journeys per year use this link to the capital, and Tonbridge to the south. Sevenoaks Station at Tubs Hill is the fifth busiest in Kent.

Sevenoaks' nearest comparable towns are Tunbridge Wells and Orpington, both take a considerable amount of consumer trade away from Sevenoaks, which does not have branches of the major retail outlets that the others can offer. The shopping complex at Lakeside, to the north of the Dartford crossing, and Bluewater near Dartford, are both within easy reach by road. The District Council has administrative offices in the town and covers an area stretching to Swanley in the north, to the outskirts of Tonbridge in the south east and to Edenbridge in the south west. The District covers the towns of Swanley and the villages along the Darent valley as well as those in the western part of the Kent Downs.

Sevenoaks is a prosperous town, with 85% of its population classified as professional, managerial, technical or skilled. 16% of the working population travel to work by rail, compared to a 6% national average. Car ownership is high with 80% of householders owning one and 50% owning two or more vehicles; 75% of children are taken to school by car. Bus services in the area are generally considered poor. The high level of car ownership and use contributes to congestion and poor air quality. Traffic congestion in the town at peak times can be heavy, despite the relief provided by the A21 bypass. Various schemes have been put forward to alleviate this problem. Partial pedestrianisation of the High Street was tried as an experiment in 1997 but was eventually dropped due to poor design and adverse local opinion.

3.3 Historical Development

There is no mention of Sevenoaks in the Domesday Book. Since its origins in the 11th Century when it was part of the archiepiscopal manor of Otford it has developed into the prosperous and busy market town we know today. The settlement had a church in its own right on the site of the present St. Nicholas church from the late 11th Century or earlier. An early two-cell building beneath the present church was discovered during archaeological excavations in 1993.

Contrary to popular belief the town is not named after the seven oak trees that lined the boundary of the Vine Cricket Ground. Sevenoaks is believed to derive from the Saxon word "Seouenaca", the name given to a small chapel near seven oak trees in Knole Park around 800 A.D.

The market was founded in 1207 and the economic success of the market allowed Sevenoaks to enlarge into a separate manor in its own right. Dunlop quotes references to the market from 1281 onwards in the Otford manor court roll entries of 1281 and 1292. Originally the market grew up at the southern end of town but moved to the Shambles area between London Road and High Street in the late 13th century. The original medieval market house was replaced in 1843 by the present Regency style building, now a hairdressers, which has been amongst other things a technical institute and public toilets. The farmers' livestock market moved to the BT site at Tubs Hill in 1925 and the Council obtained the ancient market rights that enable the small Saturday retail market to operate today.



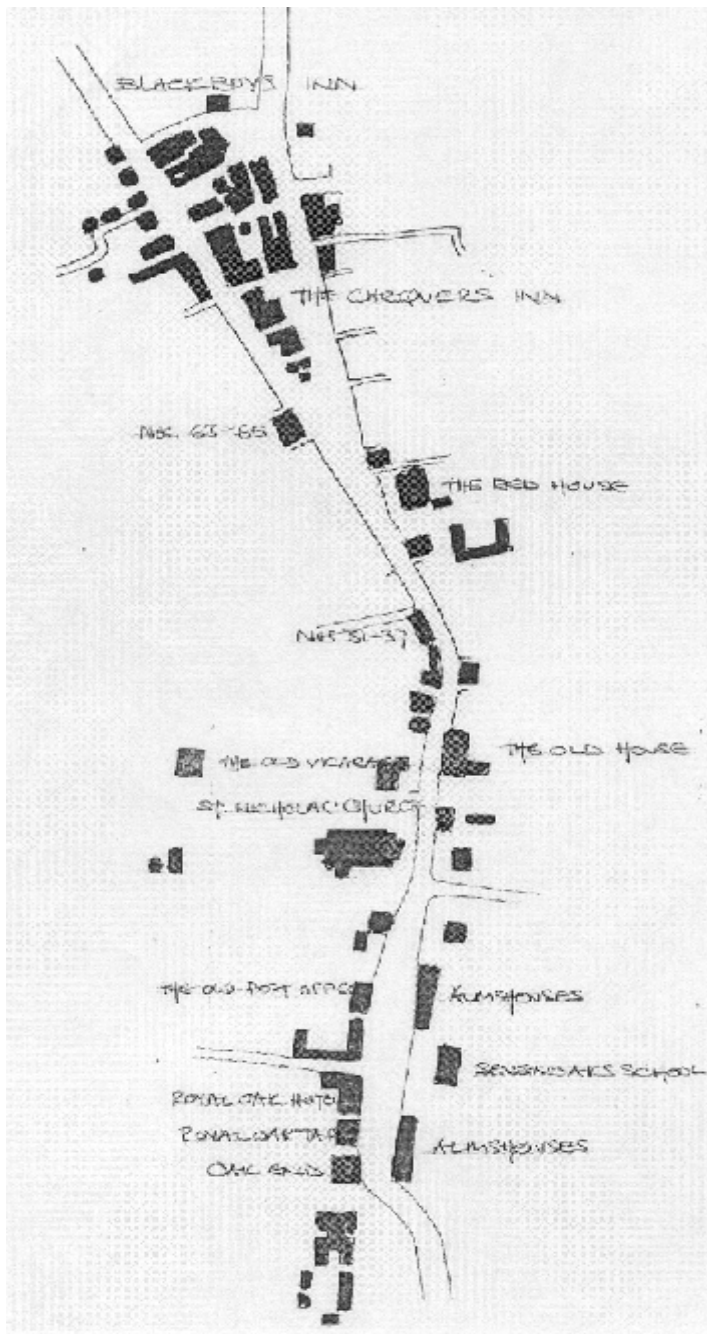
Sevenoaks market in the 1860's

Flemish weavers settled in the area in the 14th Century and their industry was to flourish in the district for 300 years. These immigrants were followed in Tudor times by others bringing new industries such as papermaking, market gardening, hop growing and the extraction of coal. Iron smelting followed in the 17th Century providing the area with a rich assortment of productive occupations.

In 1450 the rebellion against Henry VI led by Jack Cade led to the Battle of Solefields, at which Cade defeated the troops sent against him by the King. There is a plaque to commemorate this battle at the junction of Tonbridge Road and Solefields Road at the southern end of the conservation area.

Sevenoaks was originally a small cluster of houses around the Manor of Knole where there may have been habitation since Saxon times. Knole House is one of the most important reasons for the town's establishment. Throughout the 17th and 18th Centuries the house was enlarged by its successive owners the first Earl of Dorset and the Sackville family who acquired the house in 1668. One of the remarkable things about Knole House is how little it changed after the 17th Century.

The Shambles in the heart of the town developed as a market and accommodation for labourers on the Knole estate and by 1687 the structure of Sevenoaks High Street and market place were well established and helped to increase the prosperity of the growing town.



Map 3 Sevenoaks Town Centre in 1680

The coming of the railway initiated the most significant change in the town's development. For hundreds of years Sevenoaks remained constricted to its hill top site surrounded by a number of country estates such as Knole, Kippington, Montreal, Bradbourne, Greatness and Wildernesse. The first station opened at Bat and Ball in 1862 and the station at Tubs Hill followed in 1868. Sevenoaks then began its expansion into a base for commuting workers to London. This second, and now more important railway line was delayed due to topographical limitations along the deep valley between the town and the Kippington estate, and from this time onwards new development began to stretch northwards from the historic town centre.



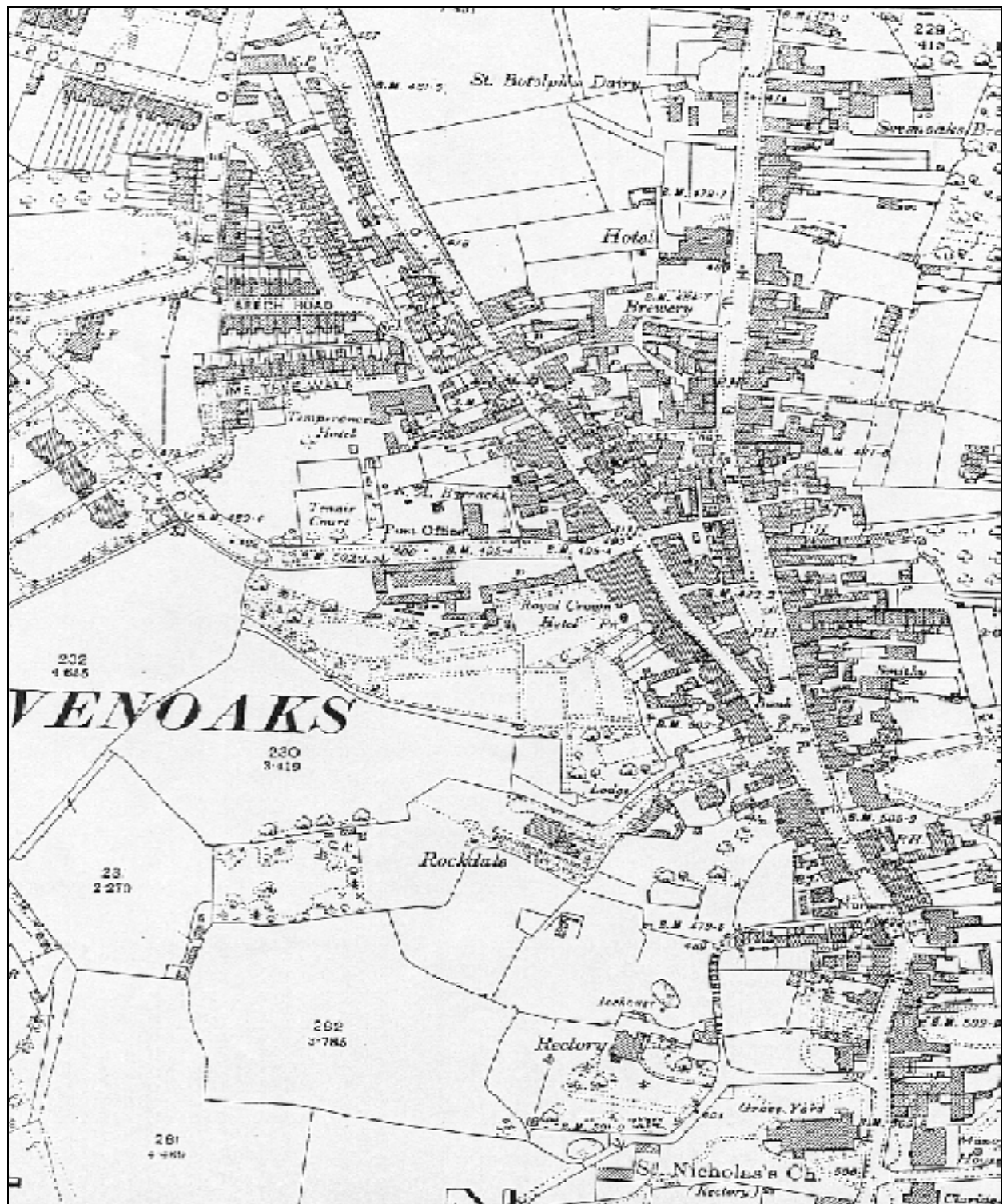
High Street looking north 1900's



London Road looking south 1901

At the turn of the 20th Century there was a marked increase in house building and a number of spacious houses appeared in the north of the town and in the Kippington area. A series of large properties were erected in the Wildernessee area when the Estate was sold in 1924, and after the First World War, municipal housing projects were begun in Greatness and Hillingdon.

Other large estates were sold off for redevelopment and the modern face of the Sevenoaks as a commuter town emerged. The urban population rose steadily from approximately 8,000 in 1890 to 17,000 in 1961 and stands today at approximately 19,000.



Map 4 Sevenoaks Town in 1896

3.4 Historic Landscape

The town maintains an historic and defining relationship with the surrounding countryside. Knole Park in particular visually links into the town centre and can be seen from selected viewpoints. Early paths and lanes, parts of early drovers' routes leading out to the Charts are still clearly defined today by built form and historic boundary treatments. The layers of development still maintain the linear structure of the town over a ridge which filters into the planned and natural landscape of the surrounding area.

3.5 Current Landscape Setting

The primary landscape feature of Sevenoaks High Street Conservation Area is its setting in the surrounding countryside on the northern slope of the Greensand ridge with views across the vale of Holmesdale to the North Downs. Maintenance of this relationship is a function both of the conservation and design of the town in relation to the surrounding countryside and of the planning of surrounding rural areas in relation to the town.

Selected views to the North Downs are focussed by built form and there are some views to the south east over Knole Park. The scale and historic character of the southern part of the town centre is defined in part by views of St Nicholas' church tower. These views are varied but of very high quality and should be carefully considered in terms of rooflines and skylines. At night the floodlit tower is a dramatic feature of the upper High Street.

The impact of the landscape on Sevenoaks helps to understand its established character today. There is a contrast between the urban and rural areas in the form of views out to the strongly defined countryside. These views can be characterised as varying from the long prospect of the Downs to glimpses of Knole Park between buildings. The footprint of an historic landscape is never far from most of the developed parts of the town centre.

3.6 Trees and Natural Features

Trees and hedges contrast with built form at the southern end of the High Street with some fine mature trees defining spaces to the front of buildings. Trees also form a significant backdrop to historic development and can be seen in views out towards Kippington and Knole.

Trees and open space contribute strongly to the special character of Sevenoaks. Retaining mature trees and hedges is fundamental to preserving this character. Trees in conservation areas are protected and their removal will only be permitted where a clear case exists. New trees should be native species that will add to the quality and local distinctiveness of the area. Contact the Council's tree officer for further advice.

3.7 Architectural Description

Sevenoaks High Street Conservation Area contains buildings from six centuries and displays a great wealth and variety of architectural detail. The materials used are equally varied and even the colours of the paintwork and shop fronts add to the diversity of the street scene.

Many of the vernacular materials of Kent including clay tiles, tile-hanging, ragstone, weatherboarding and deep orange and red brickwork (with some vitrified headers) can be seen both in the historic buildings and reinterpreted with varying degrees of success in later developments. The proximity to the gault clay of north Kent and the advent of the railway resulted in the use of London stocks (mixed with red and orange brick in an architecturally pleasing form) and natural Welsh slate roofs.

A comparative historic map analysis reveals that post 1647 the basic spatial structure of the 17th Century town still remains today. Namely a very fine grain of built form with a human scale series of alleys and footways leading to small courtyards and gardens. This has produced a number of dynamic sequences of spaces particularly relating to the upper High Street, St Nicholas Church and the Shambles. The historical significance of its buildings, the sense of enclosure and human scale generated in the retail core and the visual importance of the southern entrance to the town are all key characteristics leading to its designation as a conservation area. The quality of the conservation area and its building stock could be considered outstanding in a national context.



The Old Post Office

The conservation area divides into two principal parts, north and south, each with a distinctly different architectural character. At the southern end of the High Street there is only one shop, the old post office, which acts as the School tuck shop. Other building uses are residential, offices and Sevenoaks School together with the Royal Oak Hotel. The buildings at the southern end are visually dominated by the ragstone of the School and adjoining almshouses, St Nicholas' Church and the Royal Oak Hotel. Otherwise brick and tiles are the favoured materials used in varying degrees of grandeur. Chantry House, The Red House and The Old House are good eighteenth century examples of classically proportioned houses with deep eaves cornices, a dormered attic storey with brick bands and arched lintels of decorative brickwork. The area has a very high architectural and historic quality with many outstanding buildings.



Chantry House

Small dormer windows occur on many other buildings at this end of the town and give added interest to the roofscape. Victorian shop fronts remain even where buildings are converted to office use, and on upper floors many of the traditional window patterns are unchanged.



Southern end of the High Street

To the north just before the road divides at the fountain the main shopping area begins and continues down each fork to the northern limits of the area. In the commercial area the variety of styles, storey heights and materials change in a much less cohesive manner. Newer infill sometimes adopts a simple classicism, sometimes a more consciously modern interpretation of traditional elements. As with many shopping streets, much of the interesting detail is to be found at first floor level and above as standardised corporate signage tends to remove individuality from the view at eye level.



The Fountain and Junction

4.00 CHARACTER APPRAISAL

4.1 Character Areas

Every town of any size can be sub divided into a number of areas each with its own special character given by the layout of its streets and open spaces, the nature of its buildings and the relationships between these elements. Division of a conservation area into a number of individual 'character areas' that together make up the whole is one way of defining the character and quality of its overall townscape. Drawing the division lines between character areas is not an exact science but the exercise is useful if discussion of townscape and character is to be coherently structured. An important element of character in urban environments is the interplay between open and enclosed spaces including the public realm, and buildings.

The High Street Conservation Area divides broadly just south of the fountain into what could be described as the commercial end to the north and the school end at the south. Additionally Lime Tree Walk is largely residential and therefore differs from the commercial core; the Shambles has a tight character predicated on it's formation by building over part of the early market.

These three character areas are shown on the character area map at the end of this document. Each has a distinct and cohesive character which is assessed below.

4.2 Character Area Assessment

School and Church

Although the buildings to the south are not all connected to Sevenoaks School, there is a cohesive feel about this end of town that contrasts with the wider variety to the north. Similarities between buildings are repeated at intervals, the red brick and white painted cornices of the Red House, Chantry House and the Old House and the solid and imposing ragstone of the School the Royal Oak and Manor House are interspersed with smaller timber- framed buildings, now generally residential or offices.



High Street from Park Grange

Entering the area from the south the road climbs and winds past the new entrance gates to the school, built in traditional stone with contemporary detailing, and past the lawned areas in front of Park Grange.

Park Grange itself sits in an elevated position dominating the southern entrance to the town and has its own small listed lodge and imposing iron entrance gates dividing the independent School site from the High Street and forming a visual stop at the southern end of the original market place.



The Upper High Street



Park Grange



Sevenoaks School



The Royal Oak Hotel

Turning the double bend into the upper High Street from the south this dramatic historic market place is suddenly revealed, stretching north to Chantry House which steps forward to enclose the vista. This space is thought to be the original market place from before the 13th Century. On the east side all is Sevenoaks School property. The original School buildings and the Royal Oak Hotel face each other across this broad space. The School flanked by two rows of almshouses and the Hotel by the vernacular residential buildings including the converted former Royal Oak Tap and Little Oak End. The contrasting colours of the grey ragstone, red brick walls and clay tile hanging add a locally distinctive character to the streetscene.



An Early Photograph of the Upper High Street

Sevenoaks School and the almshouses, together with the Royal Oak Hotel, form an outstanding group of buildings at the southern end of the High Street. The road is relatively wide at this point and the views from all directions have changed little since the buildings were originally constructed. Only the level of traffic on the road is unrecognisable from earlier years.



The Old Post Office group

An important group of buildings at 7 to 17 High Street is focussed on the 16th Century timber framed building which is now the Old Post Office. This group is a mix of architectural styles and periods providing a contrast with the formality of the School and almshouses on the east side of the road.

White weatherboarding, simple wooden casement windows and a clay tiled mansard roof are found on the three cottages in the quiet square behind the Old Post Office and the grander set piece buildings on the High Street. This gives emphasis to the subtle change of scale and detail between the grander frontage and visually subservient buildings in Oak Square.



18th Century Cottages in Oak Square

To the north of Oak Lane, the buildings begin to step forward and enclose the view as the entrance to Knole is reached. St Nicholas Church visually dominates this section of the High Street and the surrounding churchyard forms a green contrast to the road and surrounding buildings. The main entrance to Knole Park is situated at a point where the road has narrowed after a rather awkward corner. Traffic tends to build up at this point. However there are two fine school buildings either side of the timber gates and, if stuck in traffic, one can always admire the Church and its setting in the maturely wooded churchyard.



St Nicholas' Church



The Churchyard

The Old Vicarage is set back behind a private front garden in contrast to buildings to the north and on the east side which are tight on the back edge of the pavement. A stuccoed façade contrasts with the red brick and ragstone of other buildings in the High Street.



The Old Vicarage

This visually important building is at a transition point between the open character around St Nicholas Church and the tight enclosure of Rayley's corner to the north. The modulated openness and enclosure is an important character feature of the conservation area which is sensitive to change.

Rectory Lane

Between the Church and the Old Vicarage, Rectory Lane runs past the churchyard and Rectory Farm and links via a footpath to Oak Lane. Within a few hundred metres of the High Street this footpath still retains a bosky rural character which should be carefully protected.



Rectory Lane footpath

The footpath also joins St Nicholas' Drive, with fine views across the north western fringes of the town, and connects to Six Bells Lane which turns east to rejoin the High Street by the public garden.

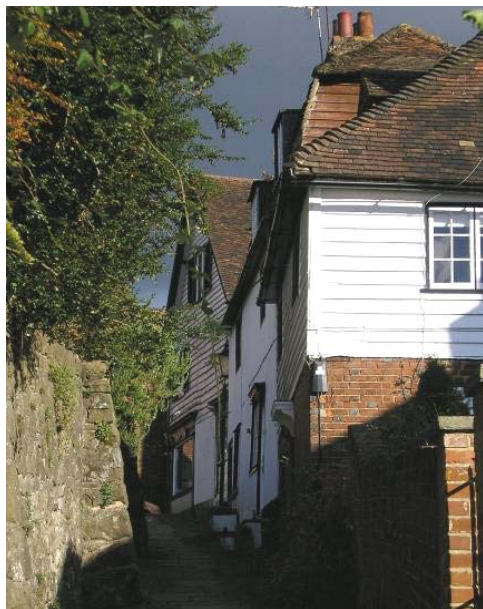
Six Bells Lane

A picturesque backwater off the High Street, Six Bells Lane is a footpath leading steeply downhill past a series of white painted and weatherboarded cottages. Together with the adjacent tranquil public garden the Lane provides respite from the bustle of the main road and has a small scale and distinctively different character from the High Street.



Six Bells Lane

As the Lane drops down the hill there are views of the church tower. The name is derived from the peal of six bells that hung in the tower. These were replaced in the 1750's by a more modern peal of eight. The sound of the bells, views of the tower and links with the public garden are important features of this area.



Cottages in Six Bells Lane

On the High Street, between the Old Vicarage and the entrance to Six Bells Lane, there are a number of early 18th Century properties, followed by some 19th Century former shops, some still retaining their original shop fronts.



The Old House High Street

On the eastern side, a series of terraced houses flank each side of the Old House, forming an important grouping with the Old Vicarage and nos 19-21A opposite. The road narrows again and bends to the left by a gabled 16th Century timber-framed building, much altered into a series of former shops. There is then a visual break on each side provided by the public garden on the west and a large pair of Victorian red brick semi-detached houses set in a slightly elevated position a little way back from the pavement on the east. The incongruity of these buildings is softened by a pair of trees that stand in front of them. The trees and the space around them provide a foil to the otherwise continuous built form facade of buildings at this end of the High Street.



The High Street adjacent to the public garden

Opposite the garden, which is the only notable area of open space within the town, is an attractive row of 18th Century red brick houses. From here the commercial end of the High Street begins with the road rising slightly giving the first views of the High Street and London Road junction at the fountain. It is here at this transition point that the Red House dominates the street scene and forms an effective end to the southern section of the conservation area.



The Red House

The conservation area includes the Rockdale area behind the High Street to the west, off Rockdale Road. The Victorian ragstone built Rockdale House has been extended and converted into an old peoples' home but still retains historic character.

London Road and High Street

London Road, although similar to the commercial section of the High Street, has its own character, particularly at its northern and southernmost tips. The buildings adjacent to the junction and running northwards on the western side of the road are classically styled and detailed until the facade of the Stag Theatre is reached. This was once the site of the historic Royal Crown Hotel, demolished in the 1930's to be replaced by a cinema, which is not included in the conservation area.



London Road and the Stag Theatre

The first important building on the east side is the Chequers Inn, which, although presenting its main front to the High Street, has an entrance on this elevation. There follows a pair of 18th Century shops, divided from their 19th Century neighbour by a passage to the market square in the High Street. The road is very narrow at this point, with only a token pavement on the eastern side and the western side is almost permanently in shadow, giving the stone and stuccoed buildings a rather gloomy air. This feeling lightens on the other side of South Park where the entrance to the Shambles and Dorset Street are separated by the white painted Thai Square building and the two sides of the road do not crowd in on each other to such an extent.



Former Dorset Arms now a restaurant

Descending the hill to the north, there is a jumbled mix of new and old, particularly on the west side but with good views out of town to the Downs beyond.

There is an important group of buildings in London Road centred on the converted Lady Boswell's School that includes number 49, built in ragstone like the school and at a similar time together with the mansard roofed weatherboarded property at 48.



Lady Boswell's School, now a restaurant.



London Road- northern end

The boundary of the Conservation Area finishes on the east side at the Bligh's Meadow car park but continues northwards on the west side to include the old red brick school, now a restaurant with a cheerful outdoor eating area, down the hill past a pleasant row of taller shops, to the group of small cottages at 73-93 London Road. These cottages were formerly part of Bligh's Farm. Although dating from different eras, this group forms a unit because of a series of projecting box bay windows and their intimate scale. They form an effective visual full stop in London Road at the end of the retail part of the town centre.



Bligh's Cottages in London Road

Conversely, approaching Sevenoaks from the railway station at Tubs Hill, this group of buildings is the first to give some indication of the wealth of historic buildings to come as the visitor enters the town centre.

High Street northern end

From the fountain and the jettied timber-framed building formerly housing Outram the saddlers and now a fish restaurant, the High Street continues in a north easterly direction towards the site of the old market, now reduced to a few stalls on a Saturday. The fork in the road is presided over by a bank, built in 1924 to replace the simpler, smaller shop with three angled facades that formerly face this junction.

Beyond here, by the main entrance to the Chequers, the street widens to accommodate the market. There is a lay-by to the road that provides parking for traders' vehicles on Saturdays and the stalls are set up in front of nos. 13 - 17. A former shop in London Road has been converted into a cafe that makes use of the pedestrianised area on the eastern High Street side on fine days and brings an almost continental atmosphere to the area. Adjacent is the Lloyds Bank building where once stood a larger and more imposing bank.



Market Square

This part of the High Street is colourful and bustling. There is a sense of space that opens up when progressing from the visually tight area by the Market building up the hill into the historic market place; the varied colours, materials and roof heights accentuate this feeling. Individually some of the modern buildings may lack architectural cohesion when viewed in the context of the more historic properties but the overall impression is of a pleasant and welcoming part of town.

Individual buildings form focal points and architectural highlights along the High Street but the special historic character of the whole area is created by the overall impact of the number and variety of buildings both listed and unlisted. Subtle variations in height, roof pitch, age and style in a limited palette of colours and narrow range of materials combine to give a harmonious character. The majority of buildings are brick and the prominent materials are red brick, white painted timber, clay roof and hung tiles and plaster. Colours are muted reds, browns, black and light paint. Many architectural details are evident on upper storeys above the shop fronts. Details include brick stringcourses, moulded wooden eaves cornices, hood moulds over windows with original glazing and doorways. The historic buildings have been adapted through time but have generally retained character and integrity.



High Street East Opposite the Fountain

Moving towards the northern limit of the shopping area the High Street becomes similar to other modern shopping streets but despite the blandness of some of the newer development has a cohesive commercial character with many buildings of interest. The large three storey terrace at the north eastern end of the High Street forms a gateway building where original character has been eroded through varying standards of shop front and the use of poorly designed plastic windows. However, the overall character of the structure remains. The value of the building and the High Street as a whole could be enhanced by the consistent application of design standards over time.



Northern end of the High Street

The Shambles, Dorset Street and Bank Street

Linking London Road and High Street are a series of narrow lanes, partially closed to traffic, with an intimate atmosphere and a smaller scale than the two main roads. This is an important area within the commercial part of the town and includes picturesque streets and paths with some interesting details and the type of specialist retail outlets, arts and craft shops, galleries and restaurants that encourage shoppers to linger.

The Shambles square, although at the heart of this complex, has the back of modern infill on it's eastern side that tends to spoil the appearance of what should be a very pleasant pedestrian area. High Street shops backing onto this space are without an active frontage to the Shambles with poorly maintained back areas that attract rubbish and detract from the intimate character of this important public space.



Dorset Street



The Shambles



The Shambles

Linking the two main shopping streets, Bank Street and Dorset Street have buildings at a smaller scale than the High Street and London Road but the variety of materials, roof heights and finishes remains. The dominant building in Bank Street is the old ragstone non-conformist chapel which was converted for commercial use many years ago to a standard which would not be acceptable today. The small scale and built variety of this area and the detailed treatment of the paving is an important aspect of the conservation area's character.

Lime Tree Walk

In Lime Tree Walk, to the north west of London Road, the conservation area includes an interesting terrace of artisan's houses. They are stuccoed with decorative brick banding and a contemporary drawing by the architect shows the cottages have been built almost exactly as originally designed.



Lime Tree Walk drawn by Thomas Jackson

Built between 1878 and 1882 this terrace of listed artisan's houses was designed by the distinguished Oxford University architect Sir Thomas Jackson. What makes Lime Tree walk of great social significance is the fact that it was intended for working men. It must be one of the earliest examples of an architect having faith that people other than the rich and cultured would appreciate witty, carefully designed and above all welcoming buildings.

The Walk has a distinctive character of its own. The original buildings were conceived as an architectural set piece and social experiment including the Temperance Hotel and the model artisan's cottages. Lime Tree Walk has a different character from High Street but is included in the conservation area to safeguard this interesting and historic group of buildings and to reflect its importance as early philanthropic housing built at the time of the garden suburb movement.

The unity of the original design has been adversely affected by colour changes to most of the listed cottages but many historic details remain. The modern flats at the western end are included in the conservation area because they visually enclose this residential space.



Lime Tree Walk



Former Temperance Hotel

The Temperance Hotel embraced the late Victorian interest in cycling when it became the local headquarters of the Cyclist's Touring Club with links to the cycle manufacturer C. Timberlakes at nearby 53 London Road. The weathervane reflects this historic connection.



Cycle weathervane

4.3 Individual Features & Groups of Buildings

The individual importance of the many listed buildings that front the High Street and London Road and give the High Street Conservation Area so much of its character have already been discussed. However, there are a number of areas where the juxtaposition of the buildings, their variety and detailing interact with one another to reinforce the special atmosphere of the area.



View to Market Place

In the market place the historic association with the old market, the widening of the space and the use of outside areas for eating adds to the interest and character of the High Street. Small details combine to enhance the area; the planting of a tree, the careful selection of street lighting and furniture, the variety of hard landscaping surfaces, and not least the cheerful and well tended baskets of bedding plants in the spring and summer months. Conversely, any lack of attention to these details together with poorly designed shop fronts, sign clutter or paving can quickly detract from the character and interest of the conservation area.



The Historic Market Place



Well Court

Dorset Street and Bank Street, particularly in the area around the Old Market House, have a special small scale character, as does Well Court and the link to the Shambles. The pedestrian priority of these streets has contributed significantly to their economic use and vibrancy, although there is a tendency for delivery vehicles and parked cars to ignore the shared space and create a dangerous situation for unwary pedestrians.



The Old Market House

4.4 Negative Features

In contrast to those examples that enhance the character of the Conservation Area, there are some areas where the potential has not been realised, or where the buildings or details positively detract from the atmosphere. The bus station adjacent to Boots has done little to improve traffic flow through the High Street. Although surrounded by car parks and the Waitrose development, the details of the shelters are unimaginative and constricting. It does not sit comfortably with either the old or the new buildings in the surrounding area.



The Bus Station

Opposite the Red House in the centre of the conservation area a garish and inappropriate shop sign, together with a display of bicycles on the pavement, strikes a jarring note at an important focal point. The High Street has a bustling character and is generally busy with pedestrians and traffic. Traffic noise and congestion have a negative impact on the pedestrian environment. Street signage and other street furniture can prove detrimental to the character of the conservation area as can ill considered street and shop frontage lighting. Most of the High Street now has traditional style lamps and standards and these are a definite improvement on the previous mix of designs.



Street furniture and wide lines can create clutter

Some shops have blinds or awnings which provide additional interest and colour to the shop fronts without losing or altering the architectural detail. Both the High Street and the Shambles contain a number of inappropriate and poorly designed shop fronts which, when proposals come forward, should be replaced with designs which harmonise with the original character of the area and the architectural elements of the buildings to which they are to be fitted.

4.5 Key Issues

This Appraisal concludes that the most important issues which can affect the special architectural and historic interest of the Sevenoaks High Street Conservation Area are:

- Busy traffic in the High Street
- Noise and air pollution from traffic at peak times
- Unscreened service areas
- Poorly defined foot links to Knole Park
- Maintenance of views to open countryside
- Public realm quality and sign clutter
- Poor maintenance of traditional details in paving
- Neglected street furniture and railings
- Inappropriate additions to building frontages
- The loss of traditional details
- Inappropriate shopfronts using garish colours and poor quality detailing
- Over-bright lighting to commercial premises
- Ostentatious large advertisements inside shop windows.
- Plastic windows in both commercial and residential properties.
- The effects of poor quality new development
- Improvements needed to some buildings



High Street

5.00 MANAGEMENT

5.1 Conservation Area Management

Historic buildings and places are a built environment resource in which everyone has an interest. Changes are inevitable but it is important to understand and then seek to sustain or enhance areas. English Heritage good practice encourages local authorities to prepare a management plan addressing the issues arising from the Conservation Area Appraisal and set out recommendations for action. Some of these actions will be applied generally to conservation areas in the District, and others, such as enhancement proposals, are specific to the Sevenoaks High Street Conservation Area.

Clearly in a town centre possessing the important historical and architectural qualities of Sevenoaks the overriding policy should be to preserve and enhance those qualities. However conservation area status is not intended to imply prohibition of development. Conservation area management is therefore largely the management of change, to ensure that local distinctiveness and the special character of place are respected and responded to in a positive manner. Change is inevitable in Sevenoaks. The challenge is to manage change in ways that maintain and reinforce the area's special qualities.

5.2 Applying Planning Policy

The District Council will consistently apply existing and future planning policy to ensure high quality design which protects and enhances the character and appearance of the Conservation Area. This will be applied to all development requiring planning or listed building consent including new or replacement buildings, shopfronts, small scale alterations and extensions and boundary treatment. This approach will be followed for proposals both within the Conservation Area and those outside the designated area which affect its setting or impact on its character.



Land west of High Street

Sevenoaks' built and natural heritage will be conserved and any new development should protect and enhance cherished townscape assets of local architectural, cultural, and conservation importance and the character of the surrounding landscape. Local distinctiveness is an important aspect of character to be assessed both in the context of the whole conservation area and the site and its immediate surroundings, when designing any development proposal.

5.3 Current and Future Pressures on the Area

Significant development pressure from the commercial operators of the High Street could lead to very detrimental changes (which appear at times very minor). Given the high degree of historic assets surviving within the conservation area any development is likely to impact on the character and appearance of the area. Very careful consideration of the fine grain and scale of the town is needed in any interventions. A thorough understanding of even small areas of potential development is essential in order to maintain the overall quality and authenticity of the historic core. The principal opportunity lies with redevelopment of the Bligh's Meadow site off London Road. This offers the opportunity to regenerate London Road and to strengthen the pedestrian links between London Road and the High Street.

Increasing the strength of the pedestrian links between the town centre and Knole Park could increase the volume of leisure visits to the town centre with commensurate uplift for commercial activity. Reducing the degree of intrusion of vehicular traffic would also increase the attractiveness of the shopping streets in the town centre, but this needs to be balanced against accessibility and provision of vehicle parking facilities.

The second phase of Blighs Meadow development is the most important proposal for central Sevenoaks to be considered by the District Council in the near future. It is vital that the development succeeds in commercial terms as well as integrating with the character of the town and the conservation area.

The parameters for the new Blighs 2 scheme should encourage high quality development and innovative design that reflects local identity and distinctiveness and promotes healthy, safe and secure living and working environments. The design and layout must be informed by the wider context of Sevenoaks town centre, having regard not just to the immediate neighbouring buildings but the townscape and landscape of the whole area. The pattern and pedestrian scale of existing local streets and spaces in Sevenoaks should help determine the character and identity of the new development. Pedestrian linkage and flow should be carefully considered in relation to existing patterns.



Rayley's Corner in the High Street

The dominance of cars, both moving and parked, is an issue in the High Street Conservation Area. Despite the bypass to the west of Sevenoaks the main streets are busy at all times of the day and whilst this helps to provide the activity which promotes a healthy town centre, it can create difficulties for pedestrians and a poor quality environment in the main shopping area and the upper High Street.

Traffic through the High Street and down London Road is always heavy, and due to the narrowness of the road in many places, an inappropriately parked vehicle can cause long tailbacks, particularly during the morning and afternoon school runs. As traffic increases this problem is likely to become worse. Although alternative traffic management schemes have been considered, no solution has yet been found.

5.4 The need for contextual design.

All development in the conservation area, must respond to its immediate environment and context, in terms of scale, density, form, materials and detailing. Applicants for planning permission must provide a "Design and Access Statement", to justify the design decisions that have been made as the scheme was developed and to show how proposed alterations relate to their context. Where appropriate long views of and from the site must be taken into account. Proposals which fail to respect the local contextual framework or the scale, height, proportion and materials of the local area will not normally be permitted.

The following are general principles that should be adopted for all development within the conservation area.

Scale.

Scale is the combination of a building's design, height and bulk when related to its surroundings. Most of the buildings in Sevenoaks High Street conservation area are two or three storeys with pitched roofs and are of a modest character. Proposals for new or replacement buildings should reflect this context and include drawings showing adjacent buildings.

Extensions to existing buildings.

Proposed extensions must take into account the scale of the existing building and must not dominate or overwhelm the original. Extensions should respect the form and character of the original building and its locality and use high quality materials and detailing. For listed buildings this is particularly important. Design should be of high quality, whether modern or traditional. Roof lines, roof shape, eaves details, verge details and the creation of new chimneys are important considerations. Wherever possible extensions should not dominate neighbouring properties, lead to an unacceptable loss of open space or result in the loss of historic plot boundaries.

Repairs

Repairs to existing historic structures must be undertaken sensitively to ensure that the appearance and condition of their fabric is not harmed. The regular maintenance of historic buildings can help to avoid the costly repair work required to rescue a building from dereliction. It is especially important to ensure that historic buildings are kept weather and water tight to prevent further deterioration and for this reason it is necessary to keep roofs in particular in a good state of repair.

Windows

The commonest window types within the conservation area are single glazed white painted timber windows, either in the form of side hung casements to many of the older and more modest buildings or vertical sliding sashes on the higher status eighteenth and nineteenth century buildings. Simple metal windows also form part of the original design of mid 20th Century buildings and black frames are used on a few buildings.

Listed Building Consent is always required to alter the form of fenestration in listed buildings. Windows of traditional design, which are in keeping with the building they belong to and respect the historic nature of Sevenoaks, make a very important contribution to the character and appearance of the conservation area. Windows should normally be white painted or reflect the character of the original building.

5.5 General Improvements

Several buildings, mainly in the more commercial centre would benefit from redecoration, more appropriate windows, removal of wires, general repairs and improvements to their exterior. The building illustrated below is immediately east of the thriving High Street shopping area, has remained empty for many years having an adverse effect on the character and viability of the commercial area.



Neglected Building of Interest

5.6 Traffic and Streetscape

The dominance of vehicles both moving and parked is an issue in the High Street Conservation Area. Despite the A21 bypass to the west of Sevenoaks, the town centre is busy at most times of the day. This helps to provide the activity which promotes a healthy town centre but can create a poor environment for pedestrians. At Rayley's Corner narrow pavements and road create a traffic dominated environment. In London Road, High Street and the Shambles, illegally parked vehicles and narrow pavements detract from the vitality and character of the town

The relationship between buildings and public realm in Sevenoaks is very important. There is a clear hierarchy of spaces informed by pedestrian routes, the character of the street, the width of the road, its surfacing material, positions of buildings relative to the carriageway and footways, together with the functions and uses of the buildings in the town centre.

Vitality is an important aspect of success. To maintain the town's character as a popular and well used commercial centre we need to provide attractive public spaces which are safe, well designed and maintained with good pedestrian access. Policies should focus on high quality materials and townscape, maintaining interesting views and activities, entertainment and places where people can meet and socialise. A poorly designed public realm will have an adverse effect on the viability of the whole town centre.

5.7 Streetscape Design Principles

Best practice principals to be adopted as part of the design process for streetscape works within Sevenoaks conservation area include the following:

Surface Materials

Surface materials form the foreground of the street scene. Quality in the design and construction of footways and street surfaces is vital to the character of the area.

- Relate ground surfaces to the local context.
- Keep paving simple and avoid discordant colours.
- Maintain and restore historic paving and detail such as kerbs and gulleys.



Restored paving detail

Street furniture

In Sevenoaks the finest historic streetscapes often have the minimum amount of street furniture sited carefully to reinforce an underlying sense of visual order. Therefore:

- Retain historic street furniture which reinforces local character; identify and remove superfluous or redundant items.
- Minimise signage and locate signs on existing bollards, lamp posts or walls and buildings at the back edge of the pavement.
- Use a unifying dark colour such as Knole blue for all appropriate street furniture items.
- Reduce guard rails to a minimum and use simple designs that relate to local character.
- Avoid standardised lighting and choose the design and light source most appropriate for the area.

Bollards

The conservation area contains a range of wooden, concrete, plastic and metal bollards of different colours and designs. In some areas the number of bollards is visually obtrusive and has an adverse effect on character and appearance.

- Reduce street clutter and use a unified design of metal bollard based on historic precedence to help reinforce the local sense of place.

Traffic management

- Traffic calming measures should be fitted sensitively into the street-scene as though they were part of the original character of the area.
- Adopt a minimalist approach. Any works should involve minimal visual interference with the established streetscape and respect the historic street layout.
- Limit road markings to those essential for highway safety.



Historic ragstone paving in the upper High Street

5.8 Paving Treatments

Particularly unusual and distinctive features of the Sevenoaks streetscape are the small areas of historic paving that survive. The historic, archaeological and aesthetic importance of much of this paving should be valued for its contribution to the character and appearance of the conservation area.

Some work on street improvements and the reduction of street clutter has been carried out by the District Council, particularly the enhancement of the upper High Street some years ago. However, the condition of the pavements in other parts of the conservation area remains poor, including areas along the west side of upper High Street where trenching by the water supplier has left some pavements in poor condition.



Loss of stone paving and poor quality reinstatement

5.9 Historic shop front character.

Some visually important historic shop fronts survive in Sevenoaks High Street and London Road. Shop front quality varies in the town but there are a few shopfronts where some or all of the irreplaceable work of the designers and craftsmen of the 19th and the first half of the 20th Century can still be seen. In addition there are a number of shops where inappropriate later amendments such as deepening or overlaying of fascias are likely to hide surviving, and valuable, original details.

5.10 Sustainable design

To encourage sustainable development, all new buildings should where possible use products with a low environmental impact, including the use of locally sourced materials from sustainable resources. Where appropriate in a conservation area, new buildings should also include provision for waste reduction, the re-use of materials and should be energy efficient, including the use of renewable energy systems.

Energy efficiency for the existing buildings within the conservation area could be improved by such measures as loft insulation and the provision of secondary double glazing, subject to the views of the Council's conservation and building control officers.

The Council will seek to ensure that existing local facilities are retained and their viability maintained by facilitating further environmental improvements and high quality new development.

5.11 Building Regulations

Government Guidance (PPG15) makes it clear that "in exercising their responsibilities for the safety of buildings under the building and fire legislation, local planning authorities should deal sympathetically with proposals for the repair or conversion of historic buildings". The District Council will continue to apply Building and Fire Regulations sensitively in conservation areas and to listed buildings to ensure that there is no conflict with the preservation of the character of the area or historic buildings.

5.12 Trees in the Conservation Area

Whilst the conservation area is generally focused on listed buildings and other important built features, the landscape surrounding it and trees within it contribute significantly to appearance. The open spaces and trees which provide the setting to the Sevenoaks High Street conservation area can be as important as the buildings or historic features themselves in retaining character. Trees and open spaces help to improve the quality and amenity of the area providing cool dappled shade and better air quality in a busy area.

5.13 Crime

All new development should be carefully designed to provide a safe and secure environment. Active frontages are encouraged with windows overlooking public space. A coordinated approach to managing the town centre should include regular removal of rubbish and graffiti together with effective design, maintenance and repair of street furniture and paving.

5.14 Promotion of cultural heritage

To increase the public's awareness and to encourage economic growth and tourism, the Council will actively seek to promote the conservation area and its cultural heritage. To facilitate this the document will be publicised, placed on our website and distributed to local commercial bodies, amenity groups, the Town and County Councils and other interested parties.

Research suggests that employment and potential economic benefits derive from promotion of cultural heritage and tourism, including:

- increased resources from conservation of cultural heritage.
- positive image encourages investment.
- enhanced local retail spend.
- increased income from tourism.
- new jobs.
- increased civic pride leading to a more positive environment for economic development.
- revival of local traditions and associated income.
- increased economic visibility leading to further economic development opportunities.

5.15 Pride and Identity

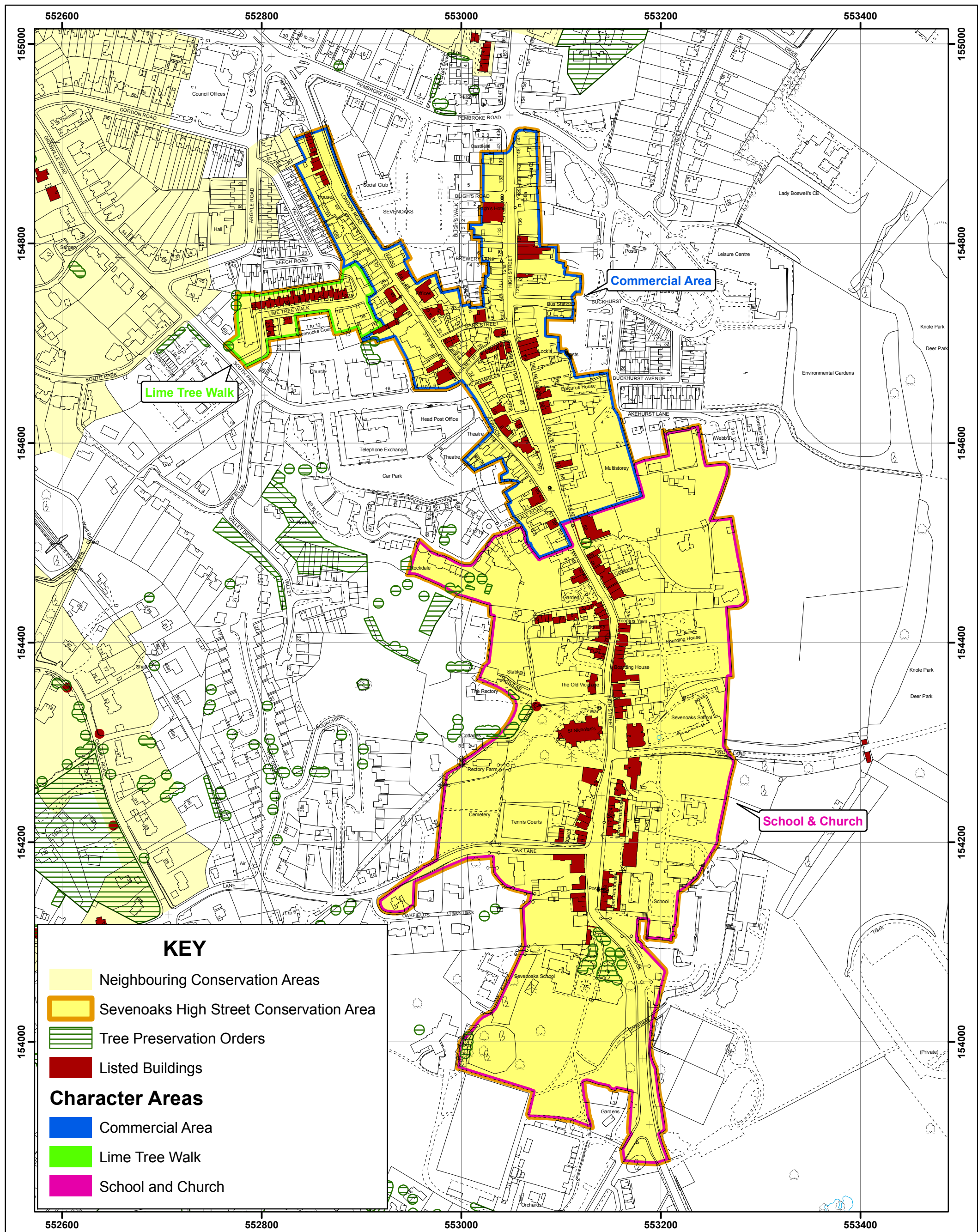
The market town is a quintessential part of the traditional image of rural England and a vital part of the English rural economy. Sevenoaks town centre faces a wide range of challenges including the economic, social and physical impact of change, competition from out-of-town shopping, the adverse effects of traffic on the area and erosion of environmental quality. In common with their surrounding countryside, market towns have always changed, and will continue to do so. Sevenoaks' long history and rich historic fabric in the High Street Conservation Area are assets which, wisely used, can help to produce an agreeable and interesting built environment, economic prosperity and a sense of civic pride and identity.

Acknowledgements:

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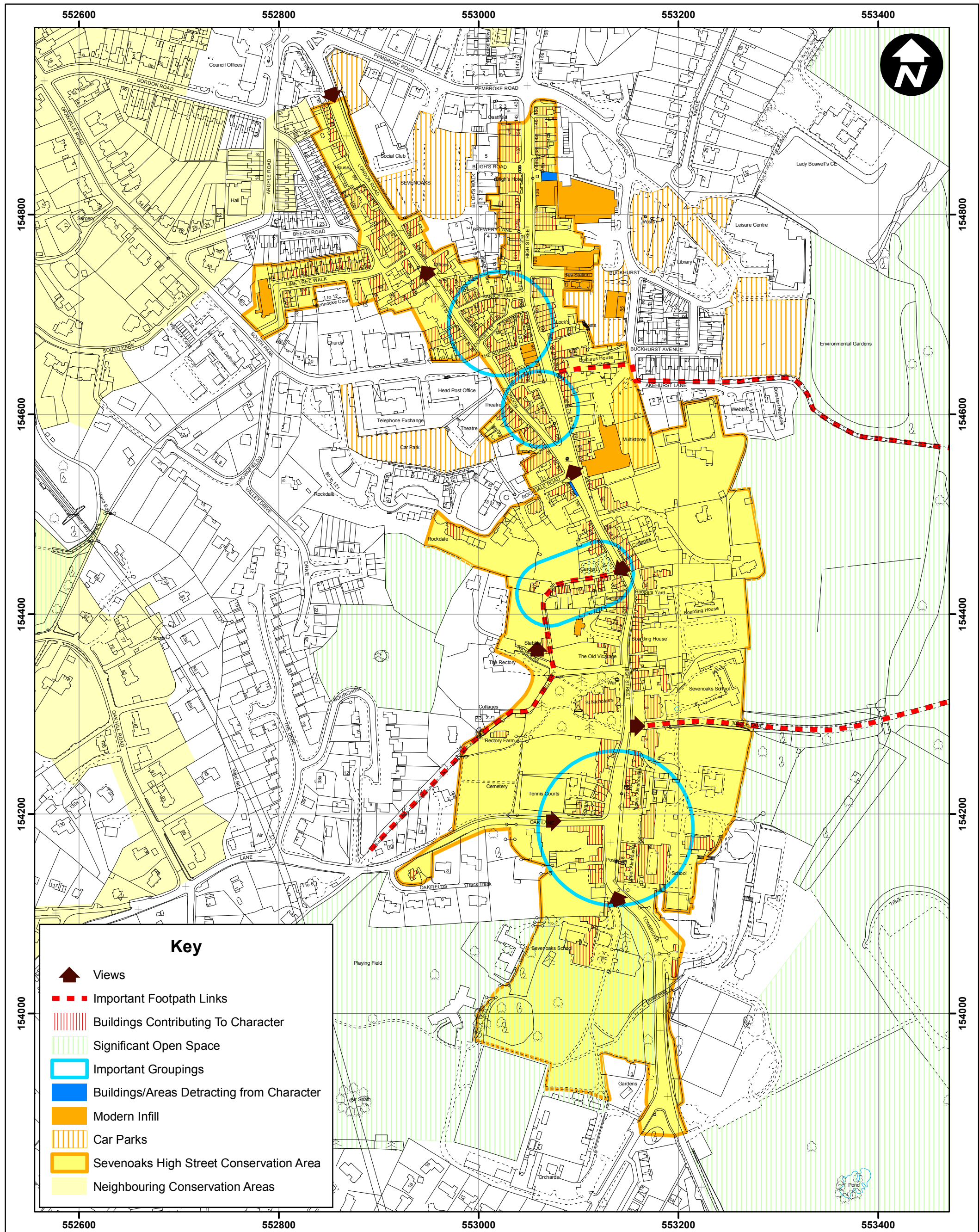
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Sevenoaks District Council, 100019428, 2007.

Map 5 High Street, Sevenoaks Conservation Area Character Areas & Designations

Scale 1:3,500
Date August 2008
Drawn By FMcG



Map 6 High Street, Sevenoaks Conservation Area Character Appraisal

Scale 1:3,500
Date August 2008
Drawn By FMcG

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Sevenoaks District Council, 100019428, 2007.