

# Seal Conservation Area Appraisal *Draft*

## September 2018

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This draft Conservation Area Appraisal for Seal Conservation Area supports the duty of Sevenoaks District Council under section 71 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 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, see the *Sevenoaks District Conservation Areas: an introduction to appraisals revised in 2018*, available at <http://etc>

## 1.0 Overview of Seal Conservation Area

The village of Seal lies 2 miles to the north-east of the town of Sevenoaks, on an historic east-west route through Kent which is now the A25. To the north is the M26 and beyond that the North Downs. It sits within the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and some open spaces on the edges of the conservation area are included in the Metropolitan Green Belt.

### Conservation area boundary

Seal Conservation Area comprises the historic built-up area of the village of Seal along with the Recreation Ground to the west and part of the northern edge of the Wildernes estate. The Wildernes Conservation Area abuts Seal Conservation Area to the south.

### Designation history

Seal Conservation Area was designated in 1972 and extended in 1987 and again in 2006. The previous Conservation Area Appraisal was published in December 2003.

### Topography and geology

The village sits on the Greensand ridge, from which the stone used in many village buildings comes. To the north is the Vale of Holmesdale with Guzzle Brook, a tributary of the River Darent, running through it. Beyond that rises the chalk escarpment of the North Downs. Views over the vale towards the downs are an important characteristic of the conservation area.

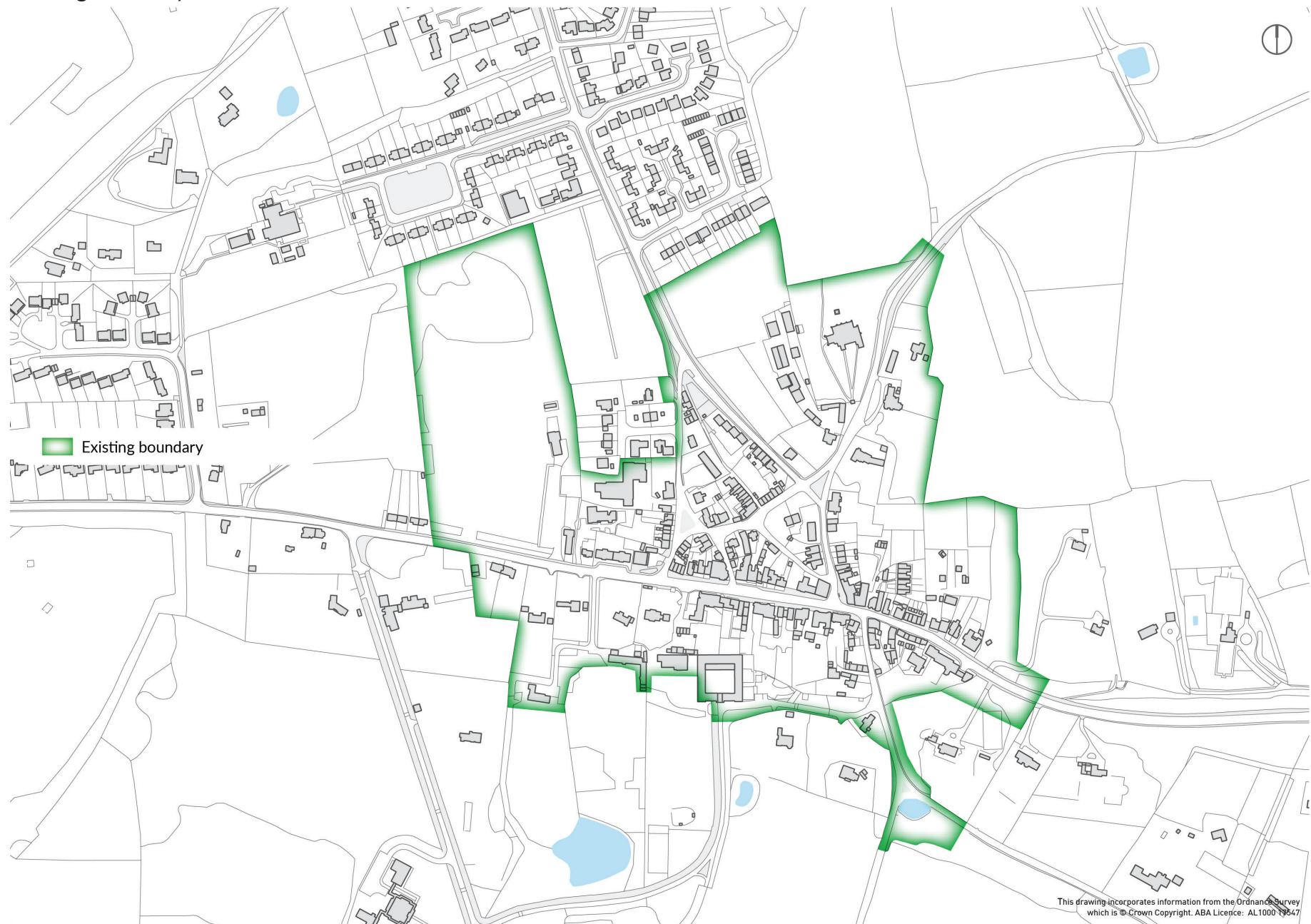
### Summary of special interest

Seal is an attractive village with a well-preserved historic townscape. The main features of Seal Conservation Area's special historic and architectural interest are:

- *It retains the character and appearance of a traditional Kentish village;*
- *An attractive, informal streetscape composed of buildings of varied but traditional character;*
- *A well defined village boundary;*
- *A rich mix of historic buildings including a medieval parish church, a small number of medieval houses, some good Georgian domestic architecture and a good collection of late nineteenth-century 'Old English'-style buildings;*
- *A large number of buildings and structures that are listed;*
- *Visual harmony resulting from use of a limited palette of local, natural building materials and colours;*
- *Traditional craftsmanship embodied in original building materials and architectural features;*
- *A strong visual connection with the North Downs;*
- *The parish church is an important landmark.*

Draft

Existing boundary



## 2.0 Historical development

### Beginnings

Seal lies on the ancient Saxon Road from Winchester to Maidstone and is mentioned in the Domesday book. From the earliest times up to the middle of the twentieth century it was a predominantly agricultural community, with pasture, arable and fruit growing; hops were grown locally from at least the sixteenth century. The oldest parts of the parish church date to the thirteenth century and it was enlarged with a typical Kentish west tower in the 1520s.

The village green, on the north side of the High Street, was being encroached upon as early as the fifteenth century, when Forge Cottage was built. There are at least four medieval hall-houses in Seal village: the former Kentish Yeoman, the former Crown, 29-31 High Street and Camden House in School Lane.

### Georgian Seal

The second half of the eighteenth century saw a number of prestigious houses built in Seal, such as The Croft, Church Street (1767–73) and the Grey House (c.1760). Other Georgian buildings in Seal include the 5 Bells Inn and the cottages to the west of it, as encroachment on the village green continued. Medieval houses were modernised with new brick or tile facades.

### Nineteenth century

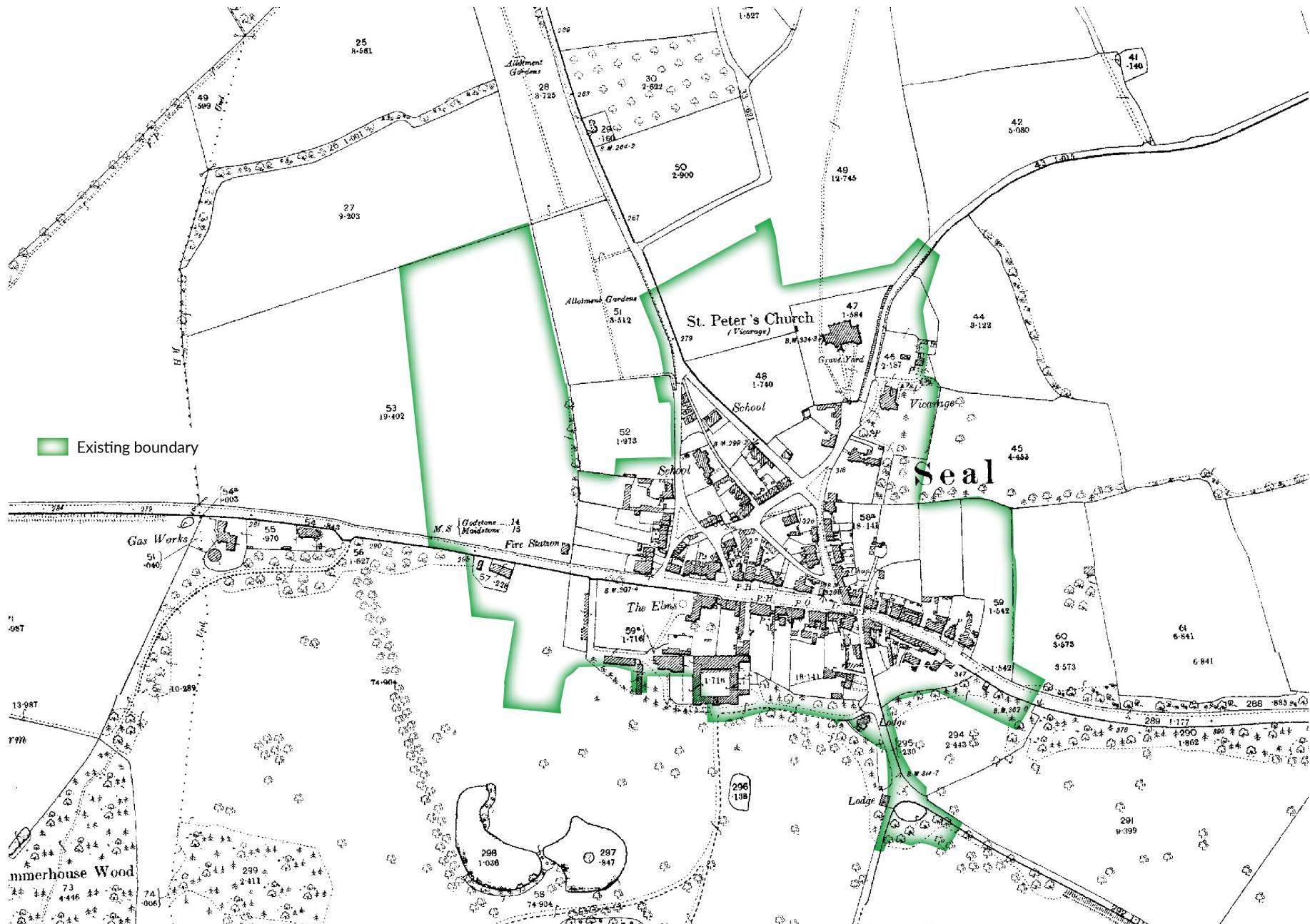
By the mid-nineteenth century the local economy was still based on agriculture, and associated trades such as blacksmiths, wheelwrights, harness-makers, saddlers and farriers were located in the village. A particular specialism was developed in edge-tool manufacturing. At the church, the north aisle was added by the architect George Gilbert Scott in 1855 and the churchyard was extended northwards in 1869.

The late nineteenth century saw many new buildings in the village. The Coffee Tavern at the east end of the High Street was built in the early 1880s, to discourage drunkenness, and the Bible Christian Chapel in Church Street was built in 1886. Much of the development at this time is associated with local benefactor Lord Hillingdon who lived at nearby Wildernes. Under his patronage the Village Hall, Fire Station and a number of houses were built and the land for the Recreation Ground and the Allotments was given over to the village.

### Twentieth century

Seal expanded significantly in the 1920s (the parish population increased from 1,600 in 1921 to 2,078 in 1931), with developments to the north of the historic village, a mixture of public and private housing. The 2nd Lord Hillingdon sold Wildernes in 1924 and it became a country club. After the Second World War, agriculture was still the principal local industry. In 1945 Herbert Schwartz, a former German prisoner of war, set up Seal General Engineers in the outbuildings of Church Farm. The village continued to expand to the north after the war, as Seal steadily turned from an agricultural to a commuter settlement. At the same time, increasing traffic, particularly on the High Street, has altered the rural character of the village.

Historic OS 1894



## 3.0 Architectural and built character

### 3.1 Spatial character

The spatial character of Seal is a good example of a settlement built around the three key elements of main street, village green and parish church. It can be summarised as follows:

- The High Street has continuous development along its length, with most buildings tight up against the pavement;
- North of the High Street is a network of narrow streets with informally grouped buildings around two small greens that are remnants of the former village green;
- Many houses along the High Street have historic outbuildings in their back yards;
- The church stands at the north-eastern extremity of the village providing a landmark to the area;
- Larger houses set in generous gardens, and the churchyard create a greater sense of openness and greenery in the north-eastern part of the conservation area;
- The land falls away to the north allowing views towards the North Downs and giving an understanding of local topography;
- Open space on the edges of the conservation area mean that Seal can still be understood as a discrete settlement.



### 3.2 Building forms and details

The historic buildings of the conservation area are strongly traditional in character and can be summarised as follows:

- Small-scale and domestic in character;
- Some larger-scale buildings on the High Street and Church Street;
- Predominantly two storeys;
- Traditional forms of pitched roofs often with gable ends facing the street;
- Unbroken roof slopes;
- Brick chimneys, often tall and prominent;
- Timber-framed sash or casement windows, mostly small-paned, with square or segmental heads;
- Panelled timber doors.



*Small-scale and domestic*



*Two storeys with unbroken roof slopes*



*Brick chimneys*



*Sash windows and casement windows*

### 3.3 Architectural styles

Seal has a rich mix of architectural styles and detailing that reflect the incremental development of the village. The predominant types of historic architecture in Seal Conservation Area are:

- Kentish vernacular: a style characterised by the use of locally available materials that reflect local custom and building tradition. Characteristic features within Seal include Ragstone walls, timber frame walling, tile hanging, steeply pitched roofs covered with plain clay (Kent peg) tiles, and painted timber weatherboarding;
- Georgian domestic architecture, characterised by Flemish bond brickwork or rendered facades, symmetrical elevations and sash windows. Example in the village include both large houses e.g. the Grey House, Church Road, and small scale cottages;
- 'Old English' style buildings of the late nineteenth century.



Vernacular



Vernacular



Georgian domestic



Georgian domestic



Old English



Old English

### 3.4 Traditional building materials

#### Before 1850

Historically there was plentiful timber in the parish for building, as well stone quarries, and brickworks at Seal Chart. Characteristic materials dating from pre-1850 are:

- Timber frame walling, mostly now concealed;
- Local red brick, usually laid in Flemish bond and often with burnt/blue headers;
- Tile-hanging on upper storeys;
- Plain clay (Kent peg) tile roofs;
- Rubble stone, mostly Kentish Ragstone (grey), but also Folkestone sandstone (yellow) and ironstone (dark brown), used widely for the return walls of houses or for boundary walls or simply as a plinth for a house;
- Timber weatherboarding;
- Use of brick tile hanging i.e. mathematical tiles;
- Rare examples of Rat Trap brick bonding.



Tile-hanging and weatherboarding



Local red brick



Red brick and Kentish ragstone



Weatherboarding

### After 1850

Use of materials from the mid-nineteenth century onwards was influenced by the more economic transport of materials and from, the 1880s, a revival of vernacular styles. As a result the characteristic materials are:

- Half-timbering;
- Red brick;
- Tile-hanging on upper storeys;
- Clay tile roofs, often with decorative ridges and finials;
- Kentish Ragstone;
- Yellow brick.



Half-timbering



Clay tile roofs with decorative ridges



Red brick and tile-hanging



Kentish ragstone and yellow brick

### 3.5 Boundaries and streetscape

A large number of buildings within the conservation area stand right on the edge of the pavement or the street, with no front garden or yard. Where historic boundary treatments occur they tend to be low and make an important contribution to the streetscape, either as retaining walls or as traditional separation between private and public space.

The most common boundary treatments within the area are:

- Kentish Ragstone walls, sometimes with brick dressings;
- Brick walls;
- Timber palings;
- A notable example of nineteenth-century iron railings in front of Camden Terrace on School Lane.

Road and pavement surfaces are mostly tarmac, with concrete kerbs, although parts of School Lane, Church Street and the High Street have better quality, brick paving.

The street furniture on the High Street is standard, poor quality design and therefore harmful to the character and appearance of the conservation area. There is also a profusion of traffic signage at certain points on the High Street.

The Victorian stone horse trough at the junction of Church Street and High Street, a K6 telephone box outside the village hall and a Post Office pillar box outside the parade of shops on the High Street make positive contributions.



Kentish Ragstone walls



Brick walls



Timber palings



Iron railings



Brick paving



Victorian stone horse trough

### 3.6 Heritage assets, positive contributors and detractors

The buildings and structures of the conservation areas 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 12.

#### Positive contributors

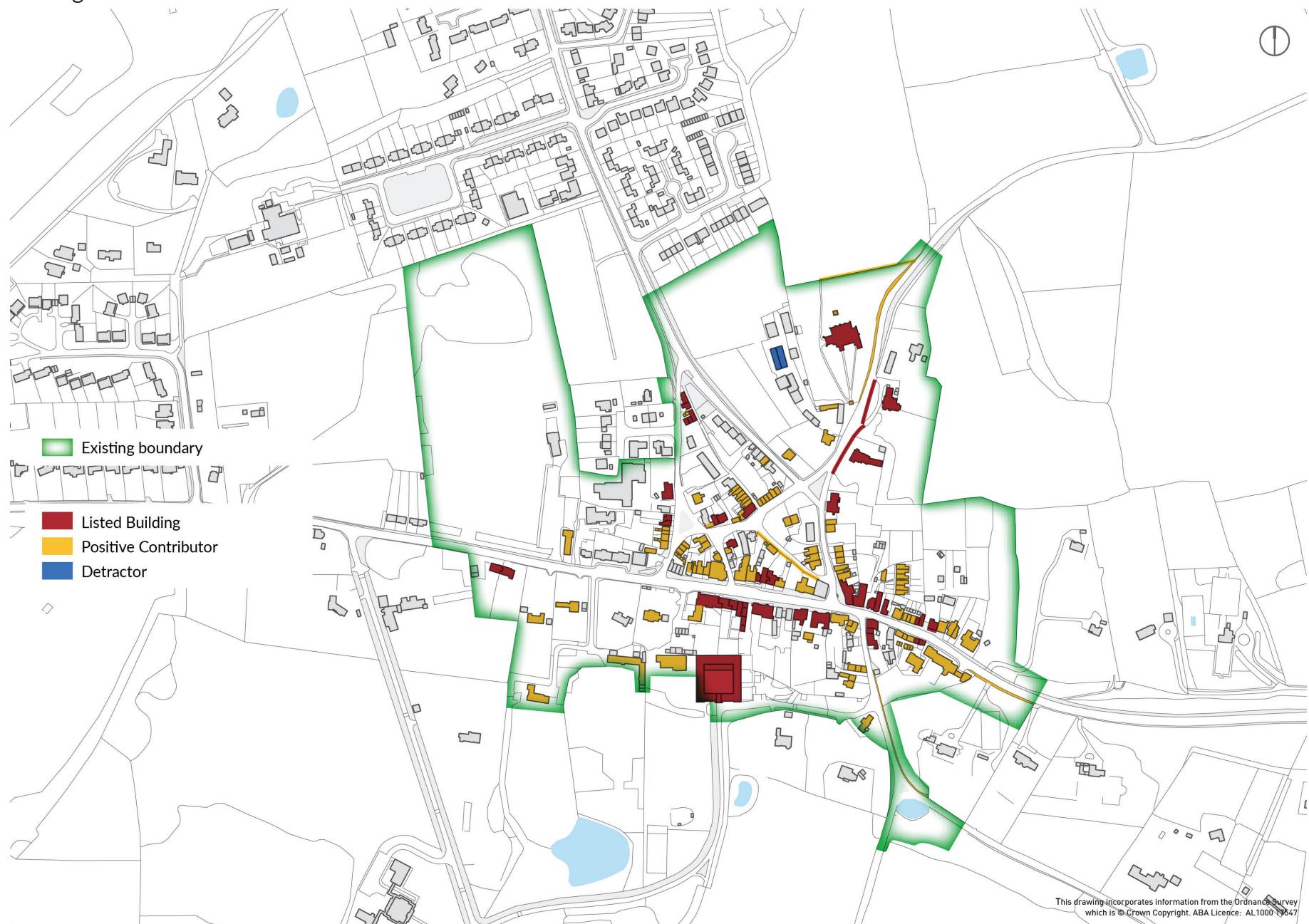
The conservation areas contains a large number of heritage assets, both designated and non-designated, all of which add to the architectural and historic interest of the conservation area. The extent of a building's contribution to the character and appearance of the area is not limited to its street elevations but also depends on its integrity as an historic structure and the impact it has in three dimensions. Rear elevations can be important, 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 <https://www.historicengland.org.uk/listing/what-is-designation/>.*
- *Positive contributors (non-designated heritage assets). These are unlisted buildings that help to 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 guidance Conservation Area Designation, Appraisal and Management (2018).*

#### 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.

## Heritage assets



### 3.7 Character Zones

Five zones of discernibly different character can be identified within Seal Conservation Area, based on their spatial character and architectural qualities, historical development and the contribution they make to the conservation areas:

The features and individual characteristics of each zone that contribute to, or detract from the character and appearance of the conservation areas are summarised below. The boundaries of the Character Zones are shown on the .

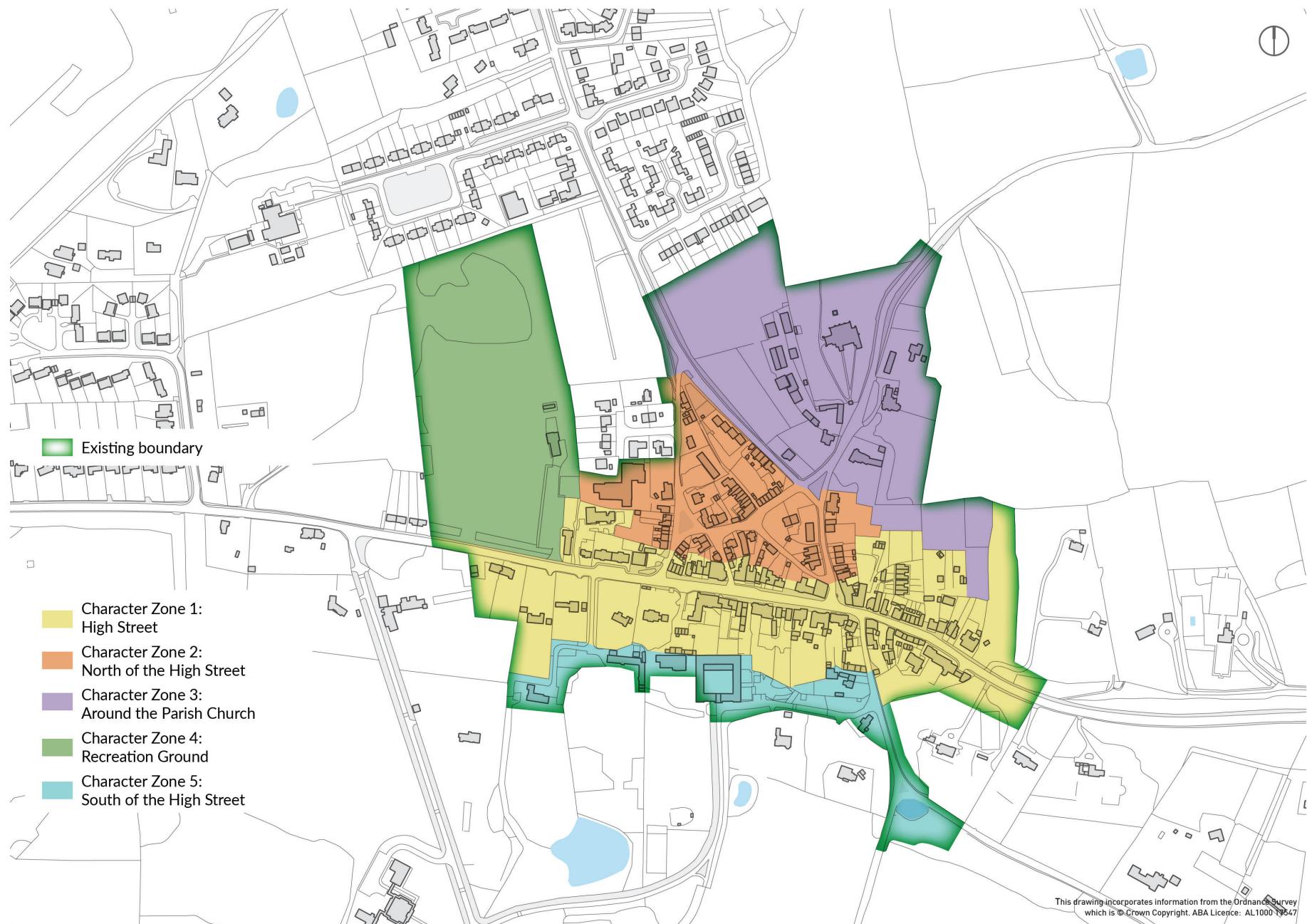
#### Character Zone 1: High Street

- Strongly linear character with long views up and down the street;
- To the east, the built-up area stops decisively, giving the village a clear boundary; to the west sporadic development on both sides of the street has blurred the boundary;
- A streetscape of a rich mix of styles and architectural details unified by a consistent colour palette and texture of red clay roof tiles, hanging tiles and brick and white painted timber and render surfaces;
- Includes a number of prominent individual buildings: the library, the nineteenth-century Village Hall, the two former pubs, Old Seal House and no.26;
- Buildings mostly front straight on to the pavement although some have front gardens;
- Views along the central section are animated by slight variations in building line and roofline and rhythm of gable ends facing the street;
- Retains the character of the historic commercial centre of the parish with commercial/retail units fronting the street and some shopfronts having been retained in units converted into domestic use;
- A number of yards and alleyways with associated outbuildings illustrate the close grain of the village's historic development;
- Trees and the line of the North Downs form an attractive backdrop to views that also allows understanding of local topography.

**Important views:** 1, 4, 7, 8 (see map on page 20 for location of views)



### Character zones



## Character Zone 2: North of the High Street

- A tight network of lanes developed from the medieval period onwards;
- Fragments of the old village green to east and west are key features;
- Narrow or no pavements with buildings of various ages, often grouped in terraces;
- Dwellings predominantly small workers and artisan cottages, with some houses of larger scale dating from the late nineteenth century;
- From the north side of Church Road the ground slopes steeply away, creating distant views to the North Downs.

**Important views:** 2, 3 (see map on page 20 for location of views)



### Character Zone 3: Area around the church east of Childsbridge Lane

- A more open texture and rural character than in Zones 1 and 2;
- Provides transition to open countryside to the north-east;
- Substantial houses in large gardens and the church in its churchyard;
- Long rubble stone boundary walls lining Church Street are a key feature;
- Workshops and sheds in the former yard of Church Farm add to the rural character of this zone;
- Good views of the medieval parish church;
- Extensive views to the North Downs from the north side of the church;
- Open space on either side of Childsbridge Lane creates an important separation between the historic village and the twentieth-century extension to the north.

**Important views:** 3, 5, 6 (see map on page 20 for location of views)



### Character Zone 4: Recreation Ground

- The Recreation Ground provides a buffer between the historic village and the twentieth-century extension to the north and ribbon development to the west;
- Glimpsed views of the church and of the North Downs from parts of the Recreation Ground.

**Important views** in Character Zone 4: n/a



### Character Zone 5: South of the High Street

- The southern approach to the village retains a rural character, giving a strong definition to the built-up area of the village;
- The former stable block and lodge to Wildernes are key features, illustrating the historic connection between the village and the Wildernes House and estate;
- A long rubble stone wall on the east side of Park Lane is a key feature;
- Substantial houses set well back from the road in large gardens.

**Important views:** n/a



## 4.0 Views

Views make an important contribution to our ability to appreciate the character and appearance of the conservation area.

Two types of view have been identified, along with examples of each type. These are shown on the map on page 20.

Such a list of views cannot be definitive, but illustrates the nature of views that are important to Seal Conservation Area.



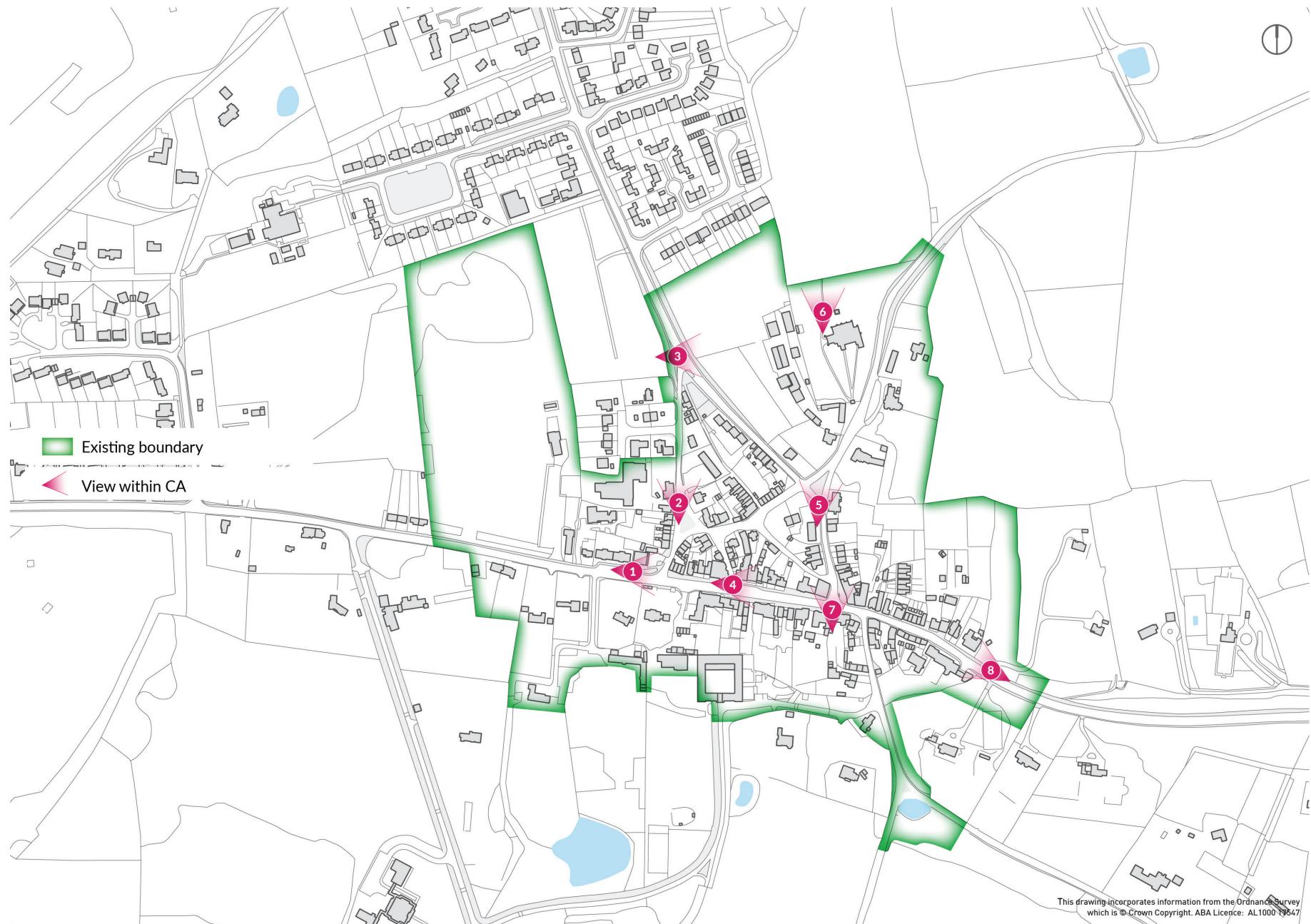
**Townscape views** within the conservation area which include a mix of building types and materials and give a sense of the spatial character and architectural quality of the village. (Views 1–5, 7–8).

The important views are characterised by the interaction of informal groups of buildings of a strongly traditional character with the local topography. The only landmark building in the Conservation Area is the church, which can be seen quite widely, e.g. from the Recreation Ground and the Allotments, as well as in the views identified here.



**Contextual views** which look out to the landscape beyond the Conservation Area and give an understanding of its topography and setting (View 6).

## Views



## 5.0 Open space assessment

There are large amounts of open space within and around Seal Conservation Area, some of which makes a strong contribution to its character. Open space contributes in two main ways:

- Allows views;
- Defines the built-up area of the village.

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 streets of the Conservation Area tend to be the most important. Seal is not easily viewed from the surrounding landscape and the footpath which approaches from the north only gives a view of the church, not the Conservation Area as a whole.

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. Much of the land surrounding Seal Conservation Area is comprised of private gardens and therefore does not come within the definition of open space used for this assessment.

The contributions of individual parcels of land are shown on the map on page 23.

Open space inside the conservation area

- The 'greens' at road junctions contribute to the conservation area's historic interest as fragments of the old village green;
- The churchyard, Church Farm fields and the north end of the Recreation Ground combine with the Allotments (outside the CA) to create a separation between the historic village and the twentieth-century extension to the north;
- The churchyard also allows extensive views over farmland towards the North Downs;



Part of the old village green



The Recreation Ground

- The Recreation Ground and the Church Farm fields allow good views of the church;
- Small amounts of open space at either end of the High Street help to create an understanding of Seal as a discrete village settlement.

#### Open space outside the conservation area

- The Allotments form part of a buffer between the historic village and its twentieth-century extension to the north;
- Farmland to the north-east of the village helps to define the village boundary and enables extensive views to the North Downs;
- The southern approaches to the village still have a strong rural character thanks to open space either side of Grove Road and Park Lane;
- Due to the local topography and the extent of vegetation to the south side of the Conservation Area there is no visual connection between the open space there and the Conservation Area.

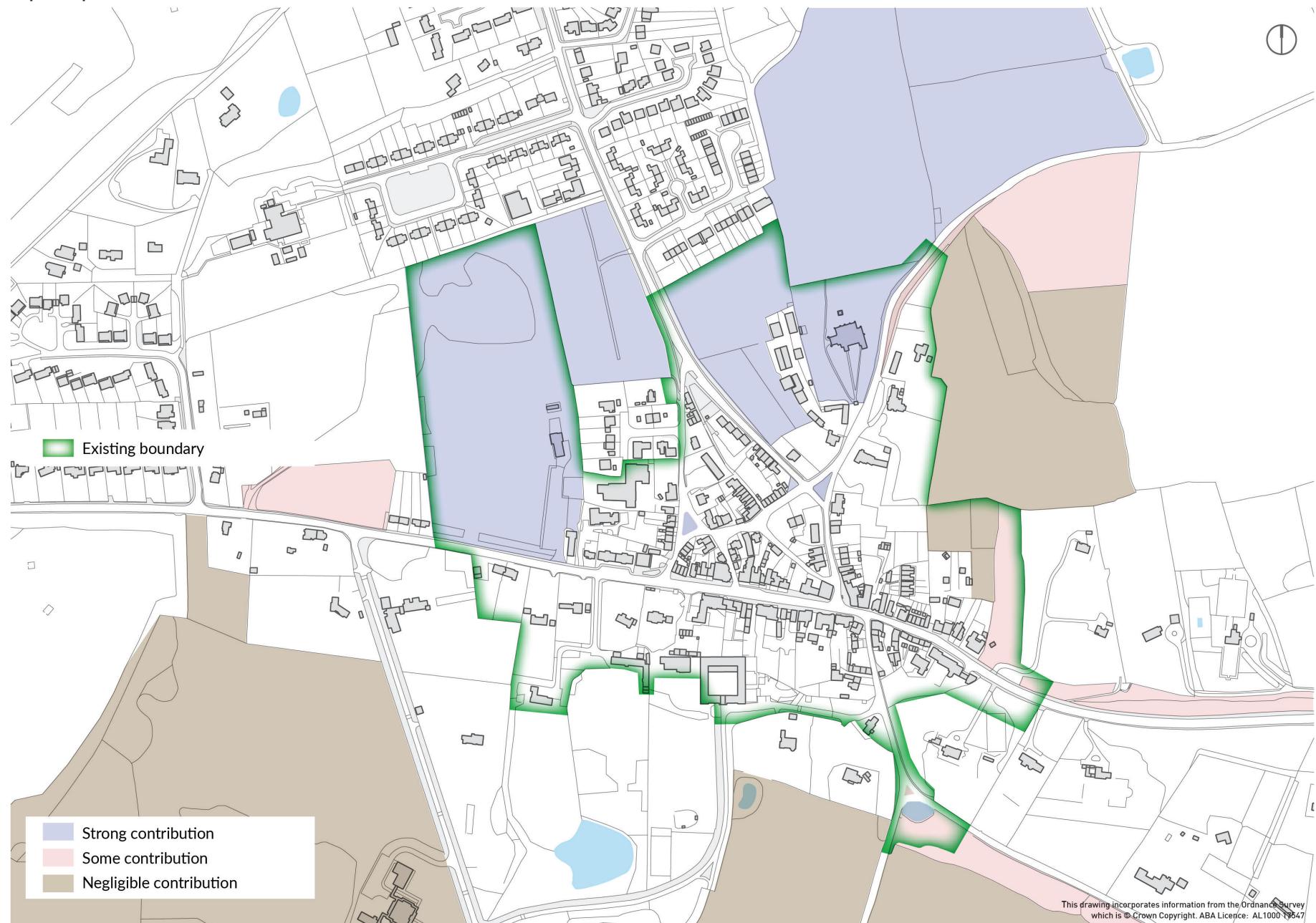


The Allotments



The buffer between the historic village and its twentieth-century extension

Open space



## 6.0 Condition and issues

The character and appearance of the conservation area is generally well-preserved. There are, however, some issues which affect it and should be addressed in the ongoing management of the conservation area.

- Heavy traffic and the lack of crossing points turn the A25 into a physical barrier between the northern and southern side of the High Street;
- A profusion of traffic signage and poor quality street furniture and street surfaces detract from the character of the High Street and setting of listed buildings;
- The light-industrial warehouse at Church Farm west of the church detracts from the setting of the church;
- Inappropriate uPVC replacement windows e.g.in the terrace of Nos. 3 – 9 High Street;
- Inappropriate pointing to some Ragstone walls.



Traffic and other signage harming the setting of listed buildings on the High Street



Inappropriate pointing to some Ragstone walls

## 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 Seal made in the preparation of this appraisal.

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

#### *Recommendation*

Sevenoaks District Council will issue 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 due to increased planning controls and particular requirements for materials and detailing in 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 into account the Conservation Area Design Guidance which is issued with the revised appraisals. The guidance will be 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 will be reviewed periodically to assess its effectiveness and revised if necessary.

[Add LINK to Conservation Area Design Guidance]

## 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.

Development in the setting of the conservation area could 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 for details).

- *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;*
- *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 mature trees.*

To help determine whether the impact of proposed development is harmful to the character and appearance of the conservation areas, 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) provides advice on assessing impacts of development on the setting of heritage assets.

## Enforcement

### Recommendation

In implementing its Planning Enforcement Plan, Sevenoaks District Council will pay special attention to preserving or enhancing the special qualities of the Leigh 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 Council's website: [www.sevenoaks.gov.uk/info/20069126/planning\\_enforcement](http://www.sevenoaks.gov.uk/info/20069126/planning_enforcement).

## Public realm

### Recommendation

Streets and public open spaces should be managed in a way that enhances their character and contribution to the conservation area.

The street furniture and pavement surfaces on the High Street are standard, poor quality design and harmful to the character and appearance of the conservation area. There is also a profusion of traffic signage at certain points on the High Street. More sensitive, better quality design and removal of unnecessary or superfluous street furniture or signage would help to enhance the conservation area.

This depends on public bodies rather than owners of private property. Kent County Council, Sevenoaks District Council and Seal 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: [www.historicengland.org.uk/publications](http://www.historicengland.org.uk/publications)

# Alan Baxter

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