

Swanley Village Conservation Area Appraisal

July 2019

This appraisal for Swanley Village Conservation Area supports the duty of Sevenoaks District Council to prepare proposals for the preservation and enhancement of conservation areas.

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 2019".

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1.0 Overview of Swanley Village Conservation Area

Swanley Village lies on the western edge of Kent, 16 miles from central London and a mile and a half north-east of the modern town of Swanley. The M25 motorway is 350m to the east of the village and the railway line between London and east Kent runs just to the south, the nearest station being at Swanley.

The entire conservation area is within the Metropolitan Green Belt.

Conservation area boundary

Swanley Village Conservation Area encompasses the main village street from Highlands Farm in the west to Coldharbour Farm in the east, along with land on the north side as far as the Victorian church, school and vicarage and the north part of Beechenlea Lane.

Designation history

Swanley Village Conservation Area was designated in 1984 and extended in 1997 and again in 2006. The previous conservation area appraisal was published in December 2003.

Topography and geology

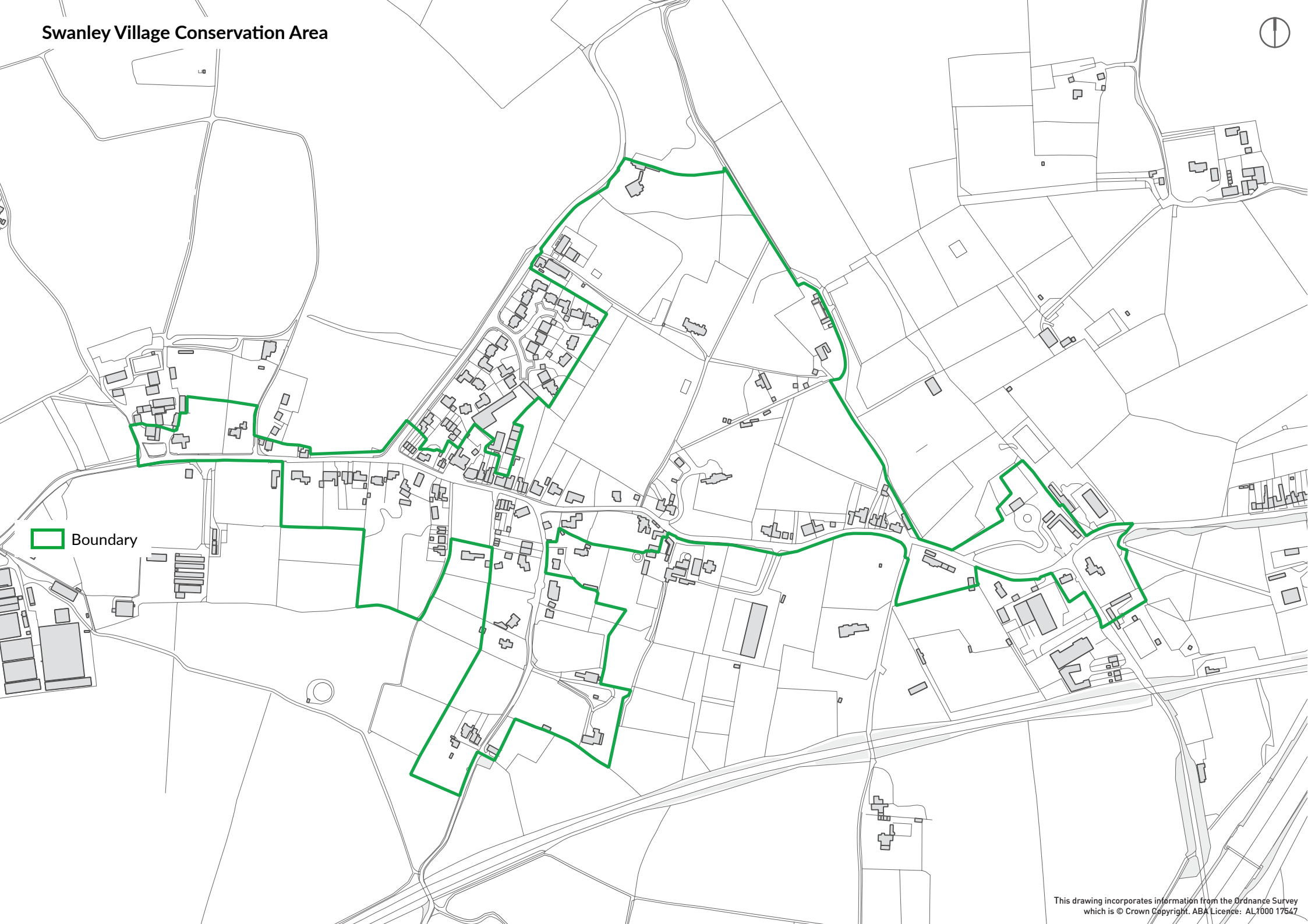
Swanley Village occupies an area of high ground between the valley of the River Darent and its tributary the Cray. The main street through the conservation area climbs up to the brow of Highlands Hill then descends, flattens before dipping again after The Lamb Inn. The gently rolling landscape around the village lies partly on Thanet Sand and partly on chalk, but neither seems historically to have provided building materials. Agricultural land still forms the setting of the village.

Summary of special interest

The main features of Swanley Village Conservation Area's special historic and architectural interest are:

- It retains the character of a Kentish rural hamlet;
- A well-defined village boundary and sense of rural isolation despite its proximity to Swanley town and it being within few hundred metres of the M25;
- A mix of historic buildings dating from the late medieval to the early twentieth century that reflect the incremental development of the village;
- An important group of Victorian buildings comprising the church, school and vicarage, set within a parkland setting, and built by the notable Victorian architect Ewan Christian;
- Traditional craftsmanship embodied in original building materials and architectural features.

Swanley Village Conservation Area



 Boundary

2.0 Historical development

Swanley Village is the place that was historically known simply as Swanley. It was named 'Swanley Village' in the 1920s when the name Swanley was transferred to Swanley Junction, the urban town that had grown up from the 1860s around the railway junction a mile to the south-west of the village.

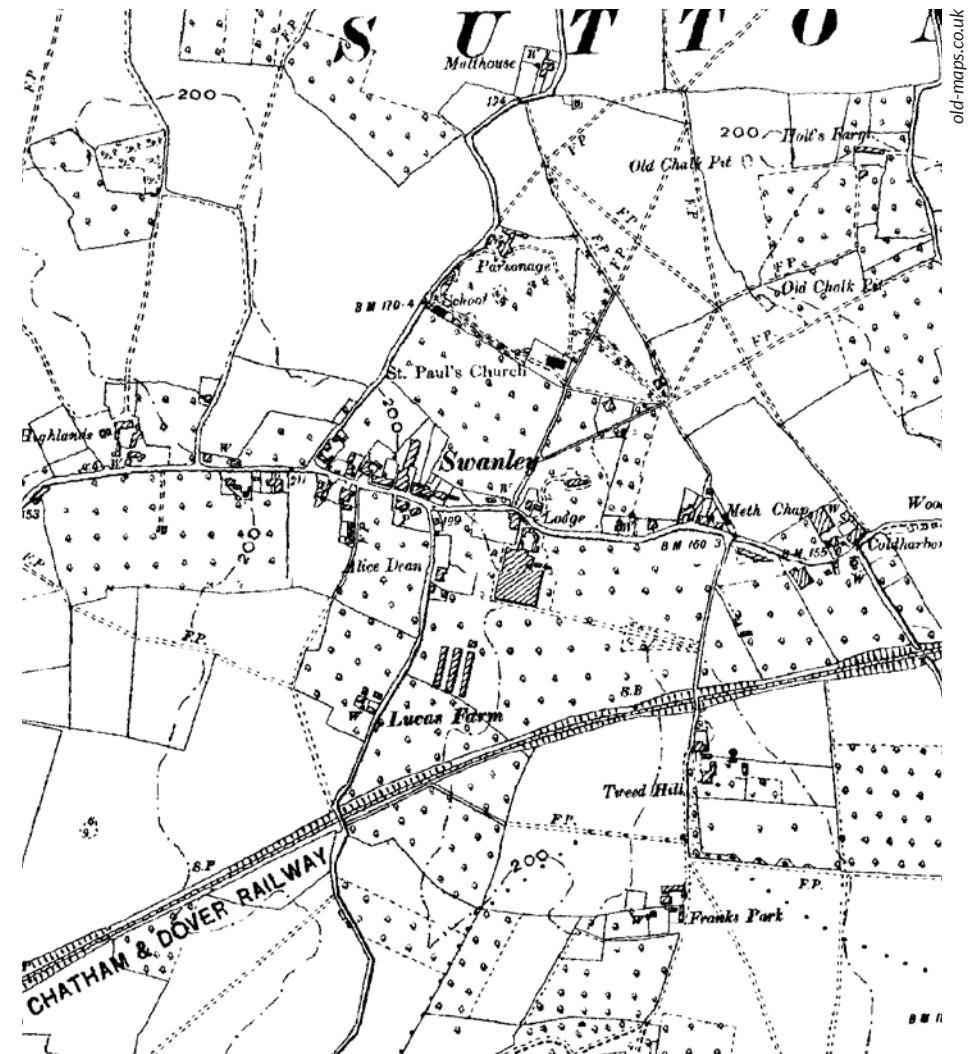
Beginnings

The origins of Swanley Village were probably as a clearing in woodland used for grazing in Saxon times, when two homesteads – Highlands and Gilden Hall – were established on an area of higher ground between the River Darent and its tributary the Cray. An agricultural community slowly grew, based along Swanley Village Road, between the two homesteads, which after the Norman conquest became manors in monastic ownership. The village was part of the parish of Sutton-at-Hone and did not therefore have its own parish church.

Nineteenth century

Swanley remained an agricultural settlement with only gradual change until the nineteenth century. Several buildings date from the first half of the century and indicate a growing population and greater economic activity. The Wesleyan Methodist chapel (now greatly altered) was built in 1817; Alice Dene was rebuilt c. 1820, followed by Prospect Row (1821), Old Place (1826–29), the Nook and Rose Cottage (1830s), Fern Cottage and Crocus Bank (1840). In 1860–61, the village gained a church, designed by the noted architect Ewan Christian, along with a school and vicarage. Parish status followed in 1862.

The comings of the railways in the 1860s changed the future of the village and surrounding region. The Chatham main line, which runs along the southern edge of the settlement, was completed in 1860, although Swanley only received its



1897 edition of the Ordnance Survey

own station to the south-west of the village in 1862 with the completion of the Sevenoaks branch. In the following decades, a new railway town grew around the rail junction, known as Swanley Junction, and the area developed into a centre for horticulture and market gardens that supplied the London markets. Within the village, many new buildings were erected on Swanley Village Road, including the two pubs, but the commercial centre of the parish established itself in Swanley Junction.

Twentieth and twenty-first century

The twentieth century saw the rapid expansion of the Swanley Junction whose name was subsequently changed to Swanley while the original settlement received the affix 'Village'. Swanley Village remained for the most part unaffected by new development: the *Official Guide to Swanley* in 1960 could still describe it as 'an old world village unspoilt by modern development' (*Official Guide*, p.15). The characterisation still holds up today. The village is predominantly residential, although there is a plant nursery and a group of small business units at the Old Stable Yard at Coldharbour Farm. The village shops have now gone, but the primary school, church and two pubs remain.

More recently the population grew significantly as a result of the re-development of the former Beddington Fruit Company factory on School Lane with housing in the late 1990s. One of the most significant changes in the village is the creation of the village green which was established as part of the above housing scheme and is maintained by the Swanley Village Trust.

3.0 Architectural and built character

3.1 Spatial character

The spatial character of the conservation area is a good example of a small, low density settlement which has developed very gradually over centuries. It can be summarised as follows:

- Linear development along a narrow, winding main street with secondary streets or lanes intersecting ;
- No discernible village centre, although clusters of buildings occur around road junctions;
- Outlying farmsteads around the village, i.e. Highlands, Coldharbour and Lucas;
- Large gaps created by open spaces and gardens give a sense of separation between development clusters;
- No or narrow pavements;
- Varied building line;
- Informal grouping of buildings;
- Loose texture and varied plot sizes;
- Building generally only on one side of the road;
- No historic backland development except for Elm Cottages;
- Sense of enclosure with little opportunity to see the landscape beyond;
- Many houses set above road level behind retaining walls;
- Well-kept front gardens add to the rural character of the streetscene;
- Open public spaces including the allotments, the village green, church green and churchyard make up a large part of the conservation area.



Contrasting areas of looser and denser texture

3.2 Building forms and details

The historic buildings can be summarised as follows:

- Small-scale and domestic in character;
- Simple rectangular forms, mostly flat-fronted, but some nineteenth and twentieth-century buildings have bay windows;
- Predominantly two-storey;
- A mixture of individual houses, pairs and short terraces;
- A variety of traditional pitched roof forms including M-shaped roofs;
- Unbroken roof slopes;
- Tall brick chimneys;
- Timber-framed sash or casement windows, mostly small-paned, with square or segmental heads;
- Planked and panelled timber doors;
- Nineteenth-century date stones.



Simple building forms



Unbroken roof slopes



Varied size of building



M-shaped roof



Unbroken roof slopes



Date stones

3.3 Architectural styles

The predominant types of historic architecture in the Swanley Village Conservation Area are:

- Kentish vernacular styles characterised by simple building forms and the use of local traditional materials i.e. timber frame walling, weatherboarding, red brick, clay-tiled roofs, casement windows;
- Georgian and Victorian domestic architecture, characterised by Flemish bond brickwork or stucco rendered elevation, slate roofs, symmetrical facades and sash windows. A number of properties of that period are suburban type detached villas or attached houses that reflect the influence of the capital, as does the use of yellow or buff coloured brick;
- Vernacular revival buildings of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.



Kentish vernacular



Kentish vernacular



Georgian domestic



Victorian domestic



Vernacular revival



Vernacular revival

3.4 Traditional building materials

The use of traditional materials makes a large contribution to the character and appearance of the conservation area. Three phases of historic building can be distinguished, each with its own palette of materials:

Pre-1800 vernacular

- Timber frames, now concealed by later added brick elevations or weatherboarding;
- Plain clay tile roofs, historically Kent peg tile roofs;
- Weatherboarding, traditionally painted in white for domestic properties;
- Local red brick.

Nineteenth-century domestic

- Yellow or buff coloured brick laid in Flemish bond;
- Painted stucco render;
- Timber sash windows;
- Slate roofs;
- One example of Rat trap bond brickwork (Model Cottages).

Vernacular revival

- Red brick walls;
- One example of rat-trap brickwork (Model Cottages);
- Tile-hung upper storeys;
- Clay tile roofs with decorative ridge tiles;
- Timber casement windows.



Weatherboarding and brick covering timber frame



Weatherboarding



Yellow brick and slate roofs



Yellow brick and slate roofs



Clay tile roofs



Tile-hanging

3.5 Boundaries and streetscape

Boundary treatments including many hedges make an important contribution to the character of the conservation area, defining the narrow streets and providing a sense of enclosure. The greenery and openness provided by the front gardens also greatly adds to the rural nature of the village.

From historic photographs, the typical front garden boundary seems to have been wooden palings like those outside The Cottage or White Cottages.

Others which contribute positively to the character of the conservation area are:

- Brick or brick and rubble stone retaining walls and boundary walls;
- Metal railings, e.g. original cast-iron railings in front of Woodhurst, Swan House, Holly Tree and Portswood;
- Flint and brick walls.

There are only short stretches of pavement within the conservation area, mostly paved in good quality red brick, which along with the use of granite setts on the roadway, enhances the quality of the streetscape.

In terms of street furniture, the historic replica lamp posts on Highlands Hill and Swanley Village Road contribute positively, as do the early-to-mid twentieth-century pillar box at the corner of Highlands Hill and the post box in the gate pier in front of Old College Cottage.



Brick-and-flint walls



Wooden palings



Stone and brick retaining wall



Attractive gardens



Brick paving and historic replica lamp post

3.6 Heritage assets, positive contributors and detractors

The buildings and structures of the conservation area contribute in different ways to its overall character and appearance, some positively (positive contributors), others negatively (detractors). The contributions of individual elements are mapped on the [Interactive map](#) at the front of this appraisal.

The conservation area 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 the buildings' contribution to the character and appearance of the area is not limited to their street elevations but also depends on their integrity as historic structures and the impact they have 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.

3.7 Character Zones

Two zones of discernibly different character can be identified within the conservation area, based on their spatial character and architectural qualities, historical development and the contribution they make to the conservation area.

The features and individual characteristics of each zone that contribute positively to the character and appearance of the conservation area are summarised below. The boundaries of the Character Zones are mapped on the [Interactive map](#) at the front of this appraisal:

Character Zone 1: Swanley Village Road and Beechenlea Lane

- Strongly linear character;
- Cluster of development mainly around road junctions, with some attractive groupings of buildings;
- Winding street creates short range views and picturesque juxtapositions;
- Houses set in well-kept gardens;
- Mature trees and hedges emphasise rural character.

Important views: 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7 (see [Interactive map](#) for location of views)



Character Zone 2: Area around the church north of Swanley Village Road

- Individual buildings set in green spaces;
- Parish church at the heart of the area;
- Large areas of public open spaces i.e. village green, churchyard, allotments and the church green between churchyard and school;
- Church, vicarage and school form an important group of Victorian buildings built by the same architect;
- Abundant trees;
- Parkland character to setting of church and associated buildings;
- Secluded footpaths with occasional glimpsed views;
- Views of parish church from the village green.

Important views: 5, 8 (see [Interactive map](#) for location of views)



4.0 Views

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

The views within the conservation area are constantly unfolding due to the winding nature of the main street. Boundary treatments, hedges and woodland lining the street to both sides limit the views into the surrounding countryside. The church tower provides a landmark when seen from the new village green but is otherwise hidden in views by mature tree cover.

Important views have been identified and are shown on the Interactive map at the front of this appraisal. Such a list of views cannot be definitive, but illustrates the nature of views that are important to Swanley Village Conservation Area.



View 3: view along Beechenlea Lane towards Swanley Village Road



View 7: view of Swanley Village Road



View 5: view of the church spire from the village green

5.0 Open space assessment

There are large amounts of open space within and around Swanley Village Conservation Area, some of which make a strong contribution to its character. The extent of the contribution of individual parcels of open space depends on the way they are experienced. Hence, those which are visible in views from the main streets of the conservation area, or from the footpaths around the village make the greatest contribution.

Open space is defined as common land, farmland, countryside and recreational spaces (including allotments, school grounds, churchyards and cemeteries). Private gardens and private car parks are excluded. Much of the land surrounding Swanley Village 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 [Interactive map](#) at the front of this appraisal.

Open space inside the conservation area

- The allotments on the south side of Swanley Village Road make a strong contribution by ensuring the street is not continuously built up on both sides, thereby reinforcing its character;
- Large, mostly publicly accessible open spaces north of Swanley Village Road are an essential part of the character of Character Zone 2 and distinctive to the conservation area;
- Large areas of public open spaces i.e. village green, churchyard, allotments and the church green between churchyard and school.



Land to the rear of Swanley Village Road (north side)



Village allotments

Open space outside the conservation area

- Farmland to the south-west of the village helps to preserve the village boundary which can be appreciated when approaching by road and on the public footpath which runs south from Elm Cottages;
- Open space to the south of Swanley Village Road rises and forms the backdrop to views from footpaths on the north side of the road; where this open space meets the street it makes a strong contribution by ensuring the street is not continuously built up on both sides;
- Some pockets of open space to the south of Swanley Village Road make little or no contribution because they are already bounded by development and are not readily experienced from roads, footpaths or open spaces;
- Open space to the north-west and north-east of the conservation area help to define the village boundary and thereby appreciation of its rural character.



Land to the south-west of the conservation area looking towards Swanley



Land to the north-west of the conservation area

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 its ongoing management.

- Heavy through traffic affects the rural character of the conservation area;
- Modern boundary treatments of inappropriate suburban character;
- Lack of front boundaries, loss of front gardens and expansive areas of hard standing for off-street parking;
- Plastic windows and doors, which are alien and unsympathetic materials for historic buildings and therefore detract from their character;
- The lamp posts at the east half of Swanley Village Road are modern designs; it would be beneficial to replace them with the same historic replica lamp posts found elsewhere in the conservation area.



Modern boundary treatment of inappropriate suburban character



Lack of front boundaries detracts from the character of the conservation area

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 Swanley Village Conservation Area 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 account of 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.

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 can have a harmful impact if it would erode the village boundary where that is still well-defined, or would threaten its open character or harm important views. As identified in this appraisal, areas of open space in the setting of the conservation area differ in their contribution to its 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 and hedges.

When proposing new development within the setting of the conservation area, applicants should assess and describe the likely impact of their proposals on the significance and 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 should pay special attention to preserving or enhancing the special qualities of the Swanley Village 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

Conservation area boundary

Recommendation

The boundary of the conservation area should be amended to include Lucas Farmhouse and the group of buildings around it, and the building attached to the Coach House at Old Place, now part of Old Place Stables, so as to protect the character of Swanley Village Road and Beechenlea Lane as part of the conservation area.

The new boundary is mapped on the interactive map at the front of this appraisal.

- Lucas Farmhouse, Land North of Lucas Farmhouse, Lucas Cottage and Pine Cottage, Cygnet and Land East of Cygnet, Beechenlea Lane.

Lucas Farm is one of three farmsteads surrounding the village – Highlands Farm and Cold Harbour Farm. It is to farmsteads such as these that the settlement owes its origins, as noted in the history section of the draft appraisal. Although there is some open land between Lucas Farm and the houses further north on Beechenlea Lane, the nature of Swanley Village is that of a scattered settlement, with the buildings dispersed along its main streets and no distinct village centre.

Outlying farms at the approaches into the village have been identified as one of the key spatial characteristics and Lucas Farm therefore contributes strongly to the character and interest of the village.

The farm consists of a group of buildings comprising the farmhouse and associated late 19th century farm workers cottages, a barn and stable building dating from around 1900 and a modern infill i.e. Pine Cottage. Lucas Farmhouse is an attractive late-Georgian building, displaying a date of 1828 on its front elevation. Historic maps show that the farmhouse is a remainder of a much larger dispersed farm complex. The buildings are in keeping with and of similar quality to those within the conservation area. An exception is the modern Pine Cottage and there would be scope for enhancement to the conservation area by altering or replacing it.

- Building attached to the Coach House at Old Place, now part of Old Place Stables, Swanley Village Road.

The building attached to the eastern end of the listed Old Place Coach House is contemporary with the main house and other listed outbuildings and historically formed part of the stable yard to the south-east of Old Place. It adds to the group value of the Coach House and Stables to the east of Old Place which are listed for their historic value, illustrating a complete early nineteenth-century residence. The building stands in an elevated position and towers over Swanley Village Road where it forms a key focal point in the approach from the east.

Article 4 directions

Recommendation

Article 4 directions should be made to protect historic boundary treatments and front gardens.

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

As set out in this appraisal, an important part of the character of the conservation area is the way that many buildings are set back behind front gardens, enclosed by low boundary fences, railings or hedges. Where gardens have been paved over and boundary treatments been removed, this has had an urbanising effect on the streetscene that is harmful to the rural character of the village. In order to exercise control over such changes and protect the special interest and character of the conservation area, it is recommended that the following permitted development right be removed:

- The provision within the curtilage of a dwellinghouse of a hard surface for any purpose incidental to the enjoyment of the dwellinghouse as such (Class F of Schedule 2, Part 1 of the GPDO);
- The erection, construction, maintenance, improvement or alteration of a gate, fence, wall or other means of enclosure. (Class A of Schedule 2, Part 2 of the GPDO).

Village Design Statement

Recommendation

The Parish Council and local people could give consideration to whether a Village Design Statement should inform design of development in the village (including the parts which fall outside the conservation area), so as to extend community involvement and reinforce the design guidance issued with this appraisal.

Village Design Statements (VDS) are prepared by local people to guide new development in their villages (not restricted to the conservation area). They are used when assessing planning applications for development and other changes within villages. The statements have been adopted as informal guidance by Sevenoaks District Council and are used in assessing planning applications. Adopting a VDS for Swanley Village would enable local people to express their views on design, both inside and outside the conservation area, and reinforce the design guidance issued with this appraisal.

Alan Baxter

Prepared by Nicolas Chapple

Reviewed by Robert Hradsky

Draft issued September 2018

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