

# Leigh Conservation Area Appraisal

**July 2019**

This appraisal for Leigh 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 Leigh Conservation Area

The village of Leigh stands in open country two miles west of Tonbridge, in the Weald of Kent. A mile to the east is the A21 Sevenoaks to Tonbridge road. The railway line between Tonbridge and Redhill defines the southern boundary of the village.

The park of Hall Place and parts of the village on the north and west sides are designated as Metropolitan Green Belt. The south-west corner of the conservation area is within the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

### Conservation area boundary

The conservation area comprises the historic village at its extent at the end of the nineteenth century, along with Hall Place and part of its inner park, and the early twentieth-century development of Garden Cottages.

### Designation history

Leigh Conservation Area was designated in 1972 and extended in 1986 and 2006. The previous conservation area appraisal was published in March 2001.

### Topography and geology

The village lies on the edge of the flood plain of the River Medway, with the ground rising to the north. The church stands at a high point, commanding views south towards the High Weald. The area around the village is geologically mixed, yielding clays and various forms of Wealden sandstone. Most of the village lies on an area of Tunbridge Wells Sand, with bands of clay immediately to the south and running across the Hall Place estate. Wealden clay provided the raw materials for bricks and the heavy waterlogged soils favoured the growth of oak trees suitable for timber-frame construction.

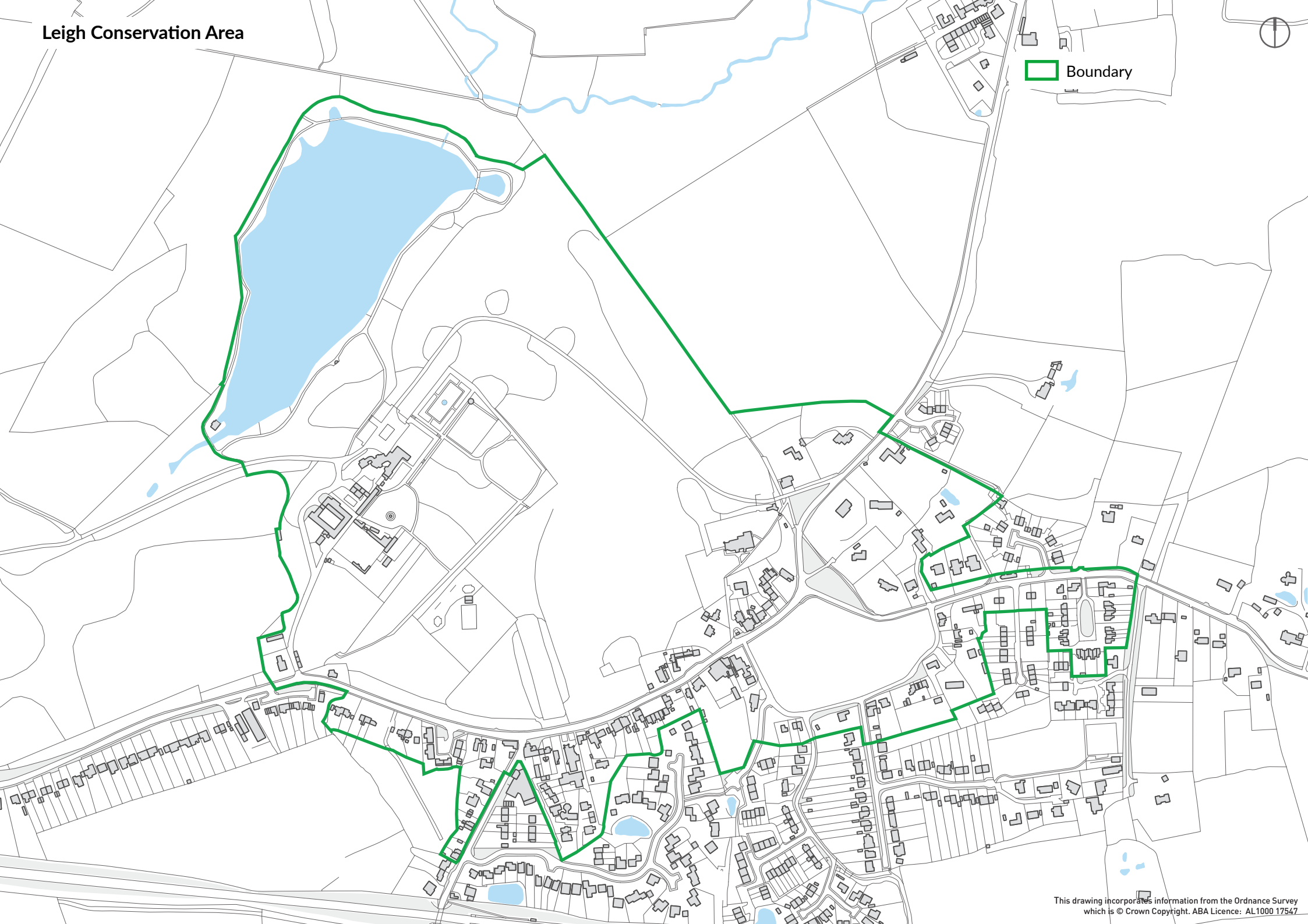
### Summary of special interest

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

- An outstanding example of an estate village, improved by its owners in the second half of the nineteenth-century;
- Hall Place, the country house historically associated with the village, and its surrounding gardens and parkland, which are Grade II\* registered;
- Fanciful lodge buildings to Hall Place provide gateway features into the village;
- An unusually large number of architect-designed houses, several of them by two major nineteenth-century architects: George Devey and Ernest George;
- Large village green;
- A number of designed set-pieces and picturesque groupings of buildings;
- Historic buildings of earlier periods reflecting Kentish vernacular building traditions;
- Traditional craftsmanship embodied in original building materials and architectural features;
- Important visual connections between the village and Hall Place park;
- Fine views south from the churchyard towards the High Weald.

Leigh Conservation Area

Boundary



## 2.0 Historical development

### Beginnings

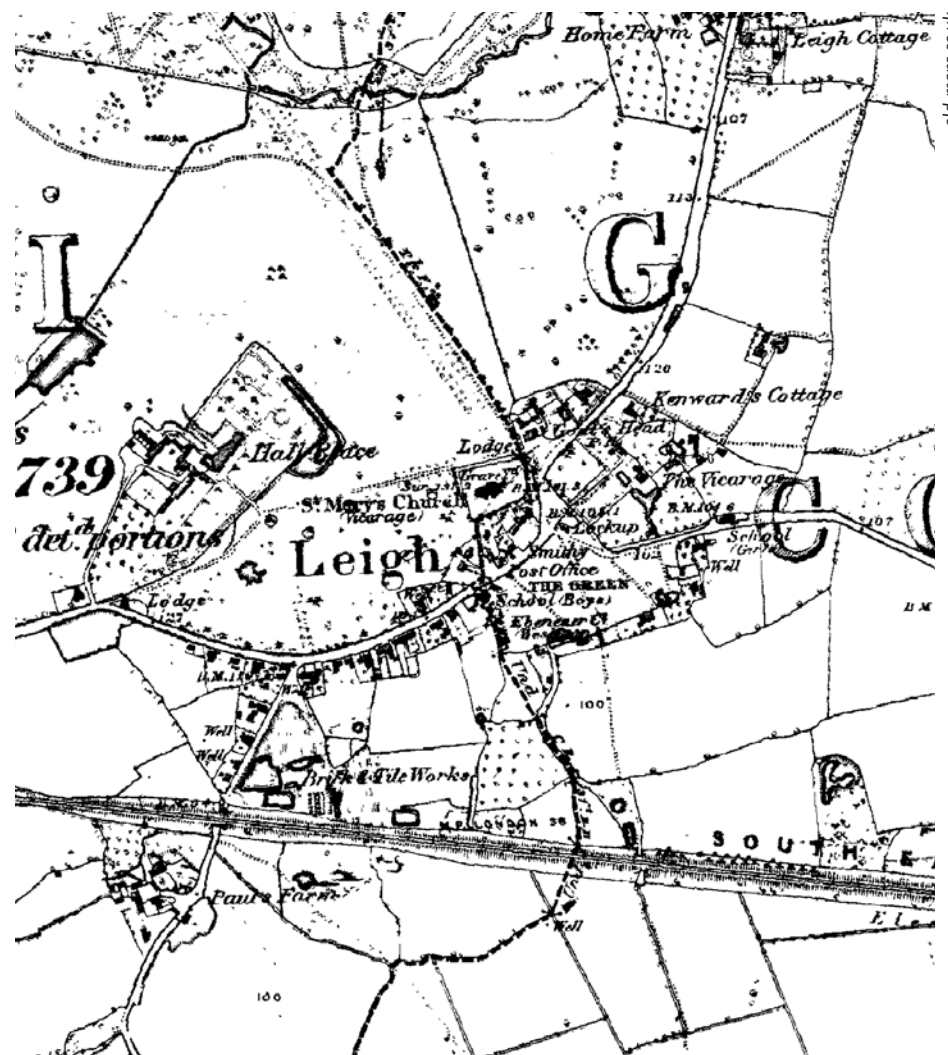
Leigh was in existence by at least the eleventh century and by the fourteenth century the parish church had been built. Around this time large areas of land were acquired by the owners of Penshurst Place, to the south-west, and successive owners of Penshurst were to have an influence on the development of the village. The village was the centre of an agricultural community and its original nucleus lay around the site of Forge Square and the White House (which is a later house built over a medieval cellar).

### Seventeenth and eighteenth century

There is little evidence of development in Leigh during these centuries. On Lower Green, Budgeons Cottages bears a plaque recording: 'O and E Budgeon's Gift – 1620', while Old Wood Cottage and Elizabeth's Cottage may be seventeenth-century (if not earlier). Orchard House was re-fronted in the eighteenth century and it is likely that some of the other old houses were modernised with new brick, tile or weatherboarded facades during this time. In 1778 Edward Hasted in his history of Kent wrote that 'the Village hath nothing worth notice in it'; if that was true then, it would certainly change in the following century.

### Nineteenth century

The greatest influence on the village in the nineteenth century came from the owners of Hall Place, which by the late eighteenth century had been separated from Penshurst. The Baily family owned Hall Place from 1820 to 1870. It has been estimated that between 1841 and 1870 forty new cottages were erected in Leigh. Before 1860, these were still essentially Georgian in character, e.g. Barden Cottages (1856) on the south side of the Green, or Ranmore and Elvanin on Lower Green (1853) for Lord de Lisle of Penshurst.



1871 edition of the Ordnance Survey

Work done under Baily patronage included Old Lodge and East Lodge, Stone Cottage and restoration of the parish church. By 1864 Baily was employing the architect George Devey, who had previously worked for Lord de Lisle, to build Park House.

In 1870 Hall Place was bought by Samuel Morley, who continued the work of improvement, giving Leigh the school and village hall and amenities that other villages did not have, e.g. sewerage, gas light and water. He continued to patronise George Devey who rebuilt Hall Place in a neo-Tudor style for him in 1871–74 and oversaw the construction of the Nonconformist chapel in 1871, re-using material from the old Hall Place.

After Devey's death in 1886, Morley employed Ernest George, one of the leading architects of the day, who designed several buildings in the village including Forge Square (1886–87), the Square (1889), both of which originally had thatched roofs.

## Twentieth century

From the early part of the century the village started to expand beyond its historic envelope, but little changed within its core. Of the streets developed in the twentieth century Garden Cottages of 1905–13 is the most significant. Charlotte Cottages, a group of buildings providing affordable housing, was built in the 1960s on the site of an earlier house and its garden. Notwithstanding the heavy traffic, Leigh has very much retained the character as conceived by the Victorian landowners.

A change to the village is the loss of traditional mix of uses, although Leigh still has shops, a pub, businesses and community assets, such as a school and nursery, village hall and church.

## 3.0 Architectural and built character

### 3.1 Spatial character

The historic village of Leigh grew up around the parish church, village green and high street. Its most distinctive spatial characteristic is the juxtaposition of the great open space of the Green and the narrow and tightly enclosed High Street. Its spatial character can be summarised as follows:

- Linear development, with the Hall Place estate lying to the north of the village and extending right to the edge of the High Street;
- Large amounts of open space: Village Green, Hall Place park and churchyard;
- Around the Green and at the entrances to the village it has an open texture with houses standing apart in their own gardens;
- Siting of church on higher ground;
- Closely spaced detached or groups of buildings along the High Street set behind front gardens;
- Much of the High Street is confined by the estate wall along its northern side;
- Most houses have open aspects, not directly facing other houses;
- Little visual connection with surrounding landscape except looking south from churchyard;
- Open parkland of Hall Place.



### 3.2 Building forms and details

The historic buildings which contribute positively to the conservation area are characterised by the following :

- Small scale in the centre of the village with a group of larger houses to the east of the church;
- Domestic in character;
- Older houses are simple in form, but late nineteenth-century houses are more complex in plan form and roof form, with multiple gables, projecting upper storeys, bay windows etc.;
- Mostly informal groupings, but some composed groups, i.e. the Square and Forge Square, Charlotte Cottages;
- Traditional, steeply pitched roofs with many prominent gables and ornamental bargeboards;
- Tall brick chimneys;
- Many buildings display dates and the arms of the landowning families who built them;
- Many nineteenth-century buildings have high quality carved and turned woodwork including open porches and barge boards;
- Metal-framed windows, with leaded lights or decorative patterns of metal glazing bars, e.g. The Cottage, High Street, and Forge Square;
- Timber framed casement windows under flat or segmental arches.



*Simple building forms*



*More complex building forms*



*Composed groups*



*Steeply pitched roofs*



*Date stones*



*Carved woodwork*

### 3.3 Architectural styles

The predominant types of historic architecture in Leigh Conservation Area are:

#### Before 1850

- Kentish vernacular: a style characterised by the use of locally available materials that reflect local custom and building tradition. Characteristic features within Leigh include timber framed walling, tile hanging, steeply pitched roofs covered with plain clay (Kent peg) tiles, and painted timber weatherboarding;
- Georgian and early-Victorian domestic: a style characterised by Flemish bond brickwork or rendered facades, symmetrical elevations and sash windows. Examples in Leigh include both large houses e.g. Chilling House, High Street, and smaller cottages, e.g. Barden Cottages, The Green.

#### After 1850

- 'Old English' style of the mid-to-late nineteenth century: a style in which architects aimed to revive traditional Wealden architecture to picturesque effect; characterised by the use of a mixture of walling materials, leaded-light windows, steeply pitched roofs and tall brick chimneys;
- Neo-Tudor of the mid-to-late nineteenth century: a style characterised by the use of motifs from Tudor architecture such as patterned brickwork, stone mullion windows and stone hood-moulds.



*Kentish vernacular*



*Kentish vernacular*



*Early Victorian domestic*



*Neo-Tudor*



*Old English*



*Old English*

### 3.4 Traditional building materials

#### Before 1850

Historically there was plentiful timber in the parish for building, as well as clay nearby for making bricks and tiles. Local sandstone does not appear to have been widely exploited until the nineteenth century. As a result the characteristic materials pre-1850 are:

- Timber frames;
- Local red brick laid in Flemish bond patterned with blue/grey headers;
- Tile-hanging on upper storeys;
- Plain clay tile (historically Kent peg tile) roofs;
- White painted timber weatherboarding.



*Timber frame*



*Weatherboarding*



*Local red brick*



*Clay tile roofs and tile-hanging*

## After 1850

From the mid-nineteenth century onwards building construction was influenced by the availability of a greater variety of materials due to more economic methods of transport and, from the 1860s, a preference for vernacular revival styles. Characteristic materials are:

- Half-timbering in a variety of patterns;
- Red brick laid in English bond, patterned with grey brick;
- Tile-hanging on upper storeys;
- Clay tile roofs, often with patterns of plain and shaped tiles;
- Slate roofs on neo-Tudor buildings;
- Wealden sandstone;
- Wooden shingles on upper storeys;
- Thatched roofs to The Square and Forge Square (replaced with clay tiles in the twentieth century).



*Half-timbering*



*Half-timbering and wooden shingles*



*Red brick patterned with grey brick*



*Clay tile roofs and tile-hanging*



*Slate roofs*



*Wealden sandstone*

### 3.5 Boundaries and streetscape

Boundary treatments and front gardens make an important contribution to the character of the conservation area. The use of a mixture of timber fences, field gates and hedges around the Green greatly add to its rural character. Along the High Street, a strong consistency of enclosure to the street is provided by a mix of traditional boundary treatments. Many boundaries reflect the style of the houses they belong to. Boundaries to front gardens are low allowing views into the front gardens.

Boundary treatments in the area include:

- Large sections of estate wall made of red brick, blue brick diapering and stone dressings. At its eastern extremity, it is lowered to become a continuous run of boundary walls to former estate properties i.e. The Stone House, Charlotte Cottages (a twentieth-century insertion) and The White House;
- Wooden palings, mostly picket fences, often with a hedge behind. This can be found in front of most houses, giving a consistency and sense of identity to the conservation area;
- Victorian brick and stone boundary walls;
- Two examples of metal railings;
- Estate-type railings to Forge Square;
- Hedges.



*Brick estate wall to Hall Place*



*Stone boundary walls*



*Estate-type railings*



*Hedges*

There is a wealth of street furniture in the conservation area, which contributes positively to its character and appearance. It includes:

- The Well House and its nineteenth-century pump;
- Drinking fountains in the park wall (one missing its metal fixtures);
- Horse trough on the Green;
- Hanging signs.

Road and pavement surfaces are generally tarmac, with a mixture of granite and concrete kerbs, and as such are neutral in their contribution.



*The Well House*



*Drinking fountain in the park wall*



*Hanging signs*



*Standard modern street furniture*

### 3.6 Heritage assets, positive contributors and detractors

The buildings, structures and open spaces 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

Four zones of discernibly different character can be identified within the Leigh 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 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: High Street and Penshurst Road

- Dominated by mid-to-late nineteenth-century buildings;
- Strongly linear in character;
- Denser texture between Fleur de Lis in the west and the school in the east;
- Variety of building types, including all the village institutions, such as the school, village hall, shop and pub;
- Views are constantly unfolding due to the curved alignment of the street;
- Views into the parkland of Hall Place;
- Front gardens, many well-kept, provide attractive setting for houses.

**Important views:** 1 (see [Interactive map](#) for location of views)



## Character Zone 2: The Green and St Mary's Church

- All domestic properties with the exception of the church and the cricket pavilion;
- Picturesque grouping of buildings at its northern side i.e. Forge Square, The Forge, Forge House & Forge Cottage and South View;
- Loose texture of properties east of church and north of Powder Mill Lane, with houses widely spaced and set well back from the street;
- On the southern and western side of the green loose texture with buildings set behind front gardens facing the green; long views over the green towards the church;
- Well-defined historic boundary at north-east corner of the village.

**Important views:** 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 (see [Interactive map](#) for location of views)



### Character Zone 3: Hall Place and park

- Characteristic English parkland of the nineteenth century;
- Imposing neo-Tudor house by leading nineteenth-century architect George Devey;
- Distinctive lodge buildings and gateways positioned at eastern and western end of the village;
- Views into the park from High Street/Penshurst Road, although visual connection between the house and the village are obscured by mature trees and shrubs;
- Park wall along High Street/Penshurst Road makes a strong contribution to the conservation area;
- Other views into the park from the churchyard and the footpath on the east boundary of the conservation area;
- Of fundamental historic importance to the village.

**Important views:** B (see [Interactive map](#) for location of views)



### Character Zone 4: Garden Cottages

- Small close off Powder Mill Lane;
- Set-piece of early twentieth-century social housing development of traditional character with Arts and Crafts influences;
- Terraces of four and six cottages set behind front gardens, arranged around three sides of a Green, with a pair of semi-detached and detached properties at the entrance from Powder Mill Lane;
- Domestic properties of one and a half storeys, rendered elevations.

**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.

Examples of the types of view that are important to Leigh Conservation Area are shown on the [Interactive map](#) at the front of this appraisal. Such a list of views cannot be definitive, but illustrates the type of views that are important.

Important views in Leigh Conservation Area include:

- Unfolding views of groups of buildings as one traverses the length of the High Street;
- Views across the village green;
- Views from the village green towards the church;
- Views to the High Weald from the churchyard;
- Views across the parkland of Hall Place, including of the house itself from the public footpath.



**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. Trees play an important part in these views, but are sometimes intrusive (Views 1–3, 5 and 6).



**Contextual views** which look out to the landscape beyond the conservation area and give an understanding of its topography and rural setting (View 4).



**Scenic views** from outside the conservation area towards Hall Place and the village, which help to appreciate its rural setting (View A).

## 5.0 Open space assessment

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

- It allows views;
- It 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 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. Although the grounds of Hall Place are private, they have been included in this assessment because of their visibility from public spaces and their fundamental importance to the conservation area.

The contributions of individual parcels of land are mapped on the [Interactive map](#) at the front of this appraisal.

### Open spaces inside the conservation area

- Open spaces inside the conservation area, notably the village green, create the sense of openness and rural character of the village and provide attractive settings for the buildings;
- The grounds of Hall Place provide the historic parkland setting associated with the character and status of a country house.

### Open spaces outside the conservation area

- The portions of Hall Place park on Penshurst Road and between the footpath on the east side of the village and the mansion make a strong contribution because they retain their historic parkland character, which can be appreciated from the road;
- The portion of Hall Place park which is now open farmland along Hildenborough Road at the entry to the village from the north: this is important in limiting and defining the historic boundary of the village, although it has lost its historic parkland appearance;
- Parts of Hall Place park away from the road and footpath: these parts are integral to the setting and character of the country house but they are not experienced by many people and therefore make a lesser contribution;
- The land to the south of the conservation area makes little contribution since it is on the side of the village which has experienced major twentieth-century expansion, eroding the village's historic boundary; none of it plays a part in important views towards the conservation area, nor is it experienced by many people.

## 6.0 Condition and issues

The character and appearance of Leigh Conservation Area is generally well-preserved, but there are some issues which affect it and should be addressed in its ongoing management.

- Clutter around the old cattle trough at the entrance of the village detract from this historic feature and the streetscene;
- Moving the Scout hut to a new location would improve the setting of the architecturally and historically interesting waterworks building on Kiln Lane;
- Over-scaled new buildings and extensions on existing houses detract from the character and appearance of the conservation area;
- Plastic windows and doors, which are alien and unsympathetic materials for historic buildings, detract from the character and appearance of the conservation area;
- Encroachment by traffic onto the edges of the village green is currently managed successfully, but needs monitoring to ensure the character and appearance of the green is not harmed.



*Clutter around the old cattle trough*



*Damage to the edges of the village green*

## 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 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 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 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)

## Conservation area boundary

### *Recommendation*

Leigh Conservation Area should be extended to include the northern section of Crandalls, Garden Cottages and properties on Powder Mill Lane, so as to protect buildings and open space which contribute to the conservation area's special interest.

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

The properties that are recommended for addition to the conservation area are the northern section of Crandalls including land to the south of site of former Public Conveniences, and land belonging to Chestnuts; The Green nos. 1–22 Garden Cottages, 21 and 22 Barnetts Road, 1 Powder Mill Lane, The Hawthorns, Oak Tree Cottage The Beeches, The Cottage and Rosslyn, all on Powder Mill Lane.

- Northern section of Crandalls, Land to the south of Site of Former Public Conveniences, and land belonging to Chestnuts, The Green, Leigh

The openness provided by the northern section of Crandalls and the side garden and drive to Chestnuts, enclosed by traditional split log fencing, are clearly visible from the village green and contribute to the character of The Green.

- 1–22 Garden Cottages

Garden Cottages is an intact grouping of early twentieth-century houses designed by the architects Stanley-Barrett and Driver who had exhibited similar designs in the Letchworth Garden City 'Cheap Cottages Exhibition' in 1905. It is of historic interest as a representative, but early example of the co-partnership housing model which flourished in the early twentieth-century, most notably in the garden cities. It also has historic associations with two local figures, Liberal MP Alfred Paget Hedges and Dr Frank Fraser and illustrates an important aspect of Leigh's social history. Architecturally it is of interest as a set-piece, single-phase development that in layout and house design incorporates many features that are associated with the nationally important Arts and Craft style and garden city movement. The building form and layout of the development survives intact.

- 21 and 22 Barnetts Road, 1 Powder Mill Lane, The Hawthorns, Oak Tree Cottage The Beeches, The Cottage and Rosslyn, all on Powder Mill Lane

This run of twentieth-century houses on Powder Mill Lane contributes positively to the character and appearance of the conservation area because of their traditional forms and sympathetic scale, materials and details, such as clay tile roofs, roughcast walls and casement windows. It is recommended that the strip of land on the north side of Powder Mill Lane, opposite these houses, is also included in the conservation area, to protect their setting. This follows the precedent at the west end of Powder Mill Lane, where a strip of land by the road successfully preserves the rural character and appearance of the area, despite the houses built behind it (i.e. Oak Lodge to Hedgerows).

## 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 on the High Street is a mixture of standard, poor quality design and some more appropriate, sometimes historic elements. The character and appearance of the High Street and the Village Green are sensitive to changes in street furniture and surfaces and careful consideration is needed before any changes are made. Small changes made over time can easily have a negative cumulative effect.

More sensitive, better quality design and removal of unnecessary or superfluous street furniture or signage would help to enhance the conservation area. The edges of the Village Green need special attention to ensure they are not eroded by traffic.

Management of the public realm depends on public bodies rather than owners of private property. Kent County Council, Sevenoaks District Council and Leigh 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: <https://bit.ly/2OD4JXx>

# Alan Baxter

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