

# Eynsford Conservation Area Appraisal

July 2023

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

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

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## 1.0 Overview of Eynsford Conservation Area

Eynsford is an historic village in west Kent with a population of 1,814 (2011 census). It is six and a half miles to the north of Sevenoaks and approx. 18 miles south-east of central London. The village is situated in the bottom of the River Darent Valley, giving it a strong sense of rural detachment, though both the M20 and M25 are less than 2 miles away. Eynsford is connected to Sevenoaks and London by the railway which first opened in 1862. The village lies within the Metropolitan Green Belt and the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. There are also three scheduled monuments in the parish: Eynsford Castle, Eynsford Bridge and Lullingstone Roman Villa.

### Conservation Area boundary

Eynsford Conservation Area encompasses the whole of the historic village, except some late-nineteenth century housing on each end of the High Street. The westward boundary extends to the railway viaduct along the valley of the Darent. Twentieth-century housing developments within and on the edges of the village (primarily on the eastern side) are excluded from the Conservation Area.

### Designation history

The Eynsford Conservation Area was first designated in 1973 and subsequently extended in 2006 following a review by the District Council.

### Topography and geology

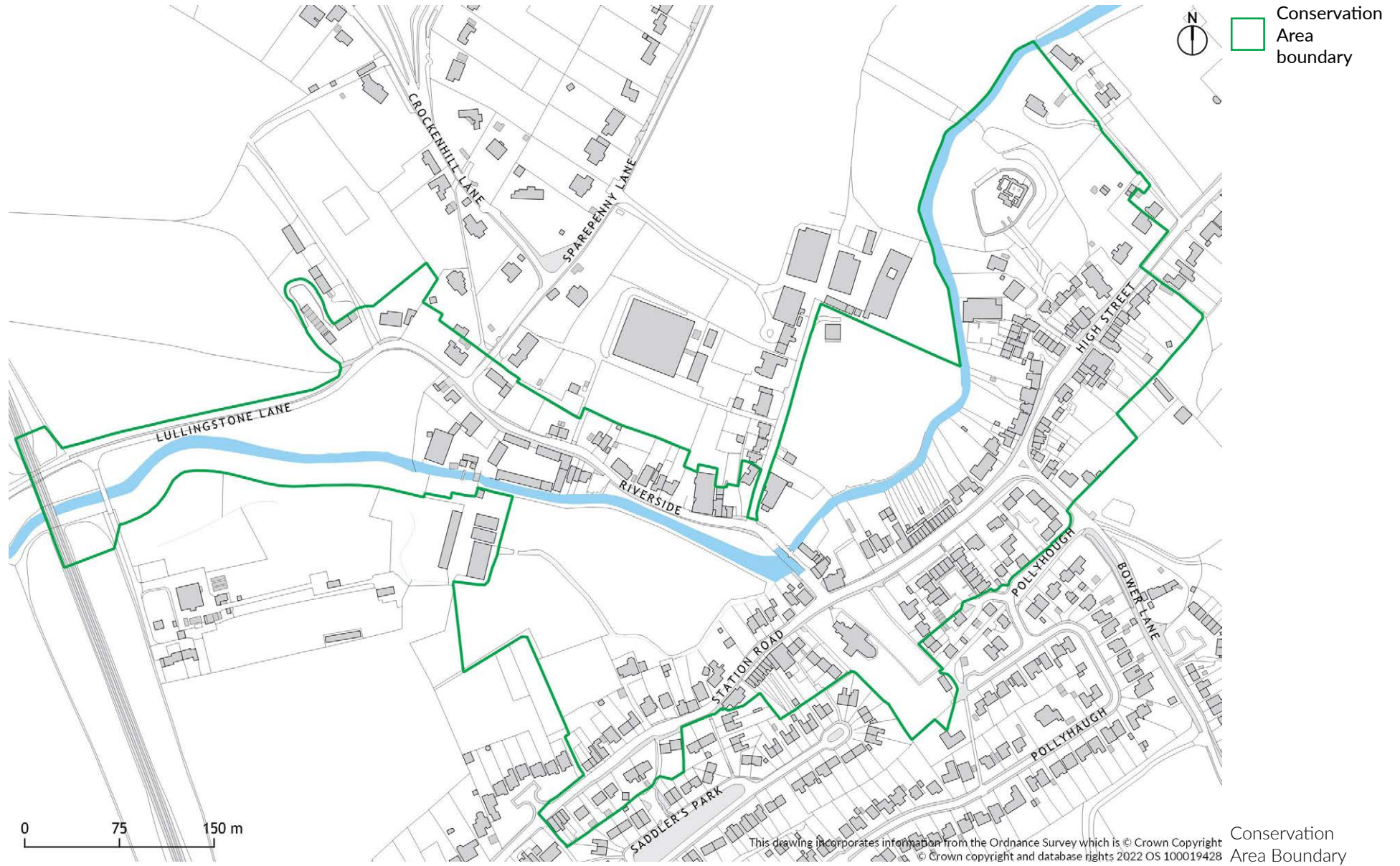
The topography of the village has been shaped by the River Darent, which flows through a gap in the North Downs, north of Sevenoaks. The High Street runs parallel to the river until the historic crossing point, at which point Riverside follows the river upstream. Views of the river, meadows and the surrounding gentle slopes are crucial to Eynsford's sense of place and its special character.

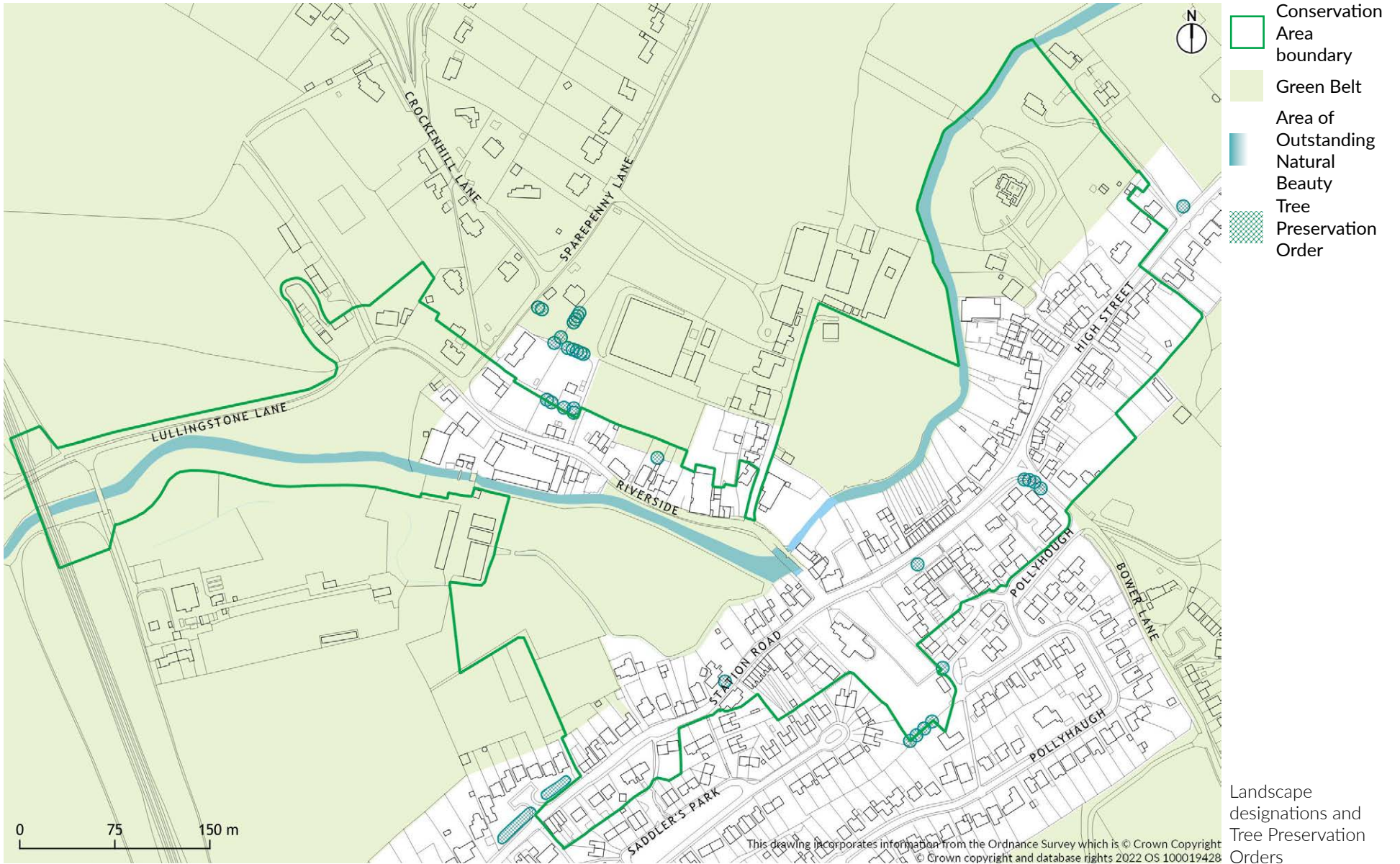
The village sits on a mixture of gravel, sand and clay in the valley, with a band of chalk beneath the higher part rising up to the Downs. As a result, there is no good building stone, although much use is made of flint which is found nearby. Local clay has traditionally been used for making roof tiles and bricks.

### Summary of special interest

Eynsford is an attractive riverside village nestled in the North Downs, historically focussed around two centres: the castle to the east, and upstream the church and crossing point over the River Darwent. The main features of special historic and architectural interest in the Eynsford Conservation Area are:

- The crossing of the River Darent. This provides a particularly picturesque composition, with the bridge and ford in the foreground of attractive views east, to the church, and west, to the water meadows; historic buildings also contribute to this area;
- An exceptionally well-preserved example of an early Norman castle at the northern end of the village, though not visible from the High Street;
- A large number of historic buildings including the eleventh-century flint church, late medieval timber-framed houses, Georgian brick buildings and Victorian terraces;
- Traditional craftsmanship embodied in original building materials and architectural features;
- Unfolding, linear High Street, with views of the Downs in the background; and,
- A well-defined boundary on the western side of the village, preserving its rural relationship with the river and the Downs rising either side. Most new development lies behind older buildings along the eastern side of the High Street, and therefore out of view.





## 2.0 Historical development

### Beginnings

Evidence of settlements in the Darent Valley stretch as far back as Neolithic times. The Romans later favoured the valley, with the well-preserved Roman villa, Lullingstone, situated west of the village upstream from the Conservation Area.

### Middle ages to 1800

The name Eynsford is derived from Old English, meaning 'Ægen's Ford', suggesting that the village grew around the river crossing. This is likely the one still in use today, because of the proximity of the parish church. 300 metres downstream from here is Eynsford Castle, probably built by William of Eynsford, the son of Ralph, the first Norman tenant of the Archbishops of Canterbury. This contains some of the earliest Norman stonework defences in the country: the lower two thirds of the enclosure wall are thought to date to 1088. The present parish church, St Martin, was built soon after, at the expense of William. Further works were carried out to St Martins in the thirteenth, fourteenth, sixteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Evidence of the pre-industrial prosperity of the village can be found in surviving buildings. These include a number built during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, such as Malt Cottage, Elizabeth Cottages and Tudor Cottage. From the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, some larger houses survive, for example Ford House, Eynsford House and Russell Garth. The charming bridge dates to 1596.

### Nineteenth and twentieth centuries

The railway arrived at Eynsford in 1862, stimulating an expansion of the village to the north and south of the High Street. The terrace between Bower Lane and St Martins is an example of the buildings also erected within the footprint of the pre-nineteenth century village at this time.

Growth continued in the early-twentieth century, such as the row of semi-detached houses on the northern side of Bower Lane. These were followed immediately after the Second World War by further groups of new houses east of the High Street, along St Martin's Drive, Pollyhaugh and Saddler's Park.

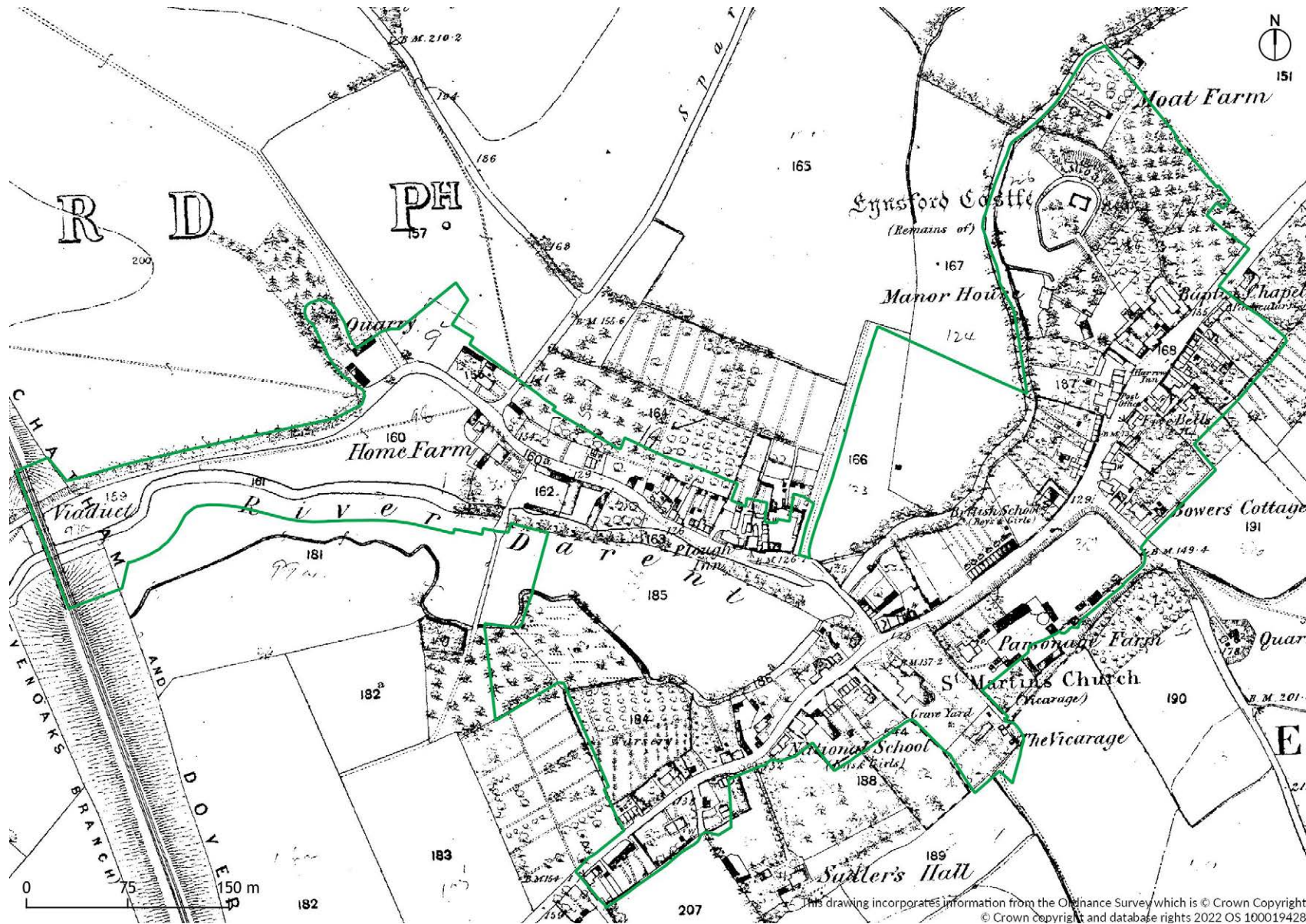
New development slowed after this, due to the creation of the Metropolitan Green Belt (1950s) and the designation of the Eynsford Conservation Area (1973).



### Historical associations

Eynsford has been the home of well-known residents such as the composer Peter Warlock, who lived in the village for four years in the 1920s, and Arthur Mee (1875-1943) editor of the *Children's Newspaper* and the *Children's Encyclopaedia*.



Riverside from the eastern bank, approximately 1885




  
 151
   
 Conservation Area boundary

First edition OS, surveyed 1865, published 1869

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## 3.0 Architectural and built character

### Spatial character

Eynsford is an example of a riverine village settlement with two historic centres: the ancient river crossing and parish church is one, and the Norman castle downstream to the north is the other. It appears that these two foci attracted separate clusters of houses and trades, which over the centuries have gradually coalesced along the High Street to form the single linear village we see today. Its spatial character consists of:

- Two historic centres: the river crossing and the Norman castle;
- A linear form, along the High Street;
- A secondary arm along Riverside, following the banks of the Darent;
- Where the two meet, a picturesque grouping including the bridge and the church, which is built on higher ground clear of flooding;
- Buildings that are small in scale;
- The High Street is more enclosed, with many buildings in terraces or pairs, and large numbers built right up to the pavement;
- By contrast Riverside is open, with large areas of meadow and other open space alongside the river;
- The position of the church on higher ground;
- Fewer front gardens than some other villages in the District. They are found primarily on Station Road and Lullingstone Lane;
- Trees are a strong feature in most parts of the Conservation Area, concealing from view many of the newer houses along the High Street; and,
- A clearly defined village boundary on the western side of the village, with open landscape up to the viaduct.



The openness of the Riverside area



The more closed nature of the High Street

## Building forms and details

The historic buildings which contribute positively to the Conservation Area are characterised by the following:

- Mostly small in scale and domestic in character;
- The older houses tend to be more complex in form, and later buildings simpler in outline;
- The oldest houses were detached, but later subdivision and construction introduced a mixture of terraces, pairs or small groups as well. More recent houses have tended to be detached;
- Predominantly two storeys;
- Traditional forms of pitched roofs, with a mixture of gabled, hipped or catslides;
- Brick chimneys, tall and prominent;
- Timber-framed sash windows and a mixture of timber and metal casement windows. Many of the casements are leaded lights; and,
- Panelled timber doors.



Casement windows



Pitched roofs



Detached houses



Terraced houses



Tall brick chimneys



Building forms



## Architectural styles

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



Vernacular



Vernacular



Georgian



Victorian workers' cottages



Victorian commercial architecture



Old mill buildings

## Traditional building materials

A limited palette of traditional building materials makes a significant contribution to the special interest and distinctiveness of the Conservation Area. Many of these are characteristic of West Kent:

### Pre-1850

- Flint, used extensively in the church and the castle, and sparingly elsewhere;
- Timber framing with rendered infill panels or concealed behind lime render, or sometimes refaced by tile hanging or brick;
- Lime render;
- White painted timber weatherboarding;
- Timber casement windows, from c.1700 timber sash windows;
- Local red brick, usually laid in Flemish bond often incorporating dark headers; and,
- Roofs of handmade clay plain tiles.



Timber frame



Local red brick



Clay roof tiles



Weatherboarding



Brick and flint



Flemish bond brickwork

### After 1850

- Buff or red coloured brick laid in Flemish bond;
- Handmade clay plain tile or Welsh slate roofs;
- Timber sash windows; and,
- Wooden shop fronts.



Half timbering and red brick



Welsh slate roofs



Yellow brick and clay roofs



Buff brick

## Boundaries and streetscape

Boundary treatments also make an important contribution to the character and appearance of conservation areas. The use of a mixture of low brick walls, wooden palings and hedges reinforce the historic village character. Alongside these, there are a number of less common boundary treatments, such as high brick walls (primarily found on the southern end of the High Street) and knapped flint walls (found around the church and in a few other locations).

Elsewhere, there are a large number of buildings that stand right on the edge of the pavement or the street, with no (or very little) front garden.

Modern bow-topped metal railings, primarily found on the northern end of the High Street, are not of a historic pattern and therefore not consistent with the Conservation Area's special character and appearance.

All roads are laid in tarmac, with pavements laid in a mixture of tarmac and York stone. There are a number of manhole covers of historic interest. They are identified by the name 'Gibson-Eynsford' cast in to them.

Road markings are prevalent in the village, with the most common being:

- Broken white lines (High Street);
- Parking lines (High Street south and Riverside); and,
- Double yellow lines (High Street south and Riverside).

The street furniture and highways infrastructure on the High Street is almost all of a standard design and harmful to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area. This includes bus stops, bins, modern street lamps, reflector bollards and a guard rail. Alongside this, there is also a profusion of traffic signage on both the High Street and Riverside.

An exception is the charming, ornately cast early electricity supply box on the west side of High Street just south of Bower Lane. This rare example is of both historic and aesthetic interest.



Iron railings



Wooden palings



Hedges



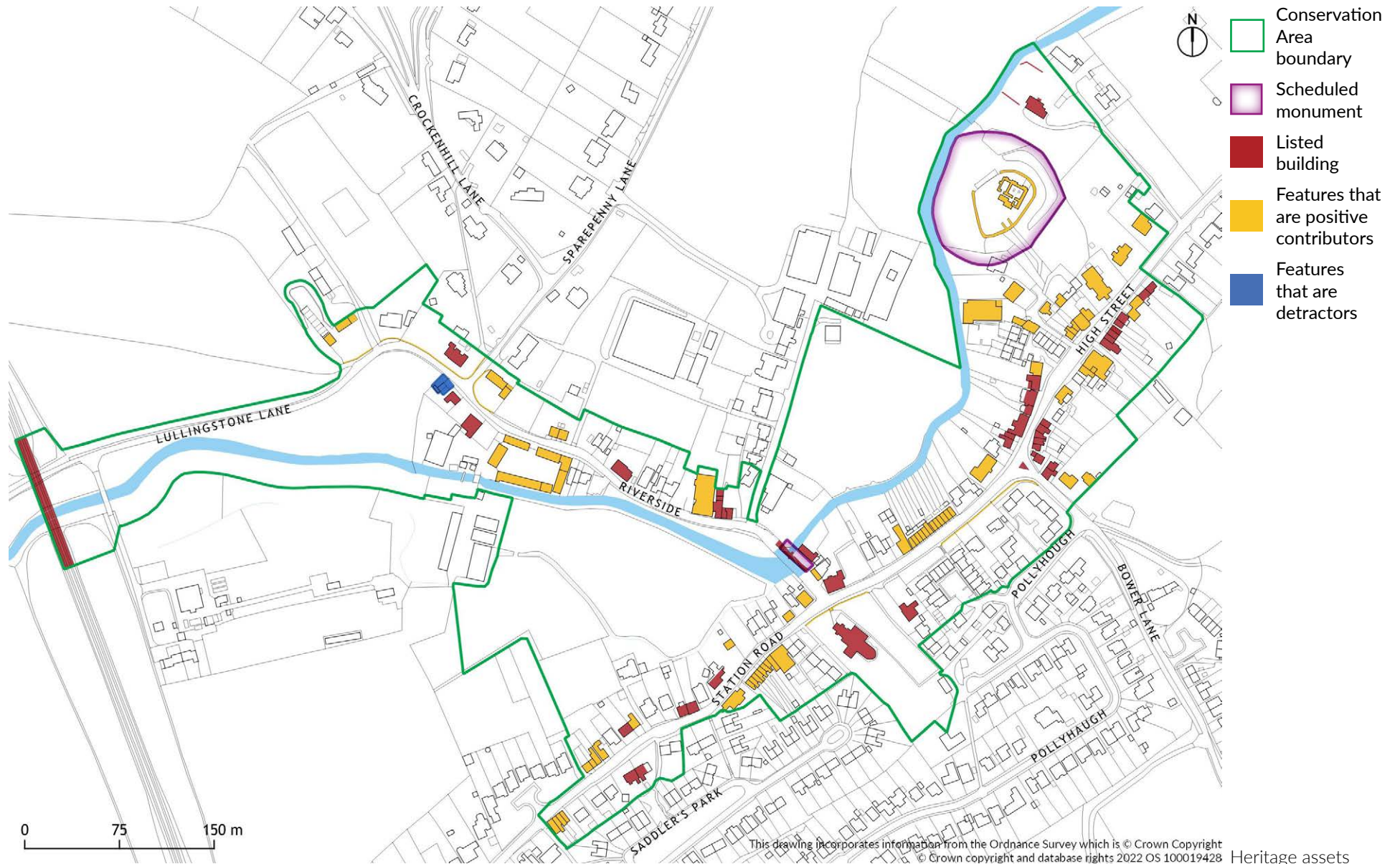
High brick walls



Knapped flint walls



Bow-topped railings



## 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 and listed buildings), others negatively (detractors). The contributions of individual elements are shown on the map on [page 12](#).

### Positive contributors

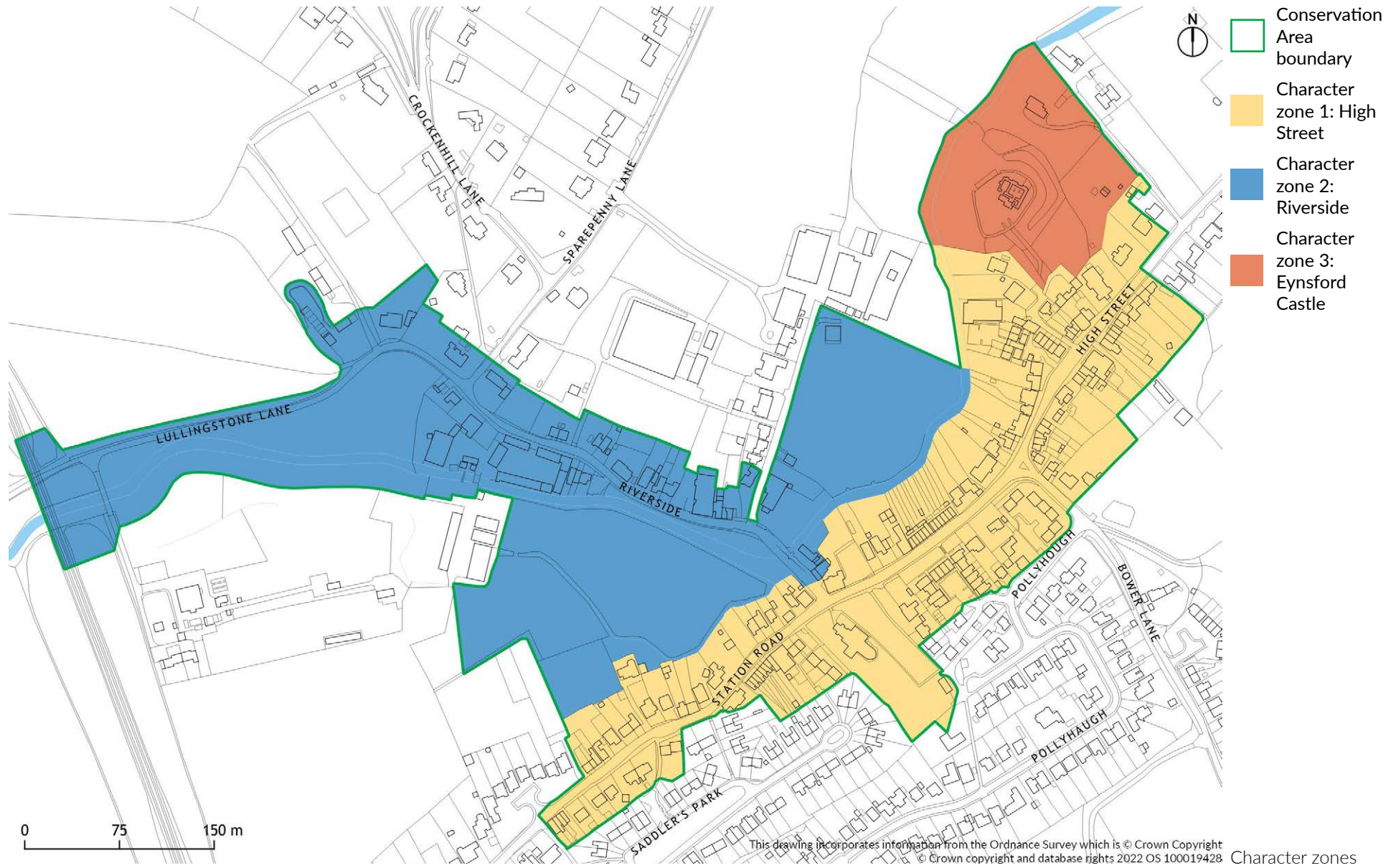
The Conservation Area contains a large number of heritage assets, both designated and non-designated, all of which contribute to its architectural and historic interest. The extent of a building's contribution to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area is not limited to its street elevations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

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

### Detractors

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





## Character Zones

### Character Zone 1: High Street

- Defined by two historic centres, one by the entrance of the castle and another by the church and river crossing;
- Views constantly unfold and reveal along the winding High Street;
- Variety of building types illustrating the economic, social and cultural life of the village, including many houses and all the village institutions, such as the two churches, three pubs, the shops, the village hall and the former school;
- Many of the buildings face directly onto the street or have very small front gardens. The exception to this is the Church of St Martin and the houses immediately north;
- A particularly important group is the two groups of houses dating from the fifteenth to eighteenth centuries on the junction between High Street and Bower Lane and immediately to the north. These include: Bower Cottage; Windmill Cottage; Elizabeth Cottages; Boyne; Vine Cottage; Rose Cottage; Russell Garth; Russell Cottage; and Eynsford House;
- Much of the High Street generally has an enclosed character; and,
- The Church of St Martin and its steeple is the only building that can be seen from multiple points of the High Street. This provides a 'full stop' in views from the north end of the village.





### Character Zone 2: Riverside

- Characterful riverside setting, with views up and down the river, and into the meadows and fields beyond;
- Well-defined rural approach to the village;
- Excellent views of the sixteenth-century bridge, the ford and the medieval parish church, and their townscape context;
- Individual buildings surrounded by green spaces; and,
- Abundance of green space and trees.



### Character Zone 3: Eynsford Castle

- Visually separated from the High Street by buildings and mature trees;
- Exceptionally important ruins, set in green space beside the River Darent;
- Contiguous with green space and open country on the opposite side of the river, rising up to the Downs opposite;
- Good views from the castle to the surrounding North Downs; and,
- No through routes or traffic, so quiet and tranquil.



## 4.0 Views

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

Three types of view have been identified, along with examples of each type. These are shown on the map on [page 19](#). In complex historic townscapes such as that found in Eynsford, such a list of views cannot be definitive, but those that have been selected illustrate the nature of views that are important in the Eynsford Conservation Area:

- Views are generally linear and unfold along the winding High Street and other roads;
- Views of the surrounding North Downs are limited, however there are many expansive views around the River Darent;
- Highly special views around the bridge and medieval church, and of and from the Norman castle; and,
- A view of the village from the railway viaduct, seen in its landscape context.



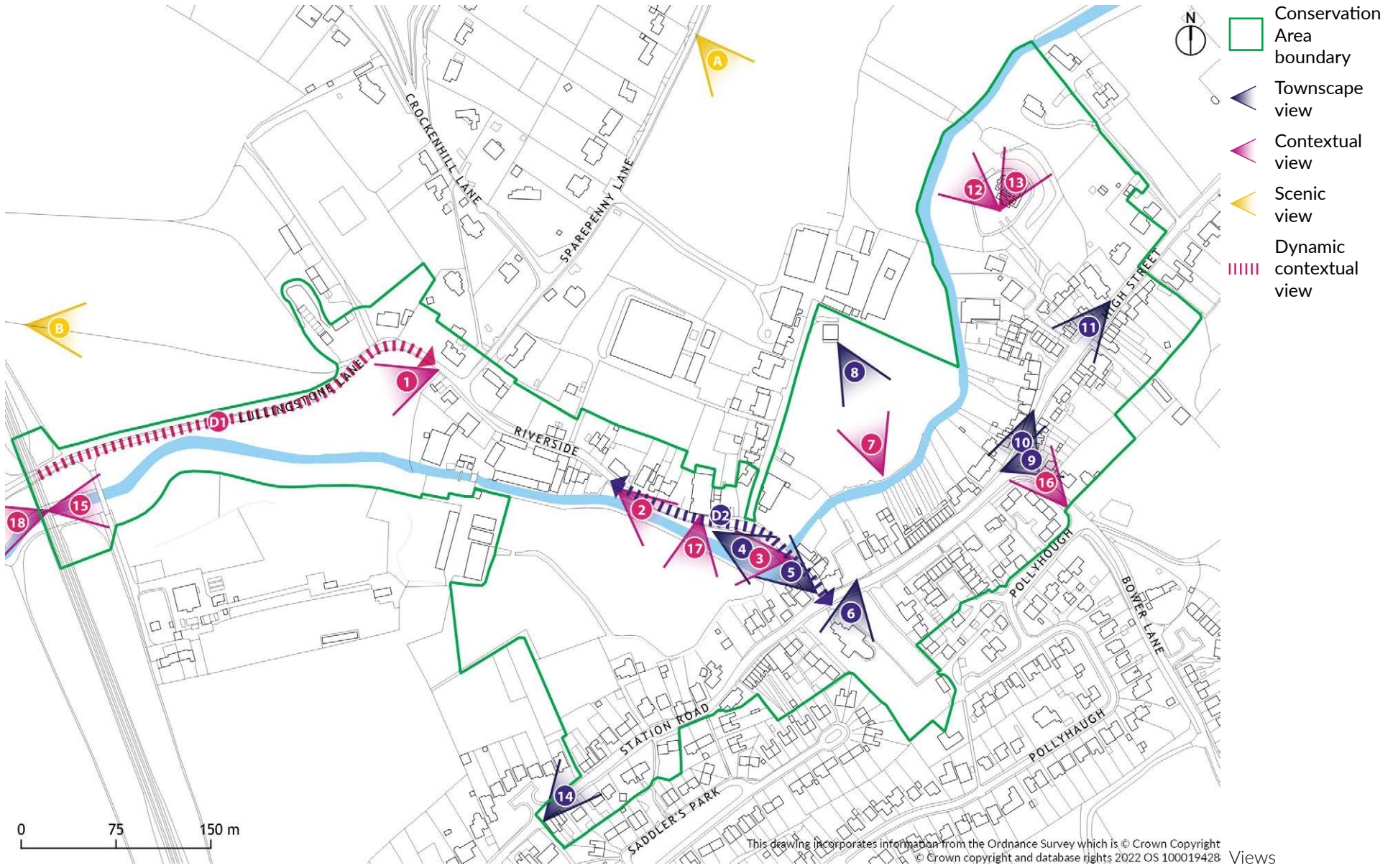
**Townscape views** within the Conservation Area which include a mix of building types and materials and give a sense of the spatial character and architectural quality of the village. Trees play an important part in these views, but are sometimes intrusive.



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



**Scenic views** from outside the Conservation Area, which take in the village as a whole, together with its surrounding landscape and help to appreciate its rural setting and topographical context.



## 5.0 Open space assessment

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

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

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

The contributions of individual parcels of land are shown on [page 21](#).

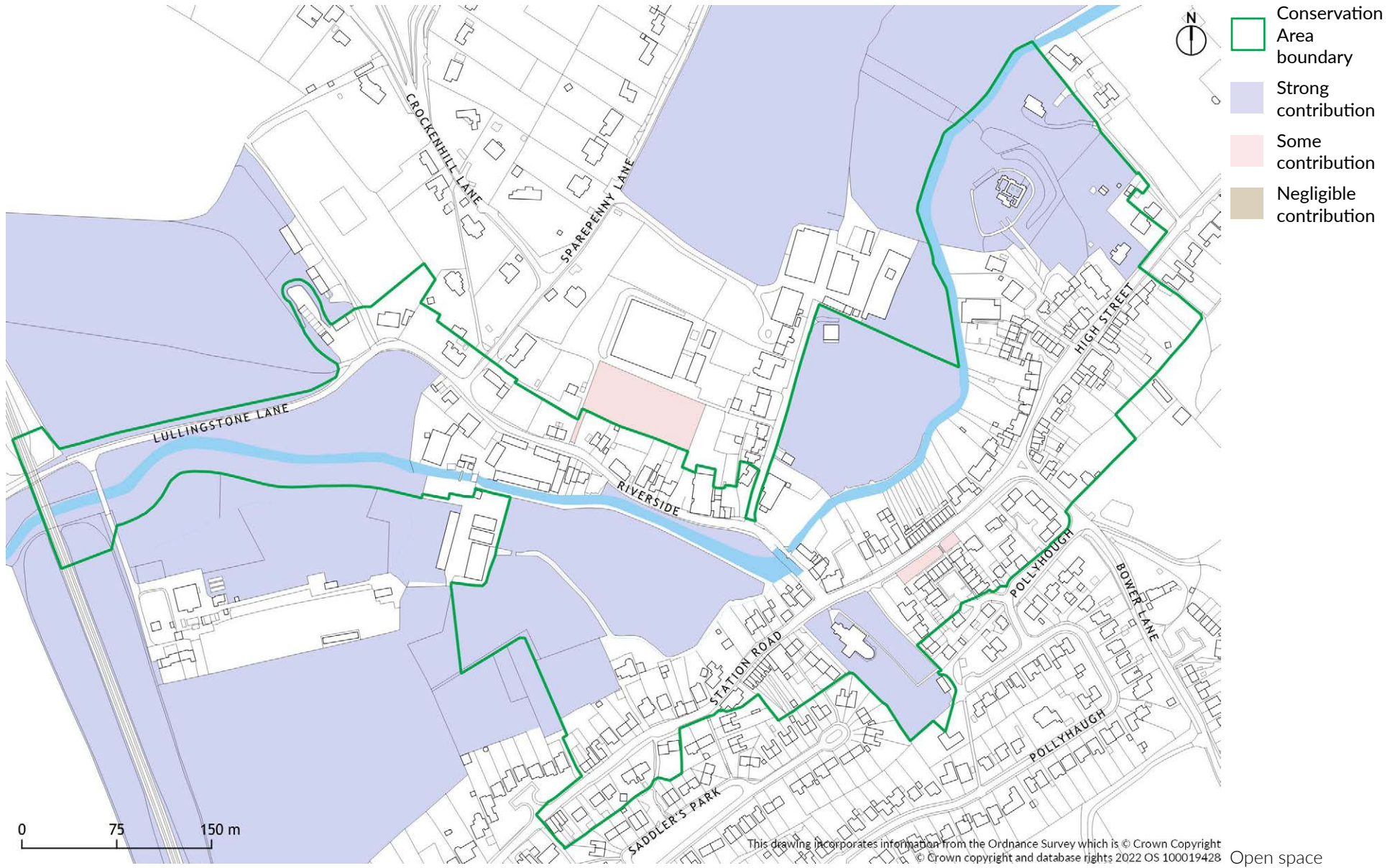
### Open space inside the Conservation Area

- The greenspace around Eynsford Castle is intrinsic to its heritage significance (kept open in order to provide no cover for attacking forces) and is essential for the appreciation of the scheduled monument;
- The meadows south of Riverside are highly picturesque, have ecological value and are fundamental to understanding Eynsford's riverside origins and historic character. They provide a natural setting to the river and village, enhancing views across and out of the Conservation Area;
- Beyond this, the open space south of Lullingstone Lane contributes strongly to the rural setting of the River Darent and views from Eynsford Viaduct;
- The churchyard is a major and historic green space at the heart of the Eynsford, separating the twentieth-century development on Pollyhaugh and Saddler's Park from the older village;

- The green space between the High Street and the modern houses west of Pollyhaugh provides an essential buffer between the historic village and more recent development; and,
- Eynsford Cricket Ground enhances the riverside setting of the Darent north of the bridge.

### Open space outside the Conservation Area

- The land south of the River Darent, outside the Conservation Area, contributes strongly to the setting of the river and village, reinforcing the historic edge of the settlement and enhances views out of the Conservation Area;
- The fields east of Sparepenny Lane provide an agricultural boundary to the north of the village, contributing positively to views into the village and out of Eynsford Castle; and,
- The field north of Lullingstone Lane allows for some of the best views into the village. The rural setting of the field and the land around the Darent in the foreground pleasantly complements the outline of the village in the background.



## 6.0 Condition and issues

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

- Because the houses are generally small, there is considerable pressure for extensions, which would detract if they were not of appropriate scale and materials;
- Over-scaled new buildings or extensions are harmful because of the modest historic scale of housing in the village;
- Plastic windows and doors are alien and unsympathetic materials for historic buildings and therefore detract from their character;
- Parking on the street and in front of houses is visually intrusive and detracts from the historic character and appearance of the streetscape;
- A number of car parks are open to the street and in doing so harm the historic character and appearance of the Conservation Area; and,
- The extent of highways signage, road markings, bus stops etc are visually intrusive and detract from the character of some parts of the Conservation Area, such as the bridge over the Darent, which is a highly special part of the Conservation Area deserving of more sympathetic treatment.



Car park opening onto the street



Road markings and street furniture

## 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 Eynsford made in the preparation of this appraisal.

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

#### **Recommendation**

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

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

### **Design of new buildings and alterations to existing buildings**

#### **Recommendation**

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

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

### **Development in the setting of the Conservation Area**

#### **Recommendation**

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

The village's historic boundaries are still well-defined on the eastern side especially and as a result the Conservation Area has a well-preserved rural setting which contributes strongly to its character and appearance. Its position in the bottom of the Darent Valley, between the Downs, means that open space in the valley floor and on the sides of the Downs play an important part in the way the Conservation Area is experienced. Development in its setting could therefore potentially have a harmful impact if it erodes the village boundary where that is still well-defined or harms important views in to or out of the Conservation Area. As identified in this appraisal, different areas of open space around the Conservation Area make a different contribution to its character and appearance (see [section 5.0 on page 20](#)).



## Guidance

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

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

## Enforcement

### Recommendation

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

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

## Public realm

### Recommendation

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

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

There are also a number of car parks, one public and some private, that are open to the street and in this way undermine the historic character and enclosure of the streetscape. The District Council and Parish Council should work with the owners and managers to introduce appropriate screening or suitable boundary treatments to reduce this harm.

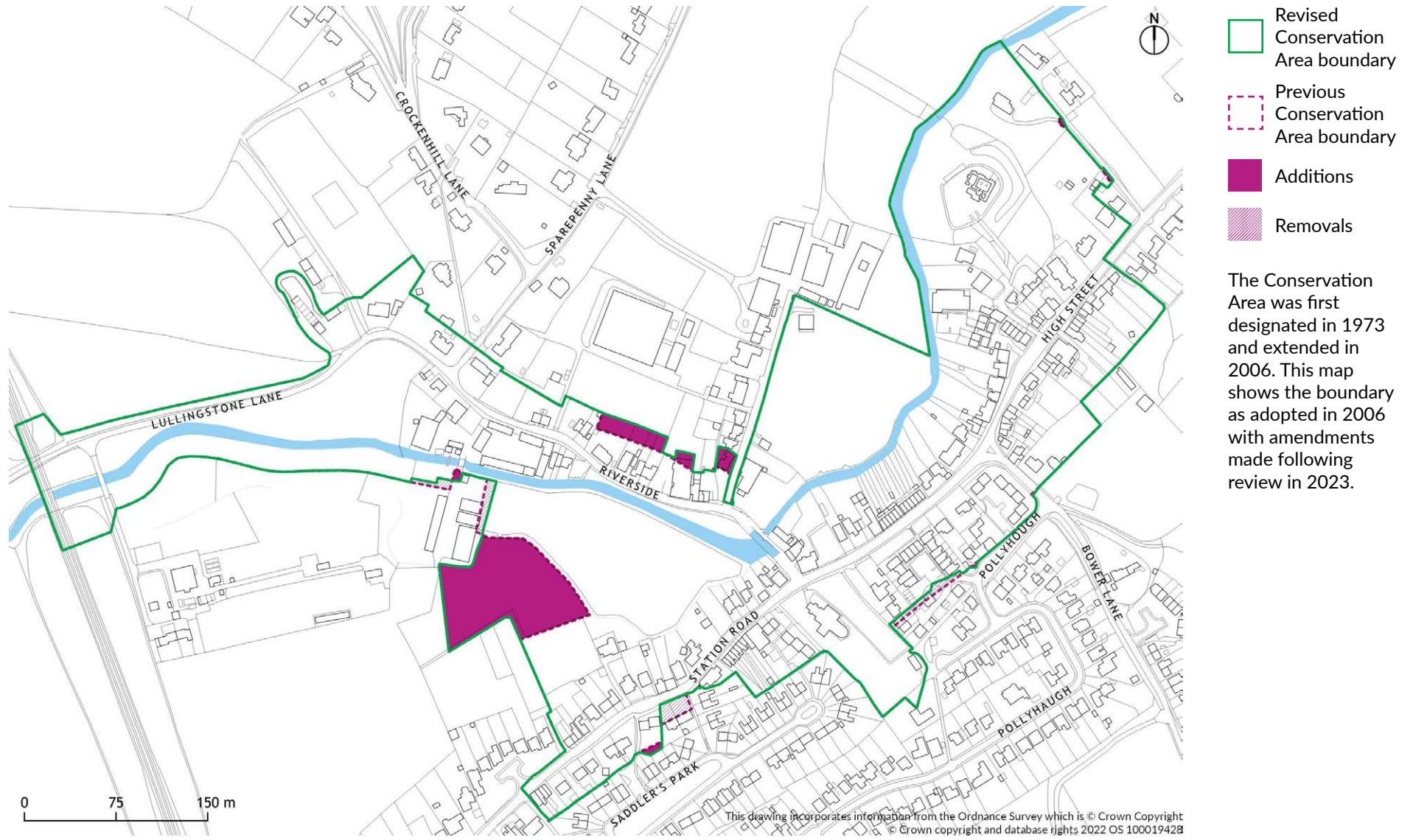
## **Parking**

### **Recommendation**

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

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

## 8.0 Appendix: 2023 boundary changes



# Alan Baxter

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**Reviewed by** Gemma Fowlie

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