

Farningham Conservation Area Appraisal

July 2023

This appraisal for Farningham 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.

| | | |
|-----|--|----|
| 1.0 | Overview of Farningham Conservation Area | 1 |
| 2.0 | Historical development | 5 |
| 3.0 | Architectural and built character | 7 |
| 4.0 | Views | 20 |
| 5.0 | Open space assessment | 22 |
| 6.0 | Condition and issues | 24 |
| 7.0 | Management recommendations | 25 |
| 8.0 | Appendix: 2023 boundary changes | 27 |



1.0 Overview of Farningham Conservation Area

Farningham is an historic roadside village in west Kent with a population of 1,319 (2011 census). It is seven and a half miles north of Sevenoaks and 18 miles south-east of central London, within the Metropolitan Green Belt and the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The village grew up where one of the historic roads from London to Canterbury and Dover crosses the River Darent, and is now bypassed in close proximity by the A20 and the M20. Although not served by a railway station, Eysnford and Farningham Road Stations are both less than two miles away and served by trains to London, Sevenoaks and Rochester.

Conservation Area boundary

Farningham Conservation Area encompasses the whole of the historic village, except for some late-nineteenth century housing east of the High Street. Twentieth-century housing developments within and on the edges of the village are excluded from the Conservation Area.

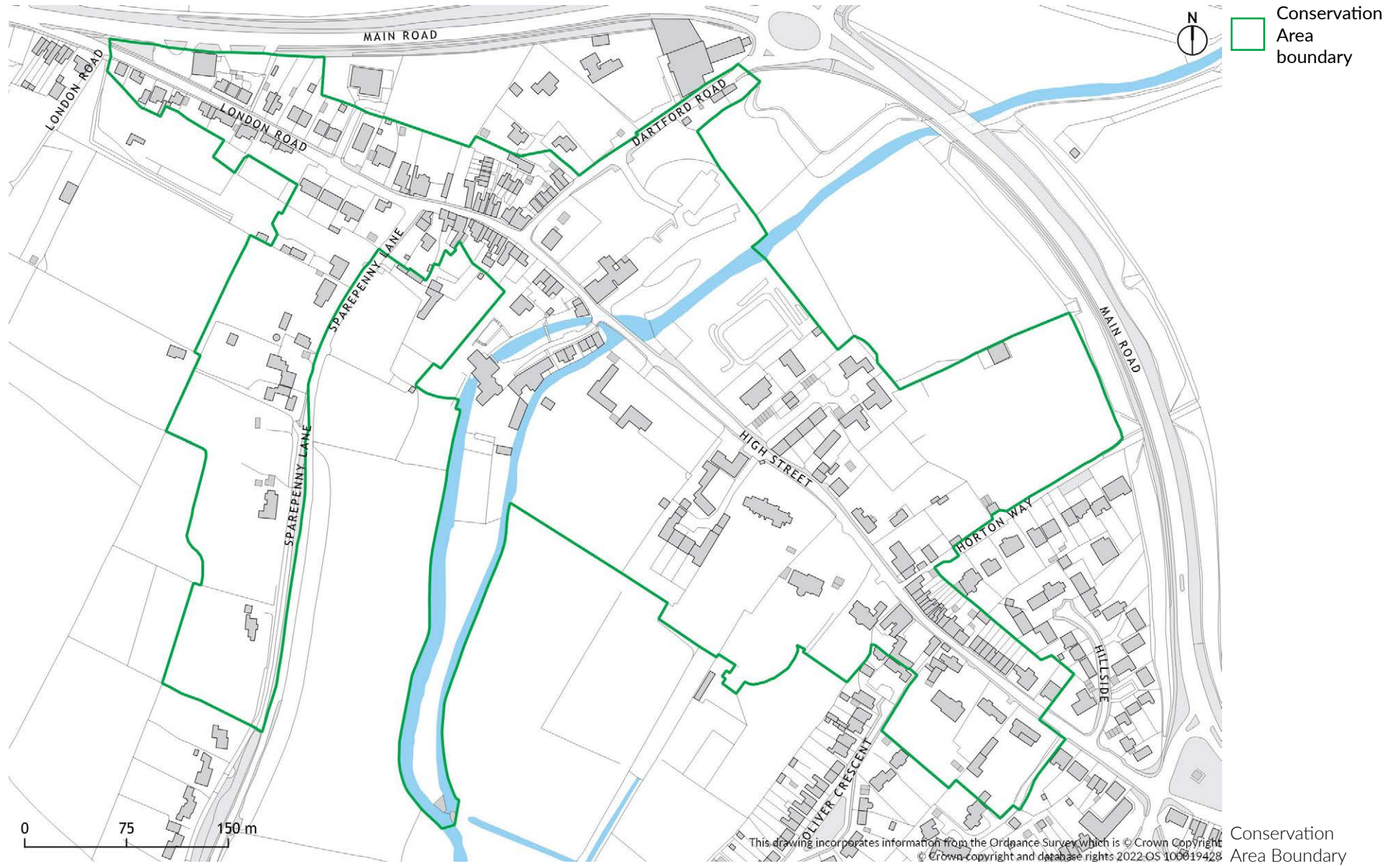
Designation history

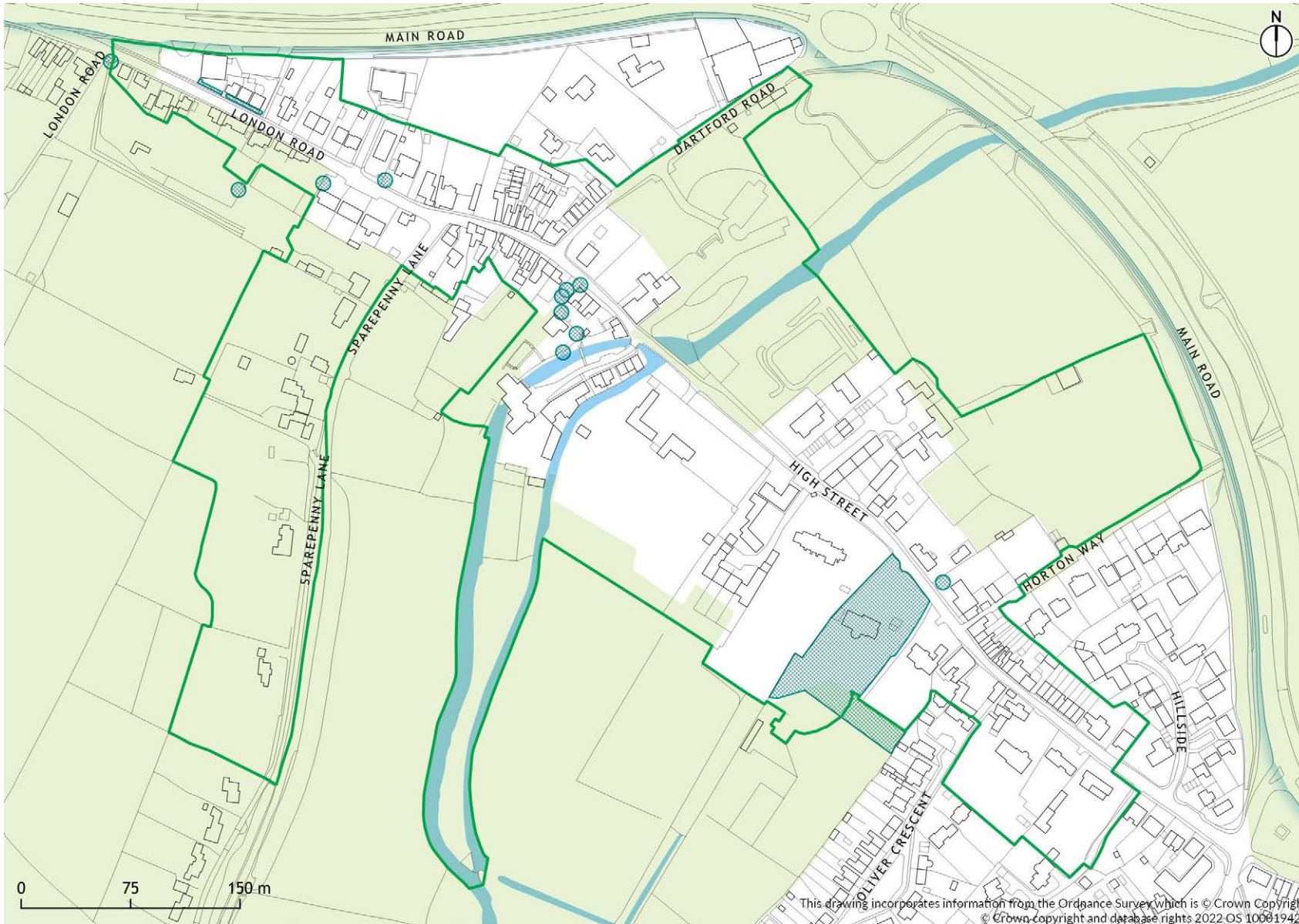
The Farningham Conservation Area was first designated in 1969. The boundaries were expanded in 1990 and 2006 after reviews by Sevenoaks District Council.

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. One of the historic roads from London to Dover crosses the Darent at this point. As the High Street, this forms the backbone of the village, descending down, across and up the other side of the valley. Sparepenny Lane and Eysnford Road head south (upstream) on either side of the valley. The presence of the Darent and views of the surrounding hills are crucial to Farningham's sense of place and its special character.

In the valley bottom, the village sits on gravel, sand and clay. The higher parts on either side are located on the band of chalk which forms the North Downs. As a result, there is no good building stone, although much use is made of local flint. Local clay has also traditionally been used for making roof tiles and bricks.





- Conservation Area boundary
- Green Belt
- Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
- Tree Preservation Order

Landscape designations and Tree Preservation Orders

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Summary of special interest

Farningham is a very attractive, well-preserved and historic village in a good landscape setting. The main features of the special historic and architectural interest of Farningham Conservation Area are:

- Its character as a historic river crossing settlement, with a highly picturesque area around the eighteenth-century bridge, including an exceptionally well-preserved mill complex, the Lion Hotel, the rare cattle screen across the Darent, and the wooded banks of the river;
- Its character as an historic roadside village that prospered in the eighteenth century as a staging post on the London – Maidstone – Dover road. This is reflected, for example, in the number and nature of buildings erected in that era, some of which have a more urban character than most villages in the District;
- The resulting linear nature of the village along the High Street, which has an enclosed townscape on the valley sides and a much more open and green character in the valley bottom;
- The Conservation Area contains early works by two prominent architects, Jessica Albery, an early pioneering female architect, and Allies and Morrison, who went on to become one of Britain's largest architecture firms. Jessica Albery designed the Village Hall, the rebuilt parts of the Manor House following WWII and some interesting houses just outside the Conservation Area;
- The wealth of historic buildings, including the flint-faced medieval church, the Manor House, late medieval timber-framed houses; the weatherboarded mill complex, farm buildings and eighteenth-century inns, houses and terraces;

- Traditional craftsmanship embodied in building materials and architectural features;
- The topography and landscape, with the river Darent flowing through a green corridor in the middle of the village, and the North Downs rising to the south;
- Well-defined boundaries which preserve the historic core's rural setting, with limited twentieth-century expansion primarily on the eastern side of the village; and,
- Strong visual connections to the enfolding landscape of the Darent Valley, with hills forming part of the background of many views.



2.0 Historical development

Beginnings

Evidence of settlements in the Darent Valley stretch back to the Neolithic era; evidence of an Iron Age farmstead was unearthed in 1973. The Romans later settled in the Darent Valley, with at least three Roman villas and three Roman farmsteads known to have existed within the modern parish.

Middle ages to 1800

A Saxon cemetery was unearthed in the 1930s, with the name Farningham likely appearing during this period. The first known landlord was Archbishop Alphege, who in the year 1010 gave Farningham to the monastery of Christ Church in Canterbury.

The oldest standing building in the village is the parish church of St Peter and St Paul, which has fabric dating from the thirteenth century. There are few other pre-1700 buildings, but many more from the eighteenth century, when the village prospered as a staging point for increasingly heavy traffic between London, Maidstone, Canterbury and Dover. New inns were erected to serve the stagecoaches, such as the Grade II listed Lion Hotel, and to improve the road the ancient ford was replaced by a bridge in 1773. Other industries included weaving and the extensive water-powered mill.

Nineteenth century

The bridge was widened in 1833, at a time when the number of stagecoaches passing through the village was at its peak. However, the arrival of the railway in the 1860s rapidly destroyed the stagecoach trade. An ironworks opened at Mount Pleasant in the same decade, and the village more than doubled in size between 1821 and 1901.

1900–1945

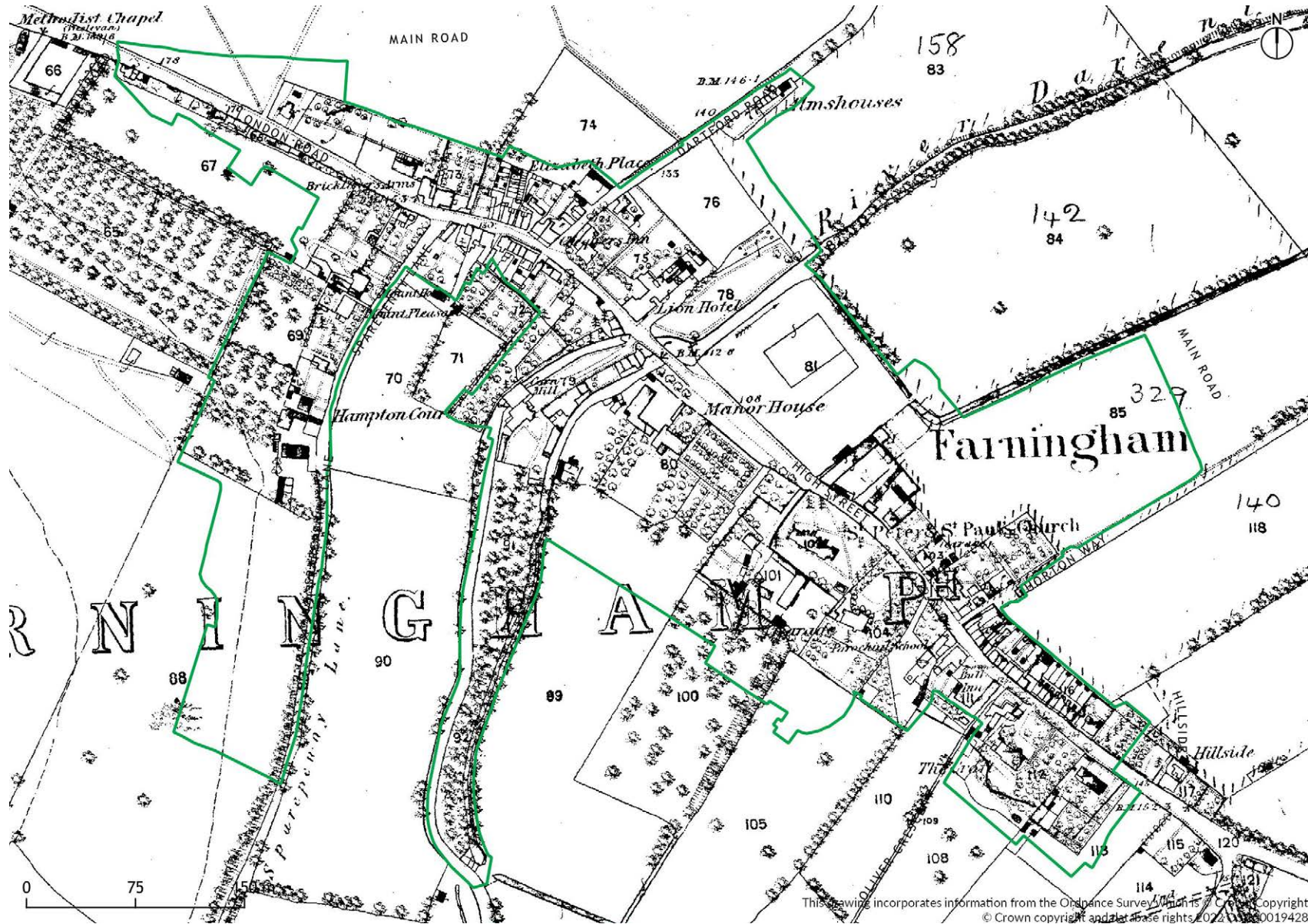
One of the most significant developments of the first half of the twentieth century was the emergence of motor vehicles. The weight of London – Kent traffic funnelled through Farningham was such that an early by-pass was built north of the village in the mid-1920s.

Post-1945

After the war, new dwellings were constructed on the southern side of the village; the population nearly doubled between the 1950s and the 1970s. Some of these houses were built by local resident and architect, Jessica Albery, who had already designed the Village Hall in the 1930s. In 1977, the M20 was extended from Wrotham to Swanley, effectively a second by-pass north of the village. The removal of through traffic has had a considerable impact on the character of the village.



The Lion Hotel in approximately 1905



Conservation Area boundary

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First edition OS, surveyed 1864-7, published 1869

3.0 Architectural and built character

Spatial character

Farningham is a historic settlement formed where a main road crosses a river. This is reflected both in its linear form – down, along and up the valley – and in the types of buildings that long-distance road traffic stimulated. Its spatial character can be summarised as follows:

- Linear development along the main street either side of a river crossing, with secondary streets and lanes intersecting;
- A spacious green village centre encompassing the Church, Manor House and river, with greater density on the valley sides, to the east and west, above the flood plain;
- A river corridor, with the mill complex, bridge, picturesque cattle screen, tree-lined banks and meadows;
- Generous amounts of public green space in the valley bottom, including the Market Meadow, the riverside and the churchyard;
- Trees make a major contribution in this part of the village, and when in leaf they largely conceal the Church and Manor House from most views;
- Compared with the broader, open and greener part of the High Street in the valley bottom, the streets climbing the valley sides are narrower and more enclosed;
- Reflecting this, buildings on the east and west ends of the High Street are generally built up to the pavement line, whereas along the central section of the High Street and on Sparepenny Lane, they are mostly set back behind in grounds and gardens;
- Also, quite a number of the buildings that are built up to the pavement line on the east and west ends of the High Street are rows or terraces, and some have three storeys, creating a more urban character than most villages in the District;
- Views along streets that evolve and change as the streets rise, wind and fall; and,
- Clearly defined historic landscape boundaries to the village, especially to the south-west.



Open space in centre of village (foreground) and more closed part of the High Street (background)

Building forms and details

The historic buildings within the Conservation Area can be summarised as follows:

- A mixture of two and three-storey houses;
- Most houses are rectangular in form and generally flat fronted;
- Buildings frequently in terraces, rows or pairs on the eastern and western sections of the High Street and on Dartford Road. However, in the central part of the High Street and on Sparepenny Lane, most buildings are detached;
- Various forms of traditional pitched roof, mostly hipped or gabled, with a number of M-shaped roofs;
- Shopfronts projecting from the fronts of the buildings;
- Tall brick chimneys;
- Timber-framed sash and casement windows; and,
- Planked and panelled timber doors.



Two storey houses



Three storey houses



M-shaped roofs



Projecting shopfronts



Tall brick chimneys



Sash windows and panelled timber door

Architectural styles

- Vernacular, a style characterised by the use of locally available materials that reflect local custom and building tradition. Characteristic features in Farningham include flint walling, weatherboarding, steeply pitched roofs covered with clay plain tiles (including Kent peg tiles) and casement windows;
- 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. In addition to detached and semi-detached houses, terraces began to appear. Slate roofs begin appearing in the nineteenth century; and,
- Neo-Georgian and vernacular houses of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries.



Vernacular



Vernacular



Polite Georgian



Polite Georgian



Victorian houses



Vernacular revival

Traditional building materials

Pre-1850

Historically, timber was plentiful in the area, as well as clay for making bricks and tiles. As a result, the characteristic materials pre-1850 are:

- Timber weatherboarding, painted (in domestic buildings) or tarred;
- Structural use of timber, often faced with weatherboarding or brick, sometimes refaced with later brick elevations;
- Flint walls;
- Locally fired red brick laid in Flemish or English Garden bond;
- Mathematical tiles on 46 and 47 High Street – fired-clay plain tiles designed to look like brickwork, often attached to a timber frame;
- Traditional lime render (finished in limewash or painted); and,
- Locally-fired handmade plain clay (Kent peg tile) roofs.



Timber weatherboarding



Structural use of timber and painted lime render



Flint walls



Locally fired red brick



Locally fired plain clay roofs



Mathematical tiles

Nineteenth and early-twentieth century

From the mid-nineteenth century onwards, the railway network made it possible to use materials manufactured many miles away. Meanwhile, from the late nineteenth-century, there was an interest in reviving the local vernacular. As a result, the characteristic materials of this era are:

- Yellow ('London stock'), buff and red brick, usually in a Flemish bond;
- Lime render finished with limewash or pale coloured paint;
- Tile hanging;
- Flint;
- Timber sash and casement windows;
- Timber shop fronts; and,
- Clay tile or Welsh slate roofs.



London stock brick



Lime render



Early-twentieth century houses with tile hanging



Welsh slate roofs

Boundaries and streetscape

Boundary treatments make an important contribution to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area, with a number of different types found. These vary between low-rise railings or fences to high brick walls. Modern boundaries tend to follow one of the various historic precedents. There are also a large number of buildings that face directly onto the street, without a front garden or area.

The historic types of boundary treatments are:

- Local red brick walls (e.g. the Manor House);
- Spear top iron railings (e.g. the White House and at the eastern end of the High Street);
- Knapped flint walls (e.g. the churchyard and on Sparepenny Lane); and,
- Wooden palings (e.g. around the Mill and at the western end of the High Street).

All road surfaces are tarmac, with some road markings such as double yellow lines and bus stops. Pavement surfaces vary between York stone slabs, recent red block paving and tarmac. All kerbs are granite. Where there are no pavements, the margin of the road surface is often two rows of granite setts. The granite and the York stone paving contribute positively to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area because they are historic materials traditionally used for surfacing.

The quality of the street furniture varies in the Conservation Area. While modern bus stops, litter bins and feeder pillars detract from the historic character and appearance of the Conservation Area, the post box, historic 'Farningham' sign, the heritage-style street lighting and the minimal amount of traffic signage contribute positively to the Conservation Area.



Red brick walls



Spear top railings



Knapped flint walls



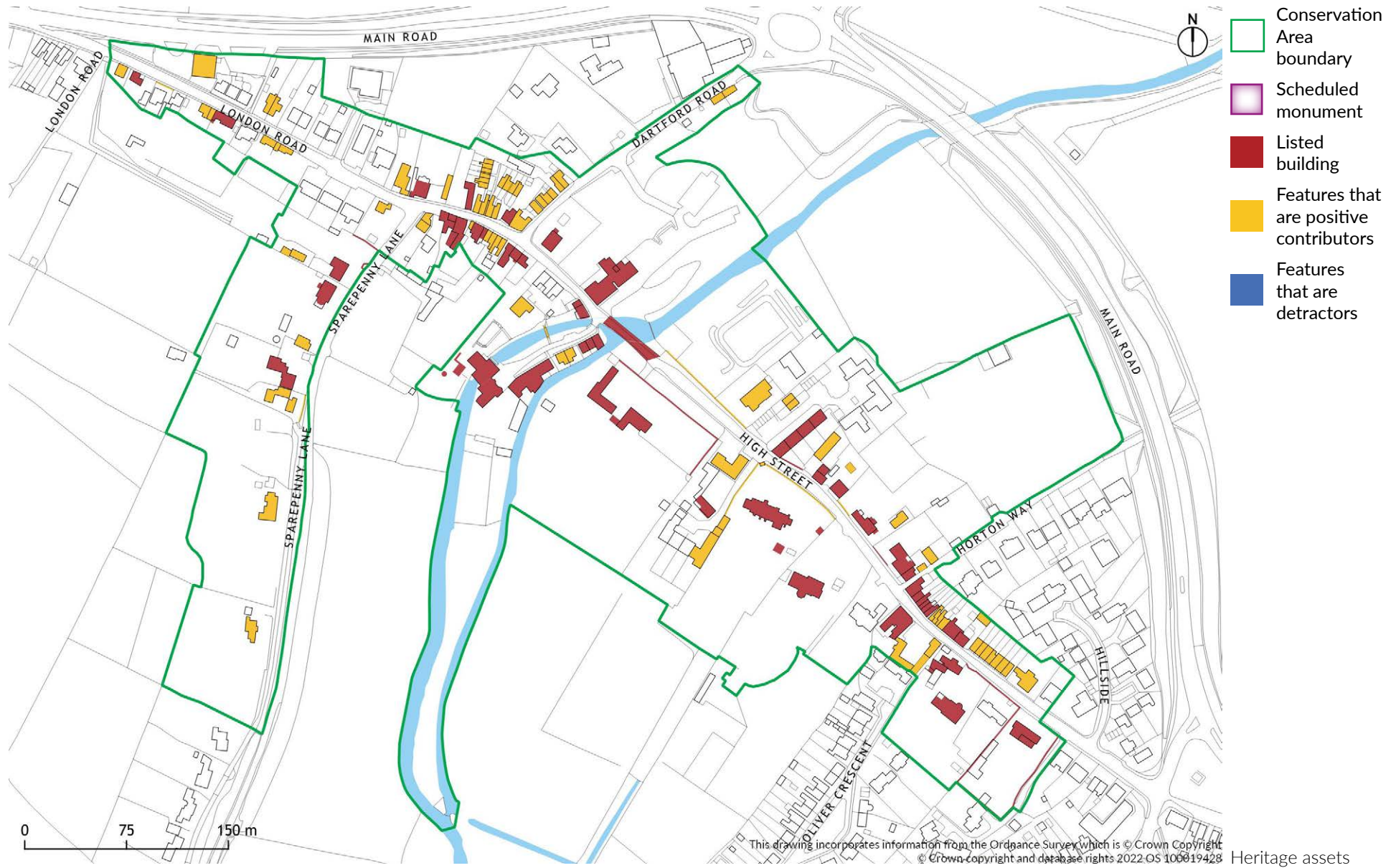
Wooden palings



Red block paving from the late-twentieth century commonly found in the village



Street furniture and road markings



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 13](#).

Positive contributors

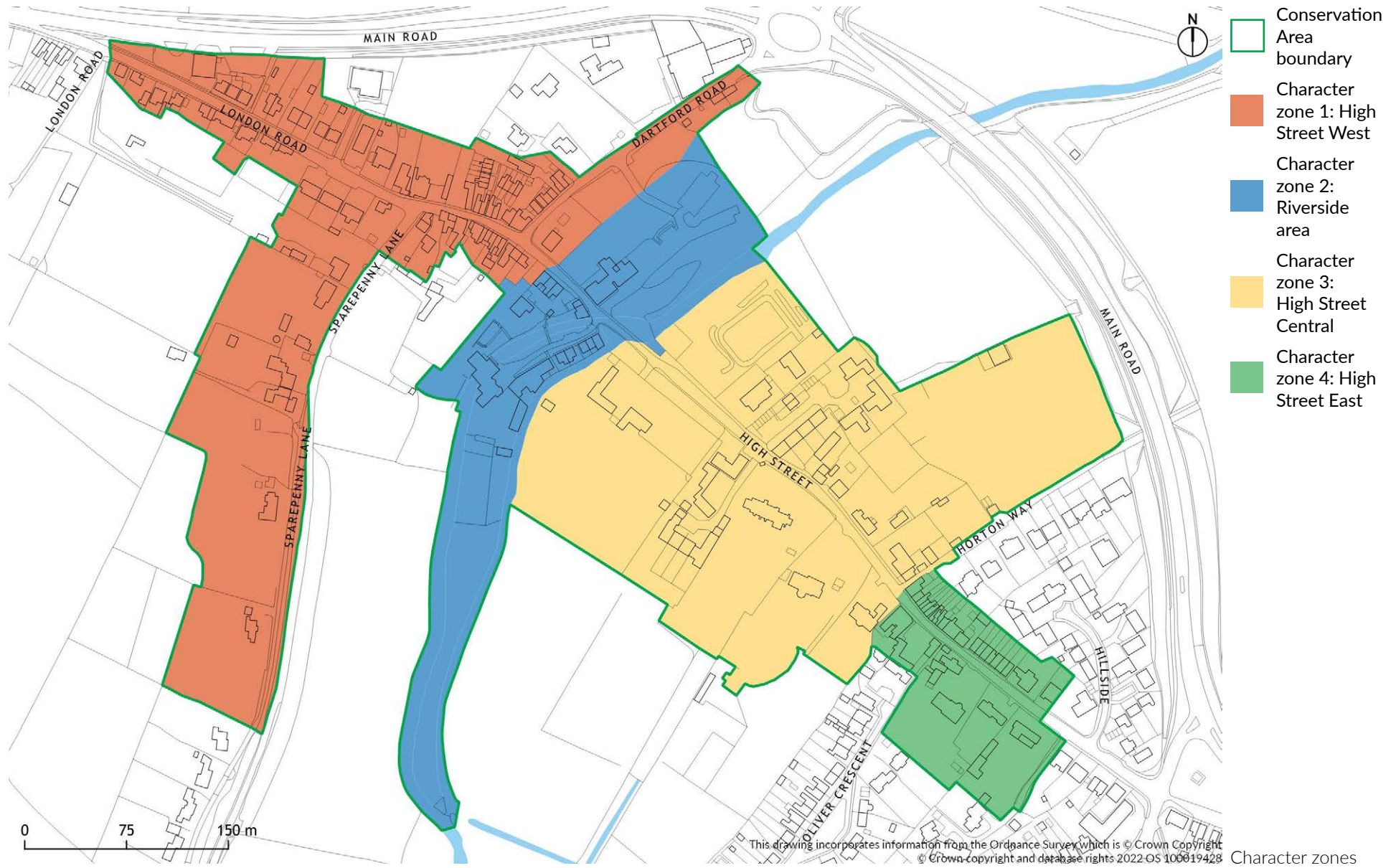
The Conservation Area contains a large number of heritage assets, both designated and non-designated, all of which contribute to its architectural and historic interest. The extent of a building's contribution to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area is not limited to its street elevations 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 West (including London Road/Sparepenny Lane/Dartford Road)

- Hilly streets and lanes leading out of the village;
- More enclosed on the High Street, while heading out on Sparepenny Lane and London Road the buildings are set further apart and back from the street;
- The High Street retains the character of a historic commercial centre, with shopfronts lining the street;
- Views out over the Darent Valley and of the North Downs;
- Views towards the village from Sparepenny Lane; and,
- Small properties behind the buildings on the High Street.



Character Zone 2: the Riverside

- Parkland character/abundant trees;
- It has an open feel like the High Street Central area;
- A feeling of arrival at the Lion Hotel, the largest building in the Conservation Area;
- River crossings/screens; and,
- An important grouping of buildings are the white-painted, weatherboarded buildings around the former mill.



Character Zone 3: High Street Central

- Open feel, compared to High Street West and High Street East;
- Front gardens – many well-kept – provide attractive setting for houses;
- The Market Meadow is an important component of the townscape of the High Street;
- Large buildings within their own grounds, such as The Manor House, the Church, Glebe House, Hodsoll House and the converted farm; and,
- Limited modern development, with two notable exceptions: the houses behind the old parsonage and the development behind the old farmhouse (an early project of Allies and Morrison).



Character Zone 4: High Street East

- Taller buildings than most of the Conservation Area, giving it a more urban feel;
- Narrow or no pavements with buildings of various ages, often grouped in terraces, creating an enclosed townscape;
- Views out of the area to the surrounding North Downs – looking west along most of this part of the High Street;
- Buildings generally from the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries; and,
- Larger houses in their own grounds on the south side of the road and smaller houses, often terraced, on the north side.



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 21](#). In complex historic townscapes such as that found in Farningham, such a list of views cannot be definitive, but those that have been selected illustrate the nature of views that are important in the Conservation Area:

In the Farningham Conservation Area, important views include:

- Long, unfolding views up and down the High Street;
- Views of significant buildings, such as the parish church;
- Views of the riverside area, including the Mill complex, the Lion Hotel, the bridge and cattle screen;
- Views into and out of the village that reveal it in its landscape and topographical setting; and,
- The historic settlement can be viewed and appreciated within its landscape setting, a good example being the view towards the village from the Darent Valley Path.

Some of the views are kinetic, in that movement along the road reveals the changing streetscape.



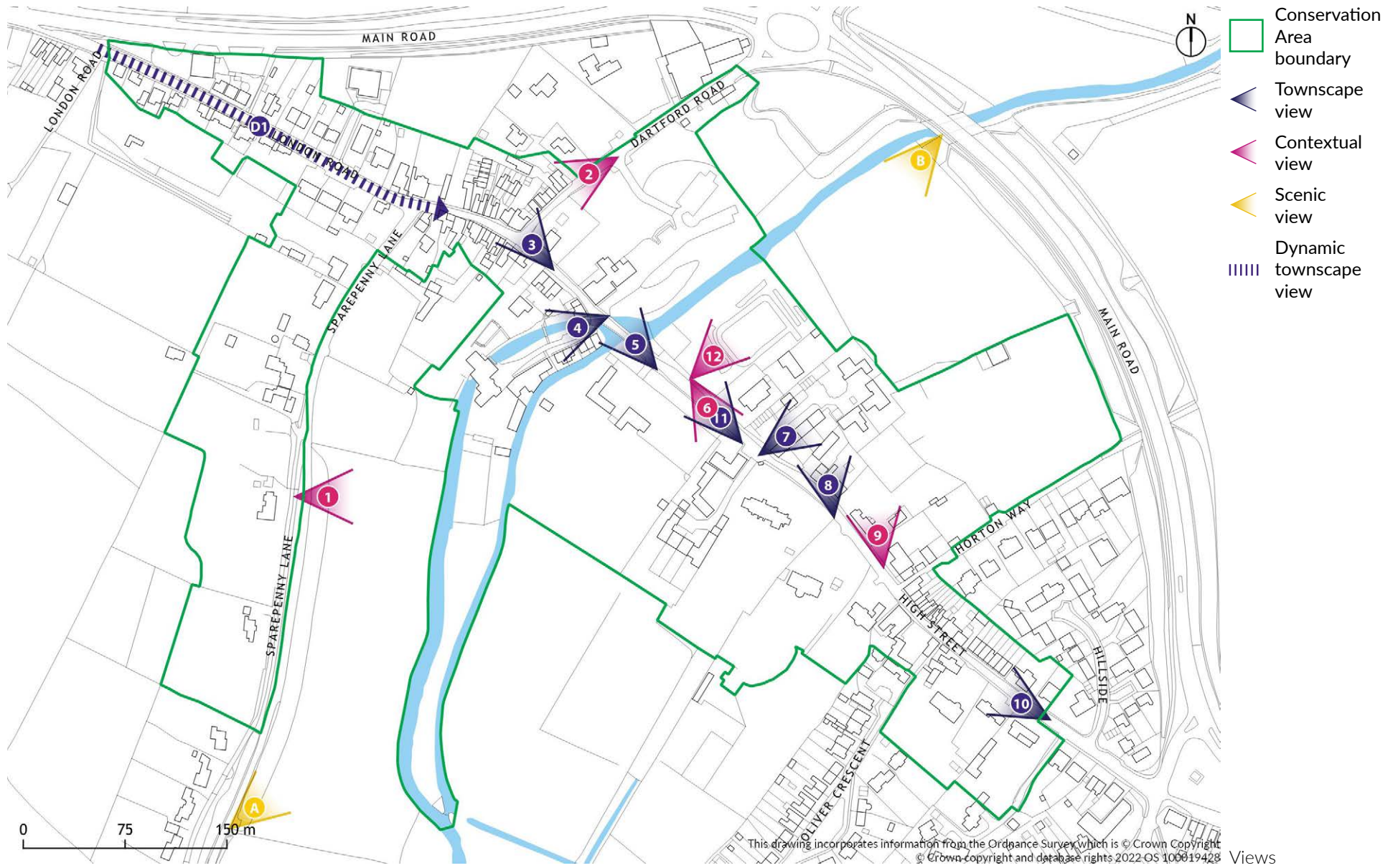
Townscape views within the Conservation Area which include a mix of building types and materials and give a sense of the spatial character and architectural quality of the village.



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 well-defined boundary. The church tower is prominent in some.



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Views

5.0 Open space assessment

The large amounts of open space within and around Farningham Conservation Area, especially to the north and the south, strongly contribute to its character and appearance. The topography of the Darent Valley is vitally important to this, as well as the water meadows around the river, that give a rural feel to the centre of the village and are central to its unique character, whilst the North Downs rising up around the village to the west provide a rural backdrop that enables an understanding and appreciation of the Farningham's topographical context.

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.

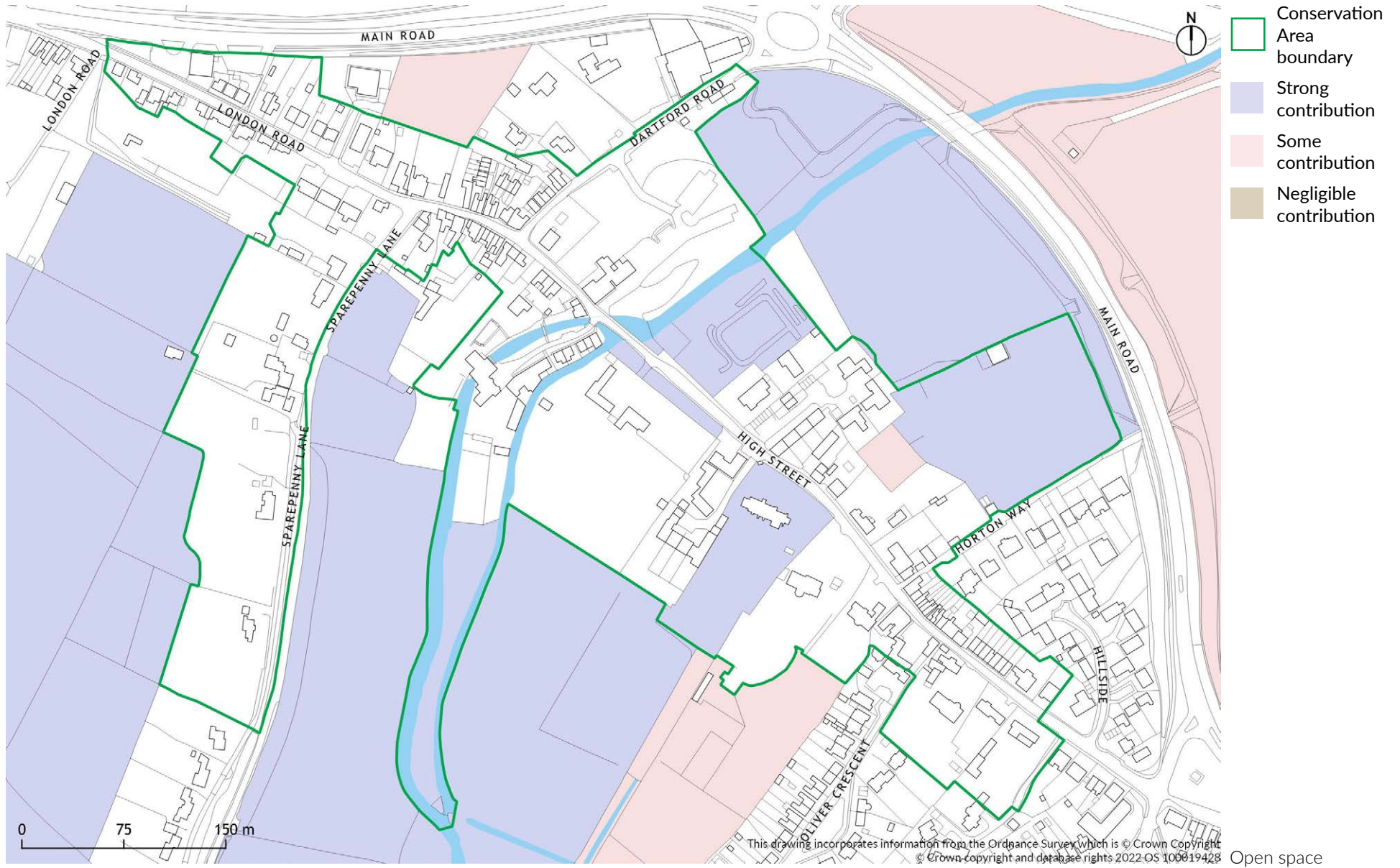
The contributions of individual parcels of land are shown on [page 23](#).

Open space inside the Conservation Area

- The Market Meadow and the green swath on the south side of the High Street, which are at the heart of the Conservation Area and the principal public green for the village;
- The wooded banks of the River Darent;
- The Mill Island;
- The churchyard, with the medieval church rising up amidst a stand of mature yew trees. At the back of the churchyard, there are views across the meadows and fields of the Darent Valley to the North Downs beyond; and,
- The cricket pitch is a historic sporting area, with good views towards the historic core of the village, and the church tower.

Open space outside the Conservation Area

- The North Downs rising to the west are visible from a number of locations in the Conservation Area;
- The fields and meadows of the Darent Valley on each side of the Mill island maintain the historic edge of the village and relationship to landscape; they also form the landscape foreground to scenic views in towards the village, in which the church tower is often prominent; and,
- The meadows and woods north of the Market Meadow maintain the rural character of the northern edge of the village, and make a buffer between the High Street and the A20 by-pass.



6.0 Condition and issues

The character and appearance of the Conservation Area are generally well-preserved. There are, however, some issues that should be addressed by 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 are harmful;
- Plastic windows and doors, which are alien and unsympathetic materials for historic buildings and therefore detract from their character;
- Unsympathetic boundary treatments on some of the newer properties; and,
- If shops close and the buildings are converted to residential or other uses, historic shop fronts, signage and associated fittings should be conserved.



Shop fronts that should be retained if they convert to residential use



Unsympathetic 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 Farningham 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 22](#)).

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 Farningham 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.

Though this Conservation Area has relatively little unappealing road signage, some areas of the streetscape such as road markings bus stops and bins could be more in keeping with the area. Management is the responsibility of public bodies. Kent County Council, Sevenoaks District Council and Farningham 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](#).

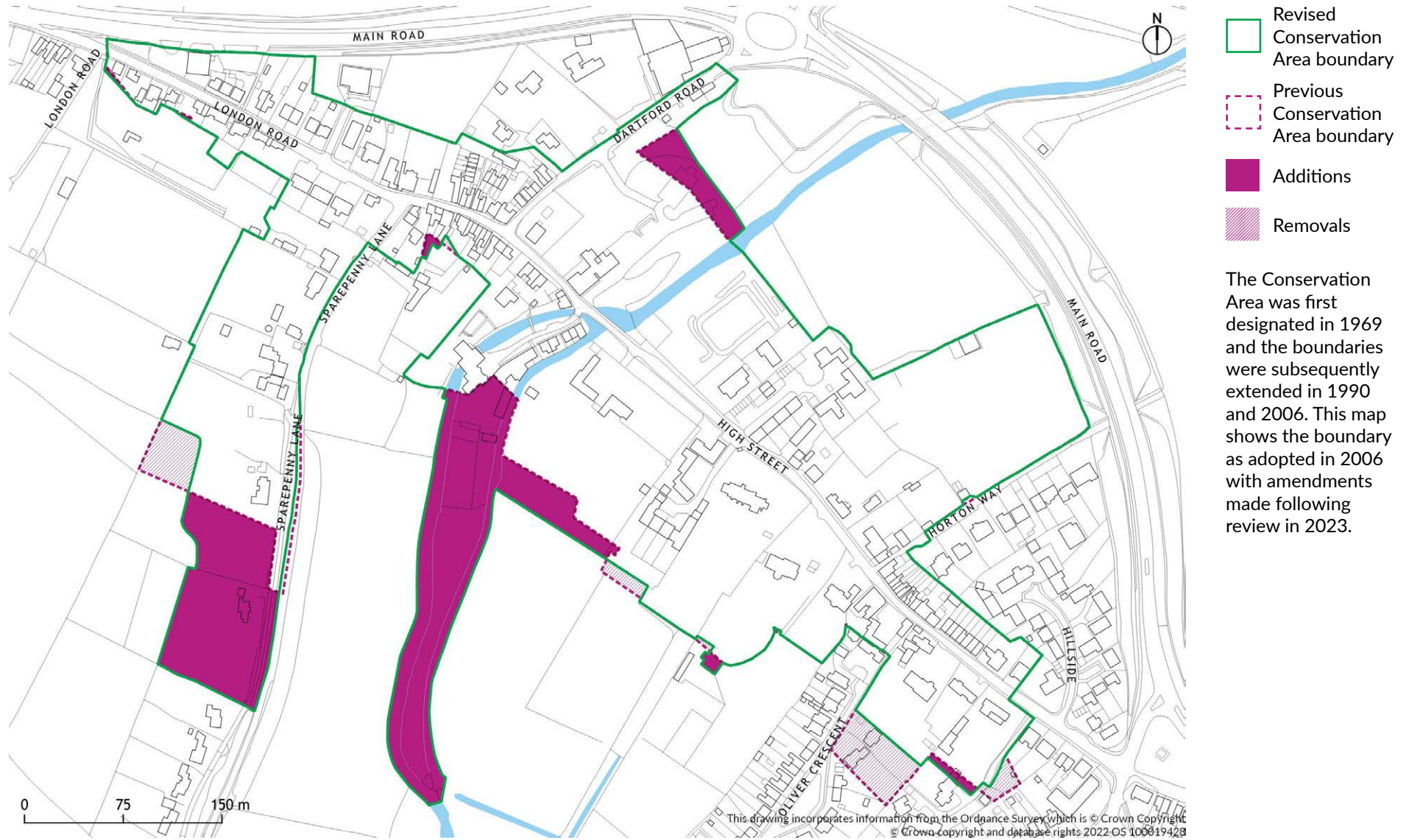
Parking

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

Prepared by Aydin Crouch and Richard Pollard

Reviewed by Gemma Fowlie

Consultation Draft issued November 2022

Consultation Draft issued January 2023

Final Appraisal issued July 2023

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