

# THE BOROUGH OF ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS

## HISTORIC LANDSCAPE CHARACTERISATION

REVISION OF KENT HLC (2000)



AUGUST 2016

## Summary of the Town of Royal Tunbridge

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**The parish summary should be read in conjunction with the Tunbridge Wells Borough Historic Landscape characterisation Report (Section I User Guide and Interpretation; Section II The Gazetteer of HLC Types and Section III the Maps). June 2017.**

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The revised Historic Landscape Characterisation for the Borough of Tunbridge Wells could not have been undertaken without the dedicated support of David Scully, Landscape and Biodiversity Officer at Tunbridge Wells Borough Council and also Lis Dyson County Archaeologists at Kent County Council. The Tunbridge Wells Borough Historic Landscape Characterisation builds on the project begun by the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty [AONB] Partnership. This work could not have been undertaken without the help of Paul Cuming Kent Historic Environment Records Manager and Richard Dadd GIS Technician at Kent County Council. A 'Thank you' is extended to all. Appreciation and thanks also goes to the team at the High Weald AONB Partnership especially Sally Marsh, Co-Director, Charles Winchester Landscape Researcher and Matt Pitts Land Manager Adviser.

My colleague Phil Sansum kindly undertook the processing of the missing Tithe maps for the Borough for which I am very grateful.

The views expressed in this report are entirely the author's own and do not reflect the policies of neither Tunbridge Wells Borough Council, Kent County Council nor the High Weald AONB.

## PERIOD TABLE

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Description	Archaeological Period	From	To
Hunting societies	Upper Palaeolithic	30,000	10,000 BC
Hunter-gather societies	Mesolithic	10,000-8,000	4,000-3,500 BC
The first agriculturalists	Neolithic	3,500	2,100 BC
Beginning of metal working in bronze	Bronze Age	2,100	600 BC
Beginning of metal working in iron	Iron Age	600 BC	AD 43
	Romano-British	AD 43	AD 410
	Anglo-Saxons [or Early Medieval]	AD 410	1066
	Medieval	1066	1540
	Post-medieval	1540	Present

*The Archaeological and Historical Periods used in the Sussex HLC & Revised Kent HLC*

Key to HLC-Prev	Description	Date	Combined
P1	Late 20th century	AD1945 – present	Post 1900
P2	Early 20th century	AD 1914 – AD 1945	
P3	Early Modern	AD 1800 – AD 1913	19th century
P4	Late Post-medieval	AD 1600 – AD 1799	Post-medieval
P5	Early Post-medieval	AD 1500 – AD 1599	
P6	Medieval	AD 1066 – AD 1499	Medieval
P7	Early-medieval	AD 410 – AD 1065	
P8	Roman	AD 43 – AD 409	
P9	Prehistoric	500,000 BC – AD42	

**Summary Assessment of the Historic Landscape Characterisation  
For rural areas of Royal Tunbridge Wells in  
Borough of Royal Tunbridge Wells**

**1. Introduction**

**Historic Landscape Characterisation [HLC]** is a process by which the landscape of an area is interpreted and mapped by selected historic attributes which contribute to the local historic character. The dominant historic attributes are that of enclosure and settlement. The pattern of fields, the nature of the boundaries, the form and distribution of historic settlement shape the local character and distinctiveness of a given area. The term 'historic landscapes' means in this context all landscapes which have been shaped by human interaction. HLC maps character not land use though with finer grained HLCs for some of the historic types reflect the use of the land. It can be likened to a fine water-colour painting which despite using OSMM as its base does result in some 'blurred' boundaries between character types at the very detailed field by field level. HLC is a starting point when investigating the historic landscape for any given area. However it is not a substitute for detailed desk-based assessments and field observations.

The Historic Landscape Characterisation for Royal Tunbridge Wells forms part of a district wide revision of the Kent HLC (2000). Four parishes in the east of the district have been completed (Goudhurst, Hawkhurst, Cranbrook & Benenden) and the remaining parishes are being undertaken as part of a rolling programme of phased characterisation. As each parish is completed a short analysis is presented. The parishes will then be grouped up to form the district-wide HLC. The sequence of characterisation has been prioritised to provide firstly information on those parishes close to the town of Royal Tunbridge Wells, and secondly to complete the wider countryside of the borough. The centre of the built-up area of the town has been omitted as the priority is to characterise the historic landscape of the rural parts of the borough.

This report sets out a summary of the some of the results for the present day rural component of Royal Tunbridge Wells. A Methods Report together with a Gazetteer of Typologies and attributes is being prepared for the end of the first phase of this revision (at the end of September 2016).

**2. Historic context of Royal Tunbridge Wells**

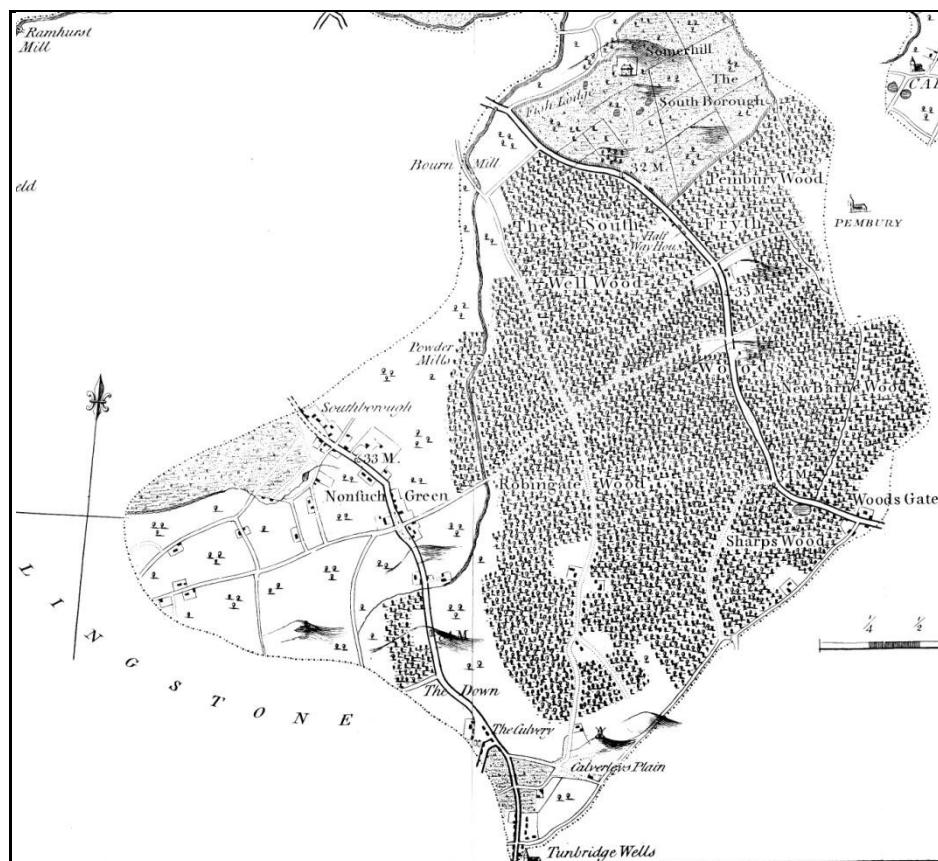
For the majority of Royal Tunbridge Wells the underlying geology comprises Tunbridge Wells Sand Formation, with main sandstone outcrops on Rusthall and Tunbridge Wells Commons. Along the county boundary Ashdown Beds extending northwards from East Sussex underlie the area. The topography comprises higher ground cut by smaller incised valleys running north, north east and south west into the neighbouring parishes. The main part of the town is located on the high ground. The deposits of iron stone in the sandstone provide the mineral source of the iron for the famous spring waters, which formed the basis for the historic development of Royal Tunbridge Wells.

The town of Royal Tunbridge Wells comprises historic territory from its neighbouring ecclesiastical parishes, mostly the ecclesiastical parish of Tonbridge within the South Frith of

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the Lowy of Tonbridge. On the east are parts of the ecclesiastical parish of Pembury whilst to the south the county boundary with Sussex was extended into ecclesiastical parish of Frant. On the west are parts of historic Speldhurst and includes the Manor of Rusthall. Thus the present day area is very much a modern creation and takes much of its historic character from these parishes. The history of the Lowy dominates this character.

A lowy is an area of land or territory granted to a fortified settlement such as a castle. The land provided income so support the castle and its functions at a strategic crossing point on the River Medway. So when William I decided to fortify the crossing on the river at Tonbridge, the castle and the lands were seized from the Saxon owners (and which included a proportion of the Archbishop of Canterbury's property) and granted to Richard de Tonebridge alias Fitz Gilbert (Hasted 1797 Vol V. 203-204) and then to the powerful Clare family. Most of this land comprised the swine pastures and dens belonging to the large Kent manors of Otford and Wrotham in the Lathe of Aylesford. Succeeding archbishops fought legal battles to restore their lands. This resulted in two perambulations of the boundary of the Lowy being prepared in 1258 & 1279 (Cole 2014, p75-92). The southern part of the lowy comprised the manor and lands of Southborough together with a district named the Southfrith, which gave its name to a manor centred at Somerhill. This was a hunting chase which formed part of the demesne lands of the Clares as part of Tonbridge. For further background on the early medieval history of this area see Witney (1976), Cole (2014, 80, 88), and Hasted (1797 Vol V).

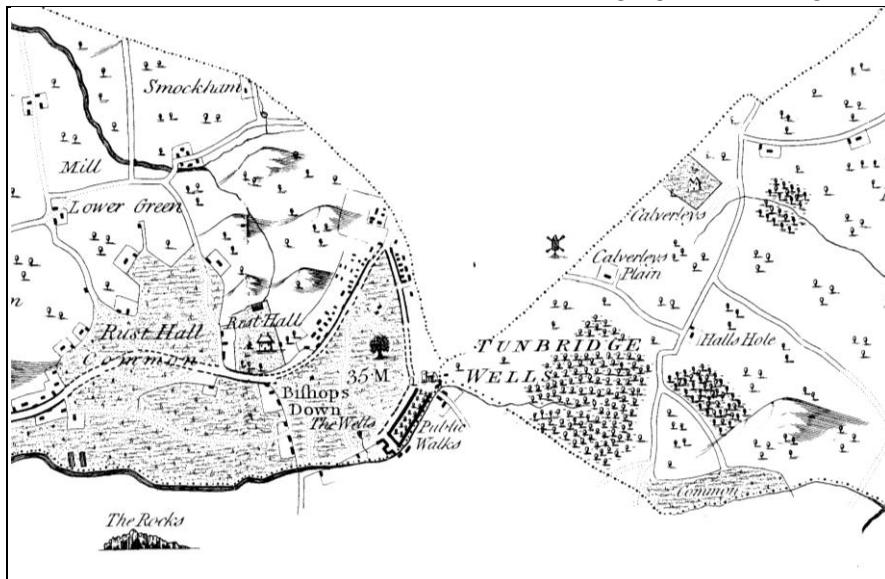


*Extract from Edward Hasted's Map of the Lowy of Tonbridge - Southfrith*

After AD 450 with the coming and settling in Kent of the Saxons the Weald was divided into large ‘commons’ attached to large agricultural estates in north and east Kent. Kent was carved up to utilise large swathes of the landscape. These estates became the lathes the territories of which spread into the Weald to lay claim to the woodland and grazing pastures. These commons were used for seasonal grazing but were gradually broken up into dens or swine pastures attached to the evolving manors located in the north and east on the demesne and farmed land. Eventually temporary settlements in the dens became permanent farmsteads taking their names from the ‘dens’ and the settlers enclosed land and laid out fields from the swine pastures in order to cultivate crops and keep stock. The area of Speldhurst and the western end of the district of Tunbridge Wells lay in the large and powerful lathes of Aylesford and Dartford, dominated by the manors such as Otford and Wrotham claiming extensive grazing pastures across this area of higher ground bounded by the River Medway.

Medieval farmsteads occupy the higher ground and several have become gentrified in the C19 to country estates and parkland such as The Park and David Salomon’s House. At the northern end of the parish the landscape comprises hillside and ridge-top farmsteads surrounded by fields with ancient gill woodland in the narrow steep-sided stream valleys.

On the eastern edges of the Town are the important areas of Ancient Semi-natural Woodland, a modified remnant of the South Well Wood and Robins Gate Wood, which are likely to be the survivors the former chase of South Frith belonging to Tonbridge Castle.



Extract from Edward Hasted's Map of the Hundred of Wachlingstone 1797

The iron rich springs which lined the edge of the high sandstone outcrops became the focus as watering places. Tunbridge Wells was born and with relatively easy access to London, it rapidly became well established. The town of Royal Tunbridge Wells expanded in the C18 and C19 westwards into Speldhurst and northwards into Nonsuch Green and around Southborough Common. The south and eastward expansion of the town extended into the woods and fields around the area known as “Woodgate” – one of the medieval gateways into the South Frith. These areas were laid out to small country mansions with large gardens

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which in turn became developed into extensive housing estates. Parkland and landscaped gardens still occur along this routeway into the town.

### **3. Results of the revised HLC for the rural parts of Royal Tunbridge Wells**

Some examples of the digitising of Royal Tunbridge Wells as part of the wider revised HLC for the borough of Tunbridge Wells are presented in the map extracts on the following pages. The first phase of this project will be presented in a GIS project for the parishes of Speldhurst, Southborough, Royal Tunbridge Wells and Pembury. Only a brief analysis of the HLC attributes is presented here. It has been split into its main period and type component attributes, but by applying the different style sheets it is possible to show the various attributes for the present day HLC, as well as a conjectured image of what the historic character of the late medieval and early-post-medieval landscape might have looked like.

#### **3.1 The Phase 1 Kent HLC**

Map 1 shows the broad HLC type for the Kent Phase 1. This was one of the earliest HLCs to be undertaken in England and was produced using a very broad-brush approach.

The broad type of character is very much defined by large blocks types; Field patterns are not defined by the smaller settlement or areas of woodland.

#### **3.2 The Revised Kent HLC for Tunbridge Wells Borough – Royal Tunbridge Wells**

Map 2 shows the broad HLC type for the revised Kent HLC for Tunbridge Wells Borough. The finer-grained approach to the data capture can clearly be seen for example with the scattered settlements in the areas of enclosures, the areas of parkland and the higher incidence of woodland. Designed landscapes are a strong historic landscape feature of the countryside on the south and eastern parts of the town. As well as the larger areas of parkland occupying the high ridge tops there is a concentration of designed landscapes within town itself. This is the influence during the Late post-medieval and Early modern development of the town of Tunbridge Wells as a place for leisure and recreation. It gave rise to areas being gentrified from small farms to country mansions with larger gardens..

#### **3.3. The HLC Types for present day landscape of rural Royal Tunbridge Wells**

Map 3 shows the revised HLC types for Royal Tunbridge Wells. Immediately it can be seen that the eastern part is dominated by the ‘wooded-over commons’ of Rusthall and Tunbridge Wells. To the southeast lies a large area of modern fields dotted with farmsteads and small pieces of woodland. Only at the southern boundary close to Hawkenbury are fields still intact. However some of these are modern ‘assart’s from ancient woodland. The main road west from Pembury is lined with areas of parkland and designed landscapes. This is the area historically called ‘Wood gate’ and may have been one of the medieval drove gateways into the South Frith. Greggs Wood is a remnant of assart woodland of this former forested chase. The north-west corner comprises planned fields around Lower Green which abut Hurst Wood. The place-name ‘hurst’ is a common element in names in and around Tunbridge Wells suggesting that when the area was being settled in the early medieval period areas of enclosed woodland occupied prominent positions on hills and were easily identified in the more open wood-pasture type landscape of his part of the High Weald.

### **3.4 The Time-depth and antiquity of the present landscape of rural Royal Tunbridge Wells**

Map 4 shows the projected period of origin for each character type in rural Royal Tunbridge Wells based on the historic map evidence and understanding of the Kent landscape. Essential much of the rural areas have a modern historic character dominated by the modern boundary and woodland loss creating large open field landscapes. Fragments of the medieval origin of the landscape survive in the form of the historic farmsteads and areas of fragmented ancient semi-natural woodland. This is a particular feature of the south-east corner of Royal Tunbridge Wells. Great Bayhall is a medieval moated site, Mouseden and Dodhurst are also small settlements of medieval origin. The commons are a relict landscape feature of the medieval period but because they have been covered with extensive areas of secondary woodland in the modern period they have been characterised as such (so masking their antiquity).

### **3.5 Analysis of different character types**

Map 5 shows only the HLC broad type for Enclosures by HLC type for Royal Tunbridge Wells. This is an example of how the HLC can be queried in order to assess the different historic character types. The rural landscape is dominated by the patterns of enclosures which appear to have little or no evidence of a historic enclosure pattern. This is the result of post-medieval parkland, landscape gentrification and settlement expansion, but also in the main due to modern field amalgamation. Fragments of assart type fields do occur around High Wood to the south and close to Hurst Wood in the north-west.

Map 6 gives an indication of this where the same polygons have been illustrated by the Boundary type attribute. The boundaries are dominated by grass balks for the modern fields creating a very open landscape which derived from the historic medieval woodland landscape created from woodland clearance and enclosure. Wooded hedges are either outgrown hedges (due to lack of management) or wider wooded shaws. The fences are evidence of paddocks, laid out within an older field system.

### **3.6. The conjectured medieval and early post-medieval landscape of rural Royal Tunbridge Wells**

Map 7 is a composite map of the present HLC overlain with those polygons where the previous historic character can be identified from the historic mapping. Each time there is a character change as shown on the historic maps (up to 4 changes recorded in the GIS attribute table as Prev-1 to Prev-4) this has been captured in the HLC. The result is that map 7 gives an indication of what the historic landscape may have appeared like c.1500-1600, when many of the medieval features would still have been intact. It also shows the origins of the present historic character.

The south east corner of rural Royal Tunbridge Wells reveals its wooded landscape origin where organised (cohesive) and aggregate assarts centred on medieval farmsteads were cleared from the extensive areas of woodland. This woodland survives as the ancient assart woodland. To the north is the conjectured wood pasture of South Frith of the Lowy of Tonbridge. Rusthall and Tunbridge Wells Commons although shown as commons may also have originated as wood pasture.

The origins and antiquity of the regular informal fields is difficult to assess, but these fields could date from the early post-medieval due to field re-organisation of an earlier field system or may even be medieval in date.

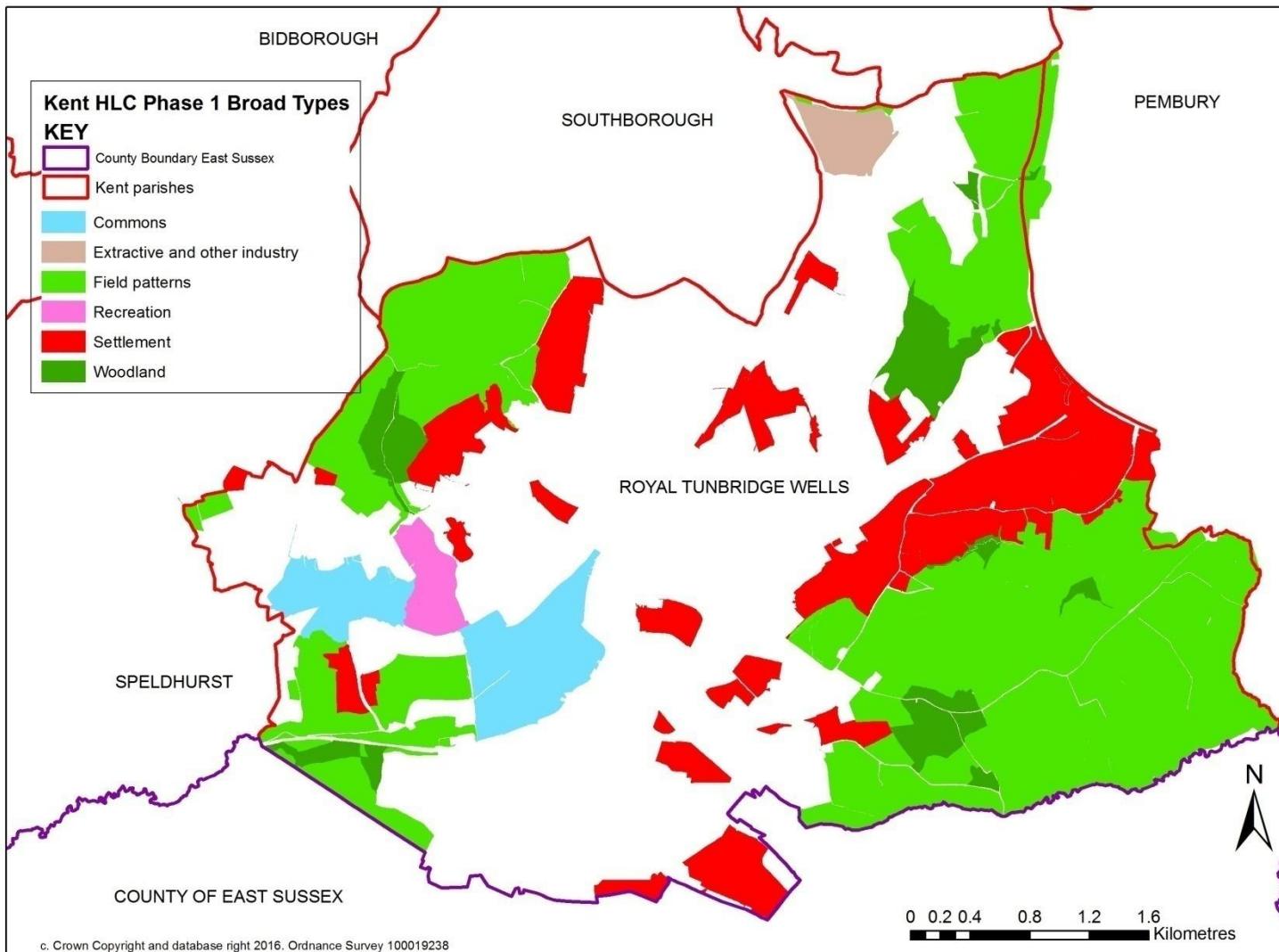
#### 4. Initial Conclusions

This analysis only touches on the potential of HLC to understand the historic character of the landscape and provides the starting point for research for any given area. The HLC reveals that the rural landscape of Royal Tunbridge Wells has considerable time-depth having undergone significant changes in the post-medieval period. As the settlement around the town has southwards into the medieval farmed countryside the enclosures have been converted to parkland and larger gardens, through boundary removal and tree planting. In the Early modern and early 20<sup>th</sup> century modern field re-organisation of the enclosures around the medieval farmsteads has created a very open landscape which contrasts sharply with that in the neighbouring parish of Frant where the medieval wooded landscape remains far more intact. In the north-west around Lower Green a more formal enclosure landscape survives abutting ancient woodland suggesting field enclosure reorganisation in the Early post-medieval period.

The rural elements of Royal Tunbridge Wells are an important reminder of how this landscape has changed from a medieval chase to a post-medieval gentrified landscape, with modern farming around its southern edge.

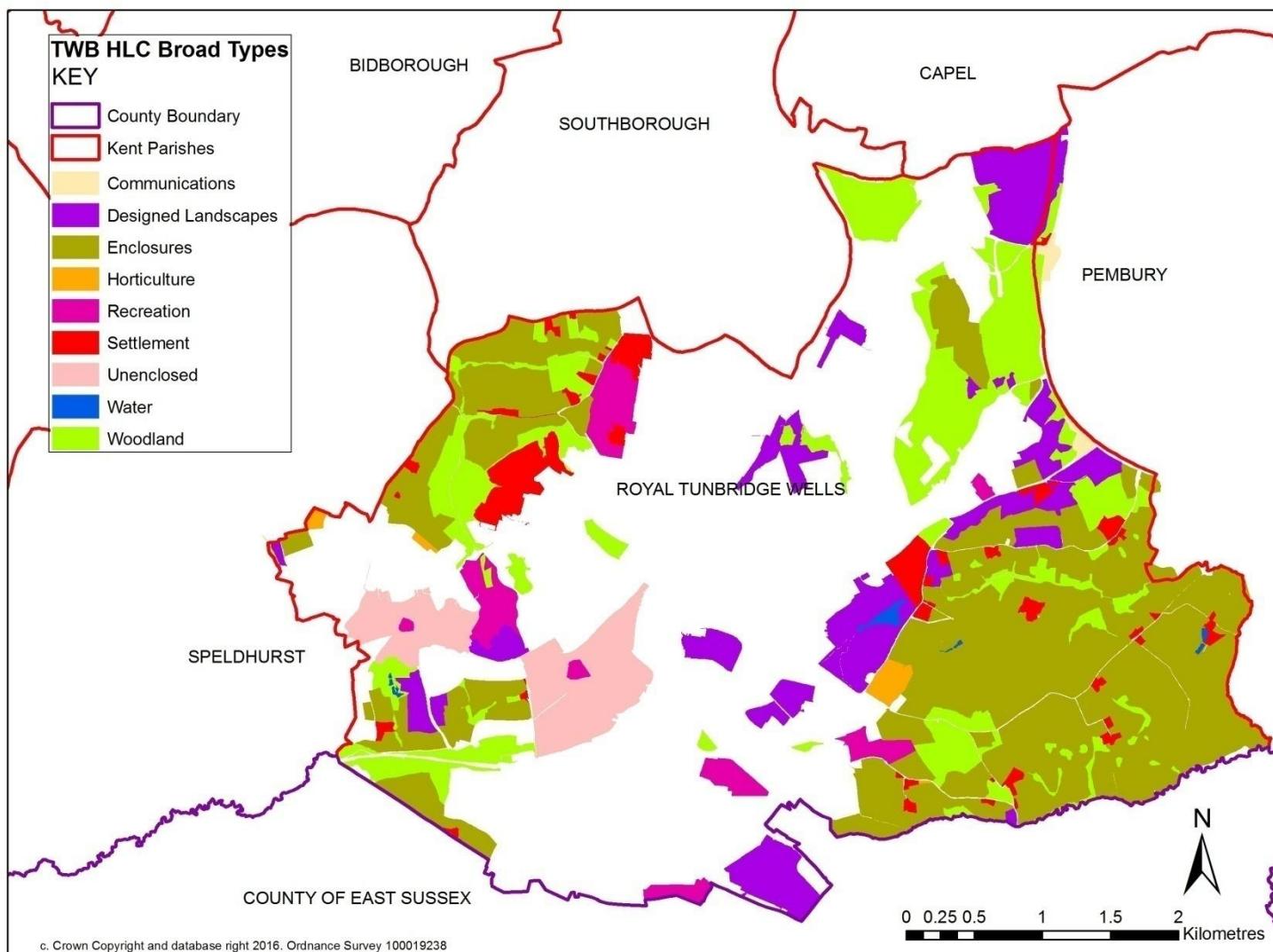
Far more research is needed to understand the different processes of enclosure in the Weald of Kent, especially in the understanding the medieval settlement and expansion. For example the division of land with their farmsteads into yardlands, sulungs, virgates etc. and interpreting medieval manorial surveys with the actual territories in the landscape.

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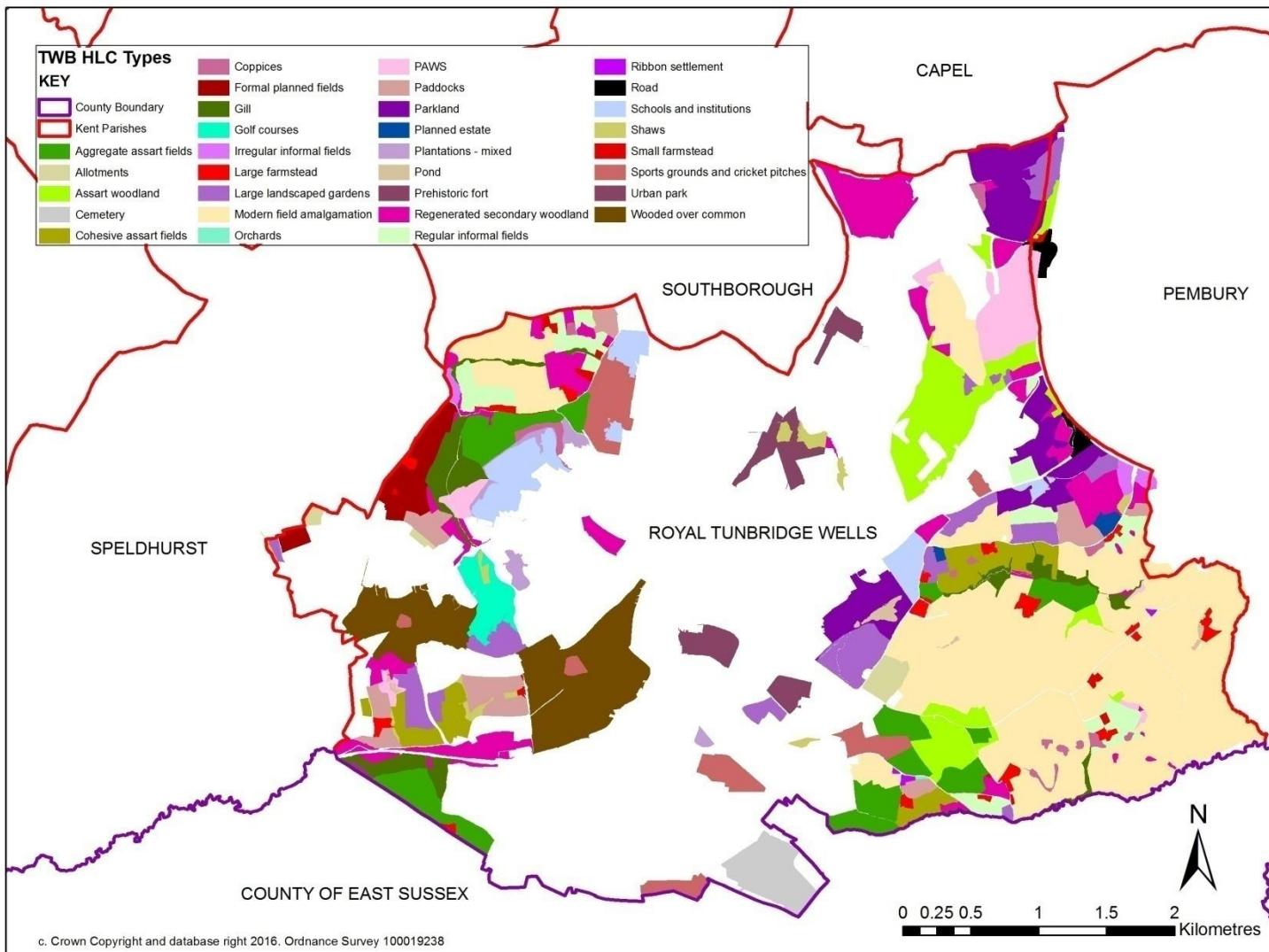
MAP 1

BOROUGH OF ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS  
REVISED KENT HLC (2000)  
ROYAL TUNBRIDHE WELLS



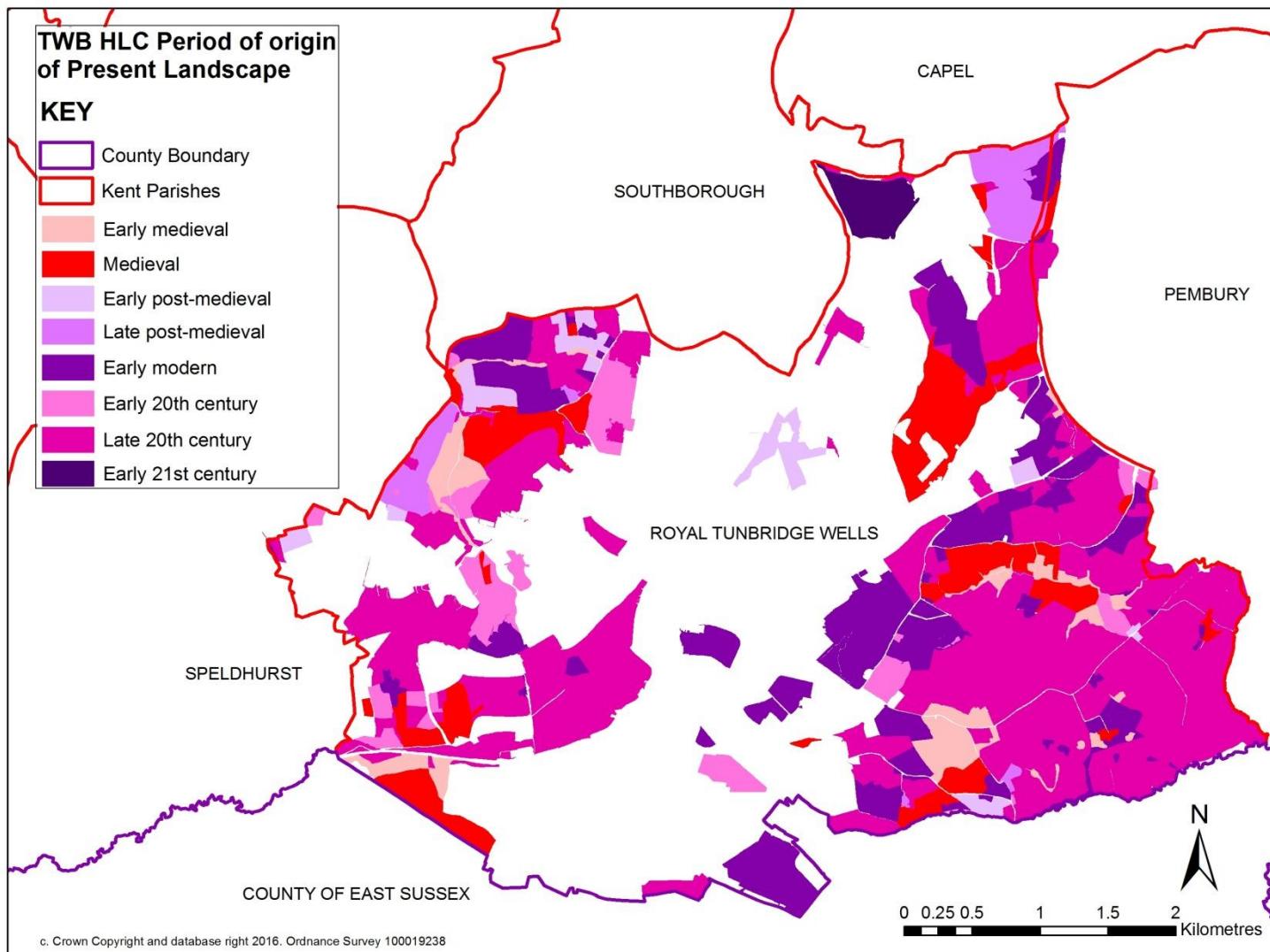
MAP 2

BOROUGH OF ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS  
REVISED KENT HLC (2000)  
ROYAL TUNBRIDHE WELLS



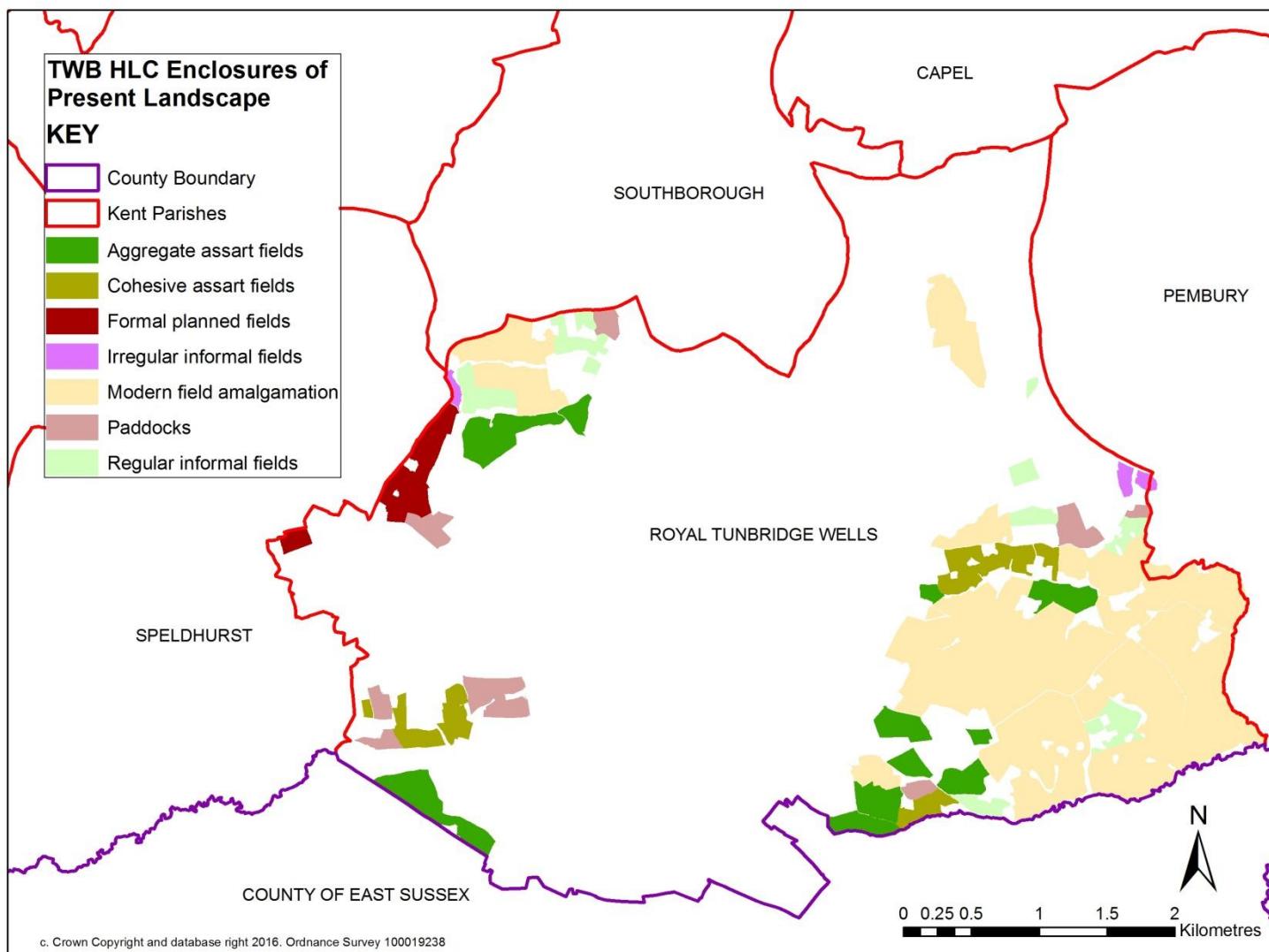
Map 3

BOROUGH OF ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS  
REVISED KENT HLC (2000)  
ROYAL TUNBRIDHE WELLS



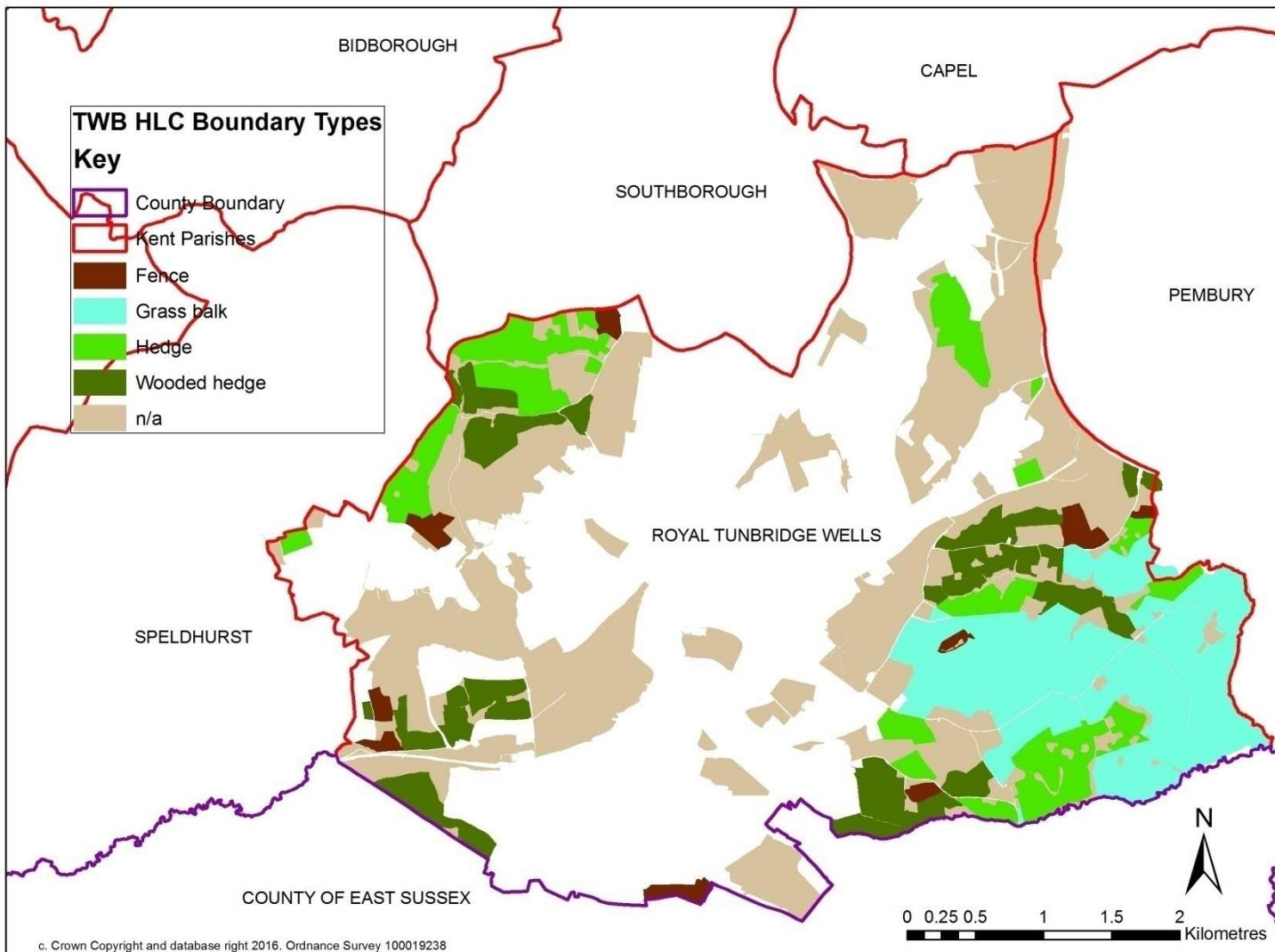
MAP 4

BOROUGH OF ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS  
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ROYAL TUNBRIDHE WELLS



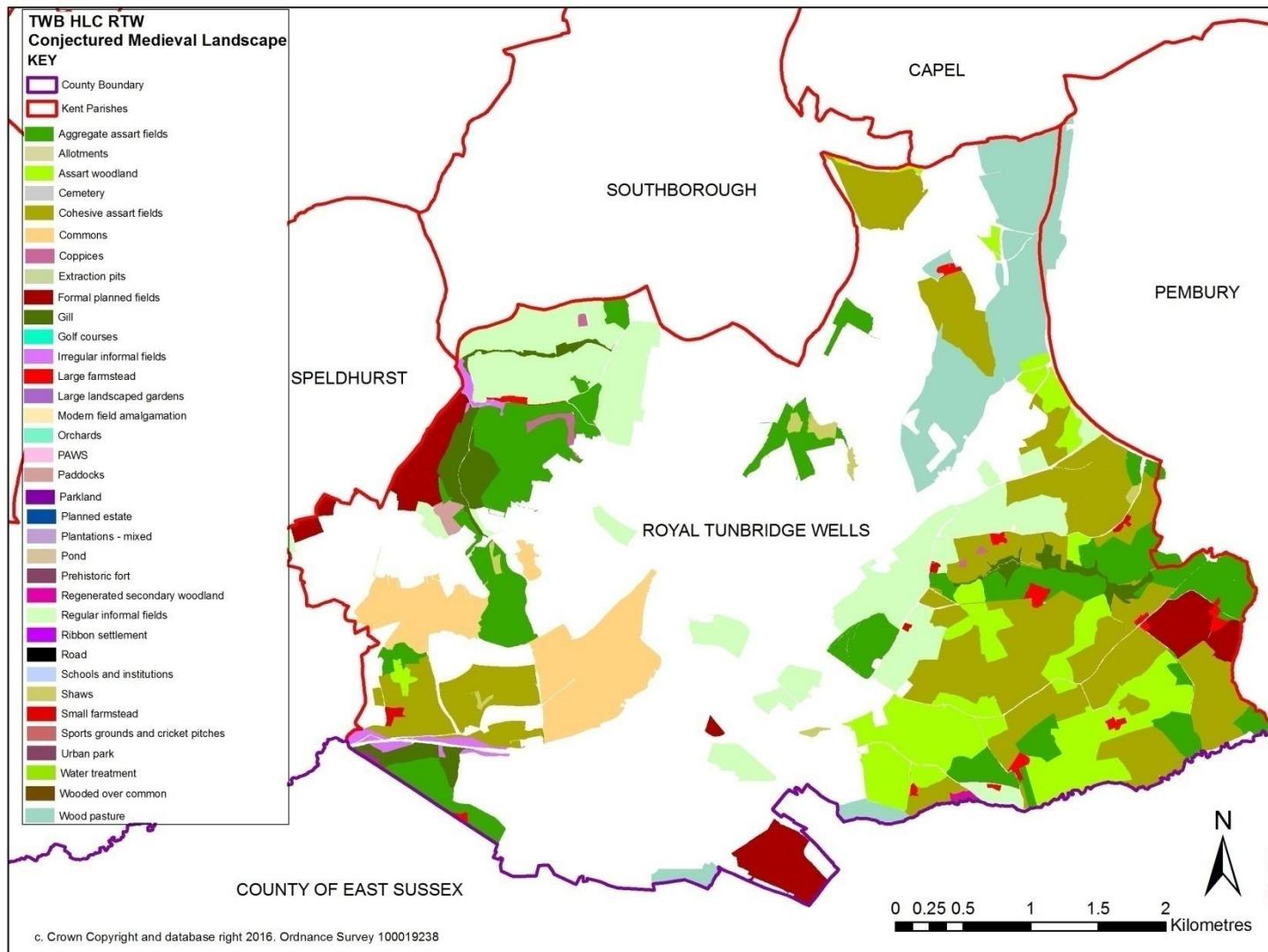
MAP 5

BOROUGH OF ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS  
REVISED KENT HLC (2000)  
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MAP 6

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MAP 7

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