

Groombridge Conservation Area Appraisal Supplementary Planning Document



Adopted
June 2006

Groombridge

Conservation Area Appraisal

Supplementary Planning Document

Tunbridge Wells Borough Council
in partnership with Speldhurst Parish Council,
Groombridge Local History Group and other
local representatives.

Prepared by: The Conservation Studio

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Summary

This document has been produced for Tunbridge Wells Borough Council in collaboration with Speldhurst Parish Council and local amenity groups. Local authorities are required by law to preserve or enhance their conservation areas and part of that process is the production of a 'Conservation Area Appraisal' to explain what it is important about the area, and what improvements are needed.

This Appraisal follows the format recently (August 2005) suggested by English Heritage in their document 'Guidance on Conservation Area Appraisals'.

Guidance on Conservation Area Appraisals
www.english-heritage.org.uk

Key Characteristics

This Appraisal concludes that the most significant features of the Groombridge Conservation Area are:

- The unspoilt rural setting in the Metropolitan Green Belt and the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty;
- The topography created by the valley of the River Grom and dominance of trees in the parks, along roads and the river and encircling the northern side of the settlement;
- The sloping green and its exceptional array of 17th century cottages, remarkably unspoilt;
- As a result of the above, the 56 listed buildings, no less than 27 of which are Grade II* and five are Grade I. Such a concentration of high grades is wholly exceptional and serves to underscore the very special quality of the settlement;
- Groombridge Place, remarkably little altered since it was rebuilt in the second half of the 17th century, with its 17th century walled garden and 17th century and later landscaped park, a Grade II* registered landscape;
- The 'Gothic survival' church built in 1625, an unusual date for the building of a church, and the four listed Camfield monuments in the churchyard;
- The complete ensemble of village green, church and Groombridge Place with only the minimum of intrusion from the 20th and 21st centuries;
- The mellow variety of building materials, of brick, tile hanging, tile roofs, timber-framing, sandstone and weather boarding;
- The soft and ambiguous boundaries of the properties fronting The Green; and
- The harmonious uniformity of paint colours for doors and windows on The Green.



View towards Groombridge Green from Groombridge Place



Looking north from Groombridge Place



St John's Church

Key Issues

This Appraisal concludes that the most important issues which threaten the special architectural and historic interest of the Groombridge Conservation Area are:

1. Pressure to extend and modernise the historic buildings, and the protection of their existing historic features;
2. A need to protect the more secondary outbuildings which nevertheless contribute to the character of the Conservation Area;
3. The need to maintain the open aspect of The Green;
4. The protection of existing hedges and woodland;
5. Busy traffic through the Conservation Area;
6. Dominant signage to Burrswood and the poor quality electricity sub-station;
7. Groombridge Place – neglected former main entrance; and
8. Poor quality and dominant street signage.

Conservation Area Boundary Review

A number of additions have been made to the Conservation Area:

1. The field to the south west of the village has been added, continuing the southern boundary of the Conservation Area westward as far as the belt of trees, then following the wooded area of Burrswood;
2. Amended western boundary to include the wooded area in Burrswood Park up to the lane;
3. Addition of Hillside; and
4. Amendment of the eastern boundary to coincide with the boundary of the Registered Historic Park and Garden of Groombridge Place.



Sub station by Burrswood Lodge



Entrance to Burrswood



View of trees from Burrswood Drive

1.0 Introduction

The Definition and Purpose of Conservation Areas

- 1.1 The first conservation areas were designated in England under the Civic Amenities Act 1967 and more than 9,500 now exist. Under Section 69 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, local planning authorities have a duty to designate as conservation areas any “*areas of special architectural or historic interest the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance*”.
- 1.2 Conservation areas are diverse in size and character, but in general it is the quality and interest of the area that is of importance, rather than the individual buildings within it. Such designation gives the authority greater control over demolition, minor development, works to trees and advertisements in the conservation area. However, it also brings certain responsibilities. Under the terms of the 1990 Act, local authorities have a duty to review the extent of designation from time to time, to designate further areas if appropriate, to bring forward proposals for the preservation and enhancement of conservation areas (with public consultation) and to pay special attention to the character or appearance of conservation areas in exercising their planning powers.
- 1.3 It is not just the local planning authority that has a role in protecting and enhancing conservation areas. The principal guardians are the residents and business people who live and work in the conservation area who are responsible for maintaining the individual properties, which together contribute to the character of the conservation area.
- 1.4 Designation also raises awareness of an area’s special attributes and can foster pride in the locality. Government planning guidance stresses that our built and natural heritage should be valued and protected for their own sake as a central part of our cultural heritage and that the responsibility for environmental stewardship is shared by everyone.
- 1.5 New development and change can take place in conservation areas, but designation should ensure that such proposals will not have an adverse effect on the character or appearance of the area.

The Purpose and Status of this Appraisal

- 1.6 The principal purpose of this Appraisal is to provide a firm basis upon which proposals for development within the Groombridge Conservation Area can be assessed, through defining those key elements that contribute to the special historic and architectural character and which should be preserved. It supplements and provides clarity to policies contained in the Local Plan, primarily those relating to demolition and development within conservation areas and should be read in conjunction with the Plan. It will therefore be a key document in maintaining character and promoting appropriate, sensitive proposals in the Conservation Area.
- 1.7 Other purposes included undertaking a review of the boundary in accordance with section 69(2) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, which requires local planning authorities “*from time to time to determine whether any further parts of the area should be designated.*” The Appraisal also highlights particular issues and some of the elements that detract from the appearance



The Old Granary, Langton Road



A cottage in Groombridge

or character of the Conservation Area. These provide the basis for potential future actions for improvement.

1.8 In turn, the purpose established the key objectives as follows, which were then tested through a Sustainability Appraisal:

- To review the boundaries of the Conservation Area;
- To define the key characteristics and features which contribute to its special character or appearance which should be preserved or enhanced, providing a basis for making sustainable decisions about its future through planning decisions;
- To record those principal elements that detract from the character or appearance of the Conservation Area and to identify opportunities for enhancement, potentially to be delivered through management plans or other initiatives;
- To inform key agencies, residents etc., whose activities impact on the Conservation Area, and to maximise the investment by all such stakeholders in the preservation and enhancement of the Conservation Area to the benefit of their social and economic quality of life;
- To promote the public's understanding and enjoyment of the historic environment; and
- To protect and maintain biodiversity.

1.9 The Borough Council is also required to undertake a Sustainability Appraisal (SA) as part of the preparation of a Supplementary Planning Document. This is to ensure conformity with other higher-level strategies and policies, to identify any sustainability issues and to ensure that the Supplementary Planning Document is as sustainable as possible. This is set out more fully in Section 10 of this document.

Sustainability Appraisal
www.tunbridgewells.gov.uk

Statement of Community
Involvement
www.tunbridgewells.gov.uk

1.10 This Supplementary Planning Document forms part of the Borough Council's Local Development Framework, which is set out in the approved Local Development Scheme. In terms of the consultation process, this document followed the draft Statement of Community Involvement and its preparation has been subject to the involvement of key stakeholders as well as a public consultation. This is set out more fully in Section 9 of this document.

1.11 This document has been approved by Tunbridge Wells Borough Council for development control purposes and will help guide the Council when making decisions about applications for development within, or on the edges of, the Groombridge Conservation Area. The Appraisal will also inform other agencies and individuals whose activities impact on the fabric of the Groombridge Conservation Area, such as the County and Borough Councils and local businesses and householders.

2.0 The Planning Policy Context

National and Regional Guidance

- 2.1 Government advice on the control of conservation areas and historic buildings are set out in Planning Policy Guidance Note 15 – Planning and the Historic Environment. Further advice about conservation area control, including the production of management proposals, has recently (August 2005) been produced by English Heritage.
- 2.2 The Regional Spatial Strategy and Kent & Medway Structure Plan policies also provide the general strategic policy context.

PPG 15: Planning and the Historic Environment
www.communities.gov.uk

South East Plan
www.southeast.ra.gov.uk

Kent and Medway Structure Plan
www.kmsp.gov.uk

Tunbridge Wells Borough Local Plan

- 2.3 There are two policies in the Tunbridge Wells Borough Local Plan 2006, which relate to conservation areas in general – Policies EN4 and EN5. Further policies about the control of development within Groombridge can also be found in the adopted Local Plan, principally Policy EN1.
- 2.4 Policy EN4 seeks to control the demolition of buildings within conservation areas.

Tunbridge Wells Borough Local Plan 2006
www.tunbridgewells.gov.uk

POLICY EN4

Development involving proposals for the total or partial demolition of unlisted buildings which contribute positively to the character of a conservation area will not be permitted unless an overriding case can be made out against all of the following criteria:

- 1. The condition of the building, and the cost of repairing and maintaining it in relation to its importance and the value derived from its continued use;**
- 2. The adequacy of efforts made to retain the building in use, including efforts to find compatible alternative uses;**
- 3. The merits of alternative proposals for the site, and whether there are acceptable and detailed plans for any redevelopment; and**
- 4. Whether redevelopment will produce substantial planning benefits for the community, including economic regeneration or environmental enhancement.**

- 2.5 Policy EN5 sets out criteria for determining whether a development is appropriate within a conservation area.

POLICY EN5

Proposals for development within, or affecting the character of, a conservation area will only be permitted if all of the following criteria are satisfied:

1. The proposal would preserve or enhance the buildings, related spaces and vegetation which combine to form the character and appearance of the area;
2. The siting of the development would be similar to adjoining building frontage lines where this is important to the character of the conservation area;
3. The layout and arrangement of the building(s) would follow the pattern of existing development and spacing of adjoining plot widths where this is important to the character of the conservation area;
4. The scale, massing, use of materials, detailing, boundary treatment and landscaping would preserve or enhance the character of that part of the conservation area in which the proposal would be situated;
5. The use, or intensity of use, would be in sympathy with the character and appearance of that part of the conservation area in which the proposal would be situated;
6. The proposal would not result in the loss of trees, shrubs, hedges or other features important to the character of that part of the conservation area in which the proposal would be situated; and
7. In meeting the parking and access requirements, the character and amenity of the area would not be adversely affected.

- 2.6 The detailed character appraisal contained in this document will assist in the interpretation of these policies.

Other Local Plan Policies

- 2.7 There are a number of other general and specific policies in the Local Plan, which are relevant to the Groombridge Conservation Area. Specific policy designations are set out in detail in the Tunbridge Wells Borough Local Plan 2006 and the Proposals Map. They can be accessed via the Local Plan link on the Borough Council's website. They can be summarised as follows:

MGB1 Metropolitan Green Belt.

- EN1 Design and other Development Control Criteria**
- EN8 Outdoor Lighting**
- EN9 Ancient Monuments**
- EN10 Sites of Archaeological Interest**
- EN13 Ancient Woodland**
- EN11 Historic Parks and Gardens**
- EN25 Rural Landscape Protection**
- EN26 Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty**
- H11 Extensions outside Limits to Built Development**

Tunbridge Wells
Borough Local Plan 2006
www.tunbridgewells.gov.uk

Other Designations

- 2.8 Finally, there are designations that are made through other legislation. These include listed buildings and tree preservation orders. It is advisable to check with the Borough Council on detailed enquiries, as these designations are subject to changes. They are also subject to Local Plan policies and other legislation. These designations are shown on the accompanying Heritage Designation maps together with the Archaeological, Ancient Woodland and Historic Park boundaries.

Heritage Designation map -
Groombridge Conservation
Area
www.tunbridgewells.gov.uk



A selection of building materials and details in Groombridge

3.0 Location and Landscape Setting

Location

- 3.1 Groombridge is located on the edge of west Kent, some seven kilometres to the west of Tunbridge Wells. It lies within the Metropolitan Green Belt and the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

Topography

- 3.2 Groombridge developed as a nucleated settlement on the rising ground of the north bank of the River Grom within the wider distinctive landscape which extends westwards from Tunbridge Wells, characterised by a number of high ridges intersected by a complex network of valleys. The village itself lies on the steeply sloping south-facing slope which drops down to the valley of the River Grom, a short river that rises in Tunbridge Wells and feeds into the River Medway two kilometres west of Groombridge. This part of the Borough has been designated as 'Wooded Farmland' within the Borough Landscape Character Area Assessment.

Geology

- 3.3 The village is located in a valley on the edge of the sandstone ridge that extends west of Tunbridge Wells towards the valley of the River Medway. Groombridge sits on the south-facing hillside, unlike the more typical Wealden pattern of ridge top settlement.
- 3.4 The whole area is underlain by hard, Tunbridge Wells sandstone which radiates out in high ridges. The distinct topography comprises smooth, open ridges which have been cut and dissected at the base by tributary streams merging from springs at the junction of the sandstone and softer Wadhurst clays. 'Chalybeate' springs are found throughout the area, which have a high iron content and distinct rust colour.

Relationship of the Conservation Area to its Surroundings

- 3.5 Groombridge is on a south facing slope and is screened from the north by deciduous woods, especially beech. Approached from the north it is surprisingly well hidden, and The Green is not revealed until the visitor stumbles upon it. The Green itself is well contained and is even screened from the lower ground across the county border to the south by trees. There are attractive views between The Green and Groombridge Place and, from the north eastern approach, across the park of Groombridge Place.
- 3.6 The Conservation Area covers The Green and central core of the village, south to the River Grom and county boundary, north to the boundary of a prominent beech wood and along the two roads that lead out of the village north east and north west to include various outlying houses. The basic form of the village is set by the triangular green and the three roads that lead away from it. The combination of privately owned parkland on the south of the settlement and the hillside to the north discouraged the spread of development. More importantly, the building of the railway well south of the old village took the pressure off and stimulated the growth of a whole new settlement that has remained visually separate.



The view from Fountain Cottage to Court House



Looking north from east of Groombridge Place



The Green

- 3.7 The Green occupies a steeply sloping site and is fringed on two sides by groups and terraces of cottages, mostly of 17th century origin. There is some development on the east side of The Green, but the focus here is the church of St John, built in 1625, and its graveyard. Groombridge Place and its park occupy the land east of The Green. It is interesting that when Packer rebuilt the house in the late 17th century, he did not follow fashion and build on a new site, higher up the hillside and with a view, but he rebuilt in what must have been the courtyard of the medieval house. Burrswood was built to the west in the 1830s and its land occupies the land west of The Green and south to the river. Before the house was constructed, there was a farm and tannery on the site. To the north there is farmland and the ground rises more steeply to the beech wood that forms an important visual backdrop to the village and the Conservation Area. The Tithe map of c.1840 reveals that remarkably little has changed in the intervening 165 years; even many of the field boundaries remain the same.
- 3.8 The Tunbridge Wells Circular Walk passes through the village, entering from the east past Groombridge Place and a very attractive path cutting diagonally up the hill, behind the church and to The Green. It then leaves the village north-eastward, disappearing behind houses on Groombridge Hill.



The Crown Inn



The Dower House

Biodiversity

- 3.9 The village is surrounded by a pastoral, farmed landscape, where open fields provide improved pasture or land for arable crops. Beech and holly hedges are common, although some of these have been adversely affected by field enlargement. There is an extensive beech wood to the north of the village and this continues down the western side, merging with the park of Burrswood.
- 3.10 The ornamental parkland of Groombridge Place, with specimen trees, is important to the character of the east side of the village, and parts of it are listed Grade II* on the English Heritage Register of Historic Parks & Gardens. The park extends to about 40 hectares and was probably established in the mid to late 19th century. It lies mainly east of the house along the floor of the valley and up the valley sides to the north and south of the gardens. The valley floor is laid to meadow grassland with trees, including weeping willows. To the north west, the rising slopes are laid to pasture with scattered mature trees, whilst to the north east, open grassland and vineyard (planted 1990s) are abutted further up by mature woodland. Between the house and the village is a lake, with a small island, shown on a map of 1769.



Groombridge Place from the east



View from the churchyard to Groombridge Place

4.0 Historic Development and Archaeology

Historic Development

Pre-Conquest

- 4.1 Groombridge is Saxon in origin. The chief of the tribe was one 'Gromen'. He and his men 'kept' the bridge over the river, hence the name Groombridge. It is believed that there has been a building on the moated site of Groombridge Place since before the Norman Conquest.

Conquest-1500

- 4.2 In 1239, the owner of the area was William Russell, later succeeded by the de Cobham family. In 1286, Edward I granted to the de Cobhams a charter to hold a weekly market and annual fair to be held in May. These originally took place on or around The Green, but later the market moved to a site off Withyham Road, across the border in Sussex, surviving there as a fortnightly cattle market until the 1950s. The fair died out in the early 1900s.
- 4.3 In 1360, the Manor was purchased by Thomas Waller. Legend has it that his descendant, after the fighting at Agincourt in 1415, found and captured the Duc d'Orleans, brought him to England and kept him prisoner at Groombridge. In fact the Duc was imprisoned in the Tower of London and it was his brother, John of Angoulême, who was brought over as a hostage in 1413 by the Duke of Clarence. He was held at various locations before finally coming to Groombridge where he remained for thirty years until the ransom was paid.
- 4.4 At this time, the parish of Speldhurst stretched from Tunbridge Wells to Groombridge, but the Manor of Groombridge extended only from the river to Langton Green.

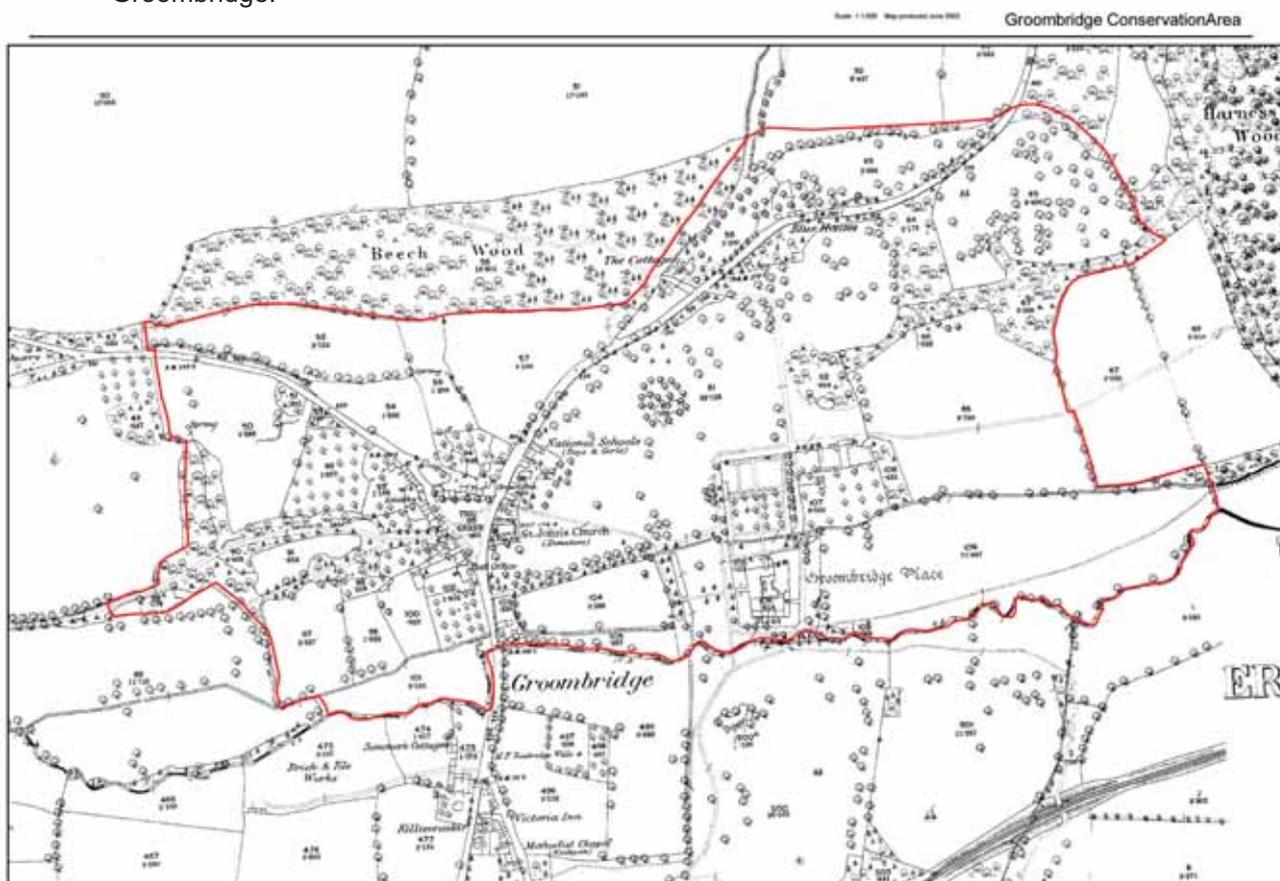
1500-1800

- 4.5 The Waller family remained Lords of the Manor through to 1604 when it was sold to Thomas Sackville, Earl of Dorset. However, soon after, in 1618, the Manor passed to John Packer and he built the church in 1625. This was an act of Protestant patriotism as thanksgiving for the safe return of Prince Charles (later Charles I) from Spain in 1623. It had been feared that he might marry the Catholic Infanta, but he returned a bachelor. Between 1652 and 1674, Packer's youngest son, Philip, a friend of the diarist John Evelyn, rebuilt Groombridge Place to essentially its present form. Philip Packer probably also laid out the gardens.
- 4.6 Whilst there is evidence that some of the houses surviving today around The Green existed in 1610, it seems likely that the village took on its present shape during the busy period of building that followed John Packer's acquisition of the Manor. Most of the buildings surviving to this day date from this period.
- 4.7 When the last member of the Packer family died in 1709, the estate was in debt and after a long-running and costly law suit became vested in Chancery from 1734-54. During this time the Groombridge Gang of smugglers, led by Thomas Morton and John Bowra, achieved some notoriety in the area.
- 4.8 In 1754, the Groombridge Estate was bought by William Camfield, who is said to have "retrieved the mansion house, chapel and the whole village from the utmost ruinous condition and made it an agreeable

place.” Robert Burgess became the owner in 1788. On his death he left it to his widow Sarah, who later became Mrs Harbroe. For some sixty years it was the home of the Saint family (relatives of Sarah) until the Rev J J Saint finally inherited under the terms of Sarah’s will. It remained in the hands of the Saint family until 1919. During that time there were few significant changes.

1800-2000

- 4.9 As with so many rural settlements dependent on agriculture, Groombridge remained a small, contained village until the arrival of the railway in the 1860s led to the development of a new settlement, ‘New Groombridge’ on the south side of the River Grom. The station opened in 1866 and the railway connection to Tunbridge Wells was made in 1868.
- 4.10 Probably a combination of the hillside terrain of ‘Old’ Groombridge and the estate ownership made it more attractive to develop a new settlement on the lower ground south of the old village, and because this is where the railway itself arrived.
- 4.11 Old Groombridge before the railway was a thriving community supporting a wide variety of business – grocer, post office, butcher, baker, draper, carpenter and joiner, blacksmith, coal merchant, boot and shoe maker, saddler, carrier, miller, watch maker, tailor, innkeeper and a schoolmaster are all listed in Kelly’s trade directory for 1871, five years after the railway arrived. The National School was built, north of the church, in 1858, paid for by Sir Walter George Stirling, Bart of Burrswood and with grants from the Committee of Council on Education, the National Society and Canterbury Diocesan Board. The school closed in 1922, having been replaced by schools in New Groombridge.

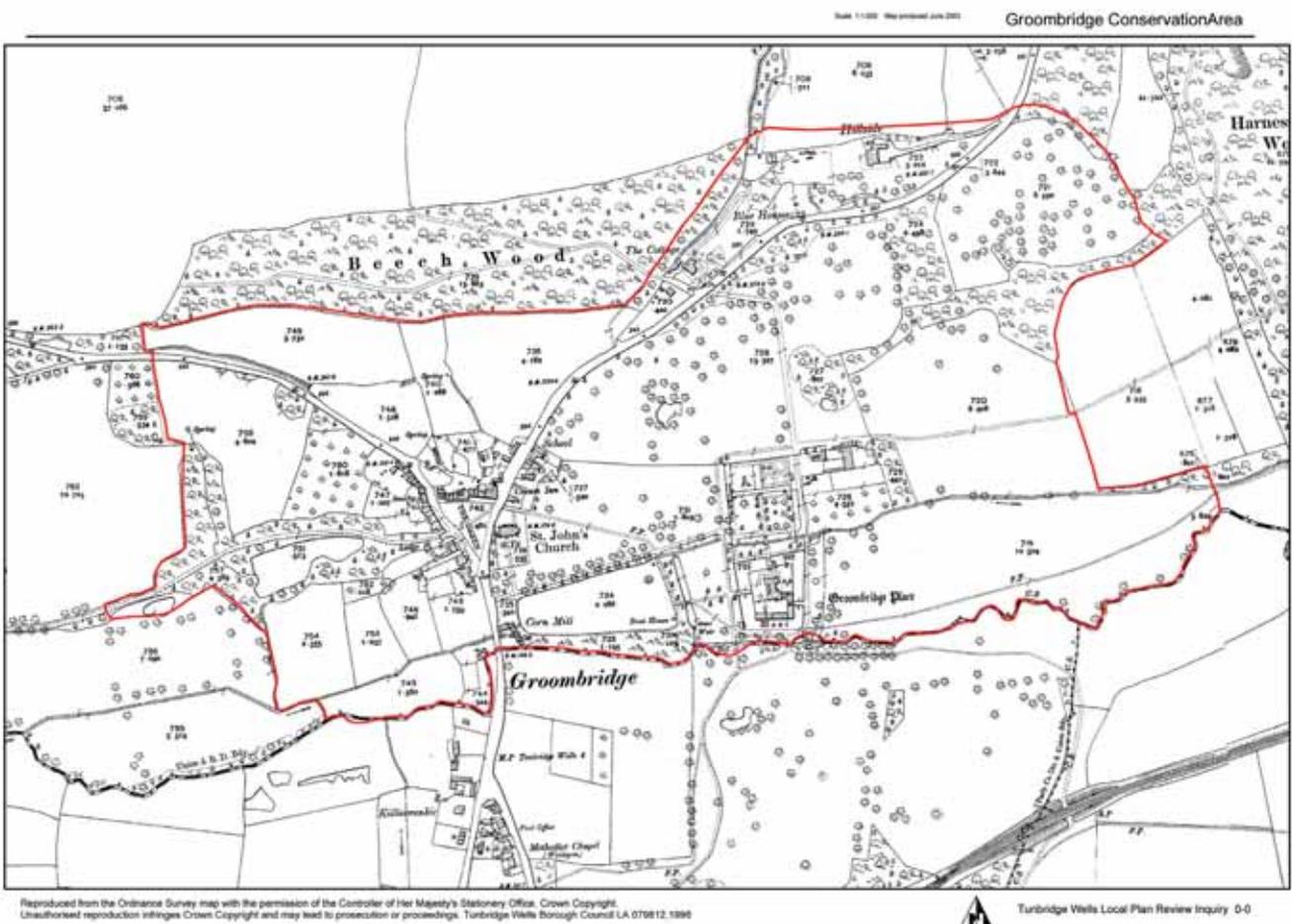


Reproduced from the Ordnance Survey map with the permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office. Crown Copyright. Unauthorized reproduction infringes Crown Copyright and may lead to prosecution or proceedings. Tunbridge Wells Borough Council LA 070812,1066

1870 Ordnance Survey map

- 4.12 From 1866, as New Groombridge grew, the old village remained static and gradually became an almost exclusively residential settlement. Apart from Groombridge Place and Burrswood, built by Decimus Burton in 1831-38 for David Salomons, the larger properties outside the village were exclusively farms until the railway arrived in 1866. Improved transport prompted the building of several large houses, most notably three by the eminent Victorian architect, Norman Shaw: Glen Andred (1867); Leyswood (1869); and Hillside (1874). In the 1920s, the artist, Lawson Wood, chose to build Court Lodge just above the village on Groombridge Road. His architect, John D Clarke of Eastbourne, incorporated a 13th century manor house, moved from Udimore in Sussex.
- 4.13 Groombridge’s beautiful landscape setting on the hillside, with the Parkland of Groombridge Place and Burrswood to the south, and the increasing ‘old world’ charm of its cottages, ensured a future for Old Groombridge as a highly desirable residential village and tourist destination. It is no surprise that it is the inn (The Crown) that has survived where other businesses have moved on.

PPG 15: Planning & the Historic Environment
 PPG 16: Archaeology & Planning
www.communities.gov.uk



1909 Ordnance Survey map

Archaeology

- 4.14 Archaeology, which includes standing remains and built structures, as well as buried deposits, can add another layer of understanding to the evolution and present-day significance of the settlement. Every historic building within the Conservation Area potentially contains information about how the building came to its present form, although this might be hidden below layers of later alterations and additions. Any activity that disturbs these layers may therefore provide an opportunity for new information, research, interpretation and education. However, before granting permission for further changes, and as recommended in PPG15, the Borough Council may ask an applicant to provide an 'Archaeological Evaluation' of the building to help the Borough Council reach an informed decision about the proposals.
- 4.15 The most significant archaeological site within the Conservation Area is the medieval moated site of Groombridge Place, which is a designated Scheduled Ancient Monument (KE12728). Additionally, the area of land immediately around Groombridge Place and extending south to the river, westward to the road, and north to the lower half of The Green and to Ivy Cottage, is identified as an Area of Archaeological Potential. However, this designation is somewhat out of date and the area of potential could usefully include all of the village centre.
- 4.16 The local sites and monuments record (SMR) is held by Kent County Council and includes a record of finds and past archaeological investigations. For Groombridge, the entries include all of the statutory listed buildings, the scheduled monument and evidence of post-medieval settlement remains to north of the existing settlement.

5.0 Spatial Analysis

Townscape

- 5.1 For an analysis of the townscape character of Groombridge, the Conservation Area may be divided into six character zones, each with its own distinct characteristics. This is defined by the historic form of development (plot layout, roads and boundaries); the relationship of buildings to spaces, type of buildings and the materials; uses and activities; the contribution of landscape, trees and hedges.

Groombridge Hill north of The Crown – key characteristics

- Meandering road of gradual descent following the contours, emerging from the woods of the upper hill with complete canopy to broad, open views across farm and parkland;
- Scattered groups of buildings on the upper side only;
- Informal mixture of hedgerow and chestnut paling with uncut verges interspersed with specimen mature oak trees;
- Soft edge to the carriageway; and
- Arrival at the village with informal grouping of buildings and sense of arrival at the rear of the buildings that face The Green.

The Green – key characteristics

- Strong sense of enclosure on two sides; continuous building on one side, looser grouping with gaps between on the second and open to the church and churchyard on the third;
- Buildings fronting directly onto The Green, whether or not land is private;
- Homogenous group of highly graded listed buildings, yet with great variety;
- Building materials dominated by red/orange brick and tile, but also black and white weatherboarding;
- Continuous backdrop of trees to the north; wealth of trees closing views to west and south and open views into parkland to east;
- Lack of urban paraphernalia (apart from the motor car), signs, lighting, fences, pavements; and
- Brick pavement of The Walks and formal lime trees.

Groombridge Place – key characteristics

- Timelessness of ancient buildings, weathered and remarkably little altered;
- Formal gardens around the house and wider setting of established parkland;
- Dense planting around the ponds and river;
- Informal relationship between Groombridge Place and The Green, linked by a footpath; and
- Sense of enclosure and mystery created by the dense planting west of the house, coming upon the house with surprise, and more open with views east of the house.

Burrswood – key characteristics

- Dense 19th century tree planting forming a screen behind buildings in views from The Green;
- Ponds concealed within woodland and with the driveway beneath a tree canopy;

Townscape Analysis map -
Groombridge Conservation
Area
www.tunbridgewells.gov.uk



Langton Road is surrounded by trees



The Walks



Groombridge Place

- Irregular backs of houses and their rear gardens glimpsed from the drive; and
- Typically 19th century lodge and entrance heralding a different form and period of development and contrasting with other development on The Green.

Groombridge Road – key characteristics

- Country lane descending obliquely across the contours, enclosed by trees and high banks;
- Open aspect around Court Lodge and formal garden with yew topiary; and
- Entry to village with cottages on one side, storage buildings on the other and the sense of arrival deferred until The Green is reached.

South entry into the village – key characteristics

- The Green well screened by trees; and
- Pinch point of the bridge over the river with views to The Mill complex and with willow trees associated with the river.



Burrswood Lodge

Approaches

- 5.2 Groombridge is approached from three directions. The principal route through the village is the B2110, which forms the east side of The Green. The road leaves the main Tunbridge Wells to East Grinstead road west of Langton Green and descends south westward through Old Groombridge and across the river into New Groombridge and East Sussex. Leaving the north west corner of The Green, Groombridge Road continues north-westward to join the Tunbridge Wells to East Grinstead Road about 2 kilometres west of the junction with the B2110. The 1929 Ordnance Survey map shows the principal route from Tunbridge Wells to East Grinstead running through Groombridge.
- 5.3 The north eastern approach starts beyond the boundary of the Conservation Area at the entrance to Top Hill Farm, the beginning of the descent to Groombridge and the Grom. Here the road bends, past Stone Cottages (listed Grade II), to descend, following the contours, with Harness Well Wood dropping away steeply to the left and providing, in summer, a canopy of trees over the road. One of the Norman Shaw houses, the appropriately named Hillside, is sited on a terrace before the land falls away more steeply. The Conservation Area boundary is reached just before the first scattered houses that hint of the approaching village; first Blue Cottage (formerly Blue Houses), then The Cottage and Fountain Cottage, all Grade II listed buildings. The gate piers to The Cottage are also listed, as is the 1894 horse trough and drinking fountain that must have been a welcome sight for travellers climbing up the hill from the village. This was provided in memory of William Coston, who built Hillside. From Blue Cottage, a pavement is provided on one side of the road only, hinting at the village that is to come.
- 5.4 After passing this scattered group of cottages, the woods are left behind and suddenly views open across the gently sloping field towards Court Lodge to the west, and more dramatically to the south, to the park of Groombridge Place and the first glimpses of cottages in Groombridge village. The rural feel persists, a mixture of hedgerow and chestnut paling, uncut verges interspersed with mature oak trees, right up until the village is reached. The road straightens and a small



The water trough on Langton Road

cluster of buildings heralds the village. However, after the attractive descent to the village, the sense of expectation is retained as it is only when the Crown Inn and Crown Cottage are reached that The Green itself is revealed.

- 5.5 Groombridge Road is no more than a country lane. At the second entrance to Burrswood, and at the crest of the hill, the lane bends eastward towards Groombridge and gently descends the contours past Quarry House and The Drift. The lane is heavily enclosed by hedges, raised banks and overhanging trees and enters the Conservation Area a little before the 30mph sign. One outlying house is within the Conservation Area, Court Lodge, just outside the village and visible in views from the north eastern approach close to Fountain Cottage. Approached from the north west, the bosky lane opens up at this point to reveal the house set back on the right. The lane drops into the village with a high bank on the left, interrupted by a concrete driveway to a group of dark-stained weather-boarded garages and outbuildings. The first group of cottages appear on the right and the lane bends to reveal, only at the last minute, The Green.
- 5.6 From the southern approach there is just a small gap between the more extensive settlement of New Groombridge, in East Sussex and Old Groombridge, but visually the two are barely connected, owing to the extensive band of trees that line the banks of the River Grom. The B2110 narrows to pass over the listed bridge that crosses the Grom. The enclosure given by trees is very important, and it is with some surprise that one emerges from the canopy of trees and The Green is all at once revealed.



Bridge over the road to New Groomsbridge



The triangular village green

Spaces and Views

- 5.7 The key open space of Groombridge is the triangular village green. Enclosed by buildings on two sides, the eastern side adjoins the open space of the historic churchyard surrounding St John's Church. North of the church, the public footpath through pasture makes a direct physical and visual link to the park of Groombridge Place. From the west side of The Green, the entrance to Burrswood gives access to its grounds, although publicly accessible.
- 5.8 The Green is one of the finest ensembles in Kent, the combination of the sloping ground, the triangular shape and the harmonious ranges of traditional buildings ranged principally around two of its sides, all remarkably unaltered into the 21st century. The Crown Inn and Crown Cottage, both listed Grade II*, are set aside the road as it enters The Green from the north east, both side-end to the road and facing south, almost as if the road were something of an irritant as it breaks through into The Green.
- 5.9 The higher (northern) side of The Green is known as The Walks, a brick paved path with pollarded limes and the simplest of post and rail timber fences. The continuous row of cottages dates from the early 17th century onwards.
- 5.10 The two roads converge at the south end of The Green and disappear into trees before crossing the River Grom into Sussex by way of the modest sandstone ashlar bridge (Grade II) dating from the late 18th century or early 19th century.

5.11 The most notable views are:

- Descending Groombridge Hill in the vicinity of Fountain Cottages to Groombridge Park and south westward to Court Lodge;
- From the north west corner of The Green eastwards across to St John's Church and Groombridge Place;
- From Groombridge Place north westward towards St John's Church and The Green; and
- From Groombridge Park east of the house looking north westwards towards Beech Wood.

Landmarks and Focal Points

5.12 The most important landmarks and focal points are:

- The Green, the principal green space in the Conservation Area which acts as a central focal point;
- St John's Church, notable for its 17th century brickwork and tiled roof;
- The Crown Inn, with its outside sitting area, dominating the northern side of The Green;
- Mill House and its outbuildings, located close to the road and important in views from The Green and along the street; and
- Groombridge Place, its moat and its formal gardens, creating a very special 'ensemble' in the landscape.



Mill House



St John's Church from The Walks

6.0 Definition of the Special Interest of the Conservation Area

Activities and Uses

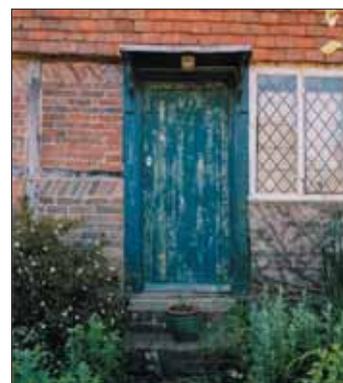
- 6.1 Old Groombridge today is primarily a residential dormitory village. Employers are Burrswood 'Christian Hospital and Healing Centre', the Groombridge Place estate and the Crown Inn. New Groombridge, over the border in East Sussex, has a more diverse range of employment. Eridge Station, some four miles to the south, provides a direct but slow rail link to London. Groombridge station remains, as part of the tourist Spa Valley Railway, offering a limited service into Tunbridge Wells. The Crown Inn is an important local facility, very popular in the summer, located in an historic building at the top side of The Green. St John's Church is the only religious building, located on the east side of The Green, in the heart of the Conservation Area. A well-used recreation ground can be found outside the Conservation Area in New Groombridge.
- 6.2 Names of buildings, such as The Old Butchers, The Old Forge and The Old Town Post Office, tell of former employment uses in the village, as do surviving features such as the shop front on the corner property at the western end of The Walks.

Plan Form, Building Types and Boundaries

- 6.3 The layout, or plan form, of the village is dictated by the three roads that form a Y with The Green at its junction. The two upper arms of the Y curve away to the north. Both these northern approaches descend the hill and are bordered by numerous trees, forming a canopy in summer. Groombridge Road becomes a sunken lane as it approaches the village. Both converge on the village in a manner that conceals The Green, which is revealed only at the last moment. The 'pinch-point' entries into the village are important and are repeated with the narrow bridge over the Grom at the south entrance to the village. All three create informal 'gateways' which mark the edge of the built-up area. The layout of the parks of Groombridge Place and Burrswood provide almost a corridor of parkland on the river slopes above the Grom.
- 6.4 The c.1840 Tithe Map of Groombridge shows the village very much as it is today, with most of the buildings in the Conservation Area shown. Little has been added or taken away since that time. Whilst the village is of ancient origins, it is likely that with the rebuilding of Groombridge Place in the second half of the 17th century came the building, or re-building, of the village. The earlier buildings all front The Green, or are very close by. From the 18th century, a few outlying cottages and houses were built along Groombridge Hill and in the later 19th century, a few more country retreats appeared, sometimes, like Hillside, set back from the road.
- 6.5 Most of the buildings, apart from the later houses, were built by the Groombridge Place Estate. The church was built by the owner of Groombridge Place and remained a private chapel until 1872. The details and materials are common to the Kent and East Sussex vernacular. They are, therefore, modestly sized, usually two storeys high, with a third storey in the roof, lit by dormer windows. Roofs are steeply pitched. Of the older buildings The Dower House is the only one that might be termed 'polite' architecture. Despite the fact



The Old Town Post Office



Brick and handmade clay tiles are a feature of the conservation area

that the majority of the buildings on The Green were probably built at much the same time, there is enormous variety. Whilst there is a predominance of mellow red clay brick and tile, there is also white and black weatherboard. But even here, the red tile roofs and brick chimneys combine to form a weathered and harmonious whole.

- 6.6 Overall, there is a pleasing homogeneity of an estate village, an effect assisted by the conformity of paint colours used for doors and windows. The separation between public and private areas is blurred, to the benefit of the whole. This softness of edges is also marked by the lack of pavements and kerbs. The only pavement around The Green is the mellow brick paving of The Walks. Even the modern pavements along the eastern boundary with the churchyard, and on the approaches to the village, are softened by being weathered and having a low kerb. At the top of Bird-in-Hand Street there is a further short section of brick pavement. The virtual absence of street lighting contributes to the rural calm of the village. Timber fences to the churchyard (first indicated, however, in an illustration of 1809) and to one or two properties around the north east corner of The Green are slightly discordant.



Brick paving in The Walks

Listed Buildings

- 6.7 Old Groombridge is a very small settlement, but has one of the densest concentrations of listed buildings in the county. There are 56 listed buildings, no less than 27 of which are Grade II* and five are Grade I. Grade I buildings are among the top 3 or 4% of listed buildings in the country.
- 6.8 Groombridge Place accounts for four of the Grade I listings. Groombridge Place itself is a delightfully little-altered, late 17th century house still set within its medieval moat: an H-plan house facing west and with two pairs of giant redwoods (shown on the 1st edition OS map, surveyed 1868-74) at the front. The contemporaneous service courtyard, moat walls and bridge, together with the garden walls, are all listed Grade I. The moat walls are probably of medieval origins. All the buildings around Groombridge Place are listed, in recognition of individual merit, but also because the whole complex is of such exceptional historic interest, being remarkably little altered. Ivy Cottage was built as a banquet house and also dates to the late 17th century. The gardens and park are also listed Grade II* on the English Heritage Register of Parks & Gardens.
- 6.9 Most of the east side of The Green is occupied by St John's Church (Grade I), built as a private chapel in 1625 by John Packer of Groombridge Place, to celebrate and give thanks for Prince Charles' return from Spain, unmarried to the Catholic Infanta. It is unusual for new churches to be built at this time and St John's is a case of Gothic survival rather than Gothic revival. It is of modest red brick and sandstone chapel, set back in its graveyard, and entirely appropriate to its informal village setting. Significant works were undertaken twice during the 19th century, in 1824 and 1895 (repairs to the east end after damage by lightning). In 1912, the roof was rebuilt. Within the churchyard there are four listed tombs: a group of three Camfield chest tombs dating from the 1780s, located approximately two metres south of the nave; and a chest tomb of 1812 in memory of Anne Camfield, located approximately four metres south of the nave.
- 6.10 Around The Green, all the buildings are listed, the majority at Grade II*. Those on The Walks are all listed Grade II*, a stunning grouping,



St John's Church

not of a piece, but united by the weathered brick, tile hanging and big tiled roofs, punctuated at intervals by hipped roof dormers and brick chimney stacks. The cottages on The Walks are not designed, but nothing is out of place and all blends happily together.

- 6.11 The west side of The Green is a barely less perfect and is romantically called Bird-in-Hand Street. At the lower end is The Old Butchers (Grade II*), a stand-alone house with a double-pile plan, and big central chimneystack. White painted weatherboarding sets it apart from the more prevalent red tile hanging. The Old Butchers shop itself is a single storey projection towards The Green. The Old Town Post Office (Grade II*) returns to the brick and tile palette of materials. The front garden of the left-hand half is enclosed by 19th century railings. Discreetly set back is Burrswood Lodge and gate piers (Grade II), rock-faced sandstone and 'black and white', built c.1838. Nos. 1, 2, 3 and 4 (Grade II*) step up the street boldly. The black stained weatherboarding harmonises comfortably with the earth tones of the brick and tile.
- 6.12 At the top of The Green is the single storey Old Forge (Grade II), again dark stained weatherboarding. The modern up-and-over doors are regrettable. As Bird-in-Hand Street leaves The Green, there is a further continuous run of cottages, first Nos. 5 & 6 (Grade II*) with an incoherent but happy mix of brick, weatherboard and tile hanging. No. 6 was a pub. No. 7 (Grade II*) is a narrow weatherboarded frontage and Nos. 8-10 (Grade II) are a neat row of late 18th cottages, surprisingly ordered after the hodgepodge variety that has gone before. No. 11 (Grade II*) returns to the variety of weatherboard and tile, with a sandstone plinth. Set back behind No. 11, No. 12 (Grade II*), exceptionally, has exposed timber framing.
- 6.13 At the south end of The Green, The Dower House (Grade II*) dates from c1680, a proud brick house with two projecting gabled wings. It was a grocer's shop until 1939. Next to the bridge (Grade II) are the Mill House (Grade II*), a former stable (Grade II) and the former watermill (Grade II*), set among trees by the river.
- 6.14 Away from The Green, Court Lodge, on Groombridge Road, is listed Grade II*. Court Lodge was built in 1912, incorporating the remains of a 13th century courtyard house re-erected from Udimore, near Rye. The project was organised by the local artist, Lawson Wood, and supervised by his architect, J D Clarke, and the historian, J E Ray. Outside the Conservation Area to the west, Burrswood, of 1831-38, designed by Decimus Burton for Alderman David Salomans, is listed Grade II, as are its terrace walls and steps. Ascending Groombridge Hill, the late 18th or early 19th century Fountain Cottages, The Cottage with its gates and gate piers, Blue Cottage and the 1894 roadside horse trough and drinking fountain are all listed Grade II. Beyond the Conservation Area boundary, the Norman Shaw house, Hillside, was built in 1871 for William Cotton Oswell, explorer who, with David Livingstone discovered Lake Ngami. It is listed Grade II, as is the row of 1840s Stone Cottages yet further out.



Bird-in-Hand Street



Stone Cottages, Langton Road

Key Unlisted Buildings

- 6.15 There are relatively few unlisted buildings within the Conservation Area and they are all of value. The main group is either side of Groombridge Hill, just before it meets The Green: St John's House and the former National School on the east side, built in 1858; and The Old Granary, The Black & White Shop and the outbuildings to

The Crown, on the west side. These buildings create a sense of enclosure and 'announce' the village from the north eastern approach. St John's House and the former National School give away their date by the use of Welsh slate on the roof. Whilst the railway did not reach Groombridge until 1866, it had reached Tunbridge Wells 21 years earlier. The other buildings are a mix of brick and black stained weatherboarding. The Old Granary has some poorly detailed window insertions, but remains a building of character and of historic interest. The group of outbuildings off the east side of Groombridge Road are also of merit as simple workaday storage buildings of black stained weatherboarding with tiled roofs. These were originally built as storage for carriers' carts to Crown Farm.

Building Materials, Colours and Textures

- 6.16 Building materials in Groombridge are typical of the west part of Kent and East Sussex, using local sandstone, clay and timber. Situated off the sandstone ridge, its use as a building material in Groombridge is confined largely to plinths and elements such as the external gable end chimneystack on The Crown Inn. In the 19th century, sandstone was a little more extensively used. Its earlier use is generally in rougher hewn blocks, but in its later use the stone is more finely squared into blocks and tooled to present an attractive surface. The sandstone is a light brown colour, which merges well with the rich reds and browns of the clay bricks and tiles that are the predominant building materials at Groombridge. There were sandstone quarries in Langton Green, and a brickworks is recorded behind Pollys Hall on the Sussex side of the River Grom, which must have been the local supplier for Groombridge. Timber would have been cut from the surrounding forests, of which Shadwell Wood to the east of Speldhurst is the last sizeable local remnant.
- 6.17 For walls, brick is the predominant material for ground storeys, but clay tile hanging is equally prevalent for upper floors. Surprisingly, whilst brick and tile are what is remembered most, weather boarding, usually black stained, is also extensively used. White painted weatherboarding is also used in a couple of locations.
- 6.18 Roofs are almost always of clay tile, but Welsh slate is used on St John's House and the former school.



The outbuildings to Mill House use the local sandstone

Local Details

- 6.19 Groombridge is notable for the unspoilt nature of The Green and its enclosure by groups of buildings that are entirely harmonious and with nothing out of place. The materials, whilst quite varied, are weathered and sit comfortably together. The steep pitched roofs are a defining feature, covered with handmade clay tiles and with hipped roofed dormers and substantial chimneystacks. Chimneystacks are generally placed along the ridge or at the gable end. The latter sometimes have projecting stacks built of sandstone or brick, or a combination of the two materials. The best example is on The Crown. Eaves are generally open, with rafters showing behind cast iron gutters. Verges over-sail or are finished with lime mortar fillets. Roofs have a variety of forms: gable ended hipped; and half-hipped. The group of houses north of the entrance to Burrswood steps down the hill nicely with a gable, a hip, a half-hip and a gable.
- 6.20 The village has a variety of windows, usually timber frames with metal casements and squared or diamond leaded lights of the 18th century

or later. The Crown and Somerden have white painted, double-hung timber sash windows, a fashionable smartening-up of around 1840. The Crown even has tripartite sashes for two windows. A feature of The Walks is that several properties have former shop windows divided with glazing bars into small panes.

- 6.21 Almost all of the doors around The Green are made from timber, either panelled or ledged and braced plank doors. They are important not least because they are normally painted green and therefore blend in and are understated. Where they have been painted a different colour it is not an enhancement. The brilliant white of The Old Post Office door draws attention to itself. Most entrances have simple flat hoods on brackets and covered in lead. Door furniture is generally painted black and consequently does not draw attention to itself. Where brass has been used, the reverse effect is achieved. Brass is not appropriate to the vernacular character of the buildings and is discordant.



The Walks

Public Realm

- 6.22 There are two areas of historic paving in the Conservation Area. The most notable is the brick paving of The Walks, which was carefully repaired and re-laid some twenty years ago. 19th century red brick paving is the local tradition and is also used outside Nos. 8-10 Bird-in-Hand Street. These are standard brick sized and made from fairly consistent red clay, with little changes in colour or texture. They are laid in stretcher bond, the first example along the length of the pavement, and the second, across the width of the pavement.
- 6.23 Otherwise, the pavements are covered in black tarmac with concrete kerbs, with a coarse aggregate and laid with a minimal upstand. In many areas there are no pavements at all and this helps to retain the rural character. Outside The Dower House, modern Tegula paving has been used, changing to gravel, neither material being particularly appropriate.
- 6.24 There is no street lighting in Groombridge, apart from a single traditional swan-neck column at the south end of The Green. On its own this does not intrude, but it would not be desirable to extend the public lighting.
- 6.25 A simple oak post and rail fence is used along The Walks to good effect. Less desirable, but deemed necessary, is the proliferation of oak posts that prevent vehicles from damaging The Green along the length of the access road that crosses it.



Brick paving is a local tradition

Green Spaces, Trees and Hedges

- 6.26 Old Groombridge is a rural village surrounded by parkland, fields and woodland. The East Sussex 'New' Groombridge, although larger, is equally a rural settlement, albeit one with a more urban feel. The Green is the dominant public green space, but green space abounds and the boundary between public and private is not a strict division. Thus, beyond The Green, the churchyard, much of the parkland to Groombridge Place and the grounds of Burrswood are all, to some extent, available and visually contribute to the sense of openness and rural setting. The private gardens of the houses around The Green contribute to the character of the Conservation Area. At the front they are generally not clearly separated from The Green and to the rear the huggermugger of boundaries, sheds and flower and vegetable gardens is a positive feature.

6.27 The trees within the Conservation Area lie mainly within the parkland, in field boundaries or in the surrounding woodland. The most significant tree groups are:

- In St John’s Churchyard;
- On either side of the River Grom;
- In the parkland of Groombridge Place, especially the avenue in front of the house, the trees around the lake and the specimen trees in the park;
- On either side of Groombridge Hill, below Hillside;
- In the grounds of Burrswood;
- The ornamental lime trees around The Green; and
- The mature trees behind Somerden and Crown Cottage viewed from The Green.



Trees on either side of the River Groombridge

6.28 Field boundary hedges are important on the two northern approaches into the village. Less attractive is the Leylandii hedge in front of Somerden, which could usefully be removed to reveal the old tailor’s shop behind.



Burrswood Drive

7.0 Conservation Area Boundary Review

- 7.1 As part of this Appraisal, the boundaries of the Conservation Area have been critically reviewed and now include additional areas, which contribute to the special character:
- (i) *Add the field to the south west of the village:*
- 7.2 This large, L-shaped field has as its southern boundary the River Grom; its eastern boundary follows the boundary of properties in the village and its eastern and northern boundary abuts the grounds of Burrswood. The southern part of the grounds of Burrswood should also be included. The trees of Burrswood form a backdrop to the properties on the west side of The Green. The lake and its environs form attractive designed landscape that should rightly be a part of the Conservation Area, even though Burrswood House itself lies beyond the Conservation Area. A line of trees follows the southern and western boundaries of the L-shaped field and the western boundary of the Conservation Area would then logically follow the western boundary of the wooded area of the grounds of Burrswood northwards up to The Drift and Groombridge Road and across the Beech Wood.
- (ii) *Add Hillside:*
- 7.3 Hillside was the second house at Groombridge designed by the influential Victorian architect, Richard Norman Shaw, who was actually responsible for very few buildings in the area. It was built in 1870-71. Whilst it does not directly relate to the Conservation Area visually, it is located just outside the present boundary and represents a layer of the history of Groombridge when, in the 19th century, it was 'discovered' as a desirable and convenient location to build a country retreat. The house is listed Grade II and it is set in mature gardens. The amended boundary would logically include the house and its grounds.
- (iii) *Change the eastern boundary to coincide with the boundary of the Groombridge Place Registered Landscape:*
- 7.4 Groombridge Place is included within the English Heritage Register of Parks & Gardens of Historic Interest at Grade II*, both for the 17th century and later gardens around the house and for the wider park established in the 19th century. The boundary of the registered area within Kent follows Groombridge Hill to the west, and to the east follows the park boundary from opposite the driveway entrance to Hillside down the hill to the River Grom. There is a logic to the Conservation Area boundary following the boundary of the Registered landscape, as Groombridge Park plays such an important part in the character of the Conservation Area, both as a backdrop in views but also for its own sake, especially in the area where it abuts the village.

8.0 Issues

- 8.1 The unique qualities of Groombridge have been recognised for many years and the village is well preserved as a result, with very little out of place. The buildings are generally in good condition and it is clearly a desirable location. However, this special character is fragile and could easily be threatened by injudicious changes. The more likely threat is from individual quite minor changes that cumulatively will threaten the character of the Conservation Area.

Pressure for Expansion and Modernisation

- 8.2 Groombridge was an estate village, and many of the houses were not owner occupied. As more properties are sold to owner-occupiers, in a desirable village of high property values, there is likely to be pressure to expand and make changes. However, there is very little scope for enlarging existing housing and modernisation has to be carried out with the utmost sensitivity to the historic fabric, both inside and outside, using only traditional materials. Many of the houses are listed Grade II* and it is inevitable that there will be considerable inflexibility to change interior plan forms. As far as the public face is concerned, small changes assume greater importance than they would in a less homogenous and perfect village. Paint colours and door furniture needs to remain consistent throughout. The paraphernalia of modern electrical equipment - communications equipment, satellite dishes, burglar alarms and other security measures need to be hidden from public view.
- 8.3 The Council could also encourage the retention of outbuildings, which provide an important contrast to the more formal frontage buildings facing The Green. These comprise the outbuildings behind The Crown, at Somerden, The Old Forge, and the group of buildings off Groombridge Road (north west of The Green).

Boundaries

- 8.4 The Green at Groombridge is notable for its lack of clearly defined boundaries at the fronts of properties. This blurring is important to the character of the Conservation Area. Elsewhere, shrubs and hedges of native species contribute to the rural character. Some new or replacement boundaries have been made using inappropriate treatment, such as conifer planting or the use of close boarded fencing.
- 8.5 The Council could consider the following actions:
- Discourage the definition of boundaries to properties fronting the west side of The Green. The open aspect of The Green, with properties appearing to front directly onto it is important and should be maintained;
 - Discourage the use of non-traditional tree planting, especially conifers;
 - Encourage good husbandry of all woodland and farmland to ensure appropriate tree planting and maintenance of hedgerows; and
 - Consider additional protection of the most important trees by the imposition of additional Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs).



The Crown Inn and its outbuildings



Undefined front boundaries are characteristic of the west side of The Green

Traffic and Pedestrian Movement

- 8.6 Like so many villages, Groombridge suffers from busy and often speeding traffic which passes through the village. Pedestrians crossing the bridge over the River Grom have little protection from traffic.
- 8.7 To improve the situation, the Council could consider how best to reduce the speed of traffic passing through the village without compromising the rural qualities of the environment. The bridge forms a natural pinch point at the southern entrance and, to a lesser extent, The Crown Inn and Crown Cottage perform the same function at the north eastern entrance to The Green. Accentuating these pinch points may be sufficient to slow traffic further, perhaps by the use of low key chicanes similar to those used in Ditchling near Lewes, which have been very carefully designed to reduce their visual impact on the Conservation Area.

Burrswood Lodge

- 8.8 The signs at the entrance to Burrswood are excessive in number and are visually assertive. The standard National Trust approach of white lettering on a black background is an accepted model of conveying the required information without being visually arresting.
- 8.9 The electricity sub-station is screened behind the entrance wall to Burrswood and has some planting. It is, nevertheless, an alien installation that remains visible and could benefit from further planting to help screen the sub station from view.

Groombridge Place Old Entrance

- 8.10 The gates here have been renewed but, owing to lack of use, the bell-mouth to the driveway has an air of neglect.

Signage

- 8.11 The standard modern sign at the junction of Groombridge Hill and The Green directing motorists to Burrswood stands out owing to its position on The Green. If it is essential, consideration could be given to a non-standard and more discreet design. At the south end of The Green there are three signs, a 30mph sign fixed to the lamppost, a sign advising that Bird-in-Hand Street is unsuitable for large vehicles and a sign bearing the street names.
- 8.12 Consideration could be given to whether all three signs are really needed and to a subtler grouping of the signs to lessen the impact.
- 8.13 The Council could therefore:
- Encourage more discreet signage for the village entrance to Burrswood and removal of the sign to Burrswood on the east side of The Green; and
 - Reduce the clutter of the three separate signs at the south end of The Green.



Old entrance to Groombridge Place



Sign to Burrswood

Sustainable Design

- 8.14 To encourage sustainable development, all new buildings should use products with a low environmental impact, including the use of locally sourced materials from sustainable resources. Where appropriate in a Conservation Area, new buildings should also include provisions for waste reduction, the re-use of materials and should be energy efficient, including the use of renewable energy systems.
- 8.15 Energy efficiency for the existing buildings within the Conservation Area could be improved by such measures as loft insulation and the provision of secondary double glazing, subject to the views of the Council's Conservation Officer and the Council's Building Control department.
- 8.16 The Council should seek to ensure that the existing local facilities are retained and their viability maintained by providing further improvements for access.

Crime

- 8.17 All new development should be carefully designed to provide a safe and secure environment.

Promotion of the Cultural Heritage

- 8.18 To increase the public's awareness, and to encourage economic growth and tourism, the Council should actively seek to promote the Conservation Area and its cultural heritage features. One such action would be to publicise this document and to arrange for it to be distributed to local residents and other interested parties.

9.0 Consultations

Introduction

- 9.1 This document has been prepared in accordance with the guidance set out in PPS12 regarding preparation and consultation on Supplementary Planning Documents.
- 9.2 The most relevant Local Plan Policies are set out in this document at Section 2. The Supplementary Planning Document is intended to support these policies.

PPS12: Local Development Frameworks

www.communities.gov.uk

Statement of Community Involvement

www.tunbridgewells.gov.uk

Consultation Process

- 9.3 The initial preparation of the document was through a working group made up of consultants from The Conservation Studio, Borough Council officers, representatives from the Speldhurst Parish Council, Speldhurst Village Society, Langton Rural Society and other individuals.
- 9.4 From September 2005, the process included walkabouts by the working group of each of the three conservation areas in the parish. These were followed by a joint workshop session. The resultant informal initial draft Appraisal was then subject to scrutiny and input from members of the working group, together with other key council officers.
- 9.5 The draft document was reported to the Borough Council's Local Development Framework Members Working Party on 19 December 2005. The Cabinet portfolio holder for Planning received the report and approved the draft Appraisal on 18 January 2006 as the basis for public consultation. (Item 060120/070).
- 9.6 The document was subject to public consultation for a period of four weeks between 30 January and 27 February 2006.
- 9.7 Documents available comprised: draft Groombridge Conservation Area Appraisal SPD; Executive Summary; Sustainability Appraisal; Statement of SPD Matters; Statement of Consultation; and map of the Conservation Area. There was also a questionnaire. These were available on the Borough Council's website, at the Council offices and local libraries.
- 9.8 Some 728 organisations were notified by letter of the consultation and where the documents could be viewed or obtained. Copies of the draft Appraisal and associated documents were sent to 15 key organisations, including the four Regulation 17 bodies.
- 9.9 A staffed exhibition, based in Langton Green, was held on 3 and 4 February 2006.
- 9.10 The consultation draft was also reported to the Borough Council's Western Area Planning Committee for comment on 9 March 2006, and was made available to all Borough Councillors.

Response to Consultation

- 9.11 The responses to the consultation were reported to the Local Development Framework Members Working Party on 18 May 2006 and to the Cabinet portfolio holder for Planning on 28 June 2006, (Item 060630/014).
- 9.12 The report details the responses received and outlines the proposed changes to the document where appropriate. The report and minutes of the meeting are available from the Council's Committee Section on request, or can be viewed on the Council's website.
- 9.13 The Appraisal was ratified at Full Council on 10th July 2006 and adopted as Supplementary Planning Document, together with the revised Conservation Area boundary.

www.tunbridgewells.gov.uk

Notices

- 9.14 A notice of public participation was placed in a local paper advertising the formal consultation period and where the documents were available.
- 9.15 On adoption, relevant notices were placed in the London Gazette on 31 August 2006, and a local newspaper, in accordance with S.70 of the Town & Country Planning (Listed Buildings & Conservation Areas) Act 1990.

London Gazette
www.gazettes-online.co.uk

10.0 Sustainability

- 10.1 The Borough Council is required to undertake a Sustainability Appraisal/Strategic Environmental Assessment (SA/SEA) as part of the preparation of a Supplementary Planning Document. This is to ensure conformity with other higher-level strategies and policies, to identify any sustainability issues and to ensure that the Supplementary Planning Document is as sustainable as possible.
- 10.2 The Sustainability Appraisal (SA) for the Groombridge Conservation Area Appraisal was independently undertaken by Waterman Environmental on behalf of the Borough Council in order to integrate sustainability considerations into the preparation of the SPD. Sustainability encompasses environmental, social and economic components. The report developed the previous work done on the overall Sustainability Appraisal Framework for the LDF.
- 10.3 Consultation with the four key national agencies was undertaken and any comments incorporated in the final SA/SEA. The SA/SEA was also consulted on alongside the SPD.

Sustainability Appraisal
www.tunbridgewells.gov.uk

11.0 Contact Details

11.1 For queries on planning matters or general conservation advice.

Telephone: 01892 526121

Fax: 01892 544746

E-mail: planningcomments@tunbridgewells.gov.uk

Or write to:

Head of Planning Services

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Royal Tunbridge Wells

Kent TN1 1RS