

Otham Conservation Area Appraisal



**Maidstone Borough Council
Approved 27th February 2009**

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OTHAM – CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL

I Introduction

The Definition, Purpose and Effect of Conservation Areas

The concept of conservation areas was first brought into being by the Civic Amenities Act of 1967, but the relevant legislation now is the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act of 1990. This act places a duty on local authorities to designate conservation areas where appropriate and defines a conservation area as “an area of architectural or historic interest the character and appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance”.

Designation as a conservation area brings additional powers to the local authority. Briefly these include the control of demolition of unlisted buildings, more restricted permitted development rights for single dwelling houses and a notification system relating to works to trees not covered by a tree preservation order.

In addition to these enhanced powers, the local authority is also required when dealing with applications for planning permission to have special regard to the question of whether or not the proposed development would either preserve or enhance the special character of the conservation area. There is a presumption that developments which would not preserve or enhance this special character should be refused planning permission.

The Purpose of the Appraisal

The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires local authorities to review their conservation areas from time to time in order to consider the possibility of revising their extent and to identify changes and pressures which may affect the original reasons for their designation. In order that informed decisions can be made on planning applications it is important to identify the special character of conservation areas which it is sought to preserve or enhance.

The most appropriate form for fulfilling these requirements is the production of a conservation area appraisal for each individual conservation area. English Heritage published an advisory booklet on the form which conservation area appraisals should take in February 2006, and this current appraisal has been prepared in accordance with these guidelines. It is intended to identify the key elements which combine to produce the special historic and architectural character of the conservation area, to analyse how they interact and impact upon one another and to explain how the area has developed into its current form. It will also seek to identify pressures and developments which threaten the special character of the conservation area and sites and features which detract from its character and appearance.

The clear understanding of the conservation area's qualities which the appraisal produces will provide suggestions for future policies and improvements as well as providing a framework against which decisions on individual proposals may be assessed.

History of Designation

The Otham Conservation Area was first designated by the Maidstone Borough Council on 19 October 1977 as part of a general review of conservation areas in the Borough. This initial designation included properties in Otham Street from the drive to Amber House to Forge Cottage only. In January 1983, Otham Parish Council requested an extension to the north and east of the initial designation; in February of that year Members resolved not to designate the extension.

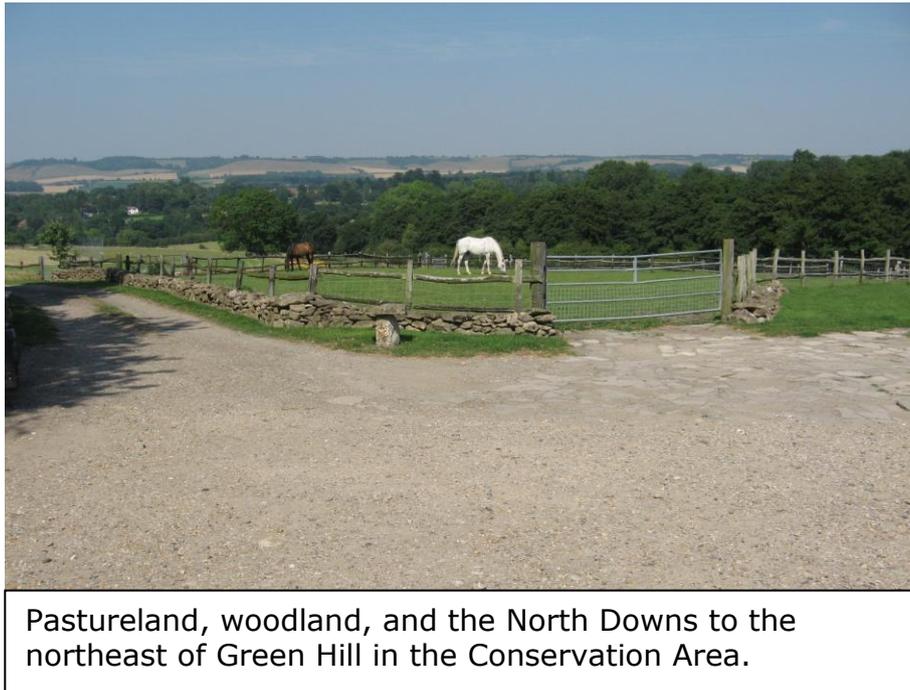
However, the question of extension was revisited in 1992. According to the 1992 Planning and Transportation Committee report, "The existing conservation area only covers a small part of the historic village, albeit that part which has the most concentrated character. However, there are many other buildings and open spaces within the village as a whole which are attractive or are of special architectural or historic interest and I consider that the request for the conservation area to be extended to cover the whole of the late medieval village pattern is justified." Following a review of the area, the extension approved on 9 June 1992 greatly increased the size of the Otham Conservation Area, adding the land surrounding Stoneacre, the Playground, and Green Hill.



Maidstone suburbs encroach on Otham's views to the northwest.

Location and Topography

The village of Otham is located 3.5 miles southeast of Maidstone, at the point where 20th-century suburbanisation ends and more rural settlement begins. It occupies a landscape of low rolling hills, offering views of the North Downs beyond. It is on the dip slope of the ragstone ridge where it descends to the Len Valley. The former ragstone quarry – partly wooded today – is in the hollow between Stoneacre and Otham Street. The landscape surrounding the Conservation Area is mostly working fields and pastureland.



The Conservation Area is roughly cross-shaped. Most of the buildings included fall on the north-south axis of Otham Street/Green Hill. This axis also offers the two main approaches to the village. The smaller east-west axis includes the land of Otham Manor to the west, and the cluster of buildings at Stoneacre located to the east. A number of footpaths pass through the area. The closest major roadways are Sutton Road (A274) to the south and Ashford Road (A20) to the north. Bearsted and Maidstone offer the nearest railway stations.

Article 4 Directions

The character of conservation areas can suffer significantly from the cumulative impact of “minor alterations” which can be carried out to single dwelling houses as “permitted development” under the General Planning and Development Order without the need for planning permission. Such alterations can include replacement windows and doors and re-roofing in inappropriate non-traditional materials.

The local Authority can seek to bring such minor alterations under planning control by the use of Directions under Article 4 of the General Planning and Development Order. A full Article 4 Direction requires the

approval of the Secretary of State, but the Council can make an Article 4(2) Direction within a conservation area without the need for such approval. An Article 4(2) Direction can only related to development fronting a highway, waterway or open space and is restricted to bringing under control specific forms of development within the curtilages of single dwelling houses.

There are no Article 4 Directions currently in force within Otham Conservation Area.

II Historical Development

Archaeology

Due to limited formal archaeological investigation in the area, little is known of Otham's prehistory and early history. Isolated finds at Stoneacre include a second-century Roman coin and a medieval pendant. Other evidence of Roman settlement in the area comes farther afield, with Roman pottery and another coin found at Merriams Farm to the east of Otham, where Saxon pottery has also been found. More complex early settlement is known to have taken place nearby. The Iron Age Boughton Monchelsea/Loose oppidum lies southeast of Otham.

Considering the richness of the Otham Conservation Area's historic environment, it is surprising how little historical information is known about the village's origins. The stony and infertile Chart Hills were originally common pasture of the primary settlements in Holmesdale to the north. Permanent settlements in the Otham area may have evolved in the 7th or 8th centuries.

Development History

By the time of the Norman Conquest, the area was known as "Oteham". According to the Domesday Book, it was given by William the Conqueror to his half-brother Odo, Bishop of Baieux: "The arable land is two carucates and an half. In demesne there is one, and nine villains, with three borderers, having one carucate. There is a church, and two servants, and one mill of five shillings, and three acres of meadow. Wood for the pannage of eight hogs." Not long after, the Bishop's disgrace placed the land in the hands of the crown. The family who held the land took the name of Otham until there was a division of the estate between two sons in the 13th century: Walter and Robert de Valoigns. For the following three centuries, the estate passed through a number of hands.

It is during the reign of Henry VIII that we first see a name affiliated with the estate that carries into modern history. Thomas Hendley, Esq. acquired the manor and advowson in the 16th century. Gore Court became his seat and remained so at least through the end of the 18th century. Gore Court, the Church of St Nicholas and Otham's historic water mills lie well outside the Conservation Area although their history is connected to that of the village.

Gore Court is not the only early "high status" building to survive in Otham. In fact, most of the 14th- to 16th-century timber-framed buildings lie within the present-day Conservation Area. In his 1989 book *Otham: People & Places*, R H C Vaux describes the village as having "a wealth of timber framed houses". This is generally attributed to the success of the Kentish ragstone quarries in the vicinity. The main quarry in the village lay between Otham Street and Stoneacre, a landscape which can still be read today in the hollow known as Pigeon Bank. Due to the rich topsoil, Otham's fortunes remained high even after quarrying eased off in the late 15th century.

The agricultural economy referred to in the Domesday Book has continued throughout history, although the crops themselves have changed in importance. For example, hops began to increase in the first half of the 18th century while at that time fruit production remained relatively low. In 1837-38 tithe commutation papers and the resulting Article of Agreement, the Parish of Otham was said to have 900 acres, all subject to tithes. Of this land, 243 acres was arable land, 245 acres meadow or pasture land, 170 acres dedicated to the cultivation of hops, 44 acres to fruit, and 198 acres of woodland. The 1855 Kelly's Directory of Kent listed seven "farmers" in the Parish. By 1867, eight were designated as "farmer and hop grower"; thereafter hops are included in the commercial title of many farmers. Only in the early 20th century does "fruit grower" appear as a separate listing. Interestingly, although positions became increasingly specialised in this century – with such titles as "poultry farmer", "farm bailiff" and "overseer" being separately designated – the number of business listings for agriculture remained at roughly 7-8 up to the 1934 directory. Today, some fruit production continues but hops are no longer grown in the area; most of the working landscape is given over to grazing and grain and hay cultivation. Many of Otham's farming buildings are still used for agricultural purposes.

While the population of the village has fluctuated somewhat, it has remained a village in size. Census records and Kelly's Directory reports show that the population peaked in late Victorian times. From a population of 277 in 1801, it rose to 357 in 1851, 375 in 1881, 335 in 1901, 333 in 1921, and 355 in 1931. The current population is roughly that of the 1851 peak.

The economic strength of the parish resulted in a relatively high density of late medieval dwellings in Otham village. The oldest known surviving medieval house in the Otham Conservation Area is the remarkable Otham Manor. With its origins in the 14th Century, its quality of construction and association with notable people indicate the importance of this house. It is thought that the 16th-century wing of the house may be attributed to the Wyatt family; Sir Francis Wyatt became governor of Virginia in the early 17th Century. The house's alternative name of Wardes/Wards comes from its late 17th-century resident, James Ward. 18th-century tenants were responsible for farming the largest area in the village at the time.



Otham Manor as viewed from the footpath to the north. A number of other timber-framed hall houses are found in the Conservation Area.

The house experienced a decline in prestige when the population rise of the mid-19th century led to the subdivision of the house into a number of workers' cottages. This decline was short-lived, however. Otham Manor's higher status returned when the house was acquired by Sir Louis du Pan Mallet in 1911, the former Ambassador to Constantinople. He not only restored the house, but he also was known to employ a large staff, including six gardeners. During Sir Louis Mallet's time there, the house is known to have hosted dignitaries and other influential members of society, including Winston Churchill.

East of Otham Manor, the most important estate centred around Stoneacre. The Ellis (Elys) family were responsible for bringing it to prominence from the 15th century through to the early 18th century. The estate was held by a number of families following Edmund Ellis's death in 1712, most notably the Baldwins, the last of whom died in the early 20th century.

Stoneacre's name originates from its connection to Kentish ragstone quarrying. The current house was built in the hollow of the quarry in the late 15th century on the site of an earlier dwelling. A timber-framed hall house, it began as a squire's dwelling and although it later became a farm house, it was never subdivided into smaller cottages like so many others of its age. The original house had five rooms with the hall open to the roof. Only in the mid 16th century, when domestic privacy became more valued, did the division of the hall allow for the addition of two bedrooms. Thanks to major restoration works in 1924, the magnificent hall has been exposed.

These 1920s works were conducted by Aymer Vallance, another important owner of Stoneacre. He is not only responsible for revealing some of the building's hidden features, but also for adding a "new" wing. To construct this extension, Vallance essentially transported part of a building at North Bore Place in Chiddingstone, which was then being demolished. Spandrels on this northwest wing are dated 1547 and 1629, likely to be the start and end dates of that building's construction. Given their date and Kentish origins, although these modifications are not original to Stoneacre, they are not out of keeping. Vallance's decision to leave Stoneacre house and gardens to the National Trust in 1928 is another important part of his legacy. Although it has remained a residence since then, it also serves as a public amenity. At the same time, the working farm continues to be owned and managed separately.

Although of high quality, Otham Manor and Stoneacre are not the only prestigious hall houses in Otham. Synyards's origins are roughly contemporary with Stoneacre's and it, too, saw its open hall divided into two floors during Elizabethan times. Originally it belonged to the manor of Stoneacre. Its name is attributed to its late 18th-century occupant, Mr Swineard. The tenant farmers who lived here through the mid-19th century were also master blacksmiths and it is estimated that a forge was built at Synyards earlier in the century (Forge Cottage is located south of Synyards along Otham Street, though the building probably predates this period and is thought to have had its origins as an oasthouse). Synyards's more recent history distances the house from its past connections to the working environment. Like Stoneacre it experienced a thorough early-20th century restoration, in 1905, by Philip Johnston. Today it is maintained in excellent condition as a single dwelling by its current owner.

Another house which was built as part of the Stoneacre Manor was The Limes, located north of Synyards. The timber-framed house was built in the mid 17th century. The Chittendens, principle tenants of the Ellis family, were among the biggest farmers in Otham. 18th and 19th century residents – the Edmeds – were butchers as well as farmers.

Lying between Otham Manor and Synyards is Belks farmhouse, likely to originate in the early 15th century. Less is known about the early evolution of this house, which is smaller than its other medieval neighbours. Although part of the Otham Manor, it clearly had its own identity as a farmstead, as the collection of buildings around it indicates. Its modern-day surroundings include cottages, a former oasthouse, and a maltings complex, all of varying ages dating back possibly as far as the 17th Century. The malt house is attributed to Bowyer Hendley and was used to prepare barley to brew ale. By the mid-19th Century, the house was divided into two cottages and shared by a family of carpenters and farm labourers.

The last house to have such early origins is today known as Madam Taylors Cottages. Also called the Manor House, it is believed to date from the mid-16th Century. While renovating the house significantly in the late

17th century, Bowyer Hendley is thought to have built the garden wall which is still a prominent feature. The name "Madam Taylor" is attributed to Bowyer Hendley's daughter, who had married Thomas Taylor. After she died in the 18th Century, the house was divided into three cottages. Unfortunately, much of what we see today was the result of major renovations and alterations carried out in the 1970s.

Thus far, we have reviewed the early historical development of the village along Otham Street and surrounding Stoneacre, where a relatively high number of high status timber framed buildings can still be found to represent these phases of the Otham's history. To the north end of the Conservation Area lies the agricultural community of Green Hill. Historically the area was partly linked to the Stoneacre estate and evolved to have a distinctive character. The oldest buildings – Green Hill Cottage and Ivy Cottage – both date from the 17th century. While neither may have had the status of some of the farm houses to the south, these timber-framed cottages would have had the status of residences for those who worked the farms around them. The former agricultural buildings in the area more recently converted to dwellings were parts of these farmsteads. Greenhills Farm across the way also developed at this time (although the house that we see today most likely dates from the 18th century and has been almost completely altered since).



Greenhill House – with its origins in the Georgian period – still presides over an agricultural landscape typical of this part of the Conservation Area.

Green Hill saw other phases of development. In the 18th century, Holly Cottage was built for farm labourers while Greenhill House was designed as a higher-status house. In the 19th century, the house known today as Hendleys was built, although the land surrounding it was part of a charity established in 1590, which eventually included the house and 15 allotments. 19th century documents indicate a succession of wheelwrights working here, some of whom also served as carpenters and undertakers.

It is likely that the wheelwrights here had a working relationship with the blacksmiths at Synyards.

The cluster of buildings we might now think of as the heart of Otham evolved around a 16th-century house now divided into two cottages located at the junction of Otham Street and Stoneacre Lane known today as Elizabethan Lodge and Tudor Cottage. The building's initial use may have been domestic but by the 18th century it was a public house. A 1792 deed indicates that it was known as The Five Bells. It is unclear when the pub was closed, but in the 19th and 20th centuries, it housed another important institution in village life: the Post Office and grocers. This part of the building is still visible as the wing of the building closest to Otham Street. Although Cherry Orchard Cottage to the south may have been an earlier centre of civic activity as the post office and home of the parish clerk and constable in the mid 19th century, purpose-built institutions developed in the vicinity of Tudor Cottage and Elizabethan Lodge throughout the second half of the century.

The first of these institutions was the school. Now known as The Old School, this building was erected in 1851 although there is reference to a school mistress in 1847. The money needed to build the school was solicited from local families and charitable groups to serve the poorer families of the parish. Kelly Directories indicate that in 1885 it was enlarged to serve 100 children, although the average attendance between 1899 and 1911 ranged from 50 to 58 pupils. As further evidence of the establishment of this area as a centre of civic activity, the clock on the school was installed in 1897 for Victoria's Diamond Jubilee. The School House was also built as a dwelling in the late 19th century, most likely for the headmistress.



The Victorian-era Institute has been a centre of Otham's civic activity for over a century.

Otham has long had a strong sense of civic pride. The Parish Council was formed in 1894. In 1895, Institute Hall was built across from the school with the generosity of the Forster family of Rumwood. It originally served as a Men's Institute but in 1926 became the Women's Institute. Later that decade the Forster family presented the deed to the building to the Women's Institute.

The early part of the 20th century also saw the creation of another important civic space across from Madam Taylors Cottages. Former hop grounds and a cherry orchard were given to the community in 1919 by J R Betts of Greenhill and A Johnson of Gore Court in memory of men of the parish who fell in World War I. A memorial stone cross was paid for by public subscription. More recently, the village sign was erected alongside the war memorial, further emphasising the importance of this space as a centre of the community.

Otham continued to evolve as a largely self-sufficient community until later in the 20th century and development was kept more or less in check. A population expansion in the later 19th century led to erection of some more housing for farm workers in the village, including Primrose Cottages and Gable Cottages. The 20th century saw a moderate number of dwellings built, mostly single residences. The greatest change has come from a shift in the economy away from dependence on the immediate vicinity for the community's livelihood. While farming continues, associated craftsmen such as wheelwrights and blacksmiths are no longer part of the local economy. As cars have become more affordable, people have found it easier to go outside the area to make their livelihoods and gather provisions. The last of the village enterprises – the post office and shop – closed in the 1970s. Today, Otham is a residential community surrounded by working farmland.

III Character Area Appraisal

General Village Character

Despite its proximity to Maidstone, Otham village maintains a rural, agricultural character that is visually connected to its past economic prosperity. Its link with quarrying is not only seen in the undulating landscape, but also indirectly in the high number of high-status timber-framed dwellings. The agricultural economy that became the mainstay of the village in modern times is still very much a part of the village character as a number of the historic farms remain. The buildings that arose from this economy are also largely intact and the relatively low amount of 20th-century intrusions results in Otham's distinctive rural character.

An important feature of Otham's character is its internal and external landscape setting. The siting of clusters of buildings, for example, allows us to read their interrelationship, particularly in the settlements linked to historic farming patterns. Equally important are the spaces in between

and surrounding buildings. Some land within the Conservation Area is pastureland or otherwise undeveloped. Otham also contains a high proportion of large gardens which are not only attractive in their own right but also offer the low density necessary to provide the village with its characteristic views. These views and those over the wider landscape of fields and woodland make an important contribution to Otham's special rural character, which is further confirmed by the sounds and smells of this quiet residential and agricultural village.



A view towards the historic quarry from Otham Street illustrates past and present economic uses of the land within the Conservation Area.

Village Analysis / Approaches and Views

"A narrow and tortuous lane seldom more than 10 feet wide, tall hedges and stretches of mellow brick and ragstone walls shut out the view till near the summit, where it opens out, with a foreground of cornfields, cherry orchards and hop gardens. Almost every house, some on the street, some half hidden by the high old walls, festooned with roses and creepers, is ancient and picturesque. Here one of half-timber with projecting gable, there of Carolean red brick; and down below, in the valley, one gets a peep of Stoneacre, a fifteenth century house with a forgotten history, steep pitched roofs half timber and half stone, rich in time, oak beams and with an open roofed hall cut up by later floors."

With very few detail alterations, Philip Johnson's 1905 description of a visit to Otham – quoted in R H C Vaux's *Otham: People & Places* – still stands as an excellent character assessment of the northern approach to the Conservation Area as well as some of the views along the way.



The view north from the top of Green Hill shows the northern boundary of the Conservation Area.

The main southern approach to the Conservation Area along Otham Street passes through more recent housing development and is somewhat less dramatic in its flat topography. However, this presents an interesting contrast once one has entered the Conservation Area, which asserts its agrarian character with a field to the left and Forge Cottage to the right. In itself, this contrast makes the approach dramatic.



Fields and woodland to the west of the southern approach to the Conservation Area

A third approach is possible from the south via Stoneacre Lane. As this roadway is unpaved much of the way, it provides perhaps the most historically authentic entrance to the Conservation Area.

With the area's hilly topography, most views out of the Conservation Area further affirm its rural character. Most of the visible surrounding landscape is working fields and woodland with the occasional building dotted along the horizon. Only views north and northwest of some locations in Green Hill show the encroachment of Maidstone's suburban development in the distance. Still, in these views fields and pastureland occupy the foreground. The wide views towards the North Downs from the vicinity of Green Hill and the War Memorial are particularly important to the character of the Conservation Area and its setting.



The view eastwards from near Stoneacre illustrates the area's recreational and farming roles.

Detailed Analysis and Description

A detailed description of the main buildings and sites within the Conservation Area follows. These descriptions are based on examination from the street and historic map analysis. Buildings have not been examined internally or from non-public viewpoints.

Buildings and structures have been assessed according to their value to the character of the Conservation Area. They have been graded as follows:

- Essential - buildings/sites which, because of their high architectural or historic interest or townscape function, must be retained.
- Positive - buildings/sites which contribute positively to the character and interest of the Conservation Area and whose retention should be encouraged wherever possible. Some buildings in this grade may have suffered from unsympathetic alteration but could be restored to their original appearance relatively easily.
- Neutral - buildings/sites which do not harm the character of the area but whose retention is not necessary.
- Negative - buildings/sites which harm the area's character where redevelopment would be advantageous.

Green Hill

General Character

The predominant character of Green Hill today is still that of a working landscape as it is surrounded by fields and pastureland. Houses and agricultural buildings are densely packed together, giving a strong sense of their interconnection. However, high hedges occasionally impose on a sense of unity.

Buildings/Sites

Address	Listed/Unlisted	Description/Comments	Value to Character
Green Hill House	Listed Grade II	Early 19 th -century house in the "Gothick" style. Built in evenly-coursed ragstone with a low-pitched, hipped, slate roof. House comprises 3 interconnected parallel ranges. Front elevation typifies the Georgian emphasis on symmetry in the regular placement of its sash windows with Gothick top lights.	Essential



Holly Cottage's simple form and traditional materials make a positive contribution to Green Hill's historical character.

Holly Cottage	Unlisted	Ragstone and brick pair of cottages with tile hung and rendered first floor. Peg-tiled roof and central chimney stack. Probably dates to 18 th century.	Positive
Green Hill Oast	Unlisted	Located just east of Holly Cottage, an attractive former oast complex of brick & ragstone, probably of early 19 th century. A significant focal point along the access road. It appears to be disused and somewhat overgrown, which is regrettable because of its significant contribution to the character of the area.	Essential

The Oast House & Homestead Complex	Unlisted	A ragstone and brick complex – currently two dwellings – of various dates. The core of the building is possibly an old timber-framed house. A variety of window styles, mostly appropriate to the ages of erection. Clay-tiled roof. The associated stables and other farm buildings of ragstone, timber and brick are especially important to the character of the Green Hill community.	Positive
Green Hill Cottage	Listed Grade II	Dating from the 17 th century as a two-storey house row with a continuous jetty. Timber framed, close-studding with plaster infilling at ground level. Plain tiled, hipped roof. Additional features include projecting a gable-end chimney stack and leaded, casement windows. Now used as a single dwelling. Its rear view is prominent on the access road and has a more modern appearance.	Essential
Greenhills Farm	Unlisted	Red brick house with clay-tile roof. Probably originally 18 th century but significantly altered and rebuilt. Inappropriate plastic windows. Contains a prominent, characteristic cat-slide roof which contributes positively to its rural setting.	Positive
Ivy Cottage	Listed Grade II	16 th -century house with 17 th -century and later modifications. Gabled, timber framed, and rendered with a plain tile roof. Irregular fenestration. Some walls rebuilt in ragstone and red brick.	Essential

Hendleys	Unlisted	Modernised 19 th -century red-brick house. The original range has regular fenestration of sash windows and Flemish bond brickwork. Clay tiled roof. In the process of alteration at the time this report was being compiled. An important focal point from along the access road into Green Hill.	Positive
The Stables & Valley View	Unlisted	Modern, single-storey dwellings of red brick. Its low position helps ensure that it does not significantly detract from the rural, historical character of the area.	Neutral



Despite being unlisted, Greenhill Oast offers an essential contribution to the character and setting of this part of the Otham Conservation Area. It is not only an attractive vernacular building but also provides an authentic link to Green Hill's long history in farming.

Stoneacre

General Character

This part of the Conservation Area provides a glimpse of past estate landscapes with its agricultural buildings and landscape centred around the mediaeval manor house. By its isolation it maintains this character and despite the house being opened to the public seasonally one day a week as a National Trust property, it is still clearly a working landscape.

Buildings/Sites

Address	Listed/Unlisted	Description/Comments	Value to Character
Stoneacre & Path	Listed Grade II*	Late 15 th or early 16 th century farmhouse with various alterations, most notably a 1920s restoration which reinstated the 2-bay centre hall. That alteration added a northwest wing moved from 16 th -century North Bore Place in Chiddingstone, Kent. The house is characterised by its prominent main gable, exposed timber framing, irregular mullion and transom fenestration and multiple chimney stacks. The house and attractive gardens continue to serve as a single residence and are owned and managed by the National Trust.	Essential
Stoneacre Farm	Unlisted	A large complex of working farm buildings, some dating to the 19 th century. Although somewhat derelict, it maintains a direct link between the area and its agricultural roots so contributes positively to the character of the surroundings.	Positive

Stoneacre Farm Cottages	Unlisted	Early 20 th -century semi-detached cottages on the edge of the farm. Red brick and rough-cast finishes. Clay tile roof. Modern replacement windows somewhat detract from the building's character.	Positive
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Stoneacre's well maintained house and garden clearly illustrate Otham's early affluence.

Otham Street

General Character

As the spine of the Conservation Area, Otham Street is the setting for a variety of building types that chronicle its history as a self-sustaining, rural village. The working landscape is ever present, with fields beyond the dwellings and pastureland along Otham Street itself. Evidence of related industries such as the maltings and forge and more recent institutions like the school, post office and institute is present in the architectural fabric. There is no commerce today within the Conservation Area.



“The Barn” – one of the converted agricultural buildings that formerly made up Madam Taylors Farm.

Buildings/Sites

Address	Listed/Unlisted	Description/Comments	Value to Character
Madam Taylors Farm Buildings: The Barn & The Cart Lodge	Unlisted	As distinct from the working farm buildings located just north of the Conservation Area boundary, this cluster of former agricultural buildings of various ages has been converted to dwellings. Materials include stained timber, ragstone, and brick with clay tile and pantile roofs. An attractive grouping.	Positive
Madam Taylors Cottages	Listed Grade II	16 th -century timber-framed house significantly restored in the 1970s. Mostly rendered with some brick features and hanging tiles. Prominent chimney stacks to both side and front elevations.	Essential

Madam Taylors Cottages Garden Wall	Listed Grade II	17 th - or 18 th -century garden wall in ragstone and Flemish bond red and grey brick chequer. Modern damage has resulted in iron bracing to the south; more recent damage to the centre of the east face is currently being investigated to ensure its repair.	Essential
War Memorial, Playground & Village Sign	Unlisted	Stone cross on stepped plinth erected in 1919 within the playground, both presented to the people of Otham. Offer fine views of the North Downs. The Village Sign is of modern materials and design, presenting the various tools that represent the craftsmen who supported the community throughout history. This open space is a focal point of the Conservation Area, both in terms of views and public use.	Essential
North View	Unlisted	House built in the 1920s, abutting Tudor Cottage. Roughcast and render façade. Casement windows with brick quoin surrounds. Modern conservatory to side.	Positive
Tudor Cottage & Elizabethan Lodge	Listed Grade II	Late 16 th -century house, now a pair of cottages with a variety of features. Timber-framed and painted brick; stone plinth. Exposed timbering to Otham Street first floor. Stoneacre Lane extension of roughly coursed rubble stone dates from 19 th century. Includes a brick wing along the Otham Street frontage that was once the post office.	Essential

Applegarth	Unlisted	Bungalow built in the 1920s, rendered with applied timber framing. Concrete roof tiles with conservation roof lights. Modern plastic windows somewhat mar its appearance.	Neutral
Otham Village Hall (Women's Institute Hall)	Unlisted	Built originally as a Working Men's Club ca. 1895 by Arthur Forster of Rumwood Court. Red brick in Flemish and stretcher bond with dentil features. Clay tiled roof. Remains an important centre of village activity.	Positive
1, 2 & 3 Primrose Cottages	Unlisted	19 th -century farmworkers' cottages in ragstone with red brick quoins and window surrounds. Regular fenestration with single-glazed sash windows and hipped dormers. Located below street level at right angles. Recent modifications maintain a sense of unity in the group.	Positive
The Old School	Unlisted	Picturesque former school in ragstone. Built in 1851 and enlarged in 1885, it still retains its bell and bell turret, gable-end clock, lattice-framed windows and shutters. A strong visual association with the village's 19 th - and 20 th -century history.	Essential
School House	Unlisted	Late-19 th century red brick residence, likely built for the school's headmistress. Red brick with clay tiled roof and gables. Special features include decorative finials and pendants. Modern plastic windows detract somewhat from the building's late Victorian character.	Positive

Otham Manor (Wardes)	Listed Grade I	Large, timber-framed hall house dating from the 14 th century with 16 th -century alterations. Restored and extended in the early 20 th century. Considered an important early example of the "Wealden"-type house, with 2 open-hall bays. Exposed timbers with rendered pargetting. At right angles to the road, it is mostly hidden from view at street level because of mature planting.	Essential
1 & 2 Gable Cottages	Unlisted	Semi-detached red-brick cottages built prior to the 1876 Ordnance Survey map. Flemish-bond red brick with clay-tile, half-hipped roof and a central chimney stack. Set below road level in attractive grounds.	Positive
Stone End	Unlisted	Large, modern bungalow located set back from the street amid mature foliage. Not visible from the roadway.	Neutral



Set below street level, Gable Cottages are a picturesque pair of rural Victorian dwellings.

Chambers Cottage & Cherry Orchard	Unlisted	<p>Originally part of the maltings complex. Probably late 18th-/early 19th-century cottage with ragstone ground floor. First floor of the main range is red and grey brick chequering. Ground floor window surrounds with brick quoins. Casement window replacements detract somewhat from the character of the building. Half-hipped clay tile roof with hipped dormers. The main elevation of Cherry Orchard has been altered more recently and is of less uniform appearance. A mix of materials includes weatherboarding, render, ragstone, and brick. Inappropriate modern door and window replacements detract from the character of the complex.</p>	Positive
Malthouse Cottage	Listed Grade II	<p>Early 18th century. This building has evolved from an oast house, to a maltings, a store, and now a house. Red and grey brick Flemish bond with ragstone and weatherboarding. Very large circular kiln with cogged brick eaves cornice.</p>	Essential
Holly Tree Cottage (Holly Tree House)	Listed Grade II	<p>17th-century timber-framed house or barn with 19th-century features, including the façade: Flemish bond in mostly red brick with grey-brick chequering to northeast. Boarded door and casement windows contribute to the cottage character.</p>	Essential

Rose Cottage	Listed Grade II	Likely built as a barn in the 18 th century, converted to a dwelling in the 20 th century. Built in 2 sections with a timber frame, rendered and weatherboarded. Plain tile roof.	Essential
Rose Cottage Oast House	Unlisted	Circular oast kiln in Flemish bond brick. Steeply-pitched clay tile roof with cogged eaves detailing. Cowl has been removed. An oast complex appears on this site in the the 1876 Ordnance Survey map but this circular kiln is not indicated until 1908. Was given permission to be converted to ancillary accommodation for Rose Cottage in 1989. Currently has modern flat roof extension to north end.	Positive
Belks (White Cottage)	Listed Grade II	Originally an open-hall farmhouse dating from the late 14 th century with alterations through the 20 th century. Exposed timber framing with render infill. Evidence of modern intervention, such as the casement windows, compromise its character somewhat, resulting in a Grade II listing despite its early date.	Essential
Tulip Cottage & Lilac Cottage	Listed Grade II	Probably originated as a barn, now a pair of cottages. 16 th -century, timber-framed with 19 th -century red brick façade in Flemish bond. Prominent central chimney stack. Boarded doors and casement windows, currently painted white.	Essential

Bramley	Unlisted	Set in attractive grounds, a 1930s bungalow of yellow brick in stretcher bond. Low-pitched roof of asbestos shingles. A well-made building of its period which is neutral in character on its own architectural quality. However, its low height and spacious grounds are important to the open nature of the Conservation Area at this point.	Neutral
The Limes	Listed Grade II	Timber-framed house originally built in the 17 th century with early 19 th -century alterations, including the rendered façade. Front elevation of Georgian design, incorporating symmetrically placed, 16-pane sash windows, and a central panelled door with fanlight under a porch with engaged Doric columns. Half-hipped, plain tile roof with two dormer windows.	Essential
Graynoth Place	Unlisted	Built in the 1960s in a traditional vernacular style with clay tiles and red brick cladding in stretcher bond. Casement windows and a clay tile roof. A good example of a modern house built to blend with its surroundings.	Neutral

Swallows	Unlisted	Likely dating from the late 19 th century, possibly a former agricultural or service building to Synyards. Red brick in Flemish bond with prominent gable end to street with exposed timbers, render infill, finial and bargeboard details. Plain clay tile roof. Modern garage with link extension also in red brick. Replacement casement windows somewhat detract from the building's otherwise attractive appearance.	Positive
Synyards & Path	Listed Grade I	Wealden open-hall house originating in the late-15 th century. Significantly restored in 1905. Close-studded timber framing with render infill. Moulded bargeboards and other timber features. Steeply-pitched hipped roof with prominent front gable. Irregular fenestration includes latticed transom and casement windows. Set within a hedged garden, it is difficult to view from the street.	Essential

Little Court	Unlisted	<p>Built after World War II to replace a building believed to be contemporary with Synyards but lost in the late 19th century. Rendered ground floor with clay-tiled first floor. Plain clay tile roof. Leaded casement windows. Interesting tile details surround the front door. Rendered garage extension to north. Because of its siting and detailing, an especially good example of a modern house built to blend with its surroundings.</p>	Positive
Forge Cottage	Unlisted	<p>Former agricultural building which likely dates from the 19th century, possibly originally an oasthouse of the square type. Rendered ground floor with some exposed timbers. Clay peg tiles to north and west elevations at first floor, stained weatherboards to south and eastern extension. Hipped and half-hipped clay tile roof. Establishes the character of the Conservation Area when entering from the south.</p>	Positive



Historically connected, these two buildings at the southern end of Otham Street represent different time periods, architectural styles, historical uses, and approaches to conservation. Synyards (above) has been painstakingly restored while Forge Cottage (below) has been altered over the years yet remains sensitive to its context.



IV Conclusions

Otham Conservation Area is a well-preserved example of an affluent medieval village which still maintains a strong sense of identity today. The age and variety of building and settlement types reflects the village's long history. With Otham's high proportion of high quality listed buildings, working farms, views over the countryside and attractive green space, the character Maidstone Borough Council aims to preserve and enhance is its distinctive rural, agricultural qualities.

To provide such protection of the historic environment, development should continue to follow a carefully controlled pattern which is only permitted when modifications or additions would be in character with the area. The detailed street and building analysis carried out in Section III of this Conservation Area Appraisal provides a basis for considering future proposals for redevelopment or alterations. According to this analysis, Otham has an unusually high number of buildings categorised as offering a "positive" or "essential" contribution to the character of the Conservation Area; the preservation of their distinctive features is vital to the retention of Otham's unique character. As there are no buildings which are categorised as having a "negative" character, proposals to demolish existing structures will rarely be considered appropriate. Only those whose character is considered "neutral" would normally be considered as possible candidates for demolition or significant alteration, and only where the new proposal offers the opportunity for the site to make a positive or essential contribution to the area.

Considering the quality and beauty of Otham Conservation Area, it is important to ensure that, where redevelopment is appropriate in principle, it is of suitable form, scale and quality. At the building level, structures should be limited to two storeys (plus attic where appropriate) and should adhere to established building lines, utilise good quality of materials which reflect those currently predominant, and be of high architectural standard. In order to achieve an appropriate form of development, it may prove necessary to consider the relaxation of normal planning standards in some instances.

The siting of any new development within the historic landscape should also consider locally-established patterns. Generally speaking, this provides for large gardens and other green space between buildings or clusters of buildings. Some areas of settlement have evolved historically as denser than others but overall buildings are sporadically scattered in informal patterns. This pattern and the local topography have resulted in a number of important views from the Conservation Area. As the setting for the Conservation Area, these views are to be protected. All of these patterns are crucial to the character of Otham; therefore, increasing density significantly within the Conservation Area or in areas which provide its characteristic views is to be strongly discouraged whenever possible. This is supported by the Maidstone Borough-Wide Local Plan regarding development in the countryside, in which Otham is not identified as a settlement in which development would be encouraged.

The evaluation that resulted in this Appraisal supports the legitimacy of the boundary lines that were established in the 1992 extension of the Otham Conservation Area as a cohesive group of buildings and spaces with special architectural or historic interest. In the future, the possibility of minor adjustments may be considered to ensure that the Conservation Area follows sensible boundary lines along individual properties. There may also be a case for the consideration of the cluster of buildings located southeast of the Conservation Area – known as Otham Hole – for designation as a separate conservation area. Further study of this area will form part of the future Management Plan.

Given the Conservation Area's rural character, it is important to note the contribution of trees. Within the Conservation Area, it is necessary for 6 weeks notice in writing to be given of any proposed works to trees with a trunk diameter greater than 75mm measured at a height of 1.5 metres above ground level. In the case of any sites coming forward for redevelopment the Council will require tree surveys, assessments and protection measures to be submitted with any planning application wherever trees are present. Where expedient it will seek to protect suitable trees by the making of Tree Preservation Orders, of which the Conservation Area already has one as well as two woodland orders. In relation to significant trees existing within the Conservation Area it will be important to seek their retention or replacement if appropriate as trees are major contributors to the character of Otham.

As mentioned previously, a cause of loss of character is often not directly due to redevelopment but instead the cumulative impact of individually relatively minor alterations. This can include replacement windows, loss of porches/door cases, the changing of roof materials, the installation of inappropriate fencing or excessively high hedges. Together such changes can result in the loss of original character which provides a conservation area with its local distinctiveness. These processes are slowed down by Conservation Area designation, but the making of an Article 4(2) Direction would give the Council greater powers to prevent such alterations where they would impact upon the character of the Conservation Area. The evaluation of Otham as a possible candidate for an Article 4(2) Direction will happen during the process of developing a management plan.

Essentially, therefore, it is important to preserve even minor features which contribute to the character of the Conservation Area and give local distinctiveness. In order to enhance Otham's significant rural character, the management plan which follows from this Conservation Area Appraisal should additionally include:

- i. A programme of re-instatement of original details, especially windows, doors, and decorative features.
- ii. The establishment of guidance notes for appropriate boundary walls, hedges, and fences.

Although Otham does not currently face any direct threats or present any major detractors to its historical character, it is all the more important to continue on the path of carefully managed development so that its historical significance is protected.