# Lower Higham

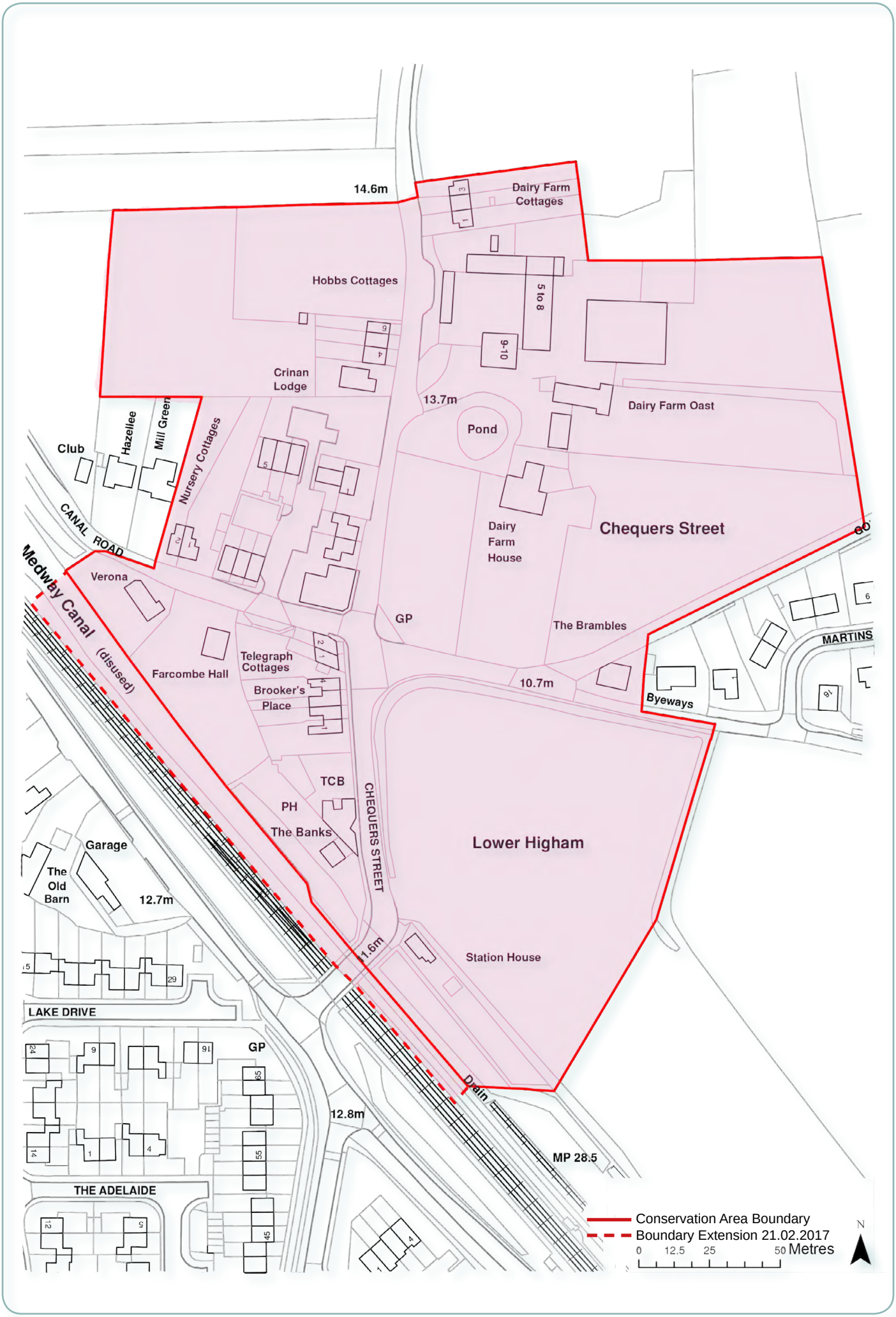
Rural Conservation Area Appraisal

## Supplementary Planning Document

Delivering for the Community

Gravesham Borough Council

Lower Higham, Conservation Area Boundary



# LOWER HIGHAM - RURAL CONSERVATION AREA CHARACTER APPRAISAL 2016


**1 STATEMENT OF SPECIAL INTEREST OF THE CONSERVATION AREA**

**2 INTRODUCTION**

2.1 Lower Higham Conservation Area 4
2.2 The purpose of the appraisal 4
2.3 Planning policy context 4
2.4 Community involvement 5

**3 LOCATION AND LANDSCAPE SETTING**

3.1 Geographic location 7
3.2 Activities and uses 7
3.3 Geology 7
3.4 Biodiversity 8
3.5 Topography 8
3.6 Relationship of the conservation area to its surroundings 9

**4 HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT** 10

**5 SPATIAL ANALYSIS**

5.1 The conservation area setting 12
5.2 The conservation area, layout, spaces and enclosure 12
5.3 Views, focal points and landmarks 14
5.4 Trees, boundaries, planting 15

**6 STREETSCAPE**

6.1 Public realm 16

**7 THE BUILDINGS IN THE CONSERVATION AREA**

7.1 Listed buildings 18
7.2 Locally listed buildings 18
7.3 Key unlisted buildings contributing to conservation area Character 18
7.4 Modern buildings of no historic interest and historic buildings whose character has been degraded, neither category contributing positively to conservation area character 19
7.5 Building form 19
7.6 Local details 20
7.7 Building materials 20

**8 CHARACTER ANALYSIS** 21

**9 ISSUES**

9.1 Definition of issues 23
9.2 Conservation area boundary review 23
9.3 Alterations to buildings 23

9.4 Highways and traffic 23
9.5 Enhancement potential 24
9.6 Trees 24

**APPENDICES**
Appendix 1 25
Appendix 2 26

**FIGURES** 27

## 1 STATEMENT OF SPECIAL INTEREST OF THE CONSERVATION AREA

The historic core of Lower Higham is a very small settlement formed around a rural crossroads in largely open countryside. It is some four and a half miles east of Gravesend, a mile north of the larger, modern, village of Higham and some two miles south of the shore of the Thames. It is at the divide between reclaimed Thames marshland and gradually rising ground to the south. Its special interest lies in its two discrete areas of small scale, historic, 19th century development. These occupy the south west and north east quarters of the cross roads. They contrast with the very large open arable field occupying the south east quarter of the cross roads. The latter is a landscape area changed as a result of the building of the early 19th century canal which formerly ran along the south west boundary of the conservation area. This field is included in the conservation area for its historic interest and as the key, south east, setting for the two areas of historic development described above.

## 2 INTRODUCTION

### **2.1** Lower Higham Conservation Area

Lower Higham Conservation Area was designated on 29th September 2008. The conservation area's boundary contains the historic street of Chequers Street, and parts of Church Street, Canal Road and Lower Rochester Road.

### **2.2** The purpose of the appraisal

This appraisal follows on from designation and identifies and defines the special architectural and historic interest for which the Lower Higham Conservation Area merits designation. It also identifies the positive features that should be protected and highlights the negative factors that detract from its character and appearance. It will be used by the Borough Council in considering relevant applications for planning permission, including proposals for demolition or alteration of buildings, as well as for new developments. It will also help property owners and developers to take account of the importance of buildings, features, spaces and landscape within and adjacent to the conservation area.

The appraisal is to be included as background papers in the Local Plan and, as such, will be a due consideration in the planning process. The appraisal was adopted as a separate Supplementary Planning Document within the Local Plan on the 21 February 2017.

Preparation of the appraisal involved an extensive survey of the conservation area. However, the omission of any particular feature does not imply that it is of no significance.

The Historic Environment Record (HER) for Gravesham is managed by Kent County Council and can provide information for a wide variety of buildings and sites, from finds of prehistoric flint tools to medieval castles and Second World War pillboxes. For further information visit: www.kent.gov.uk/HER

### **2.3** Planning policy context

Conservation areas are defined as 'areas of special architectural or historic interest the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance' in the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (the Act). Local planning authorities are required by the Act to identify the parts of their area that should be designated as conservation areas and to formulate and publish proposals to preserve or enhance them. Local authorities must submit proposals for the protection and enhancement of conservation areas for consideration at a public meeting within the relevant area. They should also have regard to any views expressed by people attending the meeting.

Broadly, the effects of designation are:

- Conservation area consent must be obtained from the local planning authority or Secretary of State prior to the substantial or total demolition of any building or structure within a conservation area, with some exceptions

- The local planning authority must consider the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of the conservation area when assessing relevant applications

- Permitted development rights are slightly different in conservation areas

- Permission is required from the planning authority to fell or prune a tree over a certain size

As well as receiving statutory protection, conservation areas are afforded a degree of protection under the planning system whereby it is expected that proposed development will preserve and enhance heritage assets and their setting as an irreplaceable resource. The exception to this would be where any substantial harm or loss of heritage interest is necessary to achieve substantial public benefits that outweigh that harm or loss.

Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (as amended) requires that applications for planning permission be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material planning considerations indicate otherwise.

In the case of Gravesham, the development plan effectively comprises the adopted Gravesham Local Plan Core Strategy (2014) and remaining 'saved' policies from the Gravesham Local Plan First Review (1994). In certain instances, the Kent Minerals Plan and Waste Plan will also be of relevance and a material planning consideration. Plans in preparation are also capable of being a material planning consideration with the weight accorded them depending on the stage reached, whether there are unresolved objections and the consistency of the emerging plan with national policy.

Amongst a range of other things, policies set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF, 2012) and Planning Practice Guidance (2014) issued by the Government are also material planning considerations in the determination of planning applications. Of particular importance in this respect are paragraphs 126 – 141 of the NPPF which set out the approach toward conserving and enhancing the historic environment, with the weight to be accorded the conservation of designated heritage assets and their settings dependent on the significance of the asset, the degree of harm likely to occur as a result of development, and whether such harm is outweighed by any public benefits that would arise.

The importance of retaining the built as well as natural heritage of Gravesham is well recognised because of the contribution this can make through reinforcing local distinctiveness and the creation of sense of place. This document identifies the special character of Lower Higham Conservation Area and how that special character can best be preserved and enhanced.

In terms of the setting of the rural conservation areas, it is important to recognise that the surrounding landscape may also be of significance in determining impact or developing an appropriate design response. The reader's attention is therefore drawn to other documents available on the Council's website relating to landscape character appraisal in general and the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) in particular. In the case of the latter, the Council is under a statutory duty to have regard to the purposes of including land within the AONB when taking decisions on applications that may impact on it or its setting.

**2.4** Community involvement

This survey of the conservation area follows a presentation at a stakeholder meeting on 23rd October 2008. At that meeting local stakeholder support for designation of Lower Higham Conservation Area was confirmed. (In the case of Lower Higham Conservation Area, designation had preceded the meeting due to the imminent threat of demolition to an important focal building within the hamlet, the Chequers Inn.)

The present survey identifies in more detail the following:

- The special characteristics of Lower Higham Conservation Area
- The key negative features and issues
- A range of possible actions that would mitigate or offset these detractors

## 3 LOCATION AND LANDSCAPE SETTING

Figure 1 Local settlement and communications.'
Figure 2 Local contours.'
Figure 3, Significant local topographical features'.

**3.1** Geographic location

Lower Higham, about 4 ½ miles east of Gravesend, is at the inland edge of the marshland that fringes the coast of the Thames estuary in this part of north Kent. It developed at the junction of an east/west back-road, Lower Rochester Road, which connects Rochester with Chalk and Gravesend, and a north/south road, School Lane/Chequer Street/Church Street, extending from the A226 Rochester Road to end at the hamlet of what is now known as Church Street, still further out towards the marsh.

**3.2** Activities and uses

The village is very small, in fact it is little more than a hamlet. It possesses one large part-working farmstead, Dairy Farm, with original farmhouse and associated farm buildings including a barn, a former oast house, a large fruit store and some terraced former farm cottages. The oast has been converted to residential use and the farmhouse and its garden have been sold away from the farmstead. The remaining farm buildings are let to various commercial users.

The remaining residential development in the village is small in scale and extent, either terraced or individual houses/bungalows. The former corner shop has closed and the building of which it was part has been largely replaced by two modern houses. There were once three public houses, these now reduced to one. Higham Station, on the line between Strood and Gravesend, is situated a short distance from the Conservation Area.

The village is subject to heavy lorries driving to and from the former Nuralite Works site along Canal Road as well as skip lorries along Lower Higham Road. This use has a visually detrimental effect on road verges, hedges etc in and adjacent to Lower Higham and may also cause some pedestrian danger.

**3.3** Geology

The land on which Lower Higham stands is within the London Basin. Chalkland which in this part of north Kent is the dip slope and escarpment of the North Downs, everywhere forms the borders of the Basin. The crest of the Downs runs roughly parallel to the coast of the Thames Estuary here, which in the area of Lower Higham is fringed by marshlands. As it declines northward the chalk dip slope is overlain by geologically later beds of sands and clays followed by gravel terraces and the esturine alluvium forming the marsh itself. South, east and west around Lower Higham the underlying chalk is mantled by Eocene deposits (Oldhaven, Blackheath, Woolwich, Reading and Thanet Beds). The lower sandy beds of these, occurring along the chalk borders of the Basin, are often associated with clays. In Kent in particular they give rise to various soils of considerable fertility which have in the past encouraged the development of orchards and market gardens, and militated against the survival of substantial areas of woodland.

Traditional ‘extractive’ primary and secondary local materials in this part of Kent are flint and lime from the chalk and brick from the clays and brick-earths.

**3.4** Biodiversity

The character of the area in which the village is located conforms to that described in the Gravesend Landscape Character Assessment. It is one of generally intensive agriculture ‘…with large fields and few hedgerow boundaries. Overgrown orchards, shelterbelts, gappy hedgerows…’ (p25). There is a Local Wildlife Site incorporating a stretch of the former Thames and Medway canal (and possibly railway line?) and canal bank (?) along the south west side of the Conservation Area. This extends from the railway bridge in the south of the conservation area north westward for some distance, following the canal beyond where the conservation area ends on Canal Road. Figure 4

**3.5** Topography

Lower Higham developed around cross roads at the lowest, most northerly reliably dry, point at which the east/west course of the Lower Rochester Road, here fringing the Thames marshes, could cross the route of Church Street (which runs northward to end at the shrunken settlement now called Church Street). The cross roads at the centre of Lower Higham is on the 10 metre contour line or thereabouts.

Approaching from the south beyond the canal/railway cutting, School Lane descends quite steeply before entering Lower Higham. Passing through the settlement, where it briefly becomes Chequers Street, it continues away northwards (now as Church Street), rising again for a while a little above the 10 metre O.D. contour line along a spur of high ground with lower lying fields to either side, en route to its termination in Church Street. From here footpaths lead out onto Higham marshes where cattle were sent for summer grazing.

The east/west running Lower Rochester Road descends to the cross roads from the east over gently falling and undulating farmland with wide views. Having originally passed directly through the village it then rose slightly again (as it still does) over open fields before dropping to, and then below, the 10 metre contour and eventually along the marsh edge, on its way to Chalk.

Some of the arrangements just described were disrupted in the early 19$^{th}$ century by local highway realignments caused by the building of the Thames & Medway canal, completed in 1824. A bridge was built to carry Chequers Street over the canal and a diversion road carried the western half of the Lower Rochester Road in a south east direction parallel with the canal until it met the bridge.

The canal was without locks and its water level, 7m OD, reflected spring high tide levels in the Thames and Medway. Maintaining this datum level involved the formation of a rapidly deepening and widening cutting as the canal drove from the low lying land to the west, into rising ground on the south west side of the village. Further to the south the cutting ended at the foot of a substantial wall of excavated chalk. Here the canal entered a still extant tunnel under the Downs, running under Telegraph Hill, and was carried on through to Strood. Ground level above the tunnel mouth stands at 20m OD. This part of the canal route is now occupied by a railway line, with Higham Station standing in the cutting just before the tunnel entrance.

**3.6** Relationship of the conservation area to its surroundings

The immediate surroundings of the conservation area vary in character from suburban to open country. To the south west, and strictly separated off by the railway/canal cutting, is the modern suburban development of the later part of Lower Higham. To the south east there are wide open vistas across rising ground in arable cultivation. To the east is another suburban development around Martin's Close, only partly screened from the village by planting and hedges. North east and north beyond Dairy Farm the rising ground is mostly in arable and orchard use. North-west beyond the village confines lies the marsh, screened from the village by a slight rise in the ground and enclosing tree belts, hedges etc. Trees and hedges are heavily concentrated around the village, except to the south east.

## 4 HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

Archaeology, early and late medieval periods
(see Appendix 1)

The modern period

Norden's map of 1609 shows a village of Higham, but this is likely to have been what is now called Church Street, to the north of the modern Lower Higham. The present settlement is clearly identified in a map of 1769 but is given no name, perhaps implying its relative insignificance then, as now. At that time it was probably no more than an 'incident' – a pub, perhaps and a farmstead with a scattering of cottages - on the way north to the then more important settlement of Higham (now Church Street). Since 1769 different map makers have given the hamlet various names among which is Chequers Street, after the pub at the cross roads. Today, with the decline of the original village of Higham (now Church Street) and the emergence of a new, modern, Higham village along the road to the south, the hamlet's name has settled to Lower Higham. Within the village Chequers Street survives on the modern OS as the name of the area around Dairy Farm farmstead and also on the ground as the stretch of the part of Church Street in front of the Railway Tavern.

The developments having the greatest effect on the village were the construction of the Thames and Medway Canal and the subsequent railway line. The west end of Lower Rochester Road was cut off where it left the village (and its remaining stub-end re-named Canal Road) and traffic south along Chequers Street was diverted to a new bridge across the canal at the end of the built up area (**Figure 3).** A part of the original 19th century bridge survives in one of the side abutments to the modern road bridge which now replaces it. The dumping and spreading of mountains of spoil in the field alongside the village street (**Figure 3**) must have been a particularly disruptive and unpleasant experience for the inhabitants of the time. The effect of this dumping is still visible today in the raised levels of this field. The canal work was completed in 1824 and the section alongside the conservation area and through the tunnel to the Medway was replaced by the present railway line in 1845.

At what was probably its maximum size in the late 19th century the village possessed three pubs, one certainly long established and giving its name to the settlement, then called 'Chequer Street', another (the Malt Shovel in Canal Street) associated with the coming of the canal in the first part of the 19th century and a third (The Railway Tavern, which has recently been granted planning permission for conversion to residential use, with a house on the former car park) following the arrival of the railway shortly afterwards. It possessed one long established major farmstead grouping – Dairy House Farm – this including a farmhouse, pond, barn, yard and oast house. Elsewhere in the village there was a smithy and saw pit, a post office and (probably) a shop, as well as what was no doubt at first a canal bridge keeper's, later to become the present 'station', house. There were also a number of two storied terraced agricultural workers dwellings, a semi-detached pair of slightly higher status houses, a three storey block of terraced houses carrying a plaque dated 1856 and one or two individual houses standing in their own grounds. All these latter domestic buildings probably dated from no earlier than the first half of the 19th century, after the coming of the canal, and some had replaced earlier structures.

Today the village remains much as it was in the 19th century, although there has been a reduction in the number of 19th century houses and workshops. In some cases these have been replaced by modern dwellings. A nursery garden within the

village came and went in the last century. Much of the farmstead layout and its built form remains but some buildings including the oast house have other uses. The saw pit, smithy and one of the pubs, the Malt Shovel, have disappeared as have the village shop and the post office.. The Chequers and the Railway Tavern have been converted to residential use.

## 5 SPATIAL ANALYSIS

**5.1** The conservation area setting

As noted earlier the immediate surroundings of the conservation area vary from suburban to mostly arable open country. Seen from the south and the east the settlement lies in a 'bowl' in the landscape. From whichever direction it is approached by road, emerging into it comes to some degree as a visual 'surprise' because of the 'cloaked' nature of the approaches. There are various long views of it and the most significant of these are best presented by means of captioned photographs as follows:

View looking towards Lower Higham from the south east, south of the Lower Rochester Road. An area of modern residential development, Martins Close, is visible east of the conservation area. This intrudes on views of the village setting from this direction. The tall trees on the skyline along Gore Green Road mark the conservation area boundary with Martins Close. The latter's negative impact on the village setting is less in summer when trees and other vegetation help to screen it a little. The wide visual gap on the horizon between The Chequers and Dairy Farm farmhouse, allowing a view out to passing shipping on the Thames, is a key feature of the scene.

View from the south, from School Road, before the canal/railway bridge and the turning into the station forecourt, as the road descends through the new suburban development on this side of the railway cutting. Dairy Farm farmhouse is visible beyond Station House.

View looking east from the Lower Rochester Road. From here what can be seen of Lower Higham is in the upper part of the village on a slight ridge. In summer the main features visible are the cowls on the former oast house kilns and the roof and upper floor of the farmhouse at Dairy Farm.

Along Canal Road north westward away from the village, low lying land alongside the canal is quickly reached, screened from the settlement by tree and shrub growth and hedges. From the north west, where the conservation area boundary moves away from the canal on rising ground, the village is screened from view by hedge, tree and shrub growth. North beyond Dairy Farm Cottages, at the crest of the hill, hedged fields again limit the view. Views from the north east of the Dairy Farm complex are screened from the hamlet as it is approached by road from that direction, due again to the lie of the land, its rising nature, and local tree, hedge and shrub growth.

**5.2** The conservation area, layout, spaces and enclosure

**Figure 5** Main elements of layout, spaces and enclosure

**Layout**

The conservation area is developed around a rural cross-roads (known as 'The Square'), two arms of which embrace part of a large, open, field, **area 1, Figure 5**. A key element of character is that built development extends to less than half the road frontages within the area, the remaining frontages either relating to fields or gardens. The village has two visually separated types of historic development: linear along the west side of Chequers Street, **area 2, Figure 5**, and nucleated at the Dairy Farm farmstead east of the upper part of Church Street**, area 3, Figure 5.** The modern OS

map confirms the separateness of these developments for each has its own name, the former ‘Lower Higham’, the latter, as noted, ‘Chequers Street’.

**Spaces and enclosure**

Though the conservation area centres on the cross roads these are not developed spatially. In Chequers Street linear enclosure is given by the steep roadside bank to the east echoed by the building line to the west. The latter is only broken by the car park entry to the yard of the Railway Tavern, **area 7 Figure 5**

Within the conservation area undeveloped road frontages are formed as either field, or garden, boundaries. Thus the important contributing open space of Dairy Farm farmhouse’s front garden, **area 4 on Figure 5,** is part walled and part fenced against the highway. The garden can be seen into from certain viewpoints on roads within and out-with the village.

As noted above, a second area of open space is also associated with the Dairy Farm complex – this comprises ‘service spaces’ - the drives, yards and pond and its surroundings - all west or north of the farmhouse and extending north as far as the north west side of the former barnyard, **and part area 3 on Figure5.** The whole group, buildings and spaces, is prominent from the north part of Church Street. The area has been somewhat visually downgraded partly by the needs of modern commercial vehicles. The pond, as noted earlier, is an important historic feature in its own right, even empty as it now is.

The previous field abutting Church Street and running down to the rear yard of the Chequers, is now in residential use and within the village envelope, **Area 5 on Figure 5.** This new development now unites the village’s two main areas of historic development, allowing them to read as separate entities.

**Relationship between buildings and spaces**

One of the most visually important buildings in the village, Dairy Farm farmhouse, stands on rising ground looking south over the lower part of the village from within its large enclosed garden. Its west and north elevations relate to its historic pond, the garden space around it and to the adjoining open farm ‘service’ space on the west and north.

Seen from within the great field to the south east, the buildings on the lower part of Church Street including the Chequers pub are a group forming an edge to this part of the modern agricultural landscape lying within the conservation area. The Chequers dominates due to its detailed design and scale.

Seen from the south east, from the great open field within the conservation area, the low tree filled gap between the Chequers Pub and Dairy Farm farmhouse is, as noted earlier, a key part of the view.

**5.3** Views, focal points and landmarks

> **Figure 6,** Views, focal points and landmarks. Views 1 to 7 are positive, 8 is negative.’

**Positive and negative views**

Significant views, features etc. and their details are shown on **Figure 6** with the exception of **View 1** which is not on the map**,** as it is taken from far to the west, from the Lower Rochester Road. The one 'negative' view is **View 8.**

**Focal points**

From within the village, due to its scale and detailed design, the Chequers pub dominates the limited 'focal point' space at the main cross roads, and point **FP** on **Figure 6.**

**Key freestanding 'landmark' buildings**

These, 'Station House' and 'Brambles', at two entrances to the conservation area, are visible from various locations around the conservation area and are noted as **A** and **B** on **Figure 6**.

Details of views for inclusion on **Figure 6.** As with topographical features the aim here is to get all view captions onto the map, and nowhere else.

**View 2,** the village from the entrance to the station approach.

**View 3,** up Chequers Street from the corner next to the railway bridge**.**

**View 4,** down Church Street/Chequers Street from opposite Dairy Farm farmhouse.

**View 5** looking a) west from Dairy Farm house (or the adjoining highway) over the open space behind the Chequers pub and b) from the house south over the great field towards Station House.

**View 6** in both directions along roads leading out from the central cross-roads, all of which are limited, visually 'stopped', in one way or another.

**View 7,** of the east elevations of the buildings along Chequers Street, followed by the wide green horizon gap between developments and then the buildings of the Dairy Farm complex, all as seen from the great field to the south east.

**View 8,** looking east from Church Street into the yards etc to the rear of Dairy House Farm. This is the principle negative view (but where improvement is theoretically possible)

**5.4** Trees, boundaries, planting

**Figure 7.** Contributing trees, hedges, walls, fences.

**Trees and hedges**

A continuous area of tree and shrub growth north west of the railway bridge, extending alongside the canal/railway line and adjoining the south west boundary of the conservation area is a 'Kent Wildlife Site'. This forms a tree-screen buffer between the village and railway line.

A line of mature trees marks the conservation area boundary on Gore Green Road. This grouping is visible from various points out-with the village, separating the conservation area visually from the adjoining modern Martins Close development.

Two native evergreens, yews, stand to each side of the main, south facing, elevation of Dairy Farm farmhouse, partly obscuring it. They are prominent in many views from the south and south east, making a significant contribution to conservation area character.

Lower Higham's main surviving old orchard occupies the west half of the front garden of Dairy Farm farmhouse. This contributes to views within the village and is part of the immediate setting of the house.

Recent development within the conservation area is that forming part of the west side of the upper part of Church Street. This combined with the garden wall opposite, gives strong highway enclosure here**.**

Other garden boundaries and field hedgerows within and around the village combine to give a generally enclosed aspect to it when approached from the north and north east. Seen from the south and east they provide a green setting for many of its buildings.

**Walls and fences**

Other boundary conditions within the conservation area comprise banks, street frontage buildings, walls and fences. As has been described, the high field banks to the south side of Lower Rochester Road and the east side of Chequer Street are prominent boundary features. They are opposed across the road in one case by the timber picket and then flint and brick boundary wall to Dairy Farm House's front garden, and in the other by the back of pavement street frontages of the buildings along the west side of Chequer Street.

The boundary walling to Dairy Farm farmhouse's front garden returns around the corner and up Church Street, making it a significant conservation area feature. Its combination of red brick and flint may put its building at a rather earlier date than the canal and hence of many of the buildings in the village. Some of it may have been part of the walling of the cattle yard shown as existing at the time of the earliest O.S. map. The village's only other significant boundary walling, again fronting the highway, is a discontinuous section in Canal Road, built in yellow stocks and thus post dating or contemporary with the canal.

## 6 STREETSCAPE

**6.1** Public realm

### Pavements

Part of only one street in the village, the west side of Chequers Street, has a significant run of footway. As the most densely populated part of the village, facing the most heavily used section of road in the conservation area, this is appropriate but not ideal. Other road edge conditions are narrow grassed verges, steep grassed banks and hedged and/or fenced or walled road margins in places roughly finished with road-stone and dirt.

Pedestrians in the upper part of Church Street as well as Canal Road and Lower Rochester Road have to share the carriageway with vehicles. As these roads are quite narrow in parts and traffic speeds often fast, especially along Lower Rochester Road and Chequers Street, there is some danger.

### Public open space

The village's only 'public' land is a small piece left as result of highway improvements. This is at the cross-roads where the formerly right angled street boundary wall to the south west corner of the front garden of Dairy Farm house is chamfered off at 45 degrees to produce a vehicle vision splay at the junction. On the small grass triangle in front of the 45 degree section of wall stands an unrelated and jumbled array of 'street furniture' including street signs, utility poles, a George VI pillar box and a seat looking down the road.

### Other public structures/services

The only other structure for public use is a steel and glass bus shelter accompanying a bus stop sign on a concrete pole, built into the side of the field bank half way along Chequers Street opposite the Railway Tavern. A recycling skip was noted in the car park of the Railway Tavern pub; the brewery supplying space for this local community service. Planning consent has recently been granted for conversion of the building to residential use.

### Street lighting, overhead telephone lines

Provision of street lighting is sparse. Three lighting points were identified, one at the cross roads, one in Canal Road and one in Chequers Street. The last is located well away from the bus shelter. All are small in scale and impact, being bracketed off (it is assumed) telegraph poles. The poles and their wires are by contrast a significant feature of the local 'townscape'. They are sited on roadside field margins, individual lines spanning the road to reach the houses but in Canal Road and Church Street they march with the buildings.

### Traffic

Heaviest traffic flows appear to be over the railway bridge into Chequers Street and then round the corner into Lower Rochester Road. Vehicles use this route equally in both directions and invariably move at speed. The importance accorded to the free flow of traffic through the village is underlined by the 'controlled zone' highway signs and yellow lines on Lower Rochester Road. Thirty-mile-an-hour speed-limit signs are

placed west of the junction with Gore Green Road, well inside the conservation area. Gore Green Road shows signs of traffic use with its sides worn into in places. Lesser routes diverging from the main cross roads follow alternatively Canal Road or (the upper part of) Church Street. As noted earlier, Canal Road carries heavy vehicles travelling in both directions to and from the industrial estate in the countryside to the north west of the village. These emerge at the cross roads, often turning south onto Chequers Street headed for the railway bridge, and vice versa. The upper part of Church Street seems less consistently heavily trafficked.

**Parking**

There is no public car park in the village. In front of Dairy Farm Cottages and the adjacent roadside stable block on Church Street are a number of informal parking bays opening directly off the highway, all on partly unmade ground. On-site parking is available to the inhabitants of most of the small number of modern houses in the village. A lay-by dedicated to the cars of the occupants of the modern Telegraph Cottages at the cross roads is provided in Canal Road. The parking area adjacent to the Railway Tavern seems to act as an informal village car park, although this is likely to change with the recently approved proposal for a residential dwelling, and cars also park in the road in front of the Brooker's Place building.

## 7 THE BUILDINGS OF THE CONSERVATION AREA

**Figure 8,** Building character.'

**7.1** Listed buildings

Dairy Farm farmhouse is listed grade II.
According to the list entry the farmhouse is late seventeenth or early eighteenth century in date. It is built of red brick in Flemish bond, with a steeply pitched hipped tiled roof.

By virtue of being within the curtilage of Dairy Farm House, the former farm buildings of 19th century date are also protected by its listing; these include the barn, cattle sheds, stables and oast house**.**

**7.2** Locally listed buildings

There is no adopted comprehensive Local List for the Borough and identification of buildings or structures for a local list is considered to be a priority once criteria have been agreed. Any Local List should be drawn up with the full consultation of the local community.

**7.3** Key unlisted buildings contributing to conservation area character

A number of the buildings noted here have had their original windows and doors replaced in whole or in part. Some have also suffered the loss of their original, natural slate or tile, roof coverings or their walls have been rendered. Some of these items are 'reversible' i.e., original detail and finishes might be brought back at some time or other. Where a building has been so heavily altered that restoration would be impracticable, it is excluded.

Key unlisted buildings are:

- 2 no. public houses, 'Railway Tavern' and 'The Chequers', one of two storeys, the other of two and a half storeys
- 1 no. early 19th century two storey house, 'Station House' (former 'Bridge House' and thus probably originally linked to the managing of the canal)
- 1 no. early 19th century two storey house, 'The Banks' (built on the bank of the canal)
- 1 no. early 20th century two storey house. 'The Brambles'
- 4 no. 19th century terrace houses, three storeys, 'Brooker's Place, 1856' (This essentially urban form of terrace is rare in such a location (on account of its three storeys) and must have been purpose-built with particular users in mind.)

Unlisted buildings making some contribution to conservation area character are:

- 2 no. 19th /early 20th century two storey terraces of three dwellings each, 'Dairy Farm Cottages' and 'Hobbs Cottages
- 1 semi-detached house pair, two storeys with two storey rear outshuts, 'Nursery Cottages', late 19th/ early 20th century date. A bit of a cut above the standard agricultural workers cottages

**7.4** Modern buildings of no historic interest and historic buildings whose character has been degraded, neither category contributing to conservation area character:

- 3 no. detached modern dwellings

- 2 no. former village shop pair, 'Telegraph Cottages', at the cross roads, now in large part re-developed and with original character erased

- A very large shed built in the 20th century as a fruit store at Dairy Farm

**7.5** Building form

The village is a mixture of individual buildings and short terraces. Most of the historic buildings follow the anonymous regional patterns of their time, generally and in their detail. (Though detail has often been altered and visually downgraded recently.) Partly because of their late date the buildings along Chequers Street can be characterised as urban, rather than rural, in form.

**Plans**
Overall, individual building plan form throughout the village is simple, with some terraced houses showing typical later 19th century rear extensions (Brookers Place), allowing the continued use of traditional relatively narrow roof spans, or tentatively architecturally manipulated front elevations (Dairy Farm Cottages).

**Construction**

As most of the buildings are 19th century in date, built form is based on the use of load bearing external wall construction with, it can be assumed, major internal walls also of masonry.

**Openings in walls**

Throughout the village external openings in the walls of its pre mid 20th century buildings tend to be classical in form i.e. openings are usually taller than they are wide.

**Roofs**

Roofs are both hipped and gabled. The Railway Tavern, the earlier of the two surviving pubs, has a street front parapet to hide a low slate roof. The roof of the Chequers and the dormers within this etc. are expressed self consciously as a major part of the architect's design.

**‘Architectural’ design**

The Chequers is the only building to show an architect intent on creating a unique design. Although of commonplace load bearing masonry and pitched roofed construction its two primary – street facing – elevations are to a design that makes it ‘unique’.. Its ‘uphill’ elevation was clearly seen as of lesser importance by the designer. On the face of it, it is surprising that the Chequers was thought worthy of this complete and quite lavish rebuilding in the early years of the last century.

**The Farmstead**

The farmhouse, because of its age – parts of it will be earlier than anything else in the village – may contain some framed internal structure. The design of the farm barn, weather-boarded with a low pitched slate roof recently over-clad in sheet metal, is characteristic of such agricultural structures of the 19th century. The other farm buildings, most of them contemporary with the barn, appear to follow 19th century masonry load bearing principles having stock brick walls and low pitched roofs designed for slates.

**7.6** Local details

The detail of the village’s buildings is typical of equivalents of similar date elsewhere in the District. Standing out as particular to the location are Railway House and the Chequers pub. Both are atypical, the former because of the stark expression of constraint in its details and overall form, and the latter on its corner site, because of the exuberance of its detailed architectural design and use of strongly contrasting colours of brick and render in its walls.

Brooker’s Place, because of the urban character of its three storied form and quite showy moulded stucco arches and lintels to doors and windows, seems out of place in a rural environment, and so does the Railway Tavern with its white stuccoed walls and parapet, and slate roof. As noted above, these buildings help give a late Victorian/Edwardian character to Chequers Street.

The agricultural buildings of the farmstead conform to a 19th century Kent pattern - a combination of very simple, almost industrial, building form with ‘stripped down’ details, the use of ‘engineered’ design principles and what were then ‘modern’ materials (yellow stock bricks and Welsh slate roofing).

**7.7** Building materials

External wall finishes range from red and yellow brick to painted stucco and self finished roughcast. Only one building, the main barn at Dairy Farm, uses one of Kent’s other traditional cladding materials, weatherboard. In this case the original boarding would have been the later, narrower width, imported tarred softwood variety. Roofs in the village are clad in a mixture of materials from peg tile and slate to modern concrete tiles and metal sheeting. On the older buildings concrete tiles and their like are modern replacements for the original materials.

## 8 CHARACTER ANALYSIS

This is simply expressed by a series of bullet points as follows:

Positive features contributing to conservation area character

- The essential form of the village, developed around a cross roads with linear development on one side contrasted with nucleated development on the other and with more than half the road frontages within the conservation area remaining undeveloped

- The linear street front development along one side only of Chequers Street (the lower part of Church Street)

- The nucleated development around Dairy Farm

- The contrasting Victorian/Edwardian characters of the domestic buildings on Chequer Street and the agricultural buildings of Dairy House farmstead

- the wall to the garden of Dairy Farm farmhouse

- The great open arable field making up the conservation area's south east quarter with its steep banks down to the roadsides, forming an eastern setting for much of the village

- The 'land mark' buildings of Station House and the Chequers Pub defining the limits of Chequer Street, where upper floors look over a partly sunken highway to open country

- The Chequers pub at the cross roads, a 'landmark' as well as a fulcrum at the bend in the main road

- The Dairy Farm farmhouse, a 'landmark', with its two yew trees in front and with the oast kilns and other farm buildings standing behind it

- The historic pond to the west of Dairy Farm farmhouse

- In Canal Road, the effect of enclosure of the conservation area to the west from a curving road, hedges and trees, the former Nursery Cottages and an associated low boundary wall

- The section of Lower Rochester Road within the area, semi-rural in character with an enclosing bank to one side and garden wall and fences (with garden behind) to the other. The related part-open landscaped and part-old orchard front garden to Dairy Farm farmhouse, also forming the latter's setting

- The 'landmark' house, The Brambles, at Lower Rochester Road's junction with Gore Green Road, facing down the road towards the Chequers at the cross roads, defining the limit of the conservation area

- The mature trees along Gore Green Road

- The continuous green boundary along the old canal line north west from the railway bridge concealing most of the historic village development set eastward beyond it

- The distant view north west towards the Thames as seen from the south-east field

Negative features/issues affecting the character of the conservation area:

- The appearance of the publicly visible ‘service’ space between the rear of Dairy Farm house and its former agricultural buildings

- The appearance of the generally belt and braces adjacent-to-the-street car parking arrangements in parts of the village

- The appearance of the Railway Tavern car park, recently granted planning permission for a single family dwelling.

- General traffic through the village and the regular use of part of the roads through the village by heavy lorries, all with consequent danger to pedestrians

## 9 ISSUES

**9.1** Definition of issues

The following issues form part of the means by which it is intended to preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the conservation area. Some arrangements by which to manage change have already been adopted following public consultation, such as the Article 4 Direction explained below, whilst others have been identified by the appraisal process and represent proposals only at this stage.

**9.2** Conservation area boundary adjusted

The south-west boundary of the conservation area between Canal Road and the bridge to Chequers Street follows the property boundary between private gardens and railway land. The conservation area boundary has been moved further to the south west, to run the boundary parallel to its previous line, along between the railway tracks and the south west bank of the former canal.

At the initial public consultation in October 2008 it was suggested that, following analysis, the conservation area boundary might be extended to include nearby areas comprising the site of the former canal wharf and the line of the former canal/present railway and cutting, and the railway station, from the railway bridge as far as the tunnel mouth. The proposition has now been carefully examined. It is considered that while the isolated group of station buildings might benefit from the protection given by conservation area status, the larger area that was proposed for possible inclusion here contributes little to the character of the conservation area. Again, the site of the former wharf contributes nothing to existing conservation area character, isolated and concealed as it is from the village. Additionally, as now a piece of open field, the wharf site would not be protected from agricultural changes by including it within the conservation area.

**9.3** Alterations to buildings

It is evident that well–intentioned, but unsympathetic changes, especially to doors, windows and roofs, have a cumulative effect that is damaging to the character of the conservation area. The putting in place of an Article 4 Direction would bring many of these small incremental changes under the remit of the planning system.

**9.4** Highways and traffic

General traffic through the village and the regular use of part of the roads through the village by heavy lorries, all with consequent danger to pedestrians, have been identified as negative factors within the conservation area. Consideration should be given to an appropriate traffic management scheme.
It should be noted that highways matters are the remit of KCC and subject to their funding arrangements and further consultation with GBC and the Parish Council.

**9.5** Locally Listed Buildings

There is no adopted comprehensive Local List for the Borough and, subject to the availability of resources, identification of buildings or structures for a local list is considered to be a priority once criteria have been agreed. Any Local List should be drawn up with the full consultation of the local community.

**9.6** Enhancement potential

Enhancement might be gained by highway works arising out of point 9.4 above. Different kinds of road finish, road narrowing and speed humps can, if sensitively used, enhance local character.

The present appearance of the privately owned, publicly visible, ‘service’ space between the rear of Dairy Farm house and its former agricultural buildings has been identified as a negative feature of the conservation area. There is potential for enhancement here and the opportunity should be taken, should occasion arise, to develop a coherent landscape/streetscape scheme for the whole of the area between the public highway, the farmhouse the farm buildings.

The generally belt and braces nature of certain adjacent-to-the-street car parking arrangements in part of the village could undergo some enhancement; at its most basic this would take the form of substituting, say, ‘grass-crete’ or its equivalent for broken tarmac and earth. Implementation would be a matter for the private sector rather than the Council.

There is scope for enhancement to the appearance of the car park of the Railway Tavern. Fortunately this car park, because of its small scale and enclosed site, is not critical in the wider view.) However, if in due course changes to its present tarmac surfacing are considered, local enhancement could be gained by moving to an alternative finish such as bound gravel or even ‘grass-crete’ or the equivalent. The Railway Tavern has recently been granted planning permission for conversion to residential use with a single family dwelling on the car park.

**9.7** Trees

Subject to certain size restrictions, all trees within the conservation area benefit from a level of protection, and permission is required from the local planning authority to undertake works to them.

**9.8** Archaeology
The Conservation Area has archaeological potential relating to the Thames and Medway Canal. There is potential for further archaeological remains to be discovered within the Conservation Area and in the event of development proposals being submitted appropriate archaeological mitigation may be needed.

**APPENDIX 1**

**Historical Development. - Summary Archaeology, Early Medieval period (AD 410-1066), Later medieval period (AD 1066 – 1540)**

**Summary Archaeology**

Local finds confirm that Stone Age and Iron Age people were established in the area. Traditionally Higham has been considered the site of a ford across the Thames where Aulus Plautius pursued retreating Britons during the Roman conquest. No evidence has been found of a Roman ford in the vicinity, but there is considerable evidence for Roman activity around Higham, including a 1st – 2nd century settlement nearby.

**Early Medieval period (AD 410-1066)**

Around the 9th and 10th centuries, the local parochial system began to replace the earlier Saxon Minster system, with formal areas of land centred on nucleated settlements served by parish churches. Higham was among a number of such early medieval parishes in the area. In AD 774 a church in Higham is mentioned in a grant of land given by Offa to the Archbishop of Canterbury. This church and any associated settlement may have been located in the same area as the extant stone church at Church Street north of Lower Higham which has some Saxo-Norman work in its fabric, and is mentioned in Domesday Book.

Early medieval occupation in the area is likely to have been associated with the exploitation of the saltmarsh environment. Charters including references to Meadham, Bulenham and Beckley in Higham indicate that there was some reclamation taking place from the 8th century to produce arable cultivation and freshwater meadow.

**Later medieval period (AD 1066 – 1540) (Source as above)**

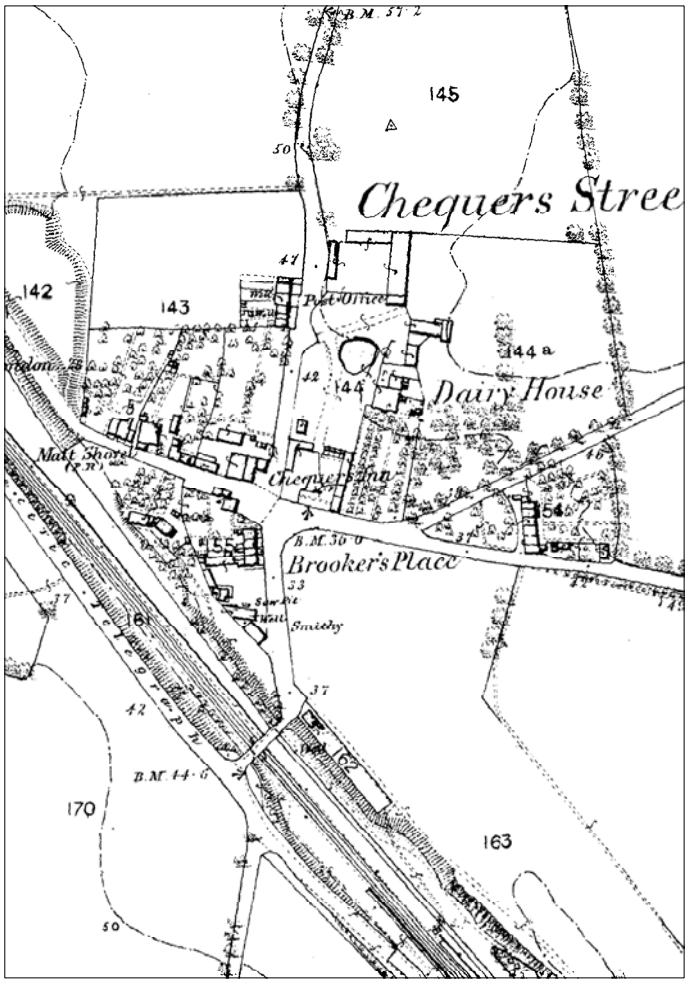
The Domesday Book records land for two manors in Higham and these can possibly be identified with those later called Higham and Lillechurch. The modern Lillechurch Farm lies more or less due east of Lower Higham, south of Cliffe Woods and not far from the Rochester-Cliffe road. These and a number of other manors locally were owned following the conquest by Odo Bishop of Bayeaux, William's brother. After Bishop Oddo's disgrace in 1083 his Higham manors were confiscated by the King and became part of the Royal estate.

In 1148 a Priory was founded by King Stephen at Higham Lillechurch, with Stephen's daughter Mary as first Prioress and the manor of Lillechurch as its endowment. Buildings related to this establishment are located close to the parish Church at Church Street and their site has been partly investigated.

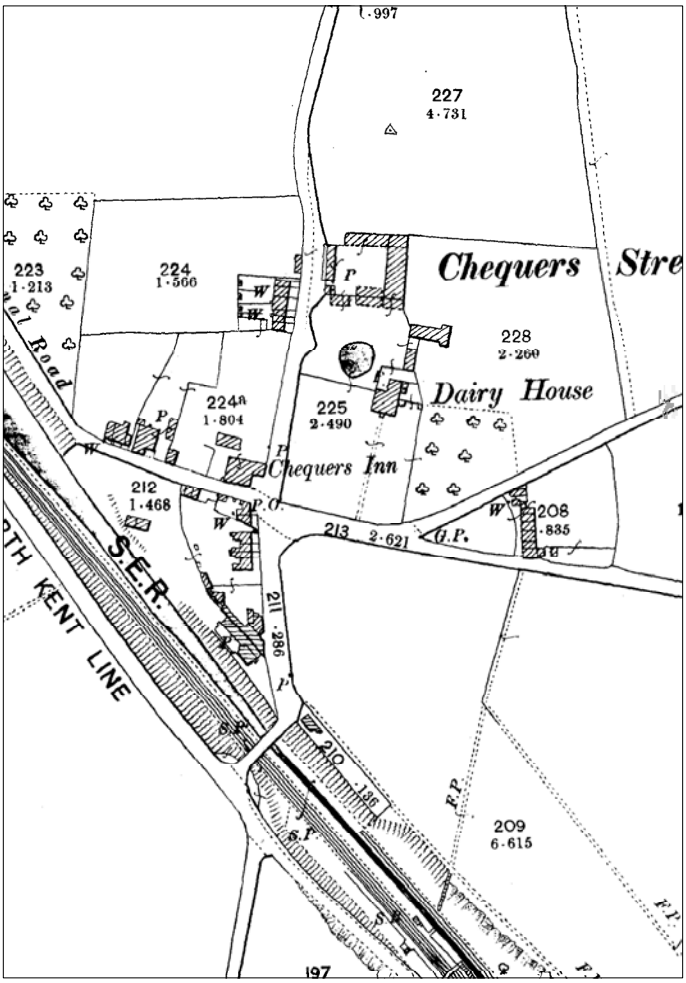
In 1522 the Nunnery of Higham Lillechurch was dissolved…. On the basis that only three nuns remained and that these were tainted with immorality. The King settled the property on the newly founded St John's College in Cambridge which has owned it ever since. The College owns Dairy House Farm and most of its agricultural buildings.

Appendix 2

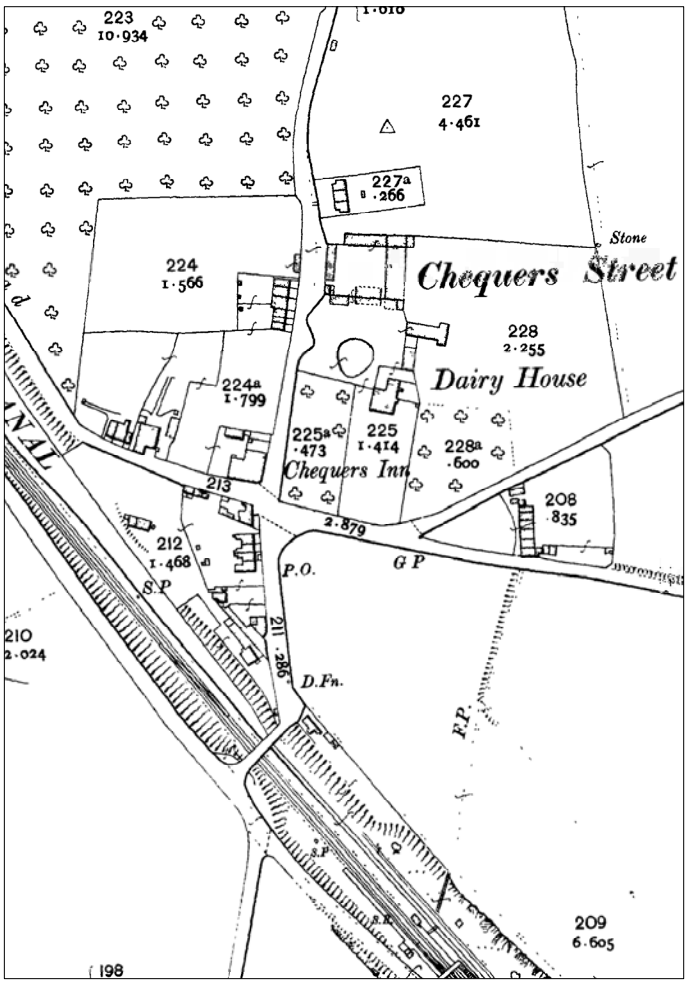
1843-93



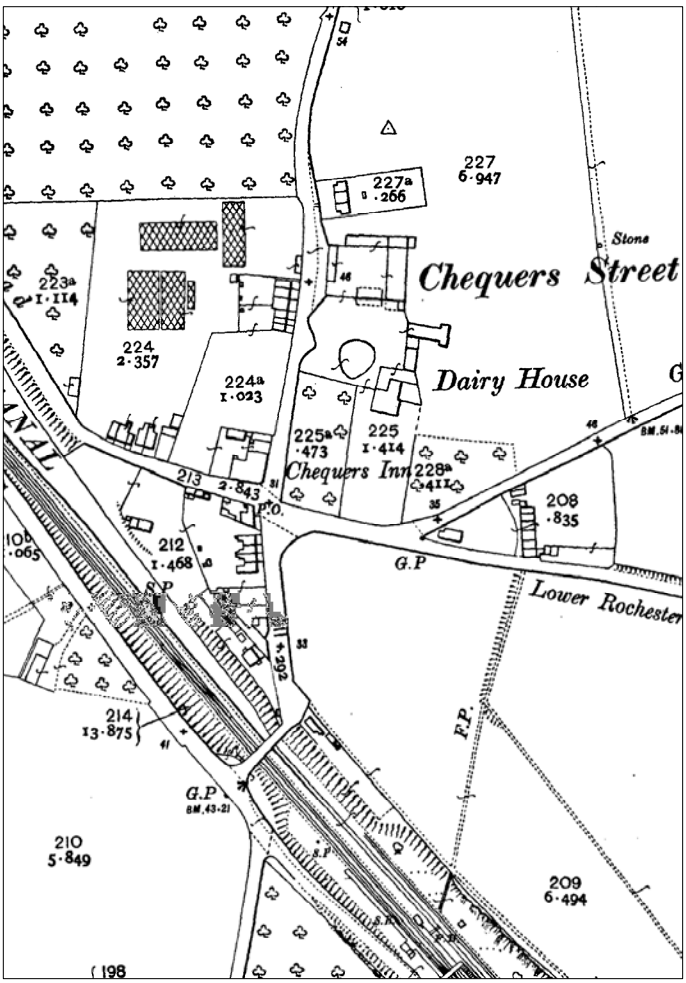

1891-1912




1904-39

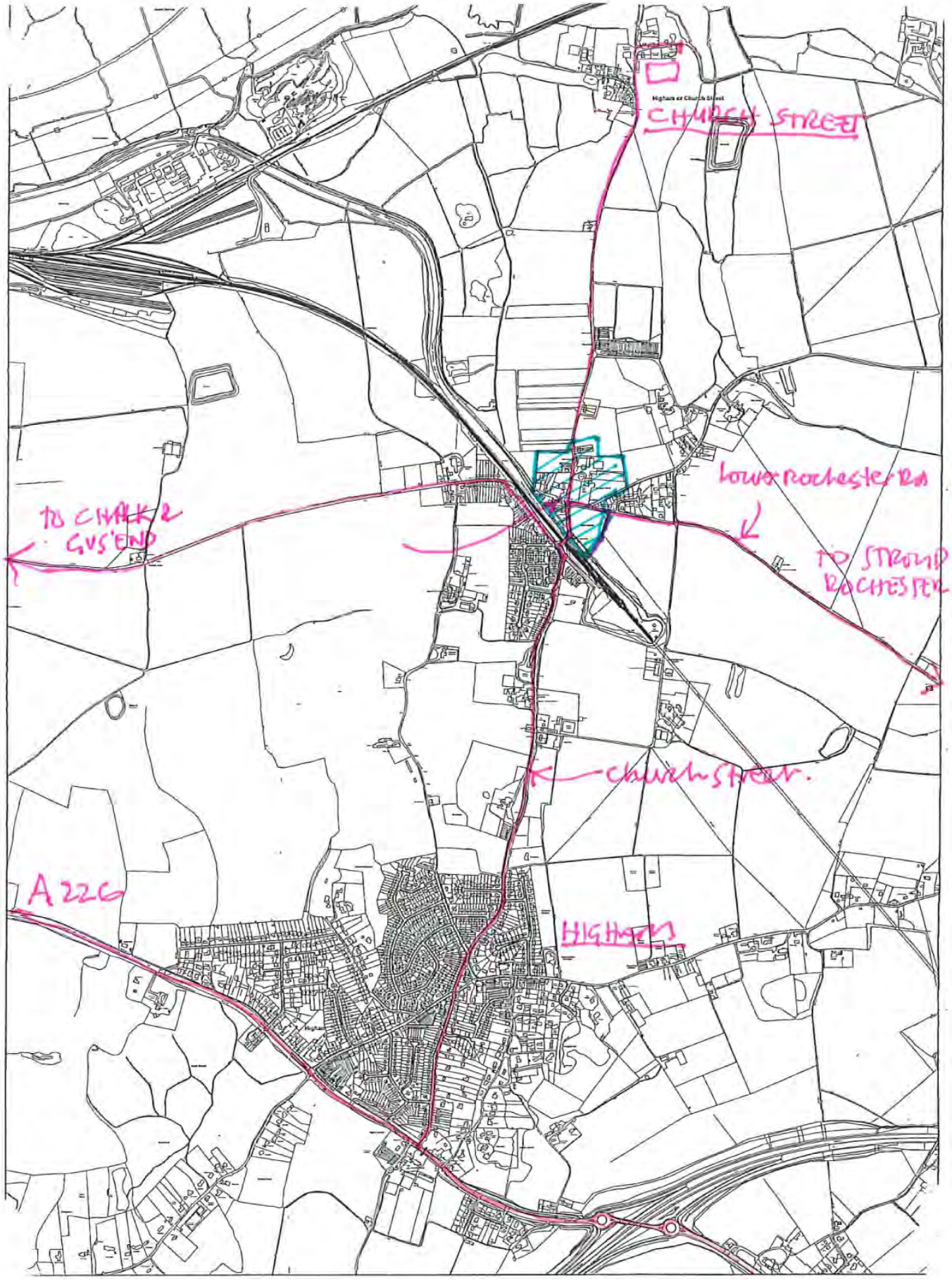



1919-43



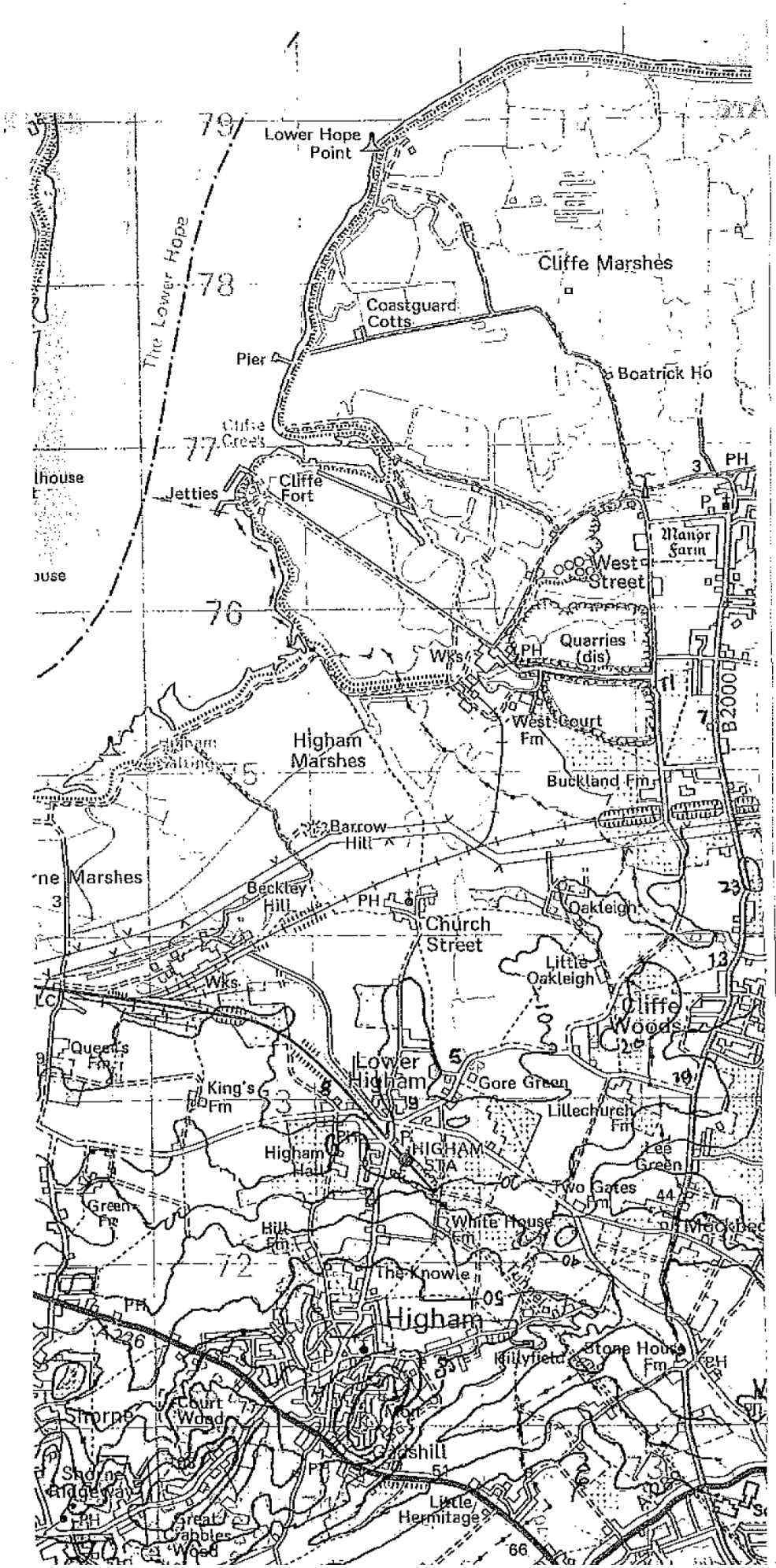
## Figure 1

**Local settlement and communications**
Lower Higham



## Figure 2

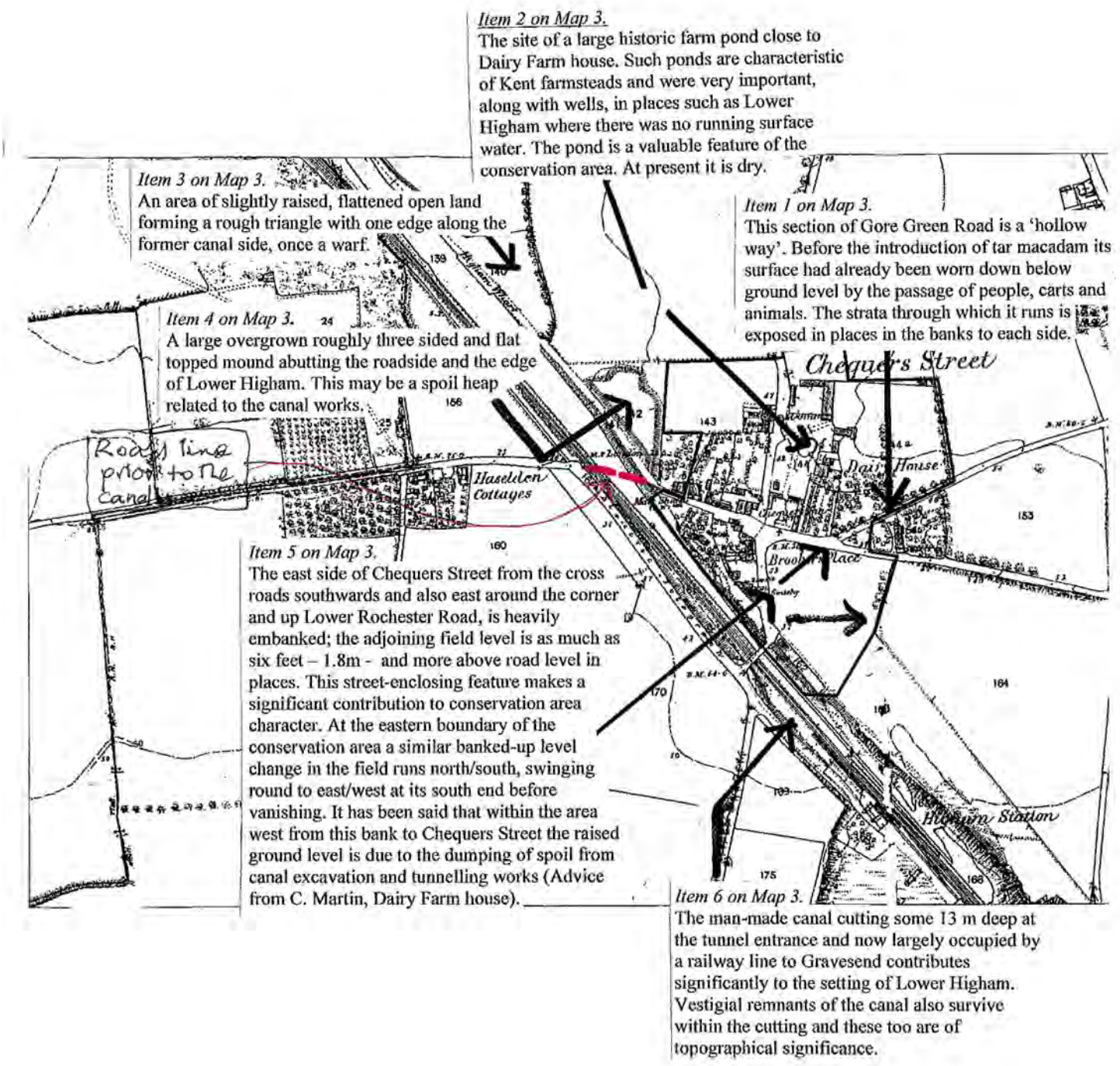
**Local contours**
Lower Higham



## Figure 3

**Significant topographical feaetures**

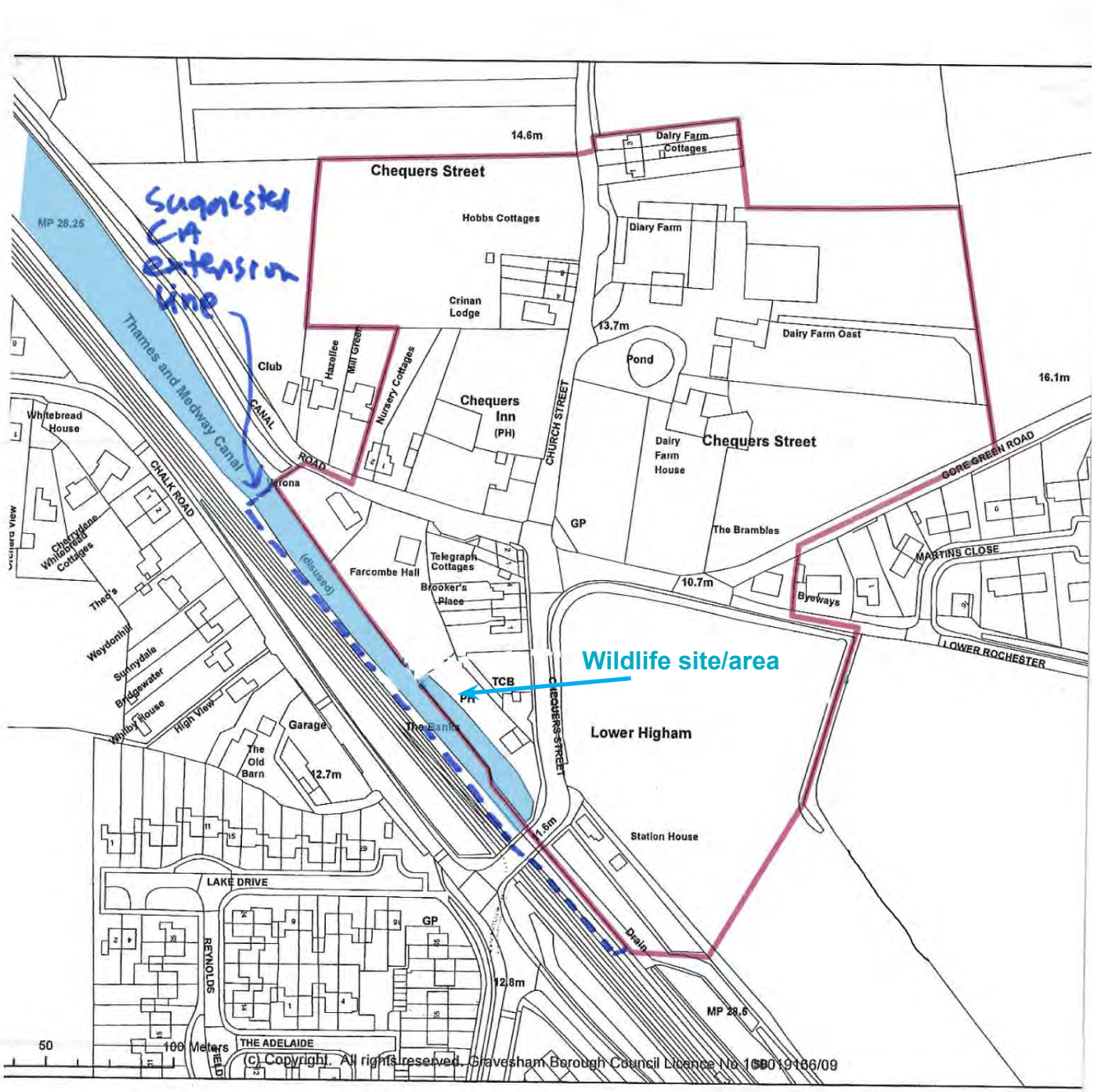
Lower Higham



# Figure 4

### 3.4 Biodiversity

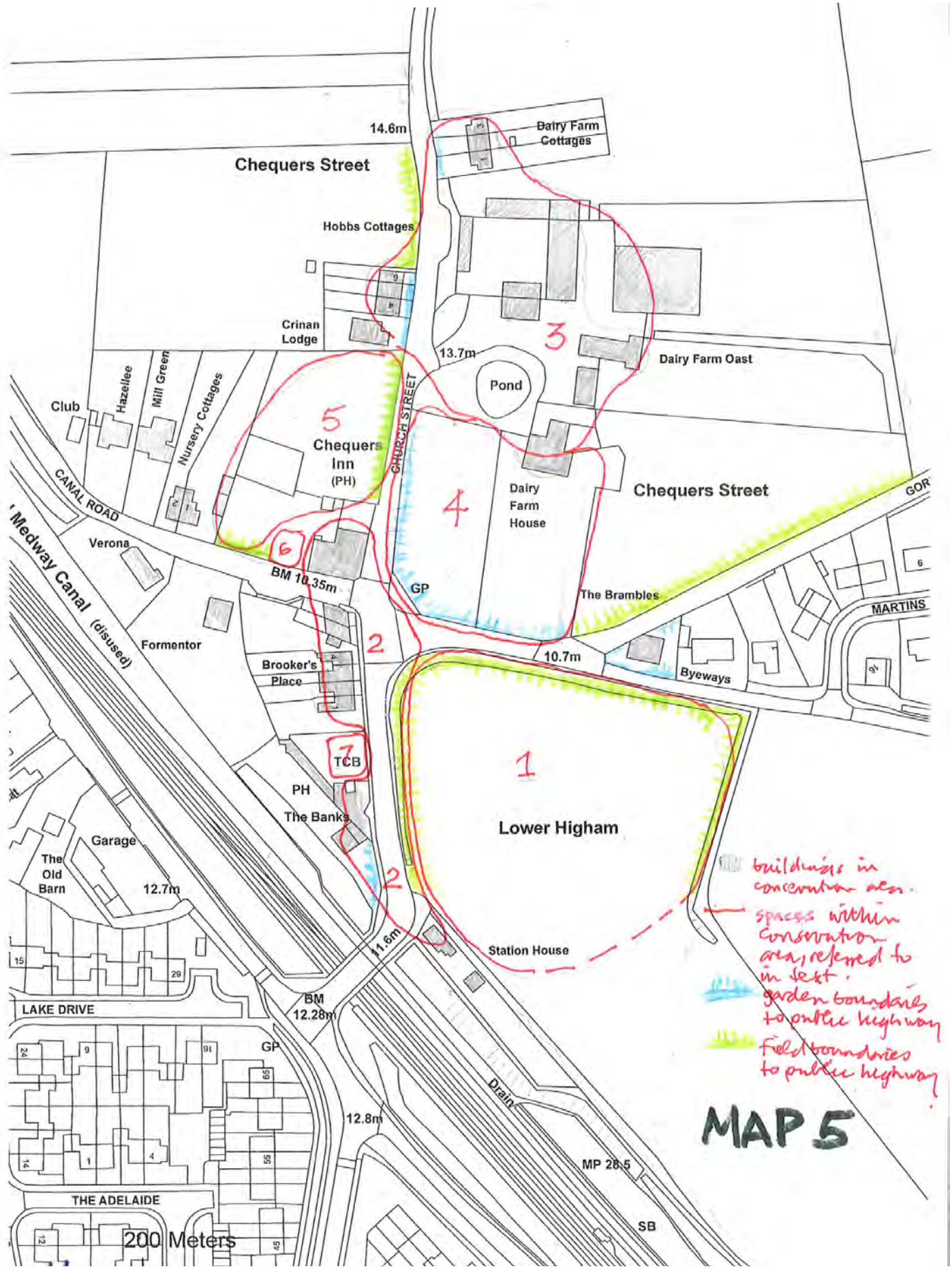
Lower Higham



## Figure 5

### 5.2 Main elements of layout, spaces and enclosure

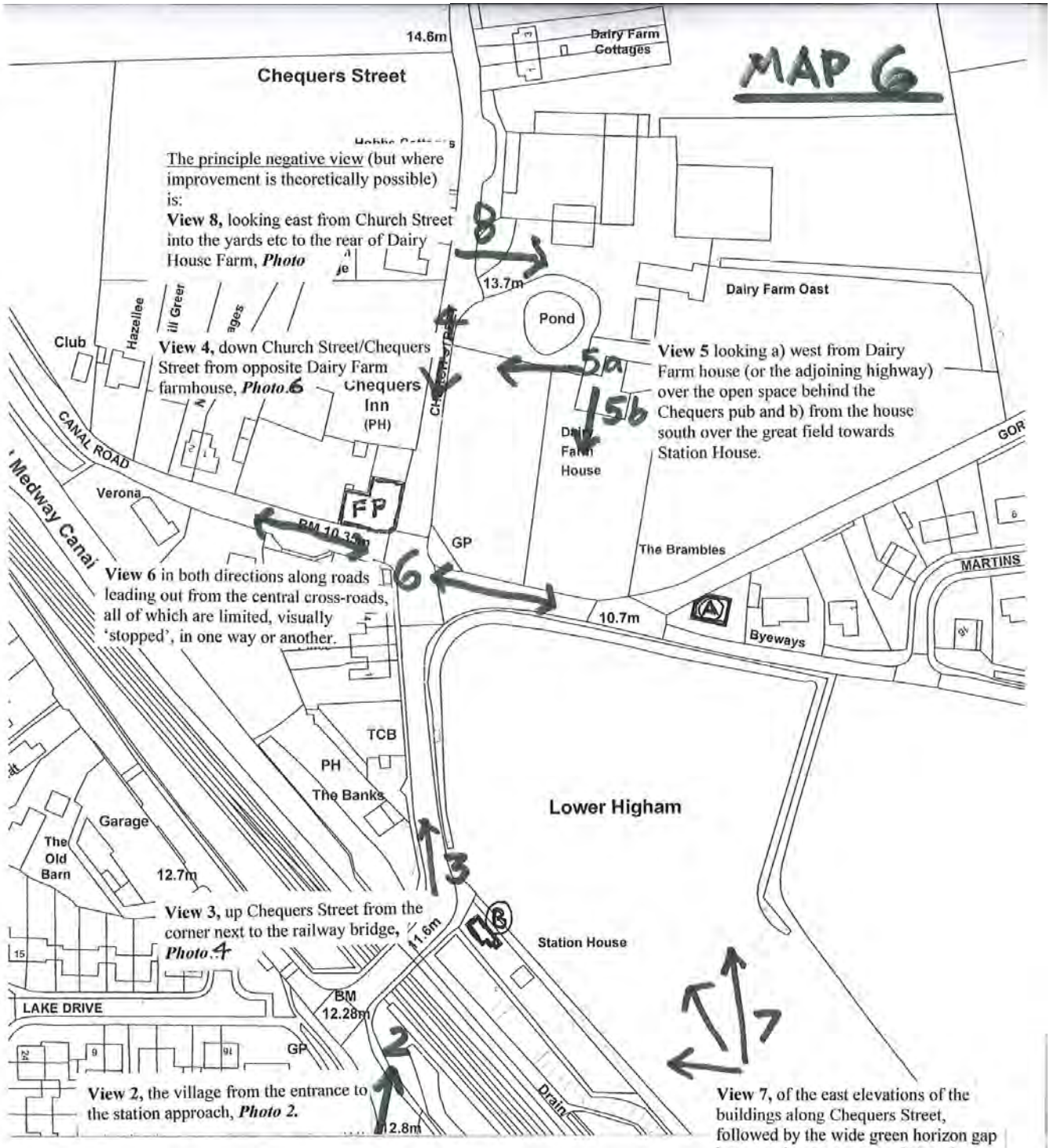
Lower Higham



## Figure 6

### 5.3 Views, focal points and landmarks

Lower Higham




**5.3. Views, focal points and landmarks**

*MAP 6, Views, focal points and landmarks.*

Positive and negative views.

Significant views, features etc. and their details are shown on ***MAP 6*** with the exception of **View 1** taken from the west from the Lower Rochester Road which is shown only in ***Photo 3.*** (views 1 – 7 positive, 8 negative)

16

## Figure 7

**5.4 Contributing trees, hedges,walls and fences**
Lower Higham



## Figure 8

**7 Building Character**
Lower Higham

