# The Street, Meopham

Rural Conservation Area Appraisal

## Supplementary Planning Document

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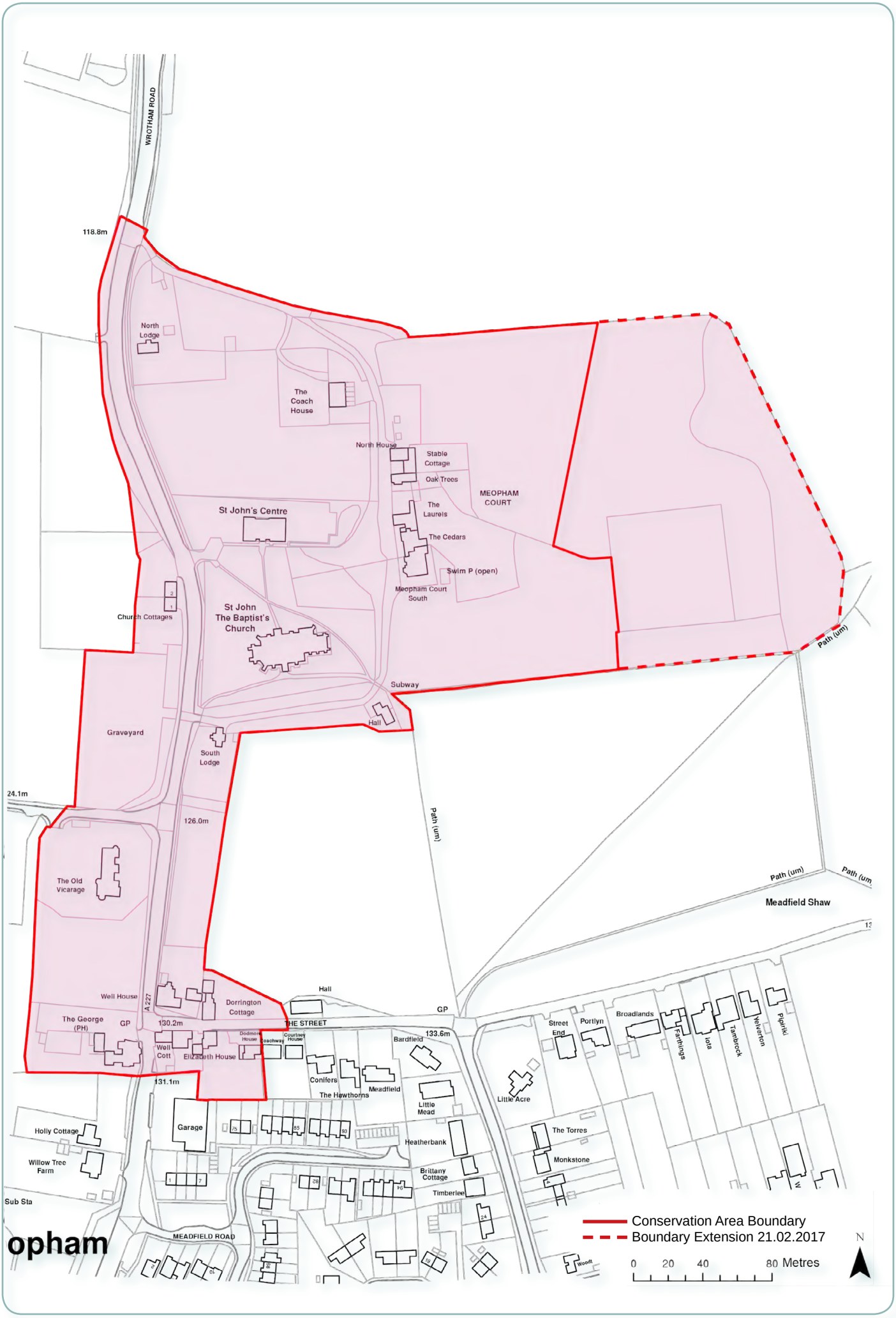
Gravesham Borough Council

# Meopham, The Street, Conservation Area Boundary



# MEOPHAM THE STREET – RURAL CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL 2016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## 1 STATEMENT OF SPECIAL INTEREST OF THE CONSERVATION AREA

Meopham The Street Conservation Area is of special interest for its historic buildings and for the various wall-, hedge-, and tree-enclosed spaces around and to the north, east and west of the St John's Church and Meopham Court; for the hedges, tree belts and garden spaces along the Wrotham road; and for the grouping of buildings around the junction of The Street with Wrotham Road.

## 2 INTRODUCTION

**2.1** Meopham The Street Conservation Area

Meopham The Street Conservation Area was first designated on 23rd of January 1970. In 1999 a draft conservation area statement was prepared; this included a proposal for a small extension to the conservation area. A public meeting to discuss the draft statement was held on 15th October 1999 and the results of this consultation were included in the statement. The statement was subsequently adopted as Supplementary Planning Guidance by the Council.

The conservation area's boundary contains parts of the historic streets of Wrotham Road, Shipley Hills Road and The Street.

**2.2** The purpose of the appraisal

This appraisal supersedes the conservation area statement referred to above. It identifies and defines the special architectural and historic interest for which the Meopham The Street 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 a background paper 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 both the special character of Meopham The Street 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

Prior to its adoption by the Council, the conservation area statement of 1999, including the proposed boundary extension, was the subject of public consultation and support.

The present survey identifies in more detail the following:

- The special characteristics of Meopham The Street 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

**3.1** Location, communications and local context
Figure 1

Meopham The Street, on the A 227 Wrotham Road about 5 miles south of the centre of Gravesend, is on the dip slope of the Downs and stands at about 125 metres AOD. Some distance away to the south are the heights of the chalk. To the immediate west of the village a system of dry valleys leads north to the Thames at Northfleet and Gravesend. East across the tableland from the village Luddesdown's deep dry valley curves away north east, falling eventually into the Medway at Cuxton. The landscape around Meopham The Street is a balance of large open arable fields, hedges, copses and small woods, to some extent reflecting local geological conditions.

Meopham The Street with its church is the original settlement of Meopham and today has the outlying satellites of Hook Green and Meopham Green to north and south. All three occur now as 'incidents' along the A227. This road provides a direct connection from Gravesend on the coast, due south up and over the more or less east/west running dip slope, and then the escarpment, of the North Downs to the Chartlands below this, and thence to the Low Weald beyond. In the north it crosses the modern M2, Roman Watling Street. In the south, on reaching the base of the chalk escarpment, it links to a second set of major historic east/west routes in this case following along the foot of, and below, the Downs.

The line of the A 227 is long established; it was one of the many Kent 'droveways' along which in Saxon times and perhaps before, domestic animals were driven to summer and autumn pasture in the woods of the Weald. Saxon Meopham's area of such detached pasture was probably around Meopham Bank in the Tonbridge area, about 12 miles away (Everitt 1986, 37). The road takes care to avoid the area's deep north and north east running dry valleys, always following the line of the watershed between them and taking a gradually ascending, more or less due north-south, route. Modern Meopham The Street takes its name from the cluster of historic buildings around a 'T' junction a little way south of the church where the A227 – the Wrotham Road – is joined by a minor road running off to the east, known as The Street.

**3.2** Activities and uses

The village, formerly hardly more than a hamlet, is within easy reach of Gravesend and Dartford and is close to the M2 motorway and even closer to Meopham station on the London Victoria line. This has long made the area an attractive dormitory for London commuters. Apart from St John the Baptist's Church and vicarage, in the past it possessed the local manor house of Meopham Court, with an associated very large home farmstead and two lodges, a public house, a village shop and one or two houses or cottages, one being a post office. Today it is a dormitory settlement, with Meopham Court now in a number of separate ownerships, and retaining its public house though having recently lost its post office and its shop.

**3.3** Geology, topography and local building materials
Figures 2 & 3

The conservation area is on a bed of Palaeocene Thanet Sands locally overlying the chalk of the Upper Cretaceous period which here forms the dip slope of the North Downs. The settlement makes use of a small plateau area developed on the Downs

dip slope. South beyond Meopham The Street this plateau narrows down into a ridge with north and north east running dry valleys closing in to each side. At Meopham Green, a short distance south along the Wrotham Road, the relatively easily managed local beds of Thanet Sands and head drift give way to intractable Clay with Flints which caps all the highest chalk-land hereabouts. On the clay deciduous woodland often still dominates.

The Wrotham Road climbs gradually southwards through the conservation area running for much of its length here along the east flank of an east-west slope in the land. This flank forms the east side of a dry valley to the west beyond the conservation area boundary. Shipley Hills Road leading off westward from the Wrotham Road descends into this valley.

Over time the surface of Wrotham Road has been worn down, and no doubt also physically cut down, into the flank of the dry valley. This has resulted in the formation of a bank along the east side of the road from some way north of the churchyard south almost to its junction with The Street. The gradient of The Street coming in from the east at the south end of the conservation area steepens as it drops down to its junction with the Wrotham Road. At the opposite, north, end of the village higher ground against the road continues northwards past the church where a roadside boundary wall retains the raised up graveyard behind it

Flint from beds within the chalk of the region has a long history of use in local building. Its use with stone dressings in the 14th century is seen in St John's Church. Its 19th and 20th century use combined with brick dressings is seen in some of the buildings of Meopham Court and also in the series of long boundary walls to the Wrotham Road (much rebuilt in the 20th century). The earliest vernacular walling form in the village – hardwood timber framing now plastered over or otherwise hidden externally – probably occurs in a number of houses in the village, notably at Church Cottages or the George public house. Chalk was burned through the region to produce lime for mortar and plaster from very early times. Chalk and clay were mixed and processed locally from the late 18th century to produce various sorts of cement for exterior renders. Examples of these occur in the village. Different varieties and mixes of local clay were used in brick-making in the area. The reds came first, the yellow/browns following, again from the late 18th century. Reds predominate within the village. The clay Kent peg roofing tile was made and in use in the region from the middle ages through to the mid 20th century. This too predominates on roofs in the village though a late extension to the George public house is slated in Welsh slates.

**3.4** Relationship of the conservation area to its surroundings
(General setting and land-use characterisation. The village in the wider landscape)
Figure 4 part present OS for comparison with -
Figure 5 part first OS (early c 1800s)

Farm land lies between the north edge of Meopham The Street and the suburban southern part of Hook Green on the Wrotham Road to the north. The settlement is hidden in views from the north and east by close-lying belts of hedging and mature woodland. From within the large almost completely tree-enclosed field outside the conservation area boundary to the immediate south of the churchyard, little can be seen. Glimpses of the tower of the church and the south façade of Meopham Court behind the trees in one direction and a huddle of Kent peg roofs in the other, around the Wrotham Road/The Street junction, is the most that can be had in summer. To the west from Shipley Hills Road the view is to the hedges and trees of the back gardens of development along the Wrotham Road including the 20th century extension to the churchyard. Beyond these again groupings of mature trees once

more dominate the picture. A fine view of the church tower can be had from the fields to the west, north of Shipley Hills Road.

The following features form the wider setting of the conservation area:

- The farm land to each side of the Wrotham Road separating modern suburban development in Hook Green to the north along main road, from Meopham The Street

- Open, gently rolling arable landscapes to north and west of the settlement

- The large tree-belt enclosed arable field to the south of Meopham Church and Meopham Court and to the north east of the settlement around the junction between The Street and the Wrotham Road, extending south to the shaw alongside The Street/Foxendown Lane

- The shallow valley formed in the arable fields to the west of the Wrotham Road and north of Shipley Hills Road with an enclosing tree-and-hedge belt along its west side

- The continuation of this dry valley south of Shipley Hills Road, with various developments and enclosures extending into it

## 4 GENERAL HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

**4.1** Early settlers in the region and the recent history of the settlement

North Kent has a long history of known settlement. Iron Age and Roman remains have been found at Meopham, including a Roman villa discovered just to the south of the George Inn. The present medieval village church is a complete rebuilding carried out in the early 14th century. Meopham is a Saxon name which Eckwall records as first being mentioned in 778. The existence of a Saxon church here is confirmed through a will made in the 10th century by one Blythric which was witnessed by Wina, the parish priest. Blythric left a large part of his considerable possessions to Christ Church, Canterbury and this began a long connection between Meopham and the church. Meopham and Nurstead were both mentioned in the Domesday Book and in 1327 Simon de Meopham was appointed Archbishop of Canterbury. At first the demesne lands of the manor were farmed to supply food to the monks of Christ Church but later they were, in the usual way, rented out to tenant farmers. After the dissolution, ownership of the manor passed to the Dean and Chapter of Canterbury. During the17th century the famous royal gardener John Tradescant (G says 'the younger') lived in Meopham and it is said that he planted the mulberry trees north of Meopham Green.

At the time of the 1840 Tithe Map the historic parts of the village were not much bigger than they are today. The gap along the Wrotham Road separating the historic, aristocratic, part of the settlement comprising Church and Manor House from the more plebeian grouping of vernacular buildings around the Wrotham Road/ The Street junction, took more or less the same form then as now. The main and most significant difference is that in 1840 the Manor home farm site still existed, close to and just north-west of the Manor House itself. This was a sizeable building group with yards and ponds. Its disappearance in the later 19th century suggests the reduction of the Manor House to nothing more than a dwelling, albeit a very large one. This, currently in multi-occupation, still stands within a large curtilage. In the 20th century the village was extended considerably southward along the Wrotham Road beyond The George pub so that it now joins up with Meopham Green.

**4.2** Water supply and the original siting of the village

Prior to the introduction of mains water, water supply in the village in the 19th, and into the 20th, centuries, was from wells and pumps driven down into the chalk aquifer. A well in front of Meopham Court and pumps in the gardens of Church Cottages, The Vicarage and the George Inn are shown on the 1896 O.S. map. The name Well House at the corner of this junction is evidence of the former importance of access to local water supplies; villagers were allowed to draw their water from this private supply. The problem of water supply will have been the same in previous centuries; today there appear to be no surface water flows, continuous or seasonal, in the vicinity. For this reason ponds – of which there were formerly a number in the conservation area – were also important.

## 5 THE VILLAGE'S HISTORIC LAYOUT, ITS FORM TODAY AND ITS ASSOCIATED PUBLIC REALM

**5.1** The village's historic layout and the form today
Figure 6 with conservation area boundary
Figure 7 Comparison maps ditto, a selection of large scale c 19. Together, one page
Figure 8 1840 OS extract

For discussion purposes the conservation area is divided into three main zones. In the north and mostly to the east of the Wrotham Road is an area of largely undeveloped yet enclosed land including large gardens and the part walled-in main village graveyard, along with the church and what is left of Meopham Court. Opposite and south beyond this on the west side of the Wrotham Road are Church Cottages and south of this a modern extension to the graveyard and the former vicarage and its garden setting, the last two walled to the highway. To the east of the road south beyond the graveyard and beyond a gate lodge to Meopham Court there is a narrow strip of field. This includes a steep bank down to the highway which is revetted against the road in places and grown over with trees and shrubs. Lastly, south again, are the small collection of historic and other buildings around the junction of Wrotham Road and The Street.

The siting of, and the relationship between, the church and Manor House were primary aspects of the original village, whatever its size and form. The church is set back within the graveyard with its visually powerful west tower on display to the main road. As noted earlier it is a complete re-build of the early 14th century (with later interventions, see further below). Further back beyond it, and a little to its north so that originally it too might be seen at least in part from the road, is the Manor House. In 1852 the Manor of Meopham was purchased by a Robert Barnett who remodelled the existing 18th century (and perhaps earlier) house – now called Meopham Court – and added a large neo-Gothic flint and stone front to its south end.

Today the building is divided up into separate properties. The former stable courtyard, built of flint with brick banding and buttresses is probably largely the work of Barnett. This is now North House, Stable Cottage and Oak Trees. South of this is a tall mostly late 19th century red brick building, The Laurels, and attached to this again is a slightly taller classically detailed 18th century red brick two storey range, The Cedars. This has suffered subsequent alteration. South beyond this is Barnett's wing, a tall flint and brick building with gabled, tiled roofs, 'Gothic' detailing, sash windows and, as noted, a projecting front entrance porch.

The 1840 Tithe map shows what is now missing from the classic relationship of Church and Manor House, for the manorial farmyard mentioned earlier still existed then. This was an extensive arrangement of barns, yards, cattle sheds, stables and the rest and stood immediately north of the house, extending west from this as far as the main road. In 1840 there may have been up to three thrashing barns with three or four cattle yards and three or perhaps four farmyard ponds. Later on in the century the sub-grouping nearest the highway disappeared. This loss was then followed by the rest, so that by the late 19th century all that was left was a pond alongside the Wrotham Road frontage a little north of the north-west corner of the graveyard. This too has subsequently been lost. It was sited so as to receive the road water run-off from the south-running stretch of Wrotham Road uphill all the way to the junction with The Street, and beyond. In the 18th century such ponds were replenished by what were known as 'pond showers'. Across the main road, opposite the pond, was the

village pound – shown on the 1870s OS Map but gone by the time of the next revision.

The site of the lost agricultural buildings complex is mostly occupied today by street-walled and planted garden lands fronting the Wrotham Road. These extend back eastwards to Meopham Court and north to the field edge that still forms the north boundary of the conservation area. Much of this area is the garden of the hidden 'Coach House'. This was originally a late 19th century structure (shown on the 1896 OS Map) and is now a two storey brick and flint house standing just to the north west of the north end of Meopham Court. This building's name confirms it as originally servicing the 19th century great house. The modern St John's Centre (Church Hall) stands at the south edge of the old farmstead site, close against the north graveyard wall, on an area of former farmyard. Towards the main road, land dedicated to it and used as a car park, may overlap the site of part of the old roadside pond.

Today at the north extremity of the conservation area a carriage drive leads east off the Wrotham Road, where there is a much altered gate lodge. The drive runs along the north edge of the conservation area (largely hidden from external view) and swings round to the south to end in front of the northern half of Meopham Court. The route appears to have been an alternative entry to the old farmyard and later became the 'service' entry to the house, its stables and other ancillary buildings being at its north end. South of the church a second drive with an earlier and less altered gate lodge ('Gothick' – late 18th/early 19th century) leaves the Wrotham Road to run alongside the south boundary of the churchyard. This in turn swings round to the north to end in front of the southern portion of Meopham Court. This is the older of the two accesses to the great house and formerly it too led on to the home farm. Its first stage, abutting the churchyard, runs within an avenue of mature forest trees.

Immediately east of Meopham Court and cut through by the eastern conservation area boundary is a very large, flat, roughly rectangular area of open land. This forms what is effectively a secret rural space, surrounded on three sides by mature field hedges and plantings of forest trees and fronted on the other by the east elevation of the house and its northern appendages. When inspected, the land in its northern section which once formed part of an orchard, appeared to verge on the derelict. Within some of this space - perhaps as part of the 1850s 'make-over' – a garden was formed as a setting for the southern half of the great house. This was extended eastward later in the 19th century and includes remnants of a ha-ha along part of its north boundary. Some of the garden layout seems to survive as does some of the original planting. There are a number of mature ornamental evergreen trees standing among lawns. Of particular note is a fine Wellingtonia. At its east end the extended Victorian garden ended against the west wall of the property's substantial walled garden. A part of the overall 'secret' rural space, this great square enclosure with its ten foot high red-brick walls, is hidden from 'external' view with only its north wall showing 'internally' amidst luxuriant tree and shrub growth. It appears to be intact. A present it is outside the conservation area.

West of the southern half of the house the Victorian garden was extended to occupy a space that appears to have been cut-out of the churchyard; part of its edge is formed as a ha-ha, like that in the garden to the east. The land had taken this form by 1840 when it was possibly already part of the house garden or maybe a paddock or small croft related to the house. The mature forest trees along its boundary with the graveyard were already a significant feature 100 years ago.

From the south east corner of the churchyard and under the southern drive to the house (by means of a low pedestrian underpass) footpaths through the graveyard

lead into a corner of what were two largely tree-enclosed arable fields, now converted to one, lying outside the conservation area immediately south of the church and manor house. Today from this point a number of field paths lead off. The first runs slightly east of south – along a former field boundary – to join with Whitehill Road en route to Harvel. A second runs diagonally south-east to join with Foxendown Lane running on to Luddesdown. A third runs east and then north-east to run across country directly to the church and College at Cobham. A fourth path diverging from the last one appears once to have run via Camer and Sole Street to the corner of Shorne Woods and beyond. The first stages of all these routes, which are almost certainly very long established, are along the edge of or across, the eastern half of the arable field just described. A Saint Andrew's cross of routes within this half of the modern field is completed by a further footpath running from its north east corner to its former south west corner at The Street/Foxendown Lane.

As noted earlier the west boundary of the former pair of fields just discussed is along the east side of a narrow strip of land running north-south, abutting a section of the Wrotham Road. The north end of this strip is occupied by Meopham Court's south lodge and its well planted garden. The south end is occupied by Well House which is part of the historic development around the Wrotham Road/The Street junction (see further below). Key features of the strip are it's generally shrub and forest tree grown character and the way in which it banks down to the modern footway alongside the main road. As noted earlier over part of its length the bank is revetted at the base and exposed higher up where it is topped by close boarded fencing. Trees and shrubs overhang it throughout, leaning over towards the road.

Returning now to development in the northern half of the village and along the west side of the Wrotham Road, mature trees and a field hedge alongside the road mark the west boundary of the conservation area south as far as Church Cottages. Modern carriageway alignment improvements and 'road-corridor' widening have resulted in the useful addition of footways and grass verges and much rebuilding/introducing of flint boundary walling to the eastern side of the road here, probably at the expense of some local character. Coming from the north the first development in the conservation area on the west side of the road is two storey Church Cottages. This pair of dwellings must originally have been one unit and may date from the first half of the 17th century or earlier**.** Its first floor was once fully jettied to the road and it has a prominent side chimney stack. The cottages have a rural setting of flint boundary walls (partly rebuilt for road widening), hedges and trees.

South again beyond Church Cottages, along the road and within the conservation area, is a burial ground. This site, in 1840 woodland which subsequently became farmland, was acquired by the parish council in 1917 as an extension to the historic graveyard around the church. It has its own 20th century timber framed and clay roof-tiled lych gate set into a flint and brick boundary wall on the road frontage. Spaced out immediately behind this wall are a number of mature Scots Pines and Holm Oaks. These were once part of a narrow roadside belt of planting which ran from the garden of Church Cottages to the corner of Shipley Hills Road. A well grown quick-set hedge hides the burial ground from view from the west and mature forest trees crowd around the Shipley Hills Road junction.

Set back within generous gardens and mature shrub and tree planting at the southern corner of the junction of Shipley Hills Road and Wrotham Road is the Old Vicarage. An earlier Vicarage on the same spot was demolished c.1865 and the present building erected in its place. The only apparent vestige of the earlier arrangements is a single storey brick and slate ancillary building, possibly originally stabling or the like, at the widened side entrance to the Vicarage site off Shipley Hills

Road. This was one of a pair that stood to each side of the old entrance and may be of late 18th or early 19th century date. The present house, in the Gothic style, is of two and three storeys in red diaper patterned brick with stone dressings and steep peg tiled and gabled roofs. The most northerly of its three projecting two storey bays is a modern addition. The property is walled in at the front and down the side by a high flint and brick-dressed boundary wall pierced at its north east corner by a second and very substantial timber framed lych gate giving access to, and announcing, the front of the building. This was added when the building was converted to six flats in the mid-1980s.

South beyond the grounds of the Old Vicarage the west side of the highway is enclosed by a tall modern red brick wall at back of footway, overhung from behind by shrub and tree growth. This wall is a re-building to a new line brought about by widening of the Wrotham Road in the 1970s (which also affected the original line of the equivalent flint walling in front of the Old Vicarage). It is overhung by bushes and shrubs. South again beyond this are the modern yard – car park – of the George Inn, open to view, and then the George itself. The view into the car park is closed to the west by hedging and trees.

The George Inn's timber framed mid 16th century core is parallel with the road with a 19th century extension added at its southern end. In 1840 there was a pond within the pub site close up to the building's north gable. There appears to have been another on the site of the later 19th century extension. West of the building the yard with its pond was closed off by two additional, freestanding structures; the remnant of one of these, single storey, white rendered and slate roofed, is incorporated into part of the modern building enclosing the rear court. All the other yard features have of course disappeared. During the 19th century the pub was called the Market Crouche (i.e. Cross), a reminder that a weekly market was held outside it. Outside it also were the two famous 'Stock' trees named after the village stocks which originally stood on the site. These were also lost to the road widening of the 1970s.

The tiny, built up heart of the hamlet of Meopham The Street is north east across the road from the George, developed around the west end of The Street at its junction with the Wrotham Road. There were some changes here between the 1840 and 1896 maps but the scale of development within this historic core remains little different today from what it was 170 years ago.

Prominent on the northern corner of the junction with elevations to both Wrotham Road and The Street, is 'L' plan Well House. This is of two stories, its walls brick built with peg tile roofs. An eye-catching and unusual feature of its south elevation facing The Street is the creeper clad west half of the facade with its high brick parapet. This 18th or early 19th century feature screens the junction between two effectively separate roof structures. These roofs relate to the two arms of the house - one aligned north-south and the other east-west and joined at the corner - which have different ground floor levels. The brickwork at the east end of Well House's south elevation is different from that towards facing west to the Wrotham Road; the historic maps show that it relates to a 20th century extension. This has been so carefully designed and carried out that at first glance, and after the passage of some years time for the new work to 'weather back', the existence of the 'join' is easily missed.

A set-back modern double garage with a black painted door fills part of the gap between the east end of Well House and its neighbour Dorrington House. The latter is at right angles to the road with its 'salt box' or 'cat slide' (cross-section) gable wall standing at the edge of the highway. It has various low, modern pitched roofed extensions away from the road, at and around its north end. The roof-scape only of

these contributes to the wider picture. It is said that the core of the building is 17th century in date and includes a timber frame, now hidden everywhere by later brickwork.

Returning now to the southern corner of The Street's junction with Wrotham Road**,** this is 'turned' at the back of footway with a full two storey blank walled rear extension. The main body of the tiny brick corner house, Well Cottage, faces The Street. The upper part of its front wall has been rebuilt, probably in the 20th century. Originally separate, it has been thrown into one with the earlier 18th century red brick terrace house next door along The Street. Abutting this pair to the east, and stepping up in scale is Elizabeth House. This appears to be an18th century building, again standing close to the back of footway. The central chimney stack and symmetrical (and plastic windowed) dormers suggest that this was originally either a single and large, wide frontage 'lobby entry' house, or that it was designed from the start as a pair. The front was altered by the insertion of the two large six over six paned sliding sashes with the doorway between, useful when the building served as a shop and post office.

The short flight of steps up to the front door of Elizabeth House confirms it as built on rising ground. This point appears even more overtly at the final historic house on this side of The Street, freestanding Ormiston, formerly Dodmore, House. Tall brick under-building at the road frontage here plays a significant part in character. The building is much altered and judging by the break in its roof slopes is perhaps of two build dates. Its external appearance strongly suggests (probably late) timber framing. (This view is given in full awareness that some of the apparent external timbers here may be decoration only.) Part of the street front gap between Ormiston House and Elizabeth House is nicely managed by a short section of tall flint wall.

This completes the review of the historic dwellings and features around the road junction in this part of the conservation area. However, one more building of interest lies a little further east just within the conservation area on the south side of the road. This, a long, single storey, framed, weather-boarded and peg tiled shed, stands well back, and up, from the highway and was built in the second half of the 19th century. It now appears to serve as garaging and storage for one or more of the adjacent modern houses.

**5.2** The associated public realm

The only 'off road' public open spaces in the village are those residual grassed areas associated with the Wrotham Road as it passes through the north half of the conservation area. These are described in more detail below, where the effect of the modernising of that highway is considered.

The key semi-public open space in the village is the historic graveyard surrounding the village church. On its west side this is retained against the highway by an excellent historic flint and brick-coped retaining wall. Graveyard ground level is much raised above the road. This means that in views out west from within it the cars on main road below the retaining wall are invisible. The cranked-plan north-side graveyard boundary is, as noted earlier, closed by groupings of mature forest trees and shrubs along its length. These continue around to close the graveyard in beyond the east end of the church. In the south the graveyard shares enclosing features, again in the form of mature trees, with the south carriage drive to Meopham Court. A public footpath passes diagonally through it and another well sited modern path gives direct access between church and modern Church hall immediately to the north.

Alterations to the public realm in the form of the modernising of the Wrotham Road significantly altered village character firstly in the inter-war period and then in the 1970s. These works have left their mark. They are now briefly described, dealing first with the section of road running from its north entry to the conservation area south as far as the historic graveyard.

Improving the road for drivers from the north entry to the Conservation Area south to Church Cottages was achieved by replacing more abrupt bends with long gently curving ones. The road's entry place was slightly adjusted in the north. Protected points were Meopham Court's north lodge, Church Cottages and the graveyard wall. The curve running between these points left some of the earlier west side road boundary in place and shaved off significant parts of the west side (the former Meopham Court home farm site). The last pond went at this time. These factors account for the modern, though now nicely weathering and very good-looking, section of continuous flint boundary wall east of the road here with its footpath and parallel grassed vehicle vision strip running right up to the church hall car park entry. In addition they allowed the survival of some of the old west side road hedge line with its trees. The varying width areas of highway-related grassed verge adjoining this west boundary, make-good the outdated line of the old road. The effect of all this is pleasant though with a certain blandness about it.

The section of main road in front of the graveyard had a footway along its east side from early on and this had been extended from the south corner of the graveyard on southward up the hill by the early years of the 20th century. There was no footway on the other side of the highway. Road widening and the introduction of a new west-side footway were the results of the 1970s project. Among other things widening of the road-corridor was required to meet highway vision splay standards at the entrance to Shipley Hills Road. This requirement and the introduction of the new west-side footway, resulted in the loss of most of the historic boundary walling along the west side of the road from opposite the graveyard all the way up the hill to the George Inn. The replacement boundary walls built up the hill here along this side of the road are all set back and aligned differently from the earlier walls. After 40 or so years all this second stage work now 'blends in' well, the flint walling being of excellent quality. Immediately south beyond the 'fixed point' of the George the road improvements end and suburbia begins.

A modern, carefully designed and nicely part-flint-walled car park is adjacent to the church hall close to the north entrance to the graveyard. The only other car park in the village is at the George Inn. Of considerable size and at right angles to the highway, this is well concealed from view in approaches from north and south along Wrotham Road.

The modern Wrotham Road makes no concessions to the fact that it is passing through a Conservation Area. Traffic calming measures around Church Cottages and St. St John the Baptist's church as well as around the junction of The Street with Wrotham Road might help to make these locations more pedestrian –friendly.

## 6 THE BUILDINGS OF THE CONSERVATION AREA

### **6.1** Building types

Meopham The Street has a high status medieval establishment building in its Church of St John the Baptist.

Meopham Court is an example of the mid-Victorian idea of the minor stately home, minus the home farm. Long before its modern division into six separate houses, Victorian Meopham Court appears to have been a substantial main house of more than one date. This was tenuously attached by means of a conservatory to a stable courtyard with a wide arched open side, two further sides enclosed at two storeys and the third at one storey. Some distance away to the north was a large, free standing coach house, possibly of two storeys. In addition to all these, the little estate possessed two gate lodges, one Georgian or Regency in date, the other Victorian. Finally, beyond its extended mid-Victorian garden was (and remains) the very substantial brick-built walled vegetable garden.

The Old Vicarage is the other building of some status historically in the village. A Gothic style rebuild of circa 1865 following the demolition of its predecessor. It was originally of three and a half main bays, two of which projecting forward towards the main road. A third projecting bay designed to be 'in keeping' with the originals was added in the late 20th century when the building was converted to six flats. The house stands in its own grounds (once including a small orchard) originally landscaped by the Victorians. Of its two entrance buildings in Shipley Hills Road – assumed to have been stables and carriage houses – one has been lost. Presumably this was demolished at the time of conversion in the 1980s.

The once fully timber framed Church Cottages, now a pair of dwellings, must have been built as one unit no later than the early 17th century. Its close proximity to the roadside and to the Church opposite suggests that it may have begun as a 'Church house'. These were buildings for the common use of parishioners, used especially for the purposes of brewing 'church ale'. An (often blocked up) external first floor entrance via an (often lost) external stair is one feature confirming a Church House.

The George Inn's mid 16th century core may or may not have started life as a public house; it could just as well have been a domestic property. Its early 19th century north addition extended the area of what was by then definitely an inn.

The 19th century Tithe and OS Maps show that then the main body of Well House ran alongside The Wrotham Road. Said to contain timber framing, its building date could be any time up to the 18th century. Across The Street Well Cottage comprises a small, late, narrow frontage brick and tile built workers cottage, joined to a section of 18th century narrow frontage brick cottage to make one larger modern dwelling. Beyond these to the east and stepping up in scale is Elizabeth House. As noted earlier this appears to be of the 18th century and was built either as a single, wide frontage 'lobby entry' dwelling house of some quality, or alternatively as a pair of dwellings. Latterly it was the village shop and post office. Freestanding Ormiston, formerly Dodmore, House is the last house in the conservation area here. Its roof is divided at the centre and it may have once been two dwellings. Dorrington House is on the other side of the road opposite Ormiston House. The historic part of the building is earlier than its two storey rear-cat-slide section. This core structure is claimed as 17th century in date with a hidden timber frame. Like most of the other houses in this part of the village its date and size suggest that it was built by middle

class people, who may or may not have been directly connected to the local agricultural scene.

A little east beyond Ormiston House and set up the bank from the road is the long, single storey, weather-boarded and peg tiled possible cart, carriage storage and/or stabling building dating from between c1840 and c1870. Originally it will have served a local purpose such as cart or carriage storage (maybe some stabling). A prominent loading door in the roof suggests that there was storage space there too, possibly for hay. The building is of significance as an example of a modest workaday type that is increasingly rare because of its vulnerability to insensitive alteration or to demolition and redevelopment. It was part of a slightly larger grouping lost to modern development.

**6.2** Listed, locally listed and key unlisted buildings; buildings making a neutral contribution to conservation area character; and buildings detrimental to conservation area character

Figure 9 listed, 'locally listed'/key unlisted, 'neutral' and 'detrimental' to character.

**6.3** Brief descriptions of some buildings contributing to conservation area character

This list is not comprehensive. Other historic buildings not included also contribute to conservation area character. Descriptions are generally confined to the street façade of the building only. Comment is made without the benefit of internal inspection. Interiors invariably fill-out the picture and may sometimes change the emphasis of exterior descriptions.

**Church of St John the Baptist**

Seen from the road the Church is 'an impressive sight, with its stately west tower, matching the proportions of the clerestoried nave and chancel. The church is a complete rebuilding of the early 14th century …' (Pevsner, 417) with steeply pitched roofs stepped down from nave to chancel. Pevsner further notes that 'The aisles …. are a perpendicular rebuilding: Hasted says Archbishop Courtenay (1381-96) was responsible' . The roofs of these therefore are formed as very gently pitched lead flats running out to a simple overhanging gutter detail at the eaves. Simply roofed masonry porches project to both north and south sides of the nave. The top stage of the tower was added in the 19th century to replace a spire. The west door is Victorian and numbers of the windows were also renewed in the 19th century, apparently with care.

**Meopham Court**

In the 19th century was a substantial house of more than one date. On the evidence of the 1840 Tithe map the rebuilding of the mid century seems to have been based more or less on the pre-existing building 'footprint'. The exterior appearance of the steep roofed stone clad Gothic southern section of the building must date from this time. North from this is a two storey brick central section of building dating, from external evidence only and from the maps, to the late 18th/early 19th century. Its rear, east, elevation is rendered. Its west elevation may have been renewed or reinstated in the 20th century.

North beyond this again is a tall narrow two storey terminal 'cross-wing' the footprint of which was present at the time of the Tithe Map. Externally this has the appearance

of severely stripped-down Victorian work in red brick but closer examination shows some earlier brickwork at lower levels. The whole building has a complex arrangement of roofs.

There is a gap between the house's north cross wing and the three-sided stable court further north. The two storey south wing of the court was in place before the 1850s but may have been altered to match the new north wing at that time. The court's west range is two storied to the courtyard with a mono-pitch peg tiled roof falling to single storey on the east. Flint and red brick banding are the themes throughout, with a smart flint and brick arch over the courtyard entry and heavy, sloped buttresses adding interest to the front of the building.

The former large, free standing coach house, of two storeys, appears modernised throughout.

**Meopham Court's two gatehouses**

The earlier of the two small gatehouses is a delightful building with a rectangular two story central block having a central brick chimney stack and a hipped roof rising above small single storey side extensions and a large single storey bay window to the front. All the extensions have hipped slated roofs running up to the sides of the main block. Windows to the front are Gothick in style with a tiny 'eyebrow' dormer at first floor. Roofs are slated and walls are rendered with the render stops picked-out at the corners.

The other, later, gatehouses, in place by 1896, again had a centralised plan but has been enlarged since, bringing it to almost twice its original size. This has damaged its historic interest somewhat. The ground floor walls are in red brick laid in Flemish bond, the first floor is tile hung and the roof is peg tiled. The dormer to the main road is prominent.

**The Old Vicarage**

This, as noted, is in the Victorian Gothic style and is of two storeys with tall gables with another floor accommodated in the roof space. The building is in red and blue diaper patterned brick with stone dressings and roofs are steep and peg tiled. Considerable care was taken with the extension in the 1980s. The replication of sash and casement window details in the new work, following the originals, is to be commended as perpetuating local character though some of the new dormers in the extension are over-large.

**Church Cottages**

The historic northern three quarters of Church Cottages is a long, narrow depth, two storey building originally with a continuous jetty to the road. As originally built the house was probably fully timber framed. It has chimney stacks to each end as well as a projecting one on the front wall, the latter being an arrangement not especially common in Kent. Today the upper floor of its front elevation is still timber framed behind over-all external plaster/render. The ground floor here was underbuilt in brick at a later date, forward below the jetty in the usual way, removing the old framed wall in the process and thus increasing ground floor area a little. Though the original building may be of early 17$^{th}$ century date its southernmost bay is a later addition.

**George Inn**

The main two storey block of the George Inn is formed as a double pile. Its front, 16th century section has its own roof structure parallel to the highway. This is half-hipped at north and south in the post-medieval Kentish manner. Its west slope runs down to a valley gutter shared with the other half of the double-pile lying behind, and parallel to, the front section. At its north end this too has a half hipped gable matching that of the front section, resulting in an overall 'M' cross section roof. The front part of the George is underbuilt in later brickwork to just below first floor level with timber framing above, behind external plaster/render. Its north gable retains framing throughout, here hidden behind weatherboarding. The front elevation has a small single storey bay window as well as the building's front door and three asymmetrically placed double hung sash windows. Individual window panes are wider than they are tall, confirming that the windows have been cramped by their insertion into pre-existing fabric. The north gable of the rear half of the double pile is in brick to eaves level. Above this and up to the half-hip eaves it is plastered/rendered, again suggesting framing behind. A two storey late 18th/early 19th century extension extends across the south elevation of the double pile. It is in white painted brick throughout with a low pitched slate roof hipped at each end. Its eight over eight double hung sashes could be contemporary with those in the front of the main building, just described.

**Well House**

Externally brick-built, Well House is 'L' shaped in plan. Its two wings are joined at the west end at right angles to each other, each section with a separate roof. The part parallel to the Wrotham Road has its roof half-hipped at both ends. With its simple eaves and two windows up and two down it is visually secondary to the other half of the 'L' which faces onto The Street. This wing, with its modern east-end extension, has its separate, hipped, roof partly hidden behind a parapet. The parapet extends right to the west corner of the original four bay façade here. Enveloping close clipped ivy adds an attractive if slightly bizarre and very English effect. The modern east extension to the east-west wing contributes to the overall architectural 'weight' of the composition. The house has been comprehensively re-windowed but the new probably follow the old patterns, more or less.

**Well Cottage**

Narrow frontage Well Cottage and its 18th century east addition turn the corner of the junction of The Street and the Wrotham Road in the same way as Well House opposite. Their joint two storey façade to The Street is in red and pale red/yellow brick with simple, slightly overhanging eaves. The earlier reds are interspersed with blue headers and there is a brick string course at first floor level. The elevation to the Wrotham Road comprises a brick gable to the end of the main building with a rear extension roof running back from this parallel with the highway, all at two storeys. Both parts of the elevation to The Street were re-windowed, and thereby visually damaged, in the 20th century. A front door has also been removed and blocked up.

**Elizabeth House**

The rendered Street elevation of Elizabeth House is tall and generously proportioned and, as noted, was originally symmetrical about a central chimney stack with single small dormers to each side. Like some other houses around the junction, it has a half-hipped roof, with what may be a (now obscured) early 18th century moulded eaves fascia and soffit detail. This may represent the date of its building. The front has four square openings for casement windows to the first floor; those to the right

are spaced so as to line with the two large, early 19th century (possibly 1835-40) former shop sash windows below (with shop door between). Those to the left are more closely spaced and here there is a matching lower pair with slightly arched heads confirming brick behind the render. The render is modern; the façade was indeed originally in fair-faced brick, had other low level opening now blocked up and may once have had projecting brick stringcourses**.** The former shop door is protected by a modern tiled porch roof with carved barge boards and carved and pierced gable infilling below. Formerly it was covered by a makeshift sloping hood. Some of the glass in the shop windows may date from the first part of the 19th century. The 'humping up' of the wide black-painted dummy stringcourse over the shop doorway seems capricious and arbitrary. It roughly reflects the stepped arrangement of a signboard formerly placed over the door. The building might repay careful internal and external examination.

**Ormiston House**

This two storey cottage pair over a tall brick basement was more extensive to east and south in 1840. It was reduced to its present size between circa 1870 and 1896. The roof is fully hipped with a central brick chimney stack, it is intended for peg tiles, and turns a corner. The front elevation and roof show a building break with different height eaves. This elevation and the building's returned east flank are almost certainly of lightweight, timber-framed, construction. The west flank has been skinned in brickwork. The timber framing showing in the front elevation may or may not reflect historic arrangements; close investigation would confirm this one way or another. This structure might prove to be of more historic interest than first appears.

**Dorrington House**

This is across the road from Ormiston House. The historic part of the building is, as noted earlier, its two storey rear-cat-slide cross section part gable-on to the road. This core structure is claimed as 17th century in date with a hidden timber frame.

**Possible former cart and/or stabling building**

This long 19th century shed is set up the bank to the east of Ormiston House. It is one storey high with its peg tiled roof hipped to one end and its other end butted tight up against the gable wall of a modern house. Its front elevation comprises three sets of vertically boarded (probable) garage doors and a panel of horizontal weatherboarding, all stained dark brown. In the front roof slope is a narrow dormer with a loading door to the front. This must give (or have given) external access to a loft within the roof space. The dormer has a gabled peg-tiled roof. Its sides are clad in diagonal boarding.

**6.4** Building materials

The usual palette of Kent building materials occurs within the historic buildings of the conservation area. There is even a small scale, late, display of tile hanging (Meopham Court's north lodge). Timber frames clad externally with weatherboarding and also finished with painted external lath-and-plaster do occur. Flint walling is seen in a number of buildings and in boundary walling. Local plain red, red and blue header and later yellow, brickwork also features as do the later smooth stucco and modern painted renders over brick. Roofs are almost all clad in local peg-tile with a few covered in natural slate imported from Wales.

**6.5** Local details

Local village detail follows the general tradition and development of Kent's timber, flint and brick vernacular architecture with no building or use of material that has a character unique to Meopham The Street.

Much original exterior joinery survives, but in places modern replacements damage the appearance of 'host' buildings. Inroads into appropriate character are invariably made by the introduction of off-the-peg timber and plastic windows. The design, detail and appearance of these are almost always unacceptable in conservation areas. Similar problems of character-damage can arise through poor brickwork re-pointing and the replacing of original exterior renders by different modern ones.

## 7 SPATIAL ANALYSIS

**7.1** Spatial character and form of development within the conservation area.
Map showing arrangement of Village 'character areas'.

The village is divided up notionally into three separate, abutting, areas each with its own distinctive character. These are all shown on the figure 10. The areas are:

1. The north part of the conservation area as far south as the lych gate to the modern graveyard on the east side of the Wrotham Road and the gate lodge south of the old graveyard on the west side

2. The central part of the conservation area, on the west of the main road from the modern graveyard lych gate in the south to the north east corner of the car park of the George Inn and, on the east, from the lodge house south as far as Well House

3. The south part of the conservation area including the buildings and land around the junction of Wrotham Road and The Street

Note: Trees, mostly deciduous, are a key element of conservation area character at Meopham The Street. Environments are described below with the trees in full leaf. In winter, with leaves absent, more will be seen through their open canopies.

**7.2** Individual character areas
Figure 11

Each character area is identified individually on the accompanying Map. Its special character is briefly described. A further Map brings the material together showing the relationship of buildings to spaces, nature of spaces, contributing and detrimental features are all shown. Main contributing trees, garden areas, planting and important boundaries are shown. Discussion assumes an approach to the village along the Wrotham Road from the north.

1. The north part of the conservation area as far south as the lych gate to the modern graveyard on the east side of the Wrotham Road and the gate lodge south of the old graveyard on the west side

Starting in the north, a curving north-south running corridor-space relates to the north section of the Wrotham Road. Appearance here is dominated by carefully considered 20th century carriageway realignments. The curves in the road cause views down the corridor to open up gradually as one travels south. To the east the corridor space with its highway, grass verges and footpath, is visually confined by a continuous high flint and brick boundary wall. The north end of this wall is backed by substantial trees and shrubs around the well concealed North Lodge. North beyond this, planting joins up with a belt of mature shrubs and trees along the roadside beyond the conservation area. East of the wall's central section is a large open grassed garden area (see further below). South beyond their central section the road and wall swing the other way, around Church Cottages and past the Graveyard. A good group of mature trees and shrubs behind the wall marks the entrances to the St John's Hall car park and the graveyard. Enclosure to the western side of the corridor is given as far south as the garden of Church Cottages by a border of well grown woodland trees and hedging.

The highway corridor continues south from around the entrance to the main graveyard to a point (for the purposes of discussion) notionally opposite Meopham Court's South Lodge. The major feature to the east of the road here is the tall flint retaining wall with individual trees such as yews standing back above it within the graveyard. If the passer-by on the road takes the time, there is also a fine view of the church tower up-slope beyond these in an almost woodland setting, closely surrounded by trees on three sides. South along the road immediately beyond the graveyard is the south drive entrance to Meopham Court with alongside it, the delightful South Lodge standing back and up above the main road.

Returning now to the west side of the Wrotham Road, Church Cottages is almost opposite the entrance to the graveyard. It is a pivot point around which the road curves and has spatial importance for this reason. The sense of it as a long established place can be felt within the Cottage's wider roadside setting of garden hedges, creeper grown boundary walls and trees. This feeling is engendered also by the historic church and graveyard and their setting across the road. South beyond Church Cottages mature deciduous and evergreen forest trees front the 20th century burial ground, in summer almost meeting with others across the road to form a green tunnel up the hill towards The Street. These trees stand behind a rebuilt and realigned flint boundary wall with its lych gate, all set at the back of the new footway.

In the north half of the character area east beyond the highway boundary wall is the large area of private gardens mentioned earlier. This and the woodland around it are visually associated with the North Lodge and the Coach House. The north drive to Meopham Court leaves the main road between gate piers beyond the North Lodge. It follows east along the field edge at the conservation area's north boundary. It is hidden, running just within a small area of deciduous woodland extending to the field boundary. This plantation conceals the conservation area from view from the fields to the north. The North Lodge and The Coach House are partly surrounded by the wood and therefore also largely concealed. After a short distance the drive turns south still within woodland, heading for the north end of Meopham Court. To the west a glimpse of the rear of the Coach House can be had through more trees before the drive emerges and widens out in front of what were once the stables of the House.

The north drive in front of the old stables is enclosed on the west side by hedging. On its way to a car park further south in front of the north end of the main house, it passes through a modern brick-piered gateway and here the lawns of domestic gardens open up to the west. These are modern divisions in what was originally the house's west garden, that enclave projecting into the north east side of the graveyard. This area is enclosed to the north, west and south by plantings of enclosing (and concealing) mature deciduous trees which continue south along the east boundary of the graveyard. Here they combine with a narrow shrubbery alongside which runs the south drive to the house. These mature planting arrangements conceal the western side of the House from 'outside' view.

The Victorian gardens south and east of Meopham Court are largely shared between the three southernmost divisions of the building. Much of the original open garden survives to the south and east of the range with its ornamental Victorian tree plantings at maturity. It extends south to an east-west field boundary (which is also the conservation area boundary) along which is a belt of enclosing shrubs and trees. South from this boundary, outside the conservation area, is the single large field (formerly two fields) referred to earlier. Its west side also is enclosed by mature trees and shrubs. North and west views towards the conservation area from within this field are thus blocked by tree, shrub and hedge growth. However, the garden's tall specimen evergreen forest trees show above their lower native neighbours, signalling

its presence. The south elevation of the Hall itself and the top of the church tower can, with some difficulty, be picked out.

The east end of Meopham Court South's Victorian garden finishes against the tall west wall – also the conservation area boundary here – of the walled vegetable garden that will once have been an integral part of the site's local economy. This is screened from the south by continuing tree and shrub growth between it and the parallel field edge.

The further sub-area north beyond the walled garden is the large enclosed, 'secret' open, grass, weed and bramble grown space mentioned earlier, once orchard grounds. About half this is within the roughly north-running conservation area boundary here. To the east the space is enclosed by a belt of mature native hardwoods and to the north by wide overgrown hedges. To the west are the backs of the various properties making up development at Meopham Court. The space provides an intimate rural east setting for the House.

The discrete area surrounding St John's Hall is just outside the north boundary wall of the graveyard and is separated from Wrotham Road by its small car park. Mature trees and walls at the road front screen it there, as do trees and shrubs along its boundary to the large open garden to the north. Further mature boundary trees form a visual barrier between it and the west gardens of Meopham Court and the graveyard to the south. Seen from within the graveyard, the modern frontispiece of the hall just peeps out between trees behind a gap in the flint boundary wall.

The separate area containing the Church and its graveyard setting is in turn enclosed by trees to north, east and south. It is more open on the west, where it looks out from behind its retaining wall over the Wrotham Road beyond Church Cottages to glimpses of the dry valley and countryside and woods beyond. Graveyard ground level, which is raised already against the road, rises further towards the church and the boundary on the east beyond this. The south entrance drive to Meopham Court leaves the main road opposite the lych gate of the new burial ground. It runs within its avenue of forest trees and is notionally separated from the graveyard by a post and rail fence.

2 The central part of the conservation area, on the west of the main road from the modern graveyard lych gate in the south to the north east corner of the car park of the George Inn and to the east from the lodge house south as far as Well House

Through this part of the conservation area Wrotham Road forms a corridor hemmed in on both sides by banks, walls and tree and hedge screens.

To the west of the road the 20th century burial ground is fronted by a narrow stand of deciduous and evergreen forest trees including Scots Pine and Holm Oak fronts. They are close behind the high modern flint boundary wall. This wall continues beyond the burial ground's lych gate up to and around the corner of Shipley Hills Road. From there it runs westward along the roadside, at a reduced height, to end at the south-west corner of the burial ground. The burial ground falls westward and to a degree northward also. Views into it from Wrotham Road are blocked by the boundary wall there. From within it, views of woodland beyond as well as of closer-up planting, can be had over its south wall and over its other, hedged, boundaries.

South across the Shipley Hills Road junction, flint walling again turns the corner, forming the Shipley Hills Road boundary to The Old Vicarage and concealing everything but the upper parts of the house. The flint wall runs west alongside the

road to end at the single storey brick garden building adjoining the modern vehicle entrance to the Old Vicarage grounds.

Returning to the south corner of the Wrotham Road/Shipley Hills Road junction, here there is a break in the street walls for a substantial modern lych gate announcing the house inside. This is set back and at an angle to the corner. South from the corner, tall flint and brick-coped walling continues uphill along Wrotham Road, again hiding the roadside garden of The Old Vicarage. Less concentrated tree and shrub growth behind the wall here allows brief but clear views of the upper parts of the building from the main road. South beyond this the wall continues as far as the opening for the George Inn car park. This stretch has been rebuilt in red bricks with shallow projecting piers at intervals. It is topped by a continuous growth of overhanging bushes and young trees with a more mature group in the south, against the boundary to the George Inn car park.

The east side of Wrotham Road from Meopham Court's South Gate Lodge as far south as Well House, is formed as a bank rising gently from the back of footway in the north and more steeply towards the south. About half way up the hill the bank becomes revetted at its foot with a set-back close boarded fence on top. This continues until a short section of red brick boundary wall at back of footway indicates the start of Well House's original back garden. Throughout its length the bank is overhung by mature deciduous trees hiding all views from the road to the 'outside' and vice versa.

3 The south part of the conservation area, including the buildings and land around the junction of Wrotham Road and The Street.

Approaching from the north along Wrotham Road, the development at its junction with The Street is little more than an 'incident' to be briefly noted in passing as one encounters more suburbia. From this direction the building with the most presence is the George Inn. From the opposite direction the south elevations of the George and the west flank of Well Cottage with its wall and back garden planting, are important. But the south elevation of Well House, with its white picket fence and ivy adding emphasis to the existence of the junction, is the most eye-catching element here.

Coming from the east along The Street the former single storey cart house or stables up the bank, set back from on the south side of the road, is easily missed. A little further west, the east flank of Ormiston House announces the start of the closely built-up part of the conservation area. It is matched opposite by the street gable and rear cat-slide roof of Dorrington Cottage. Together these form a visual pinch-point in highway related space. West beyond Dorrington Cottage space swells out north again to take in the building line set-back in front of Well House and its garage etc. As just noted Well House's white picket fence at the roadside is an important part of the picture here. Opposite, the building line remains more or less at back of pavement from Ormiston House west to Well Cottage at the corner of the junction with the main road. All this adds up to a very small 'street scene' completely enclosed to north and south. Westward, across Wrotham Road, is the car park of the George Inn. Mature trees border its north side. In the background, above various outshuts beside the car park, more distant trees are visible. In this approach from the east the effect of the Inn's car park is mitigated firstly by its narrow width to length ratio, secondly by the surrounding parts of buildings, trees and shrubs and thirdly by the simple but effective low white picket fence across much of its boundary along the back of footway.

**7.3** Landmarks or key buildings, focal points and views
Figure 12 showing Landmarks, focal points and views. Main contributing and detrimental views are identified.

Because of its essential character, generally that of small scale development concealed behind hedges and/or trees or within woodland, there are few landmarks in Meopham The Street. The church and especially its tower, is one. Others are Church Cottages, the George Inn and Well House. Approaching along The Street from the east the white flank of Dodmore House signals the start of the village core from this direction.

A unique 'external' view of some of the south east part of the conservation area – a huddle of one and two storey brick buildings with Kent Peg tiled roofs set down behind mature trees, shrubs and hedges - is to be had from footpaths across the field to the north, between The Street and Meopham Court.

Generally views within and without the conservation area are dominated by nature in the form of well grown forest trees and shrubs, often as horizontally extended features (e.g. at field boundaries) that are best presented graphically. These, along with the other matters remaining for consideration here are therefore left to be shown on the accompanying maps.

## 8 SUMMARY CHARACTER APPRAISAL

Including positive, neutral and negative features

As has been suggested, the essential, and very positive, character of Meopham The Street is that of visually dominant woodland, trees, shrubs and hedges providing a setting for small scale development and open spaces in places. The generally 'woodland' effect is enhanced by the concealing function of the boundary walls and banks along the sides of Wrotham Road. It is also helped by the siting well away from public roads - and screening from public footpaths – of Meopham Court and its immediate hinterland to the east. In addition hedged and tree enclosed fields around the conservation area, abutting its boundaries, provide most of it with an exceptional rural setting.

One or two buildings are judged to make a neutral contribution to Conservation Area character. The 20th century widening of the Wrotham Road resulted in a loss of historic visual character because of the need to provide a highway footpath, to alter previous roadside boundary lines and to build new boundary walls. Nonetheless with the passage of time the initial rawness has gone and the picture, though probably visually blander than before has retained some of its attractiveness. In that sense the widening works can be argued to have had a neutral effect on the appearance of the Conservation Area in the long run.

Heavy traffic along the Wrotham Road will always be a negative feature of the Conservation Area. In terms of negative features affecting the appearance of the conservation area there is little to cause anxiety other than the common problem of uninformed alterations of detail and material in the buildings.

Positive features:

- The tree and hedge surroundings of the northern and central sections of the conservation area

- The woodland area along the north edge of the conservation area

- The hidden open space east of Meopham Court, a small part of which is within the Conservation Area

- The series of separate tree/hedge bounded enclosures or semi enclosures in the northern part of the conservation area, for example:

  - the garden areas associated with the Meopham Court Coach House
  - the old west garden of Meopham Court
  - the old east and south gardens of Meopham Court
  - the St. John's Centre enclosure
  - the main Graveyard
  - the tree avenue along the south drive to Meopham Court

- The buildings of Meopham Court, The Church, Church Cottages, the South Lodge, the Old Vicarage and the former stables/coach house (assumed) at the vehicle entry to the Old Vicarage grounds

- The wall, tree and hedge bounded space of the modern burial ground to the west of the main road

- The flint and brick walls to each side of Wrotham Road
- The flint and brick walls to each side of Shipley Hills Road
- The tree-and-shrub grown east bank-side of Wrotham Road from the graveyard to Well House
- Tree, shrub and hedge growth along the west side of Wrotham Road from the north entry to the Conservation Area to the burial ground to the George Inn
- The grouping of historic buildings about the junction of The Street with Wrotham Road

Neutral features:

- The Coach House
- The effect of the modern widening and straightening of Wrotham Road

Negative features:

- The effect of heavy traffic along Wrotham Road

## 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 reviewed

Most of the visually enclosed landscape 'compartment' immediately east of Meopham Court is outside the present conservation area boundary. Given its close visual linkage to the house and given also that it contains a great walled Victorian vegetable garden, the conservation area boundary now includes all of this area and its surrounding, and defining, hedge-and-woodland belts.

**9.3** Alterations to buildings

It is evident that some well-intentioned, but unsympathetic changes, especially to doors and windows, have had an effect that is damaging to the conservation area. An Article 4 Direction is now in force, applying to all building frontages facing the public highway and bringing many small scale incremental changes under the remit of the planning system.

**9.4** Uses and vitality

The Church is a focus for quite a widely spread parish and the new church hall gives an extra dimension to that focus. The George Inn offers a different, secular focus. For the rest, the Conservation Area is today essentially a dormitory settlement with many people travelling elsewhere to work.

**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** Highways and traffic

Traffic-calming measures in the area around Church Cottages and St. St John the Baptist's church and more particularly around the junction of The Street with Wrotham Road might help to make these locations more pedestrian-friendly.
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.

**9.7** Enhancement potential

Local streetscape enhancement could arise from the traffic calming measures suggested above. Any traffic calming proposals should be carefully worked out and detailed to produce improved visual settings for the buildings as well as improved pedestrian safety.

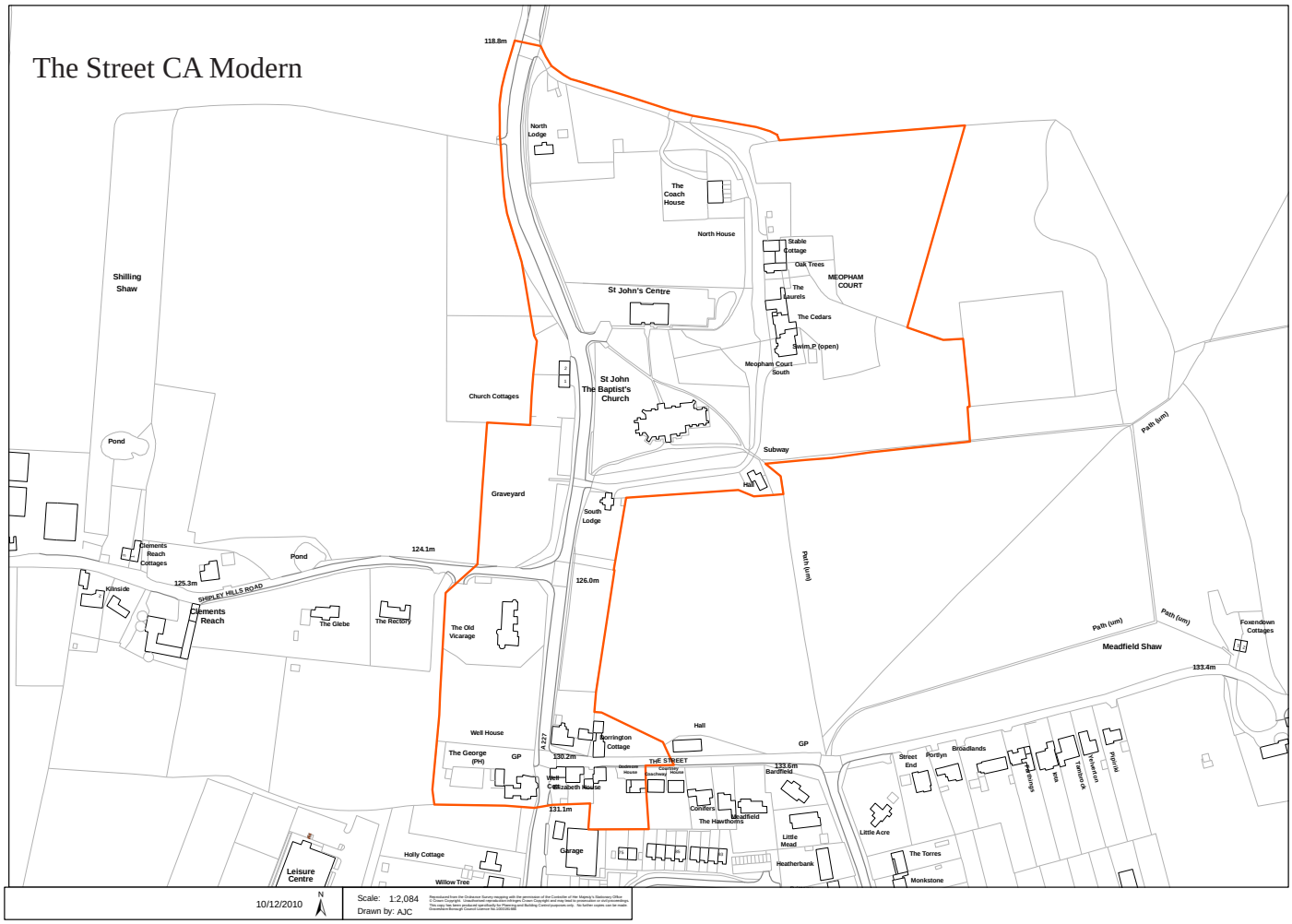
**9.8** Trees

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.

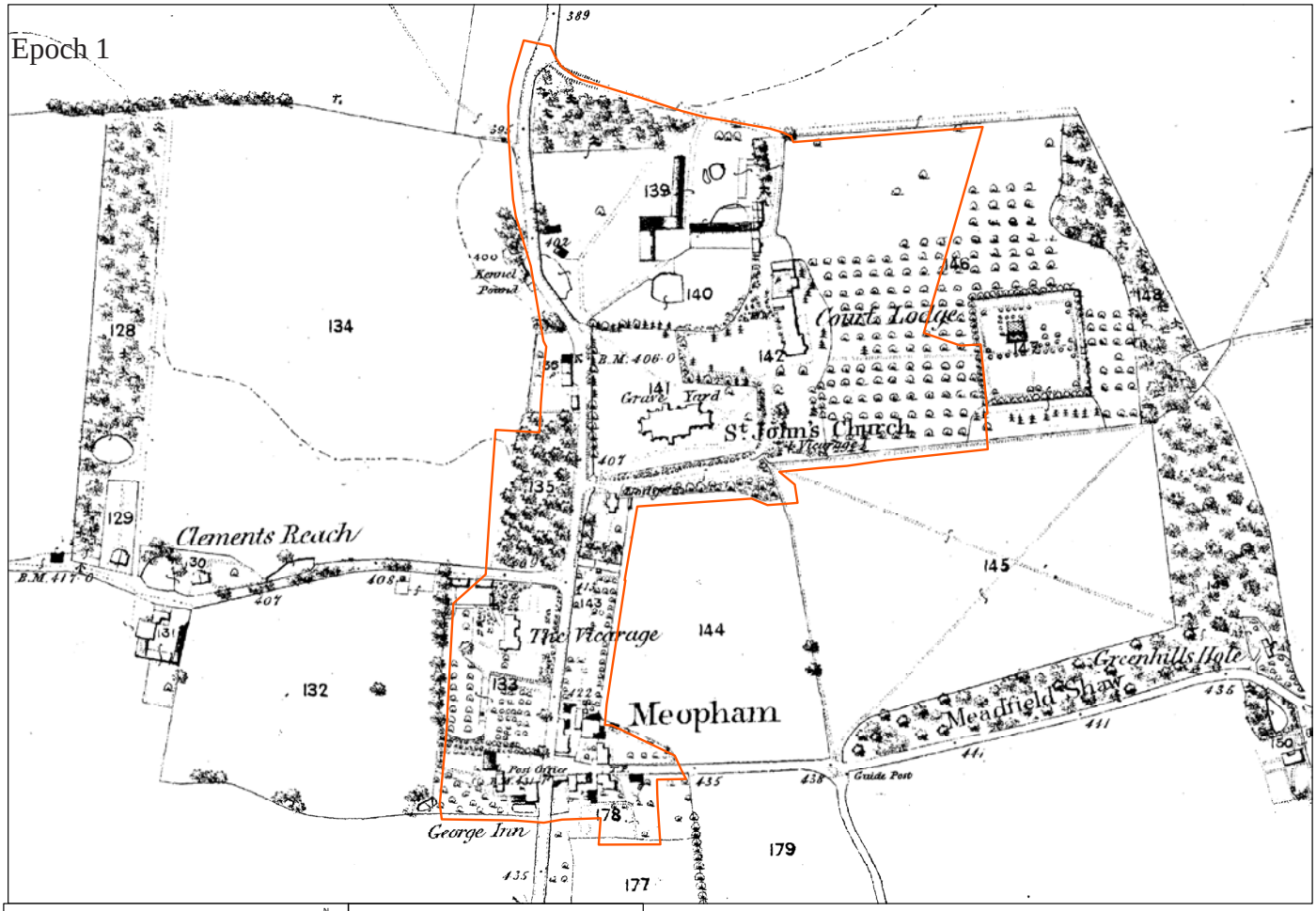
**9.9** Archaeology

The Conservation Area has archaeological potential relating to the prehistoric, Roman, early medieval and medieval periods. There is potential for further archaeological remains to be discovered and in the event of development proposals being submitted appropriate archaeological mitigation may be needed.

# APPENDIX 1


The Street CA Modern
118.8m
North Lodge
The Coach House
North House
Stable Cottage
Oak Trees
MEOPHAM COURT
The Laurels
The Cedars
Swim.P (open)
Meopham Court South
St John's Centre
St John The Baptist's Church
Church Cottages
Shilling Shaw
Pond
Subway
Hall
Graveyard
South Lodge
Path (um)
Clements Reach Cottages
Pond
124.1m
125.3m
SHIPLEY HILLS ROAD
Kilnside
Clements Reach
The Glebe
The Rectory
126.0m
The Old Vicarage
Path (um)
Path (um)
Foxendown Cottages
Meadfield Shaw
133.4m
Well House
A 227
Dorrington Cottage
Hall
GP
The George (PH)
GP
130.2m
THE STREET
133.6m
Bardfield
Street End
Portlyn
Broadlands
Well Cott
Elizabeth House
Conifers
Meadfield
The Hawthorns
131.1m
Little Mead
Little Acre
Garage
Holly Cottage
Heatherbank
The Torres
Leisure Centre
Willow Tree
Monkstone
10/12/2010
N
Scale: 1:2,084
Drawn by: AJC

Epoch 1




10/12/2010 N Scale: 1:2,084 Drawn by: AJC

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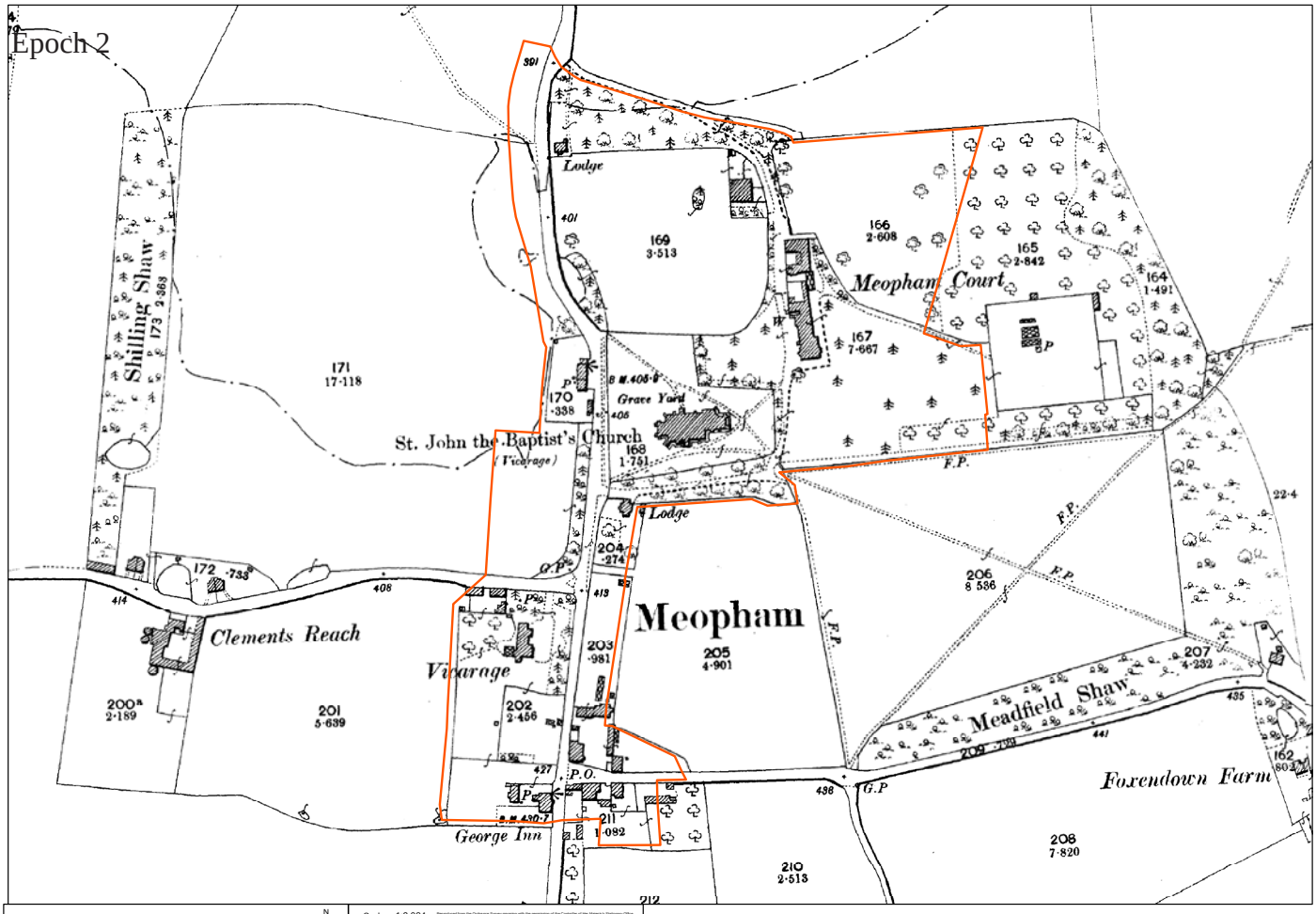
Epoch 2




10/12/2010 N Scale: 1:2,084 Drawn by: AJC

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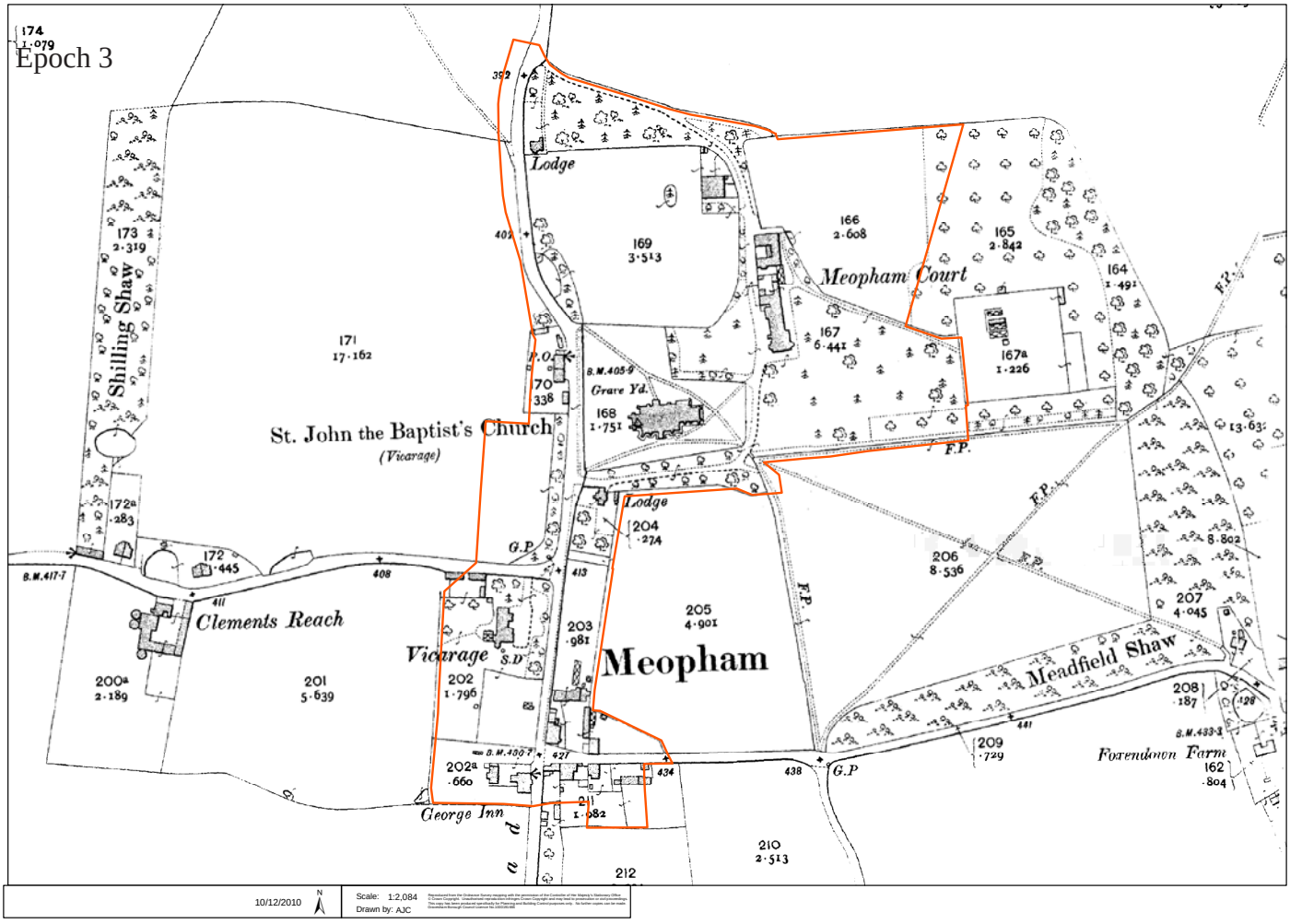
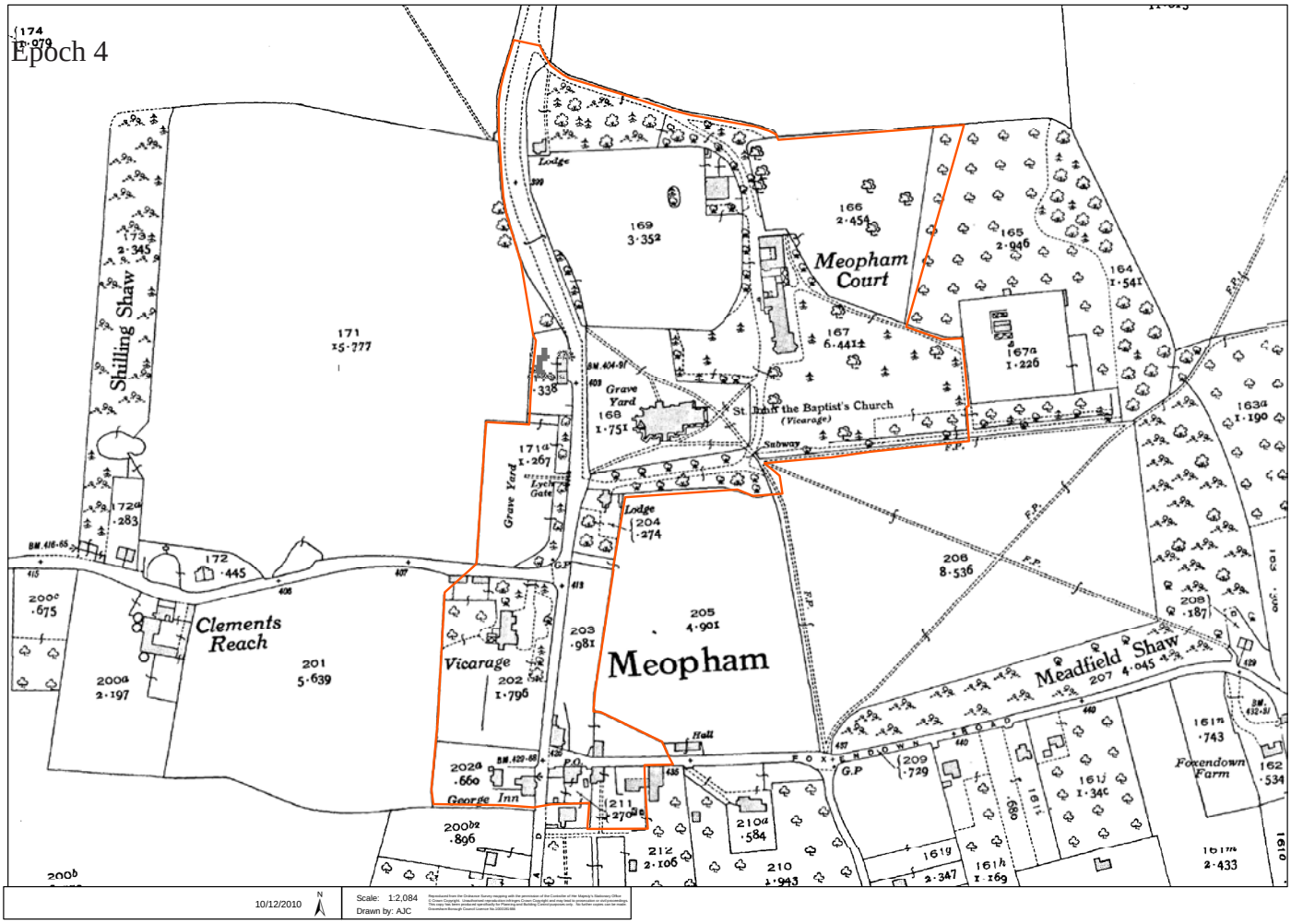
Epoch 3




10/12/2010 | Scale: 1:2,084 | Drawn by: AJC

Epoch 4

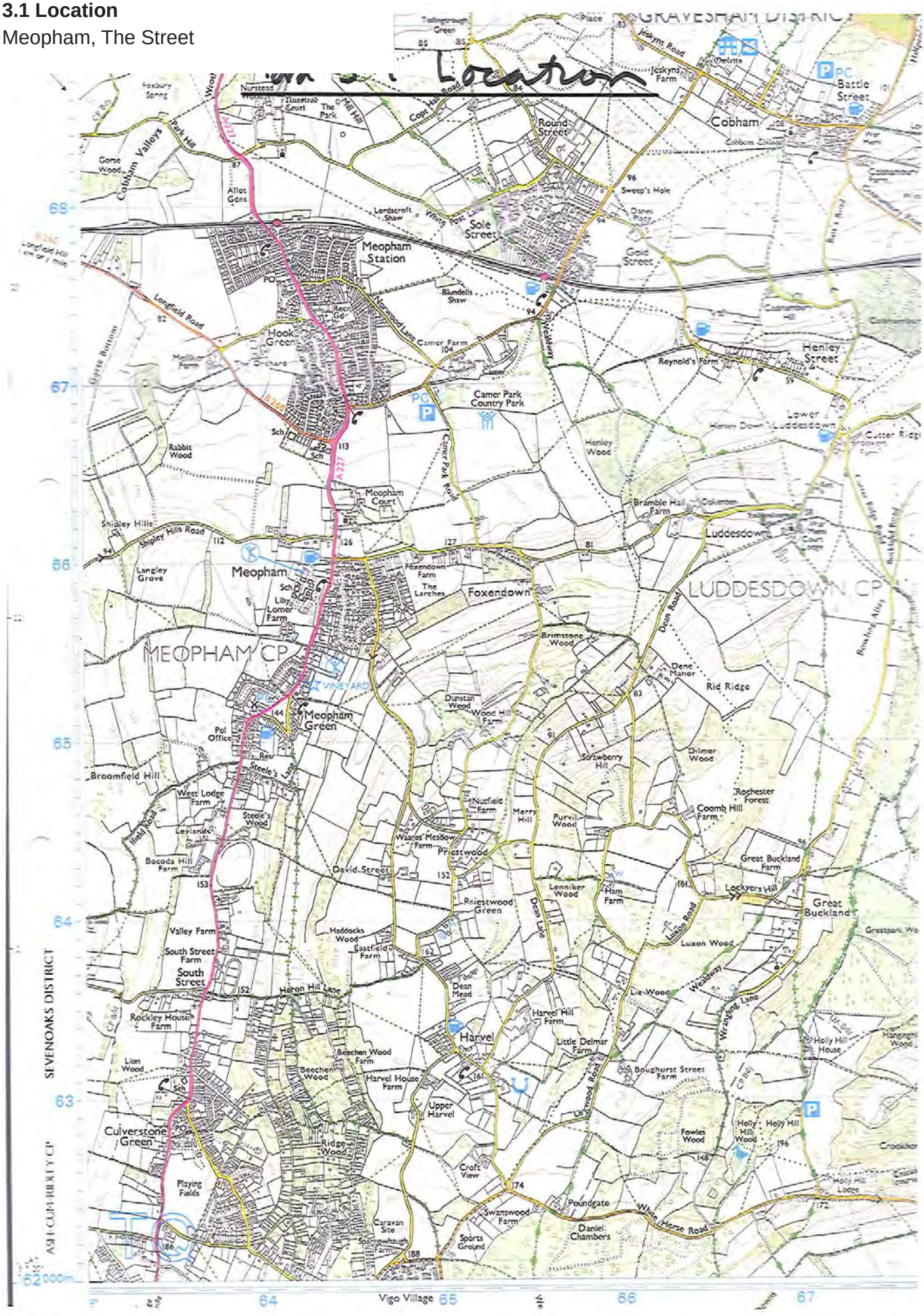



10/12/2010 | Scale: 1:2,084 | Drawn by: AJC

# Figure 1

### 3.1 Location

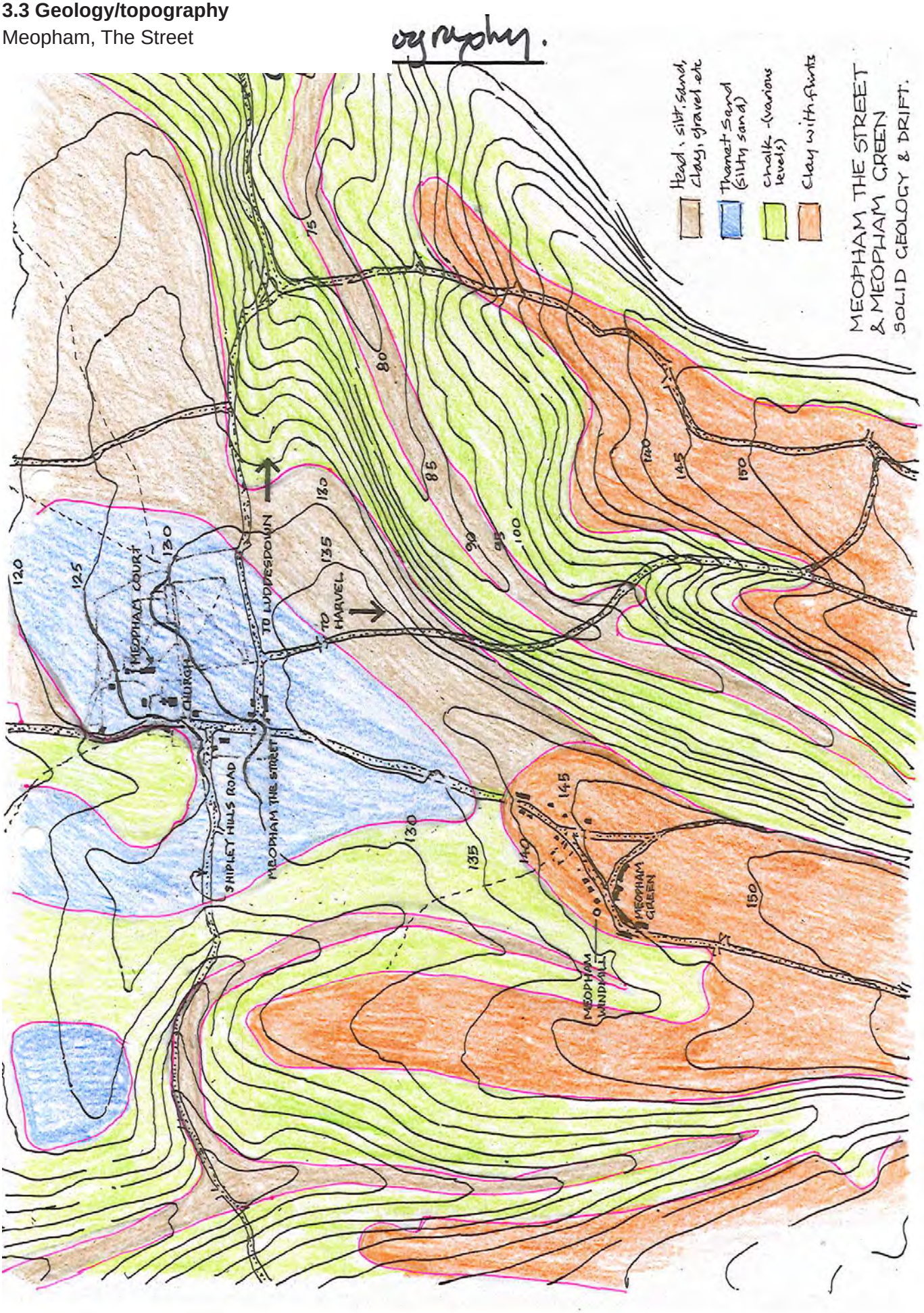
Meopham, The Street



## Figure 2

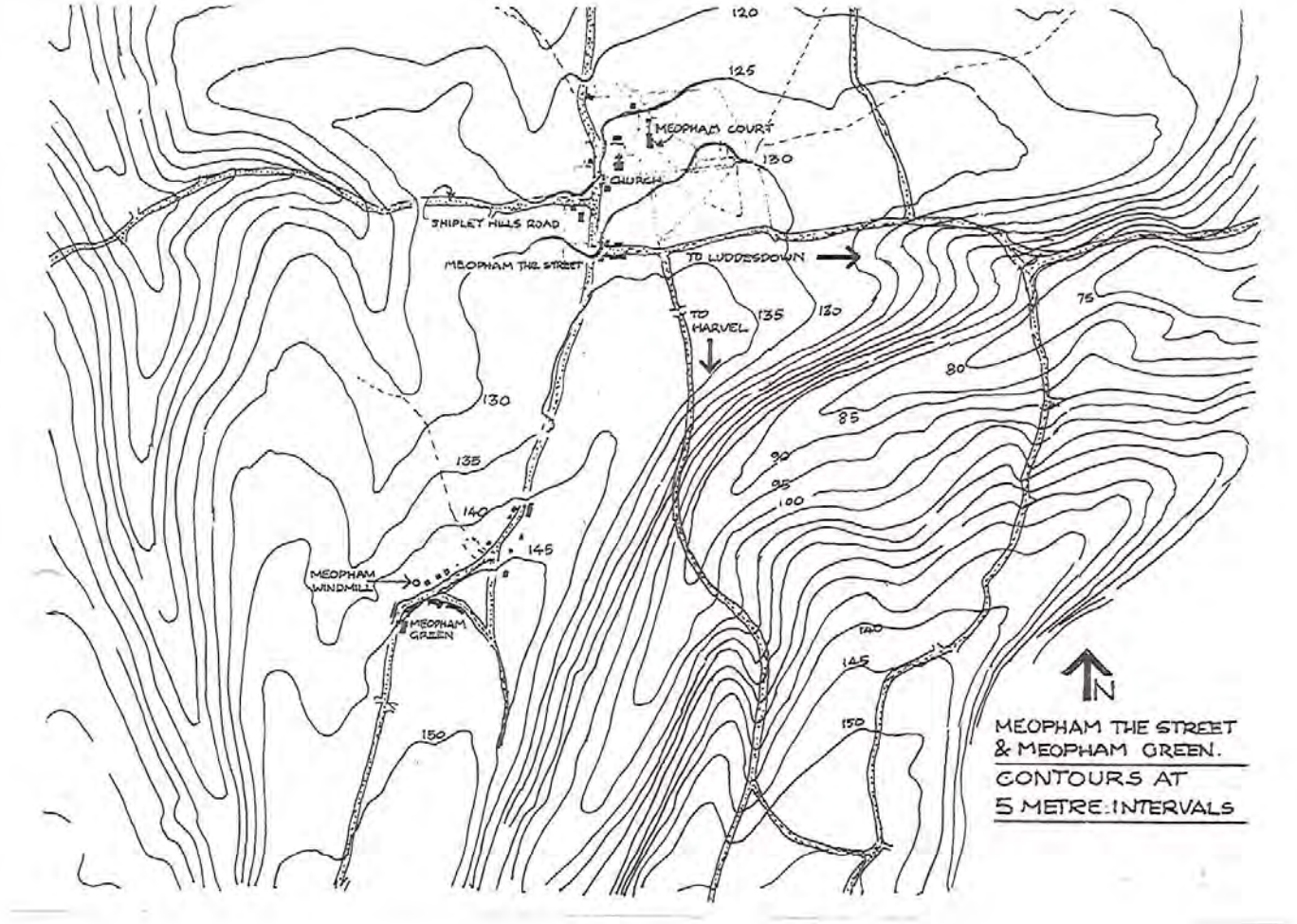
### 3.3 Geology/topography

Meopham, The Street



## Figure 3

**3.3 Contours**
Meopham, The Street



## Figure 4

### 3.4 Conservation Area surroundings

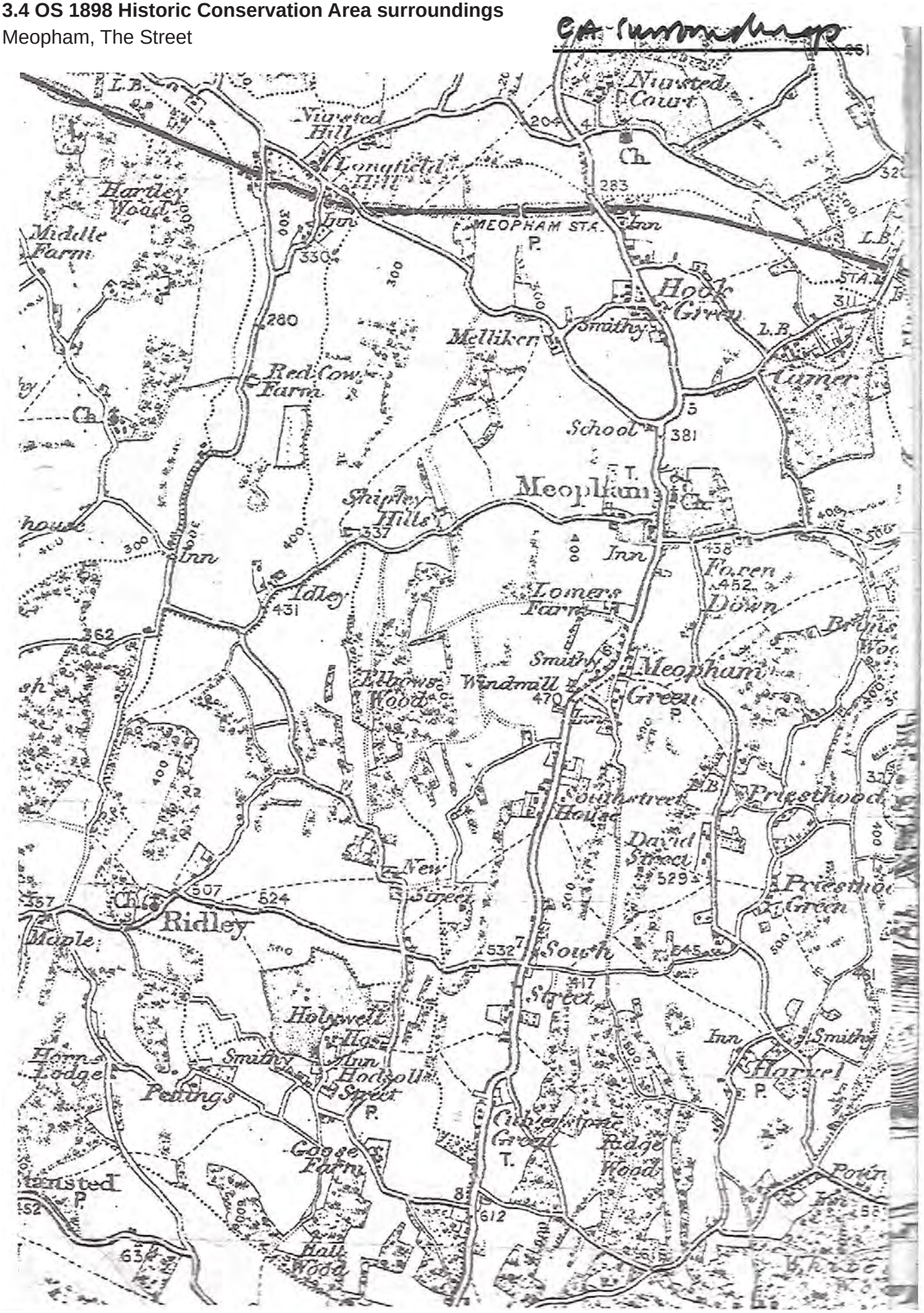
Meopham, The Street



## Figure 5

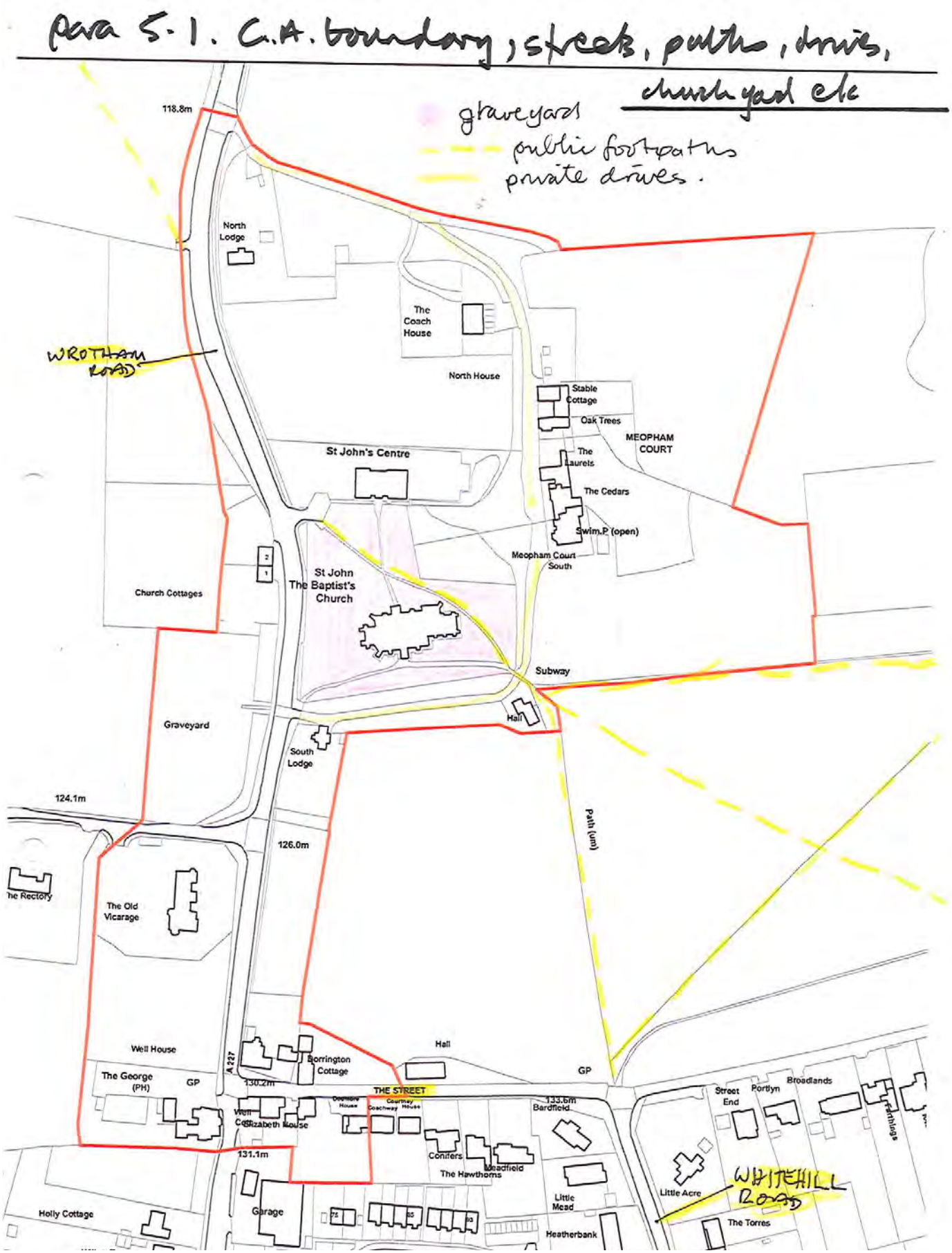
**3.4 OS 1898 Historic Conservation Area surroundings**

Meopham, The Street



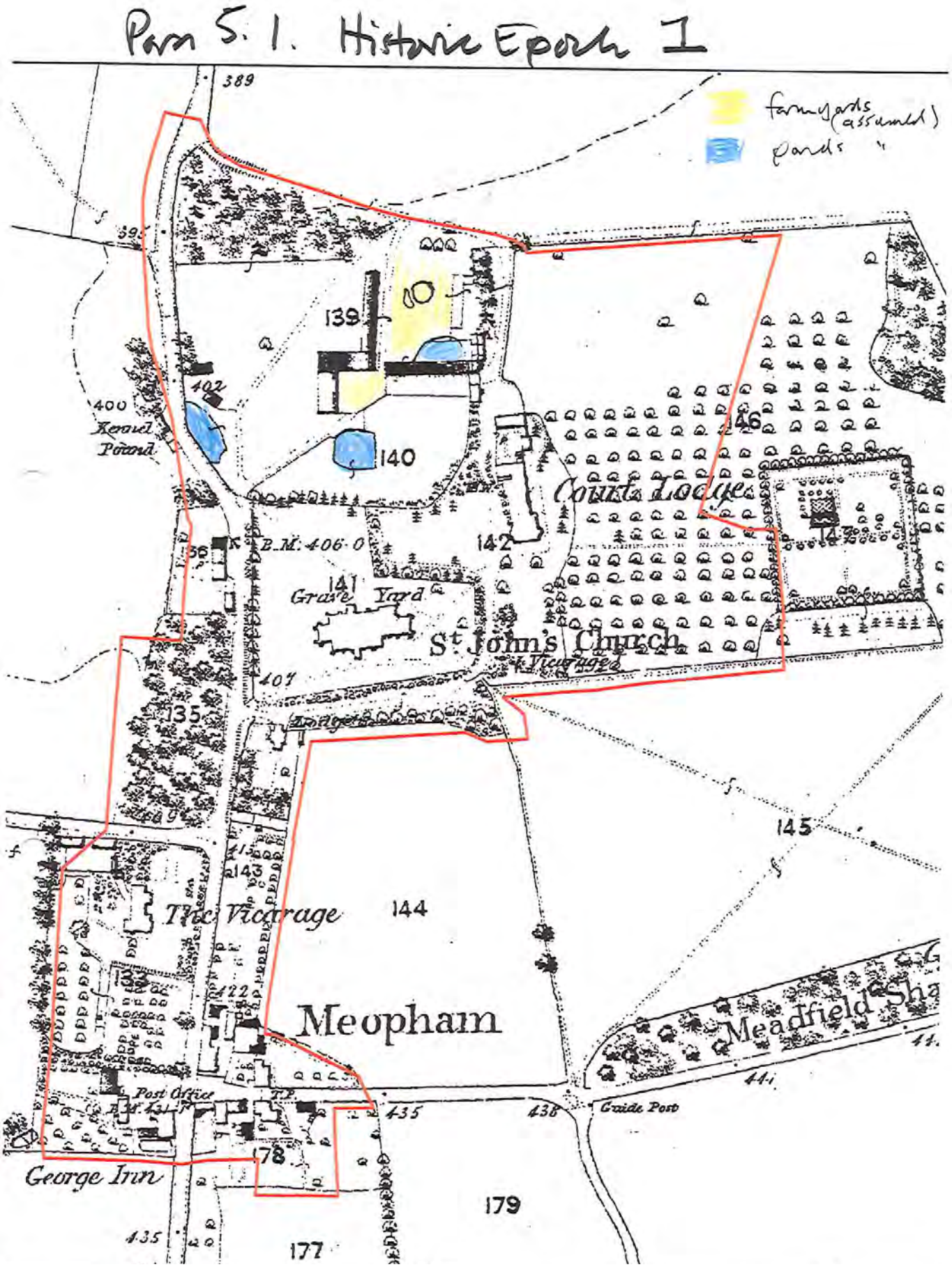
## Figure 6

**5.1 Conservation Area boundary, streets, paths, drives,church yard etc**
Meopham, The Street



## Figure 7

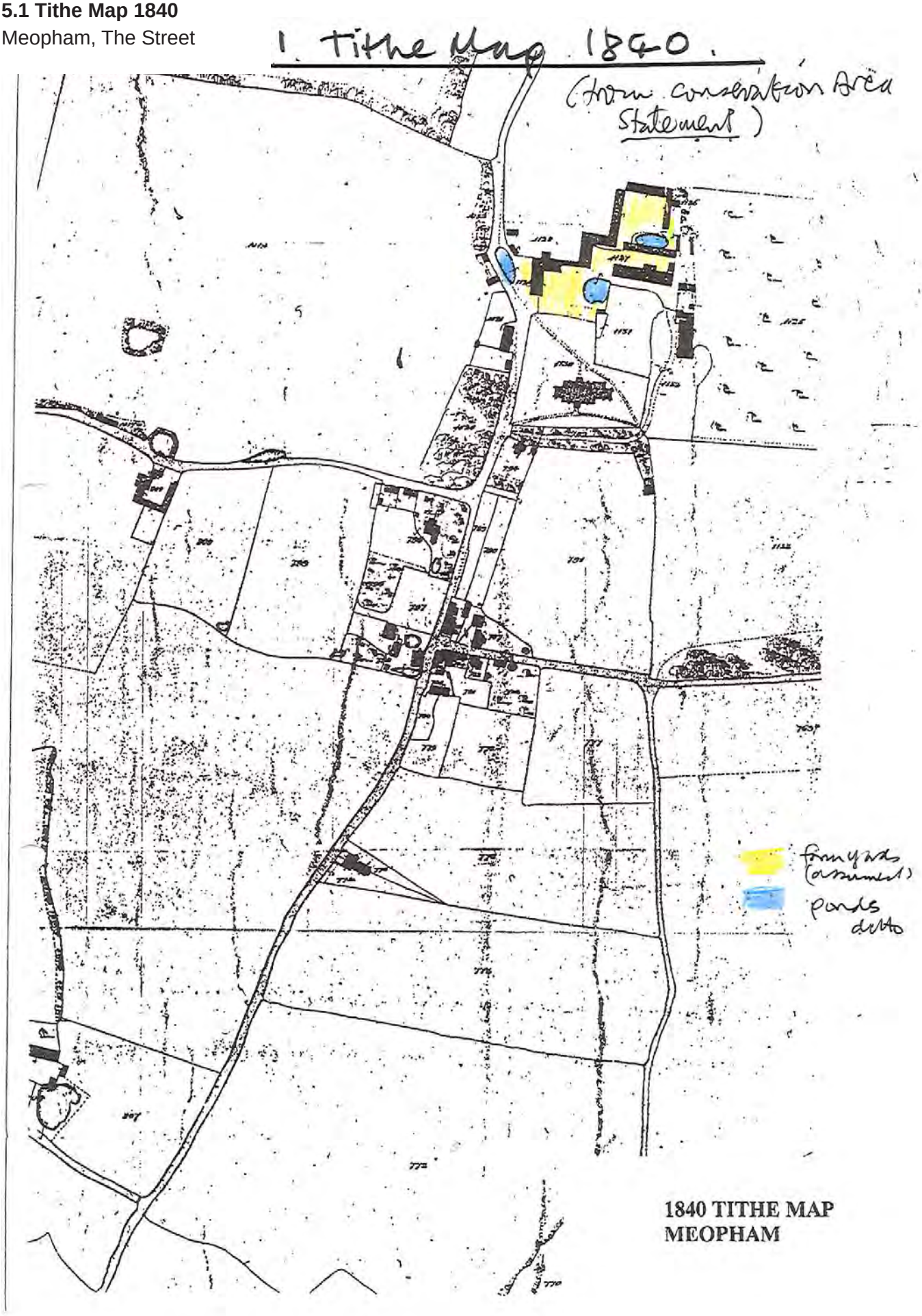
**5.1 Historic Epoch 1**
Meopham, The Street



## Figure 8

**5.1 Tithe Map 1840**

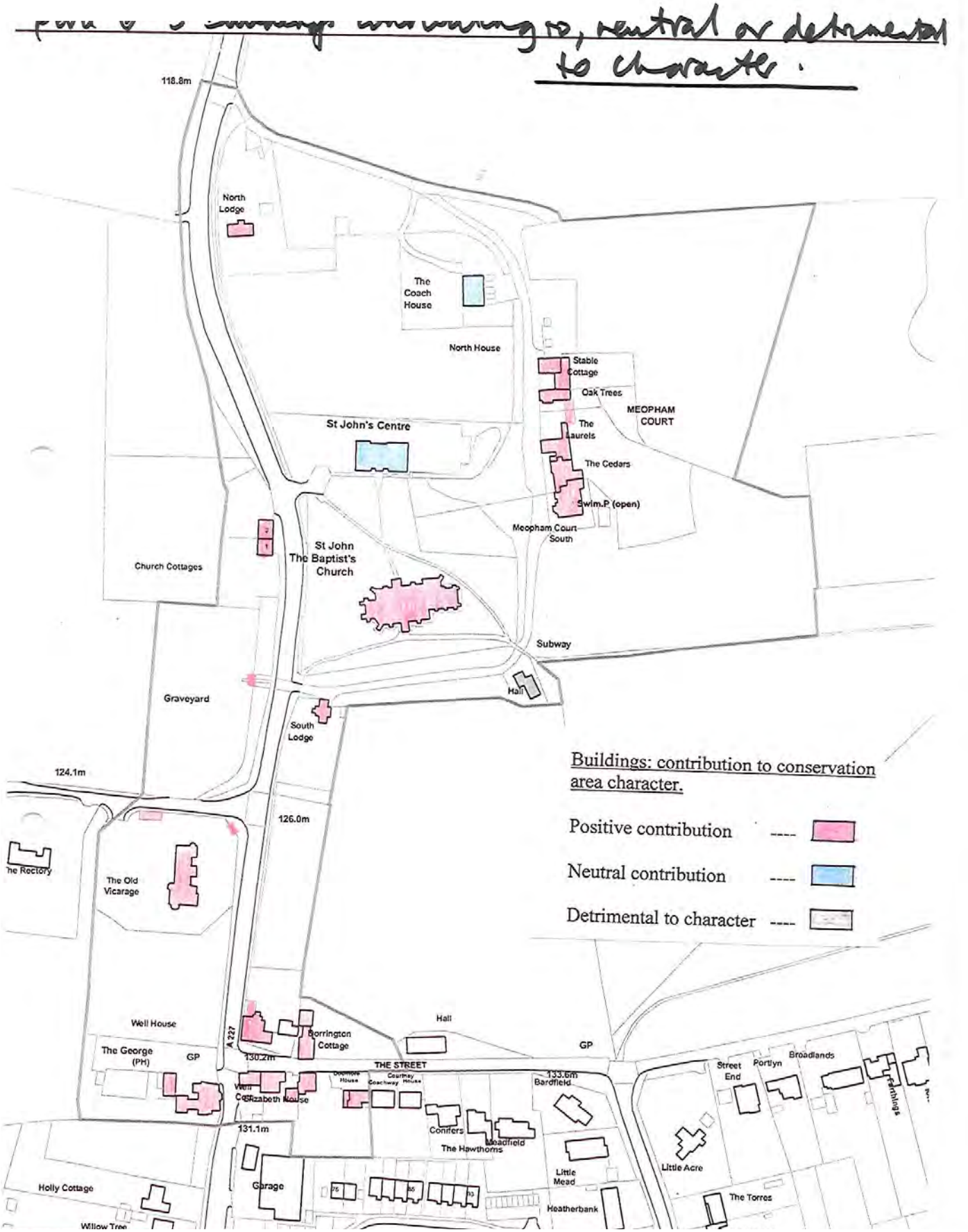
Meopham, The Street



## Figure 9

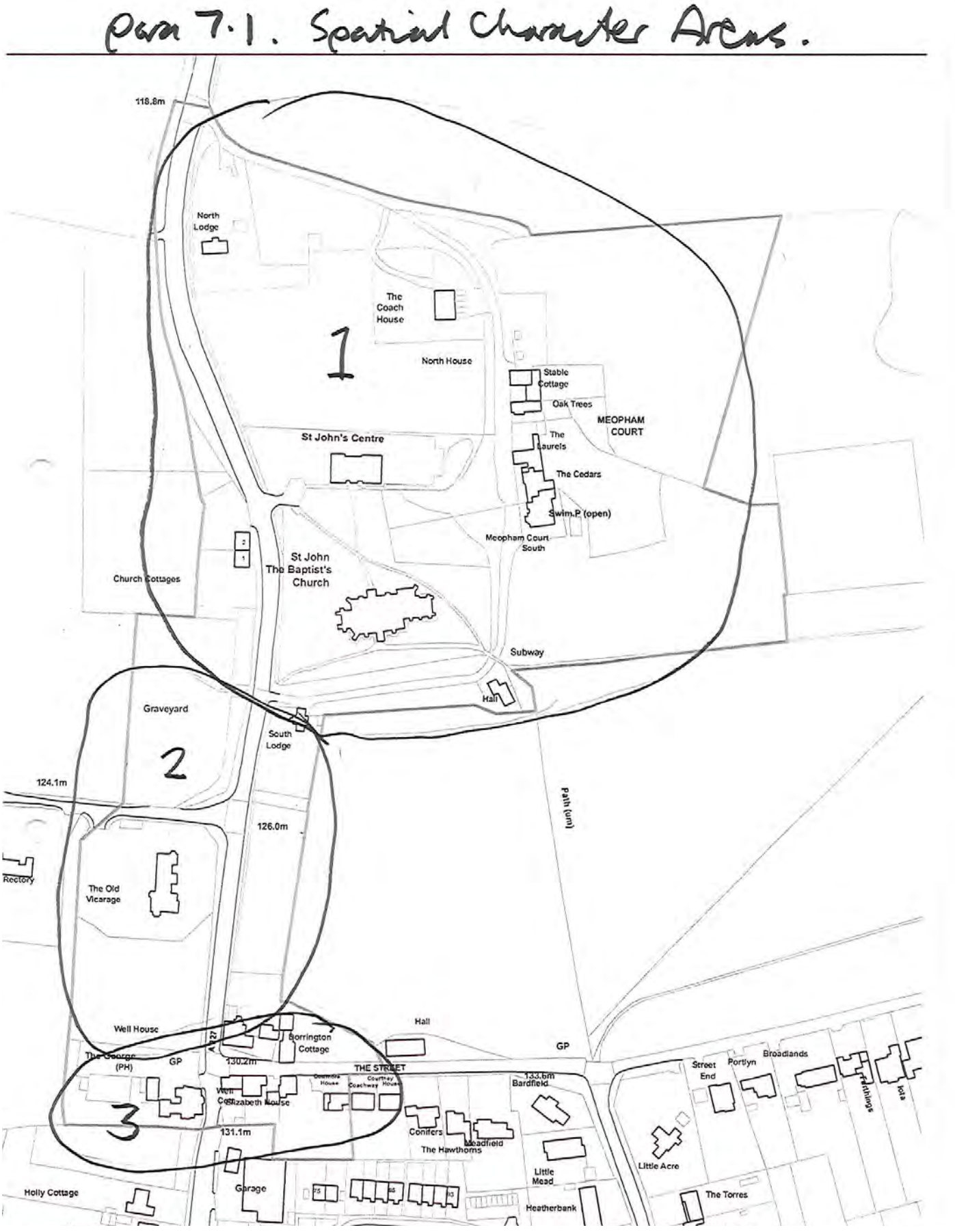
### 6.3 Buildings contributing to , neutral or detrimental to character

Meopham, The Street



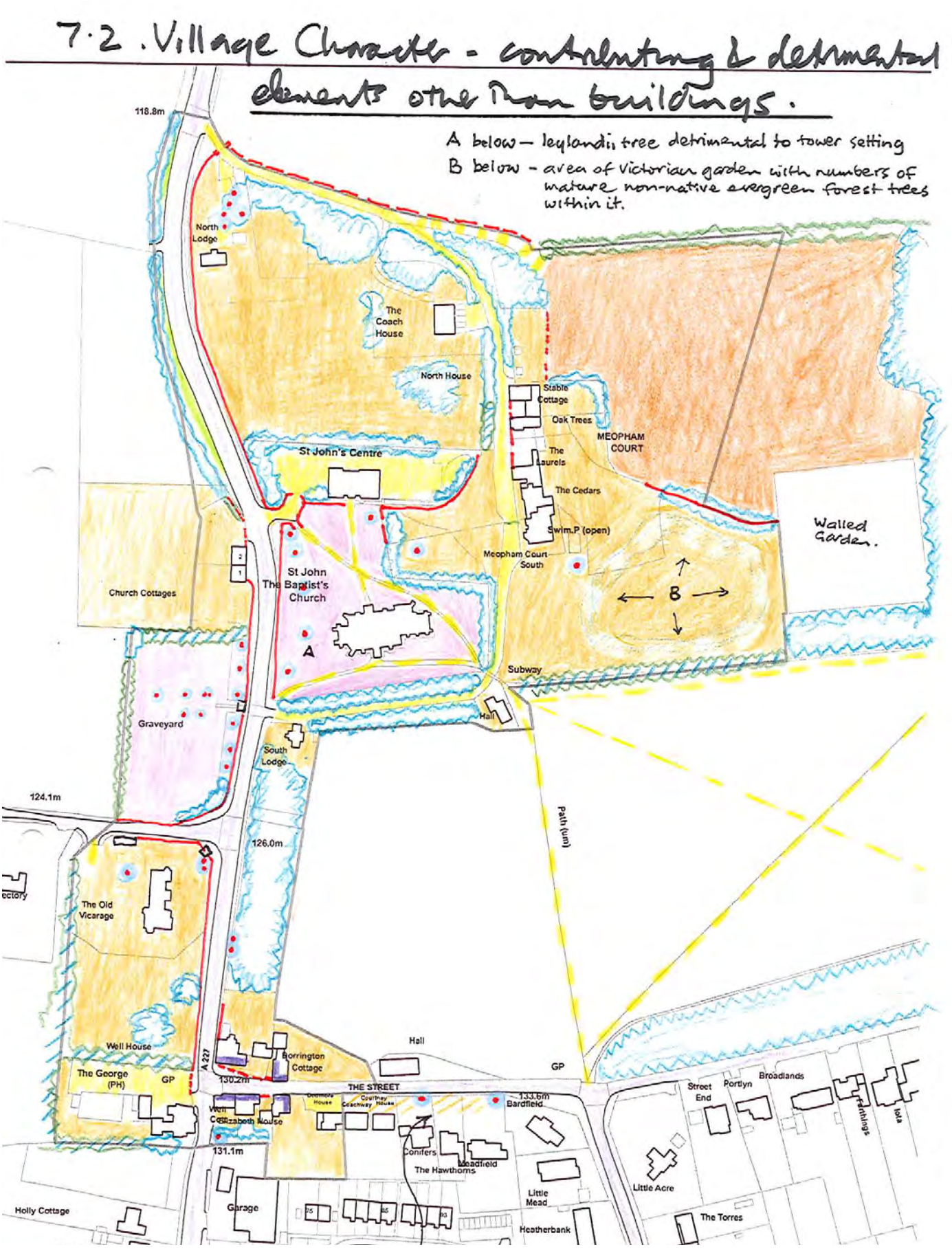
## Figure 10

**7.1 Spatial Character Area**
Meopham, The Street



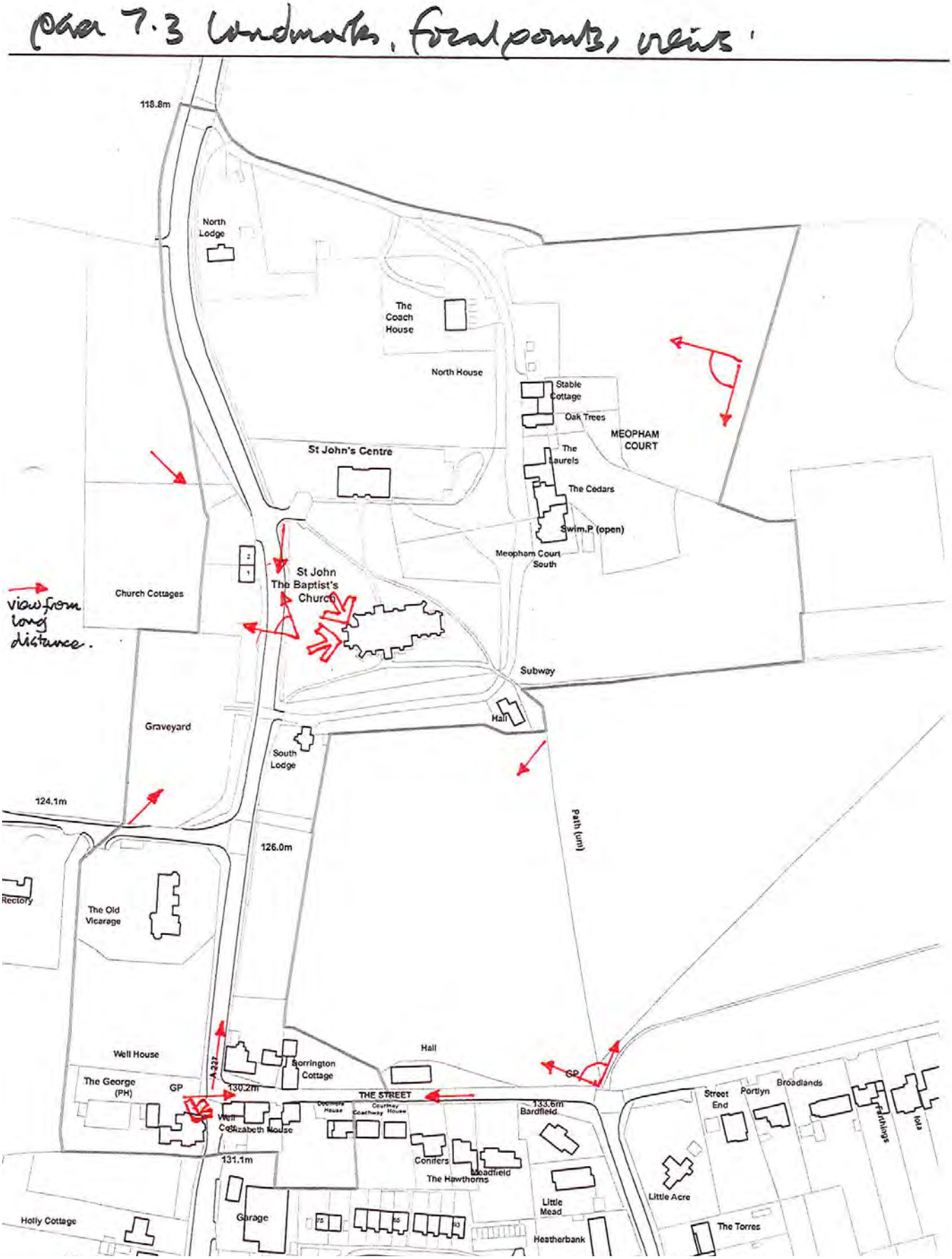
## Figure 11

**7.2 Village Character - contributing and detrimental elements other than buildings**
Meopham, The Street



## Figure 12

**7.3 Landmarks, focal points, views**
Meopham, The Street



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