

GREENHITHE CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL



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Introduction

Under Section 69(2) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, local planning authorities have a duty to review conservation areas from time to time.

The Greenhithe Conservation Area was designated on 19th August 1975 and further extended on 1st June 1998.

Conservation area designation introduces a general control over the demolition of unlisted buildings and provides the basis for policies designed to preserve or enhance all the aspects of character or appearance that define an area's special interest. It will be for the Dartford Borough Local Plan review to determine whether changes are necessary to the actual policies which apply to conservation areas.

The statement defines as fully as possible the character and appearance of the Greenhithe Conservation Area, including architectural and natural features.

Any omissions of particular buildings, features or space should not be taken to imply that they are of no interest or importance.

Origins and Development

Greenhithe is set on the Thames water front, four miles east of Dartford. Access to the village is from the south, while the street pattern is a direct result of the topology and the older functions in the village, which centred around shipping. Several wharves and a pier served the village in the past for lighterage, ship repair and watermen, and for the merchant navy training college. It is only one of four locations on the south bank of the Thames between Tower Bridge and the estuary where there is access to the river's edge.

Greenhithe has origins dating back to Roman times. It was an important location for chalk quarrying between the 1400 and 1700's. Eagle Cliff, a tall promontory, to the south of the existing conservation area shows some of the original terrain. Beyond this sits a former chalk quarry now occupied by new housing development on the quarry floor. Greenhithe was an important ferry point from Stoneness in Essex. Pilgrims would cross the river here and join the Pilgrims Way, visiting nearby Swanscombe Church where Bishop Odo had placed relics of St. Hilderforth on their way to Canterbury.

One of the earliest references to Greenhithe mentions that the pier (built in 1842 and now demolished) was 'one of the prettiest on the river'. Pleasure steamers called to carry passengers to Rosherville Gardens in Gravesend and the coast towns.

The village has a long relationship with the river. Shipbuilding and repair works occupied a major part of the western and northern parts of the village. These works have now retracted to the western end of the village, whilst the old works sites are now being developed for housing. The only remaining boat repair yard within the Conservation Area is in Pier Road. Services associated with shipping such as specialist electrical repair and ship provisions have also had a long standing presence in the village. However, these are also declining. The village has evolved, therefore, from one dominated by commercial works and premises closely associated with shipping, interspersed with domestic premises, to one where housing is now dominant.

To the east of Greenhithe is the old Merchant Navy Training College and Ingress Abbey. The Abbey grounds used to be extensive and stretched to the eastern edge of the current Empire Paper Mill site. The current site division is relatively recent. Although the present Abbey was built in 1833, there have been at least five granges or manors on the site. The Ingress estate stretches back to at least the 1300's. Records show the link between the Abbey and chalk quarrying as the estate was let to a local man to '... dig and carry off chalk there to the amount of one acre in length and breadth'.

Character

Greenhithe is essentially a riverside village of a domestic

Figure 1- The Avenue

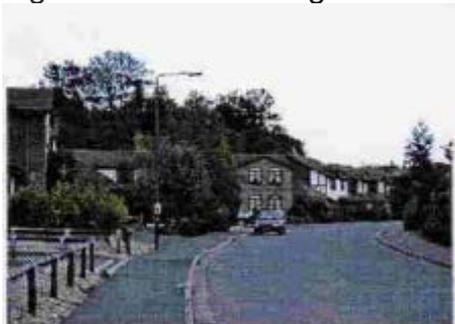


scale with a treed backcloth. There has been a considerable improvement to the buildings and environment since the Conservation Area was designated in 1975. At that time, there was a need for extensive repairs to both unlisted and listed buildings, together with environmental improvements. Whilst there is scope for further environmental improvements, the built stock is now generally in very good condition.

The village is characterised by the narrow High Street running parallel to the river, reached by The Avenue (Figure 1) to the east and Station Road to the west. Along the High Street, buildings are generally tight to the footpath, with little or no front garden, creating an intimate linear space directly related to the human scale.

Direct access to the river frontage is relatively limited within the older part of the

Figure 2- New housing



village. Few properties have direct views from their major rooms, while views to the river from the street are restricted by

Figure 3- Victorian terrace



building form. This creates a comparatively introverted setting considering the closeness of the river. In some ways this restriction increases the appeal. Glimpses of the river are possible in the older part of the Area, while the newer housing development opens up the river frontage creating a contrast. However there is a need to reinforce pedestrian links along the river edge. There is a perceptible increase in individuality of building from West to East-

Figure 4 - Georgian houses



modern (Figure 2) and Victorian terraces (Figure 3), to Georgian town houses (Figure 4) and large individual properties at the eastern edge of the village (Figure 5).

The High Street is currently under major change with new housing being constructed. This has begun to infill large gaps in the streetscape left by

the retraction of Everards works. These gaps fall both inside and outside the current boundaries of the Conservation Area, but will contribute greatly to the overall streetscape in time.

Figure 5- Detached houses at the eastern end of the village



Figure 6 – Ex Shopfront



The narrowness of the High Street accentuates the effect of any open space which opens off it. This is most apparent to the west of No 18 High Street. In this case it is a detriment to the streetscape, compared to the eastern end, where the road turns south into The Avenue. The area outside the Pier Hotel is the most important, in terms of townscape, within the Conservation Area (Figure 1). There is no particular unifying architectural style in

Figure 7- Architectural detail



Figure 8- Woodlands



Figure 9- Flint Chapel



Greenhithe, so building details become important. Although most of the domestic buildings are not architecturally outstanding some do have some interesting features (Figure 7), and many incorporate a range of architectural styles from the C17th, often with surprisingly good interiors.

At the western end, Woodlands forms an important visual cornerstone to the High Street, although there is a need for some environmental improvement to help create a better setting (Figure 8). Due to the east/west orientation of the street, the architectural styles and features of the buildings on the south side are

Figure 10 - The Warren



not appreciated owing to shadow. Interesting buildings include the Chapel (Figure 9) and The Warren (Figure 10).

At the eastern end, behind the frontages of the Pier Hotel and 8 - 18 High Street, Bendigo Wharf and Neptune Cottages have an adverse impact on the rear of the former Village Club, which has an elevation facing the river but which is now difficult to see. This building is unusual as the frontage in the High Street is very much of a domestic dwelling; the rear is in much need of repair, but could be brought back into use. The complex rear access arrangements to these properties in the High Street and to the Causeway results in an unfortunate jumble of space with no clear hierarchy or ownership (Figure 11).

Figure 11- Bendigo Wharf



By comparison, beyond the major space outside the Pier Hotel, into Pier Road, the character changes to a very low key, intimate space. Beyond, the houses of Walmer,

Figure 12 – Pier Cottages

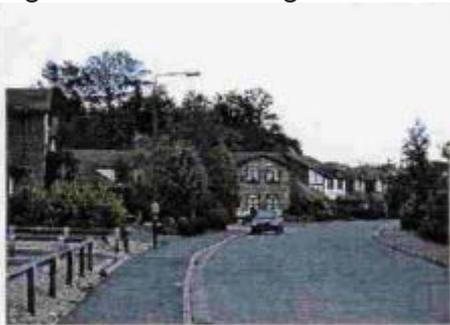


Beach Brow and Ingress Priory, set in their own grounds and facing the open space on Figure 12- Pier Cottages the river front, contrast sharply against the cottages in Pier Road, which have a very shallow plan form with no rear gardens (Figure 12).

From the river, Greenhithe is an attractive village set against a backcloth of trees. There are almost no street trees within the Conservation Area, (apart from those outside the Pier Hotel). However, trees within the curtilage of a number of properties, such as The Warren and Beach Brow, contribute to the Area.

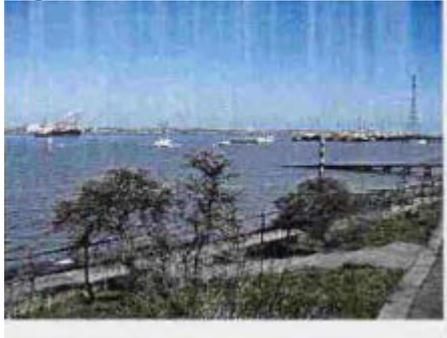
The trees on the remains of Eagle Cliff form a very

Figure 13- Treed ridge



important visual barrier and backdrop both from the river and the newer housing to the south of the village (Figure 13).

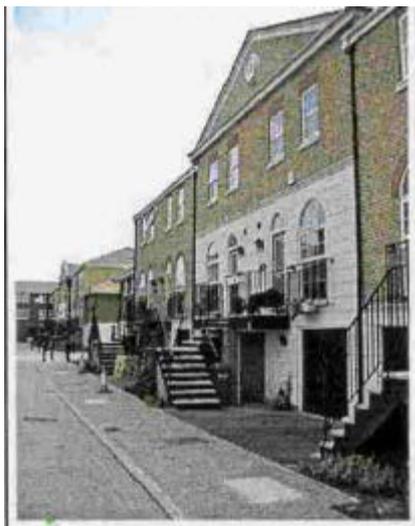
Figure 14- River view



With such a tightly built environment within the High Street, the spatial relief provided by the foreshore to the east of the village cannot be overemphasised. With extensive views up and down the river, this space is in total contrast to the village core (Figure 14).

Access to the river from this space will be complemented by the new housing at the opposite end of the village (Figure 15).

Figure 15- New river front housing



Materials and Styles

There is a predominance of small scale buildings in the village, constructed of mainly yellow stock bricks (but now well weathered). Most have steeply pitched, tiled roofs. The rendered facade and Dutch gables to 10-12 High Street are an exception, as is the flint to the Chapel. (Flint has been used extensively in walls in The A venue partially outside the Conservation Area). Considering the availability of this material (from the chalk workings) there is surprisingly little use of flint within the village itself.

The fine brickwork to Walmer and even to the simply detailed cottages at 28-34 High Street all help underlie the built quality of the Conservation Area.

Attempts to clean brickwork which is weathered by removal with chemicals or by mechanical means is likely to result in physical damage. Rendering also removes the patina of time which is irreplaceable, and changes the built character substantially. This sort of change would constitute a material change in town planning terms and require consent within the Conservation Area.

Figure 16- 18 High Street



Figure 17- Neptune Cottages



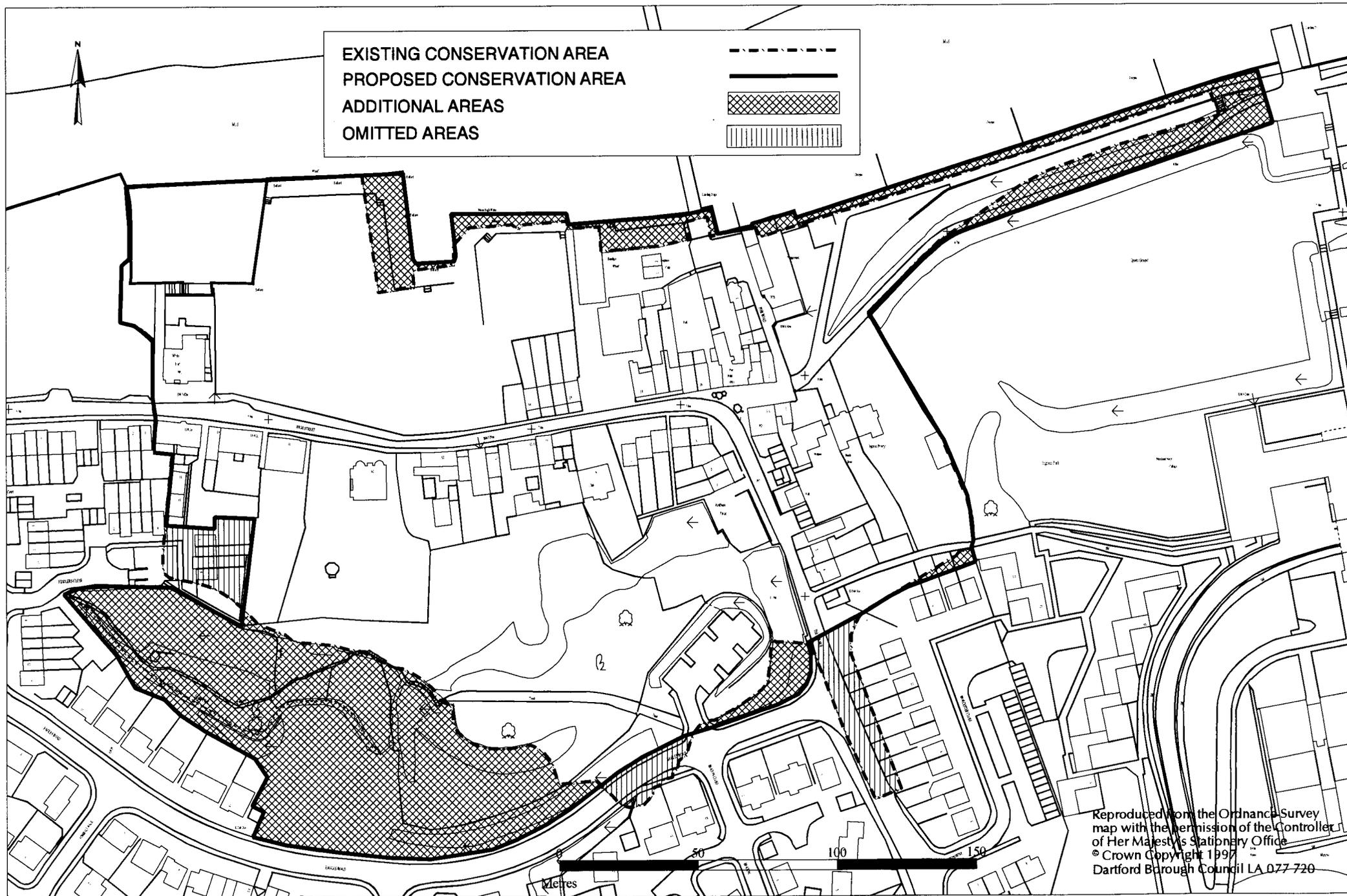
Some timber- framed buildings remain, such as 18 High Street and Neptune Cottages.

(Figures 16 and 17), although timber boarding is rare here. The modern housing in the Conservation Area adopts the materials of brick with artificial s late or tiles, and uses dormer windows, which are relatively common within the Conservation Area (Figure 2). The scale of the development is appropriate, although some of the detailing is less so. However, over time the schemes will mellow into the built environment. Some buildings remain which reflect Greenhithe's industrial past; for example, the works between 18 and 28 High Street are partly timber- framed with modern corrugated steel cladding. However these industrial buildings are now the exception. There may be a case for conserving these buildings if archaeological investigations show that they are of some antiquity.

With regard to the street materials, there do not initially appear to be any remarkable finishes within the Conservation Area at present. However, closer inspection finds remains of cobbles present in the alley to the west of The White Hart, and these should remain- there may be further traces under modern surfaces.

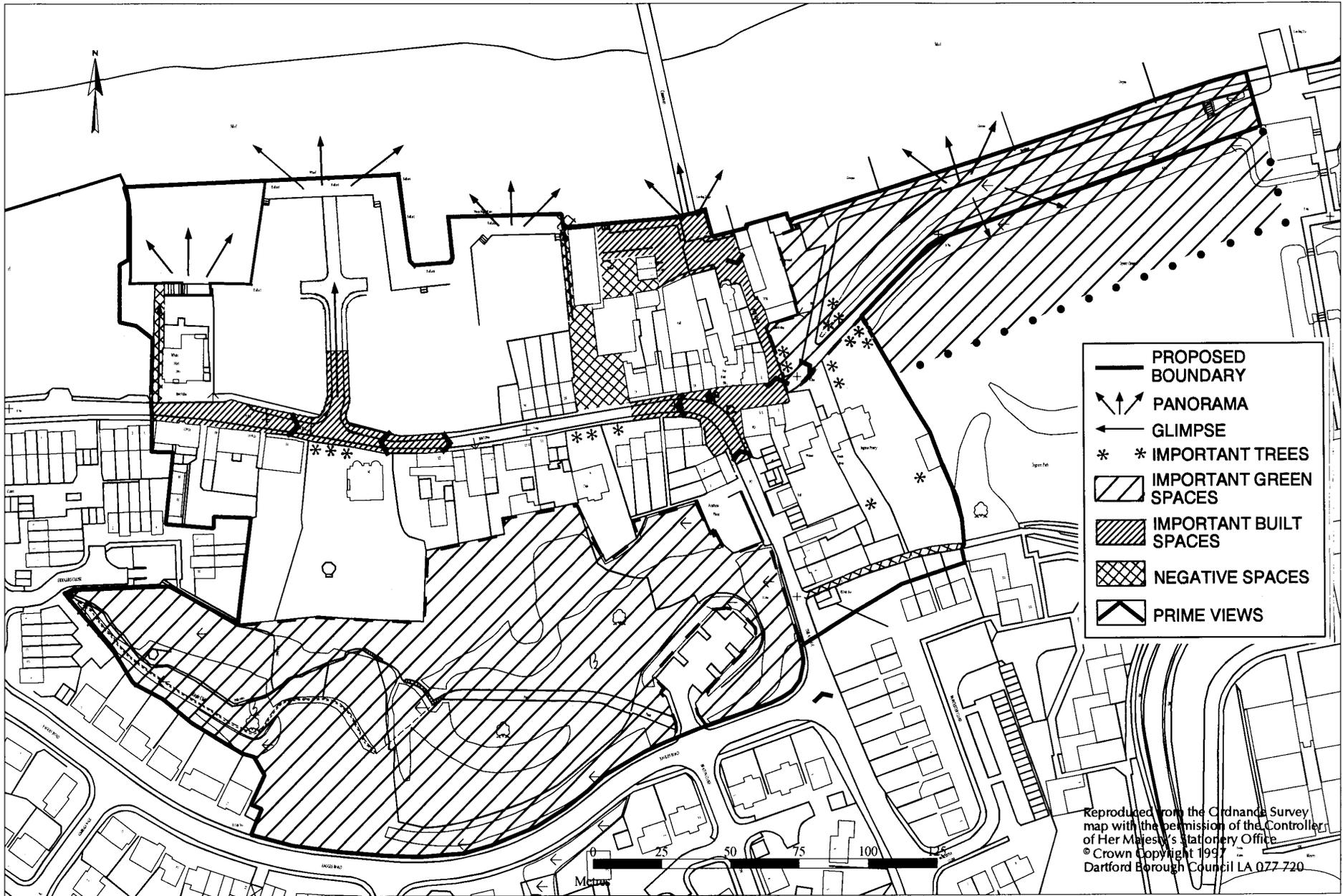
Conclusions and Recommendations

With regard to individual properties, there are several which need to be treated as one architectural group, such as The Pier Hotel and 8-12 High Street, 14-18 High Street, 28-34 High Street, and 1-3 Pier Road. Any proposed changes to these groups should be carefully assessed against the overall impact of the group, which should particularly include changes in decoration to 14-18 High Street. The materials used are traditional and are generally subdued, with relatively strident colours only applied where appropriate (i.e. 8-12 High Street). Architectural forms are traditional, with pitched, dark plain tiled roofs, natural brickwork or render with small openings for doors and windows; eaves heights are also relatively consistent in each group of buildings. Any new development within the Area should address these characteristics.



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GREENHITHE- PROPOSED REVISIONS TO THE CONSERVATION AREA BOUNDARY



SPACES VIEWS AND FEATURES

MAP 2

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PROPOSED BOUNDARY

KEY BUILDINGS

GOOD TOWNSCAPE VALUE

SOME TOWNSCAPE VALUE

REQUIRING ATTENTION

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