

Bexon Conservation Area

Character Appraisal and Management Plan

Public Consultation Draft October 2025



Bexon Conservation Area

Character Appraisal and Management Plan

Project Details

Project Number: F3487

Client: Swale Borough Council

Address: Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, Kent ME10 3HT

Quality Assurance – Approval Status

Issue: Draft 1 for Internal Review

Date: 15.09.2025

Authored By: David Sorapure

Checked By: Laura Johnson

Approved By: Maria Kitts

Prepared by:

Place Services

Essex County Council

County Hall, Chelmsford, Essex CM1 1QH

T: +44 (0)333 013 6840

E: enquiries@placeservices.co.uk

www.placeservices.co.uk

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FOREWORD

“Historic buildings and places add to the quality of people’s lives and help to create a sense of place that we all identify with. As a community and as a local authority, we have a responsibility to safeguard our historic assets for future generations and to make sure that they are not compromised by unsympathetic alterations or poor-quality developments. Conservation area designation and subsequent management is one way in which this can be achieved.

Conservation areas are not intended to stop development or to prevent change. Rather, they give the local community and the Borough Council the means to positively manage change and to protect what is special about the area from being harmed or lost altogether. Swale Borough is fortunate in having such a rich and varied mix of built and natural heritage. The Borough Council wants to see it used positively as a catalyst to sustainable, sensitive regeneration and development, and to creating places where people want to live, work, and make the most of their leisure time. To that end, we have surveyed and appraised Bexon on the basis that it appears to display all the special qualities befitting of conservation area status. Bexon Conservation Area comprises the hamlet of Bexon, including Bexon Court, the Malthouse and the Manor House. This area is bounded by Bexon Lane to the north and surrounded by agricultural land. The significance of the Bexon study area chiefly derives from its rural character, the historic interest of its collection of historic buildings, the former manorial site and the unaltered, historic landscape.

The results are set out in this document, which the Borough Council is now seeking constructive feedback on.

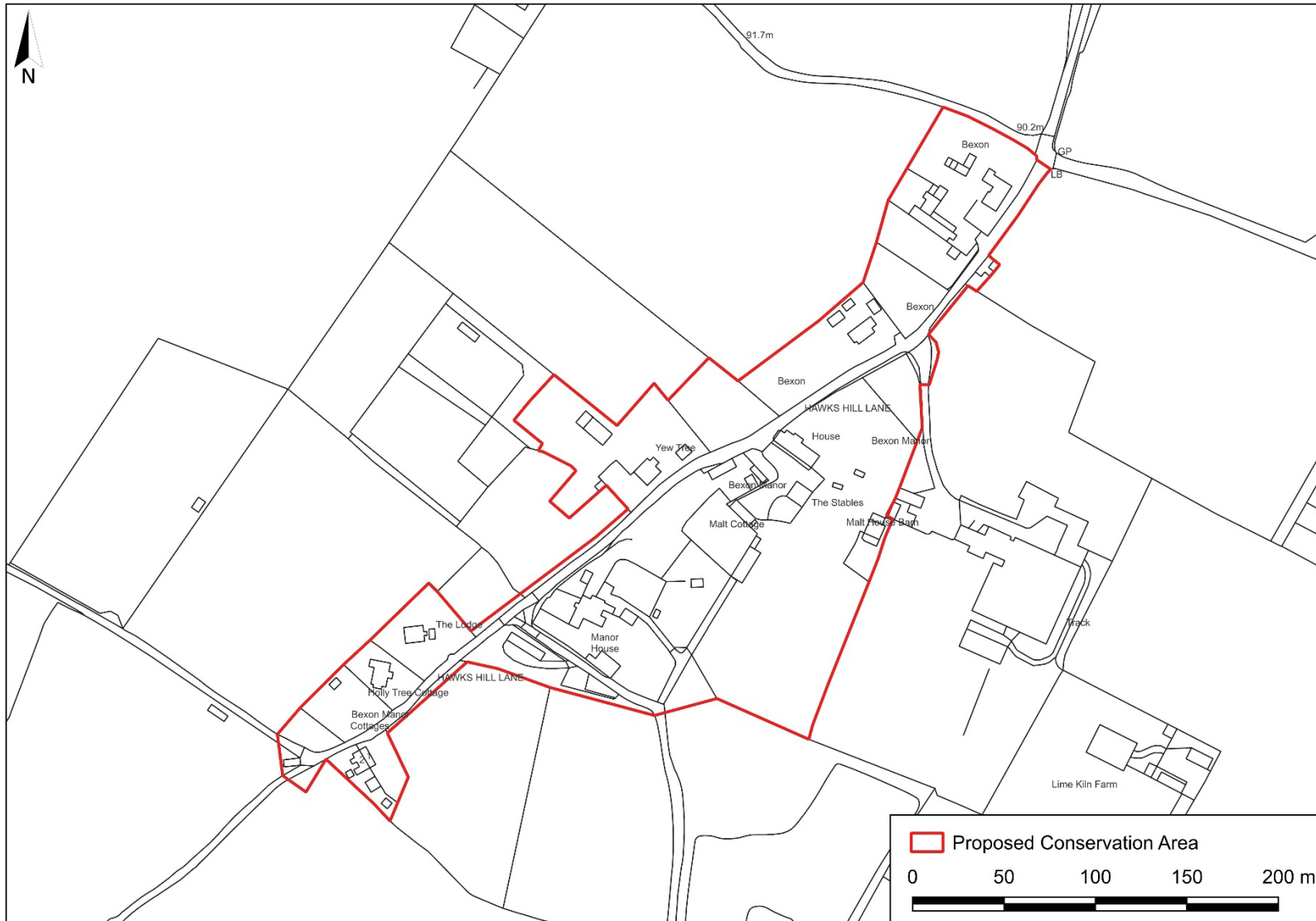
This assessment of the Bexon has directly derived from the work on one of a series of conservation area reviews which the Borough Council is

committed to undertaking, following the adoption of the Swale Heritage Strategy 2020 - 2032.”



Councillor Mike Baldock,
Swale Borough Councillor and
Heritage Champion

Mike Baldock



Map 1: The Conservation Area boundary

1. Introduction

1.1 Bexon Conservation Area

Bexon Conservation Area comprises the hamlet of Bexon, including Bexon Court, the Malthouse and the Manor House. This area is bounded by Bexon Lane to the north and surrounded by agricultural land. The significance of the Bexon study area chiefly derives from its rural character, the historic interest of its collection of historic buildings, the former manorial site and the unaltered, historic landscape.

1.2 Purpose of Conservation Areas

Conservation Areas were introduced as a result of the Civic Amenities Act of 1967. They are defined as “an area of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance”.¹

Local planning authorities must ensure that an area justifies designation as a conservation area because of its special architectural or historic interest, so that the concept of conservation is not devalued through the designation of areas that lack special interest.² This document will assess and define the special interest of the Bexon Conservation Area, in order to provide a rationale for its designation. It will describe and evaluate the contribution made by the different features of its character, appearance and setting.



Figure 1: Lime Kiln Road and the Grade II listed Bexon Manor Barn

Conservation area designation provides protection to historic places and assists in proactively and positively managing change, so that their special character is preserved and enhanced. Areas may be designated for their architecture, historic layout and use of characteristic or local materials, style or landscaping. Generally, it is normally a combination of some or all of these attributes which merits designation of the area. Above

¹ Section 69 (1)(a) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990

² National Planning Policy Framework 2024, Paragraph 204

all, conservation areas should be legible as cohesive areas in which buildings and spaces create a unique environment which is of special architectural or historic interest.

Conservation area designation requires the local planning authority to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of a conservation area and its setting. Local planning authorities have greater control over the demolition of buildings and planning permission is required for substantial demolition of any unlisted building or structure in a conservation area. In addition, there is greater control over householder development. Planning permission is needed for changes to buildings which would normally be permitted such as cladding a building, inserting dormer windows, or installing a satellite dish. All trees in conservation areas are protected, included those not covered by a Tree Preservation Order (TPO) and 6 weeks notification should be given to the Local Authority before certain work is carried out on trees without a TPO.

1.3 Purpose of the Appraisal

The purpose of this Conservation Area Character Appraisal and Management Plan is:

- To identify the significance of the heritage asset and describe the value that the conservation area has to this and future generations because of its heritage interest, which may be archaeological, architectural, artistic or historic interest.

- To increase public awareness and involvement in the preservation and enhancement of the area and of what makes Bexon Conservation Area special.
- To provide clear guidance for homeowners and developers on the attributes of the Conservation Area, such as materials, which will require consideration when proposing changes or new development.
- To provide a framework for the local planning authority to aid in making planning decisions, to guide positive change and regeneration.
- To set out the Conservation Area boundary in accordance with Section 69(2) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.
- To highlight particular issues and features which detract from the character or appearance of the Conservation Area which offer potential for enhancement or improvement through positive change.

This Conservation Area Character Appraisal and Management Plan provides an assessment and description of the area's special architectural and historic interest and the prevailing character and appearance of the area, which should be preserved and enhanced.

The Appraisal seeks to describe the distinctiveness of Bexon by identifying the attributes that contribute to its special character. However, the appraisal is not all-inclusive, and the omission of any particular building, feature, view or attribute does not imply

that it is not of interest, or that it is not a positive element in the Conservation Area.

The Appraisal sets out the boundary of the Conservation Area and provides justification for what is included and what is excluded. It also includes a management plan to help Swale Borough Council and other stakeholders positively manage the Conservation Area into the future. A management plan may include action points, design guidance and site specific guidance and can identify potential threats to the character of the area.

The assessment recognises designated and non-designated heritage assets within the Conservation Area which contribute to its special interest, along with their individual settings. It will consider how the area developed, its building styles, forms, materials, scale, density, roads, footpaths, alleys, streetscapes, open spaces, views, landscape, landmarks, and topography. These qualities have been used to assess the key characteristics of the area.

This Appraisal may also serve as the basis for the formulation and evaluation of policies in the Local Plan. The Conservation Area and the findings of the Appraisal are a material consideration in development management decisions by the local planning authority and by the Planning Inspectorate in determining planning appeals.

It can also heighten awareness of the special character of the place to help inform local Parish Councils in the formulation of Neighbourhood Plans, Village Design Statements and individuals in their design choices. This Conservation Area Character Appraisal has been compiled in consultation with local organisations, elected representatives and council officials. It is

to be the subject of public consultation and is prepared with a view to being formally adopted for development management purposes.

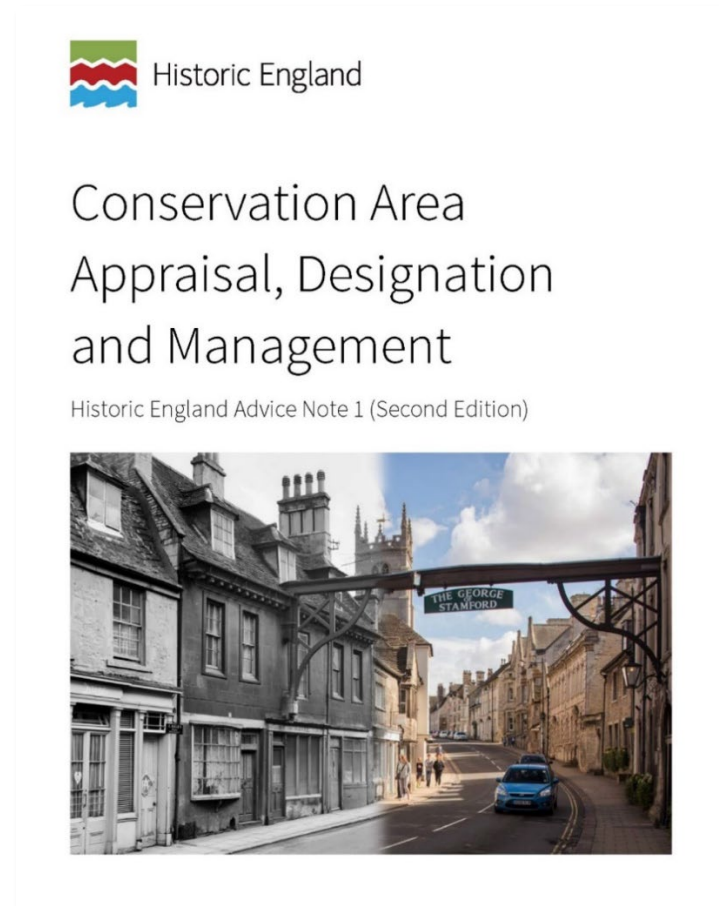


Figure 2: Front cover of Conservation Area Appraisal, Designation and Management (Historic England)

This appraisal is based on information derived from documentary research, a site visit and analysis of the proposed area for designation and will aim to enhance the understanding of the Bexon area and its development. It has been carried out using the recommendations and guidance provided by Historic England in their Advice Note 1 (second edition).³

1.4 Planning Policy and Guidance

National Planning Policies

The national legislative framework for the creation, conservation and enhancement of conservation areas and listed buildings is set out in the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. Section 69 of this Act requires Local Planning Authorities to designate areas which they consider possess architectural or historic interest worthy of preservation or enhancement as conservation areas.

As part of this, section 71 of the Act requires the Local Planning Authority to formulate and publish proposals for the preservation and enhancement of these areas, such as in the form of an appraisal document. It is also the Local Authority's duty to ensure that special attention is paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the conservation area's character and appearance when making planning decisions, as per section 72 of the Act.

National planning policy in relation to the conservation and enhancement of heritage assets is outlined in the Government's National Planning Policy Framework, or NPPF (2024). Chapter

16 of the NPPF relates specifically to the historic environment, with a glossary providing a definition of heritage terms, some of which are reproduced in Appendix 6.3 of this document.

Within the NPPF, the importance of heritage assets is outlined, with emphasis placed upon the contribution they make to the quality of life of existing and future generations. Local Planning Authorities should seek to preserve or enhance the historic environment, developing strategies which consider the wider benefits that the conservation of heritage assets can bring, and draw upon the contribution made by the historic environment to local character and distinctiveness.

The NPPF states that when considering the designation of conservation areas, local planning authorities should ensure that an area justifies such status because of its special architectural or historic interest, and that the concept of conservation is not devalued through the designation of areas that lack special interest (NPPF, Paragraph 204).

Under the provisions of The Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) (Amendment) (No. 3) Order 2020 (the GPDO), many permitted development rights are removed or altered in conservation areas, meaning that planning permission may be required for works which would usually be considered permitted development if they take place outside a conservation area.

³ Historic England 2019 *Conservation Area Appraisal, Designation and Management Historic England Advice Note 1* (Second Edition)

2. Summary of Special Interest

The positive elements that contribute to the architectural and historic special interest of the Conservation Area are summarised below.

Key Positive Characteristics:

- Bexon retains its historic character as a small rural settlement which developed from a small medieval manorial farming community.
- It has a strong visual identity, derived from its history of development, with prominent and notably historic buildings along Hawks Hill Lane.
- As a rural hamlet, the settlement has never relied on a central focus or public centre and its historic layout along Hawkes Hill Lane remains unaltered.
- For its small size, Bexon has a comparatively high number of listed buildings and non-designated heritage assets, which make a positive architectural contribution to its special interest.
- There is a variety of traditional building styles, types and building materials which reflect the history and development of the settlement.
- Trees and hedges make a significant contribution to the Conservation Area and help to reinforce the verdant and rustic character of the hamlet.
- The traditional boundary treatments, such as brick walls, post and rail fences and timber railings are in keeping with the area's identity and make a distinct contribution to the special character of the place.
- There is a strong, historic relationship between the hamlet and the surrounding landscape, and this can be experienced through views and vistas from within the settlement and within its setting as well as through the network of public footpaths.
- The buildings and the public domain are generally well curated and in good condition.
- The rural agrarian setting remains generally unaltered and is visible in many views, both glimpsed and more notable vistas. The surviving historic setting enhances the viewers experience of Bexon's historic interest.
- The Conservation Area has a distinct tranquillity, which reinforces its rustic character. While sporadic vehicles do travel along Hawkes Hill Lane, the level of road traffic is limited, which enhances this positive characteristic.

3. Character Appraisal

3.1 The History and Development of Bexon

The hamlet of Bexon began as an early, outlying farmstead settlement, developing into a small manor within the radius of the village of Bredgar (approximately 2 kilometres to the northwest), within Bredgar Parish. While Bredgar village provided the focal point of much of the rural community's activity, the outlying hamlets such as Bexon contributed to the wealth and prosperity of the parish from agricultural production in the surrounding countryside. Bexon is one of a number of a lesser manors within the wider parish of Bredgar, and this group includes other small settlements such as Silver Street, Swanton, Deans Hill and Manns Place.⁴

Historic mapping and accounts show that Bexon has also been commonly called 'Baxon', or 'Baxton' throughout its history. There is no specific mention of Bredgar or Bexon in the Domesday Book of 1085, although the Bredgar Parish Church of John the Baptist, was certainly in existence by 1066.⁵

The name Bexon or Baxon possibly originates from the Old English name of 'Bake Stone'.⁶ In the medieval period, the small

manor was in the possession of John de Bexon's family, who was resident there in the early fourteenth century.⁷ Later in the fourteenth century the manor came into the possession of the Tonge family who held other estates in east Kent; the Tonges continued their tenure of Bexon for nearly three centuries. Some sources state that the manor was also sometimes called Crops and a Henry Crompe is known to have owned a landholding or 'yoke' at Bexon. It is possible that the land was at some stage divided into two yokes and that together these formed the manor.⁸

The manor was centred around Bexon Manor House, which survives today and is Grade II* listed. The existing building dates to the fifteenth century but was probably built on the site of an earlier manor.⁹

William Tonge of Bexon Manor died in 1624. Prior to his death he provided a detailed description of the manor:

My principal mansion house at Baxton with the court before yt the arbor with the fruit yearlie growing therein the herbage or pasture of the apple orchard to it adjoining and of the new planted cherry garden called the croft adjoining to it the well

⁴Swale Borough Council 2023. *Bredgar Conservation Area Character Appraisal and Management Plan*. Public Consultation Draft.

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Allinson, H. 2013 *Bredgar, the History of a Kentish Parish*. Second Edition. Synjon Books

⁷ Hasted, E. 1798. *The history and topographical survey of the county of Kent*, Second Edition, volume 6 Canterbury. Accessed 20.02.2025 <https://www.durobrivis.net/hasted/octavo/1798-hasted-o-06.pdf>

⁸ Allinson, H 2013 *Bredgar, the History of a Kentish Parish*. Second Edition. Synjon Books

⁹ Palmer S. (Ed.) and the Bredgar Women's Institute 2023. *A Short History of Bredgar in the County of Kent*. Bredgar Parish Council

*wellhouse and court wherein it standeth the stable and the little barne to it adjoining the hen house and the reasonable uase of the great close about the said house.*¹⁰

This description provides an insight into the highly important and successful production of fruit at Bexon, including apples and cherries. It demonstrates how fruit production has been a mainstay of the economy of the area and a fundamental part of the life of its community for centuries.

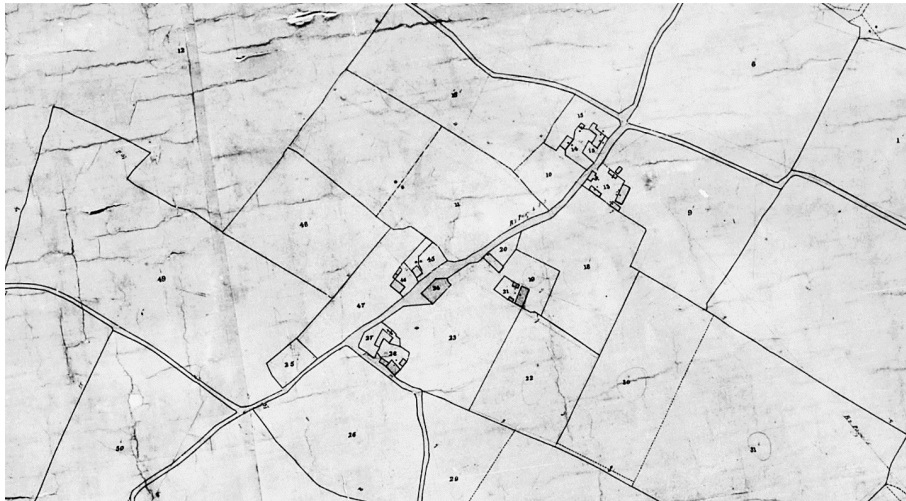


Figure 3: Tithe Map, December 1839

On the Tithe Map of 1839 (**Figure 3**) the extent of the hamlet can be seen, while the Tithe Appointment provides details of ownership and land use from that year. Bexon Manor House is shown as being in the ownership and occupancy of Mr William Wise, who also owned many of the surrounding fields, particularly to the east and south. The numerous fields in his ownership are described as pear and cherry orchards, along with hop gardens, a barn and cottages, presumably for agricultural workers. Other extensive landowners around Bexon mentioned in the Tithe Map are John Benchley, owner of Bexon Court, and Edward Twopenny. The fields within both men's ownership are listed as oast orchards, cherry and apple orchards, hop gardens and a hog meadow.

The extent of agricultural production, particularly orchards, is again clearly shown on the OS map surveyed in 1864/65, published in 1870 (**Figure 4**). Here the hamlet of 'Baxon' can be seen surrounded by extensive orchards. On the OS map surveyed 1946 and published in 1950 (**Figure 5**), the extent of surrounding land covered with orchards has increased, particularly to the west of Bexon.

¹⁰ Allinson, H. 2013 *Bredgar, the History of a Kentish Parish*. Second Edition. Synjon Books

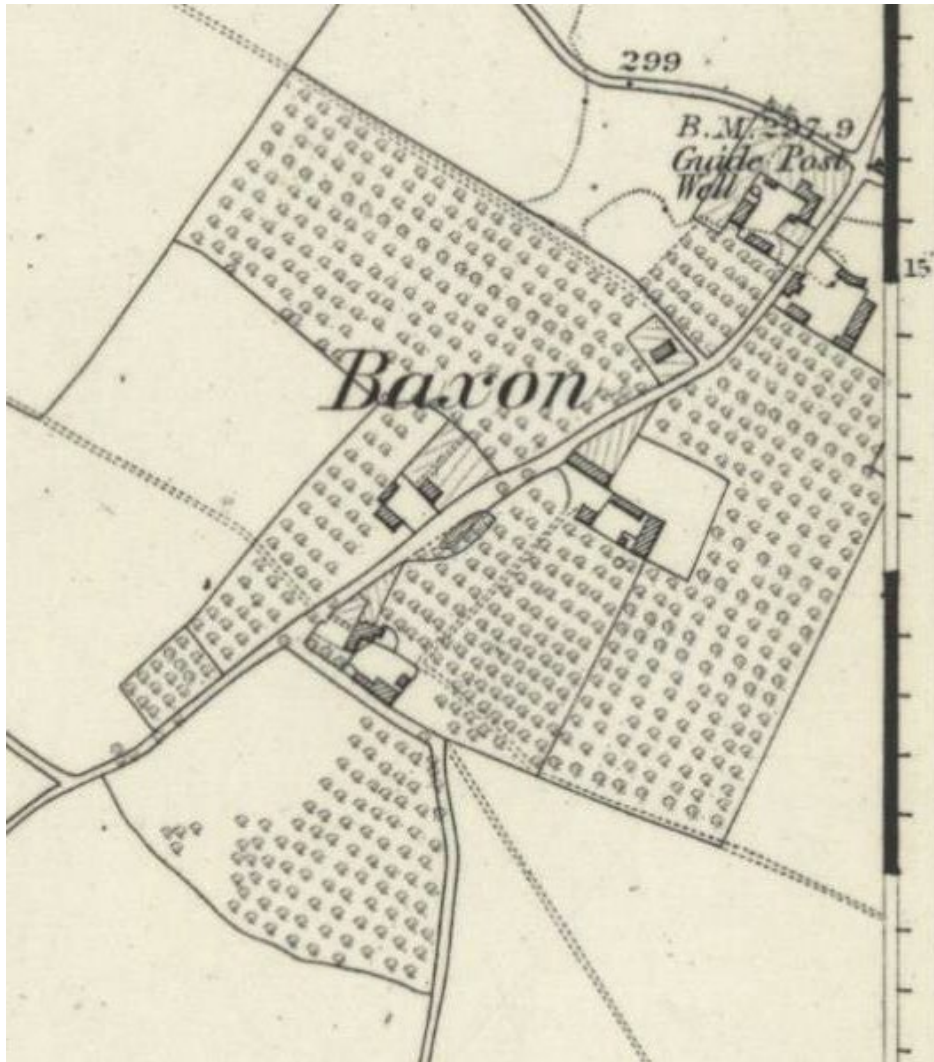


Figure 4: OS: Kent Sheet XXXII. Surveyed: 1864 to 1865. Published: 1870

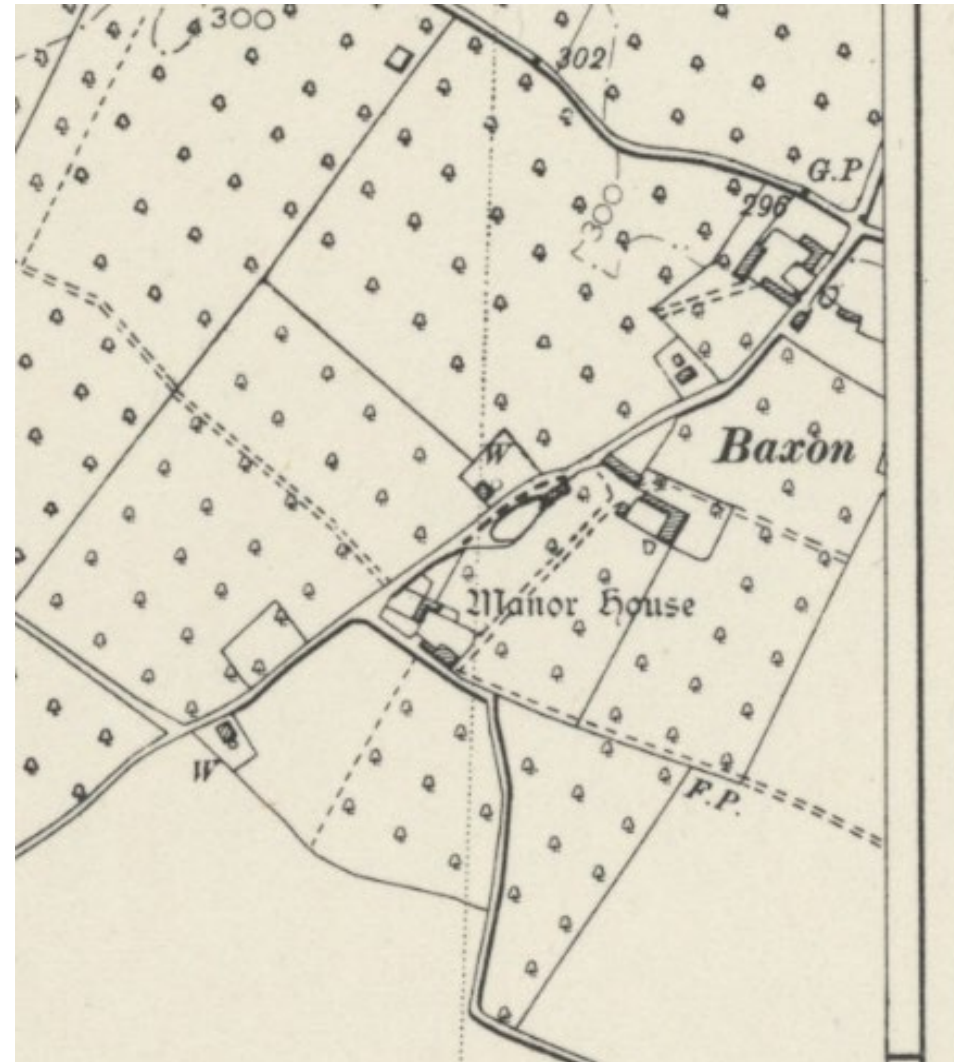


Figure 5: OS: Kent Sheet XXXII,SE Revised: 1946, Published: ca.1950



Figure 6: Fruit pickers in Bredgar Parish c1909 (H.D. Allinson)



Figure 7: A family cherry picking at Bredgar c1925 (H.D. Alinson)

3.2 General Character

Bexon has a distinctive identity and character derived from its long history and origins as a small farmstead settlement and manorial estate, dependent on agriculture and fruit production. The oldest of its dwellings attest to its historic origins as the Manor of Bexon. As one of Bredgar's outlying hamlets, Bexon also has a strong visual and historic connection to the surrounding countryside and the dependency on agriculture is also manifested in some of its most prominent buildings, such as the Malt House and the Oast House.

There is a variation in building styles and types, with local building materials and historic construction techniques in evidence, with Flemish bond brickwork, timber framed buildings, Kent peg tiles and thatched roofs being particularly noteworthy. These contribute to the special character and appearance of Bexon.

The layout and verdant character of the lanes and paths reinforce the rustic character of the Bexon and there is a prevailing sense of tranquillity, which enhances the experience of the Conservation Area's historic and architectural special interest. Some modern changes have occurred, such as the modern commercial units at Bexon Manor Stores to the east of the Manor House, although this development is outside of the Conservation Area boundary. The historic agricultural buildings of the Malt House and the Oast House have been converted to residential use, although on the whole, this has been undertaken in a sensitive manner. In general, the hamlet has been well managed by local owners, the Parish Council and the Local Planning Authority.

There is an unspoilt and rural quality with clusters of buildings surrounded by a managed rural landscape, with woodland, coppices, meadows, and lanes, centred around Hawks Hill Lane. Along the lane are dwellings, some of high historic interest, along with former agricultural buildings. Hawks Hill Lane is accessed from the north at the junction with Bexon Lane. This provides a route to Bredgar to the northwest and Milstead to the southeast.

Bexon has a characteristically loose and sparse grain of development, with generous open spaces between its buildings. This sparseness of built form is an important characteristic and indicative of its historic development as a small rural community.

For its size, the hamlet has a notable stock of distinctive historic buildings, with the earliest examples dating to c.1500. Traditional building forms and materials are to be found, including exposed timber framing, red brick, timber weatherboarding and thatch. Bexon has a quiet and tranquil character, with residential dwellings and former agricultural buildings within abundant greenery and mature trees.

Bexon has a characteristically loose and sparse grain of development, with generous open spaces between its buildings. This sparseness of built form is a characteristic of its historic development as a small rural community. Bexon is clearly an area of special architectural or historic interest the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance. The hamlet has a distinct and unique sense of place which merits protection as a Conservation Area.

¹¹ 2018 Swale Local Landscape Designations Review and Recommendations Final Report, Swale Borough Council Prepared by LUC

3.3 Topography, Geology and Landscape

Bexon is a small, rural hamlet lying on the slope of the North Downs, roughly four kilometres to the south of Sittingbourne. The land rises from sea level at Sittingbourne to the north, reaching its highest point at 400 feet above, near Bicknor, to the southeast of Bexon.

The hamlet of Bexon has developed along Hawks Hill Lane, which a gently winds through the settlement on a southwest to northeast alignment. At the northern end of the hamlet Hawks Hill Lane intersects with Bexon Lane at a 'T' junction, which connects the hamlet to the villages of Bredgar to the northwest and Milstead to the east. The hamlet is in close proximity to the M2, which runs to the north and the northern end of the Conservation Area is approximately only 240 metres from the motorway.

The hamlet is within the Kent Downs National Landscape, and the landscape in which the Conservation Area is located is identified as commonly being one of farmlands occupying dry valleys and downs in the Swale Local Landscape Designation Review¹¹. Geologically, Bexon is sited upon a chalk formation¹², below which is an underlying beds of Gault clay, sands and ragstone. Agricultural land in the vicinity is of high quality and includes orchards around the hamlet and there are pockets of ancient woodland throughout the parish.

¹² British Geological Society: <https://www.bgs.ac.uk/map-viewers/bgs-geology-viewer/>

Topographically, the land rises to the southwest and Hawkes Hill lane has a corresponding incline. From a relatively open character surrounded by farmland at the north end of Hawks Hill Lane, the area rapidly becomes greener and roadside hedges increasingly become taller and mature trees more numerous as the lane leads south.

There is a junction leading east with Lime Kiln Road roughly two-thirds along the length of Hawks Hill Lane, before it turns sharply to the west and becomes Bashford Barn Lane and leads away from the hamlet.

There are two public footpaths that connect to Hawks Hill Lane on its western side, both emanating from the direction of Bredgar. In addition, at the southern end of Hawks Hill Lane is a tree-lined track that heads south towards Trundle Wood.

3.4 Archaeology

Bexon has potential for the preservation of significant archaeological remains dating from the prehistoric to the post-medieval period.

Cropmark evidence to the south of the Conservation Area shows a probable Neolithic henge and a group of ring-ditches of probable Bronze Age date, indicating that the area of Bexon has been a settled landscape since the Neolithic period. The presence of cropmarks demonstrates the high potential for the survival of below-ground archaeological remains in and around the Conservation Area.

The Conservation Area comprises a medieval manorial estate. There has been very little development in the area and it can be presumed that below-ground remains survive relating to earlier phases of activity.

The geology of clay with flints on a chalk bedrock is conducive to the good survival of most archaeological remains. Environmental remains, preserved in deeper features could hold information on the wider landscape as well as evidence for food and cereal production.



Figure 8: An aerial view of the Conservation Area and its agricultural setting

3.5 Key Buildings

Bexon has developed over the centuries into a small rural hamlet, based on an earlier, small manorial estate. This historic development can be appreciated in the age and function and diversity of its buildings. High status residential dwellings, along with smaller cottages are positioned in close proximity to barns and oast houses. Within the Conservation Area, the continuity of the local agricultural economy and way of life of the residents of Bexon is attested by its dwellings, barns, cottages and oast house that range in date from the late medieval to the twentieth century.

Of the limited number of buildings within the Bexon hamlet, a large proportion are of heritage value. Five are statutorily listed, four being Grade II listed with one Grade II* listed. Grade II listed buildings are considered to be of 'special interest', while Grade II* listed buildings are defined as 'particularly important buildings of more than special interest'; only 5.8% of listed buildings are listed at this grade.¹³

In addition, three structures have been recently identified as non-designated heritage assets, during the recent public consultation process on the Swale Local Heritage List. These are buildings which are not of sufficient interest to warrant national statutory listing, but their local heritage significance is recognised and must be considered during the assessment of any planning application affecting that significance.



Figure 9: Bexon Court

Bexon Court (Figure 9) is in a prominent corner position at the northern entry point of the Conservation Area. The distinctive building is Grade II listed (List Entry No. 1186015) and was built c.1500 as a Wealden Hall House. This form of building is a characteristic medieval and regional type, most commonly found in Kent and Sussex. The Wealden Hall House is characterised by having a central open hall (although many now have floors inserted in this space). Within this space was a central, open fire pit, flanked at either end by floored, jettied end-bays which were contained under a single roof. One of the end bays would have

¹³ Historic England. <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/what-is-designation/listed-buildings/>

housed the service area, often divided into a buttery and pantry, while the other end bay provided higher-status residential accommodation. The entry door to the house led to a cross passage, with an entry to the open hall on one side of the passage and two doors to the service rooms on the other side. As the houses evolved, upper floors and chimney stacks were often added, and the development of such buildings tends to follow a recognised pattern.

Bexon Court has a close-studded timber frame with curved braces, a jettied first floor, timber mullioned windows with side lights to each floor and a substantial sixteenth-century red brick chimney stack and rebuilt gable end. It makes a highly positive contribution to the character of the Conservation Area.



Figure 10: Barn of the former Bexon Court Farm

To the south-east of Bexon Court and on the opposite side of Hawks Hill Lane is a modest agricultural brick building, with a dual pitched corrugated roof (**Figure 10**). This is a surviving element of the farmyard buildings of **Bexon Court Farm** and therefore historically associated with the listed building to its northwest. The Tithe Map provides evidence for a consistent link between the ownership and occupation of both the house and farmyard. The surviving brick building is first shown on the historic mapping from the 1890s and likely replaced an earlier building on the same spot. It provides clear and tangible evidence of the historical presence of the Bexon Court farmyard and makes a positive contribution to the historic special interest of the Conservation Area. The building has been identified as a non-designated heritage asset due to its evidential historic value.

To the south of Bexon Court is a single-storey building, with an unusual overhanging porch (**Figure 11**). The building is within the immediate setting of Bexon Court and was constructed as a swimming pool in the 1970s, probably replacing earlier agricultural buildings. It was then converted to an artisan's workshop in 2008 and is currently occupied by a chandelier maker and glass restorers. Although somewhat unusual in form, the building utilises traditional materials, with a brick plinth, black weatherboarding and a clay tile roof, which complement the character of the Conservation Area.



Figure 11: The glass workshop in the foreground and the agricultural building behind

Directly behind the glass workshop is a brick built, two storey, former agricultural building with an external timber staircase associated with Bexon Court (**Figure 11**). The building is characteristic of the area and has a historic association with Bexon Court, providing a positive contribution to the area's special interest.

Bexon Cottage is unlisted but is a non-designated heritage asset due to its historic and architectural interest and its aesthetic value (**Figure 12**). The building appears on the OS map surveyed in 1864/65 and published in 1870 (**Figure 4**). Due to the building's symmetry, it is possible to speculate that the two-storey dwelling may have originally been built as a semi-detached pair of agricultural workers' cottages. It is built in red and pink chequered brick, with gault brick detailing around the windows. There are two wall-dormers to the façade, a central chimney stack and a tile covered roof.



Figure 12: Bexon Cottage

The Malt House is Grade II listed (List Entry Number: 1343892) and dates from the seventeenth century (**Figure 13**). The building has been converted into cottages and shows evidence of its phased development and use as an agricultural maltings in its historic fabric. The building is distinctive, with a part thatched and part tiled roof, with historic brickwork in Flemish bond, including the prominent, brick-built gable at its western end.



Figure 13: The Malt House

Bexon Manor Oast House on Hawkes Hill Lane is an unlisted building has been converted to residential use and dates approximately from the 1890s (**Figure 14**). It was originally adjacent to a pond and owned by the Manor House. The building is typical of its type and was designed for drying hops as part of

the brewing process. The hops were spread out on a thin and perforated floor and dried by hot air rising from wood or charcoal fires below. The heat escaped through a cowl in the distinctive, pyramidal roof which could turn with the wind. The Manor Oast is a good example of agricultural vernacular architecture and retains its historic character, despite the modern addition of a brick-built porch.



Figure 14: Bexon Manor Oast House

Yew Tree Cottage is Grade II listed (List Entry Number: 1069396) and has origins as a sixteenth-century, timber-framed house (**Figure 15**). It is now clad in chequered brick and hanging tiles and has a flint plinth, along with a cellar and well shaft. The Tithe Map of 1839 (**Figure 3**) shows that the house, garden and hop fields were in the occupation of John Cornford a tenant farmer and owned by Edward Twopenny.



Figure 15: Yew Tree Cottage

Bexon Manor is a Grade II* listed (List Entry Number: 1069395) dwelling, dating to the fifteenth century with early-seventeenth century alterations (**Figure 16**). The building was the centre of the historic, small manorial estate of Bexon. It is a timber framed building with a jettied first floor, close studding and a tiled roof. It has wood mullioned oriel windows on the first floor, and segmental bay windows to right and centre on ground floor. The building is secluded and set behind substantial mature trees and hedges which partially conceal its façade. Despite this, it makes a highly positive contribution to the character and special interest of the Conservation Area.



Figure 16: Bexon Manor

The **barn to the southeast of Bexon Manor** on Lime Kiln Road is Grade II listed (List Entry Number: 1186005) and dates from the seventeenth century (**Figure 17**). It is timber framed with timber weatherboard cladding and a thatched roof. The single-storey building has a midstrey to the north and is highly prominent within its surroundings, with an historical association to Bexon Manor House.



Figure 17: Barn to the south-east of Bexon Manor

Bexon Manor Cottages, Numbers 1 and 2 Hawkes Hill Lane are a semi-detached pair of brick-built, two-storey cottages (**Figure 18**). The pair are late-nineteenth century in date and are likely to have been built as agricultural workers' cottages, on land that was part of Bexon Manor. The brickwork of the dwellings has been painted and there have been some modern extensions and alterations, yet the dwellings make positive contribution to the character and special interest of the Conservation Area.



Figure 18: Bexon Manor Cottages

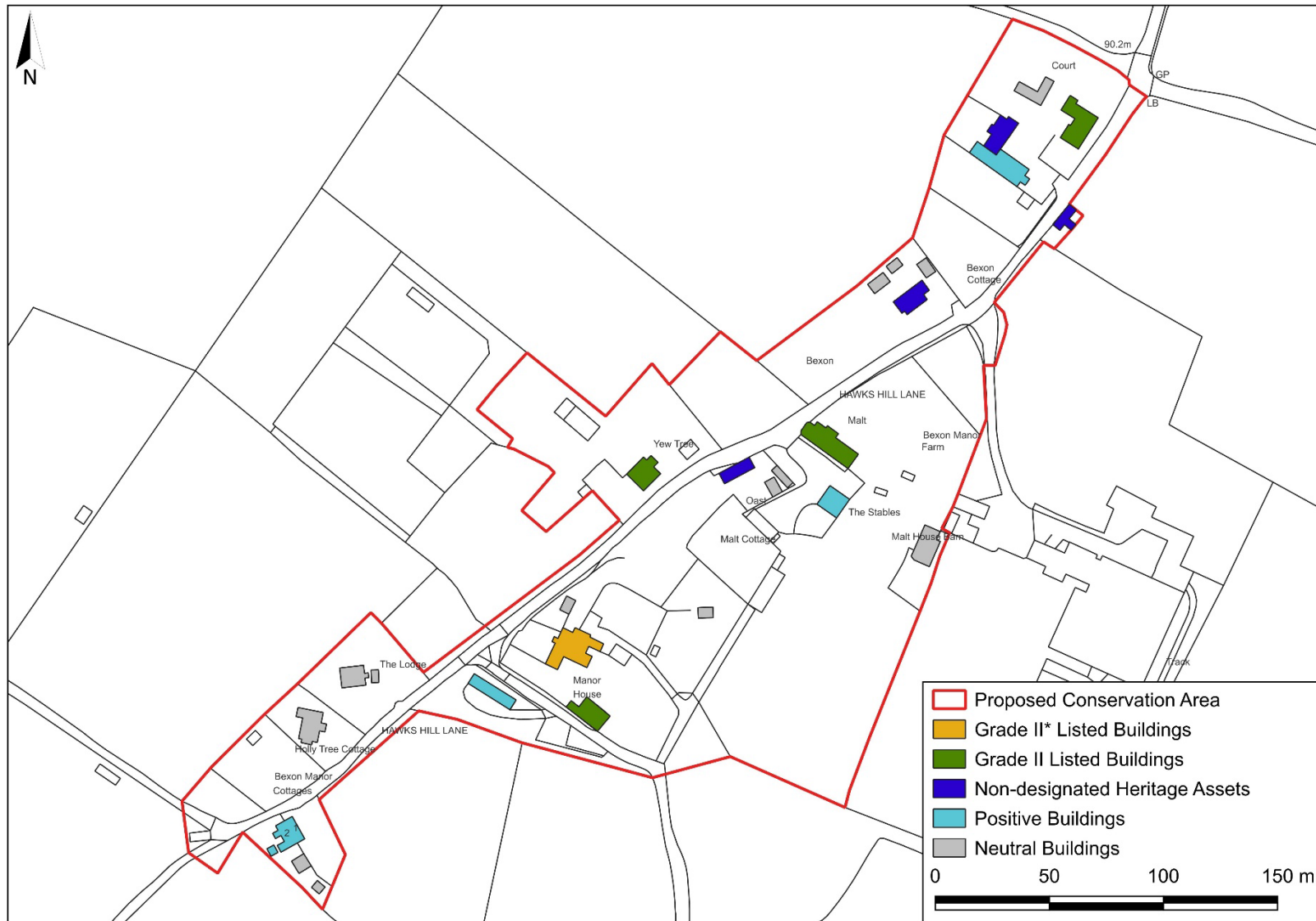
Holly Tree Cottage (Figure 19) and **The Lodge (Figure 20)** are two, detached mid-to-late twentieth century bungalows, built in red brick in stretcher bond, with tiled roofs, which are typical materials. The buildings are of limited architectural value and make a neutral contribution to the character of the Conservation Area.



Figure 19: Holly Tree Cottage



Figure 20: The Lodge



Map 2: The significance of buildings within the Conservation Area

3.6 Building Materials

Bexon Conservation Area's distinct character is partly formed through the variety of architectural styles and building materials within its boundary, many of which reflect traditional building methods. These are often also indicative of the age of buildings within the Conservation Area and highlight popular techniques and styles at the point they were constructed.

Typically, before the mid-nineteenth century building materials were locally sourced or made locally as it took considerable time and energy to transport goods. With the development of the railway network, slate and bricks could be easily transported which led to their use country wide, whereas buildings which pre-date the industrial period are typically built in materials which were easy to source close to where they are located.

In the case of Bexon, timber and plaster are commonplace for the oldest buildings, as the local area is lacking in natural stone. Flint was also an abundant building material, while other, quarried and more high-quality building stone had to be imported into the region.

3.6.1. Walls

Timber frame

Hardwood timbers, such as oak and elm were commonly used in building construction during the medieval period. Out of Bexon's five historic, listed buildings, four utilise timber framed construction. The most prominent of these, where the exposed

timber frame is clearly visible, are Bexon Court and Bexon Manor House. These are fine examples of close studding, where exposed timber studs are placed closely together for aesthetic effect (**Figure 22**). Due to the extra work involved and the increased numbers of timbers, close studding was also an expensive option, and its use demonstrated the status of the building's owner. The technique originated in East Anglia, but by the early fifteenth century it had become common in the rest of lowland England, particularly in the houses of gentry and prosperous farmers.¹⁴ Both buildings are also jettied, with an overhanging first floor; Bexon Court was constructed as a Wealden House, with a central open hall and cross-wings containing chambers at either end.

Brick

Red brick is a distinctive and traditional material in the area, due to the plentiful supply of brickearth and the local brickmaking industry which operated prosperously in the county, peaking in the nineteenth century. From the seventeenth century, large hardwood timbers became more difficult to source and brick became more extensively used as a primary construction material. At Bexon there are both early and more recent examples of brick construction.

Bricks were used in the chimney of Bexon Court, added to the building in the sixteenth century. The Malt House is predominantly built in red brick in an English bond and dates to the seventeenth century (**Figure 26**). These earlier examples use a more irregular clamp-fired red brick and early bricks are generally narrower, with larger bedding joints. The nineteenth

¹⁴ Harris, R., 2006. *Discovering Timber Framed Buildings*. Shire Books. Bucks.

century brick buildings of Bexon include Bexon Cottage and Bexon Manor Oast House, both of which are built in Flemish bond, with the latter using a yellow stock brick (**Figure 23**). Checkerboard brickwork is also evident on Yew Tree Cottage and Bexon Cottage.

Hanging tiles

The use of hanging tiles is limited in Bexon but it can be found on the southwestern façade of Yew Tree Cottage (**Figure 24**).

Vertical tiling, or 'tile hanging', is the technique of applying roof tiles to vertical walls as a cladding. With origins in the late seventeenth century, the technique became popular in the Arts and Crafts movement and has continued to be used since then, particularly in the inter-War period. Often hanging tiles were limited to use on the upper storey of a building only and combined with another house cladding material, such as render or brick, on the lower storey. The clay tiles are hung from wooden battens, sometimes creating a pattern on gables, bays and roofs of porches, with varying tile shapes and colours. The wooden battens were plugged into the mortar beds or fixed by wooden pegs. Timber battens are still used today, although ventilation is provided under the tiles along with an underlay layer and drainage of any water that might get into the membrane beneath.

Timber weatherboarding

Black featheredged timber weatherboarding is traditionally reserved for use on timber-framed agricultural buildings such as barns and byres, where it is often used in combination with a brick plinth (**Figure 27**). The material is therefore distinctive as a lower status, utilitarian finish. When used on domestic dwellings, weatherboarding was traditionally painted white. The examples

of weatherboarding within Bexon are all to be found on buildings with a distinct agricultural character. This includes the Grade II listed Bexon Manor Barn and it is also used on the ancillary buildings at Bexon Court and at the Malt House.

3.6.2. Roofs

Clay roof tiles

Traditional, handmade Kent peg tiles are a common roofing material with a long history of use in the region. Originally peg tiles were often made with locally dug clay and many country estates had their own brickworks and kilns, producing a range of necessary wares, including bricks and tiles. A lime kiln was sited at Lime Kiln Shaw on Lime Kiln Road on land that was part of the Bexon Manor Estate to the southeast of Bexon, however, historic mapping suggests it had ceased in use by the time of the 1839 Tithe Map. Red clay, plain peg tiles with a double camber are the most common roofing material in the Bexon Conservation Area and are used on many of its most prominent and significant buildings (**Figure 28**).

Slate

The use of natural slate as a roofing material became more widespread during the nineteenth century, particularly once the railway came to Sittingbourne in 1848 and the material became more available in the region. In Bexon slate is not a prominent material for dwellings but it is used on ancillary buildings and often contributes to the utilitarian character of black weatherboarded buildings, such as the single-storey buildings at the Malt House.

Thatch

Historically, thatch was widely used on both agricultural buildings and domestic cottages. The surviving examples of thatch in the Bexon Conservation Area contribute to local distinctiveness and the sense of place, providing evidence of historic regional traditions and skills (**Figure 25**). In Bexon, there are two prominent and historically significant buildings with thatched roofs. These are the southern part of the Malt House and Bexon Manor Barn. The Malt House thatching has a distinctive ornamental cut block ridge, while the barn has a simpler and shallower flush ridge.

3.6.3. Doors and Windows

Within the Conservation Area there are many examples of historic and traditionally styled timber doors and windows which make a positive contribution to the character and special interest of the area (**Figure 29**). Many are in visually prominent positions and these set a positive standard that helps define the character of Bexon Conservation Area. The continued use of traditional windows, joinery skills and natural timber also preserves the Conservation Area's historic and architectural character and special interest (**Figure 21**). Fortunately, the examples of uPVC windows in the Conservation Area, which cannot replicate the quality or detailing of traditional timber windows, are limited and they do not represent a common or typical feature.



Figure 21: Modern timber window of sympathetic character at the Oast House



Figure 22: Close studding and a jettied first floor at Bexon Court



Figure 23: Nineteenth-century stock bricks at Bexon Manor Oast House



Figure 24: Hanging tiles on Yew Tree Cottage



Figure 25: An example of a thatched roof



Figure 26: Early brickwork at Malt House



Figure 27: Weatherboarding on Bexon Manor Barn



Figure 28: Clay roof tiles



Figure 29: Historic window at Bexon Court

3.7 Boundary Treatments

There are a variety of characteristic boundary treatments within the Conservation Area (**Figure 30**). At its northern entry point, adjacent to Bexon Court, is a brick-built wall constructed using red bricks in Flemish bond with a plinth, coping bricks and a variation in height.

Boundary hedges along Hawks Hill Lane are also prevalent, while roadside grass verges are also present, occasionally with timber verge protection posts.

There is a variety in the forms of fencing used in the Conservation Area, including metal estate fencing, timber post and rail and picket fencing. These examples are appropriate for the Conservation Area as they contribute to its rural character. Close board fencing is also evident, but as it is more urban in character, it is not sympathetic to the Conservation Area and incongruous where present.



Figure 30: Examples of boundary treatments within the Conservation Area

3.8 Trees, Hedgerows and Open Spaces

Trees and hedges in both private and public areas are an extremely important element of the streetscape in Bexon and they make a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area, framing views of its buildings and setting and reinforcing the settlement's distinctive rural character (**Figure 31**). The trees and hedgerows also contribute to the area's tranquil environment.

The open spaces within the Conservation Area contribute to its character and appearance. Most, if not all of these, are in private ownership. Yet such spaces, including provable gardens are positive elements which enhance the character and appearance of the area and often allow important views to be appreciated.

The north-eastern end of the Conservation Area has a more open character. The privately owned gardens and lawned spaces on the western side of Hawks Hill Lane, such as those between Bexon Court and Bexon Cottage, are positive elements. In addition, on the eastern side of Hawks Hill Lane, the triangular grassed area at the entrance to Bexon Manor Stores and the adjacent garden of the Malt House provide a sense of openness with a verdant character at the centre of the Conservation Area.



Figure 31: Examples of green and open spaces within the Conservation Area

3.9 Public Realm and Highway

Swale Borough Council has published guidelines for the management and improving the design of Kent's rural lanes, within the Kent Downs National Landscape¹⁵. Guidelines are provided for:

- Planning for, and giving greater priority to, pedestrians and cyclists
- De-cluttering and co-ordinated design
- Managing traffic
- Road surfaces, paving and edge treatments
- Street furniture
- Signing
- Landscape and ecological features
- Historic and modern features

The lanes and paths that run through the Conservation Area have a typical rural and rustic character with limited signage, no lighting or road markings, and boundary hedgerows and trees. Hawks Hill Lane is the primary route through the Conservation Area and for much of its length it is narrow and at times winding, sometimes

with grass verges and hedges. The winding, green route of Hawks Hill Lane and Lime Kiln Road is appealing and a distinctive characteristic, which enhances the bucolic character of the Conservation Area.

With the exception of three bollards at the junction with Lime Kiln Road, there is little in the way of street furniture and traffic signage. Timber verge posts are present, but these are low and inobtrusive. The scarcity of urbanising elements in the street scene is highly beneficial to the area's rural character. The lack of such detracting items is partly due to the quietness and limited use of Hawks Hill Lane by traffic in the area.

There is a post mounted, red letter box at the north end of Hawks Hill Road from the 1970s, which is a positive element in the street scene. Two public footpaths connect with Hawks Hill Lane, both emanating from the north-west and the direction of Bredgar. Where they intersect with Hawks Hill Lane, they are marked by way marker posts or a kissing gate.

The materials used in the surfaces of the public realm are consistent, being made up of asphalt, and the appearance is typical of a rural lane. Private drives are sometimes gravelled or tarmac is also used. A notable and beneficial surface treatment can be found outside the entry gate to Bexon Manor House and is repeated adjacent to Bexon Manor Barn, where paving bricks from the road lead to the pedestrian gates.

¹⁵ Kent Downs AONB Unit. 2009. *The Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Rural Streets And Lanes: A Design Handbook*. <https://kentdowns.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Rural-Streets-and-Lanes-a-design-handbook.pdf>



Figure 32: Examples of the public realm within the Conservation Area

3.10 Significant Views

A selection of key views both within and outside the Conservation Area are illustrated on **Map 3**. The views illustrated here are not exhaustive and there will be other views not described which contribute to how the significance of the Conservation Area is understood and appreciated. All planning applications for development in the Conservation Area, and within its setting, should consider if there are any contributing views which will be affected and seek to mitigate against any harmful impacts.

Where open spaces exist within the Conservation Area, they are important in providing glimpsed views of historic buildings or views out to the Conservation Area's setting. Often these views are framed by important trees. Viewpoints One to Four are from within the Conservation Area boundary. Viewpoints Five to Seven are views from outside the boundary, but within the Conservation Area's setting.

Viewpoint One

The northern end of the Conservation Area has a more open character which allows significant views, such as those of Bexon Court within its setting. Along with views of this important building, there are glimpses out into the setting, sometimes framed by mature trees (**Figure 33**).

Viewpoint Two

The small open meadow to the northeast of Yew Tree Cottage allows views, framed by trees out to the Conservation Area's agrarian setting.



Figure 33: Viewpoint One, looking west



Figure 34: Viewpoint One, looking north

Viewpoint Three

The view northeast from the junction of Hawks Hill Lane and Lime Kiln Road allows the verdant nature of the Conservation Area to be appreciated. From this viewpoint, the Grade II* listed Bexon Manor can also be appreciated within its rural setting (**Figure 35**).

Viewpoint Four

Opposite the Grade II listed Bexon Manor Barn on Lime Kiln Road, a gap in the foliage allows views southwards, out into the setting of the listed building. From here, the barn and the pastoral character of the Conservation Area can be appreciated (**Figure 36**).

Viewpoint Five

The views from the setting to the north of the Conservation Area provide important vantage points of the historic settlement. One of these is from the field to the northeast, where the northern end

if the Conservation Area, defined by the distinctive presence of Bexon Court is visible in views looking southwest (**Figure 37**).



Figure 35: Viewpoint Three looking northeast



Figure 36: Viewpoint Four looking southwest



Figure 37: Viewpoint Five looking west



Figure 38: Viewpoint Six looking south

Viewpoint Six

The kinetic views on the approach to the Conservation Area from the two public footpaths to the west are significant. Public rights of way are often long established with historic origins as pathways through the landscape and have been used by the local community in the past. In this instance, the two public footpaths are certainly evident on the earliest OS mapping surveyed in 1864. From the northernmost footpath, wide views of the Conservation Area within its setting can be appreciated. As Bexon is neared, specific buildings can be seen, through trees and foliage from varying positions along the footpath (**Figures 38 and 39**).



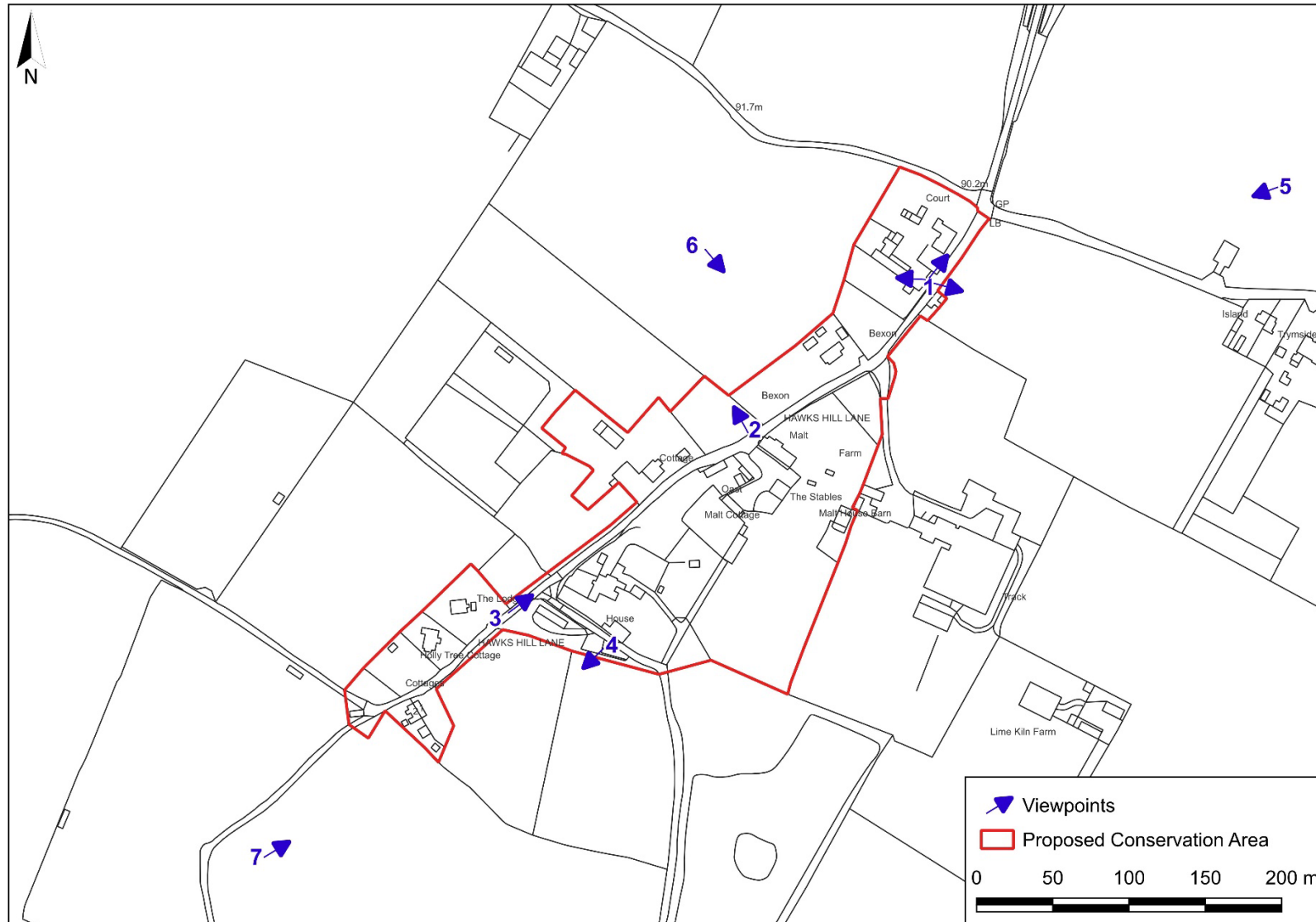
Figure 39: Viewpoint Six looking southeast

Viewpoint Seven

The rural setting to the south of the Conservation Area can be accessed via a historic trackway at the junction of Bashford Barn Lane and Hawkes Hill Lane. The Conservation Area, as defined by Bexon Manor Cottages and the mature trees within their grounds, can be appreciated in views looking northeast, across the agricultural fields (**Figure 40**).



Figure 40: Viewpoint Seven looking northeast



Map 3: Significant views within and outside the Conservation Area

3.11 Setting

The setting of the Conservation Area has a notably agricultural character. Within the immediate setting are orchards, located beyond the Conservation Area boundary to the west and east. Historic mapping shows that the extent of Bexon's orchards was greater in the past, with the 1946/50 OS map (**Figure 5**) showing continuous orchards between Bexon and Bredgar. This expansion in fruit production may have been in response to the national shortages of food during the Second World War.

The surviving orchards are a positive element within the setting of the Conservation Area and attest to the longstanding and historic production of fruit in the locality and its continued economic importance.

Beyond the immediate orchards at the boundaries of the Conservation Area, the agricultural character of its setting continues with open cultivated fields. While historically fruit production made a highly important contribution to the local economy, other arable crops were extensively grown in the environs of Bexon, Bredgar and Milstead. This remains the case today, with the Bexon Conservation Area being surrounded by cultivated fields of cereal crops. This aspect of the Conservation Area's setting attests to the historic reliance of the settlement at Bexon on agriculture. The existing agricultural fields surrounding the Conservation Area and their bucolic character greatly enhance the ability to experience the Bexon's special interest as a historic rural hamlet.



Figure 41: The setting to the east, opposite the Grade II listed Bexon Court



Figure 42: Open fields in the Conservation Area's setting to the north-east



Figure 43: Sheep within the rural setting to the south of the Conservation Area



Figure 44: The wider setting to the south of Bexon Conservation Area

The M2 Motorway is within the Conservation Area's wider setting to the north. While the motorway is less than 300 metres from the northern end of the Bexon Conservation Area boundary, there is a fair degree of separation between the road and the Conservation Area and little to no visual impact. However, the traffic on the motorway is audible from the Conservation Area and as a result, the sense of tranquillity has been diminished.

Whilst there is no visual link between Bexon and nearby settlements such as Bredgar, the significance of the historical connection between the settlement and its surrounding rural landscape is demonstrated by the network of lanes and footpaths which pre-date, the arrival of motor transport. The network of footpaths reflects strong historic connections and would have provided well used routes across the landscape, used by the local community.



Figure 45: Bashford Barn Lane, leading west from the southern end of the Conservation Area



Figure 46: The setting looking north-west from the Conservation Area boundary, with a public footpath heading towards Bredgar



Figure 47: Lime Kiln Road heading south-east from the Conservation Area



Figure 48: The footpath heading south from the Conservation Area, lined with coppiced trees

At the southern end of the Conservation Area is an unnamed pathway that heads south towards Trundle Wood. This path is clearly marked on historic mapping and is likely to have historic origins. From the Conservation Area the pathway is clearly defined bordered by coppiced trees but becomes more ephemeral to the south.

4. Opportunities for Enhancement

The identification of negative characteristics allows the focus of the Conservation Area's management on its future positive enhancement.

Key Negative Characteristics:

- The sporadic use of mass-produced, modern building materials which dilute local character and distinctiveness.
- The accumulation of litter around the green area, at the entrance to Bexon Manor Stores off Hawks Hill Lane.
- The presence and close proximity of the M2 motorway within the setting of the Conservation Area negatively impacts the area's rural character and tranquillity.

The introduction of an inappropriate colour palette and low-quality modern materials (concrete roof tiles, or uPVC windows, for example) is a concern within the Conservation Area. The architectural interest of the area is vulnerable to a diminishment of quality through the replacement of traditional windows, doors and roof cladding with poor quality modern materials. By using a palette or materials which are out of keeping with the area, buildings can be visually dominant within a streetscape and therefore have an impact the character of the area and group value of a street scene.



Figure 49: Rubbish close to the entrance of Bexon Manor Stores

5. Management Plan

Conservation area designation provides recognition of the architectural or historic special interest of an area, in order that appropriate steps can be taken ensure its preservation or enhancement. Rather than preventing change, the designation will effectively manage change, so that the needs of the local community can be met, whilst ensuring that the positive elements that contribute to the area's special interest are protected and that any changes are not harmful or will not diminish that special interest.

The following management plan is aimed at homeowners, developers, local groups and Local Authority planning officers and is intended to encourage active involvement in the future management of Bexon Conservation Area. It provides an opportunity for the Borough Council, the Parish Council, local amenity groups, Kent Highways, Kent County Council, individual householders and local businesses to take part in positively managing the area.

There is a wealth of published guidance on positively managing change in conservation areas. Swale Borough Council has adopted supplementary planning documents (SPDs) which are listed Appendix 6.2 . Historic England has also published a range of guidance and advice notes which are listed in the bibliography at Appendix 6.4 .

5.1 Legislation and Policy

When a conservation area is designated, there is legislation, planning policy and regulations which govern which types of

development require planning permission and the way that the Local Planning Authority undertakes plan making and decision taking.

The legislation and policy that directly affect designated conservation areas and provide the formal framework for managing change are outlined in Appendix 6.2 . Most significantly, the Local Planning Authority is required to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of the Conservation Area in the exercise of all its planning functions.

The Swale Borough Local Plan aims to ensure that the significance of Bexon Conservation Area is sustained and enhanced through:

- Preserving or enhancing the area's special character or appearance.
- Preserving or enhancing the setting of the conservation area and of other designated heritage assets.
- Safeguarding and better revealing the significance of any archaeology.
- Protection and enhancement of landmarks and significant views or vistas within and without the conservation area.
- Safeguarding non-designated heritage assets which make a positive contribution to the significance of the area.
- Safeguarding significant spaces.
- Safeguarding significant trees.

- Promoting high quality design in new development which responds positively to context and to the distinct character of the conservation area.
- Continued sensitive management of the public realm.
- Requiring new development to respond positively to the Conservation Area Character Appraisal

5.2 Development Management Tools

5.2.1. Pre-Application Advice

Early engagement with the Local Planning Authority is beneficial to potential applicants. Swale Borough Council's Planning Team provides a pre-application advice service which can be useful for formulating designs and proposals affecting heritage assets. Early advice will allow Swale Borough Council to guide development in a positive manner through early engagement. More information on pre-application advice can be accessed via the council [website](#).

5.2.2. Heritage Statements

The special architectural and historic interest of the Bexon Conservation Area has been set out in Sections 2 and 3. In order to manage change in the Conservation Area whilst preserving its special interest, an understanding of this significance and how it can be affected by a proposal is needed by the Local Planning Authority, owners, developers and applicants. Specific buildings, proposals or development sites may require detailed analysis in order to understand the impact changes may have. It may be

necessary for applicants to submit Heritage Statements, Heritage Impact Assessments or Archaeological Impact Assessments. These should describe the history and special interest of a site and demonstrate how a scheme will either preserve or enhance the Conservation Area's significance. As required by the NPPF (Para. 207), Heritage Statements and Heritage Impact Assessments require appropriate expertise and specialist heritage consultants should be appointed by applicants if required.

All applications within the Conservation Area and its immediate setting require an appropriately detailed Heritage Statement, which are also necessary for listed building consent applications. The level of detail should be proportionate to the significance of the asset and sufficient to understand the potential impact of the proposal on the heritage asset's significance. A Heritage Statement should be undertaken using the guidelines on the preparation of heritage statements from Historic England.¹⁶

The visual impact of any development on key views of heritage assets or important views within the Conservation Area should be considered during the decision-making process. This includes development outside the Conservation Area within its setting. Where appropriate, views should be considered within Design and Access Statements or Heritage Statements which should be carried out in accordance with Historic England's methodology and guidance on assessing setting.¹⁷

¹⁶ Historic England, 2019. *HEAN 12: Statements of Heritage Significance*

¹⁷ Historic England, 2019. *GPA 3: The Setting of Heritage Assets*

5.2.3. Enforcement

Where the necessary permission has not been sought for alterations, such as the loss of historic doors or windows, and building alterations which are not contained within the GPDO, the Local Planning Authority's powers of enforcement should be considered. This assists in reinstating any lost character or architectural features, the loss of which have had a negative effect on the Conservation Area, as well as avoiding a precedent being set for similar, uncharacteristic works.

5.2.4. Unauthorised Works to Listed Buildings

Carrying out unauthorised works to a listed building is a criminal offence and individuals can be prosecuted. A Local Planning Authority can insist that all unconsented work is reversed. Swale Borough Council should therefore be consulted before any work is carried out to a listed building. Both the contractor who carried out unauthorised works and anyone who caused or instructed the work to be carried out are considered liable for the offence. If a homeowner or developer is relying on an architect or builder to carry out works to a listed building, it is essential to be sure that all consents are in place. Approved plans should not be adapted or changed as the project develops without further consent. There is no time limit on enforcement action and the new owner could be required to fund the reversal of any unauthorised alteration.

Unauthorised works to a listed building could be identified as a liability by the checks undertaken by a purchaser's solicitor during the vending process. As a result, purchase of a listed building that has had unauthorised changes becomes a highly unattractive prospect.

5.2.5. Householder Alterations

Where householder alterations are proposed which require planning permission, the Council will ensure that any proposals enhance or preserve the special character and appearance of the conservation area.

Opportunities to reinstate missing architectural features, such as traditional timber windows and doors, or original roof coverings, along with traditional boundary treatments will be encouraged by the Council and where appropriate, such beneficial changes may be required in response to planning applications for extensions or alterations.

The cumulative impact of poorly considered alterations to traditional properties, will have a harmful effect on their significance and their positive contribution to the character and appearance of a conservation area. Alterations such as the replacement of timber windows with uPVC units, the replacement of clay tile with concrete tile, the introduction of prominent rooflights, or the use of cement fibre board cladding are harmful and will erode the character of Bexon Conservation Area over time and should be firmly resisted.

Windows

The use of uPVC windows in a conservation area is a particularly problematic issue. While manufacturers have often recently attempted to copy the appearance of timber windows, they have been unable to replicate the sections, detailing and glazing bars used in most timber windows. False applied 'glazing bars' are thin strips of plastic inserted within the glass sandwich of a double glazed unit or applied to the surface of the glass and these lack authenticity and change the character of the window. An

application for the replacement of any timber window with a uPVC unit will diminish the architectural special interest of the Conservation Area and would not be considered favourably by the Local Planning Authority. Any replacement of a timber window would need to also be timber to preserve the Conservation Area's special interest. However, the removal of a uPVC unit and its replacement with a timber window would be a positive change in the Conservation Area, enhancing its architectural special interest.

5.3 Swale Local Heritage List

Arising from Swale's adopted Heritage Strategy 2020-2032, the Borough Council is compiling a Local Heritage List in order to identify heritage assets which are not statutorily designated as Grade I, II* or Grade II listed buildings.

The Swale local Heritage List is designed to achieve the following aims:

- Raise awareness of an area's local heritage assets and their importance to local distinctiveness.
- Inform developers, owners, council officers and members about buildings within the local authority boundary that are desirable to retain and protect.
- Provide guidance and specialist advice to owners to help protect the character and setting of those buildings, structures, sites and landscapes.
- Help the council in its decision making when discussing proposals and determining planning applications.

- Accurately record the nature of and the assets within the local historic environment.

The impact of any development on a building or site included within the Local Heritage List will be a material consideration when the council considers an application for planning permission. Buildings in the Bexon Conservation Area which are to be included on the Swale Local Heritage List are listed below and indicated on **Map 2**.

- The barn 30 yards south of Bexon Court
- Bexon Cottage
- Bexon Manor Cottages

5.4 Public Realm

The public realm makes a significant positive contribution to the special character of Bexon Conservation Area. The highway, lanes, public footpaths and open areas all fall within the public realm. In sensitive rural conservation areas, it is particularly necessary to resist unsympathetic changes to the highway which are inappropriate for the area's character.

Before developing a strategy for future works in the public realm, it is important to acknowledge that the Bexon Conservation Area's lanes and footpaths contribute to its distinctive rustic character. The introduction of unsympathetic features such as concrete kerbs, street lighting, off-the-shelf road signs and traffic calming measures would have a detrimental impact on that distinctive character.

Changes to road surface treatments and the surrounding streetscape should be kept simple and whenever possible use traditional and natural materials. The historic form of lanes can be retained by maintaining edge lines, verges and boundaries. Good quality and simple schemes should be aimed for, when alterations to the public realm are required.

The identification and removal of superfluous or redundant street furniture items is beneficial, as is keeping new street furniture to a minimum. New equipment and signage should be simple, elegant and appropriate to context, while consultation with local groups would also be beneficial. Any new street signage should be restricted to those which convey essential information and the size and number of signs should be reduced to a minimum.

The narrow and winding Hawks Hill Lane is the primary route through the Conservation Area. With its grass verges and hedges it has a clearly rural character, which should be preserved in any changes to the public realm. Future highway maintenance, improvements and alterations should be carried out in accordance with the guidance document *Streets for All* from Historic England¹⁸ and Kent County Council's guidance, *Highway Works and Heritage Assets: the Kent Protocol for Highway Works in Relation to Designated Heritage Assets*.¹⁹



Figure 50: Examples of the public realm in the Conservation Area

¹⁸ Historic England 2018. *Streets for All Advice for Highway and Public Realm Works in Historic Places*.

¹⁹ Kent County Council 2011. *Highway Works and Heritage Assets: the Kent Protocol for Highway Works in Relation to Designated Heritage Assets*, KCC and KCOG.

The accesses to the public footpaths from Hawks Hill Lane will require upkeep to keep them clear of foliage and to ensure they remain visible. Of the two public footpaths the northernmost has recently been slightly re-routed in order to avoid crossing a private garden and its access to Hawks Hill Lane is the more noticeable as a result.

At the junction of Hawks Hill Lane and Lime Kiln Road is a small triangular patch of grass, which has three, black and white plastic bollards. While the grassed area is consistent with the grass verges of Hawks Hill Lane, the bollards are not positive contributing elements to the area's character. A replacement of these with a simpler more traditional and rustic form of post or bollard would be beneficial.

Opportunities for Enhancement

- Any new road signage should be well designed and appropriately located and kept to a minimum.
- An audit of overhead supply lines and poles with the statutory undertakers to establish whether there is scope to remove any overhead cables or poles or to relocate services underground.
- The replacement of plastic bollards at the junction of Hawks Hill Lane and Lime Kiln Road with a more appropriate designs and materials and the enhancement of the triangular grassed area.



Figure 51: A Yew tree within the Conservation Area

5.5 Trees and Planting

Trees and hedgerows are key positive contributors to the character of Bexon Conservation Area and they also contribute significantly to local wildlife habitat and biodiversity. The positive and active management of trees and hedgerows is to be encouraged. Proposals that include new planting should ensure that a suitable and appropriate native species is selected. All trees within the conservation area are protected. And written notice of six weeks must be given to Swale Borough Council prior to any works undertaken to trees in the Conservation Area.

Opportunities for Enhancement

- An audit and assessment of trees and hedgerows in the Bexon Conservation Area should be considered to establish if there is any scope for improved or specific management.
- Any important trees identified in an audit should be considered for additional protection through Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs).
- Positive management may occasionally involve the removal or reduction of trees and foliage, to preserve, restore or open up significant views or vistas.

²⁰ NPPF 2024, Paragraph 212

5.6 New Development Opportunities

Potential for new development within Bexon Conservation Area is very limited. While there are open areas adjacent to Hawks Hill Lane, including agricultural fields and private gardens, these contribute positively to the character of the Conservation Area. Infill development in private gardens and spaces between buildings frequently results in a cramped plot and an uncharacteristic sense of density, which would contrast with the distinctive looser grain of Bexon's development.

Proposals for new development will be considered against local and national planning policies, which attach great weight to the conservation of designated heritage assets²⁰. The local planning authority will look for opportunities for any new development within Conservation Areas and within the setting of heritage assets, to enhance or better reveal their significance. Proposals that preserve those elements of the setting that make a positive contribution to the heritage assets, or which better reveal their significance should be treated favourably²¹. Proposals that do not preserve or enhance the character of the Conservation Area or its setting are unlikely to be considered favourably.

Therefore, were any suitable location found and a new development proposed, the scheme would need to be of high quality in terms of design, detailing, landscaping and materials. The appearance of any new building would need to reference the character of the Conservation Area and its buildings. Yet, it should also not disrupt or confuse the legibility of the area's development and use as a historic agricultural settlement. Only

²¹ NPPF 2024, Paragraph 219

traditional, natural materials such as timber cladding, red or yellow brick, clay or slate tiles and timber doors and windows would be appropriate. Faux modern materials such as cement board cladding, uPVC and imitation slate lack authenticity and their use would not be appropriate.

5.7 Heritage at Risk

There are currently no designated heritage assets in Bexon on Historic England's Heritage at Risk Register or on Swale Borough Council's Heritage at Risk Register. However, unused buildings which are not listed, but are of heritage interest can quickly fall into a poor condition and their gradual decline in condition will continue if no reuse can be found.

In such circumstances the Council have the option to notify respective owners and, where appropriate work with them and other stakeholders to investigate opportunities for removing the risk and securing the future of such assets.



Figure 52: The unused former barn thirty yards to the south of Bexon Court

6. Appendices

6.1 Listed Buildings

A listed building has been identified by the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) as a structure of particular architectural or historic interest deserving of special protection. The statutory list of England's historic buildings is altered and amended periodically as buildings are added or removed from the list. The list can be accessed via the Historic England [website](#).

The listing description provided by historic England is intended to enable an identification of the building, whilst occasionally the description may also identify elements or features of particular interest. The description does not define what is covered by the listing and if a feature or curtilage listed structure is not mentioned, it does not mean that it is not covered by the listing.

The listing will cover the building in its entirety (unless specifically stated in the listing description) and any object or structure fixed to the building. In addition, The law provides that buildings and other structures that pre-date July 1948 and are within the curtilage of a listed building are to be treated as part of the listed building.²²

There are five listed buildings within the Bexon Conservation Area, two of which are Grade II* listed. The list descriptions on

the following pages are taken from the statutory list and were current in March 2025.

²² Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, Paragraph 1(5)
<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1990/9/section/1>

Bexon Court (Grade II*)

List Entry Number: 1186015



Figure 53: Bexon Court

Wealden hall house. Circa 1500. Timber framed and exposed close- studding and plaster infill with plain tiled roof. Four framed bays. Two storeys with continuous jetty on dragon posts, the central 2 bays later flooring-in of originally recessed open hall. Hipped roof with large C16 red brick stack free-standing at left. Irregular fenestration of 4 wood mullioned windows with side lights to each floor with half-glazed plank and stud door to centre right. (See B.O.E. Kent II. 1983, 158).

The Malthouse (Grade II)

List Entry Number: 1343892



Figure 54: The Malthouse

Malthouse, now cottages. C17. Red brick in English bond with plain tiled and thatched roofs. The house of 2 storeys and attic with plat band, gabled roof, hipped dormer to right and stacks to centre and rear. Irregular fenestration of 1 wood casement on first floor, 4 on ground floor with segmental heads and board door to right. Malthouse: 2 storeys and plat band, hipped roof. Three wood casement windows, cast door to right, and 2 large sloping buttresses.

Yew Tree Cottage (Grade II)

List Entry Number: 1069396



Figure 55: Yew Tree Cottage

House. C16 clad early C19. Timber framed on flint plinth and clad with chequered brick and tile hung to left return front. Two storeys and hipped roof with gablets, stacks to left and right. Two wood casements to each floor. C20 panelled door in hipped porch on left return front. Interior: evidence of jettying; cambered tie-beams; remains mullioned and shuttered window openings; flint cellar with vaulted well cover and partially in-filled well shaft.

Barn 15 Yards South East of Bexton Manor (Grade II)

List Entry Number: 1186005



Figure 56: Barn 15 yards south-east of Bexton Manor

Barn, now garage. C17. Timber framed and clad with weather board with thatched roof. flipped roof with hipped mid-stray to north. Interior: 3 bays with aisles and passing shores to arcade posts. Roof obscured by hard-board panelling.

Bexon Manor (Grade II*)

List Entry Number: 1069395

Manor house. C15 and altered 1617. Timber framed, close-studded with middle rail, exposed with colour washed plaster infill. Plain tiled roof. Two storeys and attic on plinth with continuous jetty, the C15 left end bay with a dragon post. Hipped roof with gablet left and large barge-boarded gable off-centre dated: WE1617G with 3 light mullioned window. Stack to centre right. Irregular fenestration of wood mullioned oriel windows on first floor to right and in off-centre gable, and segmental bay windows to right and centre on ground floor. Plank and stud door to left in gabled and ornamented porch with balustraded open lights. The rear range much extended with re-used framing. c. 1954. Interior: panelling, overmantels, dated W.E.G. 1617 and EC. 1619. (See B.O.E. Kent II, 1983, 158; illus: English Vernacular Houses, E. Mercer).



Figure 57: Bexon Manor

6.2 Legislation, National and Local Policy

6.2.1. Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990

Section 66: General duty as respects listed buildings in exercise of planning functions

(1) In considering whether to grant planning permission or permission in principle for development which affects a listed building or its setting, the local planning authority or, as the case may be, the Secretary of State shall have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses.

Section 69: Designation of conservation areas

(1) Every local planning authority— (a) shall from time to time determine which parts of their area are areas of special architectural or historic interest the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance, and (b) shall designate those areas as conservation areas.

(2) It shall be the duty of a local planning authority from time to time to review the past exercise of functions under this section and to determine whether any parts or any further parts of their area should be designated as conservation areas; and, if they so determine, they shall designate those parts accordingly.

(3) The Secretary of State may from time to time determine that any part of a local planning authority's area which is not for the time being designated as a conservation area is an area of special architectural or historic interest the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance; and,

if he so determines, he may designate that part as a conservation area.

(4) The designation of any area as a conservation area shall be a local land charge.

Section 71: Formulation and publication of proposals for preservation and enhancement of conservation areas

(1) It shall be the duty of a local planning authority from time to time to formulate and publish proposals for the preservation and enhancement of any parts of their area which are conservation areas.

(2) Proposals under this section shall be submitted for consideration to a public meeting in the area to which they relate.

(3) The local planning authority shall have regard to any views concerning the proposals expressed by persons attending the meeting.

Section 72: General duty as respects conservation areas in exercise of planning functions

(1) In the exercise, with respect to any buildings or other land in a conservation area, of any functions under or by virtue of] any of the provisions mentioned in subsection.

(2), special attention shall be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of that area.

6.2.2. National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

The NPPF sets out the government's planning policies and how they should be applied. It provides the national framework for

conserving and enhancing the historic environment, including conservation areas. It states that heritage assets, including conservation areas are an irreplaceable resource, and should be conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance, so that they can be enjoyed for their contribution to the quality of life of existing and future generations. The following paragraphs of the NPPF are relevant for homeowners and developers considering submitting a planning application and for the local authority in the management of change within the Bexon Conservation Area:

Paragraph 204 of the NPPF states that when considering the designation of conservation areas, local planning authorities should ensure that an area justifies such status because of its special architectural or historic interest, and that the concept of conservation is not devalued through the designation of areas that lack special interest.

Paragraph 219 states that local planning authorities should look for opportunities for new development within conservation areas and within the setting of heritage assets, to enhance or better reveal their significance. Proposals that preserve those elements of the setting that make a positive contribution to the asset (or which better reveal its significance) should be treated favourably.

Paragraph 220 states that not all elements of a conservation area will necessarily contribute to its significance. Loss of a building (or other element) which makes a positive contribution to the significance of the conservation area should be treated either as substantial harm or less than substantial harm, as appropriate, taking into account the relative significance of the element affected and its contribution to the significance of the conservation area or World Heritage Site as a whole.

Paragraph 215 states that where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal including, where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use.

In Paragraph 216 the NPPF states that the effect of an application on the significance of a non-designated heritage asset should be taken into account in determining the application. In weighing applications that directly or indirectly affect non-designated heritage assets, a balanced judgement will be required having regard to the scale of any harm or loss and the significance of the heritage asset.

Paragraph 212 states that when considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation (and the more important the asset, the greater the weight should be). This is irrespective of whether any potential harm amounts to substantial harm, total loss or less than substantial harm to its significance.

Paragraph 213 states that any harm to, or loss of, the significance of a designated heritage asset (from its alteration or destruction, or from development within its setting), should require clear and convincing justification

6.2.3. National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG)

The NPPG sets out government's guidance on how the act and national planning policy should be applied. A summary of some of the relevant guidance is given below:

Paragraph 019: How can the possibility of harm to conservation areas be assessed?

An unlisted building that makes a positive contribution to a conservation area is individually of lesser importance than a listed building. If the building is important or integral to the character or appearance of the conservation area then its proposed demolition is more likely to amount to substantial harm to the conservation area. Loss of a building within a conservation area may alternatively amount to less than substantial harm. However, the justification for a building's proposed demolition will still need to be proportionate to its relative significance and its contribution to the significance of the conservation area as a whole. The same principles apply in respect of other elements which make a positive contribution to the significance of the conservation area, such as open spaces.

Paragraph 040: How are non-designated heritage assets identified?

There are a number of processes through which non-designated heritage assets may be identified, including the local and neighbourhood plan-making processes and conservation area appraisals and reviews. In some cases, local planning authorities may also identify non-designated heritage assets as part of the decision-making process on planning applications. Irrespective of how they are identified, it is important that the decisions to identify them as non-designated heritage assets are based on sound evidence.

Plan-making bodies should make clear and up to date information on non-designated heritage assets accessible to the public to provide greater clarity and certainty for developers and decision-makers. Paragraph 055: Is an

application for planning permission required to carry out works to an unlisted building in a conservation area?

Planning permission is required for the demolition of certain unlisted buildings in conservation areas (known as 'relevant demolition').

Generally, the requirement for planning permission for other works to unlisted buildings in a conservation area is the same as it is for any building outside a conservation area, although some permitted development rights are more restricted in conservation areas. Demolishing an unlisted building in a conservation area, without first obtaining planning permission where it is needed, is an offence under section 196D of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990

6.2.4. Bearing Fruits 2031: The Swale Borough Local Plan (2017)

Relevant objectives and policies within the local plan include:

Policy ST 1 Delivering sustainable development in Swale

To deliver sustainable development in Swale, all development proposals will, as appropriate: 8. Achieve good design through reflecting the best of an area's defining characteristics; 9. Promote healthy communities through; maintaining the individual character, integrity, identities and settings of settlements; 12. Conserve and enhance the historic environment by applying national and local planning policy through the identification, assessment and integration of development with the importance, form and character of heritage assets (including historic landscape).

Policy CP 4 Requiring good design

All development proposals will be of a high quality design that is appropriate to its surroundings. Development proposals will, as appropriate: 2. Enrich the qualities of the existing environment by promoting and reinforcing local distinctiveness and strengthening sense of place; 5. Retain and enhance features which contribute to local character and distinctiveness; 8. Be appropriate to the context in respect of materials, scale, height and massing; 9. Make best use of texture, colour, pattern, and durability of materials; 10. Use densities determined by the context and the defining characteristics of the area; 11. Ensure the long-term maintenance and management of buildings, spaces, features and social infrastructure.

Policy DM 32 Development involving listed buildings

Development proposals, including any change of use, affecting a listed building, and/ or its setting, will be permitted provided that:

1. The building's special architectural or historic interest, and its setting and any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses, are preserved, paying special attention to the:
 - a. design, including scale, materials, situation and detailing; b. appropriateness of the proposed use of the building; and c. desirability of removing unsightly or negative features or restoring or reinstating historic features.
2. The total or part demolition of a listed building is wholly exceptional, and will only be permitted provided convincing evidence has been submitted showing that:
 - a. All reasonable efforts have been made to sustain existing uses or viable new uses and have failed; b. Preservation in charitable or community ownership is not possible or suitable; and c. The cost of

maintaining and repairing the building outweighs its importance and the value derived from its continued use.

3. If as a last resort, the Borough Council is prepared to consider the grant of a listed building consent for demolition, it may, in appropriate circumstances, consider whether the building could be re-erected elsewhere to an appropriate location. When re-location is not possible and demolition is permitted, arrangements will be required to allow access to the building prior to demolition to make a record of it and to allow for the salvaging of materials and features.

Policy DM 33 Development affecting a conservation area

Development (including changes of use and the demolition of unlisted buildings or other structures) within, affecting the setting of, or views into and out of a conservation area, will preserve or enhance all features that contribute positively to the area's special character or appearance. The Borough Council expects development proposals to:

1. Respond positively to its conservation area appraisals where these have been prepared.
2. Retain the layout, form of streets, spaces, means of enclosure and buildings, and pay special attention to the use of detail and materials, surfaces, landform, vegetation and land use.
3. Remove features that detract from the character of the area and reinstate those that would enhance it.
4. Retain unlisted buildings or other structures that make, or could make, a positive contribution to the character or appearance of the area.

Policy DM 34 Scheduled Monuments and archaeological sites

1. Development will not be permitted which would adversely affect a Scheduled Monument, and/or its setting, as shown on the Proposals Map, or subsequently designated, or any other monument or archaeological site demonstrated as being of equivalent significance to scheduled monuments. Development that may affect the significance of a non-designated heritage asset of less than national significance will require a balanced judgement having regard to the scale of any harm or loss and the significance of the heritage asset.

2. Whether they are currently known, or discovered during the Plan period, there will be a preference to preserve important archaeological sites in-situ and to protect their settings. Development that does not achieve acceptable mitigation of adverse archaeological effects will not be permitted.

3. Where development is permitted and preservation in-situ is not justified, the applicant will be required to ensure that provision will be made for archaeological excavation and recording, in advance of and/or during development, including the necessary post-excavation study and assessment along with the appropriate deposition of any artefacts in an archaeological archive or museum to be approved by the Borough Council.

6.2.5. Swale Borough Council Key Supplementary Planning Guidance

- Swale Borough Council Planning and Development Guidelines No 2: Listed Buildings – A Guide for Owners and Occupiers.

- Swale Borough Council No 3: The Conservation of Traditional Farm Buildings.
- Swale Borough Council Planning and Development Guidelines No 8: Conservation Areas.

6.2.6. Swale Borough Council Heritage Strategy 2020-2032

The Council has developed a borough-wide heritage strategy to help it, along with key stakeholders and other interested parties, to protect and manage the historic environment in Swale in a positive and sustainable way, on a suitably informed basis. The strategy document can be accessed via this [link](#).

A key element of the strategy is setting out the Council's overall vision and priorities, which it is hoped will align with the vision and priorities of local communities and local amenity societies as far as possible, in order that the strategy can be widely supported.

The strategy sets out a series of proposals in the associated initial 3-year action plan which are aimed at enabling the positive and sustainable management of different elements of the borough's historic environment for the foreseeable future. Priority is given to those parts of the borough's historic environment which are already suffering from, and at risk from negative change, and/or which face significant development pressure, threatening their special character. The proposed set of actions will involve joint project working with amenity societies and/or volunteers from the community wherever this is possible.

6.3 Glossary

Bay window - Window of one or more storeys projecting from the face of a building.

Casement window - Window hung vertically, hinged one side, so that it swings inward or outward.

Coping - The capping or covering of a wall.

Cross-wing - Wing attached to a main or original house block, its axis at right angles to the original block, and often gabled.

Dormer - A structural element protruding from the plane of a sloping roof surface. Dormers are used to create usable space in the roof by adding headroom and usually also by enabling addition of windows.

Gable - A triangular portion of an end wall between the edges of a sloping roof.

Hipped roof - A type of roof where all sides slope downwards from the ridge to the eaves.

Jettying - A building technique used in medieval timber frame buildings in which an upper floor projects beyond the dimensions of the floor below.

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For further information contact: Swale Borough Council Planning Services 01795 417850 www.Swale.gov.uk

Place Services
County Hall, Essex CM1 1QH

T: +44 (0)3330 136 844
E: enquiries@placeservices.co.uk

www.placeservices.co.uk

