

# Upper Bush Conservation Area Appraisal

## Purpose of the Conservation Appraisal

The Conservation Area Appraisal guides residents and planners in the best ways of caring for the historic environment in Upper Bush. It summarises the history and architecture of the area, defines the features that make the area special and sets out policies for preserving and improving its special character. As supplementary planning guidance the policies set out in this appraisal will be used when considering applications for planning permission.

This document also respects Medway Council's 'duty of regard for the purposes of the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty designation' with regards to the Kent Downs AONB.

## Key Characteristics of the Area

Upper Bush is a small hamlet of medieval origin situated in open countryside. Its key characteristics are:

- Unspoilt rural surroundings
- High quality historic buildings in a good state of preservation
- The hamlet is free of modern suburban development
- Few poor quality modern alterations and extensions
- Landscaping around houses in keeping in with the rural character of the area

## History

Upper Bush has its origins as a small hamlet that grew up on what is now the North Downs Way, **then a well used trade route**, during the medieval period. There is no separate reference to the hamlet in the Domesday book and the first recorded mention of the settlement is in 1320 when the then bishop of Rochester, Hamo de Hythe, is recorded as visiting the manor of Cuxton and holding court in the Chapel at Birch. The site of the chapel is not known. By the late medieval period Upper Bush had developed into a small hamlet with the building of at least two substantial timber-framed structures, High Birch and Borrow Hill House. Upper Bush Farmhouse, which stood to the west of the settlement, is also likely to have had a medieval origin. It is unclear whether there were other, less substantial, medieval dwellings on the site.

The hamlet formerly formed part of the Cobham estate of the Darnley family. It appears to have been a relatively late acquisition, with the majority of the land in

the hamlet being added to the estate between 1797 and 1842 and further properties being added during the latter 19<sup>th</sup> century. Before 1797 Upper Bush was part of Lord Romney's Estate in Cuxton.

Ownership of the Upper Bush before this date is unclear. It may once have formed part of the manor of Cuxton, which was held by the Bishop of Rochester in the medieval period, and passed to the Dean and Chapter of Rochester Cathedral after the reformation. However, it is not mentioned in a survey of the manor undertaken in 1649 and it is possible that the hamlet originally formed part of the Whorne's Place estate, which had been held by ancestors of Lord Romney since the 15<sup>th</sup> century.

The hamlet had developed into a thriving agricultural settlement by the 1840s. The principal farmstead by this time was Upper Bush Farmhouse, which featured a pair of cottages, large barn, outbuildings and a cart shed. A further large house was situated to the North West. Smaller cottages were grouped around the green. These were generally small yellow brick or weatherboarded buildings. High Birch and Borrow Hill house were both divided into three cottages by this time.

Further development in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century resulted in the rebuilding of the farm buildings of Upper Bush Farm, including new barns and an oast house along with the demolition of earlier barns and cottages. Additional cottages and the non-conformist Hope Chapel were also built along the north side of Bush Road. The bungalows at the entrance to the conservation area were added in 1923. The hamlet reached its largest extent just before the Second World War, when it contained 22 houses, an off-licence and a baker. During this time the Old Bakery appears to have been at the heart of the village as it featured a bakehouse, brewhouse, flour store and off license to the rear, much of this incorporated in a now demolished extension.

Upper Bush was transformed shortly after World War II when the Cobham Estate was acquired by the City of Rochester. In 1960 Strood Rural District Council decided to clear what was then considered substandard housing in the hamlet. This left only five buildings standing and involved the demolition of several historic buildings including Upper Bush Farmhouse. It was originally planned to demolish Borrow Hill House and High Birch but a campaign organised by local people led to the recognition of the historic worth and restoration of these buildings. The only modern structures to be erected are a group of barns at Upper Bush Farm. Conservation Area status was confirmed on the area in 1994.

## **Archaeology**

The land at the centre of the village must be regarded as archaeologically sensitive as the remains of further medieval and early modern buildings may survive below ground. The zone of archaeological potential is shown on Map 2.

There are no scheduled ancient monuments in the area, neither is any part of the area at present designated as an Area of Archaeological Potential.

## Landscape

The key characteristic of Upper Bush is unspoilt rural setting. The hamlet is located in the midst of open arable farmland land on a spur elevated land at the confluence of the Bush and Cuxton valleys. The ridge tops of these valleys have a dense deciduous tree cover that broadens out into Horseholder's Wood to the south of the settlement. The surrounding farmland is remarkable in that, apart from a group of buildings lining Bush Road to the north, it is completely undeveloped.

The only vehicular access is from the north and consists of one narrow access road, partially lined by hedgerows. There are however, six footpaths converging from various directions. The North Downs Way, which follows the route of an ancient cross country path passes through the hamlet. The distinctive character of the access road is recognised by its classification as a rural lane.

Horseholder's wood and the stands of trees to the north and east of the hamlet ensure that the character of the settlement is overwhelmingly one of seclusion with views being limited to only a few glimpses of the settlement obtainable from surrounding paths and roads. On approaching from the footpaths, awareness of approaching the settlement is concealed by tree cover until the centre has almost been reached. When approaching by road from the north the settlement is almost invisible, with only the modern farm buildings of Bush Farm being visible in views from Bush Road and the northern slopes of the Cuxton Valley.

Once inside Upper Bush the slightly elevated nature of the land gives good views out of the settlement to Cuxton to the east and Lower Bush and, more distantly, the Medway Bridge and Rochester to the north.



Upper Bush Road - looking North



Upper Bush - looking south

Upper Bush itself is a relatively compact settlement covering an area of only approximately eleven acres. **This is typical of historic villages in this part of Kent**

where nucleated rather than dispersed settlements are the norm. While individual buildings are set in large gardens the density of settlement is very low, houses tend to cluster together towards the front of the plots that they stand in. This gives the hamlet a clearly defined centre around a small triangular green between Borrow Hill House and The Cottage.

Landscaping around the settlement is simple, with grass verges, tarmac roads and gravel paths. Boundary treatments are attractive, with front gardens bounded by low brick walls, hedges and timber lattice and post and rail fences. Mature trees and well planted front gardens make an important contribution to the character of the village centre, reinforcing its rural nature. There is little in the way of street furniture but the approach to the hamlet is marred by telephone and power lines.

### **Built Environment**

The domestic buildings at Upper Bush are all high quality rural vernacular buildings ranging in date from the late medieval period to the 20<sup>th</sup> century. All the structures retain much of their traditional detailing and make a positive contribution to the character of the area. Dominant materials and features include large steeply pitched Kent peg tile roofs, often hipped, and tall redbrick chimneys. The simple, bold massing of the roofs, contrasted by the chimneys is a distinctive feature of all the buildings in the centre of the hamlet. Walls are an eclectic mixture of timber framing with plastered infill, painted brick and weatherboarding. All windows are timber casements fitted flush with the buildings' façade.

The key buildings in the area are Borrow Hill House and High Birch, both of which are medieval timber framed hall houses that have been restored. Borrow Hill House is relatively modest, with little in the way of ornamentation whilst High Birch is a much grander building of the Wealden type with decorated moulded doorways, 'Kentish' style tension bracing, coving and jetties. Both buildings are listed, Borrow Hill House at grade II and High Birch and grade II\*.



High Birch



Borrow Hill House

Overstrands, also known as the Old Bakery, and the Cottage are thought to date from the 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries respectively. A late 20<sup>th</sup> century extension has been added to the side of the cottage without harming the building's character.



The Old Bakery



The Cottage

Beeches Bungalows are much more modern buildings but are attractive and still very much within the rural vernacular style, being very simple with low pitched corrugated iron roofs, weatherboarded walls, low brick chimneys and casement windows



Beeches Bungalows



Upper Bush Farm

Upper Bush Farm features a late 19<sup>th</sup> century timber framed barn with a corrugated iron roof, an attractive structure that makes a positive contribution to the conservation area. The other buildings in the farmstead are a late 19<sup>th</sup> century stable block with painted brick walls and an asbestos roof and a pair modern asbestos clad barns barn. Neither are attractive structures.

## Development Pressures

Much of the character of Upper Bush is derived from its secluded rural location. This fact is recognised by its designation as part of the North Downs Area of



Outstanding Natural Beauty, the Kent Downs Special Landscape Area and the Metropolitan Green Belt. The planning restrictions associated with this mean that there is little opportunity for new buildings within the conservation area. The high quality of the existing buildings in the area means that there is a presumption against the demolition of all buildings apart from the modern structures at Upper Bush Farm.

Any new build at Upper Bush Farm would have to be of traditional form, use traditional materials and be for agricultural, forestry or outdoor recreational uses. There would be a presumption against the conversion of the 19<sup>th</sup> century farm buildings into domestic use unless it was proved that no other economic use could be found for them. The stable block and modern farm buildings are not considered to be of sufficient quality to warrant conversion should they become redundant.

All the buildings in Upper Bush retain traditional building materials and detailing, including Kent peg tiles, tall chimney stacks, timber casement windows and weatherboarding. Cast iron guttering remains on some structures but has often been replaced by uPVC. Boundary treatments are also simple and free of suburban clutter such as railings or chain link fencing. The character of other conservation areas in Medway has suffered from the loss of these features and, as they are not protected, there is no guarantee that the buildings in Upper Bush will continue to retain these features.

There is limited pressure to extend existing buildings in the village. While limited extensions may not damage the character of the area overly large and poorly designed extensions will have a detrimental effect on the character of the area. New outbuildings and garages would be expected to be of exceptional quality, modestly scaled, of traditional design and use traditional materials.

Another pressure is the increased use of land for equestrian purposes in the surrounding area. While the diversification in the use of land is to be supported the building of stables and erection of equestrian fencing on the fields surrounding the conservation area would be held to be damaging to the character of the area.

## **Policies**

1. There will be a presumption against the demolition of buildings that make a positive contribution to the Conservation Area
2. There will be a presumption against the erection of new buildings in the Conservation area.
3. Proposals for alterations and extension and outbuildings should be modestly sized, respect the distinctive architecture style and character of the existing building in terms of bulk, height, position, size and detailed design.

4. Large conservatories will not generally be considered acceptable.
5. Alterations which result on the loss of chimneys, or have a detrimental effect on roofscapes, including the insertion of rooflights and dormers onto prominent roofslopes will normally be resisted.
6. The Council will encourage the retention of original design features, such as windows and doors, and where necessary will require the use of replica features in traditional materials in replacement of these works. Aluminium and uPVC replacement units will not normally be considered acceptable.
7. In new works and replacement work, the Council will require that all materials, in particular brick and tile type, match the original building.
8. The retention and replacement of cast iron guttering will be encouraged.
9. The positioning of satellite dishes in prominent positions will be discouraged.
10. Any alterations or replacement buildings in Upper Bush farm will be expected to preserve the agricultural character of the farmstead and make use of traditional detailing and materials.
11. Trees and area of woodland will be further protected by the creation of additional Tree Preservation Orders where appropriate.
12. The retention of traditional boundary treatments will be encouraged.
13. The retention of traditional road surfaces and floorscapes will be required. Proposals for new and replacement hard surfacing around buildings must respect the character and appearance of the area in terms of materials and extent.
14. The Council will encourage statutory undertakers to remove overhead cables. New street lights must be in character with the area.
15. New signage, including footpath signs, will be expected to be kept to the absolute minimum and respect the rural nature of the area.
16. There will be a presumption against the building of new stables and equestrian fencing on land within the conservation area.
17. The Council will endeavour to preserve sites and structures of archaeological or historic significance. Land within the Zone of Archaeological Potential should be treated as belonging to Urban Archaeological Zone 2 in the Kent and Medway Structure Plan, SPG3 (Supplementary Planning Guidance on Archaeology).

## **Introduction of an Article 4(2) Direction**

The area is unusual in that there has been no inappropriate development of residential properties such as the fitting of concrete roof tiles, uPVC windows, the rendering of façades or the erection of suburban boundary treatments such as railings or brick walls.

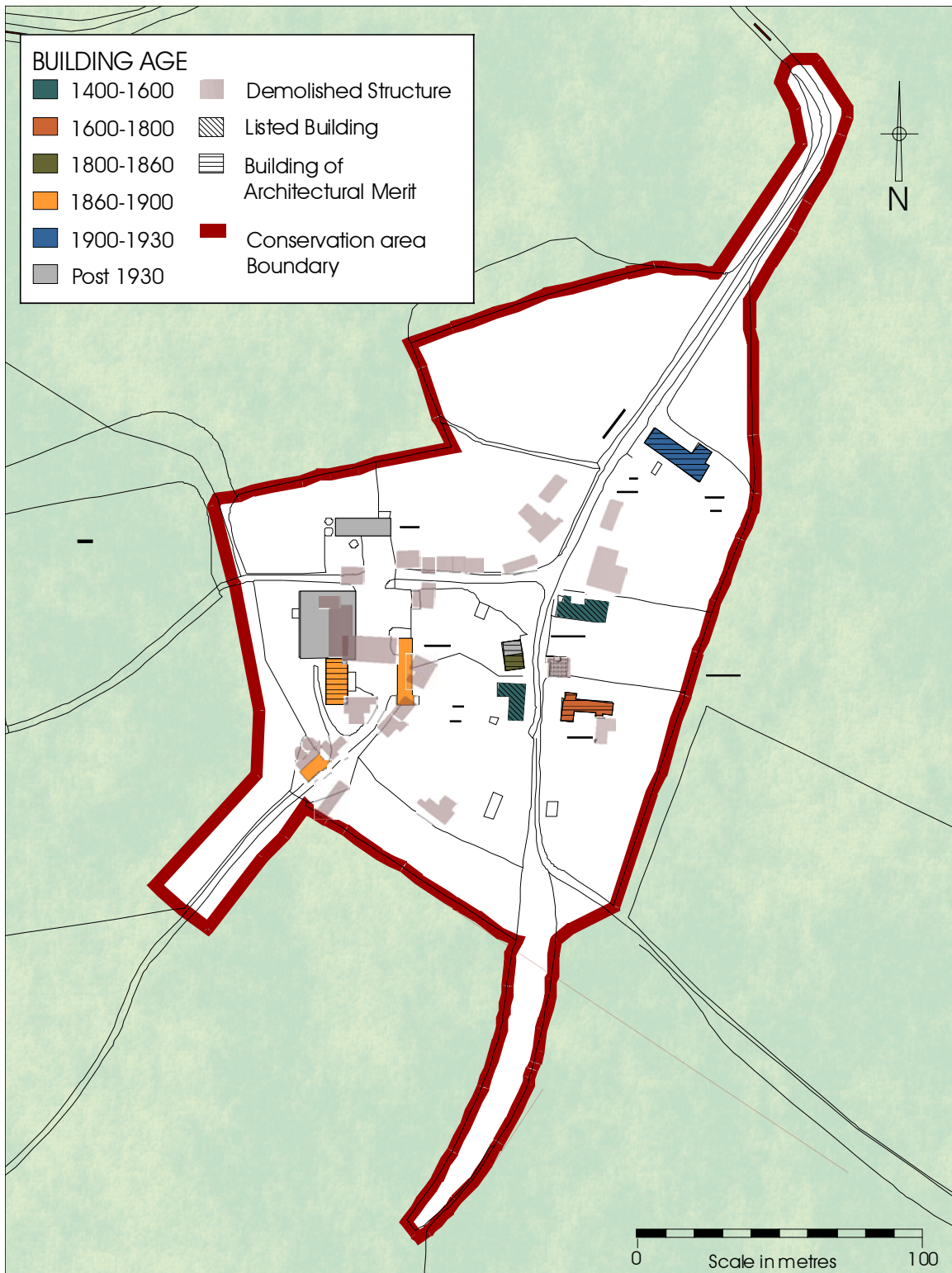
However, this situation is not guaranteed to continue and the area is thus in a vulnerable position where much of the historic character of the area could easily be lost.

For this reason the Council has, therefore, introduced an Article 4(2) Direction. Planning permission is required for the following works to a house fronting a road, path or public open space:

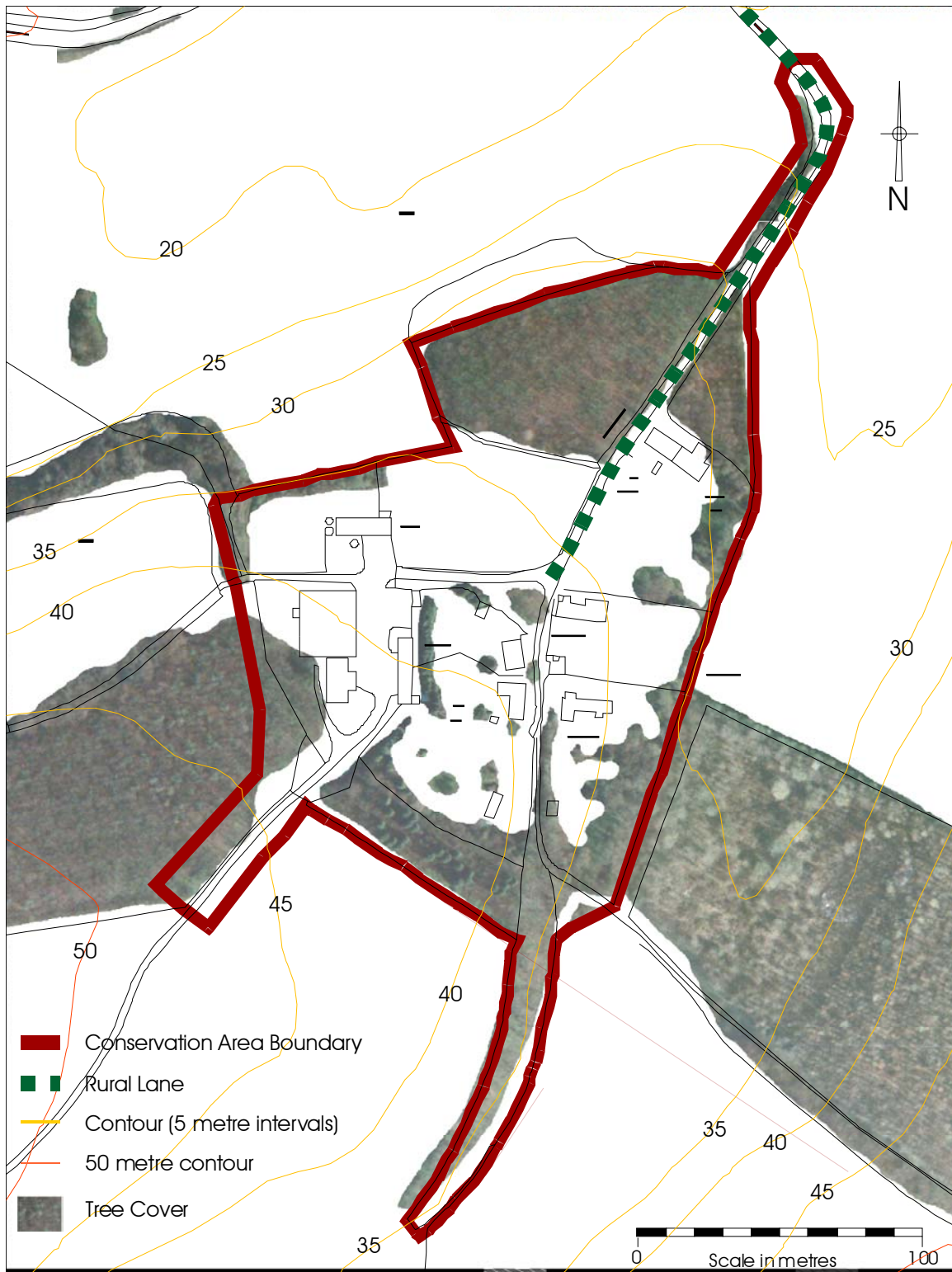
- Building, altering or removing a chimney
- Enlarging, improving or altering a house. This includes replacing windows, doors, and guttering and applying bargeboards
- Altering a roof (including re-roofing in a different material and fitting roof-lights)
- Building a porch
- Laying a drive or path
- Building, altering or demolishing a gate, fence, wall or railings.
- Painting, rendering or pebble dashing the outside of the property (not including painting woodwork).

There is no charge for making this type of planning application. The need for planning permission for extension, conservatories and roof alterations to the rear of the property would not change.

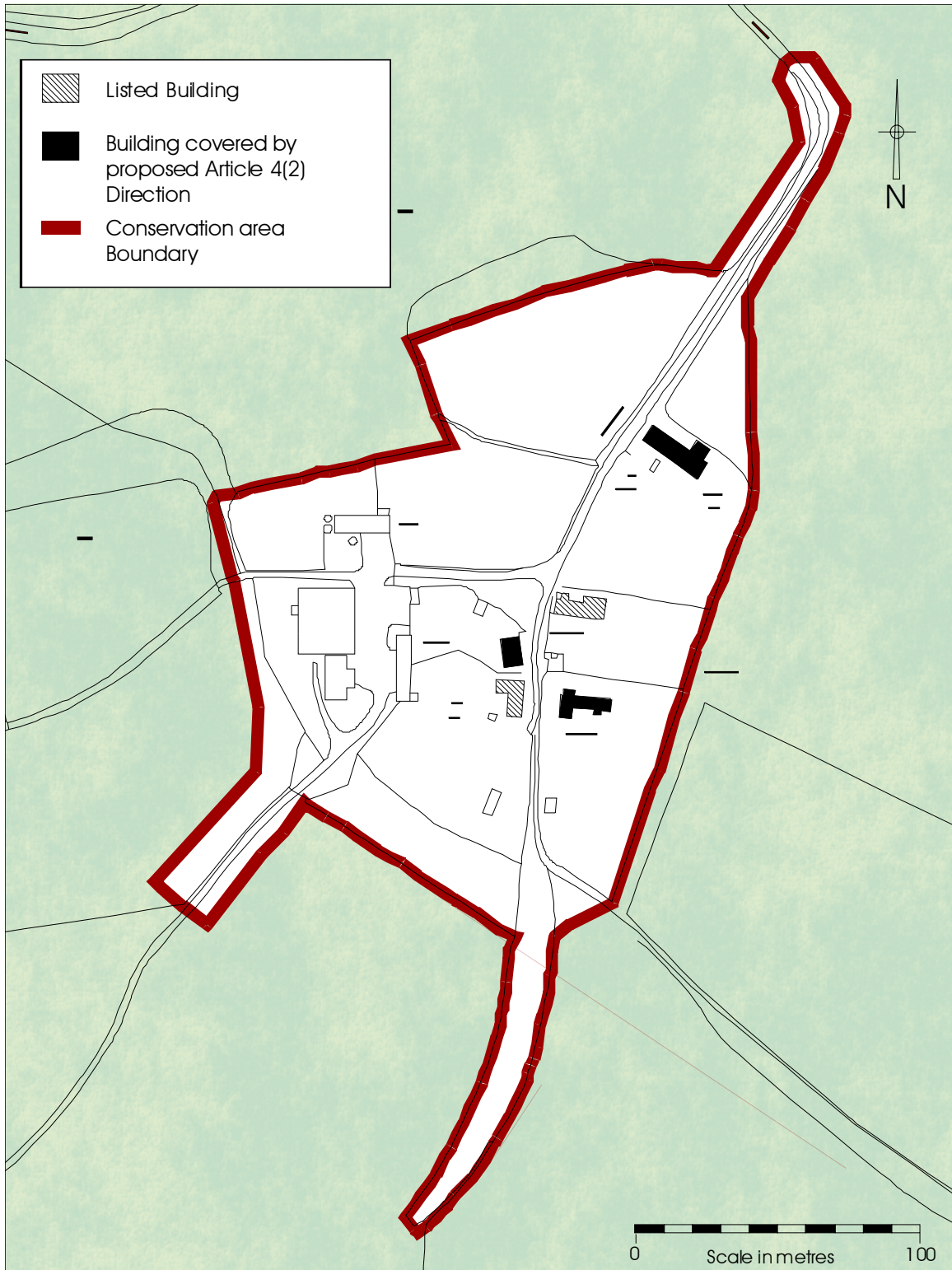




UPPER BUSH CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL:  
MAP 1 -BUILDING TYPE



UPPER BUSH CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL:  
MAP 2 -Topography and Tree Cover



UPPER BUSH CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL:  
MAP 3 -PROPOSAL