



Highland Court

Conservation Area Appraisal

June 2005

Introduction

This appraisal outlines the key elements that contribute to the special architectural and historic character of the Highland Court Conservation Area. The character is determined by more than the age and style of buildings. The combination of built form, shapes, enclosure, materials, spaces and landscape all help create the character of a place.

Conservation areas were first introduced in 1967 and are currently defined as "areas of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance" (Section 69(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990).

The City Council considers that the special interest justifying designation of a conservation area should be defined and analysed in a written appraisal of its character and appearance.

Location

The Highland Court Conservation Area lies approximately three miles south east of Canterbury, off the A2, at the southern end of the village of Bridge.

The conservation area was designated in January 1995 by Canterbury City Council as part of an overall review of conservation areas along the Nailbourne/Little Stour valley. Its total area is 35.330 hectares.

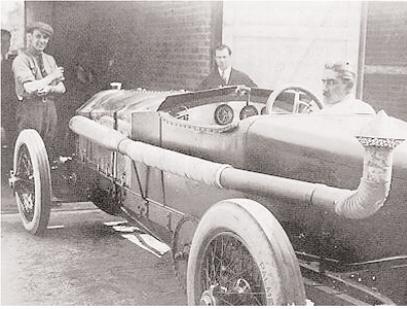
The conservation area includes Higham Park and its parkland grounds and Highland Court model farm. The conservation area boundary extends outside the original park to include part of the old Canterbury Racecourse on Barham Downs, several small ornamental tree plantations and five archaeological sites.

Historical background

Highland Court has reverted to its original name of Higham Park since the designation of the conservation area. The farm retains the name Highland Court. 'Higham' derives from the 'De Hegham' family who managed the estate ceded to them by Edward II in 1320.

London banker, William Gay, purchased the estate in 1901. As a great collector of rare plants and orchids, Higham's Edwardian gardens were completed as we see them today under his stewardship.

Countess Margaret Laura Zborowski purchased the estate in 1910. It was around this time that the Palladian front was added, encasing the eighteenth century core. The house is Grade II* listed and the contemporary forecourt walls are Grade II listed.



The Countess died in 1911, leaving the estate to her son Count Louis Vorow Zborowski, probably the most 'colourful' owner of Higham Park. The Count was notable for his development of aero-engined racing cars at the house during the 1920's. The most famous of his cars being 'Chitty Chitty Bang Bang', immortalised by the author Ian Fleming and subsequent Walt Disney film.

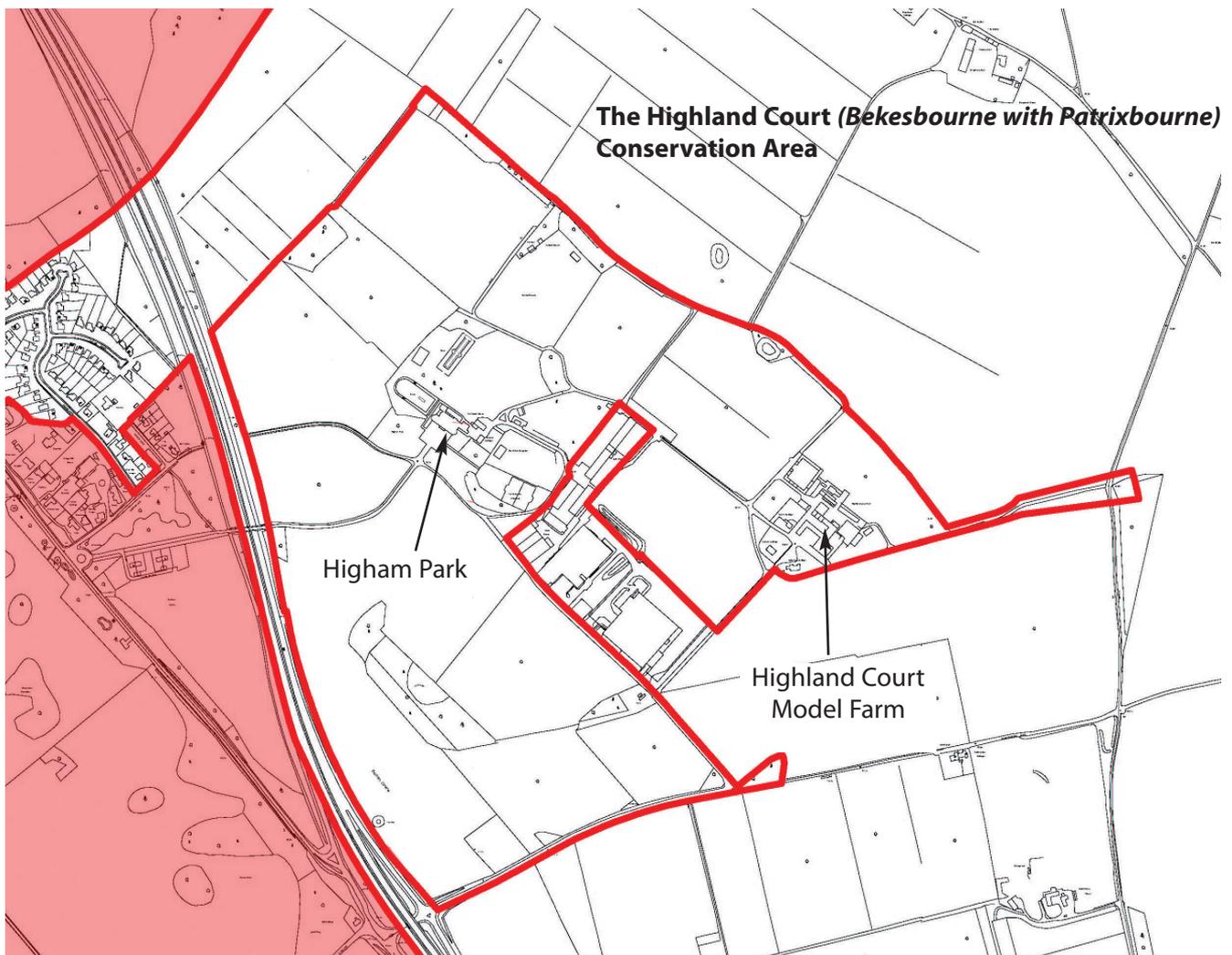


Count Zborowski's Chitty Chitty Bang Bang in two of its guises

Shortly before his death, Count Zborowski devised a miniature steam railway that circled the gardens. Eventually this was relocated to become the Romney Hythe and Dymchurch Railway on the south Kent coast, another project he was involved with.

The estate was sold to Walter Whigham in 1928 and its name was changed to Highland Court. During the Second World War the house came under the control of the War Office and became part of the Kent and Canterbury Hospital between 1951 and 1981. The estate fell into disrepair until 1995 when, under new ownership, an extensive, ongoing restoration programme of both house and gardens began. The estate has also readopted its historic name Higham Park.

Highland Court Farm was enlarged to become a model farmstead in 1929. It was built by the then owner of Highland Court, Walter Whigham, to the highest standards. The buildings are of considerable architectural and sociological value.



Landscape Setting

The Highland Court Conservation Area essentially contains the original parkland, farmland and orchards to the house and model farm. It occupies a prominent position on the crest of the north east slopes of the Elham Valley, within the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and Special Landscape Area. The conservation area is surrounded by belts of mature trees and hedgerows and later agricultural tree screening. Farmland adjoins the boundary and, to the south east of the house, several industrial scale units for fruit processing and storage. The conservation area boundary wraps around and excludes these units as their position and size intrudes into the immediate historic landscape. The original parkland has been bisected, to the west of the house, by the A2(T) trunk road which runs through a deep cutting. The entrance to the estate lies within the Bourne Park (Bishopsbourne/Bridge) Conservation Area to the west of this cutting.

Approach to the house

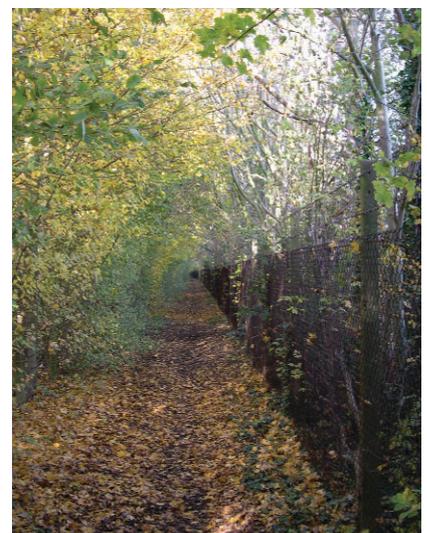
The house is approached via a road bridge over the A2(T) with the sound of traffic below providing an audible boundary to this western edge of the conservation area. The North Downs Way long distance path crosses the drive to the house and marks the physical conservation area boundary to the north of the bridge, at the top of the steep, tree lined cutting. To the south the path passes through a small copse of mixed trees adjacent to the bridge and then follows a course across arable farmland. The conservation area boundary continues in a southerly direction, along the edge of the A2(T) until it reaches Coldharbour Lane.

From the vantage point of the bridge, partially hidden by mature trees, the Palladian facade of the house gradually reveals itself as one approaches along the gently curving drive. To the right the drive is lined by recently planted evergreen hedge with distant views beyond, and to the left, simply fenced paddocks containing five large beech trees lead the eye towards a backdrop of mature trees. The drive straightens and comes to a junction with an estate road that was once the original carriageway to the house. The enormous stark form of the house lies directly ahead, dominating the view.

Contemporary entrance gates with piers surmounted with lanterns lead to an early 20th century, balustraded forecourt wall with plinths for urns of which four remain. This wall is Grade II listed. Formal lawns flank the forecourt, with ornamental trees to the west side, and a high brick wall containing large oak entrance gates to stables to the east. A path leads from the forecourt area, passing in front of these entrance gates, to an arched opening with wrought iron gates into walled gardens surrounded by mature trees. The walled gardens are completely overgrown with walkable paths cut through the undergrowth.

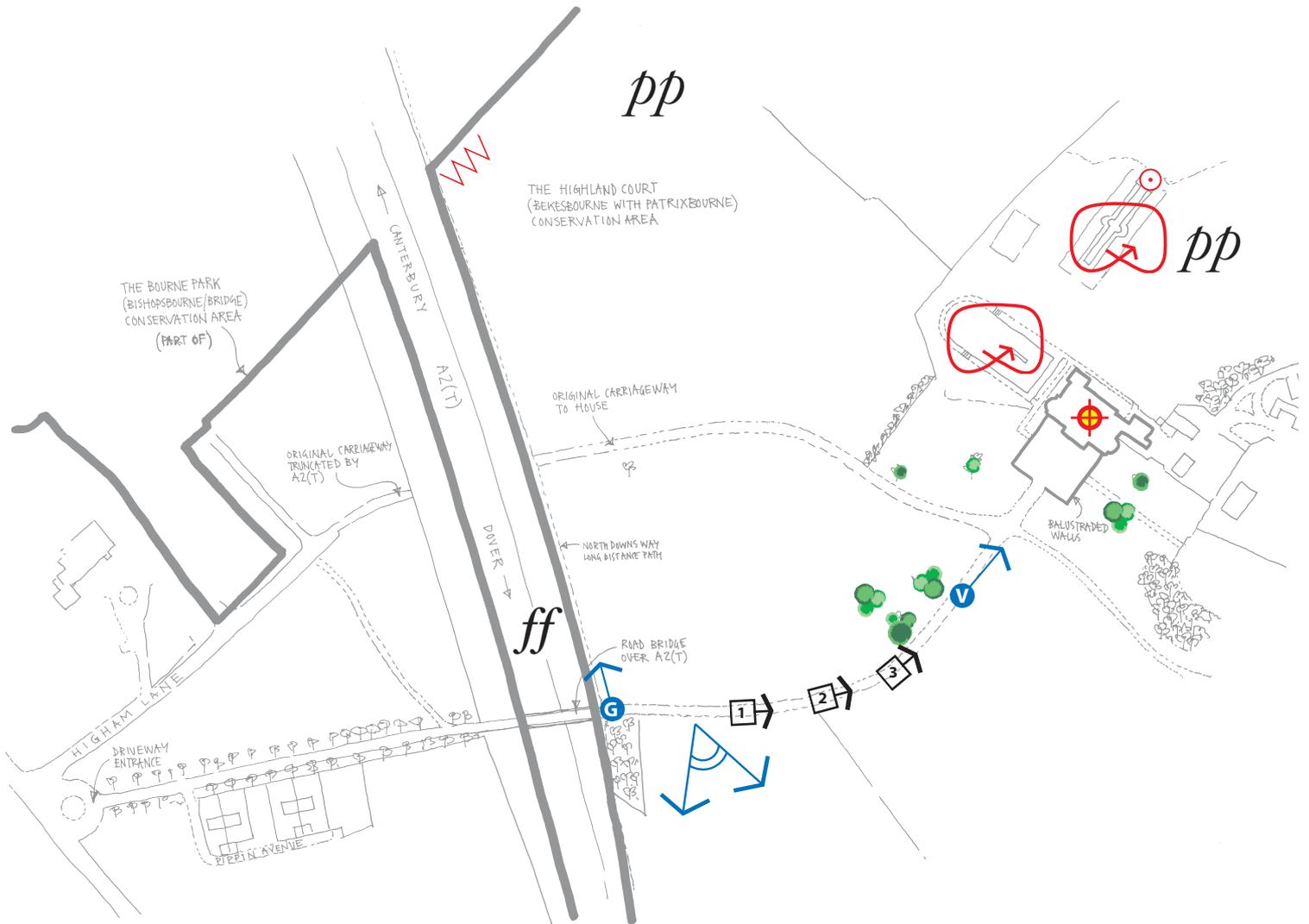


Approach to the House from the A2(T)



The North Downs Way looking north west

Approach to the house Schematic appraisal



-  Major landmark
-  Significant building
-  Significant trees
-  Special sense of place
-  Intrusive feature
-  Quiet area
-  Noisy area
-  Vista
-  View
-  Glimpse
-  Sequential views

The house itself is Grade II * and the official list description (under the name Highland Court Hospital) reads as follows:

Originally called Higham Court. 18th century core with L-shaped building around it in Edwardian Palladian style. Main front of two storeys in ashlar [actually Portland stone of the highest quality] with slate roof.

In the centre is a portico of four fluted Corinthian columns on tall bases standing on a flight of seven steps and rising through both storeys to support a pediment with ornamental scroll work in its tympanum. The first floor windows in the portico are deeply recessed behind a balcony. The portion on each side of the portico is flanked by rusticated pilasters. The end window bays are flanked by additional rusticated pilasters set between fluted Corinthian half columns. Between the bases of the half columns are panels of imitation balustrading. Modillion cornice and balustraded parapet over with solid portions at the ends surmounted by small pediments. Casement windows on first floor in moulded surrounds. French windows on ground floor in similar surrounds with architraves over and pediments over those in the end window bay and those behind the portico. Hung sashes with glazing bars.

The garden front is the 18th century building, faced with cement. Two storeys, attic and basement. Mansarded slate roof with five dormers, cornice and parapet. Seven windows and two window spaces, moulded surrounds, with architraves over those on first floor. A full height bay.

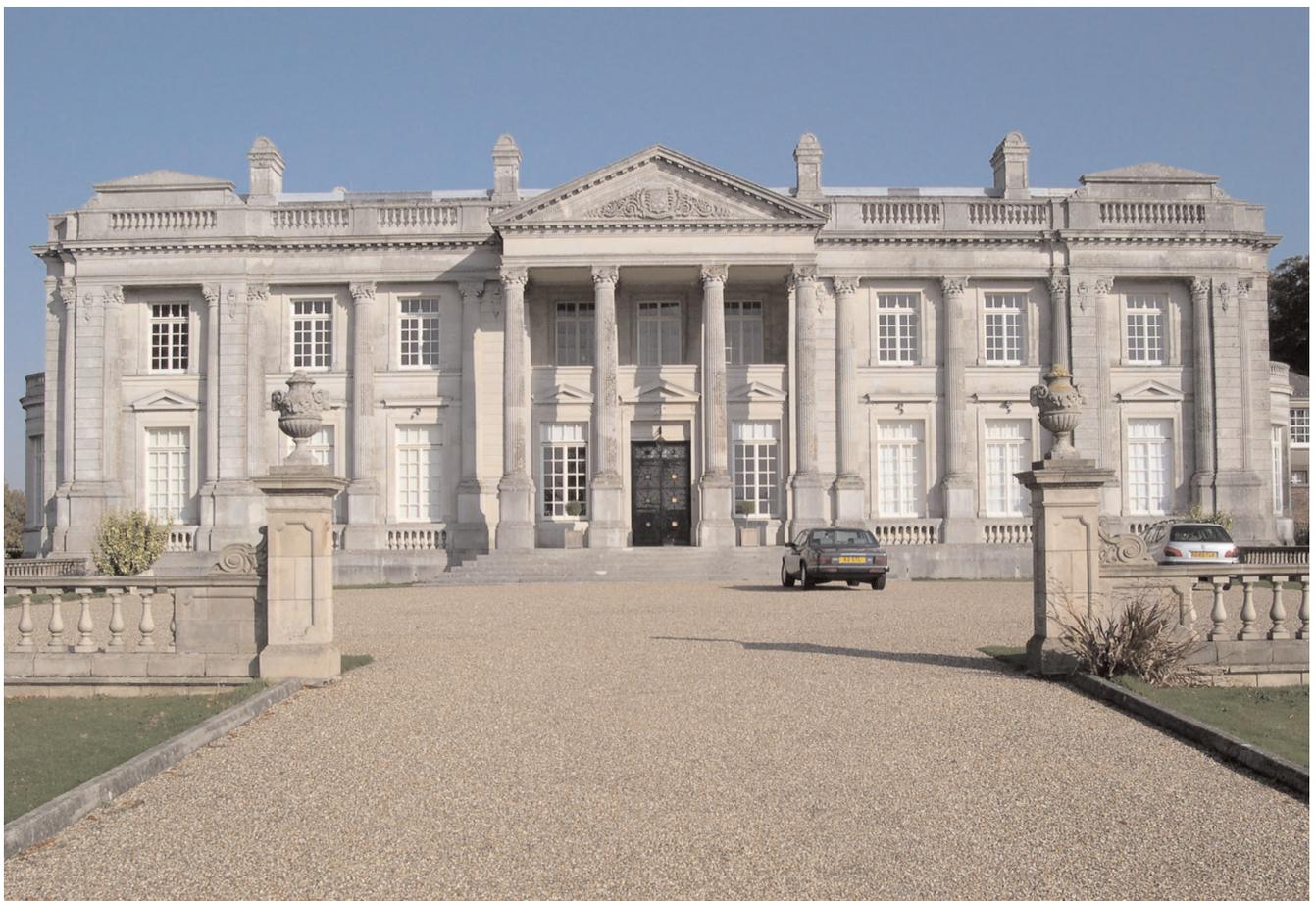
Early 20th century loggia of seven doric columns standing on four round-headed rusticated arches with steps down to the garden in the centre, and a cornice and solid parapet over. To the south-east a service wing of three windows. The north-west and south-east fronts have three windows each and are flanked by rusticated pilasters. Curved bay of three windows on ground floor with balustraded parapet over.

On the north-west front a loggia of eight twin Corinthian columns, with a curved bay of three windows behind it, leading to a ground floor projection which has one window flanked by twin pilasters on three elevations, curved walls between these windows and a solid balustraded parapet over.

The original carriageway loops back towards the A2(T) from the west front of the house behind the previously mentioned paddocks. This road also continues in a south easterly direction towards a series of large packing sheds at Highland Court Farm. The scale of these packing sheds makes a substantial visual impact on the conservation area due to their proximity to its boundary. The road then loops round to the rear of Higham Park. This section of road, through a dense screening of mature trees, provides the main domestic access to the house and other properties within its immediate curtilage.



Domestic access road with farm buildings and coldstores abutting the conservation area boundary



The Parkland and Gardens



Top: Red brick stable block with decorative weather vanes.
Above: 'Arts and Crafts' buildings next to Higham Park House

The access road has, as already stated, a dense area of woodland to its north east side and the remnants of a series of walled gardens and glass houses to the south east. A smart, two storey 1930s stable block of red brick with tiled roof and decorative weather vanes stands on the north east side of the road, on a junction with a track that leads off into the woodland to join a farm road running behind the park. Along this track are remnants of traditional wrought iron estate fencing. Behind the stable block is a single storey building of red brick dating from the late 1800s.

Looking south west, a gravelled section of road leads to two late Victorian properties built in the "Arts and Crafts" style of red brick and timber beneath tiled roofs. These buildings were a coach house and stables before their conversion to residential use. Decorative buttresses on both properties have Pluckley black glazed brick quoin detailing. All corners, as with the stable block, are of rounded

brickwork although the stables, being built later, are of unglazed red brick. Set back from these properties to the south east is the Blue Peter Bungalow. The high brick wall with entrance gates forms the backdrop to these properties.

A side gate at the service wing of Higham Park House leads into the gardens. To the right, a wide belt of mature trees forms a backdrop to the large expanse of lawn. Several specimen trees have recently been planted to recreate the structure and appearance of the original parkland. The present owners of Higham Park have extensive documentary and photographic records to aid in their ambitious restoration project. An agricultural shelter belt of trees edges the north east end of the garden, through which a cricket pitch and pavilion can be seen. To the left, the house, due to its close proximity, gives a sense of enclosure to the lawned area and its wooded surround.

A path running immediately to the rear of the house passes through an avenue of pleached Hornbeam at the north west corner of the



The Blue Peter Bungalow



The rear facade of the house



Early 20th century loggia with steps down to the garden



*The Rose Garden.
Looking north west
(above) and south
east, towards the
house (main picture)*



house. This leads to a short flight of stone steps down to a sunken, stone walled rose garden. The land slopes away gently towards the north west edge of the gardens and a formal rectangular pond in the centre leads the eye to a distant vista across orchards to woodland. From certain vantage points this view is marred by a tall telecommunications mast erected within the conservation area's northern most corner.

Looking north east from the centre of the rose garden, an arch cut through a tall yew hedge reveals a glimpse of the sunken Italianate water garden. Reportedly designed by Harold Peto during 1903 -04, it features a reconstruction of a classical style temple.

A path follows the north west boundary of the gardens in a north easterly direction, revealing a 'secret garden' and passing through a belt of birch trees at the far end of the lawn. An opening through the tree belt gives access to an estate road and a cricket pitch with a pavilion, complete with thatched roof, and a stand with scoreboard. The pavilion was constructed using material from Bifrons House at Patricxbourne following its demolition in 1948.



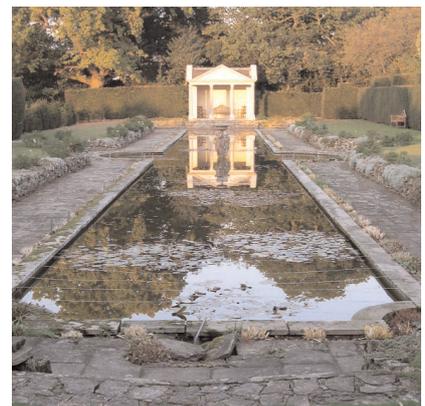
From left to right:
*view from the Rose Garden with glimpse
through arch to the Italian Water Garden;*

The Italian Water garden;

detail of classical style temple;

Secret Garden;

statuary along the Birch Walk



The Parkland and Gardens Schematic appraisal

-  Major landmark
-  Significant building
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- pp* Quiet area
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The North Downs Way and surrounding farmland

The North Downs Way long distance path marks the physical conservation area boundary to the north of the bridge over the A2(T). It is designated as a bridleway and at times can be extremely muddy. The path is lined to the left with dense, overhanging tree planting that continues down the steep cutting to the A2(T). To the right, a tall concrete post and mesh fence, occasionally interspersed with trees, edges the path. Progressing northwards, the original carriageway to the house is terminated by the path and views to the right change from parkland to orchards.

The North Downs Way continues past woodland to its right. The conservation area boundary diverts from this and follows a bridleway alongside the woodland in a north easterly direction. At this junction stands the tall telecommunications mast that can be seen from the gardens at Higham Park

Orchards occupy land to the right and ahead with distant views over fields beyond. The sound of traffic from the A2(T) diminishes as the footpath approaches a wider farm track. The conservation area boundary follows this track in a south easterly direction. Tall shelter belts of trees line the route and also divide orchards to the left and right. The tree belt to the left comes to an end, allowing views across arable land to distant hills. There is a gentle incline and the track becomes a metalled farm road.

An open area, backed by mature trees, to the right is used for storage of bulk bins and a wide belt of tree planting to the left runs at right angles to the road. A dense belt of mature trees to the right screens the cricket pitch at the rear of Higham Park.

Orchards flank both sides of the farm road from this point onwards, bounded by occasional trees and hedgerow. A road leading to cold stores/packing sheds branches off to the right.

To the north east there are views as far as Sandwich, some ten miles away, and ahead a Grade II listed water tower is visible amongst the trees of Woodlands Wood. The road slopes downwards passing by an unsightly agricultural tip, with trees surrounding the hollowed out area, to the right.

A sharp right bend in the road, at the foot of the slope, affords views of the Highland Court Farm complex. The conservation area boundary, which has followed the northern edge of the road, is now marked by a shelter belt of trees running in a south easterly direction until its junction with a track. The entirety of this tree lined track, to the east, is included within the conservation area.



Above: *The North Downs Way looking north west*

Below: *Telecommunications mast situated within the conservation area boundary*



Left: *Bridleway with distant views beyond the conservation area*

Top: *Farm road with views towards woodland at Adisham*

Above: *Unightly tipping at edge of farm road*

Highland Court Farm

Highland Court Farm is situated amongst orchards and fields to the east of Higham Park. The main access is via an access road from Coldharbour Lane.

The conservation area includes Coldharbour Lane from its junction with a slip road to the A2(T), and the land north of the lane and north east of the A2(T), which forms part of the surrounding farmland to Higham Park and Highland Court Farm. The North Downs Way crosses this arable land, passing a large area of mature trees and a shelter belt of trees that lie on a north west/south east axis. The south west face of these trees mark the line of the Canterbury Racecourse that existed here during the late 18th and early 19th centuries.

The access road from Coldharbour lane is also included within the conservation area, although the large scale modern storage and packing buildings that stand on the north east side, and dominate this part of the original parkland, are excluded. Large articulated trucks associated with these buildings are a feature of this busy stretch of road.

To the south east of the buildings, a farm road branches off from the access road. It is bordered by tall trees and leads, in the first instance, to residential properties: Colemans Cottage, an early 20th century single storey property and Jordans Cottage, a later bungalow.



Colemans Cottage



Jordans Cottage



Corner Cottage

These buildings sit amongst a backdrop of mature trees which screen the farm buildings beyond. Another residential property, Corner Cottage, the original farmhouse, is bounded by a low brick wall and is situated adjacent to the farm complex.

The farm buildings themselves are arranged as courtyards and many are now used for small scale business activities such as vehicle repairs. They were built, in the main, during the late 1800s and added to during the early 20th century. They are an excellent example of model farm architecture. Constructed of red brick with clay tile roofs and louvered copper roof ventilators, details are traditional, with oak posts and braces to the open cart sheds. Rounded Pluckley black glazed brickwork is incorporated decoratively in many of the buildings, and match those used in the former coach house buildings next to Higham Park House. The complex was built for mixed farming use and contains a row of eight brick pigsties. The floorscape around the buildings includes areas of granite sets. The brick construction of these buildings lends itself successfully to their new engineering use.

To the north of the main grouping of buildings there is a self-contained courtyard of cart sheds and stables/workshops which are beginning to fall into a poor state of repair.



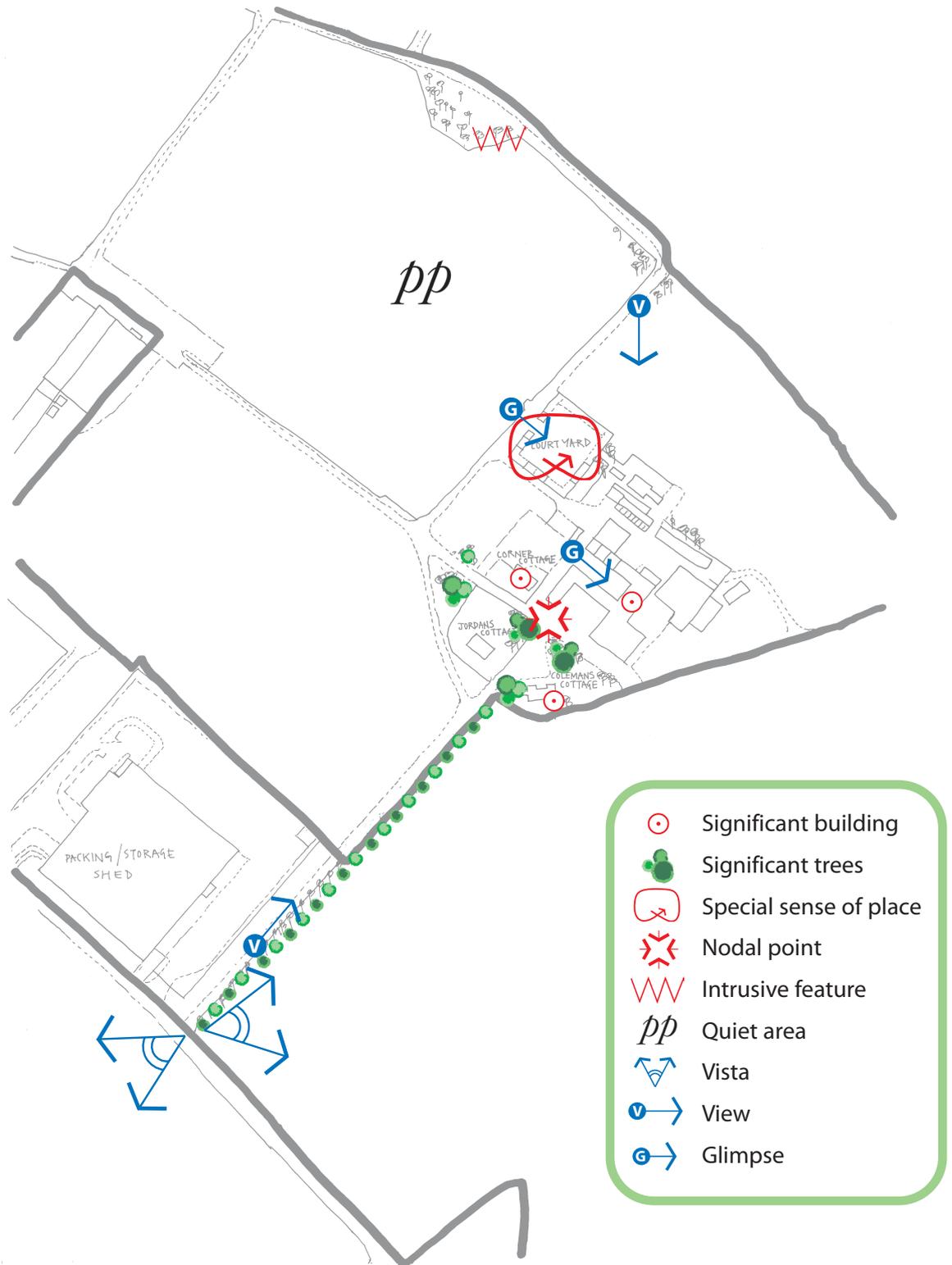
Farm buildings and architectural details within the main Highland Court model farm complex.



Bottom right: *Self contained courtyard of cartsheds and stabling.*



Highland Court Farm Schematic appraisal



Recommendations

- Use of indigenous tree and shrub species should be encouraged when creating shelter belts and field boundaries to enhance the parkland nature of the conservation area.
- Neglected courtyard buildings at Highland Court Farm have potential use as small business units.
- Industrial/agricultural tip adjacent to rear farm road is unsightly and potentially dangerous to users of this public right of way.

Appendices

1. **Policies & Legislation Applicable to the Conservation Area**

Canterbury District Local Plan (Adopted 1998) - Policies D15, D16, D17, D18, D19, D20, D21, D22, D23, D25, D26, D27

Canterbury District Local Plan First Review Deposit Draft 2001-2011 (Published April 2002) - Policies BE7 & BE8.

2. **The following buildings and structures contribute to the special character of the Highland Court Conservation Area (where a building is listed the grade of its listing is shown in brackets)**

Higham Park House (Grade II*)
Forecourt wall to Higham Park House (Grade II)
Coach House
Stables
Cricket Pavillion
Highland Court Model Farm buildings
Colemans Cottage
Corner Cottage
