



SEDLESCOMBE

Conservation Area Appraisal

Much of the information detailing Sedlescombe's long history has been taken from Beryl Lucey's book "Twenty Centuries in Sedlescombe" to whom grateful acknowledgement is given.

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1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Planning Act (The Planning [Listed Buildings and conservation Areas] Act 1990) imposes a duty on Local Planning Authorities to designate any areas of development which are considered to be of “special architectural or historic interest” as conservation areas.
- 1.2 In such areas it is the quality of buildings structures and vegetation which combine with the spaces between them to produce an area of distinctive character, a memorable and visually enriching place.
- 1.3 Once an area has been formally designated the Planning Authority is required to take special care to preserve or enhance its character or appearance. This does not necessarily mean preventing change but that special care is needed to ensure that proposals for alterations and new buildings do not harm the special interest of the area. Equally measures may be taken to maintain and restore traditional surfaces so that streets and areas of public realm continue to contribute positively to the character of the area.
- 1.4 Because it is the combination of individual aspects of an area which go to make up the sum total of its character and appearance the Act imposes extra controls over and above normal planning control. As a result unlisted buildings and trees, both crucial elements which contribute to an area’s appearance are protected from unauthorised removal so that the effect of their loss can be assessed.
- 1.5 There is no formal procedure towards designation as such though the Secretary of State in national guidance (Planning Policy Guidance (PPG)15) advises the publication of a statement which describes an area’s strengths and weaknesses.
- 1.6 Again there is no prescribed form which such a statement or “conservation area appraisal” should take but the following is a recommended list of contents suggested by English Heritage and has been used to guide the production of this document.
 - (i) Location and population, factual description of position of conservation area, its regional context and its population.
 - (ii) The origins and development of the settlement
 - (iii) The prevailing or former uses within the area and their historic patronage and influence of these on plan form and building types
 - (iv) Archaeological significance and potential of area
 - (v) Architectural and historic qualities of buildings and contribution they make to special interest of area
 - (vi) Contribution made by key unlisted buildings
 - (vii) Character and relationship of spaces within the area
 - (viii) Prevalent and traditional building materials, textures and colours
 - (ix) Local details
 - (x) Contribution made by green spaces, trees, hedges and other natural/ cultivated elements to the character of the area
 - (xi) The setting of the area and its relationship with the landscape or open countryside including definition of landmarks, vistas and panoramas
 - (xii) The extent of loss, intrusion or damage i.e., - features
 - (xiii) Existence of any neutral areas

2. LOCATION AND POPULATION

- 2.1 Sedlescombe is situated approximately 7 miles north of Hastings and straddles the B2244 Hawkhurst Road about 1 mile north of its junction with the A21 Hastings to London trunk road. There are areas of more recent housing development at the northern end of The Green east off Brede Lane and west of The Street. The older part of the village is situated on the south facing lower valley slopes overlooking the River Brede and its tributary the Line, and its southern limits are defined by Sedlescombe Bridge, an attractive brick structure built in 1875 which carries the B2244 over the River Brede. Sedlescombe is within the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the open area between Kester House and Riverbridge Cottages is part of the Brede Valley Site of Nature Conservation Importance.
- 2.2 The current population of the village (see Map 3) is estimated to be in the order of 800 against a 2001 census total for the parish as a whole of 1,372. Of this population some 27% were of retirement age which is comparable to the County average, with a higher than average proportion of school age at 17% compared to the County average of 11.5%. Just over half of these residents over 16 years old were economically active, while the proportion of those associated with traditional rural industries represent only 5% of the workforce.

3. ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE SETTLEMENT AND INFLUENCE ON PLAN FORM

- 3.1 The River Brede which owes its Danish name to its breadth was navigable up to the early medieval period and, combined with a suitable crossing and Roman road, provided Sedlescombe with its trading route to the wider world beyond. Although later land drainage and agricultural improvements altered the character of the channel and adjoining marshland the river was still used to move particularly heavy goods up to the close of the 18th century.
- 3.2 The combination of rich iron deposits in the area and a navigable river led to development by the Romans of a major industrial complex by the 1st century AD and a suggested workforce of some 1,100 – 1,200 people engaged in winning and transporting the iron. At the same time new roads were built to link the new areas of production with the River Brede and north east to Rochester.
- 3.3 The collapse of Roman administration led to a more agriculturally based economy with a renewed dependence on river transport which was to last into the 18th century and provided a means of access during the second period of development of the Wealden iron industry. An example of a typical product of the industry, a Wealden fireback, showing interestingly an early English blast furnace, is built into the exterior wall of the Bridge Garage. An indication of the impact the industry had on the area can be gauged by the fact that by the 18th century there were reckoned to be more than 30 iron furnaces operating within a five mile radius of Sedlescombe.
- 3.4 Whether it was its geographical location or industrial activity which led to the village becoming an administration centre is not clear, but by the time of the Norman invasion the twice yearly “court of the hundred” was being held in

Sedlescombe in April and October. After the conquest the "Court Leat" met in the village every 6 weeks and bustled with activity as a result. Alongside this secular system half the lands occupied by the village fell within the Liberty of Battle Abbey.

- 3.5 The influence of the Abbey cannot be underestimated. By the late 13th century the monks had established a Tannery on the banks of the Brede where oak bark, lime marl and skins all from the Abbey's own sources were processed. The river also provided motive power for a corn mill which operated at the same time through to the middle of the 18th century when it changed to milling gun powder. Mill stones and the mill stream can still be seen at Powdermills. The unsettled European situation during this period gave increasing prosperity to the village centred as it was on iron for cannon and powder. Only the expanding growth of alternative industrial centres in the 19th century saw the end of this trade.
- 3.6 The Abbey was further directly involved in the village's development when it laid out the dwelling plots on the east side of The Green. Significantly the plots do not have the usual agricultural relationship usually found in medieval settlements and combine to give the village one of the highest proportions of surviving medieval houses in the District. The Green which may have provided the location for the "Court Leat" meetings was retained and that part lying to the west of the road enclosed. By the middle of the 16th century the village consisted of 22 houses, 13 of which were held on Battle Manor lands on the eastern side of The Street and 9 held on Bricklehurst Manor in Ticehurst lands on its west side.
- 3.7 The lands immediately north of the River Brede therefore developed as a small centre of industrial activity and by the 18th century accommodated a tanyard, corn mill, powdermill, wheel wrights and smithy. There is a loosely grouped pattern of buildings reflecting the need for open storage and general clutter associated with such uses. Further north on the east side of The Green a more compact residential pattern exists where domestic commercial undertakings survived well into the 20th century, with some remaining to the present day.
- 3.8 The basic structure of the village has remained largely unaltered save for the odd individual house or reconstruction until the 20th century when five estates were all built along Brede Lane; Park Shaw, Gorselands, Orchard Way, East View Terrace and Streetlands together with a new Primary School shifted the centre of gravity of the layout towards the north-east. A small cul-de-sac development of new houses has also been built at the southern end of the village, Gregory Walk on the site of the former bakery. A comparison of the sketch map showing Sedlescombe in the 16th century with that of the first edition Ordnance Survey and today's survey (maps 1, 2 and 3) show this pattern of first stability and their growth.

4. THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE AREA

- 4.1 There have been a number of noteworthy archaeological finds in the area; sites to the north of the village in the vicinity of Alder Shaw and Footlands Farm have yielded roman artefacts including good quality Samian ware. More spectacular was the discovery in 1876, close to where Roselands now stands, of some 1,800 silver coins dating from the reign of Edward the Confessor (1041 – 1061) and

may have formed part of Harold's War Chest. The whole village from Sedlescombe Bridge north to The Old Gun House and extending east and west into open fields is included on the County Council's sites and monuments record of archaeologically sensitive areas (SMR. 761).

- 4.2 In view of the village's long history and absence of more recent development in the historic core there is a strong possibility of good archaeological deposits being present. This is especially the case in the wetter ground beside the river where organic remains associated with the former tannery may survive.
- 4.3 Within the centre of the village itself although ground conditions will not be so favourable and considerable disturbance has occurred, it is still likely that most of the former burghage plots will contain evidence of earlier occupation. Many of the remaining buildings themselves (about 14) have been surveyed by the Rape of Hastings Architectural Survey (ROHAS) and these provide detailed information about the development of individual buildings.

5. ARCHITECTURAL AND HISTORIC QUALITIES OF SEDLESCOMBE'S BUILDINGS

- 5.1 There are 27 entries in the Statutory List of Buildings of Special Architectural or Historic Interest for the central historic core of the village. Of these, one numbers 1 – 5 Manor Cottages is listed in grade I whilst the remainder are listed in grade II. Their locations are shown on the appraisal plan, and show that for all practical purposes just about the whole centre is comprised of listed buildings.
- 5.2 Many, in common with most timber framed buildings in The Weald, have been refaced with later materials, roofs which were formerly covered with thatch are now clad with warm clay tiles while walls have been underbuilt to first floor level with red brick and tile hung, again with local hand made creased clay tiles, each slightly different in character to its neighbour. Just here and there are clues to what lies inside, a jetty at Iltonsbath, the chimney rising from Holmes House while at Manor Cottages the exuberant expression of the early 17th century close studded and jettied two storey porch built onto this 15th century house is testament to the village's historic wealth.
- 5.3 Only one building, The Old Thatch which dates from the 15th century gives a hint of what the street must have looked like before the "modernisation" and underbuilding of the 17th and 18th centuries took place. Tragically this building suffered serious fire damage in 2003 but its roof has been rebuilt using dated green oak and has been rethatched so that its contribution to the character of the village can continue.
- 5.4 An exception to the almost complete dominance of brick and tile is Durud; a 16th century timber framed building immediately south of The Clock House Bistro and faced entirely with white painted horizontal feather-edged boarding, a material more often associated with the east of the District and Kent.

- 5.5 The other listed building which should be singled out for mention is the Pump House on The Green erected in 1900 to the memory of three sisters Sophia and Harriet Pratt and Mary Bucknell. The pump itself is a fine lead structure protected by an iron cage, while the house itself has a four gabled pitched roof resting on a pentice on all four sides which is supported by eight circular sandstone columns.

6. KEY UNLISTED BUILDINGS WHICH CONTRIBUTE TO CHARACTER

- 6.1 Statutory listing is a national system designed to recognise the best examples of buildings of special architectural or historic interest. There are however buildings in any historic area which, though they may not satisfy the criteria used for listing purposes, still contribute to the character of the area.
- 6.2 Sedlescombe's historic core contains three buildings all dating from the late 19th century or early 20th century which, though not listable, possess sufficient architectural quality to be noted:-

- The Clock House Bistro – a two storey rendered building with its gabled roof facing the road, ground floor retains a traditional shopfront, above are two windows with a clock face to commemorate Victoria's diamond jubilee in 1897 set between them, above this in the gable a further window – all have moulded surrounds and originally were double hung sliding sashes – now replaced with plastic, prominent quoins and ornamental bargeboards, tiled roof;
- Linton House – a two storey dwelling, ground floor red brick and painted above, two parallel ranges with gables facing the road. Ground floor contains canted bay windows, one per range, set either side of a centrally placed 4 panel door with fanlight, three windows on the first floor, all are double sliding sashes with glazing bars and margin lights.
- Claytons – a two storey dwelling, ground floor red brick, above tile hung with beaver tail tiles. Asymmetrically placed, two storey square bay at northern end with 2 bay pentice roofed porch extending across remainder. Double hung sliding sash windows, those at first floor above the porch retain their glazing bars. Tiled roof with gable facing south with false black and white close studding.

7. CHARACTER AND RELATIONSHIP OF GREEN SPACES WITHIN THE VILLAGE AND ITS SETTING IN THE LANDSCAPE

- 7.1 Sedlescombe's defining element is its green, an unusual presence in Wealden villages and, though eroded to some extent by the junction with Brede Lane, a typical engineering solution, it remains a continual delight. The houses which line its east side occupy their former Abbey plots and produce an almost continuous built frontage along its length.
- 7.2 What is lost in enclosure is however more than made up by a continuous visual engagement with the surrounding landscape. Looking south from The Street in

front of The Brickwall Hotel the village's position in the valley above the River is emphasised and punctuated by the north slope of the Cottage Lane ridge. Moving through the village there is a sense of open countryside beyond, confirmed by the view between Bulmar House and Barrack Cottage while westwards the view is of well stocked frontages. Looking northwards, The Green is framed by the grounds and south elevation of the listed Brickwall Hotel. At the southern end of the Street the valley floor is reached and defined by John Catt's brick bridge across the Brede (1875) and on either side there are large areas of level pasture and playing fields.

- 7.3 The properties which face onto the eastern side of The Green tend to be built hard up against its edge with only a small area of private land between the buildings themselves and the road which runs around The Green itself. As a result both buildings and their richly planted gardens have an intimate relationship with the wider grassed space in front, separated for the most part by low brick walls or traditional white painted picket fences.
- 7.4 By contrast the western edge to The Green is defined in part by the line of the old Roman road and is emphasised not by buildings but high brick boundary walls and hedges punctuated by individual mature trees. It is these fine specimen trees which combine with the village's informal groups of buildings to enhance its setting in the landscape. Of particular note is the copper beech at Post Boys, horse chestnuts at Brickwall, Sherrald and the village green, copper beech at The Queens Head and group of firs at Homestall.

8. PREVALENT MATERIALS AND LOCAL DETAILS

- 8.1 Sedlescombe contains the whole palette of vernacular materials which predominate the western half of the district. That is to say feather edged boarded walls give way to brick and vertical clay tile hanging. Although originally a village of timber framed buildings with daub infill panels and thatch covered roofs, by the 18th century many had been altered by having their ground floor timber walls replaced by brickwork, some with grey headers and the first floor walls covered with bright red handmade clay tiles. Slowly thatch gave way to darker fired plain clay peg tiles, thus establishing the celebrated brick and tile Sussex vernacular. Today fleeting glimpses of the old tradition are visible with examples surviving relatively unaltered at Manor Cottages, Thatch Cottage and Kester House.
- 8.2 The details found in the village are mostly the details of the 18th century south eastern vernacular. Timber casement windows, each sash divided into 3 or 6 panes of glass, or sometimes glittering leaded lights, or less common in Sedlescombe, double hung sliding sashes. Traditionally front doors had become panelled and their status emphasised by a flat hood set above the door and supported on either side by a pair of neatly moulded console brackets.

9. AREAS OF CHARACTER

- 9.1 Sedlescombe is fortunate in avoiding much of the disfiguring developments which caused so much harm to the appearance of our historic areas during the last half of the 20th century. Although the form of the village was certainly

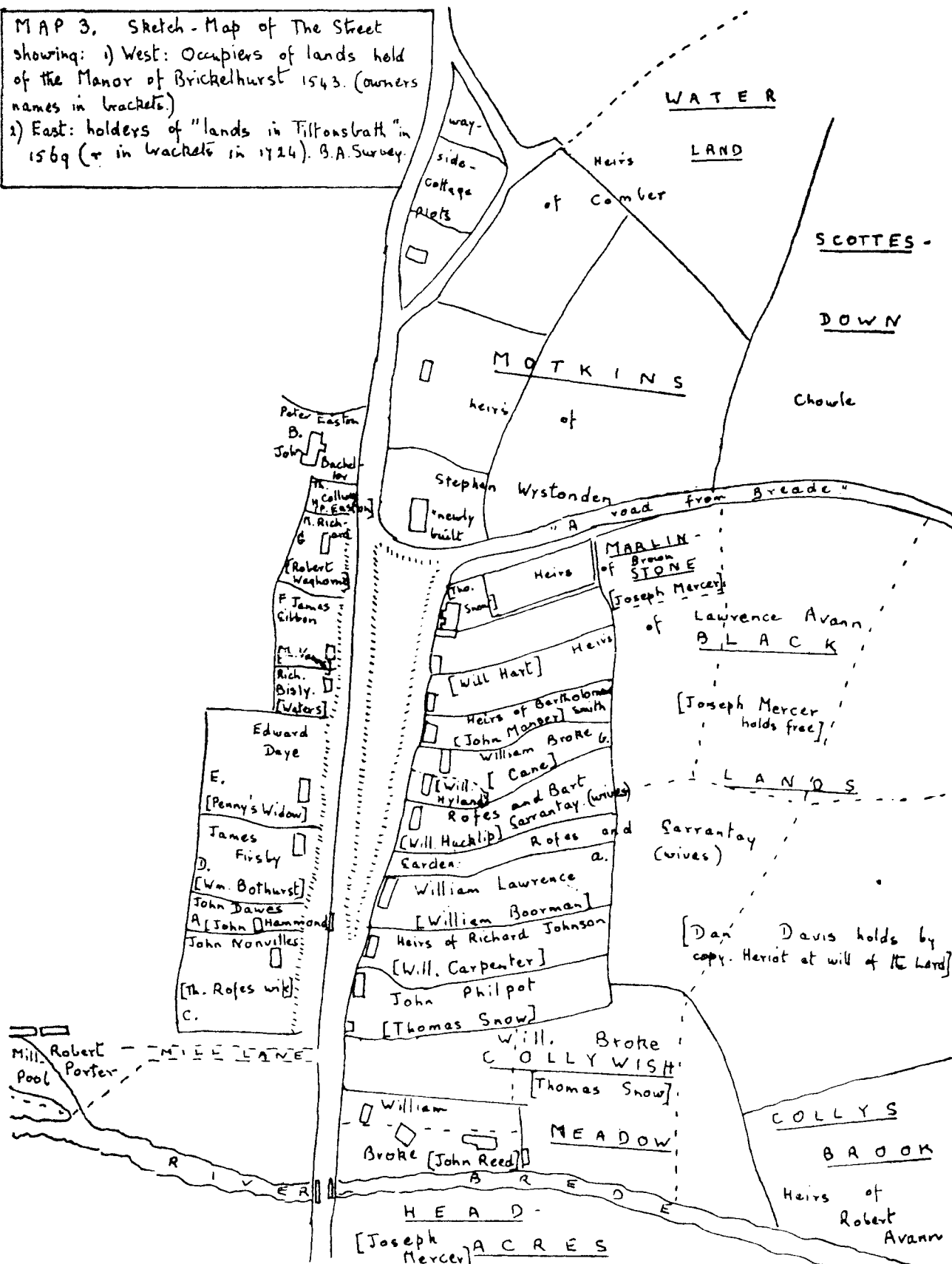
compromised by new housing estates in the 1950 and 60's, taking a line south of The Brickwall Hotel, the essential character of the village remains.

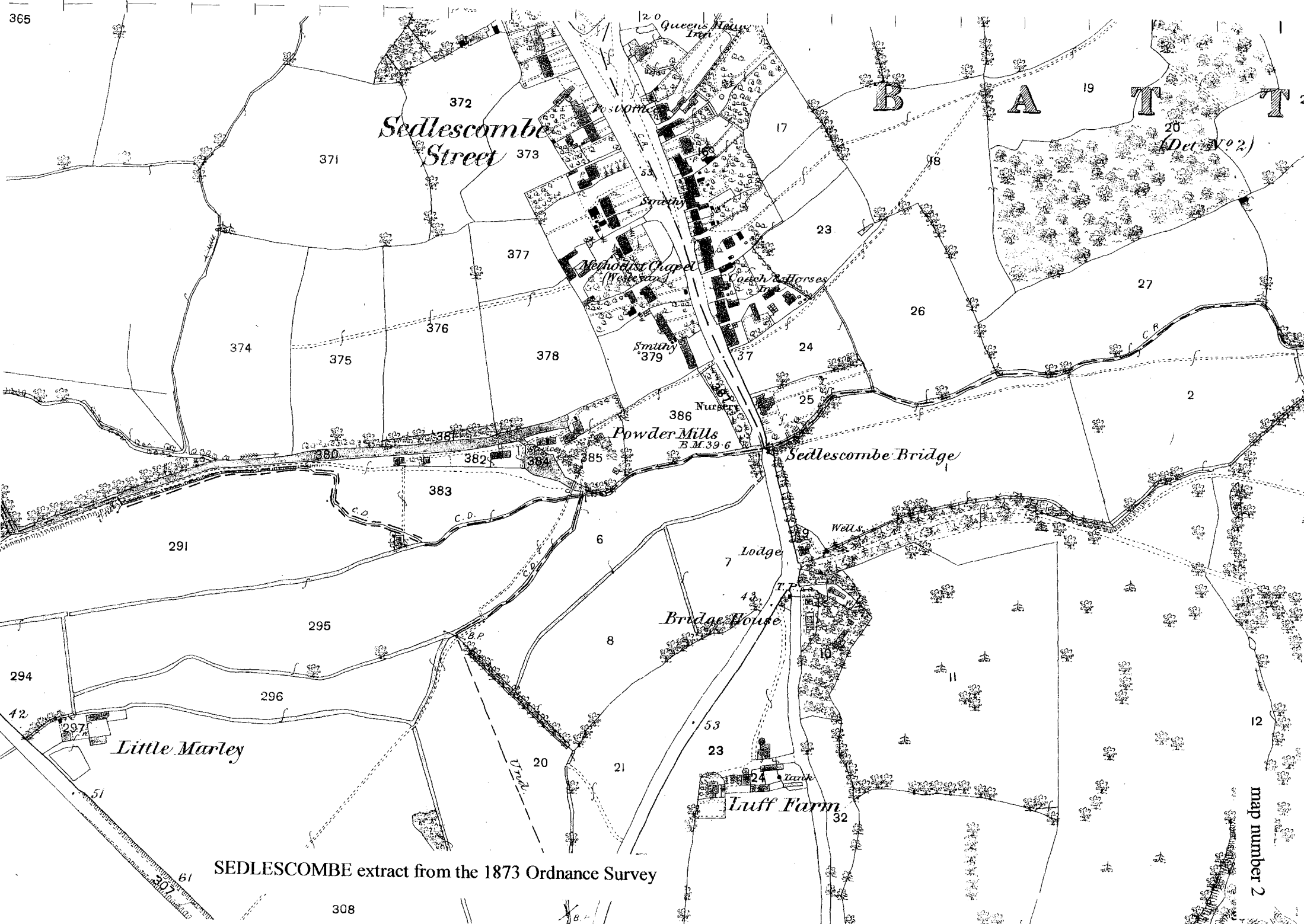
- 9.2 In part this is a result of a combination of attractive relatively continuous development along the east side of The Green, and well defined historic plots to the west all looking south to the valley floor where large, open, level fields provide a spacious setting for the village. Either way it has resulted in the character of Sedlescombe being preserved while allowing limited expansion to take place where it has had less impact.
- 9.3 Only on the west side of the Street immediately north of Sedlescombe Bridge has this open landscape setting been significantly harmed by the developments of the car sales and its associated activities.

10. PROPOSED DESIGNATION AREA AND MANAGEMENT OF CHANGE

- 10.1 The results of this appraisal have been summarized on drawing number 2 which is an attempt to bring together those physical aspects which, taken together, combine to give Sedlescombe its special sense of place. The resulting designation boundary has been drawn wide enough to include both the burghage plots on the east side of the village and the earlier "industrial" area along the river.
- 10.2 The introductory paragraphs to this appraisal describe the effects of designation and how it can be used as a means of not stopping but rather managing change so that an area's inherent character can be presented. The presence of a large number of listed buildings which are within the conservation area make this an easier task than might be the case were this not so.
- 10.3 All listed buildings regardless of grade are protected from any alterations both inside as well as outside which affect their character. Planning control is also extended to any wall, fence or enclosure within a listed building's curtilage. For Sedlescombe this means that only unlisted buildings and areas of public highway are left relatively free from control – it should be noted that only the complete demolition of an unlisted building in a conservation area is controlled – partial demolition often equally destructive in terms of eroding character - is not generally subject to control.
- 10.4 For most practical purposes this means the character of the conservation area can be protected from arbitrary and potentially harmful changes. Careful control of new development, whether extensions to existing buildings or new infill proposals can be controlled by the normal development control processes and judged against the relevant policies in the Local Plan. Where appropriate it will also be possible to make budget provision to allow schemes to be implemented which aim to enhance the appearance of a particular part of the area.
- 10.5 Designation is not the end, but the beginning of a process arrived at by first recognising that an area is of special value, identifying the reasons why and ensuring its protection and survival through the Planning system.

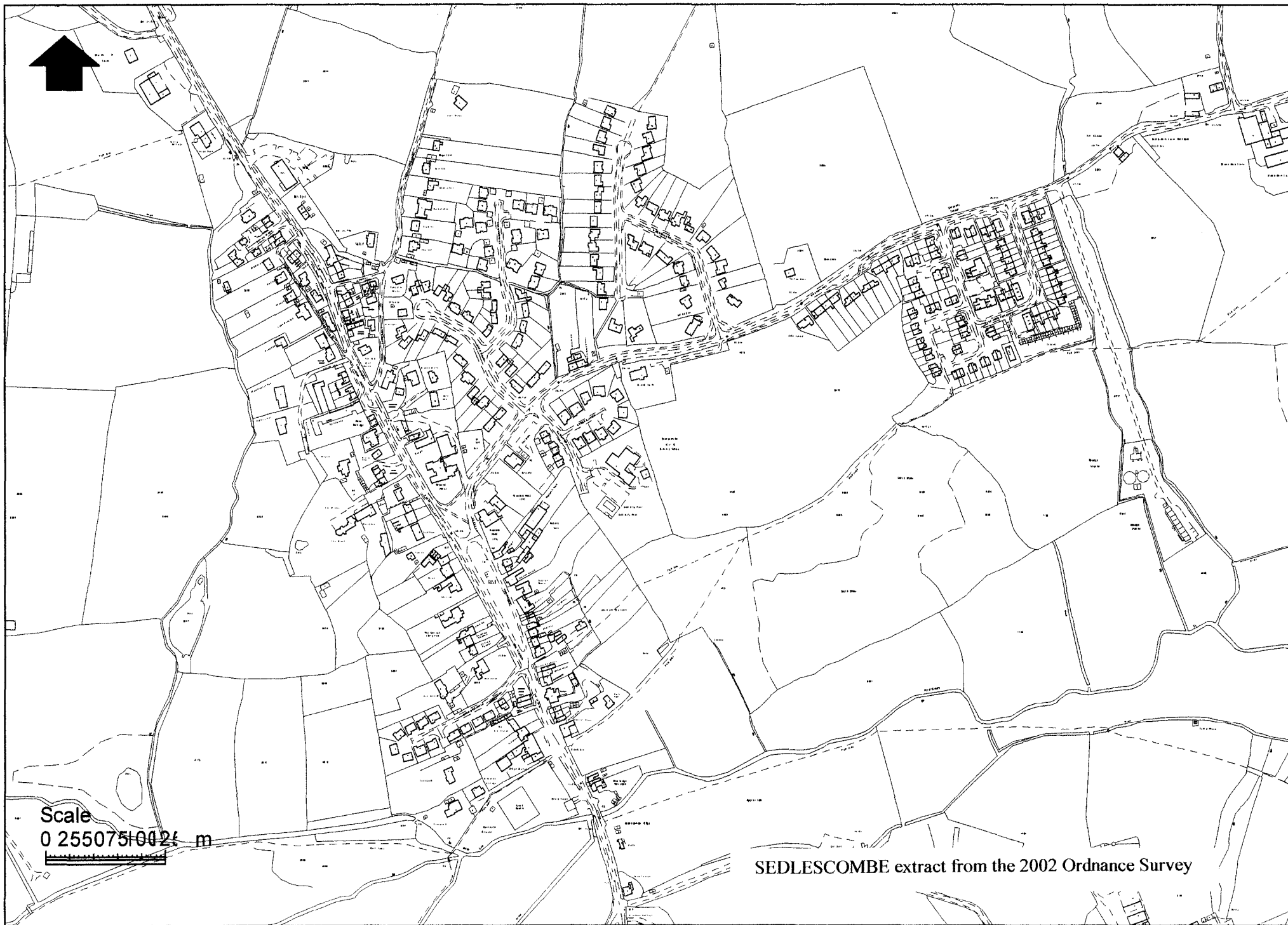
MAP 3. Sketch - Map of The Street showing: 1) West: Occupiers of lands hold of the Manor of Brickelhurst 1543. (owners names in brackets.)
2) East: holders of "lands in Tiltonsbrath" in 1569 (+ in brackets in 1724). B.A. Survey.

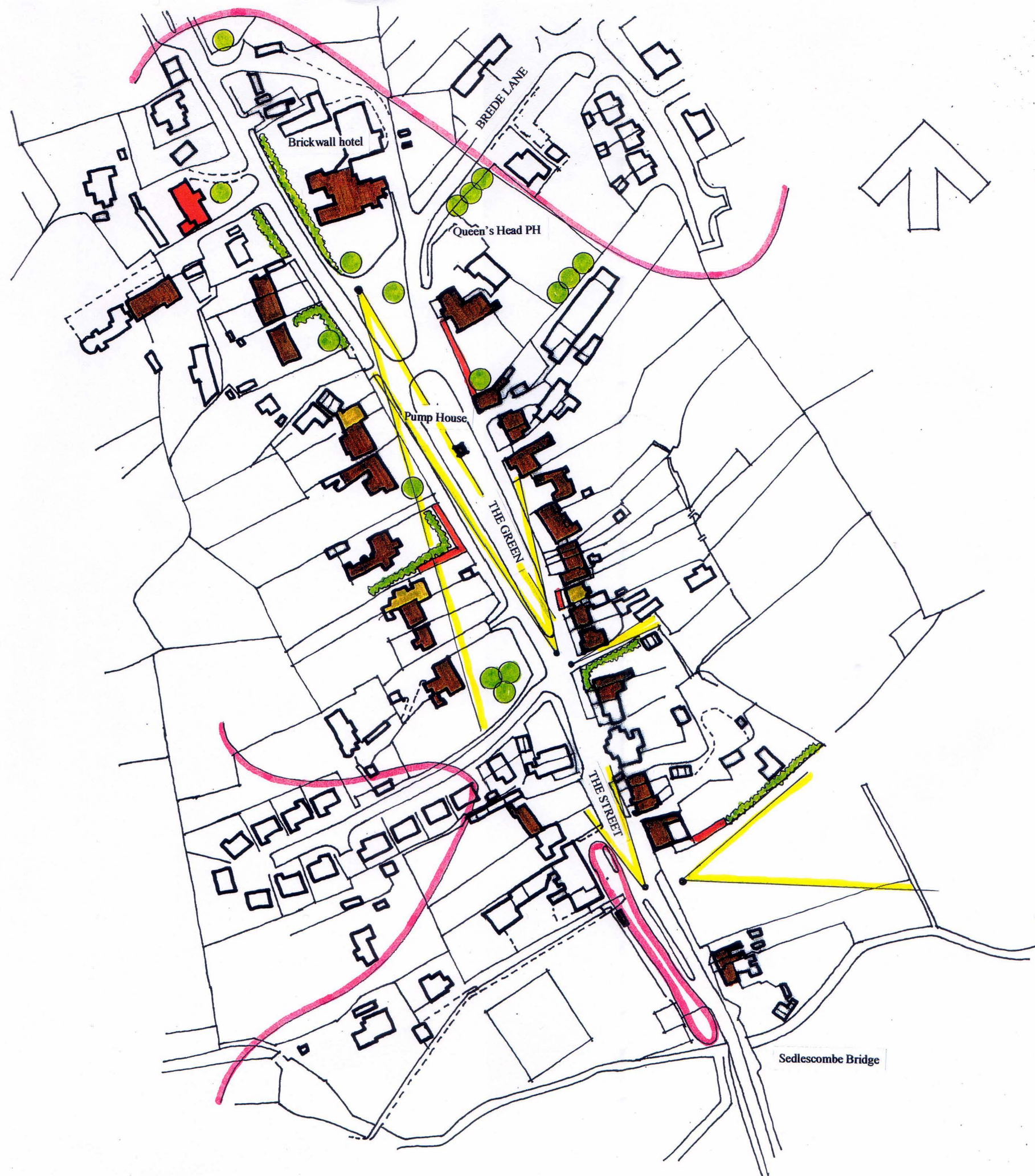




SEDLESCOMBE extract from the 1873 Ordnance Survey

map number 2





SEDLESCOMBE
Conservation Area Appraisal

- Grade I Listed Building
- Grade II Listed Building
- Building of Local Interest
- Trees of Local Importance
- Hedge of Local Importance
- Wall of Local Importance
- Significant Views
- Area of Negative Impact or Loss of Character



SEDLESCOMBE VILLAGE
Proposed Conservation Area

PROPOSED
BOUNDARY

