

TONBRIDGE CONSERVATION AREA



Introduction

The objective of the Tonbridge Conservation Area Appraisal is to analyse and record the special character of the Conservation Area, which was originally designated in 1969 with further extensions in 1981, 1985 and 1990. Following an assessment of these earlier conservation area boundaries, the Borough Council updated them in 2008 to include new areas and exclude others. The appraisal covers the area within the revised Conservation Area boundary and provides further details to assist with the interpretation and use of planning policies. It will help guide the Council in making planning decisions on planning applications and to this end has been adopted for development control purposes.

It is intended that this appraisal will inform and influence the activities of the Council and other bodies (eg Kent County Council and other statutory agencies), where these impact on the Conservation Area. It will also assist in the identification of any programmes of action that are considered appropriate by these bodies, subject, of course, to financial limitations and other priorities they may have.

Importantly, it is hoped that the appraisal will prove to be of help to residents, businesses and landowners. For anyone proposing new development or changes within the Conservation Area, the appraisal should be read in conjunction with the Borough Council's **Conservation Area Advice Note**. This includes guidance on the broad issues to be considered and the special controls that apply in Conservation Areas.



*As the purpose of this appraisal is to describe the **character** of the area, it does not include a detailed description of every feature or building. Omission of any particular building, feature or space should not be taken, therefore, to imply that it is not of interest or similarly that there are no opportunities to improve the character of the area.*

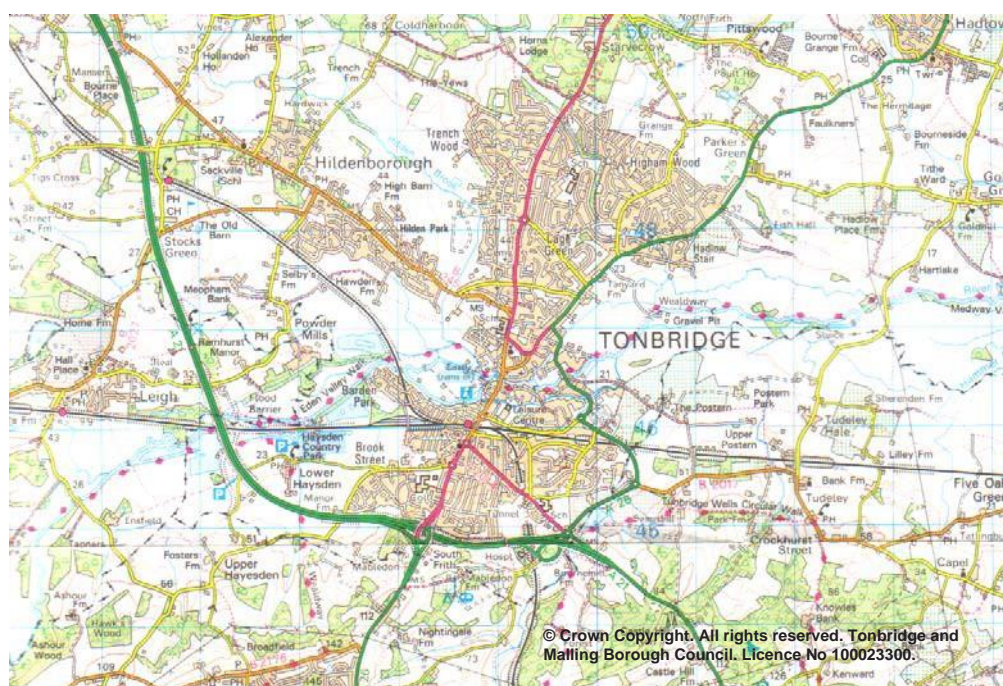
CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL

Location, Setting and Physical Form

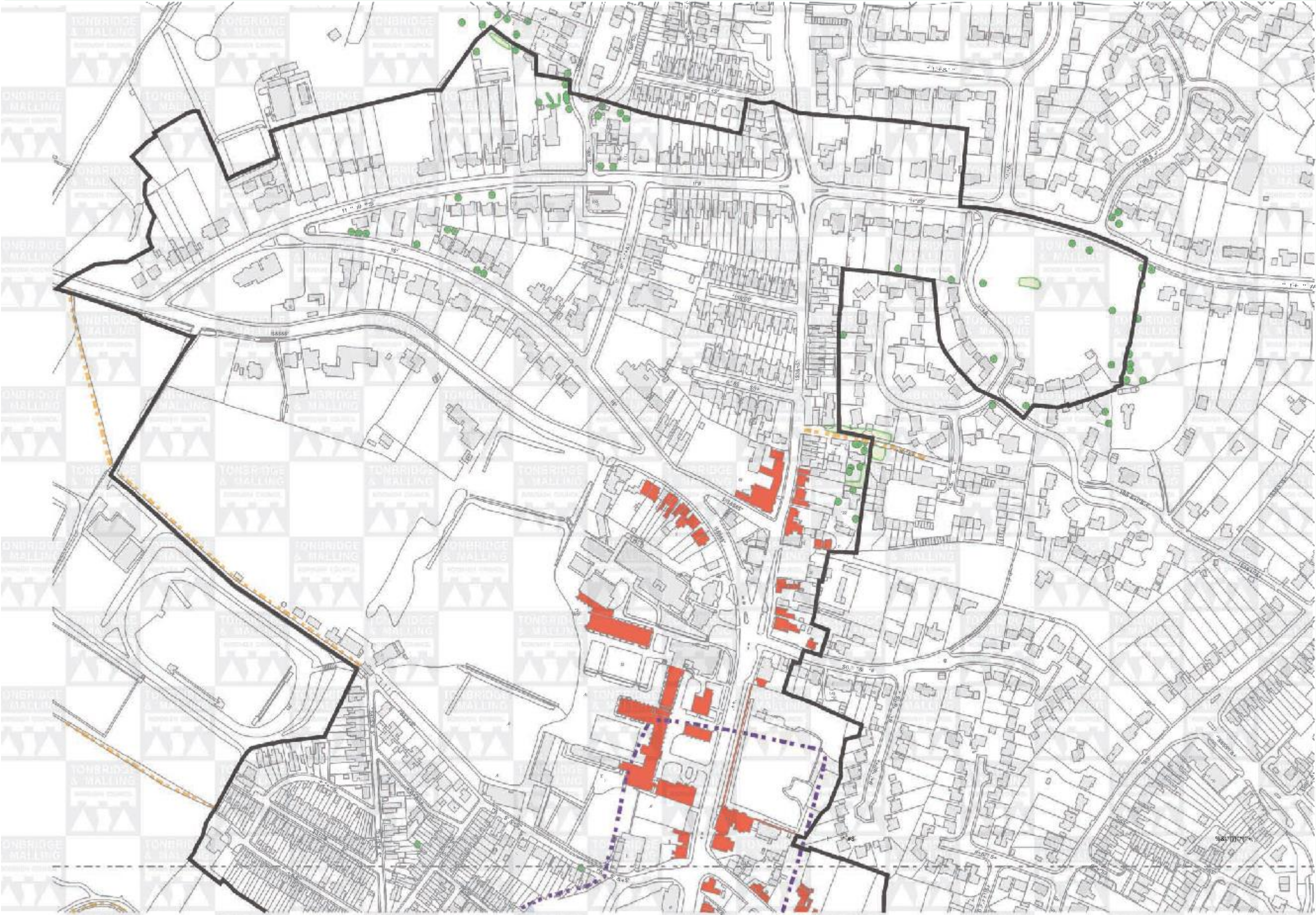
Tonbridge is situated at a crossing point of the River Medway about 6 km north of Tunbridge Wells, 10 km south-east of Sevenoaks and 20 km south-west of Maidstone. The old settlement stood on the north side of the river which was less prone to flooding but, protected by flood control barriers, the town now extends across the floodplain.

The town is narrow at this point and consequently the countryside setting is never far from the town centre. To the west, the low-lying, flat countryside penetrates into the centre as the river and its floodplain extends up to the motte. Views of the countryside unfold along riverside walks to the west and are visible as an expanse of open space when viewed from the raised motte. The river and low lying countryside with mature trees acts an important setting for the historic motte and castle and the town centre as a whole. The gently rising ground occupied by Tonbridge School playing fields and grounds also acts as an important setting to the school buildings and the conservation area as a whole. The wooded, hills and ridges of the Greensand Ridge and the High Weald rise sharply to the north and south of the town creating an attractive long distance back drop to the town. This landscaped setting is important to the character of the conservation area seen as it is from a number of vantage points including the motte.

The Conservation Area covers an area of the town from the River Medway in the South to Yardley Park Road in the north incorporating the ancient castle and historic High Street. To the south and north of the Conservation Area mainly 20th century housing developments fan out onto higher land giving the town its characteristic dumb bell shape. Maps 1a and 1b (opposite) show the extent of the Conservation Area. One of the characteristics of the Conservation Area is its diversity. The Conservation Area can be divided into areas of similar character (see Map2).



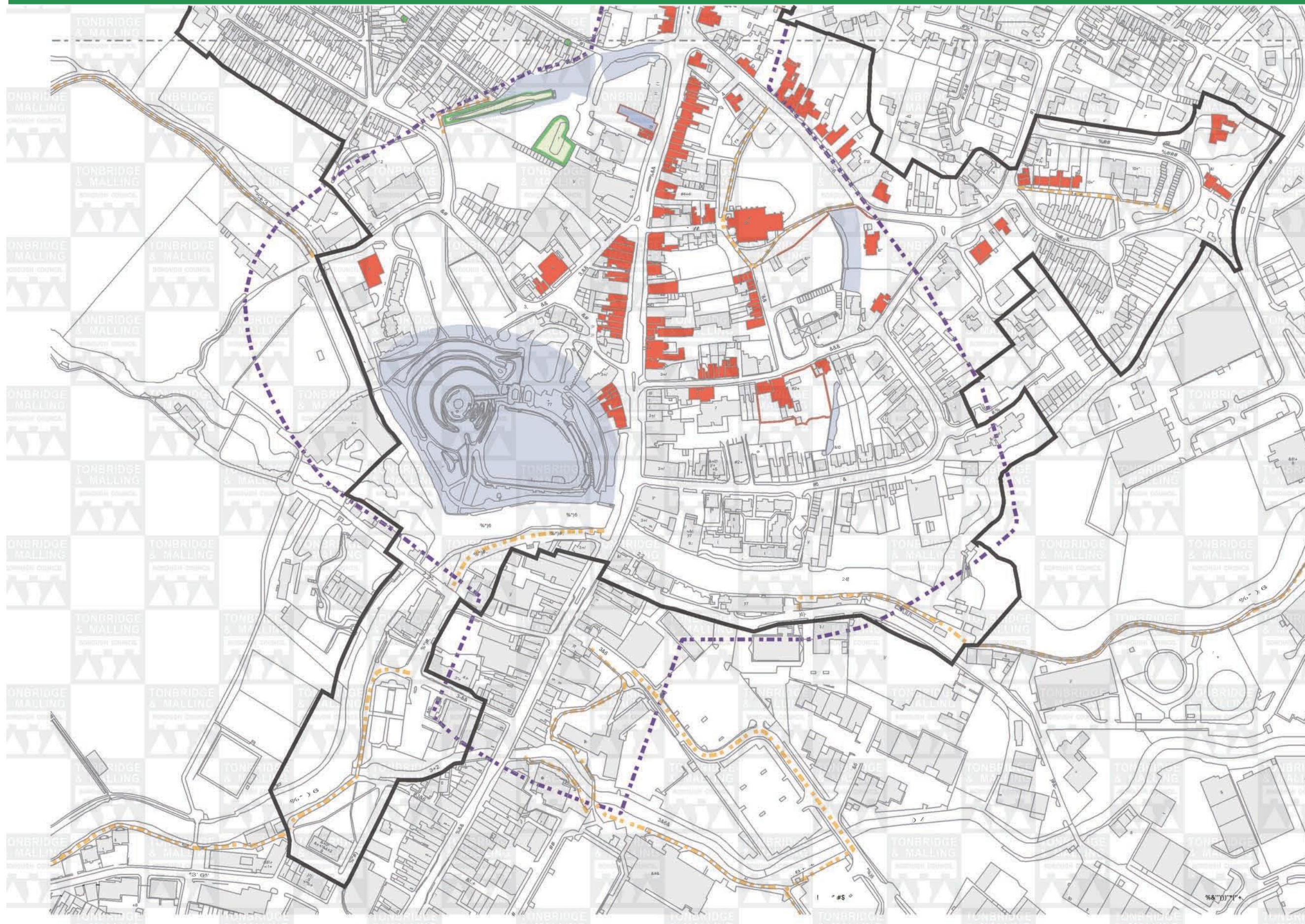
TONBRIDGE



- KEY
- Boundary of Conservation Area
 - Listed Buildings
 - Public right of way
 - Ancient Monuments
 - Area of Archaeological Potential
 - Tree Preservation Order

Map 1a

TONBRIDGE



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Map 1b

Area A – This covers the medieval core of the town. It has been divided into four sub areas:

Sub-area A1 – The 13th Century castle and grounds are a unique historical feature and dominant landmark in the Conservation Area.

Sub-area A2 – The historic High Street has a busy commercial character and contains many buildings of medieval origin and several historic inns.

Sub-area A3 – This mixed use area incorporates the small scale streets of the old market. The area is evolving with the creation of a new high density residential development on the former cattle market.

Sub-area A4 – The area is characterised by a large number of substantial listed 18th and 19th Century buildings set within large plots. The Church of St Peter and St Paul is of medieval origin and stands within an extensive landscaped churchyard, creating a green oasis just off the High Street.

Sub-area A5 – This area comprises the landscaped area around the River Medway.

Sub-Area B – A mixed use area which has seen considerable redevelopment but retains some important Saxon and medieval elements. The wharf area of the Medway reflects the industrial heritage of the town.

Sub-Area C – A group of historic buildings clustered around the medieval Mill Pond lie at the heart of this predominantly 19th Century residential area. A small parade of Victorian shops fronts the Hadlow Road.

Sub-Area D – The Slade Area is a Victorian residential neighbourhood of tight knit terraced and semi-detached houses which have retained many original features.

Area E – The northern part of the Conservation Area lies outside the medieval defences and has a spacious, predominantly Victorian character. It has been divided into three sub-areas:

Sub-area E1 – Tonbridge School and its grounds dominate the townscape of the upper High Street. The Gothic style 19th Century sandstone buildings create an impressive frontage on the High Street and the chapel tower is a landmark feature visible from many parts of the Conservation Area.

Sub-area E2 – The London Road/Shipbourne Road junction is wide and spacious and framed by trees and listed buildings. The Shipbourne Road is narrow and enclosed and the historic buildings retain many original architectural details.

Sub-area E3 – Dry Hill Park was developed in the late 19th Century. Substantial houses surrounded by mature trees stand in large plots in an elevated position with long views northwards towards the Sevenoaks Ridge.

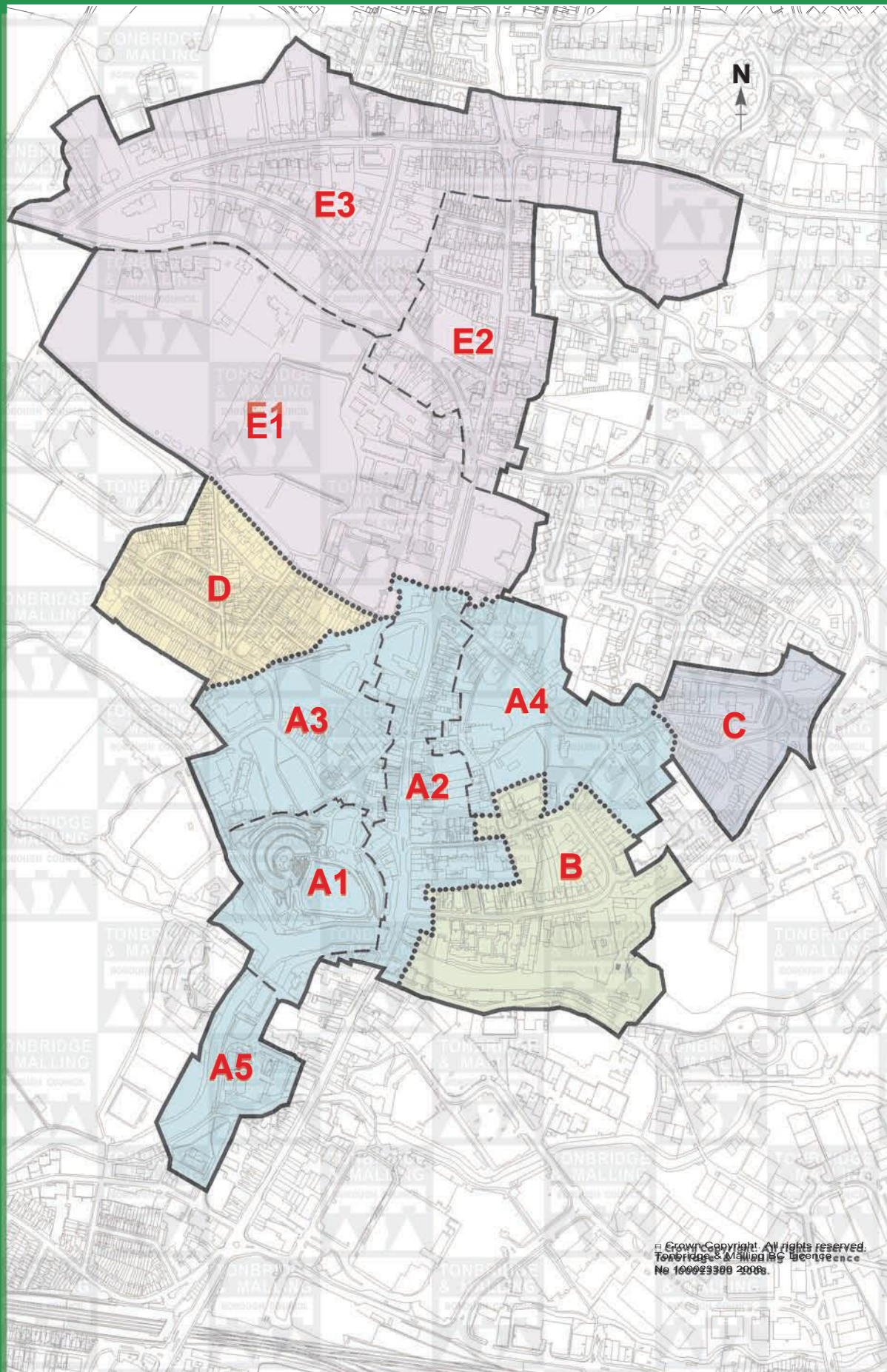
These sub-areas of special architectural and historic character are not intended to be precisely split, as there will inevitably be some overlapping of characteristics of the various areas due to the diversity of the character of the Conservation Area.

TONBRIDGE TOWNSCAPE CHARACTER ANALYSIS - SUB AREA

Key to sub - areas

- A1 Castle**
- A2 High Street**
(Including East Street(w))
- A3 Market Quarter**
(Including The Slade
Bank Street
Castle Street
Castle Fields
Stafford Road(s))
- A4 Church & Borden**
(Including The Borden
Hadlow Road(w)
East Street (e)
Church Street
Church Lane(e))
- A5 River Walk**
(Including River Lawn Road
Bradford Street)
- B Lyons Crescent**
(Including Lockside (w)
Medway Wharf Road
East Street (part)
Church Street(s))
- C Mill Stream**
(Including Mill Crescent
Mill Lane
Charlton Crescent
Mill Bank)
- D Slade Area**
(Including Stafford Road
Hawden Road
Houselands Road
Fosse Road
Lodge Road
The Avenue
Havelock Road
Lansdowne Road
The Crescent)
- E1 Tonbridge School**
(Including High Street (n))
- E2 Shipbourne Road**
(Including Ashburnham Road
Manor Grove
Old London Road
London Road (e)
Portman Park (w))
- E3 Dry Hill Park Road**
(Including Dry Hill Road
London Road
Dry Hill Park Crescent
Yardley Park Road (w))

Map 2



Origins and Development of the Settlement

The name Tonbridge is derived from the Old English tun brycg which means 'the bridge of, at, or near the manor or settlement'. It is thought that the town evolved at a clearing in the great Andredsweald forest at a point where several tracks from the North Downs to the Weald met at a ford in the river Medway. The first bridge and church of St Peter and St Paul are thought to have been constructed between the 9th and 11th centuries.

After 1066, William 1 granted land in the Tonbridge Area to Richard FitzGilbert who built a Motte and Bailey castle to defend the river crossing. Tonbridge at this time was a small roadside town standing on the higher more defensible land to the north of the river. The only significant building south of the river was the Priory of St Mary Magdalene which was founded in 1192.

By the mid 13th century the castle had a sandstone three storey gatehouse and a high stone curtain wall. In addition, a defensive fosse was built around the north, west and east perimeters of the town. The wide ditch and bank started and ended at the river and enclosed the castle, church and main street. The Medway formed the southern defense for the town. The Gatehouse and sections of the castle wall and fosse still stand today.



Castle Gatehouse

Medieval development was enclosed within these defenses giving the town a compact form. It was only well into the post-medieval period that the settlement expanded beyond them. The High street formed the principal axis of the town. There were houses on each side of the High street from the Great Bridge to the North Gate with small side streets leading off to the east and west. The church, castle (which also served as the manor house) and Tonbridge School were the only stone buildings in the town. The settlement remained principally north of the river as the south side was still frequently flooded. There was a weekly market in the town and shops, inns and other trades based around agriculture, mills, cloth making and iron working became well established.



Chequers Inn

The market originally lay outside the castle gate between Bank Street and Castle Street. It flourished and in the 16th century the market place was moved to the east side of the High Street between East Street and Church Lane and houses and shops were built on the old site. The pens and stalls of the markets and fairs stood where the High Street broadens out by the Chequers Inn. The general market ceased in the early nineteenth century but a cattle market (granted in 1671) continued. Due to the congestion it caused it was relocated behind the Corn Exchange. The site is now being redeveloped.

In 1553 Andrew Judde, Master of the Skinners Company and Lord Mayor of London, founded and endowed a free grammar school at Tonbridge. The school buildings stand north of the town walls on the west of the High Street. Today it is a private school and the 19th Century Gothic frontage dominates the townscape of the upper High Street.

The earliest inns were established in the Tudor period, possibly as a result of the Priory ceasing to offer accommodation. During the 18th and 19th Centuries the number of inns increased rapidly. By 1672 Tonbridge had become a post town with a post master. It was on the main road from London to the coast and was also on the main postal route from London to France. Tonbridge was an important staging post for coaching and carrier services connecting between London, Hastings, Maidstone, the Wells, Brighton and Rye. However, road conditions were poor. The river at that time ran through five channels and the road ran over a series of hump-backed bridges across land that frequently flooded.

In 1740 the River Medway was made navigable and a town quay was constructed. The following year the Upper Medway Navigation company started to ship out timber and iron and bring back coal, stone, gravel and lime mainly to make bricks (with local clay) for the growing town. Tonbridge became the port for the upper reaches of the Medway and an important trading centre. Tonbridge formed the focus of a large agricultural hinterland and the town acted as a centre for processing and trading agricultural products.

During the 17th, 18th and early 19th centuries, many new buildings were constructed within the confines of the town defenses, particularly in the High Street, Bank Street and East Street, often replacing earlier structures or infilling gaps. Bricks were made from the good quality local clay and began to replace timber as the main building material in the town. The 18th century weather boarded wooden houses, shops and inns were either replaced with brick houses or had a 'brick skin' put over them and featured tiled roofs. Today large parts of the town feature mid 18th century exteriors enclosing internal structures dating from much earlier in the 16th and 17th centuries. The Rose and Crown which remains in the High Street was one such Tudor building which was given a brick frontage. The town began to expand beyond the Fosse. Much of the bank and ditch on the east side of the town was levelled and filled in, and houses were built along the Borden Dyke.

After the arrival of the railway in 1842 and a more direct line to London via Sevenoaks in 1868, there was rapid increase of housing and population. Tonbridge grew from what was predominantly a farming community and became a market town centre of commerce and light industry. Small terraced housing for the poor and light industry were built on the frequently flooded land to the south, while fine houses were built for the middle classes on the higher, drier land to the north and east. The demand for trade, shops, public buildings and services increased markedly. The Dry Hill Park suburban area and Slade community were built during the late 19th Century.

Tonbridge continued to grow in the 20th Century with the expansion of residential estates particularly to the north and east of the town. A trading estate developed on the low lying land east of the town centre.

During the 1960s, in an attempt to reduce traffic congestion, two rows of historic buildings had been demolished on the western side of the High Street just north of the Big Bridge and at the Bordyke junction. This raised awareness of the pressures and threats facing the historic town centre and in 1969, following the introduction of the Civic Amenities Act, Tonbridge Conservation Area was designated.

