THE BOROUGH OF ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS

HISTORIC LANDSCAPE CHARACTERISATION

REVISION OF KENT HLC (2000)

AUGUST 2016

Summary of the parish of Speldhurst

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Landscape History & Conservation

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The parish summary should be read in conjunction with the Tunbridge Wells Borough Historic Landscape characterisation Report (Section I User Guide and Interpretation; Section II The Gazetteer of HLC Types and Section III the Maps).

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My colleague Phil Sansum kindly undertook the processing of the missing Tithe maps for the Borough for which I am very grateful.

The views expressed in this report are entirely the author's own and do not reflect the policies of neither Tunbridge Wells Borough Council, Kent County Council nor the High Weald AONB.

PERIOD TABLE

Description	Archaeological Period	From	To
Hunting societies	Upper Palaeolithic	30,000	10,000 BC
Hunter-gather societies	Mesolithic	10,000-8,000	4,000-3,500 BC
The first agriculturalists	Neolithic	3,500	2,100 BC
Beginning of metal working in bronze	Bronze Age	2,100	600 BC
Beginning of metal working in iron	Iron Age	600 BC	AD 43
	Romano-British	AD 43	AD 410
	Anglo-Saxons [or Early Medieval]	AD 410	1066
	Medieval	1066	1540
	Post-medieval	1540	Present

The Archaeological and Historical Periods used in the Sussex HLC & Revised Kent HLC

Key to HLC-Prev	Description	Date	Combined
P1	Late 20th century	AD1945 – present	Post 1900
P2	Early 20th century	AD 1914 – AD 1945	
P3	Early Modern	AD 1800 – AD 1913	19th century
P4	Late Post-medieval	AD 1600 – AD 1799	Post-medieval
P5	Early Post-medieval	AD 1500 – AD 1599	
P6	Medieval	AD 1066 – AD 1499	Medieval
P7	Early-medieval	AD 410 – AD 1065	
P8	Roman	AD 43 – AD 409	
P9	Prehistoric	500,000 BC – AD42	

Summary Assessment of the Historic Landscape Characterisation for the parish of Speldhurst Borough of Royal Tunbridge Wells

1. Introduction

Historic Landscape Characterisation [HLC] is a process by which the landscape of an area is interpreted and mapped by selected historic attributes which contribute to the local historic character. The dominant historic attributes are that of enclosure and settlement. The pattern of fields, the nature of the boundaries, the form and distribution of historic settlement shape the local character and distinctiveness of a given area. The term 'historic landscapes' means in this context all landscapes which have been shaped by human interaction. HLC maps character not land use though with finer grained HLCs for some of the historic types reflect the use of the land. It can be likened to a fine water-colour painting which despite using OSMM as its base does result in some 'blurred' boundaries between character types at the very detailed field by field level. HLC is a starting point when investigating the historic landscape for any given area, however it is no substitute for detailed desk-based assessments and field observation.

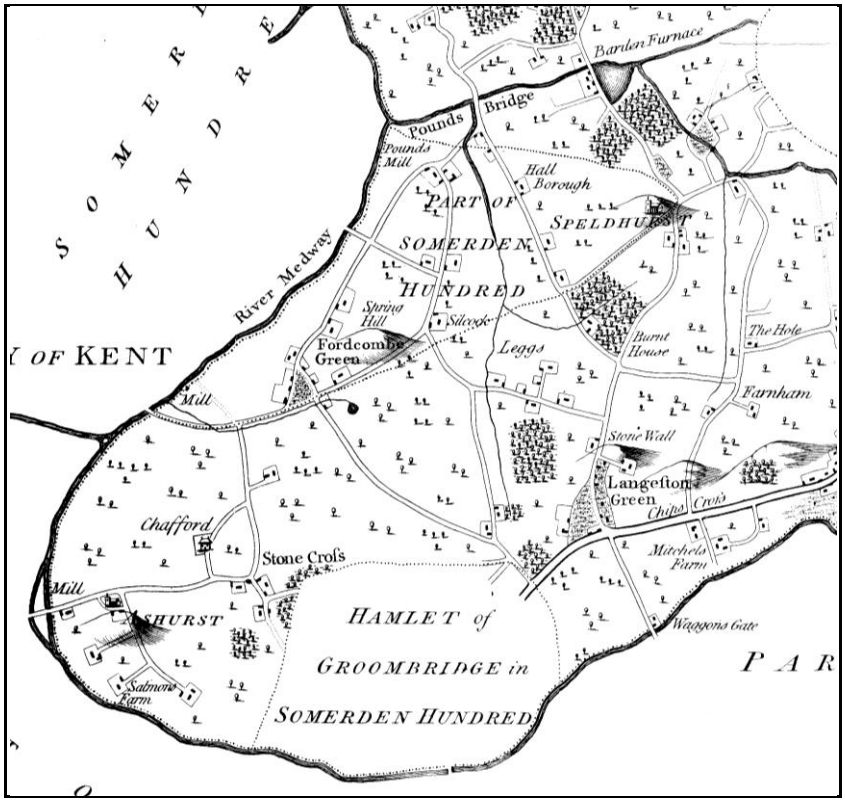
The Historic Landscape Characterisation for Speldhurst forms part of a district wide revision of the Kent HLC (2000). Four parishes in the east of the district have been completed and the remaining parishes are being undertaken as part of a rolling programme of phased characterisation. As each parish is completed a short analysis is presented. The parishes will then be grouped up to form the district-wide HLC. The sequence of characterisation has been prioritised to provide firstly information on those parishes close to the town of Royal Tunbridge Wells, and then completing the wider countryside. The centre of the built-up area of the town has been omitted as the priority is to characterise the historic landscape of the rural parts of the borough.

This report sets out a summary of the some of the results for the civil parish of Speldhurst. A Methods Report together with a Gazetteer of Typologies and attributes is being prepared for the end of the first phase of this revision (end of September 2016).

2. Historic context of parish of Speldhurst

The civil parish of Speldhurst is comprised of two ecclesiastical parishes that of Ashurst and Speldhurst together at its northern end a small part of the parishes of Penshurst and Tonbridge. The majority of the parish of Speldhurst lies within the Hundred of Wachlingstone in the Lathe of Aylesford. The hundred of Wachlingstone wraps around the southern part of the Lowy of Tonbridge. When the Lowy was created post-1066 it included many former Saxon dens or swine pastures to the south of the Medway. Groombridge on the county boundary formed part of a detached portion of the Hundred of Somerden. All this indicates that the land came under different territorial divisions, the boundaries of which still exist in the landscape. For further background on the early medieval history of this area see Witney 1976, Hasted 1797. The river Medway forms the county boundary with Sussex. As the town of Royal Tunbridge Wells expanded in the C18 and C19 westwards, the District of Rusthall was created in 1850 from the extent of the manor (KHLC U749 P10).

In 1863 Langton Green also became a district with its own chapel. The small hamlet at Groombridge also had its own small chapel as well.



Extract from Edward Hasted's Map of the Hundred of Wachlingstone 1797

For the majority of Speldhurst the underlying geology comprises Tunbridge Wells Sandstone, with alluvial deposits in the valleys. The topography comprises a long ridge of high ground extending west from Tunbridge Wells towards New Park Wood. Ashurst Park and the village of Speldhurst as their names suggest (see below) also occupy high ground. Following northwards from the main ridge are small streams, tributaries of the Medway creating incised wooded valleys. Medieval farmsteads occupy the higher ground and several have become gentrified in the C19 to country estates and parkland such as Danemore and Holmwood alias Mitchells Park. The medieval village of Speldhurst is dominated by the larger late post-medieval and early modern development of Langton Green to the south and Southborough and Rusthall to the north and east.

After AD 450 with the coming and settling in Kent of the Saxons the Weald was divided into large 'commons' attached to large agricultural estates in north and east Kent. Kent was carved up to utilise large swathes of the landscape. These estates became the lathes the territories of which spread into the Weald to lay claim to the woodland and grazing pastures. These commons were used for seasonal grazing but were gradually broken up into dens or swine pastures attached to the evolving manors located in the north and east on the demesne and farmed land. Eventually temporary settlements in the dens became permanent farmsteads taking their names from the 'dens' and the settlers enclosed land and laid out fields from the swine pastures in order to cultivate crops and keep stock. The area of Speldhurst and the western end of the district of Tunbridge Wells lay in the large and

powerful lathes of Aylesford and Dartford, dominated by the manors such as Otford and Wrotham claiming extensive grazing pastures across this area of higher ground bounded by the River Medway. Thus neither Ashhurst nor Speldhurst are mentioned in Domesday, forming part of those larger manors.

The Saxon and medieval place-names of the older settlements give clues as to the development of the early medieval landscape. The place-names indicated that it was an open wooded country that the Saxon settlers colonised with heathy ground with birch and ferns on the ridges. Hurst (*OE hyrst* or *herst*) means wood on rising ground and many of the place-names in western Kent end with this suffix. It suggests that the wood lay on hilly ground from where it could be seen and was detached from the main body of the wealden woods, (Witney 1976, 16; Hooke 2010, 128). Speldhurst and Ashurst, are examples of this and because of their prominence on higher ground attracted settlement. As well as those already mentioned, within this parish there are several names which originated from hurst such as Crokers Hatch Corner alias Crokherst, and Ewehurst (now lost). Places with den names are fewer such as Dornden alias Thornden and Barnden (formerly in Penshurst parish). The potentially heathy nature of the landscape is also indicated by the place-names of Farnham alias Fern Farm, and Birchetts alias birch. Dornden indicates thorn bushes. [See Wallenberg 1931, 1934 for details]. It was this open heathy, woody landscape that the Saxon settlers enclosed land for cultivation and established farmsteads. It is suggested that this more open land enabled enclosures to be laid out in a more regular organised fashion especially on the higher ground. The more steeply sloping and wooded areas were probably cleared and enclosed later.

The Place name of Ashurst means ‘Ash wood’ from *OE æsc* = ash-tree + *hyrst* = wood (Wallenberg 1934, 184 PNK). It was first recorded in 1100 in the Textus Roffensis. Ashurst comprised three separate early medieval swine pastures or dens belonging to the Royal Manor of Dartford and held at the time of the Conquest from the king by castle-guard at Dove. The manor of Buckland (near Dover) was appendant to the manor of Ashurst. Witney identifies two fragments one around the village and one at Ashurst Park into which the old parish of Ashurst used to be divided (Witney 1976, 172). Also appendant was Rodmaredge, including Groombridge which comprised a fragment of Somerden Hundred amid the Hundred of Wachlingstone (Witney 1976, 224; Hasted 1797, V, 255-279). Below is an extract from an Inquisitions post-mortem [IPM] of the Manor of Ashurst which describes the amount of arable pasture and wood pasture in the mid-C13.

> Item, of the same fee are in Esherst 120 acres of arable land, worth, per annum, 30*s.*; value of acre, 3*d.* Item, there are 47 acres of pasture, worth, per annum, 23*s.* 6*d.*; value of acre, 6*d.* Item, there are 40 acres of wood, the pasture of which is worth, per annum, 4*s.* Item, easement of court and houses is worth, per annum, 2*s.* Item, there is a certain water-mill, worth 20 seams of corn; price of a seam,[182] 2*s.* Item of rent of assize, per annum, 2 marks. Item, 40 hens of rent per annum, worth 5*s.*; price of a hen, 1½*d.* Item, 200 eggs of rent per annum, worth 6*d.*; price of 100, 3*d.* Item, the profit of the Tenants' Court is worth, per annum, 2*s.* Item to the same manor pertaineth the advowson of the church of Esherst, the taxation of which is 5 marks. Total of the whole value of the manor of Esherst, £6. 13*s.* 8*d.*, without the advowson of the church.

Source Arch Cant V p295 IPM of Nicholas de Gerunde 52 Hen 111 1268

Hasted in 1797 describes the parish as adjacent to Sussex separated by a small stream on south and west sides. The IPM identifies a small area of demesne arable 120 acres but there were no services due from the tenants suggesting the manor hired in labour to work the lord's demesne. The 40 acres of wood is valued not for its timber but for its pasture suggesting that this was an area of wood pasture and might be identified with Ashurst Plain or what is now the parkland around Fernchase Manor. This woodland is located on high ground as are the remains of Ashurst Wood all of which contribute to the origin of its place-name. The water mill would have been located on the River Medway. Hasted also mentions the dispersed nature of settlement across the parish with no village centre (Hasted 1797, V, 277).

Speldhurst is another place name meaning woodland on a hill. It also lies on one of the main north-south drove ways into the Wealden swine pastures. These droves often followed the higher ground and influenced where settlement was established on prominent positions (Witney 1976, 53) Hasted in 1797 describes Speldhurst parish as follows;

> *The soil in the eastern part of this parish changes to an uninterrupted scene of lofty hills, with deep vallies intersecting, the soils are a stiff loam and a barren sand, which covers a continued bed of rock stone, several of which appear above it, of large size and dimensions, greatly abounding with iron ore, which renders the springs of it more or less chalybeate;* (Hasted 1797, III, 275-276).

This part of Kent lay at on the eastern side of the Wealden iron producing area. The iron furnace at Barden mill produced ordnance in the C17 and was demolished c.1787, (Cleere and Crossley1995, 311-312).

A characteristic feature of this part of the district are the numerous greens and commons which are likely to be the modified remains of former wood pastures, such as at Langton Green and Rusthall Common within and close to Speldhurst. To the south of Tunbridge Wells lay the medieval hunting forest of Waterdown and the South Frith (or chase) of the Lowy of Tonbridge extended from the Medway south almost to the county boundary (Cole, 2014,80, 88).

3. Results of the revised HLC for the parish of Speldhurst

Some examples of the digitising of Speldhurst parish as part of the wider revised HLC for the borough of Tunbridge Wells are presented in the map extracts on the following pages. The first phase of this project will be presented in a GIS project for the parishes of Speldhurst, Southborough Royal Tunbridge Wells and Pembury. Only a brief analysis of the HLC attributes is presented here. It has been split into its main period and type component attributes, but by applying the different style sheets it is possible to show the various attributes for the present day HLC, as well as a conjectured image of what the historic character of the late medieval and early-post-medieval landscape might have looked like.

3.1 The Phase 1 Kent HLC

Map 1 shows the broad HLC type for the Kent Phase 1. This was one of the earliest HLCs to be undertaken in England and was produced using a very broad-brush approach.

Note the large blocks of woodland and absence of smaller woods and also the lack of scattered settlement and farmsteads.

3.2 The Revised Kent HLC for Tunbridge Wells Borough – Speldhurst

Map 2 shows the broad HLC type for the revised Kent HLC for Tunbridge Wells Borough. The finer-grained approach to the data capture can clearly be seen for example with the scattered settlements, the areas of parkland and the higher record of woodland. Parkland and designed landscapes of all types, are a strong historic landscape feature of the countryside around Tunbridge Wells. As well as the larger parkland occupying the high ridge tops there is a concentration of designed landscapes around the edge of Langton Green. This is the influence of Tunbridge Wells as a place for leisure, recreation and its gentrification during the Late post-medieval and early modern periods.

3.3. The HLC Types for present day landscape of Speldhurst

Map 3 shows the HLC types for Speldhurst. Immediately it can be seen that the northern part of the parish where the deeply incised ridges occur is characterised by aggregate assart fields and small areas of ancient woodland. These fields are thought to be the results of the last period of assarting and woodland clearance in the C13. Whilst in the southern part of the parish along the main ridge towards Ashurst is a mix of cohesive assart fields and Regular informal fields. Both could to have been enclosed from a more open landscape such as wood pasture or a former field system, which could be expected along the better drained more easily work soils along the ridge.

The areas of parkland tend to occur also on the ridge tops whilst the smaller landscaped gardens occur around the settlement especially that of Langton Green. The dispersed nature of the settlement can be seen from the smaller and larger farmsteads along the ridge top and droveways. Whist the settlements are strongly characterised by planned estates (of varying sizes and ages from the early modern to the late 20th century).

3.4 The Time-depth and antiquity of the present landscape of Speldhurst

Map 4 shows the projected period of origin for each character type in Speldhurst based on the historic map evidence and understanding of the Kent landscape. The northern and western parts of Speldhurst retain the most historic landscape antiquity with character types originating in the medieval period surviving into the present day. By contrast the areas to the east and around Langton Green show a landscape of the post-medieval and modern origins but one which has Time-depth given the land use change which has occurred and where elements of that past historic landscape character still may survive within the present landscape. For example some of the planned estates laid out at Langton Green respect the former field boundaries and field pattern, when the modern map is overlain with the mid C19 historic mapping; garden boundaries, road ways and estate edges may follow these older alignments, when then extend into the wider countryside.

3.5 Analysis of different character types

Map 5 shows only the HLC broad type for Enclosures by HLC type for Speldhurst. This is an example of how the HLC can be queried in order to assess the different historic character types. The rural landscape is dominated by the patterns of enclosures and it can be seen that Speldhurst has a rather fragmented enclosure pattern, the result of post-

medieval parkland, landscape gentrification and settlement expansion. However different character areas can clearly be seen. As already mentioned above the west and north of the parish retains its medieval assart fields from woodland. To the south along the River Medway are the meadows - the irregular informal fields bounded by water courses and the edge of the valley sides. The middle of the parish on the higher ground are areas for more regular formal fields which appear to have been planned in their layout. This suggests the reorganisation of an earlier field system or enclosure form perhaps wood pasture. From the early OS maps and the Tithe it is possible to see distinct field systems occupying these hilltops and closely associated with historic farmsteads with place-names indicating an early medieval origin, For example Courtenwell AD 700; Speldhurst AD 765-91; Rustall AD 765. (Wallenberg 1934, 94-99).

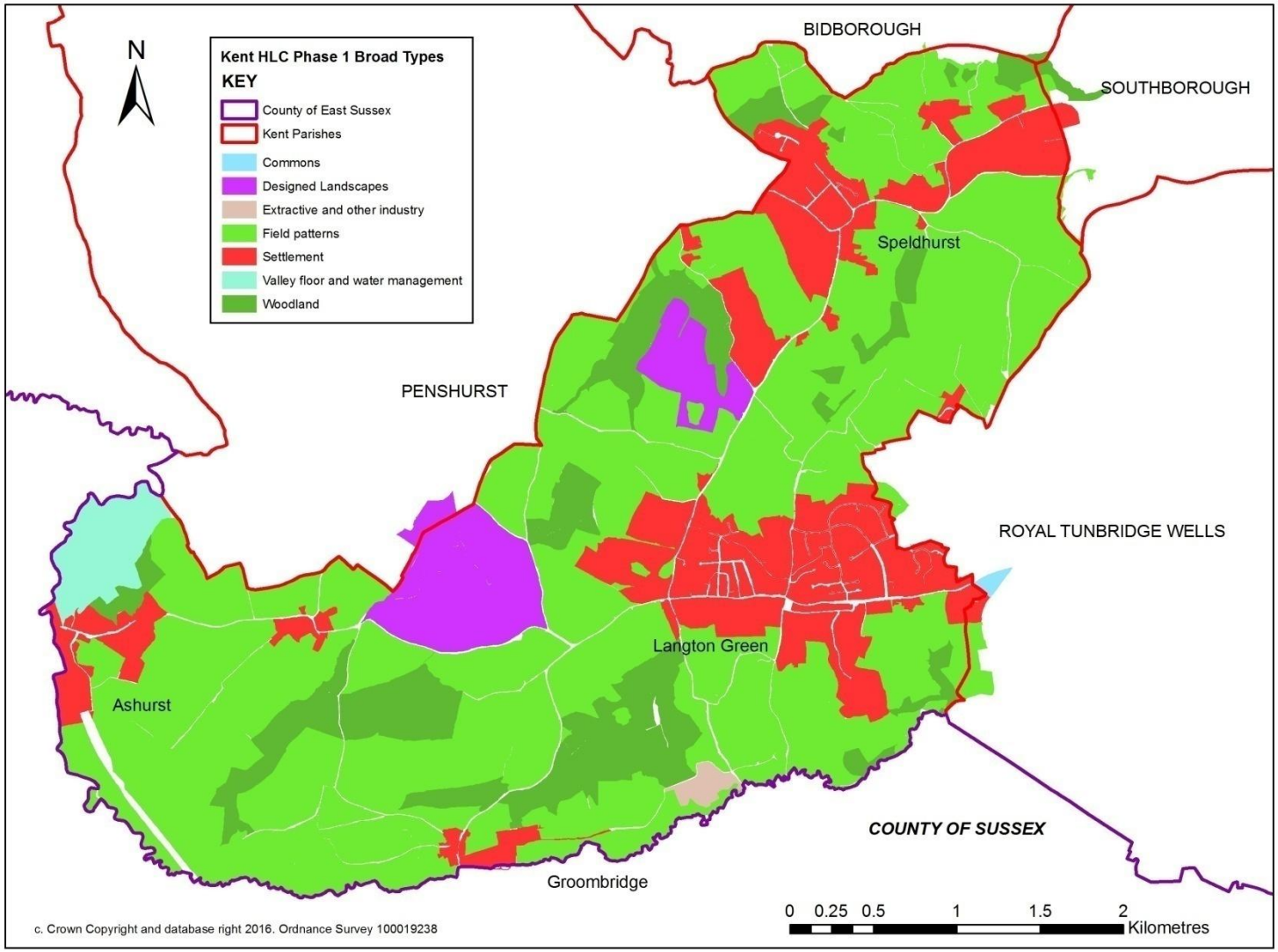
This map also shows the degree of modern field amalgamation (boundary removal) across the parish. Where such loss has occurred it is likely that evidence of the former field pattern can still be seen on the ground and in the remaining field boundaries.

Map 6 gives an indication of this where the same polygons have been illustrated by the Boundary type attribute. The field boundaries are dominated by either hedges or wooded hedges. The latter are either outgrown hedges (due to lack of management) or wider wooded shaws. As to be expected the wooded hedges are most common to the north and west of the parish but there is a concentration along the eastern side of the parish where perhaps active boundary management is not so prevalent.

3.6. The conjectured medieval and early post-medieval landscape of Speldhurst

Map 7 is a composite map of the present HLC overlain with those polygons where the previous historic character can be identified from the historic mapping. Each time there is a character change as shown by the maps (up to 4 changes recorded in the GIS attribute table as Prev1 to Prev 4) this has been captured. The result is that this map gives an indication of what the landscape may have appeared like c.1500-1600, when much the medieval features would still have been intact. The large areas of formal fields adjacent to Ashurst Plain might suggest that the area of medieval wood pasture may have extended much further and was subsequently enclosed. At the northern end of the parish the assarted landscape dominates. However a tongue of formal fields extends from Southborough to Stockland Green indicating potentially enclosures from commons.

The origins and antiquity of the regular informal fields is difficult to assess, but these fields could date from the early post-medieval due to field re-organisation or may even be medieval in date.


N
Kent HLC Phase 1 Broad Types
KEY
County of East Sussex
Kent Parishes
Commons
Designed Landscapes
Extractive and other industry
Field patterns
Settlement
Valley floor and water management
Woodland
BIDBOROUGH
SOUTHBOROUGH
Speldhurst
PENSHURST
ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS
Langton Green
Ashurst
COUNTY OF SUSSEX
Groombridge
0 0.25 0.5 1 1.5 2
Kilometres
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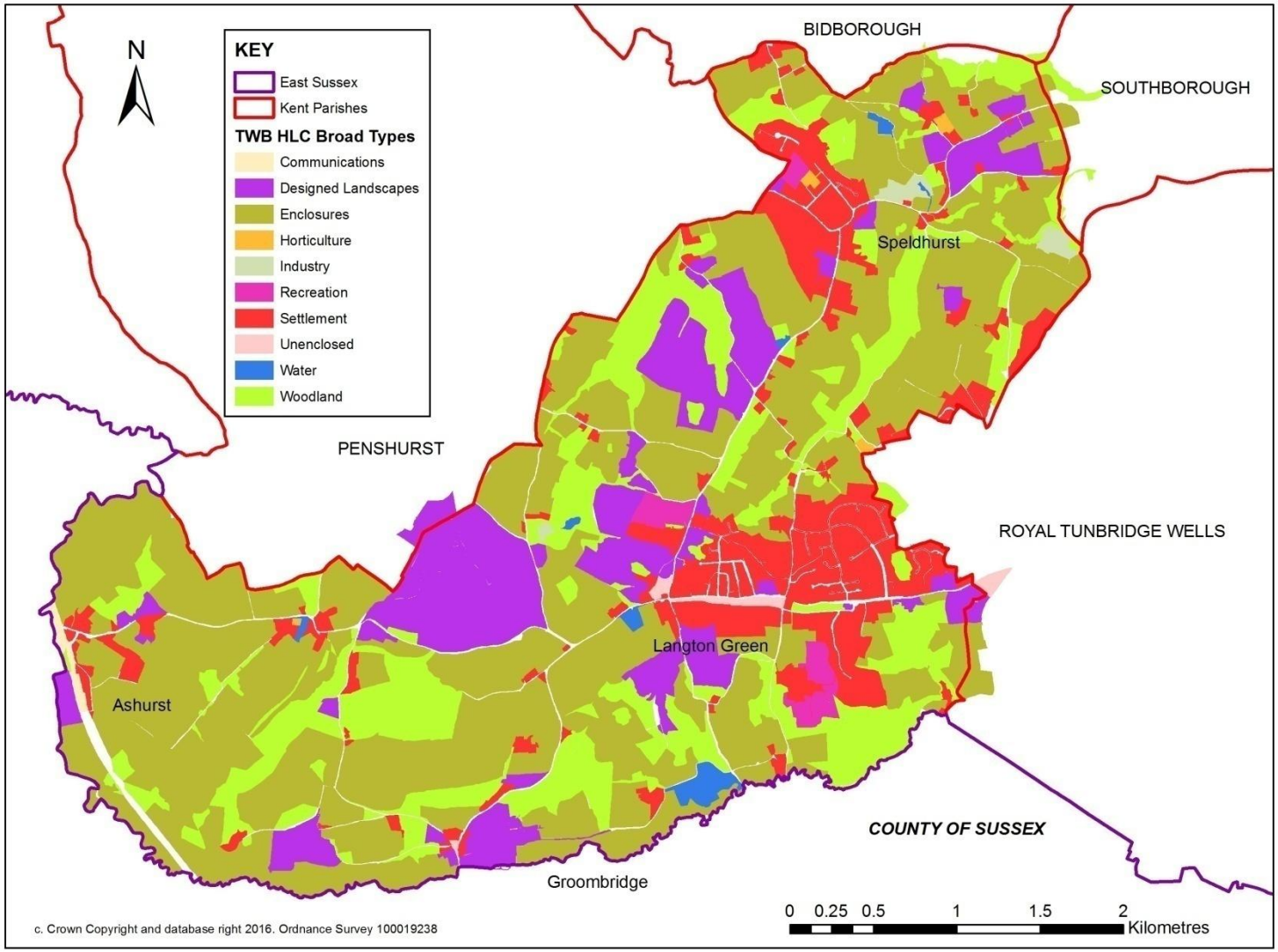
MAP 1


N
KEY
East Sussex
Kent Parishes
TWB HLC Broad Types
Communications
Designed Landscapes
Enclosures
Horticulture
Industry
Recreation
Settlement
Unenclosed
Water
Woodland
BIDBOROUGH
SOUTHBOROUGH
Speldhurst
PENSHURST
ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS
Langton Green
Ashurst
COUNTY OF SUSSEX
Groombridge
0 0.25 0.5 1 1.5 2
Kilometres
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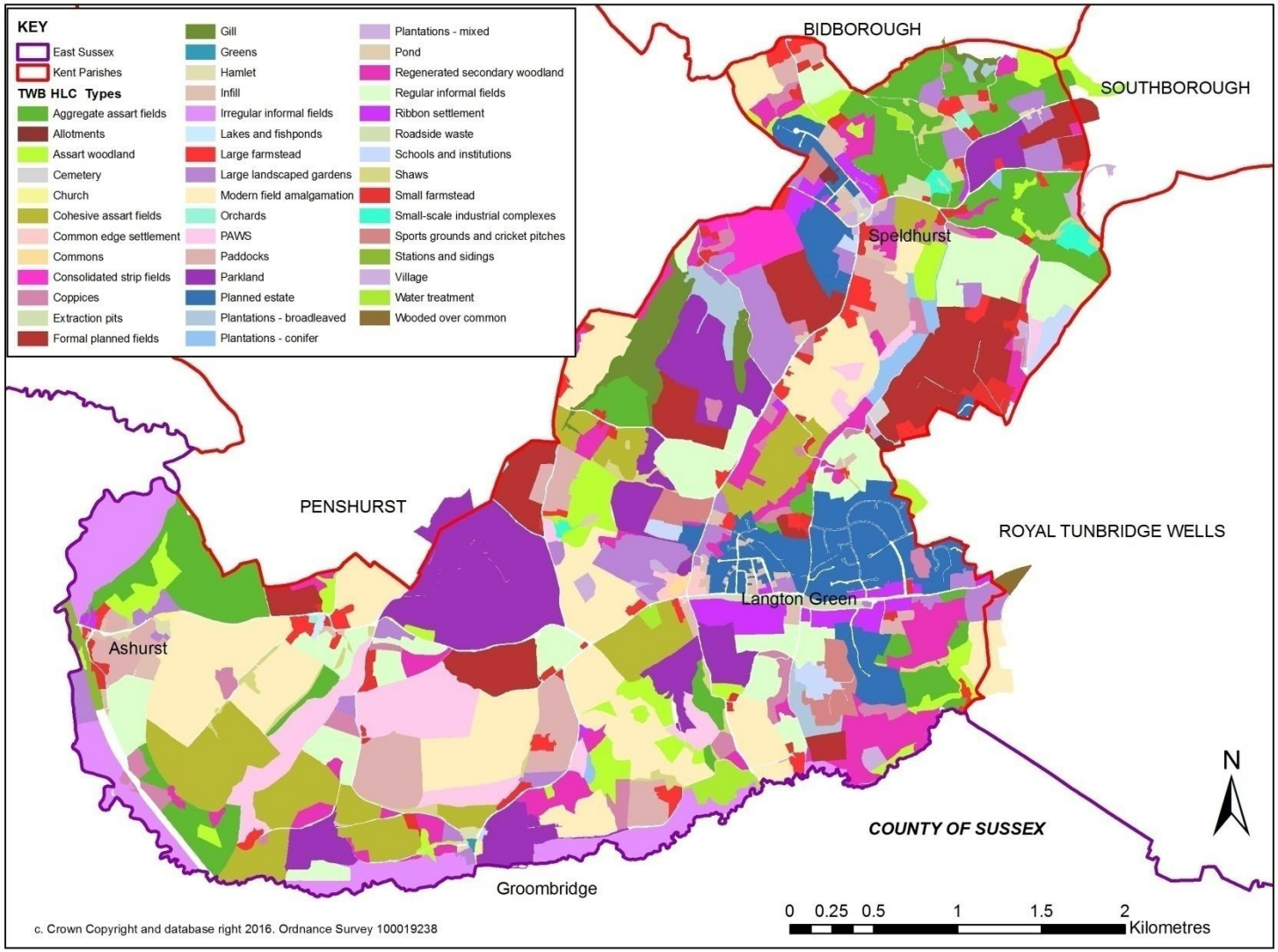
MAP 2


KEY
East Sussex
Kent Parishes
TWB HLC Types
Aggregate assart fields
Allotments
Assart woodland
Cemetery
Church
Cohesive assart fields
Common edge settlement
Commons
Consolidated strip fields
Coppices
Extraction pits
Formal planned fields
Gill
Greens
Hamlet
Infill
Irregular informal fields
Lakes and fishponds
Large farmstead
Large landscaped gardens
Modern field amalgamation
Orchards
PAWS
Paddocks
Parkland
Planned estate
Plantations - broadleaved
Plantations - conifer
Plantations - mixed
Pond
Regenerated secondary woodland
Regular informal fields
Ribbon settlement
Roadside waste
Schools and institutions
Shaws
Small farmstead
Small-scale industrial complexes
Sports grounds and cricket pitches
Stations and sidings
Village
Water treatment
Wooded over common
BIDBOROUGH
SOUTHBOROUGH
Speldhurst
PENSHURST
ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS
Langton Green
Ashurst
Groombridge
COUNTY OF SUSSEX
N
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Kilometres
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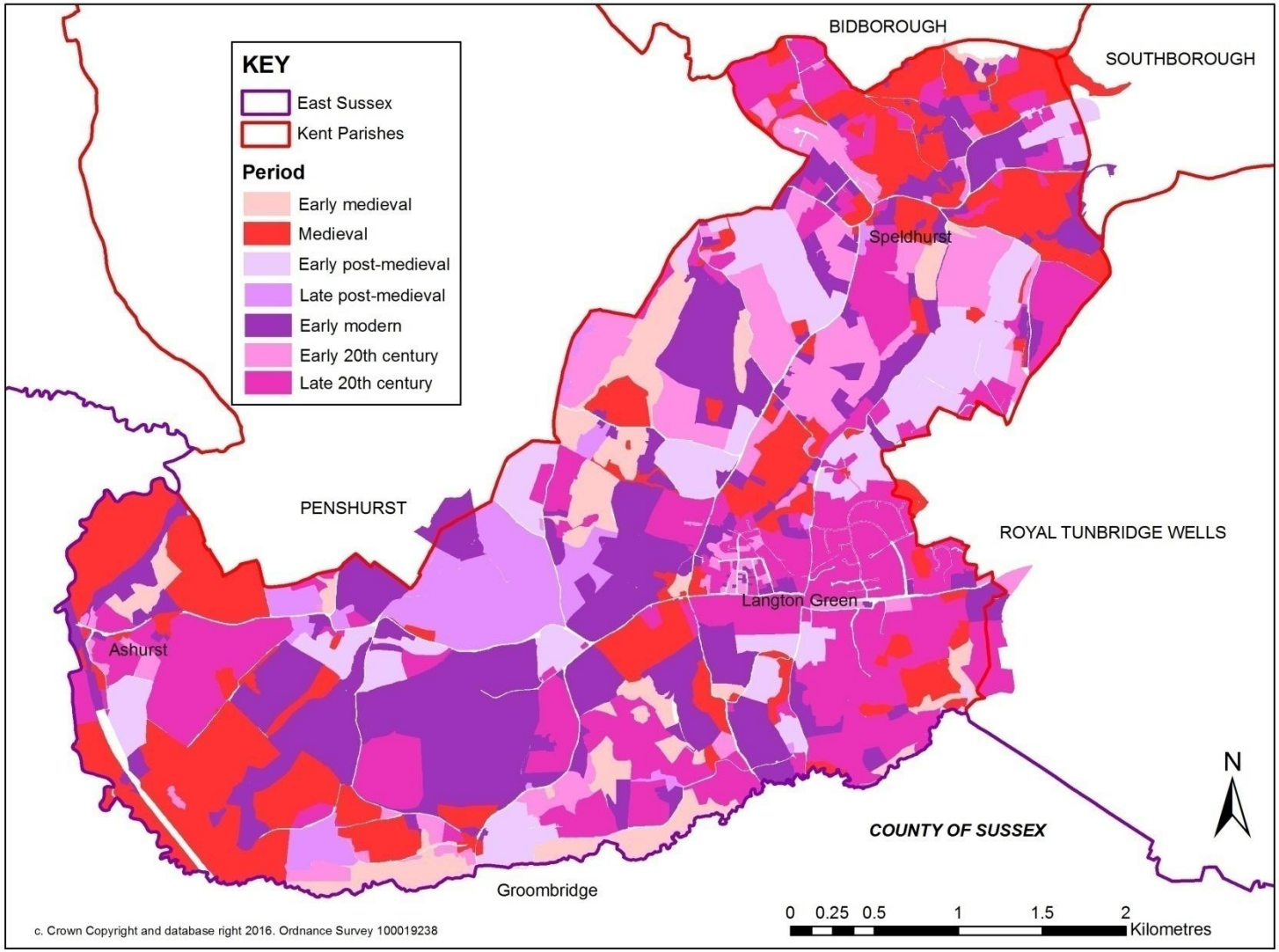
Map 3


KEY
East Sussex
Kent Parishes
Period
Early medieval
Medieval
Early post-medieval
Late post-medieval
Early modern
Early 20th century
Late 20th century
BIDBOROUGH
SOUTHBOROUGH
Speldhurst
PENSHURST
ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS
Langton Green
Ashurst
COUNTY OF SUSSEX
Groombridge
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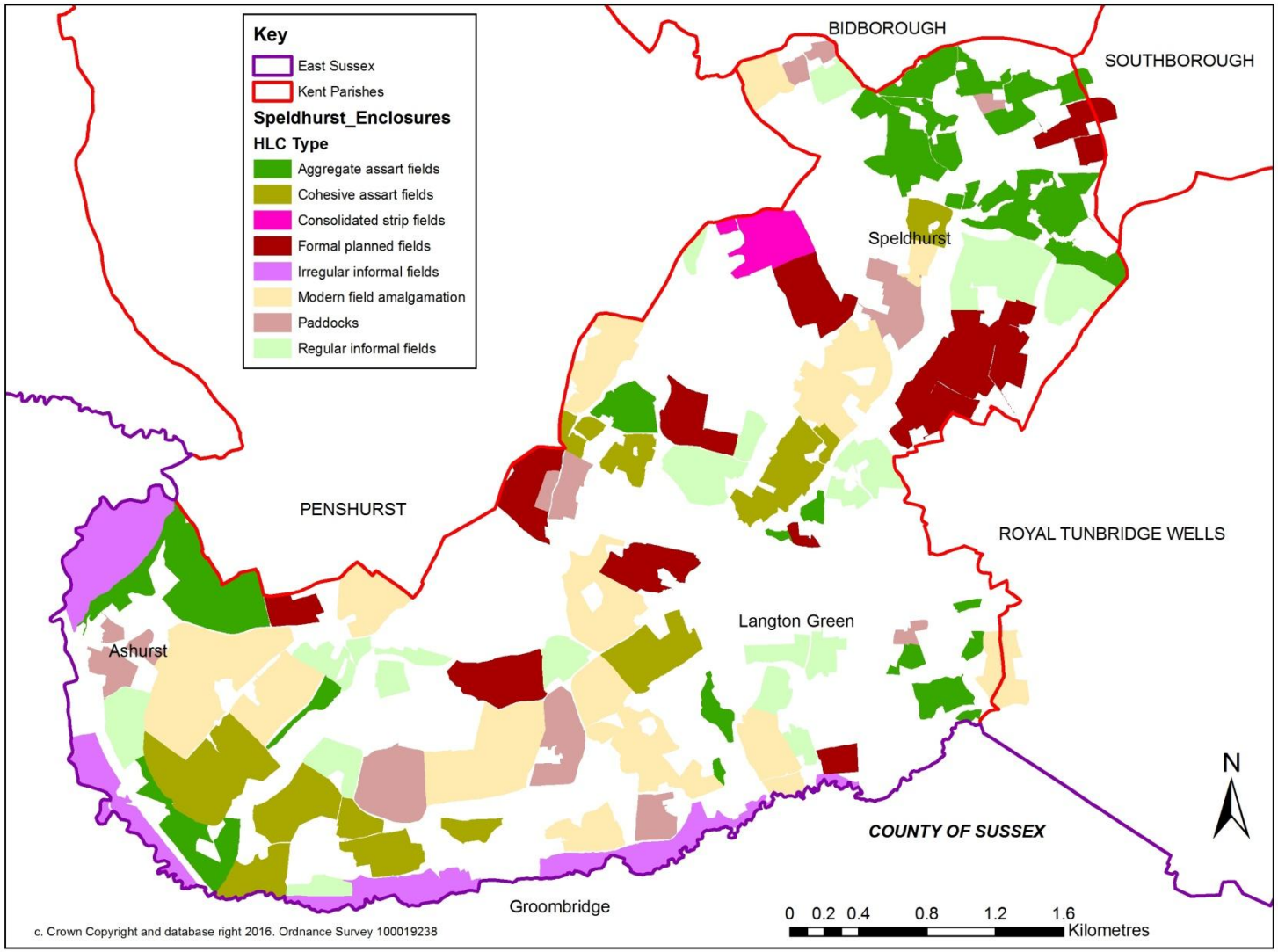
MAP 4


Key
East Sussex
Kent Parishes
Speldhurst_Enclosures
HLC Type
Aggregate assart fields
Cohesive assart fields
Consolidated strip fields
Formal planned fields
Irregular informal fields
Modern field amalgamation
Paddocks
Regular informal fields
BIDBOROUGH
SOUTHBOROUGH
Speldhurst
PENSHURST
ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS
Langton Green
Ashurst
COUNTY OF SUSSEX
Groombridge
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Kilometres
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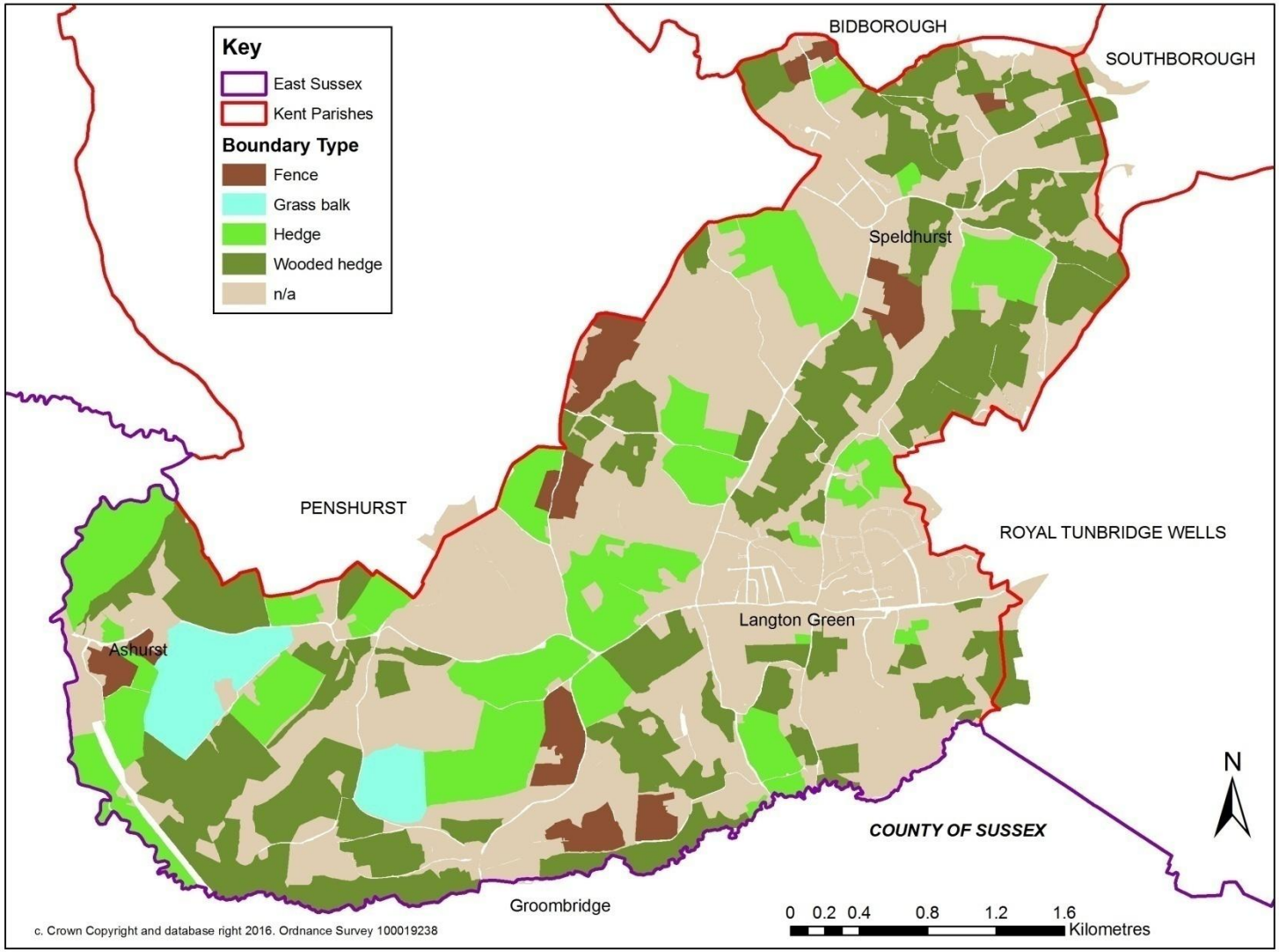
MAP 5


Key
East Sussex
Kent Parishes
Boundary Type
Fence
Grass balk
Hedge
Wooded hedge
n/a
BIDBOROUGH
SOUTHBOROUGH
Speldhurst
PENSHURST
ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS
Langton Green
Ashurst
Groombridge
COUNTY OF SUSSEX
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Kilometres
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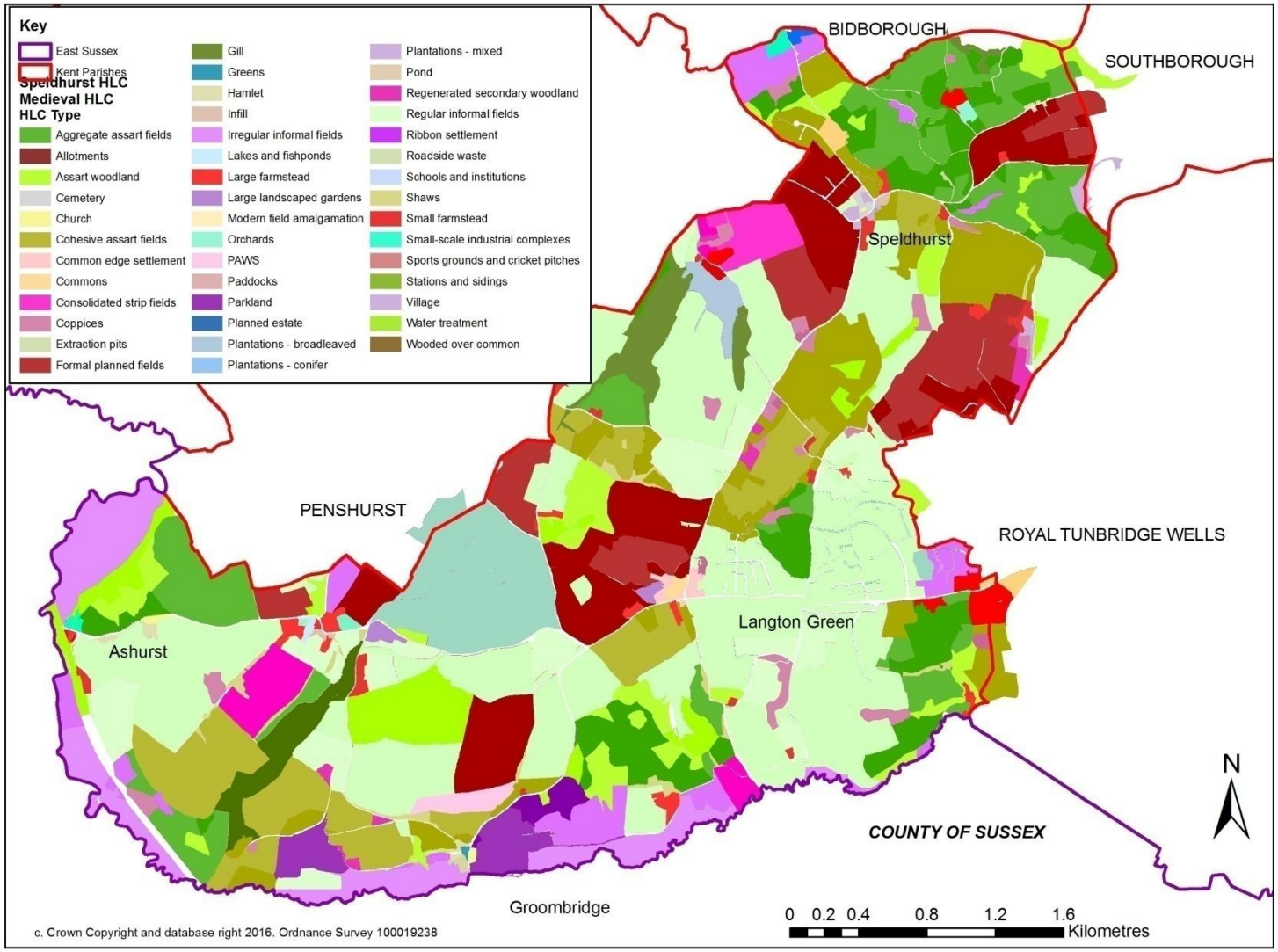
MAP 6


Key
East Sussex
Kent Parishes
Speldhurst HLC
Medieval HLC
HLC Type
Aggregate assart fields
Allotments
Assart woodland
Cemetery
Church
Cohesive assart fields
Common edge settlement
Commons
Consolidated strip fields
Coppices
Extraction pits
Formal planned fields
Gill
Greens
Hamlet
Infill
Irregular informal fields
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ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS
Langton Green
Ashurst
Groombridge
COUNTY OF SUSSEX
N
0 0.2 0.4 0.8 1.2 1.6
Kilometres
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MAP 7

4. Initial Conclusions

This analysis only touches on the potential of HLC to understand the historic character of the landscape and provides the starting point for research for any given area. The HLC reveals that the landscape of Speldhurst comprises a mix of formal designed landscapes derived from older field systems and woodland. Settlement also retains its character of being dispersed through the countryside apart from the large areas of planned estates at Langton Green.

Far more research is needed to understand the different process of enclosure in the Weald of Kent, especially in the understanding the medieval settlement and expansion.

For example the division of land with their farmsteads into yardlands, sulungs, virgates etc. and interpreting medieval manorial surveys with the actual territories in the landscape.

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